

Annual Report 2015/2016

Beyond the Market – Farm Knowledge Network

Summary

Beyond the Market's 4th initiative, the Farm Knowledge Network, began April 1, 2014, and was scheduled to run until March 31, 2016. The initiative had three goals:

- Goal #1: To provide training and professional development opportunities to farm operators in the project region
- Goal #2: To develop a central information network for regional agricultural contacts, publications, resources and tools and a mobile support library
- Goal #3: To develop a model of financial self-sufficiency to support a community-run extension services network into the future

The initiative is based out of the Community Futures Fraser Fort George office in Prince George and serves a regional area defined by the Regional Districts of Fraser Fort George, Bulkley Nechako and Kitimat Stikine. Jillian Merrick served at the program coordinator. The primary service communities are the Robson Valley, Prince George, Vanderhoof, Fort St. James, Smithers and Terrace. Core funding for the initiative is provided by:

- Regional District Fraser Fort George
- Regional District Bulkley Nechako
- Regional District Kitimat Stikine
- District of Fort St. James
- Omineca Beetle Action Coalition

Revenue was also provided to the project in 2015-2016 by:

- BC Ministry of Agriculture: \$1,600 fee-for-service was provided to create a farmland lease workbook, to be owned and published by the Ministry of Agriculture

Financials

The revenue and expenses for the Beyond the Market project from April 1 2015 to March 31 2016 is as follows:

Revenue	Amount
Regional District of Fraser Fort George	9,500
Regional District of Kitimat Stikine	5,000
Regional District of Bulkley Nechako	5,000
District of Fort St James	5,000
Omineca Beetle Action Coalition	15,600
BC Ministry of Agriculture	1,600
Bookstore Sales	117.86
Community Futures Fraser Fort George	In-kind
Total	41,817.86

Expense	Amount
Consulting Fees	840
Wages, Benefits and Training	26,180
Meeting Cost	1,576
Travel	3,027
Office Supplies, Equipment, Phone	1,464
Website and Communications material	353
Events and Workshops	13,528
Total	46,968

*Note: The 2015-2016 report is the second year of a two year project, while the financials show an excess of expenses over revenue, this was balanced by the previous year which had an excess of revenue over expenses.

Project Activities

1. Farm Client Coaching sessions

These one-on-one sessions were held in person or over the phone to provide support and coaching services for a variety of needs from farmers in the region. Fifteen documented sessions were held in 2015-2016.

2. Regional Agriculture Advisory Services

Advisory services are roughly categorized as all meeting, phone calls and presentations in which the Beyond the Market coordinator provide members of various organizations with information about the regional agriculture sector and strategies for building relationships with regional agriculture operators and key players. Our coordinator's participation in these activities is vital to championing the needs and accomplishments of the agricultural sector both within and beyond the region. Twenty-two documented

sessions were held in 2015-2016, in addition to the many activities in related to the construction a presentation of a provincial service proposal (see Project Administration section below).

3. Networking and Outreach events

These events are designed to raise the profile of both Beyond the Market's services and the regional agriculture sector, but also to provide a simple and convenient way for local operators to meet and have conversations with the Beyond the Market coordinator and each other. Many 'undocumented' coaching sessions take place during these events. The initiative's mandate was to provide at least one outreach and networking event per year in each community. In 2014-2015, the initiative hosted multiple events in each community. Thus, the frequency of these events was reduced in 2015-2016. Due to the cancellation of the Terrace event in 2016, special efforts should be made to host an additional event in Terrace in 2017-2018.

- 5th Anniversary Celebration, March 2016, Dunster, Prince George, Vanderhoof, Fort St. James and Smithers (Terrace event cancelled due to low registration)
- Vanderhoof Trade Show, May 2015
- BC Food Systems Network Gathering, June 2015, Prince George

4. Training Events

These training events were designed to increase the skill set of regional operators. The initiative's mandate was to provide three training events per year in each community.

a. Simply Sheep, facilitated by Roma Tingle, June 2015

Description: A basic introduction to sheep production.

- Prince George – 14 participants
- Dunster – cancelled due to low registration
- Vanderhoof – 4 participants
- Fort St. James – cancelled due to low registration
- Smithers – 11 participants
- Terrace – 10 participants

b. Get Ready to Grow, facilitated by Candace Appleby, September 2015

Description: Can you transform food products into something more valuable? Are there buyers out there interested in your products? What regulations affect your industry? Is there a profit to be made? Answers to these questions and more are part of our learning session on value-added food businesses. Come and meet with BC's value-added industry expert, Candice Appleby, as she provides an introductory overview of this growing sector.

- Dunster – 15 participants
- Vanderhoof - 7 participants
- Prince George – 10 participants

- Fort St. James – 1 participant
- Smithers – 6 participants
- Terrace – 6 participants

c. Technologies for the Small Farm Business, facilitated by Diandra Oliver, November 2015

Description: Beyond the Market is hosting a workshop on low-cost technologies for your farm or food business. The workshop will give you an introduction to available tools for your small business, help you assess your technology needs, and show how to use important tools and processes for inventory, time management, billing and payment systems, branding and marketing, and more!

- Terrace – 3 participants
- Smithers – 9 participants
- Vanderhoof – 5 participants
- Fort St. James – 3 participants
- Prince George – 5 participants
- Dunster – cancelled due to weather

d. The Cost of a Dozen Eggs, facilitated by Jillian Merrick

Description: Join us as we crack open the true cost of our food and the hard-boiled truth of small scale egg production. Learn how to do your own cost of production analysis. With Jillian's help, participants will find that complex number-crunching is really not so hard! Farmers, hobbyists, and consumers alike will enjoy this presentation and benefit from learning the cost of a dozen eggs.

- Prince George, November 2015 – 30 participants
- Prince George, June 2015 – 6 participants

e. DIY Science on the Farm, facilitated by Serena Black, February 2016

Description: Research and experimentation has always been an integral part of a resilient farming operation. With a lack of formal agriculture research in the region and increasing seasonal variability due to climate change, farm operators need to learn the tools to be able conduct their own research and find innovative solutions on their farms. By the end of the workshop, participants will have the confidence to develop their own site-specific research on their farm.

- Fort St. James – 6 participants
- Vanderhoof – 5 participants
- Prince George – 11 participants
- Dunster – 19 participants
- Terrace – 8 participants
- Smithers – 8 participants

f. Agrifood Processors Business Planning, facilitated by Candace Appleby

Description: If you have ever wanted hands-on guidance and structure for planning your food business, and help starting a viable food business plan, this program is designed for you. This two-day event takes you through a planning process specifically designed for food businesses. Perfect for food processor start-ups, farms entering into value added products and established food business streamlining operations. Eight modules allow you to plan for the critical elements of running a food business. These eight modules have been developed by the BC Ministry of Agriculture to help Agri-food processors grow.

- Prince George, February 2016 – 6 participants

5. Information and Communications Resources

a. Mobile Farm Bookstore

The Mobile Farming Bookstore was launched in May, 2014 and contains over 100 titles related to farm techniques and management. All titles were offered at 25% of their suggested list price, providing a 20% profit margin on sales. This pricing strategy was designed to cover the travel costs of the bookstore while also incentivizing farmers to build up their knowledge resources. The bookstore was brought to the Vanderhoof Trade Show, May 2015 and BC Food Systems Network Gathering, June 2015 in Prince George.

b. Website

In 2015, www.beyondthemarket.ca was overhauled to simplify the navigation of the site and prepare a better archive of information in the event that the program would end in 2016. The website maintains an active calendar of agricultural-related events for the region's operators, a directory of 113 local farms, and a blog.

c. Local Farm Directory

Recognizing the immense value of this directory, Beyond the Market was omitted to reaching out to the operators listed in the directory to update and correct their information, much of which was originally entered in 2011. Northern Development Initiative Trust volunteered the services of its local government intern cohort to conduct these outreach phone calls and interview with directory listing operators. This outreach project was only partially completed by the volunteers. A renewed effort to fully update the directory in 2016 will be led by the Beyond the Market coordinator.

d. Newsletter and Facebook Page

Beyond the Market maintains a monthly e-newsletter.

Project Administration

Administratively, the current initiative is run much more efficiently than past initiatives. The current initiative timeline matches Community Futures' fiscal year, reducing the time spent by the project coordinator and Community Futures staff on reporting and year end administration. In addition, the current Farm Knowledge Network funding partners require basic reporting from the project annually, significantly reducing the reporting requirement sought by previous funders. This has dramatically reduced the administrative time for the project, which allows for more time program operations and front-line service. This reduction of administrative requirement was essential for a program is run on 0.4 of a full time equivalent.

The Beyond the Market Advisory Committee met on a regular quarterly basis in 2015-2016.

In 2015/2016 a concerted effort was made to demonstrate to success of the Beyond the Market model as a community-based extension services program, and solicit funding from the Provincial Government for ongoing programming that could be replicated across the province. These efforts include the following activities:

- August 2015: Presentation of the proposed program to the BC Minister of Agriculture, the office of the Minister of Jobs, Tourism and Skills Training, and the office MLA Mike Morris, member of the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services
- September 2015: Presentation of the proposed program to the Standing Opposition Committee for Agriculture
- October 2015: Submission of the proposed program to the Provincial Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services
- October 2015: Submission of 23 letters of support for the proposed program to Minister of Agriculture, the Minister of Jobs, Tourism and Skills Training, and the office MLA Mike Morris
- December 2015: Submission of request for formal response to the proposed program to BC Minister of Agriculture, the BC Minister of Jobs, Tourism and Skills Training, and the office MLA Mike Morris
- January 2015: Requests submitted for meetings with the office MLA Mike Morris, Shirley Bond, John Rustad, and Doug Donaldson
- March 2016: A response from Community Futures Fraser Fort George to all organizations and individuals that drafted letters of support for a provincial initiative, outlining the above activities.
- March 2016: A meeting with Ministers Bond and Morris to re-present the original request made in August 2015 and answer any questions about the request.

To date, the March 2016 meeting with Ministers Bond and Morris has been the only formal response received from the Provincial Government. The proposed program was not included in the 2016 Provincial Budget.

Add:

- April 2016: Request to North Central Local Government Association Board (NCLGA) to sponsor a resolution supporting the program at the 2016 convention. Resolution was not brought forward, however.

- A request has been submitted to partner Regional District Boards to co-sponsor the resolution for the Union of BC Municipalities (UBCM.)

Future Activities in 2016/2017

The current initiative has been extended for an additional year to March 31, 2017, with slightly revised goals. The goals of the Beyond the Market program from 2016-2017:

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