

**Agricultural Land Use Planning
in Northern British Columbia**

**Case Study of
the South Peace Fringe Area,
British Columbia**

FINAL REPORT

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Executive Summary

In this report we present the results of a case study of agricultural land use planning in the South Peace Fringe Area, the part of the Peace River Regional District (PRRD) that surrounds the City of Dawson Creek and the Village of Pouce Coupe, British Columbia. The study involved an assessment of the breadth and quality of five local legislative frameworks that govern agricultural land use planning, including policies, legislation, and governance. We assessed the strength of the local framework for agricultural land use planning using four principles as criteria: maximise stability, integrate public priorities across jurisdictions, minimise uncertainty, and accommodate flexibility. The study also involved an assessment of the political context within which agricultural land use planning takes place and decisions are made. This part of the assessment included documentation and analysis of three policy regimes: farmland preservation, global competitiveness, and food sovereignty. A policy regime refers to the combination of issues, ideas, interests, actors, and institutions that are involved in formulating policy and for governing once policies are devised.

The aim of the study is to contribute to three areas of knowledge. The study lends insight to the state of agricultural land use planning in the PRRD. It contributes to an understanding of the state of agricultural land use planning in northern BC where farmland faces particular pressures from natural resource developments. Finally, the study is part of a broader national project to identify principles and beneficial practices that represent land use planning solutions that protect farmland.

Overall, we found that the local legislative framework is somewhat strong overall with a high level of stability. The framework effectively integrates priorities across jurisdictions and accommodates flexibility. However, the legislative framework was not as effective regarding minimising uncertainty, which can undermine the stronger elements of the framework. Importantly, the Delegation Agreement between the Agricultural Land Commission (ALC) and the Oils and Gas Commission (OGC) has a significant influence on the framework by contributing to uncertainty.

Principles of Land Use Planning

Regional District	Maximise stability	Integrate across jurisdictions	Minimise uncertainty	Accommodate flexibility
PRRD: South Peace Fringe Area	****	****	**	****

* = Very weak; ***** = Very strong

With regard for maximising the stability of the local legislative framework, we found this to be an area of strength for the South Peace Fringe Area. A key element of stability is a clear statement of purpose regarding farmland protection among the primary goals and objectives within each enforceable document. Official Community Plans (OCPs), as enforceable legislation, are the foundation of stability for local frameworks. Typically, OCPs include vision or goal statements, agricultural objectives, and specific policies for agricultural lands. The OCP is supported by the zoning bylaws, which provide regulations for designated agricultural land uses, thereby contributing to the stability of the framework. We found that the OCP for the South Peace

Fringe Area provides clear language and commitment to agricultural land use planning and protecting farmland. The strengths of the OCP are supported by the Regional Agricultural Plan (currently under development), which has a vision statement that includes protecting agricultural lands. This strong, direct commitment to protecting farmland complements other important elements of the framework, including the effective accommodation of flexibility within the legislative framework without introducing unnecessary levels of uncertainty.

Integrating policies and priorities across jurisdictions is a foundation for building cohesion across provincial, regional, and local governments. In order to successfully integrate policies across jurisdictions there must be sufficient details about the legislative context that guides and constrains local government plans and strategies. Overall, we found that the integration is a strong aspect of the local legislative framework. Together, both the OCP and the Draft Regional Agricultural Plan effectively integrate provincial legislation within the local framework. The Draft Plan is particularly effective in this regard, and would be more effective if the plan was adopted, in some form, by the PRRD Board.

The presence of uncertainty, typically introduced via ambiguous language, exceptions or gaps, is a critical measure of the weakness of an agricultural land use planning framework. Thus, in addition to maximising the stability of a legislative framework through enforceable policies, people want to know they can rely on these rules and regulations to be applied consistently under different circumstances. However, with regard for minimising uncertainty, the local legislative framework for the South Peace Fringe Area is weak, with much of this weakness associated with the non-farm oil and gas activities permitted under the OGC Delegation Agreement. The uncertainty of permitted non-farm uses is also increased due to expressed political support for greater “flexibility.”

Creating an effective legislative framework is an act of balance, without being too stable so that it cannot be changed when needed or too strict so that it cannot be applied in a range of circumstances. Thus, flexibility is necessary in order to moderate the restrictive effects of maximising stability and minimising uncertainty. One means to accommodate flexibility is typically done through governance mechanisms. The PRRD is the only Regional District in northern BC that has an Agricultural Advisory Committee. The AAC is engaged in agricultural land use planning, but it has not been the practice for the committee to review all applications to the ALC. The Draft Regional Agricultural Plan includes a recommendation to change this practice so that the AAC reviews all applications. The OGC Delegation Agreement is also designed to accommodate flexibility. It provides a comprehensive set of regulations that define permitted oil and gas uses on agricultural land as well as conditions and procedures for when the ALC must be involved in application processes.

In addition to assessing the strength of the local legislative framework, we also assessed how issues, ideas, interests, and institutions associated with three policy regimes influence local agricultural land use planning processes and decisions. The two policy regimes of farmland preservation and global competitiveness have influenced agricultural land use policy and legislation for over forty years. Food sovereignty, and its associated concerns with food security and demand for local food, is a nascent policy regime that is influencing agricultural land use planning. To complete the assessment of the presence and importance of the policy regimes we examined the documents that comprise the legislative framework. We found that all three policy regimes are present. Farmland preservation appears to be the most influential of the three policy

regimes by a significant degree, with food sovereignty less influential. Global competitiveness is the least influential.

Overall Influence of Policy Regimes, South Peace Fringe Area

	Vision, Goals, Objectives, Recommendations	Driving Issues, Concerns	Regulations	Action Items
Global Competitiveness				
Farmland Preservation				
Food Sovereignty				

Low Medium High

As the project unfolded, several issues emerged as common concerns across the study area. These were small-lot agriculture/fragmentation of farmland, alienation of farmland/foreign ownership, and pressure from natural resource developments. By far, the pressures of natural resource developments on the agricultural land base are very important in the PRRD. Many elements of the OCP and Draft Plan are designed to address these pressures in order to protect and promote the agricultural interest of the area. The issue of small-lot agriculture does not appear to be an issue. Although fragmentation of the land base is mentioned within the framework, it does not appear to be a significant issue. The prevalence of rural residential estates was an issue associated with the alienation of quarter sections in the area in the early 2000s and appears again in the Draft Plan as a main issue to be addressed.

In conclusion, the South Peace Fringe Area is under significant pressure from two sides. On the urban side, the municipalities of Dawson Creek and Pouce Coupe want to maximise the advantages of growth associated with natural resource developments, primarily oil and gas. At the same time, there is significant – and increasing – pressure for oil and gas development in rural areas. Much of the South Peace Fringe Area OCP and Draft Regional Agricultural Plan are directed as managing these competing uses of the land base. There is not only a direct conflict over land use, but also significant impacts on other resources such as on the supply and security of local water resources. The stability of the local legislative framework is a key element for the area to be able to manage these dual pressures, however the uncertainty of permitted non-farm uses presents a significant challenge.

Table of contents

Executive Summary	i
Abbreviations.....	v
About the project.....	vi
Principles for guiding agricultural land use planning	vii
Maximise stability	viii
Minimise uncertainty.....	viii
Integrate across jurisdictions.....	viii
Accommodate flexibility	viii
Strength of BC’s provincial legislative framework	ix
Political context and policy regimes	x
Global competitiveness.....	xi
Food sovereignty.....	xii
Farmland preservation	xii
Introduction	1
Purpose and scope of case study.....	1
Methods	1
Overview of site	2
Agricultural profile.....	4
Results	6
State of agricultural land use planning	6
Legislative framework.....	10
Content analysis of documents	14
Current Issues.....	16
Small-lot agriculture/farmland fragmentation	16
Alienation of farmland/foreign (out-of-province) ownership.....	17
Natural Resource Developments.....	17
Policy regimes.....	18
Discussion.....	25
Assessment of Principles	25
Maximise stability	25
Integrate across jurisdictions.....	26
Minimise uncertainty.....	26
Accommodate flexibility	27
Influence of policy regimes	28
Conclusion	29
References	30
Glossary.....	31
Acknowledgements.....	32
Appendix: Criteria for Evaluating Content of Legislative Framework	33
Appendix: Criteria for determining level of influence of policy regimes.....	35

Abbreviations

AAC	Agricultural Advisory Committee
AIA	Agricultural Impact Assessment
ALC	Agricultural Land Commission
ALC Act	<i>Agricultural Land Commission Act</i>
ALR	Agricultural Land Reserve
CDP	Comprehensive Development Plan
CLI	Canada Land Inventory
DPA	Development Permit Areas
GF2	Growing Forward 2
LGA	<i>Local Government Act</i>
LRMP	Land and Resource Management Plan
OCG	Oil and Gas Commission
OGA Act	<i>Oil and Gas Activities Act</i>
OCP	Official Community Plan
PRRD	Peace River Regional District
SPFA	South Peace Fringe Area

About the project

The provincial project is a one-year study to identify principles and beneficial practices that represent land use planning solutions that protect farmland in northern British Columbia. We have three objectives related to this purpose:

1. To undertake case studies to fill strategic gaps in our understanding of how agricultural land use planning policies and processes at a local level protect farmland while also integrating public priorities across jurisdictions.
2. To analyse three inter-related policy regimes within Canada's agri-food system: the long-standing policy regimes of global competitiveness and farmland preservation; and the nascent regime of food sovereignty. The aim is to understand how these three policy regimes influence agricultural land use planning at local, provincial, and national levels of policy. A policy regime and its changes refer to the combination of issues, ideas, interests, actors and institutions that are involved.
3. To mobilise knowledge gained from the research by hosting workshops across northern British Columbia.

This project represents an extension of a national project to identify principles and beneficial practices that promote integrated land use planning solutions that protect farmland across Canada.

The relation between agriculture, food, and social priorities is connected to the society we want and the place of food and farmers within it. Historically, the decline in the economic and social role of agriculture has accompanied a significant loss and degradation of the agricultural land base. This trend appears to be reversing. The growth of the local food movement, as evident by the increasing number of farmers markets and citizen-based initiatives like community gardens and local food councils, has been the forerunner of recent calls at the national level for a Canada-wide food policy. Although drastic policy changes are not likely to happen immediately at the national level, changes are already occurring at local and regional levels, with all of Canada's major metropolitan regions having launched food plans and policy councils (Vancouver, Calgary, Toronto, Ottawa and Montreal). These changes suggest that the place of agriculture and food within Canadian society has shifted to be much more aligned with public priorities.

Sorting out relations between agriculture, food, and society falls, in part, within the domain of land use planning because every act of producing and consuming food has impacts on the land base. Yet, in spite of forty years of farmland protection policies, the agricultural land base still faces growing pressures from urban development and the pursuit of other economic priorities, with few indications that this trend will be significantly curtailed. Will this trend be halted if Canada adopts a national food policy that gave citizens more influence over domestic food supplies? If Canada adopted such a policy, do governments have the ability to protect the agricultural land base in order to support these new public priorities?

Unlike the urban centres of BC where the greatest pressures on farmland are from urban development, some pressure on agricultural lands in northern BC comes from the development of natural resources, such as forestry and oil and gas. The Site C dam is another source of pressure. Likewise, most of the studies to examine the effectiveness of farmland protection policies have focussed on the pressures from urban development. Recognising that the results of

these studies are not fully transferable to northern BC, this project aims to assess the state of agricultural land use planning in this area of the province.

We anticipate that the greatest potential benefit of the research is to make a positive contribution to the development of agricultural land use plans, planning processes, and policies in northern BC to protect farmland and promote farming as the highest and best use of these lands. Our assessment will be of benefit to land use decision makers, planning practitioners, to non-government organisations, industry groups, farmer organisations, farmers, and the general public.

For more information about the project, please visit the project website or contact Dr. David J. Connell, University of Northern British Columbia.
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Principles for guiding agricultural land use planning

An agricultural land use planning legislative framework provides the context and constraints for what local governments must and can do to protect its agricultural lands. An effective framework of policies, legislation, and governance structures presents an opportunity for local governments, which can then choose how much it wants to take advantage of this opportunity. Within this context it is helpful to be able to assess the quality of an agricultural land use planning framework and understand how well it works and why. For this purpose we have identified the following four principles, which are described below:

- Maximise stability
- Minimise uncertainty
- Integrate across jurisdictions
- Accommodate flexibility

The concepts of stability and uncertainty must be understood with a view of the world as unpredictable and essentially unknowable. This contrasts with a rationale view of the world as something that we can understand fully – if only we had all of the right data and the ability to process the information. This worldview of an open future presents challenges because planning, by its very function, is focussed on making a desirable future a visible part of today's land use decision-making processes (Connell, 2009). The aim of planning is not to predict the future or claim to be all-knowing but to envision a desirable future with the information available. The functions of planning are to maximise what we can know about the future and to minimise what we do not know, thereby establishing a domain of understanding within which to make the best possible land use decisions in the present. This leads to the first two principles of agricultural land use planning.

Maximise stability

Something that is stable is difficult to topple; it stands strong and cannot be easily moved. Likewise, a stable legislative framework for protecting farmland is one that is not easily changed at the whim of shifting political interests; it is well-entrenched in acts of legislation, policy, and governance structures that are based on clear, concise language, and can hold up to court challenge. It is something that people can count on to secure the land base for agriculture and to know what the rules are. In this sense, a measure of stability is a measure of the thing itself – the legislative framework – as it is written in its present form. Thus, stability is a critical measure of the strength of an agricultural land use planning framework.

Minimise uncertainty

In addition to maximising the stability of a legislative framework through clear rules and regulations we must also consider how the framework will be implemented and applied to land use decisions. People want to know they can rely on these rules and regulations to be applied consistently and to know how it will be applied under different circumstances. In this sense, people want not only a stable land base for agriculture but also a legislative framework that provides some certainty about how it will be used to make agricultural land use decisions. However, what we do not know is boundless so we must accept that we cannot eliminate uncertainty. What governments can do is to minimise uncertainty by eliminating loop-holes, ambiguous language, and open-ended conditions. Perhaps more importantly, uncertainty can be minimised through consistent interpretations and applications of the legislative framework. In this sense, a measure of uncertainty is a future-oriented measure of expectations about how the legislative framework will be applied to land use decisions. Thus, the presence of uncertainty is a critical measure of the weakness of an agricultural land use planning framework.

Integrate across jurisdictions

Integrating policies and priorities across jurisdictions is a foundation for building cohesion across provincial, regional, and local governments. This principle of integration can be viewed as a “policy thread” that weaves together traditional areas of responsibility (Smith, 1998). One can also think of integration as a formal “linkage” between policies that provides consistency among them. Such formal linkages can come in the form of a provincial policy that requires a lower-level policy “to be consistent with” provincial statements. The aim of such vertical mechanisms is to ensure that lower-level policies are set within the context of broader public priorities. The same principle of integration applies horizontally, too, so that plans and strategies are coordinated and consistent across local governments. In order to successfully integrate policies across jurisdictions there must be sufficient details about the legislative context that guides and constrains local government plans and strategies.

Accommodate flexibility

Creating an effective legislative framework is an act of balance without being too stable so that it cannot be changed when needed or too strict so that it cannot be applied in a range of

circumstances. Thus, flexibility is necessary in order to moderate the restrictive effects of maximising stability and minimising uncertainty. The principle is to enable decision-makers to accommodate a controlled level of flexibility without compromising the primary functions of the legislative framework to provide stability and reduce uncertainty. The means to accommodate flexibility is typically done through governance mechanisms, such as quasi-judicial provincial commissions, advisory committees, and application processes.

Strength of BC's provincial legislative framework

British Columbia's legislative framework is very strong. The act of legislation to establish a land reserve of all farmland and a quasi-judicial tribunal provides the highest level of stability. As Barry Smith (1998) stated, "A stable ALR is the cornerstone of planning for agriculture; heightening certainty for persons engaged in farm businesses and support industries." Important elements within the legislation include a clear mandate for the ALC that is focussed specifically on protecting farmland. This primary focus has withstood the test of time over forty years in spite of changing governments. The additional legislation to protect farm practices extends this stability to areas of land use conflict. The strong language in the legislation that local government plans must be consistent with the ALC Act provides a necessary link in order to extend the provincial legislation into the domain of local land use planning and decisions.

There are, however, several factors that undermine stability and contribute to uncertainty within the farmland protection framework. The most influential tool that has been used by provincial governments to introduce new elements to the legislative framework has been the Ministry of Agriculture's annual service plan for the Agricultural Land Commission. Annual Service Plans have been used to introduce new factors (e.g., community need and regional responsiveness) that effectively compromised the ALC mandate. As Gary Runka stated, "Somehow, during the mid-1990s, uncertainty of purpose and direction crept in to both the administration and the perception of BC's agricultural land preservation program" (Runka 2006:5). At other times the service plans have also been used to re-inforce the legislated mandate.

The use of regional panels within the ALC has been a source of uncertainty within the legislative framework. Until 2014 the use of the ALC panels, as per the ALC Act, was at the discretion of the ALC Chair. Over the years the level of influence of regional panels in ALC decisions has shifted. In the 2002 annual service plan, the concepts of "regional representation" and "community need" were formally inserted into the ALC practices. In the following years the influence of the regional panels was strengthened. And, as noted in the 2007 service plan, the number of applications to the ALC for land use changes "increased significantly." Effectively, the greater level of influence of regional and local interests compromised the mandate of the ALC to protect the provincial interest in protecting agricultural lands, thereby changing expectations and introducing a greater level of uncertainty about how the ALC Act would be applied. As of 2010 the ALC Chair has made changes to return to a more centralised decision-making process that re-focusses on protecting the agricultural land base as a mandate of provincial interest.

In May, 2014, the ALC Act was amended through Bill 24. These changes were preceded by statements by BC's Premier in the summer of 2013 that the ALC Act would be reviewed and is subject to change. Soon thereafter a "core review" process was started (that included a range

of government services, not just the ALC) that, in relation to protecting farmland, involved very limited public input and no consultation with stakeholders. Bill 24 was introduced to the legislature in March, 2014, and passed on May 29, 2014. Aside from the impacts of the actual changes, the statements about pending changes to the ALC Act altered people's expectations and introduced uncertainty. There were three main changes to the ALC Act:

- The ALR was divided into two zones
 - The criteria for agricultural land use decisions in Zone 1 were not changed
 - The criteria for agricultural land use decisions in Zone 2 were changed and introduced additional factors that the ALC must consider when making decisions (e.g., social, economic, cultural, and heritage values)
- The regional panels were now required, as opposed to being at the discretion of the ALC Chair
- The level of direct political involvement was increased through the power to appoint members to the ALC (in some cases without consultation with the ALC)

The most significant changes affect Zone 2 for which the mandate of the ALC to protect farmland has been changed. This change has undermined the stability of the ALC mandate. Uncertainty about how the new criteria will be applied has also increased.

Overall, though, the weakest link in the provincial legislative framework in BC is that the decision-making process has been driven by applications to change land uses. The ALC Act provides a mechanism for land owners, including governments, to apply to the ALC to exclude or include land in the ALR, to approve subdivisions, and to permit non-farm uses. As recognised in a review of the ALC in 2010, these applications have dominated the activities of the ALC with the direct consequence that the ALC had limited time and resources to dedicate to working with local governments to strengthen land use policies in order to protect farmland.

Another important weakness of BC's agricultural land use planning concerns foreign or out-of-province ownership of land. Presently, BC has no restrictions on foreign ownership of agricultural land, regardless of whether it is in the ALR or not. Foreign ownership of agricultural land increases the possibility that farmland will be alienated.

Finally, the ALC recently expressed a strong interest to dedicate more resources to encourage farming and its viability. These complementary activities to protecting the land base were present when the land reserve was first established in 1973. However, the programs were eliminated soon thereafter. Such programs serve indirectly to protect the agricultural land base by increasing the demand for the land itself as productive farmland.

Political context and policy regimes

To understand how political contexts and multiple public priorities influence agricultural land use planning in Canada, and to what extent it has already had an impact, we will examine the interaction of three current policy regimes: global competitiveness, farmland preservation, and food sovereignty. A policy regime and its changes refer to the combination of issues, ideas, interests, actors and institutions that are involved. Actors of agricultural policy regimes include a wide range of interests represented by citizens, all levels of government, local organisations, professional organisations representing producers, farmers and ranchers themselves, unions, industry trade associations and environmental groups, among others. In Canada, the two policy

regimes of global competitiveness and farmland preservation have influenced policies for several decades. The recent emergence of food sovereignty as a policy regime reflects growing public concerns about the security and safety of Canada's domestic food supply, and may have significant implications for Canada's global competitiveness and the conservation and use of agricultural land. In this section we described each of these three policy regimes. A description of the criteria we used to determine the level of influence of each policy regime is provided in the appendix.

Global competitiveness

A policy regime of global competitiveness has strengthened over the past forty years at both the national and provincial levels, usually in the context of pressures on industry viability in the face of freer trade. An interest in global competitiveness often requires policies and strategies to successfully integrate into the global economy. A recent report on competitiveness by the House of Commons Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food focussed on access to new markets, barriers to trade, food safety and product labelling, and market concentration within sectors. Input to this report was provided by national and regional commodity trade associations, meat and other food processors, transportation associations, and policy institutes, among others. Scholars in this field, such as Grace Skogstad, have noted that, although the membership of the agri-food policy community in Canada is strong individually, the community is nationally fragmented and organisationally divided, as national policies do not always serve all members or geographic regions equally. For example, export-oriented policies may promote the export of raw food products at the risk of higher prices for domestic food processors. Such policies also have regional differences, where policies may benefit one region (food processing in central Canada) to the disadvantage of food producers in another region (food producers in the prairies). Notwithstanding these internal challenges, the competitiveness policy regime continues to strengthen, as evident in the Growing Forward 2 (GF2) policy framework announced on September 14, 2012.

Key ideas from GF2:

- Competitiveness and Market Growth: The sector needs to continually increase productivity, to reduce costs and to respond to consumer demands, such as for high-value products with specific attributes. Competitiveness also means increasing our share of domestic and international markets.
- The key drivers are:
 - o Innovation: The sector adopts and implements new technologies and innovations, creating and using knowledge to develop new products, technologies and business management practices that drive down costs, increase productivity and respond to consumer demands.
 - o Institutional and Physical Infrastructure: Effective rules, regulations, standards, organizations, and physical infrastructure allow firms to operate and markets to function efficiently for a profitable sector and the well-being of Canadians.
- Competing on cost: One factor in assessing the competitiveness of Canadian agriculture and agri-food sector is how cost-efficient Canadian agricultural producers, manufacturers and exporters are in relation to competitor suppliers. This is influenced

- by a number of factors, including natural resource availability and use, input prices, labour availability and cost, and scale of operation.
- Innovation is critical for improved cost competitiveness. Innovation can lead to improved productivity and reduced costs. However, despite significant agricultural research, the sector could be more effective in applying knowledge and innovating along the supply chain.
 - Focus on the role of innovation for productivity growth and the ongoing efforts to access emerging growth markets.
 - Continual innovation and adaptation has contributed to increased yields and the creation of new products and production methods
 - Increased trade, globalization of supply chains, and more exacting consumer demands have increased the importance of rules, regulations, and other market infrastructure
 - Additional industry capacity and infrastructure investments, such as information and communication technologies, will be required to enable producers, processors, buyers, and government agencies to adjust effectively to new food safety regulations and buyer assurance standards.
 - Bilateral and multilateral trade agreements and trade promotion efforts are essential.

Food sovereignty

For our purposes, food sovereignty is a broad term that focusses on the right of citizens to have greater control over its food supply. The term encompasses food security and food safety. Food security is concerned about the availability, accessibility, and affordability of food.

While the control of food supplies were among the earliest drivers of nation-building and human settlements, food sovereignty, as defined by the International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty, is about the right of peoples to define, protect and regulate domestic agricultural production and land policies that promote safe, healthy and ecologically sustainable food production that is culturally appropriate. Within Canada, the growth of the local food movement, as evident by the increasing number of farmers markets and citizen-based initiatives like community gardens and local food councils, has been the forerunner of recent calls for citizens having greater control over national agri-food policies. The National Farmers Union, Canadian Federation of Agriculture, and Food Secure Canada are some of the national actors calling for changes. Adopting agri-food policies that promote greater food sovereignty could easily reach into people's daily lives, with economic, social and environmental implications, both positive and negative. Such policy will be regarded quite differently depending on a person's values and priorities, and where agriculture fits among them.

Farmland preservation

Different terms are used in this policy regime including farmland conservation, farmland preservation, and farmland protection. For our project we will use farmland protection and farmland preservation in two specific ways:

- Farmland protection: a narrower term that we will use to refer specifically to land use planning policies that aim to *protect* farmland so that it is available for farm uses; we will use farmland protection in relation to the contents of a legislative framework.
- Farmland preservation: is a broader term that concerns all aspects of policies related to farmland including policies that not only protect farmland but are also concerned with soil and landscape conservation, etc.; can be synonymously with farmland conservation; we will refer to all that is related to farmland preservation as a policy regime.

As a policy regime, preserving farmland first garnered serious public attention in Canada in the early 1970s with most provincial and local jurisdictions having some form of legislation or guidelines in place by the end of the 1970s. The historical development of farmland policies in Canada were accompanied by a wide range of economic, environmental, and social issues that were associated with and re-inforced tensions among different land uses, such as residential, commercial, industrial, and natural resource development.

Correspondingly, motivations for preserving farmland are influenced by factors such as food production, market value for land, environmental issues, amenity of rural landscapes, agrarian ideals and land use conflicts on the urban fringe. In spite of efforts over the past forty years, Canada has experienced a continual loss of prime farmland across the country. The issue is especially acute in Ontario, which contains the country's largest supply of prime agricultural lands, but concerns for the preservation of farmland exist across the country, albeit to varying degrees. But is also acute in other jurisdictions due to a much more limited and declining agricultural land base, such as in British Columbia and Quebec.

Concern about the loss and fragmentation (parcelisation) of farmland continues to be an issue in the face of continued urban sprawl and alienation of farmland (i.e., farmland that is not being farmed or no longer suitable for farming). These issues often lead to further problems, such as conflicts or tension with residential, recreational, infrastructure, and industrial land uses. Loss of farmland is often associated with concerns about the supply of local food and, increasingly, it is concerned with "land grabbing" through foreign or out-of-province ownership of land.

Introduction

Purpose and scope of case study

In this report we present the results of a case study of agricultural land use planning in the South Peace Fringe Area, located in northeastern British Columbia (BC) in the Peace River Regional District (PRRD). This case study contributes to three areas of knowledge. The case study is part of a national project to identify principles and beneficial practices that represent land use planning solutions that protect farmland. For our purposes, the case study contributes to an understanding of the state of agricultural land use planning in northern BC. Finally, the case study lends insight to the state of agricultural land use planning in the Regional District and South Peace Fringe Area.

The case study involved an assessment of the breadth and quality of the legislative framework that governs agricultural land use planning, including the documentation of policies, legislation, and governance structures and a detailed analysis of the contents of these documents. The case study also involved an assessment of the political context within which agricultural land use planning processes are completed and decisions are made. Our assessment of the political context included documentation and analysis of three policy regimes: farmland preservation, global competitiveness, and food sovereignty.

Methods

Legislative framework:

The methods used to complete the preliminary assessment involved several activities:

- Document agricultural land use planning legislative framework:
The legislative framework consists of policies, legislation (and by-laws), and governance structures related to agricultural land use planning at local, regional (or upper-tier), and provincial levels of government. The policies and legislation were identified as enforceable, aspirational, or enabling. Refer to the appendix for definitions of these and other terms.
- Content analysis of legislative framework documents:
After identifying the relevant documents the next step was to analyse the level of detail of each document's contents. The aim of the content analysis is to assess the breadth and quality of the legislative framework.

Political context:

- Policy regimes
We analysed the contents of documents with regard for the presence and importance of policy regimes. The documents included those identified in the legislative framework. The aim is to assess the extent to which agricultural land use planning accommodates the three

policy regimes, influences land use decisions, and encompasses a comprehensive view of food systems planning, activities, and issues.

Overview of site

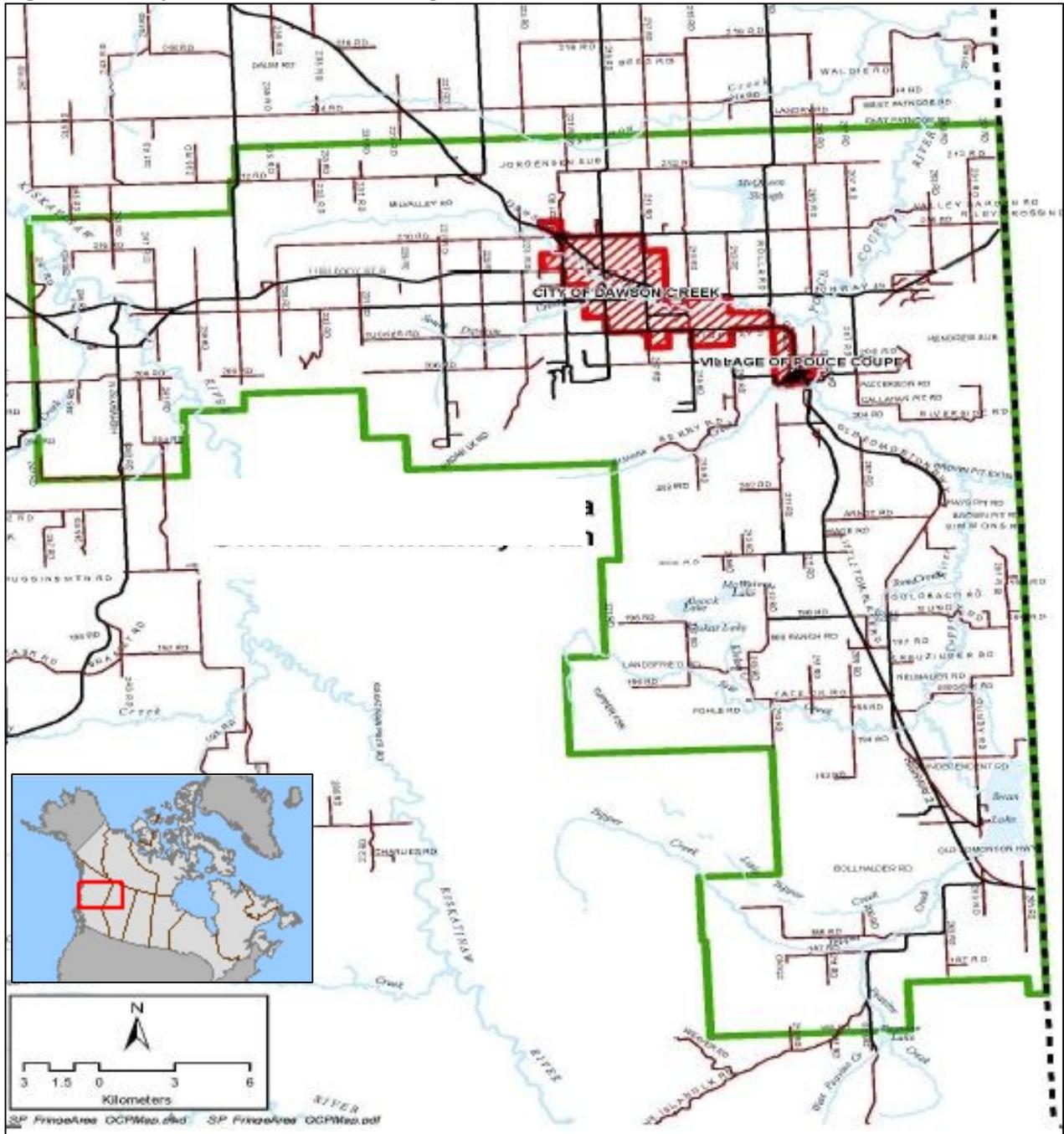
The South Peace Fringe Area, which is a land use planning designation, includes the part of the PRRD that surrounds the City of Dawson Creek and the Village of Pouce Coupe (Figure 1). According the South Peace Official Community Plan (OCP), the area covers about 94,500 ha and, in 2010, had an estimated population of 4,578. The rural area encompasses the small settlement areas of Tomslake, Arras, Bessborough, Sunset Prairie and Kilkerran.

The geography varies as the region is positioned within the BC Peace Lowland eco-section of the western part of the Canadian Boreal Interior Plains east of the Rocky Mountains located along the interior plains of the northeast of the province. Due to the Rocky Mountains to the west of the Boreal Plains, the moisture filled winds from the Pacific Ocean are blocked. This geographical feature results in long, cold winters with short days, and hot summers with long hours of sunshine.

The South Peace area has a history of being a small farming and agricultural area, which started when the Canadian government began issuing homestead grants to settlers in the early 1900s. This history also includes a legacy of rapid population and size expansion during the mid-twentieth century when the Northern Alberta Railways terminus and the Alaskan Highway were built. The completion of the railway, the highway, and development of multiple grain elevators attracted many more settlers to the region.

The economy is based on agriculture, tourism, oil and gas extraction, and retail. The town of Dawson Creek itself is located at 'Mile 0' of the Alaska Highway, contributing to a large tourism industry throughout the summer months as many travellers journey to Alaska via the highway. Agriculture is still an important part of the economy; however, it faces continuous pressures from industrial development and oil and gas activities. Throughout the past 40 years, an increase in oil and natural gas exploration in northeastern BC has resulted in the growth of the extractive industry in the PRRD. As one of the main drivers of the economy, industrial development and oil and gas extraction pose significant threats to agricultural practices.

Figure 1. Study Area, South Peace Fringe Area



Source Peace River Regional District, South Peace Fringe Area Official Community Plan.

Agricultural profile

Agriculture is very important in the Peace Region, both historically and economically, and the area is sometimes referred to as the “Breadbasket of British Columbia.” This label is appropriate given the extent of agriculture in this region compared to the rest of BC. The PRRD contains 12% of all ALR lands in the province (Table 1). In the South Peace, 78% of the land base is in the ALR and under production (South Peace Fringe Area OCP) (Figure 2). Much of this land has high agricultural capability (Table 2), producing wheat, canola (rapeseed), oats, barley, hay, forage seed for seed, and alfalfa. The region is a major producer of beef cattle, as well as producing poultry, sheep and lambs, horses, and bison. Bee keeping and honey production is also prevalent. Although the growing season is short, the days are long throughout the summer. The background report prepared for the regional agricultural plan (Don Cameron Associates, 2014) provides a comprehensive profile of agriculture in the region.

Table 1. ALR as Percentage of Total Land Area (ha)

	Land area (ha)	ALR area (ha)	ALR as a % of BC total
Peace River	11,933,660	1,477,920	12%
Northern BC	43,430,120	3,200,980	7%
British Columbia	92,973,000	4,752,630	5%

Source: Smith (1998). Note: there have been some small changes to the amount of ALR.

Table 2. Soil Classifications for Agriculture in the PRRD

Land classes	Total land in PRRD (ha)	Percent in ALR	Percent not in ALR	Percent of land area
Class 1	5,110	82	18	0.3
Class 2	120,908	90	10	8.0
Class 3	411,764	90	10	62.0
Class 4	492,952	88	12	

Source: PPRD Regional Agricultural Plan: Background Report (Don Cameron Associates, 2014)

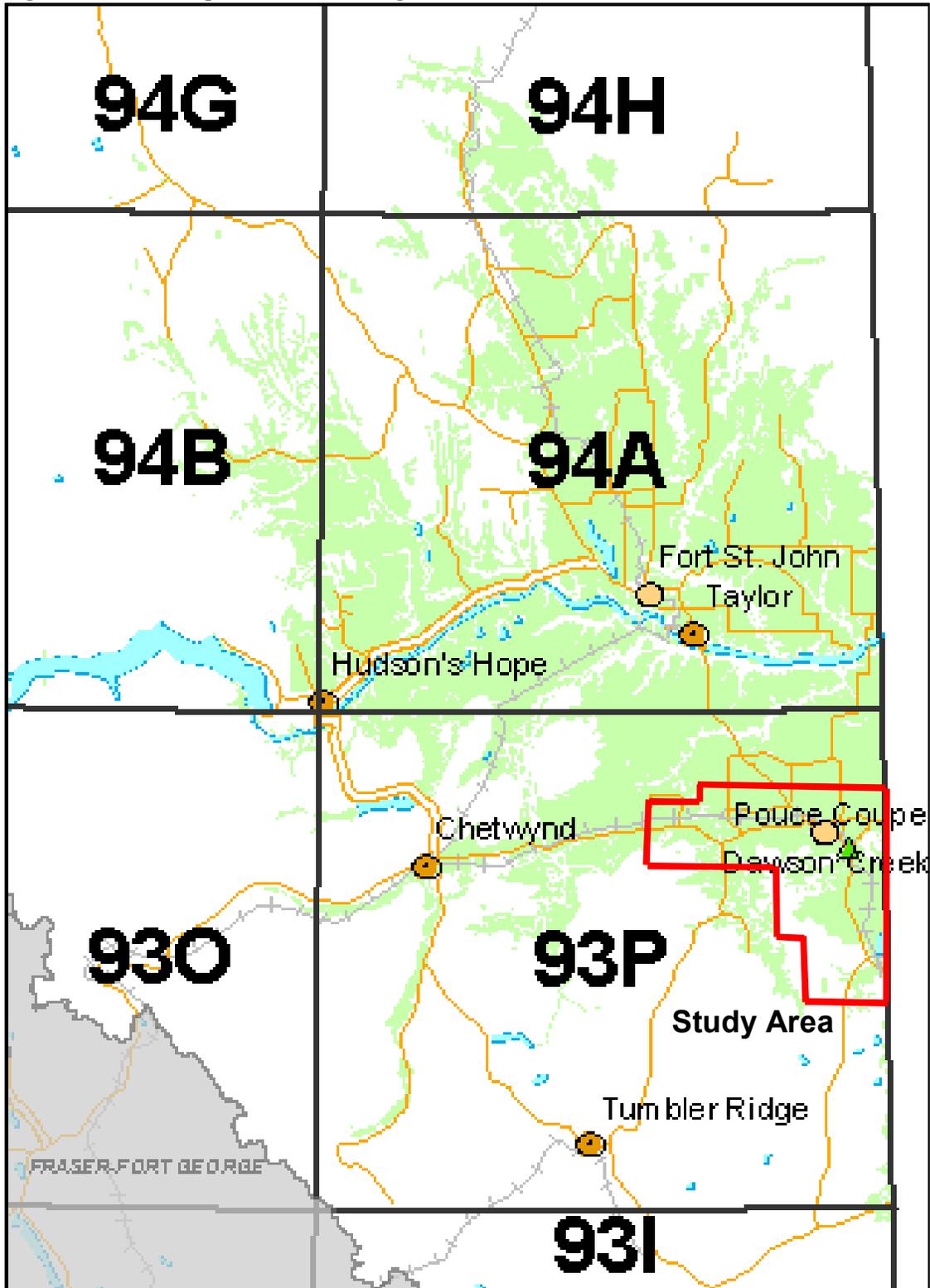
In the PRRD, there are 1,523 farms and 2,285 farm operators, based on 2011 Census of Agriculture (Table 3). These numbers have declined over the past ten years. The number of farms has declined by 13.6% and the number of operators declined by 11.6%.

Table 3. Farms and Farm Operators, Peace Region Regional District, 2001-2011

Farms			Farm Operators		
2001	2006	2011	2001	2006	2011
1,774	1,699	1,532	2,585	2,505	2,285

Source: Census of Agriculture 2001, 2006, 2011

Figure 2. ALR Map, Peace River Regional District, BC



Source: Agricultural Land Commission. Agricultural Land Reserve Mapping Overview. ALR Mapping - Peace River Regional District. http://www.alc.gov.bc.ca/mapping/RD/Peace_River.htm

Results

In this section we present the results for the case study of the South Peace Area. We begin with the results of our assessment of the legislative framework of the case study site within the context of regional and provincial policies and legislation. We then present the results of the content analyses of local government policies and legislation followed by the results of the political context, which includes our assessment of the influence of the three policy regimes (farmland preservation, food sovereignty, and global competitiveness). We discuss the significance of these results in the next section.

State of agricultural land use planning

The South Peace Fringe Area is under significant pressure from two sides. On the urban side, the municipalities of Dawson Creek and Pouce Coupe want to maximise the advantages of growth associated with natural resource developments, primarily oil and gas. This was the impetus for the South Peace Comprehensive Development Plan (Urban Systems Ltd., 2007). As stated in this plan,

The CDP identifies land to accommodate anticipated growth over a long term, 15 year plus planning horizon. Growth has been allocated by a rational comprehensive approach which considers existing development patterns, agricultural use, environmental conditions and servicing. The Plan is intended to ensure the communities of the South Peace are prepared to take full advantage of existing and emerging opportunities for investment while supporting the integrity of agriculture and the natural environment (p. 1).

This planning goal was to be achieved by removing land from the ALR in areas that are immediately adjacent to, or within, the City of Dawson Creek and the Village of Pouce Coupe. However, the development was to be take place “while supporting the integrity of agriculture and the natural environment” (p. 1).

At the same time, there is significant – and increasing – pressure for oil and gas development in rural areas. Much of the Draft Regional Agricultural Plan is directed as managing these competing uses of the land base. There is not only a direct conflict over land use, but also significant impacts on other resources such as on the supply and security of local water resources. Correspondingly, the Draft Plan includes the following two agricultural policies:

- Measure the real number of acres being taken out of farm production, by approved temporary uses, (e.g. wellsites, access roads, pipeline, etc.) over extended periods of time (i.e. 5 to 30 years or more);
- Evaluate the cumulative impacts of temporary uses on the loss of productive farm land and the effects on agricultural sustainability and food security for the future;

Thus, one of the stated goals in the Draft Plan is, “To work collaboratively with all levels of government, public, industry and other stakeholders to reduce conflicts caused by resource extraction activities and to lessen the impacts associated with cumulative industrialization on the land base and the environment (p. 28).

As noted above, the PRRD contains a large amount of ALR land and, for this reason, it is reasonable to expect a high number of applications to the ALC for exclusions, subdivisions, and other non-farm uses (excluding applications to the OGC). The number of applications in the PRRD has been consistent. Table 4 displays the number of ALC applications in the PRRD by year between the years of 2006 to 2014, and Table 5 presents these same applications divided by Electoral Area. Electoral Area D, which corresponds with the South Peace Fringe Area, has the highest number of applications. A breakdown by types of applications and the subsequent decisions made by the ALC are shown in Table 6. Of a total of 557 applications, 55% were for subdivision, about half of which were approved. Overall, 65% of applications were approved.

Table 4. Number of ALC Applications by Year- Peace River Regional District

Year	Number of Applications
2014 (to March)	30
2013	52
2012	63
2011	60
2010	54
2009	55
2008	84
2007	79
2006	65
Total	542

Table 5. Number of ALC Applications by Electoral Area

Number of Applications by Electoral Area	
Electoral Area	Number of Applications (2006-2014)
B- Northern Rockies	126
C- Fort St. John/Taylor	124
D- Dawson Creek/Pouce Coupe	215
E- Hudson’s Hope/Chetwynd	69
Unidentified Location	8
Total	542

Table 6. Type of ALC Applications and ALC Decisions

ALC Decision	ALC Applications (2006-2014)							% of Total
	Ex-clusion	Sub-division	Non-Farm Use	Soil	Utility	In-clusion	Total	
Approved	27	73	39	---	16	11	166	29.8%
Refused	9	124	10	---	---	1	144	25.9%
Refused as Proposed; Allow With Conditions	14	34	2	---	---	1	51	9.2%
Approved with Conditions	23	73	85	6	8	1	196	35.2%
Total	73	304	136	6	24	14	557	
% of Total	13.1%	54.6%	24.4%	1.1%	4.3%	2.5%		

The combined pressures from urban-based industrial development and rural-based natural resource activities place the South Peace Fringe Area in a very difficult and unique situation. Since 1976, oil and gas activities have been legally recognised as a permitted non-farm use on ALR lands without the need for an application. And since 2004, a delegation agreement between the ALC and the Oil and Gas Commission (OGC) has been in place, whereby decision-making power over specific oil and gas activities on ALR land has been delegated to the OGC. As stated in the Delegation Agreement, “Preserving agricultural land and the sound development of the oil and gas sector are both important to the economic, social, and/or environmental sustainability of British Columbia” (p. 1). The Delegation Agreement covers the PRRD and the Northern Rockies Regional Municipality.

Under the OGC Delegation Agreement, both farming and oil and gas activity are permitted uses of the land base. According to the ALC (ALC, 2013, p. 1), this situation is explained as follows:

The Agricultural Land Commission (ALC) has long viewed the majority of oil and gas activities in the ALR as being “temporary” in nature and vitally important to the economic wellbeing of British Columbia. Since 1976 the ALC has worked collaboratively with industry to develop a process of allowing the non-farm use of land in the ALR for oil and gas activities without the need of an application.

How then, did the ALC reconcile this accommodation to the oil and gas industry when one of the purposes of the legislation is to preserve agricultural land? The fundamental answer to this question is that the ALC has, and continues to view the land use as temporary, albeit likely long term, and its accommodation was predicated on the commitment from industry to restore the land back to an agricultural standard equal to, or better than, that which existed prior to development.

The Agreement is intended to be a comprehensive set of policies for establishing permitted non-farm oil and gas activities on ALR land. Policies include permitted non-farm

uses, application requirements, and procedures for applications, as well as explanations for how impact areas are calculated, guidelines minimising the impact of activities, and criteria for site assessments. The conditions for which non-farm uses are exempt or require an ALC application to the OGC is reproduced in Table 7. Under these conditions, a significant level of non-farm oil and gas activities and ancillary uses can take place on the ALR land base without the need for an application.

Although the oil and gas industry dominates the economy in the Peace region, and has a significant direct impact on ALR lands, agricultural land use planning and protection is improving in the PRRD, as evident through updated OCPs and the current efforts to complete a regional agricultural plan.

Table 7. Categories of Oil and Gas Activity and Ancillary Activity Non-farm Uses

Item	Proposed Non-farm use	Exempt from application under the ALC Act for non-farm use permission*	Application under the ALC Act for non-farm use permission made to the OGC
1	Oil and gas activity and ancillary activity sites (other than items 4 and 6) for which, on a section basis or equivalent, the combined total area occupied by existing and proposed activities is ≤ 20.0 hectares.	X	
2	Oil and gas activity and ancillary activity sites (other than items 3 and 5) for which, on a section basis or equivalent, the combined total area occupied by existing and proposed activities is > 20.0 hectares.		X
3	Pipelines	X	
4	Electric power line that is not immediately adjacent to access roads.		X
5	Conversion of an existing oil and gas activity site to an oil and gas activity or ancillary site that is listed in (i)-(v) below, for which no new land is required. (i) Facilities (including gas processing plants) that handle product from more than one facility or well site, (ii) Camps, (iii) Sumps, (iv) Borrow/aggregate extraction sites, (v) Produced-water/fresh-water storage sites.	X	
6	Conversion or expansion of an existing oil and gas activity or ancillary activity, or a new oil and gas activity or ancillary activity that is listed in 5(i)-(v) above, for which new land is required and the total project (lease) area is > 3.0 hectares.		X

Legislative framework

The legislative framework consists of policies, regulations, and governance structures related to agricultural land use planning at local, regional, and provincial levels of government. Policy documents were identified as enforceable, aspirational, or enabling (refer to the appended glossary for definitions of these and other terms). Table 8 displays the three tiers of agricultural land use planning policies and legislation. At the provincial level, the framework includes the provincial legislative documents pertinent to agricultural land use planning, such as the *Local Government Act*, *Farm Practices Protection Act*, *Agricultural Land Commission Act*, *Land Title Act*, as well as the *Water Act*.

At the regional landscape level, the Dawson Creek Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP) (ILMB, 1999) serve to guide uses of Crown land within the southern part of the PRRD. The LRMP is not a legal document; some legal orders to establish old growth management areas have been approved. The PRRD Zoning Bylaw No. 1343 covers lands in the south part of the region that is not under the jurisdiction of an OCP. We also include the PRRD Draft Regional Agricultural Plan (Draft, April, 2014) in the local legislative framework as an aspirational strategy. Although the plan is still in draft form, it does reflect current agricultural land use interests, ideas, and issues. Thus, we decided that our analysis would be more accurate and complete by including the plan among the documents, rather than ignoring the draft plan. There is no Regional Growth Strategy in the PRRD that addresses long-term planning issues for incorporated and unincorporated areas.

The local framework for the South Peace Fringe Area consists of one legislation document and one policy document. The legislation document is the South Peace Fringe Area OCP Bylaw No. 2048, approved in 2012. The local policy document is the South Peace Comprehensive Development Plan, completed in 2007 (Urban Systems Ltd., 2007), and discussed above.

Governance for agriculture land use planning is led by the ALC North Panel. However, as discussed above, the ALC has delegated decision-making authority to the OGC for non-farm uses related to oil and gas activity and ancillary activity. In this capacity, the OGC has a significant level of authority over agricultural land use decisions. The main governance structure that acts as a buffer mechanism within the South Peace Fringe Area is the PRRD Agricultural Advisory Committee (AAC), which consists of two directors and fourteen committee members. The current members of the committee represent a range of agricultural interests, including the Women's Institute, Forage Association of BC, Farmers Institute, Cattlemen's Association, Grain Producers Association, Bison Association, and the Forage Seed Association.

The general mandate of the AAC (PRRD, 2013) includes providing the Regional Board with advice on elements relating to and strengthening agriculture in the region. The main issues that the AAC will advise the Board include assisting with reviews or completion of OCPs, regulatory bylaws relating to agriculture, farm policies, or agricultural area plans. In addition to this, the AAC aids in important development proposals, including analysing the potential impacts on agriculture, water management issues, and destructive insect and invasive plant regulations and programs. Finally, the AAC may also contribute recommendations regarding the increase of agricultural awareness in the region, enhancing the understanding of the role of agriculture in the local and regional economies, addressing the issues of agricultural land base competition, and lastly, identifying and analysing infrastructural improvements that may potentially aid in

Agricultural Land Use Planning in Northern BC
FINAL REPORT: SOUTH PEACE AREA FRINGE AREA

Table 8, Legislative Framework for South Peace Area

	POLICY	LEGISLATION	GOVERNANCE
PROVINCIAL	<p>[ALC] <u>Annual Service Plans</u> [MAL] <u>Strengthening Farming</u> [ALC] ALR and Community Planning Guidelines [Smith] “Planning for Agriculture”</p>	<p><i>Agricultural Land Commission Act</i> <i>Local Government Act</i> <i>Farm Practices Protection (Right to Farm) Act</i> <i>Forest and Range Practices Act</i> <i>Range Act</i> <i>Land Title Act</i> <i>Water Act</i> Agricultural Land Reserve Use, Subdivision, and Procedure Regulation</p>	<p>Agricultural Land Commission [ALC Act] <i>Administrative Tribunals Act</i> Governance Policy for the Agricultural Land Commission</p>
REQUIRED INTEGRATION	<p>LGA Part 25 849 (e) Purpose of regional growth strategy: maintaining the integrity of a secure and productive resource base, including the agricultural land reserve</p>		
REGIONAL	<p>Dawson Creek LRMP (1999) PRRD Regional Agricultural Plan (Draft, Apr/2014)</p>	<p>PRRD Zoning Bylaw No. 1343</p>	<p>OGC Delegation Agreement PRRD Agricultural Advisory Committee</p>
REQUIRED INTEGRATION	<p>LGA Part 25 46 Conflict with bylaws A local government must ensure that its bylaws are consistent with the ALC Act. A bylaw that is inconsistent has no force or effect. LGA Part 25 882 (3) (OCP) Adoption procedures 882 The local government must refer the plan to the ALC for comment. LGA Part 25 946 (3) Subdivision to provide residence for a relative ALC Act 13 Dispute resolution on community issues</p>		
LOCAL	<p>South Peace Comprehensive Development Plan (2007)</p>	<p><i>South Peace Fringe Area OCP Bylaw No. 2048, (2012)</i></p>	

Acts (provincial laws), bylaws (local government laws, e.g., official municipal plan) [italicised]

Enforceable policy, regulations pursuant to acts [bold]

Aspirational policy at all levels [plain text]

supporting agriculture in the region. The Draft Regional Agricultural Plan explains that the current practice is for the PRRD Board to *not* refer ALC applications for subdivision or removal to the AAC for review. However, the Draft Plan recommends changing this practice, such that the Board seeks advice from the AAC for applications for removal, boundary adjustment, subdivision, or non-farm use on ALR land. The Draft Plan has a complementary recommendation to prepare an agricultural impact guideline for use by the AAC to help them review applications and make decisions that benefit agriculture.

Official Community Plan

An OCP, as enforceable legislation implemented through zoning bylaws, is a key element of stability for a local framework. The purpose of an OCP is to establish a long-term vision for an area and its residents; it sets objectives and policies that guide decisions on land use management. Given its importance, we reviewed the South Peace Fringe Area OCP to understand the importance of agriculture among other priorities of public interest and land use policies.

The importance of agriculture to the area is evident. At the front end of the OCP, it states, “The importance of agriculture in this area, the local economy, the region and the province is reiterated by this community plan.” Correspondingly, under the general aims of the plan, the OCP includes two goals related directly to agriculture:

- Economic Goal: To support and encourage agriculture industry in the SPFA through preservation of the agricultural land base and restriction on uses that are not compatible with agricultural activities. (s3.1.2)
- Agriculture Goal: To support Agriculture as a primary industry within the SPFA and recognize it is a major component of the lifestyle and rural character of the SPFA and is a major contributor to the local economy. Primary agricultural lands are a precious commodity and are needed for food security. (s3.2)

An OCP, if the plan area has agricultural lands, will include a land designation and description for its agricultural lands. These designations may be combined with other uses, such as Agriculture/Resource. The land designation in the South Peace Fringe Area is as follows:

Agriculture (AG):

The vast majority of the plan area has low density population development with broad scale agricultural and resource extraction activities. This land base is valued for its high food production capability and the protection granted pursuant to the Farm Practices Protection (Right-to-Farm) Act.

This designation recognises the high capability of the area’s agricultural land and the protection provided to farmers to undertake normal agricultural practices.

An OCP often includes a section on agricultural objectives. Here, too, we can get a sense of the importance of agriculture and the level of detail dedicated to supporting agriculture. The South Peace Fringe Area OCP includes five separate statements under Agriculture Objectives (s3.2.1) that cover a range of key issues identified in other parts of the plan, including protecting agricultural land and promoting secure access to water.

Agricultural Land Use Planning in Northern BC
FINAL REPORT: SOUTH PEACE AREA FRINGE AREA

- a) To preserve and utilize productive agricultural lands to foster self-sufficiency, promote security of food production and improve economic diversity.
- b) To encourage and support all citizens in the SPFA to have the opportunity, knowledge and resources to produce, acquire, eat, enjoy and celebrate affordable and nutritious local food.
- c) To support the AAC in promoting agricultural sustainability and preservation.
- d) To promote secure access to water for agriculture, acknowledging and supporting the coexistence of agriculture areas and watershed management areas and their interrelationship in terms of sustainability and water protection.
- e) To support the protection of the agricultural land base with emphasis on the preservation of the highest productive land, having a CLI soil rating of Class 1, 2, 3 4 and Class 5(C).

We also reviewed the agricultural land policies. The results are displayed in Table 9. The list of policies and regulations in the table are compiled from OCPs in Regional Districts throughout northern BC; they are included here as a means to assess the breadth of the policies in the South Peace OCP. Although the South Peace OCP does not cover every element that is included in the compilation, and is not expected to, further study is needed to fully understand the implications of these differences are for guiding agricultural land use decisions.

Table 9. Agricultural Policies and Regulations, South Peace Fringe Area

Protect farmland/support ALC	✓
Inclusion is supported	
Minimise potential conflicts	✓
Farm Practices Protection Act	
Re-direct non-farm uses	✓
Water supply and management	✓
Use fencing, edge-planning, buffers	✓
Minimum parcel size (ha)	✓ (63 ha)
Retain large holdings	
Discourage subdivision/small lots	
Support consolidation	
Preserve contiguous areas	
Minimise impact of roads, corridors	
Expand agricultural land area	
Conditions for subdivisions/NFU	
Permit uses that allow restoration	
Covenants on lands adjacent to ALR	
Comply with provincial regulations	
Prevent/manage invasive plants	✓
Support local, traditional food	✓
Support urban agriculture	✓
Support agri-tourism	✓
Consider future residential growth	
Measure alienation of farmland	✓
Reduce energy use/GHG	✓
Encourage economic development for agriculture	✓
Integrate with resource management on Crown land	

In addition to the importance of agriculture, we also identified the statements that are most directly relevant to protecting agricultural land. These statements appear as goals, objectives, and policies in different parts of the plan, and have been included above.

- Goal:
 - To support and encourage agriculture industry in the SPFA through preservation of the agricultural land base. (s3.1.2)
- Objectives:
 - To preserve and utilize productive agricultural lands to foster self-sufficiency, promote security of food production and improve economic diversity. (s3.2.1)
 - To support the general objectives of the ALC in preserving the agricultural land base for future food production and food security. (s5.1.1)
- Policy:
 - To support the overarching principles of the ALC: To preserve agricultural land. (s3.2.2)

For the South Fringe Area OCP, these multiple statements in different contexts reflect a high level of importance for protecting the area's farmland.

The Draft Regional Agricultural Plan, although it is not completed, complements the elements of the OCP that indicate that agriculture is very important within the local legislative framework for agricultural planning. Most notably, the Draft Plan includes the following vision statement: "The Peace River Regional District supports agricultural development and protection of agricultural land for a sustainable and profitable agricultural industry" (p. 7).

Content analysis of documents

After documenting the local legislative framework we assessed the contents of the documents. The results of this content analysis reflect the breadth and quality of the legislative framework. For this we used a three-point (check mark) scale indicating different levels of detail from minimal (✓) to moderate (✓✓) to high (✓✓✓). The criteria we used for this part of the assessment is included in Appendix: Criteria for Evaluating Content of Legislative Framework.

Local government legislation documents

The results of the content analysis of the local legislative documents are shown in Tables 10 and 11. Two documents were reviewed as part of this analysis, the OCP and the zoning bylaw. Combined, these two documents provide very good coverage of the legislative context; background on agriculture; a set of statements covering the vision, goals, and objectives for agriculture; regulations; and maps. For the latter we looked specifically for maps of ALR lands and details for the agricultural land designation. The details of the coverage of the legislative context are shown in Table 11. Here we can see that the OCP is excellent regarding the ALC Act and the Water Act. As noted above, water management is an important element of the OCP. A weaker element of the legislative context relates to the *Farm Practices Protection (Right to Farm) Act*, which is mentioned but without much detail.

Agricultural Land Use Planning in Northern BC
FINAL REPORT: SOUTH PEACE AREA FRINGE AREA

Table 10. Contents of local agricultural land use legislation documents

	Legislative Context	Background	Vision, Goals, Objectives	Regulations (enforceable policies, procedures)	Maps
PRRD Zoning Bylaw No. 1343 (2001)	✓				✓✓✓
South Peace Fringe Area OCP (2011)	✓✓	✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓

Table 11. Integration of provincial legislation in local legislative documents

	Legislative context (legislation and policies)						Land use planning tools			Gov.
	LGA	Right to Farm	ALC Act	Land Title	Water Act	Range Act	Covenant	AIAs	DPA	AAC
PRRD Zoning Bylaw No. 1343 (2001)		✓	✓							
South Peace Fringe Area OCP (2011)	✓✓	✓	✓✓✓		✓✓✓	✓			✓	✓

Table 12. Contents of local agricultural land use policy documents

	Legislative Context	Background	Vision, Goals, Objectives	Regulations (policies, procedures)	Maps
PRRD Regional Agricultural Plan (Draft, Apr/2014)	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓	✓✓✓
South Peace Comprehensive Development Plan (2007)	✓	✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓✓
Dawson Creek LRMP (1999)	✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓	✓

Table 13. Integration of provincial legislation in local policy documents

	Legislative context (legislation and policies)						Land use planning tools			Gov.
	LGA	Right to Farm	ALC Act	Land Title	Water Act	Range Act	Covenant	AIAs	DPA	AAC
PRRD Regional Agricultural Plan (Draft, Apr/2014)	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓		✓	✓✓✓
South Peace Comprehensive Development Plan (2007)		✓✓	✓✓				✓		✓	✓
Dawson Creek LRMP			✓		✓	✓				

Local government policy documents

The results of the content analysis of the local policy documents are shown in Tables 12 and 13. Three documents were reviewed as part of this analysis: the Draft Regional Agricultural Plan, South Peace Comprehensive Development Plan, and Dawson Creek LRMP. As explained above, we treated the Draft Plan as an aspirational document, as if it has been completed already and received by the Board, but not developed into implementing bylaws. Combined, these three documents provide excellent coverage of the legislative context; background on agriculture; a set of statements covering the vision, goals, and objectives for agriculture; regulations; and maps. Of the three documents, the Draft Agricultural Plan stands out as very comprehensive, with significant detail across the full range of elements. The details of the coverage of the legislative context are shown in Table 13. Here we see again that the Draft Plan is excellent, including sections on the AAC/governance, water management, and access to Crown land. The South Peace Comprehensive Plan is a very detailed document that serves a specific purpose. As such, it is an important document regarding agricultural land use planning in the areas adjacent to the municipalities but does not rate highly on our scale.

Current Issues

When reviewing the contents of the documents, we also explored three issues that have come up in the project that are current issues in most areas: small-lot agriculture/fragmentation of farmland; alienation of farmland/foreign ownership; and natural resource developments.

Small-lot agriculture/farmland fragmentation

The combined issue of small-lot agriculture (e.g., 2 to 10 ha) and fragmentation of the land base centres on what appears to be a growing awareness of food sovereignty. Much of this interest in small-lot agriculture is associated with new farmers and their need for affordable land that is reasonably close to population centres. What makes the demand for small-lot agriculture particularly important is that there is often little room within farmland protection legislative frameworks to accommodate smaller lots. The main reason is that sub-dividing into smaller lots is in direct conflict with the over-riding goal to not fragment the land base. The primary land use planning tool for preventing fragmentation is large minimum lot sizes. Thus, small lots and farmland protection are often in direct opposition.

In the South Peace Fringe Area, this particular tension over small-lot agriculture does not appear to be an issue. The OCP includes a land use designation of Agriculture-Small Holding, which has a minimum parcel size of 15 ha. As stated in the OCP, these are agricultural lands but have substantial existing residential developments in close proximity, as well as other limitations, such as significant amounts of low agricultural capability soils, topographic constraints and fragmented land parcels. In this way, these lands are not a response to the above-described tension.

The matter of fragmentation due to subdivision of agricultural land is identified in the Draft Regional Agricultural Plan. As stated, “Regardless, sub-division of agricultural land may be problematic because once land has been sub-divided, it is generally more difficult to consolidate it

back into larger, more agriculturally-viable parcels. Smaller parcels may be more likely to encourage non-agricultural uses” (p. 62).

There is another issue about parcel size and subdivision. As a response to concerns about converting quarter sections into “rural residential estates,” the provincial government eliminated the option to subdivide sections. Concerns have been expressed among farmers about the lack of ability to subdivide, but this concern does not appear in the local legislation and policy documents.

Alienation of farmland/foreign (out-of-province) ownership

Alienation of farmland has been identified as an issue in three ways: tree planting on agricultural land for carbon credits (often by foreign-owned companies); conversion of large parcels for estate lots; foreign-purchased land not in production. Neither tree planting for carbon credits nor foreign ownership of land is identified as an agricultural land use planning issue for the South Peace Fringe Area. However, using sub-divided quarter sections as “rural residential estates” was identified as an issue in the South Peace Comprehensive Development Plan in 2007. This issue is also one of the main issues listed in the Draft Plan: “increasing amounts of foreign or non-resident land ownership for rural estates results in land out of production or not available to local producers for purchase, rent or lease” (p. 30).

Natural Resource Developments

Agricultural land use planning is most often associated with urban development. In northern BC, pressures also come from natural resource developments, such as forestry and oil and gas. The expected increase in industrial activities and forecasted water issues arising from climate change both suggest a greater need for integrated land use planning.

In the case of the PRRD, far more than other parts of northern BC, a substantial part of agricultural planning is directed specifically at this issue, and is the dominant subject of the Draft Regional Agricultural Plan, with secure access to water identified as a particular source of conflict. In addition, the Draft Plan states (p. 30):

The presence of the oil and gas industry is having an impact on agriculture by:

- making it more difficult for agricultural producers to get labour and other inputs at reasonable cost
- affecting agricultural production by having wells on agricultural land
- affecting agricultural production with the cumulative, contributing effect of additional weeds and impact on bio-security
- affecting “sense of community” in rural areas by contributing to fewer people in agriculture and creating additional noise, traffic, and dust and uncertainty for the future of agriculture including a capacity to plan for the future when faced with a fast-moving oil and gas industry
- affecting recruitment of young people to agriculture when higher paying alternatives are available in oil and gas
- affecting infrastructure by putting additional pressure on roads, railways (reduced capacity for agriculture), the power grid and damaging power and telephone lines

- affecting the future of the area due to unknown impact of hydraulic fracturing (fracking) as a means of gas removal
- creating concerns related to the removal of pipelines and other infrastructure when use is completed and the pipelines are abandoned

Land and Resource Management Plans (LRMPs) play a role to integrate agricultural land uses with natural resource developments on Crown land. LRMPs are non-enforceable landscape-level plans that are designed to support forest management and also to establish protected areas. Some legal objectives that deal with specific management objectives, such as old-growth management areas, have been established as an outcome of these planning processes. The South Peace Fringe Area is covered by the Dawson Creek LRMP, which was approved in 1999.

The Dawson Creek LRMP recognises the importance of agricultural land to the area and that much of it is in private hands, and thus outside of its jurisdiction. Nevertheless, agriculture and range are identified under guiding principles with recognition of these uses on Crown lands. As stated, “The Dawson Creek LRMP recognises the need for agricultural expansion on ALR lands, particularly on arable land adjacent to existing operations” (p. 24). With regard for range, the LRMP states that “Resource management objectives and strategies have been developed to address potential conflicts and/or competition for range resources by native wildlife species and domestic livestock” (p. 24). The objectives and strategies are set out under the Agriculture/Settlement Resource Management Zone land designation. Only a small amount within this Zone is Crown land.

In other jurisdictions in northern BC, Agricultural Development Areas (ADAs) have been established as legal orders as an outcome of the LRMP process. ADAs recognise the agricultural potential and farm use of specified Crown lands. There are no ADAs in the Peace Region.

Policy regimes

The two policy regimes of farmland preservation and global competitiveness have influenced agricultural land use policy and legislation for over forty years. Food sovereignty, and its associated concerns with food security and demand for local food, is a nascent policy regime that is influencing agricultural land use planning. Within this context, the aim of our analysis was to assess how issues, ideas, and interests associated with the three policy regimes influence local agricultural planning processes, including decisions about zoning, official plans, boundary adjustments, land division and servicing, and, as well, to assess the extent to which agricultural land use planning encompasses a comprehensive view of food systems planning.

To complete the assessment of the presence and importance of the policy regimes we examined the documents that comprise the legislative framework. Presence and importance were measured as a function of both the level of influence of words, concepts, and statements that appear in the documents and of the placement of these words, concepts, and statements within each document. The criteria for measuring the policy regime statements are presented in Appendix: Criteria for determining level of influence of policy regimes.

All three policy regimes are present in the local legislative framework. The most dominant policy regime is farmland preservation, which is prevalent throughout the local

legislative framework (Tables 14 through 22). Preserving the agricultural land base is integrated in to the Draft Regional Agricultural Plan's vision statement, into economic and agricultural goals of the South Peace Fringe Area OCP, and in many objectives. Recognised as a "precious commodity," the agricultural objective in the OCP states simply, "To preserve and utilize productive agricultural lands to foster self-sufficiency, promote security of food production and improve economic diversity." Many of the statements about preserving farmland are of high influence and appear across the full range of vision, goals, objectives, driving issues, regulations, and action items.

Global competitiveness (Tables 14, 17, and 20) is the least prevalent among the three policy regimes. Most of the ideas and interests of global competitiveness are associated with building the capacity of the food processing sector and the cattle industry. Food processing is identified as a potential economic driver but disadvantaged by higher transportation costs. The opportunity to export cattle to growing markets is linked with the signing of more foreign trade agreements.

Food sovereignty (Tables 16, 18, and 22) is also influential, but not prevalent throughout the framework. There are several statements of high influence that focus on food security. As stated in the OCP, "Primary agricultural lands are a precious commodity and are needed for food security," wherein food security relates to security of food production and to the opportunity, knowledge and resources for citizens to produce, acquire, eat, enjoy and celebrate affordable and nutritious local food. A range of activities is associated with the food sovereignty regime, including using backyards and landscape areas for growing edible plants; food-related educational and cultural events; developing new community gardens; encouraging local business, agencies and institutions to adopt local food buying policies; and supporting educational opportunities to residents on gardening, composting, food processing, storage and preparation.

Looking at the presence of the three policy regimes in individual documents, the Draft Regional Agricultural Plan is the most comprehensive. The South Peace Fringe Area OCP is dominated by farmland preservation, has some important elements related to food sovereignty, and no references to global competitiveness.

Agricultural Land Use Planning in Northern BC
FINAL REPORT: SOUTH PEACE AREA FRINGE AREA

Table 14 Analytical framework for policy regimes at local level: global competitiveness documents

		GLOBAL COMPETITIVENESS			
		Vision, Goals, Objectives, Recommendations	Driving Issues, Concerns	Regulations	Action Items
Level of Influence	High Influence				
	Medium Influence		PRRD Regional Agricultural Plan Dawson Creek LRMP		PRRD Regional Agricultural Plan
	Low Influence				

Table 15. Analytical framework for policy regimes at local level: farmland preservation documents

		FARMLAND PRESERVATION			
		Vision, Goals, Objectives, Recommendations	Driving Issues, Concerns	Regulations	Action Items
Level of Influence	High Influence	<i>South Peace Fringe Area OCP</i> PRRD Regional Agricultural Plan	<i>South Peace Fringe Area OCP</i> PRRD Regional Agricultural Plan	<i>South Peace Fringe Area OCP</i>	PRRD Regional Agricultural Plan South Peace Comprehensive Development Plan
	Medium Influence	<i>South Peace Fringe Area OCP</i> PRRD Regional Agricultural Plan South Peace Comprehensive Development Plan Dawson Creek LRMP	PRRD Regional Agricultural Plan	<i>South Peace Fringe Area OCP</i>	
	Low Influence		South Peace Comprehensive Development Plan Dawson Creek LRMP		

Table 16. Analytical framework for policy regimes at local level: food sovereignty documents

		FOOD SOVEREIGNTY			
		Vision, Goals, Objectives, Recommendations	Driving Issues, Concerns	Regulations	Action Items
Level of Influence	High Influence	<i>South Peace Fringe Area OCP</i>		<i>South Peace Fringe Area OCP</i>	PRRD Regional Agricultural Plan
	Medium Influence	<i>South Peace Fringe Area OCP</i>			
	Low Influence				

Agricultural Land Use Planning in Northern BC
FINAL REPORT: SOUTH PEACE AREA FRINGE AREA

Table 17. Analytical framework for policy regime at local level: Global Competitiveness themes

		GLOBAL COMPETITIVENESS			
		Vision, Goals, Objectives, Recommendations	Driving Issues, Concerns	Regulations	Action Items
Level of Influence	High Influence				
	Medium Influence		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The BC Ministry of Agriculture has projected strong future demand for BC's agricultural products. Expecting increasing demand from emerging economies in China, India and the Pacific Rim, the Ministry predicted a \$3.5 billion increase over the next five years. The PRRD may be appropriately positioned to gain from some of this anticipated expansion. • Agriculture is subject to wide swings in profitability due to global commodity supply and demand. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food processing is recognized as a potential growth industry that can become an important economic driver. • Local processing that relies on external markets may also be disadvantaged by higher transportation costs. • Currently the cattle industry is being challenged by shrinking markets and limited processing, particularly processing that allows local cattle to be exported to growing markets elsewhere. • Some additional marketing opportunities may occur for the cattle sector should discussions related to more foreign trade agreements materialize
	Low Influence				

Agricultural Land Use Planning in Northern BC
FINAL REPORT: SOUTH PEACE AREA FRINGE AREA

Table 18. Analytical framework for policy regime at local level: Farmland Preservation themes

		FARMLAND PRESERVATION			
		Vision, Goals, Objectives, Recommendations	Driving Issues, Concerns	Regulations	Action Items
Level of Influence	High Influence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To support and encourage agriculture industry in the SPFA through preservation of the agricultural land base and restriction on uses that is not compatible with agricultural activities. Primary agricultural lands are a precious commodity To preserve and utilize productive agricultural lands to foster self-sufficiency, promote security of food production and improve economic diversity. To support the general objectives of the ALC in preserving the agricultural land base for future food production and food security. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In order to better address the issues around ‘the future farmer and preservation of farm land’, combined efforts at all levels of government, industry and from within the community, are required to ensure the future sustainability of farming and agricultural land. Minimizing any potential impacts to the agricultural industry by requiring buffering in specified areas. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To support the overarching principles of the ALC Measure the real number of acres being taken out of farm production, by approved temporary uses, (e.g. wellsites, access roads, pipeline, etc.) Evaluate the cumulative impacts of temporary uses on the loss of productive farm land and the effects on agricultural sustainability and food security 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The purpose of this strategy area is to secure the existing agricultural land base. The province of BC...has a limited amount of potentially productive agricultural land Protection of agricultural land supports present and future agricultural production by maintaining the land base for agriculture. Protect agricultural integrity and further reduce pressure on the conversion of quarter section parcels into rural residential estates:
	Medium Influence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify strategies to enhance agriculture in the context of competition with other land uses such as oil and gas, forestry, and mining To support the protection of the agricultural land base with emphasis on the preservation of the highest productive land Direct subdivision and non-farm uses not complementary to agriculture away from agricultural areas where negative impact to agriculture will be minimized. All future land use designations should consider ways of minimizing any impacts to agriculture and protecting the agricultural base. Conserve soil productivity of forest, range, and agricultural lands 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increasing amounts of foreign or non-resident land ownership for rural estates results in land out of production or not available to local producers for purchase, rent or lease 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To encourage industry to consider alternative site locations for non-farm uses that focus the impacts away from productive agricultural lands To reduce sprawl and facilitate efficient compact communities in the rural area 	
	Low Influence		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure that the best land was made available for development while mitigating impacts on agricultural land. When there is a strong desire to live in the countryside (but not farm) and there are insufficient alternatives available, it is felt that quarter sections become at risk of being lost to farming. 		

Agricultural Land Use Planning in Northern BC
FINAL REPORT: SOUTH PEACE AREA FRINGE AREA

Table 19. Analytical framework for policy regime at local level: food sovereignty themes

		FOOD SOVEREIGNTY			
		Vision, Goals, Objectives, Recommendations	Driving Issues, Concerns	Regulations	Action Items
Level of Influence	High Influence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Goal: Primary agricultural lands are a precious commodity and are needed for food security. • Objective: To preserve and utilize productive agricultural lands to foster self-sufficiency, promote security of food production and improve economic diversity. • Objective: To encourage and support all citizens in the SPFA to have the opportunity, knowledge and resources to produce, acquire, eat, enjoy and celebrate affordable and nutritious local food. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clearly identify and realize the potential importance of agriculture within this region and to the province, through the school systems and public advocacy groups • Encourage the use of building setbacks, backyards and landscape areas for growing edible plants • Support the development of food-related educational and cultural events; the development of new community gardens in locally available food resources within a local food all areas of the • Encourage local business, agencies and institutions to adopt local food buying policies • Promote awareness of food security issues and support educational opportunities to residents on gardening, composting, food processing, storage and preparation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increasing the purchase of local agricultural products in local markets can open up new markets for agricultural producers and increase economic activity within the Regional District. • Increasing the purchase of local agricultural products in local markets will benefit producers financially; keep money within the local economy; provide the local population with access to fresh, healthy food and other processed agricultural products; and meet the goals of the PRRD to encourage sustainable agriculture by reducing the distance food travels from the source to the consumer. • Increasing opportunities for direct marketing of local foods - including farmers' markets, sales directly from the source of production, and community supported agriculture (CSAs) - may contribute to increasing sales of local products within the Regional District.
	Medium Influence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To support the general objectives of the ALC in preserving the agricultural land base for future food production and food security. 			
	Low Influence				

Agricultural Land Use Planning in Northern BC
FINAL REPORT: SOUTH PEACE AREA FRINGE AREA

Table 20. Analytical framework for policy regimes at local level: frequency of global competitiveness

		GLOBAL COMPETITIVENESS			
		Vision, Goals, Objectives, Recommendations	Driving Issues, Concerns	Regulations	Action Items
Level of Influence	High Influence	0	0	0	0
	Medium Influence	0	2	0	4
	Low Influence	0	0	0	0

Table 21. Analytical framework for policy regimes at local level: frequency of farmland preservation

		FARMLAND PRESERVATION			
		Vision, Goals, Objectives, Recommendations	Driving Issues, Concerns	Regulations	Action Items
Level of Influence	High Influence	5	2	3	4
	Medium Influence	8	1	2	0
	Low Influence	0	3	0	0

Table 22. Analytical framework for policy regimes at local level: frequency of food sovereignty

		FOOD SOVEREIGNTY			
		Vision, Goals, Objectives, Recommendations	Driving Issues, Concerns	Regulations	Action Items
Level of Influence	High Influence	3	0	5	3
	Medium Influence	1	0	0	0
	Low Influence	0	0	0	0

Discussion

Our overall aim for the project is to identify principles and beneficial practices that represent land use planning solutions that protect farmland. As a step toward this final aim we identified four principles that guided our analysis: maximise stability, minimise uncertainty, integrate across jurisdictions; and accommodate flexibility. In this section we discuss the strength of the local legislative framework for the PRRD with a focus on the South Peace Fringe Area. We also discuss the influence of the three policy regimes.

Assessment of Principles

Our assessment of the four principles is summarised in Table 23. As supported through the results discussed in this report, the sources of strength for the local legislative framework are its ability to maximise stability and accommodate flexibility. The framework effectively integrates public priorities across jurisdictions, but is challenged by a high level of uncertainty associated with permitted non-farm uses of agricultural lands.

Table 23. Principles of Land Use Planning, South Peace Fringe Area

Regional District	Maximise stability	Integrate across jurisdictions	Minimise uncertainty	Accommodate flexibility
PRRD: South Peace Fringe Area	****	***	**	****

* = Very weak; ***** = Very strong

Maximise stability

A stable legislative framework for protecting farmland is one that is not easily changed at the whim of shifting political interests; it is well-entrenched in acts of legislation, policy, and governance structures that are based on clear, concise language, and can hold up to court challenge. A key element of stability is a clear statement of purpose regarding farmland protection among the primary goals and objectives within each enforceable document. Thus, stability is a critical measure of the strength of an agricultural land use planning framework.

An OCP plays an important role to express the public interest in agriculture and farmland protection. In this regard, the South Peace Fringe Area OCP contributes substantially to the stability of the local legislative framework. Agriculture is identified clearly as a public priority and the goals, objectives, and policies include clear language and commitment to preserving the area's farmland. The OCP is supported by a comprehensive Draft Regional Agricultural Plan that is guided by a vision statement to support agriculture and protect agricultural land. Currently, the absence of an enforceable agricultural plan, e.g., one that is named in the OCP as a guiding document, limits the stability of the overall framework. However, this situation could improve as a positive outcome of the on-going regional planning initiative. The Dawson Creek LRMP, although not strictly an enforceable policy, contributes to the stability of the framework, as it regards the agricultural use of Crown lands.

The OGC Delegation Agreement is essential to agricultural land use decisions in the region, including preparing agreements between the ALC and oil and gas companies. On the one hand, this agreement contributes to stability by accommodating the significant demands of the oil and gas industry through a dedicated decision-making process with a clear set of rules regarding what activities need to be reviewed by what agency. On the other hand, the agreement is one step removed from the direct authority and mandate of the ALC. The stability provided by the ALC Act is entrusted to the OGC.

By these terms, the stability of the PRRD legislative framework for agricultural land use planning and farmland protection is very strong overall.

Integrate across jurisdictions

Integrating policies and priorities across jurisdictions is a foundation for building cohesion across provincial, regional, and local governments. One can also think of integration as a formal “linkage” that provides consistency among them. In order to successfully integrate policies across jurisdictions there must be sufficient details about the legislative context that guides and constrains local government plans and strategies.

Together, the South Peace Fringe Area OCP and the Draft Regional Agricultural Plan provide a very high level of integration between local and provincial policies and legislation. The South Peace Comprehensive Plan, although serving a limited purpose, also contributes to the level of integration, especially for ALR lands adjacent to the municipalities. The ALC Act, with the corresponding responsibilities of the ALC and the presence of the ALR, is well recognised in the local legislative framework. In this regard, the section under Implementation that clearly states the role and function of the ALC is noteworthy. These strong elements of integration are offset by the absence, either in whole or in part, of other relevant pieces of legislation. For example, a weak element of the legislative context relates to the *Farm Practices Protection (Right to Farm) Act*. This act is mentioned in places of high influence but without much detail.

Overall, by this measure of integration, we found that the level of integration of public priorities across jurisdictions is moderate. If the Draft Plan gains some level of being enforceable (e.g., named in the OCP) then this rating would be stronger.

Minimise uncertainty

The presence of uncertainty, typically introduced via ambiguous language, exceptions or gaps, is a critical measure of the weakness of an agricultural land use planning framework. Thus, in addition to maximising the stability of a legislative framework through enforceable policies, people want to know they can rely on these rules and regulations to be applied consistently under different circumstances.

The PRRD does a good job of minimising uncertainty; however, there are factors outside the direct control of the local government that contribute to uncertainty. Throughout most of the legislative framework, the language is clear and consistent. Where non-farm uses or subdivision of agricultural land may be permitted, such statements are supported by conditions that uphold the importance of maintaining agricultural lands and activities, as well as the policies of the ALC Act, while impacts on agricultural lands must be minimised. This use of policy is an effective means to recognise possible exceptions while minimising uncertainty.

The following statement, which appears under Implementation – Agricultural Land Commission, is interesting in the context of minimising uncertainty.

In consulting with the ALC in the development of this Plan, it is understood that the Commission concurs with the content of the Plan thereby setting a level of certainty of the nature of future development directions in the Plan area.

This statement appears to be an attempt to insert “certainty” into the framework. At the same time, it may be interpreted as an attempt to assert the primacy of the OCP over the ALC Act, but this is not acceptable.

The Delegation Agreement is an over-riding factor that contributes significantly to uncertainty. It appears that, over the years since permitting oil and gas activity as a permitted use, the number of activities that are included in this category and the minimum size of impact area to trigger an application have both increased. The effect is that more non-farm uses are permitted without the need for an application. This increased impact on farmland results of the direct loss of farmland as well as cumulative impacts. Notwithstanding the recent drop in global oil prices and reduced level of industrial activity in the oil and gas sector, the potential for increased activity in the future, especially within the Montney Formation, is considerable. Altogether, these circumstances increase the level of uncertainty regarding agricultural land uses and the protection of farmland.

Another important aspect that contributes to uncertainty is the recently approved amendments to the ALC Act, i.e., Bill 24. The regulations to implement the amendments are currently under development. As discussed within the provincial legislature and in the local media, there is a high level of political support, as well as support from some members of the farming sector, to increase the level of non-farm uses of ALR lands in the region.

Overall, a high level of uncertainty is a weak aspect of the local legislative framework.

Accommodate flexibility

Creating an effective legislative framework is an act of balance, without being too stable so that it cannot be changed when needed or too strict so that it cannot be applied in a range of circumstances. Thus, flexibility is necessary in order to moderate the restrictive effects of maximising stability and minimising uncertainty. One means to accommodate flexibility is typically done through governance mechanisms, which include ALC panels, delegation agreements, Advisory Planning Commissions (APCs), Agricultural Advisory Committees (AACs), and standing committees of a regional board.

The PRRD is the only area in northern BC with an AAC. Its AAC was established approximately ten years ago, and they meet once every two months. The Committee is engaged in land use planning consultations and recommendations on behalf of the agricultural sector of the PRRD. Presently, not all ALC applications are referred to the AAC by the PRRD Board. Referrals mainly include controversial cases regarding non-farm uses, exclusions, and subdivisions where the Board requires further information on the cause and effects that the project will have, and to determine whether or not these problems can be mitigated.

The Peace Region is also covered by a delegation agreement, this one is between the ALC and the Oil and Gas Commission. The Agreement is accompanied by a comprehensive set of

regulations that define permitted oil and gas uses on agricultural land as well as conditions and procedures for when the ALC must be involved in application processes.

Flexibility can also be accommodated within the legislative frameworks. For example, the OCP includes land designations of Rural Community and Rural Neighbourhood for the purpose of accommodating historical patterns of residential development in rural places. A specific note to these land uses states that the “designations take into consideration multiple factors including existing development, the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR), infrastructure, development patterns, lot sizes, public input, and the goals & objectives of this plan.” The note also states that “the intention is to enhance the existing community, utilizing exiting infrastructure and facilities, while allowing for agricultural use to continue within the Rural Community during its growth period.” These policies are examples of how flexibility is accommodated for specific situations within the plan area. The different policies for the different fringe areas are also examples of flexibility. Similarly, the Dawson Creek Comprehensive Development Plan exemplifies how land use planning mechanisms are used, in this case, in order to accommodate the desire of the municipalities to take advantage of growth opportunities associated with oil and gas developments.

Overall, the local legislative framework is strong regarding accommodating flexibility.

Influence of policy regimes

The legislation and policy documents of the local legislative framework of the South Peace Fringe Area cover all three policy regimes (Table 24). Based on our analysis, farmland preservation is considered the most influential given its presence throughout the framework and multiple statements of high influence. Food sovereignty is not prevalent throughout the framework; however, there are influential statements about food security in the OCP. Most of the influence from the regime of global competitiveness arises from the Draft Regional Agricultural Plan.

Table 24. Overall Influence of Policy Regimes, South Peace Fringe Area

	Vision, Goals, Objectives, Recommendations	Driving Issues, Concerns	Regulations	Action Items
Global Competitiveness				
Farmland Preservation				
Food Sovereignty				

Low Medium High

Conclusion

The primary aim of this study is to assess the state of agricultural land use planning and farmland protection in the Peace River Regional District using the South Peace Fringe Area as a case study site. We found that the local legislative framework is somewhat strong overall with a high level of stability. The framework effectively integrates priorities across jurisdictions and accommodates flexibility. However, the legislative framework was not as effective regarding minimising uncertainty, which can undermine the stronger elements of the framework. Importantly, the ALC Delegation Agreement has a significant influence on the framework by contributing to uncertainty. The primary current issue for the region is to respond effectively to the increasing pressures of oil and gas activities on the agricultural land base. Correspondingly, farmland preservation appears to be the most influential of the three policy regimes by a significant degree.

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Glossary

Policy:

A formal statement of intent; principles, rules, or guidelines that are designed to determine or influence major decisions or actions and all activities that fall within the domain of the policy.

Enforceable policy:

Policy with clear statements of intent to enforce (often with penalty for failing to follow the policy)

Aspirational policy:

Policy without clear statements of intent to enforce (often with penalty for failing to follow the policy); a broad statement about desired outcomes, objectives, or activities

Enabling policy:

Policy with clear statements of intent to implement a policy (e.g., provide resources)

Policy regime:

A policy regime and its changes refer to the combination of issues, ideas, interests, actors and institutions that are involved.

Legislation:

A law (or Order in Council) enacted by a legislature or governing body; can have many purposes: to regulate, to authorize, to proscribe, to provide (funds), to sanction, to grant, to declare or to restrict.

By-law (bylaw):

Local laws established by municipalities as regulated by the provincial government. Note: for our purposes, a by-law is considered part of legislation.

Regulation (pursuant to Act):

Is a form of legislation (law) designed with the intent to regulate; a rule or law designed to control or govern conduct; creates, limits, constrains a right, creates or limits a duty, or allocates a responsibility.

Governance:

Methods, systems, or processes of governing; the act of implementing policy and legislation. For our purposes we are concerned with groups (e.g., commissions, advisory committees) that have the authority to apply, review, or enforce policy and legislation specific to agricultural land use planning.

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Appendix: Criteria for Evaluating Content of Legislative Framework

Legislation documents

	Legislative Context (Provincial)	Background	Vision, Goals, Objectives	Local policies	Maps
0	None	None	None	None	None
✓	Brief statements that include at least one reference to the main provincial legislation or policy related to agricultural land use planning. Little too context provided other than perhaps a statement that acknowledges the local governments duty to uphold these acts and policies.	Very brief description of agriculture background. This may include a minimal section or statistics on historical context, background and issues, and demographics on agriculture/farming.	Includes a vision, goal, or objective for agriculture but with minimal explanation or rationale.	One or two brief statements about agricultural land use policies, perhaps with little context.	Provides at least one (1) general land use map(s) with agricultural land use shown.
✓✓	Expanded statements that reference more than one of the main provincial legislation and policies and provides added context to the above. Multiple statements that outline how provincial legislation and policies “fit” in the local context.	Includes multiple sections dedicated to information and statistics about agricultural background. May also reference an agricultural plan or report.	Includes a vision, goal, and objective for agriculture with a statement of explanation and some action items.	Several statements (three to five) about agricultural land use policy presented within local context. May also reference an agricultural plan.	Provides at least one (1) general land use map(s) showing agricultural land uses and at least one (1) agriculture specific map showing designated agricultural land.
✓✓✓	Comprehensive that outlines how provincial legislation and policies “fit” in the local context.. May include diagrams to help establish thread of consistency among different levels of government.	Comprehensive account of agricultural background . May also reference an agricultural plan or report.	Includes a detailed section on vision, goals, and objectives for agriculture that outlines a rationale and action items. May also document relations with other land uses and local priorities.	Detailed section of agricultural land use policy statements (more than five) or agricultural sub-area plan adopted as by-law. May also reference an agricultural plan.	Provides two (2) or more agricultural land use maps including a map showing designated agricultural land. May also include Other maps to illustrate specific issues or policies (future areas of study, development permit areas, current land tenure).

Agricultural Land Use Planning in Northern BC
FINAL REPORT: SOUTH PEACE AREA FRINGE AREA

Policy documents

	Legislative Context (Provincial)	Background	Vision, Goals, Objectives	Local Policies	Maps
	Same as above	Same as above	Same as above	Different	Same as above
0	None	None	None	None	None
✓	Brief statements that include at least one reference to the main provincial legislation or policy related to agricultural land use planning. Little to no context provided other than perhaps a statement that acknowledges the local governments duty to uphold these acts and policies.	Very brief description of agriculture background. This may include a minimal section or statistics on historical context, background and issues, and demographics on agriculture/farming.	Includes a vision, goal, or objective for agriculture but with minimal explanation or rationale.	Several statements (three to five) about agricultural land use policy presented within local context.	Provides at least one (1) general land use map(s) with agricultural land use shown.
✓✓	Expanded statements that references more than one of the main and policies and provides added context to the above. Multiple statements that outline how provincial legislation and policies “fit” in the local context.	Includes multiple sections dedicated to information and statistics about agricultural background. May also reference an agricultural plan or report.	Includes a goof presentation of vision, goal, and objective for agriculture with a statement of explanation, a few recommendation items, and some action items.	Comprehensive section of agricultural land use policy statements (more than five).	Provides at least one (1) general land use map(s) showing agricultural land uses and at least one (1) agriculture specific map showing designated agricultural land.
✓✓✓	Comprehensive that outlines how provincial legislation and policies “fit” in the local context.. May include diagrams to help establish thread of consistency among different levels of government.	Comprehensive account of agricultural background. May also reference an agricultural plan or report.	Includes a detailed section on vision, goals, and objectives for agriculture with an extensive and detailed list of recommendations and/or action items.	Comprehensive agricultural plan. May also refer to background report.	Provides two (2) or more agricultural land use maps including a map showing designated agricultural land. May also include Other maps to illustrate specific issues or policies (future areas of study, development permit areas, current land tenure).

Appendix: Criteria for determining level of influence of policy regimes

		Placement (significance) within Document			
		Aims, Goals, Objectives	Mission, Vision, Mandate, Purpose	Driving issues, concerns	Action items
Level of influence	High influence	A clear, explicit statement as part of a short list (three to five) of items in an enforceable policy or regulation	A clear, explicit statement at the highest level of an enforceable policy or regulation		
	Medium influence	A clear, explicit statement as part of a short list (three to five) of items in an aspirational policy	A clear, explicit statement at the highest level of an aspirational policy	A clear, explicit statement as part of a short list (three to five) items in a policy	A clear, explicit statement as part of a short list (three to five) of items in a policy
	Low influence	A clear, explicit statement as part of a long list of items in an aspirational policy		A clear, explicit statement as part of a long list of items in an aspirational policy	A clear, explicit statement as part of a long list of items in a policy