

BACKGROUND

The [Columbia Basin Management Plan Strategic Priorities 2016-2020](#) identifies agriculture as a strategic priority for the Trust over the next five years. Prior to developing goals and objectives for the Trust within this priority area, we reviewed existing regional plans and reports and engaged with over 50 agriculture producers and those involved in the Basin agriculture sector to identify key challenges, needs and opportunities.

AUDIENCE

The Trust recognizes that a “Food System” is complex, with many components and participants. While each component is required for an effective system, the foundation is the production of food. Based on research, sector engagement, and our organizational context, the Trust has chosen to focus our efforts in the near term on supporting agricultural producers.

GOAL AND OBJECTIVES

The goal and objectives outlined below will guide the Trust’s agriculture related activities. They were developed based on input from the agriculture sector as to how and where the Trust may be able to provide support. The Trust will aim to achieve the following:

~Support agricultural production in the Columbia Basin~
by:

1. Improving access to technical and business development extension support;
2. Enhancing access to existing capital and financial tools;
3. Supporting efforts to attract and retain a reliable workforce;
4. Advancing efforts to maintain/develop key agricultural infrastructure;
5. Strengthening access to markets for Basin products; and
6. Helping to identify valuable agriculture land in the Basin and increasing access to and production of these lands.

IMMEDIATE ACTION

Based on the goal and objectives above and input from producers, the Trust has further refined our focus to identify areas where the Trust could take immediate action. Any activities and programs undertaken will be within the scope of the Trust’s mandate and resource limitations. In the next three years, the Trust will focus efforts on the following:

Kootenay & Boundary Farm Advisors (KBFA): KBFA is a regional initiative developed in partnership with the regional districts of Central Kootenay, East Kootenay and Kootenay Boundary and the Ministry of Agriculture. KBFA aims to maximize the region’s agricultural potential by supporting the agriculture sector with skills, expertise and capacity building opportunities.

KBFA will ensure producers can access prompt and useful technical agricultural advice to increase their knowledge to improve the efficiency and viability of their operation. Due to the diverse nature of agricultural products and producers in the region, KBFA will be customized, providing a wide range of expertise in a variety of formats including face-to-face, phone and online support. It is anticipated that KBFA will be a three year initiative. KBFA provides on-the-ground technical support and outreach to producers.

Agriculture Business Development Support: To support agriculture producers to effectively access capital, build capacity and secure agriculture infrastructure, the Trust will offer an Agriculture Business Development program for producers to assist them with a range of agri-business related needs from business planning to risk management. Existing programs and supports will be considered and leveraged where possible.

Both KBFA and Agriculture Business Development support will have a strong understanding of existing financing and granting organizations/programs and will refer producers to the appropriate support services, including the Trust. Prior to funding any projects, the Trust will request that producers access the Agriculture Business Development support to define their needs, build their business development capacity, and identify viable opportunities and capital.

Concurrent to the Agriculture Business Development Support, the Trust will explore existing funding/financing options for Basin agriculture producers to determine whether specific funding mechanisms may be required and whether there is a role for the Trust.

Increasing Market Access: Production volumes and seasonality in the region can limit local producers' options for accessing markets. The Trust will consider programming and activities to support producers to identify potential markets and market opportunities to sell their products. Support will consider direct sales, regional branding, aggregation, transportation, distribution and value-added processing.

Grasslands and Rangelands Enhancement Program: Since 2014, the Trust has supported the Grassland and Rangeland Enhancement Program (GREP), which is administered by the Kootenay Livestock Association to maintain and/or enhance grassland resources while meeting conservation, environmental and recreational objectives.

While the Trust will focus on the above areas, additional areas for future Trust consideration include agriculture land trusts/land access, workforce development/labour, access to local food and ecosystem goods and services.

NEXT STEPS

Through the above supports, the Trust will continue to learn more about sector challenges, and may develop additional supports where there is an appropriate and impactful role for the organization. This may include learning opportunities and leveraging research into the region to build sector knowledge and producers' capacity. The Trust will continue to remain responsive to funding requests from the agriculture sector and work across the organization to assess agriculture projects and identify appropriate avenues to provide support on a case-by-case basis. The Trust will use a variety of existing tools either independently or in combination to address these requests.