



Ipsos Reid



ALR Landowner Survey

Prepared for Metro Vancouver

Final Report

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INTRODUCTION

Metro Vancouver (the Greater Vancouver Regional District) commissioned Ipsos Reid to conduct a series of in-depth telephone interviews with landowners in the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR). The research specifically targeted landowners who are not farming land in the ALR that was identified as available for farming in the Agricultural Land Use Inventory conducted in 2010-2011.

The key research objectives were to:

- Determine landowners' level of interest in farming land that is not currently in agricultural production.
- Learn the barriers to farming and/or leasing land to a farmer.
- Identify what, if anything, would encourage landowners to farm or lease their land.

The following report presents a summary of these in-depth qualitative interviews with selected landowners. All participant names and identifying comments are confidential.

As with all qualitative projects, these findings are considered exploratory in nature and cannot be extrapolated to the overall population. Comments written in italics with quotation marks are not necessarily direct quotations, but are close paraphrases of what was said. These quotes represent the opinions of individual landowners and may not reflect actual circumstances and are not endorsed by the sponsoring agency.

METHODOLOGY

Ipsos Reid conducted a total of 41 in-depth telephone interviews with landowners in the ALR in Langley, Surrey, Delta, Richmond, and Barnston Island. All interviews were conducted between November 28 and December 10, 2012. Interviews generally ranged between 15 and 45 minutes, and participants were offered a \$10 coffee card as a small token of appreciation.

The research categorized landowners into three different segments: mostly unfarmed (<25%), partially farmed (25% to 75%), and mostly farmed (>75%). If participants owned more than one piece of land in the ALR, they were asked about the property with the greatest amount of unfarmed land. A breakdown of the number of interviews conducted with each landowner segment and in each municipality can be found in the table below.

Landowner Group	Number of Completed Interviews
Segment	
Mostly unfarmed (<25%)	20
Partially farmed (25% to 75%)	15
Mostly farmed (>75%)	6
Municipality	
Langley	22
Surrey	11
Delta	5
Richmond	2
Barnston Island	1

Selection of Landowners

Metro Vancouver provided Ipsos Reid a list of landowners to survey which specifically targeted landowners that are not farming land in the ALR that was considered available for farming as determined in a previously conducted Agricultural Land Use Inventory. Only landowners with telephone land lines and numbers that are publically available were included in the survey sample.

Approximately one week prior to the actual interviews, Metro Vancouver mailed a letter to 400 landowners in the survey sample informing them of the upcoming survey and encouraging their participation if contacted. This letter helped raise awareness of the research and prompted some landowners to contact Ipsos Reid directly for an interview.



Analysis of Interviews

Landowners were identified as mostly unfarmed, partially farmed, or mostly farmed as part of a series of upfront screening questions. Segment-specific summaries have been included as part of the following report and this analysis highlights some important similarities and differences between each segment.

Analysis by municipality is limited due to the small number of interviews conducted in some areas. Overall, there appears to be little difference in opinion by municipality, suggesting that experiences and barriers are largely consistent across all areas.

DETAILED FINDINGS

Sample Characteristics of Landowners

A summary of the composition of the final survey sample can be found below.

- The average length of property ownership is 28.4 years. However, there is considerable variation within this, with the length of property ownership ranging from less than 1 year to more than 60 years.
- Approximately two-thirds of participants live on the property.
- The average stated lot size is 13.4 hectares. Participants are more likely to think about their property in terms of acres, not hectares.
- The average stated amount of unfarmed land is 65%.
- The majority of participants are 55 years of age or older.
 - 2 are under the age of 35.
 - 10 are between 35 and 54 years of age.
 - 29 are 55 years of age or older.

Farming Activities

Among those farming at least a portion of their land, the most common types of farm activities are breeding/raising/selling livestock (cattle, horses, chickens), producing hay, and maintaining pastures. Mass production of vegetables and fruit is less common, although many keep their own personal gardens. The few who are involved in crop production predominately focus on potatoes or berries.

The land was often purchased with farming intentions in mind although these did not always work out as planned. Landowners provide a number of different explanations for why their actual farm activities do not match their original intentions, with the most frequently mentioned reasons including:

- Unprofitable (including lack of demand for product).
- Start up and/or ongoing day-to-day farm operation costs.
- Change in personal circumstances.
- Age/physical demands of farming.

Other less-frequently mentioned reasons include:

- Suitability/condition of land or soil.
- Unable to obtain approval from local municipality and/or the Agricultural Land Commission.
- Change in ALR regulations/restrictions.
- Environmental restrictions.

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- Inexperience/inadequate understanding of what was required.
- Difficulty finding skilled labourers willing to work the land.
- Change in labour laws.

Some purchased the land as first-time farmers; others purchased as part of an ongoing family business or inherited the land as part of a family estate. For these individuals, farming is often described as something that they were “*born to do*”.

Despite being classified as ALR land, some participants purchased the land with no intentions of farming. Rather, these individuals were generally motivated by economic and/or personal reasons, including:

- Investment opportunity.
- Operate a business.
- Build a house/raise a family.
- Acreage/size of lot.
- Country setting.
- Family-owned/wanted to keep the land in the family.
- Environmental stewardship.

Segment Overview – Mostly Unfarmed (<25%)

Of the 41 landowners included in the research, 20 are classified as mostly unfarmed, meaning that less than 25% of their property is currently farmed. Rather, this land is generally being used for personal use or kept for investment opportunities (predominately non-farming opportunities).

- *“We’re not using the land for anything, really. People come and visit and think we live in a park – it’s all forest and wildlife.”* (Langley)
- *“I’m not doing anything with the land right now. I don’t even think it should be included in the ALR. I’m keeping it until I’m allowed to use it for industrial purposes.”* (Delta)
- *“It’s not really being used for anything. A portion around the house is manicured for the lawn, swimming pool, and tennis courts but the rest is all just field.”* (Richmond)

Interest in Farming

Landowners in the mostly unfarmed segment generally demonstrate little interest in expanding farm operations although a few are actively looking to expand their farm operations in the next couple of years.

Perceived Barriers to Farming Unfarmed Land

In many cases, the unfarmed land is perceived as unsuitable for farming. Landowners provide a number of reasons why their land is unsuitable for farming, including: wet/swampy, rocky, poor quality soil, forested/treed, topography, and proximity to local roads/industries. Often the land is perceived as ‘unfixable’; others say the land could potentially be developed for farming with

enough money and physical effort, but do not believe the upfront investment would be worth the end financial gains. Overall, these individuals generally have very little interest in farming or leasing their unfarmed land, and are frustrated that it is even included in the ALR. While the land is sitting largely unused presently, they hope to have it removed from the ALR and developed for other non-farming purposes. Encouraging these landowners to increase the amount of farming on their land will be difficult.

- *"I'd like it to be rezoned – there's just no sense in farming it because it's under water and there are too many trees. You'd have to fill it and clear the timber off the land first...it's just not worth it."* (Langley)
- *"It's a matter of topography – the land is too steep and not suitable for farming. It also has a lot of trees."* (Langley)
- *"The soil's no good for farming – it's all blue clay with only a thin layer of topsoil over it."* (Surrey)
- *"The water level is too high, it can't be farmed. It's too dangerous."* (Delta)

Environmental restrictions also limit the amount of land that can be farmed. Participants indicate that this will continue to be a barrier to farming unless current environmental laws are changed.

- *"There's a salmon spawning creek that runs through the property so I can't really do much with it for environmental reasons."* (Langley)

Others enjoy living on a large piece of property surrounded by nature. While they are generally more open to the idea of farming, this is not something they are actively interested in pursuing right now. Here, the main barriers to farming appear to be a general lack of interest in farming, start up/ongoing day-to-day farm operation costs, lack of time, age/physical demands of farming, and lack of understanding regarding how to get the land prepared for agricultural use. For some, expanding their farm operations may simply be a matter of time or changing personal circumstances. Others, however, could benefit from increased financial assistance, assistance managing the day-to-day farm operations, or education/outreach efforts.

- *"We might be interested if the opportunity came to us, but we're both working full-time in other positions right now and don't have time to look into this ourselves."* (Langley)
- *"We do a lot of travelling so we're not around a lot and it would be hard to find people to take care of it for us. We're also getting too old to do anything too physically demanding."* (Langley)
- *"We used to farm it but it was too much work. Farming is hard and this is not very productive land. Now we're just doing it as a pastime to get the property tax benefits."* (Langley)
- *"I'm always open to the opportunity but it's not something I'm actively looking to do right now. I'd rather focus my expenses elsewhere."* (Langley)
- *"It's a matter of capital. It's so expensive to get going and I'm not sure there's enough money in farming to make it worthwhile."* (Surrey)

A few landowners in Langley and Surrey indicate they are actively looking to expand their farm operations. For some, this is simply a matter of time. Others, however, indicate that government regulations/red tape, as well as a perceived lack of understanding and support for farm operations generally (from both their local government and community), have prevented them from getting started. These landowners, primarily newer farmers who more recently purchased their land, could use assistance navigating the system and coordinating the different departments/agencies involved (one participant suggested having a dedicated department or staff responsible for lobbying on behalf of farmers and ensuring their case is given due attention). They would also like to see local municipalities make an effort to increase their knowledge of day-to-day farm operations, which may encourage them to work more collaboratively with farmers and support them in disputes with neighbours over hours of operation, noise, smells, etc.

- *"I wanted to bring in dirt to fill the land but ran into hurdles from my neighbours and the municipality. People don't understand that farming is not a 9 to 5 job and so they get upset when you do things at odd hours. I tried to explain this to the city but they weren't interested in hearing it. There needs to be more support from the local government. They need to have a better understanding of what it takes to start a farm from scratch."* (Langley)
- *"It seems that every agency and City department has a different perspective of what you are allowed/not allowed to do. The ALR gave me approval to bring in fill, but then the City said I couldn't do that; I even got mixed messages between different City departments. The City has too many inexperienced people who are told to follow 'best practices' instead of what the legislation actually says. I'm making progress but it is a frustrating and tedious process to try and line up all the different agencies and departments – and they don't even seem interested in working cooperatively, they're just concerned about protecting their own individual department. I'm dealing with so much of this stuff that I can't even get close to the idea of actually farming yet."* (Surrey)

Leasing Unfarmed Land

No landowners in the mostly unfarmed segment are actively looking to lease their unfarmed land. Overall reaction to the idea of leasing is mixed.

Some are potentially interested in future lease opportunities but are not ready to pursue a lease at this time. The reasons for this include: enjoy property as is, do not need the income, using the property for other purposes, not financially viable, unsure how to find a good lessee, and lack of privacy. Some also feel that their property would require a significant amount of work before it could be leased and they are not ready to make that investment at this time.

- *"We're not sure what we want to do with the land. Our daughter might come out and farm herself, so we're not ready to make any commitment to lease just yet."* (Langley)
- *"I've considered leasing it out for bee hives but no one has approached me and I haven't taken it any further myself. Right now we just like having our little bit of peace and serenity, and don't like the thought of having people in our space. But as we get older and retire, leasing the land might make more financial sense."* (Langley)

- *"It's not prime land but you could use it for pasture. I talked to a fellow down the street about running some cows on it, but it's just not worth the cost of fencing."* (Langley)
- *"Maybe I'd consider it if Metro Vancouver had some kind of land banking system where people could register their plot and facilitate finding a lease."* (Langley)
- *"I've considered it but haven't ever taken it to the next step. I just don't have the time to pursue it right now. I'm also not sure how to find a farmer who'd be interested in leasing the land – I don't know what kind of crops can grow in this soil."* (Surrey)
- *"It would depend on the type of farm operation – crops would be ok, but probably not to a chicken or pig farmer due to the smells."* (Surrey)
- *"We've looked into it before, but it was too difficult to find someone. There's no real financial gain and we'd lose our privacy. It's just not worth the hassle."* (Richmond)

Interest in leasing may be increased if:

- Farm status could be achieved.
- A proven business case was presented that demonstrated the financial benefits.
- Additional tax benefits were available.
- Assistance finding an appropriate lessee was provided.
- The lessee took on the responsibility and costs of developing the land for farming.
- Someone proactively approached them with a lease offer.

Others are much less likely to lease for the same reasons stated above. In addition, some feel their land is simply unsuitable for farming (regardless of how much money and effort was invested into developing the land for farming) or their lot is too small to lease. Encouraging these landowners to lease their land will be difficult.

- *"There really isn't enough land to lease and our house is in the middle of it."* (Langley)
- *"I already lease as much as I can. The rest is unsuitable for farming."* (Langley)
- *"It'd be too expensive to lease as farmland. It's covered in trees and getting it into a farmable state would cost too much money."* (Surrey)

Final Comments

At the end of the interview, landowners were asked if they had any final comments about use of ALR land for farming that they would like to share with Metro Vancouver. The following is a sampling of some of the comments provided by those in the mostly unfarmed segment.

- *"The ALR needs to focus more on the areas that are really exceptional for farming and not worry about the rest."* (Langley)
- *"I'd like to see them stratify the land into three different levels: prime land (non-negotiable, stays in the land reserve), secondary, and marginal. It should be relatively simple to get land out of the ALR if it's poor but impossible if it's of high quality."* (Langley)
- *"It's important to protect the land. But farmland doesn't make sense in all places."* (Surrey)

- *“This land is not farmable because of the water table. It would be much more suited for industrial land, which there’s a shortage of anyway.” (Delta)*
- *“I’d like to see them lower taxes and give us more of a break. It costs a lot to get started.” (Langley)*
- *“Land has become so expensive in the Lower Mainland that it is not viable to own it and farm it anymore without some help.” (Richmond)*
- *“The municipalities promote themselves as farm friendly, but no one actually understands it and they don’t do anything to help. It’s all smoke and mirrors.” (Langley)*
- *“It’s frustrating when you’re told one thing and proceed and invest lots of money into it, but then you’re later told that you can’t do that. There’s so much red tape and no cooperation between the agencies themselves. There needs to be someone dedicated to advancing our cause and bringing farming to the forefront.” (Surrey)*

Segment Overview – Partially Farmed (25% to 75%)

Of the 41 landowners included in the research, 15 are classified as partially farmed, meaning that 25% to 75% of their property is currently farmed.

Interest in Farming

Overall, landowners in the partially farmed segment appear to genuinely enjoy farming but balance farm use with personal use. Participants are generally long-term farmers who have been farming the land for many years (average of more than 25 years). Virtually all say that at least a portion of their land is classified as farmland according to the BC Assessment Authority because they earn sufficient income either farming the land themselves or leasing the land to a farmer.

Many started farming because they saw it as a good way to earn a living while enjoying a country lifestyle. This includes new farmers as well as those who bought or inherited family farms. The tax benefits were also attractive, particularly to those who liked the property generally and wanted to live/raise family on country acreage.

- *“We enjoy horses and wanted to set up a horse operation initially. But we still wanted to qualify for the municipal tax exemption, so we needed to expand into cattle along with horses.” (Langley)*
- *“We wanted to bring in some more money – so financial reasons.” (Surrey)*
- *“I liked the property – the area where it’s located, the view.” (Surrey)*
- *“Farming has been the family business for many years.” (Delta)*

Benefits of Farming

As previously mentioned, landowners in the partially farmed segment appear to genuinely enjoy farming and the lifestyle it provides. Specific benefits include: the opportunity to work outside/close to nature/in the fresh air, be one own’s boss, ready access to fresh products, active lifestyle, aesthetics, and sense of community (although some say this is declining as the

farming population ages and retires). Some landowners also acknowledge the overall importance of farming, mentioning things such as the opportunity to give back to their community, boost the local economy, provide a healthy food product, and keep the land in agricultural production.

While landowners agree that the tax benefits are also a nice benefit of farming, opinion is mixed on the overall financial benefits. Specifically, not all landowners feel they can make a living on farming alone.

- *“The benefit definitely isn’t economical! I’m subsidizing the farm with other activities, but it allows us to live on this beautiful acreage.”* (Langley)

Farm Challenges

The challenges facing the partially farmed segment vary on a case-by-case basis. That said, challenges can generally be placed into one of the following five categories:

1. Financial: start up/ongoing day-to-day farm operation costs, fluctuating demand for product, external market events (e.g., beef recalls, mad cow disease).
2. Natural: weather/climate, suitability of land/soil (wet, swampy, claylike, limited topsoil).
3. Operational: shortage of qualified workers, difficulty moving equipment around property, physical demands of farming (particularly an issue as participants grow older).
4. Growth/development: proximity of local developments, industries, or roads.
5. Perceived lack of government support: lack of support for farmers as a whole (undervalued), little sense of urgency to address the aforementioned challenges, inflexibility in coming up with alternative solutions to problems. Here, participants point to both provincial and local governments and the Agricultural Land Commission. These comments were made by participants in both Langley and Delta.
 - *“There’s the perception that the BC Government doesn’t value farming and has let it deteriorate. The ALR has stopped the loss of farmland, but hasn’t actually done anything to encourage farming.”* (Langley)
 - *“Before we could start growing, we had to make some modifications to the land. But these got shut down by the ALR and the Corporation of Delta, who thought we were just trying to improve the land for our house. We tried to demonstrate otherwise, but it was too much work so we gave up and decided to do something that was more suited to the land as it is. If they had taken the time to understand what we were trying to do, we would be doing that instead, but they just made it too miserable for us to continue.”* (Delta)

Leasing Farmed Land

Approximately half of the landowners in the partially farmed segment farm the land themselves. The other half leases their land to a farmer.

Experiences with leases have been predominately positive. The main benefit of leasing is financial gain (income, tax benefits). Some participants also appreciate that it keeps the land in

agricultural production, provides ready access to fresh products, and eliminates the need to purchase/maintain expensive farm equipment themselves.

Those who lease generally do not have anything negative to say about leasing. The few challenges that are mentioned include managing the lease (ensuring the land is appropriately maintained), difficulty finding an appropriate lessee, and ensuring compliance with land use/environmental restrictions.

Unfarmed Land Uses

A portion of unfarmed land is currently being used for personal use (e.g., participants live there). However, some landowners indicate their unfarmed land is not being used for any particular purpose – it is just sitting there untouched. In some cases, farming activities did occur on the land at one point but had to be stopped for a variety of reasons, including protection of environmentally sensitive areas, perceived unsuitability for farming, improperly maintained, and unprofitable. Furthermore, some simply stopped farming because they wanted to take over the land for personal use.

- *“It’s not being used for anything right now – just growing forests. And we can’t remove any trees without special permission and that’s expensive to do.”* (Surrey)
- *“The previous owner used to have cattle on the land, but then the stream got fenced off for environmental reasons.”* (Surrey)
- *“That’s the farm home plate – it’s the only area where we’re allowed to have our house.”* (Delta)

Perceived Barriers to Farming Unfarmed Land

Regardless of how the unfarmed land is being used (or not used), landowners generally agree it is unsuitable for farming. Here, they point to factors such as the condition of the soil (wet, claylike, rocky), topography, forested/woody, and environmental restrictions. As a result, several participants express frustration that the land is even included in the ALR; rather, they would like it removed and developed for other purposes.

- *“It’s very wet and has a lot of trees. If I chop the trees down, I’ll get even more erosion and flooding. I need to keep the trees there, but that also limits my farming opportunities.”* (Langley)
- *“There’s a small creek that runs through it and the bylaws restrict what I can do in that area. I’m not even allowed to put cows in there.”* (Surrey)

The overall likelihood of expanding farm operations in the next couple of years is low. Of the 15 participants included in this group, only two (one in Langley and one in Delta) gave any indication that they are considering increasing the amount of land being farmed. The remainder has no plans to expand their farm operations, primarily due to the perceived unsuitability of the land and the belief that this either cannot be changed or would require too much money and effort to make it financially viable. Several also point to their age as a barrier to increasing farm activities, while others are simply uninterested in doing so (e.g., happy with current situation/uninterested in making any changes).

Given these barriers, landowners in the partially farmed segment generally feel there is little that would encourage them to expand their farm operations. One thing that may help is assistance developing the land for farming. This may be in the form of financial aid, additional tax incentives, or manual labour.

Leasing Unfarmed Land

Landowners in the partially farmed segment generally demonstrate little interest in leasing their unfarmed land. None indicate this is something they are actively looking to pursue at this point in time.

Consistent with the reasons why landowners are unlikely to expand their farm operations in the next couple of years, one of the primary barriers to leasing is the perceived unsuitability of the land. As such, participants believe it would be difficult to find someone willing to lease the land.

- *"I considered leasing in the past but decided it was too much work to fix up the land and make it suitable for farming."* (Langley)
- *"I'm already leasing as much of the land as I can. The rest is too hilly and not suitable for farming."* (Surrey)

A second barrier to leasing is that the land is currently being used for other purposes, including personal use. Other barriers include government and/or environmental land use restrictions, unsure how to find a good lessee, and the perception that the additional income leasing would provide is simply not worth the hassle of finding and managing a lease.

- *"I'd worry about how well the lease would farm. I wouldn't want them to ruin the land or dump waste into the creek."* (Langley)
- *"I'm not sure the additional income is really enough to make it worthwhile."* (Langley)

While there is nothing that would encourage some participants to lease their unfarmed land, demonstrated financial gains and/or additional tax incentives may motivate some. Others may appreciate assistance developing the land for farming and/or finding an appropriate lessee. But in all cases, these are options that would likely need to be proactively presented to landowners rather than waiting for them to seek information themselves.

- *"For me, the biggest deterrent is the current tax laws. I've been asked to lease my land in the past, but the income wasn't enough to gain me farm status so I turned it down."* (Langley)
- *"The older I get, the more land I lease out. But it can be challenging to find farmers to lease it to."* (Langley)
- *"I'm not actively looking to lease, but if the price is right – I might consider it."* (Delta)

Final Comments

At the end of the interview, landowners were asked if they had any final comments about use of ALR land for farming that they would like to share with Metro Vancouver. The following is a sampling of some of the comments provided by those in the partially farmed segment.

- *"I somewhat agree with the ALR but it has not been done properly. It's only frozen land to stop further growth but there's no actual policy to help with farming. It's not a farming program; it's a stop development program."* (Langley)
- *"They need to have a better business understanding of what is and isn't farmable. Some land would be better developed for other purposes. The Lower Mainland is growing so fast, it would be nice to use un-farmable land for something else."* (Surrey)
- *"They need to put money into helping people get back into farming. The guys selling the big equipment and pesticides are doing well, but the farmers need help."* (Langley)
- *"The time for this is overdue. In Alberta, they really value farming. In BC, they just talk about valuing farming."* (Langley)

Segment Overview – Mostly Farmed (>75%)

Of the 41 landowners included in the research, 6 are classified as mostly farmed, meaning that more than 75% of their property is currently farmed.

Interest in Farming

Overall, landowners in the mostly farmed segment appear to genuinely enjoy farming and demonstrate great pride in their farm accomplishments. Landowners in this segment are generally long-term farmers who have been farming the land for many years (average of more than 25 years). All have land that is classified as farmland according to the BC Assessment Authority.

Benefits of Farming

Many started farming as a way to earn a living. Those who farm the land themselves seem to genuinely enjoy farming and the lifestyle it provides. While income and tax benefits are important, these individuals also tend to have a deep appreciation for the farm culture and are proud of their farm activities and accomplishments.

- *"I like the feeling of accomplishment. I've done a lot of work on the property and the land conservation aspect is very rewarding. And I really appreciate it when people tell me that my meat is the best they've ever had."* (Langley)
- *"The income isn't bad but it can be expensive to buy equipment, do all the work, and still make a profit. There are definitely easier ways to make a living but the lifestyle is worth it."* (Langley)
- *"I could write a book on the benefits of farming. It's something I was born to do. It's very rewarding to see the crops you plant grow and be harvested. And it's rewarding to know that I'm providing good food for people."* (Delta)

In comparison, those who lease the land to farmers appear slightly more motivated by the financial and tax benefits, although they also appreciate the farm lifestyle and care about keeping the land in agricultural production. Overall, lease experiences have been predominately positive.

Farm Challenges

For landowners in the mostly farmed segment, the two main challenges to farming are cost (includes start up and ongoing day-to-day farm operation costs) and the wetness of the land. One participant also commented that it can be difficult to transport farm equipment on roads around their property because other drivers have little patience for slow moving vehicles and can become very aggressive. He would like to see more signs posted on local roads alerting people to the fact that farms are operating in the area and slow moving vehicles should be expected.

Final Comments

At the end of the interview, landowners were asked if they had any final comments about use of ALR land for farming that they would like to share with Metro Vancouver. The following is a sampling of some of the comments provided by those in the mostly farmed segment.

- *“We need to protect local farming; I strongly believe in farming and growing your own produce. I don’t want to see local farmland developed for other uses.”* (Surrey)
- *“Farming is important, I hope it goes on forever.”* (Delta)

CONCLUSION

Overall Context

With a few exceptions, there does not appear to be any real sense of urgency among landowners to expand their farm operations. Participants generally seem satisfied with their current level of farming and are not actively looking to farm or lease their unfarmed land. While some are generally open to the idea of increasing their farm activities, this is something that would likely need to be proactively presented to landowners rather than waiting for them to pursue themselves. When urgency is expressed, it tends to be focused on removing land that is perceived as unsuitable for farming from the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR) so it can be developed for other non-farming purposes.

Overall interest in farming varies by segment. Landowners in the partially farmed and mostly farmed segments largely began farming as a way to earn a living. The tax benefits are also noted. Participants in both of these segments appear to genuinely enjoy farming and the lifestyle it provides. In addition, those in the mostly farmed segment, particularly those who farm the land themselves, also tend to demonstrate a deep appreciation for farming and take great pride in their farm activities and accomplishments. In comparison, landowners in the partially farmed segment are more likely to use their land for a combination of farm and personal use activities. Meanwhile, those in the mostly unfarmed segment generally demonstrate less interest in farming overall and would rather use the land for personal use or investment purposes. That said, a few individuals in this segment hope to expand their farm operations in the next couple of years.

Perceived Barriers to Farming

As noted above, very few landowners are actively looking to expand their farm operations at this time. The key barriers to farming more land appear to be an overall lack of interest (including using the land for other purposes, primarily personal use), perceived unsuitability of the land (includes both physical characteristics as well as environmental restrictions on land use), and financial challenges (start up/ ongoing day-to-day farm operation costs, unprofitable). Operational challenges, such as the physical demands of farming, also exist and are expected to become more significant as landowners grow older.

Participants commenting on the unsuitability of their unfarmed land can generally be divided into two categories: those who think the land is simply unsuitable for farming and those who think it could possibly be developed for farming with enough money and physical effort. However, they are unsure whether the resulting financial gains would be worth the upfront costs and are thus reluctant to commit any resources to developing the land for farming.

Among the few landowners who are actively trying to expand their farm operations, the primary barriers to doing so appear to be government regulations/red tape and a perceived lack of understanding/support for farm operations generally. These comments were made in reference to both the provincial and local governments, as well as the Agricultural Land Commission. Specific complaints focus on a perceived lack of interest in working collaboratively

with farmers, difficulty coordinating the different departments/agencies involved, an overall lack of understanding for day-to-day farm operations, and inflexibility in coming up with alternative solutions to problems. There is also the perception that support and tolerance for farm operations could be improved among the broader community as a whole.

Leasing Unfarmed Land

While some landowners currently lease a portion of their land, none are actively looking to lease their unfarmed land. Overall reaction to the idea of leasing is mixed.

Some are potentially interested in future lease opportunities but are not ready to pursue a lease at this time. These individuals currently enjoy their property as is, do not need the income, are using the property for other purposes, do not think leasing would be financially viable, are unsure how to find a good lessee, or are worried about how a lease might impact their privacy. Some also feel their property would require a significant amount of work before it could be leased and they are not ready to make that investment at this time.

Others are much less interested in leasing for the same reasons stated above. In addition, they may also feel their land is simply unsuitable for farming (regardless of how much money and effort was invested into developing the land for farming) or their lot is too small to lease.

Final Comments

Landowners' final comments generally focus on one of the following three themes:

1. The ALR itself

A common theme across all segments and municipalities is the issue of what land is included and not included in the ALR. Participants generally see the value of the ALR but think it currently excludes some of the region's more viable farmland while including some land that is much less suitable for farm operations. Some also add that they would like to see the ALR do more to help farmers be successful (as opposed to just preserving farmland). A few landowners would like to see the ALR disbanded altogether.

2. Financial support for farmers

Several landowners say that they would like to see more financial support made available to farmers. This could be in the form of subsidies, loans, or tax benefits.

3. Government/community relations

Lastly, some landowners come back to the issue of improved relationships between farmers, government (municipal and provincial), and the Agricultural Land Commission. They would like to see less red tape, improved collaboration, and more support for the farming community in general. These comments generally came from landowners in Langley and Surrey, although landowners in Delta echoed these comments throughout the survey.



Ways to Encourage Farming

While not all landowners are interested in expanding their farm operations, the research does suggest several things that may encourage farming among some participants. These include:

Financial

- Increased financial assistance to help with both start up and ongoing day-to-day farm operation costs.
- Increased tax incentives.

Government Relations

- Improved collaboration between farmers, local municipalities, the provincial government, and the Agricultural Land Commission.
- Increased assistance to farmers (particularly new farmers) navigating the system - e.g., better identification and coordination of key contacts/departments/agencies, creation of a dedicated department or staff to assist with the above.

Education and Outreach

- With landowners: information regarding the different types of agricultural activities that can be sustained in different types of land/soil conditions (perhaps land thought to be unsuitable for farming may be suitable for some type of agricultural activity).
- With landowners: information that clearly outlines the benefits (financial or other) of farming or leasing unfarmed land.
- With government: information aimed at improving understanding of and support for day-to-day farm operations.
- With the public: information aimed at boosting support for local farm operations.

Other

- Assistance managing the day-to-day farm operations (if unable/unwilling to work the land themselves).
- Assistance finding an appropriate lessee.

In most cases, increasing the amount of land farmed will likely require proactively reaching out to landowners rather than waiting for landowners to take this upon themselves.



APPENDIX: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Thank you for taking the time today to complete this interview. As discussed when we scheduled this interview, the purpose of this research is to better understand the level of interest you have in farming or leasing your land or a portion of your land that may not currently be in full agricultural production. These interviews are an opportunity for you to provide insight on the challenges and opportunities to encourage farming in the region.

Metro Vancouver (IF NECESSARY: Greater Vancouver Regional District – regional government) is sponsoring this study with support from their Agricultural Advisory Committee.

Please be assured that those who actually participate in the survey will not be disclosed and all your answers will be kept confidential. The interview will take approximately 15 minutes to complete.

[IF RESPONDENT OWNS MORE THAN ONE PIECE OF LAND: If you own more than one piece of agricultural land, please answer the following questions based on the property that has the greatest amount of unfarmed land.]

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1. In which of the following areas can this land be found?

Delta

Richmond

Surrey

Langley

Barnston Island (IF NECESSARY: Barnston Island can be found in Electoral Area A and Metro Vancouver is the local government)

2. How many years have you owned this land?

3. Do you currently live on this land?

4. Approximately how many hectares is this land?

5. Approximately what percentage of this land is currently being **farmed**?

INTERVIEWER NOTE: CALCULATE % THAT IS **UNFARMED** AND RECORD BOTH BELOW (SHOULD TOTAL 100%)

% FARMED: _____

% UNFARMED: _____



0% TO LESS THAN 25% FARMED = MOSTLY UNFARMED

25% TO 75% FARMED = PARTIALLY FARMED

MORE THAN 75% FARMED = MOSTLY FARMED

FARMING ACTIVITIES

[SKIP Q6 IF 0% FARMED IN Q5]

6. Please describe the types of farming activities that currently occur on the land.
7. Why did you originally purchase the land?
8. What, if any, types of farming activities were you planning when you originally purchased the land?
9. Did these activities work out as planned? Why/why not?

Questions for Mostly Unfarmed (0% to less than 25% Farmed)

10. You indicated that all or much of your land is currently **unfarmed**. What is this unfarmed land currently being used for?
11. Why are you not currently farming this land?

 PROBE: What barriers are preventing you from farming this land?
12. Was any of this unfarmed land ever previously farmed, either by yourself or someone else?

 IF YES: Why did this land stop being farmed?
13. How likely is it that you will increase the amount of land being farmed in the next couple of years? Would you say very likely, somewhat likely, not very likely, or not at all likely? Why?
14. What, if anything, would encourage you to consider farming this land?
15. Have you or would you consider leasing your unfarmed land to a farmer? Why/why not?

 IF YES: What barriers are preventing you from leasing your unfarmed land to a farmer?
 PROBE: legal complications, lack of knowledge, finding a good lease, don't need the income, land not suitable for farming



16. What, if anything, would encourage you to consider leasing your unfarmed land to a farmer? PROBE: tax incentives/disincentives, tighter restrictions to obtaining Farm Class Status, land lease program for new farmers, more restrictions on on-farm uses

Questions for Partially Farmed (25% to 75% Farmed)

17. How many years have you been farming this land?

IF THREE YEARS OR MORE: Is your land classified as farmland according to the BC Assessment Authority? Why/why not?

18. What are the main reasons you started farming the land?

19. What are the greatest benefits to farming the land? PROBE: income, access to fresh products, sense of community, tax benefits, aesthetics, importance of farming in general

20. What are the greatest challenges to farming the land?

21. Do you farm the land yourself or do you lease the land to a farmer?

IF LEASED LAND: How long have you leased this land?

What are the major benefits of leasing the land?

What are the main challenges of leasing the land?

22. You indicated that a portion of your land is currently **unfarmed**. What is this unfarmed land currently being used for?

23. Why are you not currently farming this land?

PROBE: What barriers are preventing you from farming this land?

24. Was any of this unfarmed land ever previously farmed, either by yourself or someone else?

IF YES: Why did this land stop being farmed?

25. How likely is it that you will increase the amount of land being farmed in the next couple of years? Would you say very likely, somewhat likely, not very likely, or not at all likely? Why?

26. What, if anything, would encourage you to consider farming this land?

27. Have you or would you consider leasing your unfarmed land to a farmer? Why/why not?



IF YES: What barriers are preventing you from leasing your unfarmed land to a farmer?
PROBE: legal complications, lack of knowledge, finding a good lease, don't need the income, land not suitable for farming

28. What, if anything, would encourage you to consider leasing your unfarmed land to a farmer? PROBE: tax incentives/disincentives, tighter restrictions to obtaining Farm Class Status, land lease program for new farmers, more restrictions on on-farm uses

Questions for Mostly Farmed (More than 75% Farmed)

29. How many years have you been farming this land?

IF THREE YEARS OR MORE: Is your land classified as farmland according to the BC Assessment Authority? Why/why not?

30. What are the main reasons you started farming the land?

31. What are the greatest benefits to farming the land? PROBE: income, access to fresh products, sense of community, tax benefits, aesthetics, importance of farming in general

32. What are the greatest challenges to farming the land?

33. Do you farm the land yourself or do you lease the land to a farmer?

IF LEASED LAND: How long have you leased this land?
What are the major benefits of leasing the land?
What are the main challenges of leasing the land?

WRAP UP

34. Do you have any final comments about use of ALR land for farming that you would like me to pass on to Metro Vancouver?

Finally, just a few last questions for classification purposes...

35. In which of the following age categories do you fall?

- Under 35
- 35 to 54
- 55 or over



36. Would you be interested in participating in any follow-up focus group research?

IF YES: Can you please confirm your contact information? Please note that this information would be passed on to Metro Vancouver.

RECORD NAME

RECORD PHONE NUMBER

37. Finally, can you please confirm your mailing address so that we can mail you a \$10 coffee card in appreciation for participating in this research?

RECORD NAME

RECORD STREET NUMBER AND ADDRESS

RECORD CITY

RECORD POSTAL CODE