



Agriculture Sector Strategy



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Agriculture Sector Strategy

prepared by



White Rock, BC

for





Acknowledgements

The agriculture strategy was developed from the input provided many stakeholders in the Omineca Beetle Action Coalition (OBAC) region.

OBAC would like to thank all who contributed, whether through phone interviews, in person during dialogue sessions, or through an electronic survey. Many other contributors provided input through e-mail and telephone conversations. The participants who provided identifying information are listed in the appendices.

The recommendations proposed in this strategy draw upon the information and advice shared by the many contributors combined with the interests of the communities of the region and reflect the views of the OBAC communities.

Foreword

The OBAC was formed in 2005 with financial support from the provincial government “To work to ensure sustainable development and resiliency for the Omineca Beetle Action Coalition region”. OBAC is led by a Board of Directors of the region’s Mayors and Regional District Chairs. OBAC is working with its member communities, First Nations, all levels of government, industry and sector representatives, academic institutions, and allied partner organizations to develop regional diversification plans that build resilient communities during and after the pine beetle epidemic.



The OBAC region spans more than eighteen million hectares from Smithers to Valemount and includes two regional districts and their rural constituents, twelve municipalities, and nineteen First Nations communities. At least fifty percent of the region’s forests are pine and thirty-seven percent of the jobs in the region depend directly on forestry. Eighty percent of the mature pine forest is expected to be dead within six years as a result of the mountain pine beetle epidemic currently afflicting the forests of central BC.

OBAC is putting forward long-term strategies that are designed to mitigate the social and economic impacts of the mountain pine beetle epidemic. The agriculture strategy is one of 10 strategies being developed for OBAC. Other strategies include Minerals and Mining, Tourism, Integrated Regional Infrastructure, Alternative Energy, Future Forest Products and Fibre Use.

Agriculture has long been a very important industry in the OBAC region. The purpose of this strategy is to identify what actions need to be taken by the provincial and federal governments to strengthen and diversify the region’s agriculture industry. The strategy also identifies what actions local governments, producer organizations, and others can take individually, collectively and in concert with senior governments to achieve this goal.

Executive Summary

The prosperity of the OBAC region has long been reliant on its timber resources. However the mountain pine beetle epidemic is expected to create challenges for the traditional forest sector for several decades. OBAC is developing sector strategies that provide recommendations which are designed to diversify the region's economy and create more resilient communities.

The agriculture strategy is important to the region for the following reasons:

- The agriculture industry has historically been very important to the region. However, over the past decade the productivity and diversity of the region's industry has declined relative to the province as a whole;
- The capability of the region to 'cost-effectively' produce food for local and other markets is not being fully realized;
- A renewed interest in enhancing regional and local food security, and accessing locally produced foods matches well with an interest in diversifying the region's economy. This will create new opportunities;
- A renewal of the sector, which includes development of new products and new markets is now needed; and
- Focused and collaborative efforts by the agriculture sector, business and senior and local governments are required to explore available opportunities and return the sector to profitability.

The communities of the region envision a future with an active, diversified, and profitable agriculture sector that is supported by regionally situated, responsive education and training, and effective research programs. The sector emphasizes food production that is sustainable and responsible; a sector that collaborates with health agencies, educational institutions, local governments, community groups, and others to develop measures to expand and diversify the industry. Using multiple strategies, the agriculture sector will be successful in local markets, be profitable with established products, develop new specialty and other products, and grow to serve broader provincial, national, and international markets.

The region has a strong agriculture community and many members were consulted to develop this strategy. This strategy will position the sector for short-term growth targeting local markets while laying the foundation for product diversification and growth to eventually reach provincial, national and international markets.

Four objectives have been developed to help achieve the regional vision.

- Objective 1.** Diversify and strengthen the agriculture sector.
- Objective 2.** Form stronger partnerships across the agriculture sector .
- Objective 3.** Increase the capacity to train and recruit the required work force.
- Objective 4.** Increase public support for the sector and interest in locally produced high quality food.

To achieve these objectives, the following five recommendations have been developed:

- Recommendation 1.** Develop infrastructure that supports the agriculture sector and removes barriers to its further development and diversification.
- Recommendation 2.** Attract new entrants to the industry and enable access to training and education for existing and new members of the sector.
- Recommendation 3.** Strengthen the industry by increasing collaboration across the sector and by forging partnerships and communication links with First Nations, local communities, governments, health, and education agencies.
- Recommendation 4.** Support value-added and specialized product development and the development of provincial, national, and international markets for these products.
- Recommendation 5.** Increase the demand for locally and regionally produced foods.





The required actions to implement each of these recommendations are presented in Section 6. Some key actions include:

- Establish agriculture support officers that would support business planning and economic development in the sector;
- Examine the feasibility and interest in establishing a “beef cluster” in the region that would include beef production, processing, and shipping of finished products;
- Establish new and expand existing training and education programs relevant to the region’s agricultural opportunities and potential;
- Establish measures to increase the production of and demand for local food;
- Establish a regional agricultural advisory committee to engage with local education and research facilities;
- Establish a regional agricultural resource centre in cooperation with the region’s post-secondary institutions;
- Provide the BC Ministry of Agriculture and Lands with additional staffing to increase its level of direct farm outreach and related activity in the region;
- Examine the business case for establishing a regional brand for marketing;
- Convene regional forums to review ways to partner on agriculture initiatives;
- Provide funding to support existing projects and undertake new pilot projects, crop trials, and other activities designed to increase the range of crops produced in the region;
- Undertake market research to identify the potential market for products that are currently grown or may be grown or processed in the region; and
- Assess the potential for expanding the greenhouse industry in the region.

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1.0 Community and Regional Aspirations

1.1 Introduction

Historically, agriculture has been very important in the OBAC region. The region has excellent capability for forage production without irrigation and a good supply of both developed and undeveloped agriculture land. This land produces a variety of products, however large-scale production of forage and beef for the commodity market has been the mainstay. A major regional strength is its very strong and committed producer community.



Over the past decade, however, the industry has declined relative to the province as a whole. Although active dairy farms remain, and chickens are farmed at non-quota volumes, much of the former dairy, poultry, and egg industries have left the area. In some cases, farmers have left these generally profitable agricultural sectors when they had opportunities to sell their market quota to other regions. The ranching and cattle industry, traditionally the largest sector, has been particularly stressed. Ranchers are leaving due to a series of factors that have resulted in lower cattle prices and higher production costs. Infrastructure losses, research and extension decline, an aging farmer population, and difficulty attracting new participants to the industry are major issues. There is also some concern that agricultural land may be planted to trees for use as carbon credits, which would limit the further development of some of the region's productive agriculture land.

The purpose of this strategy is to identify what needs to be done to strengthen and diversify the agriculture sector and allow it to contribute to a more diverse and resilient regional economy.

The strategy provides recommendations to senior government decision-makers to enhance growth and investment for the agriculture sector.

1.2 Methods

Preparing this agriculture strategy involved:

- Reviewing background information and reports to gain insight on regional aspirations, opportunities, and relevant initiatives;
- Establishing a list of contacts for telephone interviews in consultation with OBAC representatives and area staff of the BC Ministry of Agriculture and Lands (BCMAL);
- Conducting telephone interviews with selected contacts representing the region as a whole and individual municipalities;
- Assembling a summary of agricultural initiatives currently underway and ideas for future development based on telephone surveys and research involving other jurisdictions;
- Conducting an electronic survey to encourage suggestions and comments on options and possible strategies;
- Preparing a discussion paper and industry background document to stimulate ideas and thoughts for future agriculture development;
- Conducting dialogue sessions in different communities in the region to provide advice and feedback during the strategy development process; and
- Establishing a process through email and telephone communication for engaging a broader review audience to review the strategy.
- The primary audiences for this strategy are the provincial and federal governments. The strategy will enable community leaders to present recommendations to senior government decision-makers and others to support of growth and investment in the agriculture sector.

The strategy is also of interest to local stakeholders, particularly members of the agriculture community. This includes farmers and ranchers as well as others involved in the agriculture sector such as processors and industry suppliers. Engagement by the sector will be required in order to achieve the regional vision.



1.3 A Model for the Agriculture Sector

The agriculture sector in the OBAC region has traditionally followed a business model based on individual farmers, relatively isolated from local food demands, growing food products to be shipped out of the region. Larger food retailers in the region have generally avoided retailing locally-grown food products, preferring to purchase from producers, wherever they may be, who could ensure steady supply at the lowest possible price. Local farmers have had to control their production costs to produce primary agricultural products while wielding little control over the price received for their final product. For commodities where supply is not managed by a form of quota, farmers have competed with primary producers from across North America and the world.

Discussions with agriculture stakeholders in the OBAC region revealed an emerging interest in the OBAC communities building a more dynamic, diverse, and energetic sector. Stakeholders are enthusiastic about developing a sector that features higher levels of cooperation among producers, ensures longer term profitability for farmers, endorses sustainable local markets while building other provincial, national, and international markets, and highlights the close relationship between regional food security and health and well-being.

The regional vision for agriculture is:

The communities of the region envision a future with an active, diversified, and profitable agriculture sector that is supported by regionally situated, responsive education and training, and effective research programs. The sector emphasizes food production that is sustainable and responsible; a sector that collaborates with health agencies, educational institutions, local governments, community groups, and others to develop measures to expand and diversify the industry. Using multiple strategies, the agriculture sector will be successful in local markets, be profitable with established products, develop new specialty and other products, and grow to serve broader provincial, national, and international markets.

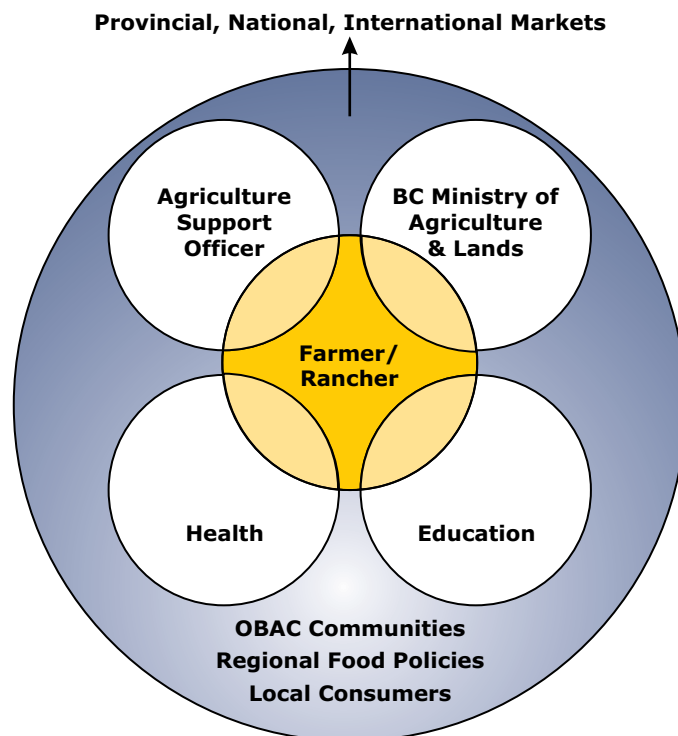


Figure 1 Model for Agriculture in the OBAC Region.

Many industry participants believe that the region needs a new model for the sector. The new model (Figure 1) emphasizes locally-produced healthy food products and the importance of food security for the region. Where possible, farmers would grow products for local processors, thus meeting many of the region's food demands. The sector would be linked more closely with health and education agencies that have important roles in developing this new model. Local consumer demand for local food products would be supported through expanded production capacity (using greenhouses where appropriate), storage facilities, and retail capacity - either in retail outlets or through expanded farmers' markets.



While it is understood that local markets are not large enough to sustain an expanded agriculture industry, the move to serve local markets will increase economic activity in the short-term and should lead to continuous improvement in product diversity and quality and niche market development. While expanding to meet local demand, the sector could develop and market products for provincial, national, and international markets. A reasonable economic return for farmers based on their investment and time is the cornerstone to attract new entrants and ensure long-term sustainability. As the sector returns to profitability, more producers will be attracted to the region.

Cattle and ranching are a large component of the agriculture industry in the OBAC region. Under the proposed model, local processing facilities would be expanded, specialty products would be developed, and more emphasis would be placed on local and provincial markets. Long-term, these initiatives would allow access to national and international markets. The region is well positioned in this regard, because of the excellent rail infrastructure and potential access to international cargo air services.

1.4 Strategy Objectives

The agriculture strategy has four components:

1. A regional vision which presents both the short-term and long-term ideals for the region;
2. Four objectives that highlight the key areas related to the vision;
3. Five recommendations that present measurable steps that will lead to accomplishment of the objectives and attainment of the regional vision; and
4. A series of actions emphasizing shorter term priorities leading to longer term steps that will allow the agriculture industry to grow and strengthen over time.

Key to attaining the regional vision will be the support of the provincial and federal governments and broad engagement by the agriculture sector. A priority need is establishment of regional capacity that will facilitate linkages across the sector, and sound business planning for individual producers and producer organizations. As well, health and education agencies will need to be linked more closely with the sector. Increased extension support from the BCMAL is crucial.

To help achieve the vision the following objectives have been developed:

- Objective 1.** Diversify and strengthen the agriculture sector.
- Objective 2.** Form stronger partnerships across the agriculture sector.
- Objective 3.** Increase the capacity to train and recruit the required work force.
- Objective 4.** Increase public support for the sector and interest in locally produced high quality food.

Five recommendations and related actions designed to help the sector meet these objectives are detailed in Section 6.



2.0 Agriculture Sector Profile

2.1 The Study Area

The OBAC region is shown in Figure 2. It includes the Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako (RDBN) and the Regional District of Fraser-Fort George (RDFFG). The total land area is 18 million hectares or about 19% of British Columbia. There are 12 incorporated municipalities and 18 First Nations included in the region as identified in Table 1 below.



Figure 2 Study Area

Table 1 Study Area Incorporated and First Nations Communities

Incorporated Communities	First Nations Communities
Village of Burns Lake	Cheslatta Carrier Nation
District of Fort St. James	Lake Babine Nation
Village of Fraser Lake	Kwadacha First Nation (Fort Ware)
Village of Granisle	Lheidli T'enneh
District of Houston	McLeod Lake Indian Band
District of Mackenzie	Moricetown First Nation
Village of McBride	Nak'azdli Band
City of Prince George	Nadleh Whut'en First Nation
Town of Smithers	Nee-Tahi-Buhn First Nation
Village of Telkwa	Saik'uz First Nation
Village of Valemount	Skin Tye Nation
District of Vanderhoof	Stellat'en First Nation
	Takla Lake First Nation
	Tl'azt'en Nation
	Tsay Keh Dene
	Ts'il Kax Koh (Burns Lake) First Nation
	Wet'suwet'en First Nation
	Yekooche First Nation



2.2 The Agriculture Industry in the OBAC Region¹

The OBAC region has excellent capacity for forage production without irrigation, and has an abundance of productive agricultural land available at prices considerably lower than most of BC. The lower population levels in the region make more intensive farming attractive and less subject to disease and other issues common in other more populated growing areas of the province. There is a committed agricultural community in the region, encouraged by strengthening demand for more local food, a demand that is not being fully met at this time.

The sector is dominated by cattle and ranching and most crop land produces hay or fodder crops, or alfalfa and alfalfa mixtures. In 2006, gross farm receipts for the region were \$100.6 million, representing 5% of BC's total. Gross farm receipts in the OBAC region (including both regional districts) increased from 2001 to 2006, but at a lower rate than the rest of the province. Gross farm receipts combined for both regional districts showed an 8% increase over the five year period compared to 18% for the province.

Currently, the region's ranchers are facing difficulties. Profits have fallen for a number of reasons - including the U.S. policy of Mandatory Country of Origin labeling, and the residual impacts from the Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE) issue. Prices for necessary inputs remain high, and as a result many ranchers have reduced their herds. Cattle numbers province-wide have declined.

Other important, smaller components of the sector include milk and chicken production. In 2007, there were 11 dairy farms in the Bulkley Valley representing less than 2% of licensed producers in BC and less than 1% of total production quota for the province. Chicken production is important locally, but is very minor in the provincial context.

There is a currently considerable interest in supplying products to local markets. Farmers markets have been established or expanded in recent years.

The region's agriculture assets include veterinary facilities, farm equipment and machinery suppliers, and generally good transportation capabilities. As well there are abattoir facilities at the Northwest Premium Meat Cooperative, located in Telkwa (a slaughter, processing, and store front facility, recently closed), and at Kawano Farms in Prince George but both are only licensed provincially at this time. Mobile abattoir capacity is being considered for the area.

¹ Information for this section taken from Census Canada data and three Agricultural Overview documents prepared by the BC Ministry of Agriculture and Lands.



The most productive areas for agriculture are generally located along the Highway 16 corridor from Prince George to Smithers/Telkwa and include the fertile farmlands of the Nechako Valley. The Bulkley Valley region, with relatively favourable climate and good soils, is recognized as one of the better areas for farming, particularly for the production of forage. The Robson Valley also has good capability for agriculture production.

2.2.1 Land for Agriculture

In 1973, the provincial government approved the Agricultural Land Commission Act that established a land use zone to protect land with agricultural potential in British Columbia. The zone is called the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR) and it encompasses approximately 5% of the province's land base. Agriculture is the priority use within the ALR. Farming is encouraged and non-agricultural uses are controlled by the legislation and regulations.

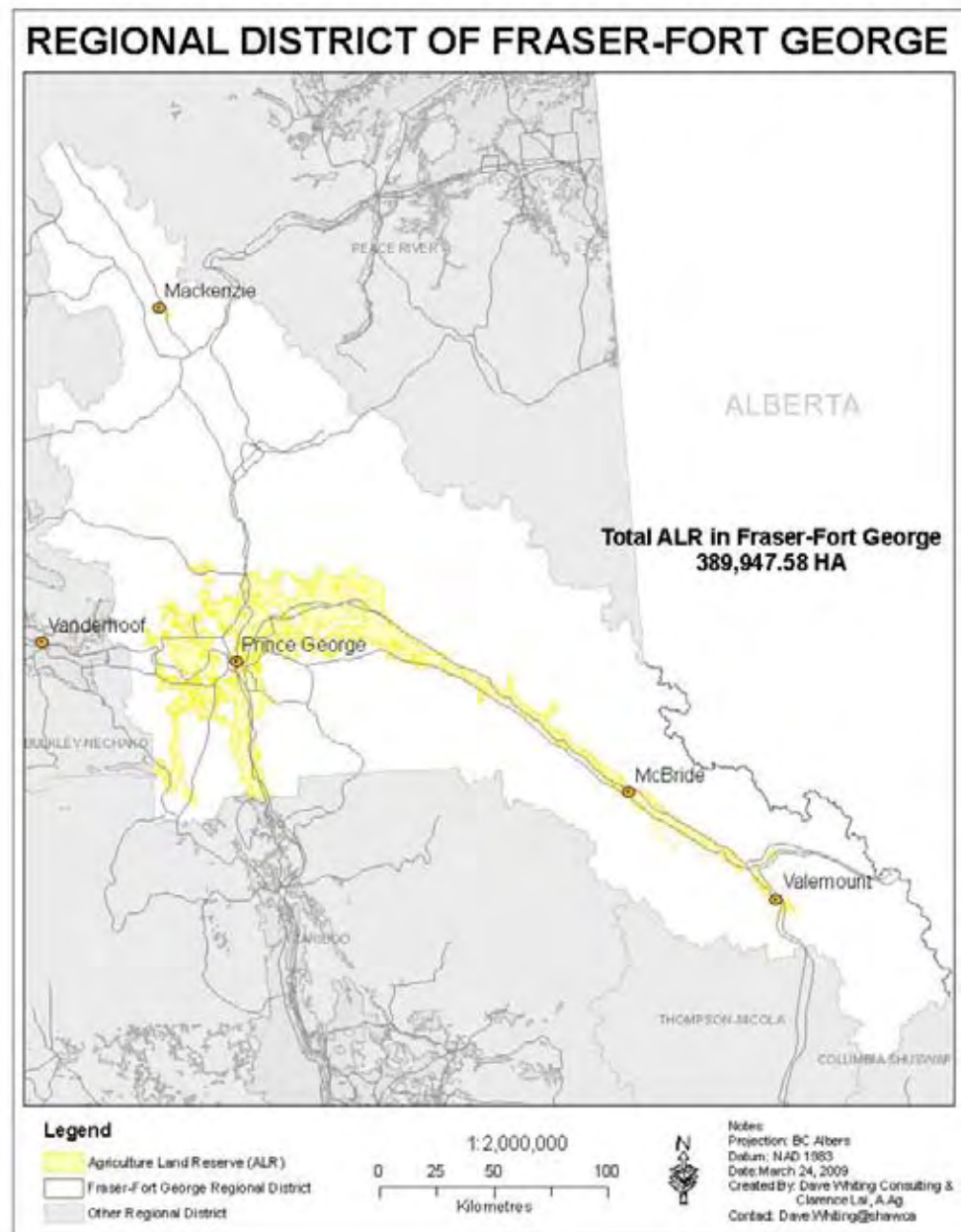


Figure 3 Land in the ALR, Fraser-Fort George Regional District

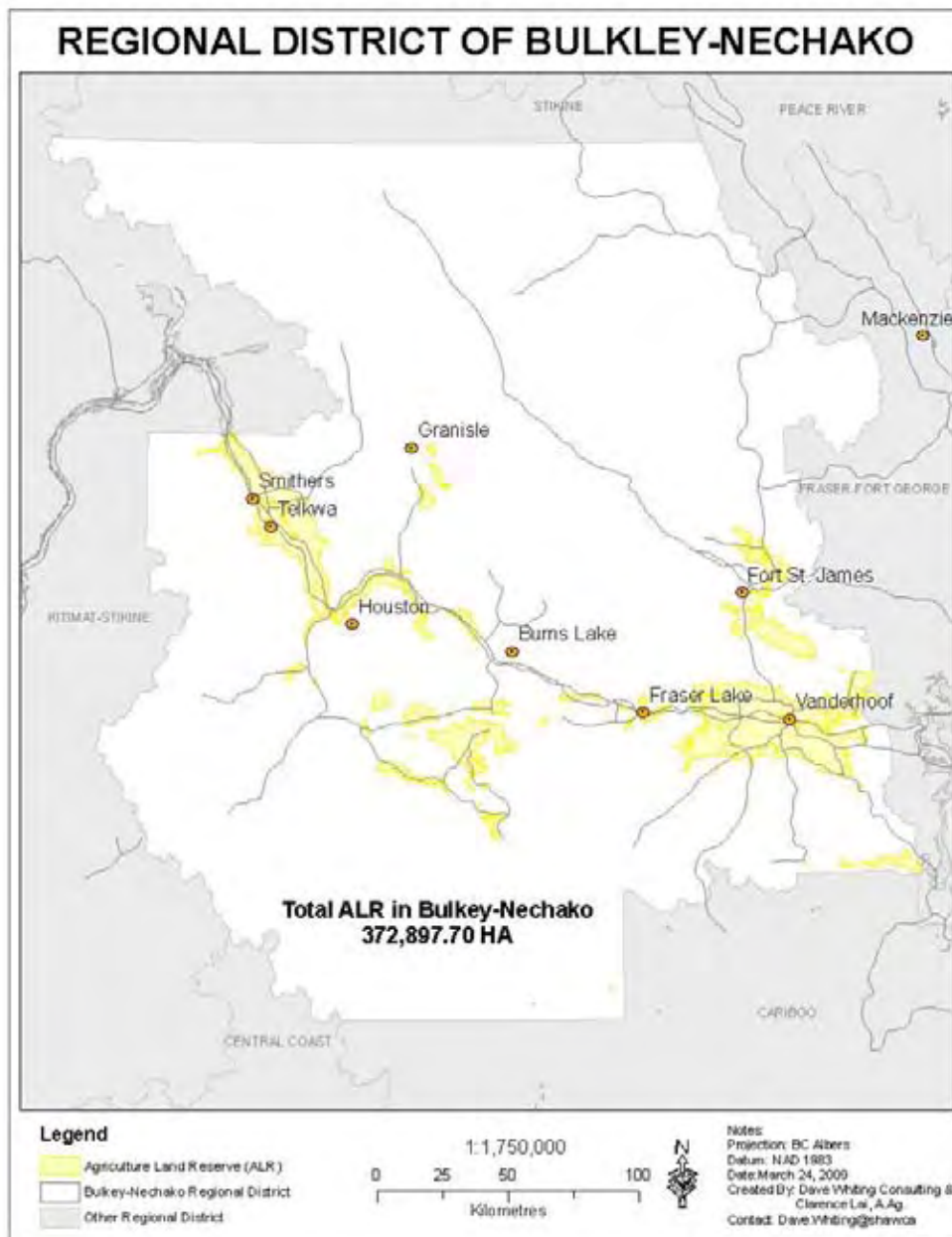


Figure 4 Land in the ALR, Bulkley-Nechako Regional District

The OBAC region has 762,844 hectares in the ALR, representing 16% of the province’s total agricultural land use zone. Figures 3 and 4 illustrate the ALR land in the two constituent regional districts.

The Regional District of Fraser-Fort George has four member municipalities and almost 390,000 hectares of land in the ALR. This represents 7% of the total land in the area. The city of Prince George accounts for 77% of the population of the Regional District. Within the city’s boundaries are 58 farms with more than 7,000 hectares in the ALR and representing 26% of the city’s land base.

The Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako has eight member municipalities and almost 373,000 hectares of land in the ALR, representing about 5% of the regional district’s total land area. Smithers is the largest municipality in the regional district, accounting for nearly 14% of the population.



2.2.2 Agricultural Capability

Agricultural capability is determined by soil and climate. Climate determines the heat energy and moisture required for agricultural production. Depending on their properties and characteristics, soils may sustain the production of certain agricultural products, but not others.

Agricultural land is divided into classes to indicate its capability for crop production. There are seven land classes normally used to describe the capability of the land to grow crops.

Class 1 land has minimal limitations in the most amenable climates:

- Class 2 to Class 5 reflect increases in limitations;
- Class 6 lands preclude arable agricultural activities but may sustain native and/or perennial uncultivated agriculture; and
- Class 7 lands preclude all arable and natural grazing agricultural systems, regardless of the climate.

Notwithstanding these classifications, innovations in drainage and irrigation, tillage, nutrient replenishment, pest management, and closed environmental systems may sustain agricultural production on land deemed unsuitable for producing specific products. For example, Class 6 and 7 lands may still be agriculturally productive, where topography and climate allow, and where the agricultural activity is in closed environmental systems such as greenhouses.

Figures 5, 6, and 7 present the main land classes in the ALR for the Highway 16 corridor areas of Smithers/ Telkwa, Burns Lake/Fraser Lake, and Prince George. The agricultural land in the OBAC region is primarily Class 4 and 5 but there is more productive farm land in such areas as Prince George, the Nechako Valley near Vanderhoof and Fort St. James, and around Smithers and Telkwa. Similar quality land class data suitable for mapping was not available for areas East of Prince George, including the Robson Valley.



Figure 5 Land Classes in the ALR - Highway 16 Corridor, Smithers/Telkwa



Figure 6 Land Classes in the ALR - Highway 16 Corridor, Burns Lake/Fraser Lake

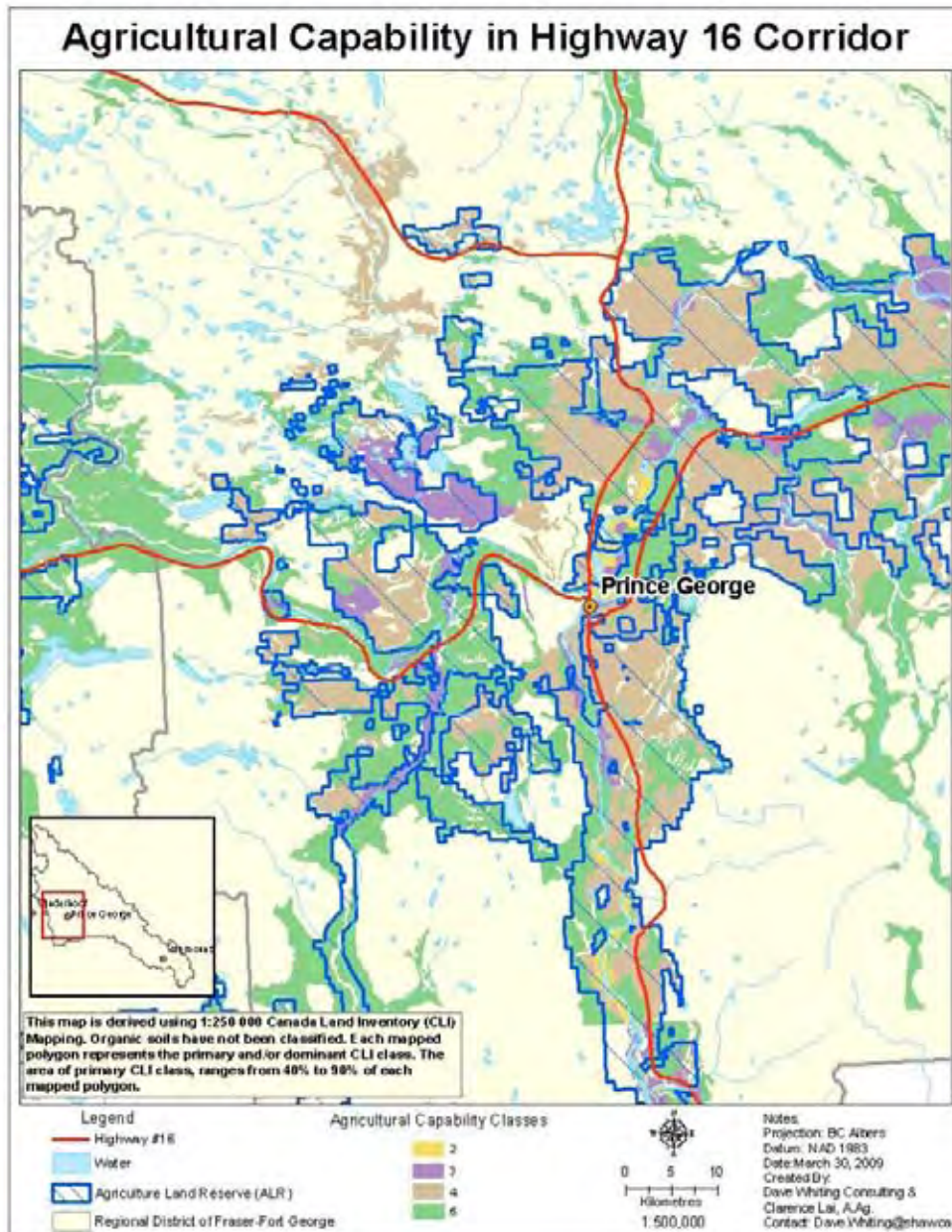


Figure 7 Land Classes in the ALR - Highway 16 Corridor, Prince George



Climate in the OBAC region varies and there are micro-climates in the region. Climate data indicate that mean annual temperatures are highest in Prince George where the mean annual temperature is 4.2°C, compared to 10°C in Richmond (Lower Mainland) and 7.7°C in Vernon (Okanagan). Most communities in the OBAC region get less than 100 frost-free days annually with the exception of Prince George that has 107 frost-free days. There can be frost in every month during some years. In contrast, Vernon has 144 frost-free days annually and Richmond has 216 frost-free days annually.

The OBAC region also receives more snow than either Vernon or Richmond, but mean summer precipitation for most OBAC communities is quite similar to that experienced in Richmond. Vernon, on the other hand, gets less summer precipitation than any community in the OBAC region, even Houston, which has the least summer precipitation of any of the communities in the OBAC region. Table 2 presents the climate in selected communities in the OBAC region and in Vernon and Richmond, for comparison purposes.

Table 2 Climate in the OBAC Region by Selected Community Compared to Two Other BC Communities

Community	Climate Feature			
	Mean annual temperature	Frost free days	Mean summer precip. in mm	Snow in mm
Valemount	3.7	99	254	217
McBride	3.5	97	279	233
Prince George	4.2	107	293	181
Vanderhoof	3.1	83	227	194
Fraser Lake	2.9	88	241	194
Burns Lake	2.7	82	222	191
Houston	3.4	81	187	169
Smithers	3.5	86	215	187
Vernon	7.7	144	183	86
Richmond	10.0	216	273	58

2.2.3 Farms and Farm Operators

The two regional districts making up the OBAC region reported a total of 1,507 farms in 2006. From 1986 to 2006, farm numbers increased in the OBAC region until 1996 and then declined in both (Table 3).

Table 3 Number of Farms in the OBAC Region

Regional District	Year				
	1986	1991	1996	2001	2006
Bulkley-Nechako	801	793	970	945	886
Fraser-Fort George	562	577	650	629	621
Total	1363	1370	1620	1574	1507

The total land area being farmed has increased in the Bulkley-Nechako Regional District (Table 4) but has declined slightly in Fraser-Fort George Regional District. In 2006, the RDBN reported 272,488 hectares being farmed - up from 207,999 hectares in 1986. The RDBFG, on the other hand, reported 107,980 hectares being farmed - down from 1986 by 2,196 hectares. In 2006, the city of Prince George reported 58 farms on 7,318 hectares, an increase of 47% since 1996.



Table 4 Hectares of Farm Land in the OBAC Region

Regional District	Year				
	1986	1991	1996	2001	2006
Bulkley-Nechako	207,999	215,960	238,858	258,323	272,488
Fraser-Fort George	110,176	99,008	98,219	100,484	107,980
Total	318,175	314,968	337,077	358,807	380,468

Perhaps of more concern to the future of the agricultural industry is the increasing average age of farm operators. In the RDBN, for example, the average age of farm operators climbed to 51.9 from 49.4 during the 2001 to 2006 period. In the RDBFG, the average age of farm operators in 2006 was 54.0, a climb of almost three years from the 2001 average age of 51.3. The average age of farm operators, however, is not just of concern to the OBAC region. In BC as a whole, the average age of farm operators in 2006 was 53.6.

2.2.4 Production in the Region

Figures 8 and 9 present the number of livestock and poultry in each regional district. Cattle ranching is the dominant agricultural activity. Cattle and calf numbers increased by 5% in the RDBN between 2001 and 2006 and have been steadily increasing for the past 20 years. Numbers declined in RDBFG between 2001 and 2006.

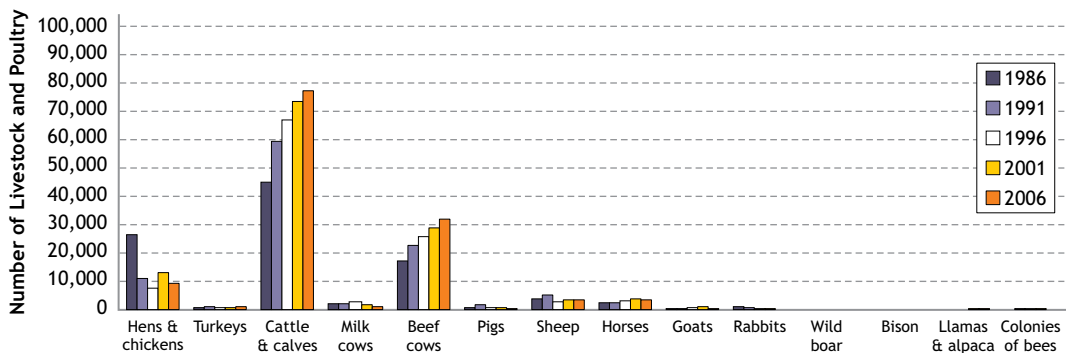


Figure 8 Number of Livestock and Poultry by Type, Bulkley-Nechako Regional District

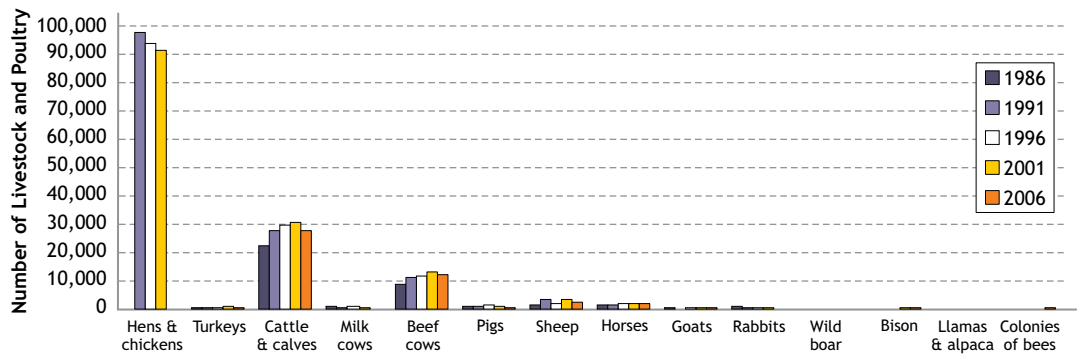


Figure 9 Number of Livestock and Poultry by Type, Fraser-Fort George Regional District

The RDFFG decline in cattle numbers was about 9%. Combined cattle and calf numbers for both regional districts, reflecting the total OBAC region, indicate a modest increase in overall cattle and calf numbers between 2001 and 2006.

In 2007, there were 11 dairy producers in the Bulkley Valley but they represented less than 2% of licensed producers in BC and less than 1% of total production quota for the province. Data available for the regional districts does separately identify milk and beef cows, however both are included in the total for cattle and calves. Dairy producers are mainly located in the Smithers/Telkwa area.

Both regional districts have modest numbers of other ruminants and other livestock representing niche markets with products often sold at local farmers' markets or from the farm gate.

Hen and chicken numbers in the RDFFG declined from 1991 to 2001. In 2006, although there were 119 farms that reported having hens and chickens, the number of birds was not available. The poultry and egg industries have been declining in the OBAC region due to production quota requirements although smaller producers raising fewer birds within the required production guidelines are emerging. Recently, one of the larger egg producing farmers in the region left the business.

The area of farmland dedicated to pasture, both managed and unmanaged, and summer fallow reflects the large number of cattle and calves managed by ranchers in the OBAC region. Figures 10 and 11 present the area of farm land by use in the OBAC region. Since 1996, the area reported in unmanaged pasture in the RBDN increased steadily. It was 131,961 hectares in 2006, representing almost 50% of the regional district's entire area of farmland. The amount of managed pasture over the same period has held steady at about 34,000 hectares. Although it has also increased steadily since 1996, the area in unmanaged pasture in the RDFFG is only 40,441 hectares, about 30% of the amount of unmanaged pasture in the RBDN.

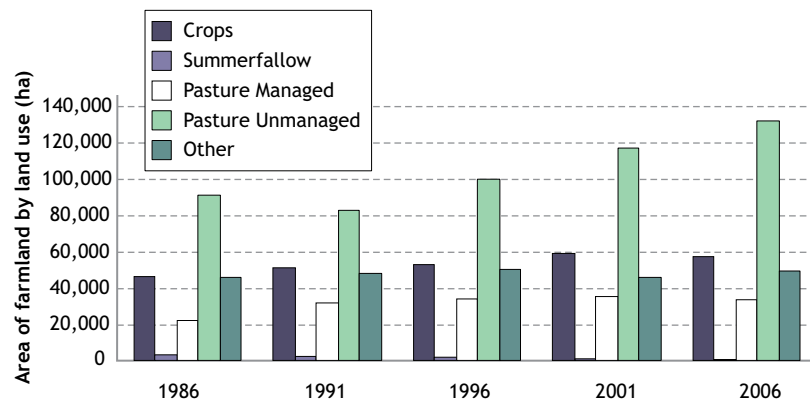


Figure 10 Area of Farm Land by Land Use, Bulkley-Nechako Regional District

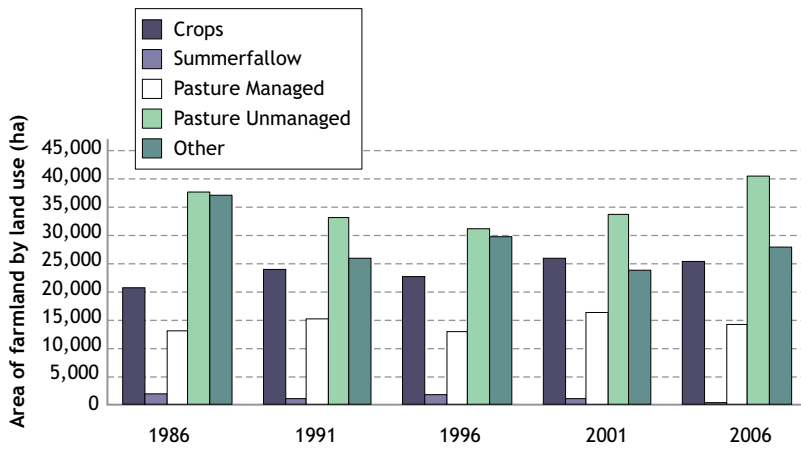


Figure 11 Area of Farm Land by Land Use, Fraser-Fort George Regional District

Field crops including alfalfa and hay dominate in both regional districts and hectares dedicated to field crops have steadily increased. Wheat, oats and barley production as a whole has fallen in the RDBN since 1991 but there are exceptions. For example, the number of hectares for oat production grew by more than 50% between 1991 and 1996, dropped dramatically in 2001 and then rose again in 2006, again by over 50%, likely reflecting market conditions during those years. Figures 12 and 13 present the area of land under cultivation by field crop type.

According to the 2006 census, comparatively little land is being used for the production of berries,

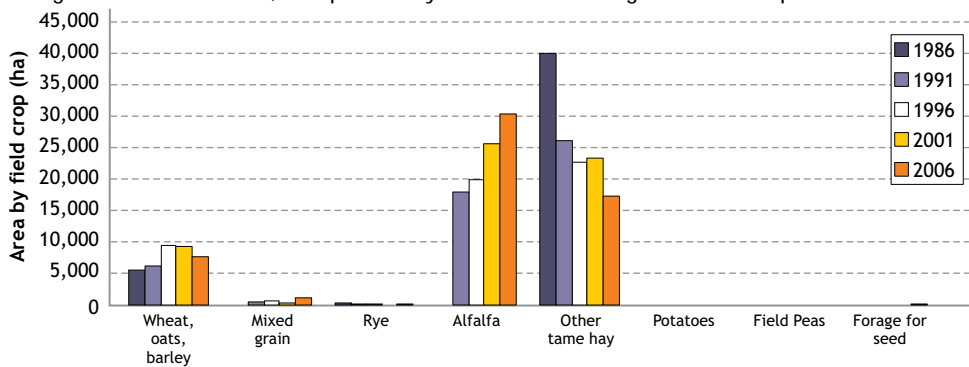


Figure 12 Area by Field Crop, Bulkley-Nechako Regional District

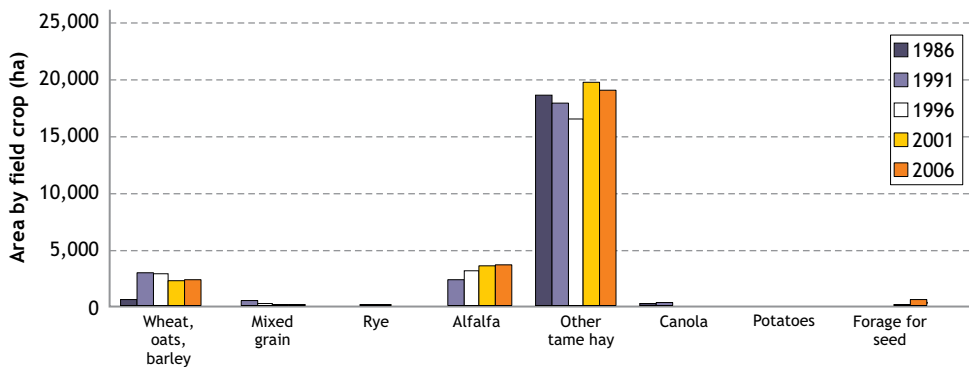


Figure 13 Area by Field Crop, Fraser-Fort George Regional District



fruits, vegetables, or other crops in either regional district. Exceptions identified in the 2006 census are vegetables in RDFFG and fruits, berries, and nuts in RDBN, where the decline from 1996 was somewhat reversed between 2001 and 2006. Since 2006, however the perception of many in the region that production of vegetables has increased.

Table 5 present the area in production by selected crop type in both regional districts.

Table 5 Area (Hectares) by Crop Type

Crop	Year				
	1986	1991	1996	2001	2006
<i>Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako</i>					
Field Crops	46,035	50,994	52,873	58,773	57,008
Fruits, berries and nuts	na	na	13	3	7
Vegetables	14	8	30	28	11
Other	66	27	170	109	426
Total	46,115	51,032	53,076	58,913	57,452
<i>Regional District of Fraser-Fort George</i>					
Field Crops	19,115	23,361	22,361	25,396	25,216
Fruits, berries and nuts	6	10	12	16	10
Vegetables	26	63	27	23	33
Other	1,472	338	293	413	52
Total	20,619	23,772	22,693	25,848	25,311

Along with a decline in area under cultivation, the number of farms producing fruits, berries, and nuts has declined. In the RDBN for example, 25 farms reported growing either strawberries or raspberries in 1996 but this dropped to 12 farms in 2006. In the RDFFG, farms reporting strawberries or raspberries increased over the same period from 10 farms in 1996 to 21 farms in 2006.

Figures 14 and 15 present the number of farms in the region by greenhouse crop. The main greenhouse crops are flowers and vegetables. “Other” crops include tree seedlings which are grown for the forest sector. Greenhouse production in both regional districts reached a peak in 2001. In the RDBN, 56 farms had greenhouses with the main crops being flowers and vegetable. In the RDFFG, 42 farms reported they had greenhouses with most producing vegetables. Farms reporting greenhouses declined in both regional districts between 2001 and 2006 but the RDFFG still accounted for 81% of all the area in greenhouses in northern BC.

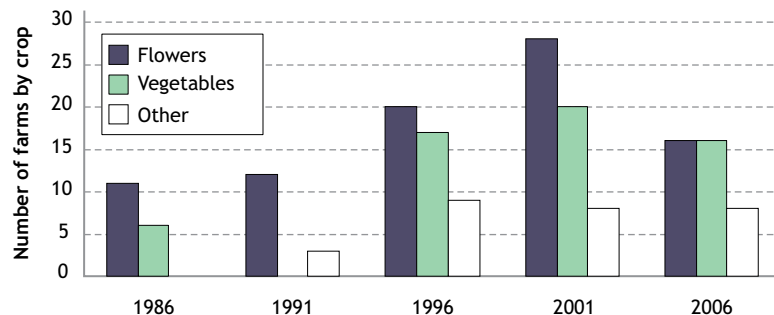


Figure 14 Number of Farms by Greenhouse Crop, Bulkley-Nechako Regional District

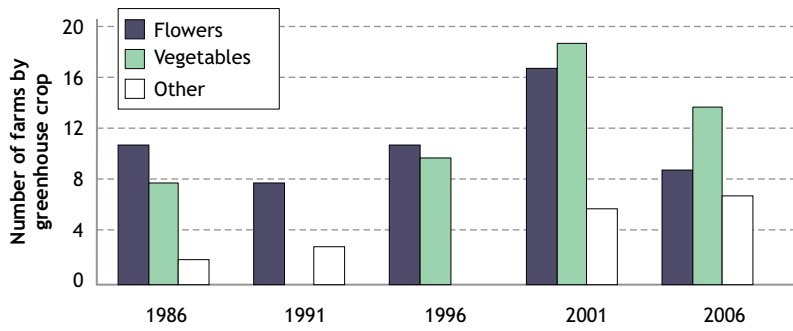


Figure 15 Number of Farms by Greenhouse Crop, Fraser-Fort George Regional District

Gross farm receipts for the OBAC region have been increasing since 1986 but not at the same rate as for the province as a whole. In 2006, combined gross farm receipts for both regional districts were \$100.6 million, an 8% increase in gross farm receipts from the 2001 period. However, gross farm receipts for BC overall increased by 18% over the same five year period. Gross farm receipts information for the two regional districts is presented in Figures 16 and 17.

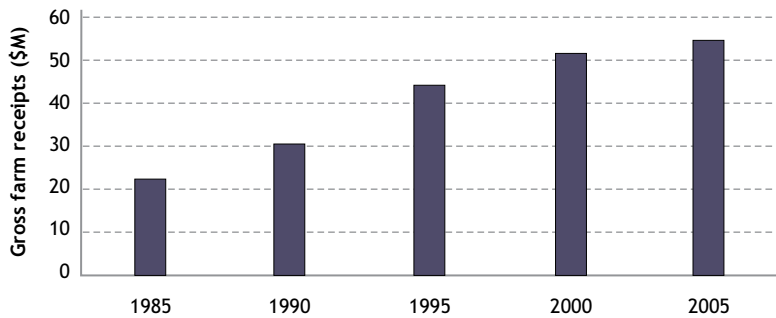


Figure 16 Gross Farm Receipts, Bulkley-Nechako Regional District

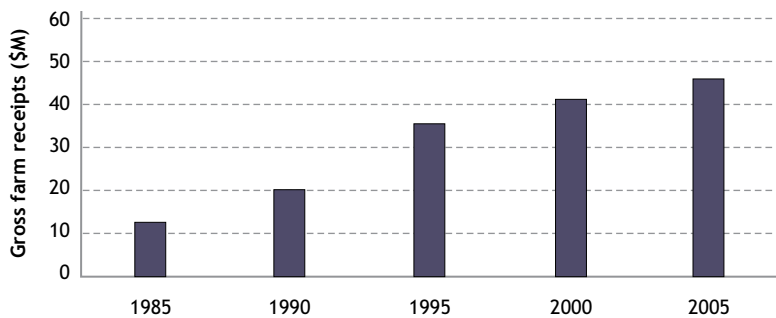


Figure 17 Gross Farm Receipts, Fraser-Fort George Regional District

Although production data is not available, agro-forestry is an area of interest in the OBAC region. The term “agro-forestry” is used to describe a land management approach that deliberately combines the production of trees with other crops and/or livestock. By blending agriculture and forestry with conservation practices, agro-forestry can optimize both economic and environmental benefits. Farmers can realize income in both the short- and long-term. Over the long-term, they may receive income from timber products grown on their farms. In the shorter term, agro-forestry practices can yield non-timber forest products such as edible mushrooms, medicinals and pharmaceuticals, craft products, berries, and fruit.



2.3 OBAC Region Agriculture in the Provincial Context

Agriculture is a significant and expanding industry in British Columbia. In 2006, there were 19,844 farms in the province and 1,507 of these were in the OBAC region. The total area of farms in BC in 2006 was 2.8 million hectares and the OBAC region reported 380,468 hectares in farms or 13% of the provincial total. In 2006, gross farm receipts for the OBAC region were \$100.6 million, representing 5% of BC's total.

BC farmers produce some 200 different agricultural products. The top farm product categories in terms of sales are dairy, chicken, floriculture, cattle, nursery products, greenhouse tomatoes, mushrooms, calves, and blueberries. In the OBAC region, cattle and calves are most plentiful. In 2006, the OBAC region had 13% of all cattle and calves in BC. Although there are some dairy farmers, they represent only about 1% of BC's total production. Chicken production is limited to non-quota growers in the OBAC region meaning that no individual grower can produce more than 3000 kg of chicken.

Floriculture production in greenhouses is present in the OBAC region but most of BC's floriculture is located in the Lower Mainland, the Okanagan and on Vancouver Island. In 2006, 25 farms in the OBAC region reported they grew flowers in greenhouses on their farms.

In 2006, only two farms in the OBAC region reported that they grew mushrooms. However, one of these farms in the Prince George area is no longer in business. Provincially there are more than 50 mushroom producers growing more than 23 million kg annually.

In 2006, three farms reported they grew blueberries in the RDFFG and two in the RDBN. Blueberry production has risen dramatically in BC in the past decade. Ninety-nine percent of all BC blueberry production is in BC's lower Mainland or on Vancouver Island. There are now over 12,000 acres producing blueberries in BC.

2.3.1 Key Institutions and Capacities

The BC Ministry of Agriculture and Lands (BCMAL): BCMAL has offices in Prince George and Smithers. In 2008, the Ministry released an Agriculture Plan for the province, "Growing a Healthy Future for BC Families". The plan's five themes relate directly to the OBAC region agriculture strategy. They are: producing local food in a changing world; meeting environmental and climate challenges; building innovative and profitable family farm businesses; building First Nations agricultural capacity; and bridging the urban/agriculture divide. There are unfilled staff positions in the region.

The University of Northern BC (UNBC): UNBC was officially opened in Prince George in 1994 and, in 2004, was named by Maclean's Magazine as the best small university in Western Canada. The federal and provincial governments have recently made investments to position UNBC as a leading national centre for bio-energy. This development could have important implications for the agriculture strategy, particularly if less expensive energy sources for greenhouses and for poultry production.

College of New Caledonia: The college has campuses throughout the OBAC region and offers courses in numerous technical areas such as forestry and engineering but does not offer courses in agriculture.

Northwest Community College: This college serves the Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako, mainly the Smithers and Houston areas. The college stresses training for the trades and could play a useful role in training people to work in the agricultural industry.

Resources North Association (RNA): Primarily started to serve the forest sector, RNA addresses forest management and sustainability for communities. Representatives from RNA have expressed support for more agro-forestry emphasis in the OBAC region, possibly leading to a wider range of non-forest timber products.

Farmers' Institutes: Farmers' Institutes are distributed throughout the province and there are currently 59 operating Institutes. The Institutes may be incorporated under the Farmers and Womens Institutes Act in order "to improve conditions of rural life" and "to act generally on behalf of its

members in all matters incidental to agricultural pursuits and rural development.”² There are active Farmers’ Institutes in the OBAC region under the broader umbrella of District B and District C Farmers Institutes.

Producer Associations: Active cattle producer associations exist along the Highway 16 corridor. The current president of the BC Cattlemen’s Association lives in Vanderhoof. The following other associations are:



- Bulkley Valley Cattlemen’s Association
- Bulkley Valley Dairymen’s Association
- Fort Fraser Livestock Association
- Lakes District Cattlemen’s Association
- Sinkut Mountain Cattlemen’s Association
- Nechako Valley Regional Cattlemen’s Association
- Cluculz Lake Livestock Association
- Fort George Shepherd’s Association
- Prince George Beekeeper’s Association
- Prince George Cattlemen’s Association
- Prince George Farmers’ Market Association
- Pleasant Valley Cattlemen’s Association
- Skeena Stockmen’s Association
- Cariboo-Central Interior Poultry Producers Association

2.3.2 BC Agriculture in the Canadian Context

In 2006, Canada was the fourth largest exporter and fifth largest importer of agriculture and agri-food products in the world, with exports and imports valued at \$28 billion and \$22 billion respectively.

The area in greenhouses in BC grew by 15% from 2001 to 2006 and BC had 24% of the total square footage in greenhouses in Canada.

BC ranks third in terms of total acreage in vegetables behind Ontario and Quebec although total acres in vegetable production in BC did decline by 4% between 2001 and 2006. In 2006, BC had 36% of Canada’s total area dedicated to growing mushrooms.

Total cattle and calves (including beef and dairy) were 801,000 head in 2006 or 5% of the Canadian total. As of January 1 2009 it had declined to 555,000 or 4.3 % of the Canadian total.

In Canada and BC, the trend has been to fewer farms, however, BC has lost farms at a slower rate than Canada as a whole. Between 2001 and 2006, BC lost 446 farms, a decline of just 2%. During the same period, Canada lost 7% of its farms.

BC has the largest percentage of farms that are 10 acres or less in size in Canada. In 2006, 27% of all farms in BC were 10 acres or less compared to 5% in Canada as a whole.

2.4 Relationship with Other Strategies

The agriculture strategy is one of a series of sector and solution strategies being developed by OBAC. The agriculture strategy links to a number of other OBAC strategies. Key linkages are described below.

2.4.1 Future Forest Products and Fibre Use

Pursuing more aggressive agro-forestry initiatives is an area where there may be opportunities for agriculture, not only as a land management strategy but also as an income source from non-timber forest products.

Both the agriculture and forestry sectors require effective management of the land resource. Land tenure agreements managed by the Integrated Land Management Bureau of the provincial govern-

² Farmers and Womens Institutes Act, Section 3, Incorporation and objects of an institute.



ment are in place for both the forest and agriculture industry. The Future Forest Products and Fibre Use strategy identifies the need for better coordination of land management and tenuring for those resource sectors dependent on crown land. Agriculture producers need tenure agreements of sufficient duration to encourage longer term agriculture development and expansion.

2.4.2 Tourism

The Tourism Strategy recommends the expansion of production for local markets and the expansion of Farmer's market. Some BC communities have been able to use farmers' markets to stimulate local agriculture and also to attract more tourists to the area. There are numerous active farmers' markets in the OBAC region located in Smithers, Hazelton, Houston, Fort St. James, Vanderhoof and Prince George and there are plans underway to establish more farmers' markets in the OBAC region.

Additional opportunities may also exist to develop farm holiday and retreat experiences, combining tourism and agriculture in home-stay or other on farm accommodations experiences.

More diversified value-added agricultural products with retail sales from the farm gate or from area retail outlets have contributed to increased levels of tourism in other BC communities. Overall the development of agri-tourism could benefit both sectors.

2.4.3 Alternative Energy

Greenhouse production is as an area for possible growth and development in the region. Although the climate in the OBAC region provides challenges for commercial greenhouse production, the use of relatively low cost bio-fuels may provide cost advantages for heating greenhouses. The alternative energy strategy recommends demonstration and pilot projects to test the feasibility of using alternative energy for commercial purposes. A trial involving greenhouses heated by bio-fuels or other alternative energy sources may be a logical early implementation step for both strategies. Alternatively debris and processing of wastes may be an energy input and source of bio-fuel. Assessments are being done in different parts of the region.

There may also be opportunities to use alternative energy technologies to provide heat and/or electricity for other agriculture operations.

2.4.4 Community Social Services and Supports

The community social services and supports strategy has identified the need to ensure secondary and post-secondary education and training programs are well connected with present and future employer needs. Agriculture development in the OBAC region is dependent upon training and education programs that address employer needs. Additionally, there is a link with between these strategies with respect to health and well-being of residents through healthy, secure, local food systems.

2.4.5 Integrated Regional Infrastructure Strategy

The areas with best agriculture potential lie along the Highway 16 corridor, the Robson Valley and from Prince George to Vanderhoof and Smithers. The integrated regional infrastructure strategy has identified the need to upgrade Highway 16 to facilitate the movement of commercial traffic. This upgrade will benefit agriculture in the OBAC region.

Also identified in the infrastructure strategy, is the need for improved access to the port of Prince Rupert for regional producers and improvements to CN rail services and the development of air cargo services to Asia. These improvements would benefit regional agriculture by providing better access to national and international markets.

2.4.6 Attraction and Retention Strategy

This strategy includes actions designed to retain and attract the necessary work force to the region. The agriculture sector requires appropriate training and education programs for its current and future work force.

Like other industries, agriculture is facing a major problem with an aging work force and many ranchers and farmers are considering retirement. The Attractions and Retention Strategy identifies a number of action designed to help address this issue.

Additional business planning and other supports for small business identified in the Attraction and Retention Strategy are extremely important for the agriculture sector.



3.0 Recent Agriculture Initiatives

This section presents information about a number of initiatives undertaken in the OBAC region that have application to the agriculture strategy. The purpose of the section is to identify other work that has been done that may assist with the development of the agriculture sector in the OBAC region. The agriculture strategy can build upon some of these initiatives.

3.1 Relevant Research and Documents

Considerable research was completed in the OBAC region, much during the time when there was a federal agricultural experimental farm in Prince George. Somewhat dated but still relevant, the research covers a range of area-specific issues such as crops and yields, soils, grazing, feed quality, the horticulture industry, and agricultural and marketing opportunities. If updated and made available electronically, the material will be useful for new entrants to the regional agriculture industry. A selection of this material is listed in Appendix C.

3.2 Great Bear Coast Field and Forest Co-operative

Work has been done in the Smithers area to design a co-operative to assist with marketing and processing of unique, quality, agricultural products. The Great Bear Field and Forest Co-operative will facilitate linking primary production and agricultural resources with secondary processing and value-added systems. A process to improve communication among producers has been initiated. Groundwork has contributed to possible future branding of the agriculture industry and provided preliminary information about quality standards for local agricultural products.

3.3 Strategic Plan for Highway 16 Trust Fund

A proposal has been developed by the Northern Agriculture Alliance (a loosely structured grouping of agriculture industry sectors and interest groups along the Highway 16 corridor), in cooperation with area staff of the BC Ministry of Agriculture and Lands, to prepare a strategic plan for the Alliance. One of the key objectives of the Alliance was to put in place funding to support agricultural initiatives in the region.

3.4 Nechako Valley Food Network

The main purpose of this volunteer group is to build a database of local producers and interested consumers that can be used by both parties to find where and when local foods are available. The Nechako Valley Food Network is governed by the Nechako Healthy Community Alliance, a newly formed non-profit society aimed at supporting local initiatives that encourage healthy living. The mission is to:

- Promote the growth and distribution of local agricultural products in the Nechako Valley; and
- Educate and aid individuals to grow and eat their own produce in an environmentally sound way.

The agriculture strategy identifies the importance of building a stronger local industry supported by regional food policies and local food security. To that end, much of the work already done by the Nechako Valley Food Network may be replicated in other parts of the OBAC region.

3.5 Growing Interest: Supporting Vanderhoof Farming

Vanderhoof is the geographical centre of BC and a traditional agricultural community in one of BC's most fertile agricultural areas. The *Growing Interest* report published by Northern Health presents Nechako Valley Food Network data collected at a meeting to strengthen the relationship between local producers and consumers and facilitate the development of a collaborative community vision towards local food security. The report contains transcripts of presentations on communication tools



used by the Nechako Valley Food Network, and covers such issues as:

- Why buy locally;
- Thinking local;
- Available technology;
- Levels and types of communication between producers and consumers; and
- Congregational liaisons to aid in collaboration.

Participants attending the meeting ranged from local farmers, beekeepers, and organic growers to business owners, teachers, students, and parents. The report presents a realistic picture of the range of experience, perspectives, and visions that must be taken into account in the process of reaching consensus on an issue such as local food security.

3.6 Expanding the Fort St. James Agricultural Economy

Fort St. James is one of 15 communities in the Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako, slightly north of the Nechako Valley. The primary agricultural activity in the area is ranching, followed by raising horses, and combination farming. The purpose of the *Trees to Tractors* project, completed in March 2009, was to determine the potential for expanding the agricultural sector in the Fort St. James area. The final report, authored by Kandace Kerr, presents the results of an environmental scan and SWOT analysis, an overview of agriculture in Fort St. James, its contribution to the local economy (including a local farmers' market), and community and local market support for local production. These are followed by an outline of the role of Fort St. James District Council in expanding local agriculture, an overview of relevant regional agricultural initiatives, and an agricultural action plan complete with objectives, strategies and actions for the consideration of Fort St. James District Council. Appendices contain summaries of the community consultation phase of the project, details of stakeholder workshops, and selected readings.

The report states that future successful development or expansion of the Fort St. James agricultural economy should be oriented to specialty or 'niche' products and value-added production (e.g. agro-forestry and agri-tourism), and be targeted to local and regional markets due to short growing seasons, limitations on crops appropriate to growing conditions, distance from markets, and other factors. The report identified the need for infrastructure (e.g. cold-storage and processing facilities) to support expansion and recommended four areas as having the most potential for contributing to the expansion of the local agricultural economy: commercial greenhouse operations tied to local forestry operations, a retail market for local foods (e.g. a permanent location for the farmers' market), diversification of the livestock industry, and establishment of a Centre of Excellence and Innovation in Northern Agricultural Education. These are explored in detail and profiled to facilitate implementation.

Finally, the report states that Fort St. James agricultural producers are well positioned to adapt traditional farming practices and market expertise and skills in agricultural techniques for northern conditions.

3.7 Farmers, Farmers' Markets, and Land Use Planning Case Studies in Prince George and Quesnel

A study of the relationship among farmers, farmers' markets, and land use planning was undertaken by UNBC3 to understand how farmers' markets develop as part of the local food industry and how they help build the capacity of local food systems in BC communities

Several key factors for farmers' market development were identified, including:

- Good management by paid staff, a strong board and dedicated volunteers;
- Presence of a critical mass of meat and produce vendors;
- Good location;
- Community support;
- Good relations with and support from municipal and regional governments and provincial agriculture agencies; and
- Relations with economic development agencies who can provide support for the market's early development.

This report suggests the need for long-term agriculture land management to address potential land use conflicts if farmers' markets are to be expanded to better serve communities with local agricultural products and grow the demand for more locally grown food in the region. The report also recommends the creation of governance structures to promote and support the development of local food systems which address both where food is grown and where it is sold. Examples provided of possible governance structures were agriculture roundtables, local food policy councils, and food charters. The intent would be to provide a "local food system lens" to review and prescribe policy decisions that support the production and consumption of local foods.



3.8 A Seat at the Table: Resource guide for local governments to promote food secure communities

This guide was produced by the Community Food Action Initiative, the Union of BC Municipalities, and BC Healthy Communities and published by the Provincial Health Services Authority in 2008. It showcases innovative projects developed or supported by local governments in BC in support of local food systems that allow farmers, food producers, and their customers to interact at the point of purchase and improve food security. One of the community projects profiled in the guide is the Good Food Box Program in the Bulkley-Nechako Regional District. Also mentioned are a year-round farmers' market and the Food in the City Task Force in Prince George.

Seven sections in the guide outline approaches used by local governments to strengthen local food systems. Each section provides an overview of the approach, explains how communities benefit and how local government can take action to implement the approach, and presents a community profile as an example. The approaches are:

- Community gardens;
- Farmers' markets;
- Neighborhood planning to make food access easy;
- Support for local food production;
- Providing healthy food choices in public buildings;
- Creating community capacity for food security; and
- Using food system assessments, charters, and policies to integrate food into local government decisions and provide direction to the community.

Overall this guide provides a framework and practical information for implementing actions designed to more aggressively serve local markets and grow the demand for locally grown food.

3.9 Managing Today for Growth Tomorrow—An Industry Strategy for Cattle Production in British Columbia

The BCCA has developed the strategy *Managing Today for Growth Tomorrow*, to build a strong, profitable, and sustainable cattle industry. The cattle and ranching industry is important in the OBAC region and this strategy has considerable relevance to this agriculture strategy. The BCCA identifies an industry vision for the future:

"A strong, healthy industry that is recognized for its ecological and economic contributions to the province of British Columbia and that is positioned to utilize the BC Forage Advantage for future industry growth."

The strategy places emphasis on managing today in order to grow tomorrow.

Five industry principles were developed in order to support the focus and vision of the strategy. Within each of the five principles, an action plan was made. The five industry principles are:

1. A healthy and sustainable cattle industry requires government support, good relations between government and industry, and effective government/industry collaboration.
2. A healthy and sustainable cattle industry requires long-term, easily obtainable access to high-quality resources.
3. Management of provincial wildlife resources must not be at the expense of the ranching industry.



4. The concept of ecological goods and services involves the recognition of the benefits and opportunities accrued to human populations from ecosystem functions. Ranching delivers many measurable benefits to society and the cattle industry should not have to bear all the costs of providing these benefits.
5. The success of the cattle industry depends on proper programming, adequate and consistent funding, effective marketing, strategic planning, research, extension, and education.

The following recommended actions emerged from these principles and they are particularly relevant to the OBAC agriculture strategy:

- Continue the renewal of grazing leases;
- Review existing tenure terms and identify how existing tenures can be changed to provide greater flexibility for the ranching industry;
- Investigate opportunities for the privatization of Crown Land, particularly Class 1-4 land, for agricultural production;
- Amend the extensive agriculture program policy to provide new opportunities for alienation of Crown land for agriculture;
- Amend the Forest and Range Practices Act to add an objective for forage;
- Investigate funding mechanisms for community pastures, expanding community pastures and for the development of new community pastures;
- Industry and government share the cost of infrastructure renewal on Crown Land (infrastructure may include fencing);
- Seed and fertilize areas of Crown range to enhance productivity;
- Provide funding for replacement of natural barriers lost due to mountain pine beetle timber harvesting;
- Provide rights-of-way management tenures to allow ranchers to remove MPB- infested timber that threatens or impacts fence lines on range tenures and private lands;
- Provide funding support to mitigate the impact of timber harvesting;
- Investigate opportunities for agricultural expansion in MPB infected areas;
- Set up wildlife population targets that take into account agricultural interests;
- Ensure any social costs imposed by government action do not fall solely on the cattle industry;
- Explore policy options to make ALR land function better in the interests of ranchers;
- Consider changes to forage production insurance that provide a drought-induced disaster component; and
- Government and industry create commitment to building extension services for producers.

3.10 Cariboo-Chilcotin Agriculture Sector Strategy

The Cariboo-Chilcotin region has also been heavily affected by the mountain pine beetle epidemic. Similar to OBAC, a series of strategies have been developed by the Cariboo-Chilcotin Beetle Action Coalition to address the epidemic. The agriculture strategy for the Cariboo Chilcotin area was completed in November, 2007. The Cariboo-Chilcotin Agriculture Sector Strategy identified some sector trends that are also relevant to the OBAC agriculture strategy. These sector trends and industry “drivers” are:

- Demographic changes including more immigrants coming to Canada, more urban growth in BC and an aging population;
- Market globalization including more opportunities to export product;
- Increasing levels of consumer sophistication which supports quality products addressing niche markets and the relevance of food as an affordable luxury item;
- Public health and social concerns which highlights the importance of food quality and food safety and the relationship between food and diet and obesity, chronic diseases, and quality of life;
- The importance of convenience and variety to the consumer which results in more demand for high quality “ready to eat” products;
- Increasing levels of interest in organic agriculture and sustainable farming practices;
- More opportunities for agricultural products targeting ethnic markets;
- Increasing sizes of farms specializing in commodity production to achieve economies of scale and, alternatively, a growth in smaller farms targeting niche or specialty markets;
- Specialized and larger processing facilities which often means closing of processing facilities in smaller population areas of BC; and

- Increasing levels of government regulation of the agriculture industry which reflects the public concern for the environment and the need for quality and safe food products and assurances of quality and safety.

The Cariboo-Chilcotin Agriculture Sector Strategy provided a number of ideas for sector growth and development that may have application in the OBAC region:

- Recruiting more agri-business investment to the region including the development of an agri-business investment package and including a “one stop” agri-business information and investment services centre;
- Identifying infrastructure needs for the agriculture sector;
- Addressing issues associated with the agriculture industry regulatory environment including Crown land ;
- Providing access to more education and extension services for farmers at the local level and preparing a full inventory of extension and education services. These services may include provincial education institutions, government extension programs primarily through the BCMAL, federal programs through Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada and Farm Credit Canada, Internet extension services, industry extension programs through the BC Agriculture Council, the BC AgriTourism Alliance, the BC Cattlemen’s Association, the BC Food Processors Association and numerous other industry groups and associations and other organizations that may be operating at the national level such as the Canadian Farm Business Management Council.



The strategy also identified specific opportunities for the region, including:

- Integrated opportunities such as agri-tourism and agro-forestry;
- More focus on market development including a regional agricultural market intelligence data base;
- Specialty crop opportunities including a comprehensive list of specialty crops rated for application in the Cariboo-Chilcotin region;
- Value-added products and processing;
- Beef industry based cluster development; and
- A comprehensive forage strategy including current forage production and future potential.

3.11 BC Agriculture Plan

In 2008, the BC Ministry of Agriculture and Lands released a new Agriculture Plan for the province called *Growing a Healthy Future for BC Families*. The Agriculture Plan contains 23 strategies articulated within five overarching themes. The five themes for the plan are:

1. Producing local food in a changing world;
2. Meeting environmental and climate challenges;
3. Building innovative and profitable family farm businesses;
4. Building First Nations agricultural capacity; and
5. Bridging the urban/agriculture divide.

All of these themes and many of the associated strategies have relevance to this strategy and the agriculture sector in the region.

3.12 Growing Forward

The most recent federal, provincial, and territorial government agricultural policy agreement, called *Growing Forward* offers numerous strategies relevant to agricultural development for the OBAC region. The agreement lays the groundwork for coordinated federal-provincial-territorial action over the next five years (2008 to 2012) to help the agricultural sector become more prosperous, competitive, and innovative.



The *Growing Forward* agreement relates to agricultural development in the OBAC region with the following main points:

1. Placing additional emphasis on profitability in agriculture;
2. Expanding and encouraging innovation;
3. Improving government regulatory performance;
4. Supporting industry-led marketing strategies such as the cattle industry strategy;
5. Enhancing food safety and food quality; and
6. Improving environmental performance of the sector.

4.0 Opportunities and Challenges Analysis

4.1 Challenges

Ranching has not been profitable for a number of years.

The agriculture industry in the OBAC region has historically been important but there is a sense of pessimism among some producers, particularly those in the cattle and ranching sector because many operations are no longer profitable. Without some short-term relief for the sector to provide time for renewal, it is likely that many will choose to leave the industry. The province recently announced the formation of a task force to address the short-term challenges faced by the sector.

Limited support for new product and market development and business planning.

In general, supports required to facilitate the development of new products and markets are not in place. Business planning support for the sector is extremely limited. Economic development capacity which focuses on agriculture and improved planning and information exchange across the sector is needed to address this challenge. Technical support (including research and extension) will also be needed.

Aging work force.

The average age of farmers in the OBAC region is 54 years of age. It is a challenge for the industry to attract new entrants. The industry has not been attractive to younger people because of the current low profit levels and high risk.

Other challenges

- Agriculture education and training opportunities are limited in the region;
- Coordination and information exchange across the sector is limited;
- Meat inspection, labeling, and other regulations are often not designed to encourage or support small producers;
- Circumstances have pushed some of the region's dairy, poultry, and egg producers to sell their quota to producers outside the region; and
- Conventional production and distribution systems have hampered development in areas of the region's sector. These limitations can in many cases be overcome with creative production and distribution solutions.

4.2 Opportunities

Growing interest by consumers in locally produced food.

Interest is growing for greater availability of locally-produced agricultural products. The benefits include improved food security, better health, reduced transportation impacts, and better profits for farmers able to sell directly to consumers. Sales through farmers' markets, for example, provide farmers with retail prices for their products. There is considerable potential and need to increase production for local markets.

Although region does not have a sufficient population to allow for expansion of the agriculture industry over the long term, the local markets can absorb much more of the current production than they do currently. Over the medium- and long-term, quality, specialty, and other products can be developed by area producers for the much larger provincial, national, and international markets.

The BC *Agriculture Plan* outlines the importance of producing food locally. Some food may travel as much as 2,500 km and come from five different countries, with major implications for climate change and food security. Current demand for local products exceeds the supply which is available at farmers' markets and there are many opportunities to produce more food for local markets.



Improved linkages to Health and Education Programs.

Consumer confidence in the safety and quality of food is critical to the growth and diversification of the agriculture industry and its ability to sell its products in global markets. The economic fallout from food safety crises can be considerable. Food borne illness is a major health issue facing people around the world. In Canada alone, public health experts estimate that there are 11 to 13 million cases of food-borne illness every year, most of which can be prevented through the use of safe food handling practices.⁴

In addition to economic factors, the connection between health and agriculture is not difficult to make. Ensuring access to fresh, nutritious food is critical for maintaining a healthy population. Supporting opportunities for community members to connect around food, such as farmers' markets, community gardens, or advocacy to improve access to healthy foods creates greater awareness and understanding of food-related issues. Food security is achieved when all citizens have access to a safe, affordable, nutritious, and culturally appropriate diet through a sustainable food system that maximizes healthy choices, also includes the ability to make a living by growing and producing foods sustainably is a key aspect of food security.

Education is a critical link to food security and sustainable agriculture. Public education promotes awareness and healthy food choices as well as resources for obtaining healthy foods and supporting their production and marketing. The formal education system may offer school-based science, health and social studies programs that provide information about, and hands-on experience with food. Extracurricular partners may work with educators to provide specific programs designed to bring agriculture into the classroom.⁵ The "Farm to School" program is a good current example.

Niche, Specialty and Value-Added Markets

There is intense competition in the commodity markets for agriculture products and producers in the region are in competition with other regions in North America with lower production costs. The development of products which can be positioned and marketed outside of these commodity markets offers a major opportunity at the provincial, national and international levels.

Expansion of storage and processing facilities

Local processing facilities can be expanded to facilitate more emphasis on local and provincial markets resulting eventually in value-added products that can be consumed anywhere in the province. For the cattle sector, consideration will continue to be given to slaughter and other processing facilities that will allow expansion of markets beyond the provincial borders. These moves will provide for eventual international markets accessed through the established shipping and air service in the region.

Healthy and Environmentally-Responsible Farming Practices

There is growing global concern about responsible agricultural practices including the humane treatment of animals. Many established growers in the OBAC region are concerned about humane treatment of animals and anxious to market cattle products that emphasize how the animals are raised as a component of the marketing strategy. The skill level related to finishing cattle on quality feeds generally is available in the region. There are also opportunities for expanded production of other meat products such as lamb, poultry, and pork.

4 Canadian Food Inspection Agency website: www.inspection.gc.ca/english/fssa/concen/causee.shtml

5 BC Agriculture in the Classroom Foundation: www.aitc.ca/bc



Slow Food is a movement which began in Italy in 1986. Founded by Carlo Petrini, Slow Food now boasts 85,000 members, with offices in Italy, Germany, Switzerland, North America, France, Japan and the United Kingdom and supporters in 130 countries. Slow Food stresses the importance for agricultural and livestock production of maintaining a balance of respect for the surrounding ecosystem and is committed to safeguarding foods, raw materials, and traditional methods of cultivation and transformation. It supports a model of agriculture, which is less intensive and healthier, founded on the knowledge and know-how of local communities.⁶

A recent announcement by Canadian retailer Loblaw Companies Limited indicates there is a growing market for food that is perceived to be produced in an environmentally-responsible manner. Loblaw's is expanding its fresh meat lines and increasing the amount of meat it sources from Canadian producers. The new line of fresh meat products includes President's Choice beef, chicken, and pork products, which showcase producers on product packaging.

Diversifying the Beef Industry

There are opportunities to diversify and expand the industry through one or more of the following measures:

- Locate more of the beef production change in the region including the exploration of the “beef cluster” concept. A beef cluster would locate much more of the value chain in the region. This would include expanded capacity to finish cattle, slaughter and processing facilities and meat inspection capabilities.
- Supplying more beef to local markets; and
- Exploring the potential for specialty products such as grass-fed or forage-finished beef from BC's Headwater's (OBAC) region. The health benefits of forage finished beef are considerable and it can be marketed as a niche product. Consumer education is needed, however, as it has a different taste and generally needs to be cooked longer and at lower temperatures; and
- Improving the viability of ranches by producing agroforestry or other crops to compliment beef production.

5.0 Sector Land and Resource Management Issues

This section reviews land resource issues which relate to the agriculture industry in the region.

Land and Resource Management Plans have been completed for most of the OBAC region. These plans address the management of Crown lands and provide recommendations for access to Crown land for agriculture and grazing and may also affect water licensing in some isolated places in the region. Access to Crown land for agricultural development remains a key issue for expanding and sustaining the industry.

The completed Land and Resource Management planning provides greater certainty to the agriculture industry for access to these available crown lands. Agriculture Development Areas (ADAs) can also be a potential tool for creating certainty. ADAs are crown lands where there is recognized agricultural capability that are suitable for future development. Within these agricultural development areas, eligible farmers may apply to develop the land for agricultural purposes. In the OBAC region there is approximately 100,000 hectares of these crown agricultural lands currently available for lease or purchase.

There is a need to retain existing agricultural land for future industry use and a need to identify and develop additional land for eventual agricultural application. Maximizing compatibility between agricultural expansion and forest or other uses is a recognized and important objective for resource management planning.

Tenure arrangements for agricultural purposes are important. Access arrangements need to be of sufficient duration to encourage longer term investment on the part of farm operators. Without secured tenure arrangements for grazing, ranchers, for example, may be reluctant to undertake fencing investments and other infrastructure investments on their farm properties.

⁶ Slow Food Canada website: www.slowfood.ca/about.php and *Oxford Companion to Food*, Oxford University Press at http://blog.oup.com/2006/11/oxford_companio6

The *Mountain Pine Beetle Action Plan, 2006 - 2011* recognized short-term economic benefits to some OBAC communities from increased harvesting related to timber salvage. The assessment of long-term benefits should include an assessment of whether further agricultural development can occur economically, resulting in a more profitable agricultural industry for the area.

The Action Plan recognized the need to reforest in areas appropriate for timber productivity. In the assessment of these areas is the opportunity to further identify and quantify agricultural development potential.

As senior governments move to address carbon emissions and climate change there are opportunities for agriculture. In Environment Canada's Guide for Protocol Developers, agriculture has been identified as one of the 40 areas being fast-tracked to develop protocols for the carbon market.

Projections for BC indicate that climate change will result in longer growing seasons which will increase the range of crops which can be grown in the region. With a moderate climate change scenario, by 2020, it may be possible to grow cereals, cabbage and potatoes, in the central interior, and corn and tomatoes along the Fraser River as far north as Prince George.⁷ These projections do not, however, take into account soils and other requirements needed to produce these crops commercially in this region.

6.0 Sector Strategy

This section presents a strategy to improve the OBAC region's agriculture sector performance and stability and strengthen its capacity to contribute to the economic health of the region. The strategy consists of a regional vision for agriculture supported by four objectives and related recommendations.

The OBAC region has an abundance of productive agricultural land available at prices considerably lower than in most areas of BC. Although the industry has declined relative to the province as a whole, and certain sectors are stressed, there remains a committed agricultural community in the region, energized by strong demand for more locally-grown food.

Vision

The communities of the region envision a future with an active, diversified, and profitable agriculture sector that is supported by regionally situated, responsive education and training, and effective research programs. The sector emphasizes food production that is sustainable and responsible; a sector that collaborates with health agencies, educational institutions, local governments, community groups, and others to develop measures to expand and diversify the industry. Using multiple strategies, the agriculture sector will be successful in local markets, be profitable with established products, develop new specialty and other products, and grow to serve broader provincial, national, and international markets.

6.1 Objectives

If achieved, the following four objectives have been developed to help achieve the regional vision.

- Objective 1.** Diversify and strengthen the agriculture sector.
- Objective 2.** Form stronger partnerships across the agriculture sector.
- Objective 3.** Increase the capacity to train and recruit the required work force.
- Objective 4.** Increase public support for the sector and interest in locally produced high quality food.



⁷ www.pics.uvic.ca/assets/pdf/Health.pdf



6.2 Recommendations

The following five recommendations have been developed to help attain the objectives and ultimately the regional vision.

Recommendation 1: Develop infrastructure that supports the agriculture sector and removes barriers to its further development and diversification.

Recommendation 2: Attract new entrants to the industry and enable access to training and education for existing and new members of the sector.

Recommendation 3: Strengthen the industry by increasing collaboration across the sector and by forging partnerships and communication links with First Nations, local communities, governments, health, and education agencies.

Recommendation 4: Support value-added and specialized product development and the development of provincial, national, and international markets for these products.

Recommendation 5: Increase the demand for locally and regionally produced foods.

The following tables provide more details on the key action required in support of each of the above strategic recommendation. The last column of each table indicates whether the actions should be implemented in the short-term (less than one year), medium-term (two to five years), or long-term (more than five years). The column labeled “primary responsibility” identifies the organization(s) that OBAC believes, at this time, should have responsibility for leading implementation of the action given their mandate, access to resources, and/or specialized knowledge or expertise. The “additional implementation team members” column identifies the organizations that also have a role to play in the implementation of the action. Responsibilities may change as implementation plans are developed.

6.3 Working With First Nations Leaders and Initiatives

OBAC’s efforts must complement the interests and priorities of First Nations’ communities, initiatives and businesses. For this reason, first Nations’ community leaders, communities, Aboriginal organizations, and Aboriginal initiatives are not identified as implementation leads or team members in the following recommendation tables. This is not intended to exclude, it is meant to be respectful of the need for ongoing work and relationship building before identifying partners.

OBAC looks forward to supporting the needed discussions between neighboring community leaders, local scale business interests and regional scale initiatives. Many of OBAC’s strategies include proposed objectives and actions aimed at finding ways to share ideas and opportunities across communities and OBAC genuinely anticipates that such opportunities can be found.

Recommendation 1 Develop infrastructure that supports the agriculture sector and removes barriers to its further development and diversification.

Specific Actions	Rationale	Primary Responsibility	Additional implementation team members	Timeline
<p>a. Establish provincially funded agriculture support officer contract positions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consideration should be given to following the model of the Central Okanagan Regional District. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a need for some immediate support to facilitate the coordination and implementation of numerous regional initiatives underway in support of agriculture. • Greater business planning support is needed by many existing and prospective producers in the region and is an important element in the return of the sector to profitability. • The officers would provide support for business planning and navigation of labeling, health and inspection issues, regulatory issues, recruitment, land use planning and other related issues. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Province of BC • Economic Development Agency (such as CFDC or proposed Regional Economic Development Agency (see the Attraction & Retention Strategy) • Agriculture Industry 		Ongoing
<p>b. Examine the feasibility and interest in establishing a “beef cluster” in the region which would include beef production, processing, and shipping of finished products. The approach should be at a reasonable scale for the region.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A first step would be to support the stabilization and enhancement of existing slaughter and processing facilities in the region. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If economically feasible, this will increase the value of the industry which is retained in the region. • Production of specialty beef products should be considered. • Partnering with the Cariboo-Chilcotin and/or Peace Regions may make this approach more feasible. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Province of BC • Sector businesses • Producer organizations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agriculture support officers 	Short- to medium-term
<p>c. Assess the business case for developing improved food storage facilities in the region.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessment priorities include, but are not limited, to Smithers, Vanderhoof, Fort St. James, Prince George and McBride. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Storage capacity is needed to extend the marketing season for locally grown food products and to broaden agriculture production 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Farmers’ Market Associations • Producer organizations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agriculture support officers • BCMAL 	Short-term

Recommendation 1 *Develop infrastructure that supports the agriculture sector and removes barriers to its further development and diversification.*

Specific Actions	Rationale	Primary Responsibility	Additional implementation team members	Timeline
<p>d. Put in place measures designed to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage consumers to purchase more locally produced food; Encourage regional producers to direct more of their production to local markets; Increase access to affordable healthy food which is produced locally Encourage public and private institutions to purchase local foods where possible; And, at the local government level: Develop food charters which outline food procurement requirements Ensure area plans address present and further agriculture needs Ensure agriculture is a priority for economic development planning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Measures that support locally grown food and more regional food security will stimulate further development of the agriculture industry. Will align current efforts by Northern Health designed to encourage the consumption of healthy locally produced foods and MAAL 's strategies under the BC Agriculture Plan. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Province of BCMAAL, Ministry of Health and Ministry of Education Producer organizations Local Governments Proposed Economic Development Agency (see Attraction and Retention Strategy) Farmers' Market Associations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agriculture Support Officers (proposed) BCMAL 	Short-term
<p>e. Ensure existing productive agricultural land is retained and identify land for future agricultural production.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Undertake capability assessments as identified under the LRMPs. Balance agriculture and forestry needs on crown land. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> As the agriculture industry grows there will be an ongoing need to maintain and expand the land base for agriculture. Balanced decisions are needed which recognize the value of agriculture, forestry and residential development when there are competing interests on crown land. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Province of BC 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To be determined 	short- to medium-term
<p>f. Develop a provincial vision for agriculture and policies which:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> encourages the growth and expansion of production in the OBAC and other regions encourages entrepreneurs to develop and grow new markets and utilize innovative farming and production practices addresses the issue of food security for the province 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Government policies and regulations can unnecessarily impact producers if they are not properly evaluated before implementation. In the recent past some small scale producers have been forced to leave the industry as a result of changes to meat inspection requirements. The provincial vision should be easily communicated and easily recognized as a priority for all levels of government. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Province of BC Federal Government Producer organizations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> BCMAL Farmers' Institutes Community Groups 	Short-term and ongoing

Recommendation 1 *Develop infrastructure that supports the agriculture sector and removes barriers to its further development and diversification.*

Specific Actions	Rationale	Primary Responsibility	Additional implementation team members	Timeline
<p>g. Evaluate existing and new regulation and policies through a “rural lens” which places the continued viability of both small and large agriculture producers as a high priority and remove or modify government policies and regulations that unnecessarily impede the development of the agriculture industry in the region. Priorities include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meat regulations which restrict local food production • Policies related to the Agricultural Land Reserve including the reassessment of parcels that may be marginal for agriculture. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There appear to be many purely administrative barriers and overlapping or conflicting requirements of producers. A balance must be achieved between food safety and sector and business growth. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Province of BC • Government of Canada 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Producer Organizations • Individual producers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • short- to medium-term
<p>h. Review the future application of the ALR and decisions with respect to it in the region are consistent with the unique needs and circumstances of the region.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It will be particularly important to make sure that the application of the ALR in the region does not impede the entry of new producers with unique and specific needs. In particular, the land use and other needs of labor intensive products and production facilities, younger and older producers and families must be considered. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Province of BC • ALC 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To be determined 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Short-term and ongoing

Recommendation 2 *Attract new entrants to the industry and enable access to training and education for existing and new members of the sector.*

Specific Actions	Rationale	Primary Responsibility	Additional implementation team members	Timeline
a. Establish and expand existing training and education programs relevant to area agriculture. This includes, for example, slaughter and processing, marketing and management training.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is a need for specialized programs in agriculture for the current and future agriculture workforce in the region 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Province of BC Producer Organizations CNC Northwest Community College UNBC UBC 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agriculture Support Officers Proposed Agriculture Advisory Committee (proposed) 	Short- to medium-term
b. Establish an agriculture mentoring program for the region to support new entrants and established farmers who wish to diversify or expand their operations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is a great deal of useful specialized knowledge among existing producers in the region that should be more extensively shared. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Province of BC - BCMAL Agriculture support officers (proposed) Industry Associations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Educational and training institutions 	Short- to medium-term
c. Update existing information resources for agriculture including a manual for new entrants; ensure relevant regional research reports are available electronically.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The information is valuable for new entrants and existing producers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Province of BC Post secondary institutions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proposed Advisory Committee 	Short-term
d. Prepare materials for targeted audiences which highlight the advantages of agriculture in the OBAC region and ensure that the material is readily available.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There are many advantages that could be important for established farmers from other regions who may wish to relocate to the OBAC region. Material can also be tailored for farmers who may wish to relocate here from another country. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Economic Development Officers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agriculture Support Officers (proposed) BCMAL 	Short-term
e. Establish an agricultural advisory committee to engage with local education and research facilities including the UNBC and the College of New Caledonia.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is a need for formal liaison between the agriculture industry and education agencies to assist with setting research, programs, courses and other priorities. The role of this committee could expand over time based on additional needs and the success of this initial focused mandate. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> BCMAL Farmers' Institutes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Education institutions Agriculture Support Officers (proposed) 	Short-term
f. Establish a regional agricultural resource centre in cooperation with the region's post-secondary institutions to house resources that provide information specific to agriculture in the region.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regional resources relevant to agriculture must be available to assist the agriculture community to adapt its practices based on local conditions. This material should be widely available to the sector and should also accessible to secondary schools. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Province of BC, BCMAL, Ministry of Education Post secondary institutions Agriculture advisory committee (proposed) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agriculture Support Officers (proposed) 	Short- to medium-term

Recommendation 3 *Strengthen the industry by increasing collaboration across the sector and by forging partnerships and communication links with First Nations, local communities, governments, health and education agencies.*

Specific Actions	Rationale	Primary Responsibility	Additional implementation team members	Timeline
a. Provide resources which allow the Farmers' Institutes or equivalent local organizations to effectively promote agriculture and agricultural development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a need for continuous support for the local agriculture industry at both the regional and provincial levels. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Province of BC: BCMAL • Area Farmers Institutes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agriculture Support Officers (proposed) 	Short-term
b. Encourage commodity-specific producer organizations and associations are adequately represented in Farmers Institutes or equivalent local organization.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All farmers to be represented to allow the Farmers Institutes or equivalent appropriate local organization to adequately speak for industry needs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Area producer and commodity specific organizations and associations • Province of BC - BCMAL 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agriculture Support Officers (proposed) 	Short-term
c. Provide the BC Ministry of Agriculture and Lands with additional staffing which will allow it to increase its level of direct farm activity in the OBAC region including technical support for new entrants and for farmers wishing to expand their existing operations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a need for more technical on farm knowledge and information in the OBAC region that is not being adequately served by the area's financial and supply sectors or other private sector sources such as agricultural consultants. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Province of BC - BCMAL 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agriculture Support Officers (proposed) 	Short- to medium-term
d. Examine the business case for establishing a local brand for marketing both primary and value-added agricultural products from the region.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stakeholders supported further discussion and review of branding as a way to stimulate the development of quality standards for locally grown agricultural products. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agriculture Support Officers (proposed) • Farmers' Institutes • Producer organizations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BCMAL 	Medium-term
e. Convene a series of regional forums to review ways to partner on agriculture initiatives. An initial step would be a forum which included the ranching industry, other regional agricultural industry stakeholders and provincial ranching industry leaders to explore the benefits of cattle production targeted to specialty markets. Options to be explored include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beef that is produced in a completely humane and environmentally sustainable manner • Grass fed or finished beef 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is considerable interest in the region for more dialogue on agriculture's role in health and nutrition as well as economic stimulation. • Evidence suggests there is a growing market for beef cattle products from animals raised in a humane and environmentally sustainable manner. Many agriculture stakeholders in the region are interested in this approach. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agriculture Support Officers (proposed) • Agriculture Advisory Committee (proposed) • Regional and local Cattlemen's Associations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BCMAL • Agriculture Support Officers (proposed) 	Short-term medium- to long-term

Recommendation 3 *Strengthen the industry by increasing collaboration across the sector and by forging partnerships and communication links with First Nations, local communities, governments, health and education agencies.*

Specific Actions	Rationale	Primary Responsibility	Additional implementation team members	Timeline
f. Short-term Develop stronger link-ages among purchasers and suppliers in the OBAC region.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some producers may not be aware of the potential economic benefits of targeting a portion of their production for local markets. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Economic Development Officers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> RDBN RDFFG Agriculture support officers (pro-posed) 	Medium-term
g. Ensure that consumer protection and food safety requirements are applied in balance with the effort to encourage small-scale economic opportunities for producers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There appear to be many purely administrative barriers and overlapping or conflicting requirements of producers that wish to get into small scale production and farm gate sales. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Province of BC 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To be de-termined - individual producers and Area Farmers Institutes and producer groups are likely part of the imple-mentation group. 	

Recommendation 4 *Produce value-added and specialized products and develop provincial, national, and international markets for these products.*

Specific Actions	Rationale	Primary Responsibility	Additional implementation team members	Timeline
<p>a. Undertake market research to identify the potential market for products that are or may be grown and/or processed in the OBAC region. Producer's need to be directly involved in this work</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Farmers will grow quality products when they know there is a market. There are numerous specialty and niche markets that could be accessed. • Some market research work has been done or is underway but more is needed. Producers must be engaged. • Possibilities include but are not limited to: shipping hay to Anchorage, sea buckthorn oil, local use of berries for wine or other value-added products such as jams or jellies, birch syrup and others. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Province of BC • Agriculture Advisory Committee. (proposed) • Agriculture Support Officers (proposed) • Producer Associations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Post secondary institutions • Farmers' Institutes 	<p>Short- to medium-term to long-term</p>
<p>b. Develop stronger communication links among producers to facilitate identification of potential markets that could be accessed by producers. An series of interactive workshops would be a good first step.</p>				
<p>c. Assess the potential for expanding the area greenhouse industry in the OBAC region.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include the possibility of using beetle-killed wood as a fuel source 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is considerable potential for quality, locally produced fruits and vegetables that could be grown in greenhouses. The availability of relatively inexpensive bioenergy could provide the region with a competitive advantage, allowing the growing season to be extended. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agriculture Support Officers (proposed) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BCMAL 	<p>Short to medium-term</p>

Recommendation 4 *Produce value-added and specialized products and develop provincial, national, and international markets for these products.*

Specific Actions	Rationale	Primary Responsibility	Additional implementation team members	Timeline
<p>d. Provide funding to support existing and undertake new pilot projects, crop trials and other activities designed to increase the range of crops produced in the region for identified markets.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assess emerging demand and opportunities for entering new markets with crops which can be produced efficiently here. [See action (a) above]. An initial pilot which involved greenhouse and field production of vegetables, the use of bioenergy, and the production of at least some specialty products should be considered. Over the long term pilots may be needed to assess the potential for new crops which can be grown in the region as a result of climate change. Provide support to test the viability of agriculture development in "non-traditional" areas such as Mackenzie and vicinity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Crop diversification could provide considerable benefits for the industry however the risks are generally too high for a producer to undertake this research on their own. Projections for BC indicate longer growing seasons will increase the range of crops which can be grown in the region. Soils and other requirements will have to be assessed in the future to determine if large new opportunities will become available. Preliminary efforts are already underway in Mackenzie to develop the agriculture sector. Making crown land available for trials is a key requirement. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Federal government Province of BC Producer Associations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Investment Agriculture Foundation WED Northern Development Initiative Trust Northern Trust Fund (Prince George airport) 	Short-term and ongoing
<p>e. Support the efforts of the BC Government ranching task force where they will strengthen the industry and allow it to move successfully through the current difficult period.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ranching is experiencing difficult times and there is a need to provide short term support while the industry adjusts to changing market demands. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Province of BC BCMAL 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cattlemen's Associations Farmers' Institutes Agriculture support officers 	Short-term

Recommendation 5 *Increase the demand for locally and regionally produced foods.*

Specific Actions	Rationale	Primary Responsibility	Additional implementation team members	Timeline
a. Ensure all OBAC region schools participate in programs established by the Agriculture in the Classroom Foundation and support the Farms to School Initiatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support for the AITC program should lead to broader understanding of agriculture and its role in the region. The “ Farms to Schools Salad Bar Lunches program” is an excellent way to connect young people to the food that is produced in the region. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Province of BC Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health, MAAL BC AITC Foundation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> School Districts 	Medium-term
b. Develop regional guides and support websites (similar to the work done by Nechako Valley Food Network) designed to make consumers aware of local food products and where to buy them.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Many area consumers are seeking locally grown food products but don’t know where to find them. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agriculture Support Officers (proposed) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Province of BC 	Short- to medium-term
c. Prepare appropriate materials, for distribution through health and education facilities, which outline the benefits of consuming locally produced food.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is a need for broader consumer awareness and understanding of the importance of supporting local agriculture and its quality, health, food security and climate change benefits. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Northern Health School Districts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Province of BC- BCMAL 	Short- to medium-term

6.4 Moving to Implementation

There is much interest and enthusiasm in the OBAC region for the agriculture industry and its development. To capitalize on this energy, there is a need to provide immediate support for the industry while moving to implement other components over a longer time frame.

Ongoing development of the industry hinges on the success in serving local markets while growing to serve other provincial, national and international markets over time.



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Appendix A Contributors to the Strategy

Participants in Dialogue Sessions and Interviews

Al Brandsma, Smithers
Alex Kulchar, Fort St. James
Art Kaehn, Hixon
Beth Demaio, Hazelton
Bill Dobbs, Vanderhoof
Bill McGill, Prince George
Bob France, Kamloops
Brent Barclay, Prince George
Carla Seguin, Mackenzie
Carli Heinrichs, Telkwa
Charlie Stephen, Vanderhoof
Charlotte Croquet, Fort St. James
Christine Glennie-Visser, Prince George
Christine Piltz, Quesnel
Cindy Shelford, Burns Lake
Cress Farrow, Smithers
Darcy Repen, Telkwa
Dave Forshaw, Mackenzie
Dave, Merz, Prince George
David Connell, Prince George
Debra Montgomery, Vanderhoof
Deborah Sargent, Smithers
Del Myers, Prince George
Denise Dowswell, Vanderhoof
Don Bassermann, Prince George
Eileen Benedict, Burns Lake
Eonia Clarke, Granisle
Emily McGiffin, Hazelton
Frederick J. Clarke, Granisle
Gerry Van der Wolf, Houston
Harold Kerr, Telkwa
Heather Gallagher, Smithers
Jerry Petersen, Vanderhoof
Jim Tingle, Prince George
Joan Chess, Prince George
Kandace Kerr, Fort St. James
Kathie Laforge, Vanderhoof
Kathie Scouten, Prince George
Kathi Zimmerman, Prince George
Kate Langham, Houston
Keith Hart, Prince George
Kevin Johnson, Prince George
Lana Fitt, Bulkley-Nechako
Lance Hamblin, Houston
Laura Grafton, Prince George
Laurie Pletzer, Fort St. James
Loraina Stephen, Prince George
Lynda Dykens, Telkwa
Lynn Poole, Prince George
Mark Grafton, Prince George
Megan D'Arcy, Smithers
Paul Davidson, Smithers
Ray Gerow, Prince George
Rob Stephen, Vanderhoof
Roland Baumann, Vanderhoof
Roma Tingle, Prince George
Ross Davidson, Fort St. James
Richard Martens, Vanderhoof
Rimas Zitkauskas, Telkwa
Shalina Mahasen, Prince George
Shirley Hamblin, Houston
Silvio Gislimberti, Valemont
Steve Martens, Vanderhoof
Sylvia Legary, Fraser Lake
Tom Greenaway, Fort St. James
Tracy Strong, Smithers
Tricia Kapelari, Telkwa
Wayne Tofsrud, Telkwa
William Norton, Prince George

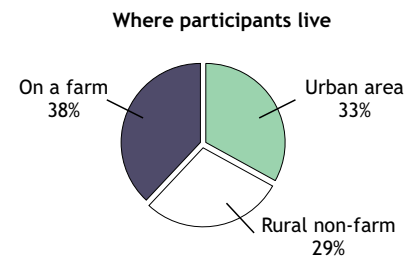
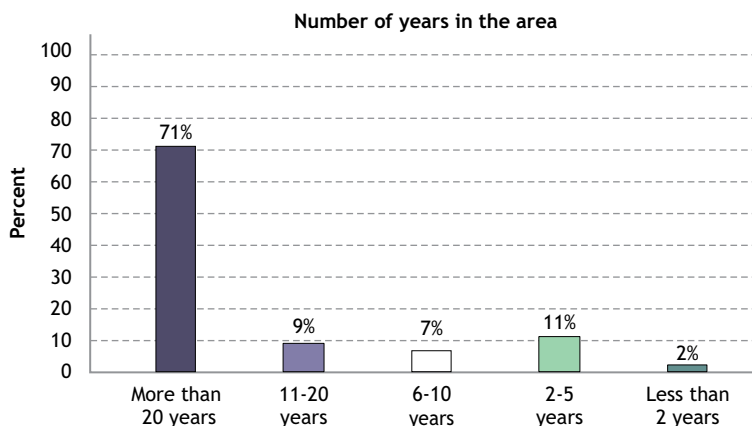
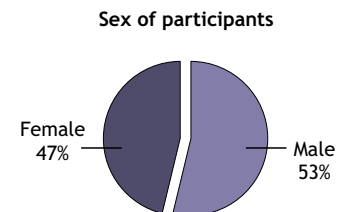
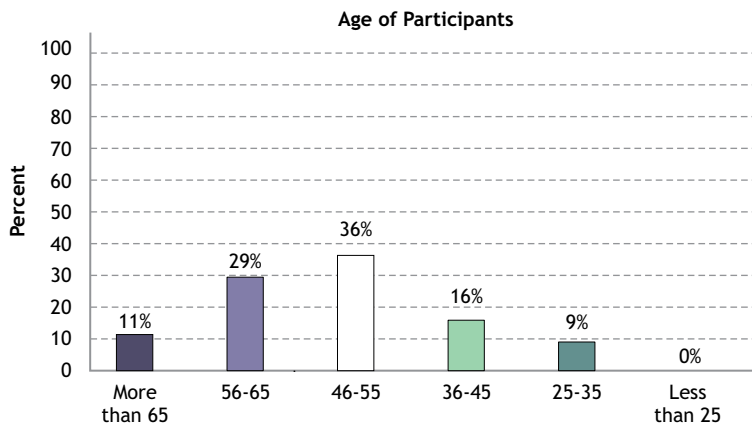


Appendix B Profile of Participants

Profile of Dialogue Session Participants

A total of 45 out of 55 participants in the dialogue sessions completed participant forms. From these data, an outline of participants was prepared:

- Most participants (75%) were over the age of 45, with 40% being over the age of 55.
- The ratio of male to female participants was almost equal, with 47% females and 53% males.
- Over 70% of participants had lived in the area for more than 20 years
- Less than half (38%) of participants lived on farms, but 29% lived in a rural non-farm setting
- Participants who indicated they lived on a farm or in a rural area were asked the size of their properties. They owned from 1 to 8,000 acres and leased from 350 to 2,300 acres of land.

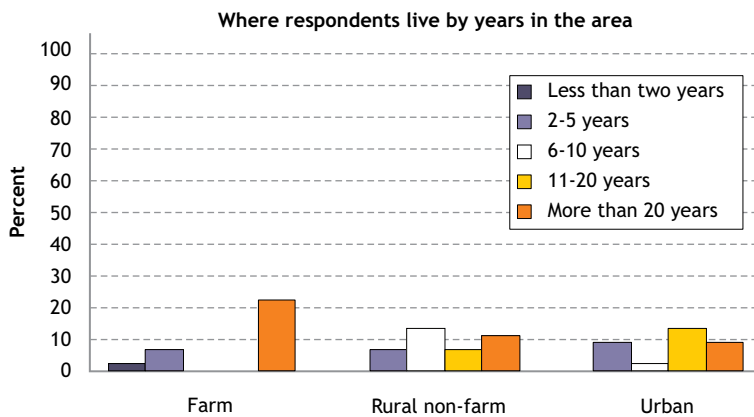
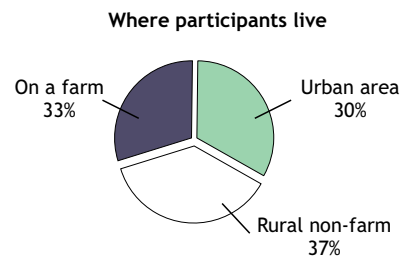
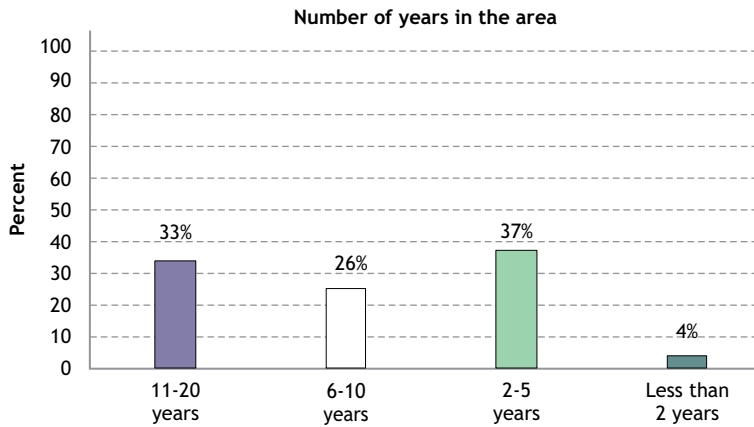
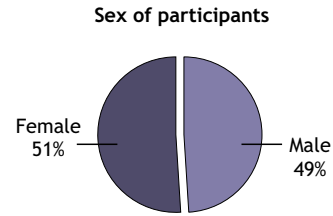
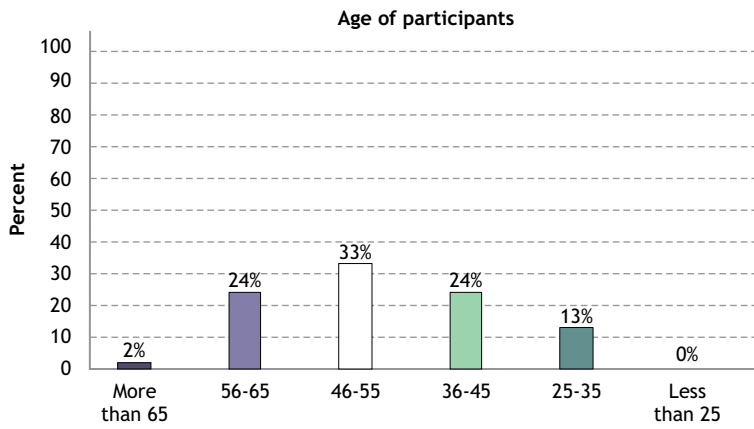


Profile of Survey Respondents

Forty-seven responses were received for the survey. The electronic survey was posted and available for completion from Thursday April 30 until Wednesday, May 27, 2009. From these data, an outline of respondents was prepared:

- The proportion of male and female respondents was almost equal at 51% female and 49% male.
- The majority of the respondents were over 45 years of age, with one-quarter being over the age of 55.
- The majority of respondents (59%) had lived in the area for over 5 years, with 37% having lived in the area between 2 and 5 years, and 4% less than two years.
- Most of the respondents were not farmers: 33% lived on a farm, 37% in a rural area but not on a farm, and 37% in an urban area.
- Respondents who indicated they lived on a farm or in a rural area were asked the size of their properties. The average was 387 acres.

Cross tabulation of data for respondents showed that farm dwellers tended to have lived in the area longer, with over half of the farmers having lived in the area more than 20 years, whereas less than 20% of respondents who had lived in the area less than 10 years were on a farm. Percentages may not add up to 100 due to rounding.





Appendix C Resources Recommended for Update

Numerous references and resources exist for the OBAC region that are still relevant and could be updated and made available in electronic format. The following is a sample of some of these materials:

- Small Farm Business Development Workshop, April 28-29, 2001, Smithers Northwest Community College
- Agricultural Recommendations for the Stikine River Valley
- Small Farm Development Course by Peter Fofonoff and Ken Awmack in conjunction with the College of New Caledonia, at Kersley, BC, Oct 11 to Nov 8, 2000
- Nechako Valley Agriculture Reference Manual by Gary Blattner, April 1999
- BCFC Forage Cultivar Trials 1983 to 1999 by Variety Evaluation Subcommittee as yearly reports
- Agriculture in the Skeena Region by Dave Riendeau, 2003
- A Manual for Growing and Using Seed from Herbaceous Plants Native to the Northern Interior of British Columbia, by C.M. Burton and P.J. Burton, 2003, Smithers, BC
- Soils of the Nechako-Francois Lake Area by Ivan Kotic, BCDA, Kelowna 1974
- Soil Survey of the Prince George Area by C.C. Kelly and L. Farstad, Report No 2, Kelowna, 1946
- Soil Survey of the Quesnel, Nechako, François Lake and Bulkley-Terrace Areas by L. Farstad and D.G. Laird, Report No 4, 1964
- A Guide to Farming in the Prince George Area by J.A. Collins, BCMAF, revised 1987
- Numerous results of field crop demonstrations and applied research for the Highway 16 and Cariboo areas on-farms during 1968 to 2004



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