



GROWING together

Availability of farmland key to agriculture's success

Local government leaders and their officials are certain to know the health of the local real estate market in their respective communities. And many can even tell you what the vacancy rate of rental housing is in the local area. After all, the price of a new home or the availability of rental housing often determines if someone will move to a new community to retire, start a job or build a business.

But what about the vacancy rates on agricultural land? How much agricultural land is currently in production? And how much ALR land is available for future agricultural production?

The B.C. Ministry of Agriculture and Lands recently completed a pilot study, using data from 2004, aimed at determining how much agricultural land is currently in production in Abbotsford.

"We chose Abbotsford for this survey because it is now the most intensely farmed area in Canada," says Mark Robbins, Regional Agrologist with the B.C. Ministry of Agriculture and Lands (B.C. MAL). "Abbotsford has seen real growth in agriculture climb at a rate of nearly 5% per year over the past decade even while the agricultural land base was shrinking."



"We chose Abbotsford for this survey because it is now the most intensely farmed area in Canada," says Mark Robbins of the B.C. Ministry of Agriculture and Lands.

At nearly \$500 million in annual farm gate sales, Abbotsford now produces over twice the agricultural output of the next largest farming community in the province. Agriculture infrastructure and spin-off benefits in Abbotsford now exceed \$1 billion annually. However, since 1973, Abbotsford has lost 1.2% of its ALR land base to exclusion. And another 5% of farmland in the municipality

is now judged to be "alienated" from farming while another 5.5% is situated on steep slopes within the community.

Robbins says if production and growth are going to continue, it's important to understand agriculture's future need for productive farmland.

The Abbotsford pilot study found only 8.3% of the available farmland is not being

farmed actively, most of which is on small, forested lots in the upland areas of the community. The average size of an unfarmed parcel in Abbotsford is 2 hectares while the average size of a farmed parcel is 7.3 hectares. There remain only six parcels of land over 8 hectares not being farmed in the prime growing areas. While small lots can be used for some agriculture operations such as mushrooms, floriculture, poultry and container nurseries, they provide fewer farming choices than larger parcels.

The absence of larger parcels of underutilized agricultural land is of particular concern to farmers in the dairy, hog and vegetable greenhouse sectors that require a larger land base. Soil capacity is also a factor. In Abbotsford, soil capabilities are generally lower in the upland area than in the rest of the municipality.

"As the demand for B.C.'s agriculture products grows and our population continues to rise, how long can we increase production before our available farmland reaches capacity?" says Robbins. "At some point, growth in production will slow. Abbotsford is probably closer to that point than any other area in Canada."

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Agriculture's fiscal contribution to local government

Does B.C. agriculture pull its weight when it comes to contributing to the tax base of local governments in British Columbia?

A recent pilot study by the B.C. Ministry of Agriculture and Lands set out to clarify the net tax contribution of farmland by investigating both property tax revenues and the cost of municipal services provided in farming areas. And while the study examined only Pitt Meadows and Abbotsford, the results provide some helpful insight on the impact of agriculture across the province.

"Perhaps because of its varied nature, the tax contribution derived from farmland isn't as apparent to the public as that of a factory or a retail outlet," says B.C. MAL Land Use Planner Jim LeMaistre. "When people see a green field, they don't always make the connection to the adjacent dairy operation."

But as LeMaistre and his colleagues discovered, the issue goes beyond perceptions and is impacted by how we identify and classify property tax revenues from various land uses in the ALR.

The B.C. Assessment Authority allocates on-farm activities like agri-business, agro-industry and on-farm residences to the broader classifications of business, industry and residential.

For example a farm may include a residence, a barn, a retail store and even a small processing operation for the packaging of fruit or berries. However, the ministry study found that only property tax generated from actual farmland is classified as farm. Surprisingly, a farm's barn is classified residential as it is judged to be an outbuilding of the residence. A retail store located on a farm

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The future of agriculture in this province – like the outlook for the province as a whole – is bright. Across all jurisdictions, people are recognizing the value of agriculture to our health, our economy, our lifestyle and our communities. It's easy to see why agriculture will play an important role in achieving the Five Great Goals for a Golden Decade.

Increasingly, local governments are playing a key role in supporting and enhancing B.C.'s agriculture through their comprehensive planning processes. Throughout the province, local governments are working collaboratively with farmers, ranchers and the Province to develop agricultural plans, policies and bylaws that promote their local agriculture industry. The growing number of agricultural advisory committees established by local governments is helping to ensure that planning for agriculture is ongoing.

Through the development of sustainable community plans and the continued efforts to promote greater awareness about the social, environmental and economic contribution of agriculture to B.C., we can build a vibrant agricultural sector that will provide opportunities for present and future generations.

As the new minister responsible for agriculture, I look forward to working closely with communities, industry, and local governments to continue to enhance this vital industry.

Hon. Pat Bell
Minister of Agriculture and Lands



Agriculture and Lands Minister Pat Bell joined members of the Kamloops 4-H club and their woolly friends for an announcement on Aug. 3, 2005. Minister Bell presented the B.C. 4-H club with a \$95,000 cheque and signed the renewal of a five-year memorandum of understanding between the Ministry and 4-H.

Okanagan Basin Water Strategy underway

With the population of the Okanagan Valley expected to triple, from 350,000 people to 1,000,000 in the next twenty-five years, concerns are growing over the future availability of water in the region and the potential of a serious water shortage.

The impact on agriculture could be even more serious as the industry currently uses 70% of the water in the Okanagan basin. Researchers at UBC and the Pacific Agri-Food Research Centre predict that climate change will see snow packs in the area decrease as the climate warms and snow levels recede to higher elevations. Current water storage will be limited if, as expected, the snow pack melts earlier and the timing of precipitation changes. And additional irrigation will be required to support crops grown in hotter temperatures and over a longer growing season.

These concerns, and many others, have led to the Okanagan Basin Water Strategy spearheaded by the B.C. Ministry of Environment and supported by the B.C.



Agriculture is a major user of water in the Okanagan.

Ministry of Agriculture and Lands, the Okanagan Water Basin Board and many water purveyors in the region.

“The strategy is intended to provide the planning tools necessary for all levels of government, producers and the public – to begin making choices on how to optimize water use,” says Ted van der Gulik, Senior Engineer with the B.C. Ministry of Agriculture and Lands.

The first phase of the project, begun in 2004, covered an extensive review of all

existing material and data on water usage in the Okanagan. The second step, now underway, entails working with local governments to prepare a detailed assessment of water supply and demand in the area. This analysis will lead to the completion of computer models and simulations aimed at providing all levels of government with the information required to assist in making future land and water use choices.

“There is no question that the only way to mitigate this pending water shortage is

to begin to look at this issue on a regional basis, because everyone in the Okanagan – farmer, resident, business, and government agency – shares the same water basin,” said van der Gulik.

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Agriculture’s fiscal contribution to local government

is classified as a business and a processing operation is classified industrial.

In order to better understand the amount of property taxes actually attributable to farmland, the ministry study reallocated property taxes paid on these on-farm activities from residential, business and industrial to a farm classification. A comparison of the two classification approaches shows the sample farm in question contributed substantially more when all on-farm activity was actually classified as farm property tax revenue.

“A recent study looked at all property taxes on farm activities - not just farmland - and found that farms contributed roughly 12% of all property taxes in Abbotsford and Pitt Meadows.”

Using this approach, the Ministry of Agriculture and Lands examined every farm parcel in both Abbotsford and Pitt Meadows to reallocate on-farm activity. In both cases, the property tax attributable to farmland jumped over three-fold to contribute roughly 12% of the property taxes in both municipalities.

The next step was to determine the level of expenditures attributable to each land use category.

For example, if major drainage works were completed in the agricultural areas, that expenditure was only allocated to farming. The last step was to determine the net fiscal impact of each land use category - the ratio showing the net contribution for each revenue dollar attributed to each category. The preliminary results from the study show that agriculture has a positive net fiscal impact on both local governments, as seen in the tables below.

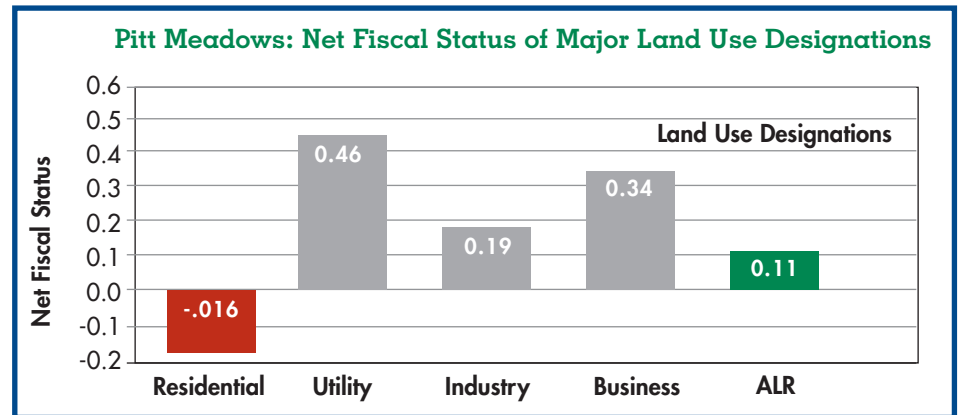
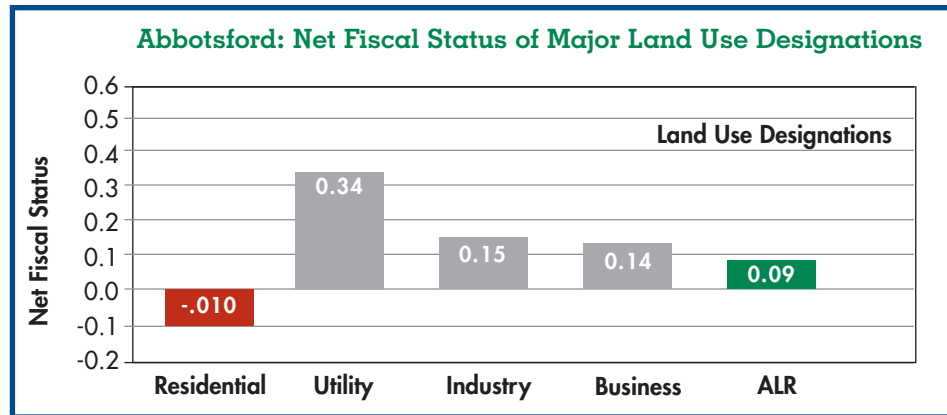
“The study speaks to the sometimes misunderstood economic impact of agriculture in many communities,” commented B.C. MAL Regional Agrologist Mark Robbins who worked on the study. “It was a real eye opener to all of us involved.”

The next step is to review the findings with all relevant agencies including the B.C. Assessment Authority and local governments. LeMaistre says ministry staff will be happy to review their findings with other municipalities looking to get a clearer picture of the contribution agriculture makes to their communities.

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Did you know?

Only 4.5% (676 ha) of Chilliwack's farmable ALR valley is available for future agricultural expansion.

Source: Agricultural Land Use Inventory, City of Chilliwack - B.C. MAFF, 2004.



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Availability of farmland key to agriculture’s success

As the pilot study in Abbotsford found, ALR land not in production can meet the current growth needs of confinement agriculture operations such as greenhouse production, but some commodities are already experiencing land base constraints to future growth.

Given Washington and California already provide much of our imported food products and are experiencing similar land use challenges, these are important long-term considerations when making local land use decisions.

“Just as local governments are cognizant of available commercial space or industrial land in their communities, we think it’s valuable for them to also understand how much productive farmland is available, both for today and tomorrow.”

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Top 20 B.C. Municipalities Total Wages and Salaries Paid for Farm Labour in 2000			
City of Abbotsford	\$65,454,496	Township of Spallumcheen	\$4,667,006
Township of Langley	\$41,097,228	District of Kent	\$4,009,177
The Corporation of Delta	\$33,852,700	City of Kamloops	\$3,462,099
City of Surrey	\$29,307,514	District of North Saanich	\$3,187,337
City of Chilliwack	\$25,070,781	District of Lake Country	\$2,912,624
City of Kelowna	\$13,469,501	District of Summerland	\$2,906,722
District of Pitt Meadows	\$12,850,705	District of Saanich	\$2,652,508
District of Maple Ridge	\$12,041,525	City of Burnaby	\$2,362,032
City of Richmond	\$10,253,460	District of Mission	\$1,963,095
District of Central Saanich	\$5,352,120	District of North Cowichan	\$1,946,155
Total			\$278,818,785
			68.7% of Provincial Total

Source: Census of Agriculture 2001, Statistics Canada

Website launched to support Strengthening Farming program

A new website designed to promote better relationships between local government, provincial agencies and the farming community has recently been launched.

Together with the B.C. Agricultural Land Commission, the *Strengthening Farming* program is an initiative of the B.C. Ministry of Agriculture and Lands. The program sup-

ports the fair resolution of land use conflicts and helps local government effectively plan for sustainable agriculture at the local level. Now, access to all the program's material is available through one portal: www.al.gov.bc.ca/resmgmt/sf

The Farm Practices Protection Act is designed to protect farmers against complaints of odour, noise, dust and other dis-

turbances, provided they engage in "normal farm practices." The new website includes helpful information on the Act which provides a balanced approach to resolving concerns raised by those living adjacent to farms.

Also included on the website are a number of tools used to help local government adequately plan for agriculture, including

information on establishing Agricultural Area Plans and Agricultural Advisory Committees.

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www.al.gov.bc.ca/resmgmt/sf

Local governments plan for agriculture

Comox-Strathcona Regional District

The future of agricultural land in the Comox Valley was front and centre during a recent day-long public workshop sponsored by the Comox Strathcona Regional District, Smart Growth B.C. and the B.C. Ministry of Agriculture and Lands.

Deborah Sargent, Manager of Planning Operations for the CSRD, reports that *Farmlands Forever: Perspectives on the Agricultural Land Reserve* provided a real opportunity for elected officials, planners and farmers to share information on the long-term impact of land use decisions on the local agricultural community. "The focus was on what

we have here as a resource and how we can sustain it in the future," said Sargent, who notes the CSRD has had one of the province's most active Agriculture Advisory Committees.

The seventy-five participants who attended the workshop heard about many of the global issues that impact our provincial industry, as well as the twin challenges of urban containment and the preservation of farmland. The workshop also covered the difficulties that urban encroachment has brought to producers and the critical need for sensitive planning along the local urban/rural interface.

District of Kent

Kent Council, the Agriculture Advisory Committee (KAAC), Fraser Basin Council (FBC) and most of all, the entrepreneurial farmers in Kent have put the community of Kent into the minds, hearts and palates of urbanites by connecting with leading chefs in Vancouver. Council's visionary "Circle Farm Tour" in 2002 led to the KAAC engaging in further small lot agriculture development.

Several "market ready" producers formed an *Agassiz Producer's Group* that has met with chefs and invited them to their farms. Now, the wonderful food grown in Kent is being featured in top

restaurants, such as in the Agassiz Tasting Menu of Vancouver's Raincity Grill.

"The *Connecting Chefs to Kent* initiative has been great for us," comments Debra Amrein-Boyes, the owner/operator of Farm House Natural Cheeses, who saw her weekly sales increase by 10% when the menu items were being offered." It meant we were able to introduce our products to a high-end market in the city that we wouldn't have otherwise reached."

Given the success of the *Connecting Chefs to Kent* initiative, it won't be long before other communities are connecting producers and consumers through the chefs in their community!

Regional District of Central Okanagan

The Regional District of Central Okanagan has made agriculture and its interests a central focus of its planning framework. The B.C. Ministry of Agriculture and Lands recently completed an agriculture land use inventory for the RDCO. This inventory was used to develop a comprehensive agriculture area plan for the region.

The RDCO agriculture plan is already producing results as the regional district is planning to hire an Agriculture Support Officer, who will act as an advocate and a liaison between the regional district and the local agriculture community. And the RDCO has begun an innovative sign program to keep agriculture top of mind amongst the area's residents and many tourists.

Both the Kelowna and the RDCO Agriculture Advisory Committees jointly organize an annual farm tour to show local community leaders and elected officials many of the opportunities and challenges facing agriculture in the area.

"The issues faced by farmers are often very different from the rest of the business community. The regulatory environment can either be innovative or stifling," said Sandra Kochan, Chair of the Central Okanagan AAC. "The real benefit of the tour is to have elected representative and planning officials meet with farmers to learn about some of the benefits and challenges in the local planning environment."

North Cowichan Regional District

Representatives from the farm community in the Cowichan Valley are keen to implement the District of North Cowichan's Agricultural Strategy, and to continue building on the progress made by the newly formed Agriculture Advisory Committee. Two meetings held to date have set the stage for a positive and constructive relationship with the North Cowichan council.

Councillor George Seymour, who chairs the AAC and championed its creation, is very encouraged by the interest shown by local farmers willing to participate on the commit-

tee. "Already their contributions are demonstrating the importance of the work that lies ahead," said Seymour. "A major step for the committee will be revision of the Agricultural Strategy and having it adopted as an amendment to the community plan."

Several of the advisory committee members have made the maintenance of agricultural drainage and securing water supplies for agriculture their top priority. Other members hope to enhance agriculture's relationship with neighbours and local residents within the community.

Did you know?

In 2001, 25% of all organic farms in B.C. were located in the Okanagan- Similkameen Regional District, with the largest concentration in the Cawston Valley.

Source: *Census of Agriculture 2001, Statistics Canada*



Surrey leads way to stop illegal fill dumping

Given that farmland in Surrey is essentially at sea level, the importance of proper drainage and the impact of the illegal dumping of soil was becoming a real issue for area farmers. In fact, prior to October 2004, due to the tremendous amount of construction going on, it was common to discover three or four hundred truckloads of dirt being illegally dumped over a weekend.

That's when Surrey's Agriculture Advisory Committee stepped in to begin to actively report illegal dumping of fill. Now with the support of the City of Surrey, they have helped to spearhead a comprehensive program aimed at reducing illegal dumping.

John Sherstone, Surrey's Manager of Bylaw and Licensing Programs points to both education and enforcement as the key to the success of the program. In addition to

an information campaign aimed at informing excavation and trucking firms where they could dump legally, Surrey produced 100 bylaw enforcement signs and placed them along roadsides, mostly in farming areas.

"We now have one bylaw enforcement officer working full time in this area in addition to our other personnel that all attend dumping sites regularly to check for permits," said Sherstone.

Daily patrols have reduced the number of non-permitted soil sites while acceptable sites have been identified to provide fill for local dyke upgrading. Problem contractors have been identified and are under investigation and observation. The bylaw personnel liaise with a number of federal and provincial agencies including Fisheries and Oceans Canada, the B.C. Ministry of Environment,

the B.C. Agricultural Land Commission and the provincial commercial transport inspectors.

Since the expansion of the program, the number of permits issued by the City to dump soil legally has increased five-fold. The word is out that trucking firms, contractors, excavators and property owners are subject to fines for illegal dumping. And there are currently four cases before the courts.

"The Surrey AAC played a key role in identifying this as an issue and we were able to respond with a comprehensive approach that benefits contractors, farmers and landowners in a positive way."

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Surrey produced 100 bylaw enforcement signs for use along roadsides, mostly in farming areas.

Local governments take steps to support agriculture

Spallumcheen: The official motto of the Township of Spallumcheen is “*Where Farming Comes First*” so it’s no surprise that when reviewing its OCP in 2004, the local council chose to develop an agriculture area plan to encourage best farming practices and to promote long term sustainable agriculture. With funding from both the B.C. Ministry of Agriculture and Lands and the Investment Agriculture Foundation, Spallumcheen’s agriculture area plan will be completed in 2006 along with a comprehensive agriculture land use inventory completed by the B.C. Ministry of Agriculture and Lands.

Cariboo Regional District: With assistance from the B.C. Ministry of Agriculture and Lands, agricultural land use inventories of farms and ranchland are planned for “interface areas” that surround three of the CRD’s major municipalities: Quesnel, Williams Lake and 150 Mile House. The regional district believes these inventories will help provide for more informed, compatible land use decisions that will help both producers and those living adjacent to them.

Richmond: Richmond is proceeding with a water supply study to determine current and future irrigation water requirements for East Richmond, and to identify needed infrastructure improvements. Some areas of East Richmond have no irrigation at all, while in other areas, different farm commodities compete for available water. The project is co-funded by the federal and provincial governments (under the Canada-B.C. National Water Supply Expansion Program), the City of Richmond, and local farm groups. The total budget is \$155,000.

Pitt Meadows: After localized flooding in farming areas in Pitt Meadows in 2003 and 2004, the municipal council chose to undertake a complete drainage study of farmland in the community. With assistance from the B.C. Ministry of Agriculture and Lands and input from the local Agriculture Advisory Committee, the study will deter-

mine whether current drainage systems are adequate to meet the future needs of more intensive agriculture.

Surrey: Surrey is also benefiting from the Canada-B.C. National Water Supply Expansion Program with a project underway to evaluate existing agricultural water supplies, investigate other water sources, and develop strategies for improving agricultural water quality for the Nicomekl and Serpentine River watersheds. The area has been experiencing water shortages and issues with water quality. The City of Surrey and the Surrey Farmers’ Institute are also helping to fund the \$95,000 project.

Squamish-Lillooet Regional District: In 2004, the Squamish-Lillooet Regional District began work on a long-term regional growth strategy for their area. Now, midway through the process and after a series of public and stakeholder meetings, the regional district has already recognized the importance of the mixed agricultural base in the region. The SLRD Board expects the growth strategy to be completed in 2006.

Langley Township: The Ministry of Agriculture and Lands has been working with staff from the Township of Langley, along with their local Agriculture Advisory Committee, to prepare a bylaw aimed at promoting compatible land use along the ALR boundary. This process has helped the ministry prepare a series of guidelines on edge planning that, once approved, could be used in other communities. The new edge-planning bylaw will be considered by council next year.

Capital Regional District: In order to help determine water needs of the local agriculture community, the Capital Regional District, the Peninsula Agricultural Commission and the Ministry of Agriculture and Lands have partnered to complete an agriculture land use inventory. Now, this data will be used to run future water use models and assist the CRD determine new rates for agriculture water usage.

Did you know?

While only 1.6% of British Columbians lived on farms in 2001, primary agriculture contributed \$1.74 billion to the Gross Domestic Product in 2002.

Source: Statistics Canada & Fast Stats Agriculture and Food, 2004



AAC workshop draws representatives from across province

The second, bi-annual Agriculture Advisory Committee Workshop held last February brought together 130 participants including producers, local government representatives and leaders from the province’s twenty-one Agriculture Advisory Committees (AACs).

The one-day workshop was intended to provide participants with an opportunity to hear about the latest issues being tackled by AACs across the province and to share information on common concerns.

“Over the past decade, we’ve seen Agriculture Advisory Committees spring up in many communities to help guide local decision-makers on local issues impacting agriculture,” says Karen Thomas of the Ministry of Agriculture and Lands. “AACs are playing an increasingly larger role by providing local governments with a forum through which various issues that affect agriculture can be addressed.”

The AAC Workshop included keynote presentations on the Comox Valley Agricultural Plan that has been recently adopted by the Regional District of Comox Strathcona. The development of the agricultural plan was carried out with the full involvement of the local AAC and has brought many tangible results: a land use inventory was completed and a consumer’s guide to local produce was distributed to 50,000 local homes.

“It was helpful for many AAC representatives who are just getting organized to hear from others on how they’ve made real progress over the past few years,” said Thomas. “We heard a presentation from the District of Kent AAC on the economic

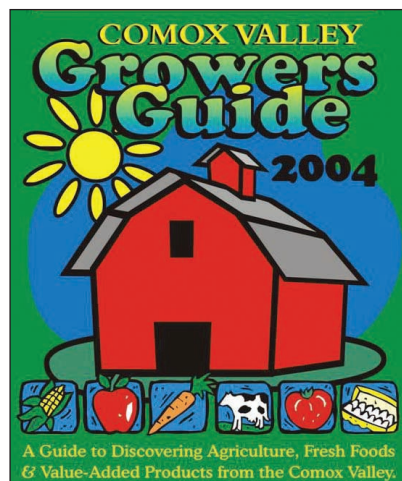
impact of small lot agriculture that really demonstrated the kind of work an AAC can do.”

Workshop participants also heard of the successful farm tours organized in partnership with the City of Kelowna and the Regional District of the Central Okanagan and their local AACs. This farm tour, and many like it around the province, was intended to provide local decision makers with a clear understanding of the size, diversity - and some of the challenges - facing primary agriculture in the area.

Thomas expects the next AAC Workshop will be in 2007. In the meantime, she hopes that existing AACs, and those local governments interested in forming one, will link together through the ministry’s *Strengthening Farming* website.

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AGRICULTURE ADVISORY COMMITTEES AS OF JULY 2005

- City of Abbotsford
- Alberni-Clayoquot Regional District
- Regional District of Central Kootenay (Creston Valley)
- Regional District of Central Okanagan
- City of Chilliwack
- Regional District of Comox-Strathcona (Comox Valley, Electoral Area ‘H’)
- Regional District of East Kootenay (Electoral Areas A,B and C)
- Fraser Valley Regional District
- Greater Vancouver Regional District
- Islands Trust - Saltspring Island
- City of Kelowna
- District of Kent
- Township of Langley
- District of North Cowichan
- Peace River Regional District
- Peninsula Agricultural Commission (District of Saanich, District of Central Saanich, District of North Saanich, Town of Sidney)
- City of Penticton
- District of Pitt Meadows
- City of Richmond
- Township of Spallumcheen
- Squamish Lillooet Regional District (Pemberton Valley)
- District of Summerland
- City of Surrey

For links to B.C.’s AACs, please go to:
www.al.gov.bc.ca/resmgmt/sf/aac

A publication of the
B.C. Ministry of Agriculture and Lands



Ministry of
Agriculture and Lands

www.al.gov.bc.ca

Other websites worth checking:



British Columbia Agricultural Land Commission

www.alc.gov.bc.ca



Agriculture and
Agri-Food Canada Agriculture et
Agroalimentaire Canada

www.agr.gc.ca



www.bcac.bc.ca



www.smartgrowth.bc.ca