



Food Secure Canada Briefing Note Green Jobs in Agriculture

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The global food system is comprised of many different food producers ranging from small subsistence farmers to large multi-national agricultural conglomerates. Together, these 1.1 billion “farmers, farm workers and fishers” are all a part of the \$6.4 trillion annual food economyⁱ. This subsector of the larger global economy has the ability to make a considerable contribution to job creation and poverty reduction in both the developed and developing world. And the global food economy will only continue to grow as it is expected that by 2050, there will be an additional two billion people to feed on the planet, with an ‘overall need to grow 70 per cent more food’ⁱⁱ.

Despite the overall growth of the global food economy, the number of farms in Canada continues to decline. According to the 2006 Census of Agriculture, the number of census farms dropped by 7.1% from 2001ⁱⁱⁱ though the area of farms as a percentage of total land has remained constant at 7.3%^{iv}. In addition, the number of people employed in agriculture continues to decline as more farms switch to mechanized production methods.

Green Jobs in Agriculture

The John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development at Rutgers University in New Jersey defines a green job as one that “involve[s] protecting wildlife or ecosystems, reducing pollution or waste, or reducing energy usage and lowering carbon emissions”^v.

The United Nations Environment Programme and the International Labour Organisation defines a green job as “work in agricultural, manufacturing, research and development (R&D), administrative, and service activities that contribute substantially to preserving or restoring environmental quality. Specifically, but not exclusively, this includes jobs that help to protect ecosystems and biodiversity; reduce energy, materials, and water consumption through high efficiency strategies; de-carbonize the economy; and minimize or altogether avoid generation of all forms of waste and pollution.”^{vi}

Conventional farming in Canada that uses chemical pesticides and fertilizers and mechanized farming practices does not allow for ‘green jobs’ as defined above. Conventional farming practices have resulted in increased extraction of natural resources and the creation of greenhouse gas emissions and non-reusable waste products.

We have created a food system – globally and domestically – dominated by large farms, intensive facilities, corporate concentration, chemical inputs, and low wages. Short term political and economic goals have depopulated rural areas and created urban slums worldwide. The continuing economic viability of Canada's food producers and processors is highly dependent on investment in production capacity, productivity improvements, marketing, human resources and related infrastructure.

Canada's investment strategy in the agri-food sector is designed to make Canada a preferred investment location for both domestic and international investors. The primary considerations do not include: food

localism, food security, local job development, or sustainability.

How Sustainable Agriculture Creates Green Jobs

The earth's resources are finite. The best available scientific evidence indicates that the global economy has grown beyond the limits of what is sustainable. We must begin to create economies that take this into account while ensuring that our current needs are being met. Canada should strive for strong economic performance and job creation with sustainable use of natural resources, minimal waste, maintained biodiversity and the preservation of ecosystems. A sustainable food system will enable this to take place.

Organic farming:

There are a myriad of environmental benefits to organic farming including a reduction in the use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides, better soil quality, and potentially even nutritional benefits, but organic farming also creates benefits for the job market.

A 2006 study by Britain's Soil Association showed that organic farming in the United Kingdom provides thirty-two per cent more jobs than non-organic farms. As organic farming is labour intensive, there is not the ability to mechanize the organic farm like there is on a conventional farm. This creates more jobs. In fact, the same study showed that if all of the UK farms were to convert to organic farms, there would be an additional 93,000 direct farm jobs created.^{vii}

Localism

A number of recent books and television specials have made some pockets of society begin to question where their food comes from. A 2001 study from the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture at Iowa State University determined that the average food product sold to institutional markets (hospitals, schools, etc) from a conventional source traveled over 1,500 miles using 4 to 17 times more fuel than a regionally grown product and releasing 5 to 17 times more carbon dioxide^{viii}.

If farm products were sold directly to local consumers, more financial capital would be kept within the community creating a number of spin-off jobs and a healthier local economy. Jobs would be created both on and off the farm in the region.

Achieving a sustainable food system can be made possible by encouraging the production of high-quality products and the use of environmentally sustainable production methods. A skilled agricultural workforce will be essential to maintaining food security in the coming transition towards a new model of low-carbon farming. Many of these skills have already been eroded through mechanization and a move towards more specialized and intensive production systems.

The labour content of capital projects should be maximized with the aim of creating employment opportunities through labour intensive methods with an emphasis on a sustainable food system. Sustainable agriculture has the ability to revitalize rural areas by creating economic stability and employment in rural areas that is non-exportable.

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- ⁱ Roberts, Wayne (2008) *The No-Nonsense Guide to World Food*. New Internationalist Publications Ltd.; Toronto.
- ⁱⁱ UN News Center. *At UN food summit, Ban lays out steps to save billions from hunger*. Accessed December 5, 2009 from <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=32959>.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Statistics Canada, 2006 Census of Agriculture, *The financial picture of farms in Canada*, Accessed December 5, 2009 from <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/ca-ra2006/articles/finpicture-portrait-eng.htm#tphp>.
- ^{iv} Statistics Canada. *Snapshot of Canadian agriculture*. Accessed December 5, 2009 from <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/ca-ra2006/articles/snapshot-portrait-t1-eng.htm>.
- ^v Cleary, Jennifer & Kopicki, Allison. *John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development research brief: Preparing the Workforce for a "Green Jobs" Economy*. Accessed November 21, 2009 from http://www.cdorh.org/empleos%20verdes/Heldrich_Center_Green_Jobs_Brief.pdf
- ^{vi} UNEP/ILO/IOE/ITUC (2008) *Green Jobs: Towards decent work in a sustainable, low-carbon world*. Accessed November 21, 2009 from http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/documents/publication/wcms_098503.pdf
- ^{vii} Soil Association, Organic Standard. *Organic works: Providing more jobs through organic farming and local food supply*. Accessed December 5, 2009 from <http://www.soilassociation.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=60CVIT1Nw0U%3d&tabid=387>.
- ^{viii} Cook, Ellen, Enshayan, Kamar, Pirog, Rich and Van Pelt, Timothy. Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture (2001) *Food, Fuel and Freeways: An Iowa perspective on how far food travels, fuel usage, and greenhouse gas emissions*. Accessed December 5, 2009 from http://www.leopold.iastate.edu/pubs/staff/ppp/food_mil.pdf