

AGRICULTURE IN ACTION: BRIDGING POLICY & PRACTICE

Companion Guide



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

CCLSP Partners:

BC Cherry Association
bccherry.com

BC Grapegrowers' Association
grapegrowers.bc.ca

Okanagan-Kootenay SIR Program
oksir.org

BC Fruit Growers Association
bcfga.com

BC Wine Grape Council
bcwgc.org



CCLSP Funders:

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TOUR COMPANION GUIDE

Introduction

Farming is an **essential element** of the Okanagan's history and identity. Tree fruit and wine grape operations generate income for farming families, put millions of dollars and thousands of jobs annually into the economy, provide high quality food and wine, and contribute to the wellbeing of British Columbians. They also add beauty to our landscapes, draw tourism to the region, and provide "green infrastructure" to our communities by retaining rainwater, preventing flooding, and recharging groundwater.

Tree fruit and wine grape growers need our support more than ever. Production costs have skyrocketed at the same time growers are dealing with impacts from the pandemic, extreme heat and cold, wildfires, and other events. Trade disruptions and tariffs will add another layer of pressure on an already strained industry. In addition, our growing population is bringing more non-farm rural and urban development near farms and intense competition around land use.

The good news is that governments can play a vital role in supporting farming and managing urban-rural conflicts. Fostering understanding and collaboration between residents and farmers is key to minimizing conflict and maintaining the integrity of our working landscapes.

The purpose of the tour is to **open the lines of communication** and **cultivate relationships** between local and provincial governments and tree fruit and wine grape growers.

This Companion Guide provides general information, recommendations, best practices, and resources to increase awareness of farming activities and empower local governments to take action to support farming.



Key Actions for Local Governments

Local governments can support agriculture through policy, advocacy, education, funding, and infrastructure improvements. Key actions are listed below and the upcoming sections of the Companion Guide dive deeper into some of the actions.

1. Land Use & Zoning

- Protect Agricultural Land Reserve lands from urban development.
- Streamline permitting for farm structures and agritourism activities.
- Require buffers between non-farm rural and urban development and farmland.

2. Infrastructure & Transportation

- Maintain and improve rural roads for farm equipment and transport.
- Consider agricultural needs and impacts when planning traffic flow changes, developments near farmland, and roadway expansions.



3. Labour & Worker Housing

- Advocate for and develop seasonal farmworker housing policies.
- Work with provincial and federal governments on farm labour programs.
- Streamline approvals for on-farm worker housing.
- Improve transit options to farms, particularly in rural areas.
- Develop ridesharing or shuttle services for farmworkers.

4. Pest & Disease Management

- Collaborate with industry on invasive species and pest control programs.
- Support funding for integrated pest management initiatives.

5. Water Security & Infrastructure

- Invest in water storage, irrigation efficiency programs, and watershed protection.
- Support policies that prioritize agricultural water use during droughts.
- Communicate early and often so farmers are aware of restrictions or infrastructure issues.

6. Waste Management

- Expand and improve chipping and composting programs.
- Develop efficient and safe agricultural waste drop-off locations.
- Ensure clear guidelines and streamlined permits for controlled burning (if necessary).
- Provide incentives for sustainable disposal.

7. Environment & Climate Change

- Fund or partner on research into climate-resilient crops and pest management.
- Support wildfire mitigation efforts near agricultural areas.

8. Communication, Education & Engagement

- Grow the community's awareness of farming through initiatives like signage, school programs, community events, educational campaigns, and social media and websites.
- Ensure elected officials and staff stay informed on agricultural policies and issues in their communities.
- Appoint an Agricultural Advisory Committee to involve local farmers in municipal decision-making.
- Build relationships with the Ministry of Ag and the ALC, research institutions, farmers institutes, and other agricultural organizations.

9. Marketing & Economic Development

- Support local food and wine tourism initiatives.
- Facilitate direct farm sales through farmers' markets and farm gate sales policies.
- Encourage agritourism & value-added activities through zoning and simplified permitting.



Provincial Legislation and Programs for Agriculture

Right to Farm Act

The Farm Practices Protection (Right to Farm) Act (FPPA) safeguards the right to farm in designated agricultural areas in British Columbia. It safeguards farmers from nuisance complaints—such as odour, noise, and dust—when they are following normal farm practices and complying with environmental and health legislation.

Farms in the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR) or on land zoned for agriculture are protected from lawsuits and certain local bylaws under the FPPA. Farms outside the ALR must still follow local bylaws but are protected from nuisance lawsuits. If issues arise, the BC Farm Industry Review Board manages formal complaints, and Regional Agrologists may provide informal mediation. The FPPA encourages local governments to support farming through planning and bylaws, ensuring that agriculture remains a priority in key areas across the province.



AgriService BC

AgriService BC connects producers with provincial programs, tools, and resources to support farm success. Services include production guides, business planning tools, emergency preparedness resources, and educational videos. Producers can also subscribe to regional e-bulletins for updates on programs, events, and local initiatives.

The **Crop and Livestock Reporter Program** is a free, volunteer-driven initiative through AgriService BC that allows producers and ag professionals to report local crop and livestock conditions. These reports help build a real-time picture of agriculture across BC and support better decision-making.

Benefits include:

- Sharing local insights to support the wider ag community
- Informing government planning and response
- Staying connected with producers across the province

Learn more: [AgriService BC](#) | [Regional E-Bulletins](#) | [Crop & Livestock Reporter Program](#)

Strengthening Farming Program

The Strengthening Farming Program, delivered by the Ministry of Agriculture and the Agricultural Land Commission, supports local governments, First Nations, and producers in understanding and applying BC's agricultural legislation. It focuses on two key areas: Farm Practices Protection under the **Right to Farm Act** and **Land Use Planning for Agriculture**.

Learn more: [Strengthening Farming Program Fact Sheet](#) | [Farm Practices Protection](#)

For those living in or near farming areas, the following provincial resources provide helpful information and guidance.

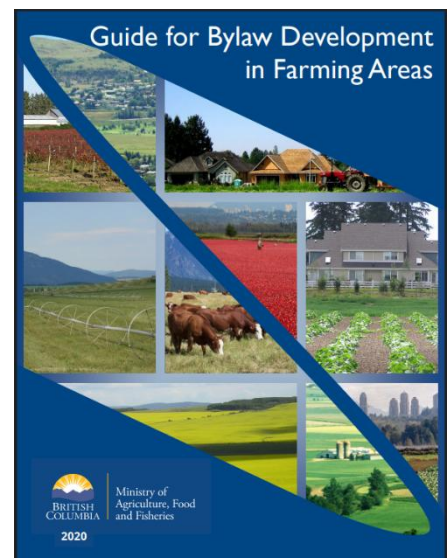
- [The Countryside and You](#) – Living near active farmland
- [Good Neighbour Farming](#) – Reducing complaints and understanding the Right to Farm Act
- [Farm Practices in B.C. Reference Guide](#) – Common farm activities and practices

Bylaw Standards

Ministry staff have developed several bylaw standards over the years that local governments are encouraged to adopt. The standards can be found in the [Guide for Bylaw Development in Farming Areas](#).

Bylaw standards include:

- Zoning designations, permitted uses, and minimum lot sizes
- Lot coverage, setbacks, off-street loading and parking, and height limitations
- Residential Uses in the ALR (Size and Siting)
- Agricultural Building Riparian Setbacks
- Temporary Farm Worker Housing



Land Use and Zoning

Local governments can adopt land use and zoning policies that protect farmland, reduce conflicts, and promote farm viability. Removing unnecessary restrictions, streamlining permitting processes, and creating consistency across jurisdictions encourages long-term commitment and investment in production. Local governments are encouraged to adopt the [Minister's Bylaw Standards](#) and Ministry staff are available to review bylaws affecting farming areas.

Most farmers work hard to be good neighbours and minimize the impact of normal farm practices, which can include dust, odour, smoke, nighttime lighting, and noise. At the same time, farmers often face challenges such as illegal dumping, unleashed dogs, trespassing, and vandalism to buildings, fences, and equipment.

Good neighbour relations rely on shared responsibility and proactive planning. Strategies such as **vegetative buffers**, **fencing**, **thoughtful subdivision design**, and **ongoing communication** can reduce conflict and build understanding between farming and non-farming communities.

Tree buffers, for example, are commonly planted on farms to reduce wind, snow, noise, visibility, and trespassing. They also help control erosion, shade livestock, and reduce farm emissions such as odour, dust, and pesticide drift.

A well-designed subdivision can make a big difference. Consider the following comparison:

- **Less effective design:** A side road ends directly at the farm boundary with no buffer, increasing the risk of land use conflict.
- **More effective design:** The road curves away from the farm, and a buffer zone separates residential backyards from farmland—reducing conflict and supporting long-term farm viability.



Transportation Planning

Considering agricultural when planning traffic changes, development, or road expansions supports farms and reduces urban–rural conflict.

Traffic Calming

Traffic calming measures, such as speed bumps, can create serious challenges for farmers—particularly tree fruit growers—transporting large loads to packinghouses. A single apple bin weighs about 800 lbs and a half bin of cherries around 400 lbs. Trucks can carry up to 24 bins at a time, and repeated jolts from speed bumps can bruise fruit and reduce quality, directly impacting market value.



Similarly, an increasing number of traffic circles near the urban-rural interface can make it difficult for farmers to move large equipment. When roundabouts are too small or curbs are not properly graded, farm machinery may be unable to pass safely, posing both logistical and safety risks.

Traffic Flow

Agricultural areas rely on safe, efficient access for a variety of vehicles, including tractors, sprayers, trailers, refrigerated trucks, and buses transporting workers. These vehicles often move slowly and require more space to turn or reverse—especially during peak harvest or planting seasons, when activity increases and impacts local traffic flow. To help maintain safety and efficiency for both farmers and the public, transportation planning should consider:

- Left-turn lanes at farm access points
- Wider shoulders for safe passing
- Properly designed roundabouts to accommodate large equipment
- Accommodations for pedestrians and cyclists, especially in agritourism areas



Labour and Worker Housing

BC's agriculture sector continues to face labour shortages, especially for seasonal work. Many domestic workers seek permanent, year-round jobs, making it difficult to recruit and retain local staff. With Canadian workers not always available, foreign workers are essential to maintaining farm productivity and food security. All workers need safe and respectful working and living conditions to thrive.

Worker housing—particularly for foreign workers—can face local opposition due to perceptions around safety. This is further complicated by complex regulations and the challenge of attracting workers in a competitive labour market. Public education, more transparency, and highlighting the value of farm workers to the economy are key to building support.



Local governments can help by:

- Reducing inconsistencies in farm worker housing bylaws.
- Simplifying approval processes for on-farm and off-farm housing.
- Offering tax incentives or grants to lower the cost of building accommodations.
- Supporting local workforce development through partnerships with educational institutions.
- Backing industry-led efforts to address long-term workforce shortages.



Pest Management

Okanagan-Kootenay Sterile Insect Release Program

The Okanagan-Kootenay Sterile Insect Release Program (OKSIR) is an international model for the environmentally friendly control of insect pests without spraying chemicals. The program was developed in 1991 as a cooperative effort of the tree fruit industry and the community, guided by science and funded by growers and other taxpayers. The key focus is to control the spread of codling moth, **an invasive pest exclusive to pomme fruits** (apples, pears, quince).

Now, growers rely on the OKSIR Program rather than chemicals. Codling moths are reared by the millions at a custom-built facility in Osoyoos, which was constructed through funding from the federal and provincial governments. The moths are sterilized and released into the orchards where they find and mate with wild moths. When a wild and a sterile moth mate, no baby moths (caterpillars) are born—essentially, the program works as moth birth control!

Since the program began, the region has seen a 94% reduction in the number of wild codling moths caught each summer, and even more importantly, a **96% reduction in pesticides** applied against codling moth in the valley.

On average, growers apply less than one spray per season against the pest compared to three or more prior to the program. Many growers haven't had to spray for 15 years. SIR controls costs for growers, with a recent financial evaluation of the program from 2022 estimating that *“if the SIR program were to stop, a grower with a 10-acre farm would incur direct annual costs between \$11,500 - \$16,000 (conventional) and \$25,000 - \$76,000 (organic) to manage codling moth.”*



Learn more: [2022 SIR Program Evaluation](#)

Starling Control Program

Since 2003, the Starling Control Program, managed by the BC Grapegrowers' Association, has worked to reduce the population of European Starlings in the Okanagan-Similkameen. The program is funded by agricultural groups and regional districts.



Introduced to North America in the late 19th century, starlings have become widespread, forming large flocks that consume and damage fruit crops, contaminate livestock feed, and spread diseases. In the region, their impact results in millions of dollars in losses annually. Traditional deterrents such as noise devices and netting have proven ineffective or impractical, making direct population control a necessary approach.

The program employs a targeted trapping strategy, carried out by professional trappers using humane methods. Trapping efforts are concentrated in feedlots and livestock operations, where starlings gather in large numbers. Once captured, the birds are euthanized using CO₂, and their carcasses are repurposed for bird rehabilitation and falconry or composted.

Learn more: [Starling Control Program Webpage](#)

BC Decision Aid System

The BC Decision Aid System (BC DAS) is an online integrated pest management decision support program for BC tree fruit growers and pest managers. It uses daily weather data from the local networks and forecast data to create insect and disease population charts linked with management and pesticide recommendations. With this information, producers can improve the timing of management decisions and apply more precise pest and disease treatments that maintain beneficial insect populations and reduce environmental impacts.

Learn more: [BC DAS Webpage](#)

Pesticide Spray Drift

To be healthy, we need to eat a variety of foods, especially fresh fruits and vegetables. Pesticides play an important role in making sure there is enough food for everyone by protecting crops from pests such as insects, weeds and fungal diseases. However, pesticide application may concern people living or pursuing activities near farms.

Pesticide spray drift occurs when a pesticide (e.g. herbicide, insecticide, fungicide) stays suspended in air long enough to drift from the area being sprayed. Spray drift occurs downwind of the application site. The potential for drift depends on many factors, including weather conditions and the type of spray equipment being used. *Some level of spray drift will always occur, either during or shortly after an application, so it is impossible for farmers to ensure zero drift over property lines.*



What does Health Canada do to protect against the risks of spray drift?

Health Canada's Pest Management Regulatory Agency ensures that pesticide labels have directions for use that include advice on how to minimize spray drift. Under normal use, pesticide spray drift is not a risk to people or wildlife. Health Canada requires strict label directions to prevent exposure to non-target plants and animals, and all pesticides go through a thorough risk assessment before approval. Pesticides in Canada are strictly regulated through scientific testing, enforcement, and education to ensure they are safe for people and the environment, when used according to label directions.

Control measures to minimize pesticide spray risk include:

- Specifying the use of certain types of application equipment.
- Instructions to spray only at certain times of the day and only in weather conditions that will minimize drift.
- Specifying the amount of pesticide that may be used for a given area.
- Establishing a buffer zone between an area to be treated and any nearby area that must be protected.

Learn more: [Government of Canada](#)

Helicopters for Crop Protection

Helicopters are primarily used in orchards for drying cherries when rain and harvest season overlap. **Helicopters are not used to spray pesticides on crops.**

Spring frosts and precipitation events at or just before harvest are of major concern to producers.

When this occurs, time is of the essence:

producers must get the water off the crop. Rain pooling around the stem of the cherry or beading on the skin can quickly absorb into the fruit.

When this happens the cherry's flesh expands more quickly than the skin can stretch, and when the pressure is too great, the skin splits.



Once the cherry has cracked, it is worthless for the fresh market. A small cost recovery might be found by selling the damaged cherries for juice, but the costs of picking and sorting the ruined cherries far exceeds such returns. Some cherry varieties are more tolerant than others to split but all will split at some point.

Helicopters are very effective and efficient at blowing the moisture off the crop. It may take several passes to dry the cherries, especially when more than one rain event occurs in a day. This can be very expensive to the farmer and irritating to neighbours. If it has rained during the night, helicopters will be out as soon as they are legally able, often as early as 30 minutes before sunrise - **which can be as early as 4:00 am at our latitude.**

Helicopters are also sometimes used by wineries to transport clients to and from their facilities which can also be a concern for close neighbours.



Climate changes and increased planting of cherries in the Okanagan has resulted in an increased use of helicopters and subsequent noise concerns from residents. The investment is high, and production is risky for cherry producers. It is important to realize that aircraft time is expensive, and farmers do not tend to use it unless it is absolutely necessary. Producers pay more than \$1,000 per hour to have helicopters fly.

Water Management

Water is essential for agricultural production. In B.C.'s Southern Interior, farms rely on three main sources: **groundwater**, **surface water**, and water supplied by **irrigation districts**, **municipalities**, or **improvement districts**.

Agricultural water supply is increasingly affected by:

- Seasonal weather and climate change
- Existing water allocation restrictions
- Population growth and urban development
- Environmental needs and competing demands from other sectors

Climate change is leading to more frequent droughts and longer, hotter growing seasons. At the same time, population growth is increasing the demand for food. In recent years, some farmers have faced irrigation cutbacks at the most critical points in the growing season.

Farmers need government policies and concrete investments to preserve their access to water, so that we can continue to benefit from reliable access to healthy, affordable, locally produced food. Things like supports for water storage on farms, modernization of existing water infrastructure, and investment in new farm and community-level water infrastructure, including reservoirs, will ensure water availability into the future.

Local water suppliers and farmers should carefully monitor what's coming in (supply) and going out (demand) so we can make more informed and collaborative decisions during water-short years. On the farm, efficient irrigation systems and scheduling and healthy soil conditions are key to maximizing crop yield while using the minimum volume of water needed.

Water suppliers should have drought plans in place that include agriculture and contain a robust set of decision points for moving through drought stages, appropriate responses for each stage, and a communications strategy.

Learn more: [OBWB Resources for Ag](#) | [BC Gov Ag Water](#)



Waste Management

Managing waste is part of everyday farm operations, including the disposal of materials from tree and vine removals, prunings, nursery activities, and agricultural plastics. Proper disposal is important for environmental protection, fire safety, and overall farm efficiency.

Only clean, dry wood can be legally burned, and even then, open burning is often restricted by provincial or local regulations. Burning materials like treated wood, plastics, or chemical containers is illegal due to the release of toxic pollutants. Alternatives like chipping, composting, and recycling can turn waste into useful farm inputs such as mulch, sawdust, or compost—reducing costs and environmental impact.



Common disposal options include:

- **Wood waste (untreated):** chip, burn (where allowed), salvage, or excavate
- **Surface materials (e.g. irrigation tubing, wires, treated wood):** reuse, recycle, or trade
- **Chemical and fertilizer containers:** return through designated dealer programs
- **Plastics (e.g. bale wrap, mulch film):** sort, bag, and bring to an ag-recycling collection site

Not all areas offer agricultural recycling or chipping programs. Producers should check with their **local government** and **fire department** for available services, regulations, and bylaws.

Managing Orchard and Vineyard Removal

A cold snap in 2024 and the push to replant with climate-resilient fruit varieties have led to widespread orchard and vineyard removals. This increase in waste is challenging for local governments, who may lack the space, facilities, or staff to manage it. At the same time, disposal rules and programs are different in each region, which makes it hard for producers to find clear and current information on what to do.

If you are planning to remove an orchard or vineyard, it's important to:

1. **Develop a disposal plan**
2. **Safely remove and dispose of surface materials**
3. **Remove and dispose of trees or vines using approved methods**

Learn more: [Agricultural Waste Best Practices Guide](#) | [Open Burning Alternatives in BC](#)

Agricultural Advisory Committees

Agricultural advisory committees (AAC), appointed by Council or Regional Board, give local governments the opportunity to access knowledge and expertise of local farmers and ranchers on day-to-day issues and broader initiatives related to agriculture. Ministry of Agriculture and ALC staff support AACs by making knowledgeable personnel available to share information and attend meetings as non-voting members.

AACs can advise on many issues and initiatives, including:

- Review proposed bylaws, official community plans and rezoning applications
- Advise on applications under the *Agricultural Land Commission Act*
- Share insight on water supply and drainage issues
- Give feedback on the effectiveness of insect and weed control programs
- Provide input on parks and recreation, transportation, growth management plans and other land use proposals that impact agriculture
- Steer agricultural studies, economic plans, and agricultural area plans to completion
- Assist with implementation of the plans for the agriculture and food sectors
- Assist with the development of agricultural edge policies
- Advise on the need for and appropriateness of farm bylaws
- Steer studies and reports on farm infrastructure needs
- Propose local government policies related to farming
- Advise on opportunities for joint funding of drainage or irrigation works
- Steer studies on impacts of transportation corridors and park and recreation proposals
- Raise agricultural awareness
- Assist with farm tours and on-farm visits
- Contribute to Agriculture in the Classroom initiatives

Learn more: [Gov of BC AAC](#)



Emergency Management

Emergencies like wildfires, droughts, floods, and landslides can occur with little warning and have devastating consequences.

Regional governments activate **Emergency Operations Centres (EOC)** when an emergency goes beyond the scope of first responders. The EOC is responsible for coordinating emergency response and ensuring public safety and brings together municipal and regional staff, volunteers, First Nations, first responders, and non-governmental organizations. Having an Ag. Coordinator / Ag. Planner in the EOC can make all the difference.

Communication and preparation at the regional scale are essential. Key tools and strategies include:

- Pre-season meetings with producers and the Ministry of Agriculture and Food
- Agriculture-specific emergency bulletins
- Emergency notifications through digital systems (e.g. RDOS uses Voyent Alert)
- Training and support for Agricultural Liaison Assistants
- Procedures for temporary access during emergencies



Producer preparedness is a key part of successful emergency management. Farmers are strongly advised to prepare an emergency preparedness plan for their farm. The Factsheet [Emergency Preparedness Tips](#) contains general considerations that apply to most producers to prepare for a variety of different events.

During an emergency, producers also play an important response role. It is the producer's responsibility to safeguard their business. Producers can take steps to remain informed about an emergency and make decisions about their operations.

The **BC Ministry of Agriculture and Food** and **AgSafeBC** offer resources to help farms plan for and respond to emergencies, including:

- Risk assessment and emergency planning tools
- Evacuation planning (including for temporary foreign workers)
- Wildfire, flood, and landslide preparedness

Learn more: [BC Gov Emergency Management for Agriculture](#) | [AgSafeBC](#)

Important Contacts in Agriculture

Agricultural Land Commission	236-468-3284 ALC.Okanagan@gov.bc.ca www.alc.gov.bc.ca
BC Agriculture Council	604-854-4454 info@bcac.ca www.bcac.ca
BC Association of Farmers' Markets	604-734-9797 info@bcfarmersmarkets.org www.bcfarmersmarket.org
BC Cherry Association	admin@bccherry.com www.bccherry.com
BC Fruit Growers' Association	250-826-3030 info@bcfga.com www.bcfga.com
BC Grapegrowers' Association	877-762-4652 bcga@grapegrowers.bc.ca www.grapegrowers.bc.ca
BC Ministry of Agriculture & Food (AgriService BC)	1-888-221-7141 AgriServiceBC@gov.bc.ca www.gov.bc.ca/agri
BC Wine Grape Council	250-809-7107 info@bcwgc.org www.bcwgc.org
BC Young Agrarians	network@youngagrarians.org www.youngagrarians.org
Canadian Food Inspection Agency	250-470-4884 KelownaPlantHealth@inspection.gc.ca
Cross-Commodity Project	www.crosscommodity.org
Health Canada (Pesticide Compliance Program)	236-330-4276 bcpesticides@hc-sc.gc.ca www.hc-sc.gc.ca/pmra
Okanagan-Kootenay Sterile Insect Release Program	250-469-6187 sirinfo@oksir.org www.oksir.org
Organic BC	250-260-4429 info@organicbc.org www.organicbc.org