

**PENINSULA & AREA
AGRICULTURAL COMMISSION**

2022 ANNUAL REPORT



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Chair

March 2023

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1.0 BACKGROUND

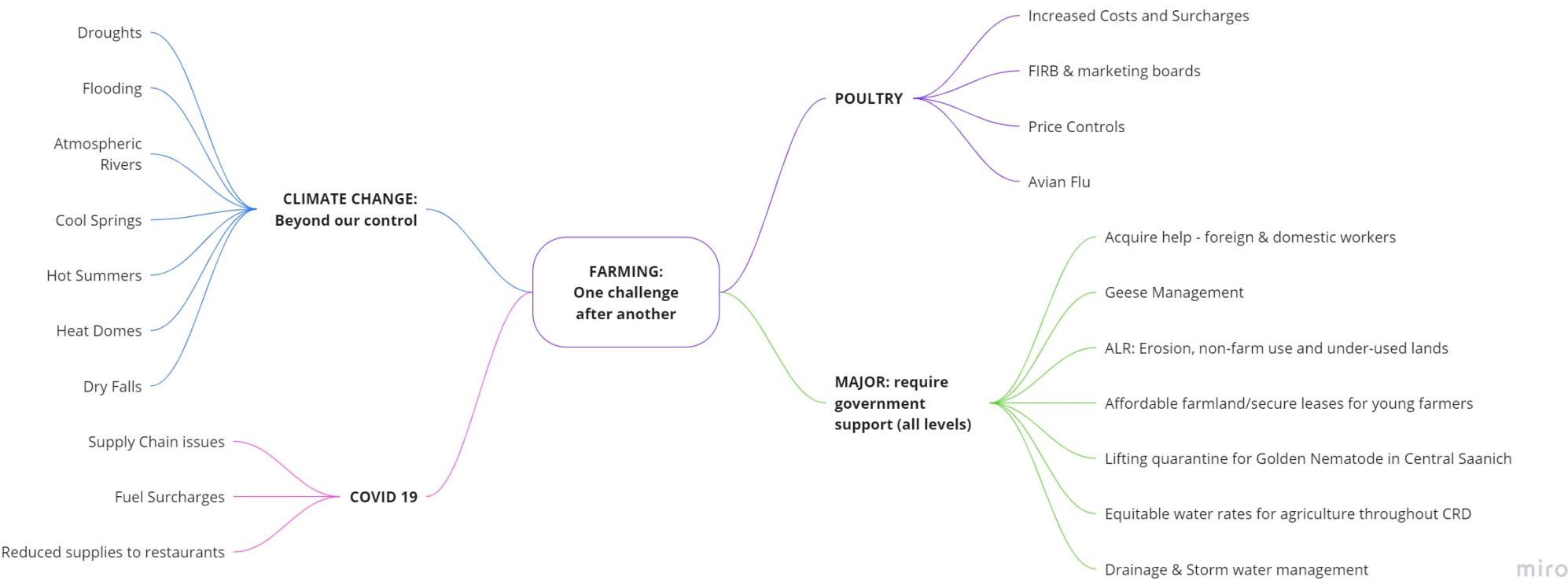
Initiated in 1997/98 with the completion of the ***Agricultural Strategy Report for the Saanich Peninsula***, the Peninsula & Area Agricultural Advisory Commission (PAAC) is financially supported by the Districts of Saanich, Central Saanich, North Saanich and Metchosin (the “member municipalities”).

PAAC's Mandate 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 15).

Our basic objective is to support and promote the sustainability of farming.



Farming: One Challenge After Another



2.0 HIGHLIGHTS FROM 2022

2.1 Effects of Covid-19 on Agriculture

Although by the fall of 2022, restrictions had eased substantially, there were still ripple effects within the agricultural community.

The supply chain continued to be an issue to some degree and gas prices were high. Foreign and domestic labour was still not back to pre-Covid levels.

Farm gate and farm market sales remained strong, and farmers provided a great selection of fresh produce. Grocery stores, particularly the Red Barn and Country Grocer, purchased more local produce. However, the Ministry of Agriculture reports that **the province produces only 30% of the food we consume.**

Restaurants were not able to operate at full capacity due labour shortages which subsequently reduced the volume of farm sales to these establishments.

The price of fuel, labour, fertilizers, feed, and other supplies such as cardboard cartons for shipping (18% increase) have all affected the farmers' bottom line. Some of these issues can be attributed to the on-going war in the Ukraine as well as COVID 19 related issues.

While not all pollinators are affected, Honeybees don't fly when temperature drops below 17°C.



2.2 Effects of Climate Change

Spring of 2022 was cool and wet; this delayed and reduced planting. Most farmers were at least 3 weeks behind schedule. One farmer had 120 acres seeded in the spring of 2021; this year at the same time it was zero.

Below-normal temperatures affected pollinators. **While not all pollinators are affected, Honeybees don't fly when temperatures drop below 17°C.** Once seedlings were in the ground frequent winds made irrigation necessary. Cooler weather was good for some crops, like rhubarb. Firbank Farms harvested 6,000lbs from one patch.

Seed sales were down compared to past years – not only in BC but on the East Coast and the USA as well. This is concerning in terms of food security.

By the fall harvest season, due to hot and dry conditions, some farmers had bumper crops and mildew was held at bay. Irrigation was required at times – unusual for the south Island in late fall.

2.3 Avian Flu Outbreak

Poultry farms were on high alert in the spring with an Avian Flu outbreak. Any vehicles coming in and out of the property had to be hosed down. Limited access to barns; clothes had to be changed when entering and leaving barns.

Outdoor flocks had to be kept inside as bird droppings (including from geese) spread the disease. **As of March 2022, over 240,000 birds had to be destroyed.** Outbreaks have been recorded in Newfoundland, Labrador, Quebec, and Ontario. Only one major outbreak reported in BC, in the Okanagan. Farms were at a red bio-security level until after the spring migration.

The growers will be affected in terms of the egg industry vs chickens. It takes 19 weeks for a chicken to start laying. If a farm was condemned, they must go through the steps to be cleared - and that could take up to six months.



2.4 Ministry of Agriculture Initiatives

M. Halstead, Regional Agrologist

The Ministry has introduced new policy framework that will see increased farm visits by agrologists and more workshops. The Ministry's budget is over now \$100 million, and the focus is shifting from exports and will be oriented towards local agriculture.

PAAC has been requesting more support for agriculture for many years; previously regional agrologists made routine farm visits, this “boots on the ground” approach is very helpful. At this time, no new agrologists have been hired; however, there are more industry specialists on hand for support.

It is acknowledged that climate change has had a tremendous impact on farming and food security; there are now opportunities to bring in better management – water retention and storage, soil management and linking agriculture to the *Water Sustainability Act*.

3.0 KEY ISSUES DISCUSSED BY PAAC

3.1 Golden Nematode–Central Saanich & Other Areas

Brent Postlewhaite, Canadian Food & Inspection Agency (CFIA) updated PAAC on the history of the Golden Nematode quarantine in Central Saanich and other parts of the world. (see January 2022 minutes).

The microscopic, soil-borne pests spread easily.

...it can remain dormant in soil for decades.

The microscopic, soil-borne pests spread easily – such as moving infested soils on farm equipment. It is a serious risk to potatoes, tomatoes, and eggplant – and can reduce crop yields by as much as 80%.

Difficult to eradicate, **it can remain dormant in soil for decades**. The origin is unclear, perhaps Europe or South America. It has been confirmed in 65 countries, including two of Canada's major trading partners – US and Mexico.

In the early 1980s, nematodes were found in 40 Central Saanich fields and potato crops have been banned since that time. Between 2010 and 2014 over 28,000 samples were collected; non-viable cysts were found in five fields. Only one field was identified as having viable cysts. **Each cyst can have up to 500 eggs.**

While the CFIA has a draft management plan, consultation with the provincial government, the BC Potato and Vegetable Growers' Association, the Canadian Horticultural Council and other stakeholders is required.

Each cyst can have up to 500 eggs.

Most of the Island's potatoes are grown in Comox, Qualicum, and Saanich. The lower Island has lost over 500 acres in potato crops.

Local farmers have spoken to our federal government representatives about lifting the 40-year ban but have been told that Ottawa has no appetite to do anything about the quarantine.

For more information: Cfia.VIPH-PVIV.acia@inspection.gc.ca



3.2 Funding for Hedgerows

The proposed partnership project with Habitat Acquisition Trust (HAT) was first discussed in 2021. Paige Erikson spoke at PAAC's March 2022 meeting to provide information about the many benefits of hedgerows around farmland.

PAAC was prepared to offer a one-time \$10,000 grant to assist with the project, proposed as a \$500 matching grant with HAT to each farmer who applies, up to a maximum of \$10,000. HAT was encouraged to seek out grants from provincial and municipal sources. PAAC members (Robin Tunnicliffe, Bev Marley, and Bob Maxwell) were appointed to a sub-committee. Plans for promotional material and events were discussed.

However, PAAC's financial commitment was postponed in May of 2022 until HAT had targeted funding available to support staff wages and the educational promotion needed the further the project. When that happens, PAAC will use its funds directly to provide hedgerow plants for farmers.

3.3 Farm Industry Review Board (FIRB)

Chicken farmers are experiencing major problems with increased expenses and not being permitted to raise egg or meat prices, because according to FIRB it is a regulated commodity.

*...feed costs increased
from \$490/tonne to \$700.*

According to Firbank Farms, in Central Saanich, at the beginning of 2022, **chicken feed costs increased from \$490/tonne to \$700; by the fall, the price had risen to \$824/tonne**. Their chickens consume over 30 tonnes a week, which results in a significant jump in overhead costs. BC is well below market cost compared to other provinces.

To have the Cost of Production (COP) changed to reflect rising costs, a meeting was held in January 2022 with FIRB, the Chicken Marketing Board, the BC Chicken Growers' Association and three main chicken processors.



While waiting for a decision from FIRB, farmers took matters in their own hands and met with the Agricultural Critic or MLAs; PAAC sent a letter to the Ministry and the member municipalities requesting support to allow growers to raise prices to reflect the COP.

In the Spring, FIRB approved an interim increase of 6 cents (per kg live weight) – approximately 50 cents per bird. The Egg Marketing Board approved an increase of 20 cents on a dozen eggs. It is noted that although the prices had risen dramatically in the grocery stores on both chicken and eggs, these increases didn't trickle down to the producers.

Grain prices and supply chain issues are unlikely to decrease due to the on-going war in Ukraine.

While Sea Span was on strike, the feed companies were hit with a 52% fuel surcharge on delivery of mash and grains. High fuel costs also affected the shipment grains; farmers were charged an additional 1% fuel surcharge – between \$200 and \$600 each week.

Firbank Farm's overall operating costs increased by at least \$100,000 in 2022. Grain prices and supply chain issues are unlikely to decrease due to the on-going war in Ukraine.

3.4 Vancouver Island Agriculture Adaptation Group

Past Chair Bob Maxwell is a member of the Vancouver Island Agriculture Adaptation Group and reports regularly to PAAC. Several focus areas have been selected within the CRD, from the Peninsula to the Gulf Islands. Funding is provided by the province.

Water deficit on the Gulf Islands is a point of discussion. The group received \$50,000 to hire a consultant to study the agricultural water capacity from Courtenay to the Saanich Peninsula.



3.5 Drainage Sub-Committee

A sub-committee was formed between engineering staff and Council representatives from Saanich and Central Saanich, together with PAAC members Terry Michell, Larry Sluggett and Mike Doehnel. It was suggested that experts (engineers, hydrologists) from the Ministry of Agriculture be on hand if required.

.. proposed overpass on Highway 17 at Keating X Road could have negative effect on drainage issues.

The intent is to address the many flooding and drainage issues in areas throughout the Districts, including Maber Flats and the Martindale Valley, that have frustrated local farmers for years. **The proposed overpass on Highway 17 at Keating X Road could also have a negative effect on drainage issues.** Other issues to consider are global warming, carbon sequestration, and protection of wetlands and forests.

CRD's Regional Food Agriculture Strategy that addresses chronic drainage issues across the region and an outreach programme that can help farmers to better understand their watersheds.

Farmers have been working these lands for over 100 years; some areas have now reached the original clay soils at the bottom. There is a need for education and support to farmers to adopt regenerative methods of farming to rebuild topsoil which could buffer the flooding.

In November, Dale Green, Regional Source Control Programmes at the CRD, provided an update on various CRD initiatives, including storm water management. Workshops were held on integrated storm water management, with the aim to recharge groundwater and decrease surface contaminant runoff into rural watersheds.

He also spoke about the CRD's Regional Food Agriculture Strategy that addresses chronic drainage issues across the region and an outreach programme that can help farmers to better understand their watersheds. Using the principles of slow, sink, spread and plan for overflow can help improve storm water management, reduce peak flows, flooding, and find ways to stop contaminants from entering

local creeks and streams. (more detail – November 2022 minutes)

In the late spring, concerned about the impact of the proposed Keating Cross Road overpass, an on-site meeting was held with Central Saanich Councillor Paltiel, Terry Michell and Ministry of Highways representatives. It was questioned if a filtration system would be used to capture unfiltered water and contaminants heading downhill to the Martindale Valley. This is a major concern for farmers, and it was noted that the ALC should be involved in discussions.



Drainage on Martindale Flats

Apparently, the Ministry of Highways is exempt from land water management policies; however, Central Saanich has made it clear that water management must be part of the overpass project, together with Ministry consultation with local farmers.

Noted that increased flooding over the past few years could be related in part, to climate change and extreme weather events, e.g., atmospheric rivers.

4.0 UPDATES ON CONTINUING ISSUES

4.1 Farm Worker Accommodations

Providing affordable, on-site housing for farm workers is a longstanding goal for PAAC and local farmers. Discussions started over 22 years ago. Part of the issue is trying to get local governments, the Ministry and the ALC on the same page. Farmers have been very patient waiting for the go ahead to provide much needed accommodation for farm workers.

In late 2022, the District of Saanich adopted its **Farm Worker Accommodation Policy**, which is in line with new ALC regulations, and is the result of 15 years of input from PAAC, other stakeholders, the ALC and the Ministry of Agriculture. Central Saanich adopted a similar policy in 2020.

Saanich's policy stipulates temporary accommodations will be permitted in agricultural zones with a Class 9 farm status (as defined by BCAA), controlled with *Temporary Use Permits* and final decisions made by Council. Based on the site, there may be a need to seek ALC approval. Location, access, and topography will be considered. Using a Temporary Use Permit allows accommodations on a temporary basis, that can be adjusted for certain circumstances when or if required.

Other conditions include:

- Applications considered on a case-by-case basis.
- A demonstrated need must be provided.
- A minimum parcel size of 4 ha on A-zoned property (not necessarily in ALR).
- The threshold for housing is set at 2,000 sq. ft.
- The housing must have no impact on agricultural productivity.

4.2 Geese Management Plans

In May 2022, Jody Watson (CRD) provided an excellent summary on the status of the geese population in the CRD, which will continue to double every four years if serious action is not taken. (see April 2021 minutes)

Much information was collected on nesting sites near wetlands and on farmland. However, while short-term strategies have been applied with some success, inconsistent and inefficient management for many years has **not helped with the increasing populations**

and resulting devastation to our farmlands. Consistent, long-term strategies, egg addling, and a regional programme are required.

The **Guardians of the Mid-Island Estuaries** (GOMIES) have developed an action plan for the egg addling and banding programmes and have been sourcing funding from government agencies, various groups, and stakeholders (farmers, municipalities, First Nations, Parks Canada, BC Parks, golf courses).

Their goal is to raise at least \$30,000 for spring addling programmes. PAAC donated \$4,000 to GOMIES to assist with addling and banding initiatives. Member municipalities and the South Island Direct Farm Marketing Association were asked to match PAAC's donation.



Jody Watson prepared a report for CRD's Environmental Services Committee in May because elected officials should be aware of the frustration farmers experience and the need to finally do something about it; PAAC provided input.

The CRD did not have a dedicated wildlife service (although the Board has been asked three times to implement this) and therefore could not provide funding or support; this was challenging for staff as there was no legal way to address this obviously much needed service. *(Board approved dedicated wildlife service Spring 2023)*

The recent outbreak of Avian Flu is another reason to control the transient geese population.

inconsistent and inefficient management for many years has not helped with increasing populations and devastation to farmlands.

5.0 REFERRALS FROM MUNICIPALITIES

5.1 Saanich Referrals

4251 Blenkinsop Road – Non-farm use on ALR Land

Application to use a portion of the property (barns) to store recreational vehicles. The proposed use does not support existing farming operations or meet PAAC's mandate.

There have been many non-farm use requests recently: if the request is beneficial to agriculture or an ancillary function that enhances the farm operation, it should be considered. PAAC also noted approval could set a precedent and therefore did not support the application.

4400 Blenkinsop Road – Non-Farm Use on ALR Land

Application to use a portion of the property (barns) for rental storage. PAAC did not support the application for the same reasons as noted above for 4251 Blenkinsop Rd.

304 Walton Road – Additional Residence for Farm Use

The owner is applying for a non-adhering residential use for an additional residence for farm use, with no changes to the current 20-acre, A-2 zoned property. The intent was to convert an existing residence for full time and seasonal workers, wine storage, bottling honey and fruit preserves in a commercial kitchen.

At this time, although drafted, Saanich had no official policy guidelines for farm worker housing and municipalities were trying to catch up with new ALC regulations.

PAAC agreed the application was premature, requesting more information regarding the farm operation to support the request for the second dwelling.

5927 West Saanich Road – Non-Farm use on ALR & Temporary Use Permit

The application was to store heavy-capacity tow trucks on an existing gravel pad on the A-1, ALR zoned property. PAAC agreed this was basically a commercial operation on agricultural land.

Acknowledged that all farms require heavy equipment storage (e.g., tractors) but not tow trucks. PAAC did not support the application as it is not agricultural use.

5550 West Saanich Road (Red Barn Market) – Boundary Adjustment

A septic field and an easement run through the subject property and the adjacent 25-acre parcel. The Red Barn has been operating on the property since 2009; not all the land is within the ALR.

The intent of the boundary adjustment (about .75 of an acre) is to remove any liability for the septic field from the owner of the adjacent parcel and leave him access to his fields and the bridge. The area around the septic field is unusable for farming.

PAAC fully supported the boundary adjustment.

5.2 Central Saanich Official Community Plan (OCP) Review

The review was initiated in 2021, and a draft circulated to PAAC in February 2022. PAAC was invited to participate in the review, which had a strong agricultural focus to ensure that farmland is supported and protected, as well as encouraging diversification in farm operations.

Consideration of agricultural-related economic policies include agri-tourism, farm promotion, B&B operations, and retention of agriculture-related industries.

Non-farm uses on agricultural lands will not be supported unless related directly to farming.

5.3 Maber Flats Wetlands Proposed Rezoning Bylaw

A special meeting was held July 14, 2022 to discuss a proposed zoning amendment for Maber Flats from A-1 to a new A-2 Maber Flats Wetlands zone, restricting the permitted uses to agriculture only.

Maber Flats has seasonal flooding; area is under-developed and has no residential use.

Proposed boundary amendment allows agriculture as a permitted use – residential use will

not be allowed. This eliminates the need for roads, hard surfaces, etc., and will allow the District of Central Saanich to address drainage and water management issues that have long existed.



Maber Flats

PAAC supported the bylaw amendment and innovative concept plan unanimously.

6.0 STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

Note: most of the original objectives in the 1997 Report are met.

The **1997 Agricultural Strategy Report for the Saanich Peninsula** proposed several recommendations designed to promote the sustainability of agriculture on the Peninsula and was the basis for the formation of PAAC.

The six objectives are to:

1. Secure an adequate supply of water for farmers at a competitive cost.
2. Increase economic returns to farmers.
3. Enhance the sustainability of the agricultural land base.
4. Foster stewardship of farmers which embrace community values.
5. Increase public awareness, education, and support for a sustainable farming community.
6. Establish a focal point for farming issues and implementation of the Strategy.

6.1 Sub-Committees

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

- Farm Economics - Terry and Jenni Michell
- Agricultural Land Base – (no representative for 2022)
- 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, expert and/or professional opinions are sought.

6.2 Farm Economics – Jenni Michell

Harvest Rd. Outdoor Food Stand

Harvest Rd. was built in 2016 to provide an outlet for my passion for great food, community-based entrepreneurship, local agriculture, ethical treatment of livestock, and to create a sustainable Vancouver Island dining experience.

One thing I have noticed over the years is how much people enjoy a trip out to the farm. Many ride their bikes from the city and like to slow down and take in the farm life. I get many comments about how much they loved sitting at Harvest Rd to enjoy their meal and see the tractors go by.

I find Harvest Rd. has become a great connection for people to see and learn more about where their food comes from. I often look out and see families talking about what they see in the fields, kids getting excited about a tractor or people exclaiming "how good the burger is!".

It has drawn many people out to the farm who had never been before. Every year I seem to get a little bit busier - which has been great exposure for the farm as well.

People really seem to want to support local and are interested in learning about why things cost what they do or about the history of the family. Everyone loves a story.

*To shorten the gap
from field to fork,
Harvest Rd. supports
and promotes
sustainable food
production.*

To shorten the gap from field to fork, **Harvest Rd. supports and promotes sustainable food production.** The menu reflects what is in season, taking its inspiration from the freshest ingredients available locally.

Harvest Rd. works with a range of local farms on the Saanich Peninsula including Square Root Farm, Sunwing Farm and Kildara Farm. However, most of the produce served has been sourced from Michell's Farm - the vast majority of which has been grown in the fields surrounding our restaurant. The meat served has been ethically raised by local farmers; and the beef cattle are pasture fed in fields you can view while dining at Harvest Rd.



Farm Fresh

Harvest Rd. has been awarded the highest level of recognition by The Vancouver Island Green Business Certification Program, including endorsement by the Surfrider Foundation.

The service of the meals provided at Harvest Rd. generate zero waste. Every container, tray, cup, lid, and piece of cutlery used at Harvest Rd. is compostable. All items associated in the service of our meals ultimately end up at an industrial compost site here on the farm. The composted material is then used to provide nutrients to the fields in which our produce is grown, and our meat is pastured. Harvest Rd. gladly accepts the extra costs associated with this process so that we can participate in a sustainable cycle of food production and service.

Farm Economics – Terry and Jenny Michell

In 2022, the wet and cool spring delayed planting for many farms, though some managed to get seeds in the ground in early March. However, many saw that these plantings didn't result in any real growth for 5-6 weeks.

The cooler weather presented interesting results for one fruit in particular: Strawberry plants grew large, bushy leaves with the blossoms finally arriving 3-4 weeks late, but the berries produced were nice and big. The large greenery on the plant allowed for great sun protection, with little to no sun scorch

It is disappointing to see some wholesalers continue to import produce instead of purchasing locally.

observed on the 2022 crop. Overall, it was a great berry season once harvesting started.

Considering the late spring and wet conditions, very little irrigation was used until mid to late June. Once the summer heat kicked in watering was necessary through until late September. And while planting started roughly a month behind for many local farms, the outstanding weather in the fall months of September and October allowed for harvesting crops late into the season. Squash and pumpkin crops were harvested daily with exceptional weather conditions, with little to no loss on these crops.



Bountiful Harvest

Demand for local farm products remained strong at farm gates and local grocery stores. It is disappointing to see some wholesalers continue to import produce instead of purchasing locally. Especially during the times local product is available.

Farm labour remained an ongoing challenge, with many farms being dependent on foreign labour. Without the foreign worker program, many large-scale farms would not be in business and the local supply chain would be greatly affected.

The harvest of first-cut hay was delayed, leading to much of its use for silage going to the local beef and dairy industry. Much of the product was shipped north to the Cowichan Valley and beyond.

Geese can ravage an entire field within hours, it is challenging for farmers to continuously monitor fields.

High-quality second and third cuts were shipped north as well. The quality of these cuts was greatly dependent on the irrigation that was available to the land. In 2022, we saw more of the local hay produced being purchased and used within the farming community and less of an interest or demand from the local equestrian groups.

The problem of the resident Canada goose population persists among numerous farmers in the Capital Regional District. These farmers have been adversely affected by the geese, resulting in significant crop losses, and the situation is exacerbating. Due to the ability of the geese to ravage an entire field within hours, it is challenging for farmers to continuously monitor fields.

Land availability continues to be a concern. There are many acres of designated farmland not producing significant crops within our local area due to issues with long-term lease agreements, flooding from urban runoff, shortage of irrigation water (either municipal or well) and lack of ditch maintenance.

If we continue to see farmland go unprotected and under-utilized, we can expect to continue to see rising food prices and the increasing risk of food shortages. It is becoming increasingly challenging for bonafide farmers to secure farmland (initial or additional), due to the allowance of non-farming use in the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR).

If we continue to see farmland go unprotected and under-utilized, we can expect to continue to see rising food prices and the increasing risk of food shortages.

The trend is shifting towards acreages becoming rural residential lands instead of being utilized as accessible farmland. This shift is particularly noticeable on smaller acreages that are more within reach for new farmers, resulting in vacant land with no farming activities. As the price of land escalates, it eventually becomes financially non-viable to engage in farming on a particular property.

6.3 Agricultural Land Base (no representative for 2022)

Loss of Farmland

Farmland is lost for many reasons:

1. Local government purchases where land that once produced food sits idle - perhaps as a flood plain providing a sanctuary for wildlife. Examples are Panama Flats, Rithet's Bog.
2. Purchases of farmland that become "private rural estates".
3. An increasing number of equestrian facilities - although the land remains "green".

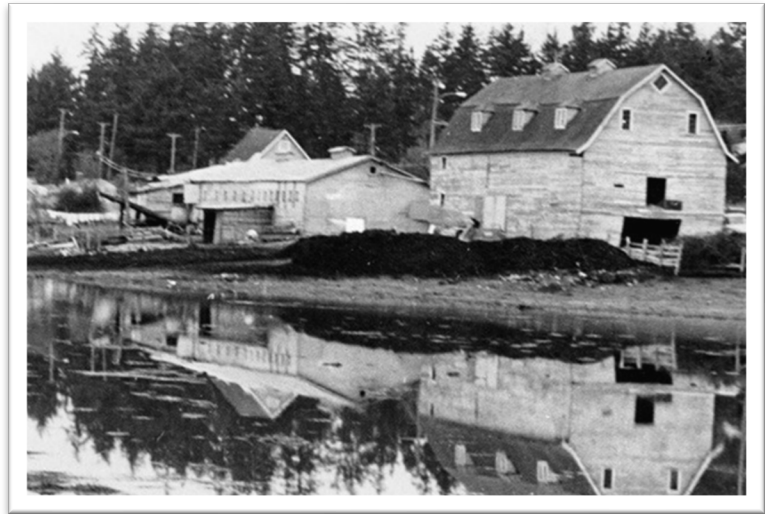
2023 marks the 50th Anniversary of the Agricultural Land Reserve

4. Flooding, caused by lack of proper drainage, water management or encroaching development. Examples are Maber Flats, Hector Road, West Saanich Road behind the Red Barn Market, and Rithet's Bog and Panama Flats. All these areas were productive farmland at one time.

Larger parcels of farmland are vital to food security; 30% of ALR land is unproductive and can sell for \$200,000+ an acre.

Referrals are received from our member municipalities each year for non-farm use applications on ALR lands; renting barns to store recreational vehicles, for example.

Owners of ALR land who do not want to farm could lease their land to young farmers who cannot afford farmland at today's prices. To ensure food security for future generations, we must encourage our young farmers and support generational farming.



Dairy Farm 1970's

2023 marks the 50th Anniversary of the Agricultural Land Reserve. It would be interesting to note how much ALR land has been lost or gained since 1973.

The following information was provided by our Regional Agrologist, Meghan Halstead:

Research land by crop type, land use and see 2021 Census of Agriculture: <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/>

\$60,556,415 = Annual farm operating revenues for CRD (per 2021 questionnaire, and based on 2020 fiscal year)

Questions? Contact Ministry of Agriculture's Sector Insights statisticians and economists by email: <mailto:alstats@gov.bc.ca>

6.4 Outreach and Education – Linda Geggie

This year saw the re-emergence of in person meetings and learning events across the region and the food and agriculture sector. PAAC stays informed, connected, and supportive of these initiatives.

The **Saanich Fair** is one of the most important agriculture events that touches a wide variety of residents in the Capital Region and provides a broad range of opportunities for connecting with farmers and seeing livestock, poultry, farm equipment etc., firsthand. PAAC worked with the Capital Region Food and Agriculture Initiatives Roundtable (CR-Fair) to support outreach efforts to engage citizens in supporting the local food system. There was also a display of the South Island Farm Hub that works to distribute produce and local food products from over 62 food and farm businesses in the region.



In terms of **New Farmer** opportunities for education and training, we know that the farm networks and mentors are one way to share knowledge between farmers. [Young Agrarians](https://youngagrarians.org/) (<https://youngagrarians.org/>) continue to support new growers and create land matches for land access. Community farms in the region also have different training and learning opportunities such as Burgoyne Farm, Lohbrunner Farm, Haliburton Farm, Newman Farm and Sandown Centre for Regenerative Agriculture.

Sandown held the second year of its “Farmpreneur” programme, which saw the new farmers undertake business development and planning while operating their businesses and holding their first Farmpreneur market during the Flavour Trails Festival.



Newman Farmhouse | Hazelmere Farm Stand | Haliburton Farm

PAAC also undertakes to stay informed and work in concert with other groups, organizations, and networks to support the development of the agriculture sector. This includes working on land access, infrastructure development and connecting to the efforts to support a more sustainable and equitable food system. Some of this work in the region includes:

1. The CRD continued to work towards supporting land access for new and existing farmers with looking at the business model of a **Foodlands Trust** with particular focus on a CRD owned property near Bear Hill and other identified properties by participating municipalities.
2. The **Closing the Supply Gap initiative** undertook an infrastructure needs survey. Facilities to store, aggregate, distribute and process local foods were identified as key infrastructure gaps in the region. In line with its recommendations, we have seen the development of multiple food hubs in the region. The new [Kitchen Connect Food Hub](https://kitchenconnectvictoria.com) (kitchenconnectvictoria.com) saw a year of construction at 808 Viewfield Road in Esquimalt renovating the warehouse and putting in place a new HACCP (Hazard Analysis & Critical Control Point) Certified Processing Kitchen, (which is expected to open in the spring of 2023). In addition, Central Saanich undertook a feasibility study for a Food Hub and the District of Saanich also launched a feasibility study, with interests in inter-food hub collaboration to ensure that services are complementary.



Hazelmere Farm Market Stall

3. The **Good Food Network**, led by CRFAIR also published its annual report for 2022 that contains highlights from various food system related initiatives and projects in the region, inspiring stories of action, with spotlights on Food Literacy, Food Access, and local Food Economy initiatives. There are so many impactful stories – great shining lights – shared from around the network by folks who led meaningful change at the local and regional levels. It was distributed to all First Nations Governments, Local and Regional governments and to the Good Food Network members and supporters. Read the [Good Food Network Progress report](https://www.goodfoodnetwork.info/_files/ugd/287ffd_e28a791a34364975bd74afa72d0d6321.pdf).
(https://www.goodfoodnetwork.info/_files/ugd/287ffd_e28a791a34364975bd74afa72d0d6321.pdf)
4. PAAC also met with the **Greater Victoria Acting Together Group** with the Food and Climate Committee to learn about key issues of importance to PAAC and see how this group may be supportive of agriculture in its local advocacy efforts.
5. Work is underway to explore the revitalization of a local **Farmers Institute** with PACC supporting meetings to explore this idea in the Spring of 2023.

Speakers & Presentations:

Several educational speakers and municipal staff presented to the PAAC committee on a variety of topics including:

Month	Topic	Speaker
January	Golden Nematode Quarantine	Brent Postlewhaite, CFIA
March	Hedgerow Partnership Project	Paige Erikson, Habitat Acquisition Trust
April	Goose Management Strategy - CRD	Jody Watson, CRD
November	Various CRD Updates	Dale Green, Regional Source Control Programme

PAAC members have expressed interest in learning more about environmental and climate adaptive farming as well as carbon sequestration. This will be a continued focus for 2023.

In addition, PAAC began to plan a Farm Tour slated for June 2023 for local government elected officials and key planning staff to introduce them to agriculture and food issues in the region.



6.5 Water Report for 2022 Growing Season

Michael Doehnel

One could almost not believe the ongoing moisture in early and late spring and well into the summer in 2022. Upland growers benefited from this, as early planted crops were able to flourish without the heat blast of the past as subsequent irrigation demands were below normal.

It did lead to some added organism pressure as warm and wet usually does. Those of us on the bottom lands just gazed out at sunken tractors and waited for the excavator to come by and yank out the machinery. In fits and starts, the odd bit of land was eventually tilled and seeded while some areas were almost 2 months late getting planted. We were on the edge of our seats but finally got all the land drilled and off to a good start.

*Those on the bottom
lands just gazed out
at sunken tractors
waiting for the
excavator to come by
and yank out the
machinery.*

Then the problems started, and it was not a lack of water, but rather soil compaction which we had inadvertently done to ourselves in trying to get water out of the soil during field

*Overall water
demand during the
growing season was
below yearly
averages*

preparations. Realistically, we should have known better but the result was a massive hard pan only 5 inches down. This really restricted the crops' potential for yield and plumpness, but as nature is wont to do, the plants compensated by dropping off tillers and leaving the remaining resources of nutrients and water for the last stalks, which eventually produced a nice crop in the thankfully long and rain free fall harvest season.

Overall water demand during the growing season was below yearly averages with moderate temperatures contributing to less evapotranspiration. As is often the case, there was a trade off, of good fall harvest weather with the timely planting of cover crops going into the winter, and any of the good-looking ones out there required irrigation to get started before the daylight got too short and the temperatures too low.

A trial of a new fall cover crop cocktail of spring red wheat, flax, and phacelia, which all made it through the winter, are looking rather spectacular at this time. Growing spring cereals in the fall often adds more vegetative matter than typical fall rye and protects the soil from hard rains while soaking up remaining nutrients so they are not lost to the environment. Using plants such as flax and phacelia also does wonders for breaking up pathogen cycles of monoculture and when heavily seeded, do a great job of suppressing weeds.



The one missing link in cover cropping here on the coast is the adaptation of more summer cover cropping when massive yields of forage or plow down and hopefully more crimped materials greatly benefit the soil and its organisms while often requiring only minimal water to produce this sea of weed suppressing green.

The CRD has hired the consulting firm *Stantec* to determine whether agricultural water use, and its subsidy to “bonafied” farmers, is still appropriate in its current form. Also, they determined whether to make changes to this outdated - and quite frankly, disproportionately advantageous to non-farmers and estate holder speculators, along with their tepid facilitators at the Ministry of Agriculture and BC Assessment whose threshold for getting tax breaks undermines municipalities' ability to make their communities whole. Lovingly referred to as FIMOs (farmers in name only).



Field of Phacelia

This is all the while our “kids”, the up-and-coming farmers, struggle to make ends meet. Something is not quite right with this model as its unintended consequence has often become a source of revenue for those with abundant resources. To be clear, I’m not a communist which is often the first word out the mouth of those who object to giving our young farmers a hand up. Be it cover crop seed or a funded rental pool of expensive farm equipment that would do wonders to help those we are really trying to nurture.

The CRD, in its latest vision statement which it presented to the new Board, failed to mention agriculture more than once in this 90+ page document. It is tragic that given all the land use studies and reports on drainage, water usage, much needed land healing compost facilities (as have been now completed on Salt Spring Island and the Strathcona Regional District) that they, and their municipal co-conspirators, still appear to be willing to send agriculture in the CRD to the dust bin of history. All the while touting the regions livability and potential food resilience while fake news about affordable living units continues to abound.

I know we can and must do better, perhaps with a deeper and younger pool of regionally inspired municipal leadership candidates who might consider working in the business of running a sophisticated municipal enterprise provided they got paid a living wage.

Respectfully submitted.

Mike Doehnel

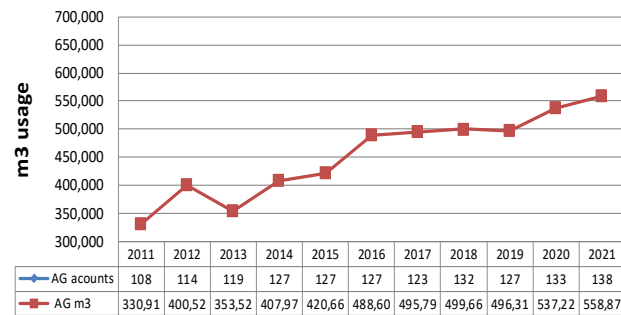
CRD Water Usage Update - 2021 (Stats always 1 year behind)

AR = agricultural and residential use, ag rate over 455 m3 usage
AG = dedicated agricultural meter

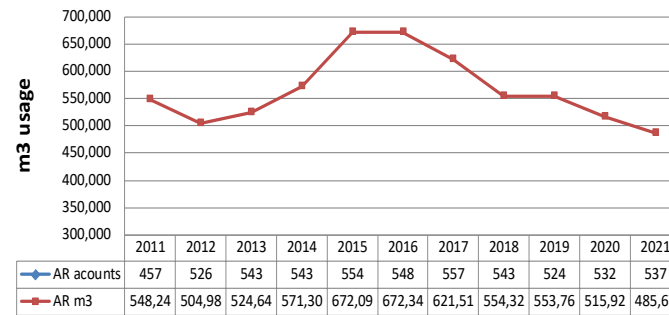
Total CRD Volume m3 2021	51,797,082	Ag usage %	2.0%
Total CRD wholesale revenue 2021	\$34,305,613	Ag usage subsidy %	4.8%

Total CRD Volume m3 2017	46,515,340	Ag usage %	2.4%
Total CRD wholesale revenue 2017	\$29,563,529	Ag usage subsidy %	4.6%

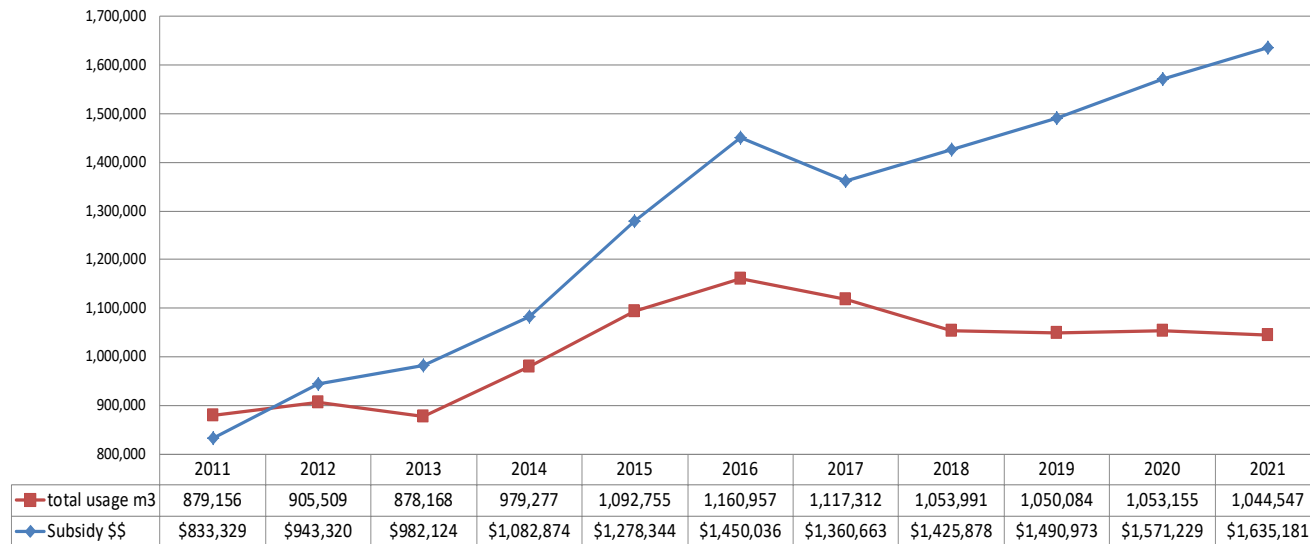
AG accounts and usage



AR accounts and usage



Total usage and subsidy



7.0 MEMBERSHIP, ADMINISTRATIVE & PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT

7.1 Membership for 2021 (Voting Members)

Name	Specialty
Robin Tunnicliffe	Sea Bluff Farm & Farm Market – vegetables & fruits
Terry Michell	Michell Farms – fruits, vegetables, hay, grains, pasture beef
Linda Geggie	(CR-Fair Rep) – grows flowers and foliage
Dianne Williamson	Firbank Farms – poultry & vegetable grower
Bev Marley	The Tiny Farm – garlic, honey & poultry
Larry Sluggett	Sluggett Farms – corn and vegetables
Satnam Dheenshaw	Gobind Farms – grows mostly berries
Anita Bull	Squash grower
Jenni Michell	Michell Farms – fruits, vegetables & Harvest Road Food Truck
Katie Underwood	Peas 'n' Carrots Farm – Vegetables (Box Programme)

7.2 Council Representatives (Non-Voting Members)

Name	District Represented
Councillor Brett Smyth	North Saanich
Councillor Chris Graham	Central Saanich
Councillor Zac De Vries	Saanich
Robin Tunnicliffe	Metchosin

We acknowledge that Councillors are often unable to attend PAAC meetings due to other Council commitments. However, their attendance and input are very much appreciated, including Councillor Thompson from Central Saanich who steps in when Councillor Graham is unavailable and is our “**Saanich Fair Guru**”.

7.3 Professional Support

PAAC is grateful for the regular attendance and professional support of **Emily Carmichael** (until May) and **Meghan Halstead** (starting in July), agrologists with the Ministry of Agriculture & Foods. At one time, a liaison from the Minister's office attended meetings on a regular basis. This provided a beneficial link between the Ministry of Agriculture and the Commission. Although several requests were made, no replacement has been appointed to date.

7.4 Community Membership & Support

In addition to our voting members, non-voting council and provincial liaisons, PAAC has an ever-growing number of “associate” members from various 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 the valuable 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. It is hoped now that pandemic regulations have been relaxed somewhat that workshops, **Farmer2Farmer** and participation in the **Saanich Fair** can resume to pre-COVID levels.

Such activities are vital to the promotion of agriculture and help to maintain public awareness.



Locally grown food

PAAC would like to acknowledge two past Commission members who continue to support agriculture by volunteering their time:

Mike Doehnel for many years has been the agriculture representative on the Saanich Peninsula Water Commission and the Saanich Peninsula Wastewater Commission. He also attends the Regional Water Commission meetings. He reports regularly to PAAC on various water issues and his report is included in this document. We sincerely appreciate Mike providing countless volunteer hours and his valuable insight on all agricultural issues.

Bob Maxwell has been a PAAC member for many years and served as Chair. His “retirement” from the Commission did not last long, as he now competently represents PAAC on the Vancouver Island Regional Agricultural Adaptation Strategy group. We thank Bob for volunteering his time and providing his knowledgeable support and input on many other issues throughout the year.

7.5 Administrative & Technical Support

The Commission is extremely grateful for the continued funding and support it receives from the sponsoring municipalities, as well as the administrative and secretarial support provided by Isobel Hoffmann since 1998.

Technical support and information are provided upon request from senior planning and engineering staff from the member municipalities. Often staff attend PAAC meetings to provide expertise on a particular application or issue involving agriculture.

We are hopeful a new CRD representative will be appointed shortly to replace Jeff Weightman who was a regular attendee, now working for the Ministry of Agriculture. It was especially helpful to receive regular updates on the CRD’s committees related to agriculture, such as the Geese and Deer Management Programmes. During 2022, PAAC was fortunate to receive excellent and informative presentations from two CRD representatives, Jody Watson, and Dale Green.

If the pandemic has taught us anything – it is how vital agriculture and food security is to everyone's health and well-being, and further, that our hard-working farmers need continued support from all levels of government.



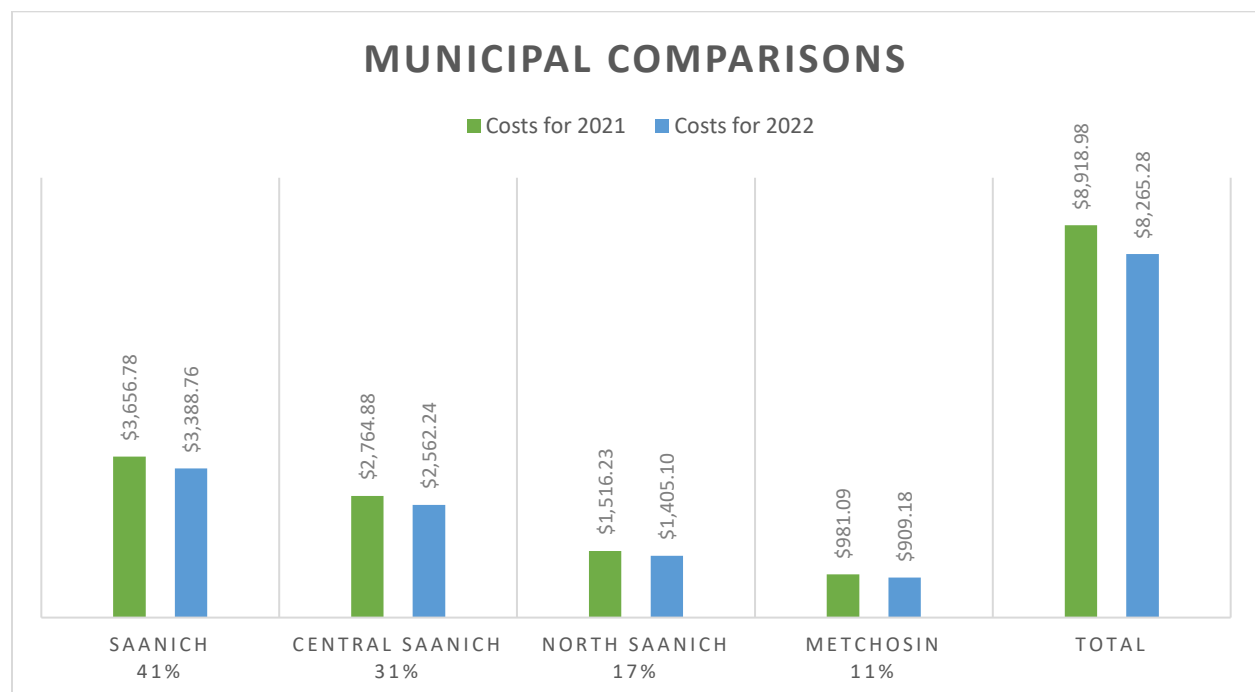
8.0 FINANCE

With the relaxation of pandemic restrictions in the late summer of 2022, in-person meeting resumed at Saanich Municipal Hall in September. The option of attending by ZOOM was still available to those members and guests who were not comfortable with in-person meetings.

There were no workshops or seminars held and PAAC did not fully participate in the scaled-down 2022 Saanich Fair, although a few members did volunteer their time and PAAC made a small contribution. We expect 2023 to be a much busier year.

Each Municipality contributes to the general administration carried out by the recording secretary, and the cost formula is based on population. Expenditures vary from year to year depending on activity levels.

Municipality	Costs for 2021	Costs for 2022
District of Saanich - 41%	\$3,656.78	\$3,388.76
District of Central Saanich – 31%	\$2,764.88	\$2,562.24
District of North Saanich – 17%	\$1,516.23	\$1,405.10
District of Metchosin – 11%	\$981.09	\$909.18
TOTAL	\$8,918.98	\$8,265.28



9.0 LOOKING FORWARD

2022 Reflections from the Chair - Robin Tunncliffe, Sea Bluff Farm, Metchosin

When I reflect on 2022, our most valuable accomplishment might be the group cohesion within PAAC across sectors, and between farmers and the government representatives who attend our meetings.

We came back to in-person meetings this fall which I feel is essential for the relationship building that happens around the PAAC table and for the mingling that happens after the meetings adjourn. Planners, farmers, and government reps often stay to brainstorm together for up to an hour. This social time is so fruitful: you can almost hear the synapses firing and the networks clicking into place. It's powerful to see the passion for agriculture flowing.

We started off the year responding to the crisis in the poultry industry. First, record high feed prices caused a price squeeze in the sector which was especially hard for the commodity growers. The Farm Industry Review Board responded to our request for action in a timely manner but then poultry producers were hit with Avian flu. We watched and learned and waited. This is a situation exacerbated by climate change and is here to stay.

PAAC donated some of our funds to Guardians of the Mid Island Estuaries to support their effective work.



Sea Bluff Farm

The next big theme for us was Canada Geese. It's a huge issue for most farmers in our region. We had an informative presentation from the CRD, and we learned a lot about the efforts being made to control the number of geese. PAAC donated some of our funds to Guardians of the Mid Island Estuaries to support their effective work. We continue to monitor and raise awareness about the issue. 2023 will be an important year for action,

A few of our members formed a subcommittee with the Ministry of Highways to address drainage on the peninsula, especially pertaining to the Martindale flats. We advocated for filtration of road runoff to prevent contaminants from ending up in our soil, and for retention systems for a slower release of water to prevent flooding. Farmer input into this process was valued and will make a difference in planning.



Robin with Sprouts

We devoted time to learning about hedgerows and the possible benefits to agriculture. We considered using some of our education funds to have a workshop for farmers about installing and maintaining beneficial hedgerows. PAAC members toured my farm in June when the hedgerow was at its most abundant. We determined that more learning is necessary, but we will revisit this idea in 2023.

Much of our time this year was devoted to studying and responding to applications for changes to zoning and for non-farm uses on ALR land. These applications are sometimes complex and can lead to fruitful discussion.

The depth of historical land-use knowledge of the peninsula that is held by some of our members is invaluable when considering land use changes. The recommendations we offer are thoughtfully submitted.

The year wrapped up with a delightful Christmas party which was attended by almost all our past Chairs. There is a long tradition of stewarding agriculture in PAAC and I'm grateful for the chance to experience it in action.

Respectfully submitted,

Robin Tunnicliffe, Chair
Peninsula & Area Agricultural Commission
March 2023

Much of our time this year was devoted to studying and responding to applications for changes to zoning and for non-farm uses on ALR land.

Food Box | Sea Bluff Farm





Sunset over Michell's Farm

Comments and questions about this report or
the Peninsula and Area Agriculture Commission may be sent to:
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