

**SPECIAL MEETING
PENINSULA & AREA AGRICULTURAL MEETING
HELD BY ZOOM
FRIDAY, MAY 15, 2020, 7:00 PM**

In attendance: Phil Christie, Chair; Linda Geggie; Bev Marley; Larry Sluggett (by phone); Robin Tunnicliffe; Dianne Williamson; Councillor Bob Thompson (C. Saanich) and Councillor Ned Taylor (Saanich, by phone). Doug Pepper, Regional Agrolgist (by phone) and Isobel Hoffmann, recording secretary.

The Chair stated:

- This special meeting was suggested by Linda to get feedback from the farming community on how they are managing through the Covid-19 pandemic, and how the restrictions are affecting farming, food supply chains, and if there is anything we can do to help.

Other issues noted for discussion:

- Saanich Fair (Bob Thompson)
- Agri-Industrial Exclusion Zone (Robin Tunnicliffe)
- South Island Farm Hub (Linda Geggie)

How is farming community managing thru the Pandemic restrictions?

- Significant impacts throughout the region.
- Farms that normally supply restaurants are scrambling to find new markets.
- Temporary Farm Workers just started to arrive and have a 14-day isolation period.
- Noted that farm gate sales have increased, in some places as much as 300%-400%.

- Robin noted her marketing was divided into 3 equal parts: farmers markets, restaurants, and the box programme.
- With Covid, the restaurant has dropped off, but the box programme has sold out, with 300 members compared to a normal range of 100-120 people. The logistics of handling more than double the demand has been difficult.
- The farmers market has been replaced with a larger roadside farm stand, and this has seen a 300%-400% increase in sales, with many new customers. This also takes a lot of attention – dealing with more people, many of whom do not know how to cook certain vegetables that are now in season and they haven't used or even seen before. Logistics are also an issue with the volume of people; we need traffic control and more parking.
- Robin was also operating an on-line store that is used for the Moss Street Market. Customers make on-line selections and the Moss Street Market arranges for pickup.
- It was difficult to determine the percentage of produce to put out on the farm gate tables as you need some for the Moss Street Market as well as the box delivery programme.
- She has not physically been to the Moss Street Market recently, and has since dropped out of the programme, offering it to Saanich Organics instead as they do not have a farm stand.

- Dianne stated her market is also experiencing an increase of around 200% to 300%.
- We were told to reduce our next cycle by 15% production and that we were going to lose our 3.5% premium that is paid by our processor.
- Some issues with the ferries due to the reduction in service. We lost our 7am sailing from Swartz Bay, which meant trucks had to drive to Duke Point to get the 5:15 a.m. sailing so the chickens were not on the truck any longer than they had to be. It is only 15 minutes from the farm to Swartz Bay whereas it is 2+ hours to Duke Point.
- Bev Marley noted that it is advantageous to have a poultry farm on Southern Vancouver Island; it is a shame that we have just one left. She asked Dianne if there is anything PAAC can do to help with the issues she is facing – reduced profits due to commodity restrictions, ferry problems, etc.
- Dianne stated that the Egg Marketing Board diverted the surplus of eggs from the pool to go to local food banks at a cost to the producers (25,000 doz per week). The surplus was because restaurants and coffee shops didn't need the eggs, but what could happen to our egg producers in the future has not been determined.
- Having a local abattoir would not help as it is likely it could only process 5,000 chickens per day. They need to process 25,000. Cowichan Bay has a processing plant that can do 5,000 – 7,000 daily. That plant is used by the other broiler farmer up-Island; she mostly uses the one on the mainland, but uses Cowichan Bay for about 10%.

The Chair noted that although it is wonderful to see the increase in gate sales, it seems there is a burden on the farmers to not only handle the extra customers, but also dealing with Covid protection requirements.

- Doug Pepper stated he is aware of what is going on, and has been reaching out directly on a regular basis to producers to find out what the issues are, and reports back to the Minister.
- The Ministry has held a number of round table discussions with producer groups to see if the government can be of help. Every commodity group has a voice.

Larry Sluggett stated:

- He doesn't start farm sales until July, but Terry Michell told him that their sales are way up as well, even though they have to limit the number of people in the store. Feed back from customers is they feel safer in the smaller store than a supermarket.
- Larry has an excellent crop coming, and has planted 31 acres. He is optimistic, but tentative.
- He noted that many farmers will lose out because of the Saanich Fair cancellation.

Bob Thompson stated:

- There will be a farmers market at the Saanich Fair Grounds this fall. (*see page 4*)
- It will not be the traditional fair, and there will be social distancing.

Temporary Farm Workers:

- They are slowly starting to arrive, but must be quarantined for 14 days (paid for by the government).
- Michells and Longview have some already working, but they are behind due to the later arrival and fewer workers.

- Doug Pepper stated he understands some of the issues were with the country they were coming from. The federal government was trying to accelerate the programme and perhaps expedite permanent resident status for some of the workers.

Metchosin Farmers Market & other Markets:

- Robin noted there have been some issues: the market is managed by a crafter who wanted to close the market because of the logistics involved. The agricultural community offered to operate it, and it was a struggle to keep it open. She suggested if other local markets are struggling to open markets, perhaps PAAC could provide some advocacy.
- Linda stated the Luxton Market didn't want to open; the Goldstream Market is not operating.
- Bob stated the major markets are operating. The Red Barn Market on West Saanich Road has done an excellent job educating customers. The Sidney Street Market is cancelled for this summer.

Agri-Industrial Use Zone:

- Referring to the recent open letter to the Premier and Minister Popham about the creation of such a zone, Robin asked why industrial uses are being considered on ALR lands? There is a lot of land proposed to be excluded.
- Linda noted Max had forwarded 3 letters, which some members may have seen. The Food Security Task Force focuses on agriculture tech solutions for the future and proposed recommendations to create an agri-industrial zone.
- Members of the farming community disagree with the government's proposed implementation of recommendation #4 of the 2020 Farm Security Task Force Report "The Future of BC's Food System".
- Doug Pepper stated this is serious and definitely something that PAAC needs to be aware of, and Phil noted PAAC needs to become better informed so we can take a position on the issue.
- Copies of the letter will be sent to all PAAC members to distill the tension points.

South Island Farm Hub:

- Linda stated the Farm Hub was being explored before Covid as a way for small-scale growers to bring produce into a hub and sell at the markets they were not able to reach because of the scale and consistency of supplies.
- The Hub will provide new marketing channels for their produce.
- When the Pandemic hit, many farms lost business because of restaurant closures. We decided to go ahead with the Hub, and approached over 70 organizations across the region that prepare meals and emergency food hampers. They were all interested in purchasing local food and there is strong support to redirect some of the Rapid Relief Funds to offset the higher cost of the food compared to businesses like Sysco. At the same time, the farm community receives a fair price for their product. 21 farms are involved to date. We are trying to figure out the supply and demand – it is a huge learning curve, including trying to get people to eat seasonally.
- \$250,000 was received from the Rapid Relief Fund; \$100,000 was directed to emergency food organizations (36 groups involved) and \$150,000 to School Districts 61, 62 and 63, because they understand where the needs are with certain families.

- It is hoped to get the programme fully operating by June, and hopefully some of the organizations will continue to buy from the Hub on an on-going basis – particularly the School Districts.
- If anyone hears of farms that are interested, let her know. Larry Sluggett stated an interest in participating.

Saanich Fair:

- Bob Thompson stated there will be a farmers market at the Fair this year – but as previously stated, it will not be the same as other years.
- There will also be a Saanich Fair, but not the traditional one we have seen for over 150 years.
- He has been working on social media programmes for the summer – such as Farm Fresh Fridays.
- For the Fair, he hopes to have some on-site activities over 8 or 9 separate stations with farm animals such as llamas, donkeys etc. to provide education opportunities....a Farm Safari.
- Dianne Williamson has offered to help.
- The major concern is to keep order and regulate the number of people. He is suggesting a maximum of 50 cars (eg. 50 families). He will involve the DFMA, and perhaps the “safari” will only be for a day, rather than the 3 days.
- There will be no music or entertainment, food trucks, or midway rides, but there will be a fair.
- Financial impact on the fairgrounds will be hard, as the Saanich Fair is their biggest money maker. He estimates over a \$200,000 loss this year to the Agricultural Society. In addition to the Fair revenue, none of the facilities have been available to rent.
- PAAC has already passed a motion to help financially with the fair up to \$1,500.
- The on-line presence will be strong; he will keep PAAC advised as plans progress.

Discussion noted that people are concerned about food security, and they are finally putting their money where their mouth is. Logistically the fair will be a huge undertaking. Perhaps the Ministry could provide some assistance. It is important that we all do something to keep the momentum going post-pandemic, and think of the farmers who have been working hard to help us through the pandemic.

Secondary Housing on ALR lands:

- Doug Pepper noted that the ALC will reach out to the municipalities of Saanich, Central Saanich and North Saanich regarding secondary housing on ALR lands.
- They have been talking to Planners about the issues.
- The ALC wants local government to take on some of the responsibility to implement some of the proposed changes with respect to allowing secondary residences on ALR lands.
- Because of Covid, things have been moving at a slower pace, but they are still moving.

SUMMARY

The Chair stated we need to recognize the farming community for their contributions over the past few months. He thanked those who participated in the meeting.

The notes will be circulated to all PAAC members, including council representatives.

The meeting adjourned at 8:20 pm.