



More responsibilities for local government with no consultation or support?

The Core Review promises changes to the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR) and the Agricultural Land Commission (ALC)

The Fraser Institute says dismantle it. The Premier seems to think it isn't working for BC. The Minister of Agriculture has been directed to examine it closely and "propose any changes necessary," and the Minister Responsible for the Core Review has announced that changes to the ALR and ALC are a top priority for the current provincial government.ⁱ

Change is coming for the ALR and the ALC.

This represents a major shift in policy at the Ministry of Agriculture and in the provincial government more generally. The 2013-14 Ministry of Agriculture Service Plan identifies work under way at the ALC to make the Commission more effective and to better define ALR boundaries. According to a recent report from the ALC Chair, this work, which was endorsed by the Province and supported by a 3-year budget increase, is progressing well.ⁱⁱ

Nonetheless, in August, the Minister Responsible for Core Review, Honourable Bill Bennett, expressed generalized frustration with the ALR on behalf of landowners who want to develop lands for non-agricultural purposes. He also identified adjustments to the ALR as an early Core Review target. The Core Review's terms of reference, published on 24 September, indicated that public input could be provided to the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services in its September-October hearings around BC. Unfortunately, the invitation was published after the hearings had started.

Providing for input to the Core Review without proper notice and prior to tabling any proposals from the process does not serve British Columbians well. The Committee accepted comments until 16 October. No further opportunities for local government or public input to the Core Review have been identified.

Have you been consulted about the changes requested of the Minister of Agriculture and proposed by the Core Review?

What happens to the ALR and the ALC directly affects you and your constituents. The ALR is a major provincial zone, tied to your government's interpretation of agricultural zoning and its related bylaws and land use plans. Any changes to the ALC's authorities and powers imply changes for local governments' authorities and powers, affecting your ability to plan for your region. Not just what the Province intends to do, but how it intends to do it – and who it expects to fund the changes – are central questions for your Council and Regional District.

The ALR is important for British Columbia.

The ALR is intended to preserve agricultural land, encourage farming and assist local governments and First Nations in planning for agriculture in their regions. The principle on which the ALR rests is that a productive, secure agricultural land base is vital to BC's ability to maintain agriculture as a viable industry and to secure our food supply. The ALR provides a means for protecting that capability and ensuring BC's agricultural businesses and farm families are supported over the long term.

If the ALR did not already exist, now would be the time to invent it. Economic, environmental and social instability and pressures on the province's farmland are many times greater now than they were when the ALR was created.ⁱⁱⁱ

Ronald Wright, author of *A Short History of Progress* (2004), summarized the key message of his book regarding the collapse of civilizations as: "Don't build on your agricultural land. Don't build on your agricultural land. Don't build on your agricultural land."

For further information: www.fooddemocracy.org

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BC has 40 years of ALR study and experience to discuss.

There are strong arguments for the benefits of the ALR. Economic studies suggest that the ALR has been successful in containing urban sprawl and mitigating rising farmland values, helping to ensure that land remains available and affordable for BC's farm families and farming businesses. Research has also shown that agriculture contributes strongly to regional economies, and that converting agricultural lands to other uses often costs more in services than it produces in municipal tax revenues.^{iv}

According to SmartGrowth BC, "the ALR has been successful in mitigating [the] constant threat of incremental urban encroachment onto agricultural land by maintaining decision making at the provincial rather than the local level ... this is in direct contrast to virtually all other jurisdictions in North America where decisions on agricultural land use have been made at the local level and thus have been much more susceptible to development pressure."^v

After forty years' shared experience of farmland protection in BC, local governments deserve to be given the opportunity to discuss any proposed changes to the ALR with the Province and the ALC. There can be productive examination of long-standing issues, such as non-farm use and farm succession, without compromising the integrity of the provincial system and the ALC's current reform efforts.

Act TODAY to make your concerns known.

1. Contact your MLA, the Premier, and Ministers Bill Bennett and Pat Pimm to ask for an opportunity to discuss changes to the ALR and ALC beyond those already approved by government as outlined in the ALC Chair's report. Copy the rest of Cabinet and the UBCM on your letters or emails.
2. Discuss this matter with your Council or Regional District and pass a resolution expressing your views. As for item 1 above, copy the UBCM, the Premier and the Ministers on your resolution.

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What other local governments are saying:

City of Vancouver, 22 October resolution

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT:

- Council reaffirms its support for the preservation of farmland in the Province's Agricultural Land Reserve
- Council work with Metro Vancouver and other municipalities to advocate for the Province of British Columbia to identify further opportunities to enhance the viability of farming in the Province.
- Council advocate that, if another review of the ALR and ALC is deemed important by the provincial government, a substantially longer period for input be afforded to the public.

The full text of the resolution is at

<http://former.vancouver.ca/cyclerk/cclerk/20131022/documents/motionb1.pdf>

Sunshine Coast Regional District, 10 October minutes

INFORM THE BC GOVERNMENT THAT:

- The SCRD wishes to be a part of the targeted consultation during the Mandate Review process
- The protection of farmland is a fundamental element of a sustainable future in British Columbia and a reduction of the effectiveness of the ALR is not an effective means of saving money for the provincial government
- The foundation of any economy is the ability to produce food
- Speculation in agricultural land for future development is driving up the cost of agricultural land, threatening farming businesses in B.C. and B.C.'s food sovereignty. Preservation of farmland by removal of speculation and reinforcing the ALC and preservation of the ALR for food production is an important contribution to the B.C. economy

The full text of the resolution is at

<http://www.scrd.ca/files/File/Administration/Minutes/2013/2013-OCT-10%20BRD%20Minutes.pdf>

ⁱ Core Review terms of reference:

http://www2.news.gov.bc.ca/news_releases_2013-2017/2013MEM0014-001465.htm

ⁱⁱ ALC Chair's report: <https://www.google.ca/#q=agricultural+land+commission>

ⁱⁱⁱ BCFSN submission to Finance and Government Services Committee: <http://fooddemocracy.org/what-we-do/protecting-the-agriculture-land-reserve/>

^{iv} Cost of community services studies, American Farmland Trust www.farmland.org

^v SmartGrowth BC, Position on the ALR:

<http://www.smartgrowth.bc.ca/Portals/0/Downloads/SGBCALRposition.PDF>