

2016 COMMUNITY EXCELLENCE AWARDS APPLICATION LEADERSHIP & INNOVATION, Agriculture

Filled Thursday, June 02, 2016

Name of Local Government

The Corporation of Delta

Project/Program Manager Name

Sean McGill

Title

Director of Human Resources & Corporate Planning

Phone

604-946-3218

Email

smcgill@delta.ca

Administrative Contact Name

Leanne Salmon

Title

Executive Assistant

Phone

604-946-3207

Email

lsalmon@delta.ca

The Mayor/Chair is aware that I am submitting this application on behalf of my local government.

Yes

Project/Program Title:

Building Agricultural Resilience in Delta

Project Summary Paragraph

Please provide a summary of your project/program in 150 words or less.

With over half of its land base in the Agricultural Land Reserve, farming is an integral part of the economic and social landscape of Delta. Farmers are facing unprecedented challenges related to climate change, development, and globalization of food production. Delta Council has a long history of advocating for the protection of agricultural land and promoting farming sustainability; however, it has become apparent that a more proactive approach to helping Delta's farmers is needed if Delta's agricultural sector is to remain sustainable in the long term.

In 2013, Delta initiated a collaborative, multi-faceted program to strengthen and build resilience in Delta's agricultural sector. The program focused on the development of a climate change agricultural adaptation strategy, and on regulatory, public communications, and educational programs which raise the profile of agriculture within the community, protect farmland from development and degradation, and promote community-supported farming in Delta.

Project Analysis

1. STEWARDSHIP

Please describe how your project/plan strengthens farming and agriculture in your community.

The program strengthens farming in a number of ways:

- Delta's Agricultural Adaptation Plan provides important information about climate change scenarios for Delta and potential agricultural impacts from which site-specific mitigation strategies have been identified. For example:
 - o Measures to improve drainage and build on-farm water storage capacity have been identified to make farms less vulnerable to heavy rainfall events and droughts.
 - o Farm-specific emergency response plans have been developed to better respond to extreme weather events.
 - o Long-term plans have been developed to adapt farming practices to a changing climate, such as the use of drought resistant crops in response to lower summer precipitation.
- The Agricultural Adaptation Plan has provided important information to support funding requests for projects that benefit agriculture, including:
 - o \$8 million Boundary Bay pump station upgrade to improve drainage to 900 hectares in south Delta (New Building Canada Fund).
 - o \$850,000 foreshore and seawall improvements at Beach Grove and Boundary Bay (Emergency Management BC).
- Enhanced communication and education have helped to raise the level of public awareness about the importance of agriculture within the community and to promote farming, buying local and a greater tolerance for farming activities that may impact local communities.
- In the past three years, Delta has implemented stricter controls to restrict the size of residential homes on agricultural land and bylaws to better regulate soil deposit and removal activities on agricultural land.

2. RESULTS

a. Please provide a brief outline of the steps involved in the program/project and the status of each step.

Establish a working group to guide the development of the agricultural adaptation plan identify areas for targeted study. Complete.

Develop a communications strategy for agricultural issues in Delta to raise the level of awareness about farming and encourage public participation and support of agricultural events and initiatives. Complete.

Review municipal policies and bylaws relating to agricultural issues to ensure agricultural sector is being protected and supported as much as possible. Complete.

b. Describe the results achieved and provide measurable results where possible.

Three focused studies have been undertaken to provide a better understanding of the potential impacts of climate change on Delta's agriculture, including:

- the potential consequences of a dike breach in Ladner;
- an agricultural emergency planning study resulted in the development of an on-farm flood preparedness tool kit for farmers;
- A drainage management study enabled farmers to assess drainage techniques and developed site-specific drainage solutions.

Delta has significantly expanded the agricultural section of its website, developed 'Meet Your Farm Neighbours' videos, provided crop and farm identification signs, and produced an information brochure about agriculture in Delta. There has been significant positive public feedback in response to these initiatives.

Delta also promotes and provides funding for farmers markets in Ladner, North Delta and Tsawwassen; community garden plots are available to residents; free gardening workshops are offered to Delta residents; there is an annual Mayor's gardening contest for children, and Delta sponsors the "Day at the Farm" event which attracts thousands of visitors each year to Westham Island. Agricultural events attract thousands of visitors each year to Delta.

With respect to regulatory initiatives, Delta has seen an increase in enforcement activity relating to soil deposit on agricultural land and a reduction in illegal fill operations.

3. CHALLENGES

What challenges did you face in implementing this program/project and how did you overcome them?

The challenge with any multi-stakeholder collaborative effort, is to find common ground where there are a range of diverse goals and objectives. This is particularly challenging when different levels of government have conflicting goals and municipal concerns may be overridden by the priorities of more senior governments. For example, more than 40 hectares of agricultural land in Delta was lost to the construction of the South Fraser Perimeter Road, which is a regionally significant highway servicing Deltaport. Delta was successful, however, in getting the Province to undertake a \$30 million irrigation enhancement project which

improved water quality and accessibility to more than 100 hectares of agricultural land in south and east Delta.

The second major challenge with this project has been funding and the challenges of securing funds to implement the various initiatives. Delta Council was supportive of providing funding of \$30,000 for the climate change adaptation study and was fortunate to be able to cost-share with the federal and provincial governments on this initiative.

4. LEADERSHIP

Describe how acting on this initiative demonstrates leadership in the advancement of farming in your community. Please include examples that are indicative of the shift in your overall approach from what may have been done in the past.

Delta's Mayor, Lois E. Jackson, and Council have demonstrated responsive leadership and support for this program. Delta is one of only three municipalities in British Columbia participating in the agricultural adaptation initiative. The program brought together numerous stakeholders, including the Delta Farmers' Institute, Agricultural Advisory Committee, and the Provincial and Federal governments together with farmers and industry partners to develop climate change adaptation strategies for Delta's agricultural community. It is a proactive, rather than reactive, approach to address climate change and rewards the early adoption of mitigation and adaptation strategies and technologies.

In addition, Delta has taken bold steps to protect farmland through bylaws and policies that restrict the size of houses on agricultural land (to discourage the speculative acquisition of farmland) and more tightly regulate soil deposit and removal operations on farmland to prevent top quality soil being covered with excavation material from developments outside the community.

5. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

How does the project encourage economic sustainability? (e.g. life cycle analysis, internalizing costs and alternative financing, economic instruments)

Farms are especially vulnerable to extreme weather events which can result in the loss of entire crops. Investment in climate change adaptation and mitigation measures reduces this vulnerability and lowers financial risk. Proactive planning for climate change provides economic stability rather than the economic uncertainty of responding to disasters or severe weather events as they happen.

While Delta continues to export a large percentage of its fresh produce, the increasing popularity of local farmers markets and farm-direct sales reduces transportation and fuel costs and helps to make farming more economically sustainable. Through community supported agriculture, other businesses in the community also benefit.

6. EDUCATION

Please describe the educational aspects of your program/project, details of your target audience and results of this outreach.(e.g. public participation, knowledge sharing, capacity building, community identity and marketing)

Education and public outreach has been a significant component of this program and over the last three years, there has been considerable public and local media interest. All of the reports, studies and plans are publicly available on Delta's website, which has been extensively updated and expanded to include a more detailed picture of agriculture in Delta. Three educational videos - Meet Your Farm Neighbours – have been filmed and posted, and Delta has produced an informational brochure about agriculture and climate change which has been widely distributed in the community. In collaboration with Delta School District, there is an "Ag in the Classroom" program for elementary schools and a new "Farm Roots" secondary school program which offers an opportunity for grade 10-12 students to gain hands-on, real-life experience of building and maintaining a farm in South Delta.

7. INNOVATION

What makes your program/project innovative?

This program has brought together government agencies, academics, farmers and community members to identify solutions to the challenges posed by climate change, and to take steps to adapt Delta's agricultural sector so it remains sustainable and viable. This work is on the leading edge of climate change adaptation at the community level and encourages 'early adapters' to plan ahead and try new and innovative ideas.

8. TRANSFERABILITY

How is this program/project transferable to other local governments?

Given the variabilities of climate, soils and geography, agricultural practices are different in every community, and there is a correspondingly large array of possible adaptation options. This means that local governments must develop their own

agricultural adaptation plans that address area-specific issues. Having said that, the collaborative model which Delta used in the development of the plan is easily transferrable to other municipalities wishing to undertake similar programs. In addition, there are many adaptation principles and farming techniques that may be applicable to other areas.

9. KNOWLEDGE SHARING

What helpful advice would you share with other communities looking to embark on a similar project?

When working with farmers, be prepared to learn about an incredible range of knowledge about your community, its history, the weather, the global nature of local production and the competing needs of producers, industry associations, and government.

Government staff and practitioners must be prepared to report out on and discuss climate change science in a variety of ways that are meaningful and engaging. Farmers are interested in infrastructure works, emergency planning, wildlife issues, and planning and development. Bring in experts to speak about these topics and allow time for dialogue and questions.

Communities should invite representatives from neighbouring communities to participate and/or observe such workshops so that those communities may contribute and learn about agricultural adaptation planning. Involve non-governmental and non-agricultural stakeholders like residents. Residents may not feel connected to agriculture directly but are typically most impacted by agriculture (and/or impact agriculture) through land use and development decisions.

10. TELL US MORE

Please share any other information you think may support your submission.

Another noteworthy demonstration of Delta's leadership and commitment to supporting agriculture is the Southlands development in Tsawwassen. The landowner is proposing develop a mixed-use residential community on 20% of the 217 hectare agriculturally zoned site, and to transfer ownership of remaining 80% (172 ha) to Delta for agricultural uses. The OCP amendment and rezoning received third reading from Delta Council in 2013 and since that time Delta has developed the concept of a community-based farm to return the land to active soil-based food production. Century Group has committed to providing \$7 million for drainage and irrigation improvements needed to making the land farmable:

- 70% of the land will be leased for soil-based farming.
- Smaller lease areas will provide opportunities for new farmers and encourage innovation in agricultural techniques.
- Boundary Bay Earthwise Community Garden will be accommodated.