



A Call For A Focus On

Farm Renewal, Business Development & Labour

In the Next Agriculture Policy Framework

“ **Investment in the next generation of farmers is investment in our future.** ”

- USDA Deputy Secretary Krysta Harden upon announcing an \$18 million investment for new farmers in 2015.

Agriculture in Canada is at a crossroads. Since 1991, we have lost more than a quarter of the farms across Canada.¹ Almost half of Canada's farmers are over the age of 55 and will soon be looking to pass on their operations to new farmers. Yet, seventy-five percent of farmers do not have someone lined up to take over their farm.² As the number of farmers and farms drop, and the levels of farm debt rise³, the overall profitability of farming is threatened. The decreasing value of Canadian agricultural products, along with increasing inputs cost and increased land values, only further jeopardize the future of farming.⁴ The Canadian government needs to take proactive steps to encourage new entrants and viable farm succession, as well as to help new farmers succeed over the long term.

The good news is that there is a growing interest in agriculture as a career and many new farmers are succeeding in developing successful farm businesses. Yet, as detailed by numerous reports, new farmers face significant challenges in terms of access to land, capital, training and labour- challenges that compromise their entry and success in farming.

WHO ARE “NEW FARMERS”?

The face of new farmers is changing. This document defines new farmers as anyone entering or ready to enter the industry as a farmer- regardless of background, age, production practices or market channels. This not only includes youth who have grown up on farms who are ready to start their own enterprise, but also young people, second careerists who did not grow up on a farm, Indigenous Peoples, and New Canadians (many of whom come from agrarian backgrounds and want to farm in Canada). These farmers are establishing farms of all types and scales, in both commodity and non-commodity sectors, domestic and export markets, and are innovators in emerging farming sectors.

The current Agricultural Policy Framework, Growing Forward 2, does not sufficiently address the unique needs of new farmers and, in some cases, excludes them from specific grants,

insurance and cost share programs. Now, more than ever, we need more diversity in agriculture, and we need more new farmers to assume existing farm assets and create new farm businesses in order to supply Canada with sustainable and local food.

The present moment offers a great opportunity for the government to harness this excitement to lift the barriers new farmers face and strengthen the future of Canadian agriculture. A comprehensive set of policies and priorities outlined at the federal level would tackle these key challenges and level the playing field for new entrants of all ages and backgrounds - regardless of their scale or production mode.

An investment in farm renewal will have ripple effects on the economic and environmental well-being of society as a whole. Supporting farm renewal will strengthen the viability of rural communities, and contribute to local and regional economic development. It is time for the Federal Government to provide leadership and support for the variety of initiatives across the next Policy Framework as well as across other ministries and jurisdictions that are necessary to support new farmers, to protect and steward our valuable farmlands and to encourage a thriving and resilient agri-food sector.

We believe these issues would be best addressed through the creation of a **Farm Renewal, Business Development and Labour Pillar in the next Agricultural Policy Framework** to outline a national strategy that guides provincial programming. The key issues this pillar would address are:

1. **The Diversity of New Entrants to Farming:** Expand the definition of "beginning and young farmer" to encompass all new entrants, including those not from farming backgrounds, second careerists, Indigenous Peoples and New Canadians. This also includes recognizing a broader range of farm operations, variable in size, structure, production practices, scale and scope.
 2. **Farmland Protection and Transfer:** Support programs that focus on protecting land for future generations and making farmland accessible to all farmers through secure, long-term, and affordable land tenure.
 3. **Seed Capital and Financing:** Increase access to start-up capital and financing for new farmers using tools such as establishment grants, early stage loans, loan guarantees, cash flow programs and more flexible Business Risk Management programs.
 4. **Training and Knowledge Transfer:** Make training and knowledge transfer accessible to new farmers through direct subsidies for training costs as well as through core funding for organizations offering on-farm training, farm apprenticeships, and farmer-to-farmer exchanges.
 5. **Business Planning and Management:** Support the adoption of best farm business management practices to secure the long-term financial viability of farms. This should include the transition between retiring farmers and new entrants, and support for new enterprises as they undertake initial farm business planning in order to increase success rates.
 6. **On-Farm Labour Development:** Provide increased support and incentives to enable farmers to create more meaningful on-farm employment opportunities and improve the retention rate of skilled labour.
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Signatory Organizations



Ecological Farmers
ASSOCIATION OF ONTARIO



Endnotes

1. Beaulieu, Martin, S. 2015. Demographic Changes in Canadian Agriculture. Statcan.gc.ca. Retrieved August 22, 2016: <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/96-325-x/2014001/article/11905-eng.htm>
 2. Robicheau, Sarah. 2012. Helping Good Things Grow. In Health and Sustainability in the Canadian Food System. Eds Rod MacRae & Elisabeth Abergel. Vancouver: UBC Press. pp.245-270
 3. From 1981 to 2014, farm debt skyrocketed 362% and land prices rose 300% according to Farm Credit Canada Ag Economics's 2015 Farmland Values Explained report: <https://www.fcc-fac.ca/fcc/about-fcc/corporate-profile/reports/ag-economist/ag-economics-farmland-values-explained-summer-2015.pdf>
 4. NFU 2012. Farmers, the Food Chain and Agriculture Policies in Canada in Relation to the Right to Food. http://www.nfu.ca/sites/www.nfu.ca/files/NFU%20Final%20Report%20to%20Special%20Rapporteur%20on%20the%20Right%20to%20Food,%20May%202012_1.pdf
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