

Request for Decision

File No: P 121 002

Date February 21, 2020
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Subject Kootenay and Boundary Farm Advisors (KBFA) – Program Continuation

REQUEST

Approve an amount not exceeding \$60,000 per year for three years to allow the continuation of the Kootenay and Boundary Farm Advisor program to June 30, 2023.

OPTIONS

1. THAT an amount not exceeding \$60,000 per year for three years, to allow the continuation of the Kootenay and Boundary Farm Advisor program to June 30, 2023, be approved to be paid from the Planning service.
2. THAT the Kootenay and Boundary Farm Advisor project partners be advised that RDEK will cease participation in the program at the end of the present contract.

RECOMMENDATION

Option 1.

BACKGROUND

In October 2014, the Regional District Agricultural Plan was adopted. The plan recommends recruitment of an Agricultural Liaison Officer. As the Regional District of Central Kootenay and Kootenay Boundary's Agricultural Plans also refer to similar recruitment it was deemed more efficient and cost effective to share resources to advance and support the agricultural industry and producers throughout the Basin.

In May 2016, the Board authorized the Regional District to participate in the Kootenay and Boundary Farm Advisor program with the Regional District of Central Kootenay, Regional District of Kootenay Boundary and Columbia Basin Trust. The partners agreed to contribute \$60,000 per year for three years to fund KBFA.

Keefer Ecological Services Ltd. was awarded a one-year contract which was extended for an additional two years. The contract terminates on June 30, 2020.

The initial year enlightened KBFA Advisors and Steering Committee on what agricultural extension looks like for producers today and how support could best be delivered. The onset of the second year required creating and implementing strategic plans, communications plans, monitoring and evaluation plans and the Producer & Advisor Tracking database. In the last year and a half, KBFA has seen significant growth in producer engagement. Now in its third year, KBFA is also a much more efficient and streamlined program which is expected to result in lower contract costs if the program continues.

ANALYSIS

Representatives from the three regional districts met with Lana Popham, Minister of Agriculture at the 2019 UBCM conference. An overview of KBFA's performance was provided, as well as the funding that has been committed by the four partners. The Ministry was requested to provide \$100,000 in funding and the four partners would each contribute \$30,000 to fund approximately fifty percent of the program. The Regional District of East Kootenay would continue to act as the lead on KBFA and manage the contract. There has been no financial commitment from the Ministry of Agriculture to date.

The Regional Districts of Kootenay Boundary and Central Kootenay and the Columbia Basin Trust have expressed interest in continuing to proceed with KBFA services. Each partner is requesting a funding amount up to \$60,000 from their respective Boards. However, realizing there will be approximately \$120,000 surplus from the original three year contract within the current budget and that a new contract will likely be lower than the original, it is expected that there will be no additional cost to RDEK in 2020 and less than the full \$60,000/yr will be required going forward.

Resolutions from the four partner's respective Boards supporting funding will demonstrate to the Ministry of Agriculture our continued commitment to the program.

Since KBFA's inception in June 2017:

- 1785 producer/advisor interactions
- 522 farms have connected with KBFA
- 253 farm visits
- 50 KBFA hosted webinars/workshops/seminars/on farm training
- 800 attendees at the above events
- 45 producer/agriculture meetings attended by KBFA (ex. WDFI, KLA)
- 308 instances of outside expert resources
- 15 farm-to-farm connections
- 1000 subscribers to KBFA's quarterly newsletter "Kootenay Farmer"
- 426 followers on Instagram

KBFA is also involved in two research projects:

- BC Forage Council Soil Carbon Project: BC Forage Council is working with 4 farms in the Boundary, 3 farms in the East Kootenay and 1 in the Central Kootenay.
- Farm Adaptation Innovator Program: Dr. Catherine Tarasoff is leading this project and working with one producer in each Regional District to research yield, soil health and water conservation.

SPECIFIC CONSIDERATIONS

Regional Sustainability Strategy

Agriculture

9.3.5 Agricultural Planning

Support for the local food industry and agricultural resources will be provided through the implementation of relevant plans and the supporting policies and actions.

Strategic Priority

The Agricultural Plan Implementation is a current priority project.

RDEK Agricultural Plan

The RDEK Agricultural Plan recommended recruiting an Agricultural Liaison Officer for a three year “pilot” period with the primary responsibility of implementing the strategies and recommendations within the plan.

Official Community Plan

Encouraging preservation of agricultural land for present and future food production, supporting agriculture, local food production, local distribution of food products and diversification of agricultural uses is an objective within all Regional District Official Community Plans.

More current plans, such as the Steeples and Elk Valley Official Community Plan contain specific policies supporting the implementation of the Regional District Agricultural Plan.

Previous Board Action

On June 8, 2018 the Board adopted Resolution 47792:

THAT the contract with Keefer Ecological Services Ltd. for Kootenay and Boundary Farm Advisors be extended for two years ending June 15, 2020.

On May 6, 2016 the Board adopted Resolution 46208:

THAT the RDEK participate in the Kootenay Agricultural Liaison Services project with Regional District of Central Kootenay, Regional District of Kootenay Boundary and Columbia Basin Trust; and further, that:

- a. Michele Bates and Andrew McLeod be appointed to represent the RDEK on the Kootenay Agricultural Liaison Services steering committee; and,
- b. A Request for Proposals be issued consistent with the project goals and directives contained in the April 27, 2016 memo from staff.

On August 7, 2015 the Board adopted Resolution 45474:

THAT Columbia Basin Trust, Regional District of Central Kootenay and Regional District of Kootenay Boundary be formally requested to assist with development of a proposal for a shared Agricultural Liaison Officer for the Columbia Basin.

Financial – Budget

KBFA's contract terminates on June 30th, 2020. A Request for Proposal will be necessary. The contract budget will be divided amongst the participating partners and will not exceed a cost of \$60,000 to the Regional District.