Supporting New Farmers through Agricultural Policy

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FLEdGE (Food: Locally Embedded Globally Engaged) and Food Secure Canada

This discussion paper was developed as a part of a community-academic collaborative project between Food Secure Canada and FLEdGE (Food: Locally Embedded, Globally Engaged) to map the existing agri-food policy landscape in Canada. The views presented are those of the authors and do not necessarily present those of either FSC or FLEdGE.

Introduction

This policy scan provides an overview of provincial programs providing support to new farmers in Canada. The focus is on provincial programs and initiatives, as this is predominantly the level at which support is offered to new farmers. It does not include an analysis of farm succession programs, another important issue for the future of agriculture that should be included in a national food policy. In addition, the scope of this brief is restricted to direct government programs and initiatives; as such it does not include the numerous supports offered to new farmers by non-governmental organizations, which in some cases receive partial funding from federal or provincial sources. The inclusion of programs and initiatives is not meant as an endorsement; rather it is an attempt to assess the current landscape to better understand existing gaps and opportunities to improve policy and program support for new farmers.

Farmers are an integral part of strengthening food sovereignty in Canada, and have a key role to play in creating a national food policy. Through a national food policy, Canada has an opportunity to shift its focus away from export-oriented, industrial-scale agriculture, to instead position diverse ecological farmers as key players in building a more sustainable and resilient food system.

This shift is needed now more than ever, as Canada faces a major farm crisis. The number of Canadian farms and farmers has been on steady decline in recent years. In 2011, there were 205,730 farms in Canada, down ten percent from 2006, with small farms accounting for the majority of that loss.[1] Since 1991, we have lost more than a quarter of the farms across Canada.[2] Almost half of Canada's farmers are over the age of 55 and will soon be looking to pass their operations down to a new generation of farmers. Yet, seventy-five percent of farmers do not have someone lined up to take over their farm.[3] Much of this gap can be attributed to the challenging barriers faced by those looking to enter agriculture. New farmers face substantial obstacles in establishing a farm and sustaining their livelihood, particularly in the areas of land access, capital, and training (See table 1.1).

Table 1.1 Summary of New Farmer Needs as identify by Food Secure Canada

Knowledge/Training Programs: Funding training and extension, mentorship, business development and networking opportunities. **Seed Capital:** Providing start-up grants, savings and debt forgiveness programs and early stage, high-risk loans. **Land Transfer and Protection:** Supporting farmland protection strategies, succession incentives and support, and farmland transfer financing initiatives.

(See the Farm Renewal Brief and New Farmer Initiative Policy Round-Up for more information)

[1] Farms with receipts between $100,000-$249,999 were the largest segment of farms to decrease, with all farm losses occurring within the $500,000 and under category. Statistics Canada 2011. http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/95-640-x/2011001/p1/p1-01-eng.htm

[2] Beaulieu, Martin, S. 2015. Demographic Changes in Canadian Agriculture. Statcan.gc.ca. Retrieved August 22, 2016: http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/96-325-x/2014001/article/11905-eng.htm

[3] 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

More than anything, what is needed is a comprehensive set of policies and programs to tackle the key challenges faced by new farmers (land, financing, and training). The current landscape is a patchwork of provincial initiatives, many of which are dependent on federal cost-sharing through Growing Forward 2, making their long-term existence uncertain. Such a federal strategy could be accomplished through the addition of a Farm Renewal Pillar to Canada's Agricultural Policy Framework, or through the creation of a dedicated support program such as an Agricultural Development Initiative to invest in Canada's next generation of ecological farmers[4]. Without a significant investment in encouraging and supporting new farmers, the future of Canadian agriculture remains uncertain.

Methodology

This discussion paper is one of six discussion papers on the Canadian food policy and institutional landscape. The research was the result of a partnership between Food Secure Canada (FSC) and Food : Locally Embedded, Globally Engaged (FLEdGE), a research project led out of Wilfrid Laurier Universities' Centre for Sustainable Food Systems. The research questions, analysis and results we co-developed with community leaders in the FSC network. The starting point of the research was to better understand enabling frameworks, exemplary practices, gaps and obstacles in provincial and federal policy interventions.

The topic of this discussion paper stems from FSC's engagement on the issue in the People's Food Policy (2011) and its Eat Think Vote campaign (2015). In the context of this paper, we draw from regional reports that were developed by the New farmers network that FSC incubated in view of the renewal of the FPT Agricultural Policy Framework in 2018. We also relied on informal scoping conversations and available documentation. The maps were presented in 2 workshops (October 2016), and were sent to FSC provincial/territorial networks, which provided opportunities for feedback[5].

As with the other papers, we paid particular attention to provincial/territorial and federal jurisdictions and good practices that a joined-up approach to food policy could build on. The reader can also refer to the annex, where a policy table and maps were designed to summarize and illustrate the discussion paper. The policy matrix provides both a federal and inter-provincial outlook.

Other discussion papers that were developed are: Northern and remote indigenous food sovereignty; Community and household food security; Regional food systems; Sustainable agriculture; New farmers and Healthy school food.

Current Government Supports for New Farmers

1. Federal Support

The federal government has few programs and initiatives that are specifically designed for new entrants to agriculture. Many new farmers have trouble accessing federal programs and services for farmers, particularly those who do not come from a farming background. This is often because of insufficient capital or because many new farmers, particularly ecological farmers, farm on a much smaller scale than conventional, larger scale, export-oriented agriculture. For example, Farm Credit Canada has a Young Farmer Loan program. However, it

[4] See Food Secure Canada's Policy Brief on Recommendations for the next Agricultural Policy Framework

[5] The authors would like to thank Cathy Holtslander,NFU Director of Research and Policy, for their comments on a first iteration of this paper, and FSC staff for their contributions in in editing and formatting the final draft of this paper.

is generally geared towards large-scale farming, and the high down payment (25%) or required additional assets to guarantee the loan make it a difficult option for new farmers. As the Canadian Federation of Agriculture noted

> Many new entrants do not have credit histories or capital available to make the large investments needed to launch an operation at a profitable scale...It is recognized that Farm Credit Canada (FCC) and some private lenders offer support to young producers/new entrants, but current programs do not fully satisfy the need. While FCC shouldn't be solely responsible for addressing access to credit there is scope to increase FCC's involvement.[6]

The expansion of Farm Credit Canada programs to include a low interest loan option and small grants for new farmers would go a long way to closing this gap. This would require a change in mandate for the FCC, away from strict revenue generation and support for export-oriented agriculture, to include support for domestic-oriented agriculture as well as export-oriented agriculture, as well as farm renewal and environmental sustainability as core guiding values.

The main federal agricultural programs that are used by some new farmers are listed below, however it should be noted that these programs are not specifically geared towards new farmers.

- Agri-Invest
- Agri-Marketing
- Agri-Competitivity
- Agri-Innovation

The research conducted for this brief, and the focus of previous consultations conducted by the New Farmer Initiative have focused on the provincial level. As a result, this is also where the focus lies for this paper. However, it can be said that overall, the federal government's approach to agriculture is focused on larger-scale farming that is export-oriented. While the federal government claims to provide supports for all farmers, the experience of small-scale ecological farmers anecdotally suggests that one size does not fit all. The federal government does indirectly support other new farmer programs through its cost-sharing of Growing Forward 2 with provincial and territorial governments, as highlighted below.

2. Provincial Support

The situation for new farmers is not entirely bleak. In addition to the diverse programs and initiatives developed by non-governmental organizations to meet the needs of new ecological farmers, there are some positive developments occurring at the provincial level that merit attention. Provincial governments provide a range of supports to new farmers, primarily through cost-sharing programs with the federal government under the Federal-Provincial-Territorial Agricultural Policy Framework.
The current framework, Growing Forward 2, is set to expire in April of 2018, the federal and provincial-territorial governments are in the midst of negotiating a new five year framework.[7] The examples highlighted here primarily address issues of training and capital, again pointing to the gap in government programs to address the issue of secure and affordable land tenure.

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[6] CFA. Positioning Agriculture for Continued Success. http://www.cfa-fca.ca/sites/default/files/CFA%20Report_APF2018%20-%20UPDATED.pdf Accessed Sept 28, 2016.
[7] See http://www.agr.gc.ca/eng/about-us/key-departmental-initiatives/developing-the-next-agricultural-policy-framework/?id=1461767369849 for updates on this process.

Training

At the provincial level, training opportunities and training subsidies appear to be the most widely offered support for new farmers. These include grants or cost-sharing for professional development opportunities, formal training, or business planning and business mentorship. There are a number of different ways to implement and structure new farmer training programs. Some provinces, like Ontario, provide a limited number of training workshops themselves, while providing cost-sharing for new farmers to undertake additional professional development opportunities or attend conferences. Other provinces, such as PEI and New Brunswick have developed a much more comprehensive program delivered by the province itself. Programs may be geared towards aspiring farmers (such as Saskatchewan and Alberta's Green Certificate Programs) or new farmers in the process of starting a farm or in their first years farming. Some programs focus more on the technical side of farming versus the business management and planning side; with few tackling both of these equally important components of running a successful farm.

PEI has developed a 7-step program to assist new farmers in building their business and purchasing a farm. New farmers must make a 3-year commitment to participate in the program, and must not have reported a farming income of over $40,000 (cumulatively) in the past 5 years. Participants are matched with a farm advisor to provide guidance and assistance in navigating the program components. The program includes training and skill development, business planning and interest-rebate assistance on new farm loans.

Manitoba's Growing Competitiveness -Next Generation is another provincial program aimed at supporting training and business development opportunities for new farmers. Following the completion of a business and financial assessment, eligible participants can receive a 50% cost-share on professional consulting services (up to a max of $5000) and a 75% cost-share on skill-development activities (up to a max. Of $7500). A similar workshop and subsidy program is offered in Ontario through the Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association (also funded through Growing Forward 2). Saskatchewan also offers a comparable cost-sharing program. Through the Farm Business Development Initiative, new farmers can receive up to 75% funding (to a max of $10000) for training, or 50% funding (to a max of $5000) for business consultation services.

Saskatchewan's Green Certificate Farm Training Program is an apprenticeship-style program that matches new farmers with an established farmer to provide on-farm training in ecological farming practices. The program currently relies on volunteer trainers, limiting the participation of some, however with additional government investment this could be an innovative farmer-to-farmer training model to replicate. Alberta offers a similar certificate training program, the Green Certificate Program. Both Saskatchewan and Alberta's programs are geared towards high school-aged students, and as such operate more in line with other co-op programs offered to secondary students. The Green Certificate Program in Alberta has more of an established curriculum in several different farming specializations, while the program in Saskatchewan is quite open, based on the skills and background of the volunteer trainer the program participant has identified. As the program description states, "Trainees progress at their own rate and once all evaluations are complete and the trainee is deemed competent in all skills, he or she will be awarded the Green Certificate." While certainly useful, these programs should really be considered programs for future or aspiring farmers, as opposed to new farmers.

An important distinction in the discussion of training programs is between programs that provide training and business development for new farmers, and programs that offer subsidies or rebates for farmers to access these services for external organizations. Rather than indirectly funding organizations that provide much-needed training and knowledge-transfer programs through subsidies and cost-sharing on an individual-farmer basis, directing funding or coordinating core training programs for new farmers would provide a much more effective and consistent means of training the new generation of farmers.

THINKFarm, an initiative of the Nova Scotian government to attract and nurture agricultural enterprises in the province, has developed a web portal to guide new entrants through the process of establishing a farm and business planning. In addition, they also provide funding for a range of workshops provided by third-party individuals or organizations. This program provides an interesting model for government and non-governmental organization collaboration on training supports.

There is also a significant difference between professional development opportunities, apprenticeship-based training and formal education programs at colleges and universities. The degree to which a training program has outlined a curriculum for participants to progress through, is one way to distinguish between training and professional development opportunities. One-off workshops on a variety of topics, or subsidies for farmers to engage in a range of educational opportunities do not provide any consistency in what information and skills-development new farmers are able to access.

As mentioned above, most of the existing government programs and subsidies are focused on business-planning training for new farmers. While this is undoubtedly needed, educational opportunities to address the more technical side of ecological farming is also crucial.

Financing and Grants

This section includes programs that offer financing (loans) and/or capital (grants) to new farmers to enable them to cover start-up costs and the purchase of farmland and machinery.

Some provinces (Quebec, Manitoba, New Brunswick, Northwest Territories) provide support in gaining access to financial resources, though most do so on a loan rather than grant-basis (with Quebec being an exception). The most common form of financial assistance is the provision of business loans where new farmers might not otherwise qualify, in exchange for a slightly higher interest rate. The distinction between different kinds of financial support is significant, as new farmers may technically have access to financing (i.e.. through a higher-interest loan,) but the terms of that access may not sustainable. The provisions of grants or patient capital[8] (as in the Quebec case) are much more valuable as new-farmer supports than some of the other loan-based initiatives. Similarly, programs like the New Entrant Farmer Loan Program in New Brunswick give new farmers a much-needed cash-flow support, as they are only required to pay the interest for the first 4 years of the loan. The Nova Scotia program, FarmNEXT, takes another approach by focusing on reducing the loan principal to provide new farmers with a stronger equity position.

The Bridging Generations Initiative (BGI) in Manitoba offers flexible financing for new farmers seeking to purchase a farm. Under the BGI program, a young farmer aged 18 to 39 years of age can opt for either: 90% financing, significantly reducing the down payment, or 5 years of interest-only payments, which eases the young farmer's cash-flow pressures while an enterprise is being established. In offering financial support specifically for the purchase of a farm this program also seeks to address the challenge of land access.

Many of the financial support programs are geared towards financing the purchase of a farm, leaving a gap for those farmers that need support with other start-up costs or accessing sufficient operating capital in the first

[8] For the purposes of this paper, patient capital refers to long-term lending arrangements, typically with a low-interest rate and/or a time delay during which the borrower does not have to make payments.

few years. The Financière agricole du Québec (FADQ) in Quebec is one key exception, providing start-up and establishment grants to farmers. Between 2006 and 2011, Quebec had the largest increase in organic farms (198)[9] and farmers continue to flock to Quebec because of its comparatively supportive environment for new ecological farmers. Through the FADQ, farmers can access grants of between $20,000-$40,000 per farm operator based on their level of agricultural-related education. Start-Up Grants are also available ($10,000-$25,000) during the first two years of operation. The FADQ also provides subordinated loans up to $5,000,000 over 30 years (based on residential mortgage rates plus a prime of 0.30-0.60%,) or up to $500,000 over 5 years (at a rate of prime + 1% renewable). The second, FIRA, is discussed in the section on land.

A significant element worth noting of both the FIRA and the FADQ is that they were established outside of Growing Forward 2 (the federal-provincial Agricultural Policy Framework), meaning that they are not dependent on federal-cost sharing funds to continue, as is the case with most of the provincial programs for new farmers.

Several provinces offer different kinds of small granting programs for business development or environmental activities. The Northwest Territories for example, provides small grants for agricultural producers through its Northern Food Development Program and its Market Development Program. The Market Development Program provides producers with between $2500-$5000 for market development activities such as feasibility studies, consultant fees and the development of marketing materials. The Northern Food Development Program provides grants of up to $5000 for a range of activities to increase and diversify local food production. While these may seem like insignificant sums of money, the overall budgets of many new ecological farms are quite modest; a grant of $5000 can make the difference between having enough money to purchase seeds for the following season, and questioning whether the farm can continue. Most government grants favour cost-sharing schemes as opposed to fully-funding proposals. While the political preference for this approach is understandable, it again puts an unnecessary financial strain on the limited cash flow of new farmers and implicitly favours larger-scale farms.

Land

Rising land prices across the country are making it difficult for new farmers to find suitable land tenure. Between 2009 and 2010 the value of farm assets in Canada (land, farm buildings and livestock) increased by 5%, due in large part to the steady increase in the value of land. For example, in Ontario, an acre of farmland was worth $2,954 in 2000; by 2010 that number had almost doubled to $5,062[10].

Most programs providing support to new farmers in accessing farmland are run by non-governmental organizations, some of which receive provincial funding. While many of these programs offer excellent services and innovative programming, they are vulnerable to the same funding challenges experienced across the non-profit sector, putting these programs in a precarious position. Two exceptions worth mentioning are the New Land Purchase Program in New Brunswick and the Fonds d'Investissement pour la relève agricole (FIRA) in Quebec.

The New Land Purchase Program in New Brunswick is an innovative program that has the dual objectives of supporting new farmers in accessing land and bringing fallow agricultural land back into production. The Agricultural Development Board will purchase land that has not been actively farmed for a minimum of two

[9] Statistics Canada 2011. Snapshot of Canadian Agriculture. Accessed on Aug 24, 2016. http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/95-640-x/2011001/p1/p1-05-eng.htm#XVI
[10] Ibid.

years and lease it back to a farmer for a period of six years. The lease payments for the first two years are deferred, and at the end of the six years the farmer must purchase the land from the Agricultural Development Board. Such a program is possible in New Brunswick in part due to the underutilization of its agricultural land in some parts of the province, a phenomenon that does not necessarily exist in other provinces. Newfoundland, for example, also boasts an innovative program where by Crown Land[11] is leased to new farmers for periods of 25-50 years at very low rates. While both of these programs embody the kind of policy rethink needed around agricultural land, it's unclear such a program would be feasible in Ontario or BC, where the value of agricultural land is quite high, and where it is less likely to find high quality, viable agricultural land that has been left fallow.

FIRA (Fonds d'Investissement pour la relève agricole), a land-access initiative in Quebec, is another excellent program that deserves national recognition and replication. FIRA offers two land-access supports to new farmers, both aimed at addressing the challenges of purchasing a farm property. The first is a subordinated loan to cover up to 12.5% of a 25% down payment on an agricultural property. Farmers are granted a grace period of up to three years without interest or principal payments. FIRA also provides new farmers with a Land Lease or Rent-to-Own option. FIRA will purchase a property (with a minimum value of $100,000) and lease it back to the farmer for a period of 15 years. At any point during the agreement, the new farmer can opt to purchase the property outright or end their tenure.

The provision of patient capital[12], as well as enabling farmers to access secure land tenure without tying up all of their savings would make a considerable difference to those looking to start and sustain a new farm. Too often farmers scrape all their savings together to afford the farm purchase and then have nothing left to actually run the farm operation.

Quebec also has an innovative land-linking initiative, Banque de Terres. Funded in part by municipal governments as well as the Quebec Ministry for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAPAQ -Le ministère de l'Agriculture, des Pêcheries et de l'Alimentation soutient l'essor du secteur bioalimentaire québécois), Banque de Terres provides a match-making services, linking farmers looking for land with farmland owners. Several other land-linking programs exists across Canada, but Banque de Terres is, to date, the only one that has received direct financial support from the provincial program.

Table 1.2 Summary Table of New Farmer Support Programs

Jurisdiction	Currently Available	Needed
Federal		Farm Renewal Pillar
British Columbia		Training/Ed, Financial Access to Land
Alberta	Training/Ed, Financial	Access to Land
Saskatchewan	Training/Ed	Access to Land and Financial
Manitoba	Training/Ed, Access to Financial	Access to Land
Ontario	Training/Ed	Access to Land, Financial, Additional Training/Ed
Quebec	Training/Ed, Financial, Land Access	
New Brunswick	Training/Ed, Financial	Training/Ed support, Access to Land

11 Between 90-95% of land in Newfoundland is government-owned.

12 Patient capital refers to long term investment or loan, where there is no expectation of a quick return. This type of lending is popular in community development and social enterprises where there is a vested interest in seeing the business establish itself and achieve long-term sustainability.

Nova Scotia	Training/Ed, Financial	Access to Land
PEI	Training/Ed	Access to Land, Financial
Newfoundland and Labrador	Financial, Land Access	Training/Ed,
Yukon	Training/Ed, Land Access	Financial
N.W.T	Capital	Access to Land,
Nunavut		Access to Land, Financial, Training/Ed

See Appendix A for a list of specific programs available.

Discussion

Summary of Trends:

- Major barriers for new farmers: access to training, financial support (whether grant or credit-based), land
- Main gaps in current government supports offered: affordable land tenure, more comprehensive and consistent training across the provinces, the provision of patient start-up capital and start-up grants.
- Non-governmental organizations currently provide the majority of new farmer support initiatives, particularly in the area of land access, yet face their own funding and sustainability challenges.
- Overall, more comprehensive supports are needed that address the root causes of the barriers experienced by new farmers.

Gaps and Constraints Moving Forward

The most consistent gap in supporting new farmers at both the provincial and federal level is access to land. Whether through purchase or other tenure arrangements, finding affordable and secure land tenure is increasing difficult. This is particularly true for new entrants that do not come from a farming background and new immigrants. Securing start-up capital (often related to land access) remains a significant second barrier, and some provinces lack sufficient training and education supports for new farmers.

Some provinces (Quebec, Manitoba, New Brunswick, Northwest Territories) provide support to new entrants looking to gain access to capital, though most do so on a loan rather than grant-basis, with the exception of Quebec (FADQ). Most programs providing support to new farmers in accessing farmland are run by non-governmental organizations, some of which receive provincial funding. Quebec (Fonds d'Investissement pour la relève agricole) and New Brunswick (New Land Purchase Program) figure as the rare exceptions.

Training opportunities and training subsidies appear to be the most widely offered support for new farmers. If we exclude formal education programs at colleges and universities, good provincial practices include farmer-centered approaches in PEI (Future Farmer Program) and Nova Scotia (ThinkFarm), workshop and subsidy programs in Ontario, Manitoba (Growing Competitiveness -Next Generation) and Saskatchewan (Farm Business Development Initiative,) and the Green Certificate program in Alberta and Saskatchewan.

Questions for Future Research

This scan provides a broad overview of the current government programs and initiatives aimed at supporting new farmers. It highlights the fragmented and disjointed nature of the current approach, and the overall need for a significant re-think and investment in supporting a new generation of farmers. Non-government organizations and farm associations have attempted to fill these gaps by offering a variety of programs and services. However, these organizations face many of the same challenges farmers face in accessing sufficient resources and core funding to sustain their work.

Land access is frequently identified by farmers as one of the biggest challenges they face, yet it is also the area in which there is the least government support. How can this gap be addressed?

Because of the different jurisdictions involved in protecting and regulating agricultural land use, it is a challenging issue to address. Not to mention that the issue of land access leads to much deeper and fundamental questions about the commodification of farmland and our cultural obsession with private ownership of property.[13] The barriers to land access in particular lay bare the tension between our current, fragmented, policy regime and one based on food sovereignty and a national food policy.

In particular, the issue of land requires an acknowledgement of the historical and continued dispossession of land from Indigenous peoples by the Crown and Canadian government. To meaningfully address this issue, the discussion on land access for new farmers needs to happen in connection to a broader conversation on indigenous food sovereignty and reconciliation with Indigenous communities.

The Agricultural Land Use Planning in Canada project recently published a policy brief highlighting several policy recommendations that should be followed-up on in subsequent research on land access for both new and established farmers. An additional consideration is how to address the question of land access in a way that works in solidarity with indigenous communities in Canada. More in-depth research could also be helpful in identifying and proposing models for the provision of patient capital, and startup grants. In addition, other financial support mechanisms, such as debt forgiveness should be explored[14].

Land access and land-financing are often lumped together as the same issue, however they each speak to distinct challenges. Policy options should be explored that encourage and support alternative land-tenure options for farmers, to emphasize that purchasing a farm is but one way of securing long-term land-tenure.

It might also be worthwhile to examine support programs for new entrants as an example in other sectors, to see what components, if any, are adaptable to the new farmer context. For example, both provincial and federal programs exist to support youth entrepreneurs. These programs include training, mentoring, business planning, and in some cases grants and income supports in the first year of operation. Are these programs utilized by new farmers? Are there modifications to them that could improve their accessibility?

Starting a farm and sustaining a farm as a new farmer are two very different things. The truth is that for new farmers to be truly supported they need far greater structural changes than are being proposed at present. Much of the current government supports are band-aid solutions to a much deeper problem threatening the future of small-scale ecological agriculture in Canada. With land prices rising, and on-farm incomes stagnating, most Canadian farms, particularly smaller-scale farmers do not turn a profit in most years. No amount of business planning or loan offers will change that. Deeper structural changes may need to be explored to tackle the systemic, root causes of many of these challenges.[15]

Solutions and policy recommendations on new farmers and farm renewal need to take a systems-based approach that connects the challenges facing new farmers to others contradictions and problems within our food system. For example, increasing access to financing for new farmers accomplishes little without complementary action on protection and preserving farmland and addressing the skyrocketing cost of farmland. The debt load of Canadian farmers will soon reach $100 billion; a number that raises serious concerns about the long term sustainability of this sector.

[13] Despite the high cost of farmland, many new farmers still articulate a desire to own their own farm, a trait we might associate with the levels of, and interest in, homeownership more broadly in Canada. See Sally Miller's 2016 book *Belongings: The Fight for Land and Food* for a more in-depth discussion on this issue.

[14] For example, several organizations in Canada and the United State have called for governments to forgive the student loan debts of new farmers.

[15] See Miller (2016).

The challenges facing new ecological farmers are well-documented, as are the potential avenues for governments to address them. What's needed is a new approach to Canada's food system, one that prioritizes and values the contribution of Canadian farmers, not just in the value of our agricultural exports, but in feeding households in their local communities, creating carbon banks and building climate change resilience. The development of a National Food Policy is an important opportunity to bring about these changes as part of a broader shift within Canadian government policy to transform our food system into one that values and supports Canadian farmers and producers in feeding our communities and protecting our natural resources.