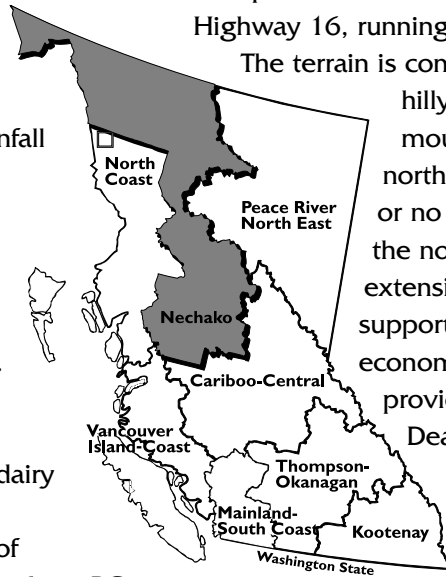


# Nechako Region Agriculture Profile

## Key Features

- Growing season varies considerably throughout the region.
- Precipitation varies throughout the region with a trend of increasing rainfall to the westward.
- Frost-free days: 52-90 (varies significantly across the region depending on geographic characteristics).
- Annual precipitation (mm) 464-522.
- Agricultural production takes place mainly in the flat river valleys and is primarily forage (feed) for beef and dairy herds.
- Agricultural production in the form of feeder cattle is sold to feedlots in southern BC and Alberta. Dairy processing occurs in Prince George and Telkwa.
- Cereal grain production is increasing.



transportation link between these communities is Highway 16, running east-west.

The terrain is composed of a high, rolling or hilly plateau bound by rugged mountains on the west and northeastern borders. There is little or no commercial forest cover in the northern half, but forests are extensive in the south where they support a large part of the local economy. The mining industry has provided the economic base in Atlin, Dease Lake and Fraser Lake.

## Land

The Nechako region covers an area of 20,931,500 ha.

Approximately 1.5% (364,721 ha) of the region is in the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR). This represents 2.6% of the total provincial ALR. The major farming areas in the region are in the Bulkley Valley-Lakes District and around Vanderhoof. Agriculture occurs mainly in the river valleys, where the land is relatively flat and the soil is fertile. About 50,000 ha of land are cultivated, the main crops being forage for beef and dairy herds.

## Agriculture

Ranching has increased dramatically in the Nechako region since the late 1970s. Almost 80% of the increase in the BC cattle herd since 1976 has occurred north of the traditional Thompson/Cariboo-Central beef regions.

At the same time, new land has been cleared for crop production. The Vanderhoof district has a significant amount of cereal crops, possibly more than any other area outside the Peace River North East region. Agriculture in the region is still

Population	39,837
Number of Farms	840
Land Actively Farmed	251,422 ha
Land in ALR	373,260 ha
Total Farm Capital	\$850 million
Jobs	12,033 weeks paid labour annually
Gross Farm Receipts	\$54.2 million
Annual Farm Wages	\$5.32 million

## The Nechako Region

The Nechako region is the second largest of the development regions, containing 20.7% of the provincial land area, but only 1% of the population. The bulk of the population lives in communities along the rail-highway corridor from Smithers to Vanderhoof and Fort St. James. A primary

characterized by enterprising part-time farmers.

The 840 farms in the Nechako region generate sales of about \$54 million, from an investment of about \$850 million in land, livestock, buildings and machinery. Much of this investment is new and has yet to realize its full potential. The high level of off-the-farm work, the tremendous agricultural potential and the relative infancy of the agricultural service sector in this region all point to significant potential for growth.

Cereal production in the region is increasing, particularly near Vanderhoof. Other short-season crops are also grown in the Nechako region. Although much new land has been made available to agriculture by clearing forested areas, the cost is very high. The local market for fresh, in-season fruits and vegetables is not developed.

The winter feeding period, which lasts from mid-November to mid-May, results in high feed costs. Future increases in local feed production are expected to help resolve this problem.

Transportation costs to markets are high. For example, shipping costs to the Lower Mainland or Kamloops are higher than that for producers farther south. With only a small local market available, shipping commodities to markets outside the region is a limiting factor on increasing production in the region. In the dairy and egg sectors, which are under supply management, producers have to buy quota to enter the industry. As for many other regions, some of consumer demand is being met by producers in the southern parts of the province who have an advantage in feed costs and production capability.

The biggest advantages that the Nechako region enjoy over the southern regions are the low cost of land and the availability of range. For example, the average cost of land in the Vanderhoof area is about 10 to 15 times lower than land near Abbotsford. Working with the forestry industry is beneficial for ranchers because it opens up range for grazing. Vegetative growth in clearcuts is quite vigorous and many of the plants make very good forage for ruminants.

The Prince Rupert grain port is a significant terminal for grain exports from across Canada. It

may offer good access for commodities produced in this region at some time in the future. Production of field crops requires refined management because of unique geographic and climatic characteristics. This is contributing to a larger livestock industry for ranchers. Despite the fact that backgrounding (feeding calves for feedlot) is well established here, some 70% of calves leave the region to be backgrounded and finished in other areas, particularly in Alberta. Expanded backgrounding could reduce this figure.

New areas of agriculture that are economically feasible are game farming and fur farming due to low land costs. Low population densities in the region mean that such enterprises could operate with little conflict. Several major salmon rivers originate in the Nechako. Thirty per cent of all BC salmon spawn in the region.

### **Food Processing**

Food and beverage processing in the region is limited. However, continued expansion of agriculture in the Nechako region will undoubtedly lead to increased processing activity. Slaughterhouses and feed mills will be required to service the beef herd industry in the future. There is currently a small local slaughter plant and a dairy processor in the region. The regional market is already large enough to warrant local processing of dairy and poultry products. The existing quota system allows for most of the local consumption of dairy and poultry products to be met by local production.

### **Selected Crop and Livestock Inventories (2011 Census)**

Grains	9,700 ha
Hay and Pasture	176,000 ha
Alfalfa	32,935 ha
Hay	49,584 ha
Potatoes	15 ha
Fruits, Berries and Nuts	9 ha
Field Grown Vegetables	21 ha
Nursery Products	3 ha
Greenhouses	12,213 m <sup>2</sup>
Christmas Trees	21 ha

Hens and Chickens	9,046	Rabbits	298
Cattle and Calves	61,525	Goats	998
Pigs	459		
Sheep	2,690		
Horses and Ponies	3,021		

***Estimated Gross Farm Receipts (2011 Census)***

Community	Number of Farms	Gross Farm Receipts
Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako	840	\$54,186,702

