



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **COWICHAN INCUBATOR FARM GROW OPPORTUNITIES FOR NEW FARMERS**

COURTENAY – Farmers are getting older, and the number of new food producers is declining, region-wide. A new program in the Cowichan Valley is aiming to reverse that trend by teaching new farm entrepreneurs the ins and outs of this demanding but rewarding business.

The Island Coastal Economic Trust is providing \$10,000 in funding toward the Cowichan Farm Incubator Project.

Spearheaded by the Cowichan Green Community Society, the project - with a total budget of only \$108,000 - will help new farm entrepreneurs establish successful businesses by offering them temporary access to land and the use of equipment at low rates. Participants will also have resources and services that are often difficult for new farmers to access on their own. By providing these opportunities to new farmers, participant farmers will have a better chance of being successful in achieving their farm business goals.

“Food production is something many of us just take for granted, and we need to get more proactive in our thinking about farm business,” said ICET Board Chair Phil Kent. “This incubator project will help new farmers - particularly young farmers - to develop the skills and competencies they need for success.”

The Cowichan Green Community has secured a 3.5 acre parcel of land through the District of North Cowichan to implement the program. By offering low rental rates for land, the Cowichan Farm Incubator will help six new farmers get the experience they need in the business of agriculture.

“For centuries, farming was ‘the family business’, with knowledge and land passed down from generation to generation,” said Cowichan Green Community Executive Director Judy Stafford. “Today, we’re seeing many farmers retiring, and their kids want to do something different with their careers. This project will help to bring new people into farming, and that’s something that we all depend on.”

The project will cover all aspects of farming from local food production, processing and distribution to business planning, marketing and sales.

Participants will also receive ongoing support as they start their farming operations, with workshops and mentorship programs.

In addition, the project will develop a regional seed-bank social enterprise, filling a gap in the local agriculture sector when it comes to knowledge transfer and seed saving.

The project aligns with the Province of BC's Agrifoods Strategy and the Regional Agricultural Framework for Action, by providing practical education for future food producers.

Estimates on job creation show 12 temporary jobs, and 10 permanent jobs arising from this project over the first 3-5 years.

### **About the Island Coastal Economic Trust**

The Island Coastal Economic Trust is a \$50 million endowment established in 2006 by the Government of British Columbia to help diversify the economies of central and northern Vancouver Island and the Sunshine Coast.

ICET is guided by a Board of Directors and two Regional Advisory Committees which include more than 50 locally elected officials and MLAs and five appointees. This exceptional team of leaders collaborates to set regional priorities and build vital multi-regional networks.

Through a community-centred decision-making process, ICET has approved \$49 million for over 135 economic infrastructure and economic development readiness projects on the Island and Sunshine Coast since implementing its grant program in 2007. ICET investments have leveraged over \$276 million in incremental funding into the region.

A full overview of ICET can be found at [www.islandcoastaltrust.ca](http://www.islandcoastaltrust.ca)

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