



BRITISH COLUMBIA CATTLEMEN'S ASSOCIATION

Representing the Beef Cattle Industry of British Columbia

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November 20, 2019

Hon. Lana Popham
Minister of Agriculture
Victoria, BC V8W 9E2
ALR_ALCRevitalization@gov.bc.ca

Our File # 2019-041
SENT BY EMAIL

Dear Minister Popham:

RE: Supporting BC Farmers Engagement

The British Columbia Cattlemen's Association is providing input as you seek ways to support BC ranchers and farmers.

The Association has a long-standing position that the agricultural land reserve only protects one of the three key elements of food security – the land – without providing equitable protection/support for either water for agriculture or the people needed to work the land.

There is a broad diversity of perspectives on the agricultural land reserve and the commission among our membership. However, **the common ground is the need to protect the producer, not just the land, and the need to make agriculture profitable.**

In our view, the Ministry of Agriculture has an opportunity to provide supports for ranchers and farmers that make a real difference in their overall financial viability. **This a time when ranching families need the Ministry and the Province to stand up for agriculture, not regulate farm families out of business.**

In April 2018, after careful review, the Association made 33 recommendations on revitalizing the ALR. In our view, many of these recommendations are still valid and I urge you to revisit them.

The BC Cattlemen's Association urges you to consider how regulatory overburden and the lack of financial supports are suppressing a generation of agricultural entrepreneurs.

Enclosed please find the BC Cattlemen's Association submission on Supporting BC Farmers & Ranchers engagement.

Regards,

Larry Garrett, President

Encl./1 – submission



BC Cattlemen's Association

Comments on

Supporting BC Farmers & Ranchers (ALR Revitalization Engagement)

November 20, 2019

Prepared for: Honourable Lana Popham, Minister of Agriculture

Prepared by: BC Cattlemen's Association

Respectfully submitted by the Board of Directors on behalf of our 1,043 rancher members.

Position Statement (excerpt)

With the implementation of the Agricultural Land Reserve, the Province has an inherent obligation to ensure farmers and ranchers have the tools necessary to support and grow their businesses. Work is still needed to provide long-term access to adequate water resources along with regulatory framework that enhances ranch businesses.

In the absence of Provincial regulations and programs to enhance agricultural industries, the Province then has responsibility to provide ranchers with options to diversify their businesses. The burden of the Land Reserve should not be the sole responsibility of the agricultural landowners.

Founding Principles

The BC Cattlemen's Association has established the following founding principles for this engagement:

- 1) Provide ranchers/farmers with **protection and support** to carry out agricultural activities;
- 2) There should be **no further infringement on private property rights**;
- 3) The province needs to manage with a goal of **making agriculture more profitable**; and
- 4) Bonafide operations must be allowed to **diversify income (through a variety of means)** as long as the productive capacity of the land is not diminished.

CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES

➤ **Social Justice**

Expropriated Property Rights:

By establishing the Land Reserve, the province expropriated private property rights and imposed momentous restrictions on ranching and farming families. These individuals have never been compensated for this loss and burden. The lingering impact of this remains within the ranching community. Restitution needs to be paid for the expropriation of agricultural landowners' rights.

RECOMMENDATION:

- 1) That the province make restitution for expropriated property rights by establishing an agricultural tax credit of 15% against gross farm income.

➤ **Regulatory Burden**

There have been numerous regulatory reviews over the last decade that are oppressing farmers and ranchers (i.e., Open Burning, Ag Waste, Groundwater Licensing, FRPA, Species at Risk, Meat Processing, Grizzly Bears, Carbon Tax, etc.). The added layers of regulatory burden are crushing BC ranch families and their businesses.

Qualified Professionals

There has been a paradigm shift in the role of government in agriculture. Over the last forty years, since the reserve was established, there has been a move away from providing experts and professional advisors "at the counter" to a shift in regulatory requirements for "hiring Qualified Professionals (QP)". This new requirement comes at great cost to the producer. It is not just the cost -- though the cost of services for one

QP often exceeds the annual income of a rancher – it is the sheer amount of times a QP is required for what have been normal farming activities.

EXAMPLES of Regulatory Burden:

- Collecting and moving manure on your own fields now can require a QP under the AEMCOP regulation.
- Routine inspection and maintenance of water storage structure now requires a QP under the Dam Safety regulation.
- Use of well water that was drilled by the landowner now requires a QP and authorization under the Groundwater Regulations.
- Doctor a sick animal now requires a QP under the provincial veterinary regulations.

Red-Tape

We recognize that there are illegal activities taking place on farmland that are detrimental to the future of agriculture. However, in the effort to crack down on mega-homes and repeat offenders, there are many legitimate ranchers and farmers who are getting caught up in red-tape and bureaucracy. The goal of having one set of rules for everyone sounds good but one-size doesn't fit all.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2) That the province establishes a Chief Agrologist, similar to the Chief Forester, to advocate for agriculture and review regulatory burden.
- 3) That the Minister of Agriculture work with the Chief Agrologist to annually monitor the regulatory burden on the sector and ensure that the provincial regulatory framework enables ranching and farming.
- 4) That the Minister of Agriculture and Chief Agrologist monitor and mitigate the cumulative effects of regulatory burden to ensure the requirements are not deleterious to the sector or its viability.
- 5) That the Minister of Agriculture and Chief Agrologist ensure the sustainable management of Crown range resources.

➤ **Bonafide Farm Operations**

Farm Income Threshold

There is financial benefit to obtaining farm status under BC Assessment; primarily reduced property taxes. Agricultural tax rates are lower than residential, commercial, or industrial rates to incent farming. These benefits should only be available to bonafide farm operations that actively participate in ranching or farming activities.

Create New Benefits for Bonafide Operations

Once the required income threshold has been achieved, then bonafide ranching/farming operations should be eligible for additional benefits:

- buildings for farm purpose are exempt from ALR limits on size and fill
- derive supplemental non-farm income from your property (from a variety of sources),
- be able to construct infrastructure within an allowed footprint.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 6) That the province increases the threshold for gross farm income to be eligible for farm status with full benefits.
- 7) Establish an allowable footprint for infrastructure and development purposes (residential, commercial and/or industrial purpose) when the designated income threshold has been obtained; and exclude farm infrastructure from the maximum allotted footprint.
- 8) That the province and ALC allow bonafide operators to derive supplemental income from their farm as long as the productive capacity of the land is not diminished.

➤ **Income Diversification**

The best way to protect agricultural land is to keep ranching and farming profitable. **In the livestock sector, profit margins are too thin to support expansion of the farm operation and allow for ranch succession without diversified farm income.** Income derived from non-farm sources is reinvested to support the

farm/ranch operation. Non-farm income often speeds the ability to grow and expand ranch operations and self-insuring against market fluctuations. Non-farm income is necessary in most agricultural operations.

RECOMMENDATION:

- 9) Removes restrictions for bonafide ranching/farming operations on deriving non-farm income from their farm properties as long as the productive capacity of the land is not diminished beyond a threshold footprint based on a percentage of the parcel area.

➤ **Encourage New Entrants, Youth and Succession**

Attracting new people to farming relies upon a positive outlook for income potential, access to supports and programs, and ability to ascertain desired lifestyle/housing. Provisions are needed for farm families and farm labour is a requirement to facilitate business growth and farm succession.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 10) that the province facilitate access to large capital loans (i.e., \$1-2 million) for bonafide farm operations amortized over 50 years to enable land acquisition and operating cash flow.
- 11) that the province establish supports to make agricultural loans interest free or negligible interest rates.
- 12) that the province establishes homesite-severance or life estate leasing to facilitate succession on bonafide farm operations.
- 13) that the province enable access to Crown lands and revise the lease-to-purchase options so they are workable.
- 14) that the province develops new community pastures on Crown ALR lands to provide grazing opportunities.

➤ **Agricultural Planning**

The Long Game

To maximum British Columbia’s agricultural and economic potential, the province must undertake long-range planning to establish goals/targets. Farmland will always be under threat from development, both residential and industrial. While the ALR seeks to protect the lands, unless profitability is addressed, there will not be anyone to work the land. The province needs to establish a 50-year plan for agriculture that is matched by a regulatory framework that support agriculture and helps achieve the targets outlined in the agricultural plan.

Local Bylaws

BCCA is concerned that agriculture is not as valued as other activities to municipalities and local governments. Both provincial and local governments need to establish policies that promote agriculture. While the ALC is trying to have harmonize decision making, the variability of local government bylaws on parcel size and housing create unfairness.

RECOMMENDATION:

- 15) That the province establishes a long term agricultural plan for British Columbia that promotes agriculture and helps the agricultural community realize its full potential.

CONCLUSION

The best way to protect agricultural land is to keep farming and ranching profitable.

<p>ADDITIONAL REFERENCE MATERIALS – www.cattlemen.bc.ca</p> <p>2009 -- Summary of BCCA member survey on the ALR</p> <p>2009 -- Position Statement on the ALR adopted (with 28 recommendations)</p> <p>2010 -- Position statement reaffirmed; Recommendations updated following the work of the Ranching Task Force.</p> <p>2010 -- BCCA submission to ALR Review Committee</p> <p>2014 -- BCCA submission on proposed changes to ALR use</p> <p>2016 -- BCCA submission on Agri-tourism in the ALR</p> <p>2017 -- Position Statement on the ALR reaffirmed by the Board</p> <p>2018 -- BCCA submission on the ALR Revitalization</p> <p>2018 -- BCCA Land Stewardship Committee submission on ALR Revitalization re: Crown lands</p>
