

# Growing TOGETHER

FARMING IN PARTNERSHIP WITH LOCAL GOVERNMENT

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## Reaping the fruits of change

British Columbia's agriculture industry is adopting new technologies and business models to stay competitive

Agriculture in British Columbia is faced with many new challenges as technology continues to push the frontiers of production and market pressures force producers to become even more efficient.

"We are in an increasingly competitive global environment and we are witnessing two main things happening," says Steve Thomson, executive director of the British Columbia Agriculture Council. "Farmers are either having to compete in the global market or begin to look at niche market opportunities."

Richard Barichello, an expert in agricultural economics at the University of British Columbia, has identified a number of international trends that agriculture in the province has to reckon with.

These include increased global trade and competition, the growing importance of satisfying consumers as their purchasing choices expand and worldwide improvements in technology. Technological advances are leading to cost reduction and yield increases in all major food commodities.

### Treadmill effect

The pressure on farmers to adopt these technological innovations is like riding a treadmill, Barichello points out. To remain competitive in the export market, farmers in British Columbia will be looking to all levels of government – including those at the local level – for the support required to keep up with the latest scientific strides.

Greenhouses are using hydroponics and cutting-edge computer technology to nourish plants and regulate hothouse temperatures, resulting in optimized production. The industry directly employs some 2,000 people in the province.

"There has increasingly been a move away from some of the traditional farming methods to greenhouse farming," says Sarah Ryall of Gipaanda Greenhouses, a family-run business in Delta. "We now use the latest technology, comparable to the best anywhere in the world."



B.C. greenhouses are now using hydroponics and cutting-edge computer technology to improve production.

The Ryalls began their greenhouse enterprise in 1972 and since then have seen greenhouse farming technology improve in terms of the quantity and quality of their yields as well as the use of environmentally friendly production methods.

“There has increasingly been a move away from some of the traditional farming methods to greenhouse farming. We now use the latest technology, comparable to the best anywhere in the world.”

Sarah Ryall, Gipaanda Greenhouses

Peter Isaacson of the British Columbia Hothouse Growers' Association says greenhouses such as the Ryall's are now able to use non-toxic, biological pest control methods, eliminating the need for pesticides.

Steering committees, with representatives from local government, have been established in a number of coastal and First Nation communities including Powell River, Barkley Sound, Nootka and Kyuquot and Clayoquot Sounds, to provide input in the approval process for new tenures.

Local government involvement in the work of the committees helps provide key information on local conditions and how best the initiative can complement local planning goals and needs.

"Local government is very attuned to local issues and local attitudes and so it is important to include them in the planning process," said Barron Carswell, aquaculture planner with the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries. "That will help us ensure, for example, that our approval process is consistent with any local zoning that is in place or planned for the future."

The recommendations of the committees help the British Columbia Assets and Land Corporation and the ministry in the evaluation of applications for new shellfish concessions in communities interested in growing their shellfish aquaculture industry.

The work of the government-financed committees, made up of various community stakeholders, includes the development of suitability maps to identify appropriate and inappropriate areas for shellfish aquaculture in their localities.

"They allow you to introduce beneficial organisms into the greenhouse," said Isaacson. "These then kill all the pest insects by going after the bad bugs. It's more difficult to do this in conventional farming."

"It is also highly productive," adds Isaacson. "You can expect a 15- to 20- fold increase in production on a particular area of land, so that's quite dramatic."

### Novel business concepts

Summerhill Estate Winery of Kelowna has successfully used agritourism to boost its competitiveness. The strategic positioning of the winery as a destination tourist attraction, complete with replicas of Egyptian pyramids, is part of a marketing plan that has paid off, drawing about 1,000 visitors from different parts of the world to its location each day.

"Agritourism has been a great success for us," said Stephen Cipes, proprietor of the winery. "We are the most visited winery in Canada and this makes it possible for us to sell more than 85 per cent of our products on site."

Other farmers are using niche marketing to directly target consumers with specialized needs. Andrea Gunner of Rosebank Farm in Armstrong grows medicinal herbs such as catnip, ginko and black walnut. She's also the general manager of the British Columbia Organic Milling Co-operative.

The co-op is presently made up of 15 producers of spelt, a wheat substitute that is gaining popularity among people with wheat intolerance. Gunner says this is a relatively untapped market with unrealized growth potential.

"The market is much bigger than the production capability is," said Gunner. "We are only able to serve the provincial market at this point but there is a big export demand and we're trying to find more certified organic growers to meet this."

~ Continued on page 2 ~



## Shellfish initiative taps input from local government

The provincial government has been working with local authorities in an effort to double the amount of Crown land allocated for shellfish farming by 2008, as part of the shellfish aquaculture development initiative launched two years ago.

The shellfish aquaculture development initiative will accommodate limited expansion of existing farms under a streamlined application process. A shellfish unit has been established in Nanaimo for application processing and issuance of tenure and aquaculture licenses.

As at the start of this year, 275 hectares of new tenured land had been approved for shellfish farming, including 23 hectares in Powell River, 66 hectares in Barkley Sound, 30 hectares in Quatsino and 96 hectares in Nootka/Kyuquot.

One of the aims of the expansion drive is to create new economic opportunities especially for First Nations. Some 56 hectares of map reserves have so far been approved for First Nations in Powell River, 200 hectares in Barkley Sound and 160 hectares in Nootka/Kyuquot.

The plan will increase the amount of tenured land to 4,230 hectares over the 10-year period of the initiative, creating an estimated 1,100 direct new jobs and boosting the industry's wholesale revenue to \$100 million annually.

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# Reaping the fruits of change

~ Continued from page 1 ~

The transition that agriculture is going through brings challenges of its own, but it also offers unique opportunities for growth for those adequately prepared to embrace it.

Thomson says educating producers as well as the public will go a long way in helping them respond appropriately to some of these technological and marketing challenges.

"If agriculture is to thrive in the new global economy producers and government will have to be much more aware of what other countries are doing and adapt accordingly," Thomson says. "Local governments, through their local planning processes, have an important role to play in supporting agriculture."

If you have any questions or comments about this article, please contact: **Dave Sands, Regional Director, South Coastal, Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries, phone: 604 556-3074, e-mail: [david.sands@gems8.gov.bc.ca](mailto:david.sands@gems8.gov.bc.ca)**

*Summerhill Winery has increased sales through an agritourism strategy that allows visitors to tour its vineyards and scenic setting.*



## Goodwill ambassador

### Agricultural science major spends summer promoting dialogue between blueberry farmers and neighbours

University of British Columbia student Bal Khosa spent his vacation working on a goodwill project to build bridges of communication between blueberry farmers who use noise devices for bird control and their neighbours.

This summer, Khosa responded to more than 50 phone complaints he received, arranging meetings between residents in Delta, Surrey, Abbotsford and other parts of the Lower Mainland and blueberry farmers.

The project, an initiative of the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries, was challenging, but the agricultural science major says the issues were quite familiar to him.

"My dad has a blueberry farm in Abbotsford and we had dealt with the same kinds of complaints before," said Khosa. "It was also an asset that I could communicate with many of the farmers who only speak Punjabi."



*Bal Khosa helped create a better understanding of blueberry farming practices.*

**“ We had a complaint from a neighbour in Delta who lived about a kilometre from the farm and who said he had no idea what the noise devices were even being used for. So when he came down to the farm and actually saw the birds and how much pressure the farmer was going through, it helped him get a better understanding of the situation. ”**

**Bal Khosa, project coordinator**

Though most of the cases involved complaints against farmers by nearby residents unhappy with the noise or timing of the noise devices, Khosa says he has on occasion also helped smooth relations between fellow farmers.

In one case in Surrey, a farmer who was building a \$2 million horse barn near a blueberry farm appeared to be set on a collision course with the blueberry farmer because of the effect the devices would have had on the horses.

"We set up a meeting and introduced the two farmers and they reached a compromise that the horses would be kept towards the

other side of the barn during the day," said Khosa. "The blueberry farmer also agreed to have the horses walked through his farm."

In the same way, helping the non-farming community understand farmers' problems better by convening a meeting between the two sides has sometimes led to the lessening of differences.

"One of the best strategies is getting the farmer and the neighbour together," said Khosa. "We had a complaint from a neighbour in Delta who lived about a kilometre from the farm and who said he had no idea what the noise devices were even being used for. So when he came down to the farm and actually saw the birds and how much pressure the farmer was going through, it helped him get a better understanding of the situation."

Before heading back to school, the first-year-student also put together a fact sheet to provide answers to questions the public may have on the use of noise devices to control bird predation. This information is posted on the ministry's Web site: [www.gov.bc.ca/agf](http://www.gov.bc.ca/agf)

The Minister of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries, John van Dongen, has asked staff to compile a report on the public concerns received this season regarding noise devices to help develop a strategy before the 2002 crop year.

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## Farm Practices Board makes mediation key goal

Over the past five years, the Farm Practices Board has focused on amicable resolution of conflicts through mediation. In doing so, it has worked hard at balancing the interests of legitimate agricultural practices with those of the non-farming community.

Ross Husdon, president of the board, says that since its establishment in 1996 under the Farm Practices Protection (Right to Farm) Act, the tribunal has been implementing a proactive strategy to address the issues that fall under its mandate.

"The board members have been very active in dealing with complaints before they are actually filed in some cases," Husdon said. "In other cases, we've managed to resolve them before they get to the stage of formal hearing, through mediation and consultation work with the parties."

Issues that cannot be decided through mediation are heard before the board's panel, which determines whether or not the farm activity in question is acceptable as normal farming practice. Though the board has no policing powers, it does follow up on resolved issues to see how the parties are faring.

The board has worked on issues of noise, dust, odour, electronic interference and traffic flow related to farming activities. It has also attended to complaints related to water safety.

Communities that have benefited from the board's work include Abbotsford, Surrey, Naramata, Oyama, Summerland, Langley,



*The Farm Practices Board is responsible for resolving local disputes regarding odour, noise, dust or other disturbances associated with farm practices.*

Duncan, Vernon, Chilliwack and Kelowna.

Husdon said the time needed to resolve an issue varies depending on the circumstances, but in critical cases the Farm Practices Board has expedited the process to avoid court action. There is no one-fits-all formula for handling complaints because different facts have to be taken into account with each case.

"In the case of farmers using noise devices to scare birds from berry crops, we could decide in one instance that a farmer can only have

two noise devices and they must be placed at a certain point because of neighbours," said Husdon.

"We may go to a farmer 10 miles away and say they can have four and they can be placed somewhere else, because of surroundings, topography, number of neighbours or whatever the case may be."

Though the decision or varying considerations of each case may differ, the aim of arriving at a just resolution remains the same. Husdon says potentially costly and divisive litigation has been avoided as a result.

If you have any questions or comments about this article, please contact: **Jim Collins, Manager, Dispute Resolution Services, Farm Practices Board, phone: 250 356-1817, e-mail: [jim.collins@gems8.gov.bc.ca](mailto:jim.collins@gems8.gov.bc.ca)**

### Did you know?

**Valentine's Day is an important day for B.C.'s floriculture industry – B.C. markets 18,000,000 roses annually!**





# Local governments - a focus on agriculture

## Delta mediation underway, Kelowna aims to develop farm bylaws and Peace River starts a major rural plan update

The past year has seen the continuation of several important agricultural studies, plans and bylaw reviews spearheaded by local governments in many of British Columbia's important farm and ranch areas.

Agricultural plans in the City of Richmond and the District of North Cowichan are nearing completion, along with the Economic Strategy for Agriculture in the Lower Mainland, led by the Greater Vancouver and Fraser Valley Regional Districts.

### Corporation of Delta

The mediation team appointed by Minister of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries, John van Dongen, to help resolve agriculture and urban land use interface issues in Delta has begun meeting with various interest groups and individuals in the area. The team, chaired by management consultant Keith Saddlemyer, is tasked with exploring how the greenhouse industry in Delta can respond to the concerns of residents, while at the same time continuing to contribute to the growth of the area's agricultural economy.

Saddlemyer says the team has been working at facilitating compromise and there are positive signs that most of the parties involved are committed to a resolution.

"If there's going to be an accommodation of various interests, it's going to be necessary for them to come to that agreement, not to have an agreement forced on them by people from outside," said Saddlemyer.

The other members of the team are Robert Hobson, chair of the Central Okanagan Regional District and Suzanne Veit, who served as deputy minister of municipal affairs for the past five years.

The committee is inviting submissions from all segments of the community and will present its report and proposals to the minister and mayor of Delta at the end of October.

Keith Saddlemyer can be reached by phone at 604 850-6670.

### City of Kelowna

In Kelowna, City and Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries staff are in the process of developing a new farm bylaw to regulate intensive agricultural land use in farm areas. A primary goal of the farm bylaw will be to broaden agricultural opportunities while at the same time minimizing rural-urban conflicts. The enactment of the farm bylaw will form part of the City's long-term agricultural strate-

gy, outlined in its 1998 Agricultural Plan and will complement changes in the City's zoning regulations.

The farm bylaw will require the approval of the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries, under Section 917 of the Local Government Act, and will be the first bylaw in British Columbia to address compatibility promotion for multiple farm commodities.

### Peace River Regional District

The Peace River Regional District has begun a two-year effort to review its zoning bylaws and develop a comprehensive rural plan. Agricultural lands form a major part of the planning area that covers over 19,000 square kilometers. The plan will also examine a number of important rural issues.

A background report will be completed in the first phase of the project, while the second phase will focus on plan development and bylaw adoption.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries has agreed to assist the Regional District in any on-going Geographic Information System work and, along with the Investment Agriculture Foundation of British Columbia, is providing funding for the project.



A granary in Peace River, where 35% of farm receipts are generated from grain and oil seed production.

### Township of Langley

Work is continuing on the review of the Township of Langley's rural plan. The review will also examine agricultural sections of the Township's zoning bylaw. Meetings between Township Planning, Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries and Land Reserve Commission staff began last year.

The parties are working together to review and revise the plan and bylaw to promote farming in the Agricultural Land Reserve while fostering good relations among different land users within the farm area.

As part of the review process, a land use inventory of the Agricultural Land Reserve was completed this summer. Information collected will be useful in understanding the impacts of proposed policies and regulations.

The review follows the Township of Langley's adoption in 1999 of the first farm bylaw in British Columbia, aimed at balancing the interests of mushroom producers and residents in the area.

### Regional District of Comox Strathcona

In the spring of this year the Regional District of Comox-Strathcona started a two-phased planning process to develop the Comox Valley Agricultural Plan.

Key goals include identifying the current agricultural situation, enhancing agricultural awareness, identifying important land use relationships and promoting sustainable farming in the Valley.

A steering committee has been appointed that includes electoral area directors, farm community and provincial government representatives. Support for the project has come from the Ministry of Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services, Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries and the Investment Agriculture Foundation of British Columbia. The plan is expected to be completed in 2002.

In addition to the initiatives noted above, the **Regional District of Central Kootenay** is leading a project to improve the understanding of land use and farming systems in the Creston Valley.

The **City of Penticton** also initiated work on an agricultural area plan in April, while the **City of Abbotsford** and the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries teamed up to complete a land use inventory of the Matsqui Prairie over the summer.

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# Richmond's Agricultural Viability Strategy - a model of partnership

## How municipal, provincial and federal collaboration helped create a blueprint for agricultural development

The Richmond City Council is expected to endorse the Richmond Agricultural Viability Strategy by the end of this year or early 2002, setting the stage for the implementation of an agricultural plan that drew the three levels of government to the drawing board.

The City, in conjunction with the Richmond Farmers' Institute, marshaled the resources of the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries to assist in the development of the strategy.

Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada contributed research expertise and funding valued at \$50,000, working in conjunction with an agri-team made up of a regional agrologist, a Land Reserve Commission official and City staff.

City of Richmond planner Kari Huhtala says seeking the support of the provincial and federal governments was crucial to the success of the task.

"Our aim was not simply the protection of agricultural farm land," Huhtala said. "Our aim was to make agriculture and the farm lands usable, viable and feasible and we decided to seek as many partners as possible, rather than try to do everything independently."

Dave Melnychuk, Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries agrologist for the project, says the ministry recommended a phased, multi-year development of the strategy, similar to the approach used in the preparation of Surrey's Agricultural Plan. The ministry has been working closely with the City through this process, currently in the third of four phases.



Richmond's agricultural strategy will help facilitate harmonious development across the city's agricultural and urban landscape.

The ministry contributed \$10,000 in support of the initiative. Richmond also received a \$30,000 contribution from the Investment Agriculture Foundation of British Columbia.

### Phases of Development

"The first phase involved putting together regional information and an agricultural profile of the city as well as the identification of issues," said Melnychuk. "This was done through survey questionnaires mailed out to land owners and through public meetings." Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada provided key support in the second phase, through its experts in Agassiz and Edmonton. Soil scientists and a land evaluation specialist contributed expertise gained

from studies elsewhere in British Columbia and Canada.

"They helped us on our statistical data on land use with some of the information from their own resources and helped us do a complete evaluation of our soils, farming capacity and farming information," said Huhtala. "This helped give us a better sense of our agricultural industry."

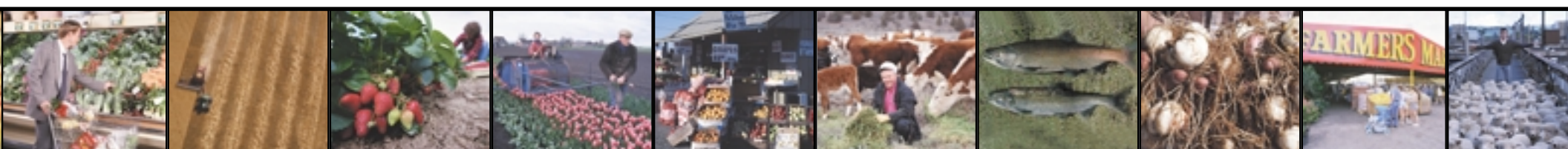
The federal agency's role resulted in the production of two technical reports on Richmond's land resources and farming systems to help in the design of a strategy appropriate to the city and its producers.

During the second phase, the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries also provided assistance in updating Richmond's Geographic Information System by integrating its 1995 land use inventory information with current agricultural data. A draft of the strategy was also completed in the second phase for public discussion.

"We are now in the third phase of public consultations on the draft strategy and we will be taking these comments and forming it all into a final strategy for endorsement by City Council," said Huhtala.

Following acceptance by city council, the plan will be implemented through 2021, within the same time frame as the city's Official Community Plan.

*If you have any questions or comments about this article, please contact: Dave Melnychuk, Regional Agrologist, Fraser Valley, Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries, phone: 604 556-3048, e-mail: [dave.melnchuk@gems7.gov.bc.ca](mailto:dave.melnchuk@gems7.gov.bc.ca)*





# Surrey committee strengthens agricultural agenda

Members have different interests but share common cause to enhance industry

The success that the City of Surrey's Agricultural Advisory Committee has had in putting farming issues on the front burner of local government politics shows the potential these types of committees have to contribute to agricultural development in their municipalities.

Surrey's committee faces many of the same challenges as other British Columbia communities, including how best to balance urban development against the needs of the agricultural sector and how to actively invigorate agriculture and agriculture-related industries in the area.

The committees nine voting and four non-voting members represent different interests – agricultural, environmental and municipal – but these have not overshadowed their collective purpose to enhance agriculture in Surrey.

"In very real terms, opposing interests have never been a problem," says Marvin Hunt, City Council representative on the committee. "Everyone at the table is looking from their perspective, but we all have the same goal and the goal is to promote agriculture and the use of our farmlands, which keeps us very focused."



A third of the land in Surrey is within the Agricultural Land Reserve and helps generate over \$100 million in annual gross farm receipts.

## Agricultural plan

Surrey's agricultural plan is a testament to this co-operation. The committee played a key co-ordinating role in the whole process, from the hiring of consultants to the laying out of the terms of reference to the actual implementation of the final product.

The plan addresses a wide range of issues including soil quality, marketing strategies, how to attract agriculture-related businesses and processing of agricultural produce.

"I think the committee's role in the development of Surrey's agricultural plan is a major accomplishment," said Hunt. "Cities often think of development plans, social plans, parks and recreation plans, but few think of having an agricultural plan."

At the heart of the Agricultural Advisory Committee's mandate is a commitment to ensuring that the voice of farmers is heard in the chambers of city hall. With some 740 registered farmers in a city with an estimated population of 360,000, the committee helps make sure that the needs of farmers and the agricultural sector are not ignored.

The committee makes room for a minimum of five farming representatives chosen from nominations by the Surrey Farmers Institute and a maximum of two representatives from other agricultural sectors such as processing and distribution.

The non-voting members also include a representative from the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries and the Land Reserve Commission.

## Local governments with Agricultural Advisory Committees

Throughout British Columbia, several local governments have appointed Agricultural Advisory Committees to provide a strong link with their farm and ranching communities and advise councils and regional boards on agricultural issues.

These include:

- City of Abbotsford
- Regional District of Alberni-Clayoquot
- Regional District of Central Kootenay
  - Creston Valley
  - Electoral Areas I & J (Castlegar Area)
  - Electoral Area E (Blewett Area)
- Regional District of Central Okanagan
- Regional District of Comox-Strathcona
- Corporation of Delta
- Greater Vancouver Regional District
- Islands Trust – Saltspring Island
- City of Kelowna
- Township of Langley
- City of Penticton
- District of Pitt Meadows
- City of Surrey
- Peninsula Agricultural Commission
  - District of Saanich
  - District of Central Saanich
  - District of North Saanich
  - Town of Sidney

## Achieving results

Some issues of concern to farmers that have featured in the committee's deliberations relate to urban encroachment, trespassing, the need for more education to help the public gain a better understanding of farming and the agricultural industry and problems of drainage.

"We were front and centre in taking part in the planning process for the drainage initiative that the City of Surrey has undertaken," said Michael Bose, chair of the committee and a farmer.

"In terms of encroachment, whenever we became aware of a new development that was bordering on agricultural land, we got to voice

our opinion on how the City should deal with the interface between urban and rural settings."

Though the committee technically serves in an advisory capacity leaving it to Council to either accept or reject their advice, the Surrey committee's well-considered recommendations have almost always received the consent of the City.

*"Everyone at the table is looking from their perspective, but we all have the same goal and the goal is to promote agriculture and the use of our farmlands, which keeps us very focused."*

**Marvin Hunt,**  
City Council representative,  
Surrey Agricultural Advisory  
Committee

"Our farmers are happy with the results we're getting," said Bose. "They see a different attitude in City Hall towards agriculture. I am happy with what we've accomplished."

But the Surrey work to change attitudes towards agriculture has not been limited just to the arena of municipal politics. One vehicle that the committee has used to bring all players into closer touch with farming is a yearly educational tour of areas of agricultural activity in Surrey.

"We have two full buses of government officials, politicians, bureaucrats, members of the development industry, bankers and more," said Hunt. "We take them on a tour of the agricultural elements of Surrey to see a number of farms and what is actually happening. So we're very much involved in educating the community."



British Columbia produces over 60 varieties of vegetables for commercial sale, many of which are grown by farmers in Surrey.

Agriculture is the largest industry in Surrey and the Agricultural Advisory Committee is helping to create a fallow ground for the continued growth of the sector. Its work has impacted many areas of agriculture in Surrey by effectively channeling matters of concern to the agricultural community to local government.

"Often farmers feel neglected, bulldozed and ignored but we've been trying to address these issues," said Hunt. "The biggest thing that we've accomplished is bringing the voice of farmers to bear in the political decisions of Surrey."

If you have any questions or comments about this article, please contact: Dave Melnychuk, Regional Agrologist, Fraser Valley, Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries, phone: 604 556-3048, e-mail: [dave.melnichuk@gems7.gov.bc.ca](mailto:dave.melnichuk@gems7.gov.bc.ca)

## Did you know?

The agricultural sector is responsible for some 263,000 jobs (2000 estimate) in British Columbia, including 33,000 in primary agriculture, 3,500 in primary fisheries, 26,000 in food processing and an additional 179,000 in the food retail and service industry.

BRITISH COLUMBIA  
Ministry of Agriculture,  
Food and Fisheries  
[www.gov.bc.ca/agf](http://www.gov.bc.ca/agf)

### Other Web Sites Worth Checking

Land Reserve Commission  
Working Farms, Working Forests  
[www.landcommission.gov.bc.ca/alc](http://www.landcommission.gov.bc.ca/alc)

Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada  
Agriculture et Agroalimentaire Canada  
[www.agr.ca](http://www.agr.ca)

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