



Mark Patrick photo

Bob Kallu began inquiring this week about the possibility of farming the contentious Garden City lands.

Blueberry farmer wants Garden City lands

Bob Kallu says property 'is just sitting there'

by Matthew Hoekstra
Staff Reporter

When farmer Bob Kallu looks across the Garden City lands, he sees blue. As in blueberries.

The 33-year-old's vision for the contentious land parcel in the heart of Richmond's growing city centre is an organic blueberry farm.

"I haven't made a proposal of what I want to do, but I will be thinking about how the community can be involved in it too."

Kallu appeared before council Monday, saying he wanted to "go on record" about his willingness to lease the land from the federal government and conclude a chapter in the political history of the 136-acre (55-hectare) plot.

Kallu, whose company name is Westcoast Harvesting, said his family has farmed blueberries in Richmond since 1970 and now has more than 100 acres around East Richmond.

The land is zoned agricultural and protected from development by the Agricultural Land Commission.

The landowner, the federal Canada Lands Company, made a pitch earlier this year with the City of Richmond and Musqueam First Nation to develop the site.

The plan would have split the land in two, one half for public amenities and a trade and exhibition centre, the other for a residential and mixed-use development.

But the commission rejected the bid in

September, opting to protect its farmland status.

Kallu, who began making calls this week to the landowner, said he didn't make his farming bid earlier because he wasn't aware the plot was agricultural land.

He believes the land is good for farming and nearby residential development won't affect his plans.

But the Canada Lands Company is still exploring options to get another deal together with the city and Musqueam that will be more palatable for the Agricultural Land Commission.

Randy Fasan, director of urban design and planning for the Canada Lands Company, said his company still has title to the land and is meeting with its partners.

"Our current strategy is to reapply, trying to address some of the reasons behind the original decision," Fasan said.

Even if the Agricultural Land Commission decides to protect the farmland in perpetuity, the Musqueam still has an outstanding claim on the land that's the subject of court injunction. That's not something Kallu is attempting to get involved in.

"I don't want to bother anybody or anything. I just want to lease the property and use it, because it's just sitting there. I know I can make use of it as farmland," he said.

"If the government gives me a chance to do that, I'd be more than happy to do that. Whoever it is I'm paying the lease to can get the money. I just want to farm it."

Organic farms are showing growth in B.C.

by Jeff Nagel

Black Press

Organic farming is growing rapidly in B.C., outperforming the sector in the rest of the country.

The number of certified organic farms in B.C. climbed 9.5 per cent in 2005 to 482, according to Canadian Organic Growers, an industry association.

Nearly three per cent of all farms are now using organic production methods—the highest rate in Canada.

"Every acre under organic management decreases the chemical load in our soils and water systems," said Laura Telford, executive director of Canadian Organic Growers.

Apples, green beans, potatoes and broccoli were among the top crop choices for B.C. organic farmers last year. Organic nut production is also on the rise.

The report shows more than 100 farms here converted from conventional to organic production last year.

Organic farms in Richmond include egg producer Rabbit River Organic Farms.

B.C. was a bright spot—the number of organic farms in the rest of Canada declined slightly.

Organic produce demand is rising by an estimated 20 per cent per year, but nearly 90 per cent of organic goods on Canadian shelves are imported.

The industry is preparing for further market growth as Wal-Mart prepares to start selling organic food.