

Agriculture Land Reserve Policy Review Student-led Project:

Community Report of Events from May – August 2023

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And

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgments.....	3
Executive Summary.....	4
Positionality Statement.....	4
Introduction.....	5
Activities.....	7
Methods.....	9
Summary (What people said).....	13
Results.....	15
Recommendations.....	18
Conclusion.....	19
Appendix.....	19
Appendix 1	
Public Presentations.....	19
Appendix 2	
News Articles Featuring this Project.....	20
Williams Lake Tribune.....	20
Famed North Cariboo August 2023 Newsletter.....	22
Farmed North Cariboo ‘Stories’.....	23
UNBC ‘Stories’.....	24
Quesnel Observer.....	25
Country Life in BC Magazine.....	27
Appendix 3	
Maps.....	31
References.....	35

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It was truly and honour to be able to hear from all walks of life about, not only the challenges are within the agricultural community in the Cariboo, but to also hear an equal appreciation for the land. No matter which part of the Cariboo I was in there was always a clear love and connection for the land.

This project stems from and is operating under the auspices of both the School of Planning and Sustainability within the University of Northern British Columbia and the Planning Institute of British Columbia's Student-led Project Internship Program.

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Finally, I would like to extend a heartfelt thank you to my partner John Sarrazin who has been with this project since the very beginning. He held the most challenging role, being that of support in every meaning of the word. From academic, financial, emotional, and physical support I truly would have been lost without the pure dedication, guidance, and wisdom from you. I am truly thankful that you believed in me when I said late one February night. That I had this idea of looking into the nuts and bolts of BC's food security issues. Without skipping a beat, you believed I could achieve this without knowing the long arduous days/weeks of planning, writing, and travel would result from this project. It is hard to understate your vital role in this project and the readers need to acknowledge your instrumental contributions to this project. I am eternally grateful to have a partner like you by my side. Sincerely, from the bottom of my heart. Thank you.

Though funding was obtained through the Planning Institute of British Columbia and the Cariboo Regional District by way of the Kersley Farmers' Insititute, the opinions expressed are solely those of the author.

Executive Summary

This student-led project seeks to ensure policy makers understand the importance of localized contexts and the implications of governance being implemented on the agricultural sector of British Columbia. This project has been broken down into two portions. The first was field work over the summer of 2023 (June to August) where physical community engagement facilitations were held at Farmers Markets and Rodeos. These engagements were to hear from farmers and ranchers in the Cariboo Region what, if any, challenges were felt by the farming and ranching community. These communities include Alexandira, Quesnel, and Williams Lake. The second portion is currently underway with that of an Independent Study from September-December 2023. In addition, a virtual platform was created and promoted to ensure further outreach was met. It is the goal of this work to seek out ethical and meaningful changes that will result in the support of growers and producers in this province to begin establishing tangible long-term applications that seek to eliminate food insecurity in British Columbia.



Image from Sisters Creek Rec Site

Positionality Statement

Descending from homesteading ancestry in the Canadian Prairies, agriculture still holds a strong connection to my daily way of life. Growing up in northern British Columbia hailing directly from a railroading family it was instilled early in life the importance of, and viability of, a resource-based economy. Like many living in the service-based center of Prince George, the direct correlation between food security and its interactions and importance in my day-to-day life declined drastically. Food security and my personal connection to it was revived and strengthened to a critical level of importance due to food shortages during both the Covid-19 pandemic of 2020 and the atmospheric river phenomena of 2021. These two unprecedented

events crippled most supply chain routes between urban BC (British Columbia) and the agricultural rich resources of the Cariboo and the larger rural area of the province.

With renewed and heightened concern surrounding personal food sovereignty in BC I recognized an ever-growing gap in decision-makers' quest to successfully resolve the current food security crisis plaguing BC. The major challenge lies in the way decision-makers and current policies have left out a key group of stakeholders in these conversations. The farmers, food producers, and ranchers who collectively share an intimate knowledge of the lands they work on are rarely consulted, and such consultations that are held shoot themselves in the foot... you can put this better... I do not claim to be an expert in agriculture or policy review, but I believe the creation of new innovative approaches that are generated in a truly collaborative manner with community members and others rich in experience offer the most promising and effective ways to move forward successfully on these pressing issues. In addition, I argue we must recognize the importance of rejecting the one-size fits all approach. Rather, we must recognize there is a need for decision-makers to identify the importance of communication and connection with those on the ground and commit the resources needed to understand local contextual issues and build strong, long-term relationships with Indigenous communities, Agricultural Associations, farmers, and ranchers with small and medium sized operations, especially in the rural Cariboo. Tapping into local knowledge sources is the surest way to build a sustainable local food economy.

Introduction

The profession of being a (family based) agricultural grower/producer is seen as a dying art which has outlived its usefulness. This is especially apparent here in British Columbia within recent decades. Yet our province's struggle for provincial food resiliency has remained static for equally as long. The question of what aspects have contributed to the decline of the profession and what remedial measures might reverse the decline has added a new sense of urgency as climate change highlights the need for more reliable and sustainable local food supplies. Through the recent pandemic and even more recently through the 2021 atmospheric river severing vital transportation connections and disastrous floods that wiped out flocks, throughout residents in the province saw food shortages and their consequences. These recent experiences have caused many to realize the importance of more local control over their food supplies. As a result, there is a renewed interest in the idea of localized agriculture production in British Columbia. In order to capitalize on the new and emerging opportunity, understanding the various barriers that inhibit those wishing to enter this profession, and those currently struggling to survive in the profession, must be understood. This report summarizes months of secondary research and consulting with those most ideally placed to answer these critical questions. The answers collected provide a road map of doable, concrete, and effective actions

that could transform the experience of entering and sustaining a family based agricultural enterprise.

The School of Planning and Sustainability at UNBC (University of Northern British Columbia), and PIBC (Planning Institute of British Columbia), undertook a community consultation project structured as a student internship. The student chose to understand some of the critical issues impacting the agriculture profession throughout the Cariboo Region. Building relationships with community partners enabled an effective outreach process for a series of community engagements to explore with members of the agriculture community that a clearer picture of the “boots on the ground” challenges emerged.

This was not a “one and gone” approach. Using well established community engagements tools (Dotmocracy and Traffic Lights) enabled comfortable opportunities for the student to engage and build rapport and relationships with a community notoriously too busy to participate in community consultation. (Explain the cyclical nature of the farmers’ seasons, and why going to farmers markets worked.). These facilitation tools encouraged community members to generate ideas. The iterative nature of the community consultation sessions also ensured that ideas and insights previously collected were affirmed and added to as the summer months progressed.

From a student perspective the experience The benefits of attaining “soft skills” such as facilitation cannot be understated as these tools are key to engaging with community members that may have a stigma with historically corporate means of engagement via surveys or limiting, and in some cases, diluting the quality of feedback being received, in a broader context. Further, building the relationships with the 9 community partners who continue to invest in this work is of great benefit for a student practitioner once they hit the world of seeking employment.



Image taken at Quesnel Rodeo July 14th



Image taken from Sisters Creek Rec Site

Activities

As an undergraduate student in the School of Planning and Sustainability at the University of Northern British Columbia, I was afforded the opportunity to apply for and receive an internship from the Planning Institute of British Columbia in the form of a student-led research project. It was in this position that the project was developed in consultation with a series of community partners who live, work, and/or, represent individuals involved directly or indirectly in the agriculture sector in the Cariboo Region. The individuals were and continue to be critical resources throughout this project and into this work's future. The partners supported the work of this project by providing advice and suggestions. They carried this role from idea generation during monthly meetings, attending public engagements with the lead researcher, sharing the project with other individuals in their circles to further gain more eyes on the project. They also reviewed and edited various forms of works such as this piece to ensure all ideas are portrayed with the interests of the community of Cariboo Farmers in mind.



Figure 2: Image taken from partners meeting April 14th

The beginning of this project stemmed from an original idea of tackling the issues plaguing the ALR, especially the many building limitations of residential dwellings and ancillary structures in the North Cariboo Region and analyzing its impacts on multigenerational farmers. This focus was met with a warm reception by both partners and growers/producers across the region. The focus then shifted early during the consultations when in discussions with my partners we discussed the potential of

broadening the project. In doing so with the goal to create impactful change to current and future policies surrounding this topic and its functions within Ministry of Agriculture and Food and the ALC (Agricultural Land Commission). We discussed the potential challenges of seeing this specific but important topic gather the attention of the decision makers and budget holders. The drive was to ensure that excellent academic work could be seen and valued as an important support to effective choices. The partners decidedly wanted to be sure this project would continue to be a vital living and breathing resource to be consulted rather than shelved, a fate shared by much of the important work in this area that pre-dates this project. From these discussions, we decided to broaden this project to be more in line with the group's vision for this work. In essence the goal became to lay the foundation for further work conducted within the same cohort. An emphasis was placed on the continued work being conducted by myself with the addition I would continue to elevate the importance of this work within various circles both academic and in kind. Add: This model of enhancing relationships for academic – community partnerships will be most valuable moving forwards as universities strive to keep educational offering relevant to the rapidly changing world their graduates are moving into.

This work also began in a sense of shared values. The Ministry, ALC, Agricultural Associations, Indigenous Communities, and Local Governments do share the same future of seeing a robust, sustainable, and profitable provincial agriculture network that supports small and medium sized operations and sustains local communities and their economies. The scope of the project then shifted to how to enact the current fundamentals of practice and policy in the functions of the Ministry of Agriculture and Food, the ALR, and other relevant bodies.

With this expanded mandate the engagements continued. These engagements were held at farmers' markets and local rodeos in three communities over nine weeks through the summer of 2023 from June 10th to August 5th, with the student facilitating booths that attracted and engaged participants. These conversations served to enrich the information being

collected with the formal engagement activities. These sessions were held in communities along the Highway 97 corridor including Quesnel, Alexandria, and Williams Lake.

Methods

The utilization of dotmocracy as a tool to engage with community members was seen as the ideal method. Since the target audience for these engagements were farmers and ranchers, we needed to consider the historical context where this group of vital food producers has felt underrepresented, undervalued, and are dealing with long-standing issues that are generations in the making. These issues can be personified as insurmountable problems within the context of what Bishop-Williams identified as “wicked problems” Bishop-Williams (2020). Wicked problems are defined as “large, complex problems involving multiple perspectives that present substantial future challenges,” (Bishop-Williams, 2020). Given the historical context of this topic of seeking supports for growers and producers we utilized dotmocracy as it is shown to be a “solutions-oriented, strategy” generated by community members who have generations of experience working within the challenges of BC’s agriculture sector, (Bishop-Williams, 2020). This approach of community centred solutions and hearing from local knowledge banks has formed the cornerstone principles of ethics of this project. Ensuring all forms of work are created by, consulted with, and presented back to the community. In this instance being the farmers and ranchers of the Cariboo.



Image of Sisters Creek Rec Site

The engagements featured two community engagement tools, well regarded for enabling contentious issues and a fair hearing.

1) A dotmocracy community engagement tool. This dotmocracy tool was a critical component of supporting honest feedback as it focuses on gaining ideas from the public and does not seek or share the identity of the person sharing the idea, thus providing anonymity. Our dotmocracy featured six initial ideas gleaned from the literature review to stem the growth of further ideas.

These six ideas were confirmed in consultation with my community partners using a traffic lights community engagement exercise. The analysis of which can be viewed prior in Figure 3. This enabled the partners to share their insights and experiences on what aspects agricultural policy need to be preserved, enhanced, removed, what might need minor changes, and identify what was working well / what was missing. Through this exercise we generated the following:

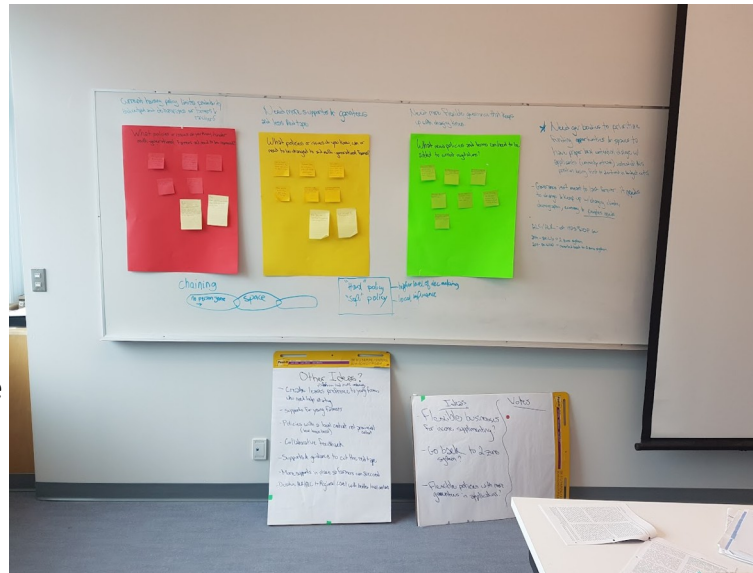


Figure 3: Image: In The Process

1. Can we allow non-farming businesses on the land of current agricultural operations to provide a supplemental income to the farmer?
2. Can we allow complimentary zoning for non-farming purposes that would benefit the broader agricultural community in that area (e.g., Tractor Repair, Livestock Veterinary...)
3. Can we consider going back to the 2-zone agriculture system? In 2014 under the BC Liberal Government the province was split into two agricultural zones. Zone one with all restrictions at the time being made up of the Lower Mainland/ Fraser Valley, Okanagan, and Vancouver Island. Zone two was made up of all other areas of the province with loosened restrictions on building practices and zoned uses. This was seen as the first substantial attempt to recognize the drastic difference in agriculture practices and related challenges in the more urban areas from rural British Columbia. This was then reverted to the previous one-zone system in 2019 by the BC NDP Government.
4. Can we increase legacy protections for generational farmers?
5. Can we have a more flexible application process with ALC? More considerations and contexts are heard.
6. Should we leave everything as is?

These ideas from partners became the dotmocracy “can” to kick and were displayed with invitations to join the conversation. It must be noted here that some of the ideas



Image of Testing Facilitation Set up

generated were already in play but were included because understanding the policy at varying stages of implementation and levels of governance is questionable. Information collected during the project confirmed these ideas were not understood or acted upon. Once a passerby had expressed interest in the topic and questions, they were invited to view these options and “vote” using sticky notes on the ideas that appeared to have the most merit from their perspective. If the participant did not agree with what was on the list or had an idea different from the listed, they were invited to write down their idea on a separate piece of chart paper. Over time, these ideas generated by the participants were also voted on by subsequent participants. Though not part of the exercise as intended it became a powerful expression of grass roots sentiment and presented a greater understanding of the local contexts regarding agriculture in the Cariboo.

During the information sessions, it was critical for the participants to remain free from the influence of the facilitator's perspectives before participating in the dotmocracy. This was difficult, as on occasions participants asked for clarity. The facilitators were able to clarify what aspects some of the ideas were referring to but could not fully explain.

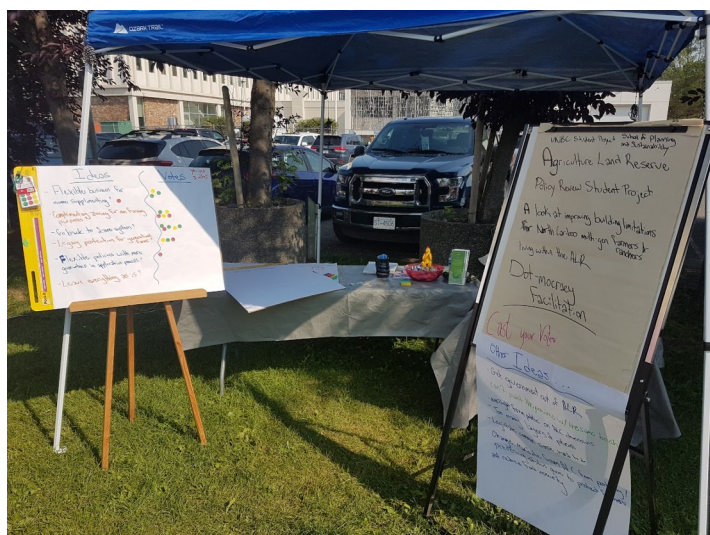


Image of July 8th Facilitation at the Quesnel Farmer's Market

The collection of participants' ideas became a feature of every engagement session. Each facilitation had a newly written paper with the same six initial ideas with no visual record of previous votes in view. This was to prevent external influence. It is also noted that, at each facilitation no prior 'other ideas' (public generated ideas) were posted from past engagements. This would enable localized richness to surface. This nuanced part of framework also

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plays a key role in the analysis portion of the engagements as multiple similar ideas across different sites, can be summarized into one main idea, recognizing the key strength importance of an idea if it was mentioned several times across multiple locations at a variety of venues including Farmers' Markets and Rodeos. These locations can be viewed via maps in Appendix 3, see figures 5.1 through 5.5.

In addition to the physical facilitations there was also a website created for the project that would act as a landing page for those wishing to learn more about the project. The site included upcoming key dates for the work, and access to the link to a virtual dotmocracy. This virtual dotmocracy was created using Mural, a multi-user collaboration platform used to gather ideas while the user's identities remain anonymous. On the mural page, the participant would be welcomed by a brief list of instructions and new user tips for those accessing mural for the first time. This would be followed further down the page with the same initial six ideas that are present at every in-person engagement. Participants would then be able to cast their vote using either coloured post-it note icons or other iconography next to the idea they agreed with. In addition, there was further space available to have other ideas shared similar to the physical facilitations. This virtual engagement further linked farmers and ranchers in areas that I was not able to visit in person during the summer but would still wish to participate and have their ideas heard. It is also important to note that entry into the mural is anonymous and no personal data was sought or collected.

While conducting the community engagement sessions there was concern for the potential lack of representation from farmers and ranchers. This was due to the fact that timing dictates the availability of farmers and ranchers. These engagement sessions were conducted over the summer months which is the prime haying season for farmers. In addition, another constraint was that there was only one person able to conduct/host these community engagements, forcing a limit on how many communities could be visited physically and limiting the geographic scope of this work significantly. To balance these limitations, a webpage was created for community groups, agricultural associations, government officials, indigenous communities, farmers and ranchers, and members of the public, to view and interact with this project in the following forms:

1. To participate in the virtual dotmocracy linked on the webpage.
2. To access bulletins and updates to the project including but not limited to:
 - a. Upcoming facilitation dates
 - b. Summaries of past facilitations
 - c. General information about the project.
3. To serve as a point of contact with the project lead Matt Henderson via email.

Creating this webpage served as a vital form of outreach to members of the target audience that might be deterred by seasonal work obligations and to support other interested

members of the public that either could not attend the in-person engagements and still wish to participate, or, who attending the physical engagements wanted time to critically think about their response prior to providing a response, or who wanted to find out more information about the project. As of this report's writing, there have been 734 webpage connections.

In addition to the launch of the webpage, the community engagements drew the attention of various media outlets who wished to hear about the project thus far and the direction it intends to go in. These outlets include newspapers such as the Quesnel Observer and Williams Lake Tribune, radio broadcast by way of CBC Daybreak North, academic institutions such as UNBC, a magazine article by Country Living BC, and various agricultural organizations such as Farmed North Cariboo. These outlets provided the opportunity to share with the public the various aspects of the research being conducted, as well, the reason for starting this research and its implications within and beyond the borders of the Cariboo Region, across all British Columbia. (See appendix attached).

Summary (What people said)

The overall theme of those farmers and ranchers who participated in these community engagement sessions was one of optimism and a wish for a better future for the next generations. To that was added frustrations surrounding not being able to communicate the challenges they face in a format that they feel they as agricultural folks will be taken seriously by the 'powers that be.' This focus on having effective communication between all of the various parties is a theme, not just for growers and producers in agriculture but for government officials from both local and provincial levels, Indigenous communities, as well members of agricultural associations. This insight shows that communication improvement has been identified by all stakeholders involved directly and indirectly with the agricultural sector. All sides wish for improved means of translating their challenges and ideas with each other when the end goal is mutual support and understanding. It is critical for all groups to come together to establish the spaces and mechanisms to ensure all voices are heard, all challenges are understood, and all reasons for change are given in full transparency, showing how choices in decisions lead back to the authority of the voices that, having suggested them, have the wherewithal to ensure they are successful.

Many of those that participated showed concern over the exorbitant means it takes to gain entry to the farming industry. These concerns cover the increased costs of land, rising overhead, cost of supplies such as materials/tools, and the rising cost of marketing, transport, and other unavoidable costs. Most of these "pinch points" have been exacerbated within the past 3 – 5 years. The participants also pointed out the current lack of emphasis placed on encouraging farming on agricultural land in more effective ways than what is already being done under the Commission's current directives. This aspect of the public seeking more

effective and drastic means of producing more supports for farmers and ranchers in rural areas of the province can best be outlined in a quote from one participant in Williams Lake.

“We have been dealing with food insecurity in this province for far too long. Those responsible have been choosing to kick the can down the road rather than leaving politics at the door and dealing with the issue head on. Now we are in a situation where the can represents food security, and it has been kicked for so long it has disintegrated and there is no longer a can left to kick. We need meaningful action taken here in rural BC where we as farmers are consulted and taken seriously. We need to ensure a better future for our children and our children’s children, and we have not done that.”

Though this quote doesn’t mention it, the rapid impacts of climate change are hastening the need for effective support. This quote highlights many of the insightful and critical comments that participants in this project were able to share.



Image of Analyzing Responses

The third aspect outlined during the engagements surrounds the ongoing decisions being made to take land out of the ALR (Agriculture Land Reserve) in more urban regions of the province in exchange for less productive land, in more rural areas of BC. Meanwhile when the applications are made for changes to farmland such as additional housing for multigenerational farming families in rural BC they were denied as the addition of a house or the taking out of non-productive land in rural

areas is seen as going against the same directive that is overridden in urban contexts. What the farmers and ranchers in the Cariboo want is to have a more dynamic vetting process of these applications where checks and balances are in place to ensure no unnecessary developments and/or large-scale estates take viable land out of the ALR while still providing support for small and medium sized farmers.

An additional component that was an outlier among what was said at each engagement was that of concern for the future of agriculture for the next generations. (Flammini, 2022b) shares in an article regarding B.C.'s 2021 Census of Agriculture states the median age of a farmer in British Columbia is 57.8. From the comments made by the participants this is said to be closer to 77 in the Cariboo. There has been a growing fear over the lack of resources for the next generation to take over. Also, an equal fear of the current generation being unable to retire with dignity as the resources to do so are said to be few and complex in nature. Additionally, there is the fear of the next generation of farmers losing an extensive bank of knowledge generated by the collective years of experience in local farmers' back pockets that has the potential to never being accessed as they die off.... And with them may go the art form of agriculture all together. Generations of localized knowledge experienced firsthand and not in a classroom. Through these fears lay critical spaces for improvement regarding the theme of succession planning. And speaks to the real need for decision-makers to take the lead in establishing supports that are direly needed.

It is important for decision-makers to value what is being said and observed by farmers and ranchers as there is no other group who is more qualified at knowing what will work and benefit on their land than the Indigenous communities and farmers and ranchers themselves who, live on and with the land. It is imperative that speakers from local contexts are not only heard but their ideas are acted on in good faith by our decision-makers.



Image of Final Facilitation on Aug 5 in Quesnel

Policies and governance that have direct and long-lasting impacts on these communities and their respective economies must be sensitive and responsive to local realities.

Results

It is important to note this project had limitations which may hinder the generalization of the results, but do not significantly impact the findings. The first and major limitation was time. As a student summer project, it was scheduled during one of the farmer's business seasons and was further limited to four months because of the requirements of the project proposal's funder. A further limitation resulted in excessive transportation costs. For example, to reduce the cost of overnight accommodation. I would leave Prince George before dawn in

order to keep expenses to a minimum. This cost additional hours of student work. Further costs were that of additional stresses and risks traveling on northern roads in pre-dawn and dusk hours. A further limitation is the lack of substantive Indigenous consultation. The lack of research ethics placed limitations on the level of engagement. In addition, this project required further community outreach beyond the existing timeline of this project's capacity in order to build the necessary relationships required to ensure no harm emerges from the work. However, an invitation to a farmer's market in one of the Indigenous communities was a great eye opener. Indigenous agriculture is an area long needing attention as the idea that Indigenous communities “did not farm” has been shown to be untrue and Indigenous Agriculture may have lessons in sustainability that the farming industry in its entirety could benefit from. However, when assessing the results of this work it is important to keep this aspect in mind. This leaves a critical gap in the research that it is important to commit to future work in this area in keeping with the principle of having perspectives shared by all those involved in a given situation.

Given the circumstances of relying heavily on public engagement with identifying potential areas of improvement on the agriculture sector there is potential for information that is either misunderstood or inconsistent with current policies creating the possibility for ideas that are either already happening or potentially incorrect. This potential for misinformation should not be taken to mean that the public is incorrect with their sentiments. These gaps identify areas of improvement regarding how governing bodies by way of the Ministry of Agriculture and Food and the ALC need to improve their methods of ensuring growers and producers have the correct information they need for successful operations.

During this process it was tabulated that 290 individual votes we cast under the ‘Initial Six Idea’ section of the facilitation, with an addition 83 unique ideas being generated by participants at these engagements. The total votes for the initial six ideas over the course of the summer of 2023 are viewed in figure 7.1.

Results for the Initial Ideas Presented at the Community Engagements		
Idea Number	Initial Idea	Number of Votes
1	Allowing non-farming businesses on the land of current agricultural operations to provide a supplemental income to the farmer.	82
2	Allow complimentary zoning for non-farming purposes that would benefit the broader agricultural community in that area. (e.g., Farming Equipment Repair, Livestock Teterinary...)	44
3	Go back to the 2-zone system	48
4	Increase legacy protection for generational farmers.	76
5	Have a more flexible application process with ALC. More considerations and contexts are heard.	40
6	Leave everything as is.	0
Vote Total		290

Figure 7.1 Table: Results for the Initial Ideas

An additional 83 unique ideas were generated during these engagements. With the participants being able to cast votes for ideas expressed by other participants there were a total of four ideas that had over five votes cast

In addition to the initial six ideas, the participants could share and vote for ideas expressed by other participants. In total, this included 83 unique ideas. The methodology for analyzing a diverse and immense data set required a set of guidelines. These guidelines ensured the analyzing was in keeping with the ideas the community provided and ensured the true plot of the idea was understood even if similar to others. The goal of this analysis was to pinpoint additional areas of improvement that may be needed in the agriculture sector. With such a wealthy data set, additional criterion had to be placed to refine the main ideas. This was resolved by identifying, within the summarized ideas, ones with 5 votes or greater. This drastically reduced the number of ideas to four. The additional ideas can be viewed in figure 7.2.

As noted in the methods section, some of the ideas generated during the creation of the initial six prompts are already in play but were included because the implementation of policy suggests they are not well understood or enacted. This is a key catalyst for emphasizing the need for improved communication between both the

Additional Participant Ideas		
Idea Number	Idea Shared	Total Votes
1	More supports and guidance through red tape are needed for farmers.	6
2	Let farmers' farm. It is currently too costly to run any scale of operation.	10
3	No more subdividing agricultural land for non-farm related housing.	5
4	Costs are too high for young farmers today. How can we/provincial government support the next generation? This is a growing/significant issue in general, not just agriculture.	5
Vote Total		26

Figure 7.2 Table: Additional Ideas Generated

Ministry of Agriculture and the Agricultural Land Commission to the general public. If people who are responsible for implementing policy in local areas are having trouble understanding and navigating the policy, how are the farmers expected to apply and access the provisions and support offered in the policy? A strong recommendation raised by this work suggests the Ministry and Commission must make intentional and well-planned efforts to improve communication, including supporting the participation and contributions of farmers themselves. This recommendation was expressed at every level, including by those who participated in the founding of the ALR 50 fifty years ago.

Recommendations

This report summarized the information gathered over the course of the community engagement paper. The recommendations to follow are drawn from the contributions of the broad and diverse group of stakeholders.

1. Continuing this engaged and participatory framework adopted for this project should be adopted for future conversations with stakeholders and partners. Such structures invite contributions that are grounded in reality and help build relationships.
2. Beyond the form and structure of consultation it is further recommended that the Ministry of Agriculture and Food shall evaluate and implement a broader communication strategy that acknowledges the mistakes in communication in the past are lessons for the urgent future of Agriculture in BC as land, profession, and policy. Such a strategy should address:
 - a. Streamline communications and use plain language to avoid misinformation and duplication of effort. This would also serve to reduce the administrative burden to alleviate workload and improve timelines.
 - b. This strategic deployment of communication must recognize and support contributions from the front line of the ALR, namely Agricultural Associations, Indigenous Communities, and Local Governments, farmers themselves, and other interested parties. Such involvement will require allocating concrete supports and resources in recognizing the seasonal availability of farmers, and the challenges in enabling access to the expertise and knowledge banks built up over time in local areas. The front line holds an astute assessment of the social and cultural impacts of ALR decisions and could enhance the likelihood of successful policy design and implementation.
3. The Ministry of Agriculture and Food and Agricultural Land Commission must step up to the challenges of leading the agriculture sector in growing into a viable and flourishing position as the cornerstone to local food security. The urgency of this work cannot be overstated. Provincial wide mandates and supports to AgriTech will falter and fail in growing rural, remote and northern food systems unless there is an equal investment to support local farmers.
4. The Ministry of Agriculture and Food and Agricultural Land Commission must establish the capacity to align ALR policies with local reality by establishing regional panels to consult and advise on the levels of flexibility required to ensure implementation of policy supports the growth and stability of agriculture, especially with a focus to legacy farming support.

Conclusion

This report and the recommendations arising from it reflect the discontent and dissatisfaction of farmers, ranchers, growers, local government bodies, and allied professions in the Cariboo Regional District. The honesty and clarity of the dissatisfaction expressed is due to work of the student carrying out the project in creating a space for people to express their ideas fully. These methods heightened the trust of participants by returning to share emerging results and highlight the strength of people's voices when woven together. We call on the Ministry of Agriculture to match the hope and commitment of the participants who so generously contributed to attempt to influence ministry policies with a locally based perspective. In participating in this work they emphasis locally generated and locally based solutions that reduce time and bureaucracy and, at the same time improve efficiency and effect cost saving. If followed to fruition this work would enable a better alignment with the original intentions of the Agricultural Land Reserve when established fifty years ago this year (2023), and which are currently under stress. The timing of this research has been said to have not been greater as echoed by government officials, industry leaders, and local farmers. It is the intention of this research to speak for the local farmers in the Cariboo Region. In addition, it is the intention the project starts serious conversation followed by ethical and equitable changes to our province's agriculture policies to ensure this sector does not continue to be seen as a dying profession. There is too much at stake and it is up to use to the decision-makers to make the necessary changes.

Appendix

Appendix 1

Public Presentations

- April 28, 2023. Presentation of project in-person at Quesnel Cattleman's Semi-Annual General Meeting in Quesnel BC.
- May 17, 2023. Presentation of Project via zoom during the Cariboo Regional District's Agriculture Development Advisory Committee.
- June 7, 2023. Hosting in-person project launch session with Community Partners in Quesnel BC.
- June 29, 2023.
 - Morning in-person project meeting with community partner Nigel Whitehead in Williams Lake BC.
 - Afternoon in-person project meeting with Community Partners in Quesnel BC.
- July 8, 2023. In-person visit with community partner Christa Pooley in Kersley BC.
- August 4, 2023. Hosted in-person project meeting with Community Partners in Quesnel BC.

- August 29, 2023. Presented in-person during the North Cariboo Riding Association's AGM in Quesnel BC.
- November 1, 2023. Presented in-person at UNBC's South Central Campus during their Regional Advisory Committee Session in Quesnel BC.
- November 13, 2023. Presented in-person during the Cariboo Cattlemen's Director's Meeting in Williams Lake BC.

Appendix 2

News Articles Featuring this Project

The articles below are listed in order of appearance in the media.

1. The Williams Lake Tribune, Appeared July 30, 2023
2. Farmed North Cariboo August Newsletter, Appeared August 1, 2023
3. Farmed North Cariboo Agri-Stories, Appeared August 1, 2023
4. University of Northern British Columbia Facebook Page, Appeared August 9, 2023
5. The Quesnel Observer, Appeared August 28, 2023
6. Country Life in BC, Appeared October 1, 2023

Articles

1. Williams Lake Tribune

Lloyd, R. (2023, July 30). University of Northern B.C. undergrad talks ALR policy with public. *The Williams Lake Tribune*. <https://www.wltribune.com/news/university-of-northern-b-c-undergrad-talks-alr-policy-with-public-5556549>

University of Northern B.C. undergrad talks ALR policy with public

Visiting farmers' markets to engage with farmers, ranchers, public on policy

Ruth Lloyd Jul 30, 2023 5:00 AM

Public engagement on policy changes proposed to the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR). (Ruth Lloyd photo - Williams Lake Tribune)

An undergraduate student at the University of Northern B.C. is talking to rural residents about Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR) policy reform.

Thanks to funds from the Planning Institute of B.C., Matt Henderson wrote a project proposal to engage with residents in northern rural B.C. communities about possible updates to policy.

With the goal of better supporting farmers and ranchers, Henderson is speaking directly to farmers and ranchers via public engagements, including attending area farmers' markets and events.

On July 21, he hosted a dotmocracy at the Williams Lake Farmers' Market, offering people an opportunity to place three dots next to any of six potential policy change ideas for the ALR to show support for those ideas.

He wanted people to provide input because he wants to hear from people involved in agriculture, stating quite clearly he does not pretend to be an expert in agriculture himself.

The six ideas were: Allow non-farming business to support farmers' supplementary incomes; complementary zoning for non-farming purposes that benefit farmers, go back to the two-zone system, increase legacy protections for generational farmers; flexible application process with ALC; or leaving everything as it is.

But he is not just going to farmers' markets and public events, he is also providing an online platform for people to have their say digitally as well.

His hope is this will be a step towards meaningful change and he said the people he's engaged with are also excited at the prospect of meaningful change in regards to the ALR.

One of the new factors with consultation on the ALR now is engagement with First Nations communities in consideration of reconciliation.

The project's potential benefits are meant to include creating an analysis of current policies on construction residential dwellings and other buildings on ALR properties, compiling community knowledge on local context of policies and their impacts on multi-generational farmers, and creating a report compiling the information he collects and providing it to his community partners to help better serve local producers.

Henderson said he is very grateful for the opportunity to work on this project and the platform it is allowing him to have in helping support agriculture and producers. He wants also to set an example for other students and researchers by engaging directly with community members and said he has a very welcome reception from people he's met.

His community partners includes Sage Gordon, president of the Quesnel Cattleman's Association. Coralee Oakes, MLA of Cariboo North, Christa Pooley, Chair of CRD ADAC, Jackie Sarginson, president of Cariboo North Riding Association, Mary Sjostrom, CRD director of electoral area A, Nigel Whitehead, CRD manager of planning services, and Rick Wittner, president of Cariboo Mining Association.

Additionally, he plans to return to communities once the report is complete compiling the input from members of the public in order to share what he found with the public.

"It's just as much the community's project as it is mine," he said.

The Land Commission Act was passed 50 years ago in British Columbia to protect agricultural land from development. Before the Act was passed, approximately 6,000 hectares of land a year was being lost to development, according to a UNBC website story.

To visit his project website, vote on the dotmocracy or find out more go to <https://alrpolicyreviewproject.my.canva.site/>

2. Farmed North Cariboo August Newsletter

FARMED August Newsletter - FARMED sponsors workshops and farm tours in the summer & fall of 2023. (2023, August). Farmed North Cariboo.

<https://preview.mailerlite.io/preview/198139/emails/94695104056395727>

A student-led project seeking community feedback on how we can better support farmers and ranchers.

Agriculture Land Reserve Policy Review Project

Matt Henderson, an undergraduate student at UNBC has been busy this summer working on a student-led project seeking to promote supports for our local producers through policy review and community engagement. Matt, who is enrolled in the School of Planning and Sustainability at the Prince George Campus, majoring in Northern and Rural Community Planning has been busy this summer hosting a series of public facilitations from June to August of 2023.

The project will be looking at restructuring the organization that is the Agricultural Land Commission with the objectives aiming to:

1. Place decision-making back in a more regional and local context.
2. Have the ALC consult with indigenous communities, agricultural associations and local governments when drafting and revising policies within our agricultural sectors.
3. To integrate more supports for our small and medium scale farming operations on which we rely so heavily on to continue feeding our province.

Through effective and ethical consultations, gathering all parties around the same table we can adapt our agriculture policies and governance to better fit the needs of our current climate and support those within the agricultural sector.

Using the 'Dotmocracy' tool, members of the public are given 3 dot stickers to place beside the main ideas or prompts that were initially created as ideas to improve the lives of farmers and ranchers.

The goal of this process is to ask the local farmers and ranchers what they believe are ways to improve their lives, thus putting our province on the right track to improve food security.

If you are unable to visit Matt at his booth at the Quesnel Farmers' Market on August 5th to provide input, you may visit his website at the following link to access the virtual 'dotmocracy' that is available 24/7 for the duration of the summer.

Matt Henderson is undergraduate student at UNBC's School of Planning and Sustainability at the Prince George Campus. His major is in Northern and Rural Community Planning the passion he is bringing to this project is a drive to see governance and policy more responsive to and inclusive of local people and local circumstances.

3. Farmed North Cariboo Stories

Roballo-Corallo, P. (2023, August). Agriculture Land Reserve Policy Review Project. *Farmed North Cariboo*. https://www.farmed.ca/application/files/6916/9162/5586/Article_Final.pdf

Agriculture Land Reserve Policy Review Project

By Paula Roballo-Corallo

In an unassuming room at UNBC's Prince George campus, Matt Henderson sits among whiteboards and a sea of chart papers taped to the walls. The scene could be one out of the latest spy thriller, but Matt's aspirations are infinitely more complex and sincere. What surrounds him is the product of months of research into understanding the issues and obstacles of rural planning in British Columbia and the nuggets of inspiration that led to his research project on reviewing the policies of the Agricultural Land Reserve.

In a time where most conversations around community planning are dominated by buzz words like Urban Metabolism and 15-minute Cities, Matt talks about things like intergenerational housing solutions, food security, sustainability, and legacy succession. Concepts and ideas that were not dreamed up in a thinktank in Vancouver, but rather from the very farmers and ranchers Matt has been meeting with. This is where Matt's research really stands out, with a concept so simple yet powerful, it's a wonder it isn't the standard; to solve the unique problems surrounding planning in rural British Columbia, you must listen to the people who live and make their living there. So instead of constructing "a solution" and taking that to the stakeholders, Matt headed to the farmers and ranchers themselves and simply listened.

The more time Matt spent at farmers markets, rodeos and in face-to-face conversations with people living and working in the North Cariboo region, the deeper the problems ran. And so, an idea that was born of addressing housing issues and affordability quickly unearthed a bigger issue of systemic encumbrance that is quickly eradicating small and medium farms and seeing the average ages of farmers steadily increase without hope of younger farmers either breaking into the sector or taking over the family farm.

The data is staggering, despite the many different struggles faced by rural communities and the incredible diversity of land and climate, it became abundantly clear that the Agricultural Land Reserve policies represent a huge stumbling block to sustainability, security

and growth in the agricultural sector of rural British Columbia. Suggested policy changes that were born out of his community engagement sessions include things like flexible business income to allow for non-farming activities, Complimentary Zoning for non farming purposes, returning to a 2 zone system, Legacy Protection for generational farms and flexible policies with more support being provided through the application process. The research also contained one key control concept: everything remaining as it is. It is important to note that out of all the people who Matt has talked to, not a single person agreed with this concept.

Despite Matt's clear frustration with the system, he remains positive and optimistic about the people involved. There are good people doing the best they can within an antiquated and cumbersome system, and he is adamant that they really are trying to do the best they can. Its refreshing to see such hope and love of community from a generation who currently have no hope of living and working the land of their hometowns. When asked about the future Matt was clear "we have been kicking the same can down the road for decades and we just can't continue to do that. The can is so battered and torn there is barely any can left to kick" The metaphor, though dire, also captures Matts fire for change. He has a few elegant and simple ideas for change that he is still flushing out. I wont spoil them here, for that you will have to come out and listen to Matt himself when he returns to Quesnel later this fall to discuss his findings and next steps. In the meantime, you can get involved either through Matt's booth at the Quesnel Farmers market on August 5 th or by visiting his website at <https://alrpolicyreviewproject.my.canva.site/> Matt Henderson is undergraduate student at UNBC's School of Planning and Sustainability at the Prince George Campus. His major is in Northern and Rural Community Planning the passion he is bringing to this project is a drive to see governance and policy more responsive to and inclusive of local people and local circumstances

4. UNBC Stories

Identifying supports for northern farmers and ranchers. (2023, August 9). University of Northern British Columbia. https://www2.unbc.ca/newsroom/unbc-stories/identifying-supports-northern-farmers-and-ranchers?fbclid=IwAR3Yubf77LPSkBsv_j5yE0wgsrL1r_Dw9u4c-WICX1RvtTOjps8uUKF8PJk

UNBC student Matt Henderson is consulting with communities in the North Cariboo region this summer with the aim of identifying policies that will support the farming and ranching industries.

August 9, 2023

The drought conditions this summer in B.C., put the precarity of the farming and ranching industries in full view, but a project led by a UNBC student is seeking to find long-term, locally focused solutions.

Matt Henderson, a second-year student in the [Bachelor of Planning](#) program, is spending the summer [engaging with communities in the North Cariboo region](#) to identify potential supports policymakers can consider to help multi-generational farmers.

“A primary goal of this project is to bring attention to the ongoing crisis of food security impacting our province,” Henderson says. “I don't claim to be an expert in agriculture, but I do support policies and governance with a localized context, rather than a one-size-fits-all approach.”

After completing his independent study this fall, Henderson will return to the same communities to share what he found.

“This is a crucial piece in working with communities as reporting back is critical to maintaining vital relationships,” he says.

Supported by funding from the [Planning Institute of British Columbia](#) and with the support of School of Planning and Sustainability faculty members Dr. Tara Lynne Clapp and Dr. Theresa Healy, Henderson conducted [community outreach sessions](#) at farmers’ markets and other community events. He’s also using an [online facilitation tool](#) to connect with people who can’t make it to the in-person sessions.

Through the project, Henderson aims to shed light on the current state of the agriculture industry in B.C. He also wants to demonstrate the need to bring all interested parties together, including Indigenous communities, local governments, agricultural associations and the Agricultural Land Commission, to create change that will support the survival of small and medium-scale farmers and eliminate food insecurity both in urban and rural B.C.

The project allows Henderson to take the knowledge and skills he’s learning and UNBC and applying it to a project that will empower communities to have a say how land in their region will be used in the future.

“I am fortunate to be enrolled in a program that promotes, first and foremost, the importance of ethical community engagement and to not take relationships with community members for granted,” Henderson says. “In northern B.C. we as academics need to maintain a level of ethics and humility at all times. It is through the relationships we create today that will help us change the future.”

5. Quesnel Observer

Lloyd, R. (2023, August 28). University of Northern B.C. undergrad talks ALR policy with public. *Quesnel Cariboo Observer*. <https://www.quesnelobserver.com/news/university-of-northern-b-c-undergrad-talks-alr-policy-with-public-5822255>

University of Northern B.C. undergrad talks ALR policy with public

Visiting farmers’ markets to engage with farmers, ranchers, public on policy

Ruth LloydAug 28, 2023 10:00 AM

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The six ideas were: Allow non-farming business to support farmers' supplementary incomes; complementary zoning for non-farming purposes that benefit farmers; go back to the two-zone system (urban versus rural farming areas); increase legacy protections for generational farmers; flexible application process with Agricultural Land Commission; or leaving everything as it is.

But he is not just going to farmers' markets and public events, he is also providing an online platform for people to have their say digitally as well.

His hope is this will be a step towards meaningful change and he said the people he's engaged with are also excited at the prospect of meaningful change in regards to the ALR.

One of the new factors with consultation on the ALR now is engagement with First Nations communities in consideration of reconciliation.

The project's potential benefits are meant to include creating an analysis of current policies on construction of residential dwellings and other buildings on ALR properties, compiling community knowledge on local context of policies and their impacts on multi-generational farmers, and creating a report compiling the information he collects and providing it to his community partners to help better serve local producers.

Henderson said he is very grateful for the opportunity to work on this project and the platform it is allowing him to have in helping support agriculture and producers. He wants also to set an example for other students and researchers by engaging directly with community members and said he has a very welcome reception from people he's met.

His community partners includes Sage Gordon, president of the Quesnel Cattleman's Association; Coralee Oakes, MLA of Cariboo North; Christa Pooley, chair of the Cariboo Regional District's (CRD) Agricultural Development Advisory Committee; Jackie Sarginson, president of Cariboo North Riding Association; Mary Sjostrom, CRD director of electoral area A; Nigel Whitehead, CRD manager of planning services; and Rick Wittner, president of Cariboo Mining Association.

Additionally, he plans to return to communities once the report is complete in order to share what he found with the public.

"It's just as much the community's project as it is mine," he said.

The Land Commission Act was passed 50 years ago in British Columbia to protect agricultural land from development. Before the Act was passed, approximately 6,000 hectares of land a year was being lost to development, according to a UNBC website story.

To visit his project website, vote on the dotmocracy or find out more go to <https://alrpolicyreviewproject.my.canva.site/>

6. Country Life in BC

Ayers, K. (2023, October 1). ALR policy review shows room for improvement 'If you don't protect the farmer, you don't have farmland.' *Country Life in BC*. Retrieved October 31, 2023, from <https://www.countrylifeinbc.com/alr-policy-review-shows-room-for-improvement/>

ALR policy review shows room for improvement

'If you don't protect the farmer, you don't have farmland'

Cariboo Regional District Agriculture Development Advisory Committee chair Christa Pooley says the ALR needs to be more flexible and allow opportunities for more revenue streams for farmers and ranchers. SUBMITTED

OCTOBER 1, 2023byKate Ayers

PRINCE GEORGE – A third-party review of Agricultural Land Reserve policies by UNBC undergraduate student Matt Henderson hopes to capture the challenges North Cariboo producers face and recommend ways government can better support the industry.

And unlike many government initiatives, it is welcomed by farmers, ranchers and community partners.

"I would say that many, many agriculturalists have become exhausted with the process of 'engagement' because especially that 2018 ALR, ALC, ministry of ag engagement process, left a really, really, really bad taste in ranchers' and farmers' mouths," says second-generation

rancher and Cariboo Regional District Agriculture Development Advisory Committee chair Christa Pooley. “It really felt like inadequate consultation from the outset.”

In 2018, the province introduced Bill 52, which aimed to address concerns about speculation and non-farm uses in the ALR. Home sizes were limited, soil removal was restricted and penalties for dumping were increased.

The changes met with opposition from producers, so the government held public consultations in fall 2019. Yet only five locations across the province hosted in-person meetings.

“It kind of felt like, ‘oh well, if we claw back this change and minimize that change, it will appease the people,’” Pooley says. “A lot of agriculturalists are beyond a place where they’re willing to engage with the ministry and so having this research carried out by a post-secondary institution, I see that there’s more appetite for engagement.”

As part of his student-led project, Henderson hosted a series of public facilitations throughout the summer using a dotmocracy, which allows participants to vote for ideas using stickers or markers. Five concepts that could support producers were generated in consultation with community partners. Then, people could vote as many times as they wished for the existing ideas, add and vote for their own ideas, or vote for other people’s ideas.

The dotmocracy was available in-person and online and allowed for completely anonymous participation.

Some of the original ideas included allowing flexibility for businesses to supplement farm income, such as a mechanics shop or welding on farms; complementary zoning for non-farming purposes that would benefit operations, such as farm equipment repair shops or abattoirs; returning to a two-zone system; legacy protection for generational farmers; and flexible policies with more supports provided through the application process with the Agricultural Land Commission.

Henderson’s preliminary results show that people from Williams Lake to Prince George want to see change and more localized context throughout policy development.

“When we have so many different voices from different sectors, regions, backgrounds all agreeing that something needs to be done ... and we need to have more voices heard at the table, it’s pretty telling,” Henderson says. “Because policies here at home in BC are stifling the industry and the small and medium-sized farmers. ... I just find it a little ironic where the powers that be are striving for and saying that we need to establish food security, eat local and such,

but the policies that are in place are hindering the ability for anyone new coming into the farming industry and those that are already in the industry.”

Since the ALC was struck in 1973, many policies have stood the test of time, when instead policies should evolve with changing demographics, economic output and climate, Henderson says.

“If we’re serious about food security and providing ... locally sourced foods to all British Columbians, we need to have policies that are actually in line with what needs to be done and we need to do it in a way that’s a lot more inclusive than what’s happening currently,” Henderson says. “Instead of an almost tone-deaf approach ... in terms of what are believed to be the realities from the folks making these decisions in Victoria and Burnaby versus the realities that are happening in communities like Baker Creek or Horsefly. Places that have far different ecosystems, climates, scales, soils than places in the Fraser Valley and Okanagan.”

Indeed, the ALC recognizes the importance of protecting agricultural land from development but perhaps not how tight producers’ margins are and the need for flexibility around revenue streams.

“Yes, we need farmland, but we also need viable agricultural businesses,” Pooley says. “We need to find healthy ways to supplement farmers’ [incomes]. So, I’m not saying, you know, that every Joe Blow have 20 pieces of logging equipment and dump their waste oil on their best fields. But I think that there can be a happy balance.”

For example, licensed abattoirs, which benefit the farming community and could provide supplemental income, require the site to be zoned for use as an establishment and all resulting operational activities must be in compliance with the ALC Act. In the Cariboo especially, Pooley says, diversified income strategies such as hauling hay, fixing equipment, agritourism or logging are essential but considered as non-farm uses and restricted on agricultural land.

Most average-sized farms can’t operate without additional revenue streams, Pooley says.

“It feels like the government isn’t acknowledging how slim our profit margins are, and that if we don’t have supplemental income, we don’t have farms,” Pooley says.

This fall, Henderson will complete an independent study course in which he will identify the public’s top responses and present them to the ALC.

Pooley hopes that since this work was conducted and presented by a post-secondary institute instead of agricultural commodity groups, for example, the ALC will receive the information differently.

In addition, Henderson will draw up recommendations on how the BC Ministry of Agriculture and Food and the ALC can restructure operations to facilitate more transparency and effective community engagement.

“There are many great works done that recommend policy changes ... but those that need to hear it, i.e. the Ministry of Agriculture and the ALC, are not designed or not inclined to respond to them in a way that will actually be impactful or seen as impactful to the agricultural community,” Henderson says.

One such recommendation is having a tiered system that gives more control to local governments in the decision-making process.

“If you’re wanting to make an improvement on your land and it’s well within your land and you’re not impacting anyone around you, then you can just go and do it,” Henderson says. “If you’re providing a third dwelling for your multi-generational outfit and you need to house grandchildren there as well, you can go to your local regional district for that.”

Overall, Henderson would like to see more input on farm policies from outside government walls.

“For problem-solving, we leave it to a select few to make the decisions for all. We need to have a more collaborative approach ... and provide insight of what’s happening in our area,” he says. “This isn’t an unorthodox idea. It’s grounded and makes sense. It levels the playing field that allows for new, innovative ideas of how we get through crises like drought, wildfires, atmospheric rivers.”

Appendix 3

Maps

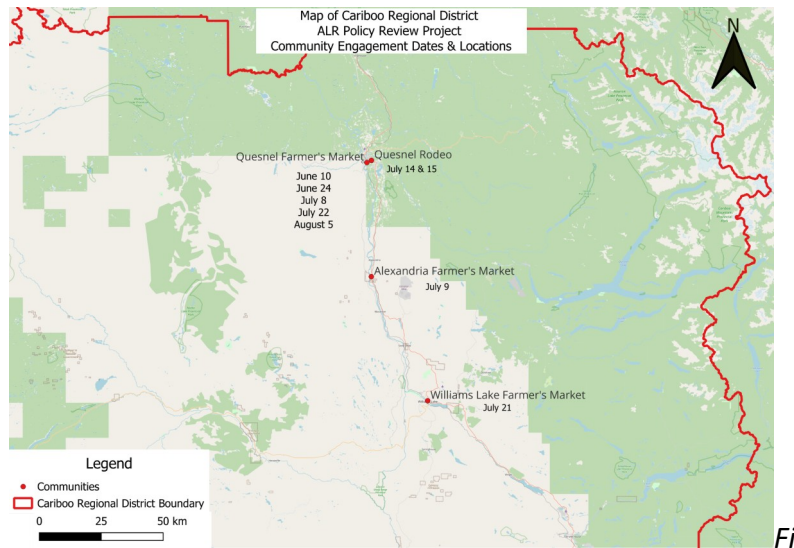


Figure 5.1 Map of Community Engagement Dates & Locations

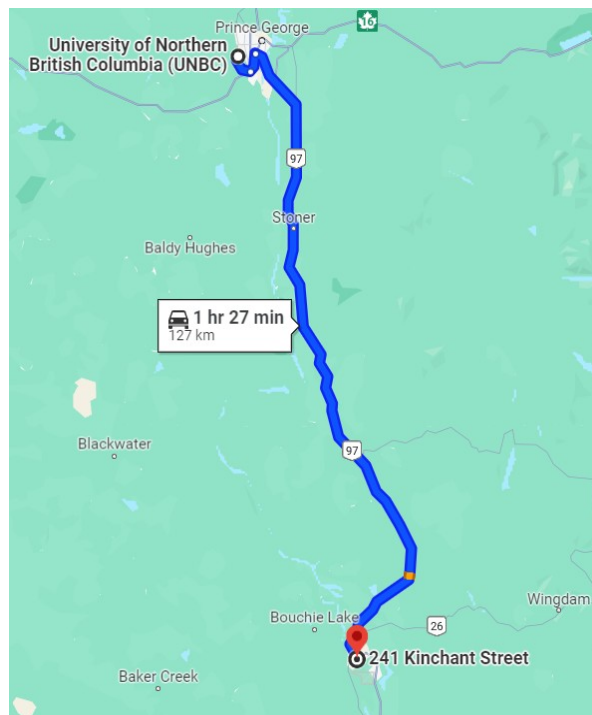


Figure 5.2: Map of Distance from Prince George to Quesnel Farmer's Market

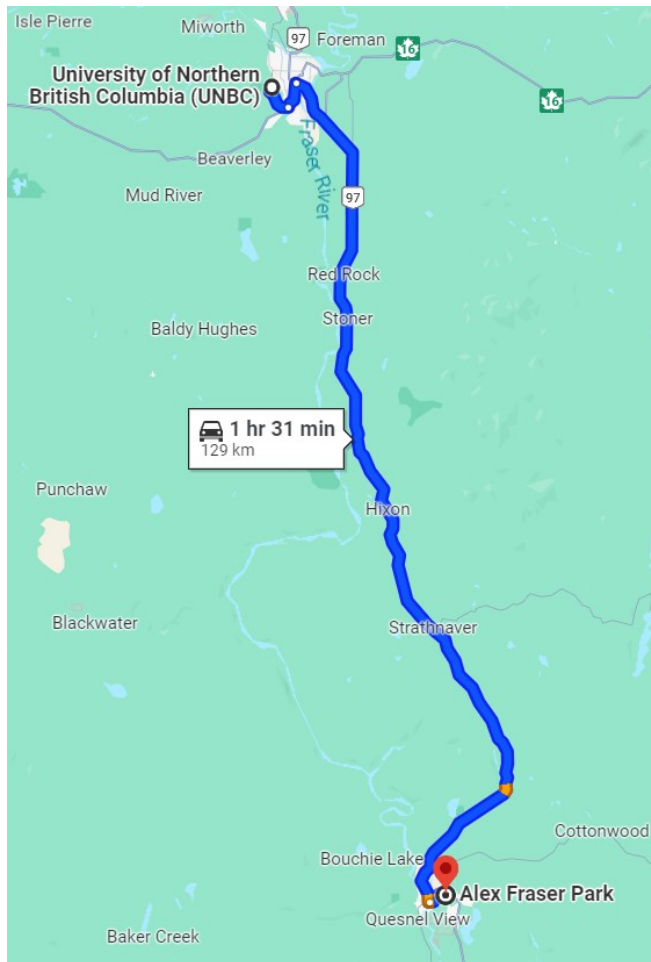


Figure 5.3: Map of Distance from Prince George to Quesnel Rodeo

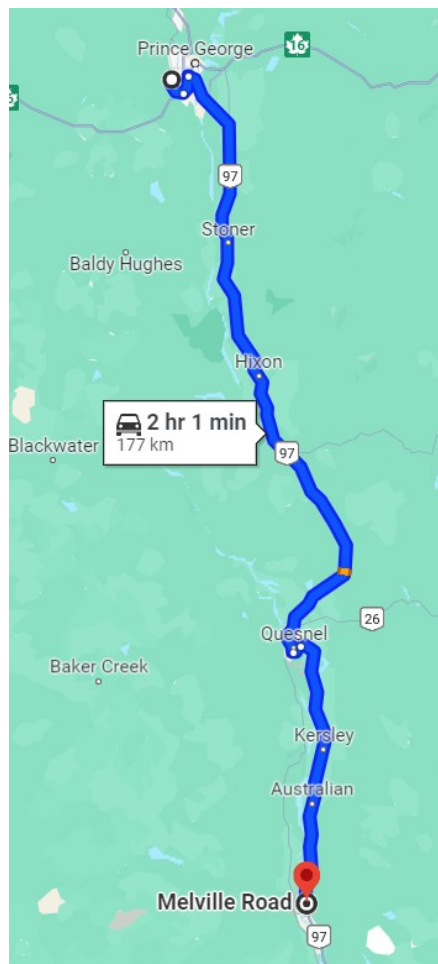


Figure 5.4: Map of Distance from Prince George to Alexandria Farmer's Market

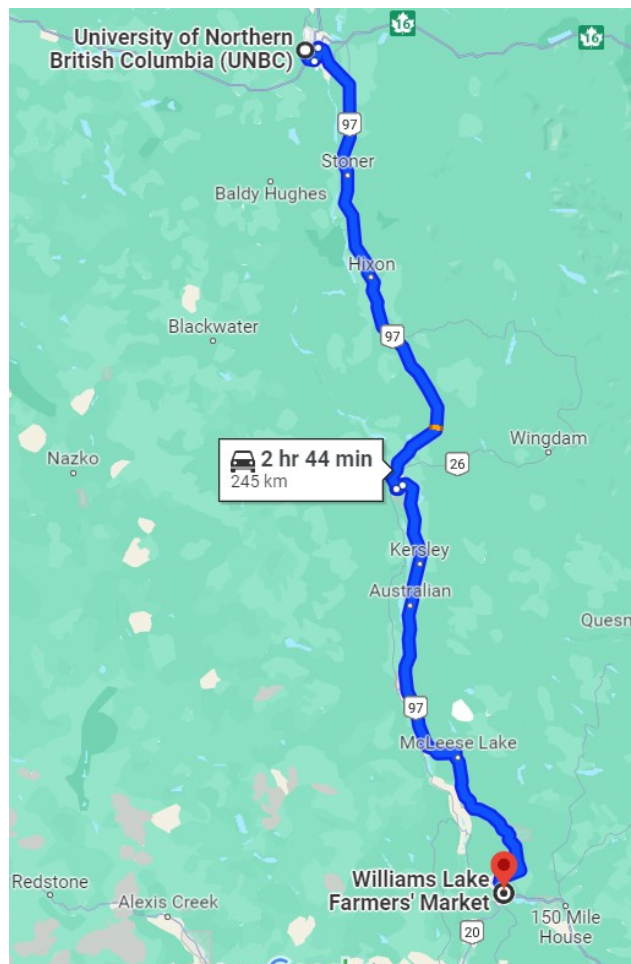


Figure 5.5: Map of Distance from Prince George to Williams Lake Farmer's Market

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- Bishop-Williams, K. E. (2020). Wicked problems through a new lens: combining active learning strategies for Solutions-Oriented teaching. *Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, 20(1). <https://doi.org/10.14434/josotl.v20i1.24879>
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