



WATER SECURITY AND MANAGEMENT

INTRODUCTION

Water is a cornerstone of agricultural production. B.C. farmers and ranchers recognize the importance of protecting this precious resource and ensuring a safe, reliable water source for our food system.

THE ISSUE

In recent years, B.C. has experienced several adverse climate events, including heat domes, wildfires, and flooding. These events have stressed supplies of safe, reliable water in multiple regions of the province and some farmers have been impacted by irrigation curtailments at the most critical time of the growing season. This demonstrates the need for policies and concrete investments which can help preserve farmers' access to this precious resource, so that British Columbians can benefit from reliable access to healthy, affordable, locally produced food.

KEY POINTS

- The evolving impacts of climate change and legislation on water security for agricultural production is an increasing concern for farmers and ranchers.
- A secure supply of safe water for agriculture is critical for continued and successful food production in B.C.
- Assured water access for farmers and government investment in projects that enhance water security will bring significant societal benefits.

BACKGROUND

The Government of British Columbia has dedicated increasing attention to issues of water security and management. From 2008 to 2013, it undertook the Water Act Modernization process, which resulted in the adoption in 2014 of the Water Sustainability Act. This legislation envisions "dedicated agricultural water", also known as agricultural water reserves.

More recently, the provincial government has established a Ministry of Land, Water, and Resource Stewardship while launching consultations on a Watershed Security Strategy and Fund. These initiatives afford new opportunities to ensure that agricultural water security is prioritized, and that the climate resiliency of farmers and ranchers is supported.

It is also important to note that many B.C. farmers and ranchers have historical water rights and that some of the water infrastructure in the province was originally built by farmers for agricultural production.

THE SOLUTION

The agriculture sector is seeking support from all levels of government to ensure continued, reliable access to safe water for agricultural production. This includes the adoption and implementation of legislation and regulations that recognize agriculture as a distinct category of water use. At the local and regional level, Water Sustainability Plans should be developed in close collaboration with farmers and ranchers to ensure both food and water security for affected communities.



WHAT COULD GOVERNMENTS DO?

- B.C. is home to a diverse range of watersheds, each geographically distinct and facing different demands from unique user groups. As such, the future Watershed Security Strategy should provide guidelines for the development of local or regional governance frameworks, rather than a 'one size fits all' set of regulations.
- If access to water for agricultural use continues to be curtailed within the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR), it will significantly diminish the utility of the ALR for preserving local food production. As such, any watershed governance initiative should acknowledge agricultural use as a separate and vital category of use.
- Adopt a Regulation formalizing the process for creating Agricultural Water Reserves (AWRs) to ensure food security and provide certainty for all user groups within a watershed region. AWRs would provide a 'floor' for agricultural water use.
- Create supports for large-scale water storage on farms, upgrade and modernize existing water infrastructure, and invest in farm and community-level water infrastructure, including reservoirs, to ensure water availability. This assistance would not only bolster the water available for agricultural production but also demonstrate how farmers and ranchers can, with support from government, take on a leadership role in water management and addressing climate change. on materials, providing quarantine accommodations and supports when such quarantine is required by public health needs, and adopting legislation or regulations that streamline the recruitment and entry requirements of foreign workers where appropriate.

WHAT IS BCAC DOING?

- Consulting and engaging with members to inform submissions to government on behalf of agriculture in B.C.
- Established a Committee dedicated to water security and management issues.