

Squamish Valley Agriculture Plan Phase 1 Engagement Summary

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Squamish Valley Agricultural Plan is a joint project of the Squamish-Lillooet Regional District (SLRD) and the District of Squamish, with support from the Squamish Food Policy Council and funding, in part, from Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada and the Government of British Columbia through programs delivered by the Investment Agriculture Foundation of B.C.

Disclaimer Statement:

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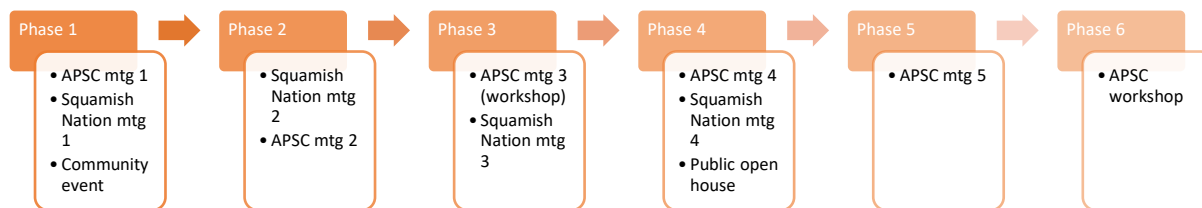
OVERVIEW

The Squamish Valley Agricultural Plan (the “Plan”) will build upon a desire by the agricultural and food systems community to assist growth in the agriculture and related sectors within Squamish and Area D. The Plan will consider agriculture and the food system in its regional context and will anticipate future changes and challenges.

The four specific objectives of the Plan are to:

1. Identify opportunities and actions to strengthen agriculture within the community of Squamish and Area D;
2. Protect and increase the productivity of foodlands and the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR);
3. Contribute to the long-term health and economic sustainability of the community; and
4. Integrate indigenous knowledge, perspectives and considerations for supporting indigenous food sovereignty within traditional lands and food systems in the region

The development of the Plan will involve engaging agriculture stakeholders as well as the general public. This engagement strategy outlines the engagement objectives, tactics and timelines by each of the six project phases. It is a working document that will be augmented prior to each phase with more detail. Communications tactics and other details are included in the last section.



This document is a summary of the engagement activities and the input we received in Phase 1 of the project.

PHASE 1 DESCRIPTION OF ENGAGEMENT

OVERVIEW

Phase 1 engagement focused on introducing the project and gathering some initial, high-level input related to a vision for food and agriculture in the area and the key challenges and opportunities that exist or are expected.

1. STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING #1

The Squamish Valley Agriculture Plan Steering Committee is comprised of agriculture and food experts and stakeholders in the Squamish Valley. The Committee acts as a sounding board throughout the planning process, providing guidance and advice at key points in the process. In particular, the group will: provide input on vision, goals, and priorities; identify approaches to help

engage the community the process; provide feedback on draft policy directions; and vet the draft plan before it is presented to the public.

The first meeting of the Steering Committee focused on introducing the project, and providing initial input on:

- local agricultural issues, challenges and opportunities
- identifying any stakeholders that might be missing from the draft stakeholder list
- some ideas for outreach and engagement

2. ONLINE SURVEY

An online survey was developed to: solicit community input into a draft vision for agriculture in the Squamish Valley; conduct an inventory of existing food/agriculture businesses and organizations; identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats; and generate potential action ideas. The survey was promoted through the District of Squamish and SLRD websites, and by the Steering Committee members. 64 people completed the online survey, and two people completed a paper version of the survey.

3. COMMUNITY EVENT #1

A community drop-in style event was held on Sunday, March 10, 5:30 – 7:30 at the Brackendale Art Gallery. The purpose of the event was to inform the community of the process and inspire residents about agricultural planning, and to seek wide input on a vision for agriculture in the Valley, issues and concerns, and ideas for action. The event included presentations from:

- Sarah McJannet, District of Squamish – introduced the project
- Lone Smith, Project Consultant – gave an overview of agricultural planning
- Kim Sutherland, Ministry of Agriculture – presented on land use regulations and Ministry jurisdiction
- Sarah Petznick, Lillooet Food and Agriculture Society – presented on the benefits of an agriculture plan for Lillooet



The eight poster stations comprised the following information and sought input:

1. Demographics: who was there, and what was the personal connection to farming.
2. Information about the project and agriculture in the Valley.
3. Vision for agriculture in the Squamish Valley.
4. What's helping and hindering agriculture in the Squamish Valley.
5. Ideas for action.

There was also a conversation table for attendees to have a dialogue with each other and one of the project team about issues and ideas.

There was also a good discussion among the attendees and the presenters about agricultural issues.

Approximately 40 people attended the event.



PHASE 1 WHAT WE HEARD

The following summarizes the input from the three engagement activities.

1. Personal connection with farming.

The largest group of participants in the event and on the survey indicated that they were a gardener (19% and 69% respectively). The second largest group of participants in the survey indicated they forage for food (22%), followed by a variety of other connections including previous generations of farmers, and supporters of local farming. The participants at the event also indicated they came from previous generations of farmers, and also indicated some small level of farming.

The survey respondents also indicated their main agricultural products, the type and number of products, major constraints to expanding their farm operations, which channels they used to sell their products, percentage of income generated through various channels, the geographic regions that their products are sold, and farm-related issues.

2. Top strengths of farming and food production in the Squamish Valley

Survey input indicated the two top strengths of farming and food production were 'access to markets – local and regional' and 'good support from local consumers,' followed by 'public is well educated about local food,' and 'strong cultural history of farming' and 'good soils.' Input from the event supported the survey input, and included good water supply.

3. Top challenges affecting farming and food production in the Squamish Valley

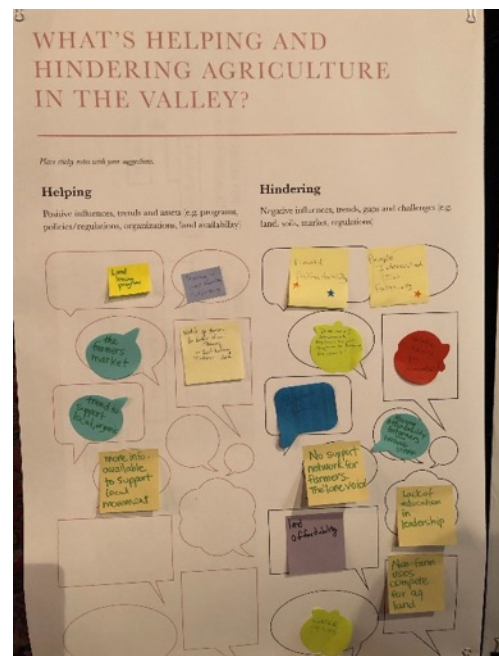
The survey responses indicated the most significant challenge was the 'high costs and capital inputs of land,' followed by 'limited supporting infrastructure,' 'flooding and other natural hazards,' and 'local government land use policies and regulations.' Additional input from the event participants included threat of land development.

The Steering Committee also identified the most significant challenges as being cost of land for farming; the difficulty in converting forested land to farmland; zoning requirements; and lack of enforcement.

4. Action ideas

A large number of ideas for actions to strengthen agriculture in the Squamish Valley were received from the survey and the public event. All of the input is included in the appendices; the main categories of action ideas offered were:

- Systemic support (e.g. create agricultural group, food hub)
- Support for farmers (e.g. tax incentives, advocate, identifying new market opportunities)
- Education/promotion
- Regulation (e.g. regulate urban development, tax implications for non-farming use of ALR land)



5. Vision

The survey and the public event sought input on words that would help describe a vision for the future of agriculture in the Squamish Valley. From the survey, the top three words or themes that were identified as most important to be included in a vision for agriculture were (in order of popularity):

1. Sustainable agricultural/food sector (environmentally, socially and economically responsible)
2. Accessible land/processing/distribution
3. Prosperous, resilient, vibrant, strong agriculture/food sector

The responses at the public event were similar to the ones from the survey, but also included food literacy, knowledge and education as part of the vision.

