

Growing the Next Crop of Canadian Farmers



About Action Canada

The Action Canada Fellowship is a public policy leadership program that aims to enhance promising leaders' understanding of the country and public policy choices for the future.

The theme selected for this year's fellowship was the future of work post-COVID-19 through a place-based lens; we, the authors, decided to look specifically at the barriers facing new entrants, with a focus on underrepresented groups in agriculture.

Acknowledgement

We acknowledge that much of the work for this task force report was conducted on the traditional lands of many diverse Indigenous Nations. The process of developing this report allowed us to spend time in British Columbia on the traditional, ancestral and unceded territory of the Musqueam people, who have passed on their culture, history and traditions from one generation to the next for millennia, on what is often referred to as Vancouver. We also spent time on the unceded traditional territories of the Matsqui, Kwantlen, Katzie and Semiahmoo First Nations, in Langley; as well as in Richmond, British Columbia, on the traditional and unceded territory of the Coast Salish Peoples. We also acknowledge that we were guests in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, on Treaty 6 Territory, homeland of the Cree and Métis Nations, and recognize these lands as the traditional homelands of the Lakota, Dakota, Nakota, Dene and Sauteaux.

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This report is a synthesis of the data, opinions and stories we uncovered over the last few months and is by no means a comprehensive account of all the important voices in this conversation.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted fundamental gaps in our agricultural system. For the first time in generations, many Canadians saw empty grocery store shelves and became acutely aware of the challenges facing our domestic food system. What followed were COVID-19 outbreaks on farms and meat processing plants and temporary foreign workers who were delayed and stranded. The pandemic highlights vulnerabilities in Canada's food supply-chain and the importance of a resilient agricultural sector.

A central challenge to increase sustainability is the looming agricultural labour shortage, a problem that was on the rise long before the pandemic. By 2029, there will be 39,600 fewer Canadian residents available to work in the sector. With an aging workforce average of [55 years](#) old, agriculture in Canada is expected to see 37% of its workforce retire in the next eight years. Rural communities are seeing a shrinking labour force, as more young people are flocking to urban centres. Simply put, there are not enough farmers.

There is a lot at stake. The agriculture and agri-food sector are important parts of the Canadian economy, employing more than two million Canadians. As the world's fifth largest exporter and importer of agri-food, the sector represents 12% of Canada's employment, and contributes more than \$114 billion of the country's annual GDP. With the right investments in workforce capacity, skills and retention, the sector is well positioned to see an \$11 billion increase in outputs by 2030. However, this can only happen if we bring new farmers into the fold.

This report will tackle the question: How might we create a more sustainable and resilient Canadian agricultural sector by reducing barriers for new-entrant farmers, with a particular focus on addressing barriers for populations who are traditionally underrepresented in farming, such as women, racialized groups, immigrants, youth and Indigenous peoples?

Throughout the course of our research, we identified barriers to entry across four thematic areas: access to capital, land, knowledge and labour. Recognizing the complex and unique nature of farming in different parts of the country, we narrowed our focus to three agricultural regions: Saskatchewan, British Columbia and Quebec. A geographic spread across the country, each province provided an opportunity to highlight scalable place-based approaches to supporting new farmers on the west coast, in the prairies, and in eastern Canada. We talked to experts in the field, academics, ranchers, producers and urban farmers in each region to identify how innovative policies served new entrants in different farming contexts. In Saskatchewan, farming is a central feature of the economy and workforce. Although they are less reliant on migrant labour compared to other provinces, their demand is expected to climb from 48,200 to 49,600 by 2025, while the number of domestic workers is set to decline. B.C. faces more significant labour shortages, with a heavy reliance on Temporary Foreign Workers, despite exhibiting the greatest number of new small-scale farmers among the three regions. In contrast, as Canada's second largest agricultural employer, Quebec employs 20% of the nation's agricultural workforce and has made the greatest investments to support new entrant farmers—resulting in a record increase in new entrants for the first time in 40 years.

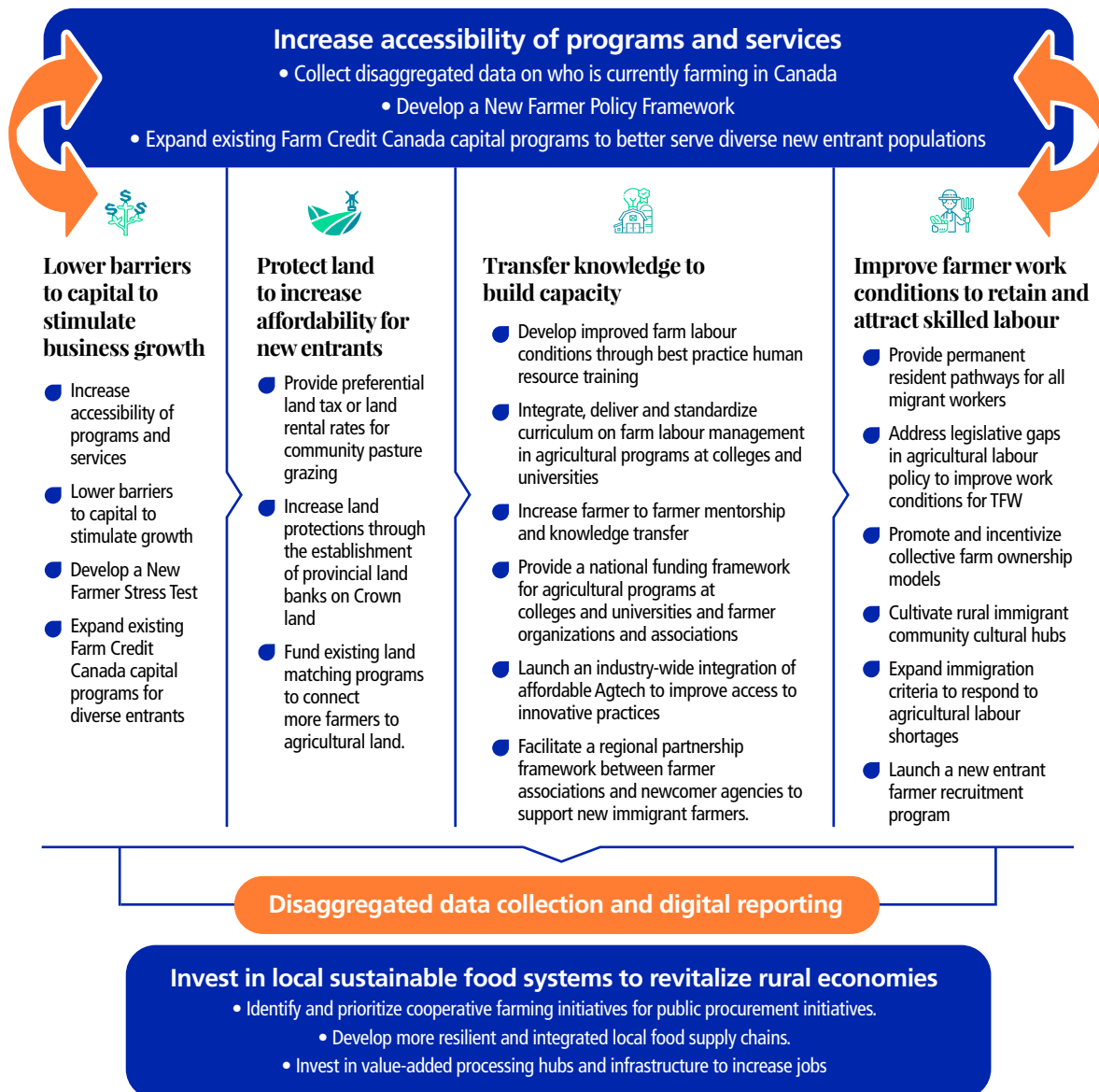
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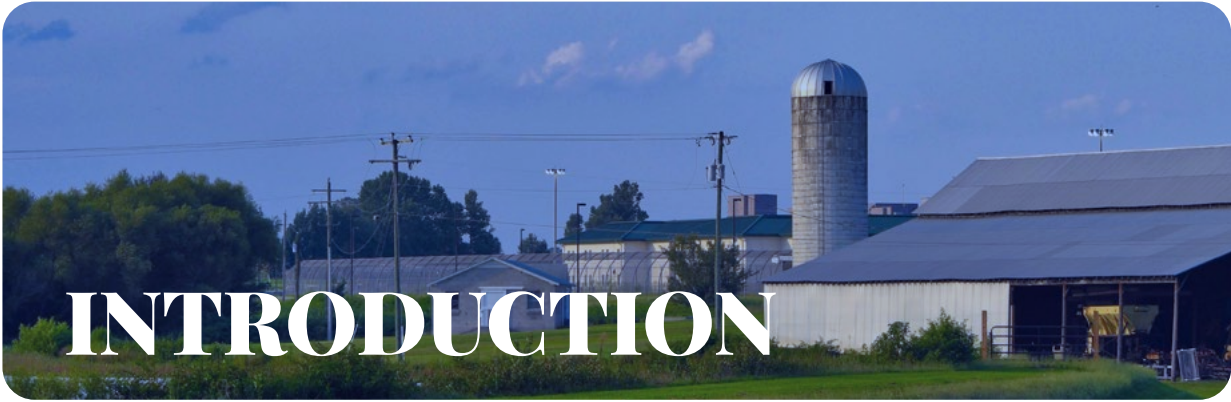
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Discussions with stakeholders and reflections on regional successes underscore the need to reimagine a more sustainable and resilient future of agriculture that can meet Canada’s needs now and into the future. To achieve this, Canada should develop an integrated strategy to address the distinct barriers experienced by new entrant farmers. We offer the following recommendations in the spirit of building a robust service continuum to meet the needs of new farmers:

- **Increase accessibility of programs and services.**
- **Lower barriers to capital to stimulate growth.**
- **Protect land to increase affordability for new entrants.**
- **Transfer knowledge to build capacity.**
- **Improve farmer work to retain and attract skilled labour.**
- **Invest in local sustainable food systems to revitalize rural economies.**





INTRODUCTION

Challenges in Canada’s Agricultural Sector

This story highlights the unique barriers that face new entrants in the agricultural sector. Addressing these barriers is crucial given the challenges that COVID-19 continues to pose to the future of farming in Canada. COVID-19 has challenged food production and distribution, caused food processors and distributors to close, and valuable food to be destroyed on farms and in restaurants. Public health measures have deeply affected farm productivity and increased the cost of producing food for many farmers, who also bore the cost of PPE and other COVID safety measures. Overall, the pandemic has resulted in an increased cost for farmers, lost income, and a heightened threat for the health and safety of wage-earning agricultural workers and farm hands. Food insecurity also reached record highs with more than [five million Canadians](#) identifying as food insecure.

The Young Farm Operator






Tara Matthews, a 29-year-old Black farmer with a **four-acre market garden in nearby Langley**, has never taken any farmer training. Building their business on grit and passion alone, Tara and her husband rely on their consistent base of urban clients to buy their vegetables at farmers markets and online. Four years into the farm, Tara still struggles to access capital to grow her operation, despite having no debt.

With much of her liquid cash tied up in core farm expenses, Tara is unable to implement a season extension or secure high-cost permanent urban growing space. To make ends meet, she needs to remain close to the city to continue off-farm work, keeping her housing costs high. During the pandemic, Tara saw a huge spike in demand for her products, but she couldn’t afford to hire the support she needed to expand, while holding on to her off-farm job.






“Banks don’t take young farmers seriously, especially when they don’t fit the stereotype of what a farmer is meant to look like.”

PAIN POINTS:

-  Racism/Discrimination
-  Lack of awareness of farmer resources
-  Difficulty securing affordable agricultural land

NEEDS:

-  Access to grants and loans
-  Support to navigate the farmland purchase process
-  A forum to connect with diverse farmers in her region

The federal government has implemented measures to support farmers during the pandemic, including loan deferral and line of credit programs, and a business-solutions fund via Farm Credit Canada. Supports for Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), an essential worker top-up fund, and a surplus food purchasing program and processor support fund were launched during the pandemic. Other initiatives included the creation of an agricultural jobs portal to direct workers to farms, and a \$9.2 million investment in a Youth Employment and Skills Program to create 700 new positions for youth in agriculture, to offset labour losses from delayed migrant workers. The federal government also released \$200 million in emergency food relief, allocating a portion of food relief funds directly to Indigenous communities.



What is systemic discrimination?

Systematic discrimination, also called institutionalized discrimination, consists of policies and practices that may appear neutral but create a disadvantage for people with a common set of characteristics, such as race, gender or status, over a prolonged period. Preferential loan policies, the application of the Indian Act, and many Canadian agricultural policies related to Temporary Foreign Workers are examples of how systemic discrimination adversely impacts current and future new entrant farmers and diverse farm workers.

While relief funding was welcome, many new-entrant and small-scale farmers were unable to meet the threshold to access these supports. This is a significant challenge, because while the average farm size in Canada has been gradually increasing, small to medium sized farms represent the majority of farm operators. In many communities, these same farmers stepped up to fill mounting supply-chain shortages and met record demand in a growing marketplace of environmentally and locally conscious consumers.

However, Canada's food system challenges preceded the pandemic. A central threat is Canada's aging agricultural workforce, which is expected to see 37% of its workers retire between 2018 and 2029. This is placing added pressure on a sector already challenged to find and retain enough workers, due to the labour-intensive nature of farm work. At the same time, a declining number of young people are entering the agricultural workforce, with a steady 70% decline since 1991. Similarly, the sector attracts a below-average share of new Canadians, despite a consistent number of newcomers having an agricultural background. These factors are driving down the number of new entrants into the sector's workforce.

Most provinces rely on the Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP) to fill these labour gaps to varying degrees. The precariousness of this approach has been evident during the COVID-19 pandemic, creating delays in access to workers due to travel restrictions, and outbreaks on farms with crowded quarters. The pandemic has also highlighted poor working and living conditions faced by many TFWs and other wage-earning agricultural labourers. While fulfilling an essential service, the TFW program subjects migrant farmers to differential inclusion in the agricultural labour market by excluding them from the rights and entitlements



“Networks and relationships can play a large role in accessing farmland. Newcomers face a particular challenge.”

Darcy Smith
BC Land Matching Program
Manager, delivered by
Young Agrarians

granted to citizens and permanent residents, which includes guarantees concerning worker health and safety, working hours and minimum standard rates of pay. Furthermore, studies have shown a direct link between these precarious work conditions and the precarious status of migrant workers in Canada, underscoring that a better future of work must also include permanent status and residential pathways for migrant workers in the TFWP.

Labour challenges and poor working conditions are compounded by a lack of local infrastructure to allow producers to sell and distribute their produce to local consumers. Export oriented production has been prioritized in federal and provincial farming policies. As a result, it is more cost effective for farmers to export their goods abroad, than to sell to local markets, due to a lack of adequate local processing infrastructure and facilities.

Climate change and on-farm adaptation also present a challenge for many farmers who lack the know-how and inputs to constantly adjust to unpredictable and fluctuating weather patterns. Many small-scale farmers do not qualify for federal crop insurance schemes, limiting their protection against climate-induced crop failure and crisis events, like COVID-19—despite being more likely to use agroecological approaches which serve to limit these types of events over the long-term. Technology and training have been identified as important tools to meet this challenge and increase production efficiency. But this option remains out of reach for new entrants due to prohibitive implementation costs, inadequate access to training and limited technology inputs for small scale operators.

The collective weight of these challenges presents a significant obstacle for any farmer, but in the case of new farmers, it can be the difference between cultivating for one versus ten seasons. What’s more, a lack of diversity and historical and persistent discrimination has created an added burden for underrepresented farmers and diverse groups in agriculture. To truly address the growing shortage in farmers, we must consider what specific barriers exist and how they impact and disadvantage different groups of new entrants.

WHAT WE HEARD

The Barriers for Entry

Our research has revealed the current agricultural sector is not equipped to address the challenges of COVID-19 and that the new entrants who wish to rise to the challenge face significant barriers to entering the sector. These barriers can be broadly categorized as access to land, capital, knowledge and labour.

Land:



The cost of Canadian farmland continues to rise as farm sales lead to consolidation into larger agri-food enterprises. Historically, most farms were family owned and transferred intergenerationally. Today, a growing number of farm operations are being purchased by large companies or investors at high profits, and leased out to smaller farmers, which has driven up the cost and competition to access affordable farmland.

The rising cost of land is a central challenge for all farmers, but has become insurmountable for many new cultivators, with more than 50% of farm operators 35 and younger leasing rather than owning land long-term. The decision to rent land creates an additional level of precarity for new farmers who invest labour, inputs and capital in land that can change tenancy with little to no notice. We also heard that new entrants located closer to cities and densely populated communities were better able to pivot their business during the COVID-19 pandemic, taking advantage of short supply chains, and the growth and interest



Barriers to Land Access: The Indian Act

Indigenous Peoples face unique and disproportionate barriers to entry in the agricultural sector. While the authors lack the lived experience or expertise to discuss authoritatively, this is a pronounced issue that must be mentioned.

Federal law restricts land use for on-reserve First Nations through the Indian Act. These restrictions, combined with the historical imposition of homesteads, regardless of existing Indigenous communities' use of lands, imposed a regime designed to disconnect First Nations from their traditional territories. It also limited the practices of their agricultural expertise. There are strong correlations between these acts and today's underrepresentation of both First Nations and broader Indigenous communities in farming activities.

Today's federal land use legislation has sought to make some improvements to these devastating colonial policies. These include the First Nations Land Management Act (1999), which to date has removed colonial barriers for 153 First Nations to allow them to develop or operate their land. Solutions are needed to address historical and ongoing land dispossession and to remove barriers for Indigenous farmers to reclaim and use their traditional land for their preferred agricultural practices.

in Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) box schemes, consumer/producer co-ops and pick-your-own farmers markets that sell directly to consumers, who are increasingly eager to buy local. However, soaring housing prices and the boom of urban development have made prime agricultural land near cities less affordable and less accessible for small farmers to purchase or lease.

Furthermore, farmers are seeing more land in the hands of industry, investors and agribusiness who purchase large swaths of prime agricultural land, which they lease at competitive prices, out of the reach of new-entrant farmers. The Indian Act and the poor quality of land made available to Indigenous communities create unique barriers for food production and are two primary challenges for Indigenous farmers. This situation is further compounded by discrimination experienced by many Indigenous and Black communities who are historically, and continually, moved off prime agricultural land to poor quality farmland in order to give prime agricultural property to white-settlers, industry and farmers.

The Immigrant Farmer






PAIN POINTS:

-  Lack of business management strategies
-  Lack of access to regional processing facilities
-  Lack of social capital to leverage opportunities and information
-  Difficult access to farmer networks and resources
-  Lack of access to capital
-  Cultural discrimination and social isolation in culturally homogenous rural communities;
-  Unaffordability of agricultural land

Wei and his partner run a half-acre farming operation near Richmond.

A descendant of Chinese farmers, he attributes his sustainable farming philosophy to his parents. Growing a variety of seasonal vegetables and unique “world crops” like bok choy, diversifying his operation has been key to his success, but as a newcomer to Canada, purchasing land has not been easy. Wei has not found any tools or services to help him navigate the process, and continues to rent a small piece of land. This undercuts his ability to scale up to meet demand for his world crops, instead focusing on time-intensive weekend farmer’s markets. With limited HR and business management skills, coupled with his English as a second language, Wei has struggled to secure and retain farm workers. Despite these challenges, he has successfully participated in free training to improve the sustainability of his farming practices. He has also used some online resources to implement a variety of low-cost technology solutions to help increase the yield of his more profitable crops.

NEEDS:

-  Free farmer training on HR best practices on-farm
-  Increased opportunities to meet and learn from other regional farmers
-  Immigrant and new-entrant friendly, dedicated support from farmer associations

“If you’re an immigrant in a new community, relationship building is tough. In agriculture there is a hidden economy: where to find tools and the best quality resources. This knowledge helps you to succeed. Without it, there are 10 times more barriers.”

Capital:



Access to capital is a barrier for any new entrant. Underrepresented groups may face additional challenges including lack of intergenerational equity to access loans, bias (conscious or unconscious) from financiers and outdated regulations. Farmers expressed concerns that it was impossible to finance land access because they could not collateralize the loan due to exorbitant land costs. These challenges are intensified for farmers who experience prejudice and discrimination. Focus group respondents recalled experiences limiting their access to capital: “they did not fit the typical stereotype of what a farmer should look like”, limited credit history due to age or recent immigration status, and other structural barriers related to regulations in the Indian Act, which do not allow Indigenous farmers to borrow against reserve land to secure loans.

Knowledge:



Agricultural work today is sophisticated and requires formal advanced education combined with “hands on” experience. Farming knowledge is also highly local, placing new entrants at a disadvantage because they are unable to benefit from expertise that has historically been informally passed down from one generation to the next. Many of the small-scale farmers we spoke to said they used an agroecology farming approach, which focuses on interactions between plants, animals, humans and the environment. This innovative method provides benefits to soil quality and crop nutrients and can lower carbon emissions, but many farmers are unable to expand their use of these practices due to limited access to capital to acquire small scale tools that reduce labour costs.

What’s more, Canadian agriculture has been characterized by cultural and racial homogeneity that has left many new entrants feeling excluded from more traditional farming organizations, institutions and farming ideologies. Systemic discrimination and preferential agricultural policy in Canada has reinforced this feeling. At the same time, farmer associations, unions and farmer supporting organizations remain a critical support and integral information source for regional farming ecosystems across Canada. These organizations share important information on best management farming techniques, resources, grants, funding schemes and general pathways to access capital where available. They can also troubleshoot shared challenges and create opportunities to network, meet, and develop important relationships that build a more supportive ecosystem that can prime diverse farmers for success. These organizations, groups and institutions also play a pivotal role as advocates to policy makers and elected officials on behalf of farmer interests. If new and diverse farmers are not participating in these spaces, their experiences and needs will not be reflected in policy advocacy at federal and provincial levels of government.



Labour:



As previously noted, the current agricultural workforce is shrinking and highly dependent upon migrant labour. Further, the high physical demands and cultural stigma associated with farming has made access to local farming labour challenging. Various government programs have been developed to help address this challenge; however, most programs are inaccessible to small scale operations and many new entrant farmers. As a result, many look for alternative avenues to recruit farm labour, providing competitive wages or additional non-monetary perks, such as free lodging, meals and transportation support, or must rely on family and friends for free labour or support.

Technological automation may address the need for more skilled labour on farms, but most technology inputs require considerable investment, specialized knowledge to operate, and ongoing capital for repairs and service. To better support new entrants, technology needs to be made affordable for new farms, and prioritize diversified and ecological operations, with a focus on investment in farm infrastructure, rather than just agri-technology itself. Investments in technology can improve farmer retention through automating elements of labour-intensive work to improve on-farm conditions, but these opportunities will remain inaccessible and ineffective without simultaneous investment in worker conditions and training to ensure people-centred, decent work practices that improve the experience of workers. Increased federal investment that supports the sustainable use of technology will be an essential part of the solution to improve labour conditions on farms.



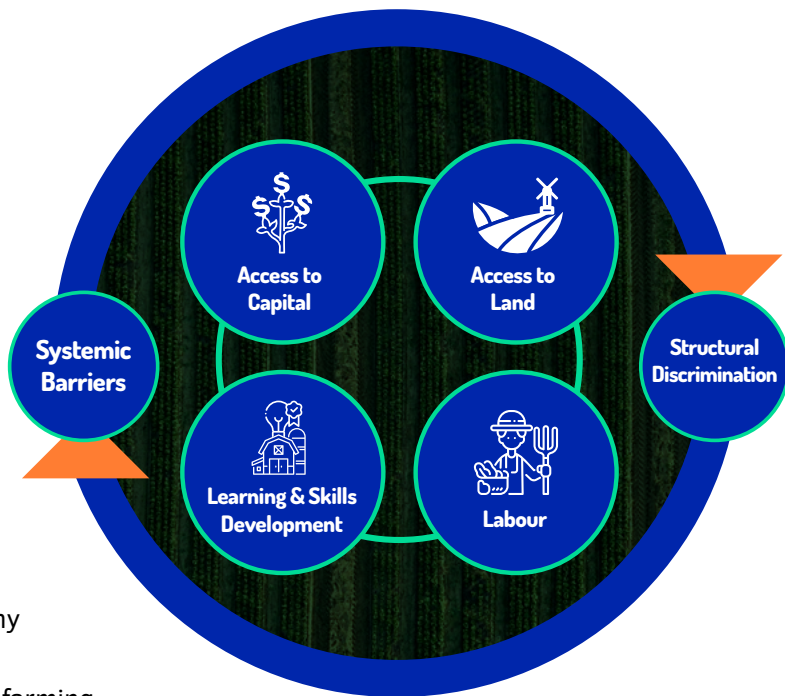
Diversity, Inclusion, Equity in Agriculture: What's the Difference?

Diversity, inclusion and equity are commonly used interchangeably, but mean different things. Diversity in the Canadian agricultural workforce can be most simply understood as the presence of differences among labourers. This can refer to differences in races, genders, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, religion, ethnicity, national origins, and mental or physical abilities. Inclusion refers to the strategy and practices to ensure marginalized identities are valued, relied upon, experience agency, and ultimately feel like they belong. Equity represents the norms, policies and behaviours that ensure that everyone has access to the same opportunities. Sometimes these concepts work together: If an equitable approach to policy development is embedded in our agricultural system, it will drive more inclusive policies, which will lead to greater diversity.

Quality of Life

The compounding weight of barriers—across capital, land, labour and knowledge—works to undermine overall quality of life for new entrants.

Farming is a unique and entrepreneurial profession, where you can work outdoors, produce goods from scratch and provide an essential service. Yet, many farmers must work seven days a week to keep their farming businesses viable, and many must add off-farm employment to supplement their income. Limited access to labour means there is rarely support to expand farm operations or provide respite to farm owners. Compounded with unpredictable income streams, this can cause significant emotional and mental strain. As documented in a [2015/16 mental health survey by the University of Guelph](#), this has led to unprecedented rates of farmer suicides and is indicative of significant mental health challenges in agricultural communities.




Agriculture and First Nations


Indigenous people and communities are engaging or planning activities across multiple agricultural contexts. Across the country they are engaging as farmers, relying on both traditional Indigenous or western practices, or a synergy of both at multiple scales; as landlords negotiating lease agreements with non-Indigenous farmers; and as agribusiness entrepreneurs. Recognizing the limits of past and recent federal and provincial agricultural and land-use policy frameworks has been an important consideration during our discussions on the future of work for new Indigenous entrants interested in agriculture.


Indigenous Farmer




PAIN POINTS:

 Lack of farmer education programs that integrate Indigenous knowledge and approaches to agriculture

 Disconnection from other Indigenous farmers and cultural cultivation practices

 Poor quality soil and land for growing food

 Challenges to access skilled labour on-reserve with limited resources to train residents

Tobias and his partner **Yanna** cultivate 160 acres to support a **small Indigenous-run farm co-op**. As Cree people, they have focused on plant breeding, repatriation of seeds and growing specialty crops to support food security in the surrounding First Nations. Tobias feels land access and knowledge are a major issue. Although he grew up on a farm, he has lost a lot of his traditional knowledge and compares the loss of his dad's farm to that of residential schools. "It only takes one generation for that link to be lost." Leaving the education system after high school, he was keen to farm, but says it was impossible to access a loan on reserve. He credits organizations like the Fair Finance Fund for their flexible social finance approach. Hands-on farmer-to-farmer sharing networks were also important for Tobias and Yanna. Ultimately, he feels, "peer to peer knowledge transfer is what we're missing; sharing traditional knowledge and learning together" is the key to building a future of self-sufficient Indigenous farmers and food secure communities. "We need farmer education that is rooted in an Indigenous way of growing and caring for the soil and land. We are ready, we just need the supports."

NEEDS:

 Access to farm education that integrates Indigenous worldviews and approaches to agriculture

 Connection to a well-resourced Indigenous focused farmer network to expand networks and share resources, opportunities and to share growing practices

 Support to train local youth and residents to participate in farm labour opportunities on-reserve

“It only takes one generation for that link to be lost, regardless of how long you and your ancestors have been farming.”



Access to Land: A History of Indigenous Farming in Peguis First Nation

The Peguis First Nation are located just north of Winnipeg, near Selkirk, and are the largest First Nation community in Manitoba with a population of approximately 10,000 people of Ojibway and Cree descent. The Peguis First Nation historically lived in the floodplains region with characteristically rich healthy soils that served their people well, and allowed them to cultivate a deep agricultural tradition that predates colonization. Often recognized for feeding and saving the settlers who first came to this region in the early 19th century, the Peguis had a very successful agricultural enterprise. Well documented entries from the early settlers remarked how they were able to “tame the savages” to adopt good farming practices. As time went on, the settlers realized the superior soil quality, from years of care by the Peguis Nation. There are many written accounts of the agricultural expertise of the Peguis People, but in 1907 through the process of an illegal land transfer the Peguis people were moved from their homelands. They were resettled 250 km north of their ancestral territories to an area with much poorer soil quality and that was prone to significant flooding, while their former lands were redistributed to white settlers. To this day, the Peguis People struggle to cultivate their land in the same way they once had, and have lost much of their traditional Indigenous agricultural knowledge, which they are slowly re-cultivating.

What Brings People to Agriculture

People choose to participate in the agricultural sector for a variety of reasons. Perhaps a farm has been in a family for generations, a legacy to leave behind for one’s children and grandchildren. Maybe it’s the active rural lifestyle, with a sense of pride in working with one’s hands in the soil and earth. Or maybe it’s the sense of purpose in providing such an essential service in feeding society. Some farmers felt motivated to address looming climate change problems and wanted to help create a more sustainable and local food system, while others felt it was an experiment to expand their self-sufficiency. In addition to self-sufficiency, [Indigenous farmers also identified](#) food security, reconnecting with the land and culture, and promoting awareness of agricultural opportunities for youth as important drivers.



More than 80% of new farmers enter without an intergenerational farming background. Although most new entrants are under 40, some are older workers drawn to farming as a second career, either full or part time, and others are retirees looking for a new adventure. Despite a diversity in motivations, the perception of new entrants is that they’re all the same.

Understanding the unique profile, diversity and motivations of new entrants will be critical to meeting their unique needs and to developing a comprehensive strategy to support their contributions to a post-COVID agricultural sector. We need to make sure programs and supports are equally accessible, effective and supportive of a more resilient and sustainable agricultural sector that is positioned to meet the challenges of our 21st century world, including climate change, food security and sustainable dignified work and supply chains, to better prop up the diverse new entrants who are keen to lead it.

Farming in Canada needs a rebrand to better attract a new generation of farmers.

The Second Career Farmer



PAIN POINTS:



Lack of information, resources and opportunities to access labour



Lack of business management supports



Lack of support to access domestic markets and procurement schemes



Need to identify and access regional processing facilities

The **Smiths** run a **mid-sized poultry, pig and mixed garden** operation just outside Yorkton, Saskatchewan. Using the sale income from their family home, **Armina** and **Syd** purchased their farm and began living out their second career dream as farmers. “I can remember, seven years ago when we first told our friends ... no one thought this was a viable career. They thought it was ridiculous.” The Smiths were able to use their extensive credit history to access a bank loan, which covered the cost of equipment and other start-up expenses. They attended regional farmer association conferences, tapping into local farm expertise and building their network. Syd has a degree in Agricultural Sciences and lots of people-management experience, but he is struggling to develop their business model and diversify their client base, due to a lack of regional processing facilities. **“The lack of local processing facilities is the glass ceiling for meat producers and is the #1 issue for new entrants.** We feel like we’re at a point where we need the next step in services and supports. Agriculture conferences are often focused on the first step, but we need to know: how do we hire employees and manage them? How do we set up larger scale shipping, and how do we partner with the county at a larger scale to fill local procurement orders to expand our business?”

NEEDS:



Tailored on-farm consultation and best management practice implementation support



Navigation support to identify and apply for various labour schemes and develop contracts with local processing sites



Business management support and succession planning advice



There is a lot of information out there, the challenge is having to wade through it to figure out what is most credible or applicable to my context. The truth is, most farmers don't know what they don't know. Ideally there would be a local network of farmers that other newer farmers could draw on. Consistent internet connections are harder for more rural farmers, which leads to uneven access.”



We need to shift our understanding of who new farmers are. They aren't just young kids from rural backgrounds whose parents farmed. Some have had careers elsewhere and are interested in getting out of the city. A growing number are immigrants who had extensive farming backgrounds in the country they came from. The kinds of supports and tools these farmers need won't necessarily be what works for large-scale, commodity producers."

..... Amanda Wilson,
Professor,
St. Paul University

Technology in Agriculture

The pace of technological advancement brings the promise of agricultural transformation to meet 21st century challenges, as it pushes innovation in agricultural approaches, tools and skills. Agricultural technologies, commonly known as Agtech, include things like precision agriculture (the utilization of data technologies to improve efficiency in targeted ways), automation, robotics, and artificial intelligence. Over the past two years, [venture capital has invested \\$4 billion](#) in agriculture technology start-ups, hoping to tap the potential for disruptive growth in perhaps the world's oldest market. But is this change inevitable?

Despite the hype from Agtech enthusiasts, many farmers are reluctant to adopt new, unproven and expensive technologies, especially when training opportunities and farmer return on investment are limited over the long term. This doesn't mean they have rejected innovative practices. Cultivators we spoke to shared stories of using craft technologies that were more accessible and adaptable to their small operations. Clinton Monchuk from Farm and Food Care Saskatchewan explained that farms with higher acreage and better returns are more likely to adopt new technologies because they have the capital to do so. But overall, adoption rates for new technologies such as precision agriculture, remain low. The introduction of new and complex technologies, while beneficial from a productivity standpoint, can also bring increased barriers for new entrants.

For many new entrants corporate inputs are unaffordable, with many new entrant and small scale operations adopting small scale technologies. Historically Agtech has been geared towards single commodity production and requires scaled up farms to access debt to finance tech systems, which adds to the crippling farm debt crisis, which Statistics Canada reported as exceeding \$100 billion dollars in 2019.

It remains to be seen how exactly new technologies will impact the farmer labour force and the long-term sustainability of agriculture. Some argue that new technologies such as robotics and precision farming will result in increased automation and a loss of good jobs that will unduly disenfranchise racialized and immigrant workers who are over-represented in labour intensive farm roles. Critics have linked increased technology with heightened surveillance, repetitive work conditions and an increased precarity in the conditions of workers. Others have identified new technologies as an opportunity to create a future high-tech workforce that will attract and retain new skills in the sector, improving worker conditions and leading to a sector wide wage bump.

Increased technological inputs on farms could serve to improve worker and animal conditions, while also continuing to reduce the number of jobs available on farms due to automation. Agri-technologies that can be applied at different scales, especially small scale, holds the potential to support more climate-friendly farming. However, further investment in agri-tech companies can create an environment that continues to exclude many new entrants by not investing into farmers and their farms directly. If the goal is a diversified, resilient, food system that is diverse and inclusive, investment in new farm start-ups should be the focus to ensure that new farms are viable and have longevity. Technology is secondary to this investment to increase the capacity of farmers to farm.

Ultimately, outcomes for the future and impact of Agtech will be determined by the terms under which new technologies are integrated. Technological inputs take place on a spectrum, from low-tech traditional agroecological approaches practiced by the small farmers we spoke to, to fully automated operations, as seen in Quebec's dairy industry. Most growers told us they identified as being somewhere along this spectrum. The question is, how can Canada ensure that the integration of technological supports doesn't further disadvantage farmers? The uncertainty and consequences of Agtech, both intended and unintended, is beyond the scope of this report, but certainly an area worth further examination.

Diversity in Agriculture Today

Studies have shown that the Canadian agricultural workforce has never been more diverse. Despite an overall growth in diversity, traditionally underrepresented groups continue to experience obstacles to enter the sector, seeing most employment gains in general labourer or lower paid positions.

Men hold the [vast majority of leadership positions](#) as managers (75%) and business owners (71%) despite the fact that women have participated in more post-secondary education and leadership programs in the field. When asked if there are barriers preventing women from advancing in agriculture, 41% of women agreed compared to only 12% of men. This underscores the need for greater education and structural policy change for employers and service agencies to combat gender bias and discrimination in the field.

Immigrants occupy more low-income positions, with more than 25% employed as harvesting labourers, and are underrepresented in specialty or managerial positions, at a rate of less than 5%. We heard about low rates of Indigenous engagement: [2.5% of employees](#) in the agricultural sector identify as Indigenous compared to 3.9% in all industries. The Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council surveyed 812 farm employers, and asked which group would be best to fill chronic labour shortages. Employers ranked younger workers (under 35) and temporary foreign labourers as the most preferable workers, while Indigenous people and immigrants were ranked lowest.

Responses and research indicate a disconnect between the perception of discrimination from those in leadership positions, primarily white older men, and the realities faced by marginalized farmers. Intersecting levels of inequality and discrimination have created a situation where diverse new entrants experience intersecting barriers that limit their entry, mobility and access to on-farm learning opportunities. Across Canada, the shortage of labourers continues to grow as employers demonstrate an inherent bias toward some groups of workers over others, namely women, immigrants, and Indigenous workers, who in turn, will become a less experienced demographic of the farming workforce.



Who is a New Entrant Farmer? What Do We Mean by Diversity Among Farmers in Canada?

New entrant farmer refers to producers and ranchers who have entered or are ready to enter agriculture by cultivating and selling their goods. This includes Indigenous peoples and First Nations, immigrants (many of whom have come from agrarian backgrounds and want to farm in Canada); youth, referred to as populations between 18 and 35 years old; racialized farmers, including farmers of African, Caribbean, South Asian, Asian, and Middle Eastern descent farmers. Qualifiers that may be included in considering diversity among farmers can be visible or invisible.

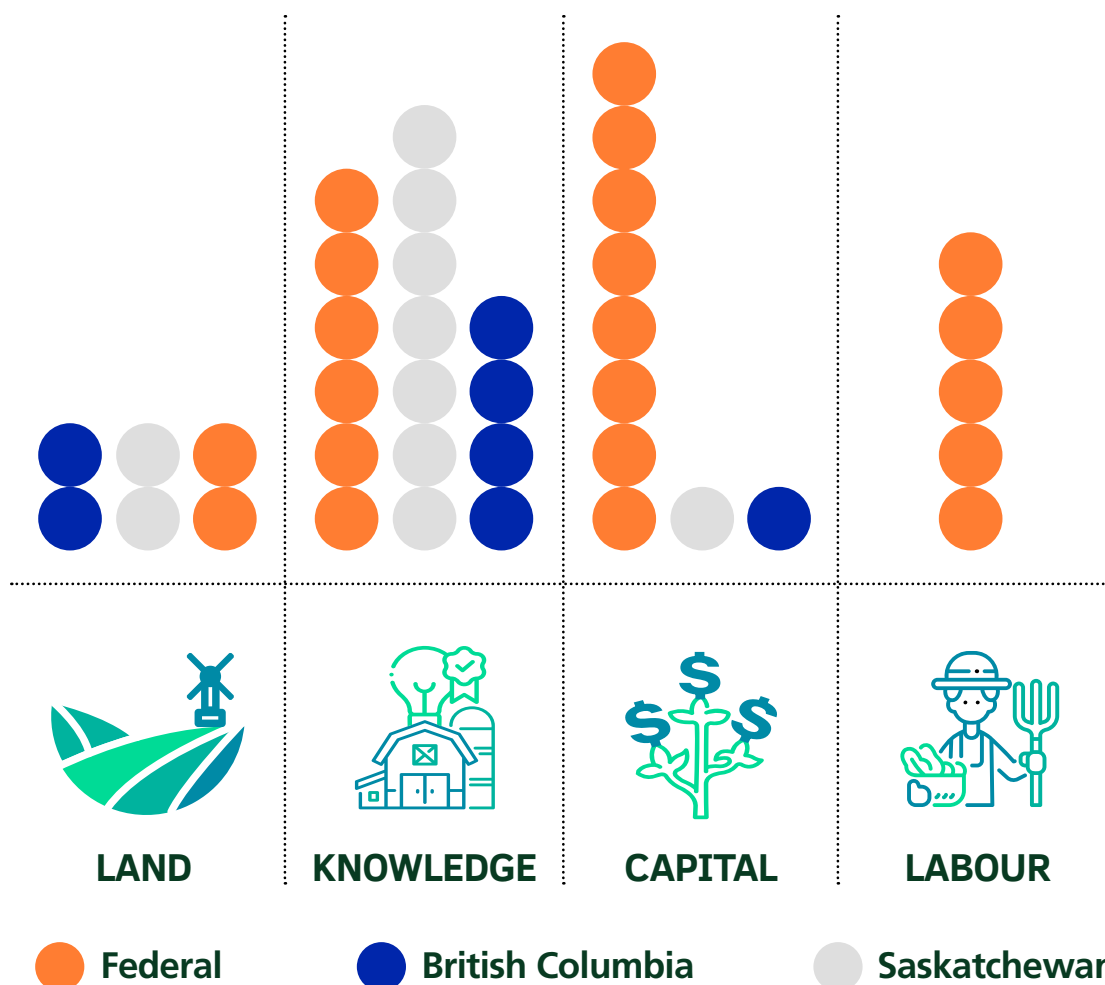
VISIBLE DIVERSITY TRAITS: Culture, ethnicity / race, nationality, gender, mental / physical status (often referred to as disability), and age.

INVISIBLE DIVERSITY TRAITS: Diversity of thought, perspectives, and life experiences, which may include education, family status, values and beliefs, religion, working-style preferences, and socioeconomic status.

The Current State Policy Landscape

We have summarized the current federal and provincial policy landscapes in Saskatchewan and British Columbia to highlight innovative responses to existing supports and current gaps in federal services, and supports for diverse and new farmers. Throughout this section we will spotlight innovative policy approaches in Quebec, a province that currently boasts the most comprehensive ecosystem of support for new farmers.

Figure 2. Current Policy Landscape



Federal

The current federal agricultural policy landscape is primarily focused on driving agricultural outputs to serve an international market with a stated goal of reaching \$75 billion in agri-food and seafood exports by 2025, outlined in the country's first [Food Policy for Canada](#). In addition to the food policy, the most significant initiative is the Canadian Agricultural Partnership (CAP), a federal/provincial/territorial collaboration that includes funding for research, insurance, crop failure recovery and innovation investment. Although comprehensive in nature, the farmer eligibility criteria for the CAP framework currently excludes many new-entrant farmers and does not prioritize women, immigrants or racialized farmers who experience greater barriers, with little to no programming to meet the needs of this demographic. Signature programs like AgriStability and AgriInvest have the ability to build local supply chain resilience by helping farmers make investments to manage risk and improve market income. Although all new farmers we spoke to said they would benefit from business risk management programs like these, not a single one was eligible due to CAP eligibility criteria. Current government agricultural policy at the federal level is primarily focused on supporting existing participants in the agricultural sector.

A promising support expected to respond to farmer needs is the [Strategic Field Program](#), hosted under the Canadian Agricultural Partnership (CAP). This tool will connect extension specialists to farm businesses to increase the transfer of research to farmers and ranchers through on-demand access to specialists who are involved in the development of key applied research and demonstration projects.

In recent years, Canada's primary agricultural lender is Farm Credit Canada (FCC), which has developed targeted programming to meet the needs of diverse farmers. FCC provides specialized and personalized financial services to farming operations, including family farms and farming dependent businesses and organizations. Programs to date include the FCC Ag Knowledge Exchange, an online farm business management information hub, and capital support and knowledge transfer activities aimed at young people and women. The programs are yet to meet the needs of other equally underserved groups. FCC is also investing in the development of targeted programs to meet the distinct challenges of Indigenous new entrants. However to date, FCC programs have primarily benefited farmers who are in a position to buy land and not the majority of new farmers who lease. Many farming organizations have called for more flexible infrastructure grants, and creative loan programs to facilitate land acquisition that can promote multi-farmer ownership models.

Although there are a limited number of federal programs aimed at supporting new entrants, a highlight is the [Indigenous Agricultural Food Systems Initiative](#). Aimed at advancing the production of fresh food within Indigenous communities, it secures planning and design support to provide opportunities for agricultural knowledge sharing and marketing of

agricultural projects. The initiative also provides supportive skills and training to establish or scale an agricultural operation. There is also an [Indigenous Student Recruitment Initiative](#) led by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada and an [ongoing outreach initiative](#) for Indigenous-led agricultural projects to develop partnerships.

While not specific to new entrants, [AgPal](#) also provides online support for farmers. This search and navigation tool is especially relevant for some new entrants to gather verified agricultural information; although some farmers identified limited access to broadband as a challenge and said direct on-call support through a help line, or farmer-to-farmer teaching programs, were more ideal. Another general program that is accessible to individual new entrants, as well as agricultural co-operatives, is the [Canadian Agricultural Loans Act Program](#). This program guarantees repayment of 95% of a net loss to farmer operations on any eligible loan up to \$500,000. Increased promotion and education, and a broader eligibility criteria to target new entrants would greatly improve access to this program. They can also generate significant benefits for collective farmer services delivered by producer cooperatives and other shared venture groups, which in turn lower individual risk and burden for individuals new to the sector.

The federal TFWP is also an essential support for many farmers allowing access to skilled seasonal labour to bolster their operations. New and diverse farmers have reported they had accessed this program to varying degrees, but that the excessive paperwork and temporary nature of the program hindered their access to year-round support; and that pathways to residency would address their needs while also strengthening integration, repopulation and general revitalization of rural communities. A recent \$9.2 million investment in a Youth Employment and Skills Program increased the labour pool over the recent summer season through the creation of 700 student jobs, which provided invaluable exposure to the potential of farming for the next generation. However, this investment has done little to address the need for a sustainable on-farm labourforce because it was focused on summer employment, and farm wage subsidies were not differentiated by the type of farm, leaving some farmers paying higher wages out of pocket.

Provincial Approaches

Approaches to Supporting New Farmers in British Columbia and Saskatchewan

The current provincial agricultural policy landscape in B.C. primarily focuses on export and macro-level economic development through agriculture. There are programs that seek to support new entrants, articulated in B.C.'s [New Entrants Strategy](#). Similarly to BC, Saskatchewan provides a diverse suite of programs that directly benefit new and existing farmers.

Access to Land

The Saskatchewan [Agricultural Crown Lands Program](#) represents an innovative approach to improve land access for new farmers and ranchers. Predicated on an approach that manages land in a sustainable fashion to preserve it for future generations, the province makes publicly held land more accessible by leasing the land for farming and agriculture production through reduced rental rates, subsidies or incentives for farmers to sustainably manage the land. In contrast, B.C.'s highly priced farmland has resulted in a need for innovative programming that enables new farmers to access land, where market failure conditions exist for agriculture. Farm Credit Canada had identified a price of over \$80,000 an acre, making new farmer land access untenable for many. Adapted from Quebec's land bank program ARTERRE, which supports land and farmer succession for a new generation of farmers, the [BC Land Matching Program](#), delivered by Young Agrarians, matches farmers with land through a dedicated staff team of land matchers, and using tools like an online land listing and resources. Young Agrarians is a youth-focused farmer-to-farmer learning, education and service organization that connects new farmers to land, business supports, training, and networks. These two programs highlight two innovative approaches to increase access to land for new farmers and responded to needs identified in the 2019 BC new entrant farmer survey, which reported that more than half of new entrants were planning to purchase their land. This trend underscores the need for new underwriting policies that secure loans through FCC and other large lenders who lease to farmers, and target underrepresented groups through improved lending criteria and innovative approaches. Global examples have included creative solutions like a microloan series and non-governmental partnerships to help get farmers business ready, further reducing the risk to lenders.

Although FCC represents the primary funding body for agricultural financing, the [Saskatchewan Food Industry](#)



Building Farmer Know How: Hands on Farmer Training at Tsawwassen First Nation Farm School

In 2009, ownership and access to the Tsawwassen First Nation's traditional territory was honoured by the Province of B.C. and the Government of Canada. Shortly after, the nation approached the Kwantlen Polytechnic Institution to develop a partnership to use a portion of their land to develop a "hands on" agricultural training program for their people.

Today, the Tsawwassen First Nation Farm School program has reserved spots for members of the Tsawwassen First Nation, free of cost. The program is designed to be deliberately accessible for other groups underrepresented in farming. The curriculum emphasizes small scale regenerative agriculture paradigm, that also incorporates First Nations perspectives, traditional knowledge and ways of thinking.

In the context of COVID-19, program staff have delivered some online programming to First Nations in other parts of B.C. They will explore whether an online farm school is something that can be scaled.

[Development Centre](#) helps small and medium-sized food processors develop and launch new value-added products. Many farmers have noted the lack of abattoirs and other local food processing infrastructure, has put a strain on the growth of their businesses and has created a “glass ceiling for meat producers”. Initiatives like this increases regional capacity to address that challenge.

Agricultural Knowledge and Capacity Building

The Tsawwassen First Nation Farm School, located in B.C., also enhances access to land and builds farmer knowledge through a farm school and a farm alumni incubator program. Farm school staff lead a tailored curriculum to support diverse learners to build their cultivation knowledge and support alumni as they farm on incubator plots located on university land, and on the Tsawwassen First Nation territory. As in B.C., there are many programs in Saskatchewan to promote knowledge development. Capacity building programs include the [Next Gen Agriculture Program](#), where eight applicants are selected annually and paired with a mentor for an 18-month farmer-to-farmer mentorship experience. [Agriculture in the Classroom Saskatchewan](#) is another forward-looking initiative that connects kids and agriculture through innovative, experiential, curriculum-based programs and resources. Offering up to \$4,000 per applicant, [Agricultural Scholarships](#) also identifies young people who are advocates for agriculture and supports their advancement. Although these programs do not address new entrant needs specifically, they build the next generation of farmers through education and supports that enable knowledge and capacity, and present one potential pathway to increase training and education to better prepare new farmers.



A Spotlight on Québec

Local Procurement: Win-win-win for farmers, rural economies and the environment

Local procurement by public institutions can play an integral role in supporting new and existing farmers by creating opportunities to increase farmer income and generate new jobs in rural communities, all while keeping economic gains in the local economy and reducing the environmental impact by limiting the distance goods must travel.

The Stratégie nationale d'achat d'aliments Québécois (National Strategy for the Purchase of Quebec Foods) aims to significantly increase the share of Quebec's food purchased by Quebec institutions. This approach seeks to improve the sustainability of Quebec' regional food system. The strategy includes several steps to ensure the purchase of foods produced or processed in Quebec, by Quebec's public sector, particularly education and health institutions.

By 2025, all public institutions will make purchasing in Quebec a procurement priority. The Québec National Food Purchase Strategy created a directory of Quebec foods, which allows chefs and nutritionists to identify and understand Quebec food products. A financial assistance program of \$900,000 has also been developed to support schools implementing projects promoting local food purchasing. The 2018-2025 Biofood Policy—Alimenter Notre Monde is expected to see \$10 billion in growth in the purchase of Quebec food products by Quebecers by 2025.

Business Development and Farm Management

Business development and farm management coaching are also a central component of new farmer capacity building, featured in B.C.'s approach. The [Small Farm Business Acceleration Pilot Program](#) provides business plan coaching for small and new farmers, as well as cost-shared funding for commercial farm infrastructure and equipment, to increase productivity and sales. A small farm is defined as having a total annual gross revenue of less than \$60,000 in the last two years. The program funding will cover 50% to 75% of total approved project costs to a maximum of \$17,500 for individual farm businesses, yet remains inaccessible to many diverse new entrants due to strict eligibility criteria. B.C.'s knowledge promotion extends beyond primary production, funding Research and Development (R&D), pilots and demonstrations, and the commercialization of promising agricultural innovations through The [Canada-BC Agri Innovate Program](#). Another initiative focused on building entrepreneurs in agriculture is The [Venture Acceleration Program](#), which provides mentorship, coaching and market validation training support to early stage entrepreneurs.

In Saskatchewan, farm producers are further supported by [10 Regional Offices](#) across the province. Regional Offices assist farmers, ranchers, producer groups and industry players with access to production as well as business information and services, providing an on-demand direct support service.

Targeted Indigenous Initiatives


As one of the fastest growing farming populations, both B.C. and Saskatchewan have developed Indigenous-specific programs to support new entrants. Developed in response to findings of the [First Nations Agricultural Needs Assessment](#) conducted in 2012, the [Indigenous Agricultural Development Program](#) supports individual Indigenous entrepreneurs with coaching and business plan development, as well as Indigenous communities with options assessments and financial and business planning. In 2019, a Senior Indigenous Advisor was hired to increase Indigenous participation in the agriculture sector. The Ministry of Agriculture has responded to agriculture-related questions and provided program information to Indigenous communities on a range of topics including horticulture, grain production, livestock production and range management. They also developed agriculture extension events for Indigenous communities.

Quality of Life Supports

While not specific to new entrants, Saskatchewan recognizes the severe increase in mental health issues among farmers, and operates a [Farm Stress Line](#). The 24/7 call centre operates a confidential support for conflict and crisis due to farm-related stress, and has recently launched a [new pilot app](#) to improve accessibility for farmers.

Gaps in Current Policies

Although a range of novel approaches have been adopted in regions, our research on the current state policy landscape and consultations with farmers have identified some key gaps to adequately support new entrants.



The **first gap** is a lack of an integrated strategy to grow new farmers through the provision of a service continuum to provide alongside support for new entrants. This has resulted in a series of one off programs that are not well connected across jurisdictions or across different types of needs facing new entrants, and privileges some farmers over others, based on their size and where they happen to live. Exacerbated by a lack of integration across “siloed” programs, there is a current lack of baseline data to understand unmet needs, recruitment strategies and areas of program success.

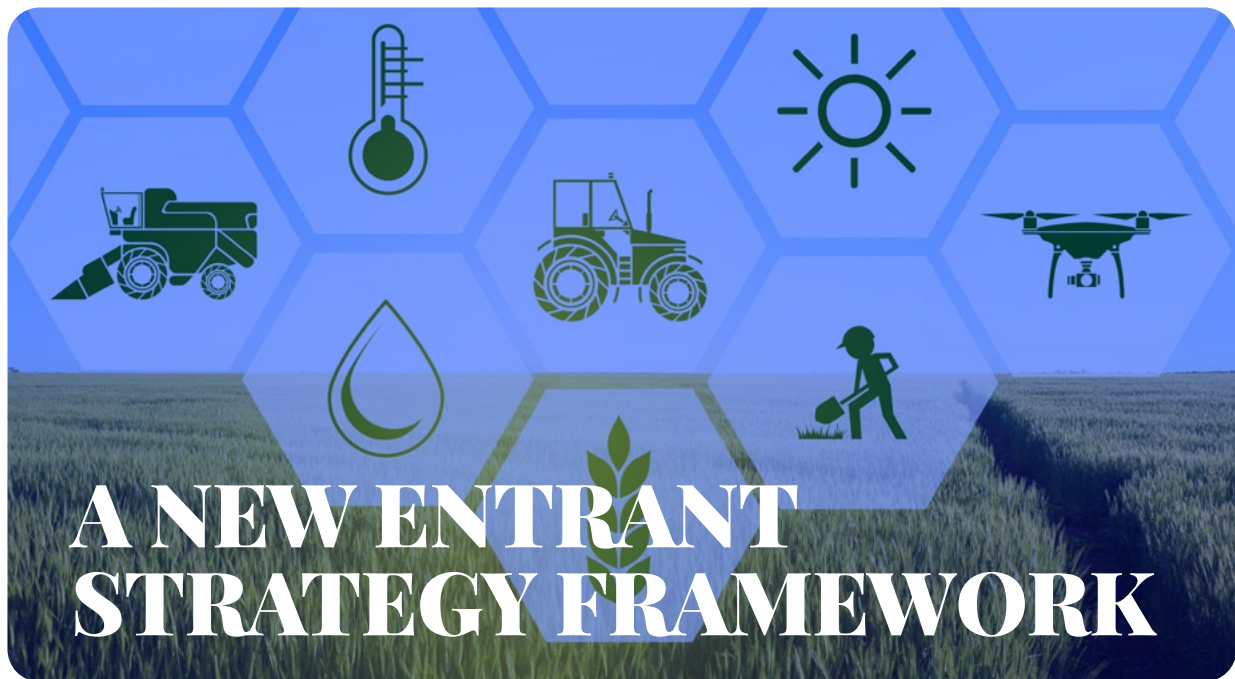
A **second gap** is that many existing programs have thresholds or other requirements that are inaccessible to smaller scale farmers and preclude many new entrants. A **third and related gap** is that many programs are not tailored to meet the diverse needs of new entrants through customized, on-demand navigation support, or translation. Programs like AgPal and the FCC’s Indigenous Pathways program are a good start, but more customized direct support and funding is required as a component of an integrated strategy to serve under represented groups. Canada needs a targeted universalist approach that prioritizes those most in need to create a threshold that will ensure that all farmers can access support.

A **fourth gap** is that there is extremely limited human resource management capacity and labour support for new entrants looking to scale their operations, and transition to online sales. The Temporary Foreign Worker Program has been challenged by COVID-19 and was inaccessible to many smaller farmers prior to COVID-19. There is a need for better support to connect new entrants without an existing operation (e.g. students or newcomers) that are eager to learn and get hands-on experience with new entrants who need support to grow their existing operation.

A **fifth gap** is a lack of national programs or strategies to promote land access through land succession, shared ownership and agricultural land protection programs to maintain land affordability, which limits the ability to access farm land and lower risks to farmers through the creation of collective farmer-ownership models or subsidized programs for shared services.

A **sixth gap** is a lack of integrated networks for local knowledge transfer. These networks are especially important to new entrants who are less likely to be familiar with local conditions, have experience navigating resources, or to be deeply integrated into local communities.

A **seventh and final gap** is the limited local infrastructure, including broadband access in rural areas, to support value-added production, digital marketing supports and processing for new farmers to grow and sustain their business. New farmers and small-scale ranchers have identified the opportunity to fill an agricultural niche of customer demand for local, sustainable food, especially during COVID-19, when international supply chains were halted for many weeks at a time.



A NEW ENTRANT STRATEGY FRAMEWORK

To date, programs and policies have not adequately addressed the historic and persistent structural and systemic policy barriers faced by diverse new entrants, rooted in the legacy of colonialism, institutional racism and a tendency for decisions to privilege and exclude certain groups, over others—to the particular disenfranchisement of Indigenous peoples. In 2019, the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) supported the implementation of the Chiefs-in-Assembly resolution to advance the economic agriculture opportunities for First Nations peoples. It acknowledged the need for increased First Nations participation and opportunities within the agriculture and agri-foods sector to address economic revitalization and increase resilience and food security for Indigenous communities. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, the report authors were unable to sufficiently engage Indigenous peoples in this ongoing discussion to craft meaningful recommendations. However, we believe the recommendations highlight innovative approaches and underscore the unique opportunity to shape a distinct agricultural strategy to support First Nations and Indigenous-led approaches to farming and food systems.

Developing a Service Continuum for Farmers

The federal government, working in partnership with provinces, territories, farmer associations, Indigenous peoples, and other key stakeholders, must develop an integrated framework to build a future of agriculture that is accessible to new entrants. There is currently no comprehensive targeted strategy that considers how to address the specific

inequities faced by new entrants. Current agricultural policy has not been developed with the needs of new entrants in mind, and despite good intentions, often serves to exclude and disenfranchise them through over regulation and red tape. An intersectional lens, drawing on tools like the Federal Gender Based Analysis Plus Framework, presents a precedent for the creation of an intersectional new entrant policy stress test that will ensure policy is more equitable for diverse new farmers facing considerable obstacles for entry across various intersections like immigration status, gender, race, age and other factors. With several years of experience working with new farmers, Young Agrarians has identified the need for a country-wide policy framework to support new farmers in creating a stress test policy screen and is undertaking work to advance this initiative.

In addition to addressing barriers, the federal government should create conditions that will allow new farmers to thrive. Initiating the collection of robust disaggregated data on new farmers provides an important first step to understand, recruit and retain future producers. Regulations to protect agricultural land from development and investment will also be key, while ensuring access to new financial tools to stimulate new farm growth through extra capital. Rewarding small-scale farmers for sustainable practices, through priority land access, subsidies, infrastructure grants, and direct payment for climate-friendly practices, can help to advance climate-neutral farming, while also equalizing the effect of economies of scale driven by larger farmers. The U.S. government has recently made investments through Executive Orders that encourage climate smart agricultural practices through direct payment to farmers, creating new sources of income for rural residents.



Wrap Around Supports for New Farmers: Learning from Quebec

Quebec's innovative approach for supporting new entrants is worth mentioning. Under the Center for Agriculture and Agri-food's (CRAAQ) mandate, farm operators, academics, and representatives of the public sector have access to a continuum of services where support, knowledge and network access is provided to new entrants. Innovative programs support new entrants accessing land and knowledge through a vibrant network of 400 dedicated experts throughout Canada who share information with over 5,000 professionals and approximately 15,000 agricultural and food companies in Quebec.

CRAAQ supports new entrants by operating Quebec's land bank program L'ARTERRE, a land matching program designed to link new farmers with land, and to transfer existing farm businesses to new operators. L'ARTERRE promotes a model focused on quality in all phases of the land matching process. CRAAQ also supports Quebec farmers diversifying their products and supporting those interested in producing organic food or managing a small farm operation. Recent statistics have shown that the number of small farms in Quebec is growing due to this effective program and a desire by customers to purchase their foods to a local source. This situation results from the synergies developed by CRAAQ and previous and more recent directives from Quebec's Department of Agriculture to substantially increase the procurement of locally grown foods by Quebec's public institutions. This new trend stops a 40-year decline of farms operations in Quebec.

CRAAQ makes a definitive impact in developing a sustainable agricultural sector in Quebec by offering a central hub to all stakeholders interested in developing Quebec agriculture.

Freeing up new public land on university campuses and public lands through tax incentives, and funding programs that reduce risk for land tenure and also provide permanent land options for new entrants, will create conditions for success. Growing farmer acumen on topics such as business management, digital marketing and human resource best practices will also ensure new entrants have the tools to retain a diverse workforce, and grow their operations.

The creation of local supply chains, outlined in the 2021 federal mandate letter from Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, is currently being explored in the Prairies, and presents an opportunity to develop new domestic markets through interprovincial and regional trade. A study published in 2015 shows that replacing 10% of the top 10 fruit and vegetable imports with locally grown produce would result in a \$250-million increase in Ontario's GDP and the creation of 3,400 new jobs. As seen in Quebec's National Strategy for the Purchase of Quebec Foods, federal dollars can do double duty, procuring goods locally while also investing in communities. For instance, the \$200 million in federal emergency food relief during COVID-19 could have procured thousands of pounds of fresh food produce from local farmers.

Wrap around supports and improved work conditions for new entrants cannot address Canada's agricultural labour shortage alone. Actions to support temporary foreign workers must also be taken. A pathway to permanent residency and citizenship provides the first step to improved livelihoods because labourers can present claims for unjust work practices without the threat of deportation. A [CAHRC Butcher's Pathway to Permanent Residency](#) report highlighted a 90% retention rate for TFW staying at plants and in rural communities an average of 10 years. Economic immigration is a primary driver of Canada's labour market growth and has also proven to be a promising driver of new entrants. Federal settlement supports that foster immigrant cultural community hubs, and connect settlement agencies with farmer associations that can also bolster belonging and inclusion for migrants and newcomer farmers. Attracting and retaining these workers will require broader policies that improve employer compliance and address legislative shortcomings that provide limited protections for this essential part of Canada's current and future farm workforce.

Doubling down on investment in farms through accessible infrastructure capital to improve access by lowering costs and providing education on appropriate technologies of scale will support farmers who struggle to afford innovations. One approach would be to co-ordinate industry-wide integration of affordable Agtech through networks such as traditional farming co-ops, which could facilitate pooling funds toward shared resources and training. At the same time, incentives for adopting new, more sustainable technologies and land management practices can accelerate change and put new tools into the hands of those who need them most.

RECOMMENDATION #1:**Increase accessibility of programs and services**

- **Collect disaggregated data on who is currently farming in Canada.** The first step to better serving new farmers is to better understand who they are and what challenges they face. Using Statistics Canada's existing farmer survey, build a more robust picture of new farmer demographics to support better programs, and retention and recruitment of Canadian farmers, including exit surveys for new entrants who have stopped farming;
- **Develop a New Farmer Stress Test.** This stress test would assess whether, and in what ways, existing and new policies and programs related to agriculture might privilege established businesses, farms and workers as compared to new entrants to make programs more equitable for new farmers; and
- **Expand existing Farm Credit Canada capital programs to better serve diverse new entrant populations.** Build on FCC programs tailored to women, youth and Indigenous Peoples to develop loan programs to benefit immigrants, Black and new-entrant farmers, to address prejudice in loan access, and to increase access to capital for farmers leasing and owning land through low interest rates.

RECOMMENDATION #2:**Lower barriers to capital to stimulate business growth**

- **Establish preferential lending rates to encourage collective land ownership models.** Land sharing models such as community land trusts, community pastures, co-ops, and other shared land-ownership approaches can pool individual resources, to allow long-term land access for more entrants;
- **Explore unique financial mechanisms to address capital barriers created by the Indian Act.** Develop approaches to enable Indigenous farmers to borrow against reserve land;
- **Identify opportunities to increase the social finance investment initiatives for new entrants.** Amplify, expand and support the innovative funders, such as the Fair Finance Fund, that assist local food and farm enterprises and cost-shared infrastructure that enhance local economies and farmer livelihoods;
- **Include quotas for new entrants in funding schemes.** Ensure that financial lending is equitably distributed and identify outreach methods to promote programs to underrepresented groups; and
- **Provide payments to new entrant farmers who have adopted sustainable practices through infrastructure grants and other mechanisms.** Agriculture has been identified as a critical sector to help address the issue of climate change. Many new entrant farmers are already adopting climate-friendly practices; providing an incentive to both sustain and expand these practices is one important way to support this group.

Protect land to increase affordability for new entrants

- **Provide preferential land tax or land rental rates for community pasture grazing on Crown Lands, and protect Provincial Crown Lands from acquisition and sale through Federal mandates.** Increase access to potential agricultural land and encourage communal land use opportunities that incentivize sustainable farming and ranching practices;
- **Increase land protections through the establishment of provincial land banks.** Work closely with provinces and municipalities to facilitate the creation of land banks to support new entrant farmers by protecting agricultural land from speculation and development and making it accessible for farming; and
- **Fund existing land matching programs to connect more farmers to agricultural land.** Increase the capacity of existing land matching programs, like the B.C. Land Matching Program, Quebec's L'ARTERRE initiative; and [FarmLINK's land listing platform](#), to support more farm seekers to connect with land owners selling land; and build the capacity of provinces and farmer associations to provide this support across Canada.

Transfer knowledge to build capacity

- **Develop improved farm labour conditions through best practice human resource training.** Partner with the CAHRC to develop and deliver a human resource curriculum to assist farm managers and new entrant farmers to better identify discrimination and support farm labourers to improve work conditions, and increase professional development opportunities on farms;
- **Integrate, deliver and standardize curriculum on farm labour management in agricultural programs at colleges and universities.** Partner with post-secondary farming programs and farmer associations to ensure future farmers and agricultural professionals are well informed on how to create a positive work environment to retain farm labour;
- **Increase farmer-to-farmer mentorship and knowledge transfer.** Deliver direct funding to farmer associations and organizations to improve sustainable agriculture practices and strengthen farmer networks to combat isolation, improve knowledge transfer, and to identify and advance farmer needs;
- **Provide a national funding framework to deliver farm management resources to new farmers.** Fund, promote and expand existing no-cost farm business management workshops for new entrant farmers through agricultural programs at colleges and universities and through farmer organizations and associations to deliver regionally appropriate farm management resources and information sessions to new farmers;

- **Facilitate a regional partnership framework between farmer associations and newcomer agencies to support new immigrant farmers.**

There is an opportunity for newcomers and settlement agencies to partner with farmer associations to translate programs, services and farm education to immigrant farmers to facilitate their entry into agriculture, as seen with the SPARR and Young Agrarians partnership in B.C., which supports

newcomers to access land through leasing; and

- **Launch an industry-wide integration of affordable Agtech to improve access to innovative practices.** In collaboration with Agtech industry stakeholders, farmer associations, university-based agricultural research units, and farmer co-ops, explore how to leverage and pool resources and institutional capacity to lower costs to innovate farm applications.



The current system is set up to exploit us. If the conditions were better, more people would want to stay in agriculture, even after gaining permanent residency, and more immigrants like myself would be happy to do this work.”

— Gabriel Alladuah

RECOMMENDATION #5:

Improve farmer work conditions to retain and attract skilled labour

- **Provide permanent resident pathways for all migrant workers.** Increase access to skilled labour through permanent resident pathways that are untied to sectoral work and prioritize workers based on their length of participation in the program;
- **Address legislative gaps in agricultural labour policy to improve work conditions for TFW.** Adopt a national strategy to commit federal,

provincial and territorial governments and other stakeholders to strengthen monitoring, enforcement and compliance to decent work conditions for migrant workers;

- **Promote and incentivize collective farm ownership models.** Improve farm labour conditions by increasing opportunities for workers’ autonomy and decision making through shared farm ownership models;

- **Cultivate rural immigrant community cultural hubs.** Encourage newcomer settlements in rural areas to diversify and grow non-urban populations and attract new diverse workers, foster inclusive cultural communities, and increase a sense of belonging;
- **Expand immigration criteria to respond to agricultural labour shortages.** Include agricultural skills as part of Canada’s broader immigrant recruitment strategy to better reflect the country’s labour needs, and begin

the process to phase out conditional work programs that create precarious working conditions for economic migrants; and

- **Launch a new entrant farmer recruitment program.** Develop a data-informed farmer recruitment campaign to attract new farmers to bridge gaps in the future farm workforce, and modernize the image of Canadian farmers as innovative, skilled, entrepreneurial and essential to building a sustainable future.

RECOMMENDATION #6:

Invest in local sustainable food systems to revitalize rural economies

- **Develop more resilient and integrated local food supply chains.** Develop programs to link rural farmers with urban and regional food procurement opportunities, with a focus on hospitals, universities, schools and emergency relief efforts to address food shortages, and food insecurity during COVID-19;
- **Identify and prioritize cooperative farming initiatives for public procurement initiatives.** Strengthen local, sustainable, climate-friendly food procurement through incentivizing the use of cooperative farming models; and
- **Invest in value-added processing hubs and infrastructure to increase rural jobs.** Work with provinces and territories to build production capacity in rural regions.



The new rural challenge: create people, not jobs... ‘people-creation’, not job creation, holds the key to growth in rural Canada .”



Debra Hauer



COVID-19

has presented an opportunity to reimagine one of Canada's oldest and most established sectors. Food security in Canada is not to be taken for granted, and policy must reflect the essential service that agriculture provides.

CONCLUSION

Growing the Next Crop of Canadian Farmers provides an overview of some of the current systemic barriers faced by new entrants in agriculture and proposes a new integrated framework to address them. Farmer experiences from across the country highlight the extent of challenges faced by those entering farming, and reveal additional barriers faced by diverse groups, who increasingly make up the next generation of producers. Drawing on a place-based approach, we explored innovative regional programs and policies in British Columbia, Saskatchewan and Quebec. These examples highlight scalable approaches to the creation of a service continuum for farmers, with a number of immediate opportunities to meaningfully improve sectoral outcomes. We encourage further consideration and research on how the federal government, in collaboration with the provinces and territories, can expand these programs nationally to create positive outcomes for new farmers, decent work

conditions for farm workers, and spur socio-economic revitalization of rural economies and regional food systems. A New Entrant Policy Framework for Canada would mark the cornerstone of an ambitious plan to create a more sustainable food system that begins to address legacies of colonialism and discrimination that have prioritized some groups over others.

Although this report tackles a substantial challenge for the future of work in agriculture, a focus on new entrants alone will not solve the myriad of problems facing this sector. Further research is needed on how technology could support new farmers to address the pressing challenges of climate change and become the drivers of green growth and a whole-ecosystems approach. Similarly, the rising mental health epidemic is a key issue of concern among producers. More research and support will be needed to ensure the wellbeing of future and current farmers is also a priority, especially as rural populations decline and social isolation increases.

This research was also unable to significantly engage with Indigenous farmers. As reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples shapes Canada's future, federal and provincial governments need to further engage with Aboriginal communities and Indigenous farmers to understand their unmet needs. This engagement should create the conditions by which effective and respectful agricultural policies can be developed that enable First Nations to drive their own food systems. Furthermore, future approaches would seek to remedy the historical and ongoing dispossession from land that contributes to today's under-representation of both the First Nations and broader Indigenous communities in farming activities.

Bringing many pressing food challenges to the fore, COVID-19 has presented an opportunity to reimagine one of Canada's oldest and most established sectors. Increased public interest in where food comes from, issues of sustainability and the essential nature of food workers have generated a valuable dialogue about the value of primary agriculture and the vital nature of Canada's agricultural workforce—to both our economic and social prosperity. Food security in Canada is not to be taken for granted, and policy must reflect the essential service that agriculture provides.

Action is needed now to change the course of this sector. Cultivating the next crop of farmers will demonstrate government leadership and commitment to build more resilient and sustainable food supply chains, while supporting farmers and ranchers to become the future “green workforce” that Canadians need. Success will only be achieved by taking a holistic systems-level view of agriculture—one that prioritizes inclusion and good jobs for our most essential workers—building a more just, sustainable and equitable agricultural future for farmers, and all Canadians.

We aspired to use this report as an opportunity to highlight voices that have been typically underrepresented in conversations about the future of work in the agricultural sector. We also sought to craft a report that portrayed diverse perspectives and offered balanced recommendations aimed at lowering barriers of entry for new farmers from underrepresented groups. In recognition of the complex and multifaceted nature of Canadian agriculture, and the interdependencies of factors such as immigration, technology and automation, climate change, and international supply chains, we opted to use a systems change approach to address the issue of how to sustainably address labour the current and looming labour shortage in Canadian farming.

Our approach recognized that land, as a site of important healing, ceremony and teachings, is a central feature of achieving reconciliation and reparations for Indigenous Peoples. For that reason, we used an anti-colonial approach to explore recommendations for the future of work in agriculture, a sector that is inextricably tied to how we use and sustain land. For this report, an anti-colonial framework meant engaging with concepts like colonialism, oppression, decolonization, power, agency and resistance, as well the agency of Indigenous Peoples and their diversity of perspectives, to ensure that policy recommendations do not serve to exacerbate or create new inequities experienced by First Peoples. This report seeks to identify opportunities to increase access and opportunity for underserved groups, including women, racialized groups, immigrants and youth, while also respecting the distinct rights and position of First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples.

The research plan for this report consisted of five phases: (1) identify issues and focus, (2) conduct research, (3) execute stakeholder outreach, (4) draw conclusions, and (5) develop policy recommendations. Within the context of this report, we conceptualized underrepresented groups in agriculture to be inclusive of Indigenous Peoples, youth, racialized/people of colour, women and immigrants. A literature review and survey of reports, academic publications, public government information and news articles was conducted to form our preliminary assumptions, structured general stakeholder interview guide, and targeted line of questioning for specific stakeholders.

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APPENDIX A – METHODOLOGY

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To test our hypothesis, gather further data, and identify gaps, we consulted with non-profit organizations, academics and subject matter experts, industry associations, and public servants from the Government of Canada, most notably Statistics Canada and Agriculture and Agri-food Canada. See Appendix A for a full list of consultations. We also conducted several one-on-one interviews and focus groups with diverse farmers and ranchers located in Ontario, Saskatchewan, British Columbia, Alberta, Manitoba and Quebec.

To compare and contrast policies from a place-based lens, we sought to explore three unique agriculture regions: British Columbia, Saskatchewan and Quebec. Following all local health protocols, we traveled to Saskatoon and Vancouver to conduct interviews (both virtual and physically distanced in-person) and visited farming operations. All engagement with Quebec stakeholders was completed virtually.

Insights gathered over the course of our research were used to develop a framework. This framework was used as a heuristic to help structure the complexity and interconnected nature of different elements of Canada's food system, and commonalities across different regions, stakeholders, and policy landscapes. The framework also identified actors most equipped to deliver these solutions based on jurisdiction, fiscal capacity and other key factors.

Government

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Karra-Lee Gerrits (Vice President, Strategy & Business Development, Protein Industries Canada), interviewed by Task Force 3, Nov. 2, 2020.

Jennifer Wright (Senior HR Advisor, Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council), interviewed by Task Force 3, Nov. 16, 2020

Debra Hauer (Manager, AgriLMI, Agricultural Human Resource Council), interviewed by Task Force 3, Nov. 24, 2020.

Jules Gallant (Director of Government Relations, Farm Credit Canada), interviewed by Task Force 3, Dec. 4, 2020.

Farmer Organizations

Clinton Monchuk (Executive Director, Farm and Food Care), interviewed by Task Force 3, Nov. 2, 2020

Ryder Lee (CEO, Saskatchewan Cattlemen’s Association), interviewed by Task Force 3, Nov. 4, 2020

Darcy Smith (B.C. Land Matching Program Manager, Young Agrarians), interviewed by Task Force 3, Nov. 6, 2020

Jane Rabinowicz (Executive Director, SeedChange), interviewed by Task Force 3, October 2020

Sara Dent (co-Executive Director, Young Agrarians), interviewed by Task Force 3, December 2020

Producers

Diverse Farmer Focus Groups, interviewed by Melana Roberts, Farmers for Climate Solutions Task Force, Oct. 24, 2020.

Diverse Farmer Focus Groups, interviewed by Melana Roberts, Farmers for Climate Solutions Task Force, Oct. 29, 2020.

Ian McCreary (Former President of Canadian Wheat Board), interviewed by Task Force 3, Nov. 2, 2020

Mary McCreary (Founding member of Treaty Land Sharing Network), interviewed by Task Force 3, Nov. 2, 2020

Sarah Clements (Tsawwassen Farm School Program Manager, Kwantlen Polytechnic University), interviewed by Task Force 3, Dec. 7, 2020

Academics

Hannah Wittman (Professor, University of British Columbia), interviewed by Task Force 3, Nov. 5, 2020

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