



SUMMERLAND REVIEW



COLUMN: Summerland council values local agriculture

Agriculture and agriculture-based businesses and services have long been a strong economic driver

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In 2015 this council publicly and formally showed their commitment to the value of culture by including a fourth 'pillar', in the district's strategic plan.

By doing so, council acknowledged that culture is as essential to a vibrant, healthy community as matters relating to the economy, the environment, and the social wellbeing of residents.

In September 2016, council adopted the community Cultural Plan, a guiding document that, with input from more than 2,500 residents, identifies five key strategic directions.

The strategies build on the community's values (see below) and can guide Summerland's cultural development into the future.

A statement in the Summerland Cultural Plan reads, "The arts; the character of the community; the quality of life; the community's history and heritage; and local agriculture ... are what make the community unique. These [values] are what define Summerland's culture."

Agriculture and agriculture-based businesses and services have long been a strong economic driver in Summerland — this sector is an important and sustaining part of our history.

Some businesses have been here long enough to be considered Summerland 'pioneers' while others are relative newcomers, including the many alcoholic beverage producers.

Community-led initiatives complement and celebrate our agricultural history, too.

Summerland hosts two community markets; farm to table events; and, after a three-year hiatus, we'll enjoy a revitalized Summerland Fall Fair this September.

What do all of these businesses and initiatives have in common?

They are the result of the passionate people who live here.

Through a combination of natural resources (soil, water, climate) and human resources (the hundreds of people who earn a living and/or volunteer in this sector) local agriculture enjoys some very committed champions.

In addition to elevating the importance of recognizing and developing a strong cultural identity in Summerland, council is also playing a role in advancing some regional food initiatives.

In 2017 the Summerland Chamber of Commerce and the district contracted a local consultant to conduct a feasibility study for siting the Okanagan Agriculture Innovation Centre in Summerland.

The vision of the Centre is "to foster and advance innovation and technologies within the agriculture industry to achieve a sustainable, resilient and prosperous regional economy" (Okanagan Agriculture Innovation Centre Feasibility Study, 2017, p. 6)

The feasibility study was well received by the B.C. Ministry of Agriculture and the next step — a business plan — is well underway.

The Okanagan Bioregion Food System Project, a food system project, is a two-year research study being conducted in the three regional districts of the Okanagan-Similkameen.

The Institute for Sustainable Food Systems (ISFS), a research branch of Kwantlen Polytechnic University, leads the project, which is just getting underway.

In collaboration with UBC-Okanagan, regional government staff, producers, First Nations, Okanagan Basin Water Board, Okanagan College and other stakeholders, researchers will gather data on what is occurring in terms of agriculture in the Okanagan.

When the project is completed, policymakers will have quantifiable data on the economic, environmental, and social opportunities of moving to a more regionalized food system.

Although the decision on whether or not to financially support the Okanagan Bioregion Food System Project was made by regional district government (Mayor Peter Waterman and Coun. Boot are RDOS board directors), Summerland council fully supports the project.

As you have read, a lot is going on in Summerland in local agriculture. W

e are fortunate to live in an area with the all resources we need.

We can be leaders in local agriculture—a sustainable sector that is aligned with Summerland's character, enhances our quality of life, and makes our town more resilient.

Toni Boot is a Summerland councillor.

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