

Focus on Farmlands Conference
c/o Capital Region Food and Agriculture Issues Roundtable (CR-FAIR)

Dec 1, 2008

Farm Assessment Review Panel
Ministry of Small Business and Revenue
Victoria, BC

Chairmen and Members of the Farm Assessment Review Panel;

The Focus on Farmlands Conference held on Nov 27, 2008 in Sidney, BC attracted over 180 registered participants, including farmers, policy-makers, elected officials, and food activists. One of the sessions was dedicated to the Farm Assessment Review, particularly how assessment policy could support and promote agricultural viability. Anne Macey of the Salt Spring Island Agriculture Alliance and David Reid of LifeCycles Project Society moderated the session.

The session participants developed a list of recommendations to the Review Panel, which we hereby submit for your review.

The main recommendation is for the Panel to inform the Minister that the Terms of Reference are too narrow, and that a broad review of agricultural policies and practices is needed in British Columbia. This review should attempt to synchronize policies among Ministries and provide a set of best practices for local and regional governments for farmland protection. The review should seek broad public support and participation in the process.

If the Panel decides to continue under the current terms of reference, the group asks the following:

- The standards be amended to include a preface that recognizes the importance of agriculture to community and ecosystem health, and establishes these benefits as an objective of the regulation.
- The standards should include a definition of "Assessor" that includes training in agrology.
- Agriculture should be set as the default classification instead of residential. When there is a doubt, the property should be classified as agriculture.
- Value-added processing should be included as part of farm income and as a farm use, with the condition that the raw inputs come from the local area.
- More public input should be taken before a final recommendation is made to the Minister. We request that the public be invited to comment on a final draft of the recommendation.

Finally, here is a list of values that the group identified, which should be considered by the panel as they develop their recommendation. The assessment classification should:

- Recognize that farms receive fewer services from municipalities than residential areas
- Promote production
- Preserve land for current and future production
- Promote biodiversity
- Promote aesthetic value and greenspace value
- Support sustainable farm practice
- Recognize and reward ecosystem goods and services such as clean air, carbon sequestration, etc
- Encourage local employment
- Support the development of localized food systems
- Be simple and easy to follow
- Recognize trees as a crop
- Promote education
- Be fair and equitable
- Promote food security
- Promote the protection of heritage and endangered farm species
- Promote diversity of livelihoods
- Recognize and support holistic farm management practices

Although these recommendations were unanimously adopted in the session, they do not necessarily fully represent the opinions of the participants or the moderators. Each individual was encouraged to submit comments that capture the breadth and depth of his or her recommendations to the Panel.

Thank you for your consideration, and we hope that you will take our recommendations into account.

Signed,

David Reid, session moderator
Anne Macey, session moderator