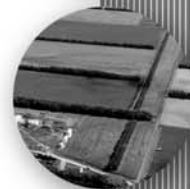


Next Generation of Agriculture and Agri-Food Policy

Report on Aboriginal Discussion Workshops National Report

March 2007



Alberta



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Ontario

Québec

Newfoundland
Labrador

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NOUVELLE-ÉCOSSE

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The Next Generation of Agriculture and Agri-Food Policy – A Federal, Provincial, and Territorial Initiative

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Publications Section
Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada
Sir John Carling Building
930 Carling Avenue
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0C5

Telephone: (613) 759-6610 or (toll-free) 1-800-635-7943 (Canada and U.S.)
TTY: 1 800 465-7735
Fax: (613) 759-6783 or (toll-free) 1-800-565-7757 (Canada and U.S.)
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10% post-consumer content

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Executive Summary

Agriculture and Agri-food Canada (AAFC) embarked on a series of regional discussion workshops with First Nations and Aboriginal producers across Canada from January to March 2007. Comments collected in these sessions provide their input into the development of the “Next Generation of Agriculture and Agri-food Policy Framework”.

A very clear message was communicated by the workshop participants – they appreciated being involved in the strategy right from the beginning, rather than at the implementation phase.

These discussions offered a forum for Aboriginal producers to express their views on key issues and challenges that hinder their participation in agriculture and agri-foods. Further, they provided a way for AAFC to collect ideas on what could increase Aboriginal involvement and success. The expected outcomes are:

- Identification of barriers to full participation in AAFC programs and services;
- Documented opportunities within the agriculture and agri-food sector for Aboriginal clients; and
- Determination of how existing programs support those opportunities, as well as the level of awareness and uptake.

For AAFC, the ultimate goal is to increase the capacity of the department to engage with Aboriginal producers and communities for successful implementation of AAFC programs and services. Secondly, it is to create the capacity for AAFC to interact with other agencies and jurisdictions in the development and delivery of agriculture-related programs and services to Aboriginal Peoples. The comments provide insight on actions and policies required to develop and deliver an effective Aboriginal agricultural strategy. Some remarks have provincial significance while others are regional, national or sector in nature and require partnerships.

For the Aboriginal community and AAFC, the intended outcome of this initiative is to promote “*The renewal of healthy and prosperous Aboriginal communities and cultures by:*”

- *Increasing Aboriginal involvement in the agriculture sector and associated economic opportunities;*
- *Supporting Aboriginal values of environmental stewardship;*
- *Building strong and trusted relationships; and*
- *Developing Aboriginal capacity through education and awareness.”*

Location and Attendance

There were seven workshops held across Canada with a total of 289 attendees, of which approximately 235 were Aboriginal People.

<i>Region</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Aboriginal Participants</i>	<i>Federal/Provincial Government Representatives</i>	<i>Total</i>
New Brunswick	Moncton	9	5	14
Ontario	London	20	7	27
Quebec	Quebec City	27	3	30
Manitoba	Portage La Prairie	100	12	112
Saskatchewan	Saskatoon	25	14	39
Alberta	Calgary	17	6	23
British Columbia	Kamloops	37	7	44
	<i>Total</i>	<i>235</i>	<i>54</i>	<i>289</i>

Workshop Process

An Aboriginal facilitator assisted with the coordination of the workshops. The facilitator's main tasks included ensuring the proper protocol was followed and that the participants clearly understood their important roles in reaching the workshop goals and objectives.

Part 1: An Elder started each workshop with an opening prayer after which the AAFC officials were introduced and the participants were asked to introduce themselves. This was followed by welcoming remarks from the AAFC official who stated the goals and expected outcomes of the workshop. Presentations were delivered on behalf of AAFC (NCR and regional offices), provincial agriculture representatives and in some workshops government officials from other federal/provincial governments. Basic lessons learned from previous efforts to establish agriculture and land-use / management programs were also discussed.

Part 2: The remainder of the day was separated into two steps. Step 1 was devoted to participants in order for them to apply their experience and lessons learned to identify potential strategic themes, opportunities, challenges and priorities for an AAFC Aboriginal Strategy. Step 2 consisted of further discussing the major themes and suggesting/recommending solutions. The two steps were conducted through breakout groups consisting of 6-8 participants.

Key Messages

There are an estimated 600 First Nations across Canada and many Métis organizations and settlements. The estimated registered Indian population in Canada is roughly 700,000 people of which roughly half are under the age of 25.

Aboriginal People are an important element in the future of Canadian agriculture and agri-food. The reasons are:

- a growing population with the largest segment of youth;
- Aboriginal people are seeking opportunities for agricultural employment, training and businesses for their youth;
- First Nations are becoming more and more influential in their traditional territories, especially in rural Alberta where many First Nations are significant business operators and economic influences;
- the representation of Aboriginal people in rural communities is increasing; and
- reviewing and modernization of Treaties and recognition of Aboriginal rights and title increase the influence of First Nations over lands and resources.

Aboriginal participation in agriculture is more visible in the southern areas of Canada, likely where the natural environment is more conducive to crop production. Aboriginal operations tend to be in cattle, bison, elk and horse ranches, augmented with hay production. Each province tends to have a product that is unique to its location – Quebec is maple syrup, Saskatchewan and Manitoba is wild rice, BC is wine, orchards and organic, NWT/Nunavut is musk-ox and caribou. The general issues and concerns of participants were on awareness of programs and services, community involvement, industry matters, lack of Aboriginal organizations in Agriculture, support services, and encouraging youth to get involved in agriculture.

National Recommendations

The following recommendations incorporate regional views and suggestions, while recognizing regional differences as well as common options that have national or multi-region application. All the recommendations have national application. The recommendations result from workshop discussions where the value of early engagement in the Aboriginal strategy was important.

Recommendation 1 – Program Communication and Coordination

- a) Develop a coordinated and relevant (client/community centered) communication strategy that provides information to Aboriginal communities on agricultural programs and services.
- b) Develop communication material that highlights the programs and services that are applicable to Aboriginal People and communities.
- c) Have agriculture programs delivered in the communities/on reserve where Aboriginal People can access information and obtain technical expertise.
- d) Host conferences/forums in various regions and on a national level to encourage information exchange.

Background

Challenges in applying to programs or becoming more involved in agriculture were attributed to a lack of awareness of AAFC or its programs, knowledge and understanding of the programs, access to/flow of information, and abilities to complete applications. In addition, several agriculture programs are not available to the Aboriginal

communities. Comments on fairness and availability reinforced that, “All cattle ranchers have the same problems when it comes to calving, feed, etc.” It was emphasized that “subsidy programs should be accessible to all farmers – i.e. cattle and grain farming on reserve land.”

There are very complex issues that cut across political, jurisdictional and social realms. Reserve and registered Indians are the fiduciary responsibility of the federal government, specifically overseen by the Department of Indian and Northern Development. While droughts, floods and disease affect all lands, the responsibility of addressing their impact is determined by jurisdiction and their priorities.

Aboriginal-led agricultural organizations exist in British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Ontario. In other areas regional organizations that started in the last 20 years discontinued (i.e. Alberta) or never existed. In some areas, Aboriginal capital and business development corporations often do consider and provide support to many different industries including agriculture, yet it is difficult for them to be fully committed advocates as they try to fulfill their own mandates and balance those with the needs of other industries.

First Nations producers in Ontario are very comfortable and pleased with the services they receive from the Indian Agricultural Program of Ontario (IAPO) and see this as the perfect third party delivery agent for AAFC and the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) programming. Currently the only Aboriginal third party delivery agent delivering on behalf of AAFC and Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food is the First Nations Agricultural Council of Saskatchewan (FNACS). Many successes have come from FNACS and their “model” is currently being emulated in other regions throughout Canada. One of the key components of the FNACS “model” is that Aboriginal producers “trust” and support First Nation to First Nation program delivery.

Aboriginal community development is holistic; it focuses on the overall community benefits. Any development needs to reflect the overall community needs, and affect cultural, social and environmental interests not just an economic interest. Local food production and distribution is a major asset to rural and remote communities as it lowers the cost of food, fosters community spirit, and reduces dependency on outside food sources. Smaller scale is more conducive to the communities that have little arable land, few available resources, and do not have an interest in large scale agricultural production.

This does not mean that there are no large scale agricultural interests amongst Aboriginal peoples. Agricultural policy should be reflected in a two-pronged approach that is community driven yet flexible for the scale of agriculture deemed appropriate.

A client / community centred policy approach would complement the existing more traditional universal producer-centred policy approach by focusing on fulfilling community needs. It emphasizes agriculture as a local self-sustaining food source in keeping with the overall AAFC mandate to preserve the security of the food.

Actions

Awareness and knowledge of the available programs and services is required to enable First Nation communities and Aboriginals to understand the assistance available to support agriculture planning, start-up and operations. These programs aid the Aboriginal community with entering the industry and remaining active members.

Development of strategies and programs begins with understanding the needs and characteristics of the First Nation communities and Aboriginal people. Principles for agencies and departments to address in their strategies are listed below:

- **Communication** – expressed by one participant as “too many language barriers” and echoed by many. Communication barriers can be alleviated by offering services that assist with completing applications, and ensuring program language is clear and free of jargon having a comprehensive reading level that meets producer’s needs. The prospective Aboriginal applicants need to easily understand that programs and services are accessible to them by naming First Nations and Aboriginals in program text and giving examples of how an Aboriginal can apply.
- **Contact** – having frequent and regular interaction in the communities via personal visits, workshops, presentations, and exhibiting at community events.
- **Awareness** – of programs for communities, including opportunities for markets and community quality of life through community gardens which can be supported through advertising and promotional activities.
- **Accountability** – to First Nation communities and farmers of programs through newsletters, editorials in Aboriginal newspapers, reporting to regional organizations, etc.
- **Accessibility** – “have programs on the reserves for people to get information”, this also includes making sure that programs specifically name First Nations and Aboriginals as qualified applicants and define the process for applying (i.e. business structure). Information can be made available through central locations, including but not limited to the internet.

Information Distribution – existing programs information should be distributed to First Nations and Aboriginal producers supported by advisory services. This information package could include specialized products and niche opportunities for Aboriginals, specifically on traditional foods, medicines, greenhouses, community gardens, orchards, and organic foods. It could also provide information on Aboriginal agriculture and agri-food success stories and AAFC contacts.

Forums and Conferences – Regional forums should be hosted in order to share program information and initiatives, and gather ideas on areas where services should be offered or improved. These events also provide a place for producers to share information and learn from others. These forums should be held annually and will provide a vehicle for AAFC to develop multi-year strategies, and reinforce their relationship with regional Aboriginal organizations, agricultural agencies and Aboriginal communities.

A national Aboriginal Agricultural conference or forum should also be considered to exchange ideas, promote success stories, and provide advice on the national strategy.

Advisory Services – Boosting the awareness and involvement of Aboriginals in agriculture can be done with the assistance of agriculture advisors. Regional workers should be assigned to support Aboriginal farmers and First Nations. For example, in Alberta this would be a Regional advisor for each of the three major Treaty regions.

The first type is general advisors who would travel to communities regularly. These advisors would be responsible for providing technical assistance, identifying agricultural opportunities, providing information on support programs and services, assisting with application completion, and referring operators to specialized services including financing.

In addition to general advisors, specialized advisors would be available that focus on agricultural fields reflective of the agricultural climate. For example, Manitoba has a considerable number of Aboriginal wild rice farmers, in British Columbia and Ontario there are opportunities in orchards and vineyards, while all First Nations can explore the sustainability and market opportunities associated with traditional foods.

General information and technical services required span a broad range such as cow / calf operations, animal health programs, gardening, chickens, pigs, berry picking / harvesting, organic farming, cattle pricing, community gardens, green housing and marketing (local and international) and GIS.

Aboriginal-Driven Agencies – AAFC should work with Aboriginal-driven agricultural agencies where they exist. These organizations should be introduced to organizations that are already in partnerships with AAFC and the respective provinces to establish cooperative relationships and promote information exchange.

In regions where an Aboriginal agricultural organization does not exist, creation of these associations should be explored. The first step to determining whether an Aboriginal agricultural organization would be supported province wide is to host a conference. Although this is a role for the Aboriginal community AAFC should provide support as requested and possible. The event would serve several purposes – to provide information to attendees on agricultural opportunities, programs and Aboriginal best practices, offer a networking forum for Aboriginal producers and developers, and determine the level of support for a regional organization.

The benefit of a regional organization is that it acts as a facilitator between Aboriginal producers, AAFC and other agricultural agencies to coordinate information flow and respond to its member's needs. Regional agriculture and agri-food focused organizations do not exist in Quebec, North of 60 or the Maritimes.

Community focused initiatives should offer a combination of programs and services (i.e. knowledge, training, awareness, funding, support) that may be sponsored through multiple agencies (federal/provincial ministries, Aboriginal driven human resources programs including social development). These programs would be delivered through a “no wrong door” strategy that reflects the appropriate “doors” into Aboriginal cultures and communities, for example, the social development agency or housing programs which assist low income households.

Recommendation 2 – Accessing Financing

- a) Conduct a program review to identify which programs are or are not applicable to Aboriginal clients.

Background

Industry volatility to market pricing, natural disasters, livestock and crop disease all increase the risk to lenders which in turn pushes interest rates up. There are also barriers to investment and capitalization when matching funds are required. These problems are common to both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal producers.

However in addition to the common problems associated with financing, on-reserve agriculture has obstacles for Indian producers that their non-Aboriginal counterparts do not face which are created by Indian Act policies that govern reserve lands. The key barrier is the inability to use assets located on reserve including land, as security for loans. This is a problem for both on-reserve individuals and for the First Nation when they seek to improve reserve infrastructure (i.e. irrigation) as accessing financing poses a problem for many Aboriginals interested in getting into or expanding their agricultural business.

Aboriginal farmers also incur restrictions to using reserve lands where title is required to accessing mainstream programs.

Since many of the problems associated with accessing financing programs by Aboriginals are outside AAFC authority, there must be an understanding of the complexities of Aboriginal lending in order to address the challenges. Partnerships and work with Aboriginal groups and INAC must be formed in order for AAFC employees to become better educated about the land management policies surrounding this issue.

Program Review – Begin with a review of agriculture and agri-food programs to determine their level of accessibility for Aboriginals (communities and people), including fair and consistent application and interpretation, language comprehension and general accessibility from an Aboriginal perspective. Also look at the marketing and distribution activities to Aboriginal specific audiences.

Once the review is done, an action plan to improve Aboriginal access should be developed and implemented.

The goal is to streamline and coordinate programs to meet Aboriginal requirements providing a “one stop” shop for producer inquiries. Communications need to be two ways with feedback flowing between the governments and producers. Aboriginal organizations should be utilized as the central agency in regions where this option is applicable.

Actions

A first step to supporting Aboriginal producers is to educate lenders on the agriculture and agri-food industry.

Conduct the funding program review of lender barriers and challenges to supporting on-reserve farm production and involve regional Aboriginal agricultural organizations (AAO) and the national Aboriginal Capital Corporation (ACC) association with the review. Preliminary discussions should

be held with regional AAOs and ACCs to understand the lending process and complexities of financing Aboriginal business, especially agricultural business on-reserve.

The program review should evaluate/consider:

- how AAFC program policy can align with the Indian Act Policy on land management;
- the creation of a trust fund for Aboriginals to provide guarantees to business, secure loans, provide matching funds for new business, promote joint ventures, reduce interest rates which has support from high levels of governments;
- skill levels required to complete applications – the key being to make them more comprehensible and easier to complete.

Recommendation 3 – Land & Treaties

- a) Develop agriculture policy and programs that reflect the Land Tenure, treaty and tax realities under which First Nations and other Aboriginal communities function.
- b) Recognize regional differences and opportunities and provide information and ongoing support services for agricultural land use planning and management to Aboriginal people and their leadership.

Background

First Nations operate under governance structures created by Indian Act Policies (band councils) that are substantially different from conventional commercial producers. These structures and policies dictate the approaches they can undertake to manage their lands and use their lands and its resources for development.

Each region's First Nations face the challenge of trying to balance the demand for land with their own community needs. Reserves vary in size, and in some areas, the average reserve is too small to operate agricultural activities. Added to this is an increase in population that results in a demand for residential land, other economic and cultural activities and the opportunities for Aboriginal agriculture participation decline. Regional differences in market, climate and infrastructure also magnify these challenges.

Some areas are attempting to address land demands through: negotiating unfulfilled Treaty promises for land; Land Claims where Treaties were not signed; regaining land control by discontinuing land leases to on reserve members; and, purchasing off-reserve lands. Once negotiations for land jurisdiction are settled, attention will focus on land-use planning and management.

Reserve lands face the same natural environmental challenges as non-Aboriginal land. Droughts and floods do not recognize reserve boundaries; however technical training for agricultural land management is often not offered for reserves.

Actions

Actions to determining land use and its shortages are listed below:

1. With regards to managing reserve lands for agricultural production, lands must be analyzed for their potential, allocated for agricultural use, and supported with infrastructure (i.e. irrigation and dam system). To do this, Band leadership must encourage agriculture within their community and incorporate it into land use plans and management. INAC's role as the "trustee" of reserve lands is essential to navigating the many policies for AAFC programs to be applied seamlessly to reserve lands.
2. In terms of land resources, certain agricultural activities require large tracts of land to make them viable. Options for acquiring and adding lands to reserve should be provided along with the promotion of agricultural activities that can occur with small areas of land (i.e. green houses). This requires the involvement of INAC.
3. For First Nations who lease agricultural lands to non-aboriginal producers, transition support of how to return these lands to Band control should be supported. Capacity development to build agricultural skills and acquire capital should also be offered.
4. Essential to improving the situation is to ensure that there is leadership, awareness, understanding, and support. Aboriginal leadership has to recognize agriculture in their community economic development and land use plans.
5. INAC also requires information on agriculture such as how they can be involved in supporting agricultural initiatives and how to plan for infrastructure.

Recommendation 4 – Youth and Human Resources Capacity

- a) Develop and implement a strategy that increases the involvement of youth in agriculture and agri-foods – include a policy framework focused on enabling the migration of producer operations from those seeking to retire or move on to a next generation of producers.
- b) Set-up long-term comprehensive agriculture and agri-food training programs for Aboriginal communities to improve operations, start-up, marketing, expansion and animal health and safety.
- c) Introduce 4-H programs in areas where Aboriginal Youth do not have to relocate – ideally on reserve/in communities.

Background

Aboriginal people have the fastest growing population in Canada and Aboriginal youth are the largest segment of the Aboriginal population. This group offers the greatest chance for maintaining and increasing agriculture participation. The challenge to motivate youth to consider a future in agriculture and agri-foods is the benefit offered by alternative lifestyles and careers.

Participation in agriculture as farmers or producers has steadily declined over the past decades. Few Aboriginal youth study in the field, and First Nations see smaller numbers of farmers' children continue the family business. In addition, the decline of the number of people operating agricultural operations is resulting in a loss of knowledge. On-reserve, the high demand for the reserve land is also reducing the amount of land available for agriculture. The trend requires an approach that engages farm operators to transfer their knowledge to youth.

Producers face challenges in everyday business operations. They need marketing knowledge – how to market and market trends, and want to learn how to improve safety and operate heavy equipment. For those considering entering the industry, guidance on how to commence an operation is required.

Programming and training opportunities should link Elders and farmers with youth to define a transition process where knowledge is transferred to youth. Youth need to be educated on how to raise, grow, harvest and store their own food.

In 2006, First Nations Agriculture Association (FNAA) established an Aboriginal agricultural training organization called the Aboriginal Agricultural Education Society of British Columbia (AAESBC) to “promote education and opportunities with a theoretical understanding and practical experience in all aspects of agriculture in British Columbia.” AAESBC exists to promote and coordinate studies in “animal husbandry, organic production, greenhouse operations, biology, chemistry, and agricultural business skills.” Other First Nations have established working relationships with agencies, programs and governments to offer agriculture and business management programs.

Actions

Workshops promoting opportunities in agriculture and agri-food should be available in communities to encourage adults and youth to start farms or greenhouses, and to pursue studies in agriculture and agri-food sciences. Program design/development needs to consider the following points:

- offering training in farm management, marketing (pricing, distribution, and promotions), start-up;
- provide business operations and management including financial management;
- team up with producers to “pool” qualified labour;

- develop financial incentive programs for training completion;
- offer workshops and training in specialized agricultural areas (see list below); and
- encourage youth to participate by offering in-class courses, 4-H youth groups.

Some training programs to be offered are:

- bookkeeping
- farm practices
- marketing
- heavy equipment / machinery operations
- livestock management
- planting (tree, apples, and berries)
- slaughterhouse start-up
- livestock
- greenhouses
- pasture rejuvenation and drainage
- financing
- disease
- wildlife management
- risk management
- proposal writing
- community gardens
- noxious weeds (prevention of spread and treatment)
- fencing
- farm safety
- proposal writing
- physical plan development

Training program principles to be incorporated are: training offered in-community, be of a short duration (i.e. 2 to 3 days) and include knowledge from Elders that motivates youth toward agriculture. If possible, training should be “hands on”. Training should promote improved business operations and encourage greater involvement in agriculture.

Agricultural Advisors and Band-to-Band education provides another potential training opportunity. Agricultural advisors are supplemental to developing Aboriginal capacity as they provide one-on-one training, can assist small groups, and travel to the community. Band-to-Band education is where “each Band specializes in a particular area then they go from Band-to-Band sharing information with youth – i.e. berry picking, animal care, smoking fish, gardening, etc.”

Partnerships with other agencies and departments should be developed to deliver these programs. These could be with 4-H, industry sector associations, Aboriginal human resources agencies (i.e.: AHRDC), human resources sector council and post-secondary institutions.

Begin with educating youth on the wide range of opportunities in the field and providing programming that allows youth to explore them. Encouraging Aboriginal youth to pursue agricultural ventures or studies could be done by First Nation leadership prioritizing agriculture in their communities. These should be initiatives designed specifically for youth that increase their awareness of agricultural opportunities and gives them a chance to explore first-hand various types of agricultural activities (i.e. band farms, summer employment).

Offer program support to assist with the transfer of knowledge and operations from producers to youth. This would be done by offering a set of business and technical programs such as financial and apprenticeship programs to address the various phases in transferring operations through to sustaining and expanding business.

Recommended activities are:

1. Evaluate initiatives that encourage youth involvement – i.e. 4-H, mentor / job shadow, FNACS's Little Green Thumbs initiative, summer agriculture camps, workshops, "green team" – to develop ideas for engaging youth.
2. Establish a partnership with programs like 4-H to help develop community youth groups.
3. Training and employment should be delivered in Aboriginal communities rather than locations where youth would need to relocate.
4. Enable youth and Elders to interact through workshops and hands-on activities like community gardens so that they can "motivate youth to grow traditional foods".

Introducing youth to agriculture can include:

- Communities showing by example (i.e. showcasing successful cases of community initiatives such as gardens)
- Connecting with in-class school programs such as day care, aboriginal head start¹ and food programs
- Exhibiting at career days
- Offering counsellors and training incentives
- Developing apprenticeship programs in agriculture
- Coordinating fun community activities for youth that can involve Elders
- Offering mentorship programs
- Sharing success stories of Aboriginal Agriculture
- Market the "4-H" Brand in First Nations communities
- Use third party websites to market AAFC programs and services
- Apply innovative usage of technology to target and reach youth

- Provide two-way cultural training for government staff before these individuals provide services to the Aboriginal communities
- Utilize cultural centres to promote agriculture
- Work-share programs amongst producers to gain more experience and exposure to new methods of farming
- Have youth visit existing Aboriginal farming operations
- Promote more products and services that assist younger farmers with the "business" of farming

Recommendation 5 – Partnerships

- a) Develop an Aboriginal partnership strategy for the department (include an interdepartmental committee).
- b) Establish partnerships with provincial agriculture and agri-food service delivery agents to develop and implement strategies specific to engaging Aboriginal people and communities.

Background

AAFC has been working toward establishing relationships and partnerships with various Aboriginal organizations and with other federal and provincial government departments and agencies.

Meetings have taken place with INAC's Economic Development ADM where AAFC was asked to present the workshop results to their Executive Council. There is potential for AAFC and INAC to work collaboratively on an Aboriginal specific agricultural program along with several other initiatives. INAC personnel were invited to each workshop and funded half of the Manitoba workshop.

¹ "The Aboriginal Head Start on Reserve initiative is designed to prepare young First Nations children for their school years, by meeting their emotional, social, health, nutritional and psychological needs."

SOURCE: http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fnih-spni/famil/develop/ahsor-papa_intro_e.html

It is crucial for AAFC to develop partnerships with HRSDC, Environment Canada, Natural Resources Canada, Health Canada, etc. in order to explore potential opportunities for all stakeholders. Federal-provincial relationships need to be built upon in order to better understand client needs and the various regional differences (i.e. treaties).

The Assembly of First Nations (AFN) is the national organization representing First Nations citizens in Canada. The AFN represents all citizens regardless of age, gender or place of residence. Future potential opportunities with AFN should be identified and correspondence between AAFC and AFN should be incorporated into the Aboriginal partnership strategy.

In addition to meeting with several Aboriginal groups and communities, to date AAFC has also met and worked with five major Aboriginal agriculture organizations.

1. The **First Nations Agricultural Council of Saskatchewan (FNACS)** currently delivers programs on behalf of AAFC and the province of Saskatchewan. Their mandate is to develop a strong, viable and sustainable agricultural sector both on and off the reserve for status Indians in the Province of Saskatchewan.
2. The **National Aboriginal Land Manager's Association (NALMA)** is a National Organization of First Nation Lands Managers which actively networks towards the enhancement of professional development and technical expertise in the functions of Land Management and which also incorporate First Nations values and beliefs in Land Management always keeping in mind the grass-root practices when dealing with land management.
3. The **First Nations Agricultural Lending Association (FNALA)** was formed to provide financing for First Nations agricultural producers. In addition to direct financing operations, FNALA also aims to increase Association lending activity by general promotion to First Nations people about agriculture and its economic and social opportunities; and foster and encourage the overall economic and social well-being of First Nations farmers.
4. The **Indian Agricultural Program of Ontario (IAPO)** is a non-profit Ontario corporation with Letters Patent issued in June 1984. IAPO is owned by Status Indian farmers in Ontario. The board of directors, who are Status Indian farmers, represent various farming districts across Ontario. IAPO's mission statement is to assist Status Indian farmers to achieve the economic utilization of the agricultural resources on Ontario First Nations territories.
5. **Southern Chief's Organization (SCO)** – The Chiefs of the Southern First Nations of Manitoba have agreed to establish an independent political forum to protect, preserve, promote, and enhance First Nations peoples' inherent rights, languages, customs, and traditions through the application and implementation of the spirit and intent of the Treaty-making process. They have recently formed the Indian Agricultural Council of Manitoba, which is to be an at-arms length agricultural organization serving the First Nations farmers of Manitoba.
6. The **Indian Agricultural Council of Manitoba** aims to be an at-arms length agricultural organization serving the First Nations farmers of Manitoba. This group was recently formed (November 2006) with the assistance of the Southern Chief's Organization.

The experience of these Aboriginal agriculture organizations and Aboriginal initiatives with establishing working relationships with agencies, programs, and governments will be valuable to the development of other AAFC national and regional strategies and to moving the agenda forward, specifically with regards to addressing the issues raised by producers.

Actions

Host a forum where Aboriginal Agricultural Organizations (AAO) and agricultural delivery agencies are invited to share information on their organizations and programs. The primary purpose of this session is to allow for information exchange between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal agricultural and agri-food organizations.

Recommendation 6 – Marketing, Opportunities and Research

- a) Develop an Aboriginal product marketing strategy to promote and distinguish Aboriginal agricultural products.
- b) Identify market and product opportunities unique to the Aboriginal community and support Aboriginal producers' access to them. Market opportunities should be explored from the perspective of new and existing markets and products.

Background

There are several Aboriginal producers in British Columbia of cattle and non-domestic animals, as well as growers of fruit, and packagers of food products. The sustainability of these products and the producers can be improved with marketing support.

Local food production and distribution is a major asset to rural and remote communities. There are significant local opportunities for different types of crops that can promote healthy lifestyle. In addition there are opportunities to harvest and market culturally significant medicinal plants.

It is important to note that First Nations whose traditional territory is divided by the 49th parallel have barriers to partnering with their American relatives and border crossing restrictions deter Aboriginals from engaging in business relationships and accessing American markets.

Actions

A strategy should be developed that distinguishes the Aboriginal products and promotes them to the proper consumer markets. Within the strategy there should be consideration of participation in marketing boards, pricing and supply strategies in collaboration with the Aboriginal Business Associations, the Aboriginal Marketing Association and the Association of Native Development Officers.

An analysis on cross-border issues and information on the export process is required for American and other international markets.

In addition to geographic markets, there are product opportunities that could provide Aboriginal producers with focused market niches. For example, several First Nations operate non-domestic animal ranches of bison and elk, and grow plants traditional to their area and culture. While these products seem to offer a niche, the operations often struggle with sustainability. A support strategy for Aboriginals on how to access markets for these products and new market opportunities should be developed.

Comments on Cross-Cutting Issues

Many issues related to Aboriginal participation in agriculture require the involvement and coordination of other federal and provincial agencies, and industry organizations. These are the top cross-cutting topics:

1. Youth
2. Program accessibility
3. Financing and capital
4. Lands – access to land and lands management
5. Capacity development and training
6. Support services

The involvement of the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (DIAND / INAC) is required as it oversees all development on-reserve, and is a key link to adding lands to reserves, and for providing resources for developments, infrastructure and planning. It is essential for AAFC and INAC to develop a partnership in order to further agriculture and economic development initiatives and joint funding for specific programming and services should be explored.

The relationship AAFC enjoys with provinces on implementing the Next Generation Policy needs a review of how services and support are extended to Aboriginal people. The assessment should consider the processes for relaying information, providing services, restrictions and limitations of services and programs to First Nations and Aboriginal producers. It is important to note that Aboriginal groups in Quebec do not experience the same openness toward provincial relationships as other provinces and territories do with their respective native residents. This is largely due to the fact that most Aboriginal people are not in favour of the referendum/separation which in turn hinders their relationship with the province.

Educational presentations that increase the knowledge and understanding of governments and Treaty rights, First Nations development processes for on-reserve agriculture, and business will improve the effectiveness of future initiatives. While the execution of Treaties can be viewed as the responsibility of INAC, they do have application to other federal departments and affect provincial ministries. First Nations Governments consider themselves on par with the Canadian government as a result of Treaty Signing between Nations. Treaties are signed on a nation to nation basis, not a nation to province basis.

An effective AAFC Aboriginal strategy requires that relationships be established with Aboriginal organizations, the federal government and other

agencies. The key organization or type is illustrated in the table below and the relationship with the corresponding priority areas indicated.

	<i>1. Financing</i>	<i>2. Lands</i>	<i>3. Capacity</i>	<i>4. Program</i>	<i>5. Support</i>	<i>6. Youth</i>
Aboriginal agricultural organizations			✓	✓	✓	✓
Aboriginal political, Treaty organizations, Métis associations		✓	✓			✓
INAC	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Services Canada			✓		✓	✓
Aboriginal Business Canada	✓		✓	✓		
Lenders – commercial, agricultural / specialty, Aboriginal capital corporations (National Aboriginal Capital Corporation)	✓					✓
Government Agricultural programs – Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Program			✓	✓	✓	
<i>Provincial Agencies – responsible for</i>						
Agriculture and Food	✓		✓	✓	✓	
Aboriginal relations		✓	✓	✓	✓	
Advanced education and technology			✓			✓
Lands and resource management	✓	✓			✓	
Youth				✓	✓	✓
<i>Other</i>						
Specialty agricultural organizations (4-H, Organic producers association, Beef Producers, Grain Growers of Canada, Canadian Bison Association, Wild rice, etc.)			✓	✓	✓	✓
Educational institutes – Band schools, post-secondary (colleges and technical institutes)			✓			✓

Note: These are essential organizations; others will be identified as strategies are developed.

Other Issues

The matter of Treaties is a major influence on the relationship that First Nations have with governments. In most regions, other than in B.C. where Treaties are currently being negotiated, unfulfilled promises and archaic clauses (i.e. “cows and ploughs”) are driving First Nations to push for Treaties to be revisited and updated. While AAFC is not directly connected with the enforcement or revisions of these Treaties, AAFC may still be considered a party as it is a federal government department and agriculture is an unfulfilled Treaty promise.

In terms of the 2003 Agricultural Policy Framework (APF), the five components – 1) business risk management, 2) food safety and quality, 3) science and innovation, 4) environment, and 5) renewal – do not encompass the key elements First Nations stated were needed to improve their participation in the agriculture sector. The next generation of the APF must consider the unique characteristics of Aboriginal (First Nations, Métis and Inuit) communities and people, especially their approach and values as it relates to community economic development. The focus of development is on “community” and how development will benefit and affect quality of life, social, cultural and environmental factors. The APF elements emphasize services to existing producers, yet to include the Aboriginal community the APF needs to incorporate activities that support the Aboriginal producers and attract others to enter the industry, focusing on youth. A new APF should promote the involvement of the Aboriginal communities while removing the barriers to existing programs and services.

Conclusions

As the number of agriculture and agri-food operations decline and lands are removed from the agricultural designation, Aboriginal communities will become increasingly appealing to the agriculture and agri-food industry. This Aboriginal community interest is boosted by the growing rate of the Aboriginal youth population, expanding reserve land base and increasing recognition of Aboriginal rights and title. Yet as agriculture and other industries realize that Aboriginals are an untapped market, the demand for Aboriginal engagement will increase the requirements of AAFC to provide incentives to Aboriginals to enter agriculture.

Across Canada, the agriculture and agri-food challenges encountered by Aboriginal producers are consistent with Aboriginals in other regions as well as non-Aboriginals. These include: lack of awareness of programs and opportunities, inconsistent access and barriers to agricultural programs by Aboriginal applicants, restricted access to capital, loan security / collateral issues, natural disasters (flood, drought and disease), need for training and capacity development and low interest of youth in agriculture.

Issues that differ by region are the:

- Political structure of the First Nations (influence of Treaty and non-Treaty areas); interaction with other Aboriginal groups; interaction with federal government departments;
- Relationship of the Aboriginal community with the provincial agencies and the recognition of the importance of Aboriginal economic development;
- Aboriginal agricultural specific agencies – absence, maturity and presence of regional associations; and
- Agricultural opportunities – driven by the culture, environment / climate, and industry opportunities (i.e. orchards, wild rice, maple syrup, bison, cattle ranching).

For AAFC to increase Aboriginal participation in agriculture and agri-foods, the new direction needs to assist with removing the barriers, developing initiatives designed specifically for Aboriginals, be consistent and have regular support services and communication with Aboriginals. These programs should include Aboriginals in their development and distribution to ensure their character and administration reflect the Aboriginal environment and has Aboriginal support.

Next Steps to Developing a National Aboriginal Agriculture Strategy

As the AAFC Aboriginal strategy proceeds, continued communication with the people who participated in the workshops and connecting with other Aboriginal people is required to demonstrate that AAFC is committed to their client's needs.

AAFC should explore the option of forming a national Aboriginal Agricultural Working Group that has representatives from existing Aboriginal Agricultural Organizations (AAO) and regional representatives from areas where no such body exists. This group would advise on the strategy and be responsible for providing direction on communication as well as for sharing information and initiatives with its constituents.

Consideration of advertising in local, agricultural industry and Aboriginal publications to reach non-Band affiliated Aboriginal agriculture producers and Métis should also be conducted. Specific topics of importance to the region are: marketing and market opportunities (i.e. USA), Aboriginal funding, actions to coordinate departments and programs, and initiatives to improve services and communications.

