



STAFF REPORT TO COMMITTEE

DATE OF REPORT March 20, 2024
MEETING TYPE & DATE Committee of the Whole of April 10, 2024
FROM: Economic Development Division
Strategic Services Department
SUBJECT: Vancouver Island University Agricultural Programming
Development Update
FILE: 6750-20 AG 2023-2025 VIU Ag Development Pgm

PURPOSE/INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the 2023-2025 Vancouver Island University (VIU) Agricultural Development Program project that is being supported by Economic Development Cowichan. VIU Cowichan will also be making a presentation at the committee meeting on April 10, 2024.

RECOMMENDED RESOLUTION

That it be recommended to the Board that the \$8,500 2023 contribution to the VIU Agricultural Program Development Project, based upon completion of the terms and conditions of the Contribution Agreement, be released.

BACKGROUND

The Professional Training and Development Department of Vancouver Island University (VIU), Cowichan campus, is the lead in a Food and Agriculture curriculum project with the Continuing Education and Training Association of BC ([CETA BC](#)), which has members from regional colleges and small universities across the province. The goals of the curriculum project are to: support emerging or existing agricultural producers, processors, and service providers to adopt more sustainable, ecological practices; to adopt Agri-technology and climate adaptation strategies, and; to support the regional Food Hub program.

Board resolution 23-242 authorized the allocation of funding to this initiative from the Function 121 – Economic Development Division 2023 budget to support this initiative, and for the CVRD to enter into a one-year contribution agreement with VIU for this purpose. The resolution also stated that consideration around funding for 2024 and 2025 was to be brought forward as part of the 2024 budget process. Consideration of CVRD funding for 2024/2025 is the subject of a separate staff report.

In June 2023, the CVRD entered into a General Funding Agreement with VIU to assist with the development of an agricultural program. The funding contributes to the establishment of a part-time Agricultural Coordinator position at VIU. This position supports the Micro Credential curriculum project as well as on-going program development in the Cowichan region, which requires establishing and maintaining network partnerships, seeking funding opportunities, and then implementing/piloting programs.

Prior to the release of funds, the agreement requires that VIU submit a progress report to the CVRD board, which must be reviewed and assessed by the Economic Development manager, prior to release of funds.

ANALYSIS

VIU hired an Agricultural Program Coordinator, Julia Fisher, in June 2023. The VIU team has been very busy since then, having:

- Exceeded the requirements for the number of networking/partnership meetings hosted within the CVRD;
- Fulfilled the requirement for grant proposals, with 3 major grant submissions, and an additional one under development at the time of the annual report;
- Continuing to serve as the lead institution for agricultural programming with the Continuing Education and Training Association of BC; and
- Submitting the 2023 annual report in a timely way.

For full information, see Attachment A. It is also important to note that as of fall 2024, VIU is offering agricultural skill development courses in the Cowichan region (see Attachment B).

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

For 2023, the \$8,500 contribution from the Function 121 – Economic Development Division 2023 budget is subject to VIU meeting the following success and impact indicators:

- Provide an annual report and presentation on project progress to the CVRD Committee of the Whole;
- Number of annual networking/partnership meetings hosted in the CVRD: 2- 4;
- Continue as the lead institution of the Agriculture Special Interest Group with the Continuing Education and Training Association of BC; and,
- Number of grant applications submitted to support the development and implementation of the suite of regenerative agriculture curriculum: 2-4, or until the curriculum is fully developed/implemented.

For 2023, these conditions have been met, or exceeded, as reported in Attachment A.

COMMUNICATION CONSIDERATIONS

Economic Development Cowichan assists in promoting the VIU Agricultural Programs through its website, newsletter, social media channels, and with support from regional agricultural stakeholders.

STRATEGIC/BUSINESS PLAN CONSIDERATIONS

Support for developing the agricultural sector was a component of the EDC Strategic Plan for 2018 to 2022. In the development of the EDC Strategic Plan 2024-2029, agriculture continues to be seen as one of the economic strengths of the region.

Supporting food security and building on the traditional industries of the Cowichan Valley were part of the CVRD Corporate Strategic Plan for 2020 to 2022. In the CVRD's Corporate Strategic Plan for 2023-2026, the emphasis is on innovation in agriculture and other foundational industries of the Cowichan Valley.

Referred to (upon completion):

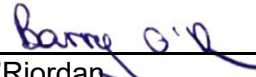
- ☐ Community Services *(Cowichan Community Centre, Cowichan Lake Recreation, South Cowichan Recreation, Arts & Culture, Facilities & Transit)*
- ☒ Corporate Services *(Finance, Human Resources, Information Technology, Legislative Services)*
- ☐ Operations *(Utilities, Parks & Trails, Recycling & Waste Management)*
- ☐ Land Use Services *(Community Planning, Strategic Initiatives, Development Services, Building Inspection & Bylaw Enforcement)*
- ☒ Strategic Services *(Communications & Engagement, Economic Development, Emergency Management, Environmental Services)*

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Reviewed for form and content and approved for submission to the Committee:

Resolution:

Financial Considerations:

☒ Corporate Officer

☒ Chief Financial Officer

ATTACHMENTS:

Attachment A – Project Deliverables Analysis, Year 1
Attachment B – VIU Agriculture courses notification
Attachment C – VIU Agriculture PPT