2024 Agriculture New Entrants Needs Assessment

PREPARED FOR MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE & FOOD

BY BC STATS – MAY 2024

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Executive Summary

The Ministry of Agriculture and Food worked with BC Stats to engage with new entrants to agriculture to better understand:

- The challenges and barriers facing new entrants;
- The level of awareness of programs and services to support new entrants;
- The different pathways individuals take to become farmers or manage a farm business; and
- The needs of new farmers in British Columbia and the agriculture industry in order to develop appropriate programs.

The assessment included data from 266 survey responses and 3 online focus groups. Compared to 2019 survey results, respondents to the 2024 survey were older (58% were 45 years or older vs 46%), higher educated (45% had at least a bachelor's degree vs 39%), and more likely to have children 18 years or older (46% vs 33%).

The farms represented in these results were mainly conventional (51%) or ecological or regenerative (32%). More hobby farms or non-profits (14% vs 1% in 2019) were represented in this cycle, but sole proprietorships remained the most common business structure (42% vs 54% in 2019).

Less than a quarter (22%) of new entrants were born outside of Canada, an increase from 2019 (15%).

For around 1 in 5 (19%) of farms, vegetables and melons were the major source of revenue, followed by fruit and tree nuts (16%), poultry and egg production (14%), and cattle ranching for beef (14%).

<u>Farming Background</u>

Around 4 in 10 new entrants were not raised on a farm (44%). For 43% of respondents, farming is their second career.

Compared to 2019, new entrants were less likely to have been *not raised on farm* (44% vs 49%), raised in a *mostly urban environment* (32% vs 38%), to have *close relatives that are farming* (13% vs 18%), or whose *parents were raised on a farm, but are no longer farming* (11% vs 17%).

Among focus group participants, family and community was a large factor in getting many of them involved in farming.

Prior to owning or managing their current farm business, new entrants had on average 5.5 years of previous experience, up from 4.5 in 2019. Nearly 4 in 10 (39%) had no previous experience, unchanged from 2019.

Farmland Ownership

The majority (85%) of new entrants said they own the farmland they manage, an increase from 77% in 2019. Most landowners made the purchase with a *mortgage* (60%), while 20% *purchased the land outright*.

Most focus group participants said they own the land they farm. Land purchases were aided by family support, such as interest-free loans for purchasing family land and including parents as shareholders when incorporating the business. Others used traditional financing options (e.g., lines of credit, selling off existing properties) or integrated tourism activities into their farm (e.g., Airbnb, farm tours, "glamping") to improve profitability.

Among those who lease their farmland, over half lease from *an acquaintance or family* (58%) and *have a written lease agreement* (52%). About a quarter (26%) of leasers used a *land matching program, such as the BC Land Matching Program delivered by Young Agrarians*, up from 19% in 2019. Most (55%) plan to purchase farmland in the next 5 years.

Barriers to Entry

Overall, the most common barriers[1] faced by new entrants with regards to their farm business or enterprise were all financial in nature:

- Lack of grants for small farm businesses (78);
- Affordability of landownership (74); and
- Lack of access to capital, credit, or other sources of financing (65).

[1] New entrants were asked to rate whether they agreed or not that an item was a barrier to entry for their farm business. These ratings were then applied to a one-hundred-point scale, the average of which provides each barrier an average score.

Compared to 2019, most barriers saw at least a slight increase in average score. The greatest change between cycles was *lack of reliable, skilled labour* (63 vs 52), followed by *lack of access to farm business-related training* (57 vs 47) and *land use and zoning regulations* (58 vs 49).

Older new entrants (65 years and older) were more likely than their cohorts to disagree that the *lack of grants for small farm businesses* was a barrier to entry. The difference was statistically significant.

Focus group participants noted the complex task of starting a farm business. Beyond the financial hurdles and steep learning curve, these new entrants were challenged by regulatory requirements related to permit applications, funding, and obtaining farm status.

When asked what the most significant barrier to entry was, A variety of challenges were put forward. The most common barrier was *affordability of landownership* (22%).

New entrants under 55 years of age were more likely to have said *affordability of landownership* was the most significant barrier when entering farming. Their counterparts (those 55 years and older) were more likely to have said they *did not face any barriers* or *government processes or regulations*. These differences were statistically significant.

<u>Supports</u>

New entrants used an average of 5.1 different supports or sources of information. This is down from 6.4 in 2019.

The most used supports by new entrants were *online educational resources, such as webinars, blogs, etc.* (65%) and *informal mentorship by another farmer* (63%). These were also the top two supports used in 2019 (64% and 68%, respectively).

Younger new entrants aged 18 to 34 used more supports on average (7.9). They were also more likely to have used *curriculum in primary and secondary schools to promote farming as a career*, *on-farm training*, and *farm workshops, field days, or farm tours*. These differences are statistically significant.

Among focus group participants, online resources on YouTube and Facebook were widely used supports, providing information on best practices, techniques, and strategies, as well as the space for new farmers to connect and build communities. These platforms were also used to find mentors, with former farm owners and industry association groups helping new farmers with practical knowledge and hands-on learning.

The supports that were deemed the most important were *government loan and grant programs* (84), *informal mentorship by another farmer* (83), *specialist consultations, such as agrologist, livestock, or horticultural specialists* (80), *agricultural infrastructure* (80), and *income stabilization for farmers in start-up phase* (80).

Women were more likely than men to rate *farm transfer/succession planning programs* and *shared initiatives* as important supports. New entrants 65 years and older were less likely than the younger cohorts to deem *income stabilization for farmers in start-up phase* and *government loan and grant programs* as important.

Educational resources were considered vital to starting a farm for focus group participants. There was positive feedback on the accessibility and diversity of existing sources of information, but many felt there were a lack of courses and programs geared towards small-scale or hobby farming.

<u>Additional Focus Group Findings</u>

Many focus group participants did not have a succession plan in place, citing the uncertainty around their farm's profitability, unknown interest from potential successors, and the overall recentness of their farm business. This aligns with the survey results, where only 10% of respondents said they accessed *family transfer or succession planning programs*.

In hopes of alleviating some of the barriers facing new entrants to agriculture, focus group participants identified several areas of need: a centralized information hub and online portal; an increase in advocacy on behalf of small-scale farmers; and initiatives to facilitate and improve youth involvement in agriculture.

For many focus group participants, the Internet was the primary source of information. Online platforms, such as YouTube and Facebook, provided helpful instruction for beginners. Along with word-of-mouth information, this reflects a trend towards easily accessible and community-driven advice. Additionally, mentorship was highly valued, as it provides direct learning from experienced individuals.

1. Introduction

The agriculture sector in British Columbia depends on a steady influx of new farming entrants for sector growth amid an aging population. In addition, as in many sectors, new entrants to agriculture are known drivers of innovation, providing operational efficiencies and new lines of business. As such, governments in many jurisdictions worldwide are focusing on new entrants to agriculture as a key segment for resource and policy investment within the sector.

1.1. Purpose

The Ministry of Agriculture and Food worked with BC Stats to engage with new entrants to better understand:

- The challenges and barriers facing new entrants;
- The level of awareness of programs and services to support new entrants;
- The different pathways individuals take to become farmers or manage a farm business; and
- The needs of new farmers in British Columbia and the agricultural industry in order to develop appropriate programs.

2. Methodology

2.1. Survey

2.1.1. Survey Design

The New Entrants Needs Assessment Survey was designed to collect information on new entrants to the agriculture sector in British Columbia. All farm businesses or enterprises that started within the last five years were given the opportunity to complete the survey. The survey collected specific details on the demographics of new entrants, their background in farming, primary farming business, barriers faced and supports accessed and was administered online between January 3 and February 15, 2024. For the New Entrants Needs Assessment Survey, please see Appendix A: Survey Instruments.

New entrants to the agriculture sector were defined as those who started their farm business within the last five years.

2.1.2. Survey Sample

The New Entrants Needs Assessment Survey utilized the Statistics Canada Business Register, a continuously updated business repository. Business contact information is collected through a survey and linked to administrative data. Agricultural businesses in BC were selected that were added to the database in the last five years.

The 2024 New Entrants Needs Assessment's sampling plan was similar to the previous survey in 2019, with one notable difference: in addition to the regular sample obtained through the Business Register, the 2019 survey utilized a snowball sample. A snowball sample is a method of sampling where survey participants are encouraged to refer other new entrants to be potential participants.

Table 1 below provides the number of survey completions by the number of years respondents have been an owner or manager of a farm business or enterprise at the time of the survey compared to 2019.

TABLE 1: SURVEY COMPLETIONS BY NUMBER OF YEARS AS OWNER/MANAGER OF FARM

Years	2024		2019			
			Regular Sample		Snowball Sample	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
One year or less	13	5%	20	6%	58	26%
Two to three years	122	46%	167	46%	97	43%
Four to five years	131	49%	174	48%	68	30%
Total	**266**	**100%**	**361**	**100%**	**223**	**100%**

2.2. Online Focus Groups

In addition to the survey, three online focus groups were conducted with new entrants. The sessions were held over Microsoft Teams between February 13 to 16, 2024, with the goal of gaining a better understand of the following:

- The challenges and barriers facing new entrants;
- The level of awareness of programs and services to support new entrants;
- The different pathways individuals take to become farmers or to manage a farm business; and
- The needs of new farmers in BC and the agricultural industry in order to develop appropriate programs.

Each session was two hours in length. The moderator asked follow-up questions, updated discussion topics, and answered participant questions.

2.2.1. Online Focus Group Recruitment

Participants for the online focus groups were recruited through the New Entrants Needs Assessment Survey. Invitation emails were sent to interested respondents, followed up with additional confirmation emails or telephone calls to ensure participants received the instructions and were reminded of the focus group dates.

In total, 19 individuals participated in the focus groups. To facilitate recruitment, a $75 gift card was provided to those who participated in the forum over the three days.

2.3. Data Analysis

2.3.1. Data Cleaning and Coding

Following the completion of survey administration, survey data were cleaned to ensure that responses were logically consistent, as well as to identify data entry errors, response errors, inconsistent information, illogical information, and outliers. No outliers were identified during the cleaning of survey data.

For close-ended questions, including all ‘other, please specify’ response options, a review of written responses was conducted to develop a coding list. Using the coding list, written responses were up-coded (aggregated) into existing response options where appropriate. Outlier responses were left in the ‘other, please specify’ category.

2.3.2. Quantitative Analysis

Once the survey data were cleaned and coded, closed-ended and coded responses were summarized using descriptive statistics (e.g. frequencies and percentages). For multiple response questions, respondents had the option of providing more than one answer; therefore, the percentages reported in the frequencies for multiple response questions may sum up to more than 100%, as respondents may have selected more than one response. Additional statistics included means, medians, and average scores were calculated to add context to the results.

In addition to descriptive statistics, cross-tabulations were produced to compare findings among sub-groups. Statistical testing was conducted to gauge whether the differences between sub-groups were statistically significant.

2.3.3. Qualitative Analysis

Content analysis was employed to analyze open-ended online forum data. Transcripts were reviewed to identify common and unique themes, which were then coded. This approach used inductive reasoning, whereby themes and categories emerged directly from the participants’ raw responses through rigorous examination and comparison, ensuring that the findings were not unduly skewed to fit a pre-formed framework based on expectation of what the research would find, while also developing enough structure to allow for the clear reporting of results by major theme.

The qualitative research was gathered through three online focus groups with new entrants and one interview with an unrealized entrant.

2.4. Overview of Report

The report has been designed to reflect the overall results of the survey, as well as provide comparisons to the previous survey completed in 2019, where applicable[2]. Feedback from the focus groups and interview is spread throughout the report in addition to a standalone section highlighting focus group topics not included in the survey.

Only significant differences between subgroups are discussed in the report. Moreover, respondents who selected ‘prefer not to answer’ were removed from the analysis.

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[2] The results for the 2019 survey included farm businesses in operation longer than five years. To compare against the current survey more accurately, these participants were removed and the 2019 data was re-analyzed. For this reason, results in this report will not match the 2019 report.

3. Respondent Profile

3.1. Respondent Characteristics

Compared to 2019, respondents to the 2024 New Entrants Needs Assessment survey were:

- older (58% vs 46% were 45 years or older);
- higher educated (45% vs 39% had at least a Bachelors degree); and
- more likely to have children 18 years or older (46% vs 33%)

Table 2 below summarize the characteristics of respondents who completed the New Entrants Needs Assessment survey.

TABLE 2: RESPONDENT CHARACTERISTICS – 2024 AND 2019

Respondent Characteristics	2024	2019
Years Managing Farm		
One year or less	5%	13%
Two to three years	46%	45%
Four to five years	49%	41%
Gender		
Woman	53%	50%
Man	46%	48%
Non-binary + Prefer to self-identify	<1%	2%
Age Group		
18 to 24 years old	1%	2%
24 to 35 years old	12%	22%
35 to 44 years old	28%	31%
45 to 54 years old	23%	21%
55 to 64 years old	20%	18%
65 years and older	15%	7%
Indigenous Identity*		
First Nations (Status or Non-Status)	1%	3%
Métis	3%	2%
Inuk (Inuit)	0%	1%
Non-Indigenous	97%	95%
Visible Minority		
Yes	10%	8%
No	90%	92%

*Multiple responses accepted. Total may sum to more than 100%.

TABLE 2: RESPONDENT CHARACTERISTICS – 2024 AND 2019 (CONT'D)

Respondent Characteristics	2024	2019
Disability Status		
Yes	12%	5%
Sometimes	7%	-
No	81%	95%
Education Level		
Less than high school	1%	3%
High school diploma or equivalent	14%	12%
Some college or university	12%	17%
Completed college degree or certificate (including trade apprenticeships)	28%	30%
Completed undergraduate degree (Bachelors)	31%	25%
Completed post-graduate degree (Masters, PhD)	14%	13%
Children*		
Children under 18 who reside in their home	35%	44%
Children 18 and older who reside in their home	15%	10%
Children under 18 who do not reside in their home	2%	1%
Children 18 and older who do not reside in their home	31%	23%
No children	27%	30%

*Multiple responses accepted. Total may sum to more than 100%.

- Response option not included in the survey.

3.2. Farm Characteristics

The makeup of the farms identified in this survey are shown in Table 3.

TABLE 3: FARM CHARACTERISTICS – 2024 AND 2019

Farm Characteristics	2024	2019
Business Structure		
Sole proprietorship	42%	54%
Partnership	26%	30%
Corporation	15%	12%
Hobby farm/non-profit	14%	1%
Other	3%	3%
Farm Type		
Certified organic/in transition to certified organic	8%	19%
Ecological or regenerative	32%	34%
Conventional	51%	-
None of the above	14%	47%

- Response option not included in the survey.

TABLE 3: FARM CHARACTERISTICS – 2024 AND 2019 (CONT'D)

Farm Characteristics	2024	2019
Multigenerational Farmland/Business		
Yes	16%	12%
No	84%	88%
Acreage		
Under 1 acre	7%	6%
1 to 3.99 acres	26%	31%
4 to 10.99 acres	36%	27%
11 to 25.99 acres	10%	11%
26 to 100 acres	11%	16%
Over 100 acres	10%	9%
Mean (acres)	85.3	128.4
Median (acres)	6.0	5.0
Gross Farm Revenue		
$0 to $4,999	34%	30%
$5,000 to $49,999	45%	52%
$50,000 and over	21%	18%
Farm Operating Expenses		
$0 to $4,999	24%	27%
$5,000 to $49,999	54%	53%
$50,000 and over	22%	20%
Percentage of Income from Farm Business		
None	21%	26%
1% to 4.99%	35%	15%
5% to 9.99%	13%	13%
10% to 24.99%	12%	19%
25% to 49.99%	8%	7%
50% to 74.99%	3%	8%
75% to 100%	8%	13%
Region		
Vancouver Island/Coast	23%	67%
Mainland/Southwest	23%	16%
Thompson-Okanagan	30%	5%
Kootenay	10%	10%
Cariboo	9%	1%
North Coast	0%	0%
Nechako	1%	1%
Northeast	4%	0%

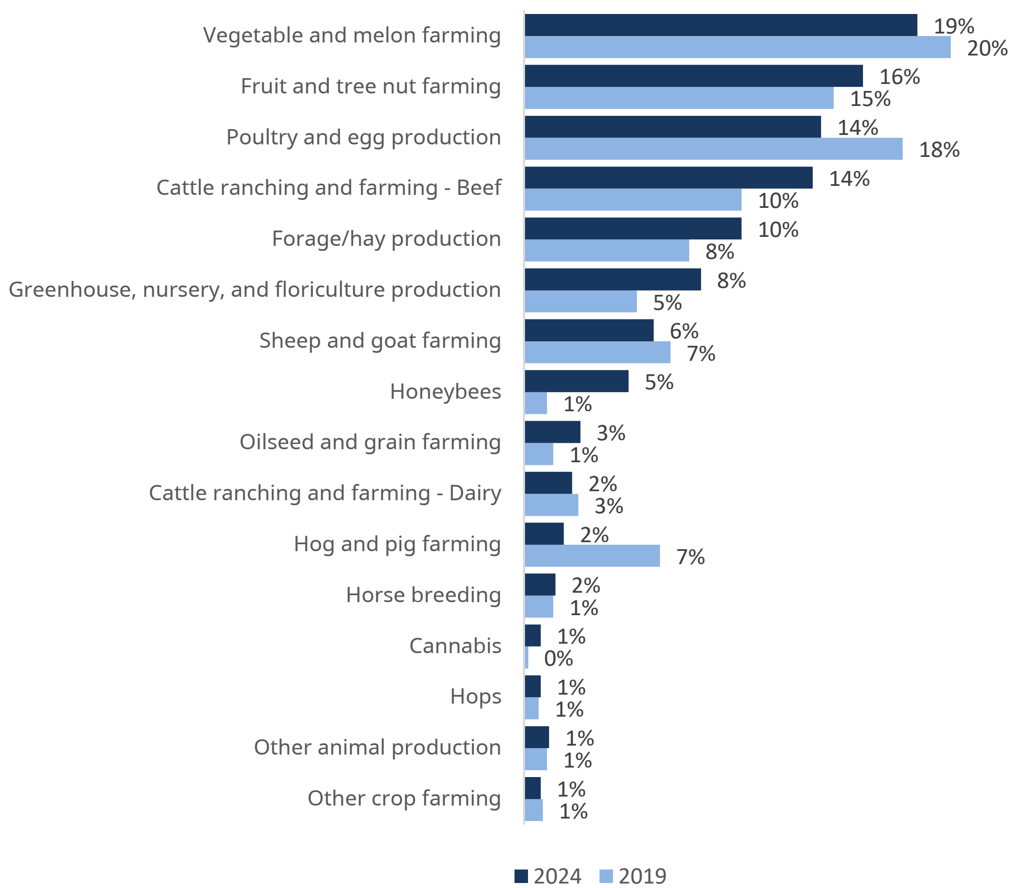
*Multiple responses accepted. Total may sum to more than 100%.

- Response option not included in the survey.

3.2.1. Major Source of Farm Revenue

The most common type of farm surveyed in 2024 grew vegetables and melons (19%), followed by fruit and tree nuts (16%). Poultry (14%) and cattle for beef (14%) were the most mentioned types of animals raised by farms, as seen in Figure 1.

FIGURE 1: MAJOR SOURCE OF FARM REVENUE – 2024 AND 2019



Compared to 2019, the current surveyed included a lower proportion of hog and pig farms (2% vs 7%) and poultry and egg producers (14% vs 18%).

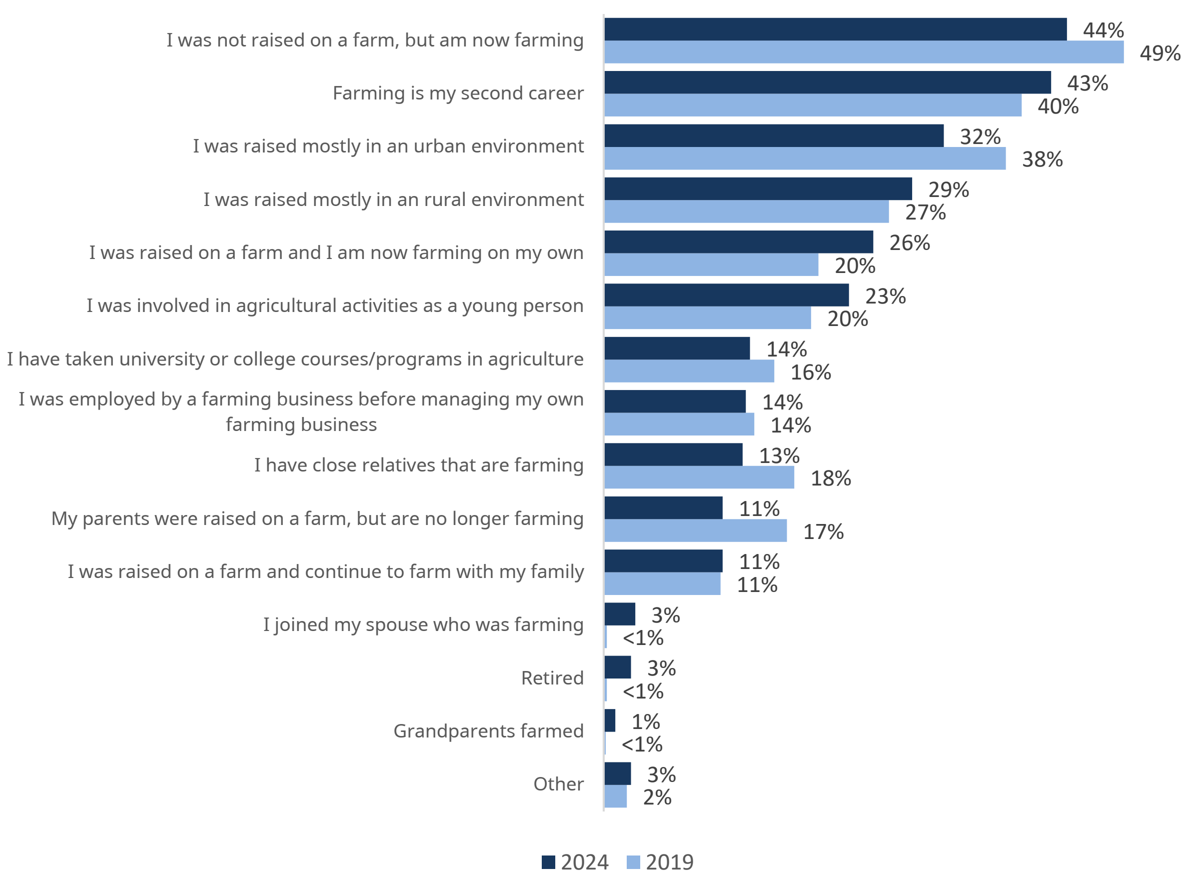
4. Farming Background

4.1. Path to Farming

There are many different paths to farming. Among new entrants, over 4 in 10 were *not raised on a farm, but are now farming* (44%), while for many *farming is a second career* (43%). Slightly more respondents were raised in a *mostly urban environment* (32%) than those raise in a *mostly rural environment* (29%).

As seen in Figure 2, about a quarter of new entrants were *raised on a farm and are now farming on their own* (26%), while 1 in 10 were *raised on a farm and continue to farm with their family* (11%). Less than a quarter of new entrants were *involved in agricultural activities as a young person* (23%), took *university or college courses in agriculture* (14%), or were *employed by a farm business before managing their own farm business* (14%).

FIGURE 2: FARMING BACKGROUND – 2024 AND 2019



Note: Respondents could provide multiple answers, so totals may sum to over 100%.

Compared to 2019, new entrants were less likely to say they were *not raised on farm, but are now farming* (44% vs 49%), raised in a *mostly urban environment* (32% vs 38%), to have *close relatives that are farming* (13% vs 18%), or whose *parents were raised on a farm, but are no longer farming* (11% vs 17%).

Conversely, new entrants in 2024 were more likely to have been *raised on a farm and are now farming on their own* (26% vs 20%).

4.1.1. Focus Group Impressions

Either through a desire to continue their family or spouse's farming lifestyle or being inspired by their community's support of local food production, family and community was a large factor in getting many focus group participants involved in farming.

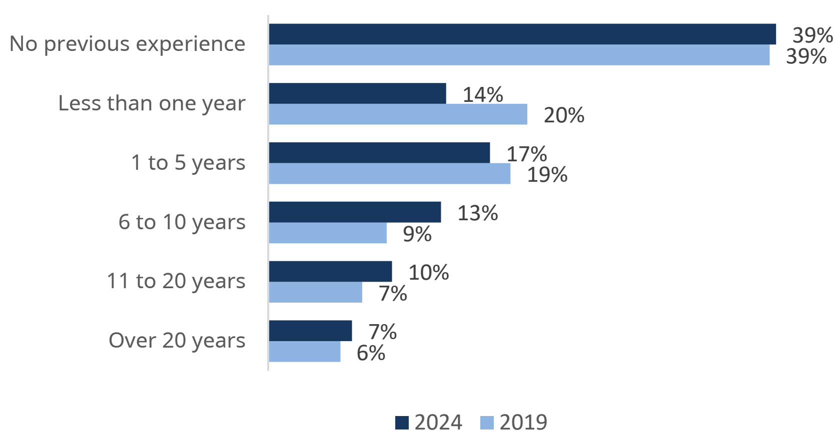
Gardening and hobby farming also served as jumping-off points for some farmers, as passion and existing land facilitated farming expansion.

4.2. Farming Experience

Prior to owning or managing their current farm business, new entrants had on average 5.5 years of previous farming experience before starting their own farming business, up from 4.5 years in 2019. As seen in Figure 3, around 4 in 10 (39%) new entrants had no previous farming experience. This is on par with 2019. Around 31% of respondents had 5 years or less of experience, while 30% had 6 years of experience or more.

In 2024, new entrants had an average of 5.5 years of previous farming experience.

FIGURE 3: PREVIOUS FARMING EXPERIENCE – 2024 AND 2019

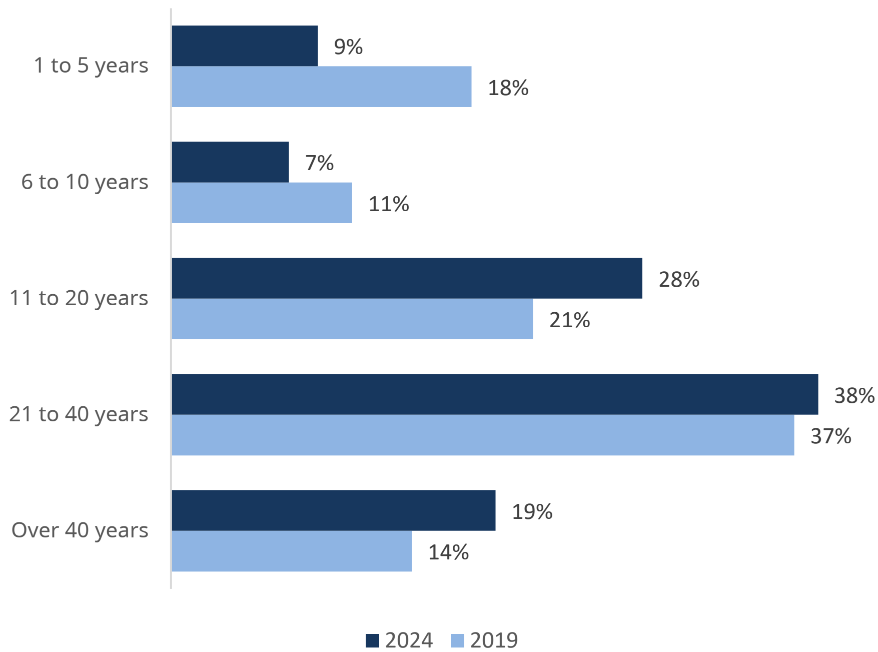


4.3. Personal Background

Less than a quarter (22%) of new entrants were born outside of Canada, an increase from 2019 (15%).

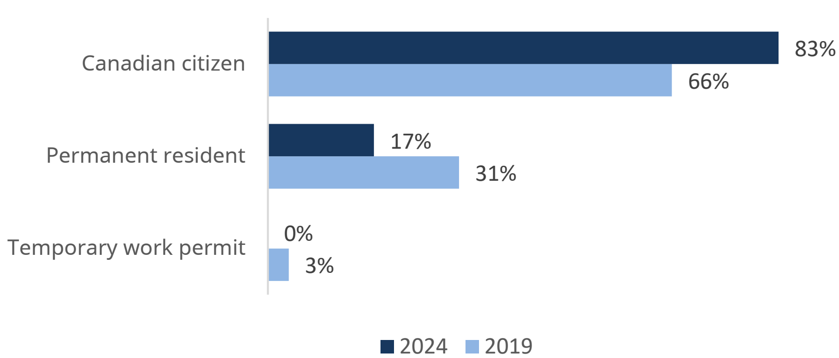
Among new entrants born outside of Canada, the average duration in Canada was 26.3 years (up from 23.4 in 2019). As seen in Figure 4, over half (57%) had lived in Canada for more than 20 years.

FIGURE 4: YEARS IN CANADA – 2024 AND 2019



Most (83%) new entrants born outside of Canada were Canadian citizens, an increase from 66% in 2019. Around 2 in 10 (17%) were permanent residents, down from 2019 (31%).

FIGURE 5: RESIDENCY STATS – 2024 AND 2019



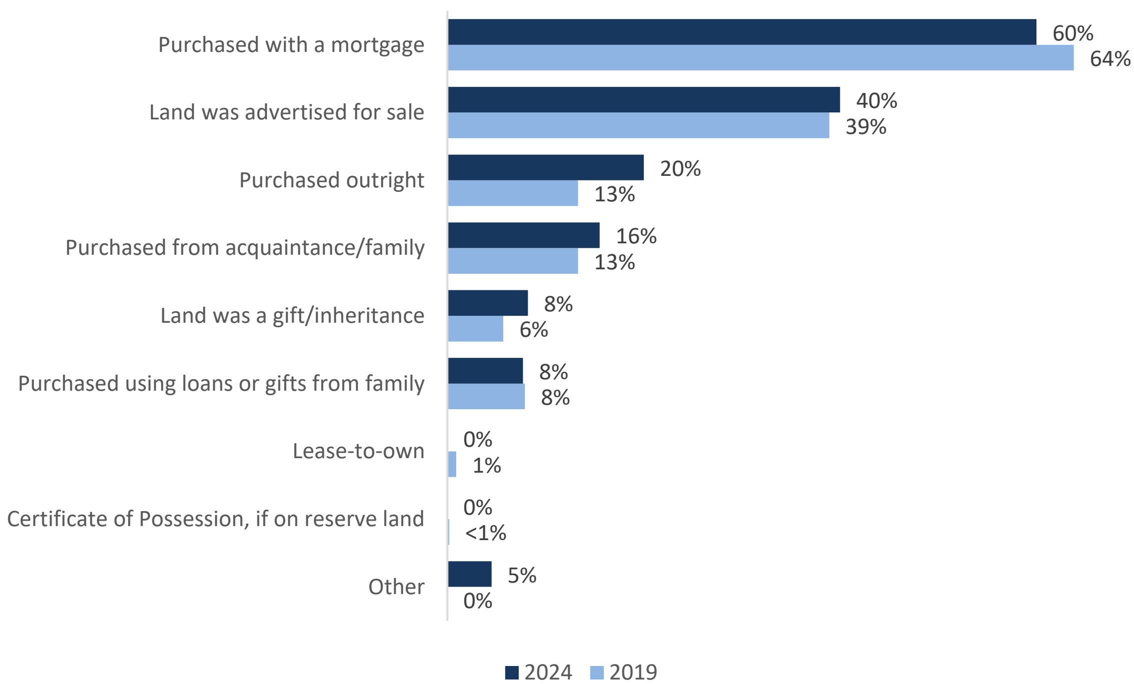
5. Farmland Ownership

5.1. Owned Farmland

The majority (85%) of new entrants said they own the farmland they manage, an increase from 77% in 2019.

As seen in Figure 6, most (60%) new entrants *purchased their farmland with a mortgage* (64% in 2019), while 20% *purchased outright* (13% in 2019). Around 4 in 10 (40%) respondents purchased land that was *advertised for sale*.

FIGURE 6: LAND PURCHASE DETAILS – 2024 AND 2019



Note: Respondents could provide multiple answers, so totals may sum to over 100%.

5.1.1. Focus Group Impressions

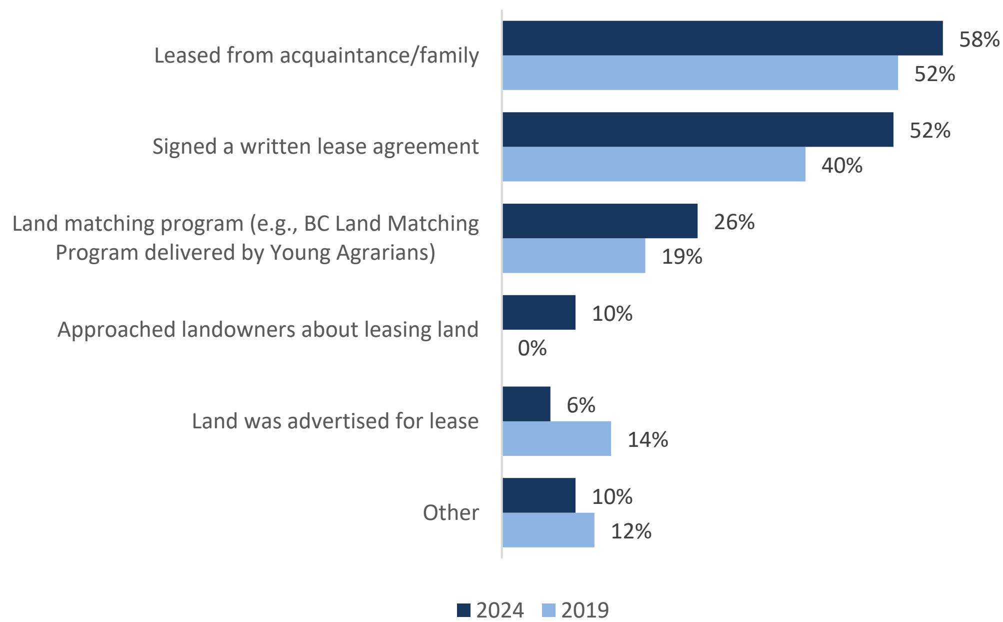
Most focus group participants owned the land they farm. Land purchases were aided by family support, such as interest-free loans for purchasing family land and including parents as shareholders when incorporating the business. Others used traditional financing options (e.g., lines of credit, selling off existing properties) or integrated tourism activities into their farm (e.g., Airbnb, farm tours, “glamping”) to improve profitability.

5.2. Leased Farmland

Among new entrants that do not own the farmland they manage, about 8 in 10 (79%) said they leased the land, while 1 in 10 (13%) farmed on family land. These proportions are both increases from 2019 (79% vs 75% and 13% vs 8%).

When it came to leasing their farmland, in 2024, new entrants were more likely to have *leased from an acquaintance or family* (58% vs 52% in 2019), have *signed a written lease agreement* (52% vs 40%), and have worked with a *land matching program* (26% vs 19%).

FIGURE 7: LAND LEASE DETAILS – 2024 AND 2019



Note: Respondents could provide multiple answers, so totals may sum to over 100%.

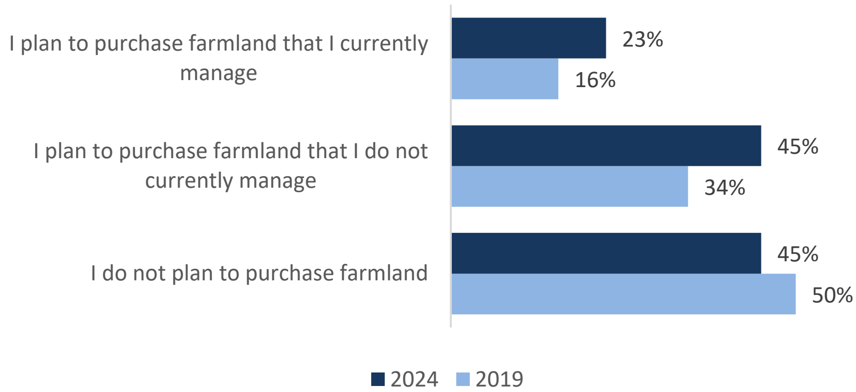
Among those with a signed written lease agreement, the average length of the lease was 4.2 years (4.4 in 2019), with most (87%) leases between 1 and 5 years (88% in 2019).

5.3. Future Land Plans

Over half (55%) of new entrants who do not own their farmland said they plan on purchasing farmland in the next 5 years, up from 50% in 2019.

As seen in Figure 8, 45% plan to purchase farmland *they do not currently manage*, while 23% have planned to purchase the farmland *they currently manage*.

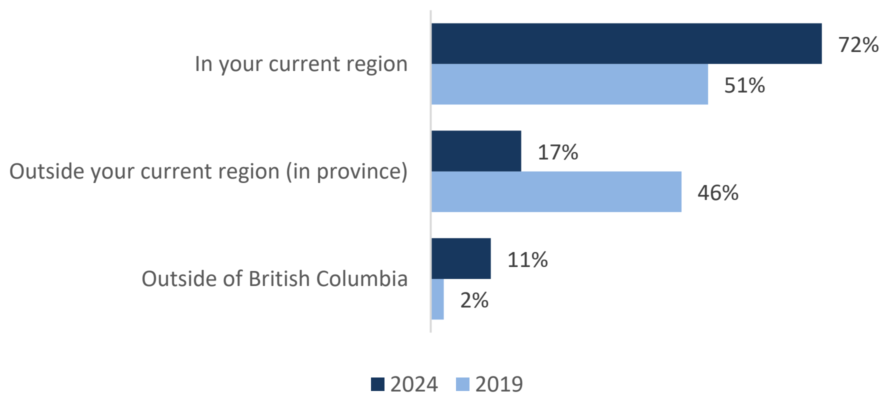
FIGURE 8: FARMLAND PURCHASE NEXT 5 YEARS – 2024 AND 2019



Note: For 2024, respondents could provide multiple answers, so totals may sum to over 100%.

New entrants who planned to purchase farmland they do not currently manage were largely (72%) planning on purchasing the land in their current region. This is an increase from 2019 (51%). Less than 2 in 10 (17%) planned on purchasing land outside their current region, but still in BC, which is a decrease from 46% in 2019.

FIGURE 9: PLANNED LAND PURCHASE LOCATION – 2024 AND 2019



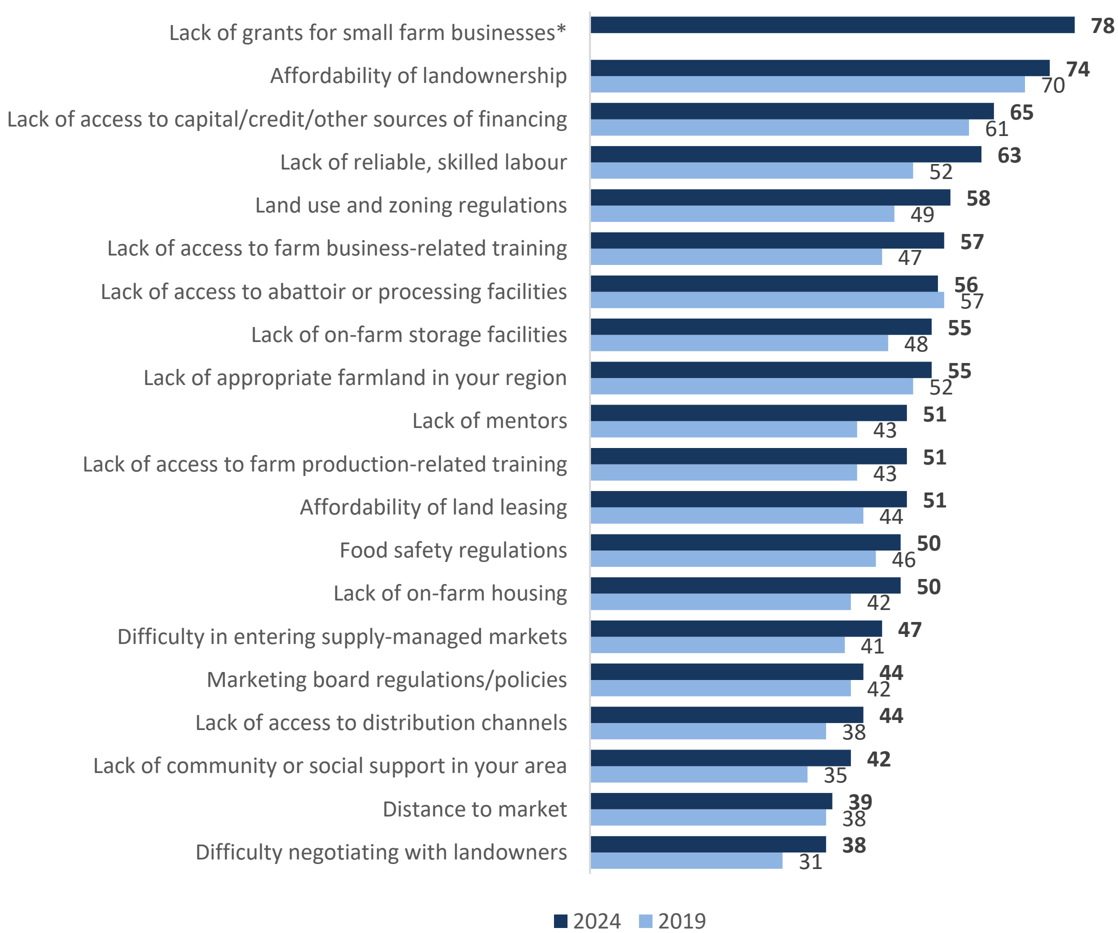
6. Barriers

6.1. Barriers Experienced

New entrants were provided with a list of common barriers to entering the agricultural industry and asked to rate whether they agreed or not that the challenge was a barrier to their farm business. These ratings were then applied to a one-hundred-point scale, which we take the average of to give each barrier an average score.

Looking at Figure 10, the average scores for the barriers ranged from a low of 38 for *difficulty negotiating with landowners* to a high of 78 for *lack of grants for small farm businesses.*

FIGURE 10: BARRIERS TO ENTRY (AVERAGE SCORE) – 2024 AND 2018



* Barrier was added to survey in 2024.

The highest three average scores were all related to financing, with *affordability of landownership* (74) and *lack of access to capital, credit, or other sources of financing* (65) joining *lack of grants for small farm businesses* at the top.

When compared to 2019, most barriers saw at least a slight increase in average score. The greatest change between cycles was *lack of reliable, skilled labour* (63 vs 52), followed by *lack of access to farm business-related training* (57 vs 47) and *land use and zoning regulations* (58 vs 49).

Two barriers were relatively stable compared to 2019: *lack of access to abattoir or processing facilities* (56 vs 57) and *distance to market* (39 vs 38).

Older new entrants (65 years and older) were more likely than their cohorts to disagree that the *lack of grants for small farm businesses* was a barrier to entry. The difference was statistically significant.

6.1.1. Focus Group Impressions

A widespread barrier to entry among focus group participants was the complex challenge of starting a farm business. This goes beyond the financial hurdles, of which there are many (significant start-ups costs, high mortgage and interest rates, etc.), and the steep learning curve, to the administrative side of running a farm business:

- navigating the regulatory requirement for permit applications and funding;
- obtaining farm status by demonstrating farm income; and
- securing adequate insurance in an industry vulnerable to a myriad of unpredictable factors (weather, pests, diseases, etc.).

Other cited barriers include environmental factors, which not only affect crop yield and livestock, but also complicate water access, as well as increased competition for land (specifically Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR) land) and labour.

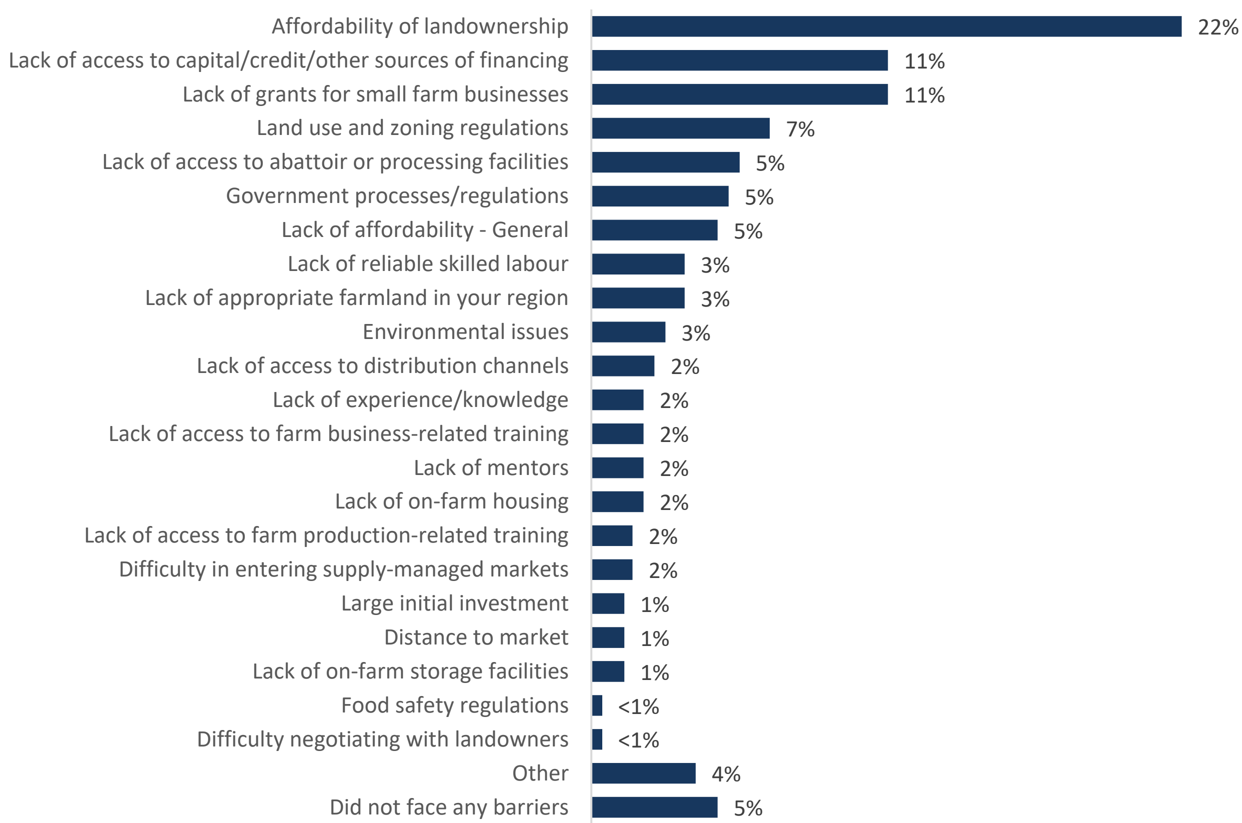
6.2. Top Barriers

There was little consensus among new entrants regarding the top barrier to entering the agriculture industry. As seen in Figure 11, over 20 different barriers were cited, while only 5% of respondents said they *did not face any barriers*.

Similar to the barriers experienced, the top barriers were all related to farm financing. *Affordability of landownership* (22%) was the most mentioned barrier, followed by *lack of* *access to capital, credit, or other sources of financing* (11%), and *lack of grants for small farm businesses* (11%).

New entrants under 55 years of age were more likely to have said *affordability of landownership* was the most significant barrier when entering farming. Their counterparts (those 55 years and older) were more likely to have said they *did not face any barriers* or *government processes or regulations*. These differences were statistically significant.

FIGURE 11: TOP BARRIER TO ENTRY - 2024

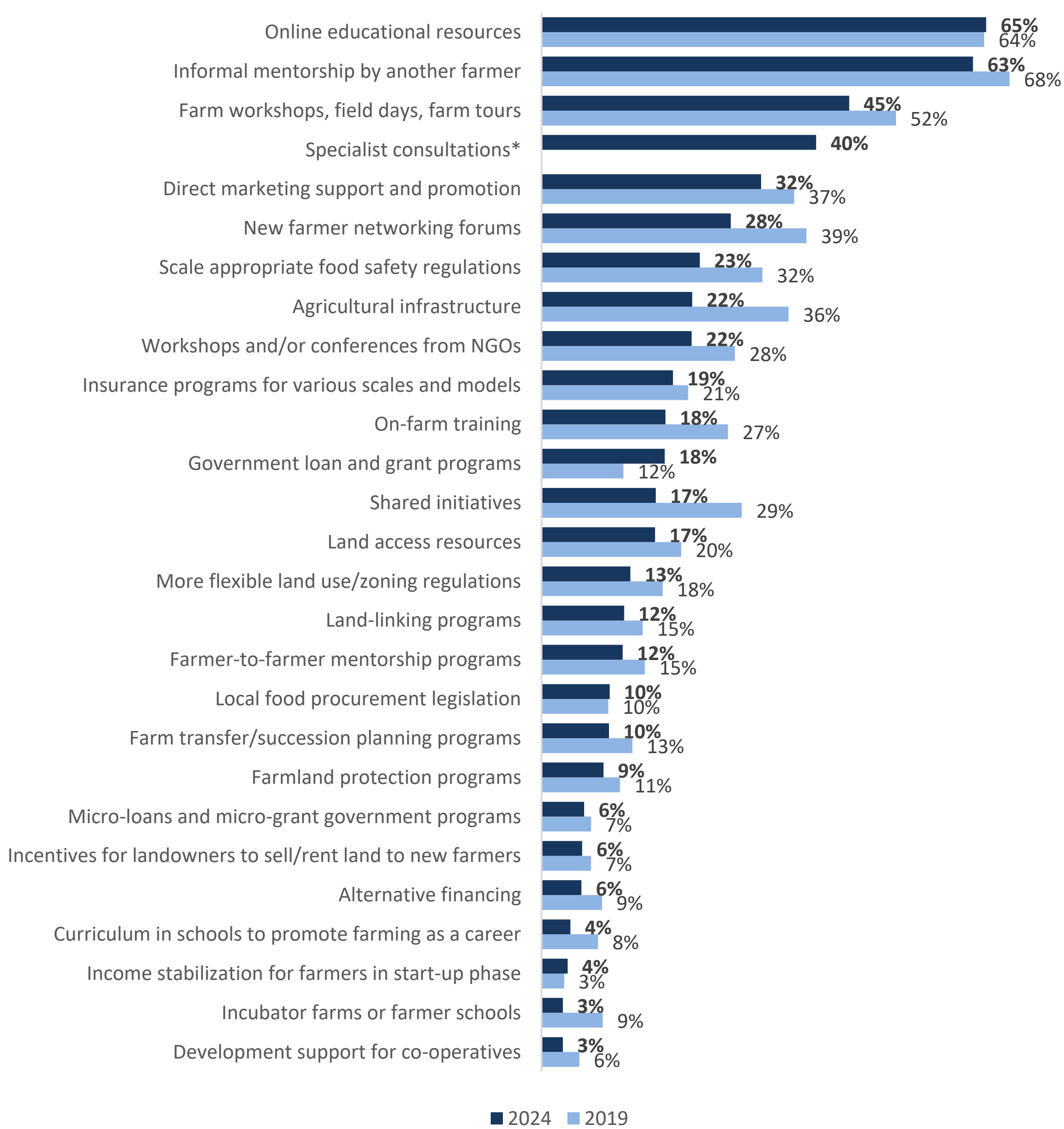


7. Supports

7.1. Supports Used

New entrants were asked about whether they had accessed a variety of supports and sources of information. Results are shown below in Figure 12.

FIGURE 12: SUPPORTS USED – 2024 AND 2019



* Support was added to survey in 2024.

New entrants used an average of 5.1 different supports or sources of information. This is down from 6.4 in 2019.

The most used supports by new entrants were *online educational resources, such as webinars, blogs, etc.* (65%) and *informal mentorship by another farmer* (63%). These were also the top two supports used in 2019 (64% and 68%, respectively).

In 2024, new entrants used an average of 5.1 different supports or sources of information.

When compared to 2019, proportions for most of the supports were lower in 2024. Some exceptions include *government loan and grant programs* (18% vs 12%) and *local food procurement legislation* (10% vs 10%).

Younger new entrants aged 18 to 34 used more supports on average (7.9). They were also more likely to have used *curriculum in primary and secondary schools to promote farming as a career*, *on-farm training*, and *farm workshops, field days, or farm tours*. These differences are statistically significant.

New entrants who are a member of a visible minority group were more likely to have used *incentives for landowners to sell or rent land to new farmers*, *on-farm training*, and *new farm networking forums*. These differences are statistically significant.

7.1.1. Focus Group Impressions

When transitioning into farming, focus group participants were largely able to leverage their existing financial and familial resources. This necessary capital and knowledge were essential foundations.

Online resources on YouTube and Facebook were widely used supports, providing information on best practices, techniques, and strategies, as well as the space for new farmers to connect and build communities. These platforms were also used to find mentors, with former farm owners and industry association groups helping new farmers with practical knowledge and hands-on learning.

Formal educational courses were also widely used, offered by schools and community organizations. These courses encompassed a variety of learning methods (e.g., workshops, field days, online resources) and were often accessible through the recommendation from peers or affiliated educational or agricultural organizations. Positively mentioned programs include the province-led webinar on beekeeping and the Independent Study in Agriculture (Ag12) secondary education course.

7.2. Support Importance

When asked how important each support or source of information was, new entrants largely felt most supports were at least somewhat important, with average scores ranging from 63 to 84.

As seen in Figure 13, the supports that were deemed the most important were *government loan and grant programs* (84), *informal mentorship by another farmer* (83), *specialist consultations, such as agrologist, livestock, or horticultural specialists* (80), *agricultural infrastructure* (80), and *income stabilization for farmers in start-up phase* (80).

In 2024, most supports were deemed as important as they were in 2019. The largest exception was *local food procurement legislation* (63 vs 66).

Women were more likely than men to rate *farm transfer/succession planning programs* and *shared initiatives* as important supports. New entrants 65 years and older were less likely than the younger cohorts to deem *income stabilization for farmers in start-up phase* and *government loan and grant programs* as important.

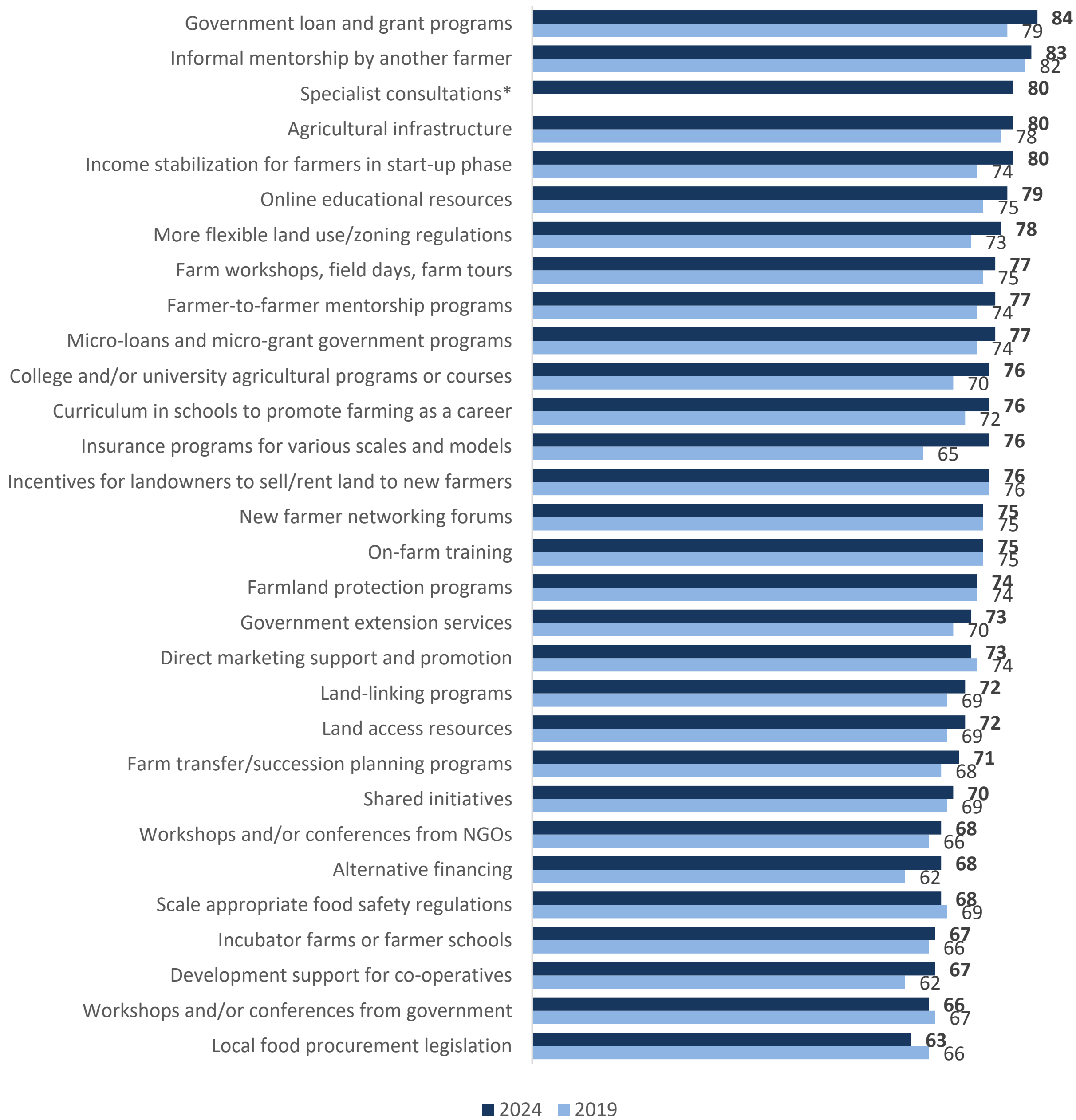
7.2.1. Focus Group Impressions

Educational resources were considered vital to starting a farm. There was positive feedback on the accessibility and diversity of existing sources of information, but many felt there were a lack of courses and programs geared towards small-scale or hobby farming.

There also exists a desire for more education opportunities focused on farm management, with topics related to securing financing, business management, and navigating regulatory requirements. Online courses were particularly attractive, as they are often more flexible, accessible, and cost-efficient options.

Regarding finances, participants highlighted the beneficial support received from regional and provincial offices on specific farming issues, such as irrigation grants from the Investment Agriculture Foundation (IAF) and advice on pest management. Partnerships with local educational institutions and industry association were also deemed valuable.

FIGURE 13: IMPORTANCE OF SUPPORT (AVERAGE SCORE) – 2024 AND 2019



* Support was added to survey in 2024.

8. Additional Focus Group Findings

8.1. Succession Planning

Many focus group participants did not have a succession plan in place, citing the uncertainty around their farm's profitability, unknown interest from potential successors, and the overall recentness of their farm business. There were a few farmers who indicated an expectation for their children to take over and some who viewed themselves as the succession plan, after taking over from their parents.

This aligns with the survey results, where only 10% of respondents said the accessed *family transfer or succession planning programs*.

8.2. Needs of New Farmers

In hopes of alleviating some of the barriers facing new entrants to agriculture, focus group participants identified several areas of need:

- a centralized information hub and online portal;
- an increase in advocacy on behalf of small-scale farmers; and
- initiatives to facilitate and improve youth involvement in agriculture.

A centralized information hub and online portal was highly thought of. An ideal version would compile resources, services, grants, and region-specific farming information. Example areas of interest included a bartering or tool-share system, food storage plans, and legal aid for lease negotiations.

Many farmers felt that there wasn't the same number of resources for small-scale farms. An increase in advocacy of behalf of small-scale farmers would hopefully result in additional small-scale farm grants, wage subsidies, and programs tailored to smaller farms.

An increase in youth involvement in agriculture was thought to be a solution to some of the labour and service challenges seen by farmers. Initiatives that promote co-op and internship hiring, skill-transitioning programs, and collaboration with post-secondary students for agricultural services (soil testing, legal assistance, veterinary needs, etc.) were all raised as solutions that address gabs in labour and knowledge within the farming community.

8.3. Preferred Information Channels

For many focus group participants, the Internet was the primary source of information. Online platforms, such as YouTube and Facebook, provided helpful instruction for beginners. Along with word-of-mouth information, this reflects a trend towards easily accessible and community-driven advice. Additionally, mentorship was highly valued, as it provides direct learning from experienced individuals.

Regardless of the source, participants stressed the importance of credibility and trustworthiness.

Appendix A: Survey Instruments

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the 2024 New Entrants Needs Assessment Survey. The Ministry of Agriculture is interested in understanding the needs of new farmers in BC. The survey is meant for individuals who are responsible for the management decisions for a farm, agricultural business, or new farming enterprise, and who have entered farming in the last 5 years.

An agricultural business or new farming enterprise may have more than one manager but only one survey is to be completed for each business.

This survey is **voluntary** and should take approximately **20-25 minutes** to complete. The deadline to submit your responses is **11:59 pm** on **Thursday, February 15, 2024**. Your participation is greatly appreciated.

The information in this survey is collected and kept confidential in accordance with the ***Statistics Act***, for statistical and research purposes. When survey results are published, your responses will be combined with the responses of others so that you cannot be identified.

If you provide comments during the survey, BC Stats will make every effort to remove any information that could potentially be used to identify you as a respondent. **To help us protect your identity, we strongly suggest that you do not sign your name or include any information that might identify you or others in your comments.**

Questions? Contact BC Stats by email at BCStats.SurveyMail3@gov.bc.ca or

call 1-888-447-4427

SCREENING QUESTIONS

The following questions are asked to confirm your eligibility to complete the survey.

S1. Are you responsible for the management decisions for a farm business or enterprise?

1. Yes
2. No [dead-end]

S2A. In 2023, which of the following was this farm business' major source of gross revenue?

Major source of gross revenue usually accounts for more than 50% of total revenues.

1. Cattle ranching and farming – Beef
2. Cattle ranching and farming – Dairy
3. Hog and pig farming
4. Poultry and egg production
5. Sheep and goat farming
6. Honeybees
7. Horse breeding
8. Other animal production, please specify: ____________________
9. Oilseed and grain farming
10. Vegetable and melon farming
11. Fruit and tree nut farming
12. Greenhouse, nursery, and floriculture production
13. Hops
14. Cannabis
15. Other crop farming, please specify: ____________________
99. Prefer not to answer

S2B. Is your primary business/enterprise?

1. Certified organic / in transition to certified organic
2. Ecological or regenerative
3. Conventional
4. None of the above
98. Don't know
99. Prefer not to answer

S2C. What is the structure of your primary business?

1. A sole proprietorship
2. A partnership
3. A corporation
4. A co-operative
5. Other association of persons
6. Hobby farm/non-profit

66. Other, please specify: __________________
99. Prefer not to answer

S3. For how many years have you been an owner/manage of [S2A recall] farm business/enterprise?

Manager refers to controlling the decisions to produce and invest in a farm business.

1. One year or less
2. Two to three years
3. Four to five years
4. Six to nine years [end survey]
5. Ten years or more [end survey]

99. Prefer not to answer [end survey]

DISCLOSURE CONSENT

Comments are a valuable part of the survey. To help us protect privacy when survey results are published, we recommend that you avoid personalizing your comments.

Q4. Do you consent to disclosure (i.e., share) all your potentially identifiable open-ended comments to the Ministry of Agriculture?

1. Yes, I consent to disclosure my comments to the Ministry of Agriculture
2. No, I do not consent to disclose my comments to the Ministry of Agriculture

SECTION A: PERSONAL BACKGROUND

A1. Which of the following statements applies to you? Select all that apply.

1. I was raised on a farm and continue to farm with my family.
2. I was raised on a farm and I am now farming on my own.
3. I was employed by a farming business before managing my own farming business.
4. I was not raised on a farm, but am now farming (first generation).
5. Farming is my second career.
6. I joined my spouse who was farming.
7. My parents were raised on a farm, but are no longer farming.

8. I have close relatives that are farming.
9. I was involved in agricultural extracurricular activities as a young person (e.g., 4H, horseback riding, young farmers).
10. I was raised mostly in an urban environment.
11. I was raised mostly in a rural environment.
12. I have taken university or college courses/programs in agriculture.
66. Other, please specify: ___________________
99. Prefer not to answer

A2. How many years of experience did you have in [S2A recall] prior to owning or managing your current [S2A recall] business/enterprise?

Formal/informal experience could include employment, education, or family/life experience.

1. Less than one year
2. __________ years
3. No previous experience
99. Prefer not to answer

A3A. Were you born in Canada?

1. Yes [Go to B1A]
2. No
99. Prefer not to answer [Go to B1A]

A3B. How long have you lived in Canada?

1. _________ years
99. Prefer not to answer

A3C. What is your residency status?

1. Canadian citizen
2. Permanent resident
3. Temporary work permit
99. Prefer not to answer

SECTION B: PRIMARY FARMING BUSINESS

The following questions relate to your current **primary** farm business.

B1A. What is the postal code of the [S2A recall] farm business/enterprise you own or manage?

1. __________ (A1A1A1)
99. Prefer not to answer

B1B. [If B1A=99] Within which region of BC is the farm business/enterprise you own or manage?

1. Vancouver Island/Coast
2. Lower Mainland/Southwest
3. Thompson-Okanagan
4. Kootenay
5. Cariboo
6. North Coast
7. Nechako
8. Northeast
99. Prefer not to answer

B2. Is your farmland or [S2A recall] farm business multi-generational? That is, the farm/farmland has been owned and/or operated by your family for more than one generation?

1. Yes
2. No
99. Prefer not to answer

B3. How many acres are you actively using for your farm operation?

1. ________ acres
99. Prefer not to answer

B4. In which markets do you sell your products? Select all that apply.

1. Domestic markets
2. Export markets
3. Supply managed markets
4. Auctions
66. Other markets, such as through contracts, brokers, or elevators. Please specify: __________
99. Prefer not to answer

B5. [If B4=1] Which sales channels do you use to sell your products domestically? Select all that apply.

1. Wholesale distribution
2. Retail distribution
3. Direct sales to consumers
4. Co-operative
66. Other channels, please specify: __________
99. Prefer not to answer

B6A. Do you currently own the farmland you manage?

1. Yes
2. No
99. Prefer not to answer

B6B. [If B6A=1] How did you come to own this farmland? Select all that apply.

1. Land was advertised for sale
2. Purchased from acquaintance/family
3. Purchased with a mortgage
4. Purchased outright
5. Purchased using grants
6. Purchased using loans or gifts from family
7. Lease-to-own
8. Land was a gift/inheritance
9. Certificate of Possession, if on reserve land
66. Other, please specify: __________
99. Prefer not to answer

B7A. [If B6A=2] Do you currently lease the farmland you manage?

1. Yes
2. No
99. Prefer not to answer

B7B. [If B7A=1] How did you come to lease this farmland? Select all that apply.

1. Land was advertised for lease
2. Leased from acquaintance/family
3. Land matching program (e.g., BC Land Matching Program delivered by Young Agrarians)
4. Signed a written lease agreement
66. Other, please specify: __________
99. Prefer not to answer

B7C. [If B7B=4] How long is your current lease agreement?

1. __________ (number of months/years)
99. Prefer not to answer

B7D. [If B7A=2] You indicated that you do not currently own or lease any farmland. On what land do you currently operate your [S2 recall] business?

1. Family land
2. Other, please specifiy: ____________________

99. Prefer not to answer

B8A. [If B6A=2] Do you plan to purchase the farmland you currently manage, or other farmland, at some point in the next 5 years? Select all that apply.

1. Yes, I plan to purchase the farmland I currently manage
2. Yes, I plan to purchase farmland that I do not currently manage
3. No

99. Prefer not to answer

B8B. [If B8A=2] Where do you plan to purchase the farmland?

1. In your current region
2. Outside your current region (in province)
3. Outside of British Columbia

99. Prefer not to answer

SECTION C: BARRIERS

The next set of questions relates to barriers that you currently face with regards to your farm business or new enterprise.

C1. On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is Strongly Disagree and 5 is Strongly Agree, to what extent do you agree that the following were barriers to your farming/ranching business?

Barriers	*Strongly Disagree 1*	*2*	*3*	*4*	*Strongly Agree 5*	*Prefer not to answer*
A. Affordability of landownership						
B. Affordability of land leasing						
C. Lack of appropriate farmland in your region (size, quality, location, infrastructure, etc.)						
D. Land use and zoning regulations						
E. Difficulty negotiating adequate tenure agreement with landowners						
F. Lack of access to capital/credit/other sources of financing						
G. Lack of on-farm housing						

H. Lack of access to abattoir or processing facilities						
I. Lack of on-farm storage facilities						
J. Lack of access to farmers market(s), wholesale markets, or distribution						
K. Distance to market						
L. Food safety regulations						
M. Difficulty in entering supply-managed markets (i.e., access to quota)						
N. Marketing board regulations/policies						
O. Lack of access to farm production-related training						
P. Lack of mentors						
Q. Lack of access to farm business-related training (marketing, accounting, etc.)						
R. Lack of community or social support in your area						
S. Lack of reliable, skilled labour						
T. Lack of grants for small farm businesses						

SECTION D: SUPPORTS

The following set of questions relate to programs, services, or sources of information you have accessed.

D1. Please indicate whether you have accessed the following supports or sources of information:

Support/Source of Information	*Used*	*Never Used*	*Prefer not to answer*
A. Incentives for landowners to sell or rent land to new farmers			
B. Land access resources (e.g., land access guides, how to lease agreement templates, etc.)			
C. More flexible land use/zoning regulations			
D. Farm transfer/succession planning programs			
E. Farmland protection programs (e.g., land reserves, banks, trusts)			

F. Land-linking programs (connecting landowners to farmers seeking land)			
G. Shared initiatives (e.g., equipment sharing, collaborative marketing or distribution, shared sourcing, etc.)			
H. Insurance programs for various scales and models			
I. Income stabilization for farmers in start-up phase			
J. Agricultural infrastructures (e.g., abattoirs, machinery co-ops, other)			
K. Direct marketing support and promotion (e.g., CSA networks, farmers markets, networking with chefs/wholesale purchasers, etc.)			
L. Scale appropriate food safety regulations			
M. Local food procurement legislation			
N. Micro-loans and micro-grant government programs			
O. Development support for co-operatives			
P. Alternative financing (e.g., crowdfunding, micro-loans, community economic development investment, etc.)			
Q. Government loan and grant programs			
R. Farmer-to-farmer mentorship programs			
S. Informal mentorship by another farmer			
T. Curriculum in primary and secondary schools to promote farming as a career			
U. On-farm training (paid/unpaid apprenticeships and internships)			
V. Farm workshops, field days, farm tours			
W. New farmer networking forums (online and in-person)			
X. Workshops and/or conferences from NGOs			
Y. Incubator farms or farmer schools			
Z. Online educational resources (e.g., webinars, blogs, etc.)			
AA. Specialist consultations (e.g., agrologist, livestock or horticultural specialist)			

Now I would like to ask your opinion about the importance of the supports previously mentioned.

D2. On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is Not Important At All and 5 is Very Important, how important are each of the following supports to pursuing farm business?

Support/Source of Information	*Not Important At All 1*	*2*	*3*	*4*	*Very Important 5*	*Prefer not to answer*

A. Incentives for landowners to sell or rent land to new farmers						
B. Land access resources (e.g., land access guides, how to lease agreement templates, etc.)						
C. More flexible land use/zoning regulations						
D. Farm transfer/succession planning programs						
E. Farmland protection programs (e.g., land reserves, banks, trusts)						
F. Land-linking programs (connecting landowners to farmers seeking land)						
G. Shared initiatives (e.g., equipment sharing, collaborative marketing or distribution, shared sourcing, etc.)						
H. Insurance programs for various scales and models						
I. Income stabilization for farmers in start-up phase						
J. Agricultural infrastructures (e.g., abattoirs, machinery co-ops, other)						
K. Direct marketing support and promotion (e.g., CSA networks, farmers markets, networking with chefs/wholesale purchasers, etc.)						
L. Scale appropriate food safety regulations						
M. Local food procurement legislation						
N. Micro-loans and micro-grant government programs						
O. Development support for co-operatives						
P. Alternative financing (e.g., crowdfunding, micro-loans, community economic development investment, etc.)						
Q. Government loan and grant programs						
R. Farmer-to-farmer mentorship programs						
S. Informal mentorship by another farmer						
T. Curriculum in primary and secondary schools to promote farming as a career						
U. On-farm training (paid/unpaid apprenticeships and internships)						
V. Farm workshops, field days, farm tours						

W. New farmer networking forums (online and in-person)						
X. Workshops and/or conferences from NGOs						
Y. Incubator farms or farmer schools						
Z. Online educational resources (e.g., webinars, blogs, etc.)						
AA. Specialist consultations (e.g., agrologist, livestock or horticultural specialist)						
BB. Government extension services						
CC. Workshops and/or conferences from governments						
DD. College and/or university agricultural programs or courses						

D3. Thinking about your experience entering farming, what was the most significant barrier you faced?

1. [List all barriers from C1 that were given a 4 or 5]
66. Other, please specify: ____________________
0. Did not face any barriers [Go to E1]
99. Prefer not to answer [Go to E1]

D4. What supports could have helped you overcome this barrier?

1. ____________________
99. Prefer not to answer

SECTION E: DEMOGRAPHICS

The last set of questions is about you, and will allow us to get a good picture of what entering farming is like for people from various backgrounds.

E1. In which year were you born?

1. ______
99. Prefer not to answer

E2. With which gender do you identify?

1. Man
2. Woman
3. Non-binary
66. Prefer to self-describe:
99. Prefer not to answer

E3. What is the highest level of formal education that you have attained?

1. Less than high school
2. High school diploma or equivalent
3. Some college or university
4. Completed college diploma or certificate (including trade apprenticeships)
5. Completed undergraduate degree (Bachelors)
6. Completed post-graduate degree (Masters, PhD)
99. Prefer not to answer

The BC Ministry of Agriculture supports inclusiveness and increased representation of target and underrepresented groups, such as new entrants, youth, women, persons with a disability, and Indigenous Peoples. By providing responses to the following question, you are helping to improve the delivery of targeted programming.

E4. Do you identify as an Indigenous person? If yes, select all that apply.

1. First Nations (Status or Non-Status)
2. Métis
3. Inuk (Inuit)
4. No
99. Prefer not to answer

E5. Disabilities are defined provincially, federally, and at the UN. Generally disabilities refer to impairments that interact with barriers in ways that keep people from fully and effectively participating in society on an equal basis with others.

Disabilities can:

- Be physical, mental, sensory, cognitive, communicative, etc.
- Be permanent, temporary, or episodic.

- Be visible or invisible.
- Include difficulties hearing or seeing even with aids (i.e., hearing aids, cochlear implants, corrective lenses).

Barriers can include:

- Attitudes, architecture, communications, sensory information, systems, or technology.

Do you have a condition that is a disability (including disorders, syndromes, injuries, etc.)?

1. Yes
2. Sometimes
3. No

99. Prefer not to answer

E6. Do you consider yourself to be a member of a visible minority group?

Members of a visible minority group are persons (other than Indigenous Peoples) who identify as having ancestral/ethnic origin from cultures such as, but not limited to, the ones below:

Examples of visible minority groups include, but are not limited to: African (Black African, African Afro-Caribbean, Indo-Caribbean, Black Canadian), East Asian (Chinese, Fijian, Japanese, Korean, Polynesian), South Asian/Indo-Pakistani (Bangladesh, Indian from India, Nepali, Pakistani, Sri Lankan), South East Asian (Burmese, Cambodian/Kampuchean, Filipino, Indonesian, Laotian, Malaysian, Thai, Vietnamese), West Asian and Middle Eastern (Afghan, Arab, Armenian, Egyptian, Iranian, Iraqi, Jordanian, Libyan, North African Arab, Turkish, Lebanese, Palestinian, Syrian), Latin American, or Pacific Islander.

1. Yes
2. No

99. Prefer not to answer

E7. Do you have any children? Select all that apply.

1. Yes, I have children under the age of 18 who reside in my home
2. Yes, I have children over the age of 18 who reside in my home
3. Yes, I have children under the age of 18 who do not reside in my home

4. Yes, I have children over the age of 18 who do not reside in my home
5. No
99. Prefer not to answer

E8. In 2023, what was the estimated total gross farm revenue (before expenses) of this operation?

1. $0 to $4,999
2. $5,000 to $49,999
3. $50,000 and over
99. Prefer not to answer

E9. In 2023, what was the estimated total farm operating expenses?

1. $0 to $4,999
2. $5,000 to $49,999
3. $50,000 and over
99. Prefer not to answer

E10. In 2023, what percentage of your household annual income would you estimate comes from your farm business?

1. None
2. 1% to 4.99%
3. 5% to 9.99%
4. 10% to 24.99%
5. 25% to 49.99%
6. 50% to 74.99%
7. 75% to 100%
99. Prefer not to answer

SECTION F: FOCUS GROUP RECRUITMENT

As part of this study, we will be conducting an online focus group to explore in further detail some of the feedback received through the survey.

The focus groups will take place in January and February, and will last about two hours. The focus groups will take place over three days, where participants will log in at their convenience to participate in a moderated discussion about starting out as a farmer in BC. Focus group participants will be compensated for their participation.

F1A. Would you be interested in taking part in this focus group?

1. Yes
2. No [end survey]

F1B. Please provide your name and contact information, so that we can contact you to participate in the focus group.

Please be assured that your personal information will be used solely for the purposes of contacting you to participate in the focus group, and will not be linked to your survey responses in anyway.

First Name:	________________
Last Name:	________________
Email Address:	________________
Telephone Number:	________________

CLOSING INFORMATION

THANK YOU FOR COMPLETING THE 2024 NEW ENTRANT NEEDS ASSESSMENT SURVEY

[If F1A=1] We will contact you shortly to provide further information about the focus group, to confirm and arrange your participation.

The information in this survey is collected under Section 26 (a), (c), and (e) of the ***Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*** (FOIPPA). It is collected and kept confidential in accordance with the ***Statistics Act*** and only used for statistical and research purposes. When survey results are published, your responses will be combined with the responses of others so that you cannot be identified.

Questions about the survey itself?

Please contact BC Stats at BCStats.SurveyMail3@gov.bc.ca

Contact information for questions about the FOIPPA, access and privacy:

Beth Collins, Executive Director, Privacy and Legislation
BC Stats, PO Box 9410 Stn Prov Govt
Victoria, BC V8W 9V1
Telephone: 1-888-447-4427

Factground

High Level

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

Operations

Data Collection Method	Online Survey
Fielding Window / Dates	January 3 – February 15, 2024

Focus Groups

Participants	19 individuals
Focus Group Dates	February 13 – 16, 2024

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 BC Stats' Executive Director.

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