

Port development trumps BC agriculture: federal minister MacAulay

Schedule 1 to the Minutes of the
General Purposes Committee
meeting of Richmond City
Council held on Monday,
November 7, 2016.

Senior level of gov't has the right to exclude BC farms from land reserve

Stories by PETER MITHAM

VANCOUVER – Lower Mainland farmland could be sacrificed to ensure agri-food exports can move to market quickly and efficiently, federal agriculture minister Lawrence MacAulay told *Country Life in BC*.

"We do not want to lose agricultural land but it's no good producing products that you can't move, either," MacAulay said, answering a question from *Country Life in BC* following a presentation to Greater Vancouver Board of Trade members on September 12. "So it's one way or the other – the port in Vancouver has to be efficient to move the products to market. The Asian market is a big market, only going to get larger, and we want to be there."

MacAulay was in Vancouver as part of a tour of Western Canada that stretched from Saskatchewan grainfields to a craft brewery on Vancouver Island.

Opportunities to boost agri-food exports figured prominently in his West Coast itinerary, with an address to the Greater Vancouver Board of Trade and an endorsement of the new catalogue of export-ready agri-food products BC has published with funding from

Growing Forward 2.

But the thrust of his remarks focused on Vancouver's port facilities and the launch pad those provide for Asia-bound products.

"We have to make sure that they can handle the products as fast as they possibly can and as efficiently as they possibly can," he said.

MacAulay's comments won't sit well with municipalities such as Richmond or local farmland advocates who have challenged the Port of Vancouver's plans to tap local farmland for port-related uses.

Yet the port, as a federal entity, holds the trump card: while it has pledged to file exclusion applications to remove protected farmland from the province's Agricultural Land Reserve, it's under no obligation to do so as an arm of the senior level of government.

"I don't think we would be bound [by the Agricultural Land Commission]," Robin Silvester, president and CEO of the port authority, said earlier this year. "We have supremacy."

Site Economics Ltd. prepared a report for

the port authority in October 2015 that estimates port activities will require approximately 2,700 acres by 2030. The demand could cost Delta alone 1,500 acres of productive farmland, according to the Delta Farmers' Institute.

Agriculture is "almost meaningless"

Silvester believes local agriculture is "almost meaningless" when it comes to local food security but that stance is at odds with MacAulay's message to the Greater Vancouver Board of Trade.

Responding to a question from the audience regarding organic production, MacAulay said his job is to ensure farmers in Canada are capturing local markets before venturing into exports.

"There are products that we aren't producing enough of, and I want to help you produce those products so that you receive the benefit," he told his audience, which included very few farmers. "My responsibility is to help you, and I want to do it."

BC agri-food export growth has outpaced forestry and mining

by **PETER MITHAM**

VANCOUVER – With the province's agri-food exports surging, BC agriculture minister Norm Letnick unveiled a glossy new catalogue of export-ready agri-food products on the Vancouver waterfront on September 12.

Accompanied by federal agriculture minister Lawrence MacAulay, Letnick said the publication aims to familiarize overseas buyers with the range of BC products available to them.

The genesis of the project, which Letnick described as a "labour of love," was his inability during a trade mission in 2014 to name more than a couple of products buyers in China could order then and there for local markets.

China No. 2

China (including Hong Kong) is the second-biggest importer of BC agri-food products after the US, importing \$406 million worth of products in 2015. Letnick said the catalogue will help expand the province's exports to China as well as countries around the Pacific Rim, including South Korea, India and elsewhere.

BC exported \$3.5 billion worth of agricultural products to 150 countries in 2015, a 23% increase over

2014.

The growth of agri-food exports has been a bright spot in BC's international trade portfolio, outpacing traditionally strong sectors such as forestry and mining.

Over 600 products

Of the more than 600 products Letnick said are available for export, the top five are farmed salmon (\$411 million), food for processing (\$294 million), blueberries (\$218 million), baked goods (\$159 million) and mushrooms (\$131 million).

The other \$2.3 billion worth of exports includes a range of processed products, which represent the majority of offerings in the catalogue.

Just 16 of the nearly 100 companies featured in the catalogue are primary producers of meat, fruit and vegetables. Letnick couldn't pin a value to the contribution export markets make to farm gate receipts, which approached \$3.1 billion last year.

However, Letnick said growing agri-food sales at home and abroad are putting more money into farmers' pockets.

The province's agriculture sector enjoyed a net cash income last year of \$440 million and even income after depreciation, was positive at \$65.3 million after nine years of red ink.

Just watch him

Most farmers know you need land to produce food you can export.

But during his recent visit to Vancouver, federal agriculture minister Lawrence MacAulay seemed so keen on overseas trade opportunities that the fact fell off his radar.

Questioned by *Country Life in BC* during a media scrum after addressing the Greater Vancouver Board of Trade last month, he made clear that Canada's farmers need access to foreign markets for their products.

While declaring his tour of Vancouver port facilities "some interesting," the PEI Member of Parliament didn't appear to have been briefed on the port's designs on hundreds of acres of local farmland. He wasn't aware of how much agricultural land might be at risk even as the port has estimated its requirements over the next decade at 2,700 acres. "We do not want to lose agricultural land, but it's no good producing products that you can't move, either. So it's one way or the other," he said.

While he told board of trade members he was all for Canada's food security, the idea that the potatoes, berries and greenhouse vegetables grown in BC might find a home in local markets wasn't part of the day's

message.

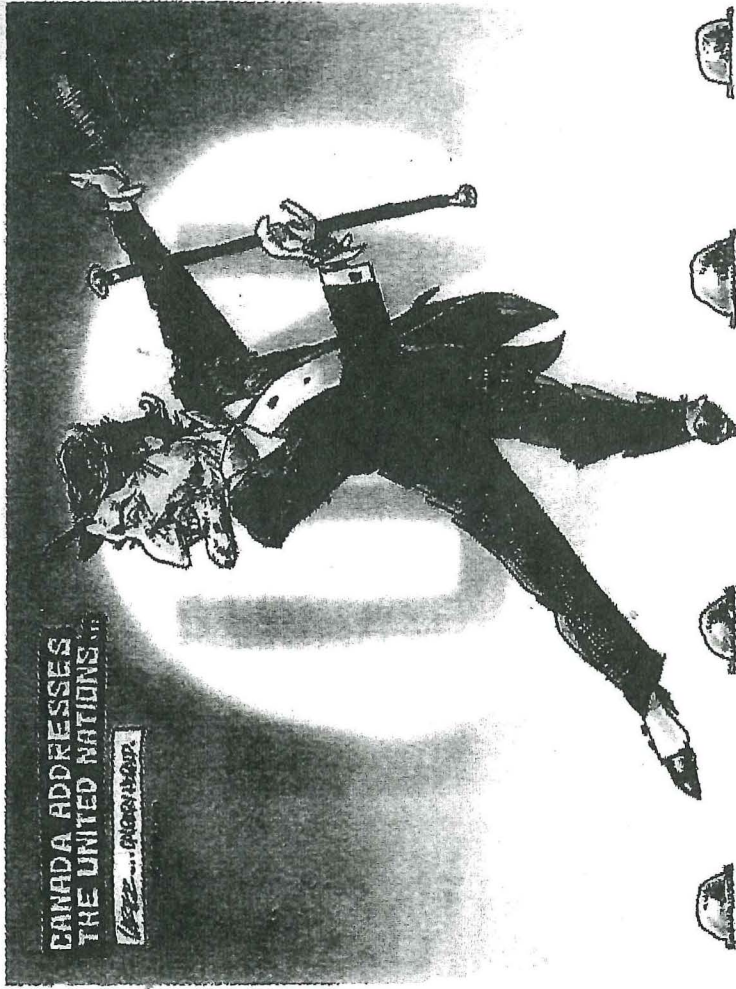
Combined with Ottawa's endorsement of the Site C power project, which will create an 83-kilometre-long reservoir and submerge thousands of acres of farmland, and its support of the Trans-Pacific Partnership, developing international markets is fundamental to the sunny ways Prime Minister Trudeau promises – clouding its ostensible support for local growers.

One of the hurdles the Liberals faced while campaigning a year ago was the widespread perception of the party being the voice of an urban elite that shops at farmers markets but would most likely squeal like a pig if it stepped in some stray nutrients (to use the polite term from Environmental Farm Plans).

Trudeau Jr has regained for Canada a large measure of the international goodwill lost during the Harper years.

But the impromptu photos that bring new meaning to his father's quip, "just watch me," seldom take place in farmyards. Producers hoping to catch him in BC would need to look no further than up the Grouse Grind, surfing in Tofino or performing a two-step for the crowds in a parade.

The challenges of getting Prairie



grain to port have been acute in recent years, but the cost of getting wheat to water shouldn't be the loss of BC farms.

BC farmers face enough challenges without the federal agriculture minister telling them they've got to suck up yet another development for their own good. That runs counter to his pledge to support local opportunities for local farmers, and jeopardizes the \$3.5 billion worth of BC agri-food exports

MacAulay says he wants to increase. A year into his term, Trudeau hasn't faced the challenges that made his father one of the country's most colourful prime ministers. The photo ops haven't included a pirouette or the so-called Salmon Arm salute to jobless protesters, or anything that could be mistaken for "fuddle duddle."

With ministers like MacAulay telling BC farmers that overseas markets come first, he doesn't have to.

NATURAL GAS BURNS NIGHT AND DAY AT STEVESTON

International Pipe Line Co.
Gas Holdings on the Fentiman Farm

June 10, 1932

Just south of Garry Road, Steveston, and east of the railway, there stands a little red building about six feet square which houses something of vast possibilities for Lulu Island and surrounding district, the full import of which will probably be determined this summer.

The little building stands over a drill hole sunk 730 feet into the earth whence natural gas is night and day flowing.

For a year the flow has not ceased and while it has supplied fuel for one home for the year -- that of Mr. and Mrs. Fentiman, Sn., on whose property the well is -- there is enough gas going to waste to furnish half a dozen other homes, officials state.

Unlike the manufactured gas such as is used in Vancouver, this burns without odor.

It can be turned to a height of a foot in the stove or heater burners and burn with terrific heat, and still there is not the slightest smell.

Mr. and Mrs. Fentiman have five burners installed, including the kitchen cook stove and the hot water tank heater, and whether it burns night and day, continuously or not, is matter of small moment, for there is no gas meter attached and the supply is apparently unlimited.

Two years ago the first well was sunk by this company, not far from the site of the present location, a depth of 850 feet being reached at that time.

The fact that gas had been struck 30 years ago on No. 1 Road, beside the Japanese hospital, led the company to take a long chance and drill the present hole, and they were rewarded by an encouraging outpouring of gas.

The sand soon filled in, and the flow did not last. Then this second hole was made, reaching the present depth of 730 feet, which resulted in a burst of water and gas just a year ago this month.

Since then the company has secured a screen fine enough to exclude troublesome sand, this cost from \$8.00 to \$9.00 a foot for a four-inch pipe, and being capable of keeping out sand as fine as the finest pepper.

It is believed that the next move will be to try to control the water which now fills the drill hole.

The gas at present flowing has to force its way up through 730 feet of water. It is believed that if this water could be controlled so as to leave the hole clear, the gas would come to the surface at terrific pressure.

In any case, whatever difficulties are yet to be overcome before the well is commercially profitable to its owners, the company itself seems to have unjaunted faith in it.

Already the company has spent \$17,000 on the Steveston holdings, and is prepared to spend more.

If their hopes are realized, the well will supply Vancouver.

Other wells will be sunk and Lulu Island may wake up some day to find itself a nest of gas holes.