

# FARMING OPPORTUNITIES IN THE COMOX VALLEY





### *Where is the Comox Valley?*

The Comox Valley is located in the south-eastern portion of the Regional District of Comox-Strathcona. It extends from Deep Bay in the south, to the Oyster River in the north and from the Strait of Georgia to the east and the Beaufort Range to the west.

The Valley covers an area of 1,734 square kilometres and has an estimated population of about 52,000 comprised of 32,000 in the municipalities of Courtenay, Comox and Cumberland, and approximately 20,000 in Electoral Area A, B, and C (2001).

## *Agricultural History*

Richard C. Mayne recognized the agricultural potential of the Valley in 1860. Within 3 years, 60 settlers were drawn to the area by the fertile soils and favourable climate. Over the last 140 years, agriculture in the area has demonstrated its strength and resiliency in the face of ongoing technological changes, marketing challenges and “globalization” pressures by continuing to adapt and expand.

**Haying - Comox  
Valley  
(Circa - 1915)**

BC Archives: Call # B 07290



## *Agriculture is Growing*

Agriculture has been steadily growing in the Valley. In 2001, there were 300 census farms operating on nearly 10,000 hectares of farmland in the Valley. In contrast, the 1991 census reported 284 farms on about 7,200 hectares. The Comox Valley accounts for over two-thirds of the farming activity within the Regional District.



## *A Productive Resource Base*

The soils in the Comox Valley have high capability ratings with 60% of the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR) classified as prime (improved Class 1-3). The three common limitations are acidity, moisture deficiency (60% require irrigation), or excess wetness (25% require drainage).



A hallmark of the Comox Valley is its wide variety of agricultural crops. There are over 60 different fruits, vegetables, nursery and field crops grown. Cattle, sheep and poultry comprise most of the animal production.

## *A Favourable Climate*

The Comox Valley has warm, dry summers (July average high 22.5° C) and short, mild winters (January, average low -0.3° C).

Bright sunshine at the Comox Airport averaged 1,939 hours between 1987 and 1997 (compared to 1,919 at the Vancouver International Airport).

Average precipitation varies, depending upon location, from about 1,200 mm to 1,500 mm per year. Monthly rainfall is generally less than 50 mm from May to September.

## *Quality soils are protected*

The Valley has 20,000 hectares of land protected by the Agricultural Land Reserve.

Most of this land is designated for agricultural use in the Rural Comox Valley Official Community Plan and zoning bylaws. With only 24% of deeded parcels producing sufficient agricultural products to qualify for the BC Assessment Authority's "farm class" and less than half of ALR land in active production there are abundant opportunities for agricultural expansion.

Farmland prices range from \$5,000 to \$20,000 per hectare for parcels over 10 hectares and from \$25,000 to \$50,000 per hectare for parcels 2 to 5 hectares in size.





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*An active local  
farming  
community and  
strong support  
for agriculture!*

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The Comox Valley Farmers' Market operates twice a week from April through December with 50 to 60 vendors.

There are also numerous retail outlets in the Valley selling locally grown products.

Processing facilities for dairy products, floral greens and timber products are active in the community.



## *Growing Opportunities*

The Comox Valley has had a long agricultural history. The land base and climate of the Valley are ideal for a wide variety of production opportunities. Farms in the Comox Valley are diverse both in the variety of operations and their size. They range from large dairy farms on hundreds of hectares, to successful small-scale organic operations serving the local market.

The Valley has a combination of growing urban communities providing expanded market opportunities, as well as large farm areas protected by the Agricultural Land Reserve, some of which are awaiting agricultural development.

The Comox Valley has a diversity of services ranging from veterinary clinics to custom machinery operators and equipment dealers. The Valley is home to a Ministry of Agriculture Regional Agrologist and has several active farm groups. Two dairy processing plants are located in the area as well as an auction barn and slaughterhouse. The Valley is well served by transportation infrastructure including a new Island Highway, Airport facilities and has potential for a barge facility in the future.

The Regional District of Comox-Strathcona is taking steps to ensure that agriculture has a home in the Valley. The recent Comox Valley Agricultural Plan identifies



issues important to the farm community and puts in place appropriate policies to meet future challenges and guide farming's place in the community for the long term.

## *Local Contacts:*

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- **Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food:**  
Jill Hatfield, 897-7518
  - **Island Farmer's Alliance:**  
Scott Crawford, 703-0027
  - **Comox Valley Economic Development:**  
John Watson, 334-2427
  - **Regional District of Comox Strathcona**  
Office, 334-6000
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### **Local Farm Groups include:**

- Farmers' Institute;
  - Agricultural Awareness Committee;
  - Agricultural Advisory Committee; and
  - Fall Fair Committee.
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- The Comox Valley Agricultural Plan can be found at [www.rdes.bc.ca](http://www.rdes.bc.ca)
  - General Information about the Comox Valley can be found at [www.comoxvalleychamber.com](http://www.comoxvalleychamber.com)



This brochure was developed as part of the Comox Valley Agricultural Area Plan. Participation and support in this process included the Regional District of Comox-Strathcona, BC Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries, BC Ministry of Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services, BC Investment Agriculture Foundation, Agricultural Land Commission, Island Farmer's Alliance and the local farm community through the Farmers' Institute.

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