

Part of the long term solution for a healthy province is an economically, socially and environmentally sustainable agriculture sector.

## A viable and sustainable agriculture & food sector in BC requires:

### A long term provincial food strategy

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Short-term, ad hoc solutions are not enough to create a sustainable agriculture sector. A more holistic approach is required to meet the needs of future generations in BC, Canada, and the world. Government, industry and consumers need to work together to develop a long term agriculture and food strategy for BC.

*What are your party's commitments in regards to developing a long term provincial food strategy for the province of BC?*

### A level tax burden with other jurisdictions

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Agriculture in BC competes in a global marketplace that has more favourable business conditions and public policies for agriculture (i.e. USA, Central/South America, Asia, other parts of Canada). BC is the only jurisdiction with a Carbon Tax on agriculture. The recently tabled budget will rebate 80% of the carbon tax for greenhouse growers and promises to exempt the carbon tax from coloured fuels. But the return to PST could cost BC Farmers & Ranchers between \$15 and \$20M per year and is based on an out-of-date exemption list that is not only discourages innovation, but is also administratively inefficient.

*How will your party reduce the tax burden on the agriculture sector?*

### More consumer support and public recognition.

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BC farmers are losing significant sales to cross border shopping and cheap imports. The public is not fully aware of all the benefits of a viable BC agriculture sector. Changing consumer behaviour is a long term exercise that needs a long term commitment.

*What will your party do to help promote BC food and agriculture in the long term?*

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## Leading the Way Together

### Vision

Growing British Columbia into the most dynamic and robust agricultural province in Canada.

### Mission

To continually improve the social, environmental, and economic sustainability of B.C. agriculture.

### Mandates

**Advocacy:** Support and lead B.C. farmers and ranchers on key issue for agriculture in B.C.

**Proactive Communication:** Distribute relevant information to increase industry awareness.

**Deliver Resources:** Provide programs, funding, and expertise to enhance the competitiveness, innovation, and viability of B.C. agriculture.

### Objectives

The long-term economic success of B.C. farmers and ranchers.

Successful farms existing in harmony with the environment.

B.C. farms that are a part of and support healthy, vibrant local communities.

## Access to adequate and reliable labour resources.

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Access to labour is one of the most important issues facing the agriculture industry. Agriculture provides employment options to low-skilled and semi-skilled individuals who do not have the ability to move to more technical jobs. However, the provincial employment insurance framework does not acknowledge the seasonality of agriculture sector and discourages workers from seeking employment in agriculture on a consistent basis. BC farm workers should be able to bank all or a portion of their hours during busier seasons so that they would be less dependent on the EI program to fill in when work is not available.

The Seasonal Agriculture Worker Program is an essential federal program that provides much needed foreign labour resources to farmers in BC, but it receives little recognition and support in BC.

*What is your party's intention to recognize the importance of seasonal labour to the agriculture industry in BC?*

## Improved coordination between provincial ministries and agencies, local governments and industry

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The multitude of government regulations and processes regarding agriculture and food are cumbersome for small family farm businesses to manage. The cumulative effect of all of the small issues, such as species at risk, packaging, attacks on farmer's "right to farm", PST, waste management, etc., are especially frustrating the sector. While the Ministry of Agriculture (AGRI) often consults with the sector, there is a feeling of disconnect between policy makers in other ministries and agencies, local governments and farmers. Historically, regional AGRI staff provided assistance to producers in navigating regulations. However, staff cutbacks and reassignments have downloaded public responsibilities to industry. Industry associations are trying to fill in the gaps, but have limited resources to be effective in this role. We need legislation, as exists in other provinces, to allow industry associations to receive resources from government to assist farmers and ranchers to adapt.

In addition, there is a feeling amongst many farmers and ranchers in BC that government is pushing them to use farmland for ecological value rather than farmland value and that AGRI has a diminishing role as a lead on agriculture issues and an advocate for agriculture within government (eg. coordinating conflicting government regulations.)

- 1. How will your party support the integration and harmonization of agri-food policy?*
- 2. What will your party do to help balance the increasing public responsibilities that have been, and continue to be transferred from government to industry?*

## **Inclusion in the Columbia River Treaty review process now underway**

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The value of irrigation water to the US needs to be included in the negotiation of this treaty so that the US pays for the value of these services and that BC's affected crops (tree fruits, potatoes and other field crops) are compensated accordingly.

*What is your party's intention regarding agriculture interests in the negotiation of the Columbia River Treaty?*

## **More support for the Ministry of Agriculture, the Agriculture Land Commission and BC Farm Industry Review Board**

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The BC Ministry of Agriculture (AGRI), the Agricultural Land Commission (ALC) and the BC Farm Industry Review Board (BC FIRB) are key institutions that protect farm land and farmers. They require adequate long term support.

Ministry of Agriculture is a critical delivery agent in extension work to industry. However industry specialists are either under resourced or non-existent, there is a growing gap in both the knowledge transfer of technological advances and the orientation of new entrants. AGRI receives less relative funding than other provinces and this is decreasing. The agriculture industry in BC often feels that that the importance of agriculture is underestimated by the BC government and that government is pushing for the use of farmland for ecological value rather than farmland value.

The ALC Act is an important piece of legislation that is strongly supported by British Columbians. However, this Act, as it is currently written:

- Discourages innovation and entrepreneurship in the agriculture industry
- Fails to provide a clear process for taking land out of ALR and swapping
- Inadequately enforces the illegal dumping of materials on agriculture land
- Provides a perception amongst local governments and developers that the ALR is a reserve of underutilized land.

The BC FIRB plays an important role in administering the Right to Farm Act to protect farmers. But farmers in BC are facing continued pressure from neighbours, even when they are following normal farm practices. The Administrative Tribunals Act came into effect in 2004 and provides tribunals with an increased capability to resolve disputes. These changes still haven't been applied to the BC FIRB under the Act to improve its efficacy, such as increased provisions for summary dismissal and the power to award costs. This lengthy delay is just one example of how agriculture has a low priority in the BC government.

*How will your party support the roles of the BC Ministry of Agriculture, the ALC and BC FIRB to better protect farmland and farmers?*