

Report to the 2017 BCFGGA Convention

from the

Water and Environment Committee

BC Water Sustainability Act

The Water Sustainability Act was adopted in May 2014. Some regulations have been finalized, including the licensing of ground water, which is water ‘in the ground’. For those who irrigate from wells, there is a dual benefit to licensing the well before December 31, 2017 - a registration fee of \$250 is avoided and priority of use is granted according to the date of first use. There will be an annual fee for irrigation wells - an ‘online water calculator’ is available at <http://www.bcagriculturewatercalculator.ca/> (make sure to ‘zoom in’ until you can see and select your property on the map) - select the crop, soil type, irrigation system, etc, and the calculator will estimate annual water usage for that particular property. Plug this result into the ‘on-line irrigation calculator’ at “water rent and fee calculator” to find out the annual fee for an irrigation well - the site is http://www.env.gov.bc.ca/wsd/water_rights/water_rental_rates/calculator/ The ‘total’ amount includes \$250 in registration fee, which is waived if the well is licensed before December 31, 2017. When we did the calculations, the annual license fee was \$50 for a 10 acre cherry farm and \$80 for a 40 acre cherry farm.

The BCFGGA is organizing workshops on licensing your irrigation well. When you register, we will tell you the information to collect and bring to the workshop. The workshops will be held in computer labs, and you will hopefully leave the workshop with your well registered. The first two workshops are being held March 2 in Penticton - call Brenda Zarr at the BCFGGA office to register for the workshop - 250-762-5226 ext. 1.

The modernizing of the BC Water Act has been a long process and is not over yet. Enabling watershed plans and regional strategies will require significant effort. The Okanagan Water Stewardship Committee of the Okanagan Water Basin Board could play a key role in developing new ways of managing water. Kevin Day is our new representative on the Okanagan Water Stewardship Committee - he has attended a few meetings in 2016 and the BCFGGA will be supporting his greater involvement in the committee.

For more information on the Water Sustainability Act, see <https://engage.gov.bc.ca/watersustainabilityact/>

Environmental Farm Plan

The next Agriculture Policy Framework is being discussed in earnest in 2017, as it's implementation date is April 1, 2018. We would like to see more funding for EFPs, such that there are more eligible projects (Beneficial Management Practices, or BMPs) such as irrigation improvements, pesticide storage sheds, electric pruners (not just the battery), air injections sprayer nozzles, and more. There are three main problems with the program:

1. Growers plan in the winter to initiate projects in the Spring (say, in April - May), but cannot start or receive approval for funding before April 1.
2. There is a mad rush for funding when the funding window opens (usually late and not well advertised) and the funding is used up quickly. The first-come first-serve method of allocating funds may not be best for the program, farms, or the environment.
3. Program funding is disrupted when programs stop and start up again.

So far, there are no solutions to these pan-agriculture problems, but all agriculture organizations will continue to strive to make improvements to the Environmental Farm Program. Support for the EFP resolutions at the Convention will provide us with direction to continue our efforts.

Climate Adaptation in Agriculture

Since 2013, the Climate Change Initiative has taken a region-by-region approach to implementing climate change projects. Last year a number of workshops were held in the Okanagan to focus on the Okanagan Valley's challenges and opportunities. \$300,000.00 has been allocated to Okanagan projects which build adaptive capacity and encourage adoption of effective farm practices to help mitigate impacts related to climate change.

Go to <http://www.bcagclimateaction.ca/regional/okanagan-thompson/> to find out more about the following Okanagan Projects:

1. Okanagan – Decision Support Tool to Improve Local Tree Fruit Management
2. Okanagan – Agriculture Drought Status Outreach
3. Vented Orchard Covers to Protect Cherries Against Rain and Hail
4. Expanding Cherry Production in British Columbia under Climate Change
5. Climate Change Influence on Disease Control Patterns in the Okanagan Tree Fruit Industry

As climate change creates challenges, the agriculture sector will respond - with planning and government programs and funding, we can turn challenges into opportunities.

Respectfully submitted,
Deep Brar, Chair