



**Regional District of Central Kootenay
Agriculture Plan**

**Prepared by Brynne Consulting
with support from the
Steering Committee of the Agriculture Plan Project**

June 2011

Acknowledgments

This Agriculture Plan would be meaningless without the participation of the residents of the Regional District of Central Kootenay who contributed their time and thoughts to its creation. They participated in the community meetings, completed the surveys, sent their thoughts via the website, met us in coffee shops, on the streets, and spoke with us on the phone. The enthusiasm and generosity of all who have contributed to the project was both inspiring and extremely useful in this effort.

The Project is also benefiting enormously through the guidance of our Steering Committee, composed of people from across the region. The members include:

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A special thank you to Fern Sabo and Stephanie Lorencz, who volunteered time and effort to help with the research, and to our intern, Candice Benner. Brynne Consulting is also grateful to Wayne Harris, the President of the Creston Valley Agricultural Society, who provided constructive feedback over the course of the Project.

Brynne Consulting wishes to acknowledge the financial assistance of the Regional District of Central Kootenay, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, the B.C. Ministry of Agriculture, and the Investment Agriculture Foundation of B.C. for making this project possible.

Disclaimer: Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, the B.C. Ministry of Agriculture and the Investment Agriculture Foundation of BC, are pleased to participate in the delivery of this project. We are committed to working with our industry partners to address issues of importance to the agriculture and agri-food industry in British Columbia. Opinions expressed in this report are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the Investment Agriculture Foundation, the B.C. Ministry of Agriculture or Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada.

Funding provided by:



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Executive Summary

An agricultural plan was seen by the RDCK as a first step to improving the quantity and quality of agricultural production in the Region. Consequently, in June 2010, the RDCK launched a one-year project to develop such a plan. Unlike most agricultural plans, which are sub-regional area plans where there is a concentration of agricultural production, this plan incorporates the entire region.

The Regional District of Central Kootenay has a rich farming history and diverse current production which includes tree fruit, berries, vegetables, poultry, beef, dairy (cow, goat and sheep), and greenhouses. The First Nations people of the area, followed by newcomers from many different countries have, over the centuries, contributed their knowledge and skills to work with the climate and resources of the region to supply the food needs of its inhabitants. As recently as the middle of the last century, much of the food consumed here was also grown or raised here, either wild or cultivated.

By the end of the twentieth century this had changed drastically and currently as much as 95% of the food consumed in our region is imported. However, RDCK residents, in common with many others across the province, have an ever-growing interest in locally raised and grown farm products. This is manifested in the increasing number of farmers markets across the region and higher volumes of traffic and purchasing at those markets. Many communities in the RDCK also have some form of food security organization that often blends support for local producers with the need to address hunger amongst their residents.

The locavores cannot exist without local farmers and harsh realities on many farms in the RDCK was a factor in launching this agricultural plan. In 2006, RDCK farmers' average net income was \$5,422 on capital investments that averaged \$680,000¹ per farm. The 562² people actively engaged in farming in the region are impacted by market conditions, regulations and international agreements that are well beyond the ability of the RDCK to change.

However, one of the core goals of the agricultural plan is to identify priority actions necessary to support the viability of farming in the District. Region-wide and extensive public consultations were undertaken to help determine those priorities. Those consultations included 15 meetings held across the region, targeted surveys (producer, consumer, and retailer / restaurateur), interviews with key farmers and informants, the participation of a regionally-representative Steering Committee, contacts via the dedicated website (agplan.ca), as well as phone and informal meetings with community members seeking to provide input to the project.

The public consultations elicited a number of issues facing farmers and food producers in the region. Problems associated with ongoing low farm incomes were identified across

1 Figures from analysis of 2006 Census data by George Penfold, Selkirk College's Rural Innovation Chair in Rural Economic Development.

2 As of the 2006 Statistics Canada Census.

the region. These include:

- continuing loss of farmers and their expertise;
- fallow or abandoned farms increasing weed and pest pressures on the remaining farms;
- loss of biodiversity as farmers are forced to focus on high value crops;
- lack of retirement options and succession for farmers;
- farm income cannot support the purchase of land at residential / recreational market values; and
- difficulty funding equipment and infrastructure needs for start-up farmers, even if they are able to acquire the land.

The loss of infrastructure in support of farming, farmers and food distribution was also commonly raised in the public consultations. Infrastructure is physical, technical and human. Local challenges related to infrastructure include:

- the loss of regionally-based extension services, providing professional support to fledgling and established farmers;
- aging farmers and few new entries into the sector;
- limited local equipment, supplies and processing facilities;
- ongoing loss of farmland; and
- the shortage of seasonal and permanent local market options.

Community members - farmers, gardeners and consumers - expressed frustration at the impact of the change in the provincial meat inspection regulation. This change resulted in a widespread reduction in livestock production across the region, causing a shortage of meat, of manure for soil fertility, and of income streams from animal products. Other regulatory barriers were identified but not as commonly as the meat regulation.

Education emerged as a high priority need as well, to be targeted at a range of sectors and ages. School education programs, farm and gardening mentoring and apprenticeship programs, education of the general public, and informing the regulators of the diversity of agriculture that exists across our region were all identified. Creative mechanisms to address hunger needs amongst RDCK residents in the immediate and long-term were described and promoted by individuals in various communities across the region.

The consultations enabled the collection of key information and input from area residents but, just as importantly, it engaged them in the process. The excitement and interest in the agricultural plan process were tangible at all community meetings, manifested in fact that participants had to be encouraged to leave the venues long after the formal meetings were over. The volume of participation in the on-line surveys also demonstrated a high level of community engagement.

The information gathered in the communities was supplemented with additional research and data gathering related to the size and use of the agricultural land base, farm characteristics and viability, agricultural history of the area, and the policy context. All this information was collated and documented in the Background Report that

accompanies this Agriculture Plan.

The barriers to and opportunities for more viable farming in the RDCK were organized under the three core goals³ of the RDCK agriculture plan process:

1. to identify priority actions to support the viability of farming in the District;
2. to ensure that the agricultural capability of the area is realized; and
3. to create a secure food supply for the region.

A suite of recommendations was then developed and circulated to the communities to gather feedback and to ensure that they reflected the needs and visions gathered in the consultation process. Those recommendations form the substance of this Agriculture Plan and are elaborated in the full document.

The purpose of the Agriculture Plan is to ensure that the agricultural capability of the area is realized and protected as part of a secure food supply for the region. Agriculture in the Region is characterized by its diversity, with larger operations predominantly in the Creston Valley and many small-lot farms spread across the RDCK. The Plan's recommendations address all sizes and forms of farm operations, from the largest fruit growers in Creston to homesteaders in the Slocan Valley and diversified small lot farmers in the Arrow Lakes and Lardeau Valley.

This Agriculture Plan reflects the priorities and needs identified by residents of the RDCK. It provides direction to the RDCK on the measures within its purview and sphere of influence that can be acted upon to foster viable farms and thriving communities. The Plan identifies priority areas and "low hanging fruit" that can be readily achieved and that will help build momentum and support for the Plan implementation.

When acted upon, the recommendations in the Ag Plan will contribute to:

- consistent information and support to farmers;
- a stronger working relationship between the RDCK and farmers of the Region;
- an increased understanding of and support for farming in the general population;
- the preservation of the land base and water for food production;
- collaborative approaches that benefit agriculture and food access in the Region; and
- stronger support for agriculture in RDCK bylaws.

A vibrant farming and food system in the RDCK will enable current and future residents to more fully enjoy the economic, nutritional, environmental and cultural benefits of agriculture.

³ As per the RDCK Request for Proposals: Agriculture Area Plan (RFP 4720-41)



Background

The RDCK would like to encourage and enhance the agricultural activities of our region. Agricultural land is of critical importance not only to the farm sector but to society as a whole through its role in protecting local food production. An Agricultural Area Plan is the first step to improving the quantity and quality of agricultural production in the RDCK, which has a limited amount of ALR lands.⁴

Planning for agriculture and a secure food supply for RDCK residents helps to ensure that decisions taken by the Regional District factor in the impact on and needs of agriculture and the food supply here. Due to the very small land base suitable for agriculture within the RDCK, it is that much more vital to factor it into the overall planning and services of the RDCK wherever possible.

The RDCK is not generally recognized by those outside the region as an agricultural area. Yet the Creston Valley is renowned for a moderate climate and bountiful harvests. It also boasts more flat land than anywhere else in the Region. More than one Creston Valley farmer has been known to state “we can grow anything here”. The history of the Valley supports this assertion. Other areas of the RDCK are equally suitable for farming, though generally on a smaller scale. The rural population of the RDCK is much higher than the Canadian average, with 61% living in communities of 5000 or less. Many of these rural residents contribute significantly to their own food supply and that of neighbours through large gardens, fruit trees and small-lot livestock.

The RDCK’s vision for this Plan goes well beyond a typical agricultural area plan, which is generally focused on a sub-region where commercial farming dominates the land use. This Plan explicitly encompasses not only the entire RDCK, but also includes the goal of fostering a secure food supply for area residents in addition to the more traditional agricultural plan goal of support for farmers. For this reason, this Plan is more accurately a region-wide agricultural plan and food supply strategy.

This document has deliberately focused on the recommendations that are the foundation of the Agricultural Plan. The process to create the Plan, the background research for the Plan, and the mechanisms for moving it forward can be found in these supporting documents, available on the RDCK website as of July 2011:

- The Consultation Report; and
- The Agriculture Plan Background Report.

⁴ RDCK Request for Proposals - Agriculture Area Plan, page 3

Plan Scope

The research and community consultations that have created this plan examined the historical and current agricultural activities and potential of the RDCK. The review explored not only the options and needs for fostering viable farms, but also what could be done to better direct the food produced within the Region to its residents.

It is unlikely that the RDCK can even claim the provincial level of food self-sufficiency of 48%⁵. Given the relative isolation of most of the communities of the Region, many residents embrace the goal of securing more of our food supply closer to home. In order to do this, we need to foster viable farms and maximize the productive capabilities of the area.

Viable farms are understood to be those that are economically, environmentally and socially sustainable over the long term. Viable farms are key to the expansion of the agricultural productivity of our region, to retaining and expanding the numbers of farmers here, to succession from one generation to the next on the farm, and to increasing the degree of food self-sufficiency in our area.

The beautiful mountains and lakes of the RDCK that bring so many visitors and new residents to the area also severely limit our agricultural potential. In contrast to, for example, the District of Kent in the Fraser Valley, where approximately half of the land base is suitable for agriculture, only 2.5% of the RDCK can be readily farmed. There are certainly area residents who have turned unsuitable land into productive farms, but this requires a commitment of time and resources that adds to the already significant challenges of making a living as a farmer. It is better suited to those whose goal is to produce their own food rather than to derive their income from that land.

The communities - and therefore the markets - of the RDCK are also dispersed due to the mountainous nature of the area. The 56,000 residents of the Region are scattered across the region, with only 39% of them living in communities with a critical mass of shoppers to support larger markets. Therefore, any RDCK-based producer is faced with long and often daunting trips with many stops required in order to deliver enough product to cover the cost of the journey, never mind support a profitable business. As a result, it is often necessary for farmers to access markets external to the region, even if they are highly motivated to sell locally. For the larger producers, in the Creston Valley in particular, without a huge shift in market conditions and access, they have no choice but to export their product outside of the Region.

Market conditions tend to dictate the options and viability of any farm operation, particularly those that are not "hobby" farms. The influence of the RDCK on those conditions is negligible, and therefore the ability of this Agriculture Plan to positively address the challenging financial realities on many commercial farms is limited. However, this only adds impetus to acting upon the recommendations that do address the financial viability of the farms.

⁵ As per the 2006 Ministry of Agriculture's "B.C.'s Food Self-Reliance" report.



Plan Goals

The intent of the Regional District of Central Kootenay in creating an agricultural plan is **to define the RDCK's role with respect to agriculture, encompassing the entire region and anticipating future changes**. The recommendations of the Plan are organized around the three main goals of the Agriculture Plan:

1. To identify priority actions to support the **viability** of farming in the District;
2. To ensure that the **agricultural capability** of the area is realized and protected; and
3. To foster a **secure food supply** for the region.

To these are added a fourth: 4. To implement the Agriculture Plan.

Because the RDCK's intent is to define its role with respect to agriculture, the recommendations in this Plan are focused on actions within the purview or realm of influence of the District. The RDCK can also act as a convener or catalyst, bringing people and information together, proposing actions, and identifying opportunities. Where appropriate, these are also included in the suite of recommendations.

The main body of this document has the recommendations grouped under each of the four goals identified above. Each recommendation is followed by a brief background or supporting rationale. Appendix A documents the priorities by Electoral Area, based on input from the community consultations. Appendix B has the recommendations organized by priority, ease of implementation ("low hanging fruit") and those that involve agencies external to the RDCK. Appendix C is the Implementation Strategy.

GOAL 1: TO IDENTIFY PRIORITY ACTIONS THAT SUPPORT THE VIABILITY OF FARMING IN THE RDCK.

The factors that affect farm viability impact farmers across Canada but are compounded in the RDCK by our location, small population base and geophysical realities. While local governments have few tools to directly impact farm income, they can lessen some of the barriers to farming.

The issues affecting farm viability identified through community consultations and additional research include:

- Lack of educational and professional support services for start up and established farmers;
- The loss of supportive infrastructure such as storage, distribution, and processing;
- Constraints on scaling up production due to small land base here, lack of trained farm help, and limited or costly local options for supplies;
- A regulatory regime that is a bad fit for smaller scale farming and short supply

chains;

- The fact that our farmers compete in a global market with industrial scale farms often in much more favourable conditions (longer growing season, lower standards and farm worker wages etc).

The recommendations in this section are intended to address these concerns.

Farm support services

VIABILITY RECOMMENDATION #1

It is recommended that the RDCK explore a partnership with the Columbia Basin Trust to establish a pilot project to provide an agricultural development service to farmers and other food producers in the RDCK.

Farmers, homesteaders, urban gardeners and “hobby farmers” across the RDCK expressed frustration at the lack of professional, accessible support that was once provided through the Ministry of Agriculture’s Extension Services. People want help with on-farm research to identify or develop crops and varieties best suited to their land conditions or resistant to disease; they want help understanding irrigation design and equipment options; they would like help setting up direct marketing systems; they want to know what to grow that is best suited to where they live and for which there is a demand that can cover the cost of production; they want assistance dealing with pests and disease pressures that are only mounting with the increase in abandoned orchards and fallow fields.

There is no doubt that a wealth of information can be obtained from the internet but for beginning farmers or those facing a new challenge or production practice on their farm, it can be impossible to identify quality material. The internet is also not the preferred information medium for many farmers. Having a dedicated staff person whose role is to stay current with best practices in farming across the sectors, to obtain current market intelligence, to monitor regulatory changes that will impact farms, and whose role is to disseminate that information could be enormously helpful. A farm support professional can also operate as the “change agent” for established farms needing to adjust their operations to remain viable.

During the community consultation phase for this Plan, it was stated succinctly in more than one meeting that if only one thing could be done, creating and maintaining a professional farm support service would have the most significant and widespread impact.

How many people would be needed to provide this service across the entire RDCK and what suite of skills would be most useful for the range of farm sectors and sizes will have to be determined. For this reason, Brynne Consulting recommends a pilot project, giving the RDCK and the farming community the time to determine the range

of services, the skill set to provide those services and the cost of doing so. It will be essential that agricultural sector be involved in the hiring process to ensure that suitably qualified individuals, with the expertise to match the region's needs, are hired.

The intent is that over the course of the pilot project the RDCK will be able to gather the data necessary to assess the value of the service and if justified, create a business plan and hold a referendum on making it a permanent, funded service. The Columbia Basin Trust has expressed a willingness to discuss with the RDCK a possible partnership and funding option for the pilot project. The regionally based colleges should also be explored as a partner in the delivery of the "extension" service. The land-grant university based extension services in the United States of America will be a useful model as will the historical service delivered by the BC Ministry of Agriculture in terms of qualifications, staffing, and costs.

The RDCK and Agriculture in the Creston Valley

VIABILITY RECOMMENDATION #2

It is recommended that the RDCK create and maintain a database for the collection and analysis of agricultural inventory data in the Creston Valley, as recommended in Creston Valley Agricultural Inventory (CVAI) of 2002.

In 2001, the RDCK and the Creston Valley Agricultural Society undertook an agricultural inventory in the Creston Valley. The project produced a comprehensive inventory accompanied by four recommendations to guide land use planning in the Valley through changes to the Official Community Plan and the creation of a new database for collecting, updating and analyzing agricultural inventory data. The RDCK incorporated the recommendations concerning the Official Community Plan but no action has yet been taken on the inventory database.

The intent of the Inventory was to "improve the general understanding of the agricultural issues in the Creston Valley and to create an inventory benchmark that will assist in policy formation now and in the future" (CVAI ii). Further, "It is strongly believed that an inventory combined with and linked to the Regional District GIS and digital orthophoto will provide immeasurable benefits to farmers and other supporting agencies" (CVAI 1).

Acting upon the fourth recommendation of the Inventory, to establish and maintain an agricultural database for the Valley will be an invaluable tool for guiding land use planning in the Creston Valley to ensure that decisions taken do not undermine the agricultural capability of the Valley in the long term. Since the Creston Valley Agricultural Society operates as the RDCK's Agricultural Advisory Committee (AAC) for the Creston Valley, they review the applications

pertaining to agricultural land in the Valley. A maintained inventory database will provide objective data to guide the recommendations by the AAC and the decisions taken by the RDCK in the Creston Valley.

It would also be useful, where the final decision taken by the RDCK is counter to the recommendations of the AAC that the rationale behind the decision is documented for future reference, and communicated back to the Agricultural Advisory Committee.

VIABILITY RECOMMENDATION #3

It is recommended that the RDCK designate appropriate resources in the Development Services Department for those seeking information and support concerning regulations and requirements related to farming in the RDCK.

The regulatory, permitting and authorization requirements expected of farmers only seem to increase each year. Knowing what is required by whom is often the largest part of the challenge for the farmer in question. Because local governments provide oversight on land use, they will, of necessity, greatly impact farm operations.

Having a clear location and designated individual as the point of contact for questions from farmers and homesteaders can help to foster confidence in the local government. This confidence and consistent relationship can also create a working environment where conflicts with non-farming neighbours or land uses can be addressed and resolved more effectively and efficiently. Ideally, the designated staff member will already possess a sufficient level of expertise to address agricultural issues as they pertain to local government, but this knowledge base will be expanded and deepened over time via contact with the farming community.

VIABILITY RECOMMENDATION #4

It is recommended that the RDCK explore re-instating exemptions from building permits fees for structures that meet the National Farm Building Code of Canada definition of farm buildings having low human occupancy.

Complex farm buildings housing large numbers of livestock and with regular human presence within them warrant a degree of oversight to ensure the safety of both the animals and humans using the building. However, it is unlikely that the RDCK building permit fees for small or simple low risk buildings such as chicken coops or greenhouses cover the administrative costs for the RDCK. Yet the cost to the farmers is prohibitive relative to the income likely generated from the new building.

Various jurisdictions (such as Saskatchewan and the Regional District of Okanagan Similkameen) currently provide exemptions for farm buildings from the requirement to obtain a building permit. Until as recently as four years ago, the RDCK also provided exemptions for

farm buildings that met size and use criteria.

Generally exemptions are based on the proposed structure meeting the definition of a farm building with low human occupancy under the National Farm Building Code of Canada. The National Farm Building Code of Canada can serve as a guide to the RDCK on when to allow exemptions. Revisiting building permit processes and fee requirements would result in efficiencies and costs savings for both farmers and the RDCK.

Regional Meat and Food Processing

VIABILITY RECOMMENDATION #5

It is recommended that the RDCK review agricultural zones in the Zoning Bylaw and amend them as necessary and appropriate to allow on-farm processing of livestock and / or other agricultural crops.

Given the relatively small-lot agriculture that happens across our Region, mixed farms (plant and animal) are a logical way to manage soil fertility and the necessity for diverse income streams. The animals are generally fed vegetative matter grown or brought onto the farms and their manure is composted and applied to the soil to return important nutrients for the next year's growing.

The change in the BC Meat Inspection Regulation in 2007 had an enormous impact on RDCK farmers. The end of legal meat production for most has meant not only a decrease in income but also an increase in costs since the loss of manure as a soil fertility tool accompanied the loss of animals. Businesses supplying the livestock industry are also struggling or have gone out of business as a result of the drastic reduction in farmers seeking young animals (piglets, chicks etc), feed, fencing and housing materials.

The RDCK now has one licensed red meat abattoir in the Creston Valley and two mobile poultry abattoirs, one based in the Slocan Valley and the second in the Creston Valley. However, these facilities do not yet meet the needs of the livestock producers - from small-lot hobbyists to larger farmers - in many parts of the RDCK.

In recognition of the limited slaughter capacity for many parts of the province, as of 2010, an on-farm slaughter license is now available to those who meet certain criteria. The criteria for this Class E license includes being able to demonstrate an inability to access slaughter, that the animal will be handled in a humane manner and that the processing will adhere to proper food safe handling procedures.

The RDCK's zoning bylaws do not explicitly address on-farm slaughter. Generally, where an activity is not listed in a zoning bylaw it is interpreted as prohibited. Yet the slaughter of animals could be classified as harvesting, since the slaughter of meat animals makes

that product available to the market, just as picking apples or digging potatoes does.

Processing of farm product, whether it is making sausage or salsa, can be a way for the farmer to obtain additional value from their labour. Given the very scarce agricultural land base in the RDCK, such processing facilities should be located so as to not unduly diminish the agricultural capability of the land.

Processing is an allowed activity in the Agricultural Land Reserve, provided that 50% of the product is derived from the farm itself. Most agricultural zoning bylaws adhere to this approach even if they are not in the ALR. However, for many farm-based processing enterprises, the volumes may not be possible to have a viable processing operation and still meet the 50% threshold. In such cases, the processing enterprise can benefit other area farms by procuring product from them.

VIABILITY RECOMMENDATION #6

It is recommended that the RDCK review restrictions on livestock numbers in rural non-agricultural zones and increase them as reasonable for the area, and environmentally sustainable for the lot size.

It has long been the practice for many rural residents of the RDCK to have small volumes of various livestock, enabling them to stock their own freezers with beef and their fridges with eggs. Excesses have historically been sold to friends and neighbours. While these “hobby farmers” may not appear to contribute significantly to agriculture in the Region, their aggregated product does make a considerable impact on our local food supply.

According to the Business Plan developed for the proposed (but never built) abattoir in the Slocan Valley, prior to the change in the Meat Inspection Regulations, there were 14,000 chickens slaughtered and consumed locally in the Slocan Valley alone each year. Many rural properties have long been home to small volumes of chickens, pigs, sheep and cattle as part of the rural egg and meat supply. However, some rural zones restrict the number of animals that can be produced on the lots. These restrictions may be overly restrictive and not serve the goal of a secure food supply for all residents of the RDCK.

Pest and Weed Pressures

VIABILITY RECOMMENDATION #7

It is recommended that the RDCK investigate a region-wide pest control program and potential partners, incorporating elements such as an agricultural pests bylaw and the Invasive Plant Management Plan.

Across the RDCK people, pests and weeds are impacting farms and

businesses. Mismanaged or abandoned farms also increase weed and pest pressures on surrounding farms. Until recently, the RDCK had an agricultural pests bylaw that positively impacted weed management practices on farms even without enforcement.

Invasive species are particularly aggressive and damaging to ecosystems and can be a danger to livestock and people. The Central Kootenay Invasive Plant Committee supports a collaborative approach to managing invasive plants in the region and is developing an Invasive Plant Management Plan. The Invasive Plant Committee includes an RDCK Director on its Board of Directors, which could help to ensure that there are efficiencies in implementing this recommendation where there is overlap with the Invasive Plant Committee's Plan.

GOAL 2: TO ENSURE THAT THE AGRICULTURAL CAPABILITY OF THE RDCK IS REALIZED AND PROTECTED.

Agriculture depends on a **land base**, on **water** and on the work and knowledge of farmers. In order to fully realize the agricultural capability of the RDCK, their respective roles in agriculture must be fully understood and supported. This planning process is one measure to protect and enhance them.

Farming in the RDCK is, by necessity, small-scale due to mountainous nature of the region, even in the relatively flat Creston Valley. The largest tree fruit farm in the Creston Valley is a fraction of the large farms in Washington State; and field crop production in Canada's prairies dwarfs the farms in the Creston Flats. This puts many of our farmers at a disadvantage, particularly when one adds in the fact that much of the farmland has been split up in to smaller parcels. Therefore, to enhance the agricultural capability of our region, effective, creative and pro-active measures are needed. Through community consultations and additional research the key areas identified to better realize the agricultural capability of the area include:

- Maintain the farmland and the Agricultural Land Reserve;
- Create mechanisms to enable new or expanding farmers to get onto the farmland;
- Utilize land use planning tools to better support and enable the diversity of farming that occurs in our region;
- Ensure the supply of water for farming activities;
- Explore and foster the role of municipalities in our regional food systems;
- Galvanize partnerships amongst a range of agencies to support farming.

The recommendations below are intended to enhance the agricultural capability of the RDCK and to address, as much as possible, the concerns raised in the community consultations.

The Land Base

CAPABILITY RECOMMENDATION #1

It is recommended that the RDCK continue to use land use planning tools to discourage subdivisions of agricultural land and to encourage the consolidation of contiguous smaller agricultural lots provided they do not result in additional residences (resulting in higher land values for the farm).

Preserving the agricultural land base is most readily done when it is being actively cultivated as a profitable farm. Inefficiency and high land prices are some of the factors that challenge farm profitability. Many farm operations benefit from having a larger and contiguous land base. The cost of acquiring new or additional land is generally higher when there is a permanent dwelling on it. In recognition of this fact, the Agricultural Land Commission discourages the addition of dwellings with permanent foundations on farmland where there are already accommodations for the farm family.

CAPABILITY RECOMMENDATION #2

It is recommended that the RDCK work with member municipalities to investigate a co-operative approach to agricultural lands within the urban / rural interface that will mitigate the loss of agricultural land to urban boundary expansions. (“build up, not out”).

Many jurisdictions have seen the wisdom of limiting urban sprawl for purposes of enabling more efficient provision of services. More and more cities are also recognizing the utility of having peri-urban agriculture due to the short transport distances to market, the benefits of the green space, and other social and environmental goods. Urban expansions do not happen in the RDCK without dialogue between the municipality and the rural area. Prioritizing the preservation of agricultural land into those dialogues will help to retain our agricultural capability and promote food production close to the markets.

CAPABILITY RECOMMENDATION #3

It is recommended that the RDCK encourage the protection of agricultural land where appropriate, through the Official Community Plan process and other land use planning tools.

As of February 2011, the RDCK has six Official Community Plans across the Electoral Areas. Each Plan is unique and so the measures contained within them to protect and enhance agricultural holdings varies. Only 2.5% of the RDCK’s land base is suitable for agriculture. Once the land is shifted to another use, it is virtually impossible to return it to agriculture.

It is important to recognize the fact that it is possible to find other locations for commercial and residential development but this

is not the case for agriculture - less than 5% of BC's entire land base is suitable for farming. Many recognize that relying on other jurisdictions for our daily food needs does not provide any level of communal food security. The assumption that we can secure our food needs from distant lands also assumes that they are able to do what we cannot - maintain and work their farmland.

A planning exercise is, by its nature, based in a long term vision: planning for a long term secure supply of food must be based in preserving and expanding the land base available to agriculture.

CAPABILITY RECOMMENDATION #4

It is recommended that the RDCK establish a maximum residential footprint policy for all agriculturally zoned land.

Measures to limit the encroachment onto agricultural land of residential buildings and related activities can help to preserve the land available for production. Residential footprint policies have been developed in the Lower Mainland in response to large mansions accompanied by detached garages, tennis courts, swimming pools and long driveways on farmland reducing the land available for agriculture. While such rural estates are not common in the RDCK, being proactive on this issue can help to preserve our farmland.

The Strengthening Farming Program of the Ministry of Agriculture is developing a bylaw standard for residential uses in the Agricultural Land Reserve to guide local governments. It will undoubtedly be helpful in determining appropriate maximum foot print policy for the RDCK.

CAPABILITY RECOMMENDATION #5

It is recommended that the RDCK amend the Zoning Bylaw to incorporate a maximum setback requirement for residential buildings in agricultural land.

In addition to the footprint size of residences and ancillary buildings and uses, the siting of these structures can have an enormous impact on the productive capacity of the land. No matter the size of the house, when it is built in the middle of an otherwise productive farm field it must also have a driveway access to the building that will further reduce the productive potential of the land. Unobstructed fields can be managed much more efficiently when it comes to irrigation structures, movement of equipment, and the planting and harvesting of crops. The municipality of Delta has a bylaw that requires a maximum setback for a farm residence of 50 meters from the road to the rear of the house.

It is important to note, however, that for farm buildings, locating them in the middle of a lot can make the most sense for the operation. For example, locating livestock housing in the middle of a large lot can facilitate grazing management across the fields

and increase the efficiency of the farm operation. In such cases, it may be reasonable to locate the farmhouse there as well, to enable monitoring by the farmers of livestock, for example. However, locating residential buildings in productive fields should be discouraged unless there is a strong rationale for housing the farmers there that supports the operation of the farm.

CAPABILITY RECOMMENDATION #6

It is recommended that the RDCK develop educational materials to promote and support the establishment of no-build clauses on agricultural land.

British Columbia has the most heavily parcelized agricultural land in the country, according to the Agricultural Land Commission. Once subdivided it is that much easier to build a house on the land. The addition of a residence is part of what pushes the land out of agriculture and into rural residential since the resulting increased property value is harder to successfully incorporate into a farm business plan. Besides lower costs to purchase or rent the land, lots without buildings on them can generally be more efficiently farmed.

The Land Base Governance

CAPABILITY RECOMMENDATION #7

It is recommended that the RDCK continue its agreement with the Creston Valley Agricultural Society to operate as the Creston Valley Agricultural Advisory Commission.

CAPABILITY RECOMMENDATION #8

It is recommended that each RDCK Director reserve and fill a position on his / her Advisory Planning Commission for someone with a background in agriculture.

There is a range of agencies involved in applications related to land use. In the Creston Valley, the Creston Valley Agricultural Society advises the RDCK on all matters pertaining to agriculture and the Agricultural Land Reserve in the Creston Valley. With the exception of Area H, all Electoral Areas of the RDCK have an Advisory Planning Commission, whose role is to make recommendations on proposed land use bylaws and permit applications. The Advisory Planning Commissions are made up of local residents and may or may not have Commission members with agricultural expertise.

Without an experienced farmer in the discussions, issues related to agriculture may not be identified and factored into the decisions. These could range from livestock and human safety issues to dominant air flow patterns and farm smells, to water licenses. Having farmer representation on the Advisory Planning Commissions can help to ensure that decisions about adjoining land uses will enable

the neighbours to live in peace, even when one of them is actively farming the land.

CAPABILITY RECOMMENDATION #9

It is recommended that the RDCK work with the Agricultural Land Commission and the Ministry of Agriculture to ensure that the Central Kootenays is represented on the Commission.

CAPABILITY RECOMMENDATION #10

It is recommended that the RDCK encourage the Agricultural Land Commission to update their ALR decision-making guidelines incorporating criteria that acknowledges the unique characteristics of this region and the productive capabilities of smaller parcels.

Decisions pertaining to land in the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR) are made by the Agricultural Land Commission, made up of six regional panels, a Chair and Vice-Chair. Each regional Panel normally has three members and is responsible for decisions on applications from within their region. The Kootenay Panel incorporates Kootenay Boundary, Central and East Kootenay Regional Districts and currently only has one member. Each of the three Kootenay regions covered by the Kootenay Panel has distinct agricultural capabilities and cultures.

Having someone familiar with the agricultural diversity and potential across the RDCK sitting on the Kootenay Panel would likely lead to better-informed decisions about the ALR within this Region. Much of the farming that occurs here is necessarily small-lot but nonetheless productive and an important part of our food supply. If an appreciation for the importance and potential for small-lot agriculture does not exist on the Kootenay Panel, they may allow subdivisions and exclusions from the ALR contrary to community wishes and priorities.

In the consultations for this Agriculture Plan many residents expressed concern about ALR decisions. Clear criteria and procedures to guide land-use decision-making processes and that include a recognition of the productive capability of smaller parcels of land would support consistent decisions across the diversity of the Region.

Water & Watersheds

CAPABILITY RECOMMENDATION #11

It is recommended that the RDCK work with the Columbia Basin Trust to expand the Columbia Basin Trust “Water Smart” initiative to encourage household water conservation practices.

The Columbia Basin Trust’s Water Initiative launched a Water Smart program aimed at residential use of water. The program’s goal is

to support communities through education and outreach to reduce residential water consumption and develop conservation tools. The Water Smart Program is seeking to achieve a 20% Basin-wide reduction in community water consumption by 2015. To date, within the RDCK, Castlegar, Creston and Erickson are participating in the Program but a broader uptake would help to create fair and consistent conservation strategies and practices across the Region.

CAPABILITY RECOMMENDATION #12

It is recommended that the RDCK work with farm and food security organizations of the Region to provide information on and encourage the use of water conservation practices in food production.

Water is the basis of all life and is also essential for farming. Not all land suitable for agriculture in the RDCK has access to adequate water to realize its full agricultural potential. It is in the best interests of all RDCK residents to plan for the conservation and preservation of water for our basic needs and food production. Water sources and watersheds do not adhere to neat property or political boundaries, so collaborative efforts are necessary to effectively address water needs and plan for the future.

CAPABILITY RECOMMENDATION #13

It is recommended that the RDCK, in partnership with the Creston Valley Dyking Districts and the Columbia Basin Trust, submit information to the Columbia River Treaty negotiation process to secure compensation for the dyke damage and maintenance costs resulting from the Libby Dam water level management practices.

The dykes of the Creston Valley were constructed to protect the valley bottom, known as "The Flats", from regular flooding of the Kootenay River and enabled food production there to flourish. The miles of dykes are maintained by the various drainage and dyking authorities in the Creston Valley, supported by annual fees from area residents. However, the task of maintaining the dyke infrastructures, constructed decades before the various Columbia River dams, is made more difficult by the changing water levels resulting from releases from the Libby Dam reservoir. These rising and receding water levels are worsening the erosion of the dykes, resulting in increased costs locally.

CAPABILITY RECOMMENDATION #14

It is recommended that the RDCK explore options for including the provision for agricultural needs in the design and operation of RDCK water systems.

As of early 2011, the RDCK owns 16 small water distribution systems. There is an additional 345 independent water systems throughout the Region. A community may apply to the RDCK to assume ownership

and operation of their water systems. This generally happens when the owners of small water systems find it difficult to meet the regulatory and cost requirements of maintaining the system.

Water is essential for food production and food is essential for every day life. Pro-active measures could help to ensure that there will be adequate water for farming across the RDCK. These measures would include factoring in irrigation needs when any water systems are retrofitted or newly constructed, and prioritizing food production over non-essential uses in the event of water shortages.

CAPABILITY RECOMMENDATION #15

It is recommended that the RDCK, in partnership with the Ministry of Agriculture, promote the Environmental Farm Plan program to farmers in the Region.

Agricultural practices can threaten water quality through chemical run-off and livestock access to watercourses, among other activities. The Canada-British Columbia Environmental Farm Plan Program provides funding for the implementation of initiatives on the farm that can help reduce environmental risks. The cost-share funding program can cover such initiatives as riparian protection, irrigation planning and farmyard runoff controls.

New Farmers

CAPABILITY RECOMMENDATION #16

It is recommended that the RDCK encourage regionally-based farm organizations, colleges and employment / career development service agencies to establish and administer farmer training and mentoring programs.

In 2006, farmers made up 1.5% of the RDCK population, generated more than \$30M in gross farm receipts with an average age was 54.3 years old. Employment and career programs, such as Kootenay Career Development Services report that interest in farming increases yearly among their clients. There are certainly many farmers who are self-taught on the job and through books and other resources. However, the learning curve for such a hands-on and ever-changing type of business can be significantly shortened with on-farm mentoring or apprenticeships.

There are no established formal farm apprenticeship programs in the RDCK. Individual farmers will take on apprentices, but for both the farmer and the apprentice to fully benefit from the arrangement, there are curriculum and logistical needs that are often beyond the skill set or time available for the farmer to address. This could be a service provided by an educational institution or community organization drawing on the expertise that exists amongst RDCK established farmers and compensating them accordingly.

Once established, the program could be promoted through the communication vehicles of the many farm, food security, skills training and business organizations in the Region as well as by the RDCK.

CAPABILITY RECOMMENDATION #17

It is recommended that the RDCK develop and distribute an information sheet on the tax exemptions available to landowners whose land meets income threshold criteria from production by the landowner or lessees.

Despite the fact that only 2.5% of the land base in the RDCK is suitable for agriculture, less than half of it is being actively farmed. Yet there are people anxious to farm who are unable to get on land. Landowners who are not familiar with the farm tax exemptions may not realize the benefits that will accrue to them should they put their land under production. These benefits are tied to the land, so the landowner need not farm the land but can lease it out.

Leasing land arrangements are best for all involved if they are long term agreements that will justify the effort to build soil and infrastructure to the farmer and will help to ensure that the land does not decline under bad management practices. The cost thresholds are much lower for leasing arrangements over land purchases, allowing new farmers the opportunity to build their skills and markets without too much risk. Established farmers also benefit from access to unused land at reasonable rates.

Pollination

CAPABILITY RECOMMENDATION #18

It is recommended that the RDCK champion a resolution at the Association of Kootenay Boundary Local Governments to have a Kootenay-based bee inspector suitably staffed to meet the needs of apiarists across the region.

Bees have gained prominence on the world stage in the past several decades for rather unfortunate reasons - due to the dramatic declines in bee populations around the world. These declines have various causes, some known and some unknown, but the loss of bees has focused attention on how critical they are to pollination of most food and fiber crops.

This attention has encouraged many new beekeepers. In the RDCK, the Kootenay Local Agricultural Society has been offering beginners and advanced beekeeping programs for several years and the courses have consistently been oversubscribed, resulting in a yearly crop of local new apiarists.

Successfully raising bees requires great skill due to the need to maintain the hive health under the onslaught of weather challenges,

mites, new diseases, and chemical exposure. Beekeepers have been supported in meeting these challenges through the work of regional Apiary Inspectors working for the Ministry of Agriculture.

It goes without saying that bees are particularly crucial to the success of the tree fruit sector in Creston. Preserving and expanding upon the bee population within the RDCK is one of the keys to farming and a secure food supply in the Region. The Ministry of Agriculture, under funding constraints, is generally not filling positions vacated through retirement. The Kootenay Apiary Inspector is crucial position that not only assists apiarists with their production practices, but also identifies new disease or pest incidences and supports breeding programs. The staffing level of an Apiary Inspector serving the Kootenays also needs to be re-evaluated regularly to ensure that the resource matches the need.

GOAL 3: TO FOSTER A SECURE FOOD SUPPLY FOR RDCK RESIDENTS.

Trade beyond our regional boundaries will always be a reality, based on the scale and types of some of the farms here and the need to meet the nutritional needs of the 56,000 residents of the RDCK. However, aspiring to a regional food system that has the possibility of meeting our essential dietary needs – in the event of a temporary condition such as winter road closures, or longer term disruptions to the supply of food entering the region – is felt by many to be a judicious goal.

But it is a goal that is necessarily long-term, given the fact that likely 95% of the food currently consumed in the RDCK comes from outside the region. Through community consultations and additional research the key areas identified to support a move towards some level of regional food security are:

- Increase the knowledge base across the population, from children, to those managing household food supplies, and those with administrative or political power to affect farming;

- Support and expand creative local solutions to hunger experienced now and that can be scaled up to address events of import shortages;

- Foster production practices that maintain and enhance the health of the ecosystems that support farming;

- Expand the role of municipalities and urban dwellers in creating a secure food supply for RDCK residents.

The recommendations below are intended to foster a secure food supply for RDCK residents, now and in the future.

Education

SECURE FOOD SUPPLY RECOMMENDATION #1

It is recommended that the RDCK continue to work with and support food security organizations in the Region to expand and become more effective in their work.

There is a broad consensus, both in the literature and from our community consultations, that educating the public and children about agriculture and food systems is a key piece in fostering a culture of support for farmers and food production. Among the benefits of broad-based educational programs are:

- When consumers better understand the production challenges of local farmers compared to the parts of the world that provide so much of our food - higher environmental and labour regulations, higher labour costs, much shorter growing seasons etc - they may be less inclined to chase the lowest possible price and choose locally produced food instead;
- Children who experience a garden are more likely to eat vegetables and fruit, learn how the seasons affect our food choices, and may consider farming as a career;
- Decision-makers (politicians, funders, business operators) who recognize the contributions of local food to our economies, health and environment are more likely to support programs and create policy to enable farming and food distribution and access;
- “Urban refugees” who live in the country will be more accommodating of the inevitable noise, smell and activities that take place on a farm when they understand that the rural landscape and farms are places of business that depend much more on the weather and market conditions than on a clock to determine operating hours.
- “Locavores” and those seeking out fresh, seasonal produce for health and other reasons will know better when and where to source the food they seek.

Food security organizations are spread across the RDCK and vary in capacity and longevity but all incorporate support for local food systems and farmers in their work to foster short and long term food security. Providing grants in aid, meeting space and supporting their work through the RDCK’s communications tools can help to improve the efficacy of their efforts.

SECURE FOOD SUPPLY RECOMMENDATION #2

It is recommended that the RDCK work with the Edible School Grounds Network

and School Districts 8, 10 and 93 to promote, establish and incorporate working school gardens into their curricula and food supply.

Funding from Interior Health's Community Food Action Initiative in March 2011 helped to launch the Edible School Grounds Network in School District #8. The launch of the Network was a very well attended event, with teachers, students and parents all involved in some stage of food garden development at their respective schools. The purpose of the Network is to help connect people who are starting or have already established a school garden, with the goal of informing, uniting and inspiring those involved. The Network hosts a Groupsite to help link people working on or interested in school gardens, and to aggregate resources to support them. Though launched, the Network needs support to perpetuate itself and expand to other schools within the RDCK.

SECURE FOOD SUPPLY RECOMMENDATION #3

It is recommended that the RDCK encourage the re-establishment of the Agricultural Land Commission's agricultural training programs at the Union of BC Municipalities Annual General Meetings.

Historically, the Agricultural Land Commission has offered training on the role of agriculture and the Agricultural Land Reserve through the Union of BC Municipalities. Unfortunately, likely due to ongoing reductions in the Commission's budget, this training has not been offered recently. However, it is of great value to decision makers who may have no experience of farming and its role in the community, in the rural landscape, and in local economies. Re-establishing this training will likely take more than a request to the Agricultural Land Commission, since their budgetary constraints are a key consideration in the services they offer. It would undoubtedly be useful for the RDCK to also convey the importance of this training to the Ministers of Agriculture and Finance and other relevant agencies, independently and through groups such as the Association of Kootenay Boundary Local Governments and the Union of BC Municipalities.

SECURE FOOD SUPPLY RECOMMENDATION #4

It is recommended that the RDCK support the public libraries in the Region to expand their agricultural resource offerings, in a range of media.

While public libraries do not exist in every community, they are one of the best examples of a service that is widely available and used, regardless of the user's economic status. This makes them a valuable learning centre at low cost to the users. Expanding the resources on farming and gardening will help to encourage and support those exploring or starting out their own farm enterprises. Local farm organizations and others could recommend a list of materials, in a range of media, which would be helpful to carry in

the libraries. Dedicated funding for the acquisition of agricultural materials could be part of the funding streams from Directors that already support our area libraries. Such funds could be used to leverage additional grants to expand the offerings.

SECURE FOOD SUPPLY RECOMMENDATION #5

It is recommended that the RDCK encourage the Ministry of Agriculture and the Agricultural Land Commission to update and disseminate “The Countryside and You” booklet in print and electronic format, and other quality material as appropriate.

The majority of RDCK residents have little to no experience of or connection with farms. This disconnect often underlies friction between farmers and their non-farming neighbours who do not understand the day-to-day operations on a farm and normal farm practices. The Agricultural Land Commission and the Strengthening Farming initiative of the Ministry of Agriculture have produced a range of useful and informative materials to help the non-farmer, planners and other government agents to better understand farming.

The publication entitled “The Countryside and You: Understanding Farming” is written in lay terms to help those living or intending to live near farms know what to expect from their farming neighbours. Equipping rural dwellers with this important information could help to reduce Director and staff time at various government agencies handling complaints about farm operations.

Many of the publications were authored prior to the turn of the century. While much of the content is still valuable, there are likely inaccuracies, for instance with regards to regulatory references or market intelligence. Many were written before the widespread use of the Internet and so could be augmented with the links to the wealth of information now available online. Rather than create a new document, updating this quality document is more efficient.

Hunger

SECURE FOOD SUPPLY RECOMMENDATION #6

It is recommended that the RDCK support agencies like the Kaslo Food Hub to establish small-scale local food distribution centres in other communities.

By all measures, Canada is a wealthy country. Yet many of our citizens have relied on food banks since the first one was created 30 years ago as a temporary measure. Food Banks are now a seemingly permanent institution in Canada, with demand for their services only increasing year after year.

Unemployment rates vary across the RDCK and are chronically high in some communities. Unemployment, poverty and hunger tend to

go hand in hand. Communities across the RDCK have emergency food access programs that often struggle to keep food stocks in line with the demand, never mind with the nutritional guidelines of Health Canada.

One advantage of having a locally based food system is that there is more opportunity to insert community values into the system. Direct relationships between the community organizations and the farmers and food producers of the region help to ensure that quality, seasonal and fresh foods can be made available to those who might not otherwise be able to access it.

The Kaslo Food Hub is a successful model of bridging the need to pay farmers a fair price for their crops with providing healthy fruits and vegetables to members of their community in need. The Hub provides a local market for the farmers' crops for those able to pay and charges a small premium on the sales to enable the purchase of that same quality produce to stock the shelves of their food bank.

The consistent market enables the farmers to plan for a known volume and range of product, taking some of the guesswork out of farming. This allows the established farmers to expand or amend their production and new farmers to enter a relatively low-risk market.

Creating farm-direct Food Hubs around the RDCK, based on the Kaslo experience, will lower the need for farmers to travel to other communities to sell their goods, lessen the food miles of the products on food bank shelves and heighten the food security of area residents of all economic means.

Local Supply & Resiliency

SECURE FOOD SUPPLY RECOMMENDATION #7

It is recommended that the RDCK assess and initiate mechanisms to expand local market options for regional food.

The venues where the vast majority of food is procured by residents of the RDCK generally have barriers, due to policy or practice, to accepting local product directly at their outlets. The RDCK has various mechanisms within its purview that will help to increase market options within the Region for food produced here. The measures include zoning bylaws that support farmers markets and street vending, ensuring that RDCK events and venues source local food whenever possible, and signage bylaws.

Whatever measures the RDCK can take to support both temporary and permanent markets and outlets for local food could contribute to the economic well being and food security of the Region.

SECURE FOOD SUPPLY RECOMMENDATION #8

It is recommended that the RDCK encourage the creation of a regional food and farm marketing program that includes regional food and seasonality guides.

Local farm guides are an important piece of market information: they let the consumer know what food is available, when, and where; and they let the farmers know what else is being produced so they can plan their crops accordingly to fill gaps and demonstrated need. There are many models of web-based and print versions of local food and farm guides. The challenge is always to build a sustainable business model to fund the necessary updating of the information, at least annually.

Print and web-based farm guides are subject to the same realities as any physical market - if they are not consistently available and known, they will not attract and retain customers. Ideally these guides are available in public libraries, chambers of commerce, rural post offices, tourism information centres and other suitable locations.

The RDCK is home to a number of locally owned or based print publications with experienced staff, marketing and distribution programs. Various farm and food security organizations in the Region have published sub-regional guides over the years, with at least four in production for the 2011 season. A formal collaboration between a regional publication and farm and food security organizations of the Region has the potential to create a sustainable business model with the resources to fund annual updates and distribution.

SECURE FOOD SUPPLY RECOMMENDATION #9

It is recommended that the RDCK encourage its member municipalities to incorporate policies and programs supportive of urban agriculture, food production and food systems.

Home gardens have a long history of feeding people. Generally one cannot produce all the staples of a diet in one's backyard, but a significant contribution towards a household's food supply can be made from a small piece of land. The so-called Victory Gardens provided 40% of the vegetables consumed in the USA during the Second World War.

Backyard gardens are enjoying a resurgence in popularity, as demonstrated in the spikes in seed and gardening supply sales across North America over the past several years. Some municipalities are taking pro-active measures to support urban food production, from beehives and community gardens, to intensive commercial production on residential lots. Many countries of the world rely heavily on the food produced within cities to feed their populations. Whether they qualify as urban agriculture or simply productive family gardens, a large amount of food can be produced within urban boundaries.

Cities are also a source of green space and gardening infrastructure. Nelson, for example, has greenhouses used to produce bedding plants for landscaping the parks across the city. Most parks have irrigation systems in place and often have fencing as well. Cities are also safe and productive environments for bees based on the abundance and diversity of plants on private and public property. Urban pesticide bylaws reduce chemical exposure for the birds, the bees and the people who share the space.

Chickens are also finding a safe home within city limits across North America, from Vancouver to Portland, from Rossland to Los Angeles. Hens are quieter than most dogs and all motorcycles and they also contribute protein in the form of eggs to the city food supply. Generally, municipal bylaws that allow the keeping of hens place restrictions on the number, have site requirements related to the location of chicken coops and normally disallow roosters and the slaughter of the chickens on the property.⁶

Urban agriculture is commercial food production within city limits while the more general food production includes gardens for home use. A food system incorporates both types of food production (commercial and own-use) and captures the full life cycle of food, from soil to kitchen or market, to compost or landfill. While the vast majority of food consumed in the households of the RDCK is produced outside of municipal limits, a significant portion of the “life” of food happens within urban boundaries, where it is processed, distributed, purchased, cooked and then the remains disposed of through whatever household or public waste management streams are available.

The Long Term Vision

SECURE FOOD SUPPLY RECOMMENDATION #10

It is recommended that the RDCK explicitly incorporate agriculture and food systems into community planning.

Communities are neither sustainable nor vibrant when their citizens go hungry. Plans help to ensure that, as circumstances change and budgets are revisited, key goals and priorities remain part of the process. Agriculture and food production activities in the RDCK can better contribute to programs such as greenhouse gas reduction targets, climate change adaptation, and resource recovery programs when they are formally integrated into the various planning processes. Public transit plans that integrate a food systems perspective would ensure that routes accommodate access to food outlets (farmers markets and grocers) for those most likely to be without their own vehicles. Programs that address, for

⁶ See, for example, the City of Vancouver’s related bylaws.

example, urban food waste management, edible landscaping, water conservation programs will all contribute to community sustainability.

SECURE FOOD SUPPLY RECOMMENDATION #11

It is recommended that the RDCK explore a collaboration with, for example, Selkirk College, the College of the Rockies and Interior Health to develop a research project to determine core dietary needs for current and projected populations versus the carrying capacity of the land base and water systems of the Region.

Widely regarded as one of the world's most influential thinkers on global environmental issues, Lester R Brown of the Earth Policy Institute has warned that we are in a "new era in which world food scarcity increasingly shapes global politics".⁷ He is not alone in attributing much of the current political unrest in various locations around the world to food shortages.

The long chains in the global food system that dominates our food supply are under threat from rising fuel costs and weather events that wipe out crops, in addition to increasing global political instability. Not everyone agrees that the global food supply is seriously threatened. But communities have seen the wisdom of preparing against the possible event of wildfires in our forests so why not apply the same logic to our food supply?

We likely will never be able to attain complete food self-sufficiency within our region. However, it would be useful to understand the degree to which we could meet our collective essential dietary needs so that this perspective can be integrated into planning and programs should it become apparent that such measures will support the long-term health and sustainability of RDCK communities.

GOAL 4: TO IMPLEMENT THE AGRICULTURE PLAN

IMPLEMENTATION RECOMMENDATION #1

It is recommended that the RDCK establish a regional Agricultural Advisory Committee to oversee the implementation of the Agriculture Plan.

A plan without implementation is a waste of time and money. This Plan was developed from the start with a recognition that implementation possibilities would be greatly enhanced by focusing on priority actions that are within the purview of the RDCK and of importance to the farming community and food supply of the Region.

Among the suite of recommendations, some imply policy or procedural changes within by the RDCK, some are based in fostering

⁷ The New Geopolitics of Food, Foreign Policy Magazine, May / June 2011

partnerships, some will impact the work plans of RDCK staff, while others have monetary implications.

This Agriculture Plan is but one amongst a host of other Plans, community needs and challenges facing RDCK staff and Directors. To ensure the Plan's success, it will require a group to oversee its implementation, with a membership drawn from the farming community, relevant agencies and the RDCK itself. Drawing on the members of the Steering Committee of the Agriculture Plan Project for the Advisory Committee would bring continuity and a demonstrated commitment to the Plan.

In order for the Agricultural Advisory Committee to be able to fulfill its mandate, it will require support from the RDCK. This can come in the form of in-kind donations of administrative support and meeting room space. Having a member of the RDCK Development Services staff sit on the committee will ensure that there is oversight and an ongoing communications link with the RDCK staff and Directors.

It must be stated that many farm and food organizations, like other community-based organizations, are suffering from a scarcity of and burnout amongst their members. It will be necessary to find ways to compensate members of the implementation committee who are taking time off their farms or from other paid work to participate in the committee. A small budget should be dedicated to support the activities of the Agricultural Advisory Committee overseeing the implementation of the Agriculture Plan.