

Attn: Mayor, Council and Staff

July 17, 2024

Via Email

We are writing this letter in response to the District of Central Saanich PAAC survey released in July 2024. I think it is important to clarify the South Island Farmers Institute role in community, our mandate and the activities we undertake.

The South Vancouver Island Farmers Institute is a dynamic and regional group of food, fuel, fibre and floral producers, friends and supporters.

We are an Institute founded and governed by farmers - for farmers and community members who support agriculture and growing.

Our activities are membership driven; we work to improve agricultural land stewardship and food security.

We promote farming in the region through research, education, cooperation and outreach.

Our activities and events are supported by membership and event fees, the District of North Saanich, District of Central Saanich, District of Sooke, the BC Ministry of Agriculture, the Fruit Growers Association Fund at the Peninsula and Area Agricultural Commission as well as private donations and corporate sponsorship.

We work towards raising the economic viability of farms on the South Island through education:

- **Sustainers Series:** 6 month winter season series features and celebrates long term farmers on the South Island. This interactive learning event series showcases the history, successes and challenges of sustaining farms and farmers in the South Vancouver Island region and addresses topics of regional concern through Ag Sector initiatives and organizations.
- **Innovation Series:** 6 month summer season series featuring local farm innovation through field days. These interactive learning events showcase innovation in technical farming practices and celebrate knowledge sharing.
- **Business Series:** 4 month winter season series addressing direct education for farm businesses, led by local farmers for peer to peer learning and access to ongoing mentorship.
- **Farmer to Farmer Conference:** Winter week long Farmer conference including 8 land based learning workshops, and a full day conference. The Full Day Conference provides a unique platform for growers to connect, enhance skills, and contribute to a stronger community.

SIFI has reinvigorated the Farmer to Farmer conference after it had been dormant for a number of years. The 2024 conference brought together a plenary opening by the Ag sector Municipalities, including Central Saanich and focused on a broad range of cropping, food, fuel, fiber, floral, livestock, water management, soils, solar, and IPM.

The 2025 conference will celebrate the event's 10th anniversary and focuses on raising the capacity and resilience of the mid-career farmer.

The District of Central Saanich supported the Farmer to Farmer 2024 conference, as it has historically done for many years, and we are hopeful that Mayor and Council will continue its support for this conference in collaboration with over two dozen supporters.

- We collect and analyse statistics from our members about their farms and land status (leasing / owning / ALR), amount of land in production, certifications (GAP / HCCP / Organic / EFP), municipality, cropping, as examples in order to define the parameters of our education series for membership and external communications.

- We provide information to those seeking to understand the South Vancouver Island agricultural sector landscape, and advocate for farm forward policy, infrastructure and land access on behalf of our membership. We seek to identify local leaders, close gaps in food growing, cropping and distribution, working to build sector resilience.
- In celebration, SIFI grants an annual Certificate of Appreciation to a non-farmer, honoring longstanding contribution to capacity building in the Ag Sector.

SIFI was initially an impetus of PAAC and has strong PAAC support. We have additionally built relationships with parallel organizations in order to bring benefits to our membership. Our smallest scale farmers had access to donated cover crop seed in 2023; Farm Folk City Folk provide members access to the mobile seed cleaning trailer through our support from Haliburton Community Organic Farm. We continue to work to build relationships with sector organizations.

We celebrate that our local Districts have access to expert advice, information and assistance on matters involving agriculture through membership with the Peninsula and Area Agriculture Commission, and that each municipality can find differences in sector sustainability and commonalities in challenges, leading to regional solutions.

We see strength in Municipalities that participate in PAAC for its expertise in deconstructing the complexities of local bylaw, provincial legislation and ALC policy, as well as supporting a District specific agricultural group to best inform and fulfil District objectives and creating sector sustainability through engaged participation in regional initiatives including the Goose Management and Land Access Programs.

The South Island Farmers Institute appreciates PAAC for its initial and continued support in fulfilling our farmer members' mandate and advancing mutual strategic objectives.

Kind Regards,  
Shellie MacDonald,  
South Island Farmers Institute President  
Katie Underwood,  
South Island Farmers Institute Vice President

cc. SIFI Board of Directors Secretary  
DCS Emilie Gorman  
PAAC Secretary