

DRAFT

# YUKON DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

## AGRICULTURE AND FOOD

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*Building the Future*

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# Agriculture and Food Strategy

## A Progress Report ■ April, 1987

**T**here are about 30 full time, and 75 part-time farmers in the Yukon. The economic value of agricultural production was estimated to be about \$1.3 million in 1985, and it has been suggested that some of the food which is imported from elsewhere could be Yukon-grown.

Agriculture in the Yukon faces a unique set of circumstances. First, it is northern agriculture. There is a limited amount of land which can sustain agricultural production, and the purchasing of supplies and the marketing of produce are complicated by the small size of, and the distance from, markets.

Secondly, agriculture in the Yukon operates in a particular social and political context. Two aspects deserve special mention:

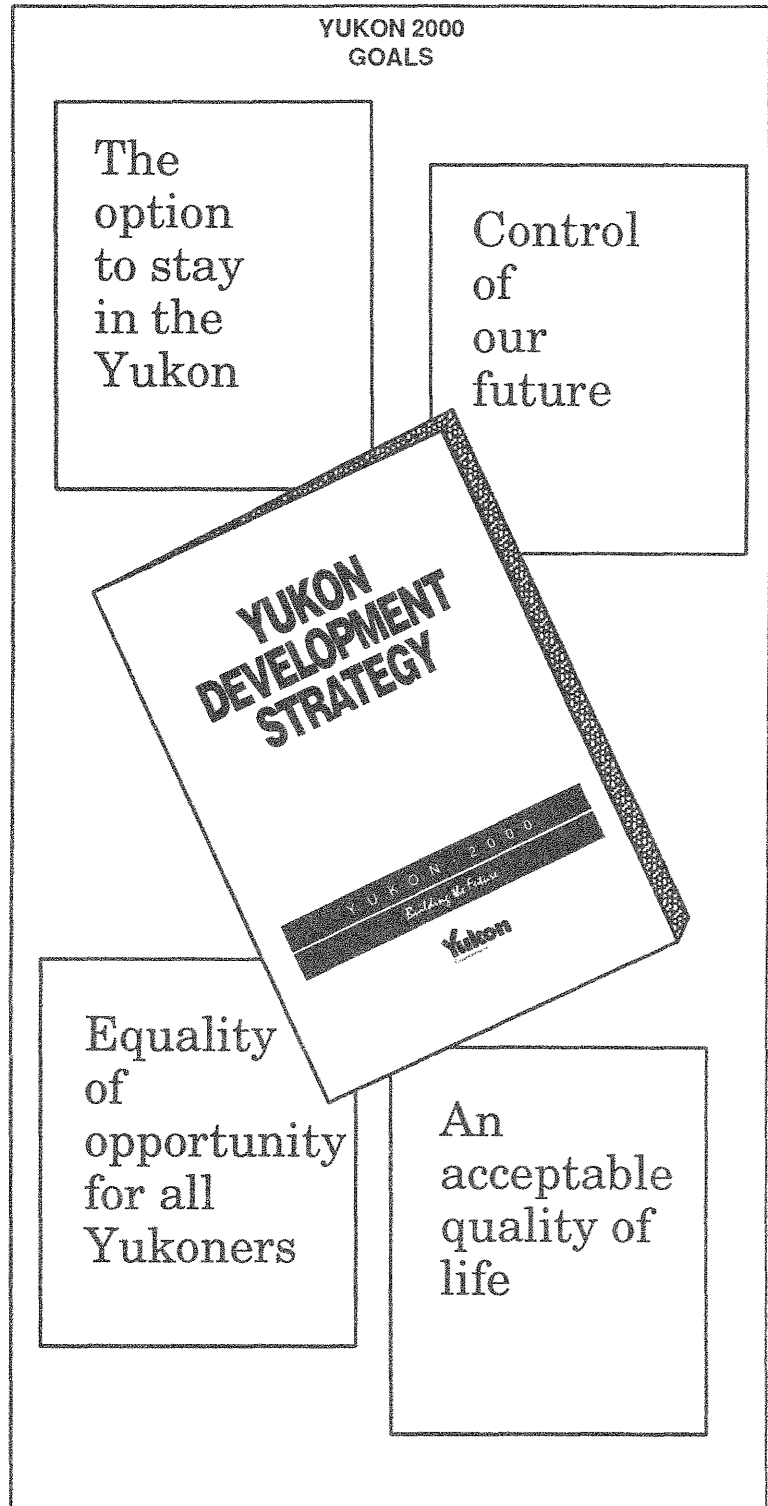
Agriculture competes for the use of land with other uses, some of which are part of the Yukon's heritage. Hunting and trapping, wildlife habitat, mining, forestry and recreation are all potentially competing for the same land.

The Yukon has two distinct cultural groups that do not share all values and traditions: Indian and non-Indian. The Indian population does not have a traditional involvement in agriculture. Traditional uses of the land by Native people include hunting and trapping, and to some extent, harvesting of berries and other edible native plants.

### Directions

*1. Make more land available for agriculture.*

This can be done through spot



land transfers, land use planning and a separate application process for rural residential land. Development of viable farms will require careful positioning so that they can benefit from the better agricultural land and beneficial microclimates.

*2. Develop production for the local market.*

This will allow for the balanced development of the production capacity, infrastructure and markets. Developing a local market should take precedence over the development of a specialty export market.

*3. Undertake research on the industry:*

- To determine the potential for import substitution through the assessment of markets.
- To determine the best horticultural crops, seeds and fertilizers for the different regions of the Yukon.

*4. Remove barriers to the development of the industry, for example:*

- By passing legislation to allow game farming and game ranching.
- By developing meat inspection regulations and infrastructure.



## Constraints

- \* lack of available agricultural land
- \* need for meat inspection legislation and services
- \* lack of meat-processing facilities
- \* lack of a large animal veterinarian
- \* high cost of transportation
- \* lack and high cost of equipment parts and services
- \* lack of legislation for wildlife farming
- \* lack of storage facilities
- \* need for market development
- \* little availability of technology and information



## Options

*1. Make land available for agriculture.*

There are three general directions for making more land available for agriculture. The planning framework within which the land application process should take place should include provisions for:

- Individual land development requirements that need to be met before title is transferred. Requirements should be adjusted for the type of agriculture that is proposed.
- Assessment of economic potential of each agricultural application through the submission of an agricultural development plan by the applicant.
- Consideration of all competing land uses.
- Consideration of water needs and rights, especially in the semiarid Whitehorse region.

*2. Develop infrastructure for the meat industry.*

A fully developed infrastructure for the meat industry will consist of veterinarian services, meat inspection, slaughter facilities, grading standards, and a meat processing industry. Several pieces of this system are or will soon be in place. There are butchers who can process meats, and the Department of Renewable Resources is arranging to bring a private large-animal veterinarian to the Yukon, who could also function as a meat inspector.

Territorial grading standards are being written, but more development is needed in the area of slaughtering facilities and production. Further development of the meat infrastructure should be in line with the production levels that can be expected in the foreseeable future.

Specifically, the development options include:

- Establishment of simple slaughtering facilities on selected farms, where inspected kills can take place.
- Purchase of a mobile abattoir as soon as the production has reached a sufficient number.

- Work towards making territorially inspected meat acceptable to restaurants and end-consumers.
- Integrate the meat processing infrastructure with the needs for processing facilities for game meats as far as possible without compromising the health and sanitation standards.

A mobile slaughtering facility with a capacity of 15 - 20 beef sides, equipped with a small power plant, pressurized water system, hoists, power split saw, and hanging rails will cost between \$40,000 and \$60,000. This type of setup is used in the prairie provinces to do custom killing at the farm site. Second hand equipment may be available at 50 - 60% of new price.

*3. Reduce high costs and lack of availability of inputs and machinery through producer co-ops.*

Bulk buying of inputs such as feed and fertilizers will allow producers to make use of volume discounts for products as well as avoid surcharges for partial loads. Fertilizer, feed grains, and hay can all be bought and stored collectively for later distribution to the participating farmers.

Cooperatives will allow farmers:

- To profit from economies of size in storage and handling that cannot easily be reached by small operations.
- To make more effective use of the Federal Feed Freight Assistance Program that contributes \$50/tonne to offset high transportation costs.
- To decrease machinery costs through shared ownership. Equipment that is used only at limited times throughout the year should be considered for shared ownership. Examples are: fertilizer applicator, grain dryer, and land breaking equipment.

*4. Pass legislation to allow game ranching and game farming.*

Game ranching and game farming are relatively new agricultural development opportunities. Existing legislation is not set up to deal with the realities of game ranching. The

Wildlife Act does not allow for the private ownership of wild animals, nor does it allow the sale of animals, meat or by-products. The Act allows special permits and current game ranching in the Yukon is proceeding under these.

New legislation is needed to make the existence of game ranches possible by allowing the private ownership of wild animals and the sale of their meat and by-products.

Specifically the legislation should address:

- Need to contain the animals by appropriate game fences to prevent interaction between wild and domesticated stock.
- Need for identification of each animal by means of ear tags, brands, or tattoos to minimize possibilities of bringing wild stock into the confinement.
- Need to make wild meat from a game ranch easily traced through the processing system to minimize the possibilities for poachers to bring wild meat into the system.
- Need to establish inspection regulations for wild meat.

*5. Alleviate continuity of supply problems for horticultural crops through adequate storage facilities.*

All horticultural production is seasonal, except in a greenhouse. One of the difficulties of marketing horticultural crops is that all of the local supplies reach the market at about the same time. The seasonality depresses the prices and makes it impossible to build a good working relationship with retailers, who demand a reliable and stable supply year round.

Keeping a part of the harvest of those vegetables that store well from the market at harvest time will likely increase the returns to the farmer and allow for a longer supply to local stores. Suitable crops include potatoes, cabbages, turnips and onions.

The development of a storage infrastructure should be in line with the production that can be expected in the foreseeable future.

Specifically, the development options include:

- Building of "on-farm" storage for the production that takes place close to the market.

- Possible establishment of a central storage facility in Whitehorse if the production increases and the location of the production shifts to areas away from the major market.

On-farm storage can be as simple as a well designed root cellar. Cost of a cellar can be as low as \$400 - \$500 for some lumber and rental of excavation machinery. A well designed root cellar has insulated walls, concrete floor, bins, and a ventilation system. Construction costs will range between \$200 and \$300 per metric tonne. One acre of potatoes will yield between 7 and 9 tonnes, requiring a cellar of about \$2000. Commercial storage facilities cost some \$125 - \$225 per metric tonne, not including the ventilation system. Total cost of a 500 tonne commercial facility is around \$100,000.

*6. Increase public awareness of agriculture through effective promotion.*

Substantial work has already gone into the design and production of a logo and slogan to identify Yukon grown products. Development of the sector will be further helped if the public at large has a better understanding of the current and potential contribution of agriculture to the social and economic well being of us all.

Development opportunities include:

- Market development through cooperative advertising of local produce and farmers markets in the local media.
- Increase public acceptance of locally produced meat. Increase their knowledge of the industry through newspaper articles, brochures and focussed lobbying of community leaders.

- Publicize agricultural success stories to counter skepticism about the viability of agriculture in the Yukon.
- Establish demonstration projects to show the possibilities of northern agriculture to potential farmers and other interested people.

*7. Promote more research and development.*

Research and development is an ongoing task. There are ongoing experiments under the New Crop Development Fund. The EDA has sponsored a berry experiment in Mayo and a sod experiment and game ranching experiment in the Whitehorse area. In addition, a number of studies have been commissioned to look at various parts of the industry.

Many aspects of northern agriculture are, however, still little known or poorly documented.

Development opportunities include:

- Continuation of the New Crop Development experiments and demonstrations to get better knowledge of suitable varieties and cultural requirements.
- Establishment of information links between the Yukon and other northern areas in Canada and abroad along the lines of links established with Alaska.
- Establish commodity groups for the purpose of information sharing along the lines of the horticultural club.
- Analyze the potential for import substitution across the agricultural industry on a regional basis.