

# Pemberton farmers brace for impact of trade war

INCREASING TARIFFS ON AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTS AND EQUIPMENT ARE CONFUSING AND EXHAUSTING, SAY LOCAL PRODUCERS

BY **LUKE FAULKS**
**Local Journalism Initiative Reporter**

**PEMBERTON'S FARMING** community is reckoning with a host of unknowns surrounding the escalating trade war between the United States and Canada. From produce exports to seed imports, equipment purchases to a potential decline in tourism, the valley is preparing for a confusing new relationship with the country's biggest trading partner.

"Agriculture, traditionally, has been a cross-border partnership for decades. And now it's just all up in the air," said Michelle Beks, who owns Shaw Creek Farm.

"Nobody really knows what's going to happen."

U.S. President Donald Trump's second term has been marked by an increased hostility towards Canada; beyond threats to the nation's sovereignty, his government has repeatedly threatened and scheduled tariffs against Canada.

The U.S. applied a 25-per-cent tariff on all imports from Canada except oil and energy, which is taxed at 10 per cent, on March 4. A reciprocal 25-per-cent tariff on $30 billion of American goods was simultaneously applied by the Canadian government. On March 6, president Trump delayed tariffs on goods compliant with the Canada-United States-Mexico Agreement (CUSMA) until April 2.

It's that April 2 deadline that is most pressing for Pemberton's growing community.

**TARIFF'D TATERS?** **The Pemberton Valley is known for its seed potato exports, many of which go to buyers in the United States.**

*PHOTO BY JOHNNYSCRIV / E+ / GETTY IMAGES*

## SEED POTATO VALLEY

Roughly seven per cent of Canada's GDP, or $150 billion, comes from agriculture as of 2023. About 60 per cent of those products are exported to the U.S., accounting for more than $100 billion in revenue, annually.

Beks spoke with *Pique* after a busy weekend contributing to that annual return.

"We were actually busy shipping potatoes to the States because our buyers want them before April 2," she said. "Pretty much all the people up here that have American customers are shipping their potatoes now."

Beks said she doesn't quite know how the imposition of tariffs will affect Shaw Creek Farm. Part of that confusion lies in the fact that seed potatoes, her farm's main export, fall under the CUSMA deal Trump signed during his first term. On March 24, Trump hinted at further sectoral exemptions to his tariffs.

"So we really don't know, because we don't know if we're going to be exempted because of that, or if we'll fall under all the tariffs with everybody else," Beks said.

"Pretty much everybody—the potato community, our representatives like the B.C. potato growers and all across Canada, those groups are still in the dark. They really don't even know what's going to happen."

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> *- MICHELLE BEKS*

Beks is hopeful longstanding customers will stick with their suppliers. At least one of her customers has said he's fine with his potatoes arriving after tariffs have gone up. And Shaw Creek still has customers within Canada, too.

"A good portion of our seed potatoes go into the Fraser Valley," added Beks. "So we aren't strictly U.S. customers."

Where Pemberton farms might run into trouble, she said, is in price hikes on farm equipment brought across the border.

## EQUIPMENT AND TOURISM AMID WORSENING RELATIONS

Canada is a net importer of farm equipment, largely dependent on the U.S. for large farm equipment like tractors and harvesters.

Like Beks, Jordan Study is concerned about the impact of tariffs on farm equipment. The former West Vancouver-Sea to Sky MLA and former Pemberton mayor runs North Arm Farm in Pemberton.

Sturdy said the likelihood of being able to swap American equipment manufacturers for Canadian ones, in an effort to "buy Canadian"—offsetting the impact of tariffs and helping grow the nation's economy—is low.

"We don't have a lot of those manufacturers here, in Canada, and it's not likely we have a big enough market to get into a major manufacturing process without having access to a market like an American market or an Asian market, or whatever it happens to be," Sturdy said.

"We're not going to build a tractor factory if we can't sell to the American market."

Sturdy sees an additional threat associated with the trade war: a changing tourism industry. Plenty of farms in the area, including his, offer tours and events as ways to generate revenue—and plenty of that revenue comes from out-of-towners coming to enjoy the Valley.

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# Pemberton, Valeriote discuss VOP's capacity to meet provincial policing and housing mandates

THE VILLAGE'S COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE ALSO RAISED CONCERNS OVER THE PROVINCIAL GRANT SYSTEM FOR FUNDING PROJECTS

BY **LUKE FAULKS**
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**AT A MARCH 25** Committee of the Whole (COW) meeting, the Village of Pemberton (VOP) sat down with interim Green Party leader and Sea to Sky MLA Jeremy Valeriote to share policy goal updates from the provincial government and challenges facing the village.

Right off the bat, Valeriote reiterated his commitment to seeing regional transit this year.

"The one that I'm going to spend most of my time driving towards, [is] a commitment to regional transit this year. So that gives us nine months, as I keep reminding the Minister of Transportation" Valeriote said. "And so that commitment is in exchange for our votes on confidence and supply."

The NDP won a single-seat majority in the 2024 provincial election, while the Greens have a two-member caucus. To better the chances of legislation passing, the parties announced a confidence-and-supply deal in December, committing the two Greens to provide votes for Premier Eby's NDP. The agreement was finalized on March 12, and sets out 12 policy areas for collaboration.

Of particular interest, Valeriote singled out the removal of barriers to community health facilities, a review of the primary care system, expanding public coverage of psychologists, a commitment to build 30,000 units of affordable non-market housing during the government's mandate, a pledge to commit $50 million annually toward electric heat pumps in 2025 and 2026, and a review of B.C. forests with First Nations and other stakeholders.



**ON THE ROAD AGAIN** MLA Jeremy Valeriote says regional transit on Highway 99 remains a key priority.

*FILE PHOTO BY BRADEN DUPUIS*

## DOWNLOADED RESPONSIBILITIES

Officials shared concerns about the VOP's ability to take on key services passed down from the provincial government. Councillor Ted Craddock led with concerns about the Village paying for 70 per cent of an impending municipal police force transition—estimated at $1.3 million in the year of transition—required by provincial law once the Village crosses the 5,000 population mark.

"I think what we're looking for is some support and to find a way to ease that transition," he said. Craddock also indicated the Village is unlikely to hit the threshold by the 2026 census, but is set to start saving for the transition in the 2025 budget.

"It needs to be a little bit more graduated," added Mayor Mike Richman. "So that's at the heart of it—that whole system has to change."

Another issue associated with a growing population is mandates around active transportation. Councillor Katrina Nightingale noted B.C. Housing mandates that local governments consider and prioritize active transportation when planning for housing—which can make applying for housing grants in Pemberton tricky.

"The housing changes that have been mandated to us have a big impact on parking and cars, numbered cars on the road," Nightingale said. "But we don't have the capacity to in any way improve our active transportation."

Council also voiced concerns over grant funding for projects. Richman noted grant funding is often insufficient, with municipalities competing for necessary upgrades to services and amenities and grants for maintenance of those new programs rarely on offer.

"We need to shift away from that model as our way of accessing provincial funds," he told Valeriote. "We feel like we have to remind [the provincial government] that those are our taxpayers' money [and we] have to go scratch and fight for them."

Richman proposed a funding model to support small communities outside of the grant system.

Councillors also noted that the bridge over Pemberton Creek, while stable, is prone to ice buildup when water levels are high, due to it having been built too low to accommodate snowmelt. Richman said the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure previously told the VOP the bridge was safe.

"So it's not very high on the replacement level, because the infrastructure itself is solid," he said of the bridge. "But it's the placement of it."

The mayor also noted seismic requirements for building seemed overly onerous, given that Pemberton lies outside of the highest relative hazard for earthquakes.

"The fact that we have to build to that structural degree, again, is cost prohibitive," Richman told Valeriote. "And [it's] just the fact that we can't access any of that funding unless we prove and agree to build to those standards when those standards don't suit us."

Valeriote noted that, despite the Green Party only holding two seats in the legislature, they had "a pretty good relationship with most ministers," and that most were "keen to work with us."

Richman said the VOP would circle back after the upcoming Union of BC Municipalities convention, scheduled for Sept. 22 to 26. ■

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"Obviously, we're often a tourism-driven business to some degree," he said. "The issues that we face at North Arm are going to be the similar ones to what other vendors in Whistler, for example, are feeling.

"If we lose our American visitors, that could be a significant problem for us."

Part of the problem is the inconsistency of the situation; with tariffs scheduled, then paused for 30 days pending a border security announcement by Canada and Mexico, then slated for April 2 for agricultural products, then increased by 25 per cent in response to retaliatory tariffs by Canada. Recently, China added a 100-per-cent tariff on Canadian peas, canola oil and meal, and a 25-per-cent levy on seafood and pork.

"I just cannot maintain that same level of concern," said Sturdy. "It takes too much energy. I guess I got used to it to some degree, and I'm going, 'well, it's too hard to anticipate what all the ramifications are going to be here.'"

## BUY CANADIAN

Kerry McCann is the co-founder of Laughing Crow Organics, a mixed vegetable farm. Laughing Crow runs a vegetable stand, corn maze, and mixed vegetable box delivery program. And while McCann's products usually stick to a 100-kilometre radius, most of the farm's seeds come from across the border.

Like Beks, she's still working on sorting out which products will be tariffed, and which won't. She did note she has seen an increase in wait times at the border.

"We had an impact from border security, where our seeds didn't get across the border as easily as they normally do," said McCann.

She said her suppliers have noted seeds are shipping slower nowadays, too. Usually, seeds take between three to four weeks, from order to their arrival. This year, it was two months.

In response to the threats and implementation of tariffs, a "Buy Canadian" attitude has taken off. McCann likened the approach to the COVID-19 era.

"The awareness for us was really great, because people wanted to shop local and support local businesses," she said. "The trade war kind of does the same thing.

"I'm hoping that people will want to support local businesses. We're generally always trying to buy Canadian when we can."

That extends to McCann's seed suppliers. She said while her usual industrial-scale seed suppliers are based out of Washington and Maine, she'll try to buy more from a smaller-scale company in Ontario.

The Pemberton Farmer's Institute, which represents and advocates for local farmers in greater community groups, is set to discuss tariffs at its annual general meeting on March 31.

Check back with *Pique* for more as this story develops... ■