

NO: **R076**

COUNCIL DATE: **April 22, 2013**

REGULAR COUNCIL

TO: **Mayor & Council**

DATE: **April 22, 2013**

FROM: **General Manager, Planning and Development**

FILE: **6520 20 (AFSAC)**

SUBJECT: **Surrey Agriculture Protection and Enhancement Strategy**

RECOMMENDATION

The Planning and Development Department recommends that Council:

1. Receive this report as information; and
2. Adopt the City of Surrey Agriculture Protection and Enhancement Strategy, a copy of which is attached as Appendix I to this report, and authorize staff to proceed with the implementation in a prioritized manner of the actions contained in the Strategy for which the City is responsible.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to seek approval of the City of Surrey Agriculture Protection and Enhancement Strategy and to seek authorization for staff to proceed with the implementation of the Strategy. The Strategy identifies key priorities and actions intended to enhance the sustainable growth and vitality of Surrey's agriculture sector.

BACKGROUND

Policy Framework

Agriculture has been a significant part of Surrey's economy and community life for more than 100 years and there is extensive policy support for agriculture in Surrey. Existing City policies and plans related to the protection and enhancement of agriculture in Surrey are contained within:

- the Official Community Plan (including Development Permit Guidelines for the protection of farming), the Agricultural Plan,
- the Economic Development Strategy; and
- the Sustainability Charter.

These City policies and plans are closely linked to Provincial legislation and policy, including the *Agricultural Land Commission Act*, the *Strengthening Farming "Right to Farm" Act* and various Regulations, Orders and Guidelines implemented by the Ministry of Agriculture and the Agricultural Land Commission.

City Council has appointed an Agriculture and Food Security Advisory Committee ("AFSAC"), which advises Council on agricultural matters, including the implementation of specific agricultural policies.

In 2011, Metro Vancouver published a Regional Food System Strategy, which includes five goals and 21 strategies that seek to enhance a resilient, healthy and sustainable food system within the Region. In 2012, the Provincial Government released a strategic document entitled "BC Agrifoods: A Strategy for Growth".

The Agriculture Protection and Enhancement Strategy (the "Agriculture Strategy") as proposed by this report and that is attached as Appendix I to this report builds on Surrey's existing agriculture policies and responds to the above-referenced Provincial and Regional initiatives.

AFSAC Policy Workshop

The preparation of the Agriculture Strategy began with a comprehensive scan of all existing regional, provincial and municipal policy documents related to agriculture in Surrey. The focus of this exercise was to determine industry trends, policy gaps, and areas where new emphasis was needed. This scan and gap analysis was the springboard for a workshop with the AFSAC in April 2012. The workshop focused on:

- obtaining feedback on existing policy statements;
- identifying the most pressing issues within Surrey's agricultural community; and
- identifying emerging issues to be addressed in a new strategy.

Input received from the AFSAC workshop was reviewed and compiled by staff with the results forming the basis of a draft Agriculture Strategy. The draft Agriculture Strategy was reviewed by the AFSAC in October 2012. Additional comments and suggestions from the AFSAC were then incorporated into the final Strategy, which is attached as Appendix I to this report.

Kwantlen Agricultural Land Study

In September 2012 the Planning and Development Department received the results of a research study conducted by the Institute for Sustainable Horticulture ("ISH") at Kwantlen Polytechnic University. This study was commissioned by staff with the focus being on reviewing Surrey's underutilized Agricultural Land Reserve lands. The study outlines a number of distinct challenges that limit the full utilization and productivity of Surrey's agricultural land base. According to the report, these challenges include:

- the availability of sufficient water for irrigation of crops;
- start-up issues faced by small-scale farmers, including access to affordable agricultural land for young farmers coming into the industry;
- competition for agricultural land from non-agricultural uses such as residential estates;
- technical and financial support available to new farmers;
- access to "shelf space" at grocery stores and access to alternative market opportunities for local farmers;
- the lack of local food processing facilities; and
- non-agricultural encroachments on farmland and land use conflicts.

Many of these challenges have also been identified by the AFSAC and are addressed within various "Priorities for Action" within the proposed Agriculture Strategy. The Agriculture Strategy and the Kwantlen ISH study share the goal of a vibrant, innovative, diverse and profitable agriculture sector in Surrey that utilizes Surrey's agricultural lands in an intensive and sustainable manner.

DISCUSSION

The Agriculture Strategy contains five Strategic Directions that represent the key priorities for agriculture in Surrey. These Strategic Directions are entitled:

- Land Base;
- Innovation;
- Infrastructure;
- Agri-Urban Connections; and
- Sustainability and Resiliency.

Commentary on each these Directions is provided in the following sections:

Land Base

Stability, predictability and a contiguous farm land base are crucial to maintaining a healthy agri-food system in Surrey. This Strategic Direction focuses on protecting farm operations from urban impacts, curbing and eliminating illegal activity on farm land, supporting increased food production, and preserving agricultural land for farming.

Innovation

Adapting to and fostering innovation is a key element to staying relevant in an ever-changing economy and global trade system. This Strategic Direction prioritizes the use of smarter, more sustainable food growing and production systems and supporting farmers who want to diversify their crops and expand into new markets.

Infrastructure

Supporting existing and new farms with appropriate and affordable infrastructure is necessary for the continued viability of agricultural production in Surrey. This Strategic Direction focuses on the on-going improvement of lowland drainage, ensuring existing and future transportation networks do not impede agricultural operations, and reviewing existing policies and regulations to ensure that they do not inadvertently place financial or operational barriers on farm operations.

Agri-Urban Connections

Operating within a rapidly changing urban region is an ever-present reality for farms in Surrey; particularly for those farms that directly abut urban areas. This Strategic Direction supports building public agriculture awareness through campaigns, connecting residents with Surrey farmers to provide a link with locally-grown food, connecting school programs with local agriculture, and supporting food systems that encourage healthy local diets.

Sustainability and Resiliency

A successful, sustainable agricultural industry relies on a stable, predictable climate and a healthy and productive natural environment. This Strategic Direction supports encouraging farmers to operate in ways that support biodiversity, supports the diversification of crops and agricultural operations and develops emergency management strategies that allow the agricultural industry to respond and adapt to unpredictable climate fluctuations.

Resources

The City has dedicated some resources to planning and coordinating City efforts in relation to ensuring a vibrant agricultural sector in Surrey. These resources will be used to assist in implementing the policies and directions contained in the Strategy for which the City is responsible and will act to encourage other stakeholders to undertake those elements of the Strategy for which they are responsible. Progress reports will be provided to Council periodically to document progress in the implementation of the Strategy.

CONCLUSION

The Agriculture Strategy sets out a comprehensive and coordinated set of Strategic Directions and Priorities for Action that are intended to protect and enhance the healthy growth, viability, profitability and sustainability of the local agriculture sector. Based on the above discussion it is recommended that Council adopt the Agriculture Strategy, a copy of which is attached Appendix I to this report, and authorize staff to proceed with the implementation in a prioritized manner of the actions contained in the Strategy for which the City is responsible.

Original signed by
Jean Lamontagne
General Manager,
Planning and Development

CS:saw

Attachments:

Attachment I Agriculture Protection and Enhancement Strategy

AGRICULTURE

PROTECTION AND ENHANCEMENT STRATEGY





MESSAGE FROM THE MAYOR

Agriculture has played a key role in creating a vibrant, sustainable city, and we are committed to protecting our land and strengthening our farming community. One-third of Surrey is agricultural, and our city is home to close to 500 farms that generate over \$165 million in economic activity.

Surrey's new agriculture strategy will enhance our land base, encourage innovation, improve sustainability, and maximize productivity. Working in collaboration with our community partners we will ensure Surrey's agricultural industry continues to thrive.

Sincerely,
Mayor Dianne Watts



MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

Surrey's new Agricultural Protection and Enhancement Strategy focuses on specific steps that we can take to preserve our land, enhance food security and remain competitive in today's marketplace.

It's important that we take steps to support this sector, which is vital to our economy and way of life.

Sincerely,
Councillor Linda Hepner



SECTOR PROFILE

Agriculture has always been a key component of Surrey's economy and community life. Over one third of the City is designated for agriculture in the Official Community Plan, most falling within the Provincial Agricultural Land Reserve. Surrey farms produce a wide diversity of crops including dairy products, poultry, berries and grapes, cut flowers and landscape materials, and a range of field-grown and greenhouse vegetables. Surrey's greenhouses contain nearly 450,000 sq. m. of production capacity. Surrey farms support over 3,300 jobs and produce over \$167 million in sales.

Surrey's favourable climate with mild winters, warm dry summers, fertile valley soils and excellent access to markets, suppliers and transportation networks have resulted in a thriving agri-food sector. Surrey farms enjoy competitive advantages in key areas including dairy, poultry, berry, horticulture, and greenhouse and market-garden vegetables produced for both local and global markets. Advances in technology and emerging consumer food trends open new opportunities for innovation on high-value food crops, value-added products, "high-tech" and "high touch" production methods and allow for targeted marketing to diverse cultural groups and promote opportunities to ensure Surrey addresses food security within its boundaries and for its residents. A new generation of farmers and consumers place a high value on "local production for local markets," providing an advantage for the near-urban farms in Surrey.

A changing world also poses challenges for Surrey farmers and processors. A high Canadian currency along with projected increases in transportation and fuel costs creates tighter profit margins for many producers, particularly for those who are export-oriented. Additionally, a changing climate may result in added pressure on irrigation in drier summers and on flood control and drainage in wetter winters; and future sea level rises may create challenges with salt water intrusion and dike protection. These challenges require innovative responses to ensure the long-term health of a thriving agri-food sector in Surrey.

The City has consistently demonstrated support for its agricultural sector. The Agriculture and Food Security Advisory Committee (AFSAC) comprised of representatives from local agriculture and food sectors, advises Council on agricultural policy and identifies solutions for the issues facing the City. The Official Community Plan (OCP) and the Agricultural Plan contain policies to protect and enhance agriculture in Surrey. In conjunction with those documents, this Agricultural Strategy is intended to set a path toward a future that addresses many of the issues currently facing Surrey's farming community.



“ Surrey is a diverse and growing city that encompasses a strong agricultural community. This combination allows for a sustainable, local and secure supply of high quality food of tremendous variety. As a fourth-generation farmer and resident, I see this as both a time of growth in our local industry and of an exciting, evolving civic identity. ”

MIKE BOSE, *Farmer*
Bose Family Corn Maze



**THE PURPOSE OF SURREY'S
AGRICULTURE STRATEGY IS TO:**

1

To identify key priorities and actions for enhancing the growth and vitality of the agriculture sector in Surrey, by outlining 5 major “strategic directions” with 30 “priorities for action.”

2

To ensure the sustainability and resilience of the agri-food sector in Surrey in the face of a changing future, responding to a changing climate, changing markets and changing technology.

3

To reinforce and complement the BC Agrifoods Strategy and to direct actions at the local government level whereby the Provincial government and Agricultural Land Commission play a lead role in agriculture with Surrey continuing to contribute significantly to maximize local opportunities and successes.

Protecting Surrey’s agricultural land base and agricultural infrastructure systems are key elements to ensuring the success of the agricultural industry in Surrey. Without viable, available, accessible agricultural land and without access to affordable and sufficient water sources, the ability to provide fresh food is severely limited.

STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

Surrey's five Strategic Directions include:

1. LAND BASE

Preserve and enhance Surrey's agricultural land base for farming.

2. INNOVATION

Encourage and support innovation in production, processing and marketing across the agriculture sector.

3. INFRASTRUCTURE

Provide infrastructure necessary to support the growth and viability of the agricultural industry.

4. AGRI-URBAN CONNECTIONS

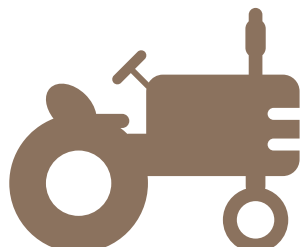
Enhance connections and relationships between agriculture and urban residents.

5. SUSTAINABILITY & RESILIENCE

Ensure a sustainable and resilient agri-food sector into the future.







STRATEGY 1

LAND BASE

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**Preserve and enhance
Surrey's agricultural
land base for farming.**

A stable, predictable and contiguous agricultural land base to operate upon is essential for the continued health and vitality of the agri-food sector for a number of reasons:

- It provides sufficient space to grow a wide range of crops efficiently
- It helps to keep land costs reasonable so farms can operate economically
- It helps to reduce competition from other land uses that prevent or impede agricultural operations
- It provides confidence in the future of farming in Surrey by encouraging long-term investments and supporting a new generation of farmers
- It maintains farm operation flexibility to meet emerging demands and opportunities

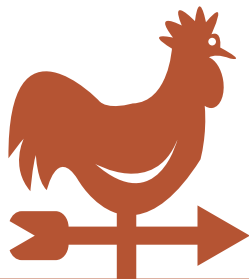
The Provincial Agricultural Land Commission (ALC) has a primary role in protecting the agricultural land base within the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR). Surrey can help reinforce the availability of the ALR land base, as well as those lands designated for agricultural outside of the Reserve, by being proactive in the enforcement of by-laws and by planning adjacent urban areas in such a way that they do not restrict farming activity.

PRIORITIES FOR ACTION

- 1 Preserve Surrey's existing Agricultural Land Reserve boundary by requiring 2 ha of land of equivalent or better soil capability (from within Surrey) to be added to the ALR for every 1 ha of land (within Surrey) excluded from it.
- 2 Protect farming and agri-food operations from adjacent urban impacts (e.g. upland stormwater drainage, traffic, nuisance complaints, trespassing and noxious substances).
- 3 Maximize the productive use of agricultural land through such means as:
 - Leasing City of Surrey agricultural land to farmers
 - Advocating for tax assessment changes to provide incentives for landowners who use their lands productively
 - Amending zoning and other regulations to support agricultural innovation
- 4 Protect Agricultural Land Reserve for farm uses by enforcing municipal by-laws controlling illegal activities and by reducing the impact of permitted uses (such as farm residences) on viable farm operations.
- 5 Develop policy and programs that support and expand food production and opportunities for farming operations.
- 6 Examine opportunities for establishing an Agricultural Support District for lands outside of the ALR.







STRATEGY 2

INNOVATION

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Encourage and support innovation in production, in processing and in marketing across the agriculture sector.

The world of agriculture and food is constantly changing; and these changing circumstances require constant innovation by the entire sector in order to respond to new challenges and opportunities. The high value of the Canadian currency, rising fuel, fertilizer and other input costs, and increased land use competition places pressure on producers and processors in BC and in Surrey. While many of these external pressures are global in scope, the City can play a role by encouraging experimentation through pilot projects and by supporting innovative approaches, technologies and practices.

Innovation can take many forms, including supporting:

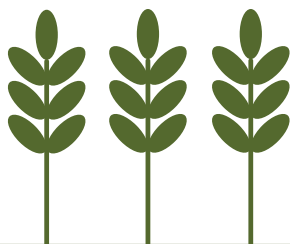
- New crops or commodities that have not yet been grown or produced in Surrey or in the region, including nutraceuticals (medicines derived from food products)
- New production technologies, techniques or practices that allow better efficiency or utilization of resources
- New and productive products derived from waste or agri-food by-products, including waste-to-energy and composting
- New approaches to providing and housing farm workers
- Opportunities for peer-to-peer learning and mentoring
- New market identification and development and engaging in niche marketing to diverse cultural groups

PRIORITIES FOR ACTION

- 1 Support Surrey-based research and development into innovative production technologies and practices such as “vertical farming,” roof-top farming, advanced irrigation and fertilization systems, etc.
- 2 Encourage the production of new crops and commodities, particularly high-value crops, and those serving new markets with growth potential.
- 3 Partner with Canada’s national trade specialists, the Province, producer groups and local businesses to develop new markets (local and global) and marketing strategies for local commodities.
- 4 Encourage innovative management programs for the recycling of agriculture and food waste into an energy resource. Determine appropriate locations for these operations, on or off farms, where efficiencies will best be realized and farming operations will not be compromised.
- 5 Support programs that connect farmers with business expertise in developing business plans for new or innovative ideas.
- 6 Advance opportunities for Farming Co-operatives to ensure appropriate food pricing of local produce and agricultural products.







STRATEGY 3

INFRASTRUCTURE

Provide infrastructure necessary to support the growth and viability of the agricultural industry.

Contemporary agriculture requires publicly-delivered infrastructure in order to grow and thrive, including:

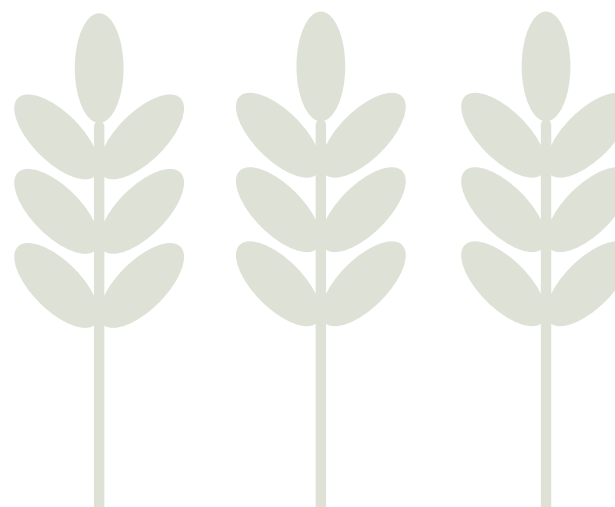
- Clean and sufficient water supplies for livestock, washing of harvested foods and food handling equipment, and crop irrigation.
- Safe wastewater treatment related to food processing and packing operations.
- Safe and accessible transportation infrastructure providing access to farms and to markets, as well as safe, convenient routes between farm parcels for slow-moving farm vehicles.
- Drainage and flood protection works including pump stations, drains, ditches and dikes.
- Appropriate and sufficient energy supplies to permit the efficient and cost-effective operation of intensive agriculture and processing operations.

Providing this infrastructure in a cost-effective manner is a challenge for the City and requires thoughtful planning and appropriate financing strategies to permit the agri-food sector to fulfill its economic potential.



PRIORITIES FOR ACTION

- 1** Investigate ways of improving access to an adequate and safe water supply for livestock watering, crop irrigation, produce washing and food processing uses.
- 2** Ensure a safe and convenient transportation network supporting agriculture including access between farms and markets, farm vehicle travel routes and direct access between fields and farm operations.
- 3** Encourage the growth of the ag-industrial sector and its agricultural support services by reviewing land use policies and regulations and adjusting where appropriate.
- 4** Partner with senior levels of government, commodity groups and industry leaders to maintain and grow the food processing industry in Surrey by providing appropriate incentives and the widespread acknowledgement of those incentives within the City's Economic Development Strategy.
- 5** Continue to improve lowland drainage and flood protection infrastructure in keeping with the Lowland Flood Control Strategic Plan.







STRATEGY 4

AGRI-URBAN CONNECTIONS

Enhance connections and relationships between agriculture and urban residents.

Agricultural operations located within a large and growing metropolitan region, especially those directly adjacent to urban neighbours, depend on constructive relationships between 'country' and 'city'. While the Provincial "Right to Farm" legislation protects defined normal farming practices, the City can help to foster positive connections between agricultural and urban land uses and communities by:

- Encouraging 'good neighbour' relations and reducing conflicts along the urban-agricultural interface
- Raising public awareness and celebrating the importance and essential value of the agri-food sector to the economy and quality of life in Surrey
- Encouraging wide and direct participation in a broader understanding of local food production by supporting such educational ventures as urban agriculture, community gardens, agri-tourism operations, farm markets and community-supported agriculture
- Making it easier for young prospective farmers to gain access to land, technical information, expertise and mentoring opportunities

These actions will benefit the agri-food sector by developing new and stronger local markets and by creating a broader public understanding and support for agriculture.

PRIORITIES FOR ACTION

- 1** Develop and implement a set of 'good neighbour' policies and guidelines including:
 - Adequate setbacks and buffering of urban uses along the edge of the ALR.
 - Ensuring no impact of urban runoff on farm operations.
 - Reducing trespass onto farmland through site planning and fencing/buffering.
 - Reducing the potential for nuisance complaints related to normal farming practices through site planning and education of urban residents.
- 2** Raise public awareness of agriculture in Surrey through initiatives such as farm tours, media materials, community events and encouraging partnerships with producer associations and grocery stores to promote local farm products.
- 3** Support community events promoting and celebrating local agriculture such as Flavours of Surrey event the Blueberry Festival, the Cloverdale Rodeo, Party for the Planet and others.
- 4** Encourage the growth of urban agriculture, community gardens, farm stands and farm markets through information support and by reducing red tape.
- 5** Consider implementing an "AgOneStop" system that provides information and assistance to farmers and prospective farmers seeking to start or grow their business.
- 6** Promote enhanced food literacy and skills in schools by using school gardens and by connecting with farm markets and farm operations.
- 7** Encourage access to healthy local food and produce for low-income families.







STRATEGY 5

SUSTAIN- ABILITY & RESILIENCE

Ensure a sustainable and resilient agri-food sector into the future.

As an industry that depends at its root on the ecological processes of soil formation, nutrient cycling and pollination and on clean water, clean air, soil fertility and a predictable climate, the agri-food sector is vitally concerned with environmental sustainability. While the factors driving climate change are global in scope, Surrey's urban and agricultural sectors alike play a role in mitigating carbon emissions and adapting to the effects of a changing climate. On a more local scale, the City can influence air and water quality and can reduce pollution and loss of fertile soils through the regulation of land uses and enforcement of its by-laws. Farming practices can also play a part in ensuring healthy and diverse ecosystems, cultivating a diversity of crops to ensure resilience and allowing natural processes to provide valuable services that enhance productivity and profit.

The concepts of diversity and resilience extend to human resources as well. Sustainability includes training and supporting a new generation of farmers and food producers to ensure continued stewardship of the land and access to healthy local food.

PRIORITIES FOR ACTION

- 1** Encourage farm operations to complete Environmental Farm Plans (EFPs), including Beneficial Management Practices, to enhance biodiversity to the greatest extent possible without compromising food production. Manage City-owned farmland to model best practices.
- 2** Encourage producers to diversify crops and agricultural operations to maintain a balanced and resilient food system as needed.
- 3** Partner with the Province and Metro Vancouver to encourage farm practices and processing activities that maintain clean surface and ground water, clean air and healthy soil processes.
- 4** Develop infrastructure (e.g. diking, drainage, flood management, transportation) renewal and emergency management strategies that allow the agriculture industry to respond and adapt to a changing climate.
- 5** Investigate the feasibility of a farm incubator program, using City-owned ALR land to support young farmers seeking agricultural training and initial access to land.
- 6** Investigate the potential for a local or regional Agricultural Innovation Fund to support sustainable and innovative projects that enhance agriculture in Surrey.



“ *Food security is when community residents have access to safe, affordable, culturally-acceptable, nutritionally-adequate diet through a system that maximizes community self-reliance, environmental sustainability and social justice.* ”

- SURREY SUSTAINABILITY CHARTER



STRATEGY IMPLEMEN- TATION

Promote best agriculture practices to enhance environmental sustainability.

Surrey's Agriculture Strategy will be implemented through a variety of means, including:

Undertaking a comprehensive review of relevant by-laws including: the Official Community Plan, Agricultural Development Permit Guidelines, Zoning By-law, Development Cost Charges By-law, Soil Removal and Deposition By-law, Land Development and Subdivision By-law and others to reduce unnecessary regulation and to support innovation and renewed investment in the agriculture sector in Surrey.

Supporting feasibility studies and pilot projects on a number of key aspects including:

- Investigation of alternative sources of water for agriculture.
- A farm incubator program supporting young farmers.
- An AgOneStop system for dealing with all agriculture-related inquiries.

Investigating the potential for establishing a Surrey Agricultural Innovation Fund, to work in conjunction with programs offered through the Investment Agricultural Fund, to provide support for innovative and sustainable agricultural initiatives.



Mayor
DIANNE WATTS

City of Surrey Mayor and Council



Councillor
TOM GILL



Councillor
BRUCE HAYNE



Councillor
LINDA HEPNER



Councillor
MARVIN HUNT



Councillor
MARY MARTIN



Councillor
BARINDER RASODE



Councillor
BARBARA STEELE



Councillor
JUDY VILLENEUVE