

# Maple Ridge Agricultural Area Planning

**Phase 2 Report:  
Discussion of Issues, Preferred Options and Recommended Actions  
Pertaining to the Maple Ridge Agricultural Area Planning Process**

**Draft**

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## **1.0 Introduction**

Phase 1 of the Agricultural Area Plan investigation and analysis has revealed that the Maple Ridge agricultural sector wishes to see a concerted effort to protect, enhance, and promote agriculture in the District. There is an expectation that traditional farming models will not be as applicable in the future and that alternative models with new and multiple objectives should be pursued. There are individuals within the Maple Ridge agricultural sector who see a need for changes in how the agricultural sector currently interacts with the community and are embracing new emerging food system options.

Key observations emerged from sector consultations that will guide the agricultural planning process. Close proximity to a large urban population with an increasing demand for local food and agricultural products is the biggest strength of Maple Ridge agriculture. As such, there is considerable opportunity to develop markets for a diverse range of high quality products that are fresher, safer, and healthier by virtue of being local.

There is overall optimism that food trends can be translated into profitable business opportunities regardless of the constraints posed by parcel size, fragmentation of the land base, or resource characteristics. These proponents include both established farmers and also relatively unseasoned operators with post-secondary educations, new ideas and substantial amounts of capital who are just starting out. However, these new entrepreneurs often lack basic agricultural knowledge and all farmers would have a greater prospect of success with targeted assistance in creating the infrastructure.

The agriculture sector faces significant threats from deteriorating agricultural infrastructure (such as gaps in the local marketing system and inadequate drainage and flood control), loss of agricultural land to non-agricultural uses, and a declining knowledge base about agriculture. As such, there are gaps in providing the necessary conditions for working agriculture focusing on the local food economy.

This Phase 2 Report is a synthesis of ideas and opinions, wishes and desires, expressed by participants in consultations and Workshop #2 to prioritize agricultural area issues, identify preferred options and recommend actions. There may be areas in which stakeholders would like more exploration of possible actions to address preferred options. We anticipate requests by the AAC to be brought forward for more investigation on preferred courses of action as they review this document.

## **2.0 A Vision for Agriculture in Maple Ridge**

Based on consultations with area farmers and other stakeholders, a vision of Year 2030 for Maple Ridge agriculture has been crafted to guide the area planning process. The Vision has four parts:

- 1. Sustainable agriculture is vibrant in Maple Ridge, making a vital contribution to the District's economy, health, environmental attributes and quality of life.**

Sustainable agriculture will possess three main characteristics that make the statement possible: farm profitability creating economic viability, environmental stewardship resulting in ecological soundness, and social justice - prosperity for all participants in the system.

- 2. Diverse agricultural activity occurs on farms of all sizes and uses many channels to distribute agricultural products and services to the consumer public.**

This statement envisions all scales of farming activity in Maple Ridge producing a diversity of products and services using a range of business models

- 3. Sustainable farming engages local residents, attracts new entrants, and takes profitable advantage of local marketing opportunities.**

Sustainable farming will be characterized by the creation of a resilient food production system in the community, providing food security and beneficial agricultural land use in a variety of ways ranging from backyard gardening to community supported agriculture to commercial ventures. In particular, agriculture will attract and support new and young entrepreneurs.

- 4. The agricultural sector is fully supported by the community.**

The key element of this statement is that the community will assist in protecting the land base, providing key agricultural infrastructure, such as regional drainage, flood control, and irrigation and protect the resource base by ensuring that the conditions for working agriculture are maintained and enhanced. Most importantly, community demand for local agricultural products and services will be strong and a well-developed local storage, handling, distribution, processing and marketing infrastructure is the cornerstone of the local food system.

## **3.0 Guiding Principles**

Several guiding principles are anticipated to direct the agricultural area plan. These are:

- Protection of the agricultural land base
- Provision of regional drainage and flood control infrastructure to ensure that agricultural capability is realized
- District commitment to regulatory reform to promote working agriculture
- Community support

### 3.0 Key Issues and Options

Several key issues were articulated through consultations and the workshops. These key issues are a subset of the broader range of potential issues investigated. Various preferred options were discussed and actions have been recommended to address these issues. Details are presented in Appendix A.

#### 3.1 Protection of the Agricultural Land Base

Agricultural farming operations in Maple Ridge are located predominantly within the ALR. About 73% of the area of properties with farm tax assessment status in the District is located in the ALR.

##### 3.1.1 Protecting the Agricultural Land Base in the ALR

###### *The Situation:*

Proposals to use land in the ALR for non-agricultural purposes are considered through consultations between the ALC and the local government. An application must be forwarded by the District to the ALC in order for there to be review and comment. Local governments are encouraged to develop planning processes that support and accommodate the mandate of the ALC to preserve agricultural land and encourage farming.

Metro Vancouver's current review of the Livable Regions Strategic Plan is refining designations within the Green Zone so that agricultural areas may be better protected from redevelopment.

###### *The Issue:*

Protection of the agricultural land base in Maple Ridge is one of the top issues requiring a strategy in the agricultural area plan. The physical land base within the ALR is under continued threat from permitted non-farm uses and applications to exclude some of the highest quality land from the working agricultural zone. It appears that a significant portion of ALR land is owned by interests that regard the farmland as a land reserve for other uses in the future. This situation appears to explain in large part why farmland in the District is being sold at values far beyond what it has the capability of supporting based on its productive capacity.

###### *Preferred Option:*

In light of uncertainty attributable to food safety and food security concerns and climate change, most agree that developing a local food system must be a high priority goal of the District's agricultural area plan. To this end, it is considered time to provide certainty that the agricultural will not be undermined by short term decisions that result in agricultural land being forever lost to development in Maple Ridge.

###### *Recommended Actions:*

Participants in the workshops identified several actions that could protect the land base from further shrinkage. These recommended actions include:

- Create a permanent boundary around the ALR
- Place a moratorium on ALR exclusions until the agricultural plan is given time to become established
- Making changes to the zoning bylaw to increase the minimum parcel size in the ALR
- Require ALR property owners to rehabilitate the soils of properties degraded by use
- Ensure agricultural impact assessments are done, as part of the development approval process, to identify the impacts of developments on agricultural lands and operations prior to development
- Ensure that applications for converting agricultural land or creating impacts on agricultural operations are vetted through an agricultural advisory committee for review and comment
- In unavoidable situations where ALR lands must be converted to non-farm use, the District to charge an "agricultural utility" to the developer of an amount considered adequate to fully compensate for the impacts created, and in turn, the levy be used to make tangible improvements in the conditions for the agricultural sector
- In unavoidable situations where ALR lands must be converted, require that the developer salvage top soil and make it available to improve soil capability on protected agricultural lands
- Consider rezoning g RS-3 parcels in the ALR to Agricultural to emphasis the intended agricultural use of the properties.

##### 3.1.2 Protecting the Agricultural Land Base Outside of the ALR

About 27% of the area of properties with farm tax assessment status is located outside the ALR.

###### *The Situation:*

The District has a defined urban area boundary that is recognized and endorsed by the Regional District. Some agricultural land in areas outside the urban area and outside the ALR are in the RS-3 zone, (e.g., in Thornhill and Whonnock), and as such have rural residential and estate suburban designations, where agriculture is permitted. These lands are somewhat protected for agriculture because they are out of the urban boundary. However, the District also has the option of preventing future changes in zoning to uses that do not permit agriculture.

**Issue:**

There is concern that loss of agriculture on these properties would represent a serious setback to the promotion of farming in the District.

**Preferred Option:**

Attempting to plan for the continuation of agriculture outside of the ALR is difficult since keeping the land in agriculture is solely the property owner's decision. Nevertheless, the significance to District agriculture of activity outside the ALR is considerable and there is interest in pursuing strategies that might keep this land in agricultural production.

**Recommended Actions:**

As these working agricultural lands are outside the ALR, they may be zoned in various designations ranging from agricultural to rural residential to urban residential. There are several ways in which the lands could more formally be reserved for agriculture:

- The property owner could voluntarily apply to have lands in productive agriculture included in the ALR.
- A government agency could purchase the lands and then either sell them with an agricultural easement or lease them to willing farmers
- Attract a non-government agency (e.g., agricultural land trust) that would purchase the development rights or purchase the property outright and lease it to willing farmers or resell the property with a covenant or agricultural easement in place
- Where agriculture is a permitted use in the RS-3 zone, the District could create a development permit area protecting the potential for agriculture on these lands
- Consider a development cost charge on developers of land in agricultural use outside the ALR equivalent to the expenditure required to secure other lands in agricultural use outside the ALR for future agricultural use.
- Encourage property owners to enter into longer agreements with other farmers to farm the land in order to keep it in its productive agricultural use.

### 3.2 Maintaining and Improving the Agriculture Infrastructure

In order for agricultural operators to operate viably, the resources need to be in a condition that allows land capability to be realized.

**The Situation:**

Agricultural capability in some areas has been seriously degraded by poor drainage, high water table, flooding, untimely and reoccurring inundation, and drought. In several cases, the highest capability land in the District is being negatively affected by inadequate water management. Problems have been exacerbated in recent years by upland development and outdated conveyance systems.

**The Issue:**

At the most basic level, development in the District has to plan for the drainage and flooding impact on agriculture or risk being sued for damages. From a sector perspective, some of the lands with the highest capability are subject to conditions that are severely limiting soil-based agriculture, such as high water table, flooding and inadequate drainage. From a perceptual basis, the District may have a hard time convincing agricultural property owners of its sincerity vis-à-vis an agricultural plan if the regional infrastructure required to support agriculture is not provided. The cumulative impact of filled or raised areas on regional drainage and flood control in the flood plain is also a concern.

**Preferred Option:**

There is concern by proponents of District agriculture that pressure to convert to non-farm use some of the highest capability agricultural lands in Maple Ridge could be abetted by the deterioration of the agricultural infrastructure and to the extent that agricultural production is severely compromised. In view of the fact that a lower standard of infrastructure improvements is required to meet agricultural drainage and flood control needs in the flood plain, it would appear to make sense to use this relationship to the benefit of agriculture and plan non-agricultural land use elsewhere.

**Recommended Actions:**

Assuming there is a will to rehabilitate and improve regional drainage and flood control infrastructure for land reserved for agriculture, the most pressing challenge is finding the finances to do so. Recommended actions include:

- Create a drainage and flood control levy to apply to all upland developments that drain storm water into floodplain, the proceeds to be used to install improved agricultural infrastructure
- Consider immediate improvements in infrastructure to be recovered by levy into the future
- Require developers of upland areas to install retention ponds so as to eliminate storm water and drainage impacts in agricultural areas
- District spearheads regional drainage, flood control and irrigation projects to rehabilitate affected areas in Albion Flats and the Northwest lowlands (in coordination with Pitt Meadows)
- District spearheads a regional drainage, flood control and irrigation project to improve land capability for agricultural lands located in the Alouette watershed.
- District develops an agriculture water servicing plan to ensure water availability in the future

### 3.3 Improving Access to Agricultural Land

In an atmosphere that encourages urban and suburban growth and developments, many property owners of ALR land predict conversion as an inevitable long term outcome and have purchased this land as an investment for this purpose. In the District's ALR, only 35% of the area has farm tax assessment meaning that some 65% is used mainly for rural residential purposes. This situation appears to explain in large part why farmland in the District is being sold at values far beyond what its productive capacity is capable of supporting.

#### *The Situation:*

This situation consists of at least two parts. First, a significant proportion of ALR properties are owned by absentee landlords who make the dwellings available to renters, many with little inclination or ability to farm the attached land. Second, the high land values make it difficult for aspiring new farmers to gain entry into the sector.

#### *The Issue:*

Owners of agriculturally designated land are under no obligation to farm the land or to make the land available to farmers. Nevertheless, there is a feeling that such owners have a responsibility to bring arable land into a productive state or permit others to do so. Alternatively, policy should be formulated to encourage the desired agricultural behavior.

With regard to high land prices, new and established farmers would benefit from greater access to agricultural land where the investment can be directed to the business's financial development rather than be tied up in assets. Models need to be pursued that will reduce the land access cost of farmers in the District.

#### *Preferred Option:*

There is widespread support for initiatives to encourage non-farming land owners to make idle land available to farmers or to start farming it themselves. Of prime interest is the potential to re-emphasize the role of agriculture in the ALR and to remove some of the perception that the ALR is a land reserve for development in the District.

#### *Recommended Actions:*

While land is a significant cost, it also serves as collateral for farming investment and operating lines of credit and contributes to permanency of the farming operation. The fundamental objectives are to increase farming activity on currently under-utilized ALR lands and to reduce the entry cost for new and aspiring farmers. New ways of accessing agricultural land will attract unconventional models of agricultural activity, particularly if operations are introduced that do not entail investment in land or that are run on a tenancy basis.

Recommended actions for increasing access to the land base by new and aspiring farmers include:

- Show community support for agriculture and encourage property owners to farm or make their land available for farming by increasing the differential between farm and non-farm tax rates
- Require property owners of ALR land to maintain their property to an agriculture standard Code that includes noxious weed control, environmental considerations, and human safety considerations
- District becomes involved in community agriculture opportunities by purchasing or gaining other access to ALR properties to facilitate leasing options for agricultural activities including education and demonstration projects, allotment gardens, community shared and supported agriculture, and entrepreneurial operations.
- Develop a land parcel clearinghouse to link farmers with property owners interested in leasing out their parcels for agriculture
- Reducing the cost of water charged to emerging farm operations
- Developing capital and operating credit options for leased land operators
- Incentives to land owners to make their land available to farmers

### 3.4 Improving the Knowledge Base of Farmers

The farming paradigm of the present focuses on efficiency, economies of scale, export markets and the faceless consumer. The farming paradigm of the future will focus on all aspects of sustainability, local food systems, targeted marketing, consumer concerns about health and food safety, and responses to climate change.

#### *The Situation:*

There is no requirement of farmers in Canada to be trained in order to produce food. Farms are succeeded by individuals who have learned farming by virtue of growing up on the farm and being exposed to "hands-on" training in their school years. A growing number have taken agricultural programs in schools, colleges and universities to hone their skills. In most cases, marketing organizations have handled the agricultural products past the farm gate and the individual producer is not aware of where his production is sold or consumed. These farmers are now older than the population at large. The farming model is being challenged on its monolithic structure, emphasis on large scale, and inability to respond to consumer demands.

#### *The Issue:*

Farming clearly needs to attract new entrepreneurs in order for agriculture to thrive in farming communities. The emerging new farmer is well educated, environmentally sensitive, knowledgeable about food trends and the consumer dynamic, has investment capital, enthusiastic, opportunistic, and willing to take business risks. Paradoxically, these individuals have all sorts of experience except in how to raise crops and animals. Agricultural extension services offered by government are heavily slanted to conventional agricultural operations, while the knowledge need of the new

emerging farmer is for small scale, organic, sustainable, value-added, and alternative farming and marketing systems. As such, there is a critical need to re-invigorate the agricultural extension system to address these opportunities

***The Preferred Option:***

There is core of entrepreneurs being attracted to the concept and economic potential of a local food system providing safe food in a sustainable manner. These people crave agricultural knowledge. The potential payback of agricultural extension services geared toward this market is tremendous.

***Recommended Actions:***

There are a number of options that may be considered to improve the knowledge base of farmers, and particularly, new farmers. These recommended actions should include:

- Encourage the Ministry of Agriculture and Lands (MAL) to develop an extension position for small scale farming in the area, particularly oriented toward organic farming information, marketing, husbandry and crop management skills.
- Encourage Producer Associations and Boards to include small scale producers in their sectors by providing information tailored to alternative production models
- Assist in the development and maintenance of a web site concerned with production issues in the immediate area
- Create a web-based clearinghouse for agricultural inputs such as sawdust, manure, compost
- Support the installation of a weather forecasting function with relevance to the Maple Ridge area
- Host business development workshop (possibly during agriculture week) inviting successful practitioners to speak on experiences in other areas
- Have lending agencies come to the community to inform and learn about agricultural financial incentive programs and challenges
- Develop a knowledge network of like-minded local farmers
- Encourage established farmers to mentor, apprentice and share knowledge with new farmers that wish to branch out at a later date.
- Develop a function to connect local farmers to relevant knowledge links such as webinars, local food blogs, Internet sites, upcoming conferences and workshops, and agricultural audio communications (such as Kootenay Coop Radio)
- Producers require a place of connection for their information needs, such as the Internet, semi-annual workshops, a knowledge network, or the local library.

### **3.5 Improving the Knowledge Base of Food Consumers**

The farm population accounts for about 2.2% of the Canadians. With society's the emphasis on time savings and convenience, the average consumer eats out more often and has become deskilled in food preparation. At the same time, however, the conventional food system is not well positioned or structured to respond to increased consumer concerns about food safety, health, disease prevention, or food security issues.

***The Situation:***

A significant amount of effort has been expended in educating school children, the public, politicians and educators about BC agriculture and BC food products. Some of these initiatives are expected to reap longer-term rewards by connecting with young future food buyers and potential farmers. These programs are important and should continue to be supported.

***The Issue:***

Fundamentally, the ability to make a living or a profit from farming will attract new entrants into agriculture. Some large proportion of profitability will hinge on developing a market for the goods and services that Maple Ridge agriculture can provide. As such, there is a need to be more market oriented in educating the public as future consumers of Maple Ridge food products.

***Preferred Option:***

Education of the consumer at all levels and through all channels is critical to successfully developing the market for a local food system. People in the local food business are the most attuned to food trends and should be partnered with to meet common food security goals. Direct sales and farmers' market producers already recognize that the market appeal of local products will be found in the marketing of the taste, smell, colour, shape and story of growing local products, attuned to local preferences.

***Recommended Actions:***

A significant body of research indicates that effective educating of the consumer to change food purchasing habits is strongly influenced by food suppliers interacting with the consumer in food choice decisions. These influencing factors include increasing face-to-face linkages between consumers and producers, teaching consumers how to prepare food, and ensuring that taste and quality are communicated in interactions. Recognition of the producer and identity preservation of the product are critical. A number of these initiatives already exist elsewhere and provide significant opportunities for Maple Ridge agricultural products:

- Take advantage of the Chef Friendly Farmers Market Program, an initiative between farmers markets and chefs to get local food onto restaurant plates and increase market presence in the community

- Get involved with the Food & Nutrition Coupon Program, sponsored by the BC Association of Farmers' Markets to increase access to fresh BC-produced products for low-income pregnant women and low income families with children, complement existing cooking and skill building programs (CSB) and expand the awareness, use of and sales at BCAFM member farmers' markets
- Develop linkages with the local food movement through the Eat BC Program, which promotes BC food producers, restaurants, distributors, processors and retail buyers of BC food products
- Participate in the School Fruit and Vegetable Snack Program, sponsored by the Ministry of Health, to connect school age children with BC food
- District to adopt local food procurement policy, wherever possible, for local government functions
- Develop a local label to promote Maple Ridge food products
- Explore the possibility to collectively grow to a certifiable standard (that would differentiate Maple Ridge agricultural products from mainstream products)
- Organize a "Taste of Maple Ridge" annual agricultural food gala, including involving chefs in preparing local food products
- Educate the consumer about nutrition, food quality and the value of local food
- Promote farm tours, tastings, road side vendors
- Improve agriculture content in school curriculum
- Improve agricultural and local food reporting in local media
- Create a Maple Ridge Farmers' Institute to advise the District on local food system development issues and strategies

### **3.6 Developing Local Distribution and Marketing Systems**

The existing mainstream food marketing system tends to be composed of large multi-nationals that compete to deliver food sourced from global suppliers at lowest unit cost. This food system delivers abundance of food, but in what is increasingly perceived to be a relatively wasteful and unsustainable manner. Supply chains are long, quality and freshness is often secondary to transportability, and various precautions must be taken to ensure food safety due to the distances travelled.

#### ***The Situation:***

Local farmers are capable of supplying only a portion of the food consumed by the local population. The concentration of distribution in the mainstream food distribution system means that the scale of local production is often too small to be considered as a supplier to wholesale and foodservice companies. As a result, local product is usually sold in niche markets too small for large retailers to enter and marketed through channels that avoid competition with commodity products. Where local product does reach retail shelves, it must compete head-on on price with similar products procured from, potentially, any continent on earth.

#### ***The Issue:***

The emerging locally based food distribution and marketing system has been characterized in its early stages by farmers' markets, roadside stands, and farmer direct sales. These marketing models are successful but, by themselves, do not have the capacity or coordination necessary to reliably transfer food from producers to consumers. Agriculture is not currently being included as one of the economic drivers in the community.

#### ***Preferred Option:***

The preferred option is that the components of food distribution and marketing be fast tracked to protect the integrity of local products. A local food system has need of the same types of distribution and marketing functions as large food systems, albeit at significantly smaller scale. Maintaining the quality of the food product through proper handling, storage, and transportation is critical and may be more challenging among small producers because of potential gaps in supply and fluctuations in quality.

#### ***Recommended Actions:***

A community based food system has to be about the effective distribution of local food as it relates to the sector, the community, and health. Options worthy of pursuing to develop a local food system from producer to retail include:

- Pursuit of grants at all political levels for capital costs, training and advisory services for the development of all stages of the supply chain
- Development of supply chain infrastructure to support the local food sector, such as procurement, staging, wholesaling, cooperative marketing
- Create food links with the agri-tourism and equine components of the local agricultural sector
- Create a food hub to receive, store, and distribute local perishable products to local marketers
- Develop diversity in local producer-consumer relationships through a variety of marketing and food distribution channels
- Bring together existing specialty food outlets and let them support the sales of local produce (such as Bruce Market, the Pumpkin Patch and other tourism food outlets).

### 3.7 Developing Local Food System Infrastructure

#### *The Situation:*

The BC food processing sector has been undergoing consolidation and concentration in lock step with increasing scale and concentration of production. Local fruit and vegetable food processing has largely disappeared and regional processing continues to decline, except for primary processing prior to export. There is limited further processing in niche markets too small for large multinational processors to enter. New provincial meat inspection regulations require that meat or poultry must be processed in provincially or federally licensed facilities, leading to the shutdown of current operating facilities and adding prohibitive cost to small scale local meat production.

#### *The Issue:*

Processing is a proven strategy of increasing product lines, food choices, and adding value to food products. Food processing makes use of lower grade products and culls produced as harvest byproducts that do not have a fresh market, thereby contributing to farming viability and resulting in more efficient and profitable agricultural operations. Processing extends the market season and transforms food into less perishable forms.

Food processing is a critical structural component of a local food system. The challenge is to attract processing opportunities that can target local needs within the limitations of the scale and seasonality of local production.

#### *Preferred Option:*

There is widespread interest in developing locally the potential to process local food products. There is a need for training of would-be processors, providing seasonal access to community or demonstration facilities, and providing opportunities for consumers to learn processing techniques. It is recognized that the capacities of the facilities could be small scale and linked into the health and food choice goals of a more accessible local food system.

#### *Recommended Actions:*

Involvement of all levels of government will be required to identify and develop local processing infrastructure. Actions that could be considered include:

- Pursue federal and provincial programs to investigate and identify value added opportunity
- Promote the potential for shared use of commercial kitchens in the community
- Investigate potentials for micro-processing and mobile processing
- Develop incubator capacity to train processor entrepreneurs and teach consumers how to use local food products
- Include agri-industrial considerations in District economic planning and land use
- Work with regulators to create food system safeguards that are appropriate and affordable for the food safety issues faced in local food systems
- Organize workshops and training for would-be processors to learn safe and nutritious processing skills
- Look to partner with like-minded interests in adjacent municipalities to take advantage of regional opportunities
- Look for partners with educational institutions such as BCIT food processing, UCFV, Kwantlen college

### 3.8 Supporting Diversity in Agricultural Land Use

There is a range in size of Maple Ridge farms although over 54% of them are less than 4 ha in area. There are also a significant number of residential properties in agricultural areas that are suitable for farming, but are currently not in active use. Consultations indicate that participants believe that policies and programs should be pursued to support all sizes of farms and agricultural land uses. Participants recommended a strategy to improve the resiliency of the rural area by promoting and embracing the diversity of agricultural products and services agricultural lands are capable of providing in the community. These sub sectors and fringe activities have similar requirements for land, drainage, and tenure. Further, these activities contribute to the agricultural sector by creating demand for processing, collection and handling, waste hauling and distribution of organic fertilizer, tack shops and riding outfits, and other support services and infrastructure needed for agriculture .

#### *The Situation:*

The ALC regulation lays out permitted ALR uses and the range is sufficiently broad to accommodate a diversity of agricultural land use. In addition to food production, land in the ALR already provides a range of services including aesthetic attributes, green space, equine operations, trails activity, hiking, recreational pursuit, bed and breakfast, agri-tourism opportunity, direct sales, and wildlife habitat. These services are valued in the community. The OCP recognizes and promotes the role of agricultural land in creating environmental values, providing diverse community services, and contributing to the rural character of Maple Ridge.

#### *The Issue:*

Although positive developments in strengthening the local food system are occurring, there is a need to accept, promote and support the diversity of goods and services created on agricultural lands in Maple Ridge. Many “farms”, including equine operations, large gardens, nursery and horticultural crops, livestock for wool production, and show animals, exist that are not in food production but have little status or support within the agricultural designation.

**Preferred Option:**

Consultations emphasized that the agricultural area plan should not try to pick “winning” agricultural models or land use opportunities. Rather, a diversity of land uses compatible with the land use designation is considered most sustainable for the District. All acceptable and permitted agricultural land uses should be integrated into a strategy to ensure that the land base is reserved for agriculture while maximizing the ways in which it may contribute to the quality of life of the community.

**Recommended Actions:**

Pursuing diversity in local agriculture is a way of ensuring that agricultural land use is capable of adaptive response to, and recovery from, challenges to food security, and other amenities valued by society. More diversity creates more ability for successful response and keeping “fringe” activities within agriculture will protect the land base and support the infrastructure also required for food production.

Recommended actions include:

- Provide land, water, and opportunities for allotment gardens and hobby gardening wherever there is community demand
- Organize workshop to teach residents how to grow and handle products and animal husbandry
- Support and integrate agri-tourism land uses with food agriculture, recreation, trails, and environmental attributes
- Develop a hub to receive, handle and store surplus products from allotment and home gardens
- Promote community shared agriculture (food box) options by providing land and loans
- Promote community supported agriculture options
- Provide a permanent home for a farmers’ market
- Continue to support and promote farm direct sales, u-pick and agri-tourism opportunities
- Support home delivery business
- Develop or support a Maple Ridge gardeners club focused on food production and horticulture
- Support non-profit food production initiatives on District land
- Support land use for equestrian activities, and have horse keeping as part of the farm use
- Support a magazine on gardening, hobby farming, animal husbandry and rural lifestyle
- Support other land uses that preserve the integrity of the land base for agriculture
- Identify seed capital and /or loans sources to pursue these opportunities

**4.0 Other Issues and Options**

Other issues have been identified but not given as high a priority in the agricultural area planning process, either because the actions required are beyond the control of the District or are not seen as critical to the plan’s success. Nevertheless, consideration needs to be made of these factors in order to promote a balanced and integrated approach to enhancing the agricultural sector in Maple Ridge.

**4.1 Agriculture-Residential Conflicts**

**The Situation:**

Edge planning along borders of agricultural areas is an effective method of minimizing conflicts related to farm sights, smells, and sounds. However, in Maple Ridge, a high proportion of parcels within the ALR and adjacent to the ALR boundary is held as rural residential properties. Many of these property owners believe they are being adversely affected by the temporary presence of farming operations in areas they think will ultimately become developed.

**The Issue:**

The rural residential land use zoning designation in the ALR has created the impression that the ALR is not reserved for farming. Farmers are being confronted by these rural residents about their agricultural activities, creating resentment, unwarranted harassment, and stress.

**Recommended Actions:**

If agriculture is to regain its priority as the best use of the ALR, steps need to be taken to convey this to all property owners. These steps could include:

- Require real estate vendors to inform prospective purchasers of ALR parcels that they will be residing in an agricultural area, where agriculture is practiced, and sights, sounds, and smells of agriculture are to be expected
- The District consider establishing an agriculture Development Permit Area along the border of the ALR and to require buffers to reduce and eliminate the potential for conflicts
- The District implements buffer guidelines recommended by the ALC
- The District changes the zoning of land in the ALR from rural-residential to agriculture
- Create signage to inform non-farming neighbours about where the farming areas are and farm practices
- Establish a Farmers Institute to provide agricultural perspective and represent the farming sector
- Hold workshops for rural residents to inform them of the ways in which their actions and behavior can adversely affect agriculture
- Better enforcement of laws respecting behavior causing adverse impacts on agricultural operations

## 4.2 Agriculture-Environment Conflicts

### *The Situation:*

Agricultural land and operations in Maple Ridge are located adjacent to many streams and sensitive environmental areas.

### *The Issue:*

There is concern that agriculture is at risk of polluting the environment.

### *Recommended Actions:*

Farm operations need to be environmentally sound due to the elevated risk of pollution occurring in a high rainfall area with numerous ravines and fish bearing streams. Options that would promote land stewardship include:

- Hold workshops to teach those interested in farming about environmental risks
- Encourage farms to complete environmental farm plans to assess the potential environmental risks posed by their operations
- Create a clearinghouse for manure disposal so that operations requiring a land application solution can find property owners willing to receive it for beneficial use
- Investigate a municipal waste management solution that would ensure that bedding, manures, green waste, and other agricultural organic wastes are handled in a systematic and environmentally friendly way
- Promote composting by providing assistance to do it right
- Promote and support demand for sustainably produced products from within the District

## 4.3 Agriculture-Wildlife Conflicts

### *The Situation:*

Agricultural crops routinely are subject to depredation by wildlife. Agricultural land, after forests, parks and conservation areas, represents a significant class of habitat and a food source for many species. Of most concern, black bears stray out of the wilderness areas to the north and enter Maple Ridge agricultural areas.

### *The Issue:*

Farmers have no ability to control wildlife on their farms and receive no compensation for the damage incurred. Exclusion fences are expensive and if located incorrectly, may also work to create corridor bottlenecks and other problems.

### *Recommended Actions:*

Strategies to reduce wildlife damage on agricultural lands need to be considered in conjunction with parks and wildlife management plans of the District and the province. Options include:

- Devise strategies to steer wildlife away from agricultural areas and to identify feasible integrated uses of lands by wildlife and agriculture
- Financial assistance to farmers to fence areas chronically affected by wildlife, such as bears and deer
- Devise strategy to deal with tame rabbits released into the wild and now preying on gardens and crops

## 4.4 Regulatory Issues

While some concern was expressed about local bylaws and policies affecting agriculture, there is a voiced need for the rural residential zoning to better reflect the purpose of the ALR. As such, the Official Community Plan should be harmonized with the intent and provisions for agriculture in Maple Ridge.

At the same time, the District does not have a history of regulatory dispute with farmers. While there is some concern about the use of land in the setbacks from streams, the application of science based criteria in limiting use would appear acceptable to those affected.

## 4.5 Transportation Issues

By and large, transportation issues are confined to specific areas and do not rank high among the agricultural sector. There is recognition that growth, the bridge, and the configuration of Maple Ridge pose challenges for the transportation system and create both positive and negative impacts on agriculture.

## 4.6 Agricultural Services

While it is acknowledged that only a remnant of an agricultural service industry still exists in Maple Ridge, it is also recognized that other communities with such services are close and easily accessed. If future demand for agricultural services emerges, there may be opportunities for local providers; otherwise the status quo is acceptable.

## **Appendix A: Findings of the Agricultural Issues and Options Workshop**

