

Beyond the Market Proposal for a Provincial Community-Based Extension Services Program

Overview prepared for Minister Norm Letnick

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The Context

Over the next 20 years, across all business sectors in Canada, there will be unparalleled shortfalls of both business owners and employees, resulting in potential closure of large numbers of small businesses throughout the province. In the agriculture sector, this generational gap is even more pronounced. The average age of a farmer in BC is 56, higher than all other provinces. BC also has the lowest percentage of farmers under 25 years of age in Canada. When we pair this generational gap with the complex challenges of farm land values, changing markets, and evolving technology and science, it becomes clear that in order for the Agriculture Sector to develop and grow viable businesses (that create jobs), the Province of British Columbia needs to make strategic investments into opportunities for new and young farmers.

When surveying new and young farmers in BC, they often point to the challenges of knowledge and training, especially in rural and isolated environments and that enhanced extension services are strongly desired by farmers of all ages. Extension service(s) is the process of transforming research and knowledge into a format that can be accessed and absorbed by those working on the front lines of development. Like training, extension services are designed to help farmers farm better, but extension services are more tailored to the capacity of individuals to learn. Extension services typically come in short formats versus extended training program or formal education. Extension services have traditionally been delivered in smaller rural communities to help reduce the barriers associated with delivery in larger centres. A lack of extension services across the province is cited as a top barrier to new and young farmers in British Columbia in:

- Local Food Futures for British Columbia. 2015
- New Farmers Initiative British Columbia Regional Report, 2014
- Young Farmers: the Future of Agriculture. Report of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food. 2010

In northern and central British Columbia, the opportunities for farmland access are greater than other regions of the province, but the challenges posed by isolation, market access, and knowledge transfer are also greater. After five years of experience developing services for new and young farmers in central/northern BC, Community Futures Development Corporation of Fraser Fort George (CF FFG) has tested and is prepared to offer a proposed model of community-based extension services for the province. We feel this model directly addresses one of the primary barriers to start-up and growth for new and young farmers through a grass-roots approach and a rural delivery model. The project has been highly regarded by its partners and clients to date and has proven it is capable of delivering high value and successful outcomes while operating within an extremely cost effective model. This is a unique model, as history has demonstrated that delivering province-wide services to rural areas is often an extremely costly endeavor. We believe that this flexible community-based model of delivery is not only essential to reducing costs, but it also provides room for regional variations and builds capacities based on the identified needs of local communities.

Over the years, funding for the Beyond the Market project has been provided by a patchwork of partners with core support remaining steady from our primary partners; the Regional Districts and the Omineca Beetle Action Coalition. Although the Beyond the Market Program spans across Highway 16, we have received many requests to expand our programs to other regions of the province, but are challenged by the complexity of engaging with so many local-level partners with various interests, and being capable of providing meaningful local delivery out of one office located in Prince George. We also recognize that agriculture is a direct responsibility of Provincial and Federal Governments, yet our local governments have shouldered the majority of the financial cost of the Beyond the Market program. We acknowledge that we have received Provincial and Federal funds over the years, which were extremely valuable for providing specific speakers series and publications; however, these

funds were largely inconsistent and targeted at one-off projects. Although the one-off projects can make an impact, there is a greater need for targeted, long-term, resources that support stable, consistent coordination services which are essential to the viability of community based extension services, or programs like Beyond the Market. Hence, in order to broaden the geographical scope of Beyond the Market programming, it is vital that the Province becomes the core financial supporter.

About Beyond the Market

The Beyond the Market project is an economic development strategy to support the local food and agriculture sector across the BC Highway 16 region. Beyond the Market is a project of Community Futures Development Corporation of Fraser-Fort George (CF FFG), based in Prince George BC, in partnership with many agencies across the BC Highway 16 region. The project began in 2010 and has consisted of four different initiatives. The project is coordinated by Jillian Merrick and guided by a volunteer advisory committee. Please refer to Appendices C and D for further information on Beyond the Market activities.

About Community Futures

Community Futures is a community-based economic renewal initiative, established by the Federal Government in 1985. Our main objectives are to help rural Canadians start or expand a business and to help sustain and improve communities and their local economies. There are 269 Community Futures offices in Canada, 34 in British Columbia, each guided by a local board of directors who volunteer their time, knowledge, and passion to guide a team of professional staff in providing a wide array of business and community economic development services.

Locally, CF FFG serves the communities of Mackenzie, Prince George, McBride, Valemount and surrounding rural areas. In 2014-2015 fiscal year, we provided business support to over 800 entrepreneurs and approved approximately \$1.7 million dollars in financing to small businesses across the region, representing 35 new or expanded businesses and over 152 jobs (full and part-time) being created or maintained. Since 1994, CF FFG has loaned over \$25 million to small businesses across our region. Community Futures' loan funds help support small businesses in our region when traditional lenders are unable to. Our core funding comes from Western Economic Diversification, but we administer a variety of projects on behalf of many different levels of government and other organizations.

Did you know?

Community Futures-assisted firms outperformed a comparable group of non-assisted firms in terms of employment growth, survival rate and revenue growth. In Canada between 2005 and 2010, Community Futures-assisted firms had an average employment growth rate of 9.5% compared to 4.2% for non-assisted firms. Community Futures-assisted firms had a survival rate of 76% five years after start-up compared to 60% for non-assisted firms, as well as a revenue growth rate of 13.8 % compared to 6.1% for non-assisted firms.

A Community Based Extension Services Model for the Province

Mission

The purpose of the new program model is to provide community-based extension services to the agriculture sector across the province, with a particular focus on new and young farmers. The program will link provincial strategies with local opportunity, and will adapt to the specific needs and strengths of each region. As a result, new and young farmers across the province will have low-barrier access to professional support, with a particular focus on business management to enhance their ability to grow their business and create jobs.

New and young farmers will gain connection to networks locally and across the province through regional and provincial coordination. The Ministry of Agriculture will gain an important community-based partner to assist in communicating available Ministry programs, publications and services. The support for a core coordination function will provide an important foundation to help leverage additional funding from other agencies for expanded services and varying regional opportunities.

The goals of the program are:

1. To increase the number of new farmers across the province
2. To increase the viability and capacity of existing farms, especially those in start-up and early growth phases
3. To improve the succession of longstanding farms to the next generation
4. To establish sound agri-business management practices that will result in job creation

Activities

Farm Business Coaching

Regional coordinators will work one-on-one with farm operators to develop business strategy. They can assist with the development of a business plan from start to finish, including health regulations, marketing strategies, hiring employees, financial analysis and more. A provincial coordinator will provide train-the-trainer assistance and to the regional coordinators to ensure a consistent and professional service.

Advisory Services

Regional and provincial coordinators shall provide strategic advice to other agencies wishing to connect, partner or work with our local agriculture sector. Regional coordinators will also gather and coordinate a regional advisory committee to provide strategic advice to the program activities and to develop grassroots involvement in the program.

Match Making and Online Directories

Regional coordinators will pair buyers and sellers of farm land, farm products, farm business opportunities, farm employment and farm internships. The provincial coordinator will assist in identifying appropriate online directory services and populating these directories with listings from regional coordinators. A strategy for non-digital match-making will also be pursued.

Annual Regional Event

Regional coordinators will organize an annual networking event (or events) to bring the entire regional agriculture sector together. These events will be especially important in the early days of the program to help build trust and familiarity within the network. There may be a specific learning outcome attached to the

Regional Event, or they may simple function as program launch and network building events. It is recognized that the broader the focus of the event, the broader the participation.

Training and Learning Events

It is expected that regional coordinators will organize additional training and extension events by leveraging additional funding for the program. The provincial coordinator will work to coordinate professional speakers and facilitator opportunities with the regions. A centralized approach will help leverage better quality facilitation and reduced costs through coordinated travel and schedules across the province. The provincial coordinator will also house a digital library of useful publications and resources for the regional coordinators.

Grant Writing and Funding Leverage

Regional and provincial coordinators will seek out and solicit additional funding to augment the services of the program, especially for training and extension opportunities. Each region will have access to a different portfolio of community development funds. Regional coordinators will also be expected to assist agricultural organizations and operations in applying for grants and services, especially national and/or provincial opportunities.

Rural Delivery Model

Delivery of digital resources to rural communities has been met with limited success. The physical presence of a coordinator on the ground in rural communities significantly increases the uptake of programs and services. Under the proposed extension services model, six different service regions would be established across the province, each with a regional coordinator. These regional coordinators would be required to visit the communities across their respective region at least twice annually, or more depending on the physical geography of the region and budget. Please refer to Appendix A for further details.

Funding Model

We propose that the Province of British Columbia issue contracts for each of the regional coordination roles and the provincial coordinator. Because regional coordinators must come with a strong business coaching and program management background, we anticipate that Community Futures offices across the Province will be well-positioned to submit proposal for this contract opportunity. This does not limit, however, the ability of any organization to submit proposals for the coordination contracts. Coordinators will also be expected to come with strong connections in the regional agricultural, food and business networks.

Annual funding totaling \$333,000 would establish a 0.6 FTE regional coordinator in each of the six proposed regions and an additional 0.4 FTE provincial coordinator, along with a modest budget for regional travel, a regional network event, and basic office, administration and communications expenses. Regional coordinators, with assistance from provincial coordinators, would be expected to leverage an additional \$20,000 -\$50,000 in funding from other sources to expand the services of the program, especially for training and extension resources. Please refer to Appendix B for further details.

Appendix A: Proposed Program Budget

	Regional Activities (x6)	Provincial Coordinator	Total
Wages & Benefits	\$ 37,000.00	\$ 27,000.00	\$ 249,000.00
Coordinator Travel	\$ 4,000.00	\$ 2,000.00	\$ 26,000.00
Office and Admin	\$ 4,000.00	\$ 2,000.00	\$ 26,000.00
Core Network Event(s)	\$ 3,000.00		\$ 18,000.00
Communications & Outreach	\$ 1,500.00	\$ 2,000.00	\$ 11,000.00
Train-the-trainer sessions		\$ 3,000.00	\$ 3,000.00
Total	\$ 49,500.00	\$ 36,000.00	\$ 333,000.00

Appendix B: Statistical Snapshot of Proposed Regions

	2014		2008	2011	
	Population	Area (km ²)	ALR Land (ha.)	Farmers	% < age 54
Peace & Northern	72,982	244,565	1,523,930	2330	21%
Stikine Region	629	118,663		0	
Peace River	66,321	117,391	1,478,000	2285	20%
Northern Rockies	6,032	8,511	45,930	45	56%
Highway 16	191,366	248,279	793,490	2,315	45%
Fraser Fort George	93,645	50,676	367,190	830	43%
Bulkley Nechako	40,387	73,361	316,060	1300	45%
Kitimat Stikine	39,169	104,461	66,470	155	55%
Skeena Queen Charlotte	18,165	19,781	43,770	30	50%
Cariboo & Central	199,621	149,549	1,493,880	3,535	43%
Cariboo	63,111	80,609	923,870	1705	41%
Central Coast	3,240	24,492	4,440	15	100%
Thompson Nicola	133,270	44,448	565,570	1815	44%
Kootenay & Kelowna	554,180	107,471	621,030	7,880	43%
Columbia Shuswap	51,789	28,929	51,390	940	46%
Central Okanagan	189,289	2,905	28,770	1520	44%
North Okanagan	82,783	7,503	68,780	1770	43%
Central Kootenay	60,013	22,095	65,170	295	47%
East Kootenay	58,059	27,543	267,020	605	39%
Kootenay Boundary	30,307	8,082	54,700	485	33%
Okanagan Similkimeen	81,940	10,414	85,200	2265	45%
Lower Fraser	2,833,885	36,302	158,370	8,795	49%
Fraser Valley	288,682	13,335	74,330	4235	57%
Squamish Lilloet	41,496	16,310	25,450	210	55%
Greater Vancouver	2,474,123	2,880	54,490	4220	40%
Sunshine Coast	29,584	3,777	4,100	130	50%
Island & South Coast	779,216	59,739	113,600	4,520	43%
Mount Waddington	11,523	20,244	1,760	0	
Nanaimo	152,518	2,038	18,680	705	42%
Powell River	19,921	5,075	9,540	140	46%
Comox Valley	64,639	1,701	40,350	670	47%
Alberni Clayquot	30,876	6,588	7,730	150	63%
Capital	372,463	2,340	17,840	1660	38%
Cowichan Valley	82,407	3,475	17,700	1045	45%
Strathcona	44,869	18,278		150	50%

Appendix C: PAST INITIATIVES

Growing the North, December 2010 to June 2012

Mission

This initiative aimed to build, strengthen, and diversify the agriculture and food service industries from Valemount to Terrace in British Columbia, Canada, linking farmers, ranchers, purchasers and consumers in the region in an effort to identify the barriers to the local food industry and encourage collaboration and entrepreneurial development to overcome them.

Activities

- Creating an inventory of food producers, distributors, commercial consumers and value-added processors in the region
- Identifying existing food storage and distribution infrastructure.
- Assessing the feasibility of a regional food distribution system and value-chain opportunities
- Bringing producers and purchasers together to network and share information
- Implementing local food purchasing pilot projects in commercial institutions
- Hosting networking and learning events, including a large regional procurement event
- Identifying potential new markets and value-added ventures
- Communicating and sharing the project learnings

Legacy

The hallmark publication of this initiative is the Regional Food System Report, available for download on the project website. Print copies of the guide can be requested from the Beyond the Market office. Other publications include a regional seasonal availability chart and facts sheets on regional fruits and vegetables, used in a game developed for classrooms and fall fair presentations, called 'Name that Vegetable'. Growing the North also developed and hosted several seminars, networking events, and presentations, which have been archived on our project website.

Funders

Growing the North was a collaborative partnership between Community Futures of Fraser-Fort George, Community Futures Nadina, Community Futures 16-37, the Omineca Beetle Action Coalition, the Regional District of Fraser-Fort George, Community Futures Rural Economic Diversification Initiative.

The New Farm Development Initiative, October 2012 to March 2014.

Mission

The New Farm Development Initiative sought to increase the number of successful new farm entrants in the BC Highway 16 region from Valemount to Terrace by building and enhancing training and mentoring opportunities and increasing access to farm land and capital for new farm entrants.

Activities

- Development of agricultural training and internship programs for new farmers in the region
- Raising awareness of the region's agricultural opportunities and challenges to potential farmers within and beyond the region
- Improving access to the region's farmland for new farmers

Legacy

The hallmark publication of this initiative, the A-Z Guide for New Northern Farmers, is available for download on the project website. Print copies of the guide can be requested from the Beyond the Market office. Other published resources include a list of agricultural training, learning and employment resources in the region, and a list of recommended book titles for farming in northern BC. The New Farm Development Initiative also developed and hosted several seminars, networking events, and presentations, which have been archived on our project website.

Funders

The New Farm Development Initiative has been made possible by funding from the Regional District of Fraser-Fort George, the Regional District Bulkley-Nechako, the Regional District of Kitimat-Stikine, the Omineca Beetle Action Coalition, the Real Estate Foundation of BC, and the Investment Agriculture Foundation of BC through the programs it delivers on behalf of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada and the BC Ministry of Agriculture.

The Regional Beef Value Chain, October 2012 to March 2014.

Mission

The Regional Beef Value Chain worked with partners to grow and diversify market opportunities for direct sales of beef in BC Highway 16 region from Valemount to Terrace. The initiative worked directly with producers, processors and purchasers to identify barriers to regional beef sales and encourage entrepreneurial development to overcome them.

Activities

- Establishment of several new direct-sale beef purchasing relationships
- Assessment of the capacity for expansion of direct sales of beef
- Assistance for region's producers in exploring new innovations and beef business models that will increase profitability and increase returns to the regional economy.

Legacy

The hallmark publication of this initiative, Beef in Northern BC, is available for download on the project website. Print copies of the guide can be requested from the Beyond the Market office. Other published resources include a list of a Snapshot of Beef Demand in BC and a Snapshot Comparison of Cattle Enterprises in Northern BC. The initiative also produced a digital, self-guided, narrated overview of the Beef Value Chain in BC. The Regional Beef Value Chain initiative also developed and hosted several seminars, networking events, and presentations, which have been archived on our project website.

Funders

The Beef Value Chain Initiative has been made possible by funding from the Regional District of Fraser-Fort George, the Regional District Bulkley-Nechako, the Regional District of Kitimat-Stikine, the Omineca Beetle Action Coalition, and the Canada-BC Ranching Task Force Funding Initiative; delivered by the Investment Agriculture Foundation of BC with funding from the federal and provincial governments.

Appendix D: CURRENT INITIATIVE

The Regional Farm Knowledge Network

Mission

The Regional Farm Knowledge Network is a community-based extension service strategy for the regional agriculture sector. Building on the experiences gained under previous initiatives led by Beyond the Market, the Regional Agriculture Knowledge Network will endeavour to create a strong service and support network in the central interior and northwest for the long-term sustainability and strengthened performance of the regional agriculture industry. This will be supported by three main goals:

- To provide training and professional development opportunities to farm operators in the project region
- To develop a central information network for regional agricultural contacts, publications, resources and tools and a mobile support library
- To develop a model of financial self-sufficiency to support a community-run extension services network into the future

Activities

Farm Business Coaching: Our business coach works one-on-one with farm operators to develop business strategy. We can assist with the development of a business plan from start to finish, including health regulations, marketing strategies, hiring employees, and more. We help answer the tough questions that farmers face.

Training Series: We deliver training series for farm operators in each of our six service communities three times per year. Communities outside of our service region may be able to offer the delivery of our training sessions in their local community on a fee for service basis. Several of our workshop meet the criteria for Speaker Series funding under Growing Forward II programs. An overview of our 2015 workshop offerings list is available on the project website.

Outreach & Advocacy: We attend fall fairs, trade shows, farmers' markets, high schools, library events and more to educate the broader community on the value of the agriculture industry and strong food systems in our region.

Advisory Services: We provide strategic advice to other agencies wishing to connect, partner or work with our local agriculture sector.

Match Making: We pair buyers and sellers of farm land, farm products, farm business opportunities, and farm employment and internships.

Resource Library & Bookstore: Our mobile farm bookstore travels across the region, selling useful and valuable titles on farming for profit. We also house a large collection of free information resources in our main office. Contact us to find out what's available to you.

For Consumers: Our online Find-a-Farm Directory has been helping consumers and food buyers connect directly with local farmers for over five years. Check this helpful tool and more in our Buy Local section.

Funders

The project has been made possible by funding from the Regional District of Fraser-Fort George, the Regional District Bulkley-Nechako, the Regional District of Kitimat-Stikine, the Omineca Beetle Action Coalition, and the District of Fort St. James. Funding for specific workshops has been provided by the BC Ministry of Agriculture through its Growing Forward II programs.