

## Attachment 1 – What We Heard Summary

A short survey was promoted throughout the RDCO to collect feedback and input on the draft Regional Agricultural Strategy. The survey was open from May 22<sup>nd</sup> to June 27<sup>th</sup>, 2025. A total of 279 responses were received. The following section provides the results for each question.

### Support for Vision Statement

Across the region the RAS vision statement is strongly supported, as illustrated in Figure 1.

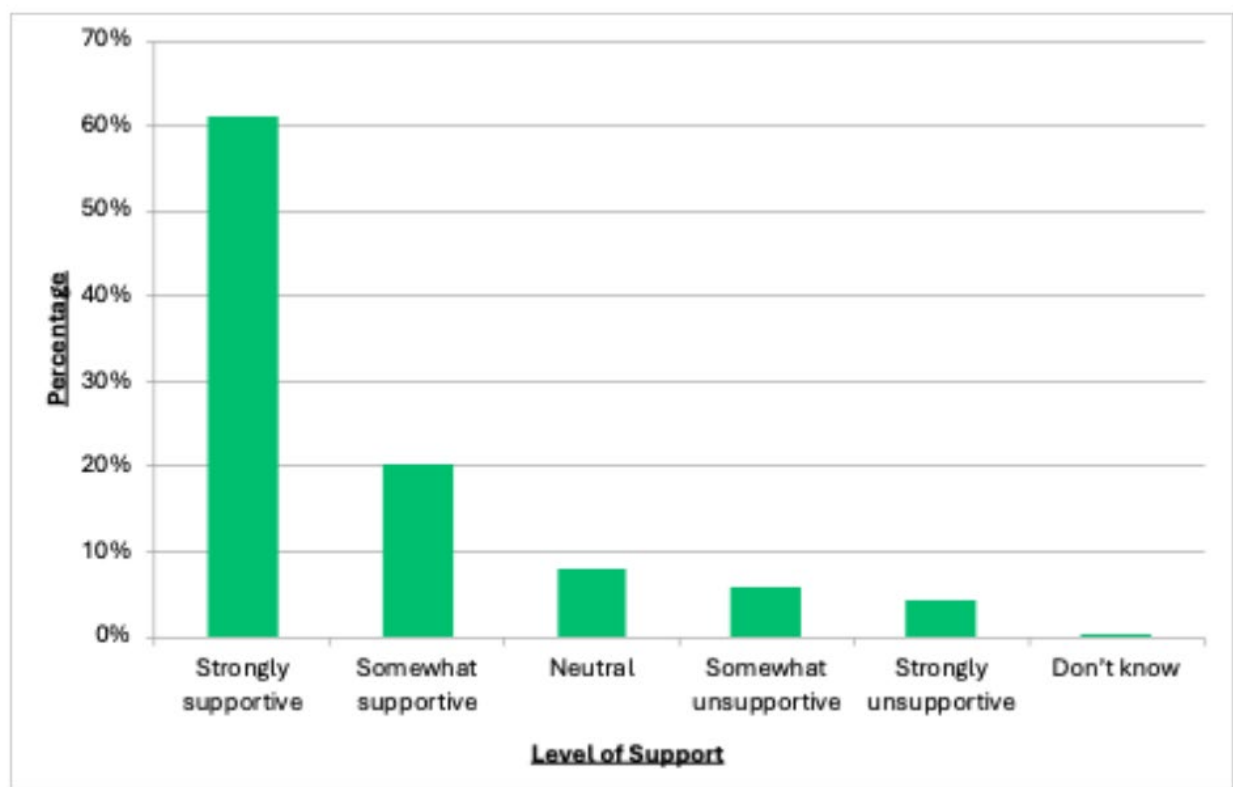


Figure 1 Level of support for RAS Vision statement from aggregated results of all 279 survey responses.

The vision statement is:

***Central Okanagan agriculture feeds our community, our economy, and our future - Agriculture in the Central Okanagan is based on strong relationships between the farming community, all levels of government, and Indigenous communities. Farmland is protected, farms are thriving, and the community supports a regional food system that sustains present and future generations through a strong local business environment, water use efficiency, climate resilience, and the responsible adoption of technological innovation.***

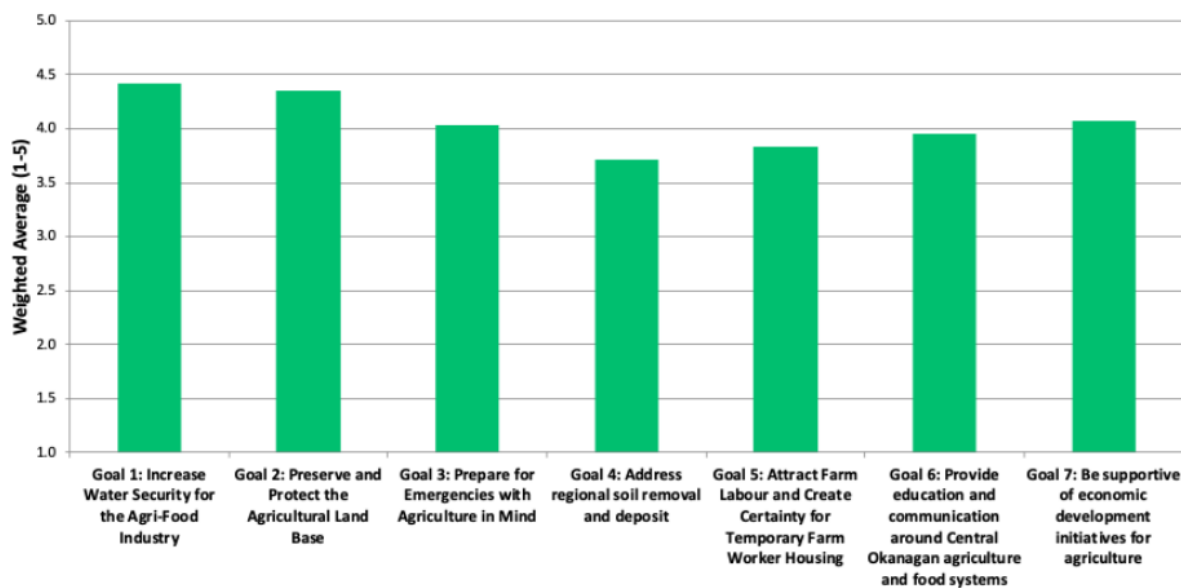
## Importance of RAS Goals

The survey respondents were asked to rank the seven goals outlined in the Strategy to achieve the vision statement. They ranked the goals from Very Important (score of 5) to Very Unimportant (score of 1). A weighted average<sup>1</sup> was used to compare the results between communities; the weighted average provides one number for each goal that sums up how important people think it is, making it easy to see which goals were rated the highest overall. Figure 2 (next page) illustrates the results from all survey respondents.

Several observations can be made from the results:

- Broad consensus on importance: All seven goals have weighted averages well above 3 (Neutral), and most are in the 4–5 range (Important to Very Important). This indicates that respondents view all goals as at least somewhat important, with many seeing them as very important.
- Modest differentiation: While there are some differences — for example, Goal 1 (Increase Water Security) scored highest overall — the differences are not dramatic. This suggests that no single goal is being either over-prioritized or considered unimportant.

*Figure 2 Importance of RAS goals using aggregated results from all 279 survey responses. The higher the weighted average, the greater the importance.*



<sup>1</sup> A weighted average is a way to calculate the “average” score and takes into account how many people chose each response. Instead of treating all responses equally, it gives more weight (or influence) to answers that more people choose. For example, if most people rated a goal as Very Important (a score of 5), and only a few rated it lower, the weighted average will be closer to 5. If responses were more mixed, the average will fall somewhere in the middle.

## Most Important RDCO Actions to Support Agriculture

The survey respondents were asked about the most important ways the RDCO can support the agriculture sector. A list of seven themes were provided and respondents were asked to select three.

The options were:

- **Develop a Consistent Vision:** Align agricultural policies and regulations so that there is consistency between municipalities across the region
- **Convene and Facilitate:** Promote collaboration and education on agricultural issues by facilitating conversations between the agricultural community, First Nations, municipalities, industry, and others.
- **Collect and Share Data:** Collect and share data to help support agricultural policy decisions and funding opportunities.
- **Provide Education and Information:** Use communications platforms to educate and inform the public about agriculture.
- **Prepare for Emergencies:** Include agriculture in emergency planning (e.g. drought, fire, flood).
- **Provide Incentives:** Provide incentives to support farming practices that benefit the environment.
- **Advocate for the Agri-food Sector:** Advocate to other levels of government on agricultural issues that are outside the jurisdiction of the RDCO.
- **Leading and Supporting:** Provide leadership and support to implement the actions in the Draft Regional Agricultural Strategy.

Providing incentives, advocating for the agri-food sector, preparing for emergencies and developing a consistent vision were ranked as the most important ways the RDCO can support the sector based on results from across the region (Figure 3, next page).

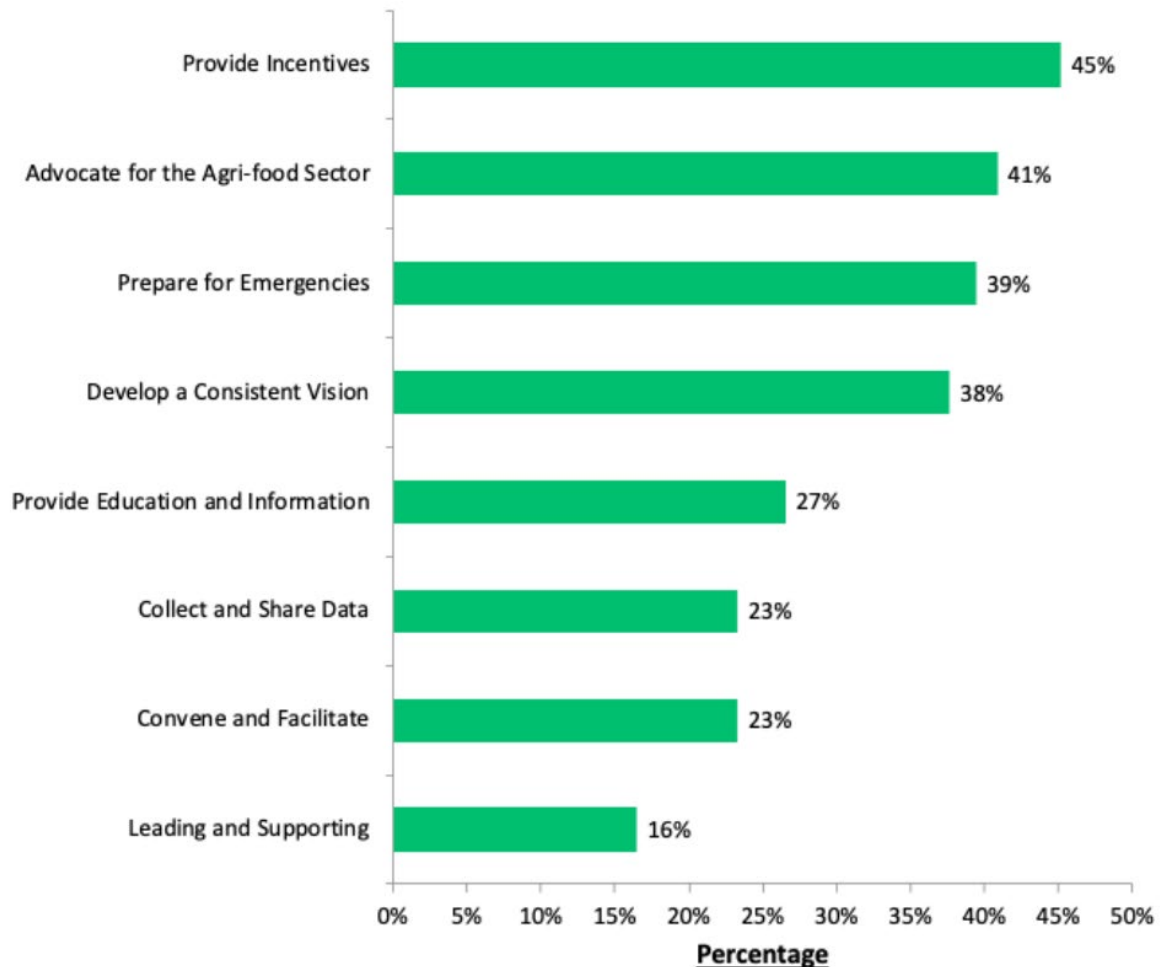


Figure 3 The most important ways the RDCO can support the agriculture sector ranked by all 279 survey respondents.

Providing incentives is important for most, followed by advocating for the sector and developing a consistent vision. Preparing for emergencies is also important.

Respondents were provided a chance to list additional important actions/ways the RDCO can support agriculture. Fifty (50) open-ended comments were received and are grouped into the following most common themes.

#### **Support Farmers & Innovation — 19 mentions**

Many respondents emphasized the need for stronger support for farmers, both financially and through programs that help them adapt and innovate. Suggestions included providing incentives for sustainable practices, supporting alternative sales avenues like farmers' markets, helping farmers adopt new technologies, and encouraging more diverse crop production. This theme reflects a desire to strengthen the sector's viability while fostering creativity and resilience in farming operations.

#### **Preserve Agricultural Land — 18 mentions**

Many respondents focused on the importance of protecting the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR) and preventing its conversion to non-agricultural uses. They noted concerns about urban

development encroaching on prime farmland and stressed the need to keep agricultural land intact and focused on food production rather than non-food crops or industrial uses.

#### **Reduce Bureaucratic Barriers — 9 mentions**

A significant number of respondents expressed frustration with excessive regulation and government interference. Comments included calls to reduce red tape, streamline processes for farm status, minimize politics in agricultural decisions, and generally remove obstacles that make it harder to farm effectively. This theme reflects a perception that bureaucratic hurdles are discouraging or slowing down meaningful progress.

#### **Water, Climate and Environmental Considerations — 8 mentions**

Several respondents emphasized the importance of sustainable water use and conservation to support agricultural viability in the region. Comments called for prioritizing water access for farms, promoting water-efficient practices, and addressing broader environmental and climate-related challenges that threaten long-term productivity. Respondents highlighted the need to balance agricultural growth with stewardship of natural resources.

#### **Education & Awareness — 5 mentions**

Respondents identified a need for greater education and public awareness about agriculture. Suggestions included integrating farming programs into schools, educating leaders about the value of agriculture, and fostering appreciation for the sector among the broader public. This theme reflects the sense that agriculture is underappreciated and misunderstood, which undermines support for it.

#### **Labour Challenges — 2 mentions**

A few respondents raised concerns about the difficulty of securing and retaining reliable farm labour. They noted that existing barriers to hiring and maintaining seasonal or permanent workers create significant challenges for agricultural operations. Suggestions focused on streamlining processes and policies to ensure farms have access to the workforce they need to remain productive.

## **Other Comments**

Respondents were provided a chance to articulate any additional comments regarding the RDCO's Draft Regional Agricultural Strategy. There were 126 written responses, which have been grouped into key themes.

#### **Summary of Comments**

The open-ended survey responses reflect a strong consensus on the importance of protecting agricultural land, supporting farmers, and ensuring the sustainability of the region's food system. Many respondents stressed safeguarding the Agricultural Land Reserve and reducing development pressures, while also calling for financial relief and clearer, more supportive policies to address the rising costs and regulatory burdens faced by farmers. Concerns about water availability, climate impacts, and environmental stewardship featured prominently, alongside calls to strengthen local

food production and promote innovation in farming practices. Respondents also highlighted labour shortages and the need to incorporate Indigenous knowledge and perspectives into planning.

At the same time, many comments reflected frustration with what they saw as excessive government control over farming operations, characterized by restrictive bylaws, micromanagement, and cumbersome approval processes. However, the majority of the complaints included in the comments were reflective of provincial policies and regulations, and not local government initiatives. Respondents urged a reduction of red tape and more streamlined, farmer-friendly policies that respect farmers' expertise and allow them to operate with greater independence. While some expressed dissatisfaction with aspects of the consultation process, others shared positive feedback and appreciation for ongoing efforts to engage stakeholders and support agriculture. Collectively, the comments underscore the need for a balanced, proactive approach that prioritizes advocacy to the provincial government, local farmland protection, support for farm economic viability, sustainability, and inclusivity while minimizing unnecessary administrative barriers.

### **Key Themes**

#### **Protect Agricultural Land & ALR (52 mentions)**

Respondents strongly urged the Regional District to preserve farmland and enforce the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR). Many expressed frustration with development encroaching on prime farmland and called for stronger policies to prevent its conversion to residential or industrial uses. They emphasized that maintaining farmland is critical for food production and the region's agricultural identity.

#### **Water, Climate and Environmental Considerations (26 mentions)**

Many respondents pointed to the need to address water scarcity, climate change impacts, and broader environmental concerns in agriculture. Prioritizing water conservation and ensuring equitable access for farms were common themes. Sustainable farming practices that align with environmental goals were seen as essential to long-term success.

#### **Cost & Affordability of Farming (21 mentions)**

Respondents highlighted the growing financial challenges faced by farmers, including high land costs, increasing input prices, and rising taxes. These pressures were seen as threatening the viability of family-run farms and deterring new entrants into agriculture. Many suggested providing tax relief, subsidies, or other financial incentives to ease the burden and keep farming accessible.

#### **Food Security & Local Production (9 mentions)**

Comments underscored the importance of supporting local food production to enhance regional food security. Respondents noted that strengthening the local food system reduces reliance on imports, lowers the carbon footprint of food, and improves resilience to external shocks. Supporting infrastructure and policies that prioritize local products was seen as a key priority.

#### **Support for Farmers (8 mentions)**

Respondents called for more tangible support for farmers, including technical guidance, training, and better access to programs and resources. Some noted that farmers often feel overlooked or

undervalued despite their critical role in the economy and community. Clearer communication and a more proactive approach by governments to help farmers succeed were encouraged.

#### **Labour Challenges (7 mentions)**

Some respondents raised concerns about the difficulty of hiring and retaining reliable farm workers, particularly seasonal and temporary labour. They highlighted that labour shortages have become a barrier to productivity and competitiveness. Suggestions included simplifying hiring processes and ensuring access to a stable workforce.

#### **Reduce Government Overreach and Bureaucracy (7 mentions)**

Respondents criticized excessive red tape and government interference as burdensome and counterproductive. Many called for streamlining regulations, simplifying approval processes, and reducing unnecessary oversight. This was seen as a way to allow farmers to focus on production rather than paperwork. It is worth noting that most comments were targeted at provincial policies and regulations, highlighting the need for advocacy by local government.

#### **General Positive Comments (7 mentions)**

Some respondents used the opportunity to express appreciation for the RDCO's work and the efforts being made to support agriculture in the region. They conveyed thanks for the consultation process and encouraged continued support for farmers and sustainable practices. These comments reflected general goodwill and support for the direction of planning efforts.

#### **Survey or Process Critique (6 mentions)**

Several respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the survey design or consultation process, pointing to unclear questions, perceived biases, or insufficient opportunities for meaningful input. Some felt the process did not fully capture the complexities of agricultural issues.

#### **Indigenous Knowledge & Stewardship (4 mentions)**

A few comments stressed the value of incorporating Indigenous knowledge and stewardship practices into agricultural planning. Respondents noted that Indigenous perspectives can help foster more sustainable and respectful relationships with the land and water. Strengthening partnerships with First Nations communities was recommended.

#### **Innovation (2 mentions)**

A couple comments encouraged fostering innovation in agriculture, including adopting new technologies, promoting crop diversity, and supporting creative business models. Respondents noted that innovation can improve efficiency, resilience, and competitiveness in the sector. Governments were encouraged to create conditions that enable experimentation and growth.