



SHAWNIGAN COBBLE HILL FARMERS INSTITUTE  
AND AGRICULTURAL SOCIETY

2021/22 Annual Report to the CVRD

Submitted by: Gerry Giles, Secretary  
Date: August 9, 2021

As this report is being written, we are, hopefully, nearing the end of the global pandemic known as Covid19. This virus has adversely impacted the lives of individuals as well as the bottom line of businesses and organizations including the many not-for-profit societies in our community. The Shawnigan Cobble Hill Farmers Institute and Agricultural Society (Farmers Institute) is no exception to the effect this wide-ranging disease has had on the valley, the province, the country and the world.

Since March of 2020, all fundraising and community events normally hosted by the Farmers Institute have been cancelled. To comply with the orders issued by Dr. Bonnie Henry, the Provincial Health Officer, all building rentals have also been cancelled. The rental situation along with its influence on the Farmers Institute's operating budget is reviewed monthly by the Directors of the organization.

With all fundraising activities and building rentals on hold, now more than ever, the annual grant provided by Cobble Hill taxpayers, through the Cowichan Valley Regional District (CVRD), is paramount to the Farmers Institute's continued existence.

We are hopeful a return to normal operations can commence in September of this year. Although we expect our regular users to return as soon as permitted by the Provincial Health Officer, we do not expect full building rentals will return until people gain enough confidence to attend indoor gatherings like weddings, anniversaries, celebrations of life and other activities that involve a large number of people.

Given the above, the following information is offered in order to present some background to the annual grant provided to the Farmers Institute. In November of 1985, a referendum was held during the Cobble Hill civic elections to gauge taxpayers support for providing an annual grant to the Farmers Institute. In that referendum, Cobble Hill residents voted 'yes' by over 70 per cent thereby giving permission for an annual grant to go toward the maintenance and operation of the Cobble Hill Hall. Every year the funds provided by Cobble Hill taxpayers have been used to cover annual insurance costs with any remaining funds going toward the maintenance of the facility.

As a result of the pandemic, the funds provided by Cobble Hill taxpayers have become even more crucial to the continuation of a society that has existed for 107 years.

We are grateful to the citizens of Cobble Hill for this annual grant. As in past years, this year's funds will pay insurance costs, anywhere from \$18,000 to \$21,000, as well as help this volunteer organization to maintain and operate the Cobble Hill Hall, the Youth Hall and the Stu Armour Hall along with the various buildings situated on the approximate 6 acres of land that comprise the Farmers Institute's holdings, which are located in the heart of the Cobble Hill Village.

This annual funding normally enables our volunteer members to plan and carry out annual activities that enrich the lives of many in the South Cowichan area. As previously mentioned, most of the events held by the Farmers Institute, including hall rentals, have been cancelled. However, one of our sponsored events has adapted to the challenges presented by the pandemic and it is still operating and gaining support.

1. **South Cowichan Seniors** - Over the past eight years, more than 150 Seniors from across the valley gathered in the Cobble Hill Hall on the second and fourth Mondays of each month to enjoy the Seniors luncheons held there.

With the onset of Covid19, these inside events were cancelled in March of 2020 and replaced with a takeout meal service. The meals, made by 'Food Safe' volunteers, are designed to be satisfying and nutritious. Takeout meals are prepared and packaged on Sunday then either cooled or frozen for pick up or delivery on Monday. Over 250 meals are provided in this manner.

This group has also made meals for the Cowichan Green Community, the CMS Food Bank and the Malahat Nation. The Farmers Institute sponsors South Cowichan Seniors by providing free use of the Hall and kitchen.

### **NORMAL EVENTS CANCELLED FOR 2020 and 2021 - Hopefully returning in 2022**

2. **Seedy Saturday** - Our annual seed and garden show along with its seed exchange component brings people together to buy, sell and exchange seeds. The focus is on heirloom varieties. This event also provides an opportunity to learn about many aspects of gardening from the experts in attendance. In 2019 well over 2,500 people attend our expanded Seedy Saturday event held in the Cobble Hill and the Stu Armour Halls.
3. **Easter Egg Hunt** - The first 'hunt' was held in 2011 and it has grown in popular since then. The hunt focuses on providing younger children with a well protected venue for their event while also creating a more challenging environment for older ones. Over 100 children attended our 2019 event, which is without question the best Easter Egg Hunt in the Valley.

### **MODIFIED EVENTS FOR 2020 and 2021 - Hopefully returning in 2022**

4. **Cobble Hill Fair** - Although the traditional 112<sup>th</sup> Cobble Hill Fair is being held virtually again this year, we are hopeful this cornerstone event will return to its usual format in 2022. Last year's Virtual Fair was considered a success based upon the number of entries submitted. The Fair judges in 2020 were surprised by both the quality of the entries and the photographs submitted.

This year we are also celebrating the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Cobble Hill Hall's existence. In recognition of this historic milestone, we will be staging a day-long event on Saturday, August 28<sup>th</sup> featuring an outdoor concert, a show and shine, an antique farm equipment display along with a display of vintage and fancy motorcycles.

2022 will marked the 113<sup>th</sup> year Cobble Hill Fair. Our Fair is a wonderful reminder of Cobble Hill's agricultural past. It also notes, promotes and celebrates the future of our community and of agriculture in our area.

Ours is an old fashioned country Fair. It embraces everything from farm animals to scarecrow building, to wine making and to vegetable and flower exhibits. There are multiple exhibitors and competitors representing many aspects of community life in South Cowichan: bee keeping, history, quilting and the best cake baked by a man to name but a few. Our Fair was attended by approximately 6,000 people in 2019 and displays in our domestic science and photography sections were at an all time high. Every year we try to change the Fair by adding something new to keep it fresh and exciting for Fair goers.

Our Fair brings people from all walks of life together to celebrate the importance of agriculture and community. Hopefully, our 2022 Fair will be held in person on Saturday, August 27<sup>th</sup> and its return will be celebrated along with the other terrific family events held in the South Cowichan area.

### **UNKNOWN AT THIS TIME**

5. **2021 Remembrance Day Ceremonies** - On this day, the hall is usually filled to capacity for the Passing of the Torch ceremony while another 2,000 people wait outside for the Cenotaph ceremony. Time will tell whether this event can be held as usual or whether it will be modified again to be held outside only.
6. **Christmas 2021 and Spring 2022 Variety Shows** - We are hopeful these concerts can be held this winter and next spring. These variety shows are open to the community in exchange for a donation of food or cash for the CMS Food Bank. Over the years these events, featuring local talent, have proven to be wonderful community gatherings.

All Farmers Institute sponsored events are organized and staffed by very committed volunteers who generously give their time and energy to our community. We are fortunate to live in an area where volunteerism plays such a huge role in our daily lives.

Funds granted to Farmers Institute by Cobble Hill (Area 'C') taxpayers are gratefully acknowledged as being crucial to the repair, maintenance and operation of the Shawnigan Cobble Hill Farmers Institute and Agricultural Society's facilities.

Respectfully submitted,



Gerry Giles, Secretary