



Delta Farmland & Wildlife Trust

2011-12 Annual Report

"Conserving farmland and wildlife through
co-operative land stewardship."

Cover Photo Credits

Trumpeter Swans (and a lone Tundra Swan) in a ryegrass cover crop; Markus Merkens

Thank you to everyone who has provided photographs to Delta Farmland & Wildlife Trust. If you are interested in contributing your own photos of wildlife and farming, please contact DF&WT at 604-940-3392 or dfwt@dccnet.com.

Our Supporters

The Delta Farmland & Wildlife Trust relies on additional funding to deliver the full extent of our stewardship programs. We would like to recognize the agencies who provided funding to our Stewardship Programs in 2011/12.

Delta Agricultural Society

Vancouver Foundation

Ducks Unlimited Canada

BC Waterfowl Society

Vancity

Habitat Conservation Trust Foundation

Agriculture, Environment, and Wildlife Fund

Environment Canada

Corporation of Delta

and

Private Donations

Delta Farmland & Wildlife Trust: Our Mission

DF&WT is a non-profit organization that promotes the preservation of farmland and wildlife habitat on the lower Fraser River delta (Municipality of Delta, City of Richmond) through co-operative land stewardship.

Challenges to Farming and Wildlife Conservation

Farmland on the lower Fraser River delta is ideal for food production because the soils are fertile and the region has a relatively long growing season. The area is also important for a diversity of migratory birds that either use the delta as a stopover before they continue their journey or they spend the entire winter here. Despite the suitability of the area for farming and wildlife, there are challenges facing both.

The heavy silt/clay soils of local farms are prone to degradation when overworked by machinery. Tractors and other farm equipment can compact the soil and intensive tillage speeds the breakdown of soil organic matter, a crucial component of soil fertility. Farmers can fallow (rest) land by planting grasses and clovers and leaving the field alone for a period of time, however many farms simply cannot afford to take crop fields out of production.



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Cedar Waxwing perched in a farm hedgerow.

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Wildlife, especially migratory birds, are also challenged to survive in the increasingly developed landscape of the lower Fraser River delta. Almost 80% of the marsh present a century ago has been drained and only 600 hectares of grassland are present in the Municipality of Delta, compared to an estimated 6,000 hectares before 1890. Native shrubs and tree communities have dwindled as well.

Farmland Stewardship in Action

DF&WT has developed stewardship programs to address the challenges facing agriculture and wildlife conservation. Through the stewardship programs, local farmers are eligible for cost-share payments when they plant crops that are beneficial to wildlife and/or agricultural production. The management guidelines that farmers follow to be eligible for the programs are guided by extensive research.

Each program addresses a specific example of wildlife conservation and/or agricultural production. The **Grassland Set-aside Stewardship Program** pays farmers to fallow land, which improves soil fertility, while providing habitat for a diversity of grassland raptors, wading birds, songbirds, small mammals, and pollinating insects. The **Winter Cover Crop Stewardship Program** helps cover the cost of establishing vegetative cover on fields before winter, which protects the soil from erosion, improves soil fertility, and provides feeding habitat for herbivorous waterfowl and shorebirds.

Through the **Hedgerow Stewardship Program**, linear corridors of native shrubs and trees are planted along farm fields to provide habitat for songbirds, raptors, and pollinating insects. Similar corridors of grasses are planted along field edges through the **Grass Margin Stewardship Program**. Farmers can also apply to cover some of the costs of soil amendments and management through the **Field Liming and Laser Leveling Stewardship Programs**. Lime maintains soil pH at optimum levels so that plants can grow effectively and laser leveling improves drainage on fields that are prone to flooding.

By providing solutions to farmers that are compatible with their crop rotations, the DF&WT Stewardship Programs are contributing to the availability of wildlife habitat and the long-term viability of



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local farming operations, which ensures that land will continue to be available for food production and wildlife conservation.

Summary of Stewardship Programs

Delta Farmland & Wildlife Trust stewardship programs are designed to contribute to agricultural soil fertility and wildlife habitat availability, while mitigating conflict between wildlife and farming operations. During the 2011/12 fiscal year DF&WT provided cost-shares totaling **\$295,096.00**, excluding hedgerow maintenance, staff time and administration costs.

Stewardship Program	Acres	Rate	Total
Grassland Set-aside			
<i>1-year</i>	152	\$300.00	\$45,600.00
<i>1-year with nurse crop</i>	56	\$150.00	\$8,400.00
<i>2-year</i>	143	\$250.00	\$35,750.00
<i>3-year</i>	75	\$250.00	\$18,750.00
<i>4-year</i>	58	\$300.00	\$17,400.00
<i>4+ year</i>	30.5	\$250.00	\$7,625.00
Total	514.5		\$133,525.00
Winter Cover Crops			
<i>Spring Cereals, Winter Cereals, and Clovers</i>	2,953.5	\$40-55	\$121,832.50
Laser Leveling	161.8	-	\$17,480.00
Field Liming (*tonnes of lime)	659.85*	\$30.00	\$19,795.50
Farmscape			
<i>Hedgerows</i>	3.71	\$300.00	\$1,113.00
<i>Grass Margins</i>	4.5	\$300.00	\$1,350.00
Total	8.21		\$2,463.00
Stewardship Programs Total			\$295,096.00

Grassland Set-aside Stewardship Program

Local farmers in Delta and Richmond are able to fallow land through the Grassland Set-aside Stewardship Program. Individual fields are planted with forage grasses and clovers and can be enrolled in the Set-aside program for up to 4 years. During that time, farmers receive cost-share payments to offset rent, seed, equipment, and labour costs (\$300/acre during the 1st year; \$250/acre in the 2nd and 3rd year, and \$300 in the 4th year). For more information on Grassland Set-asides, visit deltafarmland.ca



Figure 1: Extent of 2011 Grassland Set-aside Program

Role in Local Crop Rotation

Grassland set-asides are short-term fallows that replenish soil organic matter. Soil organic matter is made up of the residue from dead plants, fungus, and soil organisms. Soil organic matter is crucial to maintaining agricultural production, as it influences soil structure (e.g., aggregate stability), water retention, drainage (by increasing soil macro-pores), soil microbial activity, macro invertebrates (e.g., earthworms), nutrient storage and nutrient uptake by crop plants. Additionally, the roots of grasses, and especially clover, can bore channels through compacted soil, thereby increasing drainage and aeration. Increased yields from grassland set-asides have not been documented but there are anecdotal reports of higher than average potato yields following a set-aside. The program also allows farmers to transition to organically certified production by fallowing their field during the 3-year chemical free period.

Role in Wildlife Conservation

Grassland set-asides mimic the grasslands that were abundant on the lower Fraser River delta (LFRD) prior to 1890 (when land clearing and draining for agriculture began) and are therefore ideal surrogate habitat for wildlife. Populations of small mammals, especially Townsend's vole, establish under the thick canopy of grass and provide prey for predatory birds. These include raptors (Northern Harrier, Short-eared Owl, Barn Owl, Rough-legged Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk, and American Kestrel) and wading birds (Great Blue Heron and American Bittern).

Grassland set-asides provide habitat for a diversity of arthropods, including pollinating insects like bumblebees. Arthropods can also serve as a food source for shrews and insectivorous birds, including Barn Swallows and Western Meadowlarks.

Set-asides also provide nesting habitat for grassland birds. Savannah Sparrows and Common Yellowthroat nests can be found in set-asides and occasionally reports of Northern Harrier nests. Short-eared Owls and Western Meadowlarks may nest in set-asides but this has not been confirmed. It is thought that breeding populations of Western Meadowlarks have been extirpated from the lower Fraser River delta.

Other Benefits

The organic matter that accumulates in grassland set-asides and benefits soil quality also acts as a pool of carbon, temporarily locking it away into plant tissue and the soil. Although this stored carbon is released from a set-aside's soil when it is returned to crop production, the planting of new set-asides ensures that a dynamic, yet relatively consistent, pool of carbon is sequestered from the atmosphere. The annual enrollment of 550 acres of grassland set-asides results in 1,000 to 1,800 tonnes of carbon sequestered into vegetation and soil, equivalent to the emissions of 110-200 people living in the Lower Mainland.

Grassland Set-aside Acreage 1996-2011

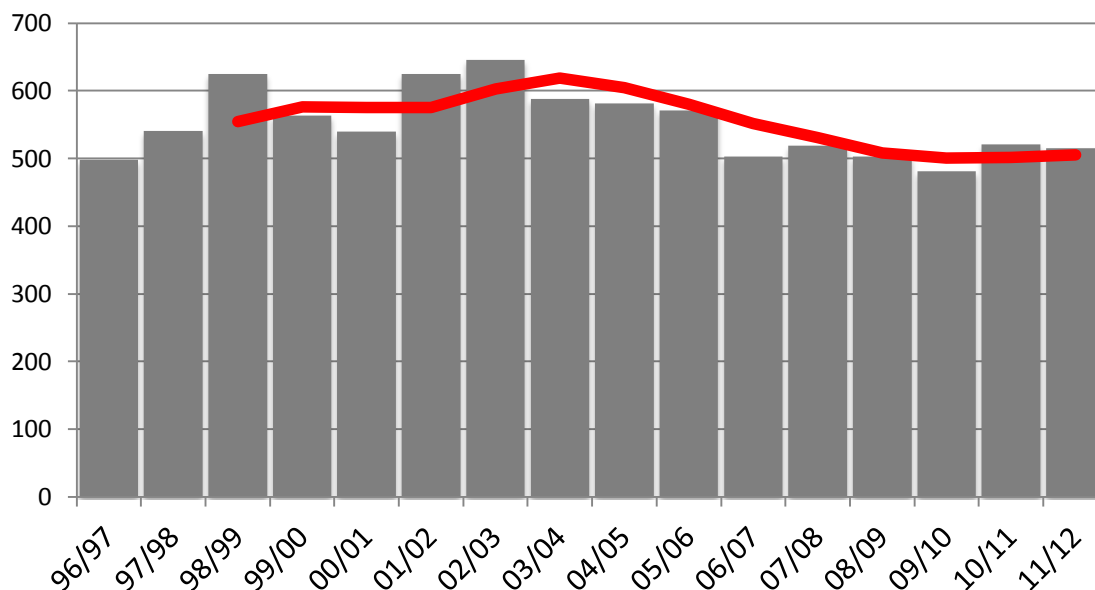


Figure 2: Historical acreage of Grassland Set-aside program enrollment from 1996 to 2011.

Winter Cover Crop Stewardship Program

Farmers in Delta can plant cereal grasses, clover, or annual forage grasses as cover crop. Cover crops can be under-seed into growing crops (e.g., cereal grains and silage corn) or planted after cash crops (e.g., beans, peas, and potatoes) are harvested. In 2011, farmers received between \$40 and \$55/acre to seed winter cover crops. The majority of cover crops are seeded in late summer and early fall. For more information on Winter Cover Crops, visit deltafarmland.ca

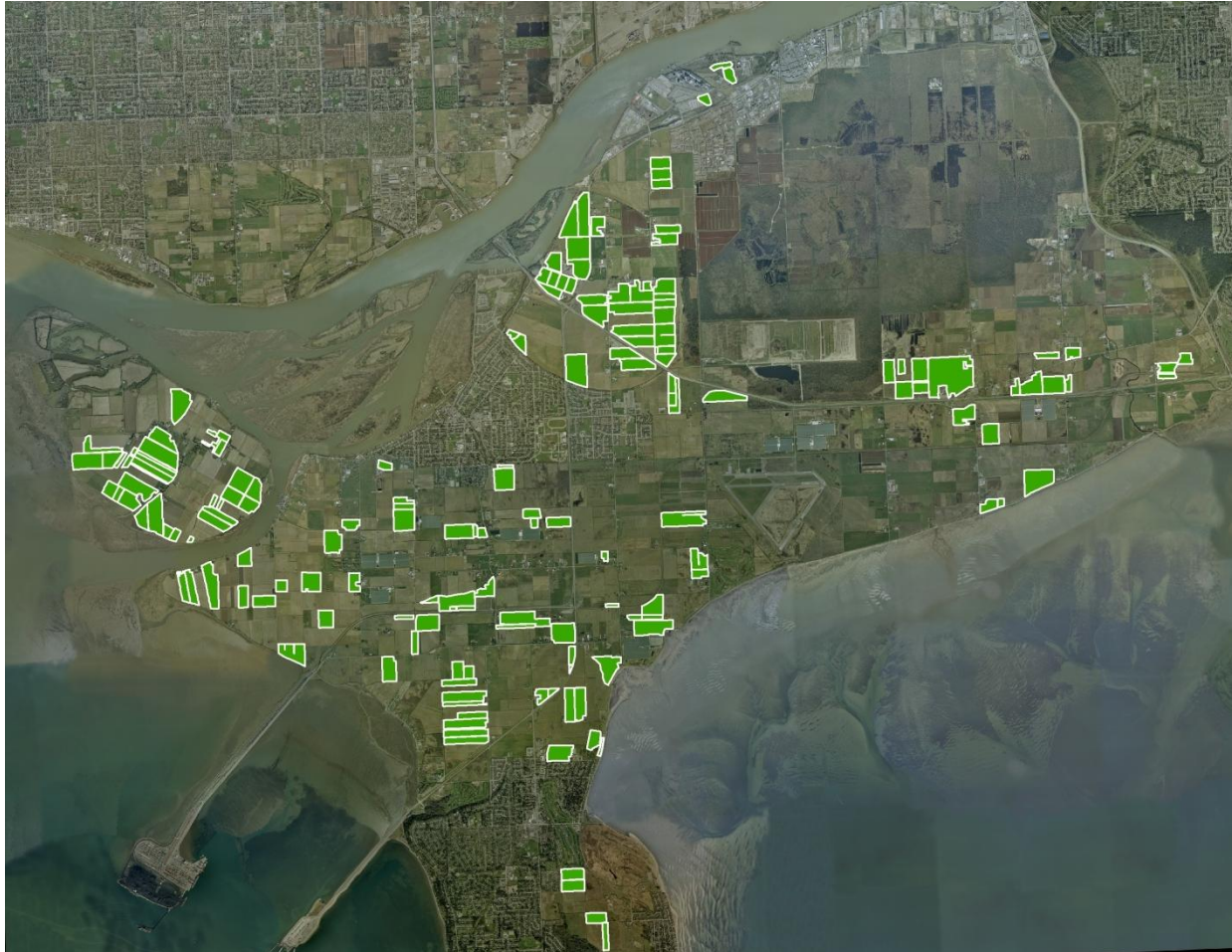


Figure 3: Extent of 2011 Winter Cover Crop Program

Role in Local Crop Rotation

The foliage of cover crops provides ground cover, preventing rain-induced soil erosion, while the roots increase soil porosity and break up compaction. Cereal cover crops scavenge nutrients that would otherwise leach from the soil during heavy winter rains. The cover crop can be incorporated in spring as a green manure to increase soil organic matter. Soil organic matter improves soil structure, increases the water holding capacity of soil, and increases the infiltration of water. Clover cover crops can fix nitrogen and offset the need to use synthetic fertilizers. While directly improving soil health, cover crops can also provide many other agricultural benefits. Cover crops can shade weeds and some (such as barley) release allelopathic compounds that inhibit weed growth, reducing the farmer's dependence on chemical controls.

Role in Wildlife Conservation

Cover crops mainly benefit herbivorous waterfowl, providing them with a protein rich food source during staging and wintering periods. Lesser Snow Geese, American Wigeon, Northern Pintail, Mallard, and Trumpeter Swans are all species that frequently feed on winter cover crops. To a lesser extent, Canada Geese, Cackling Geese, Greater White-fronted Geese, Tundra Swans, and Green-winged Teal feed on cover crops. Several species of shorebird have been identified using cover crop fields as well. Wilson's Snipe use the dense vegetation of early planted cover crops as shelter and Dunlin and Black-bellied Plover have been observed feeding on invertebrates on grazed cover crop fields. In one instance, a group of 18 Northern Harriers was observed roosting in an oat cover crop that had grown higher than 50 cm.

Other Benefits

Grasses grown for hay and pasture (perennial forage) can be grazed by waterfowl, reducing harvest yields and occasionally requiring fields to be reseeded. Winter cover crops can act as lures, drawing waterfowl away from hay and pasture and providing them with an alternative source of feed. While cover crops have not resulted in a complete abatement of gazing on hay and pasture, they offset some of the loss that growers would have otherwise experienced.

Winter Cover Crop Acreage 1996-2011

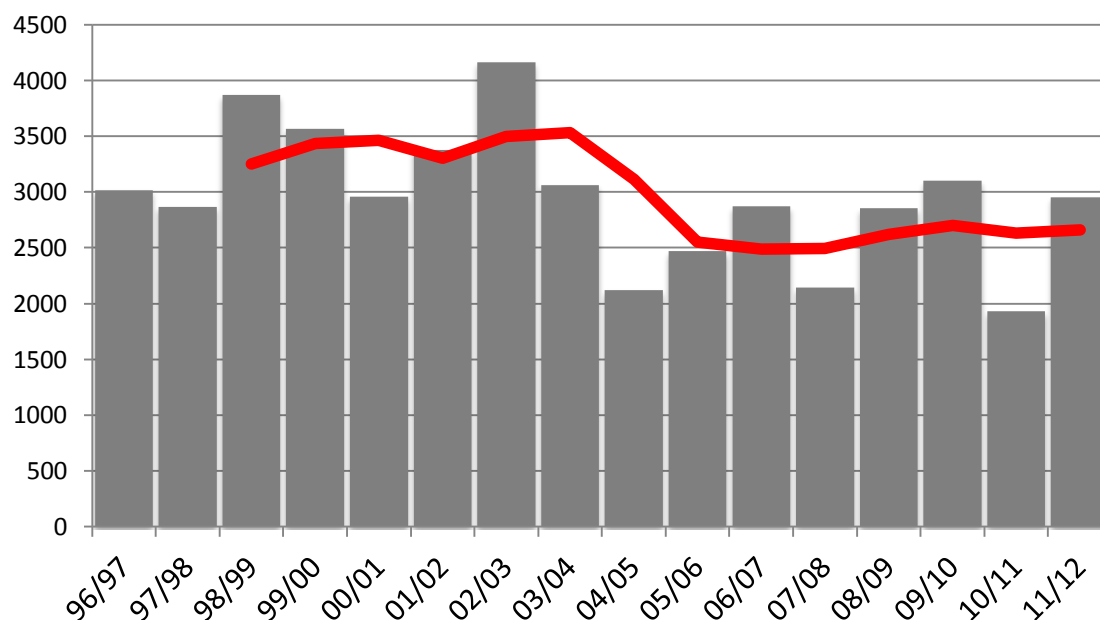


Figure 4: Historical acreage of Winter Cover Crop program enrollment from 1996 to 2011.

Hedgerow Stewardship Program

Hedgerows in Delta are rows of native trees and shrubs planted along field edges. Farmers are eligible to receive \$300/acre for hedgerows enrolled in the program. For more information on Hedgerows, visit deltafarmland.ca

Role in Local Crop Rotation

The ecology of hedgerows is complex and relatively un-quantified in Delta. It is difficult to determine exactly how hedgerows contribute to crop production, but it is known that the presence of flowering shrubs and trees attracts pollinating insects. Pollinating insects are required for fruit set in a number of local agricultural crops, including tomatoes, berry crops (blueberry, strawberry, raspberry, and cranberry) and cucurbits (squash, including zucchini, pumpkins, and cucumbers). It has been argued that hedgerows harbor both beneficial and pest arthropods, but little work has been conducted in Delta to determine the insect communities present in hedgerows.

Role in Wildlife Conservation

Hedgerows provide feeding habitat for songbirds and raptors. Many hedgerow songbirds feed upon the berries from fruiting shrubs or the insects living in the hedge. Accipiter hawks like Cooper's and Sharp-shinned Hawk will hunt smaller songbirds within the hedge. Raptors, like the Red-tailed Hawk, Rough-legged Hawk, Short-eared Owl, and Northern Harrier will use hedges as perch sites. Surveys conducted of hedgerows in Delta, including those established through DF&WT's stewardship program, indicate that older, more structurally developed hedgerows provide habitat for a wider variety of bird species.

Grass Margin Stewardship Program

Like hedgerows, grass margins are linear strips of habitat running along the edge of agricultural fields. DF&WT encourages farmers to use the same mixture of forage grass and clover used in grassland set-asides when planting margins. Farmers are eligible to receive \$300/acre for grass margins enrolled in the program. For more information on Grass Margins, visit deltafarmland.ca

Role in Local Crop Rotation

Grass margins can provide physical breaks between fields, especially fields that require buffer zones for organic certification. When margins are planted along ditch edges, the grass can trap soil that would erode off the field during heavy rains, preventing the ditch from filling with sediments. When grass margins contain clover, they can provide feeding habitat for pollinating insects.

Role in Wildlife Conservation

Similar to grassland set-asides, grass margins can provide habitat for small mammals which are prey for raptors and wading birds. Raptors may also roost in grass margins during winter; Short-eared Owls have been flushed from grass margins during field surveys. Grassland songbirds nest and feed in the grass margins.

Laser Leveling Stewardship Program

DF&WT has been offering its Laser Leveling cost-share program to farmers since 1996. Through the program, co-operators are eligible to receive up to 50% of the cost of leveling, up to a maximum cost-share of \$125/acre (\$309/ha) and a maximum of 50 acres (20 ha) leveled. For more information on Laser Leveling, visit deltafarmland.ca

Role in Local Crop Rotation

Drainage is an essential component of productive agriculture, especially in areas that experience periods of heavy rainfall. On the Fraser delta, heavy rains occur during the winter months and poor field drainage can lead to soil erosion, soil compaction, and salt accumulation. Field topography plays an important role in how water is drained from a field. Steeply sloped fields can lose significant amounts of topsoil as fine particles are washed away by water runoff. Water pools in low areas and is unable to drain, and the weight of water in these areas is significant enough to cause compaction. Furthermore, these areas take longer to dry in spring, delaying farmers' access to portions of their fields. When the puddles do dry, the osmotic pressure can pull significant amounts of salt from deeper in the soil profile to the surface, thereby impacting crop production.

Delta farmers have access to laser leveling services which can recontour their fields to maximize drainage, and minimize water ponding and soil erosion. Using GPS, stationary laser towers, and sophisticated computer software, a laser leveling plough is pulled by a powerful tractor and can accurately recontour a field. The plough fills in low areas and removes soil from high points, and fields can be contoured to be completely level, sloped, or crowned, depending on the field's characteristics.

Laser Levelling Acreage 1996-2011

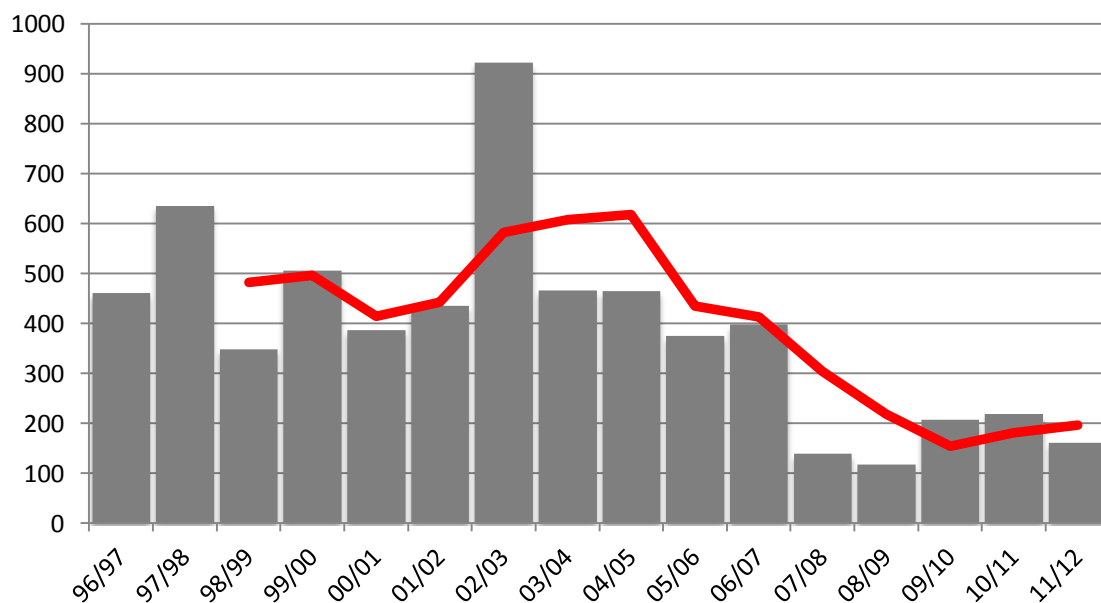


Figure 5: Historical acreage of Laser Leveling program enrollment from 1996 to 2011.

Field Liming Stewardship Program

Farmers in Delta have had access to DF&WT's Field Liming cost-share since 2004. Through the program, farmers are eligible to receive \$30/ton of lime applied, to a maximum of 2 tons/acre applied on a maximum of 100 acres. For more information on Field Liming, visit deltafarmland.ca

Role in Local Crop Rotation

Soils become acidic when there is a build up of positively charged hydrogen ions (called cations). There are several ways soils become acidic. Heavy rains can leach away positively charged ions like calcium, magnesium, potassium, and sodium. Excess nitrogen fertilizer that is not taken up by crop plants can be oxidized to acids by soil microbes. When soils become too acidic, plants are unable to take up nutrients efficiently. The application of lime to fields allows farmers to adjust soil pH to approach a level that maximizes yield potential, particularly for vegetable crops. While many factors, such as the kind of crop, soil type, and climate, influence the effect of liming a field, it can be generally stated that the application of lime on all moderate to strong acid soils will improve and maintain productivity.

At a cost of over \$79 per tonne (which includes transportation to the field and spreading), lime is an important investment in the stewardship of agricultural soils.

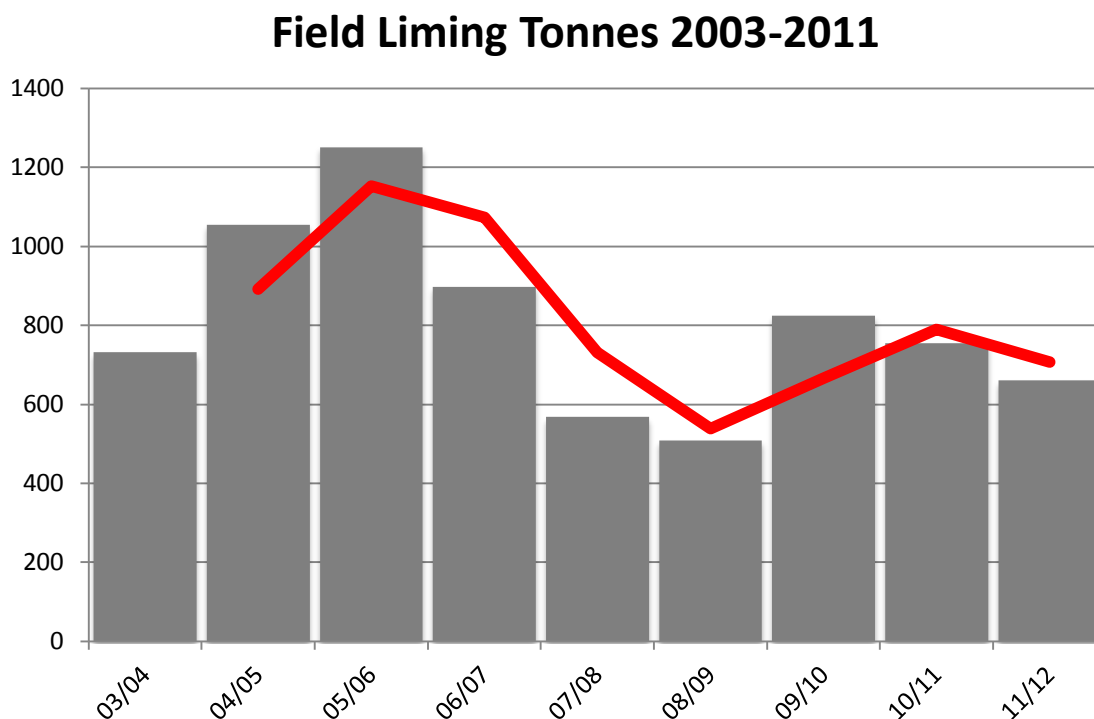


Figure 6: Historical tonnage of Field Liming program enrollment from 1996 to 2011.

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION
Unaudited, for the year ended March 31, 2012

ASSETS

	<u>2012 (\$)</u>	<u>2011 (\$)</u>
Current		
Cash	21,995	40,406
Term deposits	503,676	456,536
Contributions receivable	15,300	10,800
GST receivable	11,025	3,794
	551,996	511,536
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Long term investments- at cost	67,628	67,520
Capital assets	2,299	3,330
	621,923	582,386
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LIABILITIES

	<u>2012 (\$)</u>	<u>2011 (\$)</u>
Current		
Payroll liabilities	2,319	3,261
Deferred revenue	270,832	280,932
	273,151	284,193
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Net assets	348,772	298,193
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	621,923	582,386
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STATEMENT OF OPERATIONS AND CHANGES IN NET ASSETS
Unaudited, for the year ended March 31, 2012

	<u>2012 (\$)</u>	<u>2011 (\$)</u>
REVENUE		
Funding:		
Delta Agricultural Society	100,00	153,000
Vanc Fdn: YVR Wildlife Stewardship Fund	91,112	88,241
Ducks Unlimited Canada	48,800	10,000
B.C. Waterfowl		39,983
Vanc Fdn: Boundary Shores	15,563	15,073
Corporation of Delta	15,000	15,000
Gov't of Canada Cdn Wildlife Service	33,000	108,000
Habitat Conservation Trust Foundation	33,750	Recorded as donation in previous years
Vancity enviroFund	73,000	Recorded as donation in previous years
TG&CC Habitat Compensation Fund	13,750	13,750
Other:		
Donations	92,113	138,587
Fundraising	56,260	
Interest and other income	4,216	5,909
Total revenue	576,564	587,543
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EXPENSES		
Projects:		
Remittances to co-operators	295,096	387,158
Program coordinator	57,151	53,340
Travel and mileage	3,057	2,525
Program materials and supplies	9,663	2,375
Farmscape maintenance	4,232	2,701
Farmscape construction	25,924	20,069
Total projects expenses	395,123	468,168
General:		
Administration, office, society costs	57,830	59,281
Fundraising	39,656	2,563
Farm awareness campaign	10,421	11,366
Conservation education, communication	22,955	16,225
Total general expenses	130,862	89,435
Total expenses	525,985	557,603
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Excess of revenue over expenses	50,579	29,940
Net assets, beginning of year	298,193	240,253
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Net assets, end of year	348,772	298,193