



Introducing Ari Westhaver: Cowichan's New Young Agrarians Land Matcher

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In Cowichan, a region steeped in agricultural tradition, a quiet crisis is unfolding. As older generations of farmers approach retirement, the challenge of transitioning farmland to new, capable hands is becoming increasingly urgent. Enter Ari Westhaver, the new Vancouver Island Land Matcher for [Young](#)

[Agrarians](#), who is stepping into this critical role to ensure that farming remains a vibrant part of Cowichan's future.

Ari, who took over from Kiyomi Ito, brings nearly a decade of experience in farming, agricultural education, and organic certification. His deep understanding of the challenges facing farmers today is at the core of his work with the [BC Land Matching Program \(BCLMP\)](#). *"The sense of community in small-scale agriculture is what kept me coming back season after season,"* says Ari, reflecting on his experience as a farmer. His commitment to cultivating these connections drives his work at Young Agrarians, where his role is to connect people with the land they need to farm.

Though Ari takes the lead as Land Matcher, Kiyomi continues to be a key part of the Young Agrarians team, in her new role as the BC Apprenticeship Program Manager. *"Kiyomi's ongoing involvement strengthens the work we do, helping ensure access to land and sustainable agricultural practices across the region,"* says Pascale Schittecatte-Ćirić, BCLMP Manager.

What is the BC Land Matching Program?

The BCLMP connects agricultural landholders with farmers ready to take it on at a commercial level. Whether you're new to farming or an established operator looking for more land, the program is designed to bridge the gap. *"We focus on new farmers, those with the skills and passion but without access to land, and those looking to expand their operations,"* explains Ari.

The program's primary goal is to ensure that existing farmland continues to be farmed, and under-utilized lands are put into production (as well as increasing the number of new and stable farm businesses in BC). *"We are preserving the agricultural legacy of Cowichan by ensuring that land is actively farmed for generations to come,"* says Ari.

The CVRD is proud to support the BCLMP in the Cowichan region through a \$30,000 contribution from the Strategic Initiatives Fund, approved by the Board on April 24, 2024. This funding reflects the CVRD's commitment to improving land access for new farmers and strengthening regional food security. Since launching on Vancouver Island in 2018, the BCLMP program has facilitated 108 land matches, with 24 located within the CVRD. This shows the program's growing impact across local communities.

The Importance of Land Matching in Cowichan

Cowichan has long been known for its fertile soil, but as many farmers approach retirement, the region faces a growing need for succession planning. The BCLMP is crucial in facilitating this transition, matching landholders who are retiring with farmers who are ready to continue their work.

“We need to ensure that the wisdom and knowledge built over generations stay alive on the land,” Ari emphasizes. “Without access to land, we risk losing not just the land itself, but the foundation of our local food systems.”

A successful example of the program’s impact comes from [Digable Roots](#), a farm-to-fork operation led by Callum Bottrell. In 2019, Callum reached out to the BCLMP to find land for his business. Through the program, he was matched with 2.5 acres in Cowichan, which included housing—an essential element for his family’s farm business.

Reflecting on his journey, Callum says, *“As young farmers today, land is not easily attained. It’s expensive and difficult to find. Our dream seemed out of reach until we met the Vancouver Island Land Matcher. Young Agrarians made our dream of starting a farm possible. Without this program, it would have taken us years to achieve our goals.”*

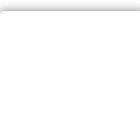
Callum’s success highlights the program’s ability to offer more than just land. Through the Young Agrarians Business Mentorship Program, Callum also gained the support he needed to navigate the business side of farming. *“The program has been with us every step of the way,” he says. “It made land access easy and approachable, and it’s been a tremendous resource.”*

Why the Program Matters

As farmers retire, the need for new farmers to step in becomes increasingly urgent. *“We are in the midst of a farmland transition crisis,”* says Pascale. *“Farmers are retiring, and without a clear succession plan, we risk losing valuable farmland.”* The BCLMP is crucial in addressing this gap, helping new farmers access the land they need to sustain local food systems.

Ari agrees, adding, *“Without land access, we risk losing the foundation of our food systems. The BCLMP ensures that the next generation of farmers has the resources and support to thrive.”*

Looking Ahead: What’s Exciting for the Year Ahead?



With Ari now at the helm in Cowichan, Young Agrarians is excited to continue its mission of supporting local farmers and landholders. *“I’m excited to continue connecting people in Cowichan and helping new farmers access land,”* says Ari. To kick off the year, Ari will be attending key community events like the Cowichan Agricultural Society’s Winery Social and the Cowichan Fair, offering farmers and landholders the chance to connect, share stories, and learn more about the resources available to them.

Meet Ari at the Cowichan Agricultural Society’s Winery Social

Looking to connect with Ari and fellow farmers? Join Young Agrarians and the Cowichan Agricultural Society on **Thursday, August 21, 2025, from 5:30 to 8:00 pm** at [Blue Grouse Estate Winery](#) in Duncan. This informal, connection-filled evening offers the perfect opportunity to meet Ari, learn about the program, and engage with the local farming community.

Guests will enjoy a tour of the vineyards and gain insights into Blue Grouse Estate Winery’s philosophy of stewardship, including their cover cropping and soil food web project. The evening will conclude with a summer potluck, local wine, and plenty of opportunities to network with like-minded individuals in the community. Whether you’re just starting your farming journey or have generations in the soil, this event is a chance to connect, share your story, and build momentum for the future of agriculture in Cowichan. Families are welcome!

How Can Cowichan Residents Connect with Ari?

If you’re in Cowichan and either looking for land to farm or have land available, Ari is here to help. *“Reach out directly, whether you’re seeking land or need information on farming resources,”* says Ari. You can contact him at [**ari@youngagrarians.org**](mailto:ari@youngagrarians.org), or meet him in person at one of the upcoming events in the region.

Stay tuned for more updates as Ari continues his important work in the Cowichan region, helping to ensure that farming remains a vital part of the community’s future.

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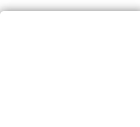
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