

THE PROVINCIAL AGRICULTURAL LAND RESERVE AND AREA C ZONING REGULATIONS

What Is The Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR)?

The ALR is a provincial land-use zone in which agriculture is recognized as the priority use. It is the biophysical resource base that supports farm and ranch activities in the province. Farming/ranching of ALR land is encouraged and non-agricultural uses are regulated. The ALR comprises just 5% of BC's total land base and is the area with the greatest agricultural capacity. As a finite and valuable resource, the province decided to protect this land, to encourage farming and ranching and to focus non-farm use to the remaining 95% of the province.

Why does farmland matter?

- Community food security, agriculture economic development opportunities, ecological integrity, social, cultural, and historic values.
- With rising oil prices, increasing food shortages, and a changing global climate, we need to enhance and retain the ability to feed ourselves, as well as future generations.
- The loss of farmland is essentially permanent.

Good soil takes thousands of years to be created, and just a fraction of the landscape has topsoil suitable for agriculture. We simply cannot manufacture good soil. The ALR, in the face of climate change, rising transportation costs and questionable farming and food processing practices in countries where we import food, makes a secure and vibrant local agriculture and farmland protection system that much more critical.

According to the BC Ministry of Agriculture and the Agricultural Land Commission (ALC), the highest and best use of agricultural land (e.g. ALR) is for agriculture. Anyone purchasing or owning land in the ALR for non-agricultural purposes or strictly rural residential use, should be aware that the business of agriculture is the primary land use and normal farm/ranch practices are protected. For example, that means the noise, dust and odours that may arise from agricultural businesses are to be expected. The *Farm Practices Protection (Right to Farm) Act* enables the pursuit and continuation of normal farm/ranch practices, despite complaints from neighbours.

It is important to be aware and understand that all land within the ALR is regulated to protect this extremely valuable resource. In the ALR land uses are restricted and agriculture is the priority use. It is the Agricultural Land Commission's experience that a lack of clear zoning bylaw regulations may result in landowners and investors being misled as to allowable uses and/or urbanization potential within the ALR.

Community members are often not aware of the hierarchy of legislation and may make decisions based on the incorrect assumption that the zoning bylaw is the final authority on land use. Local governments must ensure both clarity and consistency between their bylaws and the *Agricultural Land Commission Act (ALCA)* and Regulation. Local governments are required by the provincial ALR regulations to permit certain uses in their agriculture zones, and local governments have the ability to regulate and prohibit other uses within the ALR.

Agriculture is the foundational industry for many communities and the Pemberton Valley is no exception. The agriculture industry is a large contributor to both the local and regional economies. Markets for locally grown and processed foods are expanding across BC, putting more money into the hands of farmers, ranchers, and rural communities. These growing markets depend on the land remaining productive and available for agriculture. Working farms create a sense of place in the Pemberton Valley and throughout BC. They are part of our heritage and vital to our food security and legacy. Well-managed agricultural land also provides valuable ecosystem services, such as flood control, groundwater recharge, wildlife habitat, carbon sequestration, and open space.

Agricultural Land Commission

<https://www.alc.gov.bc.ca/alc/content/home>

Why Are We Updating and Strengthening Agricultural Regulations in Electoral Area C?

The Pemberton Valley is a small and isolated agriculture zone and lack of access to land and conflict caused by non-farm uses negatively affects the viability of all farms in the area. High land prices and low economic returns can keep farmers out of the market and can also constrain farmers from expanding their holdings. It can lead farm owners to decide against investing in capital-intensive agricultural activities, which becomes a limitation on agriculture potential.

The pressure on agricultural land from residential estate use has been increasing, and is showing no signs of lessening. The development of large footprint residential and non-farm uses on agricultural land increases the cost of farmland, fuels land speculation, impacts the future viability of the land for agricultural purposes and creates conflicts between users.

This results in increasing the cost of agricultural land far beyond the ability of existing and new farmers to afford, and severely reduces access to land for existing and new farmers looking to own or rent. In BC, agricultural land is still excluded from the foreign buyer's tax, and there are no restrictions on foreign ownership of farmland. This further exacerbates the issue of farmland speculation.

The Pemberton Valley Agricultural Area Plan and its implementation is intended to protect farmland, support the agricultural industry, and encourage the agricultural use of agriculture land, regulate and restrict non-farm and residential uses in order to ensure the viability of the agricultural industry now and in the future.

This is critically important to protect and enhance food security for the region and strong regulations are required to prevent the proliferation of non-farm uses in the ALR that remove valuable agricultural land from production and create conflict with farm uses.

It is important to realize that the Electoral Area C Official Community Plan & Zoning Bylaw Review is an ongoing process.

- Several community meetings were held in early 2017.
- Many Electoral Area C Agricultural Advisory Committee (AAC) meetings have been held with respect to the development of the Pemberton Valley Agricultural Area Plan, the subsequent review of all actions in the adopted agriculture plan, and the contents of the proposed zoning bylaw.
- The SLRD has heard several recurring concerns mentioned by community members since proposed Zoning Amendment Bylaw 1549 was drafted.
- The SLRD anticipates receiving further written input from members of the community prior to finalizing bylaws.
- The SLRD has listened to these concerns and will work to create a bylaw that reflects the variety of input being heard, as well as the requirements of the provincial ALR regulations, input from the ALC, the Ministry of Agriculture, and the Area C AAC, all while seeking to implement the Pemberton Valley Agricultural Area Plan.

Squamish-Lillooet Regional District

<https://www.slrd.bc.ca/planning-building/planning-development-services/policies-plans/agriculture-planning/agricultural-area-plans/area-c-and-pemberton-agricultural-area-plan>

<https://www.slrd.bc.ca/inside-slrd/current-projects-initiatives/area-c-ocp-zoning-pemberton-valley-agricultural-area-plan-implementation>

https://www.slrd.bc.ca/sites/default/files/pdfs/planning/guides/180306_Area_C_Timeline.pdf