

Farming Heritage



Photo courtesy Bella Coola Museum/Local Archives

Ever since the first Europeans settled here - clearing the land, opening the dense rainforest to the sky, and planting the first potatoes among the stumps - agriculture has been a passion for many Valley residents. The long summer days and relatively long growing season in this wide flat valley with extensive areas of rich alluvial soil enables production of crops found in kitchen gardens as well as sweet corn, tomatoes, potatoes, berries, and even hardy varieties of grapes.



Photo courtesy Bella Coola Museum/Local Archives

In earlier times, the Valley proved itself capable of commercial agriculture production by supplying fruit and vegetables to communities throughout the Central Coast region, and in the 1920's boasted a government-operated agricultural research station which developed a number of heritage varieties of apples.



Photo courtesy Bella Coola Museum/Local Archives

The agricultural potential of the Valley remains, but with the advance of refrigerated shipping from the south, the decline of cannery villages along the coast, and the demise of the pulp mill town of Ocean Falls, large-scale commercial agriculture in Bella Coola was no longer viable. Likewise, with transportation improvements that enable supplies to be trucked in over Highway 20, locally grown agricultural produce must compete in price with relatively low-priced imports of goods produced and shipped in a global economy.

The large fields cleared from the forest more than a century ago are now devoted primarily to raising native hay for Valley livestock and pose a constant struggle against the encroaching cottonwoods and alders that would reclaim the land for the rainforest.



Photo courtesy Ernest Hall

Nonetheless, small-scale hobby farming that sees a thriving vegetable garden with nearly every household, and a seasonal weekly farmers' market where local gardeners, crafters and artists peddle their wares, contributes to a lifestyle that is the envy of many city folk and echoes the belief that the Bella Coola Valley could have a sustainable agriculture industry. The trend toward sustainable, local, organic food production has many speculating on ways the community can pursue food security.

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