

History of Agriculture in Kamloops and Region

Kamloops has been a self-sufficient food producer since the 1880s with the introduction of the railways and the ability to ship local products to markets this way (Community Futures Development Corporation of Thompson Country, 2001). Agriculture has been an important livelihood and economic sector in and around Kamloops since this time. The following timeline is a snapshot of some of the key agricultural milestones and events taking place in Kamloops and the Thompson-Nicola Valley over time.



Acknowledgements

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Pre-contact Agricultural Activity in the Region

Traditionally, the Secwepemc were semi-nomadic, their life based on fishing, hunting, and plant gathering. They traveled great distances to procure food and other technological needs. The various landscapes they used provided everything the Secwepemc needed to survive and flourish. Secwepemc territory provided the people with a wide diversity of animal and plant food, medicines, and technological resources. All food and material culture was obtained from the various environments. The Secwepemc harvested deer, moose, elk, caribou, many smaller mammals, and many varieties of salmon and fish. They gathered over 135 species of plants for food, medicine, ceremonial, habitation, and technology.



Pre-contact Agricultural Activity in the Region

The Secwepemc, with their intimate knowledge of their environments, based their subsistence economy on balancing the use of resources and careful management regimes. They made use of food and materials that were in abundance, but also relied on other sources when their primary sources failed.

The Secwepemc practiced intensive land management regimes, which ensured sufficient supply of needed items, not only for present needs but to ensure the resources were available for future generations. One example is landscape burning to ensure better and more plentiful root crops. Survival was also dependent on ecological knowledge and cultural skills being passed down by oral tradition to the following generations.



Canada's Tournament Capital

1812

- Two European fur trading posts were established in Kamloops in 1812, utilizing Aboriginal skills to harvest animal populations, such as beaver. But 1826 the effects of trapping on these population were already noticeable.
- The seasonal round shows that the pre-contact Kamloops economy had three sectors: fishing, gathering (roots and berries), and hunting. The relative importance of these has been much discussed in archaeological and anthropological literature. A reasonable guess for the ration of the sectors in the diet of the people at the time of first contact with Europeans (hence prior to the reliance on European foodstuffs) is in the region of one third fish (principally salmon), one third roots and berries, and one third meat (Kamloops Territory in the 1860s, page 12).



Canada's Tournament Capital

1846

- Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) most likely responsible for first agricultural activity in the area with the cultivation of Timothy grass for forage for horses used in the fur trade.
- HBC imports cattle for beef and some dairy cows into Interior BC. This builds upon the existing native diet of salmon and berries adopted by the fur traders.
- Potatoes are a main staple produced at this time.
- Dr. John McLoughlin starts the first beef cattle movement to BC.



Canada's Tournament Capital

1851

- HBC plants 34 kegs of potatoes at the farm on the North Shore site of the fort. The resulting harvest boasts 400 kegs in the fall.



1852

- Paul Fraser, in charge of Fort Thompson, grows barley and wheat and starts a kitchen garden growing peas, carrots, onions, and melons.



Canada's Tournament Capital

1858

- Adam Heffley enters BC as a miner and packer during the gold rush. He raises racing horses on his land in Heffley Creek (named after him).
- The first cattle drive of which we have definitive knowledge moves north from Portland, Oregon, in June 1858, led by General Joel Palmer. Upon reaching Kamloops, Palmer sells the supplies and oxen to the miners, proceeding to the Fraser River to sell his herd.



Canada's Tournament Capital

1860

- Due to periodic flooding at the fort site, HBC develops the Calumet Farm several miles up the North Thompson River. The company's dairy cows are moved to this location where the first butter of the district is made. Excess product is sold to gold miners at Tranquille and Jamieson Creek.
- The Calumet Farm is short-lived, and crops are limited to potatoes and wheat.
- Individuals from the HBC do continue with agricultural experimentation and are successful growing crops such as cabbage, cauliflower, corn, pumpkins, potatoes, and rhubarb.



Canada's Tournament Capital

1860s

- Agricultural activities in the Kamloops District are taken over by early settlers, some of whom left the employ of the HBC. Cattle and horses are raised and oats, wheat, barley, and potatoes are grown for sale back to the HBC.



Canada's Tournament Capital

1862

- Jerome and Thaddeus Harper purchase ranchland on the north side of the South Thompson River just east of Kamloops. This ranch is the first in the Kamloops area.



Canada's Tournament Capital

1865

- Charles Cooney, a pioneer at Tranquille, starts one of the first orchards in BC.



Canada's Tournament Capital

1870s

- Fodder crops such as rye, clover, rape, vetches, and corn are added to production, with sainfoin (in the pea family) being the most popular fodder crop by the 1890s.
- Alfalfa, a crop that had been tried, is not popularly grown for fodder until sometime after World War I.



Canada's Tournament Capital

1872

- John Thomas Edwards buys Heffley's land to become a prominent rancher and businessman in the Southern Interior.

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Canada's Tournament Capital

1878

- Shuswap Milling Company begins operation where Riverside Park is located. The sawmill and grist mill produces lumber and flour and slaughters hogs for bacon.

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Canada's Tournament Capital

1890

- Kamloops hosts the second annual Inland Agriculture Association event. Local crops and livestock are displayed.

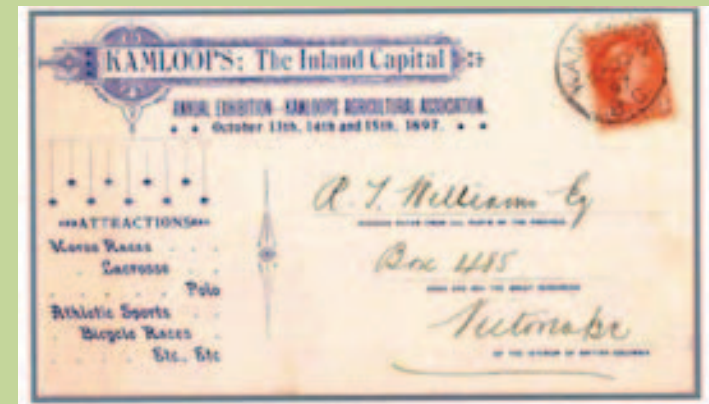
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Canada's Tournament Capital

1892

- With the expansion of the railway, ranchers and farmers begin to organize themselves in different ways to form the Kamloops Agricultural Association. The main purpose of the association is to promote the annual fair where local products get displayed. The greatest success comes in sending exhibits to New Westminster, which revealed the quality and variety of Kamloops products.
- First agricultural exhibition takes place.



1895

- Kamloops canning and preserving industry gets underway.



Canada's Tournament Capital

1899

- Obtaining and maintaining prime land for City parks begins in 1899 with the establishment of Riverside Park.

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Canada's Tournament Capital

1900

- Kamloops branch of the BC Farmer's Institute is organized to inform members on issues such as freight rates, irrigation, and experimental orchards. The organization also attempts to serve to alleviate tensions between stock raisers and farmers.
- At this time, ranching is being forced back onto the uplands. Many ranges are overgrazed by the turn of the century.



Canada's Tournament Capital

Early 1900s

- Kamloops is promoted as an "Agricultural Eden".
- Kamloops is famous for its sheep ranching and wool production.



Canada's Tournament Capital

1901

- The Shuswap Milling Company, which was located in Riverside Park, burns to the ground, making way for the development of the park as the City purchases the site shortly after.



1903

- Canadian Real Properties, with headquarters in London, England, begins developing an extensive irrigation system on the North Shore.
- John and Rose Anderson are the first to settle in the Rose Hill area.



Canada's Tournament Capital

1904

- The Inland Sentinel publishes a promotional supplement entitled "The Land of Heart's Desire", distributed widely in Canada, England, and the United States.
- Fruitlands (North Kamloops) development begins.



Canada's Tournament Capital

1905

- Many homesteaders come to Kamloops between 1905 and World War I, but few know much about farming or the need for irrigation.

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Canada's Tournament Capital

1907

- Establishment of the Kamloops and District Fruit Growers Association.

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1908

- Establishment of the Thompson Valley Canning Company.

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Canada's Tournament Capital

1909

- Canadian Real Properties is incorporated as BC Fruitlands with a "home farm" and overseeing manager.
- The irrigation development originally consists of 6,000 acres calling for extensive irrigation, including a \$50,000, 18 mile ditch, to bring water from Jamieson Creek.
- BC Fruitlands becomes incorporated.
- First apple trees are planted in the Kamloops region, in the town of Walhachin, which means "Land of the Round Rocks" in the Nlaka'pamux (Thompson) language.



1910

- British speculators establish the first orchards in the town of Walhachin.



Walhachin plowing for the orchards. Photo by unknown.



1911

- Excellent grain crops are raised in the Rose Hill and Long (Brigade) Lake region just south of Kamloops due to several wet years.
- Several farmers are ultimately forced to leave or turn to cattle ranching due to lack of regular irrigation in the dry belt.
- Livery stables were needed as garages, but cease when the horse stops being the primary method of transportation.
- T. D. Costley's livery, at the corner of Lorne Street and Victoria Street, is sold to CPR to make way for double tracking.



1912

- Heffley Creek becomes a centre for agriculture. It goes on to showcase a first ever event that features agricultural exhibits in the fall.
- Maple Leaf Milling Company opens the first small grain elevator.



Canada's Tournament Capital

1913

- The Walhachin Cannery (Anglesey Cannery) is established.
- Milton Blackwell purchases a farm east of Barnhartvale, and Blackwell Dairy Farm is established. Today, the fourth generation farm produces a full line of fluid milk products, including sour cream and cheeses.
- The Kamloops Agricultural Hall is erected in Riverside Park.



Blackwell Dairy Processing Plant



1914

- The BC Stock Breeders Association begins and presents the Bull and Livestock Show and Sale.
- The first commercial creamery after HBC experiments is established at Heffley Creek.
- Around this time, a beekeepers' association is formed to fulfill specialized needs.
- The first formal farmers' market begins on June 6, 1914, on the present site of the Plaza Hotel at 4th Avenue and Victoria Street. There are 16 vendors selling fresh vegetables, poultry, eggs, seeds, and flowers.



1915

- The first tomato cannery is established in North Kamloops by Nixon and Work. 4,000 tins of tomatoes are canned in the first year.



Canada's Tournament Capital

1916

- By this time, the "home farm" has 100 acres of orchards, primarily apples; 2,500 head of cattle; and acres of vegetable and fodder crops.
- Apples in Kamloops are found to have a higher sugar content than those grown in the Okanagan region due to lower night temperatures in Kamloops.
- The 10th Annual Convention of the Western Canada Irrigation Association is held in Kamloops.
- Based on the introduction of the first creamery two years prior, the Kamloops District Creamery Association is formed.
- The Kamloops District Creamery opens.



Canada's Tournament Capital

1917

- A sheep herders' association is formed with annual sales in conjunction with the Fall Fair.
- Nixon and Work moves its cannery to the Agricultural Hall located at the North Kamloops Fair grounds. 20,000 tins of tomatoes are canned.
- In April, the BC Wood Growers Association is formed.



Canada's Tournament Capital

1919

- The farmers' market continues through the years of World War I, despite complaints of unfair competition, finally closing in 1919. The canning industry provided an outlet for excess vegetables for many of the producers.
- The first bull sale is held on March 26, 1919, at the CPR corrals west of the city on the road to Mission Flats.



Canada's Tournament Capital

1920

- The "home farm" has expanded to 20,000 acres and includes an experimental farm.
- The tomato cannery established two years prior packs over 20,000 cases of product.
- Kamloops Canneries is established at 116 Lorne Street, using old equipment from Walhachin. It employs 30 people and in addition to tomatoes, processes beans and pumpkins.
- The British Columbia Hereford Breeder's Association is established in Kamloops to promote cattle breeding in the province.
- The Kamloops Bull Sale is moved to Riverside Park.



Canada's Tournament Capital

1920s

- Agricultural research begins in Kamloops on a scientific basis.
- The Singh family comes to Kamloops, farming vegetables and fruit to sell in fresh markets and local canneries.



Canada's Tournament Capital

1924

- 75,000 cases of produce are packed at Kamloops Canneries, which now employs 200 people. The cannery purchases property west of town (former City Public Works yard).



Canada's Tournament Capital

1925

- James Skelly buys farmland in Valleyview, planting over 4, 000 apple trees.

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Canada's Tournament Capital

1926

- The office and barn for the BC Livestock Association is constructed at the location of the Pavillion Theatre. At one time, this location is also home to the Kamloops Exhibition Association.
- Shareholders merge with four canneries in the Okanagan and at the coast to form one company, the Western Packing Corporation.
- Kamloops Canneries becomes affiliated with Western Packing Corporation.



Canada's Tournament Capital

1927

- Tobacco growing is tested on the experimental farm.
- The Broder Canning Company of New Westminster, later renamed Royal City Cannery, opens a plant in Kamloops in 1927 and sells it to Frank Carlin, a vegetable wholesaler in the city, in 1928.



Canada's Tournament Capital

1928

- An entomology laboratory to study insect pests is started.
- BC Fruitlands (a private company owning 22,000 acres) produces 4,500 tons of fruits and vegetables.
- The larger firm of Western Packing Corporation goes bankrupt, but the local operation is still viable. In September, Charles Bickford takes over as owner.
- Royal City Cannery sells its plant to Frank Carlin, a vegetable wholesaler in the City.



Canada's Tournament Capital

1929

- BC Cattlemen's Association is formed to represent the interests of beef cattle producers in BC.
- BC Sheep Breeders Association (formally the BC Wood Growers Association) is formed to accommodate the growing industry
- The wool warehouse is built to accommodate the industry and the more than 200,000 of sheep in Kamloops.



Canada's Tournament Capital

1930

- There is an influx of settlers, many of which are German families employed by BC Fruitlands. They later form the Brocklehurst community.
- By this time, the Kamloops District has more than half of BC's sheep production.



Proposed layout for the BC Fruitlands Limited Estate
in Kamloops



Canada's Tournament Capital

1930

- The Desmond's and Hugh Vicars start a large farm in Valleyview where they grow tomatoes, alfalfa, and potatoes.
- Antonio and Cesira Comazzetto start a dairy farm in Valleyview.
- Tom Bones Heritage House is built on a prominent piece of farmland on the North Shore known for orchards and fields farmed by BC Fruitlands.



Canada's Tournament Capital

1930s

- There are now three canneries, but consumer demand and prices are low. Only a small portion of the produce grown in Kamloops is handled by the canneries, with many tomatoes, beans, potatoes, onions, and apples being sold to eastern and western markets.
- Electrical power to outlying areas permits additional areas in the Thompson Valley to be irrigated by pump, including 650 acres on the Indian Reserve.
- The Skelly land, known as Jimeva Farms, is purchased. The family moves from Calgary and plants 4,000 apple trees. They also attempt to grow tomatoes and raise pigs and minks.



Canada's Tournament Capital

1931

- The cannery on Lorne Street is destroyed by fire and rebuilt, only to be destroyed by fire again in 1938.
- BC Fruitlands leases 46 acres to the City of Kamloops on what is now the Kamloops Airport.



1934

- Kamloops Cannery attempts to revive after some dormant years. A new board of directors, with Charles Bickford as operator, runs the cannery.

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Canada's Tournament Capital

1935

- Range problems lead to the establishment of a research station. Today, the Agriculture Canada Research Station along Ord Road continues with agricultural research operations.



Canada's Tournament Capital

1936

- Harry Ord, one of the earliest Brocklehurst settlers and farmers begins planting hops. The dry climate initially gives good results. Ten years later, his hops cover 20 hectares.



Canada's Tournament Capital

1938

- An entomology field lab is built at Mission Flats.

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Canada's Tournament Capital

1939

- The Provincial Winter Fair moves to Kamloops. The fair is an agricultural showcase and 4-H event.

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Canada's Tournament Capital

1945

- Successfully operating since 1934, Kamloops Canneries is bought out by Royal City Foods, and Charles Bickford retires.

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1949

- The harvest at Jimeva Farms hits a peak of 40,000 boxes of apples. Severely frigid conditions hit the next year, and the orchard is never productive again.
- The cold weather in 1949-1950 destroys the growing industry, as many orchards and market farms disappear. 75% of the apples trees in Brocklehurst were killed.



Canada's Tournament Capital

1950s

- Improved highway networks result in more reliance on imported produce from out-of-country due to cost savings.
- The canning industry in Kamloops comes to an end.
- One severe early frost kills a large portion of the fruit trees in Brocklehurst (BC Fruitlands), which adds to the pressures on orchard and tomato growers to subdivide their land for housing.



Canada's Tournament Capital

1952

- Harry Ord's hops farm closes.

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Canada's Tournament Capital

1955

- The British Columbia Department of Agriculture Annual Report for 1955 notes that "farmers and ranchers have found it extremely difficult to obtain sufficient labour. The wages offered by industry cannot be met in agriculture at present relative economic levels. Insufficient manpower adds further to costs of production".
- Private ranch, Frolek Cattle Company is established in 1955.
- The Comazzetto's Home Dairy Farm closes.



Canada's Tournament Capital

1956

- In British Columbia, Canadian Cannery, which own four plants in the province, is purchased by the Del Monte Corporation of California.

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1958

- Royal City Cannery closes.

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Canada's Tournament Capital

1960

- By this time, three of the four canning plants bought by Del Monte are closed.

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Canada's Tournament Capital

1961

- In Kamloops, the overall acreage for commercial vegetables drops from 876 acres in 1951 to 238 acres in 1961.



1969

- Ferguson Equipment opens its doors at 852 Seymour Street. The new business featured top quality lawn and garden products and good old fashioned customer service.

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Canada's Tournament Capital

1973

- The Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR), a provincial zone in which agriculture is recognized as the priority use, is established on April 18 in BC. Farming is encouraged and non-agricultural uses are controlled within this zone.
- The Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR) is established through cooperative efforts with regional districts and member municipalities. Local input on an ALR plan is gained through a Public Hearing process.



Canada's Tournament Capital

1973

- The BC Livestock Association vacates the original cattle barn. The Western Canada Theatre Company moves into the building.
- By 1973, hops production ceases.



1974 to 1976

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Canada's Tournament Capital

1978

- The Kamloops Farmers' Market is established and held every Saturday and Wednesday between the months of April and May. The market encourages and supports local production of food and provides an outlet for local produce and foods in order to promote local food security.



Canada's Tournament Capital

1981

- The Province of BC enacts the Milk Industry Standards Regulation.



Canada's Tournament Capital

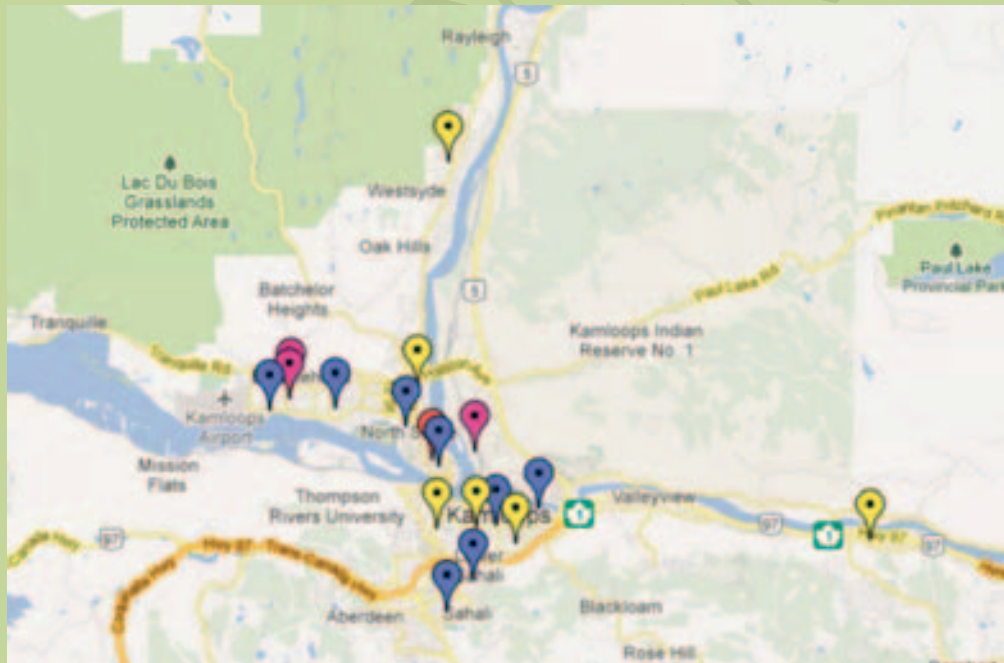
1983

- The Blackwells build their own pasteurization facility, after many years of selling raw milk to plants in Kelowna, Armstrong, and Vernon.



1984

- The Crestline Garden, Kamloops' first community garden, is established. Today there are more than 18 community gardens throughout the City.



1985

- The Sahali Community Garden is established.
- The Dhaliwal family begins farming and selling to the local farmers' market and later buys land in Heffley Creek where they still operate a successful potato and onion farm today.
- Agriforum '85 is hosted by Cariboo College (now Thompson Rivers University) and the Kamloops Chamber of Commerce. The event is for food producers interested in information about agriculture production and potential in the Thompson Valley.



Canada's Tournament Capital

1986

- Ginseng farming in the Kamloops and surrounding area begins to blossom and produce a quality product that is recognized worldwide.
- At one point in time, Chai-Na-Ta, located just outside of Kamloops, is the world's largest grower and exporter of North American ginseng.



1995

- Kamloops Food Policy Council is established to promote public education on food security issues as well as work on concrete food system projects.



KAMLOOPS
Food Policy Council



Canada's Tournament Capital

1996

- The Investment Agriculture Foundation of British Columbia (IAF), an industry-led, not-for-profit organization, is established with a mandate to administer federal and provincial industry development programs.



Canada's Tournament Capital

1997

- The BC Agriculture Council is formed in response to a need for a unified provincial organization that would represent farmers in all sectors and all regions of the province.



1999

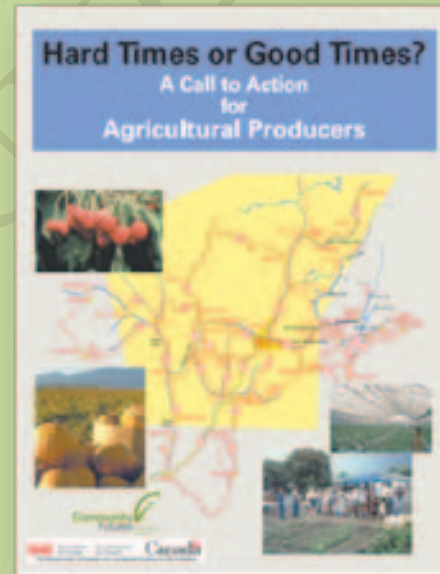
- Tk'emlups Indian Band purchases and incorporates Spiyu7ullucw Ranch Corporation (formerly Harper Ranch);
 - The deeded land is approximately 4,763 acres;
 - It encompasses approximately 16,000 acres of provincial grazing leases; and
 - Alfalfa is planted on approximately 500 acres.



Canada's Tournament Capital

2000

- Community Futures, Thompson Country (CFTC) commissions a study called 'Back to the Land-Agricultural Opportunities', which examines alternative crops that could be produced on small acreages to diversify the income of these producers.



2004

- CFTC undertakes a massive fence removal and replacement program for local ranchers who lost their fences to the wildfires of 2003. Through job creation partnerships with Service Canada, 50.8 km of five-strand barbed wire fences are removed and replaced for local area ranchers.
- The Province of BC enacts a Meat Inspection Regulation under the *Food Safety Act*. The regulation governs the slaughter of animals for food sales in BC.
- The BC Food Processors Association is formed to develop and support the food processing sector across the province.



Canada's Tournament Capital

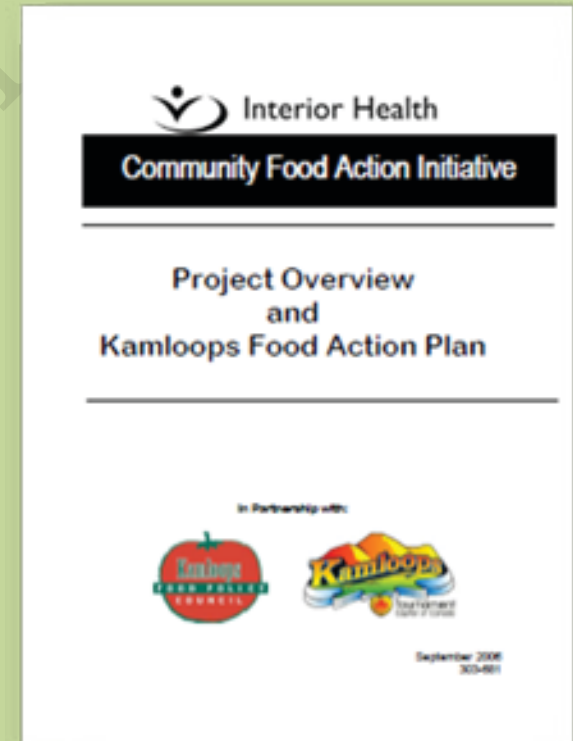
2005

- CFTC partners with Western Economic Diversification Canada, Ministry of Agriculture and Land, Investment Agriculture Foundation of BC to host the Interior Livestock Marketing Seminar, which provides insight into the realities of the implementation of the meat inspection regulations that became commonplace for abattoirs throughout the region.
- The ginseng farming industry in Kamloops and surrounding area begins to suffer from competition from cheaper ginseng growing markets in Asia. This results in most of the ginseng farms in the region closing their operations.
- Cattle drive is cancelled after 14 years as a result of competition, insurance costs, and problems at the previous year's event.



2006

- The Interior Health Authority, City of Kamloops, and Kamloops Food Policy Council partner to undertake the Community Food Action Initiative project in 2006. The goal of the project is to engage stakeholders in efforts to strengthen and support food planning, policy, and practices in the Kamloops region.



2007

- Best Practices in Urban Agriculture background report is completed for the City of Kamloops to support the development of an urban agriculture strategy.
- In November, the Premier of British Columbia convenes an Agriculture Climate Action Forum in Kamloops. It includes presentations by the Minister of Agriculture and Lands, industry representatives, and members of the provincial Climate Action Secretariat. In response to the issues identified in the forum, the Investment Agriculture Foundation of BC and the British Columbia Agriculture Council jointly establish the Climate Action Initiative project to assess the impact of climate change on agriculture and agri-food and assess the sector's challenges and opportunities to respond within an agricultural Climate Change Action Plan.



Canada's Tournament Capital

2008

- CFTC partners with Heartland Quality Foods, the Investment Agriculture Foundation of BC, and the Kamloops Food Policy Council to conduct an agriculture feasibility analysis to determine the marketing and distribution challenges facing the local food producers.



2009

- Friends of the New Victory Gardens begin hosting an annual Seedy Saturday event to promote saving seeds and growing food locally.
- The world's largest grower/exporter of North American ginseng, Chai-Na-Ta, closes its doors.



Canada's Tournament Capital

2010

- One of the last remaining apple orchards in the City of Kamloops is subdivided and listed for sale for residential housing.
- Farm-to-table living is promoted through a new master planned sustainable community in Kamloops called "Tranquille on the Lake". The fully operational urban farm adjacent to the residential area will be a model for the latest in sustainable, green farming practices, setting a new standard in environmentally responsible agricultural stewardship. Residents will also have access to community gardens where they will be able to grow their own produce.
- The BC Cattlemen's Association, which has operated in Kamloops since 1929, moves north and holds its annual meeting in Williams Lake.



Canada's Tournament Capital

2011

- Kamloops loses the Provincial Winter Fair as it moves to Barriere. For 72 years, farmers from around BC have been drawn to this agricultural showcase.

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2012

- The City of Kamloops begins planning for a City Agriculture Area Plan to develop policies, strategies, and programs to promote and protect the long-term sustainability of local agriculture and local producers.
- Thompson Shuswap Food Connections project is initiated by CFTC to strengthen the local food economy by identifying opportunities to diversify local farm production and expand local markets.
- Thompson Rivers University's Friends of the Garden (FOG) plan for Kamloops 1st Annual Tomato Festival.



References

- BC Museum & Archives
- Community Futures Thompson Country
- Tourism Kamloops
- Beyond City Limits - Rural History in British Columbia: R. W. Sandwell



Canada's Tournament Capital