

Report to the 2023 BCFGGA Convention

From the

Board of Directors

Our Board received the news of our Vice-President's death with shock and sadness. We passed along our condolences to Jeet Dukhia's family after his untimely death on December 14, 2022. Jeet wanted the best for the tree fruit sector. He would want us to continue our BCFGGA efforts and do so with his energy and conviction. So let us carry on and honour his legacy.

I would like to begin by thanking our growers for supporting this valuable organization and for all the hard work you do providing us with healthy nutritional sustenance.

Thank you also to our staff, Sheila MacGregor, CMA accountant (15 years), Bunvir Nijjer, RCIC, Labour Specialist (10 years), Don Magnusson, P.Ag, part time TFPG Publication and Fieldwork (22 years) and our most recent staff member Gail Nelson, Horticulture and Research Projects Manager who started last year.

SIR staff, consultants and Government staff federal and provincial many of whom partake in the Stabilization meetings are also to be recognized as are staff of the cherry and grape associations and our press and reporters who cover and explain our issues to a curious and supportive public.

Thanks as well to Sean Biernes of SVC for doing such a fine job of managing this unique business. Finally I would like to thank our General Manager Glen Lucas P.Ag who will have been with us for 25 years come May. This has been a very difficult and stressful year for Glen whose workload has been greatly increased by our work on the Stabilization Initiative while also keeping the vital functions of our 134 year old grower association operating as smoothly as possible and keeping up with day to day grower concerns and contact.

Shortly after being elected at last year's convention I attended a BCAC function and met briefly with our New Deputy Minister Peter Pokorny who suggested a one on one meeting. In May I had a 2 hour meeting with him in Victoria. I stressed the importance of ending the leftover system as the main plank in our 3 point plan for stabilizing and growing the BC apple industry. I thanked the Deputy Minister for the attention paid to our industry through the Tree Fruit Stabilization Plan but pointed out what we saw as errors, simplifications, misdirection and omissions. I stressed that while the Tree Fruit Stabilization Plan is a good roadmap for an industry moving forward, after so many years of poor market returns what we now have is a car in the ditch with 4 flat tires.

Our next meeting was in the Okanagan. There is a line in the conclusion of the Tree Fruit Stabilization document that states "Progressive and business-oriented farmers will manage to weather the challenges and thrive" In July, Glen, Joginder Dhand and myself toured Deputy Pokorny to the orchards of 3 of the most business savvy and progressive growers we know and they told him unprompted that they were

neither weathering, nor thriving and suggested some level of support was essential if our industry is to weather and thrive.

We also toured him through the Summerland research station research fields and he was impressed with this ongoing federal government investment which is worldwide regarded as a successful form of government leadership. Afterward he attended a meeting and vigorous discussion with our full board.

Following these meetings our frozen competitive funds were thawed and the unspent \$3.5 million was allocated by Ministry staff toward the 19 stabilization plan recommendations.

An Okanagan September meeting with Minister Popham was offered but she was unable to attend due to illness, however it was attended by Deputy Pokorny, Adrian Arts and Arif Lalani. They outlined an investment of a further \$2.5 million, which included money for hiring and educating extension staff, SIR financial support and an apple marketing strategy.

To date it is estimated that between \$6 and \$7 million has been allocated toward assisting our industry and we are thankful for this and the attention from Ministry staff. Speaking of which we now have a recently new and up-to-speed Deputy Minister, 2 recent knowledgeable Assistant Deputy Ministers and a new Minister and I believe we have turned a page in our relations.

The 19 recommendations notwithstanding, the BCFGGA has pushed forward on 3 main planks which we see as essential game changers. Those being; orderly marketing, replant and grower support.

1. On orderly marketing, this area has progressed the most, but a final answer is yet to be determined. We know that the formation of an apple packers group (which we think of as the apple marketers association) has made progress since it was formed in 2022 and grower representatives were recently invited to join. However, it is also known that an apple marketers association alone is not enough to overcome our marketing problems which stem from a lack of accurate shared pricing data and is facilitated by our leftover system where the grower receives what is left after packing and storage. In the next month, a discussion will be held on the hurdles, and the principles and practical tools to make progress on marketing issues. Workshop participants will include packers, the NVDC, BCFGGA, growers and government representatives. We are looking forward to ironing out our differences and getting to a practical solution to ensure that growers get fair pricing for our quality BC apples.
2. On replant, a new sub-committee is meeting for the first time on March 6, 2023. After 2 years of being without this vital incentive program we are still unsure of Ministry thinking in this regard. Will it be like-to-like? Will it allow growers to switch from apples to grapes or cherries? Will it be province wide including blueberries as well as the raspberries and hazelnuts that have had replant these past few years? Will it be adequately funded? We do not know the answer today, but hope to find out soon for a 2024 Replant Program re-launch. The BCFGGA is also considering a limited

BCFGA-funded Replant Program for 2023, under the old criteria, hopefully with the Ministries understanding that this program should have been continued despite our problems and modernization and efficiency cannot wait.

3. Recommendation 12 of the TFISP report states “It is recommended the Ministry of Agriculture and Food investigate opportunities to respond to requests from some organizations to provide one-time support to producers experiencing difficult financial circumstances.” We acknowledge the initiatives to which the province has allocated some funding that would otherwise have come out of growers’ pockets. To this date however we have not seen any movement on our specific request for financial support similar to that received by our foreign competitors. We have asked for a study on the June 30-July 6 Heat Dome impact on 2021 and 2022 tree fruit production and the relative amount of Production Insurance claims for this 1 in 1000 year weather event.

As I stated earlier we have a roadmap but the car is in the ditch and we need to get it fueled up and back on the road. How can this be done with what has been proposed and allocated? We first alerted our Ministry to an apple market failure in early 2018 and since then we have lost 17% of our apple acreage and the growers who remain are in a precarious position. A direct one time payment or credit of some kind is vital. Had we been where we are now, a few years ago we may have been able to “weather the challenges” without it but now it is an absolute necessity. We are not in a position to accept no for an answer on this.

The BCFGGA has been active in other areas. Your directors and staff, though putting priority on the financial crisis in tree fruit, have continued to make progress in important areas:

- The new BCFGGA Business Model implementation continues.
- One-time food safety and crop input incentives were approved for funding by the BCFGGA.
- Gail Nelson, Horticulture and Research Projects Manager was hired.
- A succession plan for our General Manager was agreed upon - it will be a gradual, planned change over a couple of years, not an imminent disjointed transition.
- We are asking for delegate and members support to consider and hopefully support a resolution to permit the sale of the test orchard and invest the funds in a way that will allow the BCFGGA to provide members with more programs as well as help the BCFGGA office to move into something more permanent as the current site is temporary.
- Labour continues to be a priority. Just when you think things are working smoothly, a new regulatory or operational hurdle emerges. I believe I have heard someone say “If there were no problems, I would be out of a job”. Those problem-solvers continue to earn their pay!
- Plans have been made, and soon implemented on new and improved communications with growers. A new website and a new newsletter format and function will be exciting to see.

Our directors and staff are amazing in every sense of the word. Our staff are very stable (though maybe not self-declared geniuses!) and their contribution is very much appreciated. Four of our current directors (maybe more when a vacated position is filled) are under the age of 40. That creates a lot of energy and ideas. The young are anxious for progress, and that is a good thing.

Again thank you to our Board, our staff, our members and all who support our efforts.

It has been an honour and a privilege to serve as President this past year.

Respectfully submitted,

Peter Simonsen
President

BCFGA Board of Directors

Jeet Dukhia, Vice President, deceased December 14, 2022

Ravinder Bains

Sukhdeep Brar

Joginder Dhand

Avi Gill

Mani Gill

Annelise Simonsen