



Community Summary Report #6
Location: Yukon & Northern British Columbia
Partner Name: National Farmers Union

Green Resilience Project Community Summary Report

Community Partner name: National Farmers Union

Conversation date: January 18th, 2022

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1. Introduction

A. Summary

Themes that emerged include;

- Farmers' incomes are directly impacted by changes in climate, and especially climate disaster.
- Government financial supports don't support small, medium sized, diversified farms.
- Farmers' income margin is so small, government needs to fund mitigation changes that require investment; infrastructure, landscape changes, research, supports, electrification, and climate disaster response.
- Insurance supports don't support small, medium sized, diversified farms.
- When funding exists for climate change mitigation, disaster response, etc. it tends to have many barriers to access, or take an incredible long-time, creating immediate cash flow issues.
- Farmers end up paying for climate change more than eaters.
- Consumers need to continue to be educated on the value to climate of local food systems.
- Farmers need to continue to build networks, mobilize, and collectively market themselves for economic stability.
- Farmers need to continue to build networks, mobilize, and make collective asks to all levels of government.
- Climate change is not the only challenge farmers face.
- Climate change and income insecurity affects the mental health of farmers.

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.

D. Why this community was selected to have a conversation

- Northern BC and Yukon communities experience a different context, and set of challenges compared to southern regions.
- There are many unique climate events due to the different biogeoclimatic zones throughout BC and the Yukon. Flood, extreme wind, drought, were all experienced.
- Many in the local communities in northern BC work in oil and gas - both consumers of farmers' products and some farmers with off-farm work with oil and gas.
- The farming community's resourceful, and supportive to one another during disaster. Homes in the community are inaccessible with the price of housing.
- There is an abundance of small-scale producers in BC, they are actively having conversations around increasing organic matter to mitigate climate impacts, and generally able to pivot more easily.
- Hard to keep up with the price of land. Farmers are competing with land priced for developers. How to support the next generation of farmers with inaccessible land prices?
- 5 out of 10 farmers in BC make less than \$10,000 / year (Stats Can).
- Starting farms is also such a big initial capital investment.
- The farming community is challenged by not being able to access emergency funds at all, or waiting 18 months for support.
- Financial assistance in the face of climate disaster doesn't fit small, mid-sized farms. Therefore climate disaster means significant income loss.
- Farm insurance did not recognize poultry as an insurable claim specifically.
- The eater community, when educated and connected to farmers, is compassionate and can rally to support farms during climate disaster.

E. About the conversation participants

Farmers and farmworkers are at the forefront of the climate crisis. One participant noted "my farm flooded this spring, it was about a 20-30 year event and I'm expecting it to happen maybe every 5-10 years going forward...I spent \$30,000 on a building and almost lost it to a

flood the following spring.” 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 Northern BC, and one Yukon farmer. Farmers’ experiences also varied based on what they produced, type of marketing, 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.

Northern BC and Yukon farmers’ experiences are unique, with distinct challenges and assets from southern farmers. It is important that the experiences from these regions are captured and communicated. 75% of participants identified “My livelihood has been or is in danger of being seriously impacted by climate change”. It was noted during the conversation that Northern BC communities will be heavily affected by the transition off fossil fuels, with some participants identifying a direct impact to their livelihoods.

F. The Community Conversation

- The conversation took place on zoom after work hours.
- The event included context, introduction of terms and shared language, and deep open discussion.
- The event was successful, all participants were engaged over the 2 hours.

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?

In the face of a change in the environment; specifically climate disaster, participants discussed the following:

- Issues in supply chain - one participant communicated delivery delays and then weren’t notified until the day before that chicks were arriving, another noted seed shortages.
 - “The supply chain issues are in food in general, but also the supplies to support recovery from extreme events, so being cut off often in more remote places, these extreme events can really amplify that access issue and the supply chain issues. We have a really globalized system for our supply chain so it’s pretty fragile when it comes to our local communities”.
- The broader community experiences food insecurity, or increased food insecurity
 - “I think another lose to the community was supply of produce, I’m one of the larger vendors at our farmers market and for 4-8 weeks after my flood the amount of vegetables available at the farmers market was decreased...these

climate change extreme events / related events can have an impact on our food security locally”.

- Having to pivot their business multiple times is significant new work creating stress on the farmer and the farm business.
- There is a heavy toll on farmers’ mental health when they are pivoting/rebuilding a crop succession plan mid-season in response to climate disaster.
- Constant pivoting of business isn’t sustainable.
- The tight profit margin for many farms makes farmers income vulnerable and affects farmers’ mental health. Constant disaster response is also a mental health burden. Farmers often have strong values and a desire to do things right in climate change mitigation which is an additional mental health burden.
 - “It certainly puts a lot of pressure from a mental health perspective on the farmer to constantly pivot, pivot, pivot because your business planning doesn’t hold true 2 years down the road, 3 years down the road...and you could be changing monthly, weekly in some cases”.
 - “Farmers are already on the frontline of climate change, and where they live, is where they work, is where they play, they’re connected to the land in a different way than the rest of the community, so these impacts, these extreme events can cause a stress, particularly when a very tight margin on income is affected”.
- Farmers are resilient and accustomed to adapting and being resourceful, but don’t want to keep being resilient in the face of adversity.
- There is farming community resilience in the fact that there are many diversified, small scale farms able to pivot quickly - but fewer in the north.
- Thinking about regenerative agriculture as a climate solution, cover crops are difficult to incorporate in the north because of a short season, that means taking a whole season out of production which is both a loss of income and a cost of cover crop seeds and labour.

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

- During flood disaster farm worker hours had to be reduced, had to pivot business to microgreens production temporarily.
 - “When climate change flooded my farm, it was a pretty direct cut of my personal income, I have staff that I have to pay minimum wage, and I reduced their hours a bit, but we still needed to replant crops and get back on track, so I had the upfront capital expenses a second time for the year, and came out of my wage”.
- When there is a relationship between farmers and consumers (via CSA, or farmers market), consumers want to support the farmer and will be patient and adaptable.
- During disaster, some programs exist but don’t support the timelines and realities farmers require, for example AgriInvest and Agristability offers disaster support but it’s too slow (18 months, after taxes are done). Both programs need to keep reference margin to be high to be triggered. In reference to crop insurance programs, young / new farmers can’t cash in based on the analysis structure.

- “You have to show a loss of income over the previous year and because my business is still very young, I’m expanding by 20-30-50% in my gross revenue from year to year”.
- Climate disaster is costly, but cost is being absorbed by the farmer.
- Direct marketers may be able to adjust their price marginally, while other commodities are “price takers” with price determined by the market.
- Food will rise in price with disasters, but consumers are experiencing the same disasters.
- In Northern BC, many consumers work for oil and gas. If those jobs are lost (and not justly transitioned), the consumers’ income is reduced or lost and unavailable to support farmers.
- Many Peace region farmers work in oil and gas on-farm, and as we transition off fossil fuels, farmers’ economic bracket will change.
- Climate change is one of many influencers shaping farmer income. We need to treat farmers better and allow them to live above the poverty line, and culturally reconnect to food.

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?

Possible solutions brainstormed included:

- Sourcing local producers, thus relying less on larger supply chain issues.
- Remote farms are challenged by barriers to accessing services and supplies, with inaccessible shipping. This constraint dictates what is feasible on farm.
- Building more collectives, working together with local producers more.
 - “I think that there could be some real synergies in relationships and solutions built cross commodity as well. So grain farmers helping livestock farmers...I guess that comes right down to strengthening our local food systems rather than relying on the global or even inter-provincial”.
- Decentralizing abattoir access allows for more efficient processing, less fossil fuel use, increase farmer income, and food staying local.
- Farmers must continue connecting with consumers, there is strength and income stability in a CSA programs. Farmers must continue educating our local communities / consumers about food growing and climate change, and the role of the small, mid-sized farm in mitigating climate change and supporting local economies, and adjust expectations. Consumers need to change their diet in order for farmers to become stronger.
 - “A connected consumer base is definitely a strength to have”.
- The government paying farmers for their part of climate solutions as they store carbon in the soil using agroecological practises and low input methods.
- Capital funds to introduce climate friendly practises like electric tractors and other electrification projects.
- Farms are often fossil fuel reliant currently and need support to “upgrade” a variety of equipment to electric models or more efficient fossil fuel models. Electrification isn’t a priority for farmers, knowing how long it would take with small profit margins to

replace big equipment. That shift needs to be funded. However, farmers are more able to respond to climate change through local partnerships, changes in practices, etc.

- More research happening on farm, more trial projects, more living labs initiatives to help incorporate climate action on farm.
- Availability of basic income would allow farmers to have the time to think through and plan to implement and trial new approaches.
- Concerns around how basic income would be used.

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?

- Participants identified that there is an agriculture adaptation strategy in the Peace region which is an important next steps strategy bringing together many voices over the common issues being faced, but it has many holes in the development plan, and it is lacking community resilience plans to address more social, ecological, thriving community resilience; no transportation plan, no supply chain plan, no labour plan, no price plan.
- Given the economic reality of farms, mitigation and adaptation efforts need to be funded by the government.
 - “For example, things like actual changes to the landscape that are going to make us more resilient to climate change like building burms to prevent flooding...is going to take some pretty serious funding and coordination, and planning”.
- If funds are available, there needs to be support to help farmers access them (grant writing support; i.e. money isn’t enough - need to make it easily accessible).
- Solutions need to come both top-down (government supported) and bottom up: (farmer-led).
- Thinking of mitigation and response, there is a need for the re-establishment of extension services, and research centres in the North could be a big step forward; including introduction of exploration farms to test new strategies, considering local context (water management, pest management, seed trials).
- Farm support community organizations could support regional branding efforts / collective marketing, specifically they could have a campaign for traceability information on food for the consumer.
- Farm work not made to be a viable career with economic opportunity in comparison with the oil industry in the region.

3. What We Learned

Please summarize your perspective on the key points you listed in section two. Why were they important? Were they brought up frequently, met with contention, surprising to you or your facilitators, etc.? Was there a strong consensus on any of the key points? You are welcome to expand on any key points you find especially interesting.

- Nearly everything that was brought up was a common experience and perspective

- Farmers are facing so many challenges and to make the on-farm changes they want to, to address climate change, they need funds and access to support to get funds.
- Farmers are too often not heard, while their experience with climate change is so acute, and they are absorbing economic costs of climate change; even though they really can't afford too.
- Consumers have a role to play in supporting local integrated food economies.
- Programs that exist are one-size fits all and small-scale producers, especially new and growing producers aren't getting any government support.
- Farmers don't have the time or money to incorporate the positive agroecological and regenerative approaches they'd like to.
- Basic income in a farming context isn't largely understood.

- To what extent do you think your conversation built wider and deeper understanding of the links and synergies between community resilience, livelihoods, income security and the low-carbon transition? Please explain your response.
 - 1 - Not at all
 - 2
 - 3
 - **4**
 - 5 - Very much so

- To what extent did participants demonstrate increased awareness of climate change and their own capacity for climate action? Please explain your response.
 - 1 - Not at all
 - 2
 - **3**
 - 4
 - 5 - Very much so

- To what extent were new relationships between community partners and conversation participants created and fostered? Please explain your response.
 - 1 - Not at all
 - 2
 - **3**
 - 4
 - 5 - Very much so

- 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.
 - 1 - Not at all
 - 2
 - **3**
 - 4
 - 5 - Very much so

- 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?
 - Stay organized and prepared to support each other in the face of shared challenges, and prepared to advocate for farmers' needs in the northern context including infrastructure funds, supply chain issues, retrofitting support, climate disaster response support (government funding and associated supports to access it that actually apply for small-scale / all-scale farms and farmers)
 - Keep farmers in the conversation with political leaders at all levels
 - Develop regional marketing and partnerships
 - Develop regional climate response plans
 - Continue to educate the community / consumers about price, food growing, food sovereignty, local food movement, farm labour, climate change

4. Next steps

Did conversation participants identify next steps for continuing the conversation, or continuing advocacy related to the topics covered in the conversation? What were they?

- Participants did not identify concrete next steps but expressed the value of building new connections during the session and an eagerness to continue to develop concepts discussed.

As the community partner organization, do you have a plan for continued advocacy on the topics explored in your community conversation? Are you able to share your plan with us at this time, and whether or how conversation participants might contribute to that plan?

- The NFU is sharing the Community Summary Report with our Climate Action Committee and policy and parliamentary strategies teams to determine next steps.