

**YUKON FARM
PRODUCTS GUIDE**

**LOCAL
AGRICULTURE NEWS**

**YUKON YOUNG
FARMERS**



Frequently Asked Questions

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Thank you to all the Yukon farmers who participated in helping to answer the FAQs above!

What makes farming North of 60 different from farming in southern Canada?

"To farm in the Yukon you've really got to be willing to jump in with both feet ... and you're jumping into mud... which is probably frozen." - A Yukon cattle farmer

Beyond the limitations imposed by the short growing season and cool climate, which are addressed later in this document, farming in the Yukon differs from farming in much of southern Canada mainly because of the relative lack of resources and infrastructure. Farmers need to be willing to manage a lot on their own and plan far in advance to ensure they have the needed supplies and equipment for the year. Examples of challenges for Yukon farmers are:

- Shipping farm materials to Yukon
 - Researching different suppliers re: shipping options – some may have prohibitive shipping costs or don't ship to Yukon
 - Costs may vary considerably by time of year
 - Bulk ordering often more cost efficient, but requires significant planning
- Caring for livestock over winter
 - Ensuring adequate feed stockpile, planning for the event of a shortage and being prepared to pay more if purchasing on an as-needed basis
 - Sourcing parts to install and maintain water heating systems and planning for associated costs
 - Having needed supplies on hand if (when) something breaks
- Planning marketing strategy
 - No local auction or feedlot, for example
 - Yukon farms may lack the scale and/or certification needed (CanadaGAP) to sell produce to a large retailer

How do I find land to farm in the Yukon?

Land Grant Program

In addition to traditional private sales, Yukon residents can also obtain agricultural land through the Agricultural Land Grant Program. Successful applicants are permitted to lease and farm a plot of land for a period of 7 years, or until the pre-agreed upon terms of the lease have been met, at which time the title of the land is signed over to the farmer. There are two types of land grants available:

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1. Spot Land Grants

- Pertain to plots of land that are located more than 100 km from a municipality
- Land may be between 6 and 65 hectares in size
- Must be considered adequate for farming purposes, meaning certain soil quality, geographic and climatic criteria must be met
- Finding land with adequate soil capability can be a challenge - 80% of soil on the plot needs to be Class 5 or better according to the [Agriculture Canada Land Capability Class](#) descriptions (most of farmland in Southern Canada is located on soils that are Class 3 or lower; Class 4 or 5 soil is used for farming purposes in Yukon).

A summary of the application process is as follows:

1. plot of land is assessed by Agriculture Branch regarding arability. If land is approved;
2. the applicant then prepares and submits a Farm Development Plan (FDP). If the FDP is accepted by Agriculture Branch;
3. the application is sent to Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Board (YESAB) for review. If the application is approved by YESAB;
4. the plot of land is surveyed and assessed, and the seven-year agreement is signed.

The seven-year agreement lays out terms by which the applicant "pays" for the land. The money the applicant puts into developing the land is considered on a one-to-one (dollar for dollar) basis towards the assessed value of the land. Sweat equity is also included in the calculation. Land is surveyed throughout the term of the lease agreement to ensure development plans are progressing as intended. Once the development of the land is completed as agreed upon, or the seven-year lease is up (whichever comes first), the land will then be legally signed over to the farmer.

2. Planned Land Grants

Planned land grants are available for plots of land located within 100 km of a municipality that have been pre-surveyed and approved for agricultural activities. These planned lands are advertised by the Agriculture Branch and grants are awarded on a competitive basis. Unlike spot land grants, the applicant pays for the cost of developing the land up front. The process leading to final approval of the lease is otherwise similar to the spot land grant program.

Land Link Program

The Agriculture Branch also offers a Land Link program that matches agriculture land owners with prospective farmers who are looking for land to start or expand their farming business. Details can be found [here](#) on the Agriculture Branch website.

Sources:

<http://www.emr.gov.yk.ca/agriculture/>

<https://www.yukon-news.com/life-for-the-right-people-with-the-right-plan-yukons-agriculture-branch-has-land/>

http://www.emr.gov.yk.ca/agriculture/ag_land.html

What can I grow in the Yukon?

Despite the challenges posed by the short growing season, cool temperatures, poor soil quality and small amount of precipitation, there are many crops that have been successfully grown here.

Hay is the predominant crop grown in the Yukon and its production is closely tied to the number of horses kept in the territory, though it is commonly sourced for other animals as well. Production of vegetables and berries has increased steadily according to each census since 2001. In general, cool weather cruciferous crops and root vegetables do well here.

Many breeds of livestock seem to thrive in the Yukon given the proper care. Breeds that have been selected for cold hardiness should be chosen whenever possible.

Examples of crops that have been successfully grown in the Yukon include:

Potatoes, carrots, beets, herbs, green onions, spinach, lettuces, broccoli, romanesco, cauliflower, kale, cabbage, parsnips, tomatoes, cucumbers, zucchinis, field peas, rutabaga, haskaps, raspberries, currants, Saskatoon berries, apples (using specially designed shelters).

Livestock raised in the Yukon includes:

Chickens (broilers and layers), pigs, beef cattle, rabbits, quail, elk, dairy cattle, alpacas, ducks, turkeys, sheep and goats.

How do region and microclimate affect farming in the Yukon?

Agricultural suitability for an area is assessed in large part by using Effective Growing Degree Days (EGDD), which are a measure of accumulated heat units within certain temperature thresholds within which crop growth can occur. EGDD are calculated using a formula that includes average daily temperatures as well as long daylight hours. Based on trends observed from multiple years of climate monitoring, Yukon can be divided into 4 agricultural regions:

- Whitehorse and surrounding area – Takhini River Valley, Ibex Valley, Mayo Road, and Marsh Lake areas
- Central Yukon Basin (Mayo and Dawson City)
- Southwest Yukon (Haines Junction and area)
- Southeast Yukon (Watson Lake and area)

Most of the agricultural activity in Yukon is centered around the Whitehorse area because of the proximity to market and the need for most farmers to maintain off-farm income, however, the Dawson/Mayo region is typically warmer, and the Watson Lake region is warmer with more precipitation and later fall frosts, making these areas better suited to farming in terms of climate. Dawson City was the first area of Yukon to develop an agriculture industry during the Gold Rush years and is currently home to about 20 farms. Haines Junction is the least suited to agricultural activity in terms of climate, with the coolest summers and greatest frequency of frosts of any of the 4 regions.

Growing season conditions in the Yukon can vary substantially from year to year, and microclimate - even a few kilometers difference - can play an influential role in agro-climatic capability. Wind, for example, can affect a farm in many ways - it can blow over hoop houses, blow off row cover, whip moisture from the soil, and cause damage to delicate growing tips of plants. One area may be particularly windy while a nearby field may benefit from natural windbreaks - these factors are important to consider when farm planning.

Source: [Yukon Agriculture State of the Industry Report 2010-2011-2012](#)

How long is the growing season? How do the long daylight hours affect farming?

"A good word for describing the growing season here is 'intense'. Things grow quickly, they can really take off... you need to be ready to deal with that intensity." -A Yukon market gardener

According to the [Yukon Agriculture State of the Industry Report 2010-2011-2012](#), the growing season officially begins on the fifth day of daily average temperature at or above 5°C and ends the first time the temperature drops to -2.2°C after July 15. Local farmers are usually able to plant outside after June 1, though crops would have been started indoors and/or in greenhouses months earlier. Killing frosts can occur any month of the year in the Yukon, meaning farmers must keep a close eye on the forecast and get to know their land well - a forecasted low of 5°C overnight for the Whitehorse area may mean -2°C in your field.

The long daylight hours enjoyed in the Yukon during the summer promote rapid crop growth, which partially makes up for the short growing season, though farmers need to be prepared to keep up with the rapid growth and associated needs of the plant, for example an increased need to water. Some plants will not develop properly (i.e. develop flowers/fruit) if exposed to too much sunlight, and others, like spinach, may bolt. Again, selecting varieties that are adapted to northern climates is key.

What are some cold climate farming methods used in the North?

Farmers in the Yukon must be resourceful and inventive to deal with the climatic realities of growing food North of 60. Some of the cold climate farming methods that have been used here are:

- Season extension and frost protection techniques
 - Floating row covers
 - Polytunnels
 - Plastic mulches
 - Sprinklers for frost protection
 - Solar-powered root zone heaters
- Greenhouses designed for northern conditions
 - Use of compost heat
 - Insulation of walls
 - Use of heat absorbing materials (rock, water) to collect daytime heat for stabilization of night-time temperatures
 - Ensuring air circulation
 - Use of an arctic entrance
- Selecting cold-hardy, short-season varieties of crops (fewest days to maturity, ability to germinate in cool, wet soils)
- Selecting or developing cold-hardy breeds of livestock (smaller stature, thicker fur, ex. Highland cattle)
- Overwintering livestock
 - Providing windbreak, south-facing shelter, plenty of room to move around
 - Installing and maintaining water system - insulated troughs, heated hose, reliable power supply, back up plans in case of power outages etc.
 - Daily checks on animals and learning how they behave in the cold temperatures - for example, cows may avoid drinking water when it's very cold outside unless the water is heated to 10°C - 15°

Is it difficult to access farming equipment and supplies in the Yukon?

Some farm supplies and equipment can be purchased locally, but many supplies need to be shipped in from southern Canada

Shipping: Shipping costs for feed and other needed materials can be prohibitive depending on the product and the retailer. Farmers may coordinate efforts to bring supplies back up north in a single trip (i.e. returning north with a trailer) to avoid expensive shipping costs. Ordering in bulk quantities from one supplier is often more cost effective than ordering small quantities of goods from multiple retailers, though this does require a significant amount of planning in advance.

Equipment: The YAA owns 5 pieces of farm equipment that are available for rent (mower, plough, aerator, drill and manure spreader). Several local farmers also offer equipment that is available for rent. Farmers that own their own equipment in the Yukon need to plan to have supplies on hand for maintenance and repair, as local options may be limited. Equipment repair is often arranged through a farmer's local network. It is important to know who has experience working on what equipment. Local equipment retailers may be able to bring in specialized equipment upon request in some cases. Having someone on the farm with mechanical skill is advantageous.

Feed for livestock: Planning well for winter feed requirements for your animals is critical. There is typically an abundant supply of high quality local hay in the Yukon, though depending on needs and time of year it can be expensive. Many factors come into play when making decisions about sourcing feed – price point, nutritional requirements for your livestock, and shipping details/timing/costs are all important considerations.

The document *Agricultural Feed Options for Northern Livestock* (Drury 2014) is available on the [Agriculture Branch website](#) for those investigating ways to produce appropriate feed for their animals.

How do I get my farm business started?

Business name and registration: Information on securing a business name and registering your business can be found on the [Department of Community Services – Corporate Affairs](#) webpage.

Business plan: It may be beneficial to hire a consultant to help develop your farm business plan. It is important to think through your marketing plan for sale of your product within the territory and research the volume and type of product that is in demand, as well as options for storage of your product if you have excess, etc. There are funding programs that will support this important step in business planning. Contact the YAA office for information about the new federal-territorial funding program.

Environmental Farm Plan: Completing an [Environmental Farm Plan](#) may increase access to funding opportunities. There are funding programs that will support this important step in business planning. Contact the YAA office for information about the new federal-territorial funding program.

Land development: There are several farmers in Yukon who will do farm work (ex. clearing, plowing land) on a contract basis. They can be found via the [Yukon Farm Products and Services Guide](#). Search for farm contractors and land development.

What is the local market like for Yukon farm products? Where do producers sell their products?

Generally speaking, Yukoners have become more aware of issues related to food security in recent years and this heightened awareness helps to support local food production and consumption. Market research is an important part of business planning.

Yukon producers can sell their products at farm gate, to local retailers, to a food co-op, to local restaurants and caterers, at farmers markets, or via community-supported agriculture (CSA) programs. Some of the grocery stores in Whitehorse have dedicated space for stocking local product. Local food may also be sold to government programs ([Selling Yukon Products](#)).

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Farming – North of 60

The ability to raise crops and livestock in the Yukon has been demonstrated from the late 1800s to the present. Over the years, agricultural activities in the Yukon have developed in response to a variety of factors. The influx of prospectors during the Gold Rush resulted in several farms being developed around the Dawson City region. Following the Gold Rush years, small farms continued to operate to meet the on-going need for fresh, Yukon-grown vegetables.

During the 40s, 50s and 60s, the building of the Alaska highway made the demand for local food less urgent as southern goods could now be obtained with relative ease. By the 1970s, however, a resurgence of interest in farming had taken place, bringing with it the formation of the Yukon Agriculture and Livestock Association (now YAA). As of 2016 there were over 140 farms in operation in the Yukon, along with several agriculture-related organizations, a dedicated Agriculture Branch at the Government of Yukon, a research farm located just outside of Whitehorse, farmers markets, a teaching farm in Dawson City, and much more.

Diversity of Yukon Agriculture

Yukon agriculture encompasses a wide range of activities. Hay continues to be the leading crop in production in terms of acreage and capital; livestock is raised for meat, milking, or for fibre; the haskap berry industry is rapidly developing; a large federally-inspected egg-producing farm is now in operation, increased cold storage allows for more produce to be available through the winter, a dairy operation will soon be operating, and farmers are growing a wide variety of vegetables to meet demand for locally produced food. The ever-expanding variety of farm products available in Yukon prompted the YAA to update the online version of the [Yukon Farm Products and Services Guide](#) in 2016.

Organic farming continues to establish itself in the Yukon, with both certified and non-certified organic farms in operation, and an active organic growers group ([Growers of Organic Food Yukon](#)). Other agricultural activities in Yukon include the production/provision of: farrier services, equine therapy services, fish farming, forest seedlings, game farming, grass sod, forage, bee-keeping and honey, and increased planning for the development of aquaponic and hydroponic facilities. In addition, First Nation governments are investigating agricultural initiatives on territorial land.

Yukon Agriculture Statistics – 2016 Census

The Canadian census of 2016 reported 142 farms operating in the Yukon encompassing a total farm area of 10,330 hectares, with 6,801 ha under production (crops and pasture). The number of farms operating in the Yukon has fluctuated since the 2001 census, from a high of 170 (2001) to a low of 130 (2011), though the total area in production has not changed as notably. Fruit and vegetable production has increased steadily since 2001, which is not surprising as the demand for locally produced food and awareness of food security has also increased in recent years, demonstrated in part by the 2016 update of the online [Yukon Farm Products and Services Guide](#) and the publication of the [Local Food Strategy for Yukon: Increasing Production and Consumption of Yukon-Grown Food, 2016-2021](#).

News Articles about Yukon Agriculture

With funding support from Growing Forward 2, YAA commissioned Yukon chef and food journalist Miche Genest to write a series of articles about Yukon agriculture referencing both historical and current content. The articles were published by Yukon News in the autumn of 2016 and spring of 2017.

[Online guide makes it easy to find Yukon farmers](#)

[These Yukon farmers go to market](#)

[Hay is for horses](#)

[How hay for horses led to hay for livestock](#)

[Profile: two Yukon haymakers](#)

[Robert Campbell and early cattle drives](#)

[Getting meat to the Klondike](#)

[Turn of the century food security](#)

[The lean years of Yukon farming](#)

[Mixed farming at Pelly River Ranch](#)

[Urban agriculture and city gardens](#)

[Community gardens and fresh local produce](#)

[First Nations farming and reconnecting with the land](#)

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