



# Growing TOGETHER

THE RURAL - URBAN CONNECTION



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## Finding the Balance in Planning

**C**an a municipality balance the needs of agriculture and urban development? How does a local government set policy that protects both environmental and agricultural interests? What are the needs of the local agriculture industry? These are just a few of the questions that all levels of government are grappling with as they attempt to find planning solutions that will help sustain agriculture in their communities. Of BC's 178 local governments, 131 contain land within the Agriculture Land Reserve (ALR), and a growing number are creating agriculture plans to help foster the development of their local agricultural sector. They are addressing issues arising from urbanization and increased competition for agricultural land, and establishing long-term strategies to ensure the sustainability of their local agricultural community. In 1993 the Township of Langley adopted the Langley Rural Plan. Most of the rural planning area is in the ALR, supporting the municipality's annual \$150 million (1995) agricultural industry. When adopted the Plan stood apart from other planning exercises in its commitment to pro-actively support sustainable agriculture. The Plan has a particularly extensive section dealing with economic issues that benefited from the involvement of the Township's Economic Development



*Maintaining buffers between farming and residential uses in Abbotsford helps to enhance land use compatibility.*

Commission. Paul Crawford, a key Langley staff person working on the Plan, stated, "The primary goal of the Plan is to enhance agricultural viability through protection of agricultural land, preservation of larger lot sizes and creation of policies to encourage the agricultural industry." In 1995, the City of Surrey established an Agricultural Advisory Committee (AAC) consisting of representatives from the local agricultural community, the Ministry of Agriculture and Food, the Agricultural Land Commission, the City, the public, and the Environmental

Advisory Committee. Lesley Aronson is an Associate Planner for the City of Surrey, and has become a strong proponent of agricultural planning. "Agriculture is one of our most important industries, and our plan has helped us resolve all kinds of urban and rural conflict. It's provided a framework to resolve disputes. Everyone involved is pleased with the results." The Surrey AAC began the process of forming an Agricultural Plan with a mail-out survey to all landowners in the city's agricultural areas. The results clearly indicated that urban encroachment and rising land prices were of serious concern to local farmers. These, and other issues, are now being addressed by the AAC. On the Saanich Peninsula, the

Saanich Agricultural Strategy is helping to guide and promote agriculture. Developed by the Peninsula Agricultural Commission, the strategy has identified issues that limit local agriculture and made recommendations to help sustain the industry. "We're representing farmers and giving them a voice," said John Kaye, chair of the Peninsula Agricultural Commission. "Our principle role is to advise municipal government. We're supported by the administration and it's making a difference. Now, we're getting ready to tackle

some real issues." The efforts on the Saanich Peninsula serve as a good example of several communities getting together to resolve common issues. The Strategy was developed collectively by Saanich, Central Saanich, North Saanich and Sidney. The success of the Agricultural Strategy is clearly based on the commitment of the four municipalities to their agricultural community. The strategy has already had an impact on water rates. In Central Saanich, for example, agricultural water rates have been reduced from \$2.25 to 80 cents per 1000 gallons. In addition, a public relations campaign has been implemented encouraging island consumers to shop for local produce. Like the Surrey AAC, the Peninsula Agricultural Commission exists due to farsighted municipal leaders who recognize the contribution that agriculture makes to their community. Kelowna is another community with a long agricultural history benefiting from an AAC. The City, when updating its Official Community Plan in 1994, made a commitment to undertake an Agriculture Plan. As a

result, the Kelowna Agriculture Plan was adopted last year, and will help to reduce existing conflict between urban and agricultural land use. In the fall of 1998, Larry Foster, a planner with the City, spoke about the Plan at a Planning Institute of British Columbia conference in Penticton. He characterized the planning process as an excellent agricultural awareness building exercise for all involved. The key objectives of Kelowna's Agricultural Plan are to strengthen farming and ensure the preservation of agricultural land. He noted that, "When agriculture is doing well economically, we all do well." Other communities are taking notice. In June of this year Mayor Anne Murray and staff of the District of North Cowichan met with members of the farm community and staff of the Ministry of Agriculture and Food (MAF) and the Agricultural Land Commission.

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**"Agriculture is one of our most important industries, and our plan has helped us resolve all kinds of urban and rural conflict."**

*Lesley Aronson, Associate Planner, Surrey*

## U.B.C.M. Joins Committee on Agriculture and Environment

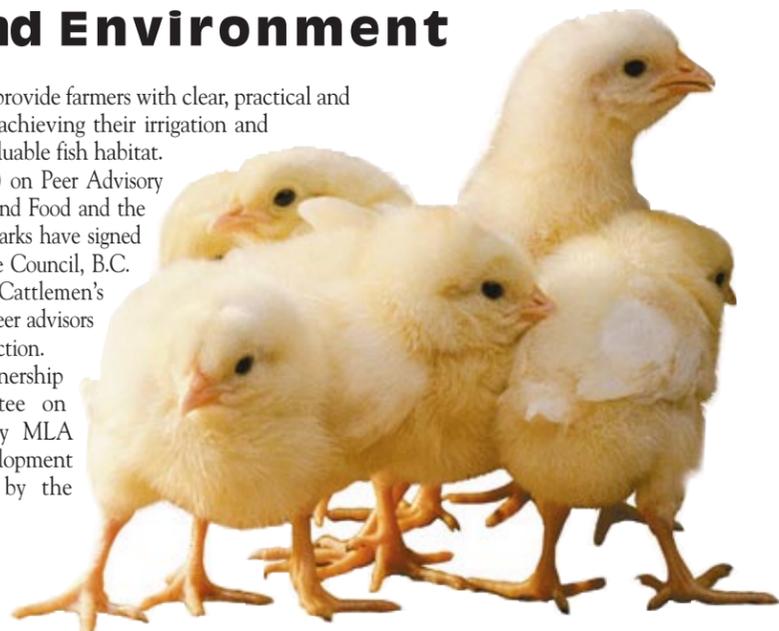
**E**ighteen months after it was formed the Partnership Committee on Agriculture and the Environment has lived up to its mandate: to support a growing agriculture industry that is both environmentally and economically sound. The joint government/industry committee is intended to facilitate consultation on environmental issues that affect farmers and agriculture. Staff from the provincial and federal ministries of Agriculture and Environment, together with representatives of the Union of BC Municipalities (UBCM), meet with Directors of the BC Agriculture Council (BCAC) four times a year. "It is essential to have local government sitting at the table," said Russell Husch, a Councilor from Lake Country and the former Chair of the BCAC. UBCM plays an important role through the involvement of Mayor Les of Chilliwack who sits on the Partnership Committee. But the Partnership Committee is more than just talk. The following is a list of issues that have been tackled to date:

**Ditch Maintenance Guidelines:** The Partnership Committee has developed a process to establish ditch maintenance protocols and guidelines that are acceptable to the farming community and environmental agencies. A pilot project is operating in the Fraser

Valley this summer. The intent is to provide farmers with clear, practical and environmentally acceptable ways of achieving their irrigation and drainage needs, without damaging valuable fish habitat. Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) on Peer Advisory Service: The Ministry of Agriculture and Food and the Ministry of Environment, Lands and Parks have signed three MOUs with the B.C. Agriculture Council, B.C. Horticultural Coalition and B.C. Cattlemen's Association that establish the role of peer advisors in contributing to environmental protection.

**Mushroom Composting:** The Partnership Committee assisted the Committee on Mushroom Composting chaired by MLA John van Dongen. With the development and adoption of a Farm Bylaw by the

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# Life on the Edge



In the world of land use planning it's difficult to avoid dealing with 'edges'. Agriculture is no exception. In fact, farming next to urban, recreation or environmentally sensitive areas can be challenging for farmers. Residents living next to farms are often concerned about the odour of manure, pesticide use, machinery noise and slow moving farm vehicles on roads. Likewise farmers living next to urban neighbours can experience problems too. Trespassing, theft and damage to crops, dumping of garbage, vandalism of machinery, fence damage, and harassment of livestock can pose serious problems for farmers. Farming close to urban areas can also involve confronting flooding from urban developments and runoff of road pollutants into ditches used for irrigation.

If conflict persists and remedies are not found, it becomes increasingly difficult to farm along the 'edge'. Gradually farm activity lessens and an the impression is left that agricultural land will eventually be urbanized. There is clearly a need for more effective approaches to improve land use compatibility for people living on both sides of the farm fence. One option is to define the agriculture / urban interface as a separate focus of planning and policy development. In doing so, existing and potential points of conflict can be identified and solutions implemented. Ensuring a good land use 'fit' along the edge adds stability within the farm area and ultimately helps to secure a key part of the community's economic fabric.

The following are a number of "edge" planning tools now available to local governments.



### Did you know?

Vancouver Island ranks third amongst major regions in farm cash receipts.

### Did you know?

About one-third of BC's beef cattle and calves graze on lands in the Central / Cariboo region. 70% of the region's farming income comes from cattle. The number of people employed in agriculture in the region increased by 17% from 1991 to 1996, while farm receipts jumped by 44%, the highest increase in the province.

#### Planning for Agriculture - Resource Materials

The Agricultural Land Commission's document Planning for Agriculture - Resource Materials has a specific chapter dealing with edge planning.

#### Development Permit Areas

A Development Permit Area (DPA) can now be established for the protection of farming. This is an urban-side edge planning tool that can set special conditions when development occurs next to an agricultural area to provide buffering or separation of development from farming.

The City of Surrey was the first municipality to adopt a DPA for the protection of farming.

#### Subdivisions Near Agriculture - a Guide for Approving Officers

In 1996 changes were made to the Land Title Act concerning the subdivision of land next to farming. In response to these changes, a guide for Approving Officers was developed. The changes represent another urban-side edge planning tool to encourage more sensitive subdivision of land next to farming to help lessen conflicts.

Besides the Guide, a booklet was also developed - **Planning Subdivisions Near Agriculture** - to assist persons that may be planning to subdivide their land next to farmland.

#### Farm Bylaws

Introduced in 1996, can now be used to deal with matters traditionally not considered by zoning and rural land use bylaws. This is a highly flexible tool that local governments can use to promote land use compatibility. Prior to adoption, a farm bylaw must be approved by the Minister of Agriculture and Food.

The Township of Langley is the first municipality to develop a farm bylaw to address mushroom farm operations and on-farm composting.

#### Landscape Buffer Specifications

This guide developed by the ALC, is primarily geared as an urban-side edge planning tool. It sets out a variety of buffer methods for use in different circumstances. It is a practical guide for local governments where the opportunity exists to create or improve the buffer between the agriculture-urban interface.

If you have any questions or comments regarding this article please contact Karen Thomas, Land Use Agrologist with the Resource Management Branch, MAF - ph: (604) 556-3106, e-mail: karen.thomas@gems2.gov.bc.ca

## Farming - Big Business in many BC Municipalities

Farming is making an important economic contribution in many municipalities throughout BC. Of British Columbia's 151 municipalities, 104 have land in the ALR and agriculture is a defining characteristic for many of these communities.

### Top 20 Municipalities by Total Annual Gross Farm Receipts

	(\$1995)	% of Jurisdiction in ALR
1. City of Abbotsford	\$314,627,232	75% (27,700 ha)
2. Township of Langley	\$150,355,771	77% (23,700 ha)
3. District of Chilliwack	\$141,307,022	66% (17,320 ha)
4. Surrey	\$106,866,115	29% (9520 ha)
5. Delta	\$65,177,713	56% (10,180 ha)
6. Pitt Meadows	\$59,368,379	86% (6930 ha)
7. Richmond	\$56,388,204	37% (4920 ha)
8. Kelowna	\$34,692,072	42% (9020 ha)
9. Spallumcheen	\$33,897,082	55% (14,390 ha)
10. Maple Ridge	\$27,106,058	13% (3450 ha)

	(\$1995)	% of Jurisdiction in ALR
11. Kent	\$21,087,899	35% (6450 ha)
12. Burnaby	\$19,388,020	3% (280 ha)
13. Mission	\$17,612,542	10% (2160 ha)
14. Central Saanich	\$16,648,975	66% (2980 ha)
15. Kamloops	\$15,959,165	13% (12,780 ha)
16. North Cowichan	\$13,089,259	33% (6,250 ha)
17. North Saanich	\$10,469,668	41% (1,510 ha)
18. Summerland	\$10,346,330	31% (2,070 ha)
19. Saanich	\$10,285,904	19% (1,880 ha)
20. Lake Country	\$10,090,013	39% (4,770 ha)

Statistics Canada, 1996 Census of Agriculture Profile Data - British Columbia; Cat. # 181-XPB, July, 1997.



# Ideas for Linking with Your Agricultural Community



**Over the last 100 years**

there have been dramatic shifts in where people live in Canada. At the turn of the century, 62 percent of Canadians lived in a rural setting and most of these people were engaged in farming. Today, over 82 percent of British Columbians live in urban settings, and most of the people living in rural areas are not farmers. In fact, only 1.5 of every 100 persons in B.C. lived on a farm in 1991 according to Statistics

Canada. It shouldn't be surprising then that an understanding of agriculture for most people, has gradually declined. Elected officials and their advisors charged with the task of making land use decisions have of course not been immune to these demographic shifts. To enhance agricultural awareness and plan for agriculture's sustainable future, working relationships must be strengthened between government and the agricultural industry. Developing strong linkages requires maintaining effective day-to-day, year-by-year connections with agricultural interests. It also requires agricultural community involvement in the development and revision of bylaws and plans dealing with agricultural areas. Directly engaging the farm and ranching communities in these processes ensures full consideration is given to agricultur-

al issues and concerns. Strengthening these links can be achieved in a number of ways. Below are some ideas that local governments may wish to consider to better connect with their agricultural community.

## Advisory Planning Commissions and Committees (AACs)

Where agriculture plays a prominent role in land use or a large part of an area's economy, local government should consider appointing a farm representative to their Advisory Planning Commission. In addition, chairs are often reserved for agricultural representatives to ensure their participation on other key local government committees such as the Economic Development Commission, Healthy Community, Environmental and Drainage and Irrigation Committees.

## Farmers' Institutes / Commodity Groups

There are nearly 60 farmers' institutes throughout BC playing an important role in

providing linkages between local governments and the agricultural community. Farmers' institutes can assist planning processes in a number of ways by identifying agricultural issues, helping to develop planning studies and agricultural strategies, and providing comment on draft plans. BC agriculture is very diverse resulting in numerous commodity groups. Key local commodity groups can also provide useful advice about how draft plans and bylaw proposals might impact their specific commodity.

## Agricultural Advisory Committees (AACs)

Several local governments have appointed an AAC and are finding them an effective means to link with their farm community (see article below).

## Other Agencies

Maintaining avenues of consultation with Provincial and Federal agricultural agencies

is also important. These include the Agricultural Land Commission (ALC) and Ministry of Agriculture and Food (MAF) as well as Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada. To support the Strengthening Farming Program the ALC and MAF have made adjustments to ensure that staff are available to work with local governments on a variety of agricultural matters.

## Liaising

In the case of municipalities, it has proven valuable if a council member is designated as a "farm / ranch liaison" person. Similarly, a specific staff person could be designated to deal with agricultural matters. In the case of regional districts, the electoral area directors have normally made a special effort to consult with the farm / ranch community.

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# Agricultural Advisory Committees

A growing number of municipalities and regional districts are finding it beneficial to establish Agricultural Advisory Committees (AAC's). These committees are an effective way to provide local governments with advice on day-to-day and long-term agriculture issues. Currently, there are about a dozen AACs or similar advisory groups established by local governments throughout BC from the Kootenays to the Okanagan Valley to Vancouver Island.

"It's about education," said Marlene Grinnell, the Mayor of Langley City and a member of the AAC for the Greater Vancouver Regional District (GVRD). "I was raised and educated in the city. Before I served on this board, I had no idea what it might be like to walk in the shoes of a farmer, but I'm beginning to understand."

The GVRD AAC advises the Regional Board which has 11 municipalities with land in the Agricultural Land Reserve and together accounted for annual gross farm receipts of nearly \$500 million in 1995. GVRD's AAC has been in existence for over five years and has been instrumental in reviewing a wide variety of proposals affecting agriculture such as investigating water issues, examining the impacts of recreation, and being involved in enhancing agricultural awareness in the Region.

Kelowna's AAC provides advice to Council on applications involving the ALR and the review of major projects that may impact the City's farm areas. The AAC also supported the work of the Advisory Committee which developed Kelowna's Agriculture Plan. Currently the City is exploring the active involvement of the AAC in assisting with the implementation of the Agriculture Plan.

The Saanich Peninsula's four communities do not have a formal AAC but do have a Peninsula Agricultural Commission. It includes four councillors and farm representatives, with only the farmers being

voting members. The Commission's main objectives are to oversee the implementation of the Peninsula Agricultural Strategy as well as deal with drainage and water matters.

The City of Surrey's AAC has the dual responsibility of advising Council on matters such as zoning amendments in the farm area, as well as overseeing the development of the City's Agricultural Plan. A key to the success of AACs such as Surrey's is the strong commitment of Council and staff in supporting the Committee's work. Appointments to AACs are often made on the recommendation of local agricultural organizations such as farmers' institutes, and representation usually includes a broad range of commodity groups and the processing and distribution sectors in the area. A model "Terms of Reference for Agricultural Advisory Committees" is included in Planning for Agriculture - Resource Materials.

AACs can contribute to Council/Board's efforts in a number of ways:

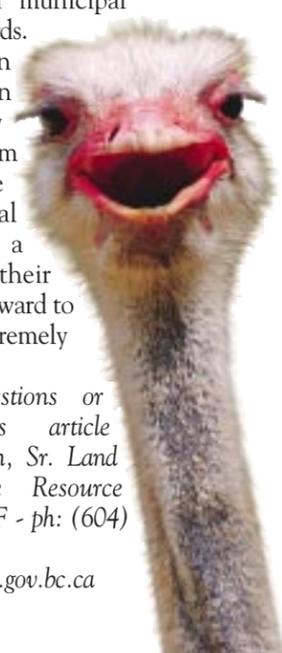
- raise the awareness of agriculture and its importance to the local and regional economy;
- aid in the development of Agricultural Area Plans and their implementation;
- assist in the development of agricultural economic strategies;
- improve opportunities for joint funding of drainage and irrigation works;

- identify and effect change regarding the impact of transportation corridors, recreation facilities and urban development on agriculture;
- applications to amend community plans and bylaws;
- applications initiated under the Agricultural Land Commission Act;
- reviews or development of community plans and bylaws;

An AAC can play an important advisory role in support of the work of municipal councils and regional boards.

As noted by the Cowichan Valley Regional District in response to a 1995 survey about linking with the farm community, "We have found the Agricultural Advisory Committee is a valuable resource and their input on items that we forward to them for evaluation is extremely important to us."

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



**"It's about education,..."**  
Marlene Grinnell  
Mayor,  
Langley City



**Did you know?**  
The Lower Mainland generated farm receipts in excess of \$1 billion in 1995, Up 41% since 1991.





## Ideas for Linking with Your Agricultural Community

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### Tours, Workshops and Direct Farm Marketing

Contact with your agricultural community can also be gained through farm tours, agricultural workshops and conferences. Local farm groups occasionally conduct farm tours or participate in an open house, inviting members of the public to join them for a visit to their farms. MAF regularly conducts 'field days' and has organized farm tours at the annual Union of BC Municipalities con-

vention. Direct farm marketing is a growing part of the B.C. agricultural scene. Producers retailing from their farm gates provide an excellent opportunity for everyone to make a direct connection with B.C. agriculture.

As the saying goes, "a chain is only as strong as its weakest link." As the linkages between urban and rural folk grow stronger, our communities and our province can only benefit.

For more information on linking with your agricultural community, please contact Barry Smith, Sr. Land Use Specialist of the Resource Management Branch, MAF - ph: (604) 556-3106, e-mail: Barry.Smith@gems4.gov.bc.ca



## GIS Model Development

A new Geographic Information System (GIS) Pilot Project, that can provide a model for other BC communities, is under development in Pitt Meadows in partnership with the Ministry of Agriculture and Food. The model is proving to be an cost-effective, user-friendly planning tool that will greatly improve our understanding of the agricultural land base.

For agriculture, with annual gross farm receipts of nearly \$60 million in Pitt Meadows alone, this Project is particularly welcome news.

From plotting drainage systems and soil types to tracking commodity production and keeping comprehensive records on land use within and bordering farm areas, the system can serve many important planning functions.

"With GIS, we can get a complete picture of how agriculture can best integrate with our entire community," says Pitt Meadows' Planner Bruce McWilliam. "Using overlays we can plot set-backs, drainage systems - even soil quality."

Given the success of the project, McWilliam even sees it as a potential business recruitment tool to expand agricultural production. Plans are underway to investigate the feasibility of linking the GIS to the city's web-site. Those looking for farm land will soon be able to "point and click" to find information regarding an individual parcel to determine its suitability for a particular commodity.

"With 86 percent of Pitt Meadows in the ALR, there is a need to support existing agricultural producers and encourage new entrants into the industry", commented Dave Sands, MAF South Coastal Regional Director. "GIS is a key tool for us to be able to accomplish that."

If you have any questions or comments about this article please contact Karen Thomas, Land Use Agrologist with the Resource Management Branch, MAF - ph: (604) 556-3106, e-mail: karen.thomas@gems2.gov.bc.ca

### Did you know?

BC's Northeast has the greatest concentration (6.5%) of people directly employed in agriculture. The region is BC's "bread basket," producing 80% of the province's grain.

## Finding the Balance in Planning

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The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the potential for developing a plan for the agricultural areas of the District. Chris Hall, District Planner, stressed the importance of understanding the farm community's concerns and values, and assuring up-to-date agriculture and land use information is available to enable a comprehensive planning process.

At the meeting Ron Bertrand, Director of the Resource Management Branch, MAF, emphasized the Ministry's commitment to working with communities throughout the province to enhance land use inventories and work together on planning processes involving farm areas.

Across the province many challenges still lay ahead. Escalating agriculture land

prices, soil conservation, drainage issues, and water availability are key challenges facing BC communities.

The adoption of agricultural plans by municipalities is an excellent indication of the commitment by local government to deal directly with agricultural concerns and ensure a home for farming in their communities for the long term. The hope is that other municipi-

palities will follow their lead to help ensure the sustainability of agriculture in their community.

For further information on planning for agriculture in your community please contact Barry Smith, Sr. Land Use Specialist of the Resource Management Branch, MAF - ph: (604) 556-3106, e-mail: Barry.Smith@gems4.gov.bc.ca



## Achieving a "Win Win" in Langley

The new Langley farm by-law is just one example of how local governments, along with the provincial government and representatives of the agriculture industry can work together to achieve a "win-win" solution to a difficult issue.

In 1997, many residents of Langley expressed anger and frustration over odour and possible environmental impacts associated with mushroom composting. Local mushroom producers in turn, were upset over what they felt was a potential threat to their livelihood. The Minister of Agriculture and Food, the Honourable Corky Evans, appointed MLA John van Dongen to chair a committee of various municipal, provincial and industry representatives to help resolve the dispute.

At the same time, the municipality, MAF and ALC worked together to develop solutions that are now possible under new provisions of the Municipal Act which provide for "farm bylaws".

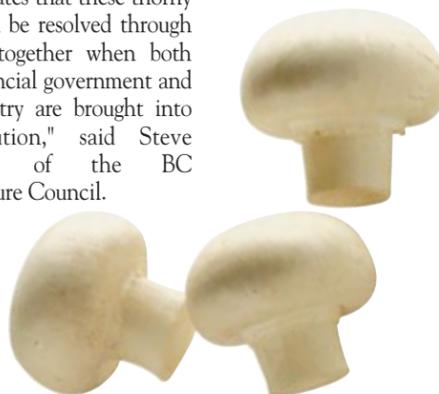
In the past, local governments could only regulate the general use of farmland. But, with the approval of the Minister of Agriculture, the new provisions enable municipalities to pass farm bylaws that can actually deal with farm practices.

Ultimately, a compromise was reached that allows mushroom composting in Langley to continue in a way that produced minimal odour, based on the required use of new odour control technology. The new farm bylaw was approved by the Minister of Agriculture and adopted by the Township in

June, 1999. Since that time, Abbotsford has developed a similar bylaw to govern mushroom operations and composting in their municipality.

"The new Langley farm bylaw demonstrates that these thorny issues can be resolved through working together when both the provincial government and the industry are brought into the solution," said Steve Torrence of the BC Horticulture Council.

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



## U.B.C.M. Joins Committee on Agriculture and Environment

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Township of Langley in June of 1999, a model is now in place that provides clear standards for mushroom composting facilities.

**Riparian Management:** A working group has been formed to develop guidelines for achieving the goals of the Fish Protection Act in farming areas.

**Nutrient Management in the Lower Mainland:** The BCAC has provided a report to government on policy and program requirements to help the industry remain environmentally sustainable over the long term.

**Wildlife:** The Partnership Committee formed a task group to re-establish provincial coordination of policy and regulatory issues; to assist local staff and

agencies to resolve problems involving wildlife and agriculture; and to investigate options for mitigating wildlife and waterfowl impacts on agriculture.

**Cranberries and the Environment:** The cranberry industry and environmental agencies have developed a cooperative process for evaluating environmental concerns related to cranberry farming.

**Non-Agricultural Wastes on Farmland:** The Partnership Committee is committed to ensuring that regulations are in place to protect farmland from being contaminated by industrial and urban wastes.

If you would like further information on the work of the Partnership Committee, please contact Ron Bertrand, Director, MAF - ph:(604) 556-3103, e-mail: ron.bertrand@gems6.gov.bc.ca

### Did you know?

In the Thompson-Okanagan region, the tree fruit industry alone generates about 6% of the region's jobs, slightly less than logging.

## Web Sites Worth Checking



<http://www.landcommission.gov.bc.ca/alc/>



BC MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE AND FOOD  
<http://www.agf.gov.bc.ca/>



Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada  
Agriculture et Agroalimentaire Canada  
<http://www.agr.ca/>

British Columbia Agriculture Council  
<http://www.bcac.bc.ca/>

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