

# Valley at farming's 'cutting edge'

Praise for sector's  
diversification here

By Philip Round  
Echo Staff

The Comox Valley is at the cutting edge of agricultural diversification, says the editor of Canada's leading farming magazine, Country Guide.

In an interview with the Echo yesterday, Tom Burton praised the way farmers and other agricultural entrepreneurs are listening to what customers want.

"The most transformative energy in agriculture today is the people - smart people making smart decisions," he said.

"And farmers in the Comox Valley are listening really intently, watching what consumers want and really working on it."

He coupled the positive attitude among individuals with the proactive approach of Comox Valley Economic Development Society (CVEDS) in encouraging crop diversification and the manufacturing of food-related products.

"Not all places can be like that - the approach wouldn't work in the middle of Saskatchewan, for example," said Burton. "But the Comox Valley is well placed."

In the latest issue of the magazine, he spotlights eight areas of Canada that he sees as 'hot spots in agriculture'.

He accepts "no two people would choose the same list" and expects to receive plenty of emails and phone calls suggesting alternative locations.

But he writes that the Comox Valley stands out as one of the places where people have shown themselves to be great at deciding what they want and have proved they are good at doing it.

"At the heart of (these areas) are bold thinkers who are also realistic in deciding what's possible," he notes.

"They are shrewd in assessing their strengths and weaknesses and they're acute in determining whether their ideas make business sense. They're people for us to learn from."

Burton's article states there are 100,000 acres of protected agricultural land surrounding Comox, Courtenay and Cumberland, but only about a third of it is currently farmed.

And even where farming is happening, it is not always being carried out to its full potential.

He gives positive accounts of diversification, ranging from farmers whose families have been established for generations - like the McClintocks - to totally new businesses like the Beaufort Winery.

Much of the report is based on promotion of the area by CVEDS, although Burton stressed the article was independently researched and written by himself and was not subject to advertising support.

The economic development society is clearly delighted by the national exposure.

"To be named as a top agricultural destination in Canada is testament to (teamwork) and typifies the incredible momentum in this sector," said CVEDS executive director John Watson.

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## Praise for farmers

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And local MLA Stan Hagen - who is also provincial agriculture minister - also lauded the endorsement.

"With the availability of fertile agricultural land, coupled with incredible climate and demand for locally-produced products, the area offers an uncanny opportunity for investors looking to produce a myriad of diverse products," he wrote.

The full Country Guide article - and profiles of the other seven 'hot spots' from Alberta to Nova Scotia - can be viewed online at [www.country-guide.ca](http://www.country-guide.ca)