The Role of Agricultural Societies in the Changing Trajectory of the Agri-Food System

by

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Abstract

Agricultural societies in Canada were established by European colonizers, beginning in Nova Scotia in the late 1700s, and were known at this time as Colonial Societias (Nova Scotia Federation of Agriculture [NASFA], n.d; Scott, n.d.). Overtime, these organizations spread across the newly established provinces as a government sponsored agricultural development strategy. Current day agricultural societies have a long history of supporting the quality of life and the success of agriculture in communities, led by the labour and passion of volunteers. These community-based organizations are part of what is known as the social economy; they are nonprofit, volunteer run organizations that respond to community needs and are distinct from the private and public sector, but often work collaboratively with them (Chaves & Monzón, 2012). They are managed provincially and their role has evolved alongside the changes brought about by the industrialization of agriculture. Investments in commodity agriculture aimed at export markets and increased reliance on manufactured inputs has resulted in the scaling and specialization of farms, which has reduced the economic viability of the traditional small-scale mixed family farm. This change is pronounced in the Prairie Region of Canada, resulting in fewer farms and farmers, and declining rural populations, which is impacting the role and future existence of agricultural societies. Alberta, a prairie province in Canada, is of particular interest in my research because there are 291 active agricultural societies, more than any other province in Canada.

The negative impacts of the dominant industrial agri-food system on the environment and rural communities, the cultural disconnect of a rapidly urbanizing society from agriculture, and reliance on a globalized food system have contributed to a resurgence of interest in local food systems. In Canada, this trend to local has gained momentum in the last two decades, resulting in

growth in local food production, distribution and marketing, driven by consumer demand and awareness of the multiple benefits of supporting local food actors. Moreover, agricultural policies have been enacted or are in development in most metropolitan regions aimed at supporting local agri-food systems and the protection of prime agricultural land. Despite this increased support and interest, local food initiatives are challenged to be economically viable within the globalized food system, and often rely on collaboration of the public, private, and nonprofit sectors.

My research brings attention to the role that agricultural societies are and could take to support local food systems, a topic which has been overlooked in research on local food systems in Canada. This qualitative study was conducted in two phases and used grounded theory for data analysis. The first phase, encompassing an environmental scan of societies and interviews with societies of interest, examined the historical and current role of agricultural societies across Canada, to understand how they are or could support local food systems. The second phase of this study focuses on the Province of Alberta and uses a community-based participatory approach and focus groups and semi-structured interviews to identify potential ways an agricultural society in Beaumont, Alberta, could respond to changing community needs and policies towards the development of urban agriculture and local food systems more broadly.

In this study I found that agricultural societies' history, current role and quantity varies by province as a result of the changing trajectory of agriculture within communities and the establishment of other agricultural support services. Today, most existing agricultural societies provide recreational infrastructure and host agricultural fairs, exhibitions and other activities based on community needs. I found that growing interest in the development of sustainable local food systems has begun to reinvigorate many societies across Canada, and had led to the

formation of new agricultural societies in British Columbia. In Beaumont, Alberta, the Beaumont & District Agricultural Society (BADAS) was found to be an important community resource which has significant potential to support changing regional and municipal agricultural policies, and the community vision for a sustainable local food system, by acting as a hub facilitating education, advocacy, networking, welcoming immigrants and supporting local economic development.

Preface

This thesis is an original work by Terra D. Pombert. The research project has received ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board under the study title: **"The Role of Agricultural Societies in a Changing Trajectory of Agri-Food System Transformation" Ethics ID: Pro0011895** on July 11, 2022.

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AAAS - Alberta Association of Agricultural Societies

BADAS - Beaumont & District Agricultural Society

EMRB - Edmonton Regional Metropolitan Board

RAMP - Regional Agricultural Master Plan

UAP - Urban Agriculture Plan

Chapter One: Introduction

For more than 250 years, agricultural societies have been integral to the agricultural, social and recreational development of communities in Canada. Agricultural societies are nonprofit, volunteer-led organizations that are mandated and overseen provincially, but with similar objectives and priorities across the country. In Alberta, the mandate is, "to encourage improvement in agriculture and enhanced quality of life for persons living in the community by developing educational programs, events, services, and facilities" (AAAS, n.d.). Given their purpose and structure, agricultural societies in Canada are part of the social economy, "organizations of people who conduct an activity with the main purpose of meeting the needs of persons rather than remunerating capitalist investors" (Chaves & Monzón, 2012, p.10). Despite their long history, in some communities these organizations are facing challenges to their continued viability due to increased expenses (eg. aging infrastructure, insurance), dependence on government funding, a declining number of farms and farmers, and increasing urbanization (Hudson, 2017). Currently, however, there is a dearth of research examining how agricultural societies are responding to or positioning themselves within trajectories of change in agri-food systems, including the re-development of local food systems and urban agriculture.

In the past twenty-five years, agri-food policy, production, and marketing has surged in urban centers across the globe in response to the demand of citizens for increased access to nutritious, fresh food and more sustainable development of their communities (McClintock, 2010). Urban agriculture embodies more than food production and farmers' markets; it also encapsulates politics, values, education, experimentation and new ways of reimagining a human and nature relationships in urban centers. The benefits of urban agriculture are multidimensional

and researchers have documented positive impacts on human health, strengthening social capital and contributing to biodiversity and ecosystem services (e.g., Artmann & Sartison, 2018; Alemu & Gerbitus, 2020; Ela & Rosenburg, 2017; Horst et al., 2017; Pevec et al., 2017). Scholars, citizens, and governments acknowledge that urban agriculture is an important component to creating sustainable and resilient communities (Azunre et al. 2019; Artmann & Sartison, 2018).

Studies have shown that the social economy and related social infrastructure are playing key roles in the successful expansion of urban agriculture and localized food systems (e.g., Connelly & Beckie, 2016; Lavallée-Picard, 2018; Wittman et al., 2012). This suggests that in order to support growing interest in and demand for local food there is a need to identify and support social economy actors and related social infrastructure within a changing agricultural landscape. Therefore, agricultural societies, as social economy organizations, could be in a position to contribute to and benefit from the expansion of localized food systems.

My research examines the roles agricultural societies are or could be taking in response to growing interest by citizens and policymakers in building resilient and place-based agri-food systems, such as through the development of urban agriculture. In this study I explored the history and current situation of agricultural societies across Canada in Phase 1, and then in Phase 2 I focused on the City of Beaumont, Alberta, where I investigated the potential of the Beaumont and District Agricultural Society (BADAS) to support the advancement and scaling up of local food systems.

Beaumont, Alberta is a vibrant and rapidly growing bedroom community minutes south of the City of Edmonton and northeast of the City of Leduc. This region is experiencing substantial residential and industrial growth and development, yet is located on prime agricultural soils. Recognition of the need to protect agricultural land to ensure agriculture

remains a long-term profitable and vibrant economic sector has come to the forefront with the adoption of the policy initiative named Regional Agricultural Master Plan (RAMP) by the Edmonton Metropolitan Region Board (EMRB). The RAMP policy aims to "create a policy framework that will balance the needs of municipalities to develop, grow, and the need to conserve our prime agricultural lands with the economic opportunities of the agricultural sector in the region" (EMRB, 2021). RAMP covers four priority agricultural land policy areas; of particular interest to this research project is policy area four, which focuses on urban agriculture (EMRB, 2021). In response to and in participation with RAMP and the EMRB, the City of Beaumont is developing an Urban Agricultural Plan to meet its obligations.

The Beaumont & District Agricultural Society (BADAS) owns 71 acres of agricultural land called the Fairgrounds. BADAS was formed in 1990 and has contributed to agriculture and cultural activities by organizing fairs, parades, hosting events, providing an equine cross-country course and facilities, community gardens and the recent development of a food forest (BADAS, 2019). The Fairgrounds land is mixed pasture and hosts a heritage barn and house originally from the community, and are in the process of restoration (BADAS, n.d.). Half of the Fairgrounds is being considered for sale because BADAS struggles to find the capital funds needed to renovate the barn and upkeep other infrastructure so as to be operable as community assets. The land the society owns is also under pressure due to urban residential development on the adjacent land parcel. Preserving the land BADAS owns and finding additional uses related to agriculture could be important for long-term protection of agricultural land in the City of Beaumont, which complies with policies like RAMP. Identifying roles and strategies adopted by other agricultural societies in Canada within the changing trajectory of agri-food systems through

this research can make an important contribution to future planning of BADAS and local food stakeholders in Beaumont.

Research Question

My research asks: As social economy organizations, how could agricultural societies be an important resource and collaborative partner within communities to develop and implement initiatives which support the revitalization of local food systems and realization of local goals connected to urban agriculture? More specifically, my objectives were to:

- explore the history and evolution of agricultural societies in Canada;
- explore strategies and initiatives that agricultural societies in Canada, and more specifically Alberta, are using to support the development of local food systems and urban agriculture;
- gain an understanding of local values, needs, and perspectives on sustainable food systems and urban agriculture in Beaumont, Alberta;
- identify relevant strategies, resources, offerings, and partnerships which BADAS could pursue to respond to local needs through co-learning processes with BADAS members, directors, and local food system stakeholders; and,
- expand on knowledge about the role of the social economy in the development of local food systems.

Conceptual Framework and Literature Review

This research examines the role of agricultural societies, as social economy organizations, in the advancement of local agri-food systems by focusing on practices, resources, and partnerships. Collaboration is a key aspect of social economy organizations and my research examines how they “interact with the public and private sectors and what functions social

economy organizations utilize in this context" (Mook et al., 2010, p.330). Previous research indicates the emergence of an intersection between local food initiatives and the social economy, which offers support such as physical and social infrastructure for producers and other food actors (Beckie & Bacon, 2019; Connelly & Beckie, 2016; Wittman et al., 2012). These two intersecting domains share "common characteristics, values, and goals: locally embedded, locally controlled and addressing local needs through relationship building, collaboration and innovation" (Beckie & Bacon, 2019, p.95). For the purpose of my research, a social economy approach will narrow the focus of study to identify opportunities for BADAS to develop its programs and offerings through partnerships with food system stakeholders from the private, public, and nonprofit sectors in Beaumont.

Agri-food System Change

Agriculture has changed significantly over the past 150 years in Canada due to changes in technology, techniques, and globalization of the food system. These factors combined have resulted in a trend of increasing farm size, consolidation of farms, intensification of production methods and a declining and aging farm population (Statistic Canada, 2022, Trobe & Acott, 2000). Free trade arrangements over the past several decades have increased emphasis on export-oriented agriculture throughout Canada, but particularly in the Prairie Region (Campbell, et al., 2019; Qualman, 2019). Global sourcing of more competitively priced food products have resulted in a decline in local food production and processing (Statistics Canada, 2018).

Canada has seen strong population growth in recent decades, predominantly from immigration, with 73.7% of Canadians in 2021 living in urban center with populations over 100,000 (Statistics Canada, 2022). Urbanization and industrial development, such as in the Edmonton to Calgary corridor, is resulting in loss of prime agricultural land and escalating

farmland prices (Begam & Adilu, 2017). The principal result of these changes more broadly has been an increasing disconnect between consumers and producers as fewer people gain direct employment from either the land or the agri-food industry (Statistic Canada, 2022; Trobe & Acott, 2000). This separation is physical as well as cultural. Granzow (2020) aptly describes this phenomenon as "this inability to see the connection between cities and increasingly distant agricultural hinterlands speaks to a broader cultural separation of, not only the urban and the rural, but also the cultural and the natural" (p.19). One response to these changes has been a resurgence of interest in small-scale and urban agriculture as a lower investment option for those wanting to move into food production for local markets (Statistics Canada, 2022), as well as a household activity focused on health and recreation (Granzow & Jones, 2020). A recent review on the role of urban agriculture in communities indicates it addresses challenges of urbanization including: food security, biodiversity and ecosystem services, agricultural intensification, climate change, resource efficiency, urban renewal and regeneration, land management, public health, social cohesion, and economic growth (Artmann & Sartison, 2018).

The re-localization of our food system is supported by urban agriculture, which can be understood as an evolving phenomenon representing a variety of both commercial and subsistence practices and processes to support, produce, consume and market locally grown produce, small livestock and animal products in an urban or peri-urban landscape, shaped by local values related to sustainability, food sovereignty and justice (Valley & Wittman, 2019, Lavallée-Picard, 2018). Whether focused on commercial enterprise or household consumption, urban agriculture has been shown to generate several benefits beyond improved access to fresh and nutritious food, including income generation, physical exercise, recreation and relaxation, reduced food miles, urban greening, and community capacity-building (e.g., Beckie & Bogdan,

2010; Bellows et al., 2003; Mougeot, 2006). Research finds the values, goals and benefits of local food production are emerging "in response to concerns about the impacts of the conventional, globalized food system" (Beckie et al., p.334, 2012) which are linked to negative environmental, social and economic consequences (Trobe and Acott, 2000). Growing awareness of negative outcomes are contributing to the increased demand for locally produced food, which has surged in Canada over the past two decades, resulting in citizens increasing interest in wellness, support for local farmers, and community sustainability (Alberta Agriculture and Forestry [AAF], 2017; Campbell et al., 2019). Contemporary global events such as the economic crisis in 2008 and the current COVID-19 pandemic have also encouraged the growth of and participation in urban agricultural activities (Mullin, et al., 2021) and local food production (Statistics Canadac, 2022).

Changes in the demand for and participation in urban agriculture have been strengthened in recent years by municipal policies across Canada that facilitate participation in urban agricultural activities by utilizing vacant lots for gardening, urban beekeeping, and urban hen programs (e.g., Fresh: Edmonton's Food and Urban Agriculture Strategy (Fresh, 2012). Urban agriculture is part of the local food movement, in which the social economy (e.g., nonprofits, cooperatives, community organizations) has played a key role (Connelly and Beckie, 2016). Social economy organizations are formed by citizens working together and taking action to address a range of values and needs not being met by the conventional globalized food system.

The Social Economy and Local Food Systems

In Canada, the social economy is contributing significantly to local food systems from farm to table, including community gardens, farmers' markets, food banks and collective kitchens (Beckie & Bacon, 2019; Beckie et al., 2012; Connelly & Beckie, 2016; Connelly et al.,

2011). The social economy "is normally distinguished from the public and private sectors based on differences in their organization of production, distribution, and consumption" (Wittman et al., 2012, p.37). Locally embedded and controlled, social economy food initiatives are "conditioned by local community norms, values and culture" (Lyson et al., 1995, p. 108). Research identifies the social economy as a counterbalance to the domination of market fundamentalism and a shift towards a pluralist view and considers it as a "third major sector between the public economy and the capitalist private economy" (Chaves & Monzón, 2012, p.5). Although distinct from the private and public sectors, the social economy often interacts with and partners with these sectors in order to achieve common goals.

Studies identify the social economy as a potential site for innovation, problem-solving and responding to local, environmental and political needs (Chaves & Monzón, 2012; Sumner, 2012). Research has identified its importance in forming, supporting, innovating and sustaining changes in local sustainable food systems (see Beckie & Bacon, 2019; Sumner, 2012). For example, the Good Food Box (GFB) in Alberta, a social economy organization, was formed to promote the importance of and access to local food supply during a time when there was considerable opposition to redevelopment of agricultural land in the northeast of Edmonton (Connelly et al., 2011). GFB was a short-lived organization which is reported to have failed due to the focus on business growth which "neglected the social base of values and people that were part of the action to address wider food, agricultural land, and redevelopment issues in the city" (Connelly & Beckie, 2016, p.58). This example is evidence that the growth of alternative food networks is a value-based response to the industrial global food system where success is tightly connected to goals beyond profit brought forward through the social economy.

The social economy is formed through shared values and beliefs that warrant action; therefore, the advancement of local food systems is distinctively shaped in each community. Granzow (2020) expressed this relationship of values and urban agriculture: "urban agriculture, in other words, is not only about the question of what we eat, but also how we live and, most importantly, how we *might* live" (p.11). How we might live is a big question which requires understanding values and gaining support within the community through conversations about what motivates people to participate impacting the acceptance, development, support for and type of urban agriculture adopted (Alemu and Grebitus, 2020; Artmann & Sartison, 2018; Kirby et al., 2021). Researchers emphasize that successful projects have a shared vision (Akimowicz et al., 2020) and are a "form of emerging commons" (Artmann & Sartison, 2018, p.13) that combine economic, social and ecological goals. The farmers' market in Rimbey, Alberta illustrates how collaborative support and innovation is attributed to the adherence to community needs and values (Connelly & Beckie, 2016). Success is credited to the unique characteristics of the market, which includes education and entertainment, limited scale of the market, and sharing risk and physical infrastructure through collaboration with others in the community and town administration (Connelly & Beckie, 2016). Rimbey's farmers' market success is evidence of the benefits of collaboration between public, private and the social economy to respond to community needs in support of urban agriculture.

Studies indicate that social economy organizations can emerge as a response to the changing needs in society. The YYC Growers and Distributors in Calgary, Alberta is a cooperative of urban and rural farmers who combine their harvest and sell their products through CSA and farmers' market streams, and was formed as an innovative response to the growing demand for local food (Beckie & Bacon, 2019). This organization is indicative of the intersection

of values between the social economy and local food initiatives because it supports social and environmental justice, education and is working with policymakers to strengthen local food systems (Beckie & Bacon, 2019). The formation of the YYC is evidence of how collaborative partnerships can build social infrastructure, another key component to the success of local food systems.

Social infrastructure is often related to and can be a part of the social economy, contributing to the development of local food systems by enabling a conducive environment for change (Beckie, 2013). Social infrastructure is the "governance structures and the relationships around food system actors … which defines a political and social space where participants can generate and utilize social capital" (Connelly & Beckie, 2016, p.53) to support the principles and intentions of alternative food networks. Academics and practitioners recognize the central role of municipalities to enable, strengthen and support connections between food system stakeholders (Beckie & Bacon, 2019; Lavallée-Picard, 2018). The key roles of government include: access to land and other resources (e.g., water, compost), subsidized start-ups, laws and regulations, organizing, education and training (Artmann & Sartison, 2018). Municipal involvement is central because of changes in provincial policies which delegated land use planning to municipalities (Hiley et al., 2011). A study examining urban agriculture in Vancouver, one of the major cities in Canada supporting urban agriculture, indicates effective social infrastructure guided its development. Examples of initiatives included; the formation of Food Policy Council (2004), urban beekeeping (2005), municipal food composting (2010), backyard hens (2010), neighbourhood food networks (2011), and food cart program (2012) (Valley & Wittman, 2019). The ongoing and sequential development of initiatives in Vancouver are indicative of a conducive environment for change, supported politically by municipal policies and resources.

Another municipally led urban agriculture policy in Victoria, BC, titled Growing in the City, was examined by Lavallée-Picard (2018). Public engagement guided this initiative which set goals to increase food production within the City of Victoria through community gardens, boulevard gardening, creating an inventory of land for potential urban agricultural sites, and a pilot project for planting food trees on public land (Lavallée-Picard, 2018). The city shared responsibility by providing funding for garden development but gave the responsibility to build or maintain community gardens to other organizations in the community (Lavallée-Picard, 2018). This example highlights the financial and political benefits as well as the stability a municipality can bring by facilitating collaboration with the social economy to share responsibility in the advancement of local food.

Municipal led urban agricultural initiatives are often aligned with existing policy and sustainability agendas (Mendes et al., 2008) because it has become an important component in the expanding discussion on how to develop sustainable cities (Artmann & Sartison, 2018; Azunre et al. 2019). Connelly et al. (2011), found that alternative food systems and community transformation are strengthened through the sharing of commitments between the social economy and sustainability goals. Sumner (2012) identified the social economy as closely connected to sustainability and food therefore will be present in the processes from farm to table in sustainable food systems. As a contributor to sustainable food systems, urban agriculture is projected to be a significant catalyst for change in the agri-food system; however, Davidson (2017) cautions that urban agriculture is not "inherently transformative in and of itself" (p.72) but offers "new forms of engagement with the political ecology of the city … and their coincidence with other disruptive forces" (p.72). Practicing urban agriculture is not enough but rather it is through interacting with the land, people, and organizations that can contribute to

agri-food system change which can be strengthened by alignment with other disruptive forces such as sustainability goals.

The adoption of urban agriculture in communities can have both positive and negative impacts, which must be considered. McClintock's (2018) study indicates that as the growth of urban agriculture begins to impact the image of a community then it can be used as a means of promotion for municipalities, business, developers, nonprofits, tourism, conferences and other groups interested in aligning themselves with the green lifestyle. Eco-gentrification describes the changes in communities that reflect values aligned with sustainable communities, such as the re-localization of food production, which can attract investment. However, the growth of "eco" trends requires a critical view of how urban agriculture is developed because it is often connected to gentrification and 'whiteness' (McClintock, 2020) and thus do "little to confront racial and class inequities" (Davidson, 2017, p.67). Social economy organizations may help advance equity concerns (Connelly et al., 2011) which can reduce some of these challenges through the inclusion of diversity in order to counteract the 'whiteness' of urban agriculture toward goals such as sustainability, food sovereignty and justice. Studies by Beckie and Bogdan (2010) and Hinton and Schnurr (2021) found that community gardens and commercial urban agriculture can be a welcoming place to support immigrants' transition to Canada.

The advancement of urban agriculture is challenged by access to land, where securing long-term land for agriculture can be difficult due to the pressure of development and urban sprawl. Scholars agree that competition for land is an ongoing challenge because of the financial rewards of development (Azunre et al., 2019; Beckie et al., 2013). They acknowledge a need to address historical thinking around land use, "which has given non-agricultural use in urban centers preference" (Azunre et al., 2019, p.104). A study on Edmonton's food and agricultural

strategy noted that "despite strong public support for the protection of urban farmland, most members of city council were compelled to equate the value of this land according to short-term economic gains associated with urban residential development" (Beckie et al., 2013, p.27). Despite this ongoing challenge in Canada, there are municipalities which have been successful in implementing legislation that protects and preserves land, for example, the Agricultural Land Reserve in British Columbia which also acts as a "*de-facto* urban containment boundary" (Hiley et al., 2011). Other challenges noted include the cost of urban land and the quality of soil and water in urban centers, which may be contaminated with pollutants (Davidson, 2017; Ela & Rosenburg, 2017). These successes and challenges indicate that, in Canada, there is progress toward the protection of and revaluation of land for long term agricultural use in urban and peri-urban areas.

Agricultural Societies in Canada

In Canada, agricultural societies have played an important role since the 1700s, contributing to agriculture life in their communities by organizing events, exhibitions, and fairs as well as recreational, educational and cultural activities (AAAS, n.d.; Merrett, 2015, Scott, n.d.). Agricultural societies "are volunteer driven, not-for-profit organizations whose mandate and diversity make them invaluable in the communities that they serve" (AAAS, n.d.). The number of organizations and their agricultural related activities in each province varies; however, Alberta is noteworthy because 291 agricultural societies remain active, more than any other province in Canada. Though food production is not a central aspect of their identities, a 2019 Alberta market statistic report indicates that 35% of Alberta-approved farmers' markets are sponsored by agricultural societies (Government of Alberta [GOA], 2022), and several organize or support community gardens (e.g. Beaumont, Spruce Grove). Agricultural societies may be in a

strategic position to support local food systems development because they can act upon local values, regional needs and contexts and because they are social economy organizations who have a history of engagement with the cultural activities of agriculture. Developing and advancing their role in the food system could be a potential way for agricultural societies to respond to and remain relevant with the evolving changes in agriculture. Currently, however, there is a dearth of research on the role and response of agricultural societies on the advancement of local food systems such as urban agriculture.

The globalization of the food system has had an impact on agricultural societies because the communities they serve have changed due to the adoption of a model of industrial agricultural production and urbanization of prime and other agricultural land. These changes have brought challenges highlighted in a recent report from Alberta and include remaining relevant in their community, lack of and aging volunteers, financial stability and direction (Hudson, 2017). These challenges have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to the dissolution of Alberta's oldest agricultural society located in Edmonton, the Northlands Agricultural Society. This 142-year-old nonprofit struggled after losing the Edmonton Oilers hockey team contract to Rogers Place and then being unable to host revenue generating events like Edmonton's K-Days and Farm Fair International due to the pandemic (Omstead, 2021). However, in the last few years before dissolution, Northlands Agricultural Society developed an urban farm project in Edmonton that was taken over by the City of Edmonton in 2021. It continues on as a resource for education and local food production in the heart of the city. Despite Northland's dissolution, this urban agricultural initiative points to a potential re-imagination of direction and purpose for agricultural societies in the province.

Irrespective of these organizational challenges, the economic, social and cultural value of agricultural societies remains significant. The Hudson Report (2017) conducted on behalf of AAAS looked at the community and economic benefits of agricultural societies in Alberta based on data from 2015. These include employment opportunities, contributions to scholarships and bursaries, cultural events, economic benefits, and providing facilities for the community. Nearly all of the $51 million of expenditures by primary agricultural societies in 2015 were spent in Alberta and within their local community (Hudson, 2017). Agricultural societies tend to have strong connections and support from local government, businesses and individuals, often receiving "in kind" goods and services valued at $4.1 million (cumulative) (Hudson, 2017). Though they continue to bring significant value to their communities, the Hudson Report (2017) advised that "agricultural societies must grow in order to keep up with their continually evolving communities… build a new vision and direction … integrating the vision, goals, and opportunities of other community leaders, champions, and stakeholders…produce and promote more events and activities" (p. vi). Though I was unable to locate information on their challenges and economic value in other provinces, strengthening their connection to local food systems may have benefits for all agricultural societies. Benefits could include new interest in societies, attracting new volunteers, new funding opportunities, creating new programs or services and new opportunities to collaborate with their community, local stakeholders, municipalities and remaining relevant by evolving with the ongoing changes in the agri-food system. Proponents for the re-localization of agriculture may benefit from collaborating with agricultural societies because they are connected to agriculture, have secure funding, are established and hold resources and positive relationships in their communities. Aligning themselves with the re-

localization of the food system could be an avenue for many of these organizations to respond to the recommendations in the Hudson Report and connect with emerging trends in agriculture.

Methodology and Methods

This study utilized a qualitative research methodology and methods (environmental scan, semi-structured interviews, focus groups) to gather data during two phases, with data from the first phase informing the following phase. Throughout the data collection phases, processes, questions, and interactions were reflected on and adjusted as needed to capture emerging themes.

Phase 1

The purpose of Phase 1 was to first develop an understanding of the history and contemporary context of agricultural societies across Canada, which to date has been an under-researched topic, and then to identify and examine more closely a select number of societies that are playing a supportive role in the development of local food systems. I began this phase with an environmental scan, consisting of a review of academic and grey literature, historical documents, society websites and social media presence. I also received some guidance on this exploration from the AAAS and other provincial associations in Canada. The information gathered informed the next task of this phase, which was to identify and examine a select number of agricultural societies (five - seven) that are playing a supportive role in local food system development in their communities through specific initiatives. To that end, I conducted semi-structured interviews with representatives from each of these societies to learn details about the nature of their initiatives, including the practices, resources and partnerships or collaborations with other agencies involved. Interviews were conducted online for a duration of 30-60 minutes using Zoom Meetings. Interviews were recorded, with interviewee consent, and transcribed verbatim. The information gathered was developed into a written summary that highlighted key

findings and was shared with the BADAS board for review and discussion. The summary was revised as needed before sharing with AAAS, the City of Beaumont and focus group and interview participants in Phase 2.

Phase 2

In Phase 2, my study focused on Beaumont, Alberta, city-region and BADAS. The purpose was to examine the current and potential role of BADAS to support local stakeholders' interests in creating a more sustainable and localized food system, as well as address the new Regional Agriculture Master Plan (RAMP) and municipal (City of Beaumont's Urban Agriculture Plan) agricultural policy directions. In this phase, a community-based participatory research (CBPR) approach (Janzen et al., 2016; Minkler & Wallerstein, 2003) was used. The intention of a CBPR approach is to be a participatory, cooperative, co-learning process in which participants are empowered and can increase control over outcomes through a balance between action and research (Minkler & Wallerstein, 2003). A CBPR approach is important for this project because research has identified that the success of local food systems needs is dependent on local values, resources and collaborative efforts of stakeholders, all of which are unique to each community. Therefore, in order to develop local food initiatives, such as urban agriculture, successfully in the Beaumont region, a participatory approach was seen to be critical in identifying what these local values and needs are, and to collectively develop outcomes that respond to community goals and local resources.

I organized four focus groups in Beaumont, which consisted of two to seven participants, and seven one-on-one interviews for those that are unable to attend focus groups to ensure inclusion of a diversity of local stakeholders. To identify participants, I used both purposive and snowball sampling. I invited directors from BADAS, one to represent the equine interests, one to

represent the garden interests and one who holds an executive position to ensure that all primary interests were represented. Other participants included food system stakeholders (e.g., businesses, teachers, citizens, local farmers). Invitations were sent out to potential focus group participants via email, Facebook or telephone.

The focus groups were 60-120 minutes in duration. Two were held via Zoom Meetings and two were conducted in person at a community center. I started the focus groups by sharing a summary of information gathered in Phase 1, then engaged participants in a joint, co-learning process to determine their values and needs around local food system development, and how BADAS is currently and could potentially better support this through the use of resources, programming and partnering with other organizations in the Beaumont region.

The focus groups were audio recorded with participants' permission and transcribed. During in-person focus groups, I had an assistant take note of key finding brought forth and map them using Miro (See Appendix F & G). An anonymized summary of the data was presented to the BADAS board for review and discussion before sharing with AAAS, the City of Beaumont and focus group and interview participants.

Data Analysis

Data analysis occurred after each phase of data collection. This study took a grounded theory approach to analysis, where the themes and theory evolved inductively from the data (Khan, 2014). This approach is appropriate because I was unable to find comparable studies on agricultural societies and their current or evolving role in supporting or advancing local food systems, such as urban agriculture.

Ethics

I submitted my research and ethics proposal for ethical review to the Research Ethics Board (REB) at the University of Alberta. This research followed provincial, municipal, and university health regulations guiding public activities during the COVID-19 pandemic. All data is stored on the researcher's password secured computer and will be removed from it and uploaded in a protected file within the students' University of Alberta's Google Drive account once this thesis is completed. As per the University of Alberta ethics requirements, the data will be kept for a minimum of five years. In completing my ethical review, I needed to consider my personal relationship with BADAS, my role as an urban farmer, including informed consent, as well as my position as a community member to both Beaumont and agricultural societies. Researching urban agriculture and the role of agricultural societies while also volunteering with the organization and being a part of the changing agri-food system is something I needed to be aware of. I had to ensure my role as a farmer and my desire to encourage local food production for my personal benefit doesn't overshadow other possible opportunities which can benefit BADAS, agricultural societies or my community as a whole. Furthermore, I needed to be mindful that my personal feelings, ideas, or biases were not being brought into discussions and did my best to be aware of how my responses, body language and demeanor impacted interviews and focus groups. I recognized that interviews and focus groups are interactional, and was cognizant of the limitations of the data I collected.

For both the one-on-one interviews and the focus groups, I clearly outlined the research goals and went through the informed consent sheet with each participant before signing. The research information and consent form outlined the topics, aims, and goals of the research, data usage, the risks, and benefits of participation, privacy and participant commitment. Research was conducted in Beaumont or Edmonton, Alberta, either virtually via zoom or in person for the one-

on-one interviews and for the focus groups. There was limited personal risk to this study as the topics are not sensitive and are limited to organizational strategies, idea generation and values related to urban agriculture and sustainable local food systems.

Personal Positionality

In addition to a requirement for my Master of Arts in Community Engagement; this thesis is tightly connected to my passions, career and hope for the future of agriculture in my community. I am a long-time resident of Beaumont; I am an activist who is deeply passionate about food and biodiversity; and, I am an urban farmer as well as a director with BADAS. This research is an important process for me to deepen my understanding of local food systems and the role of the social economy in creating and supporting changes in the food system and a reimagining of urban life.

Many topics were possible for research on local food systems in a transitioning food system; however, I chose to focus on the potential of agricultural societies because I found that they have been a missed resource in the literature on urban agriculture and local food systems. My experiences as a director with BADAS has led me to attend AAAS conventions since 2019 where themes have consistently focused on the sustainability of these organizations going into the future. Furthermore, this research responds to the key opportunities identified in the Hudson Report (2017) to continue to evolve and respond to local needs to ensure their future relevancy. As a director with BADAS there is a struggle to find support and funds to achieve development goals, also there is a disconnect between the society and the citizens of Beaumont, and to an extent with agriculture. This lack of awareness and limited offerings to connect with the community and attract invested leaders has strained the capacity of current volunteers and directors. The BADAS Fairgrounds within the City of Beaumont is a unique space that could be

capitalized on to add value for residences and encourage social interactions, recreation, and education related to nature, food production, agricultural innovations and economic growth. Therefore, identifying ways for BADAS to address and define their role in the evolution of urban agriculture may result in new initiatives and support for their future viability, as well as contribute to local, regional, citizen, agricultural, and global environmental objectives.

Conclusion

This thesis is organized into four chapters. In this introductory Chapter One presented the rationale for this study, the research question and objectives, along with a literature review, methodology and methods, and positionality statement. Highlighted in the literature review are some of the key factors influencing interest in and the development of local food systems in Canada, and the role of social economy organizations. Research has shown that strengthening local food systems is multifaceted and complex, dependent on local values and needs, and requires collaboration across all sectors. This chapter identifies a gap in the literature on agricultural societies and their current and potential role in the changing trajectories in agriculture, including the development of urban agriculture. BADAS in the community of Beaumont, and part of the Edmonton Capital Region, is identified as the culminating focal point of this research, examining how it might respond and contribute to local policy changes and citizens' values and needs as an opportunity to build their connection and value in the community. Chapter Two of this study examines the history and current role of agricultural societies in Canada and identifies societies of interest to interview in order to better understand the ways in which they are supporting local food systems. Chapter Three focuses on the community of Beaumont, Alberta and how BADAS can use its resources, programming and partnerships to support the community vision for a sustainable and more localized food system,

as well as regional and municipal agricultural policy changes. The final Chapter Four is a summary and discussion of the findings from Chapters Two and Three of this study.

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Chapter Two: The Role of Agricultural Societies in the Revitalization of Local Food Systems

Abstract

In Canada, the evolution of an industrialized and globalized agriculture model over the last century has distanced citizens and their communities from agriculture, farmers and food. Investing in and supporting local food systems is acknowledged as an essential readjustment to how we can re-establish relationships to our agri-food system. Agricultural societies are community-based organizations that could play a role in this process. Since the mid 1700s, these organizations have contributed to advancing agriculture and supporting rural communities across Canada. Despite their long history, however, the continued viability of these organizations is being challenged by a number of factors, including increasing urbanization, a declining number of farms and farmers in rural communities, increasing expenses and reduced government funding. Could the embodied expertise, community connections, and physical and social assets of agricultural societies be used to facilitate the rebuilding of local food systems? To date there has been little research on these organizations, particularly how they are responding to or positioning themselves within trajectories of change in agri-food systems. This exploratory and qualitative research examines the history and current role of agricultural societies across Canada, and provides further insights on how they are and could potentially contribute to building local food systems through interviews with select organizations located in the provinces of Alberta and British Columbia.

Keywords: *local food systems, agricultural societies, social economy, community development, food hubs*

Introduction

Agricultural societies have played a prominent role in the settlement of Canada as a strategy for fostering the growth and advancement of the agricultural sector and rural life (Jones, 1945; Clark, 1985). They are community-based nonprofit organizations, run primarily by volunteers, whose offerings respond to community needs and values. As such, they are part of what is known as the social economy, which is distinct from the public and private sectors, but often works in collaboration with them (Chaves & Monzón, 2012). Agriculture societies are provincially regulated and the number and roles of these organizations vary by province because each of the provinces has unique circumstances which have developed their agricultural systems.

Agriculture throughout Canada has changed with the adoption of an industrialized and globalized food system. The increasing scale of agriculture with an export orientation, particularly in Canada's Prairie Region, has resulted in fewer farms and farmers, which is impacting the viability of many rural communities (Hallstrom, 2023). Rising concerns about the social and cultural disconnect from agriculture (Granzow, 2020), as well as the negative environmental and health impacts (Artmann & Sartison, 2018; Bellows et al., 2003; Trobe & Acott, 2000) are motivating factors for societal, community, and policy change. One response is to invest in the re-localization of food systems by supporting small and medium-scale agriculture (Berti & Mulligan, 2017), including urban agriculture (Akimowicz et al., 2020; Horst et al., 2017; Pevec et al., 2021). Alternative food networks, such as producer cooperatives and food hubs, are initiatives that aim to reduce barriers and increase the economic viability of local food producers, but they can also contribute to communities' social, ethical, and sustainability goals (Beckie & Bacon, 2019; Berti & Mulligan, 2016; Manikas et al., 2019). Numerous studies have demonstrated that social economy organizations and their associated social infrastructure can

play pivotal roles in the development of local food systems (eg. Connelly & Beckie, 2016; Lavallée-Picard, 2018; Wittman et al., 2012). Agriculture societies, as nonprofit and volunteer-run organizations, are integral components of the social economy across Canada. However, there is a dearth of research on agricultural societies and their responses to or positioning within the trajectories of transformation in agri-food systems, including the emergence of urban agriculture.

This study addresses this gap in the literature by examining the potential of agricultural societies to support, advance, and develop local food systems. This study argues that agricultural societies in Canada can be strategic actors in encouraging and supporting the growing interest in local food systems and agricultural re-skilling. In this chapter, I provide an overview of the historical and current role of agriculture societies across Canada, developed through an environmental scan, and a more in-depth examination of organizations that are transforming their role to better support local food system development. In particular, agriculture societies in Alberta are well-placed to play a significant and supportive role in food system transformation due to the continued existence of a relatively high number of societies throughout the province, their substantial memberships, government support and an active and progressive provincial association.

Literature review

Canadian Trajectories in Agriculture

The adoption of industrial agriculture in Canada, and related reliance on agrochemical and technological inputs, has had significant impacts on farming and rural communities. One result is the consolidation of farms into large-scale operations through a process in which small and medium-scale farms have become economically unviable and over time are being acquired by larger operations. This transformation has been rapid; in 1980, there were nearly 317,000

farms in Canada (Veeman & Veeman, 1984), while current statistics indicate only 189,874 farms are now in operation (Government of Canada [GOC], 2023). Of those remaining, more than two-thirds of all revenues (87.7 billion) are generated by the largest 10% of farms (GOC, 2023).

Large-scale agriculture in the Canadian Prairie Region is less diverse and more export oriented than in other provinces, partly due to climatic and geographic characteristics. In all three prairie provinces, the top three agricultural commodities are wheat, canola, and cattle or hogs (GOC, 2023); for example, in Alberta; farms classified as oilseed, grain, and beef make up 68.8% of farms in the province and use 86% of the total farmland area (Pierre & McComb, 2023). Rural population decline is also pronounced in the prairie provinces, which has had a dramatic effect on the infrastructure, employment, local services and industry in rural communities (Hallstrom, 2023; Statistics Canada, 2022). Meanwhile, new entrants into farming are faced with high and escalating land prices, increasing costs of equipment and inputs, and volatile commodity prices, all of which serve as major barriers to reversing rural decline (Campbell et al., 2019; Statistics Canada, 2022c).

One response to these changes has been a resurgence of interest in small-scale and urban agriculture as a lower investment option for those wanting to move into food production for local markets (Campbell, 2019; Statistics Canada, 2018; Statistics Canada, 2022c). Recent statistics in Canada show that more women are choosing to become involved in farming small-scale and direct selling of agricultural products is a growing trend, particularly for smaller farms (Pierre, 2023). The agricultural sector is also transforming by adopting sustainable practices (e.g. organic, regenerative, minimum tillage), becoming renewable energy producers and investing in greenhouse production, which has seen an increase of 23.2% since 2016 (Statistics Canada, 2022c).

Growing awareness of the negative health, social and environmental impacts of the industrialized and globalized food system is contributing to increased consumer demand for locally produced food, which has surged in Canada over the past two decades (Alberta Agriculture and Forestry [AAF], 2017; Campbell, 2019). As a result, there has been significant investment supporting commercial, educational, and cultural local food initiatives (e.g. Buy BC, Local Food Infrastructure Fund) and as a household activity focused on health and recreation (Granzow & Jones, 2020).

In response to citizens' demands for increased access to nutritious and fresh food, support for local producers and more sustainable development of their communities, many cities are integrating agriculture into planning and policies (McClintock, 2010, Lavallée-Picard, 2018). Over the past two decades, there has been a rolling out of municipal urban agricultural policy across Canada, including Edmonton's Food and Urban Agricultural Strategy, Fresh (2012) and Vancouver's Park Board Urban Agricultural Policy (2015) and GrowTo an Urban Agriculture Action Plan for Toronto (2012). Other social economy-led initiatives, such as ReThink Red Deer (2007), are developing as hubs for urban agriculture and sustainability projects with municipal partnerships. New Policies to protect agricultural land are emerging, such as the Regional Agricultural Master Plan in Edmonton's metropolitan region, which aims to protect agricultural land and identifies agriculture as an economic development priority (EMRB, 2022). Advancement of local food initiatives requires social infrastructure which consists of governance structures, policies, resources and human connections available that enable change and investment into local food initiatives (Beckie & Bacon, 2019). Therefore, these new policies contribute to social infrastructure development in the food system by providing a favourable climate for growth in commercial, subsistence and recreational agriculture. Despite this progress,

research has found that integrating and valuing agriculture in new ways remains a challenge as the value of land continues to be assessed by the "short-term economic gains of residential development, despite the higher long-term costs of infrastructure and other services relative to agriculture" (Beckie et al., 2013, p.27-28). Another challenge to re-localizing agriculture is the economic viability of small and medium-scale agricultural producers, who face many barriers to entering conventional market streams (Ela & Rosenburg, 2017; Campbell et al., 2019; Manikas et al., 2019; Statistics Canada, 2022c).

Market access to locally produced products throughout Canada is largely supported through limited scale initiatives such as community-supported agriculture, food subscription boxes, farmers' markets, other direct sales methods, and small retail outlets (Statistics Canada, 2022c). Attempts to scale up and innovate can be seen in farmer cooperatives, such as YYC growers in Calgary, which is bringing urban and rural farmers together to provide a more diverse and increased volume of products through collective marketing (Beckie & Bacon, 2019). Reports conducted in Alberta and Saskatchewan indicate that consumers are increasingly seeking and purchasing local food, and the rationale behind purchasing is based on factors such as supporting local farmers, ensuring food safety, quality, and taste, and nutritional content (AAF, 2017; Campbell et al., 2019). Consumer demand may be contributing to emerging trends in agriculture, including evidence of diversification and growth in new farms in the Prairie Region. Alberta is reported to be one of only two provinces to have an increase in the number of farms from 2016 to 2021 by 2.1% and has the second-highest percentage of female farmers (Pierre & McComb, 2023). Statistics on farm types in the Prairie Region indicate increases in production of mushrooms, apiculture, other food crops grown under cover, tobacco farming, poultry and egg

production, sheep and goat farming and other miscellaneous crop farming (Statistics Canada, 2022b).

Trends in Alternative Food Networks and the Social Economy

Alternative food networks can encompass various mechanisms that offer alternative food provisioning in response to political, social, cultural and environmental concerns of the industrialized agri-food system (Alvarado et al., 2020; Corsi et al., 2018). Alternative food networks are value-based and aspire to be "locally-based alternatives to the market economy" (Sumner, 2012, p.35). Food hubs are a type of alternative food network which are often organized to reduce barriers for small-scale producers and processors, and can also respond to other societal needs such as sustainability, food security and food justice (Berti & Mulligan, 2016; Manikas et al., 2019). Morley et al. (2008) describe food hubs as a "middleman mechanism" (p.22) which are "influenced by individual consumer trends" (p.22) and aim to meet the needs of consumers and local producers who are economically challenged by the global food environment. Over the last 20 years, food hubs have expanded globally as an innovative response to the challenge of creating just and sustainable localized food systems (Alvarado et al., 2020; Manikas et al., 2019). Research in Europe positions food hubs as a valuable contributor to re-localizing food systems (Alvarado et al., 2020), and as a strategy for rural economic development (Curry, 2021). Food hubs can support policy actions and be collaborative with communities, post-secondary institutions and industry. In Canada, the British Columbia Food Hub Network is a strategy to support local food production which "aims to foster growth and innovation in the processing sector through improved industry access to facilities, equipment, technology, technical services and business support" (Government of British Columbia [GOBC], n.d.). Focused on supporting business, it responds to policies in British Columbia, such as Grow

BC, Feed BC and Buy BC, which were developed to improve food security and expand access to local products in the domestic market (GOBC, n.d.).

Social economy organizations are participatory and democratic nonprofit organizations which respond to needs and values in society not addressed through the private or public economy (Chaves & Monzón, 2012). Studies identify the social economy as a potential site for innovation, problem-solving and responding to local, environmental and political needs (Chaves & Monzon, 2012; Curry, 2021; Sumner, 2012). Notable in the literature is the intersection between local food initiatives and the social economy, whose shared values facilitate support such as physical and social infrastructure for producers and other food actors (Beckie & Bacon, 2019, Beckie et al., 2012, Connelly & Beckie, 2016; Wittman et al., 2012). According to Connelly and Beckie (2016), social infrastructure serves as the governance mechanism through which the values and objectives of alternative food initiatives are promoted. Research in Canada found that social economy organizations are contributing in multiple ways to local food systems, including community gardens, farmers' markets, food banks and collective kitchens (Beckie & Bacon, 2019; Beckie et al., 2012; Connelly & Beckie, 2016). These organizations may also help advance equity concerns (Connelly et al., 2011) because they invest in goals related to inclusion, diversity, sustainability, food sovereignty and justice (Curry, 2021) and can be a counterbalance the domination of market fundamentalism (Chaves & Monzon, 2012).

Agricultural societies in Alberta are mandated to improve agriculture and the quality of life in their communities (AAAS, n.d) but with the intensification of agricultural production and declining farm population, some no longer have strong, direct connections to agriculture. Many rural and urban communities in the province have an agricultural society which contribute to the community by providing recreation facilities (e.g. ice rinks, community halls) as well as hosting

events such as rodeos and fairs. Those who invested in physical infrastructure, such as buildings and land, could leverage these resources to encourage innovation and growth in agriculture. They benefit from provincial financial support through the Agricultural Societies Act (GOA, 2023), as well as leadership and support from the provincial association (AAAS, n.d.). On Sept 21, 2023, the Province of Alberta announced Agricultural Societies Day in recognition of their contribution to Alberta communities and history. Despite these assets and recognition, urbanization, declining government funding, increases in expenses (e.g. aging infrastructure, insurance) and declining rural communities challenge these organizations to attract new members and create new initiatives to remain viable, relevant and sustainable into the future (Hudson, 2017). Additionally, many agricultural societies are entering a period of succession; where a generation of volunteers is aging out, and new organizers are needed.

Methods

This qualitative research began by conducting an environmental scan to explore the history and evolution of agricultural societies in Canada. It consisted of a review of academic and grey literature, historical documents, and society websites and social media presence, as well as guidance from the Alberta Association of Agricultural Societies and other provincial associations in Canada. Despite their long history, information about the history and current situation of agricultural societies in Canada was difficult to find and sometimes there was conflicting information. I was unable to find conclusive data on the establishment of some agricultural society acts or provincial associations.

The information gathered informed the selection of agricultural societies for further investigation: four societies in the Province of Alberta, as this is where further research was conducted, and one society in the Province of British Columbia. The societies in Alberta are all

located in urbanizing metropolitan regions and were selected because they had innovative initiatives and directions which were connected to supporting local food system development and urban agriculture. The society in British Columbia was located in a rural area and was selected because they are a newly incorporated society developed to respond to and support recent agricultural policy and local agricultural producers in their region. The incorporation of new agricultural societies is an anomaly; in other provinces, the last agricultural societies were formed in the 1990s (Ontario Association of Agricultural Societies [OAAS], n.d.; AAAS, n.d.). I conducted semi-structured interviews with representatives from each of these societies to learn details about the nature of their initiatives, including the practices, resources, and partnerships or collaborations with other agencies involved. Interview were conducted online for a duration of 30-60 min using Zoom Meetings. Interviews were recorded, with interviewee consent, and transcribed verbatim. Questions asked aimed to gain perspective on their motivations for current offerings, how the organizations position themselves within local food systems, their future direction and aspirations and the challenges and opportunities they have experienced in meeting community needs. Throughout the data collection phases, processes, questions, and interactions were reflected on and adjusted as needed to capture emerging themes. These interviews contributed to identifying a need to include the provincial association perspective in Alberta. I secured an in-person interview with a representative in Edmonton, Alberta. The interview was 60 min and audio recorded with interviewee consent, and transcribed verbatim.

The information gathered was developing into a written summary that highlighted key findings and was shared with the BADAS board for review and discussion. The summary was revised as required before sharing with the AAAS, the City of Beaumont and focus group and interview participants in Phase two presented in Chapter Three of this thesis. This study used

grounded theory to qualitatively analyze the data collected. Themes were inductively drawn from the data by critically examining the transcriptions and tracking recurring expressions and their relationship to the local food system.

Findings

The History, Current Role and Potential of Agricultural Societies

Agricultural societies began as a government sponsored strategy to support agricultural development in Canada. Through their hosting of agricultural fairs and exhibitions based on European traditions, they brought innovation to communities by sharing knowledge, new agricultural products, tools and techniques, and competitions between producers were encouraged to develop improvements in and the economic growth of agriculture. Currently, these organizations are managed provincially and the establishment of provincial acts varies by province.

The establishment of the first agricultural society in Canada is unclear but it is reported to have occurred in the mid to late 1700s in Nova Scotia as a farmer-to-farmer network and agricultural support service (Nova Scotia Federation of Agriculture [NSFA], n.d; Scott, n.d.). In New Brunswick the first recorded agricultural society was The Sussex & Studholm Agricultural Society #21, established in 1841 (The Sussex & Studholm Agricultural Society #21, n.d.). The Sussex & Studholm Agricultural Society #21 is now known as the Sussex Co-op and is a co-operative agricultural farm store (The Sussex & Studholm Agricultural Society #21, n.d.). Agricultural societies in Prince Edward Island were established by the Central Agricultural Society, which oversaw the creation of 13 rural societies between 1827 and 1842 (Vass, 1979). In Newfoundland and Labrador, the first agricultural fair was held in 1869 (Ricketts, 2004);

however, no other mention of agricultural societies or fairs in this region is reported in the publication by Ricketts.

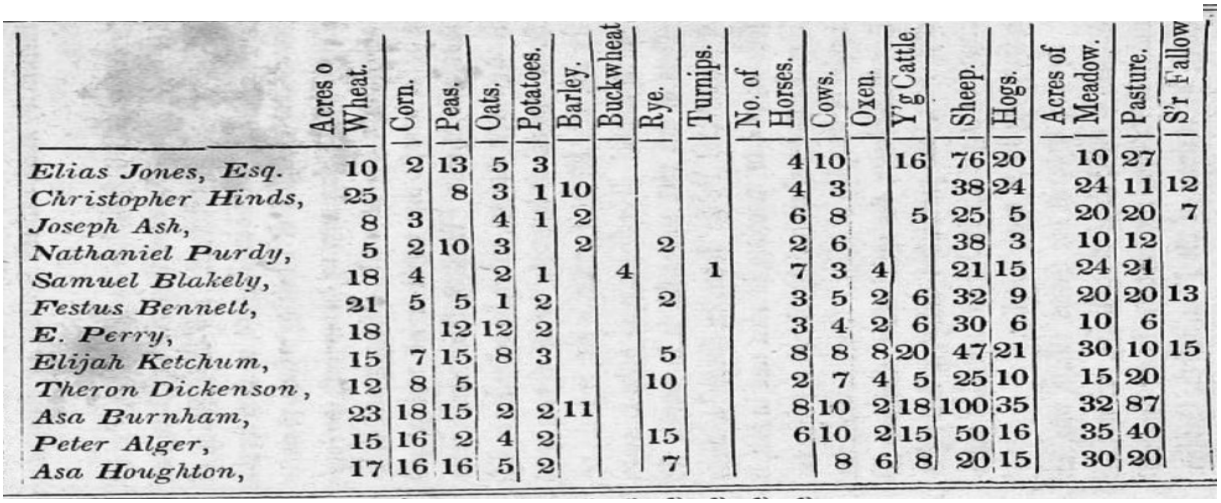
During my research into contemporary agricultural societies in Atlantic Canada, I was unable to find evidence of their current existence in these provinces, and more research would be needed to investigate how these organizations changed or dissolved. What I found was that other provincial entities appear to have subsumed societies, which are now farmer support service providers and are no longer agricultural societies; these include, the Nova Scotia Federation of Agriculture (NSFA), Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of Agriculture, Agricultural Alliance of New Brunswick, and the Prince Edward Island Federation of Agriculture. I found documentation that in Nova Scotia agricultural societies were subsumed into a new provincial organization, originally called the Nova Scotia Farmers' Association. It was formed during the winter of 1894-1895 as a "junction of the two main trends of agricultural organization in Nova Scotia: government sponsorship, as represented by the whole history of the agricultural societies, and the "grassroots" movement, as typified by the Grange experiment, the Farmers' and Dairymen's Association and, to a lesser extent, the Fruit Growers Association" (NSFA, n.d). The current mandate of these organizations is similar to historical agricultural societies, as they position themselves as supporting farmer-to-farmer networking, including advocating for them politically, addressing environmental issues like climate change, and promoting and supporting youth in agriculture and agricultural education.

In the 1800s, the formation of agricultural societies spread from the Atlantic region to Upper and Lower Canada, which consisted of what is now Ontario and Quebec. Newspaper reporting and historical documents provide evidence of agricultural societies having

close ties with the elites, politicians, and commodity producers of the 1800s in Upper Canada (The Genesee Farmer & Gardeners Journal, 1832). The agricultural products that agricultural societies accounted for in the newspaper in 1832 (Figure 1), such as wheat, hogs, and beef, are some of the largest commodity products Canada exports today (Canada Agri-Food Trade Alliance, 2024). This suggests that agricultural societies may have been a significant contributor to the trajectory of the agri-food system in Canada towards commodity production aimed at export.

Figure 1

Record of Agricultural Production from the Genesee Farmer & Gardener's Journal (1832)



	Acres o Wheat.	Corn.	Peas.	Oats.	Potatoes.	Barley.	Buckwheat	Rye.	Turnips.	No. of Horses.	Cows.	Oxen.	Y'g Cattle.	Sheep.	Hogs.	Acres of Meadow.	Pasture.	S'r Fallow
Elias Jones, Esq.	10	2	13	5	3					4	10		16	76	20	10	27	
Christopher Hinds,	25		8	3	1	10				4	3			38	24	24	11	12
Joseph Ash,	8	3		4	1	2				6	8		5	25	5	20	20	7
Nathaniel Purdy,	5	2	10	3		2		2		2	6			38	3	10	12	
Samuel Blakely,	18	4		2	1		4		1	7	3	4		21	15	24	21	
Festus Bennett,	21	5	5	1	2			2		3	5	2	6	32	9	20	20	13
E. Perry,	18		12	12	2					3	4	2	6	30	6	10	6	
Elijah Ketchum,	15	7	15	8	3			5		8	8	8	20	47	21	30	10	15
Theron Dickenson,	12	8	5					10		2	7	4	5	25	10	15	20	
Asa Burnham,	23	18	15	2	2	11				8	10	2	18	100	35	32	87	
Peter Alger,	15	16	2	4	2			15		6	10	2	15	50	16	35	40	
Asa Houghton,	17	16	16	5	2			7			8	6	8	20	15	30	20	

Note. From AAS Historical Periodicals Collection "Genesee Farmer & Gardener's Journal: A Weekly Paper; Devoted to Agriculture, Horticulture & Rural Economy. January 7, 1832, p.8 Copyright 2010 by the American Antiquarian Society.

The earliest agricultural society I found reported in Quebec was the Quebec Agricultural society formed by Lord Dorchester in 1789 (Statistics Canada, n.d). Quebec agricultural societies have continued to promote agriculture through fairs and exhibitions, currently hosting twenty-eight agricultural exhibitions per year (Association des Expositions Agricoles du Quebec, n.d.).

The Association des Expositions Agricoles du Quebec was originally formed in 1940 but was dismantled due to the war and re-established in order to give needed support to agricultural fairs in the province in 1955 (Association des Expositions Agricoles du Quebec, n.d.). I was unable to find documentation of when the Agricultural Societies Act was created in Quebec but found that the most recent version was in effect in May, 1996 but was repealed in December, 1997 (Publications du Québec, 2021). In 1997, agricultural societies in Quebec became regulated through the Companies Act (Publications du Québec, 2016).

In Ontario, the first society is reported to have formed in 1792 as the Agricultural Society of Upper Canada (Scott, n.d.). At one point, Ontario had over 500 agricultural societies (Scott, n.d.). The provincial association, the Ontario Association of Agricultural Societies, was formed in February 1911 in Castleton, Ontario (Ontario Association of Agricultural Societies District 3, 2013). I was unable to determine when the first Agricultural Societies Act was enacted to govern societies in Ontario. However, I was able find that in 1988, the Ontario Agricultural and Horticultural Organizations Act replaced the Agricultural Societies Act, the Horticultural Societies Act and the Agricultural Associations Act (OAAS, n.d.).

Following the establishment of agricultural societies, Ontario and Quebec developed farmer associations such as the Ontario Federation of Agriculture and Quebec Farmers' Association (supporting Anglophone farmers) and L'Union des Producteur Agricole (supporting French Farmers). These organizations have taken on the role of farmer-to-farmer networking and economic development of agriculture, which was once the role of agricultural societies in the 1800s, and they are also political advocacy groups which promote and support agriculture in these provinces.

The establishment of agricultural societies in Western Canada was linked to the arrival of settlers. Records are unavailable as to when the Agricultural Societies Act was first established in Manitoba; however, it was amended in 1987 (Province of Manitoba, 2003) and the most recent amendment was April 1, 2022 (Province of Manitoba, 2023). In 1875, the Winnipeg Agricultural Society was established in Manitoba (Manitoba Historical Society Archives, 2023); however, historical records indicated that by the 1890s societies were "largely displaced by the farmers institutes" which "continued the work started by the societies" (Manitoba Historical Society Archives, 2009). The provincial association, the Manitoba Association of Agricultural Societies, was formed on November 27, 1986, and incorporated on October 14, 1992 (Representative Manitoba Association of Agricultural Societies, personal communication, January 11, 2024). The Agricultural Societies Act in Saskatchewan was established in 1906 (Province of Saskatchewan, 1906) and repealed in 2007 (Province of Saskatchewan, 2007). The first agricultural society was incorporated in Saskatchewan in 1883 (Clark, 1985). The provincial association was established as Saskatchewan Agricultural Societies Association in 1953 (Moose Jaw Agricultural Society, n.d.) and was incorporated as the Saskatchewan Association of Agricultural Societies and Exhibitions Inc. in 1987 (Moose Jaw Agricultural Society, n.d.). A book on the history of Saskatchewan agricultural societies describes how settlers perceived societies at that time, highlighting their importance in the settlement of Canada:

> Many of the west's new settlers thus came with an awareness of the way an organized society could help them exchange information on crop and animal husbandry. They saw their local agricultural societies as a way to display their crops, their livestock and their domestic arts and crafts. Perhaps even more important, the societies provided an

> opportunity for the social gatherings that were so essential in early western Canada...[and] focus[ed] on the economic importance of agriculture (Clark, 1985, p.3).

The societies expanded into Alberta in the 1870s with the hosting of fairs, and they became an official agricultural development strategy under the Agricultural Societies Ordinance in 1886, which became the Agricultural Societies Act in 1903 (AAAS, 2022). The Alberta Association of Agricultural Societies (AAAS), originally formed in 1905 as the Alberta Association of Fairs, was incorporated in 1947 (AAAS, n.d).

In the 1900s, the three prairie provinces established new farmer networking and advocate organizations such as the United Farmers of Manitoba (formerly known as Manitoba Grain Growers Association est. 1903) and the Saskatchewan Grain Growers Association (est. 1906),which merged to become the United Farmers of Canada, and in Alberta, the Alberta Federation of Agriculture (previously established as Farmers' Union of Alberta, 1959). The establishment of these organizations may have influenced the direction and role of agricultural societies away from farmer networks and economic development to focus on events such as fairs and exhibitions and recreational activities which support the quality of life in their communities.

In British Columbia, The Agricultural Societies Incorporation Act was established in 1873 (The Province of British Columbia, 1892). However, information about this act and how it changed has been difficult to identify. I found two other acts which came into effect after the Agricultural Societies Act, which seemed to have overlapping roles. The first is the Farmer Institute and Co-operation Act in 1897 (Carlisle, 1986), and the second is the Agricultural Associations Act, which was enacted in 1911 (Province of British Columbia, 1911). In British Columbia, one of the oldest agricultural societies, the Cowichan Agricultural Society, was founded in 1868 and merged in 1963 with the Cowichan Farmers' Institute (est. 1914)

(Cowichan Agricultural Society, n.d.). Today in British Colombia, all nonprofits are governed under the Societies Act. Of interest in British Columbia is the establishment of new agricultural societies in the 2000s. Unlike other provinces which have not had any new societies formed since the 1990s or earlier, these societies in British Columbia were formed to support local agricultural initiatives, as a response to new agricultural policy and as promoters of non-conventional agriculture practices (eg. Biodynamic Agriculture Society of British Columbia (est. 2019), Kootenay Local Agricultural Society (est. 2008)).

The provincial acts governing agricultural societies have changed with the changes in agriculture. As noted, acts in most provinces have been repealed, and agricultural societies are now mandated under other acts, the exceptions are Alberta and Manitoba, which continue to be mandated under the Agricultural Societies Act. Most of the amended acts or repeals occurred in the 1980s and 1990s at the same time as rapid growth in large-scale agriculture. Additionally, this research suggests the direction they have taken over the last century may also have been shaped by the development of other farmer support organizations.

Today in the prairie region, there are 57 societies in Saskatchewan, 57 in Manitoba, and 291 in Alberta. Ontario has 210 agricultural societies whose "most enduring and endearing legacy" is the agricultural fair, which is an important part of Ontario's and Canadian culture (Scott, n.d.). I was unable to determine how many societies exist in British Columbia, Quebec, or Atlantic Canada (Newfoundland and Laborador, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island), and the Canadian Territories were excluded from this study as no evidence of agricultural societies was found.

The current role of agricultural societies within a community often reflect broader municipal, regional and provincial, community development and food and agriculture policy

goals. I found that agricultural societies continue to evolve and many have integrated trends from the local food movement into their offerings. Initiatives that they are championing include: advocating for buying local, creating pollinator gardens, providing community gardens, developing urban farms and food forests, supporting agriculture education, facilitating local producer and consumer connections such as through farmers' markets and agri-tourism (ex. Open Farm Days). In Alberta, for example, I found that 75 of the 291 societies with an online presence were communicating about initiatives related to the sustainable development of local food systems. Evidence of strong support for them politically in Alberta was the provincial announcement of Agricultural Societies Day on Sept 21, 2023, to recognize their contribution to Alberta communities and history.

Agricultural societies in Canada are mandated to improve and promote agriculture but with the intensification of agricultural production and declining farm population, some no longer have strong, direct connections to agriculture. These trends in agriculture and rural communities are most pronounced in the Prairie Region. Yet, many rural and urban communities in the prairies have an agricultural society, which contributes to the community by providing recreation facilities (e.g. ice rinks, community halls) as well as hosting events such as rodeos and fairs. Those that invested in physical infrastructure, such as buildings and land, could leverage these resources to encourage innovation and growth in agriculture. Despite these assets and recognition, urbanization, declining government funding, increases in expenses (e.g. aging infrastructure, insurance) and declining rural communities challenge these organizations to attract new members and create new initiatives to remain viable, relevant and sustainable into the future (Hudson, 2017). Additionally, many agricultural societies are entering a period of succession; where a generation of volunteers is aging out, and new organizers are needed.

The Current and Future Potential of Agricultural Societies to Support Local Food Systems

The four interviews with societies in metropolitan regions of Alberta and an interview with a rural society in British Columbia helped to deepen my understanding of the potential of these social economy organizations to support the revitalization of local food systems. The provincial perspective of the AAAS representative taking part in this research also contributed to understanding how these organizations are a collaborative social economy network that could be leveraged to broaden their impact beyond their own communities. Through analysis of the interview data, themes emerged concerning agricultural societies' roles, practices, and partnerships in their communities. Participants identified organizational capacity and socio-cultural changes in communities as significant influences on their offerings and their ability to respond to community needs. Representatives of agricultural societies felt that being an educational resource and advocate aligned with their mandate, and that the ability to partner and collaborate was essential to providing programs and initiatives connected to the local food system. Moreover, they identified agricultural policy changes and economic development as important directions they are or could take to contribute to the development of local food systems and the success of small-scale producers. Further details on each of the three themes are presented in the following sections.

The Influence of Capacity and Community Demographics

Organizational capacity was discussed by all participants as the main limiting or supporting factor for them to develop new programming and initiatives to contribute to the development of local food systems. Participants' shared that the capacity to respond to producer and consumer needs is shaped by the resources available within their organization, such as people, funding, skills and partnerships. Human resources were identified as the most significant

influence on their organization because they are volunteer-led with limited or no paid staff. Activities, events, and initiatives are based on what the board and members are willing and capable of doing, and what aligns with what they perceive is relevant to their organization and community. Participants agreed that each society is unique; therefore, their role in supporting or developing agricultural initiatives will vary. An interviewee commented:

> We're supposed to take our cues from the community in terms of what are their wants. We can be a little bit ahead of the times, but you basically can't be too far ahead .... It's part of the mandate of the agricultural society, to be fulfilling the needs of the community (P1).

Participants shared that local food system initiatives would require attracting passionate leaders who are willing to invest their time and energy to pursue agricultural connections. Having farmers on their board of directors was highlighted by the British Colombia society as key to building connections with their local food system because it brings the needs of local producers into decision-making. However, they noted that farmers are time constrained, so the society needs to add value to their membership in order to attract farmers, or partner with other organizations who are supporting small and medium scale farmers. This finding speaks to how social economy led food initiatives are locally embedded and controlled and "conditioned by local community norms, values, and culture" (Lyson et al., 1995, p. 108). If agricultural societies aim to strengthen their role in the local food system, they need to find ways to be inclusive of people who hold those values and culture into positions that can influence planning and decision making and resulting initiatives. However, any new direction they take or how they support local food producers will have some elements of risk. Risk is significant for small producers and nonprofits to scaling initiatives or production because both are dependent on supply and demand

(Connelly and Beckie, 2016). Connelly and Beckie (2016) draw attention to risk management as "a critical component of social infrastructure" (pp.60-61) and point to the need to consider "who shares the risk?" (p.60). First steps in managing risk for agricultural societies may be grounded in the partnerships and stakeholders they can mobilize to take action together in their communities, to share the burden of risk.

To bring local food values, norms, and culture into their organization, they may first need to build up human capacity. To build human capacity, societies need to engage with the wider community to attract people who are willing to invest their time and talents and keep them engaged. However, at times the capacity of the board is limited and this can reduce how much and how often they can engage with the community. As a participant reported:

> I think when we decided to go with just board meetings, I think the membership felt a loss of connection. So just communicating to them through a newsletter or whatever, it wasn't enough, they weren't being engaged (P4).

Ongoing communication is required using multiple platforms and methods, and this can be challenging because it requires people who are skilled in marketing and communication, as well as an understanding of your community's demographics and how they access information. As many of the boards in Alberta are managed by older generations, an influx of younger members with new skills and knowledge are needed to expand offerings and modernize their organizations:

> Some of the newer members that have joined, have more of a connection to the new way of doing things. Definitely electronic communication…which older members are a bit challenged with…They've definitely brought fresh ideas, fresh energy. I think it has

> really encouraged new members when they see the different sorts of new types of things that they can get involved with (P4).

However, electronic communication was noted by all interviewees as not enough or necessarily effective. For example, in a rural community in British Columbia, posting on community boards and word of mouth by farmers and through the farmers' market were more effective than online communications.

For the society representatives from Alberta, urbanization is shaping their organization's identity and offerings. Agricultural societies in metropolitan regions, which were once associated with small rural towns, are now situated in bedroom communities with new residents who are generations removed from rural agricultural life or are immigrants to Canada. These new residents may not be aware of agricultural societies, what they do, or how they could benefit from being a part of the society. "Urbanites" is a term participants used to describe people with little rural knowledge or agricultural backgrounds. Historically, agricultural societies were and are often still managed by commodity farmers or families with ties to agriculture. Today, they need to find a way to attract urban people and new farmers to their organization; however, building awareness of their organization within these new demographics is challenging. A participant observed in their community: "It's amazing how many people, despite the fact there are a few signs, have absolutely no idea what we're doing" (P2). Building awareness is also a provincial organizational challenge, as societies are often "a community's best kept secret" as they rarely focus on self-promotion. This is because agricultural societies invest most of their time promoting events and activities rather than developing and marketing their brand. Developing brand awareness could be essential for connecting with communities and may be a strategy that could be collaboration between societies. Connelly and Beckie (2016) suggest that

scaling of local food initiatives should take an incremental approach by investing in social infrastructure first. This strategy, they argue, can support reflexive consideration of their organizations' values but may be also essential to navigate short-term goals to achieve long-term transformative change (Connelly & Beckie, 2016). These findings suggest that focusing on social infrastructure can support developing agricultural societies brand and building awareness by encouraging reflexive thinking about their organization and partnerships with other agencies to generate innovative solutions which could support long-term change.

The perceived disconnection of people from their food system was a concern for participants. As one participant commented, "it just amazes me how in just a generation or two, how removed urbanites have become from agriculture, including my own grandchildren" (P2). Connecting urban-raised people with rural life and agriculture is considered a valuable contribution agricultural societies could make to support agriculture and local food systems. A participant noted, "we are always looking to promote that rural-urban connection" (P2). However, it was observed that the mixing of urban and rural life can create tensions along with new opportunities for societies to develop their identity around the needs of a more diverse demographic. Part of the challenge is that agriculture is perceived by many as something rural or distant, and therefore can be out of urban peoples' minds and comfort zones. An interviewee shared:

> I think there's an opportunity for agricultural societies to help make agriculture more relatable and more relevant to people that maybe don't live on ag-producing farms or on ranches. Even in small towns, you have people [who] aren't from farms (P5).

Many agricultural societies in Alberta are governed by retired and aging farmers who have a lot of experience and knowledge that could benefit emerging farmers and the general

public who want to produce food. A participant indicated that there are "multigenerational farmers in the community, and they [are] real bent [on] trying to get urban people to understand a little bit more about nature and where your crops, your food comes from that sort of thing" (P2). Participants recognized a desire among the general population to strengthen their connection to agriculture and food, but the capacity of the board and limited resources can impact their ability to pursue these types of initiatives. As a participant asserted about pursuing agricultural programming, "it would depend very much on the individuals that you have involved in a particular ag society; it would be nice to think we could do more of that" (P2). Research identifies that the intersection of values found between social economy organizations and the local food movement is a significant advantage that can facilitate actions to support the strengthening of local food systems (Beckie & Bacon, 2019; Curry, 2021). These findings highlight that these intersections of values are already woven within agricultural societies because of their long history and membership based in agriculture. Therefore, shifting their role and rebranding themselves in alignment with the redevelopment of local food systems is not contrary to their current values.

The capacity of agricultural societies to respond to community needs is reported to be influenced by their ability to build and develop partnerships and collaborations in their community. Collaborations are usually event or project-based and are often instigated by the agricultural society. Participants highlighted that reconnecting communities to agriculture and supporting local food initiatives is challenging because they tend not to be very profitable even when popular; they need to be creative to ensure their success. Seed exchanges are a popular offering and a participant shared that to help cover costs and attract participants, "We sell tables…we give or sell concessions…turn it into a growers' and makers' market…..give free

lectures on gardening…people can give a donation or buy a ticket to the raffle" (P1). Partnering with other agencies, like the local public library, to develop a seed library was another strategy to help reduce costs and could support community connections to agriculture. Diverse collaborations were shared by participants and can include sharing expertise, exchanging resources, skills and infrastructure, collaborating on events and programs or participating on committees. These findings add to other research which has found that collaborations with government, community groups, other nonprofit and businesses based on a shared vision are found to be essential to the success of local food initiatives (Akimowicz et al., 2020; Connelly & Beckie, 2016).

Developing partnerships within their community and among agricultural societies could help support the scaling of local food initiatives. Research by Beckie et al. (2012) investigated the role of geographic clustering which fosters collaboration among farmers' markets and stakeholders, and is aiding in addressing the challenges of scope, scale, organizational capacity and infrastructure which are characteristic of local food initiatives. These authors found that the clustering of farmers' markets in the regions they examined in Alberta and British Columbia is contributing to the expansion and evolution of local food networks. Agricultural societies may be contributing to clustering because of their diverse collaborations and partnerships in their communities. They could also leverage these relationships to expand the benefits of clustering in their community and provincially to support scaling of local food production.

Partnerships, participants reported, can also expand funding opportunities when they are strategically applied for, by assigning the grant writing to the partner that is in the best position to apply and be successful in acquiring a grant. Participants acknowledged that funding and sponsorship constraints can limit the scope and timeline of projects regardless of community

interest or need. Participants identified their municipal government as one of their most important and ongoing partnerships for funding and support. A participant reported that for one of their collaborative projects, “the bulk of the work that’s done there is done by town employees…. there are lots of volunteer hours go into it too, but, on a daily basis [the town takes on this responsibility]” (P2). Partnerships are not limited to local communities, however, and agricultural societies greatly benefit from the support of their provincial association. Provincial associations can set the tone for strategies and programs taken up by agricultural societies in their province and are a significant resource for accessing training, education, funding opportunities and networking among agricultural societies at conferences and regional meetings. Participants in Alberta noted that partnering between agricultural societies is underutilized and building relationships with other societies could bring significant benefits to the province. A participant shared: “I’ve often felt like it’s a network that is not leveraged for real provincial benefits” (P5). As participants noted, collaboration between societies could build a collective competitive advantage throughout the province. These findings add to other research on social economy organizations by noting that agricultural societies, unlike many other community-based social economy organizations, are part of a network of organizations across Canada. Provincial associations host annual conferences and are also affiliated with the Canadian Association of Fairs and Exhibitions, which is another connection they have across Canada. These relationships further expand their potential to share information, rebrand and support the re-development of local food systems within their province, between provinces and across Canada in ways other social economy organizations would be challenged to do.

Education, Infrastructure and Aligning with Local Trends

Agricultural societies report that they are adapting to changes in community values and demands by advocating for sustainability trends. Sustainability trends are viewed as something that has gone from a small niche in society to one being taken up by municipalities and citizens. Some of the ways they do this is by providing information about organic agriculture practices, processing and selling locally made products at their facilities, sharing these trends on social media, and sourcing from local farmers for community events (e.g. Halloween pumpkins). A participant described these trends as:

> Reduce, reuse, recycle, have everything green, eat local, eat clean and eat organic…Instagram worthy … that idea that value-added things that were grown here, organically, locally picked and harvested by hand brought to the kitchen today. It has a value in terms of you know, that people think it's something worth paying for, and I think that this is trickling down to the public in a more general sense (P1).

Advocating for these trends is another opportunity to align with their local food system and reinforce the value and benefits it brings to their local economy and community. Sumner (2012) argues that "sustainable communities should be centred on the civil commons, not on private entrepreneurship that benefit a local elite" (p.32). Re-developing local food systems is embedded in sustainability values and suggests that it may be essential for these values to be supported by social economy organizations, such as agricultural societies, who are locally embedded and responding to issues of justice and sovereignty (Connelly et al., 2011, Sumner, 2012). However, it is important to note that developing appropriate sustainability initiatives may vary based on geographic location, urban versus rural communities, and demographics (Zulauf & Wagner, 2021). Therefore, understanding the values and needs within individual communities will be essential for agricultural societies to create relevant initiatives.

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted global supply chains and increased interest in local food availability, including through home and community gardening (Mullins et al., 2021). Agricultural societies in this study with community gardens and urban farms reported more interest in their gardening resources following the COVID-19 pandemic. In response, they expanded their community gardens and agricultural offerings to meet the demands in their community. As one participant commented:

> We literally had community partners coming out of the woodwork that wanted to be involved in this food security project to allow [immigrants], and other equity seeking groups access to space to grow food. We started to see funding roll in through a connection to food security and food production for disadvantaged groups (P5).

Responding to this demand helped to secure additional government funding to expand projects. The demand for agricultural related programs in urban centres cannot be understated, as a participant expressed, "we went from having about maybe 30 families growing food on the farm to now about 300 people growing food" (P5). A participant shared that providing food production spaces is increasingly important because "most people in these urban areas have very small properties, or they live in condos and don't have access to areas to grow food" (P4). Other services identified by participants that societies provide include physical resources, such as mulch, soil, and seeds, or information on how to start a community garden. These findings support their role in the social economy, which interacts with and partners with the private and public sectors in order to achieve common goals (Chaves & Monzón, 2012). Food security, supporting immigrants and supporting disadvantaged groups are often community needs which social economy organizations fulfill and which the public sector also needs to address but may not have the capacity to undertake. This study found agricultural societies can reduce some of

their financial challenges by aligning local food system needs with social, political and policy trends in their communities, which may increase access to available funding opportunities to expand and develop local food initiatives. It is important to note that most agricultural societies are governed by Caucasian people, similar to research findings that within the local food movement there is an aspect of whiteness and ecogentrification that counter deeper goals of inclusiveness and social justice (McClintock, 2018, Horst et al., 2017). Though some agricultural societies have shown they are connecting with and responding to the needs of minority groups and immigrants, welcoming a diversity of people into their organizations may be essential for them to better connect and grow local food systems. Hinton and Schnurr (2021) and Beckie and Bogdan (2010) have highlighted the significant value that urban agriculture and gardening bring to support the health and wellbeing of immigrants transitioning to Canada. Therefore, by intentionally developing as a welcome space for immigrants in communities, they can support immigrants' quality of life and ensure local food systems are developing to be inclusive and welcoming spaces for all.

Representatives from agricultural societies interviewed identified education as a fundamental strategy to connect with their community, and this aligns with their purpose and expertise. A participant asserted: "So education, I think, is kind of our main thing that we look at, that we can be most effective" (P4). Education is also a strategy used to support food producers, advocate for environmental sustainability in food production, and expand recreational or cultural activities. Agricultural education for children and youth was viewed by a participant to be "all about that kind of hands-on immersive, very rich learning for kids. It took something relatively abstract and made it really concrete" (P5). In urban settings, creating learning spaces, such as an urban farm or community garden, can facilitate awareness and skill development. Gardens are

perceived as a relevant and accessible way for community members to connect with agriculture, and can also support small commercial operations. Moreover, in contrast to hosting events, educational programming and hands-on learning opportunities can be ongoing activities used to build awareness and community connections. As one participant explained, their urban farm model "offered kind of a three-season opportunity for people to come to the site and experience something related to agriculture" (P5).

Educational programming can be time and resource consuming, however. For example, creating educational opportunities which cater to school programming can be a lengthy process because it can take time to determine how these activities can be of value and align with teacher and curriculum needs. Beyond the school system, there is a demand among the general population for learning food skills, such as food preservation, but hosting these types of programs is challenged by a lack of experts to teach the classes and the availability of appropriate facilities. Offering the accredited post-secondary Master Gardener program is one educational avenue an Alberta society has maintained to meet demands for agricultural knowledge. This program provides employment for gardening experts in the region, and as part of the programming requirements students learn skills by helping to maintain gardening facilities. A representative from this society commented that the program has changed recently, from a focus on flower gardens and landscaping to food production and sustainable agricultural practices. This reflects their adaptation to meet changing community interests. From a provincial perspective, the role, or offerings, of an agricultural society closer to urban areas may differ from those in more rural areas. For example, providing agricultural education about where our food comes from and how we grow and process it may be most important in urban areas because people may be generations removed from agriculture or new to Canada. In rural communities

surrounded by conventional agriculture, the educational offerings may focus on alternative trends in agriculture, such as regenerative farming. Supporting agricultural education requires land resources and collaboration with public institutions such as schools and the educators which are facilitating the programming. These findings align with the ways the social economy depends on relationships in their communities to deliver services that are needed and underserved, such as agricultural education.

In this research I found that agricultural societies that provide educational or infrastructure resources self-identify as a hub. Four of the five society participants used the term "hub" to describe their potential or the direction they felt they were headed. A participant described their community urban farm model:

> We really looked at it as a venue or as a hub for the community to utilize to grow food and offer food programming, whatever kind of programming they want. We do everything from arts and culture to food (P5).

The urban farm model in its inception was also an incubator farm which supported a small-scale farmer. Incubator farms are another successful model for providing a networking hub with education and training. Though no longer an incubator farm project, it continues to depend on partnerships, which enabled them to scale up their programming while not impacting overall costs. This is because community groups organize and run the educational programs, while the agricultural society provides land access and resources. The way they are adapting to societal changes and values align with recent proposed models for food hubs. Food hubs are an evolving mechanism to support local and regional food systems whose purposes and functions can vary along with people's understanding or definitions of what a food hub is (Berti & Mulligan, 2016; Manikas et al., 2019). Food hubs are a form of alternative food network and can be organized by

social economy organizations (Curry, 2021). Most often, food hubs are defined in two ways, either in terms of market efficiency functions such as competitiveness in the supply chain or a broader definition which connects them to "visions of building a more sustainable food system" (Berti & Mulligan, 2016, p.7). Recent research on food hubs in Europe emphasizes the amalgamation of these two purposes and functions to meet consumer and producer needs to create sustainable local food systems (Manikas et al., 2019), and as a strategy for rural economic development (Curry, 2021). Developing as a multifunctional food hub is the direction that the British Columbia agricultural society represented in this research is taking:

> The intention is to create a food hub that'll have multiple services, so both supporting the branding of the region and of the firm's [agricultural society], but also having space for other community programs like food literacy and other more social initiatives. (P3)

The direction and role of this society aligns with the AAAS vision for agricultural societies in Alberta supporting local food systems in the province.

A Provincial Vision in Alberta: Contributing to Economic Development

The Hudson Report (2017), commissioned by the AAAS, details the cumulative benefits of agricultural societies in the province. This report is an important resource for societies to secure government and other funding because it provides evidence of their contribution and value. Participants in this study felt that agricultural societies could increase their economic impact in communities by focusing on ways they can support their local food system. Supporting local food producers and processors, as part of growing the local food system, was identified by interviewees as emergent but still significantly underdeveloped by agricultural societies in Alberta. Combining societies' existing resources and activities with local food purchasing was

one method to support local producers and processors that was highlighted by participants, as reflected in this comment:

> How do you make sure that if you're running the curling bonspiel that the products that you're selling at your concession actually drive economic value back to your community? Or if you've got a commercial kitchen, can that be used to stimulate business start-up. If you have lots of small food producers, is there a way you can use your community center as a hub or as a distribution center (P5).

Encouraging each other to prioritize purchasing local and regional products and creating a network of information about locally produced products could also boost the economic contributions of agricultural soceties. This can also help build relationships with their business community. As a participant stated: "You don't go for the cheapest solution; you go where you can support the most people and give back" (P1). Another potential strategy offered by a participant was to "help drive economic impact back to your community by doing small, interesting niche, sort of pop up events or activations" (P5).

Agricultural societies with land resources can leverage this to support small farm start-ups (e.g. incubator farms, greenhouses, indoor growing facilities) to grow produce for sale and provide training facilities for commercial growers. Often, small-scale farmers sell their products through community supported agriculture (CSA) and food box schemes, which are a direct marketing strategy employed by small- and medium-scale producers. This strategy was piloted by an agricultural society with land and existing perennial plants, such as fruit trees, flowers, herbs, and asparagus. They offered a food box for sale to members and had significant interest from the wider community for purchasing the boxes. The labour to manage the farming and

packing of the products was, however, a challenge for the non-profit and they did not continue this initiative. The society's representative shared their experience of this initiative:

> We were doing real urban farming all by hand and small, you know about an acre planted, if someone had more of the infrastructure and more of the equipment to do that, that could be a money-maker (P1).

They expressed a need for farmers to partner with them to make this type of initiative successful because the skill and equipment required were beyond their organization's capacity. However, they felt that a reciprocal relationship with farmers could provide benefits for all:

> If we did a partnership where we supplied the flowers and the herbs that go in [their] boxes, and we do the admin on that… and act as his banker, that's something that we could get behind where he's growing the food and people get a share of whatever we've grown as a group, we wouldn't do the vegetables (P1).

This could be a new or viable way of supporting local farmers, but currently, the participant observed limitations to building these partnerships in their community:

> There is no real mechanism by which to connect us [with farmers], I think that is what's missing…Who would want to do that? Connecting the ag societies with local farmers that are doing things that we could help them [with] and they could help us in terms of carrying that on in a big way (P1).

Interestingly, the ways that participants in Alberta saw agricultural societies being able to contribute to developing the local food system follows a similar direction that newly formed agricultural societies in British Columbia are taking. The representative from a society in British Columbia described their role as advocating for and supporting local farmers and policies to

support rural economic development and a sustainable food system. The participant reported that their efforts have brought value to the local farmers:

> There are no farms that grow food that don't want to be connected because [we reduce the labour in] marketing and communication [for] them. So I think they really see the benefit of being part of the network and kind of letting the agricultural society direct people to them (P3).

The AAAS vision for agricultural societies to support the growth and development of local food systems in Alberta also mirrors the role the society in British Columbia has taken. They believe agricultural societies in Alberta have significant potential to be a catalyst for community development by investing in the evolution of small-scale agriculture. As the AAAS representative shared:

> I believe that there is a huge opportunity in small farming, small footprint and high technology in rural [Alberta]. It's far less expensive to develop something in a rural community. Everything from hydroponics and indoor growing to small footprint, high intensity around agriculture as a whole. So we're going to concentrate in that space, and the reason for that is that there isn't anyone focusing on the space. It's my belief that our agricultural societies can be a catalyst for that level of agriculture in their own communities (P6).

Rural decline poses a significant opportunity for societies to leverage their capacity, resources, and infrastructure to innovate and support economic growth through agricultural innovation and scaling. The AAAS representative identified that capturing heat from existing buildings like hockey rinks, curling rinks, and community halls to heat greenhouses could be a successful pairing for new farmers looking to start a business. Currently, however, this is not the

direction being taken by most agricultural societies in Alberta. From the perspective of the provincial association, it's people who are holding some of these organizations back. People are comfortable and satisfied with their current activities, but this can lead to organizational stagnation. This was described by the provincial representative as “being caught in a fishbowl… [where they become a] victim of their own success” (P6). Being good at what they do, they often don’t stray from the status quo, and their identity and capacity is built around what they are already doing.

Agricultural societies in Alberta are at a pivotal moment of change because many are entering a period of succession planning, as lead volunteers are aging out and new people are needed to assume those positions. To address this challenge and better connect with a new generation of farmers, the provincial association recently took over the Alberta Young Farmers and Ranchers organization (AAAS, n.d.). They could also pursue partnering with other organizations who are supporting new farmers, such as Young Agrarians. Young Agrarians, an organization based throughout western Canada, has a modern and well-known brand, and offers a range of programming and networking support for new entrants into farming. Partnerships with organizations such as these can offer benefits to agricultural societies, such as building awareness, supporting rebranding and connecting with young and new farmers, as well as gaining knowledge of current small scale agricultural methods, practices, and trends. The AAAS representative also shared that they felt that there is a significant amount of farm infrastructure that has been left to unused as family farms were abandoned and farms size grew. They propose that these abandoned farmsteads, many of which have houses, barns, and other buildings that are deteriorating, they could be renovated and paired with new farmers to support efforts to grow local food production. Opportunities for building intergenerational connections between new and

established farmers may be another benefit these partnerships could offer that may help both types of organizations to identify and utilize existing infrastructure and resources. Agricultural societies could leverage their community connections and collaborate with other societies and organizations to network and identify useful resources and infrastructure to support the re-development of local food systems.

Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to explore the history and current role of agricultural societies in Canada and their potential to support the re-localization of food systems, including the emergence of urban agriculture. Investigation of this involved an environmental scan and follow-up interviews with societies of interest who were taking an innovative approach to connecting with their local food system. This research examined how they "interact with the public and private sectors and what functions social economy organizations utilize in this context" (Mook et al., 2010, p.330). History indicates that they played a pivotal role in the settlement of Canada and the direction of agriculture we are experiencing today, as is evident by how they were and continue to be regulated provincially through acts as a strategy to promote agriculture in Canada. Although the success and persistence of agricultural societies varies by province, overall they continue to have a role in supporting, promoting and contributing to agriculture by delivering events and supporting recreational activities which enhance the quality of life in their communities.

I found that the role of agricultural societies has evolved alongside the industrialization of agriculture and urbanization, which continues to shape how they are responding to local needs. Connections to their local food system varies in each province and community because they are community-based and rely on collaborations and partnerships to deliver programs and initiatives.

Evidence from this study strongly suggests that the values and identities held within these organizations continue to have their heart in agriculture. Agricultural societies can leverage their inherent connection to agriculture and focus on shared values with food system stakeholders to manage risk and encourage reflexive thinking to rebrand themselves and focus on incremental change by investing in social infrastructure first to support transformative change. Other strategies found that can strengthen their efforts and manage financial risk is to align initiatives with local policies and priorities in their regions which support sustainable community development and center on being inclusive welcoming spaces for immigrants. Finally, they may be in a strategic position compared to others social economy organizations to support local food development because they have existing relationships, partnerships and networking between each other, provincially and across Canada. Interestingly, this vision and hope for agricultural societies today and the ideals of a local food system are mirrored in an 1832 article, written before the industrialization of agriculture, urbanization and technological dominance.

> Some of the great advantages to be derived from Agricultural Societies are beginning to unfold themselves in the awakened spirit, that is, now abroad amongst the farmers of this country. Their dormant energies are aroused into noble exertion and prosperous enterprise (Genesee Farmer & Gardener Journal, 1832).

The organizations in this study are naturally and intentionally developing into agricultural community centres or hubs as a response to the changing trajectory of the agri-food system towards local, place-based food production and consumption. This direction is congruent with research on alternative food networks, such as food hubs which argue that they could be a more successful strategy to support local food systems if they offer multiple services which respond to consumer, producer and sustainable community development goals (Manikas, 2019). I found that

the combination of programs and strategies they use will vary in each community, as the prevalence of food producers or "urbanites" will determine the people who make up the board and determine the diversity of needs. The momentum in local food policy and the increasing demand for local food signal new opportunities for agricultural societies to engage with agriculture that encompass aspects of their historical roles. In Alberta, their mandate, purpose, and distribution position them as potential catalysts for addressing the challenges which limit the scaling up of local food production. Agricultural societies could provide needed infrastructure, resources and could collaborate to leverage their nonprofit status to support new farmers and contribute to economic development which could support the revitalization of rural communities.

To achieve this vision, agricultural societies need to ask themselves what they can do and what they can do together. Taking a collaborative approach with other societies, municipalities, and citizens, and by developing partnerships with other organizations, such as Young Agrarians, will help grow their brand and connect with a new generation of farmers. Future research to monitor how they evolve within the current trajectory of the agri-food system will require investigation by local food scholars. Only time will reveal if they will adopt a proactive approach and utilize their infrastructure and resources to collaborate and scale up local food production, or if they will remain reactive, as other social economy organizations take the lead in revitalizing local food systems.

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Chapter Three: Bridging Agriculture and Urban Life: Futures Roles for Beaumont and District Agricultural Society (BADAS)

Abstract

Agricultural societies are social economy organizations that were historically developed as a strategy to improve agricultural and rural community development throughout Canada. In Alberta, the current 291 societies dispersed throughout the province hold significant resources and infrastructure, and provide valuable services and events that contribute to a better quality of life in communities (Alberta Association of Agricultural Societies [AAAS], n.d). Urbanization and investment in commodity agricultural production has, however, dramatically changed agriculture and rural communities in Alberta since the establishment of provincial agricultural societies in the late 1800s. These trends negatively impact agricultural societies that are either located in rural agricultural communities that rely on a robust farming population, or those that are in communities that are increasingly urbanized with populations disconnected from agriculture. Awareness of the negative externalities of the industrial food system are driving initiatives for re-localizing the agri-food system. The success of local food initiatives, such as farmers' markets, relies on collaboration and the social economy is playing a significant role in fostering such partnerships. Despite significant literature on the social economy and local food initiatives in Canada, there is a dearth of research about agricultural societies' contributions to these trends. In Alberta, local food policy is expanding and there is interest and support for the scaling of local food production, educational and recreational activities. The recent Regional Agricultural Master Plan (RAMP) for the Edmonton metropolitan region aims to balance growth with the conservation of agricultural land and spark investment and economic growth in the

agricultural sector (Edmonton Regional Metropolitan Board [EMRB], n.d). In response to this new policy, The City of Beaumont was required to develop an urban agriculture plan to fulfill the goals outlined in RAMP. The Beaumont & District Agricultural Society (BADAS) is an agricultural resource in the city limits and could be an important partner in how these new policies evolve within the community and region. This qualitative community-engaged research identifies ways BADAS could address local needs, and support policies that contribute to a vision for a more sustainable local food system.

Keywords: *local food systems, agricultural societies, social economy, community development, food hubs, urban agriculture*

Introduction

For more than 130 years, agricultural societies have played a significant role in the history of agriculture and rural communities in Alberta. Mandated to improve agriculture and the quality of life by the Agricultural Societies Act, they are community-based, nonprofit and volunteer led organizations, hence are part of what is known as the social economy (Beckie & Bacon, 2019; Chaves & Monzón, 2012). Alberta is home to 291 societies (Alberta Association of Agricultural Societies [AAAS], n.d); however, these organizations face challenges to their continued viability due to increased expenses (eg. aging infrastructure, insurance), dependence on diminishing government funding, a declining number of farms and farmers, and increasing urbanization (Hudson, 2017).

Changes in farming technologies and techniques over the past 100 years have had a significant impact on agricultural productivity, farm size, and rural communities (Hallstrom, 2023). As a result, large-scale production of food commodities for export markets, such as

canola, wheat, and beef, are the dominant agricultural activities in Alberta. (Government of Canada [GOC], 2023). Urbanization is another factor transforming agricultural communities. Rural decline rate (2.7%) from 2016-2021 is the third highest in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2022), while agricultural communities near large urban centers are growing and transforming from rural to urban, with a population increasingly distanced from agricultural life. Statistics Canada (2021) reports that in 2021, 82.3% of Albertans live in urban metropolitan regions and 17.7% in rural areas. These factors have also influenced the direction and offerings of agricultural societies in the Province.

The City of Beaumont, located ten minutes south of Alberta's provincial capital of Edmonton, has a history rooted in agriculture and is experiencing rapid growth because of its proximity to the urban centers of Edmonton, Nisku, and Leduc. Beaumont is an appealing location for families because of the accessibility to urban employment opportunities while offering residents a small-town feel. Beaumont is a member of the Edmonton Regional Metropolitan Board (EMRB) and contributed to the development of the Regional Agricultural Master Plan (RAMP), approved in 2021. RAMP has the goals of conserving prime agricultural land, minimizing fragmentation, investing in agricultural production and processing, and harmonizing communities and food production (EMRB, n.d.). To that end, the City of Beaumont was required to develop an Urban Agriculture Plan (UAP). Urban agriculture is an emerging global trend in urban and peri-urban regions and can include various practices including household and commercial activities, community gardens and small animal husbandry. Motivations for developing urban agriculture can include; mitigating environmental concerns such as the heat island effect and biodiversity loss (Artmann & Sartison, 2018), providing social and cultural benefits such as improved health and access to fresh food (Kirby et al. 2021),

building social capital (Pevec et al., 2017) and supporting the integration of immigrants (Beckie & Bogdan, 2010). It is also recognized for its contribution to food security and justice and hence is an important component in creating sustainable and resilient communities (Azunre et al., 2019).

The Beaumont & District Agricultural Society (BADAS), which owns 71 acres of agricultural land within the city limits of Beaumont, operates seasonally, hosting events, a community garden, and historic buildings and equine facilities. General awareness of the existence of BADAS and its resources and activities is low within the Beaumont area; however, the organization recognizes the need to increase engagement with the community in order to attract new members and volunteers.

Research has found that the social economy is an important contributor and site for innovation in advancing local food systems (Sumner, 2012; Wittman et al., 2012). Social economy organizations contribute to collaborative food system governance that responds to community needs and values, including support for small and medium scale farmers that produce for local markets (Beckie & Bacon, 2019; Beckie et al., 2012; Connelly & Beckie, 2016; Connelly et al., 2011). Although agricultural societies have played a significant role in Canada's history and are positioned within the social economy, I was unable to find comparable research on agricultural societies within the context of local food systems and urban agriculture.

My personal motivation and connection to this research is linked to being an urban farmer and resident of Beaumont, as well as being a board director with BADAS since 2019. The direction of this research was influenced by several factors, including; participation in the RAMP engagement process, insights gained from working with a mentor from BADAS as part of my practicum, and my desire to use my research to contribute to the advancement of urban

agriculture in my community. Data were collected in two phases. Phase one, discussed in Chapter Two of this thesis, included an environmental scan of agricultural societies across Canada, followed by interviews with select societies in Alberta and British Columbia. The second phase, presented in this chapter, took place in Beaumont, Alberta. In this study Phase I identified community and stakeholder needs, values and their vision for a sustainable food system, and ways BADAS could play a supportive role in achieving this vision while also addressing recent regional and municipal policy changes. Further details will be provided in the methodology and methods section.

The remainder of this chapter begins with a literature review of agricultural societies and current changes in agriculture in Alberta, as well as an overview of trends in the development of local food systems. Following this, I share the context of the research, details about the methodology and methods, a discussion of the findings, and conclusion.

Literature Review

Agricultural Societies in Alberta

In Canada, agricultural societies have a history dating back to the late 1700s in Nova Scotia (Nova Scotia Federation of Agriculture, n.d.; Scott, n.d). They spread west into Alberta, beginning with fairs in the 1870s, and became an official agricultural development strategy with the establishment of the Agricultural Societies Ordinance in 1886, which later became the Agricultural Societies Act in 1903 (AAAS, 2022). The Alberta Association of Agricultural Societies (AAAS), originally formed in 1905 as the Alberta Association of Fairs, was incorporated in 1947 and continues to be the provincial overseeing body (AAAS, n.d). Currently, in Alberta, agricultural societies are a significant resource with 291 organizations dispersed

throughout the province, more than any other province in Canada. These organizations are independently run, but they also network together with support and resources from the AAAS. They are grouped into six regions, each with a board that meets quarterly, and the AAAS organizes a provincial convention annually to provide education and networking opportunities (AAAS, n.d.).

The mandate for agricultural societies outlined in the Agricultural Societies Act has changed over the years. In 1886, the objective was "to encourage improvement in agriculture, horticulture, and arboriculture manufacturers and the useful arts" (AAAS, 2022). Their role was clearly defined as one connected to agriculture, food, and the sustainability of natural resources. By 1980, the Act laid out more specifics to their role:

> The objects of a society shall be to encourage improvement in agriculture, horticulture, homemaking, and the quality of life in the agricultural community (a) by holding meetings for lectures and demonstrations and for the discussion of subjects connected with the theory and practice of any of those pursuits; (b) by promoting and encouraging conservation of natural resources, including soil conservation, reforestation and rural beautification; (c) by holding exhibitions or competitions at which prizes may be awarded for (d) by holding auctions or other sales of farm products, home manufactures and products and works of art; (e) by developing activities to encourage and interest boys and girls in the work of agricultural societies; (f) by supporting and co-operating with other associations and organizations to improve farm production; (g) by supporting or providing facilities to encourage activities intended to enrich rural life; (h) by conducting or promoting horse races when authorized to do so by a by-law of the society. (GOA, 1980)

Today, the mandate has been simplified: “The object of a society is to encourage improvement in agriculture and enhanced quality of life for persons living in the community by developing educational programs, events, services and facilities based on needs of the community” (GOA, 2022). The simplification of the mandate does allow for more flexibility in their work, but could also be perceived as a removal of responsibility such as conserving natural resource to other organizations and a shift in political thinking around agriculture. Family mixed farm skills, resources, and services may no longer have been thought of as needed because of the perceived success and forthcoming direction of the industrial and global agri-food system. This change in mandate may also follow some deeper changes in society, such as those noted by Granzow (2020) of the geographic and cultural separation of people from our local food system. A result of urbanization is that fewer people directly engaged with agriculture. These changes also coincide with the rapid changes in the agricultural sector in the 1980s as a result of free trade agreements which supported large-scale and export oriented farming. Challenges at that time discussed by Veeman and Veeman (1984) included volatile markets for farmers, the government’s disinvestment in agriculture research, agricultural stabilization programs aimed at commodity products, and the impacts of chemical inputs on the environment and soil quality. The 1980s agricultural societies’ mandate which is aimed at small scale mixed farm life contrasted significantly with the direction of agricultural policy towards commodity production.

Today, commodity agriculture is pronounced in Alberta, where large-scale farms specializing in oilseed, grain, and beef production make up 68.8% of farms in the province and use 86% of the total farmland area (Pierre & McComb, 2023). Along with the increasing size of farms has come a declining number of farms and farmers, which contributed to rural population decline in Alberta. These factors are impacting the viability of rural communities (Hallstrom,

2023) and their embedded agricultural societies. Recent statistics indicate a slight shift in this trend as Alberta is one of only two provinces to have a small increase (2.1%) in the number of farms from 2016 to 2021, and has the second-highest percentage of female farmers (Pierre & McComb, 2023). Statistics on farm types in Alberta indicate continued growth in large-scale oilseed production but also growth in other farm types such as mushroom production, other food crops grown under cover, tobacco farming, poultry and egg production, sheep and goat farming and other miscellaneous crop farming (Statistics Canada, 2022). These statistics indicate some diversification of food production in the province, which may signal an opportunity for agricultural societies to look back at their history to find their role in these new trends.

The Hudson Report (2017), commissioned by the AAAS, captured the economic contributions and community benefits of agricultural societies in Alberta, as well as many of the challenges. This report will be updated in 2024-2025 and is seen as an essential tool that agricultural societies can use to obtain grants, and to justify continued support through the Agricultural Societies Grant Program. Some key challenges identified in the report include: a general lack of public awareness of agricultural societies, a lack of a growth mindset in the societies to attract new members and partnerships, the need for increasing revenues to cover increasing costs, and changing demographics that "require Agricultural Societies to pursue new directions in programming and priorities in order to remain inclusive and relevant" (Hudson, 2017). Building awareness is challenging for these groups because they comprise "humble rural people who have great pride internally in what they accomplish" (Hudson, 2017). Often, even if they are among the larger businesses in a community, people don't know what they do or are even aware they exist, which "results in lower esteem and support" from the community (Hudson, 2017). Despite these challenges, the economic and community benefits they bring are

significant. In 2015, they generated “$4.00 in active non-grant revenue from each $1.0 of grant funding provided from the Agricultural Societies Grant program and $9.90 from each $1.00 of grant funding from local government sources” (Hudson, 2017). Additionally, they manage assets estimated in 2015 to be valued at $1.14 billion, including hockey areas, community halls, camping, and recreation facilities and equine and rodeo infrastructure (Hudson, 2017).

Re-localizing Food: Alternative Food Networks and the Social Economy

The re-localization of food production and local food governance is a complex and value-laden process, influenced by relations of power that overlap with cultural, ecological, economic, regional and political contexts (Beckie & Bacon, 2019). How to re-localize and scale up food production as a component of a sustainable food system has generated a burgeoning of research on alternatives, such as the grassroots approaches of local food initiatives (Trobe & Acott, 2000). Alternative food networks typically exist outside conventional supply channels, facilitating access to agricultural goods and offerings between producers, consumers, and food system stakeholders. Alternative food networks support short supply chains and include farmers' markets, other direct sales, food hubs, and small retail outlets.

Research conducted in Canada frequently identifies collaboration embedded in shared values and collective action as essential to successful local food initiatives (Connelly & Beckie, 2016, Lavallée-Picard, 2018). Beckie et al. (2012) identified regional clustering of farmers’ markets in British Columbia and Alberta, and the types of collaboration and competition that emerged as a result. Clustering in and among farmers' markets was found to strengthen competitive advantage, knowledge mobilization and encourage “innovation in food provisioning under an alternative agri-food paradigm” (Beckie et al., 2012, p.343). Food hubs are another form of an alternative food network based on collaboration that can help to scale and support the

development of local food systems. Food hubs can be "understood as intermediary organizations [who] have a coordinating function articulated in many tasks serving farmers, food processors, distributors, retailers, and consumers by creating 'shared value' for mutual economic benefit while also advancing social and ethical values: sustainability, small and medium size farms viability, social justice and social health" (Berti & Mulligan, 2016, p17). Recent research on food hubs indicates they are more likely to be successful if they combine market and supply chain support and non-market services such as contributing to food security and education (Alvarado et al., 2020; Curry 2021; Manikas, 2019). Alvarado et al. (2020) conclude that food hubs should set priorities but also need "to be flexible enough to adapt to the local context" (p.194) and that "trade-offs will arise between different values" (p.194).

Alternative food networks are often supported and organized by the social economy, which are nonprofit community organizations that respond to values and needs not being addressed by the private or public sector (Chaves & Monzón, 2012). Social economy organizations, such as the producer cooperative YYC Growers and Distributors in Calgary, are another form of collaboration found in the literature that can facilitate the scaling up of local food systems (Beckie & Bacon, 2019). These and other examples of the social economy and related social infrastructure are found to be contributing significantly to the successful development and scaling up of local food initiatives (Connelly & Beckie, 2016; Beckie et al., 2012; Connelly et al., 2011). Social infrastructure is the support which facilitates action and collaboration between food system stakeholders and can be understood as the policies, resources and human connections available that enable change and investment into initiatives (Beckie & Bacon, 2019). Both social and physical infrastructure are essential to the success of local food systems (MacRae et al., 2012) and researchers advise local food advocates to look at "how to use

infrastructure differently and how to generate resources and capacity on a more collective basis (Connelly & Beckie, 2016, p.54).” This is important because small and medium-scale food producers are challenged to be competitive within the global food system (Manikas et al., 2019).

Urban agriculture has been adopted in major cities through government policies supported by the social economy, citizens, and entrepreneurs. Urban agriculture is the practice of food production, processing, and consumption anchored in urban and peri-urban communities and developed through shared values (Horst et al., 2017; Pevec et al., 2017; Vitiello, 2022) Community and home gardens, and household consumption activities are the most common forms of urban agriculture but it also includes commercial production, processing, distribution, and marketing (Vitiello, 2022). The benefits of urban agriculture are realized through practices which contribute to biodiversity, social capital and cultural and physical health in communities (Artmann & Sartison, 2018, Horst et al., 2017, Pevec et al., 2017; Valley & Wittman, 2019). Urban agriculture is connected to values of sustainability and bioregionalism, and contributes to a food system based on “seasonal foods which can be grown locally and then regionally - local production for local consumption” (Trobe & Acott, 2000, p.315). Urban agriculture initiatives can be sites for people to discuss and reflect on values, politics, and sustainability through the reimagining of agriculture into urban landscapes (Granzow & Jones, 2020). It has also been found to contribute to the craft sector and community development (Jones et al., 2021), such as aiding immigrants in adapting to a new country (Beckie & Bogdan, 2010; Hinton & Schnurr, 2021). The diversity of urban agriculture is its strength, and realistic management requires collaboration and “embracing the diversity and multiple impacts of urban farming by nonprofits and for-profits, individuals and collectives” (Vitiello, 2022, p.254). Therefore, urban agriculture

can be considered as part of an alternative food network because it contributes to collaborations between food system stakeholders outside the conventional food system.

Study Context

Beaumont and Region

The City of Beaumont (population 21,918) is located near the southeast edge of Edmonton in the County of Leduc. Beaumont was founded as a French rural agricultural settlement, and it continues to have names and signage in French throughout the city. It is the ninth fastest-growing municipality in Alberta, with an annual growth rate of 3.48% (GOA, 2023). In 2017, Beaumont annexed 3360 acres of land from Leduc County, doubling the land footprint of the City in response to the rapid rise in population growth and demand for housing (City of Beaumont [COB], n.d). All the annexed land is zoned prime agricultural land and includes the BADAS fairgrounds, which is the only agricultural support service provider in the Beaumont city limits.

Beaumont is part of the Edmonton Regional Metropolitan Board and contributed to the development of RAMP. RAMP aims to promote diversification and innovation in agriculture to support regional food systems, minimize fragmentation and conversion of prime agricultural land, and conserve adequate supply of agricultural land for local food production and future generations (EMRB, 2021). Urban and industrial development occurring in the Edmonton region is driving land prices in Beaumont and other rural communities because traditional views on development, which prioritizes residential and industrial development, continue to dominate planning throughout Alberta's Capital Region (Beckie et al., 2013). Unless alternative values become normalized, this current trajectory of land use planning and development could

undermine the goals of RAMP. Other research has also found that using urban land for agriculture continues to be a challenge (Vitiello, 2022; Wang & Swallow, 2016). These factors have influenced the rapid conversion of the annexed agricultural land in Beaumont into residential and commercial development. All current neighbourhood structure plans in place do not identify urban agriculture or reserve land for agriculture in their plans (COB, n.d.). In a personal discussion with a city employee, I learned that the city intends to push Cheyenne Tree Farm Inc., a 160 acre horticulture business, out of the city limits. Their land is planned for residential and commercial development, which is evidence of the perceived incompatibility of agricultural land within a city. In Canada, conserving agricultural land and integrating agriculture into land use plans is accomplished through agricultural land reserves such as in British Columbia, Quebec and Ontario (Hiley et al., 2011); however, this strategy has not been employed in Alberta, or throughout Canada's Prairie Region where most of the agricultural land in the country is situated. With the significant land asset that BADAS has, it could play a critical role in preserving agricultural land within the city limits and advocating for and fostering urban agriculture, which could be a model for other societies and would comply with the objectives of RAMP. Urban Agriculture policies have been or are being developed in other communities in the Edmonton metropolitan region, such as Edmonton's Fresh: Edmonton's Food and Urban Agricultural Strategy (2012), or Leduc's Agriculture Strategy (2016). Urban agriculture has been a topic of discussion in Beaumont in recent years and was investigated by University of Alberta researchers who completed the Beaumont Urban Agriculture Report in 2018 (Bradshaw et al., 2018). Beaumont and the surrounding region have shown interest in supporting alternative agriculture initiatives, such as commercial small-scale urban and peri-urban farms, backyard chickens, and community gardens. Specific local food initiatives in Beaumont include but are not

limited to: Backyard Chickens for Beaumont AB, Gardening in Beaumont Alberta, Sunflowers Urban Farm, Greenhaven Gardens, Good Note Community Farm, Homebody Bees, BADAS, and Wild Beaumont. With the exception of BADAS which was formed more than three decades ago, the remaining initiatives have been created in the past 15 years as the metropolitan region has experienced rapid urbanization. Despite the existence of urban agriculture policy in nearby communities and Beaumont's community interest in urban agriculture, no formal policy or changes were adopted following the 2018 report. Consequently, urban agriculture in Beaumont continues to be limited to private residences and two community gardens: the Gerry Patsula Community Gardens at BADAS Fairgrounds on the west side of the city and Greenhaven Gardens outside the city to the east. Beaumont's peri-urban area hosts a number of small farms, agricultural buildings, equine facilities, as well as some large-scale farming operations.

In response to RAMP, Beaumont hired consultants in the fall of 2022 to engage with the community and develop a draft Urban Agriculture Plan (UAP). Through participation in this process, I found that the aspirations of the community had mixed support from City staff. Concerns about increased workload, complexities, and responsibilities of developing urban agriculture were brought forward by some, and if carried out, there was recognition of the need to create a new position, an urban agricultural coordinator, to support these goals. These concerns contributed to the development of a relatively conservative urban agriculture plan with a fairly long timeline. I also observed that the City approached the topic of urban agriculture integration as a municipal responsibility, and they struggled to see ways to offload responsibility to other organizations and citizens. Despite this, the City was genuinely interested in ways they could partner or utilize BADAS as a resource for pilot programs, as part of a collaboration to support the plan. The final draft of this document was completed and published on the City of

Beaumont's website in November 2023. This document outlines the vision for urban agriculture in the city:

> "Beaumont is a nimble agricultural innovator and supporter which empowers the community to engage in urban agriculture on public and private lands and connects new local initiatives to Beaumont's rich agricultural heritage in a just and sustainable way. Urban agriculture and the whole food system are visibly integrated across the city, contributing to local food security, and the economic, ecological and social well-being of Beaumont." (COB, 2023, p.1).

The vision reflects an aspiration for agriculture to be incorporated in a meaningful way and it will be interesting to see how these manifests in future development plans. This document outlines the key areas for growth, including the opportunities to partner with existing organizations such as BADAS and the regional network of communities who have or are currently developing urban agriculture.

The Beaumont & District Agricultural Society

The Beaumont & District Agricultural Society (BADAS) was formed in 1990 (Beaumont & District Agricultural Society [BADAS], 2019) and was one of the last agricultural societies to be incorporated in Alberta (AAAS, 2019). It began by organizing the Beaumont Town & Country Dayz, a community fair and annual parade. During this time, BADAS had a strong equine membership and began to fundraise to purchase land and develop an equine country course, with show rings and stalls, to meet the needs of the horse riders in the region. Seventy-one acres of agricultural land were purchased in 2000 (BADAS, 2019). The City of Beaumont eventually took over Town & Country Dayz; however, BADAS continues to organize the parade during the annual festival. BADAS currently organizes the annual Rural Roots Fair, a free family

event with varying themes each year, and hosts other events such as Open Farms Days, Beaumont Horse Trials and various equine events (BADAS, 2019). In addition to annual events, they support community needs as they arise, such as a camping site for Baseball tournaments, the Beaumont Blues and Roots Festival, drive-in movies and the RCMP Musical Ride. Despite these various activities, BADAS is not well known in the community and their membership is primarily limited to equine users and gardeners. Most of their approximate 160 yearly members are gardeners who rent the 104 community garden plots, which were expanded after COVID-19 because of increased demand. The garden is of significant benefit to the community because it is a site of inclusion and diversity, with 60% of gardeners new to Canada. In 2020, BADAS began developing a food forest and education space, which is expected to be completed in 2024, in order to bring more agricultural and educational opportunities to their membership and the broader community. In addition to these activities, the society is home to two heritage buildings moved on site from the region, the Gobeil Heritage Barn (2016) and the Magnan Heritage House (2020) (BADAS, n.d.). The society has also been offered a historic grain elevator but has yet to commit to it. A major challenge for the organization is that it is entering a period of succession, like many other agricultural societies, where the leading organizers are aging out and there is a need to attract new members who are committed to taking on leadership roles.

Concerns about pets and noise once the adjacent neighbourhood is developed and the need for increased security have been brought up at board meetings because of the rapid urban residential development adjacent to the Fairgrounds, which is potentially incompatible with some of the core annual activities of BADAS. Future planning of the Fairgrounds that takes into account these challenges has prompted an internal investigation into the sale of 40 acres of the organization’s land for urban development. Current high land prices have been a factor in

BADAS considering this sale; however, if this did occur they would need to move their equine cross-country course, which is one of only five in the province (General Manager, personal communication, April 3, 2023). Investigation of the cost associated with moving this to another site and having to maintain two parcels of land, as well as the cost associated with development of the Gobeil Heritage Barn, is currently taking place. The historic barn was intended to be a community hall and arts facility that would help the organization generate revenue and contribute to the organization's evolution and reduce dependence on funding (General Manager, personal communication, April 3, 2023). Regardless of whether they sell their land, or not, some solutions to mitigate urban incompatibilities and increase the security at the Fairgrounds are a priority.

Methods

This research utilized a qualitative and community-based participatory research approach that involved BADAS in the research process in three ways: 1) I worked with an assigned mentor from the BADAS board who helped to determine the direction of the research; 2) organization members were included in focus groups and interviews; and, 3) I reported research results and gained feedback at BADAS monthly board meetings. Other organizations involved in this study included the AAAS and the City of Beaumont, both of which were presented with a summary of findings after each phase of this research. I also participated in the City of Beaumont's community engagement process for urban agriculture policy development and contributed my feedback on the policy draft. As an urban farmer in Beaumont and a volunteer and community organizer with BADAS, I have a personal connection to this research but did my best to keep my

perspective and biases on the periphery. This study was funded through a MITACS grant in partnership with BADAS, AAAS and the City of Beaumont.

Data for this research were gathered through four focus groups and seven semi-structured interviews from December 8, 2022 to March 29, 2023. Seven people participated in the first two in-person focus groups sessions and the following two online focus groups had four in one and two in the other, totaling 20 participants in all focus groups. During in-person focus groups, I had an assistant take note of key themes brought forth and map them using Miro (See Appendix F & G).

Seven semi-structured interviews were conducted with those participants that couldn't take part in the focus groups. Five were conducted online using Zoom Meeting and two were held in person, one in Beaumont and one in Edmonton. In total, twenty-seven participants contributed to this study, including a restaurant chef (1), teachers (2), small-scale farmers (3), BADAS board members (4), BADAS members affiliated with the community garden (8), community residents (7), farmers' market manager (1), AAAS representative (1). The AAAS perspective was essential for understanding the vision and overall leadership of the provincial organization, which influences the mandate and activities of BADAS, including providing resources.

Focus groups and interviews were audio recorded, then transcribed verbatim except for two that relied on handwritten notes; one was the result of a recording error and the other was an informal discussion with a long-time Beaumont resident and farmer whose family has contributed significantly to BADAS. Data were analyzed using a grounded theory approach because I was unable to identify a comparable set of research cases on agricultural societies;

therefore, the themes and conclusions from this study are drawn inductively from the data collected (Khan, 2014).

The focus groups and interviews began with an overview of the findings from phase one of the research (Chapter Two). This included key findings from the environmental scan of agricultural societies across Canada, as well as background information on RAMP, the City of Beaumont's Urban Agricultural Plan, and an overview of BADAS history, activities, and resources. I asked questions to identify participants' values, vision, and role in the development of a sustainable food system, and while doing so, I presented an image, see below (Figure 2), to guide the discussion. This image helped focus the conversation on the connections that constitute

Figure 2

Sustainable Food System Graphic from Food and Sustainability (2015)

Note. Sustainable Food System Graphic. From Food and Sustainability. Blog. July 8, 2015. (https://environmentblog3foodandsustainability.wordpress.com/)

a sustainable food system and how they perceive their roles in this. Following these questions, I asked participants to identify ways BADAS could better support them and others in developing a sustainable food system. The discussions ended by asking participants to identify the challenges

faced by BADAS, and the local food system in general, that hinder the ability to achieve their vision. The interview with AAAS was different from the other interviews because it focused on the provincial organization's vision for how agricultural societies, in general, could contribute to observed.

Findings

The results of this study fall into four broad categories identified in the following subheadings.

Everyone has A Role in the Development of Sustainable Local Food Systems

Interviews and focus groups began by asking participants to introduce themselves and if they felt that developing a sustainable food system was important and why. In both interviews and focus groups, participants expressed concerns about the sustainability of the current food system. They felt that our food system has been taken for granted, and the COVID-19 pandemic helped to bring awareness of how interdependent our food supply is with physical and human resources across the globe. Discussions in focus groups brought forward concerns about inequity in food access and the financial expense of consuming unprocessed healthy food, particularly for those impoverished and the homeless. They expressed the views that increasing local food production and growing your food could support access to healthier and more affordable food options. As a BADAS member noted, increasing local food production has personal and community benefits, "so I think having local food will…. help take the pressure off people's wallets, and provide better food security" (F0). The environment, health and the nutritional qualities of foods today were concerns for all participants. They associated the change in nutritional quality with the industrial food system and degraded soil quality, which some participants identified as dead soil. Participants viewed the capacity to grow food locally and

learning to eat seasonally as essential values to consider when thinking about how to support sustainable agriculture. A community member shared her beliefs, “I also think that we need to have a discussion about the idea that somebody who lives in northern Canada should have strawberries in January, [and] whether that's sustainable” (F4). Participants expressed a strong desire to participate in the creation of a sustainable and locally focused food system, which they characterized as needing to be based on values that bring benefits to the environment, health, and wellness of their community. Participants agreed that it is more than about food, it is about relationships and finding a way to live in their community that brings the most benefits to them and others. Ideas were raised about re-building community through food, like bartering, trading and saving seeds, as ways to re-localize and re-socialize the food system. They also identified roles they could play in sculpting this new direction, including being an: advocate, facilitator, educator, promoter, supporter, resource person, contributor, and leader. Participants felt that they were responsible fundamentally for being an informed consumer and citizen, and had a role to play in educating others, including raising their children to understand food as a part of their culture and knowledge system. As a community member expressed:

> [I] didn’t think I was [going to] have a garden until I had kids. And it was like, nope, gotta do something, got to teach them that food isn't just available on the shelf. You need to grow it and this is how it's done (F13).

These sentiments were also have been found in a study by Mullins et al. (2021) who found that over half of their respondent’s participate in gardening for environmental reasons, to gain skills for themselves and to pass gardening knowledge and skills to their children. These findings also align with research by McClintock and Simpson (2018) who have found that participation in

urban agriculture initiatives are motivated by a desire for social and economic change embedded in sustainability, justice and food security concerns.

Contributing to the development of a sustainable food system starts with being curious and wanting to know where their food comes from, how it was grown and building a relationship with local farmers. In an interview, the restaurant chef shared:

> I like supporting family-owned and operated farms. I like knowing who I buy my food from. So that's a huge one for me. And also just being able to know what they're grazing on, what chemicals are going into growing the feed or the vegetables……I find that stuff fascinating (I21).

Teachers and local farmers who have a direct relationship with food or horticultural production acknowledged that they had a role as an educator because they perceive that people are so disconnected from agriculture. Other community members felt that to achieve a sustainable food system, people need to be better advocates and reach out to local and provincial politicians and share their concerns. BADAS members also felt that being a part of the agricultural society was a way to have a broader impact because the garden practices promote organic agriculture. These findings indicate that participants are aware of an interconnectedness our food system has with culture and community, and to contribute to change they need to actively participate.

Participants perceived and are concerned that there is a disconnection between citizens in rural and urban communities with regard to the food system. A small-scale beef farmer noted that this disconnect involves a lack of information about the processes and costs involved in sustainable agriculture practices. They shared "most of the cost goes to raising the livestock longer, and you're giving it better food and you're rotating it and doing twice the amount of work that you normally [in a large-scale conventional operation]" (F5). This disconnection can lead to

people in urban communities having unrealistic views of agriculture. As a teacher who is also from a farm family expressed:

> Sometimes people jump on the bandwagon of urban farming and they want to have chickens or they want to have goats in their yard, but they don't have the background knowledge to know what the challenges will be in that area (I20).

Participants concluded that larger rural farmers and indigenous knowledge holders could be an important "piece of the puzzle that could really help enhance whatever urban farming chooses to do" (I20). To bridge this disconnect, a community resident suggested that reconnecting urban people to agriculture could be more relatable if the word urban was used in communications:

> You know, it's a very big divide between; the rural, we know the land, and you city people know nothing. So city people don't really feel that comfortable sliding over into agriculture. I think the more you can make it seem one and the same [the more relatable it would be]. You can say this is an urban agriculture kind of activity, might be one tiny little way to get in there (F8).

This comment speaks to how agriculture is less visible or present in everyday life for most people. In the Beaumont region, agriculture is often visible in home gardens or is seen along roadways as large tracts of monoculture crops managed with large machinery. A local citizen commented that in her youth, growing up in an agricultural community, "there was always something agricultural going on in our community" (F4). This comment strikes at the heart of the discussions in focus groups and interviews; there is a perception that there are limited opportunities for people and youth to participate in agricultural activities in Beaumont outside their home. Connecting people to agriculture may require a re-imagination of agricultural life in the city. The disconnect of agriculture with youth was especially disturbing for all participants,

who perceived that many urban children don't know how food is produced. Research asserts that urban gardening can help bridge this disconnect because it is a form of activism which they found is an activity which is "helping to change post-modern urban life" (Certomà, 2015, p.17).

Participants discussed that our separation from the food system is also cultural, and people have unrealistic expectations about what food and human landscapes should look like. This finding echo's observations by Granzow (2020) of the cultural disconnect from agriculture normalized by urbanization and the expanding geographic distance of agriculture from urban areas. Farmers and community members commented that bridging this disconnect could be supported by normalizing front yard gardens, and removing the illusion of perfection that people have come to expect from grocery stores. Overall, participants felt they are part of the bridge to re-engage their community with agriculture. Additionally, participants in focus groups and interviews expressed that BADAS could play an important supporting role by connecting and coordinating people and activities. Building connections could be accomplished by increasing access to agricultural practices and knowledge through educational activities, communal garden spaces, community information sessions and providing services that support connections between producers, consumers, and the land. These findings are discussed in more detail in the following sections.

The BADAS Fairground: An Underutilized Resource to Bridge Urban and Rural Life

Following discussions on participants' concerns about the food system and what role they could play in creating a more sustainable food system, participants were asked: How could BADAS support you and others and contribute to a sustainable agricultural vision? Discussions evolved around the benefits BADAS community gardeners are currently experiencing and the potential ways the organization could better meet their needs.

Benefits of the Gerry Patsula Community Gardens

Access to community gardens, such as the Gerry Patsula Community Gardens (see Figure 3), at the BADAS Fairground, enables people to engage in agriculture and frequently participants noted the affordability and size of plots, and the good access to water. Gardeners also expressed appreciation for the shared tools, seeds, and mulch available for free, and felt that having more tools, educational events and resources like compost and mulch to support gardeners could bring more value to membership. These findings align with research by Alemu and Grebitus (2020) also found that access to tools are a contextual driver for the decision to participate in community gardens. In focus groups, participants also discussed the therapeutic benefits, such as fresh air and being in nature. Overall, participants who have used the community garden shared that they

Figure 3

Gerry Patsula Community Gardens at the Beaumont & District Agricultural Society Fairgrounds

Note. Photo of Gerry Patsula Gardens. Own Work

have had a really positive experience being involved with gardening activities, connecting with the community and learning from and sharing the food with others. These findings are comparable to other research which have documented the benefits of urban agriculture and community gardens (Alemu & Grebitus, 2020; Artmann & Sartison, 2018, Horst et al., 2017, Pevec et al. 2021; Valley & Wittman, 2019).

Participants in both interviews and focus groups identified the financial benefits of growing their own food, such as not having to buy produce most of the summer and canning and preserving what was grown. Sharing the food they grow was also another benefit, which many participants felt was an important aspect of gardening and is a way to reduce food waste and support others in the community. Participants in focus groups agreed that BADAS could support gardeners contributing produce to those in need, such as through a relationship with the food bank, churches, or farmers' market. This could be a way to build awareness of the organization in the community and support food security. Another benefit noted by participants was the difference in the quality and flavor of homegrown produce and how garden activities supports their mental and physical health and wellbeing. An African gardener commented:

> When you taste things that are produced right away from the [garden, the] taste is different [from store bought]. So usually, my kids are the ones eating potatoes. But when I tried the potato I produced, then I say: "No, no, no, it's good! (F19)"

The superior flavor of homegrown produce in comparison to purchasing food and the, mental and physical health benefits of gardening found in this study is also documented by Mullins et al. (2021) in survey research on home food gardening in Canada. Mullins et al. (2021) found overwhelming agreement regarding the quality of flavour of home grown produce and that over half of respondents felt that gardening was relaxing and good exercise.

Having access to agricultural activities is important for families because they want to ensure their children have a connection to the land and the skills to grow food. An African gardener shared how these experiences helped them to pass agricultural knowledge to their children:

> We come with our families, with our kids, so they get to see how gardening has been done..So it lightens us to see that the kids are picking up with what we are doing. They are enjoying it and they're happy about it. And for sure it's sustainable because we are doing it, they see it. Tomorrow, they'll also be likely to do it when they are on their own (F16).

Having a communal space like the food forest rather than just individual plots was seen as another way the Fairground could be used to increase the accessibility of agricultural activities in the community. Teachers and community participants who homeschool their kids thought this would be a great way for them to incorporate hands-on learning that could be aligned with the curriculum. Communal spaces that offer a shared harvest could be another way to bring value to membership, increase social interactions, and offer opportunities to learn about perennial and native plants. A community resident noted, “we don't need to limit it, [to] just the food, like there's many other things that come from farms and ranches, that could be marketed” (I22). This comment brought forward the additional contributions that could come in agricultural activities, such as craft materials and traditional medicines. A study by Jones et al. (2021) explored as a component of community development highlighting connections of craft to gardens and vineyards. They conclude that craft can “serve as a bridging concept…and enable exploration of difference versions of local revitalisation” (Jones et al., 2021, p.918). Therefore, places like the BADAS Fairgrounds has potential to not only support local food systems but can be a place that

could bridge multiple connections in community development which contribute to the re-localisation of production and skill building that align with other revivals such as craft. Expanding collaborations can help manage risk which is found to be an important aspect of developing social infrastructure and the ability of initiatives to achieve long term transformational goals (Connelly & Beckie, 2016). Communal land resources can also support reconciliation and indigenous knowledge sharing. An Indigenous community resident shared:

> I think from a supporting standpoint, I believe there's opportunity to restore some of the habitat for traditional medicines and stuff like that, especially in some of these areas, but also perhaps sharing [knowledge]… learning how to grow in an ethical manner, and in a way that would probably honour [Indigenous knowledge].... I'm sure there would be knowledge sharing there that would honour both sides, right (I22)?

The potential to develop communal spaces at the Fairgrounds could bring significant benefits to those that are unable to get an individual plot by being a site for sharing cultural knowledge, supporting biodiversity and bring in other aspects of land and plant benefits. These activities could also contribute to community building and economic development related to craft, processing and help manage risk in activities that are not profit driven but are needed and desired withing the community.

Connecting Immigrants to Land and Community

Community connection is especially important for participants who are new to Canada because they get a chance to socialize with a diversity of people and grow cultural foods that are important to them but difficult or impossible to buy. Gardeners who immigrated to Canada from Africa found that coming to the gardens was important for coping with the changes associated with leaving their home country and moving to Canada. As an African gardener expressed, “you

feel like home far away from home. We are always looking forward to it [gardening at BADAS]" (F16). An African gardener whose job is based at home shared their feelings of community at the garden:

> So it's really a blessing for me because I work from home and I'm an IT person so I work from home. So when I need some very like natural fresh air I just drive to the farm and its good day, because you go there, we talk in our local broken English or Creole. We chat with each other, see who is planting what. Sometimes we exchange seeds…if you have bitter leaf, if you give me, and I give you Jamma Jamma or something, those are some of the local names (F17).

Most of the African gardeners grow traditional crops that are unavailable in stores. They freeze and store many of the vegetables they grow so they can enjoy them all winter. Growing these cultural foods is important for them because this connects them and their families to their culture. It also benefits family and friends who visit them because they have some foods to serve that are familiar and comforting. African gardeners noted that there is much to learn about what grows here and when to start a nursery for crops and when to plant. They expressed that it would be useful for BADAS to provide information or workshops about these topics and that would help them to be more successful gardeners. These findings add to the literature on the benefits of community gardens for immigrants, such as research by Hinton and Schnurr (2021) who also found that gardening helped newcomers adjust to Canada. Another study by Beckie and Bogdan (2010) found that participating in commercial urban farming benefited senior immigrants by providing a source of income, while also providing a range of social and health benefits. Despite the many benefits of community gardens for immigrants, research highlights the whiteness of urban agriculture and ecogentrification as potential barriers for inclusiveness and social justice

(McClintock, 2018, Horst et al., 2017). Therefore BADAS, whose board of directors is all Caucasian and which is common to other agricultural societies in Alberta, needs to be aware if and how they are including diversity into decision making about the future direction of their organization.

Developing Resources and Responding to Community Needs

The popularity of garden plots at BADAS has increased significantly since COVID-19 and in 2023 they were rented to members within hours of commencing the application process, with approximately 60% of gardeners coming from Edmonton. Members commented that they were approached by others in the community to help them get a plot; however, there is not enough land in production to accommodate the demand. Beaumont participants felt that local Beaumont residents should have priority over gardeners from other communities. Other garden members from Edmonton felt that gardeners who volunteer with the garden or take good care of their plot and follow the guidelines should have priority. Several gardeners felt the size of plots was small for them and observed that there was a lot of land available at the Fairground that could be used to expand the garden to create larger-sized garden plots for members and small-scale farm entrepreneurs. Some of the gardeners grow their crops at multiple community gardens in order to grow on the scale that they want. A local flower grower and member (I23) felt if she had a bigger area and was permitted to use season extenders like row tunnels or greenhouses, then her business could be more viable.

Participants felt that the Fairgrounds had a lot of unrealized potential. The location within the City is accessible and therefore may be an important extension and counterbalance to urban life. A community member (F12) remarked that the Fairgrounds could become “a third space” for people outside of work and home, where you can get access to land without the expense or

time commitment of owning an acreage. Jeffres et al. (2009) defined third space as a place outside of work and home that "function as unique public spaces for social interaction, providing a context for sociability, spontaneity, community building and emotional expressiveness" (p.335) and for individuals it "offers stress relief from the everyday demands… [and] provides [a] feeling of inclusiveness and belonging" (p.336). Third spaces are not necessarily community gardens but often occur in places such as barber shops, cafés and parks (Jeffres et al. 2009). Third spaces can increase the perceived value of a community and regardless of location, were found to increase the quality of life for residences (Jeffres et al., 2009). The idea of the Fairground being a third space aligns with the experiences expressed by gardeners such as reducing stress, belonging and community. But perceptions of the Fairground as a third space is limited because, as a community member asserted, "If you don't have a garden or ride a horse, what can you do there?" (F12). Third spaces do not have to be restricted to the Fairgrounds. In discussions with the City of Beaumont, a potential collaboration put forward was that new community gardens could be developed in residential communities and managed by BADAS. This could be another way to create third spaces to enhance the quality of life and meet the growing demands for gardening space within the community.

Participants noted that the development of the Gobeil Heritage Barn (Figure 4) would bring significant benefits to the community, and concerns were raised that in its current state it is an eyesore. In personal communications with the general manager, I learnt that the organization is financially challenged to complete this project because after their land became part of the City of Beaumont in 2017, requirements by the City for the development plan and permits became more stringent (General Manager, personal communication, June 4, 2023). Before 2017 their land was in Leduc County, a rural municipality. Additionally, there are insufficient human

resources to move the project forward, in part due to COVID-19, which paused the operations of the organization and reduced funding opportunities (General Manager, personal communication, June 4, 2023). In focus groups, participants suggested that people could be more interested and supportive of their project if the organization built awareness about it in the community. Participants commented that there was a lack of information in general being shared about BADAS on their website and social media platforms, which is contributing to a lack of awareness of the society in the community. A consistent and ongoing communication strategy could attract people who may be interested in volunteering or supporting new ways of using the land and contribute financially to the development of the barn. Funding is one of the challenged inherent with nonprofit organizations, as these finding suggest increasing awareness could support new collaborations and partnerships which could increase the capacity of the organization to develop their resources.

Figure 4

Gobeil Heritage Barn

Note. Photo of Gobeil Heritage Barn. Own work.

Creating a community composting system, in partnership with schools and local restaurants, was seen as another opportunity that BADAS could leverage at the Fairgrounds or support at school sites. Beaumont has a green bin composting program for residential citizens but currently there are no composting programs that schools or restaurants can participate in. Participating in a composting program was seen as something that would be easy to adopt by schools because composting fits well into the curriculum and could be a good way to build a connection with the agricultural society. Composting could happen at school sites and the Fairground, with sale of the finished compost used for fundraising, or used at the Fairgrounds community garden and school gardens. This could bring benefits to children who would be able to participate in and learn about soil health, nutrient cycling and give them skills they could also share with their families at home. Composting was seen as an initiative that could be done all year round, and therefore is an aspect of a sustainable food system that is not limited by seasonality. The chef (121) commented that one summer an employee was bringing home food scraps to compost and staff were willing to sort waste and contribute to composting. However, the chef noted that a compost pick-up schedule would be needed several times a week for the restaurant to participate because of the volume produced. A compost system at the Fairground would also add more benefits to the gardeners that currently have to bring compost in from elsewhere to fertilize their garden plots. A community resident shared that even on a small scale, using compost as an education tool could support community change:

> I think showing people even just, you know, like you said, have that compost system out there even as part of your education system, so people understand how that works. Why it works, you know, how they can be part of a part of the solution and not just part of the problem (I22).

Composting is an important part of creating a sustainable food system and could be another way BADAS could connect in the community. A community resident (F10) who is also a master composter suggested that they would be willing to partner with BADAS and go to people's homes and help them with their personal compost systems. They shared that to maintain their designation, they needed to do twenty-five hours of volunteer work related to composting and this could be another way to add value to membership.

Subject Matter Expert: Educator and Advocate

A community resident felt that BADAS was in a favorable position to advance local food initiatives because their name implies they are knowledgeable in agriculture, and therefore may be perceived as subject matter experts and a trusted source of information:

> They're coming from a position of credibility, you know, they're somewhat the subject matter experts here that knowledge space is there to you know, share those stories, and are becoming a place for these kinds of stories to be shared (I22).

Therefore, how BADAS approaches and communicates what is a sustainable food system, and the role that they take in supporting this, could have a significant influence on how agriculture is accepted in the urban settings. If they develop their approach based on the community vision, this could counter traditional worldviews found to dominate thinking in urban centers (Akimowicz et al., 2020). To generate more public awareness, the idea surfaced to create BADAS member signage that people could display in their yards. Other ideas put forward included helping to normalize alternatives to lawns by creating demonstration plots of front yard gardens that could help to counter the “illusion of perfection” associated with green lawns and the belief that community gardens reduce property values.

A high priority identified by participants was finding more ways to expose people to agriculture, particularly to engage with youth because of the distance agriculture has in modern society. As a local flower grower shared:

> I think the education portion, can really be helpful, especially if we were to focus on the younger generations, because the modern world is moving away from people being farmers and giving kids the opportunity to explore that side of what could potentially be even if not a career, even just a hobby, you know, getting some exposure to that can be important when exposure is not as available as it used to be (I23).

Focus group discussions built on the idea that young children need to be engaged, but youth sixteen years and older could be the most vital group to target. A local farmer (F2) explained that older youth are the ones who have the ability to become involved in farming and therefore need to be inspired to consider it as a career path. This participant highlighted the benefits of human labour in agriculture and that there is a need for more farmers. They expressed:

> I just want to make all the food and want everybody to make all the food. I want pitchforks to be involved. And that means humans have to be involved and less tractors and more exercise and get the whole body involved, not just 2% making food for the other 98% (F2).

Participants felt that building relationships with the schools through Fairground and garden tours, school gardens, mentorship programs and educational events could be a good way to begin connecting agriculture in the community. Teachers felt that if they knew about the Fairgrounds or what kinds of resources were available, they could create field trips or use programs that align with the curriculum. These findings suggest that successful educational programs would need to be collaborate with teachers to develop programs to which align with the curriculum.

Furthermore, it was suggested that BADAS' could contribute to the development of options classes that include agriculture and indigenous knowledge. Participants who homeschool their children felt that the homeschool community could also benefit from accessing the grounds and participating in curriculum-based activities. They suggested pilot education programs could start with homeschoolers, as they have more flexibility than schools. Seasonality was noted as the main barrier to including agriculture in schools as most agricultural activities happen in the summer when school is out, however, they suggested that access to a greenhouse could help to overcome seasonality. Other connections brought forward to connect youth included developing youth programs such as a garden club and bringing in youth groups such as Girl Guides, Scout groups, and 4-H clubs. Educational activities for both adults and children are a common component and motivation found in other research on urban agriculture (McClintock & Simpson, 2018) and can also be an influence on peoples' decisions to participate with community gardens (Alemu & Grebetius, 2020). Developing educational programs through collaborations can reduce the burden on BADAS' human resources while still meeting the needs within the community. These findings support the collaborative nature of local food initiatives with the social economy which build on existing resource to expand and strengthen connections in the community.

Emphasis was placed on the role of youth sixteen years and older because they have the muscles and the ability to think for themselves and are at the point of considering their future careers and life paths. Although education for all youth is viewed as essential, younger children are perceived as having a more supportive role and the need for change in our food system is pressing; therefore, participants felt that BADAS should focus on agricultural programs that target older youth. Local food system initiatives and urban agriculture development is still very grassroots, as a teacher observed, agricultural opportunities in technology and computer science

are at the forefront, but “specifically with local food, those movements are still pretty grassroots, pretty small. So how do we get the next generation interested in that?” (F9). Mentorship programs, and providing work experience opportunities, were suggested as ways BADAS could connect with high school or university students.

Participants felt that BADAS could develop their identity around being a hub or centre for nature and agricultural programming. Connecting with the community more broadly as well as adding value for members could be supported by hosting educational courses such as soil development, insects and pests, compost, canning and preserving. Other opportunities brought forward to support education and advocacy could be information sessions about hot topics in agriculture such as the latest technology, regenerative agriculture, permaculture and no-till methods. They could also find ways to support people in the community to develop their home gardens. Participants noted that in urban neighborhoods, growing food is a challenge because there is very little topsoil on top of the clay, which limits productive growth. Participants felt it would be beneficial if BADAS could contribute to the overall success of urban agriculture in the City's by offering workshops on how to start an urban garden by building soil quality in their yards, or how to build garden boxes.

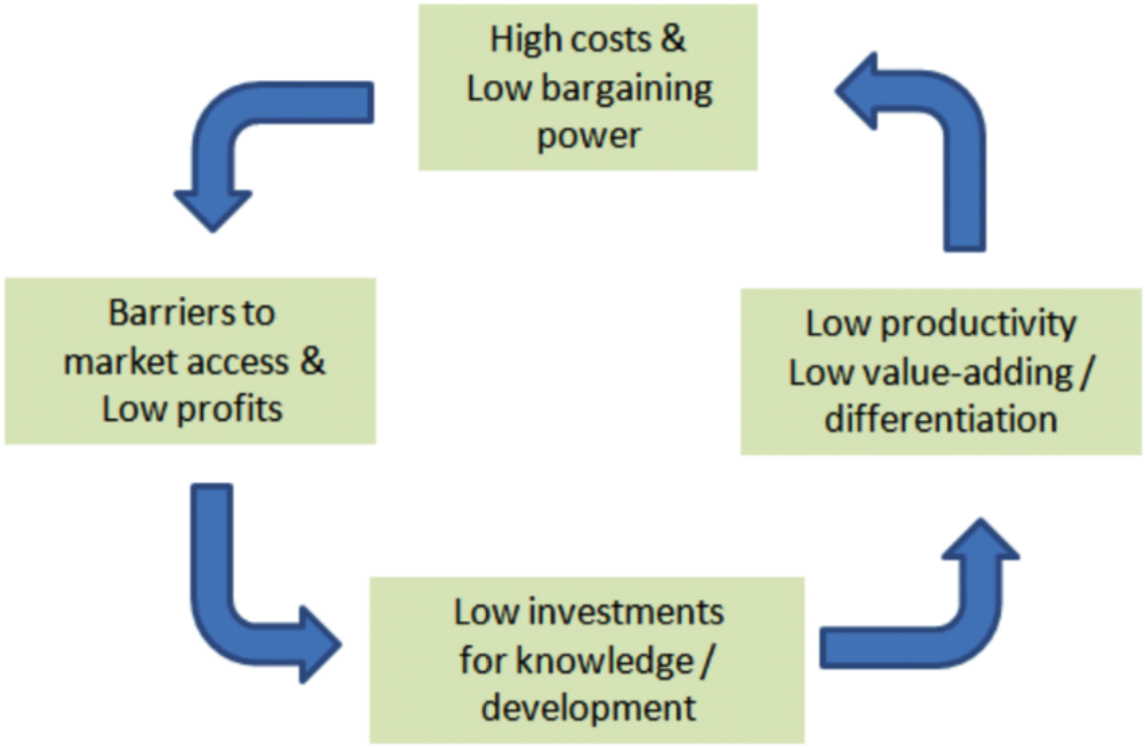
BADAS as a Networking Hub to Promote Economic Development

The recent RAMP policy identifies economic development and job creation as an important result of investing in agriculture (EMRB, 2023). Investing in small-scale and urban agriculture are challenged by several factors including; access, affordability, and tenure of land (Akimowicz et al., 2020; Ela & Rosenburg, 2017; Horst et al., 2017). The economic viability of small farms is another challenge noted in the literature, associated with high costs, scale

efficiencies and unequal bargaining power (Manikas et al., 2019;). Manikas et al. (2019) visual representation for the cycle of these challenges is found in Figure 5.

Figure 5

The Vicious Cycle of Small Farms



Note. The 'vicious' cycle of small farms. From "A Community-based Agro-Food Hub Model for Sustainable Farming" by I. Manikas, G. Malindretos, S. Moschuris, 2019, *Sustianability,* 11(1017), p.3 doi:10.3390/su11041017. In [(CC BY) license (http://creativecommons.org/license/by/4.0/)]

The farmers in this study identified these challenges in their own operations, such as the time cost of their practices and the costs of selling at farmers' markets to create a stall which attracts customers. Getting into the local grocery store was perceived as a way they could reduce costs because people are conditioned to go there already, but currently this has significant barriers. Focus group discussions with farmers also brought forward the unfairness of regulations which are tailored for large-scale producers and prevent small farm producers from selling products like

cheese. Another role for small farmers they identified goes beyond food production and requires them to also take on the role of educator and advocate to help people understand how and why they are producing ethically, the negatives of the industrial food system and why sustainable production costs more. Therefore, providing education is one way that these farmers attract customers and differentiate their products from others. Research on urban farms in Ontario indicates that personal connections are vital to small urban farmers, who success is found to depend "on farmers' ability to secure consumer loyalty" (Akimowicz et al., 2020, p.8). Other research by Wittman et al. (2012) found that farmers were telling their story and selling values such as the ethical production methods, fair wages, high costs of production and educating consumers about the local food system. The farmers in this study acknowledged that taking on these multiple roles can be challenging and, in addition to this, they are limited to what they can sell and where they can sell their goods. The restaurant chef (I21) also noted that information about bringing local products into their restaurant is limited, and it can be challenging to find local producers to purchase products from. These finding are similar to sentiments of new farmers in recent study in Saskatchewan which found "challenges including lack of access to farmers' markets and grocery stores, the costs of distribution and transport, lack of processing plants…costs of meeting and understanding regulatory standards… [and overall] lack of access to information [contributing to the] difficulty negotiating health regulations" (Campbell et al., 2019, p.3). Forming a cooperative or farmer network could be a mechanism to mitigate some of these risks and challenges. Manikas et al. (2019) assert that "small and family farms need to collaborate and form various producer organizations such as cooperatives and networks in order to gain scale economies and negotiating power on markets and for policy" (p.3). Beckie and

Bacon (2019) assert that other benefits of producer cooperatives include reflexive governance, inclusiveness and local control.

To respond to small farm challenges, BADAS could support economic development by becoming a hub to support farmer collaborations, direct selling opportunities, connect producers with retail opportunities as well as provide information about related policies and regulations that impact their businesses. Currently, in Beaumont, the Beaumont Alberta Farmers Market is the only support that facilitates agricultural connections in the community. One suggestion discussed in the focus group was to develop an app that local farmers could sell their products on, like "a farm etsy" (F5). Another suggestion was for BADAS to advocate for small producers to get into local grocery stores. As a farm producer shared:

> [BADAS could facilitate] talking with the local grocery stores to see like, what it would take, or maybe working with the local government to kind of force their hand a little bit to allow some kind of local section in the grocery store. [Even] If it's a small window in the summer, a place that could allow farmers to be there sell their produce or their products (F5).

The restaurant participant and farmers felt that BADAS could facilitate networking between consumers and producers. As the restaurant chef expressed:

> I love the idea of [BADAS being] like a networking hub. Because realistically, I've grown my relationships, through word of mouth, and people, sometimes just connecting randomly. So I think having that hub where a business like mine can go and be like, who sells what, who can I connect with (I21)?

Another way identified by participants for BADAS to contribute to economic development is by connecting with local producers and organizing a cooperative to develop a regional producer

brand, or by offering space at the Fairground for an all-season hydroponics co-operative. These initiatives could reduce the barriers for small farmers to access markets, encourage farmer-to-farmer connections, build producer and consumer relationships and support entrepreneurship.

Developing agricultural societies as a hub to support local food producers was also acknowledged by the AAAS as an important direction for all societies in the province. The representative of the AAAS saw a huge opportunity for agricultural societies to support small and medium-scale agriculture, and this is the direction their leadership is focusing on now and into the future. They shared this vision:

> Everything from hydroponics and indoor growing to small footprint high intensity agriculture as a whole. So we're actually going to concentrate in that space. And the reason for that is that there isn't anyone focusing on that space. And it's my belief that our agricultural societies can actually be a catalyst for that level of agriculture (I24).

If the 291 agricultural societies dispersed throughout the province started focusing on small-scale agriculture as a way to strengthen and grow their connection with the food system, this could have a significant impact on the scaling of local food in Alberta. Researchers assert that hubs with multiple services to meet the needs of consumers and producers can be more economically sustainable and is a strategy that can better support local food system and community sustainability goals (Berti & Mulligan, 2016; Manikas et al., 2019). As identified in the community of Beaumont, there are small-scale producers who arguably need more support to be competitive. The Fairgrounds could also be used to support entrepreneurs, which would aid new entrants and expand commercial food production and processing in the region. The AAAS envisioned multiple roles for agricultural societies based on their resources and capacity, which could include producing food and selling it to generate funds, use it to support education and

fundraising in their community, or supplying food to those in need. If this is beyond their capacity and resources, they could leverage their existing infrastructure and status as a nonprofit to collaborate with other societies and facilitate supply chain connections with the public and private sectors. The AAAS representative (I24) felt that urban situated societies, such as BADAS, were especially important for providing agricultural education and supporting the processing of value-added products. Because of the proximity to large urban populations, they could increase awareness about careers in agriculture and provide access to training, such as through the development of an incubator farm. Furthermore, the AAAS representative (I24) noted that agricultural societies could facilitate land partnerships to connect new farmers with and abandoned agricultural infrastructure in rural areas. BADAS has a significant land resource which could support new farmers because accessing land and land tenure is one of the challenges of commercial urban agriculture identified in the literature (Ela & Rosenburg, 2017). The combined resources and knowledge sharing between agricultural societies in the province could facilitate access to grants and help build partnerships with other organizations who are currently supporting new farmers like Young Agrarians.

Participants identified multiple ways BADAS could contribute to a vibrant and sustainable food system. They recognized that the land is underutilized and they could develop more land for food production; however, participants also noted that there is a lot of work and resources required to bring programs, events, and opportunities to fruition. Participants acknowledge some of the challenges facing BADAS are linked to volunteerism and the aging board, and the need to attract new leadership and members. BADAS will need to grow to create new opportunities, and therefore will need to bring more people who are prepared to take on leadership roles. Furthermore, participants felt the organization would have to hire someone to

facilitate these initiatives and invest in experts to provide quality education on food production and processing, rather than rely solely on volunteers; hence funding was identified as a limiting factor. Participants identified opportunities for BADAS to collaborate with other organizations, citizens, and the municipality in order to reduce the burden on their organization, but also to help build community connections and awareness of the potential of the Fairgrounds to become a third space for more people in the community.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore ways an agricultural society, in the City of Beaumont, Alberta, could contribute the changing trajectory of the agri-food system by supporting a local vision for a sustainable food system by responding to policy, needs of food system stakeholders and the demand by citizens for access to local agriculture products and services. This chapter contributes to a gap in the literature on local food systems which has overlooked agricultural societies, which as social economy organizations have played a vital role in the historical development of agricultural communities and local food systems in Canada. Re-localization of food production and consumption is evolving from grassroots community-based initiatives which are based on local values of people (Beckie et al., 2012; Lyson, 2015; Trobe and Acott, 2000, Sumner, 2012). Collaboration is also central to the social economy to manage risk by focusing on social infrastructure (Connelly & Beckie, 2016), which could also support community development through connecting with craft (Jones et al., 2021). A community-based participatory research approach was used in this study so that local stakeholders could collaborate in a co-learning process to identify and recommend ways that BADAS could support local values and needs for developing a more sustainable local food system.

The findings of this study highlight the benefits the BADAS Fairgrounds bring to the community of Beaumont, including being a welcoming place for immigrants, contributing to food security, providing health and wellness benefits and contributing to community connections. This research found the fairgrounds has underutilized potential to deliver agriculture education and experiences and networking, knowledge and producer support that was identified as underserviced in the region. Having a central place to access agriculture knowledge, practice, and information about the local food system was considered an important need BADAS could fulfill. As a social economy organization that has an existing brand rooted in agriculture, BADAS can leverage their position to normalize sustainable agricultural practices and production in an urban environment based on a community developed vision which aligns with local policy goals.

Scaling up local food systems and protecting prime agricultural land in the Edmonton region is a priority and considered an important sector for economic development (EMRB, 2021). With current policy changes, social infrastructure related to agriculture in the community has grown to facilitate investment in agricultural activities and initiatives. BADAS could contribute to economic development by developing as a hub to attract local producers and processors and support networking to facilitate connections between food system stakeholders. BADAS could also support innovation by offering land opportunities for new farmers to start their business or develop a cooperative, or collaborate to support the development of a regional brand strategy. This study brings attention to how the significant land resource of BADAS and other agricultural societies around the city of Edmonton and elsewhere have land and facilities that could be leveraged to develop a cluster of alternative food networks who support developing new small and medium-scale farming operations. Agricultural activities are land-based and need

space to exist and in metropolitan regions, landowners such as the BADAS could be key sites to reskill, reimagine and normalize agriculture in urban areas. If we continue to push agriculture out into “rural” then it will continue to remain invisible and will reinforce the disconnect observed between society and our food in this study and others research (e.g. Granzow, 2020). The contribution BADAS will make in response to community needs and recent policy is uncertain. Regardless of what direction they choose to go, they are positioned to bridge agriculture into urban life.

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Chapter Four: Conclusion

The role of agricultural societies in the changing trajectory of the agri-food system toward sustainable local food systems is explored in this two-phase study. The first phase described in Chapter Two was to examine the past and present significance of agricultural organizations in Canada, focusing on their potential to advance and aid local food systems. The second phase, presented in Chapter Three, examined how one society, the Beaumont & District Agricultural Society (BADAS) in Beaumont, Alberta, could help develop a sustainable food system through urban agricultural initiatives. More specifically, the objectives of this study were to: (1) explore the history and evolution of agricultural societies in Canada; (2) explore strategies and initiatives that agricultural societies in Alberta and Canada are using to support the development of urban agriculture and local food systems; (3) gain an understanding of local values, needs, perspectives on sustainable food systems and urban agriculture in Beaumont; (4) identify relevant strategies, resources, offerings, and partnerships which BADAS could pursue to respond to local needs through co-learning processes with BADAS members, directors, and local food system stakeholders; and, (5) expand on knowledge about the role of the social economy in the development of local food systems. During this study, I was unable to find comparable research on the role of agricultural societies within the context of local food system development. The only recent research I found was on the economic and community benefits of agricultural societies in Alberta, The Hudson Report (2017), which was commissioned by the Alberta Association of Agricultural Societies (AAAS). This project, thus represents, an attempt to fill a gap in the literature, and explore how agricultural societies are able to innovate themselves to support sustainable local food systems, and the communities that can depend upon them.

Investigating agricultural societies in Canada presented an opportunity to comprehend how agri-food systems have been supported and advanced by these organizations since the late 1700s. Agricultural societies were an economic development strategy supported by the government to improve and advance the economic development of agriculture, horticulture, apiculture and home economics during the settlement of Canada (AAAS, 2022). In Canada, the adoption of the global industrial agri-food system, based on economies of scale and standardized production methods, began in earnest following WWII, and since that time has resulted in the changing nature of social and consumer relationships with agriculture and the food system. There are growing concerns about the social, economic and environmental impacts of the globalized agri-food system, and its ultimate ability to lead us to a more sustainable future. How agricultural societies are able to respond to the challenges, and whether they are able to innovate roles in supporting more sustainable food systems, may well be essential to determining their own sustainability as rural institutions.

Collaborations between policymakers, citizens and nonprofit organizations have emerged to respond to these concerns and to reimagine ways we can re-introduce agriculture back into social and cultural life, strengthen our local economies, while also preserving and enhancing ecological resources. One response has been to support small to medium-scale producers and processors, as part of diversifying the local supply chain from production to processing (Beckie & Bacon 2019; Berti & Mulligan, 2016; British Columbia, n.d.; EMRB, 2021). Local food initiatives, such as producer cooperatives, community supported agriculture and food hubs are addressing the negative externalities of the industrial and global food system. They have the potential to reconnect people with food and agriculture in meaningful ways, and encourage interest and innovation, and improve the economic viability of local food systems. The adoption

of supportive agricultural policies, such as urban agriculture, is expanding in Alberta and includes the creation of urban food strategies within the Province's major cities (e.g., The City of Calgary, 2012; City of Edmonton, 2012), and more recent developments at the regional scale, such as RAMP, which seek to protect agricultural lands from development, and support growth in urban agriculture (EMRB, 2023). These changes are a response to people's demands for local food and support a conducive environment for growth of local food initiatives. Today, strategies, policies, and initiatives to re-localize food systems are evolving and researchers have found that successful initiatives rely on collaboration among the private, public and nonprofit sectors (Lavallée-Picard, 2018). Therefore, it is timely to examine the current role and potential of agricultural societies, an under examined resource that is part of the social economy and could make significant contributions to the advancement of sustainable local food systems. In this chapter, I will summarize the salient findings and discuss the significance of this study in light of existing literature, and outline future areas of study.

Summary of Findings

Phase one: The Role of Agricultural Societies in the Revitalization of Local Food Systems

Environmental Scan and Interviews: Agricultural Societies in Alberta and British Columbia

In the first phase of this study, I conducted an environmental scan of agricultural societies across Canada to gain an understanding of the history and current situation of societies across Canada. This was followed by semi-structured interviews with representatives from four societies in Alberta and one in British Columbia, and the provincial association in Alberta, the Alberta Association of Agricultural Societies. During the interviews, we discussed their current

offerings, values, and challenges, and explored their connections and future potential to support local food systems.

Agricultural societies in Canada began as farmer-to-farmer networks and support service providers that fostered innovation and improvements in agriculture by bringing new production methods, equipment, seeds and animals breeds into communities and encouraging farmer competition and knowledge sharing through fairs and exhibitions. This role has changed significantly since the late 1700s, alongside the industrialization of agriculture and evolving needs within agricultural communities. In Atlantic Canada, I was unable to find agricultural societies but found evidence they may have evolved into new collaborative agricultural networks such as the Nova Scotia Federation of Agriculture (NSFA, n.d). Agricultural societies in the provinces of Ontario, Quebec and the Prairie Region of Canada and British Columbia focus on recreational activities that promote agriculture. This includes hosting events, such as rodeos, equine activities, fairs and exhibitions, as well as operating community gardens, maintaining historical agriculture resources and rural heritage, and holding farmers' markets. Alberta is unique because it has 291 existing societies, more than any other province, which have been well supported by the province and have benefited from the progressive leadership of the AAAS. The most progressive societies in Alberta are often located in metropolitan area. Also of note is the formation of new agricultural societies in British Columbia in the 2000s. These new societies taking on roles similar to those in which agricultural societies were originally intended, including providing farmer education and networking opportunities, and supporting the marketing of local agricultural producers as well as responding to local policy and promoting sustainable agriculture.

Agricultural societies' connections to agriculture are evolving with the changing needs in their community. Three interviewees in Alberta and one in British Columbia identified their societies as hubs act as hubs connecting with new farmers, and communities through services, education and relationship building. Representatives from societies in Alberta felt that many societies in the province had become disconnected from agriculture, but that reconnecting communities to agriculture is a valuable direction for agricultural societies to take. Participants emphasised the importance of collaboration and partnerships to develop successful programs and initiatives as it expands their capacity to respond and ensure their offerings are responding to shared values within their communities. Agricultural society participants in Alberta felt that they could be doing more to support their local economy, while the British Columbia society's main focus is directly working to support local farmers and the local economy. In Alberta, the AAAS has a vision for agricultural societies to be leaders in supporting small to medium-scale agriculture initiatives, and that offering agricultural education can be a strategy to drive economic development back into rural communities. The obstacles encountered by these organizations to achieve these aspirations include aging boards, attracting volunteers, declining populations in rural communities, a lack of awareness of their organization, particularly in urbanizing communities, reliance on funding, aging infrastructure, and a lack of focus on innovation and branding. The limited involvement of farmers in agricultural societies was noted as a barrier to building their capacity to support agriculture. The British Columbia participant asserted that societies need farmers on their boards to rebuild their connection to their local food system and support producer needs. These relationships could be facilitated by offering services that reduce the burden for new farmers, including marketing, physical infrastructure and administrative support.

Phase 2: Bridging Agriculture and Urban Life: Futures Roles for Beaumont and District Agricultural Society (BADAS)

Regional agricultural policies, such as the Regional Agricultural Master Plan in the Edmonton region, are first steps towards protecting agricultural land, increasing investment and innovation in agriculture, and integrating agriculture into urban communities in meaningful ways (EMRB, 2021). In response to this policy, the City of Beaumont has developed an Urban Agricultural Plan with the objective to be an agricultural innovator with urban agriculture visibly integrated throughout the city (City of Beaumont, 2023). These policies prompted BADAS to engage in community-based research to determine how they support their local food system and build new connections in the community that could support the viability of their organization and collaborate with the City's policy goals. Data was gathered using qualitative methods of semi-structured interviews and focus groups in a co-learning process with local stakeholders, including BADAS directors and members. The knowledge gained from phase one was shared in phase two with participants in the community of Beaumont, Alberta, in order to provide context and background information as a basis for discussions. Participants explored their perspectives on a sustainable food system and discussed ways BADAS could utilize their resources, land, and brand to contribute to the community vision for agriculture. The following findings provide an overview of the benefits, challenges and potential ways BADAS can be a bridge to reconnect agriculture into urban life.

The Benefits and Future Potential of BADAS

The participants of this study felt that the BADAS Fairgrounds, 71 acres of agricultural land located in the City of Beaumont, was a significant yet underutilized resource for agricultural initiatives in the community. Those who are gardening, or using the Fairgrounds, expressed

multiple benefits from being on the grounds and positioned the Fairgrounds as a third space (see Jeffres et al., 2009) in the community to socialize, enjoy nature, support their mental and physical health, build community connections, supports immigrants to integrate into the community and has a vital cross-country equine course, one of only five in the province. These findings add to other research on the experiences of immigrants in Canada (Beckie & Boghan, 2010; Hinton & Schnurr, 2021) and the benefits of gardening, community gardens and urban agriculture (Alemu & Grebitus, 2020; Artmann & Sartison, 2018; Bellows et al., 2003, Mullins et al., 2021).

Agricultural societies were thought of as subject matter experts in agriculture that could build their brand to promote an ethical, sustainable and alternative vision for agriculture in the City of Beaumont. Participants felt that the disconnect of urban people from agriculture has shaped community values, such as the assumption that the best use of land is prioritized to residential and industrial development (Beckie et al., 2013). The potential of BADAS may be in how it can work cooperatively with the municipality, schools, citizens, food producers and community organizations to support the aspirations of the new agricultural policy and community vision for a sustainable local food system. Developing and partnering on local food initiatives to utilize the Fairgrounds and its facilities as an agricultural resource hub could contribute to the valuation of agricultural activities and agricultural land in urban settings, which has been the goal of this organization since inception. Participants felt that BADAS could play a significant role in bridging urban and rural agriculture by framing their activities as urban agriculture to be more relatable to "urbanites." Strategies identified include, connecting with youth through educational programs with schools and youth groups, mentorship, work experience and community organizations, composting and providing agricultural education,

additional services and products which can support indigenous knowledge and craft industries and providing information sessions about trends in agriculture.

The potential for BADAS to contribute to economic development could be strengthened by branding its identity as a hub which could facilitate connections between local producers and consumers, and reduce the burden on producers and retailers to access health and regulatory information related to the production, consumption, storage and use of agricultural products. Societies such as BADAS that are located in or near large urban centers may have additional potential to develop training and education programs for small and medium-scale farmers. Furthermore, they could expand their support and influence through networking and collaborating with other agricultural societies in the province to support innovation in local agricultural initiatives.

Discussions of Findings

Re-localizing food production and local food governance involves complex and value-laden processes, and are influenced by relations of power. These overlap with cultural, ecological, economic and political contexts, and are often specific to the regions and communities in which innovations are taking place (Beckie & Bacon, 2019). The social economy is an important sector which can be a counterbalance the domination of market fundamentalism (Chaves & Monzon, 2012) which has influenced the current trajectory of the agri-food system. The efficacy of the globalized industrial food system is questionable and research indicates an important intersection between local food initiatives and the social economy (Beckie & Bacon, 2019; Connelly & Beckie, 2016; Curry, 2021; Wittman et al., 2012) which may help to create a balanced model of food production. However, because agricultural societies are organized by a predominately white demographic, they need to take care to be inclusive and

welcoming to immigrants in organizational development and decision-making processes to ensure they counteract the "whiteness" and ecogentrification found within urban agriculture (McClintock, 2018). Collaboration and partnership with diverse stakeholders are essential to strengthening social infrastructure and managing risk by taking an incremental approach to support long term transformational change in the agri-food system (Connelly & Beckie, 2016). This study brings attention to agricultural societies, which are social economy organizations that have been overlooked in research on local food systems. These organizations exist in many agricultural communities across Canada and yet they have been a significantly under-utilized resource for supporting local food system development and the re-integration of agricultural life into urban and rural communities. Interestingly this research suggests that an understanding of their own organizations, their pasts, and the challenges of the present seem essential to recognizing how the re-localization of food systems is mirrored in their history. Agricultural societies were essentially multifunctional agri-food hubs who combined their services with social and recreational events that allowed knowledge and resource sharing in their communities. Therefore, this study also adds to research on alternative food networks which provide evidence that multifunctional agricultural services providers can enhance the social, recreational, cultural and economic needs of a community (Beckie & Bacon, 2019; Curry, 2021; Manikas et al., 2019; Wittman et al., 2012). Shifting their focus from recreation services to including producers and economic development strategies related to agriculture may be challenging for agricultural societies, but could support their long-term success. Collaborative partnerships can support reflexive learning about their organizations and support a foundation for innovating new ways forward.

This study found that BADAS is in a strategic position to shift to this new direction and become a multifunctional food hub because they have a significant land resource with a prime location and growing population. Development of Beaumont's Urban Agricultural Plan, growing community support and expanding local food initiatives suggest there is significant social infrastructure to enable BADAS to collaborate with other local stakeholders towards a shared vision for agriculture. Ensuring the protection of BADAS lands for agriculture may be essential for any agricultural land to exist within the city to support regional visions such as RAMP, but this land can also to help to reconnect both the physical and cultural relationship people have with agriculture. One of the biggest hurtles found in this research is the predominant development paradigm in Alberta, where land is valued "according to short-term economic gains" (Beckie et al., 2013, p.27), which continues to shape our expectations of how we live in urban communities.

Areas for future research could include further investigation into what individual agricultural societies need in order to be a significant resource in the trajectory of the local food system. This research has demonstrated that each agricultural society is unique, therefore, community-based research on individual societies could determine the best ways they could support community priorities, through building connections with other farmer organizations, such as Young Agrarian, as well as other agricultural societies. Studies could examine how societies are supporting the integration of immigrants and ways they are or could better support female farmers. Research could investigate clustering (Beckie et al., 2012) as a phenomenon of individual and geographically situated agricultural societies, and how this might support the scaling of local food systems within their communities and the province. Concomitant with the areas of research noted previously, consideration should be given to an assessment of the

governance of agricultural societies and how and to what extent this reflects local food system governance. This knowledge will help, not just agricultural societies, but all stakeholders evaluate opportunities and challenges for the transformation of agri-food systems so as to meet the emerging values and aspirations of the communities involved. Only time will reveal how BADAS and other agricultural societies will contribute to the changing trajectory of agriculture and food, and if urban agriculture will continue to remain at the fringe or play a key role in the re-integration of agriculture into our culture and everyday lives.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Phase one Recruitment Script

Email Subject line: Invitation to Participate in Student Research on Agricultural Societies

[Date]

Ethics ID: Pro0011895

Good Day [insert name],

My name is Terra Pombert and I am a graduate student at the University of Alberta completing a Master of Arts in Community Engagement. I am contacting you because your agricultural society has programs and offerings which are connected to local food system such as urban agriculture. I am conducting research to learn more about what agricultural societies are doing to respond to changes in agriculture and the demand for local food. My research study is titled "The Role of Agricultural Societies in the changing trajectory of agri-food system change" and is being conducted in Beaumont, Alberta.

I would like to discuss this project in more detail with you to see if you would like to participate in this study. Following this, if you choose to take part then I can set up a 30-60 min interview. The interview intends to gather data about the choices your organization is taking related to the local food system. Interviews will be audio and video recorded online using zoom, if conducted in person then they will be audio recorded using my personal iPhone.

Taking part in this study is voluntary. If you would like to discuss this project in more detail please let me know the best time and method to contact you. Discussion of the project will take no more than 15 min.

Thank you for your time, I look forward to hearing from you.

Kind regards,

Terra Pombert

University of Alberta

pombert@ualberta.ca

Appendix B: Phase one Information Letter and Consent Form: Interviews

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

Interview Consent Form

Title of Study: The Role of Agricultural Societies in the changing trajectory of agri-food system change.

Contact information:

Principal Investigator: Terra Pombert

Faculty: School of Public Health

Master of Arts Community Engagement

Email: pombert@ualberta.ca

Supervisor: Dr. Mary Beckie

Faculty: School of Public Health

Director of Community Engagement Studies

Email: m.beckie@ualberta.ca

Phone: 780-492-5153

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you take part, the study team is available to explain the project and you are free to ask any questions about anything you do not understand. You will be given a copy of this form for your records.

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?

You are being invited to take part in this study because the [insert name] is taking an active role in local food systems and you have knowledge about their programs, services and activities. The purpose of this research is to learn about how agricultural societies are or could support local food systems such as urban agriculture. This knowledge will help to inform BADAS in the community of Beaumont, Alberta to support, engage and collaborate with others in common goals related to local food systems, such as urban agriculture.

What is the reason for doing the study?

Agricultural societies are important nonprofit volunteer run organizations, they provide opportunities in education, recreation and cultural activities related to agriculture. Agriculture has changed in recent years in the prairie region of Canada resulting in export driven large scale farming practices. Food insecurity and our relationship with food production has come under question and a response to this is a growing local food movement based on smaller scale, local and urban agriculture development. There are no studies about how agricultural societies are responding to the development of local food systems including how they are taking part in urban agriculture, urban agriculture policy and small-scale farmers.

In this study urban agriculture is understood as personal, commercial, marketing, cultural and educational activities connected to growing food in or near urban areas.

How will this information be used?

The information you provide will form a part of Terra Pombert's thesis to complete her Master of Arts in Community Engagement. It will contribute to a summary of the resources, needs, values in the community of Beaumont related to local food systems, particularly urban agriculture which will be presented to BADAS, Alberta Association of Agricultural Societies (AAAS) and the City of Beaumont. What you say may also be used as part of public or academic presentations including at the AAAS 2023 conference.

This information will also be used for the future planning of BADAS, Beaumont's Urban Agricultural Plan and to generate knowledge regarding the community of Beaumont's needs, values and priorities related to the development of urban agriculture.

What will I be asked to do?

You are being invited to take part in an interview. This will be a one-on-one conversation where you can share your knowledge about your agricultural society regarding the values, reasoning, participation with and programs you offer related to agriculture and local food systems such as urban agriculture. The conversation will be recorded and transcribed word-for-word by the researcher. The written transcript will be returned to you via email and you will have two weeks to make any changes or revisions as you see fit. After that, we will confirm with you that the transcript is accurate and it will become part of the data set.

The interview will take between 30-60 min. The interview will take place in person or online using zoom based on individual needs and location. If we meet in person, you can select where

we meet and all Covid-19 protocols will be in place including masking and distancing. If we meet online, you have the option to turn off your camera at any time.

What are the risks and discomforts?

You are unlikely to experience risks or discomforts by taking part in this research. All data can be anonymized and your personal information will not be included in the study.

COVID-19 Related Risks: Because interviews may take place in person, we will adhere to all public health guidelines currently in place including masking and distancing were necessary. Please feel free to discuss protocols with us prior to taking part in the project.

What are the benefits to me?

There may not be any direct benefit to you for participating in this research. However, it may be helpful for you and or your agricultural society to think and talk about this organization from a local food system viewpoint. Other benefit will be in the knowledge sharing with other agricultural societies, universities, governments, and communities who are interested in developing local food systems. Also, sharing your practices, values and initiatives can help the Beaumont & District Agricultural Society (BADAS) find new ways to connect with agriculture in the Beaumont area.

Do I have to take part in the study?

Being in this study is your choice. If you decide to take part, you can change your mind and stop being in the study at any point until December 1, 2022. After this point I cannot remove your

contributions to the study because the data will have been analysed in full and shared with the City of Beaumont, BADAS and the Alberta Association of Agricultural Societies (AAAS). To withdraw from the study please contact Terra Pombert at (pombert@ualberta.ca) or her supervisor Dr. Mary Beckie (m.beckie@ualberta.ca).

Even if you remain in the research study, you may choose to withdraw some or all of your responses. Individual interview transcripts will be sent to you by email and you will have two weeks to review the contents and remove, change or withdraw anything that you like.

Will I be paid to be in the research?

Interviews will be conducted in person or online using Zoom Meetings, if conducted in person then all light snacks or beverages will be paid by the researcher. If you have an out-of-pocket expense such as transportation or childcare costs, these will be reimbursed. There will be no payment for the interviews but a thank you gift will be given with a value of up to $50. If you leave the interview or withdraw, out-of-pocket expenses will still be covered.

Will my information be kept private?

During this study we will do everything we can to make sure that all information you provide is kept private until analyzed and personal information removed. No information relating to this study that includes your name will be released outside of the researcher's office or published by the researchers unless you give us your express permission. All Data collected and devices used will be encrypted. Sometimes, by law, we may have to release your information with your name

so we cannot guarantee absolute privacy. However, we will make every legal effort to make sure that your information is kept private.

For interviews, your name will not be used. We will use an alternate name. You can choose a name yourself at the end of this form or we can choose a name for you. If you would like to use your real name, please discuss this with the researchers and indicate this on the form at the end of this document. At no point will you be identified in this work; however, your agricultural society may be identified. If you wish for the agricultural society to remain private, you can indicate this at the end of this form.

During analysis, electronic data will be stored on a secure google drive at the University of Alberta and a password protected computer with access only by the researcher. Any paper copies of data will be kept in a secured file cabinet in the researchers' private home.

What will happen to the information or data that I provide?

After the study is done, we will store your data for a minimum of 5 years. Any physical papers and transcripts will be stored in a secure cabinet in the researcher's private home. Electronic data will be stored on a secure University of Alberta Google drive. Data will be stored for at least 5 years, but may be kept longer for future research. Your name will never be associated with any electronic data. Your data may be linked to other data for research purposes only to increase the usefulness of the data. Any researcher who wants to use this data in the future must have the new project reviewed by an ethics board.

What if I have questions?

If you have question about the research now or later, please contact Terra Pombert (pombert@ualberta.ca) or her supervisor Dr. Mary Beckie (m.beckie@ualberta.ca).

This study is funded by MITACS which supports students in university and organizational partnerships in community engaged research. See https://www.mitacs.ca/en for more information.

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the University of Alberta Research Ethics Office at reoffice@ualberta.ca and quote Ethics ID Pro00118295 This office is independent of the study investigators.

How do I indicate my agreement to be in this study?

By signing below, you acknowledge:

- That you have read the above information and have had anything that you do not understand explained to you to your satisfaction.
- That you will be taking part in a research study.
- That you may freely leave the research study at any time.
- That you do not waive your legal rights by being in the study.
- That the legal and professional obligations of the investigators and involved institutions are not changed by your taking part in this study.
- That the interview will be audio recorded.
- That you agree to the data being stored as part of a data repository.

SIGNATURE OF STUDY PARTICIPANT

_____

Name of Participant

I give permission for my real name to be used Yes No

Pseudonym: _____

I give permission for the organizational name to be used Yes No

_____ _____

Signature of Participant. Date

SIGNATURE OF PERSON OBTAINING CONSENT

_____ _____

Name of Person Obtaining Consent Contact Email/Number

A copy of this information and consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

Appendix C: Phase Two Recruitment Script: Focus Group

Email Subject line: Invitation to Participate in Local Student Research on Urban Agriculture

[Date]

Ethics ID: Pro0011895

Good Day [name],

My name is Terra Pombert and I am a graduate student at the University of Alberta completing a Master of Arts in Community Engagement. Our community is developing an urban agricultural plan and I am contacting you because you may have an interest in urban agriculture. Your perspectives and insights would be a valuable contribution to the development of local food systems, such as urban agriculture in Beaumont, AB. I am conducting community-based research to learn about the needs, values and resources in Beaumont connected to the local food system and ways the Beaumont & District Agricultural Society can connect with others to fulfill local needs and goals. My research study is titled "The Role of Agricultural Societies in the changing trajectory of agri-food system change" and is being conducted in Beaumont, Alberta.

I would like to discuss this project in more detail with you to see if you would like to participate in this study. Following this, if you choose to take part, I would like to invite you to take part in a focus group. The focus group will take 90-120 min. Focus groups will be audio recorded with my personal iPhone. Alternatively, if you are unable to attend a focus group, I would be happy to

include your perspective in a one-one one interview at your convenience using Zoom cloud meetings. Interviews will be audio and video recorded using Zoom cloud Meetings.

Taking part in this study is voluntary. If you would like to discuss this project in more detail please let me know the best time and method to contact you. Discussion of the project will take no more than 15 min.

Thank you for your time, I look forward to hearing from you.

Kind regards,

Terra Pombert

University of Alberta

pombert@ualberta.ca

Appendix D: Phase Two Information Letter and Consent Form: Focus Groups

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

Focus Group Consent Form

Title of Study: The Role of Agricultural Societies in the changing trajectory of agri-food system change.

Contact information:

Principal Investigator: Terra Pombert

Faculty: School of Public Health

Master of Arts Community Engagement

Email: pombert@ualberta.ca

Supervisor: Dr. Mary Beckie

Faculty: School of Public Health

Director of Community Engagement Studies

Email: m.beckie@ualberta.ca

Phone: 780-492-5153

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you take part, the study team is available to explain the project and you are free to ask any questions about anything you do not understand. You will be given a copy of this form for your records.

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?

You are being invited to take part in this study because you live in the Beaumont, Alberta region and have an interest in or take part in local food systems, such as urban agriculture and or are a director with the Beaumont & District Agricultural Society (BADAS). The purpose of this research is to learn about how agricultural societies are or could support local food systems such as urban agriculture. This knowledge will help to inform BADAS in the community of Beaumont, Alberta to support, engage and collaborate with others in common goals related to local food systems, such as urban agriculture.

What is the reason for doing the study?

Agricultural societies are important nonprofit volunteer run organizations, they provide opportunities in education, recreation and cultural activities related to agriculture. Agriculture has changed in recent years in the prairie region of Canada resulting in export driven large scale farming practices. Food insecurity and our relationship with food production has come under question and a response to this is a growing local food movement based on smaller scale, local and urban agriculture development. There are no studies about how agricultural societies are responding to the development of local food systems including how they are taking part in urban agriculture, urban agriculture policy and small-scale farmers.

In this study urban agriculture is understood as personal, commercial, marketing, cultural and educational activities connected to growing food in or near urban areas.

How will this information be used?

The information you provide will form a part of Terra Pombert's thesis to complete her Master of Arts in Community Engagement. It will create a summary of the resources, needs, values in the community of Beaumont related to local food systems which will be shared with BADAS, Alberta Association of Agricultural Societies (AAAS) and the City of Beaumont. What you say may be part of public or academic presentations including at the AAAS 2023 conference.

This information will also be used for the future planning of BADAS, Beaumont's Urban Agricultural Plan and to generate knowledge regarding the community of Beaumont's needs, values and priorities related to the development of urban agriculture.

What will I be asked to do?

You are being invited to take part in a focus group. First information learned from other agricultural societies will be share, then participants talk about the values, needs, resources and priorities around the local food system in the Beaumont community. The discussion will be recorded and transcribed word-for-word by the researcher. The written transcript will be emailed to you then you will have two weeks to make any changes as you see fit. After that, we will confirm with you that the transcript is correct and it will become part of the data set.

The focus groups will include 5-8 people and will take between 90-120 min in length. Focus groups will be in person or online depending on the comfort level of participants. Location of the focus group will be in the City of Beaumont at the CCBCC. If you join online, you have the option to turn off your camera at any time.

What are the risks and discomforts?

You are unlikely to experience risks or discomforts by taking part in this research. All data can be changed so that your personal information will not be included in the study. As a part of a group discussion, your opinions and ideas may become known to other participants so you are invited to contribute as much or as little as you like. Due to the nature of focus groups there is a risk of loss of privacy and though confidentiality cannot be guaranteed participants will be asked to keep the groups conversation confidential. It is not possible to know all of the risks that may happen in a study, but we have taken all reasonable safeguards to minimize any known risks to you.

COVID-19 Related Risks: Because focus groups may take place in person, we will follow all public health guidelines in place including masking and distancing where necessary. Please feel free to discuss protocols with us prior to taking part in the project.

What are the benefits to me?

There may or may not be any direct benefit to you for taking part in this research. Benefits will depend on your role in the food system and the outcomes and relationships built with others in the focus group. Additionally, taking part in the focus groups may help you to better understand what others in the community think, value, services provided, chances for partnership and needs related to urban agriculture. Other benefits will be in the knowledge sharing with other agricultural societies, universities, governments, and communities who are interested in developing local food systems or policy.

Do I have to take part in the study?

Being in this study is your choice. If you decide to take part, you can change your mind and stop being in the study at any point February 28th, 2023. After this point I cannot remove your contributions to the study because the data will have been analysed in full and shared with the City of Beaumont, BADAS and the Alberta Association of Agricultural Societies (AAAS). To withdraw from the study please contact Terra Pombert at (pombert@ualberta.ca)or her supervisor Dr. Mary Beckie (m.beckie@ualberta.ca).

Even if you remain in the research study, you may choose to withdraw some or all of your responses. Focus group transcripts will be sent to you by email and you will have two weeks to review the contents and remove, change or withdraw your comments in the discussion. However, as this is a group discussion there are some limitations to removing all your comments if other participants are responding to you and or advance topics you have talked about.

Will I be paid to be in the research?

Focus groups will be held in person or online using Zoom Meetings, if in person then a light snack or beverage will be paid for by the researcher. If you have an out-of-pocket expense such as transportation fees or childcare costs, these will be reimbursed. There will be no payment for participating in focus groups but a thank you gift will given with a value of $50. If you leave the focus group or withdraw, out-of-pocket expenses will still be covered and you will get to keep the thank you gift.

Will my information be kept private?

In this study we will do everything we can to make sure that all information you provide is kept private until analyzed and personal information removed. No information relating to this study that includes your name will be released outside of the researcher's office or published by the researchers unless you give us your express permission. All Data collected and devices used will be encrypted. Sometimes, by law, we may have to release your information with your name so we cannot guarantee absolute privacy. However, we will make every legal effort to make sure that your information is kept private. For focus groups please be aware that what you say will be heard by others in the focus group. While we strive to protect the confidentiality of the data we cannot guarantee that others from the groups will do the same.

You can choose a different name for yourself at the end of this form or we can choose a name for you. If you would like to use your real name, please discuss this with the researchers and put this on the form at the end of this document. If you are part of an organization or business please let us know if you would prefer an alternate name for the organization.

During the study, electronic data will be stored on a secure google drive at the University of Alberta and the personal password protected computer of the researcher with access only by the researcher. Any paper copies of data will be kept in a secured file cabinet in the researchers' private home.

What will happen to the information or data that I provide?

After the study is done, we will store your data for a minimum of 5 years. Any physical papers and transcripts will be stored in a secure cabinet in the researcher's private home. Electronic data will be stored on a secure University of Alberta Google drive. Data will be stored for at least 5 years, but may be kept longer for future research. Your name will never be associated with any

electronic data, unless you have given consent. Your data may be linked to other data for research purposes only to increase the usefulness of the data. Any researcher who wants to use this data in the future must have the new project reviewed by an ethics board.

What if I have questions?

If you have question about the research now or later, please contact Terra Pombert (pombert@ualberta.ca) or her supervisor Dr. Mary Beckie (m.beckie@ualberta.ca)

This study is funded by MITACS which supports students in university and organizational partnerships in community engaged research. See https://www.mitacs.ca/en for more information.

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the University of Alberta Research Ethics Office at reoffice@ualberta.ca and quote Ethics ID Pro00118295. This office is independent of the study investigators.

How do I indicate my agreement to be in this study?

By signing below, you acknowledge:

- That you have read the above information and have had anything that you do not understand explained to you to your satisfaction.
- That you will be taking part in a research study.
- That you may freely leave the research study at any time.

- That you do not waive your legal rights by being in the study.
- That the legal and professional obligations of the investigators and involved institutions are not changed by your taking part in this study.
- That you agree to the data being stored as part of a data repository.
- That the focus group will be audio recorded.

SIGNATURE OF STUDY PARTICIPANT

_____

Name of Participant

I give permission for my real name to be used Yes No

Pseudonym: _____

I give permission for the organizational name or business to be used: Yes No NA

Pseudonym: _____

_____ _____

Signature of Participant. Date

SIGNATURE OF PERSON OBTAINING CONSENT

_____ _____

Name of Person Obtaining Consent Contact Email/Number

A copy of this information and consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

Appendix E: Phase Two Information Letter and Consent Form: Interviews

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

Interview Consent Form

Title of Study: The Role of Agricultural Societies in the changing trajectory of agri-food system change.

Contact information:

Principal Investigator:	Terra Pombert
Faculty:	School of Public Health
	Master of Arts Community Engagement
Email:	pombert@ualberta.ca
Supervisor:	Dr. Mary Beckie
Faculty:	School of Public Health
	Director of Community Engagement Studies
Email:	m.beckie@ualberta.ca
Phone:	780-492-5153

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you take part, the study team is available to explain the project and you are free to ask any questions about anything you do not understand. You will be given a copy of this form for your records.

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?

You are being invited to take part in this study because you live in the Beaumont, Alberta region and have an interest in, support or take part in local food systems, such as urban agriculture. The purpose of this research is to learn about how agricultural societies are or could support the local food system in our community. This knowledge will help to inform BADAS in the community of Beaumont, Alberta to support, engage and collaborate with others in common goals related to local food systems, such as urban agriculture.

What is the reason for doing the study?

Agricultural societies are important nonprofit volunteer run organizations, they provide opportunities in education, recreation and cultural activities related to agriculture. Agriculture has changed in recent years in the prairie region of Canada resulting in export driven large scale farming practices. Food insecurity and our relationship with food production has come under question and a response to this is a growing local food movement based on smaller scale, local and urban agriculture development. There are no studies about how agricultural societies are responding to the development of local food systems including how they are taking part in urban agriculture, urban agriculture policy and small-scale farmers.

In this study urban agriculture is understood as personal, commercial, marketing, cultural and educational activities connected to growing food in or near urban areas.

How will this information be used?

The information you provide will form a part of Terra Pombert's thesis to complete her Master of Arts in Community Engagement. It will contribute to a summary of the resources, needs, values in the community of Beaumont related to local food systems, particularly urban agriculture which will be presented to BADAS, Alberta Association of Agricultural Societies (AAAS) and the City of Beaumont. What you say may also be used as part of public or academic presentations including at the AAAS 2023 conference and the Canadian Association of Food Studies Conference at York University.

This information will also be used for the future planning of BADAS, Beaumont's Urban Agricultural Plan and to generate knowledge regarding the community of Beaumont's needs, values and priorities related to the development of urban agriculture.

What will I be asked to do?

You are being invited to take part in an interview. First information learned from other agricultural societies will be share, then we will talk about your values, needs, resources and priorities around the local food system in the Beaumont community. The discussion will be recorded and transcribed word-for-word by the researcher. The written transcript will be emailed to you then you will have two weeks to make any changes as you see fit. After that, we will confirm with you that the transcript is correct and it will become part of the data set.

The interview will take between 30-60 min. The interview will take place online using zoom. You have the option to turn off your camera at any time.

What are the risks and discomforts?

You are unlikely to experience risks or discomforts by taking part in this research. All data can be anonymized and your personal information will not be included in the study.

What are the benefits to me?

There may or may not be any direct benefit to you for taking part in this research. Benefits will depend on your role in the food system. Additionally, taking part in the interview may help you to better understand what resources and opportunities exist in our community for partnership and developing programs or initiatives related to urban agriculture. Other benefits will be in the knowledge sharing with other agricultural societies, universities, governments, and communities who are interested in developing local food systems or policy.

Do I have to take part in the study?

Being in this study is your choice. If you decide to take part, you can change your mind and stop being in the study at any point until April 30th, 2023. After this point I cannot remove your contributions to the study because the data will have been analysed in full and shared with the City of Beaumont, BADAS and the Alberta Association of Agricultural Societies (AAAS). To withdraw from the study please contact Terra Pombert at (pombert@ualberta.ca)or her supervisor Dr. Mary Beckie (m.beckie@ualberta.ca).

Even if you remain in the research study, you may choose to withdraw some or all of your responses. Interview transcripts will be sent to you by email and you will have two weeks to review the contents and remove, change or withdraw anything that you like.

Will I be paid to be in the research?

Interviews will be conducted in person or online using Zoom Meetings. There will be no payment for the interview but a thank you gift will be given with a value of up to $50. If you leave the interview or withdraw, out-of-pocket expenses will still be covered.

Will my information be kept private?

During this study we will do everything we can to make sure that all information you provide is kept private until analyzed and personal information removed. No information relating to this study that includes your name will be released outside of the researcher's office or published by the researchers unless you give us your express permission. All Data collected and devices used will be encrypted. Sometimes, by law, we may have to release your information with your name so we cannot guarantee absolute privacy. However, we will make every legal effort to make sure that your information is kept private.

For interviews, your name will not be used. We will use an alternate name. You can choose a name yourself at the end of this form or we can choose a name for you. If you would like to use your real name, please discuss this with the researchers and indicate this on the form at the end of this document.

During analysis, electronic data will be stored on a secure google drive at the University of Alberta and a password protected computer with access only by the researcher. Any paper copies of data will be kept in a secured file cabinet in the researchers' private home.

What will happen to the information or data that I provide?

After the study is done, we will store your data for a minimum of 5 years. Any physical papers and transcripts will be stored in a secure cabinet in the researcher's private home. Electronic data will be stored on a secure University of Alberta Google drive. Data will be stored for at least 5 years, but may be kept longer for future research. Your name will never be associated with any electronic data. Your data may be linked to other data for research purposes only to increase the usefulness of the data. Any researcher who wants to use this data in the future must have the new project reviewed by an ethics board.

What if I have questions?

If you have question about the research now or later, please contact Terra Pombert (pombert@ualberta.ca) or her supervisor Dr. Mary Beckie (m.beckie@ualberta.ca).

This study is funded by MITACS which supports students in university and organizational partnerships in community engaged research. See https://www.mitacs.ca/en for more information.

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the University of Alberta Research Ethics Office at reoffice@ualberta.ca and quote Ethics ID Pro00118295 This office is independent of the study investigators.

How do I indicate my agreement to be in this study?

By signing below, you acknowledge:

- That you have read the above information and have had anything that you do not understand explained to you to your satisfaction.
- That you will be taking part in a research study.
- That you may freely leave the research study at any time.
- That you do not waive your legal rights by being in the study.
- That the legal and professional obligations of the investigators and involved institutions are not changed by your taking part in this study.
- That the interview will be audio recorded.
- That you agree to the data being stored as part of a data repository.

SIGNATURE OF STUDY PARTICIPANT

_____

Name of Participant

I give permission for my real name to be used Yes No

Pseudonym: _____

I give permission for the organizational name to be used Yes No

_____ _____

Signature of Participant. Date

SIGNATURE OF PERSON OBTAINING CONSENT

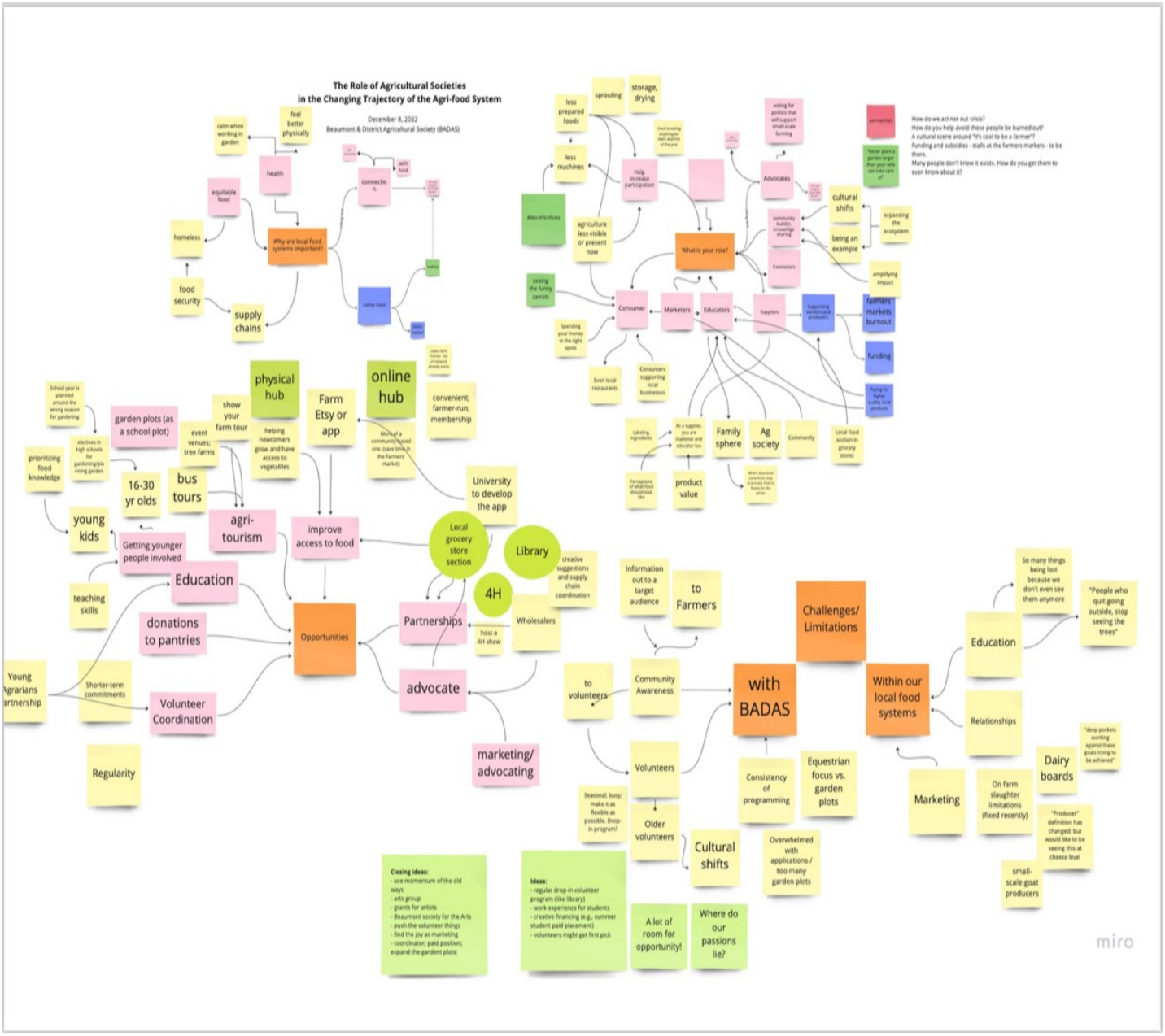
March 23, 2023

_Terra Pombert_____ ___pombert@ualberta.ca

Name of Person Obtaining Consent Contact Email/Number

A copy of this information and consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference

Appendix F: Focus Group December 8th, 2022 Miro Data



Appendix G: Focus Group January 23, 2023 Miro Data