

Chair Margo Wagner and Board
Cariboo Regional District
Suite D, 180 North 3rd Avenue
Williams Lake, BC, V2G 2A4

Dear Chair Wagner and Board,

We are pleased to hear that the CRD Board will be meeting to discuss the agriculture initiatives and planning for the region, scheduled on January 14, 2020. To help frame the conversation, the Cariboo Agricultural Research Alliance (CARA) wanted to provide relevant information regarding work our organization is doing within the region, and our vision for how to support the agriculture sector throughout the region in the future.

Organizational Background

CARA is a collaborative initiative that has engaged more than 30 stakeholders throughout the region on developing applied research and extension activities that are necessary to strengthen the agriculture sector. The outreach and engagement that was involved in developing CARA was extensive, resulting in a collaborative of substantial value. Highlighting CARA's collaborative capacity, a list of member organizations participating in CARA's Steering Committee and in CARA's Scientific Advisory Committee is provided with this letter. Our organization's vision is to build connections between farmers, researchers and government, to support the farm base in the Cariboo to help grow the province's agriculture sector. For this reason, CARA is uniquely situated to bring people together in a way that has not happened before in B.C. but requires support to realize this potential.

Agriculture Research and Extension Programming Development Update

CARA completed the development of a *Regional Adaptation Research Strategic Plan*¹, released in 2020, that outlines the top 10 research priorities. The strategic plan involved a high level of engagement from producers, including currently under-represented stakeholders (e.g. First Nation communities, new entrants to the sector), and it outlines concrete direction for next steps for CARA to pursue.

Two research projects were developed from the top two priorities outlined in the Strategic Plan. The Greenhouse Innovations for Cariboo Market Garden Season Extension (2020-2021)² is being led by the College of New Caledonia, with results being used to pursue additional funding in this field. The Multi-functional Pasture Rejuvenation in the Cariboo has successfully secured three years of funding, with

¹ CARA's Regional Adaptation Research Strategic Plan: https://cariboo-agricultural-research.ca/documents/CARA_lib_CB12-CARA-2020-strategic-plan.pdf

² Greenhouse Innovations Project: <https://cariboo-agricultural-research.ca/wp/wp-content/uploads/Greenhouse-Project-Overview.pdf>

implementation in spring of 2021. This project, led by Thompson Rivers University, is providing a collaborative opportunity that leveraged funding from multiple organizations to expand the scope of the work being conducted, working with provincial producer associations, CRD producers and the Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resources and Rural Development (Range Branch).

These projects are examples of how CARA is building capacity within the region, outlining how transdisciplinary, collaborative research can solve complex challenges and engage multiple stakeholders in the process. CARA understands that our community surpasses administrative borders or disciplinary silos, and so are developing a community of interest and practice that will attract innovators of the sector to work in the CRD.

Agricultural producers will benefit directly from the research projects being implemented, being provided with relevant, contextual information to help make management decisions to grow and strengthen their agri-businesses. There is cumulative value in the work, as the implementation of these research and extension programs helps increase the number of students and new professionals in agriculture living and working throughout the Cariboo Regional District. This will increase the capacity for the agriculture sector to thrive and realize its potential to support the regional economy.

Further Action and Next Steps

CARA is situated to be a leader for applied agricultural research and extension in the province, as there is no other organization collaborating across agricultural commodities, with representation from industry associations, regional and provincial government, academia and First Nations communities. CARA is also building a relationship with the BC Agricultural Climate Adaptation Research Network (ACARN), to ensure that the work being done is synergistic with other initiatives throughout the province and has a direct connection with expertise and researchers in the province.

As a new organization, CARA requires long-term support in order to efficiently build our resources and programming. There is currently no funding for CARA's administration and is dependent on volunteers from member organizations; current programming relies on soft funding, and substantial energy is put towards proposal writing. The beginning years of an organization are critical to its long-term success, and an organization that spans across such a vast region and cross-commodity focus will be crucial to help producers facing substantial challenges, following extreme wildfire and flooding events in recent years.

As the Cariboo Regional District advances on agriculture planning in the region, it is critical to consider how the development of research and extension programming is a foundational aspect to a successful agriculture sector. CARA's engagement has been intentionally broad, focused on pan-regional and cross-commodity collaboration, connecting government agencies, industry associations, First Nation communities and researchers. CARA has proven our ability to deliver effective programming, including the establishment of an extensive, online research library³, as well as the development of two research

³ CARA Research Library: <https://cariboo-agricultural-research.ca/library/>



<http://cariboo-agricultural-research.ca>
info@cariboo-agricultural-research.ca
(250) 564-4115 ext2233

projects that connect multiple partners and funding agencies, and have direct application to regional farmers and ranchers.

Due to the diversity of the representation and stakeholders committed to supporting this initiative, CARA is in a unique position to substantially leverage core funding. Similar initiatives have been well supported in other sectors, including forestry and natural resource development; the agriculture sector deserves similar support and advancement. We request an audience with the Board of the Cariboo Regional District in February, to discuss CARA's current initiatives, our long-term vision to support an economically thriving agriculture sector and the opportunity to collaborate.

Sincerely,

David Zirnhelt, Chair
Cariboo Agricultural Research Alliance

Steering Committee - Member Organizations Represented

Industry Associations

District H Farmers' Institute
Cariboo Cattlemen's Association
Kersley Farmers' Institute
Cariboo-Central Interior Poultry Producers Association
BC Forage Council
FARMED
BC Sheep Federation

Government

Ministry of Agriculture (Provincial)
Cariboo Regional District
BC Agriculture and Food Climate Action Initiative

Academic Institutions and Research Organizations

University of Northern BC
Thompson Rivers University
College of New Caledonia
BC Agricultural Climate Adaptation Research Network (ACARN)

First Nations

Williams Lake Indian Band

CARA Scientific Advisory Committee – Organizations Represented

Thompson Rivers University (Dr. John Church)
University of Northern BC (Dr. David Connell)
College of New Caledonia (Steve Storch)
BC Agricultural Climate Adaptation Research Network (Dr. John Janmaat)
BC Ministry of Agriculture (Nicole Pressey)
Kersley Farmers' Institute (Rob Borsato)
BC Sheep Federation (Mike Doherty)
Cariboo-Central Interior Poultry Producers' Association (Wylie Bystedt)
Cariboo Agricultural Research Alliance (David Zirnhelt, Chair)