

Discussion Document for Revising the 2006 Yukon Agriculture Policy

Building a 2018 Agriculture Policy



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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to gather input from farmers and industry on the 2006 Yukon Agriculture Policy and identify potential revisions to help shape an updated agriculture policy to guide industry for the next decade. This document identifies the main goals and policies of the 2006 policy and seeks feedback on these policies, and invites suggestions for improvements.

Consultation timeline

The consultation timeline is 60 days.

How to provide feedback

Feedback can be provided in the following manner:

- In person: If you would like to meet with Agriculture Branch Director Matt Ball to discuss your input, please call (867) 667-5838 or (800) 661-0408, ext. 5838 to make an appointment.
- Email: Written comments can be emailed to: agriculture@gov.yk.ca
- Mail: Written comments can be mailed to: Agriculture Branch, 320-300 Main Street, Whitehorse, Y1A2B5
- Phone: Phone in comments to:
(867) 667-5838 or (800) 661-0408, ext. 5838
- Fax: Submit comments by fax at:
(867) 393-6222

BACKGROUND

Yukon Agriculture Policy: Past and Present

In 1982, the Yukon government adopted its first agriculture policy.

In 1986, the Yukon government created an Agriculture Branch to assist with industry development.

In 1991, a successor policy called Agriculture for the 90s was adopted. This policy established a Yukon government process for acquiring and developing new agricultural land, and established government programming in farm management, extension services, marketing, conservation, research and public health.

In 2006, the current Yukon Agriculture Policy 'Vision for Yukon Agriculture' was adopted. This policy was designed to meet the interests of the Yukon agriculture industry and the public. It also reflects national agriculture policy commitments to encourage an agriculture industry that is economically viable, environmentally sustainable, and produces high quality and safe food.

The stated goal of the 2006 policy is to encourage the growth of a Yukon agricultural industry that:

- produces high quality products for local consumption;
- is economically viable;
- operates in an environmentally sustainable manner; and
- contributes to community well being.

The policy's vision is to develop a Yukon agriculture industry that significantly increases its production of healthy locally-grown food for local consumption. To support this, government has given a priority to:

- expanding the agricultural land base in a carefully planned manner;
- improving utilization of agricultural lands; and
- providing support for programs and infrastructure that help the growth of an economically viable and environmentally sustainable industry.

The policy also established the Agriculture Industry Advisory Committee (AIAC) to provide advice on agriculture development and management in the territory. This committee includes broad representation from the industry, including producers from a variety of agricultural sectors. The policy also makes a commitment to evaluate itself no later than in its tenth year of implementation.

For the past 10 years, the Agriculture Branch has worked closely with the AIAC to implement the policy, promote responsible agricultural development, and identify aspects of the 2006 policy that should be reviewed and updated. Through this collaborative process, the AIAC and Agriculture Branch have identified the policy areas that require review in this discussion paper.

QUESTIONS

1. How would you like to see the industry evolve and grow over the next 5 to 10 years?
2. How can government work with industry and farmers to achieve this vision?
3. What issues or challenges do you see facing the industry over the next 5 to 10 years?

The Yukon Agriculture Industry: Past and Present

The Yukon agriculture and agri-food industry has historically focused on producing food and feed for the local market. According to Yukon Census of Agriculture data, which is the best available information, over the last 10 years the industry has experienced the following trends:

	2006	2011	2016
Total number of Yukon farms	148	130	142
Total land in production (crops and pasture)	6,269 ha	6,893 ha	6,801 ha
Total number of cattle and calves	220	213	245
Total number of pigs	160	56	482
Total number of horses and ponies	629	615	429
Total number of hens and chickens	6,301	3,601	6,798
Farms reporting vegetables	25	24	28
Farms reporting fruits, berries and nuts	10	13	16
Total gross farm receipts	\$4,080,385	\$3,727,611	\$3,879,482
Total farm business operating expenses	\$4,258,435	\$3,727,611	\$3,879,482
Total farm capital (land, buildings and equipment)	\$66,118,480	\$86,563,618	\$108,425,446

The above table illustrates growth in the total amount of land under production and in the production of cattle, pigs, poultry and farms producing vegetables, fruit, berries and nuts.

Total farm receipts have also increased compared to 10 years ago. Significantly, total farm expenses are also less than they were 10 years ago. 2016 shows the first census year where farm income receipts were greater than expenses, demonstrating the improving economic performance of the industry.

Currently, there are 142 farms reported in Yukon. They grow and sell a wide variety of products. Over the years, hay production has been the largest portion of Yukon's agriculture industry in terms of the number of farms, acres and revenue. Yukon farms also provide fresh, healthy products for human consumption. These include vegetables, preserves, dairy, eggs, honey, jams, meats, fresh produce, sod, and bedding plants.

These products are found in large retail stores, community markets, and in gourmet meals prepared by restaurants and caterers in Yukon's food service industry.

Over the period of the current policy, the production and economic viability of farming in Yukon has been improved through the use of new equipment, new farming techniques, available business planning and funding. This has helped to reduce our dependency on food imports. It also helps grow the economy and adds diverse work options in our communities.

The industry also faces key challenges. These include a cold and dry climate, low nutrient soils, high operating costs and small local markets. Yukon's agricultural and agri-food industry is relatively small by national standards, but it is durable and diverse.

POLICY AREAS FOR REVIEW AND FEEDBACK

Overall Yukon Agriculture Policy:

QUESTION

1. Were you aware the Yukon government had a 2006 Agriculture Policy?

Yes No

Support for Yukon Agricultural Products:

As noted in the background section, Yukon farms produce a variety of products for local consumption. These products are available at a variety of outlets.

QUESTIONS

1. How important is it for you to have local opportunities to buy Yukon agricultural products?

Not important at all	Not very important	Somewhat important	Important	Very important
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2. How can government support more opportunities to produce and make available local farm products in Yukon? Please check all that apply:

Not important at all	Not very important	Somewhat important	Important	Very important
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3. Where do you usually purchase Yukon agricultural products? (check all that apply)

Farm gate

Community market

Retail store

Restaurant/cafe

Other?

4. How can government support more opportunities to produce and make available local farm products in Yukon? (check all that apply)

Branding

Advertising

Funding and incentive programs

More planned agriculture land

Other

5. What types of local agricultural products do you already buy, or would be interested in buying? Please check all that apply:

Hay

Beef and/or pork

Poultry

Eggs

Vegetables

Fruit and/or berries

Honey

Bedding plants

Value-added products (processed items, preserves, etc.)

Other products (please specify)

6. Do you have any concerns regarding Yukon agricultural products?

Yes No

If yes, please specify what concerns you have:

7. What improvements would you like to see in the type, quality or availability of Yukon agricultural products?

Agricultural Land Development:

Less than two per cent of Yukon's 483,450 square kilometres is suitable for agricultural development because of limitations of geography, climate and soils. Of this, only 15,500 hectares are currently developed as agricultural parcels. Farmland now occupies 0.03 per cent of Yukon's total land base.

Making new agricultural land available is a key goal of the 2006 Agriculture Policy. From 2006 to 2016, 89 new agricultural parcels were developed and over 3,100 hectares of new farm land were released.

The 2006 policy states:

- The Yukon government will continue to make new land available for agriculture development.
- Land development procedures will respect industry's need for new land and public interests regarding environmental sustainability, economic viability and land use compatibility.
- New land for agriculture will be made available through the following two methods:
 - Yukon government planned agricultural subdivisions; and
 - Agricultural spot land applications.

QUESTIONS

1. Do you support the Yukon government's approach to make more land available for agricultural development?

Yes No

2. If no, please state why not :

The Agriculture Branch currently administers two land programs to make land available for agriculture:

- **Planned agricultural subdivisions:** In this program, the Yukon government develops an area with planned agricultural lots, advertises that the lots are available and accepts submissions from eligible applicants. Successful applicants are selected based on a detailed technical evaluation of their submitted farm business plans, and enter into an agreement for sale for the planned lots.
- **Spot land applications:** In this process, a person who wishes to develop a new farm on undeveloped crown land makes an agricultural spot land application to the Agriculture Branch. Applications must meet rigorous technical requirements and include a detailed Farm Development Plan, and are thoroughly reviewed and evaluated before they are rejected or approved.

The Agriculture Branch currently places an emphasis on developing new agricultural land through the planned subdivision program.

1. Should more farm land be made available through the planned agricultural subdivision program?

Yes No

If no, why not?

If yes, where should new agricultural subdivisions be located?

Do you have concerns with the planned agricultural subdivision program?

Yes No

If yes, what are they and how could the planned agricultural program be improved?

2. Should more farm land be made available through the agricultural spot land application program?

Yes No

If no, why not?

If yes, where should new agricultural spot land applications be located?

Do you have concerns with the spot land application program?

Yes No

If yes, what are they?

How could the agricultural spot land application program be improved?

3. Do you support the current government emphasis on the planned agriculture land processes?

Yes No

If no, why not?

If yes, please state why:

Agricultural Land Management: Improved Land Utilization

To have a strong agricultural industry, owners of agricultural parcels must use their land effectively.

The 2006 Policy states:

- applicants for new agricultural land must make a commitment to the proper utilization of their parcel.
- Yukon government will give priority to supporting programs that encourage the owners of idle agricultural lands to bring their parcels back into production.

The Agriculture Branch provides funding, business planning and marketing support to encourage agricultural land to be brought into production. Despite these efforts, only about 50 per cent of Yukon land zoned as agriculture is currently being used for growing crops or pasture.

QUESTIONS

1. Is the underutilization of agricultural land of concern to you?

Yes No

Why or why not?

2. In your view, what are the main reasons why Yukon agricultural land is underutilization and left fallow?

3. How can government encourage converting agricultural land back into production?

Agricultural Land Management: Regulating Land Uses

Many farmers rely on the ability to undertake accessory activities on their parcels to diversify their income. This diversification is important to maintaining economic viability. While government supports the diversification of income on agricultural parcels, it is also important that land zoned for agriculture is protected for agriculture and agriculture remains the primary use of that land.

The 2006 policy states:

Accessory activities for the purpose of diversifying farm income will be allowed on agricultural parcels, subject to the following conditions:

- The accessory activities must be consistent with the existing legislation and regulations that apply to the parcel.
- The accessory activities must be consistent with any existing land use plans or agricultural development guidelines that apply to the parcel.
- Agriculture must remain as the primary use of the parcel.
- The accessory uses must not negatively impact the agricultural use of the parcel.
- The accessory uses must not result in unreasonable negative social, economic or environmental impacts to the surrounding area or adjacent parcels.

QUESTIONS

1. Are you involved in accessory activities on your farm?

Yes No

2. If yes, how important are these accessory activities in regards to diversifying your farm income?

Not important at all	Not very important	Somewhat important	Important	Very important
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3. Do you have any concerns regarding the current policy on accessory uses?

Yes No

4. If yes, what are your concerns:

5. In your view, how could the current policy on accessory uses be improved?

6. How can government ensure that agriculture remains the primary use on lands that are zoned agricultural?

5. What methods should be used to best manage the piled woody material (windrows)?

The Environment

Yukon residents value a healthy environment.

The 2006 Policy states:

Yukon government policies and programs for agriculture will be designed to facilitate an industry that is compatible with the environment and environmentally sustainable on a long term basis.

The 2006 policy makes commitments to addressing environmental concerns by:

- carrying out periodic environmental scans of the industry, including monitoring water, soil and air quality and identifying the impacts of industry on habitat and wildlife;
- encouraging the industry to develop and implement Environmental Farm Plans;
- increasing the awareness of environmental issues with industry members; and
- encouraging and promoting best environmental farming practices in regards to wildlife, disease transmission, safe use of chemicals, protection of ground and surface water, soil conservation and farm waste disposal.

QUESTIONS

1. Do you have concerns regarding the impacts of agriculture on the environment?
Yes No
2. If yes, what are your concerns?
3. How could the agriculture policy be improved in regards to addressing farming and the environment?

Strengthening the Agricultural Economy

The Yukon government supports the growth of an agricultural industry that is economically viable, economically sustainable, and provides net economic benefits to Yukon. The 2006 policy identifies various initiatives to support these objectives.

The 2006 Policy states:

- Business Risk Management:
 - The national Canadian Agriculture Income Stabilization program is available to Yukon farmers.
- Infrastructure Development:
 - The Yukon government will support the development of required infrastructure to facilitate the growth of the agriculture industry.
- Reducing Operating Costs:
 - The Yukon government will support programs to help reduce industry costs.
- Marketing:
 - The Yukon government will support improved marketing for the agricultural industry.
- Extension:
 - The Yukon government's role in providing extension services for the industry will be expanded.
- Training and Human Resource Development:
 - The Yukon government will support enhanced skill development in the industry.
- Economic Diversification:
 - The Yukon government supports economic diversification in the agriculture industry.
- Value Added Production:
 - The Yukon government supports increased value-added processing in the agriculture industry.

Local farmers continue to produce an abundant supply of hay, and many producers are expanding their markets by supplying fresh food products to retailers, restaurants and farmers' markets. The agriculture industry has been increasing over the past 10 years with local eggs in the stores, fresh root vegetables available year round and greenhouse-grown vegetables.

QUESTIONS

1. Please identify the service areas that you have made use of in your farm operation, and identify any suggestions you may have for the improvement of these program areas.

Insurance or income stabilization: Used?

Yes No

Suggestions for improvement:

Infrastructure Development: Used?

Yes No

Suggestions for improvement:

Cost of production reductions: Used?

Yes No

Suggestions for improvement:

Marketing: Used?

Yes No

Suggestions for improvement:

Extension Services (farm visits, research, seminars): Used?

Yes No

Suggestions for improvement:

Training and Human Resource Development: Used?

Yes No

Suggestions for improvement:

Economic Diversification: Used?

Yes No

Suggestions for improvement:

Value-Added Production: Used?

Yes No

Suggestions for improvement:

Please rank in numerical order the areas and programs that are most critical to the success of your farm:

- | | |
|---|--|
| project funding | additional land for production |
| crop insurance | access to land |
| business planning | local research and demonstration projects |
| access to financing | workshop and training opportunities |
| access to labour | field inspection and extension services (i.e., soil testing) |
| marketing and retail access for your products | other/specify: |

Organic Farming

Organic farming is a small, but rapidly growing sector of the Yukon agriculture industry.

The 2006 Policy states:

The Yukon government will promote and encourage the increased growth of organic farming in the Yukon.

Since the 2006 Census, organic production farm numbers are up. There are currently eight certified organic farms in Yukon, and additional farms are in the process of becoming certified. They produce a range of crops including fruits, vegetables and greenhouse products. The 2006 policy commits to supporting the industry in the areas of extension services, training, information sharing, certification, marketing and financial support.

QUESTIONS

1. What are the current challenges faced by organic farmers in the territory?
2. How can government improve its support for organic farming in Yukon?
3. How can government promote buying organic to the public?

Food Safety and Food Quality

The Yukon government gives a priority to an agriculture industry that produces safe and healthy foods.

The 2006 Policy states:

The Yukon government will support the development of standards and procedures for the agriculture industry that facilitate the production of safe and high quality foods.

The 2006 policy commits the Yukon government to:

- developing regulations, policies and programs to address food safety regimes;
- identifying and implementing food safety and quality standards;
- developing needed infrastructure and services for food inspection and monitoring; and
- assisting in developing data management standards for traceability systems.

QUESTIONS

1. Do you have food safety concerns for the Yukon agriculture industry?
Yes No
2. If yes, what are your concerns?
3. What can government do to better inform or improve on-site food safety (i.e., prescriptive processes, manuals, labeling, or education)?

Funding Programs

During the 2006 policy implementation, two national/provincial/territorial policy frameworks (Growing Forward and Growing Forward 2) were developed and implemented. Both were five-year agreements that delivered cost-shared funding to support agricultural development in the territory.

The 2006 Policy States:

The Yukon government will continue to work in close cooperation with Canada to deliver industry development programs and the Agricultural Policy Framework Agreement.

QUESTIONS

1. What were the strengths of these programs?

2. What were the weaknesses of these programs?

3. Have you accessed funding from these programs?
Yes No

4. If yes, how did the funding benefit your operation

5. How could these programs be improved?

6. Are there additional or different types of programs that you would like to see offered for Yukon agriculture?
Yes No

7. If yes, what types of additional programs would you like to see offered?

New Initiatives

While the 2006 Yukon Agriculture Policy has served as a valuable foundational document for the last decade, there are a few areas that have emerged that are not addressed in the current policy.

Climate Change

The 2006 Yukon Agriculture Policy does not address climate change. Climate change is already a reality in the North. These changes will affect growing conditions in the territory, which will in turn impact Yukon's agriculture industry. Some impacts may be positive for agriculture. Others may be negative.

Climate change modeling may be used to identify new potential areas favorable for agriculture. Understanding and adapting to the likely effects of the changing climate and permafrost conditions will be necessary to optimize future agriculture production.

QUESTIONS

1. Do you believe that Yukon agriculture has been, or will be, impacted by climate change?

Yes No I don't know

2. If YES, how has it been, or will it be affected?

3. How can agriculture in Yukon adapt to climate change?

Intensive Agriculture Pursuits

Intensive agriculture is not addressed in the 2006 Yukon Agriculture Policy. The Yukon government is looking to define intensive farming to bring clarity on permitted farm practices. Increasingly, 'intensive livestock operations' have been included as a discretionary use under agriculture zoning. However, without a clear definition, it may lead to ambiguity.

Intensive agriculture normally includes producing an agriculture product on a concentrated scale, typically livestock in a feedlot. These are common in southern Canada, but currently there are none in Yukon. There are many different forms of intensive agriculture that could be considered, depending on: market demand, location, climate, type of livestock, number of livestock, size of area, and impacts on the environment and surrounding land uses.

British Columbia provincial government uses 'intensive agriculture' as the use of land, buildings and other structures by a commercial enterprise or an institution for the confinement of poultry, livestock or fur bearing animals, or the growing of mushrooms.

The Saskatchewan government defines intensive agriculture as a livestock operation if the livestock confinement space per animal unit is less than 370 square meters (4,000 square feet). 'Animal unit' is a means of comparing different ages and species of livestock. The amount of nitrogen produced by one animal unit is approximately the same across species, i.e., one cow, 200 broiler chickens, or six feeder pigs represent one animal unit and would produce about the same amount of nitrogen.

QUESTIONS

1. How would you define intensive agriculture?

2. Should Yukon pursue intensive farming?

Yes No I don't know

3. What type of intensive agriculture should be considered and where should it be located?

Type of intensive
agriculture

Location

New Entrants to Agriculture

While the 2006 policy addresses improving access to farm land through the agricultural land program and the subdivision of agricultural parcels program, it does not address the issue of attracting new entrants to the agriculture industry. Starting a new farm, or taking over an existing farm, can be very difficult for new entrants to the industry. It is capital intensive, often cost prohibitive, involves hard work, is subject to crop and climate risk, and the financial reward can be a challenge considering the financial investment required, the potential revenues to be had, and the alternative employment options available.

Yet, the future of the farming industry in Yukon, and the ability to provide locally-grown fresh healthy food to Yukon people, depends on the ability to attract new people to get into farming in an economically and environmentally sustainable way. This is a key challenge for the industry.

QUESTIONS

1. What are the main challenges for new entrants to start or take over a farm business in Yukon?
2. How can these challenges be overcome or addressed?
3. How can the updated Yukon Agriculture Policy best encourage new entrants to Yukon agriculture?

4. To those exploring getting into farming, what issues have you experienced? What are the greatest barriers?

Right to Farm

As our population grows, along with the number of agricultural lots, people may be more likely to increasingly live in neighbourhoods adjacent to farm operations. Some non-farm residents may have concerns about farm practices, which create dust, odour, noise or other disturbances. Farmers also have concerns with trespassing, theft of crops, increased traffic on rural roads, water run-off from urban areas and litter. It can be anticipated that these issues will continue to arise.

Other jurisdictions in Canada have introduced farm practice protection (Right to Farm) policies to protect the rights of farmers. This typically involves creating both informal and formal processes to assist all parties in resolving concerns and complaints about farm operations.

QUESTIONS

1. Should Yukon consider adopting Right to Farm policies?

Yes

No

I don't know

Are there any additional comments you would like to add?

Thank You For Your Feedback:

Thank you for reviewing this material and providing us with your input.

The results of this discussion document will be compiled and released in an Engagement Report. All this information will be considered in the process for preparing an updated Yukon Agriculture Policy.

If you have any further comments or have any further suggestions on how we can support agriculture in Yukon, please contact the Agriculture Branch at: (867) 667-5838 or (800) 661-0408, ext. 5838

SUBMIT