



Plan to Farm

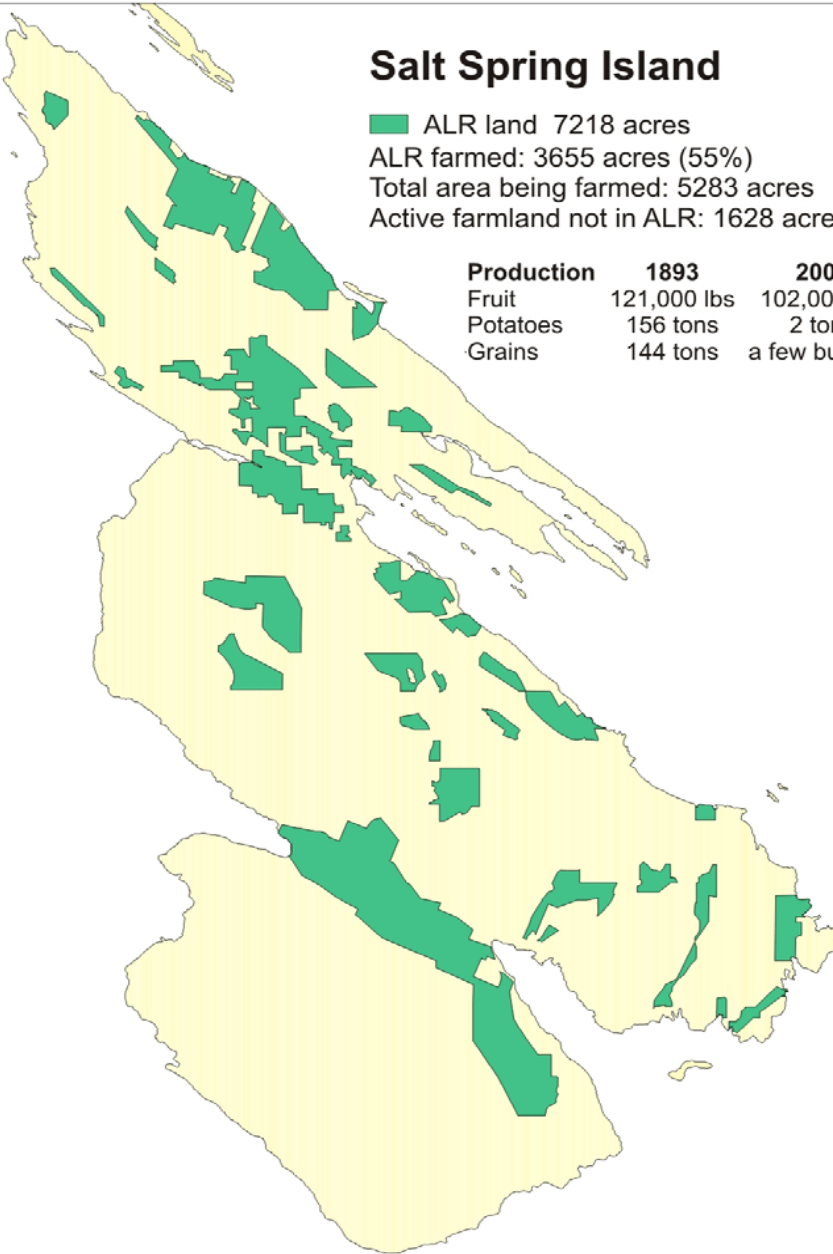
An Area Farm Plan
for Salt Spring Island

January, 2008

Salt Spring Island

■ ALR land 7218 acres
ALR farmed: 3655 acres (55%)
Total area being farmed: 5283 acres
Active farmland not in ALR: 1628 acres

Production	1893	2006
Fruit	121,000 lbs	102,000 lbs
Potatoes	156 tons	2 tons
Grains	144 tons	a few bushels



The Salt Spring Island Area Farm Plan

Our Vision:

“That Salt Spring Island become a place where agriculture is a strong, vital and productive part of the local economy, and is carried out in a manner that protects and promotes a sustainable community.”



Michael Levy Photo

What's the Plan?

Farmers are solitary people. We love our animals and we carefully tend our crops. And yet, in order to revitalize agriculture in our community, we know we have to work together. That's why the three key recommendations of the Salt Spring Island Area Farm Plan all speak to the need to collaborate, cooperate, and coordinate.



“The most important thing you can do to protect agriculture on Salt Spring Island is to preserve the land base.” – Malcolm Bond

2921 hectares (16%) of Salt Spring's land base is in the Agricultural Land Reserve.

Our first recommendation is to

establish a Salt Spring Island Agricultural Alliance.

Not a big bureaucracy, but a small, community-based and farmer-directed office. One that would represent agricultural interests, inside and outside our community, with government, with merchants, with new farmers, and with each other.

Its first job would be to implement the recommendations of this plan. In time, it would become the place to go for information and resources, to help with marketing and promotion, and to locate funding and other assistance to support agriculture. To link farmers with farmers, and farmers with consumers, and farmers with retailers.

Information and linkages are important for our future. But we can't grow agriculture without the land.

That's why our second recommendation is to
establish a community farmland trust.

Its purpose would be to acquire and manage land, to arrange leasehold agreements, and to ensure that farmland held by the trust would be actively farmed in an environmentally and socially sustainable manner.

There are many models of successful farmland trusts, whose goal is not only to preserve the land for future generations, but to provide future generations of young farmers with a place where they can grow, raise their families and their livestock and their crops.

A farmland trust could help protect land from speculation and development, could provide a variety of tenure agreements to suit different needs, and could ensure sustainable agricultural practices.

And we know that individual farmers, burdened with increasing rules and regulations, find it difficult to provide, on their own, all the facilities they need to run a successful farm operation. This is where we think community needs must be met with community facilities.

"If we want young people



to farm on Salt Spring, there has to be some kind of social shift that makes it more socially acceptable to farm." – Bree Eagle

Currently two-thirds of properties in the ALR on Salt Spring smaller than 4 hectares are not farmed.

Therefore, our third key recommendation is to

**establish key community facilities
that support the expansion
of agricultural activities.**



These include the operation of an abattoir, and the establishment of facilities for cold storage, local food processing, and composting. Each of these would ensure that farmers have a place to take their livestock, and to process their food, in a manner that is safe, controlled, and local.

The Area Farm Plan does not take a position that these facilities would be publicly owned – indeed, they might well be run by private operators – but we consider it important that they be available in the community on a regular basis so that local agriculture can flourish on the island.

With those three elements in place – an agricultural alliance, a farmland trust, and key community facilities for agriculture – we believe that Salt Spring Island would go a long way to re-establishing itself as “a place where agriculture is a strong, vital and productive part of the local economy,” as our vision statement encourages.

“We don’t have much time to secure our food supply. Climate change and the end of cheap oil are going to force the issue sooner than we think.” – Dan Jason

Additional Strategies for a Sustainable Agricultural Future

The three key recommendations are big ideas, and important goals. But they're not enough. Through our extensive dialogue process, community members identified a number of other important ideas that are critical for the sustainable future of farming on Salt Spring Island. Details of these recommendations are available in the full report, which we encourage you to read. Here are some of the highlights:

Pursue strategies that protect agricultural land and that make more land available for farming.

Apart from the farmland trust, we must work with local government, the Agricultural Land Commission, and private landowners to see that more suitable land is brought into production. The local Agricultural Alliance office could serve as a means of linking property owners who don't work their own land with willing workers who want to grow food. Various forms of mutually beneficial tenure are available and should be explored.



**Room for growth:
Only about 2% of our
grocers' inventory comes
from local sources.**

Address the farm housing issue.

We all recognize that few young farmers can afford to buy agricultural land on Salt Spring Island. This is an enormous obstacle for the future of farming on the island. Alternative land tenure and leasehold arrangements are useful, but we need more housing for farmworkers on the island. Local government and the Agricultural Land Commission need to become allies in the provision of housing for legitimate farm workers.



“I love the idea of an agricultural alliance. We want agriculture to be a strong force on the island, and the Alliance could be that kind of body.” –
Lisa Lloyd

Develop a coordinated approach to the production and sale of locally-grown products.

These all-important linkages between farmers, growers and producers, and their customers are vital to the success of a local agricultural economy. We can facilitate the operation of farmers’ markets, direct sales, and retail marketing.

Establish a voluntary Salt Spring Island agricultural code of practice and encourage the implementation of beneficial farm management practices.

We believe improved and environmentally-sound farm practices are important for the long-term sustainability of agriculture. Beneficial farm practices can reduce costs and improve local environmental community health.

Increase local understanding and appreciation of agriculture.

Education is a key to better farm management and successful farming operations. This should take a variety of forms, both for children and youth, and on an on-going basis for farmers. We should share our knowledge, learn new techniques, mentor young farmers, and take advantage of federal and provincial resources to improve local agricultural operations.

Local government planning should reflect the priority of agriculture.

In order to preserve our agricultural future, our Official Community Plan and Land Use Bylaw need to give priority to agricultural land uses.



On Salt Spring, only 5 percent of the land in the ALR is used for the production of field vegetables and flower crops.

Develop local agri-tourism guidelines.

We can support local farmers by supporting their opportunity to engage in on-farm experiences for tourists. Agri-tourism activities should be directly related to agriculture, and there are many ways that this can support farm income.



"The viability of a farm is the key to everything. The Plan should set the stage for addressing viability." – Ray Hatch

Increase agricultural awareness of new and potential residents.

New islanders should be encouraged to participate in the agricultural economy, as growers and consumers of local food. At the same time, they may need to be educated about moving into an agricultural community, by increasing their understanding, support and appreciation for local agriculture, and by reducing the potential for conflict between farmers and non-farm residents.

Improve local food security.

Especially as an island community, we must learn to grow and process more of our own food. It's healthy for our environment, for our economy, and, especially for ourselves. The various provisions of the Area Farm Plan all speak to the recognition that a healthy local agricultural sector improves the health of the larger community.

Making the Vision a Reality

Our goal is for agriculture to be an important part of the economy of Salt Spring Island. We also want agriculture to be carried out in a way that protects and promotes a sustainable community.

If the Area Farm Plan is put in place, in time we will have achieved many objectives:

- More agricultural land will be protected and more land brought into agricultural production;
- Farms will be more economically viable;
- Young people will have increased access to land and have more opportunities to farm;
- More food will be grown and raised, and our food security will increase; and
- We will participate more fully in the regional recovery of local agriculture and sustainable food production.

Community facilities will be available so that all farmers will have access to the services they need. Provision of these facilities will mean that individual farmers would not have to pay to set up those facilities themselves, helping make their own farms more viable. They would also assure farmers that the food they produce will meet government regulations.

The Area Farm Plan can help achieve our key objectives, support farms and farmers, and give local priority to agriculture.



“We should be encouraging every family on a lot to grow food.” – Marguerite Lee

Getting Where We Want To Be

Our three key recommendations are:

- to establish a Salt Spring Island Agricultural Alliance;
- to establish a community farmland trust; and
- to establish key community facilities that support the expansion of agricultural activities.

In the immediate term, members of the Area Farm Plan Steering Committee are prepared to work with community groups like the Farmers Institute, the Island Natural Growers, and Salt Springers for Safe Food to help establish the Agricultural Alliance. We hope that the Local Trust Committee, the BC Ministry of Agriculture and Lands, the Capital Regional District, BC Parks and other organizations that have an interest in agriculture will be willing to join us in planning the Alliance.

Initially, this would be a volunteer organization run by a Board of Directors with representatives from the various community groups and other willing organizations. Over time, we envision a paid, part-time coordinator, funded by various sources, who would manage the ongoing responsibilities of the Alliance. One of its roles would be to track our progress and review the position of agriculture in the community periodically.

We expect that the volunteer Board of the Alliance, together with the Farmers Institute, would take the lead in helping establish the local farmland trust. It may be that the Farmers Institute will have community land to serve as the initial donation for this purpose.

Various models for a successful farmland trust already exist; they've been around a long time. We want to review those models carefully and tailor a workable fit for agriculture on Salt Spring Island.

Our third key objective is the establishment of community facilities. An abattoir, cold storage, food processing facilities and a composting location are high on the list of priorities.

We know that establishing these facilities will require both the cooperation of food producers among themselves, the participation of the private sector, and possible government assistance. This is where that all-important coordination between farmers is essential. By working together, providing assured supply, and knowing that the facility will exist when needed, we can help re-vitalize the agricultural sector on Salt Spring Island.

Our shared expertise is also crucial to our success. Local farmers have many decades of agricultural experience. They know what works, and what doesn't. They know what's a problem, and what isn't. We want to tap into that knowledge, and make sure that it's shared with young farmers, new neighbours, and each other.

We depend upon each other. Just as the consumer needs the farmer, so does the farmer need the consumer. To implement a successful agricultural strategy requires that we establish those linkages more closely. Governments, retailers, and marketers also have important roles to play in building a successful agricultural future on Salt Spring Island.

Our commitment is to a strong and healthy agricultural sector within a strong and healthy community.

“We hope to see production doubled in the near future, and Salt Spring Island becoming increasingly self-reliant as time goes by.” AFP Steering Committee

The Community Consultation Process



Development of the Salt Spring Island Area Farm Plan involved many people.

At a very early stage of the process, three separate day-long Community Dialogue sessions were held, averaging over 100 participants. During those discussions, people identified the scope of the problems facing agriculture in our community, and outlined what they thought were the opportunities for agriculture. Finally, they were asked to identify their vision for food and agriculture, and how they hoped to get there.

For those dialogues, we brought together a diverse group of community members: farmers and food processors, retailers, environmentalists, restauranteurs, tourism operators, farmer's market shoppers, and people who just like to eat. That was enough to qualify. As the plan emerged, we also held round-table discussions with experienced farmers to gather their reactions. And we had countless discussions, around the table, over the fence, and in the store. We did a lot of listening.

In the end, the Plan belongs to the community. Because even though we did a lot of rendering, that's where it began in the first place.

– The Area Farm Plan Steering Committee

Acknowledgments and Gratitude

In 2005, the Salt Spring Island Trust's Agricultural Advisory Committee recommended that an Area Farm Plan be developed for the island. In 2006, the Salt Spring Island Farmers Institute and the Island Natural Growers, in collaboration with the Local Trust Committee and the BC Ministry of Agriculture and Lands, began to work on that plan.

This document, and other supporting reports, are the result of that effort.

We wish to acknowledge the financial assistance of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada and the Investment Agriculture Foundation of BC for making this project possible. The Salt Spring Island Farmers Institute, the Island Natural Growers, the Salt Spring Island Local Trust Committee, the BC Ministry of Agriculture and Lands, and the Capital Regional District all provided additional funding and support.

Under the direction of the Steering Committee, Derek Masselink of Masselink Environmental Design produced the report that accompanies this Plan.

The members of the Steering Committee gratefully acknowledge all the funding partners for this project, the work of Masselink Environmental Design, and the support and participation of many members of the Salt Spring Island community throughout the development of this Area Farm Plan.

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Funding provided by:



Ministry of
Agriculture
and Lands



Islands Trust

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