



Community Summary Report #29

Location: Atlantic Canada

Partner Name: National Farmers Union

Green Resilience Project Community Summary Report

Community Partner name: National Farmers Union

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1. Introduction

A. Summary

Conversation highlights and themes:

- Climate change directly impacts farmers' livelihoods and incomes. It is not the only challenge farmers face.
- Our food system is broken and is not resilient. Impacts ripple throughout society and include food insecurity and a farm labour crisis.
- We need more farmers, but barriers to entry including cost and lack of public education inhibit new entries.
- Farmers bear the cost of adapting to climate change and increasing their own resiliency.
- Solutions offered do not typically benefit small-scale farms.
- Climate change will not benefit the agricultural sector by extending the growing season. Other harmful side effects will negate any "positive changes".

B. About the Green Resilience Project

This community conversation was part of the Green Resilience Project, a Canada-wide series of conversations exploring and documenting the links between community resilience, income security and the shift to a low-carbon economy. Working with a designated partner organization from each community, the Green Resilience Project aims to create spaces in which a wide range of participants can talk through the links between climate change and income security, and identify possible next steps to build or maintain community resilience in the face of these challenges.

This Community Summary Report reflects what we heard and learned in our community's conversation. Each Project partner organization across Canada will be producing a similar report. In March 2022, the Green Resilience Project will produce a final report summarizing findings across conversations, which will be available to the public and shared with Environment and Climate Change Canada.

Funding for the Green Resilience Project is generously provided by Environment and Climate Change Canada's Climate Action and Awareness Fund. The Project is managed and delivered by Energy Mix Productions, Basic Income Canada Network, Coalition Canada Basic Income - Revenu de base, Basic Income Canada Youth Network, national experts and local partners

C. About the Community Partner organization

The National Farmers Union (NFU) is Canada's national farm organization committed to family and cooperative farms. Promoting agroecology and food sovereignty for 50+ years,

the NFU does not waver in our vision for farmers, eaters, and the earth, embedded in social and economic justice coast to coast to coast, and internationally. The National Farmers Union is a direct-membership organization made up of farmers and farm workers who share common goals. Our goal is to work together to achieve agricultural policies which will ensure dignity and security of income for farmers and farm workers while enhancing the land for future generations.

The National Farmers Union is happy to partner with the Green Resilience Project as this conversation closely aligns with our climate and farm crisis work and we are committed to ensuring farmers are included in topical dialogues, and heard by decision makers.

D. Why this community was selected to have a conversation

This conversation took place among farmers in the Atlantic Provinces. Climate change has a direct impact on farmers and their livelihoods. Participants mentioned extreme weather causing damage on their infrastructure, and a fear that storms are only going to get stronger and more persistent. Additionally, rapid temperature fluctuations and potentially warmer winters may have impacts on healthy perennial production and lead to an increase in pest populations. Changes like these that are beyond the control of farmers result in real financial ramifications both in loss of crops and an increase in costs associated with preventative and supplemental measures (more greenhouses, more row cover and insect netting). There is a myth that climate change will be good for the agricultural sector because the growing season will be extended. This is a dangerous presumption because it does not account for the aforementioned storms or other extreme weather events (drought, flooding, fires) that will negate any “benefits”. This type of misinformation clouds public assessment of the issue and inhibits government level support for farmers.

All of these very real impacts, paired with the longer term degradation and depopulation of rural areas means that farmers now often lack the support systems necessary to cope with harsh changes. There is added stress due to the unpredictability of environmental changes and the associated impacts on income. These financial burdens reach beyond farmers and can be felt across society as a whole with the cost of living increasing, it becomes harder for folks to access food and therefore harder for farmers to make a living. The community in question does not represent a specific geographic region, rather a shared sentiment among food producers. Despite changes in rural communities, many participants did still note that there is strength and support in their community. There was a belief that positive change would need to begin at a local level.

E. About the conversation participants

of conversation participants: 18

Farmers and farmworkers are at the forefront of the climate crisis. The impact on income security in the face of climate change is felt acutely by farmers, farm workers, and landworkers of all kinds. Farmers are also business owners that rely on land to access income. Farmers need to be included and heard by decision makers on issues of climate change and income security.

The participants were not all located in the same local community. They were situated across the Atlantic provinces. Farmers' experiences also varied based on what they produced, type of marketing, and scale of farm, among other differences. The National Farmers Union leveraged our network of farmers to reach participants. Participants did not need to be members to participate. All farmers and farm workers, member or non-member from the region were invited to participate.

The conversation on climate and income impacts everyone and there were several perspectives missing from this dialogue, even amongst food producers. Migrant farmworkers create a massive amount of the food found in grocery stores and markets around the Atlantic provinces and nationally, and they are disproportionately impacted by external crises (weather, pandemic) due to the precarity of their employment and the inequities rooted in the temporary foreign worker program. Their voices were not represented in this conversation. Agriculture is a colonial practice taking place on stolen land and indigenous communities are on the frontline of the climate crisis. Indigenous voices and perspectives were also lacking in this dialogue. Participants all had different perspectives and experiences to share, though none identified as a person of colour. Additionally, all participants were directly involved in agriculture, and most were active farmers. That being said, the farmers at this conversation primarily came from small-scale diversified farms.

F. The Community Conversation

This conversation took place virtually over zoom. As it was a small group, we all engaged in one conversation without breakout rooms. The facilitator, a farmer from the region, introduced the Green Resilience Project, National Farmers Union and key topics/ terms as noted in the prepared slides from the Green Resilience Project. We did not make any changes to the questions.

This was a relatively large group, so it was broken into two breakout rooms for the bulk of the conversation. The conversation was vibrant and each participant was offered space to share if they were interested. Feedback stated that this was a nice opportunity to connect with fellow farmers about a challenging topic.

2. What We Heard

A. How are the changes to our community's environment and economy discussed in the introduction affecting you, your family or the community as a whole?

- Farmers feel the impacts of the climate crisis very acutely because of their relationship to the environment and their incomes may be directly impacted by unexpected or extreme weather.
- So many external factors beyond the weather impact farming because of their disruptions on ecosystem balances - everything from mining exploration impacting waterways to aggressive forestry practices disturbing animal habitats and population balances. .
- Small-scale farms are relatively resilient because they are typically diversified. This means that there is a relatively high degree of adaptability to changes, but this flexibility is not without cost. It was noted that overhead costs continue to climb and that it is difficult to make predictions about food pricing.

- The uncertainty and challenges associated with both farm inputs and outputs makes it hard to create a sustainable business model.
- Some of the increasing costs are directly related to climate change. For example, folks are spending more on insect netting because warmer winter temperatures means that pest populations are increasing. Stronger winds and increasing storm frequency means that financial and temporal investments in infrastructure are also on the rise. Not all farmers have the option to be spending this kind of extra money. It is very difficult to budget for the unknown.
 - *“We’d love to transition the farm to alternative forms of energy, solar power, that kind of thing, but there’s a lot of costs to getting all that stuff in place, so we’re trying to think about how we can make the farm as resilient as possible going forward and it feels like the biggest immediate challenge is the cost associated with that.”*
- Many farmers stated that they work hard to be self-sufficient, but that there is a general lack of support for small scale producers.
- Farmers tend to rely on their communities for support as there is no fall back funding or crop insurance in case of emergencies and policy is not reflective of their needs. As impacts become more pervasive however, neighbours who once may have been able to help repair a barn after a storm, for example, may be now caught up maintaining their own infrastructure.
- *“A lot of the policy solutions that we’re seeing are really directed at more capitalist technocratic solutions, and not about things like seed saving and seed diversity and adaptation. Things that work in terms of small scale, agroecological systems.”*
- Changes to the environment and economy extend beyond farmers and into the entire food system. Farmers are often caught in a difficult position of trying to offer affordable food to their community while not undercutting their neighbours, and of course paying their own bills. Farmers' experiences cannot be regarded in a silo because they are relevant to a bigger, broken system.

B. How are these environmental and economic changes related to each other?

- For farmers, there is no separating environmental changes from income security.
- Farmers are being squeezed financially on all sides because costs are increasing, profit margins are decreasing, and less people can afford our productions.
- One grower mentioned being interested in farming because it provides self-sufficiency and a separation from the capitalist system.
- *“The current status quo agriculture system wants us to buy our way out of, to buy our way into climate adaptation mitigation to buy climate solutions. And, and they’re doing that by packaging up these really high tech, expensive inputs. But I think that’s what we actually need is the policies to stop going towards things like gene editing, and start going towards, say, Farmer run organizations, because what we need is for the knowledge that farmers have been gathering for so long, to actually be shared, because sharing innovations, you don’t have to buy anything, you’re relying on people’s knowledge.”*
- Our current food system relies on the exploitation of migrant farm workers and unpaid interns which creates unrealistic expectations about food prices and farm sustainability.

- We have an unsustainable food system and it is impossible to compete with subsidized products
- The current food system is exploiting migrant farm labour in order to make food affordable to consumers. Work needs to be done here to build solidarity with farmworkers and guarantee a living wage.
- Subsidies in our current food system are misplaced and the abundant challenges with creating a land-based livelihood are a deterrent to new people that might be interested in trying it out.
- New options are needed to make food production easier and to make the food system more focused on human rights than market prices.
- Number of young farmers is decreasing which creates uncertainty about the future of the food system. We need better training opportunities and the removal of corporate interest from our public education on food.
- Anyone in a marginalized situation is focused on food and shelter, not ‘how can I change my behaviour to help the planet?’. Large barriers and high upfront costs make it hard to transition into farming if one is doing a different job because they need money.
- Uncertainty about money is a huge burden and causes stress throughout society.
- Climate change may create literal barriers to success due to roads being flooded and cutting off access to markets.
- The pandemic has shown a lack of resilience in our society and has highlighted that decision makers will always protect the status quo.
- The rural/urban divide should be part of the conversation on climate change.

C. What are some possible solutions to the challenges we’ve discussed that will help the community respond to climate change and create income security for all community members?

- Participants identified a need for community based solutions. This includes cutting out the middleman and, for farmers, focusing on direct marketing and collaboration.
- *“I think there are ways that we can work together. I do think that that builds community resilience, and that way we can respond to whatever challenges come our way in terms of climate change.”*
- Always coming up with new solutions is tiring, so it is important to assess what assets we already have in the community and to invest in them.
- Community support also includes prioritizing the needs of Indigenous community members as we continue to grow respectful and accountable partnerships.
- Agroecology was mentioned as a solution rooted in grassroots movements.
 - *“Fundamentally, it does include farming and growing food in harmony with ecological systems. But it also includes the importance of building resilient communities of justice for women and youth and non binary folks, at the top of the discussed decision making. It involves cross border solidarity and inter movement solidarity.”*
- We need to educate the next generation of farmers, but also prioritize sharing knowledge that we already have. This includes centring voices of BIPOC communities and building justice into the educational system.

- *“There really is a disconnect, I think, between food and farming and what a lot of young folks are learning in schools. I think we need more opportunities to reconnect all of us, but especially young people, with the natural world and with growing food and eating food that they've grown and building that into the education system, and then creating more opportunities for intergenerational talking and mentorship”*
- Support for alternative models to accessing land would reduce financial stress and start-up costs which would help to remove the barrier of entry into this field of work.
 - Ideas mentioned were land linking and land matching programs, land trusts, and farmland preservation.
 - *“I think ensuring that young and new farmers have access to the land is kind of a key piece of this puzzle moving forward. Policies that would support this change are likely to require some funding that would have to come from different levels of governments.”*
- Offering compensation to farmers for the environmental services and carbon sequestration that they provide. This is how to make agriculture a desirable alternative during a just transition.
- Highlighted solutions to income security included basic income to relieve financial stress on farmers and the greater community. Incorporating paying staff a living wage into business models also came up.

D. How do you think these solutions can be achieved to build, maintain or strengthen community resilience? Who is responsible for these changes—individuals, community groups, governments or a mix?

- Everyone needs to be involved. It feels like the same people are always at the table which can lead to burnout. Not taking time and energy to engage new voices is an area of weakness when we talk about resilience.
- Farmers represent less than 2% of the Canadian population. Alone, we have a limited capacity to influence policy, so we need to work together with eaters and advocates of a just food system in order to push for change.
- Need to remove conflicts of interest from decision making and increase oversight.
 - *“It is the industry that works with the government to define what an equitable transition is. We need 3rd party review - protected from both government and industry interests.”*
- Skepticism in the government's political will.
 - *“It's hard to see from where I am any provincial action on climate change - oil and gas prices determine what happens in the province.”*
- Need to remove red tape and bureaucratic barriers that prevent local food from getting into the hands/ mouths of the community.
- We need to have more people working on the land and more support for young people that may be interested in more sustainable farming practices.
- An involvement of the education system to incorporate local food systems into curriculum. We need to inspire the next generation of farmers and limit barriers to entry.

- “Less fossil fuels on farms means more humans on farms - either working or growing their own foods.”
- There is fear that it may take more major disasters to inspire action.

3. What We Learned

Takeaways and lessons learned:

- Our current food system is broken and not resilient in the face of climate change.
- Farmers are resilient and tend to adapt quickly to environmental challenges, though they are personally absorbing the added costs. There is a need for financial support.
- We have a farm labour crisis that leads to the exploitation of migrant farm workers. Need to work on building solidarity and ensuring that voices of farmworkers and seasonal workers are represented.
- Basic income may relieve financial stress, but was not unanimously viewed as a solution.
- Corporate interests dictate policy and result in governments upholding the status quo.
- Current institutional supports do not cater to small scale producers. These conversations need to be shared with policy makers.
- Consumers are necessary players in improving the food system, though they are also impacted by the climate crisis and rising food costs.
- We need a greater diversity of voices in these conversations. Building solidarity with Indigenous communities needs to be a priority.
- Small scale farms as they currently exist within our food system are not a perfect model of food sovereignty because they are still tangled with environmental degradation (clearing trees for farmland), labour issues (unpaid internships, exploitation, complicated dynamics between farm owner and farm workers), and white supremacy (who has power and access to land/ resources).

- To what extent do you think your conversation built a wider and deeper understanding of the links and synergies between community resilience, livelihoods, income security and the low-carbon transition? Please explain your response.
 - **4** - This conversation encapsulated a broad geographic region, so it was a valuable opportunity to learn from each other about specific experiences and challenges.

- To what extent did participants demonstrate increased awareness of climate change and their own capacity for climate action? Please explain your response.
 - **4** - Comments and feedback noted that participants left feeling hopeful - to some extent- and appreciated having a chance to learn from others.

- To what extent were new relationships between community partners and conversation participants created and fostered? Please explain your response.
 - **4** - The National Farmers Union is a member based organization, so it is always valuable to have a chance to engage with members in a more indepth

way. Some of the non-members have joined the union because they support the climate action and advocacy work that we do.

- To what extent did your conversation create opportunities to foster ongoing discussion of solutions related to climate change, income insecurity and community resilience? Please explain your response.
 - This was a chance to share the ongoing projects of the National Farmers Union with a group of engaged participants. Community building and networking is always valuable.
- In your opinion, what does the community need to do next in order to build or maintain resilience in the face of climate change and rising income insecurity?
 - Continue to build grassroots' movements and find support within the community.
 - Increase collaboration between farmers and eaters. Farmers cannot fix the food system alone.
 - Remain engaged in conversations that direct policy.
 - Educate the community about your growing practices, local food movements, and food sovereignty.
 - Build capacity for regional collaboration including cooperative farming and distribution.
 - Analyze measures being taken on farms to combat climate change and the associated successes/ challenges.

4. Next steps

Clear next steps were not identified during this conversation, but feedback highlighted the value of spaces like these for sharing experiences and diving into a more solutions based conversation. Participants are interested to see where this research goes and if it will impact policy.

The National Farmers Union is sharing the Community Summary Report with our Climate Action Committee, as well as our policy and parliamentary strategy teams to determine next steps.