



BC Food Systems Network

NEWS RELEASE
For immediate release

BC Food Systems Network cautious about new farmland regulations

Vancouver, June 23, 2015 - "We've been waiting to exhale," says Brent Mansfield, Director of the BC Food Systems Network, which represents hundreds of food growers and food security advocates around BC. He is referring to the recently announced changes to regulations under the *Agricultural Land Commission Act*, which have been pending for nine months.

The *Act* itself went through significant change in May 2014, over widespread public opposition. The Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR) was divided into two zones and changes were made to the Agricultural Land Commission (ALC)'s decision making criteria and structure: six regional panels replaced a single provincial Commission.

Then, in July and August 2014, the provincial government consulted with selected stakeholders on about 11 proposed regulatory changes related to activities that could be allowed on farmland without involvement of the ALC. "We were very concerned about some of the government's proposals which would have opened up ALR land to significant abuse, bypassing the ALC," says Mansfield. "We are relieved that the most threatening proposals were not adopted and that the Minister heeded concerns raised by stakeholders."

The new regulations encourage value-adding activities by co-ops and apply the same rules as wineries to breweries, distilleries and meaderies. They will allow landowners to lease portions of their land for agricultural production, and in Zone 2 they introduce, with conditions, life-term leases for retiring farmers, and second single-family dwellings for family or rental income.

Mansfield goes on, "we recognize several of these provisions as good ideas in principle. However we have some outstanding concerns about the leasing options and the second dwelling option, since there will be no supervision from the ALC. We question how and by whom the regulatory conditions will be applied. Could all these provisions apply on one property? If so, how many residences will be possible on a farm? How will impacts on farming be monitored? Will there be any follow-up if there are problems?"

"Overall," says Mansfield "especially given the changes to the *Act*, we remain very concerned about the direction in which BC farmland protection policy is going. Six regional panels are more susceptible than a single Commission to local development pressures. The two zones and additional decision-making criteria all point to a loosening of oversight and protection of BC's farmland. The issue of enforcement has not been re-visited.

Finally, the abrupt firing in May of ALC Chair Richard Bullock, six months before the end of his term, increases our unease. Mr Bullock followed the ALC's mandate and did the job expected of him by the public – protecting farmland with a view to BC's future farmland and food needs. We will have to wait and see how the legislative and regulatory changes to the ALC play out."

Trust of farmers and protection of farmland for farming are values esteemed highly by BC citizens, as shown in a September 2014 [public opinion poll](#) issued by the Real Estate Foundation and Vancouver Foundation. Farming, growing food and natural freshwater systems rated top priority for land use; loss or development of farmland as top agricultural issue; and reliance on BC food as top food concern. A full 95% of respondents support or strongly support the ALR to preserve BC's farmland.

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For more information, contact:

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