

September 12, 2024

Patrick Ward
City of Pitt Meadows
12007 Harris Rd
Pitt Meadows, B.C. V3Y 2B5

Sent Via Email: pward@pittmeadows.ca

Subject: Support for Pitt Meadows' 2024 UBCM Resolutions on Agricultural Land Viability and Farm Property Tax Reform

Dear Mr. Ward,

On behalf of the BC Agriculture Council (BCAC), I am writing to express our support for the City of Pitt Meadows' proposed resolutions, which will be presented at the 2024 Union of British Columbia Municipalities (UBCM) Convention. These resolutions—focused on reforming the farm property tax system—are critical to ensuring the long-term viability of agricultural land in Pitt Meadows and throughout British Columbia.

BCAC appreciates the Ministry of Agriculture and Food's ongoing commitment to working with farmers to protect the valuable agricultural land within the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR). In line with that commitment, the proposed reforms by the City of Pitt Meadows are a vital next step in fostering sustainable agricultural production in B.C. and ensuring the proper utilization of agricultural land.

Pitt Meadows' Agricultural Viability Strategy has outlined the need for significant reforms, including updates to income thresholds for Farm Classification, changes to the school tax exemption, and the introduction of a targeted tax on unfarmed agricultural land. BCAC shares the City's vision of stimulating a more productive and sustainable agricultural land base, and we believe these proposed reforms will help reduce land speculation and encourage farming on underutilized land within the ALR.

Specifically, BCAC supports the following resolutions being put forward by the City of Pitt Meadows:

NR76 – School Tax Exemption Reform

The proposed changes to the School Tax Exemption would make Farm Classification a requirement to access this benefit, providing a financial incentive to either farm the land or lease it for farming. This aligns with the goal of encouraging active farming on agricultural land and ensuring that these tax benefits are used for their intended purpose.

NR77 – Unfarmed Land Tax

The Unfarmed Land Tax aims to address land speculation within the ALR by taxing properties that could be farmed but remain idle. This measure will incentivize property owners to engage in farming or lease their land to active farmers, reducing the number of inactive parcels within the ALR and increasing agricultural productivity.

NR92 – Minimum Income Requirements for Farm Classification

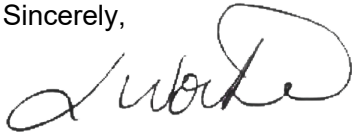
B.C.'s low-income threshold for Farm Classification has long been a concern for the agricultural community. The proposed increase to this threshold is a positive step toward ensuring that farmland is used productively, rather than for lifestyle purposes or tax advantages. However, simply raising the income threshold does not fully address the broader issue of underutilized land. A comprehensive review of the Farm Classification system is necessary to encourage the productive use of agricultural land across the province.

We would like to emphasize the importance of working collaboratively with the government to review and modernize the ALR Use Regulation to ensure it supports agricultural production for the next 50 years. This includes addressing challenges such as on-farm worker housing, processing, and retail activities that are critical to long-term agricultural sustainability. The proposed reforms from the City of Pitt Meadows directly align with this objective by creating stronger financial incentives for active farming and responsible land use within the ALR.

In closing, BCAC commends the City of Pitt Meadows for its leadership in advocating for these critical reforms. We believe these changes are essential to fostering a more vibrant and sustainable agricultural sector in British Columbia and urge the provincial government to support these resolutions.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. Woike', with a large, stylized loop at the end.

Jennifer Woike, President
BC Agriculture Council