

Farmland Access In British Columbia: Four Innovative Approaches





Acknowledgements

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— YOUNG AGRARIANS —

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Farmland Access in British Columbia: Four Innovative Approaches

Foodlands Trust Project, CRFAIR’s Municipal Farmland Trust Initiative, Young Agrarians Matchmaking Pilot, and The Smart Farm Project

This document focuses on the topic of farmland access and land management in British Columbia. We are jointly committed to ensuring that the next generation of farmers in BC have access to land to develop viable farm operations, and that elder generations of farmers are able to leave a legacy of fertile land. We acknowledge that many agricultural lands across the province are located on the traditional territories of Indigenous Peoples. We acknowledge the colonial history of agricultural land policies, and strive to maintain open dialogue with Indigenous communities to ensure our work respects and supports Indigenous land rights and food systems.

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Introduction

Farming and food production are the foundation of our local food system and key contributors to regional economies, retention of natural areas, provision of ecosystem services, and community well-being. There is growing public awareness and enthusiasm around building a sustainable local food and agriculture system in BC. A 2014 survey of BC residents reported that 92% believe local food production and the reduction of dependency on food imports is very important. BC residents hold “food and farming” as the second most important land use in the province after “natural fresh water systems.”¹ The excitement and support for local foods is reflected in the rapid growth of local food markets and distribution systems. In 2012, provincial farmers markets sales were 147% of 2006 sales levels, contributing over \$170 million in economic benefits.² Maintaining working agricultural lands to grow local food in British Columbia is a public priority.

It is important that farmland not only remain protected, but that it is accessible to farmers and remains actively farmed. Farmland access refers to the ways in which farmers secure the use of land for farming. Farmland access requires that:

- Farmland is available (especially to new entrants) for farm use;
- Farmland is priced at its agricultural value and is affordable to farm enterprises;
- Duration and security of tenure meets the needs of farmers;
- Retiring farmers are financially able to transfer their assets to incoming generations.

The four programs described in this booklet contribute innovative and complementary approaches to addressing challenges around farmland access for current farmers and new farm entrants in BC. We are very excited to share our work and are always looking for ways to increase involvement, support and partnerships as we advance our programs.





The Challenges

This section provides an overview of major challenges that have given rise to the need for initiatives addressing farmland access and support for a new generation of farmers.

Increasing Development Pressures on Limited Farmland

Since 1973, the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR) has protected farmland in British Columbia. Local governments also contribute to the retention of farmland through zoning bylaws. Yet, even with these protective measures, there is significant development pressure on BC's limited farmlands. Development pressure and land speculation grow along with increasing population and sprawling urban centres, reducing the availability and affordability of farmland for farming. For example, the population of BC's highest agricultural producing region, the Fraser Valley, is expected to double³ and the population of the Capital Region is projected to increase by 30% by 2036.⁴ As development pressure heightens, there is a need to strengthen farmland protection measures and invest in farmland access strategies. Our programs aim to serve a function complementary to the Agricultural Land Reserve.



Non-Farm Use, Speculation & Rising Cost of Farmland

The protection of farmland must be coupled with measures to promote the utilization of farmland for farming. Non-farm uses of farmland and the high cost of farmland are major problems in BC. The amount of BC land reported to be actively farmed in 2011 amounted to 55% of the total land in the ALR.⁵ Residential, transportation, commercial and recreational uses of ALR land have been documented across the province. Non-farm uses reduce land availability for farming in a province in which farmland is a mere 5% of the total land base. In addition to reduced availability of farmland, non-farm uses and speculative holdings drive up the cost of farmland above its farming value. This leads to a scenario where the cost of farmland can exceed potential revenues derived from farming the land. A recent Vancity report documents that 20% of land being leased for farming in Metro Vancouver are holding properties, indicative of land being purchased on speculation (purchased with the intent to sell or develop).⁶ There is also a growing trend of farmland being purchased as rural residences for its pastoral character, especially in peri-urban areas, and evidence that this drives up the cost of farmland.⁷



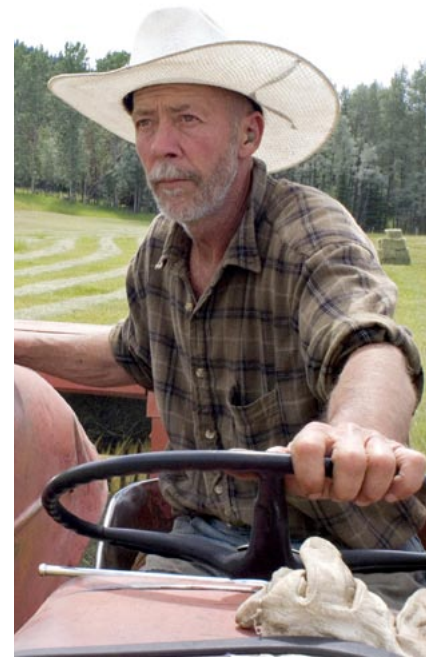
The cost of farmland has steadily climbed in BC for over two decades.⁸ Over this same period of time, average net farm income in BC has remained near flat,⁹ a significant number of small farms reported negative incomes,¹⁰ and farm debt has steadily risen.¹¹ The average cost of farmland in Southern BC is the most expensive in Canada.¹² In the Capital Region farmland prices can reach over \$100,000 per acre.¹³ In Metro Vancouver farmland prices range from \$150,000 to \$350,000 per acre for parcels less than 5 acres, and range from \$50,000 to \$80,000 per acre for those more than 40 acres.¹⁴ According to Farm Credit Canada, farms are not financially viable when the cost of land exceeds 80,000 per acre.¹⁵ Even though farmland may be protected in BC, it is not necessarily being farmed and, due to the high cost, may be entirely out of reach for farmers. Non-farm uses of farmland, land speculation, and the high cost of farmland are major impediments to the success of a new generation of farmers and a sustainable local food system in BC.

As farmland becomes increasingly unaffordable across Canada, the proportion of farmland that is owned by farmers has declined over time while the proportion of rented land has risen across the country.¹⁶ Short-term leases are problematic for sustainable farming, which requires long-term investment in the land. In our work, we define alternative farmland access as land access mechanisms that are distinct from a traditional individual/family owner-operator model or independently negotiated lease agreements between private landowner and individual/owner-operator. Research carried out in partnership between UBC Centre for Food Systems and FarmFolk CityFolk found a rise in the use of alternative land access models and programs in BC between 2000 and 2014, and documented over 55 cases of farms employing alternative models to access farmland.¹⁷ Farmers and agricultural support organizations are driving the development of creative solutions in response to the challenges around farmland ownership and access in BC.

Crisis of Farmer Attrition

Alongside farmland retention and access challenges, we are facing what has been termed a “crisis of farmer attrition” in BC and across Canada. In BC only 5.4% of farm operators are under 35 while 54% are over 55 years old.¹⁸ The average age of farmers is at a historic high. A Statistics Canada analyst reported that “the trends of fewer operators, fewer young operators and fewer farms showed no signs of reversing and may indicate more consolidation and significant turnover in farm assets in the future.”¹⁹ More than half of Canadian farmers are over 55 years of age and Food Secure Canada estimates that 75% of these farmers do not have someone to replace them upon retirement.²⁰ Canada is faced with a situation in which there are a lack of incoming farmers, a pending exit of aging farm operators, and a pending transfer of farmland at a time when land is more expensive than ever and profitability is low. The issues of who will replace outgoing farmers, how and to whom farmland will be transferred, and the intergenerational transfer of farming knowledge is of extreme importance to the future of agriculture in BC and across the country.

Despite the statistics of declining young farmers and the many challenges faced by the agricultural sector, a renewed enthusiasm for farming has emerged amongst younger generations. This renewed interest is evidenced in the recent growth in programs established to support new farm entrants. In BC there has been an increase in the number of hands-on training programs, internship and mentorship programs, support networks, and land access tools for new farmers. The Young Agrarians network is one such program that has expanded dramatically in BC and beyond since its inception in 2012. The experiences of farm support organizations and research studies from across Canada suggest a shift in the demographics and pathway of new farm entrants. We are seeing a rise in new entrants from non-farming backgrounds seeking farming careers in small-scale ecological agriculture.²¹ A recent study found that 80% of aspiring and new farmer survey respondents in BC were from non-farming backgrounds.²² This presents a challenge in that these new entrants do not gain farm training through family and typically do not inherit family farmland and assets. This shift represents a departure from the traditional family farm transfer and requires new farmer support and succession planning programs designed to manage this shift.





Land Access Most Significant Barrier to New Entrants

New farm entrants face a diversity of challenges and several recent studies confirm that the cost of farmland is one of the most significant barriers to establishment. A survey study of new and beginning farmers in BC found that of 15 listed challenges the three most significant were indicated to be:

- 1) cost of land,
- 2) lack of capital, and
- 3) lack of farmland that is currently available.²³

Similarly a national survey of new farmers in Canada found that of 18 obstacles faced by new farmers, “affordability of land ownership” was the top ranked obstacle.²⁴ Another recent national study on new farmers states that “of the many structural, economic and practical challenges facing new and young farmers, we have found that securing access to affordable and productive farmland is perhaps the most overwhelming.”²⁵ Farmland access and supporting the successful establishment of new generations of farmers are overlapping and pressing issues in BC and Canada.



Farmland Access Programs in BC

There is a need for programs to support new and young farmers to access farmland and facilitate the transition of farmland between generations. There is simultaneously a need for initiatives and policy that address the root problems driving the crisis of farmland loss, non-farm uses and lack of affordability. Our four programs tackle the issue of access to farmland from different but complimentary angles to achieve a shared vision.

Our shared vision is:

- Respect for Indigenous land rights and food practices;
- A protected and actively-farmed agricultural land base;
- Ecologically sustainable production practices on the land;
- Supported and economically viable new generations of farmers on the land;
- A sustainable local food and agriculture system for British Columbia.



Photos: Opposite; Brian Harris, This page: Michael Mappese

PROGRAM 1



Foodlands Trust Project

Program of FarmFolk CityFolk in partnership with UBC Centre for Sustainable Food Systems

Region: BC

Funders: Real Estate Foundation of British Columbia, Vancity

Website: www.farmfolkcityfolk.ca/projects/foodlands-trust

Contact: Heather Pritchard, Program Manager, sustain@farmfolkcityfolk.ca

Objective

To initiate and operate a provincial foodlands trust organization in British Columbia. To acquire and hold land and offer long-term tenure for community groups to manage the land for farming and foraging. To contribute to protected and actively used foodlands with recognition and respect for Indigenous food systems and the environment.

Why Foodlands Trust?

While BC's Agricultural Land Reserve preserves farmland, there is no assurance it will be used for food production. The Foodlands Trust Project complements the ALR by facilitating affordable access to foodlands. Placing land in trust essentially removes it from the private market and ensures use for farming and food activities. It addresses rising land values, non-farm uses, and speculation driven by market dynamics.

Project Background

In 2006, The Land Conservancy of BC (TLC) played an important role in acquiring farmland in British Columbia, often partnering with FarmFolk CityFolk to identify potential projects for acquisition. In 2012, when TLC cancelled their farmland program, FarmFolk CityFolk continued to provide support for alternative, community-led models of farmland ownership, access, and governance in BC. They weren't, however, positioned to hold land in trust. In 2014, FarmFolk CityFolk and UBC Centre for Sustainable Food Systems identified the need to for a new trust that would acquire and manage farmland and partnered together on the Foodlands Trust Project.

The first project phase (2015) was to conduct research into existing land trusts and hold a series of community and stakeholder consultations. An advisory committee formed to determine the best way to structure, operate and finance the new trust. The second phase, beginning in 2016, is to initiate and develop the trust under the umbrella of FarmFolk CityFolk and begin to place land in trust.

The shift from farmland to foodlands recognizes the diversity of food-harvesting systems and opens a dialogue between farmland access initiatives and Indigenous food sovereignty initiatives.





Key Project Activities

1. Develop, operate, and finance a foodlands trust
2. Seek and accept donations of foodlands to hold in trust and make available for food production
3. Establish and manage long-term secure lease agreements with people who commit to active and sustainable food production on the land
4. Provide resources and support to community groups seeking to place land in trust and/or form land cooperatives to access farmland

Key Accomplishments to Date

1. Engaged and consulted the community on the formation, function and structure of a provincial foodlands trust
2. Formed a Foodlands Trust Advisory Committee under the umbrella of FarmFolk CityFolk
3. Developed resources and provided support to communities striving to place land in trust and/or form farm cooperatives
4. Identified lands with potential to be put in trust

Project Financing

The development phase of the trust includes creating a business plan with the support from financial advisors to ensure the long term stability of the trust. Land acquisition and operations of the trust will be made possible through a combination of the following:

- Accepting donations of land to place in trust
- Raise funds through donations and grants (to the trust and/or community groups managing land in trust)
- Creation of a Foodlands Trust Endowment (with support from Vancity Community Foundation)
- Revenue generating activities, e.g. rent from land leases
- Requiring that leasees of land in trust have an approved business plan and be financially sustainable independent of the trust.

Project Impact

The Foodlands Trust Project will provide a means for working farm and foodlands to be held in trust and made accessible to farmers and communities for food production. There is currently no organization with a mandate to hold working farmland in trust and our project will fill this gap. The Foodlands Trust Project directly addresses the problematic rising cost of land and non-farm uses of farmland in BC and contributes to keeping BC's farm and foodlands in production.

Benefits of a Foodlands Trust include:

- Protected farmland
- Land access for current & new farmers
- Secure leases for farmers
- Support for new entrants into agriculture
- Farmland kept in production
- Provision of farmer training and resources
- Support for the formation of cooperatives
- Succession planning options:
 - Non-family farm transfers
 - Support retirement on the land
 - New farmer mentorship

PROGRAM 2

CRFAIR's Municipally Supported Farmland Trust Initiative

Program of CRFAIR (Capital Region Food and Agriculture Roundtable Initiative)

Region: Capital Regional District, Vancouver Island

Project Funders: Real Estate Foundation of British Columbia, District of North Saanich

Website: crfair.ca

Contact: Linda Geggie, Program Manager, lgeggie@telus.net



Objective

To work in cooperation with local and municipal governments to advance a local government farmland acquisition fund and trust that holds and makes public lands available for farming and food activities in the Capital Regional District (CRD). To encourage the development of local government policy tools and the management of public lands to support farmland protection, access, and utilization for food and farming.

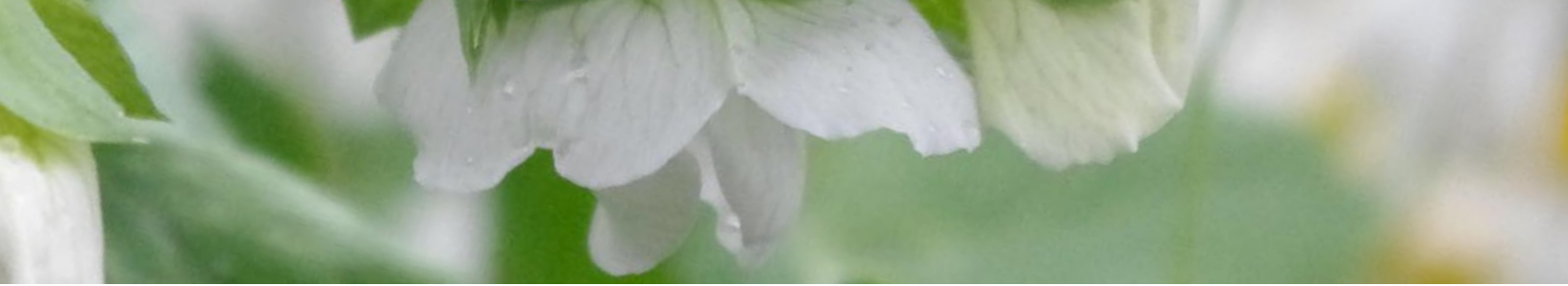
Background

CRFAIR works collaboratively to strengthen regional food security and our local food system in the Capital Region. CRFAIR advances a diversity of strategies for local government to foster the development of new farmers, protect farmland, and supply long-term access to farmland. One strategy is the initiation of a regional farmland trust and access program to secure farmland and make it accessible to farmers at affordable rates. Two of the municipalities in the CRD (Saanich and North Saanich) passed motions to explore a municipal farmland trust in 2014. With support from these two municipalities, CRFAIR undertook an exploration of models and mechanisms available to local government to initiate a farmland trust and acquisition fund. CRFAIR is currently in the process of disseminating the findings and seeking political support for implementation.

Why a Local Government Farmland Trust?

The advancement of farmland trusts in BC has been limited to date. The cost of farmland is an impediment to land acquisitions by non-profit organizations. A local government farmland trust approach has the potential to leverage public funds, policy options, and government operating capacity to successfully advance a regional farmland trust with the capacity to be sustained over time. There are already successful examples of public land used for food production and there is opportunity to further advance the management of public lands for farming and food activities in BC.





Key Project Activities

1. Seek support for implementation of a regional trust from all municipalities in the CRD through dissemination of reports and in-person presentations
2. Create a political directive to move a food and farmland trust task force forward in the CRD and provide on-going support to the task force
3. Work with key municipal, community and academic stakeholders to develop partnerships and plans for pilot sites for inclusion in the farmland trust
4. Collaborate with others in BC to share learnings and models across regions

Accomplishments to Date

1. Motions passed by council in Saanich and North Saanich in support of exploring options for a municipal farmland acquisition fund trust model.
2. A regional land-banking solution became a CRD board strategic priority for 2015 to 2018 and is included in the regional food systems strategy under development.
3. Consulted on, produced and distributed a report on mechanisms available to local government to support the utilization of publicly owned lands for food and farming
4. Led a community and stakeholder consultation on the development of Sandown, (83-acre parcel of ALR that will be transferred to the District of North Saanich as an amenity contribution).

Project Financing

A local government farmland trust will be publicly funded and managed by government staff with community partners. Key strategies with potential to finance a municipally supported farmland trust include:

- A farmland acquisition and management fund is established by local government (funds raised through property taxes and/or cash-in-lieu amenity contributions and/or development cost charges)
- Farmland directly acquired (transferred to public ownership) as a community amenity contribution, as a result of density bonusing or as a charitable gift
- Share cost of land management with non-governmental partner organizations
- Revenue generation on land, e.g. rent from tenants, events
- Leasees of public lands in trust must have an approved business plan and be financially sustainable independent of the trust

Impact

A municipally supported farmland trust model would be the first of its kind in BC. It has the potential to leverage local government resources and policy tools to increase the use of public lands for food production and would act to elevate land use planning for farming and food activities on par with planning for other sustainability priorities like water, parklands, and affordable housing. It is an innovative approach to increase the protection of farmland, leverage resources to support farming, and ensure the utilization of farmland for food production.



PROGRAM 3



Young Agrarians Matchmaker Pilot

A Partnership with FarmFolk CityFolk in consultation with Banques de Terres

Regions: Fraser Valley

Funders: Vancity, Real Estate Foundation of British Columbia

Website: youngagrarians.org

Contact: Sara Dent, Project Coordinator, farm@youngagrarians.org

Objective

Young Agrarians is a partnership with FarmFolk CityFolk. As a response to climate change and the rapidly increasing need to recruit and support new farmers, Young Agrarians mission is to grow the next generation of ecological and organic farmers in Canada.

Background

Starting January 2012, Young Agrarians (YA) is a collaborative network strategy by and for farmers with a start-up programming focus on Southern BC. Our programming model has expanded into Alberta through Organic Alberta. Through farmers organizing across Canada, our network is national at the grassroots level.

Key Activities

Growing new farmers is a complex and challenging developmental process. By using a multi-tiered approach, YA provides a number of services and supports essential to this growth. Through consultation and feedback, we have identified four key areas for long-term program development to support new entrants: land access, business mentorship, farmer2farmer educational events, and on-line communications and engagement.





In Quebec, Banques de Terres (Land Bank) is a government-funded third party agency that provides direct services to support retiring farmers and farmland owners to connect with new farmers ready to start farms. In 2016-17, with guidance from Banques de Terres, we are piloting the development of a matchmaker service in the Fraser Valley in partnership with the City of Surrey. This service will provide matchmaking, facilitation, and legal support. This program will have a dedicated coordinator to connect new farmers to farmland.

Accomplishments to Date

Southern BC has the highest real estate values in Canada. Food Secure Canada's recent survey indicates that 74% of Canadian farmers plan on selling their land in the next decade. Meanwhile, new farmers are forced to innovate to access land for long-term farm business development. Young Agrarians provides tools and workshops to connect landowners and land seekers (landlinking). To date we have hosted 15 landlinking workshops bringing together approximately 630 landowners and farmers looking for land across Southern BC. We have also created, updated and disseminated 3400 electronic and hardcopies of our BC Land Access Guide, Lease and License templates.

Project Financing

Banques de Terres estimates that the cost per land match made through their service is \$3000 per farm. This is a very reasonable expenditure to ensure that new farmers are able to start their businesses with stable land access. Banques de Terres is paid for through regional governments in Quebec, and through demonstrated growth is now partnering with Quebec's Provincial Government to expand the matchmaker coordinator base throughout Quebec's counties. In Southern BC, Young Agrarians is looking for future program partners with a focus on regional and municipal districts.

Impact

In 2016 we are setting up the programming infrastructure to pilot land matching in the Fraser Valley, with the long-term goal of being able to provide this form of support across Southern BC. By offering this innovative service, we can support more new and young farmers to access land to start farm businesses, and ensure that existing farmland continues to be farmed. The matchmaker service will support governments to meet regional agricultural planning goals to ensure that BC farmland continues to be farmed by future generations.



PROGRAM 4

The Smart Farm Project

Program of Deer Crossing The Art Farm

Region: Sunshine Coast

Funders: Real Estate Foundation of British Columbia, Vancouver Foundation, Investment Agriculture Foundation of BC, Sunshine Coast Regional District, Vancity Community Foundation

Website: deercrossingtheartfarm.org/smartfarm

Contact: Chad Hershler, Program Coordinator, chad@deercrossingtheartfarm.org

Objective:

To capitalize new or struggling farms by increasing low footprint housing density on small acreages outside the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR).

Why Smart Farms?



Land costs too much and farming makes too little. While the bulk of the province's prime farmland is in the ALR there is land outside of the ALR with productive potential. These properties are generally smaller than average ALR lots, are typically serviced and cleared and in many cases have some type of housing already in place. The Smart Farm Project explores whether increased density on such lots using low footprint designs could catalyze small farms and provide affordable housing for new and young farmers.

Project Background:

The Smart Farm Project went through several stages, beginning first with market research, moving into an outreach phase for data and recruitment of volunteers for case studies. The consultant and management team selected four case-study properties that reflected a diversity of geography, ownership and potential farm yield. The team collaborated on a Smart Farm proposal for each property, including farm plan, designs, legal recommendations and a feasibility analysis. The case-study approach allowed the team to explore the Smart Farm design across a spectrum of potential proposals, from the unconventional co-operative driven model through to the more conventional developer-driven model.



Key Activities:

1. Adapting smart growth principles to small farm acreages outside the Agricultural Land Reserve in rural communities.
2. Leveraging increased density to create affordable homes and farming opportunities, boost agriculture production and generate more jobs for the local economy at the same time.
3. Designing legal, financing and governance models to support potential Smart Farm proponents and working with the Sunshine Coast Regional District on a Development Application Process for Smart Farms in the region.

Accomplishments to Date:

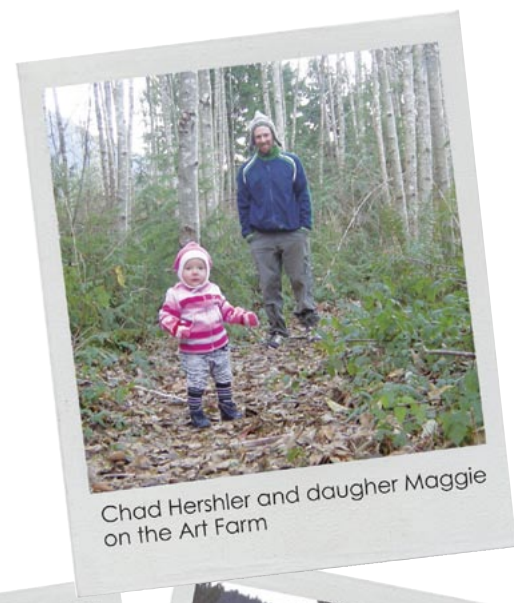
1. Adapting smart growth principles to small farm acreages outside the Agricultural Land Reserve in rural communities. With a combination of innovative design, progressive local planning, non-profit or public oversight, social investment and farming know-how, the Smart Farm Project leverages increased density to create affordable homes and farming opportunities, boost agriculture production and generate more jobs for the local economy at the same time.
2. Designing legal, financing and governance models to support potential Smart Farm proponents and working with the Sunshine Coast Regional District on a Development Application Process for Smart Farms in the region.

Project Financing

The extra value gained from the increase in density goes towards mitigating the cost of land, development and equipment purchase for new or existing farm businesses. Smart Farms are designed to make farming more financially viable.

Impact:

The Smart Farm Project aims to support the launch of three Smart Farm pilots on the Sunshine Coast within the next two years, while continuing to advocate for and support Smart Farm developments across Southern BC. The project contributes unique and replicable models for integrated housing and farming developments on non-ALR land.



Chad Hershler and daughter Maggie on the Art Farm



An Art Farm Event



Sandy Buck and son Sky on the Art Farm



Working Together

We believe that working together and implementing a diversity of approaches is the best way to address our current farmland access challenges and build a resilient local food system in BC. Our programs offer different models of farmland access including models for farming on ALR land and non-ALR land, access to publicly-owned farmland, access to land held by a non-governmental land trust organization, and tools to support leasing and ownership of privately owned land. Getting farmers on the land is only one part of the puzzle and our programs also offer different types of support to newly establishing farmers and to current farmers seeking options for expansion or succession. By offering a suite of options through a diversity of programs we can most effectively meet the diverse needs of current and emerging generations of farmers in British Columbia, who will in turn steward and grow resilient food systems.



We believe in the strength and value created by farms that are integrated with community and our programs work to foster strong and vibrant communities through food and agriculture. The Young Agrarians program brings people together through in-person land-linking events, workshops and community potlucks across the province. The Smart Farm approach integrates farming and residential development in contrast to development that pushes farming to the margins. CRFAIR's municipal land trust initiative seeks to increase the engagement of residents in local agriculture through planning processes and community food activities on public lands. The BC Foodlands Trust Project emerged out of FarmFolk CityFolk's Community Farms Program and is founded in a philosophy of farm and foodlands stewarded by and for communities.



Support Us

Partnership is key to our success. We work with each other and with the support of many other non-governmental organizations, funders, provincial and municipal governments, and academic institutions. We are grateful for our support to date and hope to expand our support and partnership networks to continue to advance our work.

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