

August 11, 2021

Dear SCRD Board of Directors,

The Sunshine Coast Farmers Institute requests that **soil-based commercial food farmers** be exempt from Stage 4 water restrictions. Water restrictions based on indoor vs outdoor water use are arbitrary, unfair and not in the best interest of our communities' need for food security, nor our aquifer's and ecosystem's long term health.

We urge the SCRD to permit exemptions to **soil-based commercial food farmers** based on the fact that, unlike other outdoor water uses, food is an essential requirement for human health. Locally grown food is a community asset.

We request this exemption for the following reasons:

- 1. Food is an essential human need and as such, local food production needs to be protected.** At a time when food scarcity looms large and our traditional food suppliers in BC, the Prairies and California are experiencing unprecedented wildfires and drought, the duty to protect and invest in local food farmers is even more urgent.
- 2. Farm water use is part of the hydrologic cycle and recharges the aquifer.** Soil-based food farmers are an important part of the green water cycle as our outdoor watering recharges our aquifers with uncontaminated water. Unlike indoor businesses that produce grey water and operate on sewer systems, the outdoor watering of farmer's crops and orchards steward the water cycle.
- 3. Soil-based farming supports our ecosystem and reverses climate change.** Soil-based farmers with healthy living crops and livestock-grazed pastures sequester carbon. This carbon drawdown into living roots, feeds our soil microbiome and cools our climate. Farmers' crops, orchards and pastures also support wildlife and feed pollinators, which are essential to our food supply.
- 4. Local farmers are already at a breaking point** with unprecedented drought, heat domes, labour shortages, skyrocketing input costs, and low profit margins. Losing crops and income in one of the most productive summer months will push our farmers over the edge of viability and harm our local food security.
- 5. Commercial farmers need equitable access to our water infrastructure.** Equality issues arise when other ALR land owners and heavy water users, such as industrial marijuana grow ops and breweries have no water restrictions simply because they are indoor users. This inequality is even more difficult to accept given that some marijuana grow ops' water use returns contaminated grey water that pollutes our aquifers. Farmers, whose profit margins are far lower

than marijuana grow ops, pay the same property taxes and commercial water rates, and therefore have the right to equitable access to our municipal services.

In addition to being aligned with the [SCRD Ag Plan](#), several of the [SCRD's We Envision: A Regional Sustainability Plan](#) statements refer to the need to support a local, viable and resilient food system. Perhaps this statement sums it up best, "all people on the Sunshine Coast having access to high-quality drinking water, locally grown and produced food". Food and water are equally vital to human life.

The number of commercial food farms and the area they cover is not large. According to the [2019 Agricultural Land Use Survey](#), On the entire lower Sunshine Coast, of the 44 parcels used for farming inside the ALR, 24 out of the 114 hectares were used for food farming that may require some irrigation (berries, tree fruits and vegetables); and of the 29 parcels used for farming outside the ALR, 9 out of the 41 hectares were used for food farming. [Only 8% of ALR land is farmed.](#) [The Regional Sustainability Plan](#) states "The actual land used for commercial food production may be as low as 12 hectares total. With recognized environmental stresses worldwide and the rising cost of fuel for transporting food, food security is a growing concern."

With rising costs and the dangerous effects of climate change, farmers need all the support they can get. By terminating water use at the height of the growing season, local governments are adversely affecting an already stressed essential sector. We ask our local government to take steps to protect the sector that feeds us, recharges our hydrologic cycle and reverses climate change.

[The UN climate change report sounds "code red for humanity"](#). We need to take bold action now to protect one of our most precious resources, our local food supply. Please permit soil-based commercial food farmers outdoor water use during stage 4 water restrictions.

Please invest in our community's biological bank account.
Thank you for your time and consideration.

Regards,

The Sunshine Coast Farmers Institute Board
www.sscfi.ca