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Liquid gold

A well-maintained irrigation system makes for well-maintained orchards, as Lake Country orchardist Bruce Naka demonstrates during the Lake Country Farmers Institute social at the Alfred family's 99 Rows Venue and Vineyard on June 5. "This high-density orchard is about 40 years old," said Naka, "and it shows that if you install a good irrigation system and maintain it, it lasts." Water is anything but a dry topic for farmers, many of whom are facing a third year of drought despite a reprieve this spring as cool weather brought gentle rains to the southern half of the province. | MYRNA STARK LEADER

Disaster fund denied

Feds refuse long-awaited financial support

KATE AYERS

ABBOTSFORD – Ottawa has denied millions in funding to the three municipalities hit hardest by the 2021 atmospheric rivers.

Abbotsford, Merritt and Princeton received written notice at the end of May that their applications to the federal Disaster Mitigation and Adaptation Fund were rejected due to a lack of information.

The application packages each totalled more than 500 pages, leaving the mayors

Promise betrayed ▶

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BC Milk halts deductions

PETER MITHAM

BURNABY – The BC Milk Marketing Board will not resume deductions from producer returns to fund Dairy Innovation West (DIW) following a request from the BC Farm Industry Review Board. BC FIRB directed BC Milk on May 22 to cease any participation in funding arrangements for DIW, given its status as a regulator rather than a shareholder in DIW. BC Milk told BC FIRB in February it had made two payments totalling

\$310,335.45 funded by transportation levies BC Milk deducts from producer returns. The deduction amounted to 23 cents per hectolitre, a small amount in itself, but significant as producers continue to wrestle with tight margins. The deductions were set to resume this month. BC's share in DIW are held by the Dairy Industry Development Council, which anted \$1.5 million this spring to cover BC's portion of \$8 million in costs not covered by the project's \$70 million construction loan from Farm

Credit Canada. There was no update at press time how BC would cover its remaining share of the \$8 million (a sum of approximately \$1 million). "[DIDC] is working with fellow shareholders on solutions to ensure the project is a success," a statement to *Country Life in BC* says. BC FIRB says it is in discussions with BC Milk regarding its activities with respect to DIW and the larger transformation initiative underway within the Western Milk Pool.

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► Promise betrayed, says farmer who hosted ag ministers

“flabbergasted,” according to Abbotsford Mayor Ross Siemens.

“This is the most productive farmland in the country, and for us to get zero ... I mean, we knew we weren't going to get the whole amount, but we were expecting a substantial chunk,” Siemens says. “We were just absolutely astounded.”

The three municipalities each received similar responses, the only difference being the recipients addressed at the top of each letter.

Abbotsford's long-term DMAF application included three projects totalling \$1.6 billion, Siemens says.

If approved, \$66 million would have been used for upgrades to the Barrowtown Pump Station, \$870 million for a new Sumas River pump station and \$120 million for flood storage and habitat enhancement work.

Earlier this year, the province announced \$76 million for the first of the three projects, increasing the Barrowtown Pump Station's resiliency with wing walls to protect the facility.

A round of federal funding would have supported design work and the ordering of equipment.

“This [provincial funding] was a very clear message to the federal government that the province takes this issue in our valley, here in our region, in our province, very seriously,” Siemens says.

In Merritt, \$48 million was requested to reinforce the

Main Street bridge as well as to repair pump stations and other damaged equipment.

In addition, as part of the Coldwater Land Acquisition Plan, the city requested \$21 million to acquire land and build a dike that would protect over 1,270 homes.

Merritt will continue to push for federal support and met with DMAF representatives on June 12.

“The one thing that will never happen with this mayor and council is we'll never let this ball stop rolling. We need to protect our citizens,” says City of Merritt mayor Mike Goetz. “Considering we had Minister Blair here telling everybody how much he had our back and we wouldn't be forgotten, the exact opposite has happened.”

The dairy sector also expressed disappointment in the decision.

“Infrastructure failure poses a significant threat to Sumas Prairie farms, who generate economic benefits for the Abbotsford community, in addition to contributing to our provincial food supply,” BC Dairy general manager Jeremy Dunn says in a statement. “It is crucial for government to take the steps needed to ensure that our local and provincial infrastructure is upgraded to protect our homes, our businesses and our provincial economy from future impacts related to extreme climate events fueled by ongoing climate change.”

The new federal funding would further the initial

recovery work funded through a historic, \$228 million recovery package former federal agriculture minister Marie-Claude Bibeau and her BC counterpart Lana Popham

“This is not just their homes and their life, this is provincial food security ...”

ROSS SIEMENS, MAYOR OF ABBOTSFORD

announced in February 2022.

The funds followed a December 2021 visit to Oranya Farms in Abbotsford to see first-hand the damage the flooding had caused and pledge their governments' support for the sector.

Oranya owner Corry Spitters operates four farms on Sumas Prairie and lost about 200,000 birds in the flooding that fall.

“They came to my farm,” says Spitters, who considers the latest federal rejection a betrayal. “Bibeau assured us with Lana Popham ... that Ottawa was going to be there to fix this problem, to be there to support the local farmers. And now they're reneging on it.”

Siemens says the ball is now in the province's court.

“Next steps are really to get people to make this a federal government issue. The province [has] given us some good support, but we'll be relying on them to amplify our voice,” he says.

Meanwhile, UBC researchers are calling for the return of Sumas Lake, drained to create Sumas Prairie in 1924, as a means of creating a more flood-resistant landscape.

cost around \$1 billion based on assessed values.

The report doesn't take market value into account or factor in lost revenue and other costs, but money is the least of the issues for Baars.

What's really at stake is food security.

“The issue is that there's thousands of acres of phenomenal farmland that are feeding people,” he says. “There are millions of people that live within 100 kilometres of the Sumas flats that literally get fed

fresh produce a large part of the year from that land. ... People are going into food banks, and we have a food crisis in our country. Why would you drown farmland? Unless you have an answer to that, there's no point talking about the math.”

Siemens agrees.

“This is the most productive farmland in the country. We have three, four generations of families that have poured their heart and soul into [their farms]. This is not just their homes and their life, this is provincial food security,” Siemens says. “[And] if we're going to relocate those farms, where on earth do you think we are going to find that productive of farmland in the province of British Columbia?”

Sumas First Nation did not respond to an interview request before deadline, but Chief Dalton Silver has gone on the record speaking against displacing those living, working and farming on Sumas Prairie, saying it would echo the injustice done to his own people when Sumas Lake was drained.

UBC researchers propose a buy-out of properties on the lakebed, which they say would

MEA CULPA

We were mortified when several readers called us out on the photo used with the story *Chicken growers welcome new longterm pricing* in our June edition. The photo was of caged laying hens, not broilers. We sincerely apologize for the error (and welcome photos of your meat birds).



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