

# Our Food, Our Future Agriculture Symposium

Growing Opportunities in Agriculture  
through Innovation and Collaboration

November 20–22, 2018  
Corner Brook Civic Centre

## 4<sup>th</sup> Biennial Proceedings



Our Food, Our Future - Growing Opportunities in Agriculture through Innovation and Collaboration, facilitated discussions across a continuum of disciplines relating to agriculture, all of which contribute to building a sustainable, robust food system that will enhance food self-sufficiency in Newfoundland and Labrador.





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## Symposium Committee

Planning for the fourth biennial “Our Food, Our Future: Growing Opportunities in Agriculture through Innovation and Collaboration” symposium was a true collaborative effort. The organizing committee consisted of representatives from the Agriculture Production and Research Division of the Provincial Government’s Agriculture and Lands Branch; Grenfell Campus, Memorial University of Newfoundland; Agriculture and AgriFood Canada; Food First NL; and the Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of Agriculture.

## Acknowledgements

The organizing committee would like to thank the following organizations for their commitment to making the fourth biennial symposium “Our Food, Our Future: Growing Opportunities in Agriculture through Innovation and Collaboration” a success:

**Partners:** Department of Fisheries and Land Resources, Agriculture and Lands Branch, Agriculture Production and Research Division, Grenfell Campus, Memorial University of Newfoundland (MUN), Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of Agriculture, Agriculture and AgriFood Canada, and Food First NL.

**Funding:** Canadian Agriculture Partnership (CAP), Atlantic Opportunities Agency (ACOA), Department of Fisheries and Land Resources  
Grenfell Campus, Memorial University of Newfoundland

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## Introduction

The Department of Fisheries and Land Resources, Agriculture Production and Research Division, together with Grenfell Campus, Memorial University of Newfoundland; Agriculture and AgriFood Canada; the Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of Agriculture; and Food First NL held its fourth biennial Agriculture Symposium on November 20-22, 2018 in Corner Brook, Newfoundland and Labrador.

“Our Food, Our Future: Growing Opportunities in Agriculture through Innovation and Collaboration” facilitated discussions across a continuum of disciplines relating to agriculture, all of which contribute to building a sustainable, robust food system that will enhance food self-sufficiency in Newfoundland and Labrador.



This three-day event was intended for new and existing farmers, students, researchers, extension specialists, and the general public interested in agri-food production, secondary processing, research and food systems. Participants learned more about becoming successful farmers, innovative methods and technologies, sustainable intensification, small-scale production, farm diversification, and marketing and consumer awareness. Specific themes that drove the three-day discussions were:

- Innovating the Food System in Newfoundland and Labrador,
- Sustainable Northern Agriculture,
- Diversifying and Growing Food and Food Products,
- The Future of Food and Farming, and
- Food Access: Marketing and Distribution.

The overall objective of this year's symposium was to enhance the collaborative efforts amongst various stakeholders to build a sustainable, robust food system that will improve food self-sufficiency in Newfoundland and Labrador. This event also highlighted innovative research and initiatives, and provided information and networking opportunities to existing farmers and new entrants in efforts to inspire new and expanding agri-businesses.

This event provided opportunities to:

- Visit booths throughout a trade show that displayed innovative technologies and products designed for both large and small-scale agriculture production;
- Visit and interact with agricultural researchers and extension specialists;
- Hear from a variety of successful industry and business professionals who have built farm enterprises and successful agribusinesses;
- Network with representatives from community and government programs and initiatives that are contributing to growing the agriculture sector and improving food self-sufficiency in the province;
- “Pitch” farm and/or business concepts to business development consultants and agriculture commodity specialists and have them mentor participants through the conception to commercialization phases; and
- Taste some of the finest locally produced foods and beverages produced right here in Newfoundland and Labrador. This banquet highlighted top local chefs who use local ingredients and products in their dishes.

The first symposium, held in November 2012, proved to be a success with more than 100 participants. The second event, held on November 3 - 4, 2014 in Corner Brook was a two-day event with approximately 125 people in attendance. The third event held November 2-3, 2016 in St. John's, had 220 people registered, and the most recent event received 235 registrations. Past symposia proceedings documents can be found at [ourfoodourfuture.ca](http://ourfoodourfuture.ca).

Since the inaugural symposium event in 2012, a significant shift has occurred in relation to government priority regarding food production and collaboration as a whole, which has translated into a renewed interest in local farming, food production and agri-business development. The symposium itself has also evolved over time as a result of the expansion of agricultural research capacity in the province and the need to collaborate and align research priorities so that efforts are not duplicated and knowledge generation is accelerated. The main focus of the symposium series thus far has been to build networks, facilitate collaboration, and share research results with other researchers and research users. The 2016 symposium took a different approach by engaging with the audience and asking specific questions about what they consider to be the bigger challenges, issues or knowledge gaps in the areas of agricultural business, social and cultural aspects of food, and agricultural sciences. From this engagement session, the conversation of where agriculture is and needs to go was heard, which has since influenced current policy direction. Today, agriculture in Newfoundland and Labrador is at a pivotal point where it is recognized as an opportunity to contribute to economic growth and enhance prosperity in the province.

## Presentation Synopses



The event was once again designed to tell a story over its duration. With the overall objective to inspire new and expanding agri-businesses within the province, it was imperative that information on the various aspects of the food chain be discussed in a coherent manner. It is understood that the local food system is diverse and complex, and covering all related topics would be very difficult to do over three days. It was decided that the main topics to be presented would focus on these four categories: Innovating the Food System in Newfoundland and Labrador; Sustainable Northern Agriculture; Diversifying and Growing Food and Food Products; The Future of Food and Farming, Food Access: Marketing and Distribution. The event agenda can be found in Appendix A.



**Innovating the Food System in Newfoundland and Labrador:** Discussed the various initiatives and collaborative approaches that are strengthening the local food system. An overview of the current food system was presented, as well as an innovation framework approach to collaborating within agriculture innovation systems. The knowledge generators were identified and collaborative applied agriculture research was highlighted. A Northern Ontario perspective on forming alliances with stakeholders and developing common strategies was discussed as a model to overcome challenges and discover opportunities for growth.



**Sustainable Northern Agriculture:** Provided information on the importance of sustainable soil management and introduced the audience to an assessment tool that could be adapted to production systems locally. This session also highlighted a farmer's perspective of overcoming challenges of agriculture production in the Yukon. During the panel session, there were in-depth discussions on a Labrador initiative ("The Pye Centre" – a social enterprise) that will potentially provide support to the agriculture industry in that area of the province. As well, local industry professionals reflected on various aspects of agricultural production in our unique soil and climatic conditions. The second part of this session focused on innovative approaches to working within the constraints of isolation, main focuses were the advantages and strengths of community development leadership to improving sustainability of northern rural communities. The panel session provided an opportunity for a discussion about what it means to be innovative on farm and within an agri-business.

**Diversifying and Growing Food and Food Products:** Provided the audience with first-hand knowledge and insights from various local farm enterprises and diverse agri-businesses. These groups presented their individual stories of success and challenges with primary production, secondary processing and marketing in this province. A presentation on agriculture in Iceland brought to light the similarities between Iceland and Newfoundland and Labrador. The first panel session under this theme provided opportunity for local farmers to talk about how they have diversified over time, what it took to become the successes they are today, how they have adjusted and overcome challenges (i.e. weather, consumer demand/awareness), and how they plan for the future.



The second panel session discussed the opportunities for entrepreneurs interested in secondary processing and other potential agri-business not yet fully being explored. Panelists reflected on the quality and uniqueness of the products being produced in Newfoundland and Labrador, and noted that as an industry, we need to identify ways to add value and tweak business models to generate new revenue streams.

### **The Future of Food and Farming:**

Emphasized the importance of entrepreneurship, education and training in charting the course of the future of food. This session discussed how agriculture is entering a new era and is a growth industry with tremendous opportunity. It inspired people in the audience to tell their farms' stories, highlighted examples of programs designed to train new farmers and provide information about becoming a farmer in Newfoundland and Labrador, and discussed who the food producers may be in the future.



The panel session highlighted one local farm's journey to become a successful business with a niche market in the Gros Morne area. There was some reflection on that the fact that farms are physically further away from the majority of the population, yet people are increasingly interested in knowing where their food comes from, and how it is imperative that our farmers tell their stories. There were also discussions about the challenges of starting a farm in Newfoundland and Labrador and the innovative, economically feasible ways to get started. This discussion included reflection on the value of being and/or getting a mentor, incubation/learning common farms, and contributions small farms can make to rural areas.

**Food Access: Marketing and Distribution:** Provided information on successful examples of collaborative initiatives that have bridged the supply and demand gap and assisted in the development of robust food systems in other jurisdictions.

The panel session provided an opportunity for local farmers to discuss their collaborative approaches to food production and marketing. The Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) model and "Food Hubs" were considered as a potential means to support and market products from small farms.

The second panel session highlighted the perspectives of local farmers, retailers and distributors. Each reflected on the challenges and opportunities presented by the current supply and demand for local products. Panelists provided insights into food safety certification, fair pricing and commitment from retailers, and retail purchasing/advertising.



## Trade Show, Posters and Booth Displays

A trade show was a new component of this event series, which brought innovative technologies, products and services designed for both large- and small-scale agriculture production to Newfoundland and Labrador. As a province committed to growing the agriculture industry through the creation and expansion of farm businesses, this trade show presented an opportunity for participants to obtain knowledge and information from vendors who work in the areas of production, machinery and equipment, farm supplies, processing, value-added and marketing.

Graduate students and researchers presented a total of 24 scientific posters under the themes of Sustainable Northern Agriculture, Diversifying and growing Food and Food Products, The Future of Farming and Food Access: Marketing and Distribution. Symposium participants were provided several opportunities throughout the event to visit the posters and discuss research outcomes with researchers.



Representatives from local funding organizations, provincial and federal government, community groups and industry organizations were present with booth displays to discuss opportunities for funding and programming with symposium participants.

## Outcomes

Invited guests from other jurisdictions brought a variety of perspectives to the discussions, which inspired participants in the room to think about ways in which those models may be adapted and adopted locally. Unlike past symposia events, this event provided an opportunity to hear from a variety of local food producers, processors and distributors who provided realistic viewpoints of the local agriculture industry and food system.



**Discussions over the duration of the event can be summarized into five general themes.**

### **Newfoundland and Labrador is unique and must be celebrated**

There is no denying that Newfoundland and Labrador is unique. Aside from the climate, the short growing season, limited arable land base, and isolation from mainland Canada, Newfoundland and Labrador's uniqueness has several disadvantages; but what cannot be ignored are the advantages. Being isolated brings with it challenges for farming and food production in general. The high transportation costs have resulted in higher cost of production and increased reliance on marine transport for farm inputs and food for residents and livestock. The advantage of being isolated: the creation of a population that is resilient, resourceful and patriotic.

Being a geographically large province with pockets of communities scattered sparsely throughout has meant that all stakeholders interested in food production have to come together to achieve growth. The Way Forward - Agriculture Sector Work Plan was developed by many stakeholders who have ensured this collaborative plan is a shared responsibility, and sets out to achieve growth in food self-sufficiency (20 per cent by 2022). It must be noted that this process and commitment is unique and has been commended by many individuals and groups from jurisdictions all over the world.

With its similar climate, growing tourism industry, changing food demand, increases in farm consolidation and direct marketing, Iceland was held up as another isolated jurisdiction to which our province should look to help us expand and market our uniqueness throughout the world. Newfoundland and Labrador has recently proven to have a unique advantage in the biochemical profiles in the products that are being grown here, and that needs to be capitalized on. These unique functional ingredients can add value to secondary products. The value may not be in the volume of what is being produced, but in the quality of the high-value products we are producing. Newfoundland and Labrador should celebrate its unique advantages and focus on increasing food self-sufficiency, and could be used as a model for similar jurisdictions.

### **Innovation and collaboration is required**

The theme of the fourth biennial Agriculture Symposium was "Our Food, Our Future: Growing Opportunities in Agriculture through **Innovation** and **Collaboration**," so as expected, most of the discussions over the three days centered on these topics. Collaboration was referenced many times as a requirement to grow aspects of this industry. Collaborative approaches to the creation of regional storage and food hubs were discussed, as well as the need for a "platform" to facilitate this collaboration and augment industry members working together.



Mentorship was discussed as a means to share information and guide new farmers or agri-businesses. Many successful industry stakeholders throughout the province would be willing to work with interested new entrants. The Newfoundland and Labrador Young Farmers Forum discussed its mentorship program, where farmers and interested mentees can be matched and supported. More information can be found at [nlyoungfarmers.ca/mentorship-pilot](http://nlyoungfarmers.ca/mentorship-pilot)

Research project specifics were not discussed (they were presented in poster format instead); however, research and innovation was recognized as an imperative aspect required to grow and diversify the agriculture industry in the province. It was acknowledged that Newfoundland and Labrador producers are innovative every day by the manner in which they select seeds, protect the environment, reach and educate customers, and adapt to weather. It was suggested there needs to be more interactions between researchers and end users. Events such as this symposium help to bridge that gap and build trust with industry. While most of the research being conducted and presented at this event was specifically related to a direct application to agriculture production, there were knowledge gaps identified that would fall within other disciplines that need to be considered. These included lack of understanding about what the local demand is for local produce, what consumer preferences are, what the local assets are, and what the actual startup costs are for a small farmer.

### **Education and skills training is a necessity**

At this event, Fisheries and Land Resources Minister Gerry Byrne announced the new Agriculture Technician Co-op, two-year diploma program being offered at the College of the North Atlantic beginning in September 2019. Education and skills training has been a limiting factor in Newfoundland and Labrador as it is the only jurisdiction in Canada without direct access to post-secondary programming in agriculture. With an aging labour force, increasing average age of farm operators, and decreasing number of farms, this skills training has the potential to be a game changer for the agriculture industry in this province.



One aspect of skills training that requires attention is the lack of opportunities for individuals to demonstrate their ability to farm or to “test the waters,” allowing them to learn first-hand and be mentored along the process and then scale up with time. The idea of incubation plots where people can begin farming and share assets and markets was discussed in depth and needs to be explored further.



### **Entrepreneurial thinking can be cultivated**

Farming is a business like any other, but it is not often viewed as such. Traditionally, farmers just want to farm and often do not take risks and think of ways to add value to their businesses. The idea of teaching entrepreneurial thinking was discussed, which identified that anyone with passion and determination can be an entrepreneur. It was acknowledged throughout the event that local business support is available through the Navigate Entrepreneurship Centre (a partnership of Grenfell Campus and the Corner Brook campus of the College of the North Atlantic), Memorial University as well as at the Department of Fisheries and Land Resources. These services of which can be availed of at any stage of business development or expansion.

### **Primary/secondary food production and distribution need focused attention**

It is well known that the demand for fresh, local produce exists in Newfoundland and Labrador. Distributors and retailers identified that the demand goes beyond the traditional root crops, with consumers requesting a more diverse offering of local products. Communication and collaboration between retailers and producers needs to be fostered, and while individual producers can be contacted for supply, it would be preferred to go to one or two places for a supply. The idea of central or regional storage and how that could possibly assist with bridging the seasonality of supply, addressing marketing challenges, ensuring fair and reasonable prices for farmer's products and improving distribution challenges was discussed in depth.

Challenges for new entrants to start a business in secondary processing were conveyed. It was noted there are significant requirements for infrastructure, investment and technical expertise, which often do not exist in the province. It was suggested that interested individuals or businesses could partner with institutions to conduct "proof of concept" projects that could lead to commercialization, noting that funding is available for equipment and infrastructure. Creation of a commercial kitchen business incubator could also help bridge that gap in the early stages while a company is building equity.



## Next Steps

This event's main purpose and goal were to inspire, create networking opportunities, increase collaborations and share knowledge. Based on the comments received (both through the Slido technology and handwritten form), this event achieved its goals. An event like this creates work, re-focusses energy and inspires people to keep moving forward.

Since the inauguration of this event six years ago, and even over the last two years, there has been a tremendous focus on improving the food system in this province. It is recognized that "Everybody Eats," and that it is not the responsibility of one organization to advance all the aspects of the food system. Everyone has a part to play, whether producing food, researching, marketing, selling, advocating, educating, distributing, celebrating and purchasing – everyone has a role in shaping the state of our food system and how it is improved to meet the needs of our people. These collective efforts will serve all of us better in our pursuit to decrease our reliance on imports and contribute to the prosperity of the province.

The organizers of this event will continue to collaborate and work to address The Way Forward commitments, build and support education programming around farmer training; continue to set priorities and conduct research, and continue to provide business and extension support.



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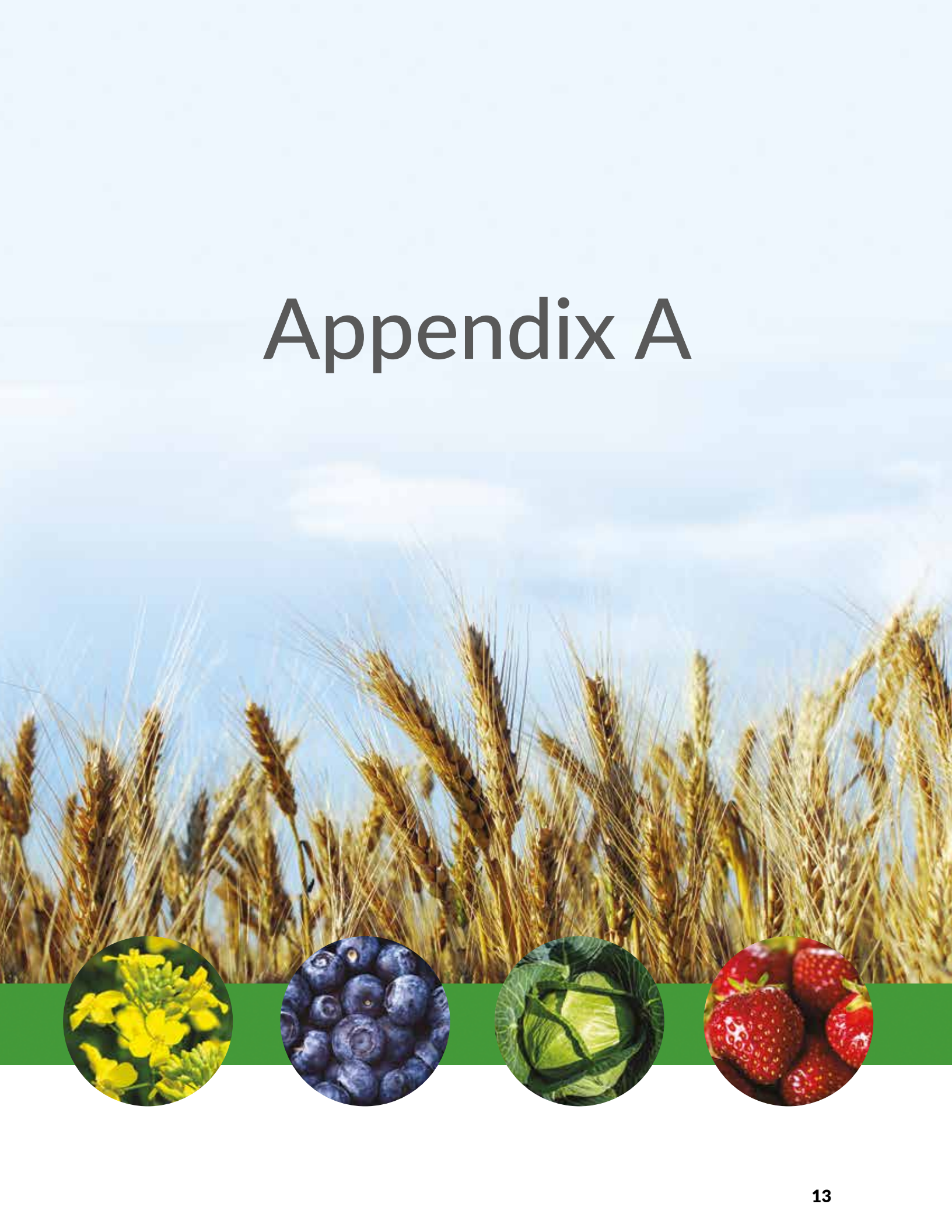
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# Appendix A





4<sup>th</sup> Biennial Agriculture Symposium

# Our Food. Our Future.

Growing Opportunities for Agriculture through Innovation and Collaboration

# Agenda

November 20–22, 2018

Corner Brook Civic Centre



## Tuesday, November 20<sup>th</sup>

- 3:30 pm** | Tour of Functional Foods Laboratory, Grenfell  
Meet at the Grenfell Atrium (entrance with flags in front)
- 7:00 pm-9:00 pm** | Registration, Networking, Trade Show and Poster Viewing, Cash Bar

## Wednesday, November 21<sup>st</sup>

- 7:30 am** | Registration, Trade Show, Poster Viewing, Registration – Breakfast
- 8:30 am** | Government of Newfoundland and Labrador (NAME)\*  
Memorial University of Newfoundland, Dr. Gary Kachanoski, President  
Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, Melvin Wheaton  
Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of Agriculture, Merv Wiseman, President  
Food First NL, Kristie Jameson, Executive Director

### Innovating the Food System in Newfoundland and Labrador

- 9:00 am** | **A Call for Collective Action to Advance the Food System in Newfoundland and Labrador**  
Kristie Jameson, Executive Director, Food First NL
- 9:15 am** | **Agriculture Knowledge and Innovation Systems in Newfoundland and Labrador**  
Sabrina Ellsworth, Manager, Agriculture Research, Fisheries and Land Resources
- 9:30 am** | **Collaboration and Innovation in the Northern Ontario Ag-Scape**  
Stephanie Vanthof, Manager, Northern Ontario Agriculture Farm Innovation Alliance
- 10:00 am** | **Panel Session**  
Sabrina Ellsworth (Fisheries and Land Resources), Kristie Jameson (Food First NL), NAME (Innovate NL)\*, Stephanie Vanthof (Northern Ontario Agriculture Farm Innovation Alliance)
- 10:30 am** | **Networking Break: Trade Show and Poster Viewing**

### Sustainable Northern Agriculture

- 11:00 am** | **Building Sustainable Soil Management into Food Production Systems in Newfoundland and Labrador**  
Dr. Dan Pennock, Department of Soil Science, University of Saskatchewan
- 11:30 am** | **Food in the North. Taking Back our Food Chain. Innovation and Disruption**  
Sonny Gray, CEO, Northstar Agriculture, Yukon
- 12:00 pm** | **Panel Session**  
Dr. Adrian Unc (Grenfell Campus, MUN), Dr. Daniel Pennock (University of Saskatchewan), Dr. Julia Wheeler (Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada), Jamie Jackman (MUN-Labrador Institute)



- 12:30 pm** | **Lunch (to be provided): Trade Show and Poster Viewing**
- 1:30 pm** | **Northern Agriculture: An Innovative Approach**  
Shae-Lynn Roberts and Jessica Poole, Researchers, The Coasters Association, Quebec
- 2:00 pm** | **Panel Session**  
Melvin Rideout (Rideout's Farm Inc.), Des Sellars (Nature's Best Farm), Sonny Gray (Northstar Agriculture), Shae-Lynn Roberts (The Coasters Association)
- 2:45 pm** | **Networking Break, Trade Show and Poster Viewing**

#### **Diversifying and Growing Food and Food Products**

- 3:30 pm** | **Adapting to Changes and Supporting Diversification in Icelandic Agriculture**  
Karvel Lindberg Kavelsson, Manager of the Icelandic Agriculture Advisory Centre
- 4:00 pm** | **Farming through the Seasons, a Family Collaboration**  
Susan Lester, Farmer, Lester's Farm Market
- 4:30 pm** | **Panel Session**  
Des Sellars (Nature's Best Farm), Rodney Reid (Exploits Meadow Farm), Chris Oram (Mark's Market), Susan Lester (Lester's Farm Market)
- 5:00 pm** | **Tour of Functional Foods Laboratory, Grenfell**  
Grenfell Campus, meet at Arts and Science atrium (entrance with flags in front)

**7:00 pm - 10:00 pm** | **Banquet: Taste some of the finest locally produced foods/beverages made in Newfoundland and Labrador. Grenfell Campus meet at Arts and Science atrium (entrance with flags in front). Cash bar to open at 6:30 pm.**

## **Day 2: Thursday, November 22<sup>nd</sup>**

- 8:00 am** | **Breakfast**

#### **Diversifying and Growing Food and Food Products continued**

- 8:30 am** | **Broiler Production: More than Just Chicken**  
Darrin Didychuk, President and General Manager Country Ribbon Inc.
- 9:00 am** | **Panel Session**  
Adam Blanchard (Five Brothers Cheese), Lloyd Warford (Cranberry Association of NL), Shae-Lynn Roberts (The Coasters Association), Dr. Raymond Thomas (Grenfell Campus, MUN), Dr. William Newell (Navigate), Karvel Lindberg Kavelsson (Icelandic Agriculture Advisory Centre)

## The Future of Food and Farming

- 9:45 am | Can We Learn Entrepreneurship?**  
Dr. William Newell, Navigate, College of the North Atlantic- Corner Brook Campus
- 10:00 am | Networking Break. Feature: Secondary Processed Local Food and Product Sampling, Trade Show and Poster Viewing**
- 10:30 am | The Future of Food – Entrepreneurship and New Farmers**  
Kim McConnell, AdFarm, Calgary, Alberta
- 11:00 am | Growing a Farm: New Farmer Education in the 21st Century**  
Dr. Gary Stephenson, Professor, Oregon State University
- 11:30 am | Becoming a Farmer in Newfoundland and Labrador**  
Matthew Carlson, Young Farmers Coordinator, Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of Agriculture
- 11:45 am | Bridging the Divide: How Diversity Can Support the Province's Agriculture Sector**  
Justin Campbell, Diversity Outreach Coordinator, Association for New Canadians,  
Sarah Thompson, Project Manager, Association for New Canadians
- 12:00 pm | Panel Session**  
Matthew Carlson (Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of Agriculture), Justin Campbell (Association of New Canadians) Dr. Gary Stephenson (Oregon State University), Lori Haycock (Gros Morne Farm and Market) Kim McConnell (AdFarm), William Newell (Navigate)
- 12:30 pm | Lunch: Trade Show and Poster Viewing**

## Food Access: Marketing and Distribution

- 1:30 pm | Building Local Food Systems through Co-operation**  
Peggy Baillie, Consultant and Farmer, Local Food and Farm Co-ops, Ontario
- 2:00 pm | Setting the Table: Bringing Multiple Stakeholders Together to Change the Food System**  
Alicia Lake, Executive Director, Pan Cape Breton Food Hub Co-op
- 2:30 pm | Networking Break in room, 15 minutes**
- 2:45 pm | Panel Session**  
Krista Chapman (Three Mile Ridge), Name (St. Johns Farmers Market)\*, Sarah Crocker (Seed to Spoon), Sean Dolter (The Greenhouse)
- 3:30 pm | Panel Session**  
Byron Bellows (Colemans), Brad Walsh (Atlantic Grocery Distributors Ltd.), Melvin Rideout (Rideout's Farm Inc.), Kent Fudge (Mountain View Farm)
- 4:00 pm | Summary and Next Steps**  
Dr. Ivan Emke, Honorary Research Professor, Grenfell Campus, MUN
- 4:15 pm | Closing Remarks**

\*Items not yet confirmed



