

## What is Agrology in British Columbia?

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Agrology is the objective application of science and economics to manage agriculture and natural resources, with the overarching objective of sustaining of our finite land and water systems. In BC, agrology as a profession is governed by the BC Institute of Agrologists (BCIA) under the provincial *Agrologists Act* (Government of BC 2003). The role of the BCIA is to protect public interest by ensuring the integrity and competency of its professional members (BCIA 2019a). As part of this, the BCIA is responsible for verifying that new members meet the membership criteria of, at minimum, a Bachelor's degree in an agrology area of practice (BCIA 2019b). To transition from Articling Agrologist to Professional Agrologist standing, members must then fulfill requirements including completing agrology work experience and professional development, participating in BCIA provincial and branch activities, and taking an ethics workshop (BCIA 2019c). This highlights the BCIA's role in not only providing regulating and disciplining functions but facilitating mentorship and professional growth.

Since its inception in 1947, the BCIA has grown to over 1,600 members and has broadened from a focus on agriculture to a multidisciplinary natural resource profession encompassing 38 areas of practice under sectors including agriculture, environment, life sciences and food (BCIA 2019a, 2019d, 2019e). These varied areas of practice align with the diversity of ecosystems across BC and the wide-ranging industries and ecosystem services they support. Professional Agrologists can be found working in government laboratories refining food safety practices, doing contaminated site assessments for oil and gas operations, providing extension services to farmers as integrated pest management consultants, supporting First Nation community development and land use planning processes, and restoring salmon habitat as part of NGO projects. These are but a few examples of Agrologists at work, yet they illustrate the diversity of employers, skill sets and work environments. The numerous industries that rely on Agrologists' expertise translate into massive value for the province. In 2017, the agrifood and seafood industry provided 28,500 jobs and contributed \$4.5 billion to BC's GDP while mining and oil and gas provided 28,900 jobs and contributed \$7.5 billion to BC's GDP (Statistics Canada 2019); these are only two examples of the many sectors in which Agrologists work. Despite this diversity of jobs held by Agrologists in BC, we all share a common commitment to the Code of Ethics, environmental stewardship and continued professional development. This aspect of Agrology is of the utmost importance given the public reliance on Agrologists to make evidence-based decisions that incorporate best practices, their specialized training and the latest scientific advances.

The future of agrology in BC will hold many changes with the new provincial *Professional Governance Act*, the scope of which includes giving Agrologists practice rights in addition to the existing title rights (Government of BC 2018). Right to practice combined with the increasing pressures on natural resources due to population growth and climate change highlight the critical role that Agrologists will continue to play in managing complex ecological and social landscapes to sustain BC's abundance resources—clean water, fertile soils and productive, biodiverse forests—and the ecosystem services they provide to all British Columbians.

## References

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