

# Comox Valley Agricultural Plan

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## Draft Recommendations

April 2024

## Acknowledgements

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## Acronyms

AF	BC Ministry of Agriculture and Food
APC	Advisory Planning Commission
ALC	Agricultural Land Commission
ALR	Agricultural Land Reserve
ALUI	Agricultural Land Use Inventory
BCWS	BC Wildfire Service
BMP	Beneficial Management Practices
CVAP	Comox Valley Agricultural Plan
CVEP	Comox Valley Emergency Program
CVFI	Comox Valley Farmers Institute
CVFMA	Comox Valley Farmers Market Association
CVRD	Comox Valley Regional District
DFO	Department of Fisheries and Oceans
EASC	Electoral Areas Services Committee
EFP	Environmental Farm Plan
EMBC	Emergency Management BC
ENV	BC Ministry of Environment
FOR	BC Ministry of Forests
GHG	Greenhouse Gas Emissions
IAFBC	Investment Agriculture Foundation
MIFI	Mid-Island Farmers Institute
MOTI	BC Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure
SWOT	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats
TRAWP	Tsolum River Agricultural Watershed Plan
WLRS	BC Ministry of Water Land and Resource Stewardship

## Executive Summary

The *Comox Valley Agricultural Plan (CVAP)* update considers agriculture within the current growth and policy context of the region and attempts to identify and anticipate future changes and challenges to the sector. The development and implementation of the *Comox Valley Agricultural Plan* is an important opportunity for elected officials, the agricultural sector, and community organizations to work together toward a more resilient and sustainable local economy.

The objectives of the CVAP update are to:

- Provide an overview of the current challenges experienced by the regional agri-food system;
- Present policy and regulatory recommendations, and
- Develop a strategy to ensure the plan is implemented.

While food security is an important component of a resilient food system, the underlying contributors to household food insecurity (e.g. low-income, housing affordability, job security) are outside the scope of most agricultural plans. Therefore, most of the recommended actions in the CVAP do not directly address household food security. However, a strong agricultural sector, whereby producers of all commodity types and sizes are supported, will contribute positively to community food security.

The development of the CVAP was assisted by a Project Advisory Committee of local producers and processors, local government staff, and consultants. This final report is the culmination of a *Background Report*, *Interim Report*, and *Engagement Summary Report*. Through this public and stakeholder engagement process, the following vision statement was crafted:

*Agriculture is the heart of the Comox Valley. The history of the region, including during pre-colonial times when Indigenous food systems were abundant, will continue to influence this growing sector of the local economy today and into the future. With a mix of enterprises focused on a diversity of markets, the Valley's farms will continue to produce quality products. Farmers will be supported in their stewardship of land and water resources and become resilient to the impacts of climate change. The community will nurture a new generation of farmers with the capacity and resources to adapt and innovate so that a thriving agriculture and food system in the Comox Valley can continue to prosper.*

The CVAP identifies a total of 22 recommended actions presented under 5 goals:

1. Steward water resources to meet agricultural water needs.
2. Maintain agricultural land protection policies and support for producers.
3. Support actions to grow the regional agri-food economy.
4. Collaborate towards climate change adaptation, mitigation, and emergency preparedness.
5. Strengthen awareness of the Comox Valley agri-food sector.

The participation of senior levels of government, agricultural businesses, and community organizations will be essential to realize a resilient, sustainable, and profitable local agricultural sector. Shared leadership and a commitment of resources and ongoing community collaborations and partnerships will be required for full implementation of the actions in this plan. This CVAP is intended to be a robust document that will serve communities within the Comox Valley for at least the next 10 years.

## 1.0 Introduction

The Comox Valley stretches from the central east coast of the Vancouver Island to the mountains of the Vancouver Island ranges. The area consists of a gently sloping terrain, descending from west to east, creating various drainage patterns and microclimates. Most of the Comox Valley's rain falls in the winter months or is mixed with snowfall, with summers being characterized as dry and prone to bouts of drought.<sup>1</sup> Land within the Comox Valley has been used for food-related purposes throughout history. In pre-colonial times, the Pentlatch ancestors of the K'ómoks First Nation occupied the area now known as the Comox Valley and practiced an array of ecosystem management techniques to increase the abundance of preferred plant and animal species in the local area<sup>2</sup>. Early historical records indicate that the Comox Valley was closely managed and tended by local Pentlatch people for millennia, and the land was undoubtedly owned by specific Pentlatch lineages. The Tsolum River prairie, the open parkland environment encountered by colonists in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century in the Comox Valley were anthropogenic environments that were regularly and carefully managed by local Pentlatch people. These prairies were the northern extent of the Garry Oak ecosystem and hosted a range of plant species that were important to traditional Pentlatch diets. These species included camas (*Camassia quamash*), bracken fern (*Pteridium aquilinum*), blueberry (*Vaccinium sp.*), and saskatoon berry (*Amelanchier alnifolia*). The primary way Pentlatch people maintained these Garry Oak ecosystems and associated prairies was through the use of controlled burns. By burning these prairies, Pentlatch people maintained their extent and increased the productivity of desired plant species and deer.

As colonial populations increased from the late 1800's to mid 1900's agricultural development became a prominent form of land use, and Vancouver Island farms provided much of the food required by residents.<sup>3</sup> However, in the last 50 years there has been a decrease in the proportion of food that is produced on the island – unverified figures suggest what was once a resiliency rate of 85% is now closer to 5-10%.<sup>4</sup> The *Comox Valley Agricultural Plan* (CVAP) update provides a coordinated approach to support agriculture and food systems in the Comox Valley over the next 10 years. The goal is to work towards a great level of self-sufficiency while ensure that a wide range of agricultural endeavours and food-related initiatives are sustained.

### 1.1 Agricultural Plan Study Area

The Comox Valley includes K'ómok's First Nation lands as well as land under the local government jurisdictions of the Comox Valley Regional District (CVRD) and its member municipalities (Figure 1). The CVRD is located on the eastern coast of Vancouver Island, British Columbia (BC). The CVRD covers an area of 2,425 km<sup>2</sup>, of which 700 km<sup>2</sup> is water. The region encompasses several watersheds that provide water to agricultural and residential users. Such watersheds include Comox Lake, the Tsolum River, the Oyster River, Black Creek, and Roy Creek. In recent years, concerns have been raised about the security of water quantity in the region and pressures placed on freshwater resources, due to climate change and drought-related crop requirements and increasing residential development.<sup>5</sup> The Tsolum River Agricultural

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<sup>1</sup> Pacific Climate Impacts Consortium. [Plan2Adapt tool](#). Accessed May 2022.

<sup>2</sup> Content provided by Dr. Jesse Morin.

<sup>3</sup> Strategies for Increasing Food Security on Vancouver Island. Vancouver Island Community Research Alliance, Office of Community Based Research. 2011.

<sup>4</sup> A Baseline Assessment of Food Security in British Columbia's Capital Region. Emily MacNair. 2004.

<sup>5</sup> CVRD. [Tsolum River Agricultural Watershed Plan](#), Phase One. February 2019.

Watershed Plan (TRAWP)<sup>6</sup> was developed to better understand the demands on the watershed and identify responsible use for the future security of the watershed. The TRAWP culminated several recommendations, such as collaborative management of the Tsolum watershed (including proactive land-use planning and policy co-creation with K'ómoks), improving understanding of the watershed and climate change, encouraging sustainable water management through the use of provincial management tools, and supporting community and producers in water management techniques.

The CVRD contains three electoral areas and three municipalities (Figure 1). The municipalities host most of the food-retail and processing infrastructure and labour pool. There is active farming within the City of Courtenay's boundaries. The Town of Comox was historically an agricultural area and still retains some agricultural heritage, with many farms surrounding Comox in Electoral Area B. The Village of Cumberland developed as a mining town rather than a farming community, but the population is supportive of local food products and the town has numerous food related businesses. Denman Island, located in Electoral Area A, has a Farm Plan that was developed in 2010<sup>7</sup>. Electoral Area A is known as Canada's oyster capital and has a history of seafaring and shellfish production. More than half of BC's shellfish production comes from Baynes Sound<sup>8</sup>. Electoral Area C is home to most of the CVRD's farms and is the focus of the CVAP study area.

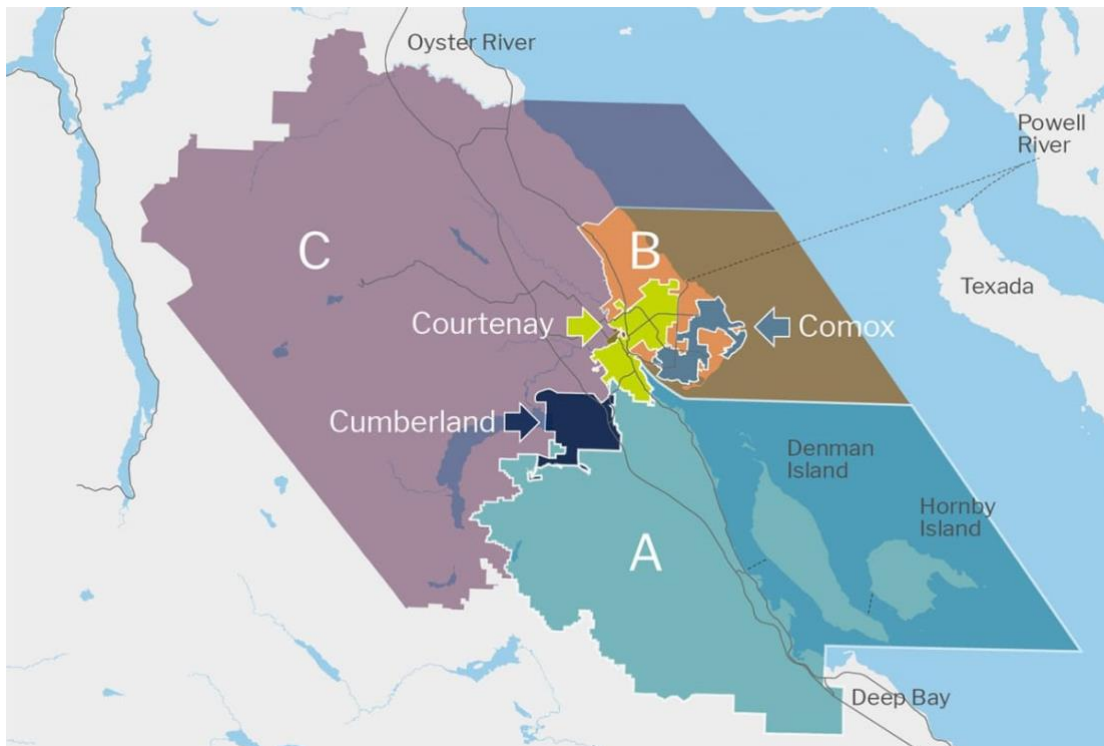


Figure 1. Map of the Comox Valley Regional District.

<sup>6</sup> CVRD. [Tsolum River Agricultural Watershed Plan](#), Phase Two. May 2021.

<sup>7</sup> [Denman Island Farm Plan](#), 2010. Islands Trust.

<sup>8</sup> Government of Canada. [Community profile: Comox Valley](#). Accessed June 2022.



## 1.2 Agricultural Planning Framework

Agriculture is governed by a network of Federal, Provincial, and local governments, each playing a specific role in regulating and providing services to the use of agricultural land, the making and distribution of food products, and ensuring the health and safety of the food system. Other entities and departments within levels of government focus on the economics of agriculture and on the interface between environmental protection, climate change and agriculture. At the provincial level, important policies and regulations include the *Agricultural Land Commission Act*, *Farm Practices Protection (Right to Farm) Act*, *Water Sustainability Act*, *Environmental Management Act*, and *Assessment Act*.

Regional districts play a role in region-wide planning by developing a Regional Growth Strategy (RGS) and other policies that link or coordinate the otherwise independent planning and land use regulation choices of member municipalities. The CVRD RGS was adopted in 2011, with a new direction for land use management that included a shift from planning within the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR) for rural areas, to planning specifically for agricultural areas. There are eight goals areas in the RGS, and the agriculture and food sector intersect with several of them, such as “Food Systems”, “Ecosystems, Natural Areas and Parks”, and “Local Economy”. The RGS identifies the land uses for agriculture within the Rural Settlement Areas and Agricultural Areas, which have been established using the ALR boundaries. Land use policies and regulations in the CVRD’s three electoral areas are contained within the Rural Comox Valley Official Community Plan (OCP) and the Rural Comox Valley Zoning Bylaw which contain relevant policies and regulations. The OCP advances the 2011 RGS’ land use management direction with specific policy directions to preserve the integrity of agricultural areas and to direct non-farm development to areas outside the ALR.

An Agricultural Plan focuses on a community's farming areas to uncover practical solutions to challenges and to identify opportunities to strengthen the agricultural sector and to contribute to the community's long-term sustainability.<sup>9</sup> The intent of agricultural planning is to develop recommendations to support the agricultural viability of the community. While food security is an important component of a resilient food system, the underlying contributors to household food insecurity (e.g. low-incomes, housing affordability, job security) are outside the scope of most agricultural plans. However, a strong agricultural sector, where producers of all commodity types and sizes are supported, will contribute positively to community food security.<sup>10</sup> Successful Comox Valley farms, whether they sell their goods locally or not, contribute to a region that attracts and retains the supporting networks and businesses necessary for a resilient food system, such as farmers institutes, equipment dealers and mechanics, seed and feed stores, food distribution companies, and other networks. Increasing the agricultural productive capacity of Vancouver Island, through methods which are sustainable as well as economically and socially beneficial to local communities, will support food security in the Comox Valley.

## 1.3 Agricultural Profile of the Comox Valley

The CVAP update is the culmination of a *Background Report*, an *Interim Report*, and many engagement activities, which are documented in the *Engagement Summary Report*. A summary of the engagement process is included in the Appendix. A summary of the *Background Report* and *Interim Report* is provided below.

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<sup>9</sup> Smith, B. 1998. [Planning for Agriculture](#). BC Ministry of Agriculture publication.

<sup>10</sup> Community food security arises when all community residents obtain a safe, culturally acceptable, nutritionally adequate diet through a sustainable food system that maximizes community self-reliance and social justice.

An Agricultural Land Use Inventory (ALUI) was completed for the CVRD by the BC Ministry of Agriculture and Food in 2013. Results indicated that of the over 23,000 ha of ALR in the CVRD (Figure 2), only 23% was being actively farmed and 38% of land was unusable for farming due to built infrastructure (roads, utilities, etc.), residential use, waterbodies, wetlands, or its status as a park or reserve. The ALUI found that 28% of farms in the Comox Valley were using irrigation in 2013. As the climate warms and summers become drier, the need for irrigation is expected to increase across the region.<sup>11</sup>

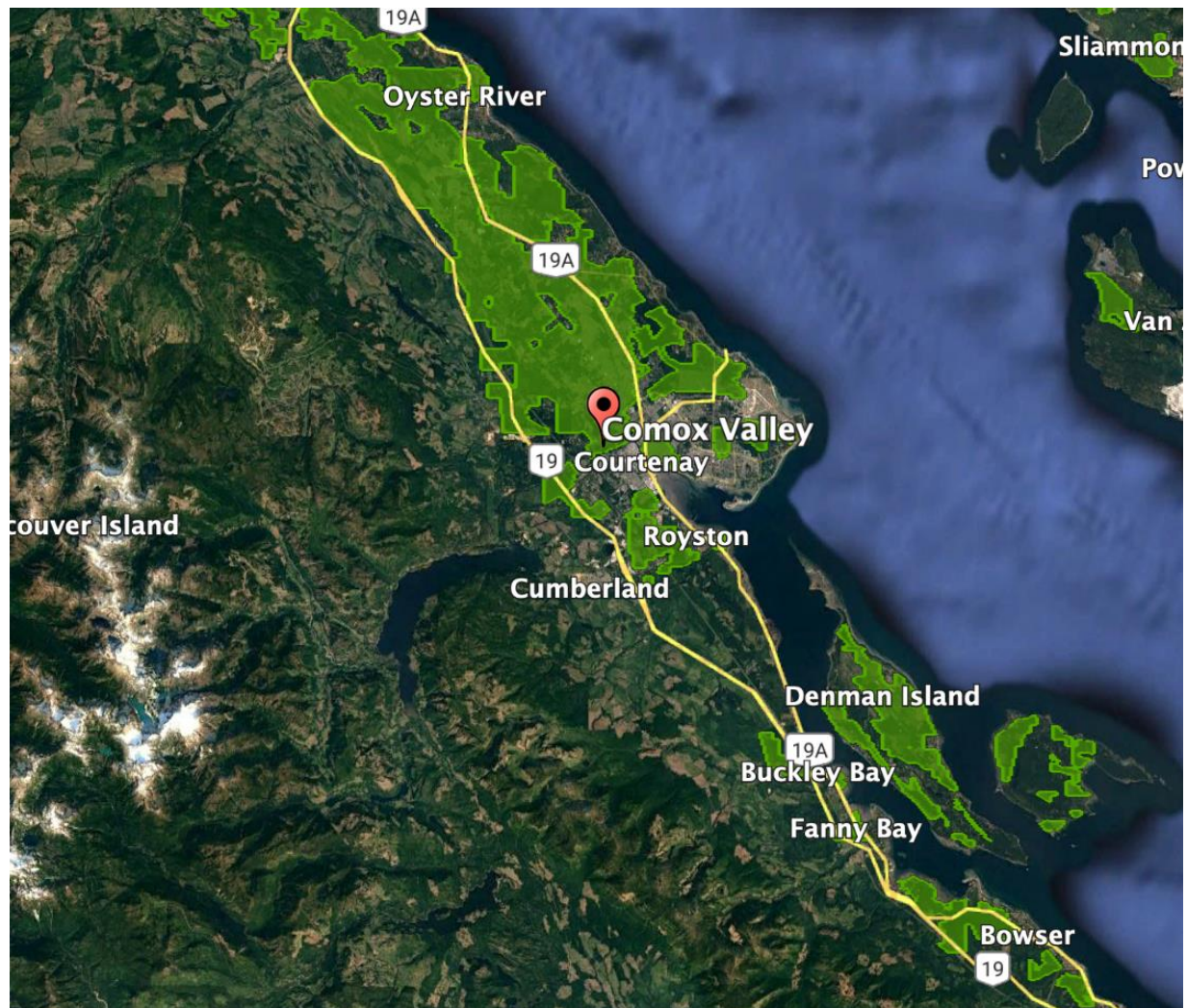


Figure 2. Agricultural Land Reserve (green) in the Comox Valley.<sup>12</sup>

The federal Census of Agriculture showed a drop in number of farms in the Comox Valley, from 416 in 2016 to 351 in 2021. This drop is likely partly due to a change in the Census definition of a “farm”, whereby producers must indicate that farm income is being reported to the Canada Revenue Agency, rather than simply having an “intent to sell” agricultural products, in order to qualify as a Census-defined farm.

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<sup>11</sup> Climate and Agriculture Initiative BC. [Regional Adaptation Strategy: Vancouver Island](#). 2020.

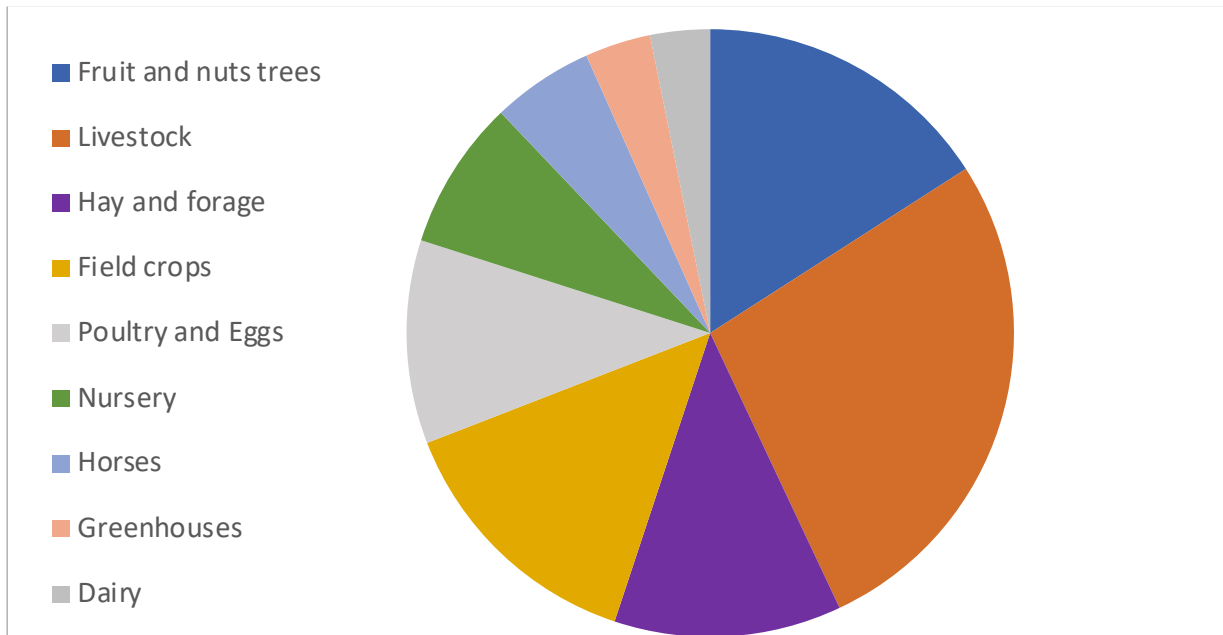
<sup>12</sup> BC Ministry of Agriculture. Comox Valley Regional District Land Use Inventory. 2014.

As land has continued to be subdivided over the last century, by 2021 over a third (37%) of Comox Valley farms were less than 4 ha (10 acres) in size, with few farms over 40 ha (100 acres). Smaller parcels are associated with non-farm use of agricultural land, such as rural estates.<sup>13</sup> Although some types of agriculture can be successful on small parcels, (e.g., intensive market gardens, greenhouse operations, nurseries), generally the smaller the parcel is, the fewer viable options there are for farming. This is illustrated through 2022 BC Assessment data, presented in Table 1.<sup>14</sup>

*Table 1. Number of parcels with Farm Class Tax Status based on parcel size in the Comox Valley.*

	<2.0 acres < 0.8 ha	2 – 10 acres 0.8 – 4 ha	> 10 acres > 4 ha	Total
<b>Total Parcels with Farm Class*</b>	28	247	540	815

The most common type of Comox Valley farming operation is fruit and tree nut production, cattle ranching, hay production, and vegetable production. Figure 3 presents the types of farming taking place in Comox Valley in 2021 on a total of 351 farms<sup>15</sup>.



*Figure 3. Farm types in the Comox Valley in 2021, total is 351 farms (Source: Statistics Canada, 2021).*

The average age of farmers in the Comox Valley is 59 years old. Despite this, only 24 farms (7%) had written succession plans in 2021. A total of 35 farms reported using employed labour on the farm, in addition to the primary farm operator. Of those, 25 farms reported providing full time work on a year-round basis,

<sup>13</sup> Ministry of Agriculture. [Comox Valley Land Use Inventory Report](#). 2013.

<sup>14</sup> BC Assessment, 2022.

<sup>15</sup> Census of Agriculture, 2021.

while 22 farms reported part-time work year-round and total of 21 farms reported hiring on a part time seasonal/temporary basis.

Comox Valley producers must offset income with the costs of land, labour, and agricultural inputs such as fertilizers, fuel, and feed. Many farmers across different regions of BC have indicated challenges in producing sufficient financial resources to afford adequate farm labour, equipment, and other farm inputs (seeds, feed, soil amendments, etc.) to enhance production levels, and the situation in the Comox Valley area is no different. In 2021, average gross margins were 4%, meaning that for every \$1.00 spent by the farmer, \$1.04 was earned by the farmer. A full 33% reported less than \$10,000 in gross farm receipts, and 10% farms reported no earnings at all.

Farming on Vancouver Island creates challenges to accessing larger markets on the Lower Mainland and beyond. Access to transportation and distribution infrastructure is required to reach the larger domestic and export markets and while the CVRD is well-served by several transportation routes such as Highway 19, Highway 19a, and BC Ferries, this transportation comes at a growing expense as the cost of fuel rises. While there are large scale distributors and grocers in Comox Valley, many small-scale producers struggle to meet contracting requirements such as volume, labelling and quality control (e.g. Good Agricultural Practices or GAP certification). There are additional local vendors creating alternative opportunities for selling locally produced foods into the community, such as LUSH Valley's Harvest Box<sup>16</sup>, an operation which purchases fresh food from local producers and distributes them through a weekly harvest box program. Many farms in the Comox Valley, over 190, are selling directly to customers through farm gate stands, farmers markets, Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) and direct deliveries to consumers.<sup>17</sup>

Processing services and resources are a critical part of a diversified agri-food system, offering opportunities for producers to create value-added products, build their businesses in new directions and extend their season through preserves and storage crops. Food processing services encompass everything from slaughter and cut and wrap, to value-added processing into jams and frozen goods. Comox Valley farmers have access to four abattoirs and there are several farmgate licenses in the area which allow for limited on-farm slaughter. Comox Valley is home to dozens of food processors from craft beverage makers to condiments and pasta makers. In recent years there has been discussion of creating a farmer food hub, which would provide farmers access to storage space, food processing tools in a commercial kitchen, and a central location for distribution.

The long-standing agricultural nature of Comox Valley means that the region is home to a variety of agricultural support services including farmers institutes, regional agrologists, 4-H clubs, producers associations, policy councils and the Comox Valley Exhibition. Each of these organizations helps to round out support, information, and resources for farmers.

In order to ground-truth the findings of the background report and to identify key issues and opportunities, engagement activities took place over approximately 10 months (Fall 2022 to Spring 2023). There were two distinct rounds of engagement:

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<sup>16</sup> LUSH Valley. [Introducing the New Harvest Box Program](#). July 2020.

<sup>17</sup> Census of Agriculture. [Direct sales of agricultural products to consumers](#). 2021.

- The first round developed an understanding of the challenges, and opportunities facing the sector, primarily through interviews and Project Advisory Committee Meetings, and
- The second-round dove deeper on the key areas of concern identified in round one, through community workshops, focus group meetings, a webinar and written submissions.

The process held space for the involvement of the K’ómoks First Nation and communications were led by CVRD leadership. A consultant for K’ómoks First Nation provided content regarding pre-colonial food systems within the community to inform the Background Report.

A detailed overview of all the engagement activities undertaken including perspectives heard is available in the *Engagement Summary Report* and fulsome summary is in the Appendix III. Table 2 provides a breakdown of stakeholders who were engaged in the project’s process. Notably, almost 75% of the 113 people that participated are from the agri-food sector. It is important to note that some people who attended multiple events but were counted as separate individuals.

*Table 2. Summary of stakeholders engaged throughout the CVAP update process.*

Category	#	%
Agri-food sector	77	72
Government staff	13	12
Local organizations	14	10
General public	9	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>113</b>	<b>100</b>

## 2.0 Vision, Goals, and Recommendations

The *Background Report*, *Interim Report*, and *Engagement Summary Report* all contain detailed information and data that inform the vision, goals, objectives, and actions of the plan. These companion documents provide the background and rationale for the recommendations and can be [found on the project website](#).

As an important ongoing aspect of planning and implementation, the CVAP must be undertaken through an over-arching lens of reconciliation. This will require a deepening of dialogue and working and governing relationships with K’ómoks First Nation on both traditional food harvesting and agricultural issues. This dialogue could centre around areas of joint interest and approaches to collaboration, including initiatives that could be pursued collectively.

### 2.1 Vision Statement

The vision statement describes a clear, comprehensive future state and intention for agriculture in the Comox Valley. This vision is intended to provide a common point on the horizon that help to orient all efforts in the same direction.

***Agriculture is the heart of the Comox Valley.** The history of the region, including during pre-colonial times when Indigenous food systems were abundant, will continue to influence this growing sector of the local economy today and into the future. With a mix of enterprises focused on a diversity of markets, the Valley's farms will continue to produce quality products. Farmers will be supported in their stewardship of land and water resources and become resilient to the impacts of climate change. The community will nurture a new generation of farmers with the capacity and resources to adapt and innovate so that a thriving agriculture and food system in the Comox Valley can continue to prosper.*

## 2.2 Goals

The goals presented here reflect the vision statement and overall aims articulated and amalgamated through feedback received during engagement and presented in the *Interim Report*. The goals and associated actions are not presented in order of importance; all are critical for improving agricultural capacity.

1. Steward water resources to meet agricultural water needs.
2. Maintain agricultural land protection policies and support for producers.
3. Support actions to grow the regional agri-food economy.
4. Collaborate towards climate change adaptation, mitigation, and emergency preparedness.
5. Strengthen awareness of the Comox Valley agri-food sector.

## 2.3 Recommendation Tables

Each CVAP goal represents a result to be achieved through a list of 22 recommended actions. The actions are intended to be achievable, measurable, relevant, and time-bound where possible. The recommended actions are presented using the following priority levels, which were assigned based on input from the farming community. These levels may be adjusted based on availability of funding and other resources as implementation progresses.

Priority levels:

- **Ongoing:** These actions may have already begun but require continued, renewed support to achieve success over the next 10 years.
- **High:** Requires urgent action for progress to be made and/or for other actions to succeed. Should be started within 1-2 years.
- **Medium:** Not critical for actions to move forward, but necessary and important. Should be started within 3-5 years.
- **Long Term:** Less important, but still necessary for improvements in the local agricultural system. Should be started within 6-10 years.

## Goal 1: Steward water resources to meet agricultural water needs.

Concerns over water availability for agriculture are anticipated to become more acute, with water shortages increasing in frequency and duration due to impacts from climate change and competing demand from non-agricultural users. At the same time, minimum in-stream water levels must be maintained for fish and aquatic ecosystem health. Meanwhile, the population of the Comox Valley continues to rise, placing increased pressure on water systems due to residential, commercial, and industrial demand. Although water resource management is largely governed by regulations set by senior levels of government (i.e. from the provincial *Water Sustainability Act*), the CVRD does have some leverage at the local level. A recommendation first noted within the TRAWP is to form a regional watershed stewardship service, as a new service area for the CVRD. This concept is currently in exploratory stages and is generally supported by the agricultural community. This points to the opportunity to integrate water resource management into land use planning decisions more generally and to further engage with the agricultural community on water-related decision-making.

*Table 3. Goal 1 recommendations.*

Action	Description	Priority Level
1.1	<p><b><i>Support alternative water collection and storage practices within the agricultural community.</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Co-host workshops regarding best practices for dugouts, storage ponds, rainwater collection tanks, and other forms of water storage.</li> <li>• Help producers by highlighting construction requirements and a vendor list that can help to install dug outs and other water storage facilities.</li> <li>• Advocate to senior levels of government to reduce administrative and regulatory barriers to building on-farm water storage facilities.</li> <li>• Provide information regarding funding opportunities and other resources.</li> </ul>	<b><i>Ongoing</i></b>
1.2	<p><b><i>Advocate for drainage upgrades and maintenance of existing agricultural ditches.</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify existing needs to improve, extend, and maintain drainage ditch systems including flood gates within agricultural areas. Communicate these needs to Provincial and Federal levels of government.</li> <li>• Partner with DFO, ENV, and AF to host educational events that examine drainage issues on farmland and opportunities to improve conditions.</li> <li>• Advocate to Provincial and Federal government agencies to provide the agricultural community with resources to improve drainage infrastructure, ditch clearing, maintenance, and upgrades.</li> </ul>	<b><i>Ongoing</i></b>
1.3	<p><b><i>Encourage water stewardship and conservation practices.</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with K'ómoks First Nation to identify areas of shared management and interest.</li> <li>• Work with AF to update the ALUI and associated Agricultural Water Demand Model on a regular basis (e.g., every 10 years) to obtain a more accurate estimate of agricultural water needs.</li> <li>• Advocate for agricultural water licences to be fast-tracked through FrontCounterBC.</li> <li>• Provide links to online water conservation resources and/or printed materials, that can be sent with utility bills or other mail-outs.</li> </ul>	<b><i>Ongoing</i></b>

Action	Description	Priority Level
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue to collect and disseminate water use data across land uses in the region in order to foster trust and increase transparency regarding water-related decision making.</li> <li>Consider water availability when issuing residential building permits.</li> </ul>	
1.4	<p><b><i>Ensure that if a regional water service is created that it includes agriculturally specific outreach and extension regarding water-related issues in the region.</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consult with the agricultural community if/when a regional water service is being developed.</li> </ul>	<b>High</b>

**Goal 2: Maintain agricultural land protection policies and support for producers.**

There are a range of policies and regulations affecting agricultural land in the Comox Valley, and these often overlap between the Province, the CVRD, and member municipalities. Policies that both support the land base, as well as serving the needs of producers and their operations, is critical to growing the local agricultural economy. Continuing to align local and regional planning efforts with provincial regulations will help to minimize conflicts between producers and non-producers and support farming activities. New initiatives must also emerge to reduce the impacts of public trails in farming areas. Although trails, camping, outdoor education, parks, and protected areas are often supported by the public, when occurring near farmland they can weaken or impede the development of a viable agriculture sector in the area. Using a nested approach within policy to protect agricultural land and support producers will help to lead to an increase in confidence in the sector, and in the productivity of land base.

*Table 4. Goal 2 recommendations.*

Action	Description	Priority Level
2.1	<p><b><i>Maintain the Agricultural Coordinator position.</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue to commit resources to the Agricultural Coordinator position and consider re-framing it to an Agricultural Planner, albeit with the continued ability to pursue priorities of local agricultural significance.</li> <li>Develop a clear description of role and responsibilities for the position (please refer to Appendix V for a possible scope of this position).</li> <li>Meet with representatives from CVFI and MIFI to ensure that the Agricultural Coordinator position is designed to support both organizations but is firmly embedded within CVRD staff and not cross-appointed to other organizations.</li> <li>Consider expanding the role of the Agricultural Coordinator / Planner into a full-scale regional agricultural service (this is discussed further under the Implementation section of the Plan).</li> </ul>	<b>Ongoing</b>
2.2	<p><b><i>Re-assess the role of the Agricultural Advisory Planning Commission.</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Examine the current Terms of Reference of the CVRD’s Agricultural Advisory Planning Commission (APC), which currently is limited to reviewing applications and advising the Board on agricultural matters.</li> <li>Consider expanding the role of the APC to that of an Advisory Committee, with the ability to complete tasks, manage a budget, and facilitate cross-organizational communication.</li> <li>Consider assigning the Advisory Committee a role in implementing the CVAP.</li> </ul>	<b>High</b>



Action	Description	Priority Level
2.3	<p><b><i>Enhance compliance and enforcement for farmland protection.</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop communications materials (such as a brochure or factsheet) that can be distributed by CVRD and member municipalities’ building permitting offices to ALR landowners and developers regarding the legislated restrictions on development on ALR land. This may require some staff training to ensure regulations a well-understood. The building permitting offices have both an opportunity and responsibility to educate landowners and assist with enforcement of ALR land use. This will help to ensure that building permits are granted to landowners who are aware of the regulations.</li> <li>• Work with the ALC to develop and resource a coordinated joint compliance and enforcement strategy for land within the ALR to prioritize and address ongoing issues over the longer term.</li> <li>• Work with municipalities to identify enforcement issues on non-ALR farmland.</li> <li>• Foster partnerships between Electoral Areas and municipalities to create effective urban-agricultural interfaces that are maintained under development pressures.</li> </ul>	<b><i>High</i></b>
2.4	<p><b><i>Update the Regional Growth Strategy, Official Community Plan, and Zoning Bylaw to be consistent with provincial policies, bylaws, and best practices.</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue to recognize agriculture as a priority use within the ALR, restricting non-farm uses.</li> <li>• Consider adopting building setbacks on non-ALR properties that are adjacent to ALR land in an effort to reduce conflicts between neighbours.</li> <li>• Ensure land use designations and zoning tools indicate support for farms located outside the ALR and provide similar benefits (such as farm stands).</li> <li>• Update the Zoning Bylaw with ALC policies and regulations for ALR lands. This will require an assessment as to whether or not to match the number and maximum size of dwellings with current provincial regulations, or to impose additional restrictions. See Appendix for additional details.</li> <li>• When updating the OCP and/or Zoning Bylaw, follow ALC and AF requirements and guidelines regarding residential uses on farmland. The ALC’s <a href="#">Guide to Bylaw Development in Farming Areas</a> and AF’s <a href="#">Guide to Edge Planning</a> are key resources regarding residential footprints and maximum setbacks.</li> <li>• Refer draft RGS, OCP, and zoning bylaw amendments to the ALC for review.</li> <li>• Review and evaluate the Farmland Protection Development Guidelines to determine if adjustments should be made to improve effectiveness.</li> <li>• Advocate to the province to modernize taxation policies to stimulate agricultural production.</li> </ul>	<b><i>Ongoing</i></b>
2.5	<p><b><i>Continue to manage and reduce conflicts between producers, recreational trail users, and wildlife.</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Document conflicts that producers experience with trail users, particularly impacts from unleashed dogs and trespassers.</li> <li>• Continue to install fencing along Right of Ways between trails and farms to protect both livestock, wildlife, and pets.</li> <li>• Develop and fund a pilot project that examines the use of hedgerows as an appropriate barrier along some trails.</li> <li>• Explore and promote innovative ways to reduce wildlife and waterfowl conflicts on farms.</li> <li>• Organize workshops on electric fencing and other measures to mitigate conflicts with livestock while ensuring safety for wildlife.</li> </ul>	<b><i>Ongoing</i></b>

### Goal 3: Support actions to grow the regional agri-food economy.

Comox Valley producers and processors currently sell their products locally, regionally, provincially, and internationally, however they have identified that a re-investment in local services and infrastructure would reinvigorate the sector. The agri-sector community has also indicated that the Comox Valley could benefit from a regional market analysis, whereby specific growing opportunities and routes to market are investigated. This will require a detailed analysis of business indicators and will provide the business case for investment into infrastructure, services, and other resources for the sector. This type of initiative could be aligned with a Regional Agricultural Service. A sector strategy would allow for a strengthening of the economic development lens. This could be accomplished, in part, by integrating some of the objectives being explored in the regional tourism strategy.

*Table 5. Goal 3 recommendations.*

Action	Description	Priority Level
3.1	<p><b><i>Seek opportunities for establishing a permanent location(s) for farmers markets and local food retail.</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assess work completed to date on the establishment of a year-round permanent farmers market.</li> <li>• Meet with the CVFMA to initiate a process around establishing a permanent location(s) for farmers markets, local food pop-up markets, and other avenues for regional producers to connect with consumers. Maximizing the use of existing lands and assets, such as the Exhibition Grounds, should be accommodated for the benefit of the agri-food sector.</li> <li>• Obtain funding for a business strategy (if required) for the use of existing CVRD infrastructure.</li> <li>• Make a final decision regarding the involvement and/or other forms of support by the CVRD for a farmers market location.</li> <li>• Help promote the Farmers Market Coupon program.</li> </ul>	<b><i>High</i></b>
3.2	<p><b><i>Develop an agri-food sector market assessment and growth strategy for the Comox Valley.</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Using the Census of Agriculture, BC Assessment, and the ALUI as a baseline, investigate the true economic value of the regional agri-food sector including gross revenues, labour, and secondary services. The recent BC Farmers Market Economic Impact Study can also be used to inform this work.</li> <li>• Work with BC Transit and CVRD staff to seize opportunities to increase transit services to rural areas to facilitate farmworker commutes, particularly during evenings and weekends.</li> <li>• Distribute information from AF, research organizations, and other groups regarding what crops/products are best suited to the area and have the potential for market growth and develop regionally specific profit models and business planning resources.</li> <li>• Work with the agricultural community to identify agricultural landowners and/or sites that would be good candidates for participating in provincial crop trial initiatives. This could include the Agricultural Coordinator facilitating a meeting with AF, the BC Eco Seed Co-op and UBC Seed Trial group.</li> </ul>	<b><i>Medium</i></b>
3.3	<p><b><i>Work to support succession planning and new entrants in ensuring the longevity in the sector.</i></b></p>	<b><i>Long Term</i></b>

Action	Description	Priority Level
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explore innovative practices within CVRD’s jurisdiction to support new entrants into joining the agri-food marketplace and maintain (or increase) the productivity of ALR land.</li> <li>• Provide links to resources to help inform new entrants on licensing, insurance, funding opportunities and support services.</li> <li>• Host workshops to help farmers create innovative and site-specific succession plans.</li> <li>• Work with Young Agrarians to facilitate land linking and highlight the fact that there are a range of parcel sizes that are potentially available for agricultural activities.</li> </ul>	
3.4	<p><b><i>Support investment into services and infrastructure that expands regional food processing, storage, and aggregation capacity.</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with the Farmers Institutes to secure funds and/or financing from grants or lending agencies for new agri-business ventures. This could include offering letters of support.</li> <li>• Continue to work with industry and community interests around establishing shared food infrastructure facilities (i.e. Food Hub) in the Comox Valley.</li> <li>• Consider opportunities that are supportive of new and young farmers and food processors.</li> <li>• Identify shared interest, common ground, and potential assets for regional food infrastructure with K’ómoks First Nation.</li> <li>• Promote existing information on regionally adapted successful crop varieties available from regional seed suppliers, AF, and universities.</li> <li>• Support local seed saving and seed adaptation initiatives.</li> </ul>	<b><i>Ongoing</i></b>

**Goal 4: Collaborate towards climate change adaptation and mitigation, and emergency preparedness.**

It is estimated that, by 2050, the CVRD will experience climate shifts that include a rise in median temperatures of approximately 2.7°C, an increase in precipitation by 3%, and a decrease in winter snowfall by 74%. Climate change is projected to cause flooding in the spring and more severe drought conditions in the summer, putting pressure on irrigation infrastructure and water availability. Increased wildfire risk and alterations to precipitation patterns, due to climate change, will affect wildlife populations and movement patterns. Emergency planning efforts must continue to consider the more frequent occurrences of droughts and wildfires. Emergency management and preparedness planning should include an agricultural perspective and invite producers to the table when organizing an approach to respond to emergency events.

*Table 6. Goal 4 recommendations.*

Action	Description	Priority Level
4.1	<p><b><i>Incorporate agriculture in CVRD Community Climate Action planning initiatives and strategies.</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Include the agriculture sector in climate change plans and strategies and acknowledge the connection between emergency preparedness and food supply reliability.</li> <li>• Recognize the local agri-food sector as part of the solution for mitigating impacts of climate change and the role a robust local food system plays in minimizing GHG emissions by reducing the transportation involved in food products (both inputs and outputs).</li> </ul>	<b><i>High</i></b>
4.2	<p><b><i>Support sustainable farming practices and the protection of ecosystem services on farms.</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Through the Agricultural Coordinator role, encourage local farmers to participate in the <a href="#">Environmental Farm Plan (EFP)</a> program, which is run by Investment Agriculture Foundation BC (IAFBC) and is free, voluntary, and confidential. Participating farms may be eligible for funding through <a href="#">IAFBC’s Beneficial Management Practices</a> program to implement sustainable farming practices and technologies.</li> <li>• Support <a href="#">farming practices that reduce GHG emissions</a> through livestock and manure management, soil conservation and carbon sequestration, energy conservation and fuel switching as well as on-farm energy production.</li> <li>• Explore opportunities whereby the CVRD could contribute to compensating producers for ecological goods and services sustained by farmland. This could include supporting and distributing information about IAFBC’s <a href="#">Farmland Advantage</a> program.</li> </ul>	<b><i>Medium</i></b>
4.3	<p><b><i>Communicate with, and involve, agricultural stakeholders in emergency preparedness planning.</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Undertake a regional asset mapping exercise to create an inventory of tools, equipment, and infrastructure available to the agricultural community during an emergency. This could include emergencies related to natural hazards, climate change, and/or biosecurity.</li> <li>• Enhance on-farm emergency preparedness by ensuring producers are aware of existing risks, roles &amp; responsibilities during an emergency. Emphasize that the responsibility for livestock during an emergency belongs to the livestock owner</li> </ul>	<b><i>High</i></b>

Action	Description	Priority Level
	<p>and the importance of registering through AF’s Premises ID program, no matter the size of the farm operation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Add emergency planning tools such as livestock farm “buddy systems” and the <i>Farm Flood Readiness Toolkit</i> to the CVRD website.</li> <li>• Include a producer perspective when reviewing local emergency response plans.</li> <li>• Continue to work interdepartmentally and with Provincial counterparts to ensure all parties have a shared understanding of the number and type of assets that can support an emergency response for agriculture as well as protocols and procedures for an emergency event.</li> </ul>	
4.4	<p><b><i>Continue to support wildfire risk reduction initiatives with agricultural stakeholders.</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create a list of resources for farmers regarding best practices for land clearing, safe open burning techniques, and alternative waste disposal methods.</li> <li>• Partner with CVRD Emergency Programs and provincial organizations (e.g. BC Wildfire Service) to host a community workshop on fire risk management for agricultural stakeholders at a time of year when farm operators are most available to participate (e.g. November/December).</li> <li>• Ensure that trees/vegetation within roadside Right of Ways are maintained to minimize the threat of fire and road blockages.</li> </ul>	<b><i>Ongoing</i></b>
4.5	<p><b><i>Increase solid waste management opportunities through recycling, composting, burning alternatives, and food waste reduction within the food system.</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide additional services to rural communities to avoid producers having to privately contract out waste removal, reduce self-hauling, or conducting on-site burning.</li> <li>• Explore opportunities with Clean Farms for improved plastics recycling including silage bags, plastic feed bags, bale twine, hoses, and irrigation pipes &amp; fittings, among other things.</li> <li>• Continue to host pesticide, chemicals, and livestock medication round-up events in partnership with Clean Farms.</li> <li>• Work with Recycle BC (Multi-Materials BC), Tire Stewardship BC, and others to assist with removal of recyclable materials including old tires in farming areas.</li> <li>• Partner with Clean Farms and/or local recycling depot to launch a small scale pilot project to recycle plastic bale wrap.</li> <li>• Explore expansion of the Province’s Extended Producer Responsibility program to provide additional waste diversion opportunities.</li> </ul>	<b><i>Medium</i></b>

## Goal 5: Strengthen awareness of the local agri-food sector.

A strong local agri-food system greatly benefits from public knowledge and awareness of the hard work, dedication, and skill underlying a successful farm operation. The public also needs to know how to be a good neighbour to farm operations. While many residents suggest there is good local support for local food, there is room in the Comox Valley region to increase the demand and support for producers. The need for more educational resources for both producers and consumers are key concerns raised by stakeholders in meetings and through the results of the community survey. Building upon existing partnerships with other organizations and institutions is crucial in continuing to grow awareness around regional food and agriculture.

*Table 7. Goal 5 recommendations.*

Action #	Description	Priority Level
5.1	<p><b><i>Develop a regional Food Security Plan for the Comox Valley</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with key regional collaborators to develop a regional Food Security Plan that would align with the CVAP and other CVRD plans.</li> <li>• Ensure that equity-seeking/deserving groups (e.g. seniors, youth, single parent families, refugees, and new residents) are engaged in identifying challenges and opportunities for improving household food security.</li> <li>• Consider both household and community food security by examining policies and strategies that local governments and regional entities can adopt to support better access to affordable, nutritious, and culturally appropriate foods.</li> <li>• Consider incorporating food waste reduction and food recovery into a regional solid waste management plan. This could involve partnering with local organizations such as Lush Valley, Second Harvest, Fishes and Loaves, CVFMA, and others. Strategies to minimize food waste at different stages of production, distribution, and consumption could be included.</li> </ul>	<b><i>High</i></b>
5.2	<p><b><i>Develop and maintain online agricultural resources that are readily available to the public.</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create a one-stop landing webpage for agriculture and food related items on the CVRD website. Currently there are separate pages for the CVAP project and Food Hub project, but they are not explicitly linked. For examples see: <a href="#">Township of Langley</a>; <a href="#">Alberni Clayoquot Regional District</a>; <a href="#">Nanaimo Regional District</a>; and <a href="#">Squamish Lillooet Regional District</a>.</li> <li>• Use GoogleMyMaps or another user-friendly online platform to present a visual representation of the inventory. This could include an evolution of the current print-based Growers Guide.</li> <li>• Provide informational resources to the Real Estate Board, Association or directly to local realtor groups, to inform them and potential property buyers or developers about land use restrictions, normal farm practices, and the <i>Farm Practices Protection (Right to Farm) Act</i>. This may include <a href="#">The Countryside and You</a> brochure.</li> <li>• Provide information regarding regulations and development restrictions in the ALR.</li> <li>• Provide links to the <i>Water Sustainability Act</i> and regulations for licensing and commercial water use.</li> </ul>	<b><i>Medium</i></b>

Action #	Description	Priority Level
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide informational resources to existing residents to convey the importance of agriculture and how to be a good neighbour to agricultural operations.</li> <li>• Provide information on agriculture and its importance for the local economy and local food systems. This could include publishing infographics, videos, and other messaging through District communications channels.</li> <li>• Export relevant data from the map to create an annual <i>Comox Valley Farm Guide</i> that includes farms, farm stands and markets, &amp; local food processors.</li> <li>• Expand the map database to include agricultural support services and share the map with stakeholders, such as emergency preparedness and programming efforts.</li> </ul>	
5.3	<p><b><i>Support an annual Comox Valley Agri-Food tour.</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reach out to K'ómoks regarding the possibility of partnering with CVRD staff and officials to create learning opportunities about traditional food harvesting and the impact that colonial agriculture has had on the region's food system.</li> <li>• Work with Farmers Institutes and others to help fund, plan, promote, and host a tour that could focus on attracting a specific group audience and/or the public.</li> <li>• Include producers and processors in the tour stops.</li> <li>• Consider developing self-guided options (in-person and video tours).</li> <li>• Include the agri-food tour as a key part of on-boarding for new elected officials and staff.</li> </ul>	<i>Ongoing</i>
5.4	<p><b><i>Identify and support opportunities for school-aged children to learn about and engage in the food and agriculture system.</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support schools, camps, and clubs in continued participation in the Farm 2 School, BC Fruit and Vegetable Program, and similar programs.</li> <li>• Encourage procurement partnerships between local farmers and schools to supply fresh food for breakfast, lunch, or snack programs.</li> <li>• Support the production of food on school grounds by providing soil or compost, fencing, small tools, or other infrastructure for these projects where possible.</li> <li>• Share existing educational materials for elementary, middle school, and high school students such as the online "Beef Production in BC" modules developed by the BC Cattlemen's Association, and other resources developed by industry associations.</li> </ul>	<i>Medium</i>

### 3. Monitoring and Evaluation Framework

A monitoring and evaluation framework is helpful in guiding progress of the implementation of CVAP actions and in measuring success. Where relevant, current performance indicators used by the CVRD can be incorporated. Table 12 presents descriptions of six indicators along with examples of success (what is being measured), evaluation mechanisms (how it is being measured), and data sources for each.

The indicators are presented as “performance” or “process” related:

- “Performance” indicators note the overall success of the plan as actions play out on the ground.
- “Process” indicators signal the overall implementation of specific actions over time.

The status of the indicators should be reported annually.

Table 8. Monitoring and Evaluation: Performance Indicators.

Indicator	Measure of Success	Evaluation Mechanism	Data source	Frequency of Reporting	Baseline Data
<b>Performance Indicators</b>					
<b>1. Total farmed area and number of farms (on ALR and outside ALR)</b>	Increase in farm activity on parcels available for farming.	Track the area of farmland under production: - Total area in production - Average # of acres/farm - # of farms year over year	Farm classified area from Statistics Canada Census of Agriculture BC Assessment ALUI updates	5 years	2013 ALUI  2021 Census of Agriculture  2023 BC Assessment
<b>2. Integrity of the ALR and agriculturally-zoned lands</b>	Number of hectares has been maintained in ALR and other zones designated as agriculture.	Comparison of ALR characteristics over time: - ALR application decisions	ALC website  Development application data from CVRD	Annually	2013 ALUI  ALC website  Zoning changes to agricultural land in CVRD.
<b>3. Increased water resilience</b>	Number of farms that have on-farm water storage.	Communication with farmers and with AF.	Farming community survey  AF	Annually	Not yet available



Table 9. Monitoring and Evaluation: Process Indicators.

Indicator	Measure of Success	Evaluation Mechanism	Data source	Frequency of Reporting	Baseline Data
<b>Process Indicators</b>					
<b>4. Number of educational events hosted with the agriculture and food sector.</b>	An increase in events held in the agriculture and food sector.	Comparison of event numbers annually.	Farmers Institutes, AF, and CVRD events calendars.	Annually	MIFI, CVFI, AF CVRD websites and staff.
<b>5. Number of CVAP recommended actions completed</b>	50% of actions completed within 5 years of adoption (Excluding ongoing actions)	Tracking of actions completed over time.	Updates and amendments to bylaws and other CVRD policies.  Any new projects emerging from the CVAP.	Annually	An evaluation of the actions completed to date.
<b>6. Annual Budget allowance for continued CVAP implementation</b>	Budget allocated each year for CVAP implementation.	Track budget allocations for CVAP actions as well as budget for specific projects related to CVAP actions.	CVRD Board commitments for budget.	Annually	CVRD budget commitments for 2024-2025.

## Appendix I: Glossary

### **Agriculture**

Agriculture can be defined as the systematic and controlled use of living organisms and the environment to improve the human condition. Sustainable agriculture enhances environmental quality and the resource base on which it depends; provides for basic human food and fiber needs; is economically viable; and enhances the quality of life for farmers and society as a whole over the long term.

### **Agricultural Land**

According to the *Agriculture Land Commission Act* (the "ALC Act") agricultural land is the land resource upon which agriculture takes place due to its ability to grow food products. The agricultural land resource and the products that can be grown are based on a soils and climate combination which can vary across the landscape. Although agricultural land is primarily required for the production of food for human and animal consumption, agricultural activities also include the growing of plants for fibre and fuels (including wood), and for other organically derived non-food products (e.g. pharmaceuticals, etc).

### **Food Hub**

A strategically located facility with a business management structure facilitating the aggregation, storage, processing, distribution, and/or marketing of locally/regionally produced food products. Food hub refers to both facilities that distributes food to increase food security in the community and/or facilities that are set up to provide small farmers access to a market they would normally have be able to access.

### **Food Security**

Food security exists when all people at all times have access to sufficient, safe, nutritious, affordable food to maintain a healthy and active life. (World Health Organization).

### **Food System**

A sustainable community food system is a collaborative network that integrates sustainable food production, processing, distribution, consumption and waste management in order to enhance the environmental, economic and social health of a particular place. Farmers, consumers and communities partner to create a more locally based, self-reliant food economy. (Gafsi, Mohamed, & Favreau, Jean Luc. (2013). Indicator-Based Method for Assessing Organic Farming Sustainability. Methods and Procedures for Building Sustainable Farming Systems)

### **Regenerative Agriculture**

Regenerative Agriculture is a system of farming principles and practices that increases biodiversity, enriches soils, and improves watershed health. One of the goals of regenerative agriculture is to capture and store carbon in soil and biomass, thereby acting as a carbon sink.

### **Resilient/Resilience**

The ability to anticipate risk, limit or mitigate impacts, and adapt, evolve and grow when faced with change. A resilient community is self-reliant and ensures those most in need have access to essential services such as food, housing, water, and energy to support ongoing social, economic and environmental health.

### **Urban Agriculture**

In general terms, means cultivating, processing, and distributing food in or around a town or city or other urban setting. In the Comox Valley, it is defined as the act of growing food on a lot and includes produce grown in a garden, community gardens, fruit and nut tree production, keeping of hens and bees, and can include agricultural retail sales.

## Appendix II: Recommendations for OCP, Zoning Bylaw, and Development Permit Guidelines Updates

Continue to include agriculture as a permitted use in non-ALR urban and residential zones, where appropriate.

- When updating OCPs and zoning bylaws, continue to permit agriculture uses on non-ALR land, where appropriate (e.g. institutional).
- Consider any special provisions for urban agriculture, where needed (e.g. henkeeping bylaws, water use for food gardens).
- When updating definitions in the Regional Growth Strategy, Official Community Plans or zoning bylaws, consider including flexible language and definitions that support innovative and emerging food production methods (e.g., agroforestry, rooftop gardens, aquaponics, community greenhouses) in specific zones as appropriate.

Encourage the farming of farmland and prioritize soil-based agriculture in the ALR.

- Work with the real estate industry and others to discourage purchase of farmland by non-farm entities.
- Advocate for higher property taxes on unused farmland.
- Consider biodiversity and wildlife trade-offs with agricultural operations.
- Locate non-land based production like greenhouses, mushrooms, and cannabis away from agricultural land
- Encourage the location of enclosed growing systems in non-ALR zones (e.g. light industrial, commercial)

Ensure zoning supports appropriately scaled processing and value-added activities.

- Continue to ensure that local policies and zoning facilitates and incentivizes the establishment of appropriately scaled value-added processing and retail activities in industrial zoned areas and farmland, in alignment with ALC policies and regulations.

Maintain the Farmland protection Development Permit Area.

- Update Section 85 of the Rural Comox Valley OCP No 337, *Farmland protection development permit area*, to include a reference to the *Guide for Subdivision Near Agriculture (2024)*.
- Where appropriate, update the development permit area to reflect best practices for minimizing conflicts between agricultural land (ALR and zones where agriculture is permitted) and other land uses.

## Appendix III: Engagement Results

The key engagement results that were used to inform the development of the central themes and topics found in the *Interim Report*. The key challenges uncovered during the engagement process are summarized below.

### **Comox Valley is Home to a Passionate Agricultural Community**

One of Comox Valley's greatest strengths is a long and rich history of agricultural production, with generations of knowledge and experience in farming, foraging and harvesting in the region's climate and landscapes. Within Comox Valley there are two Farmers Institutes which at time present divergent perspectives on topics of mutual interest. Furthermore, the community also pointed to a disconnect between local governments understanding of agriculture and the realities on the ground. There is hope that maintaining the role of the CVRD Agricultural Coordinator can help to minimize the disconnect and divergence between government and Farmers Institute's over time.

### **Water is a Key Concern**

Water management is one of the key issues in Comox Valley, producers note the changing hydrological systems associated with climate change are compromising water availability in the summer and creating drainage issues in the winter. Producers stated that there is a need for further support on developing water storage, in the way of accessible information about where funding can be found, and regulatory advocacy. Producers noted that there is a need to balance the needs of urban and rural water users, as well as provide information and messaging around the importance of agricultural water use. For example, there is a need to educate realtors regarding the need to disclose to potential buyers of agricultural properties that a water license may be required.

### **Market Diversity Leads to Sector Strength**

Producers based in the Comox Valley sell their products to a wide diversity of markets, from the farm-gate to international customers and relies on many agricultural resources such as storage, distribution, processing and marketing. This market diversity builds resiliency and strength into the sector however, it was also noted from interviewees that the amount of food being produced in the valley has been on a decline over the past 100 years. Interview findings pointed to rising costs of land, transportation, and inputs such as equipment, seeds, fertilizers, packaging, and feed as one of the core struggles at making farming profitable. Furthermore, a reduction in agricultural services such as slaughter are further compromising the economic viability of the sector.

### **Farmland Protection is Critical**

The Comox Valley is experiencing the pressure of urbanization of agricultural land, with many producers pointing to shifting urban boundaries and subdivision of ALR land (or small minimum lot sizes) as compromising the protection of land for agricultural production. Farmland is also being purchased by individuals looking for a residential acreage, with no intention to farm, and this is driving up agricultural land values. Furthermore, many interviewees cited a lack of enforcement on ALR infringements as a contributor to loss of farmland and the need for the CVRD to build a relationship with the ALC to support enforcement. It was also noted that increasing prices of farmland is impeding farmers in expanding their operations or for new entrants to begin financially viable operations.

### **Succession Planning and New Entrants are Needed to Ensure Business Sustainability**

While the Comox Valley has a rich history of agriculture, new entrants into the industry often find it difficult or impossible to build a profitable farm, with many new farmers in the region leaving agriculture within the first five years. New farmers are often relying on grant programs and bank loans, which are unsustainable and frequently result in the need to close the farm. At the same time, a wave of farmer retirements is hitting the region, presenting and opportunity to weave succession planning into the opportunity to welcome new farmers.

## Appendix IV: Funding Opportunities

In order to implement the recommendations presented above, funding will need to be sourced. While some funding may be allocated through the CVRD, outside sources of funding have been identified to support specific initiatives within the implementation plan. Information on current funding opportunities is provided below. Note that funding programs are continually evolving and will need to be monitoring on a regular basis.

### **Investment Agriculture Foundation of BC (IAFBC)**

The Investment Agriculture Foundation (IAFBC) is an industry-led, not-for-profit organization that delivers government-funded programs to the agriculture and agri-food sector of British Columbia. Project funding is available in a variety of areas from supporting local marketing or export initiatives, to enhancing environmental sustainability, to developing a new product or process and more. Visit [www.iafbc.ca](http://www.iafbc.ca) for more information.

### **B.C. Agri-Business Planning Program**

The B.C. Agri-Business Planning Program supports producers and processors to access the following types of business planning services:

- Business Structures: identification and evaluation of potential business structures
- Production Economics: development of production systems and/or strategies
- Business Strategy: development of a strategic plan
- Financial Analysis: development of financial analysis
- Value Added Ventures: development of a business plan for a new value added venture
- Risk Assessment and Mitigation: assessment and development of a business and financial risk management system or strategy
- Human Resources: development and implementation of a strategic Human Resource Plan
- Succession/Transition Planning: development and preparation of a Farm Succession Plan

Eligible applicants can access funding for business planning services from a Qualified Business Consultant.

### **Real Estate Foundation of BC (REFBC)**

The Real Estate Foundation of BC (REFBC) is a philanthropic organization based in BC that supports land use and real estate practices that contribute to resilient, healthy communities and natural environments. The grant program supports non-profit organizations (charities, societies, NGOs, universities and colleges, local and regional governments, First Nations) working to improve BC communities and natural environments through responsible and informed land use, conservation, and real estate practices. Grants support projects, initiatives, and sustainable solutions that address current land use challenges and help communities to plan for the future.

General grants are focused on the following interest areas:

- Sustainable Land Use
- Built Environment Sustainability
- Freshwater Sustainability
- Local and Sustainable Food Systems

There are two intakes per year and applications are open to any non-profit organization doing work related to land use and/or real estate in BC. Local and regional governments and First Nations are eligible to apply.

More information and past projects can be found on REF's grants website at <http://www.refbc.com/grants>.

## Appendix V: Possible Scope of Work for an Agricultural Coordinator (or Planner) Position

### 1. Overall Function of the Agricultural Coordinator (or Planner) Position

There are several models for an Agricultural Coordinator role that can be considered. Local governments such as the Bulkley-Nechako Regional District, Alberni-Clayoquot Regional District, Metro Vancouver, and the Capital Regional District all employ an Agriculture or Food Security Planner or Coordinator position. Based on feedback from the Comox Valley community, the Agricultural Coordinator should focus on facilitating communication and engagement between the CVRD and the agricultural community in order to coordinate efforts towards growing and maintaining a strong agriculture sector.

### 2. Scope Areas of the Agricultural Planner Position

#### a. Provide a conduit and liaison with the agricultural community:

- i. Help to provide information on existing policies and regulations to producers.
- ii. Build and foster relationships within the agriculture industry as well as other businesses in the food and agriculture value chain (e.g. processors, distributors, aggregators, retailers).
- iii. Increase flow of information to and from the agriculture community and the CVRD (staff and elected officials).

#### b. Act as an internal resource on agriculture:

- i. Help to create and maintain a consistent framework for agriculture within the suite of statutory and non-statutory plans and strategies of the CVRD (e.g. vision, strategic directions and initiatives, policy and plan development).
- ii. Ensure that information regarding funding opportunities are clearly and efficiently shared with producers.

#### c. Support internal communication around agricultural issues:

- i. Coordinate CVRD participation and involvement in farm tours and other special events related to agriculture.

#### d. Support external communication on agriculture:

- i. Develop CVRD website updates.
- ii. Promote special events related to agriculture.
- iii. Initiate agricultural celebration and passive education projects.
- iv. Maintain a contact database of regional producers to be used in promoting engagement and other events.
- v. Work with communications staff to develop social media that can be used by producers to promote events.

#### e. Support emergency preparedness and response:

- i. Support producer education initiatives.
- ii. Coordinate with other bodies to identify assets and protocols for an emergency response.
- iii. Support communications, coordination and outreach during emergency events.

**f. Support communication with other regions and senior levels of government**

- i. Liaise with AF and the ALC to ensure a smooth flow of information and resources.
- ii. Partner and participate on AF and Agriculture & Agri-Food Canada initiatives to ensure that decision making around insurance and compensation programs related to drought and weather impacts are inclusive of regional Comox Valley farms and agriculture.
- iii. Liaise with other regional districts on issues of mutual interest.
- iv. Provide a staff point of contact for K'omoks First Nation.
- v. Lead agricultural stakeholders through new and ongoing emergency preparedness initiatives as the local and provincial government levels.

**g. Oversee any studies, programs, or processes related to agriculture including:**

- i. Agri-food sector strategy and marketing plan.
- ii. Regional Food Security Plan.
- iii. Feasibility study for potential Agricultural Service.
- iv. Integration with potential regional watershed stewardship service.
- v. Solid Waste Management Plan including recycling, composting, and alternatives to burning.
- vi. Outreach on on-site water storage.

**3. Ways for the CVRD to support the Agricultural Coordinator (or Planner) Position**

- Develop external communication supports, such as key messages and potential supports the CVRD can provide, to enable the Coordinator to communicate more effectively with community.
- Normalize the position within the CVRD staff structure, with CVRD email and business cards.
- Provide a discretionary budget for honoraria, prizes, meeting refreshments, and other incentives to thank and recognize producers for their contributions on committees, in engagement etc.
- Allow for interns to provide summer support to the Agriculture Coordinator.
- Establish a regular update, information sharing, and reporting structure between the Agriculture Coordinator and other CVRD staff and elected officials.

**4. Further considerations**

- Identify strategies to address inter-regional issues and key players.
- Identify roles for the Agriculture Coordinator position within an Agriculture Service vs. business as usual.