

PEACE RIVER REGION: AGRICULTURE PROFILE



Key Features

- Temperatures vary greatly throughout the Peace River region, which has long winters and a short growing season.
- With long daylight hours, the majority of the region is best suited to prairie crops, such as wheat, barley, canola, and forage.
- The terrain is very similar to that of the Prairie provinces.
- Major commodities in the region include cattle, forage, canola, wheat, barley, oats, fescue, assorted fine seeds, peas, bison, sheep, poultry, dairy, hogs, honey, vegetables, and horses.
- There are several honey and sugar processors in the region, and apiculture (honey) is a significant industry.
- Annual precipitation: 446 to 503 mm.
- Frost-free days: 90 to 115.

2016 Census of Agriculture	
Population	68,335
Land in the Agriculture Land Reserve (ALR)	1,333,209 ha
Total Farmland Area	804,052 ha
Number of Farms	1,335
Total Salaries/Wages *	\$12,133,582
Gross Farm Receipts	\$195.5 million
Total Farm Capital	\$2.6 billion

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

The Peace River Region

The Peace River region is the largest of BC's regions, representing 22% of the land area of the province and 1.5% of the population. It stretches from the Rocky Mountains along the Alberta border to Jasper National Park, and west to the Spatsizi Plateau. The terrain is generally flat in the north and east and mountainous in the south and west. The central part of the region extends westward beyond the Rockies into the remote Omineca Mountain range, an area where lode gold mining has commenced and a number of promising metallic mineral deposits have been discovered.

Grain, forage crops, and beef cattle traditionally provided the economic base of the area around Chetwynd and Prespatou in the north to Fort St. John and southward to Dawson Creek near the Alberta border. The forest industry, mining, oil and natural gas, hydroelectric power projects, and agriculture have provided much of the region's more recent economic growth, with tourism increasing in importance.

Land

The Peace River region covers an area of 20,249,862 hectares, and approximately 6.6% (1,333,209 hectares) of the land is in the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR). This represents 28.9% of the total provincial ALR (second only to the Cariboo region). The agricultural area of the Peace River region extends from the Alberta border on the east to halfway between Fort St. John and Fort Nelson in the north, and on to the foothills of the mountains to the west and south.

Temperature variations are wide, with long winters and a short growing season. The low-temperature growing season, with long hours of daylight, dictates the types of crop that can be grown. Early-maturing crops, such as forages, canola, wheat, barley, and oats, perform well at lower temperatures and utilize the long daylight hours to produce the best yields. There are a number of microclimates in the region that provide an opportunity to grow short-season crops commercially, such as potatoes, rutabagas, carrots, beets, cabbage, lettuce, peas, and even tomatoes and sweet corn, especially in those areas adjacent to the Peace River and its major tributaries at elevations below 800 metres.

Photo courtesy of the BC Grain Producers Association — grain trucks at harvest



Photo courtesy of the BC Ministry of Agriculture — canola field in bloom

Agriculture

The Peace River region is a crucial agricultural production centre for the economy of both the area and the province. There are nearly 825,000 hectares of land farmed in the region, which accounts for 31% of land farmed in BC. In 2016, the 1,335 farms in the region generated sales of more than \$195.5 million, from a capital investment of about \$2.6 billion in land, livestock, buildings, and machinery. The majority of the gross farm receipts are from oilseeds, grain, and wheat at 42%, with beef cattle ranching and hay farming following at 39%. Forty-one percent of the total farmland in the region is seeded/improved pasture, 34% is planted to cereal crops and hay, and the remainder is used for other agricultural purposes.

The Peace River region produces about 98% of the canola crop, 75% of the grain crop, and the majority of the forage seed in the province. Beef and forage production is also important in the region, and there is a well-established cow/calf industry. While there is some finishing and backgrounding done in the region, a significant number of calves leave to be finished in Alberta and other regions. Game farm production (particularly bison) is growing significantly, and the region has four provincially inspected slaughter facilities: two for red meat (beef, bison, pork, and sheep) and two for poultry. The region also has good transportation and infrastructure to support the agricultural industry.

Soil management is crucial in this region, as most of the soils are prone to water erosion, and some have acidity (low pH) issues. Many farmers have adopted soil conservation techniques, such as good soil management through crop rotation, zero-tilling (seeding directly into previously cropped land), and reducing summer fallow and improving tillage practices on slopes. These techniques have also helped to improve productivity.

Relatively large populations of wild ungulates (such as mule deer, Roosevelt elk, and moose) often damage forage, forage seed and grains, and oilseed crops, and predator control can be challenging for livestock producers.

The abundant land, coupled with a low population density, provides the Peace River region with a significant advantage over other regions in the province for the expansion of various agriculture enterprises, as well as opportunities for new entrants and ventures. While the region has fewer urban-rural land use conflicts than other parts of BC, there are disputes that occur around designating ALR land for non-agricultural uses.

Areas of agriculture with future potential include continued expansion of the game farming and cow-calf and beef finishing industries, as well as further production of hogs, forage seed, pulse crops, other oilseeds, and organic products. Secondary processing of primary products is also an area of future opportunity in the Peace River region.

Local production of fresh, in-season fruits and vegetables is not yet well developed, and further opportunities exist for these commodities. Dawson Creek has an active year-round farmers' market, while Fort St. John (the largest city in the region) and Fort Nelson both have seasonal ones. Food and beverage and livestock processing is relatively small in the region.

Selected Crop and Livestock Inventories (2016 Census)

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

Sub-region Agriculture Statistics

[Peace River Regional District](#)

[Northern Rockies Regional District](#)