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## OPINION EDITORIAL

### AGRICULTURE CENSUS DATA VITAL TO GROWING INDUSTRY

**By Pat Bell**  
**Minister of Agriculture and Lands**  
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(441 words)

The future of agriculture in this province – like the outlook for the province as a whole – is bright. Across all jurisdictions, people are recognizing this industry as vital to our health, our economy, our lifestyle and our communities.

Data from the upcoming Census of Agriculture puts the industry in focus for many groups, including farm operators, farm organizations, agri-businesses, the Canadian public, governments and academics. This census, conducted every five years by Statistics Canada, is the only source of information about agriculture that gathers and publishes data right down to the commodity sector and community levels. This year it takes place on May 16.

B.C.'s people are diverse, and the agriculture sector is no different. Many farming families in this province go back several generations and the agriculture industry also involves people from all over the world who have immigrated here to farm. Many of our immigrant farmers have chosen to farm the fertile lands of the province, including the Fraser Valley, and they have brought a diversity of ideas and new investment capital to the agriculture sector.

In recognition of the vital importance of the agriculture sector, we are developing an agriculture plan for the province. Recently, a six-member government caucus committee was appointed to lead the way toward a long-term vision for agriculture in B.C. Members of the Agriculture Planning Committee will work closely with agriculture leaders, opposition members, First Nations, local governments and stakeholders in building a plan that will enhance agriculture's vital contribution to our economy, environment and quality of life.

In addition to providing your input into the Agriculture Plan, we need your help to create an up-to-date picture of agriculture in Canada by completing and returning the census questionnaire. The farm industry benefits from census data in many ways, including planning and decision making. Agricultural producer groups are guided by data from the census, governments use them to make decisions and census information also helps other businesses market their products and services to farm operators.

In B.C. the information we get from census data allows us to analyze our industry on any number of different levels. Having the most up-to-date information allows us to understand what is working, where, and why. If you have not received a census questionnaire, or have questions about the data and why they are collected, please visit the 2006 Census of Agriculture website at [www.statcan.ca/english/agcensus2006/index.htm](http://www.statcan.ca/english/agcensus2006/index.htm). It's critical that agricultural operators take the time to complete the questionnaire so that we have the information we need to move forward and grow the industry further.

On May 16 tell *your* story by counting yourself in as part of British Columbia's farm community.

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A photo of Minister Pat Bell in an Okanagan-area orchard is available at:  
[www.mediaroom.gov.bc.ca/DisplayEventDetails.aspx?eventId=308](http://www.mediaroom.gov.bc.ca/DisplayEventDetails.aspx?eventId=308)

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