

Expanding the Influence of Regional Agricultural Support

An Alberni-Clayoquot Regional District 'System Change' Project
Project funding by the Vancouver Foundation

September 2020



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foundation



ALBERNI-CLAYOQUOT
REGIONAL DISTRICT

Gratitude and acknowledgement to the many organizations and individuals who contributed to this project including: ACRD Agricultural Development Committee and Coastal Agricultural Roundtable (Members and Member organizations), BC Climate Action Initiative, Islands Agriculture Show, District A Farmers' Institute, Ministry of Agriculture, Island Health, Comox Valley Regional District, Cowichan Valley Regional District, Capital Regional District, Regional District of East Kootenay, Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako, Kootenay-Boundary Farm Advisors Program, Kamloops Food Policy Council, Lillooet Food and Agriculture Society, Capital Regional Food and Agriculture Initiatives Roundtable, Colin Dring, Investment Agriculture Foundation of BC, BC Cooperative Association, Young Agrarians, North Island College, Cowichan Green Community, Farm Food Drink, Nanaimo Foodshare, BC Agricultural Climate Adaptation Research Network, and other individual producers and stakeholders.

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Executive Summary

The Alberni Clayoquot Regional District's (ACRD) Systems Change project set out to develop a model for Regional Agricultural Support (RAS) that better influences and informs Provincial frameworks, ensuring accommodation for the unique contextual realities of various geographical regions and producer populations.

The system approach included some tough questions. Where does structure come from, what gives a system power, and what leverage points can change those cultural and systemic dynamics? Systemic analysis requires the use of a broad perspective and a 'beginner's mind': curious, open, and willing to explore.

Agriculture is an essential service, yet producers face significant barriers and challenges. These problems are complex, and they differ across a wide diversity of sectors, communities, and geography. A coordinated, collaborative, and structured system for agricultural support is required. The ACRD's existing Agricultural Plan Implementation Project is generally very well regarded, but reflection makes clear that it eventually hits a glass ceiling in supporting producers. Why, and how can we change that?

This report provides an overview of ACRD programming, a summary of discussions with other RAS and the Province, some relevant case studies, a summary of the project's main event and key findings, and recommendations for future work.

The After-Action Review of existing ACRD agricultural programming highlighted areas where we've succeeding in influencing broader systemic influences.

We know RAS positively impacts producers, and the nature of ACRD programming highlighted two key needs: core funding and a bridging role between organizations.

Engagement with other communities helped to identify shared values and narratives and to make recommendations for our own future programs.

It also helped to highlight the importance of Regional Agriculture Support within the larger systemic frameworks.

Discussions with the Province helped to influence the way communities are considered within Provincial agricultural frameworks.

Clear and formal links between RAS and the Province can be supportive to both levels of governments, and these channels for upstream feedback support efficacy, long-term sectoral growth, and diverse cultural relevancy.

Definition of Regional Agricultural Support (RAS):

For the purpose of this project, RAS was defined as: *any organization that: (a) 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.*

Key Themes and 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)

Next Steps and Recommendations

The following actions will support a meaningful renewal and expansion and of agricultural support within our own communities. They'll also support external programs and relationships that will influence change within broad-scale systems.

Within the ACRD

1. Support the area's various food and agricultural organizations to increase their own capacity and impacts by providing core funding and mentorship to key organizations
2. Act as a bridge between these organizations in order to support regional collaboration and funnel broadly acceptable recommendations to Province and to ACRD Board of Directors
3. Involve industry/academia in specific initiatives
4. Work with other RAS organizations and the Province to develop mutually-supportive tools for evaluation, networking, and education
5. Ensure programs are flexible, adaptable, and able to responding to emerging concerns

With involvement of other organizations

1. Create and share a database of RAS and related resources from across the Province
2. Help to determine priority data for performance measurement of RAS
3. Gather and analyze existing data, using a team approach that includes multiple organizations and academia
4. Hold Province-wide events and discussions about the role and support of RAS
5. Build and fund core roles for bridging and collaboration within Provincial government
6. Build supports and policy for rural and non-traditional food production and processing efforts
7. Lobby for inclusion of core funding for RAS to the next round of Canadian Agricultural Partnership (CAP) funding

Section 1: After Action Review - ACRD Agricultural Plan Implementation Project

An 'After-Action Review'(AAR) generally serves as a process to analyze what happened, why it happened, and how it can be done better. The following AAR summarizes past and current initiatives to help determine which strategies have had the most systemic influence.

History of Project

In 2011, the ACRD Board of Directors adopted the Alberni Valley Agricultural Plan with a vision for increasing food security in the region and outlining 12 primary goals to achieve it. Targets were geared towards developing the resources (land, labour, capital, and management ability) which would allow the community to produce 40% of the food consumed locally within 20 years.

In 2014, a team of Agricultural Support Workers (ASW) was contracted for a 6 month term to assist with implementation of the Plan. The following 5 key initiatives were identified in the initial Request for Proposals:

1. Realizing Improvements to Farmers Markets
2. Identifying Opportunities Through Farm Gate Sales
3. Developing Local Marketing Opportunities in Region and across Vancouver Island
4. Including Shellfish Growers in Local Agricultural Initiatives
5. Identifying and Securing Grant Opportunities

An initial survey conducted by ASW indicated that producers' top two concerns were access to slaughter services and an adequate, affordable supply of quality water. At the initial contract's completion, a final report included recommendations for future focus areas.

In subsequent ASW terms, strategic priorities were updated and reviewed as new issues and opportunities emerge. In 2018, a Coastal

Addendum to the Alberni Agricultural Plan was completed, and efforts to support agriculture within coastal communities increased.

Project Structure

The ACRD's Agricultural Development Committee (ADC) reviews and discusses matter relating to agriculture and helps to guide the work of staff and ASW. The ADC is available for public delegations and can make policy recommendations to the ACRD Board of Directors.

The ADC meets monthly. Current members includes the Alberni Farmers' Institute, Eat West Coast, Alberni Food Hub, School District 70, Alberni District Fall Fair, City of Port Alberni, Shelter Farm (non-profit), ACRD Board of Directors, and area producers and processors.

The Coastal Agricultural Roundtable (CAR) is a newly established ACRD Committee which serves a similar purpose within the coastal region. It is co-facilitated with Clayoquot Biosphere Trust, with the intent of grounding the work strongly on the coast. The Committee includes representation from District of Tofino, District of Ucluelet, Yuułu?if?ath, Ahousaht, ACRD Area C, Eat West Coast, Nuuchahnulth Employment and Training Program, Alberni-Clayoquot Health Network, Ucluelet Local Food Society, Tofino Community Food Initiative, and area producers and processors. This Committee meets 2-3 times per year.

ASW report directly to ACRD planning staff, and an annual report is presented to the ACRD Board of Directors.

Financial and In-kind Support

The ACRD has awarded a \$30,000 contract annually to ASW, generally subsequent to April budget discussions. Most contracts have concluded in December with either a lapse in or ad-hoc services between January-April each year. In April of 2019, the Board approved the first multi-year contract, which continues through December 2020.

Additional funding has been allocated by the ACRD to match grant funding, support Coastal Initiatives (\$15,000 in 2019 and 2020), participate in the Vancouver Island Climate Action Initiative, ensure broad producer input in the establishment of a Food Processing Hub, and support agricultural events.

Since 2014, ASW have secured additional funding of over \$200,000 for specific initiatives via grant applications and requests to external agencies¹. They have also directly assisted other organizations to secure funding in excess of \$800,000, including via the City of Port Alberni's application for a Food Processing Hub and the Alberni Farmers' Institute's Fire Mitigation and Field Trials project.

Undocumented in-kind contributions include the time commitment and support of ADC and CAR members and other project partners. These contributions are significant, and must be acknowledged with as much appreciation and respect as that of cash contributions.

Summary of Projects and Initiatives

- ACRD Council for Agricultural Water Supply (2020-2022)
- Fostering Collaboration Among Coastal Community Gardens (2020-2021)
- Advancing the CAR: Actioning Community Priorities around Food and Agriculture (2020)
- Supporting development of Food Processing and Innovation Hub (2019-present)
- BC Agriculture and Food Climate Action Initiative (CAI) - Vancouver Island Regional Adaptation Advisory Committee and Working Group (2019-present)
- Systems Change project - Expanding the Influence of Regional Agricultural Support (2019-present)
- Coastal Addendum to the Alberni Agriculture Plan and implementation (2018-present)
- Educational and engagement sessions, Emergency Planning for Agricultural Producers (2018/2019)
- Provincially and locally funded 'Grow Local' program (2017/2018)
- Armyworm Monitoring Program, with Ministry of Agriculture (2017-present)
- Host of 2017 Island Agriculture Show
- Agricultural Use of Water Project (2017)
- Brand-use Agreement and Buy-Local Proposal (2015/2016)
- Series of educational events: Land Access and Linking; Producer to Chef; and Co-ops (2015/2016)
- Research and documentation - Farmers' Markets; Farm Gate Sales; Marine Culture (2015/2016)
- Publication of West Coast Growers' Guide (2015-present)
- Lobby to Province for Regional Designation under the Meat Inspection Regulations (2015-2020)
- Facilitation of the ADC (2014-present) and CAR (2019-present)
- Development of documents outlining available grant resources (2014-present)
- Public and producer outreach; support for agricultural events (2014-present)

¹ Contributing organizations include Strategic Outreach Initiative, Province of BC, Investment Agriculture Foundation of BC, Real Estate Foundation of BC, Vancouver Foundation, Clayoquot Biosphere Trust, Alberni-Clayoquot Health Network, MNP, Young Agrarians, Bank of Montreal, Alberni Valley News, BC Shellfish Growers Association, City of Port Alberni, Alberni Valley Transition Towns Society, Tofino Community Food Initiative, Islands Agriculture Show, Partnership for Water Sustainability, and others

Systemic Impacts / Program Strengths

Systemic impacts have occurred in 3 key areas: Policy, Community Capacity, and Partnerships and Relationships. These have helped to expand our influence at the Provincial level and contributed to industry growth and increased food security at the regional level.

Policy Examples:

- Contributed to development of BC CAI's Vancouver Island Regional Adaptation Strategy and subsequent implementation projects which support local agricultural needs
- Recommended policy changes at Provincial level with regards to rainwater harvesting, crop insurance programs, Armyworm monitoring support, Meat Inspection Regulations, and Regional Agricultural Support, via UBCM resolutions and direct engagements
- Engaged coastal leaders and Kwantlen Polytechnic University in a Coastal Food Policy Forum aimed at guiding development of supportive local food policies
- Ensured agricultural consideration within other ACRD programs and policies, including Covid-19 emergency response, burning bylaws, emergency planning, and organic waste management

Community Capacity Examples

- Supported increases in small-scale, residential, and commercial food production via producer communications, programs, education, and event support
- Contributed to expansion of the agricultural programs and effectiveness of other community organizations, via mentoring and support
- Helped to secure community-accessible infrastructure via the new Food Processing Hub
- Increased the community's ability to deal with emerging issues, proactively and effectively
- Lent credibility (via Regional District involvement) and support to partner organization's grant applications and initiatives
- Supported Alberni Food Hub (AFH) to increase leadership in Grow Local initiatives, including via the Garden Starter Pack program and hiring staff for public education
- Supported Tofino Community Food Initiative (TCFI) to increase Grow Local programming and expand scope to support the broader coastal region
- Supported Alberni Farmers' Institute, City of Port Alberni, TCFI, Shelter Farm and other organizations to successfully develop project plans and apply for grants
- Supported Ucluelet Local Food Society and Maatsquis Secondary School with infrastructure development
- Published a database of regional publications and information on ACRD website and through e-newsletter and social media platforms

Partnerships and Relationships

- Created formal networks of food and agriculture organizations within the Regional District, both in Alberni Valley and in Coastal Community
- Formal relationship and funding established with the Ministry of Agriculture for Armyworm monitoring program
- Brought the Provincial Ministry of Agriculture together with local producers and organizations at Systems Change event, in roundtable meetings with AGRI staff, and at other public and educational events
- Included Indigenous governments and councils in agricultural opportunities and info sharing
- Increased visibility and sense of support for agriculture within the local public
- Increased ACRD 'brand' and influence as agricultural region across the Province

- Increased connections with other agricultural organizations across the province
- Increased understanding, interest, and engagement in agriculture for SD70, City of Port Alberni, regional Municipalities, Indigenous organizations, and others via ADC and CAR meetings
- Engaged in consultative processes with stakeholders to support creation of programs that reflect the needs of stakeholders
- Increased the level of trust between producers and local government
- Established links with academic institutions (UBC, KPU, NIC)
- Contributed to inclusion of marine products within agricultural mandate (2017 Island Agricultural Show and Coastal Addendum project)
- Contributed to inclusion of forest harvesting within agricultural mandate (via Coastal Addendum projects and Indigenous outreach)

Ongoing Challenges / Barriers

Centralization of workload onto very limited ACRD resources

- Extremely limited resources within partnering organizations - including financial, administrative skills, and human resources
- Many Committee members are volunteers, leading to burn-out, a sense of being unappreciated, and a lack of financial resources to contribute to or attend meetings
- Administrative challenges for Regional District to hire temporary employees or student support

Lack of Clarity about Roles; Redundancy in Efforts; the Coastal and Alberni Valley Divide

- Redundancy in mandate between ACRD Agricultural Support and Eat West Coast where it pertains to coastal initiatives, but neither having sufficient resources to manage independently
- Lack of clarity about roles within partnership projects and for various Committees
- Redundancy of efforts between local organizations, particularly where not immediately involved in regional Committees
- Sometimes, hesitation about including health and social initiatives, as opposed to strictly agri-business supports
- Blurring of lines between ACRD's Agricultural Development Committee (ADC) and Agricultural Advisory Committee (AAC): ADC is resourced whereas AAC (focused on land use planning) is not
- Various Regional Governments experience challenges with administering Provincial regulations and make redundant efforts to craft appropriate local policies and bylaws
- Lack of formalized and consistent connection with other RAS organizations
- Lack of formalized avenue to influence or comment on Provincial policy, except where invited

Long-term Insecurity

- Intermittent or non-existent contracts for Agricultural Support and Committee facilitation
- Project-based rather than core funding for partnering organizations
- Lack of youth involvement in agricultural initiatives; lack of perceived desirability of sector's jobs

Lack of Specific Supports

- Need for specific technical and on-farm support for individual producers, including for innovation and funding resources
- Lack of academic involvement and support for pilot projects and research
- Need for public education, engagement, and marketing campaigns related to agriculture and support of local food systems

Section 2: Research into Other Programs/Models

Other Regional Agricultural Support Initiatives

Discussions with other RAS initiatives² explored their major initiatives, funding and staffing models, primary successes and challenges, connections to the Province and Regional governments, impacts at the Provincial level, and cultural dynamics. We learned that:

Mandates and Roles

- Most RAS are strongly engaged in outreach, education, and networking within their regions, including with primary producers.
- They often work to implement Area Agricultural Plans, often with a strong focus on the smaller / startup growers. They create strategic plans and identify local priorities.
- Each notes the unique nature of their regional context, producer needs, and priorities
- Their focus often includes community health, food security, and food system issues; local producers are seen as integral to those
- Most operate as non-profit organizations or charities. They feel that direct involvement of Regional District governments is rare but highly valued.

Local Challenges

- All struggle with core funding and rely heavily on time-bound, project-based grants
- Shared challenges include: infrastructure and regulatory issues; volunteer recruitment and compensation; need for professional development and training; need for marketing, promotion, technical, and advocacy support; sector in-fighting (big / small scale, organic / conventional etc.)
- Producers need help with bureaucratic complexity, grant applications, and directing to resources; they often report feeling hopeless or overwhelmed in those contexts

External Connections

- They have little formal connections or routine engagements with other RAS, though there is widespread interest in participating in them
- Their connections to the Province are sometimes grant-dependent and they are generally linked to or engaged with both the Ministry of Health (MoH) and the Ministry of Agriculture (AGRI)
- They are interested in working with academic institutions, though access varies across the Province

Policy and Process Complaints

- They are often frustrated by processes that, by their nature, exclude producers (surveys in mid-summer, lack of funds for participation in projects on on Committees)
- They share a sense of frustration that provincial policy and regulations doesn't scale down to small-scale and / or rural producers and that Provincial supports do not fit regional needs
- They note issues are siloed at the Provincial level, but more integrated regionally
- They share a desire to focus developing local markets
- They note that agriculture and food system issues are broad, but programs and policies are specific, not systemic
- They share a need for tools for measurement and evaluation.

² Comox Valley Regional District, Nanaimo Regional District, Cowichan Valley Regional District, Capital Regional District, Regional District of East Kootenay, Regional District of Bulkley Nechako, Kootenay-Boundary Farm Advisors (KBFA), Kamloops Food Policy Council (KFPC), Lillooet Agriculture and Food Society (LAFS), Capital Region Food and Agriculture Initiatives Roundtable (CRFAIR), Nanaimo Food Share, District A Farmers' Institute (DAFI), Young Agrarians, BC Agricultural Climate Adaption Research Network (ACARN), BC Climate Action Initiative (CAI), BC Food Web, Investment Agriculture Foundation of BC (IAFBC), Farm Food Drink, Cowichan Green Community, North Island College, University of BC (Colin Dring), Island Health (IH), and Ministry of Agriculture (AGRI)

Table 1: Comparison of 6 RAS initiatives

	LAFS	CRFAIR	RDBN	KBFA	KFPC	DAFI
Area served	Pop. 2500; 138 farms	S. Van. Island, Pop. 400,000; 700+ farms	Pop. 38,000, 747 farms	1500 farms in region	1000 farms in RD Thomson-Nicola; 309 in Kamloops	Vancouver Island, Sunshine Coast and Gulf Island
Budget	44,500	500,000	350,000 (2020)	200,000	40,000	<1000
Core Funds	25,000	125,000	99,500	200,000	30,000	0
Funding sources	Core funding from RD; other	15-20% from Province; other	N. Devel. Initiative Trust; other	75% from RD; Columbia Trust	Various	FI locals
History	Convened 2016 by Squamish-Lillooet Regional District (SLRD) Area B, District of Lillooet & St'át'imc Ag Plan Working Group.	Initiated as an informal network in the 1990s and evolved into an independent organization and legal entity in 2013.	RDBN Ag Committee started in 2016; Ag Coordinator staff (pilot position) funded in 2017	Started in 2017 by RDs of Central Kootenay, East Kootenay, Kootenay Boundary, and Columbia Basin Trust	Formed in 1995 as an independent, grassroots food policy council	Established in circa 1920-30s
Mandate	Implement AAP and advance agri-economic development; support local farmers, ranchers, growers in building a sustainable food system.	Seeks to achieve a healthy, local, sustainable, and equitable food system through collaboration.	Ag. promotion, education, economic development; leverage opportunities; build relationships; lobby to senior government	To provide technical extension services to the agricultural sector within the Basin	Working to grow a regenerative, sovereign, and just food system by building community capacity through programs, policy, and partnerships.	Information transfer, policy work, dialogue w/ Province. Umbrella organization for FI locals within the region. Part of Advisory Board to AGRI under FWIA
Recent projects, work activities, issues of concern	Abattoir Feasibility Study; Agritourism Strategy; Market Access and Growth Strategy; education, events; Farmer Directory; invasive species; cold storage study; local branding; Grow Local program	Food Access, Food Policy, Farmlands, and Food Literacy Working Groups; Good Food Network; capacity building, collaborating; measurement tools, metrics; education, events; research	Emergency preparedness; youth in ag.; ag. promotion; ag. plan updates; submissions to Province; climate change strategy; business development support; surveys	Technical and business support; producer outreach; measurement and evaluation of impact; building relationships; bridging ag. sectors; farm visits, workshops, field days, presentations	Network building and relationships; gleaning program; 'Pop Cycle' social enterprise; seed library; Ag. & Food Plan development; Food Plan Implementation; Food Hub Pilot Project; workshops	Communications with Locals; sharing member issues, concerns; working on legislation, regulation, policy (such as ALCA, MIR, Right to Farm, others)
Structure	Non-profit society (felt a FI would be less impactful politically)	Non-profit society (independent of local govt, in order to bridge the silos)	Regional District program with FT staff person	For-profit business, hired / administered by RDEK to deliver services.	Charitable organization.	Incorporated under Farmers and Women's Institutes Act (FWIA)
Connection to Regional District	RD receives annual report, directs P.I.L.T funds to LAFS, administers N. Development Initiative Trust funds (part of RD's application is for LAFS)	Contract with local government to undertake engagement activities, research, and policy development related to local food systems	Direct initiative of RD as a pilot project. Transitioning to FT staff position in Nov 2020	Program's contract held and administered by the Regional District of East Kootenay; RD supports communications strategy / delivery	Staff sometimes attend meetings; Food Plan Implementation Project includes City and RD representation.	Delegates sit on various RD boards or committees, though not as formal DAFI reps. Local FI members sit on AACs and bring those issues up to DAFI
Connection to Province	Local MLA attends some events, funding via grant programs	Funded by Island Health as a Food Security Hub; Strong relationship with Regional Agrologist	Some funding from IAFBC; shares links to Provincial programs; lobbies to Province and contributes to Provincial consultations	KBFA are partners in 4 of 7 CAI's action plans. RA involvement in work.	Has received funding via Interior Health	AGRI administers FWIA registration and reporting. DAFI has seat on CAI committee AGRI set up a FI website & hosted FI annual events.
Lillooet Agriculture and Food Society (LAFS), Capital Region Food and Agriculture Initiatives Roundtable (CRFAIR) Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako (RDBN), Kootenay-Boundary Farm Advisors Program (KBFA), Kamloops Food Policy Council (KFPC), and District A Farmers' Institute (DAFI)						

Other Provincially-funded or Provincially-scaled Organizations

Other organizations play a role in BC's overall support system for agricultural initiatives and stakeholders. The following are significant contributors and support programs both regionally and cross-regionally.

Investment Agriculture Foundation of BC

IAFBC is an industry led, not for profit society that creates funding opportunities to support a thriving BC agriculture and agri-food sector through delivery of Provincial and Federal/Provincial programs.

IAFBC's Agricultural Area Planning (AAP) Program has been running since 1999. The program provides funding to assist local governments and their agricultural communities to work together to develop a shared vision for the future of agriculture and to support agriculture area planning activities. Recently reviewed, a revamped program will be re-launching in fall 2020. The program's review included conversations with agri-consultants, current program users, Agricultural Plan authors, and a UBC researcher.

Funding for IAFBC programs comes from interest earned on prior programs and through Canadian Agricultural Partnership (a joint Federal-Provincial initiative). CAP programming generally is available over a 5 year term and has specific focus areas, such as innovation currently.

The revamped program is expected to include continued support for development of AAPs, as well as for related implementation projects. Some of IAFBC's considerations reportedly include:

- Many Regional Districts have already written their plans, and they often include large numbers of recommendations, which makes implementation challenging
- Changes to staffing and elected officials have resulted in reduced priority for agriculture in some Regional Districts, resulting in AAPs which are shelved
- Funding for development of AAPs generally does not include funding for broad-scale implementation, also resulting in them being shelved
- AAPs generally lack references to emerging issues (as they have not happened at the time of publication), and typical project-based implementation does not address the need to respond to these)
- IAFBC has challenges with regards to funding forest harvesting and marine initiatives, though processing of those products is eligible
- The Province sees a need for every region to have an Agricultural Land Use Inventory, which IAFBC also funds, but which are not always integrated with AAPs
- There are potential concerns that AAPs are being used to justify exclusion of ALR land
- Quality of AAP consultants vary, and strong guidelines for deliverables and outcomes are important
- Agricultural planning is best when linked to other area planning initiatives such as climate and health

Young Agrarians

Young Agrarians (YA) started out as a program of FarmFolk/CityFolk, and is a project of Agrarians Foundation (AF) as of 2019. The AF mission is to educate the public by providing courses, seminars, workshops, and counselling about agriculture, farming, food processing, entrepreneurship, community economic development and environmental sustainability.

YA programs and agricultural supports include business mentorship, job postings, educational events and mixers, a U-Map directory, and land access programming (including the AGRI funded BC Land

Matching Program). Their programs stretch Province-wide, but are supported through regional coordinators and land matchers. More recently, they've expanded programming into the Canadian prairies and online across the country.

YA is a registered charity with a total budget of \$700,000, of which core funding is about 10%. About 55% of funding currently comes from the Province of BC.

Some YA comments about agricultural support:

- Agriculture is an essential service
- Farming is hard, and it is hard to support profitability needs of producers
- There is value in establishing resources to support producer access to infrastructure grants and wage subsidy programs
- YA is effectively engaging with the agriculture sector and delivering valuable services
- BC produces a variety of commodities and there are regional/geographic differences, issue differences (e.g. irrigation issues are different for forage producers vs. vegetable producers), and sector differences (e.g.: soil management is different for orchards vs. forage vs. veg)
- Local governments need implementation dollars for agricultural economic development
- It takes skilled people able to work across the diverse spectrum of producer needs
- There is opportunity for a multi-level government support program (Federal/Provincial/Regional)
- There is a need for core funding of food/farm non-profits who are working to rebuild and revitalize local food systems, which will take philanthropy and a coordinated effort to build
- There is value in a Quebec model which uses multi-region agri-food committees as a mechanism for support and distribution of funds
- Sees need to connect Regions first, then connect to Province

ACARN

The BC Agricultural Climate Adaptation Research Network (ACARN) aims to bridge and increase collaboration between industry, academia, and government. The network includes UBC, Kwantlen Polytechnic University, Agri-Food Canada, AGRI, CAI, and others. It is run by a steering committee. They are currently working on an agricultural extension sub-committee, looking to potentially develop an extension program in Northern BC.

ACARN hosts an annual provincial workshop that changes locations (held in Kelowna in 2019) as well as Regional workshops, funded by the Ministry of Agriculture. The Regional workshops support areas underserved by research, bringing in researchers and sharing findings. In 2019, they partnered with Kootenay-Boundary Farm Advisors to support producers in sharing practical research results. ACARN noted that it was great to have a local partner who could support continuity and local follow-through after the event, but that KBFA did not receive financial support to assist with the partnership.

CAI

The BC Agriculture and Food Climate Action Initiative (CAI) develops tools and resources that increase the capacity of agriculture to adapt to climate change. They deliver two primary programs; a Regional Adaptation Program and a Farm Adaptation Innovator Program. Funding is provided by the governments of Canada and British Columbia under the Canadian Agricultural Partnership, a federal-provincial-territorial initiative, and is administered by the IAFBC and the BC Agricultural Research & Development Corporation.

On Vancouver Island, early CAI work included a Cowichan Valley adaptation plan and 8 subsequent projects, including a business case for Regional Agriculture Extension Services. More recently, the CAI

convened an Island-wide Advisory Committee and published a Vancouver Island Adaptation Strategy. Currently, a working group of various Regional Districts, producers, Farmers' Institutes, and food security organizations is supporting development implementation projects with a budget of \$300,000.

An interesting shift concerning 'volunteerism' is taking place within the current Vancouver Island CAI program. Some members of the Advisory Committee expressed concerns about the lack of funding support for the producer and producer organization participants, for whom there was no honorarium or travel compensation budgeted (presumably, local government representatives were being paid to attend). One representative commented that they were being asked to travel, attend numerous meetings, then review and submit feedback to a 70 page report, but that they were expected to do this as a volunteer.

This expectation is not unique; producers are generally asked to offer their consultative services for free, and this poses valid concerns that feedback is *equitably* received from various participating stakeholders. It is a great example of structural inequity, and common within agricultural committees.

Once concerns were noted and discussed, a travel allowance was offered to independent or non-profit attendees, and it was indicated that funds for stakeholder engagement will be included in future implementation project budgets (a CAI first).

Overall, the CAI's structure is a good example of engaging with local communities to understand priorities and develop relevant supportive programs. CAI facilitators explicitly seek out broad stakeholder diversity on their Advisory Committees, including various commodity groups, governments, and industry organizations. They also work very closely with academic and research organizations.

CAI staff have noted that there are gaps in knowledge transfer/extension services, applied research, and results sharing within agriculture, and that many of their projects support those roles. Also noted was a lack of agricultural programs at universities and lack of access to academic experts in rural areas.

BC Food Web

The BC Food Web (BCFW) was pointed out in numerous conversations with other agricultural support initiatives and with the Province. BCFW is an online database of food system-related research briefs, reports, resource links, and webinars. It is free to use and available to anyone, including producers, processors, policy-makers, educators, and the general public. Content includes industry and crop-specific resources as well as broader planning and policy content.

BCFW is hosted by UBC Farm and receives funding from the Canadian Agricultural Partnership (CAP), a Federal-Provincial initiative. It has recently recovered from a lull in activities, which was reportedly due to staffing and grant funding. As exemplary of something stakeholders desired, it's worthy of further investigation as to find out why it went through such a period and efforts to ensure its maintenance.

Island Health's Food Security Hubs (BC Ministry of Health)

Island Health (IH) is a Provincial Health Region. The IH 'Community Food Action Initiative' distributes funding to Food Security Hubs (Food Hubs) in each of Vancouver Island's Regional Districts, in order to support healthy food systems, address food insecurity and, ultimately, to improve health. These Regional Hubs administer the funds, identify key local priorities, and catalyze local

actions. They convene with each other regularly, via phone and in person, to discuss initiatives, share information and resources, and discuss Island priorities and needs. Their collective voice is then brought forward, through an Island Health facilitator, to a Provincial table which includes each of the Provincial Health Regions and the Ministry of Health.

The project is funded by the budgetary allocation to each Provincial Health Region from the Ministry of Health. Each Health Region is able to develop its own prescription for program delivery. IH's funding was initially delivered to regions through a granting program model, but it transitioned to the Regional District based Food Hub model in 2011. Island Health provides \$15,000 annually to each Regional Food Hub. Within the ACRD, this is divided in half between the Alberni Food Hub (Alberni Valley) and Coastal Communities (Eat West Coast)

This model is an excellent example of a Provincial Ministry connecting with and supporting regional interests and organizations to support Provincial goals. It offers a clear structural mechanisms to connect local voices directly with a Provincial Ministry. As with IAFBC's program, this project is currently completing an evaluation, with results expected to be shared in Fall 2020.

Food Hub programming generally supports broad food system goals, including literacy, health, food distribution. Hub representatives note that agricultural production is a key component of a healthy food system, and their programs generally have some agricultural support components - producer education, farmer directories, Grow Local programs, promotion of local products, liaising with producers and producer groups, and even direct farm development, such as with Nanaimo Food Share. Hub endeavours also include food production and procurement initiatives that are not traditionally regarded as 'agriculture', such as Indigenous food systems, urban agriculture and community gardens, marine resources, distribution of food waste, and school garden initiatives.

Island Health acknowledges the blurry line between food security and agriculture. Recently, the Ministry of Health arranged for the Ministry of Agriculture (AGRI) to meet with the Health Authority Food Security Committee, as part of AGRI's Food Security Task Force. In the 2021 Provincial Budget Consultations, Island Health's Food Hubs called for food security to be explicitly recognized and for stabilized funding for community food security organizations and community dieticians, to allow for a proactive and coordinated approach to food systems in B.C.

Provincial Ministry of Agriculture

Overview

The Provincial Ministry of Agriculture mandate and priority areas are described as “Grow BC, Feed BC, and Buy BC”, with the related priorities of: Building Sustainable Production from Land and Sea; Building the Value of and Access to B.C. Food; and Building Consumer Awareness and Demand. The Ministry is organized into two Divisions (Agriculture Science and Policy Division; and Business Development Division) and 6 Branches (Food Safety and Inspection; Innovation and Adaptation Services; Plant and Animal Health; Business Risk Management; Corporate Governance Policy and Legislation; and Sector Development).

RAS concepts are relevant within the ‘Regional Agrologists’ and ‘Partnerships and Outreach’ units of the Sector Development Branch, but also within the Innovation and Adaptation Services Branch (Strengthening Farming; Market Development; Innovation; and Resource Management), Climate Action Initiative and the Corporate Government, Policy and Legislation Branch.

As part of this System Change project, various Ministry of Agriculture representatives were interviewed and engaged with in order to learn how RAS could support Provincial goals, and where (and how) it could gain influence. In general, contacts spoken with were informed, caring, helpful, and understanding. As individuals they understand the systemic challenges at play, yet obstacles were noted as they described the complexity of working within the AGRI structure as a whole. Various ideas and suggestions were collaboratively discussed,

Multiple Provincial representatives made one particular suggestion to stakeholders who are requesting changes from the Province - that they need to be clear about which policies, specifically, are impacting producers, and in what specific ways. Furthermore, they suggested being specific about what was wanted instead, noting that sometimes funding is available for a specific ask, but that it is much harder for the Province to respond when problems and requests are presented as broad perspectives or complaints that fall across multiple government agencies.

This point is well taken - requests to the Province would best be provided in clear, concise, level-headed, positive, and backed-up ways. Here is the challenge in question - How does a stakeholder develop, share, and lobby in this clear, level-headed, and specific way, without any resourcing or support to do so? A specific and thought-out request requires a particular skill set, preferably with research and surveys at the local level, documentation and analyzation of findings, and the time to find and navigate winding channels to reach the appropriate contacts. Rural communities often lack connections or access to academic institutions to support this, and producers are not necessarily skilled bureaucrats.

A mechanism of support is required for development of structured, well-defined, and clear requests to the Province from rural communities and producers. If there is none, the Province must listen as best as it can and work towards understanding the reasoning and developing the solutions themselves.

Conversation - Regional Agrologist

(Sector Development Branch)

“Regional Agrologists (RA) leverage regional attributes and encourage economic growth and stability in conjunction with social and environmental health through innovation, adaptation and local market development. Through long term relationships in the local community, strategic extension, and with a client service focus, they provide effective implementation of ministry programs and initiatives” (Jill Hatfield, 2019). There are currently about 15 RAs across the Province, and they are widely acknowledged as helpful by RAS representatives.

Extension services have changed, as has the agricultural industry. At one point the internet was the primary source of information for farmers. The internet has changed how producers access knowledge and information. Producers have many more sources of information and often look to RA's to validate this information for their individual situations. There has been a reduction in support such as field days and on-farm visits, in part because so many people have jobs off-farm and there are concerns about biosecurity and privacy.

Demographics and farm operations are changing as well. There is some disconnect between the old ways of farming and the new, and older information delivery models are not seen as relevant by the new generation of farmers. Larger industry operations generally receive support from their industry organizations and specialists that operate on a global scale. There are fewer calls for industry specialist support (such as for drainage and livestock) and more for support with emerging markets and innovation.

Funding programs for agriculture is negotiated through the Canadian Agricultural Partnership agreement which have 5-year time horizon and often targeted policy objectives. For communities working collaboratively through local networks such as local governments, farm organizations, universities and colleges on regionally important projects is often the most successful approach.

Conversation - New Entrant Agrologist

(Sector Development Branch)

The New Entrant Agrologist (NEA) was created to address the concerns related to people entering agriculture for the first time. The New Entrant role is one point of contact for coordination and providing linkages with AGRI programs and support services. NEA is a provincial role however the position has a close relationship with RA's across the province who are often the first point of contact for new entrants.

The New Entrant Strategy (2019) is built on the three pillars (Land, Knowledge, and Capital) needed to address key barriers facing entrants to the sector. Support is delivered such as land-matching, publication of business development guides, workshops, and cost sharing through the Agri-Business Planning Program. The Strategy was developed by AGRI and funding was supported by the Canadian Agricultural Partnership, a five-year federal-provincial initiative to strengthen the agriculture and agri-food sector.

The New Entrant Needs Assessment provides a series of surveys, forums, and interviews. The highest need for support noted from the new entrants surveyed was for informal mentorships - such as through networking, connecting old / new farmers, and peer support (something RAS is well equipped to do within a community). Prospective industry entrants also noted a lack of awareness with regards to available supports and indicated a need for a centralized place for the dissemination of accurate and region-specific information.

Conversation - Regional Team Lead***(Sector Development Branch)***

Staff team of the Sector Development Branch in the coastal region. AGRI's involvement in communities is through programs such as the Provincial network of Food Processing and Innovation Hubs, the CAI, ACARN, B.C. Agri-Business Planning Programs. Support from the New Entrant Agrologist, the team of Regional Agrologists and in-kind involvement in various industry events.

There was interest expressed in exploring opportunities to continue to work towards supporting and strengthening RAS initiatives. The passion and expertise of RAs was noted, however they also cover large areas with diverse production systems. Extension services as knowledge transfer in order to be effective has to be a 2- way street (both to and from producers), and there is significant potential for academia to help with bridging gaps.

Some suggestions for areas of potential systemic improvements included streamlining and sharing databases, thereby discouraging repeated redundant efforts by various organizations. The BC Food Web was used as an example, though its recent hiatus was duly noted. Other suggestions for supporting agriculture at the Regional level included via annual meetings connecting Regions and the Province and through the use of a network approach.

Other Conversational Notes***(Innovation and Adaptation Services Branch; Corporate Governance, Policy and Legislation Branch)***

Land Use Planners (LUP) help to develop land use policy. They are available to Regional Government staff to consult with about bylaw development in farming area and making decisions about OCPs and applications.

It was suggested better links are needed between Regional Governments and the Province, but that there has sometimes been reluctance on part of local governments to participate, such as at a recent UBCM convention. It was also suggested that working on specific issues (such as Cannabis, for example) rather than providing general education about how the system works is akin fire fighting and does not promote long-term understanding. There is a need a common understanding of what a legal framework looks like, as well as educational tools for local governments and the public.

It was noted that it takes a tremendous amount of resources it takes to do consultations, both for the Province and for local governments, and that it would be valuable to deepen relationships with local governments, ensuring 2-way communications in order to listen to and understand where people lie.

Policies to preserve land and programs to encourage farming were described as two separate things. This poses an interesting question, and one very relevant to Regional Governments: How can policies about agricultural land (which Regional Districts must administer, in part) be better integrated with programs to support producers?

Section 3: Case Studies and Examples

It is useful to highlight a few brief case studies and related initiatives, in order to understand the context, challenges, and opportunities for Regional Agriculture Support. While this project is not meant to address these specific concerns, they are an interesting look into how the existing system operates. In particular, systemic changes involving RAS may assist in resolving challenges in ensuring regions are heard and accommodated at the Provincial level.

Legislative amendments to B.C.'s Agricultural Land Commission Act

Legislative amendments to the ALCA were enacted in 2019. Subsequently, significant public concerns were raised about the changes and the process which resulted in them. Producers and ALR landowners felt they had not been adequately consulted with and that the changes would negatively affect them. The Province subsequently held a series of public consultations, to which there were 2299 respondents, and findings were shared in their "Supporting B.C. Farmers Public Engagement - "What We Heard" Report"(WWH)

Some Local Governments noted that changes in ALC caused planning departments significant stress and financial/resource burden with the significant time spent researching and responding to questions regarding the ALCA changes. They expressed feeling a sense of being suddenly downloaded on, without the related expertise required to respond to inquiries and develop local bylaws in order to adapt to the changes.

Many stakeholders referred to the diversity of BC and the challenges of one-size-fits-all policy. Some felt that the ALC looked at the lower mainland to set policy, and that those policies were not reflective of communities outside of that region.

While the Province did consider the public consultations conducted by an independent Advisory Committee in 2018 prior to changing the Act, the WWH also stated that "Many people who emailed were not aware or fully aware of the consultation undertaken by the Independent Committee in 2018". They felt they were not properly informed of the consultations and that there was a lack of advanced notice of the changes.

Feedback from all 6 in-person public engagement sessions included concerns about lack of Provincial engagement with ALR landowners and about the role of local government: as summarized from the Delta session: "Lack of direct communication to land owners and a lack of communication between the different governing bodies for example between ministries, between local government and ALC and Ministry of Agriculture."

At the Merville event, the ALC, Province, and Regional Governments were described as a 3-legged stool supporting implementation of the Act, though Regional Government was not part of the presentation and seemed to be struggling with administering it.

The public feedback did result in some changes. AGRI subsequently consulted with a group of local governments on the regulations to bring Bill 15 into force, a process which concluded in winter 2019/20. Implementation of some of the ALCA changes was delayed, and in January 2020, the Ministry launched a second consultations process on potential residential flexibility options for the ALR as

outlined in a public intentions paper. This amendments to the original changes to the ALCA aim to alleviate the concerns expressed by the public and incorporate the feedback from the WWH.

It is plausible that a formal channel for communications and stronger resourcing of the Regional Government 'leg' of this stool could have supported 1) a stronger experience of public consultations BEFORE the Act was changed, 2) better understanding of regional governments about the impacts of changes and their role with regards to those changes, and 3) significantly less interruption to Regional Governments regular jobs and service provision to their constituents. Stronger public consultation opportunities prior to changes the regulations may have resulted in changes that were more amenable to stakeholders in the first place and certainly may have eliminated the need for the consultations after.

This brief case study points to a structural gap in public consultations process which could be overcome. Local government and local food and agricultural organizations have close contact with individual producer communities, and in many cases, a strong sense mutual sense of trust and local communications channels which could support strong producer outreach. At the Regional level, Agricultural Advisory Committees, whose role it is to review ALC issues and applications, must be given appropriate opportunity and the time required to participate in initial consultations as well.

Changes to Provincial Meat Inspection Regulations

Increased access to slaughter services was one of two top priorities of the ACRD's producers when its agricultural support program was initiated in 2014. Since then, a financially resourced initiative has allowed for related research, development of a local working group, producer and stakeholder consultation processes, lengthy documentation, and numerous engagements with Provincial representatives.

A formal Request for Designation under the Meat Inspection Regulations (MIR) was submitted to the Province by the ACRD Board of Directors in July 2017. By 2018, the Province had engaged a Standing Committee to conduct public consultations about the MIR. A report on those consultations was published in Fall 2018, then in summer 2019 a second consultations opened to Regional Districts in response to that report's recommendations. The ACRD responded again, and finally, in June 2020, the Province granted the ACRD Request for Designation under the Regulations, along with that of two other Electoral Areas in BC and indicated further changes that were pending.

This long process has been reported as frustrating by ACRD producers, and it was complicated by the lack of formal pathway and process for making such a request. Throughout the ACRD's lobby, other groups, such as the Small Scale Meat Producers Association, also lent their perspective and it was arguably the snowball effect, in part, that led to the eventual changes. In the ACRD, it was a 6 year process, staying on top of developments, applications, consultations, and stakeholder engagement that made the difference. Within its lobby, the ACRD was able to share the concerns of other regions and organizations, and hopefully, the changes resulting from the Ministry's examination of the MIRs will benefit producers across the Province.

Farmers' Institute Website

Farmers' Institutes (FI) across BC work at a regional level to support their producers. Generally, FIs are not well-funded or staffed. Though their mandate says they can engage directly with the Province annually, very few do or have the opportunity. In 2018, however, the Province declared November 30

Farmers' Institute Day and invited Institutes from across the Province to a special event, in an effort to bring them together with the Province and have meaningful discussions.

At the event, a website was suggested as a way to share information and support the Institutes. Subsequently, with the help of a steering committee, the Province developed and launched an online FI platform. The intention was for the site to be a tool of the FIs, not the Province. As per the Province:

"The website is intended to be a tool that you can use:

- *To connect with other Farmers' Institutes*
- *To post and learn of relevant agriculture events and workshops*
- *To provide a portal for potential new members to connect with their local Farmers' Institute*
- *To provide a Members area where Farmers' Institutes can share documents with each other but not necessarily with the general public"*

The website is polished, well constructed, and seems to have a desirable framework. It is an interesting example, however, because it seems as though FI's simply are not using it. Most of the posts have been posted by the province to promote provincial programs. It is unclear whether the Province's intent is in line with what the FIs actually want or need. If FIs had been better resourced themselves, would they have decided on and pursued another avenue of communications that they were more invested in and/or that better fit with their organizational structures and membership?

Colin Dring, UBC Research Project

Colin is a Phd student in the Faculty of Land and Food Systems at the University of British Columbia whose research focuses on regional agri-food systems in the Lower Mainland. He is interested in local governments' role in agricultural planning and how it contributes to creating regional food systems by integrating land-use, agricultural development, and Municipal/Regional/Provincial governance.

As part of his presentation to the System Change event (see page 23), Colin noted that local governments' primarily employ land-use planning tools to address agricultural issues, and to a lesser degree, agricultural development (e.g. economic, community/social, sustainable) and educational supports (e.g. awareness-raising). He suggested that Land Use Planning is not the best tool for integration of agriculture with other social, economic, and environmental issues, nor does it, in isolation, address the rich diversity of the agricultural sector. In addition, he notes:

- A lack of creativity in the typical "planner mode"; that governments are bound to old models while trying to address new challenges
- Compounding problems from an increase in urbanization and public disconnect from farming/food
- A gap in food system planning education to staff and planners
- That agriculture is not separate from food security systems, and that thinking so creates problems
- That there are benefits to joining food security and agricultural committees
- A suggestion that municipalities think more holistically around food systems, agriculture, and health
- A suggestion that food security organizations have a voice in Provincial agricultural policy development
- That the National Food Policy is housed in Agriculture
- That project funding, as opposed to people funding, isn't flexible or adaptable enough and doesn't work with emerging issues
- There is disparity in equity about which farmers are being supported
- That food system practitioners need to share notes
- That a lack of organized ways to pressure government is system of power and control

Colin recently developed an interview guide for regional government, and is interested in continued work in bridging the “muddy” gap between local government and Province where it concerns agricultural planning and food security systems, including within jurisdiction and regulation, and legal powers. He is also developing food system and rural planning curriculum for professional development of local government staff.

UBCM Resolution, 2019

In 2019, the ACRD brought a Resolution to the Union of BC Municipalities convention, requesting funding support, through a stable framework, to establish strategic and long-term regional agricultural extension supports.

The Province’s response included a summary of existing Provincial programs. It reinforced a declaration that a participant made at the the ACRD’s System Change event - that when RAS asks for something, the Province responds that ‘they have a program!’, even though the request clearly means that the existing program is not meeting the Regional needs.

In this case, the Region was asking for funding for programming that is driven and managed from *within* the Region. The Province’s response was that they are already taking care of the regional needs, but it pointed out programming over which the region has no control. See full script in Appendix 1.

Section 4: Recap of Key Project Event

As part of this System Change project, the ACRD hosted a full-day event in advance of the Islands Agricultural Show on Thursday February 6th, 2020.

Event Purpose and Context

The 3-part event brought representatives from a variety of Regional Agricultural Support (RAS) initiatives together with Ministry of Agriculture staff and other stakeholders. 36 people attended the morning session and 25 attended the afternoon workshop. Vancouver Foundation funding ensured participants from across the Province were resourced to attend, and there was very positive feedback about the composition and caliber of the group. Prior to the event, participants were asked to respond to a short survey. A [full event summary](#) with findings and list of participants is available on the ACRD website.

Participants examined the broad agricultural support system under which they operate, and were asked “hard to answer” questions about cultural dynamics, stakeholder assumptions, structural gaps, and power dynamics. With this lens, and through a solution-focused framework, they worked to identify leverage points and commonalities, generating ideas for next steps from a shared perspective. The event was facilitated by Ben Hyman, Chair of the BC Cooperative Association.

Part 1: Panel Event

Representatives from a variety of Regional Agricultural Support (RAS) initiatives from around the Province share their program history and models along with regional perspectives about needs, challenges, and emerging opportunities.

Part 2: Mini-Presentations

Representatives from Island Health and Investment Agriculture Foundation of BC and a UBC researcher shared program info as it relates to Regional Agricultural Support.

Part 3: Workshop

A workshoping event helped participants to:

- Develop and present a shared Regional Agriculture Support (RAS) narrative to the Province
- Facilitate an analysis of the current system of Agricultural Support (Provincial and Regional frameworks)
- Drill down to feasible and specific actions that can be undertaken to better connect 1) the Province to RAS and 2) various RAS organizations to one another.
- Develop a set of ‘Best Practices’ for RAS initiatives that will support BC communities to implement effective programs

Summary of Event Findings

Threats/Weaknesses, Opportunities/Strengths

- Areas of threats and weaknesses included: land use issues; bureaucratic complexity; funding limitations; cultural contexts; general sector challenges; and knowledge transfer gaps.
- Strengths and opportunities included: shared values; models & program examples; public awareness; resources; people’s passion and expertise; and emerging issues.

Linking to the Province

Recommendations to strengthen linkages with the Province included via: data and measurements; collaboration; structural links; and planning processes.

Next Steps

Recommendations for next steps included:

- A. Create and share a database of RAS and related resources from across the Province
- B. Determine priority data for performance measurement of RAS
- C. Collate existing data
- D. Continue convening events in conjunction with established forums - inviting expertise, developing joint strategies, and sharing perspectives
- E. Build and fund core roles for bridging and collaboration within government (as an umbrella) and organizations (to ensure stable participation)

Best practices for RAS

A key intended outcome of this projects engagement with other RAS from across the Province was the development of a list of Best Practices for RAS. This could help ensure that any core funding is directed to organizations that are strong, stable, and effective. Such 'Best Practices' could be requirement for funding contributions, and it will help all RAS (especially new start-ups) to improve their programs.

The following Best Practices were identified: engage a diverse, cross-disciplinary, and multi-jurisdictional team of advisors; use a strength-based, collaborative, and solution-focused approach; build in flexibility to deal with and capitalize on emerging issues and resources; be strategic - match gaps with regional assets and energy.

Shared Narrative

A shared narrative helps develop cohesion, collaboration, and strength to RAS interests. The narrative below was developed subsequent to the IAS event.

"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 and producers today.

We are passionate and committed to working towards that 'shadowy future'. We seek to learn and to work together, and we share a need for core funding and collaborative and comprehensive efforts."

Section 5: Key Themes and Recommendations

Getting back to the original questions: What systemic changes can increase the impact of Regional Agricultural Support, and how can the ACRD best amend its own programs?

Key Themes and Findings

- 1. There is keen interest in making adaptations to the current system**
 1. A recognition that agriculture and the agricultural industry are changing;
 2. Passionate, skilled, and knowledgeable people are bringing new ideas
 3. Consumer consciousness is shifting
 4. Organizational involvement in the sector is growing at the community level
 5. People are willing to work together to problem-solve
- 2. Systemic changes can be challenging, slow, and complex**
 1. It takes time, will, and a leap of faith
 2. *"The system isn't broken, it was built this way."*
- 3. Regional level programming allows for the integration of Health and Agricultural interests**
- 4. Structural 'Bridges' and formalized 'Bridging' roles are required**
 1. Structural gaps in complex systems hinder collaboration (including between multiple levels of government)
 2. Formal bridging roles bring multi-level, multi-sector, multi-perspective stakeholders together to find or create workable solutions
 3. *"Looking for a Unicorn"*³. It's challenging to offer extension-type services to the diversity of producers and products within a region
 4. Bridges and bridging roles support development of multi-sector infrastructure, collaborative programming, and avenues for knowledge sharing
 5. A strong network of RAS organizations helps them to be recognized by the Province
- 5. A lack of core funding hinders RAS progress**
 1. Core funding allows for adaption and response to emerging issues
 2. Core funding is essential for equitable participation in bridging platforms and mutually-supportive system networks
 3. Regional activities support Provincial needs; Community organizations support Regional needs
 4. Lack of funding stability year to year results in short-term fire fighting and energy expenditures just to survive
- 6. There are significant power and equity imbalances within the system**
 1. Between Provincial and Regional governments
 1. Current system is primarily top-down rather than bottom-up; while both are equally important forces
 2. Regional governments lack funding and jurisdictional authority to develop Regional programs or policies
 3. Regional governments are mandated to administer Provincial policies and must adapt to change

³ M. Bates at the System Change event, Feb 2020 regarding Kootenay-Boundary Farm Advisors program start-up

5. Province has agricultural mandate, whereas Regional governments do not, however agriculture and food issues are important and can be directly supported regionally (*see United Nations Sustainable Development Goals graphic, Appendix 2*)
2. Between paid workers and volunteers
 1. Within Committees and within organizational roles
3. Between rural/urban communities; small-scale/commodity producers
 1. Elitism against small producers and so-called 'hobby farmers' or 'community gardeners'
 2. Regulatory hurdles and lack of framework scalability for artisanal, seasonal, or part-time producers
 3. Policy targets are large economic contributors (industry) and areas of high population and high land values
4. Between Indigenous and non-Indigenous perspectives
 1. Systemic racism is evident through lack of Indigenous representation within governments and community organizations
 2. Locally or culturally important food practices such as in forest/marine harvesting are not widely recognized within 'agriculture'

7. Measurement and Data is important

1. It is challenging to measure increases in happiness, health, community resilience, and lifestyle satisfaction, and equally hard to measure their impact on economic growth and social services costs
2. It is easier to evaluate the impact of one large agricultural producer than many small ones
3. The Province reportedly has to respond to the Treasury Board with evidence and those may influence the funding available to the Province and its Ministries
4. Multiple community organizations are attempting to develop measurement tools, and reinventing databases which already exist elsewhere in a similar form

8. Key leverage points exist for systemic change in way agriculture is supported

1. Climate change: Agriculture is dependent on a certain environment, and humanity is dependent on food
2. Academic involvement lends credibility and allows for knowledge sharing and research in a rapidly changing field
3. Regional governments have a role in agricultural planning:
 1. They have an inherent interest in local food security and vibrant local social and health systems
 2. They are required to administer and respond to Provincial policy, regulations, and legislation
 3. Scalability and regulatory hurdles could potentially be mitigated, in part, at the local level
4. Currently, the Covid-19 pandemic
 1. A resurgence of interest in resilient, localized food systems, with associated funding opportunities
 2. Necessity is causing rapidly changing market, labour, production, processing, and distribution frameworks and conditions

ACRD Program Recommendations

Continue a Regional Agricultural Support Program with focus on:

1. Supporting the areas various food and agricultural organizations to increase their own capacity and impacts by providing core funding and mentorship to key organizations

- Mentorship could include: assisting with grants, program development, employee work plans, and strategic planning; navigating system bureaucracy and requirements; and resource sharing
 - Core funding supports stable, equitable engagement and participation in collaborative efforts and Committee tables
2. Acting as a bridge between these organizations in order to support regional collaboration and funnel broadly acceptable recommendations to Province and to ACRD Board of Directors
 3. Involving industry / academia in:
 1. Technical extension services and programming
 2. A Province-wide continuing educational program in agricultural planning for Regional Government
 4. Involving other RAS organizations in further networking events, with a particular focus on development of measurement and evaluation tools
 5. Continuing to engage Province in discussions about RAS and mutually-supportive endeavours
 6. Adapting programs as needed and responding to emerging concerns

Program specifics must be designed in collaboration with regional organizations and stakeholder groups. A grant application for a second stage Vancouver Foundation System Change project can be the mechanism to construct this project and to support it over a 3-year term. However, regardless of the funding resources available, the focus and intent of future ACRD's Agricultural Programs should lie in supporting downstream organizations via core funding and mentorship while acting as an umbrella and a bridge between those organizations, upwards to the Province, and externally towards other Regional Governments and organizations.

To change this system will mean changing the power dynamics. The ACRD has asked, through this System Change project, for more impact at the Provincial level, we must model this delegation of power and authority, by channeling it downstream ourselves and supporting the requests and needs from organizations within our community. By building them up, we'll build local resilience, capacity, and skills.

With guidelines, support, and oversight in place, our regional program will support local organizations to participate, in a paid capacity, at regional tables and collaborative initiatives and to expand their own capacity for supporting agriculture. Concurrently, we will continue to work with and engage the Province in developing structural supports for RAS, educating Regional Districts about agricultural and rural planning, and developing a network of RAS, so that we can learn from each other, expand our impacts, grow our capacity, and collaborate more widely.

Requests to Province

While the ACRD lacks authority to determine Provincial actions, the following requests are indicated through discussions with Provincial, RAS, and other stakeholders:

- A. Create and share a database of RAS and related resources from across the Province
- B. Help to determine priority data for performance measurement of RAS
 - What does RAS have to measure that will help the Province to understand and value it? (per Ministry of Agriculture and Ministry of Health)
- C. Assist with collation of existing data
 - Gather and analyze existing data, using a team approach that includes multiple organizations, the Ministries of Agriculture and Health, and academia

- D. Continue to participate in events and discussions about the role of RAS and ways it could be supported
- E. Build and fund core roles for bridging and collaboration within government (both between Ministry of Agriculture and Ministry of Health, and between Province and Regional Governments)
- F. Build supports and policy for small scale, part-time, and/or artisanal producers and processors (similar to the New Entrant Program or via development of a Small Producer Branch)
- G. Lobby for inclusion of core funding for RAS in the next round of CAP funding
- H. Provide in-kind and/or financial support to future ACRD applications to the Vancouver Foundation's System Change granting stream, in order to further the objectives above

Note the following two recommendations in the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services' REPORT ON THE BUDGET 2021 CONSULTATION which referred to regional agriculture and local food security:

- Recommendation 30: *Develop policies that support agriculture productivity and regional production and collaborate with Indigenous governments in coordinating local producers, building capacity, creating space for community gardens, and supporting farmers' markets.*
- Recommendation 31: *Continue to develop local food production, processing and distribution hubs, including investing in innovation and nutrition security, and prioritize funding for food security at the community and provincial level in emergency response planning, with the aim of improving food security and local agricultural capacity and productivity.*

Author Postscript

Many thanks to everyone who lent their perspectives and time to this project. I am humbled by and in awe of the amazing work happening across this province, and I learned a great deal from each of you.

What I heard, overwhelmingly, was an interest and willingness to work together, a shared desire for improvements in the way we support our agricultural producers, and a positivity about the potential for agriculture and food initiatives in BC. In a challenging time, a challenging environment, under complex systemic conditions, and across diverse populations and geography, I have great hope for continued collaboration and revitalization within our regional, provincial, and national food systems.

I want to acknowledge that this report may contain errors, or that I may have unwittingly misrepresented comments, statements, or stakeholder intentions. If so, I apologize, and I encourage you to reach out so that we can make corrections to any online copies. I know too, that there are many missing pieces to this story (and thus, we have much more to discuss!)

Mixed with this positivity, there is an equally great sense of frustration within the system. Through deep listening, active engagement, and continued forward steps, I believe unmet needs can be understood and accommodated. We are learning to live together in peace on this bountiful earth.

With great respect,

Heather Shobe
Project Coordinator
ACRD Agricultural Support Worker

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Appendix 1: ACRD Resolution to UCBM

RESOLUTION B-32, 2019: *Whereas agricultural extension services support government and community priorities around food security, economic development, climate change adaptation and water management;*

And whereas agricultural producers and stakeholders in each Regional District are subject to unique challenges and opportunities that are difficult to address in the long-term or in a consistent manner without predictable, non-project-based funding:

Therefore be it resolved that the Ministry of Agriculture provide funding to local Governments through a stable, annual and accountable framework

RESPONSE, Ministry of Agriculture: *The Ministry of Agriculture provides support to the agriculture sector through Grow BC, Feed BC, Buy BC, which is a three-pillared strategy to enable sustainable shared prosperity for a better B.C., by supporting B.C.'s agriculture, seafood and food processing sectors, encouraging consumption of B.C. products and building resiliency within the sector.*

The Ministry has a variety of programs and services to support B.C.'s farming communities, industry groups and aspiring new farmers. These programs are designed to promote local food products, support innovation, build capacity of B.C.'s existing producers and processors, assist new entrants looking to farm in B.C. and support farmers to adapt to a changing climate.

Currently, the Ministry provides direct service delivery to primary and value-added producers through a network of front-line staff and technical staff support capable of facilitating contacts between producers, industry associations, local governments, First Nations and other stakeholders and communities of interests. These interests are served with a broad range of modern tools, information and resources but support needs are increasing given a changing environment, pressures on the urban/rural interface and technological change.

Examples of key activities include:

- *Regional Agrologists (15 Agrologists) who deliver strategic outreach activities, facilitate strong agricultural land-use planning, coordinate agricultural emergency response, and address current and emerging issues facing agriculture within a specific region, in collaboration with local governments, regional producer organizations and local producers;*
- *Industry Specialists (11 Specialists) who drive agricultural competitiveness by delivering industry extension programming, research, and coordination to key agricultural commodities province-wide, in collaboration with producers, processors, provincial-federal organizations and governments, and;*
- *AgriServiceBC, which provides a single point of contact for producers, processors and citizens to access Ministry information, programs and services.*

Appendix 2: United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals

Jurisdictions and Impact Areas

The graphics below illustrate the role that Municipal level governments have in localizing the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals.

Note that, in Chart 1, Agriculture is not listed within standard Municipal jurisdictions, but that, as per Chart 2, it has relevance to Sustainable Development Goals 1, 8, 9, 11, 12, and 15 which are within Municipal government 'Impact Areas'.

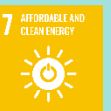
Chart 1: Canadian Jurisdictions⁴

The SDGs – Canadian Jurisdictions

National	Provincial	Municipal
-Agriculture -Finance -Environment -Fisheries and Oceans -Industry -Justice -Labour -National Defense	-Agriculture -Education -Energy -Environment and resource development -Health -Infrastructure -Justice -Transportation	-Emergency and Disaster Services -Parks and Pathways -Public Transportation -Recreation -Roads, streets and walks -Sanitary sewage and treatment -Waste Management -Water Supply -Tourism

Chart 2: Governmental Impact Areas on UN's 17 Sustainable Development Goals

The SDGs – Canadian Jurisdictions

National	Provincial	Municipal
  	  	  
  	  	  
 	 	

⁴ Graphics courtesy of British Columbia Council for International Cooperation