

Capital Regional District | November 2024

How much will this new service cost?

- The new service is proposed for gradual implementation, beginning with the pilot project at Bear Hill Regional Park. An estimated budget of \$320,000 will be considered for the first year, including a one-time capital costs for the pilot project. Potential site and service expansion will only be considered upon evaluation of the pilot project including an evaluation of future costs and potential revenue.
- The maximum amount that can be requisitioned annually for the service is one million dollars (\$1,000,000) or an amount equal to the amount that could be raised by a property value tax rate of \$0.00543 per one thousand dollars (\$1,000.00) to the net taxable value of the land and improvements within the service area.

Why is a new service needed?

- New generations of farmers have found it increasingly challenging to maintain the viability of farming and local food production in the CRD.
- The average age of farmers in the CRD is approaching 60 years old (2023 Regional Growth Strategy Indicators Report).
- High land cost is a key issue that has made it challenging for new and young farmers to get started.
- The Regional Foodlands Access Service is intended to facilitate and support new and expanding farmers to have opportunities to access affordable production lands.
- The CRD does not currently have authority or mandate to deliver programming related to food and agriculture.

What will a Regional Foodlands Access Service do?

- The Regional Foodlands Access Service (RFAS) will be able to run agriculture focused programming. The service will operate initially on regionally owned lands, with the ability to acquire land or enter into land use agreements in the future.
- The service will be able to provide capital funding for improvements and operational funding for programs. This could be done directly by the CRD or through third-party service delivery.
- The service will be able to provide funding to support agricultural activities that promote sustainable agricultural practices and regional food security.

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- The service will also be able to deliver educational and outreach activities to support agriculture and regional food security.

What programs are proposed to operate under the service?

- The first program that is proposed is an agriculture pilot project in the eastern section of Bear Hill Regional Park.
- This pilot program will operate a test site to build organizational capacity to support agricultural uses through partnerships with local farming organizations.
- A grant program is also being considered to support land matching lease arrangements. This program will focus on new and expanding farmers signing long-term lease agreements with private landowners.
- Additional agriculture focused programming can be developed in the future.

How will farmers be selected to participate in the Bear Hill pilot project?

- Preference will be given to experienced small plot farmers who are seeking to expand to additional acreage.
- A non-profit organization will be selected as the farm site operator in 2025. The operator will be responsible for developing criteria for farmer selection process.

Why was the Bear Hill Regional Park site chosen for the pilot project?

- In a business case study completed in 2022, three potential sites were considered for the pilot project.
- Bear Hill Regional Park was identified as the most viable of these sites due to land ownership and existing assets on the site, including deer fencing and irrigation mains.

When will the service consider expansion to other potential farm sites?

- Expansion to additional lands will be considered starting in year three of the Regional Foodlands Access Service.
- Learnings and capacity building drawn from the Bear Hill pilot project will be key guiding factors in assessing and preparing a new site.

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Who has been engaged in the development of the service concept?

- Following the completion of the Foodlands Trust Business Case in 2022 a variety of members of the agricultural community were engaged through stakeholder meetings and with the Peninsula and Area Agriculture Commission (PAAC).
- Local governments have been informed through the Development Planning Advisory Committee (DPAC), which has received updates and provided feedback through quarterly meetings.

How will decisions about capital investments be made?

- Considerations about capital investments in the Bear Hill pilot site will be made cooperatively between CRD staff and the farm site operator. The CRD Board approves the budget and is the decision-making authority for capital investment.

Aside from the Bear Hill pilot project, what other programs will be run by the service?

- A grant program will also be operated under the service to support land matching lease agreements between prospective farmers and private landowners.
- The goal of this grant program will be to encourage land match leases by promoting the program and providing support grants for startup infrastructure.
- The Regional Foodlands Access Service bylaw has been drafted to allow for the creation of additional programs to support agriculture in the future.

Will the service acquire land?

- The service will have the ability to acquire land. Future land acquisition would proceed through standard CRD business and financial planning processes.

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How much impact will this have?

- Initially, the RFAS is expected to have a small impact on overall farming in the CRD given that it will be a single pilot site.
- However, as the service matures and brings additional lands into food production this impact will increase.
- The service will also be able to run other programs to support the agricultural community in the future and have positive impacts in other ways.

How does this benefit my community?

- Generally, improvements to local food production in the CRD will make food more available and increase local resilience and capacity.
- All communities in the CRD will be able to participate in RFAS programs.
- Though the Bear Hill pilot site is in Saanich, the service can expand to additional surplus CRD and municipal lands elsewhere in the CRD.
- The land matching grants program will apply across the region to support farmers and agriculture across the region.
- Future agricultural programs, such as education and outreach, can be scoped to function throughout the CRD.

How will the RFAS address the rising cost of farmland?

- The Regional Foodlands Access Service (RFAS) does not directly address the rising cost of farmland. However, it aims to mitigate the impact of high farmland costs by:
 - Facilitating affordable access to productive farmland for new and expanding farmers.
 - Activating surplus CRD-owned lands for agricultural use. The service can provide farming opportunities by utilizing existing public fallow lands without requiring farmers to buy land.
 - Implementing a land matching grant program will support land leases for farming on privately held lands, potentially reducing the need for farmers to buy land.
 - These measures provide alternative ways for farmers to access land and start or expand their operations without purchasing increasingly expensive farmland.

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What is an Alternative Approval Process?

- An Alternative Approval Process (AAP) is a form of approval that allows electors to indicate whether they are against a local government proposal moving forward. Electors do this by submitting a completed elector response form to the CRD. If 10% of eligible voters complete and submit the form, the AAP has not obtained elector approval.

Why does the CRD need elector approval?

- As per the Local Government Act, the CRD must receive the electors' approval before it can adopt a bylaw to establish a new service.

What is the expected approval timeline? When would the AAP start? When would the service be established?

- The anticipated timing for the Regional Foodlands Access Service AAP is as follows:
 - September 2024 – 1st, 2nd, 3rd reading of Bylaw 4602 by the CRD Board
 - November 2024 – Bylaw received approval of the Inspector of Municipalities
 - November 21, 2024 – AAP response period begins
 - January 15, 2025 – AAP response period ends at 4:30 pm
 - February 2025 – AAP results delivered and final adoption of the Bylaw (if applicable)

Where can I find more information on the AAP?

- For more information on the Alternative Approval Process (AAP), who can participate, where to find a response form, and how forms may be submitted, please visit www.crd.bc.ca/foodlands-aap