

**PENINSULA & AREA AGRICULTURAL COMMISSION MEETING  
HELD BY ZOOM  
THURSDAY JANUARY 13, 2022, 7:00 PM**

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In attendance: Linda Geggie; Bev Marley; Terry Michell; Robin Tunnicliffe; Larry Sluggett; Dianne Williamson; Councillor Thompson (C. Saanich) and Councillor Smyth (N.Saanich), and Isobel Hoffmann, Recording Secretary.

Guests: Mike Doehnel; Brent Postlewhaite, Canadian Food & Inspection Agency; Anita Bull

Regrets: Satnam Dheenshaw

Minutes: The Minutes of November 18, 2021 were adopted as circulated.

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**Election of temporary Chair/Co-Chair pending the appointment of new members:**

**MOTION: Moved by Dianne Williamson and Seconded by Bev Marley: “That Robin Tunnicliffe be nominated as Chair.”**

**There being no other nominations, the Motion was Put and Carried.**

There was no successful nomination for Co-Chair or Treasurer at this time. Carry Forward to March once new members have been appointed.

Regarding the appointment of a Treasurer, signing authority with Island Savings currently has Carol Davidson and Bev Marley (past treasurers) on file. Bob Maxwell, past Chair, also remains as a signatory on file. No cheques were required last year as all events were cancelled due to COVID. The bank statements have been directed to the Saanich Municipal Hall and the Secretary can provide updates when required – although there is normally very little change to the balances. It was agreed at this time there is no urgency to appoint a treasurer, and if this does become necessary, it will be addressed at that time.

**Robin Tunnicliffe assumed the position of Chair.**

Minutes: The Minutes of November 18, 2021 were adopted as circulated.

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**SPEAKER'S BUREAU:**

**Brent Postlewhaite, Canadian Food and Inspection Agency**

Brent gave a detailed presentation on the history of the Golden Nematode in Central Saanich and other parts of the world. A copy was later sent to PAAC members for their information. Highlights noted below and a map of Central Saanich is attached to the Minutes:

- Potato Cyst Nematode (PCN) is a microscopic soil-borne quarantine pest.
- A serious risk to potato production, it reduces yields of potatoes and other host crops such as tomatoes and eggplants by up to 80%.
- It spreads by moving infested soil (cysts), equipment with soil, and seed potatoes from infested fields; very difficult to eradicate because remains dormant without hosts in the soil for several decades (up to 30 years).
- There are two species: Golden Nematode and Pale Cyst Nematode (PCN).

- Countries in Europe with wide spread infestation produce potatoes, but under complex, costly and onerous certification programmes.
- The origin is unclear, possibly originated in European or South American (Peru), where the potato originated (Andean Region).
- It has been confirmed in 65 countries worldwide – including all major trading partners who regulate PCN: United States, Mexico, Thailand, Canada.
- The presence of PCN (and potato wart) is a significant challenge to obtain market access for Canada, for example chipping potatoes to Japan.
- PCN adds significant costs (laboratory testing) for certification.
- The first infestation was discovered in New York State in 1941. Most recently cases were found in Idaho and Quebec (2006) and Alberta (2007).
- In BC, Potato production on Vancouver Island began in the 1950s and PCN was discovered in Central Saanich in 1965 in a field that had been used to grow flower bulbs since 1930s.
- All potato fields in BC were surveyed (40,000 soil samples) and tested for PCN.
- In 1966, the original quarantine area was created; fields infested with PCN were removed from potato production.
- During the late 1960's soil fumigation was initiated on infested field in an attempt to eradicate PCN.
- In early 1980s, PCN was again found in 40 fields in C. Saanich, despite fumigation and restrictions that were in place. The overall approach has always been eradication.
- **Current Requirements and Arrangements:**
  - In 1979, the BC Government enacted the *Golden Nematode Regulation*
  - In 1980, the federal *Golden Nematode Order* was enacted and established, current land classifications (A,B, and C) and movement restrictions
  - In 1982, two additional federal regulations were enacted to ban host crop production; potatoes, tomatoes and eggplants.
  - In 2006, Canada-United States agreed to a set of Guidelines to facilitate trade between the two countries. The PCN-GLs were updated in 2008, 2009 and 2014.
  - Between 2010 and 2014, 28,830 samples were collected, and non-viable cysts were found in five fields. Viable cysts were identified in one field only.

**A timeline for Central Saanich:**

- 2014: 5 years of PCN sampling completed on ALR land within regulated area
- 2016: Bioassay testing on 5 fields – no viable PCN found
- 2017-18: Development and Management Plan to focus on land out of agricultural production for 30+ years.
- 2018: Ongoing – consultation and approval of Management Plan
- TBD: Amendment of Federal Regulations and release of eligible land and implementation
- Central Saanich has 9,600 acres in total over 460 fields. It is proposed to regulate a total of 18 fields totalling 120.1 acres.
- There will be no seed potatoes allowed; fields will be tested following a crop.
- Equipment cleaning requirements to control soil movement will be required.

- The next immediate steps include consultation of the Draft Management Plan with the BC Government, the BC Potato & Vegetable Growers Association, the Canadian Horticultural Council, and other stakeholders for consultation and followed by Federal Regulatory Amendment.

In response to comments and questions from PAAC, Brent stated:

- Regarding nematode resistant varieties of potatoes, and varieties grown in Europe, he advised that New York State has 8 restricted areas and they are growing potatoes in a strict 3-year crop rotation, leaving a field fallow for 1 year. He doesn't know about varieties grown in Europe, but he is aware they are always coming up with new varieties.
  - Comments noted that the lower Island has lost over 500 acres of potato crops.
  - Most crops are grown in Comox, Qualicum or Saanich areas.
  - There is a huge shortage of potatoes on Vancouver Island.
  - If some fields in Central Saanich are opened up, there should be no exportation of these crops to other areas.
  - Contamination doesn't affect the actual potato, just the hair roots of the plant. Every potato has to be washed with clean water, then washed again in fresh water. Soil removed from the washing process sits in a bin on the farm.
  - Potatoes are a good rotation crop with other crops and this can increase yields.

Brent agreed no exports would be a good idea, but noted it would be hard to regulate. He will bring this point forward during future discussions.

- There is no easy way to tell if your fields are infected as the cysts are microscopic, and each cyst could have over 500 eggs. Wilted or dying plants can be an indication. If you have an inspection you have every right to ask for the results. These will be passed directly to the land owner and won't be published. Fumigation doesn't always work as cysts can be impermeable.

In response to a comment re writing to local MPs about the current status and requesting testing, Brent encouraged people to do anything they can to get answers and the government's attention.

It has been 40 years since the quarantine, and only certain fields were quarantined, not the entire area. Terry Michell stated he has met with Elizabeth May and prior to that Gary Lunn. He was told that there was no appetite in Ottawa to do anything about the quarantine.

It was noted that Elizabeth May could be helpful in extracting information from Ottawa.

Information:

**CFIA-Victoria District Office** : cfia.VIPH-PVIV.acia@inspection.gc.ca  
103-4475 Viewmont Ave, Victoria, BC V8Z 6L8; **(250) 363-3618**

**Brent Postlethwaite** – Regional Program Officer, CFIA  
brent.postlethwaite@inspection.gc.ca **(250) 363-3618**

## AGRICULTURAL ISSUES: NEW – Nothing to Report

## AGRICULTURAL ISSUES: CURRENT

- a) **Saanich Farm worker Housing Policy – Carry; Pierre Iachietti not present**
- b) **Funding for Hedgerows (Project with HAT) –** Secretary to check status with Paige Erickson from HAT. Discussion noted it would be helpful if a brochure was available to hand out to potential farmers interested in planting hedgerows.
- c) **Central Saanich OCP Update –** scheduled for February 10, 2022 meeting
- d) **Proposed Drainage Sub-Committee –** Terry Michell and Larry Sluggett attended the Central Saanich meeting virtually. The Council asked if Saanich and the Ministry of Agriculture would be involved. The Secretary advised that Saanich Council will be considering the issue within the next few weeks. They were waiting for Central Saanich to make a decision first.  
  
Councillor Thompson stated a staff member from Engineering will be appointed. At this time the District does not have a Chief Engineer so he does not know who the appointee will be. A council representative was not officially appointed as it was agreed Council do not have the expertise to make decisions on this issue. He has had discussions with the Director of Planning and Building Services, Jarrett Matanowitsch.
- e) **Verling Road Vet Clinic –** Central Saanich Council forwarded the application to the ALC for consideration. This process can take 6 months or more. If approved, then Council will take the Bylaw to 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> reading and a covenant will be approved to ensure the vet clinic is used for large farm animals and not domestic pets.

\*\*\*\* Bob Thompson left the meeting at 8:00 pm\*\*\*\*

## COMMENTS, UPDATES & CONCERNS RE FARMING OPERATIONS:

Terry Michell stated:

- He is still harvesting kale, cabbage, and Brussels sprouts from his fields.
- Onions and squash that were in storage are being shipped to the mainland to compensate for crops lost to the November floods.
- He has been shipping a lot of beets and parsnips to California.
- He noted there are over 350 acres of land on the mainland under water. It takes a long time for it to drain off the land.
- Labour, gas, fertilizers and other supplies continue to rise. Deliveries taking longer and supplies are getting tight.
- On the other hand, seed sales are strong and supplies and selection seem to be plentiful.
- According to the Ministry of Agriculture, BC only produces 30% of the food we consume.
- The “eat local” movement is successful on the Island, farmers' markets are very busy. But it is a different story on the mainland.
- Restaurant orders are down, but the Red Barn and Country Grocer buy a lot local produce.
- Labour is an issue: workers under 25 are not interested in farm work.

- Mike Doehnel noted he has a very successful harvest of barley and rye, as well as 14 acres of wheat. Geese are still a continual problem however.
- Discussion noted that we could look into **school tours on farms** – meet your local farmer....find out where your food comes from, etc.
- Noted that David Friend started “**Agriculture in the Classroom**” on the Island. This was fairly successful on the Island but not as successful in the rest of the province.
- Wholesale prices are rising; Sobey's makes more money off the local farmers.
- Members agreed with this last statement, noting that the portion of sales received by the retailers and wholesalers increases and the farmers' prices are stagnant.
- Robin noted her farm stand sales continue to increase; they have just raised their prices and no-one has questioned it. Her farm hands are now paid \$18/hr but it is still difficult to get enough help.

General discussion ensued on the continual **loss of farmland** from various causes, including horse farms; local government purchases (Panama Flats and Maber Flats for example) where the land sits idle; private purchases of larger farms to use as “estates”.

- Larger parcels of land are vital to our food security, and the pandemic over the past few years has shown how critical and tenuous our food security can be.
- Over 30% of ALR land is unproductive. According to the real estate market farmland is selling for \$200,000 an acre.
- We need to be more vigilant and about what is happening to the farmland and obtain an inventory of gains and losses over the past twenty years or so.
- The number of referrals from the municipalities for non-farm use on ALR lands is increasing and it was questioned if this is because municipalities are more pro-development.
- PAAC's mandate is to advise local municipalities on agricultural issues; should PAAC take a position on these issues?
- Noted there are many areas in Saanich that used to be productive farmlands: Rithets Bog, the area behind the Red Barn on West Saanich Road, Hector Road, Panama Flats, etc. Now they are flooded most of the year.
- This is a main reason to activate a drainage committee: there is very little active farming in Saanich; do we want Central Saanich to go down the same path?
- Agreed that we need to be more pro-active: a google search of agriculture in Saanich takes you to a real estate site. It is even worse on the West Shore with endless development and increasing populations – and this makes protection of the farmland we have left even more important.
- Noted the CRD completed a Land Use Inventory a few years ago, Jeff Weightman worked on this with the Ministry of Agriculture. The information is in a data base and Linda Geggie stated with the help of the CRD's Food and Agriculture Committee Task Force she will try to locate the document.
- Regarding horse farms and private purchases for “estate” use, while not necessarily supporting farming, at least the land is kept green for future use. As well, there are many types of farming: such as growing grapes and hops for wine and beer making, or growing flowers.

- People who own large ALR parcels can lease the land to farmers who cannot afford to buy, but long leases would be important. For example, it can take 4 years for a crop of asparagus to produce enough to make it worthwhile. Until the restrictions are lifted to allow easy and fast yielding crops such as potatoes and tomatoes, this will be an issue.
- Regarding pricing, farmers should not be shy about raising their prices for top quality, fresh produce.
- Farming is not attracting young people any more for many reasons – mostly the cost of farmland and setting up a farm. It was noted earlier about bringing agriculture to the classroom and that is the place to start – middle school or high school – to get youth interested in farming.
- Galey's farm on Blenkinsop is surviving by introducing agri-tourism and it also a way to bring attention to your farm. Jennie Michell stated she has started a small food stand on the Michell Farms property which also bring people to the farm market.
- We need to think about the future of farming on the Peninsula and beyond because it will not survive without generational farming.

Dianne Williamson stated:

- The chicken growers are meeting with the **Farm Industry Review Board (FIRB)** because costs have tripled and we are not permitted to raise prices.
- Chicken feed has increased from \$490/tonne to \$700/tonne. Chickens consume over 30 tonnes a week, so that makes for a significant jump in overhead costs.
- BC is below market cost compared to Alberta and Manitoba,
- Robin noted she sells eggs at her farm stand from her neighbour's farm for \$10/dozen, and customers are buying them.

Linda Geggie reported on the **South Island Food Hub**, now in its second winter season.

- 30 producers and 30 processors are involved in the project to date.
- Charities receive government funding and can buy straight from the farm.
- There is a lot of pressure on charities and other agencies to feed more people.
- More interest in buying on-line since Covid with delivery of food boxes door to door.
- It is good to see people supporting local farmers.
- The Food Hub intends to develop more processing kitchens – for washing and packaging produce, making pesto, etc.
- The Ministry currently supports eight Food Hubs around the province. Locally the Hub is situated at 808 Viewfield.

## CORRESPONDENCE

- a) Letter to Central Saanich re draft report on **Housing and Agricultural Lands**:
  - Central Saanich acknowledged the letter and will keep PAAC updated.
- b) Letter to Saanich re proposed **non-farm use on ALR Land for 443 Hector Road**.
  - This application was a little confusing; the Saanich Planner, Chuck Bell, did provide a written explanation about the application for the January meeting, and a response was sent from PAAC, noting no serious objections but suggesting an agrologist's report should be obtained. Staff were recommending rejection.

- PAAC was of the understanding the property was a compost operation owned by Mr. MacNutt and the property has been grandfathered for this use.
- This is another example of land classed as farmland not being farmed.
- Noted that Durrell Creek runs through this property and remediation is required.
- The compost operation seems to be encroaching on other properties and outside of the grandfathered area.
- It also appears that Saanich is delivering materials to the site for composting.
- The secretary was asked to talk to Chuck Bell about these concerns. Noted it would have been helpful to have some representation from Saanich present at the meeting.

## **MEMBERSHIP**

The Secretary advised on the status of membership for PAAC.

- The Terms of Reference allow a total of 12 members. We had 10 members last year, now we are down to 7, although attendance from one of those members is infrequent.
- We need at least 2, possibly 3, new members.
- Emails have been sent to various people based on suggestions from PAAC members.
- Most people are already very busy and don't have the time to commit to another group.
- Katie Engqvist was requested to send an email to the Farm Fresh Guide membership.
- As per usual, any new appointments have to be endorsed by the sponsoring councils.
- Members were requested to forward any potential names to the Secretary.

## **ANNUAL REPORT**

The secretary reminded members that sub-committee reports were needed for the 2021 Annual Report. As well any photos that people think would be interesting for the report would be welcome.

**NEXT MEETING:** The next PAAC meeting is scheduled for Thursday, February 10, 2022 at 7:00 pm

**ADJOURNMENT:** The meeting adjourned at 9:10 pm

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Isobel Hoffmann, Recording Secretary

## **PARKING LOT (Pending Issues)**

1. T-5 slip from 2020 further to interest on PAAC's GIC
2. Grape & Fruit Atlas for Vancouver Island
3. 50<sup>th</sup> Celebration of ALR 2022 (ALC & Ministry of Agriculture)
4. Appointment of new representative from Minister's Office
5. Additional Farm Tours with Brian Spencer for Council members (Spring 2022)