
OPINION-EDITORIAL

LONG-TERM VISION TO PROTECT AGRICULTURE

By Pat Bell
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(388 words)

The agriculture industry is incredibly important to B.C. and the preservation and sustainable use of the agricultural land base continues to be a government priority. Our government has no intention of doing anything to weaken the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR). On the contrary, our government will protect agricultural land and particularly our prime agricultural land.

I recently read the Suzuki Foundation's report on the ALR: "Farmland Forever: Reshaping the Agricultural Land Reserve for the 21st Century." It contains some excellent suggestions that I believe could be applied to further protect our agricultural land. I have already asked the Agricultural Land Commission (ALC) chair to look into the recommendations, but I also intend to personally meet with the authors of the report to discuss these ideas.

As part of government's long-term vision for agriculture I believe we need to better define the term 'community need' to ensure that public interest is protected. I have specifically asked the ALC chair to look into that and bring some recommendations back to me. If there are things our government can do to better protect our agricultural land, I am very interested in hearing what they are.

One of the key challenges we face is ensuring the productivity of the highest value lands. Community growth around the province places incredible pressure on the ALR, and the ALC has done an exceptional job in withstanding those pressures.

The numbers do not support the belief that land is being removed from the ALR at a high rate. In the first four years of this government's mandate the entire amount of land that came out of the ALR was comparable to the amount removed in the year 2000 alone.

We produce a greater variety of agricultural products over a wider range of geographical and climatic conditions than any other area in Canada -- and all this in a province where only a tiny part of our land base is suitable for agriculture. That scarcity of good farmland is why B.C. has preserved our best agricultural lands within the ALR.

My vision for agriculture is a long-term vision; our government wants B.C.'s agriculture industry to grow and prosper. Available, affordable agricultural land is a critical piece of a strong agriculture industry and our government is firmly committed to the preservation of our agricultural land through the ALR.