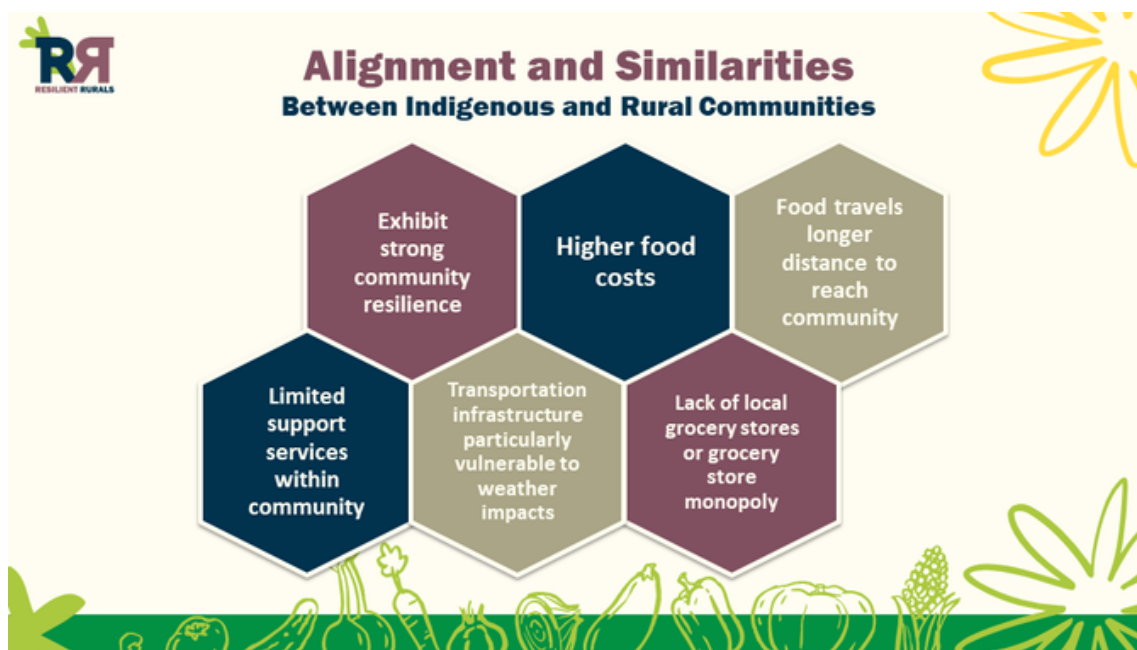


THE CURRENT FOOD LANDSCAPE

TRANSCRIPTION AND NOTES

0:00 Welcome back. Previously, we defined food sovereignty and the unique role it can play in addressing Canada's food insecurity. In Module 2, we will explore the current food landscape in Alberta. We will touch on topics such as the shared challenges faced by rural and indigenous communities, the role Canadian agriculture plays in our economy, and finally, the barriers that exist when revitalising rural communities.



0:33 Rural and Indigenous communities have a lot of differences. However, they also share significant food insecurity factors, including:

- Higher food costs
- Food that travels longer distances to reach communities, which can increase spoilage and cost
- There is often a lack of local grocery stores, which can impact the nutritional value of food. Or these communities might only have one grocery store, which can exacerbate those high prices.
- Transportation infrastructure is particularly vulnerable to weather impacts and due to a lower population density, fixing and maintaining transportation routes is often considered lower priority.
- Limited support services exist within each community, which can reduce their ability to respond to different challenges.
- And finally, both rural and indigenous communities exhibit strong community resilience, which is a protective factor against food insecurity.

It is because of these shared food insecurity factors that we believe we can generate shared food insecurity solutions.

1:48 Canada has a strong, agri-food industry, which generates significant revenue (1). Despite generating nearly \$90 billion in 2022, the reality is that the number of Canadian farms is decreasing, as industrial farms buy independently-owned property (1). One aspect of this is the urbanisation trend in Canada.



Canadian Agriculture Industry

The Canadian agri-food industry consists of primary agriculture, food and beverage processors, and food retailers/wholesalers:



Primary agriculture consists of **189,897 farms on 6.2% of Canada's land area.**



Over the last 50 years, the **average farm size has doubled** due to consolidation and technological advances.



In 2022, Canadian farms **generated a record \$87.7 billion.**



The largest **10% of farms generated 2/3 of this revenue (\$57.9 billion).**



In Alberta, their **top 3 livestock commodities totaled to \$11.1 billion** (cattle and calves, canola, wheat).



Over 80% of Canadians live in urban centres, making Canada more urbanised than the United States, France and Germany (2). Despite agriculture operating as one of its main industries, Alberta has urbanised significantly since 1901; in 1901, only 25% of Alberta's population lived in urban centres and a mere 115 years later, 83.5% of Albertans now live in large towns and cities (3). The discovery of oil and fossil fuels, industrialisation, and World War II all played a significant role in driving Alberta's urban boom (3).

This pattern of industrialisation and urbanisation in Alberta has resulted in significant depopulation of rural areas, which places rural municipalities at a significant disadvantage due to a reduced tax base and greater responsibilities dedicated delegated by the provincial government (4). These challenges can make it difficult for small towns and rural communities in Alberta to meet their infrastructure needs or invest in services to draw in new residents (4).



Farmers Wanted: Alberta's Agriculture Future



By 2033, farms, nurseries, and greenhouses **will need 24,000 workers.**



66% of producers do not have a succession plan in place.



In 2029, an **estimated 19,600 jobs in our agricultural industry are at risk of going unfilled.**



Farmland and producers should be on the frontlines of climate adaptation, but **we don't have enough people working in the industry** to make that happen.



3:25 Rural communities are facing a small tax base, which reduces their capacity to adapt, our farm, nursery, and greenhouse sector is also facing a significant lack of workers (5). Farmers are growing older and many do not have plans for who will take over their farms when they retire (5). Often these family farms will be absorbed by industrial farms. While farmers and other producers could play a significant role in stewarding the land, protecting ecosystems, and implementing carbon capture technologies, the reality is, there's not enough workers to fill these necessary positions (5).

The lack of a labour force means that sometimes crops are wasted, farmers are overworked and profits are lost (6). While temporary foreign workers have been hired for decades to fill this labour gap, even that is not enough to respond to this shortage (6). Additionally, as more of the agriculture workforce nears retirement, the existing worker pool is growing even smaller (7). The seasonality of agriculture, lack of required skills, long hours, distance from urban centres and competition with a high-paying energy industry are all factors that contribute to lack of interest in agriculture positions (7). Increased awareness among Canadian workers is needed to fill these positions and increase farm sustainability long term (6,7).



Rural Depopulation and De-Skilling





- As children of rural farmers moved to urban centers, farming, cooking, and preservation **skills were lost over time in favour of convenience.**
- COVID-19 led to an **increased interest in traditional gardening, cooking, and preservation skills.** Social media groups based around gardening, from-scratch cooking, and food preservation are becoming increasingly popular.
- In many Canadian cities, **people are moving back to small towns and rural communities.** This trend has not been seen in Alberta.

4:48 We can hope that as more people join the agricultural industry, this will also lead to more people moving to rural communities. Overwhelmingly, rural depopulation has emerged as a barrier to growing rural communities and to meeting these agricultural worker requirements. As Albertans moved to urban centres in the 20th century (3), the skills that would have opened up agricultural careers were not passed on. Additionally, personal food skills such as how to grow your own food, cook from scratch, or preserve food for winter also diminished over time (8). This was a natural pattern as the convenience of grocery stores and commercially available foods meant people did not need the labour-intensive skills that they had in the past. However, it also means that if there is a disruption to that convenience, people may not have the skills to adapt.

Luckily, these skills are not forever lost. Think back to grocery store shelves. In the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, red yeast and baking supplies were nearly impossible to find! This move back to cooking from scratch, preservation and home gardening can be seen in the growth of social media pages and groups targeting these skill sets. Additionally, many Canadian cities, such as Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver, lost residents to small towns and rural areas, reflecting a potential for revitalising rural Canada with the help of remote and hybrid working conditions (9). While this pattern was not reflected in Alberta, the rising cost of housing in metropolitan areas may push residents towards affordable, smaller communities (9).



Barriers to Rural Revitalization

-  **Lack of reliable high-speed internet** impacts educational opportunities, business expansion, and introduction of new technologies.
-  **Difficulties attracting and retaining skilled talent** and limited skill development opportunities for residents.
-  **Limited funds to apply towards new infrastructure, affordable housing, and community revitalization.** Many communities cannot afford to build and maintain recreation centers that would draw in new residents.
-  **Limited staff time and/or skill to apply for potential funding.** Even when applying, small communities are often overlooked due to smaller populations.
-  **Limited ability to build sustainable and climate-adapted strategies** into community infrastructure and operations.

6:28 Rural Canada adds vibrancy, resilience and innovation to the Canadian fabric and contributes about 30% of the overall GDP (10). However, drawing new residents, skilled workers and youth is a continuous challenge (10).

For example, high-speed internet has swiftly become a required resource for those pursuing further education, and rural communities often have limited Internet speed and bandwidth (10). Internet speeds can also act as a barrier to retaining youth and for the implementation of new technologies and businesses (10). By building stronger Internet infrastructure across the country, the Canadian government will be able to open up new opportunities and ensure rural communities can better access additional resources (10). A skilled and talented workforce can also be difficult to attract rural communities, as is represented by the decrease in healthcare services in many communities across Alberta (10). Training the existing rural population is a key, as is ensuring that rural communities are enticing enough for other skilled workers to relocate there. This often requires stronger infrastructure such as a recreation center, library, or community events (10). Unfortunately, due to a diminished tax base and reduced capacity to apply for funding, rural communities simply do not have the funds to build new infrastructure and can already struggle to maintain aging infrastructure (10). Without addressing the lack of services and the challenges that we're all communities face, rural revitalization is difficult. Finally, as rural communities will likely face the brunt of climate change impacts while lacking the funds to address these risks, rural sustainability and climate adaptation in these communities is significantly limited (10). These same

climate risks expose vulnerabilities in the rural food system, exacerbating already limited choices and high costs.

Visit resilientrurals.com to learn more about how we help rural communities adapt to climate risk.

8:33 That concludes Module 2: The Current Food Landscape. To learn more about this topic, please review our references page.

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