



2017 Community Excellence Awards

Application Form

Leadership & Innovation, Agriculture

Please complete and return the application form by **Friday, June 23, 2017**. If you have any questions, contact UBCM at awards@ubcm.ca or (250) 356-5193.

SECTION 1: Applicant Information

Local Government: Regional District of Central Okanagan

Complete Mailing Address: 1450 K.L.O. Road Kelowna, BC V1W 3Z4

Contact Person: Valentina Trevino

Position: Business Development Officer

Phone: 250-469-6282

E-mail: vtrevino@investkelowna.com

SECTION 2: Staff Contact

An invitation to attend the UBCM Community Excellence Awards Breakfast Reception will be sent out via e-mail in early September. Winners will not be named before the ceremony.

Please provide the contact information for the person in your office who should receive and reply to the invitation, on behalf of the elected officials/staff who will be in attendance at the UBCM Convention.

Staff Contact Person: Corie Griffiths

Position: Director

Phone: 250-469-6280

E-mail: info@investkelowna.com

SECTION 3: Project/Program Information

1. Name of the Project/Program:

Regional District of Central Okanagan Economic Development Commission (RDCO-EDC) - Agriculture Support Program

2. Project/Program Summary. Please provide a summary of your project/program in 150 words or less

The Central Okanagan (CO) is a major centre for agriculture in BC. The sector has important links to tourism, manufacturing and the quality of life for which the region is known for. Over the last 30 years, agriculture throughout the region has been challenged

by factors that greatly impact farm operators' abilities to derive income from their land, including rising land/labour costs and international market forces. Small farm operators must be savvy business planners/marketers in addition to possessing the technical skills traditionally associated with farming in order to succeed in the global marketplace.

In response to the gap in business development services/resources available to local farm operators, the EDC, a function of the RDCO that provides economic development services to CO communities, created the Agriculture Support Program. The Program works with partners, including BC Ministry of Agriculture, local government's Agricultural Advisory Commissions, industry associations and academia to provide business support to local farm operators. Key program elements include:

- Site Visitation
- Agri-tourism business development program
- Educational Seminars (Succession, marketing, business planning, etc)
- Central Okanagan Economic Profile for Agriculture
- Resources for Farm Operators
- Increasing profile of the sector through RDCO-EDC website and targeted media publications

SECTION 4: Project Details

Please answer each question in 250 words or less (our judges value directness and brevity). If you experience difficulty answering a particular question, consider the aspects of your program that may relate to the question and show us how they are linked. Remember to include measurable results whenever possible.

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

The agriculture sector is an economic driver in the CO and an important element of the region's high quality of life/reputation as a world class tourism destination. Over the past 30 years, farm operators in the CO and across the country have experienced new challenges and opportunities as global trends have impacted markets and land and labour prices have increased.

In order to compete in a global economy, small farm operators are required to be knowledgeable in all aspects of operating/marketing their business, in addition to the technical skills associated with farming. This presents a particular challenge as small farm operators generally do not have the means to invest in marketing or business development staff and resources that larger operations can employ, and many lack conventional business management experience.

The RDCO-EDC's agriculture support program fills the gap between business development services and resources available to the agricultural industry. Services include providing direct business development expertise by working with farmers 1:1, facilitating/creating seminars on topics customized to local operators' needs and creates & distributes resources including the CO Profile for Agriculture and Resources for CO Farm Operators.

"I cannot say how much time/effort the RDCO-EDC put into our farm to make this all work... Farmers like us must be diversified in many areas not just growing crops. We have little or no training in book keeping, exporting or promoting ourselves. I can say that our farm ran day-to-day hoping to make it another year. I know this year with all I have learned from the RDCO-EDC program that our lives will be changed for the better, personally and financially".

Loretta & Glenn Cross, Local Orchardists and Agri-Tourism Operators

4. Results

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

*Business Enhancement and Development: The RDCO-EDC's Agriculture Support Program visits 20+ farms annually for in-depth site visitations to understand the needs of the industry, provide 1:1 expertise and connect farmers with resources. Approximately 25% of site visits lead to follow-up assistance to provide additional customized expertise/support.

The RDCO-EDC's website, InvestKelowna.com features a searchable, user-friendly resource section with information for current/prospective farm operators published by partner organizations and the RDCO-EDC.

*Agri-tourism Business Planning Program: Between 2012-2015, the RDCO-EDC ran a pilot Agriculture to Agri-Tourism Business Planning Program where 18 farm operators participated and received up to 30 hours of coaching/mentoring each from the RDCO-EDC. Based on a successful best practices program by the University of Tennessee, the RDCO-EDC developed the Agri-Tourism Business Planning Guide as well as a series of customized speaker presentations addressing specific topics (municipal planning staff, insurance provider, accountant, tourism industry specialist, social media expert, etc). Program participants also received 1:1 site visits/guidance from Thompson Okanagan Tourism Association and Tourism Kelowna.

As a result of the program, the RDCO-EDC provides the Agriculture to Agri-Tourism Business Planning Guide to farm operators in the CO and across BC, as well as extensive 1:1 consultation. The Guide has been shared with other communities and it is publically available at no cost.

*Increased Profile: Continued need to raise public awareness of the sophistication and innovative practices of CO farms and promote agriculture as a viable career and business opportunity; especially important for succession planning as the Census of Agriculture 2016 reported the average age of farm operators in the Central Okanagan is 57.9. This is an ongoing component of the program.

B) Describe the results achieved and provide measurable results where possible.

*Business Enhancement and Development:

-Conducted in-depth 1:1 site visits with approximately 50 local farm operators in the last 3 years.

-Production/free public distribution of multiple customized resources: "From Agriculture to Agri-Tourism," a research piece on agri-tourism in the CO; the "CO Economic Profile for Agriculture", an Agri-tourism Business Planning workbook, and a "Resource Guide for Farm

Operators".

-Act as a resource to provide assistance with information related to zoning/application processes.

-Connectivity to government by communicating industry intelligence to stakeholder groups (i.e government, post-secondary, business support).

*Agri-tourism Business Planning Program:

-17 farm operators participated in agri-tourism business planning program, representing up to 100 full time, part time and/or seasonal employees.

-Farm operators completed business plans and/or implemented improved planning processes and reported increased profit margins and being in optimal positions to grow their businesses.

-Development of a customized local database – 100+ agri-tourism interested farm operators, stakeholders and industry representatives.

-Program graduates reported better connectivity to supply chain, local business community & government, and benefits from collaborative marketing efforts and mutual support.

*Increased Profile:

-RDCO-EDC has increased profile of agriculture in the region by facilitating media coverage (20+ promotional pieces) in regional/national news outlets like the Kelowna Daily Courier, YLW Magazine, Canadian Grower and Orchard & Vine magazine.

-RDCO-EDC asked to participate in presentations to local/regional agricultural advisory committees, the City of Kelowna's Agriculture Plan development process, farm industry association workshops and local tourism events.

-A video on the RDCO-EDC agri-tourism business planning program was published to attract future participants and educate farm operators on value of business planning.

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

Several of the challenges that the RDCO-EDC encountered when implementing the agriculture support program are related to misconceptions regarding the industry. There is the public perception that farming is easy – the dream of buying agricultural land and start a boutique winery, for example – but in reality the process is complex and requires in-depth research and planning along the way. The Commission's many resources available focus on education, communication and providing information regarding the process of starting a farm, including costs, zoning, bylaws, etc., as well as connecting farmers with the appropriate contacts for regulatory information and best practices.

Specific challenges addressed by the Agri-Tourism Business Planning Program include helping farmers understand and develop the range of skills needed to diversify from traditional farming into agri-tourism. Such areas of focus include staffing and marketing based on solid market research. The focus on business planning addresses this major barrier to growth.

Many farm operators do not see the relationship and marketing advantages of viewing

themselves as part of the regional tourism industry. Tourism industry research and connections to industry associations, resources and support is an additional tactic the RDCO-EDC facilitates in its Agriculture Service programming.

On the other hand, the RDCO-EDC also raises awareness with multiple levels of government and other decision makers about the day-to-day challenges and needs of farmers and the importance of the industry in the region and provides customized support to CO farmers.

- 6. 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.

The RDCO-EDC facilitated the development of additional regional agriculture support and worked with provincial Ministry of Agriculture staff, local government Agricultural Advisory Commissions and local farm operators and identified the need to provide 1:1 customized support for local farmers with business planning/literacy. By recognizing the changing times/technologies within a traditional industry and the need for an innovative approach to business planning/development to ensure long-term business viability, the Commission tailors services offered to small farm operators to reflect the current global agriculture landscape.

The RDCO-EDC further connects farmers to other EDC specialists and partner organizations. The Commission's Export Development Officer has worked with several farms to navigate the regulatory and technical complexities of exporting agricultural products. As international demand for Okanagan cherries has increased, the RDCO-EDC has assisted local orchardists develop markets in China and other Asian markets. An example of how a shift in the industry - demand for BC cherries - needs to be met with the appropriate resources to help farmers thrive in a competitive market.

Raising the profile of agriculture, by facilitating regional/national media coverage with 20+ promotional pieces, to encourage young generations to consider entering the sector is another focus of the Commission and one that has been adapted from what may have been done in the past. By continuing to promote the industry through traditional print and incorporating electronic distribution channels (website, blog, social media), the RDCO-EDC raises public awareness on the sophistication of CO farms and promotes the industry.

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

The RDCO-EDC's Agriculture Support Program's main focus is to support CO farm operators to derive income from their land and improve the long-term viability of CO farms, agriculture related businesses and the sector overall. By providing direct 1:1 business planning/development expertise; connecting farmers with resources and support available through government and industry associations; and raising the profile of the industry in the CO the RDCO-EDC is encouraging the economic sustainability of the industry in the region.

Through exploration of modern farming techniques, export opportunities, agri-tourism opportunities, and alternate business ideas, local farm operators have a better chance at deriving more revenue from their land. In a region where agriculture is a key economic driver with important links to tourism, manufacturing and lifestyle, encouraging and supporting the sustainability of the industry is vital.

The RDCO-EDC's participation in industry stakeholder sessions with CO communities,

agriculture workshops, post-secondary/student presentations and other regional industry events, as well as media coverage on the local agriculture community, continues to increase an understanding of agriculture as a key economic sector and its future in the region.

- 8. 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)

There are two main educational aspects on our program:

1) Educating the Farm Operator - There is a perception by a number of farmers throughout the region that government at any level generally doesn't understand the day-to-day life and demands of a farmer, leading to frustration and unwillingness to seek support and resources. The RDCO-EDC builds relationships through regular site visitation by a dedicated agricultural support representative and connects farm operators to available resources from government and industry associations. Through the Commission's business enhancement and development agriculture program, farmers receive direct 1:1 business expertise in areas including market development, business planning, agri-tourism and exporting, as well as access to agriculture-specific resources and guides.

2) Educating the General Public (Government, Industry Associations, Community) - The RDCO-EDC communicates the needs of the agriculture sector to government, industry associations and the general public and increases the profile of agriculture in the Okanagan. The Commission creates agriculture focused content for its website and local publications and hosts annual 'state of agriculture' meetings with its 40+ member advisory board made up of elected officials, staff from multiple levels of government and industry/community leaders.

- 9. Innovation.** What makes this program/project innovative and creative?

The RDCO-EDC's Agriculture Support Program is innovative in that it provides focused business development expertise targeted to meet the unique needs of CO farm operators based on direct connectivity to the sector. Typically, agricultural support programs offered by governments in Canada focus on policy understanding and/or technical expertise provided by agrologists. Recognizing that farm operations have distinct business development requirements, the RDCO-EDC works to bridge the gaps between business development proficiency and expertise in the current agriculture support landscape.

The RDCO-EDC delivery mechanism for agriculture and agri-tourism resources is varied and includes multiple platforms - 1:1 site visitation, mentorship sessions, sector-focused guides, videos, and website posts among others - leading to increased participation and engagement from farm operators.

The program adapts according to unique local demands and market forces. For example, in BC 51.1% of farm operators work off-farm, compared to 44.5% nationally and the percentage of small farms selling direct to consumer is much higher than the national average. An expressed desire from small farms in the CO to derive more revenue from their land led to the creation of resources for Agri-tourism, the first of its kind from a local government in BC.

- 10. Transferability.** How is this program/project transferable to other local governments?

The RDCO-EDC makes all resources publically available and offers direct assistance with communities looking to implement programs. For example, the RDCO-EDC has created an

Agriculture to Agri-Tourism Toolkit that includes a custom Business Planning Guide, speaker series format, meeting and site visit plans, business plan coaching and mentorship program. The Implementation Kit and Toolkit is readily shared with municipal, provincial and federal agencies (Ministry of Jobs, Tourism & Skills Training, BC Economic Development Association) and other communities and community groups looking to develop agriculture business development and revenue diversification programs.

The RDCO-EDC has received business development inquiries from farm operators outside of the CO, including Salmon Arm, Chilliwack and Vancouver, who could benefit from similar programs in their communities.

11. Knowledge Sharing. What helpful advice would you share with other communities looking to embark on a similar project?

The key learning from activities in the agricultural sector is that farm operators have unique day-to-day business challenges related to operations, financing and marketing. The sector is highly dependent on numerous unpredictable forces like market prices and the weather. Responding effectively to industry needs requires flexibility and adaptability of programming and schedules. Direct contact, feedback and engagement from farm operators is essential to a successful program.

The RDCO-EDC's Agriculture Support Program is based on best practices identified from organizations around the world. For example, the RDCO-EDC created programming based on and with support from a highly successful best practices program from the University of Tennessee. Other communities can replicate the RDCO-EDC's success by searching for best practices from comparable communities, including the CO.

Any organization or community who is considering facilitating a similar program should be prepared to invest a substantial amount of time and resources to make the program work. Although easily underestimated, the work that it takes to provide 1:1 mentorship, referrals and follow-up is significant.

12. Additional Information. Please share any other information you think may help support your submission.

The RDCO-EDC's 2017 Central Okanagan Economic Profile for Agriculture will be released in June 2017 with updated statistics and commentary on the state of agriculture in the region based on the 2016 Census for Agriculture. This document is widely referenced by new and existing farm operators in business planning activities, as well as by foreign investors and companies looking to do business in the region.

In 2017, the RDCO-EDC's Agri-tourism program was recognized by the Ministry of Jobs, Tourism and Skills Training as a provincial best practice in agriculture. A profile of the program has been created by MJTST and will be posted to the BC Ideas Exchange in the coming weeks.

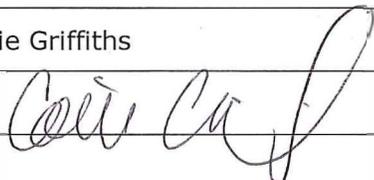
SECTION 5: Signature

Applications are required to be signed by an authorized representative of the applicant.

Name: Corie Griffiths

Title: Director

Signature:



Date: June 21, 2017

Applications should be submitted as Word or PDF files. If you choose to submit your application by e-mail, hard copies do not need to follow.

Submit applications to Local Government Program Services, Union of BC Municipalities

E-mail: awards@ubcm.ca or mail: 525 Government Street, Victoria, BC, V8V 0A8