

Agriculture Sector Support Plan

**Regional District of Kitimat-Stikine
Economic Development Commission**

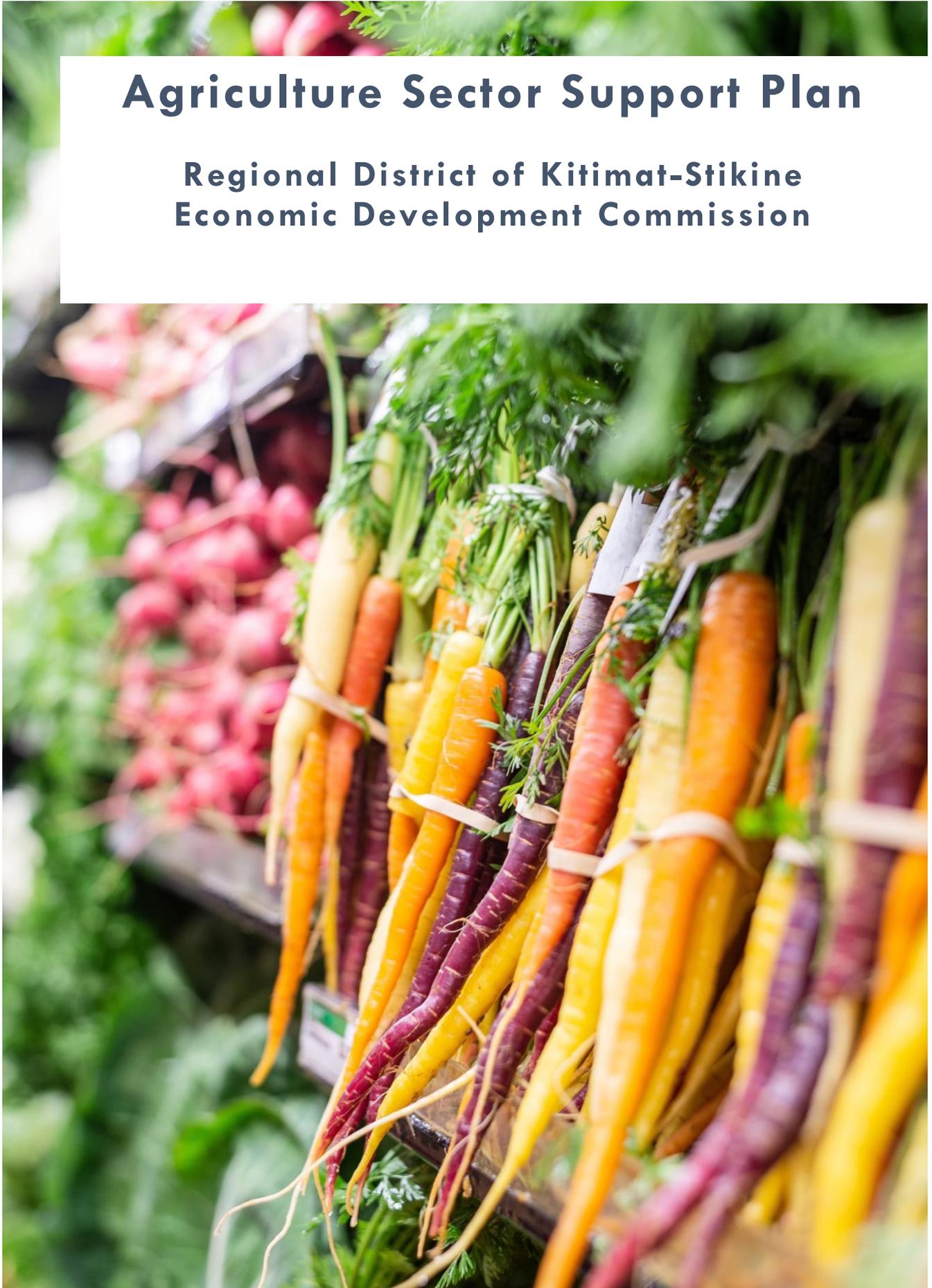


Table of Contents

| | |
|--|------|
| Acronyms..... | iii |
| Acknowledgements | iv |
| Executive Summary | v |
| 1.0 Introduction..... | 1 |
| 1.1 Project Methodology | 1 |
| 1.2 Study Area and Scope | 2 |
| 1.3 Stakeholder Engagement..... | 3 |
| 2.0 Situational Analysis | 3 |
| 2.1 Food-Producing Land Base | 3 |
| 2.1.1 Agricultural Land Reserve | 4 |
| 2.1.2 Agricultural Capability | 5 |
| 2.2 Agricultural Sector Profile of the Region..... | 6 |
| 2.3 Food System Profile of the Region..... | 7 |
| 2.3.1 Processing and Value-Added Infrastructure | 7 |
| 2.3.2 Storage..... | 8 |
| 2.3.3 Agricultural Input and Service Suppliers | 9 |
| 2.3.4 Transportation and Distribution | 9 |
| 2.3.5 Local and Regional Sales Channels..... | 9 |
| 2.3.6 Community Organizations and Industry Associations..... | 10 |
| 2.3.7 Connections with Neighbouring Regional Districts | 12 |
| 3.0 Role of Regional Districts in Supporting the Agriculture Sector | 12 |
| 3.1 Examples of Economic Development Commissions Supporting Agriculture | 13 |
| 4.0 Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats Assessment..... | 14 |
| 5.0 Analysis of RDKS Agriculture Sector Potential | 17 |
| 5.1 Primary Production and Self-Sufficiency..... | 17 |
| 5.2 Agriculture and Food Sector Knowledge and Awareness | 17 |
| 5.3 Stable Funding for Food System Organizations | 18 |
| 6.0 Goals, Recommendations and Actions | 19 |
| Goal 1. Collect Resources and Expand Knowledge of the Regional Agricultural Sector | 20 |
| Goal 2. Grow Communication and Awareness of the RDKS Food and Agriculture Sector..... | 21 |
| Goal 3. Support New Agri-Food Businesses, Innovation in Agricultural Production and Traditional Food Systems | 22 |
| Goal 4. Foster Sector Development and Increased Value Chain Market Viability | 23 |
| 7.0 Implementation Strategy..... | 24 |
| 8.0 Monitoring and Evaluation Framework | 28 |
| 9.0 Conclusion | 29 |
| Appendix I - Stakeholder Engagement Summary Report | I |
| Appendix II - RDKS Agricultural Sector Details..... | VI |
| Appendix III - Funding Opportunities for Local Governments | VIII |

Acronyms

| | |
|--------|---|
| AAC | Agricultural Advisory Committee |
| AGRI | BC Ministry of Agriculture |
| ALR | Agricultural Land Reserve |
| BC CAI | BC Agriculture and Food Climate Action Initiative |
| CLI | Canada Land Inventory |
| COEDC | Central Okanagan Economic Development Commission |
| CSA | Community Supported Agriculture |
| EDC | Economic Development Commission |
| GAP | Good Agricultural Practices |
| MASH | Making Agriculture Sustainable in the Hazeltons |
| NHA | Northern Health Authority |
| RDBN | Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako |
| RDKS | Regional District of Kitimat-Stikine |
| RD | Regional District |
| SWOT | Strength, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats |
| USDC | Upper Skeena Development Center |

Acknowledgements

This report was produced by Upland Agricultural Consulting Ltd. for the Regional District of Kitimat-Stikine (RDKS) Economic Development Commission.

The authors would like to express gratitude to all of the community members who were interviewed and provided input into this report, and to Maggie Hall, Economic Development Officer at RDKS.

All photos courtesy of Creative Commons unless otherwise indicated.



Executive Summary

The *Agriculture Sector Support Plan* (the “Plan”) evaluates the current agriculture sector within the Regional District of Kitimat-Stikine (RDKS) and provides specific recommended actions that the Economic Development Commission (EDC) can implement to support the regional agriculture and food system. The development and implementation of the Plan is an important opportunity for RDKS staff, elected officials, food producers and processors, and community organizations to work together toward a more resilient and thriving local agricultural economy. The Plan will assist the EDC in understanding how it can best allocate resources to support the agricultural sector and lead to business success.

The Plan was developed by combining existing data and studies with stakeholder engagement in order to understand existing gaps in the sector. Engagement efforts focused on food producers throughout the region as well as community organizations focused on food security initiatives. In light of COVID-19 and the resulting immediate focus on food security from an emergency planning perspective, many residents and producers indicated a desire for the RDKS to reinvest in the regional food system. The engagement efforts revealed there is a small, yet dedicated, number of vegetable and livestock farmers in the region producing food for local consumers. These producers cannot always meet the current level of local demand and they see potential to grow the agriculture sector. This can be accomplished by bringing more land into production, and more businesses into operation. This growth will create an economic driver out of the regional agricultural sector and will highlight how investment into renewable resources, such as horticulture and livestock production, can contribute to a sustainable regional economic drive. These new and existing farm businesses will flourish and create secondary spinoff opportunities (such as jobs in food processing, agri-tourism, and veterinarian services). Several community organizations involved in agriculture and food security are well-established and can provide opportunities for collaboration and support from the RDKS. Fostering relationships with Indigenous communities to explore food sovereignty and recognize stewardship of traditional territories for food provisioning was a common desire of stakeholders.

The stakeholder engagement results were combined with an assessment of the agricultural land capability in the region and the existing infrastructure supporting the agricultural sector. A Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats Assessment was provided to identify potential areas of weakness within the sector.

An important component of the planning process was the creation of the [RDKS Agricultural Asset Map](#). The map is a list of up-to-date information on primary producers, direct marketing channels, community gardens, and non-governmental organizations. This map can be easily updated by RDKS staff to ensure that it remains current. The map will be useful in connecting consumers with producers and highlighting local food retailers, community organizations, and their projects within the region.

The Plan highlights recommendations to fill identified gaps within the regional food and agriculture sector so that it can reach its highest potential. The recommendations and implementation strategy in the Plan aim to build upon and leverage initiatives within the region’s agriculture and food sector. The strategy provides an implementation timeline and assessment of anticipated sources of funding required to successfully complete each recommended action. Supporting organizations whose goals and activities overlap with certain actions are identified in the implementation strategy. The Plan identifies a total of 4 goals, 13 recommendations and 36 associated actions for the RDKS (summarized in Table i below and detailed in Section 6 of this report).

Table i. Summary of goals and associated recommendations.

| | |
|---|---|
| Goal 1: Collect Resources and Expand Knowledge of the Regional Agricultural Sector | |
| # 1.1 | Collect resources to develop knowledge of regional agriculture sector and food system. |
| # 1.2 | Provide learning opportunities for RDKS and EDC staff and elected officials to build their knowledge of regional agriculture. |
| # 1.3 | Coordinate, convene and build partnerships with key stakeholders in the agriculture and food sector. |
| Goal 2. Grow Communication and Awareness of the RDKS Food and Agriculture Sector | |
| # 2.1 | Provide local food and agriculture information for residents and visitors online |
| # 2.2 | Update and promote the RDKS Agricultural Asset Map |
| # 2.3 | Assist with current agricultural events and annual regional farm tours |
| # 2.4 | Support and promote the development of regional agricultural sector jobs |
| Goal 3. Support New Agri-Food Businesses, Innovation in Agricultural Production and Traditional Food Systems | |
| # 3.1 | Provide sector-specific business development resources to agricultural producers and food processors. |
| # 3.2 | Support and facilitate land-linking and succession planning programs locally. |
| # 3.3 | Work with and support Indigenous communities in the region in traditional food systems and involvement in the agriculture sector. |
| Goal 4. Foster Sector Development and Increased Value Chain Market Viability | |
| # 4.1 | Support producers in accessing stable markets for products |
| # 4.2 | Identify and pursue viable solutions for local meat processing. |
| # 4.3 | Attract investment and conduct market research. |

The *Agriculture Sector Support Plan* recommends actions to ensure that agricultural land is used productively and farming, foraging, and other forms of food production are valued and sustained. The leadership of the RDKS, and partnerships with agricultural businesses and community organizations will be essential to realize a resilient, sustainable, and profitable local agricultural sector. A commitment of resources and ongoing community collaborations and partnerships will be required for full implementation of the actions in this plan. This *Agriculture Sector Support Plan* is intended to be a robust document that will serve the RDKS for at least the next 5 years.

1.0 Introduction

There is a rich history of agricultural production and Indigenous traditional food practices within the Regional District of Kitimat-Stikine (RDKS). Indigenous communities, within whose territories the RDKS is situated, have stewarded the land for thousands of years, and continue to practice hunting, fishing and gathering of animals and plants for traditional food sources. The region has also seen over a hundred years of settler food production activities, such as ranching and farming, in the fertile river soils. However, the majority of the food consumed within the region is grown or raised in other areas of BC, Canada or other parts of the world. There are several community organizations that work within the realm of supporting increased production and food security within the RDKS. In the past few decades, there has been increased attention towards the value of local food production as an economic driver and to support food security within the region.

The RDKS has expressed an interest in developing a better understanding of their Economic Development Commission's (EDC) role in supporting the regional agriculture sector and food system, which has led to this project, the *Agriculture Sector Support Plan* (the Plan). The objective of the Plan is to provide a set of recommendations for the RDKS undertake in order to support the stability and growth of agricultural businesses and the local food system within the region. The Plan will assist the Regional District's EDC in understanding how it can best allocate resources to support the agricultural sector and lead to business success. The recommendations and implementation strategy in the Plan aim to build upon and leverage initiatives within the region's agriculture and food sector.

1.1 Project Methodology

The Plan combines existing data and studies with a stakeholder engagement effort in order to understand existing gaps in the sector and to craft strategic action-oriented recommendations for the RDKS. Several methods of assessment and analysis were used during the multiple phases of this project.

During the first phase of the project, a situational analysis was completed by collecting and evaluating background and baseline data from existing sources. The research focused primarily on gathering information about primary producers and food processors as well as direct marketing (e.g. farmers markets, farm gate sales, veggie box programs) infrastructure and existing supports within the food system. Stakeholders throughout the region involved in food production and food security initiatives were engaged for their input and advice into the opportunities for supporting food and agriculture in the region. The objectives of the stakeholder engagement were to:

- Understand the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to agriculture in the region;
- Identify gaps that exist within the agricultural sector; and
- Determine potential methods in which the RDKS can support regional agriculture.

During the second phase, a strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) assessment was completed using the information gathered in the situational analysis and during the stakeholder engagement. The SWOT framework is used as a method to develop and provide the foundational knowledge needed to inform strategies and recommendations for the Plan. A gap analysis was then completed to describe the current state of the agricultural sector and highlight opportunities that the RDKS can lend support to grow and expand. Current programs, funding and partnership opportunities are highlighted that can be supported to advance initiatives and fill the sector gaps.

During the third phase of the project, the results from the previous two phases were synthesized into recommendations for how the RDKS can support and grow the priority areas for regional agriculture. The recommendations are Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Time-based (SMART) and follow examples of successful methods used by regional districts and economic development commissions around the province. An implementation strategy is also described with a high-level assessment of resources needed, funding opportunities and potential partnerships with local organizations to achieve the recommendations.

A final component of the project was the creation of an [RDKS Agricultural Asset Map](#) and associated registry. The registry and map form an up-to-date inventory of primary producers, retailers, agricultural service providers, community gardens, and non-governmental organizations.

1.2 Study Area and Scope

Situated in Northwestern British Columbia, the RDKS spans a geographic area of over 100,000 km² with a population of almost 40,000 people.¹ The majority of residents live in the southern half of this region along Highways 16 and 37; in and around the District of Kitimat, City of Terrace and the ‘Hazeltons’ (Hazelton, New Hazelton and South Hazelton) (Figure 1). The agricultural producers in the region are mainly small to medium scale mixed productions farms with some limited larger operations (e.g. egg production, ranching).



Figure 1 Study area: the boundaries of the Regional District of Kitimat-Stikine. (Source: RDKS Geomap)

¹ [Our region](#). 2020. Regional District of Kitimat-Stikine.

1.3 Stakeholder Engagement

Numerous stakeholders were engaged throughout the region to provide input into this report. Engagement included all types of producers found in the region such as vegetable farmers, ranchers and livestock farmers, speciality crop and mixed farming operators. Several organizations were also consulted along with provincial organizations, Young Agrarians, BC Ministry of Agriculture and Economic Development Commissions from other Regional Districts. Common discussion themes included:

- There is a strong interest in increasing local food security and regional food production, particularly in light of COVID-19 and a desire to examine emergency planning and regional food sources.
- Relationships with Indigenous communities should be fostered in order to address food sovereignty and recognize stewardship of traditional territories for food provisioning.
- Collaboration between community organizations that already exist in the region should be increased, and for governments should support existing support initiatives, in order to avoid duplicating efforts.
- Long-term capacity building and operational funding is needed for community organizations and their food projects to ensure success of food security and agriculture initiatives.
- Each growing area within the RDKS is unique and geographically separated from one another and therefore should not be treated uniformly.
- Increased value from a consumer and local government perspective should be placed on the importance of supporting local food production, as a way to boost the local economy and provide fresh food products.
- The food and agriculture system is intertwined within the political, social, environmental and economic issues and characteristics of the region, which should be considered in any food and agricultural initiatives.

Detailed information about various aspects of the food and agriculture sector was discussed during interviews with stakeholders. These details are incorporated throughout this Plan document and provide valuable information which are the basis for the Plan's recommendations. The specific results of the stakeholder engagement are summarized in *Appendix I: Stakeholder Engagement Summary Report*.

2.0 Situational Analysis

The situational analysis describes the characteristics of the current agriculture and food system within the RDKS. The agricultural land base and food production capabilities are described to highlight the areas of the region with potential for sector expansion. The current profile of the agricultural sector is highlighted, including the number and type of farms, profitability, and farmer demographics, which provides the context for the primary production of agricultural products in the region. Finally, the components of the regional food system and supports for primary agricultural production are described along with community initiatives to set the larger-scale view of the food system and agricultural sector within the region.

2.1 Food-Producing Land Base

The RDKS has both an agricultural land base and water resources that can support a variety of food production systems. The 'uncultivated' land base and water systems are components of the regional food system as Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities hunt, fish, forage and practice other forms of

deriving food from the environment. There is also a history and culture that continues today of homesteading in the region as residents grow food and/or raise livestock on a small-scale for personal consumption and bartering/sharing with neighbours. As such there is a strong knowledge base within Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities on growing, gathering and hunting practices.

2.1.1 Agricultural Land Reserve

The Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR) and associated agricultural capability ratings are two foundational resources that provide an understanding of agricultural potential for land in BC. The ALR is a provincially designated zone in which agriculture is recognized as the priority use. This zone comprises lands with the ability to grow food; however, the land varies in capability and suitability and therefore not all crops and livestock are feasible on all ALR lands. Agricultural activities can also occur on land outside of the ALR. It is informative to see which lands have been designated as ALR in the study area, to get an idea of certain locations that may be most fertile. There are 65,992 hectares of ALR in the RDKS.² For comparison, the neighbouring Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako has 373,544 hectares of ALR³ and the North Coast Regional District has 43,195 hectares of ALR.⁴ There is a very small number and size of ALR parcels in the northern areas of the RDKS, for example there are a limited number of small parcels around Telegraph Creek. The vast majority of the ALR parcels are located in the southern areas of the RDKS (Figure 2).

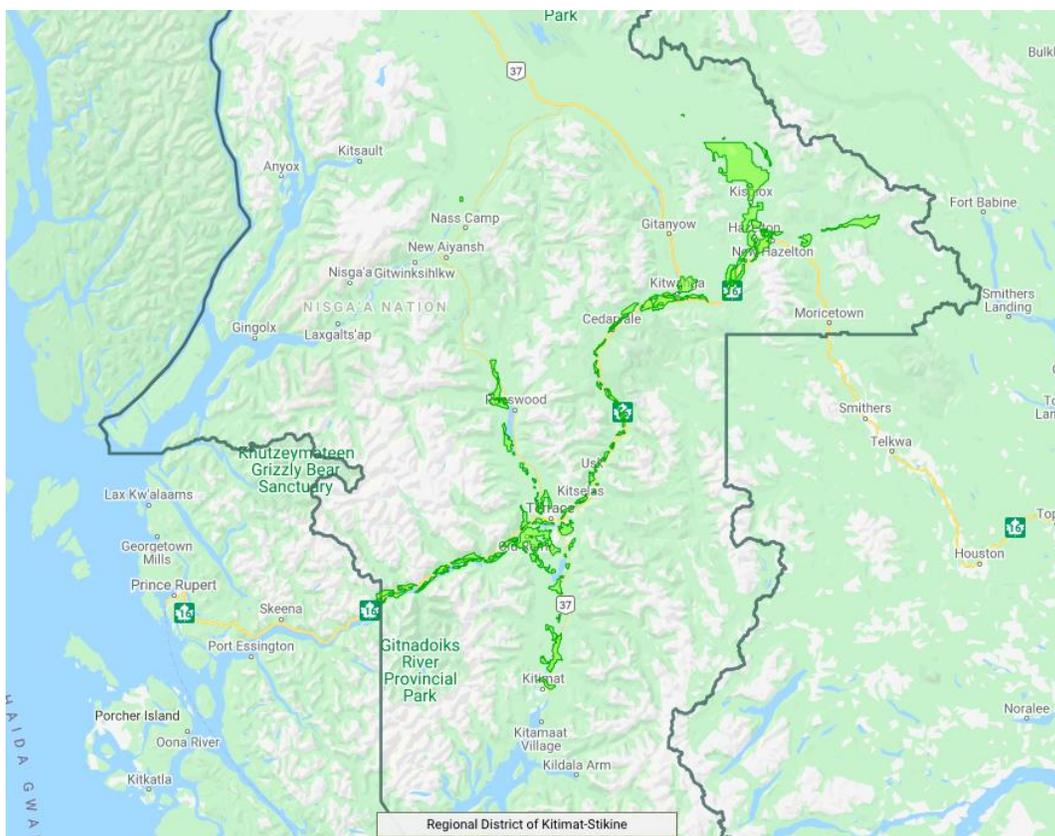


Figure 2 The majority of ALR (green shaded area) is found in the southern part of RDKS. (Source: RDKS Geomap).

² [Agriculture in Brief: Regional District of Kitimat Stikine](#). 2016. BC Ministry of Agriculture and Statistics Canada.

³ [Agriculture in Brief: Regional Districts of Bulkley-Nechako and Stikine](#). 2016. BC Ministry of Agriculture and Statistics Canada.

⁴ [Agriculture in Brief: Regional District of Skeena-Queen Charlotte](#). 2016. BC Ministry of Agriculture and Statistics Canada.

2.1.2 Agricultural Capability

The Agriculture Capability Rating System is a method designed to enable consistent and objective assessment of land based on inherent limitations for crop production. It was developed in the 1960s as part of the Canada Land Inventory (CLI).⁵ Agriculture Capability ratings are based on soil, landscape, and climate properties, not crop yield data, and some limitations may be altered by management techniques (e.g. irrigation, stone-picking, levelling). Agriculture Capability ratings can be used to help determine appropriate crop choices, realistic target yields and assess and mitigate site-specific risks such as flooding, stoniness, steep slopes, or nutrient loss.

Lands in Classes 1 to 4 inclusive are considered capable of sustained agricultural production of most crops. Class 5 lands are considered capable of producing forage crops or specially adapted crops. Class 6 lands are capable of providing only pasture for livestock. Class 7 lands generally are incapable of use for either crops or livestock (they are usually rocky outcrops or wetlands).

In BC, most soils were mapped for Agricultural Capability ratings in the 1980s, and these maps remain in use throughout the province. The associated Computer Assisted Planning, Assessment, and Map Production system has since been translated into Geographic Information System database files.

Throughout the RDKS area, the agricultural capability of ALR ranges from Class 2 – Class 7 lands. There is a limited amount of Class 2 lands occurring on floodplains of rivers within the study area. Class 3 - 5 lands occur around the Hazeltons, Greater Terrace, Kitimat and are almost exclusively found in the numerous river valleys (e.g. the Kitimat, Kalum and Skeena Rivers).⁶ Often, small pockets of Class 7 lands can be found surrounded by higher Class agricultural lands. For example, an area may have a rocky outcrop (Class 7) surrounded by Class 3 lands which are perfectly capable of agricultural production. These lower Class pockets were historically included within the ALR so as to ensure a contiguous and defensible boundary. Oftentimes barn structures or residences will be sited upon these lower Class areas within a parcel. Figure 3 (following page) provides two examples of maps that are used to identify agricultural capability within the region.

With improvements made to agricultural lands (such as stone removal, addition of drainage, irrigation) and the use of growing-season extension methods, many crop types may be suited to the study area including tree fruits (apples and cherries), raspberries, strawberries, blueberries, potatoes, cabbage, kale and other vegetable crops.⁷

⁵ Ken and Sondheim. 1987. *The BC Ministry of Environment and Parks Thematic Mapping Geographic Information System*. CAPAMP. Volume 1: Data entry and validation procedures for soil, agriculture capability, surficial geology and the all-purpose entity. MOEP Manual 10. Surveys and Resource Mapping Branch, Ministry of Environment and Parks.

⁶ Agricultural Land Capability Maps. Canada Land Inventory. Accessed through iMap BC.

⁷ Land Use and The Agricultural Land Base – Greater Terrace Agriculture Area Plan. 2013. Dr. Norma Kerby.

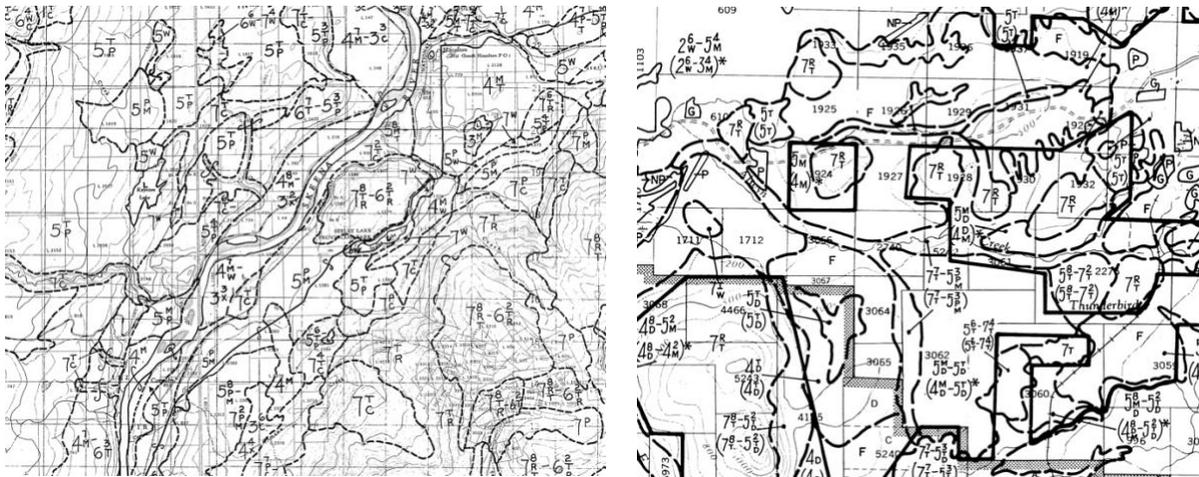


Figure 3 Examples of agricultural capability maps. Left map is southwest of Hazelton, right map is south of Terrace. (Source: Canada Land Inventory, retrieved from iMap BC).⁸

2.2 Agricultural Sector Profile of the Region

Despite some land capability limitations, agricultural activities do thrive within the region. According to the Statistics Canada Census of Agriculture (Ag Census), there were 99 farms operating within the RDKS in 2016.⁹ Farms are growing a variety of crops such as, hay and field crops, fruits, berries and nuts, vegetables, nursery products and growing vegetables in greenhouses.¹⁰ The most common livestock raised in the region is poultry, followed by horses, sheep/lambs, goats, cattle, rabbits and bees.¹¹ Many farms report agricultural activities of a combination of livestock and crops. According to the Ag Census, only one farm indicated that they were growing certified organic products for sale, and one was transitioning to certified organic practices.

In 2020, BC Assessment data shows 65 properties with farm tax status (with profits over a threshold limit of approximately \$2,500) within the RDKS with ten of these farms located in the City of Terrace. According to BC Assessment there are 23 mixed farms, 15 grain and forage farms, 14 beef farms, 4 vegetable farms, and 1 poultry farm. A B.C. Ministry of Agriculture Land Use Inventory for the RDKS is expected to be completed in 2020/2021. This inventory will provide a more detailed snapshot of agricultural land use and land cover within the region.

Farms in the RDKS are represented by a variety of sizes with 16% of farms being under 10 acres, 30% between 10 and 69 acres, and 54% over 70 acres.¹² An almost equal number of men and women operate

⁸ Maps can be accessed by visiting <https://maps.gov.bc.ca/ess/hm/imap4m/>, then selecting the “Data Sources” > My Provincial layers > Geology and Soils > Terrestrial Ecosystems Information Scanned Map Boundaries by Project Type > Agricultural Capability Scanned Map Boundaries. Once the Agricultural Capability layer is selected, zoom to RDKS, select the “Identify” function under the Home tab, and options for downloading Agricultural Capability maps at different scales will be prompted.

⁹ The Statistics Canada dataset is derived from information that is self-reported by farmers, this is a noteworthy limitation to the statistical reporting process. The Ag Census is updated every 5 years.

¹⁰ Farms classified by farm type, [Table 32-10-0403-01](#). 2016. Statistics Canada.

¹¹ [Agriculture in Brief: Regional District of Kitimat Stikine](#). 2016. BC Ministry of Agriculture and Statistics Canada.

¹² Farms classified by total farm area, [Table 32-10-0404-01](#). 2016. Statistics Canada.

farms in the RDKS and the average age of farm operators is 56.2 years.¹³ Five operators were under the age of 35 and 90 operators were 55 and older in 2016. This suggests the need to plan for farm succession as farmers reach retirement age and are looking to pass their operations on to a younger generation. An increasingly older farming population also suggests attention be placed on attracting younger people to farming and retaining young farmers. A provincial organization, Young Agrarians, is working within this capacity and recently appointed a coordinator to the Northern region of the province, which includes RDKS.

Many farms in the region have relatively small profits, with 49% reporting less than \$10,000 gross farm receipts annually. At low levels of gross farm receipts, even slight shifts in income and expenses can have an influence on overall profitability. Over a third (39%) of farms reported earnings of between \$10,000 and \$49,999 and only 12% earned more than \$50,000 annually.¹⁴ *Appendix II – RDKS Agricultural Sector Details* provides more in-depth information.

2.3 Food System Profile of the Region

A food system encompasses components such as food production, processing and storage, transportation and distribution, retail and consumption, and waste management. This section describes the supports and infrastructure that are available within the RDKS for the food system. Connections within the food system between neighbouring regions is also discussed.

2.3.1 Processing and Value-Added Infrastructure

Value-added products can provide much higher returns for producers than simply selling raw goods. For produce, taking the extra step of canning, dehydrating, or creating a new product with a long shelf life (e.g. salsa) can also provide income over the entire year rather than only providing a return during the harvesting months that selling raw goods provides.¹⁵ Processing supports for livestock producers include abattoirs and cut and wrap processing facilities in order to be able to sell a variety of meat products.

Based on a search of the Small-Scale Food Producers Association and BC Food Processors Association resources there is no large commercial-scale food processing or value-added infrastructure in the area. There are some small commercial kitchens in the region, often associated with community halls, which may be conducive to very small scale value-added production. The 2019, Upper Skeena Food Hub study found that there are “an overabundance of commercial kitchens that are currently underutilized” in the Upper Skeena.¹⁶ However, the level of food safety certification held by these kitchens is unknown. Throughout the study area, zoning bylaws allow for food processing activities to be sited in commercial and light industrial areas, so potential business opportunities do exist.

There are some small-scale food processors creating and selling value-added products within the region. Examples of these businesses include a coffee roastery, a brewery, and bakeries. There are several small-scale vendors at the Skeena Valley Farmers’ Market and Hazelton Farmers’ Market that sell a variety of value-added products such as baked goods, preserves, ice cream, and herbal teas.¹⁷

¹³ Farm operators classified by number of operators per farm and age, [Table 32-10-0442-01](#). 2016. Statistics Canada.

¹⁴Farms classified by total gross farm receipts in the year prior to the census, [Table 32-10-0436-01](#). 2016. Statistics Canada.

¹⁵ Stott, D., et al. 2013. *Report #3: Potential Demand of North Fraser and Lower Mainland Agricultural Product*. Pitt Meadows Economic Development Corporation.

¹⁶ Upper Skeena Food Hub, Briefing: Food Hub Research & Findings. 2020. Firyal Mohamed and Tenley Dahlie.

¹⁷[Our Market Vendors](#). Hazelton Farmers’ Market.

Meat Processing Regulations and Capacity

In 2007, the province of BC changed the meat processing regulations such that licensing and certification was costlier and involved administrative oversight. These changes resulted in part to more than 300 abattoirs closing throughout the province over the last 10 years. Currently, there are no Class A (slaughtering and processing) or Class B (slaughtering only) facilities within the RDKS. This indicates that in order for a producers' meat products to be sold outside of their regional district, they must transport their livestock outside the region for slaughtering.

According to the BC Ministry of Agriculture website¹⁸, the following licensed Class A and B meat facilities are the closest to RDKS producers:

- Bulkley Valley Custom Slaughter, Telkwa (cattle, hogs, lamb, sheep, goats, poultry, rabbit)
- Country Locker, Vanderhoof (cattle, hogs, bison, sheep/lambs)
- Kawano Farms, Prince George (cattle, hogs, lamb, sheep, goats, bison)
- Newsat Farm, Vanderhoof (poultry, rabbit)

Class D licences support local food production and food security in areas of BC that have a low population density, low animal production levels and where it is unlikely that a Class A or B facility will open. Class D licenses allow for meat slaughtered at these facilities to be sold within the boundaries of the regional district of which they are located, to retail or direct to customer.¹⁹ There are several Class D licensed producers in the RDKS, although the exact number is unknown as the information is not released publicly. In the summer of 2020, the authority of the Class D and E licences was transferred from the Regional Health Authorities to the Ministry of Agriculture.

Once meat has been slaughtered at a licensed facility, it must then be processed by a licensed butcher if it is going to be sold via retail or through restaurants. Few regional options for butchering of meats exist - only Skeena Valley Meats in Terrace is a licensed butcher.

2.3.2 Storage

The ability to store products for market will impact both the mix of products that can be offered and the types of target sectors that can be reached by farmers at an individual and collective level. Storage can take several forms, including dry, refrigerated, and/or frozen. While some vegetables, such as onions, garlic, and carrots only require dry storage, others such as leafy greens, cucumbers, and berries will require refrigeration if stored more than one or two days. Frozen storage is the best option for those who are processing goods into value-added items (e.g. smoothies, sauces, soups). Storage options come in all sizes, and most farms have some level of dry or cold storage as part of their operations through the use of cellars or coolers. Some producers may already have cold storage needs that extend beyond their farms' capacities at certain times of the year, as these products are harvested all at once and the excess must to be frozen for sale throughout the winter months. For example, in July, August and September when daytime temperatures can climb, additional cold storage may be needed for produce. And in the winter months, more freezer storage may be needed for frozen produce or meat.

¹⁸ [Licensed Meat Processing Facilities in BC](#). BC Ministry of Agriculture.

¹⁹ One animal unit means: combined weight, when measured alive, of 1000 lbs (454 kg) of meat (e.g., beef, poultry, bison, etc. Source: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/industry/agriculture-seafood/food-safety/meat-inspection-licensing>

There are limited to no storage facilities (dry, refrigerated or frozen) in the region available for producers to access. Due to the low volumes of products grown and produced in the region and large distances between the region's farms, options for feasible shared product storage facilities are limited. The 2019 Upper Skeena Food Hub study found that in the Upper Skeena communities there were some root cellar infrastructure in several communities, although most are in need of renovations.²⁰

2.3.3 Agricultural Input and Service Suppliers

Access to farm inputs such as soil amendments, animal feed and tools and equipment are vital to a successful agricultural operation. There are a limited number of businesses in the study areas that provide goods and services specific to the needs of farms. There are a small number of hardware stores such as Home Hardware, Canadian Tire, and local hardware and building supply stores that may provide some goods for general agriculture operational needs. However, many producers interviewed cannot find the agricultural equipment needed for their businesses within the region and must order supplies from outside of the region, which increases costs. There are two local feed supply stores in the study area, Ridgeway Feeds south of Terrace and Tri-Town Lumber & Feed in Hazelton.

2.3.4 Transportation and Distribution

The agricultural sector in the RDKS relies on regional transportation linkages for accessing local, regional and provincial markets. The primary transportation system of the study area is simple and linear, with Highway 16 acting as the main artery connecting the Hazeltons to Terrace and the region east/south towards Prince George or west towards Prince Rupert and Highway 37 connects Kitimat and Terrace to Dease Lake .

Large-scale commercial food distribution systems operate within the region, such as Overwaitea Food Group, that deliver foods to the grocery stores in the areas. There is at least one more localized wholesale distributor, J&F Distributors, serving Northwestern BC. It can be difficult for small-scale food businesses to access the large-scale distribution channels because many producers are too small to meet production requirements of larger scale retail outlets and there may be gaps around labeling, quality control, traceability and food safety. Additionally, in selling to wholesale distributors, farms fetch lower prices for their products than if selling direct to consumers.

2.3.5 Local and Regional Sales Channels

Direct Sales

Over 40% of small farms in BC (farms with less than \$10,000 in gross farm receipts) reported selling food products directly to consumers in the 2016 Ag Census.²¹ Farm gate retail is the predominant method farmers in the RDKS use to sell their products (e.g. farm stands, kiosks, u-pick).²² Producers also sell at the Skeena Valley Farmers' Market, the Hazelton Farmers' Market, and through Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) programs (e.g. weekly veggie box subscription), online ordering and home delivery.

²⁰ Upper Skeena Food Hub, Briefing: Food Hub Research & Findings. 2020. Firyal Mohamed and Tenley Dahlie.

²¹ [Small farms and direct marketing play a large role in British Columbia](#). 2017. Statistics Canada.

²² [Agriculture in Brief: Regional District of Kitimat Stikine](#). 2016. BC Ministry of Agriculture and Statistics Canada.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been an increase in farms using online methods to sell their products directly to consumers. This include using web-based platforms such as Localline, allowing direct ordering through Facebook, and/or emailing weekly fresh sheets to consumers.

The Skeena Valley and Hazelton Farmers Markets are one of the most common ways producers sell their foods. Over 70 vendors sell products at these markets, which have been in operation for over 20 years. The markets participate in the BC Ministry of Agriculture's Nutrition Coupon Program in which community organizations provide coupons to lower-income families, pregnant women and seniors; this program also supports the producers at the markets by increasing the customer base. The markets are open every Saturday or Sunday from May to October, however, due to COVID 19 there have been disruptions to the normal functioning of the markets. There are also ongoing challenges associated with funding and staffing the markets to ensure effective knowledge and skills transfer between market managers.

Local Grocery and Wholesale

Local grocery and specialty food stores (particularly small and medium-scale grocers) can accept products and allocate shelf space to local foods with greater flexibility than larger retailers. Successful partnerships with grocers and local producers depend on strong relationships and flexibility by both parties on their terms of business. There are numerous small-scale grocery and health food stores in the study area. Some stores and farming operations have established relationships to sell produce through these local retail outlets.

Restaurants

Restaurants are a traditionally challenging sector for farms to access on a regular basis. While restaurants carry the promise of good prices and opportunities to showcase individual farms and specialty products, the relationship between chef and farmer can take a lot of effort and time to be established. Deliveries can be extremely time-sensitive. A small number of farmers are selling to restaurants, although often times at inconsistent volumes.

2.3.6 Community Organizations and Industry Associations

A successful local food system is supported by industry associations, community organizations and community leaders, through activities that promote local food products, offer networks of support and contribute to food policy discussions.

There are a limited number of industry associations with active chapters in the RDKS. Some RDKS ranchers may be part of the Bulkley Valley Cattleman's Association and some producers participate in events held by the Smithers Farmers' Institute.

There are several community organizations that are involved in work related to supporting regional agriculture and the food system. There are community gardens that offer plots of land for interested residents, run by non-profit organizations, local societies and community volunteers. Many of these community gardens also donate or sell excess produce to support their operations and their communities. In the spring of 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic, many new community and backyard gardens were established and led by local community leaders who supported residents in starting and maintaining the gardens, especially in the Upper Skeena communities.

Regional community organizations are involved in many initiatives around agriculture and food including promoting discussion around food policy, initiating innovative food projects, running programs for youth to increase skills in agriculture, and hosting land-based programs for Indigenous communities. The following are a list of key community organizations involved in food system work:

- [Upper Skeena Development Centre](#) (USDC) and the [Senden Agricultural Resource Centre](#)
 - USDC works on food security and Indigenous food sovereignty within the Upper Skeena communities and they house the Senden Sustainable Agriculture Resource Centre program. The Resource Centre consists of a three acre garden, historic farmhouse, greenhouse, root cellar and bees. Food security activities and programs include: CSA seasonal food box program, skills building programs for youth, and land-based programs for Indigenous youth through food security skills.
- [Storytellers' Foundations – The Learning Shop](#)
 - The Learning Shop fosters an active citizenship by engaging community members in Literacy, Essential Skills and Lifelong Learning. The Learning shop has several programs relating to food and agriculture such as “Youth Works” which is a social enterprise where youth are paid to work in a food production (gardening and wild harvesting), catering, and wreath making business. Youth are supported by a learning mentor (informal educator). They host educational programs for youth about gardening and cooking in their commercial community kitchen.
- Skeena Energy Solutions - a project by the Skeena Watershed Conservation Coalition
 - Skeena Energy Solutions is a grass-roots initiative aimed at supporting alternative energy options that are suited to northern contexts, sustaining northern cultures, building local economies, and promoting sustainable food production. They have completed several food production and security projects, including: the [Gitwangak Community Garden](#), the [Sik-e-Dakh Greenhouse Project](#), the [Recycled Energy Garden](#) and the [Poultry-Centered Regenerative Agriculture Project](#)
- [MASH](#) - Making Agriculture Sustainable in the Hazeltons
 - MASH is a registered non-profit society operating mainly in the Hazeltons, with programs also reaching west to Gitanyow and east to Telkwa. Their focus is on food security and community economic development that includes some performing arts aspects. Their goal is to build capacity, network and deliver events. MASH previously housed the Northwest BC Food Action Network.
- [Terrace Food Association](#)
 - The Terrace Food Association is an incorporated association with the mission to support organic and good agricultural practices and encourage food education that facilitates sustainable food security in the region. The Association also focuses on supporting, advocating and developing policies and action plans that promote food security and independence.
- Young Agrarians
 - Young Agrarians is a farmer-to-farmer educational resource network for new and young ecological, organic and regenerative farmers in Canada. The representative of Young Agrarians for the Northwest lives in the RDKS and is active in organizing workshops and on and off-farm educational [events](#), [business mentorships](#), and [land access programming](#).

These organizations are playing a vital supporting role in fostering awareness and building capacity for a local food system. Many of these organizations have several programs related to agriculture and food which can be supported and built upon.

2.3.7 Connections with Neighbouring Regional Districts

The agriculture and food system of the RDKS is linked to the other nearby jurisdictions, and agricultural inputs and food travel into the RDKS. The Regional District of Bulkley Nechako (RDBN), to the east, has vast amounts of agricultural land used predominantly for ranching and forage, along with mixed vegetable and livestock farming. The RDBN has several provincially licensed abattoirs, six farmers' markets and well-established agricultural supply stores and supports. The RDBN supports their agricultural producers in a number of ways, including through the production and promotion of an annual producer directory and hosting a webpage dedicated to agriculture on their regional government website.²³ Food and farm products travel across both regional districts' borders as producers access markets and customers bases in larger population centres such as Terrace and Smithers. There are some agricultural supplies stores located in the RDBN from which RDKS producers purchase inputs.

The North Coast Regional District (NCRD) lies to the west of the RDKS. While there is limited agricultural land within this regional district, seafood products are likely to travel into the RDKS. Some producers in the RDKS may also access the Price Rupert market and at least one producer has found a stable restaurant customer in Prince Rupert.

3.0 Role of Regional Districts in Supporting the Agriculture Sector

An agricultural sector is complex and interacts with political, social, cultural, environmental and economic components of society. Agricultural economic development involves a process of influencing growth of the sector to enhance the economic well-being of a community.²⁴ This section outlines the role and jurisdiction the RDKS, and in particular its EDC, has within the agricultural sector and food system sphere.

Regional districts are a federation of municipalities, electoral areas and Treaty First nations, which each have representation on the Regional District Board of Directors.²⁵ Regional districts are required to provide emergency planning services and capital financing for local governments. There are also other services regional districts can provide, at the discretion of the district board, including land use planning and economic development.²⁶ Planning documents such as Regional Growth Strategies, Official Community Plans, and Agricultural Plans can include policies that support agricultural production and local food systems. Business development initiatives, such as sector growth strategies, can support and enhance agricultural enterprises and organizations. Several regional districts have "Agricultural Development Advisory Committees" or "Agricultural Advisory Committees" (AACs), for example the Cariboo Regional District, Squamish-Lillooet Regional District, Metro Vancouver, and many others. These committees are involved in and support projects aimed at promoting public awareness, diversification and growth of the agriculture sector and advise the Board of Directors on matters regarding the agricultural sector and development and land use planning. Regional districts can work with community organizations to advance a collective voice that represents the interests of the region to higher level of governments and agencies responsible for providing services in the region.²⁷

²³ Example of the Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako's webpage focused on regional agriculture:

<https://www.rdbn.bc.ca/departments/agriculture>

²⁴ [Agriculture Economic Development](#). 2017. Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs.

²⁵ [Regional Districts in B.C.](#) nd. Government of BC.

²⁶ [Regional District Powers and Services](#). nd. Government of BC.

²⁷ [2019-2020 Strategic Plan](#). 2019. Regional District of Kitimat-Stikine

3.1 Examples of Economic Development Commissions Supporting Agriculture

There are two types of EDCs in BC. The first type is membership funded, and organizations like these tend to play a stronger advocacy role. The second type, which includes the RDKS EDC, is tax-funded, and focusses more on delivering government objectives and actions. EDCs of regional districts can act in several roles relating to agricultural economic development, including as a promoter, a connector, an educator, and enabler and an organizer.²⁸ For example, being a ‘promoter’ or ‘educator’ and sharing information about farm businesses in the region to the public and consumers. Being a ‘connector’, EDCs play a role in networking and connecting regional agriculture and food sector stakeholders to help facilitate partnerships and identify potential funding pools.

EDCs throughout BC support their local agricultural sectors in a variety of ways. Examples include the [Central Okanagan Economic Development Commission](#) and the [City of Abbotsford Economic Development Commission](#), both with strong agricultural objectives. Identifying what supports other EDCs provide to their agriculture sector can highlight potential ideas and opportunities for the RDKS EDC. Common methods of support across the province include creating educational materials such as websites, sector development documents, maps, synthesizing statistics and data for informational brochures, and often partnering with local tourism agencies.

Communications materials are developed for:

- a) agricultural producers to provide information on supporting services and programs,
- b) residents in the region to provide information on where to purchase locally grown foods and what it means to live near active farming, and,
- c) agri-tourism information for visiting tourists.

For example, the RDBN spearheads an initiative titled “[Connecting Consumers and Producers](#)” which includes a website and an up-to-date directory of producers within the region and is easily accessible to consumers. The Comox Valley Regional District EDC has a comprehensive [website](#) dedicated solely to the agri-food industry which contains news updates, investment opportunities, past research and a [growers guide](#).

Another way EDCs support the agriculture sector is through funding research. Examples include topics such as agricultural asset inventories and sector research, agricultural equipment bank studies and local food purchasing studies. For example, the COEDC has undertaken many studies related to their agriculture and food sectors and provides several supporting resources for their agricultural sector such as a [Resource Guide](#) for farm operators.

Some EDCs also have expressed interest in facilitating leasing of public land for agricultural production (for example, the [Capital Regional District](#)). Several EDCs have allocated staff time or provided funding for external contractors to assist with implementation of agricultural plans and to help support the region’s agricultural section (for example, the Alberni-Clayoquot Regional District hires part-time “[Agricultural Support Workers](#)”).

²⁸ [Agriculture Economic Development](#). 2017. Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs.

4.0 Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats Assessment

A SWOT assessment is a framework used for understanding a situation or industry by studying its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. In this case, the SWOT assessment is applied to the agricultural sector within the RDKS. The strengths and weaknesses are internal factors that farmers, residents and local governments have some control over. The opportunities and threats are external influences that local stakeholders and governments have little control over, but which impact the agriculture and food sector.

This SWOT assessment for this Plan uses the information gathered in the situational analysis and the stakeholder engagement to provide context for understanding current and future opportunities for development and growth in the RDKS agriculture sector, and highlights actions that the EDC can take to support sector growth. The end results of the SWOT assessment provide the foundational knowledge needed to inform strategies and recommendations for the Plan.

The following figure highlights the factors considered during the SWOT assessment.



Figure 4. SWOT assessment criteria.

Table 1 SWOT assessment for the RDKS regional agriculture and food system.

| Topic | Strengths | Weaknesses | Opportunities | Threats |
|--------------------|--|--|---|--|
| Environment | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good water access for irrigation • Some use of water and nutrient management practices • Potential for use of innovative cold climate growing techniques | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Land clearing may be needed to increase production potential • No diking infrastructure to protect farms from flooding | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Climate change may increase growing degree days and the diversity of what can be grown n • Good water and soil quality in valleys • Growing climate conducive to a variety of crops | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Climate change may increase flooding, fires, drought and extreme weather events • Invasive species • Wet climate • Lower # of frost free days compared to other agricultural areas in BC • Wildlife conflicts (eagles, coyotes, elk, bear, etc.) |
| Production | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Core base of established farmers • Some land is available for farming • History of farming and homesteaders with regional growing knowledge • High demand for local food from consumers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited availability of local produce • Lack of seasonal, skilled labour • Lack of agricultural land leasing opportunities • Lack of locally-available feed/agricultural inputs • No regional large animal veterinarian | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forested farmland allows for unique production methods and foraging • Skill development resources area available from provincial government | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Challenges to increase farming production on private land • Growing season shorter compared to other BC areas • Many producers must work off-farm to make ends meet |
| Processing | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some processing and value-added food activities already occurring locally • Some Class D slaughter licenses in region • Several community kitchens that can act as small-scale food hubs • Recommendations from Upper Skeena Food Hub feasibility study | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of regional Class A or Class B abattoir • Limited licensed butcher shops • Lack of food safe kitchens and cold storage • Currently, lack of production carrying capacity to warrant investment in larger-scale processing facilities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Federal funding initiatives for food infrastructure • Several food hubs on Vancouver Island, Interior, and Kootenays are building capacity (learning opportunity) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meat Inspection Regulations and existing abattoir licensing options • Large distances between growing areas |

| Topic | Strengths | Weaknesses | Opportunities | Threats |
|-----------------------------------|---|---|--|--|
| Distribution & Storage | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some coordination for food boxes between producers in region • Farms have individual on-farm storage capacity • Local markets available to reduce travel distances | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of coordinated/shared distribution vehicles and access to larger distributors • Lack of local cold or dry storage options | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Existing truck sharing programs in Lillooet and other communities offer learning opportunities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High costs of delivery • Long distances to travel to markets • Distribution system to grocery stores and restaurants tailored to import markets |
| Retail & Marketing | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some existing support from local retailers • Two Farmers' Markets • Some producers have established relationships with buyers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulty in establishing and maintaining relationships with restaurants, grocery stores, wholesale buyers • Time consuming for producers to focus on marketing products • Lack of coordination between producers and buyers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provincial trend towards institutional (e.g. schools, hospitals) local procurement • Some restaurants appear interested and open to purchasing local ingredients • Regional coordinating of marketing • Online ordering increasing in popularity for individual farms | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Competitive prices from imported goods • Competition with well-known provincial and national brands • Lack of flexibility by larger retailers around shelf space for small-scale, locally-produced foods • Purchasing food mainly happens at large grocery stores |
| Community Characteristics | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High demand for local food products • An increasing interest in food security and growing food • Strong community organizations championing local food • Existing agriculture and food programs offering life skill building and pre-employment training | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Households with low incomes • Lack of government awareness of local food system • Difficulty obtaining steady funding for community run programs | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting and building initiatives started by existing community organizations and programs • COVID-19 impacts on the local food system such as renewed interest in local food system and funding opportunities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changes in government funding priorities • Larger regional and global economic forces impacting incomes • COVID-19 impacts on the local food system • High regional under employment and unemployment rates |

5.0 Analysis of RDKS Agriculture Sector Potential

This section describes the results of the gap analysis. For this project, the 'gap' refers to the space between the current state of the agriculture sector (situational analysis and SWOT) and the potential of the state of the agriculture sector. Based on input from the research and stakeholder engagement, there appears to be untapped potential for expansion of the agricultural sector within the RDKS. The demand for locally produced and processed foods is high and yet the current supply of locally produced foods does not meet this demand. There is unused agricultural land with capacity for production and the region has a good growing climate. A small but growing community of local producers are dedicated to producing foods for the local market. Several community organizations support sustainable local food systems and agricultural development and have a strong presence in the region, with the potential for continuing and expanding programs to educate residents about the local agriculture sector.

Despite strong regional potential for agriculture, there are several reasons influencing this gap in agricultural sector capacity. The following key gaps have been identified in the regional agricultural sector.

5.1 Primary Production and Self-Sufficiency

There is a core base of primary producers in the region providing locally grown vegetables, fruits, eggs, honey, and some raising poultry and livestock; amounting to a small local supply. These products are sold to regional consumers through direct marketing (e.g., farmers markets and online sales). Indigenous communities in the region are beginning to embark upon food production business initiatives (e.g. Kitsumkalum First Nation) as well as foraging and stewardship of traditional foods. There is also a culture of homesteading, hunting, fishing, and gardening for personal consumption of foods. Despite these strengths, there is currently not enough supply of local food to meet the food self-sufficiency needs of the region. If regional agricultural businesses are to thrive and contribute to a more resilient food system, then more primary production and local food consumption must occur.

Several factors impact food self-sufficiency of a region, many of which are highlighted in the SWOT analysis. Some of the main factors include:

- Difficulty of running a farming business (i.e. managing all aspects of the planning, production, harvesting, marketing, regulations, etc.),
- Perception that small-scale farming is not profitable,
- Need for secondary support systems, such as agricultural supply stores for inputs and equipment,
- High levels of underemployment and unemployment and lack of skill agricultural labour,
- Limited supporting networks and learning opportunities for producers, and,
- Limited number of abattoirs and butchers.

5.2 Agriculture and Food Sector Knowledge and Awareness

The long history of agriculture and Indigenous food practices in the region provide a wealth of regionally specific knowledge of food cultivation, hunting, fishing, foraging, and gathering. Several sources of data (e.g. the Ag Census, BC Assessment) and past reports (E.g. Greater Terrace Ag Plan, Upper Skeena Food Hub Feasibility Study) have highlighted the agricultural activities within the region. If properly quantified by measuring all of the spinoff business transactions related to food within the region, the agriculture and

food sector likely plays a large role in the overall economy of the RDKS, despite the relatively limited attention it garners within local government.

There are several audiences to consider for addressing the opportunity to educate and build awareness of a regional agriculture and food system. Broadly these audiences are: consumers, producers and local governments (both staff and decision-makers). Examples include:

- Developing regional resources that point consumers in the direction to where to find local foods, what foods are in season, and the value of supporting local producers.
- Providing regional producers with more information about growing their businesses and opportunities to share knowledge amongst regional farmers.
- Updating RDKS staff and decision-makers as to what agricultural products are grown in the region, the challenges and opportunities for regional agriculture, and how to support agriculture.

This report is one resource that can be used to address some of these knowledge gaps.

Additionally, there lacks a central source of information where regional actors (governments, community organizations, producers) in the agriculture and food sectors can look to for up-to-date information about the agricultural sector and, for example, past food and agriculture projects. This lack of centralized knowledge base can lead to a duplication of efforts and missed opportunity to learn from local successes.

5.3 Stable Funding for Food System Organizations

As mentioned, there are several community organizations in the region conducting on-the-ground work related to regional food security and agriculture. These organizations undertake important food system work, and many initiatives strive to bridge the gaps identified within this report. Many initiatives support skill-building and food growing to increase local food security and improve access to foods, particularly among lower income residents. However, a lack of dedicated funding to hire skilled human resources has been identified by these organizations as a significant barrier to maintaining, growing or enhancing a number of the successfully piloted food projects in the region.²⁹ Non-profit and/or non-governmental organizations struggle to compete with hiring staff who may have higher wage opportunities within government, mining, oil and gas, and/or forestry jobs. While these issues are not isolated to the RDKS region, there is a high level of local unemployment and under-employment, and it can be difficult to mobilize this sector of the workforce. Improving funding streams and the availability of resources to sustain full-time staff is critical to ensuring the longevity of these organizations. Longer term core funding would release Executive Directors from the continuous cycle of applying for funding and reporting to funders and allow them to do the important work of managing staff and projects.

²⁹ Results from stakeholder consultation and Upper Skeena Food Hub, Briefing: Food Hub Research & Findings. 2020. Firyal Mohamed and Tenley Dahlie.

6.0 Goals, Recommendations and Actions

In this section, opportunities are highlighted to fill gaps within the regional food and agriculture sector so that it can reach its highest potential.

There are 4 goals, 13 recommendations and 36 associated actions identified in this Plan.

A focus is placed on actions that the RDKS can lead. The implementation section (Section 7.0) of this Plan identifies the timeline and funding needed for achieving the actions.

The four goals are aligned with several regional and provincial initiatives and reports, including:

- RDKS Economic Development Commission, Economic Development Plan 2018-2023:
 - Business Retention and Expansion, Strategic Area 5: Assist agricultural businesses
- RDKS 2019-2020 Strategic Plan
 - Strategic Focus Area 1: Engaging and Communicating with our Citizens
 - Strategic Focus Area 3: Partnerships with communities and first nations
- Recommendations from the 2015 Greater Terrace Agriculture Area Plan
- Recommendations from Upper Skeena Food Hub Briefing: Food Hub Research & Findings
 - Senden Agricultural Centre Youth Program and Educational Demonstration
 - Traditional Diet Educational Campaign
- Ministry of Agriculture Programs:
 - [Strengthening Farming Team](#);
 - [Business Development Workshops](#);
 - Regional Agrologist workshops
- Young Agrarians: Land Linking Events and Networking Workshops
- [BC Agriculture & Food Climate Action Initiative](#) and [BC Agricultural Climate Adaptation Research Network](#) resources
- Community organizations and relevant programs described in Section 2.3.6

Goal 1. Collect Resources and Expand Knowledge of the Regional Agricultural Sector

To growth the regional agricultural industry, it is important that the RDKS become knowledgeable about the key players, characteristics, challenges and opportunities of the industry. Knowing the history, current state and future potential state of the agricultural sector will allow staff to target efforts on sector development. New opportunities for collaboration and support often emerge from building trusting relationships and keeping lines of communication open. Gaining a more comprehensive understanding of the regional agriculture sector will help draw important connections and tailor relevant economic development activities to the regional agriculture sector.

| Recommendations | Actions |
|---|--|
| 1.1: <i>Collect resources to develop knowledge of regional agriculture sector and food system.</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Keep an up-to-date list of stakeholders and resources, such as producers, distributors, processing facilities, community kitchens, community organizations, etc. (e.g. build off of list created during this project). B. Keep internal folders on all previous studies, reports and resources on regional agriculture, promote staff to become aware of resources. Review reports and become aware of recommendations (e.g. Upper Skeena Food Hub Report, Greater Terrace Agriculture plan, etc.). C. Keep up-to-date with other organizations’ regional projects along with the project’s status and level of implementation and/or success. This also should include agricultural land use data such as AGRI ALUIs, BC Assessment, Ag Census data. |
| 1.2: <i>Provide learning opportunities for RDKS and EDC staff and elected officials to build their knowledge of regional agriculture.</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Take the regional agricultural profile and results from this report and share it widely with staff and Board of Directors. B. Ensure that RDKS staff and elected officials understand the agricultural history of the region. C. Provide annual (or as needed) agriculture updates at Board meetings on topics affecting the agricultural community either directly or indirectly. D. Organize an annual farm tour/virtual event to connect the staff and Board to the farming community and land base. (Alignment with Action 2.3). |
| 1.3: <i>Coordinate, convene and build partnerships with key stakeholders in the agriculture and food sector.</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Periodically check-in with key stakeholders (via phone or email) to understand their challenges and identify opportunities to help grow the sector and become adept at directing consumers, producers and organizations towards useful resources and potential partnerships in the region. B. Support regional food and agriculture meetings organized by other entities where possible and appropriate (e.g. provide in-kind resources such as conference call lines and meeting rooms, promotion through existing communication streams, participation by staff and Board members). (Alignment with Action 2.3, and 3.1). C. Encourage RDKS Board of Directors to consider forming an Agricultural Advisory Committee³⁰ within the RDKS Planning Department. This committee would be comprised of members of the public with a keen interest in agriculture and would provide input into planning and economic development initiatives that may impact agriculture. The AAC could meet virtually to help overcome long distances between representative members. There are over 40 AACs operating across BC, and the Ministry of Agriculture provides support to local governments wishing to establish such an AAC. |

³⁰ “An Agricultural Advisory Committee is appointed and functions similarly to other advisory committees of regional boards. A key asset is that members are predominantly drawn from the farm and ranching community and the committee focuses on agricultural issues.” [Agricultural Advisory Committees](#). Nd. BC Ministry of Agriculture.

Goal 2. Grow Communication and Awareness of the RDKS Food and Agriculture Sector

There is an opportunity to improve awareness of local agriculture and access to local food for residents and visitors of the region. The support for a local food system is largely based on general public knowledge and awareness of local food products and processes. The need for more educational resources for consumers and retailers were key concerns raised by stakeholders during engagement. In particular, there is an opportunity for the EDC to play the role of champion of the regional agricultural sector through awareness-raising and external communication. By increasing communication, the EDC can strengthen awareness on a wide-range of topics in food and agriculture that will help to improve clarity and quality of working relationships with local farmers and food sector businesses as well as spread awareness to community members about the agricultural sector.

| Recommendations | Actions |
|---|---|
| 2. 1: <i>Provide local food and agriculture information for residents and visitors online</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Build a public facing website (or build off of existing RDKS Agriculture webpage) containing information for consumers about regional agriculture and update regularly with new resources. (Alignment with Action 3.1). B. Start an online social media presence promoting agriculture and regional farming businesses. |
| 2.2: <i>Update and promote the RDKS Agricultural Asset Map</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Appoint a staff person to update the asset map annually (or as needed). B. Promote the map publicly through the website, newsletters, social media, and other communications outlets. |
| 2.3: <i>Assist with current agricultural events and annual regional farm tours</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Include local producers in annual festivals and events and support existing agricultural events (e.g. Skeena Valley Fall Fair) when possible. (Alignment with Action 1.3) B. Support annual learning events to celebrate and showcase food production in the region to enable the public to get to know local farmers. Due to geographic distances between regional farms, establish 2-3 localized events for each growing region. Discuss with producers on best approaches for events, including a farm-to-table dinner and/or farm tours. (Alignment with Action 1.3). |
| 2.4: <i>Support and promote the development of regional agricultural sector jobs</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Support existing educational programs through in-kind support, promotion or funding such as the educational programs at Senden Sustainable Agricultural Resource Centre and Storytellers' Foundations – The Learning Shop. B. Support a dialogue with schools districts and programs such as Farm to School, to understand how the RDKS can support learning opportunities. C. When promoting the region as an employment centre, ensure that agriculture is highlighted alongside other industry jobs. |

Goal 3. Support New Agri-Food Businesses, Innovation in Agricultural Production and Traditional Food Systems

With a good growing climate, suitable land and local markets, there is an opportunity for the expansion of thriving farm and food businesses in the RDKS. To realize this opportunity, the EDC must place efforts into attracting new producers to the area and supporting existing farmers and food businesses. Being a resource that provides business development supports for new and existing food businesses will help to build relationships. It is also vital to support existing initiatives and programs related to Indigenous traditional food systems and skill building to foster a wholistic regional food system that provides economic opportunities for all.

| Recommendations | Actions |
|---|--|
| <p>3.1: <i>Provide sector-specific business development resources to agricultural producers and food processors.</i></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Engage with local knowledge holders, experienced farmers, AGRI and Small Business BC to host workshops for farmers, and those who are interested in farming, on business development training, food processing and safety certification, Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) certification, etc., in order to be nimble in the marketplace and to gain confidence in production and processing capacity. Topics may include, but are not limited to: New Farm Start-Up Guide; High Intensity Market Farming; Taking Stock Assessment Workbook; Accessing Start-Up Capital; Small Scale Processing; GAP certification; Guidance on Federal and Provincial Food Safety and Labelling; Certification Process: Organic, Halal, Kosher, Gluten-Free B. Promote and connect producers to resources and facilitate learning for producers on how climate change may impact growing in the region and highlight strategies for local farmers to mitigate, prepare and adapt to climate change (e.g., longer growing season, more irrigation, less available water, native crops, cover cropping, crop rotation, drainage over landscape, sustainable soil management, seed saving, etc.). C. Use existing RDKS Agriculture and Economic Development webpages to provide information specifically for producers and food businesses about business supporting programs, funding and resources to assist with business success. (Alignment with Action 2.1). D. Circulate funding and emergency business response opportunities to the agricultural sector when needed (e.g. supports for COVID-19 impacts). |
| <p>3.2: <i>Support and facilitate land-linking and succession planning programs locally.</i></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Work with organizations such as Young Agrarians and AGRI to facilitate land linking and succession planning for those who have farmland, but are not farming, or those that are planning to wind down their farming career. B. Investigate opportunities to lease unused RDKS land to support the agricultural sector, for example as a farm stand for local producers to use, or an incubator farm for those learning food production skills. |
| <p>3.3: <i>Work with and support Indigenous communities in the region in traditional food systems and involvement in the agriculture sector.</i></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Work with organizations, such as the Skeena Energy Solutions and the Senden Agricultural Resource Centre, on maintaining and strengthening existing Indigenous agricultural and food systems programs and initiatives. B. Meet with Indigenous communities in the region to build understanding regarding traditional food systems, new and innovative food production projects, and community food security. C. Look for partner opportunities and initiatives of mutual interest and value with Indigenous communities towards supporting growing, foraging and harvesting food outside of existing conventional agri-food systems. For example, collaboration on land use projects and other economic development opportunities. |

Goal 4. Foster Sector Development and Increased Value Chain Market Viability

The EDC has the opportunity to foster an atmosphere of support for food and agriculture businesses. Producer and food business entrepreneurs are crucial to creating a vibrant and diverse agri-food sector for the future, through the production of local food and niche-market products that meet growing consumer demands. These collaborations can happen along the food system “value chain” to link producers, processors, marketers, food service companies, retailers and supporting groups such as distributors, suppliers and local organizations. A value chain can be defined as a strategic partnership among inter-dependent businesses, governments and organizations that collaborate to actively create value for the final consumer resulting in a collective competitive advantage.³¹ For example, institutions, organizations and governments can harness their purchasing power to support local farmers, food entrepreneurs, distributors and processors who may have been unable to access large institutional markets in the past. Strengthening relationships within the local food supply and value chain will assist in improving the market viability of the local agricultural sector.

| Recommendations | Actions |
|---|--|
| 4.1: <i>Support producers in accessing stable markets for products</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Create a local food procurement policy for the RDKS and support local procurement initiatives in schools, other local government facilities and local institutions (e.g. health centres, community events, etc.). B. Support and attend events to connect producers to a variety of buyers (larger wholesale, institutional, small retail, restaurants). (Alignment with Action 1.3) C. Continue to support farmers’ markets and explore opportunities to establish year-round markets. |
| 4.2: <i>Identify and pursue viable solutions for local meat processing.</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Engage with local meat producers and AGRI to find solutions to the regional need for meat processing, such as Class D licensing to allow on-farm slaughter and mobile services. B. Investigate opportunities for educational institutions in the region to provide butchering courses to increase supply of trained butchers in the region. C. Provide opportunities for AGRI to run SlaughterSafe training workshops, for example by hosting a video-link or providing a meeting facility. |
| 4.3 <i>Attract investment and conduct market research.</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Prepare resources that document the RDKS’ competitive advantages for agri-business and facilitate answering investors’ inquiries for when they become necessary. B. Support and conduct value-chain studies and market research. For example, working with AGRI and/or Northern Health Authority to connect food producers to FeedBC initiatives and investigating the opportunity for a regional food branding initiative. |

³¹ [Agriculture Economic Development](#). 2017. Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs.

7.0 Implementation Strategy

The *Agriculture Sector Support Plan* recommends actions to ensure that agricultural land is used productively and farming, foraging, and other forms of food production are valued and sustained. The strategy detailed in this section provides an implementation timeline and assessment of anticipated sources of funding required to successfully complete each recommended action. Supporting organizations whose goals and activities overlap with certain actions are also identified. At this time, no external organizations have been asked to commit to these actions, however, the successful implementation of the Plan will require ongoing collaboration with community partners.

There are 36 recommended actions presented in the following table in order of implementation timeline:

- **Ongoing:** requires continuous attention.
- **Short:** to be implemented in 1-2 years.
- **Medium:** to be implemented in 3-4 years.
- **Long:** to be implemented in 5 or more years.

All of the actions listed requires ongoing commitment by the RDKS. Many of these actions will be completed in a continuous manner, as opportunities present themselves, for example, supporting events and workshops, staying in contact with relevant organizations and updating links to resources as new information arises. It is suggested that the Plan be updated every 5 years to ensure continued alignment with regional agriculture sector conditions and objectives.

With regards to funding needs, three levels of estimated requirements are presented:

- \$ minimal costs, can likely be covered within existing staff workplans
- \$\$ moderate costs, may require up to \$10,000 to complete
- \$\$\$ higher costs, may require over \$10,000 to complete

A full list of potential funding sources is provided in *Appendix III – Funding Opportunities*.

Table 2 Implementation priority, funding resources and responsibilities of recommended actions.

| Action # | Description | Supporting Organizations | Timeline | Funding Level |
|----------|--|--|----------|---------------|
| 1.1 A | Keep an up-to-date list of stakeholders and resources | | Ongoing | \$ |
| 1.1 B | Keep internal folders on all previous studies, reports and resources on regional agriculture | | Ongoing | \$ |
| 1.1 C | Keep up-to-date with other organizations' regional projects | Young Agrarians Terrace Food Association Skeena Energy Solutions Senden Agricultural Resource Centre MASH | Ongoing | \$ |
| 1.2 A | Take the regional agricultural profile and results from this report and share it widely with staff and Board of Directors. | | Ongoing | \$ |
| 1.3 A | Periodically check-in with key stakeholders regarding key challenges and needs | | Ongoing | \$ |
| 1.3 B | Support regional food and agriculture meetings organized by other entities | | Ongoing | \$ |
| 2.1 B | Start an online social media presence promoting agriculture | | Ongoing | \$ |
| 2.2 B | Promote the map publicly | | Ongoing | \$\$ |
| 2.3 A | Include local producers in annual festivals and events and support existing agricultural events | | Ongoing | \$\$ |
| 3.1 D | Circulate funding and emergency business response opportunities | | Ongoing | \$ |
| 3.2 A | Work with organizations such as Young Agrarians and AGRI to facilitate land linking and succession planning | AGRI Young Agrarians | Ongoing | \$\$ |
| 2.4 C | When promoting the region as an employment centre, ensure that agriculture is highlighted alongside other industry jobs | | Ongoing | \$ |
| 3.3 A | Work with existing organizations on maintaining and strengthening existing Indigenous agricultural and food systems programs and initiatives | Local Indigenous communities Terrace Food Association Skeena Energy Solutions Senden Agricultural Resource Centre MASH | Ongoing | \$ |

| Action # | Description | Supporting Organizations | Timeline | Funding Level |
|----------|--|---|----------|---------------|
| 2.2 A | Appoint a staff person to update the asset map | | Short | \$ |
| 1.2 B | Ensure that RDKS staff and elected officials understand the agricultural history of the region | | Short | \$ |
| 1.2 C | Provide annual (or as needed) agriculture updates at Board meetings | | Short | \$ |
| 1.3 C | Encourage RDKS Board of Directors to consider forming an Agricultural Advisory Committee | | Short | \$\$ |
| 2.1 A | Build a public-facing website or webpage containing information for consumers about regional agriculture | | Short | \$\$ |
| 3.1 C | Use existing webpages to provide information specifically for producers and food businesses about business supporting programs | | Short | \$ |
| 4.1 A | Create a local food procurement policy for the RDKS | | Short | \$\$ |
| 4.2 C | Provide opportunities for AGRI to run SlaughterSafe training workshops | AGRI | Short | \$ |
| 1.2 D | Organize an annual farm tour/virtual event to connect the staff and Board to the farming community | Farmers and community organizations | Medium | \$\$ |
| 2.3 B | Support annual learning events to celebrate and showcase food production in the region to enable the public to get to know local farmers | AGRI Young Agrarians MASH Terrace Food Association Skeena Valley Far Fair | Medium | \$\$ |
| 2.4 A | Support existing agri-food and food security educational programs | AGRI Young Agrarians Terrace Food Association Skeena Energy Solutions Senden Agricultural Resource Centre MASH Small Scale Food Producers Association Small Scale Meat Producers Association | Medium | \$\$ |
| 3.1 B | Promote and connect producers to resources and facilitate learning for producers on how climate change may impact growing in the region | BC Agriculture and Food Climate Action Initiative | Medium | \$ |

| Action # | Description | Supporting Organizations | Timeline | Funding Level |
|----------|--|--|----------|---------------|
| 3.3 B | Meet with Indigenous communities in the region to build understanding regarding traditional food systems, new and innovative food production projects, and community food security | Local Indigenous communities Skeena Energy Solutions Senden Agricultural Resource Centre | Medium | \$\$ |
| 4.2 A | Engage with local meat producers and AGRI to find solutions to the regional need for meat processing | AGRI Northern Health Authority Small Scale Meat Producers Association | Medium | \$ |
| 4.2 B | Investigate opportunities for educational institutions in the region to provide butchering courses | | Medium | \$ |
| 2.4 B | Support a dialogue with school districts and programs such as BC Farm to School | School District Senden Agricultural Resource Centre Storytellers' Foundations – The Learning Shop BC Farm to School | Long | \$\$ |
| 3.1 A | Host workshops for farmers, and those who are interested in farming, on business development training | AGRI Small Business BC | Long | \$\$ |
| 3.2 B | Investigate opportunities to lease unused RDKS land to support the agricultural sector | | Long | \$\$\$ |
| 3.3 C | Look for partner opportunities and initiatives of mutual interest and value with Indigenous communities | Local Indigenous communities Skeena Energy Solutions Senden Agricultural Resource Centre | Long | \$\$\$ |
| 4.1 B | Support and attend events to connect producers to a variety of buyers | | Long | \$\$ |
| 4.1 C | Explore opportunities to establish year-round farmers markets | Farmers markets | Long | \$\$\$ |
| 4.3 A | Prepare resources that document the RDKS' competitive advantages for agri-business | | Long | \$\$\$ |
| 4.3 B | Support and conduct value-chain studies and market research | | Long | \$\$\$ |

8.0 Monitoring and Evaluation Framework

A monitoring and evaluation strategy has been developed to help guide the implementation process of the Plan. It includes measurable performance indicators to determine progress of the Plan over time. Through tracking the indicators, an assessment will be provided both of how many actions are being accomplished, and the general support of the agriculture sector by the RDKS government and local residents. The following tables presents indicators for each of the four recommendations of the Plan. Each indicator is followed by the:

- Suggested frequency of evaluation;
- Baseline measurement, if available;
- Desired trend for the future; and
- Source of the information.

The indicators do not attempt to provide a complete analysis of all variables, but rather assess general trends and provide a picture of support for the agricultural sector and the effectiveness of Plan implementation.

Table 3 Monitoring and Evaluation Indicators.

| Goals | Indicator | Frequency | Desired Trend | Source |
|---|---|-----------|---------------|-----------------|
| Goal 1: Collect Resources and Expand Knowledge of the Regional Agricultural Sector | Number of presentations/updates to Board meetings. | Annual | Increase | Staff research |
| | Number of farm tours/visits attended by RDKS staff and BOD members. | 2 years | Increase | Staff research |
| Goal 2: Grow Communication and Awareness of the RDKS Food and Agriculture Sector | Number of local agriculture and food-related festivals and events supported and attended by residents and tourists. | Annual | Increase | Staff research |
| | Number of updates to website and RDKS Agricultural Asset Map. | Annual | Increase | Staff research |
| | Number of youth related agricultural programs supported. | Annual | Increase | Staff research |
| Goal 3: Support New Agri-Food Businesses, Innovation in Agricultural Production and Traditional Food Systems | Number of meetings attended and programs supported related to Indigenous involvement in the regional food system. | 2 years | Increase | Staff research |
| | Number of agriculture and food networking and workshops supported and attended by producers. | Annual | Increase | Staff research |
| Goal 4: Foster Sector Development and Increased Value Chain Market Viability | Number of properties qualifying for Farm Tax Status. | Annual | Increase | BC Assessment |
| | Number of producers selling at farmers' markets and to local retailers (e.g. grocery stores). | 5 years | Increase | Producer survey |
| | Number of RDKS events serving regionally produced foods. | 2 years | Increase | Staff Research |

9.0 Conclusion

The rich history of Indigenous traditional food practices, homesteading, and agricultural production within the RDKS is an integral part of the region's identity. Farming, food gathering and agricultural activities play an essential role in the local food economy and improving the quality of life of residents. This *Agriculture Sector Support Plan* provides the RDKS staff and decision-makers, along with all members of the regional agricultural community, a strong road-map and directive towards supporting the stability and growth of agricultural businesses and the local food system within the region.

This *Agriculture Sector Support Plan* is intended to serve the RDKS for at least the next 5 years. The regional agriculture sector will become strengthened and more resilient as a result of full implementation of the Plan's actions - creating positive trickle-down effects for the entire region for years to come.

Appendix I - Stakeholder Engagement Summary Report

Objective and Scope of Engagement

To establish recommendations that are truly based upon the needs of the Kitimat-Stikine food and farming community, the Agriculture Sector Support Plan process engaged with regional stakeholders involved in agriculture. The objectives of the stakeholder engagement were to:

- Understand the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to agriculture in the region;
- Identify gaps that exist within the agricultural sector; and
- Determine potential methods in which the RDKS can support regional agriculture.

Engagement included all types of producers found in the region such as vegetable farmers, ranchers and livestock farmers, speciality crop and mixed farming operators. Several organizations based in the community were also consulted along with provincial organizations, BC Ministry of Agriculture and other regional districts.

Engagement Methods

Several methods were used to identify and contact stakeholders. Primary producers actively farming in the region were identified through research and existing resources, for example:

- Vendor list for the Skeena Valley and Hazelton Farmers' Markets,
- Existing maps³² identifying producers and food businesses,
- The 2015 Greater Terrace Agriculture Plan list of stakeholders, and,
- Internet-based searches for farms and community organizations in the RDKS.

Stakeholders were contacted via an email outreach letter and subsequent follow-up phone calls. Interviews took place over the phone or via online video platforms such as Zoom. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and associated restrictions with in-person meetings and travel, no in-person interviews were conducted.

Engagement Results

Response Rate

A total of 24 stakeholders were contacted to participate in the interviews. The number of total stakeholders interviewed was 15. Details of who participated are described in the following table; the total number of interviews equals more than the number of stakeholders interviewed as several stakeholders have more than one role in the community (e.g. a primary producer that is involved in a community organization) .

| Stakeholder Category | Number of Engagements |
|--|-----------------------|
| Mixed Vegetable Farmers | 6 |
| Livestock Farmers/Ranchers | 3 |
| Community Organizations | 7 |
| Ministry of Agriculture | 1 |
| Other Economic Development Commissions | 1 |
| Total | 18 |

³² <https://lovenorthernbc.com/communities/>; <https://maps.youngagrarians.org/map>

Stakeholder Feedback

The results from the stakeholder feedback are synthesized into the following sections below. Compiled responses ensure anonymity of the stakeholders.

Common Themes

- Interest in increasing local food security and food production.
- Facilitate and support relationships with Indigenous communities in food sovereignty.
- Collaborate with community organizations that already exist in the region and build upon work already being done to avoid duplicating efforts.
- Foster healthy relationships between organizations, governments and residents to ensure successful initiatives within the region.
- Interest in food hub and/or equipment sharing on some scale.
- Each growing area with the RD has different characteristics so should not be treated uniformly.
- Encourage transparency in decision-making around policies and funding decisions.
- Increase the value of local agriculture as a way to boost the regional economy.

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats (SWOT)

Strengths (these can be somewhat controlled internally)

- History of farming and culture of rural homesteading in the region.
- Some homesteading in the region still occurs and there is a knowledge base of how to grow crops and raise livestock in the region.
- Available land for more smaller scale farm businesses (e.g. small-scale livestock, a diversity of annual and perennial crops).
- Established producers are seeing high demand for local foods (some cannot keep up with demand for produce, meats, eggs).
- More affordable land compared to other agricultural areas of BC.
- Farmers' Markets are a great food sales channel incubator for smaller-scale farmers to start out.
- Farmers' Market nutritional program is very beneficial (Hazelton farmers market wouldn't be as successful without this program).
- Farm to School program in region raises awareness of local foods and focuses on building gardens to teach students about growing food.
- Strong and effective non-profit, non-governmental organizations involved in the food system.
- Larger-scale grocery stores willing to stock local products.
- Prince Rupert is an untapped market for producers.

Weaknesses (these can be somewhat controlled internally)

- Small number of producers, therefore small support network.
- Some homesteaders/producers do not participate in knowledge sharing.
- Long travel distances for producers to markets within the region.
- Lack of services and support:
 - No agricultural industry groups or farmers' institute,

- No well-stocked agriculture supply store in the region which increases costs and takes longer for supplies to get to northern farmers.
- Some producers have difficulty starting and maintaining relationships with various sales channels:
 - E.g. Restaurants, grocery stores: need to build relationships and secure consistent orders and quality of product.
- Some producers have difficulty in to overseeing the marketing/branding pieces needed to sell their food and increase access to markets along with the actual farming aspect of their business.
- Lack of business training for small-scale farmers and lack of skilled farm workers.
- Lack of knowledge related to succession planning for retiring farmers.
- Lack of Class A and/or B abattoir in region. Small number of Class D abattoirs with limited capacity.
- Lack of ability to easily dispose of slaughter wastes.
- Lack of trained and licensed butchers in region.
- Consumers' food literacy and education around importance of local food is lacking.
- No large-animal veterinarian in the region.
- Challenges getting people to come to work in the morning (not a lack of jobs, but a lack of motivation) – this is often the result of historical and cultural trauma, other issues at play, but creates barriers to employee retention.
- Lack of clarity around the potential role of the regional district when it comes to agriculture and food.

Opportunities (these are external influences)

- Covid-19 creates opportunity to re-focus on local/regional food systems.
- Climate with fairly long growing season considering northern latitude.
- Good soils in river valleys.
- Diversity of crops can be grown in the region.
- Replacement of imported foods with locally produced foods as there is a very low level of local food production currently.
- Farmers have space to grow but lack of markets and labour.
- Innovations in farming practices can be used to reduce costs of growing foods.
- A permanent structure to act as a covered farmers' market with electricity would support producers.
- Mobile slaughter unit would support increased meat production and subsequent regional sales.
- Creation of a producers co-op to help with bulk purchasing of agricultural supplies and/or regional unified branding.
- Sharing of larger farm equipment between producers may be possible within each cluster of growing area in the region.
- Increase operational funding for organizations supporting local food system (i.e. organizations can gain initial capital start-up costs for initiatives but challenging to obtain funding to maintain operations until the initiative can financially sustain itself).

Threats (these are external influences)

- Impacts from climate change - wet climate and moisture can be an issue for growing some crops.
- Price sensitivity for regional residents as they may have less income to spend on higher priced foods.

- Lack of dedicated regional government support/advocacy for local producers and knowledge of local food system.
- Transportation network can be cut off during emergency events (e.g. flooding).
- Competition with imported foods that are cheaper.
- Region is dependent on the provincial/global supply chain.
- Regional growing areas are geographically distant from one another so hard to network between farm businesses.
- Meat inspection and processing regulations are challenging to navigate in rural/remote communities.
- Uncertainty around sustained funding of non-profit, non-governmental organizations for operational needs (e.g. staffing) that do the heavy lifting of food system coordination in the region.
- Focus of local/regional governance attention on oil and gas, forestry, tourism sectors – the agricultural sector is often neglected even though it has a potentially huge economic role to play.
- Covid-19 and uncertainty regarding food security.

Role of the Regional District in Agriculture and Food

General Support:

- RD to become familiar with organizations and initiatives already taking place in the region and support them.
- Understand the value of work already being completed in the region.
- RD staff and BOD to be continually updated and learning about regional agriculture on a constant basis as new information/projects arise.
- Advocate for local producers and food production and promote locally produced foods (for example, letters of support).
- Conduct and/or fund agricultural research studies (for example, percentage of food that could be produced locally compared to what is currently produced; or, how can more local food be incorporated into local retail stores?).
- RD keep an inventory of all agricultural projects completed in the region and success of projects which can help determine funding needs (e.g. on a dedicated webpage).
- Put together an advisory team to implement the agricultural support plan recommendations (pay team members for time).
- Make connections with neighbouring RD EDCs also doing agriculture work (e.g. RDBN) and AGRI regional representatives.

Funding:

- More funding for increasing local food production.
- Flexible funding to meet community needs and needs of each organization, particularly to cover staffing/operational needs over the longer term.
- With help from local organizations, determine what agriculture and food security projects should be carried out in the region and then incubate/fund those projects and continue to support if they prove successful.

- Provide long-term funding for operations of certain initiatives/organizations that have proven to be successful.
- Help with employment of youth for skills building in agriculture.
- Support the BC Farmers' Market nutrition coupon program for the two Farmers Markets within the region.
- Compensate farmers/organizations when they give time to participate in advisory panels and volunteer their time.
- Facilitate the establishment of a Regional Trust Fund to manage regional money and invest in regional community organizations (for example, the Columbia Basin Trust).

Education and promotion of local agriculture and food:

- Help 'demystify' the idea that small-scale farming can't provide an income.
- Provide resources for consumers about importance and availability of local foods.
- Provide resources for local food retailers on how to connect with producers.
- Promote region as a place for investing in agriculture (e.g. have a package of information ready to go for potential investors in region).
- Build knowledge within the RD, so that a staff member can provide assistance to producers on how to invest in a farm business in the region.
- Promote materials for livestock producers/homesteaders on meat regulations (e.g. how to obtain Class D abattoir license) and how to properly dispose of slaughter waste.
- Advertise the region as an area with a wealth of agricultural business opportunities (attract new people with innovative ideas).

Workshops and Farm Tours:

- Organize a farm tour in each growing area of the region for regional district staff to become familiar with agriculture and for consumers.
- Support hosting workshops/training sessions for producers on technical farming aspects for each growing area in the region.
- Support hosting workshops connecting producers with restaurants/grocery stores.
- Support workshop in bringing livestock producers together to discuss animal health issues and solutions.

Other Actions:

- Determine interest in creating a catalogue of producers willing to share or rent out farm equipment to other producers.
- Support formation of producer co-op to facilitate bulk buying of agricultural supply inputs.

Appendix II - RDKS Agricultural Sector Details

Types and Size of Farms

The Statistics Canada, Census of Agriculture (Ag Census) reported 7,918 hectares of farmland in 2011 in the RDKS; however, the total area of farmland was not reported for 2016.³³

According to the Ag Census data, there were 99 farms operating within the RDKS in 2016. The Ag Census found the following distribution of farm size:

- 16% were under 10 acres,
- 30% were between 10 and 69 acres, and
- 27% farms were between 70 and 179 acres.³⁴

Farms are growing a variety of crops such as, hay and field crops, fruits, berries and nuts, vegetables, nursery products and growing vegetables in greenhouses.³⁵ The following types of livestock are most common, presented in descending order:³⁶

1. Poultry: 66
2. Horses: 38
3. Sheep & Lambs: 17
4. Goats: 12
5. Cattle: 33
6. Rabbits: 8
7. Apiculture/bees: 6

Many farms report agricultural activities of a combination of livestock and crops. According to the 2016 Census of Agriculture, only one farm indicated that they were growing certified organic products for sale, and one was transitioning to certified organic practices. As the Statistics Canada dataset is derived from information that is self-reported by farmers, this is a noteworthy limitation to the statistical reporting process. Nevertheless, it provides an additional layer of information to consider. The Ag Census is updated every 5 years.

In 2020, BC Assessment data shows 65 properties with farm tax status (with profits over a threshold limit of approximately \$2,500) within the RDKS with ten of these farms located in the City of Terrace. According to BC Assessment there are 15 grain and forage farms, 4 vegetable farms, 1 poultry farm, 14 beef farms, 23 mixed farms and 7 farms categorized as “other”.

Number and Age of Farmers

A total of 155 people were recorded in the 2016 Ag Census as farm operators. The gender of farmers is evenly split in the region, with 80 men and 75 women recorded as farmers. The data indicates that the average age of farm operators slightly increased from 55.8 years in 2011 to 56.2 years in 2016.³⁷ Five operators were under the age of 35 and 90 operators were 55 and older. This suggests the need to plan for farm succession as farmers reach retirement age and are looking to pass their operations on to a younger

³³ [Agriculture in Brief: Regional District of Kitimat Stikine](#). 2016. BC Ministry of Agriculture and Statistics Canada.

³⁴ Farms classified by total farm area, [Table 32-10-0404-01](#). 2016. Statistics Canada.

³⁵ Farms classified by farm type, [Table 32-10-0403-01](#). 2016. Statistics Canada.

³⁶ [Agriculture in Brief: Regional District of Kitimat Stikine](#). 2016. BC Ministry of Agriculture and Statistics Canada.

³⁷ Farm operators classified by number of operators per farm and age, [Table 32-10-0442-01](#). 2016. Statistics Canada.

generation. An increasingly older farming population also suggests attention be placed on attracting younger people to farming and retaining young farmers.

Farm Profitability

Total farm capital (or worth) increased from \$65.7 million in 2011 to \$71.1 million in 2016 in RDKS according to Ag Census data.³⁸ The increase in total farm capital is partly attributable to the increase in value of land, buildings, and equipment (Table 1).

Table 4. Value of Farm Capital by Category in RDKS (StatsCan. 2011, 2016).

| | 2011 | 2016 |
|------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| | Total Value (\$) | Total Value (\$) |
| Land and buildings | 59,323,210 | 62,950,030 |
| Farm machinery and equipment | 4,889,629 | 5,569,801 |
| Livestock and poultry | 1,546,444 | 2,634,420 |
| Total farm capital | 65,759,283 | 71,154,251 |

Overall, farm profitability in the area has more than doubled (Table 2), although it is difficult to tell if this a trend or a fluctuation. Gross margin is calculated as gross receipts minus operating expenses, which are the expenses directly related to production. In 2016, the gross margin for farms in the RDKS was 9.7%, indicating that, on average, for every dollar of farm sales generated, farmers gained 9.7 cents. By contrast in 2011, the gross margin was -26.3%, which means that for every dollar of farm sales, farmers lost about 26.3 cents. It is important to note, however, that this represents the gross receipts and not the net revenue.

Table 5. Farm Profitability on the Kitimat-Stikine (StatsCan. 2011-2016).

| | 2011 | 2016 |
|--------------------------------------|--------------|--------------|
| Gross Farm Receipts (\$) | \$2,065,279 | \$4,536,213 |
| Total Operating Expenses (\$) | \$ 2,607,766 | \$ 4,095,852 |
| Gross Margin (%) | -26.3% | +9.7% |

Changes to profitability may be due to fluctuations in income (price obtained for agricultural products) and expenses (such as transportation costs, inputs (such as feed, compost), fuel, and other overhead). Many farms in the region have relatively low gross farm receipts, with 49% reporting less than \$10,000 annually. At low levels of gross farm receipts, even slight shifts in income and expenses can have an influence on overall profitability. Over a third (39%) of farms reported earnings of between \$10,000 and \$49,999 and only 12% earned more than \$50,000 per year.³⁹

³⁸ Farm capital (farm machinery and equipment, livestock and poultry, land), [Table 32-10-0437-01](#). 2016. Statistics Canada.

³⁹Farms classified by total gross farm receipts in the year prior to the census, [Table 32-10-0436-01](#). 2016. Statistics Canada.

Appendix III - Funding Opportunities for Local Governments

| Organization | Deadline | Funding | Notes |
|--|---|----------------------------|---|
| Civic Info Grants Database | n/a | n/a | Up to date listing of funding available for local governments - may partner for applications |
| EcoAction Community Funding Program | March | Between \$20,000-\$100,000 | Funding is available for new projects that engage Canadians and clearly demonstrate measurable, positive environmental results related to clean water or climate change. |
| Farm to School BC | Variable | \$650 - \$3,500 | Various grants for schools to help get students outdoors learning and participating in hands-on experiences in nature. |
| Federation of Canadian Municipalities | Variable | Variable | Multiple programs relating to food security, climate change mitigation, asset management, relationship with Indigenous communities, etc. New or existing municipal employee who will work on initiatives to improve adaptation to local climate change impacts or reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions |
| Government of Canada: Canada Summer Jobs | Ongoing | n/a | Canada Summer Jobs is an initiative of the Youth Employment and Skills Strategy, which aims to provide flexible and holistic services to support all young Canadians develop the skills and gain paid work experience to successfully transition in the labour market. |
| Government of Canada: Community Support, Multiculturalism, and Anti-Racism Initiatives Program | Ongoing, at least 18 weeks prior to event | \$25,000 | Provides funding to community-based events that promote intercultural understanding, or foster civic memory and pride or respect for core democratic values grounded in our history. The primary intention is to create concrete opportunities for interaction among cultural, faith or ethnic communities. |
| Government of Canada: Legacy Fund – Building Communities Through Arts & Heritage | Ongoing | Maximum of \$500,000 | Provides funding for community-initiated capital projects to commemorate historical event, involve resorting spaces of community significance and/or encourage arts and heritage activities. |
| Government of Canada: Western Economic Diversification Canada | Ongoing | variable | A variety of funding programs for economic diversification/support. |
| Investment Agriculture Foundation: Canada-BC Agri-Innovation Program | April | Variable | Enables B.C.'s agriculture and food sectors to accelerate the pace of innovation. |

| Organization | Deadline | Funding | Notes |
|---|------------------------------|---------------------------------|--|
| Northern Development Initiative Trust - Marketing Initiatives | May 11- App intake quarterly | 20,000 | The Marketing Initiatives program provides grant funding to support new campaigns or projects that promote and/or position a community or region to take advantage of opportunities that support economic vitality and diversification. |
| Northern Development Initiative Trust – Economic Diversification Infrastructure | Application intake quarterly | Up to \$250,000 | The Economic Diversification Infrastructure program provides grant funding to support major infrastructure projects in order to strengthen the local economy. |
| Northern Development Initiative Trust- Northern Industries Innovation Fund | Continuous | \$50,000 | Small and Medium Sized Business - The Northern Industries Innovation Fund program provides funding for small and medium sized companies engaged in forestry, agriculture, aquaculture, mining, energy, oil and gas, manufacturing and the supply chain activities related to these sectors. |
| Plan H | 15-Jul | Variable | The PlanH program provides funding to local governments to support learning about the community context for health and well-being, partnership development between sectors, collaborative priority setting for health and well-being in local planning and policy, and innovative action to influence local health outcomes. |
| Province of British Columbia: Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program, Rural and Northern Communities Infrastructure | 22-Oct | Variable | Eligible projects will support public infrastructure, defined as a tangible capital assets primarily for public use and benefit. To be eligible, projects must meet at least one of the following core or alternative outcomes. The core outcomes specific to the RNC program include improved food security. |
| Real Estate Foundation BC | February and Sept | Variable | Local and Sustainable Food Systems Grants - a list of past projects: http://www.refbc.com/interest-areas/local-and-sustainable-food-systems |
| Rural BC Dividend Fund | n/a | \$10,000 - \$500,000. | The BC Rural Dividend has provided \$25 million a year to assist rural communities with a population of 25,000 or less to reinvigorate and diversify their local economies. |
| Union of BC Municipalities - Community to Communities Forum | April, September, December | undefined | This program was designed specifically to help First Nations and local governments connect. |
| WorkBC Employer Training Grant – Job Creation Partnerships | first-come, first-serve | Max of \$10,000 per participant | Foundational Training Stream: assist unemployed EI eligible clients with opportunities to gain meaningful work experience |