

**PENINSULA & AREA AGRICULTURAL COMMISSION MEETING
COMMITTEE ROOM #2 – SAANICH MUNICIPAL HALL
THURSDAY OCTOBER 12, 2023 7:00 PM**

In attendance: Robin Tunnicliffe in the Chair; Linda Geggie; Katie Underwood; Dianne Williamson; Terry Michell (Via ZOOM); Mayor Windsor (C. Saanich), Councillor De Vries (Saanich) and Isobel Hoffmann, Recording Secretary.

Guests: Megan Halstead, Regional Agrologist; Cassidy Daskalchuck, Saanich Planning (Via ZOOM) Noah Brotman, CRD; Michael Doehnel; Shellie MacDonald, Haliburton Farms; Barry McLean and Kathleen Zimmerman.

Regrets: Jenni Michell; Larry Sluggett

Minutes: The Minutes of September 14, 2023 were adopted as circulated.

TREASURER'S REPORT - Jenni Michell – not present

- Isobel reported there has been little change in the balance of the Island Savings Accounts.

SPEAKER'S BUREAU:

- Speakers from the **South Island Food Hub** in Esquimalt were tentatively scheduled but unable to make it; hopefully they will be able to attend the November 16th meeting.
- Linda Geggie provided an update on the Grand Opening of the Hub that took place last week.
 - The Hub was first established in 2020 as a COVID response with funding through the Rapid Relief Fund.
 - It serves charitable organizations and school programmes who can apply for a subsidy to offset costs; this way the farmer doesn't lose money and can get paid fair market price.
 - School programmes are being expanded to include SD #61; 400+ meals were provided to the Sooke School District.
 - Over 90 producers contribute to the hub and it is growing more popular with 70+ organizations participating.
 - The Mustard Seed warehouse, set up in 2017, now have rescued over two million pounds of food worth over \$9 million.
 - Extra space is available in the warehouse to store perishable food and produce that has to be used up quickly.
 - There is a commercial kitchen at the Hub that can be used for processing. It can be rented on an hourly basis.
 - Ty James is working on getting a new abattoir to process poultry.
 - Large volumes of apple juice and apple sauce have been processed.
 - New funding from Investment Agriculture in support of developing the local food industry and infrastructure in the region is being researched.

- There are 9 different food hubs in the region in some form of development, including the Gulf Islands; discussions about expanding to Sooke and Metchosin. A joint application to Investment Agriculture would be beneficial and is being considered.
- Storage, transportation and distribution are all key areas that would need funding.
- A Blast Freezer was discussed and Linda noted this is on the wish list.

Shellie McDonald stated:

- She and Katie attended a meeting for Central Saanich Food Hub Stakeholders.
- They were surprised to note the report was almost a duplication of the report for the Saanich Farm Hub.
- There was discussion about a 4-leg abattoir; apparently pigs are being processed in Metchosin.

Mayor Windsor stated:

- The municipality is looking for feedback. Keating X Road is viewed as a possible location.
- Our land costs are the second highest across the province, behind Vancouver, and there is a shortage of industrial land.

Discussion noted:

- Sea Bluff Farm in Metchosin donated over \$20,000 worth of food last year to the food hub from over-harvested produce and when clearing out beds. They have a dedicated gleaner that comes regularly.
- Some of the vegetables are considered 2nd grade but still good and are often taken to the Mustard Seed. By charging half price for the food the farmer gets a tax receipt.
- Eighty percent of the food used in school lunch programmes is local. The province has announced \$200 million to schools across BC under the “Feed BC” programme.

Investment Agriculture Fund: Arzeena Hamir

Arzeena was unable to attend the meeting this evening. Robin stated:

- In order to help farmers in the region we need to form a stronger link with Investment Agriculture. There is funding available for beneficial management practices.
- A role for PAAC would be to help farmers access this funding. Unfortunately there are not enough trained consultants to guide farmers.
- 1800 farms across the province have received funding this year and it would be good to use this funding in a meaningful way.
- She had a consultant complete an application for her farm, but Investment Agriculture would not speak to the consultant.
- It was noted the current application process is lengthy and tedious and often applications are rejected.
- Perhaps a grant should be explored for the Bear Hill property – part of the Land Access Programme.
- Michell Farms received funding from Investment Agriculture to develop an irrigation plan on the farm, and to provide hard surfaces for the cattle operation. There were a lot of environmental issues to address. It was a 50% matching funds grant.
- Firbank Farms (poultry) has to pay money up front and then get a refund. They have a writer to complete the grant application forms for a percentage of the grant.

Meghan Halstead, Ministry of Agriculture, stated:

- More people are being trained on the Island to help with the grant applications. Mike Doehnel has been working with her on this.

REGIONAL EXTENSION PROGRAM:

- You may have heard that the Ministry is hosting engagement events around the Province on the topic of extension for climate change adaptation for farmers.
- For more information, please visit the [Regional Extension Program webpage](#)
- On the Islands & South Coast, farmers are invited to participate in **Regional Extension Program Workshop**.
Where: **Parksville BC**
When: **9:30am-4:00pm, 15th of November 2023**
How: **Registration will be required (see info below)**

Please contact agricultureextensionprogram@gov.bc.ca or phone AgriServiceBC at 1-888-221-7141 for details.

- There will also be an online survey, and a virtual Zoom event option following this in-person session.

CORRESPONDENCE:

- a) Response sent to Saanich Planning re Application for Farm Worker Accommodation on property at 3983 Holland Avenue, recommending the application not be approved as there is no demonstrated business case to indicate the land will be used for food production.

AGRICULTURAL ISSUES: CURRENT – Nothing to report

a) Water update – Mike Doehnel

- A speaker at a recent meeting of the Waste Water Commission noted that raw bio-solids are still being shipped to the mainland.
- The Saanich Peninsula Waste Water Commission is planning a pilot project on how nitrogen and phosphorus benefit agriculture.
- A company is planning a large treatment plant for both human and dairy solids about 3 times larger than the Saanich Peninsula plant. From the effluent going to the Saanich Peninsula treatment plant, 600 tons of nitrogen goes into the garbage

Councillor De Vries stated:

- there will be an engagement process for a long-term management plan for Bio-solids at the CRD level, and farmers will have an opportunity to provide input.
- The bio-solids could be used in forestry or larger farms. It will be a long-term solution looking at thermal processing.
- If there is a change in current policy, it will be because the consultant advises there is an interest in land application for the product.

- The CRD has been talking about this for many years and it has not been proven safe to use. One of the concerns is accumulation of metals and pharmaceuticals. We have to have a backup plan.

b) South Island Farmers' Institute – Katie Underwood

- On September 24, 2023, a seed processing workshop was held in Metchosin at Sea Bluff Farm attended by about 15 to 20 people throughout the day.
- A potluck lunch was served and positive feedback received on the workshop.
- Another workshop was held in Central Saanich the next day; one is planned at Haliburton Farms in Saanich on October 19th – 22nd, as well as more up Island.
- Funding was provided by the Knowledge and Technology Transfer Programme (KTTP).
- A couple of other programmes are ready to go as well: The Farmer to Farmer workshop, four full days in February of networking, workshops, speakers and farm visits.
- They are looking for funding; PAAC has supported the event in the past. It was suggested the Farmers' Institute submit a request for funding. VanCity provided \$2,000.
- The Institute also received funding to hold monthly meetings, providing more opportunity for networking with other members.
- The first of six meetings is proposed for November 1st at the Fairgrounds. One of the topics to discuss at this meeting is the the Food Hub and community resources.
- Shellie noted that they haven't invited any of the speakers yet, but they are hoping to get positive responses from Mike Doehnel (Water), Jody Watson, CRD (Geese), someone from the Farm Fresh programme, Bob Maxwell (DFMA), and someone from the BC Assessment Authority.
- They hope to also talk about regional concerns, farm sustainability, challenges and successes.
- 4-H members can join the institute free of charge.
- Discussion ensued about the Right to Farm Act and the Annual Welfare Act; the point being that not everyone (including local police on occasion) are aware of these regulations and guidelines. Farming can be so difficult these days and we need some advocacy.

d) CRD GOOSE MANAGEMENT PROGRAMME – No update available from CRD

Robin mentioned that she has snow geese her farm in Metchosin.

e) CRD LAND ACCESS PROGRAMME – Noah Broatman

- three applicants have applied for the Land Access Programme for the Bear Hill property. No decisions have been made yet.
- He is hopeful that the CRD will establish this programme as a Service shortly.
- An agrologist did some soil sampling and a hydro-logical study. The report should be available within the next month.
- Hoping similar studies will be done at Haliburton and Sandown .

f) Education – Linda Geggie

- CRD has provided funding for another post solution projects??
- There is a small provincial grants programme for farms, possibly for hedgerows and pollinators.
- Applications have been submitted and she is waiting to hear.

OTHER BUSINESS

- a) **Vancouver Island Agriculture Adaptation Group – Bob Maxwell** – not present
- b) **Vancouver Island AgriService Newsletter – Meghan Halstead**
 - Link to sign up: https://agriservicebc.campayn.com/contact_list_form/signup/110236

UPCOMING EVENTS/WEBINARS

- Webinar: November 15, 2023 - Regional Extension Committee – the Islands and Sunshine Coast region. Megan will send information to PAAC
- Events will also be held on October 25 in Duncan and October 24 in Courtenay via ZOOM
- Water Management Workshop in Courtenay on October 27, 2023
- Event are taking place at Sandown in November – Shelly has details.
- Island Ag Show: Megan stated she is considering whether to get a bus and have a group to to the event.
- Some watershed workshops about droughts are being planned. \$200,000 budget available.

NEXT MEETING: The next PAAC meeting is scheduled for Thursday, November 16, 2023 at 7:00 pm at the Saanich Municipal Hall, Committee Room No. 2
NOTE THE DATE CHANGE

ADJOURNMENT: The meeting adjourned at 8:45 pm

Isobel Hoffmann, Recording Secretary