

PRESERVING
OUR FOODLANDS



The B.C.
Agricultural Land
Commission

If you want more information
about the preservation of B.C.'s foodlands
or wish to express your views
on this important issue, call or write to the
Commission today.



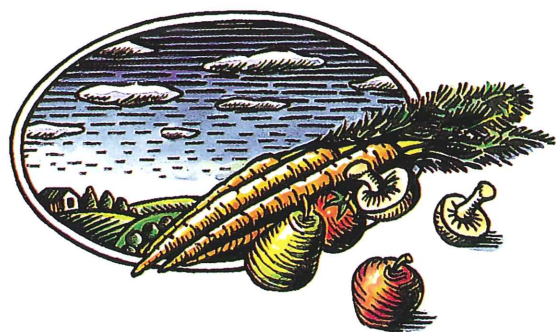
The B.C.
Agricultural Land
Commission

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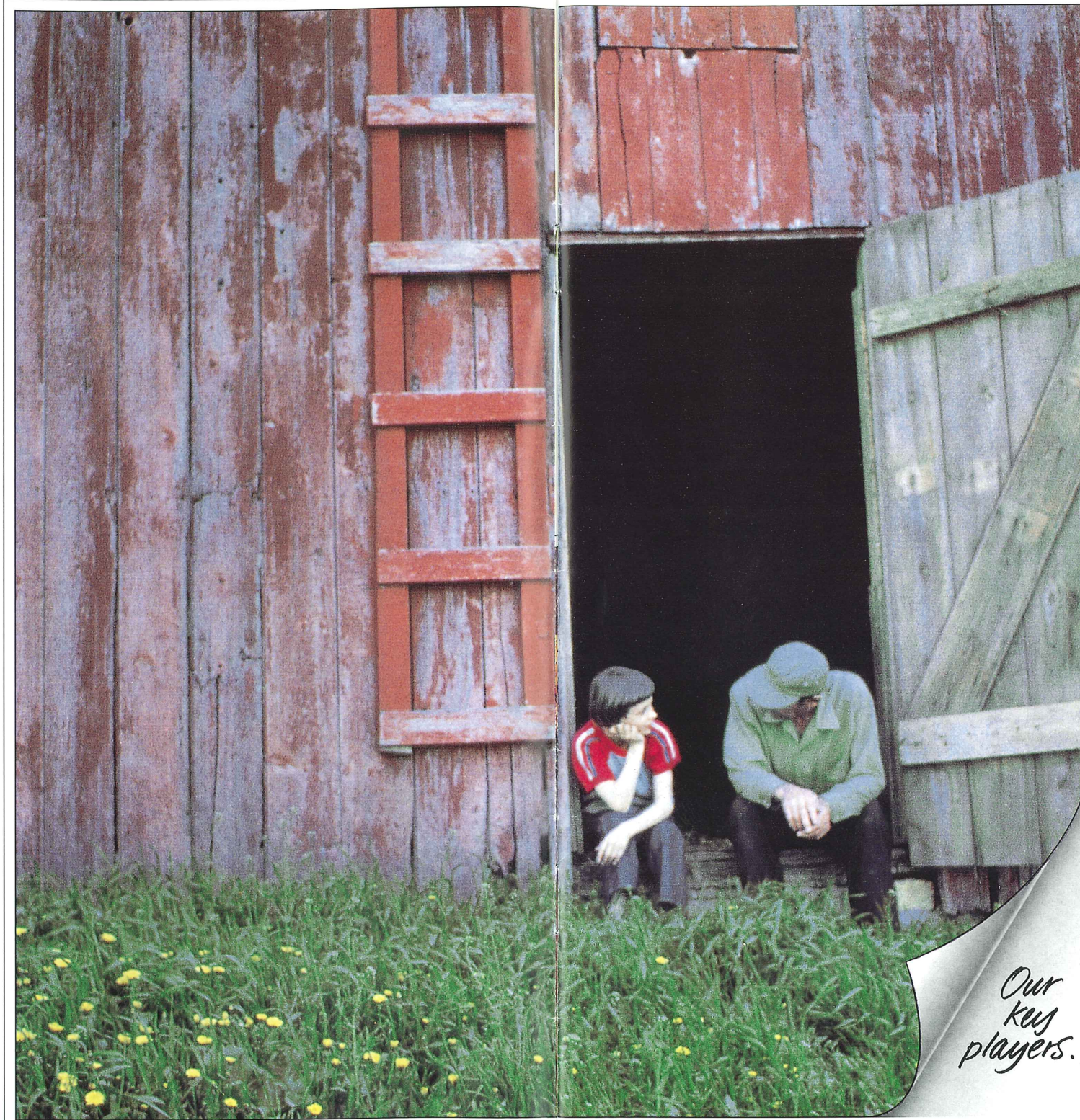


◆
PRESERVING
OUR FOODLANDS

Since 1973 the Agricultural Land Commission has been the primary steward of B.C.'s valuable agricultural land. The Commission helps to preserve a vital industry and an important way of life in British Columbia, with a track record of years of hard work and success. The Agricultural Land Commission – staff, Commissioners and participating agencies – strives to work for the best interests of all British Columbians.



The cover photo shows a Sumas Prairie dairy farm in the Fraser Valley. It was taken by Commission staffer Barry Smith.



◆
B.C.'s AGRICULTURE
AND FOOD INDUSTRY

- ◆ The agriculture and food industry is a \$12 billion industry in B.C. involving 250 different commodities and employing over 230,000 British Columbians.
- ◆ This sector contributes significantly to Canada as a trading nation – annual agricultural exports from B.C. to over 50 countries are valued at \$650 million.



Photo courtesy of Western Greenhouse Growers.

- ◆ The total investment in B.C.'s 20,000 farms in terms of land, equipment, stock and other tangible assets is over \$10 billion; the investment in terms of individual and family commitment, hard work and community spirit is immeasurable.
- ◆ B.C. needs to keep the agriculture and food industry strong and vibrant; it must focus on the needs of farmers who are the key players in this process. They are valuable contributors to the economic, social and cultural life of B.C.

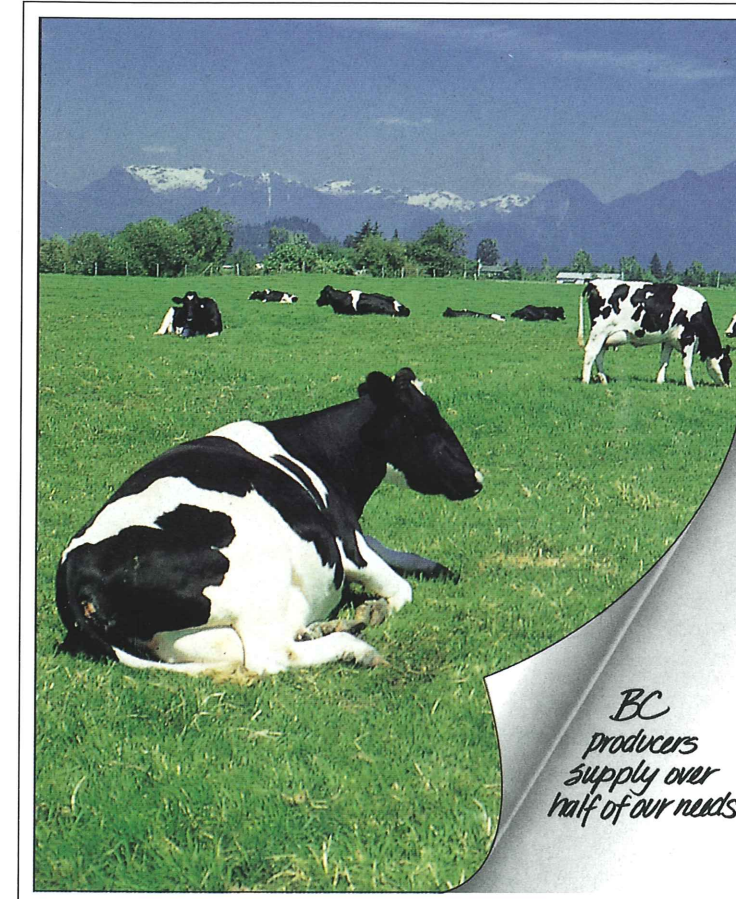
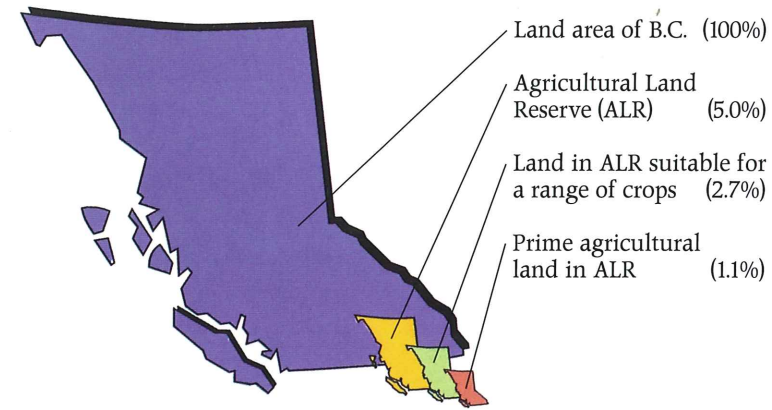
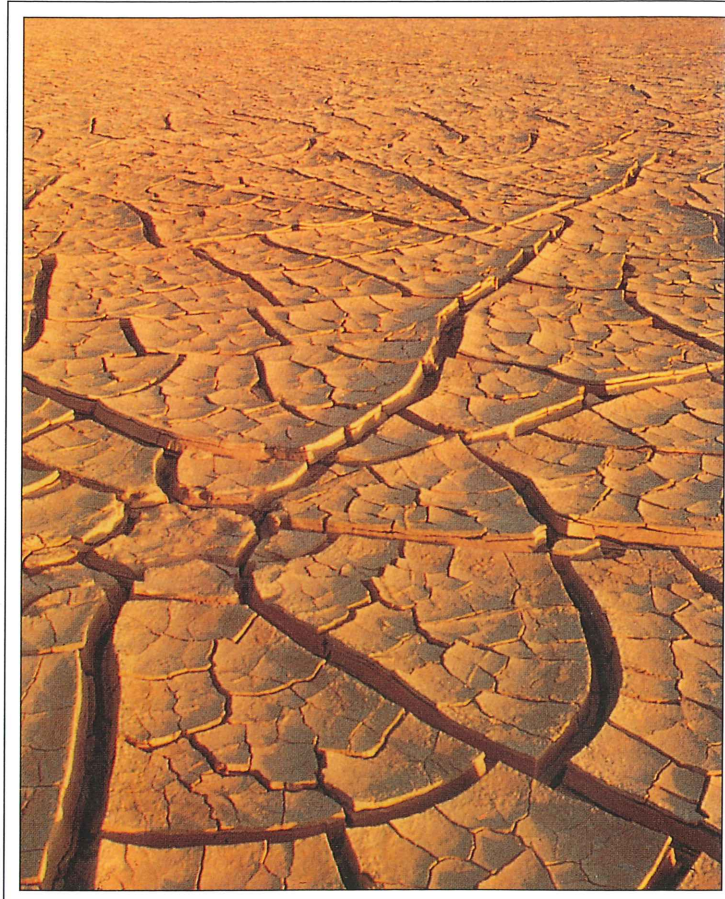
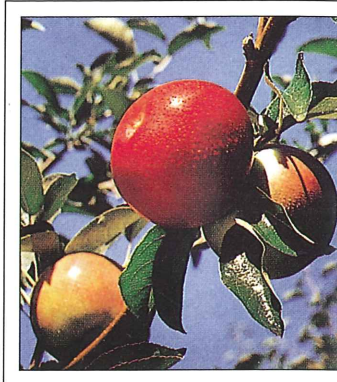
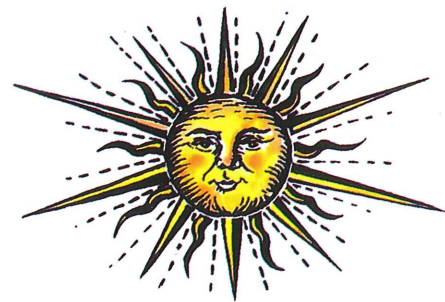
THE NEED TO PRESERVE OUR FOODLANDS

◆ Since the end of World War II, agricultural land has been rapidly disappearing all over the world. Soil erosion, urbanization, the growth of deserts and salinization have all contributed to a loss of productive farmland.

◆ Local governments have attempted to regulate the use of farmland through zoning and other land use controls. This has had varying degrees of success and has often resulted in a complex web of conflicting policies.

◆ B.C.'s population, now about four million people and growing constantly, relies heavily on B.C. grown agricultural products. In fact, the province's agricultural producers supply more than half of our food requirements.

◆ Having a secure, home grown food source is a cornerstone of any country's independence. The loss of B.C.'s farmland would force a growing reliance on sources outside the province for our food needs. This prospect has clear risks – particularly with respect to ensuring a high quality food supply at affordable prices.



◆ Besides the key contribution which agriculture makes to the B.C. economy, the preservation of our farmland has important environmental and social benefits, and maintains rural landscapes that benefit all British Columbians.

◆ British Columbia, while a large province (bigger than Washington, Oregon and California combined) has only a small amount of productive agricultural land. These foodlands are some of the highest quality in Canada.

◆ 77% of B.C.'s population lives in two small



areas centred on the Lower Mainland and the Okanagan Valley – a mere 3% of the province's land base. Yet 77% of B.C.'s agricultural dollars are generated in these same two areas.

◆ Up to the 1970's nearly 6,000 hectares of prime agricultural land were lost each year to urban and associated uses. This happened despite growing domestic and worldwide demand for B.C. products, questionable foreign food supplies and the small amount of agricultural land in the province. Since land converted from agricultural to urban use is seldom returned to productive farming, this precious resource was lost forever.

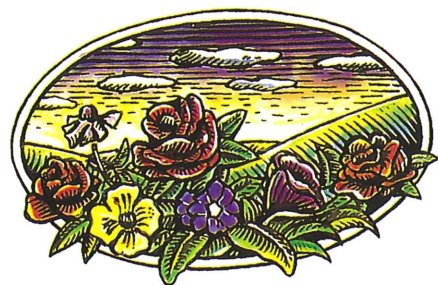
THE RESPONSE IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

THE Provincial government responded to the serious erosion of our agricultural land base by taking steps to preserve agricultural land with a straightforward and consistent approach through the Agricultural Land Commission.

Successive Provincial governments have endorsed the approach and supported the work of the Commission, which has been viewed as a model for provinces, states and countries all over the world.

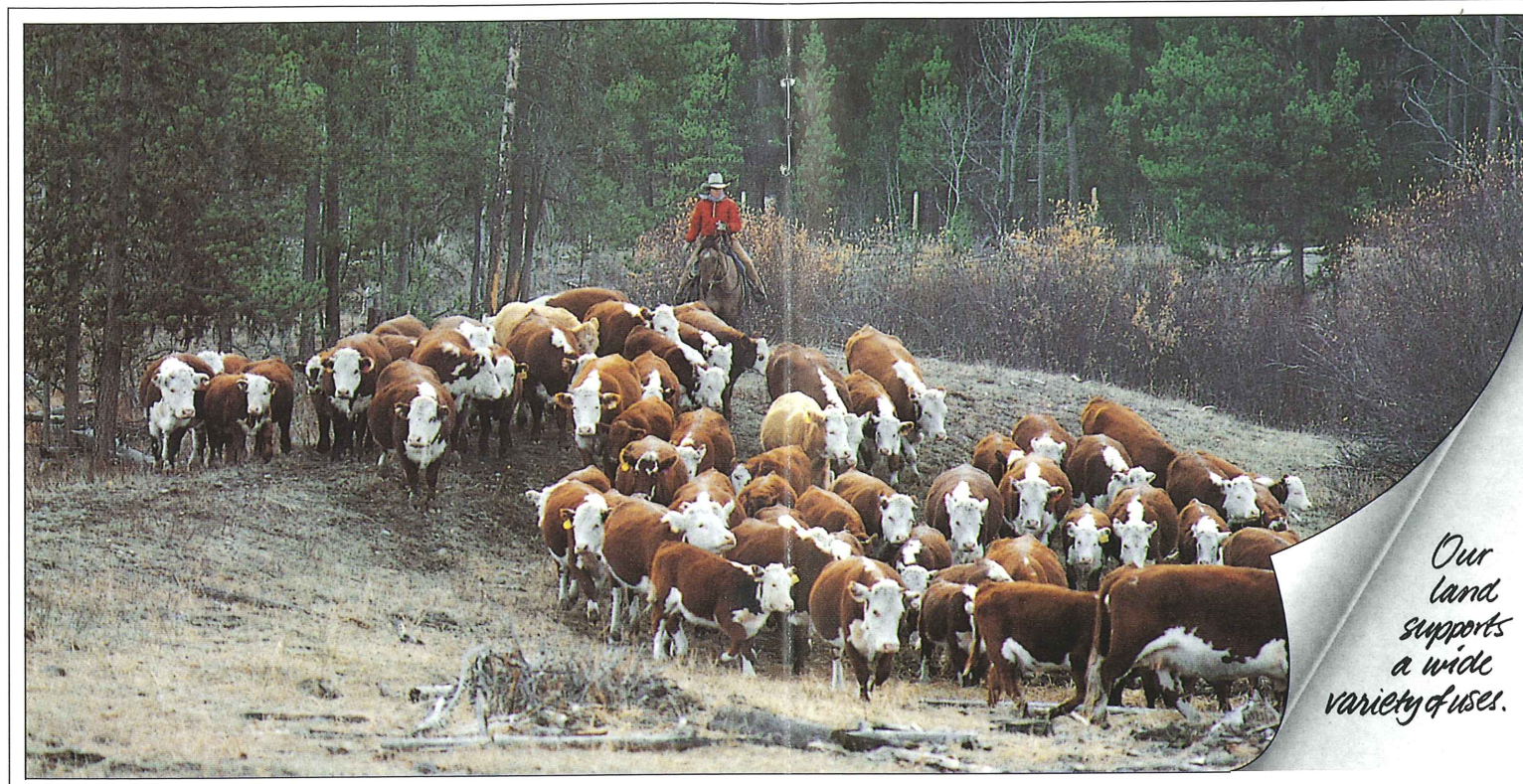
THE MANDATE OF THE COMMISSION

◆ B.C.'s Agricultural Land Commission Act provides for the establishment and operation of an independent Agricultural Land Commission.



◆ The Commission consists of at least five members appointed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council (one of whom is designated as the Chair) who report to the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

◆ Commissioners are drawn from a cross-section of agricultural and other sectors from regions throughout B.C., and are chosen for their demonstrated leadership, professional and decision-making skills.



*Our
land
supports
a wide
variety of uses.*

MISSION STATEMENT

THE GOAL OF THE AGRICULTURAL
LAND COMMISSION IS SIMPLE:

- 1 TO PRESERVE BRITISH COLUMBIA'S
AGRICULTURAL LANDS FOR PRESENT
AND FUTURE USE;
- 2 TO ENCOURAGE THE ESTABLISHMENT
AND MAINTENANCE OF FARMS; AND
- 3 TO ENCOURAGE LOCAL GOVERNMENT
BYLAWS, PLANS AND POLICIES WHICH
SUPPORT FARMING.

OUR APPROACH

THE Commission strives to achieve its goals by encouraging effective land management. Commissioners and staff work closely with landowners, local governments, the farm community and the general public to ensure our limited supply of agricultural land is available for food production now and in years to come.

The cornerstone of the agricultural land preservation program is the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR), which covers about 5% of the land mass of the province. The Reserve is often in close proximity to British Columbia's rapidly expanding cities and towns due to historical settlement patterns.

The ALR was established through the cooperative efforts of regional districts and municipalities over the period 1974 to 1976. Local input was gained through public meetings and the contribution of local and Provincial governments, ministerial committees and other agencies. Initially the Reserve comprised 4.7 million hectares and, despite boundary changes over time, it remains approximately the same size today.

The Reserve can be thought of as a Provincial land use zone in favour of agriculture in which non-agricultural uses are regulated and farm activities are encouraged. This includes private and public lands presently being farmed as well as land with agricultural potential.

THE COMMISSION'S DAY-TO-DAY OPERATIONS

SINCE 1974, the Commission has considered over 30,000 different applications from landowners and others wishing to remove land from the ALR, subdivide land within the ALR or use agricultural lands for non-farm purposes. On average the Commission reviews 1,000 applications and land use documents each year.

The number of applications has remained relatively steady over the years; their complexity, the number of issues addressed and the range of people interested in the outcome have expanded dramatically.

Together with the general public's growing concern over environmental issues, there is also far more public awareness and opinion with respect to each application.

The Commission is supported by a small, efficient staff providing professional, administrative, drafting, land use planning and research services. It is ably assisted by



the field staff of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and it solicits the input of industry advisors.

The Commission also relies heavily on municipal councils and regional boards who, together with their staff, support the Reserve through local land use planning programs. Individuals and governments at the local level are the first contact with applicants and are important players in the preservation of agricultural land in B.C.

In addition to considering applications, the Commission conducts an array of other activities. It is constantly refining the ALR boundary to reflect new information and research on crop potential, soil, terrain, present land use, climate and other factors that determine the suitability of land for agriculture. The Commission continually works to improve communications with local governments, farm organizations, landowners and the general public. And it assists local governments with their plans and bylaws to work towards consistency with Provincial objectives.

The Commission is also active in the area of sustaining the quality of agricultural soils under the **Soil Conservation Act**.



*Family +
individual
commitment,
hard work and
community spirit.*

THE COMMISSION'S RECORD OF SUCCESS

THE B.C. Agricultural Land Commission has consistently met the goals and challenges assigned to it by the Provincial Legislature and the people of B.C. It has succeeded in reducing the loss of prime agricultural land from a high of 6,000 hectares per year in the early 1970's to less than 500 hectares per year today. The ALR has contributed to the long-term viability of agriculture and greater food self-sufficiency of British Columbians by helping to stabilize agricultural communities and reduce the impact of urban growth on our foodlands. For example, the Commission has identified 40,000 hectares of land in the Lower Mainland, outside the Reserve, which are largely suitable for urban development but not yet fully utilized. This amounts to an area nearly four times the size of the City of Vancouver.

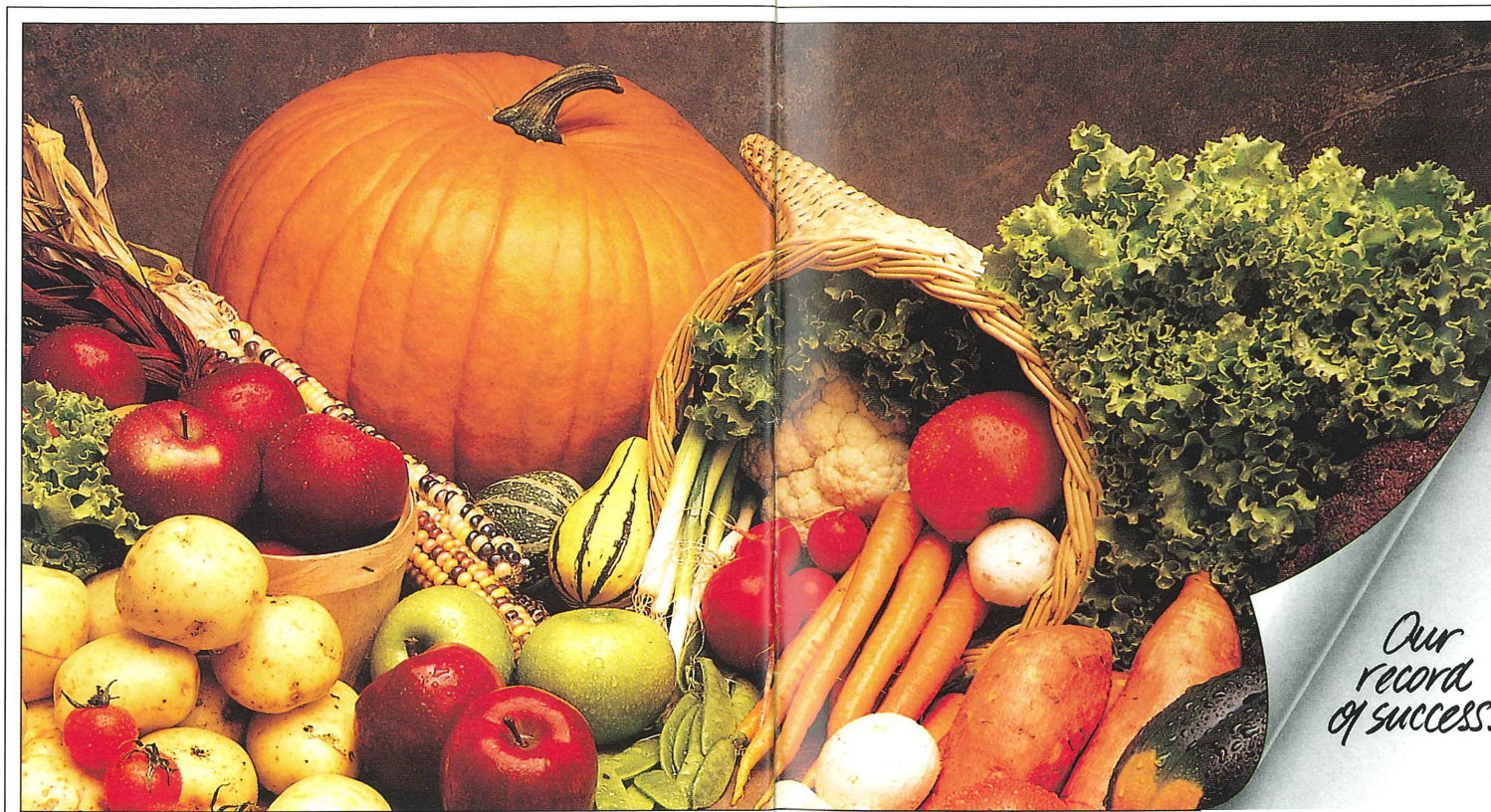


Over the years, the Commission has provided an objective, apolitical process for dealing with the many applications it receives and the reviews it conducts.

The Commission has worked hard to balance the desires of individual landowners with the long-term preservation of our foodlands.



Photo courtesy of Min. of Agriculture, Fisheries & Food.



OUR ONGOING COMMITMENT

THE Commission is committed to sustaining agriculture to meet the needs of all British Columbians. It works to increase public awareness of B.C.'s agriculture and food industry, land use issues, the value of our agricultural resources and the importance of ensuring the long-term preservation of agricultural lands. It encourages governments at all levels to develop bylaws, plans and policies which support agriculture. It participates in the development of regional growth strategies and works with local governments to ensure more focused planning for agriculture.

HOW CAN YOU BECOME INVOLVED?

EVERY British Columbian has a stake in the future of our foodlands. And every British Columbian can participate in this important work.

Whenever you have the choice between purchasing local B.C. food products or imported ones, choose B.C. Not only are the quality, safety and freshness guaranteed, this contributes to the economic well-being of farming and the province as a whole. As long as farming and the industry are strong, our agricultural lands will continue to be used for the purpose they are best suited: growing food.

The Agricultural Land Commission is committed to the future of B.C. and its agricultural industry. We are committed to preserving our foodlands.



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