

*Agricultural Land
Commission*

**2005/06
Annual Service Plan Report**



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For more information on the British Columbia
Agricultural Land Commission, contact:

Agricultural Land Commission

Suite 133 – 4940 Canada Way

Burnaby, BC

V5G 4K6

or visit our website at

<http://www.alc.gov.bc.ca/>

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Message from the Minister and Accountability Statement

I am pleased to present the 2005/06 Annual Service Plan Report for the Agricultural Land Commission. Over the past year, the Commission continued the difficult task of preserving the province's limited agricultural land in the face of constant pressure to convert agricultural land to other forms of land use.

One of the key challenges we face is ensuring the productivity of the highest value lands. Community and economic growth around the province places incredible pressure on the Agricultural Land Reserve, and the Commission has done an exceptional job in withstanding those pressures.

The agriculture industry is vitally important to B.C. and the preservation and sustainable use of the agricultural land base continues to be a government priority. I intend to work with the Agricultural Land Commission chair and other stakeholders to explore opportunities to further protect our agricultural land.

The 2005/06 Agricultural Land Commission Annual Service Plan Report compares the actual results to the expected results identified in the Commission's 2005/06 – 2007/08 Service Plan Update. I am accountable for those results as reported.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Pat Bell". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Honourable Pat Bell
Minister of Agriculture and Lands

June 30, 2006

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Highlights of the Year

The Commission achieved the following key results in the 2005 – 2006 service planning period:

- The Commission received 560 new applications and made 687 decisions;
- Local governments referred 33 official community plans and amendments and eight zoning by-laws to the Commission for review;
- Responsibility for the Commission was transferred to the Minister of Agriculture and Lands from the Minister of Sustainable Resource Management;
- The six regional panels of the Commission met a total of 104 days with applicants, local governments, agricultural associations and other stakeholders;
- The executive committee met at regular intervals for a total of three days and the full Commission met a total of two days.

Purpose, Vision, Mission and Values

Purposes

The purposes of the Agricultural Land Commission are set out in section 6 of the *Agricultural Land Commission Act* as:

- (a) to preserve agricultural land;
- (b) to encourage farming on agricultural land in collaboration with other communities of interest; and
- (c) to encourage local governments, First Nations, the government and its agents to enable and accommodate farm use of agricultural land and uses compatible with agriculture in their plans, bylaws and policies.

Vision, Mission and Values

Vision

The vision of the Agricultural Land Commission is a land base in British Columbia reserved for farming.

Mission

The mission of the Agricultural Land Commission is to preserve agricultural land and encourage and enable farm businesses throughout British Columbia.

Values

The Commission is committed to the following values:

- **Integration** — Policies and programs foster long-term sustainability by considering a range of economic, social and environmental values.
- **Accountability and fairness** — The Commission sets performance standards, monitors compliance and reports on progress. The Commission acts fairly and in the public interest.
- **Transparency** — The Commission establishes open processes; the bases of all decisions are public information.
- **Science and knowledge** — Agricultural Land Reserve boundaries and decisions are based on biophysical criteria, local knowledge and site specific circumstances.
- **Responsiveness** — In carrying out its responsibilities, the Commission considers the needs of farmers, landowners, applicants, First Nations, local governments and others.
- **Shared responsibility** — The Commission strives to develop positive working relationships with local governments, First Nations and others and to ensure consultation with all stakeholders in its decisions and activities.
- **Certainty** — The Commission makes clear and timely decisions within a predictable and understandable regulatory framework.

Strategic Context

The Agricultural Land Commission operates within a dynamic environment influenced by factors including diverse and often competing interests as well as broader agricultural, land use, environmental, economic and societal trends. These influencing factors may be external (i.e., beyond the Commission’s direct control) or internal (i.e., as a result of the Commission’s own actions). External and internal factors that influenced the Commission within the 2005–06 service planning period include the following.

External Factors

- Despite efforts to reduce the number and type of uses requiring an application to the Commission, the number of applications submitted to the Commission has been increasing — including several notable and complex applications to exclude land from the ALR to accommodate urban growth. Strong economic growth, a buoyant housing market and continued population growth may underlie this increase. The following table shows the increase in the number of applications over the past three years.

Year	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06
Number of Applications	463	544	560

Internal Factors

- The Commission committed to maintaining a high level of responsiveness, requiring additional effort on the part of regional panels to accommodate the increased application load. As a result, the Commission was unable to dedicate as many resources to pro-active planning work as it had anticipated during the 2005–06 period.

Service Delivery and Core Business

The core business of the Agricultural Land Commission is the preservation of agricultural land through the administration of the *Agricultural Land Commission Act*. The business of the Commission is carried out through three functional areas:

Land Use Planning and Application Processing

The Commission reviews and decides applications under the *Agricultural Land Commission Act* and enforces compliance with the Act and regulations. In addition to deciding land use applications under the Act, the Commission reviews plans and bylaws of local governments and other agencies to ensure that the ALR is properly identified and that the policies are supportive of the ALR and farmland preservation. The Commission works with many stakeholders including individuals, farm organizations, local governments and First Nations to support farm development and to remove unnecessary obstacles to farm expansion in their areas.

Strategic Planning and Corporate Policy

The Commission develops strategies, plans and policies to achieve the goals and objectives set out in the Service Plan. The Commission also participates in the agricultural planning and policy initiatives of other ministries, agencies and local governments.

Administration and Information Systems

The above two functions are supported by an administration, records management and information systems unit. This includes maintenance of an application database and ALR maps for the province.

Report on Performance

Performance Plan Summary Table

Synopsis of Commission Performance Measure Results

Five Great Goals	Commission Mission Preserve agricultural land and encourage and enable farm businesses throughout British Columbia			
	Commission Goals	Commission Objectives	Performance Measures	Results
To lead the world in sustainable environmental management, with the best air and water quality, and the best fisheries management — bar none.	1. Preservation of agricultural land	• Lands suitable for agriculture are retained in the ALR	1.1 Net change in total land area in the ALR (ha)	✓✓
		• Commission decisions do not significantly diminish the suitability of land for agriculture	1.2 Percentage of decisions for non-farm use and subdivision approved on the basis of community need	✗
To create more jobs per capita than anywhere else in Canada.	2. A land use framework that encourages and enables farming	• Plans, policies and activities of the Commission, local governments, ministries, agencies and First Nations encourage and enable farming	2.1 Percentage of official community plans that encourage and enable farming	N/A
			2.2 Number of local government agricultural area plans	△

✓✓ Exceeded target. ✓ Achieved target. △ Target mostly achieved. ✗ Missed target. N/A — Not Applicable.

Goals, Objectives, Strategies and Performance Measures

Commission Goal 1

Preservation of agricultural land.

Agricultural land comprises less than five per cent of the total land area of British Columbia. There is ongoing pressure to convert this limited agricultural land to non-agricultural uses. The Commission protects agricultural land in BC through the Agricultural Land Reserve or ALR, a provincial land use zone in favour of agriculture. The ALR provides an agricultural land base that supports, and creates opportunities for, a safe and secure source of food and other agricultural products. The protected land base also provides for agricultural expansion and compatible economic activities.

Objectives

The objectives related to the preservation of agricultural land are to ensure that:

1. Lands suitable for agriculture are retained in the ALR; and
2. Commission decisions do not significantly diminish the suitability of land for agriculture.

Strategies

The Commission employs the following strategies to achieve the above objectives:

1. The *Agricultural Land Commission Act* provides processes for landowners, local governments and First Nations to apply to the Commission to include or remove land from the ALR. The Commission decides applications with the objective of ensuring that lands suitable for agriculture are retained in the ALR; and
2. The Commission reviews the plans and bylaws of local governments and other agencies to ensure that the ALR is properly identified and that the policies are supportive of the ALR and farmland preservation.

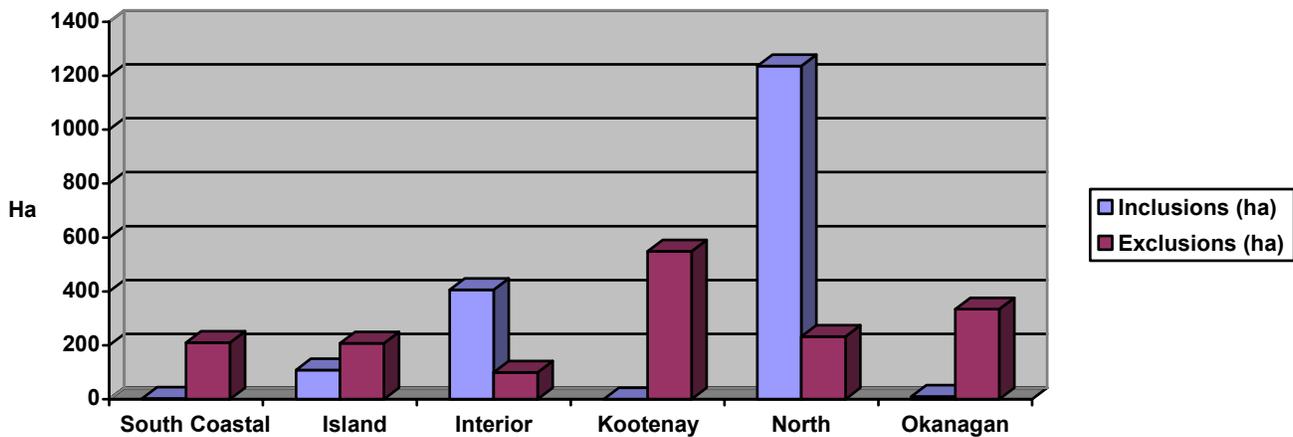
Performance Measures

1. The amount of land with capability for agriculture is finite and its location is fixed, although the suitability of agricultural land may change over time as a result of factors such as surrounding development and investment in agricultural infrastructure. The Commission, through the application process, includes or excludes land from the Reserve based on suitability for agriculture. The Commission also may exclude suitable agricultural land to meet community needs in cases where no alternatives exist.

The *net change in the size of the ALR* is an indicator of the stability of the agricultural land base. A relatively stable or increasing net size of the ALR indicates that lands suitable for agriculture are being retained in the ALR.

The size of the ALR remained relatively constant in 2005/06; the net changes resulted in a 132.3 hectare increase. Inclusions and exclusions by region are shown in Chart 1.

Chart 1: Inclusions and Exclusions by Region

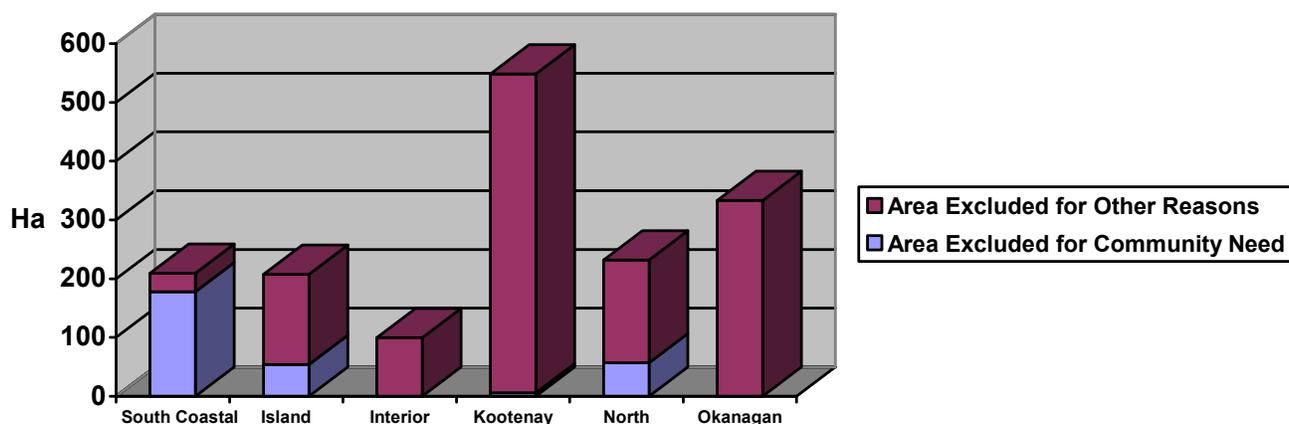


- Some approvals are granted on the basis that they meet a pressing community need that cannot be addressed without impacting agricultural land. A trend towards a high *percentage of applications for non-farm use and subdivision approved on the basis of community need* indicates an increased likelihood that the overall suitability of land for agriculture is being compromised. Note that community need is a factor in some decisions where poor agricultural suitability is also a factor. The indicator only includes decisions where community need was the primary factor in the decision. The indicator also includes applications for exclusion, which are considered applications for non-farm use for the purposes of the performance measure.

The percentage of applications approved on the basis of community need in 2005/06 was 2.9 per cent (13 out of 451 decisions for exclusion, subdivision and non-farm use, constituting 13 per cent of the land area approved), exceeding the targeted maximum of two per cent of approvals. The percentage of applications submitted on the basis of community need is outside of the Commission’s control and the percentage approved on that basis may vary year to year. However, a rate of approval on the basis of community need that exceeds the target of less than two per cent consistently over a number of years indicates that the Commission should examine the overall impact of community need applications on the agricultural land base.

Exclusions approved on the basis of community need are broken down by region in Chart 2. This chart shows that a significant percentage of the area approved for exclusion in the South Coastal was excluded on the basis of community need. This is to be expected within the South Coastal region where little unsuitable land remains in the ALR that may be the subject of an exclusion application; most land excluded, therefore, is intended to address a compelling community need.

Chart 2: Community Need Component of Area Approved for Exclusion



Performance Measure	2002/03 Actual	2003/04 Actual	2004/05 Actual	2005/06 Target	2005/06 Actual	Variance	Target Met?
Per cent net change in the size of the ALR	+0.84 %	-0.01 %	-0.01 %	<0.1% decrease over 3 years	No net change	+0.1 %	✓
Per cent of decisions for non-farm use and subdivision approved on the basis of community need	No data available		14.1 % ¹	<2%	2.9 %	+0.9 %	✗

Data Sources and Issues

¹ This measure is intended to report on applications decided where community need was the primary reason for approval. Reporting on the percentage of applications approved on the basis of community need in the 2004/2005 period includes all applications where community need was a factor in the decision, even if community need was not the primary reason for the decision. The data reported for 2004/2005, therefore, is not directly comparable to the data reported for 2005/2006.

For the purpose of comparison, community need was a factor in 11.8 per cent of decisions in the 2005/06 period. This is directly comparable to 14.1 per cent in 2004/05.

Commission Goal 2

A land use framework that encourages and enables agriculture.

The land use framework for agriculture includes the *Agricultural Land Commission Act*, local government land use plans and by-laws, and the legislation, plans and policies of other ministries and agencies that affect agricultural land use.

The ALR is a working agricultural land base. The utilization of the ALR for agricultural production contributes to the economy, stabilizes rural communities and provides a safe and secure food supply. The Commission shares the responsibility for encouraging farm use of agricultural lands with its key partners. These include 134 local governments, the agricultural sector and its professional organizations, the Ministry of Agriculture and Lands, other ministries and agencies, Agriculture Canada and other federal agencies, and some First Nations.

Objective

The objective related to a land use framework that encourages and enables agriculture is to ensure that the plans, policies and activities of the Commission, local governments, ministries, agencies and First Nations encourage and enable farming.

Strategies

The Commission employs the following strategies to achieve the above objective:

1. The publication of guidelines to assist local governments and other agencies with land use responsibilities to ensure that the provincial interest in encouraging and enabling farming is addressed by their plans and policies; and
2. The selective review of local government official community plans and by-laws to determine consistency with the guidelines, legislation and regulations.

Performance Measures

1. The *change in the number of local government official community plans that are consistent with the Agricultural Land Commission Act and with the Commission's guidelines* is an indicator of the Commission's success in working with others to encourage, enable and accommodate farming.

The intent of the Commission is to move from reviewing all plans and by-laws of local government to a risk-based program of comprehensive audits of a sample of plans with ALR. Local government plans will be evaluated to determine their consistency with the Act and Commission guidelines and the degree to which they encourage farming in the ALR.

The planned development of the audit program has been put on hold pending a more comprehensive review of the Commission's internal practices and procedures; therefore, no data pertaining to this measure is available.

2. The Commission, along with the Ministry of Agriculture and Lands, also encourages local governments to adopt agricultural area plans that support agriculture. An increase in the *number of agricultural area plans* adopted is another indicator of the Commission and Ministry's success in encouraging, enabling and accommodating farming.

No additional agricultural area plans were adopted in 2005/06.

Note that the Ministry of Agriculture and Lands measures the ability of the farm community to address and influence issues that affect agriculture by tracking the number of Agricultural Advisory Committees in its Service Plan. This performance measure complements the measure included in this Service Plan of the number of agricultural area plans adopted. The Ministry has established a baseline of 24 agricultural area committees in 2005/06, with a target to increase that number to 26 in 2006/07.

Performance Measure	2004/05 Actual	2005/06 Target	2005/06 Actual	Variance	Target Met?
Per cent of official community plans that encourage and enable agriculture	Not applicable	Completion of audit plan and establish baseline by end of fiscal	Audit plan not completed	Not applicable	Not applicable
Number of agricultural area plans adopted	12 ¹	14	15	+1	△

Data Sources and Issues

¹ Updated information from the Ministry of Agriculture and Lands indicates that the actual number of agricultural area plans adopted by 2004/05 was 15, not 12. There was no actual increase, therefore, in the number of plans adopted.

Deregulation

The table below lists the Commission's most significant deregulation and regulatory reform initiatives.

Performance Measure	2004/05 Actual	2005/06 Target	2005/06 Actual	Variance	Target Met?
Evaluation of impacts of fill/soil deposit deregulation	N/A	Audit of fill/extraction proceeding via notice of intent	Audit complete ¹	None	✓
Evaluation of oil and gas uses/impacts	N/A	Audit of Oil and Gas Commission delegation	Audit complete ²	None	✓
Processing time for applications	86% of applications decided within 90 days (estimate)	80% of applications decided within 90 days	64.4% of applications decided within 90 days	-15.6% ³	✗
Regulatory requirements maintained at June 2004 baseline	223	223	223	0	✓

Data Sources and Issues

- ¹ A review of notices-of-intent to place fill or remove soil received in 2005/06 indicates that the Commission reviewed and responded to 32 out of 35 notices within the 30-day timeframe. The Commission did not respond to 3 notices within the 30-day timeframe based on a preliminary assessment that the proposals would benefit or have no significant impact to agriculture.
- ² The audit of the ALC's delegation of oil and gas applications to the Oil and Gas Commission is for applications submitted in the year 2004.
- ³ The Commission achieved an average application processing time of 85 days; however, the increased number and complexity of applications resulted in fewer applications being processed within the 90-day target. Additional time was required to ensure an adequate assessment of many applications prior to a decision. In the North, Interior and Kootenay Regions, the Commission extended its practice of postponing the on-site review of applications submitted in the winter months to spring in order to minimize the safety risk of winter travel and to improve the panels' ability to view the land.

Report on Resources

Resource Summary Table 2005/06

	Estimated ¹	Other Authorizations ²	Total Estimated	Actual	Variance
Operating Expenses (\$000)					
Agricultural Land Commission	2,068	0	2,068	2,030	38
Total	2,068	0	2,068	2,030	38
Full-time Equivalents (FTEs)					
Agricultural Land Commission	21	0	21	19.23	(1.77)
Total	21	0	21	19.23	(1.77)
Commission Capital Expenditures (Consolidated Revenue Fund) (\$000)					
Agricultural Land Commission	15	0	15	0	15
Total	15	0	15	0	15

¹ These amounts have been restated, for comparative purposes only, to be consistent with the presentation of the 2006/07 *Estimates*. Schedule A of the *Estimates*, presents a detailed reconciliation.

² "Other Authorizations" include Supplementary Estimates, Statutory Appropriations and Contingencies.