

# Pender Island Farmers' Institute

PO Box 38

Pender Island, BC V0N 2M0

www.pifi.ca

## 2015 FARM SURVEY SUMMARY

In the summer of 2015, the *Pender Islands Farmers' Institute* requested that farmers and food-producers complete a farm survey to help us plan for our future. In addition to our own planning, we wanted input from farmers to inform policy makers regarding the needs, issues and perspectives of our farm community. Thirty surveys were returned. 63% of the responses were from North Pender, 18% from South Pender, 14% from Mayne and 5% from Galiano Island.

The Pender Islands Farmers' Institute has served the people and farm community of the Penders since 1899, with the objectives of "improving conditions of rural life, promoting the theory and practice of agriculture and horticulture, arranging on behalf of members for the purchase or sale of commodities and to promote home economics, public health, child welfare, education and better schools". Regular activities include sponsoring the Fall Fair, the Farmers' Market, the Nep Grimmer-Ashton Ross-Smith Student Bursary, the School Garden project and Seedy Saturday. The Pender Island Farmers' Institute would like to thank the farmers and food producers who participated in the survey and shared their thoughts and ideas with us.

### *Where are the farms, who farms and how do they farm?*

**Land Use:** Total acreage identified in the survey: 641 acres; 380 acres in ALR, 240 acres in Rural, 21.25 acres in Rural Residential. Average of 38.2 acres are owned/farm (range of 0-150 acres), some with mixed zoning (ALR/Rural). 135 acres in ALR are leased, 0 acres in Rural, 0 acres in Rural Residential. 5 parcels were reported as leased by farmers or growers (note that all of the leased acres in the survey are leased by people who already own land and farm, and are leased from other farmers or retired farmers). *Although 67% did not want to lease more land, 24% did want to lease more land, and 19% wanted to lease some of their land out in the future to other farmers as they get older.*

**Farmers and Land Owners:** *57% are farm operators who actively farm, producing farm products for the marketplace (e.g. food, feed, fibre). 19% are growers who grow a significant portion of his/her own household food and considers him/herself a farmer or grower. 9% are land owners whose land is either leased and actively farmed by another producer, or is not farmed but is suitable for farming. 62% have farm tax classification with BC Assessment (range 2-64 years, average of 16 years), 38% do not have farm tax classification. Most of the respondents were 60-69 years young (42%).*

**Farm Practices:** *There is a high interest in good stewardship of the land through organic and natural farm practices. 81% use organic practices but are not certified organic, 28% use natural practices, 4% are certified organic (IOPA).*

**Where do people go for help and information?** *Most go to their farming neighbours (71%), many use the internet, workshops and print sources. People would like to see a loaning library, local seminars and discussions, a network of farmers, distance education or local programs people could attend while working full time to learn cheese making, greenhouse growing and organic growing. People are interested in field days and workshops as well. Developing market and growing strategies are also of interest, especially for those looking at diversification or niche markets.*

### *What are the top issues identified as primary obstacles to the survey respondents' farm profitability?*

**Labour:** *57% identify labour as an issue, making it the number one issue. Family members are the main workforce on the farms in the survey, very few have paid labour. Some use friends, neighbours and bartering arrangements. 33% said they would use the WWOOF program or a similar apprentice program. 38% said they would like farm worker housing, but others feel that the supply of suitable local labour is more of an issue.*

**Water:** *A sustainable water supply is of great importance to respondents. Increasing water storage, improving irrigation are suggested options for the future. Long term climate change impacts on farming (drier summers, wetter winters, rising temperatures, and extreme weather events) are also important factors to consider.*

**Processing:** This was also identified as an important issue. *43% of farms process some or all of their products. When asked if they were not currently processing, but would they like to process their products, 33% of respondents*

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*said yes.* Items processed are lamb, beef, poultry, jam, vinegar, wool, hides, and apples. Processing of farm products occurs in Metchosin, Saanich, Salt Spring, Saturna, Alberta, Ontario, on own farms and in own certified kitchens. Processing of livestock and poultry on the island has been identified as an area to work on. Processing of apples has also been mentioned, with the development of processing infrastructure for cider as one suggestion. Other infrastructure gaps such as storage have also been identified.

**Regulatory barriers:** *Regulations at the local, regional, provincial and federal levels have been identified by some respondents as barriers impacting their farming businesses in many ways (growing, processing, marketing).*

**Marketing:** *48% said they need help marketing and accessing more markets.* A variety of marketing methods are used. 67% use a farm stand, 29% a farmers' market, 15% wholesale on-island, 15% use a website, 10% wholesale off-island, split between other Gulf Island and Vancouver Island, and the Lower Mainland. 10% to grocery stores. 10% special events, 10% social media, 5% use a CSA. *Many are concerned with costs of production and market prices which influence profitability.* Some are interested in *co-operative marketing.* Having a farm store like the Farm Gate on Mayne Island has been put forward as an idea for the future. Some suggest that marketing and education go together, to *raise people's awareness so that they support local farming and consume more local farm products, from Farmer's Markets, farm stands, direct from farmers or from local retail outlets.*

**Transportation:** *Ferry travel is an issue for many farm operations (48%), primarily due to the fares, but also due to the time and complexity involved in ferry travel.*

**Environment:** *Canada geese, deer, invasive species are critical issues.* A long term goal is the sustained availability of farms and resources for the long term. *The protection of the Agricultural Land Reserve for food security is also a concern for the future, especially with ongoing and future climate change impacts globally.*

*Is there a desire to "grow agriculture" in the Gulf Islands?*

**Yes:** Many said that they would expand their operations if they could *market the additional product* for a *reasonable return.* Many would be able to farm more with *suitable help.* *Most said water is a limiting factor to expansion, but with improved infrastructure they could produce more.* When asked if they would grow more or different crops/livestock or start an additional farm enterprise if they could *process,* 38% said yes, 10% said no. Some are interested in *buying or leasing more land* if suitable land is available. Most need deer fencing to expand. **..and No:** Some are *satisfied* with the scale of their farming activities and have no intention of expanding.

## **Why do Farmers Farm?**

Farmers and food producers farm *because they love it.* Many express their enjoyment in what they do and that it is *way of life.* Many see it as something *to do in retirement,* for *health and nutrition* for their family, the *love of the outdoors,* and for the *love and respect that they have for the land.* Many said that they *love growing and caring for livestock and the land.* Many said that it is *just the right thing to do.*

## **Where do we go next and what should we do?**

Survey respondents are interested in *strengthening the Farmers' Institute,* with a focus on promoting local food and agriculture. The mandate of the Farmers' Institute will include addressing the critical issues identified from this survey to help build local food and agriculture.

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2024

We have used the survey results as a strategic plan for the institute to address the top issues identified in the survey and add this work to our regular activities.

Following is the work we have done from 2016-2023

**Labour** - The Farmers' Institute has used federal funding to hire farm apprentices for various farms and encourage farmers to work cooperatively to hire and share labour for their needs. We have also had a farm apprentice from University of the Fraser Valley help with different farms.

**Water** - The Farmers' Institute has put on two workshops regarding water - one on Keyline Design for water, water catchment and storage and another on water licensing, irrigation methods, and storage of water. Farmers were also supported individually in applying for groundwater licensing with the province.

**Processing** - The Farmers' Institute applied for provincial infrastructure funding to address the lack of meat processing on the islands, which we were not successful in achieving. The Farmers' Institute advocated for the new meat regulation changes, which now allows for a farmgate license allowing for local processing and there is one Farmgate licence on North Pender. The storage infrastructure gap was identified so we successfully applied for federal infrastructure funding for freezer and refrigerator storage to help with temporary storage needs for farmers and distribution to the community. We also recently received funding from the United Way for processing equipment.

**Regulatory barriers** have been addressed through participation of some board members on the Agriculture Advisory Planning Commission for Islands Trust, and through ongoing communication with the Ministry of Agriculture and Food. A member has also been on the CRD CESC for the past several years.

**Marketing** - the Farmers' Institute manages the Farmers' Market and became a member of BC Farmers' Markets so that we could grow the market, promote the market, and participate in its funding and nutrition programs such as the Farmers' Market Nutrition Coupon Program. In 2021 we added a mid-week food only Farmers' Market to boost sales for farmers and increase accessibility for the Farmers' Market Nutrition Coupon Program.

**Transportation** - we communicated with the local ferry advisory committee to ensure that agriculture be included by ferry terminal staff as an essential service during COVID so that ferry travel to get supplies was not impeded. Early in COVID as transportation was limited to essential travel the Farmers' Institute arranged to pick up feed and other supplies for farmers. BC Ferries has received communications asking that livestock shipping be given priority on ferries, since the local routes do not allow livestock reservations.

**Environment** - Canada geese, deer, invasive species remain an issue for farmers that we continue to find challenging. Most farmers have adjusted their farming to the wildlife and keep on watch for new invasive species so they can be dealt with early on. The Farmers' Institute supports the continued protection of the ALR. Climate issues such as drought, heat waves and the heat dome, atmospheric rivers and flooding, extreme cold, have become more serious, and sometimes new, issues since the survey was done in 2015.