

# CROSS-COMMODITY ADVISORY COUNCIL

Minutes of the **Cross-Commodity Advisory Council** held in-person at RDCO's Woodhaven Boardroom and virtually via MS Teams on January 28, 2025.

## **PRESENT**

Adrian Arts  
Beth Cavers  
Dapinder Gill  
Karen Yeung  
Kate Durisek  
Melissa Tesche  
Nikki Callaway  
Sukhpaul Bal  
Tyrion Miskell  
Walter Makepeace

BC Ministry of Agriculture & Food  
BC Cherry Association  
BC Grapegrowers' Association  
BC Wine Grape Council  
BC Wine Grape Council  
BC Fruit Growers' Association  
BC Wine Grape Council  
BC Cherry Association  
BC Grapegrowers' Association  
Okanagan-Kootenay Sterile Insect Release Program

## **REGRETS**

Gord Morrison  
Jesse MacDonald  
Madeleine van Roehoudt  
Michelle Cook  
Ryan Ostertag

Consolidated Fruit Packers  
Agriculture & Agri-Food Canada  
Grower at Large  
Okanagan-Kootenay Sterile Insect Release Program  
Consolidated Fruit Packers

## **GUESTS**

None

## **STAFF**

Kellie Garcia  
Shamore Watson  
Shelby Austen

CCLSP Project Director  
CCLSP Domestic Labour Lead  
CCLSP Administration & Communications Manager

### **1. WELCOME & INTRODUCTIONS**

Kellie Garcia, CCLSP Project Director, called the meeting to order at 9:24 am. She introduced new members Karen Yeung (BCWGC) and Dapinder Gill (BCGA).

### **2. ADOPTION OF AGENDA**

**Moved by: Walter Makepeace**

*"THAT the January 28, 2025, meeting agenda be approved as presented."*

**Seconded by: Melissa Tesche**

**CARRIED**

### **3. ADOPTION OF MINUTES**

**Moved by: Sukhpaul Bal**

*"THAT the November 26, 2024, meeting minutes be adopted as presented."*

**Seconded by: Beth Cavers**

**CARRIED**

#### 4. ROUND TABLE UPDATES FROM MEMBERS

- Nikki shared that it has been a quiet winter for the industry. Growers have been content with the mild weather as they plan their replant programs. Many are writing business plans for the first time. The rebate for Washington wines will not be available until April 1, which is a challenge for certain white wines that would typically be released now. This delay, along with market shortages, is creating additional pressure on the industry.
- Beth updated the group on the BCCA AGM scheduled for February 14. She recently held a BCCA board strategic planning session, where key industry issues were discussed. Export programs are ramping up, but the loss of Growers Supply as a pest identification resource is a challenge for producers. On a positive note, two strong summer student applications have already been received, and so far, it has been a good winter for cherries.
- Adrian provided an update from the Ministry of Agriculture and Food, noting that the Climate Resiliency Program launches on January 30, with a webinar expected to be posted prior. Work continues on the Enhanced Replant Program (ERP) Advisory Committee and updates will soon be circulated to industry. The next meeting is set for February 25 and commodity-specific meetings planned for early March. He encouraged the group to review the newly released ministerial mandate letters to see how they align with industry needs.
- Kate highlighted that BCWGC is focused on launching the Wine Grape Industry Task Force and has hired a program manager and communications facilitator. A draft strategic plan will be presented in a town hall format at Southern Interior Horticulture Show to gather industry feedback. She is also helping plan the ERP Advisory Committee meeting, emphasizing the importance of a coordinated response and structured feedback from industry. Additionally, she is managing the Sustainable Winegrowing BC program because the Program Manager moved to another position. Kate noted that BCWGC membership status played a role in ERP application scoring and suggested that MAF consider adopting similar criteria for other programs.
  - Sukhpaul asked whether BCWGC's existing levy system allows for collections on Washington fruit. Kate clarified that levies only apply to fruit grown on mainland vineyards and noted that this year's levy revenue was greatly impacted by the cold damage. She also mentioned that the next Third Thursday R&D meeting will cover the recent impacts of cold weather.
- Sukhpaul provided an update on BCCA's strategic planning and his recent meetings with government officials. He had an introductory meeting with Minister Popham, who is already familiar with BC agriculture. A few weeks ago, he also met with Lawrence Hanson, Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, focusing on business risk management. On behalf of BCCA, he presented a proposal to increase the cap and compensation rate and plans to follow up with a formal letter.
  - Adrian asked if anyone is analyzing bud samples. Sukhpaul shared that Jealous Fruits runs a hardiness program with a freeze chamber, and a few weeks ago, buds were tolerant to -16°C. He noted that there are a lot of cherry buds, so even if some are vegetative, there could still be a record cherry crop. Dapinder added that grape growers are seeing 10-15% damage, but it appears to be within a normal range and less severe than expected.
- Dapinder raised concerns about ERP qualifications, emphasizing the need for IAF programs to be more accessible to farmers rather than structured for companies. Many growers have abandoned applications due to the complexity, opting to work with their banks instead. He also noted growing demand for BC wine in other regions like Washington and California and stressed the importance of ensuring that new grape varieties being planted align with market demand.
- Tyrion shared excitement about launching the Wine Grape Industry Task Force and is actively exploring ways for CCLSP to be involved. BGGA has moved its AGM to the SIHS and had a busy fall with strategic planning and governance training. In 2025, the focus will be on ensuring growers are signed up for Business Risk Management programs. Additionally, she noted a federal Grapegrowers Association has been established to address issues like disease and pest control, BRM, and pesticide regulations.

- Adrian noted that MAF posted an RFP to support governance training for all industry boards, but only received one bid, and that bid was not a good fit. They may reopen the opportunity next year.
- Walt shared that he is preparing to clear 12 acres of apples. He thanked Production Insurance for their payouts this year and appreciated their proactive outreach during the postal strike, ensuring farmers stayed informed. He noted that the mild weather has been positive for operations.
- Melissa shared that she is working to revamp BCFGA's AGM on February 20 to boost attendance but noted challenges in grower engagement. She updated the group on meetings with Minister Popham and MLA Sandhu, expressing optimism about government support but concerns over potential tariffs and whether the one-time funding commitment from the fall will be upheld. She also noted that Fruit and Vegetable Growers Canada has hired a new Executive Director who plans to launch a federal election campaign focused on BRM and the BC grower experience. Melissa reminded the group about two upcoming Apple Marketing Commission engagement sessions with materials in English and Punjabi. Lastly, BCFGA is confirming Pesticide Applicator Certification (PAC) points at SIHS to identify training gaps and determine additional courses needed.
  - The committee discussed PAC point tracking, with Kate interested in collaborating as no system exists for grapes. Tyrion questioned why industry manages a Ministry program, and Adrian explained that industry-led tracking helps maintain standards and avoids producers rewriting tests every five years. Melissa supported a collaborative approach, and Adrian suggested CCLSP could help coordinate. Melissa will share the BCFGA tracking process with CCLSP partners.

## **5. REGULAR BUSINESS**

### **5.1 CCLSP COMMITTEES AND COMMUNICATIONS**

Shelby Austen provided an update on CCLSP committees and communications.

The Advisory Council welcomed Dapinder Gill as BCGA's new representative, with efforts ongoing to secure a BCFGA representative and add grower members at large.

Committee updates included the Innovation & Technology Committee, which identified cold mitigation sprays and data sharing as 2025 priorities, with collaboration underway with BCFGA and BCWGC. The Domestic Labour Committee discussed labour needs for 2025 and will set priorities based on findings from BC Fruit Works and the Labour Research Project. The Extension Committee focused on updates related to BC DAS, the BC DAS Expansion, the November agriculture tour, and planning for the 2025 extension conference.

Communication efforts are centred on finalizing the 2024 annual report, highlighting accomplishments such as transitioning TFISP to industry, leading collaborative initiatives, and administering over \$900,000 in grants. Planning is also underway for the 2025 extension conference and spring agriculture tour. CCLSP continues to engage with partners at key industry events and aims to increase media presence, strengthen government outreach, and organize field days, webinars, and workshops in the coming year.

### **5.2 STABILIZATION FUND: FINANCIAL UPDATE**

Kellie Garcia provided a financial update, noting \$639,227 remains unallocated in the Stabilization Fund after current commitments.

### **5.3 CURRENT CROSS-COMMODITY PROJECTS**

#### **BC Fruit Works**

Shamore provided an update on BC Fruit Works, noting that the project deadline has been extended to March 31, 2025, to allow more time for producer education and engagement and long-term strategy development. To support

producer education, three mini videos are being produced to promote careers in tree fruit and wine grapes, with content updated to remain relevant long-term. Discussions with the Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council about adding a tree fruit and wine grape module to their Welcome to Canada e-Learning course are ongoing, though delayed. Shamore also introduced the Pick New Zealand website as a potential model for BC Fruit Works, highlighting its approach to industry promotion, job role breakdowns, and resource sharing. For the long-term strategy, evaluation questions were integrated into the labour research interviews, which wrapped up in December. KPU is now analysing feedback to inform recommendations. Additionally, the BC Fruit Works website is moving to Twirling Umbrellas for improved support, lower costs, and easier content management.

The committee discussed challenges with worker education and domestic labour. Kate noted that BCWGC previously funded worker education materials with little uptake and expressed hesitation about the effectiveness of the e-learning module. Adrian emphasized the need for HR training for farmers, as local worker retention is declining due to treatment on farms. He also mentioned past efforts to develop a Red Seal horticulture course with Okanagan College, but Kate noted that high living costs and lack of student support limited interest.

Sukhpaul agreed that worker education has had low engagement and supported HR training to improve farm conditions. He saw value in the Pick New Zealand model as a centralized industry resource and suggested incorporating similar elements into BC Fruit Works. Tyrion felt BCFW is too small to address systemic labour issues, while Melissa stated that domestic labour is no longer viable due to cost of living, and efforts should focus on employers rather than worker recruitment.

Karen suggested partnering with immigration organizations like South Okanagan Immigrant and Community Services to create an agriculture-specific program rather than leaving all responsibility to employers. Dapinder raised concerns about the next generation of farmers, suggesting a program to encourage Mexican workers to immigrate permanently instead of returning home each season. Sukhpaul proposed two potential ideas: developing an HR handbook tailored to Service Canada requirements, including templates and documentation guidelines, or launching a pilot worker-sharing program based on Australia's model, where workers receive industry permits rather than being tied to a single employer.

#### Local Government & Agriculture Tours

Kellie informed the council that CCLSP will host its second tour on April 2, 2025, in the Penticton area, inviting elected officials, local government staff from the South Okanagan, and representatives from the Ministry of Agriculture and Food, and the Agricultural Land Commission. She requested feedback from the committee.

Melissa raised concerns about the tone of discussions with both elected officials and staff present. Beth suggested including seating options for those with mobility issues. Adrian encouraged CCLSP staff to define the goals of the tour, noting the challenge of focusing on industry concerns or showcasing agricultural success. Kate recommended a facilitated debrief at the end to structure discussions.

### **5.4 CROSS-COMMODITY PROJECT DEVELOPMENT AND FUNDING APPLICATIONS**

Kellie provided an update on project development and funding applications for 2025/26, outlining three key project ideas. The Cross-Commodity Data Strategy aims to improve industry-wide data collection, sharing, and use, starting with interviews and a literature review to assess needs and gaps. A data manager/GIS specialist would be hired to oversee the project. The second project focuses on Business Risk Management (BRM) programs and the barriers farmers face in accessing them. The BC Government recently hired Zero Gravity Marketing to improve BRM communications, and Kellie asked if any advisory council members participated in providing feedback or if a report has been shared. The third project involves Local Government Engagement, expanding on discussions from the Lake Country agriculture tour. This would include semi-annual meetings between farmers and regional districts and presentations to elected officials on agricultural challenges. Planning will begin after the April agriculture tour, with initial costs covered by CCLSP.

The committee discussed challenges with the Cross-Commodity Data Strategy and industry data-sharing. Kate suggested working with the Kelowna Agritech Innovation Centre to assess available data and conduct a gap analysis. Sukhpaul noted that historical data-sharing restrictions make it difficult to obtain accurate acreage numbers for each commodity, even though this information is essential for industry planning. Melissa emphasized the need to review existing data from industry associations and the Ministry, particularly for ERP and replant risk assessments.

Nikki highlighted how large companies already share data nationally and internationally. Kate stressed the need to clearly define the project scope and involve the Ministry, while Melissa noted that data collection was a key recommendation in the Stabilization Plan, creating a valuable opportunity to move forward. Karen suggested engaging large winery partners to encourage data-sharing and help establish a foundation for the project.

## **5.5 DISCUSSION OF OTHER CROSS-COMMODITY ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES**

No discussion.

## **6. OTHER BUSINESS**

### **6.1 FORMAT OF CROSS-COMMODITY ADVISORY COUNCIL MEETINGS**

Kellie encouraged members to share any feedback on improving the meeting format by reaching out directly to CCLSP staff.

## **7. ADJOURNMENT**

The next Cross-Commodity Advisory Council meeting will be held virtually on March 20, 2025, from 9:00 - 10:30 am.