

CARIBOO-CENTRAL REGION: AGRICULTURE PROFILE



Key Features

- In general, the Cariboo-Central region experiences a relatively short growing season with moderate rainfall.
- There are significant differences between the climate and microclimates in this region. Around the city of Prince George, for example, the river valley's frost-free period is significantly longer than in the upland benches adjacent to it, and the Williams Lake area further south experiences earlier and longer growing seasons.
- The terrain is characterized by rolling plains ideal for cattle and other livestock production.
- Beef cattle ranching and hay farming make up the majority of gross farm receipts in the region, and it is home to the BC Livestock Co-op in Williams Lake, one of the largest cattle auction markets in the province.
- The river bench soils along the Fraser River are excellent for producing alfalfa, potatoes, cabbage, cauliflower, and root vegetables.
- Annual precipitation: 250 to 630 mm.
- Frost-free days: 85 to 120.

2016 Census of Agriculture	
Population	156,494
Land in the Agriculture Land Reserve (ALR)	1,327,423 ha
Total Farmland Area	469,652 ha
Number of Farms	1,411
Total Salaries/Wages *	\$8,622,690
Gross Farm Receipts	\$106.3 million
Total Farm Capital	\$2.2 billion

**Source: 2016, Census of Agriculture and Tax Linkage, Statistics Canada*

The Cariboo-Central Region

Located in the Central Interior of the province, and starting in the south at the town of Clinton, the Cariboo region stretches north to Quesnel and beyond to Prince George, and it includes 14.2% of the province's land area and 3.4% of its population. The Fraser River loops through the region, forming the boundary between the Chilcotin and Cariboo Central districts. Surrounded by high mountains on the east and southwest, the Cariboo is primarily a high, rolling plateau. Sections are heavily forested, but lower elevations provide excellent areas for raising beef cattle. The region's southern portion is the centre of cattle ranching in the province.

Land

The Cariboo-Central region covers an area of 13,128,585 hectares, and approximately 10.1% (1,327,423 hectares) of the land is in the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR). This represents nearly 30% of the total ALR in the province — the most of all regions in BC. The area around Prince George has high, rolling plateaus that are ideal for cattle ranching, which takes place in both the forested range and improved pasture uplands. The Fraser River is the major waterway in the Cariboo and is joined by the Nechako River at Prince George. Forage crops are produced in the river's valleys and its tributaries. The river bench soils are sandy or silty loams, which are excellent for producing alfalfa, potatoes, cabbage, turnips, cauliflower, and carrots. Areas of land with ancient glacial lake bottoms contain a high clay content, but with appropriate soil management, they are very good for producing forage crops, such as timothy, brome grass, alsike and red clover, as well as grain crops.

Agriculture

Agriculture has long been an important industry in the Cariboo-Central region. It has an interior climate (cold winters, hot summers, low precipitation) suitable for growing many crops, with fertile soil along rivers and extensive natural grazing available to ranchers on Crown land.

In 2016, the 1,411 farms in the Cariboo-Central region generated sales of about \$106.3 million, from an investment of almost \$2.02 billion in land, livestock, buildings, and machinery. The majority of the gross farm receipts in the region are from beef cattle ranching and hay farming, with the remainder coming from dairy, other livestock, grains, fruits and vegetables, and other commodities.

The Regional District of Fraser-Fort George has a large agriculture land base with relatively affordable land and limited rural/urban conflict.

All dairy, egg, and poultry production is governed by provincial quotas. Vegetable and small fruit production sales are generally off-farm, direct to stores, or at local farmers' markets.

The main livestock and game farming operations in the Cariboo-Central region are cow-calf, cow-yearling, and purebred beef, with smaller numbers of dairy, bison, finished beef, sheep, and horses. A provincially licensed slaughter facility in Prince George supports local meat and value-added sales of beef, bison, fallow deer, hogs, lamb, and goats.



Photo courtesy of the BC Ministry of Agriculture — pasture renewal

The Robson Valley area, located southeast of Prince George in the Rocky Mountain Trench (also known as the “Valley of a Thousand Peaks” because of the towering mountain ranges on either side), is a long, deep valley along the Fraser River from Dome Creek to Valemont. This natural area includes unique wetland, grassland, and river ecosystems and is very productive for canola, wheat, barley, oats, specialized forage seed, and forage crops. Livestock operations are primarily cow-calf, cow-yearling, dairy, horses, and increasing numbers of bison. Problems in the area include grazing conflicts between ranchers' livestock and elk and the high price of land near the mountains. Advantages of the location for agriculture include low transportation costs to Alberta and a favourable climate for high-value field crops like wheat and canola.

The economy of the central district of the Cariboo-Central region is resource-based, with strong agriculture, forestry, mining, and tourism sectors. Agriculture provides a stable and long-term financial base for the regional economy, with the beef industry forming the backbone of the agriculture industry. Beef production is based on the region's extensive rangelands, which provide summer grazing of forage, in addition to forage produced on farms for winter feeding. As well as beef cattle ranching, the agriculture industry includes dairy, sheep, game farming, horses, poultry, horticulture crops, and forage production. There are two provincially licensed local meat plants.

Wildlife impacts on agriculture lands and livestock can be significant and are an ongoing concern throughout the Cariboo region. There is also growing pressure to use agriculture lands for non-agriculture purposes, such as conservation and commercial and recreational development.

Selected Crop and Livestock Inventories (2016 Census)

For detailed statistics for the Cariboo region, see the [Agriculture in Brief](#) tables from the BC Ministry of Agriculture.

Sub-region Agriculture Statistics

[Cariboo Regional District](#)

[Regional District of Fraser-Fort George](#)