

NEWS RELEASE

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CHALLENGES REMAIN FOR PRESERVING B.C.'S AGRICULTURAL LAND

VICTORIA – The Agricultural Land Commission continues to face challenges in achieving its mandate to preserve agricultural land and encourage farming in British Columbia, says Auditor General John Doyle in his most recent report, *Audit of the Agricultural Land Commission*.

“In 1994, my Office examined the commission’s performance and found that there were a number of improvements needed if the commission’s mandate was to be met,” said Doyle. “Sixteen years later and upon re-examination, I found that significant challenges continue.”

The Agricultural Land Commission is an arm’s-length tribunal responsible for administering the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR), made up of approximately 4.7 million hectares of land located throughout the province. This land was set aside in the 1970s due to concern over the loss of agricultural land to urban development. The commission makes decisions on applications for non-farm uses, subdivisions, and to add or remove land. It is also responsible for working with local governments on land use planning, as well as compliance and enforcement activities.

The audit examined whether the commission was effectively preserving agricultural land, encouraging farming, protecting the ALR and evaluating its own effectiveness. Among the audit’s main findings are several challenges to meeting these criteria, including:

- a lack of knowledge regarding the boundaries of the ALR and the included lands’ suitability for agricultural use;
- inadequate compliance and enforcement activities;
- the commission’s self-identified limitations to meet its goals through the application process;
- the commission’s insufficient involvement in long-term land use planning with local governments; and
- a need for more adequate evaluation of the results of its decisions.

“The fundamental importance of preserving agricultural land is particularly significant given the uncertain effects of climate change on our food imports and our agricultural systems,” said Doyle. “I am encouraged by the commission’s acceptance of my recommendations and I look forward to receiving updates on their plans and actions for future improvements.”

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