

# BC Fruit Growers' Association

Presentation to  
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MP Kelowna - Lake Country



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## **Introduction**

The BCFGGA appreciates the opportunity to present some current issues and, most importantly, to seek your support for a federal companion program to match a Replant Program which we have proposed to the Province of BC. We also wish to present some interesting survey results, as Angus Reid completed a survey of our members in the past month.

## **Replant Companion Program**

The provincial Minister of Agriculture, Don McRae, is attending a national Agriculture Ministers meeting later this week in Ottawa. We anticipate he will discuss the type of program the federal government would put in place to match any possible Replant Program funding. We anticipate any funding from the federal government would be targeted at innovation projects, which we support. Your communication with the Hon. Gerry Ritz to facilitate a quick and positive resolution is most appreciated. Our growers are in need of positive news on the financial front, after suffering 3 very poor years of apple returns.

## **Recent Survey Results for the Tree Fruit Industry**

We are very pleased that, despite the recent downturn in the apple economy, there has been a marked improvement in growers' intentions to remain in the industry. We anticipate this may be due to the recent 'shake out' in our industry, as those with shorter expectations left our industry early, over the past few years, and the downsized industry are the 'here to stay'. (see Appendix 1).

We are also pleased that many growers intend to replant to apples, compared to cherries and grapes. A reason for this commitment to the apple sector may be that sites, growing conditions, and markets for wine grapes are becoming limited, and that the expansion in the cherry sector has paused, while foreign markets are secured and market risk is diminished for the present time – though we are working to ensure that cherries again enters a renewed growth cycle (see appendix 2).

## **Current Issues**

### **1. Seasonal Agriculture Worker Program**

The Seasonal Agriculture Worker Program (SAWP) has been very important to the agriculture sector. Even in times of economic downturn, there is a shortage of seasonal agriculture workers – most Canadians are not available for unskilled, relatively low-paying jobs. The

urbanization and demographic trends in Canada make the SAWP program increasingly important to being able to harvest our entire crop.

In applying for SAWP workers (Mexico and the Caribbean Commonwealth countries are the only eligible source of workers) growers fill in an application (called a Labour Market Opinion) and commit to an employment contract with stringent terms. Service Canada adjudicates the applications, then Immigration Canada issues a work visa and the Mexican government (most workers are from Mexico) accepts the contract. The grower is advised of contract acceptance and travel arrangements (paid by the employer) are made from the Ministry of Labour's Mexico City site.

Usually, the process takes 3 – 4 weeks between application and confirmation of acceptance. At present Service Canada is working on applications from mid January. This backlog creates potential harm to the BC agriculture industry. We appreciate your follow-up on this critical item for our industry.

## 2. Cherry Exports to China

The mainland China market represents a good market opportunity for BC cherries, but access has not been granted yet due to “phytosanitary” regulations. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency has been diligent in finalizing the technical aspects of gaining market access. However, we now recognize that industry needed to have more direct engagement, through the federal and provincial trade offices, with the Chinese to ensure that AQSIC (the Chinese CFIA) placed more priority on determining access for Canadian (BC) cherries. It is late, but your support for federal engagement in this issue may help us gain direct access for cherries to China this year, and alternatively would ensure access for next season.

## 3. Business Risk Management Programs

The Agriculture Ministers are meeting to negotiate the successor to “Growing Forward 2”, a five year federal-provincial agreement on agriculture programs. The most important group of programs falls under the category of Business Risk Management. There are reports that BRM programs will be de-emphasized so that greater resources may be placed into innovation, as well as to meet government fiscal retrenchment. We attach an appendix on our current thoughts, summarized in a recent presentation to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Agriculture.

## Summary

The industry has redoubled its efforts to achieve and maintain competitiveness. We are pleased with the positive outlook of growers in a recent survey.

Our top federal priorities are:

1. Matching funding for a proposed provincial Replant Program
2. Cherry Export Access to China
3. Speeding up Service Canada review of SAWP applications
4. Seeking positive change to the Business Risk Management Program

The BCFGAs appreciate your support for these industry initiatives to achieve sustained competitiveness in the tree fruit industry.