



The British Columbia Fruit Growers' Association

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NEWS RELEASE
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BC Budget Benefits Tree Fruit and Agriculture Sectors

(Victoria) – The 2015/2016 provincial budget released today in Victoria will provide a number of new program benefits for BC fruit growers and agriculture in general, while maintaining an agriculture budget expenditure at similar levels to prior years.

Primary for the tree fruit sector is the new Replant Program, announced in late November 2014 by Premier Christie Clark. The Replant Program was confirmed in the budget, with a start for the 2015 planting season. The program provides growers with a grant of about 25% of the cost of re-planting orchards to higher-density plantings that are more productive and use less inputs and benefiting the environment. Adoption of new varieties is essential to the industry's strategic plan. "I was very pleased to be in Victoria to express my thanks to the provincial Minister of Agriculture for this important program, which will provide close to \$8.5 million for replant over the next 7 years. This investment helps tree fruit growers sustain their operations, and triggers additional investments in the local economy," commented Fred Steele, President of the BC Fruit Growers' Association after attending the budget presentation in the BC Legislature.

Another initiative of the budget is an additional \$1 million for the BC School Fruit and Vegetable Nutrition Program, providing a benefit for close to half a million school children. All grades K-12 benefit, including First Nations band schools. "Adopting healthy eating habits early, in a learning environment, is very effective. Learning about nutritious fruits and vegetables in a school environment will lead to improved eating habits and better health outcomes, plus it encourages youth to support local agriculture and the local economy," said Steele.

The Buy Local initiative, which promotes consumption of locally produced food, will receive \$2 million in funding. Additionally, a new initiative will be developed to give farmers credit for their philanthropic donation of fruits, vegetables and other foods. "The Minister of Finance clearly wants to help the agriculture sector promote its products and develop an even larger contribution to the provincial economy," said Steele.

Other initiatives that will benefit agriculture include placing resources (\$25 million over 3 years) to support the new Water Sustainability Act, which will modernize BC' water laws, regulate groundwater (water well) use, and strengthen provincial water management in light of growing demands and climate change all essential to ensuring an affordable, adequate supply of water for growers and other water consumers. Another initiative important to some rural areas is the acceleration of internet provision in rural areas that do not yet have access. Finally, development of a proposed national Cancer Prevention Centre in Vancouver could help promote eating healthy fruit and vegetable foods that reduce cancer rates.

“Overall, for a ‘stand pat’ budget, there is much to be thankful for in the agriculture sector, and this will in turn help tree fruit growers to provide healthy BC products and increase the economic contribution of tree fruits to the local economy,” concluded Steele.

The BCFGA represents 520 commercial tree fruit growers in BC.

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