

Summary: Agri-Extension/Research Support Forum, May 2022

Held Wednesday May 11, 2022 from 1:30-3:00pm Via Zoom

AGRI EXTENSION/RESEARCH SUPPORT WHAT'S AVAILABLE?

A forum to help identify and describe resources for agri-producer extension services & research support in BC. *What are the gaps and some possible strategies to fill them?*



“The experts are among us.”

- Rachael Roussin, Kootenay-Boundary Farm Advisors

Presentations by: Kootenay-Boundary Farm Advisors, BC Agricultural Climate Adaptation Research Network, Institute of Sustainable Food Systems, and Ministry of Agriculture and Food

Participants: Alberni-Clayoquot Regional District, BC Co-op Association, Capital Regional District, Center for Seafood Innovation, Comox Valley Regional District, Dock+ Food Processing Hub, Investment Agriculture Foundation, Island Health, Kamloops Food Policy Council, North Okanagan Land 2 Table Network, Qathet Regional District, Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako, Regional District of Central Kootenay, Regional District of East Kootenay, University of British Columbia, Vancouver Island University, Young Agrarians, and others. *29 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

About This Event

This event is 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).
 1. 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, which is where this forum comes in.

In addition, the ACRD is also working with Colin Dring from UBC to engage Regional District and Planners in rural agricultural planning via academic interviews and education, and aims to support development of online resources/database for RAS organizations in year three.

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.

"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."

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Presentations and Q&A

1) Rachael Roussin, [Kootenay-Boundary Farm Advisors Program](#) (KBFA)

Contact: coordinator@kbfa.ca

KBFA is an agricultural extension program that supports producers to improve agricultural production and efficiency by helping find solutions to farm-specific production issues.

KBFA's general farm advisors, locally based in the Kootenay region, rely upon a large and expanding network to offer producers the best available information and resources. Events and field days are coordinated to address shared interests and facilitate networking within the sector while regular e-newsletters, social media and farm visits foster producer engagement and information sharing.

KBFA is funded collaboratively by three Regional Districts (East Kootenay, Central Kootenay and Kootenay Boundary) and Columbia Basin Trust. The program is Delivered by consultants and overseen by funding partners.

KBFA is in their 5th year of operations. Their contracted consultants are 'generalist' advisors, with a background in agri-science, but work with a team of specialists when needed, including academic institutions. Their mandate is very specific to the commercial sector within their regions. The commodity sector often has other support via industry associations; KBFA clients are generally smaller-scale.

Coordinating with champions within the region has proved to be a great way to harness local farmers' knowledge. Reporting on services is done for each regional district, and tracking numbers is important. KBFA provides excellent value for their cost. Currently funding is primarily via regional government, is this appropriate long-term?

Key learnings about agricultural extension:

- It is outreach and engagement based
- The experts are among us
- Coordination is paramount
- Is strongly relationship-based
- Key inroads are being made in increasing the viability of small, diversified farms - profitability is their largest challenge
- Farm visits are crucial; producer engagement is critical
- A key challenge and opportunity is in getting science-based info and expertise to producers, so they don't have to sift through it all themselves

Tips for conducting extension services for producers:

- Facilitate discussion
- Have fun
- Learn, listen, and funnel research when available
- Record webinars; zoom meetings actually increased producer participation
- Regional Districts make good boundaries for extension services
- Meet producers where they are at! Go on site - farmers are busy!
- Track numbers and reach to support continued funding and buy-in
- Having a communications person is key to program success - their e-newsletter, *The Kootenay Farmer*, has 1500 subscribers and is a most valuable tool.

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Audience commentary:

- “I think if agriculture is considered part of economic development then local/regional governments can definitely play a more significant role in terms of funding”
- “Great presentation Rachael! So great to have you as the Project Coordinator for KBFA!”
- “For us, the Regional Agriculture Coordinator positions fall within the Economic Development Department at the Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako.”

2020 Data & Highlights

- ▶ **All Regions Combined:**
 - ▶ 60 + farm visits
 - ▶ Advice to producers on 440 issues
 - ▶ 142 connections to experts
- **Events/Field Days**
 - ▶ 16 in-person
 - ▶ 4 online
- **NEW Communications**
 - ▶ Blog & Facebook
 - ▶ KBFA Videos (YouTube)



Mercy's Mushroom, Kaslo, 2020

Opportunities

- For Farmers:
 - Networking
 - New entrants
 - Access to relevant information
 - Feeling supported / connected
- For Government/Stakeholders
 - Knowing the issues for farmers and ranchers
 - A means to **communicate** with Ag Community
 - Regional District approach is non- bureaucratic, efficient and low admin (affordable?)

It isn't perfect, but impacts are significant!



Supporting Our
Region's Producers

Join us at Ravine Creek
Farm to discuss how
low tillage farming practices
are used to manage weeds,
build soil and retain moisture.

Date: Wednesday May 18 & August 31
Time: 3:00 – 5:00 p.m. (PST)
Location: Ravine Creek Farm, Slokan
Valley
EBFF Register at kbfa.ca/events

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Presentations and Q&A

2) Shauna McKinnon, [BC Agricultural Climate Adaptation Research Network](#)

Contact: shauna@bcacarn.com

ACARN was launched in May of 2017 to improve linkages and collaboration among agricultural researchers, industry specialists, policymakers, students and producers from across BC. The aim is to develop an effective network approach to address climate adaptation research needs in BC's agriculture industry by enhancing provincial research, promoting interdisciplinary projects, and improving the efficient use of climate adaptation resources.

ACARN also works closely with the Climate & Agriculture Initiative BC to enhance research extension strategies in the province.

BC has a significantly sized agriculture sector that is highly diverse. ACARN's working group includes AAFC, BC MAF, Industry partners, academic researchers, and external experts. Their network approach involves identification of common problems then working together to find collaborative solutions. Shauna is ACARN's only staff person.

ACARN facilitates research projects and also hosts educational events, workshops, and field days across the Province on issues of common concern. These help to create space for dialogue and supportive connections and cross-collaboration between diverse stakeholders, including between producers and researchers.

A 2021 project, for example, developed a roadmap for a sustainable agricultural weather monitoring network across BC. This demonstrates ACARN's way of identifying a common problem, convening several organizations to work together, and coming up with a collaborative solution and funding avenues. The project connected local agriculture with weather monitoring systems across the province.

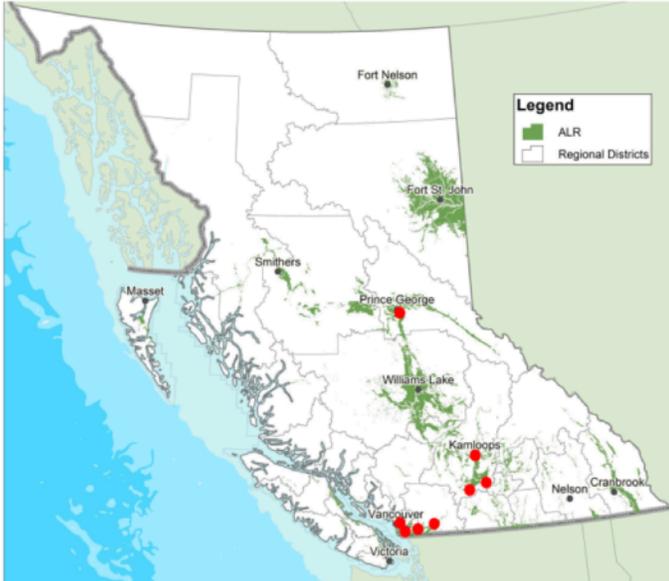
ACARN's 1400 members include government, producers and industry, students, academic researchers, and non-governmental organizations. In general, ACARN has noticed interest in climate and future trends, on farm management strategies, and seeing growth of membership in municipal, regional and first nations government. In cross-cutting issues, it is helpful to have multiple agencies working together to build institutional support. ACARN can develop projects, but they also need regional links to help action them.

Audience commentary:

- Does aquaculture fit in the BC Agricultural Climate Adaptation Research Network?
 - There was acknowledgement about the diversity of BC's food production sectors, but no, ACARN mandate does not include aquaculture. There are differences between marine and terrestrial research and needs.
- Does networking include partnerships for water sustainability and is there any extension available for improved irrigation? Water is important!
 - Not directly. For those looking for irrigation resources, these new webinars and videos from the Kootenays are excellent: [Irrigation webinars](#) and [Irrigation videos](#)

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Why we started



BC's highly diverse agriculture sector

- 14 biogeoclimatic zones
- 2.6 million hectares of farmland
- 17,000 farms with 26,000 farm operators
- Over 200 commodities
- Agriculture farm cash receipts \$4.03 billion

Limited research capacity

- 6 universities with agriculture research programs
- 2 AAFC research centres

The Network Approach



RESEARCH
PROJECTS

WORKING
GROUPS

EVENTS &
WORKSHOPS

CONNECTING



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Presentations and Q&A

3) Leah Sandler, [Institute of Sustainable Food Systems](#):

Contact: leah.sandler@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.

ISFS is housed at Kwantlen Polytechnic University's Richmond campus, but they have personnel working across the province. Their work is highly collaborative, unequivocal and hard-hitting, combining resources in order to get things done. ISFS creates knowledge via applied research projects (creation and implementation), then provides extension services within regions and for producers, via knowledge transfer and adoption. They believe extension services must be a two-way street.

ISFS staff capacity ranges from 15-22 people, only 1 of which is funded outside of casual service contracts. 57% of their grant funding comes via non-profit and private organizations. A further 29% is through local government, 18% through the Federal government, and 5% through the Province of BC.

Key objectives are to:

1. Address challenges and opportunities
2. Provide resources and technical information to organic/regenerative farmers, associated business, et al
3. Provide data-driven information needed to inform decision-making, policy, advocacy, and action

Recent projects include the Southwest BC Bioregion Food System Design, which looked at the potential for localizing food systems within a bioregional scale. For example, 100% of Surrey's need for 27 crop and livestock products could be satisfied for 6 months, using 3300 acres of its unused farmland.

They also host an online BC Food System Policy Database, where stakeholders can search for policy precedents and to better understand how local government policy is addressing local food systems. Other projects involved on-farm research helping to transition conventional farmers to organic, Indigenous food sovereignty, and land development plans. Relationships are the basis for extension services, and extension projects must include the entire spectrum, from research to end user.

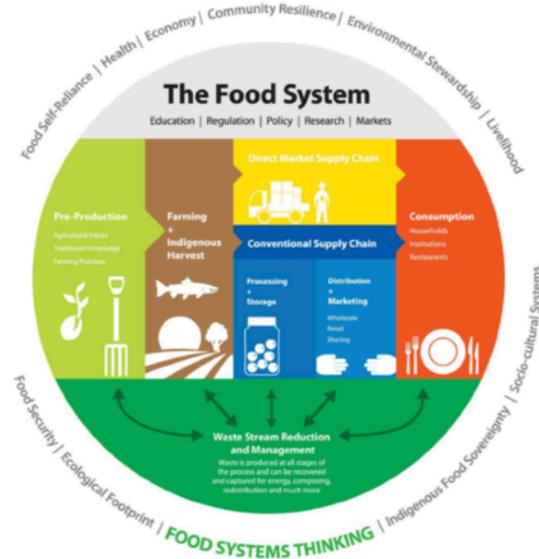
Recently, ISFS was commissioned to do a one-year study to develop a province-wide organic agriculture extension service. This Organic Extension Project included extensive stakeholder surveys, identification of opportunities and gaps, and recommendations for structure, funding, and operation of a Province-wide extension service.

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“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”

The ISFS multidisciplinary team

- Agriculture
- Food systems
- Planning
- Indigenous Food Sovereignty- Reconciliation
- Policy
- Natural resource management
- Agroecology/ ecology
- Extension and education
- Resource and development economics
- Farm business management
- Community and household nutrition/ health
- Communications/ marketing



Organic Extension Project: Recommendations

Purpose & Objectives



Purpose:
Widespread adoption of organic and regenerative practices.

Long-term vision:
Thriving and resilient BC organic and regenerative agriculture and food system sector.

Inclusive of all farmers and food businesses interested in organic and regenerative practices.

Operations



Structure:

- **Directors** provide oversight
- **Management Team** provide strategic leadership and planning
- **Dedicated extension agents** stationed regionally in partnership with **existing extension organizations**
- **Administration** provides operational support

Implementation: Phased approach over 5 years, operating at half capacity for year 1-3, and expanding to full capacity in year 4 and 5.

Funding

\$3.6M



Start-up cost:
The cash contribution needed to pilot this initiative over 5 years is \$3.6M.

Over 5 years, focus on development of a sustainable funding model.

Funding options for further investigation:

- Sector-led endowment campaign
- Sector funding mechanism
- Cost recovery
- Contributions from provincial and regional governments.

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



Institute for Sustainable Food Systems



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Presentations and Q&A

4) **Angela Boss, Regional Agrologist - B.C. Ministry of Agriculture and Food**

Contact: angela.Boss@gov.bc.ca or 1-888-221-7141 AgriServiceBC.gov.bc.ca

Angela's presentation included a description of the role of Regional Agrologist in accessing extension resources. She also received feedback from the audience about what they'd like to see in future programming.

BC Ministry of Agriculture and Food's (MAF) mandate and priority areas are illustrated with the concept *Grow BC, Feed BC, and Buy BC*, and a focus on increasing sustainable production, increasing access to BC food, and expanding consumer awareness and demand.

Regional Agrologists work as part of MAF's Extension and Support Services Branch. They are regional experts who work with a multidisciplinary lens that includes the natural sciences, economic development, social issues, emergency management, and more. Their mandate is extensive. 17 RAs work as frontline staff across the province.

Regional Agrologists can provide:

- Info on Ministry programs and services (AgriServiceBC)
- Support of agrology issues and other inquiries
- Support with dispute resolutions and compliance concerns
- Support to local governments on emergency planning and ALC policies
- Knowledge transfer on emerging agritech practices and applied research
- Linkages with other AFF specialists and services

Angela's role in providing extension services in the North Island region includes:

- Enhancing existing extension opportunities (such as support of CAI vegetable trials)
- Initiating knowledge transfer activities (such as EUGW and irrigation workshops)
- Supporting local extension efforts (proposal development, resourcing speakers, Islands Agriculture Show, etc)
- Improving knowledge of current opportunities (a new AgriServiceBC - Islands edition e-newsletter)
- Working to understand what is going on and where the gaps are

Audience commentary:

- The Regional Agrologist for the Kootenays has been a great collaborator with the Kootenay and Boundary Farm Advisors. All Ministry staff have been helpful and supportive with information and resources.
- My main question for Angela is whether MAFF Extension can go on farm?
 - Response: Yes to on farm visits. I did about 19 farm visits last year. RA role does not include compliance or enforcement.
- Angela is a powerhouse of information and a great asset to the north island region!
- We have had very good experiences over the years working with the new entrant agrologist at the Ministry

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Our People

The Ministry has a dedicated staff that includes a diversity of highly trained professionals and technical experts that deliver programs, services and training across the Province.



Agrologists and Industry Specialists



Land-Use Planners and GIS Analysts



Resource Specialists



Food Safety Experts



Plant and Animal Health Experts



Market Development Managers



Regional Experts with a Multidisciplinary Lens

Natural Sciences

- IPM
- Agroecology
- Organics
- Soil Health
- Nutrient Management
- Food Safety
- Drainage and Irrigation
- Climate Change

Economic

- Rural development
- Business Planning
- Labour
- Processing
- Supply Chains
- Market Demand
- Agri-Tech
- Agri-tourism

Social

- Land Use Planning support
- Emergency Management
- Food Security
- Indigenous Ag
- Succession Planning



Interdisciplinary specialists connecting the many topics and issues across our agricultural communities

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Other Topics and Resources Shared

Jenny Horn, Vancouver Island University

Jenny has just finished working on a report for Continuing Education and Training Association of BC (Colleges, Techs and Regional universities). The report provided a gap analysis of micro-credentials in BC for Regenerative Agriculture, Sustainable For Processing, Business Enterprise, and Food Systems/Studies. (Micro-credentials include certificate, diploma, short courses, etc. but not degree programs). They are now looking to collaborate to develop and deliver programs with partners across province. Reach Jenny at hornofplenty1@shaw.ca

Regional District Bulkley-Nechako

Regional Agriculture Coordinators publish an informative [Podcast Series and E-Newsletters](#)

Emerging Themes

How-To (provide extension support):

- Use a network approach
- Include research AND knowledge-sharing (need good academic data *and* people sharing it on the ground)
- Base it in good relationships
- Workshops, field days, webinars are all useful tools
- Strong communications platforms are required
- Both regional and province-wide actors are required

What we're hearing:

- There's a big appetite for research, particularly involving climate adaptation and regenerative practices
- There's a big appetite for on-the-ground extension services across the Province
- There's often a lack of regionally-based (agri)academic institutes, research projects, and producer liaisons, but there are academic institutions working at a cross-provincial scale
- There's a desire for collaborative approaches

Closing and Next Steps

Participants gave a strong 'Thumbs-Up' for the idea of follow-up discussion and a chance to hear more about ISFS's recent organic extension research project. There's a shared interest in working together to identify gaps and brainstorm solutions to support producers across the province. A Mentimeter poll was shared to collect participant feedback. Results are attached below.

The next province-wide RAS network conference call is expected the week of June 13th. The focus of that call will be a presentation from Colin Dring about his findings from interviews with staff from 17 Regional Districts across the province. Heather Shobe will also present a brief summary of activities and findings from year 1 of the ACRD's System Change project.

Feedback and suggestions about agri-extension and research opportunities are welcome. Please email ACRDagriculture@gmail.com

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Mentimeter Polls - Participant Feedback

What was most interesting or exciting to you from the presentations? (*What did you learn?*)

That there is a whole wack of stuff going on all over the place!

experience of KB Farm Advisors

The amount of engagement and interest in Extension models

Hearing about diversity of extension support and how different organizations work with and link

All the presentations were great - love the emphasis on one-on-one farm visits.

All the presentations were great. I learned a lot about research and extension and made some good contacts for future collaboration!

Very exciting to see such a broad range of individuals & organisations focusing on ag extension in BC. It is interesting and concerning that only one element of the FOOD SYSTEM, terrestrial agriculture, is being addressed.

It was good. There is a lot of overlap in what different regions are doing.

It was nice to see the value of peer-to-peer knowledge transfer as a common theme across the presentations. It's more powerful when the practitioners and the researchers are listening and learning from each other. Thanks for hosting!



What do you want to discuss more in future? (*What ideas are you most curious about?*)

The connections...

supporting economic growth, profitability

Tech and extension

How to not duplicate work, in particular field day ideas and work. Also, funders - a clear understanding of where to find funds for projects.

Linking to Post Secondary Institutions



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