

Professional Development Coordinator's Report

Dear Registrants of the BCIA FV Branch:

The Fraser Valley Branch delivered a diverse and engaging series of Professional Development (PD) events throughout 2025. These events supported member learning, strengthened community connections, and highlighted innovative agricultural practices across the region.

May 7, 2025 – Sekhon and Sons Nursery Tour (Piroche Plants), Pitt Meadows

The tour at Sekhon and Sons Nursery was an excellent success, with full attendance from BCIA members and guests. Farm owner Rajveer (Raj) Dhillon welcomed participants and provided an overview of recent improvements since acquiring the farm in 2021. While the previous owner focused on collecting rare Asian plants, Raj has shifted the nursery toward market-driven production, including a growing emphasis on native species.

Participants learned about plant varieties, propagation techniques, irrigation and water management, marketing strategies, inventory tracking, and adaptations to climate-driven trends such as climate-resilient and low-flammability species. The nursery's extensive WIFI-enabled inventory software was also demonstrated. (19 participants)

June 12, 2025 – Stó:lō Tourism Tour, St. Mary's Residential School Grounds, Mission

BCIA registrants joined Stó:lō Tourism for a powerful and reflective tour of the former St. Mary's Residential School, the last residential school to operate in British Columbia, closing in 1986. The tour provided important insights into the lived experiences of Survivors and the ongoing impacts on Indigenous communities. The event encouraged participants to reflect deeply on reconciliation and its relevance to personal and professional practice. (30 participants)

July 21, 2025 – Organic Blueberry Tour, Virasat Farms

Thirty-five participants attended a regenerative organic blueberry production tour at Virasat Farms, hosted by owner Gurprit Singh Brar. The tour showcased chemical-free blueberry production across nearly 40 acres of three organic cultivars—Calypso, Liberty, and Aurora.

Participants learned about organic certification, soil type impacts on growth, nutrient retention, and water movement. Varietal selection, disease management, and market considerations were also discussed. A diverse cover crop mix planted between rows demonstrated approaches to weed suppression, soil improvement, and beneficial insect support. (35 participants)

August 2, 2025 – Follow-up Saffron Farm Tour, Ramsar Berry Farm

Twelve BCIA registrants and four guests participated in a follow-up tour focusing on saffron bulb (corm) multiplication. Owner Avtar Dhillon demonstrated the growth cycle by digging into raised beds and explaining typical yield patterns, with each bulb producing 7–8 new bulbs annually. Differences between bulbs grown in native versus garden soil were examined, with garden soil producing larger and more numerous bulbs.

Dhillon also shared a small plot of Ashwagandha under experimentation. (16 participants)

October 23, 2025 – BC Hazelnut Industry Tour, Van Maren Hazelnut Farm, Chilliwack

Twenty-eight Agrologists attended a comprehensive session on hazelnut production. Professor Chris Bodner (UFV) provided an overview of the history, challenges, and innovations within British Columbia's hazelnut sector. Farm owner Cornel Van Maren explained the complete production cycle from tree establishment to processing.

The group discussed differences among hazelnut varieties, disease resistance, and production potential. Van Maren highlighted strong connections with Oregon hazelnut producers and shared insights on industry collaboration. The session was highly interactive and benefited from clear weather. (28 participants)

November 6, 2025 – Agriculture & Research at the University of the Fraser Valley (UFV)

Twenty-seven registrants attended a visit hosted by UFV's Agricultural faculty. Professor Chris Bodner welcomed participants and provided updates on the development of UFV's four-year Agribusiness and Animal Science degree programs.

Research presentations included:

- Cranberry variety evaluation
- Perennial plant restoration
- Climate-resilient crop production
- Dryland rice research
- Berry Environmental Resilience Research & Innovation (BERRI) Centre overview
- Utilization of low-value crops and coproducts in animal production
- Poultry welfare, chick processing, and stress measurement research

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Participants toured UFV's research greenhouses and engaged in discussion about aligning academic research with local agricultural challenges. This event helped strengthen links between industry and academia. (27 participants)

Submitted by:

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