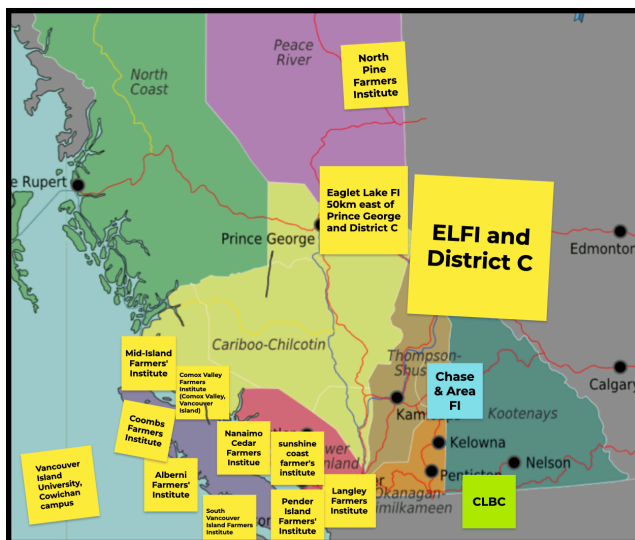


Stonehaven Farm, Alberni Valley
photo: Lisa Aylard

SUMMARY

BC FARMERS' INSTITUTES' ONLINE GATHERING NOV. 30, 2023



"Wow, what a roster of amazing people here!"

- Participant

14 Farmers' Institutes & 28 participants

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



vancouver
foundation

Under the Farmers' and Women's Institute Act, Farmers' Institutes have a unique and important ability to advise the Minister of Agriculture directly on matters of interest to them.

Local Institutes are cross-sectoral and regionally-focused.
Coming together from across BC, they explore and learn more about the issues and opportunities common to all.

Summary of Recommendations - indicated by the overall discussion:

1. **That local Farmers' Institutes (FI) are included in correspondence** whenever:
 - *strategic planning processes take place (any government or relevant organizations)*
 - *consultations are pending for any topic where agriculture and food is involved*
 - *there will be significant or potential industrial impacts to land (ie: mining, logging, large developments)*
2. **That notification be made ASAP** for any pending Ministry of Agriculture and Food (MAF) hosted meetings with FIs and:
 - *that they be held after District A Farmers' Institute's AGM in January 2024*
 - *that they include a presentation from MAF about FI history, structure, and functions*
 - *that FIs have an opportunity to share presentations about their projects and activities*
3. **That the Superintendent of FI attend Districts Farmers' Institutes AGMs**, as well as any local FI meetings when possible
4. **That MAF provide a letter to each FI outlining their eligibility for grants** under the Farmers' and Women's Institute Act:
 - *including their relevant number or identifier and contact info for the Superintendent of Farmers' Institutes*
5. **That MAF eliminate the requirement for a BCeID for the KTTP grant** and/or allow paper submission of applications
6. **That MAF take steps to improve the BC Farmers' Institute website** as previously indicated
7. **That MAF increase dedicated staff time or provide funding** in order to adequately administer and support BC's 30+ FIs and the farming communities they represent
8. **That MAF implements a clear structure and annual timeline for an FI Advisory Board meeting** with the Minister of Agriculture and Food
9. **That additional meetings are convened to bring together FIs from across BC** by any FI or agri-food related non-profit with sufficient capacity and skills

"My burning question is - how do we stay mobilized?"

"Needs to be a better, more efficient way to facilitate networking between FIs and on behalf of FIs."

"FIs need to reassert their straight line of communication to provincial government for direct change in agriculture in BC."

- Participant commentary

Event Overview:

A powerpoint presentation was shared including: the event background; a brief history of Farmers' Institutes; an overview of relevant regulations; a summary of FIs' primary activities and roles; and trends indicating changes that may impact FIs in the future.

Google Jamboard was used as a tool to record participant perspectives, and breakout rooms allowed for small group discussion about priority needs and requests.



From PPT presentation

Key insights:

- Farmers' Institutes's (FI) want routine opportunities and solid mechanisms to engage with and learn from each other, in-person where ever possible
- The Farmers' and Women's Institutes Act already includes a means and mandate to meet directly with Minister of Agriculture and Food.
 - *Caution is urged in making changes that would negate that, and,*
 - *There needs to be a structure in place to ensure those meetings happen annually*
- FI's include small and larger scale producers, though often the larger-scale are more involved with industry associations specific to their particular product.
 - *FI's are, in particular, a great venue to hear from small-scale and diversified producers*
- FI's want support and funding to address their own regional priorities, not only provincially-acceptable mandates
- More information is needed about the rights and structure of Farmers' Institutes
 - *For members and Institutes - so they know how they should behave*
 - *For the public - so they know how to support and engage with FIs*
 - *For granting organization - so they understand Farmers' Institutes eligibility under the Act*
- There's currently a strong interest in FIs' role in supporting local emergency planning and preparedness
- FIs are actively engaged in advocacy (locally and Provincially); producer education; community infrastructure; community programs; and networking
- FIs are actively seeking new members and funding
- FIs, particularly the District FIs would like Superintendent of Farmers' Institutes to attend their Annual General Meetings





What's needed to better support Farmers' Institutes?

Priority actions or requests, from Break-out Room Discussions:

1st Priorities:

- Keep the community base of the FIs because they cover all the sectors and can provide a voice for rural and farming families and communities
- Communication and networking channels - to province and laterally to other institutes
- Funding not specifically tied to MAF mandates. Let the FIs decide their own priorities
- Funding: direct to FI's from MAF and ability to apply for grants as FI. Add FIs to nonprofit registry
- Direct voice to ministry for regional action

2nd Priorities:

- Provide opportunities to reach across the sectors from agriculture to forestry, First Nations communities and others, to do more planning for fire and water management.
- Attracting new farmers/members, training new farmers
- More opportunities as the newest FI to interact and network with all FIs
- Provincial engagement: Minister WILL meet with FI; how to form advisory board to Minister?
- Emergency Act - wildfires for example - lose autonomy with ranch, farm, livestock etc. FIs not involved. How be better prepared for emergencies, ie: fires. Collaboration needed

3rd Priorities:

- Provide opportunities to train and increase capacity to respond to emergencies in ways that are aligned with best practice and with community values.
- More newsy website, info sharing between Institutes, replication of successes
- Training for young farmers -- grants and money at that level to jump start small scale farming; federally and provincially
- Diversity of membership - large and small producers

Farmers' Institute's Key Activities and Roles, Currently



Other Discussion Points: *(any follow-up is shown in green)*

Expanding the definition of agriculture:

- Reference to Farm Property Tax Assessment, where requirement to clear land for eligibility negates opportunities for agroforestry and native plant harvest or propagation
- *As follow-up, participant also referred to a need to reduce silos between industries and increase emphasis on 'policy coherence' across sectors (e.g. agriculture as a supplier of environmental services; risk to food security by fire (or floods); how to deal with both demand for housing and demand for food security and green space).*

Ensuring FIs are consulted during strategic planning processes:

- Increase involvement with local government
- A participant mentioned an ICE-T news release referring to an ACRD Strategic Planning initiative. *This relates specifically to economic priorities post highway 4 closures this past summer; the ACRD has reached out to the Chamber of Commerce to inquire about producer involvement.*
- Regional District of Fraser Fort George recently presented their Regional Agriculture Strategy 2022 to the Prince George Farmers' Institute
- ACRD usually involves producers via their Agricultural Development and Agricultural Advisory Committees. Their Strategic Plan includes 'Enhance Agricultural Development'
- The Vancouver Island Economic Alliance (VIEA) recently hosted a Regional Food Action Lab. Farmers' Institutes were in attendance and noted as a wonderful resource in need of support. *There will be follow-up to this event next year and past participants, including FM members, will be notified in advance.*
- *Economic Development Cowichan is reportedly undertaking a Strategic Plan Review. Area producers are encouraged to contact them about being included in consultations*

Meeting in person, vs. meeting online:

- Many participants wanted future meetings, including with the Ministry of Agriculture and Food, to be held in person rather than online
- Some suggested that a mixture of online and in-person meetings could be useful

Possible upcoming online meetings with Ministry of Agriculture and Food:

- Superintendent of Farmers' Institutes recently attended a Comox Valley Farmers' Institute meeting and said they were considering hosting an online meeting of FIs in January or February 2024. This was correlated by others.
- FIs need to be notified ASAP so they can set aside the time to attend
- In-person meetings are preferable and the 2018/2019 meetings were extremely well-attended
- District A Farmers' Institute's AGM is in January and they would want the meeting to be after that so they could decide on some requests and priorities

History and recent decline of Farmers' Institute activity:

- One participant noted that these same types of conversations have been going on forever
- FIs were very strong organizations until about the 1950's, when commodity-specific organizations started popping up
- Covid 19 negatively affected the activity of many FIs, and many have not since recovered
- Knowledge is being lost as farmers get older
- Many FIs no longer have many large-scale farm members, as those have joined industry associations instead

Annual meetings with the Minister of Agriculture and Food:

- The mechanism to meet directly with the Minister is in place (via the Act), FIs just need to use it
- In the past, the FI Advisory Board was made up of one delegate from each District FI and they met with the Minister of Agriculture right before the legislature opened each year.
- In recent years, but not since 2019, District A FI has met with the Minister directly as well. They gathered briefs from each of their locals, chose 4 subjects that they all struggled with, and presented those directly to the government.
- The Honourable Minister Alexis met briefly with North Pine Farmers Institute and toured their grain elevator when she was in the region last year
- A few years ago, a Regional Agrologist made a presentation about FI history, structures, and functioning to Coombs Farmers Institute which was well received
- At one point, there was a change in language of the Act regarding provincial engagement - shifted from 'will' meet, to 'may' meet *A request was made for more info about when/why that happened and through what process*
- Suggestion to advocate for meetings with Minister via local MLAs

Challenges with contacting the Ministry of Water, Lands, and Resource Stewardship:

- One FI was trying to get information prior to their AGM and the only contact info they could find was a mailing address
- Not having a direct means of communicating with the government about such important issues is frustrating
- New contact info was found and shared during the event

New farmers:

- Relying on leased land changes everything
- Need to listen well and be able to hear both the advice coming down from seasoned farmers *and* the problems being experienced by the new

Significant challenges noted with FI applying for Grants:

- KTCP grants require a BCeID, which FIs cannot obtain. One FI was not able to submit an application for the first intake in 2023, despite significant effort
- Administrative challenges of the KTCP are well-known and a meeting was held by MAF in January 2023 in attempt to address them
- Suggestion to contact 'Lindsay', the KTCP program administrator if in need of support
- Suggestion that in the past there was a push for all FIs to become societies so that MAF would not have to administer them
- Other granting organizations (such as Victoria Foundation) are not allowing FI applicants, despite their eligibility under the Act (was presumed they were unwilling to go through any additional hoops to confirm eligibility)
- Clarity of process and eligibility for grant application is required
- Some FIs have successfully applied for many different grants

Education and training:

- Suggestion to connect to post-secondary institutions to request needed programming
- Students are concerned about food systems and want opportunities to learn
- Much more training, support, and knowledge transfer is required for new entrant farmers
- Post secondary schools are discussing how to better support farming communities, have intention to form network, and view FIs as key part of regional extension story

Modernization of emergency management legislation and disaster financial assistance:

- Concerns were noted about proposed changes, where/when/how the government will be able to assert power, and the limited time available to provide feedback
- Discussion around the difficulty in reviewing the significant material that is shared during consultations processes, as well as challenges with finding all the relevant information
- *Note that consultations process is now open until Jan 31, 2024*

Primary FI roles and activities include:

- networking for local agricultural community and rural residents
- Infrastructure, economic capacity, and equipment (including lending libraries)
- Workshops and field days
- Fire preparedness training (such as offering fire suppression training S100 to members and rural residents)
- Local projects and info sharing with public (such as signage along roadways, local resource guides, online product sales channel)
- FIs could receive funding to distribute to farmers/producers

Increasing the capacity of FIs:

- One FI is considering hiring a co-op student to assist their administration and programs. The cost would be about \$9000/yr
- The ACRD recently hired an UBC planning intern to assist development of their staff agri-food position. It cost \$1000; the program required a designated planner as supervisor
- Many FIs want to recruit new members; keeping the institutes attractive for new members by being active, engaged, and relevant; fill the intergenerational gap in membership
- More mobilization and networking between FIs is needed; need a way to start communications easily so they can act quickly and cohesively when needed
- FIs need to be farmer-led and have more funding
- "Some funding from government is necessary, but I feel we need to be more and more independent from needing Govt in order to exist (and thrive!)"
- Question - how to move messaging/resolutions uphill and collectively get them to the ears that need to hear and decision makers?
- *Canada Summer Jobs program provides 100% of funding to non-profits for employing students over the summer months. Applications for summer 2024 close January 10, 2024*

BC Farmers' Institute Website:

- Would like website to help FIs keep in touch with each other, provide updates, have discussions
- Originally, the Ministry of Agriculture and Food suggested that each FI receive \$300/month for 1 year to administer the website, on a rotating basis. This was not followed up as FIs didn't all have interest or skills to do so
- Who is keeping up maintenance of website?

Collated Resources

- [Event Summary](#) - Farmers' Institute Gathering, Nov. 30, 2023
- [PPT Presentation](#) - Farmers' Institute Gathering, Nov. 30, 2023
- Summary of Proceedings from MAF's in-person meetings with all Farmers' Institutes in Nov. [2018](#) & [2019](#)
- [Resolutions from Comox Valley Farmers' Institute to District A Farmers' Institute](#) (to bring to MAF)
- [Overview and Excerpts from Farmers' and Women's Institutes Act and Regulations](#)
- [BC Farmers' Institutes](#) - webpage
- Strategic Planning - Examples of including food and agriculture
 - Regional District of Fraser Fort George's [Regional Agriculture Strategy 2022](#)
 - [Alberni-Clayoquot Regional District Strategic Plan 2021-24](#) (Strategy 1.4 - Enhance agricultural development)
 - [City of Port Alberni Strategic Plan 2023-27](#) (Goal 5.5 - Members of community have access to safe and secure sources of food)

- [Alberni-Clayoquot Strategic Recovery Plan](#) (example of where agri-producers' input is needed)
- Vancouver Island Economic Alliance's [Food Security Action Lab](#) project
- Other submitted and suggested resources
 - BC FireSmart - [Farm and Ranch Wildfire Preparedness](#)
 - [Public engagement on B.C.'s modernization of emergency management legislation and post-emergency financial assistance](#) (Now open until Jan 31, 2024)
 - [National Farmers' Union](#) reports
 - [Country Life in BC](#) newspaper
 - [Aunties in Action](#) (Jenny Horn's thesis on rural women developing social capital - see pgs 76-77 re: Women's Institutes)
 - [Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship](#) Contact info

Zoom Room 1

What is needed to better support Farmers' Institutes? (From MAF or otherwise)

1. Choose a scribe to make notes and report back to group.
2. Discuss and decide on 2-3 priority actions or requests.

improve communication, basic scheduling with existing AGM;

Become more involved with local government with participation in things like the VI Economic Summit

How attract members and what is the value that they provide

Integration across the sectors will strengthen capacity to act together esp. in emergencies

Build upon the existing Act and framework to ensure a direct line of communication.

Value and understand the resiliency of farming communities and how FI and WI are integral to that.

become more empowered and connected. Not be steamrollered.

1. Keep the community base of the FI because they cover all the sectors and can provide a voice for rural and farming families and communities.

2. Provide opportunities to reach across the sectors from agriculture to forestry, First Nations communities and others, to do more planning for fire and water management.

3. Provide opportunities to train and increase capacity to respond to emergencies in ways that are aligned with best practice and align with community values.

Think about things like: funding, connections to each other, administrative capacity, education and training, the website, the Act, particular expertise, infrastructure, Provincial engagement, etc

Zoom Room 2

What is needed to better support Farmers' Institutes? What would you lobby for? (From MAF or otherwise)

1. Choose a scribe to make notes and report back to group.
2. Discuss and decide on 2-3 priority actions or requests.

seeing what others are doing in farmers' institutes, connections and networking between FIs

direct meetings, in person, with the minister!

more communication from the province, other institutes, some way to communicate with others

We're the only active FIs in the District, out of touch

website as a place of communication with other districts

province has tried to get rid of FIs... we need to watch the proposed legislation change carefully so they don't take FIs (and the power of FI Act) away from us

on a positive note - according to BCAC, gov trying to look at WSA, put agriculture first in drought situations

be careful of government overreach under the state of emergency

priority actions

1. communication and networking channels
2. attracting new farmers/members

MONEY - grain elevator owned by the FI, we're doing okay on our own, but would like more if offered, to build infrastructure for community

ways to attract new members, new farmers

training resources for new farmers

Think about things like: funding, connections to each other, administrative capacity, education and training, the website, the Act, particular expertise, infrastructure, Provincial engagement, etc

Zoom Room 3

What is needed to better support Farmers' Institutes? What would you lobby for? (From MAF or otherwise)

1. Choose a scribe to make notes and report back to group.
2. Discuss and decide on 2-3 priority actions or requests.

Constant, core funding needed. Core capital, even, for 4-5 years. Hard to fund education and then try to get paid back.

Funding supports incidental expenses and insurance for field days. Hall rental. Members using their own personal cc's to pay for things.

Who is responsible for website updates? MAF? FIs? Who has capacity?

Need some ability to have conversations and updates on the website.

System needs to change - pre-covid meetings and processes; go back to those ways and expect that the ministry will step up to meet with us.

FIs are not non-profits, which complicates sponsorships and grant funding applications.

Priority 1 - funding not specifically tied to MAF mandates. Let the FIs decide their priorities to focus on.

Priority 2 - more opportunities as the newest FI to interact and network with all FIs.

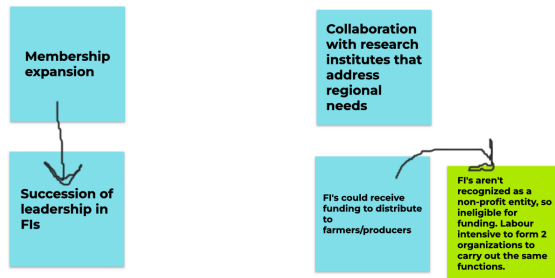
Priority 3 - more newsy website, info sharing between institutes, replication of successes.

Think about things like: funding, connections to each other, administrative capacity, education and training, the website, the Act, particular expertise, infrastructure, Provincial engagement, etc

Zoom Room 4

What is needed to better support Farmers' Institutes?
What would you lobby for? (From MAF or otherwise)

1. Choose a scribe to make notes and report back to group.
2. Discuss and decide on 2-3 priority actions or requests.



Priority Actions / Requests:

1. Funding: direct to FI's from MAF and ability to apply for grants as FI (not need to form another org) --> FI's be added to nonprofit registry

2. Provincial engagement: Minister WILL meet with FI and how to form advisory board to Minister?

3. Training for young farmers - grants and money at that level to jump start small scale farming; federally and provincially

Think about things like: funding, connections to each other, administrative capacity, education and training, the website, the Act, particular expertise, infrastructure, Provincial engagement, etc

Zoom Room 5

What is needed to better support Farmers' Institutes?
What would you lobby for? (From MAF or otherwise)

1. Choose a scribe to make notes and report back to group.
2. Discuss and decide on 2-3 priority actions or requests.

The need for FI Institutional Knowledge. Better communication and understanding of locals/districts/advisory committee and how it all works together. How to move message!

The urban non farming voice can be very loud these days. It is important that FIs be farmer led and driven

Think about things like: funding, connections to each other, administrative capacity, education and training, the website, the Act, particular expertise, infrastructure, Provincial engagement, etc

Zoom Room 6

What is needed to better support Farmers' Institutes?
What would you lobby for? (From MAF or otherwise)

1. Choose a scribe to make notes and report back to group.
2. Discuss and decide on 2-3 priority actions or requests.



Think about things like: funding, connections to each other, administrative capacity, education and training, the website, the Act, particular expertise, infrastructure, Provincial engagement, etc