



Agriculture's Connection to Health: Responding to Local Governments

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Agriculture-Health Evidence Topics Important to Local Government Planning Activities

PHSA's *Agriculture's Connection to Health: A summary of the evidence relevant to British Columbia* was produced to consolidate health evidence related to agriculture. The evidence review addresses issues that fall within both provincial and local jurisdictions. Topics related to local government planning activities include:

- local food availability
- food cultures and availability
- food self-sufficiency
- agricultural policy and land use
- economic security
- environmental quality
- climate change impacts and adaptation

See the *full report* or *executive summary* for health evidence findings.

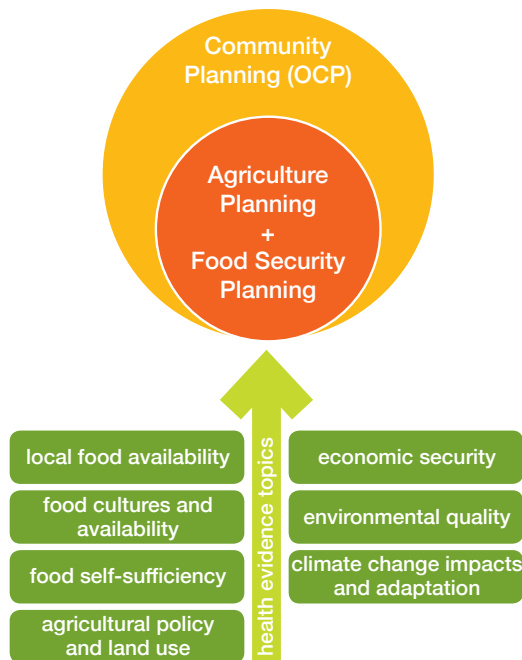
Health, Agriculture, and Local Governments

Local governments in BC are looking to health authorities for input into local planning activities that involve agricultural land. Though their jurisdiction over agriculture is limited, local governments play an important role in decisions about agriculture that can impact human health in communities. Local government planning activities set visions, objectives, policies, and actions for agriculture. Communities will benefit from health authority input into these activities.

This resource will assist health authorities to respond to local government requests for the health perspective on agriculture. It describes three types of local planning activities that focus on agriculture, references evidence from a recent PHSA evidence review, and provides examples of requests that local health authorities may receive. The intent is to guide local health authorities to craft informed, place-based responses that assist community decision making.

Local Government Planning Activities for Agriculture

Health authorities may be asked to provide input into various types of planning activities involving agriculture. Community planning, agriculture planning, and food security planning are some of the local planning activities that would benefit from health authority participation.



Community Planning

Community planning is a broad activity that shapes how communities develop—and therefore covers many topics. Official community plans (OCPs) embody the work of community planning. They are local government bylaws that provide policies for land use, economic development, social policies, environmental policies and GHG emissions—topics that have a relationship with agriculture. In smaller communities, OCPs may contain the extent of a community's agricultural policies. In larger communities, complementary plans or strategy documents may develop agricultural policies in more detail.

See PHSA's *Introduction to Land Use Planning for Health Professionals* for more information.

Agriculture Planning

Agriculture planning develops policies and actions either as part of an OCP or as a separate plan that complements the OCP, often called an agricultural area plan or agricultural area strategy. Agriculture planning activities focus on a local government's farm area, typically with intent to support farming, strengthen rural character, and clarify the role of traditional agriculture in community sustainability through policies, implementation actions, and land use plans.

Food Security Planning

Food security planning typically focuses on both traditional and non-traditional forms of agriculture, seeking to create a community local food system that supports the local economy. Food security planning looks at the entire food system: production, processing, distribution, consumption, and disposal. Planning activities develop food security policies and actions either as part of an OCP or as a separate plan that complements the OCP. In a separate plan or strategy, food security is commonly integrated with planning for agriculture, health, and social, economic, and environmental sustainability; such plans and strategies can go by many names (food system, food self-sufficiency, food self-reliance, local food, community agriculture, etc.).

Regional Planning

Regional planning activities help to shape local planning activities. Regional growth strategies provide high-level guidance and coordination for local governments within a region, shaping the overall settlement of the region over a 20-year period. They also address the integrity and security of the region's agricultural land reserve and productive resources. Community planning activities must respond to the plan for the region.

Responding to Local Government Requests

The following are four examples of possible requests that a local government may make to a health authority. Findings from PHSA's evidence review provide a starting point from which to consider the topic of agriculture. Health authorities can apply these findings by considering the issues specific to their health area. Gathering local information will help health authorities frame a response.

Request #1

We're currently updating our official community plan and specifically our land use plan, which includes land in the agriculture land reserve (ALR). Does farmland have any community health implications?

Findings

- Local policies that support the ALR help to protect and preserve agricultural land (PHSA report, p30)
- Farmland preservation helps to maintain a level of food production that contributes to food self-sufficiency, and food self-sufficiency supports healthy eating (pp24–28)
- Greater availability of locally produced fruits and vegetables may increase their consumption (pp17–19)
- The agriculture sector employs around 22,900 people in BC (p34)
- Farm-to-school/institution initiatives have the potential to contribute to healthy eating (pp22–23)

Applying findings locally

- How food self-sufficient is the area? Are low self-sufficiency levels suspected of having an impact on the population's health?
- Are local fruits and vegetables available in the local health area (when in season)?
- Does the area's population show low consumption rates of fresh fruits and vegetables and evidence of nutrition-related diseases?
- Do agricultural lands provide significant employment in the area?

Local Information Is Key

Responses to local government requests should use information specific to the community.

- ❑ Look for information that is geographically specific and as local as possible (community-based, municipal, or regional). *BC Community Health Profiles* provide local health statistics.
- ❑ Keep in mind whether the local government has jurisdiction over issues.
- ❑ Avoid the use of jargon or explain such terms.
- ❑ Connect directly with the individual who made the request to strengthen the relationship between organizations.
- ❑ Respond within the required timeline.

- Are there any initiatives currently connecting area farms to schools or other institutions? Are positive health outcomes suspected? Or is there demand?

Request #2

We're undertaking a new food security plan for our community. What are some health considerations that relate to agriculture for food security and self-sufficiency?

Findings

- Farmland preservation helps to maintain a level of food production that contributes to food self-sufficiency (PHSA report, pp27, 30)
- Food self-sufficiency supports healthy eating (pp24–28)
- Greater availability of locally produced fruits and vegetables may increase their consumption (pp17–19)
- BC will experience increases in temperatures and frequency of weather events, which have the potential to negatively impact crop yields in some regions (p39–41)
- Some regions may experience increased food production capacity due to increasing temperatures (p39)
- Food self-sufficiency in BC is increasingly important as extreme weather will affect production in California, which is currently where 40%–50% of BC's supply of fruits and vegetables comes from (p26)

Applying findings locally

- How food self-sufficient is the area? Are low self-sufficiency levels suspected of having an impact on the population's health?
- Does the area's population show evidence of disease related to low consumption rates of fresh fruits and vegetables (or high consumption of non-local or processed food)?
- What climate change impacts on agriculture are expected in the area? How would this affect food self-sufficiency?
- What climate change impacts are expected in regions where the area's non-local food is sourced? How would this affect food security?
- Do expected climate change impacts create an opportunity to change which agricultural products are being produced or to increase the amount of land under food production?

Request #3

Our social planning department is researching the importance of agriculture and food to our community's cultural well-being. What are some issues we should think about?

Findings

- Indigenous foods, foodlands, and waters contribute to healthy eating and physical health and are core parts of culture and identity for Indigenous populations (PHSA report, pp20–22)
- The availability of culturally appropriate or traditional fresh fruits and vegetables can be an important part of healthy eating for immigrant populations (p20)
- The agriculture sector employs around 22,900 people in BC (p34)
- Farm-to-school/institution initiatives may provide economic benefits to local farmers (pp22–23)
- The availability of local food can help people to feel connected with their environment (p18)

Applying findings locally

- Are there any Indigenous or other cultural groups in the area with specific food needs and are these needs being met? Does local agriculture or do local foodlands play a role?
- Do agricultural lands, or the processing of food from local agricultural products, provide

significant employment in the area? How might unemployment rates be affected with an increase or decrease in farmland under production or local food processing?

- Are there opportunities for partnerships between local farms and institutions that could strengthen local farming operations and bring fresh food to area residents?

Request #4

We've heard from some residents that they are concerned about human health and environmental impacts from agricultural practices. We're currently drafting an agriculture area strategy and would like your perspective on agricultural practices and health.

Findings

- Agriculture can negatively affect surface and ground water quality through nutrient, sediment, bacteria, and pesticide contamination (PHSA report, p35–36)
- Agriculture can negatively affect air quality through contributions to particulate matter, odours, and volatile compounds (pp36–37)
- Pesticides are associated with both negative and positive health impacts (pp37–38)
- Buffers can benefit residents by reducing noise, dust, and odours, and buffers provide environmental benefits such as improving water quality (p38)

Applying findings locally

- What is the quality of drinking water supplied to residents? How do local agricultural practices contribute to water quality?
- What is air quality like in the area? How do local agricultural practices impact air quality?
- Are buffer zones currently being used to reduce the impact of agriculture to the community and environment?
- Is there sufficient distance between new residential developments and commercial agricultural land? Are buyers informed about the potential for odour or noise in agricultural areas?