

Lillooet/Lytton Agricultural Opportunities Scoping Workshop

Held March 9, 2002 in room 201 of the Lillooet Rec Centre.

Purpose:

To examine how agriculture could be expanded and diversified in the Lillooet Forest District.

Background:

During 2001 a community development action plan process was developed for the communities within the Lillooet Forest District. In the process of developing the plan, there were a number of options and issues raised with respect to agriculture in the region. It became clear that the agricultural sector had been neglected in the recent past. There appeared to be no overall cohesion or common direction in agriculture.

The CDAP team and the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries realized that there was an urgent need for an agricultural opportunities scoping workshop. People currently involved with agriculture in the region, both large and small producers with a spectrum of agricultural interests were invited. Eighteen participants attended (see Appendix 1).

The intent was to provide an opportunity for the participants to work with each other and Ministry of Agriculture staff to identify how to make better use of the agricultural potential in the region.

The participants brainstormed the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT analysis) to agriculture as a business in the Lillooet Forest District. They then broke into smaller groups to discuss specific community-based approaches for taking advantage of the strengths and opportunities and to avoiding or overcoming weaknesses and threats.

The outcome of the workshop are a number of ideas that need further work, such as creating a local producers organization and holding workshops on specific topics of interest.

A. Strengths/Opportunities of Local Agriculture

Environmental Issues

- Great Climate - good heat units and long frost free period
- Can grow a wide range of crops
- Late season can supplement other producing areas

- Isolation of farms (keeps spread of disease and pest to a minimum)
- Good solar gain for green houses

Economic Issues

- Interest in niche market alternative crops
- Talented small operators
- Entrepreneurism
- Woodlot potential to supplement agriculture - agri-forestry

Infrastructure/social issues

- Diversity of people and alternative lifestyles
- Hidden creativity
- Strong organic producer's association
- Waste heat for use in green houses
- Growing area tourism creates potential agri-tourism market
- Houses on farms available for agritourism

Marketing Issues

- Northernmost agricultural area for many crops for markets north
- Lillooet/Lytton image (warm, sunny, pollution-free, etc)
- Opportunities for joint marketing
- Local stores will buy local produce
- Value added opportunities
- Proximity to lower mainland market and Whistler

B. Weaknesses/Threats to local Agriculture

Environmental Issues:

- Minimum winter temperatures lower than south Okanagan together with winter winds and a lack of snow cover all cause winter environmental constraints
- Wildlife competing for crops
- Later harvest crop than lower mainland for most crops
- Rocky ground
- Managing pests and diseases
- Short season for processing any products
- Need microclimate information

Economic Issues:

- Shortage of flat arable land - High cost of farm land
- Lack of availability of capital at reasonable rates

- Numerous small operators that can not afford capitalisation for equipment
- Water Costs - threat of increased pumping costs

Infrastructure/social Issues:

- Lack of transportation to markets
- Small agricultural community
- Need places for agri-tourists to overnight
- Agricultural support organisations are lacking
- Lack of processing and cold storage facilities
- Non-meat inspection area
- Limited supply of skilled agricultural labour
- Losing population base
- Need right equipment for small acreage
- Lack of research on what we could grow here
- Lack of recorded agricultural history
- Lack of agricultural association to share ideas
- Government regulations
- Meeting WCB standards for workers
- ALR restricts diversification to non-production economic opportunities

Marketing Issues:

- No markets for some products
- Lack of market information, no marketing association or marketing board
- Below the threshold to be effectively in the market
- Problems marketing to wholesalers

C. Possible Solutions Identified

1. Local Agricultural Co-operation:

- The overarching interest that came out the meeting was the creation of a local producers organisation to enhance the exchange of information between local producers via meetings, email and other methods. Any of the following ideas could be explored by such an organisation.
- Also considered is creating a directory of local producers, including youth (possibly through a local 4H club)
- Looking into creating a local market gardeners co-op to access all of the regional farmers' markets.
- A few other issues to consider are organising workshops on various agricultural topics, exploring some form of equipment co-op and sharing information to be able to capitalise on

what we can do that others can not.

- Collaborative business development - growers working with producers to meet product niche

2. Agri-tourism

This is an emerging sideline for agricultural producers in places like the Okanagan and should be considered within the region. Some questions to consider:

- The scale of local producers versus the demand for agri-tourism – there is not enough local infrastructure to accommodate a large number of tourists.
- What is agri-tourism and what are the opportunities? A workshop with experienced practitioners would be helpful.
- The region is well placed to emphasise an organic tourism aspect and could enhance this with the organic harvest festival. The organic theme works well along the lines of helping to create an image for the region.
- While not entirely the same as agri-tourism, there are programs for working holidays on farms which may help address the seasonal labour shortage issues. The Willing Workers On Organic Farms (WWOOF) program is being used by several farms in the region.

3. Value Added:

There are a number of ways to increase the value of products produced and so stimulate more production and/or more income from present production:

- Build on existing producers and products
- Joint Marketing
 - Possibly create a local brand
 - Work on a regional image emphasising the climate and clean air and land (consider declaring a GMO free region)
- Cold storage facility – is there enough demand to make use of one? What is in place that could be used?
- A common or shared small scale processing facility could be set up to add value to products and extend marketing possibilities.
- Do more research on products that could be sold in Whistler/Squamish

4. Other crops and products for consideration:

- Given that there is a good base of organic production, it is worth considering expanding organic production to build on an existing strength,
 - As an example one could look at the 'natural' beef market.
 - Another option is to consider certified organic seed production.
- Greenhouses: What crops would work best? What markets? Given the waste heat from the mills in the region, is there a way to use this heat to keep the greenhouses heated?
- Explore emerging niche markets for new products: ie restaurants looking for special products.
- Look to symbiotic relationships such as ginseng and goldenseal.

- Get more information on the opportunity for grape production in this region.
- Explore non-beef livestock production.
- Improve local research capability and share results.
- Explore speciality crops such as:
 - Stevia
 - Oregon Grape
 - Black Currant (look into the oil in the seeds)
 - Sea Buckthorn
 - Saskatoons
 - Wild crafting

5. Water issues:

Two primary approaches were raised on this issue:

- Water conservation through such approaches as using drip irrigation or mulch (it was also suggested people should look at Aquidyne.com for water filtering solutions)
- Improving water infrastructure in some areas such as east Lillooet and making a better assessment of water needs in all areas.

D. Focus Areas for More Work

- 1) Form a Local Agricultural Producers Group
- 2) Conduct Information Workshops on:
 - Niche Crops/Specialty Crops
 - Small Farm Success
 - Agri-tourism
 - Grape Growing and Wine Production
 - Small Scale Processing
- 3) Build a Regional Image/Identity
- 4) Conduct Market Research
- 5) Improve the Available Labour Force
- 6) Work with Youth

E. Sources of Assistance

The B.C. Ministry of Agriculture will have 6 core areas of activity: resource management, fish, risk management, corporate structure, food quality and safety, and industry competitiveness.

The B.C. Ministry of Agriculture will not continue to give direct extension recommendations to

growers. They will not be putting on workshops, but will be acting as resource people only. Grower information will be available through: agribusiness extension and through infobasket (a specialist maintained web site that is regularly updated with latest info relevant to agriculture in the province.

There is a joint federal provincial Agri-food Futures Fund (AFFF) from which funds are available for specific purposes relating to development and sustainability of the agri-food industry in BC. It can be accessed directly by various industry organizations in BC for activities such as: research and development, training and education, technology development and transfer, market development, communications, and environmental enhancement.

Attendees:

| | | |
|---------|------------|---|
| Thad | Allen | Askom Valley Farm |
| Katie | Brown | |
| Trevor | Chandler | CDAP Team and Bruin's End Farm |
| Cindy | Fredrick | |
| Patsey | Gessey | |
| Brian | Grossler | |
| Steve | Hempell | |
| Richard | Hug | |
| David | Jones | |
| Lucy | Jones | |
| Mojave | Kaplan | |
| Arnold | Malm | Old Airport Gardens |
| Bob | Meredith | Golden Cariboo Honey |
| Bernard | Schulmann | CDAP Team |
| Paul | Scotchman | |
| Susan | Senger | CRB |
| Greg | Smith | Askom Farm |
| Graham | Strachan | Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries |
| Randy | Sundermann | FRBC |
| Barry | Wilson | |

Next meeting Thurs April 18th at Lytton Village office from 6-9 pm

Goals of meeting:

Formation of a Lytton/Lillooet Agricultural Producers Group

Set priorities for further co-operative work.

Everyone welcome