

B.C. Fraser Valley Farm Start-Up Guide

Farmable Land Is Waiting For You In The B.C. Fraser Valley



Learn how to start your farm or lease your farmland – from the ground up.





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SECTION 1 | LAND



It's clear Fraser Valley farmland is fertile and productive. It can also be profitable for you as a new farmer or as someone looking to lease farmland. The key is that you plan how you'll use your farmland and understand what you'll grow.

ABOUT SURREY AND FRASER VALLEY FARMLAND

B.C. has the most diverse agricultural production in Canada, and Surrey and the Fraser Valley is no exception, with excellent soil and a fantastic climate for all kinds of crops.

Farmers across the Fraser Valley have profited from the land, growing many of B.C.'s fruits and vegetables, like:

- Blueberries
- Cranberries
- Potatoes
- Green and wax beans
- Celery

FRASER VALLEY AGRICULTURAL LAND RESERVE (ALR)

The B.C. Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR), established in 1973, consists of land zoned and protected for farming across the province – around 5% of B.C.'s total area.

The South Fraser region is home to a large portion of this ALR land. In Surrey alone, there are around 2,465 hectares of ALR land (or 27% of the reserve) available for farming now. Some has already been cultivated, making it even easier for new farmers to pick up and start farming.

LAND LEASE MAP

Use the new South Fraser Land Lease Map at maps.youngagrarians.org to find up-to-date postings of available farmland across the Fraser Valley or to post your ALR land for lease now.



AGRICULTURAL LAND LEASE ESSENTIALS

With land leasing and under a land lease agreement B.C. landowners can make all, or part of, their land available to a farmer in exchange for rent. Farm leases are a mainstay of Fraser Valley and Lower Mainland agriculture – and more common than you might think. For example, approximately 40% of farmland in Surrey is leased, and around 77% of leased farmland in Metro Vancouver is owned by individuals, not businesses.

The B.C. Government offers a [comprehensive guide to agricultural lease agreements in British Columbia](#).

A [sample land lease agreement and lease agreement template](#) can be found on the Young Agrarians website.

Just remember, before you sign any type of agreement, have a lawyer or accountant review.

Lease Benefits For Landowners

The most obvious perk for Fraser Valley ALR landowners is extra income, but there are several other advantages:

- **Opportunity to revitalize land:** For untouched land, a farm lease can add cultivation value. For previously farmed land, it can be a chance to test producing something new.
- **Opportunity for farmers to take on less:** Leasing keeps land productive if a farmer needs a break – due to an illness, for example – or wishes to retire. While five years is the most common period for an agricultural land lease, Fraser Valley leases sometimes run as short as one year.
- **B.C. land lease tax advantages:** Retired farmers can receive property tax exemptions if their land is in B.C.'s ALR and continues to be farmed. When leasing ALR land in Fraser Valley municipalities, landowners may be eligible for other tax benefits. Check with [B.C. Assessment](#) to learn more.
- **Beautification:** Having farmers cultivate your land can, in some cases, beautify your property. Growing orchards of stone fruits, nuts or other flowering trees can create an aesthetically pleasing farm.

Lease Benefits For Farmers

Especially for those just starting out, leasing is a great way to obtain access to land affordably, and with a relatively low level of commitment. In some cases, young and new farmers enjoy mentorship from an experienced farmer too.

Young Agrarians Land Matching Program

Farmers and landowners who want additional support will find it in the [Young Agrarians B.C. Land Matching Program](#). The B.C. Land Matching Program emphasizes a hands-on model that matches farmers and landowners with similar visions and needs, and assists in developing an agreement that is beneficial for all parties.





EVALUATING LAND FOR FARMING

Before you sign a Fraser Valley land lease, you'll need to evaluate the land to make sure it suits the needs of your crops and production.

- **Water supply:** Make sure there is an adequate water supply at the site for irrigation. Ask the landowner if there have ever been water shortages in the area. Also check to see if there is potable water for washing produce. If there isn't, could you install a water-treatment system? Check with the [City of Surrey's Engineering Department](#) on the locations of aquifer production and wells found throughout the City.
- **Location:** Where is the land in relation to markets and housing for you and your employees? Is the property accessible for equipment? Will increased traffic or parking be issues for the landowner? Check with the [City's COSMOS map](#) to see if your location falls in the Agricultural Land Reserve.
- **Soil and vegetation:** Make sure the site's soil is the right type for your crop and scout the land for the presence of harmful weeds.
- **Layout:** How hilly or flat is the land and in what direction is the sun exposure? Different crops prefer different hours of sunlight. Also consider wind exposure, which can make growing challenging.
- **Equipment:** Does the farm come with machinery that you can use? If so, who will be responsible for repairs and maintenance?
- **Storage and buildings:** Are there secure buildings to store farm equipment? What about refrigeration facilities? Greenhouses? If not, can you build on the land and will the landowners pay for building materials?
- **Security and privacy:** Is there fencing in place, and if not, could you install it? Preferably, the landowner would pay for this or you might be able to install a variety you could take with you when you leave. Is the land visible to nearby streets and neighbours and will this be an issue?
- **Farm stands:** Will the landlords allow you to sell produce from the farm or build a market stand? Some prefer not to allow this due to increased traffic.
- **Power supply:** Does the site have enough power or the right voltage and capacity for your needs?
- **Cell reception:** Does your mobile phone work in the area? If not, will a landline be enough for your business?
- **Lease length:** For how long are the owners willing to lease their land? Longer is often better. A year-to-year agreement might be risky because new farms usually need at least five years to become profitable.
- **Restrictions:** Does the landowner have any conditions that would limit your options on the land (e.g., rules against garbage piles, or equipment and supplies sitting in the open)?

The land evaluation checklist above comes from the Young Agrarians. For a more detailed version of this list, download the group's [Land Access Guide](#).

Leasing is a Great Way to access Land | Mike Bose

Farmer Mike Bose is passionate about Surrey. His family has been farming here for more than 100 years.

"Surrey has always been a great place to farm and it's a great place to start a new farming business," says Mike, who manages his turkey farm on top of vice-chairing the City of Surrey Agriculture and Food Security Advisory committee. "It offers proximity to a variety of different markets if you're a smaller scale operator."

But finding land can be a challenge. That's why Mike is also a fan of programs like Young Agrarian's B.C. Land Matching Program, which connects landowners with farmers. "The cost of buying land in the Lower Mainland is high," he says. "Resources like this one are going to help more farmers access land." "While there's a will to have the land farmed, much like it's always been, the reality is the culture has changed. Not all farmers' children want to farm," says Mike. "Often, those who are most interested in your land and willing to pay immediately aren't farmers."

So, it makes sense for established farmers to connect with newbies looking for land. "Established farmers can also provide invaluable information that is not always covered in farming programs, like knowledge of the unique terrain and weather of the Fraser Valley," says Mike. As a fourth-generation Surrey farmer, he should know.



SECTION 2 | PRODUCTION



You don't build a house without a blueprint, so why would you grow your produce without planning it out? Knowing what you want to produce before you start growing will lead to your success. Once you get to know your land, you may get more creative with what you grow. In the beginning, however, production planning, skill training and knowing what crops you want to grow will start you in the right direction.

Small farmers across the Fraser Valley grow many kinds of crops, including fruits, vegetables, grains and pulses. These farmers grow crops like:

- Lentils
- Hops
- Hazelnuts
- Strawberries

STEPS TO GREAT FARM PRODUCTION

Follow four steps to a happy and full farm. Ask yourself these questions to map out your future farm's production:

- 1. Crops:** What are you going to grow?
- 2. Production planning:** How and when will you grow your crops?
- 3. Skill training:** What skills do you or your employees need to have to grow your crops?
- 4. Finding farm equipment:** What equipment will you need to borrow, rent or buy to manage your farm?



FARM CROPS FOR THE FRASER VALLEY

The rich soils of the South Fraser region are fantastic for many types of crop production, including fruit, vegetables, grains and livestock feed. What you grow will depend on:

- the type of land you're leasing;
- the type of soil on your land;
- the kind of farming you're passionate about;
- your farming skills; and
- the type of farm products most popular on the market.

When in doubt, choose a crop with a long growing season to match the long frost-free period of the Fraser Valley region. A few examples include:

- **Fruits:** pears, strawberries, apples and hazelnuts
- **Vegetables:** squash, lettuce, potatoes, rutabagas, cabbage and broccoli
- **Nursery products:** Christmas trees, grasses, turf, flowers and other decorative plants

For a full list of crops grown in the Fraser Valley, visit the [B.C. Farm Fresh website](#).

Download one of the [B.C. Government Crop Production Guides](#) for detailed information on the farm crop you want to grow.

Crop Rotation

Crop rotation refers to alternating the crop you grow on a particular piece of land, to preserve soil nutrients and limit the spread of diseases and insects, such as corn rootworms. Some farmers do this from year to year, but you can also change crops seasonally. An example might be to grow a vegetable during the summer, then move to a pumpkin patch in the fall.

Smaller Fraser Valley acreages will have less space to rotate crops than larger farms. Learn more about the impact crop rotations can have on nutrient management via the [B.C. Agriculture & Food Climate Action Initiative](#).

FARM PRODUCTION PLANNING

All set to grow? Once you've leased your land and have come up with a business plan and a list of crops you want to grow, it's time to create a detailed production plan. This should include timetables for seeding, fertilizing and harvesting your crops, as well as seasonal crop rotation, if applicable.

For help with production planning:

- Consult the relevant [B.C. Government crop production guide](#).
- Connect with other farmers in your area to learn what type of production schedules work best for them, and to see if you can obtain farm production plan examples.
- Search the Web for free production planning spreadsheets and record-keeping resources.

Continuous Harvesting

With careful scheduling, you may be able to grow almost year-round. This is known as continuous harvesting, and it involves multiple plantings spaced out for multiple yields. The possibilities will depend on your production resources. You can also lengthen your growing season and diversify your produce with a greenhouse, which offers extra warmth and climate protection for crops that need it.



FARM SKILL TRAINING

First things first: you don't need to know everything about farming to become a farmer. There are plenty of farmer training programs in the Fraser Valley and other ways to gain agriculture skills and abilities in specific areas of farm work.

Skills Needed For Working On A Farm In The Fraser Valley

Farmers use a range of skills every day. Some are physical, like hefting hay bales, and some are people-related, like managing employees and talking to shop owners. Other examples include:

- sowing seeds;
- putting up and fixing fences;
- spreading fertilizer;
- harvesting crops; and
- managing time and staying organized.

For most agriculture jobs, it also helps to have an understanding of the machinery, technology and modern farming techniques that offer many advantages for new farmers.

Farming Courses And Workshops

Depending on your current knowledge and how much time and money you can commit, you may want to consider:

- farm workshops, to learn specific skills. One example is [MarketSafe](#), a food-safety program for farmers who make, bake or grow products to sell at markets;
- apprenticeships, for hands-on practice before you lease land;
- courses at colleges and universities that specialize in agriculture; and
- individual arrangements. If you don't know how to operate a certain piece of farm equipment, you could contract or hire someone to train you, or even do the job for you. You could also barter or exchange skills with another farmer.

There are lots of opportunities for young farmers to take over Fraser Valley farms and learn. According to Statistics Canada, the average age of farm operators in 2016 was 56. That means a large number of farmers are retiring and are likely able to share knowledge and skills when they lease their farmland





BUYING FARM EQUIPMENT IN B.C.

The type of equipment your farm needs will depend on what you want to grow. You may find yourself looking for anything from trucks, tractors and ploughs to seeders, fertilizer spreaders, sprayers and mulchers. Create a detailed inventory of farm machinery as part of your business plan.

If you'll be producing the same type of crop or product for many years, buying agriculture equipment upfront may be worthwhile. There are plenty of farm equipment dealers in the Fraser Valley, with owners who speak multiple languages. Be sure to consider the cost of tax, insurance, maintenance and fuel over the life of the equipment. One big advantage of buying is that owned equipment is an asset, so each payment you make builds equity (unlike with leasing). You can also rent owned equipment to other farmers when it isn't being used, which brings in extra income.

Other things to consider:

- **Buying used:** While buying a brand new tractor or plough may be tempting, buying used farm equipment can be more cost-effective. Check classified advertisements and websites for agricultural equipment for sale. Just be aware that used equipment will need more repairs than new machines. Used equipment may also be more expensive – and not as common – than you'd expect, due to the high number of farmers buying equipment in Surrey, Langley and Abbotsford.
- **Financing:** For large purchases, you may need a loan, especially if you want to keep cash available for other purposes. Banks will normally finance a new piece of equipment over 7 to 10 years; used equipment over a maximum of 5. The Canadian Agricultural Loans Act program provides guarantees for equipment loans that may be able to help keep your interest rate down.

Leasing Versus Buying Farm Equipment

While leasing generally costs more in the long run than buying, there are several advantages:

- lower upfront costs.
- access to top-of-the-line equipment that is less likely to break down.
- shorter-term commitments, which give you flexibility to match your equipment to your changing needs. Equipment leases typically run between 3 and 5 years.

If you're planning to lease farmland, you may also be able to lease agricultural machinery from the same Fraser Valley landowner. Talk to the owner early in the lease process to learn what's available.

Sharing, Borrowing Or Renting

Consider cooperating with local farmers to use their equipment. While certain tools and agriculture machines may be in operation too often for you to borrow, some farmers will make their farm machinery available at affordable rates – with or without an operator. You may also be able to barter equipment use for other services.

Check with neighbouring farms or ask local suppliers about renting farm equipment in Surrey, Langley and Abbotsford. You can also look on sites like Craigslist or Kijiji for hiring opportunities.

“ If you'll be producing the same type of crop or product for many years, buying agriculture equipment upfront may be worthwhile. ”



SECTION 3 | PLANNING YOUR FARM BUSINESS

Business planning will help you describe in detail how your business is going to be successful. Your business plan will include:

- how you'll operate your farm;
- how much you'll be spending on your business;
- how much revenue you're expected to gain; and
- how you will market and sell your produce.

Creating a business plan allows you to turn your ideas into a profitable business, gain financing from lenders or investors and help identify your strengths and opportunities to overcome weaknesses and threats to your business. Once you have a clear business plan, you'll have a better idea of what type of land you should be leasing to start your business.

“Once you have a clear business plan, you'll have a better idea of what type of land you should be leasing.”





BUSINESS STRATEGY FOR FARMERS

Anyone can start a farm, but a successful farm requires a well-planned strategy like any other business, both early in the business-planning process and as the operation evolves. To form a strategy for your South Fraser farm business, you need to know:

- **Where you are:** What are your strengths, and where might your business do well compared to others? Answering these questions will lead you to your competitive advantage.
- **Where you want to be:** Looking forward, where would you like to see the business in one year, five years – even 10? Do you envision steadily increasing profits? Becoming a leader in your industry segment? Expanding your customer base? Diversifying into other crops?
- **How to get there:** Plot a course and consider what milestones will be necessary along the way. Build in flexibility and as you move along the path, re-evaluate the feasibility of your goals.
- **When you've arrived:** How will you measure success? Be sure that each of your goals contains a specific target that will allow you to recognize what you've achieved, and when.
- **Where you have been:** Past successes and failures offer valuable insights for the future. Evaluate at regular intervals, asking questions like, "What did I do right?" and "How can I improve moving forward?." Then, redirect efforts accordingly.

How To Write A Farm Business Plan: First Steps

The first section of your farm business plan should answer the questions above, and consist of:

1. A mission statement
2. Business objectives
3. Goals
4. An action plan



We've provided more detail on these elements below. To find a business plan template and other agriculture business planning resources for your Fraser Valley farm, visit the [B.C. Government's Taking Stock: Self Assessment Tool](#).

1. Mission Statement

This should capture the core purpose and function of your business and consists of one to three sentences summing up its values, key markets, and direction. In other words: who you are, what you do, whom you serve and what you stand for. This will help guide all of your activities, but it will be especially helpful when it comes time to identify your target market and develop your marketing plan.

2. Business Objectives

Come up with four to eight high-level priorities for your business (no more, or you risk diverting focus from your mission statement). Together, these should paint a picture of how you want your business to look in the future.

3. Goals

Goals should be specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-bound. Each objective will have its own set of goals; however, some goals might contribute to more than one objective. Examples of goals could be:

- Increase profits by \$25,000 in five years to allow for increasing family salaries.
- Improve cost of production for farm enterprise (to control costs and identify profitable areas).
- Restructure debt to regain a greater operating credit line for flexibility with purchases.

4. Action Plan

For each goal, create an action statement that explains how that goal will be accomplished. Your action plan should detail how, where, when, how often and by whom goals will be achieved.

Remember, you don't have to go through the process of setting up a farm enterprise on your own. Professionals such as accountants and lawyers can be a great source of help. The B.C. government offers some great resources on goal setting and business planning for farmers and small businesses in general. You can also talk to other farmers to help you set realistic goals.

FARM FINANCE

You'll need a detailed plan for funding and maintaining your operation. Take time to think about the financing you'll need for your South Fraser farm and create a solid financial plan with help from a professional. You'll also need to familiarize yourself with the crops you're interested in farming to understand what resources you'll need.

Financing a Small Farm

The amount and type of financing you'll need for your Fraser Valley farm will depend on the size of the operation and your own financial situation. There are four main sources to consider:

- **Personal resources:** You may be able to fund a small farm with personal or family savings, or lines of credit.
- **Business/farm loans and lines of credit:** For larger farms, especially those needing machinery and buildings, you may require a loan or credit from a financial institution. Financial Institutions offer a variety of loans that can help finance your farming operation.
- **Operating credit:** Some suppliers provide short-term credit over the growing period. Co-operatives, for instance, sometimes offer supplies to members in exchange for future earnings from farm production.
- **Farm grants:** Some Fraser Valley farmers may be eligible for grants to help with start-up, hiring, training, marketing and other aspects of the business. Visit the [Community Farms Program website](#) for more details on small-farm grants and loans.

Financial Plan

In your financial plan, you'll need to go beyond subtracting production costs from projected sales. A farm financial plan should also include:

- **Projected income statement:** How much you think you can make. When forecasting, be conservative. It is unlikely your profits will match those of an established farm. Create projections for best-case and worst-case scenarios.
- **Cash flow analysis:** How much cash flows in and out of the business over a set period?
- **Projected balance sheet:** Any spending or income that isn't profit or loss. This includes assets, liabilities, and capital.
- **Source-and-use-of-funds analysis:** A yearly summary of where your capital will come from, and what it will buy for the business.

If this sounds a bit too complex to handle on your own, we strongly recommend hiring an accountant to look at your projections and all of your books going forward.

Learn more about small-farm financial planning on [Farm Management Canada](#).

For more information on funding opportunities for farmers, you may want to look at the [Community Farms Program webpage on Grants and Loans for Farmers](#).





FINDING WORKERS FOR B.C. FARMS

If you want to expand your farm business beyond a small operation, you'll need to consider bringing in some helping hands – whether they're students, seasonal workers, part-time employees or full-time staff. Depending on your needs, there are several sources to consider:

- **Family and friends:** In the short term, family and friends can be a great source of farm help. But if they're assisting as a favour, don't expect much more than one season. If you're thinking of hiring family members as paid employees to work on your farm, consider whether you would be comfortable firing them if things didn't work out.
- **Permanent full-time or part-time staff:** To grow your business, you may need to consider obtaining year-round help. Online classifieds such as Craigslist and Kijiji advertise job listings to a large audience for free. You could also post your opportunity in the email newsletter of a farming institution or organization, such as the [Certified Organic Associations of B.C.](#), or on an employment site that lists farm worker jobs, such as:
 - o [Agricultural Labour Pool](#)
 - o [Government of Canada Job Bank](#)
 - o [FoodWork.ca](#)
 - o [Wow Jobs](#)
 - o [GoodWork.ca](#)

- **Seasonal workers:** If your operation needs extra staff on a seasonal basis, the federally sponsored migrant worker and low-skilled worker programs may be options. Read more on the [Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program](#).
- **Students:** Summer full-time or winter part-time students are a great source of hired help. Many students also take weekend agriculture jobs (six to eight hours per week) during the school year.
- **Interns:** Some university and college agriculture programs require students to do internships on working farms, usually in exchange for room, board and some financial compensation. B.C. schools with agriculture programs include Kwantlen Polytechnic University, University of the Fraser Valley and the University of British Columbia. You may also qualify for funding assistance through the [Canada Summer Jobs program](#). Also check out the [SOIL apprenticeship program](#), which connects Canadian organic farms with apprentices.
- **WWOOFers:** Worldwide Opportunities on Organic Farms (WWOOF) is a global organization that links volunteers with organic farmers. WWOOFers exchange farm work for room, board and the chance to learn about organic agriculture. To become a host, your farm must be "involved in organics in some way, growing or producing organic products." Visit the [WWOOF Canada website](#) for more. Alternatively, [helpx.net](#) offers a similar service for non-organic and organic farms.

Retaining Farm Workers

Training can be time-consuming, so you want to hold onto good workers. Here are some ways to do that:

- **Be clear about your expectations.** Create written job descriptions for each position. This may feel excessive for farm work, but even workers whose roles seem simple – like berry pickers – will benefit from clear wording about what they do and whom they report to. Clear job descriptions also make performance evaluations much easier.
- **Keep records.** As soon as you hire a permanent employee, you must register with WorkSafeB.C. and the Canada Revenue Agency, and keep records according to government regulations. Create a contract for each employee, including the job description and all other employment terms and conditions.
- **Evaluate performance.** A performance evaluation is more than a pat on the back (although recognizing good work can improve employee satisfaction and retention). You'll need to set aside time to sit down and discuss how the job is going, including where the employee is meeting expectations and any areas for improvement.

Learn more about hiring and retaining farm workers in the [B.C. Employer Reference Information Handbook](#).





FARM MARKETING

After you grow great produce, your next challenge is to tell people about it. This is where your marketing plan comes in. It will help you identify who will be interested in your products, where you can reach buyers and how you'll promote your farm and products.

Follow these basic steps to create an agricultural marketing plan:

- **Identify what makes your farm special.** Research what makes your farm and products different from those of other similar businesses in the South Fraser Valley. This is also known as your competitive advantage. The [Canada Business Network](#) has a great webpage about how to get started on market research.
- **Figure out who is most likely to buy your products.** Will it be individual consumers? Restaurants? Supermarkets? Promotion can be costly and time-consuming, so you need to make sure you direct your marketing strategy at the right people. For example, if you can produce a consistent product that can be delivered daily, restaurants may be your best target. However, if you harvest small amounts of several crops, you may want to focus on [farmers' markets](#) and individual consumers. Create a detailed list of all the places you might sell your agricultural products, including how often and for how long each year.

- **Determine marketing goals and tactics.** Ask yourself how you'll connect with your customers. From there, come up with a strategy and specific ways to market your product, including how much you'll spend promoting yourself and your products. There is no formula for how much you'll need to spend on promotion, but it's better to budget too much than too little. Pick platforms most likely to reach your buyers. You'll want to consider newspaper, radio, television and online advertising. Other platforms include brochures, websites, social media, signage, local farm-marketing associations and events such as fall fairs and harvest days.

For more information on marketing for farmers, download the B.C. Government's [New Farm Start Up](#) and supplemental [Growing Your Farm Enterprise](#) documents.

For help with marketing in your specific industry, connect with a growing association through the [B.C. Agricultural Council](#).

NOTE: Some B.C. farm products, like field vegetables and cranberries, are subject to marketing regulations. Check any rules governing your product before you invest in marketing.

BUSINESS SMARTS MAKE BETTER FARMERS: NATY KING OF HAZELMERE ORGANIC FARM

Farming is never just about farming, and nobody knows that better than Naty King, owner of Surrey's Hazelmere Organic Farm.

"As with any other business, you're competing with others in your field, and you need a good base in financial management and creativity to take advantage of opportunities," she says.

Thirty years ago, Naty and her late husband, Gary, left behind careers in finance to grow organic produce and raise their family in Hazelmere, a quiet corner of South Surrey. Today, the farm is going strong, supplying organic vegetables and culinary herbs to Lower Mainland grocery stores, wholesalers and restaurants.

As Naty points out, the farm's success isn't due to growing talent alone. "There are certain skills you need to have outside of being a good farmer: basic financial management, so that you can plan, manage, and adapt based on how your farm is doing, as well as creativity in selling and marketing your products," she says.

Accounting comes in especially handy when things don't go according to plan. "You'll need to manage your finances to ensure that you don't lose your livelihood," says Naty. New farmers are the most vulnerable to change and need to be the most adaptable.

When an opportunity comes up, business smarts are a good skill to help decide whether it's worth pursuing, or whether you need to cut and run. For instance, Naty says: "While boutique restaurants may be a great place to sell your goods, be aware that they are often small in scale and operating on thin margins and can't always be relied upon to make large orders."

Marketing skills will help you establish a customer base. Consider your farm's brand: will you present it as a family destination with pumpkin patches and corn mazes? Or perhaps as a trustworthy behind-the-scenes supplier to local businesses?

"Channel your passion and love of what you do into how you talk about your work to attract a variety of different clients," advises Naty, who gets the word out about Hazelmere at community events focusing on conservation, organic farming and farm-to-table cuisine.

To sum up: if you want to be a successful farmer, get ready to share your passion and sharpen your pencil - growing is only one piece of puzzle.

MODERN FARMING

There are two main groups of farmers today: those who value technology and automation, using modern techniques to create efficiency wherever possible, and others, who believe in a simpler, “back to the land” approach, moving away from fossil-fuel-powered equipment and instead doing most of their work by hand. For Fraser Valley farmers who are just starting out, the modern approach is probably easiest, although you’ll have to decide what works best for your crop and farm business. You may decide that upgrading the latest technology is too expensive, or it might make sense, especially if your farm is highly specialized in one crop or product.

What do we mean when we talk about technology in farming? Everything from hybrid seeds and advanced fertilizers to high-tech machinery such as GPS-guided sprayers, drones, computerized soil sensors, robotic carts and sorters, and automated irrigation systems.



Benefits of Technology In Farming

Each farmer must decide whether a particular technology’s benefits are worth the cost. Some advantages of implementing technology on South Fraser farms are:

- streamlined processes, with less room for human error and waste;
- increased yields and greater food security;
- reduced labour costs;
- prevented repetitive injuries;
- improved planning, through access to better soil and weather data; and
- reduced vulnerability to pests and crop diseases.

You can stay up to date on the latest advances in farm equipment and technology by reading:

- [Farm West](#)
- [Certified Organic B.C.](#)
- [Modern Agriculture magazine](#)
- [AgCanada.com](#)
- [Farm Industry News and other farming publications](#)



SECTION 4 | CONNECTION WITH YOUR FARM COMMUNITY



Connecting with farm groups and organizations can help you stay up to date on what's happening in your farm community.

To get started on connecting with other farmers and growers, check out the Farmer Groups across the Fraser Valley, including the [B.C. Agricultural Council](#), which has close to 30 member associations representing different areas of farmers and growers within B.C.'s agricultural industry. Alternatively, you can search for information on national, regional and provincial not-for-profit and publicly-funded farm organizations and commodity groups through [Agriguide.ca](#).

“Efficient City processes make it easier for businesses to start and grow. Surrey has developed a leading-edge solution to move the entire business licencing process online.”

RESOURCES FOR NEW FARMERS

Starting a farm can be overwhelming, so it's helpful to connect with other South Fraser farmers who have gone through the process. There are many farming groups in the Fraser Valley, with farmers from diverse cultural backgrounds who speak a variety of languages.

You can reach out for support and advice any time, but we suggest touching base with other Fraser Valley farmers as early as possible. For example, consider connecting with local farmers when you're developing a business plan, putting together a promotion plan or choosing which crops to grow.

The following groups are a great source of help for beginner farmers and anyone starting an agriculture business:

- [Canadian Association of Farm Advisors](#) offers financial, succession and management support, provided by bank advisors, management consultants and farm-supply companies. The group also hosts events for Fraser Valley farmers.
- [Fraser Valley Farm Direct Marketing Association](#) provides marketing support for B.C. farms.
- [Fraser Valley Organic Producers Association](#) is responsible for organic-farm certification in the Fraser Valley. They also maintains a detailed membership listing of local organic farmers.

- [Urban Farming Society](#) supports the interests of urban farmers. More than 30 Metro Vancouver farms participate.
- [Young Agrarians](#) is a network for new and young ecological and organic farmers.
- [Community Futures South Fraser](#) provides loans and business-advisory services to rural communities in the South Fraser region.
- **Commodity associations:** provide crop-growing resources and crop-specific support:
 - o [B.C. Blueberry Council](#)
 - o [B.C. Cherry Association](#)
 - o [B.C. Christmas Tree Council](#)
 - o [B.C. Cranberry Growers' Association](#)
 - o [B.C. Cranberry Marketing Commission](#)
 - o [B.C. Fruit Growers' Association](#)
 - o [B.C. Grain Producers Association](#)
 - o [B.C. Grapegrowers' Association](#)
 - o [B.C. Greenhouse Growers' Association](#)
 - o [B.C. Hazelnut Growers Association](#)

- o [B.C. Landscape & Nursery Association](#)
- o [B.C. Potato & Vegetable Growers' Association](#)
- o [B.C. Certified Seed Potato Growers Association](#)
- o [B.C. Strawberry Growers Association](#)
- o [B.C. Vegetable Marketing Commission](#)
- o [B.C. Wine Grape Council](#)
- o [B.C. Young Farmers](#)
- o [Fraser Valley Cole Crop Growers' Association](#)
- o [Fraser Valley Pea and Bush Bean Growers' Association](#)
- o [Raspberry Industry Development Council](#)
- o [United Flower Growers' Co-ops](#)



GET TO KNOW YOUR COMMODITY ASSOCIATION: PAUL GILL OF M&M PACIFIC COAST FARMS

Most farmers specialize in one or two crops. With so much of their livelihood bound up in a small market segment, they need the best, most current information on growing, harvesting and selling their crops. Paul Gill, owner of Surrey-based M&M Pacific Coast Farms, knows exactly where to turn for that data: B.C.'s commodity councils.

Family owned and operated since 1979, M&M grows and sells blueberries that are picked fresh daily, cleaned, packed and ready to eat, along with blueberry jams, jellies, honey, syrup and other products.

Paul recommends all farmers get in touch with the B.C. Agriculture Council as a first step. "It's a great resource for new farmers," he says.

The B.C. Agriculture Council represents more than 14,000 B.C. farmers and ranchers, and close to 30 farm-sector associations across the province. In addition to advocating for its members, the council works hard to promote local products, providing programming, funding and expertise to improve B.C. agriculture.

What's more, almost every type of crop has its own B.C. commodity council: blueberries, apples, root vegetables – you name it.

"These groups are great, too, as they do a lot of farmer-based research and marketing," says Paul. Their meetings give farmers a chance to get together with other growers, industry experts, scientists and more. "They can be the point of contact if, say, you're looking for someone to help monitor your fields, or to do custom work if you can't afford to own certain machinery," he says. "As a blueberry farmer, the amount of information the B.C. Blueberry Council makes available to farmers is unbelievable."



START-UP FARMS

Grow Your Passion and Your Farming Business

Use your experience, passion and growing knowledge to start your farm in B.C.

1. Learn about the Fraser Valley land and how to grow with it.
2. Plan out your business on your own or with other professionals.
3. Learn and keep up with climate and environment resources, so you know what to expect each season.
4. Talk to other South Fraser farmers in the farming community and learn, learn, learn. And share some of your skills while you're at it!

Start-Up Farms In The Fraser Valley

Farming is a career and lifestyle that's growing in popularity. There are many resources from regions like the Fraser Valley and the Province of B.C. that can assist you. Every single small farmer in B.C. had to start somewhere – and most started with resources provided by other farmers. Some helpful resources include:

- [Agriculture and Seafood resources](#)
- [Young Agrarians](#)
- [The New Farm Start-Up Guide](#) published by the B.C. Government.

You aren't in this alone. Meet other farmers in the Fraser Valley and get the peace of mind that comes with hearing others' experiences.

SECTION 5 | FARMING CONDITIONS IN THE FRASER VALLEY



The Fraser Valley has outstanding growing conditions for farmers. These farming conditions make it a large and varied market where farmers produce over 200 commercial products like cranberries, raspberries, potatoes and corn that are valued both locally and internationally.

The Fraser Valley often has cooler and wetter climates than the rest of B.C.. It's also home to fertile soils that are great for growing certain fruits and vegetables. In this section, you will learn more about the region's growing conditions and get information on how to manage your farmland for the crops you're growing.

BE PREPARED, WHATEVER THE WEATHER: RON TAMIS OF RODRISO FARMS

Ron and Pam Tamis took over a family beef operation in 2002, starting out with just 11 head of cattle and 1,000 bales of hay. Over the years, they've added a pumpkin patch, sweet corn, potatoes, squash and a variety of other vegetables. The whole family helps out on the farm, including Ron and Pam's three young boys.

"The best part about having a small-scale sustainable farm is that we can make a living for our family and do it together," says Ron.

One thing the Tamises have learned over the years is to monitor the weather and be prepared for anything. In general, the Fraser Valley has a perfect combination of climate, soil and environment for growing. Thanks to mild winters and plenty of precipitation, a variety of crops thrive better here than anywhere else in the country. "But farmers still need to be aware of the environment and prepare for anything the elements can throw at them," says Ron. Contingency plans will help ensure you don't lose your crops.

"In Surrey, moisture used to be the biggest issue you'd face as a farmer," Ron says. "But the past few years are trending hotter and drier, which means you need to rethink crop selection."

For example, are you growing something hearty enough to contend with a drier overall climate? Should you invest in an irrigation system? You also need to be aware that climate patterns are cyclical. For rainy years, you'll still need a good drainage system.

"While we're blessed to have an ideal climate for growing a variety of different crops in the Fraser Valley, we also need to be aware that nothing ever goes as planned," says Ron. "It pays to think about what you'd do in case of any possibility."



FRASER VALLEY FARMING CLIMATE

Weather in the Fraser Valley is mild, especially compared to Ontario and the rest of Canada. Thanks to the nearby Pacific Ocean and Coast Mountains, we have warm summers, plenty of precipitation and winters that rarely dip below zero Celsius, with long periods of little or no frost. In Surrey, for instance, the average summer temperature is 22°C (72°F), while the winter average is 5°C (41°F).

Fraser Valley rainfall averages:

- Surrey: 152 cm/60 in
- Chilliwack: 158 cm/62 in
- Delta: 90 cm/35 in
- Abbotsford: 148 cm/58 in
- Langley: 140 cm/55 in

Environment Canada issues regular weather forecasts for Vancouver, covering weather in Langley, Surrey, Delta, Chilliwack and Abbotsford. It also publishes alerts on storms and other extreme weather events. For long-term weather forecasts, a [Farmer's Almanac](#) will come in handy.

Effects Of Climate Change

Climate change is affecting farming regions worldwide. Over the coming years, Fraser Valley weather conditions are expected to follow global trends, with gradually increasing annual temperatures, growing degree-days (heat accumulation), longer frost-free seasons and increased winter and spring precipitation. Scientists also predict more frequent extreme weather events – windstorms, heavy rain, forest fires, hail, droughts and floods – and drier summer conditions for B.C.'s farming climate. The B.C. Government is helping farmers meet these challenges through its Climate Action Initiative.

Additionally, seasons are shifting. This can have a significant impact on production planning. For example, raspberry harvests used to start in early July; however, in the past two years, the harvest has ended by mid-June. Rainfall averages should be supplemented with monthly trends.

B.C. Agriculture & Food Climate Action Initiative

The [Climate Action Initiative](#) provides resources for farmers to adapt and respond to the challenges of climate change. It also identifies new opportunities presented by the changing growing season. For example, some farmers are taking advantage of warmer, drier conditions to test out different crops, such as wine grapes and fruit trees.





FLOOD MITIGATION | FLOODING IN THE FRASER VALLEY

Climate change is causing water levels to rise worldwide, increasing the risk of flooding in Surrey and across the South Fraser region. Sudden and heavy rains can also cause flooding. On a farm, flooding can cause lost crops, loss of oxygen and nutrients in soil, and gravel left behind on land.

The Fraser River and its water levels are the region's biggest concerns when it comes to flooding. This is because so much agricultural land lines the riverbanks. Local governments are working together on a regional flood strategy and improving the river's system of dykes. For example, the City of Chilliwack has spent more than \$9 million on dyke upgrades in the last 10 years, covering nearly 20 km, or half of the dyking system.

How To Prepare For Flooding

Before you lease land, look into its flood history. Pay a visit to City Hall and find out whether the property is on a floodplain, and what measures your municipality has in place for flood protection and preparation. Be familiar with [Surrey's floodplain areas](#). Depending on where you lease farmland, you may want to choose a flood-resistant crop. Soybeans and rice tolerate flooding better than potatoes and dry beans, for example.

To protect your South Fraser farmland from flooding:

- **Watch the weather closely**, and keep up with flood warnings in Surrey, Chilliwack, Langley, Abbotsford and across B.C.
- **Reduce tilling and build flood-preventing infrastructure**, such as flood walls and wells.
- **Plant cover crops**. These are crops you plant in addition to your main crop, to protect against erosion and flooding. Examples include red clover, rye and oats. In some cases, cover crops also improve soil health, prevent pests and diseases, and increase yields. [Old Farmer's Almanac](#) has more information on the benefits of cover crops.
- **Review** the Fraser Basin Council literature on [Flood Management](#).

Recovering From A Farm Flood

A flood can be devastating to a small farm. If you think you can recover some costs, consider replanting. Just be sure the decision is economic, and not emotional. Calculate all replanting costs, including clearing any debris, seeding, planting, pesticides, tilling and harvesting, and subtract them from the potential earnings of a delayed harvest. Also, be certain the soil will dry out enough in time to support growth, as soggy soils may interfere with root development.

IRRIGATION | WATERING YOUR CROPS

South Fraser farms get plenty of rain, but drought is always a possibility; farmers need to have an irrigation system in place. First, make sure you have a clean water source to protect your crops from contaminants. The type and amount of irrigation you need will be affected by:

- the weather in your area
- the crop you're growing
- the size and topography of your Fraser Valley farmland
- the type and depth of your soil
- the location of your water source
- the power supply

Next, use an online [Irrigation Schedule Calculator](#) to predict your farm's watering needs. During times of water restriction, you can still irrigate, but there may be limits in effect. For more information, visit the B.C. Government's page on [Drought in Agriculture](#).

Irrigation System Purchase And Repairs

If you're leasing land, the landowner's irrigation system usually comes as part of the package and the landowner pays for any repairs (depending on the conditions of the lease).

If you're purchasing a sprinkler system yourself, choose a well-known supplier who is familiar with the [B.C. Sprinkler Irrigation Manual](#).





SOIL | THE DIRT ON FRASER VALLEY SOIL

Fraser Valley soils are some of the richest in Canada, supporting all kinds of farm produce, from vegetables, berries, and cereal grains to nursery products and pasture. Knowing your soil is critical for land planning and deciding which crops you'll grow.

Soil Types

Soil consists of finely ground rock, clay and organic materials. The amount of these elements and the soil's particle size affect its growing ability. Most B.C. and Fraser Valley farm soil falls into the following categories:

- **Loam:** A fluffy blend of sand, silt and clay. It holds onto nutrients, but also drains and aerates well, which is ideal for many crops.
- **Sand:** Gritty, large particles that drain quickly, retaining less moisture and fewer nutrients than other soil types. Some crops, such as raspberries, corn and potatoes, thrive in sandy soils.
- **Clay:** Tiny particles that hold moisture and nutrients well, but drain slowly, with limited air circulation. Beans, beets and Swiss chard, among other crops, do well in clay soil.

Soil Nutrients

Plants draw a variety of nutrients from the soil, including nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium, calcium, sulphur and magnesium, among others. If your soil is low on one or more nutrients, you can add fertilizer. Fraser Valley farmers make use of both chemical and organic fertilizers – the choice will come down to your needs and operation. Refer to B.C. Agriculture's [Production Guides](#) to see if your soil is a good match for your desired crop and to learn which fertilizers can supply missing nutrients as part of your soil preparation.

Soil pH

This refers to a soil's acidity. Most crops grow best at a pH between 6.0 and 8.2. Soil acidity can be modified through the addition of lime (calcium carbonate) and other materials.

Dirt Testing Basics

Soil testing can reveal a variety of characteristics, including pH, nutrients and organic content. You have two main options for soil testing:

- **Buy a DIY (Do-It-Yourself) kit:** These start at around \$20, and, depending on the kit, can measure soil pH, nutrients and other elements. Results from home kits may not be accurate unless you follow the testing methodology exactly.
- **Use a soil scientist:** Pricier, but precise. You collect a sample and send it to a lab, which gives you a full composition and nutrient profile, in addition to testing soil pH. The B.C. Government maintains a regularly updated list of soil-testing resources across Surrey, the Fraser Valley and Western Canada.

For more information on testing Fraser Valley soil conditions, visit a local gardening centre or nursery.



