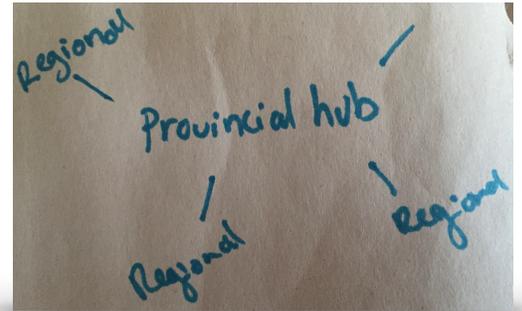


Key Takeaways: Extension/Research Support Event - Friday, January 27, 2023

on the unceded traditional territory of the Matsqui First Nation and Sumas First Nation, Abbotsford BC

There are Shared Narratives:

- **Collaboration is key**
 - A 'coordinating' role is important
 - Need for a network connecting: regions to a province-wide 'hub' or program; and large academic institutions to regional hubs and community colleges
 - Desire for supportive collaboration with Ministry of Agriculture and Food
- **So much happening across the province, requiring:**
 - Clear channels of communication
 - A comprehensive database of resources
 - Much more discussion!
- **Significant diversity** (within regions, production methods, geography...)
 - Need for regional flexibility
 - Challenging to create structures for collaboration
- **Disconnect between producers - academia - government**
 - Desire for on-ground extension support and community-based research
 - Perceived usefulness of Regional Agrologists (classic extension models), community-based research projects, and regional producer organizations (Farmers' Institutes)
- **Lack of capacity across board** (on the ground, in academia, in government...)
 - Need for expanded training and education programs for agriculture
- **Social, economic, and environmental factors**
 - Complexity of agri-food systems
 - 'Results-orientation' & lack of capacity for strategy development/long term visioning
 - Short term, often inflexible funding
 - Food is critical to social justice, yet agriculture treated as economic opportunity
 - Extension/research support required for sustainability/climate mitigation efforts
 - Relationship building! - a pervasive lack of trust; present and historic wrongdoing



There is Interest in Moving Forward:

- Reboot of the Farmers' Institute website
- A virtual meet-up of Farmers' Institutes from across the province
- Grant applications to support 1) an academic collaboration and 2) new entrant farmers

What Now? What's Next?

As follow up, and as part of the ACRD's System Change project:

1. *An intended 3rd year focus of compiling a comprehensive and accessible database of organizations, initiatives, and resources from across the province*
2. *Potentially co-hosting a virtual event with ACARN to identify specific extension-research gaps and action areas*
3. *Helping to connect those interested in pursuing academic collaboration and grant application/s*
4. *Following up with those interested in rebooting the Farmers' Institute (FI) website*
5. *Helping to convene a province-wide virtual meeting of Farmers' Institutes, if requested*

Email if you are interested in helping or being a part!

ACRDagriculture@gmail.com

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



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Event Summary: Extension/Research Support - Friday, January 27, 2023

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Presentation [\(See the PPT slides online here\)](#)

Heather Shobe - Alberni-Clayoquot Regional District (ACRD) Agricultural Support Coordinator

- Primary purpose of event:** To help create connections and solutions for delivery of effective, impactful, and palatable agri-extension services and research support
- Needs and perspectives** - A thematic overview of what's been heard from: Producers; Regional Districts and Regional Agricultural Support Organizations (RAS); Academia; Marine interests; Indigenous perspectives
- Emerging opportunities** and ideas for the future - 3 potential opportunities:
 - MAF Regional Extension Program, in development
 - Invigoration of Farmers' Institutes (FI)
 - Academic Collaboration
- Suggestions for a Regional Extension Program**

Images below from presentation created pre-event by Heather Shobe

Opportunities?

Invigoration of Farmers' Institutes

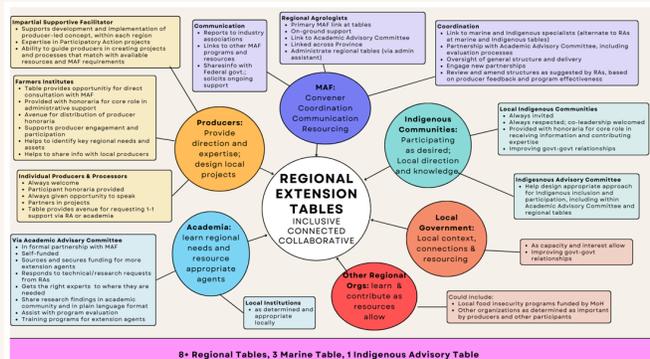
- Regional tables are opportunity for direct consultation with government
- Avenue for distribution of producer honoraria where available
- Support producer engagement and participation
- Help to identify key regional needs and assets/ share info with producers
- Reinstate annual province-wide gathering
- Fund an independent province-wide coordinator
- Expanding membership to include marine and Indigenous participation

Academic Collaboration

- Establish a self-funded Academic Advisory Committee
- Seek formal partnership with MAF program
- Source and secure funding for more extension agents
- Respond to technical/research requests from RAs or others
- Ensure the right experts get to where they are needed
- Share research findings in academic community and in plain language
- Assist with evaluation of programs
- Support training programs for extension agents

WHAT'S BEEN SUGGESTED?

- Honoraria for producer & Indigenous participation
- Use of a collaborative network approach, regionally and across province
- Acknowledge diversity: each table tailored by the region, for the region
- Formal academic involvement
- Primary goal of increasing 'boots-on-the-ground' support for producers
- Long time-frame; clear strategy; responsive and adaptable processes
- Ground-up leadership by producers; on-ground support from top-down



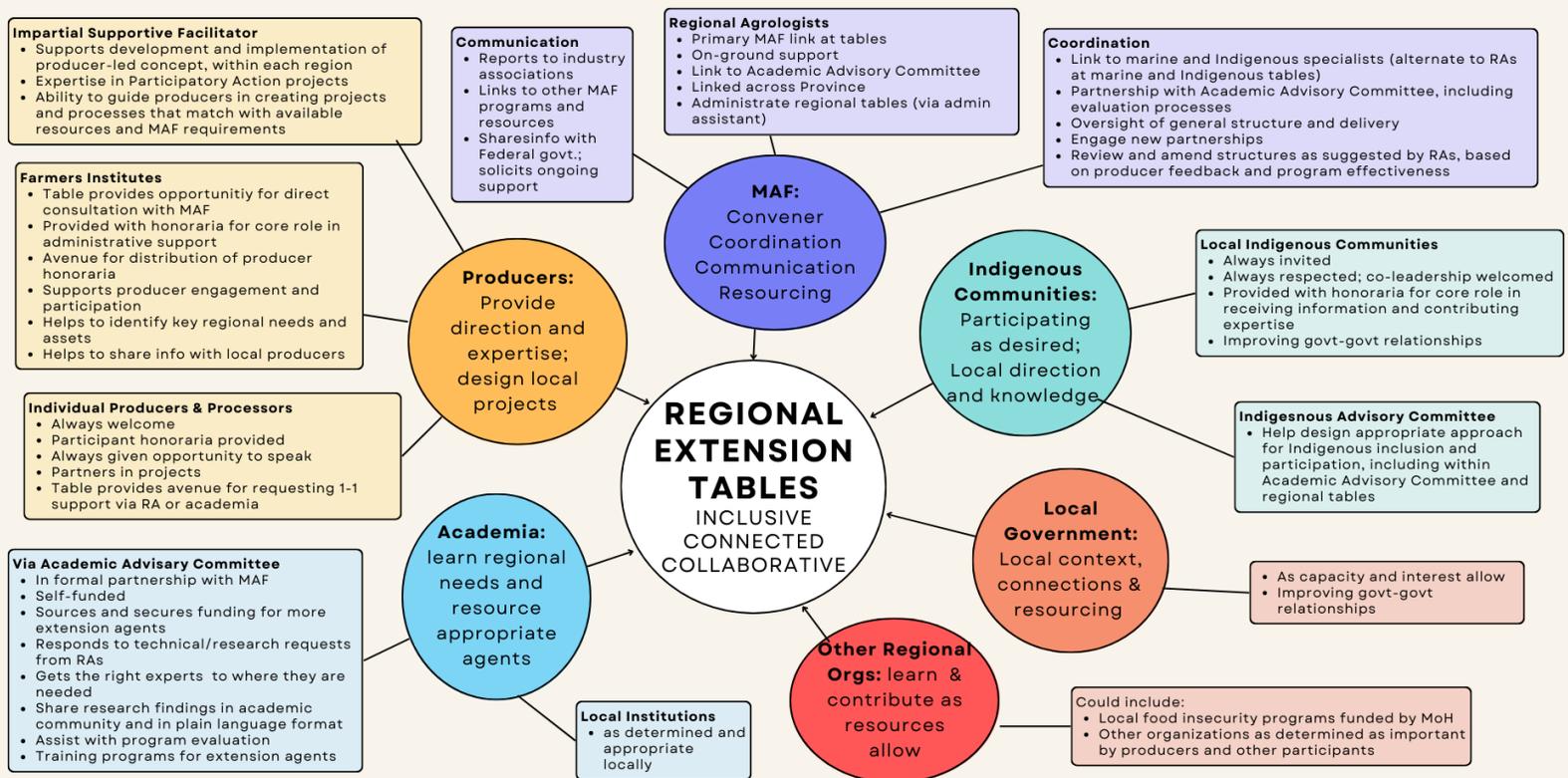
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Effective Extension, 9 Key Policy Recommendations:

1. Explicit policy and strategy is required for effective governance, funding, coordination, and implementation of extension
2. Public funding is critical to ensure it reaches all
3. Coordinated approach required to identify gaps, reduce duplication, ensure strategic focus and quality of programs
4. Producers and producer organizations need support to better identify, prioritize, and link their needs to extension services
5. Monitoring and evaluation of extension performance must be strengthened
6. Extension providers need ongoing training in leadership, technical, managerial, educational skills
7. Participatory decision-making, to move away from top-down info-sharing
8. Leverage technology to increase reach
9. Design to meet complex challenges and bring positive change for a resilient food system

* Adapted from: Organic Extension Needs Assessment, Institute of Sustainable Food Systems, pg 36
https://www.kpu.ca/sites/default/files/ISFS_Organic_Extension_ph1&2_layout_final.pdf



8+ Regional Tables, 3 Marine Table, 1 Indigenous Advisory Table

Concept Framework / Seed for Discussion (not intended as a final recommendation)
 designed by Heather Shobe, ACRD System Change Project

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Break-Out Sessions

Table Topics:

1. Ensuring Producer Needs are Met
2. Creating Academic Partnerships and Involvement
3. Ensuring a whole-food-system approach, including Indigenous and Marine Food Systems

Round 1 Question:

How could this need/opportunity (1,2,3 above) be served within a Regional Extension Program?

BREAK-OUT GROUP TOPICS:

- A. Ensuring Producer Needs are Met
- B. Creating Academic Partnerships and Involvement
- C. Ensuring a whole-food-system approach - Indigenous and Marine Food Systems
- D. Other?

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

- > What do you need?
- > How do you want to be involved?
- > What can you contribute?
- > In what way/s do you want to work together?

ROUND 1:

How could this need/opportunity (A,B,C) be served within a Regional Extension Program?

ROUND 2:

What actions are YOU able to take, proactively, either on your own or in collaboration with others?

Round 2 Question:

What actions are YOU able to take, proactively, either on your own or in collaboration with others?

Discussion Highlights, 'Meeting Producer Needs'

- Challenges

- So much information out there; overwhelmed; is this applicable?
- Wide range of needs (from new to experienced farmers) and focus (time, profit, interest, type of agri, region, etc)
- Who to go to for what info?
- How to reach producers?
- Need frameworks for newbies (ie: ALR regs)
- Engagement and survey fatigue

- Current practices when seeking info

- Start local/regional (peer to peer)
- Regional Agrologist
- Farmers' Institute (FI) Facebook pages and resources
- Industry associations
- FI conferences (apply for knowledge transfer grants?)

- Key themes

- Collaboration
- Respect for regional differences
- Flexible structures - coordination and recognizing regional needs
- Communication channels are important

- Actions to take proactively, individually, or collaboratively

- Convene online FI meeting
- Mobilize committee to revitalize FI website
- FI communications and website coordination/revisioning/management
- Start working on a youth employment program
- Discern needs and where supports are required
- Better understanding of roles and responsibilities, ie:
 - Multiple overlapping memberships (YA, FI, FFCF)

How could producer needs be served within a Regional Extension Program?

Key Themes: Collaboration
Respect for regional differences
Flexible structure → coordination + recognizing regional needs
Communication channels

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- How to communicate and to whom?

Discussion Highlights, 'Academic Involvement'

- Understanding producer struggles

- Producers scale down after 5 years because they burn out and are broke and wonder 'why can't I get any support?'
- Obvious that supports are lacking for small-scale farms, even with their own institutional/academic farm

- Connecting producers to research

- Need researcher to set up project+help with data collection
- Need to convey to producers the importance of research
- Need for learning/understanding of methodologies
- Need for ongoing support and relationships with community-based researchers
- A disconnect between PhD needs vs producer needs

- Training programs

- Need for expanded training and education programs for agriculture
 - Few extension training programs in Canada (Guelph degree program?)
 - Training also needed for producers and agri-support organizations
- Open access curriculum, accessible by partner universities/institutions?
- Micro-credentials - Structured theory vs. one-off field day approach
 - Potential to develop micro-credential for extension, marketing, food safety, farm-scale food processing, agronomic support, etc

- Options

- Return to classic extension model
- Develop model for doing community-based research
- Fund farmers directly to do the research
- Make clearer - 'who to contact about what'
- Connect major research universities with regional institutions (ie: community colleges)
- Pursuit of extension program funding by individual institutions

Knowledge translation?

- Fostering collaboration

- Get knowledge mobilized/on everyone's radar
 - Need for a system (reduce duplication) - who is at the table?
 - Regional approach - 'Ecosystem of Relationships'
- How to bring Ministry of Agriculture and Food to the work universities are doing?
 - Need producers+ministry+program development specialist
- Need for facilitator for collaboration and to make those linkages, need for a hub
 - Council vs coordinator (coordinator means it's not 'side of desk' but may burn out)
- Role for academic institutions to support and develop infrastructure for distribution networks, business feasibility studies
- A director as central point of regional table incl.: MAF, Health districts (Indigenous and non-Indigenous), Farmers Institutes, Regional Agrologists, Indigenous communities
 - Connect regional profiles to the province (provincial network of regional hubs)
 - How to define regions - by RD? Academic region? Health districts?
 - Meet twice per year

- Gaps

- Researchers' ability to do extension - lack of capacity for:
 - Field days, direct farmer support, translating research into producer language
 - Structures that help build long term relationships with producers
 - Non-publishable research (ie: variety trials)
- Community-determined research objectives might change - need flexible funding or funding to identify goals

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Thanks to individual participants and to participating organizations!

BC Agricultural Climate Adaptation Research Network, BC Dairy, Canadian Seafood Processing, Comox Valley Regional District, Golden Ears Farm & Chase Farmers' Institute, Kamloops Food Policy Council, Kootenay-Boundary Farm Advisors, Kwantlum Polytechnic University, BC Ministry of Agriculture and Food, Noakes Farm, Pro-cert Organics, Rage's Farm, Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako, Royal Roads University & University of the Fraser Valley, Thomson Rivers University, Township of Langley, University of BC, Vancouver Island University

25 Participants in total

"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,



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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."

Project Funding by Vancouver Foundation

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