

# 2016 COMMUNITY EXCELLENCE AWARDS APPLICATION LEADERSHIP & INNOVATION, Agriculture

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*Filled Thursday, June 09, 2016*

## **Name of Local Government**

Regional District of North Okanagan

## **Project/Program Manager Name**

Rob Smailes

## **Title**

General Manager of Planning & Building

## **Phone**

250-550-3736

## **Email**

Rob.Smailes@rdno.ca

## **Administrative Contact Name**

Kari Cameron

## **Title**

Executive Assistant, Corporate & Administrative Services

## **Phone**

250-550-3772

## Email

kari.cameron@rdno.ca

**The Mayor/Chair is aware that I am submitting this application on behalf of my local government.**

Yes

## Project/Program Title:

RDNO Regional Agricultural Plan

## Project Summary Paragraph

***Please provide a summary of your project/program in 150 words or less.***

The development of a Regional Agricultural Plan was initiated in 2013 as a priority Regional Growth Strategy implementation project. The planning process was led by the Regional District's Regional Agricultural Advisory Committee, which also acted as the Agricultural Plan Steering Committee. The Committee provided local knowledge, technical advice and input into the planning process and acted as liaison with the regional agricultural community. Upland Consulting was retained to undertake the development of the Plan.

The Regional Agricultural Plan includes:

1. A vision for a strong agriculture sector for the next 20 years;
2. A summary of current issues and opportunities relating to agriculture;
3. An overview of agricultural stakeholder and public engagement;
4. Creative actions and approaches to address issues and opportunities;
5. Strategies and policies that will support and enhance the economic sustainability and resilience of the agricultural industry; and,
6. An implementation and funding strategy.

## Project Analysis

### 1. STEWARDSHIP

*Please describe how your project/plan strengthens farming and agriculture in your community.*

The Regional Agricultural Plan is intended to be an action-oriented strategic document that focuses on regionally appropriate collaborative solutions to identified agricultural issues. The Plan intends to enable the Regional District to facilitate action with the support of member municipalities, various senior government agencies, community organizations, agricultural producers, businesses and representatives.

Extensive public and agricultural stakeholder input throughout the process resulted in the identification of seven priorities, each with their own actions. These include:

1. Protecting farmland and farmers
2. Strengthening the local agricultural economy
3. Encouraging sustainable agricultural practices and Climate Change Resilience
4. Managing clean, accessible and affordable water
5. Ensuring farmland availability for emerging and multigenerational farmers
6. Creating supportive government policies and regulations
7. Raising awareness through education and celebration of agriculture

### 2. RESULTS

*a. Please provide a brief outline of the steps involved in the program/project and the status of each step.*

The following actions have been accomplished since project initiation (December 2013):

1. Regular meetings of Regional Agricultural Advisory Committee;
2. Completion of the Agricultural Land Use Inventory;
3. Regional food system workshop which provided an opportunity for consultation early in the planning process to identify themes and areas of focus;
4. Public open houses, at farmers' markets;
5. Two focus group sessions with key agricultural producer stakeholders;

6. Surveys of the farming and non-farming communities;
7. General context review and development of the Background Report;
8. Development of the Market Opportunities Analysis;
9. Identification of potential strategies, policies, actions and pilot projects;
10. Presentation of the draft Regional Agricultural Plan to the Regional Agricultural Advisory Committee;
11. Referral of RAP to member municipalities, Regional District departments, First Nations, agricultural producer groups, the British Columbia Agricultural Council and various senior government agencies, including the Ministry of Agriculture and the Agricultural Land Commission for comment.
12. Review and discussion of the referral comments received by the Regional Agricultural Advisory Committee with recommended edits.
13. Revised Agricultural Plan ready for final review and comment; and,
14. Recommended endorsement of the revised plan by the Regional Agricultural Advisory Committee and Regional Growth Management Advisory Committee to the Board of Directors.

***b. Describe the results achieved and provide measurable results where possible.***

The Regional Agricultural Plan was endorsed by the Board of Directors on November 4, 2015. The Board has endorsed Plan implementation with four priority projects underway in 2016. These projects include:

- Monitoring BC's new Water Sustainability Act for forthcoming regulations that may be pertinent to the agricultural community.
- Encourage farmers to participate in the environmental Farm Plan (EFP) program by working with Advisors to create an environmental health plan for the farm. The EFP is voluntary, confidential, and free. There are financial incentives for implementing best management practices.
- Encourage the RAAC to review all North Okanagan ALR-related decisions on an annual basis to explore the cumulative impact of applications on the farmland base. These would include exclusion, inclusion, subdivision, non-farm use, and major urban development applications adjacent to the ALR.
- Ensure that RDNO employees, directors, and members of the RAAC have the appropriate level of understanding of agriculture and associated legislative framework that allow them to effectively address the needs of the farming

community. This could be achieved by providing professional development workshops and updates.

### **3. CHALLENGES**

***What challenges did you face in implementing this program/project and how did you overcome them?***

The RDNO will carry out implementation of the Regional Agricultural Plan over the long term. Funding for projects is always a challenge. To date implementation has focused on projects that can be completed in-house, however, the RDNO continues to apply for and pursue grant and partnership opportunities.

### **4. LEADERSHIP**

***Describe how acting on this initiative demonstrates leadership in the advancement of farming in your community. Please include examples that are indicative of the shift in your overall approach from what may have been done in the past.***

Up until 2012 the RDNO did not have a Regional Agricultural Advisory Committee or Regional Agricultural Plan to provide guidance to both staff and politicians on what support is needed to address the various challenges the industry faces. With both the RAAC committee and Agricultural Plan in place, the RDNO is taking an active role in addressing those issues and identifying / supporting opportunities that will strengthen the farming community. The RAAC meets monthly to discuss matters specific to the agriculture industry, they review ALC applications and provide advice to the Board on land use matters effecting agriculture and help promote agriculture through raising awareness of their industry (e.g. Dairymen's Association- Breakfast on the Farm).

### **5. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

***How does the project encourage economic sustainability? (e.g. life cycle analysis, internalizing costs and alternative financing, economic instruments)***

The Regional Agricultural Plan contains 17 actions/policies specific to strengthening the Local Agricultural Economy focusing on:

Economic viability of local operations;

Regional marketing opportunities; and

Creation, distribution and sales of value-added farm products.

Each action/policy identifies the key players needed to implement these goals along with the time frame and resources required.

## 6. EDUCATION

***Please describe the educational aspects of your program/project, details of your target audience and results of this outreach. (e.g. public participation, knowledge sharing, capacity building, community identity and marketing)***

During the development of the Regional Agricultural Plan it was noted that farmers want to see agricultural education at the community level as well as in the local school curriculum. Citizens who are educated about the local food system are able to express their support for local food to friends and family outside of the region. Educational opportunities can also be used to explain the beneficial characteristics of supporting local agricultural production and the extension of these benefits to the local economy. The Regional Agricultural Plan contains 12 actions/policies specific to raising awareness through education and celebration of agriculture. Subthemes that emerged within the recommended actions include:

Education occasions for the public;

Agritourism opportunities at the farm level; and

Agricultural events and showcases at the community level (2016 examples include:

- 2nd annual Breakfast on the farm- hosted by the North Okanagan Dairyman's association;
- RDNO facilitated a workshop for all Advisory Planning Commission members to gain a better understanding of the planning process. The Agricultural Land Commission (Martin Collins) presented on the values, goals and objectives of the ALC; and
- the Chairman of the RDNO Board presented information to the Vernon Chamber of Commerce/ business community on the economic impacts of agriculture within our region and the ways in which the RDNO is supporting this important sector).

## 7. INNOVATION

***What makes your program/project innovative?***

Regional Agricultural plans are becoming more common within the province, however, plan implementation being overseen and lead by a Regional Agricultural Committee is not as common. The RDNO and Regional Agricultural Advisory Committee saw value in this approach in that there would be a good level of

engagement, a diverse and robust skillset, there is good local knowledge provided on a continual basis and networking and connections can easily be made. The RDNO is in its first year of plan implementation however based on the high level of community consultation and engagement with both the farming community and Regional Agricultural Advisory Committee, there is great interest and a strong commitment and desire to implement the actions of this plan.

## **8. TRANSFERABILITY**

### ***How is this program/project transferable to other local governments?***

The methods used in developing this plan can be applied in the development of other Regional Agricultural Plans within the province. The public consultation and community engagement components for plan development can also be replicated and were key to highlighting the issues and opportunities that exist within our Agricultural sector. From a staff perspective, having the Regional Agricultural Advisory Committee (RAAC) as the steering committee for plan development, has put the RDNO in a strong position for success as we have multiple resources and a high level of commitment from both the agricultural community and elected officials to take ownership and oversee implementation of this plan. It is important to note that the RAAC committee is made up of both industry representatives and elected officials and this diversity was essential in getting buy in and support from both those who the plan will effect (industry) and those who make the decisions regarding regulation, policies and project funding (elected officials). Within the RAAC membership there is a representative from every jurisdiction in the region and the majority of commodity groups. I would suggest that this oversight (by RAAC) has been one of the key successes in this process and should be shared and “transferred” to others undertaking similar processes.

## **9. KNOWLEDGE SHARING**

### ***What helpful advice would you share with other communities looking to embark on a similar project?***

The development of an Agricultural Plan is a big undertaking, however, it may be one of the most significant actions a Local Government can take to support this industry. Through the development of the Regional Agricultural Plan we have identified the various challenges and opportunities that producers (small to large scale operations) face. For example, the average age of farmers in our region is 55+ and there doesn't appear to be many young farmers waiting to take over. Having said that, the general public continues to put more of an emphasis/importance on

the ability to buy local and ensure food security within the region. There are a number of challenges to making that happen but at least with an Agricultural Plan in place, actions can be taken to bridge the divide.

## **10. TELL US MORE**

***Please share any other information you think may support your submission.***

Agriculture defines the history and identity of the North Okanagan. Every community within the RDNO contains land within the Agricultural Land Reserve and has agricultural designations within their Official Community Plans with supporting polices and zoning. However, these lands are under constant pressure from developers because people want to live here for the rural lifestyle. Therefore, it is essential that the general public is aware that Agriculture provides both local and regional economic benefits, as well as multiple opportunities for local access to agricultural produce and products. The Regional Agricultural Plan is the culmination of a Background Report, Market Opportunities Analysis, and extensive consultation with the agricultural community. The Regional Agricultural Plan combines that information to present a vision statement, key priorities and recommended actions towards planning for agriculture in the North Okanagan.

By 2035: “Agriculture is an important part of the North Okanagan’s past, present, and future identify and offers everyone an opportunity to become connected to the local food system. The land base is affordable for farms of all sizes and profitable agricultural businesses thrive with support from government policies and regulations. Sustainable production practices ensure resilience in the face of climate change and provide residents and visitors with a diversity of healthy food and related agricultural crops”.