

## **Agricultural Plan Community Forum**

Over the past several months, the Alberni-Clayoquot Regional District has been working towards the development of an Agricultural Plan to guide growth and development of the agricultural industry.

The local agriculture industry is dealing with a diverse set of issues and opportunities at a pace and complexity that has never been experienced before. Changes in population, demands for food security, and the call for environmental sustainability all contribute to the economic viability of farming.

### **AGENDA FOR MEETING – AGRICULTURAL PLAN – January 17<sup>th</sup>, Echo Centre**

#### **3:30 – 5:30**

History of Agriculture in the Valley

Current Profile of Agriculture in the Valley

Break

#### **7:00 – 9:00**

Food for Thought – Vision, Opportunities and Issues

Breakout Sessions

Wrap Up

This forum is a community dialogue on agriculture to discuss the four fundamentals of the industry. Economic Health, Environmental Responsibility, Social Responsibility and Culture.

A strong agricultural community is built upon a strong economic, social, environmental and cultural foundation.

The goal of the public consultation meeting is to identify any other issues and opportunities that may have been overlooked in the work to date.

The meeting discussions will move forward on creating a Vision that:

- Encourages a visible, prominent, recognized and appreciated industry
- Creates an economically viable industry that is
  - Environmentally and socially sustainable
  - Efficient
  - Community oriented
- Increases local food self-sufficiency.

### **1. ECONOMIC: ECONOMIC HEALTH**

Economic issues and opportunities related to the potential for making the agricultural industry profitable by focusing on the viability of the existing farms and the potential for new agricultural businesses.

The quality of place and the quality of life a place provides are important to continue to attract and retain talented agricultural people and quality businesses

### **2. ENVIRONMENTAL: ENVIRONMENTAL RESPONSIBILITY**

*American naturalist and preservationist John Muir: "When one tugs at a single thing in nature, he finds it attached to the rest of the world."*

This quote has particular relevance as all human activities have an impact on the environment. Conversely, the relative health of the environment will determine and will contribute to the nature and scale of activities in the other areas of this plan: economic and social.

Without a life-sustaining environment, the other two variables cease to exist.

There are global and local environmental challenges and include climate change, dwindling nonrenewable resources, shrinking natural habitats, diminishing biodiversity, ocean acidification; and increasing human population pressures. Environmental issues will relate to the minimization of the ecological imprint of agriculture.

### **3. SOCIAL and REGULATORY: SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY**

Social and Regulatory issues and opportunities will relate to the current local, provincial, national and international trends in agriculture and the governing legislation that has been put in place to facilitate the trends.

A growing awareness in the importance of local food production is a current trend. But because of this trend, regulations and policy may be being adopted that impact the ability of farming as an economically viable lifestyle.

Food production, processing, distribution, and retailing businesses/facilities are all impacted by policy and regulations.

#### **4. CULTURAL:**

By recognizing and celebrating diversity in all the culture of the community, the agricultural entity within, can be strengthened. Through training, access to information, education and spirit of cooperation, all residents will benefit.

The purpose of the Agricultural Plan is to prepare a vision for agriculture for the Alberni Valley that will help achieve the following;

- Establish a permanent role for agriculture as an essential component of the physical/ecological, social and economic well-being of the Alberni Valley;
- Provide direction on how the vision and plan will be clearly articulated through policy and governance opportunities, including recommendations for future development of community plans and a growth strategy;
- Develop an Agricultural Plan and strategy that meets the needs of local consumer markets as well as surrounding markets on Vancouver Island and beyond;
- Provide guidance and identify strategies to encourage agricultural activity, within and outside of the ALR, and will help agriculture compete with other land uses given the limited land base;
- Address current issues and build recommendations for policies that ensure the best possible future for agriculture;
- Ensure that agricultural capability is fully realized and developed as part of a viable agriculture sector in the region
- Consider First Nations' input and assess agricultural opportunities for First Nations.
- Identify gaps and solutions as well as infrastructure and education needs for both individuals and industry; and
- Provide the basis for agricultural policies to be included in Official Community Plans for the Alberni Valley.

And of course the Agricultural Plan needs to be sustainable. This means that development meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

**A detailed description of the issues and opportunities identified to date will be available at the Regional District website by January 11, 2011.**