

July 24, 2013

## **REGIONAL AGRICULTURAL PLAN FINAL TERMS OF REFERENCE**

### ***Scope and Approach:***

The majority of AAPs are either municipal or sub-regional in scope. The Regional District of Nanaimo, Cowichan Valley Regional District and the Regional District of Central Kootenay developed comprehensive, regional AAPs through partnerships with their member municipalities.

A region wide approach to planning for agriculture enables a collaborative effort that can maximize the capabilities across the North Okanagan. It also supports planning that recognizes the distinct nature of each community while ensuring a consistent policy approach to agriculture.

### ***Goals & Objectives:***

The goal is to ensure the long term viability, prosperity and resilience of agriculture in the North Okanagan. This will be accomplished through creation of a plan containing actions and innovative approaches that support and maintain a strong and sustainable agricultural industry within our diverse communities.

The planning process will review and draw upon previous work, including current bylaws, policies and plans developed over the years by our municipal partners and in consultation with senior agencies and the farming community, including the RGS. An integral component will include examining other British Columbia local government approaches to improve agricultural viability and prosperity.

The following outcomes are expected:

- Develop a vision for agriculture for the next 20 years;
- Identify and explore current issues and opportunities relating agriculture;
- Determine creative actions and approaches to address issues and opportunities;
- Develop an implementation strategy;
- Engage stakeholders to contribute to a comprehensive action plan that is reflective of their input;
- Identify opportunities and policies that will support and enhance the economic sustainability and resilience of the agricultural industry; and,
- Develop an innovative agricultural area plan which addresses long term viability and resilience of farming.

The specific objectives for the Plan are:

- To undertake a comprehensive analysis of the agricultural industry and the resource base;
- To identify agricultural issues, trends, opportunities and challenges facing the agricultural industry;
- To develop strategies and policies to take advantage of opportunities and mitigate challenges;
- To develop policies to protect agricultural land;
- Focus of local and regional policy solutions and collaborative actions that may involve many partners, including senior levels of government;

July 24, 2013

- To develop policy and establish criteria to assist in the evaluation of ALR exclusion, non-farm use and subdivision applications; and,
- To provide recommendations that will promote public awareness of the importance of agriculture.

The Plan is **not** intended to review the boundaries of the ALR or reduce local autonomy on agricultural issues. The Plan is intended to provide guidance to local government and support local and regional agricultural planning efforts.

***Regional Agricultural Plan Overview & Scope of Work:***

A Regional Agricultural Plan will involve developing a vision and identifying strategies that address current and future issues to ensure the long term prosperity and resilience of agriculture in the North Okanagan. Through discussions with the Agriculture and Food System Working Group, Regional Growth Management Advisory Committee and the Regional Agricultural Advisory Committee (RAAC), the following issue areas have been noted as significant to agricultural sustainability and industry resilience:

- encouraging innovation and investment;
- loss of agricultural lands and reduction of actively farmed lands;
- financial and regulatory barriers for existing and new agriculturalists;
- optimizing farming opportunities;
- public education and linkages between community and agriculture;
- services and infrastructure (eg. irrigation and agricultural water rates);
- transportation;
- succession planning;
- edge planning;
- environmental challenges;
- food security; and,
- climate change impacts on the agricultural industry.

***Draft Plan Development Process:***

The purpose of this project is to conduct a comprehensive planning process to research, develop policy alternatives, undertake public and agricultural stakeholder consultation and create realistic and achievable recommendations for a Regional Agricultural Plan for the North Okanagan. The Plan should provide guidance on how the Regional District and municipal, partners can implement the objectives and policies adopted in existing plans and it should identify priority actions needed to support the long term sustainability and resilience of agriculture in the region.

The planning process has three Phases. The goal of Phase I is to develop an information base and a common understanding of the issues and opportunities facing agriculture in the North Okanagan. The focus of Phase II will be to develop strategies, actions and an implementation strategy that address these issues and opportunities. The deliverable will be a Regional Agricultural Plan that will provide guidance on agricultural land use issues and the long term sustainability and resilience of the agricultural sector. Phase III will focus on the development of the implementation strategy, focusing on priority and key actions, reporting, education and monitoring.

July 24, 2013

### **Phase I: Agricultural Profile**

The purpose of the Agricultural Profile is to provide a basis on which to build a Plan that is representative of the North Okanagan context. The objectives of Phase I are:

- Investigate historical and current agricultural information, in order to develop an agricultural profile for the region;
- Complete an agricultural Land Use Inventory (LUI), in partnership with the Ministry of Agriculture, using existing information and identify gaps;
- Communicate with stakeholders in the region to determine strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats facing agriculture in the North Okanagan;
- Conduct a preliminary market opportunities analysis;
- An in-depth review of current agricultural policies and the legislative environment; and,
- Review relevant local, regional and provincial policies, programs and regulations, including:
  - Regional Growth Strategy
  - North Okanagan Food System Plan
  - Township of Spallumcheen Agricultural Area Plan
  - District of Coldstream Agricultural Area Plan
  - Official Community Plans
  - Zoning Bylaws

### **Phase II: Regional Agricultural Plan**

Phase II will focus on an in-depth review of current agricultural policies, develop recommendations to enhance agriculture in the region, create an implementation strategy, and identify funding opportunities. The overall process to develop the plan will be to:

- Recommend goals, objectives and actions for resolving the main issues and capitalizing on opportunities.
- Develop policy priorities and recommendations in collaboration with the RAAC, Board of Directors, the agricultural community, participating jurisdictions, senior levels of government and residents.
- Identify recommended amendments to existing policies and bylaws.
- Develop a detailed implementation strategy for the Regional Agricultural Plan.
- Make recommendations on funding opportunities and evaluation strategies.
- Recommend appropriate priorities to address the issues facing farming and agriculture in the region.

### **Phase III: Implementation Strategy**

The Regional Growth Strategy was adopted on September 21, 2011 and has developed both an implementation strategy and monitoring and evaluation program. The Agricultural Area Plan's implementation program, although separate, will be required to complement and support established Regional Growth Strategy programs. Phase III tasks will include:

- Identify pilot project and program opportunities, in collaboration with potential project partners. Develop preliminary budgets and identify funding opportunities.
- Prepare an implementation strategy by identifying priorities, actions and participants to successfully achieve solutions and to promote agriculture.

July 24, 2013

- Establish a monitoring process that measures ongoing progress towards plan implementation; and maintains an activity inventory of the agricultural sector in the region.
- Include the farm community, the general public and community organizations in the plan implementation process.
- Identify processes to implement and direct the plan process.

***Proposed Deliverables:***

**Regional Agricultural Plan**

The purpose of the Regional Agriculture Plan is to ensure that the agricultural capability of the North Okanagan is enhanced as part of a secure food supply for the region through improved decision-making related to agriculture and agricultural land uses. Agriculture in the Region is characterized by its diversity, with larger operations predominantly in Coldstream, Spallumcheen and the Electoral Areas and many small lot farms spread across the North Okanagan.

The Plan's recommendations will need to address all sizes and forms of farm operations, from the largest fruit growers in Greater Vernon to homesteaders in Cherryville and diversified small lot farmers that exist throughout the region. This Plan will address issues related to the preservation of the agricultural land base and maintaining and expanding agricultural capabilities throughout the region. The objectives that the Plan will address will focus on four land use policy areas:

- Support Designated Farmland Uses
- Increase the Productive Use of Farmland in the ALR
- Enhance the Agricultural Resource Base
- Create policy on issues including: a. criteria to evaluate the various forms of Agricultural Land Commission applications (ALR exclusions, non-farm uses, and subdivisions)

This Plan will provide guidance on local and regional opportunities to support the agricultural sector, which may include:

- improved farm business management that can be realistically implemented by farmers and farm organizations;
- local and regional policies and approaches which will encourage agricultural activity within and outside the ALR and allow agriculture to become more profitable, resilient and sustainable;
- identification of agricultural crops and products with potential for enhancing agriculture in the region including opportunities in smaller and medium scale agricultural farm operations;
- strategies to attract new farmers and new investment in primary and value-added production;
- improve education and information exchange between the farm community and the public including better education of youth with respect to farm practices and the role that the industry plays in the community;
- promote local agriculture;
- Identify new markets, approaches and opportunities that will increase the profitability of the agricultural sector; and,
- address environmental issues related to agriculture.

July 24, 2013

The emphasis of this Plan will be on taking advantage of the opportunities, and addressing the issues that are local and regional, policy solutions and collaborative action and a integrated approach that may include senior government ministries.

The regional emphasis for this Strategy will mean that current social, economic and environmental links between agriculture and the community will have to be recognized and new links established if change is to take place. Both the agricultural sector and the community will have to be involved in developing a vibrant, sustainable and resilient agricultural sector in the North Okanagan.

The Plan will define the Regional District's role with respect to agriculture and identify appropriate policies and actions to support the long term viability of farming by protecting the agricultural land base.

***Agriculture Area Plan Consultation Process:***

The Plan will need to be developed with consultation with the agricultural community, key stakeholders, residents, First Nations and senior levels of government to ensure that the Plan is reflective of regional concerns and issues regarding long term agricultural sustainability and resilience. Consultation will provide the opportunity for developing creative and realistic solutions and policies to respond to those challenges. It is the experience of other local and regional governments that an inclusive public and agricultural community engagement program is one of the most important elements for creating robust and comprehensive agricultural planning outcomes.

The RAAC will act as the Plan's steering committee throughout the Plan's development process and will assist in facilitating farming community involvement.

Based upon the agricultural area plan work programs of other local and regional governments, the following public and stakeholder engagement activities are recommended:

- Workshops were with a range of agricultural stakeholder groups, including specialty (small-scale, organic) agriculture, field horticulture (plant agriculture), intensive horticulture, horticultural processing, supply-managed (dairy, poultry) operations, supply managed processing, livestock operations and livestock products processing.
- Interviews with prominent stakeholders (to be identified).
- Community meetings to enable farmers and residents to provide input about the agricultural areas they work and live in. Feedback from these meetings can play a key role in identifying agricultural issues and policy solutions.
- Surveys targeted at specific groups, such as agricultural producers, processors, retailers and consumers to provide insight on issues, barriers, agricultural awareness and potential solutions.
- Open houses and information sessions at key points within the process.
- Farm Tours for stakeholders, local and senior government representatives and other agencies, with the goal of providing farmers the opportunity to demonstrate their operation and discuss their challenges and barriers directly.

July 24, 2013

***Responsibilities:***

***Regional Growth Management Advisory Committee***

The Plan is considered a priority RGS implementation action and a potential sub-strategy of the RGS. The Regional Growth Management Advisory Committee (RGMAC) is responsible for overseeing RGS development, implementation and review. Although the RGMAC will not be directly involved within the development of the Plan, this Committee will be responsible for:

- Developing Regional Agricultural Plan Terms of Reference; and,
- Reviewing and commenting on the draft Plan deliverables.

***Regional Agricultural Advisory Committee***

The Regional Agricultural Advisory Committee (RAAC) was appointed in early 2013. Each of the agricultural representatives brings their experience and understanding of agriculture in the North Okanagan to the planning process. The RAAC members will provide support and, through the planning process, act as liaisons with the agricultural community. The core responsibilities of the RAAC will be to:

- Assist with defining key components of the Terms of Reference for the Plan, including advice on the goals and objectives and priority issues to be considered within the Plan.
- Assist with engaging and consulting the agricultural community, rural residents and industry during Plan development.
- Provide advice and technical support to Regional District staff and the selected consultant(s) on the history of agriculture in the region and current agricultural issues and priorities.
- Review and provide feedback on the draft Plan including policies, recommendations and implementation strategies.