

System Change

Expanding the Influence of Regional Agricultural Support

*For RAS Conference June 23, 2021
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Background / History

- ACRD's Alberni Agricultural Plan (2011) led to Agricultural Plan Implementation Project in 2014
- A 2019/2020 'Develop' project through the Vancouver Foundation included a review of the ACRD's Agricultural Plan Implementation Project, engagement with other communities, and research into other models of Regional Agricultural Support



Photo: Tom Walker

From System Change Event at the Islands Agriculture Show, February 2020:

“Looking for a Unicorn...”

Michele Bates - Planner, Regional District of East Kootenay (on meeting diverse needs)

“Agriculture is an Essential Service”

Sara Dent - Executive Director, Young Agrarians

System Change ‘Test’ funding = \$100,000 per year for 3 years



Definition

For the purpose of this project, Regional Agriculture Support (RAS) is defined as:

Any organization that: (1) Seeks to provide general supports for agriculture from within a specific and defined area in BC, and; (b) Leads and determines priorities, management, and structure from within its specific region

Phase 1 Key Themes & Findings

1. *There is broad interest in exploring opportunities and mechanisms for systemic changes*
2. *Systemic changes can be challenging, slow, and complex*
3. *Regional level programming allows for the integration of Health and Agricultural interests*
4. *Structural ‘bridges’ and formalized ‘bridging’ roles are required*
5. *A lack of core funding hinders RAS progress*
6. *There are significant power and equity imbalances at play*
7. *Data, measurement, and evaluation are important*
8. *Key leverage points exist for change (including climate change, academic involvement, existing Regional government roles, and Covid-19)*

Threats and Weaknesses

Land Use Issues

- Competing pressures for land base (recreational/parks/wildlife/agriculture/real estate)
- Diversity of land base
- Urbanization
- Variety of land ownership models

Funding Limitations

- Lack of free professional supports - only large scale producers can afford to pay
- Difficulty funding products that don't meet federal mandate (eg: fish)
- Lack of capacity for face to face conversations
- Need for a “system navigator/catalyzer/bridging role”
- Lack of ‘core’ funding
- Grants programs generally for specific projects only

Bureaucratic Complexity

- Definition of Agricultural Planning (Is it production? Food security? Access to markets? Land use?)
- Regulations don't scale down well to small-scale, diverse groups, or individuals
- Structural impediments - issues are complex but are dealt with in silos (Health, Agriculture, Environment, etc)
- Trade agreements
- Downloading onto producers - lack of skill set/resources for grant applications and navigating bureaucracy, sense of hopelessness and overwhelm
- Local government is required to respond to Provincial policy changes “We have to, we have no choice, we figure it out.”
- Issues are broad, but programs/policies are specific
- How to responding to emerging issues or evolving needs?
- Challenging for small farmers voices to be heard
- Challenges with Provincial/Federal mandates and jurisdictions (Fish, etc)

Cultural Contexts

- Lack of creativity (“planner mode”), being bound to old models
- Favours “industrial” farming (because it is more easily measurable!)
- Top-down programs vs. Bottom-up needs - “Look at this program we have!/Program doesn't work for us...”
- “Shouting into the ether” Sense that no one listening
- Lack of indigenous input/perspectives/accommodation
- General disconnect from farming/earth/food
- Focus on export rather than developing local market
- Sense that small scale production is “not legitimate”

General Sector Challenges

- Perception of non-profitability of agriculture
- Profitability takes time
- Limited consumer base (cost, convenience, out of season preference)
- Hard to support the BC's product diversity
- Sector in-fighting (big/small scale, organic/non-organic, etc)
- Food waste (poor distribution/management)
- Demographics of farmers (age, technology limitations)
- Access to year round markets is difficult
- Challenges in encouraging new entrants

Knowledge Transfer Gaps

- Poor distribution of knowledge requirements (through general local government, businesses)
- Lack of core role for directing resources
- Loss of extension services
- Lack of informal mentorships
- Urbanization creates broken linkages for knowledge transfer
- New entrants not trained in agriculture
- Limited uptake in workshops

Strengths and Opportunities

Shared Values

- Shared value of “local healthy food production”
- Desire for learning and collaboration
- Common goals can help connect diverse

Public Awareness

- Consumer consciousness is shifting, which supports government funding
- More consumer and public interest

Resources

- New technology, the internet, social media
- More communities have agricultural plans
- National food policy (opportunity to bridge agriculture and food security)
- More multi-sector organizations at the community level
- Business supports and provincial agricultural programs
- Regional agrologist are “an ear to the ground” and have key networks
- Land leasing resources
- Learning opportunities are available for farmers
- UBCM and other annual events which bring stakeholders and industry together
- Opportunities for resourcing, collaborating, networking, improving
- Farmers' Institutes as a platform for producer voices

Models / Program Examples

- Programs where the Province links with Regional Districts and producers, involve academic expertise, and bridge commodity divides (Island Health's CFAI, Climate Action Initiative, Agricultural Adaptation Research Network, Young Agrarians)
- Provincial Ministries supporting external mandates (Ministry of Health's BC Farmers Market Coupon program)
- Farmers' Institutes bringing commodity

People: Passion and Expertise

- New people/new ideas
- Lots of knowledge
- More champions in planning roles
- People are working together to problem solve
- Energy from young people/farmers
- Political will
- Infusion of energy from young farmers and organizations

Emerging Issues

- Climate change, crisis, and disasters can be incentive or help mobilize
- Local planners engaged because of recent hot topics (ALC/Cannabis)
- Lengthening relationships and programs

A Shared RAS Narrative

Food impacts our communities, and we are representatives of those communities. We value our producers and our pastoral landscapes for their contribution to our communities' wellbeing.

The challenges to supporting agriculture are complex, and it remains uncertain how to best connect the future of food to the land today. We are passionate and committed to working towards that “shadowy future”. We seek to learn and to work together, and we share need for

Public Statement



“The ACRD’s System Change project sets out to test a regional model for food system and agricultural support. Strong regional structures will influence Provincial frameworks and ensure accommodation of the unique contextual realities of BC’s various geographical regions and producer populations.”

By bridging and supporting local organizations, building a BC-wide network of other regionals-driven organizations, and engaging in targeted education and resource development, we will support change in the way producers, Indigenous stakeholders, and communities are supported within Province-wise agricultural frameworks, ensuring efficacy, long-term sectoral growth, and diverse cultural relevancy.”

Starting Principles, Core Project Management Values

1. The 'System' is already changing
2. We are all on the same team
3. Transparency, inclusivity, and grace

“It’s important to remember that the village is not a community of people who think the same way as we do. The village existed before words like audience, market, and niche. The village was often people we didn’t like but had to get along with for survival. There were probably people in that village that drove us crazy—as anyone living in a rural community can attest. But we didn’t cast them out because we knew one day we might need to rely on that person.”

- Charlotte Priest

Project Activities - *Within ACRD*

- Supporting local organizations to expand capacity, including via core funding (\$49.5K annually) and mentorship
- ‘Bridging’ organizations via strong Committee structures and networking support in order to foster collaboration, partnerships, and info sharing.
- Fostering Indigenous engagement in development of culturally-appropriate structure, roles, language, and plans for food system work and agri-initiatives
- Fostering equity - ensuring producers’ expertise, contributions, and perspectives are valued and recognized within regional planning and advisory processes

Project Activities - *Across Province*

- Building a network of RAS from across the Province
 - Annual in-person events and 2-3 joint calls per year
 - Contributing to development of strong RAS programs and resources
- Diverse multi-stakeholder engagement to solicit, share, and incorporate various perspectives (including Provincial Ministries and organizations)
- Engaging Regional Districts and Planners in rural agricultural planning via academic interviews and education

Key Participants (TY!)

- **Regional Agricultural Support organizations (RAS):** 8 'core' organizations (& *others welcome*)
 - Lillooet Food and Agriculture Initiative; Capital Region Food and Agriculture Initiative; Kootenay-Boundary Farm Advisors; Bulkley-Nechako Regional District; North Okanagan Land 2 Table Network; Kamloops Food Policy Council; District A Farmers' Institute; Nanaimo Foodshare (tentative)
 - Participation honoraria of \$250/yr, plus \$500/yr in years 2/3 to pilot a simple evaluation tool
- **Regional Governments, TBD**
 - Approx. 10 RD's participating in interviews/education about agricultural planning with PhD student Colin Dring
- **Province of BC** - Ministry of Agriculture, Food, and Fisheries; Ministry of Health
- **Other BC Agriculture Organizations**
 - Young Agrarians, ACARN, BC Food Web, KPU, BC Cooperatives Association, and others

Timeline / Annual Focal Points

Year 1	Developing and sharing simple tools for evaluation and measurement of impact (so we speak a common language) - <i>with CRFAIR (Capital Region Food and Agriculture Roundtable Initiative)</i>
	Regional Government Interviews - <i>with Colin Dring</i>
Year 2	Supporting RAS connections to academic/technical ‘extension’/resources - <i>with ACARN (BC Agricultural Climate Adaptation Research Network) and KPU (Kwantlum Polytechnic University)</i>
	Regional Government education and info-sharing, as part of BC Planners event (TBD) - <i>with Colin Dring</i>
	RAS pilot of evaluation tool
Year 3	Developing comprehensive/accessible Province-wide database of RAS organizations, initiatives, and resources - <i>with BC FoodWeb</i>
	RAS pilot of evaluation tool
Annually	Project review and evaluation, with adaptation as required
July 2024	Project end; publication of Final Report

Questions?



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ALBERNI-CLAYOQUOT REGIONAL DISTRICT

