

## Event Summary - Expanding the Influence of Regional Agricultural Support

Thursday February 6, 2020 10:00 am – 4:30 pm

Cowichan Exhibition Grounds, Duncan BC

### ***“Looking for a Unicorn...”***

*Michele Bates - Planner, Regional District of East Kootenay (on meeting diverse needs)*

### ***“Agriculture is an Essential Service”***

*Sara Dent - Executive Director, Young Agrarians*



Photo: Tom Walker

The Alberni-Clayoquot Regional District’s *System Change* project seeks to develop a model for Regional Agricultural Support that better influences and informs Provincial frameworks, ensuring accommodation of the unique contextual realities of various geographical regions and producer populations.

A review of the ACRD’s Agricultural Plan Implementation Project will highlight areas where we’ve succeeded in influencing Provincial systems. Engagement with other communities and research into other models of Regional Agricultural Support will help to identify shared values and narratives.

Discussions with the Province will support renewed and impactful plans for agricultural support in the ACRD and elsewhere.

***Thank you to all the day’s participants!***

***The project’s Final Report will be available in June, 2020***

#### ***Project funding by the Vancouver Foundation***

*Vancouver Foundation is dedicated to creating healthy, vibrant and livable communities across BC. Since 1943, our donors have created 1,800 endowment funds and together we have distributed more than \$1 billion to charities. From arts and culture to the environment, health and social development, education, medical research and more, we exist to make meaningful and lasting improvements to communities in BC.*



Alberni-Clayoquot  
Regional District

vancouver  
foundation



# Event Summary - Expanding the Influence of Regional Agricultural Support

## Purpose and Context

This 3-part event brought representatives from a variety of Regional Agricultural Support (RAS) initiatives together with the Province of BC and other stakeholders. 36 people attended the morning session and 25 attended the afternoon workshop.

Rather than focusing on the specifics of particular current-moment issues and concerns, we looked at the broader agricultural support system under which they operate, asking “hard to answer” questions about cultural dynamics, stakeholder assumptions, structural gaps, and power dynamics. With this lens, we hoped to identify leverage points and changes that could mitigate a variety of challenges, both now and in the future.

We used a solution-focused framework to seek and identify commonalities, generating ideas for next steps from that shared perspective.

### Definition of Regional Agricultural Support (RAS):

For the purpose of this event, RAS was defined as: *any organization that: (a) Seeks to provide general supports for agriculture from within a specific and defined area in BC, and; (b) Leads and determines priorities, management, and structure from within its specific region.*

## Workshop Participant List

	Name	Organization		Name	Organization
1	Alana Mullaly	Comox Valley Regional District	14	Analisa Blake	Island Health, Community Food Action Initiative
2	Brianne Labute	Comox Valley Regional District	15	Colin Dring	University of British Columbia
3	Alex Dyer	Alberni-Clayoquot Regional District (ACRD)	16	Janey Thony	District A Farmers' Institute
4	Meg Curtis	ACRD Agricultural Development Committee	17	Alana Wilson	Investment Agriculture Foundation of BC
5	Keith Batstone	Cowichan Valley Regional District	18	Samantha Charlton	Climate Action Initiative
6	Michelle Bates	Regional District East Kootenay/ Kootenay-Boundary Farm Advisors	19	Ben Hyman (facilitator)	BC Cooperative Association
7	Heather Shobe	ACRD Agricultural Support Worker	20	Azra Martin	Young Agrarians
8	Michelle Tsutsumi	Kamloops Food Policy Council	21	Bob Haugen	North Island College
9	Sarah Petnick	Lillooet Agriculture and Food Society	22	Sara Dent	Young Agrarians
10	Linda Geggie	Capital Region Food and Agriculture Initiative Roundtable	23	Judy Stafford	Cowichan Green Community
11	Jill Hatfield	Ministry of Agriculture, Regional Agrologist	24	Phyllis Horn	Farm Food Drink
12	Jason Lussier	Ministry of Agriculture, Regional Team Lead - Coast	25	Jen Cody	Nanaimo Foodshare
13	Adrien Semmelink	Ministry of Agriculture, New Entrant Specialist			

# Event Summary - Expanding the Influence of Regional Agricultural Support

## Summary of Key Findings

### 1. “Thinking about the current structure and systems of agricultural support in BC...”

#### **Areas of Threats and Weaknesses**

- Land Use Issues
- Bureaucratic Complexity
- Funding Limitations
- Cultural Contexts
- General Sector Challenges
- Knowledge Transfer Gaps

#### **Areas of Strengths and Opportunities**

- Shared Values
- Models / Program Examples
- Public Awareness
- Resources
- People: Passion and Expertise
- Emerging Issues

### 2. Link Province to RAS and RAS to RAS through:

- Data and Measurements
- Collaboration
- Structural Links
- Planning Processes

### 3. Best Practices for RAS

- Engage a diverse, cross-disciplinary, and multi-jurisdictional team of advisors
- Use a strength-based, collaborative, and solution-focused approach
- Build in flexibility to deal with and capitalize on emerging issues and resources
- Be strategic - match gaps with regional assets and energy

### 4. A Shared RAS Narrative:

*Food impacts our communities, and we are representatives of those communities. We value our producers and our pastoral landscapes for their contribution to our communities' wellbeing.*

*The challenges to supporting agriculture are complex, and it remains uncertain how to best connect the future of food to the land and producers today. We are passionate and committed to working towards that “shadowy future”. We seek to learn and to work together, and we share a need for core funding and collaborative and comprehensive efforts.*

### 5. Next Steps:

- A. Create and share a database of RAS and related resources from across the Province
- B. Determine priority data for performance measurement of RAS
  - What does RAS have to measure that will help the Province to understand and value it? (per Ministry of Agriculture and Ministry of Health)
- C. Collate existing data
  - Create a team to gather and analyze existing data, including multiple organizations, the Ministries of Agriculture and Health, and academia
- D. Continue convening events in conjunction with established forums - inviting expertise, developing joint strategies, and sharing perspectives
  - What does RAS need to understand about Provincial priorities?
  - What pieces of work can RAS support the Province with?
  - How, specifically, can the Province better support RAS?
- E. Build and fund core roles for bridging and collaboration within government (as an umbrella) and organizations (to ensure stable participation)

# Threats and Weaknesses

### Land Use Issues

- Competing pressures for land base (recreational/parks/wildlife/agriculture/real estate)
- Diversity of land base
- Urbanization
- Variety of land ownership models

### Funding Limitations

- Lack of free professional supports - only large scale producers can afford to pay
- Difficulty funding products that don't meet federal mandate (eg: fish)
- Lack of capacity for face to face conversations
- Need for a "system navigator/catalyzer/bridging role"
- Lack of 'core' funding
- Grants programs generally for specific projects only

### Bureaucratic Complexity

- Definition of Agricultural Planning (Is it production? Food security? Access to markets? Land use?)
- Regulations don't scale down well to small-scale, diverse groups, or individuals
- Structural impediments - issues are complex but are dealt with in silos (Health, Agriculture, Environment, etc)
- Trade agreements
- Downloading onto producers - lack of skill set/resources for grant applications and navigating bureaucracy, sense of hopelessness and overwhelm
- Local government is required to respond to Provincial policy changes "We have to, we have no choice, we figure it out."
- Issues are broad, but programs/policies are specific
- How to responding to emerging issues or evolving needs?
- Challenging for small farmers voices to be heard
- Challenges with Provincial/Federal mandates and jurisdictions (Fish, etc)

### Cultural Contexts

- Lack of creativity ("planner mode"), being bound to old models
- Favouring "industrial" farming (because it is more easily measurable!)
- Top-down programs vs. Bottom-up needs - "Look at this program we have!/Program doesn't work for us/Look at this program we have!/Program doesn't work for us..."
- "Shouting into the ether" Sense that no one listening
- Lack of indigenous input/perspectives/accommodation
- General disconnect from farming/earth/food
- Focus on export rather than developing local market
- Sense that small scale production is "not legitimate"

### General Sector Challenges

- Perception of non-profitability of agriculture
- Profitability takes time
- Limited consumer base (cost, convenience, out of season preference)
- Hard to support the BC's product diversity
- Sector in-fighting (big/small scale, organic/non-organic, etc)
- Food waste (poor distribution/management)
- Demographics of farmers (age, technology limitations)
- Access to year round markets is difficult
- Challenges in encouraging new entrants

### Knowledge Transfer Gaps

- Poor distribution of knowledge and regulatory requirements (through generations, producers, local government, businesses)
- Lack of core role for directing people towards resources
- Loss of extension services
- Lack of informal mentorships across generations
- Urbanization creates broken link in knowledge transfer
- New entrants not trained in agriculture
- Limited uptake in workshops

# Strengths and Opportunities

### Shared Values

- Shared value of “local healthy food production”
- Desire for learning and collaboration
- Common goals can help connect diverse sector interests

### Public Awareness

- Consumer consciousness is shifting, which supports government funding
- More consumer and public interest
- Consumers are advocates and allies

### Resources

- New technology, the internet, social media
- More communities have agricultural plans
- National food policy (opportunity to bridge agriculture and food security)
- More multi-sector organizations at the community level
- Business supports and provincial agricultural programs
- Regional agrologist are “an ear to the ground” and have key networks
- Land leasing resources
- Learning opportunities are available for farmers
- UBCM and other annual events which bring stakeholders and industry together
- Opportunities for resourcing, collaborating, networking, improving
- Farmers’ Institutes as a platform for producer voices

### Models / Program Examples

- Programs where the Province links with Regional Districts and producers, involve academic expertise, and bridge commodity divides (Island Health’s CFAI, Climate Action Initiative, Agricultural Adaptation Research Network, Young Agrarians)
- Provincial Ministries supporting external mandates (Ministry of Health’s BC Farmers Market Coupon program)
- Farmers’ Institutes bringing commodity groups together

### People: Passion and Expertise

- New people/new ideas
- Lots of knowledge
- More champions in planning roles
- People are working together to problem solve
- Energy from young people/farmers
- Political will
- Infusion of energy from young farmers and organizations
- Younger generation is more aware
- Interested market

### Emerging Issues

- Climate change, crisis, and disasters can be incentive or help mobilize
- Local planners engaged because of recent hot topics (ALC/Cannabis)
- Lengthening relationships and programs increase impacts over time

## ***A Shared RAS Narrative***

Food impacts our communities, and we are representatives of those communities. We value our producers and our pastoral landscapes for their contribution to our communities’ wellbeing.

The challenges to supporting agriculture are complex, and it remains uncertain how to best connect the future of food to the land today. We are passionate and committed to working towards that “shadowy future”. We seek to learn and to work together, and we share need for core funding and collaborative and comprehensive efforts.

# ***Best Practices for RAS***

- Engage a diverse, cross-disciplinary, and multi-jurisdictional team of advisors
- Use a strength-based, collaborative, and solution-focused approach
- Neutralize power imbalances and use neutral gathering spaces
- Build in flexibility to deal with and capitalize on emerging issues and resources
- Plan for longevity and secure core funding - change takes time
- Work to “action” studies, not just produce them
- Be selective with which gaps you fill - strategically match gaps with regional assets and energy
- Assess for duplication and reduce where unnecessary - Don’t reinvent the wheel, tailor to your needs
- Set clear expectations, mandates, Terms of References, and Strategic Plans
- Bring academia and funders to the table
- Get political buy-in, involve elected officials and the greater community
- Beware of participation fatigue - compensate participants
- Host events and projects with clear outcomes - “next steps matter”
- Connect with others, build relationships and bridges across the broader food system

# ***Ideas for Creating Linkages***

## **Data and Measurements**

- Create and share a database of existing Agricultural Support organizations, programs, and assets
- Collate and share stories and examples of what’s working
- Collectively decide on measurement tools and needed data
- Share quantifiable evidence of the positive impacts of RAS and local food system planning

## **Collaboration**

- Tap in to opportunities to present information and host collaborative workshops at established conferences and annual events (eg: UBCM, Islands Agriculture Show, Planning Managers Conference)
- Include specialized experts and academia at events and engagements
- Engage with and learn from policy specialists
- Do outreach - “open the silo window a crack, and look outside your own realm”
- Bring silos together through a cross-disciplinary and strength-based approach
- Use neutral spaces and work to balance power discrepancies
- Build relationships constantly
- Involve community and make a collective effort

## **Structural Links**

- Feed RAS programs into Provincial mechanisms and databases
- Feed Provincial programs into RAS mechanisms and databases
- Define, fund, and fill core roles as a “bridgers”, catalyzers, and connectors
- Establish formal partnerships between organizations or from organization to government
- Link to and partner with professional agricultural and producer associations
- Use Farmers’ Institutes as a platform for engagement with producers
- Province: use available networks to spread information and support strategic partnerships
- Support multi-sector infrastructure
- Create umbrellas, networks, & hubs
- Connect to Province through UBCM or Regional Agrologists

## **Planning/Processes**

- Use new models, while taking the best from old models
- Determine points of accountability and connection
- Think Top-down AND Bottom-up
- Keep following up

# Event Summary - Expanding the Influence of Regional Agricultural Support

## Agenda and Discussion Recap

### Panel Event

Panelists shared their program history and models along with regional perspectives about needs, challenges, and emerging opportunities.

*Jill Hatfield*: Regional Agrologist, Ministry of Agriculture

*Linda Geggie*: Executive Director, Capital Region Food and Agriculture Initiative

*Heather Shobe*: Agricultural Support Worker, Alberni-Clayoquot Regional District

*Michele Bates*: Regional District of East Kootenay/Kootenay-Boundary Farm Advisors Program (KBFA)

*Sarah Petznick*: Executive Director, Lillouet Agriculture and Food Society

*Michelle Tsutsumi*: Communications Lead, Kamloops Food Policy Council

### Discussion highlights:

- “Looking for a Unicorn” - Was difficult for the KBFA to find a contractor who could offer extension-type services to the diversity of producers and products within the region
- Significant lack of core funding and organizational/contract stability year to year
- Processes and change takes a significant amount time (years)
- Indigenous perspective is lacking within the agricultural industry; systemic racism is evident
- Including pilot projects within feasibility studies or plans helps to ‘action’ idea and create clear and measurable outcomes (as opposed to just creating reports)
- Regional Agrologists are a touchpoint of connection to Provincial programs and an avenue of support for producers and Regional Districts
- Ability to be flexible in programs and to act on emerging issues is important for RAS; also a strong need to be strategic
- Opportunities to engage and collaborate with other initiatives are valuable; relationships are key
- There are many organizations working on similar initiatives, often competing for funding streams and creating redundancy in programming and effort
- While duplicity could be reduced, there are also regional and organizational differences that may require some degree of it
- Producers face significant barriers and challenges; Issues are complex
- Agriculture is an ‘Essential Service’ and strong, broad-based, and collaborative support is required.

### Mini-presentations

#### Colin Dring - University of British Columbia

Colin discussed his doctoral research, which looks at local governments' role in Regional food systems, within the Lower Mainland area. Colin noted that local governments' primarily employ land-use planning tools to address agricultural issues, and to a lesser degree, agricultural development (e.g. economic, community/social, sustainable) and educational supports (e.g. awareness-raising). He identified key challenges with reliance on urban planning

## Event Summary - Expanding the Influence of Regional Agricultural Support

tools for agriculture and regional food systems, and that there is a concurrent lack of capacity for rural and agricultural planning. He noted that Land Use Planning is not the best tool for integration of agriculture with other social, economic, and environmental issues, nor does it, in isolation, address the rich diversity of the agricultural sector. Finally, he emphasized tensions within local governments being able to comply with Provincial policy and regulations and the urban issues occupying the majority of resources and political attention.

Colin suggested that local governments' primary methods of supporting agriculture are generally through supportive and congruent land use (e.g. zoning ordinances and Official Community Plans), events (such as farm tours), land access work, local food procurement policies, and in dealing with environmental or climate issues, and that there are benefits to reframing agricultural planning as integral to urban food systems (e.g. food security, job creation, celebrating different food cultures)."

### Analisa Blake - Island Health

Island Health's 'Community Food Action Initiative' distributes funding to Food Security Hubs in each of Vancouver Island's Regional Districts in order to support healthy food systems, address food insecurity and, ultimately, to improve health.

Each Provincial Health Region has a budgetary allocation from the Ministry of Health and is able to develop its own prescription for program delivery. IH funding was initially delivered through a granting program model, but it transitioned to the Regional District based Food Hub model in 2011. The Island Food Hubs convene regularly, via phone and in person, and their collective voice is then brought forward to a Provincial table which includes each of the Provincial Health Regions and the Ministry of Health.

### Alana Wilson – Investment Agriculture Foundation of BC

IAFBC is an industry led, not for profit society that creates funding opportunities to support a thriving BC agriculture and agri-food sector through the effective delivery of Provincial and Federal/Provincial (CAP) programs.

A Local Government Agricultural Area Planning Program has been running since 1999. It is currently under review and expects to reopen in spring 2020. The revamped program is expected to include continued support for development of Area Agricultural Plans as well as for related implementation projects.

## Workshopping Event

### World Cafe Brainstorm: Session 1 - Focus on Examining

1. **“When you think about the current structure and systems of agricultural support in BC...”** (*think physical/power structures, linkages and networks, resources, players, assumptions, focus areas, other elements, etc*)

#### **1. What are some Threats & Weaknesses?**

- What undermines it, what is missing?
- Where are broken links, structural gaps?
- What are key outstanding needs of Regions and the Province

## Event Summary - Expanding the Influence of Regional Agricultural Support

### 2. What are some Strengths and Opportunities?

- Positive attributes, energy, resonance, commonalities, shared visions
- Opportunities for synergy, resourcing, collaborating, networking, improving, work-arounds
- Ideas and solutions

2. Groups report back as to “What stood out?”

### *World Cafe Brainstorm: Session 2 - Focus on Strategizing*

**1. Ideas for Linking Province to RAS or RAS to RAS**

**2. What are some suggested ‘Best Practices’ for RAS**

3. Groups reports back as to - **“What are most feasible and achievable next steps?”**

### *Group Discussions:*

1. Shared Narratives - “What do we have in common?”
2. Key learnings - “What is new for you?”

***“We value local, healthy food production.”***

*A cornerstone ‘shared narrative’*