

October 16, 2020

Dear BC Agriculture Council (BCAC),

Thank you for your letter regarding British Columbia's food security and food system, the BC NDP is pleased to respond. Please find our answers to your questions below.

## 1. Workforce

**The COVID-19 pandemic this year has exposed the devastating impact a disruption in the agricultural workforce can have on our B.C. food supply.**

**How will your party support a sustainable workforce to directly ensure the stability of our local food system?**

As BCAC knows, the BC NDP government is working on this and related issues through numerous initiatives. We are working closely with BCAC, other sector groups, local governments, the ALC, the federal government, and farmers, ranchers and other employers in the Farm, Food and Fish sector.

The 1.5 billion recovery fund has specific allocations for new workforce support.

An example of our shared efforts that produced country-leading results was the direct funding to pay for all costs for a two week quarantine, including food and support services for Temporary Foreign Workers. This allowed thousands of TFWs to enter BC safely this year and at the same time protected public health, and averting more than 60 likely outbreaks of COVID-19

Labour on farms is a complicated issue as we all know. A BC NDP government is committed to continuing to work with the sector to address the numerous and shifting challenges.

## 2. Water

**Water is the cornerstone to agriculture. B.C. farmers and ranchers recognize the importance of protecting this precious resource and ensuring a safe, reliable water source for our food system. How does your party plan to protect and conserve water to ensure that it is accessible to farmers when it is needed most?**

Everyone needs water, including B.C. farmers and food producers, who depend on a reliable and consistent water supply to produce food. Water use efficiency is the first step in management of our water supply. If re-elected, a BC NDP government will protect clean water in British Columbia by creating a watershed security strategy to plan, manage and protect local watersheds for the public good. As part of this strategy, we will seek a partnership with the federal government to establish a Watershed Security Fund to fund Indigenous, local, and

regionally led clean water initiatives – and create good, sustainable, local jobs for British Columbians in watershed restoration, monitoring, technology, training, and education.

### 3. Safe Farm Families

At last year's "[Ag Day in Victoria](#)" (a.k.a. Ag Day), industry was thrilled when government shared details on how they were working to deter those who are illegally harassing and intimidating farmers and ranchers. Specifically, they introduced a motion to amend the trespass act with a key objective to help those who enforce the laws better understand the serious impacts of a protest. Additional commitments were to:

- determine what additional tools or enforcement actions may be necessary;
- work with law enforcement and industry in order to advance the necessary changes to strengthen the protection that farmers and ranching families need; and
- raise the issue on the federal level as it requires a coordinated provincial and national response in dealing with the kind of harassment and intimidation taking place.

**Question a) What is your party's plan for 'next steps' related to the above commitments?**

**Question b) In addition to the above, does your party have additional plans to ensure B.C. farm families and their employees feel safe in their workplace and homes?**

B.C. farmers and ranchers support freedom of speech and peaceful protest. Unfortunately, there have been instances where individuals who have taken to trespassing on farms and intimidating farm families. A farm or ranch is not just a workplace. It's a home, and it's a place with children and grandparents.

As you know, (former) Agriculture Minister Popham has taken a strong position on this matter, and expressed it clearly at the last Agriculture Day in Victoria. At the meeting she brought together the Attorney General David Eby and the Solicitor General Mike Farnworth. All of them spoke and laid down clear lines and expectations. Their statements were subsequently released publicly and are included below. A working group with industry and law-enforcement participation is already at work on next steps and a BC NDP government will continue with this work.

[Popham's November 2019 statement is here:](#)

Lana Popham, Minister of Agriculture, made the following remarks at the BC Ag Day reception on Oct. 28, 2019 supporting B.C. livestock producers:

"I've spoken at this reception many times. There is so much to talk about, so much to be proud of in the industry, and so many topics that affect different sectors.

"Tonight, I want to do something a little different though, and focus on one very important issue. I want to speak directly and publicly in support of those of you that raise livestock. You are valued and respected members of our society, all of our communities need you. You work hard to provide protein that millions of people rely on for nourishment.

“Livestock operators are part of an agriculture and seafood industry that generates \$15 billion dollars a year and creates over 63,000 jobs in our province. For example, stockbreeders and ranchers in B.C. annually market more than 150,000 cattle and calves that produce more than 80,000 tonnes of beef with a value of more than \$220 million dollars.

“I understand some people are opposed to the use of animals for food – or in any way at all. They are certainly entitled to make that choice, and to express their opinion and advocate for change in a peaceful way. However, I am speaking today to make a different point. I asked these two rather tall gentlemen to be here with me when I make my statement. So, I’d like to introduce Mike Farnworth, Minister of Public Safety and Solicitor General and Minister Eby who is our Attorney General.

“I wanted them to be here because I wanted to make it clear that I have back-up from British Columbia’s Attorney General and the Solicitor General, and these are the men responsible for B.C.’s laws and responsible for their enforcement.

“So, let me be clear, this government is working hard to deter those who are illegally harassing and intimidating farmers and ranchers. We are working hard to deter people who trespass on your property and damage your farm equipment and endanger the animals in your care. We understand the current rules are not stopping illegal protesting activity and we have already taken a number of steps to address this problem.

“Earlier this year, with industry support, we turned the National Farm Animal Care Council Codes of Practice into law here in B.C. This demonstrates to the public, to our consumers, that the B.C. government and the industry respect animal welfare.

“Earlier this month, we held a round-table to bring the agriculture industry and leaders together with the RCMP, police, and the Ministry of Public Safety and the Solicitor General. A key objective was to help those who enforce the laws to better understand how serious the impacts are of protests on livestock producers and their families.

“We introduced a motion to amend the Trespass Act so it is clear that it can be used on those who trespass on all livestock premises. We commit to you that we will redouble our efforts to work with the BC Agriculture Council to determine what additional tools or enforcement actions may be necessary. We are prepared to work with law enforcement and industry in order to advance the necessary changes to strengthen the protection that farmers and ranching families need.

“Further, we understand that a farm or ranch is not just a workplace – it’s a home and a place with children and grandparents. Trespass, mischief, prowling at night –these are all against the law and must be treated as such. I understand that bullying, harassment and threats occur outside of the farm as well, in the community, at processing plants, and on social media.

“Such actions violate your privacy rights, they are traumatic, and create fear and anxiety. And it takes a heavy toll on the emotional well-being of farmers and their families. Harassment and

threats of violence wherever they happen are unacceptable, and I know the Solicitor General has to more say on that subject. We also know that trespassers can violate bio-security, compromising the health of animals, and putting entire herds and flocks at risk.

“Farmers and ranchers love their animals and take their care and welfare very seriously. It is crucial for farmers and ranchers to be assured that their animals are safe and in good health, especially when they are in their barns and on their property.

“Finally, I want to acknowledge the hit to the bottom line when trespassers intrude. I know very well how tight the margins can be and how these threats and actions can harm them. Supporting the farmer and the rancher is just as important as protecting the land and water, and I give you my word, we are going to do it.”

David Eby, Attorney General, made the following comments at BC Ag Day reception:

“Lana asked me to come up and share with you what happened in the legislature last week. We had a routine bill, the Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act. One of the sections of the bill related to the Trespass Act, specifically it was adding airplanes as one of the areas where you are not allowed to trespass. It was a suggestion, it came from an MLA in a committee, let’s include airplanes in the trespass act, it goes to the public service, it spits out as one of these miscellaneous bills and it seemed relatively uncontroversial and hopefully helpful.

“An MLA on the BC Liberal side said its fine to be adding airplanes but what about this issue that is happening on farms. And he put forward a proposal to amend the bill to include farm property. Now, I’ve been in opposition for four years and I know how this works. It’s important to do things in opposition that are symbolic for your constituents. I’ve put forward many amendments and I think I was successful, once, as an opposition MLA.

“I heard the comments from the member and I know I’ve been speaking with the minister responsible and I know this is a concern. In the Trespass Act as it stands, the lawyers that I sit with that advise me on these things, and I’ve asked them about it and they’re like it’s really clear: farms are included in the Trespass Act, barns are included, farmland’s included and you don’t really need the amendment.

“Sometimes in law, you need to send a message. So, I asked my staff to go back and draft an amendment for the miscellaneous statutes bill that was consistent with the rest of the laws of British Columbia. So that we could put it forward and we could vote on it in the legislature, so we could be really clear: that farms, and farmland are included in the Trespass Act, buildings used for the raising of livestock are included. Because we want to send a message and we think it is critically important that we send the message that we support you farmers in what you do.

“We support you in raising livestock, feeding our families, and we count on you everyday to do that work and to have our laws reflect that care and concern that we have for the work that

you do is really important. It's important for our province and as Attorney General, if I can assist in doing that with the work of our Agriculture Minister, then I will absolutely do that every time.

"So, we're on your side, we've amended the law to make it absolutely clear to everybody. There are ongoing investigations in relation to a number of matters so I can't talk about specific cases but I'll tell you we take them incredibly seriously and I want to thank you for coming tonight."

Mike Farnworth, Minister of Public Safety and Solicitor General, made the following comments at BC Ag Day reception:

"All of you play a vital role in the food security of this province, in the economy of this province, ensuring that we have a food supply that we need. You have every right to conduct your business in a way that is safe, in a way that meets your needs, and that you don't have to be concerned about either the safety of your family or your animals or be concerned about intimidation or harassment.

"I've often heard the word, activists. The people who do vandalism, the people who trespass on your property, the people who intimidate your family, or harass you on Facebook, are not activists. That is just straight criminality and thuggery.

"Activists engage in law abiding protests, they work to bring people along, they work to change people's attitudes. Destroying your property is not that. I want to assure you that we take this very seriously.

"Every year I meet with the Chiefs of Police and the Associations of Police and I will tell you that I will be raising this issue with them. Because one of the things we have to do is give it a higher profile. To make it understand that it is not a victimless crime, that these activities are not just some sort of prank. They have a very serious impact on your family, on you, your mental health and well being, and your livestock and your farming operations.

"One of the things that will be happening now that the (federal) election is over is that they'll be a new cabinet appointed is that ministers have the annual federal/provincial/territorial ministers meeting. One of the things that we can do at those meetings is make it clear to the federal government that issues like this need not just a provincial approach because there's a lot of things we can do provincially but if you want serious penalties that recognize the criminal nature of this, those have to be addressed by the federal government.

"Our commitment is that we will raise this at the federal level as well. Because its not just a British Columbia issue, it's a nationwide issue and it requires a coordinated, provincial and national response in dealing with the kind of harassment and intimidation that too many of you have faced.

"Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you and to let you know that we're on your side."

#### 4. Land use

**The nature of farming is continually changing; whether to meet the needs and expectations of consumers and society or to incorporate new practices that improve the quality and affordability of our food. B.C. farmers and ranchers want to evolve with changing farm practices while continuing to protect B.C.'s farmland for farming and food production.**

**What is your party's commitment to maintaining the integrity of the agricultural land for agricultural purposes?**

A re-elected BC NDP government will continue to focus on helping farmers farm, and helping consumers get access to fresh, locally grown or raised food and beverages.

In its first term the BC NDP government, with support from BCAC, passed Bill 52 which made numerous improvements to the Agricultural Land Commission Act. For example, it banned mega-mansions and fill dumping in the ALR. We also passed Bill 15 which strengthened the independence and administration of the ALC.

The Ministry of Agriculture budgets under the last BC NDP government were the largest ever for that Ministry.

In our platform we've committed to increasing our support through the Canada/BC Agri-Innovation program, to helping BC companies grow, hire more workers, and position our province as an agri-tech leader, while protecting farm lands in the ALR.

We also committed to creating a new Regenerative Agricultural Network that will bring together natural systems of production with agri-technologies that enhance production – such as robotics, precision farming, and mesh networks.

Our platform commitments are to continue and expand successful programmes already in place:

Feed BC: getting more BC grown and raised food into BC hospitals

Grow BC: increasing the amount of land being farmed

Buy BC: encouraging people purchase food that is grown and produced in BC

Farm cash receipts in B.C. increased 6% in 2018, and in 2019 they went up 13%, to almost \$4 billion. And net cash income for BC farmers in 2019 was \$560 million, up \$120 million in one year. This is a 30.5% increase as compared to the previous five year average.

Add in historic high returns from the food processing industry and the farm, food and fish sector is contributing over \$15 billion annually to the province's GDP –the largest amount ever. These indicators make it clear that the farmers and the BC NDP government are on the right path.

At the same time we know that even at the best of times farming is very hard work and farmers face many great challenges. And this pandemic and the resulting economic disruption is from the best of times. Farmers and others in the sector have faced tremendous challenges. A government led by John Horgan and the BC NDP will continue to help us all get through this. It's about looking after each other, and building back better.

In this election we have a choice - should we continue building a resilient food system, or go back to the way it was under the BC Liberals. The BC NDP will continue its work to help farmers farm. We want farmers to be prosperous and successful, now and for generations to come.