

Peninsula & Area Agricultural Commission

2015 - ANNUAL REPORT

The Peninsula & Area Agricultural Commission (PAAC) was initially formed during 1997/98 with the completion of the **Agricultural Strategy Report for the Saanich Peninsula** in 1977. The name was changed in 2014 from the Peninsula Agricultural Commission to reflect the inclusion of Metchosin and the possible inclusion of other municipalities in the future.

Its Mandate is to advise the member municipalities on matters involving agriculture, and to facilitate the development of programmes for implementation of the Saanich Peninsula Agricultural Strategy Objectives.

What did we accomplish during 2015?

- ◆ Our major accomplishment was the **Farm Tour** on June 13, 2015
(see brochure attached to the report)

The tour was a great success with over 30 attendees, including MLAs Lana Popham and Gary Holman. Each member municipality was represented by a Councillor and/or the Mayor, as well as municipal staff and members of agricultural and water advisory committees, and others. We were disappointed there was no representation from the Agricultural Land Commission.

In addition to the farm site visits that ranged from dairy, poultry, fruit, vegetables and grain, commentary on the bus was provided by Michael Doehnel and Ryan Vantreight (both past members of PAAC). To round out the day's events, we had a tour and tasting at Sea Cider (agri-tourism) and a tour of the Eurossa Greenhouse operation. A delicious lunch at Bev Marley's home, made from local produce of course, was a highlight of the tour, providing a mix and mingle atmosphere. All comments from participants were very positive.

Through the assistance of Rob Kline with the Ministry of Agriculture, we were successful in applying for a grant through the "BC Strategic Outreach Initiative – Growing Forward 2" that partially covered the costs.

The farmers on the tour spoke passionately about the crop loss they continue to face year after year due to the impact from wildlife (geese, deer, rabbits, etc). This summer farmers were also dealing with severe drought conditions, which coupled with the geese problems, resulted in one farmer, Bryce Rashleigh, losing entire fields of grain crops at a cost of thousands of dollars.

Another serious issue for farmers such as Dianne Williamson from Firbank Farm is the lack of an abattoir on Vancouver Island able to handle commercial processing of large quantities of birds. Dianne stated that because it is less stressful for the birds, they are loaded on to trucks in the dark, starting late in the evening through to the early hours of the morning in order to catch the first ferry to the mainland, where they are shipped to Abbotsford for processing. Ferry costs are increasing yet again this year, with anticipated annual shipping costs topping \$60,000.

PAAC was pleased with the turnout for the tour and felt that our politicians now have a better understanding of the issues our farmers face while trying to not only make a living, but also sustain and support local agriculture. It was a great opportunity for our elected officials and municipal planners to talk face to face with local farmers and listen to their concerns.

◆ **Saanich Fair – 2015**

(see more info under Education & Outreach, pages 4/5)

Once again, with a lot of planning and hard work from our volunteers, the PAAC information booth at the Saanich Fair was a great success.

The ever-popular zucchini races stole the show! Kids build a “race car” using zucchini and decorate with a multitude of items. Then, two at a time, they race them down the track. We ran out of supplies a couple of times as the zucchinis only last so long!

To help with the organization and the madness of the zucchini races, we hired two students through CR-Fair to assist. This was a great decision as our volunteers could concentrate on answering questions at the PAAC information tent, where we also had games set up, such as “seed matching” and “guess the mystery vegetable” – enjoyed by adults and children alike.

Once again we had a speakers' tent and heard presentations on supporting local agriculture, direct fair trade principles supporting small-scale producers in remote areas, and food security for the future.

However, we may re-think this format for next year as some of the presentations were not well attended. We may need better promotion, or locate the tent in a different area, or perhaps the Saanich Fair is just not the right venue for this type of event.

Issues Discussed at PAAC Meetings During 2015

■ Regional Goose Management Strategy

See Appendix 1 attached to this report for more information.

Sadly, this was a major topic for discussion once again during 2015 and it monopolized our agendas most months – as it has for the last 10 years or so. PAAC has continued to write letters to the CRD and the Provincial Government outlining the struggle our local farmers to face year after year from non-migratory geese in the hope that something definitive will be done.

The geese not only impact farmers, but have a significant effect on lake water quality, recreational facilities (playing fields, golf courses). The ecological impacts on off-shore islands, estuaries and riparian areas is also significant.

The geese population has increased from 80-100 geese brought to the Island by the BC Wildlife Branch in 1969 to over 9000 birds at the last count.

Although the Central Saanich pilot cull that took place in 2015 during moulting season was considered successful because it established a protocol, it really did very little to address the expanding geese population on the lower Island. One cull is insufficient.

As long as non-migratory geese have “sanctuaries” to rest, breed and eat (parks, lakes, marine foreshores) the populations will never be reduced to acceptable levels, unless significant culling and egg addling is funded and maintained for decades. Estimated annual costs would be around \$55,000 – an amount far less than the hundreds of thousands of dollars our farmers continue to lose year after year.

Lack of public education (which leads to public criticism), lack of funding and not having a sole agency and effective municipal programs dedicated to this issue is a contributor to the slow progress.

This is a regional issue: all stakeholders should be involved – CRD, Victoria Airport Authority, School Districts, First Nations, DND, golf courses, etc.

Hunting restrictions have been eased by some municipalities and the Canadian Wildlife Service. The Federal Government has to step up however: for example, they could exempt resident geese from the *Migratory Bird Convention Act* and allow hunting in summer as well as other seasons.

For their continued hard work, leadership and commitment, we sincerely thank PAAC member Bev Marley as well as Rob Kline, regional agrologist with the Ministry of Agriculture, Jeff Weightman with the CRD and Central Saanich staff for their attendance at CRD meetings.

- **Regional Deer Management Strategy**

To a lesser degree, this topic was discussed regularly at PAAC meetings. The cull in Oak Bay was noted in the press to be successful, but in fact only few deer were culled at a considerable cost.

Municipalities and farmers continue to work on the deer problems on the Peninsula and Saanich with more fencing and some shooting for crop protection. However, crop damage continues and for some farmers at unsustainable levels.

Other issues discussed by PAAC during 2015 include:

- VisionSandown – PAAC contributed to the discussions for creating a vision for the 84-acre property in North Saanich (Oct. 8)
- Martindale Flats, drainage issues (Sept. 10 & Oct. 8)
- O'Donnell Creek drainage issues (Sept. 10)
- Temporary Farm Worker Housing (Feb. 12 & Mar. 12)
- CRD Food Strategy (Feb. 12)
- Referral from Central Saanich: 6379 Old West Saanich Road request for non-farm use (May 14) Bruce Greig attended
- Referral from Saanich: Proposed addition to Colquitz Linear Park (Feb. 12) Steve Holroyd attended
- Referral from Central Saanich: Request for input on proposed formalization of the Central Saanich Agricultural Advisory Committee (Oct. 8) Bruce Greig attended
- Referral from Saanich: Request for input on the proposed Saanich Agricultural & Food Security Task Force (Nov.12) Jane Evans attended

Guest Speakers & Presentations at PAAC meetings during 2015

- April 9: Tour of Level Ground, Keating Cross Road (Stacey Toews)
- May 14: Jessica Dennis: Local Government Farm Trusts
- June 11: Jesse Howardson (Life Cycles) – Farm Gleaning
- June 11: Merging Markets & Opportunities for Regional Growers
(from Susan Tychie's report, presented by Linda Geggie)
- Sept. 10: Phil Christensen: Drainage issues O'Donnell Creek
- Oct. 8: Ryan Vantreight: Water Extension to Longview Farm

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES (Sub-committee Reports)

Note: most of the original objectives in the 1997 report have now been met.

The **1997 Agricultural Strategy Report for the Saanich Peninsula** set forth a number of recommendations designed to promote the sustainability of agriculture on the Peninsula, and was the basis for the formation of PAAC. Consistent with the recommendations of the Strategy Report, the Commission has five working committees focused on implementing strategic objectives for:

- Farm Economics - Terry Michell
- Agricultural Land Base - Phil Christie
- Resource Stewardship - Kim Lonsdale (dormant for 2015)
- Education and Outreach - Linda Geggie/Nikki Tate
- Water - Michael Doehnel

A voting member of the Commission chairs a strategic sub-committee. Membership on the sub-committees may include Commission members, non-voting Commission representatives and associates. From time to time, outside expert and/or professional opinions are sought. Below are reports from the subcommittee Chairs:

- **AGRICULTURAL LAND BASE:** Phil Christie

There were major changes made to ALC Act in 2014 and these were implemented in 2015. Although concerns were previously raised about these changes, overall, PAAC commented positively on the new legislation and new regulation changes; no negative effects have been noted.

PAAC discussed the ongoing shrinkage in the number of actively producing farms and what, if anything, could be done. In many cases farmers are now retiring and there is no one to take over. The Agricultural Land Base subcommittee is continuing to review this issue since both small and large scale farming activity is important to support. It was noted that even the very small farms buy equipment, produce food and employ people.

Several drainage issues were brought forward for discussion during 2015. These included:

- Martindale Flats, Central Saanich and Saanich
- Maber Flats, Central Saanich
- Panama Flats, Saanich &
- O'Donnell Creek, Saanich near Bear Hill and North end of Elk Lake

Of these Martindale and Maber Flats were singled out for priority discussion and action by PAAC. PAAC members attended a Central Saanich Council meeting in November to address the continuing flooding issues and answer Council's questions regarding both Martindale Valley and Maber Flats drainage issues.

The Agricultural Land Base Subcommittee arranged for on-site discussions as well as reviews with Municipal Engineering staff. PAAC members will continue to participate in local government staff meetings and stakeholder meetings that are to be held early in 2016.

- **OUTREACH & EDUCATION:**

- **Sub-Committee Report – Linda Geggie & Nikki Tate-Straton
(including Saanich Fair, 2015)**

- While the PAAC enjoyed many speakers over the course of the year to increase our understanding of key issues or learn about new topics, we also worked to support broader public and farmer education and training efforts.

- The Education Committee worked with partner organizations to undertake a number of activities including the **Farm Tour** for elected officials, **Farmer2Farmer Conference** and the **Saanich Fair**.

- PAAC members participated in the **Farmer2Farmer** Advisory team that developed the Farmer2Farmer programme. We had over 200 farmers participate from the region. PAAC contributed \$500 towards this annual event. The theme for 2015 was Animal, Vegetable, Management. There were over a dozen workshops and a keynote opening included ten experienced regional farmers sharing their pearls of wisdom around what they believe contributes to their farms 'success.

- At the **Saanich Fair** PAAC worked closely with CR-FAIR and the Southern Vancouver Island Direct Farm Market Association to have an information tent that had a series of games and activities to engage the public, including the zucchini races, which were really popular with kids of all ages.

This year PAAC created an educational handout that talks about varieties of squash and their uses as well as provides recipes. We distributed over 1000 copies during the fair. This was a great addition to the squash display and added a more educational component to the zucchini races.

PAAC member Nikki Tate-Stratton organized the Education component – which has been very popular event with attendees at the Saanich Fair. This year's lectures were:

- Food Inventors for the future? Christa Atherton, Farmers City Market
- Level Ground-Direct Fair Trade for Ethical Consumers Stacey Toews
- Urban Agriculture: Food Security for the Future - Quinn MacDonald, editor of Concrete Jungle Magazine.

- **WATER:**

- **Sub-Committee Report – Michael Doehnel**

- A relatively mild winter and early spring (as noted by the early timing of hazelnut flowering in Jan/Feb) had farmers racing to seed crops into moist soil.
- Immediately, drought conditions set in which accelerated the need for water to keep young transplants and seeds alive and also pushed up harvesting time for berries.
- Overall disease conditions were favourable due to the lack of moisture and the associated “warm and wet” loving plant pathogens.
- Water usage during the summer months was higher than “normal” but those crops that set down good roots gave average expected yield results.
- Grains were affected by the drought stress driving up protein levels and decreasing yields.
- Some very nice Chickpeas were harvested this year although they were also affected by the droughty conditions.
- Hay and silage making proceeded with nary a storm to mar quality and storability.
- Daffodils were two weeks early again as has been the case for two years now.
- Tree fruits were generally of good quality with smaller fruit in non-irrigated locations.
- Geese and deer continue to hammer many crops with losses again in the multiple thousands of dollars while flooding from upland properties continued unabated.

Membership

Voting Membership for 2015 was as follows:

- Robert Maxwell, Co-Chair (Fieldstone Farm – berries/tree fruits)
- Jack Mar, Co-Chair (Central Saanich vegetable farmer)
- Bev Marley, Treasurer (The Tiny Farm – eggs, fruits and vegetables)
- Terry Michell (Michell Farms – fruits, vegetables, hay, grain, cattle)
- Linda Geggie (CR-Fair)
- Dianne Williamson (Firbank Farms - poultry)
- Nikki Tate-Straton (Dark Creek Farm – pork/poultry)
- Bernadette Greene (North Saanich Farm Market – fruits and vegetables)
- Phil Christie (Saanich Hay producer and Agrology Land Consultant)
- Kim Lonsdale (Agricultural Economist)
- Samantha Charlton (Agricultural Planner and Consultant)

PAAC appreciates the input and continued support from its Council liaisons. We recognize their busy schedules and thank them for taking the time to attend our monthly meetings.

The Councillors (non-voting members) appointed to PAAC for 2015 were:

Councillor Vic Derman – Saanich
Councillor Cecila Stock – North Saanich
Councillor Cam McClennan – Sidney
Councillor Chris Graham – Central Saanich
Councillor Kyara Kahakauwila – Metchosin

Our Provincial liaison, regional agrologist **Rob Kline**, continues to provide professional, expert advice, guidance and assistance, as well as keeping PAAC up to date on the government's agricultural initiatives.

PAAC is concerned that when Mr. Kline retires his position will not be filled. We cannot stress strongly enough that maintaining this “boots on the ground” position is essential to support continued growth in the agricultural sector.

In addition to our voting members, non-voting municipal and provincial liaisons, PAAC has an ever-growing number of “associate” members from various farm-related groups, past members, and other individuals who have expressed an interest in the sustainability of farming in our region. We welcome their attendance at meetings and they receive copies of the Agendas and Minutes on a monthly basis.

PAAC appreciates the volunteer hours, hard work, commitment and dedication of all its members as we endeavour to achieve sustainable agriculture and food security

for our region. In addition, some of our members sit on other working groups, such as the CRD Deer and Geese Management Committees, agricultural advisory committees, and take part in agricultural-based workshops and meetings throughout the year (eg: the Farmer2Farmer workshop).

In particular, past member, Michael Doehnel, continues to competently represent PAAC and our local farmers on the Saanich Peninsula Water Commission and the Water Advisory Commission. His volunteer time and valuable insight are very much appreciated.

Administrative and Technical Support Services

The Commission is very grateful for the continued funding support it receives from the sponsoring municipalities as well as the ongoing administrative support provided by Isobel Hoffmann, who retired from the District of Saanich in 2012 and has been the recording secretary for PAAC since 1998.

The Provincial government liaisons are Rob Kline, agrologist with the Ministry of Agriculture and the Agricultural Land Commission.

Professional assistance and information is provided when requested from senior planning staff of the member municipalities and the CRD, and this is greatly appreciated.

In particular, we would like to thank Planning staff members:

- Bruce Greig (Central Saanich)
- Neil Findlow, Jane Evans and (Saanich)
- Coralie Breen (North Saanich)
- Jeff Weightman – CRD

Community, technical and professional advisers who are always ready to assist PAC in its research include CR-Fair, the Direct Farm Marketing Association (Bob Thompson), as well as individual experts who have attended PAC meetings throughout the year.

Finally, PAC would like to again thank the many community groups in Greater Victoria who continue to do excellent work in helping local agriculture:

- Food and Agriculture Initiatives Roundtable (CR-FAIR)
- CRD Roundtable on the Environment, Healthy Communities Subcommittees
- Environment – Farmland/farming Strategic Group
- LifeCycles; BC Assoc. of Farmers Markets; local farm pocket markets.
- South Island Direct Farm Marketing Association

- Wine and Grape Growers' Associations
- North Saanich Agricultural Advisory Commission
- Central Saanich Agricultural Advisory Commission
- North and South Saanich Agricultural Society (Fairgrounds)
- Saanich Agricultural Historical Society

Without this community of dedication and support, PAAC would not function and agriculture would not have the support it deserves.

- **Finance**

The Commission is funded by the five participating Municipalities based on a formula established in 1998, and modified on two occasions to accommodate the inclusion of the District of Metchosin and the Juan de Fuca Electoral Area. With the withdrawal of JDF in July 2013, the funding formula reverted back to the one used in 2012.

Each municipality contributes to the general administration costs (including postage, photocopying and stationery) carried out by a recording secretary. Monthly meetings are held at the Saanich Municipal Hall.

The costs vary depending on the workload for that particular year. 2015 was a productive and busy year, a highlight being the farm bus tour in June. Ten regular meetings were held (no meetings in Jul or August). The total administrative costs for 2015 are \$8,782.59, (an increase of \$161.17 over 2014) apportioned as follows

	\$
District of Saanich (40%)	3,513.04
District of Central Saanich (30%)	2,634.78
District of North Saanich (16%)	1,405.21
District of Metchosin (11%)	966.08
Town of Sidney (3%)	263.48

Comparison budgets for previous years:

- 2014 \$8,621.13
- 2013 \$8,267.67
- 2012 \$7,618.82
- 2011 \$6,567.10
- 2010 \$6,912.42

Summary:

PAAC would like to continue to work with the member municipalities to provide input on agricultural issues such as Agricultural Area Plans, Official Community Plans, and other land use and bylaw issues related to agriculture, such as edge planning, drainage and ALR issues.

Hopefully, we will also continue to work with the CRD to implement the Goose and Deer Management Strategies if the programmes and the funding is extended.

We would encourage the municipalities to utilize the expertise available on the Commission.

Most importantly, we hope to continue to work both for the farmers and with the farmers. Where appropriate, consult with experts, professionals, municipal staff, regional and community agricultural interest groups to continue to promote the sustainability of farming, and improve food security and farm economics on southern Vancouver Island.

Respectfully submitted,

Robert Maxwell & Jack Mar, Co-Chairs (2105)
Peninsula & Area Agricultural Commission
February 2016

Attachments:

- Saanich Fair 2015 Poster
- Farm Tour Brochure
- Appendix 1: PAAC Report to CRD re Geese Issues
- 2016 PAAC membership list