

ACADEMIC INSTITUTION	The University of the Fraser Valley	PROJECT NAME	Fraser Valley AgroConnect
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NEED AND AUDIENCE

The Fraser Valley generates over \$1 billion in gross farm receipts every year, nearly double those of Ontario’s Niagara region, which is Canada’s second most productive agricultural area. Moreover, one in five jobs in the Fraser Valley is in the agriculture industry. Our business will support Fraser Valley farmers in three areas: information gathering, business management, and recruitment. Our role is to alleviate the burden of research by amalgamating existing resources offered by governments, public institutions, and non-profit organizations. We will provide a free platform to connect farmers with relevant information such as available grants and upcoming events. We will also provide additional tools, advice, and expertise as needs, trends, and current events emerge. Finally, we will address labor volatility by connecting farmers with eager student workers looking to support the agriculture industry. There are several benefits to consuming locally. A study conducted by the New Economics Foundation found that twice the money stayed in the local community when consumers purchased locally versus from the supermarket. Further, closing the distance between producers and consumers, and in turn, reducing the miles food must travel to reach the consumer plate, reduces greenhouse gases. BC has the second-highest number of farms participating in direct marketing in Canada. The most common method of direct marketing is farm gate sales, stands, kiosks, or U-picks. Farmers would benefit from utilizing alternative channels to sell goods. Our field interviews uncovered several challenges in harnessing technology and social media. Older generations displayed a tendency to gravitate away from social media and many farmers, especially those experiencing language and cultural barriers, did not understand the benefits of social media. In addition, smaller and newer farms faced difficulties building a loyal customer base in online markets, an issue larger and more established farms did not experience. In BC, COVID-19 has triggered a shortfall of 6,000 to 8,000 labourers and the number of unfilled jobs is expected to surge to 15,200 by 2029. Uniting agricultural employers with students also addresses the barriers young people face entering the workforce in the wake of the pandemic. Young people were among the hardest hit by job loss due to COVID-19. The jobless rate for young people aged 15-24 is almost twice as high as the general population. Finally, government and non-profit organizations are increasingly aiding small and medium enterprise producers. Of course, as resources for farmers increase, so too does the time and effort required to navigate copious platforms, eligibility requirements, deadlines, and applications. Farmers would benefit from the synthesis of operational information.

ACTION TAKEN

We created a team, and developed our business plan, mission, values, and logo. We created content on social media marketing and operational advice. We are currently in the process of aggregating existing resources and grant information and working with a web developer to build the online platform. We partnered with several local farmers and agriculture experts to create an advisory board. The board will guide our business strategy and vet our content to ensure it is meaningful and relevant to farmers. We will also utilize UFV’s network within the agriculture industry including the Agriculture Department and the Food and Agriculture Institute. We expect to launch the project by May 2022.

IMPACT

To ensure the content we are producing is pertinent to local farmers, we worked with a farmer/the owner of Canadian Poultry, and in turn, provided entrepreneurial advice and assistance throughout the process.

PROJECT START DATE	05/01/2022	IS THIS PROJECT WHOLLY-OWNED AND OPERATED BY THE TEAM?	Yes
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STANDARD METRICS

(These metrics are related only to the project presented and represent work done since March 1, 2021)

Number of businesses started	0	Number of existing entrepreneurs helped	1
Number of people exposed to entrepreneurship	0	Number of jobs created	0