

Starting a Community Farm Guide

Are you interested in farming with other people?

Would you like to support a sustainable food supply in your community?

Do you want to make sure your farm remains farmland after you retire?

If you want to farm, are concerned about farmland disappearing, and want to help build healthy, local food systems, you may want to be part of the Community Farms Program.

This guide describes the process of starting a community farm for:

- A. Future farmers (individuals and groups who want to farm in community)
- B. Community groups who want to support farmers and community farming
- C. Farmland holders with farmland that they want farmed and/ or shared

In addition, this guide provides an outline for acquiring and securing farmland for community farming:

- D. Acquire and secure farmland

What is the Community Farms Program?

The Community Farms Program brings together landowners, farmers, local communities, and resources to develop and support community farms in BC.

The goal of the Community Farms Program is to actively secure farmland for present and future food production. We do this by:

- Facilitating farmland securement for local food production
- Helping new farmers access affordable land
- Providing an information hub of farm-related governance models, best practices, management tools, and training
- Assisting a network of farmers, landowners, local communities, and resources to support community farm development in BC

What is a community farm?

A community farm is a multi-functional farm where the land is held “in trust” for community rather than owned privately. A community group or cooperative governs land use agreements, and agricultural uses of the land are shared by a community of farmers. The primary focus of a community farm is local food production using sustainable agricultural practices. Land holders, land managers, and farmers work together by mutual agreement. Farmers are housed on or near the land.

A. Future farmers

On a community farm, farmers farm cooperatively and share agricultural uses of the land.

Decisions about land-use allocations and general management principles are made through the development and implementation of a Whole Farm Plan. This document describes the characteristics and capacity of a farm, and identifies resources and opportunities to be an economically successful community farm with diverse agricultural, ecological, and social activities.

The Whole Farm Plan defines each farmer's relationship with the farm and other farmers. Individual farm business plans reflect the Whole Farm Plan, and are compatible with all other farm business plans.

If you want to farm with other people:

- Review Community Farms Program criteria (see Community Farms Program Definitions and Criteria).

Do you want to make a commitment to the Community Farms Program?

If YES:

- Go to following list

If NO:

- Find available vacant land (for example, see Linking Land and Future Farmers, SOIL)

- Complete Community Farms Farmer survey. Go to http://97.75.194.101:82/farmer_survey/.
- Get farming experience (volunteer, apprentice, work, start a garden).
- Find a mentor(s).
- Find people interested in joining a community farming support group or business. Go to Section B, Community groups.
- Locate land. See Section D.
- Do a test run by working together on a project or growing food together.
- Build business and financial skills. For more information, see <http://www.communityfarms.ca/resources/busResources.shtml>.
- Collaborate with the farm's community group and other farmers to develop a Whole Farm Plan for the land. Go to Section B Community groups.
- Build a farm business plan in accordance with the farm's Whole Farm Plan. For more information, see the Whole Farm Plan Guide (<http://ffcf.bc.ca/programs/farm/cf/planGuide.html>) and Business Planning for Small-Scale Community Farming Enterprises (<http://ffcf.bc.ca/programs/farm/cf/business-plan.html>).
- Grow and sell.

B. Community groups

In the Community Farms Program, a community group is responsible for managing what happens on the land, rather than a private individual. The community group governs land use agreements. Farmers are responsible for managing and operating their farm business(es).

If you want to work with a group to support community farming:

- Review the Community Farms Program criteria (see Community Farms Program Definitions and Criteria).

Do you want to make a commitment to the Community Farms Program?

If YES:

- Go to following list

If NO:

- Find available vacant land (for example, see Linking Land and Future Farmers, SOIL)

Please refer to the Whole Farm Plan Guide for detailed information on how to develop and work with a community group (<http://ffcf.bc.ca/programs/farm/cf/planGuide.html>).

Please refer to A Guide to Farmland Access Agreements for detailed information about farmland agreements (<http://ffcf.bc.ca/programs/farm/cf/laa.html>).

- Contact Community Farms Program staff and determine the support you need (resources and information, facilitation, administrative support, recording). Call 604-730-0450, or email sustain@ffcf.bc.ca.
- Find other people interested in supporting a community farm.
- Identify all farm stakeholders and who needs to be represented in the community group. For more information, see the Whole Farm Plan Guide.
- Decide how you will communicate with your group and with all farm stakeholders.
- Define the vision, purpose, and terms of reference for your group. For more information, see the Whole Farm Plan Guide.
- Establish meeting schedules and meeting agreements.
- Choose and establish a structure for your group (registered society or cooperative, other).
- Complete legal documents for your group (bylaws, rules, incorporation, registration).
- Determine how your group will work together. (style, decision-making, decision records and communication, representation/ membership and application, limitations, notification, committees)
- Locate and ensure availability of land (land cooperatives, municipal (including parkland), institutional, private (lease). See Section D.
- Collaborate with farmers and farm stakeholders to develop a Whole Farm Plan for the land. For more information, see the Whole Farm Plan Guide.

- Set up agreements between farm stakeholders and/ or external individuals and agencies (see A Guide to Farmland Access Agreements and the Whole Farm Plan Guide):
 - Land-use:
 - Farming
 - Public access
 - Community engagement
 - Education and training
 - Conservation
 - Other
 - Housing
List housing:

 - Farm buildings
List buildings:

 - Define policies for the community farm and group (membership, communications, privacy and confidentiality, growth/ population, pets, guests/ visitors, substance use)
 - Water use
 - Utilities
 - Farmer equity
 - Farmer retirement
 - Other
- Identify indicators of progress for your group.

C. Farmland Holders

Farmland may be owned privately, or by land cooperatives, land trusts or governments that wish to share or transfer management and care of the land to individuals and groups for active farming.

Many farmers who no longer want to farm don't have family members to continue, but do want their farmland to remain in food production after they retire. Land cooperatives may be owned by members who do not want to farm directly and who want to invite farmers to operate farm businesses on their farm. Land trusts with a mandate to protect farmland may acquire farmland by donation, purchase, or lease, and need help to farm and maintain it. Municipalities or other levels of government may have farmland within their jurisdiction, and respond to inquiries from groups who want to farm it.

If you have farmland in your care and you want to share it and/ or protect it for farming:

- Review the Community Farms Program criteria (see Community Farms Program Definitions and Criteria).

Do you want to make a commitment to the Community Farms Program?

If YES:

- Go to following list

If NO:

- Find available vacant farmers (for example, see Linking Land and Future Farmers, SOIL)

- I want to own the farmland and bequeath it to my family.

Note: Privately owned farmland is beyond the scope of the Community Farms Program.

- I want to sell the farmland to a community farm group or cooperative:

- at appraised market value
- at reduced market value

- I want to donate the farmland to a:

- Community group or society
- Cooperative
- Land trust

- I want to lease the farmland to a:

- Community group or society
- Cooperative
- Land trust

See A Guide to Farmland Access Agreements (<http://ffcf.bc.ca/programs/farm/cf/laa.html>).

- I want these conditions applied to the farmland:
 - Life estate or life tenure
 - Covenant
 - Dissolution clause (distribution of land and assets upon dissolution of the recipient landholder)
 - Undivided conservation interest (purchase of conservation interest by land trust)
 - Other
- I want to participate in farming activities on the farmland:
 - As primary farmer with sole decision-making authority
 - As a member of a farming business (partnership, cooperative)
 - As a member of the farm's community group
 - As a mentor to the community farm
 - Other

Note: Primary farmers with sole decision-making authority are beyond the scope of the Community Farms Program.

D. Acquire and secure farmland

If you are a community farm group or farmer, you need to find and secure farmland for farming. You may be able to buy land as a group, or you may find suitable farmland that you can rent from a private owner or land cooperative, land trust or government.

When looking for land

There are several things to consider and keep in mind when you are looking for farmland. Think about:

- Land – How much do you need and where?
- Soil quality – What kind of soil/ terrain is best for the type of farming you want to do?
- Water access – What are your water needs for irrigation, livestock, and processing
- Proximity to markets – Where are your primary markets in relation to the land?
- Drainage – Are there drainage issues and how are they managed?
- Infrastructure and equipment – What do you need?

In addition, please see Section C, Landholders for a list of basic terms to clarify with any potential landholder.

When you find farmland

When you find land you think might be suitable, you need to learn some things about it to help you decide if and how to acquire it, whether you are renting or buying. The information you gather will also help your group develop your Whole Farm Plan once you have secured the land and are ready to farm.

The Whole Farm Plan Guide offers detailed procedures and information on completing an inventory and assessment (<http://ffcf.bc.ca/programs/farm/cf/planGuide.html>).

- Purchase the property **land title** from the Land Titles Office (\$15). The title will give you:
 - the legal description
 - the property identification number (PID)
 - the property address
 - any encumbrances (liens, covenants, or easements)
- Determine the **zoning** on the land.
 - Agricultural Land Reserve
 - Municipal, Regional District (for example, Agriculture, Rural Residential)
- Research the property's **legal and physical characteristics**. Much of this information can be found online, and you can also refer to the Whole Farm Plan Guide.
 - Farm status
 - Taxes
 - Property boundaries
 - Geology, soils, and topography (is it on a floodplain?)
 - Eco-zone (typical native plants)
 - Presence of fish/ red-listed species

- Find the **property's assessed value**.
 - If you own the property, you can receive detailed information about the property's assessed value from the BC Assessment Authority.
 - If you do not own the property, and have an account with Access Online, you can review the property's assessed value in comparison to other properties in the neighbourhood, but you will not be able to access a breakdown for land and buildings. See www.bconline.gov.bc.ca.

If you are buying land, you will need all this information. **Please find and use experts to help you negotiate the land purchase and fundraise.**

If you plan to rent

- List your needs and questions regarding the length of tenure and farmland tenure agreements.
- Talk about your needs and questions with the landowner, and ask them to describe theirs.
- Establish trust and good will with the landowner.
- Determine the type of agreement that best suits your situation. For more information, see A Guide to Farmland Access Agreements (<http://ffcf.bc.ca/programs/farm/cf/laa.html>).
- Decide which clauses are required and which are optional for your situation.
- Write an agreement that is fair for both parties, encourages sustainable practices, and can be amended if changes occur.
- A lease is the most secure type of agreement. If you are leasing an entire property, request that the lease be-registered on the land title. If the land sells, the lease goes with the title.
- If you want to lease a portion of a property, in order to avoid procedures with the ALR and local government, do not register a lease on the title, but ensure that length of tenure is a minimum of three years OR use a license agreement instead of a lease.
- Keep notes of emerging issues as they arise, then arrange to meet with the landlord a few times a year to discuss adjustments to your agreement if necessary. Do not let issues build and fester.

There are different considerations when arranging tenure on private or public land.

Renting private land

The land you want to farm may be owned by an individual, a cooperative, or a land trust. See Section C for a list of things to consider when entering into a tenure agreement with the landowner.

Ask the landowner about their:

- Long-term plans (donate and protect, bequeath to family, sell)
- Conditions (covenant, life estate)
- Ongoing participation in farming

Renting public land

The land you want to farm may be owned by a municipality or regional district, or be Crown land owned by the provincial or federal government.

- Approach the government with your interest.
 - Municipal/ regional district: Planning Department or Development Services
 - Province of BC: Integrated Land Management Branch. See Ministry of Agriculture and Lands web site for Extensive and Intensive agriculture policies and application process (http://www.al.gov.bc.ca/clad/land_prog_services/policies.html).
- Research the land online and on-site.
 - Conditions and limitations
 - Government agency's future plans