

Minister's Statement
Real Progress in Support of B.C.'s Tree Fruit and Wine Grape Industries
(Tree Fruit Industry Stabilization Plan)
September 2023

In March 2021, the Ministry of Agriculture and Food launched an initiative to stabilize B.C.'s iconic tree fruit industry. The resulting Tree Fruit Industry Stabilization Plan (and its 19 recommendations) was published in November 2021. Implementation of several foundational recommendations began in January 2022. Through the entire process, the Ministry has fully engaged a representative group of industry and related organizations.

I recently had the opportunity to spend some time touring the Okanagan and Similkameen. I was able to hear first-hand from producers and industry organizations the successes and challenges faced by the Tree Fruit and Wine Grape sectors. I was pleased to hear the impact the Tree Fruit Stabilization Plan has had in the sectors and the opportunities it has created for collaboration.

There have been significant achievements over the last 18 months. With a lot of hard work and collaboration, we are now witnessing some real progress.

For instance, we are seeing real collaboration among groups in the apple, cherry, and wine grape sectors. They have discovered they have many of the same challenges such as access to consistent and reliable labour and extension services. By working together, they can provide both leadership and capacity to find solutions to their problems.

This collaboration has extended to B.C.'s commercial apple packers. They are teaming up with the Ministry to develop and implement a multi-year apple marketing strategy for both domestic and foreign markets. Their common goal is to improve returns for B.C. apple growers.

Packers, apple growers, and key organizations are also working together to investigate the pros, cons, costs, and potential benefits for the orderly marketing of B.C. apples. The over-arching goal is an industry-wide approach to marketing and sales that would benefit everyone involved.

Industry organizations have created a technology (called BC FruitWorks) which allows B.C.'s orchards to access willing, available domestic labourers to perform a variety of on-farm functions. Those same organizations are working to ensure an orderly approach for farmers to the best horticulture and extension services.

These are just some of the exciting developments we are seeing. Shortly, the Ministry will be releasing a comprehensive update on the work and next steps.

An exciting by-product of this activity has been the way organizations and associations in the industry have stepped up and assumed, or are assuming, leadership roles for some of the activities that more naturally belong to industry. This has created the foundation for the next natural steps in the evolution of the Stabilization Plan, including:

- The natural transition of some functions to industry over a period of months to ensure there are no disruption to the work while creating permanent and secure support for the activities. The long-

term leadership for this work will likely come from a group representing multiple commodities (apples, cherries, wine grapes) using their combined capacity.

- The Ministry maintaining responsibility for some activities that are naturally its responsibility. This would include maintaining and enhancing the data sharing project, and the timely development of an apple marketing strategy.
- Confirming the success implementing relevant, priority recommendations and the strong foundational work that has already been done has eliminated or reduced the need to act on the few outstanding initial recommendations in the Stabilization Plan. For example, substantive improvements in the resources available to apple producers (e.g.: new varieties, horticulture services, replant funding, domestic labourers, etc.) have created the circumstances for each apple producer to be successful without the need for direct funding from government.

This is an exciting time for B.C.'s tree fruit and wine grape industries. Discussions are already underway to make the changes necessary to ensure activities are housed with strong, well-resourced organizations, transitions occur in orderly, phased ways, and the opportunities for success are maximized.

The Ministry will be releasing the details of this work, which are being developed in collaboration with industry organizations, once complete.

As always, our objective is to ensure profitable tree fruit and wine grape industries that continue to be an important part of the province's economy, and producers receiving a fair return for their investments in B.C.'s food supply and food safety.

Finally, I want to acknowledge the impacts that recent extreme weather events (freezing, drought, fire) have had on much of BC's agriculture industry, including apple, cherry, and grape producers. My ministry will continue to support industry through our Business Risk Management Program, other programs, and other forms of support.



Pam Alexis, Minister

September 15, 2023

Date Signed