

What is Agrology in BC?

Submitted by Angeli dela Rosa

When I first heard the term ‘agrology’ in 2017, I was intrigued enough to apply for a student membership with the BC Institute of Agrologists but did not really understand what an agrologist does. I was excited to meet an articling agrologist at the BC Seed Gathering conference that same year and I asked her what she does. She patiently answered my question and talked about her work supporting farmers to get free environmental risk assessments for their operations. I realize now that it must be a common occurrence for agrologists to be asked the question, “What do you do as an agrologist?”, and that there is no single answer to that question.

Agrology is a practice and a profession. Agrologists use evidence-based practices from science and economics to support work in the agricultural and environmental sectors. In British Columbia, the Agrologists Act regulates the profession and recognizes the purpose of the BCIA in upholding the public interest and governing its members. A person generally cannot use the title ‘agrologist’ unless they are registered as a member of the institute in good standing. Members must adhere to the institute’s Code of Ethics and act with integrity, competence, and objectivity in fulfilling their duties as agrologists. There is no one specific degree or educational background required to work as an agrologist, but registered members of the BCIA must have at least an undergraduate degree and have taken courses in the natural sciences, agriculture, or resource economics. They must gain work experience in agrology and commit to continued professional development every year.

Agrology in BC is a diverse profession that supports a range of industries. The BCIA recognizes 38 areas of practice for agrology that fall under one or more sectors (agricultural, environmental, agricultural and environmental, life sciences, food, common practice areas, and aquaculture). Almost half of the BCIA’s members declared working in the environmental sector in 2017. The largest single employer of agrologists in the province is the provincial government, mostly in the Ministry of Agriculture and FLNRO. Agrologists can also work for other levels of government, agricultural and natural resource firms, post-secondary institutions, NGOs, and operate their own consulting business. Many agrologists are advocates and activists for a range of issues including climate change and agricultural land preservation.

As for what BC’s agrologists actually do on a day-to-day basis, it varies. A scan of the BCIA’s Featured Agrologists shows that many agrologists engage in technical work in the field or in the lab such as monitoring invasive plants, snorkeling to survey mussel populations, conducting groundwater sampling, and managing soils data using GIS. Other agrologists are involved in education, teaching at colleges and universities or training staff to work with small farmers in other countries about pest management. And many agrologists work with people, supervising teams, meeting with industry and First Nations stakeholders, and delivering presentations to share the results of their work. Across this diversity, BC agrologists are united by their commitment to scientific principles and environmental stewardship.

Sources

Agrologists Act -

http://www.bclaws.ca/EPLibraries/bclaws_new/document/ID/freeside/00_03013_01#section3

BC Institute of Agrologists - BCIA Website and Resources - <https://www.bcia.com/>

Robert Moody – An Introduction to the Profession of Agrology (presentation) -

https://www.bcia.com/sites/default/files/imce/Resources/UBC_BCIA%20Intro%20Sept%202016.pdf