



This report is funded by the Government of British Columbia through programs and initiatives delivered by the Investment Agriculture Foundation of BC.



The Government of British Columbia and the Investment Agriculture Foundation of BC are pleased to participate in the delivery of this report. We are committed to working with our industry partners to address issues of importance to the agriculture and agrifood industry in British Columbia. Opinions expressed in this report are those of the author and not necessarily those of the Investment Agriculture Foundation or the Government of British Columbia.

# Overview of Tour

On November 6, 2024, the Cross-Commodity Leadership Support Project (CCLSP) – a partnership of five tree fruit and wine grape industry groups – hosted a bus tour in Lake Country, BC. The event connected local government staff with farmers, to strengthen relationships and create a better understanding of the challenges faced in navigating policies and regulations.

A great deal of knowledge, experience, and passion was brought to the tour by the more than 50 people who participated. Attendees included numerous farmers from the region and staff from the City of West Kelowna, Westbank First Nation, City of Kelowna, Regional District of Central Okanagan, District of Lake Country, and City of Salmon Arm. Other participants joined from industry support organizations and consultancies (see Appendix A for a list of attendees).

Unfortunately, Ministry of Agriculture and Food and Agricultural Land Commission staff could not attend due to the interregnum.

The tour kicked off at Winfield Memorial Hall, where participants received a welcome from Lake Country Mayor Blair Ireland, and heard an introduction from the CCLSP Project Director, Kellie Garcia. The day included visits to four operations, each offering valuable insights into the real-world issues impacting agriculture in the region. Alan Gatzke, long-time Oyama orchardist, provided narration on the bus between stops.



The first stop was Royal Fruit Packers, where Dave Sandher and his sons showed us their state-of-the-art cleaning, sorting, and packing facility. Next, we toured the housing facility for seasonal agricultural workers at Jealous Fruits with Alex Geen and other staff. Our third stop was Dorenberg Orchards, a multi-commodity farm owned by the van Roechoudt family that has been in production since 1949. Finally, co-owners Roger Wong and Geri Davis welcomed us to Intrigue Wines, a winery that operates a tasting room and wine shop year-round and a picnic area in the warmer months.

# What We Heard

Throughout the day, participants shared perspectives that were rich in insights and highlighted several challenges facing agriculture. Key themes emerged from both discussion at the tour stops and the feedback gathered through a survey.

Many producers expressed frustration over the complexity and inconsistency of regulatory requirements, particularly around frontage improvements, wastewater discharge permits, and water access. At Royal Fruit Packers, for example, operators highlighted the challenges they face with wastewater discharge guidelines and lengthy permit processing times (up to 5 years), which can impact their ability to efficiently manage operations. Similarly, at Dorenberg Orchards, road access requirements, zoning challenges, and inflexible water turn-off policies were seen as significant barriers to smooth operations or farm diversification.



On the other hand, land use planners are balancing multiple priorities such as managing urban-rural interface conflicts, promoting environmental sustainability, addressing housing affordability, and navigating complex public and political relations.

Often working as generalists with limited authority, planners face challenges in aligning varied stakeholder needs with available resources. These experiences highlight the importance of collaboration to create clearer, more streamlined processes that support agricultural producers while also addressing the broader responsibilities of local governments.



The Jealous Fruits Dormitory site highlighted another recurring theme: the need for better public understanding of agricultural practices. Many participants expressed surprise at the level of amenities provided for workers in temporary farm housing such as air conditioning, Wi-Fi, transportation, and on-site laundry and kitchen facilities.

However, misconceptions around housing for foreign workers and its safety sometimes fuels opposition from local communities. These challenges are deepened by the broader labour market considerations farmers face, including the need to attract and retain workers in a competitive environment, all while navigating complex regulatory compliance requirements for housing standards. Educating the public and increasing transparency around the housing process, as well as highlighting the benefits of agricultural workers to the local economy, emerged as key areas for future focus.

At Intrigue Wines, participants discussed the difficulty in meeting requirements for food offerings in lounge areas and the impact of spatial separation rules on visitor experiences. These discussions pointed to a need for more flexible regulations that account for the unique challenges of small-scale wineries and other niche agricultural businesses. Land-based wineries often face additional hurdles due to their reliance on agricultural zoning and land use policies, which differ from the regulations governing commercial wineries located in urban, industrial, or non-agricultural settings.



The tone of the discussions received mixed feedback from attendees. While many participants valued the opportunity for farmers to openly share their challenges, some felt the conversations could have been more balanced and focused on solutions. At times, frustrations were understandably expressed by attendees. In a few cases, local government participants faced questions about decisions made by previous staff or other levels of government, which complicated the dialogue. Refocusing these conversations toward shared understanding and collaboration could improve future engagement.



# Recommendations

Most of the issues discussed on the tour are not new and have already been identified in agricultural plans and other local government planning documents and brought forward at agricultural advisory committee meetings, industry town halls, and other events and meetings. The tour offered another opportunity to reiterate the importance of these issues and discuss possible solutions. None of the issues are easy to solve, but incremental steps can (and must) be taken to improve plans and processes, address inconsistencies between jurisdictions, build trust, and communicate the importance of agriculture in the region.

## *Policy and Regulation*

A recurring theme throughout the tour was the need for clear, consistent, and supportive local government policy and regulations for agricultural operations. Producers emphasized the importance of streamlined permitting processes and better compliance guidance, particularly around diversification, property access, frontage requirements, and water and wastewater management.

Key operational bottlenecks could be addressed by creating clear permit checklists, simplifying processes, providing predictable timelines for approvals.

Pre-application meetings were highlighted as a critical opportunity for the farmer to discuss their needs and goals with local government staff and to foster a more productive approach to regulatory challenges. Having a dedicated staff person with agricultural expertise at each local government to work across departments (planning, engineering, etc.) could also improve relationships, processes, and timelines.



## ***Collaborative and Productive Dialogue***

While the tour provided producers with a platform to voice their concerns, participants highlighted the importance of creating more balanced and collaborative discussions in the future. Structuring discussions to include input from both producers and government staff can deepen mutual understanding and lead to more effective problem-solving. Regular check-ins, workshops, and continuous dialogue were suggested as ways to improve relationships and foster trust.

It was proposed that CCLSP partner with regional districts to organize semi-annual facilitated discussions between local and senior governments and farmers to enhance communication and collaboration across the sector.



## ***Education and Awareness***

Public misconceptions and complaints about agricultural practices, particularly around seasonal workers, water use and wastewater discharge, and noise and air quality are a significant barrier to positive community relations. Participants on the tour recommended launching targeted education campaigns to improve community understanding of agriculture's role in the regional economy and food system, as well as highlighting the benefits of having temporary foreign workers and modern on-farm housing standards in the community. Local governments can help to promote and celebrate agriculture in the community.

## ***Infrastructure and Water***

Participants stressed that road or other infrastructure upgrades done in the community need to consider the unique needs of agricultural operations, such as adequate access to the farm for large vehicles and road design that is conducive to transporting fruit. Consultation with surrounding farms during the design phase would help flag potential issues early on.



Participants also highlighted water security as a key issue impacting farms today. An increasing population, aging infrastructure, and a changing climate are adding pressures to water systems and impacting water availability and quality for agriculture. Concerns about water shut offs during critical growing periods stressed the importance of proactive communication.

## ***Agricultural Waste Management***

The need for sustainable and cost-effective agricultural waste disposal alternatives was highlighted, especially given the widespread tree and vine loss over the last few years. Participants suggested that local governments could collaborate with other levels of government to develop and promote cost-effective waste management solutions. Rebates or subsidies and accessible disposal locations would give farmers more opportunity to evaluate options and choose the best approach for their operations.



## ***Farm Worker Housing***

Labour shortages and housing for farm workers was also identified as a key issue because much of the tree fruit sector relies on temporary foreign workers to harvest and process crops. A lengthy permitting process involving all levels of government is required for constructing farm worker housing, and inconsistencies exist between farm worker housing zoning bylaws within the region. This hinders the success of farm businesses as well as the growth of the sector.



Local governments are dealing with many complicated housing challenges these days, but they need to continue to do what they can to create certainty for farm worker housing. This could include building relationships and increasing communication with staff at the Agricultural Land Commission and the Ministry of Agriculture and Food and examining internal policies and regulations for opportunities to better support farm worker housing.

## ***Innovative Technologies and Practices***

Participants expressed strong interest in innovative technologies and sustainable practices that could help address agricultural challenges. Feedback indicated that highlighting success stories and showcasing tools such as weather-based decision systems, adaptive water management technologies, and sustainable waste disposal methods would add significant value to future events.



# Conclusion

The Agriculture in Action: Bridging Policy & Practice tour brought together a wide range of people to discuss the challenges and opportunities facing tree fruit and wine grape farms in the Lake Country region. Feedback we received indicated that people found great value from the tour. They enjoyed getting an inside view of the operations and hearing personal accounts from the farmers and appreciated the opportunity to meet new people and reconnect with friends and colleagues.

Among other topics, the day highlighted the need for clear and supportive regulations, better communication during infrastructure upgrades, increased public understanding of agricultural practices, secure access to water, better support for farm worker housing, and stronger collaboration between farmers and government representatives.

CCLSP staff and our industry association partners will continue to work with local governments to move forward on these challenges. The best role of the CCLSP is that of convening and coordinating. We are planning another bus tour for spring 2025 in the south Okanagan that will build on the feedback we received at the Lake Country tour. For example, it was clear that we need to move to a format that allows for more balanced, solutions-focused discussions and structured reflection. A roundtable session at the end of the tour could provide an opportunity to synthesize lessons learned and collaboratively identify actionable next steps. We also need to have the right people “on the bus,” and look forward to welcoming the Ministry and ALC staff now that our new government is formed.

Looking ahead, there is a great opportunity to create inclusive and collaborative conversations. By encouraging open dialogue, exploring the root causes of challenges, and finding ways to improve communication, we can build stronger connections. Let’s keep working together to find shared solutions!



# Appendix A

Attendees of the Agriculture in Action: Bridging Policy & Practice tour in Lake Country, BC, on November 6, 2024.

Name	Organization
Alan Gatzke	<i>Gatzke's Orchard &amp; Farm Market</i>
Anna Warwick Sears	<i>Okanagan Basin Water Board</i>
Ariel Cawley	<i>District of Lake Country</i>
Barbara Hall	<i>UBC Okanagan</i>
Beth Cavers	<i>BC Cherry Association</i>
Brian Zurek	<i>District of Lake Country</i>
Cam Graham	<i>City of West Kelowna</i>
Dapinder Gill	<i>BC Grapegrowers' Association</i>
Dave Sandher	<i>Royal Fruit Packers</i>
David Bailey	<i>Kalwood Farms</i>
Domenic Rampone	<i>West Manufacturing LTD</i>
Evan Esch	<i>Okanagan-Kootenay Sterile Insect Release Program</i>
Gail Nelson	<i>BC Fruit Growers' Association</i>
Gord Morrison	<i>Consolidated Fruit Packers</i>
James Littlely	<i>Okanagan Basin Water Board</i>
Jesse MacDonald	<i>Agriculture &amp; Agri-Food Canada</i>
Kellie Garcia	<i>Cross-Commodity Leadership Support Project</i>
Kimberly Brunet	<i>City of Kelowna</i>
Laura Feeny	<i>Health Canada</i>
Lindsay Allman	<i>Westbank First Nation</i>
Lisa Wambold	<i>Terralink Horticulture</i>
Lynn Lashuk	<i>Lake Country Farmers Institute</i>
Madeleine van Roechoudt	<i>Dorenberg Orchards</i>
Melinda Smyrl	<i>City of Salmon Arm</i>
Michelle Cook	<i>Okanagan-Kootenay Sterile Insect Release Program</i>
Myrna Stark Leader	<i>Central Okanagan Economic Development Commission</i>
Nick Van Dalen	<i>District of Lake Country</i>
Roger Bailey	<i>Kalwood Farms</i>
Roger Wong	<i>Intrigue Wines</i>
Ron Bowles	<i>City of West Kelowna</i>
Ruth King	<i>Sustainable Winegrowing BC</i>

Name	Organization
Ryan Ostertag	<i>Consolidated Fruit Packers</i>
Sandra Schira	<i>Okanagan Basin Water Board</i>
Shamore Watson	<i>Cross-Commodity Leadership Support Project</i>
Shannon Tartaglia	<i>Tartaglia Planning Consulting</i>
Shaun O'Dea	<i>Regional District Central Okanagan</i>
Shelby Austen	<i>Cross-Commodity Leadership Support Project</i>
Shirley Choi	<i>Agriculture &amp; Agri-Food Canada</i>
Sim Sandher	<i>Royal Fruit Packers</i>
Tarsem Singh Goraya	<i>Central Okanagan Tree Fruit Grower</i>
Tom Walker	<i>Country Life in BC</i>
Trevor Empey	<i>District of Lake Country</i>
Tyrion Miskell	<i>BC Grapegrowers' Association</i>
Viviana Toledo	<i>Terralink Horticulture</i>