

KOOTENAY REGION: AGRICULTURE PROFILE



Key Features

- The moderate climate of the Kootenay region supports a wide range of field and horticulture crops (particularly in the rich valley bottoms).
- The generally rugged terrain is characterized by major river valleys, mountain slopes, and grassland ranges, with agricultural land scattered throughout.
- Beef cattle ranching dominates the agricultural activity in the region.
- The Creston Valley in the south produces much of the region's dairy, poultry, cherries, and apples.
- Meat, honey, and fruit and vegetable processors access their product locally.
- Annual precipitation: 370 to 569 mm.
- Frost-free days: 110 to 160.

2016 Census of Agriculture	
Population	151,403
Land in the Agriculture Land Reserve (ALR)	381,551 ha
Total Farmland Area	127,129 ha
Number of Farms	1,157
Total Salaries/Wages *	\$16,223,523
Gross Farm Receipts	\$90.9 million
Total Farm Capital	\$1.43 billion

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

The Kootenay Region

The Kootenay region is located in the southeastern portion of the province, with the US border to the south, Alberta to the east, and the Okanagan region to the west. It includes 6.3% of the province's land area and 3.3% of its population.

The topography in the Kootenays is very rugged, with a series of valleys running north/south that are separated by high mountain ranges. There are a number of reservoirs for power-generating facilities along the Columbia and Kootenay River waterways. Cattle ranching is prominent in the large flat areas located in the Rocky Mountain Trench (also known as the "Valley of a Thousand Peaks" because of the towering mountain ranges on either side) and the Grand Forks area. The Creston Valley is well known for both its growing and processing of fruit and vegetables. Five large lakes — Kootenay, Arrow, Slocan, Duncan, and Koochanusa — cover extensive areas of this region.

Agriculture and manufacturing make significant economic contributions to the Kootenay region, as do increasing populations of retired people in urban centres, such as Creston, Nelson, and Grand Forks. Tourism and the service industry are also becoming substantial contributors to the economy of the region. The city of Cranbrook is the regional centre for trade and services for the east, and Nelson serves as the main administrative centre for the west.

Land

The Kootenay region covers an area of 5,772,130 hectares, and approximately 6.6% (381,551 hectares) of the land is in the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR). This represents just over 8% of the total ALR in the province. This region includes the Columbia and Kootenay Rivers, with agriculture scattered throughout these major river valleys. The region has four mountain ranges — the Selkirks, Purcells, Monashees, and Rockies — and their slopes provide grassland ranges for summer grazing of livestock and valley bottoms for growing hay and cereal crops to use as winter feed for livestock.

Agriculture

The agriculture sector of the Kootenay region accounts for 2.4% of the total gross farm receipts in the province. In 2016, gross receipts from the approximately 1,157 farms approached \$90.9 million, with total farm capital of just under \$1.43 billion. The top sectors were beef cattle ranching, hay farming, and fruits and vegetables. Field crops, including forage seed, dairy, poultry, and floriculture, are also important products.

Fifty-nine percent of the 127,129 hectares of farmland in the region is natural pasture land, of which 18% is used for growing crops, 5% for seeded/tame pasture, and another 18% includes woodlands, wetlands, and land with farm buildings. The area with farm buildings includes animal production and other agriculture operations. Of the area devoted to crops, 82% is in hay, 12% in field crops, and the remaining 6% in fruits, vegetables, and other horticulture crops.



Photo courtesy of the BC Ministry of Agriculture Ñ apple orchard

The East Kootenays (in the southeast corner of the province) is characterized by its extensive rangeland. There is also a significant amount of land not under cultivation that has potential for perennial forage crops for livestock. The availability of this abundant land for range and forage production is an opportunity for future expansion of livestock farming. Natural resources from the land base, such as grazing land, water, recreational land, and forest production, provide many economic benefits to the area and are managed in an integrated fashion, respecting the unique requirements and contributions of each.

Viticulture (the cultivating and harvesting of grapes) is prevalent on the valley floors, particularly in warmest areas in the south, such as the Creston Valley, Grand Forks, and potentially in the future, Rock Creek.

Typically, the high cost of transporting commodities into the region means imported produce is more expensive than that which is locally grown, and this tends to boost local production and marketing of horticulture crops. In addition, there is an increasing demand for local food (particularly vegetables, organic products, and poultry), especially at farmers' markets and direct sales outlets. By contrast, producers who want to market outside of the region (to the Lower Mainland/Fraser Valley or Alberta) are at a disadvantage due to those same high transportation costs that make imported products so costly.

There is a growing interest in encouraging young farmers (under 35 years) to start new, small farms throughout the Kootenay region. However, increased farmland values continue to be a barrier.

Food Processing

The food and beverage processing sector in the Kootenay region is small but diverse. Meat, honey, and fruit and vegetable processors use local products, and there are processing facilities for dairy products, brewing, and livestock feed, as well as nine provincially licensed meat plants and six licensed wineries. The region also has other food manufacturing activities, including commercial and retail bakeries, and coffee and tea enterprises.

The high cost of transporting goods to and from the Kootenays is an incentive for producers to both grow and process high-value products in the region instead of shipping out unprocessed commodities. There is also an opportunity to expand local fruit and vegetable processing, which is being successfully done in the Okanagan region.

Selected Crop and Livestock Inventories (2016 Census)

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

Sub-region Agriculture Statistics

[Regional District of East Kootenay](#)

[Regional District of Central Kootenay](#)

[Regional District of Kootenay Boundary](#)