

## Summary: Brainstorming Session, Extension/Research Support

*Held Wednesday October 5, 2022 from 1:00-3:00pm Via Zoom*

# AGRI EXTENSION/RESEARCH SUPPORT DISCUSSION AND BRAINSTORMING SESSION

- *What key components must be considered when planning programs for extension and research support?*
- *What specific challenges are you currently experiencing?*



***“ Extension services without connection to academia and technical expertise is just social networking”***

*- Event participant, during break-out room discussion*

**Presentation by:** Wallapak Polasub and Kent Mullinex, Institute of Sustainable Food Systems - *Agriculture Extension Service Feasibility Study and Implementation Plan*

**Participant Organizations:** Alberni-Clayoquot Regional District, BC Agricultural Climate Adaptation Research Network, City of Port Alberni, Comox Valley Regional District, Kootenay-Boundary Farm Advisors, Kwantlum Polytechnic University, Ministry of Agriculture and Food, Nanaimo Foodshare Society, Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako, Vancouver Island University, Wesco Foods. *14 participants in total*

Part of the Alberni-Clayoquot Regional District's 'System Change' project: *Advancing the Influence of Regional Agricultural Support.*



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## Welcome and Territorial Acknowledgement

This event was hosted in spirit of co-creation and collaboration, in order to help gather ideas, needs, resources that contribute to development of programs supporting producer access to technical extension and research services.

The agenda offered time for participant brainstorming and discussion and for sharing information about projects from around the province.

[A summary of the first event in this series, held June 2022, can be found here.](#)

The next and final event is tentatively scheduled to be held in-person, in Abbotsford on January 27, 2023.

## 1) Presentation and Q&A

**Wallapak Polasub and Kent Mullinex, [Institute of Sustainable Food Systems](#):**

Contact: [wallapak.polasub@kpu.ca](mailto:wallapak.polasub@kpu.ca), [kent.mullinix@kpu.ca](mailto:kent.mullinix@kpu.ca)

*KPU's Institute for Sustainable Food Systems (ISFS) is an applied research and extension unit at KPU focused on advancing organic and regenerative agriculture and place-based food systems as integral and foundational to sustainable society. ISFS works with producers, all levels of government, Indigenous Nations, community, and civic-sector organizations to create and apply new knowledge.*

*Their presentation included key findings from their recent BC Organic- Agriculture Extension Service Feasibility Study and Implementation Plan: a collective vision for a coordinated, strategic, collaborative, province-wide extension service.*

Wallapak and Kent discussed the findings from ISFS's [BC Organic- Agriculture Extension Service Feasibility Study and Implementation Plan](#). A live recording of this presentation is [here](#).

### **About the study:**

- Commissioned by Province of BC in order to assess needs/gaps and formulate strategic recommendations;
- Used snowball sampling method that included info from anyone that was engaged in any sort of extension activities, via surveys and in-depth interviews;
- Steered by a diverse working group and advisory committee;
- Focused on organic agriculture, but results are transferable or could be inclusive of other sectors, particularly sustainable and regenerative agriculture.

### **Proposed budget, funding, and implementation:**

- Comprehensive and province-wide extension services will be expensive, but most of proposed budget would go for services on the ground rather than administration;
- Many universities are on board and offered in-kind support (including UFV, UBC, UNBC, TRU, KPU);
- Many regional districts and NEAT (Northern Environmental Action Team) were interested and offered in-kind or cash support;

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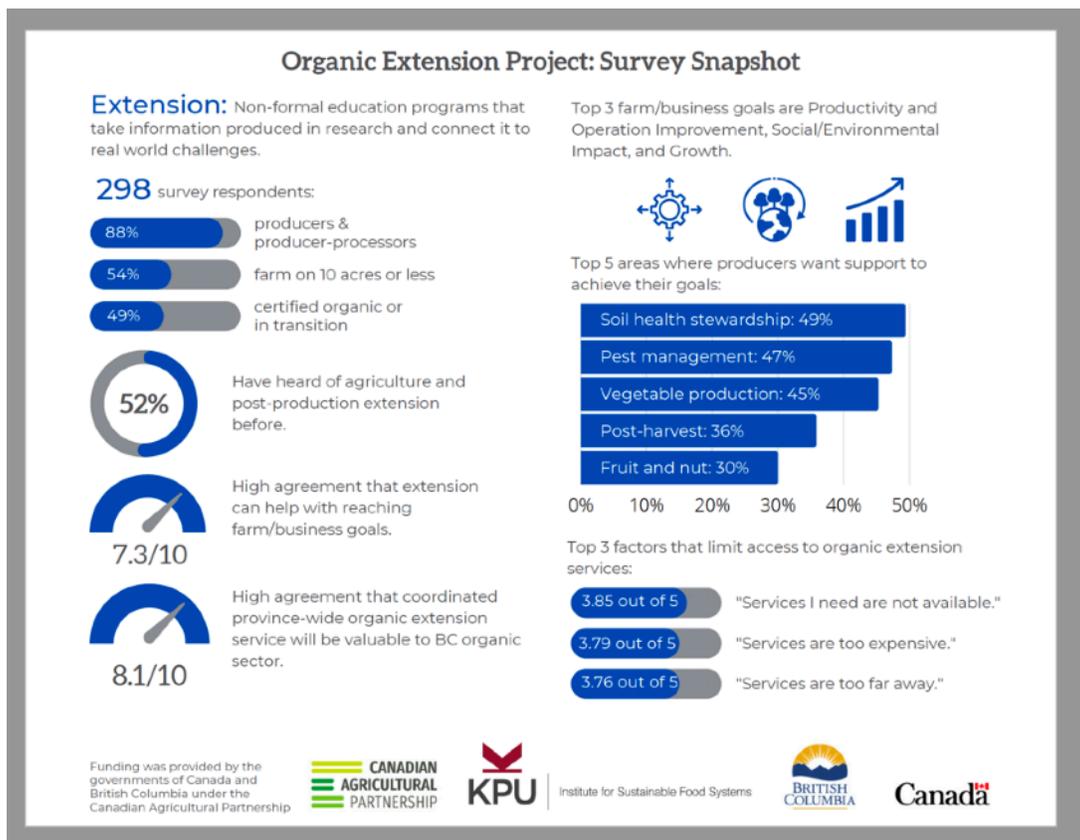
- Cost of 3.6 million over 5 years, proposed funding by fee for service (revenue stream created over time), endowments, and governments;
- ISFS has applied for grants to action the recommendations and continues to investigate potential funding avenues. They haven't received much feedback from the Province.

### Key findings:

- Currently no formal strategy/coordination across the province;
- Hard for people to navigate system or find help;
- Access to region-specific information is lacking;
- Remote regions are not being well-served;
- Regional districts reported generally that they have agri on their radar and that this sort of service would be of colossal support;
- Funding and capacity is limited within the organizations who currently offer services;
- Collaboration is key - with broad interest but varying stages of readiness and capacity;

### Recommendations:

- An operations model including:
  - Board of Directors, with reps from MoA, First Nations, & Organic BC (strategy and oversight)
  - Management team, including academic institutions (Designing services; how/ where to connect to research)
  - Regional Extension Agents (stationed across BC; generalists, but with local knowledge and coordinating with other Agents)
  - Administration (meetings, budgets, communications)



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## Organic Extension Project: Opportunities and Gaps

Opportunities	Gaps
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sector readiness and support for extension</li> <li>Cost-savings from collaboration</li> <li>Existing programs, resources, networks, relationships</li> <li>Extension actors' expertise and readiness to collaborate</li> <li>Market demand for organic and regeneratively grown food</li> <li>COVID recovery and food system resilience</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Explicit long-term strategy</li> <li>Public and sector funding</li> <li>Peer support networks for all farmers</li> <li>Coordination of extension</li> <li>Monitoring and evaluation</li> <li>Online tools/resources that are accessible and place-specific</li> <li>Food system-wide programs linked to climate change, reconciliation</li> </ul>

Based on the analysis, we recommend an extension service with a bold vision and broad mandate to grow BC's organic and regenerative sector. We recommend structuring the service as a coalition of committed collaborating organizations to build on existing resources, coordinated with mutual priorities and shared goals.

Funding was provided by the governments of Canada and British Columbia under the Canadian Agricultural Partnership





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## Organic Extension Project: Recommendations

Purpose & Objectives	Operations	Funding
<div style="text-align: center; margin-bottom: 10px;">  </div> <p><b>Purpose:</b> Widespread adoption of organic and regenerative practices.</p> <p><b>Long-term vision:</b> Thriving and resilient BC organic and regenerative agriculture and food system sector.</p> <p><b>Inclusive of all farmers and food businesses interested in organic and regenerative practices.</b></p>	<div style="text-align: center; margin-bottom: 10px;">  </div> <p><b>Structure:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Directors</b> provide oversight</li> <li>• <b>Management Team</b> provide strategic leadership and planning</li> <li>• <b>Dedicated extension agents</b> stationed regionally in partnership with <b>existing extension organizations</b></li> <li>• <b>Administration</b> provides operational support</li> </ul> <p><b>Implementation:</b> Phased approach over 5 years, operating at half capacity for year 1-3, and expanding to full capacity in year 4 and 5.</p>	<div style="text-align: center; margin-bottom: 10px;">  </div> <p><b>Start-up cost:</b> The cash contribution needed to pilot this initiative over 5 years is \$3.6M.</p> <p>Over 5 years, focus on development of a sustainable funding model.</p> <p><b>Funding options for further investigation:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sector-led endowment campaign</li> <li>• Sector funding mechanism</li> <li>• Cost recovery</li> <li>• Contributions from provincial and regional governments.</li> </ul>

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## 2) Break-out Rooms and Discussions

Break-out room discussions were self-facilitated by participants. The 'Google Jamboard' platform offered a place to document ideas, with two questions helping to guide conversations:

1. What key components must be considered when planning programs for extension and research support?
2. What is a specific challenge you are currently experiencing, with regards to producer access to extension and research support?

### **Discussion Highlights:**

ARECA - an Alberta example of a coordinated extension services approach:

- By the 2000's Province of Alberta had severely curtailed their extension services. In (circa) 2009 the Agricultural Research Extension Council of Alberta (ARECA) was launched. ARECA "*supports a network of applied research and extension associations to connect to program, services, innovations and research to improve the profitability and sustainability of their farm business* (<https://www.areca.ca/home>)";
- ARECA is widely seen as a successful model.

Theme: Research requires systematic and thorough planning and implementation:

- Effective and useful research requires connection to academia;
- [Producer guides to self-conducting research trials](#) are helpful but producers need clear access points and resources to support them to undertake and carry them out
- A key point of research is to share results and create new widespread practices - this is beyond the producer's responsibility;
- Producers often abandon formal research protocols as the season progresses or they get busy (they garner enough info for their own needs, but not enough to be statistically relevant or transferable to others).
- On-farm research needs to reinforce theories of, or enhance, the academic research (which is a specific and technical process);
- Knowledge-sharing and strong communications, with and amongst producers, is a key component of useful agri-research;
- Need for evaluation and monitoring of research - is it reaching people? Is it meaningful?

Participant perspectives about current situation in BC

- "*Given how MoA is reintegrating extension into their mandate, is their interest to contribute funding to this (the ISFS proposal)?*";
- Universities and Provincial government could be partnering to provide services to producers that, meanwhile, contribute to university research;
- [Classification of Professional Agrologists is changing](#) - the field may shrink and their costs may rise in response;
- A giant gap between what's happening in universities and what's happening on the farm;
- BC is incredibly diverse;
- Funding that is accessible to farmers is of value;
- Sometimes what a researcher want to know has no bearing/relevance for the farmer;
- There's a level of distrust between farmers and government;
- Farmers are in great need of technical extension and research support;

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- Provincial staff are currently in consultations about Federal/Provincial funding and actioning the priorities of the [Guelph Statement](#) - this is taking a lot of their time.
  - Guelph Statement priorities include Science, Research, and Innovation (with specific reference to extension activities).

### ***New Provincial Pilot Projects:***

Ministry of Agriculture and Food is currently working on two 'pilot' extension projects:

1. Lower Mainland, On-Farm Demonstration Research
  - A [Request for Proposals](#) was recently posted on BC Bid to contract services to deliver two practical workshops of 1.5-day duration that would empower producers to conduct their own on-farm trials, test production methods of interest, and increase the sustainability and resiliency of their operations.
2. Vancouver Island, Needs and Resources Assessment
  - In development - finding out who's doing what; and understanding regional players, needs, and gaps.

### ***Specific Recommendations/Ideas Presented:***

- Solicit joint letter of support for KPU's proposal, which could be shared with Province or included in KPU grant applications for project funding;
- Community based research models/farmer-led extension:
  - Farmers lead the discussion and bring in the experts - allows good partnerships, though takes time to build relationships and a framework for the research.
- Mother/daughter research plot models (strong oversight on 'mother' plot, with co-occurring 'daughter' plot with less)
- Funding open to all regions and all farmers
- Province could hire a number of research advisors, available for 1-1 support with producers across province, to help design & implement useful on-farm research projects
- Good extension should not be top-down, but rather strongly collaborative and inclusive of both top-down AND bottom-up needs, perspectives, and approaches;
- Many others, participant-recorded in the Jamboard pasted below

## 3) Closing and Next Steps

The next and final event (facilitated by the ACRD) on this extension/research topic is tentatively scheduled to be held in-person on January 27th, 2023.

The Ministry of Agriculture and Food has offered space in their Abbotsford Ministry offices (pending final confirmation). This in-person event will be concurrent to the Pacific Agriculture Show, also being held in Abbotsford, with the aim of encouraging attendance from across the province.

Feedback and suggestions about agri-extension and research opportunities are welcome. Please email [ACRDagriculture@gmail.com](mailto:ACRDagriculture@gmail.com)

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## Jamboard Results

Question 1: What key components must be considered when planning programs for extension and research support?



Question 2: What is a specific challenge you are currently experiencing, with regards to producer access to extension and research support?



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## About This Event

This event was part of the Alberni-Clayoquot Regional District's (ACRD) System Change project, Expanding the Influence of Regional Agricultural Support, a 3-year project with funding support by the Vancouver Foundation

The project has 2 streams:

1. Internally within the ACRD, to strengthen its own regional food system, inclusive of Indigenous and marine stakeholders; and
2. Externally to region; via engagement with BC Ministry of Agriculture and Food, BC Ministry of Health, and various Regional District; and via development of informal cross-provincial network of Regional Agricultural Support organizations (RAS).
  - The RAS network include a Core 8 group: Capital Region Food and Agriculture Initiative Roundtable (CRFAIR), District A Farmers' Institute (DAFI), Kamloops Food Policy Council (KFPC), Kootenay-Boundary Farm Advisors (KBFA), Lillooet Agriculture and Food Society (LAFS), Nanaimo Food Share (NFS), Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako (RDBN), and North Okanagan Land to Table Network (NOL2T)

The first year's RAS network focus was on development of evaluation metrics and tools for RAS, and on developing a framework and language around 'why regional agriculture support matters'. The second (current) year focus is on supporting RAS connections to academic/technical 'extension'/resources.

Sign up to receive emails and updates about the ACRD's System Change project and other events like this by sending an email to [ACRDagriculture@gmail.com](mailto:ACRDagriculture@gmail.com) and asking to subscribe.



*“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.”*