

**For immediate release
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NON-PROFIT FORMED TO STRENGTHEN AGRICULTURAL SECTOR IN LILLOOET AREA:

Call for members, nominations for inaugural Board of Directors and Executive Director

Lillooet, BC – In the last months of 2015, the Squamish-Lillooet Regional District (SLRD) Area B, District of Lillooet & St'át'imc Agricultural Plan (Ag Plan) Working Group began the process of forming a non-profit society to implement the Ag Plan and advance agricultural economic development in the Lillooet area. The move to form an independent non-profit society will also allow for increased access to funding opportunities. The society, called Lillooet Agriculture and Food Society (LAFS), is currently seeking membership, four Board Directors and a part-time Executive Director. Funding for the first year of operations is being provided through SLRD Area B's portion of BC Hydro Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILT) funds. However, the society will operate independently from the SLRD.

"Supporting the growth of agriculture is an essential piece of our economic development strategy, and helping to get this new organization off the ground is an important step," says Mickey Macri, Director of SLRD Electoral Area B. "I hope people from around Area B, Lillooet and the northern St'át'imc communities feel inspired to get involved so they can play a direct role in revitalizing the agriculture sector in our region."

Three Board Directors were confirmed late in 2015 as this was required to formally register the society. Nominations are currently being accepted for four additional directors to join Tristan Banwell, Dylan Foss, and Mandi Rogers on the inaugural Board of Directors. Nominations will remain open until the positions are filled. Nominations and inquiries about membership in LAFS can be forwarded to Tristan Banwell at farmer@spraycreek.ca. A part-time Executive Director is also currently being sought to run the society, with program development, communications, fundraising, and administration being key tasks. For more information, please see the posting in the Lillooet News or on the SLRD website at <http://www.slrd.bc.ca/AreaB-AgPlan-Implementation>.

"The formation of an agricultural non-profit represents a major milestone for the people of Lillooet and surrounding area," says Sam Quinlan, SLRD Area B Agricultural Advisory (AAC) Committee Chair. "The hope is that this organization will act as a cohesive voice for local farmers and ranchers, as well as those linked into the food system at other levels including processors, cooperatives, and vendors of products grown out of this region's incredibly productive soils and surrounding landscape. We have so much to be proud of here - now it's just a matter of working more closely to strengthen our agricultural economy and support the talented people who are already working hard to maintain and grow the agricultural base for the Lillooet area."

The Ag Plan, adopted by the SLRD Board in October of 2014, is currently in the implementation phase. The AAC and Agricultural Plan Working Group began the process of delivering on key recommendations of the plan last year, beginning with creating a non-profit society focused on enhancing the agricultural viability of the region, promoting awareness, education, and research around local agriculture and food security, advancing sustainable agricultural practices and assisting in localizing all aspects of the food system.

In August of 2015, the SLRD contracted Ione Smith, Professional Agrologist and Kristina Salin, Registered Planner and Landscape Architect to work closely with the AAC and Ag Plan Working Group to implement several priority recommendations from the Ag Plan before the end of 2015. Both Ione and Kristina were involved in creating the Ag Plan and were able to use their familiarity with the plan and their individual professional expertise to swiftly achieve a select amount of early objectives. Funding for this initial implementation phase was provided by SLRD Area B through its annual allocation of Economic Development Capacity Building funds awarded by the Northern Development Initiative Trust.

For more information on LAFS, please contact Tristan Banwell, Acting Chair, LAFS Board of Directors at 250-256-1620 or by email at farmer@spraycreek.ca.

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For more information, please contact:

Jeannette Nadon
Communications & Grants Coordinator
Squamish-Lillooet Regional District
Telephone: (604) 894-6371 ext. 239
Email: jnadon@slrd.bc.ca