

The background of the entire page is a close-up photograph of several clusters of small, densely packed purple flowers. These flowers are surrounded by green leaves that have a slightly serrated or ruffled edge. The lighting is soft, highlighting the texture of the petals and the veins on the leaves.

**PENINSULA & AREA  
AGRICULTURE COMMISSION**

**2024 ANNUAL REPORT:  
A YEAR OF ENGAGEMENT**

**April 2025**

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Overview .....	3
Chair's Remarks .....	4
Education Report.....	6
Speaker Series .....	6
Association of Vancouver Island Coastal Communities Farm Tour .....	7
Illegal Fill Dumping Workshop.....	8
Farmer2Farmer Gathering & Field Days .....	9
South Island Farmers Institute Report .....	10
Sustainer Series .....	10
Innovation Series .....	11
Topical Discussions both Enduring and Emergent: .....	13
CRD Foodlands Access Program.....	13
Biosolids.....	13
Canada Geese .....	14
Increased Housing Density on the Agricultural Land Reserve.....	15
Lifetime Capital Gains Exemption for Farmers .....	16
Compost With An Elevated Level of Boron .....	17
Water Report.....	19
Financial Report .....	21

## Acronyms:

ALR	Agricultural Land Reserve
ALC	Agricultural Land Commission
AVICC	Association of Vancouver Island Coastal Communities
CRA	Canada Revenue Agency
CRD	Capital Regional District
OMRR	Organic Matter Recycling Regulation
PAAC	Peninsula and Area Agriculture Commission
RWSC	Regional Water Supply Commission
SIFI	South Island Farmers Institute
SPEC-BC	Society Promoting Environmental Conservation
SPWC	Saanich Peninsula Water Commission
WAC	Water Advisory Committee



# Overview

The Peninsula and Area Agriculture Commission (PAAC) formed in 1997 as a response to a strategic planning exercise in Saanich. The disconnect between government and the agriculture community was noted and it was decided to appoint a commission, made up primarily of farmers, to advise and advocate for the farming perspective on the peninsula. We've since grown to include North Saanich, Central Saanich, Saanich and Metchosin. Our focus is protecting the land base, advocating for farmers and providing public education on agriculture issues.

We meet monthly on the second Thursday at 7 p.m., at the Central Saanich firehall on Keating Cross Road at West Saanich. Our members are chosen from different agriculture sectors and food policy circles. Together, we represent a spectrum of expertise, spanning many decades. We invite others to sit in on our meetings, to send us their questions on agriculture related issues, and to solicit our feedback on anything pertaining to farming that crosses their desk. We are here for service. We are dedicated to supporting our agriculture sector.



# Chair's Remarks

2024 was a year of engagement for PAAC.

We started the year on a high note, with the **Farmer2Farmer** gathering in February at the Saanich Fairgrounds organized by the South Island Farmers Institute (SIFI). The workshops started with presentations from local government about their work to support agriculture including District of Central Saanich Director of Planning and Building Services, Jarret Matanowitsch; Metchosin Council Member Shelly Donaldson; North Saanich Planner John Lunny; Saanich Agriculture and Food Security Planner Cassidy Daskalchuk; and District of Saanich Manager of Economic Development Mitchell Edgar. These in-person workshops bolstered the nearly 100 farmers who, along with their entourage, were present at this noteworthy and valuable event.

PAAC are proud sponsors of the SIFI, and we commend their work to bring the farming community together for education and networking. We are committed to backing this dynamic organization at every opportunity.

PAAC's next event was a **Tour of Farms** in Metchosin for the Association of Vancouver Island Coastal Communities (AVICC). This tour included: Sea Bluff Farm, a Certified Organic vegetable farm that focuses on 12 months of production and; Stillmeadow Farm, a medium scale pig farm that also grows its own grains and runs its own abbatoir. As part of this tour, we prepared a 100% Metchosin-grown lunch for the 30 participants and, while they enjoyed this beautiful and local meal, we regaled them with tales of abundant agricultural potential in our region.





Our main event was a November workshop on **Illegal Fill Dumping** in the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR). We brought in speakers from the Mainland: ALC Burnaby Soil Resource Supervisor Jenny Huynh; ALC Burnaby Director of Operations Avtar Sundher; Island ALC Officer Mike Jorgenseon, and; City of Richmond Soil Bylaw Officer Mike Morin. We filled the main hall at the Saanich Fairgrounds with a diverse audience: bylaw officers from all over the Capital Region District (CRD), municipal councillors, planners, environmental groups, students and farmers. It was a full day of learning about this very destructive practice which unfortunately is commonplace in all of our municipalities. Everyone feasted on the lunch we made from local ingredients, during which time we walked around and helped to build-up networks across the region.

At our **regular meetings** we tackled some big issues, leaning heavily on our municipal partners for advice and support. As usual, agriculture issues are multi-pronged, and we

rarely get a full conclusion. Yet, PAAC's strengths include our tenacity, our long view of issues and our depth of knowledge and understanding. Below is a summary of the main topics we discussed in 2024.



What an incredible year!  
It's been an honour to work  
alongside PAAC Members.  
For all they gave, worked toward,  
created and participated with,  
many thanks.  
~ Robin

In closing we are excited about embarking on this next phase of PAAC. In December, we bid a fond adieu to our long-term secretary and Saanich employee, Isobel Hoffman. With her departure, it was fitting that we shift the role of hosting our commission to another municipality. North Saanich has taken up the mantle, and we're very grateful for their support. We're also thankful to Central Saanich for agreeing to host us at the firehall, a convenient location for most members.

- Robin Tunnicliffe,  
PAAC Chair

# Education Report

As part of its ongoing mandate, PAAC continues to promote education and knowledge-sharing among its members and with the broader farming community. This year PAAC facilitated a range of learning opportunities focused on key agricultural challenges including land management, environmental concerns, and industry best practices.

## ***Speaker Series at Regular Meetings:***

PAAC hosted several guest speakers during regular meetings to provide insights on critical topics affecting local agriculture, including:

- **Biosolids Management** – Experts shed on the benefits and risks of biosolid applications in agriculture, addressing regulatory frameworks and upcoming policy decision being made by the CRD;
- **Geese Management** – Presentations covered the impact of overpopulation on farmland, strategies for mitigation, and the latest work of the CRD on population control;
- **Taxation Policy** – PAAC held discussions on the implications of Inheritance Tax on farmland to better understand implications for the Farmers, a Farmer's legacy and the farm community as a whole.





### ***AVICC Farm Tour and Luncheon:***

On April 13, PAAC sponsored a farm tour event for the AVICC conference. We hosted 45 delegates from across Vancouver Island and brought them to Metchosin. Our first destination was Stillmeadow Farm, a medium size pork, lamb and grain producer.



Delegates were able to get up close with adorable piglets while learning about the challenges of running an abattoir as well as having fields decimated by Canada goose pressure.

Sea Bluff Farm was the final destination of the day, a ten-acre mixed Certified Organic vegetable operation that focuses on winter production. There, delegates had a 100% Metchosin-grown meal and had the chance to mingle with farmers.



### ***Illegal Fill Dumping Workshop:***

On November 13, 2024, PAAC organized a workshop on illegal fill dumping, a growing concern affecting farmland in the CRD. The event was held at the Saanich Fairgrounds and attended by representatives from local and regional governments, farmers, bylaw officers, the ALC and community groups.

*ALR means:  
Land  
Reserved for  
Agriculture*

#### **Workshop Highlights:**

- Explored the negative impacts of illegal dumping including soil contamination, drainage issues, and invasive species introduction.
- Clarified roles between municipalities, the ALC and enforcement bodies in tackling illegal fill disposal.
- Presented best practices from other jurisdictions, including bylaw enforcement strategies from the City of Richmond.
- Facilitated roundtable discussions on strengthening regulations, improving compliance monitoring, and increasing public awareness.

*Under those packed, cubic meters of  
illegally dumped fill, is farmland*



The workshop provided attendees with actionable strategies to prevent, identify, and report illegal dumping while fostering collaboration between key stakeholders.



### ***Farmer2Farmer Gathering & Field Days:***

PAAC played a supporting role in the annual Farmer2Farmer Gathering, organized by SIFI.

This event featured:

- Field Days: On-farm learning sessions where local producers shared both best practices for, and innovative approaches to, sustainable farming.
- Conference Sessions: Panels and workshops covering topics such as soil health, farm advocacy, climate adaptation and farm business resilience.

Through its speaker series, targeted workshops, and support for regional farmer gatherings, PAAC reinforced its commitment to fostering a well-informed and connected farming community.



# South Island Farmers Institute Report

2024 was another great year for the newly formed South Island Farmers Institute (SIFI).

The winter held a great deal of Farmer education in our region due to the relaunch of the first Farmer2Farmer conference since 2019. This event welcomed about 75 producers, workshop facilitators and exhibitors to the Saanich Fairgrounds. Complementing the conference day, Farmer2Farmer Week included four field half-days across Southern Vancouver Island. Bob Maxwell was awarded SIFI's Annual Certificate of Appreciation, honouring him not only for sparking the idea of a "Farmer Winter School", but also for helping to build the next generation of Farmers by educating us all about soils and how to care for them. Thank you for a lifetime of contribution, Max!



## ***Sustainer Series***

These monthly meetings welcome Producers who have been feeding the South Island community for decades and, sometimes, for generations. The intention

*Bridging the gap  
between long-standing  
and younger producers*

behind these monthly meetings is to bridge the gap between long-standing food producers and those who wish to connect with them. Typically, those wishing to connect are younger farmers and community members. 2024 welcomed Lorea Tomsin, Michael Hughes, Terry Michell, Dan Ponchet, Dan Ireland and John Buchanan, respectively. This series also welcomes discussion of a topic



of regional concern. Issues that were on Farmers' minds this year included biosolids, grants, farm taxation and, of course, Canada geese.

In collaboration with Haliburton Farm, SIFI hosted a Winter Business series, crunching numbers and supporting economic success through local mentors. This was a combination of in-person and online evening workshops discussing topics such as insurance, taxes and costs of production.

### ***Innovation Series***

Summer brought on the Innovation Series, which covered visits to the Centre for Plant Health, Applied Bio-Nomics and deep dives into mechanical cultivation at Madrona Farm and Square Root Farm. As always, what was a planned two-hour workshop extended to four and a half hours due to highly engaged participants and good-hearted facilitators.



In collaboration with the Society Promoting Environmental Conservation (SPEC-BC), SIFI once again hosted a cover crop program, distributing seed to 18 of our smallest members.

SIFI hosted an "All Candidates Conversation on Agriculture", inviting every candidate running in the provincial election to come together to discuss their visions for the future of BC Agriculture.

By the year's end, 71 Farm and Farmer Members as well as 28 non-voting Friends of Farmers actively shaped SIFI's mandate.

In total, SIFI has run 25 events in the past 18 months. This brought the voice of SIFI members to various forums including those of Provincial, Regional and Municipal governments.

*25 events hosted in the past 18 months*

In addition to strongly representing South Island producers at a District level, SIFI continues to operate as part of the Farmers and Womens Institute Act, under the umbrella of the Ministry of Agriculture and Food. As this legislation was established over a century ago, SIFI continues to navigate an outdated system.

SIFI appreciates PAAC for its continued support in fulfilling our farmer-led mandate and advancing mutual strategic objectives.





## Enduring and emergent topics discussed at length:

### ***CRD Foodlands Access Program***

PAAC has been part of the planning discussions about the CRD Foodlands Access Program since its inception. There are diverging opinions in the group about the execution of this program. However, over the years we have heard from young farmers who have tried and failed at farming because of lack of access to land. The cost of startup is prohibitive and the on-going challenges facing farmers from cost of living, to access to labour and market uncertainties, are making farming out of reach for folks in our region.



This is happening at a time when there is escalating food prices, climate pressures and pressures on the global land base. If we want the tradition of farming to continue in the CRD, we must pay for it. This model has been developed over many years, with lots of input from working examples across our region and our bioregion. If we truly want a future that includes agriculture in our region, access to land must be facilitated by local government.

### ***Bio-Solids: PAAC stands against applying biosolids on farmland***

In February we had a presentation on the land applications of biosolids. This issue has arisen for discussion many times over the past 20 years.

We have learned that while the CRD is producing 10 tonnes of biosolids daily, it cannot be applied directly to land. This is due to the fact that the treatment process results in the presence of up to 1200 chemicals that would negatively impact soil health. The only option is to thermally treat it so that these approximate 1200 chemicals can be denatured and rendered safer. While this is not a popular position, our mandate states that we must protect our land. We believe that these biosolids are not safe when directly applied.



Up to 1200 harmful chemicals  
in the 10 tonnes of biosolids  
produced daily in the CRD

Following further research by PACC, directors at the CRD addressed this issue with us in March. There is an option to incinerate the biosolids and turn them into a type of biochar. This option was more appealing to PAAC members but we need more information about what chemical compounds can withstand the incineration. Discussion on biosolids continues.

### **Canada Geese**

For years geese have been toxifying irrigation systems, volume of land in grain crops is being reduced and quality pasture for animals is in decline.



PAAC forced the discussion on the need for a cull of the Canada goose population beginning in 2025. As PAAC has been asking for major action on this front since 1997, we were encouraged to begin the 2024 year with a Regional goose control coordinator in place. As that coordinator, Samantha Hammond attended a few of our meetings and provided us with reports of the Region's activities.

Samantha, along with the Supervisor of Environmental Stewardship and Initiatives Jody



Watson, spent a fall day in Metchosin with Tom Henry, a livestock and grain farmer. The drive with Tom provided Samantha and Jody with a first-hand account of how incredibly debilitating and destabilizing the impact of geese has been on farmers.

Samatha has been instrumental in getting a Regional stakeholder's group together, comprised of Parks and Recreation, Department of National Defence, and First Nations. PAAC had a representative attend all meetings, which brought the voice for agriculture to the table.

Five years ago PAAC took the position that there had been ample research done to take informed action. Since then even more resources have been allocated to surveys and counts that we have been assured are necessary to attract federal attention. This year, an activity taken on by the group is to help to populate a digital App designed to track goose movements on the South Island. We remain hopeful for some solid action in 2025.

PAAC members have noted some positive results (attrition) from egg addling, yet as the ample research shows, we need a cull to bring the numbers down to a manageable level, before addling can be an effective management tool. PAAC Chair Robin Tunnicliffe presented PAAC's position to the CRD Environmental Services Committee in November.

### ***Proposal for Increased Housing Density on the ALR:***

In 2024, municipalities were presented with the opportunity to allow increased housing options on their farmland. PAAC followed this issue closely, and actively advised both Saanich and Central Saanich whenever they reached out for comment.

PAAC's position on this issue is to minimize the residential footprint on farmland. This land is already under too much pressure. We believe firmly that



the highest and best use of this land is for growing food for our region.

We were pleased with Saanich's practical policy solution for preserving farmland. We highlight and recommend their model for other municipalities who are serious about food security.

### ***Lifetime Capital Gains Exemption for Farmers***

This was a stubborn issue that took some sleuthing to fully understand.

The Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) is using this new policy instrument to help incentivize farm succession planning. Farm succession is one of the biggest issues of our time. Figuring out how to keep land in/for agriculture is no small task, especially given the price of farmland in this region.



*Farm Succession Plans  
may benefit the  
next generation of Farmers –  
if “formalized”*

Farmers are eligible for a million dollars of tax exemption, if they actively farm the land themselves until it is transferred to the next generation. If the land is let out to lease, the farmer loses this exemption. Land for lease is a valuable commodity in our area and is desperately needed by farmers looking to start up or expand their operations. It is a shame that the CRA's policy instrument works to

disincentivize landowners to share their land.

We had Chris Graham, who is both a Central Saanich councillor and an accountant, come to our meeting to help us understand the implications of this policy. We concluded that while it is punitive to some and can lead to



land not being used to its potential, it does also create an incentive for farmers to formalize their succession plans so that the next generation of farmers can benefit from this tax break.

### ***Compost With An Elevated Level of Boron***

Several farmers on the peninsula purchased compost from a local supplier in 2023/24 that contained an elevated level of Boron. This had devastating and possibly lasting effect on the operations of these farms. Where one of the farmers spread the compost, a whole section of her farm became unproductive. Where another farmer used the compost in her seedling mix, she lost 80% of her seedlings which would have produced 10 acres of commercial squash.



PAAC took this very seriously. Many of our small farmers are purchasing commercial compost with the intention of following best practices of land stewardship. If they are unaware of the potential for contamination in compost, they may attribute crop failure to other causes and become discouraged. We were unable to determine the scope the problem.

The Ministry of Agriculture was approached and provided testing support which determined that there was a toxic level of Boron in the sample.

*Puzzle:  
Local soils are  
Boron deficient.  
How is it possible  
for local compost  
to contain toxic levels  
of Boron?*

A nutrient analysis supplied by the compost manufacturer also showed the presence of Boron at a toxic level. PAAC members found this very disturbing, as our local soils are, in fact, Boron deficient. It is a puzzle how local compost could contain such high levels. One suggestion is that drywall, which is very high in Boron and also very expensive to dispose of, may have been added to the production of this compost. No conclusion was reached, and no purveyors of

this compost would comment on how this Boron level came to be.

Much research and many months of interviews revealed very little information:

- The Ministry of Agriculture doesn't have a standard for what constitutes safe compost, although they do say that soil containing 2ppm of Boron is toxic to plant life.
- The Ministry of the Environment follows up on the standard set out in the Organic Matter Recycling Regulation (OMRR) that covers safe compost. There are no plans to introduce a standard for Boron in compost as it had not previously been reported as a problem. Currently a review of OMRR standards is being undertaken, and PAAC will actively participate in order to protect CRD soils.
- To make things more confusing, there are different classes of soil amendments including "soil conditioners" which are not held to any standard.

*Certified organic compost  
should be safe –  
but is not.*

The only course of action that PAAC can take is to promote best practices on farms. This includes making compost on site and educating farmers about the effects of Boron. While we couldn't make any progress on this issue, we were able to raise it. We contacted our local compost purveyors to let them know that PAAC will be continuing to monitor the situation.





In 2024, PAAC played a critical role in advocating for farmers, protecting agricultural land, and addressing pressing regional challenges. While significant progress was made in fostering dialogue and influencing policy, ongoing issues — such as farmland access, environmental threats, and regulatory barriers — require continued attention. Moving

forward, PAAC remains committed to persistent advocacy, strengthening farmer support networks, and working with municipal and regional partners to ensure a resilient and thriving agricultural sector on the Peninsula and in Metchosin.

- Ongoing issues:*
- *farmland access;*
  - *environmental threats; and*
  - *regulatory barriers.*

## Water Report

PAAC has a representative on the Water Advisory Committee (WAC) to help keep farmers abreast of changes and to provide a farming perspective at the table.

There is a downloadable report available in PDF format that outlines the intent of the CRD to bring the Saanich Peninsula Water Commission (SPWC) into the greater fold of CRD Integrated Water Services (IWS), rather than continue to be a standalone commission with specific agricultural representation.



This presentation has been given to both the SPWC and the Regional Water Supply Commission (RWSC) for purposes of information. It is yet unclear as to whether this will be voted on by the SPWC itself, or by the RWSC, followed by the greater CRD board.

The issues at hand are: integration of services; fewer layers of duplication, and; a realignment of the wholesale water rates between the two jurisdictions. PAAC is curious if, in the process, a weakening of farm / agricultural representation may occur.

The WAC has representation from various interest groups including a member from the SPWC. A working report was presented by WAC to the RWSC in reference to the IWS rationale to increase water pricing for the farming community. The “Agricultural Water Rate Study – Overview” is on page 60 at this link:

<https://www.crd.ca/media/file/wac2024-02-27agendapkg>

At a RWSC meeting it was agreed that another study would not be done, and water rates would remain the same for the upcoming year 2025. As always, this rate would continue to be reevaluated on an annual basis.

In order to streamline its reporting to both the IWS and the RWSC, the WAC terms of reference have been subject to a review. Reporting from the WAC to the IWS and the RWSC is required to fall more in line with IWS initiatives, without steering too far from that mandate.



Otherwise, it was a more moderate year for farm irrigation from all sources, as late spring temperatures and early fall rains contributed to overall lower usage. Agricultural water usage reports are normally finalized in the following year, so 2024 data should be available in 2025.



# Financial Report

PAAC continues to benefit from the financial support of our member municipalities: Saanich, Central Saanich, North Saanich and Metchosin.

We accomplish a lot with little funds. This year we were successful in getting a Knowledge Transfer Grant from the Ministry of Agriculture to help cover the costs of our dumping workshop. In everything we do, PAAC members and our community generously donate many hours of time. This report was designed by two volunteers who

worked with the raw materials beautifully. The farmers donate the food for the event meals, and this year Isobel Hoffman volunteered her time and skills to cater lunch for 100 hungry participants at the Illegal Fill Dumping Event.



Here is a breakdown of the administrative costs for running PAAC over the past few years:

Municipality	2022	2023	2024
District of Saanich - 41%	\$3,388.76	\$4,666.19	5,098.69
District of Central Saanich – 31%	\$2,562.24	\$3,528.09	3,885.10
District of North Saanich – 17%	\$1,405.10	\$1,934.76	2,114.09
District of Metchosin – 11%	\$909.18	\$1,251.90	1,367.94
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$8,265.28</b>	<b>\$11,380.94</b>	<b>12,435.82</b>

*PAAC remains committed to ensuring a resilient and thriving agricultural sector on the Peninsula and in Metchosin.*