

## **Memorandum: Proposal for Southern BC Agricultural Forum**

### **1. Project Overview**

The Creston Valley-Kootenay Lake Economic Action Partnership is proposing to host a multi-day agricultural forum for the Southern Interior, comprising of expert-led presentations, panel discussions with farmers, and farm tours.

The primary purpose of the event is to provide the agricultural sector of the Southern Interior with the support it requires for sustained operations in the face of a rapidly changing climate. One avenue for providing such support is through education and connecting farmers with the most reliable bodies of knowledge on best practices as well as valuable connections to existing services and supports to help them deal with both climate adaptation and other prevalent issues. This proposed educational support will not only benefit farmers across the Southern Interior but also food producers further afield in the province.

For the proposed presentations, we aim to invite experts on such topics as:

- climate adaptation (focusing on fruit, vegetable and wine producers);
- risk management for the agricultural sector;
- agri-tourism destination development;
- immigration and sourcing of foreign agricultural workers
- and agri-forestry best practices

As a secondary goal, the forum would also provide the farmers of the Southern Interior with a platform for discussion of common challenges and opportunities for growth and collaboration. These important insights will be gained through panel discussions between food producers, others engaged in the agricultural sector, and industry leaders or experts as facilitators. Such input will allow and, potentially influence, decisions and actions by local and provincial government, various community organizations and community leaders as regards further support to the agricultural industry.

Community leaders and organizations who will be invited to attend include:

- Regional District Area Directors
- MLAs and MPs representing communities across the Southern Interior
- Ministry of Agriculture and Food
- Ministry of Jobs, Economic Development and Innovation
- Community Futures
- Fruit and Vegetable Growers of Canada
- Michael Hoher (Export Navigator)
- Cory Kanzig (local PacifiCan representative)
- Other

## **2. Rationale for project:**

Many communities in the southern interior of BC are currently in the grips of an agricultural crisis. Extreme weather events due to climate change have become more frequent, placing undeniable stress on our food producers' ability to maintain their operations.

Fruit, vegetable, and wine growers across the province suffered major losses due to the sudden and severe cold snap that occurred in January 2024 and followed closely on the heels of a false spring. Some fruit growers in the Creston Valley-Kootenay Lake area, for instance, suffered as much as 100% bud mortality. Even more worrying is the fact that operations producing peaches, nectarines and apricots experienced not only bud mortality but also tree mortality. Many farmers in the Southern Interior will be forced to replace entire orchards, which will leave them without these revenue streams for at least three years.

The economic impact of such extreme weather events also extends to related sectors such as agri-tourism. Many Southern Interior communities are reliant on summer tourists drawn to the area by the promise of an abundance of soft fruit such as cherries and peaches. The pollination industry is similarly expected to feel the acute and negative impact of the January 2024 weather event. The loss of fruit trees will translate into a sharp decline in demand for pollination services.

Assistance to the agricultural industry is extremely urgent. It is imperative that we support our agricultural sector in order to protect our food security and to shield our small, rural economies from economic disaster.

## **3. Time and date of forum**

The date and time of the event is yet to be determined. The tentative plan is to host the forum in the Creston Valley between November 2024 and January 2025.

## **4. About the Creston Valley-Kootenay Lake Economic Action Partnership**

The Economic Action Partnership was created to advance the joint economic and community development goals of the Town of Creston, the Lower Kootenay Band, and the Regional District of Central Kootenay Areas A, B and C. The economic development objectives of the EAP are consolidated around a number of pillars, including 'Tourism', 'Sector Development', 'Local Business Matters', and 'Natural Resources'. The EAP's strategic plan and information about completed and current projects can be found [here](#).