

# Trustee Notebook *By Laura Busheikin*

## SUPPORTING FARMING ON DENMAN

After almost three years of work, The Denman Island Farm Plan is complete. This 107-page document is a guide to all things agricultural on the Island. You can find it on the Denman Island Local Trust Committee website, and very soon bound copies will be available at various Island outlets.

The Plan's development was led by a small dedicated group of islanders, appointed by the Denman Local Trust Committee (DLTC). It represents a huge amount of volunteer work, community consultation, and research of all kinds. It is full of ideas, geographic information, history, economic analysis, demographic data, lists of useful resources, and more. It has photos, quotes, graphs, charts, and maps. It's a rich and substantial document. But its value is minimal unless it gets used. The Plan was created to be a practical guide, not a theoretical text. Here are some of the ways the Farm Plan can be of use:

**For farmers or anyone contemplating farming on any scale**, the Plan has scientific information about soils, about what existing farms are producing and how, about what the challenges are, where the opportunities are and where to find resources.

For instance, you can learn that our farms are relatively small — the average Denman farm ranges from 0.1 ha to 59 ha. Compare that to the BC average of 126.5 ha or the Vancouver Island average of 23.8 ha (pages 25 - 26). Farm revenue on Denman is also relatively low — average revenue per farm on Denman is \$7,351, about half of what it is on most other Trust Islands (in fact, on Hornby, Salt Spring and Gabriola it is over \$20,000) (page 28).

If you are now wondering why this might be so, the Plan will tell you that Denman has relatively few large-scale, highly profitable farms, such as wineries and large poultry operations, compared to other Gulf Islands.

The Plan also includes a clear explanation, and a Denman-specific discussion, of regulations governing dairy, egg, and meat production and distribution as well as the ins and outs of qualifying for farm status (which confers significant tax exemptions) (pages 63 - 66).

Are you looking for ways farmers can work together? You don't have to start this community conversation from scratch. On pages 34 and 35 you'll find a succinct outline of options for cooperation, with recommendations, that reflects the Plan's two years of consultation and research.

**If you are part of a non-profit group** whose work relates to farming, food security or the economy, the Plan will let you know what initiatives already exist (page 99), provide you with a list of funders (page 74), and give you all kinds of data to help you shape your project and flesh out a grant application.



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**If you are involved in education**, and want to create farm-related programming, there's a whole section (pages 49 - 54) that suggests topics, program ideas, funding sources, and potential partners for education aimed at farmers and consumers, from kids to adults.

**For individuals who care about their community, their environment and food security issues** — this Plan is a great read to deepen your understanding of farming's role in our Island culture, economy, history and ecosystem.

Are you concerned about Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) in agriculture, and do you perhaps dream of making Denman a GMO-free zone? Turn to page 33 for a history of past efforts towards this goal and some ideas about where this conversation might go next.

Do you wish that local farm products were easier to get a hold of? Pages 39 - 41 tells you you're not alone, and also lays out some ways to improve the situation, and the map on page 107 will show you where to find roadside and onsite stands.

Looking for projections about how climate change will affect agriculture on the Island? See page 20, but brace yourself first.

Do you have questions about agri-tourism? Just what does this word mean and what does it look like in practice? How to figure out if it is appropriate for Denman? See page 36 - 39.

**For governing bodies**, the Plan includes recommendations for specific regulatory changes to support farming on Denman (pages 55 - 70). Specifically, for the Denman Island Local Trust Committee (DLTC), it provides a list of suggested Land Use Bylaw and Official Community Plan.

As well, the Plan recommends that the DLTC consider creating both an Implementation Body for the Plan, and an Agricultural Advisory Planning Commission. This new Commission that would help carry out the Farm Plan and provide recommendations to the DLTC on rezoning, subdivisions, and other local issues to do with agriculture. The DLTC will be considering these recommendations over the next few months.

These are just a few of the ways the Farm Plan can be useful to you and your community. Our lives both influence, and are influenced by, agriculture in myriad ways. I've heard it said that "eating is an agricultural act." So is reading the Farm Plan.