

Ploughing Towards an Updated Yukon Agriculture Policy



Introduction

Over the summer of 2018, the Department of Energy, Mines and Resources, Agriculture Branch completed a public engagement to collect public input on Yukon's agriculture policy. The engagement process included two surveys: an online questionnaire hosted on engageyukon.ca, and a stakeholder survey released through email and also available on the Yukon Agricultural Association's website.

Energy, Mines and Resources advertised each of the surveys through a variety of media. The stakeholder survey was available from April 30 to August 1, 2018. The online survey was online from May 24 to July 6, 2018.

We received 206 valid responses to the online survey. All but one respondent said they were Yukon residents, with 76% of respondents living in the Whitehorse area. Most respondents completed the survey as private citizens or businesses (97%), while three respondents completed the survey on behalf of a territorial government department, and four respondents completed the survey on behalf of some other non-governmental organization.

Those who completed the survey as private citizens or businesses identified as: an interested member of the public (44%), a gardener (31%), a hobby or commercial farmer (22%), or a business owner involved in agriculture (4%).

Through the stakeholder document we received input from 18 individuals. As well as face-to-face conversations and email submissions from another 30 individuals, and group meetings with farmers in Dawson and Whitehorse.

- 89% of respondents noted that it was important or very important to have access to local foods.
- 74% of respondents were satisfied or very satisfied with local products.
- A significant number of respondents emphasized the need to maintain strong environmental protection while growing the agricultural industry.

Thank you to everyone who took the time to comment.

The following themes and areas of comment were recorded during our 2018 consultation:

1. Values/Vision for Yukon Agriculture
2. Agriculture and our Partners (Environment and First Nations)
3. Land for Agriculture
4. Managing Agricultural Land
5. Yukon's Agricultural Economy
6. Diversifying Yukon Agriculture
7. Support Services for Yukon Producers

The following summary provides a representative overview of the diverse range of comments we heard. It does not include every comment we received during the consultation and public engagement.

1. Values

Demand for Local Food

- 89% of respondents noted that it was important or very important to have access to local foods.
- 74% of respondents were satisfied or very satisfied with local products.
- Agriculture should continue to contribute to sustainability of communities.

Local supply and awareness

- Increase availability of local food for northern residents.
- Increase awareness and interest in agriculture and food.
- Further education of benefits of agriculture and the cost of food production.
- Inform consumers about the value of supporting local food systems and the overall sector.
- Support local food availability in the grocery store and promote farmers' markets and farm gate sales.
- Supply fresh, healthy food directly to consumers, while reducing the distance from farm to plate.

“Quality local food produced and consumed in the Yukon should be a driving force behind the Policy.”

Encourage a thriving Agriculture sector

- We need to build a relevant and viable agriculture industry. The strategy should support diversified farms to advance economic opportunities in the sector.

- We need to ensure standards are available for local food sales. We need to support a safe, self-reliant, environmentally sound agriculture sector.

One Government

- The Agriculture Policy needs to consider and complement existing strategies and policies. It should align with the Local Food Strategy, City of Whitehorse Local Food and Urban Agriculture Strategy.

Made in Yukon Approach

- Yukoners understand the unique challenges of producing fresh, safe and healthy agricultural products in the North's unique environment. We need a made for Yukon approach that reflects the challenges of growing the sector in the North.
- Agriculture is important because people need to eat, and health and food security increases the more locally produced food is available.

2. Agriculture and our Partners (Environment and First Nations)

First Nations

- Work closely with First Nations and wildlife officials to understand environmental and cultural impacts of agriculture.

- Work with First Nations on joint agricultural developments.
- Support First Nations farming initiatives focusing on food production within communities.
- Provide opportunity for First Nation input on programming and policy on an ongoing basis.

Farming within the Environment

- Reduce the number of human-wildlife conflicts due to agricultural activities through funding for electric fences and other efforts.
- Contain spread of disease and invasive plant species in the environment.
- Separate wildlife and domestic stock.
- Balance land development - agriculture land is often in areas of high wildlife value.
- More knowledge and education on wildlife habitat requirements is needed.
- "Please avoid habitat fragmentation."
- Incorporate environmental farm planning into farm business planning.

Environmental stewardship

- Implement initiatives to improve environmental management in the agriculture and agri-food sectors.
- Use extension and outreach tools that can promote wise stewardship.

“Support the safe, sustainable development of food production systems.”

Climate change

- We need to better understand climate change impacts and explore adaptation strategies.
- There is a need for local scientific knowledge, e.g. on insects and diseases that affect crops and livestock, impacts of daylight hours on plant growth.
- Promote import displacement to reduce carbon footprint of food and distance from farm to table.

Updated Agriculture Policy

- Develop key performance indicators for monitoring and reporting of progress.

Animal welfare

- Support strong animal welfare rules that protect the livestock and reduce wildlife conflict.
- Create legislation or regulation for fencing standards.

Coordinated Approach

- Collaborate with the Canadian Food Inspection Agency.
- Work with other agencies to reduce the cost of food for northern residents.

- Work with municipalities on agriculture and food.
- Ensure coordinated approach with other Yukon government departments and branches.

3. Land for Agriculture

Land availability

- 59% of respondents felt that more planned agricultural land was needed.
- 81% of respondents felt that further agricultural developments should be allowed on rural residential parcels.
- Maintain spot and planned land processes.
- Work with municipalities to develop suitable lands for agriculture.
- Provide education on the concept of land leasing and rental.
- Access to affordable land is often cited as a barrier to farming.
- Enabling titled land is key to successful financing.

Release of lands

- Land needs to be close to communities and markets, land if granted should not be titled unless used at highest and best use.
- Consider coordinating land development within municipal spaces.

- Create alternative pathways to land development for certain farm business plans.
- More land should be released through private developments.
- Land is sometimes not being developed in a method to be properly farmed.

“Diverse income sources are often needed to support the farm.”

Respectful neighbours

- Farming should be protected through zoning. Changing rural landscape with more residential development needs to be understood.
- Increasing densification of housing on farm land increases residential/farming conflicts.
- Examine adopting “right to farm” policies.

Subdividing

- Allow flexibility in the size of the agricultural parcel to be subdivided.
- The subdivision of agricultural land should be for the benefit of agriculture.
- Varied input on subdivision of agricultural land from not allowing it to being more flexible.

- Change the subdivision of agriculture parcels program to allow greater ability of existing farmers to sell land to new entrants.

Intensive farming

- Intensify use on existing land base should be pursued to reduce need for further land development.
- Intensive agriculture makes sense if it is intended to be specific to the raising of animals.
- Yukon is one of the last remaining areas that is not impacted by large scale farms, genetic modification and pesticide/herbicide runoff, and we should maintain that.

4. Managing Agricultural Land

Land utilization

- Respect First Nations land needs, and ensure land that is released is properly utilized.
- The Yukon government should be supervising and withdrawing these leases that are not being utilized properly.
- 36% of respondents felt that agricultural land was underutilized.
- Examine changes to the tax rates if land is not used as intended.

5. Yukon's Agricultural Economy

- “Penalize through property tax system if land owners refuse to farm”.
- Create productivity policy that mandates continued agriculture activity on all agriculture-zoned lands.
- Continue programs to financially support bringing land back into production.
- Enforce non-utilization clause and make portions of underutilized land available to new farmers.
- Support opportunities for alternate farming methods

Land clearing

- Create best management practices for land clearing.
- Government should support or sponsor use of a mulcher to mulch windrows.
- Examine other models of managing windrows aside from burning.

“Make sure land is used for farming, not country residential”

Grazing

- Optimize forage production for livestock grazing on rangeland.
- Grazing and pasturing livestock should be encouraged and supported.
- As the population grows and more livestock is locally raised, there will be a better market for field crops.

Regulations

- Promote profitability by reducing red tape.
- Federal and territorial legislation can often hinder agriculture industry development.
- Help facilitate regulatory hurdles for small producers and processors.
- Ensure safe, ethical food production.

Building code

- Improve regulatory process for farm buildings.
- Building challenges – lack of agriculture building code.
- Increase awareness on current regulations, zoning and code requirements for construction.

Shared economy

- Create shared commercial kitchen space for small producers to preparing value-added products and meet food safety standards.
- Examine co-space model for producing and selling farm products.

Branding

- Create certifications for local products.
- Effective distribution and marketing of local food through existing retail outlets.
- Certification of Yukon Grown or Yukon Born and Raised designation, and back up by legislation or regulation to be certified.

Labour

- Training new farmers and farm workers.
- Create labour programs for farm labour.
- “One thing I’d like to see is more labour available to farmers.”
- Create a labour pool of high school and college students.
- Increase investment and supports for local training, and for skill and capacity building.

Improve market access

- Create export opportunities to Alaska, and into Canada.
- Increase availability of local foods for northern residents
- There are opportunities with population growth and strong support from Yukon population.
- Provide local food producers with opportunities for larger market access to buyers.

- The government and should lead in the procurement of local food and non-food agriproducts.
- Varied responses, with some respondents supporting farmers’ markets and some recommending less focus on community markets.

“Less restrictive building codes for non-residential agricultural structures.”

Food distribution

- Increase producer and supplier opportunities and improve distribution networks for food and food related products.
- Increase locally produced food available in retail market and more local businesses utilizing locally sources food.

6. Diversifying Yukon Agriculture

Primary Use

- Define primary use, too much latitude on what is developed on farm.
- Primary use needs to be enforced.
- Better define primary use in this policy.
- Accessory and discretionary uses should not be allowed if farm is not the primary use of the property.

Diversity

- Support diversified farms including game farming.
- Need game farming under agriculture to see new game farms develop.
- Support for both organic and conventional farming.
- Maintain funding programs that support infrastructure development and diversification.
- Support diversity and encourage new models of agriculture unique to Yukon.
- Opportunities in new farming technologies including container farming.

“Please avoid habitat fragmentation.”

Value added

- Increase investment in viable, sustainable, commercial food production.
- Value added products can be improved with less red tape and less restrictions.
- 55% of respondents buy or wanted to buy more local value added products.
- Support the commercial and economic benefits of primary and secondary industry.
- Diversify the agriculture sector into food processing.

- Support the safe, sustainable development of food production systems.

Accessory Uses

- Support accessory uses on farm as it helps provide income to support farming activities.
- Concern is with those who are no longer farming as a primary use and only focused on accessory or discretionary uses.
- Not enough inspections to see that farming is primary use and secondary use have over taken primary use.

Biodiversity

- Diversification within an agriculture/silviculture portfolio.
- Integrate permaculture.

Horticulture

- More Yukon-grown plants available through retail or landscapers.
- Support the development of non-food agriproducts as well as food, such as landscaping plants and food-bearing perennials, where appropriate to land use. (i.e. - this does not mean that fertile ground should go towards hay.)
- Support non-commercial food production.

7. Support Services for Yukon Producers

Business operation support

- Help financially with the costs, and provide office support for paperwork/ computer problems.
- 77% of respondents wanted continued support of funding programs.

Organic

- Support costs associated with organic farming.
- Promote organic production methods.
- Organic certification – can only use the word organic if certified.
- Continue research into organic methods of production, public education.

Knowledge transfer

- Knowledge transfer from current growers to new and potential growers.
- Encourage and support the transfer of food production skills.
- Create a community of extension agents.
- Support workshops and networks.
- Assist the agriculture industry with human resources, succession planning and new entrants.
- Look for partnerships with colleges and universities.

Reduce energy costs

- Innovate and create research opportunities for cost-efficient power and heat sources.
- Review opportunities for adopting solar or other alternative energy sources.

Access to equipment

- Subsidize farm equipment.
- Limited local equipment options available.
- Provide funding support to bring up good used farm equipment. Shipping costs to import equipment from down south are high.

Loan programs

- Examine a low or zero interest loan program for infrastructure not currently covered through funding programs (e.g. - for greenhouses, barns, etc.).
- More funding for private infrastructure to help address climatic limitations (e.g. - greenhouses) including low interest loan programs.

Made-in-Yukon solutions

- Support local research into appropriate cultivars and cultivation techniques.
- Business plans need to reflect Yukon realities.

What's Next?

The input you provided on these topics will help us write an updated agriculture policy to support Yukon agriculture towards 2030. We want our updated agriculture policy to support all aspects of the agriculture and local food sectors, including food for people, feed for livestock and food distribution and environmental impacts.

Updating agriculture policy will help make Yukon more self-sufficient in food production, and support a prosperous agriculture sector.

We will now roll up our sleeves and write the updated policy working closely across Yukon government, with other partners, including First Nations, and with the Agriculture Industry Advisory Committee. The new policy will be released this winter.

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