

# The BC Land Matching Program: Explained and Evaluated

## Researchers

Dr. Hannah Wittman, Professor, Centre for Sustainable Food Systems, UBC

Véronik Campbell, Academic Programs Manager, Centre for Sustainable Food Systems, UBC

## Project Funders and Partners

The B.C. Land Matching Program evaluation was funded by the BC Ministry of Agriculture and supported by the Young Agrarians and the Centre for Sustainable Food Systems at UBC Farm.

## About this Brief

This research brief was prepared by the BC Food Web team, based on: Wittman, H., Campbell, V. (2020) B.C. Land Matching Program Evaluation. Centre for Sustainable Food Systems at UBC Farm

## Key Findings

- Land matching offers a key opportunity to link new farmers to arable land.
- In its first three years of implementation the BCLMP served 1,600 individuals engaging with the program and facilitated 55 land matches.
- On average, it takes 6 to 7 months to create a successful land match.
- Essential aspects of an effective land match are a strong agricultural community network, availability of region-specific resources, aligned goals of land seeker and landholder, and business and legal literacy.
- 66 percent of land seekers and 63 percent of landholders indicated that their farming operation and land was more stable after matching through the BCLMP.
- The BCLMP should continue to deliver education and business resources, track long term outcomes, and develop programming to meet new entrants' identified needs.

## Introduction

The agricultural sector in British Columbia (BC) is facing a farm renewal crisis, and the long-term viability of the sector depends on attracting and retaining a new generation of farmers. From 2011 to 2016, BC lost over 2,000 farms; the average age of farmers in BC is 56.3, and just nine percent of farmers in BC are 35 years of age and under.<sup>1</sup> Access to land is consistently identified as the number one challenge for new farmers in Canada. Land matching programs are an opportunity to lower the barrier to entry created by the high cost of land. Young Agrarians (YA) is an organization and educational resource network for new and young farmers. It delivers the BC Land Matching Program (BCLMP) as a core component of the YA "Grow a Farmer" Strategy. Since 2016, the BCLMP has piloted and expanded land matching and business support and referral services to new farmers looking for land to farm and to landholders interested in finding someone to farm their land. BC's regions vary greatly, with far more expensive land in the south, especially the Lower Mainland and Okanagan, but greater market access in contrast to Central and Northern BC. The program provides regionally-specific support to address these differences.

The primary **objectives** of the BCLMP are to:

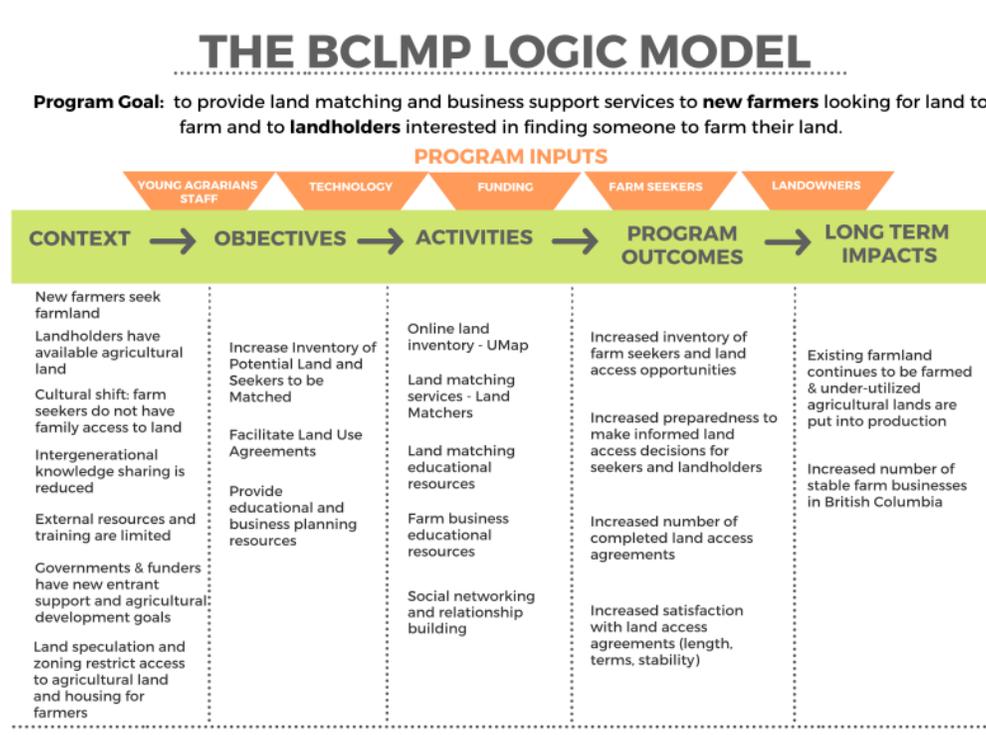
- Increase the inventory of potential land and farmland seekers to be matched;
- Facilitate land agreements; and
- Provide educational and business planning resources.

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1 Statistics Canada. Table 32-10-0442-01 Farm operators classified by number of operators per farm and age,

## The BCLMP Logic Model

A logic model is a visual aid that illustrates a program's goals, inputs, objectives, activities, and expected outcomes in a specific context. This model describes a pathway to the desired long-term impacts of the BCLMP: to grow the agricultural sector in British Columbia by ensuring that existing and underutilized farmland continues to be farmed by future generations of farmers.



## Methods

From August to December 2019, the research team conducted an evaluation of the BCLMP to determine how the outcomes of the BCLMP are aligning with the needs of new entrant farmers. The evaluation looked at the factors contributing to successful land matches, and identified areas of potential growth for the future. The evaluation considered short, medium, and long-term outcomes, as well as contextual factors affecting those outcomes.

## Results

Evaluation results were recorded across several primary **outcomes** defined as constituting BCLMP "success":

- Increased inventory of land seekers and land access opportunities;
- Increased preparedness to make informed land access decisions for land seekers and landholders; and,
- Increased number of, and satisfaction with, completed land access agreements.

The evaluation also considered the program's potential long-term impacts of maintaining a stable and actively farmed land base in B.C. The evaluation found promising growth in the number of matches, acres maintained or brought into production, improvements in farm stability, satisfaction with the program overall, and the development of a strong network of educational and farm business support program partners across the province.

Between 2016 and 2019, over 1,600 individuals engaged with the BCLMP, and the evaluation found strong increases in the inventory of land seekers and land opportunities, one of the main goals of the program. Activities contributing to the success of this goal include relationship-building and networking activities, land matching activities, and the ongoing development of the online UMAP tool, which hosts the land and farmer listing inventory.

Another key short-term outcome of the BCLMP is increased preparedness to make informed land access decisions for both land seekers and landholders. The activities most directly contributing to the success of this goal for land seekers were online resources, including lease and license templates, and land matcher services. For landholders, the top two activities were matchmaking services and land matcher support for vision and needs assessment. In addition, referrals played a crucial role in successfully preparing participants for effective matches. These included referrals to other land access educational resources, webinars on farm business development, network coordinators, and more. In general, respondents indicated a desire for increased opportunities to develop legal literacy, as well as access to business development services.

The research team identified **key recommendations** to improve the program and its outcomes.:

- Agricultural investment programs and support services in British Columbia should consider the unique context of cultural and generational shifts in future farming populations and restricted access to farmland for new entrants. In response, programs and support should invest in innovative educational, business development, and land access models to sustain the future farming sector in B.C.
- Support continued investment in a provincially managed land matching program, on a long-term (five years) funding model, to allow the necessary program maturation time to create regionally-based support networks, relationships, and a more extensive inventory of seekers and land opportunities.
- Clearly define necessary staff roles for provincial program expansion, including support for regionally coordinated land matching activities, business and legal training experts able to provide expanded reach for targeted one-on-one support to new entrants, and marketing/outreach staff. Consider new ways to market land access programs to broad constituencies, including current farmers, new entrants, and new immigrants to B.C.
- Engage with new entrant and sustainable agriculture training programs at UBC, KPU, UFV, and TRU to advance business and legal literacy education and curriculum enhancements, with specific resources developed for the range of diversified farming sectors, production models, and market conditions present across B.C.'s agricultural regions.
- Develop webinars for legal literacy and business planning in collaboration with the Young Agrarians Grow-a-Farmer-Strategy.
- Support new programming with lenders to support financial investment in farm businesses operating under a non-ownership land access model.
- Support new programming for public investment in capital infrastructure on shared or leased farmland (e.g., housing, irrigation, shared equipment, mobile greenhouses, etc.).
- Track program outcomes on a three- to five-year cycle, balancing assessment of short, and medium-term outcomes.
- Track program long-term impacts on a 10-year cycle.

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