

PENINSULA & AREA

AGRICULTURAL COMMISSION

2020 ANNUAL REPORT



Firbank Farm Market - Island View Road

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2020 ANNUAL REPORT



1.0 Background and Mandate:

Initiated in 1997/98 with the completion of the **Agricultural Strategy Report for the Saanich** Peninsula, the Peninsula & Area Agricultural Advisory Commission (PAAC) is financially supported by the Districts of Saanich, Central Saanich, North Saanich and Metchosin (the “member municipalities”).

The mandate of PAAC is to act as a resource, provide advice, information, and assistance - upon request or proactively - to the member municipalities on matters involving agriculture in the areas served by the member municipalities and the region, and to facilitate the development of initiatives for implementation of the *Saanich Peninsula Agricultural Strategic Objectives* (page 12)+.

2.0 Agriculture Highlights from 2020:

2.1 The Effects of the Covid-19 Pandemic on agriculture in the Saanich Peninsula and surrounding areas

Lives were turned upside down in early March 2020 as the COVID-19 Pandemic arrived on the Island and raged throughout the entire year. Our farmers, however, continued to plough, plant, harvest, and market their crops. The demand for fresh farm food grew at a never-before seen rate, with some farm gate and market sales increasing by as much as 300%.

It has not been an easy task to meet the growing demands for more farm production by the public, who, it seems are changing preferences. The public in our area are more frequently buying directly from the farmer to not only avoid less food handling but also by-passing the long lines at the larger grocery stores, some of whom increased their prices substantially. Although the price of produce at farm markets did increase, between 5% and 7%, this was mostly because of increased overhead and staffing costs due to Covid-19 protocols.

With the closure of restaurants during the first lock down, farmers had to find a way to survive. They started looking for new outlets, which included local retailers that are more open to buying local (Red Barn, Thrifty's, The Root Cellar and many others), the South Island Farm Hub and new box programmes. Customer interest in bulk buying for freezing, drying, and canning increased substantially. The logistics of handling the increased farm gate and market sales proved difficult as Covid-19 restrictions and protocols had to be followed.

The biggest obstacle for farmers was the lack of farm workers, both foreign and domestic. Some farmers were reluctant to plant until there was a guarantee there would be help with the harvest. It was difficult arrange for temporary foreign workers (mostly from Mexico) to travel to Canada as the borders were closed. Workers finally started to arrive by May, which put many farmers behind schedule. However, we are grateful to the provincial government for stepping in to help with the arrangements, including financing the required 14-day quarantine costs, which would have been prohibitive for the farmers.

Some farmers had arrangements to hire domestic workers, but with the arrival of CERB payments, many of the workers opted not to work and collect the benefit instead.

Many farm markets were cancelled, such as the Sidney Street Market, and the Luxton and Goldstream Markets. The Saanich Fair was also cancelled for the first time in 150 years.

Reduced ferry schedules during the first few months of the pandemic caused difficulties for Firbank Farms' poultry operation which transports livestock on a regular basis to and from Abbotsford. Losing the 7:00 am sailing from Swartz Bay meant driving over 2 hours to Duke Point to catch the 5:15 am sailing to prevent the chickens from being on the truck too long. The Egg Marketing Board directed that a surplus of eggs due to restaurant closures be diverted to local food banks at a cost to the producers, but they were later compensated through insurance coverage. Once restaurants re-opened demand increased again.

The Ministry of Agriculture held round table discussions ensuring that every commodity had a voice to discuss the issues the farmers and producers are facing and offered help where they could.

2.2 The South Island Farm Hub

Pre-Covid-19, *Closing the Supply Gap Programme* lead by CR-Fair initiated the **South Island Farm Hub** as a way for small scale growers to sell to markets they were previously not able to reach because of the scale required and consistency of supplies. The Hub would provide new marketing channels for them and potentially be able to get more local food into retail and wholesale suppliers.

When the Pandemic hit, many farms lost business because of restaurant closures, and it was decided to forge ahead with the Farm Hub support the farmers who lost this segment of their sales. About 70 organizations across the region who assist with emergency food hampers and meal preparation were approached to determine their interest in distribution of these fresh fruits and vegetables.

In partnership with the Victoria Foundation, \$250,000 from the Rapid Relief Fund was directed to the programme, with \$100,000 directed to emergency food organizations and \$150,000 to School Districts 61, 62 and 63. Although logistics were difficult getting the food delivered to the School Districts, it was beneficial for the students to have access to fresh, local fruits and vegetables. 26 farms participated and growers received a fair market price for their commodities, with pickups twice a week. 80% of the sales went to charitable food markets and schools.



Delivery to Our Place 2020



The South Island Farm Hub warehouse is located at 808 Viewfield Road. An expansion is contemplated to incorporate food processing as well with the creation of a HACCP Certified processing kitchen. There has been interest from farmers and processors to use the warehouse to process/freeze seasonal produce. The Red Barn has expressed an interest in purchasing processed food. Funding has been received from the Ministry of Agriculture's



North Star Organics Farm Hub Team

Food Hub Network Programme to develop the Food Hub. Also co-located at the warehouse is the Food Rescue project. Over two million pounds of food was diverted from the landfill in 2020 because of donations to the project and redistributed to the FoodShare Network by the Mustard Seed.

2.3 Vision Sandown

The District of North Saanich’s request for proposals closed mid-January 2020 and was awarded to the Circular Farm and Food Society. Two proposals were received and were vetted by staff. Fifty-five acres of the 83-acre property will be farmed, with the remainder being left as forest or wetlands.

On-site progress at Sandown includes: The main greenhouse is built; perimeter fencing is completed and the main water line has been connected. Fickle Fig has moved some livestock onto the property. The “Farmpreneur Programme” has been set up with lease plots for emerging growers. The cost for new farmers is \$1,900 for a one-year lease, which includes an acre with the shared amenities of the greenhouse, irrigation, fencing and connections to the South Island Food Hub. The Sandown team have a variety of expert mentors as well.

2.4 Saanich Fair 2020

For the first time in 150 years there was no traditional Saanich Fair in 2020. There had been lots of ideas generated for the Fair pre-Covid-19 and hopefully they can be carried forward. The farm community and fairgoers alike deeply missed having the fair so we are all hoping that we can celebrate all the special things the Fair has to offer in the fall of 2021.

A farmers' market was held on the Saturday of the Labour Day weekend (a special Peninsula Country Market); there were also some “virtual” competitions held for the Junior Section including the longest bean.

The financial impact on the fairgrounds was hard as the Saanich Fair is their biggest money maker, and it is estimated that the Agricultural Society lost over \$200,000.



3.0 Issues Discussed by PAAC during 2020

3.1 Agri-Industrial Use Zones:

At its May 15, 2020 meeting, PAAC discussed the proposed creation of this new zone, and questioned why industrial uses are being considered on ALR lands. Some members of the farming community and many of the retired soil scientists who originally surveyed the ALR disagree with Recommendation #4 in the province's 2020 Farm Security Task Force Report on The Future of BC's Food System.

In other jurisdictions, rural agri-industrial land use designation is an integral component of comprehensive agricultural planning. Agri-industrial uses provide inputs and services to primary agriculture and as such, are generally recognized as requiring less infrastructure and generate lower per square foot revenues than more intensive industrial uses. The demand created for off-farm agri-industrial activity in the ALR appears to be directly related to the inability of some types of agri-industrial enterprises to compete with other industrial initiatives for industrial lands. Some Lower Mainland Cities would like to accommodate this demand and believe that it is warranted within the existing ALR.

Some researchers think that clustered rural agri-industrial development, at an appropriate location that is not on prime (Class 1 to 3) agricultural capability land, is more effective in protecting the farmland base. It would allow for more efficient provision of agri-industrial services than the current process of ad hoc and dispersed development and spot zoning. Abbotsford wants the ALC to negotiate with them to establish the terms of a rural agri-industrial zone within the ALR. They note that a clearer definition of "farm industrial use" is required with a monitoring process that is practical to enforce, focused on primary agricultural production, and penalizes non-compliance, possibly with a rule to allow a small percentage of non-conforming use. The Fraser Highway Corridor is a good candidate for rural agri-industrial zone designation by virtue of its history of non-agricultural use, degraded condition, and limited agricultural capability. This issue is being followed by PAAC.

3.2 Canada Goose and Deer Management:

In January, egg addling permits were put in place with a focus on the Gorge, Oak Bay and Royal Roads areas. An assessment is underway to review current funding levels for other methods of controlling Canada Geese. The annual bird count was by helicopter covering the "hot spots" that are reported by the public, farmers, and bird watchers.



Last year's count missed Victoria and the Gorge area because it is part of the international air space. Over 4,000 Canada Geese were counted in other areas of the CRD. Increasing goose populations continue to plague our farmers who have been trying to get both our local and provincial governments to make more efforts to decrease the geese populations and stop the continuous loss of crops, costing hundreds of thousands of dollars each year.

Local bylaws allow for deer hunting on the Peninsula which keeps the population numbers down in most of the farming areas. However Oak Bay, Esquimalt and Saanich continue to have issues addressing the growing deer population since due to high human population densities the police are not willing to issue shooting permits.

3.3 Farm Worker Accommodations

This continues to be a major issue for farmers and has been a discussion item for PAAC for many years. The Regional Agrologist noted that the ALC wanted local governments to take responsibility to implement some of the proposed changes including allowing secondary residences on ALR lands. Although the Pandemic has slowed down the initiative some local governments have made extra efforts including North Saanich which fast-tracked an application enabling the farmer to house 17 additional temporary foreign farm workers this year.

Additionally, both Central Saanich and Saanich have identified farm worker accommodations as a priority and are working on policies to further this goal.

3.5 Support for Agrologist for the Peninsula & the CRD:

At its January 9, 2020 meeting, it was recommended that a letter of support for an agrologist for the Peninsula and the lower Island be sent to the Minister of Agriculture, noting this should be a priority and it is the best possible use of budget funds. Although food security is one of the top concerns of BC residents, Agriculture has one of the lowest budgets.

At one time there were over 20 soil specialists, district agrologists and forage experts with a vast wealth of knowledge in the area. 15 years ago, we had three agrologists for the Island and this has now been reduced to one. A response from Minister Popham in March noted that several positions were relocated to regional offices currently located in Duncan. In addition, recognizing the increasing need for specialists in rural agricultural communities, the Minister advised a full-time position will be posted for a Resource Development Agrologist to support producers in the Saanich Peninsula and area.

3.6 Support for Farmers:

Our commission members are noting that environmental and political movements and associated teachings are affecting the image of farming especially larger scale commercial farming. There are some strident individuals who now use derogatory terms to refer to farmers who drain, irrigate, and use fossil fuels to till, harvest, heat greenhouses, or apply inorganic fertilizers. These sentiments ignore the reality that most local farmers are taking climate change and sustainability initiatives seriously and are moving forward with science-based approaches. Although the conversion is slow due to farm economics, some local farmers are buying more fuel-efficient equipment (including the odd electric tractor), using appropriate crop rotation and tillage methods while ensuring that local production continues in a way that keeps locally produced food and forages available and affordable.

3.7 Carbon Sequestration (January 2020)

A referral from Central Saanich in January regarding Carbon Sequestration Agricultural Practices resulted in a year-long discussion and research on this topic. PAAC had planned to host a workshop, but this was sidelined due to the Pandemic. Carbon Sequestration is

linked with climate change initiatives and food security. It is an important concept for agriculture and relates to future plans for the Hartland Landfill and the CRD's management of urban area organic leftovers including kitchen and yard trimmings. Peninsula and area soils are mostly lacking in organic matter and, in many situations, they are not being rebuilt due to a lack of a source for organic matter (less livestock) so discussions continue.

3.8 425/443 Hector Road – Referral from Saanich (October 2020)

Rainbow Valley Nursery Ltd applied for a non-farm use on ALR land for on-site storage of topsoil. PAAC was asked to comment and noted there were no operating farms in the immediate area but there was encroaching development. It was unlikely the long-term general use of the land site would change to a farm use. While there were no objections to the application it was noted that an agrologist's report would have been helpful to determine the quality of the soils.

3.9 5550 Forest Hill Road – Referral from Saanich (October 2020)

The property owner applied for a non-farm use on ALR land to allow for a new accessory building with washrooms and office space to house equestrian-related workshops and seminars. The Commission had no objections to the application, noting that while some people view equestrian operations as a less preferable agricultural use, other members note that they generate a lot of money for the local economy, buy local hay as well as provide manure for our farms.

3.10 50th Anniversary of the Establishment of the ALR

In 1972, the province introduced the protection of agricultural land and in 1973 initiated the Agricultural Land Reserve through creation of the Agricultural Land Commission. It was suggested that a celebration be planned. Various ideas were put forward and Emily Carmichael, Agrologist with the Ministry and PAAC representative, was asked to be the liaison between PAAC and the ALC. The Ministry has recently informed PAAC that the celebration will be in 2023.

3.11 Proposed Grape and Fruit Atlas for Vancouver Island

Some years ago, a grape atlas was produced, with the help of the provincial government, for the Okanagan region and it has been very helpful to established and new producers.

It was suggested a similar reference guide would be helpful for this region. Also, as the Peninsula and other parts of the Island have micro-climates which grow excellent berry crops as well as tree fruits, it was suggested the Atlas could be expanded from more than just grapes.

PAAC has contacted the various grape growers and cideries on the lower Island, including the Grape Growers Association, for their opinion and hopefully potential support. Much of the inventory required for an atlas including soils, and climate mapping has already been completed. However, suitability research will be required, and the scope of the project must be defined.

Although still in the very early stages, PAAC is hopeful that with collaboration from various groups, and perhaps the Ministry, this proposed project will soon become reality.

3.12 Central Saanich OCP Review (December 2020)

At its December meeting, PAAC heard a presentation from Modus Consultants and Central Saanich Staff. PAAC was asked for input on the top issues, challenges, and opportunities within Central Saanich. Some of the comments noted during discussion included: the under-use of ALR lands; urban run-off and flooding; crop protection; landscaping businesses using ALR lands for storage as there is no industrial or commercial areas for them to use; the lack of livestock processing infrastructure on the South Island; the continual tree removal for the expansion of farming, and the desire to leave some trees as a buffer.

PAAC will continue to provide input on the OCP review throughout 2021.

3.13 Tree Protection Bylaw Amendments – Central Saanich (November 2020)

PAAC provided comments to Central Saanich on its proposed amendments to the Tree Protection Bylaw at its November and December meetings, noting the importance of

maintaining a tree canopy, and that trees prevent soil erosion and help with water retention.

In general, farmers only remove trees where necessary, but it was acknowledged there have been exceptions. Municipal government cannot prohibit tree removal on ALR lands that are being put into agricultural production so the revised bylaw is proposing if a farmer wishes to remove trees, a letter must be submitted confirming the removal is required for agricultural use of the land that will be actively farmed.

4.0 Guest Speakers and Presentations at PAAC Meetings During 2020

January:	Jill Robinson, CRD – Elk/Beaver Lake Initiative
February:	Bob Thompson – Saanich Fair Proposal
March:	Anna North, Min of Agriculture – Residential Flexibility Policy in the ALR Larry Kimmet (PAAC) – Problems with Excess Nitrogen & Phosphorus Jeff Weightman, CRD – Carbon Sequestration
November:	Samantha Charlton Monitoring Pests & Beneficial Insects
December:	Modus Consultants & Andrea Pickard, C. Saanich Planner – OCP Review Ivo van Der Kamp, Central Saanich – Tree Protection Bylaw Amendments

Emily Carmichael from the Ministry of Agriculture has brought several provincial programmes, initiatives, and webinars to the Commission's attention, including a **Small FarmAcceleration Programme**, a pilot project allowing small or new farmers to access cost-sharing for infrastructure.

5.0 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 several recommendations (Strategic Objectives) designed to promote the sustainability of agriculture on the Peninsula and was the basis for the formation of PAAC.

The Six Strategic Objectives are:

1. To secure an adequate supply of water for farmers at a competitive cost.
2. To increase economic returns to farmers.
3. To enhance the sustainability of the agricultural land base.
4. To foster stewardship of farmers which embraces the community values.
5. To increase public awareness, education, and support for a sustainable farming community.
6. To establish a focal point for farming issues and implementation of the Strategy.

Strategic Objectives & Reports

Consistent with the recommendations of the **Strategy Report**, the Commission has four working sub-committees focused on implementing strategic objectives for:

- Farm Economics - Terry Michell
- Agricultural Land Base - Phil Christie
- Education and Outreach - Linda Geggie
- Water - Michael Doehnel

Although a voting member of the Commission chairs a strategic sub-committee, membership may include other Commission members, non-voting Commission representatives and associates. From time to time, outside expert and/or professional opinions are sought.

5.1 FARM ECONOMICS – Terry Michell – Report to be sent separately

Farm worker accommodations and the ability to bring in and house farm workers are also greatly affecting the economic viability of local commercial scale farms. A high degree of regulation as well as a reluctance of local governments to move quickly to approve farm worker accommodation is adversely affecting the bottom line and impeding the production on local farms.

The Covid-19 pandemic brought on many challenges for the Agricultural Industry, but the greatest challenge was receiving **Temporary Foreign Workers**. Some workers were able to arrive in January and February prior to the pandemic, however many field growers who usually receive their workers April thru June did not know whether or not they would receive workers at all.

The Mexican Ministry of Labour offices completely closed for the month of April 2020 which made it impossible for many workers to process their Visas. Other challenges included changes to housing requirements on short notice, the 14-day quarantine period,

the unavailability of flights, and the upfront expenses incurred due to these circumstances, all while the farmers were trying to get their fields prepared and planted.

Many farmers considered planting considerably less crops due to the uncertainty of not knowing if they would have reliable help come harvest time. Some relief came when the Province announced they would be arranging the 14-day quarantine hotel accommodations for the Temporary Foreign Workers arriving to British Columbia, at no expense to the farms. The travel agency for the TFW's also began arranging charter flights. Farms who had initially considered producing less were now able to move forward at full steam with planting confidently. Many farms experienced a shortage of labour in the Spring and Early Summer months during berry harvest, but had a full crew mid-Summer through Fall for later harvest. The CERB benefit made it difficult to hire locals during the labour shortage.

For fruits and Vegetables, the Spring and Summer weather was favorable to the crops during the growing months. There were challenging harvest conditions in the fall. Much of the most productive fields are lower laying lands that flood as early as late summer unexpectedly due to urban runoff being diverted to the lower lying agricultural producing areas. Some vegetable crops were abandoned in field in early October 2020 as they were completely submerged.

It was a better than average year for farmgate sales as many people wanted to visit local farm stands to support local more than ever with the pandemic. Shopping at farm stands and markets was a way for the public to avoid large grocery store lineups and support local, and also being able to get outside and have a safe shopping experience during lockdown. The public responded well to farm markets' and farm stands' Covid-19 protocols/policies.

Wholesale –There was very good support from local wholesalers and retailers. Even though the sales to restaurants were down through commercial suppliers, the retail food markets were up which helped compensate for this. Over the past decade the demand for local has increased annually. There was extremely high demand for local produce again in the spring, resulting in commodities selling out quickly in the fall.

5.2 AGRICULTURAL LAND BASE - Phil Christie

The Rising Price of Agricultural Land

According to the Farm Credit Canada Report Published in April 2020, farmland values increased by an average of 13.1% over the previous year and although sales slowed early in the year due to the pandemic, they picked up considerably as 2020 progressed and reached historically high levels. As most farm owners know, when the purchasing power of our money decreases due to the inflationary pressure created by government actions

such as quantitative easing, land becomes more and more expensive though its utility and production have not changed.

As the price of farmland increases, it becomes more and more out of reach for young farmers who in general farm more innovatively and intensively. On Southern Vancouver Island as much as 60% of the ALR lands used to be actively farmed. In recent years it seems that utilization of our farmland base is dropping significantly as evidenced by smaller herds of beef, dairy and other livestock and lower demand for forages compounded by high prices of farm equipment, irrigation water, drainage and irrigation improvements, lack of abattoirs, the cost of land, cost of farm labor and labor scarcity. Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) payments did not help.

All these factors add up to preventing new entrants to the farm community. On a more positive note, we are fortunate that in the fall of 2020 Greenchain Consulting published an excellent report for the South Island Prosperity Partnership (SIPP) addressing the feasibility of building an abattoir in the CRD area. This report found that in most cases we currently only produce a tiny fraction of what we consume on the South Island (e.g. beef approx. 1/31 and pork 1/100). PAAC will work with SIPP to promote the addition of an abattoir to the CRD area as more farm animals will improve the health of our land base (think manure for the fields), improve farm economics as well as provide higher quality local meat products.

Urban Runoff & Agricultural Land

It is with great frustration that many of our local farmers continue to suffer the ravages of urban runoff onto their Class 1 and 2 stone free, highly productive bottomland soils. With high intensity storms now occurring at all times of the year, the resulting flooding not only destroys existing crops it also often leaves behind traces of various pollutants including oils, antifreeze, tire rubber and other urban waste.

This degradation occurs on most of the low-lying flats within our area. On-going conflicts over urban runoff water management need to be taken seriously by each local government working in tandem with the farmland owners to effectively push both Federal Fisheries and the Provincial Ministry of Environment to look for and allow solutions that will return these key agricultural areas to the historic level of production that the farmers once benefited from without further damaging the land or the existing streams.

Additions and Subtractions to our land base

On other fronts, there are a couple of additions and subtractions from the land base. North Saanich awarded a 10-year lease of 55 acres of the Sandown lands to the Circular Farm and Food Society. The society will provide community gardens, an emerging farm program, host workshops and showcase soil regeneration. The District, in turn, will provide funding of \$135,000 in 2020 and \$125,000 for each of the following two years. Commission members noted that having been a commercial horse racing venue for many years, in addition to the general cleanup that was done by the owner, the area will require considerable further efforts at remediation before becoming fully productive farmland.

Also, in North Saanich, the Agricultural Land Commission approved the District's application to exclude 6.4 hectares (almost 16 acres) from the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR). The property lies in the northwest corner of the lot containing the Panorama Recreation Centre. Commission members noted that the land in question has been used for many decades as a public recreation area and that as such it was never likely to be farmed. With the approval of this ALR exclusion, North Saanich can now subdivide a smaller lot from the parent lot allowing for the establishment of a library on a separately titled parcel of land.

Another significant transaction was the transfer of the Woodwyn Farm from the province to the Tsartlip First Nation, who were able to purchase the farm from BC Housing through a \$7.77-million grant from the Province. After having purchased the farm in 2018, BC Housing leased the property to a local farmer, who now leases from the Tsartlip First Nation and continues to actively grow hay, grain and vegetable and fruit products.



Woodwyn Farm

5.3 OUTREACH & EDUCATION - Linda Geggie

For 2020 we saw limited opportunities for external outreach and the cancelling of the key events where we see education opportunities for the farm community. Fortunately, the Island Agriculture Show in Cowichan February 7 and 8 was able to go forward and there were many attendees from the Capital Region. Events like Farmer2Farmer and the Saanich Fair however were cancelled. The Saanich Fair is one of the key events that touches a wide range of residents in the Capital Region and provides a broad range of opportunities for connecting with farmers and seeing firsthand livestock, poultry, farm equipment etc. It was unfortunate that this popular event had to be cancelled but we look forward to it being back again in 2021.

In terms of New Farmer opportunities for education and training we know that the farm networks and mentors are a keyway for sharing knowledge between farmers. The Community Farms in the region also all have different training and learning opportunities such as Burgoyne Farm, Lohbrunner Farm, Haliburton Farm, Newman Farm and Sandown Center for Regenerative Agriculture. This year Sandown launched its Farmpreneur program. This program had 29 applications for 9 spots that provides them with land and the training program.

In terms of education of the PAAC Committee and members we had several speakers that came to PAAC to speak on different topics including:

- Jill Robinson, CRD – Elk/Beaver Lake Initiative (Watershed Health)
- Anna North, Min of Agriculture – Residential Flexibility Policy in the ALR
- Larry Kimmet (PAAC member) – Problems with Excess Nitrogen & Phosphorus
- Jeff Weightman, CRD – Carbon Sequestration
- Samantha Charlton Monitoring Pests & Beneficial Insects

PAAC members have expressed interest in learning more about environmental and climate adaptive farming as well as learn more about carbon sequestration and this will be a focus for 2021.

5.4 WATER REPORT for 2020 Growing Season - Michael Doehnel

The year 2020 was indeed more in line with seasons of the more distant past; moderate temperatures, overcast skies, intermittent showers, and some rain events. This reduced watering requirements across the board for most but was more onerous for hay and grain growers who sometimes did not quite have the 5 or so days in a row to dry down their crops (hay). Overall, this was not only problematic from a quality standpoint the additional burden of imported “low sugar” hay into this area has caused a substantial decline in hay sales. Similarly, there is an abundance of round bale silage due partly to the same weather and water availability for up island growers who also had more water and therefore less need for our local “exported” silage. Food animal populations are very low so there is just not the demand. This should be the signal that it’s time to try other crops which now can be more successfully grown due to the recent national pesticide risk reduction strategy for wireworm control. The big question remains-how will we encourage these new farmers?

Flooding of farmland continues to be a serious problem and in addressing this issue it has been discussed, to the point of extreme frustration, in hopes that the municipalities of Central Saanich and Saanich work together in mitigating these events. Many long-term public officials have intimate and intricate knowledge of these issues but have again requested from PAAC and farmers to submit their thoughts and recommendations for both Budget and OCP deliberations as they relate to agriculture. It is extraordinary that the farming community would have to again reiterate their concerns when much of this extensive work has been done in the past only to see these reports remain idle on the shelf at municipal hall. Action is needed in the strongest of terms, not just more empty rhetoric. If Council wants farming to continue in this area it sure seems that they are doing their very best to drown this industry, both literally and figuratively.

I would also like to invite both of our local ministers, the Honourable Lana Popham, and the Honourable Adam Olson to become actively involved with their LOCAL constituents to move the ball forward. Since their regional responsibilities lie firmly with the fact that a large portion of the land, they govern is in the ALR, full stop!! If our local elected representatives truly want agriculture to continue the Peninsula, they should do something and do it now. It continues to irritate the farming community how many politicians state in their election/re-election platforms about how they unequivocally support farming. We are literally on our knees begging for substantive action.

The CRD Integrated Water Services, in conjunction with the Regional Water Supply Commission and the Water Advisory Committee, has recently decided to move ahead with an evaluation of agricultural water rates as the subsidy continues to rise with most of these top up funds going directly into general revenue of the municipalities with not one shred of commitment to encouraging new young farmers or adaptation to our swirling climate anomalies. Under consideration is the water rate be applied fairly across the many municipalities (as noted by the attached letter from PAAC dated May 13, 2019 mentioned), who gets the rate, and what the future holds for increased water usage to bona fide farmers growing and processing food. A long-awaited land use report and water demand model is being used as a starting point for deliberations but as with many of these government commissioned reports there is some wanting more accuracy and personal engagement with actual farmers.

6.0 PAAC MEMBERSHIP & SUPPORT

6.1 Voting Membership for 2020:

- Phil Christie, Chair (Agrologist – hay, vegetables, and fruit)
- Terry Michell (Michell Farms – fruits, vegetables, hay, grain, pasture beef)
- Linda Geggie (CR-Fair)
- Dianne Williamson (Firbank Farms – poultry, some vegetables)
- Bev Marley (The Tiny Farm – garlic, bees (honey), poultry)
- Larry Sluggett (Sluggett Farms – corn and vegetables)
- Carol Davidson (Orchards & small farm sales)
- Satnam Dheenshaw (Gobind Farms – mostly Berries)
- Larry Kimmett (BC Farm and Foods)

6.2 The Councillors (non-voting members) appointed to PAAC for 2020 were:

- Councillor Zac deVries, Saanich
- Councillor Brett Smyth– North Saanich
- Councillor Chris Graham – Central Saanich
- Robin Tunncliffe – Representing Metchosin Council

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 when they can.

6.3 Professional Support

PAAC is grateful for the regular attendance and support of Doug Pepper and Emily Carmichael, the Regional Agrologists who continue to provide insight, knowledge, assistance, contacts, and valuable information to the Commission.

Unfortunately, Chris Weiczorek, Assistant to the Minister of Agriculture (Lana Popham) who attended regularly left the Ministry early in 2020. It is hoped that a new liaison from the Minister's office will be appointed as this was a very useful link between PAAC and the Minister's Office.

The official provincial liaison to PAAC is the **Agricultural Land Commission**.

6.4 Community & Membership Support

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 input they provide.

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

Past member, **Michael Doehnel**, continues to competently represent PAAC and our local farmers on the Saanich Peninsula Water Commission and the Saanich Peninsula Wastewater Commission. He attends PAAC meetings from time to time to provide detailed updates on the water issues as they pertain to agriculture. His water report is included in this document (*see page 15*). Mike's volunteer time and valued insight on all agricultural issues are very much appreciated.

6.5 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.

Technical support and information are provided when requested from senior planning and engineering staff of the member municipalities and the CRD, and this is greatly appreciated.

We would like to thank staff members:

- Ivo van der Kemp, Andrea Pickard (Central Saanich)
- Jeff Weightman, Henry Lee, Jill Robinson – CRD

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

7.0 FINANCE

Regular meetings were held at the Saanich Municipal Hall during the first 3 months of 2020. Once the Pandemic arrived, four more meetings were held throughout the year by ZOOM. There was less activity than in past years: fewer guest speakers; no workshops or seminars; no Saanich Fair or Farm Tours. Consequently, the administration costs for 2020 are reduced over past years.

	\$ 2020	\$ 2019
District of Saanich (41%)	\$2,367.63	\$4,718.69
District of Central Saanich (31%)	\$1,790.16	\$3,567.79
District of North Saanich (17%)	\$ 981.70	\$1,956.53
District of Metchosin (11%)	<u>\$ 635.22</u>	<u>\$1,265.99</u>
Total:	\$5,774.71	\$11,509.01

Comparison budgets for previous years:

2018	\$10,111.92
2017	\$ 9,870.02
2016	\$ 9,731.12
2015	\$ 8,782.59
2014	\$ 8,621.13

8.0 LOOKING FORWARD

As the Chair of PAAC, I am extremely proud of the Commission's work completed on the many emerging and ongoing issues that impact the agricultural community. Over the past year, PAAC has worked hard for the member municipalities to provide input on agricultural issues, Agricultural Area Plans, Official Community Plans, and other land use and bylaw issues related to agriculture, including Farmland trusts and farm worker accommodations.

Our focus for 2021 will be to initiate the proposed Grape and Fruit Atlas to assist established and new producers, and to work with the Ministry of Agriculture and the Agricultural Land Commission to plan a celebration in 2023 to recognize the importance of the establishment of the Agricultural Land Reserve.

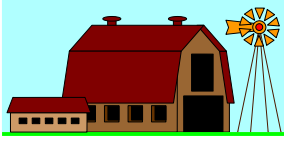
We will continue our work with the CRD to further develop Canada Goose and deer management strategies, providing the programmes and the funding are extended through 2021. We will continue to encourage the municipalities and the CRD to utilize the expertise available on our agriculture advisory commission and would encourage those local governments who are not currently members to consider joining us.

As our farm community and commission members anxiously wait to once again participate in the Saanich Fall Fair, we will be asking the non-farming community to increase their support to local farmers by buying locally and getting behind the various agricultural initiatives as the world slowly recovers from the Covid-19 Pandemic and begins to address the effects of Climate Change.

Respectfully submitted,

Phil Christie Chair
Peninsula & Area Agricultural Commission
March 2021

Attachment: May 13, 2019 letter to CRD Water Commission – *See Water Report (Mike Doehnel) Page 18*



Peninsula & Area Agricultural Commission

*c/o Saanich Municipal Hall
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Telephone: (250) 475-1775 Fax: (250) 475-5440
Secretary: Isobel Hoffmann, isobel.hoffmann@saanich.ca Co-Chairs:
Jack Mar & Phil Christie*

May 13, 2019

Mr. Ted Robbins, General Manager
Integrated Water Services
Capital Regional District
479 Island Highway
Victoria, BC V9B 1H7

Dear Mr. Robbins:

The Peninsula and Area Agricultural Commission has recently completed an evaluation of farm water charges and reconciliation from the three main agricultural water user municipalities (Saanich, Central Saanich, and North Saanich). We found that there could be ways to simplify and reduce the administrative burden for all parties as it pertains to the CRD's accounting of payments. (See description of variables starting on page 2)

We anticipate the CRD and the municipalities would work together to provide a final cohesive plan for the planting season 2020.

Special notes to:

- **Saanich:** in the interest of fairness, PAAC recommends that Saanich, like the other municipalities, not charge and then rebate the AG farmer fixed per meter tri annual charges.
- **North Saanich:** In the interest of fairness that North Saanich get the rebate from the CRD from AG meters equivalent to the fixed meter charges charged by the other municipalities.
- **Extra Note using 2017 data:** Due to the difference of the bulk wholesale price of water \$0.6375 per m3 for Saanich and \$0.9111 per m3 for both Central and North Saanich, North Saanich pays an extra \$56,176 and Central Saanich pays an extra \$190,592 for wholesale water compared to Saanich. This should be addressed by reducing the wholesale bulk water rate for all Agricultural use through the Saanich Peninsula distribution system to match the rate paid by Saanich. This would be similar to the reduced bulk wholesale rate currently paid by the Center for Plant Health.

.../2

Central Saanich Example				Saanich example			
municipality pays	0.9111	m3 wholesale from CRD		municipality pays	0.6375	m3 wholesale from CRD	
farmer rate	0.2015	m3 from municipality		farmer rate	0.2015	m3 from municipality	
retail rate	1.557	m3 from residential customers		retail rate	1.560	m3 from residential customers	
differential	1.356	CRD pays diff of farmer rate and retail rate to municipality		differential	1.359	CRD pays diff of farmer rate and retail rate to municipality	
farmer uses	1	m3		farmer uses	1	m3	
farmer pays	0.2015	m3		farmer pays	0.2015	m3	
muni pays	0.9111	m3		muni pays	0.6375	m3	
muni the hole for	-0.7096	m3		muni the hole for	-0.4360	m3	
CRD pays muni	1.356	m3		CRD pays muni	1.359	m3	
Final rebate less cost of bulk water	0.6459	m3 for farm water(345 connections) less cost of bulk water		Final rebate less cost of bulk water	0.9225	m3 for farm water(130 connections)	

PAAC supports farm water rates for food and feed-producing lands whereby the water use and farm production, especially for AR accounts, should be monitored and adjudicated by a professional agrologist/farmer. It is only at the pleasure of the CRD and its member municipalities, which have continued to support food and feed production in the region, that this financial support is available.

This regional only rebate does not fall under the same set of farming rules as applied by both the ALC and the BC Assessment Authority. It is also recommended that some of the money rebated to Municipalities be available for new and/or upgraded meters, back-flow preventers and a comprehensive review and implementation of water balancing and availability in the system to ensure current and expected future demand is available to accredited farmers. This will encourage more food production from both new and established farms.

Working with 2017 data:

- **Central Saanich: Troy Ziegler contact**
 - Residential retail rate is a fixed per meter and consumption tri-annual charge.
 - AG accounts do not pay a fixed per meter charge. The fixed per meter charge is calculated by CS annually and is rebated to the district from the CRD annually.
 - AG accounts pay the agricultural consumption rate of \$.2105 per m3. Central Saanich is rebated annually from the CRD the difference between the retail consumption rate and the agricultural consumption rate for their total consumption (on their bills it states the retail rate but the actual calculation does not reflect this).
 - AR accounts pay the fixed per meter tri-annual charge and it is not rebated from the CRD to the district.
 - AR accounts pay retail rates up to 455 m3 usage annually and the agricultural consumption rate thereafter. Central Saanich is rebated annually from the CRD the difference between the retail rate and the AG consumption rate for their total agricultural consumption only.
 - Central Saanich has a discount of 10% if bill paid on or before due date.
- **North Saanich: Meghan Mason contact**
 - Residential retail rate is a yearly fixed per parcel charge only and a consumption tri-annual charge.
 - Both AG and AR accounts pay a yearly fixed per parcel charge only (no fixed per meter charges and no CRD rebates).
 - AG accounts pay the agricultural consumption rate of \$.2105 to North Saanich who in turn get rebated from the CRD the difference between this rate and the retail rate on a tri-annual basis.
 - AR accounts pay residential retail rates up to 455 m3 annually (divided by 3) and the agricultural consumption rate thereafter on a tri-annual basis.
 - The agricultural portion is rebated as above to North Saanich by the CRD on a tri-annual basis.
- **Saanich: Ann Tetley contact**
 - Residential retail rate is a fixed per meter (varies depending on size of meter) and retail consumption tri-annual charge.
 - AG accounts pay the fixed charge per meter (varies depending on size of meter) and the agricultural consumption charge of \$.2105 per m3 tri-annually.
 - The district rebates the account annually for fixed per meter charges.
 - The CRD rebates the district the fixed per meter charges and the difference of the retail and agricultural consumption rate annually.
 - AR accounts pay the fixed charge per meter (varies depending on size of meter) and the retail consumption charge tri-annually and the district rebates the account annually for consumption charges over 455 m3 as per above formula.
 - The CRD rebates the district the difference of the retail and agricultural rate for agricultural consumption annually. The fixed charge is not rebated from CRD to the district nor from the District to the account

Respectfully submitted for your consideration. We look forward to receiving your response.

Jack Mar and Phil Christie
Co-Chairs, Peninsula & Area Agricultural Commission

cc: Mayor Haynes and Councillors, District of Saanich
Mayor Windsor and Councillors, District of Central Saanich
Mayor Orr and Councillors, District of North Saanich