

Agriculture Plan Update

List of Recommended Actions - DRAFT

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DRAFT

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Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, the BC Ministry of Agriculture and the Investment Agriculture Foundation of BC, are pleased to participate in the production of this publication. 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 City of Kelowna, and not necessarily those of the Investment Agriculture Foundation, the BC Ministry of Agriculture or Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada.

Introduction

This list of recommended actions is based on a review of comparable best practices, consideration of professional planning principles and has been developed with the input of the AAC. The actions stem from key issues that have been identified through engagement efforts with the agricultural community and the public. These key issues relate directly back to the Agriculture Plan Update's Vision Statement.

Vision Statement

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.

Key Themes

The themes presented here reflect both the vision statement and the amalgamated feedback received during engagement events. The themes will be used in the Agriculture Plan Update to identify recommendations that the City of Kelowna can take to address issues facing agriculture and food security. In order to remain focused on issues that the City is able to provide leadership on (from a jurisdictional perspective), priority is given to issues and actions that can be tackled by local government.

The following 7 key themes are presented according to the order in which they are referred to in the Vision Statement.

1. Harnessing and stewarding the bio-physical environment: taking advantage of great soil and sun, while minimizing water use and waste.
2. Increasing consumer awareness and support for local agriculture: introducing Kelowna farms to residents and visitors alike.
3. Managing urban and rural growth & development: keeping non-farm uses off the ALR.
4. Supporting economic development of the agricultural sector: creating farms that create a profit.
5. Bridging existing gaps in the food system: getting local food onto local plates.
6. Planning for farm succession: making sure that retirement of the farmer doesn't mean retirement of the farm.
7. Aligning local policies and regulations with the Agriculture Plan's vision: providing clear direction for decision-makers and landowners.

This list identifies recommended actions for each of the seven major themes and the issues associated with each of them.

Recommended Actions

Theme 1:

Harnessing and stewarding the bio-physical environment: taking advantage of great soil and sun, while minimizing water use and waste.

The Central Okanagan, is one of the best growing regions in Canada. With its warm summer climate and fertile soil, it can support a wide variety of crops. Climate and soil were listed as the top strengths of farming and food production in Kelowna by survey respondents. However, there are still some environmental challenges facing farmers in the region. Stakeholders and survey respondents commented on the importance of the natural ecology of the land and environmentally sound farming practices to help replenish the soil, recharge water sources and provide habitat for natural pollinators, while using water conservation methods and efficient waste management. Climate change was listed as both an opportunity and a threat by 58% of survey respondents and was a key issue of focus at meetings with stakeholders. It will have effects on nearly all the other issues in this theme, including invasive species and water management.

Issues related to this theme include climate change, soil and resource mapping, invasive species, wildlife conflicts and water management.

List of recommended actions for Theme 1:

- Work with the Invasive Species Council of BC and Regional District of Central Okanagan on initiative to control noxious weeds and invasive species.
- Include agriculture in climate change strategies and plans.
- Develop emergency plans (i.e. wildfire, drought) that are inclusive of agriculture.
- Work with AAFC Summerland Research Station and BC Ministry of Environment to determine opportunities for soil maps to be digitized and made available online.
- Enforce and ensure City bylaws (Maintenance of Boulevard Bylaw, Noxious Weeds & Grass Control Bylaw) contain up-to-date list of species of concern.
- Maintain fair water pricing for agricultural users.
- Provide support for water reclaim and re-use projects on farmland.
- Explore impacts of increasing access to treated water and sewer for agriculture.

Theme 2:

Increasing consumer awareness and support for local agriculture: introducing Kelowna farms to residents and visitors alike.

Support for local agriculture is strong in Kelowna. Almost all of the survey respondents (97%) indicated that they “always” or “sometimes” buy locally grown items when they have that option. However, over half (55%) indicated that were not knowledgeable about the *Right to Farm Act* and normal farm practices. Education of community members in regards to agriculture and educational needs for farmers were both key concerns raised by stakeholders at community meetings. Farmers themselves indicated they would like opportunities to enhance professional development, yet lack the time. A total of 83% of the farmer survey respondents indicated that they were not involved in agri-tourism, which points to an opportunity to create a community-wide agricultural identity that would include agri-tourism and branding. The use of a single brand to identify Kelowna-grown food and food products could help solidify support from the public while enhancing their understanding of the local food system. Over half (52%) of the survey respondents noted that a lack of education about the local food system was a challenge for the agricultural sector. Stakeholders also mentioned the need to reinforce primary, secondary, and post-secondary curriculum to bolster the amount of information about the local food system in the education system. Respondents were asked if their children learn about gardening, farming and food production in school. Of those that did have children, only 20% think that they discuss these topics in school.

Issues related to this theme agri-tourism, local marketing and branding, local food support and partnerships with other institutions.

List of recommended actions for Theme 2:

- Explore opportunities to participate in a agri-tourism strategy with other agencies.
- Develop historical interpretive signage regarding agriculture for local parks.
- Investigate signage opportunities along roads in farming areas to indicate specific farms, crops, etc.
- Support agricultural events, festivals, fairs, and celebrations.
- Develop policies and bylaws to increase opportunities to sell local food within the community.
- Work with school districts to explore the possibility of using school grounds for pop-up markets or other agricultural events.
- Support curriculum in schools and community-level programming that educates residents about the history of agriculture in Kelowna.
- Investigate the costs and benefits of a local food procurement policy.
- Develop an identity for Kelowna that highlights a diverse agricultural sector.

Theme 3:

Managing urban and rural growth & development: keeping non-farm uses off the ALR.

Kelowna residents are very supportive of the ALR - 96% of survey respondents indicated that policies preserving farmland were important or very important to them. Farmland protection opportunities were identified throughout the stakeholder engagement process, such as vegetative buffers along the urban/rural boundary. These additional initiatives include tools that will help to limit non-agricultural development, minimize conflicts between producers and non-producers, and proactively use and manage farmland for agriculture. Stakeholder groups expressed challenges with regard to land use planning, where islands of residential areas have been created in farmland that now require connecting roads and other infrastructure. Concern over the non-farm use of ALR also remains. Some parcels of farmland are being purchased with no intention of farming, followed by construction of extremely large homes. Over half (51%) of farmers who responded to the survey indicated that they were only actively farming less than 5 acres of land. Many farmers expressed frustration at restrictions placed on non-farm activities that may otherwise provide economic returns over and above allowable farming activities. This tension was also acknowledged during the stakeholder session, where some producers expressed a desire to increase the diversity of activities that should be allowed on farmland. While the Provincial Agricultural Land Commission ultimately has the jurisdiction to permit activities on the ALR, the City has the jurisdiction to regulate them. The City of Kelowna's ALR compliance and enforcement strategy has been in force for the last two years and has already resulted in successful changes. However, when asked if the City was doing enough to enforce non-farm use of farmland, 31% of survey respondents said no and another 34% said that they did not know, indicating that there is a lack of knowledge amongst the public regarding farmland protection.

This theme includes the following issues: non-farm use on ALR land; reducing speculation; compliance and enforcement; underutilized ALR lands; island effect of farmland parcelization; and residential footprint policies.

List of recommended actions for Theme 3:

- Address known non-compliance issues and hot spots through bylaw enforcement.
- Support the Farm Practices Protection Act and associated dispute resolution process.
- Work with the real estate industry to develop a "Good Neighbour" policy that provides new landowners with information about normal farm practices and development restrictions.
- Provide information to real estate industry about impacts of farmland speculation.
- Adopt permanent growth boundary protection tools to further protect the ALR.
- Plan roads, sewer, and other services such that the island effect for farmland is minimized.
- Adopt a policy such that ALR applications are only forwarded to the ALC if an Agrolgist report indicates an overall benefit to agriculture.
- Develop a homeplate policy to limit overall footprint of residential uses on ALR.
- Meet with other local governments to discuss common concerns and advocate for changes at the provincial level (e.g. property transactions and disclosures).

Theme 4:

Supporting economic development of the agricultural sector: creating farms that create a profit.

Kelowna farmers are able to produce a fairly wide variety of crops and livestock products and local retailers have a keen interest in offering local products for sale. Support for new farming initiatives is important for growing the sector; however, support is also needed to enhance current farming operations and allow farmers to capitalize on economies of scale. The majority of small-scale produce growers are unable to provide enough quantity of products for export out of the region independently, or to sell to retail outlets and restaurants on a consistent basis. The need to encourage farm product processing and other value-added opportunities regionally is recognized as a way to increase economic viability. Innovation enhances profitability and allows farmers to develop entrepreneurial ideas, gain useful marketing and business management skills, and access capital. The community is split as to whether or not the local agricultural sector is growing or declining, with 36% indicating they feel the sector is growing and another 36% who believe that it is declining. Stakeholders indicate that making a profit is challenging because input costs are high and competition from imported goods is strong. During engagement, producers indicated that they need assistance, in the form of extension services (e.g. providing administrative tools for farmers, local information about soils, succession planning resources, etc.), from the City as well as accessible business development resources. Farm profitability is also closely tied to labour and farmworker housing. Some Kelowna farms find it difficult to retain farm workers due to lack of housing and temporary rental housing for seasonal farm workers is difficult to find. Lack of skilled labour was listed in the survey as one of the top challenges to farming in Kelowna. Rental housing off the farm and transportation for the worker also creates added expenses for farm operators. On the other hand, construction of farm worker housing on the farm opens the possibility for the structures being converted to other non-farm uses in the future.

Issues related to this theme include extension services; farmworker housing; farm-scale business planning; and sector innovation.

List of recommended actions for Theme 4:

- Enhance connections between producers, small businesses, non-governmental organizations, and small scale food processors.
- Conduct an inventory of food storage, distribution, and processing capacity for small and medium-scale producers.
- Support staff in professional development towards agricultural and rural planning.
- Provide templates and other guidelines and support for farmworker housing development.
- Continue to communicate third-party business planning sessions and workshops to the agricultural community.
- Support the agricultural economic development goals of the Central Okanagan Economic Development Commission (COEDC).
- Advocate for general support from higher levels of government.
- Support the development of a local Farmers Institute.
- Support community-level agricultural facilities for food preparation, processing, and cold storage and investigate possible funding sources.

Theme 5:

Bridging existing gaps in the food system: getting local food onto local plates.

The main components of the local food system include: production, storage, processing, distribution, retail, and waste management. Gaps, or weak links, may exist between various components of any community's food system. Residents of Kelowna have indicated strong levels of interest in purchasing local foods, however 46% of survey respondents noted that limited access to local products is a challenge. This points to an opportunity to develop alternative local retail opportunities. Even with increased availability some barriers to improving food self-sufficiency remains. For non-farmers, 29% of respondents mentioned cost as a barrier to purchasing local food. While it is difficult for the City to provide leadership in influencing the price of food, it can play a role in continuing to support local organizations with mandates to improve access to fresh, local, healthy foods for at-risk sectors of the community. Another concern raised by local farmers and other stakeholders was the limited amount of supporting infrastructure for agriculture, including secure processing facilities, cold storage and distribution opportunities. This is particularly true for smaller, independent

farmers that are not members of larger industry groups. A large-scale commercial composting facility was identified as a resource that would be used by urban and rural food producers alike. Many respondents to the survey cited the need to expand urban food production opportunities, in particular: increase the number of community gardens (there are 11 community gardens in Kelowna); increase the number of school gardens; and promote edible landscaping and agriculture in City gardens and parks.

This theme includes the following issues food security; food processing infrastructure and storage needs; distribution channels; retail opportunities; managing food waste; and community gardening and urban farming.

List of recommended actions for Theme 5:

- Conduct an inventory of urban (public land) farming opportunities.
- Investigate grant/funding stream opportunities for projects that support local food system initiatives.
- Endorse/support the visions of other local organizations working in food security, food access, and food self-sufficiency.
- Explore the possibilities of incubator farming on public lands.
- Explore needs and opportunities for a community food hub (a centralized location with a commercial-scale kitchen and simple processing equipment for small-scale food and beverage products).
- Support the development of a healthy food strategy as a theme of the Healthy City Strategy.

Theme 6:

Planning for farm succession: making sure that retirement of the farmer doesn't mean retirement of the farm.

Whether a producer is just starting out or coming from a long family history of farming, the question whether and how to obtain land is challenging. Sometimes a family's younger generation of farmers may decide to switch crop varieties, upgrade equipment, or modernize practices. These activities all entail investment costs. The cost of farmland in most regions of BC is prohibitive: not only for new farmers but also for those who are taking over longstanding family farm businesses. There is also pressure from the real estate industry to develop large estate homes on farmland, or to sell ALR parcels as holding properties. The top challenges to farming and food production in Kelowna, indicated by survey results, were: Difficulties accessing land for farming due to speculation, high costs, and capital inputs (73%); competing non-farm uses for farmland (urban - rural edge issues) (70%); and Lack of succession planning (age of farmers, no new young farmers) (56%). The Kelowna farming community also noted that it was difficult to find information and advice regarding the most appropriate type of access agreement for land (purchases, rentals, and leases) and affordable farm financing. This is where mentorships and apprenticeships can be a useful resource. Leasing (and/or licensing) farmland can be one of the most affordable ways for farms to become established and expand. During stakeholder meetings, there was interest raised by both farmers and non-governmental groups in having the City pursue the option of establishing a farmland trust. With appropriate policies and community initiatives in place, some of the burden of accessing land can be alleviated.

Issues related to this theme include farmland trust models; alternative tenure arrangements; and mentorships and apprenticeships.

List of recommended actions for Theme 6:

- Support dissemination of guides, factsheets, reports, on alternatives to buying/selling of farmland.
- Explore opportunities to establish a farmland trust (possibly regional).
- Promote land linking and mentorship programs (i.e. Young Agrarians).
- Work with the real estate industry to provide those selling ALR with alternative options to fee-simple sales.

Theme 7:

Aligning local policies and regulations with the Agriculture Plan Update-'s vision: providing clear direction for decision-makers and landowners.

Land use regulation by local governments is established under the *Community Charter* and the *Local Government Act*, which contains extensive land use regulations, zoning powers and subdivision powers. This enables local governments to adopt regional growth strategies and OCPs that create a framework for land use regulation, including zoning bylaws. The City of Kelowna's OCP can recognize agriculture as a significant contributor to the community's landscape, identity and economy and include policies to support and enhance this role. Zoning bylaws can influence agricultural land in several ways, including the setting of minimum parcel sizes and maximum building footprints, setting parameters around secondary dwellings, setbacks, and establishing the potential for subdivision of agricultural lands, to name a few. Collectively, these plans and bylaws express a commitment to the preservation and strengthening of farmland, including the protection of lands capable of agricultural productivity, encouraging a diverse and profitable agricultural sector and supporting a sustainable and resilient local food system. Awareness of jurisdictional responsibilities and authority can be useful in defining policy, strategies, actions and projects that can be taken by local government and those that require broader collaboration.

This theme includes the following issues: updating bylaws; innovative OCP policies; guidelines and strategies; and supporting third-party initiatives.

- Perform regular review of OCP and Zoning Bylaw to ensure that commitment to agriculture and food system is embedded and reflected.
- Convene with local government planners to discuss common agricultural and food security goals to ensure the best practices and regional alignment.
- Meet with other Farm Bylaw municipalities (Abbotsford, Langley, Delta) to discuss common issues.
- Provide support (endorsements, funding) for non-governmental groups working on projects/initiatives that the Agriculture Plan Update supports.
- Explore the development of a local food procurement strategy.
- Re-examine ALR minimum lot sizes and determine whether they support or constrict a diversity of agricultural activities.
- Explore compensation for ecosystem services provided by agriculture.