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## NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release  
2022AFF0008-000249  
Feb. 19, 2022

Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries

### **StrongerBC Economic Plan helps agritech grow**

VICTORIA – British Columbians will soon be able to enjoy more locally produced food, while farmers will have new opportunities to grow, thanks to regulatory supports from the B.C. government.

An improvement to the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR) Use Regulation is part of the StrongerBC Economic Plan that sets out to make British Columbia a global player in the agritech marketplace.

“Making B.C.’s food system more sustainable and resilient helps build a stronger economy and prosperous farming communities,” said Lana Popham, Minister of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries. “When the pandemic and recent climate change-related floods disrupted supply chains, British Columbians were reminded of the incredible bounty in our own back yard. Opening opportunities for more vertical farms and innovative agritech practices in partnership with existing traditional farms helps solve our overall food security and food economy puzzle.”

The regulation allows for more intensive farming, known as vertical farming, where crops are grown in vertically stacked layers, maximizing space and reducing energy costs and greenhouse gas emissions. While vertical farming can be placed anywhere, this opens the door to additional opportunities on ALR land for farmers and farm businesses to produce more food for British Columbians.

The ALR is designed to ensure food security and these changes allow it to be used in a practical way to increase local food supply. For example, vertical farming and other controlled environment structures can also make smaller pieces of land that are currently fallow more viable to grow on.

“A key pillar of our StrongerBC Economic Plan is centred around fostering innovation to grow the economy, while tackling climate change,” said Ravi Kahlon, Minister of Jobs, Economic Recovery and Innovation. “By opening up new opportunities for agritech companies to operate in B.C., we are positioning our province to be a world leader in finding innovative solutions to food security problems.”

The regulation is an important step toward making B.C. a leader in using technology and innovation in agriculture to reduce emissions, create new opportunities and ensure a secure and sustainable food supply for British Columbians. In the coming months, the Province will also launch a new agritech centre of excellence to help companies grow and scale up, providing more high-quality, high-tech jobs for British Columbians.

“As the agriculture capital of B.C., we know in the City of Abbotsford just how important this industry and agritech is to our economy, community and food security in the province,” said

Henry Braun, mayor of Abbotsford. “Changes to the ALR regulation brings much-needed certainty and predictability for organizations to invest in and grow agritech in our community.”

Agritech operations use technology and innovation, such as robotics for harvesting or controlled indoor growing systems, to produce more sustainable food, while using fewer resources. Agritech farming contributes to a more resilient food system with increased product density and shorter growing times with the potential to increase crop yields, product quality and food security.

The StrongerBC Economic Plan moves British Columbia forward by tackling the challenges of today, while growing an economy that works for everyone. The long-term plan builds off B.C.’s strong economy recovery and works to address two long-standing challenges – inequality and climate change – by closing the skills gap, building resilient communities, and helping businesses and people transition to clean energy solutions. The plan sets two main goals for the province – inclusive growth and clean growth – and puts forward six missions to keep B.C. on track.

#### **Quick Facts:**

- B.C. has more than 150 agritech companies, including in areas of food processing, precision agriculture, bioproducts, food safety/traceability and soil/crop technology.
- B.C. has an agritech land strategy that builds on recommendations made in 2019 by the Food Security Task Force to review land-use planning policies and regulations to ensure B.C.’s agritech sector has a place to grow.
- The Government of B.C. is launching a Regenerative Agriculture and Agritech Network that will help farmers adopt the latest technology to increase profitability and environmental sustainability, while strengthening the provincial food system.
- Positioning B.C. as an agritech leader while ensuring provincial food security and protecting farmland is a priority in both Popham and Kahlon’s minister mandate letters.

#### **Learn More:**

To learn more about B.C. agritech,

visit: <https://www.britishcolumbia.ca/TradeBCPortal/media/Marketing/bc-agritech-mit.pdf>

To learn more about the Regenerative Agriculture and Agritech Network, visit:

<https://news.gov.bc.ca/25034>

To learn more about the Agritech Concierge program, visit:

<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/covid-19/economic-recovery/agritech-concierge>

To learn more about the Agritech Grant program recipients, visit:

<https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2021PREM0022-000556>

To learn more about the recommendations of the Food Security Task Force, visit:

<https://engage.gov.bc.ca/govtogetherbc/impact/food-security-task-force-results/>

Two backgrounders follow.

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## BACKGROUND 1

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### **Improving B.C.'s food security**

The Province has consulted with Treaty First Nations, some local governments, the Agricultural Land Commission and the BC Agricultural Council and will be doing further targeted consultations with additional local governments, agricultural partners, industry experts and business associations on these changes to B.C.'s Agricultural Land Reserve Use Regulation.

These discussions will seek to ensure that any changes will benefit communities, farmers and the agritech industry, while protecting agricultural land and soil.

The B.C. Food Security Task Force provided recommendations to government outlining new ways to use technology and innovation to strengthen B.C.'s economy and the agriculture sector, today and for generations to come.

The task force's findings include:

- applying the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals to agricultural policies;
- establishing an incubation/acceleration strategy for B.C.'s agritech sector;
- creating an agriculture and agritech institute in B.C. in partnership with post-secondary institutions; and
- reviewing land-use planning policies and regulations to ensure B.C.'s agritech sector has a place to grow.

The implementation of any changes will be monitored closely to ensure they are supporting the agritech industry without eroding the food-producing soils, which are also important for food security. These changes will further support work underway to develop a new Regenerative Agriculture and Agritech Network, which will create jobs and opportunities for farmers and improve food security by using agritech to enhance production, while helping to mitigate impacts from climate change.

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### **Developing B.C. agritech**

In 2021, the B.C. government invested \$7.5 million in grants for high-potential agritech companies to help increase food production and established the Agritech Concierge as a one-stop shop to help businesses grow, diversify, access new markets and attract investment opportunities.

This investment helped to fund projects, including the development of robotics for safe and efficient berry and mushroom harvesting, autonomous electric vehicles to transport produce within greenhouses for processing, packing and shipping, smart technology to enhance wine analysis and production, and low-cost wireless biosensors to monitor pathogens common in agriculture.

In addition to the regulatory change and new Centre of Excellence, the Agritech Concierge operated by the Ministry of Jobs, Economic Recovery and Innovation will continue to provide personalized service to businesses to attract investment capital, navigate government programs and work to support the securing of land for businesses to scale up and prosper.

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