

Farm Practices in B.C. Reference Guide

Strengthening Farming Program



Ministry of
Agriculture
and Food

FACTSHEET

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COMMODITY: FORAGE

Description

Forage crops are grown throughout British Columbia supporting various livestock commodities such as dairy, beef, sheep, goats and horses. They include a wide range of annual and perennial grasses and forbs grown for hay, silage and pasture. Major species include alfalfa; red and white clover; timothy; brome grass; orchard grass; tall fescue; corn; and the cereals wheat, barley, rye, and oats.

The majority of forage crops are fed on the farm or ranch where they are grown. Lesser amounts are sold within the province or traded among farmers. An export market also exists for some movement of forage out of the province. Significant quantities of hay, mainly alfalfa, are imported to the south coastal areas of the province from Washington, Alberta and the B.C. interior.

Forage producers use farm equipment such as tractors, trucks, manure spreaders, mower-conditioners, balers, and harvesters. In drier regions, access to irrigation water is critical and the use of irrigation equipment is common. Growers may use manure, fertilizer, and other nutrient sources to increase and improve production and pesticides to control weeds and insects. The types of buildings common in forage-growing enterprises include barns, hay sheds, and silos.

Farm Practices of Particular Interest

Practices for specific farm activities can be found in the Farm Practice section of this reference guide. Farm practices of interest to forage production include the following:

Cultivation

Some forage crops are annual, so the land used to grow may require cultivation each year before seeding. The generation of dust during cultivation, seeding and harvesting operations is common, especially when field conditions are dry. Additionally, no-till, minimum till, light harrowing, and direct seeding practices may occur, along with research trials exploring these management options.

See also Farm Practice: [Cultivation](#)

Harvesting

Harvesting of forage crops is weather dependent and time sensitive. Equipment may have to be operated early in the morning or late at night to take advantage of ideal conditions. Harvesting operations when conditions are dry may release dust as well.

See also Farm Practice: [Mobile Equipment](#)

Nutrient Management

Crops require nutrients to grow. Soil conditioners, inorganic fertilizers, and manure are often applied prior to seeding and throughout the growing season. Applications of nutrients are usually carried out during daylight hours unless weather or seeding constraints are present. Calm days should be chosen to spread dusty materials such as lime whenever possible. Odour intensities and duration during manure spreading operations will vary depending on weather conditions, methods of application, and elapsed time.

See also Farm Practice: [Fertilizers and Soil Conditioners](#)
[Manure Storage and Use](#)

Pesticide Application

Forage crops are generally sprayed with pesticides far less frequently than vegetable or fruit crops. The most common operation is the application of herbicides to control weeds in forage corn. Grasshopper control may also be common in some regions. The timing of pesticide application is often critical to success.

See also Farm Practice: [Pesticides](#)

Water Management

Drainage and irrigation are critical components of forage operations in many regions of the province to optimize production. Tractor– powered irrigation pumps can create noise nuisances for neighbours. In some situations, installation of electric pumps can mitigate ongoing disturbances of this nature. Excess irrigation in coarse soils may result in drainage problems on adjacent properties at lower elevations where the water may surface.

See also Farm Practice: [Drainage](#)
[Irrigation](#)
[Stormwater Management](#)

Principal and Accessory Buildings

From an operational perspective, principal farm buildings for forage–growing enterprises are carried out in conjunction with livestock or grain operations and typically

include storage sheds, barns, and silos. Accessory farm buildings may include storage for agricultural wastes, chemical storage, and machine sheds for forage cutting and harvesting equipment. If a livestock or grain component of a forage growing operation is included, the numbers and types of principal and accessory buildings are broadened. From a watercourse protection perspective, however, the definition of principal and accessory buildings may differ. For the purposes of determining applicable setbacks from watercourses and property lines, therefore, local government bylaws or the Guide for Bylaw Development in Farming Areas should be consulted. Building assessments may need to be conducted on a case-by-case basis if the designation of a building as principal or accessory is unclear.

Legislation

Agricultural producers are expected to follow all legislation that pertains to their farming operations. The provincial *Farm Practices Protection (Right to Farm) Act* stipulates that a “farm operation” must meet the *Public Health Act*, *Integrated Pest Management Act*, *Environmental Management Act*, and the regulations under those Acts, as well as any land use regulation (amongst other requirements), to be protected from liability in nuisance, from being prevented from conducting that farm operation by court order, and from the application of certain local government bylaws. Local government bylaws may also apply to some farm practices, and farmers affected should contact their relevant local government for more information.

Some of the Acts, regulations, and bylaws that may be relevant to this topic may include the following:

Federal Legislation

The *Fisheries Act* protects fish and fish habitat in ditches, streams, rivers and wetlands and prohibits the discharge of deleterious substances such as fertilizers, manure and pesticides into watercourses frequented by fish, or that may end up in water frequented by fish. It also prohibits the harmful alteration, disruption or destruction of “fish habitat”.

Provincial Legislation

The *Integrated Pest Management Act* regulates all aspects of pesticide sale, storage, use, and transport on public roadways.

The *Weed Control Act* and its Weed Control Regulations place the responsibility for control of “noxious weeds” on land “occupiers”.

The *Motor Vehicle Act* and Motor Vehicle Act Regulation protect people traveling on public roads, in part by regulating hazards – including the operation and movement of farm equipment, implements, vehicles, and animals on public roads. The Act requires that loads must be securely fastened and/or sealed to prevent loss during shipment.

The *Plant Protection Act* and its regulations establish preventative measures, and inspection and treatment programs to mitigate the spread of certain pests, insects or diseases that are destructive to plants.

The *Environmental Management Act* legislates agricultural activity that could impact the environment including pesticides, nutrient management, soil amendments, and recycling organic materials. This includes different codes of practices such as the *Organic Matter Recycling Regulation*, *Code of Practice for Soil Amendments*, and *Code of Practice for Agricultural Environmental Management*.

Publications

Publications that provide information on forage production include the following:

[*Advanced Forage Management*](#)

[*British Columbia Environmental Farm Plan Reference Guide*](#)

[*Nutrient Management Reference Guide*](#)