

## AGRICULTURE

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# Toward a circular food economy

West Coast Reduction's organic recycling capacity plays a critical role in B.C.'s sustainable agriculture system

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Postmedia Content Works

All industries are focusing on their business models as they work to evolve to true sustainability. In British Columbia, the local agricultural sector is well on its way there, building a resilient and viable business model that minimizes waste, maximizes value and puts more local foods on family tables across the province at lower prices.

Vancouver-based West Coast Reduction Ltd. (WCRL) plays a critical role in completing that virtuous circle, ensuring that organic materials that would otherwise be disposed of as pre-consumer food waste are transformed into valuable products, from feedstock for renewable bio-fuels, to protein meal for agricultural feeds and pet foods, and raw material for fertilizers.

About 50 per cent of fish, beef, pork and poultry products are considered inedible by consumers. Since 1964, WCRL has been using its industrial-scale operations to process these materials and separate them into oils and protein, which are then used by other industries.

What makes this circular economy truly sustainable is that it isn't an artificial model created through legislation, but one forged



Vancouver-based WCRL plays a critical role in a circular economy, ensuring that organic materials that would otherwise be disposed of as pre-consumer food waste are transformed into valuable products. *SUPPLIED*

by willing partners who see its value.

"All participants, from small farms and agri-businesses to end buyers of our products are part of this process because it adds value to their enterprises," says Jared Girman, director of government relations and strategic initiatives at

WCRL. "Our agricultural partners supply us with the products we need because we pay for them. It takes a line item that would otherwise be a cost to the business and turns it into a profit centre. That revenue allows them to keep food prices low. Our customers, in turn, rely on us to provide

them with products that are critical to their own supply chains."

Through its Redux program, WCRL also collects used cooking oils from restaurants, grocery chains, food service companies, food processing companies and bakeries. Redux refines millions of pounds of used

cooking oil annually.

The province's CleanBC mandate has set a goal of producing 650 million litres of renewable liquid fuel in the province annually. In 2019 alone, WCRL supplied 232,000 tonnes of feedstock to bio-fuel producers, who are asking the company to supply twice as much going forward. Without that supply, goals set by both the province and bio-fuel producers would be derailed.

Customers for WCRL's protein products would be similarly sidelined without a sustainable supply.

"They require not only a guarantee of quality, but also an assurance of traceability," says Girman. "They need to know in transparent fashion exactly how that protein was derived and who supplied it. That way, they always know what goes into the food you provide your dog, your cat or local farm animals."

The volume of waste material processed by WCRL each year is so significant that it would overwhelm the capacity of existing local waste infrastructure. WCRL currently processes 1 billion lbs. of waste in Western Canada annually — its Vancouver plant alone handles an amount equivalent to 59 per cent of the organic waste produced in Greater Vancouver each year. However, a current ban on organics in local land-

fills means these materials would have to be transported elsewhere by truck or rail for disposal.

If all of the waste processed each year by WCRL's Port of Vancouver location were landfilled or composted, it would generate more than 120,000 tonnes of greenhouse gases, Girman says. In the future, the company will look to incorporate an anaerobic digestion system that would supply enough renewable natural gas to make its operations energy self-sufficient and better than carbon vneutral.

WCRL is a member of the Sustainable Food Alliance of BC (SFABC), an agricultural sector association which promotes a sustainable model designed to minimize waste while ensuring the production of healthy local foods for future generations.

"The agriculture sector in BC is a textbook example of a fully-functional circular economic model," says Ken Ingram, executive director of SFA. "But without every part of the system in place, the sustainable model falls apart. Food prices would rise and we would need to find new sources of imported proteins. BC relies heavily on the value chain created by deriving value from pre-consumer organic waste. If you took WCRL out of the equation, the regional food system would suffer."

# NOTHING LEFT BEHIND\*

## \* EXCEPT CLEANER FUEL.

At West Coast Reduction, nothing is important to us. Because when there's nothing left — that's when we've done our job. We collect food waste and by-products from food producers, like farms, restaurants and even supermarkets, transforming them into ingredients used in animal feed, renewable energy, and thousands of other products we use every day. Our efforts contribute to a sustainable local food supply, and help us all live in cleaner and healthier communities.

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