

To Dr. Heather Bears,

I have written this letter in response to the city of Pitt Meadow's request that I participate in its currently ongoing Environmental Inventory Management Strategy Project. The opportunity to provide feedback is appreciated, especially given that both current and past councils have displayed that they take feedback from its farmers seriously, and addressing concerns farmers have raised. For this, I commend the city. More importantly though, I hope that the city will continue to take our concerns seriously, and hence I write this letter in faith that the city will review and

consider it with all due diligence. Likewise, we respect the city's desire to provide its citizens with a livable city by protecting, restoring, and enhancing, its natural assets. However, we are apprehensive that this survey, and the project in general, will privilege the environment over farmers. Consequently, I am using this letter as an opportunity to accomplish three objectives: firstly, to raise our concern that the project will likely lead to unintended and undesirable outcomes regarding the livelihood of the city's farming community; secondly, to vigorously demonstrate the reasons why we are concerned; and thirdly, to suggest how the project could proceed in a way that does not harm farmers.

In specific terms, our concern is that the survey could result in productive farmland being designated as a natural asset and set aside for conservation, thus depriving farmers of an integral component to their livelihoods. We do recognize that the survey is not completely blind to the needs of farmers. Question 6 from the mapping questions section asks for the identification of any natural assets in the ALR that are of benefit to farmers, and questions 9 and 18 also touch on subjects of concern to farmers. We appreciate such consideration. Nonetheless, the remaining 15 questions pertain primarily to the environment. What is even more conspicuous is the types of questions that the survey does not ask. For example: is there any land that should be protected from being designated a natural asset? Or: Is there any land that if designated a natural asset could yield negative externalities to businesses or farmers? We find questions such as these extremely pertinent because farmers in Pitt Meadows are already under tremendous strain from

numerous different angles. The potential impact of land lossage that this project could have on farmers is severe enough in its own right, but its true damaging potential can only be understood when it is considered in relation to all of the other preexisting challenges farmers face.

Farmers in Pitt Meadows are currently contending with an interlocking set of problems in the form of decreasing fiscal viability; unhelpful government policies; land lossage; indifference and hostility from the public and as a result of all these increasing personal stress levels. Each of these individual issues would be worrisome for any business. Combined, they put the financial viability of farms in Pitt Meadows at risk. Overviewing each one in turn, and noting the cumulative negative effect these have already had on farming will provide the project with the necessary information to truly understand why farmers find it concerning.

The increasingly worrisome financial position farmers can be easily demonstrated through national statistics from the last few years. In 2018, Canadian farmers experienced a realized net income decrease of 41.0%, caused by a combination of stagnant cash receipts, which rose by only .3% that year, and a 6.2% increase in farm expenses, which was the biggest single increase in 6 years. In 2019 farmers across Canada did do better, seeing realized net farm income climb by 10.4% (a 0.1 billion dollar increase)¹. This gain can be accounted for by a 5.7% increase in cash receipts since 2018, rising from \$62.4 billion, to \$66.1 billion in 2019. Nonetheless, operating expenses continued to rise, growing from \$50.7 billion to 53.1 billion, amounting to a 5.7% increase.² Thus, on a national level, the pressure on farmers continues to grow, and the limited gains made in 2019 do not at all make up for the precipitous loss in realized net income registered in 2018.

These distressing trends are the product of the negative regulatory environment in Canada. Each level of government (federal, provincial, and municipal) has its own set of policies and rules, the cumulative effect of which has been to make farming an increasingly onerous profession.

Looking at just the municipal level, farmers in Pitt Meadows have been continually dealing with the loss of farmable land, as the city has regrettably assented to the removal of farmland from the ALR, and its transfer to other uses such as industrial parks, airports, intermodal rail yards, monster homes and fill sites. Moreover, as of 2014, 38% of all land still remaining in the ALR in Metro Vancouver was being used for non farm purposes.³ This has been accompanied by a theathened loss of access to both potable water and river, inhibiting our ability to successfully

grow crops on the remaining land still available to us. The general trend of the policies outlined in this paragraph have contributed to the increasingly hard-pressed situation that farmers find themselves in.

The shortfalls in government policy to offer support to farmers has been accompanied by increasingly apathetic, and even antagonistic attitudes from the public and some local politicians. One example is an attempt made last year by environmentalists in Pitt Meadows to have salmon introduced to drainage ditches in the ALR. Thankfully, after farmers faced this down, the city opted ultimately not to go through with the project. The necessary reparian setback required for this policy could have seen farmers losing anywhere from 9% to 40% of their land to the creation of habitat, and would have further impeded access to water supplies. The impact of these changes could have been devastating to farmers, yet to environmental groups, it is too often the case that any impediments to farmers caused by their policies are entirely unappreciated, let alone even acknowledged.

In other instances, rather than apathy, farmers are met with utter hostility. There are growing movements calling for the cessation of animal farming - something that can only be accomplished by the abolition of our farms and way of life. These movements are often highly radical in nature, and do not hesitate to intimidate and terrorize farmers, who are now the victims of trespassing and sit-ins, which can seriously interrupt farm activity, as well as forms of online bullying such as vocal attacks on social media, and death threats. The experience of Abbotsford pig farmer Ray Binnendyk, in April 2019 is indicative, as self styled 'animal liberation activists,' trespassed upon his property, and protested that his farm was emblematic of the 'inherently violent animal agriculture industry.' Despite such invasive tactics, the only segment of his community that Binnendyk could count on for visible support were fellow farmers.

The consequences of these mounting difficulties can be registered in the decreasing number of local farmers. In 1996, there were 3,464 farms in Metro Vancouver, but by 2016 this number had fallen by 30% to only 2,412.⁵ Pitt Meadows did only marginally better than the regional trend, experiencing a 25% decrease in the number of farms from 178, to 133 over the same time period.⁶ Anecdotal statistics offered by a former Provincial Barn Inspector for Pitt Meadows suggest that the number of dairy farms in Pitt Meadows has fallen from 60 farms in 1960, to only 6 dairy farms today. While more up to date statistics are regrettably unavailable,

considering all of the already aforementioned challenges, it is entirely reasonable to expect this negative trend to continue.

Lastly, in addition to the well being of our business suffering, the impediments and antipathy farmers must confront also results in our mental health suffering. Within Canada, 45% of farmers have high levels of stress.⁷ Other sources have indicated that 58% of farmers suffer from anxiety.⁸ To provide some context, the national average for such types of psychological distress stands around 7% of the population. The reported causes for this mental duress include: unpredictable weather; animal disease; economic stresses; overwork; burden of paperwork/ bureaucracy; media criticism; and social isolation.⁹ My personal experience, as well as that of the few other remaining farmers in Pitt Meadows, can attest to the veracity of this report. That farmers in Canada have suicide rates 20% - 30% higher than the rest of Canada's population should follow as no surprise.¹⁰

The questions in the survey for the Environmental Inventory Management Strategy Project make reference to natural assets that are 'at risk,' in need of 'protection,' or prioritized for 'restoration' and enhancement. In light of the overwhelming adversity that farmers face, it is not natural assets that are at risk. Rather, in my eyes, **it is farmers that are the most threatened species in Pitt Meadows, and our farmland is the most threatened type of habitat.**

Given our increasingly difficult predicament, we hope that the city will be able to understand the gravity of the concerns farmers have regarding the Environmental Inventory Management Strategy Project, and treat them seriously. Farmers are in no position to weather further blows to their financial viability. To alleviate our concerns, it is our suggestion that the city confine its efforts to protect and enhance its natural habitat between the dykes and the water of the Fraser, Pitt, and Allouette rivers, as well as the Pitt Addington marsh wildlife management area. There are no farms operating in these areas, thus the city can still provide its citizens with all the benefits to be derived from vibrant natural assets, without harming its farmers.

Sincerely,

Joe Bachmann

- ¹ “Farm income 2018 (revised data),” Statistics Canada, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/190528/dq190528a-eng.htm>.
- ² “Farm Income 2019,” Statistics Canada, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/200526/dq200526aeng.htm>.
- ³ “Farming in Metro Vancouver,” MetroVancouver (2014), pg. 13.
- ⁴ Ben Lypka, “Meat the Victims animal rights group invade Abbotsford Farm,” *The Abbotsford News*, (April 30th, 2019). <https://www.abbynews.com/news/meat-the-victims-animal-rights-group-invade-abbotsford-farm/>
- ⁵ “2016 Census of Agriculture Bulletin,” Metro Vancouver (2016), pg. 3.
- ⁶ Ibid.
- ⁷ “Healthy Minds Healthy Farms,” *Wilton Consulting Group*, (May 2020), pg. 2.
- ⁸ Canada, House of Commons, “Mental Health: A Priority for Our Farmers,” *Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food*, (May 2019), pg. 8.
- ⁹ Andria Jones-Bitton, “Stress, anxiety, depression, and resilience in Canadian farmers,” *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology* (2019), pg. 232.
- ¹⁰ Canada, House of Commons, “Mental Health Challenges that Canada Farmers, Ranchers, and Producers Face,” *Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food*, (September 17, 2018), no. 107, 1st session, 42nd Parliament.