

VANCOUVER ISLAND-COAST REGION: AGRICULTURE PROFILE



Key Features

- The Vancouver Island-Coast region has one of the longest growing seasons in Canada, with a temperate marine climate and microclimates that support a diversity of crops and farm operations. Vegetables, berries, apples, and specialty crops are produced mainly for the local market.
- The region's livestock production is primarily cattle, hogs, and poultry.
- Aquaculture is rapidly expanding in economic value and scope.
- Annual precipitation: 873 to 2,123 mm.
- Frost-free days: 158 to 201.

2016 Census of Agriculture	
Population	799,400
Land in the Agriculture Land Reserve (ALR)	120,082 ha
Total Farmland Area	51,829 ha
Number of Farms	2,786
Total Salaries/Wages *	\$36,976,871
Gross Farm Receipts	\$200.5 million
Total Farm Capital	\$3.53 billion

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

The Vancouver Island-Coast Region

The Vancouver Island-Coast region is located on the west coast of BC and includes all of Vancouver Island, the Gulf Islands, and a section of the coastal mainland stretching from Powell River to Bella Coola. It includes Victoria, which is the provincial capital and the oldest city in Western Canada, along with several medium-sized cities and many smaller oceanside communities. The region is dominated by rugged mountains, coastline, and forest, with the exception of a narrow coastal plain extending along the east coast of Vancouver Island. It includes about 9% of the total land area of the province and is home to approximately 799,400 people, which is 17.2% of BC's total population.

Land

The Vancouver Island-Coast region covers an area of 8,423,161 hectares, and approximately 1.4% (120,082 hectares) of the land is within the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR). Although this represents only 2.6% of the province's total ALR, the area accounts for over 5% of BC's total gross farm receipts.

Higher land costs due to increasing urban development pressure, especially around major centres, are making farming less cost effective and restricting access for new farmers.

Agriculture

Agriculture has long been an important part of the economy in this region. The climate, especially on the level east coast of the Island from the Comox Valley to Victoria, is ideally suited to growing a wide range of commercial crops. The major producing areas are the Alberni, Comox, and Cowichan valleys, the Saanich Peninsula in the south, the Gulf Islands, and the Powell River lowlands on the coastal mainland.

Most of the 2,786 farms in the Vancouver Island-Coast region are relatively small, with an average size of 18.6 hectares. In 2016, the region generated sales of more than \$200.5 million from a capital investment of about \$3.5 billion in land, livestock,

buildings, and machinery. Dairy, nursery, and floriculture generate the most farm receipts at over 48%. The 51,829 hectares of farmland is divided between 17% in natural land for pasture, 36% in crops, 8% in seeded/tame pasture, and 39% includes woodlands, wetlands, and land with farm buildings. The area with farm buildings includes greenhouse and animal production operations. Of the area devoted to crops, 71% is in hay, 15% in field crops, 10% in berries, fruits, and vegetables, and the remainder in other horticulture crops.



Photo courtesy of the BC Ministry of Agriculture — strawberries

The agriculture sector in the region is very diverse in terms of both products and the scale of farm operations. Well-established farms, representing only 10% of the total, generate the majority of the revenue at 80%. Most farms are small-scale operations, producing less than \$10,000 per year. Less than one-third of the agricultural land is actively farmed, and the farmed area is not used as intensively as it could be. The average revenue per hectare of farmland in the Lower Mainland/Fraser Valley is almost six times more than on Vancouver Island. Higher input costs, lack of infrastructure, scale, and access to markets for exporting products are all factors that contribute to this discrepancy. The availability of water for irrigation can be difficult in some areas, lessening production options. Close proximity to urban areas, increasing land values, wildlife damage to crops, and competing land uses challenge future agricultural growth potential in the region. However, excellent climate and soils that produce a diverse range of high-quality, fresh, and safe products, coupled with the high cost for competitors to access unique local markets, provide opportunities for local farmers, food processors, and other new business ventures. The region has a large and growing urban population and is a tourism destination with potential to increase support for local food, floriculture, nursery production, and agri-tourism. This includes producing and marketing products that have a unique “Island” character.

A growing number of farmers are expanding their businesses in response to consumer demand for high-quality, sustainable, and locally grown food and associated activities, such as value-added products, agri-tourism, and culinary tourism.

Food Processing

Vancouver Island has a wide variety of food processing operations. There are growth opportunities throughout the Vancouver Island-Coast region for cottage wineries and breweries, as well as services to the hotel and restaurant industries for specialty meats, vegetables, fruits, and flowers. There is also potential for encouraging interest in locally processed farm products, direct farm sales, and guided farm tours.

Aquaculture

Aquaculture, or the farming of fish and shellfish, is a significant contributor to the regional economy and brings needed jobs with good income to many rural/remote communities. Of all sectors of the food production industry in the Vancouver Island-Coast region, aquaculture continues to be one of the highest contributors, with a positive future.



Photo courtesy of the BC Ministry of Agriculture — apples in the Okanagan

Selected Crop and Livestock Inventories (2016 Census)

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

Sub-region Agriculture Statistics

[Capital Regional District](#)

[Cowichan Valley Regional District](#)

[Regional District of Nanaimo](#)

[Alberni-Clayoquot Regional District](#)

[Comox Valley Regional District](#)

[Regional Districts of Strathcona and Mount Waddington](#)

[Powell River Regional District](#)

[Central Coast Regional District](#)