

Environment and Water

The level of activity around Environment and Water has increased:

- There is greater concern about climate change.
- There is more regulatory activity about the environment and water.
- The Okanagan experienced flooding and then a drought in 2018. Though they did not impact the Okanagan directly, we experienced smoke from forest fires in the Cariboo. This smoke may have cooled the very high temperatures and protected apples from sunburn.

A waste control regulation being proposed. Nitrogen (N) and Phosphate (P) being regulated. Nitrogen is not a problem for Okanagan (low risk of leaching into aquifers due to low rainfall), but Phosphate may be regulated close to stream or lake. Our position is that the need to regulate agricultural use of Phosphate as a water runoff concern is unproven, and that the proposed rules are ill-conceived. BCFGA is attending a consultation on February 19 to re-emphasize our concerns about the proposed Phosphate regulation.

The registration of Water Wells used for irrigation had an initial deadline of December 31 2017 to register without fee. The deadline is now extended to March 31, 2019. The BCFGA has been requested to organize some workshops on water well registration.

There was a discussion about proposed open burning smoke control regulation during the year, but this is not presently active. BCFGA will continue to monitor and participate in consultations.

Water pricing has reared its ugly head in Kelowna. Protecting growers' access to affordable and adequate water will be a priority. The drought of 2017, after Spring floods, focused our attention on the need to increase water storage, especially in the face of rising water use of a growing urban population. We are also concerned about changes made by water purveyors to practices such as arbitrary changes to earlier shut off dates. Between water storage, pricing, and arbitrary rules on use, the BCFGA has much work to do.

Kevin Day and alternate Glen Lucas represent BCFGA on the Okanagan Basin Water Board's Okanagan Water Stewardship Committee, where we can review, analyze and have input into water planning at a regional level.

BCFGA participated in three Climate Action Initiative projects:

- The "Decision Aid System" being offered by SIR, which was demonstrated at the February 8 Hort Symposium.
- Development of an irrigation planning 'tool' or framework to assess water use at the farm level.
- Wildfire emergency planning, with a workshop recently offered.

These were interesting projects and we hope that they will be used by growers and help adjust to climate change.

As we prepare for the review of the Columbia River Treaty, we will be obtaining more information on the relative pricing of water locally and with our international competition. We will at the same time be evaluating the impact of climate change on future water demand. Water is essential to agriculture, and the importance of good stewardship will increase in the future.

Lastly, the Environmental Farm Plan is part of the new Canadian Agricultural Partnership (Growing Forward 3) to be launched in March 31, 2018. Problems abound. There is not enough funding in the program, and the type of eligible BMPs have all but eliminated the interest of tree fruit and grapes in the program. When these BMPs aligned with tree fruit and grape grower needs, the industry responded and had the highest participation rate. Improving the EFP Program is a priority in the Water and Environment 'portfolio' of the BCFGA.

Between Climate Change, water regulations and issues, environmental regulations, and the Environmental Farm Plan Program, there is a lot of work for the BCFGA over the next few years.

Respectfully submitted,
Deep Brar, Chair