

Hon. Lana Popham, Minister of Agriculture
Wes Shoemaker, Deputy Minister of Agriculture

August 10, 2017

Brief

BC Fruit Growers' Association

Fred Steele, President

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Our presentation is focused on the mandate letter for the Ag. Minister. We would also like to add items on

- *The Minister of Labour's mandate letter*
- *A proposal to the federal government for a tree fruit rejuvenation program*
- *Columbia River Treaty review, and*
- *Strengthening agriculture associations*

Goals from the Minister's mandate letter *(BCFGA comments in italics)*

1. Revitalize the Agriculture Land Reserve and the Agricultural Land Commission.
 - *Our association and BCAC support the ALR.*
 - *We support a single zone, though there may be a need to recognize different situations such as expansive land parcels.*

- *The ALC has received a huge increase in resources, and we would like to see those resources used for compliance and enforcement of non-farm uses.*

[Minister Popham noted that a consultation with industry and public would be held and relied upon in determining any new ALC direction.]

2. Establish Grow B.C. to help young farmers access land, and support fruit and nut growers and processors to expand local food production.

- *The best way to promote better access to land is to reform the farm property tax classification to raise the income threshold for the current class 9 rate, and introduce a new rate that is a lesser benefit (higher tax rate) for non-productive ALR lands. However, this proposal was made over 20 years ago and failed due to the opposition from small parcel holders using the properties as rural residences, and this is a barrier to achieving property tax change and increasing access to more farmland.*
- *We support BCAC's proposal for a farm property tax assessment to support agricultural associations.*
- *Replant will help the tree fruit industry to expand local food production. Additional funding of \$320,000 is required this year, imminently. There are existing provisions for up to \$ 1 million Supplemental Funding.*
 - *An NDP campaign promise was made to provide additional funding for tree fruit replant [Minister Popham observed the promise of \$5 million new Replant Program funding was entirely earmarked for the tree fruit sector].*
- *Additionally, the BCFGa is proposing two areas of funding for industry development that will bring funds from outside the provincial agriculture budget to tree fruit and vegetable sectors:*

- *A national program is being proposed to the federal government which will provide interest free loans targeted for land not yet planted to tree fruit.*
 - *The Columbia River Treaty review has been initiated. [Minister Popham noted that Hon. Katrine Conroy is responsible for the CRT review]. If there is agreement that the Columbia River Treaty review and likely renegotiation is an important item for the BC economy, is there opportunity to do things differently? Could we begin with a higher level of engagement by the Ministry of Agriculture and including affected industries in the process? Impacted industries include the tree fruit and potato & vegetable grower associations.*
3. Initiate Feed B.C. to increase the use of B.C.-grown and processed foods in hospitals, schools, and other government facilities.
- *The BCFGAs support and offer to participate in development of the Feed BC initiative.*
4. Bring back an enhanced Buy B.C. marketing program to help local producers market their products, and work with local producers to expand market access in the rest of Canada and abroad.
- *The current program is splintered into many independent projects that benefit individual companies but does not create value from a unified approach.*
 - *The BCFGAs support a common approach to the program - re-introduce logo and ensure that individual projects complement the common approach. In other words, end the fragmented, shotgun approach. Build the brand. **A comprehensive marketing plan is needed for all BC agricultural products under the BuyBC umbrella.***

- *The BCFGGA supports the BCAC proposal to invest \$.5 million of the \$2 million BuyBC budget into public trust, which complements the BuyBC brand by building consumer awareness and confidence in BC agricultural practices.*

Items beyond the Minister's immediate mandate letter

1. Labour - the creation of a registry for Temporary Foreign Workers makes sense for those programs that are not overseen by foreign governments and the Provincial Grower SAWP Organization (WALI in BC). However, creation of a registry for SAWP will duplicate the current registry of the foreign governments and WALI. *Therefore, it would make sense to add value by placing government resources into audit and inspection of housing facilities, rather than creating a duplicate registry for SAWP workers.*
2. Labour - minimum wage \$15 per hour by 2021. *The BCFGGA supports incremental steps and that the piece rate for picking fruit not be indexed to increases in minimum wage. [Minister Popham emphasized that a Fair Wage Commission is being established and will make recommendations on implementation]. We support a training tax credit for youth, aboriginal and disabled people as a way to encourage entry into the job market and to help with the additional training and supervision costs for these groups.*
3. As a last item, we seek a new direction to strengthen agriculture associations. *Associations are non-profit and their management is tightly controlled by farmer-directors. Associations provide the same benefit as municipalities: delivery of services and programs at a very reasonable cost, and under local direction.*