

# LOWER MAINLAND SOUTH COAST REGION: AGRICULTURE PROFILE



## Key Features

- The Lower Mainland-South Coast region has more than 60% of the province's population.
- It includes the Fraser River — the longest river in British Columbia (1,375 km) — and its rich and fertile valley.
- With its moderate climate, fertile soils, and availability of irrigation water, the region supports a strong agricultural sector of over 200 commercially produced commodities.
- It produces over 70% of BC's dairy products, berries, vegetables, poultry, eggs, pork, greenhouse vegetables, mushrooms, floriculture, and nursery products.
- The region includes significant greenhouse production, poultry, hogs, cattle, and sheep.
- It is the provincial leader in the food and beverage processing sector and home to nearly 56% of the industry.
- It has the highest number of both frost-free days and rainfall of all regions in the province.

2016 Census of Agriculture	
Population	2,832,000
Land in the Agriculture Land Reserve (ALR)	161,961 ha
Total Farmland Area	107,390 ha
Number of Farms	5,217
Total Salaries/Wages *	\$367,280,165
Gross Farm Receipts	\$2.4 billion
Total Farm Capital	\$17.4 billion

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

- Annual precipitation: 920 to 1,500 mm.
- Frost-free days: 174 to 200.

## The Lower Mainland-South Coast Region

While the Lower Mainland-South Coast region has roughly 61% of BC's total population, geographically, it is the smallest region, with only 3.9% of the province's land area. The terrain of the region consists of the flat, low-lying Fraser Valley, associated uplands, and the mountains that border them. It also encompasses part of the adjacent mainland coast (known as the Sunshine Coast), which is connected to Vancouver by the BC coastal ferry system, as well as the Squamish and Lillooet River valleys that are linked to the town of Lillooet through Anderson and Seton lakes.

The Lower Mainland in the southwest corner of the province is the leading centre for many of the activities in BC, including manufacturing, services, trade, farming, and fishing. In the Abbotsford-Chilliwack area along the Fraser Valley, agriculture is the dominant resource activity.

### Land

The Lower Mainland-South Coast region covers an area of 3,630,331 hectares, and approximately 161,961 hectares (or 4.5%) of the land is in the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR). This represents just 3.5% of the total ALR in the province.

The most fertile lands of the region are found in the Fraser Valley, which is the area on both sides of the Fraser River, from Hope to Vancouver. Of the region's 107,390 hectares of farmland, 61% is crops, 19% is natural land for pasture, 4% is seeded/ tame pasture, and 16% includes woodlands, wetlands, and land with farm buildings. Of the area in crops, 67% is planted to hay and field, primarily to feed the large dairy herds in the region. The remainder of the land planted in crops is comprised of 21% fruits and berries, 7% vegetables, 4% nurseries, and 1% other agricultural commodities.

## Agriculture

Agriculture is a significant contributor to the economy of the Lower Mainland-South Coast region, with a total farm capital of about \$17.3 billion and gross farm receipts of over \$2.4 billion in 2016, representing more than 65% of the province's total gross farm receipts. The top earners in this region are poultry (meat, eggs, and hatcheries), dairy, greenhouse crops, floriculture, fruits and berries, vegetables, and mushrooms.

Vancouver is the largest city in BC, with a population of about 2.6 million in the metropolitan area. It is situated at the western end of the Fraser Valley, which has the richest agricultural land in the province. As a result, urban expansion and development pressures have resulted in the loss of farmland, land use and allocation conflicts, nuisance and noise concerns related to some types of agriculture (livestock, berries, and greenhouses), and rising land prices. The average cultivated farmland value in the region is the second highest in the province, next to the Okanagan. (For more information, see the [2017 FCC Farmland Values Report](#).)

Water management is a major issue in the Lower Mainland-South Coast region. There are drainage and irrigation challenges in several areas, and there are both ground and surface water quality concerns throughout the region. Agricultural producers are required to follow relevant environmental legislation and proper practices in drainage and irrigation, as well as waste management, to protect ground water.

With a large population base so close to the US border, this region is seen as a good market for American imports, especially fruits and vegetables. This often affects prices of local products, making it challenging for local producers to compete with the large volumes of US imports during the peak summer crop season. Close proximity to the US also results in cross-border buying of agricultural products, such as milk, and loss of sales for local producers.

There are several factors that contribute to the significance of agriculture in this region. Mild climate, availability of irrigation water, a diversity of crops, close proximity to markets with large and increasing populations, the ethnic diversity of local populations, and access to export markets (e.g., the US and Asia) all contribute to stable markets and the development of significant niche markets. Well-developed transportation systems also enable rapid and lower cost transport of commodities.



*Photo courtesy of the BC Ministry of Agriculture — dairy cows grazing*

Most sectors, including greenhouse vegetables, floriculture, nursery, dairy, and poultry, utilize advanced technology for crop nutrition, climate control, plant and animal health, marketing, and management. Being in close proximity to universities and research centres (e.g., Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada [AAFC]) further facilitates product and technology development. Access to local food processors also helps increase the production of value-added products for other markets.

Some sectors have potential for growth, including producing greenhouse vegetables on a year-round basis, which can help balance seasonal field vegetable production. Additional floriculture and ornamental production in greenhouses will help meet the demands of increasing populations and residential development.

Producing specialty vegetables to meet the specific needs of an ethnically diverse population is another growth opportunity.

An increased interest in locally grown food has expanded opportunities for agri-tourism and the marketing of complete farm “experiences.” An influx of tourists to the area could also result in increased direct farm sales of products and services (e.g., bed and breakfast, farm tours, etc.) to augment farm incomes.

## **Food Processing**

Total food and beverage processing in BC ranked fourth among provinces in Canada, generating \$9.8 billion in 2017. With 903 food and beverage processing facilities in the Lower Mainland-South Coast region, it is the provincial leader in this sector and home to nearly 56% of the industry. There are opportunities to increase the significance of the food processing sector in this region, as well as other regions of the province, by increasing the value of the finished product and by specializing in and producing gourmet or luxury products, such as salmon pâté and artisan cheeses.

## **Selected Crop and Livestock Inventories (2016 Census)**

For detailed statistics for the Lower Mainland-South Coast Region, see the [Agriculture in Brief](#) tables from the BC Ministry of Agriculture.

## **Sub-region Agriculture Statistics**

[Fraser Valley Regional District](#)

[Metro Vancouver](#)

[Sunshine Coast Regional District](#)

[Squamish-Lillooet Regional District](#)