



# Regional Board Report

## Information

**To:** Regional Board  
**From:** Director of Development & Engineering Services  
**Date:** May 15, 2025  
**Subject:** Draft Regional Agricultural Strategy - Public Engagement Launch

**Voting Entitlement:** *All Directors – Unweighted Corporate Vote – Simple Majority (LGA s.208)*

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**Purpose:** To provide an update as to the next steps of the Draft Regional Agricultural Strategy advancing to public engagement.

### Executive Summary:

Agriculture is an important part of the heritage and cultural identity of the Central Okanagan. It contributes to the economy, the landscape, and to the high quality of life enjoyed by residents. Several challenges are facing agriculture in the region, such as pressures from population growth, a changing climate, and an evolving economy. In response, the RDCO is updating the Regional Agricultural Strategy (RAS), which will facilitate a coordinated regional approach to supporting a thriving agricultural sector in the Central Okanagan. The RDCO's original Agricultural Plan was established in 2005. The necessity to update the plan emerged as a priority within the Regional Growth Strategy Priority Projects Plan in 2017.

Phase 2 of the Regional Agricultural Strategy update was launched in October 2024. Multiple forms of engagement, including focus groups, interviews, planning labs, an open house, and a staff-level Working Group have helped shape Phase 1 and 2 of the strategy to date. Representatives from a broad cross-section of organizations (including the agricultural sector, development industry, First Nations, and provincial and local government partner organizations) have been engaged. A project update on the draft vision, focus areas, and early draft recommended actions was presented to the Regional Board on March 20, 2025. Since then, Staff and the consultant team have prepared a first draft of the strategy for the purpose of public engagement.

The Draft Regional Agricultural Strategy has been reviewed by the inter-governmental Working Group and is now ready for public engagement. The Working Group includes representatives from member municipal governments, Westbank First Nation, the cross-commodity Leadership Support Project, the Ministry of Agriculture and Food, Interior Health, the OK Sterile Insect Release program, and the regional agri-food sector. A short survey, hosted on RDCO's public engagement platform [yoursay.rdco.com](https://yoursay.rdco.com), will be shared with the public from May to June to gather feedback from residents on the Draft Regional Agricultural Strategy. To promote the survey and gather feedback across the region, communication tactics will be undertaken including a news release, print and digital advertising, and collaboration with member municipalities to amplify the survey across the region. The emerging common themes and feedback received from the survey will be reviewed to make refinements to the strategy. The Final Regional Agricultural Strategy is anticipated to be presented to the Regional Board for endorsement later this fall.

**Recommendation(s):**

**THAT** the Regional Board receive the Draft Regional Agricultural Strategy – Public Engagement Launch report from the Director of Development and Engineering Services dated May 15, 2025 for information.

Respectfully submitted by: Mariah VanZerr, Regional Planning Manager

Report Approved by: Danielle Noble-Brandt, Director of Development & Engineering Services

Approved for Agenda: Sally Ginter, Chief Administrative Officer

**Strategic Plan Alignment:**

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Emergency preparedness  | <input type="checkbox"/> Truth and reconciliation       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Health and wellness     | ✓ Environment and climate – Regional priority only      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Regional transportation | ✓ Growth and development – Electoral Area priority only |

**Background:**

The Central Okanagan is one of Canada’s fastest growing regions. Over the next several years, the RDCO is advancing key regional planning initiatives to address topics that impact each government partner and pose challenges across jurisdictional boundaries. Since agriculture is an important part of the Central Okanagan’s economy, heritage and quality of life, a regional approach allows for enhanced coordination on shared cross-jurisdictional challenges, such as pressures from population growth, a changing climate, and an evolving regional economy.

The RDCO’s original Agricultural Plan was established in 2005. The necessity to update the plan emerged as a priority within the Regional Growth Strategy Priority Projects Plan in 2017. Phase 1 culminated with the completion of the [Central Okanagan Agricultural Background Report](#) in winter 2022. Phase 2 commenced in October 2024 and aims to revise the Regional Agricultural Strategy following the steps outlined in the timeline below. The strategy is being developed with the assistance of Upland Agricultural Consulting and is expected to be finalized by fall 2025.

**Regional Agricultural Strategy (Phase 2) – Timeline:**



A project update on the draft vision, focus areas, and early draft recommended actions was presented to the Regional Board on March 20, 2025. Since then, the project team has incorporated the feedback received and prepared the first draft of the strategy for public engagement.

### **Regional Agricultural Strategy– Engagement Activities**

Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the Regional Agricultural Strategy have included multiple forms of engagement, including focus groups, interviews, planning labs, an open house, and a staff-level Working Group. The Working Group includes representatives from member municipality governments, Westbank First Nation, the cross-commodity Leadership Support Project, the Ministry of Agriculture and Food, Interior Health, the OK Sterile Insect Release program, and the regional agri-food sector. The Working Group has met four times since October 2024 to review and provide feedback on the Regional Agricultural Strategy vision statement, goals, focus areas and early draft recommended actions.

The Draft Regional Agricultural Strategy has been reviewed by the Working Group and is now ready for broad public engagement. A short survey, hosted on RDCO's public engagement platform [yoursay.rdco.com](https://yoursay.rdco.com), will be shared with the public from May to June to gather feedback from residents on the Draft Regional Agricultural Strategy. To promote the survey and gather feedback across the region, communication tactics will be undertaken including a news release, print and digital advertising, and collaboration with partner municipalities to amplify the survey across the region. The public feedback gathered from the survey will be used to inform the Final Regional Agricultural Strategy, which will be presented to the Regional Board for endorsement later this fall.

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### **Considerations:**

#### Organizational/External:

Development Services staff is responsible for the overall project management, contract management, and administrative functions of project delivery. The Regional Agricultural Strategy will inform future regional planning projects and initiatives such as the RGS update, and other key land use policy and planning frameworks.

The Working Group for the Regional Agricultural Strategy includes representatives from member municipality governments, Westbank First Nation, the cross-commodity Leadership Support Project, the Ministry of Agriculture and Food, Interior Health, the OK Sterile Insect Release program, and the regional agri-food sector. Additionally, several Focus Groups have been held to inform the Regional Agricultural Strategy. Focus Group members have included representatives from the development industry, municipal and first nation staff, and agricultural community.

#### Financial:

The Regional Board has approved \$106,080 as part of annual budget deliberations to support this work. The RDCO also received a grant from the Investment Agriculture Foundation of BC, which is providing \$10,000 in funding to offset the total amount for the Phase 2 Regional Agricultural Strategy update.

#### Considerations not applicable:

- Legal/Statutory Authority
- Alternate Recommendation

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Attachment(s):    1. Draft Regional Agricultural Strategy  
                          2. Regional Agricultural Strategy – Public Engagement Launch - Presentation