Vol. 11 No. 3, pp. 5–18 December 2024

Canadian Food Studies La Revue canadienne des études sur l'alimentation

Field Report

Reflections from first-generation small-scale vegetable farmers

Richard S. Bloomfield[a*] and Deishin Lee[b]

[a] Western University; ORCID: 0009-0003-8397-8513
[b] Western University; ORCID: 0000-0002-6335-2877

Abstract

Renewal of the agriculture sector requires an influx of young farmers, either members of farming families or first-generation farmers. The latter face distinct challenges (Bloomfield, 2023; Magnan et al., 2023). This study seeks to understand some of their motivations and challenges in order to inform policy changes to support and encourage more first-generation farmers.

Agriculture has long been regarded in Canada as not only economically but also culturally significant. Yet less than 1% of the population are recognised as farmers by the latest census data (Statistics Canada, 2021). In the last three decades alone, Canada has net lost nearly 150,000 farmers and the average age of a Canadian farmer is now 56. Only 8.5% of Canadian farmers were under 35 in the last Agricultural Census, compared to 20% in 1991, and that percentage has been declining steadily since 1931 (Clapp, 2023; Magnan et al., 2022; Qualman et al., 2018; Statistics Canada, 2006, 2022). Further, the number of young people from farming families staying in agriculture is declining. Several reports, including that of the Royal Bank of Canada Climate Action Institute, show that a majority of farmers do not have a succession plan in place although, within the next decade, 40% will retire (Yaghi, 2023). People from non-farming backgrounds find it difficult to enter the profession due to barriers that include prohibitive costs and lack of training. To ensure that Canada can feed its growing population, we must address the farmer shortage by understanding the experiences of new—particularly young—farmers.

Keywords: Agriculture in Canada; agriculture and municipal land use; agricultural policy; first-generation farmers; local food; small-scale vegetable production; young farmers

*Corresponding author: rbloomfi@uwo.ca

DOI: 10.15353/cfs-rcea.v11i3.657
ISSN: 2292-3071

Résumé

Le renouvellement du secteur agricole nécessite un afflux de jeunes agriculteurs et agricultrices, qu'ils soient issus de familles d'agriculteurs ou agriculteurs de première génération. Ces derniers sont confrontés à des défis distincts (Bloomfield, 2023 ; Magnan et al., 2023). Cette étude vise à comprendre certaines de leurs motivations et certains de leurs défis afin d'éclairer les changements de politiques visant à soutenir et à encourager un plus grand nombre d'agriculteurs de première génération.

Au Canada, l'agriculture est depuis longtemps considérée comme un secteur important sur le plan économique, mais aussi sur le plan culturel. Pourtant, d'après les données du dernier recensement (Statistique Canada, 2021), la part de la population reconnue comme agricultrice est de moins de 1 %. Au cours des trois dernières décennies, le Canada a perdu près de 150 000 agriculteurs, et aujourd'hui, l'âge moyen d'un agriculteur canadien est de 56 ans. Seuls 8,5 % des agriculteurs canadiens avaient moins de 35 ans lors du dernier Recensement de l'agriculture, contre 20 % en 1991, et ce pourcentage n'a cessé de diminuer depuis 1931 (Clapp, 2023 ; Magnan et al., 2022 ; Qualman et al., 2018 ; Statistique Canada, 2006, 2022).

Notamment, le nombre de jeunes issus de familles d'agriculteurs qui restent dans le domaine est en baisse. Plusieurs rapports, dont celui de l'Institut d'action climatique de la Banque Royale

Introduction

This field report shares insights from first-generation farmers to inform policy recommendations that would benefit such farmers in the Middlesex-Elgin-Perth Counties region and more broadly in Ontario.

Agriculture has long been regarded in Canada as not only economically but also culturally significant. Yet less than 1 percent of the population are recognised as farmers by the latest census data (Statistics Canada, 2021). In the last three decades alone, Canada has net lost nearly 150,000 farmers and the average age of a Canadian farmer is now fifty-six. Only 8.5 percent of Canadian farmers were under thirty-five in the last Agricultural Census, compared to 20 percent in 1991, and that percentage has been declining steadily since 1931 (Clapp, 2023; Magnan et al., 2022; Qualman et al., 2018; Statistics Canada, 2006, 2022). Further, the number of young people from farming families staying in agriculture is declining. Several reports, including that of the Royal Bank of Canada Climate Action Institute, show that a majority of farmers do not have a succession plan in place, despite 40 percent will retire within the next decade (Yaghi, 2023). People from non-farming backgrounds find it difficult to enter the profession due to barriers that include prohibitive costs and lack of training. To ensure that Canada can feed its growing population, we must address the farmer shortage by understanding the experiences of new—particularly young—farmers.

Renewal of the agriculture sector requires an influx of young farmers, either members of farming families or first-generation farmers. The latter face distinct challenges, some of which have been detailed elsewhere (Bloomfield, 2023; Magnan et al., 2023). This field note builds on previous work which seeks to further understand some of their motivations and challenges in

order to inform policy changes to support and encourage more first-generation farmers.

We interviewed six first-generation small-scale vegetable producers running four operations in Middlesex, Elgin, and Perth Counties in Ontario. Our focus on first-generation farmers naturally led to a focus on small farms which, in turn, are typically vegetable producers (Muñoz, 2021). First-generation farmers tend to be small-scale because they do not have access to large swaths of family-owned farmland (Laforge et al., 2018; Smaje, 2023; Weis, 2007). Due to the small land tracts available to them, these farmers must generate high revenue per acre, thus leading many to farm fresh vegetables—which are higher value than traditional commodity cash crops such as corn, soy, and wheat. Since small farms tend to contribute directly to local food systems, they help to strengthen food-system resilience (Dale, 2021). Understanding and supporting small first-generation farms can have a broader positive impact on communities and the food system, in addition to addressing the problem of declining farmer population.

Methodology

We conducted qualitative semi-structured interviews starting with a list of questions about their motivation for starting a farm, how they run their operation, and how they see the future policy landscape with follow-ups based on their responses. We interviewed six first-generation small-scale vegetable farmers running four operations in the Middlesex-Elgin-Perth County region from January to April 2020. This timing was intentionally selected to avoid peak planting and harvesting seasons for vegetable farmers. To solicit participants, we contacted personal acquaintances in the local farm community. One of the authors is embedded within the local farm community and has farm experience which helped to inform the question development and discussions with participants. We then used a snowball approach to connect with others through referrals from the initial set. We were able to create a small group of producers who fit the purpose of this research. Eight first-generation farmers were approached and six agreed to interviews. One round of interviews was conducted in person, each interview lasting forty-five to sixty-five minutes. Three of the four conversations took place inside a house located on the farm, while the fourth took place in an urban home because there was no residence on the land they farmed. Table 1 shows the main characteristics of our participants. Throughout this paper a pseudonym system is used to represent the participants including one letter and number. The letter represents the farm, and the number indicates which participant. The research protocol was approved by the University Research Ethics Board in accordance with the Tri-Council Human Rights Tribunal. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed totalling over 21,000 words, by the authors.

The farms in our study ranged from 0.25 to fourteen acres of cropland in production. Notably, two farm operations owned the land and two leased. Their primary outlets for distribution were weekly farmers markets, community supported agriculture programs

(CSAs),[1] and directly to restaurant chefs. All participants had some form of off-farm employment, a significantly higher proportion than the 50 percent that was reported in the latest census data in Canada and has been unchanged since at least 2001 (Statistics Canada, 2006, 2021).

Table 1: Characteristics of Participants

Characteristic	Farm A Participant A1, A2	Farm B Participant B1	Farm C Participant C1, C2	Farm D Participant D1
Size of farm (acres)	14	0.5	0.25	7
Number of years in operation	8	3	2	9
Number of full-time employees	3	1	0	2
Number of seasonal employees	4	1	0	2
Number of owners	2	1	2	2
Owner(s) time on farm	Owner 1: FT Owner 2: PT	Owner 1: FT	Owner 1: PT Owner 2: PT	Owner 1: FT Owner 2: PT
Owner(s) off-farm work	Owner 1: No Owner 2: Yes	Owner 1: Yes	Owner 1: Yes Owner 2: Yes	Owner 1: No Owner 2: Yes
Distribution channels	• Farmers markets: 60% • CSA: 35% • Restaurants: 5%	• Farmers markets: 67% • Restaurants: 33%	• Farmers market: 85% • CSA: 15%	• Restaurants and retailers: 60% • Farmers markets: 40%
Land: own / lease	Own	Lease	Own	Lease (2 locations)

Learnings from interviews

The farmers we interviewed shared valuable information about their motivations for starting a farm and their primary challenges. Their motivations can be understood in terms of their relationship to their customers (value proposition) and a broader set of commitments to society (intrinsic motivations). Challenges identified were mainly financial and operational constraints.

[1]CSA is a model in which customers buy a "share" in the farm at the beginning of the year (typically before any harvest) in exchange for a weekly box of vegetables during the harvest for a predetermined number of weeks (COG, 2024).

Value proposition to customers

When asked about their value propositions, all participants felt that customers valued higher quality vegetables. Vegetables were sold within a day or two of being harvested and most participants associated that freshness with quality. This is in contrast to produce distributed through an industrial food supply chain that may take weeks moving from harvest to plate. Some participants also mentioned the presentation of their food being critical for capturing the awe of their customers. Participant B1 stated: "The thing we hear the most immediately is just that the produce is beautiful. We are very particular about presentation. And I think that's real. When a chef opens up a box and everything is spotless and really clean, it's kind of this seamless thread of excitement."

Notably, official Organic Certification[2] was not seen as a selling point by any participant and none were certified at the time of the interviews. Participant B1 noted that they "came to the understanding that what people really wanted was not to see that you are Organic Certified but just to see that it is local and fresh and it's me." Similarly, Participant A1 stated that "a lot of people aren't looking at us because we're organic. I think it's people who want to buy from the farmer and recognise that quality difference, I think that's the biggest thing." Organic Certification conveys a dimension of quality to consumers through a trusted third party. This could be helpful for large-scale operators in the industrial food system who are disconnected from consumers, but was viewed as unnecessary for these farmers, who could communicate directly with customers through weekly conversations on delivery or at farmers markets. Participant B1 explained: "These relationships have proven to be very fruitful. There is something really nice about seeing the same people every week and there is something nice about having built that trust with a chef and built a relationship to the point where we sit down in the winter and talk about, 'Oh man, let's grow this together.' Chefs are now coming out to the farm more to be more involved."

Therefore, even though all participants practised methods of farming that often met or even exceeded the minimum requirements for Organic Certification, they felt that it offered them only minimal benefit, while the administrative costs of certification were often prohibitive.

The above quote highlights the importance of the direct relationship between the farmer and the consumer. Many business models depend on intermediaries like distributors, retailers, or even internal sales teams to move product from producer to consumer, but for small-scale vegetable producers, these functions are accomplished through the relationship between the producer (farmer) and consumer. This connection goes beyond economic transactions, generating a personal bond between the producer and consumer that helps establish the long-term loyalty required to stabilise small-scale farms. These relationships are viewed as positive long-term social connections and are a motivation for many first-generation farmers. Given the external risks inherent in farming (e.g., climate change, weather patterns, and commodity prices), a committed buyer is critical. Such a relationship allows for flexibility to work

[2] Various bodies are accredited by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency to administer Organic Certification to producers based on practices that are acceptable in organic agricultural production and processing systems according to the Canada Organic Regime (CSI, 2024)

collaboratively when yields are less satisfactory, when produce is deformed, or even during a crop failure.

Motivations

Participants' motivations to farm extended well beyond economic reasons and included combatting the climate crisis, improving food security, connecting people with healthy food, and resisting corporate control of the food system (Mooney et al., 2015; Weis, 2010, 2022). Participant B1 explained: "I really have come to value the connections with the local community. Just going to market and providing people with something you see that they appreciate, and you know you've done your best to produce and that's really what I'm focussing on now. It's what keeps me going."

Participant C1 emphasised the connection to nature: "When we moved to the farm here, I was able to reestablish that close connection to nature.... So, it really was nature that inspired me to reestablish that connection and further establish the connection with food, community, and sharing our experiences."

While all participants expressed altruistic motivations, each also had a clear vision of their farm as a business. Participant D1 explained: "I saw an opportunity in business and saw that this is where things are going. People are all over this. There is an opportunity, and I know the demand is there, too. I've always been entrepreneurial. I've always been making money on my own."

Although these two perspectives are not necessarily incongruent, much of the literature on small-scale farm production focusses more on altruistic angles, often overlooking the farmers' business acumen and business motivations.

Challenges

Farmers identified two main categories of challenge: financial and operational. Although these are interdependent, the financial challenges seemed foremost in the farmers' minds.

Financial

Financial challenges came primarily in two forms: the initial investment and the subsequent cash flow for daily operations.

Startup Capital

To start a farm, significant capital investment is required for equipment, on-farm infrastructure, and—in many cases—to buy the land. All participants found it difficult to access external funding and therefore spent significant amounts from their personal savings on farm equipment and infrastructure.

Participants expressed uncertainty about where to look for funding, indicating a lack of information or hindered access to available information for people attempting to start farms. Once connected with a lending institution, participants often encountered confused responses from the potential lender, even from financial institutions intended to support farmers, such as Farm Credit Canada or rural credit unions and banks. Lenders seemed more accustomed to working with larger-scale industrial farms. Participant B1 stated:

"They don't really have a formula that fits what we are looking for. We are in this funny in-between grey zone. 'Are you a hobby farm or are you involved in agriculture—what's going on here?'"

There were similar problems seeking government grants intended to support farmers. After learning that a neighbouring (industrial) farm received a $100,000 grant, Participant D1 applied to the same grant for funding to build a greenhouse. The response was: "No, that's not how it works." The participant noted that the amount requested was relatively small compared to amounts requested by industrial farms, but "if a small-scale startup farm were eligible for even $10,000 of this kind of grant funding within a few years of starting their operation, it would go so far."

Acquiring land can also be a major startup capital challenge for first-generation farmers. Participant D1 explained: "The land in this region is absolutely out of reach. Even if I had a $300,000 house I could sell, I probably still couldn't afford [land here].... For one, there are no small plots available. This county definitely promotes protecting the large farms. And they have their reasons. I've talked to the county about it and where they're coming from. When you do [find] those properties, [they] are snapped up by people who want to have a hobby farm. They are not really interested in working the land."

Participant D1 noted: "If you want a hundred-acre piece of land, you need three million dollars in our county. And we're talking farmland now, so you need 20 percent down, so $600,000 cash to get started. So, we actually rent this piece of land." Other participants echoed the issue of rising local land prices driven by those who desire to live in the countryside as a lifestyle choice, rather than to work the land as a vocation. Participants B1 and D1 expected their future in farming would have to take place in a different region "because the sale price [of land] would just be so high, which has led me to look elsewhere."

On the one hand, land prices are so high that starting a medium- or large-scale livestock or cash crop farm is unaffordable. On the other hand, if first-generation farmers look for smaller parcels of land for vegetable production, they compete with buyers for recreational land who are willing to pay a premium for it but are not interested in farming it. These dynamics are reinforced by municipal and provincial policy language designed to protect farmland from urban sprawl development. The Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs expressly discourages the severance of farmland because they believe that land division fragments the agricultural land base and can affect the long-term viability of agriculture (Geerts & Robertson, 2016). Thus, affordable, and appropriately sized farmland is hard to come by for younger first-generation small-scale farmers starting a small-scale vegetable farm enterprise.

Cash Flow

Managing cash flow is also difficult for first-generation farmers. Much of the agriculture industry, including vegetable farming, is seasonal, making cash flow uneven. During the winter and early spring, little revenue can be generated on these farms in Southwestern Ontario without the help of expensive growing-season extension infrastructure such as greenhouses. However, farmers have to pay for operating expenses (e.g., seeds, compost, labour, utilities) before they receive revenue. Participant D1 noted: "I think it cost me $20,000 to sell the first $20,000, so that was a big challenge."

To supplement their income, many farmers (especially first-generation farmers) must also do off-farm work. This has long been recognised as a threat to food security in Canada (Clapp, 2023; Magnan et al.,

2023). More than 50 percent of farmers in Canada need to supplement their household income with off-farm labour (Statistics Canada, 2023a). Although dependence on off-farm income has been decreasing, this trend is driven by the thousands of farmers who have been compelled to leave the vocation entirely, rather than by farmers becoming more self-sufficient (Statistics Canada, 2006). As Participant A1 stated, "This is what a lot of people don't realise, is that if you are going to start a farm, you're committing to three or four years of no income, or next to no income [from the farm]." However, the use of their time in off-farm work undermines their ability to make the farm financially viable, potentially leading farmers into a vicious cycle of low farm income, more off-farm work, and even less time to increase farm income.

Participants also shared their experiences of working off-farm while farming. Participant C2 said: "I was working sixty hours a week, [my wife] was working forty-five hours a week. We were both commuting to different towns to work." All participants acknowledged that off-farm labour contributed to the financial stability of their household, but none considered this to be desirable. Participant D1 also noted that the total hours worked far exceed a typical forty-hour work week "[My wife] is here and she has other jobs off the farm too, so her hours go up and down but it's close to full-time. And then I'm two full-time jobs (on the farm), I put in eighty to ninety hours per week." Although the participants were hesitant to ask for government labour support to decrease their off-farm dependence, Participant C1 expressed their frustration: "We are busting it out here trying to support our community and barely keeping it together and financially it could go down very easily. So absolutely, if there was funding to go towards having help on the farm and...services to help make [providing a primary source of income] feasible, because sometimes it feels like it's not and we aren't quitters and we want to continue to support our community and involve them in our journey, but at this point, it's just quite a struggle."

Operational

Marketing and sales

Our participants sell their products through farmers markets, CSA programs, and local restaurants and retailers. These channels depend on a strong farmer-client relationship. The potential for interaction and transparency in these smaller-scale direct relationships engenders accountability and trust and allows participants to establish a shared set of goals and values (Mount, 2011).

Strong relationships are the hallmark of a strong supply chain (Beth et al., 2003; Gualandris et al., 2023). However, the relationship between small farmers and their clients is typically between individuals (not firms) and without formal contracts. This can bring risk. Participant D1 gave an example: "If the chef leaves the restaurant, most of the time, so does the business, unless you have a good restaurant that is supportive of what you are doing." Therefore, it is important for small-scale producers to diversify their revenue streams and marketing efforts. This is another time-consuming part of operating a farm that is exacerbated by selling high-margin but low-volume products. Even though the farm is small, the farmer must develop and maintain multiple distribution channels, each requiring personal attention. Two participants explained these challenges, noting the costly nature of the commitment. Participant D1 explained: "We deliver to everybody twice a week. It's a big challenge, too. Distribution is expensive but part of what we do." Further, Participant C2 emphasised the significant time delivery takes from on-farm work: "It wasn't even really the cost of gas to

get there, although that should be a factor. A twenty-minute conversation at every place, that's three hours to deliver seven boxes and we need that three hours here [on the farm]."

Labour and Work-life Balance

First-generation farmers spend a huge amount of time trying to establish their farms. Participant A1 noted:

> I'm sitting here with you and there are five people doing work and they know what they are doing. In 2015, that never would have happened because I didn't know what I was doing, so how could I expect someone else to know what they're doing? So, there is a whole bunch that goes on in those first few years and it's not just how to grow a tomato, it's how to create systems and all that stuff that goes with it. I think that the startup phase is a learning curve. And yes, I'm still passionate about it, but it's not so new that it consumes everything that I'm thinking and doing. Those first couple years, it consumes everything you are thinking and doing.

> When you start a new business, you can spend every waking hour and every thought on it. Now, nobody can do that forever—things will fall apart. So that's called, I guess, the startup phase. I think anybody who goes through a startup knows that you have to get through that. You have to get to a point where you can make it a reasonable vocation. By that, I mean you take a vacation, maybe you have some retirement savings, maybe you can leave the farm once and a while, those kinds of things.

But even further along in the process, these small-scale farmers put in extremely long hours on the farm. Participant D1, who had been operating for seven years, stated: "I'm still at ninety hours a week and this is the last year of that for me. If it doesn't work with a regular fifty-to-sixty-hour week, then I can't do it." Participant C1, in the third year, expressed a similar sentiment: "My part-time [work on the farm] is still a lot of time. I still invest probably five hours a day. We work into the night a lot." The need for knowledgeable labour and low-cost tools appropriate for scale can complicate this further, as described by Participant A1: "What I think was new information was understanding the balance between efficiency of labour and the right tools and how to match them at different scales."

Hiring labour has also been challenging. It is expensive, especially if the farm has not started generating adequate income, and labour shortages—in particular, for seasonal labour—have been difficult to manage. Participant A1 noted with frustration that suppliers of imported vegetables often employ very low-paid labour and do not factor environmental costs into the final grocery store price. "I'm not against free trade, but it doesn't seem right that we expect our labourers to get paid $14 per hour and then we demand that we as farmers compete with the [imported] vegetables. Unless we decide as a society that we don't care that our vegetables are grown here, which is, I feel, the decision we are [currently] making."

As a solution to the cash-flow problem, one participant was planning to introduce a new model, sharing the farm profits equally between owners and full-time workers. The idea is to incentivise the workers to share in the extra labour burden described above traditionally carried exclusively by the owners. Creative solutions like this abound in small-scale farms, which must innovate to survive.

Reflections

Like many startup founders, first-generation vegetable farmers must grapple with raising adequate investment capital and managing limited cash flow during their early stages of development. Farming, however, has clear biophysical constraints (time and space) not found in most manufacturing, retail, or service industries. For farmers, return on investment is inherently constrained by the time it takes to build soil and how much land is available. While technology has changed some of the possibilities when it comes to land management, there is little evidence this has improved the financial returns to farmers directly (Qualman et al., 2018). Our exploration into the experiences of small-scale first-generation vegetable farmers revealed key challenges. These challenges point us to potential policy changes which could help these farmers.

Policy makers have been encouraging farmers to think more like entrepreneurs and innovators; that is, to invest in expensive new technology to combat the risks of low farm income, high debt, increasing insolvency, and rising poverty (Government of Ontario, 2019). But most Canadian farms are smaller-scale—generating less than $250,000 of revenue and making almost zero percent net income—and there is limited scholarship on the skills needed for farmers to be entrepreneurial (Dias, 2019; Statistics Canada, 2021, 2023b, 2023c). That is, net farm income is low across the board but also highly unequal, with the largest farms capturing most of what little there is and therefore able to reinvest earnings (Qualman et al., 2018). Based on information shared by our participants, small farms without excess profits have difficulty making these expensive investments. Therefore, to create opportunities for small-scale farmers, it seems prudent that federal agricultural policies should include scale-appropriate policy rather than a one-size-fits-all approach. This could include, but not be limited to, further investment in extension agent funding and more public research into low-cost solutions for small-scale farmers. Our preliminary investigation points to the need for further study to this end.

One potential avenue to explore is localized private-public partnerships such as the Fair Finance Fund (2019) a non-profit social finance fund dedicated to providing loans and mentorship services to local food and farm enterprises which can help bridge the wide gap in access to capital for small-scale first-generation farmers (Obregón et al., 2023). In other words, creating supportive links at the local level would help small-scale farmers who do not benefit from export-oriented large-scale food policy that is more applicable for the commodity-driven industrial food system.

Underlying many of the concerns expressed by the participants in this study was access to affordable productive farmland. Provincial and municipal land policies could be assessed and revised to better support not only large industrial farms, but also smaller-scale alternative methods of commercial agricultural production. For instance, the land severance policy in Middlesex County which prohibits division into farm lots smaller than forty hectares (98.8 acres) clearly disadvantages small farms and first-generation farmers.

Moreover, there is longstanding policy that is meant to preserve the agricultural land base from non-agricultural development but has also made it hard for farms to add secondary, value-added uses on land zoned for agriculture such as agri-tourism and recreational uses, or retail services such as a farm market or store. Value-added on-farm enterprise activity is often restricted and encouraged to be located in a settlement area rather than on the farm. This limits the economic possibilities of small-scale farmers, who might otherwise

be able to augment their revenue streams with non-agricultural activities or by capturing higher margins from retailed produce on the farm.

These municipal policies are rooted in the provincial Guidelines on Permitted Uses in Ontario's Prime Agricultural Areas, which paradoxically encourages *all types, sizes and intensities of agricultural uses,*[3] while simultaneously indicating that small farm lots should not be created, based on the implicit assumption that the larger the farm, the more efficient (Geerts & Robertson, 2016). This sort of consolidation and large-scale focus needs to be re-examined if first-generation farmers are to succeed. The small-scale farmers we interviewed demonstrate that they need only two to ten hectares of productive land to create a viable commercial farm enterprise.

Over the last three decades, Canada has lost more than two-thirds of its young farmers (Statistics Canada, 2023d). The full effects of this loss have yet to be realised. It is likely that, in the coming decades, the number of farms and farm families in Canada will fall dramatically, from about 260,000 now to fewer than 100,000 by the 2040s (Desmarais et al., 2017; Qualman et al., 2018).

This is not an inevitable trend. There are young people who would be farmers if they thought they could make their small farms work alongside the bigger farms. More efforts should be made to develop agricultural policies to ensure "that farmers are able to earn a decent living, and to enable the entry of new farmers into farming" (Obregón et al., 2023; Food Secure Canada, 2011). A human-scale approach would strengthen the social bonds between consumers and producers and help rebuild rural communities—both of which would make the nation's food supply, and those producing it more secure for the future.

Richard Bloomfield is passionate about the social and environmental sustainability of food production. He is a PhD candidate in Geography and Environment at Western University and an Assistant professor in Management and Organizational Studies at Huron University. His research focusses on the political economy of agro-food systems in Ontario by examining current farmland policy, ownership dynamics, and alternative land-use models that support next or first-generation farmers. He co-founded Urban Roots London in 2017, a non-profit urban farm which is addressing issues around food access.

Deishin Lee is an Associate Professor of Operations Management and Sustainability at Ivey Business School at Western University. She studies innovative operational and supply chain models that productively use waste streams. She focusses on food supply chain operations that rescue surplus crops for the food security network. Her work has been published in leading academic journals in operations management (e.g., European Journal of Operational Research, Management Science, Manufacturing & Service Operations Management, Operations Research, Production and Operations Management) and agricultural economics and policy (e.g., American Journal of Agricultural Economics, Food Policy).

[3] Emphasis ours.

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