



The Corporation of the District of Central Saanich

MEMORANDUM

To: Gary C. Nason, Administrator (for Council)

From: Bruce Greig, Planner (on behalf of the Agricultural Area Plan Steering Committee)

Date: March 28th, 2011

Subject: **Feedback to the CRD Regional Sustainability Strategy; early findings of the Central Saanich Agricultural Area Plan**

Background:

As Council is aware, the Capital Regional District (CRD) update to the Regional Growth Strategy and transition to a Regional Sustainability Strategy (RSS) is underway. Input from member municipalities is requested by the end of April, 2011, on the proposed policy directions for the RSS. A focus area identified by the CRD discusses issues of Food Security. The CRD summary of policy directions clearly frames the issues:

"There is greater need and desire for accessing local food sources to promote wellbeing and to connect with the land. Traditional production agriculture systems are failing on many fronts, including loss and/or fragmentation of productive agricultural land, aging farmers, increasing farmland and farm input prices, low commodity prices and stiff competition from off-shore produce."

This statement echoes early findings from the process of developing the Agricultural Area Plan (AAP) for Central Saanich. The AAP has highlighted a suite of issues and opportunities facing farming in the District that have *regional* implications: issues resulting from regional market forces, opportunities for farms to increase production and sales by supplying the region's population in innovative ways, and the need to coordinate efforts among agencies with a role in regional food systems. The Agricultural Area Plan Steering Committee suggests that the District should seize this opportunity to lobby for the CRD to take action on food security within the RSS.

The role of Central Saanich farms in regional food production:

The Saanich Peninsula has historically been the "breadbasket" of the area, being home to half of the farm land and three quarters of the farm production in the CRD. The major share of farming on the peninsula occurs in Central Saanich, where the soils, climate, and resourcefulness of the farming community have long fed the urban population of Greater Victoria. While Vancouver Island farms produced 85 percent of our food supply as recently as the 1950's, current production has slipped as low as five percent due to

external forces that reduce farm viability. These forces are equally at work in Central Saanich:

- 1/3 of farm parcels are now used for residential purposes with no associated farm use;
- the average farm operator on the peninsula is 55 years old;
- in 2005 (the year of the last Census of Agriculture), farming in the District generated \$18.5 million in gross farm receipts, while total direct farm expenses (not including depreciation) also equalled \$18.5 million – *thus the agricultural sector, on average, generated no gross margin and no return on investment;*

This crisis facing the region's farms needs immediate, coordinated action. If we do nothing we will continue to see farms going out of production as more farmers retire and the land becomes dominated by new owners pursuing rural lifestyles. But all is not lost - recent awareness and demand for local food among our urban population may create an opportunity for Peninsula farms to regain their role as the breadbasket of the CRD.

Therefore:

The Agricultural Area Plan Steering Committee recommends that Council call on the Capital Regional District to include the following initiatives within the Regional Sustainability Strategy:

- ensure that regional **household organic recycling** results in peninsula farm operations gaining access to this source of organic compost;
- take a regional approach to **soil and water conservation** on farmland including standardized soil deposit and removal regulations, education and enforcement;
- create a regional office for **agricultural extension** and **business development** to support innovation and growth in local food production, processing and marketing;
- create a regional **farm land trust** and **farm land acquisition fund** to acquire a supply of land for lease to farmers, including incubator farm plots for new farmers;
- lead a regional, coordinated approach to **crop protection** and management of over-abundant wildlife species (introduced geese and deer) populations;
- create a **farmland-wildlife stewardship programme** to pay farmers for providing ecological goods and services, and establish a regional levy to fund the programme;
- provide lower **agricultural water rates** for food production; and,
- guide institutions (universities, school districts, health care facilities, local governments, etc.) within the region to adopt **procurement policies to buy locally produced food** by investigating legal hurdles and providing examples of approaches that have proven successful.

Respectfully submitted,



Bruce Greig, mcip
Planner

Endorsed by:



Councillor Alastair Bryson, chair
Agricultural Area Plan Steering Committee