

MAKING SENSE OF THE DRIFT:

Feeding a Population with Farmland Protection Legislation in British Columbia

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To quote, from an unknown source: The society which scorns excellence in plumbing because plumbing is a humble activity and tolerates shoddiness in philosophy because it is an exalted activity will have neither good plumbing nor good philosophy. Neither its pipes nor its theories will hold water.

Gary Runka, second commissioner of the Agricultural Land Commission (June 1975 to January 1979)¹

FOOD CRISES AND FARMLAND PRESERVATION LEGISLATION

IN THE EARLY 1970s, there was a world food crisis. The causes were manifold. Weather events, economic decisions, and political actions all contributed to creating a perfect storm in which grain prices doubled or even tripled in varying locations, leading to chronic starvation in particular countries and ultimately nearly 2 million dead.² In British Columbia, the government noticed. It expressed concern over worldwide wheat and beef shortages and predicted that California and Mexico would eventually need their food-producing lands for their own growing populations and that American embargos on some food products would likely repeat in the future.³ Within this predicament, and before passing the *Land Commission Act, 1973* (henceforth Bill 42 or the Act), the government explained:

¹ Gary Runka, keynote address to the Fourth Annual BC Mine Reclamation Symposium, Vernon, British Columbia, 5 March 1980, 20.

² Christian Gerlach, "Famine Responses in the World Food Crisis 1972–75 and the World Food Conference of 1974," *European Review of History/Revue Européenne d'Histoire* 22, no. 6 (2015): 930 and 935; Peter Timmer, "Reflections on Food Crises Past," *Food Policy* 35, no. 1 (2010): 2.

³ Lesley Campbell and Jim Ploknikoff, *Agricultural Land Reserve Historical Binder: On the Agricultural Land Reserve 1973* (Burnaby: Agricultural Land Commission, 1995).

We must protect our present and future supply of food. British Columbia is a “deficient” province in terms of meeting its own food requirement. We cannot take for granted that outside sources will always be able to supply our needs. We are highly vulnerable in terms of security. While it may now seem extremely remote, no one can predict for certain that the presently reliable supply of food could not change with alarming suddenness. Among these risks must be included possibilities of war, disease, drought and other calamities beyond the control and influence of provincial or national authority. Canada depends heavily on American supplies which, in the event of a home need, would place British Columbians in a serious position. The production of food in British Columbia protects citizens against price exploitation; we are not left to the mercy of the food importer and cannot be held up for ransom.⁴

During the past two centuries, Timmer notes that periodic food crises, spaced approximately thirty-five years apart, have occurred.⁵ Surveying past crises, it appears that governments often attempt the following policy responses during a food crisis: (1) the stabilization of domestic prices (e.g., by banning exports); (2) increasing local markets or production (e.g., temporarily subsidizing fertilizer costs to boost production); and/or (3) providing safety nets to poor consumers (e.g., through income relief or food aid).⁶

In British Columbia, Bill 42 falls under the second category as a crisis intervention meant to ensure and stabilize *both* future consumer food prices and local food production. The first annual report of the Agricultural Land Commission, the tribunal tasked with overseeing the legislation, states that two factors influenced the decision of the province to pass the legislation: (1) internal food production (i.e., it was believed that the province was too reliant on imports from other countries) and (2) farmland availability (as it was assessed that only 4 percent of the province’s land was arable).⁷ This means that goals of farmland preservation *and* food production are impossible to disentangle within this historical piece of legislation in British Columbia.

⁴ Government of British Columbia, *Bill 42: Land Commission Act* (Victoria, British Columbia, March 8, 1973), 4.

⁵ Timmer, “*Reflections*,” 1.

⁶ Timmer, 6.

⁷ BCLC (British Columbia Land Commission), *The Annual Report of the Provincial Land Commission: 1973–1974* (Burnaby: BCLC, 1974), 4 (hereafter all Agricultural Land Commission annual reports are referred to with a short title and the year of publication).

We begin this article by describing the goal of internal food production (known as food sufficiency) and outline some key statistics related to the province's rate of agricultural production. We then describe the Agricultural Land Commission (ALC) and Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR) and document how increasing food production, which was once seen as an urgent matter, seemingly left the ALC's purview despite being enshrined in its legislative purpose to this day. To address this predicament, an applied history approach is taken, and the first five years of the ALC's writing and work are considered. What these documents and actions reveal is a very particular formative ethic related to land, collaboration, and public service. Our findings serve to add to historical and contemporary understandings of *why* the ALC drifted away from encouraging food production and *how* we may collectively address current farmland and food security crises in British Columbia. We acknowledge that the *Land Commission Act* (Bill 42) and the ALR overlaid a new legal zoning designation across many of the traditional and unceded territories owned and stewarded by the two-hundred-plus First Nations in British Columbia and thus was a continuation of the legacy of colonial dictatorial power and control on the province's landscape. We hope that this analysis of the history of this legislation assists in understanding and fulfilling the original intentions of the ALR as provincial and First Nations governments work together to address the present-day implications of historic and enduring wrongs, in the spirit of Reconciliation.⁸

FEEDING A POPULATION: THE CONCEPT OF FOOD SUFFICIENCY

The question of whether we are producing enough food is also called the question of food sufficiency or self-reliance. It is measured as the rate of difference between food production and consumption in a given area. Writing about food self-sufficiency as a policy intervention, Clapp concludes: "The key point is that food self-sufficient countries produce an amount of food that is equal to or greater than the amount of food that they consume."⁹ Although some countries seek to ensure

⁸ In this article, we maintain the use of "their" in instances when referring to the original staff of the ALC (as a group of people) during the early 1970s. When referring to the ALC as an administrative body in general (and not specifically during the 1970s), or when referencing BC or Canada, the pronoun "its" is used.

⁹ Jennifer Clapp, "Food Self-Sufficiency: Making Sense of It, and When It Makes Sense," *Food Policy* 89 (2017): 89.

their populations are food sufficient on a national scale, a state of food sufficiency can also be sought for on a provincial or regional scale. However, it is important to note that food sufficiency can be either holistic or singular, it cannot be both. That is, a region can be singularly food sufficient (e.g., in one crop such as blueberries or potatoes) or holistically food sufficient, whereby all dietary needs are met within a bounded regional scale.¹⁰ What is considered suitable in a dietary sense for a given human population can, and does, differ across regions as well as time. Achieving holistic food sufficiency is always a mix of what food is available and whether that food provides optimal nourishment.

In British Columbia, Ormsby found that, in the 1860s, there were such a small number of farmers that *all* butter and cheese had to be imported into the province. Until 1905, the province was importing \$2 million (over \$52 million in 2023 currency) more in agricultural produce than it was exporting, and only in 1911 did production first exceed imports.¹¹ Writing just after the war in 1945, Ormsby concluded that the province “consumes most of its production and exports relatively little.”¹² This assertion has been confirmed by Pierce and Furusest, who state that, during the mid-1940s, British Columbia required net food imports of 3 percent.¹³ However, this number rose dramatically postwar, and in 1955 the provincial food supply was thought to be approximately 29 percent imported – a number that slowly increased to between 55 and 60 percent in the early 1980s.¹⁴ Since the 1970s, there have been various estimates of British Columbia’s food sufficiency. These estimates have ranged from 53 percent to 73 percent.¹⁵ The province itself attempted an assessment in 2006 and concluded that it was 48 percent food sufficient (and, if fish were added, 53 percent food sufficient).¹⁶ Mullinix et al. measured the theoretical food sufficiency in southwestern British Columbia (for the

¹⁰ Meagan J. Curtis, “Agricultural Food Sufficiency in Alberni-Clayoquot, Canada: An Applied History Approach” PhD diss., University of British Columbia, 2023.

¹¹ Margaret Ormsby, “Agricultural Development in British Columbia,” *Agricultural History* 19, no. 1 (1945): 11–20.

¹² Ormsby, 14.

¹³ J.T. Pierce and Owen J. Furusest, “Farmland Protection Planning in British Columbia,” *Geojournal* 6, no. 6 (1982): 555.

¹⁴ Pierce and Furusest, 555.

¹⁵ R. Markham, *Supply and Demand Balance in the BC Food Sector: A Statistical Analysis*, ARDSA Project No. 271304 (Victoria: Ministry of Agriculture, Government of British Columbia, 1982); W. Riemann, *The BC Food Balance* (Victoria: Ministry of Agriculture, Government of British Columbia, 1987).

¹⁶ Government of British Columbia, *BCs Food Self-Reliance: Can BCs Farmers Feed Our Growing Population?* (Victoria: Ministry of Agriculture and Lands, Government of British Columbia, 2006).

year 2011) and found it to be a maximum of 40 percent.¹⁷ In practice, any calculations of provincial or regional food sufficiency are inherently restricted as a result of serious data limitations. The production numbers for all types of farms in any given region are not publicly available, nor are data on where this food is then distributed. There are exceptions (such as in the meat and dairy industries), but some of this information is considered proprietary, and there are legitimate privacy concerns involved in this type of data collection. Furthermore, regional differences matter. According to Polsub et al., the provincial rate of food sufficiency is not necessarily commensurate to that of smaller regions in the province.¹⁸ A 2013 assessment of the ability of the province's eighty-nine Local Health Areas to meet regional food self-sufficiency found that 55 percent of them had zero or low food self-sufficiency ratings.¹⁹

THE AGRICULTURAL LAND COMMISSION AND AGRICULTURAL LAND RESERVE

To increase provincial food sufficiency during the world food crisis of 1972 to 1974, Bill 42 ushered in both the ALC (also called the Commission)²⁰ and the ALR (also called the Reserve). The Commission functions legally as an administrative tribunal that adjudicates various types of applications from parties who want to undertake non-agricultural activities in the ALR (such as building residences or structures) or include or exclude land from the Reserve. The ALR itself is a zoning designation overlaid on all provincial land that was deemed suitable for or as contributing to agricultural use. Its total area has ebbed and flowed over the decades, but it still sits close to its original area at approximately 4.7 million hectares (11.6 million acres)

¹⁷ Kent Mullinix, Caitlin Dorward, Cornelia Sussmann, Wallapak Polasub, Sean Smukler, C. Chiu, Anna Rallings, Caitriona Feeney, and Meidad Kissinger, *The Future of Our Food System: Summary of the Southwest BC Bioregion Food System Design Project* (Richmond: Institute for Sustainable Food Systems, Kwantlen Polytechnic University, 2016), iv.

¹⁸ Polsub Wallapak, Caitlin Dorward, and Kent Mullinix, "Modelling Current and Future Food Self-reliance of the Okanagan Bioregion," KPU Institute for Sustainable Food Systems, 2020. https://www.kpu.ca/sites/default/files/FoodSelfReliance_tech_report_ISFS_final_1.pdf.

¹⁹ Aleck Ostry and Kathryn Morrison, "A Method for Estimating the Extent of Regional Food Self-Sufficiency and Dietary Ill Health in the Province of British Columbia, Canada," *Sustainability* 5, no. 11 (2013): 4954.

²⁰ The ALC is called by various names throughout history: the Land Commission, the Provincial Land Commission, and the British Columbia Land Commission. For consistency, we use here often its most contemporary moniker – the Agricultural Land Commission or ALC.

or just less than 5 percent of the land in the province.²¹ Although the percentage has held relatively firm, ALR land has often been rezoned in the southwestern area of the province (and put to alternative uses) while land in the north has become designated as ALR in a compensatory fashion. To define the Reserve boundaries, the Canada Land Inventory survey of agricultural soil capability was used to decide what land was in and what land was not. The best soils in the province (called Class 1–4) were included immediately unless there was a clear reason for them not to be (e.g., the land use on these parcels was already established or slated for another use). Less arable soil (called Class 5–7) was included as well if the ALC thought they could complement production on Class 1–4 lands or if excluding them would “encourage ruinous intrusion of incompatible uses into an otherwise wholly agricultural community.”²²

The second appointed commissioner of the ALC (Gary Runka) was a soil scientist as well as a professional agrologist, and he supervised three to four other soil scientists at the Commission.²³ In 2006, many decades after his work during the first years of the Commission (1975 to 1979), he spoke at the Post-World Planners Congress Seminar about the Reserve. During this speech, he reminded the audience that the decision to use the Canada Land Inventory survey of agricultural soil was critical for it made clear that “the mandate was not to balance competing land uses, not to negotiate the conditions under which one might use farmland for other purposes, but to protect farmland and to preserve the option to use that land for food production.”²⁴ However, he went on to express concern about the Commission’s activities in the decades since its creation and left the audience with the following statements and questions:

Its focus on applications has been to the detriment of the Commission’s role in promoting and encouraging farming within the ALR. That part of its mandate has been left to wither in the background. So, now, 35 years into the program, many British Columbians are beginning to ask the question – has the ALR program strayed from its roots?

²¹ Provincial Agricultural Land Commission, *Annual Report 2021–2022* (Burnaby: Agricultural Land Commission, 2022).

²² Mary Rawson, *Ill Fares the Land: Land-Use Management at the Urban/Rural/Resource Edges – The British Columbia Land Commission* (Ottawa: Ministry of State and Urban Affairs, 1977), 25.

²³ Rawson, 29.

²⁴ Gary Runka, “BC’s Agricultural Land Reserve: Its Historical Roots,” Vancouver, British Columbia, Post-World Planners Congress Seminar, Planning for Food, 21 June 2006, 2.

And, if so, are we comfortable with the direction it has been drifting over the past decade? If not, what would be required to get it back on track?²⁵

FOOD SUFFICIENCY AND THE AGRICULTURAL LAND RESERVE

Concern about the failure of the Commission to promote and encourage farming was not a new concern. Four years after he left the Commission, Gary Runka wrote:

I look to the next ten years with caution. The strength of the ALR boundary cannot forever be held through restrictive regulations alone and hopefully, during its second decade, the Agricultural Land Commission will be able to play a more dynamic role in protecting the land resource by encouraging a healthy, diverse, agricultural industry.²⁶

When the BC auditor general audited the ALC in 2010 to determine if it was achieving its mandate, his report affirmed: “One of the main reasons for preserving farmland – in British Columbia and elsewhere in the world – is to secure food production into an uncertain future.”²⁷ Nevertheless, the auditor general concluded that the ALC was struggling to achieve this. In the decade since, studies have shown that not much has changed.²⁸ The former chair of the ALC, Richard Bullock, wrote in 2018 that, although the ALC has prevented the loss of farmland, “there has been a larger failure to foster wider economic viability and a diversity of opportunities in our food production sector ... We forget, and at our great peril, that the most fundamentally important resource is agricultural land and its ability to produce food for us when put to its only proper use.”²⁹

²⁵ Runka, 6–7.

²⁶ The Provincial Agricultural Land Commission, *Ten Years of Agricultural Land Preservation in British Columbia* (Burnaby: Provincial Agricultural Land Commission, 1983), 35.

²⁷ Office of the Auditor General of British Columbia, *Audit of the Agricultural Land Commission* (Victoria: Auditor General of British Columbia, 2010), 2.

²⁸ The under-utilization of farmland is of concern in the province. See Kent Mullinix, Caitlin Dorward, Marc Shutzbank, Parthiphan Krishnan, Karen Ageson, and Arthur Fallick, “Beyond Protection: Delineating the Economic and Food Production Potential of Underutilized, Small-Parcel Farmland in Metropolitan Surrey, British Columbia,” *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development* 4, no. 1 (2013): 33–50; Kristi Tatebe, Naomi Robert, Russell Liu, Angeli dela Rosa, Eric Wirsching, and Kent Mullinix, *Protection Is Not Enough: Policy Precedents to Increase the Agricultural Use of BC’s Farmland* (Richmond, BC: Kwantlen Polytechnic University, 2018).

²⁹ Tatebe, 3.

The observation that the ALR has failed to effectively increase food production, which many farmers know from direct experience, has been noted for decades. In 1997, Hanna reminded us that “placing farmland within a strict reserve cannot in itself ensure that such land will be used for farming, nor can it ensure that capability will be maintained or enhanced, or that good stewardship will be practiced.”³⁰ In his article on the history of the ALC, Garrish leaves us with the question: “If the ALC’s ability to impede the conversion of farmland is all that is valued, then should any of the remaining pretenses of safeguarding agriculture be kept?”³¹ To this day, the technical and legal answer to this question can be found within the Act, which states that one of the main purposes of the ALC remains to “encourage farming of land within the agricultural land reserve in collaboration with other communities of interest.”³² Thus, a gap persists between the historical and legislative purposes of the Act and the actual fulfilment of their intended aims. After looking more closely at the history of the Commission’s first years, we contend that it is possible to transform pretenses into actualities so as to begin again addressing the enduring problem of provincial food sufficiency.

METHODOLOGY: APPLIED HISTORY

The methodology used in this analysis is that of applied history. In the last decade, this subdiscipline of history has been rethought by various scholars in the field.³³ Stimulated by the belief in the potential of history for guiding better policy and decision making, multiple applied history manifestoes have been penned.³⁴ This approach to reading historical documents is slightly different from other historical approaches, as the Applied History Manifesto out of the Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs explains:

Mainstream historians begin with a past event or era and attempt to provide an account of what happened and why. Applied historians

³⁰ Kevin Hanna, “Regulation and Land-Use Conservation: A Case Study of the British Columbia Agricultural Land Reserve,” *Journal of Soil and Water Conservation* 52, no. 3 (1997): 169.

³¹ Christopher Garrish, “Unscrambling the Omelette: Understanding British Columbia’s Agricultural Land Reserve,” *BC Studies* no. 136 (2002): 54.

³² *Agricultural Land Commission Act*, S.B.C. 2002, c. 36, s. 6(1)(b), https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/complete/statreg/02036_01#section6.

³³ Harm Kaal and Jelle van Lottum, “Applied History: Past, Present and Future,” *Journal of Applied History* 3 (2021): 135–54.

³⁴ Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, *Applied History Manifesto* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 2016); Jo Guldi and David Armitage, *The History Manifesto* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

begin with a current choice or predicament and attempt to analyze the historical record to provide perspective, stimulate imagination, find clues about what is likely to happen, suggest possible policy interventions, and assess probable consequences.³⁵

Applied historians believe that there is utility in comprehending past elements of a problem before theorizing on how to “fix” it in the present. They seek to share historical information in order to strengthen our ability to both better understand our present-day circumstances (i.e., how we got here) as well as our future decisions (i.e., where we will go).

Food sufficiency is a suitable topic for this methodology, not least because when BC residents were polled in 2008, 91 percent agreed with the statement that “it is important that BC produce enough food so we don’t have to depend on imports from other places.”³⁶ With the goal of providing us today with some much needed perspective, this article examines the first Agricultural Land Commission annual reports from 1973 to 1978, the ALC’s submission to the Provincial Commission of Inquiry on Property Assessment and Taxation, and other internal publications released during this period. Furthermore, any material written by the inaugural staff or commissioners of the ALC itself are also integrated into the analysis.

These documents comprise all publicly available documents written by the ALC or its staff during this time period. We bounded these first five years as the official “beginnings” of the ALC as it was during these years that the boundaries around the ALR were drawn and the ALC’s original intentions were first implemented (before significant changes were made to the legislation in 1977). As with most historical research, results and conclusions were formed inductively as the documents were read. Our reading of these documents represents an interpretation and account of a few aspects we read as vitally important when assessing the intentions and purpose of the ALR. This review is not a comprehensive policy analysis but, rather, a historical documentation, and contemporary assessment, of a portion of the story of the ALR’s creation.

There is a built-in bias within the historical analysis as the ALC is analyzed through the eyes and writings of ALC staff and commissioners themselves. This is not considered detrimental as the intention of this work is to understand food sufficiency from the viewpoint of the

³⁵ Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, 10.

³⁶ IPSOS Reid Public Affairs, *Poll of Public Opinions toward Agriculture, Food and Agri-Food Production in BC*, report for the Investment Agriculture Foundation of BC (Vancouver: IPSOS Reid), 4.

Commission (rather than from that of farmers or other residents) as it was given the task of encouraging food production and dealing with the perceived food sufficiency crisis at the time – a task that has not been removed from its legislative purpose.³⁷ As the concluding section makes clear, many of the concerns that motivated the ALC during the 1970s remain unresolved within the province today. As governments, policies, and politics have changed over the last fifty years in British Columbia, one key public policy question around farmland has arisen: Is the ALR destined to become a dinosaur on the landscape, indicated as a notation on land titles while being understood by very few? Or can it once again be aligned with one of its foundational intentions – to stimulate provincial food production and sufficiency? A short summary of multiple contemporary challenges related to farmland and food is provided in the conclusion, where we underscore the importance of this history in light of present-day concerns.

RESULTS

The Formative Years of the Agricultural Land Commission: A Matter of Life and Death

Petter argues that the original *Land Commission Act* was pushed forth in a chaotic, hurried manner by the newly elected BC New Democratic Party (NDP) government.³⁸ Despite this, William Lane, the first commissioner of the ALC, said the Act was “the most important piece of agricultural legislation in a lengthy history of the industry in this part of

³⁷ There remains a serious lack of research on farmers’ perspectives of the Reserve and the Commission, which others should seek to rectify. One exception to this is Krueger and Maguire, who interviewed farmers in the Okanagan as part of their research: Ralph Krueger and Garth Maguire, “Protecting Specialty Cropland from Urban Development: The Case of the Okanagan Valley, British Columbia,” *Geoforum* 16, no. 3 (1985): 287–300. The attendant controversies and debates involved in the ALC’s and ALR’s creation have been covered to a larger degree elsewhere. For example, see Barry Smith, “The British Columbia Land Commission Act–1973” (MA thesis, University of British Columbia, 1974); Gary Runka, “British Columbia’s Agricultural Land Preservation Program,” in *Land Use: Tough Choices in Today’s World*, *Soil Conservation Society of America* (Ankeny, IA: Soil Conservation Society of America, 1977); Andrew Petter, “Sausage Making in British Columbia’s NDP Government: The Creation of the *Land Commission Act*, August 1972–April 1973,” *BC Studies* 65 (1985): 3–33; Geoff Meggs and Rod Mickleburgh, “The Art of the Impossible: Dave Barrett and the NDP in Power, 1972–1975” (Vancouver: Harbour Publishing, 2012); Garrish, *Unscrambling*, 2002.

³⁸ Petter, *Sausage Making*, 3.

Canada.”³⁹ Gary Runka, who followed him, called the Act “one of the most influential land use planning initiatives ever undertaken in British Columbia, and perhaps even across Canada.”⁴⁰ During these years, the ALC had serious concerns around proper resource management in relation to food production and saw the situation basically as an existential matter – a matter of life and death. In 1975, they stated:

We tend to forget that the daily preoccupation of most of mankind is obtaining sufficient food to maintain life. Many countries are engaged in a desperate race to keep food supplies growing at least as fast as their populations ... In a world that suffers from malnutrition and starvation, unabated population growth can only increase the pressures on land capable of producing food ... If British Columbia is to satisfy its domestic needs and maintain the option of a trading position in the food markets of the world, our valuable agricultural land must be safeguarded.⁴¹

The first annual report of the Commission called British Columbia’s situation “ominous when viewed in a world context” and echoed the government’s concerns, stating “dependence on external food producers could pose several long-run problems for the province. It will be highly vulnerable should external political, economic market competition, or physical factors cause a reduction in the reliability or availability of imported agricultural products, or drastically raise their prices.”⁴²

There was an urgency within their work. The Commission felt that British Columbians had, at that moment, to choose their future land use patterns and that they “must act soon, for if we do not,” as Sir Julian Huxley wrote ‘Man will become the cancer of the planet, destroying its resources and eventually his own future self.’⁴³ During these formative years, concerns around population, food production, and land use resulted in mounting pressure. The pressure created a further cocktail of existential and economic fears. It was the ALR that acted as a pressure release valve for these fears. Yet, despite this agitation, the ALC’s approach to encouraging food production during this period was arguably highly constructive and collaborative rather than forceful or authoritative. The ALC worked under a specific land ethic, an ethic of collaboration

³⁹ William T. Lane, *The Land Commission and Its Significance to British Columbia Agriculture*, address to the BC Department of Agriculture, December 1973, 5.

⁴⁰ Runka, *BC’s Agricultural Land Reserve*, 1.

⁴¹ BCLC (British Columbia Land Commission), *Keeping the Options Open* (Burnaby: BCLC, 1975), 3.

⁴² BCLC, *Annual Report 1974–1975* (Burnaby: BCLC, 1975), 2–3; Lane, *The Land Commission*, 5.

⁴³ BCLC, *Keeping*, 3.

with the farming community, and an ethic of personal humility around their work and public service.

A Formative Land Ethic

During its beginning years, the ALC appeared to view land in the context of morality, intergenerational justice (i.e., as something that current generations are obligated to protect for future generations), and as a public good. In her 1976 report on the Reserve for the Ministry of State and Urban Affairs at the Government of Canada, Mary Rawson, one of the Commission's first staff members, wrote:

The BC Land Commission, in contemplating the growth of cities, stands, figuratively speaking, in the farmyard. We glance back rather balefully and see Oliver Goldsmith's deserted village:

Ill fares the land, to hastening ills a prey,
Where wealth accumulates, and men decay.

When we look forward, we may with equal gloom remark the year 1984 approaching. It is only eight years away. George Orwell knew about food ... The Land Commission in British Columbia also shouts "Food!" Our central obligation is to protect food-producing Lands [*sic*].⁴⁴

Goldsmith's poem is a description of the degradation of rural life at the hands of those who seek riches. During its formative years, the ALC was not only sensitive to the philosophical matter of land and resource spoilation but also to the moral spoilation that may accompany this. The intrinsic worth of land was written about as superior to fleeting and empty promises of monetary wealth. Just because land could be sold or developed for profit did not mean this was the best course of action. In 1975, the ALC wrote:

It is generally agreed that we now have, or know how to acquire, the technological capability to do nearly anything we wish to do with our land. The question facing us today is not "how can we do it?" but rather "for what purpose?" This question is central to the philosophy of integrated land-use management and is the spirit behind the passage of British Columbia's *Land Commission Act*.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Rawson, *Ill Fares*, 11–12.

⁴⁵ BCLC, *Keeping*, 3.

Land was furthermore viewed as a matter of intergenerational justice. The ALC described the ALR as a long-haul fail-safe device for present and future needs,⁴⁶ and this belief was built into their decision making and actions. Their first annual report outright rejected short-term economic or technological considerations when evaluating inclusion of land in the Reserve. They stated:

The objects of the Act are to protect the agricultural resource in the long haul, hence, short-term economic or technological consideration must be given relatively little weight in evaluating whether a given parcel of land should be included or excluded from the ALR ... [Soil classifications] must be kept in mind rather than the short-term economic possibilities which may arise from time to time in connection with the land, particularly in regard to locations near urban areas.⁴⁷

The ALC agreed that activities besides agriculture could occur on the ALR, but there was one test as the Commission saw it: “The test is whether or not the proposed use irreversibly affects the agricultural productivity of the land.”⁴⁸ Forestry and recreation uses were seen as compatible because: “The primary criterion for compatibility is that the physical capability of the land to produce agricultural crops is not permanently damaged by the proposed non-farm use – that is, that the land-use can be changed should the land be needed for food production in the future.”⁴⁹ The Commission viewed factors such as parcel size, economic viability, current market conditions, or ownership as largely irrelevant – the only thing that mattered was options for agriculture to be retained in the “long-run.”⁵⁰

The ALC’s work, and its existence itself, were considered permissible only because farmland was seen as a public, rather than as a private, good (making it something the government had the right to intervene in protecting). To the Provincial Commission of Inquiry on Property Assessment and Taxation, the ALC wrote, “It has been recognized by policy makers from early times that the rent of land attributable to the general influence of economic growth is a ‘collective good’ and that society may legitimately appropriate this value for its own use.”⁵¹ It is

⁴⁶ BCLC, *Keeping*, 14.

⁴⁷ BCLC, *Annual Report 1973–1974*, 5.

⁴⁸ BCLC, *Annual Report 1973–1974*, 6.

⁴⁹ BCLC, *Keeping*, 10.

⁵⁰ Runka, *British Columbia’s Agricultural Land Preservation Program*, 13.

⁵¹ BCLC, *Brief from the British Columbia Land Commission to the Commission of Inquiry on Property Assessment and Taxation* (Burnaby: BCLC, 1976), 20–21.

critical to understand that decisions related to how the ALC acted were an outgrowth of these fundamental philosophical positions and ethical concerns. Mary Rawson makes this point clearly when she writes:

While we do take seriously the critical task of preserving food-producing lands, we do so in the belief that there are broader and less animal concerns to be served as well. We desire, for example: 1) to nurture the growth of a new understanding of man's relationship to land, a new land ethic; 2) to increase the democratic element in our lives, to return decision making to the local level; 3) to improve the quality of urban life – patterns of settlement are of concern. Therefore, while we beat the drum on the importance of food, and sound the trumpet when farmlands are in danger, it is not that we think these other aspects unimportant. They are important. Unless all are pursued creatively and continuously, the specific task of protecting food-producing lands will not get easier.⁵²

These beliefs ultimately led the ALC to seeing itself, during its formative years, less like an enforcement branch of the government than as a mediator and advocate for farming. This was most clearly displayed in their collaborative work with the farming community as well as their program of leasing land to new farmers.

A Formative Collaborative Ethic

The farmer as a person, farm productivity, and the farming community were all core considerations during the ALC's beginning years. Gary Runka wrote about their management philosophy in 1977 as follows:

In managing the Agricultural Land Reserve, the Commission is constantly concerned about the real effect of its decisions and actions on the farming community and society in general. It is not enough to preserve the land. Land is only part of the team. If we do not work also to preserve the expertise of the farmer and protect the sense of identity, self-confidence, and vitality of the farming community, the whole philosophy of preserving agricultural land may well be useless.⁵³

Just as land and food were fused, so were the farmer and farmland seen as inextricable from each other. In their submission to the province's Select Standing Committee on Agriculture in 1977, the ALC wrote:

⁵² Rawson, *Ill Fares*, 12–13.

⁵³ Runka, *British Columbia's Agricultural Land Preservation Program*, 14.

The protective zoning of farmland in Agricultural Land Reserves was not, in itself, enough to ensure the province's long-term ability to produce food. It is also imperative to preserve and nurture the expertise of the farm community. As the land is essential to our capability to produce food, the knowledge of farming is essential to our ability to produce food. If not fostered, such knowledge can be lost in one generation.⁵⁴

Actions always speak louder than words, and during these years, the Commission spent money and used staff time to assist novice farmers and advocate for existing farmers. Although economic considerations were not held as paramount when considering the exclusion or inclusion of land in the ALR, the ALC did show concern for the economic viability of farming. Indeed, they felt their role in this matter was socially expected. In their words, "many people from within and outside government look to the Commission to fill an Ombudsman, Advocate, and Catalyst role in a variety of situations that related directly or indirectly to the farm community."⁵⁵ Key to this was the resolution of conflicts farmers were facing. As the 1978 ALC Annual Report states, "beyond the administrative and quasi-judicial responsibilities, the Commission advocates for a strong agricultural community and this often involves an ombudsman role with respect to the resolution of issues concerning the use of farmland."⁵⁶

In 1974, at the request of local farmers, the Commission contested an application for a right-of-way by Canadian Pacific Railway that interfered with farmland. They discussed issues concerning roads, gas, and hydro lines that were making it difficult to move farm machinery from one farm to another with various provincial and municipal departments (in order to arrange special traffic controls during peak seeding and harvesting times).⁵⁷ In 1975, they leased one hundred hectares (1,247 acres) to the City of Vernon (at nominal rent) for installation of a pilot effluent spray irrigation project (for the disposal of all municipal sewage by land application) and they cost-shared a study with the Township of Spallumcheen on ways to develop while retaining rural qualities.⁵⁸ In 1977, the ALC participated in a provincial committee to address troublesome restrictions on livestock operations, worked to

⁵⁴ BCLC, *Annual Report 1977–1978* (Burnaby: BCLC, 1978), 34–35. Emphasis in original.

⁵⁵ BCLC, *Annual Report 1977–78*, 29.

⁵⁶ BCLC, *Annual Report 1977–78*, 1.

⁵⁷ BCLC, *Annual Report 1974–1975* (Burnaby: BCLC, 1975).

⁵⁸ BCLC, *Annual Report 1975–1976* (Burnaby: BCLC, 1976), 7. See also BCLC, *Annual Report 1978*, 29–41; W.C. Yeomans, *Spallumcheen: The Visual Environment* (Victoria: BCLC, 1977).

manage the protection of rangeland reserves outside the ALR for cattle ranchers, commented on hydro proposals in northern British Columbia that had the potential to affect agricultural land, and chaired a farm and stream commission involving the federal government to address watercourse issues that farmers were encountering.⁵⁹

That same year, the Commission initiated a study to increase food production and integrate urban and recreational uses on a piece of land they owned, the 809-hectare (2,000-acre) Macdonald-Buchanan property (in southwestern British Columbia), which was being leased to multiple farmers.⁶⁰ That was not the only piece of land the Commission owned and/or leased. In the beginning, the ALC had an active program of buying and leasing land in order to encourage food production in the province. This work was considered important enough that, in an intended structure diagram of the Commission from 1973, they imagined “Land Acquisition and Management” as a third of their intended workload (Figure 1). The Commission was given an initial fund of \$25 million for acquisition and land management. Garrish has found that a total of \$10,974,000 was spent on 3,250 hectares (8,032 acres) of land in 1975 by the Commission.⁶¹ Surveying the first five annual reports (1974 to 1978), it appears that the ALC eventually spent more than \$13.5 million on almost 8,863 hectares (21,900 acres) of land across the province during these years.⁶²

The task of land acquisition, and the logic by which the ALC bought or held properties, evolved during these early years. In 1976, they stated that their purchase objectives were:

- a) To act as a “buyer of last resort” for sick or retiring farmers;
- b) to promote multiple land use aims; c) to prevent or block imminent urban pressures; d) to act as an agent of the Department of Agriculture in assembling land for agricultural planning purposes; and
- e) to experiment with innovative integrated land uses.⁶³

⁵⁹ BCLC, *Annual Report 1977–78*, 29–41.

⁶⁰ BCLC, *Annual Report 1974–75*, 11; BCLC, *Annual Report 1976–1977*, 19.

⁶¹ Garrish, *Unscrambling*, 42.

⁶² These are the authors’ calculations. During these years, the Commission also received gifts of land from private citizens totalling 653.5 acres (approx. 264 hectares). This includes the Morrell Wildlife Sanctuary, Campbell-Brown Park (above Kalamalka Lake in the Okanagan), land from Alice Wall (Nanose Bay), land for an ecological reserve (south of Langley), and waterfront land for a nature reserve (Bowen Island). These are all found in BCLC’s Annual Reports from 1975 to 1977.

⁶³ BCLC, *Annual Report 1975–1976*, 6.

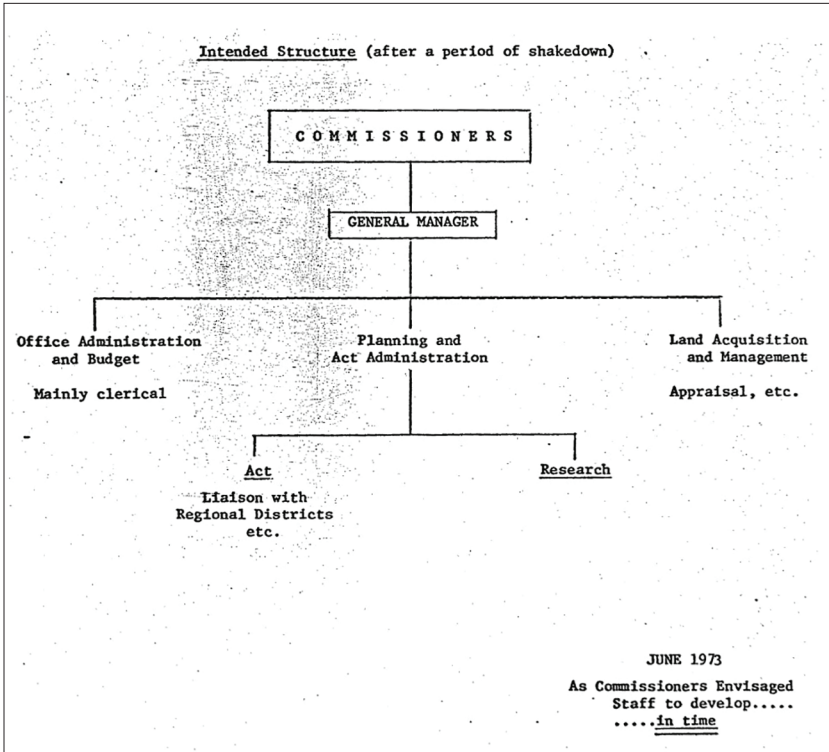


Figure 1. ALC Intended Structure (from Campbell and Ploknikoff, *Historical Binder*, 132).

After 1976, they were still considering acquisitions if “the Commission felt the land purpose to be in the public interest.”⁶⁴ Their policy on these lands developed into long-term leasing with an option to purchase for the lessees.⁶⁵ In 1975–76, the ALC inspected forty-three parcels of highway department land totalling 243 hectares (600 acres) for agricultural capability. They expected these properties to be transferred to them for agricultural leasing. The year after, they secured the transfer of sixty parcels of surplus Ministry of Highways ALR-controlled land, totalling 405 hectares (1,002 acres), and advertised them for lease to adjacent farmers.⁶⁶ In 1977, the ALC discussed the leasing of 1,618 hectares (4,000 acres) owned by the BC Harbour Board to farmers.⁶⁷ Leasing and purchasing were done to help increase farm sizes, promote multiple use

⁶⁴ BCLC, *Annual Report 1976–1977*, 15.

⁶⁵ BCLC, *Annual Report 1977–1978*, 39.

⁶⁶ BCLC, *Annual Report 1975–1976*, 8.

⁶⁷ BCLC, *Annual Report 1976–1977*, 18.

aims, encourage production, and secure a future for younger farmers.⁶⁸ The 1975 annual report explains:

One of the reasons for the purchase of farmlands was to establish a small supply of viable farms which could be made available to younger farm families on a career-long basis. The extremely high cost of land, coupled with the great expense of establishing most agricultural operations, has acted to prevent many otherwise eligible farm families from re-entering active production.⁶⁹

Urban food production was also supported. In 1975–76, the Commission set aside \$270,000 from their capital fund to assist the Horticulture Branch in the Ministry of Agriculture in establishing six allotment garden sites around or in Vancouver and Victoria.⁷⁰ As these examples demonstrate, actions taken by the ALC during these formative years were directed towards increasing provincial food sufficiency through collaboration with local governments and the farm community. However, this co-operative work was arguably made possible through the humble manner by which the ALC approached their work. This can be seen through the ALC's recognition of the extent of their knowledge, commitment to acting in the public interest, and acknowledgment of the views of others.

A Formative Ethic of Humility in Public Service

In the early 1970s, the successes or failures of the Commission were always open to discussion and reflection. Gary Runka wrote in 1977: "As the saying goes, the proof of the pudding is in the eating. The question is, how successful have we been in British Columbia in preserving agricultural land?"⁷¹ He attempted an answer to his own question in 1983, writing:

No program can be perfect. Mistakes are bound to be made at any and all points along the way, from legislation through to process to implementation. As I continue to travel extensively throughout BC however, I constantly ask myself, would this farmland be here today if it were not for the ALR? ... While I might see a few warts and sore thumbs here and there, I also see thousands of acres that, in my view,

⁶⁸ BCLC, *Annual Report 1975–1976*, 6

⁶⁹ BCLC, *Annual Report 1974–1975*, 5.

⁷⁰ BCLC, *Annual Report 1975–1976*, 7.

⁷¹ Runka, *British Columbia's Agricultural Land Preservation Program*, 141.

would have been lost to food production forever, without the protection of the Agricultural Land Reserve.⁷²

Gary Runka reflectively acknowledged that no process is perfect and did not appear to lead with predetermined conclusions in mind; rather, he acknowledged that circumstances constantly change and that new information could be forthcoming. The chaotic way in which Bill 42 was rushed through (see Petter, “Sausage Making”) meant that, during their first years of work, the ALC had to invent the wheel, so to speak. This was acknowledged within the Commission itself. Mary Rawson wrote a retort to the charge that they acted without comprehensive information, stating: “If study does not come before, it will have to come after. Continuing open-mindedness, ingenuity, and attention to detail will be needed to settle a wholly defensible concept into a wholly defensible shape.”⁷³ When the Commission wrote to the Provincial Commission of Inquiry on Property Assessment and Taxation they were clear that they valued being honest about what they knew and humble about what they did not:

Your Commission will have had reference to the extensive records of the Legislative Standing Committee which investigated farm taxation a little over a year ago. We did not make a submission to that Committee. We have held back so far from making representations on tax matters not only from modesty but because of the difficulty in obtaining information. We believe that when more facts are available, opinion on taxation will be less divided: they will permit us to focus more readily on the true issues. The members of your Commission may have heard the wry remark attributed to Ogden Nash, “I would rather have my facts all wrong than have no facts at all.” The members of the Land Commission take a different view. They would rather not speak if their facts are all wrong. It is part of the purpose of our submission to assemble and present information not previously available to the public.⁷⁴

Acting in the public interest and with transparency were core to the Commission’s work in this period, during which they showed a remarkable ethic of putting others (and future generations) before themselves and laying bare their faults. It is perhaps unsurprising then

⁷² Provincial Agricultural Land Commission, *Ten Years*, 34–35.

⁷³ Rawson, *Ill Fares*, 42.

⁷⁴ BCLC, *Brief*, 8.

that the Commission felt their work required the assistance, insights, and partnership of others. In 1975, they wrote:

The establishment of the Land Commission was in response to a clear need for shared decision-making in the land planning process. It was only through the spirit of cooperation which emerged from joint efforts of the general public and local, regional and provincial governments that the ALRs were established in so short a period of time. The Commission will continue to encourage such participation in the ongoing administration of the ALR.⁷⁵

Reflecting on the year 1977, the Commission argued that they had a successful year in promoting the concerns of agriculture as they had “long identified the need for open communication and remain[ed] committed to encouraging, participating and if necessary, initiating, dialogue amongst resource agencies, various levels of government, members of the farm community, farm organizations and the general public.”⁷⁶ It can therefore be surmised that, while the ALC began firmly supporting food autarky (i.e., provincial food self-sufficiency), they never supported a food autocracy; rather, they acted in a humble and co-operative manner – a manner marked by self-reflection, transparency, and open-mindedness that encouraged broad public participation. They also appear to have known that ignoring practical facts (i.e., the “plumbing,” as Runka metaphorically put it) is just as dangerous as neglecting the core philosophies underlying agricultural or policy work. Both are required for a home to be in defensible shape. If the plumbing in one’s house fails, there may be flooding, and if one’s philosophical foundations are built on sand, the house on it will crumble.

DISCUSSION

Reasons for the Drift

Garrish calls this brief beginning period of the Commission “the activist period,” during which “the work of the land commission seemed to fully embody both the spirit and the mandate envisioned for it under the legislation outlining the government’s agricultural strategy.”⁷⁷ Decades previously, Furuseth saw it similarly, stating that, during these years, the Commission “sought an expanded activist role, beyond that of zoning

⁷⁵ BCLC, *Keeping*, 10.

⁷⁶ BCLC, *Annual Report 1977–1978*, 6–7.

⁷⁷ Garrish, *Unscrambling*, 32 and 43.

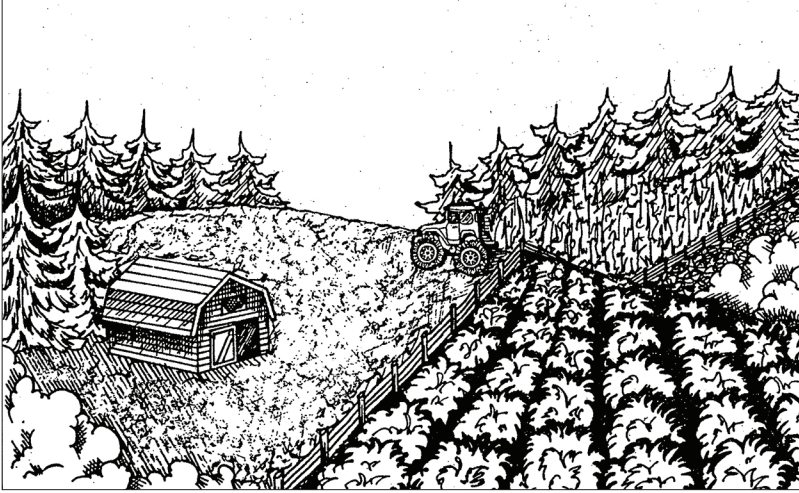


Figure 2: Farm graphic with barn and tractor from the Provincial Agricultural Land Commission, *Ten Years*, 49.

administrator.”⁷⁸ These statements compel us to ask whether moral and ethical concerns about land, collaboration with others, and humility in work are traits only activists hold or whether many more among us, who do not necessarily consider ourselves political, also have the capacity to embody them?

In 1975, the NDP lost power. The Social Credit Party (later known as the BC Liberals and now known as the BC United party) became the ruling government in British Columbia until 1991 and then formed government again for sixteen years starting in 2001. Two years after the 1975 transfer of government, in 1977, significant changes were made to the Act. Amendments removed the Commission’s responsibilities over greenbelts, landbank land, and parklands; gave them responsibility for the *Soil Conservation Act*; and introduced a mechanism for landowners to appeal ALC decisions to the provincial Environment and Land Use Committee. Garrish contends that the promotion of agriculture by the ALC was “the undisputed casualty in this process” and that it affected the ALC in the decades that followed.⁷⁹ However, researchers have found no statistically significant correlation between ALR exclusion approvals (1974 to 2006) in the southwestern part of the province and the

⁷⁸ Owen Furuseth, “Planning for Agricultural Lands in British Columbia: Progress and Problems,” *Environmentalist* 1, no. 4 (1981): 304.

⁷⁹ Garrish, *Unscrambling*, 33.

political party that governed at the time.⁸⁰ Beyond this, there persists a lack of evidence to support the supposition that successive governmental ideologies or these legislative changes were the primary cause of the ALC's drift, as Gary Runka called it. Further research would need to be done to address this absence of evidence.

The Commission does not appear to have seen the 1977 amendments as changing their work. The 1978 Annual Report acknowledges the amendments but then states that, nonetheless: "The Act identifies as the Land Commission's sole responsibility, preservation of agricultural land and maintenance of farms. In reality, this will bring about little change in Commission policy and direction."⁸¹ Six years later, in 1983, the Commission still remained hopeful they could support food production, stating:

It is hoped that the future will see the Commission taking a more active role in promoting farm development of the Agricultural Land Reserve lands through specific projects. Many earlier examples of farmland acquisition/leasing could bear repeating. Unfortunately, the earlier program was ended due to budgetary limitations but when the provincial economic [*sic*] improves, the Commission hopes to again become involved in such a program to assist in the development of the agricultural land resource.⁸²

It is indisputable that the ALC's funding dramatically lessened after these formative years. In 1976, the ALC's operating budget was \$3,629,127 (approx. \$18.3 million in 2023 currency). By 1977 it had been reduced to \$1,051,578 (\$5.3 million in 2023 currency).⁸³ However, in May 2017, after sixteen years of the BC Liberals in power, another NDP government (the original creators of the ALC) was re-elected. During this period (2017 to 2021), the ALC's budget increased by almost 60 percent. However, in a manner very dissimilar from its beginning years, 70 percent went to salaries and benefits (i.e., a total of \$3,527,130).⁸⁴ Moreover, the farming sector during this period did not appear to experience increased support; rather, what occurred was significant contestation after the passing of Bill 52 (the *Agricultural Land Commission*

⁸⁰ Tracey E. Stobbe, Alison J. Eagle, Geerte Cotteleer, and G. Cornelis van Kooten, "Farmland Preservation Verdicts: Rezoning Agricultural Land in British Columbia," *Canadian Journal of Agricultural Economics* 59, no. 4 (2011): 555–72.

⁸¹ BCLC, *Annual Report 1977–1978*, 5.

⁸² Provincial Agricultural Land Commission, *Ten Years*, 54. The ability of the ALC to hold and dispose of property was not removed until amendments to the Act in 2002.

⁸³ Garrish, *Unscrambling*, 44.

⁸⁴ Provincial Agricultural Land Commission, *Annual Report 2021–2022*, 72.

Amendment Act, 2018) and Bill 15 (the *Agricultural Land Commission Amendment Act, 2019*), which created significant controversy and eventually resulted in a 2021 retraction of regulations found within Bill 52.⁸⁵ These events indicate how important it may be for future researchers to delve deeper into understanding the connections (or tensions) between shifts in politics and the functioning of arm's-length tribunals, Crown corporations, or government agencies.

Ultimately, the reasons for the drift Gary Runka notes are likely multiple and concurrent.⁸⁶ The argument here is not that politics have no influence, or that broader farm economics are irrelevant, but, rather, that there is more to the story of the ALC, of which history serves to remind us. It cannot be forgotten that our material and emotional realities and the province's overall ability to feed its population are controlled not only by external economic forces or legislation but also by our own underlying ethics towards public service, land, and others. As these formative years remind us, the ALC's work to increase provincial food sufficiency was never just a political or economic matter, it was always also a philosophical one.

CONCLUSIONS

Historical Lessons for Food Sufficiency Today

Another food crisis is inevitable. Concerns about whether British Columbia produces enough food to feed its residents remain. Timmer concludes that, after a food crisis, "there is a gradual return to basic market forces as the crisis recedes and governments withdraw both financially and in policy activism."⁸⁷ While it may be natural to be lulled into

⁸⁵ Bill 52 originally limited secondary housing on ALR land, and Bill 15 took away the ability of individual landowners to apply to the ALC to exclude their land from the ALR. After this, the minister of agriculture changed ALR regulations in 2021 (without public input) to allow indoor vertical farming (i.e., agritechnological) ventures to be set up in the ALR. See Peter Mitham, "Province Opens ALR to Agritech Development," *Country Life in BC*, 1 March 2022, <https://www.countrylifeinbc.com/province-opens-alr-to-agritech-development/>. This move arguably represents a substantial rupture in the philosophy of land use within the Commission (Meagan J. Curtis and Janette Bulkan, *Agritechnology in British Columbia and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals* (Vancouver: UBC Faculty of Forestry Policy Brief, 2022), <https://forestry.ubc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Agritech-Policy-Brief.pdf>).

⁸⁶ It is also important to note the wider cultural zeitgeist around politics and environment occurring in Canada during the 1970s. For example, see Christopher J. Orr, "Environmental Aspirations in an Unsettled Time: Pierre Elliott Trudeau, the Club of Rome, and Canadian Environmental Politics in the 1970s," *Canadian Journal of History* 57, no. 2 (2022): 246–79.

⁸⁷ Timmer, "Reflections," 1.

complacency, crisis prevention rather than reactivity is more advisable.⁸⁸ Current environmental concerns (including declining biodiversity, water scarcity, and climate change) are pushing policy-makers to echo the repeated saying that the world will soon face the “need to feed nine billion people in 2050.”⁸⁹ In order to do so, some scientists estimate that a 119 percent increase in edible crops will be required by that time, while others point out that achieving even a 25 to 70 percent increase would be challenging.⁹⁰ Others call this rhetoric neo-Malthusian and note that increasing production may simply exacerbate economic and environmental problems within the food system.⁹¹ Furthermore, as Amartya Sen’s work on distributive justice makes clear, famines can occur at the same time as, and in the same place, where there is no significant decline in food production.⁹² That is, there may be enough food available, but that food may not be distributed equitably. Nevertheless, the question of food sufficiency is again growing, and pressure on policy-makers is building.

Many of the concerns from the 1970s that compelled the original legislation remain, and some more contemporary concerns have been introduced. In 1976, the Commission listed four pressures on farmers: “1) the intrusion of urban people 2) increasing land prices 3) increasing costs of all kinds from fertilizer to financing 4) competition from imported foodstuffs.”⁹³ Although the ALR may have halted some urban sprawl, a farm income crisis has gripped the industry since the mid-1980s. In these decades until today, farmers have seen their expenses rise to such an extent that input costs consume over 95 percent of farm revenue while Canadian farm debt has doubled since 2000.⁹⁴

⁸⁸ Timmer, 2.

⁸⁹ Thomas Kuyper and Paul C. Struik, “Epilogue: Global Food Security, Rhetoric, and the Sustainable Intensification Debate,” *Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability* 8 (2014): 71.

⁹⁰ M. Berners-Lee, C. Kennelly, R. Watson, and C.N. Hewitt. “Current Global Food Production Is Sufficient to Meet Human Nutritional Needs in 2050 Provided There Is Radical Societal Adaptation,” *Elementa* 6, no. 1 (2018): 10; Mitchell C. Hunter, Richard G. Smith, Meagan E. Schipanski, Lesley W. Atwood, and David A. Mortensen, “Agriculture in 2050: Recalibrating Targets for Sustainable Intensification,” *Bioscience* 67, no. 4 (2017): 386.

⁹¹ Isobel Tomlinson, “Doubling Food Production to Feed the 9 Billion: A Critical Perspective on a Key Discourse of Food Security in the UK,” *Journal of Rural Studies* 29 (2013): 81.

⁹² Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom* (New York: Knopf, 1999); Amartya Sen, *Poverty and Famines: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981); Christopher Morris, “Introduction,” in *Amartya Sen*, ed. Christopher W. Morris (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 3.

⁹³ BCLC, *Brief*, 12.

⁹⁴ National Farmers Union, *Tackling the Farm Income Crisis* (Saskatoon: National Farmers Union, 2019).

In 1972, the ALC stated that the average sale price for farmland was \$3,752 per 0.4 hectare (one acre) in the Fraser Valley (southwestern British Columbia), which, controlling for inflation, is approximately \$27,042.06 per 0.4 hectare (one acre) in 2023 Canadian currency.⁹⁵ At that time, the government felt that escalating land values were negatively affecting the rate of newcomers entering the field of farming.⁹⁶ In the fifty years since, prices have continued to climb, and at a rate surpassing normal inflation. In 2022, British Columbia maintained its position as the Canadian province with the highest average farmland values (per acre). Farmland on the south coast (which includes the Fraser Valley) was estimated to be worth approximately \$139,000 per 0.4 hectare (one acre).⁹⁷ Financially, this means that, since the ALC was founded, farmland in the Fraser Valley has increased by approximately 414 percent. The lack of affordability of this land (and access to it) is easily demonstrated by noting that the average hourly wages of full-time workers in Canada rose by only 14 percent from 1981 to 2011.⁹⁸

Land prices also continue to affect the retirement picture for farmers and farm transition rates. In Canada, the average age of farm operators is fifty-six years, and farmers under thirty-five years of age make up only 8.6 percent of all operators in the country. A vast majority, approximately 88 percent, of Canadian farmers have no succession plan.⁹⁹ It is reported that Canada is losing young farmers at twice the rate that it is losing its general farm population. Qualman et al. argue that “state policies, too focused on export maximization and deregulation, have left farmers vulnerable and without adequate incomes, even as these policies have advanced the interests of agribusiness in Canada’s agri-food chain.”¹⁰⁰ We now face a societal food production paradox – over the past century and into our current, while the production of many agricultural commodities has risen, regional food sufficiency rates have not.

⁹⁵ BCLC, *Brief*, 14.

⁹⁶ Government of British Columbia. *Bill 42*, 4.

⁹⁷ The 2023 value range excludes the top and bottom 5 percent of sales. Farm Credit Canada, “Farmland Values Report” (Regina: FCC, 2023). To control for inflation when doing calculations, see the Bank of Canada’s Inflation Calculator at www.bankofcanada.ca/rates/related/inflation-calculator.

⁹⁸ René Morissette, Garnett Picot, and Yuqian Lu, *Wage Growth over the Past 30 Years: Changing Wages by Age and Education*, catalogue no. 11-626-X – No. 008 (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 2012).

⁹⁹ Statistics Canada, *Canada’s 2021 Census of Agriculture: A Story about the Transformation of the Agriculture Industry and Adaptiveness of Canadian Farmers* (Ottawa: Government of Canada, 2022).

¹⁰⁰ Darrin Qualman, A. Haroon Akram-Lodhi, Annette Aurélie Desmarais, and Sharada Srinivasan, “Forever Young? The Crisis of Generational Renewal on Canada’s Farms,” *Canadian Food Studies/La Revue Canadienne Des Études Sur l’Alimentation* 5, no. 3 (2018): 122.

Part of the reason for this is that the Canadian and BC governments actively support trade liberalization policies and increasing food exportation – a policy also supported by many farmers. In Canada, since the early 1990s, the food supply chain has continued to be consolidated in fewer and fewer hands, and the value of agri-food exports has more than tripled.¹⁰¹ British Columbia exported \$4.8 billion worth of agriculture, seafood, food, and beverage products in 2020 to 151 international markets.¹⁰² Currently, the province also subsidizes agritech developments, and it is anticipated that agritech export revenues will range from \$56.4 to \$93.9 million by 2025.¹⁰³ At the same time, in words reminiscent of the ALC during the 1970s, researchers who modelled southwestern British Columbia’s food sufficiency in 2016 argued:

It is increasingly unwise for any region to become excessively dependent on potentially unreliable external sources of supply or to commit an excessive part of its own productivity to external markets ... It is clearly time to rethink the region’s entire development trajectory – indeed, the world’s development trajectory ... Food (in)security may well become the defining anxiety of the early Anthropocene.¹⁰⁴

Grim as the future may appear, the ALC fortunately remains in a legacy contract with the public to act in a manner that supports farmers and provides sustenance to local communities from local farming activities. In 1973, the legislation stipulated that the first two objectives of the Commission were to “(a) preserve agricultural land for farm use and (b) encourage the establishment and maintenance of family farms and land in an agricultural land reserve, for a use compatible with the preservation of family farms and farm use of the land.”¹⁰⁵ This legacy remains, and one primary legislative purpose of the Commission is to encourage farming within the Reserve in collaboration with communities. Key to honouring this, and ensuring food security for future generations, may be circling back to the ALC’s early years and remembering their unique ethic related to land, collaboration, and public service.

¹⁰¹ Qualman et al.

¹⁰² Canadian Agricultural Partnership, *British Columbia Agriculture, Seafood, Food and Beverage: International Export Highlights Year in Review* (Victoria and Ottawa: Government of BC and Government of Canada, 2020); “Exports” here refer to international exports and do not include interprovincial exports. They are defined to include “all goods grown, produced, extracted or manufactured in British Columbia and leaving the province (through customs) for a foreign destination” (25).

¹⁰³ BC Food Security Task Force, *The Future of BC’s Food System: Findings and Recommendations from the BC Food Security Task Force* (Victoria: Government of British Columbia, 2020), 32.

¹⁰⁴ BC Food Security Task Force, iv.

¹⁰⁵ *Land Commission Act*, Statutes of British Columbia 1973, chapter 46. This can be found in Campbell and Ploknikoff, *Agricultural Land Reserve Historical Binder*.