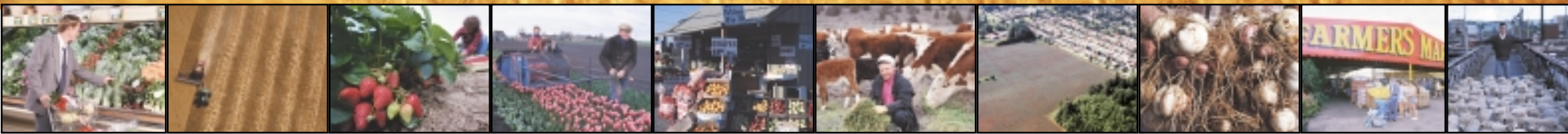




Growing TOGETHER

THE RURAL - URBAN CONNECTION



Fall 2000, Vol 1, No.2



BC's Local Governments

Planning for agriculture's sustainable future

Does agriculture have a place in local government planning processes? More and more municipalities and regional districts are answering this question with an emphatic - yes!

This, however, has not always been the case. Historically municipalities have focused much of their planning and policy efforts on a wide range of urban development challenges. Farming, ranching and the agricultural land base have often been a low priority on public agendas at the local level. But by the 1990's several municipalities were beginning to place increasing emphasis on their rural and agricultural areas.

"As with many other municipalities in urban regions, the official community plan did not consider rural issues in a comprehensive manner."

*Paul Crawford, Senior Planner,
Township of Langley*

With the adoption in 1993 of the *Langley Rural Plan*, for the first time a municipal council focused as much planning attention on its rural areas, which are predominantly within the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR) - as on its urban neighbourhoods.

Several other local government planning processes and studies were also directed at the rural and farm areas of the province to ensure agriculture's continued place in their communities. This momentum, which started in the early 1990's, is continuing. Following is a summary of several notable local government projects completed or started during the last year.



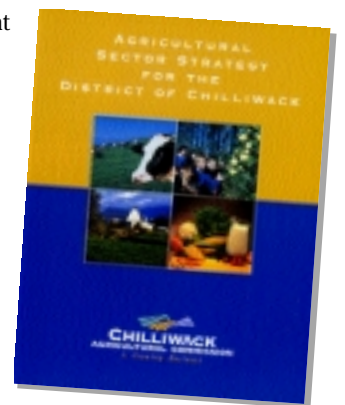
A strong local agriculture industry provides many benefits: access to local produce; a strong, diverse economy; and sustainable communities.

Agriculture Plans, Studies and Strategies completed during the 1990's

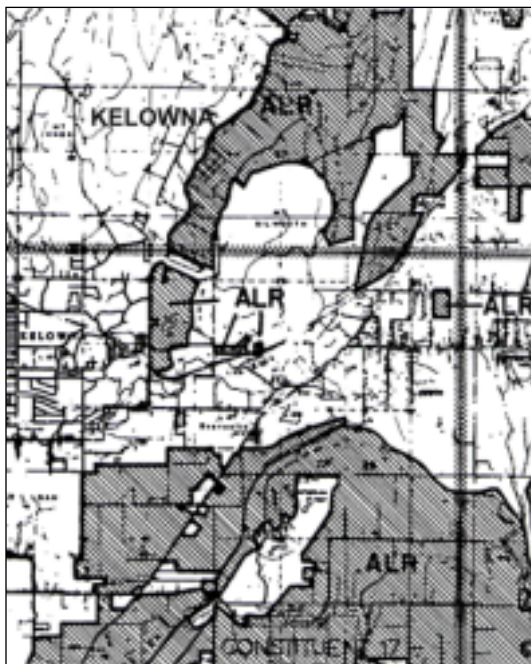
| | |
|---|-------------|
| Delta Agriculture Study | 1992 |
| Langley Rural Plan | 1993 |
| Delta Rural Land Use Study | 1993 |
| Agriculture Strategy for the Saanich Peninsula | 1997 |
| Vision Maple Ridge Rural Plan | 1997 |
| Kelowna Agriculture Plan | 1998 |

Chilliwack Agricultural Strategy

Chilliwack has made a major commitment to economic development in their community by investing \$4 million in the Chilliwack Economic Partners Corporation (CEPCO) over the next five years. Recognizing the importance of agriculture to the region, CEPCO established the Chilliwack Agricultural Commission as a subsidiary organization. The result has been the development of the *Agricultural Sector Strategy for the District of Chilliwack*. The strategy explored the strengths, constraints and opportunities for Chilliwack's agricultural sector. It outlined a series of goals and seven key strategies and actions. Looking ahead, the Strategy predicts that "Chilliwack's strengths, along with recent trends in agriculture outweigh most difficulties and lead to significant opportunities. Farmers continue to view Chilliwack as an excellent place to farm."



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Kelowna is an example of just one of many municipalities with very lengthy farm edges. As the crow flies, the City of Kelowna is about 14 kilometres wide and 26 kilometres north - south. Yet its ALR "coastline," just within the City, is over 260 kilometres in length - the approximate distance from Vancouver to Merritt.

Special Management Areas

Developing 'edge' planning guidelines

Local governments are continually faced with land use compatibility issues. Finding the right balance between different needs and interests competing for a limited land base isn't easy. In an ideal world, planning provisions would simply be put in place to prevent incompatible land uses from locating next to each other. However, the likelihood of meeting this objective is low. This is particularly the case in B.C. where geographic constraints have resulted in many different uses competing for a very limited land base.

One area that demands careful consideration in achieving compatibility is along farm 'edges'. Historic land use patterns, coupled with a rapidly growing urban population, have created very lengthy edges between agriculture and other land uses in many municipalities. The tremendous diversity of B.C. agriculture results in many different farm activities, some of which may lead to concerns from non-farm neighbours about dust, odour, pesticide use, or machinery noise. Likewise, farmers and ranchers can experience impacts from non-farm neighbours. Trespass, litter, theft and damage to crop and equipment, harassment of livestock, and flooding from urban development can pose serious problems for farmers and ranchers.

If these impacts are not handled effectively along both sides of the 'fence', friction can result between neighbours, and farming can become increasingly difficult. To help strengthen relations between neighbours and the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries (MAFF) is currently engaged in a project to develop guidelines and standards that can be applied within Special Management Areas (SMAs). These areas include urban / farm edges, clusters of non-farm uses in the ALR such as rural residential nodes, and areas of environmental sensitivity. The goal of the project is to develop guidelines and standards that will help to minimize nuisance complaints and other problems that may arise between farmers and their neighbours and at the same time allow farming to operate in a viable manner.

Because conflicts can impact both sides of the edge, it is important that solutions to urban / rural conflict be based on the principle of 'shared responsibility'. The types of SMA guidelines and standards developed will address land use, buffering and sighting on both the farm and non-farm sides of the interface. In addition, farm management standards will be developed to guide farming activity within SMAs.

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BC's Local Governments

Planning for Agriculture's Sustainable Future

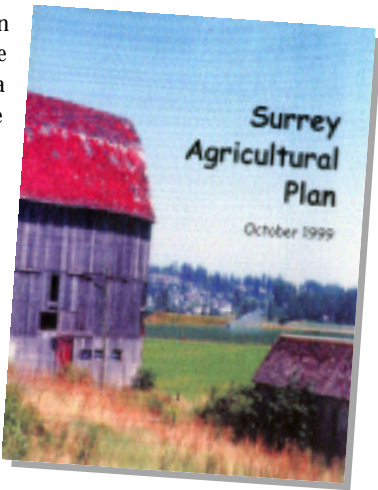
Surrey Agricultural Plan

The City of Surrey's population is large and growing rapidly. Despite being B.C.'s second largest municipality, Surrey is much more than just an urban community and in recent years Council has taken several steps to ensure the long term sustainability of its farm sector. In 1995, Council appointed an Agricultural Advisory Committee (AAC) to provide advice on day to day land use issues and longer range planning questions.

Between 1991 and 1996, Surrey's population increase was larger than the combined population increase of the Provinces of Saskatchewan, Manitoba, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Newfoundland.

In 1998 the Official Community Plan was updated and included supportive agricultural policies with a commitment to protect and enhance farming. To help meet this commitment, Surrey put in place the first development permit area for the protection of farming in BC. The plan also directed that a 'farm community plan' be developed.

With the direct involvement of the AAC, what emerged was the *Surrey Agricultural Plan* adopted in 1999. The Plan provides a comprehensive framework and implementation strategy for addressing agricultural issues, resolving rural-urban conflicts and helping to ensure the long-term viability of the agricultural sector.



OCP established a policy to work with the Land Reserve Commission (LRC) and the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries (MAFF) to, "...identify and implement policies and programs aimed at improving farming viability." To meet this objective the City and local Farmers' Institute joined forces to develop the 'Agriculture Viability Strategy.' The purpose of the Strategy is not to determine if the agricultural resource and ALR land should be farmed, but how they can be *better* farmed and managed. During the first phase of the process two documents were completed by the City - an *Agriculture Survey Report*, which gathered public opinion, and a comprehensive *Agriculture Profile*. Phase two of the project is underway. Besides a number of tasks being completed by consultants, MAFF and Agriculture Canada are also providing assistance.



"The premise behind the Richmond Agriculture Viability Strategy is: in the past we have managed the ALR for protection of farmland; we must now move toward managing it for the viability of farming."

Terry Crowe, Manager, Land Use Department, City of Richmond.

North Cowichan Strategic Agriculture Plan

Early in 2000 the District of North Cowichan initiated a strategic agricultural planning process. The work is being guided by an Agricultural Plan Advisory Committee made up of District farmers, representatives for the Chamber of Commerce and Community Futures, a District Councilor and municipal, MAFF and LRC staff. The objectives of the Plan are to report on the current status of the agricultural industry and identify constraints, opportunities and solutions to the challenges facing the industry. The Plan will recommend future action, identify means to promote agriculture in the District and establish a monitoring process.

Involving the farm community and the general public in the planning process has also been identified as a key part of the process. "With the growth of agriculture in our area, it is essential that we involve local industry representatives in our planning process," comments Chris Hall, Director of Planning, North Cowichan. "Our agricultural plan will bring some focus to what is a very important part of our local economy."

Greater Vancouver / Fraser Valley Regional Districts

The Agricultural Advisory Committee of the Greater Vancouver Regional District is developing an *Economic Strategy for Agriculture in the Lower Mainland*. Working with the Fraser Valley Regional

District, the GVRD has obtained funding and should have this significant project completed mid-way through 2001. A sub-committee of GVRD's Agricultural Advisory Committee has been established to provide a valley wide overview, including representatives from MAFF and the LRC. The project objectives will include an understanding of the historic and present context of agriculture in the area. The report will produce both a long range and short range strategy for increasing the economic viability of the agricultural sector in the Lower Mainland.

Creston Valley OCP Update

The Regional District of Central Kootenay is currently in the process of updating the OCP for the Creston Valley area. To assist this process, MAFF, LRC and Regional District staff have met to consider how to enhance and use information in the Valley. It is hoped that an improved understanding of land uses and farming systems in the Valley will assist in the process of determining issues that can be addressed within the Plan or other subsequent actions. Given that the Creston Valley annually generates about 75% of all gross farm receipts in Central Kootenay, the MAFF and LRC are pleased to be able to work with the Regional District on this important project.

In the case of all of the locally driven agricultural planning processes that have emerged over the last number of years, MAFF, LRC and the Ministry of Municipal Affairs have played an active role in providing support in a variety of ways, and will continue to do so. An important lesson has also emerged. Each of these planning processes have been enhanced by the decision of councils and boards to directly involve members of their agriculture community in the process!

It is important that the efforts of local governments to ensure agriculture's continued place in their communities are recognized. None of these planning processes would have been realized without the vision and commitment of local councils, regional boards and their staffs.

If you have any questions or comments about this article, please contact: Barry Smith, Sr. Land Use Specialist, Resource Management Branch, BCMAFF - ph: (604) 556-3106 email: Barry.Smith@gems4.gov.bc.ca



Surrey Agricultural Advisory Committee at work.

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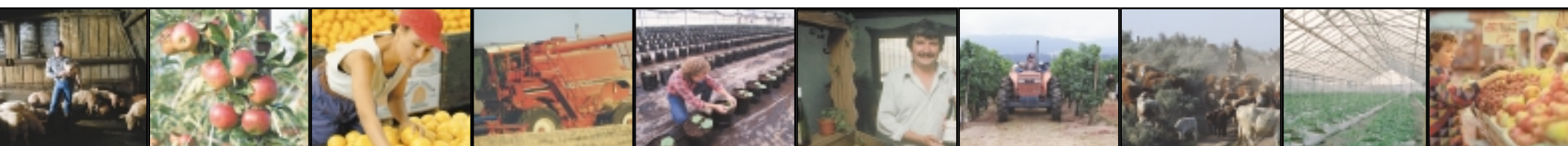
Special Management Areas

Developing 'edge' planning guidelines

Standards that address farming activities can be implemented through a farm bylaw. Guidelines that address urban / non-farming activities can be best implemented through zoning bylaw provisions and policies associated with development permit areas for the protection of farming within official community plans. In addition, care taken at the time of subdivision through the application of buffering techniques and sensitive subdivision design is also important. Together, special management area guidelines and other edge planning tools should work as a complimentary package applied in a manner that best meets local circumstances. As a result, an important part of the work program will involve consultation with local governments and the agriculture industry.

The final guidelines and standards are intended to be easily enforceable and cost effective, yet strict enough to address the issues that generate concerns. They should provide the support that local governments need to address urban-rural compatibility issues and add stability to the farming and ranching sectors. The stability that is achieved through this edge planning process will ultimately help to secure agriculture as a key part of each community's economic and social fabric and enhance liveability for everyone.

If you have any questions or comments about this article, please contact: Karen Thomas, Land Use Agrologist, Resource Management Branch, BCMAFF - (604) 556-3104, email: Karen.Thomas@gems2.gov.bc.ca



Growing Small

Interest in small scale & small lot farms on the rise

Farmers must compete in a global commodity marketplace. The post NAFTA reality for those producing for commodity markets is clear. Be more efficient, lower your costs - get big or get out! In many areas this has resulted in fewer farms but far higher production on each farm.

In the midst of these global challenges facing farmers in commodity focused agriculture, a new group of farmers has quietly emerged. These farmers do not worry about global markets or global market prices. These are the rapidly growing numbers of small to medium scale farmers producing products for their local community marketplace.

There has been an increase of 3,000 new small farms in B.C. between 1991 and 1996

The demand for locally grown products is increasing and the number of farms emerging to meet this demand is also growing. Between '91 and '96 the number of farms selling \$5,000 to \$50,000 worth of produce grew by 30% - representing 3,000 new small farms. It is anticipated that the upcoming 2001 census will see this growth continue.

In many parts of B.C. historic subdivision patterns have created farm areas with many smaller parcels that lend themselves to small scale, community-oriented farming.

While each small farm may not produce a great deal by itself, taken together, farms selling under \$50,000, produce over \$200M in farm gate sales annually in B.C. More importantly small scale farm operations support rural community development in a number of ways by: adding a second income for rural families; supporting agribusiness infrastructure such as feed mills and equipment repair; supporting the economic and social fabric of rural communities; adding to items produced within the community; and often acting as an interface between areas of urban population and farming.

Where did these 3,000 new farmers come from? Some of them started small because of capital constraints, but most come from

non-traditional backgrounds and are small by choice. They supply the community market and use farming as a home based second family income or retirement income. Yes, people are actually taking early retirement to become farmers!

Sylvia and Barry Leden operate Regatta Gardens in Coombs, where they moved 13 years ago to enjoy the rural lifestyle. Together, they have cleared 3 acres of their 22-acre parcel and now produce everything from broccoli to sheep for their roadside store. Their small operation has grown to employ 6 seasonal staff and attracts customers from Ladysmith to Tofino.

"Our biggest challenge is trying to balance farming part time. In order to manage the crops properly, along with your customers and your clientele, it can be quite difficult with another job. And then there is always family," says Sylvia.

While global markets do not concern small lot/scale farmers, local regulations do. At a four-day workshop to discuss small lot and small scale farming, held in Abbotsford and Nanaimo, in October, 1999 farmers identified local rules and regulations as a major barrier to growth. For example, certain types of agriculture, even at a small scale, are often restricted on small lots. Setback regulations can also have a much greater impact on the usability of a small parcel compared to a larger one.

"As a small lot farm, a good target is \$10,000 gross per acre. If you can do that in a 3 month season you're doing well."
Sylvia Leden, Regatta Gardens, Coombs

The growth in small scale, direct marketed, community focused farming will likely result in more local farm markets, more on-farm retail outlets and more on-farm direct to consumer marketing. Local governments may wish to consider how their current bylaws and rural development initiatives support the anticipated growth in this area of agriculture.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries has published a

report entitled, 'The Role of Small Lot Agriculture in the South Coast Region'. While the report expands on the growing phenomenon of small lot/scale farming in the South Coastal Region, it should also be applicable in many other parts of the province. The report along with the recommendations of the workshops held on small lot/small scale farming are available through Ministry offices.

If you have any questions or comments about this article, please contact: Mark Robbins, Regional Agrologist, South Coastal Region, BCMAFF - ph: (604) 556-3086, email: Mark.Robbins@gems5.gov.bc.ca



Planning for Agriculture

Funding & support available to local governments

With an increasing number of local governments focusing planning efforts on their rural / agricultural areas, the question of how to adequately fund these important projects continually arises. While funding always seems to present a challenge there are both new and old sources that can be accessed to assist in the completion of agricultural studies, land use inventories, the development of agricultural area plans, and OCP and bylaw updates involving farming areas.

The Community Planning and Development Grant Program of the Ministry of Municipal Affairs is a well recognized and long standing program to assist local governments on a wide range of planning projects. The grant programs administered by Municipal Affairs are directed at improving the economic, social and environmental well being of B.C. communities. In the past few years this program has been used to assist planning projects specifically directed towards planning in agricultural areas within jurisdictions such as Surrey, Pitt Meadows and North Cowichan.

A new funding source is the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries through the Resource Management Branch. To date funds have been provided to assist Richmond, North Cowichan and the Greater Vancouver and Fraser Valley Regional Districts. In all cases, ministry funds form only part of a larger funding package. This emphasizes the importance of partnership building, and is contingent upon the involvement of the agricultural community.

In addition to providing funding, MAFF has adjusted the focus of a large number of staff to work, along with the Land Reserve Commission, on an as-needed basis with local governments. A number of documents such as a Farm Practices Guide, Planning for Agriculture, A Guide for Bylaw Development in Farming Areas, and

an Approving Officer Guide have also been developed specifically to complement local government efforts. In addition, MAFF has recently attained the services of a Geographic Information System (GIS) specialist to work with local governments on land use inventory and GIS projects.



Another new source of funding for planning projects that involve the local farm community is the B.C. Investment Agriculture Foundation. Over the past year the Foundation has recognized the importance of local planning processes focused on farming areas. As a result, funds totaling some \$300,000 have been earmarked for the program. To date the Foundation has supported projects in the City of



Surrey, City of Richmond, Greater Vancouver Regional District and the District of North Cowichan.

The Foundation has developed guidelines outlining criteria and application details. Several different forms of activities are eligible for funding and different funding limits have been established taking into account the varying levels of farming activity in communities throughout B.C. The primary outcome anticipated by the Foundation is, "a local government planning and regulatory climate that ensures

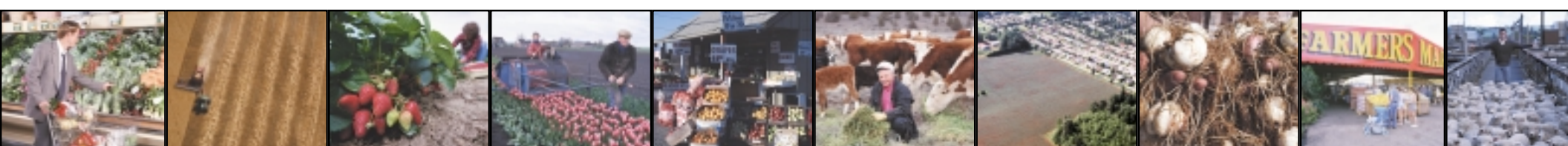
"It is absolutely critical for local governments to be involved in planning for agriculture in their area. To that end, the B.C. Investment Agriculture Foundation is prepared to help in funding planning initiatives at a local level."

Gary Kenwood, Chair, B.C. Investment Agriculture Foundation.

the preservation of the agricultural resource base and enhances the economic viability of agriculture." Involvement of the agriculture community in the process is also a key requirement when funding is being considered by the Foundation.

While it can probably be assumed that funding will always be a challenge, the on-going support of the Province and the B.C. Investment Agriculture Foundation ensures that new efforts to plan for agriculture's long term future in B.C. communities will be realized.

If you have any questions or comments about this article, please contact: Barry Smith, Sr. Land Use Specialist, Resource Management Branch, BCMAFF - ph: (604) 556-3106 email: Barry.Smith@gems4.gov.bc.ca



An Agriculture GIS

The Pitt Meadows pilot project

Agriculture is becoming part of the planning mainstream in many areas of BC. Several local governments, from Kelowna to Surrey, have completed agricultural area plans. Many others are involved in projects to improve their land use and water inventory in farm areas.

Having improved inventories will equip local governments with a strong information base from which to better understand and help meet the challenges facing agriculture.

Recent legislative changes such as the enactment of the *Farm Practices Protection (Right to Farm) Act* and changes to the *Municipal Act* and *Land Title Act*, have opened up new planning opportunities in agricultural areas which can ensure farming's place in local communities and help reduce land use conflicts. As in any planning effort, information is key. It is critical to have in place innovative means to analyze

information and understand its implications so that effective decisions can be made, conflicts resolved and opportunities realized.

In 1996, MAFF and the District of Pitt Meadows took advantage of these new planning opportunities and joined together to work on an agricultural Geographic Information System (GIS) pilot project. It was felt that

GIS held considerable promise not only to enhance the understanding of farming areas, but also to help identify issues important to strengthening, sustaining, and promoting agricultural development. The benefits of adding agricultural data and tools to the District's GIS were explored. However, the project also provided an opportunity to test approaches to undertaking land use inventories in farm areas and examine the applicability of a variety of different information layers and sources. The intent from the outset was to ensure

that the experience gained in working with Pitt Meadows would be available to other local governments.

Now completed, this project enabled the District and MAFF to explore the benefits of adding agriculture data and tools to the District's GIS.

The agricultural GIS is proving to be a cost-effective, user-friendly planning tool.

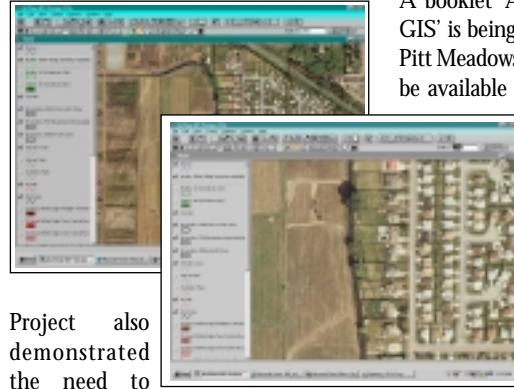
The District now has a system that will:

- increase access to local farm sector information;
- act as a tool to enhance decision-making; and
- assist in the promotion of farming in the community.

More specifically, applying GIS to the District's farming area can provide information that is useful in future updates of Pitt Meadows' Official Community Plan and bylaws. Some of the tools that were developed can be used to demonstrate the effects of setback distances and commodity restrictions on the agriculture industry. Other tools can help investigate the possibilities of starting or expanding a farm business and provide information that can assist an operator in making management decisions.

Additional features of the agricultural GIS include its ability to identify land use patterns along the farm edge and help determine the need for buffering.

The Pitt Meadows GIS Pilot Project provided an excellent opportunity to demonstrate how GIS technology can be combined with resource information to strengthen farming in BC. The



Project also demonstrated the need to involve a number of partners and the importance of sharing information and expertise.

It now serves as a model for other B.C. communities who are interested in planning for and promoting agriculture.

Given the success of the pilot project, MAFF is interested in pursuing further

work with other local governments. It is anticipated that future projects will include building GIS tools to identify marketing and employment opportunities, as well as trends in land use and ownership patterns. The opportunity for employing GIS to help in the application of buffers along the urban / rural edges will also be examined further.

A booklet 'AgFocus' - An Agricultural GIS' is being developed based upon the Pitt Meadows Pilot Project and will soon be available to local governments. The booklet outlines the agricultural GIS tools and describes the pilot project. For those who only want a brief synopsis of what an agricultural GIS is capable of, a brochure will be available shortly.

If you have any questions or comments about this article, please contact: Karen Thomas, Land Use Agrologist, Resource Management Branch, BCMAFF - (604) 556-3104, email: Karen.Thomas@gems2.gov.bc.ca

Surrey Takes Lead in Flood Control

The Serpentine Nicomekl flood control project



It should come as no surprise that as urban development increases the impact on neighboring agricultural producers - particularly those farms in lowland areas can be severe.

The City of Surrey is showing the way by correcting long-standing drainage

and flooding problems experienced by farmers in the Serpentine - Nicomekl Lowlands.

"The history is quite simple. The agriculture land in Surrey is basically all the lowlands of Surrey," says Surrey Councillor Marvin Hunt. "Over the

years as development has continued in the uplands, more and more water has been sent down into the lowlands causing flooding on farmland."

The Serpentine Nicomekl Flood Control Project is designed to reduce the frequency and duration of flooding experienced by the area's farms. A team of engineering, environmental and agricultural experts are designing and building dykes, fish friendly pumping stations, a fish-rearing pond, and new riparian buffer zones.

"Flooding has a snowball effect. With the floods comes increased damage to crops from ducks and other wildlife. And six feet of water laying on a field compacts soil which makes it harder for new roots to take," says Don Livingston, a third generation farmer and the Co-Chair of the Upper Serpentine Farm Preservation Group. "It was getting to the point where we couldn't afford to farm here anymore."

Before city officials could tackle the job, a strategic study was completed to examine a number of options to control flooding and improve drainage. Once an overall strategy was selected, the lowlands were broken into smaller functional areas. An integral part of the planning process was a series of open houses intended to gather feedback from local farmers and residents.

"From the start, the strategy had to deal with both environmental and agricultural concerns, as well as deal with the impact of storm water," according to Vince Lalonde, a Project Manager in Surrey's Engineering Department. "It goes quite a few steps beyond just resolving the upland/lowland drainage problems."

Originally the project was to be implemented over a 10-year period, but at the urging of Surrey council the majority of benefits from dyke construction and other project

initiatives are already being felt by area farmers.

Surrey has ramped up spending to roughly \$8 million per year in each of the past two years on this project. They plan to spend a similar amount next year. In total the job of protecting Surrey's farmland from flood damage is expected to cost roughly \$40 million over the entire life of the program.

"The City is taking the bull by the horns and we are certainly thankful for that," said Livingston. "We can see that the overall plan should work and that it should enhance agricultural production. And that is good for everyone."

If you have any questions or comments about this article, please contact: Ron Bertrand, Director, Resource Management Branch, BCMAFF ph: (604) 556-3103 email: ron.bertrand@gems6.gov.bc.ca

Agriculture Overviews

A window on local agriculture

From small farms in Metchosin to huge grain farms in the Peace, agriculture can be found in almost every corner of B.C. Of 181 local governments - municipalities and regional districts - 132 have at least some land in the Agricultural Land Reserve.

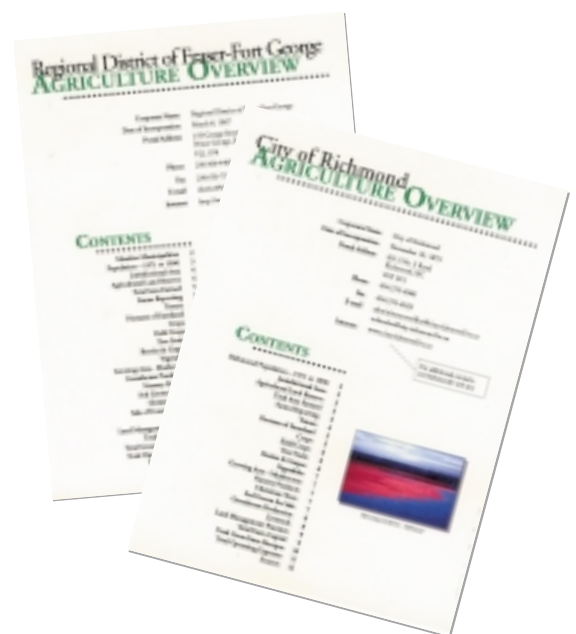
However, very often information about farming and ranching is not available at a local government level. Rather, statistics are frequently generated on a province wide basis or for broad agricultural regions or focus on individual commodities. Information portraying agriculture at the local level is, however, accessible for several municipalities and almost all B.C. regional districts through Statistics Canada's Census of Agriculture.

To make this data more readily available, work is underway by the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries to develop over fifty "Agriculture

Overviews" for key farming and ranching municipalities and regional districts throughout the Province.

The Overviews will be between 12 and 16 pages long and provide a wide range of information that should assist local governments, the Ministry and others to better understand agriculture at the community and regional district level. About ten overviews have been completed to date. As they are finalized, copies will be forwarded to the respective municipality or regional district.

If you have any questions or comments about this article, please contact: Barry Smith, Sr. Land Use Specialist, Resource Management Branch, BCMAFF - ph: (604) 556-3106 email: Barry.Smith@gems4.gov.bc.ca



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