

**RDEK AGRICULTURAL PLAN
TERMS OF REFERENCE
March 2012**

1.0 Introduction

The RDEK Board of Directors authorized proceeding with the development of an Agricultural Plan in March 2011. The development of the proposed Agricultural Plan will be completed in partnership with the Ministry of Agriculture and Agricultural Plan Steering Committee (APSC). An Agricultural consultant will be contracted to assist with the development of the Agricultural Plan.

Preliminary work in advance of the development of the Agricultural Plan was undertaken in 2011. A comprehensive Land Use Inventory utilizing the Ministry of Agriculture methodology was undertaken by the RDEK in the summer and fall. Analysis of the data gathered during the survey will provide insight into current agricultural activities on ALR land as the Plan process proceeds. The APSC was established in November 2011. The members of the APSC were appointed by the RDEK Board.

The development of an Agricultural Plan is an important opportunity for the RDEK and the agricultural sector. Current and long range planning by the RDEK has worked to mitigate the impact of development on the agricultural land base; however, the need for long range planning for agriculture is recognized. The Agricultural Plan will provide a unique opportunity to propose recommendations to regulations, plans and policies to support agricultural producers and the land base on which agriculture occurs. Discussion about the current state and desired short and long term future for agriculture will be facilitated within the Agricultural Plan process.

2.0 Context

Agriculture is an integral part of the East Kootenay way of life. Prior to European settlement local First Nations people utilized the land. Land was marketed to the original European settlers as agricultural properties and they undertook subsistence agriculture activities. Over time the cultivated agricultural activities expanded to include mixed production and utilization of Crown range land to meet local needs for agricultural goods. Agriculture throughout the RDEK has evolved and adapted to the topography in recognition of the constraints of soil capability and climate. Agricultural land is primarily along the bottom of the Rocky Mountain Trench. Mountains rise sharply on either side in the Columbia and Elk valleys and development and agricultural activities are restricted to a ribbon along the length of the valleys. The Trench is much broader in the central region extending south to the United States border, facilitating wider spread agricultural activity.

Funding Provided by:



Agriculture is an important economic activity throughout the RDEK. Recent trends have focussed on the importance of locally grown or produced food. However, the impact of wildlife on crops, current economy, development pressure on agricultural land, commercial food distribution system, consumer habits and government regulations continue to challenge the local agricultural sector in the East Kootenay region. The Agricultural Plan will explore the opportunities available to the RDEK and the agricultural community to foster, adapt and sustain agriculture.

3.0 Scope

The Agricultural Plan will consider the agricultural sector within each of the six electoral areas of the RDEK.

4.0 Objectives

- Identify a clear vision for the future of agriculture within the East Kootenay region.
- Identify actions and short and long term indicators that can be undertaken by the RDEK and/or the agricultural sector to enhance, promote and protect agriculture.
- Provide recommendations to amend RDEK bylaws, plans, policies to reflect the goals of the Agricultural Plan.
- Provide recommendations to changes in Provincial legislation, regulations and policies to reflect the goals of the Agricultural Plan.
- Recognize the strengths and weaknesses of the agricultural resources in the region and focus on the potential for viable, sustainable and diversified agricultural endeavours.
- Provide a recommendation to the RDEK Board on the future composition and role of the RDEK Agriculture Advisory Commission (AAC).

5.0 Priority Issues

A range of issues drive the need to have an Agricultural Plan in the region. The four priority issues below introduce the preliminary themes identified and their context.

1) The People

Each individual in the region whether they are a producer or consumer is part of agriculture. A successful agricultural sector requires informed, educated and engaged producers and consumers. Successful producers are essential for agriculture to be maintained as a viable industry. In order for current and future producers to succeed consumers need to have an awareness of agriculture and adapt their practices to support local operations. The Agricultural Plan will focus on the role of producers and consumers in achieving a viable and sustainable agricultural sector.

2) The Place

The geography of the East Kootenay region has defined the agricultural sector. The protection and preservation of the land base is essential to sustaining agriculture in the region. Land under private and public ownership must be accessible and productive for

future generations. A balance must be sought between the use of land for agriculture and other resource values that influence the viability of agriculture activities. The connectivity between resources, including recreation, water, and wildlife is a key component in maintaining an agricultural sector. The management of Crown resources must recognize the overarching impact of decisions on the viability of agriculture. For example, the potential for the disruption of the natural forest cycle through forest management practices and the resulting change in ground cover and water resources. Opportunities for utilization of land in a manner that recognizes the importance of integrated and inclusive resource management planning that recognizes the requirements of a healthy and sustainable ecosystem.

3) The Pressures

The agricultural land and producers within the region are subject to a range of pressures. As is common in other regions, lands that are most suitable for agriculture are also the lands most desirable for development. The continuing demand for residential and non-residential uses, frequent ALR applications for non-farm use, subdivision and exclusion and rising land values are placing pressure on agricultural land resources. The second home market has declined in recent years, but the previous boom has left its mark in the region. Seasonal populations provide a greater market for seasonal produce and value added agricultural products; however, new residential development places pressure on the agricultural sector by removing land from the agricultural base for development.

The economics of agriculture in the East Kootenay region is placing pressure on producers. Low commodity prices, high input and transportation costs, and a limited local independent market have resulted in marginal economic viability for many producers. When combined with changes in regulations over the recent years the impact has been significant. The commercialization of meat processing and centralization of the food distribution system are two such examples of regulatory changes. The Agricultural Plan provides an opportunity to examine the pressures being experienced within the agricultural sector. Emphasis will also be given to recommending changes that would facilitate the agricultural sector adapting and diversifying in a timely manner.

4) The Possibilities

The Agricultural Plan will proactively explore the possibilities that exist to sustain an economically viable agricultural sector in the East Kootenay region. The intent is to identify where the agricultural sector can capitalize on consumer awareness, market trends and opportunities. In order to be successful, there must be flexibility and adaptability in the regulations that govern the agricultural sector at the Provincial and Local Government levels. The Plan is an opportunity to bridge the divide between producers and consumers, generations of producers and between producers within the region. The Agricultural Plan will also be an opportunity to foster dialogue and a shared understanding between the RDEK and the agricultural sector. Connectivity within the region must be cultivated in order to capitalize on opportunities to create a sense of agricultural identity in the East Kootenay through branding and marketing.

6.0 Partner Responsibilities

- The RDEK will facilitate the Agricultural Plan process, contract the Agricultural consultant, assist with community and agricultural sector engagement and work with the Agricultural Consultant to draft the Agricultural Plan.
- The APSC and Ministry of Agriculture will provide technical support and assist with liaising with the agricultural community during the development of the Agricultural Plan.
- The Agricultural Consultant will lead community and agricultural sector engagement and work with the RDEK to draft the Agricultural Plan.

7.0 Communications

Project communications will be in the form of general and targeted communications. A formal communications strategy will be determined in consultation with the Agricultural consultant.

General communications will be undertaken in recognition of the approximately 20,000 rural residents in the RDEK who are directly or indirectly impacted by or are part of the agricultural community in the region. Updates will be made available via Electoral Area newsletters and the RDEK website at major benchmarks in the process and to educate and provide information about engagement opportunities. Major benchmarks will include hiring of the Agricultural consultant; compilation of background, survey results and Agricultural Land Use Inventory information; draft Plan and final Plan presentation. Engagement opportunities are anticipated to include, but are not limited to, workshops, open houses to present the background information, draft and final plans.

Targeted communications will be directed to established agricultural groups and individual producers to provide updates on the Agricultural Plan process and notification of engagement opportunities. Individual producers will be identified by an agricultural interest mailing list provided by the Ministry of Agriculture. The mailing list will be updated and revised as the Agricultural Plan process proceeds. The intent of targeted communications is to ensure that individuals and stakeholders are receiving information in a timely manner and encouraging participation in the process. Targeted engagement activities are anticipated to involve the APSC. Potential activities include: but are not limited to, farm tours, questionnaires, and small group discussions (i.e. kitchen table meetings).

8.0 Implementation

- The Agricultural Plan is proposed to be adopted as a RDEK policy document.
- To support the implementation of the Agricultural Plan, the Plan will include clear direction for the subsequent amendment of RDEK Official Community Plans (OCPs), zoning bylaws and other planning documents.
- The Agricultural Plan will include an implementation strategy, including identification of priorities, responsibilities and required resources.

9.0 Schedule

The project schedule will follow the schedule in Appendix A.

Proposed Schedule RDEK Agricultural Plan

Agricultural Plan Terms of Reference - Appendix A

Activity	Spring 2011	Summer 2011	Fall 2011	Winter 2012	Spring 2012	Summer 2012	Fall 2012	Winter 2013
	Phase 1 Application to IAF	March						
Board Authorization	April							
Land Use Inventory (LUI) Field Work								
Establish Plan Steering Committee			October					
Preparation of LUI Database & Mapping								
Analyze LUI / Report Results								
Phase 2 Application to IAF				November				
Develop Plan Terms of Reference								
Board Approval Plan Terms of Reference				March				
Request for Proposals – Agricultural Consultant								
Board Approval – Agricultural Consultant					April			
Draft Plan Preparation								
Draft Plan Presentation & Revision								
Plan Finalization								
Implementation								Ongoing

Legend: Blue = Phase 1
 Orange = Phase 2
 IAF – Investment Agriculture Foundation of British Columbia