



BOARD REPORT: March 12, 2021

1450 K.L.O. Road, Kelowna, BC, V1W 3Z4

P: 250-469-6187, 1-800-363-6684

www.oksir.org

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Dr. Susanna Acheampong
BC Ministry of Agriculture,
Food & Fisheries

Taras Pojasok
Agriculture and
Agri-food Canada

BC Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries Looks to Stabilize Apple Industry

Representatives from the BC Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries (MAFF) presented their newly-launched initiative that aims to develop a BC Tree Fruit Industry Stabilization Plan over the next 8 months. The MAFF team explained that the Ministry is keenly aware of the circumstances facing apple producers and is concerned about the future of the apple industry, noting that the industry has been in decline for several years and growers are experiencing significant financial difficulties. The Ministry has identified the need for a comprehensive plan and leadership to address the challenges. The project began with the first of three phases, in February. The final BC Tree Fruits Industry Stabilization Plan will be released on September 30, with an implementation plan developed through October 29.

Multiple years of declining returns have made it difficult for growers to make ends meet, and as a result, apple acreage is being removed at an alarming pace. OKSIR will be participating in the project and is keen to see the industry stabilize—declining acreage results in fewer parcel taxes being collected and declining revenues for the program. The project comes at the same time as the OKSIR Board is engaged in its own 5-yr Strategic Planning Process. The OKSIR Board was pleased to see the provincial government's strong support for the stabilization of the apple industry, noting that it has come at a critical time.

Okanagan-Similkameen Loses Almost 500 acres of Apples in 2021

Reinforcing the need for the MAFF Project, the Board was presented with the 2021 preliminary values for the parcel tax. The number of pome fruit acres in the Okanagan, Shuswap, and Similkameen Valleys continues to drop, as it has since 2018. Compared to the same time last year, RDCO and RDOS have lost 229 and 208 acres, respectively. RDNO and CSR decreased by 20 and 22 acres, respectively. Program staff noted that trees are still being removed this spring as growers make tough choices about what to farm for the year ahead.

UAV Program Launch On Track for The Season

The UAV program is set to launch in the central Okanagan this spring. After successful pilot studies in 2017 and 2018, the program's hopes for operationalizing the technology were dashed by new federal regulations in 2019 and then by the pandemic in 2020. The results of the pilot studies, which were recently published in scientific journals, indicated that release via UAV instead of ATV was better for the sterile moths. Other benefits of using UAVs include fewer interruptions for growers, fewer health and safety risks for OKSIR field staff, and cost savings for the program—UAVs can cover more acreage in a shorter period of time than staff can with traditional ATV releases.

The next regular meeting of the OKSIR Board will be 9:00 a.m. on **Friday, May 14, 2021.**

