

Agricultural Centre - Feasibility Study

Darrell Toma presented findings of the North Cariboo Agriculture Centre Feasibility Study, recently conducted by Toma & Bouma Management Consultants and Lionsgate Consulting for the City of Quesnel, with funding from Cariboo-Chilcotin Beetle Action Coalition. The presentation highlighted current trends in the agriculture sector, feedback received from local producers and small scale food processors through community meetings and a survey, and a proposed budget and structure for a potential Agri-Food Innovation Centre in Quesnel.

The feasibility study highlighted the following for the North Cariboo region using 2011 data:

- North Cariboo region is mainly comprised of beef cattle and forages/cereal crops with a number of speciality vegetable and fruit growers.
- Has 394 farms with roughly \$19 million in revenue and \$494 million invested capital.
- Trends in agri-foods include an increased focus on local foods, value-added food products, renewables, health and functional foods, rural tourism, entrepreneurship, and a decrease in government extension services.

The study shows there are approximately 20 food development centres in Canada that fall under three different categories. The first category includes Federal/Provincial centres that focus on pre-commercial tasks such as ingredients, product design, formulation, testing and packaging. The second category includes college/university centres that look at the development and management of agricultural research in regional or local areas. The third category, and the one that is growing in demand in western Canada, is that of the farm applied research offered by farm associations that serve local smaller farm operations with crop and fertilizer trials.

The following input was gathered from over 80 local stakeholders through direct interviews, meetings and an e-survey:

What are you most interested in?

- Strawberry and soft fruit crops
- Hops and malt barley
- Vegetables – both field and greenhouse
- Community gardens and local food
- Forage and grain production for livestock
- New crop opportunities
- Processed foods – baked goods, canned products
- Use of community kitchens

Who is helping the farmers now?

- Personal farm friends, local personal, or industry networks
- No one
- Farm associations (BC Cattlemen's/Forage Council)
- Internet websites (Mainly USA sources/Some BC Agriculture)
- Print sources – farm/industry magazines
- Local agriculture and food organizations

What is needed?

- A person (professional/experienced) who can help in gathering technical information and show how to adapt research/ideas for local conditions.
- Centre of education for new entrants and people looking for new opportunities.
- Technical information, knowledge and local professional advice.
- Coordination and communication to farmers and for consumers.
- Master event calendar and awareness of speakers

The study suggests there is a market gap in the region for a resource to be delivered through a new regional Agri-Food Innovation Centre. A society may be established in order to access funding for start-up and a recommended three year pilot project in order to provide needed resources to farmers and food processors and conduct research to encourage innovation in the region.

Improve Accessibility in the City's Downtown Core

Council approved amending an existing grant application to the Northern Development Initiative Trust ("NDIT") for the Capital Investment Analysis grant that will look at how to improve accessibility in the downtown core. If the grant application is successful, the analysis will make recommendations and list best practises for: better placement of curb cuts; increased/better placed seating; number and placement of accessible parking stalls; and an accessible approach between City Hall and Kinchant Street.

Final 2016 Tax Rates

The City has now received tax rates from all taxing authorities for 2016. Based on per \$100,000 of residential assessment, the expected 2016 property taxes are \$1,093.80 before the homeowner grant. The average residence in Quesnel is valued at \$170,129 and will see an increase of \$31.49 in total property taxes for 2016.

Next Meetings

5:30 pm – May 17th – North Cariboo Joint Planning Committee
7 pm - May 24th – Regular Council