

NEWS RELEASE

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Campaign: *STOP NOW – No marijuana grow-ops on prime farmland!* gains province-wide momentum through efforts of a new community group

A new community group has been formed to tackle what many believe is a looming ‘Gold Rush’ of marijuana grow-ops on BC’s prime farmland in the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR). Citizens Protecting Agricultural Land (CPAL) wants the BC government to put local food security before the interests of the marijuana industry. CPAL is connecting voices who agree through their campaign, ***‘STOP NOW – No marijuana grow-ops on prime farmland’***. They also started a province-wide petition which they plan to present to the Legislative Assembly next month. CPAL’s message is gaining momentum.

Since its inception only three weeks ago, CPAL members have been spreading word of their ‘STOP NOW’ campaign within the Victoria area and beyond. They’ve met with politicians, the public, the media, community groups and business owners. CPAL members have also attended Town Hall meetings, and written letters to government officials and newspapers.

“The response has been tremendous,” says one CPAL member. “People are concerned that grow-ops threaten local food security. They’re surprised when they learn that grow-ops don’t require farmland, and outraged that the soil is being covered with concrete for greenhouses, destroying the agricultural value of the land. Hundreds of people have signed our petition and more are coming in.” The Central Saanich Community Association supports CPAL’s position. CPAL is seeking support from other associations as well as politicians, several of whom have already spoken out against the use of land in the ALR for grow-ops. CPAL is also exploring partnerships with like-minded community groups.

CPAL arose from local concerns about plans to construct a marijuana grow-op on prime farmland located within the ALR in the Martindale Valley, but the issue is province-wide in scope.

CPAL members are concerned prime farmland in the ALR is under immediate threat from grow-ops. “We’re seeing both new grow-op greenhouses being constructed, and existing greenhouses being converted from food crops to marijuana on land in the ALR,” says a CPAL member. “A marijuana ‘Gold Rush’ on prime farmland looms as the date for legalization approaches. We’re concerned this new demand is increasing agricultural land prices and will make it harder for the next generation of farmers to afford farmland.”

In 2015, the provincial government passed new rules to allow grow-ops on land in the ALR, even when local citizens and their municipal Councils disagree. CPAL believes the rules must be reversed NOW in order to save prime farmland for food crops. The province recently formed a committee to review the ALR and make recommendations in late 2018 or 2019. But CPAL members say we can’t wait that long.

“We must say ‘STOP NOW’, before any more prime farmland is lost to the marijuana industry. We’re urging members of the public to sign our petition and write letters to the Minister of Agriculture. This will send a strong, unified message to the provincial government that we want them to put local food security before the interests of the marijuana industry. We don’t want the next generations of British Columbians to have to rely on other countries for our food crops.”

For more information: contact CPAL Communications Coordinator (Ken at email: kgm@telus.net)