

Delivered Electronically, May 19, 2020

OPEN LETTER

To the Honourable John Horgan, Premier and the Honourable Lana Popham, Minister of Agriculture

We the undersigned are extremely concerned about the impact on agricultural land and the farming community of government's decision to implement Recommendation #4 of the 2020 Food Security Task Force report, titled 'The Future of BC's Food System'.

We understand that a deputy minister has been appointed to lead an initiative to convert up to 0.25 % of the ALR to non-farm use as an agri-industrial zone, thereby permanently eliminating the potential for soil-based food production on up to 11,500 ha of agricultural land.

As a group of individuals with wide-ranging experience in soils and land capability, farming, agricultural land preservation and land use planning, our concerns are several.

It is a serious mistake to assume that simply directing agri-tech to 'lower capability' Class 4-6 lands within the ALR will minimize impact. Capability class is only a reflection of range of crops, not productivity, specialty crop suitability or value to agriculture. In many parts of the province, these lands are integral to farm operations. For example, many Class 5 lands in the Lower Mainland are the mainstay of the blueberry/cranberry industry; Class 4 and 5 lands in the Okanagan comprise the backbone of the wine and tree fruit industry; Class 5 forage lands in Bulkley Nechako and Peace River regions are the foundation of a livestock industry; and the Class 6 natural grasslands of Interior BC provide critical spring and fall grazing for many ranches.

For government to facilitate and promote non-farm uses within the ALR – with no requirement that they be tied to food production on surrounding lands – ignores the well-documented negative impacts such uses can have on surrounding farms and the feasibility of bringing more farmland into production. The ALC has almost 50 years of experience in building criteria into its decision-making on applications for non-farm use within the ALR to ensure impacts of allowed uses are minimized.

Another major concern with this initiative is the complete lack of consultation and involvement to date of the Agricultural Land Commission, the entity with the provincial legislative mandate and responsibility to protect the scarce 5% of our provincial land area capable of food production. The ALC's March 9, 2020 letter to government, expressing serious concerns with the Task Force recommendation and requesting to be consulted prior to a decision being made, appears to have been ignored.

Establishing an agri-industrial zone within the ALR directly contradicts the 2018 Minister's Committee report, titled 'Revitalizing the Agricultural Land Reserve and the Agricultural Land Commission', which recommended an 'agriculture first' policy within the ALR; curbing speculation and non-farm impacts on the ALR; limiting activities that damage and alienate land from farming and ranching; and ensuring that the ALC is 'at the table' when it comes to decisions on lands within the provincial ALR. We strongly support these Committee recommendations.

We urge government to redirect its promotion of an agri-tech industry to outside the ALR. In situations of demonstrated need for this use within the ALR, the ALC has the legislative mandate and experience to decide where and under what conditions such uses could be allowed. In our opinion, to circumvent the ALC endangers, rather than enhances, BC's food security.

Yours sincerely,

*Ron Bertrand, former Director of Resource Management Branch, BC Ministry of Agriculture
Art Bomke, Professor Emeritus, UBC Faculty of Land and Food Systems*

Abra Brynne, Food Policy Analyst
Richard Bullock, Retired Orchardist, former Chair of the ALC
David Connell, PhD., Associate Professor, University of Northern BC
Mike Fenger, Registered Professional Forester (Retired), former provincial Soil Surveyor
Julie Glover, Retired Land Use Planner, former Vice-Chair of the ALC
Gordon Gram, Retired Real Estate Executive
Arthur Hadland, Grain Farmer, former ALC Commissioner
Niels Holbek, BSc. Ag., former ALC Commissioner
Wendy Holm, Professional Agrologist (Retired)
Evert Kenk, Registered Professional Forester (Retired)
Terence Lewis, PhD., Land Use Consultant, former provincial Soil Surveyor
Kent Mullinex, Director of Institute of Sustainable Food Systems, Kwantlen Polytech University
Shelagh Niblock, Dairy and Equine Nutritionist
Tom Perry, MD, former Minister of Advanced Education
Jane Perch, Land Commission staff during establishment of the ALR
Shaundeh Runka, former ALC Policy Analyst, Member of Minister's ALR/ALC Revitalization Committee
Paul Sanborn, PhD. PAg., Associate Professor, University of Northern BC
Joan Sawicki, Land use Consultant, former Minister of Environment, Lands and Parks
Margaret Schmidt, PhD., Associate Professor, Simon Fraser University
Brian Underhill, former ALC Deputy CEO, Member of Minister's ALR/ALC Revitalization Committee
Eveline Wolterson, Professional Agrologist, Land use Consultant.