

4. Food Security

Communities on an island or isolated by great distances have most of their food shipped in from farms and distributors. Such communities have low food security, especially in an emergency, such as an earthquake or a prolonged ferry strike. Food security is also about food quality and accessibility. When relying on trucked-in sources, the cost of food is higher, and that cost increases as fuel costs rise. High food costs make it difficult for low wage earners and people on fixed incomes to feed themselves and their families.



4.1 Food Bank Usage

Food banks and soup kitchens are programs that began as temporary measures to serve people in need. They are now permanent fixtures in the Comox Valley. There are six main emergency food support programs: Comox Valley Food Bank, Courtenay Foursquare Church, the Salvation Army, St. George's Pantry, St. Vincent de Paul, and AIDS Vancouver Island Cold Weather Outreach. The recent economic downturn has increased the use of food banks and other food programs across the board, although this reported increase is based on staff observations, and not statistical numbers.⁷⁷

From March 1, 2007, to February 28, 2008, the Comox Valley Food Bank distributed 7,711 bags of food at their depot.

Recipients are given one bag of groceries once a month that covers basic meals for three days. Families of 2 also receive 1 bag per month. Families of 3-4 receive 2 bags, and 5 or more in a family receive 3 bags of groceries. The approximate value of the bag of groceries is \$25.00: this is a \$5.00 increase since the *2004 QOL Report*. A typical bag of groceries includes (new items since 2004 are marked):

1 litre of milk	1 large can of spaghetti sauce	16 individual bags of tea
1 can of fruit	1 500 gram package of butter	1 can of vegetables (new)
1 small bag of rice	1 package of Ichi-ban noodles	1 small bag of oatmeal (new)
2 cans of soup	1 can of baked beans	

⁷⁷ Verbal reports at the Inter-agency Brown Bag Meeting sponsored by the Comox Valley Social Planning Society, April 7, 2009.

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Additional items that may be added depending on availability, such as a package of hamburger meat, or a package of dry cereal, or bread and baked goods (mostly day old), or perishable fruit and vegetables. In addition to their monthly grocery allowance, clients can return throughout the week and pick up items that have been donated by stores within the community.

Staff at the Comox Valley Food Bank reports an increase in homeless individuals with children, and an increase in "the working poor" with both full time and part time employment. There are also more people reporting no source of income.⁷⁸

Approximately 49% of the food bank clients were on social assistance in 2007 compared to 62% in 2003. Although it appears that there are fewer people on assistance, the decrease is actually due to a change in income assistance rules.⁷⁹ Clients who would normally be qualified for income assistance have had their benefits discontinued due to a two year maximum on assistance.

The food bank participates in the "Plant a row, grow a row" (PAR-GAR) program where gardeners grow a row of vegetables to donate to the food bank. This initiative is sponsored by the Canadian Food Banks, the Canadian Composting Organization, and the HGTV television network. In the 2008 growing season, more than 380 pounds of produce was harvested from the gardens at the compost centres in the Valley and in Campbell River. The Comox Valley Regional District plans to increase the garden beds by 50% at both centres for the 2009 growing year.⁸⁰



4.2 Community Meal Programs

The Comox Valley has a wide variety of community meal programs, some that remain unknown to many citizens as the volunteers quietly fill the need in the community as best they can.

The Sonshine Lunch Club operates out of St. George's United Church. They are open Mondays, Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays. They served 28,634 meals in 2007 and predicted that they would serve 35,360 meals in 2008: this would be a 6.3% increase from 2001. Each day they were open in 2008, they served an average of 170 people. The average in 2007 was 138 people a day. On Tuesdays, Mental Health uses

⁷⁸ Verbal reports at the Inter-agency Brown Bag Meeting sponsored by the Comox Valley Social Planning Society, April 7, 2009.

⁷⁹ Comox Valley Food Bank. Manager, Jeff Hampton. Interview May 23, 2008.

⁸⁰ 2008 Comox Valley Regional District Annual Report, p. 19.

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the church to offer lunches to their clients. During their annual Christmas dinner for 2007, they served 230 people.⁸¹

Other food programs cater to specific groups. The Stone Soup Program provides a safe neighbourhood place for young families to meet. Their program helps parents and children build relationships and network with other families. They served lunch to an average of 1,500 families during 2007. They also provide a safe indoor and outdoor play area and give talks about nutrition, health, and other parenting issues. Parents can also meet with health nurses at the house for consultation and discussion. They are open Tuesdays and Thursdays from 10:00 am to 1:00 pm.⁸²

Four Square Gospel Church runs a soup and sandwich program that currently averages over 100 people day and on some days has had 130 people in attendance:⁸³ This has grown from 20 people in the year 2000.⁸⁴

The Salvation Army provided approximately 5,000 breakfasts and dinners at its co-ed emergency homeless shelter in 2007: this is a 29.5% increase from 2003.⁸⁵ They had over 3,000 "stays" in 2007 consisting of 365 unique individuals. In 2005 they started a Tuesday Bag Lunch program and have provided approximately 5,000 lunches to an average of 200 unique individuals. The Salvation Army gives out food hampers four times a year which consists of 1.5 bags of non perishable items. At Christmas they distributed about 600 hampers. Coast Realty distributed another 600 hampers. Between the two agencies, the hampers provided food for approximately 2400 people.⁸⁶

LUSH Valley Food Action Society provided over 16,000 pounds of fresh fruit to the community in their 2008 harvest year.⁸⁷ LUSH Valley is the only food security organization in the district with several programs to tackle food security issues. The *Fruit Tree Program* (since 2002) is a harvest sharing partnership among fruit tree owners, volunteer pickers and local food distribution agencies, such as food pantries and soup

⁸¹ Sonshine Lunch Program. President, Mac Wilson. Interview June 24, 2008.

⁸² Stone Soup Program. Co-ordinator, Rhonda Davis. Interview June 24, 2005.

⁸³ Four Square Gospel Church. Judy Woods. Interview June 6, 2008.

⁸⁴ Four Square Gospel Church. Helen Brown, Coordinator.

⁸⁵ Salvation Army. Program staff. Interview February 20, 2004.

⁸⁶ Salvation Army. Community Services Director, Shawn Wilson. Interview June 9, 2008.

⁸⁷ LUSH Valley Food Action Society. Acting Executive Director and President, Betty-Anne Juba. Interviewed July 15, 2009.

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kitchens. *Planning for Plenty*, a project with Vancouver Island Health Authority, Community Health under the Community Food Action Initiative, fosters awareness about food security, increases access to local healthy food, and boosts the community's capacity to achieve food self-sufficiency.

"The Hub", at 1126 F Piercy Avenue in Courtenay, houses the LUSH administration offices, a warehouse, a meeting room and a commercial kitchen where processing and other learning initiatives, such as food preserving and fruit tree pruning occur. The facility is accessible by ramp.⁸⁸

A farming initiative that began June 2009, sponsored in part by a Provincial /Federal Job Creation Program, farms two plots of land with the food destined for distribution to the community.

LUSH is planning to start a *Food Rescue* program in September 2009. The program will intercept food from Health Board approved sectors of the food industry before it goes to the landfill. Food will be sorted, processed, and redistributed to the community where it is most needed. Waste will be turned into animal feed or compost.⁸⁹

The new LUSH web site, launched in 2009, distributes food security information to the community at large. Visit www.foodcomoxvalley.org. Subscribers can receive emails of the weekly newsletter.

Monthly meetings are every 2nd Thursday at 4:00 pm and are open to the community.

Related Indicators: Lone Parent Families – Employment and Economy

4.3 School Lunch Program

BC's Ministry of Education CommunityLINK Nutrition Programs include either snack and/or meal programs. Funding is directly allocated to schools in need: determined by school request and vulnerability data. Wherever possible, funding is used to supplement already existing initiatives within schools. Schools are encouraged to utilize as many different sources as possible (Fruit and Vegetable program, school milk program, Dry Foods, PAC support, community and school volunteers, in kind donations) to create nutritional support programs most suited to their schools and students.

In 2002, seven schools offered various school lunch programs. In 2008, 14 of the 28 schools in School District 71 had programs funded by Community Links (CL). Some

⁸⁸ LUSH Valley Food Action Society web site. Available at <http://www.foodcomoxvalley.org/>.

⁸⁹ LUSH Valley Food Action Society Newsletter, Winter 2009, p.3.

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schools have programs outside of CL funding. These schools have a breakfast program of some sort available to all students. Regular recipients are children of single parents, children of the working poor, and low income families.

Schools report that approximately 325 students use the meal programs on a regular basis. The daily numbers fed vary from school to school. There may be two students or 50. The biggest challenge reported by the schools was meeting the healthy food guidelines as food costs continued to rise.

A partnership between the School District and the Wachiay Friendship Centre formed in 2007 called the Dry Foods Program. The School District provides \$8,000 to the program, and the Wachiay Friendship Centre gives \$14,000. The Centre purchases non-perishable food items such as soup, crackers, and granola bars. All schools have access to this supply to supplement their other meal programs.

Parent Advisory Councils informally contribute to meals in some schools, as do local grocery stores. Four schools participate in the Fruits and Vegetable Program; five schools participate in Dairy Program, and often use these to supplement their CommunityLINK allocations. School representatives believe that children who participate in the meal programs form stronger connections to the school community.

“They have a connection with the parent volunteers and with others in the breakfast club. They select their own food and clean up after themselves. They even, of their own accord, wanted to start an anti-bullying club.”⁹⁰

Anecdotal reports from classroom teachers indicate that students who participate in breakfast/lunch programs are generally more alert and ready for instruction.⁹¹

Related Indicators: Lone Parent Families – Employment and Economy



4.4 Cost of Food for a Family of Four

Healthy eating is a cornerstone of healthy living. Optimal growth and development of young children depend on having enough of the right foods. Along with active living, healthy eating helps maintain weight, preventing many diseases in children and adults.⁹²

⁹⁰ School District 71. Allan Douglas, Director of Elementary Instruction. Summary of Community Links June 2007 report.

⁹¹ School District 71. Allan Douglas, Director of Elementary Instruction. Phone and emails, June 2008.

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The monthly cost to feed a family of four in British Columbia in 2007, as determined by the Dieticians of Canada, was \$715: up 10% from \$648 in 2003. It cost, on average, \$715 a month to purchase a healthy “food basket” (see next paragraph) for a family of four (two adults, two children) in BC. The highest cost is \$796 in the Vancouver Coastal Health region compared to \$680 in the Interior Health region.

The food basket includes 66 basic foods that require food preparation skills. It does not include take-out or restaurant meals, nor does it account for any special dietary needs, differences in activity levels, or cultural food choices. It does not include any non-food items such as personal care or household supplies. The reference family of 4 consists of mother and father (ages 25-49) and two children (boy 13, girl 7).⁹³

The support rate from income assistance for the reference family in 2007 is \$401: the rate has remained the same since 2001. The monthly rate for shelter for 2007 is \$700: this is only a \$50 increase since 2001. For the years 2002-2006 the shelter allowance decreased to \$590.⁹⁴

The high cost of food for a family of four exceeds a low income level and puts individuals at risk of food insecurity in the Comox Valley and in BC.

Related Indicators: Employment and Economy



4.5 Farmers' Market Impact

In British Columbia there are about 100 known markets, up from 60 known markets in 2000. This growth reflects the increasing role of farmers' markets in local food systems and their contributions to British Columbia's communities. Pat Bell, former Minister of Agriculture and Lands, stated:

“One of the benefits of farmers' markets that receives little attention is what they do to bridge what I call the urban agricultural divide. By speaking directly with the people who grow and produce the food products, the consumer establishes connectivity with the source, and that's something we need more of in a world where

⁹² Dieticians of Canada. The Cost of Eating in BC 2007.

⁹³ Dieticians of Canada. The Cost of Eating in BC 2007.

⁹⁴ BC Ministry of Employment and Income Assistance. Employment and Assistance Rate Tables.

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many youngsters think what they're eating comes from the supermarket."⁹⁵

In January 1992, ten local farmers in the Comox Valley met under the guidance of the District Agriculturist. By opening day on May 2, 1992, twelve producers were ready to sell their wares. Baked goods, preserves, and seafood were soon introduced to accommodate customers, adding diversity to the market. By the end of the first year, thirty vendors had sold at the market. Some of the original farmers who still sell at the market today are: Arden Farm, Kirby Road Farm, Ryegate Farm, and On-line Farms. All products must be grown or produced in the Regional District of Comox-Strathcona. The Comox Valley Farmers' Market has a "food only" policy.⁹⁶

In 1994 the first newsletters were produced and live entertainment became a regular part of the market scene. In 1997 a second market was started in downtown Courtenay on Wednesday mornings. The market season was extended to include an indoor winter market in 2001. The winter market is located at the Native Sons Hall and continues until the last Saturday before Christmas.⁹⁷ According to the minutes of September 10, 2007, 78 applications were approved as vendors.⁹⁸

New markets have started elsewhere. In 2007, the Miracle Beach Farmers' Market began. Located at the Miracle Beach Landing in Black Creek, it runs from June 26 – August 28 every Thursday from 4-7pm. In order to participate in the Miracle Beach market, vendors must be local farmers/growers or artisans. Currently, the vendors come from as far north as Campbell River and as far south as Qualicum. In 2007 there were 30 vendors participating in the market.⁹⁹

Customer Survey

A team of North Island College (NIC) students conducted a survey that included interviews with 16 customers at the Saturday and Wednesday markets. While this small sample did not allow them to draw conclusions about all Comox Valley Farmers' Market

⁹⁵ BC Association of Farmers' Markets and School of Environmental Planning, University of Northern BC. Economic and Community Impact Assessment Final Report November 22, 2006.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Comox Valley Farmers' Market. History – Since 1992!

⁹⁸ BC Association of Farmers' Markets and School of Environmental Planning, University of Northern BC. Economic and Community Impact Assessment Final Report November 22, 2006.

⁹⁹ Miracle Beach Farmers Market. Karen Falk, Organiser. Interview June 11, 2008.

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customers, it gave insight to some of them. The following results provide a profile of the customer survey respondents.

Respondents said they planned to spend an average of \$20.91 the day they were surveyed. The composition of the respondents is listed below.¹⁰⁰

10 respondents were female, 6 were male.

The average (weighted) age of respondents was 54.6 years.
(For BC: 48.2 years).

The average (weighted) household income was \$47,143.

The information collected in this assessment enabled the survey team to measure the economic and community impact of the Comox Valley Farmers' Market.

Economic Impact Assessment

Measuring the economic impact of the farmers' markets is a way to measure the ripple effect of people's spending at the market. How does this spending benefit the local economy? The ripple effect includes the revenues to the market vendors and the monies vendors spend on inputs (seeds, feed, and ingredients, etc.) to get to the market.

Economic benefits, which include direct, indirect, and some induced effects, are measured in terms of revenue (\$), output (\$), and employment (jobs). This study measured only revenues that accounted for direct and indirect effects. NIC students chose to calculate revenue benefits using a multiplier of 2.0, a commonly used number in other studies of farmers' markets. This multiplier means that for every dollar spent at the market another dollar is spent in the local economy.

The annual economic impact is calculated by multiplying direct annual sales by the multiplier. Direct annual sales are calculated as follows:

$$\begin{array}{ccccccc} \text{Average expenditure} & \times & \text{Number of spending} & \times & \text{Number of sessions} \\ \text{by customer} & & \text{customers per session} & & \text{per year} \end{array}$$

¹⁰⁰ BC Association of Farmers' Markets and School of Environmental Planning, University of Northern BC. Economic and Community Impact Assessment Final Report November 22, 2006.

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For the Saturday Comox Valley Farmers' Market, annual direct sales are:

$\$20.91 \text{ per customer visit} \times 1,181 \text{ spending customers} \times 37 \text{ sessions} = \$688,740$

Using a multiplier of 2.0, the annual economic impact of this market is: \$1.4 million. For the Wednesday Comox Valley Farmers' Market, annual direct sales are:

$\$13.14 \text{ per customer visit} \times 281 \text{ spending customers} \times 17 \text{ sessions} = \$52,780$

Using a multiplier of 2.0, the annual economic impact of this market is \$105,560. Combined, these results mean that the Comox Valley Farmers' Market has a total economic impact of approximately \$1.5 million per year; money that contributes to the local economy each year. These monies benefit not only market vendors but also the local businesses that supply these vendors. The total estimated annual economic impact for all farmers' markets in BC is \$65.3 million.

Community Impacts

To measure the "spill over" effect of the Comox Valley Farmers' Market, the survey team estimated the impact of market customers spending at local businesses on the day of the market. 73% of market customers said they would do additional shopping at neighbouring businesses while in that area of town. Using the same method as above, the annual economic impact of additional spending is \$984,700 for the Saturday market, and \$133,000 for the Wednesday market. Combined, these figures add over \$1 million of additional spending by market customers annually. The estimated annual economic impact of farmers' market customer spending on neighbouring businesses in all of BC is \$53.3 million.

The Comox Valley Farmers' Market also contributes to the social development of the area. 15 of 16 respondents to the customer survey said the farmers' market was their primary reason for being in town that day. In addition, six of 16 respondents spent over an hour at the market and at least half that time talking with others. The Comox Valley Farmers' Market is not only a place to find seasonal food but also a place to come together to build community.¹⁰¹

¹⁰¹ BC Association of Farmers' Markets and School of Environmental Planning, University of Northern BC. *Economic and Community Impact Assessment Final Report*, November 22, 2006.



4.6 Organic Food

Certified organic farmers are committed to maintaining standards which protect the health of land, air, water, animals, wildlife, and people. BC Certified Organic food is grown and raised in ways that respect BC's natural environment. Healthy soil, wise use of water, and a balanced farm ecosystem are hallmarks of organic agriculture. That means cleaner air, safer drinking water, and healthier food chains, here in BC and around the world. Organic food is grown without synthetic herbicides, pesticides, hormones, or genetically modified organisms (GMOs).¹⁰²

BC has emerged as a leader in organic farming in Canada, with the greatest number of organic farms growing both fruit and vegetables. As of 2003, 21,735 acres of land in BC were being managed organically, with another 5,686 acres in transition. Women are particularly drawn to organic farming, with 40% of organic operators being female (compared to 36% of conventional farm operators).

Table : Organic Farmers and Organic Processing & Handling

Farmers		Processing & Handling	
Number Certified	482	Certified Processors	103
% of Total Farms in BC	2.8	Certified Handlers & Traders	57
% of Organic Farmers in Canada	13	% of Organic P & H in Canada	20
Number in Transition	108		
Value of Production	29.1		

Source: Certified Organic Associations of BC, Provincial Summaries Organic Statistics 2005 BC

Table : Certified Producers - BC & Comox Valley

BC		Comox Valley	
Year	Number	Year	Number
1992	154	2007	11
2005	484		

Source: Certified Organic Associations of BC, Provincial Summaries Organic Statistics 2005 BC

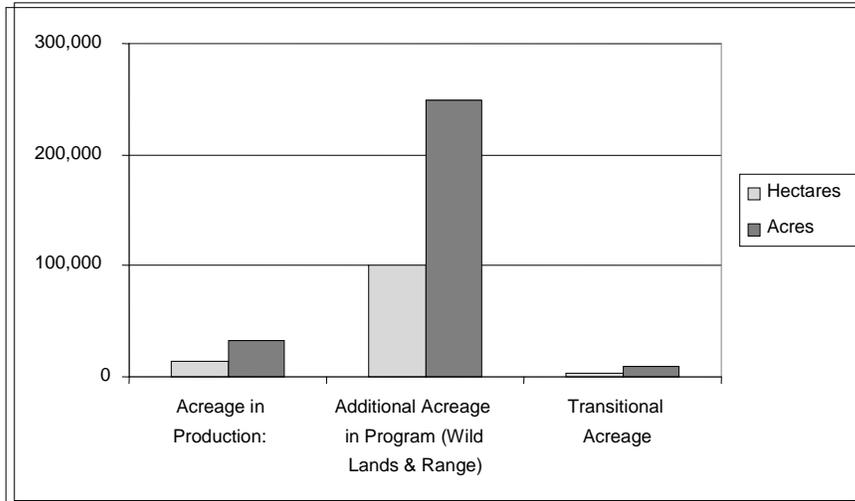
Over half of BC consumers are buying organic. The majority of organic shoppers purchase their organic foods at mainstream grocery stores, although farmers' markets

¹⁰² Certified Organic Associations of British Columbia web site, About Organic: Why Buy Organic? Available at <http://www.certifiedorganic.bc.ca/aboutorganic/whybuy.php>.

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and other direct-to-consumer sales continue to be important sources for regular organic consumers.¹⁰³

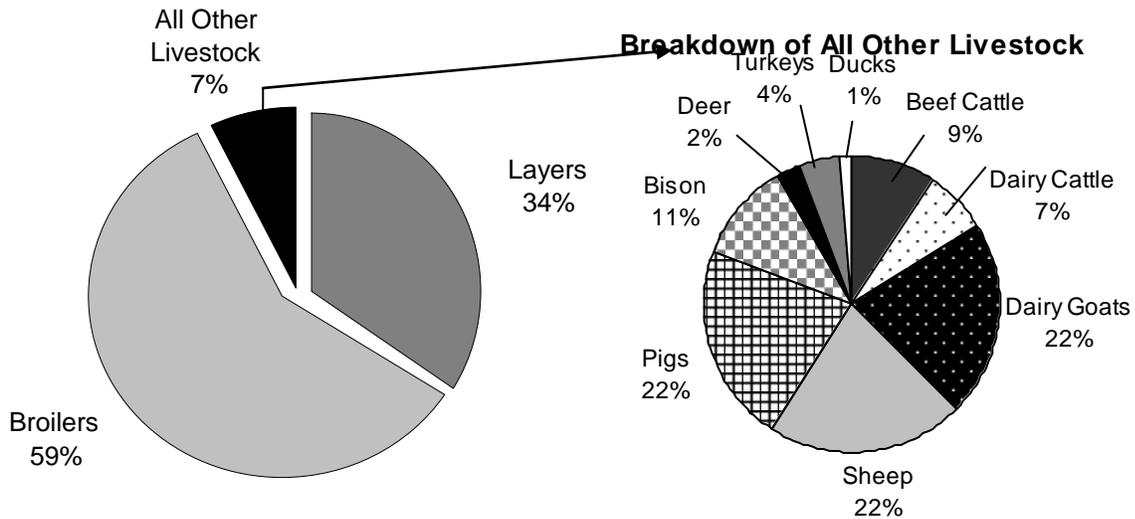
Figure : BC Areas in Production, Program, and Transition



Source: Certified Organic Associations of BC, Provincial Summaries Organic Statistics 2005 BC.

The two figures below show the breakdown of organic livestock and crops in BC. Chickens, both layers and broilers, make up the bulk of organic livestock (93%).

Figure : Organic Livestock in BC

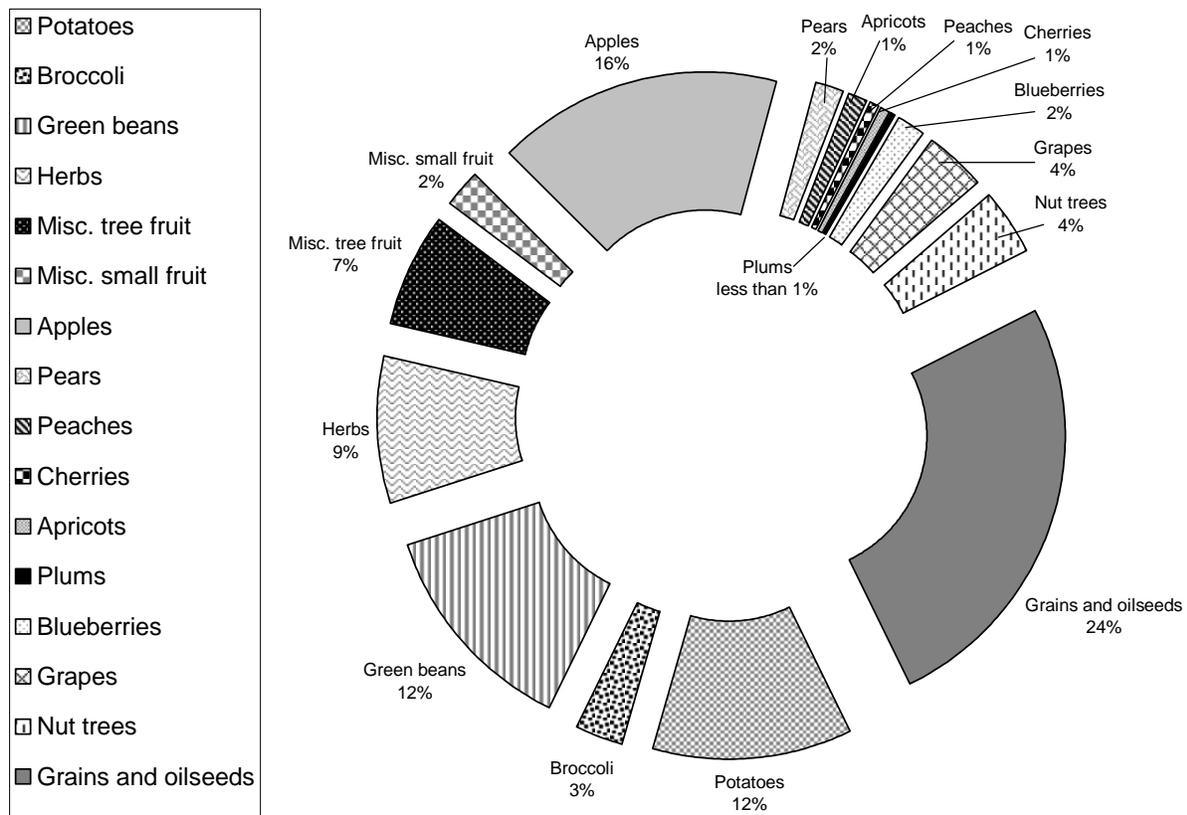


Source: Certified Organic Associations of BC, Provincial Summaries Organic Statistics 2005 BC.

¹⁰³ Certified Organic Associations of British Columbia web site, About Organic: Why Buy Organic?

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Figure : Organic Crops in BC (minimum figures)



Source: Certified Organic Associations of BC, Provincial Summaries Organic Statistics 2005 BC

The farming industry generates \$12 billion annually, employs over 230,000 British Columbians, exports to over 50 countries, supplies more than half of BC's food requirements, and is a valuable contributor to social and cultural life.¹⁰⁴



4.7 Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR) Land Use

The Agricultural Land Reserve creates habitats for wildlife and supports biodiversity. ALR lands are "open, green spaces" that "provide scenic landscapes, recreation opportunities, and contribute to our enjoyment of BC's outdoors."¹⁰⁵

In 1973 the British Columbia provincial and local governments established a land use zone for the purpose of protecting the decreasing amount of agricultural land. A total of

¹⁰⁴ BC Agricultural Land Commission web site, *Preserving Our Foodlands*.

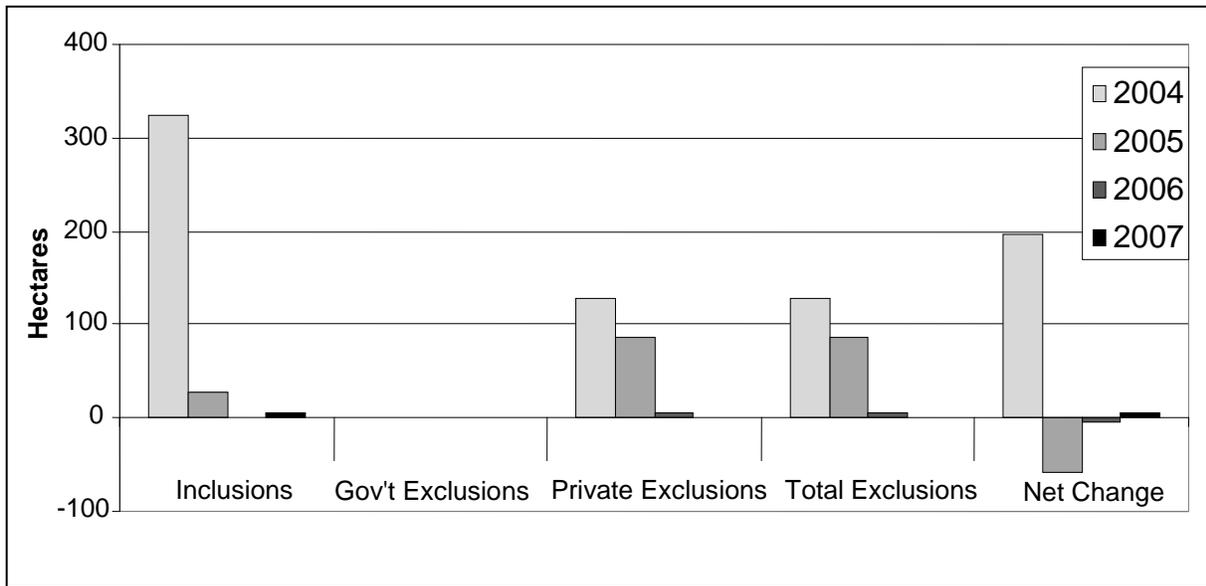
¹⁰⁵ Smart Growth BC web site, Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR).

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5% of BC's land was incorporated into the Agricultural Land Reserve.¹⁰⁶ 2% of Vancouver Island is designated as ALR.¹⁰⁷

43,725 hectares (1 hectare=2.47 acres) of land was designated ALR at its inception in 1973. Since 1973, 4,778 hectares have been included in the ALR and 8,192 hectares removed: leaving a net loss of 3,415. From 2004 to 2007, 356.4 hectares of land have been added to the ALR and 217.8 hectares of private land excluded. The net change over this four year period has seen an increase in ALR land by 138.6 hectares.

Figure: ALR Areas Included and Excluded by Regional District, Comox Valley



Source: BC Agricultural Land Commission, *ALR Maps by Regional District: Comox Valley*.

¹⁰⁶ BC Agricultural Land Commission, *History of the ALR*.

¹⁰⁷ BC Agricultural Land Commission web site, Chart 1: Percentage of ALR by Region, January 1, 2008.