

COMMITTEE REPORT



Date: March 21, 2024
To: Agricultural Advisory Committee
Subject: 2017 Agriculture Plan's Implementation Progress
Department: Development Planning and Policy & Planning

Purpose

To provide the Agricultural Advisory Committee an update on the implementation progress of the 2017 Agriculture Plan.

Background

Agriculture is one of the defining features of the Central Okanagan region and drives a significant amount of economic activity and tourism, accounting for nearly \$190 million in farm operating revenue in 2021 in addition to other associated economic activity. In Kelowna, nearly 46 per cent of the land base is dedicated to agriculture (the vast majority of which is in the Agriculture Land Reserve (ALR)). The City supports the agricultural community through the creation of long-term plans and policies that ensure agricultural lands are protected and available now and, in the future.

Endorsed by Council in 2017, the Agriculture Plan is a 10-year action Plan with a vision that "*Kelowna is a resilient, diverse, and innovative agricultural community that celebrates farming and values farmland and food producers as integral to our healthy food system, economy and culture.*" The Plan includes 52 actions that are organized according to available financial resources (i.e. achievable with existing resources vs. requiring additional staff and/or financial resources) and a phased implementation timeline.

Since the Plan's endorsement, a number of changes and events have occurred that impact the agricultural landscape in the City, examples include:

- Amendments to the Agricultural Land Commission (ALC) Act and ALR Regulations
- COVID-19 pandemic
- Climate hazards affecting production (e.g. extreme precipitation events, heat dome, drought, flooding, wildfire) and also highlighting challenges to local food security
- New City Plans (e.g. 2040 Official Community Plan (OCP), 2040 Transportation Master Plan (TMP), Climate Action and Resiliency Strategy (in progress))
- New Council Priorities

The Agriculture Plan is an intersecting plan that highlights agricultural values and actions that can be integrated into other City initiatives and objectives.

Progress on Actions:

As summarized in Table 1, many of the Agriculture Plan's actions have been successfully implemented (*Attachment A: Agriculture Plan Implementation Progress* provides further details about the status of each of the actions). Nearly 81 per cent of the actions are in progress, ongoing or completed. Only one action scheduled to be implemented in Phase 2 was not started. This was the development of a Healthy Food Strategy as other priorities took precedence. The implementation to date is more successful than originally planned, especially given that no additional staff or financial resources have been dedicated. This success is due in part to the Province implementing some recommendations province-wide (e.g. dwelling size limits, commercial event regulations, etc.) as well as providing dedicated enforcement staff in the region, which was not anticipated at the time of the Agriculture Plan's development. Further, staff have been able to find synergies with other projects to implement some of the actions (e.g. Farm Protection Development Permit Guidelines were refreshed with the 2040 OCP). In late 2022, the City hired a term agricultural planner, and part of their task is continuing to implement the Plan.

Table 1: Status Summary of Agriculture Plan Actions

	Actions to be implemented with existing resources					Actions to be implemented with additional resources				
	Completed / ongoing	In progress	Not started	Not proceeding / no longer applicable	Total	Completed / ongoing	In progress	Not started	Not proceeding / no longer applicable	Total
Ongoing	9	0	0	0	9	3	1	0	0	4
Phase 1 (2018 – 2019)	13	0	0	0	13	5	1	0	6	12
Phase 2 (2020 – 2022)	3	1	1	1	6	2	2	0	1	5
Phase 3 (2023 – 2027)	0	2	0	0	2	0	0	1	0	1
Totals	25	3	1	1	30	10	4	1	7	22

As the Agricultural Plan is in Phase 3, the final phase, staff took the opportunity to review the actions to determine if they aligned with the 2023 – 2026 Council priorities, any new City policies or bylaws, provincial legislation updates and the City's 2040 Official Community Plan (OCP). Nine actions were identified as "no longer proceeding" or "not applicable" because of changes to the Agricultural Land Commission (ALC) legislation (e.g. amendments to include provisions for secondary dwellings) or updates to City policies or bylaws (e.g. updates to the Business Licence Bylaw).

Evaluating Success:

The Agriculture Plan includes a "Monitoring and Evaluation Strategy" to determine the progress of the Plan over time. Some of the measures are available annually or at the end of each Phase, but others rely

on data available in five year or more increments, such as the federal Census of Agriculture or the provincial Agricultural Land Use Inventory. Attachment B summarizes the performance status of each of the indicators.

Five indicators are performing in the right direction. These indicators are directly impacted by decisions made by the City to maintain lands that are designated as agricultural lands and they demonstrate the commitment to working with the ALC to ensure properties are in compliance with the ALC Act and City zoning on agricultural lands. Highlights include:

- Ongoing, short-term, medium-term, and long-term actions for Phase 1 and Phase 2 are exceeding implementation targets.
- Compliance and enforcement of non-farm use on agriculture is exceeding targets for closing files (from 2017 to September 20, 2023, 214 files closed). This is also used to measure progress on Council's Agriculture Priorities.
- Preserving farmland within and outside of the ALR continues. This is also used to measure progress on Council's Agriculture Priorities.

Four indicators are performing in the wrong direction which are all related to land acreage in crop production (also used to measure progress on Council's Agriculture Priorities) and the number of active farms. Examining data over the prior decade reveals significant annual variability in the indicators. The performance of these indicators is also not wholly within the City's control to have them perform in the right direction. However, the five indicators performing in the right direction directly support these indicators by preserving and protecting the agricultural land base for future farm use. Further, there could be a lag period between implementing the Plan's actions and seeing positive results. These indicators should continue to be tracked and supplemented with other data as it becomes available.

Two indicators, the average age of farmers and the number of hectares in the ALR/A1 have remained relatively constant since the Plan was endorsed.

Next Steps:

Phase 3 will continue to focus on completing those actions that are currently in progress as well as continue to implement ongoing actions. The two remaining actions that have not been started may require additional resources, either financial and/or staff to be undertaken. Resourcing options will be investigated and budget requests for individual actions will be made as part of the normal budget cycles.

Additionally, work will continue on integrating an agricultural lens into the development of other City policies and plans (e.g. Climate Action and Resiliency Strategy) while focusing on actions that will aid in moving indicators that are performing in the wrong direction into the right direction.

The Regional District of Central Okanagan completed a Regional Agricultural Strategy Background Report in late 2022 and plans to work on the subsequent strategy in 2024. Staff will participate in any local government input opportunities to that strategy.

Conclusion:

Agriculture is an anchor and foundation of the community. It is more than just an economic driver, it is part of what makes Kelowna beautiful, unique, and provides so many benefits to the community. Agriculture is the cornerstone of local food security, attenuates stormwater, mitigates flood and wildfire risk, reduces heat island, and provides the backdrop for many tourism events.

While agricultural lands serve many positive functions, there are many competing interests for the land, and the need to protect against 'use creep' is a notable challenge. This reinforces the importance of the Agriculture Plan's implementation and the continued need for the Permanent Growth Boundary (PGB), almost 55 per cent of which borders along the ALR (and an additional 15 per cent borders Okanagan Lake). As the City continues to support and create strong, defensible policy that protects agricultural lands, Kelowna will continue to have diverse and thriving agricultural industries now and, in the future.

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Attachments:

Attachment A: Agricultural Plan Implementation Progress
Attachment B: Agricultural Plan Performance Indicators