

# BALANCED BUDGET 2007

*Ministry of Agriculture and Lands*

*Agricultural Land  
Commission*

## **2007/08 – 2009/10 SERVICE PLAN**

February 2007



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## **Message from the Minister and Accountability Statement**

As the minister responsible for the Agricultural Land Commission, I am pleased to present the 2007/08 – 2009/10 Service Plan for the Agricultural Land Commission.

B.C.'s fertile lands yield some of the world's highest quality agricultural and food products. We produce a greater variety of agricultural products over a wider range of geographical and climatic conditions than any other area in Canada. A high quality agricultural land base has long been the cornerstone of B.C.'s farm economy and is an important resource for the future. That is why B.C. has preserved five per cent of our entire land base — our best agricultural lands — for food production within the Agricultural Land Reserve.

The Agricultural Land Commission administers the Agricultural Land Reserve as an arms'-length administrative tribunal. Although the Chair reports to me, the Commission operates independently within the framework of the *Agricultural Land Commission Act*. Its members are entrusted by the government to preserve agricultural land, to encourage and enable farm businesses throughout British Columbia and to consider community interests.

Over the past year, the six regional panels of the Commission faced an increasing number of applications, many of which were complex and the subject of much public scrutiny. A great deal of thought and discussion has taken place on how to best position the Commission to deal with the ongoing challenge of reconciling the needs of growing communities with the critical task of maintaining our agricultural lands. This Service Plan reflects the outcome of these discussions and identifies a number of actions and strategies that will improve the capabilities of the Commission in many areas, including pro-active planning and enforcement.

The Agricultural Land Commission 2007/08 – 2009/10 Service Plan was prepared under my direction in accordance with the *Budget Transparency and Accountability Act*. I am responsible for the basis on which the plan has been prepared. All material fiscal assumptions and policy decisions as of February 15, 2007 have been considered in preparing the plan and I am accountable for achieving the specific objectives in the plan.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Pat Bell', written in a cursive style.

Honourable Pat Bell  
Minister of Agriculture and Lands

February 15, 2007



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# Commission Overview

## Purpose of Commission

The Agricultural Land Commission is the provincial agency responsible for administering the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR), a provincial land use zone in favour of agriculture. The purposes of the Commission are:

- (a) to preserve agricultural land;
- (b) to encourage farming on agricultural land in collaboration with other communities of interest; and
- (c) to encourage local governments, First Nations, the government and its agents to enable and accommodate farm use of agricultural land and uses compatible with agriculture in their plans, bylaws and policies.

The *Agricultural Land Commission Act* sets out processes for land use approvals including the inclusion or removal of land from the ALR and non-farm uses and subdivisions of land within the ALR. The Act is supported by the Agricultural Land Reserve Use, Subdivision and Procedure Regulation, which details procedures for applications and defines permitted land uses and land subdivisions within the ALR.

The Act is administered by a government-appointed Commission consisting of 19 members including a Chair and six panels for six geographical regions of the province. Each panel has three members including a Vice-chair.

## Vision, Mission and Values

### Vision

The preservation of British Columbia's agricultural land as the basis of the food system and related agricultural economy.

### Mission

Preserve agricultural land and encourage and enable farm businesses throughout British Columbia.

**Values**

The Commission values:

- i. the benefits of agricultural land preservation;
- ii. its role as an independent administrative tribunal;
- iii. partnerships and collaboration with other governments and agencies;
- iv. technical information on which to base decisions;
- v. the judgement and experience of members and staff;
- vi. transparency and fairness in decision making; and
- vii. responsiveness to applicants and the public.



# Strategic Context

The Commission will continue to play the lead role in agricultural land preservation and in doing so, will make a positive contribution towards achieving one of government's Five Great Goals of leading the world in sustainable environmental management.

The Commission's continuing efforts to work with stakeholders to encourage and enable farming and farm businesses in the ALR will also contribute positively to another of government's Five Great Goals of creating more jobs per capita than anywhere else in Canada.

Over the past three decades, the Commission has responded to pressures on the ALR by refining the boundaries, initiating a series of minor changes to its guiding legislation, and by developing working partnerships with other ministries, local governments and more recently, First Nations. Despite these ongoing changes, the Commission must pursue significant operational changes that will position it to respond proactively to agricultural, land use, environmental, economic and societal trends.

## **A: Environmental Scan**

- Increasing growth pressures on agricultural land. Population, housing and land consumption patterns in all regions and particularly within high-growth areas is increasing land use competition. Several high-profile applications over the past two years are indicative of mounting pressure on the Commission to allow lands within the ALR to be utilized for residential and non-agricultural employment lands within these high-growth areas. The number of applications by land owners has also increased significantly over the past three years, despite streamlining efforts that expanded the types of non-agricultural uses that could proceed without an application. It is anticipated that pressure on the ALR will continue to build in the coming years.
- Renewed priority on domestic food supplies and the contribution of agriculture. Natural crises and crises precipitated by human actions, as well as concern over the source and quality of the food available to B.C.'s population, has focused attention to the ALR's role in providing a safe and adequate supply of food for domestic consumption. There is also a growing awareness of the vital role agriculture plays in local economies and the potential for future export opportunities.

**B: Strengths, Weaknesses, Threats and Opportunities**

<b>Strengths</b>
Effective regulatory tools for preserving agricultural land.
High degree of public support for agricultural land preservation.
Strong tradition of partnering with communities and stakeholders.
High degree of staff and Commissioner dedication to program.
<b>Threats</b>
Land consumption for non-farm uses, including community needs, will result in increasing conflict/pressure on ALR.
Competing public and private values that occur on the agricultural land base may increasingly interfere with the encouragement and enabling of agriculture.
Increasing application caseload will further detract from the Commission's ability to focus on strategic priorities.

<b>Weaknesses</b>
Little direct influence on community and regional growth management practices outside of the ALR.
Limited resources for effective program delivery, including compliance and enforcement.
Current business practices detract from Commission ability to focus on strategic priorities.
Inadequate information management systems and mapping hampers decision making and client service.
<b>Opportunities</b>
Future world events such as peak oil and climate change will reinforce the public importance and strategic value of a land base to support domestic agriculture.
Increased consumer awareness and demand for locally grown, healthy food will strengthen support for agricultural land preservation.
The Commission can improve its enforcement effectiveness and implement strategic directions through new business practices and partnerships with other agencies and local governments.
Canada Land Inventory ratings of land capability for agriculture provide an information base that can be built on.

## **Core Business Areas**

The core business of the Agricultural Land Commission is the preservation of agricultural land through the administration of the *Agricultural Land Commission Act*. The business of the Commission is carried out through three functional areas:

### ***Land Use Planning and Application Processing***

The Commission reviews and decides applications under the *Agricultural Land Commission Act* and enforces compliance with the Act and regulations. In addition to deciding land use applications under the Act, the Commission reviews plans and bylaws of local governments and other agencies to ensure that the ALR is properly identified and that the policies are supportive of the ALR and farmland preservation. The Commission works with many stakeholders including individuals, farm organizations, local governments and First Nations to support farm development and to remove unnecessary obstacles to farm expansion in their areas.

### ***Strategic Planning and Corporate Policy***

The Commission develops strategies, plans and policies to achieve the goals and objectives set out in the Service Plan. The Commission also participates in the agricultural planning and policy initiatives of other ministries, agencies and local governments.

### ***Administration and Information Systems***

The previous two functions are supported by an administration, records management and information systems unit. This includes maintenance of an application database over 36,000 files and ALR maps for the province.

## **Information Resource Management Plan**

The Agricultural Land Commission Information Resource Management Plan overview is available on the Commission website at:

<http://www.alc.gov.bc.ca/relatedplanningprocesses/overview.html>.

# Goals, Objectives, Strategies and Results

## Overview

### Commission Goals

The Commission has set two goals critical to achieving its vision:

**1. Preserve agricultural land.**

Agricultural land comprises five per cent of the total land area of British Columbia. There is ongoing and increasing pressure to convert agricultural land to non-agricultural uses. The Commission protects agricultural land in B.C. through the Agricultural Land Reserve or ALR, a provincial land use zone in favour of agriculture. The ALR provides an agricultural land base that supports, and creates opportunities for, a safe and secure source of food and other agricultural products. A protected land base also provides for agricultural expansion and compatible economic activities.

**2. Encourage and enable farming of land in the ALR.**

The land use framework for agriculture includes the *Agricultural Land Commission Act*, local government land use plans and by-laws, and the legislation, plans and policies of other ministries and agencies that affect agricultural land use.

The ALR is a working agricultural land base. The utilization of the ALR for agricultural production contributes to the economy, stabilizes rural communities and is the foundation of a safe and secure food system. The Commission shares the responsibility for encouraging farm use of agricultural lands with its key partners. These include over 130 local governments, the agricultural sector and its professional organizations, the Ministry of Agriculture and Lands, other ministries and agencies, Agriculture Canada and other federal agencies, and First Nations.

### Linkage to the Five Great Goals

The goals of the Commission are aligned with two of the Five Great Goals set by the government. The Commission goal to “Preserve agricultural land” relates to the long-term management of a resource base for both current and future needs. It contributes to the Great Goal “To lead the world in sustainable environmental management, with the best air and water quality, and the best fisheries management, bar none.”

The Commission goal to “encourage and enable farming of land in the ALR” relates to providing a business environment for agriculture. It contributes to the Great Goal “To create more jobs per capita than anywhere else in Canada.”

## **Cross Ministry Initiatives**

The Commission works closely with the Ministry of Agriculture and Lands on issues, programs and initiatives intended to improve land use planning for agriculture. Ministry and Commission staff utilize a team approach to participating in local government planning and by-law initiatives that impact agriculture.

## **Regulatory Reform**

British Columbia continues to make regulatory reform a priority across government, making it easier for businesses to operate and succeed in British Columbia, while still preserving regulations that protect public health, safety and the environment. A citizen-centred approach to regulatory reform will reduce the number of steps it takes to comply with government requirements or access government programs and services.

The Commission will support Government's Regulatory Reform initiatives by committing to controlling regulatory burden and improving regulatory quality by:

- reviewing the *Agricultural Land Commission Act* and regulations in order to shift the Commission's regulations to be more citizen centred, cost-effective, results-based, and responsive to our clients by reducing and/or streamlining the steps or business processes involved in complying with provincial regulations; and
- adhering to the regulatory criteria set out in the Regulatory Reform Policy, and targeting a zero per cent net increase in regulation through 2009/10.

# Commission Performance Plan Summary

Great Goals	Agricultural Land Commission Mission Preserve agricultural land and encourage and enable farm businesses throughout British Columbia.		
	ALC Goals	ALC Objectives	Performance Measures and Targets
To lead the world in sustainable environmental management, with the best air and water quality, and the best fisheries management, bar none.	1. Preserve agricultural land.	1. The boundaries of the Agricultural Land Reserve reflect agricultural suitability, the needs of the agricultural industry and long-term community needs and food requirements.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Complete 2 co-operative planning processes with targeted local governments in northern and eastern British Columbia by 2009/10.</li> </ul>
		2. Decision-making practices based on adequate information and that are appropriate to regional circumstances.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>100 per cent of community need proposals supported by adequate information.</li> </ul>
		3. A high degree of compliance with Commission decisions and the <i>Agricultural Land Commission Act</i> .	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Appoint 6 officials from other ministries and local governments to assist with compliance and enforcement.</li> </ul>
To create more jobs per capita than anywhere else in Canada.	2. Encourage and enable farming.	1. Agricultural goals and objectives are "built in" to existing land use planning systems and practices.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>100 per cent of new Official Community Plans and regional growth strategies reviewed preserve agricultural land and encourage and enable farming.</li> <li>20 per cent reduction in the number of applications and routine Official Community Plans reviewed by panels through delegation to staff and other changes to business practices.</li> </ul>
		2. Provincial and local government land use regulations support, and adapt to changes within the farm-based economy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Complete 2 cooperative planning processes with targeted local governments in northern and eastern British Columbia by 2009/10.</li> <li>100 per cent of new Official Community Plans and regional growth strategies reviewed preserve agricultural land and encourage and enable farming.</li> </ul>

# Performance Plan

## **Goal 1:** *Preserve agricultural land.*

**Objective 1:** *The boundaries of the Agricultural Land Reserve reflect agricultural suitability, the needs of the agricultural industry and long term community needs and food requirements.*

The Agricultural Land Reserve is primarily intended to preserve British Columbia's limited agricultural land base for food production and to provide land use certainty to encourage agricultural businesses.

The Agricultural Land Reserve should be based on agricultural land capability and suitability for a diverse range of agricultural products.

Consideration of applications to exclude land from the Agricultural Land Reserve for community needs should be based on detailed assessments and, over time, thorough comprehensive planning processes undertaken in partnership with local governments that address both ongoing food production and community needs. These processes should emphasize alternatives to the exclusion of Agricultural Land Reserve to meet community needs, such as infill and redevelopment.

**Objective 2:** *Decision-making practices based on adequate information and that are appropriate to regional circumstances.*

The nature of the agricultural resource, the agricultural economy and community needs vary considerably from region to region. The Commission will implement new business practices that recognize these differences and balance them appropriately with the provincial mandate to preserve agricultural land and encourage farming. These practices will provide clarity around decision-making considerations. In addition, new business practices will facilitate approaches to subdivision and non-farm development that benefit agriculture.

Several changes to current business practices will be required in order to improve key decision making processes, improve information management, maximize the effective use of Commission and staff time and enable Commission members to focus more on strategic issues.

**Objective 3:** *A high degree of compliance with Commission decisions and the Agricultural Land Commission Act.*

Responding to priorities such as the increase in applications means that the Commission has been unable to dedicate sufficient resources to enforcing land use regulations and following through on decisions to ensure they are implemented. The Commission must allocate additional resources to enforcement and compliance and make more effective use of partnerships with other agencies and local governments. As part of the Commission's periodic review of the *Agricultural Land Commission Act* and regulations, the existing compliance and enforcement-related provisions for issues such as soil deposit and fill will be reviewed.

**Goal 2:** *Encourage and enable farming.*

**Objective 1:** *Agricultural goals and objectives are "built in" to existing land use planning systems and practice.*

The Commission participates in local planning exercises including official community plans and by-laws and regional growth strategies to ensure that growth management policies minimize the long-term impact on the Agricultural Land Reserve and to encourage farming. The Commission can increase its overall effectiveness by shifting more of its resources from the review of all applications to earlier and more in-depth participation in pro-active land use planning processes.

**Objective 2:** *Provincial and local government land use regulations support, and adapt to changes within, the farm-based economy.*

The Commission, in partnership with the Ministry of Agriculture and Lands, reviews the plans and by-laws of local governments and participates in the development of provincial regulatory and policy processes to ensure that farm businesses are supported. The Commission must continue to focus resources on participating in these processes as well as tailoring its approach to respond to the varying needs of agriculture within each region.



## **Strategies**

There are a number of specific strategies that the Commission will employ to achieve its goals and objectives. The strategies are interrelated and the success of key strategies depends on making progress on other strategies.

- i. Identify opportunities to engage local governments, particularly within the northern and eastern portions of the province, in planning processes that incorporate specific strategies for preserving agricultural land, for ensuring the continued ability of the land to supply food, for bringing additional agricultural land into production, and for strengthening the regional and provincial agricultural economy. These processes may include targeted reviews of specific Agricultural Land Reserve areas.
- ii. Define the information required for the Commission to assess local government proposals to designate land within the Agricultural Land Reserve or to apply for the exclusion of land to meet a community need.
- iii. Adopt business practices that will reduce time spent on applications and inquiries and refocus the Commission on pro-active land use planning and strategic issues, such as creating a specific process for significant applications, implementation of an audit-based system of review for official community plans and the delegation of routine matters to staff.
- iv. Increase compliance and enforcement effectiveness by refining regulations and processes where appropriate, allocating sufficient resources and through closer partnerships with local governments and other agencies including the appointment of officials from other ministries and local governments to assist with enforcement and compliance.
- v. Improve information management, mapping and statistical analysis capabilities to improve decision making, ensure public accountability and improve client service, including the implementation of a new application tracking and statistical analysis software.

# Resource Summary

The Agricultural Land Commission operates under a single sub-vote of the Ministry of Agriculture and Lands as specified in the *Estimates*.

	2006/07 Restated Estimates <sup>1</sup>	2007/08 Estimates	2008/09 Plan	2009/10 Plan
<b>Operating Expenses (\$000)</b>				
<b>Agricultural Land Commission</b> .....	2.144	2.402	2.435	2.463
<b>Total</b> .....	<b>2.144</b>	<b>2.402</b>	<b>2.435</b>	<b>2.463</b>
<b>Full-time Equivalents (FTEs)</b>				
<b>Agricultural Land Commission</b> .....	22	23	23	23
<b>Total</b> .....	<b>22</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Capital Expenditures (Consolidated Revenue Fund) (\$000)</b>				
<b>Agricultural Land Commission</b> .....	15	5	5	5
<b>Total</b> .....	<b>15</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>

<sup>1</sup> These amounts have been restated, for comparative purposes only, to be consistent with the presentation of the Updated 2007/08 *Estimates*. Schedule A of the 2007/08 *Estimates* presents a detailed reconciliation.