

Program Review

**An Evaluation of the  
Investment Agriculture Foundation  
Local Government Agricultural Planning  
Program**

**FINAL REPORT**

February 28, 2011

Prepared by:

David J. Connell, PhD MCIP  
Associate Professor  
School of Environmental Planning  
University of Northern British Columbia

Daniel Sturgeon  
Research Assistant  
University of Northern British Columbia

*Funding provided by:*

**Canada**



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since 1999 the Investment Agriculture Foundation of British Columbia (IAF) has funded the *Local Government Agricultural Planning* (LGAP) program to support projects that will lead to the development of agricultural plans within municipalities and regional districts. As of May 2010, this funding program has led to the development of 27 agricultural plans and strategies in the Province. An evaluation of the LGAP program was completed between May and December, 2010. This report presents the final result of this evaluation. The aim of the evaluation is to contribute to knowledge of what projects have been able to deliver the most significant value and which ones encountered problems. The broad objective is to use the findings of the evaluation to improve the development of future agricultural planning in order to strengthen municipal planning processes, protect the importance of agriculture, and promote its viability.

### Evaluation design

The project involved both formative and summative evaluations. The formative evaluation aimed to improve the funding program by examining the method of its delivery and the quality of its implementation. The summative evaluation examined the effects or outcomes of the funding program by describing what happened subsequent to developing the agricultural plan, assessing the extent to which the funding could be said to have contributed to the outcomes, and determining the overall impact of the funding beyond the immediate target of creating an agriculture plan.

The analysis focussed on 16 completed agricultural plans. In-person interviews, along with follow-up telephone and email exchanges, were completed with 34 people covering twelve of the completed plans. Telephone interviews were completed with seven key informants who were in a position to influence the development and delivery of the LGAP program. Data were collected about the effectiveness of the planning efforts with respect to the applicants' objectives and the efficacy of the LGAP program with respect to IAF's intended outcomes.

### Key findings

#### *Outcomes of funded projects*

The following points summarise the key outcomes of the completed plans.

- 27 projects were funded, of which 16 have been completed and 11 are under development.
- All of the 16 completed agricultural plans were received by local governments via formal resolutions. Seven of the plans have led to changes in land use policies that guide local government decisions. Six of the completed plans have been formally adopted as a sub-area Agricultural Area Plan, with one under review for adoption.

## Program Review: An Evaluation of the IAF LGAP Program

- A relationship exists between stated goals and project outcomes. When the stated goal of the plan was to have it adopted as part of the OCP in five of six cases the goal was achieved. In contrast, when there is no mention of having plans adopted as secondary plans then the plan is most likely to be only ‘received’ by local governments.
- The general scope of the completed plans was similar. All but one plan provided a vision statement for agriculture in the area. Every plan focussed on both land use issues and economic development, although to differing degrees.
- The contents of the completed plans were assessed using a set of key considerations as a guide: legislative context; background; objectives and goals (and vision); plan policies; and mapping. The results show a range of levels of detail. Most of the plans lacked detail in more than one content area. Based on this set of considerations, the City of Richmond and the District of Lake Country were the most complete plans.
- Positively influencing agricultural land use policy decisions was mentioned frequently by interviewees.
- Many key informants provided clear statements about the benefits of agricultural plans to improve consistency between provincial policy and legislation and local government policies.
- Most completed plans provide sufficient details about the legislative context to provide a “thread” that helps to integrate policies across jurisdictions.
- The planning process itself was identified as positively influencing the level of awareness and opinions of agriculture. The process was also identified as helping to bring groups together, open dialogue, and improve understanding of agricultural issues among non-farmers.
- Overall, there is a strong sense that the completed plans had a positive influence over a range of outcomes, but this influence may have been more indirect than direct. The agricultural land base, agricultural operations, and political context mean that plans have been developed for different reasons, with different starting points, and with different goals and objectives. Furthermore, the breadth and influence of external factors on the agricultural sector (e.g., non-agricultural priorities, such as urban development and economic growth) means that it is not possible to directly associate outcomes of the agricultural planning processes with broader provincial and community priorities. In particular, identifying direct economic benefits to local farms and the agricultural areas was very elusive. Benefits of agricultural plans for reducing urban/rural conflict were noted, however, the benefits were not always direct or apparent.

### *Efficacy*

The LGAP program has a good sense of the program’s intended outcomes, but the communication of these outcomes can be improved. The aim is to provide local agricultural planning solutions, with a focus on land use policies and regulations, that improve the viability of farming in the area. These points are expressed clearly in IAF’s promotional materials for the LGAP program. The eligible activities are consistent with these intended outcomes. Overall, the information provides good direction to potential applicants. There are, however, two concerns that introduce ambiguity.

## Program Review: An Evaluation of the IAF LGAP Program

- Inconsistent use of the terms ‘agricultural plans’ and ‘agricultural area plans’ by IAF (and among completed plans) contributes to confusion about intended project outcomes with implications for the future development and delivery of the LGAP program, as noted in the recommendations.
- The stated expectation that AAPs be “formally adopted” by local governments is unclear. The term ‘adopted’ can be and is used differently by different governments. This can create confusion about what is an expected outcome of the LGAP program.

These two areas of ambiguity are contributing to confusion about the intended outcomes and appropriate scope of agricultural planning processes.

### *Effectiveness*

In the context of the LGAP’s intention to support agricultural planning as a means to find solutions that improve the viability of farming in the area, it is clear that the funding program is effective. There is a high level of satisfaction regarding the plans created by the planning processes, the benefits of having these plans, and of the funding provided by IAF through the LGAP program. In particular, many people interviewed noted the critical importance of the program funding as essential to getting the planning efforts off the ground and gaining buy-in from local governments. Some concerns about the LGAP were expressed by applicants. These concerns centred on a perceived lack of on-going support and expertise once the planning efforts began. Concerns were also expressed about the lack of follow-up to help implement the plans (many applicants were not aware of possible funding). However, relative to the positive outcomes of the projects these concerns were less significant.

Providing more information to applicants about agricultural planning, and about Agricultural Area Plans in particular, will help improve the program’s effectiveness. There are excellent resources available but they do not appear to be used well. Among these resources Smith’s *Planning for Agriculture: Resource Materials* is essential reading. There are opportunities for IAF to work with the Ministry of Agriculture, the Agricultural Land Commission (ALC), and other agencies to improve the breadth of resources available to support agricultural planning.

### **Recommendations**

Agricultural planning in BC has moved through two phases. The first focussed on land preservation and the second on agricultural land use planning – making sure agriculture was recognised as the highest and best use of agricultural land. Throughout this second phase IAF’s *Local Government Agricultural Planning* funding program has been instrumental. Now, after supporting agricultural land use planning for more than ten years, IAF has an opportunity to improve how it delivers the LGAP program.

The aim of this project was to evaluate what has been accomplished by and as a result of the funding program. The broad objective was to improve the development of future agricultural plans in order to strengthen municipal planning processes and protect the importance of agriculture to communities. Based on the program evaluation, the

## **Program Review: An Evaluation of the IAF LGAP Program**

researchers have only one area of concern: the lack of clarity about the expected outcomes of the LGAP program. By addressing this concern, the researchers believe that IAF can improve the LGAP funding program and, in turn, improve the development of future agricultural plans in order to strengthen municipal planning processes and protect the importance of agriculture to communities. We believe that the concern about the lack of clarity about the expected outcomes of the LGAP program can be addressed through the following recommendations. We also provide suggestions for further consideration.

### **1.0 Clarify the expected outcomes of the LGAP program**

- 1.1 Determine whether the current statement about the program's overarching expected outcome is consistent with the priorities of the LGAP program;
- 1.2 Clearly distinguish between an agricultural plan as a general undertaking and an Agricultural Area Plan as a formal policy tool used by local governments. Use these terms more precisely and consistently in all of IAF information materials about agricultural planning.
  - 1.2.1 Provide information about the purpose of an AAP.
  - 1.2.2 Clarify use of the term 'strategy' (versus plan and AAP).
- 1.3 Clarify what it means to 'formally adopt' (versus receive, accept, endorse, etc).
- 1.4 Revise IAF promotional materials to reflect changes.

### **2.0 Develop funding options based on the expected outcomes of agricultural planning processes.**

- 2.1 Align expected project outcomes with different stages, and associated activities that are eligible for funding, of the planning process.

### **Other suggestions**

The following points are presented as suggestions for IAF's consideration.

*Develop additional requirements for LGAP funding eligibility.*

- Require an AAC to be in place and operating before applying for funding. The LGAP pamphlet presently states [emphasis added], "IAF *expects* applicants to have a steering committee (Agricultural Advisory Committee) in place at the time of application." Perhaps clearer language is required if having an AAC in place is already a requirement.
- Require land use inventories be included in or completed as part of the planning process (not just listed as an eligible activity). These inventories provide essential information for creating effective plans.
- Require applicants to state whether or not the goal is to recommend revisions to or adoption of agricultural land use policies. If this goal is not known at the time of application then the applicants could state when in the planning process the decision to include this goal or not will be made. This requirement is suggested as a means to encourage applicants to have clear goals and objectives. This

## Program Review: An Evaluation of the IAF LGAP Program

requirement is not intended as a criterion of evaluation; IAF can be neutral with regard to these specific goals of the applicant, but can require applicants to have clear goals and objectives.

- If the goal is to have land use policies revised or formally adopted then IAF should require applicants to make a decision as to whether an AAP is appropriate or not for their agricultural area. If this decision is not known at the time of the application then the applicants could state when in the planning process the decision will be made. This requirement, like the previous, is suggested as a means to encourage applicants to have clear goals and objectives. This requirement is not intended as a criterion of evaluation; IAF can be neutral with regard to these specific goals of the applicant, but can require applicants to have clear goals and objectives.
- Restrict recommendations for agricultural land use policies (but not agricultural plans) to issues within the legislative control of local governments.

*Provide a resource kit about agricultural planning to applicants.*

- Develop a set of ‘best of’ agricultural planning practices and outcomes based on the successes of the LGAP program.
- Encourage the Ministry of Agriculture and the Agricultural Land Commission to improve resources to support agricultural planning, such as:
  - Update Smith’s (1998) *Planning for Agriculture: Resource Materials* to reflect current legislation.
  - Encourage the Ministry of Agriculture and the Agricultural Land Commission to deliver more professional development workshops to agrologists and local government planners on agricultural planning.
- As resources permit, provide more mentoring and advice throughout the planning process. (This may be provided better by the Ministry of Agriculture or the ALC.)

*Encourage the updating of agricultural plans and AAPs to keep plans current (e.g., every five years).*

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary _____	i
Introduction _____	1
Background _____	3
Evaluation Design _____	10
Results _____	13
Part 1. Perspectives of ‘founders and shapers’ _____	13
Part 2. Outcomes of Funded Projects _____	16
Part 3. Perspectives of Key Informants _____	24
Discussion _____	34
Recommendations _____	41

### **Acknowledgement:**

This report was commissioned by the Investment Agriculture Foundation of B.C. and funded through programs it delivers on behalf of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada and the B.C. Ministry of Agriculture.

### **Disclaimer:**

Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada and the B.C. Ministry of Agriculture are pleased to participate in the production of this evaluation. We are committed to working with our industry partners to address issues of importance to the agriculture and agri-food industry in British Columbia. Opinions expressed in this report are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the Investment Agriculture Foundation, the B.C. Ministry of Agriculture or Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada.

## LIST OF TABLES

1.	Agricultural Plans Funded by IAFBC: Plans Under Development_____	16
2.	Agricultural Plans Funded by IAFBC: Completed Plans_____	17
3.	Contents of agricultural plans_____	18
4.	Summary: References to legislation and policy tools._____	19
5.	References to legislation and policy tools by completed plans by area._____	19
6.	Agricultural Advisory Committees._____	20
7.	Summary: outcomes of completed agricultural plans._____	23
8.	Outcomes of completed agricultural plans by area._____	23
9.	Key informant descriptions of ‘agricultural planning’ and ‘agricultural area plans’._____	25
10.	Outcomes of Agricultural Area Plans ‘adopted’ by local governments._____	26
11.	Outcomes of agricultural plans ‘received’ by local governments._____	27