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HAPPY AS A PIG: Spring fever is in the air at Lentelus Farms on Vancouver Island where this little piggie is squealing with delight at the return of warmer weather. Lentelus, appropriately enough, means "joy of spring." DAVE SEMMELINK PHOTO

One province, one panel

ALC governance to change

by **PETER MITHAM**

VICTORIA – A second round of changes to the Agricultural Land Commission is in the works that will eliminate the system of six regional panels the BC Liberals established in 2002.

The change headlines a bill BC agriculture minister Lana Popham introduced March 7. It was one of the first government bills tabled in the current sitting of the legislature, underscoring its priority on the government's agenda.

"This bill will strengthen the independence of the commission and improves the governance structure, enabling it to better advance its important mandate to preserve

See ALC on next page ↗

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Groundwater deadline extended

by **PETER MITHAM**

VICTORIA – Thousands of BC farmers and ranchers at risk of losing their priority water rights at the end of February aren't outlaws after all.

For the third time in as many years, the province extended the deadline for registering existing wells and applying for groundwater licenses until March 1, 2022. The surprise move came February 19 as the March edition of *Country Life in BC* hit the press. It followed growing

calls for the province to extend the deadline, given that fewer than 500 licenses had been issued for the 20,000 wells the province expects to register.

"We are very pleased that government listened to farmers and ranchers and extended the licensing period," said Reg Ens, executive director of the BC Agriculture Council. "There are still a lot of people who are having difficulty with the application process. We hope that government will assign more staff for processing to

speed up approval of completed applications."

Groundwater users who did not register their wells by the end of February would have lost their priority access to groundwater under the province's new first-in-time, first-in-right (FITFIR) system under the Water Stewardship Act of 2016.

The system aims to protect groundwater by giving right of first use to the oldest wells; junior rights fall to more recent wells. Should an aquifer

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