2024 Agriculture New Entrants Needs Assessment Comment Report

PREPARED FOR MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE & FOOD

BY BC STATS – AUGUST 2024

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PUBLISH DATE

August 2024

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Results at a Glance

From January 3 to February 15, 2024, new entrants to agriculture across British Columbia were invited to participate in the 2024 Agriculture New Entrants Needs Assessment survey. This survey provided new entrants the opportunity to share feedback online about their experiences starting a farm in B.C. A total of 266 new entrants completed the survey.

An interview with an unrealized entrant to agriculture was also conducted. This individual had considered entering the farming industry, but ultimately did not. Their feedback will be included where applicable.

This report moves beyond the statistical survey data provided in other reports and explores new entrant responses to one of the survey's open-ended questions. Respondents were asked to identify the most significant barrier they faced when entering farming and, as a follow-up question, respondents were then asked:

What supports could have helped you overcome this barrier?

In total, 210 respondents answered this question. Their comments were reviewed and categorized into main themes, presented in the table below.[1]

TABLE 1: SUPPORT THEMES

THEME	% OF COMMENTERS
Financial Supports	48%
Additional Resources	31%
Regulatory Changes	27%
Education & Training	9%

[1] Individual comments that touched on several topics were coded to more than one theme. Therefore, percentages across themes will not add to 100%.

About This Report

While the New Entrants Needs Assessment survey was able to provide an idea of which supports those new to agriculture have used and deem important, this open-ended question provides a valuable opportunity to hear from new entrants, in their own words, which supports could have helped the most.

To analyze respondent feedback, each comment was read and classified into one or more themes – a theme being a commonly expressed support new entrants said would have helped them overcome their most significant barrier of entry.

A summary of the relevant themes is presented in this report in a few different layouts and varying levels of detail:

- **Theme Rankings –** A focused view of the support themes most referenced by commenters in relation to their most significant barrier to entry.
- **Theme Summaries –** A summary of each of the themes, including subthemes.

Additionally, the following appendix may be a useful reference when interpreting your organization's results:

- **Appendix A: Theme Counts & Descriptions –** A detailed table showing all themes, percentages of comments within each theme and percentages of total comments.

Theme Rankings

To help identify where particular support themes are of the greatest importance to new entrants, the table below identifies the most common themes brought forward in reference to the most significant barrier experience when entering the agriculture industry. Themes are ranked by the number of comments, with higher rankings coloured more deeply. Only the top three themes, or "hot spots", are displayed for each barrier identified.

In cases where two themes received the same number of comments within a single barrier, both themes are ranked identically. For a theme to be designated as a hot spot for a barrier, a minimum of three comments related to that theme must have been submitted. Therefore, groups with relatively few comments may display less than three hot spots or none at all. This is to avoid over-emphasizing the significance of a small body of comments. Only barriers with at least three comments are included in the table.

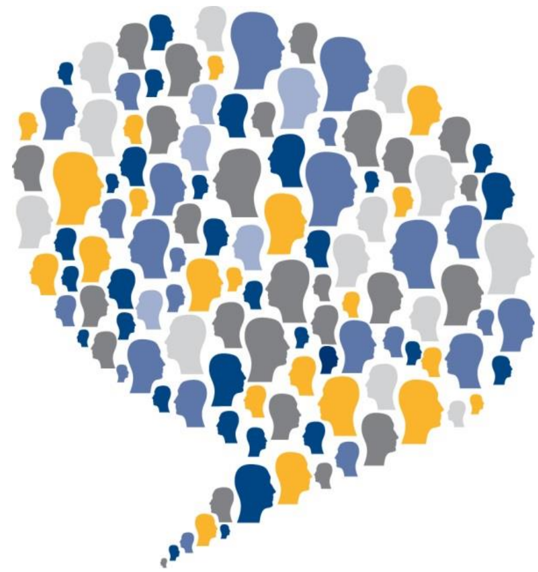
TABLE 4: BARRIER THEMATIC HOT SPOTS ON WHAT SUPPORTS COULD HAVE HELPED

Most Significant Barrier	Financial Supports	Additional Resources	Regulatory Changes	Education & Training
Affordability of landownership	1	2	3	
Lack of access to capital/credit/other sources of financing	1	2		
Lack of grants for small farm businesses	1			
Land use and zoning regulations		2	1	
Lack of access to abattoir or processing facilities		1		
Government processes/regulations		2	1	
Lack of affordability - general (e.g., land, feed, supplies, Carbon Tax)	1	3	2	
Lack of appropriate farmland in your region (size, quality, location, infrastructure, etc.)				
Lack of reliable, skilled labour		1	2	
Environmental issues (e.g., excess rainwater, weather, predators, Climate Change)		1		
Lack of access to farmers market(s), wholesale markets, or distribution			1	
Lack of access to farm business-related training (marketing, accounting, etc.)				1
Lack of experience/knowledge		1		1
Lack of mentors		1		
Lack of on-farm housing			1	

Most Significant Barrier	Financial Supports	Additional Resources	Regulatory Changes	Education & Training
Difficulty in entering supply-managed markets (i.e., access to quota)				
Lack of access to farm production-related training				
Large initial investment	1			
Distance to market				
Lack of on-farm storage facilities				
Other		1	2	
All	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**

Theme Summaries

While the previous section shows how often a topic was commented on, the next section breaks down each theme and details the subthemes.



In the following section, themes are presented in order of prominence across all comments, from the most to least common. Each theme is described in general terms with a summary of the comments, followed by a breakdown of the most common barriers this support when help.

As the most common theme, the financial support section includes an additional chart with the subthemes presented for the top barriers to entry.

Financial Supports (48%)

Nearly half of new entrants indicated that financial supports could have helped overcome their most significant barrier to entering agriculture. Respondents would like to see an expansion in government agricultural grants, with increases to access, size, and diversity in grants available (26%). New entrants also expressed interest in seeing more low-interest or interest-free loan options (9%), as well as lower taxes and/or tax credits (5%). Around 2 in 10 (18%) said financing or financial support in general would have been helpful.

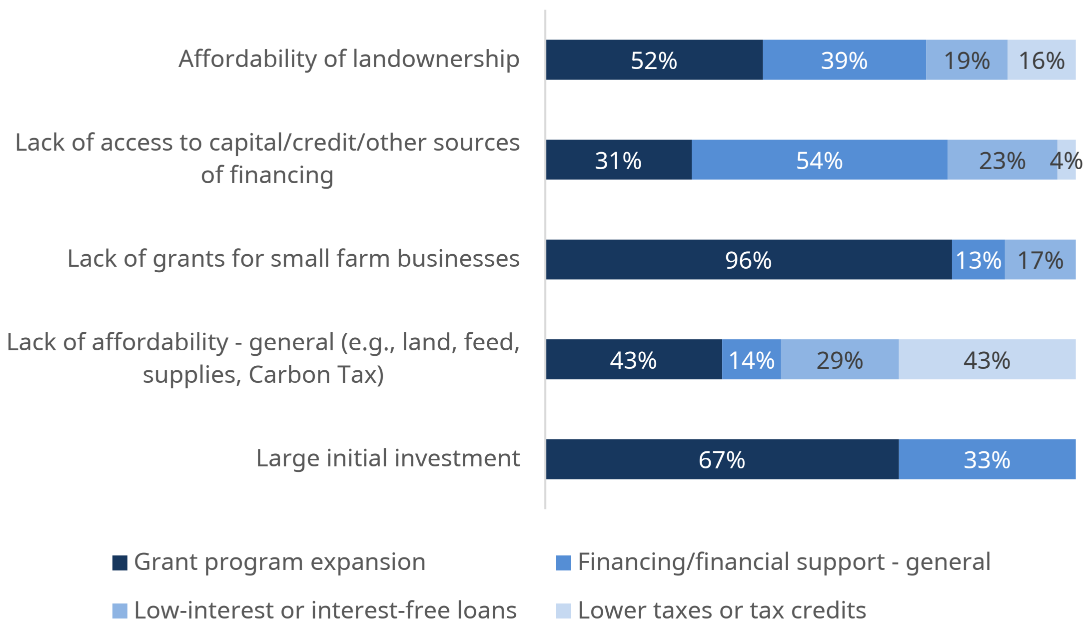
TABLE 2: MOST COMMON BARRIER THIS SUPPORT WOULD HELP OVERCOME

MOST SIGNIFICANT BARRIER TO ENTRY (TOP 5)	% OF COMMENTERS
Affordability of landownership	30%
Lack of access to capital/credit/other sources of financing	25%
Lack of grants for small farm businesses	24%
Lack of affordability - general (e.g., land, feed, supplies, Carbon Tax)	7%
Large initial investment	3%

Of those who could have used financial supports, 3 in 10 (30%) said *affordability of landownership* was their most significant barrier of entry. About a quarter of commentors said their most significant barrier was *lack of access to capital, credit, or other sources of financing* (25%) and *lack of grants for small farm businesses* (24%).

As seen in Figure 1, expanding grant accessibility, amounts, and types was the support most needed to help overcome several different barriers to entry. Improvements to this program may assist new entrants when it comes to the *affordability of landownership* and *large initial investment*, as well as the *lack of grants for small farm businesses.*

FIGURE 1: TOP FINANCIAL SUPPORTS BY MOST COMMON BARRIERS OF ENTRY[2]



Interview Impressions

The unrealized entrant expressed being overwhelmed by the substantial commitment required to manage a farm, as supplementary employment was needed. Financial support would have provided this individual the opportunity to focus solely on the farm and unburden them from their start-up loans.

[2] As comments may have been categorized into multiple themes or sub-themes, totals may not sum to 100%.

Additional Resources (31%)

Around 3 in 10 new entrants indicated that additional resources could have helped overcome their most significant barrier to entering agriculture. Respondents would like to see an increase in access to agricultural infrastructure, such as abattoirs and machinery co-ops (8%), while some new entrants expressed a need for help navigating government processes, regulations, and available supports (6%).

TABLE 3: MOST COMMON BARRIER THIS SUPPORT WOULD HELP OVERCOME

MOST SIGNIFICANT BARRIER TO ENTRY (TOP 5)	% OF COMMENTERS
Lack of access to abattoir or processing facilities	18%
Affordability of landownership	13%
Lack of reliable, skilled labour	10%
Land use and zoning regulations	6%
[Seven barriers tied]	5%

Of those who could have used additional resources, nearly 2 in 10 (18%) said *lack of access to abattoir or processing facilities* was their most significant barrier of entry. About 1 in 10 commentors said their most significant barrier was *affordability of landownership* (13%) and *lack of reliable, skilled labour* (10%).

Interview Impressions

Echoing some of the comments, the interviewee noted that while a vast number of resources may be available, there is a time commitment required to navigate them properly. Supports to guide new entrants through the processes could have helped.

Regulatory Changes (27%)

A quarter of new entrants indicated that regulatory changes could have helped overcome their most significant barrier to entering agriculture. Commenters wish to see more flexibility when it comes to government regulations (18%) and would like to see protections put in place for both the agriculture industry (4%) and farmland (3%).

TABLE 4: MOST COMMON BARRIER THIS SUPPORT WOULD HELP OVERCOME

MOST SIGNIFICANT BARRIER TO ENTRY (TOP 5)	% OF COMMENTERS
Government processes and regulations	19%
Land use and zoning regulations	17%
Affordability of landownership	12%
Lack of affordability - general (e.g., land, feed, supplies, Carbon Tax)	12%
[Three barriers tied]	6%

Of those who could have used regulatory changes, nearly 2 in 10 said *government processes and regulations* (19%) and *land use and zoning regulations* (17%) were their most significant barrier of entry. About 1 in 10 commentors said their most significant barrier was *affordability of landownership* (12%) and *lack of affordability in general* (12%).

Education & Training (9%)

Nearly 1 in 10 new entrants indicated that education and training could have helped overcome their most significant barrier to entering agriculture. These commenters required more agricultural education in general (4%), farmer-to-farmer mentorship (2%), and more online educational resources (2%).

TABLE 5: MOST COMMON BARRIER THIS SUPPORT WOULD HELP OVERCOME

MOST SIGNIFICANT BARRIER TO ENTRY (TOP 5)	% OF COMMENTERS
Lack of access to farm business-related training (marketing, accounting, etc.)	16%
Lack of experience or knowledge	16%
Lack of access to farm production-related training	11%
Environmental issues (e.g., excess rainwater, weather, predators, Climate Change)	11%
Lack of grants for small farm businesses	11%

Of those who could have used further education and training, the most common significant barriers were *lack of access to farm business-related training* (16%) and *lack of experience or* *knowledge* (16%). About 1 in 10 commentors said their most significant barrier was *lack of access to farm production-related training* (11%), *environmental issues* (11%), and *lack of grants for small farm businesses* (11%).

Interview Impressions

The unrealized entrant observed the resources they found most helpful came from informal sources, such as online platforms and community networks.

Appendix A: Theme Counts & Descriptions

A detailed examination of respondents' comments in the survey revealed major themes that are summarized in the tables below and were further explored in this report.

In each table, the themes are presented in descending order down the left side, followed by the number of respondents whose comments related to that theme. The last column displays the corresponding themes as a percentage of the total number of respondents who commented.

Supports to Overcome Barrier to Entry

TABLE 5: DISTRIBUTION OF COMMENTS FOR WHAT SUPPORT COULD HAVE BEEN USED[3,4]

MAJOR THEME AND SUB-THEMES	NUMBER OF COMMENTS	% OF COMMENTERS
FINANCIAL SUPPORT	**102**	**48%**
Grant program expansion (e.g., increased access, larger grants, more diverse grants)	55	26%
Financing/financial support - general	37	18%
Low-interest or interest-free loans	19	9%
Lower taxes or tax credits	11	5%
Other	<5	-
Alternative financing (e.g., crowdfunding, micro-loans, community economic development investment)	<5	-
ADDITIONAL RESOURCES	**65**	**31%**
More access to agricultural infrastructures (e.g., abattoirs, machinery co-ops, other)	17	8%

[3] Individual comments that touched on several activities were coded to more than one theme or sub-theme. Therefore, counts and percentages across or within themes may not add to the theme or respondent totals.

[4] Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number.

MAJOR THEME AND SUB-THEMES	NUMBER OF COMMENTS	% OF COMMENTERS
Help navigating government processes, regulations, and supports available	12	6%
Labour support	10	5%
Incentives for landowners to sell or rent land to new farmers	5	2%
Shared initiatives (e.g., equipment sharing, collaborative marketing or distribution, shared sourcing, etc.)	5	2%
Direct marketing support and promotion (e.g., CSA networks, farmers markets, networking with chefs/wholesale purchasers, etc.)	5	2%
Insurance programs for various scales and models	<5	-
New farmer networking forums (online and in-person)	<5	-
Land access resources (e.g., land access guides, how to lease agreement templates, etc.)	<5	-
Land-linking programs (connecting landowners to farmers seeking land)	<5	-
Access to specialists (e.g., agrologist, livestock or horticultural specialist)	<5	-
Farm transfer and succession planning programs	<5	-
Government extension services	<5	-
REGULATORY CHANGES	**57**	**27%**
More flexible regulations	37	18%
Industry protections	8	4%
Farmland protection programs (e.g., land reserves, banks, trusts)	7	3%
Development support for co-operatives	<5	-
Support for alternative farming (e.g., indoor, urban)	<5	-

MAJOR THEME AND SUB-THEMES	NUMBER OF COMMENTS	% OF COMMENTERS
Local food procurement legislation	<5	-
EDUCATION & TRAINING	20	9%
Education - general	8	4%
Farmer-to-farmer mentorship programs	<5	-
Online educational resources (e.g., webinars, blogs, etc.)	<5	-
On-farm training (e.g., paid or unpaid, apprenticeships, internships)	<5	-
Workshops and/or conferences from governments	<5	-
OTHER SUGGESTIONS	**9**	**4%**
TOTAL RESPONDENTS COMMENTING	**210**	**100%**

Appendix B: Background

High Level

Study	2024 Agriculture New Entrants Needs Assessment
Project Sponsor	Ministry of Agriculture & Food
Previous Cycles	2019

Operations

Data Collection Method	Online survey; Interview
Fielding Window / Dates	January 3 to February 15, 2024

Population / Sample

Scope	New entrants to the agriculture industry who had started their farm business within the last five years
Population Surveyed	266 new entrants to farming completed the survey 1 unrealized entrant to farming interview
Comment Response Rate	79% of respondents provided comments describing supports (210 out of 266)

Key Measure(s)

Type of Measure	Open-ended survey question
Methods of Analysis	Content analysis

Confidentiality

During survey administration, employees received personalized invitations and reminders. All survey responses were encrypted during submission and stored on a secure server accessed only by select employees at BC Stats. BC Stats employees are sworn under the *Statistics Act*, and all information collected in the survey is protected by the *Statistics Act*. Only aggregate results are provided in the reports. Individual responses or information that could identify an individual cannot be disclosed.

BC Stats is the provincial government's leader in statistical and economic research, information and analysis essential for evidence-based decision-making. BC Stats, the central statistics agency of government, is excited to be taking a lead role in the strategic understanding of data sources and analysis across government. The goal is to increase overall business intelligence—information decision makers can use. For more information, please contact Executive Director Kathleen Assaf.

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