

January 7, 2025

The Honourable David Eby
Premier of British Columbia
PO BOX 9041 STN
Victoria, B.C. V8W9E1
Sent Via Email: premier@gov.bc.ca

Dear Premier Eby,

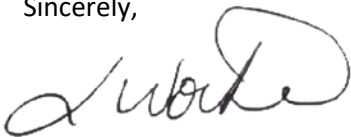
On behalf of BC Agriculture Council (BCAC), thank you again for meeting with us on September 9th, 2024 where we discussed British Columbia's agriculture sector priorities. These priorities were developed in partnership with our farm member associations that represent over 20,000 farm families who, in turn, generate 96% of provincial farm cash receipts. Congratulations again on being elected as the Premier of British Columbia!

Today, I am writing to emphasize the importance of ensuring that solutions for B.C.'s agriculture sector, outlined in mandate letters, are informed by those within the agriculture sector. Below are reminders of the priorities discussed, which are critical to our sector's success. We have appreciated our past conversations with you and are encouraged by your commitment. We look forward to seeing your vision for supporting these priorities in the upcoming mandate letters.

We are committed to working with you, Minister Popham and all provincial ministries to strengthen the growth and competitiveness of agriculture in our province, ensuring it continues to be a pillar of our economy and food security.

We would welcome an opportunity to meet and discuss how we can support the development and implementation of mandate letters, once they are released. We look forward to continuing a strong working relationship that builds a stronger, more sustainable future for farmers, ranchers, and all British Columbians.

Sincerely,



Jennifer Woike
President, BC Agriculture Council

CC:

Lana Popham, Minister of Agriculture and Food, AF.Minister@gov.bc.ca

Harwinder Sandhu, Parliamentary Secretary, BC Ministry of Agriculture and Food, harwinder.sandhu.mla@leg.bc.ca

Shannon Salter, Deputy Minister to the Premier, Shannon.Salter@gov.bc.ca

Kelly Greene, Minister of Emergency Management and Climate Readiness, EMCR.Minister@gov.bc.ca

Honourable Randene Neill, Minister of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship, WLRs.Minister@gov.bc.ca

BCAC Sector-Wide Priorities

1. Provincial Agri-Food Competitiveness and Growth Strategy: We were thrilled by your platform's commitment to establish a Premier's Task Force and co-develop a Provincial Agri-Food Competitiveness and Growth Strategy. A clear and actionable strategy will position B.C. as a leader in sustainable agriculture and food production, ensuring the sector can innovate, adapt, and remain resilient in the face of growing demands and environmental pressures. We look forward to collaborating on this initiative.

2. Increased Provincial Investment: Over the years, you have made historical injections into B.C.'s agriculture sector that have been desperately needed. BCAC and its members are genuinely thankful for this recognition and investment. A stable annual budget that the sector can rely on is also important and as it stands, B.C. currently ranks last among provinces in funding its Ministry of Agriculture.

3. Water Security and Infrastructure: Agriculture is a unique water user, directly tied to food production and rural livelihoods, and must be prioritized accordingly. Your platform's commitment to protecting agricultural water, investing in storage infrastructure, and prioritizing water for food production aligns closely with the needs of our sector. Farmers need bold action now to protect the future of agriculture, including clear legislation recognizing agriculture as a distinct category of water use and fast-tracked implementation of storage solutions.

4. Agricultural Land Prioritization: The Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR) is a finite resource critical to food security and the future of farming. Optimizing its use is essential to ensure agricultural productivity and resilience for generations to come is key. BCAC recommends updating farm classification thresholds under the Assessment Act, which have remained unchanged since 1997, to reflect inflation and encourage active farming. This adjustment would reduce speculative holdings and ensure that ALR land is used for its intended purpose—agriculture. Additionally, policies that promote sustainable use of ALR lands, such as tax measures to support active production and penalties for misuse or underutilization. These measures would protect agricultural land from encroaching development and other competing uses while enabling farmers to continue contributing to B.C.'s food security and economy.

5. Emergency Management and Climate Readiness: Your commitments to expand the Extreme Weather Preparedness Fund and improve capital access for farmers recovering from climate disasters are important steps forward. Equally important is securing agricultural representation in emergency operations centers to ensure the unique needs of agriculture are reflected in disaster planning and response. Additionally, establishing pre-qualified access for producers and essential trades to enter evacuation zones is vital, both to uphold animal welfare and to sustain food production during emergencies.

6. Indigenous Reconciliation: BCAC recognizes the importance of building partnerships between farmers and First Nations communities, and we support policies that encourage mutual understanding and shared opportunities. Inclusive reconciliation processes are essential to ensuring that the perspectives of all impacted sectors, including agriculture, are considered.

7. Food Processing Capacity: BCAC and its members believe in creating a more resilient and self-reliant agricultural sector. Expanding local food processing not only strengthens supply chains but also supports farmers by adding value to their products, reducing transportation costs, and minimizing the risks associated with fluctuating exchange rates and reliance on imports.