

Nareka Jacques

From: Jason Austin [REDACTED]
Sent: Thursday, January 16, 2025 1:07 PM
To: Municipal Hall
Subject: Fwd: Proposed CRD Foodlands Access Service
Attachments: 2019 05 02 Jason Austin re Farmland Trust proposal.pdf; 2019 05 03 Addressing Food Security in the Capital Region.pdf; 2019 05 05 letters re CRD Farmlands Trust proposal.pdf; 2019 06 10 CRD Farmlands Trust proposal.pdf; 2019 06 10 Seeds of dissent growing on Peninsula farms - Peninsula News Review.pdf

Please forward this to the Mayor and Council. Can it be placed on the Council agenda so I can speak to it?

Thank you,

Jason Austin
Gatton Farm

----- Forwarded Message -----

Subject: Proposed CRD Foodlands Access Service

Date: Wed, 15 Jan 2025 22:31:17 -0800

From: Jason Austin [REDACTED]

To: CRDBoard@crd.bc.ca, malto@crd.bc.ca, directorsgi@crd.bc.ca, sbrice@crd.bc.ca, jbrownoff@crd.bc.ca, jcaradonna@crd.bc.ca, ccoleman@crd.bc.ca, zdevries@crd.bc.ca, bdesjardins@crd.bc.ca, sgoodmanson@crd.bc.ca, charder@crd.bc.ca, directorssi@crd.bc.ca, pjones@crd.bc.ca, dougkobayashi@crd.bc.ca, dougkobayashi@crd.bc.ca, mlittle@crd.bc.ca, Cliff McNeilSmith <cmcneilsmith@crd.bc.ca>, kmurdoch@crd.bc.ca, cplant@crd.bc.ca, mtait@crd.bc.ca, dthompson@crd.bc.ca, stobias@crd.bc.ca, directorjdf@crd.bc.ca, kwilliams@crd.bc.ca, Ryan Windsor <rwindsor@crd.bc.ca>

CC: Victoria Mayor and Council <mayorandcouncil@victoria.ca>, council@saanich.ca, council@esquimalt.ca, allmayorandcouncil@northsaanich.ca, cday@colwood.ca, dgrove@colwood.ca, djantzen@colwood.ca, iward@colwood.ca, kjordison@colwood.ca, mayorandcouncil@metchosis.ca, admin@sidney.ca, obcouncil@oakbay.ca, council@sooke.ca, mayorandcouncil@viewroyal.ca, kwilliams@highlands.ca, leslie.corvidconsulting@gmail.com, ann@eco-sense.ca, gord.baird@gmail.com, marciemclean@shaw.ca, karel@roessong.com, rose26@telus.net, info@highlands.ca, Mayor Ryan Windsor <Ryan.Windsor@csaanich.ca>, chris.graham@csaanich.ca, zeb.king@csaanich.ca, gordon.newton@csaanich.ca, Niall Paltiel <Niall.Paltiel@csaanich.ca>, sarah.riddell@csaanich.ca, bob.thompson@csaanich.ca

The CRD Board of Directors,

Re: Proposed CRD Foodlands Access Service

My name is Jason Austin. I am a retired CPA and an active farmer as Gatton Farm, on 5 acres in Central Saanich.

For the last 8 years, with the help of wonderful volunteers, Gatton Farm has been the largest single donor of fresh farm produce to the food banks in the Capital Region, averaging 40,000 lbs each year. We do this with a low profile and without government grants or any public funds.

Last week I became aware of the Alternative Approval Process for a proposed CRD Foodlands Access Service, bylaw 4602. I have spoken to a number of other farmers and residents and none were aware of this, and as the AAP process closes today there is no time to get the word out to the public about this significant proposal. I am writing to you then in my dual capacity as an account and a farmer to give you my views. Because of the significant cost of this proposal I am copying this to the Mayors and Councils of the region so they can speak on behalf of their residents if they choose.

The proposed bylaw 4602 describes itself as:

1. The service being established and to be operated is a service to preserve and coordinate preservation and access to farmland for agricultural use, and to promote regional food security, including, without limiting the foregoing:

- a) purchasing, leasing or otherwise acquiring land to be used for agriculture and agricultural-related activities;
- b) providing capital funding for improvements to agricultural land, and operational funding for delivery of service programs on agricultural land;
- c) entering into agreements with third parties for service delivery and operation of programs in support of the service;
- d) providing grants or financial assistance to support agricultural initiatives that promote beneficial and sustainable agricultural practices and regional food security; and
- e) delivering the service and achieving the service goals through education, outreach, and other promotional activities

And the bylaw states it can requisition up to \$1,000,000 every year from the municipalities. There is no end date. By any measure this is a major cost.

[https://www.crd.bc.ca/docs/default-source/legislative-pdf/alternative-approval-process/2024-foodlands-access-\(bylaw-4602\)/bylawno.4602.pdf?sfvrsn=e7b851cf_1](https://www.crd.bc.ca/docs/default-source/legislative-pdf/alternative-approval-process/2024-foodlands-access-(bylaw-4602)/bylawno.4602.pdf?sfvrsn=e7b851cf_1)

First I must advise you it appears to me the AAP process has been invalidated because the Notice given to the public does not meet the disclosure requirements of the Community Charter. I will send you my reasons

tomorrow.

If I am correct that the Notice is not valid then the process automatically comes to a halt. Regardless though, I think the CRD board and the region's municipalities should reexamine the proposal because just as the Notice is misleading and factually incorrect, so too are many of the premises on which this proposal was been presented to the CRD board. There will be other views different from mine, but as the lawyers may say, I can give you probable cause why this proposal should be reconsidered.

This proposal has its foundation in a 2019 CRD study that the CRD asked the municipalities to contribute land and money for, but the majority of the municipalities declined. It has come back now in 2025 as a CRD proposal seeking approval to assess the taxpayers of the region up to \$1,000,000 every year for ever. The timing of course is appalling as every municipality is struggling to adjust their budgets.

Attached are the reviews I did in 2019 showing that much of the CRD 2019 study was inaccurate and misleading in material ways – so much so that I commented *“did no one read this stuff?”*. My 2019 critique was not refuted by the CRD so it is reprehensible that this same flawed report has been brought forward, without correction, to support this latest multi-million proposal when the CRD was knew it was flawed. https://www.crd.bc.ca/docs/default-source/regional-planning-pdf/food-agriculture/foodlandstrustfullreportandappendices-.pdf?sfvrsn=41acc8ca_2

Please take a moment and read the attachments.

As one example of a major misstatement, the 2019 CRD report said *“Only 50% of the CRD’s ALR is in production.”*. Predictably this caused consternation and became headlines at the time. The statement however was false. The report had taken numbers that were said to be the area farmed and divided that by the area of the ALR. But the ALR is not an area that is solely farmland, it includes everything within the ALR boundaries. In Central Saanich for example, the ALR includes the First Nations Reserves, part of the Pat Bay Highway, Stelly’s School, municipal roads and sidewalks, and housing. The report authors had not removed those non-farmland areas from the area of the ALR to get to the “Farmland in the ALR” and hence came up with the sensational and false claim that only 50% of the ALR is in production.

At the core of the proposed Foodlands Access Service are these positions:

That farm land is too expensive for new and existing farmers to acquire to farm.

That the area farmers are old.

The food security claim that more CRD region farmland must be put into production because the region has only 2 days supply of food and if the supply of food is interrupted then we must be able to turn to the local farmers.

These positions are misleading.

Yes, farm land has become expensive to buy but it is generally cheap to rent. Some land owners rent their land for free to a farmer so they can claim the farm property tax exemption. Other farmers rent for what are nominal amounts considering the value of the land.

Yes, the average age of farmers is increasing which begs the question “Why?” The simple answer is our small farmers cannot earn a living from farming. This is the reality:

- Most of our farmers have between 2-10 acres so they have little economy of scale for mechanizing.
- We live in a cool northern climate which limits the crops that can be grown.
- Farm labour is near impossible to find or to afford for these small farmers, and they can't meet the requirements for using temporary labour from other countries.
- It is one thing to grow the crops but near impossible to find a market to sell them. Some have farm stands and have developed a steady customer base over the years but these are generally small sales. Companies like Thrifties do buy some local produce but they typically want to deal with just one grower for a produce line, and will require Canada GAP certification which is beyond most small farmers. <https://www.canadagap.ca/program/>
- Almost no small farmer has a contract at the beginning of the year – everything is a gamble with the weather and the ability or inability to sell so the farmer will grow what the farmer can afford to lose, not what the potential of the farm is.
- And the coup de grace for small vegetable growers is if they do manage to sell their produce then they mostly cannot get a livable price for it due to the competition from cheap imported produce. Even the very large growers can be sideswiped by a flood of cheap produce.

Consider these studies:

2010 Cowichan Valley - 80 per cent of farmers grossed less than \$25,000

<https://www.saanichnews.com/news/seeds-of-dissent-growing-on-peninsula-farms-271744>

2011 Central Saanich study: "... as a whole, the CS agricultural sector barely covered direct expenses, generated little gross margin and no return on investment"

https://www.centralsaanich.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/documents/agricultural_area_plan_0.pdf

2016 Saanich study: 50 farms in the 2-10 acre size and only 3 grossed more than \$25,000 before expenses

<https://www.saanich.ca/assets/Community/Documents/Planning/BackgroundReportAFSP0525.pdf>

The numbers above are gross numbers that the farmers receive before they pay their expenses and mortgages. There are no benefit packages. There are no pensions. Is it any wonder that the farmers we have are older? – no sensible young person would go into farming under these conditions. **As a general statement there is no money in small scale farming.**

The chart below is made up from the census returns and shows that the number of agricultural workers in the region dropped by a third every 5 years between 2011 and 2021.

Number of agricultural workers in the Capital Region			
Census year	2011	2016	2021
	*	*	**
Number of agricultural workers	2,044	1,355	862
Decline		33.71%	36.38%

* https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/farming-natural-resources-and-industry/agriculture-and-seafood/statistics/census/census-2016/aginbrief_2016_capital.pdf

** https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/farming-natural-resources-and-industry/agriculture-and-seafood/statistics/census/ag-in-brief/ag_in_brief_2021_-_cd_capital.pdf

Looking at the claim that more CRD region farmland must be put into production because the region has only 2 days supply of food. and if the supply of food is interrupted then we must be able to turn to the local farmers:

Food and farming are motherhood issues. This claim about food security will push buttons until you think it through.

The current CRD Foodlands Access Service proposal is aimed only at entrant farmers and small existing crop farmers. It is not aimed at the egg producers or dairy operations, nor is it aimed at the larger established crop farmers. That excluded group however are the main food producers in the Capital Region – their output will not be effected by whether there is a Farmlands Access Service or not.

Trying to bank on our local farmers for regional food security overlooks two critical factors:

1. Our crop farmers grow outdoors in a northern climate. The farmers grow perishable crops, not cans of peas. Look out the window – it is January – if there was a disruption to our food supply today, what do you think the farmers can do about it?
2. This is a classic supply and demand situation. Our farmers could grow enough basic produce to feed our population – so the potential supply is there. But where is the demand? In order for the farmers to grow more, the public must buy that produce at a price that will give the farmers a livable income – that would mean an increase in vegetable prices and there are no signs the public is prepared to do that.

The odds against entrant farmers surviving are low but there are always exceptions and a few will. The survivors would probably compete against existing farmers for the higher end markets like restaurants, and not get into the production of bulk food that is necessary for food security.

It is disingenuous for anyone to suggest – and naïve for anyone to believe - that even a multi-million dollar CRD Foodlands Access Service, charged to the taxpayers, can produce enough crop[farmers who would move the dial on food security for the region.

Should the CRD proceed with this Foodlands Access Service?

The low cost of imported produce make crop farming unviable for all but the niche markets and the large scale farming operations.

Rental land is available but there is little demand. I was told the CRD itself tried unsuccessfully to rent out the Bear Hill property and did not get any takers.

The CRD proposal would duplicate programs that have been carried out for years at Haliburton Farm in Saanich, Newman Farm in Central Saanich, and more recently at Sandown in North Saanich. North Saanich should be asked for a report on how much it has contributed to Sandown in terms of land, cash, and the share of property

taxes from the commercial developments like Canadian Tire on the Sandown lands, and any other contributions. That may be an eye popping amount.

So far I have been addressing the concept of the proposed Foodlands Access Service. But I suggest you also look at the breadth of the proposed bylaw - it is drafted to allow the CRD to do anything, anywhere, with anyone, for up to \$1,000,000 a year until the end of time, and to charge that to the taxpayers. On top of this, there is not a single business plan to show what is expected from the program or how the entrant farmers would survive. This is a blank cheque with no guard rails, and ripe for abuse.

The proposed CRD Foodlands Access Service is unrealistic and unwarranted. It would not have a positive impact on food security for the region, and would be a squandering of taxpayer money.

Farm Vouchers - A better alternative

Many of our residents in the Capital Region are food insecure and unable to pay for fresh produce (this is the group I donate all my produce to).

We also have a small farm sector in crisis for lack of a market to sell their produce for a livable price.

If the CRD is genuine about securing our farm sector then the CRD could issue Farm Vouchers to the various food banks, food kitchens, womens shelters and other worthy groups. These groups could then use them to negotiate and buy produce from the Capital region farmers which could redeem them from the CRD. I mentioned above that most small farmers have no contracts at the start of a year so everything is a gamble for them. If they knew ahead of time that they had orders they would be able to plant more and with confidence.

A CRD Farm voucher program is the most effective and efficient use of taxpayer funds as it benefits two groups in need, and it strengthens the farm sector. The organizing can and should be kept simple – a web site could be established where farmers can list what they will have available and the groups can list what they want and when. I think logically it should be limited to the smaller farmers for most effect (and excluding me). And I believe it could start with as little as \$50,000 for the first year to try it. The size of the program should be limited to the need of the people who cannot afford food now. To expand beyond that would be using public funds to compete with the farmers and grocery stores.

Farm vouchers would be a worthy use of taxpayer money and help deal with food insecurity at an individual level.

Conclusion

I said at the outset that there will be other views and those views should be sought. As an accountant and a farmer it is my firm belief that:

- the proposed Foodlands Access Service would not enhance food security in the region and would be a squandering of taxpayer money, and ripe for abuse
- a better alternative would be a Farm Voucher program that would serve two communities in need – our farmers and the food insecure of the region

Sincerely,

Jason Austin
Gatton Farm
Saanichton

"The information contained in this transmission may contain privileged and confidential information of the District of Central Saanich. It is intended for review only by the person(s) named above. Dissemination, distribution or duplication of this communication is strictly prohibited by all recipients unless expressly authorized otherwise. If you are not the intended recipient, please contact the sender by reply email and destroy all copies of the original message. Thank you."

My name is Jason Austin. I am a retired CPA and now an active farmer on 5 acres in Central Saanich. For the last 26 years I have donated my farm produce to the food banks.

I was the largest provider of fresh produce to the food banks in the Capital Region in 2018, sending in 42,000 lbs.

It is with these dual backgrounds that I write to you now about the CRD proposal for a farmlands trust. The links to the CRD proposal are at Item **7.13** of the agenda

at https://www.crd.bc.ca/docs/default-source/crd-document-library/committeedocuments/capitalregionaldistrictboard/20190410/2019-04-10agendapkgrb.pdf?sfvrsn=98e9ccca_4 There are 6 reports to read. In addition, the CRD has written to the municipalities and made statements in a Question and Answer format.

In the past Saanich, Central Saanich, North Saanich and Sidney, supported

the creation of a regional farm land trust and farm land acquisition fund to acquire a supply of land for lease to farmers, including incubator farm plots for new farmers.

See Appendix 1. It is clear from those letters the municipalities contemplated a passive land holding trust that would lease to any farmer, and have incubator plots for new farmers.

What has been proposed by the CRD is very different. It calls for the lands to be actively administered by an NGO and leased only to entrant farmers, **and that the municipalities or others pay all the costs**

- to provide fencing; irrigation, drainage
- to buy the farm equipment including tractors
- to provide a level of bureaucracy of 1 ½ persons at \$70,000 per person to manage these farm lands
- for web site and advertising to compete with the existing farmers.

This CRD proposal would use public funds to set up the entrant farmers in direct competition with the existing farmers, and then to advertise against them in the future. It is wrong.

The proposal acknowledges that the municipalities would have to subsidize these operations for ever into the future for at least \$127,000 a year but that assumes all the grants are obtained. If they are not the municipalities would be on the hook for the extra shortfall.

Farmland ranks right up there with motherhood and apple pie, and the CRD proposal plays on those sentimental feelings but it lacks clarity. I have spent considerable time attempting to understand the figures bandied about in the proposal, and I cannot make sense of them. What is clear though is that the high costs arise because of the departure from the passive trust envisaged originally by the municipalities. Under their intent the only involvement would be the periodic

leasing of the lands which could be handled in-house by CRD staff. **It is the involvement of the NGO and the proposal to set up the entrant farmers in competition with existing farmers that creates this heavy cost.**

Not only is this wrong, but how much more evidence do we need to show that the CRD and NGO's are not equipped to operate or manage businesses – this would become the agricultural equivalent of the sewage project as the grants fell through and the entrant farmers fail.

The CRD erroneously claims that the BC Ministry of Agriculture say 50% of the farmland in the Capital Region is unproductive (Appendix 2)

The report also erroneously claims that Central Saanich spends \$64,600 on its 18 acre field at Island View. Central Saanich spend nothing on that land (Appendix 3). This error is so obvious it makes one wonder if anyone read the proposal. Like the strange claim at page 6 that farmland can be used for swimming and recreational hunting! Really? – anyone swimming in a farm dugout takes their life in their hands! – and **recreational hunting** on farmland in the CRD? – did no one read this?

Another example of something that should have been caught, is in the CRD Appendices at page xiv:

Agricultural activities taking place within a CRD foodlands access program would likely mirror existing regional farm practices. Within the CRD, the majority of farms do not include large numbers of animal livestock, although nearly half do have small poultry operations. The 2016 Agricultural Census indicates the following livestock and poultry data for CRD farms:

- ***46% include chickens in their operations (average of approximately 300 birds on those farms, which is considered small scale)***

This is the table where these numbers came from:

Census of Agriculture Data (continued)	2006		2011		2016	
<u>Animals on Farms</u>	Farms	Number	Farms	Number	Farms	Number
Hens & Chickens	382	449,487	456	232,779	465	152,879

The consultant divided 152,879 birds by 465 farms, and concluded that farmers had 300+ bird each. But these numbers cannot be averaged as the consultant did. [Poultry growing in BC is on a quota system](#) for more than 200 birds, and no new quotas is available for Vancouver Island. There are two groups of growers - a few commercial growers who have many thousands of birds, and the rest of us with small flocks. The numbers cannot be averaged, and to say the average farmer has 300 birds and that new entrants may grow 300 too, is plain wrong. Again you have to ask “did no one read this stuff”?

An astonishing omission in the CRD proposal is that there is no projected business plan from the perspective of the proposed entrant farmers. The only numbers that are hinted at are in Table 7

of the main report at page 23. There the report suggests these new farmers will gross \$100,000 on 5 acres, \$50,000 on 20 acres of hay production, and \$500,000 on 80 acres of mixed use. There is nothing to substantiate these high numbers. The authors of this CRD report also did a report to Saanich in 2016 [“District of Saanich Agriculture and Food Security Plan Background Report”](#) that included this table

Table 11. BC Assessment Farm Income Summary – District of Saanich (Jurisdiction 308)

Income Ratio Group	Minimum Income Levels			Grand Total
	\$10,000 (< 0.8 ha or 2 acres)	\$2,500 (0.8 – 4 ha or 2 to 10 acres)	\$2,500+5% (> 4 ha or 10 acres)	
1.000 - 1.249	0	16	3	19
1.250 - 1.499	1	5	1	7
1.5 - 1.749	0	9	2	11
1.75 - 1.999	0	3	2	5
2.000 - 2.999	1	7	0	8
3.000 - 4.999	0	4	4	8
5.000 - 9.999	1	2	3	6
>=10.000	1	3	2	6
	4	50	17	71

To get farm status, farms must achieve minimum gross income levels which are set according to their size. Under 2 acres is \$10,000; between 2-10 acres is \$2,500; and more than 10 acres is \$2,500 plus 5% of the land value. Looking at the middle column of farms between 2-10 acres, the first row shows that 16 farms (32%) only did between 1 – 1.249 of their minimum, ie between \$2,500 - \$3,122 (1.249 x \$2,500). And at the high end of the scale, **only 3 farms out of 50 did more than \$25,000 (10 x \$2,500).**

In other words, this table says that **94% of the Saanich farms between 2-10 acres, achieved less than \$25,000 in gross income.** Yet the same authors in the CRD proposal now suggest a new farmer with no experience will gross \$100,000 on 5 acres!

It may be that some entrepreneurs will achieve higher income by value adding – like making jam from berries, or establishing a produce box business, but value added does not count as farm income.

I have seen the sample letter that CRFair is asking people to send to you, but CRFair themselves say on their website:

In the Capital Region, most of our food providers continue to struggle with economic viability. We are blessed with rich alluvial soils and a favourable growing climate that can produce food year round. ***Despite these advantages, competition with "cheap foods" from global sources has led to a decline in our ability to support local infrastructure and capacity to maintain a secure regional food supply.*** [my emphasis]

<http://www.crfair.ca/new-page>

If the established, experienced farmers are struggling, how do we expect inexperienced entrant farmers to survive? The CRD report says that farmers are getting older – that is because their kids are smart enough to see there is no financial return for the hard work that farming requires!

Consider this quote from the 2004 [“A baseline assessment of food security in British Columbia’s Capital Region”](#)

... Canadians have become so accustomed to paying a minimal amount for food that farmers now spend 86 cents in operating expenses for every dollar they make from receipts of agricultural products ...

This is what the Stats Canada report said of total gross farm receipts

Census of Agriculture Data		2006	2011	2016
Total Farmland Area ⁵	ha	13,563	13,606	13,265
Number of Farms	#	991	1,093	1,003
Average Farm Size	ha	13.7	12.4	13.2
Total Farm Operators	#	1,430	1,660	1,495
Total Farm Capital		\$958,435,626	\$1,573,835,484	\$1,398,032,746
Total Gross Farm Receipts		\$54,261,663	\$50,874,004	\$64,588,697

It won't be good math but think about this: If 1,495 farmer operators gross \$64,588,697, the baseline report above suggests they will net only \$6,048 per operator. ($\$64,588,697 \times .14 / 1,495$). The math can be challenged, and the large commercial farmers will make more, but the point is that most small farmers make little money.

If this proposal were to proceed, the likelihood is the majority of the entrant farmers would fail, and the municipalities would be called on to bail them out. And at the same time, the existing farmers would be harmed from the unfair competition created by taxpayer funds.

That 2004 report [“A baseline assessment of food security in British Columbia’s Capital Region”](#) said on page 7:

In order for local farming to thrive, consumers must pay a price that is reflective of the costs of production – the real cost of food.

There are thousands in need in the Capital Region who cannot pay the cost of produce now, and there lies the conundrum for you:

- **Do you spend public money as suggested by the CRD, to set up entrant farmers who will compete with the existing farmers, and will need consumers to pay higher prices in order for them to survive and therefore put food further from the reach of those in need,**
- **or do you set up a program designed to provide affordable nutritious food for those in need?**

I walk the walk. For 26 years I have donated all my farm produce to those in need, and I believe that is where our resources should be applied. I will write a separate letter with ideas for that.

I recommend you reject the proposal by the CRD for an NGO administered farmland trust

- it is factually inaccurate;
- it is reliant on grants from other agencies which are not guaranteed
- it can only succeed if food prices are driven up in the Capital Region
- no business case has been made for the entrant farmers, and the likelihood is they will fail
- it would use tax payer funds to harm the existing farmers, many of whom are struggling
- and it talks as if it will magically create farmland from thin air, but that farmland already exists in public hands and is protected by Council and by the province under the ALR

I recommend you support the intent originally envisaged by the municipalities for

the creation of a regional farm land trust and farm land acquisition fund to acquire a supply of land for lease to farmers, including incubator farm plots for new farmers.

with the clarification that this be a passive farmland trust run by the CRD staff, and there be no administration of the leased land other than in the normal role of landlord..

Yours truly,

Jason Austin
Lamont Road,
Saanichton

Appendices below:

Appendix 1 - Past municipal support for a land bank

February 2014 Central Saanich

1. *Building on the existing regional water service, continue to provide farms with bulk water at reduced rates and support expansion of the water delivery system where it can be demonstrated to support local food production and processing;*
2. *Support, through prioritized regional gas tax funding, agricultural drainage infrastructure projects that demonstrate a benefit for local food production;*
3. *Ensure that regional composting of organic waste protects the agricultural land base, and provide a mechanism for farms to access compost at a bulk rate that is affordable in the quantities necessary to enhance farm soils for food production;*
4. *Create a regional office for agricultural extension and business development to support innovation and growth in local food production, processing and marketing, with a mandate to focus on the following:*
 - a) *Regional food distribution;*
 - b) *Regional processing and storage infrastructure*
 - c) *Support for institutional purchasing of local products*
 - d) *Support for innovation and funding (navigating provincial and federal funding programs); and,*
 - e) *Collection and analysis of data on regional farming.*

Furthermore, Council suggests the CRD seek funding from the Province to support the creation of this regional office and the Ministry of Agriculture has indicated interest in exploring this model if there is regional support.

In addition, the District reiterates its request for the CRD to support the following (as initially requested in 2011)::

5. *Create a regional farm land trust and farm land acquisition fund to acquire a supply of land for lease to farmers, including incubator farm plots for new farmers;*
6. *Create a farmland-wildlife stewardship programme to pay farmers for providing ecological goods and services, and establish a regional levy to fund the programme; and,*
7. *Guide institutions (universities, school districts, health care facilities, local governments, etc.) within the region to adopt procurement policies to buy locally produced food by investigating legal hurdles and providing examples of approaches that have proven successful.*

2014 July Town of Sidney

WHEREAS the Capital Region is working to support agriculture and farming through the Regional Sustainability Strategy and the Regional Food Systems Sub-Strategy;

AND WHEREAS individual municipalities have begun efforts to work regionally to support these aims;

BE IT RESOLVED that the Town of Sidney work in concert with the CRD and other regional municipalities to support a regional farm trust and farm land acquisition fund to acquire a supply of farm land, and including land already acquired, for lease to farmers, including incubator farm plots for new farmers;

AND FURTHER RESOLVED that the CRD Board be notified of this resolution and encouraged to work actively toward this initiative.

2014 October North Saanich

That Council direct staff to send a letter of support to the CRD and other municipalities to consider establishing a regional farmland trust and farmland acquisition fund.

2016 September North Saanich

The District comments on the Strategy's recommendations and actions in context of the following District of North Saanich Strategic Plan objectives:

To enhance protection of regional rural and agricultural municipalities and public agricultural holdings in the region with a farm land acquisition program.

and

Draft Food and Agriculture Strategy

The District supports the Strategy recommendations and actions and encourages the CRD to strengthen the actions needed to achieve the following:

- a. Food Security & Production - encourage the development of a regional agriculture plan which improves food security and production and discourage non-farm use of agriculture land, including federally owned crown land; and make regional food trust a high priority;
- b. Economic support – encourage the CRD to support farmers and local governments with marketing, drainage and wildlife control and water rates; and
- c. Partnerships –improve the CRD capacity to address regional issues such as supporting a regional agrologist specific to the region and support the CRD to find a solution to lack of cattle abattoir and other related farming infrastructure, in the region or on the island.

Thank you for considering our comments on the Food and Agriculture Section and the draft Food and Agriculture Strategy. The District supports consistent regional direction to strengthen the food and agricultural sector.

2016 December Saanich

Exploration of Farmland Trusts

This letter confirms that at their meeting held December 12, 2016, Council considered the Capital Regional Food and Agriculture Initiatives Roundtable (CRFAIR) "Findings Report – Exploring Farm and Food Lands Access in the CRD: A Local Government Farmland Trust Approach" and resolved as follows:

"That Council:

1. *Receive, with thanks, the Capital Regional Food and Agriculture Initiatives Roundtable (CRFAIR) "Findings Report – Exploring Farm and Food Lands Access in the CRD: A Local Government Farmland Trust Approach" for information;*
2. *Request that the CRD Board refer the development of a regional farmland trust to the proposed Regional Food Security Task Force as a priority initiative; and*
3. *Support continued work to explore a farmland trust in the Capital Regional District, through participation in the proposed "Capital Region Food and Agriculture Strategy Plan" companion Task Force."*

017 September North Saanich

23-AAC DISCUSSION: The Agricultural Advisory Commission agrees in principle with the idea of farmland trust and recommends to Council that the District of North Saanich work in concert with the CRD and other regional municipalities to support a regional farm trust and farm land acquisition fund to acquire a supply of farm land, including land already acquired, for lease to farmers at fair market value, and incubator farm plots for new farmers provided that the regional farm trust and farmland acquisition fund address the following concerns:

- full public consultation process on all acquisitions and expenses;
- a cap to be set on taxpayer funding;
- possible unfair competition of existing local farmlands must be addressed in a fair and equitable way; and
- a management and sound business plan must be presented.

And, further resolved that the CRD Board be notified of this resolution and encouraged to work actively toward this initiative.

Food and farmland trusts provide long-term protection of farmland and are one mechanism used to help farmers secure affordable, long-term land tenures in the face of increasing land prices. They are voluntary agreements involving the sale or donation of property or a perpetual conservation covenant by a will/ estate of a land owner to a government agency (e.g., District of North Saanich) or a private, non-for-profit land trust organization (e.g., Salt Spring Island Farmland Trust) and are intended to complement the existing provincially designated Agricultural Land Reserve.

A food and farmland trust can also broaden its mandate to help strengthen the economic viability of local agriculture by:

- 1) becoming the coordinating body to promote and develop economic opportunities for local farmers;
- 2) increasing local agricultural training and mentoring opportunities for existing and new farmers;
- 3) supporting the implementation of beneficial farm management practices; and
- 4) advocating for policies to preserve and enhance regional agriculture.

A broader mandate for the proposed trust would not only be consistent with the "North Saanich Agricultural Plan", it would also be consistent with the "Whole Community Agriculture Strategy" and "The Economic Development Strategy for Agriculture in North Saanich." Thus, the AAC and Staff are in support of the concept of a regional food and farmland trust and acquisition fund and fully support feasibility and further exploration moving forward of this important mechanism to increase land access in the CRD.

A broader mandate for the proposed trust would not only be consistent with the "North Saanich Agricultural Plan", it would also be consistent with the "Whole Community Agriculture Strategy" and "The Economic Development Strategy for Agriculture in North Saanich." Thus, the AAC and Staff are in support of the concept of a regional food and farmland trust and acquisition fund and fully support feasibility and further exploration moving forward of this important mechanism to increase land access in the CRD.

Appendix 2 - Percentage of land in the ALR that is productive

The CRD proposal claims that only 50% of the ALR land in the Capital Region is productive, and quotes the BC Ministry of Agriculture as the source of this. This is an extract from the CRD proposal:

Farmland Productivity

Only 50% of the CRD's ALR is in production⁴. The underutilization of farmland, both now and in the future, is a lost regional opportunity. With over 50% of the

⁴ BC Ministry of Agriculture, 2016. Agriculture in Brief, Census of Agriculture, British Columbia Provincial Profile.

This is not correct.

Here are tables from the [BC Ministry of Agriculture analysis of the 2016 agricultural census of the Capital Region](#). For brevity I have only shown what I believe is relevant. See the link for the whole table.



Jurisdictional Makeup

Member Municipalities: Central Saanich, Colwood, Esquimalt, Highlands, Juan de Fuca, Langford, Metchosin, North Saanich, Oak Bay, Saanich, Saltspring Island, Sidney, Sooke, Southern Gulf Islands, Victoria & View Royal.

Population (2016) ¹	#	383,360
Jurisdictional Land Area ²	ha	234,049
Agricultural Land Reserve (2017) ³	ha	16,396
Population Increase (2011-2016) ⁴	#	23,369

Census of Agriculture Data		2006	2011	2016	Share of B.C. 2016
Total Farmland Area ⁵	ha	13,563	13,606	13,265	0.5%
Number of Farms	#	991	1,093	1,003	5.7%
Average Farm Size	ha	13.7	12.4	13.2	na
Total Farm Operators	#	1,430	1,660	1,495	5.7%
Total Farm Capital		\$958,435,626	\$1,573,835,484	\$1,398,032,746	3.7%
Total Gross Farm Receipts		\$54,261,663	\$50,874,004	\$64,588,697	1.7%
Total Number of Employees	#	na	2,044	1,355	3.0%

Farmland Use	ha	13,563	13,606	13,265	0.5%
Crops ⁶	ha	3,858	4,752	4,464	0.8%
Summerfallow	ha	23	37	76	1.4%
Tame or Seeded Pasture	ha	1,061	1,647	1,420	0.7%
Natural Land for Pasture	ha	3,773	2,560	3,760	0.3%
All Other Land ⁷	ha	4,847	4,610	3,545	1.0%

End Notes

1 Source: Statistics Canada. Census of Population.

2 Source: Statistics Canada, Geosuite: <http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/geo/index-eng.cfm>

3 Source: Adapted from Agricultural Land Commission. Agricultural Land Reserve as of January 1, 2008 (for 2006) & April 1, 2012 (for 2011) & April 2017 (for 2016)

4 Source: Adapted from Statistics Canada. Censuses of Population.

5 Total farmland area includes both workable and non-workable land on farm operations in B.C.

6 Crops include hay crops, field crops, field vegetables, fruits and nuts, sod and nursery products.

7 Other farmland area includes: woodland, wetlands, Christmas tree land, land on which farm buildings, barnyards, lanes, home gardens, greenhouses and mushroom houses are located, and idle land.

8 Does not include those crop areas suppressed to meet the confidentiality requirements of the Statistics Act.

9 The "number of farms reporting" may not equal the sum of the parts because farms reporting more than one category (or activity) are only counted once.

This table shows the 2016 total farmland area is 13,265 ha and the area of the ALR is 16,396 ha. **This suggests that 81% of the ALR is productive.**

I emailed the author of the proposal and asked why the report said only 50% of the farm land is productive when the statistics show 81%. The answer given was:

*The numbers in the agricultural census indicate 16,396 ha ALR as you note. Under Total Farmland Area, we subtract the subcategory of "All Other Land" which includes woodlands, wetlands, and other non-farmable areas (see Footnote 7 of that Ag in Brief document). When that adjustment is made you get 53% productivity in 2006, **59% in 2016**. I still think this is an overestimation, as per Footnote 5, which explains that the total Farmland Area (13,265 ha) includes both workable and non-workable land. However, it's the best figures we have, short of a full Agricultural Land Use Inventory. Interestingly, this is one of the last regions in the province to conduct an Agricultural Land Use Inventory. [my emphasis]*

This answer is troubling.

1. The CRD proposal stated it was the BC Ministry of Agriculture who said that only 50% of the ALR is productive. **They did not.** On the face of it, the Ministry data shows that **81%** of the ALR is productive. It appears that the claim that 50% of the ALR is unproductive was simply plucked from the air.
2. In the response above, the statement was made: "... we subtract the subcategory of "All Other Land" which includes woodlands, wetlands, **and other non-farmable areas**". This was not accurate either and the example given was misleading. Following is the Note 7 to the Ministry data – nothing is said about "non-farmable":

*7. "Other farmland area" includes: **woodland**, wetlands, **Christmas tree land**, land on which farm buildings, **barnyards**, lanes, home gardens, **greenhouses** and **mushroom houses** are located, and idle land.*

Far from being "non-farmable", the category of "All other land" includes some of the most intensely productive land in the ALR – chicken barns, green houses, and mushroom barns. Woodland and Christmas tree land are productive farm uses. Home gardens are productive. None of this should be deducted from the calculation of productivity.

This discussion only addresses the false claim in the CRD report that the BC Ministry of Agriculture said that 50% of the ALR land is not productive. What this discussion does not address, is if the use made of the farmland is the highest and best use of that farmland. You only have to look around to see that the bulk of the farmland is in grass, and not in food crops. That is another issue.

3. Apples and oranges

The discussion above followed the direction used in the CRD proposal of dividing the farmed area by the area of the ALR. But even this was wrong because these data sets are coming from different sources and the numbers speak of different things.

Population (2016) ¹	#	383,360
Jurisdictional Land Area ²	ha	234,049
Agricultural Land Reserve (2017) ³	ha	16,396
Population Increase (2011-2016) ⁴	#	23,369

Census of Agriculture Data		2006	2011	2016	Share of B.C. 2016
Total Farmland Area ⁵	ha	13,563	13,606	13,265	0.5%

The BC Agriculture web pages shows the ALR data came from the ALC

³ Source: Adapted from Agricultural Land Commission. Agricultural Land Reserve as of January 1, 2008 (for 2006) & April 1, 2012 (for 2011) & April 2017 (for 2016).

And the total farmland area and numbers below that came from Statistics Canada.

Source: Statistics Canada and Adapted from Statistics Canada. Census of Agriculture, 2006, 2011, 2016, unless otherwise specified.

These are not the same thing.

- **The ALR area in the Capital Region** is measured by the BC Assessment Authority regardless of what is on it. Below is a map of the [ALR lands in Central Saanich](#) Notice the ALR area in Central Saanich includes two First Nations reserves, several municipal parks such as Centennial Park, and even the high school at Stelly's.
- **The “Total Farmland Area”** is the total farmland area in the Capital Region as self reported by farmers to Statistics Canada. Some small amount of this reported farmland lies outside the ALR boundaries.

In other words, the ALR area of 16,396ha appears to be significantly inflated by First Nations Reserves, municipal parks, and schools, none of which are seriously intended to be farmed. I have asked BC Assessment Authority and the Agricultural Land Reserve for confirmation that these areas were counted in the ALR area measured as 16,396ha, but have not heard back yet. If they were, then the productivity ratio would rise substantially when they were removed.

The “Total Farmland Area” includes some farms outside the ALR boundaries. I suspect this will not be significant but it should be known.

CORPORATION OF THE DISTRICT OF CENTRAL SAANICH

ZONING MAP - SCHEDULE 1 OF BYLAW #909

Legend:

- A-1 Agriculture
- A-2 Farmland Agriculture
- A-3 Soil Conservation Agriculture
- A-4 Recreational Agriculture
- A-5 Veterinary Agriculture
- A-6 Agriculture
- C-1 Core Commercial
- C-2 Arterial Commercial
- C-3 Neighbourhood Commercial
- C-4 Neighbourhood Commercial (Amended)
- C-5 Service Station Commercial
- C-6 Neighbourhood Commercial
- C-7 Marine Commercial
- C-8 Tourist Commercial
- C-9 Tourist Display
- C-10 Commercial Garden, Nursery/Residential
- CD-1 Comprehensive Development Zone 1
- CD-2 Comprehensive Development Zone 2
- CD-3 Comprehensive Development Zone 3
- CD-4 Comprehensive Development Zone 4
- CD-5 Comprehensive Development Zone 5
- CD-6 Comprehensive Development Zone 6
- CD-7 Comprehensive Development Zone 7
- CD-8 Comprehensive Development Zone 8
- I-1 Light Industrial
- I-2 Extraction Industrial
- P-1 General Institutional
- P-1A Neighbourhood Institutional
- P-12 Community Institutional
- P-13 Public Institutional
- P-2 Parks and Open Space
- P-3 Public Open Space
- R-1 Residential Single Detached
- R-2 Residential Single Detached
- R-3 Residential Single Detached
- R-4 Residential Single Detached
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Appendix 3 - Cost to Central Saanich to maintain the 18 acres at Island View Road

The CRD report states at page 20:

*... the annual maintenance activities associated with a 19-acre field adjacent to Island View Park in Central Saanich includes mowing, ditch clearing, and routine maintenance (e.g., fencing inspections and repairs) and currently amounts to approximately **\$3,400 per acre** per year, or **\$64,600 per year for the whole 19-acre site**.*

And at page 28 states

*Local case studies identify the costs incurred to maintain public lands “as-is” currently range from \$360 to **\$3,400 per acre per year**, depending on the site characteristics and the level of public access. These figures should be kept in mind when considering investment levels associated with the costs of running a farmland access program.*

And elsewhere it uses this \$3,400 per acre per year, to say in effect that municipalities are spending up to this \$3,400 per acre each year so it won't really cost them much to give the land to the proposed Farmland trust.

The reality is that Central Saanich spends nothing on this 18 acre field (not 19 acres as said in the report). Central Saanich acquired this property for free as part of an approval for an upland subdivision. The land is not drained. The fences have not been touched in years. And a neighbouring farmer cuts the grass for nothing. On the south and east sides of the field is a major drainage ditch that serves the upland areas as far away as Welch Road, but this has nothing to do with the field. The ridiculous number of \$64,600 should have raised an alarm with the consultant. And everyone at the CRD knows there is no work to this field, so how could this major error have come uncaught through the Committee stage and then the full CRD board? It would seem that no one bothered to read the proposal.



Addressing Food Security in the Capital Region - May 3, 2019

My name is Jason Austin. I am a retired CPA and now an active farmer on 5 acres in Central Saanich. For the last 26 years I have donated my farm produce to the food banks.

I was the largest provider of fresh produce to the food banks in the Capital Region in 2018, sending in 42,000 lbs.

Much is said about food security and I have seen complex and wordy definitions, but these cloud the issue as they become so vague they are meaningless. I believe a clearer goal can be set by the CRD that is understood and capable of measurement.

“That affordable, nutritious food be available to all people in the Capital Region.”

Yesterday I recommended rejection of a CRD proposal for an NGO administered farm land trust program that would entail substantial sums of public funds to set up entrant farmers in competition with existing farmers. The administration costs were high, and also public funds should not be used for the benefit of one group against another.

The use of public funds can, however, have a positive effect where they link different segments of the economy.

The invisible poor

In Victoria we have the visibly addicted and poor, such as the clients served by Our Place. But in much greater numbers throughout the region are the invisible poor – those we might pass on the street and not realize the difficulty they have to pay rent, to buy the necessities for life, and their inability to afford fresh, nutritious produce.

Our motto in Central Saanich is “The land of plenty”, yet that is an obscene mockery when food prices are beyond the reach of our people.

The support agencies

There are many support agencies ranging from the highly visible like Mustard Seed, Our Place, and Salvation Army, to smaller ones like Rainbow Kitchen, Living Edge, St Vincent de Paul, Womens transition House, Gateway Baptist, to mention just a few.

What they have in common is the unrelenting poverty their clients face, and the almost hopelessness to help them escape from that. In too many cases their best hope is that poverty

can be made enduring. I have had interactions with some groups over the years and I don't know how they or their clients manage to face each day.

Even though these agencies receive grants they almost never have sufficient fresh food available for their clients, and another common element they share is the uncertainty over food supplies – many operate day by day.

The farmers

Many of our farmers are struggling. Growing food is the easy part. The tough part is the low price of imported produce; there is the difficulty to get a buyer when that crop is ready, and if there is no buyer then either the crop is lost or it has to go into cold storage which most small farmers do not have. Likewise the buyers prefer to buy from a few large farmers instead of many small farmers. Also the public expect “perfect” produce without blemishes, and reject food with a blemish even though it is disease free and nutritious.

This should be understood clearly – there are many small farmers in the Capital Region willing and capable to grow food, but who are not growing now mostly because of the difficulty to sell the produce.

In other words, we have the paradox where members of our society cannot afford fresh nutritious food, and farmers who can grow the food but have no easy access to market.

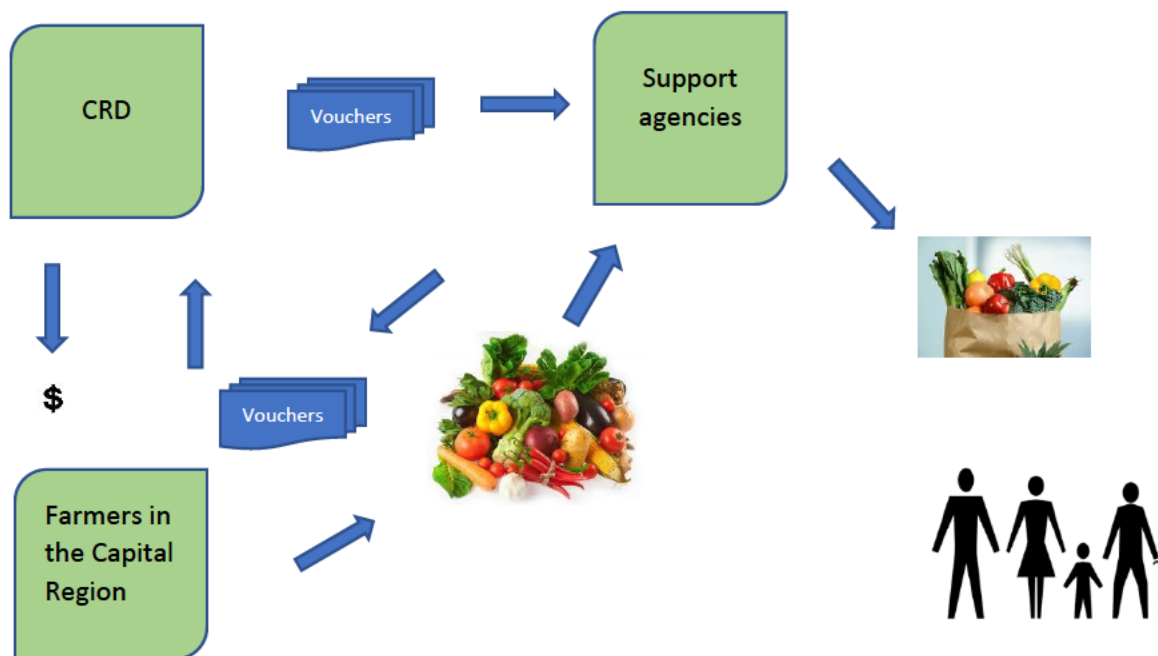
The CRD can be the link between them.

The difficulty with many CRD programs is that the administration costs tend to be very high.

A solution would be a CRD Farm Voucher Program.

On a Farm Voucher program, the CRD would provide a fixed sum each year in “Farm Vouchers”, say \$500,000.

The Farm Vouchers could be allocated each year by a small committee to the support agencies, who would then use them to buy fresh produce from farmers only in the Capital Region and distribute it to their clients. The farmers would redeem the Farm Stamps from the CRD.



- It would cost virtually nothing to set up and nothing to administer.
- This would provide fresh nutritious produce to those in need to all areas of the Capital Region
To put land into production that is not farmed now, the program would need to be directed to the small farmers.
- It would keep the money in the Capital Region
- It would not disrupt other segments of the economy such as the grocery chains because the fresh produce would be going to those who cannot afford to buy from the stores. For the same reason this would not affect the operations of the larger farmers who sell to the grocery chains.
- There would be minimal administration for the CRD - just the accounts payable department to redeem the Farm Stamps as they come in
- The agencies would be able invite bids from farmers to grow for them to meet their needs – specific crops at specific times, and specific wholesale prices.
- It will help preserve the food security of the region.

The key is to keep it simple with minimal administrative overhead.

Jason Austin
Lamont Road,
Saanichton

Subject: To Mayor & Council - letters re CRD Farmlands Trust proposal

From: Jason Austin [REDACTED]

Date: 5/05/2019, 5:21 pm

To: "Mayor and. Council" <mayorandcouncil@metchosin.ca>

Dear Mayor & Council,

Attached is a second letter I sent Council on May 3rd that I understand may not have reached you yet. This second letter was referenced in my first letter, and ideally should be read with it.

In my second letter to Council, I describe the hardship faced by so many in our Region who cannot afford the rising food prices. I describe the small farmers of our region who are willing to grow food but have no market for it. I said ***"we have the paradox where members of our society cannot afford fresh nutritious food, and farmers who can grow the food but have no easy access to market."*** And then I considered the millions the CRD would have the municipalities pay to set the entrant farmers up to fail, and the logical solution is clear. Let the CRD create **annual farm vouchers** that would be allocated to the many support agencies, that those agencies could use to buy food from small farmers at wholesale prices for their clients. **This will provide fresh, nutritious produce to those in need in the Capital Region and stimulate our small farming sector, leading to improved food security.** I suggested \$500,000 because that was one of the cost numbers in the CRD proposal, but **a starting number of \$200,000 would be more realistic** to begin with.

Since writing that second letter I have become aware of more information that members of Council and the CRD should know of.

1. Farm productivity is based on the "farmable" ALR area, not the gross ALR area.

The ALC has confirmed that the measurement of the ALR does include the "non-farmable" areas in Central Saanich like municipal parks, most of the two First Nations reserves, and even the high school. That ALC email is attached. I suspect now that the gross ALR area also includes the *roads* that are within the ALR boundaries, so I have gone back to the ALC to confirm this. What this means is the farming productivity per centage should not be measured by the area farmed divided by the area of the ALR but by the area farmed divided by the farmable area of the ALR. In Central Saanich alone, the non-farmable areas in the ALR may be at least 450ha. And when calculated on a regional basis, I expect the farming productivity may be 85% or more.

2. Setting up the entrant farmers to fail

I have been critical that the CRD report did not provide a study showing the reasonable expectations of the entrant farmer program. After all, these entrant farmers were supposed to be saving the food security for the region at a likely cost to the municipalities in the millions. Instead, the CRD report at Table 7, floated unrealistically high possible gross sales receipts, \$100,000 for 5 acres being one of them.

In my first letter I pointed to a 2016 study for the Corporation of Saanich by the same authors that showed **94% of the farmers in the 2-10 acres size in Saanich had gross income less that \$25,000.**

I have now found **a 2011 report done for Central Saanich** that confirms the 2016 Saanich study:

2.4 Revenue Characteristics of Census Farmers

Over 50% of farms are less than 10 acres in size, 62% generate less than \$10,000 in gross farm receipts (GFRs) annually, and occupy less than 15% of the farmland base. This under \$10,000 category accounted for about \$1 million (5.4%) of the total GFRs generated in the District. Farming enterprises generating between \$10,000 and \$50,000 in GFRs annually are estimated to account for about \$13 million of annual GFRs in Central Saanich. There is also a smaller percentage of farming enterprises (14%) that generated more than \$100,000 in GFRs and contributed farm revenues of about \$4.5 million in 2006. ***However, as a whole, the CS agricultural sector barely covered direct expenses, generated little gross margin and no return on investment (All Farms- 0.1%, in the Figure below). This situation has not changed to the present.***

https://www.centralsaanich.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/documents/agricultural_area_plan_0.pdf

That last sentence about farming in **Central Saanich** is worth repeating for the benefit of anyone who thinks the CRD proposal may be a good plan:

... as a whole, the CS agricultural sector barely covered direct expenses, generated little gross margin and no return on investment.

There you have separate consultants for both Saanich and Central Saanich, examining real data, saying that small scale farming here is not profitable.

Anyone who supports the CRD proposal either has a vested interest in it, or has not examined it with care. On the other hand, for a fraction of the cost, a CRD Farm Voucher program will benefit those in need in the Capital Region, and it will stimulate the region's small farmers leading to improved food security - a double benefit for the same funds.

Yours truly

Jason Austin
Lamont Road
Saanichton

— Attachments: —

ALC email May 3 2019.pdf	1.1 MB
Addressing Food Security in the Capital Region.pdf	198 KB

Subject: CRD Farmlands Trust proposal
From: Jason Austin [REDACTED]
Date: 10/06/2019, 3:53 pm
To: "Mayor and. Council" <mayorandcouncil@metchosin.ca>

The Mayor & Council, and the Parks Committee
Metchosin

I have written to you previously about the CRD farmlands trust proposal. I gave detailed reasons in that previous correspondence, but in a nutshell it is based on the false claim that 50% of the farmland in the ALR is not utilized, and it calls on municipalities to spend millions in providing land and equipment for entrant farmers, despite all the evidence showing that small scale farmers make no money and that these entrant farmers will inevitably fail. Here are more examples of well known farms in difficulty:

Newman Farm The CRD proposal makes mention of **Newman Farm operated by the Farmlands Trust**, but did not tell you that the Farmlands Trust pays no rent yet still approaches Central Saanich for grants. Central Saanich declined, and **in April 2019 the Farmlands Trust informed the District it wished to decline agricultural management of the central portion of Newman Farm.** <https://centralsaanich.civicweb.net/document/82738/NFAPC%20Minutes%202019Apr24%20draft.docx?handle=C519CF6F7BE84DF8A5D49A2285A0CF66>

Hope Farm in Duncan. 36 acres, owned by Mustard Seed since 2008 has been bleeding money. Mustard Seed is now seeking a consultant to help turn it around, and here is part of their terms of reference for the consultant (my red emphasis):

Hope Farm has engaged in a variety of social enterprises over the years. These include raising and selling pork, chicken and duck (ongoing), selling chicken eggs (ongoing), selling food boxes, produce sales, u-pick and, most recently, selling The Mustard Seed Coffee Company coffee (ongoing). There are 4 buildings on the farm including a 10,000sq ft warehouse - 25% of which is currently leased by another non-profit in the region.

As of 2019, the recovery program and farming activities have covered only 41% of the overall operating budget for Hope Farm.

https://www.glassdoor.ca/job-listing/hope-farm-consultant-the-mustard-seed-street-church-JV_IC2302451_KO0,20_KE21,51.htm?jl=3236357897

Top down interference by the CRD in the farming economy is doomed to expensive failure.

There are however, practical actions the CRD can do to promote farming in the CRD. These are just a few:

1. Water for agriculture. Climate change is coming with the prediction that the Capital Region will experience longer, hotter and drier growing seasons. The longer and hotter season will be beneficial to

most farmers, but they will need much more water for agriculture. Much, much more water, at affordable rates, and this can only come from the CRD. **It is vital the CRD has that water available for agricultural use at affordable rates in the medium term.**

2. Temporary labour. There is no supply of farm labour for the small farmers. Larger farmers can afford the expense and the difficulties of meeting the Federal requirements to bring in temporary workers, but small farmers can't. The rules are so restrictive, that the larger farmers cannot even hire out their temporary foreign workers to the small farmers. **The CRD can lobby the provincial and federal governments to ease the restrictions on temporary foreign farm workers to allow the larger farmers to hire out their workers to bonafide small farmers.**

3. Abattoirs. Farmers used to be able to slaughter on their own premises and sell at the farm gate. That was disallowed some years ago, but there are no abattoirs available locally, so those farmers have either gone out of business or had the added expense of having to ship their animals long distances for slaughter. **The CRD can invite discussions with farmers about the slaughter of their livestock, and, if convinced, could lobby the provincial government to allow slaughter on the farmer's premises as before.**

It is not possible for the CRD proposal to succeed, and from what I hear they are becoming aware of that. My suggestion is Council refer this back to the CRD with the recommendation that the CRD invite input from the farmers of the region on how best the CRD can help the farming sector.

Sincerely,

Jason Austin

PENINSULA NEWS REVIEW

Seeds of dissent growing on Peninsula farms

Nick Murray

Jun 10, 2019 5:00 AM



A 2010 report suggests 80 per cent of farmers in the Cowichan Valley grossed less than \$25,000 and 90 per cent less than \$100,000. (Black Press File)

Following the Capital Regional District's (CRD) attempts to start a "foodland trust," a consultants' report has been sent to municipalities, which some Peninsula farmers say is flawed.

Establishing a land trust has been part of the CRD's food and agriculture strategy as they want to secure land solely for agriculture, encourage new farmers and provide future food security, with Peninsula municipalities joining together to add appropriate land to the trust.

ALSO READ: [Foodlands trusts help break down farming barriers: study](#)

The CRD committee overseeing the process accepted the Foodlands Access Program Feasibility Study and sent it to municipalities, with responses expected by July.

Opponents of the report question assertions regarding the use and productivity of the land, and especially the aim to assist entry-level farmers. The cost of the project is likely to be around \$100,000–\$120,000 per year, for the municipalities to cover long-term. This would include preparing the land, buying machinery and providing a website and advertising budget for the rookie farmers, which would appear to pit them against already squeezed local farmers.

Jason Austin of Gatton House Farm reflects the misgivings of many in the community.

“The CRD proposed that the municipalities and others spend millions to set up a handful of entrant farmers, and to continue to subsidize them into the future, yet in 2010, 90 per cent of all farmers on Vancouver Island grossed less than \$100,000 before expenses. Despite the huge expense of taxpayer money there is little chance these entrant farmers would survive.”

ALSO READ: [Saanich council nourishes regional foodland trust with unanimous endorsement](#)

The *News Review* has seen 2010 figures from the Cowichan Valley suggesting that before expenses, 80 per cent of farmers grossed less than \$25,000 and 90 per cent less than \$100,000. Members of the agricultural community say these figures are largely echoed on the Peninsula, with a Central Saanich (CS) report from 2011 stating “..as a whole, the CS agricultural sector barely covered direct expenses, generated little gross margin and no return on investment.” In 2016, the same authors of the CRD report wrote one for Saanich called “District of Saanich Agriculture and Food Security Plan Background Report” that seemed to suggest 94 per cent of farms between two and 10 acres grossed less than \$25,000. This appears to be in stark contrast to the CRD report, which predicts new farmers will be able to make \$100,000 gross sales on just five acres.

Other misgivings persist, such as the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR) designation in Central Saanich, which includes the municipal parks, both First Nations land reserves and even a high school. As a result, opponents of the plan estimate 450 hectares within Central Saanich’s ALR to be unfarmable and are urging a review. The CRD report also contains a number of surprises, saying farmland can be used for hunting and swimming, 50 per cent of farmland in the region is unproductive and Central Saanich spends \$64,600 on its 18-acre field at Island View. Critics say these statements are incorrect, although according to the CRD, the consultants stand by their report.

ALSO READ: [Carbon dioxide at highest levels for over 2.5 million years, expert warns of 100 years of disruption](#)

Generally, farmers seem to be aligned with the CRD’s goal to stimulate agriculture and provide food security, but the disputed information and the aim to set up new farmers has led to calls from some quarters for alternative ideas, such as a farm voucher program.

When contacted, the CRD said nothing had been decided and they were committed to a process of consultation before final recommendations are made. The municipalities are free to opt in or out, with the related costs, of any part of the proposals.

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