



Engagement of Youth in Farming and the Problem of Farm Succession

Considerations for the Development of the Canadian National Food Policy



prepared by the Food Secure Canada Youth Caucus

Problem

Youth play a key role in food and agriculture in Canada. In 2010, the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food stated that “young farmers guarantee the future of agriculture and play a key role in rural economic development... Canadian young farmers are innovative, market-oriented, enterprising and, because they work in a sector that generally requires high capital investments for relatively low returns, are more than ordinary entrepreneurs” (House of Commons, 2010). A new wave of young farmers is needed to address the current farming succession crisis.

More than half of the Canadian farming population is over 55, and 80% are looking to retire in the next 10 years (Statistics Canada, 2015). Despite a growing number of youth interested in farming, three quarters of the farmer population do not have a succession plan for their farm (Robicheau, 2012). Farmland loss continues unabated, with debt and costs associated with farming on the rise. In addition to farmland loss, changes of land tenure can present a barrier for young farmers seeking farmland. Owned land has dropped by 2.1%, whereas leased land has increased by 9.9% (Statistics Canada, 2015). The increasing corporate concentration in all links along the supply chain is affecting the financial viability of farming and resilience.

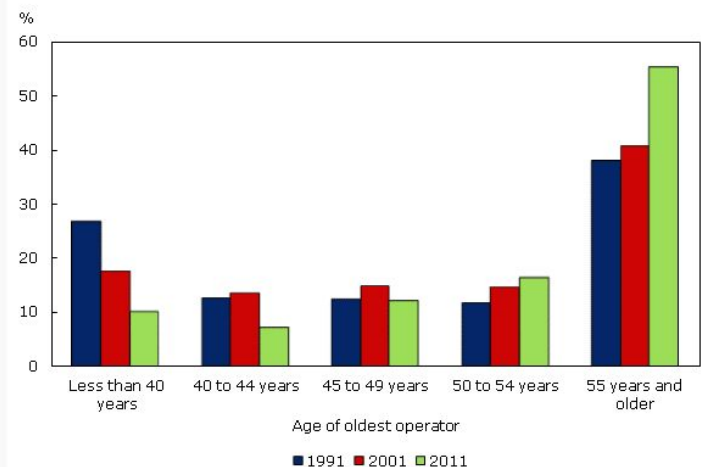
The Food Secure Canada Youth Caucus calls for the Canadian government to create targeted policies to support more entrants into agriculture and support new farm businesses in order to supply Canada with sustainable and local food.

Vital Statistics

From Statistics Canada, 2015

- Average age of farmers in 2016 was 55
- 24,850, or 9.1%, of Canadian farmers are under 35
- Farms with the oldest operator under 40 years old represented between 8.0% and 12.2% of all farm types except for hog farms, where they accounted for 15.7%.
- The greater income stability provided by the supply management system for dairy, poultry and egg operations may be appealing enough for young operators to stay in agriculture and continue to operate the family farm

Chart 2
Distribution of farms by age of the oldest operator, Canada, 1991, 2001 and 2011



Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Agriculture, 1991, 2001 and 2011

Short and long-term solutions: What needs to be done

In 2015, The National Farmers Union advised that “the Government of Canada and the provinces must set up mechanisms for farm family intergenerational land transfers that do not rely on loans and interest payments”. Governments must find ways for young and new farmers to gain secure access to farmland that does not require massive indebtedness. Such mechanisms could include:

- Community-owned land trusts and land banks to ensure food production by local farmers;
- Community-based financing options (that retain interest-payment dollars within local communities);
- Government agencies that support seller-finance options;
- An income-assurance plan for beginning farmers to assist them in becoming established and support their long-term success; and
- A retirement savings program or pension plan specifically designed for farmers that would reduce their need to rely on selling land to fund their retirement.

National Food Policy Priorities:

We are calling on the government to undertake an overhaul of Growing Forward 2, the policy framework for Canada’s agriculture and agri-food sector, to ensure that its programs are accessible to and adequately serve the needs of new farmers. This is to be complemented by programs to reduce land, capital and training barriers for new farmers, as outlined in FSC’s “Home Grown Crisis” document.

- **Renew agricultural policy framework to:**
 - Fund consulting, affordable training, mentoring, and apprenticeship programs that recognize the importance of experienced farmer-to- new farmer knowledge transfer.
- **Increase access to land programs by:**
 - Removing incentives and creating barriers for foreign, speculative, and absentee land ownership to help support land ownership of young farmers.
- **Increase access to capital programs by:**
 - Expanding Farm Credit Canada’s envelope to make programs more available to aspiring and new young farmers.
- **Support program with robust statistical information:**
 - Maintain and improve the Census of Agriculture by Statistics Canada regularly to gain a better understanding of the realities and barriers young farmers face.

It is paramount that vital resources, such as training, land, and capital, are accessible to youth, to ensure that they are able to launch prosperous farming careers in Canada. Renewing policy frameworks can aid in dismantling barriers faced by young farmers, such as land ownership and access to capital programs, giving youth a chance to continue the work of creating sustainable and local food systems. This will ultimately affect the financial viability of farming and help to ensure the continued supply of sustainable and local food to Canadians.

Key Resources:

Food Secure Canada. Home grown crisis - Growing our farmer population. Available online:
https://foodsecurecanada.org/sites/foodsecurecanada.org/files/support_for_new_farmers.pdf

House of Commons, Young Farmers: The Future of Agriculture. 40th Parliament, 3rd Session, November 2010.

National Farmers Union. 2015. Losing Our Grip: How Corporate Farmland Buy-up, Rising Farm Debt, and Agribusiness Financing of Inputs Threaten Family Farms. Available online:
http://www.nfu.ca/sites/www.nfu.ca/files/Losing%20Our%20Grip%20-%202015%20Update_med.pdf

Robicheau, Sarah. 2012. Helping Good Things Grow. In Health and Sustainability in the Canadian Food System. Eds. Rod MacRae & Elisabeth Abergel. Vancouver: UBC Press. p.245-270

Statca.gc.ca, "Demographic Changes in Canadian Agriculture". Martin S. Beaulieu, 2015. Retrieved May 5, 2015: <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/96-325-x/2014001/article/11905-eng.htm>

Statca.gc.ca, "Snapshot of Canadian agriculture". 2014. Retrieved August 22, 2017:
<http://www.statcan.gc.ca/ca-ra2006/articles/snapshot-portrait-eng.htm>

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