

HORSE COUNCIL BRITISH COLUMBIA



Agricultural Land Survey Results 2014



The Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR) is a provincial zone in which agriculture is recognized as the priority use. Farming is encouraged and non-agricultural uses are controlled.

The ALR covers approximately 4.7 million hectares. It includes private and public lands that may be farmed, forested or vacant land. Some ALR blocks cover thousands of hectares while others are small pockets of only a few hectares.

In total, the ALR comprises those lands within BC that have the potential for agricultural production.

The Agricultural Land Reserve takes precedence over, but does not replace other legislation and bylaws that may apply to the land. Local and regional governments, as well as other provincial agencies, are expected to plan in accordance with the provincial policy of preserving agricultural land.

The Agricultural Land Commission Act sets the legislative framework for the establishment and administration of the agricultural land preservation program.

Horse Council BC conducted an informal and independent online survey to garner a snapshot of our member's views of the Agricultural Land Reserve. The survey respondents showed overwhelming support for a continuation of the ALR with thoughtful modifications and improvements that would ensure useable accessible farmland for generations of BC residents.



Horse Council BC, with permission from the BC Cattleman's Association (BCAA) used the same survey BCAA sent out in May of 2008. This was done in the interest of being able to compare meaningful data and because of commonalities within both industries. Some questions were reworded slightly to reflect specific needs of an equine farm. The survey was sent electronically to approximately 40% of HCBC's total membership with 13% completing the survey.

HCBC members are passionate and committed to their place within the BC agricultural community and want to see BC as a successful leader in growing and maintaining lands capable of producing food and raising livestock.

A limited number of the respondents indicated they have an equine business to maintain farm status but offered other agricultural pursuits on their land.

Few equine farms in BC are strictly food production but all equine related activity use agricultural land to produce, feed and house horses, **generating 740 million dollars in economic activity for the province of BC annually.**

(2009 Horse Council British Columbia BC Ministry of Agriculture Equine Industry Study)



1. Do you own or live on ALR land?		
	Number of Responses	Response Ratio
Yes	371	66.1%
No	180	32.0%
Unsure	14	2.4%
Total	561	100%

2. Did you purchase your land before or after the ALR was established?		
	Number of Responses	Response Ratio
Before	48	9.9%
After	409	84.5%
Both	28	5.7%
Total	484	100%

3. Are you a bona fide farmer - do you have farm status based on your equine business?		
	Number of Responses	Response Ratio
Yes	165	30.4%
No	382	70.4%
Total	542	100%

4. Do you feel your business options are limited by the land use restrictions placed on ALR land?.		
	Number of Responses	Response Ratio
Yes	135	26.4%
No	320	62.6%
Unsure	60	11.7%
Total	511	100%

5. Do you feel the ALR restricts your ability to sell?		
	Number of Responses	Response Ratio
Yes	137	27.1%
No	326	64.5%
Unsure	43	8.5%
Total	505	100%

6. Rate the importance of land salability to the future of your agricultural business.		
	Number of Responses	Response Ratio
Low	204	42.3%
Med	148	30.7%
High	131	27.1%
Total	482	100%

7. Rate the importance of land salability to your retirement.		
	Number of Responses	Response Ratio
Low	149	29.7%
Med	131	26.2%
High	221	44.2%
Total	500	100%

8. Do you think the current list of permitted uses of ALR land should be further restricted?		
	Number of Responses	Response Ratio
Yes	107	19.5%
No	298	54.3%
Unsure	145	26.4%
Total	548	100%

9. Do you feel the government should provide support programs to offset the restrictions placed on lands within the ALR?		
	Number of Responses	Response Ratio
Yes	257	47.0%
No	163	29.8%
Unsure	128	23.4%
Total	546	100%

10. Do you feel ALR restrictions should be applied to land the same way in all parts of the province?		
	Number of Responses	Response Ratio
Yes	268	48.8%
No	181	32.9%
Unsure	105	19.1%
Total	549	100%

11. Should the ALR land designation be retained on agricultural lands that have been in a First Nations Treaty settlement?		
	Number of Responses	Response Ratio
Yes	382	69.8%
No	53	9.6%
Unsure	114	20.8%
Total	547	100%

12. Do you support payments to landowners for the Ecological Goods & Services (EG&S) provided to society from agricultural land?		
	Number of Responses	Response Ratio
Yes	224	40.9%
No	74	13.5%
Unsure	251	45.8%
Total	547	100%

13. Is the Agricultural Land Reserve the only way to preserve farmland?		
	Number of Responses	Response Ratio
Yes	280	50.7%
No	139	25.1%
Unsure	132	23.9%
Total	552	100%

14. Do you feel conservation covenants should be allowed on ALR lands?		
	Number of Responses	Response Ratio
Yes	287	53.0%
No	66	12.1%
Unsure	188	34.7%
Total	541	100%

15. Do you believe it is critical to secure farmland at a local/regional level?		
	Number of Responses	Response Ratio
Yes	492	88.9%
No	36	6.5%
Unsure	25	4.5%
Total	553	100%

16. Rate the importance of the Agricultural Land Reserve Act in supporting the ability to breed and raise horses		
	Number of Responses	Response Ratio
Low	89	16.3%
Med	217	39.8%
High	240	44.1%
Total	544	100%

17. Are the current economic conditions contributing to your views on the ALR?		
	Number of Responses	Response Ratio
Yes	151	27.4%
No	318	57.8%
Unsure	83	15.0%
Total	550	100%

18. Do you think the ALR should be eliminated?		
	Number of Responses	Response Ratio
Eliminate	41	7.4%
Keep	469	85.2%
Unsure	42	7.6%
Total	550	100%

19. Should exclusions of land from the ALR be permitted?		
	Number of Responses	Response Ratio
Yes	197	35.8%
No	260	47.2%
Unsure	95	17.2%
Total	550	100%

20. Should inclusions of land be permitted?		
	Number of Responses	Response Ratio
Yes	428	77.6%
No	33	5.9%
Unsure	94	17.0%
Total	551	100%

21. If land exclusions are permitted, should this be mitigated by inclusions into the ALR?		
	Number of Responses	Response Ratio
Yes	252	46.2%
No	96	17.6%
Unsure	200	36.6%
Total	545	100%

22. Should land inclusions be in the same region as the excluded land?		
	Number of Responses	Response Ratio
Yes	301	55.8%
No	65	12.0%
Unsure	173	32.0%
Total	539	100%

23. Should exclusions and inclusions be from within the same land capability classification (class 1-7)?		
	Number of Responses	Response Ratio
Yes	275	51.3%
No	55	10.2%
Unsure	208	38.8%
Total	536	100%

24. Do you think the current list of permitted uses of ALR land should be expanded?		
	Number of Responses	Response Ratio
Yes	251	45.5%
No	156	28.3%
Unsure	150	27.2%
Total	551	100%

The following pages are a sampling of opinions from the five questions that allowed for opinions. Selection of comments for publication was done to best portray the average overall consensus.

Review of the comments indicates support for the ALR and a strong desire to see farmland in BC protected and farmers supported.

It was stressed overall that the provincial government should work to ensure farmland and food production is part of the decision making process and policy direction across all ministries.



ALR Survey Summation of Comments.

Q. 3 Are you a bona fide farmer (do you have farm status based on your equine business)? (150 responses)

52.5 % of respondents have farm status for agricultural pursuits other than horses. But all respondents have horses on their farm.

16% are in the process of applying for farm status OR have been denied farm status, majority having horses.

14.5 % did not reply

14% consider themselves hobby farms only and typically had 1-3 horses.

.02 % are 'bona fide farmer' with their equine business.

The following questions garnered responses too varied to quantify with a percentage, so key messages were extracted that showed the most popular opinions.

Q. 13 Is the Agricultural Land Reserve the only way to preserve farmland?

These comments below capture the underlying consensus that respondents placed on the importance of preserving farmland and strengthening the capacity to grow, produce and purchase local food.

"I think a good way to preserve farm land is to promote farming on it: make it easier for people with plans to farm to be able to afford it and maintain it as a farm. For people wanting to start out, purchasing a piece of land in order to farm is almost impossible with any multi-acre piece being well over 1 million dollars plus the cost of investment to get the farm going."

"It's not the only way, but it is the strongest way. BC has a small amount of arable land that is in demand for other non-agricultural uses. The ALR is to preserve farmland on a provincial scale. The ALR provides a landscape for the business of agriculture and secures land for future farmers and ranchers. In addition, local governments must work with the ALC and Ministry of Ag on agricultural area plans, OCPs, and bylaws that support agriculture."

"Highly important, must be left as is rather than the new proposed system (zone 1&2) We are coming into a time of food shortages the ability to have food security for BC that is local is paramount. Horse use on ag land keeps that land available for future use as food growing area, providing rules are being followed re manure, fill dumping etc."

"The ALR needs to operate on a different time scale, i.e. considering needs 30, 50, 100 years from now rather than being forced into the 4-5 year cycle of the political calendar. It needs to be sacrosanct and free from political manipulation and the pressures are only going to get worse."

"I do believe it is critical to secure farmland, especially for food purposes, but the small farmer/rancher is not able to make a living anymore and the large corporate farms/ranches are the only ones continuing this industry. And the ALC is not securing the best farmland currently in use, it is removing southern land for development and adding northern lands which are not as productive."

Q 17 Are the current economic conditions contributing to your views on the ALR?

"The economic conditions are all the more reason to keep land in the ALR. Farm land will be greatly needed in the future. Buying local produce will be the way to go. This would not be possible without farmland."

"The ALR has interfered with my ability to breed horses. The land next to me was taken out of the ALR with restrictions resulting in me being bothered by the neighbours land use."

"1) To afford the land it requires us to work fulltime off site

2) Land all around our farm has been subdivided and large developments going up the mountains - higher income people want to 'look' at the farm as their 'view' but have very little tolerance for farming activity.

3) Feeling more and more 'trapped' on the land - as the smaller parcels imbedded in the city (we have 8 acres) are unlikely to be able to sustain a profitable income.

4) Selling options limited"

"Developers are pressuring owners and government to make changes but that shouldn't have any bearing on our need for farm land. Current conditions are not as important as long term food security and preservation of a rural landscape."

"At any cost we should be hanging on to farmland. Economic challenges and a string of bad luck with breeding has taken away my farm taxation status for the area that I use for the horses so I feel penalized for maintaining my farmland which I do willingly yet I have to pay higher taxes during bad years and I actually resent that."

"There is less and less tolerance for agriculture/animals and more and more pressure on land to be released for development. Then there are crazy restrictions on small half acre plus parcels that are horse friendly but you can't get the zoning to allow even one kept in a good set-up, whereas other communities or areas have different pockets of zoning allowing it. It seems to be getting very random and it's becoming unaffordable to own your own property where you can have a horse."



Q. 25 In your opinion, what changes are necessary to improve the ALR?

Overall comments had a central theme;

- Improved inspection and land classifications system to accurately determine best use of land.
- All government policy and regulations should move in the direction that protects farmland and farm practices and enables food production.
- Put more land into ALR

"Provide mechanisms which limit the ability of local Councils to propose exclusions of land from the ALR. Fundamentally, land use decisions in the ALR should be made on the basis of benefit to agriculture. It is also essential to recognize the long-term nature of agriculture. Short-term concerns should play little role in ALR decisions."

"Many small land sizes of ALR parcels make it impractical to actually use other than for intensive farming - only producing a bare minimum to claim status. ALR should be provided for parcels that are used just for animal husbandry (i.e. boarding stables) even when actual sales of animals don't occur."

The land currently classified as ALR needs to be better classified ie not just from old map/soil data and land classifications that were used to set the ALR but actual on site classification of polygons to check soils, water availability, slopes etc. so a well informed decision can be made on each parcel of land.

"Include horse boarding as farm income ... why not be able to include income for taking care of the old horses? Boarding includes the whole farm cycle: hay production, grain production, yes purchased not grown however contributors."

"grade the classifications: ie: fertile crop producing land should be rated higher and more strictly controlled than a rocky pasture which is only good as a pasture. There should be several classifications and the property should be examined to determine possible uses, rather than an arbitrary classification"

"Increase the budget of the Agricultural Land Commission. Once an exclusion application has been denied, no further exclusion application for that property should be permitted for 7-10 years. Any ALR exclusions should be matched with inclusions of equal or greater size and soil capability. Remove all political influence over the ALC."

"Allowing flexibility and on-site inspections of limited exclusions would allow large acreage bona fide farms to subdivide small portions of limited potential land to improve the viability of the main farm base. Many farms/ranches have ceased to exist by selling all their individual titles because unable to sell small portions of useless land."



Q 26 In your opinion what are some of the recommendations that Horse Council BC can make to government to have the ALR better serve the equine community?

"Reintroduce allowance for boarding stables to qualify as ALR land. These are active "farms", even though many do not breed / produce livestock (since horses are not food stock constant production of animals is impractical and unwanted). Make the income level (to qualify for ALR) higher for boarding stables if necessary."

"Allowing mixed boarding/breeding operations. If the boarding places generate enough income from hay, breeding etc it should be allowed. Hay grown for use or sale to support a boarding facility should qualify. And keeping/maintaining pasture on those properties should count too. Grazing horses should be same as cows."

"Eliminate the dollar earnings requirement as long as the property is being used for the purpose of raising livestock. At least have an averaging over several years. Livestock do not mature on an annual basis like a vegetable or hay crop. This year may result in sales of several thousand dollars, but then not have stock ready for sale for 2 or 3"

"If market price ever comes back for slaughter horses allow them to graze ALR land like cattle. If horses are livestock let's start treating them that way. It is unpopular but there is nothing wrong with horses being bred for human consumption just like cattle."

"The rules regarding farm status need to be made more suited to horse breeding in that it takes approximately four or more years to raise a finished product to sell. The present rules of selling a product yearly for \$2000.00 is not conducive to raising horses."

"I believe those of in the ALR who do not have farm status but derive income from the equestrian industry should be accorded some form of agricultural status based on the financial contribution we make to the agricultural industry. There are several hundred horses in the ALR area in Vancouver, and only few on farm status property."

Horse Council BC agrees with and supports the recommendations of our members. HCBC is willing to work to achieve sustainable, practical farming practices that support BC residents.



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