

# Becoming a Young Farmer in Manitoba

*A summary report*

---

**April 2020**

---

**Hannah Bihun**, Research Assistant & MA Student in the Department of Environment and Geography

**Dr. Annette Desmarais**, Associate Professor & Canada Research Chair in Human Rights, Social Justice and Food Sovereignty



**University  
of Manitoba**

---

## Executive Summary

There is a growing crisis of generational renewal on farms in numerous countries. The average age of farmers is rising, many do not have succession plans, and some studies suggest that young people are leaving the countryside in droves. This narrative rings true in many countries of the Global North where the agricultural landscape is characterized by increased farm size, debt economies, and concentration of capital. Since the mid-1980s, Canada, for example, has lost one-third of its farms, while the number of young farmers (15-34 years of age) has declined by 70% (Qualman et al., 2018). The global trend of disappearing farmers is undeniable and critically important to address, yet little is known about the young farmers who are bucking this trend by choosing to stay in farming and the new entrants (first generation farmers), who have no farming background but opt to become farmers. This research in Manitoba is part of an international research project on young people's pathways into agriculture in Canada, India, China, and Indonesia. 48 interviews with a diverse group of young farmers in rural Manitoba, offer a counter-narrative, that young people actually *do want to farm* and they are motivated by a variety of factors, including, a love for the work in farming and the lure of a quiet life in close proximity to nature. Our research highlights the different ways that first generation farmers and continuing young farmers get into farming, the factors and forces that helped them along the way, their challenges, and the strategies they adopt to remain on the land. An analysis of these young farmers' experiences with government policies, programs, and regulations, highlights the need for policy changes that take full account of the diversity of farms in rural Manitoba. Recognizing the differences in experiences and needs across the various types of young farmers is the first step to creating inclusive policy and programs that could assist young people to succeed as farmers and lead to a vibrant and diverse agricultural sector in the province.

***I think a farmer would be anyone who uses the land in a productive way. A productive and probably caring way...caring is caring whether it's a vegetable garden or a hundred acres or 10,000 acres...you still have that same respect and you still get that same feeling when something grows. – Young conventional grain farmer***

---

# Table of Contents

Overview of International Research Project.....	4
Researching Young Farmers in Manitoba.....	5
Young Farmer Pathways into Agriculture.....	9
What Motivates Young People to Farm?.....	16
Key Barriers Young Farmers Face in Entering or Continuing a Life in Agriculture.....	18
Developing Inclusive Policy for the Future of Farming in Manitoba.....	25
Sources.....	27

*This research was made possible through an Insight Grant provided by the Social Sciences and Humanities Council of Canada.*

## Overview of International Research Project

Our research in Manitoba is part of an international project funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Council of Canada (SSHRC) that seeks to better understand the looming generational shift in world agriculture. Table 1 explains the scope and goals of this international research. As the research proposal indicated,

It is widely claimed that young people are not interested in farming, . . . the farming population is ageing and large numbers of farmers appear to have no successor. Meanwhile, farm land prices are rising rapidly, making it an attractive target for corporate investment. At the same time, for young people interested in farming, access to farmland appears to be a major problem. If visions of sustainable agricultural futures are to be realized, and if young people are going to have a place in that future, the problems that young people face in establishing themselves as farmers have to be given more serious attention than has been the case in recent research and policy debate.

Scope	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Canada (Manitoba and Ontario)</li> <li>- China</li> <li>- Indonesia</li> <li>- India</li> </ul>
Investigators in Canada	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Dr. Sharada Srinivasan, University of Guelph (Principle Investigator)</li> <li>- Dr. Haroon Akram-Lodhi, Trent University (Co-Investigator)</li> <li>- Dr. Annette Aurélie Desmarais, University of Manitoba (Co-Investigator)</li> </ul>
Key Research Questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How are young people entering into farming?</li> <li>- What motivates young people to farm?</li> <li>- What challenges do young farmers face?</li> <li>- Do young farmers feel positive about the future?</li> </ul>

Table 1. A summary of the international research project investigating the entries, barriers and successes for young farmers in different parts of the world.

In Canada, research was conducted in Ontario and Manitoba. The Canadian findings will be compared with those from the three countries to better understand the similarities and differences in the experiences of becoming a young farmer in Canada and Asia.

This report focuses only on the research in Manitoba with the overall goal of assisting Manitoba Agriculture in determining how it can best support young farmers entering into farming and continuing to farm in the province. Given the aging population of farmers in the province, it is important to take steps to ensure that agriculture is seen as an attractive option for a diversity of innovative and motivated youth, and that there are accessible avenues for entry into the profession so that young people are able to make a livelihood by farming in Manitoba.

## Researching Young Farmers in Manitoba

In Manitoba, the narrative that young farmers are exiting farming appears to reign true. Both in Canada as a whole and in Manitoba alone, the number of young farmers under 35 years old has fallen 70% since 1991 (Figure 1) (Statistics Canada, 2016; Qualman et al., 2018).

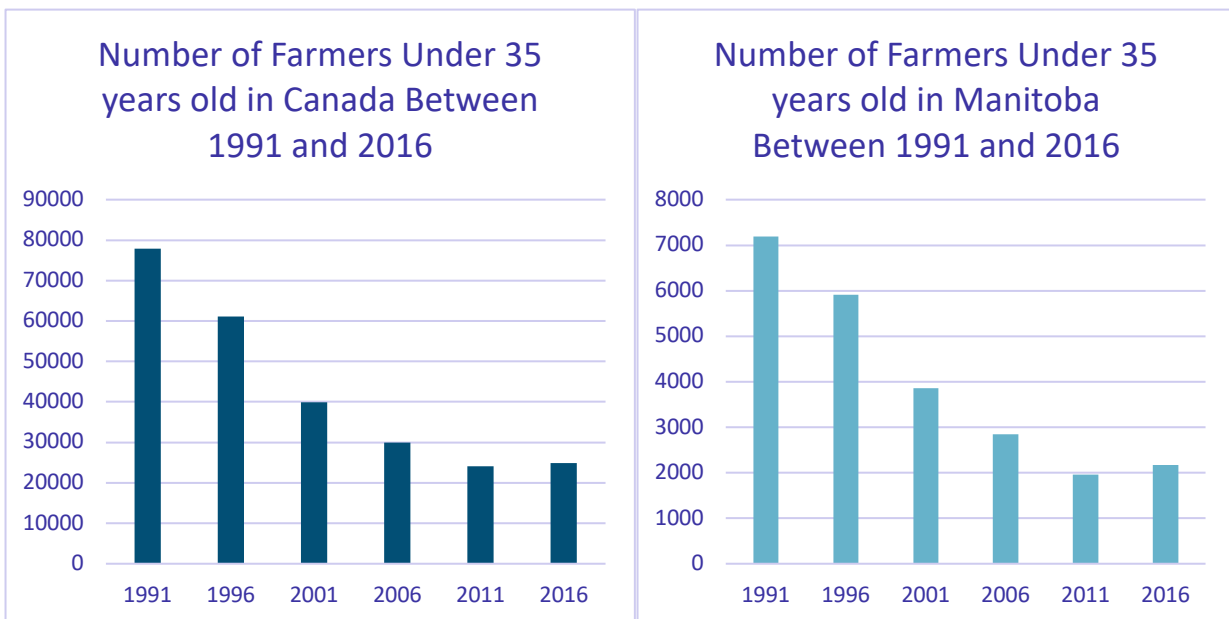


Figure 1. Steady decline in the number of farmers under 35 years old in Canada and Manitoba since 1991. Source: Statistics Canada (2016)

However, in Manitoba between 2011 and 2016, the number of farmers under 35 years old increased by 11% and the average age of farmers in the province is now the second

---

lowest across Canada (Statistics Canada, 2016). Despite this potentially promising upturn in the number of young people farming in Manitoba, the trend of staggering decline of young farmer numbers in Manitoba over the last three decades does raise concern over the future of agriculture and the viability of rural farming communities.

Although the global narrative that young people are generally uninterested in a life in agriculture persists, our research indicates that there is also a strong counter-narrative. Young people actually do want to farm and they are motivated by a variety of factors, including a love for the work in farming and the lure of a quiet life in close proximity to nature. Young farmers in Manitoba are driven, well-educated, and have a breadth of knowledge about farming and agriculture. They value the farming lifestyle and love what they do. To ensure a future in agriculture for young people and those who will follow, it is important to understand the pathways used by young people who enter farming, what support is needed, and what challenges they are facing that could be mitigated by inclusive and collaborative policy development.

Between April and July 2017, Dr. Annette Desmarais worked with Research Assistant Meghan Entz, who interviewed 48 young farmers<sup>1</sup> from across southern Manitoba (Figure 2). 46 out of the 48 young farmers also completed a survey answering basic questions about themselves, their families, and their farms. For the purposes of this research, we define “young farmer” as being between the ages of 18 and 40 years old<sup>2</sup>. The average age of the young farmers we interviewed is 32 years old. We spoke with 32 men and 16 women, nine of them were farming couples that we interviewed together. To better represent the farming landscape in Manitoba, and to draw distinctions between young farmers entering into different types of agriculture, we categorized farmers based on their methods of production (Figure 3). Although these categories do not capture all of the nuances and diversity that exist within each category, they do provide insight into the similarities and differences in the

---

<sup>1</sup> We also interviewed 9 older farmers and 3 others involved in the agriculture industry, however, this report will only focus on the responses and data from the young farmer interviews.

<sup>2</sup> Although other government bodies, including Statistics Canada, use the range 18 to 35 years old to describe young farmers, we chose to expand this to 40 years based on the parameters set by farmer organizations and the federal government in terms of who is eligible for “young farmer” services. One of the female farmers interviewed was 45 years old, however, she was interviewed with her husband who is 40 years old, she is a newcomer to farming through marriage to her husband (who is considered a young farmer) and provided insight about entering farming as a young woman. For these reasons we included her in our results for young farmers.

motivations, supports, and barriers to farming that young farmers face depending on what and how they produce.

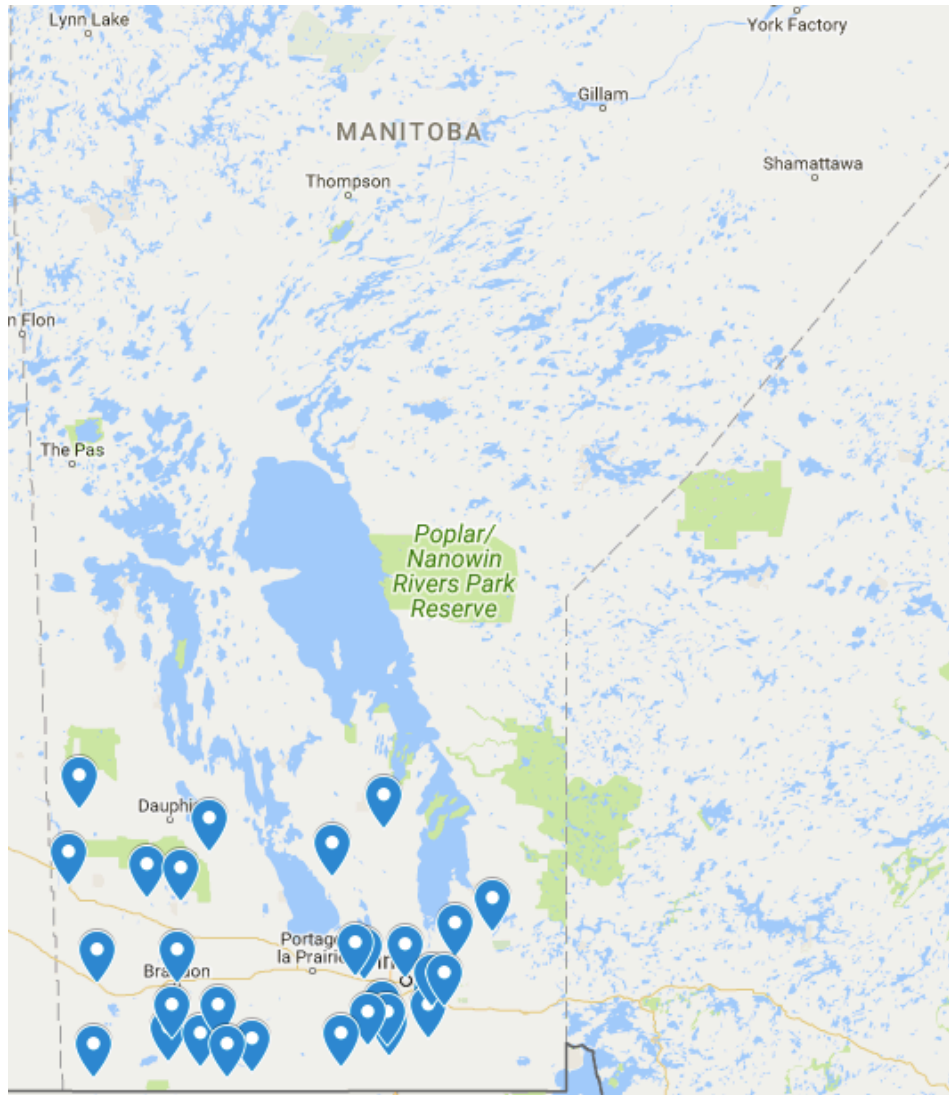


Figure 2. The pins on this map represent the locations in Manitoba where we interviewed young farmers. In some cases, we interviewed a number of farmers from the same location and sometimes only one. Source: Google Maps (2018).

The conventional category includes those farming grains, legumes, forage seed, hay, cattle, hogs, sheep, and any mixture of those using conventional methods of production, usually on a larger scale. Organic and transitioning to organic includes those producing any variety and combination of cereals, green manure, livestock, fruit, and vegetables and are certified organic or in the process of transitioning to certified organic. This category varies in size but most were primarily small to medium-scale farms, relative to the size of the conventional farms. The alternative styles of

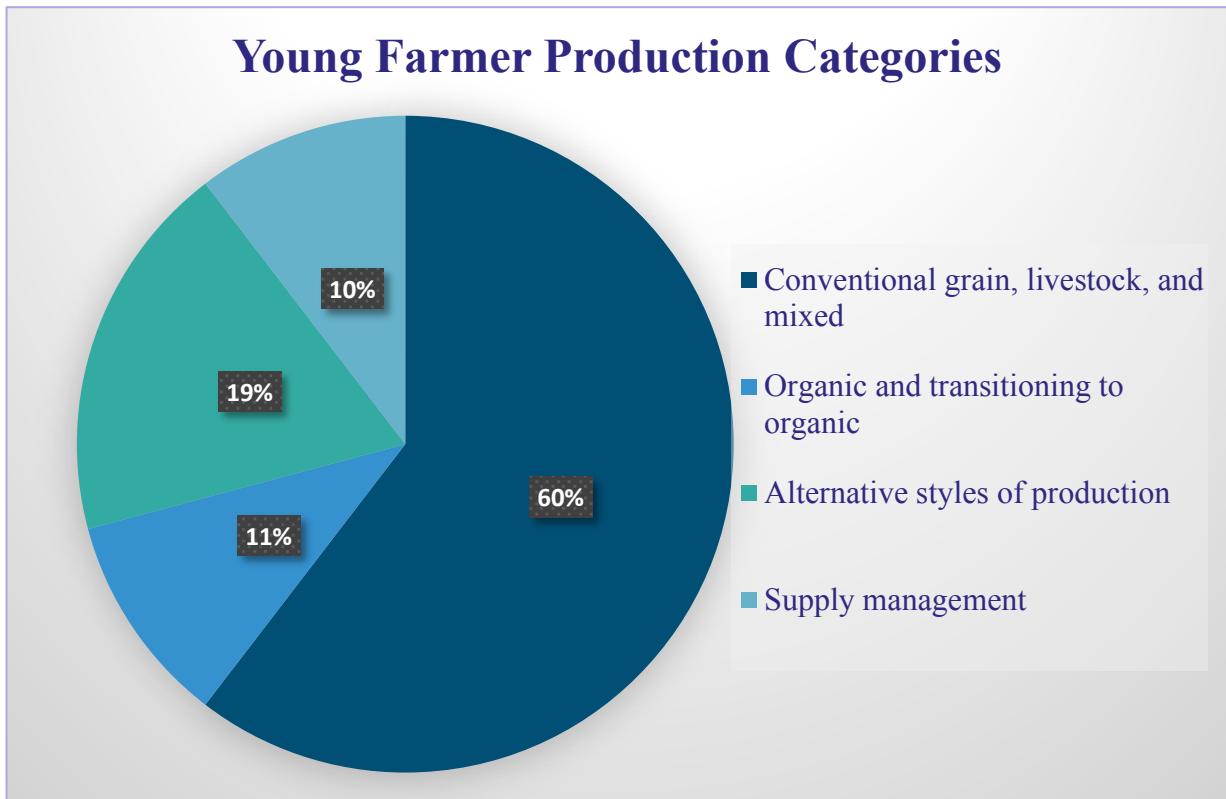


Figure 3. The distribution of young farmers in our Manitoba study based on their type of production.

production category includes vegetable market gardeners, people using organic principles though they may not be certified or are planning to certify, and small-scale livestock operations using permaculture principles in their farm and livestock management. The supply management sector includes dairy, egg and poultry producers whose operations are subject to quotas under supply management regulations.

We also made distinctions based on marketing strategies (Figure 4). For the purpose of this study we classified direct marketers as those selling 51% or more directly to consumers or that market directly to local restaurants and retailers who then sell to local consumers. Conversely, conventional marketers are those selling through more commercial channels and who do not engage in a significant amount of direct marketing to local consumers.



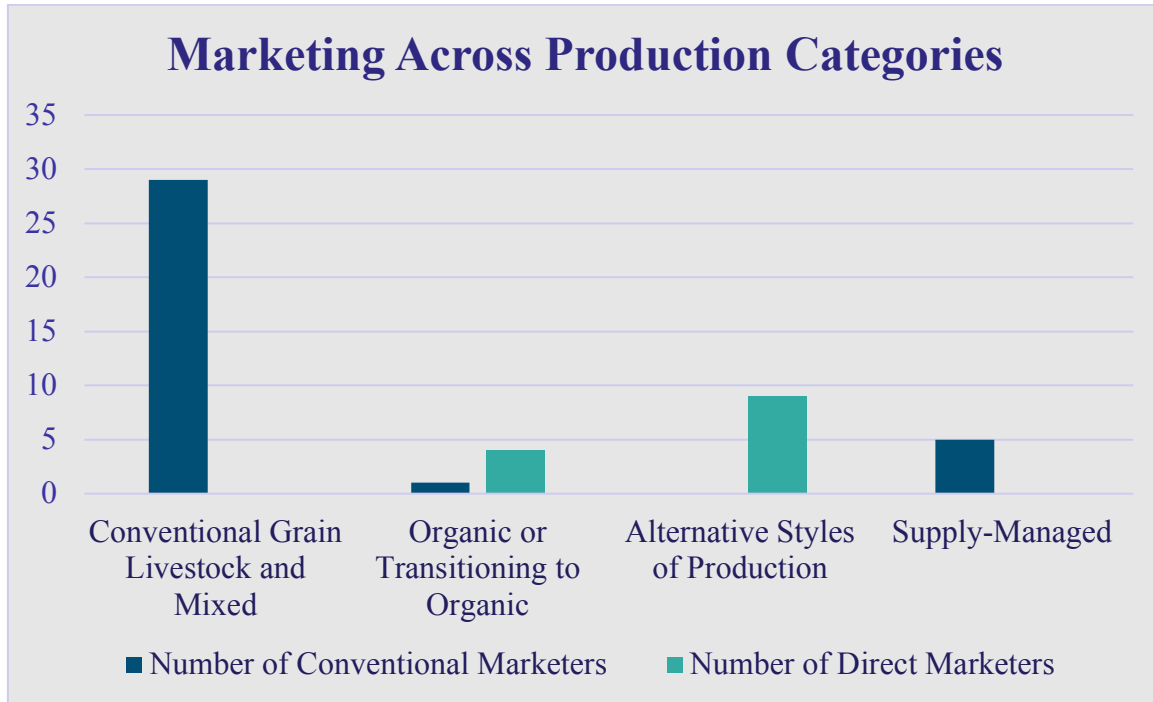


Figure 4. The number of conventional versus direct marketers across the different production categories of young farmers in this study.

## Young Farmer Pathways into Agriculture

Young farmers in Manitoba enter into farming in a variety of ways. Our research revealed, for example, a distinct difference in the ways that conventional and supply-managed farmers are entering into agriculture, compared to those classified as organic or alternative producers. We’ve outlined these distinctions below.

### Conventional Grain, Livestock and Mixed / Supply Managed Farms

#### Upbringing:

The young farmers involved in the supply management sector or those producing grain and/or livestock using conventional methods of production enter agriculture with a wealth of farming knowledge and experience

under their belts. 94% of the farmers in this category come from a farming family (Table 2). These farmers talked about growing up on the farm and participating in farm

# of Farmers in this category	34
From a Farming Family	32 (94%)
1 <sup>st</sup> Generation Farmers	2 (6%)
Average Age	30 years old
Gender Breakdown	Male = 24 (71%) Female = 10 (29%)

---

chores and work, sometimes voluntarily and sometimes as a requirement. Many spoke with appreciation about the discipline, skills, and passion that those early experiences instilled. One grain farmer described his experience as a young boy on the farm and the appreciation that he feels towards his father for teaching him the value of hard work,

*I remember taking care of the yard, I was 12 and we had a big whipper snipper. I remember coming back to the shop to take a break and trying to stay in the shop and my Dad said, 'No, get back out there'. It took another 12 years for me to be so happy that he made me do that. It just taught me perseverance and to keep pushing.*

A mixed grain and livestock farmer remembers his young days on the farm fondly as well, describing his passion for farming even then,

*There was nothing that I didn't enjoy with the farm. Wherever dad went, I was two-steps behind him, whether it was sleeping in the back of the tractor cab or walking around the animals or farm sales at the auction mart, all of it was good, all of the time.*

As children raised on farms, the farmers we interviewed spoke about family dynamics and the distribution of workload amongst siblings. For example, a dairy farmer spoke about the ways her siblings shared responsibilities on the farm, each of them having their preference of tasks, and the need for teamwork to ensure everything runs smoothly:

*My sister loved the grunt work, I loved the cows, she didn't mind doing the feeding and the grunt work, we each had gifts to disperse among [the farm]. My brother enjoyed the machinery part, so if we got a tractor stuck he'd haul out a chain. We worked together, you have to work together.*

The only two first-generation conventional farmers in this study were women who married men who came from a farming family; in both cases the parents-in-law are still farming with the couple. These two women noted that they rely heavily on the

---

knowledge of their spouse and his parents to learn about farming and the overall operation of the farm.<sup>3</sup> Although she has now been on the farm with her spouse for ten years, this first-generation mixed grain and livestock farmer explains that she looks to her husband to make the decisions on the farm due to his lifelong experience as a farmer,

*In all honesty, I rely on [him] very much. Because he just has been doing it so long that when it comes down to a big decision, I think it just goes through [him]... Not that I think [he] wouldn't be willing to let me make some decisions, but I just feel that he's the more qualified decision maker.*

#### *Education:*

In addition to having grown up on the farm and having years of practical experience, 79% of the conventional farmers attended some form of post-secondary education. Of those who attended college or university, 70% entered into an agriculture-related degree or diploma program<sup>4</sup>. Most of the farmers who had an agriculture diploma noted its value especially in the business side of farming, in expanding their understanding of the agricultural system as a whole, and in creating networks of peers. One grain farmer explained that the agriculture diploma provided him with more insight than he might have found staying on the farm,

*I would recommend [the University of Manitoba Agriculture diploma program] to anybody wanting to farm. How should I put it? My Dad has lots of experience and lots of knowledge and you learn an awful lot about that, but [the diploma program] really opened my eyes to a whole new world of what agriculture means.*

---

<sup>3</sup> One of these women was interviewed with her husband and explained that he was the true farmer while she did not identify as a farmer. However, because she participated in work on the farm, provided many insights about being a young farmer in Manitoba and did not work off-farm, we included her in this research.

<sup>4</sup> Three of the 19 young farmers who indicated they attended university or college for agriculture did not finish the program but attended for at least one year.

---

Echoing this sentiment, an egg producer explained that pursuing an agriculture diploma gave him the knowledge he needs to manage the farm and the finances,

*I didn't necessarily learn how to farm better, but I learned how to be a farm manager... and really how to look at the books and to analyze that part.*

The conventional farmers we interviewed are also expanding their knowledge about farming through social media, conferences, workshops, family members, friends, and neighbors. One conventional livestock producer, who grew up on a family farm but whose family sold the farm when he was a teenager, explains that he and his partner often depend on their neighbors for the wisdom that others may find in their parents or grandparents,

*Yeah, I find that a lot of the time you're not the first person to ever have that problem. If it's a production problem then you can just talk to a neighbouring farmer, that's who you lean on. If you're farming with your Dad, you ask your Dad the question, but we don't have that, so we ask fellow producers.*

#### *Entering Agriculture:*

While there are a few conventional farmers who began farming full-time right after high school, the majority of them attended post-secondary education, went travelling, or gained some work experience off the farm before finding their way back to the farm. Some worked jobs un-related to farming, not sure if they would ever take over the family farm, while others found jobs working for agri-business companies such as Paterson Grain or Cargill, for example. The majority of young farmers in this category came back to conventional grain, livestock, mixed farms, or supply-managed farms when some of their family members were still farming and had created opportunities for them to join the operation. Over 74% of conventional farmers interviewed have at least one parent still involved in the farm.

#### *Succession:*

Succession plans vary greatly between farm families. Many of the young farmers in this study are currently in various stages of their succession plans, while others are

still in the process of discussing what succession will look like for their family. 76% of the participants in this category communicated that they are likely to inherit land from their families and most of them are poised to take over the family farm in some capacity.

### Organic and Transitioning to Organic / Alternative Styles of Production

*Upbringing:*

There is a stark contrast between the conventional or supply managed young farmers and those practicing organic or alternative methods of production, in terms of their diverse entries into farming. More than half of the farmers in these categories are first-generation farmers (Table 3).

Table 3. Demographics	
<i># of Farmers in this Category</i>	14
<i>From a Farming Family</i>	6 (43%)
<i>1<sup>st</sup> Generation Farmers</i>	8 (57%)
<i>Average Age</i>	32 years old
<i>Gender Breakdown</i>	Male = 8 (57%) Female = 6 (43%)

The farmers who came from a family farm described similar experiences and appreciation as their conventional counter-parts about their well-rounded upbringing on the farm. One market gardener who grew up on a grain and vegetable farm in Alberta described his experience working hard as a young child and only coming to understand the value of that work once he left the farm,

*Some parts were fun, but you don't realize how good it was until you leave it, right? So, I started when I was 6, I knew how to drive a tractor by the time I was 10 and I worked every evening and every summer. It was a lot of work and then you saw the kids who did not have to do that.*

A certified organic mixed grain and livestock farmer describes his lifelong connection to the land he is farming today, explaining the diverse experience he gained as a young boy and how that has benefitted him throughout his life,

*Like most farm kids I rode the combine, loved harvest season, participated in a lot of the activities to a certain extent. It was probably when I was around 12 I*

---

*started to, with my Dad, grow small experimental plots of some native grasses...I also raised chickens and sold them as a teenager. A lot of our land is in alfalfa grass that is hayed, and sold as cattle feed, that put me through university. So, I've continued to have a connection to the farm economically and physically here, over my lifetime.*

Seven out of the eight first-generation farmers in this category grew up in an urban setting, living fairly typical city lifestyles and not having much, if any, interaction with farming as children. For most of them, farming as a profession was not on their radar until later in their young adult lives. As one mixed pasture-raised livestock farmer explains,

*I grew up in the city center... not with any kind of farming background or any designs on becoming a farmer, except some very girlish hopes of one day having a ranch with dogs and horses. But I wasn't making any moves towards that.*

#### *Education:*

All fourteen of the young farmers in this category attended post-secondary education. However, only two (one first-generation farmer and one from a family farm) attended a degree or diploma program related to agriculture. Interestingly, of all 26 young farmers in our sample who attended an agriculture-related post-secondary program, only one is a first-generation farmer. Young farmers entering agriculture and using organic or alternative methods are gaining the knowledge they need from different sources, including on-farm work, social media, workshops and conferences.

Furthermore, many of the first-generation farmers indicated that they rely on a spouse, spouse's family, neighbours, or friends to teach them the practical knowledge that they did not learn as kids. 63% of the first-generation farmers in this category did some sort of practical training, such as interning on a farm or the farm mentorship program. Most newcomers to farming also explained that they are learning as they go by trial and error, reading, and consulting experienced farmers who are willing to give them the time of day,

---

*Whatever books I can find on the subject of market gardening, permaculture, agriculture. There's a lot of resources out there in print, which is great... Lots of it is trial by fire because the thing is, books are great, but farming is so site specific that it doesn't always apply.*

#### *Entering Agriculture:*

Although 43% of the non-conventional farmers come from a family farm, they are farming much differently than many of their peers and generations before them did, adopting organic and holistic principles and often farming on a much smaller-scale. One fourth-generation farmer, who now farms with his wife who is a first-generation farmer, describes the progression of their family farm over the years,

*Every generation has done something different, trying to figure out how to keep farming, so the initial [farm] would have been mixed farming and then my grandfather would have been mixed farming but mostly grain, my Dad was mixed but mostly berries, and now I'm a market gardener.*

In all but one case, the parents are no longer involved in the farming operation, the one exception is a large-scale conventional grain farm that converted over 4000 acres to organic last year.

Based on the data from the participants in this study, farmers engaged in alternative styles of production are more likely to be first-generation farmers. And, if they come from a farm family, they are less likely than those farming conventionally to be farming with their parents. Overall, they spoke more about the creative ways that they gain knowledge and experience. In some cases, they develop relationships with people outside of their families for advice, to access labour, and even to access land. This is likely due to the fact that compared to conventional and supply managed young farmers in Manitoba, first generation farmers have less family support and knowledge to draw on when it comes to agriculture.

#### *Succession:*

As mentioned above, most of the farmers in these category are either first-generation farmers or are from family farms that are no longer in operation. However,

---

there are some cases where farmland is still in the hands of the family and they stand to inherit that land, but succession plans are not necessarily needed for most farmers in these categories.

Young farmers entering into alternative and organic production models are, in many cases, doing so independently from their parents, though that is not to say that they are not getting help in other ways. While those from farming backgrounds are often sharing, renting, or purchasing farmland from their parents, first-generation farmers rarely have these same opportunities. However, one first-generation farming couple entered into a very unique situation with an older farmer in their area. They have been renting land from him and are in the process of developing a succession plan that works for everyone involved,

*The land that we've purchased is being sold to us by somebody who does not have a successor, I guess we're the successors. So, they are selling it to us at a fair rate and I think part of their reasoning is that they see that we can fill that position, because we've been at it for a while and our business is pretty stable, so the opportunity to rent land was a little easier.*

## **What Motivates Young People to Farm?**

Participants identified a number of motivating factors in their decision to farm (Table 4). The most commonly mentioned motivation was family; more specifically young farmers mentioned that they valued being able to work near their parents, children, or other family members. Some also indicated that they were happy to be able to raise their children on the farm and instill in them the value of hard work. The second most common motivator is the quiet life that farming affords and living in close proximity to nature. The young farmers interviewed talked about how much they value the privacy of rural living, working with animals and connecting with nature. The third most common motivating factor was the diverse set of skills and task associated with farming and a sense of pride in their work. Farmers who mentioned this spoke about the satisfaction of watching things grow and feeding people. They appreciate that they are able to do something different each day and are tasked with learning a variety of skills.

The other motivations that we identified (as outlined in Table 4) include a feeling



of altruism or social responsibility. We coded for this motivation whenever farmers talked about their perceived responsibility to the land, the next generation, and farming in a sustainable way. Many young farmers mentioned that their parents enabled or required them to farm, and this was a motivating factor in that their parents instilled a love for farming at a young age, gave them financial support as they entered into agriculture, or in some cases developed succession plans to provide opportunities to continue farming. Young farmers in Manitoba are motivated by the autonomy that farming allows, in being their own boss and setting their own schedules. Finally, the research indicates that young farmers are motivated to farm because it is viable and/or profitable for them. It is important to note that most of the time farmers were talking more about the viability than the profitability of farming. That is, often they weren't speaking directly about making money but more that they see farming as a sustainable livelihood.

**Table 4. Young Farmers' Motivations**

Motivation	Young Farmer Quotes
Family	<i>"Part of it is raising our kids on the farm, that's probably one of the reasons why do what we do."</i>
Quiet life in nature	<i>"Out in the country it's just quiet...99% of the time if the truck drives by on the road I know who it is."</i>
Pride and the variety in their work	<i>"I enjoy the fact that every day is different, the challenges are different... it's a multi-faceted job, you go from one thing to the next - you're a veterinarian, engineer, welder, accountant, business person, marketing. And then growing food for people."</i>
Social responsibility	<i>"I feel as though a lot of my peers and younger generations are going to look up to what I do. So, I feel that I have a great responsibility in doing it the right way. "</i>
Parents and family support	<i>"My brother and I wouldn't be farming if it wasn't for my Dad, no question about that."</i>

Rural culture	<i>“But I think in some ways it’s harder than we thought but easier in other ways. I think the relationship part is easier, like you find there’s a lot more support in a rural community.”</i>
Viability and/or profitability	<i>“Each year I sell more CSA shares and sell them faster and I don’t even advertise anymore they just keep coming so I think there’s a lot of interest I’ve got a customer base now.”</i>
Autonomy	<i>“I own my time...and [have] flexible hours. I like to get up at 3:30 am and work, and have a 3 hour nap in the middle of the afternoon, and go to bed at 10pm at night. You can’t do that at a normal job.”</i>

## Key Barriers Young Farmers Face

Young farmers in Manitoba face a myriad of barriers in entering and continuing to farm. Table 5 summarizes 12 of the main issues that emerged from the interviews with 48 young farmers. This report focuses on the top three most commonly mentioned barriers as they were each mentioned at least once by 75% or more of the young farmers in this study. We highlight these primarily because they appear to be the most pressing issues for young farmers in the province today.

**Table 5. Key Barriers Identified by Young Farmers in Manitoba**

Barrier	# of farmers out of 48 who mentioned this barrier at least once
1. Access to land	<b>41 (85%)</b>
2. Access to credit/finances/financial management	<b>37 (77%)</b>
3. Policy and government regulations or programs	<b>36 (75%)</b>
4. Risk/weather	<b>24 (50%)</b>
5. Social and/or physical isolation	<b>24 (50%)</b>
6. Succession planning	<b>23 (48%)</b>
7. Public perceptions of agriculture	<b>22 (46%)</b>
8. Finding labour/good labour	<b>19 (40%)</b>
9. Balancing work and home life	<b>19 (40%)</b>
10. Profitability or viability of farming	<b>17 (35%)</b>
11. Finding or balancing off-farm work	<b>13 (27%)</b>
12. Effective marketing	<b>9 (19%)</b>

---

## Land

Access to land was the barrier mentioned most frequently in our interviews, with 41 of 48 young farmers mentioning this as a barrier at least once (Table 5). The issue of accessing land was common across all farm sizes and production categories. Young farmers are accessing land in diverse ways and many farmers simultaneously own, rent, and/or share the land that they farm. The barriers to accessing land include the rising price of farmland, increased competition for land, large corporate farms exercising their buying power to secure land, private farmland sales, less availability of farmland, insecurity associated with renting land, and the inability to access credit and build equity to buy land. A conventional grain farmer summarizes some of these main issues explaining that the price of land means he must try to rent the land, but even that has its challenges,

*It's getting more and more unobtainable, even to rent. It's very competitive, very cut throat. I've even been told from someone, who will remain anonymous, that I'm 'stepping on people's toes' because I went and bid on a piece of land. But, you know, if land is at \$6,500 an acre, I don't see how a young farmer can afford to buy land so what do you think we're going to do? We have to try to rent it.*

Another conventional grain and livestock farmer agrees that the price of land is making it increasingly difficult to access, especially for newcomers to farming, suggesting that the high price of farmland is linked to the lack of new farmers in her area,

*"There are no newcomers that are coming to agriculture... I consider myself extremely lucky to be able to farm with my Dad because if there is somebody my age who does not come from a farming family, with the price of land and equipment, you don't really have a chance, unless you're really wealthy, to buy farmland and start a farm. I don't know if there'd be an opportunity for new young people to come [here] and farm."*

The most common aspect of land as a barrier was in relation to accessing credit and capital to purchase land when the prices are so high. 69% of the time when a young farmer was speaking about the difficulty of accessing land, they were talking about land

---

as it relates to finance. Thus, our research indicates that these two top barriers are increasingly linked as farmland prices rise.

### **Credit, Finances, and Financial Management**

Accessing credit and managing finances was the second most common barrier mentioned by participants. Again, this was a common barrier mentioned across all farming styles, sizes, and entries into farming. Young farmers indicated that they are struggling with increasing debt loads, efforts to build capital and equity, accessing financing, difficulties in understanding financial management, and issues related to cash flow. 60% of the young farmers in this study rely on off-farm work to supplement their household income.

Although many young people are driven to become farmers, the financial demands to enter the sector are limiting their ability to succeed. A supply-managed dairy farmer, for example, explains that there would be more young dairy farmers if it were easier to build the equity,

*Equity to buy quota. The knowledge you can get, there're lots of people around that can help you gain the knowledge you need to be a dairy farmer, and there's a lot of great herdsmen out there that would be great farmers. But they just don't have the equity to actually do it.*

He goes on to say that the Manitoba New Entrant program is a big help but that you still need a lot of money to get started. A young conventional grain farmer discussed the struggles she faces in building equity and getting established as a farmer, and she recognized that this would be even more difficult for someone who does not come from a family farm and does not have those supports and connections to help get going. She said,

*When I first started, I kept wanting to buy land and I just didn't have enough equity. You rent land and you can't borrow enough money to put enough inputs in the ground to grow your crop. It was a constant battle to come up with the revenues to be able to plant the crop and get established, and then build equity so that you could buy land. I would say in my experience that's the biggest barrier*

---

*of getting in; it is just getting established without [already] having someone in the industry.*

### **Policy and Government Regulations or Programs**

The third most common barrier identified by young farmers in Manitoba is government regulations or programs. Three main issues were identified. First, many young farmers feel that there are no political parties that really understand the needs of young farmers. Some farmers felt that politicians will say what they need to say to get elected, but when it comes down to actually implementing any real policies to help farmers, they all fall short. As one young farmer put it,

*Some of them use [farmer interests] for their benefit, to get the vote. But, in terms of actual action, I haven't really seen in recent history any party that's really jumped, that's really tried to understand the issues enough to really do something...I don't believe...just because you have less taxes on farmers, that all of a sudden everyone's just going to be hunky dory.*

The majority of those interviewed expressed the view that young farmers in Manitoba are not feeling heard or understood by their political representatives and policy makers.

The second concern raised by 38% of conventional young farmers in this study<sup>5</sup> were diverse issues related to the carbon tax. It is important to note though, that this research was conducted before Manitoba Premier Brian Pallister announced that farmers would be exempt from this tax. While there were varied opinions around the carbon tax, the most common concern was not the tax itself. Instead, most were concerned that while fertilizer and other input companies can offset the cost of the tax by raising their prices, farmers can only sell their product based on the market price. As one farmer put it,

*How would the carbon tax be damaging to young farmers? Simple, we can't pass that tax on to anybody, but anybody we buy inputs from can pass that tax on to*

---

<sup>5</sup> None of the alternative or organic producers mentioned the carbon tax as a concern.

---

*us. The railroads will simply pass the tax on to the elevator who will pass the tax on to us. We'll be paying it so many times over.*

Finally, supply management system and other regulations were commonly cited barriers mentioned by young farmers. Specifically, farmers spoke about the need to recognize the different scales of farms in creating specific supply management policies. For example, a newcomer to farming who direct markets eggs and poultry, as well as other livestock, told us that she and her partner,

*Support supply management as a national protection...but it's not set up appropriately for new entrants who are also having tenure issues and financing issues to get in.*

It is not only dairy, poultry, and egg producers who are feeling affected by these issues. A vegetable grower who sells his produce using a CSA model explains how caps on the number of acres he can grow some vegetables doesn't allow him to grow at a reasonable rate. This means that he either stays very small or has to increase substantially in size to compete,

*[The] current cap on potato acres and carrot acres is detrimental. We're only allowed to do 5 acres of potatoes and after that we have to get a quota from peak of the market. Once you do peak of the market then you can only sell through peak of the market. And then that changes your whole pricing. So, as soon as you get passed 5 acres and you get to 6, your selling price drops and then you have to compete with the bigger guys, so you either go from 5 acres and you'd have to do at least 60 or 70. As soon as you start doing that you have to start thinking chemicals and it just changes everything. So, It's quite frustrating. That policy just protects the larger farms and that drives me nuts.*

On a more positive note, many of the young farmers identified that they have accessed government lending programs for young farmers which have been a huge help to them, including MASC, FCC or funding from Growing Forward 2. Feedback about these programs was mostly positive with farmers mentioning that this funding has

---

helped them diversify their farming practices, buy new equipment, and expand their knowledge base through education. One organic first-generation farmer said that the Growing Forward 2 program helped her in the following ways:

*We've been able to access the grant funding through Growing Forward and that's been really, really helpful for us. We've been able to fund a lot of our machinery through that, they have the 50/50 capital purchase funding opportunity so it's a long process and certainly a huge application process, and a long time waiting to find out if we're able to find funding but in the end, we were successful in that. And we also got funding for getting a manufacturing food safety program as well, so that's been helpful.*

## **Gender dimensions of Manitoba agriculture**

*Farming is still a man's world, even though it shouldn't be.*

- Conventional grain male farmer

An important aspect of rural and farm communities that we also addressed in this research are the gender dimensions of farming and the challenges for young women farmers. Young farmers were asked if they thought that women face different challenges than men as farmers. 66% of young farmers producing for conventional markets said that women do face different challenges than men while only 38% of direct marketers felt women had different challenges.

Many conventional male farmers had opinions about the gender dimensions of conventional farming. A conventional grain farmer said that women have a harder time being taken seriously as a farmer in some situations,

*I think for a young woman farmer there are very unique challenges... As much as I hate to admit it, especially around here, yes a woman that is indeed running her own farm is extremely rare. So, the implement dealer shows up, "is your husband here?", "Well, no I'm the one that farms though! Did you want something?" I think they have to put up with a lot of that every single day. And I think there's still a lot of farmers and or people in the industry who think traditionally.*

---

Another conventional grain farmer said that he and his sister, although both qualified farmers, get different responses when they attempt to rent land from older farmers, assuming that gender is the reason for this inequality,

*I would say from the business side they would face very similar challenges, but from the social side there would be... less acceptance that they can do it. And it sounds really stupid but when I go and knock on a land lords door to rent land, I have no problem talking to them and they are comfortable with me. But when my sister goes and knocks on a different one, it seems very awkward and they're not sure how to address her. Because they're an older generation, they've maybe not learned that women can do what men can do.*

An alternative livestock farm woman explains that she too recognizes the imbalance in social capital between men and women in the agriculture community,

*[My husband] probably could have started this on his own, I don't think I would have been able to access the social capital in the same way had I been a single woman.*

A conventional grain farming woman explains that women are often expected to do more work than their male counterparts but in the same amount of time,

*Women are expected to do more things in the same amount of time, like all women are. Whether it be cleaning the house, or walking the dog, or cleaning, cooking is kind of a shareable thing, but the cleaning is the one that really gets us...So I think that there're lots of times that my list never ends, and [my partner's] list does.*

Many conventional farming men pointed to hard working women in their industry as the ones who will change this perception as they fight to prove themselves as farmers.

Overall, gender inequality seemed to be a bigger challenge for women farming conventionally. After her husband indicated that he didn't think the challenges would differ for men and women farmers, a conventional mixed dairy and grain farmer



---

explains that indeed there are some unique challenges for women as they fight for their place in the agriculture industry,

*Well, I think men get treated more seriously than women do. Like the other day, “where’s the boss of the house,” Now I just play along, whatever, “[He’s] on the pile, go find him, good luck”. Mostly input dealers, but we work with a female banker and I think that’s awesome... She’s in a male dominated job as well and farmers like to deal with male bankers, right? So, she’s got to fight.*

An instructor involved with a university farm, who is also a farmer and has worked with many young female farmers, argues that women have a lot more power and opportunity in the local, organic food movement in the province,

*There is a dynamic that women face that young men don’t face entering farming, but I also think that that’s changing in the local food movement and in the organic scale.*

This is corroborated by our data since only 29% of young farmers in the study who are producing for conventional markets are women, while 46% of the young direct marketers that we spoke with are women.

## **Developing Inclusive Policy for the Future of Farming in Manitoba**

Manitoba young farmers come from diverse upbringings and enter into agriculture via distinct pathways. These pathways influence the type and scale of agriculture that will be available to young farmers. A young person entering without any previous connection to a farm has to acquire land, machinery, social capital, and knowledge, while someone coming from a farm family may access these resources more readily. The financial requirements to enter into conventional or supply-managed farming mean that this type of farming is essentially off limits to new entrants. While there are a number of young people in Manitoba who have grown up on a conventional farm and are poised to take over from their parents, as farms continue to increase in size and decrease in number, there are fewer and fewer farmers.

---

Although this process may create efficiencies by increasing economies of scale, it does raise all kinds of questions about the future of the sustainability of agriculture in the province. The get bigger approach, of course, benefits an increasingly smaller number of farmers, renders land less available to young farmers as large farms exercise their buying power, and financing is harder to obtain for young people attempting to establish themselves on the farm and/or those who want to continue farming.

The experiences of the young farmers interviewed for this research certainly represent a strong counter-narrative to the drive to vacate the countryside. These are highly motivated, educated, innovative, hardworking young people who have an intense desire to farm. They do, however face significant barriers. It is important to stress that the solutions to these barriers, including, among others, land access, finances, government support, will differ significantly for a large-scale farmer producing commodities for export or for national markets than they will for a small-scale farmer producing food for local markets. Effective policy and regulations must therefore focus on meaningful solutions that break the mold of the one-size-fits-all approach to agriculture and food policy, programs and regulations in Manitoba and begin to embrace and prioritize diversity in the agricultural sector. To ensure a rich and sustainable future for farmers, farmland, and the agricultural economy, especially in the context of the increasing risks associated with climate change, it is crucial to find new ways to support *all* of the young farmers entering agriculture and/or continuing to farm so that they can succeed and contribute to the vitality and viability of rural communities in Manitoba..

---

## Sources

Qualman, D., Akram-Lodhi, H., Desmarais, A.A., and Srinivasan, S. (2018). Forever Young? The crisis of generational renewal on Canada's farms. *Canadian Food Studies*, 5(3), pp. 100-127.

Statistics Canada. (2016). *Canola area surpassed spring wheat area in Manitoba*. Farm and Farm Operator Data: Highlights and analyses. Retrieved on March 18, 2019 from <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/95-640-x/2011001/p1/prov/prov-46-eng.htm>.

