

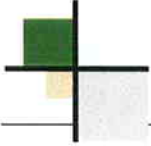
Strategic Agricultural Plan



District of
North Cowichan

May, 2001

**NORTH COWICHAN
STRATEGIC AGRICULTURAL PLAN
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representing the local farming community,
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to the preparation of this Plan**

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OVERVIEW/EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Farming has been a mainstay of the community and economy in North Cowichan from its settlement in the 1850's. Agriculture continues to make a vital contribution to the employment and economic base, with direct employment (1996) of over 400 directly and generating annual farms sales of approximately \$13 Million. Of the Municipality's 20,400 hectares, over 6,250 hectares are in the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR) and 4,793 ha. are farmed.



However, farmers have encountered growing threats to their economic and social stability characterized by a declining land base, development pressures, burdensome regulations, environmental constraints and competitive disadvantages with their Mainland counterparts.

Recognizing that the survival of agriculture depends on developing a more competitive base, and stronger consumer support, farmers in North Cowichan, through the Cowichan Agricultural Society (CAS), in 1998, assisted in launching an initiative to establish the Island Farmers Alliance (IFA), to protect and advance their interests. The plan was prepared through a series of public workshops. Interested parties from throughout the Valley participated in setting the goals and action steps under the guidance of the Steering Committee consultants.

With the launching of the District of North Cowichan's Official Community Plan review, the Municipality decided to include, as a priority, the development of a Strategic Agricultural Plan, recognizing not only the importance of agriculture to the economy but also the vital role of the farming community in its social structure.

The Strategic Agricultural Plan identifies issues that threaten or present obstacles to the future stability of the agricultural industry in the Municipality and the region and opportunities that can help strengthen the agricultural community and economy. It proposes goals, objectives and actions to address these issues and opportunities, and provides direction and co-ordination for actions of the District of North Cowichan, the Agricultural Society and producer and other groups that have activities related to agriculture. The Strategy promotes an entrepreneurial spirit for agriculture, and development of the small farm sector based on local marketing. It has a Vision Statement, 6 main Goals and approximately 60 proposed action steps to achieve them.

The Vision:

The agricultural sector in the Cowichan Valley will be healthy economically, socially and environmentally. It will consist of a medium scale farm component that markets through traditional commodity systems, and a small-scale farm component that markets both basic production and value added products to local and regional markets. The industry will be noted for its diversity and its support for, and from the community.



GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

To Improve the Planning Framework for Agriculture

Good land is essential as a basis for production. For agriculture to be successful in the region, it will be necessary to continue to protect the agricultural land base from subdivision and non-farm development, provide more opportunities for small farms and increase agricultural input on planning decisions.

To Support and Enhance Small Farm Sector

The small farm sector has been largely ignored by most of the programs and agencies that support agriculture. Training, education, research, identification of market opportunities and of local farm and business development opportunities are all needed for the small farm sector to grow. Also, more opportunities to generate income from non-farm activities in the form of home businesses will be needed.

To Expand the Marketing Opportunities

Revitalizing farm sector will mean enhancing regional and provincial marketing opportunities for medium/large scale farms, and enhancing local marketing opportunities for small farms. To support small farms, value added processing of agricultural products, and diversification of economic opportunities through agri-tourism will also be necessary. There may also be opportunities to expand green house production using waste heat from the pulp mill at Crofton, or by using other waste as an energy source.

To Improve Communications With the Community

For the other goals to be achieved, the community and local governments and organizations must support the agricultural industry. This will mean increasing political and public awareness of the local agricultural industry and the issues it faces. This can be accomplished through a strong Education in the Classroom Program with School District 79, farm tours and events, and informing rural landowners about farming operations.

To Improve Land and Water Stewardship, Conservation and Management

In addition to good land base, agriculture needs access to water for irrigation. The Strategy proposes to improve access to water and water management. Water is a limited resource and must be used wisely. That means improving information related to soil and water management and farm management skills and practices related to water use and water quality.

To Reduce Costs and Regulatory Barriers

Like any other small business, agriculture is subject to many regulations and requirements that add to the cost of business. Some of these are necessary and appropriate. Others may be unnecessary burdens on the industry. The goal is to reduce or remove burdens.