# Agricultural Land Tenure Systems: Implications for Farmland Succession, Access, Governance, and Food Systems Transformation

by

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**Abstract**

Farmland in Canada is undergoing significant transformation as rising land values, farmland consolidation, financialization, and barriers to farm succession increasingly challenge access to land for new and young farmers. These challenges are rooted within longer histories of colonial land dispossession and the imposition of private property systems. In response, a growing number of people and organizations are developing Agricultural Land Tenure Systems (ALTS) that seek to reimagine relationships of land ownership, access, governance, and stewardship. However, despite increasing interest in these models, little empirical research has documented their prevalence, diversity, and potential contributions within the Canadian context.

The overall objective of this research is to better understand the emergence and potential of ALTS in Canada as responses to contemporary challenges of farmland access, tenure security, and food systems transformation. This research addresses two key questions: (1) what ALTS currently exist in Canada, how are they defined and implemented, and how do they differ from conventional private ownership in terms of structure, governance, and goals?; and (2) what motivations, opportunities, and challenges shape the development and implementation of ALTS in Canada, and how do those involved in creating and managing these initiatives understand their potential contributions to farmland protection, succession, governance and access for new and young farmers?

This paper investigates these questions through two complementary research components in collaboration with the National Farmers Foundation. First, it develops an online national database of ALTS to identify and characterize the diversity of alternative farmland tenure arrangements currently operating across Canada. Second, this research examines the motivations, experiences, benefits, and challenges of organizations involved in ALTS through semi-structured interviews.

By documenting the emerging landscape of ALTS in Canada and examining the experiences of those building these models, this research contributes to broader conversations about farmland futures, food sovereignty, and alternative property relations. While ALTS alone cannot resolve the structural challenges facing Canadian agriculture, they provide important examples of how farmland can be governed differently. This research highlights the need for continued experimentation, institutional support, and policy innovation to strengthen more equitable and sustainable pathways for farmland access and food systems transformation.

Keywords: agricultural land tenure systems; farmland access; farmland succession; food sovereignty; agroecology; land governance

**Foreword**

This research paper is a key component of my Masters in Environmental Studies and directly aligns with the learning objectives outlined in my Plan of Study. My area of concentration, *Alternative Rural Land and Food Systems*, explores how relationships with land, agriculture, and food can be reimagined in response to contemporary social, environmental, and political challenges. This research contributes to that focus by examining Agricultural Land Tenure Systems (ALTS) in Canada, including how these emerging models challenge conventional approaches to farmland ownership, access, governance, and stewardship.

The paper fulfills multiple goals in my Plan of Study by integrating theory with community-engaged research. Specifically, it engages with the learning components of private property, food sovereignty, decolonization, and public education. Through examining alternative land tenure arrangements, this research critically explores how dominant systems of private property shape access to land and how alternative governance models create new possibilities for collective stewardship and community benefit. It also draws on food sovereignty and agroecological perspectives to consider how land access is connected to broader transformations of agricultural and food systems. A decolonial lens further situates these conversations within longer histories of Indigenous land dispossession and colonial property regimes.

This research also reflects the MES program's emphasis on connecting academic learning with engaged practice. Through my collaboration with the National Farmers Foundation and my work co-developing a national database of ALTS and conducting interviews with organizations across Canada, this project sought not only to analyze alternative models but also to contribute a resource that can support knowledge-sharing and public education. By documenting the experiences of those building these initiatives, this research aims to strengthen understanding of the opportunities and challenges associated with alternative approaches to farmland governance.

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I am especially grateful to my colleagues and collaborators at the National Farmers Foundation, including Dr. Annette Aurélie Desmarais, Dr. Jamie Baxter, and Glen Koroluk. From our initial connection and after identifying shared research interests, they generously brought me into their ongoing project, which ultimately became the foundation for this MRP. Working alongside them has been an incredibly formative experience and has shaped not only the direction of this research, but also my understanding of what community-engaged research can look like in practice. Being able to contribute to an applied, collaborative project grounded in real-world farmland initiatives made this work far more meaningful and connected to the communities and organizations involved.

I extend my deep appreciation to all of the farmers, organizers, and practitioners involved in agricultural land tenure systems who generously shared their time and experiences through interviews. Their openness and willingness to reflect on their work made this research possible. I was also fortunate to visit ten different farms identified through our ALTS database during this Master's program, allowing me to connect the research with the places, people, and practices at the centre of this work.

I am grateful to the Canadian Network of Community Land Trusts, the Common Ground Network, and the National Farmers Union for their support, knowledge-sharing, and opportunities for collaboration throughout this project.

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**AI disclaimer**

During the preparation of this MRP, the author utilized specific artificial intelligence tools to assist with data processing and language refinement. The tools were used as follows:

**Otter.ai**: This automated transcription tool was used to convert audio recordings of qualitative interviews into text documents. The author manually reviewed, edited, and verified all resulting transcripts against the original audio.

**DeepSeek (Generative AI):** This tool was used during the data analysis phase to assist with organizing and outlining preliminary sub-themes derived from the coded interview data. It was subsequently used as a language assistant for general proofreading and to improve the overall flow and clarity of this MRP.

The author reviewed, edited, and verified all AI-generated outputs and takes full responsibility for the content of this work.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

### 1.1 CANADA'S CURRENT AGRICULTURAL LANDSCAPE

Canada's agricultural system is deeply rooted in settler colonialism and racial injustice. Before European colonization, Indigenous Nations practiced diverse and complex land and food governance systems (Wittman & James, 2022). The history of Canadian agriculture is also marked by systemic racism, from blocked access to land beginning with the Black Loyalists in the eighteenth century (NFU, 2021) to the ongoing exploitation of racialized migrant farm workers through the Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP) and Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAWP) (Binford, 2019). The hegemony of predominantly white male settler farmers is maintained today through a racialized, colonial, and patriarchal social and legal order (Rotz, 2017).

Canada's current agricultural policy maximizes industrial agri-food production and commodity exports, which has led to a corresponding rise in agricultural inputs such as fertilizer and pesticides. Farmers are pressured into high-input, high-yield production systems, but the financial benefits increasingly flow to agribusiness corporations rather than farmers themselves (Qualman, 2019). As a result, Canadian farm debt has nearly doubled since 2000, reaching a record $106 billion, and most farm families have to rely on off-farm jobs, government subsidies, and other non-farm income to stay afloat (Qualman, 2019).

Canada is also losing farmland at an alarming rate. Between 2001 and 2021, the country's total farmland area shrank from 166.8 million acres to 153.7 million acres, a loss of 8%. At the same time, the number of farms declined by 23%, dropping from 246,923 farms in 2001 to 189,874 in 2021. This equates to a loss of roughly three farms per day over 20 years (Dyck, 2024). As small and mid-sized farms disappear, remaining farms are growing larger (the average size of a Canadian farm has nearly tripled over the past 70 years) (Dyck, 2024). At the same time, weak provincial legislation means that only 7% of Canada's prime agricultural land is protected by moderately strong policy frameworks (Connell, 2021). While laws such as Quebec's *Act Respecting the Preservation of Agricultural Land and Agricultural Activities* (1978), British Columbia's *Agricultural Land Reserve* (1973), and Ontario's *Greenbelt Act* (2005) offer some protection, farmland speculation, non-farm development, and resource extraction continue to threaten agricultural land (Connell, 2021).

Another significant trend shaping Canadian agriculture is the financialization of farmland, a process through which financial actors including hedge funds, private equity firms, pension funds, and wealthy individuals increasingly purchase agricultural land as an investment asset rather than primarily for agricultural production (Magnan & Sunley, 2017). In Saskatchewan, for example, the relaxation of

farmland ownership regulations in 2003 enabled investors to acquire more than 800,000 acres of farmland, often with the objective of generating rental income through leasing arrangements with independent farm operators while also benefiting from long-term land appreciation and capital gains (Magnan & Sunley, 2017). This growing separation between land ownership and agricultural production has raised concerns about land affordability, speculation, and barriers to farmland access for new and aspiring farmers.

Access and affordability are thus critical challenges. While 1 in 3 Canadians were farmers in the 1930s, today farmers make up just 1.7% of the population (National Farmers Union, 2021). Young farmers struggle with high land costs and debt, leading to insecure rental arrangements. Canada's farming population is aging, with the average age now 57, and only 12% of farms have a formal succession plan (National Farmers Union, 2021). This lack of planning, combined with a predicted unprecedented turnover of agricultural land across Canada in the coming decades, risks accelerating consolidation and increasing corporate control over agriculture. With an urgent need to build a resilient local food economy, it is clear that new approaches to farmland tenure and governance are needed, ones that facilitates equitable access for new and young farmers while working towards Indigenous, environmental, and social justice.

## 1.2 MY POSITIONALITY AS A RESEARCHER

My path to this research has developed over several years. After completing my bachelor's degree and returning to my hometown of Orillia, I became active in community organizing and activism around social and environmental justice. A significant part of this work included co-founding an anti-urban sprawl movement opposing the forced expansion of Orillia's urban boundary into surrounding townships, a process that threatened nearly a thousand acres of farmland and woodlands. During this period, I also began working on a small-scale agroecological farm, where I gained firsthand experience in sustainable agriculture, land-based education, and the structural challenges facing young and aspiring farmers. As a young woman entering agriculture without a farming background or access to family land, I also became increasingly aware of the gendered and intergenerational barriers that continue to shape who is able to farm, own land, and participate in agricultural decision-making. These experiences strengthened my interest in questions of land access, equity, and alternative approaches to farmland governance.

A particularly meaningful aspect of this journey has been involvement in Indigenous solidarity work, through which I have sought to better understand the histories of the land I call home. In the Orillia region, agriculture has long been intertwined with the displacement of both the Wendat and Anishinaabe peoples, including through the injustices of the Williams Treaties and the Coldwater Experiment, one of

the earliest examples of Canada's modern reserve system. The area is also home to the ancient fish weirs at the Narrows, a more than 4,000-year-old Indigenous fishing technology in which wooden stakes were driven into the water to guide and trap fish, reflecting long-standing and sophisticated relationships with water and food systems in this territory. Building relationships with Indigenous community members and participating in ceremonies, events, and land and food initiatives has significantly shaped my understanding of land, justice, and responsibility.

I also spent nearly two years working at a nonprofit conservation land trust that protects over 15,000 acres of land in the Lake Couchiching region, and worked to engage the community, strengthen relationships, and further land protection. This experience deepened my understanding of conservation practices and the important role that land trusts can play, but at the same time made me think more broadly about how land protection efforts might also extend to addressing community needs such as farmland protection and access.

This trajectory also led me to become involved in an informal group exploring the creation of a community land trust in the Orillia area to secure land for community needs, including ecological agriculture. Through this work, I became aware of and connected with the Canadian Network of Community Land Trusts (CNCLT), whose work has further informed my research interests and direction.

## 1.3 THE PROJECT

This project has two primary components in collaboration with the National Farmers Foundation. The first involves compiling and maintaining a publicly accessible database documenting ALTS across Canada. The second involves conducting interviews with selected ALTS to better understand their governance structures, opportunities, and challenges, and synthesizing these findings into a research report tentatively titled *Canadian Farmland Tenure in Transition & Agricultural Land Tenure Systems.* Together this project seeks to better understand how ALTS may contribute to more equitable, accessible, and sustainable approaches to farmland ownership and governance in Canada.

## Chapter 2: Methodology

### 2.1 METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

This study employed a Community-Engaged qualitative research design conducted in partnership with the National Farmers Foundation (NFF). Matsuoka and Raphael (2024) describe Community-Engaged Research (CER) as an umbrella term for a research paradigm that guides how knowledge is produced through collaboration between professional researchers, students, and community partners. Central to CER is the idea that "participation on the part of those whose lives or work is the subject of the study fundamentally affects all aspects of the research" (2024, p. 33). CER is also defined by being social and action oriented, providing practical benefits to communities, addressing power relations in knowledge production, respecting local knowledge and cultural contexts, and contributing to broader goals of equity and social change (Matsuoka and Raphael, 2024). Further, Poyntz (2025) argues that Community-Engaged approaches are particularly well suited to research in rural contexts experiencing significant economic, social, and environmental change. CER allows researchers to work in closer collaboration with organizations and communities navigating these shifts, producing research that is attuned to local dynamics while contributing to broader scholarly debates (Poyntz, 2025).

Consistent with this approach, my research was developed collaboratively with the NFF, a national organization dedicated to the promotion, creation and enhancement of food systems based on the principles of food sovereignty: sustainability, equity, and justice. Through research, education, and projects that advance these principles the NFF works to support food producers and provisioners, workers, and rural communities in Canada (National Farmers Foundation, 2026). The research topic and overall objectives were shaped through discussions with the NFF to address knowledge gaps related to alternative farmland tenure models. Throughout the project, ongoing dialogue with the NFF informed the design of the development of the national database of Agricultural Land Tenure Systems, the interview guide, the interview transcription and coding process, and the outputs of the research which included both this MRP, the database, and a report for the organization.

Relationality and mentorship have been important influences on my methodological approach taken in this research. Through relationships I had with individuals at the Canadian Network of Community Land Trusts (CNCLT), I was able to complete a placement with the organization for an Experiential Education credit in the winter term of 2025. Through this placement, I was able to connect with the National Farmers Foundation (NFF), where we discovered a shared interest in researching and mapping alternative farmland tenure models. Around this time, the NFF was seeking a Research Assistant to support its

ongoing work on alternative farmland tenure, and I was brought onto the research team in this role and eventually a broader collaborative relationship for my MRP.

As a community-engaged research project, mentorship and collaboration with members of the NFF research team has played an important role in shaping and carrying out this work. Working alongside researchers at the NFF with deep experience in peasant and agrarian studies and land-use law has provided me with valuable guidance and learning opportunities throughout this research process. Graduate research is often experienced as a highly individual and isolating process, however being in a collaborative relationship with an organizational partner helped me to situate this project within a broader ecosystem of organizations and researchers working to address farmland access and tenure challenges in Canada.

## 2.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The overall objective of this research is to better understand the emergence and potential of Agricultural Land Tenure Systems (ALTS) in Canada as responses to contemporary challenges of farmland access, tenure security, and food systems transformation. By documenting these initiatives and examining the experiences of those involved in creating and managing them, this research seeks to better understand how alternative tenure arrangements are being implemented, what motivates their development, and the opportunities and challenges they present. My research questions are as follows:

1. What is the prevalence of Agricultural Land Tenure Systems in contemporary Canada, and how are they being defined and implemented across the country? How do these models differ from conventional private ownership in terms of structure, governance, and goals? (Addressed through the national ALTS database)
2. What motivations, opportunities, and challenges shape the development and implementation of Agricultural Land Tenure Systems in Canada, and how do those involved in creating and managing these initiatives understand their potential contributions to farmland protection, succession, governance and access for new and young farmers? (Addressed through semi-structured interviews with those involved in ALTS, as presented in a draft NFF report)

## 2.3 DATA COLLECTION

The database and interviews were conducted as part of a broader research study titled *Farmland Tenure in Transition*, led by Dr. Jamie Baxter at Dalhousie University and Dr. Annette Aurélie Desmarais at the University of Manitoba in collaboration with the National Farmers Foundation (NFF). This research project seeks to better understand how organizations in Canada are engaging in alternative farmland

tenure arrangements that improve land access for farmers and contribute to stronger food systems. The aim is to find out more about what alternative farmland tenure relations and models exist in the United States and Canada, along with the motivations of those involved as well as the opportunities and challenges they face. I joined the project as a research assistant with the NFF in 2025, contributing to the development of the national database and conducting interviews. Dr. Baxter and Dr. Desmarais supervised this work throughout my research assistantship and continued to provide mentorship and guidance as I expanded the project into the NFF research report and this Major Research Paper.

### 2.3.1 ONLINE DATABASE OF AGRICULTURAL LAND TENURE SYSTEMS (ALTS) IN CANADA

*Background on database*

Despite growing interest in alternative farmland tenure systems as a response to rising land prices, farmland consolidation, and barriers to entry for new farmers, there is currently no empirically grounded definition of these different models or a comprehensive dataset of those currently operating across Canada. Many initiatives such as land trusts, cooperatively owned farms, nonprofit owned farms, and public land access programs exist in fragmented networks and are often documented only locally or informally. Developing an online, publicly-accessible database of ALTS based on publicly-available information and helps address this gap by modelling these initiatives using a clear framework and compiling this data into a single resource, providing a clearer picture of the diversity and distribution of ALTS across Canada. It also serves as a resource to support the continued development of ALTS by improving their visibility, facilitating knowledge sharing, and enabling future research.

*Inclusion Criteria*

A key component of the methodology for our database of Agricultural Land Tenure Systems (ALTS) was establishing clear inclusion criteria. The NFF has based its research on a core definition of 'Agricultural Land Tenure Systems' as an interconnected set of relationships with and/or with respect to land and mechanisms to define and sustain those relationships over time. Based on this definition, the NFF developed two specific criteria for including land tenure systems in its ALTS database–i.e., for including them as "alternatives" to conventional forms of private-individual tenure. For inclusion, the farmland tenure system must: (1) include at least one formal structure for collective land governance (2) be designed with the explicit goal of advancing food systems transformation in one or more dimensions of agroecology. In addition, initiatives were required to involve a minimum scale of agricultural land. In general, projects with less than 0.5 acres of cultivated land were excluded from the database. This threshold was adopted to distinguish alternative farmland tenure initiatives from smaller-scale community

gardens or garden plots. While such projects may also involve collective governance and food system objectives, documenting every community garden across Canada was beyond the scope of this project. The database therefore focuses on initiatives with a land base capable of supporting farm-scale or semi-commercial agricultural production.

It is important to note that this database adopts a conventional definition of farmland focused on cultivated agricultural land and farm-scale production, which includes many Indigenous-led agricultural practices and initiatives. However, this definition does not capture the full diversity of Indigenous food systems, which include relationships with land and water through practices such as harvesting, hunting, trapping, fishing, and other foodways.

Collective governance in our ALTS definition refers to formally structured processes through which two or more parties participate in decision-making typically codified through legal or organizational mechanisms such as leases, bylaws, or governance agreements. This definition captures a spectrum of tenure systems. For example, when privately owned land is leased to a cooperative, the cooperative constitutes a level of shared governance by collectively determining land use practices among its members. Where land is owned by a nonprofit and leased to a cooperative, there are multiple layers of shared governance—one at the level of ownership and another at the level of land use and management. This perspective emphasizes that tenure extends beyond title alone to include the broader and evolving set of institutions, agreements, and practices that shape how land is accessed, governed, and used over time.

*Identification of Database Entries*

The database was compiled using two complementary approaches: (1) a web-based environmental scan and (2) targeted outreach through partner organizations and existing sector networks.

As part of my role as a Research Assistant with the National Farmers Foundation (NFF) during the summer and fall of 2025, I was responsible for identifying and documenting potential examples of Agricultural Land Tenure Systems (ALTS) from publicly available sources. This work built upon research I had conducted during a winter 2025 placement with the Canadian Network of Community Land Trusts (CNCLT), where I had begun compiling examples of agricultural community land trusts and other alternative farmland tenure models. These preliminary datasets, together with an internal list maintained by the NFF, served as the starting point for the database.

The web-based environmental scan involved systematic searches using search terms such as "non-profit farm [province]," "co-operative farm [province]," "community farm [province]," "land trust farm [province]," and related combinations for each province and territory. To identify additional organizations

and verify information, I also searched on public registries and directories, including the Ontario Business Registry, Nova Scotia Business Registry, Federal Corporation Registry, and the Canada Revenue Agency's Charities Listing, as well as organizational websites, annual reports, and publicly available governance documents where available.

In addition to the environmental scan, our four-person research team drew on internal networks, both personal and through the National Farmers Foundation, to identify additional initiatives. For example, I coordinated with the National Farmers Union–Ontario to include a call for submissions in their member newsletter inviting farmers using alternative land tenure structures to contact me to be added to the database.

*Data Recorded for Each Entry*

A key goal for the NFF in designing the database was to develop a tool capable of modelling or representing complex land tenure systems with structures that differ from conventional fee simple ownership held by one owner or a small number of co-owners. To meet this aim, the NFF developed a unique approach to modelling land tenure arrangements according to (1) the land title and collective decision-making (governance) components of the tenure system and (2) the specific actors involved, including their legal status and other characteristics. This allows for a much more flexible approach to documenting ALTS at high levels of detail and specificity that are difficult to capture using broader categories like “co-operative” or “community land trust”. The NFF’s database design also makes it possible to query the compiled data in many different ways and has enabled a much more nuanced understanding of the diversity of arrangements that exist across the country.

The first component of the database—the land records—documents specific farmland sites associated with alternative tenure models. For each land entry, we recorded standardized information describing the land base and its ownership, leasing, and governance arrangements. The second component of the database—the actor records—documents organizations and entities involved in the ALTS through ownership or interests. Actor records allow organizations to be linked across multiple land entries, reflecting situations where a single organization owns, leases, or participates in governance across several sites. “Land” and “actors” in the database are then linked together by identifying actors as parties that hold legal interests in specific farmlands and/or occupy roles in the governance structure associated with the land.

Below is a map of the main data tables that currently make up the database design described above.

Land Records

| | |
|---|---|
| Name | string |
| Acres | integer |
| PID | integer |
| Land Uses | string |
| Website URL | string |
| Farm Image | string (URL to image file) |
| Notes | string |
| Address | combo fields (street address, town, municipality, province, postal code, phone) |

Title Records

| | |
|---|---|
| Land | selection (from Land) |
| Title holder | selection (from Actors) |
| Type of title interest | string (fee simple; life estate) |
| Transfer date | date |
| Notes | string |

| | |
|---|---|
| Title document | file (PDF) |

Interest Records

| | |
|---|---|
| Land | selection (from Land) |
| Interest transferor | selection (from Actors) |
| Interest transferee/holder | selection (from Actors) |
| Type of title interest | String (lease; covenant; easement; contract) |
| Transfer date | date |
| Duration | integer |
| Terms | string |
| Notes | string |
| Interest document | file (PDF) |

Governance Records

| | |
|---|---|
| Land | selection (from Land) |
| Governance description *("Governance" means any formal structure or rules established to make decisions about the farmland, including rules about who can access the land and* | string |

| | |
|---|---|
| *how it should be used. For ALTs created as part of an organizational structure like a non-profit or for-profit corporate entity, this governance structure might take the form of a Board of Directors subject to organizational bylaws. Governance rules might also be created in other ways, such by an agreement between the parties or as part of the provisions included in a land lease)* | |
| Key governance terms | string |
| Participating actor | selection (from Actors) |
| Governance role | string |

Actor Records

| | |
|---|---|
| Name | string |
| Date established | date |
| Class | selection (private, non-gov, government) |
| Entity type | selection (corporation, non-profit, co-op, etc) |
| Charitable | boolean |
| Charitable Purposes | string |
| Address | combo fields (street address, town, municipality, province, postal code, phone) |

*Verification Process*

To improve accuracy of database entries, I conducted outreach to each organization included in the dataset. Organizations were contacted via email and provided with a draft version of their database entry for review. Recipients were invited to verify the information and provide corrections or additional details where necessary. A follow-up email was sent approximately one week later to organizations that had not responded.

At the time of writing, 57 out of 114 entries had responded and verified their information. Entries that have not yet been verified will be clearly identified as such when the database is published.

*Limitations*

A key limitation of our methodology is the reliance on publicly available online information and network-based identification. Initiatives that lack a web presence, operate informally, or are poorly documented may not have been identified through this process. As a result, the database should be understood as representing the publicly visible landscape of alternative farmland tenure initiatives, rather than a representative sample or a comprehensive census of all such initiatives in Canada.

Nevertheless, our research team has confidence that the database captures a substantial portion of currently visible ALTS initiatives across the country. The National Farmers Foundation intends to maintain the database as a living resource, with entries updated and expanded over time as additional initiatives are identified.

2.3.2 INTERVIEWS

In my role as a research assistant with the NFF, I conducted 26 semi-structured interviews with those involved in Agricultural Land Tenure Systems in Canada, analyzed and coded the interview transcripts, and was the primary author for a draft NFF report synthesizing the interview findings.

*Participant Recruitment*

The database served as the basis for identifying interview participants. Organizations that had verified or contributed to their database entries via were then sent a recruitment email inviting them to participate in interviews. Recruitment aimed to include a cross-section of initiatives from multiple regions and ALTS models across the country; however, participation ultimately depended on organizational interest and availability.

- 11 interviews representing British Columbia

- 8 interviews representing Ontario
- 2 interviews representing Quebec
- 3 interviews representing Prairie provinces
- 2 interviews representing Maritime provinces

*Data Collection*

This method involved conducting semi-structured qualitative interviews with organizers engaged in ALTS across Canada. Interviews were conducted online via Zoom, lasted up to one hour, and followed a semi-structured format consisting of 11 open-ended questions. These questions explored participants' involvement in ALTS initiatives, the challenges and successes they have experienced, their perceptions of impact, and broader reflections on policy and collaboration. Semi-structured interviews were chosen to allow for a conversational style of interview, allowing me to jump in with follow-up questions or for participants to share something important to them outside the bounds of the question. The interviews were conducted over Zoom (recorded), and each one lasted between 30-90 minutes. (See Appendix 3 for interview questions)

*Ethics and Ethical Considerations*

Ethics approval was obtained from the Research Ethics Board at Dalhousie University in May 2025 with Dr. Jamie Baxter as the Lead Researcher. I was listed on the Research Team of the project as a Research Assistant, and it was also specifically written in Appendix D: "We will present our synthesized findings in a report that will be publicly available and they may also be used as part of a graduate student (Master's) thesis."

To protect participant privacy, all identities remained anonymous in the NFF Report and my MRP. Any personal identifiers were removed and terms like "interviewees" or "an organizer with a land trust" were used instead. A consent letter was sent to all interviewees ahead of time, and informed consent was verbally obtained from all participants at the start of the interview, ensuring that they understood the purpose of the study, how their data was used and64 their right to withdraw at any time. Audio recordings and transcripts were stored on a OneDrive folder with a secure login, accessible only to me and the NFF research team.

*Data Analysis*

The interview recordings were transcribed using OtterAI. After transcription, I read through each transcript multiple times for accuracy and to edit as needed. Each transcript was then sent to each

interviewee to review and make additional edits, removals, or clarifications. Transcripts were then analyzed thematically using Taguette, an open-source coding tool, to help organize the data and tag sections based on themes. Interviews were analyzed using a hybrid deductive-inductive thematic coding approach where initial codes were derived from the interview guide and research questions, while additional subcodes emerged through in-depth engagement with the data.

*Limitations*

One important limitation of this study relates to the representation of Indigenous perspectives and Indigenous-led ALTS. While issues of social justice, including land access and reconciliation with Indigenous peoples were addressed directly in the qualitative interviews, this study did not include interviews with Indigenous-led projects or organizations. This was due in part to the scope of the research and the parameters of the ethics protocol guiding participant recruitment. As a result, the findings presented in the draft report reflect perspectives of non-Indigenous-led ALTS. This limits the extent to which the research can speak to Indigenous approaches to land stewardship, food production, governance, and land return, which are critical to broader discussions of land justice in Canada. Given the distinct legal, cultural, and political contexts shaping Indigenous land relations, these perspectives require dedicated and appropriately designed research approaches. Future research would benefit from work led by Indigenous researchers and organizations, and it is hoped that the National Farmers Foundation can support or partner in such research moving forward.

## Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework: Land Politics

The overarching theoretical framework for this research draws from the field of land politics. Franco & Borras define land politics as "the land-based social relations between social classes and groups within society, and between the state and society, that are structured by formal and informal, state and non-state rules, procedures or norms, and the degrees of autonomy and capacity of actors to understand their situation and take actions to maintain or change it" (Franco & Borras, 2021, p. 1279). They also highlight the highly contested concept of 'land tenure security': "whose tenure and whose security, tenure security for what end?" (Franco & Borras, 2021, p. 1279). Land politics thus looks at the power relations, values, and institutional arrangements that shape how land is owned, used, and controlled. Relatedly, Peluso & Lund conceptualize 'land control' as "practices that fix or consolidate forms of access, claiming, and exclusion for some time. Enclosure, territorialization, and legalization processes, as well as force and violence (or the threat of them), all serve to control land" (Peluso & Lund, 2011, p. 668). While land politics encompasses a broad and diverse field, this framework provides a lens to examine farmland governance, tenure, and access in a Canadian context.

### 3.1 AGRICULTURE AND COLONIALISM

Examining agriculture and land tenure in Canada is inseparable from the history and ongoing realities of colonialism. European settlement dispossessed Indigenous peoples in the name of agricultural development, fundamentally reshaping land relations across the Prairies and beyond (Beingessner et al., 2023). The property system that underpins Canadian agriculture today emerged from the historical and social context of seventeenth-century rural England enclosures (Blomley, 2019), and was imposed through violent and coercive mechanisms designed to separate Indigenous peoples from their lands (Kepkiewicz and Dale, 2019). Central to this project was the institutionalization of private property, a key tool through which settler governments sought to facilitate, rationalize, and "legally" justify the occupation of Indigenous territories (Kepkiewicz and Dale, 2019).

Prior to European colonization, Indigenous nations across what is now Canada maintained diverse and sophisticated systems of governance rooted in place-based relationships to land, food, and ecological stewardship (Rotz, 2017). Colonization profoundly disrupted these systems: Morrison (2010) notes that Indigenous communities have experienced the systematic erosion of cultural, ecological, and social structures essential to sustaining Indigenous food systems. This destruction was not incidental but central to settler colonial expansion, which sought to replace Indigenous land relations with Euro-Canadian agricultural and property regimes.

A key instrument of this transformation was the Dominion Lands Act of 1872, through which the Canadian government distributed Indigenous lands to Euro-Canadian settlers. Under this policy, male settlers were granted 160 acres of land, provided they established residence and cultivated the land within a specified timeframe (Beingessner et al., 2023). Additional incentives allowed settlers to purchase adjacent lands at low cost, accelerating agricultural settlement across the Prairies (Gidluck, 2003). This process depended upon treaty-making, coercive displacement, and reserve creation, all of which facilitated settler access to land while confining Indigenous peoples to restricted territories.

Colonial policies actively undermined Indigenous food sovereignty. The near-extermination of the North American bison destroyed a foundational source of sustenance for many Plains nations (Rudolph & McLachlan, 2013). While treaty agreements often promised agricultural tools and support as Indigenous communities adapted to these forced changes, government policies systematically obstructed Indigenous farming success. As Carter (2019) details, the Canadian state enacted policies designed to suppress Indigenous agricultural productivity, including reserve allotment in severalty, restrictions on machinery use, and the imposition of 'peasant farming' models intended to prevent Indigenous farmers from competing with settler agriculture. These interventions not only undermined Indigenous economic autonomy but also protected settler farmers from competition.

The colonial restructuring of Indigenous food systems through land dispossession and agricultural suppression continued into the residential school system. Agriculture within these institutions was often weaponized as a tool of discipline, exploitation, and cultural erasure. Survivors recount being forced to work in vegetable gardens and on school farms as punishment, cultivating food they were frequently prohibited from consuming, while the produce instead supported school staff or was sold externally (Coté, 2016; Mullinix, 2015). Simms et al. (2025) further document how residential schools used agricultural labour to train boys as farm workers and girls in domestic labour, often hiring them out as cheap labour to settler farms and households. Nutrition experiments conducted on Indigenous children within these institutions further reveal the extent to which food and agriculture were embedded in colonial systems of control and violence (Simms et al., 2025).

Consequently, for many Indigenous peoples, agriculture remains entangled with historical trauma, complicating contemporary discussions of farming, food sovereignty, and land restoration. Although Indigenous peoples contributed enormously to global agriculture—crops first developed by Indigenous peoples in the Americas now constitute over half of globally cultivated foods (Rudolph & McLachlan, 2013)—their own agricultural participation remains limited. Contemporary barriers remain, as First Nations farmers often cannot use reserve land as collateral for loans and are excluded from subsidy

programs available to settler farmers. Furthermore, large portions of reserve agricultural land are leased to non-Indigenous producers, perpetuating patterns of dispossession (Rudolph & McLachlan, 2013).

This history provides essential context for examining ALTS as contemporary responses to farmland access and tenure challenges. The systems of private property, agricultural settlement, and land governance within which ALTS operate were established through the dispossession of Indigenous peoples and continue to shape contemporary relationships with land. This history provides an important lens for examining how ALTS seek to create alternative forms of farmland access, ownership, and governance, while raising broader questions about whose access, tenure security, and food sovereignty these models aim to advance. While this research documents participants' perspectives and reported approaches to social justice and Indigenous land reconciliation, it does not independently evaluate the decolonial or reconciliation outcomes of individual ALTS. Nevertheless, the colonial history of Canadian agriculture provides important context for interpreting both the aspirations and limitations of alternative farmland tenure arrangements.

### 3.2 THE HEGEMONY OF PRIVATE PROPERTY

The dominance of private property as the naturalized and "common-sense" way of organizing land relations is a defining feature of contemporary land politics in Canada and across much of the Global North. In Canada, the establishment of private property was deeply intertwined with colonialism, particularly through the surveying, parcelling, distribution, and titling of prairie lands, processes that entrenched Euro-Canadian systems of land governance and normalized exclusionary ownership relations as the dominant paradigm (Beingessner et al., 2023). As Calo et al. (2024) argue, the exclusionary "ownership model" of property has become hegemonic within legal systems worldwide, particularly in wealthy industrialized nations. This ownership model represents a dual form of hegemonic control, where it enforces physical control over land while disseminating ideological norms that naturalize and legitimize property rights.

Drawing on Ostrom's framework, private property is often understood as a "bundle of rights," encompassing rights of use, transfer, exclusion, and other transferable claims (Hamilton, 2005; Miller, 2016). Within Canada's common law tradition, however, the Crown retains underlying title to all land, while individuals hold various tenures, estates, and interests derived from Crown sovereignty. Although many Indigenous scholars and activists challenge this foundational legal fiction (see Manuel & Derrickson, *Unsettling Canada*), fee simple ownership remains widely regarded as the closest approximation to absolute ownership permitted under English common law (Pienaar, 2008).

Pienaar (2008) further emphasizes that Canadian land tenure rights are largely structured around exclusivity, privileging the rights of possession and use through the exclusion of others. Kepkiewicz and Dale (2019) similarly notes that individuals and corporations rely on the sanctity of their right to exclude others from bounded spaces, while communal or collective understandings of property are marginalized. Indigenous claims to land are rendered illegible when they do not conform to the geographies of ownership (Kepkiewicz and Dale, 2019). Further, this right to exclude (often considered the core power of ownership) is rendered legitimate precisely because the state reliably carries out the work of exclusion (Calo et al., 2024).

At the global scale, the contemporary dominance of private property is reflected in the increasing corporate concentration of land. Borras and Franco (2012) argue that the fusion of industrial agriculture, global food systems, and energy markets has contributed to a renewed process of enclosure, in which land and natural resources become increasingly valued as commodities for accumulation. While historically associated with colonial dispossession and the privatization of common lands, contemporary enclosure operates through processes of corporate acquisition, state-supported investment, and the concentration of land ownership and control (Borras and Franco, 2012). Franco and Borras (2021) also characterize contemporary land politics as marked by systemic resistance to redistributive land reform and an ideological fixation on privatization. Through political processes of rollback, containment, blocking, and promotion, neoliberal states and agrarian elites have actively reinforced private property regimes (Franco and Borras, 2021).

Calo et al. (2024) and Rotz et al. (2019) both interrogate the supposed neutrality of private property's "promises." Calo et al. describe private property as one of humanity's "most powerful, albeit contested inventions," rooted in liberal and utilitarian logics that equate secure ownership with prosperity, responsibility, and environmental care. Rotz et al. (2019) show how this logic operates in Canadian farmland relations, where secure tenure under private property is widely assumed to promote long-term investments in soil health and biodiversity, while rental arrangements are framed as less conducive to stewardship–however, these assumptions obscure how the property system itself reproduces dispossession, speculation, and ecological harm.

Although private property is hegemonic within Canadian land politics, it is important to recognize that private ownership is not absolute. As Hamilton (2005) notes, private property rights are consistently constrained by broader societal interests through mechanisms such as municipal zoning, farmland preservation policies, rights-of-way, and environmental protections. Similarly, Miller (2016) emphasizes that the "bundle of rights" associated with private property is routinely circumscribed by legal, economic,

social, and ecological regulations. In Ontario, for example, farmers may face restrictions on land severance, development, environmental practices, and market participation, while zoning laws such as Greenbelt protections can limit land sales for development. These constraints demonstrate that private property rights are socially negotiated rather than unrestricted. Nonetheless, these limitations do not fundamentally challenge private property's hegemonic role, but rather illustrate how the state actively manages and stabilizes private ownership systems.

Understanding the hegemony of private property is central to this research because ALTS are defined in relation to—and emerge within—a farmland system in which individual, fee-simple ownership remains the dominant and normalized model. This framework provides a basis for examining how ALTS reorganize the rights and relationships associated with farmland, including ownership, access, governance, use, and exclusion. The database documents the diverse legal and organizational structures through which these relationships are being reconfigured, while the interview research examines the motivations, opportunities, and challenges associated with creating and maintaining such alternatives. At the same time, this framework cautions against treating collective or non-profit ownership as inherently transformative. Because ALTS operate within broader legal, economic, and political systems structured around private property, land commodification, and unequal access to capital, their ability to challenge these systems may vary considerably.

### 3.3 LAND AS SOCIAL RELATION, LAND IMAGINARIES, CRITICAL AGRARIANISM

Recent scholarship across geography, political ecology, and agrarian studies has emphasized that land is not simply a physical or economic asset, but is a social relation continually shaped through political, cultural, and discursive processes. Calo et al writes that "Land relations—property, access, tenure, landscape—are a central underlying driver of the material form of food systems, from farm to distribution" (Calo et al., 2024, p. 4). They emphasize that property (most often conceptualized as private property) is itself a social relationship: not primarily a connection between an owner and a thing, but between owners and non-owners, as rights to one's property only have meaning through the power to exclude others from its use and benefit (Calo et al., 2024). This notion of exclusion is deeply rooted in the Lockean conception of property as individual dominion, where ownership is justified through labour and secured through bounded territorial control (Bromley, 2019). Beingessner (2021) similarly conceptualizes land ownership as a field of social relations among people regarding material resources. Property regimes, then, are not static legal frameworks but social constructs that are sustained through practices and narratives that legitimize certain claims to land while marginalizing others.

Expanding on this relational view, Beingessner et al. (2023) introduce the concept of land imaginaries to describe the "underlying understandings, views, and visions of what land is, can, and should be" (p. 638). They show how agrarian, neoliberal, and financial imaginaries intersect in shaping the politics of farmland, defining who is entitled to own, manage, or benefit from land and to what ends. Under neoliberalism today, this imaginary is being reworked through processes of financialization and market speculation, generating new conflicts over farmland access, privatization, and institutional investment (Beingessner et al., 2023). In contrast to the dominance of these neoliberal logics, scholars such as Wittman et al. (2017) describe the rise of a critical agrarianism that reimagines land relations in more collective, ecological, and socially just terms. Rooted in food sovereignty and social justice movements, this emerging agrarianism rejects the Lockean ideal of land as the basis for individual property rights, and seek to "repair the metabolic rift" between people and nature (Wittman et al., 2017). Miller (2016) also writes about patterns of alternative property relations which "include new kinds of valuation that resist market pricing and emphasize governance principles, peer to peer education, ethics, distribution of capital and assets, long-term thinking and planning, diversity, use rights and differences in rules of conflict resolution and communication" (p. 5).

These critical agrarian perspectives are strongly reflected in the work of La Vía Campesina, a transnational social movement defending peasant life and widely regarded as one of the most significant transnational social movements in the contemporary world, representing over 500 million rural families (Martínez-Torres & Rosset, 2010). Its membership is composed of organizations representing peasant and family farmers, rural workers, landless peoples, Indigenous peoples, artisanal fisherfolk, and rural women and youth, reflecting a broad coalition of communities engaged in struggles over land, livelihoods, and food systems. Emerging in response to neoliberal globalization, the industrialization of agriculture, La Vía Campesina advances food sovereignty as an alternative paradigm that fundamentally reimagines land, food, and farming systems. Introduced at the 1996 World Food Summit, food sovereignty rejects the neoliberal reduction of agriculture to the production of commodities for global trade, instead asserting the rights of peoples to define their own food and agricultural systems according to local ecological, cultural, and economic needs (Martínez-Torres & Rosset, 2010). La Vía Campesina as a movement believes that food sovereignty must be achieved through agroecology, which is not only a set of ecological farming practices but also as a broader framework for transforming food systems. Agroecology seeks to move beyond industrial, fossil fuel-dependent agriculture toward diversified farming systems rooted in ecological processes, local knowledge, and social justice (Altieri & Toledo, 2011). The core principles of agroecology include "recycling nutrients and energy on the farm, rather than introducing external inputs; enhancing soil organic matter and soil biological activity; diversifying plant species and genetic resources

in agroecosystems over time and space; integrating crops and livestock and optimizing interactions and productivity of the total farming system, rather than the yields of individual species" (Altieri & Toledo, 2011, p. 588).

La Vía Campesina's vision of food sovereignty and agroecology is inseparable from its evolving conception of agrarian reform, which encompasses land redistribution as well as broader struggles over territory, power, and social transformation (Rosset, 2013). Historically, agrarian reform has taken both capitalist and socialist forms, either aimed at integrating peasants into market economies or redistributing land as part of wider structural transformations. However, La Vía Campesina advances what Rosset (2013) calls 'genuine and integral agrarian reform,' which "is characterized by the democratization of agrarian structures, changing the relations of economic and political power that cause land concentration. Such an agrarian reform should prohibit the commoditization of the right to produce and (re)introduce control of overproduction, limiting exports and dumping, and guarantee food sovereignty" (p. 765). Importantly, LVC broadens agrarian reform to include not only peasants but also Indigenous peoples, fisherfolk, pastoralists, and other rural communities, integrating diverse territorial struggles. Internal debates within La Vía Campesina around land titling and communal versus individual ownership highlight the complexity of constructing alternative property regimes. While LVC strongly defends common property systems and collective land titles as key tools for resisting privatization and corporate land grabbing, it has also, in some contexts, supported individual or small-scale private land titles as a means of protecting peasants from dispossession. Ultimately, LVC's agrarian reform framework emphasizes securing land and territorial control for rural peoples while resisting the concentration and commodification of land under neoliberal capitalism (Rosset, 2013).

These struggles over agrarian reform also raise broader questions about how land sovereignty can be achieved through the redistribution and democratization of land control. Borras and Franco (2012) take up this discussion through the concept of a people's counter-enclosure and people's enclosure, arguing that resisting dispossession requires not only defending communities against corporate and state-led enclosure, but also proactively creating institutions through which people can assert political authority over land. While counter-enclosure refers to struggles that defend existing forms of access and use against privatization or dispossession, a people's enclosure campaign goes further by seeking to establish durable forms of collective control over land. As Borras and Franco (2012, p. 9) argue, "a peoples' enclosure campaign is one where working peoples pro-actively assert their political control over their remaining lands against potential and actual threats of corporate or state enclosure. It is one that can be done either independently from the central state via community-based enclosure of the commons or in direct engagement with the state."

These perspectives provide an important framework for understanding ALTS as more than alternative tenure arrangements for owning or accessing farmland. By conceptualizing land as a social relation and attending to the land imaginaries that shape its ownership, governance, and use, this research examines how ALTS may reflect different values and relationships to land than those associated with dominant private, neoliberal, and financialized farmland systems. The concepts of food sovereignty, agroecology, critical agrarianism, and agrarian reform further shape the broader food-system goals that may motivate these initiatives, including environmental stewardship, community benefit, collective governance, and the democratization of land access and control. These perspectives also inform the inclusion criteria used in the national ALTS database, which identify initiatives not only through the presence of collective land governance but also through their explicit orientation toward food-systems transformation in one or more dimensions of agroecology.

## Chapter 4: Literature Review

### 4.1 DEFINING ALTERNATIVE FARMLAND TENURE

The literature does not provide a single or fixed definition of 'alternative' farmland tenure. Instead, the term is often constructed in contrast to dominant systems of individualized and market-based land ownership. Several scholars explicitly characterize alternative tenure as moving beyond private ownership. For example, Wittman et al. (2017, p. 305) describe "community-based land initiatives as an alternative to models of redistributive land reform based on individual ownership," while Dennis (2015, p. 65-66) argues that "alternative land access and community farming are practices which contest the attachment of citizenship, political rights, agrarian values, and action with individual land ownership." Similarly, Hamilton (2005, p. 6), referring specifically to agricultural land trusts, characterizes them as "a model that places importance on the non-economic dimensions of farming and takes an alternative view of property rights."

At the same time, the literature frequently frames 'alternative' in relation to the issue of farmland access. Learmonth et al. (2011, p. 2) define alternative models as "alternative ways to access farmland that is affordable and secure," while Ruhf (2013, p. 53) emphasizes "thinking of land access beyond ingrained cultural values, past historical arrangements, and current conditions," instead utilizing "dialogue and innovation around how farms and farmland can optimally be accessed, held, and passed on."

A further defining feature in the literature is the emphasis on collective or community-based arrangements. Dennis (2015, p. 52) notes that alternative land access "encompass a variety of models (including community farms) involving community collaboration to achieve local food production." Baxter (2017, p. 61) similarly defines farmland commons as "an institutional structure for collective action, i.e., a set of rules, norms and strategies for shared access, use and management of farmland resources."

Some scholars highlight the values-based aspects that define alternative tenure models, and situate them within broader political and economic transformations. Wittman et al. (2017, p. 308) argue that these models act as a "counter response to the urbanization and financialization of land," while advancing land stewardship and prioritizing the public interest over private gain. Similarly, Worosz and DuPuis (2024, p. 1878) describe them as an "alternative mode of agricultural governance" with a value-based goal or mission, set apart from a market-driven profit maximizing food system. Speaking to the environmental dimension of these values, Bunce and Aslam (2016) observe that the prominence of non-governmental land trusts in Canada reflects a strong emphasis on the preservation and conservation of agricultural and

natural lands. These perspectives position ‘alternative’ as a cultural shift toward more relational, ecological, and social understandings of land. Expanding on this, Miller (2016, p. 130) identifies a range of distinguishing characteristics across alternative property regimes, including “valuation, governance principles, peer to peer education, ethics, distribution of capital and assets, long-term thinking and planning, diversity and use rights, as well as differences in rules of conflict resolution and communication.” Although these patterns vary across contexts, they indicate how alternative models differ from dominant systems and offer responses to the ongoing commodification and exclusionary nature of farmland.

## 4.2 TYPOLOGY OF ALTERNATIVE FARMLAND TENURE MODELS

Before looking at examples of alternative farmland tenure models in Canada, it is important to distinguish between property and access. Ribot and Peluso (2003) argue that access has often been insufficiently theorized by property and natural resource analysts and is frequently conflated with property rights. Rather than defining access in terms of legal ownership or rights, they conceptualize access as the ability to benefit from resources. By emphasizing ability rather than rights, this perspective draws attention to the broader social, economic, legal, and institutional relationships that enable or constrain people from benefiting from land (Ribot and Peluso, 2003). In the context of farmland, access therefore extends beyond ownership to encompass the diverse mechanisms through which people are able to farm, make decisions about land, and derive livelihoods from it.

Building on this distinction between property and access, Wittman et al. (2017) developed a typology of alternative farmland access models in British Columbia that provides a useful framework for understanding the diversity of arrangements emerging across Canada. Rather than defining models by a single characteristic, their typology identifies four key characteristics: land ownership, land access, land governance, and land use. First, land ownership refers to the formal or legal property rights associated with farmland, including both land title and customary land rights. Within alternative models, ownership structures extend beyond individual private ownership to include land trusts, which acquire and hold farmland in perpetuity to protect it from development and lease it to farmers; cooperatives, where land is collectively owned by farmers and/or community members; public land, where various levels of governments retain ownership while making land available for agriculture through leases or licenses; and non-profit organizations, which own and manage farmland to advance social, educational, or community development objectives alongside agricultural and land based activities (Wittman et al., 2017). Second, land access captures the tenure relations through which land is made available for farming, ranging from individual or group ownership via title to a spectrum of non-ownership arrangements, including short and

long-term leases, informal agreements such as memoranda of understanding, crop-sharing arrangements, and hired operator models. It also includes pathways to farmland access through training and participation, including incubator farms, apprenticeships, and community volunteer arrangements. (Wittman et al., 2017). Third, land governance refers to the institutional structures through which farming activities are organized and managed. These may include formal or informal cooperatives, non-profit societies, universities, individual farm enterprises, or multiple independent farm businesses operating on shared land (Wittman et al., 2017). Finally, land use describes the primary objectives pursued through these tenure arrangements. While some models support commercial farm operations, others prioritize social and community services or are embedded within intentional communities (Wittman et al., 2017).

This typology illustrates that alternative farmland tenure models are not mutually exclusive categories but made up of multiple interacting dimensions. For example, a parcel of land may combine non-profit ownership, long-term leasing, cooperative governance, and a focus on both commercial production and community programming. Baxter (2017) further emphasizes that 'real-world' farmland commons rarely conform to a single institutional form; instead, they frequently involve hybrid property arrangements, including cases where small, decentralized groups of farmers share access to land that remains under private ownership. Thus, the Wittman et al. (2017) typology provides a flexible framework for examining the diversity of alternative farmland tenure models identified in this literature review, while reinforcing the notion that 'alternative' farmland tenure is best understood as a spectrum of arrangements rather than a singular form.

### 4.3 EXAMPLES OF ALTERNATIVE MODELS ACROSS CANADA

This section reviews examples of alternative farmland tenure models in Canada documented across the academic and grey literature over time. The analysis includes initiatives established as early as the 1930s through to the present, allowing for consideration of both the historical roots and more recent innovations in alternative land tenure. This temporal range reflects the evolving nature of these models, as well as how they are responding to shifting social, economic, and political conditions.

The examples are organized geographically, grouped by province or broader region (e.g., Prairies, Maritimes, and Circumpolar). This regional grouping approach aims to show how alternative farmland tenure models are shaped by place-specific contexts, including differences in agricultural systems, land markets, policy environments, and cultural and historical factors.

Identifying examples of alternative farmland tenure models across Canada through the academic and grey literature presents several limitations. Much of the available literature documents initiatives at a particular moment in time, meaning that some models are now outdated, have evolved significantly, or are no longer in operation. As a result, this section should be understood as a review of models as they have been documented, rather than an accurate representation of the current landscape. To address these limitations, a subsequent section of this MRP draws on an up-to-date national public database of alternative farmland tenure systems developed in collaboration with the National Farmers Foundation. This database incorporates web-based environmental scans of organizational websites and directories, as well as direct verification through outreach, offering a more current and comprehensive picture of existing models.

### 4.3.1 BRITISH COLUMBIA

British Columbia's farmland tenure landscape is strongly shaped by the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR), a landmark agricultural zoning initiative established in the 1970s under an NDP government. The ALR designated approximately 11.4 million acres (about 5% of the provincial land base and nearly 80% of its prime agricultural land) for agricultural use, restricting subdivision and conversion to non-agricultural purposes (Wittman & Barbolet, 2011). While widely regarded as a landmark farmland protection policy, scholars emphasize that 'protection is not enough' (Tatebe et al., 2018). A significant portion of ALR-designated land remains underutilized, with some regions reporting that less than half of the land base is actively farmed (Tatebe et al, 2018). This is partly due to the fact that land within the ALR is not required to be in production, and landowners may also apply for exclusions by demonstrating limited agricultural suitability or broader community benefit. As a result, some ALR land is held speculatively or used for non-agricultural purposes such as luxury rural estates (Wittman & Barbolet, 2011).

Within this context, alternative land tenure models have emerged to facilitate access to high-value farmland. Wittman et al. (2017) identified 55 community farms in British Columbia operating under alternative land access arrangements, primarily concentrated in the Lower Mainland and Vancouver Island-Coast regions characterized by high-quality soils, intense development pressure, and extremely high land values. These models include land trusts, land cooperatives, public land arrangements, non-profit ownership structures, and shared farming agreements on privately owned land, with the latter being the most common. Although this study does not detail specific cases, other literature provides some examples.

Several initiatives combine public land ownership with nonprofit governance, such as the Haliburton Farm in Saanich operating on municipally owned land with a nonprofit organization overseeing farmer access and programming (Weiler, et al., 2015). Cooperative ownership models are also present, such as Fraser Common Farm, a land cooperative established in 1976 that hosts Glorious Organics, a worker cooperative (Wittman & Barbolet, 2011). Additional examples including Keating Community Farm Cooperative, Horse Lake Community Farm Co-operative, and Talking Mountain Ranch operate on land owned by The Land Conservancy of British Columbia, a non-profit land trust (Francis et al., 2012; Gorsuch & Scott, 2010). At a broader provincial level, the Foodlands Co-operative of British Columbia has been identified as a key initiative researching and establishing a BC Foodlands Trust program aimed at acquiring and holding farmland in trust for long-term community benefit, while facilitating access for farmers through partnerships with local organizations (Tatebe et al., 2018; Tatebe et al., 2021; Marrapese et al., 2014). Finally, the non-profit Young Agrarians operates a land matching program in British Columbia, connecting land-seeking farmers with landowners and supporting land access and tenure resources for ecological agriculture (Tatebe, et al., 2021; Marrapese et al, n.d.; Wittman et al., 2017).

Crown farmland leasing is present in British Columbia and is structured through three main agricultural tenure types: grazing leases, extensive agricultural leases, and intensive agricultural leases. Grazing leases are the most widespread and are primarily used for livestock production on Crown range, typically issued as long-term tenures tied to stewardship requirements under the Range Act (Arsenault, 2019). Extensive agricultural leases support soil-based cropping such as grains, forage, and vegetables at a larger scale, generally requiring applicants to already be established farmers and often including conditions around minimum cultivation levels and proximity to existing private farmland. Intensive agricultural leases provide smaller parcels of Crown land for higher-value, labour-intensive production such as market gardens, greenhouses, and livestock operations, and are typically issued on longer terms to encourage investment in farm infrastructure and commercial viability (Arsenault, 2019).

British Columbia has also developed innovative university and campus-partnered farmland models that integrate agricultural education, research, access, and incubation. A prominent example is the University of British Columbia (UBC) Farm, a 24-hectare diversified research and education farm managed by the Centre for Sustainable Food Systems. Protected through grassroots advocacy by students and community members, the UBC Farm has evolved from a student-led organic farm into a major hub for sustainable agriculture education, research, and seed sovereignty initiatives, including organic seed production and partnerships with regional seed cooperatives (Lyon et al., 2021). Similarly, Kwantlen Polytechnic University's Institute for Sustainable Food Systems operates two farm school initiatives: its Richmond Farm School, which provides small-scale ecological farming education and incubator plots, and the

Tsawwassen First Nation–Kwantlen Polytechnic University (TFN–KPU) Farm School, developed in partnership with, and on reserve land of, the Tsawwassen First Nation (Mullinix, 2016).

### 4.3.2 PRAIRIE PROVINCES (ALBERTA, SASKATCHEWAN, MANITOBA)

As home to more than 70 percent of Canada's farmland, the prairie provinces have an important role in national discussions surrounding farmland access, tenure, and agricultural restructuring (Magnan et al., 2022). Historically, the prairies have been a site of experimentation with alternative tenure models, particularly through large-scale public land management and reform initiatives. One of the most significant examples is the federal Community Pasture Program (CPP), established under the Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Act (PFRA) in 1935 in response to drought, soil erosion, and widespread farm abandonment. Through this program, a total of 87 community pastures were developed across the three provinces on abandoned and marginal lands, encompassing millions of acres and supporting approximately 4,000 livestock producers grazing over 200,000 head annually (Kulshreshtha et al., 2008). These pastures were publicly owned and managed, with operations funded through a combination of user fees and federal support, and were designed not only to rehabilitate fragile ecosystems but also to support rural economies and support diversified livestock production (Kulshreshtha et al., 2008). As Calo et al. (2021) note, the community pasture system represented a rare model of multifunctional public land tenure, integrating conservation, agricultural production, and public access. Although the federal Conservative government discontinued the program in 2012, strong resistance from ranchers and civil society actors led to the retention of these lands under provincial ownership, with many now leased to cooperative or nonprofit grazing associations, often in partnership with conservation organizations (Calo et al., 2021; Beingessner et al., 2023).

Another major experiment in public farmland tenure was the Saskatchewan Land Bank, introduced in 1971 under an NDP government. Widely seen as a pioneering land reform initiative, the program saw the provincial government purchase approximately 1.2 million acres of farmland and lease it to nearly 4,000 primarily young farmers on long-term, secure leases (Gidluck, 2003). The Land Bank model separated ownership from use, providing lessees with many of the benefits of ownership including long-term planning security and intergenerational transfer, while keeping land held publicly. However, the program's long-term success was limited by inadequate funding to keep up with escalating land values, administrative difficulties, and political opposition. Following the election of a Progressive Conservative government in 1982, the program was ultimately dismantled (Gidluck, 2003).

Along with state-led and commons-based models, the prairies also have distinctive forms of communal landholding rooted in cultural and religious traditions. Hutterite colonies represent a longstanding alternative tenure system in which land is collectively owned and managed by a communal ethnoreligious group. These colonies, which "hold all things common," operate large-scale, highly productive mixed farms that integrate crop and livestock production while distributing resources and labour communally (Evans, 2019). Their expansion, however, has been shaped by shifting legal frameworks: the 1947 Communal Property Act in Alberta restricted colony establishment by imposing distance requirements between settlements and subjecting land acquisition to extensive approval processes, reflecting broader efforts to assimilate Hutterite communities (Evans, 2013). The repeal of this legislation in 1973 marked a significant turning point, removing barriers to land acquisition and enabling their growth within Alberta and their number of colonies and total landholdings has expanded substantially since then (Evans, 2013). In Alberta, despite owning only a relatively small share of total farmland, Hutterite communities contribute disproportionately to agricultural output: in 2011, there were 170 Hutterite colonies in Alberta, owning an estimated 2 million acres of Alberta's 50.5 million acres of farmland, or about 4 percent–and producing 80 percent of the province's eggs, 33 percent of its hogs, and more than 10 percent of its milk (Evans, 2019).

Additional examples of alternative tenure models in the Prairies are community-based initiatives such as the non-profit Genesis Land Conservancy based in Saskatchewan (Beingessner, 2013; Hamilton, 2005; Gorsuch and Scott, 2010). Emerging from earlier research on community land trusts commissioned by agricultural and cooperative organizations, and in response to the farm crisis of the 1980s and early 1990s, Genesis was founded with the goal of removing farmland from the speculative market and holding it in trust for long-term community benefit. Land is acquired through donations, bequests, and preferential sales, with tax incentives encouraging land transfer to the trust. It is then leased to farmers through long-term leases (Beingessner, 2013). As of 2010, it was identified that Genesis owns 4,000 acres composed of 10 farms (Gorsuch and Scott, 2010). A smaller-scale example of alternative tenure on the Prairies is the Tamara Ranch Project in Red Deer, Alberta, which operates as a 'farmland commons' on privately owned farmland. Two independent farm enterprises jointly lease land from private landowners under a long-term agreement, coordinating livestock and vegetable production through shared agroecological practices. Formal contracts structure land use, access, roles, and responsibilities, illustrating a hybrid model of collective management on privately held farmland (Baxter, 2017).

Crown land leasing also remains an important system shaping agricultural land access, but it varies in structure and policy across provinces. In Alberta, over 8 million acres of public land are leased primarily for grazing under long-term tenures, with additional programs allowing limited lease-to-purchase

opportunities and reinforcing stewardship criteria within the White and Green Zone system (Arsenault, 2019). Saskatchewan similarly manages a large share of its agricultural base through Crown leases, with approximately 17 million acres of rented farmland and a highly detailed policy framework governing allocation, renewal, transfer, and use, although recent policy shifts have increasingly encouraged the sale of leased land back to producers. In Manitoba, Crown agricultural leasing is largely concentrated in forage dispositions and has undergone recent modernization efforts, including the introduction of public auctions for lease allocation and a temporary suspension of lease transfer policies to review transparency and fairness (Arsenault, 2019).

#### 4.3.3 ONTARIO

Southern Ontario contains approximately fifty percent of the best topsoil in Canada by the federal classification, while also being a region experiencing some of the country's most intense urbanization and development pressure (Miller, 2016). In response to these pressures, the Greenbelt was created in 2005, a globally significant land-use protection zoning initiative encompassing 1.8 million acres of protected countryside, including over 7,000 farms and some of Canada's most productive agricultural regions (Friedmann, 2011). While the Greenbelt has played an important role in slowing farmland conversion, there are still significant vulnerabilities including speculative pressures along its borders, gaps in protections, loopholes, and barriers for new and small-scale farmers seeking affordable access to land (Friedmann, 2011). Ontario is thus a key site for examining the development of alternative land tenure models that move beyond protection alone to address long-term land access.

Public land is an important component of Ontario's alternative farmland tenure landscape. First, the National Capital Commission (NCC), a federal Crown corporation, owns and manages approximately 5,500 hectares of agricultural land within Ottawa's Greenbelt, leasing parcels to over 70 farmers engaged in a wide range of operations, including dairy, cash cropping, market vegetables, and beekeeping (NFU-O, 2025). While historically dominated by conventional commodity production such as corn and soy, the NCC's Sustainable Food and Agriculture Strategy seeks to transition toward more diverse, sustainable, and locally oriented food systems. Rental rates are tied to regional market assessments and adjusted periodically, resulting in some degree of financial uncertainty for producers. An example of a community farm leasing from NCC Greenbelt land is the BeetBox Co-op Farm, a worker co-op founded in 2017 which operates a successful CSA, a line of prepared foods, a farm store, and events throughout the year (NFU-O, 2025).

Similarly, the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA) manages over 279 hectares of farmland across the Greater Toronto Area, leasing land to farmers through an open and competitive

process. The TRCA recognizes agriculture as a legitimate long-term land use within its broader conservation mandate and prioritizes farming operations that contribute to food security, environmental, and community benefit. TRCA leases are typically shorter in duration, ranging from one to five years. Additionally, most TRCA farmland is located in highly urbanized contexts, creating both opportunities (e.g., proximity to markets) and challenges (e.g., land-use conflicts, lack of on-site housing, fluctuating lease rates due to market appraisals) (NFU-O, 2025; Miller, 2013). Examples of community farms operating on TRCA land include Black Creek Community Farm (Miller, 2016; Friedmann, 2020) and FarmStart's incubator farm at McVean Farm (Miller, 2013).

A third model of public farmland access is The Rouge National Urban Park (RNUP). Approximately half of the park's 9,000 acres is devoted to agriculture, with over sixty farmers leasing land. These leases are generally for more experienced farmers capable of managing medium to large-scale operations, and tenants are often responsible for maintaining significant rural infrastructure including barns and drainage systems. Access to a lease with RNUP requires navigating government approval processes for leases and infrastructure development and land modification, which can be lengthy and complex (NFU-O, 2025).

A final example is the use of hydro corridors (lands beneath major electricity transmission infrastructure) for food production. Through the Community Engagement and Entrepreneurial Development (CEED) project in 2016, and after years of consultation, approvals, and securing funding, two Toronto sites were selected for development. One example is Flemo Farm in Flemingdon Park, which provides residents with small-scale plots, shared infrastructure, and opportunities for supplemental income through market-oriented food production. Efforts to expand and replicate this model elsewhere in Toronto are underway, suggesting that hydro corridor agriculture may offer an innovative approach to alternative farmland access and tenure increasing for urban agriculture and community-based food production (NFU-O, 2025).

Ontario has also seen some innovative nonprofit models that support alternative farmland access through training and incubator-style tenure. A key example is Everdale, a nonprofit ecological farm and community learning centre founded in 1998 in Hillsburgh, Ontario (Laforge & Levkoe, 2018; Miller, 2013). Located in one of Canada's most productive yet high-cost agricultural regions, Everdale has an emphasis on hands-on ecological farmer training and is one of the only agroecological farm schools in Canada. Their education/training programming, the Sustainable Farming Certificate, includes one year of on-site training that combines elements of practical and theoretical learning. They also offer a Farmer Training workshop series, and established the Collaborative Regional Alliance for Farmer Training (CRAFT) network in Ontario as well as co-founded the Black Creek Community Farm in Toronto. In

addition, they sell produce through their Community Shared Agriculture (CSA) program and multiple farmers' markets (Laforge & Levkoe, 2018).

Finally, agricultural land trusts are a significant alternative tenure model in Ontario. These nonprofit entities acquire land or conservation easements to ensure its long-term use for agriculture. The Ontario Farmland Trust (OFT), established in 2004 as Canada's first province-wide agricultural land trust, is a prominent example in the literature (Rotz, 2019; Gorsuch and Scott, 2010; Tatebe et. al, 2018; Hogg, 2023; Miller, 2013; NFU-O, 2025). Originating from collaborative efforts among farmers, researchers, and planners at the University of Guelph, OFT has played a key role in advancing farmland preservation through both advocacy and on-the-ground action. Notably, the organization contributed to amendments to Ontario's Conservation Land Act in 2005 which enabled the use of agricultural conservation easements, legal agreements that restrict non-agricultural uses of land while allowing it to remain in private ownership. Through these easements, OFT has protected over 2,700 acres of farmland across more than two dozen farms (NFU-O, 2025).

#### 4.3.4 QUÉBEC

Québec is unique among Canadian provinces not only as the country's primary francophone jurisdiction, but also because it operates under a civil law system in the Civil Code of Québec rather than the common law framework used throughout Canada. The legal structure behind ownership and tenure in Québec is quite different, shaping how land can be used, shared, and transferred, and thus has important implications for land tenure. However, it is important to note that this section is somewhat limited by language barriers within the literature and the complexity of Québec's legal and policy landscape, and therefore provides a partial rather than comprehensive overview.

Québec also has a notably stronger and more deeply embedded cooperative sector than other provinces, including in agriculture and rural development. The strength of this sector can be traced to the economic crisis of the 1980s when high unemployment (exceeding 14%) and industrial decline resulted in a coordinated response from the state, labour unions, and civil society. Rather than relying solely on market-based or state-led solutions, Québec took a 'social economy' approach that positioned cooperatives as key vehicles for job creation and service provision (Diamantopoulos, 2011). This led to the emergence and expansion of "new co-op" forms, particularly worker cooperatives, worker shareholder cooperatives, and solidarity cooperatives, which now account for a significant share of cooperative employment. Crucially, this growth was supported by the development of supporting infrastructure, including financing, legal frameworks, and technical assistance networks, coordinated in part through organizations such as the Chantier de l'économie sociale (Diamantopoulos, 2011). This helps explain why

collectively oriented and non-ownership-based farmland tenure models may be more viable and scalable in Québec than in other provinces. An illustrative example is the Tourne-Sol Co-operative Farm, a worker-owned ecological farm engaged in direct marketing that is able to sustain multiple livelihoods without reliance on off-farm income (Miller, 2013).

In addition to its cooperative infrastructure, Québec has developed a range of policies and programs aimed at improving land access. For example, farm incubator initiatives such as a program in the L'Ange-Gardien municipality provide training, infrastructure, and temporary land access for new entrants (Laforge et al., 2018). Land-linking also plays an important role: Québec's Banque de terres connects landowners with aspiring farmers and facilitates the development of rental agreements. Initially developed at the municipal level, this model was expanded provincially in 2017 to serve regional county municipalities across Québec (Laforge et al., 2018). Finally, Québec's strong agricultural education system plays an important role in supporting new entrants into farming. Numerous college and university programs, including specialized organic agriculture programs such as those offered at CÉGEP de Victoriaville, contribute to this farmer training and education network (Laforge et al., 2018).

#### 4.3.5 MARITIMES (NEW BRUNSWICK, NOVA SCOTIA, AND PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND)

Atlantic Canada has a significant history of alternative land tenure that has been shaped by strong state involvement. In Prince Edward Island, the Land Development Corporation (LDC) was an early state-led farmland bank approach focused on consolidation, where the government acquired land from small, non-viable, or absentee-held farms and redistributed it through leasing and sale to expand farm size (Arsenault, 2019). It was established under the Liberal government of Alex Campbell and in operation from 1969 to 1982. The underlying policy logic was that agricultural modernization required fewer, larger, and more mechanized farms, leading to the industrialization of production through increased use of synthetic inputs and capital-intensive technologies. While the program was ultimately effective in restructuring the agricultural sector, it also generated significant rural resistance, contributed to outmigration, and overlooked significant environmental consequences associated with industrialized production (Arsenault, 2019). As Arsenault argues, however, the institutional model itself remains useful: despite its productivist orientation, the LDC functioned as a centralized land intermediary with the capacity to actively shape land markets and facilitate access, particularly for younger farmers. In this sense, "a similar corporate model is needed today; however, an entirely different philosophy, focus, and vision is needed to effectively address the challenges facing PEI land and agriculture" (Arsenault, 2019, p. 88). As of May 2019, the PEI government continues to lease 1,376 acres of agricultural land to local

farmers, many of which originate from land transferred to the government during the land bank experiment (Arsenault, 2019).

Across New Brunswick, Crown ownership and leasing arrangements remain central. Around 60,000 acres of crown land is leased for agricultural purposes, including maple syrup production, blueberries, cranberries, and community pastures (Province of New Brunswick, 2020). However, access to these lands is uneven. For example, in 2013 the province allocated the exclusive use of 15,712 acres of Crown land for wild blueberry production to Oxford Frozen Foods, a large Nova Scotia-based firm. The transfer of high-quality blueberry acreage to a single corporate actor was criticized for disadvantaging New Brunswick producers by limiting access to the most suitable land and contributing to unequal competition, especially given that independent local producers had previously been promised access to a portion of this land (Holtslander, 2015). In addition to these lease arrangements, the province operates a New Land Lease Purchase Program through the Agricultural Development Board, which purchases farmland and leases it to new entrants for up to six years, with deferred payments in the initial years and a requirement to purchase the land at the end of the term (Province of New Brunswick, 2020; Arsenault, 2019). Complimenting this, New Brunswick's community pasture systems provide a cooperative land access model in practice. For example, the Tantramar Grasslands Co-operative near Sackville manages an approximately 1,800-acre pasture on provincially owned land, leased from the Department of Agriculture, Aquaculture and Fisheries and collectively operated by local farmers. Established in the 1960s, it is one of six community pastures in the province, together supporting about 70 farmers and 2,500 head of cattle. Farmers pay fees to access shared grazing land, distributing costs and management responsibilities while avoiding the need for individual land ownership (Weldon, 2021). Gorsuch and Scott (2010) also identify The New Brunswick Community Land Trust as a farmland trust working to protect farms through conservation easements and outright ownership of farmland.

In Nova Scotia, similar community pasture systems operate at a larger institutional scale through the provincial Farm Loan Board, which owns and leases 8 community pastures to local pasture cooperatives. These arrangements reduce capital barriers, support herd expansion, and create entry points for new farmers by separating land ownership from use (Wort, Sangster, Harrington, and Wood, 2020). Nova Scotia has also seen the emergence of community land trusts, such as the Tatamagouche Community Land Trust Cooperative, which hold land in perpetuity for community benefit and provide long-term, secure access through 99-year leases (Hanavan and Cameron, 2012; Miller, 2013). Gorsuch and Scott (2010) also identify Heliotrust as a farmland trust in Nova Scotia working to protect farms through conservation easements.

### 4.3.6 CIRCUMPOLAR CANADA

The circumpolar region encompasses Yukon, the Northwest Territories, Nunavut, Nunavik (Quebec) and Nunatsiavut (Newfoundland and Labrador), generally defined as areas above the 55th parallel (Seguin et al., 2021). This region differs substantially from southern agricultural systems, as conventional agricultural models are far less prevalent. Limited arable land, harsh climatic conditions, lack of infrastructure, and high production costs have historically constrained local food production. As a result, food systems are characterized by high costs and supply instability, with disproportionate impacts on Indigenous communities (Seguin et al., 2021). Additionally, Seguin et al. (2021) identify a range of sociocultural and economic constraints that shape participation in northern food production. For many Indigenous peoples, culturally significant land-based activities such as hunting, fishing, and intercommunity gatherings take priority over and limit engagement with farming or greenhouse initiatives. There are also linguistic and conceptual barriers, as agricultural terminology and certain crop types may not have direct equivalents in Indigenous languages. Circumpolar agriculture also faces significant structural and economic challenges, including limited human capital, high capital and operating costs, and logistical constraints (Seguin et al., 2021).

Despite these challenges, local agricultural initiatives are expanding. In 2018, 36 community gardens and 17 greenhouses were counted across northern Canada, the majority of them in small communities in the Northwest Territories (Friedrich, 2021). Yukon also has a somewhat stronger presence of soil-based agriculture, including farms operated by First Nations such as the Na-Cho Nyak Dun, Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in, and Carcross/Tagish Nations (Croft, 2020). Controlled-environment agriculture has also grown significantly across the North as communities respond to food insecurity through greenhouses, hydroponics, and adaptive infrastructure. Across Nunavik, new greenhouse projects have been established in communities such as Salluit, Kuujjuaq, and Kangiqsualujjuaq, with additional development underway in Inukjuak (Wat, 2025). Similar initiatives are emerging in the Northwest Territories, including A-frame and geodesic dome greenhouses in Tulít'a, as well as adaptive reuse projects such as a greenhouse established in a former hockey arena in Inuvik (Blake, 2023; Lamberlink, 2025). In Nunavut, examples include an igloo-shaped greenhouse in Naujaat and a container-based (‘sea can’) greenhouse in Gjoa Haven (Brown, 2020; High Arctic Haulers, 2019).

Formal Crown land agricultural access is most developed in Yukon through the Agricultural Land Grant Program which offers conditional 7-year leases aimed at supporting new farm development and local food production. The program operates through two main lease granting types: Spot Land Grants, where applicants identify suitable remote Crown land, and Planned Land Grants, where government-designated

parcels near communities are allocated through a competitive process. Both require approved farm development plans and environmental review, and leases are tied to ‘sweat equity,’ where farmers must invest in land improvements such as clearing, infrastructure, and soil development. In some cases, land can be transferred to the farmer once development requirements are met, making the system partly a pathway to ownership (Arsenault, 2019).

## Chapter 5: Prevalence of Agricultural Land Tenure Systems in Canada (Database Results)

### 5.1 OVERVIEW OF THE ALTS DATABASE

At the time of writing, the database has identified 114 Agricultural Land Tenure Systems (ALTS) across Canada that met the inclusion criteria outlined in Chapter 2.

Designing a database to model a diversity of land tenure arrangements is a complex task. Conventionally, the research literature has turned to broad and often poorly defined categories such as “cooperatives” and “land trusts” to describe ALTS, but in this project the NFF set out to create more precise models of the many overlapping property interests and governance structures that comprise different ALTS. With this approach, the database has captured a range of initiatives involving non-governmental organizations, public institutions, and private entities involving multiple actors with distinct roles in land ownership, governance, and agricultural production.

In order to accurately model ALTS, the database is organized around two interconnected record types: Land Records and Actor Records. Land Records document specific farmland sites and associated property rights and governance structures, while Actor Records capture the different individuals and entities that hold different legal interests in the land or otherwise participate in collective decision-making.

### 5.2 PATTERNS AND STATISTICS

A number of interesting patterns and trends emerged from the entries in the database, which will be discussed in detail below.

#### 5.2.1 DISTRIBUTION ACROSS THE PROVINCES AND TERRITORIES

The 114 land records identified in the ALTS database, at the time of writing, were distributed across 11 provinces and territories, although this distribution was uneven across regions (Table 1). Land records were identified in every province/territory of Canada except the Northwest Territories and Nunavut.

Ontario contained the largest number of land records, with 36 entries representing 31.6% of the database, followed closely by British Columbia with 34 entries (29.8%). Together, these two provinces accounted for 61.4% of all land records identified.

Smaller numbers of land records were identified in Quebec (13 entries), Alberta (9 entries), Saskatchewan (6 entries), Manitoba (5 entries), and New Brunswick (5 entries). Few records were identified in Nova Scotia (3 entries), while Newfoundland and Labrador, Prince Edward Island, and Yukon each contained only a single identified land record.

Overall, the database indicates that ALTS are geographically widespread but concentrated within a limited number of provinces. This concentration suggests that the visible landscape of ALTS in Canada is disproportionately located in Ontario and British Columbia, although regional differences in public visibility and documentation may also influence these patterns.

*Figure 1: Geographical distribution of ALTS*

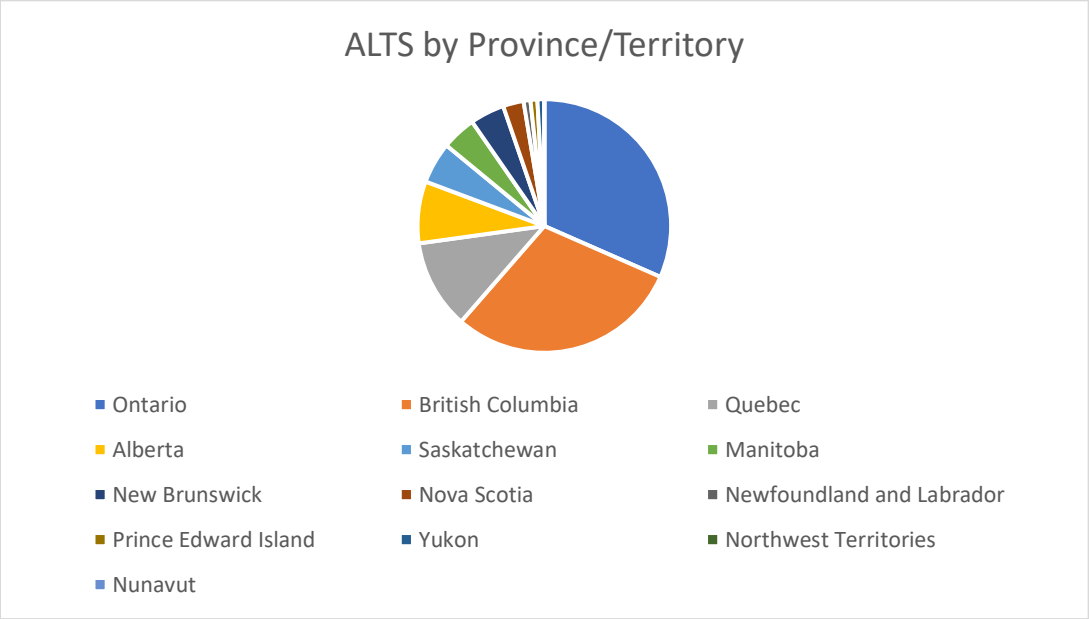
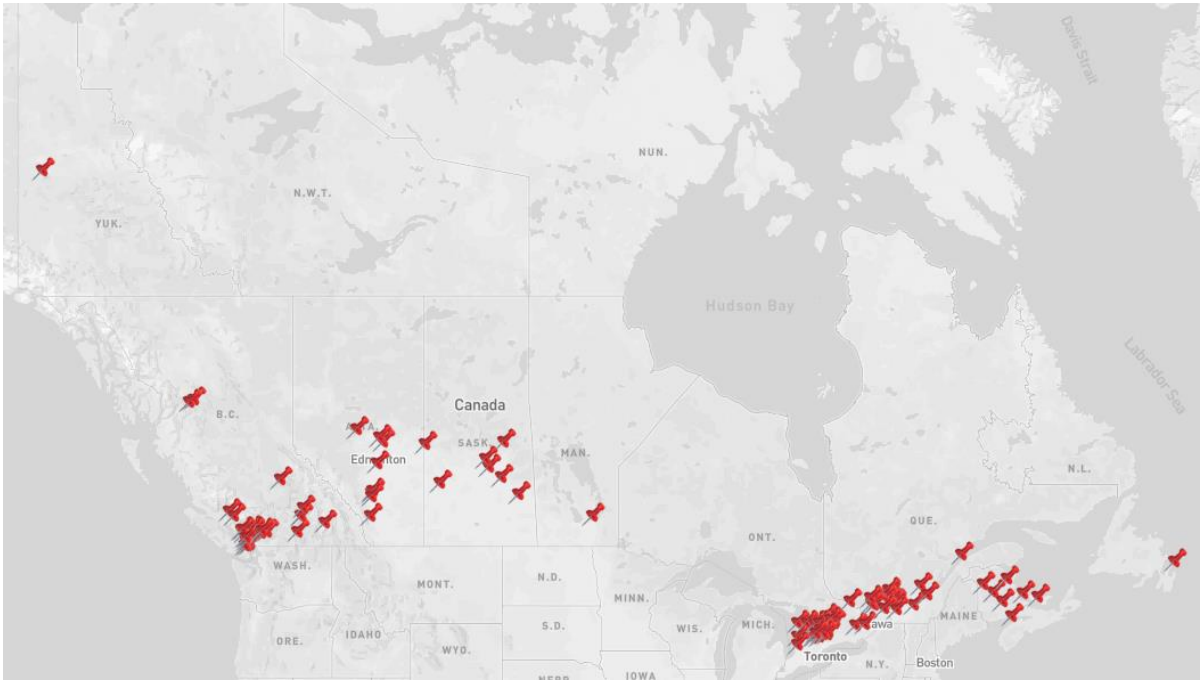



*Figure 2: Map of ALTS in Canada*



### 5.2.2 OWNERSHIP AND LEASING TRENDS

The ALTS database classifies land ownership into three broad categories: (1) NGO ownership, (2) Government ownership, and (3) Private ownership. Overall, NGO ownership is the most common category, accounting for 56 of the recorded sites. Within this group, ownership is primarily held by co-operatives (20), non-profit organizations (33), universities (2), and religious institutions (1). Government ownership represents the second most common category, comprising 33 sites. These include municipal governments (13), provincial governments (8), federal government bodies (7), and First Nation governments (5). Privately owned land accounts for 17 sites, while ownership was unknown for 8 records.

*Table 1: Ownership Structures of ALTS*

| Ownership Category | Subcategory | Number of Sites |
|---|---|---|
| NGO (56) | Non-profit | 33 |
| | Co-operative | 20 |
| | University | 2 |
| | Religious institution | 1 |
| Government (33) | Municipal | 13 |
| | Provincial | 8 |
| | Federal | 7 |
| | First Nation | 5 |
| Private (17) | Individual/private | 17 |
| Unknown (8) | Unknown | 8 |

Leasing is a key mechanism through which land access and governance is distributed within ALTS. In many cases, ownership and day-to-day land management are held by different actors, with leasing arrangements enabling organizations without land assets to secure access to farmland. This separation between ownership and use highlights the relational nature of ALTS, where control over land is not

necessarily tied to ownership status. Leasing also appears to function as a tool for reducing capital barriers to land access, particularly for co-operatives, non-profits, and community-based organizations that may lack the resources to purchase land outright. At the same time, the diversity of leasing arrangements in the database suggests that there is not a single dominant leasing model, but rather a flexible set of arrangements shaped by local contexts and actor relationships. Where lease information was available, agreements were typically medium- to long-term in duration, ranging from approximately 3 to 30 years. Even shorter-term arrangements were often structured as rolling or renewable leases, providing a degree of continuity and tenure security beyond what might be expected from standard short-term rental agreements.

The dataset reveals a wide range of ownership and leasing combinations, reflecting the complexity and flexibility of ALTS. These illustrate how ownership and operational control are often separated, with land frequently leased between different types of actors. The following typology summarizes the main ownership–leasing arrangements observed in the database:

- Owned and operated by a co-operative
- Owned by a co-operative, leased by a co-operative
- Owned by a co-operative, leased by a non-profit
- Owned by a co-operative, leased by business(es)
- Owned and operated by a non-profit
- Owned by a non-profit, leased by a co-operative
- Owned by a non-profit, leased by a non-profit
- Owned by government, leased by a co-operative
- Owned by government, leased by a non-profit
- Owned by government, leased by business(es)
- Owned by a private landowner, leased by a co-operative
- Owned by a private landowner, leased by a non-profit
- Owned by an institution, leased by a co-operative
- Owned by an institution, leased by a non-profit
- Other arrangements, including limited partnership (LP) ownership and strata ownership structures

The timing of land acquisition among ALTS that hold title also provides some insight into the development of alternative tenure arrangements. Of the initiatives with a documented title-acquisition date, 72.7% acquired their land between 2000 and 2020, while only 18.2% acquired title between 2021 and 2025. This contrasts with the timing of lease arrangements, where 78.3% of initiatives with recorded

lease-start dates began their current leases between 2016 and 2025. Although these data cannot establish a definitive temporal trend, the difference suggests that recent experimentation with ALTS may be occurring substantially through alternative access and leasing arrangements rather than through new land acquisitions. This distinction is particularly relevant given the increasing cost of farmland acquisition. Leasing and other forms of shared or non-ownership-based tenure may provide organizations and farmers with mechanisms for securing long-term access without requiring the substantial capital necessary to acquire land outright. At the same time, the relatively small number of recent title acquisitions in the database may point to the financial barriers facing organizations seeking to build alternative land ownership structures.

### 5.2.3 SPATIAL RELATIONSHIPS TO URBAN CENTRES

The database indicates that ALTS occur across a range of spatial contexts, from urban agricultural sites within cities to rural farmland located at greater distances from population centres. For the purposes of this analysis, spatial context was classified based on the geographic information available for each record, including listed addresses and proximity to identified urban centres. Because this classification was not generated through a formal geospatial modelling process, the urban and peri-urban categories should be understood as descriptive rather than definitive. Records located within or immediately adjacent to urban centres were classified as urban/peri-urban where their location suggested close functional connections to nearby population centres, including through access to markets, communities, and urban institutions.

Of the 114 land records identified, 45 records (39.5%) were classified as either urban or peri-urban, while 69 records (60.5%) were classified as rural. This distribution suggests that although rural contexts remain the predominant setting for ALTS, a substantial proportion of initiatives are located within or adjacent to urban areas.

### 5.2.4 SCALE AND LAND USE CHARACTERISTICS

The scale of land holdings documented within the database varied substantially, reflecting the diversity of ALTS operating across Canada. Acreage information was available for 100 of the 114 land records. One extreme outlier, Waldron Ranch (88,000 acres of cattle grazing land), was excluded from descriptive statistics because of its disproportionate influence on summary statistics (Table 2)

Excluding this outlier, recorded site sizes ranged from 0.5 acres to 865 acres, with a median size of 38.5 acres and a mean size of 122.1 acres. The distribution of acreage was highly variable, with 50% of records falling between approximately 11.9 acres and 145.5 acres.

The database includes initiatives operating across multiple scales of agricultural activity. Smaller sites were common, with 55% of recorded land holdings under 50 acres and 15% occupying less than 5 acres. At the same time, 21% of recorded sites exceeded 200 acres, demonstrating that ALTS are also present on a larger-scale.

It should also be noted that the acreage recorded in the database reflects the total size of the entire property. In many cases, this includes forested land, non-arable areas, buildings, and other landscape features, and therefore does not necessarily represent the exact acreage under active cultivation for each site. Disaggregating cultivated versus non-cultivated land area could be a useful future refinement of the database.

*Table 2: Acreage statistics of ALTS*

| Acreage Statistic | Value |
|---|---|
| Total land records in database | 114 |
| Records with acreage data available | 101 |
| Land entries missing acreage values | 13 |
| Extreme outlier excluded from descriptive statistics | 1 (Waldron Ranch, 88,000 acres) |
| Minimum acreage | 0.5 |
| Maximum acreage (excluding outlier) | 865 |
| Median acreage | 38.5 |
| Mean acreage | 122.1 |

### 5.2.5 GOVERNANCE PATTERNS

The Governance Summary field contains some of the most qualitative and descriptive information within the ALTS database, documenting organizational structures, decision-making processes, leadership arrangements, stakeholder involvement, and the social objectives embedded within ALTS. A key finding that emerges from this dataset is the high degree of diversity in governance models. Rather than adhering

to a single organizational form, ALTS operate through a wide range of arrangements that reflect differences in ownership structure, organizational mission, local conditions, and community relationships.

One clear pattern is the prevalence of formal organizational structures layered with participatory or community-based governance practices. Many initiatives are governed through Boards of Directors, often supported by staff teams, volunteers, advisory groups, or committees. Board sizes varied substantially, ranging from small boards of four to seven members to larger governance bodies of 13–15 directors. In many cases, boards provide strategic oversight while operational decisions are delegated to on-the-ground staff, tenant farmers, volunteers, or membership groups.

Cooperative governance represented another prominent pattern across the database. Worker cooperatives, member-owned cooperatives, solidarity cooperatives, and community service cooperatives appeared throughout the dataset. Many cooperative initiatives emphasized democratic participation through one-member-one-vote systems, collective ownership, or member-led decision-making structures. Governance within these organizations ranged from relatively formal board-led cooperatives to highly decentralized systems where members collectively managed operational and strategic decisions.

Decision-making structures themselves were highly varied. Consensus-based governance appeared frequently, particularly among cooperatives, ecovillages, and intentional communities. Several organizations employed sociocracy or dynamic governance models, using consent-based processes, interconnected working circles, and distributed leadership structures. Other initiatives relied on more conventional governance approaches through elected boards, committees, or executive leadership teams. In some cases, governance structures remained relatively informal or were not publicly documented.

A further pattern emerging from the database is the prevalence of multi-actor and layered governance arrangements. Many initiatives operate through partnerships involving landowners, nonprofit organizations, municipalities, conservation organizations, educational institutions, Indigenous governments, tenant farmers, and community groups. Governance responsibilities are frequently distributed across multiple actors rather than centralized. Examples include steering committees, advisory bodies, co-management agreements, shared lease arrangements, and governance structures that separate strategic oversight from day-to-day operations.

The governance summaries also revealed that governance structures are often closely tied to broader social and food systems objectives. Food security, environmental stewardship, regenerative agriculture, farmer training, education, accessibility, inclusion, Indigenous food justice, and community development repeatedly appeared as priorities.

### 5.2.6 INDIGENOUS-LED PROJECTS

The database identified 8 land records associated with Indigenous-led agricultural initiatives, representing approximately 7% of all land records documented. These initiatives included projects owned or operated by First Nations governments, Indigenous organizations, and initiatives explicitly oriented toward Indigenous food systems and community food production.

Several initiatives were directly connected to First Nations governments, including: Rama Community Farm in Ontario (owned and operated by the Chippewas of Rama First Nation), ntámłqən Community Garden & Food Hub in BC (owned and operated by the Lower Similkameen Indian Band), Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Farm in the Yukon (owned and operated by the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in First Nation), and cə̀lisələm Tsawwassen First Nation Community Farm in BC (owned and operated by the Tsawwassen First Nation).

Other initiatives were operated through Indigenous-led organizations, including: Kenhte:ke Seed Sanctuary and Learning Centre in Ontario (run by non-profit Ratinenhayén:thos), The Indigenous Food Sovereignty Garden in Ontario (run by non-profit All Our Relations Land Trust), Eminidowang Kiitigan – Spirit Garden for Everyone in Ontario (run by Anishnabeg Outreach), and Tea Creek Farm (run as a social enterprise with an Indigenous training program).

Importantly, this subsection attempts to document only Indigenous-led agricultural initiatives identified within the scope of the ALTS database. These records are not exhaustive and should not be interpreted as representing the broader diversity of Indigenous food systems, land relationships, or land-based practices. Indigenous food systems exist beyond agricultural production to include practices such as hunting, fishing, trapping, harvesting, gathering, seed stewardship, and other relationships to land and food that are not currently captured within the database's focus on farmland and agricultural land tenure. The database thus should not be interpreted as providing a comprehensive account of Indigenous agricultural land relationships or Indigenous approaches to land tenure. Rather, these records indicate a strong and diverse presence of Indigenous-led initiatives within the broader landscape of alternative farmland tenure systems documented through this project, and highlight that ALTS intersect with Indigenous-led approaches to land stewardship and food production.

## 5.3 WHAT COMES NEXT: FUTURE DEVELOPMENT AND UNANSWERED QUESTIONS

While the database provides one of the first national overviews of Agricultural Land Tenure Systems in Canada, it remains in the early stages of development and should be understood as a preliminary and evolving resource rather than a complete or finalized inventory. The database represents an initial effort to

identify, document, and categorize the diverse range of ALTS operating across the country, while also establishing a foundation for continued research, verification, and expansion. As such, the database highlights important gaps, limitations, and opportunities for future development.

The first limitation relates to the verification status of database entries. As described in Chapter 2, representatives from each ALTS entry included in the database were contacted and provided with draft versions of their entries for review, correction, and supplementation. Follow-up emails were sent to representatives that did not initially respond. At the time of writing, 54 of the 114 database entries, or 50% of entries, have been reviewed and verified by representatives in ALTS themselves. While this verification process substantially improved the accuracy of many records, the other half of the entries remain based primarily on publicly available information gathered from organizational websites, reports, and other online sources. As a result, some details may be incomplete or may have changed since the information was collected. Entries that have not yet undergone organizational verification will be clearly identified as such when the database is published.

One immediate area for database expansion is regional coverage. Representation from Québec remains limited relative to other provinces due to language barriers and challenges identifying initiatives through English-language search processes and networks. Efforts are currently underway with Québec-based organizations and partners to improve representation within the province, and to include the addition of a French-language or translation option to improve accessibility and participation. Other regional gaps remain as well, including further documentation of Community Pasture tenure in provinces like Manitoba and Nova Scotia.

Future database development could also expand the depth of information collected for each entry. While current records focus primarily on ownership structures, governance arrangements, and land access models, there is significant potential to incorporate additional legal, economic, and operational information. For example, future versions could include governance documents such as bylaws, constitutions, lease templates, and organizational policies to allow for more detailed analysis of institutional structures and decision-making processes. Additional data collection could also examine economic, environmental, and social outcomes to measure the success of agroecological farming. Potential indicators could include economic measures such as farm income, rental rates, land values, and long-term financial viability, as well as non-economic indicators such as soil health, biodiversity, stewardship practices, and community benefits.

Additional legal information is also an important area for future inquiry. While ownership categories and leasing arrangements were documented wherever possible, more detailed analysis of land title

arrangements, tenure security, legal ownership structures, leases, and easement/covenant arrangements would improve understanding of how these systems operate in practice.

Another limitation relates to the scope of what was included within the database itself. The database primarily focuses on farmland and land-based agricultural initiatives, meaning that some forms of agricultural production that do not fit conventional understandings of land may be excluded. For example, rooftop farms, vertical farms, aquaponics systems, and other non-traditional production systems don't fit neatly with farmland-based classifications and were excluded from the database. As these models become increasingly important components of local and urban food systems, future iterations of the database could consider expanding definitions of agricultural land access to better capture these alternative forms of production.

Finally, the process of building the database revealed broader challenges associated with researching ALTS. Much of the relevant information was dispersed across organization websites and government databases, with varying levels of transparency and public availability. Governance structures, decision-making processes, ownership and leasing information were often not fully documented or changed over time. Overall, the unanswered questions identified through this process point toward the need for continued database development rather than a finalized dataset. Due to the diversity and complexity of ALTS, documenting these systems is an ongoing process requiring updates, relationship-building, and expanded forms of data collection.

## Chapter 6: The Emergence and Development of Agricultural Land Tenure Systems in Canada (Qualitative interview results via NFF Report)

This chapter presents a draft version of the report *Canadian Farmland Tenure in Transition & Agricultural Land Tenure Systems* developed as part of the broader *Farmland Tenure in Transition* research project in collaboration with the National Farmers Foundation (NFF). Following submission of this MRP, the report will undergo further revisions, including the addition of an introduction, conclusion, and supplementary research materials, followed by a final review and approval process through the NFF prior to publication. As such, the version presented here should be understood as a completed draft and not as the final published version.

I was the primary author of this draft report and was responsible for conducting the interviews, leading the interview analysis, synthesizing the findings, and drafting the report text. The report was developed through a collaborative research process with ongoing guidance, feedback, and editorial input from Dr. Jamie Baxter and Dr. Annette Aurélie Desmarais from the NFF. The report is included in this MRP as the primary qualitative component of my research, addressing the second research question regarding the motivations, opportunities, and challenges that shape the development and implementation of Agricultural Land Tenure Systems in Canada, and how those involved in creating and managing these initiatives understand their potential contributions to farmland protection, succession, governance and access for new and young farmers.

**Motivations for Building Alternatives**

A primary goal of this research is to understand what motivates people to participate in ALTS as a response to key problems and opportunities they have identified. We asked interviewees why they initially became involved in their project, what issues or challenges they hoped to address through the ALTS, and what they expected to accomplish.

We already have a solid understanding from the existing research literature of the challenges facing farmers with respect to agricultural land in Canada at a general level, but we sought to capture participants' own perspectives on the problems they perceive within existing agricultural and land tenure systems, as well as the more positive and forward-looking goals and aspirations that shape their engagement with ALTS.

*Reducing Barriers to Access*

Our interviewees expressed a shared understanding that farming in Canada is inaccessible for many in large part because of barriers to secure and affordable farmland. Their engagements with ALTS are motivated by a desire to address the structural problems and inequalities presented by interrelated systems of property, financial investment, labour and agricultural production and their belief that ALTS offer viable pathways to improving access, shared governance and land stewardship and ground the long-term viability of their farm enterprises.

One land trust organization described their early motivation to get involved with farmland access work based on these concerns and in terms of re-connecting farmers with the land:

> It started because of a growing sense that there was something wrong with the current model of both farmland ownership and with the approach to land management. In land ownership, it was seen that the size of farms was ever increasing, and the types of ownership was moving more towards a corporate model and away from the family farm model, which caused some concerns, particularly in the growing separation between those who were working the land and the connection that they felt to the land - a lot more farm workers, employees, as opposed to those who were intimately connected to the land. The cost of getting into farming, both because of the rising costs of land and the rising costs of equipment and inputs, was making it more and more difficult for younger people, younger families, to get into farming." (Interview 24)

Key sources of this disconnect between farmers and the land–even among those currently farming–were interrelated trends of farmland consolidation, privatization and financial speculation and investment.

Interviewees perceived a significant movement toward treating farmland exclusively as financial assets rather than as integrated socio-ecological and agroecological systems. As another land trust interviewee observed:

> I see this as this opportunity to now help address one of these challenges that we're seeing in terms of land access for new, young and underrepresented farmers. We're also seeing a lot of investment companies that are now buying up farmland and turning around and leasing it back to the farmers, and that trying to be a method of being able to give cash assets back to the farmer for expanding their farm business, or buying new equipment, or whatever that might look like" (Interview 03).

Investment and financialization are especially of concern among younger farmers under the age of 35 and in peri-urban contexts because these farmers are often leasing "from developers who own land closer to urban centers where a lot of new and young farmers are coming from, and those precarious lease agreements are not conducive to a new farmer trying to get established, or the long-term viability of their farm operation." (Interview 03) Other interviewees likewise observed that there are significant links between exclusionary forms of land ownership and patterns of intergenerational succession. One farmer explained that, in their view, "[a] lot of generational farmers are losing, I want to say, a bit of traction. People don't want to take over farms anymore, so bigger corporations are buying them, and small-scale farmers are disappearing" (Interview 05). For this participant, ALTS represented one way of responding to these trends by helping sustain small-scale agriculture and creating pathways for future generations of farmers.

How then do those building and working with ALTS understand these systems as responding to the need for greater tenure security and farmland affordability? Some of the models in our research emerged explicitly around "incubator" models designed to reduce barriers to entry in the form of startup costs. As one incubator explained, because "[a]ll over Canada and North America, it's really expensive to buy land…the incubator program allows…it to be accessible and attainable for new and young farmers to get into agriculture without a huge financial barrier up front" (Interview 15). In practice, these incubator models typically provide new and aspiring farmers with low-cost access to small plots of land, along with shared infrastructure such as equipment, storage, and irrigation. Some also offer training, mentorship, and opportunities to build skills and market connections, allowing participants to develop and test their farm businesses without taking on significant debt or long-term financial risk.

At the same time, we found that participation in ALTS was not limited to short-term incubator projects: interviewees were also turning to ALTS as long-term solutions to the connected problems of tenure

insecurity and farmland affordability. A key mechanism here is that some ALTS allow farmers to avoid the need to purchase land outright, thereby removing the dual burdens of financial debt and market risk while protecting some degree of farmer autonomy not available in standard land-lease arrangements. This was a driving motivation, for example, for one land trust organization we interviewed in Quebec:

> We realized quite rapidly that the structure of agriculture in Quebec, and I guess it's the same in Canada and other countries, is not very viable for the farmers, and that one of the solutions to diminish their indebtment was to have them not have to buy the land. So this was the main idea, to remove the land from the farmer's property, but to give them access with full autonomy for their production. (Interview 25)

Some participants linked their value-based motivations around tenure security and affordability to concerns about housing security and intergenerational futures. Land-based projects were sometimes designed to provide stability for families and younger generations by adding a housing component, as expressed by a co-operative:

> “It was clear that housing prices were just skyrocketing. We had young kids we knew would eventually grow up, where are they going to go when housing is well out of reach? What can we do to even help them? So having a land base where we could actually have room for people to stay, to farm, to have food security, to have housing security.” (Interview 18)

Other interviewees linked goals of affordability, access and security specifically to distributive and equity concerns. ALTS models were motivated by a focus on supporting marginalized communities that are disproportionately affected by structural barriers to farming–as well as by broader forms of systemic inequality such as a lack of generational wealth. One ALTS organizer we interviewed spoke about the impact that such a focus on equity-deserving groups can have:

> It was a means to give marginalized communities like BIPOC communities, queer communities, female identifying persons, to give small scale farmers from these communities an opportunity to be able to get into farming. So when we're not feeling represented, or we don't have the generational wealth when it comes to agriculture, it's a little difficult to kind of get your foot in the door. (Interview 05)

It was clear from our interviews that participants seeking to advance equity and distributive justice through ALTS regard these goals as deeply connected to–not distinct from–issues of tenure security and affordability. This perspective also reinforced that security and access are not only about the financial dimensions of farmland and farming, but also about the degree to which farmers experience the

relationships to land and community as safe and inclusive–particularly in places where they have experienced or continue to experience conditions of exclusion and discrimination. For these participants, their involvement in ALTS are motivated in part by the desire to reconfigure these relationships to ground the long-term viability of their farms and livelihoods.

*Building Stronger Food Systems*

Many participants' motivations were rooted in shared values around food systems transformation writ large, particularly the desire to strengthen more sustainable and community-oriented food systems alongside educational goals. Engagement with ALTS was often framed as a way to put these values into practice, addressing social, environmental, and educational needs while shaping the design and operation of their projects including land use, organizational structure, and programming.

Food security, local food systems, and food sovereignty were repeatedly cited as central motivational concerns, particularly among organizations with explicit mandates to enhance access to food and provide public education. One participant explained that their non-profit organization's mission to improve food security was inseparable from its educational work, framing the establishment of a farm as a way to achieve both goals:

> "[Our organization] has a mandate to improve food security in the region. And so food security for us involves focusing quite heavily on education, but also access to food. So the idea of having a farm or a place to produce food was something that the organization wanted to do." (Interview 16)

Other participants framed food production as a platform for broader community engagement and economic development. In these cases, growing and processing food was not only about access but also about creating opportunities for cooperative work, skill development, and social innovation:

> "Another motivation was around the importance of local food systems, food security, food sovereignty. And really that food production and processing is actually a great starting point for whether that's cooperative work, cooperative business development, community engagement–all of that is a great platform for lots of areas of building new models, innovation and community." (Interview 17)

Environmental sustainability and land management practices were also central to participants' value-based motivations. Many interviewees described conventional agricultural practices as unsustainable,

highly dependent on fossil fuels and inputs, and damaging to long-term land productivity, framing regenerative and agroecological approaches to land as necessary:

> "Land management practices - the increasing use and reliance on chemicals, on large equipment, tillage, and moving towards mono cropping and limited rotations and limited beneficial land management practices - were all causing concerns as well. All that bundled together was, I would say, the impetus for the creation of [our organization]." (Interview 24)

Several participants highlighted the value of agroecological approaches that take a more holistic approach, aiming to manage the land in ways that support long-term ecosystem health and the well-being of the community, rather than focusing solely on intensive production, maximization of yields, or financial gain. One interviewee noted that organizations such as the United Nations "believe that small-scale regenerative agriculture is actually the future of food security and for the planet" (Interview 18), framing their project in alignment with this vision.

Finally, community-building was also central to participants' engagement in ALTS. They saw these as spaces to reconnect people with one another, with the land, and with local food systems, countering social fragmentation and disconnection from nature. One interviewee exemplified this approach, noting that their goal was to create "more space for community to be community, because community is a verb," designing the project as an inclusive space where people could support and care for one another (Interview 08). Another participant described of their non-profit as:

> "Broadening the horizons in a way that can really create a space for the community to come, to assemble and experience all kinds of different things that can nurture them in different ways. And that can connect them not only to the people around them, but to the land again. Because we're really disconnected from nature, from where our food comes from, from community support." (Interview 05)

These shared values centered around food systems transformation, community, and education were shown to have helped instill confidence in participants that projects would not only be feasible in the present, but can endure and remain meaningful into the future.

*Making Democratic Decisions*

A third set of motivations identified by participants in our study concerns the desire to develop and experiment with more democratic, collective, and participatory models of farmland governance. Interviewees expressed dissatisfaction with conventional forms of private landownership based implicitly

on decision-making structures that concentrate authority in the hands of one or two landowners. In contrast, ALTS were seen as offering organizational forms—such as cooperatives, nonprofits, and other shared governance or collective arrangements—that distribute decision-making power, encourage participation, and create greater accountability around how land is used, allocated and managed.

Several interviewees saw cooperative models in particular as appealing because they allow members to engage with projects in different ways while still having a shared framework for decision making. One interviewee emphasized this flexibility and inclusiveness as follows:

> "I really love the cooperative model and what it does. And making a system and a model that people can engage with in all these different ways, but that is really democratic. And definitely I've seen it be really challenging when people make it challenging, but I think that it doesn't need to be like that. I think that it offers a lot of good." (Interview 04)

Other participants viewed nonprofit organizational structures as offering an alternative to individual landownership by introducing formal governance processes that involve boards, staff, volunteers, and various membership categories. These arrangements were perceived as increasing transparency and distributing decision making across multiple actors rather than concentrating control in a single individual. One interviewee explained that a foundational motivation for their non-profit farm was to create a space where governance itself reflected collaborative values, "that this would be a space for inclusive decision making; it was trying to very much foster that sense of we're doing things together, we're sharing responsibility" (Interview 08). Another interviewee described how these organizational structures can broaden participation in decisions about land use:

> "I think any piece of land held by a [nonprofit] Society, let's say, rather than just a private landowner, shares the decision making process of that land a little bit more, just by the nature of running a Society. There's a board of directors involved, there's staff involved, there's volunteers and members involved, all of which contribute to, hopefully, the overall vision and trajectory of your nonprofit Society." (Interview 21)

At the same time, interviewees acknowledged that alternative organizational structures do not eliminate power dynamics altogether. However, they often provide mechanisms for greater transparency and accountability compared to privately owned land arrangements:

> "I think charities and other institutions have a better way of at least creating a mandate or creating a structure that makes it a bit more transparent and accountable. There's always going to be a

> power dynamic. There's always one entity on the deed or on the title of the land, but there's a bit more chance of accountability and transparency with organizations." (Interview 13)

Participants also highlighted social and practical reasons for pursuing collective approaches. Many wanted to avoid taking on complex land-based projects individually while preferring to build initiatives that could leverage diverse skills, resources, and perspectives of multiple collaborators. One co-operative member explained that bringing others on board allowed them to avoid having to "do this alone" while benefiting from "different views on how to do things" (Interview 04).

In part, the aspirations our interviewees expressed around shared governance were closely linked to those around affordability and access described above. Collective decision-making is seen as a necessary component of the ability to pool resources in a way that reduces the financial barriers associated with purchasing farmland individually. By pooling resources and developing shared housing alongside the productive agricultural land, ALTS participants sought to create a model where multiple households could maintain long-term relationships with the land:

> "For younger people or an individual trying to buy the land and make a viable farm, it's mostly not doable financially, so one way to approach that was to pool our resources together and build a number of homes together, and that way have people who are tied to the land in a in a shared way." (Interview 22)

These motivations suggest that the desire for democratic and collective governance structures are both ideological and practical. Participants viewed ALTS as creating organizational structures that could redistribute decision-making power, enable collaboration, and create forms of shared land stewardship, governance and resource-pooling that would be difficult to achieve through conventional forms of private landownership.

**Benefits of ALTS**

To better understand how our study participants evaluated their experiences with ALTS they were asked whether or not they regarded their project as successful and to describe their major accomplishments. We then further explored what participants saw as the most important benefits of these arrangements for those directly involved—including farmers and landholders—as well as for rural communities and the broader public. Our questions were designed to capture participants' own definitions of success and the range of outcomes they associated with ALTS across integrated social, economic, and ecological dimensions. Below we present the key themes that emerged from participants' answers to our questions.

While there is some overlap between the motivations and benefits discussed throughout this report, this reflects the relationship between participants' aspirations for ALTS and the outcomes they experienced in practice. Whereas the motivations section examines what participants hoped these models would achieve, this section focuses on the benefits and impacts they identified through their experiences of developing and operating ALTS.

*Secure, Affordable, and Equitable Access to Land*

This theme speaks to the sense of security and affordability that many participants associated with ALTS more broadly, rather than with any single tenure arrangement. Across interviews, participants described how ALTS can create more stable forms of land access by restructuring relationships to land ownership, governance, and affordability. These arrangements took multiple forms—including long-term leases, cooperative ownership structures, and shared governance models—but were consistently described as responses to one of the most significant barriers facing farmers today: insecure and unaffordable access to land.

For several tenant farmers, long-term leases were described as enabling the kinds of decisions and investments that are otherwise difficult under precarious tenure arrangements. One farmer explained that the security of a fifteen-year lease had fundamentally changed how they approached their farm business:

> "In order to continue doing what we're doing, we need to have a feeling of security and where we're growing. So it's definitely enabled us to start planning for 20 years from now what our business might look like. I think a lot of young, new farmers are dealing with short term leases or alternative ownership stuff that ends up taking advantage of them. Like, it's pretty hard to plan your life around that. So for us, we were able to be like: okay great, we know we're going to be here for at least 15 years, so we can invest in upgrading the well, or these things that we know we're going to realize those investments. We feel extremely lucky." (Interview 11)

For some participants, these alternative arrangements were the only reason they were able to farm in their region at all. One farmer leasing land from a land trust emphasized that without this model, the cost of farmland would have made farming impossible:

> "We wouldn't be here if it didn't exist this way. We wouldn't be in southern Ontario, the price of land wouldn't allow for this kind of activity to occur. So if anything, it's one of the most effective ways, in my mind, of preserving farmland for local food production that I know of." (Interview 17)

Reasonable lease rates were described as reducing financial pressure and allowing farmers to prioritize food production rather than servicing high land costs. For organizations owning these lands, maintaining affordable arrangements was often an explicit objective. One co-operative that owns the farm explained that their leasing structure was intentionally designed to avoid placing excessive financial burdens on tenant farmers, noting that "there's a fairly reasonable financial arrangement that's probably not too onerous on them," because "the whole idea is to try to keep them on the farm growing food" (Interview 06). By lowering the financial barriers associated with land access, these arrangements help redirect limited farm revenues toward production, labour, and ecological stewardship rather than rent.

Participants also noted that land access becomes significantly more viable when tenure arrangements are paired with shared infrastructure. In several projects, leases included access to greenhouses, irrigation systems, tools, and other essential equipment that would otherwise represent major startup costs for new farmers. For one farmer leasing land from the federal government, their ten-year lease combined with existing infrastructure—including city water, greenhouses, and shared tools (Interview 13)—created conditions that made the farm viable in ways that land alone would not.

For land trusts in particular, these arrangements were also framed as mechanisms for ensuring long-term stewardship and continuity in agriculture. By placing farmland into trust, organizations are able to maintain land in agricultural use beyond the tenure of individual farmers while supporting sustainable management practices over time. As one staff member at a land trust explained, holding land in trust has enabled farms to remain part of "multi generational farming operations" while keeping people farming who might otherwise have been forced out by land costs (Interview 24).

Finally, several participants highlighted how these models can also address challenges associated with family farm succession. In cases where farmland might otherwise be sold on the open market during generational transitions, placing land into trust was described as a way of maintaining agricultural use while preventing speculative resale. One interviewee explained that land trust structures can provide mechanisms that ensure farmland remains dedicated to farming rather than being utilized for private gain:

> "Even from family farms passing on farms from one generation to the next, there's still a huge issue of, well, if we give you the farm, what's to say in 10 years you're not just going to sell it and pocket the money for yourself? There's nothing. So this [model] becomes an opportunity in terms of family farm governance–holding the farm in trust, providing very supportive land tenure agreements, even within a family, but ensuring that nobody's going to be selling the whole thing and walking away with all the cash." (Interview 17)

ALTS thus act as institutional structures that reshape the conditions of land access in agriculture. Through mechanisms such as long-term leases, collective ownership arrangements, shared infrastructure, and governance models oriented toward long-term sustainability, these systems work to reduce the precarity often associated with farmland access and create more stable conditions for farmers to establish viable operations. However, interview data suggests that tenure security extends beyond economic stability alone. As discussed in the motivations section, participants frequently linked secure access to land with broader questions of safety, belonging, and inclusion, particularly for those who have historically faced barriers within dominant agricultural systems. In this sense, ALTS may not only improve affordability and long-term planning capacity, but also create conditions for more secure, accessible, and supportive relationships to land. While these broader social justice dimensions are explored further later in the report, the findings suggest that tenure security within ALTS is best understood as both an economic and social condition.

*Food Sovereignty*

Food sovereignty emerged as a useful framework for understanding how interviewees described the relationship between ALTS, food production, and community wellbeing. While only a few participants explicitly used the term "food sovereignty," many described outcomes and practices that aligned closely with its principles: local control over food systems, community decision-making, knowledge sharing, ecological production practices, and greater autonomy over how food is grown and distributed. Rather than simply increasing the availability of local food, interview data suggests that ALTS can reshape who has control over land, production, and food system governance.

This interpretation aligns with La Via Campesina's definition of food sovereignty as "the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems." Across interviews, participants described building food systems that integrated production, education, community engagement, and ecological stewardship, often in ways that challenged more conventional market-oriented agricultural models.

Most projects produced mixed vegetables using agroecological methods on relatively small land bases, typically with less than ten acres in production, often supplemented by food forests, orchards, small-scale livestock, greenhouses, or hoophouses. Several participants also identified bringing underused or idle land back into production as a major success, with one interviewee noting that their project had expanded production by an additional three acres since its establishment (Interview 02). These examples illustrate

how ALTS can support productive land use while enabling more localized control over agricultural decision-making.

Distribution of produce for ALTS occurs through a range of channels, including farm stands, on-farm stores, community kitchens, direct sales, Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) programs, farmers' markets, and occasional you-pick operations. CSA programs varied considerably in scale, serving anywhere from approximately 20 to 200 households. Some interviewees highlighted the volume of food produced as a significant indicator of success:

> "I think just the fact that 20 years on, there's a lot of food being grown there and shared throughout the community. There's also a lot of knowledge about food being not only shared, but transmitted from one generation to the next and then value added in the community kitchen. That's pretty huge." (Interview 08)

Similarly, some emphasized the double role of these projects in both food production and education:

> "I think it's been a success, and I don't have the statistics right in front of me, but an awful lot of people go through the farm and participate in our programs, and it produces a lot of local food for our community, and it teaches people how to produce food themselves. So it's a food production area, but it's primarily an educational model so that's what we are trying to accomplish, and I think that we are" (Interview 16)

Apart from direct sales and household consumption, many models also supported food banks, community kitchens, shelters, school meal programs, and community fridges. Urban and peri-urban locations were seen as particularly important in facilitating these relationships, making it easier for organizations to access produce and for staff or volunteers to visit the farms.

ALTS, then, do more than improve access to food: they enable communities to reclaim decision-making power over land and food production, moving beyond food security toward more locally defined and controlled food systems.

*Stewardship, Innovation, and Agroecology*

Interviewees emphasized the role of ALTS in linking opportunities for innovation and experimentation with better land stewardship, biodiversity and agroecological practices. Because ALTS can help to pool risk and minimize uncertainty in significant aspects of agricultural production, our study participants told us that they sometimes have greater flexibility to experiment with new or unfamiliar practices, pilot new initiatives, and integrate ecological stewardship goals with agricultural production in novel ways.

Some ALTS projects have been especially successful in securing external funding sources to support pilot initiatives and demonstration projects related to stewardship goals. Examples include funding for a geodome which will function as a community gathering space, energy and climate-focused demonstration projects such as agrivoltaics solar panels, an eco-drum composter which converts offal and green waste into compost to divert back into agricultural use, developing a field for 'best management practice' demonstration plots, and a sustainable apiary models and protecting native pollinators in response to declines in habitat and biodiversity.

In addition to external grants and philanthropic funding, some participants highlighted the importance of alternative financing pathways in enabling ALTS to acquire and secure farmland. Conventional lending institutions can be hesitant to finance nonprofit, cooperative, or community-based land acquisitions, particularly when ownership models do not align with traditional assumptions about agricultural investment and repayment. However, one participant described a charitable nonprofit receiving financing from a local progressive credit union that enabled them to acquire a farm within a short timeframe, allowing them to secure the property despite the challenges of obtaining conventional bank financing for this type of acquisition (Interview 01). While such financing pathways remain limited and are not yet widely available, this example demonstrates how ALTS are experimenting with innovative institutional relationships to overcome some of the financial barriers associated with alternative forms of farmland ownership.

It is notable that farms in our sample are not composed solely of cultivated farmland. Significant portions of the land base include forests, woodlots, wetlands, riparian areas, hay fields, and other ecologically sensitive areas and are important to the overall mission for these ALTS. In some cases, farms are actively undertaking restoration or rewilding initiatives. One project has initiated a 'forest floor project' fencing off a section of land to allow it to regenerate while also using the space for outdoor education with local schools (Interview 06). Another farm has plans to restore portions of hay field back into wetlands, working with local organizations to support habitat recovery in response to wetland loss (Interview 02). Participants also highlighted their efforts to plant native species and pollinator habitat.

For some farms, these practices are explicitly guided by agroecological principles. One interviewee described how their community farm adopts agroecology as a framework for both production and education, focusing on practices such as "trying to grow using less water" and "preserving soil health" through methods like no-till farming while also connecting agroecological farming practices to broader social, economic and political questions about food systems and food insecurity (Interview 09).

Participants also consistently noted land stewardship and protection from development as core measures of success. Some mentioned that their projects were located in rapidly growing municipalities where farmland loss has been significant, making the preservation of agricultural land particularly important. Securing farmland through a non-profit, cooperative, or land trust structure was viewed as a way of ensuring that the land would remain dedicated to agriculture in the long term. One tenant farmer reflected on how reassuring it felt to imagine "not ever having to be stressed about developers knocking on our door" and being able to pour energy into the farm without worrying that it might eventually be sold and developed (Interview 11). This connects to core benefits of tenure security from ALTS discussed above.

When asked about successes, some interviewees spoke about the land itself as a beneficiary of ALTS initiatives. One participant described how alternative tenure arrangements can create conditions that support more holistic approaches to land stewardship and long-term ecological management:

> "The land also benefits long term, especially with preferential lease agreements where you're not gouged at market rates, you don't have so much pressure on the land to always be producing. You can do rest years a bit easier. You can put in some conservation parts of the farm without thinking, well if we take away that acreage, we're not gonna be able to pay for this. You can treat the farm a little bit more holistically and not just economically." (Interview 17)

Underlying many of these practices is the governance structure of the organizations themselves. Many participants recognized that land owned by non-profits, cooperatives, or land trusts is managed according to explicitly articulated social and environmental values rather than purely financial considerations. One land trust interviewee noted that decisions about land use are made by a values-based board of directors whose mandate prioritizes ecological and community benefit, rather than maximizing financial returns from the property:

> "High level decisions around the use of the land and the structure of the agreements is made by a values-based, as opposed to a profit-based board of directors, right? Just to hear the questions that board members ask, and the direction that they are pointing is, again, not towards a maximum profit mentality. Of course, they have a fiduciary responsibility to the organization and to seeing the sustainability of the organization, but that is very different than, 'how can we get the most money out of each piece of land that we hold title to?'" (Interview 24)

Another participant similarly described how shifting toward market-rate leasing at one point almost undermined their project, explaining that treating land primarily as an asset was fundamentally incompatible with the organization's mission:

> "That's been one of the mottos of this [organization], is to not look at land so much as an asset, and look at it more as a productive activity and stewardship and human nourishing—as opposed to, "What's the market rate? How do we get the most market rate out of the place?" In fact, [the organization] had a bit of a challenge at one point where there was some leadership that had a market rate concept. And I'd say it almost destroyed the farm, like it made it almost not attractive to anything except for a conventional farmer. That whole concept doesn't work." (Interview 17)

Rather than simply making farming less expensive, these perspectives suggest that ALTS may more explicitly recognize and accommodate the real costs and benefits associated with agroecological production. Under more conventional land tenure arrangements, the ecological and long-term benefits of these practices are often treated as externalities, creating pressure to prioritize short-term productivity in order to meet ownership or lease costs. By structuring land access and governance differently, ALTS may create conditions where ecological stewardship is treated as part of the farm's value rather than as a financial sacrifice. In this sense, the success of ALTS may lie less in lowering costs outright and more in reshaping how land, productivity, and environmental care are valued within agricultural systems.

*Community, Social Cohesion, and Wellbeing*

Across interviews, participants highlighted the role of ALTS in fostering community, social connection, and wellbeing. While these projects are often framed in terms of land access and food production, participants described them equally as social systems that bring people together around shared work, learning, and care for the land. In this sense, the benefits of ALTS extend beyond food production and land access to include the cultivation of community relationships and supportive social environments for both farmers and non-farmers.

High levels of participation—through volunteering, tenancy, and community programming—were widely cited as central to the success and viability of these projects. Given the tight financial margins of small-scale agriculture, volunteers were often seen as both economically and socially essential. As one participant noted, "we wouldn't do what we do without the volunteers," highlighting how a group of skilled retirees regularly dedicate time to help keep the project functioning (Interview 21). Another interviewee similarly emphasized the importance of volunteer contributions, explaining that "the margins for having a viable farm are pretty tight, so good volunteer contributions can really help." (Interview 22)

Participation was also viewed as an indicator of project success and resonance with community. Several participants pointed to growing numbers of people visiting, volunteering, or participating in programs

over time. One interviewee shared how the farm has expanded its activities, as evident through mapping and metrics:

> "We love to look at the GIS maps or Google Maps and see each year how it expands and changes. So the proof is really there. And again, with the metrics, like counting how many people are coming through, how many pounds of food are being produced, and all of that. Yeah, it's really encouraging, it's really exciting. I feel like every year we do something new, like now adding the market, or adding the farm for school meal programs, and so every year there's something new and some growth, a new direction that we're kind of taking as an organization. The community gardens are full, like we just expanded it, everybody's loving it." (Interview 15)

Community-building events were described as a particularly important mechanism through which these connections are cultivated. Participants frequently referenced potlucks, festivals, work parties, and seed exchanges as spaces where people gather around the farm. One participant recalled a potluck dinner held in the meadow of the farm, where participants gathered around tables to share dishes made from food grown on the land. The evening concluded with people exchanging growing tips and reflecting on the season's lessons, illustrating how "the sharing or commoning of knowledge in the oral tradition" (Interview 08) remains an important part of these projects. Another interviewee recalled a recent event on their farm:

> "It was just really cool to have everybody come out, enjoy themselves, and really express that. You know, many people left saying how happy they were to participate in the day and how nice it was to just feel the love and community amongst everybody there, and how excited they were to come back. That was like, wow, okay, we're still building, but the people are happy, and the people are seeing it, and the people are wanting to come back and wanting to participate. And they like the energy and everything that's being offered right now, and it's just, it's really motivating and validating to keep pushing forward." (Interview 05)

Intentional community-building efforts also extended beyond the farms themselves. Many farms organize events, workshops, or partnerships aimed at welcoming new farmers, gardeners, and community members. One participant explained that a key focus of their co-operative was "being very community minded," whether through encouraging young farmers to work on the farm or organizing events that engage the wider public (Interview 06). Such efforts suggest that ALTS often embed community engagement directly into their organizational missions.

Interviewees frequently discussed the wellbeing benefits associated with participation in these projects. Farms were described as accessible and restorative spaces where individuals could spend time outdoors in a serene setting, perform meaningful physical work, and develop social relationships. One participant explained that volunteers often appreciate the simplicity of the work—"weed this row, or these tomatoes"—describing it as a "zen activity" that many find beneficial for their mental health (Interview 21). The opportunity to participate in short, structured volunteer shifts also allows people to engage with farming in manageable ways while still contributing to food production.

For farmers themselves, these cooperative and collective structures were often described as reducing isolation and distributing the pressures of agricultural work. Several interviewees noted that working within a shared governance or cooperative model made farming more manageable and sustainable. One member of a co-operative explained:

> "I think that almost all of us who work on the farm, feel like we wouldn't have a farm if we were a solo farm owner. I think all of us feel like we're able to do this job because it's with other people, and because it's with this model that otherwise, the stress of it and just the challenges would be too much. And that also we've been able to build something bigger and more successful more quickly, because we're more people. And I think that the quality of life is higher than I see a lot of my other farmer friends having. Because there's more people, we're able to share the load and the responsibilities." (Interview 19)

Participants also highlighted the role that these projects play in addressing and supporting mental wellbeing within farming communities. Agriculture is widely recognized as a profession associated with high levels of stress, long working hours, and social isolation, particularly for farmers working independently. Several interviewees suggested that ALTS help mitigate these dynamics by creating opportunities for social interaction, shared work, and community engagement around farming activities. As one farmer reflected, these spaces offer rare opportunities "to come together, be in nature, reconnect with old practices, and support each other within the community" (Interview 05). Another participant emphasized that the social networks formed through these projects are meaningful for farmers themselves, while also providing opportunities for older community members to remain involved in food production in ways that are manageable and fulfilling:

> "Just the social connections that come from this, especially, I think for a lot of farmers. I mean, supposedly the mental health and suicide rates of farmers is very high, unfortunately. And so having good, vibrant social network and community around us is really important. And we have a lot of folks who are older, 70's plus, and this is a really meaningful way for them to be engaged in

> a farm without having the responsibility and the physical load, but they can assist at a market or in seeding or doing tasks that they like to do and are physically able to manage, and that's good, the sense of accomplishment. And food is, as you know, the great connector of people." (Interview 22)

Finally, participants acknowledged that cultivating these forms of community requires considerable time and relational work. Building trust, maintaining collaborative governance, and organizing collective activities all demand ongoing effort and emotional labour. As one interviewee observed, models based on co-leadership or shared decision-making "always boil down to trust and relationship" (Interview 21), processes that inevitably take time to develop. Yet despite these challenges, participants widely viewed these relational investments as 'worth it' and essential to the long-term viability of their projects.

*Education, Training, and Pathways into Farming*

Education and skill-building emerged as central functions of many ALTS. ALTS often operate as educational infrastructures embedded within working farms, expanding opportunities for people to engage with food production and learn practical skills. Learning is intentionally shared with farmers, volunteers, and the broader public.

Educational programming frequently begins with children and youth, particularly those with little prior exposure to farming or food production. Many host school field trips, farm camps, and food literacy initiatives designed to reconnect young people with land-based practices and the origins of their food. One participant described how these experiences allow students to move through the full cycle of growing, harvesting, and preparing food, helping translate abstract environmental and food system issues into direct hands-on learning:

> "There's a lot of kids that don't know where their food comes from, they don't know anything about that process. They hear about climate change and environmental issues, but they don't necessarily have direct hands-on experience with it. And so yeah, I think that that doing that, and then, having a cooking class, for example, right on site when they've harvested the food or planted the food and have gone through like, the entire process, I think, is knowledge that they can take with them through their lives and improve their own food security at any point in their life. So that's our belief in it." (Interview 16)

Several projects have also developed more formal partnerships with educational institutions to embed these experiences within school curricula. One interviewee described a food literacy pilot that their non-profit farm developed with a local school district, where students participated in seasonal field visits and

classroom curriculum designed to reinforce lessons learned on the farm. She noted that the enthusiasm students showed for these experiences reinforced the importance of providing hands-on exposure to food production (Interview 23).

Beyond youth education, a number of ALTS also intentionally create pathways into farming for adults interested in developing agricultural skills or careers in agriculture. Several farms operate incubator or training programs that provide new farmers with access to land, shared infrastructure, and mentorship. These programs allow participants to gain practical experience while reducing the financial risks associated with starting a farm independently. As one participant explained, their incubator program provides not only land but also shared equipment, regular cohort meetings, and ongoing mentorship:

> "We provide a lot of mentorship. We check in every two weeks as a cohort. We have shared infrastructure, so we have a wash-pack station, greenhouse, a walk behind tractors, Jang seeder, like everything really that you would need. So it's really, really helpful. Some incubator problem programs are just supplying the land. But with us, we're going beyond that, having all these additional amenities." (Interview 15)

These training initiatives were often framed as addressing the structural risks associated with entering agriculture, particularly the financial risks of purchasing land or investing heavily in infrastructure without prior experience. One interviewee observed how their program allows new farmers to experiment and learn through failure in ways that would be difficult if they had already committed to purchasing expensive farmland:

> "The idea is that they rent from us for about 5 to 10 years, and throughout that process, we help them build their business plan. We help them get a good price on renting land, so you can focus a little more on making those mistakes, trying things that are maybe unconventional, that you might not want to risk having that failure otherwise, because you just bought a half a million dollar piece of land. So it's giving people an opportunity to make those mistakes, but also help them along the way to build their business plan, and also help them along the way to ideally buy their own land once they leave us, to have all the tools and the structure in place to be able to do that." (Interview 05)

Some projects offer youth-specific training initiatives that introduce participants to farming as a potential livelihood. One interviewee described their youth training program as providing a first exposure to food production for youth who might not otherwise encounter farming:

> “Our youth training program is really fun, and it gives people who probably otherwise wouldn't have an opportunity to learn anything about food growing that little window into it, which is cool, because then you can take that interest and then go do something else. But without seeing it for the first time, it's sometimes kind of hard to get to know you're interested, and hard to get started on something of your own.” (Interview 07)

At the same time, participants acknowledged that existing training opportunities for farming remain limited, and some hope to start or expand them in the future. One interviewee noted that while their organization already facilitates access to farmland, they are exploring the creation of a formal apprenticeship program that would allow learners to gain hands-on experience across multiple farms and cooperative sites, creating more structured pathways for skill development (Interview 20).

Finally, participants recognized how employment within these projects can itself function as a form of training and entry into farming, as seasonal positions and staff roles often provide opportunities to gain practical farming experience. An interviewee from a co-operative explained how their farm employs several seasonal workers each year and these positions are designed not only as jobs but as opportunities for “meaningful work” and skill development, with the potential for some employees to eventually join the cooperative itself (Interview 19).

**Equity, Inclusion and Justice in ALTS**

A number of our interviewees linked outcomes related to equity, inclusion and justice directly to the benefits of ALTS described in the previous section of this report. But because these dimensions of ALTS are understudied and often not well understood, we asked participants to speak specifically to their justice-oriented goals for ALTS and to the benefits–expected and actual–of their initiatives for individuals and groups historically marginalized or excluded from agriculture, including for women, queer and transgender people, and BIPOC communities and in terms of land reconciliation with Indigenous peoples. This section of the report addresses how study participants characterized their goals related to equity, inclusion and justice and critically explores how participants sought to realize those goals and interpreted the benefits of ALTS for equity-deserving and justice-seeking individuals and groups.

*Implicit versus Intentional Inclusion*

Across the interviews, a key distinction emerged between forms of implicit inclusion of social justice goals—marked by openness and non-discrimination—and intentional inclusion—which involves actively addressing structural barriers to participation. Many models described themselves as open, welcoming,

and non-exclusionary places, yet lacked explicit social justice strategies or targeted efforts to address systemic inequities.

This was often articulated as an 'anyone is welcome' approach, where inclusion is assumed through general openness rather than pursued through intentional outreach or policies. For instance, one participant shared that while they have "a natural sympathy towards those groups," they could not point to "a particular policy or efforts made to include or promote their access to farmland" (Interview 24). Similarly, another participant framed their organization's role specifically in terms of providing land, explaining that "we're not actively helping someone become a farmer, that's up to them. But the land is accessible" (Interview 26). In both cases, they saw their role as providing land access but distanced themselves confronting structural barriers that shape who is able to become a farmer. This logic was also reflected in more individualized, non-discriminatory framings of inclusion that reject targeted approaches:

> "Our space is open and welcome to anybody, so you can come. I don't care about your sexuality, I don't care if you're white, I don't care if you're green, you're a human being, you eat food, and if you want to come and spend time with us and learn more about what we do, you're always welcome." (Interview 14)

At the same time, some interviewees reflected directly on the limitations of this 'implicit inclusion' model and identified intentional inclusion as an area for growth. One interviewee acknowledged that while their programming is open, "we would like to be more intentional as we grow in our invitation and education… but we don't do a lot of that at this moment" (Interview 21), highlighting a gap between their current values and practice. One cooperative described early steps toward more proactive engagement such as attending Pride events and visibly encouraging participation from LGBTQ+ communities: "we're not just hoping that we have members of the community that become involved in the farm, but we are encouraging them" (Interview 06). These efforts suggest a shift toward recognizing that inclusion requires visibility and outreach.

Importantly, movement toward intentional inclusion was not without tension. One interviewee reflected on a tension they feel around intentionally recruiting racially marginalized people, questioning how best to pursue this in the context of their farm being located in a predominantly white, rural area. They expressed concern about whether this would necessarily translate into a safe or supportive experience, given the nature of the surrounding community:

> "So we're in rural Quebec, in a very white community. We don't have a lot of non-white people who are applying, and I often have sort of a question about what would be best for those

> individuals–if we should be doing more outreach, and if we would be, what would be best for those individuals coming and working and living in this community? I kind of have those questions about, for our context, the most impactful way to actually make those differences." (Interview 19)

These findings demonstrate that while many ALTS are grounded in inclusive values, they often rely on passive approaches that may not disrupt existing inequities. Emerging efforts toward intentional inclusion indicate a growing awareness of these limitations, yet also reveal the complexities of translating equity commitments into action.

*Intentional Inclusion Through Recruitment, Hiring, Pricing, and Governance*

In contrast to passive models of inclusion, some ALTS demonstrate more intentional and active approaches to equity, tying social justice considerations directly into their organizational structures and decision-making processes. These projects move beyond passive inclusivity, and instead equity considerations are incorporated into their land access decisions, hiring practices, pricing, and governance structures.

One key mechanism is the incorporation of equity criteria into land access processes. Some projects explicitly weigh whether access will support individuals from underrepresented groups. One land trust with a new land access program explained that when assessing applications, they use criteria to consider, "will this help an underrepresented community member gain access to land?" (Interview 03). This shifts land access from a neutral process to one that actively seeks to counteract processes that have historically excluded some groups from land.

Similarly, hiring practices were a way in which targeted inclusion came into play. Some interviewees described an intention to recruit and retain staff from marginalized communities, with one noting that "We try to hire folks that are part of marginalized groups. Lots of our team are BIPOC folks or queer folks… trying to make sure our team is as diverse as we can make it" (Interview 09). In some cases, these efforts were supported through partnerships with employment agencies and external funding programs, enabling farms to hire individuals facing barriers to employment while contributing to the viability of their farm operations. As one interviewee explained:

> "So through our employment programs we do that, but I've got to say, those are mutually beneficial employment programs. We're bringing diverse people into the rural community and

> into farm work, which is great. And then on the flip side of that, though, we do get subsidized for our wages through those programs, and that has allowed us to keep up a certain amount of our production as well." (Interview 17)

Governance structures were also identified as an important part of targeted inclusion. Projects aiming to support marginalized farmers stressed the importance of leadership that reflects the communities they intend to serve, noting that representation within boards helps ensure that inclusion is not just symbolic but shapes decision making. One project which explicitly aims to support land access for BIPOC farmers explained:

> "It's also creating a space where we're not just doing it for the sake of doing it, but our board also represents the communities that we want to help, you know? So I think that that's really important for us too, and also creating a space where people feel comfortable being themselves." (Interview 05)

Patterns of gender and queer representation further illustrated how the composition of organizations can shape participation. One cooperative saw a feedback loop where having many women and queer people in leadership makes others from these groups more likely to apply, suggesting that inclusion can reproduce itself once established (Interview 19). Another non-profit observed that both within their farm site and in their broader region, farming is very female dominated: "there's a lot of women interested in small-scale regenerative farming" (Interview 15).

Although not explicitly prompted, several interviewees also raised physical accessibility as a dimension of targeted inclusion. Some projects have incorporated accessibility infrastructure such as ramps, accessible washrooms, and raised beds—and see them as necessary inclusions in a sector where "historically, farming isn't really an accessible endeavor" (Interview 15). Accessibility was also discussed in relation to the challenges of accessing rural farm sites. One non-profit has been actively thinking through transportation barriers to visiting their farm, including the possibility of shuttling people from urban centers or renting a vehicle to support participation (Interview 05).

Finally, income level and affordable access to food were raised as factors for inclusion. One co-operative has offered a CSA "solidarity share" program since 2021, where CSA boxes are sold at reduced prices for low-income households and expand access to local organic food for people who might otherwise be excluded. Another co-operative has deliberately set lower prices for fresh local food to increase accessibility, while acknowledging the tension this creates with compensating themselves fairly:

> "Those are some big decisions. It means that we don't get paid as much, and the money that we can put back into the farm isn't as much. And we've talked about other models for maybe next year, like doing a sliding scale to make it more accessible. But obviously, local food, and also for us to pay ourselves a living wage is a balance." (Interview 04)

These practices illustrate how certain ALTS are operationalizing equity through concrete interventions in access, labour, governance, and pricing. While these approaches do not fully resolve structural inequities, they represent a shift toward more deliberate redistribution within agricultural systems.

*Indigenous Engagement and Reconciliation*

Engagement with Indigenous communities appeared frequently as an important dimension of social justice work within these ALTS. Indigenous engagement took multiple forms, ranging from early-stage relationship-building and cultural exchange to land-based programming, food sharing, and emerging strategies for land access and treaty rights. Many participants highlighted humility and reflexivity, noting that reconciliation is not something that can be "completed," but an ongoing commitment that unfolds over time.

Several projects framed reconciliation as fundamentally relational, grounded in knowing whose land they occupy and attempting to build trust over time. One interviewee articulated both the commitment to this work and the tensions that can be present:

> "We are working on trying to build a relationship with that First Nation as well, which takes time, right? It takes time, and it takes patience, and we have a lot of trust to build with the First Nations community. And yet, at the same time, one of the challenges is like, we need to get somebody on the land, we need to move forward with this… so still needing to move forward on the project, but also needing to build those relationships, to find the opportunities that would be of benefit to our Indigenous neighbours as well. So there's no perfect recipe on how to go about doing that, and we're learning on this journey as well on how to do that better." (Interview 03)

Other projects highlighted land-based learning on their farms and the renewal of Indigenous ecological knowledge. One interviewee noted an upcoming meeting with a nearby First Nation to explore opportunities for growing Indigenous food plants and supporting pathways back to land-based practices. Several others referenced Indigenous medicine gardens on their farms that are either long established or currently in development. One participant reflected on a recent plant walk led by an Elder on their farm:

> "When he got to what settlers call Ocean Spray, he called it by its traditional native name, Qethelph. He then almost seemed to call it back into a relationship with humans as he explained how to pick the seeds and form them into a pulp to lay on a wound, to draw out the toxins and promote healing. I could feel it happening, this renewal of a relationship, an ancient relationship that was of mutual respect and great honouring of the plant." (Interview 08)

Rather than formalized programming, some farms described supporting Indigenous initiatives through informal resource-sharing. One interviewee explained:

> "Sometimes we'll also try to share our equipment and materials with other organizations that are starting up. We did have an organization in Calgary that works with Indigenous youth, primarily young girls, and they were starting their own community garden. So just trying to give supplies, if we have extra seeds and things like that, or extra knowledge to share." (Interview 09)

Some initiatives focused on partnerships with Indigenous children, youth, and families. One non-profit had an early relationship with a Native Child and Family Services organization where families participated in harvesting and land-based programming. Others spoke about hosting Indigenous youth groups, summer camps, Elders' visits, or sharing produce with Indigenous food box programs.

One farm co-operative recalled a long-standing relationship with local First Nations communities that predates their current organizational structure. Early members were invited onto reserve land to start community gardens, and Indigenous community members regularly spent time on the farm. This was described as a reciprocal exchange of knowledge, and participants acknowledged that they learned significant land-based skills and cultural knowledge through these relationships. Many of the individuals involved were residential school survivors, a history that shaped the depth and meaning of the engagement. These relationships continue in the present for the co-operative, through collaboration with a nearby First Nation on a youth agricultural training program, hosting workshops, and welcoming Elders and community groups onto the farm.

Some interviewees pointed to emerging efforts within their internal governance, such as board-level workshops on Indigenous culture and growing methods. One participant discussed early-stage connections with the Treaty Land Sharing Network which operates in Saskatchewan and Alberta, noting the potential for future collaboration that could support Indigenous land use and treaty rights. Another shared that their farm's name follows an Indigenous word, gifted by the local First Nation, and that this has become a small but ongoing communal learning process, including learning how to pronounce it correctly.

At the same time, participants clearly articulated limitations in their ability to support Indigenous land access or land-back initiatives. Two interviewees noted that such efforts were constrained by the fact that they do not own the land they farm. As one explained, “there's definitely like limits to what we're able to do, I think, especially in terms of like land back because we don't own the land… there’s really cool models where people partner with organizations to say, like, this is land that we have, that we want you to have access to, too. We are not able to do that and where we're at” (Interview 04). Similarly, another participant reflected, “I wish we could do more. I think if we had our own land, we would be able to do more” (Interview 09). These limitations highlight structural barriers that extend beyond individual or organizational intent.

Indigenous engagement within ALTS is characterized by the strong significance of relationship-building, learning, and localized forms of collaboration, but may remain limited in its depth and structural impact, as they often stop short of redistributing land or decision-making power.

*Partnership-Based Equity Work*

Partnerships are a central tool through which ALTS engage in equity-oriented work, allowing them to extend their social impact beyond the boundaries of their own operations. Rather than acting alone, many initiatives operate within broader networks of organizations already engaged in food access, social services, and advocacy. These collaborations allow ALTS to expand their social justice efforts and impact while recognizing the limits of their own capacity, expertise, and reach.

Throughout the interviews, interviewees listed partnerships with food access organizations, social service agencies, advocacy groups, and other aligned nonprofits that serve diverse and marginalized populations. One interviewee emphasized the importance of connecting underrepresented farmers not only to land, but also to community and peer support through existing organizations:

> “With underrepresented groups, it's not just land access–there's additional barriers or challenges that they face in the agricultural community. And so this is why we have been talking to other organizations like the National Farmers Union of Ontario and Ecological Farmers Association that have BIPOC farmer meetup groups, queer farmer meetup groups, and mentorship opportunities. So making sure that we have some sort of partnership or collaboration in line with being able to say, ‘hey, we don't want you to be at it alone, and we know that it's helpful for you to be able to talk to other members of your community from these underrepresented groups, here's other resources.’ We don't want to reinvent the wheel that already exists and that's doing very well.” (Interview 03)

Food donation was one of the most common partnership-based strategies mentioned. Many farms regularly donate produce to food banks, community kitchens, and meal programs serving low-income and marginalized communities. As one participant explained, “donating the product has been a great way to reach maybe minority groups as well that might need some fresh produce and not be able to afford it at a farmers market, or have that time and luxury to go to a farmer's market.” (Interview 15) Taking it a step further, one non-profit rents space in their farmhouse to a group that operates a food bank alongside broader social support and outreach services, tying food access work directly within farm production (Interview 08).

Some also described hosting farm tours and site visits for their partner organizations, including community groups they donate food to or collaborate with on programming. These visits were often seen as opportunities for education, relationship-building, and increasing comfort with farm spaces that may otherwise feel inaccessible.

The ability to engage in partnership-based equity work also appears to be shaped by organizational form. Organizations such as non-profits and co-operatives with collective governance structures can expand the capacity for social justice engagement, making it more feasible than in individualized or privately operated farm models. As one co-operative shared:

> “I think we're also able to do a bit more giving back or contributing to the community because we're more people. There's a bit more mental space and energy for other projects that aren't just production, because there's six of us who are running the business so we have a little more space in that way.” (Interview 19)

Partnership-based approaches allow ALTS to extend their equity work beyond their own farms, placing themselves within broader networks of social support and community care. By collaborating with organizations, partnerships can leverage existing resources and infrastructure while avoiding duplication of effort.

**Challenges and Limitations of ALTS**

To understand the challenges and limitations associated with ALTS, we asked interviewees to reflect on the barriers they have encountered in building and operating these models. Questions explored whether participants perceived any drawbacks to the arrangements they had adopted, as well as what aspects of the model they found most difficult to implement or sustain. Participants were also invited to consider potential future changes, including what they would like to see improved or adapted within these models moving forward.

*Ownership, Authority, and Precarity*

While secure, affordable, and long-term access to land was cited as a major success for many tenants leasing through these models, other tenants experienced instability and uncertainty within similar arrangements. For some, leasing from a nonprofit or public entity offered a rare sense of tenure security outside of speculative land markets. For others, changes in governance, funding, or landowner priorities brought constraints that limited their autonomy and ability to plan long-term. This section focuses on those latter experiences, examining how ownership, authority, and decision-making power can produce precarity even within alternative models intended to provide stability.

Several participants reflected on the assumption that publicly owned land is inherently alternative or progressive. It was questioned how "alternative" these arrangements truly are when the power dynamics of a conventional landlord-tenant relationship remain largely intact. In this sense, these models may be "alternative" in intent, but in practice are often only as strong as the relationships and political contexts that sustain them. One interviewee from a nonprofit farm operating on municipally owned land described this tension, noting that although the land is publicly owned and intended to support community-oriented agricultural programming, the organization still operates under conditions similar to any other lease arrangement with a landowner. They explained that:

> "The challenges have just been the security for funding and security of the land. Which is so funny, because it's basically the same challenges you would have as a farmer leasing land for your own business. It's the same things, it's like, the funding and the security of the land are still the challenges, right?" (Interview 15)

Another interviewee referred to the government entity from which they lease land as a "distant landlord," describing the constraints this arrangement places on their co-operative's autonomy. In this case, the land is publicly owned, while the co-operative operates as a long-term lessee under a formal lease agreement with the government. The participant explained that even relatively minor land-use decisions, such as planting a row of fruit trees, require prior approval from the landlord, highlighting the limited decision-making authority afforded under this structure (Interview 01).

Similar dynamics were present when land was owned by charities or religious institutions. In one case, a nonprofit leasing land from a religious institution felt a disconnect between the concept of land sharing and their lived reality of decision-making authority:

> "I do think conceptually, land should be shared. I don't really think we should have this rigid ownership of land in general. So I do think the model of land sharing is really good and should be

> done. But that being said, I think the challenge is that the church still sees it as their land, they are like, 'we own this land.' So there have been some times where it doesn't really feel like we're sharing the land. We are very much a tenant and they own it, and so they are the ones that make the final decision on everything. And so, that sort of collaboration is maybe not there all the time, as much as I wish it would be." (Interview 09)

Institutional turnover was mentioned as another key factor affecting precarity. Changes in elected officials or nonprofit board members can abruptly reshape funding, priorities, and interpretations of previous agreements. For one nonprofit leasing from a government body, shifting municipal councils jeopardized their long-term plans by cutting funding: "Because councils change, and maybe they didn't understand the vision from 10 years ago, when this all started to come about" (Interview 15). A cooperative leasing from a charitable organization similarly noted that shifts in governance transformed their previously flexible arrangement into a conventional landlord-tenant relationship: "Right now, it feels like a landlord-tenant [relationship], whereas before, it was a lot more easygoing and we would just do stuff and say 'hey, we did this,' and okay fine" (Interview 02). One interviewee shared these concerns but expressed optimism that this vulnerability can be mitigated through stronger agreements and legal documentation:

> "You never know how a nonprofit board is going to change over time. So if you get new people into a board, they don't understand what the original agreements were about, well, what's going to happen? So those are other kinds of insecurities that need to get addressed, but they can get addressed through proper legal documentation." (Interview 17)

Precarious or short-term lease arrangements further compounded these challenges, particularly for nonprofits leasing government-owned land. One co-operative leasing land from the federal government has a 5-year lease that is renewable with negotiation, but confessed that it "feels a little short for making serious long-term investments—something like 10 or even 25 years would suit us much better." (Interview 01) Another nonprofit leasing from municipally owned land described long delays in securing stable and long-term tenure, which constrained their ability to invest or plan:

> "The issue that we have is that we've been waiting and waiting for a longer term lease, but because the city's plans for the land are still unsettled, we're really limited in what we can do. So we have it on a year-to-year basis. The relationship that we have with the city is quite strong, I don't have really strong fears year-to-year that we would leave, but we also can't really settle in." (Interview 16)

In the most extreme cases, one non-profit is facing a series of recent events jeopardizing their operations: council turnover, sudden funding withdrawal, potential lease shortening, and reductions to their land base:

> "It's really hard to plan right now, because if we had been in the same position that we had been– that the funding was continuing, and we knew that they didn't want to shorten the lease or the size–then next year we would start expanding beyond our 12 acres and having more people come on. But now that there's this new thing going on, we don't have any area to expand to beyond the 12 acres we're already in." (Interview 15)

Finally, a major issue for ALTS is that they often lack pathways for financial security or equity building. Tenants generally access housing and land through long-term leases rather than ownership, limiting opportunities to leverage them for loans or build equity. One interviewee observed this as a fundamental structural issue:

> "One big challenge is still an outstanding issue of long term security, in terms of financial, that there's no real asset outside of like your machinery and the animals, there's no real asset that you own. So what are you going to do when you're in trouble, and what are you going to leverage for loans? Those are kind of big issues that are underlying." (Interview 17)

One tenant farmer sharing these concerns floated the idea of a lease-to-own housing model on public land, in which the government entity would retain ownership of the land while tenants could gradually build equity in the housing itself. In this model, rent payments would contribute toward eventually paying off the home, while the surrounding land would remain publicly owned and protected from development (Interview 11).

These findings overall suggest that without mechanisms to redistribute authority, secure tenure, build equity, and support long-term financial stability, ALTS risk reproducing many of the same conditions of precarity and power imbalances found in conventional land tenure systems.

*Recruitment, Capacity, and Succession*

For ALTS in which organizations own and steward land while farmers operate as tenants, the question of tenancy becomes a key governance challenge. Securing land outside of speculative markets does not automatically guarantee that it will be actively farmed, or that farming activities will align with the social and ecological goals of these models. Instead, organizations need to continually recruit, evaluate, and support tenants who can sustain both agricultural production and the broader mission of the project.

One challenge relates to visibility, recruitment and outreach. Several organizations reported difficulty reaching the farmers they hoped to attract, particularly new or beginning farmers who might benefit most from these opportunities. As one nonprofit explained, recruiting tenants often requires building networks with institutions that already support farmers:

> "Definitely getting people to know who we are. We want to be able to receive farmers, but if the people don't know that we exist, it's a little hard. So we're trying to make connections with universities, with other organizations that support small scale farmers or that are just a little more well known, and that might want to support our mission and our vision and help us get our name out there so that people wanting to rent land know that there is access somewhere." (Interview 05)

Even when prospective tenants are identified, land alone is often insufficient to make tenancy viable. Interviewees recognized that farmers frequently require additional infrastructure—such as storage, processing space, or housing—in order to operate successfully. One nonprofit farm received applications from farmers who ultimately could not move forward because their site lacked these supports, explaining that applicants often needed "a place where they can store the food, process the food, and housing," and that this absence had led them to lose potential tenants (Interview 20).

Tenancy also raises long-term questions of succession and demographic change. Some organizations attempt to structure leases in ways that encourage intergenerational transition, although interviewees acknowledged that these goals are difficult to achieve given the limited pool of new entrants to farming. One land trust described the ideal scenario in which a tenant farms the land and eventually passes the lease onto a successor which is not always possible given the relatively small pool of new and young farmers:

> "Ideally, we find a tenant, and they farm the land, and they have somebody to pass the lease on to, and they pass it on to them, and they farm the land. We have kind of a restriction at 65, we don't want to have leases with somebody over 65 years old. We want to at least have somebody else on the lease who is that next generation or younger. And so that's an ideal situation. But that's not always possible, right? So then we have to look at how to deal with that too." (Interview 24)

Finally, interviewees noted the risks inherent in tenant selection, particularly where organizations seek tenants who will contribute to both agricultural production and community development and land stewardship. One interviewee recounted a situation in which shorter-term tenants did not align with these

goals, illustrating the difficulty of assessing in advance whether prospective tenants have the skills, values, and commitment required to support the full mission of these projects:

> "How do you know that you're going to have a good tenant who's going to be capable of doing agriculture, community development and being a good steward of land? On this farm, we ended up in a situation where there were some shorter-term tenants who didn't have any concept of community development or land stewardship, and really drove the farm into the ground in various ways, cost crazy amounts of dollars, and they were essentially getting preferential lease agreement without all the other components of the mission involved." (Interview 17)

These challenges make clear that the success of these models depends not only on the land ownership structures, but also on the ongoing organizational capacity required to secure tenancies that are lasting and aligned with organizational social and ecological objectives.

*Collaboration and Social Learning*

Another prominent theme articulated by interviewees was that these models require extensive relational work, social learning and cultural shifts for which many participants and institutions are not fully prepared. Interviewees repeatedly emphasized that collectively owning or governing land is far more time-intensive than private ownership because it demands ongoing communication, shared decision-making, and clear accountability measures.

In practice, much of this governance occurs through nonprofit or cooperative structures. Many ALTS are overseen by boards of directors and operate through decision-making models that incorporate staff input and in some cases, consensus-based processes. While these structures aim to distribute authority and provide accountability, interviewees noted that they can also slow the pace of action, particularly when organizations are trying to acquire land or launch new initiatives. One land trust explained that because their board meets only every two to three months, "the process from an internal governance perspective can be challenging when you have a property and you want to get going and you're ready to go," (Interview 03) as it still requires multiple layers of governance decisions, policies, and management structures to be put in place.

Interviewees also stressed that collaborative land governance depends heavily on interpersonal dynamics and social capacity. One interviewee reflected that while cooperative ownership is appealing in principle, it can be difficult to sustain in practice without strong relationships, clear structures and decision-making processes:

> “I have, through my own life, seen a lot of people try. It's a very, very, very difficult thing to do, to own and manage land in cooperation. You know, unless you have really tight relationships and really structured decision-making models and people who are past the point of being really super sensitive with each other, because it's hard.” (Interview 21)

Several interviewees cautioned that formal and written governance agreements, while important, cannot prevent conflicts if underlying social relationships deteriorate. Interpersonal dynamics and power relations can destabilize projects in ways that are difficult to anticipate or resolve, especially once conflicts become layered and deep-seated. One interviewee who is part of a co-operative outlined this risk:

> “Agreements are really important too, having those somehow written on paper properly, but if the social relations start falling apart, it's really a disaster. That's why community based projects are so risky also, because it really could just take a bad apple or a somebody with the wrong position and too much time on their hands to really make hell for a whole project. So those are risks for sure.” (Interview 17)

Subtle governance challenges related to mindsets and distributing responsibility were also raised as a challenge. One interviewee described the difficulty of maintaining a shared understanding of accountability within collective models, especially when individualized thinking and assumptions are deeply ingrained:

> “The other challenge is for people to think: I'm part, I'm implicated, but I'm only responsible for part. I'm not responsible for the whole, no one is. But the problem is, certain people, especially if they’ve been around for a while, tend to slip into thinking they are responsible for the whole. Or they start to think there’s a certain way things should be done.” (Interview 08)

Several interviewees connected these governance challenges to broader cultural norms. Collaborative land stewardship often runs counter to dominant societal expectations around individual ownership and control. One cooperative has been struggling with this cultural shift, explaining that while viable ownership and financial models exist, cultivating a genuinely collaborative culture has been far more difficult for their model:

> “So many things can go wrong, but for us the biggest issues have been around governance, people's expectations, things like how do you work collaboratively long-term where people don't feel taken advantage of, all of those things. It's really the social pieces–you know, we can find the financial models, we can find the ownership models. That stuff all sort of exists, or we can find it,

> it's not hard to do. But actually getting people to change the way they think to a collaborative model and a collaborative culture, that is hard, because the mainstream society is extraordinarily focused on the individual and on it being so selfish." (Interview 18)

The same interviewee suggested that many of the informal skills and norms required for collective action have weakened over time, noting that contemporary communities often lack the kinds of social infrastructures that once made shared labour and mutual support more routine: "their actual social skills are pretty much completely lacking from someone 100 years ago. They would never know how to organize a barn raising. They would never know how important it is to participate in a barn raising. They're not necessarily part of a church providing volunteer hours to make sure that people are taken care of in their community" (Interview 18).

These perspectives show that internal governance is not just a technical or organizational challenge but one that is deeply social and relational. Importantly, most interviewees described processes of ongoing learning, development, experimentation, and trial-and-error. Participants acknowledged that ALTS models were still new to them and recognized that they are still making mistakes and learning and adapting as they go.

*Social and System-Wide Barriers*

Another recurring challenge was the broader ideological and cultural resistance to ALTS models. These models challenge deeply embedded norms and assumptions in society about land as private property, agricultural productivity as a matter of scale and efficiency, and value as something measured primarily through market returns. As a result, ALTS often encounter skepticism or misunderstanding on all fronts—including the general public, institutional funders, professional service providers, and even participants within the organizations themselves.

A central barrier identified was widespread public unfamiliarity with ALTS. Interviewees emphasized that dominant understandings of land as a privately owned commodity remain deeply ingrained, making it difficult for people to imagine land as a shared or collective resource:

> "Also to change the paradigm about ownership of land. Right now farmland has become a commodity in the capitalist system that has sometimes no link to its usage for feeding people and all that. It's sometimes [used as] a security for some big organization. It shouldn't be like that. We think there shouldn't even be individual ownership of farmland, that it should be a resource for the community, as water is and other resources. So, there's much to do to change that perspective

within the general population. But then again, we will see where it goes. We like to think that putting one stone each day will bring us where we want to go." (Interview 25)

Another interviewee highlighted how colonial and protective attitudes toward land reinforce these paradigms, as people still hold "a very colonial idea of how land ownership works" and remain highly protective of their property, which complicates efforts to share land or implement collective governance (Interview 09). For this nonprofit farm, these attitudes have been at the root cause of some of the issues with their landlord even though the idea is that they are sharing land.

These ideological tensions were also particularly relevant for projects operating on publicly owned land, where community perceptions about taxpayer funding sometimes generated backlash. One interviewee described how misunderstandings about the purpose of communal farming projects can translate into criticism:

> "It's really easy to have misunderstandings, or there's always going to be challenges with communal projects like this on municipal land, because people think 'my taxpayer dollars are going to these hippie farmers' or whatever, you know, there's always one in the crowd. And so it's like, how do we change the narrative for those people so that they really understand the community benefits? And so I think communicating the message effectively is really, really important." (Interview 15)

Even within organizations committed to ALTS, attitudes toward land can reflect more conventional and commodified frameworks. One nonprofit farm interviewee observed that some colleagues criticized tenants for not paying rent and interpreted this as a failure to value the land. In his view, however, these tenants were providing a service by bringing the land back into production: "Otherwise before they were in that plot, it was all thistle" (Interview 13).

Unfamiliarity with alternative ownership and governance structures also generated skepticism among professionals such as lawyers, insurers, lenders, and government officials. Several noted the additional time, cost, and uncertainty involved in navigating institutions that lacked frameworks for these models:

> "Everybody from insurance companies to city or county officials to potential lenders, nobody really knows what to do with the co-op structure. And insurance in particular, is very risk averse, and so are lenders. So we've been able to get financing through the credit union and insurance through Cooperators, which is also obviously a co-op. But even those were not easy, yeah, so it's limiting in that way." (Interview 22)

One land trust recounted a situation where this unfamiliarity and skepticism directly undermined land acquisition, when a potential donor was talked out of donating their land by a lawyer who considered the model "shady" simply because it was unconventional (Interview 24).

This tension is also evident in the legal structures underpinning most ALTS initiatives, where alternative framings of "commons" or collective governance remain embedded within conventional private property regimes. As one interviewee explained when asked how the land tenure model functions in practice, "the reality is that we live in a private property regime. And in reality, the Commons is legally private property, its title held by the Foundation" (Interview 08). This highlights how ALTS remain constrained by the legal and institutional frameworks of private ownership within which they must operate.

These challenges reveal that ALTS operate within institutional and cultural environments that are still largely structured around conventional models of land ownership. As a result, organizations pursuing these alternative arrangements need to engage in efforts to translate, legitimize, and normalize new ways of understanding land, ownership, and value.

*Financial Viability and Resource Constraints*

Financial challenges were identified as a central barrier to the sustainability of ALTS. Chronic underfunding affects virtually all projects, but nonprofits and cooperatives that rely heavily on grants, donations, and limited earned revenue face particular vulnerability. These constraints influence not only the ability to acquire and steward land but also the capacity of day-to-day operations.

For land trusts in particular, limited discretionary funding hindered their ability to acquire additional properties or even explore new opportunities. One interviewee described the challenge of launching a new land acquisition program within their already stretched organization:

> "It's a brand new program that a charitable non-profit is trying to get set up when we are understaffed and under-resourced and yet also trying to grow. And all of our funding is earmarked for certain activities. And so you don't really have a lot of discretionary funds to be able to put to this." (Interview 03)

Even if landowners are philosophically aligned with ALTS, financial realities for farmers often prevent outright land donation. One interviewee with a land trust explained that common to conventional farm business models, farmers "use their land as a guarantee to borrow money to be able to operate," (Interview 25) meaning that their outstanding debts prevent them from donating the land to a land trust.

Several interviewees questioned whether anyone—nonprofit, cooperative, or private individual—can realistically take on land without substantial external financial support. Skepticism about the economics of farming itself was expressed, and they emphasized that nonprofit ownership of farmland alone does not resolve this issue:

> "Cracking the nut of how to sustain anybody who takes on a land base is really the biggest question. There aren't people farming for a reason—it's a very difficult way to earn money… There's nothing about the tenure of the land being owned by a non-profit that makes that any different. You either need massive amounts of money from another revenue stream, or you have to support yourself through the land base. That part takes a lot of money to earn a little bit of money." (Interview 21)

Apart from land acquisition, ongoing financial costs associated with operations and infrastructure were persistent challenges. One nonprofit explained how ambiguity around responsibility for repairs and upgrades created tension within a shared land arrangement:

> "Money is obviously a big thing too. Who is going to pay for this if it needs to be fixed–is it you that pays for it, or is it us? Whose responsibility is it? And for us, we are a relatively small nonprofit, even though we've been around for a long time, we don't have huge funders or anything like that, so it can be really hard for us to afford large changes. Or if there is something that happens infrastructure wise, we can contribute to it, but we probably can't pay the full cost. So yeah, figuring out that part of it is also the challenge." (Interview 09)

Similarly, the limitations of grant programs were apparent, as they often favour scale and efficiency and are not always designed for small-scale operations. One interviewee noted that most grants explicitly exclude expenses they need covered: "Getting the equipment we need is a bit of a challenge because it's expensive, and most grants don't fund infrastructure and equipment" (Interview 05). Another added that available funding is often targeted toward large-scale projects, leaving smaller farms under-resourced: "A lot of grants that exist are for big places… There are very few, basically no grants for small things, they're all for big things" (Interview 04). Another nonprofit farmer echoed this sentiment, complaining that every industry is focused on "efficiency of scale" and going bigger–-but that for diversified vegetable farming a smaller scale is better: "There's other ways to make it work. If you take any farm masterclass, it's usually start very, very small, dial that in, and then expand." (Interview 13)

Another interviewee in British Columbia also recalled a bureaucratic 'chicken-and-egg' dynamic that their farmland trust found themselves in: their nonprofit organization was attempting to access funding

through the BC government's Environmental Farm Plan program, but eligibility depended on holding farm tax status. However, their application for farm tax status had stalled because as a registered charity they do not pay property taxes and were therefore treated as a low priority. This example demonstrates the limited access to public funding for ALTS when some programs are designed around conventional farm ownership and tax structures. The interviewee lamented: "There are so many diverse bureaucracies that are not working together to support this model" (Interview 20).

Organizational structure also shaped access to funding. One cooperative is incorporated as a for-profit entity, and described how this legal status has limited their eligibility for grants and funding despite their social and community-oriented mandate.

Expansion ambitions were also constrained by capital costs, particularly around housing. One cooperative interviewee explained how high construction costs has effectively excluded younger participants from joining their alternative land tenure model:

> "The unfortunate part is that the cost of building here is so high, the only people that could afford to buy in were those that already had a lot of equity in a home, which meant they're more of my demographic, not many young people. Yeah, we had interest from young people, but the financial stretch was just too much." (Interview 22)

For farming businesses leasing land from nonprofits, market-based assumptions embedded in rental pricing created additional pressure. One farming tenant who leases from a nonprofit landowner recalled the extensive effort it required to negotiate a secure an affordable lease:

> "It took a lot of work, we spent probably two or three years exploring various legal agreements and leasing style agreements that centered on both land care and preservation, as well as farmer security. A huge risk, a huge challenge, was: as first-generation farmers or people entering farming, it's a massively insecure industry. If you're getting into market rates on rents, then you're also hand strung–the market rates on rent are based on industrial production, as well as usually cash cropping in southern Ontario here. And so those rates don't make any sense to a community farm." (Interview 17)

Finally, a few urban-based projects identified security as a resource challenge. Operating in dense urban contexts exposes farms to vandalism, theft, dumping, and interferences, which require time, labour, and financial resources to manage. One interviewee at an urban non-profit farm explained:

> “Urban agriculture, in general by being urban, is close to other people who might interfere with your stuff and break things, or wander through and take stuff, or dump. We got a lot of people dumping garbage around our fence. And that's not really something you'd have to deal with in a more rural setting.” (Interview 07)

These accounts suggest that funding and resource constraints are not simply problems to be solved through better grant-writing or financial planning, but rather they reflect deeper structural mismatches between ALTS and the current financial, institutional, and market systems in which they are forced to operate.

**Networks and Coalitions Among ALTS**

To understand the extent to which ALTS are connected to broader movements and collaborations, we asked interviewees whether they saw their work as part of a wider network or coalition at the local, provincial, or national levels. Questions explored relationships with other organizations, farms, and initiatives with similar goals, including whether participants engaged in sharing knowledge, strategies, or resources. Participants were also asked to reflect on the significance of these networks for their work.

*Selective or Limited Formal Affiliation*

While many ALTS recognize the value of formal networks and coalitions, many expressed that their participation is constrained by limited capacity. Rather than a lack of interest, selective or minimal engagement in formal affiliations reflects a response to lack of resources, competing priorities, and the demands of early-stage organizational development. As a result, participation in networks were approached selectively or deferred altogether.

Several interviewees noted that their models were still in early stages of development, with their primary attention focused on getting their farm off the ground. For these organizations, joining provincial or national networks is viewed as important but not yet feasible. As one participant explained, “it's definitely on our radar that that's important. And we have limited money to buy memberships to things, and so we will have to pick and choose the ones that feel the most meaningful to us” (Interview 04). Here, financial constraints influence not only whether organizations participate in networks, but also which forms of affiliation are considered accessible or worthwhile. Time constraints are also a factor, resulting in having to make difficult choices about where to direct their limited organizational capacity:

> “It's just that we are swamped, and we have limited funding and resources and people, and so I'm literally picking and choosing, and our team is literally picking and choosing the people that we

> can speak to and disseminate information to. I wish we had the time to do it for everyone, but we just don't." (Interview 23)

Engagement in networks or coalitions is further limited by the nature of volunteer-based governance structures that characterize many ALTS. Many rely on boards and members who balance farming with full-time employment, family responsibilities, and other commitments. Under these conditions, sustained participation in networks or coalitions such as attending regular meetings or contributing to initiatives regularly is difficult to maintain. As one interviewee described, maintaining contact with other groups can be challenging as their organizations pauses internal meetings altogether during peak seasons:

> "We do talk [with others] periodically, but it's not like we have regular meetings and and chat about challenges and all that, just because we're all volunteers, and our board–pretty much everybody has full time jobs, families and plus a couple of them are farmers, so there's lots going on, and so there's limited time. We recently just at our last meeting a month or so ago, we said let's just take the summer off. And we're not going to meet again until September, just because it's challenging. So yeah, even though we know they're out there, and we have chatted with other groups at times, it's not like it's regularly that we chat with people." (Interview 02)

Beyond capacity limitations, some participants also questioned the tangible benefits of existing networks. One farm project expressed frustration, describing a dynamic in which they feel they contribute time and expertise but receive little in return. While they identified clear areas where formal networks could provide meaningful support such as governance guidance, conflict resolution, or shared services—they felt that these supports were largely absent. This points to a gap where existing networks may not yet be adequately equipped to meet the specific needs of ALTS:

> "For example, the most critical thing to get support on might be things like, how do you actually improve your governance model? How do you resolve conflicts? Is there some larger body that could provide health insurance for all these people? There's all sorts of places where groups like ours could truly benefit from some sort of an association. But I'm not seeing it quite yet. It mostly seems to be that we're still sort of on a leading edge, doing things that most people aren't familiar with." (Interview 18)

Despite these barriers, a number of organizations demonstrated an ongoing interest in networks by informally mapping similar initiatives within their region or province. Interviewees described identifying other community farms and related projects as a preliminary step toward potential collaboration. However, in the absence of dedicated leadership or capacity to coordinate these efforts, these connections

are not yet developed. As one interviewee noted, bringing everyone together into a network would require someone motivated to "champion" such a project (Interview 26), something that is difficult to sustain within volunteer-led initiatives.

Limited participation in formal networks among some ALTS might thus be less a matter of disengagement than of structural constraints. Capacity limitations combined with gaps in the perceived value and relevance of existing coalitions result in a pattern of selective affiliation.

*Informal, Relationship-Based Networks*

Rather than joining formal coalitions, networks, or partnerships, many ALTS rely on informal and relationship-based networks. These networks function as key support systems, enabling resource sharing, knowledge exchange, and coordination in contexts where formal supports are limited or absent, or ALTS participants simply do not have time for them.

Both rural and urban farms described a strong desire to cultivate neighbourly ties and collaboration with nearby farms and community groups rather than participating in formal network or coalition-building. One rural farm is on land leased from a government entity, where there are other tenant farmers nearby. These neighbourly relations are important to the operation of the farm and the farmers' quality of life:

> "We're constantly lending equipment back and forth, and all three of us go to the same Saturday market so we're sharing stuff that way. I would say I feel really hopeful and excited about the thought of a thriving farm community in this area. And I think that's what makes this life–and this job–way easier and way more fun. I'm not interested in being a farmer that's just isolated in this life. So we do big farm lunches together and yeah, it just feels like in a few square kilometers, there's a lot of good work happening." (Interview 11)

Similarly, another farm framed networking as a deliberate strategy for building community support and enabling future collaboration. They shared that "the more networking we do, the more support we have from the community, the more connections we make, the more we can collaborate. And then expand and kind of support each other's projects and ideas" (Interview 05). This suggests that informal networks can allow organizations to scale their impact through local relationships rather than through formally joining networks.

Informal economic relationships also formed part of these networks, with one cooperative describing purchasing food products from other farms in order to resell them to their customers while supporting another local food producer.

Knowledge and resource sharing and mentorship, particularly during early stages of organizational development, was another impact of these informal networks. One cooperative described how a similar co-operative that was more established acted as an ongoing mentor for them, providing guidance on governance matters such as bylaws and continuing to offer support on technical questions like accounting (Interview 19). Another co-operative echoed this experience and the openness of similar organizations to share resources, documents, and time, noting that this generosity is embedded within the co-operative ethos itself:

> "People were so open with being like, give us a call anytime, here's a copy of our bylaws. And so when we actually do our bylaws we have some really good stuff to build from of farms that we know, and farms that I followed for a really long time and really trust and love the way that they're doing things. But yeah, built into the cooperative model is cooperation, and so that's also cooperation amongst cooperatives. Which means that people have been so generous with their time, especially when they're coming into busy seasons as well, with just being really open with answering questions and things that they don't have to think about anymore." (Interview 04)

Several projects in turn contribute to these informal networks themselves by sharing knowledge where they can, including giving presentations, speaking at conferences, or participating in interviews. Such informal networks and relationships appear to play a critical role in co-learning and the provision of mutual support in ways that are flexible, low-cost, and responsive to the needs of emerging and resource-constrained organizations.

*Participation in Issue-Aligned Coalitions & Sector Networks*

In contrast to more informal arrangements, ALTS also enter into formal, issue-aligned coalitions and networks where this best suits their needs and capacities. These affiliations tend to align around shared goals such as food justice, agriculture, land access, and social services, and operate at multiple scales—from local or regional coalitions to provincial or national associations. For participating organizations, these networks are important places for coordination, information sharing, advocacy, and policy engagement.

At the local and regional levels, interviewees noted participation in coalitions of food-focused nonprofit organizations. These were characterized as spaces for regularly convening organizations engaged in food

production and distribution, where participants collectively discuss their operational challenges while also engaging in advocacy and policy-oriented conversations (Interview 09).

At the provincial level, several interviewees referenced farmer unions and associations. In Ontario, the National Farmers Union of Ontario and the Ecological Farmers Association of Ontario were mentioned. In British Columbia, Young Agrarians was frequently cited, particularly for its Land Matching program which connects landholders looking for someone to farm their land with farmers seeking land to start an agricultural business. One interviewee noted that Young Agrarians had supported their farm project by helping identify a new farmer tenant, as well as by helping them with the language of their leasing and licensing arrangements. Others spoke more broadly about the organization's role in advancing alternative land access and succession models:

> "Alternative approaches are super critical. And there are lots of other good things going on, like even in BC, with and the Young Agrarians does a lot of this work of sort of connecting would-be young farmers with people that have land, who maybe will then build in a succession plan that includes eventual ownership of the land, or part of the land. And I think that's really, really important." (Interview 22)

Several groups in British Columbia also mentioned being in early-stage conversations with the Foodlands Co-operative of BC, which is a nonprofit aiming to build a collective of communally owned farm projects.

Regional dynamics also shaped the extent and nature of network participation. In Quebec, one interviewee identified the Union des Producteurs Agricoles (UPA), the sole recognized farmers' union in the province, as being a structural barrier to forming alternative farm networks or coalitions:

> "They have a monopoly on unions, and I know the historical reasons for that which were not bad, but the union has become so big and powerful that the big members, the conventional industrial farming, resist any change. And since they have all the power, sometimes more than the Ministry of Agriculture, it's very slow to move the big machine. So, that's an additional challenge here in Quebec, the Ministry doesn't have the courage, or sometimes even the power, to make the necessary changes, to help not only the installation of young farmers, but to help have better practices." (Interview 25)

At the national scale, a network of agri-based land trusts across Canada, which meets regularly to share ideas and address common governance challenges was highlighted. A Zoom call is held every other month to connect and share ideas, and one land trust described it as being very beneficial for their

organization (Interview 24). As an example, they noted that they are currently working to update their charitable purposes and have benefited from being able to draw on the knowledge and experience of other organizations in the network. They also noted that being part of the network has provided reassurance and guidance in navigating the significant responsibilities and commitments of managing a charity intended to hold land in perpetuity.

Similarly, the Canadian Network of Community Land Trusts (CNCLT)—which is primarily focused on urban land trust models—has established a working group on agricultural land trusts, creating an emerging space for discussion and exchange among those involved or interested in agricultural applications of the model. A small number of interviewees pointed to this group as a valuable forum for sharing experiences and learning across different organizational contexts.

Participation in formal networks and coalitions among ALTS were shown to be important yet still evolving sites for coordination, advocacy, and institutional learning. ALTS are often geographically dispersed and organizationally diverse (co-ops, land trusts, nonprofits, hybrid models), which can make alignment with a broader group difficult and a singular network or coalition that attempts to connect all ALTS is still yet to exist. It is worth noting here that the national database of ALTS to which this report is a companion resource aims to take a preliminary step toward addressing this fragmentation by documenting and mapping existing initiatives across Canada, and thereby supporting greater visibility and potential connection across the field.

**The Potential for Widespread Adoption of ALTS**

To understand participants' perspectives on the future growth of ALTS, we asked participants a final set of questions concerning their reflections on whether the ALTS in which they have been involved have the potential to become more widespread in their region, municipality, or province. Questions focused on participants' views about the conditions that might support or limit the expansion of these models, as well as what kinds of policies or program incentives could make them more accessible or attractive to those interested in starting or continuing to farm.

*Opportunities from Intergenerational Transfer*

We heard clearly from interviewees that, despite some obvious challenges to scalability, the time to establish and grow ALTS as viable alternatives is now. Our interviewees emphasized that the current moment of demographic change and intergenerational succession is creating an inflection point in Canadian farming–one that some viewed as a critical opportunity to scale ALTS. These ALTS were seen as strategic initiatives given the large-scale transition already underway as aging landowners exit farming

and significant amounts of farmland are transferred to new owners and users. In this context, ALTS were seen as pathways to redirect land and wealth transfers away from consolidation and financialization and toward more community-based and sustainable forms of land stewardship and governance.

Participants frequently underscored the demographic reality of an aging farming population, noting both the scale of land transfer and the uncertainty surrounding it. One interviewee explained that there is growing resonance when discussing these models with landowners, particularly given that many are wrestling with questions about succession and legacy:

> "I think there's lots of potential. Again, just seeing the resonance when I'm talking to people about our model and what we do, and also knowing the current situation of intergenerational transfer both of wealth and land - there's a lot of baby boomers (nothing new, we've been talking about this for a long time) but they're getting to be 65, 70 years old. And in lots of cases, both with wealth and with land, that transfer is happening. And in lots of cases, there's lots of questions, uncertainty around what's going to happen with that transfer." (Interview 24)

Interviewees emphasized that this uncertainty is particularly dire for older farmers who do not have successors. Many older farmers do not have family members willing or able to take over their operations, creating a gap that ALTS may be well positioned to fill. Such models offer a pathway that can allow landowners to transition their land in a way that aligns with both economic imperatives while respecting and nurturing long-standing relationships to land. As one participant noted, these arrangements can enable landowners to remain connected to their land while also supporting a new generation of small-scale farmers (Interview 05).

Interviewees also pointed to values-based motivations that may be driving interest in ALTS among current landowners. Landowners were described as having a strong sense of care and attachment to their land, a desire to see a meaningful legacy continue, and concern about broader trends in agriculture. One participant pointed to widespread discomfort with the consolidation and industrialization of farming for landowners:

> "That care and connection for the land, and that desire to see that legacy continue, and for some sort of beneficial farming. And the general sense for lots of people that there's something wrong with the ever increasing size of farms, the depopulation that's happening in the rural areas, the loss of rural communities and then the loss of care for the land - the short term thinking that's emerged in terms of maximizing profits and maximizing extraction. So I do think there is potential for this to expand." (Interview 24)

Importantly, interviewees also provided us with tangible evidence that this moment is already translating into action. One farmland trust recently received its first donated farm, which led to a significant increase in interest from other landowners. At the time of the interview, the land trust indicated that twelve additional farms had expressed interest in donation.

At the same time, participants were clear that this opportunity is not without its limitations. The viability of ALTS models often depends on the willingness of retiring landowners to either donate land or accept below-market prices—conditions that may not always be feasible, particularly due to the dramatic increase in farmland values. As one interviewee noted, rising land values make conventional market transfers increasingly impossible:

> "You also need a willing farmer who's retired and going to essentially, probably reduce the cost of that transition as well. So that is a big challenge, a big barrier. Like back when this farm was purchased, it was still in a day when land prices were somewhat under control. This farm was purchased for $420,000 in 1991, it's probably worth close to $4 million now. At $420,000 you could probably make a go at it. At $4 million, where are you going to come up with $20,000 a month?" (Interview 17)

The growing wave of intergenerational land transfers represents a significant opportunity for ALTS. While these models offer promising pathways for facilitating land transition, preserving agricultural land, and supporting new entrants, their success ultimately depends on the alignment of landowner values, financial conditions, and broader policy support as described below.

*Government Policies, Funding, and Incentives*

In contrast to the opportunities presented by intergenerational land transfer, participants emphasized that the ability to scale ALTS is fundamentally shaped—and constrained—by the broader political economy of agriculture in Canada. ALTS were described as operating within a system characterized by high land costs, shifting market pressures, and policy environments that do not adequately support small-scale or community-oriented farming and therefore act as key barriers to scaling ALTS. One interviewee highlighted the increasing pressures facing farmers today:

> "I really think that there has to be major changes in the agricultural structure and use of the land that is being done nowadays. It's not viable. It's not viable for the farmers. It's not good for the land most of the time, and on top of that, dealing with climate change, dealing with products that come from all over the world, and sometimes our farm under not so good conditions and all that, we are at the point where there has to be major structural changes." (Interview 25)

Several interviewees situated these constraints within a broader critique of land commodification and neoliberal agricultural policy. Participants described how farmland has increasingly been treated as a financial asset, contributing to rising land prices that far exceed what agricultural production can justify. One farmer stressed that "the math on entering as a new farmer onto land producing vegetables and agricultural products for local consumption just won't make sense. Without broader support, financial subsidy, or not thinking in terms of market rates, but rather thinking in terms of productivity of the land" (Interview 17). This framing highlights the core tension that while ALTS seek to shift land use toward community benefit, they are forced to operate within a system that continues to prioritize market and investment potential. Another participant argued:

> "It's just the way in which capitalism has commodified everything, including land and homes. It's just made it ridiculous, and so that that has to be challenged, and the only way to do that is government regulation, really, to stop that kind of inflated cost to land that makes it an investment, rather than people doing what we've done for thousands of years. It's just sad, and it's neoliberalism that's just sort of progressively made it harder and harder, and now we're in the, seems like the final throws of it. I don't know, it's pretty brutal." (Interview 22)

Within this context, direct government funding emerged as the most immediate and widely identified need. While some participants acknowledged that support exists across federal, provincial, and municipal levels, many emphasized that it is inconsistent, insufficient, and vulnerable to shifting political priorities. As one interviewee noted,

> "We do have really great support from all levels of government, but it's still a matter of funding. Funding is being cut, left right and center for everything right now. So how much is there? And how important does the government that's representing the people feel this is?" (Interview 23)

Funding was closely linked to the challenge of land acquisition, which was widely described as prohibitively expensive and a primary barrier to scaling these models. Participants emphasized that without substantial public investment—particularly in the form of funding dedicated to land purchase—most ALTS would not be feasible. As one interviewee noted, "the difficulty, of course, is the land… how are you going to get enough money together to buy the land privately? Not likely" (Interview 26). This points to the need for government-support to finance land acquisition, whether through grants, low-interest loans, or public land transfers.

Several interviewees further stressed that rapidly rising land prices are intensifying this challenge, making these models increasingly difficult to replicate even when they have been successful in the past. One co-

operative reflected that their land purchased in 2019 would now cost at least double, raising concerns about whether similar initiatives could be undertaken today: “so the question of, like, could we do this again? That’s what is tricky, I find… this model I think has been successful, but also there’s a lot of particularities about it that make it slightly hard to replicate” (Interview 19).

It was also suggested by some that government support should focus on strengthening organizations already engaged in this work, rather than creating new programs. Some noted that nonprofit and cooperative models play important roles in supporting farmers but are often constrained by unstable or fee-for-service funding structures that rarely cover more than their basic operating costs. Because farming and farmer-support programs are not highly profitable, they argued that long-term public funding is necessary to provide organizational stability, allow for growth, and ensure these models can effectively support new and existing farmers.

Similarly, some noted the potential for public–nonprofit partnerships, particularly at the municipal level. One interviewee suggested that municipalities could recognize agriculture as a key economic and community asset and partner with land trusts or similar organizations to manage public land or administer long-term agricultural leases. In this model, governments would provide funding while the land management and lease administration would come from experienced organizations, with a portion of revenue returning to them for doing this work.

Aside from direct funding, tax-based incentives were raised as an underdeveloped policy tool such as the federal government’s Ecological Gifts Program, which allows landowners to donate ecologically sensitive land or easements in exchange for substantial tax benefits, including capital gains exemptions. One interviewee discussed ongoing efforts to establish a federal “Agri-Gifts” program modeled after the Ecological Gifts Program, noting that it could play a significant role given the large amount of farmland expected to change hands in the coming years. They explained that an Agri-Gifts program could waive capital gains taxes on donated farmland or easements, making it feasible for landowners to sell land at below-market value or donate it outright. Even in cases of partial donation, landowners could receive tax receipts proportional to the donated value, reducing their overall tax burden and creating incentives to transfer farmland into ALTS.

Another interviewee suggested that charitable remainder trusts, a mechanism more common in the United States, could be adapted for farmland in Canada. This approach incentivizes landowners to donate a future interest in their property while retaining the present right to possession and use of the land during their lifetime. Remainder trusts enable current landowners to receive an immediate charitable tax receipt that can be applied to income taxes.

Finally, one interviewee envisioned a land model in which large farms could be donated to an ALTS and subdivided into smaller parcels, enabling more intensive use of the land by a greater number of people:

> "I'd like to see programs where people could donate their farms. You know, you have a 500-acre farm, they could say, I donate that. And then they'll break it up into smaller pieces, and then a hundred people might be able to afford to actually have a little piece of land that they can grow food on." (Interview 06)

While ALTS create new pathways for land access, affordability, and stewardship, they also expose the limits of relying on market-based logics to sustain agriculture. Their long-term viability and ability to scale beyond isolated examples depends on a broader transformation of policy frameworks, including sustained public funding, supportive institutional partnerships, and innovative tools that can counter the pressures of land commodification.

*Power in Numbers*

The role of collective action in enabling ALTS to emerge and expand was a central theme. Expanding these models were described as relational processes rooted in cooperation, trust-building, and grassroots organizing. In this framing, 'people power' operates as a broader strategy for challenging conventional models of agricultural tenure.

Many initiatives begin through informal, relationship-based actions, where entry points often take the form of direct outreach and conversation. One interviewee noted that relationships and communication play a central role in connecting landowners with prospective farmers:

> "I think people just need to be able to kind of band together and kind of make it happen. You know, it sounds way too simple, but it first starts with, like knocking on a door and asking the question and having a conversation. You know, like that old farmer that's ready to retire and doesn't know what to do with his land–he may not know where to look, but if you have this idea that you want to put forward, it's worth knocking on the door." (Interview 05)

These practices were also situated within longer traditions of collective organizing. One participant explicitly connected contemporary efforts to the historical legacy of labour movements, suggesting that many of the solutions to current challenges already exist but require collective coordination to be realized, "Usually the problem arises when the solution is already there–it's just how society organizes itself to solve the problem, rather than keep making the problem. So it's a solution that's already been there. It's already been found since the early days of labour movements, now we just have to work on making it

work" (Interview 10). This perspective positions ALTS as part of a broader continuum of collective responses to inequality in society, rather than novel interventions.

Cooperatives were frequently identified as a concrete example of this collective approach. One co-op member emphasized that shared ownership and contribution can significantly lower barriers to entry, particularly around land access, and sees a lot of potential in this model:

> "I think it's a really good model for access, like even the barrier of price is lowered when you have multiple people contributing. It was more affordable for each of us to contribute, rather than if it was just one of us and starting a farm. So I think it's definitely got a good chance of functioning in lots of different contexts and places." (Interview 04)

Interviewees also described more formal forms of collective action aimed at influencing policy and land-use decisions. One farm, for example, was started through sustained grassroots organizing, including petitioning, public outreach, and direct engagement with elected officials to prevent the sale of public farmland and instead establish a community farm. The interviewee reflected, "Because they have to listen to the community, right? Politicians are elected by us" (Interview 26).

Finally, some participants pointed to the role of knowledge-sharing and research as tools for collective mobilization. Disseminating findings, building awareness, and engaging community groups and policymakers were seen as important steps in expanding the reach of ALTS. In this sense, research itself becomes part of the collective process, contributing to the circulation of ideas, broader awareness, and the potential scaling of ALTS.

Collective action is a foundational component of scaling ALTS, operating across multiple scales, from interpersonal relationships to organized political advocacy. While structural barriers remain, these models demonstrate how cooperation and grassroots organizing can enable new forms of land access and organizing to take place.

*Housing Constraints and Zoning Limitations*

Housing emerged in the interviews as a central constraint on the scalability of ALTS, particularly in contexts where agricultural land-use policy assumes a separation between land access and residential needs. In British Columbia, several interviewees referenced the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR) as an example of this broader tension. While participants generally supported the ALR's role in protecting farmland from development pressures, they also emphasized that its regulatory framework does not always align with the housing requirements of alternative farming models.

A key issue raised was that ALTS often depend on on-site or closely integrated housing, particularly in collective, cooperative, or small-scale farming arrangements. However, farmland zoning regulations such as the ALR typically limit residential development on farmland, often restricting properties to a single primary dwelling. Interviewees suggested that this creates structural barriers for models that rely on multiple residents or shared living arrangements as part of their economic viability. As one participant noted, small-scale farming in practice often depends on having people living directly on the land and integrating housing and food production within the same site (Interview 18).

This tension is also reflected in the financial and institutional barriers associated with securing housing within alternative tenure arrangements. One interviewee operating under a long-term lease on federal park land described how housing access required substantial upfront investment in renovations, despite not owning the property. Under their agreement, they negotiated a rent abatement to offset approximately $100,000 in required repairs, financed through a personal loan. While the arrangement enabled long-term access to both land and housing, the participant noted that this type of model would likely be inaccessible to many aspiring farmers due to the capital required:

> "I don't think a regular bank would have been like, here's a bunch of money for a house you don't own… for a lot of people, it would be really hard to come up with that capital to invest in a property that you don't own" (Interview 11).

This example highlights how even relatively supportive land tenure arrangements can reproduce significant barriers through housing-related costs and financial risk. Although the lease provided long-term access to land, the requirement to invest heavily in housing infrastructure effectively limits participation to those with existing capital or family financial support. As the participant noted, this level of accessibility is likely to be "pretty rare," particularly for new or young farmers without access to loans or inherited resources.

More broadly, interviewees emphasized that the separation of housing and farmland poses a fundamental challenge for ALTS viability. Without affordable and flexible housing arrangements, farmers may be unable to remain on-site or sustain operations economically. One participant suggested that more integrated zoning approaches—such as clustered residential development combined with community gardens and farming spaces—could better align housing policy with agricultural needs (Interview 20). Similarly, another interviewee noted that their ability to continue farming was directly dependent on having affordable housing embedded within their tenure arrangement, stating that without this condition they would likely be unable to remain in agriculture: "If we had to go and pay regular market rate on renting, or mortgaging a house, or even living off the farm somewhere, I don't think we would do it. One

of the things that allows us as a family to continue farming, is having a lease amount that suits the operation" (Interview 17).

These insights illustrate how zoning and agricultural land-use policies can constrain the scalability of ALTS, particularly through their treatment of housing. While frameworks such as the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR) provide important protections against large-scale farmland conversion, our interviews suggest that their current design often fails to accommodate the integrated housing needs of alternative farming models. In particular, limits on residential flexibility, combined with the financial burden of securing on-site housing, create structural barriers for cooperative, collective, and entry-level farming arrangements. Without policy adjustments that better align housing with agricultural land use—particularly for non-traditional and multi-household farming models—the expansion and long-term sustainability of ALTS will remain constrained.

*Third-Sector Support*

In addition to government intervention, housing and zoning changes, and grassroots action, interviewees highlighted the necessary role that third-sector organizations play in advancing ALTS–particularly where government policies and supports are inadequate and/or slow to emerge. Charitable and non-profit organizations were described as key actors that can pilot, implement, and scale solutions to land access, financing, and farmer support.

One area of innovation identified was the development of alternative financing mechanisms to facilitate farmland access. For example, one land trust organization is actively exploring a revolving fund model, in which initial capital is used to purchase farmland, place an easement on it to ensure long-term protection, and then sell it to a farmer at a more accessible price point. The proceeds from the sale would then be reinvested into the fund, enabling the organization to repeat the process and support additional farmers over time (Interview 03).

Interviewees also noted the importance of land-matching programs that connect landowners with aspiring farmers. While Young Agrarians' Land Matching Program in British Columbia was cited as an effective model, participants in other provinces noted the absence of comparable programs. One interviewee in the prairies stressed the need for a formal land matching programs:

> "There's people out there that have space and that are looking for people to use it, or are interested in people using it, but there's no program really like there is in BC, for Alberta. So people who might not think about, or be comfortable with talking to random people on the internet and going out to their farms and looking at their land like I was–having a program like

> that would definitely make things easier for people. Especially if they're visibly a minority of any kind and not comfortable with that." (Interview 04)

At a broader scale, one interviewee argued for the creation of a national community farmland trust that could raise the capital to acquire farms and have local groups carry out the farming operations. They pointed to an existing organization in the United States: "the Agrarian Commons in the US actually has the model running a national charity, who's raising dollars to support purchase, maintain lands, and then local chapters, essentially, who are governing those lands. It's a pretty good system" (Interview 17). This model was seen as a potential direction for scaling ALTS in Canada beyond isolated or regionally specific efforts.

In addition to land funding and acquisition, interviewees repeatedly stressed the need for training and capacity-building for new and young farmers. Access to land alone was viewed as insufficient without the knowledge, skills, and support systems necessary to sustain viable farming operations. Concerns were also raised about the fragility of existing programs, particularly as funding cuts threaten nonprofit-led training initiatives. One interviewee grieved the recent loss of a training program in Ontario and the future consequences:

> "We're at risk of, what other training is readily available for new and young farmers to get into agriculture? Like people who aren't going to go the traditional route of getting their Bachelor of Agriculture from the University of Guelph, or don't have the funding or resources to send themselves to university, or still need to work a full time job while they're trying to get their farm up and running. How do they have time to go and do that at university full time, right? There has to be other pathways to gain the education as well. So again, from a program type incentive component, they need funding to be able to ensure that program remains viable." (Interview 03)

In response, some participants advocated for the development of more comprehensive training "hubs" that could support farmers from diverse backgrounds, including newcomers to Canada and those with prior farming experience in other contexts. Such programs were seen as essential for enabling a broader range of participants to enter agriculture and transition to independent farming over time (Interview 14).

Through financing tools, land-matching programs, a national farmland trust model, and training initiatives, organizations can actively work to address gaps left by existing government and market systems. While these interventions do not eliminate structural constraints, they demonstrate how organizations can contribute to the expansion and diversification of ALTS.

## Chapter 7: Discussion and Conclusion

### 7.1 REFLECTION

This MRP began with a broad question about the emergence and prevalence of Agricultural Land Tenure Systems (ALTS) in Canada, and the potential roles these models may play in responding to some of the most pressing challenges facing Canadian agriculture. Rising farmland values, the financialization of agricultural land, barriers to entry for new and equity-deserving farmers, Indigenous land justice, ecological degradation, and growing concerns around food security have all raised questions about whether conventional models of private farmland tenure are sufficient to support more equitable and sustainable agricultural futures. These interconnected challenges provided the broader context for this research, which sought to understand what ALTS are, how they are being developed and governed, and the opportunities and challenges experienced by those creating them.

My motivation for undertaking this research is also rooted in my lived experience and my long-standing commitments to social and environmental justice. As a farmworker, I have experienced firsthand the realities of agricultural labour and the structural constraints that shape who can access land, resources, and long-term security within the sector. As a young person and community organizer, I am also directly positioned within the long-term implications of the affordability crisis, farmland succession challenges, and the accelerating impacts of climate change, all of which make questions of land access and stewardship feel urgent and immediate. My relationship to this work is also informed by a personal and spiritual connection to land and life, which shapes how I understand care, responsibility, and interdependence within food systems.

While there has been growing interest in alternative approaches to farmland ownership and governance, relatively little research has examined these initiatives collectively within the Canadian context. Many projects operate independently, often with limited visibility beyond their local communities, making it difficult to understand the broader landscape of experimentation occurring across the country. This MRP sought to address that gap by documenting and analyzing the diversity of ALTS in Canada while exploring how those involved understand their motivations, governance arrangements, successes, and challenges.

To do so, this research combined two complementary approaches in collaboration with the National Farmers Foundation. The first was the development of a national database of Canadian ALTS, providing what is, to my knowledge, the first systematic overview of these initiatives across the country. The second

involved 26 qualitative interviews with people directly involved in establishing and operating ALTS to understand the motivations, challenges, and successes of building these alternatives.

This research aligns directly with my Plan of Study's area of concentration in Alternative Rural Land and Food Systems, and my components of private property, food sovereignty, decolonization, and public education. ALTS were found to challenge dominant private property relations by experimenting with collective and shared forms of land access; closely tied to food sovereignty goals, especially efforts to improve equitable land access and support more diverse pathways into farming; engaging with questions of settler colonialism and alternative visions of land rooted in equity; and public education both in the work of ALTS and in this project itself which has the intention of producing a database and report that can support knowledge sharing, reflection, and public engagement beyond academia.

This research helped me develop a range of practical and analytical skills, from data collection to knowledge mobilization. Building the database required conducting a web-based environmental scan, identifying relevant organizations, and systematically organizing dispersed information into an organized format. This also involved outreach to organizations, developing communication strategies, and following up in order to invite participation in interviews. I gained experience co-designing semi-structured interview questions as well as conducting interviews which further developed my skills in active listening, probing for depth, and adapting to different conversational dynamics. I then learned how to transcribe, code, analyze and organize data to finally synthesize complex qualitative material into a narrative report.

## 7.2 THE PROMISES OF ALTS

Improving secure and affordable access to land was certainly central to this research. Nearly every participant described rising land prices, farmland speculation, and insecure leasing arrangements as major barriers facing farmers, particularly younger and new entrants. In response, ALTS sought to reduce debt, improve tenure security, and remove land from speculative markets. These findings reinforce Wittman, Dennis, and Pritchard's (2017) argument that cooperative and community-based farmland models emerge as responses to the failures of private ownership to provide both social equity and long-term stewardship.

However, the interviews also demonstrated that participants rarely viewed secure land access as an end in itself. Participants consistently described these initiatives as attempts to fundamentally rethink relationships between land, farming, community, and ownership. Participants described ALTS as strengthening local food systems, improving food security and food sovereignty, supporting regenerative agriculture, creating educational opportunities, building community, and expanding access for

marginalized groups. In this respect, ALTS challenge dominant understandings of farmland as primarily an economic asset. Miller (2016) argues that alternative property arrangements require alternative ways of evaluating success. Rather than measuring value through profit maximization or capital accumulation, she suggests considering the equitable distribution of benefits throughout communities. This perspective strongly resonates with the findings of this study, as participants often described success not through just financial returns but through the number of people able to access land, participate in farming, learn new skills, restore ecosystems, or build stronger relationships with food and one another. Farmland was understood as producing multiple forms of public value simultaneously.

These findings also contribute to ongoing discussions about food sovereignty, property, and settler colonialism. Kepkiewicz and Dale (2019) argue that one way settlers can support Indigenous struggles for land is by challenging the dominance of private property relations that are often taken for granted within capitalist societies. While participants in this study generally did not present ALTS as solutions to Indigenous dispossession, many were intentionally experimenting with tenure arrangements that move beyond exclusive private ownership while also engaging, to varying degrees, with questions of Indigenous justice and land reconciliation. Cooperative ownership, land trusts, shared governance, and nonprofit stewardship all represent efforts to rethink property as a shared social relationship rather than an individual commodity. In this sense, ALTS may create spaces for questioning the assumptions underlying settler property regimes, even as participants also acknowledged the limits of these models within colonial legal and political structures.

Finally, the interview findings highlight that ALTS generate benefits well beyond farming itself. Community-building, education, and farmer training were consistently described as central objectives rather than secondary outcomes. These findings support earlier work by Wittman et al. (2017), who found that community farms reconnect agriculture with surrounding communities through education, volunteering, public programming, and food production. Likewise, McCune et al. (2017) argue that agroecological education is not simply about transferring technical skills but about cultivating collective identities and social movements. Participants similarly described ALTS as spaces where people learn not only how to farm but how to work collectively, govern shared resources, and imagine alternative futures.

## 7.3 THE LIMITS AND CHALLENGES OF ALTS

At the same time, this research demonstrates that ALTS should not be romanticized as complete solutions to Canada's farmland crisis. While participants described meaningful successes, they were equally open about the significant institutional, legal, financial, and social barriers they continue to face.

Perhaps the most important finding is that ALTS remain deeply embedded within the dominant property system they seek to challenge. Even projects explicitly describing themselves as commons ultimately depended upon conventional legal title, charitable ownership, or leasehold arrangements. Publicly owned land was not necessarily free from landlord-tenant dynamics, while nonprofit ownership did not eliminate questions of authority or power. These findings reinforce Miller's (2016) observation that the conventional distinction between public and private ownership often obscures more fundamental questions about who exercises decision-making power. Likewise, Baxter (2017) argues that farmland commons represent institutional innovations operating within, rather than outside of, existing legal systems.

A related limitation is that not all ALTS necessarily seek to fundamentally challenge the broader social, political, and economic structures that shape farmland relations. While many initiatives advance important goals around access, stewardship, community benefit, and food systems transformation, their approaches exist along a spectrum of critical engagement with issues such as colonialism, private property, financialization, land concentration, and social justice. Some initiatives operate primarily within liberal nonprofit or charitable frameworks, focusing on increasing access and inclusion without explicitly questioning the underlying property relations that structure exclusion from land. This distinction is important because, as Kepkiewicz and Dale (2019) argue, “the potential for agroecology to perpetuate colonial relations in a Canadian context is apparent in proposals for land reforms and alternative land access that have yet to question the sanctity of settler property ownership” (p. 991). They caution that agroecological and food sovereignty approaches must be considered alongside the realities of the settler colonial state, rather than understood as sufficient solutions to the inequities embedded within land relations.

Governance itself also presents ongoing challenges, where collective decision-making requires significant investments in trust, communication, and conflict resolution. As Baxter (2017) notes, commons-based governance is inherently accompanied by collective action dilemmas, as the interests and priorities of individual members do not always align with those of the collective. This tension was present throughout our interviews, with participants describing the challenges of the significant time and relational work required to maintain collaborative governance structures as well as conflicts that have arisen. Thus, ALTS do not resolve the challenges inherent in governing land, but instead requires new forms of collective decision-making, participation, and relationship-building.

Participants also described substantial financial and institutional barriers. Alternative ownership structures frequently proved unfamiliar to banks, insurers, lawyers, planners, and government agencies, creating

additional costs, delays, and uncertainty. Funding was a major constraint, with Ashraf and Konforti (2010) noting that alternative food organizations often struggle to secure stable financing because existing financial institutions are poorly suited to hybrid social and agricultural initiatives. On-farm housing was another significant limitation, as Baxter (2017) highlights that municipal on-farm residency rules are largely designed around intergenerational family farm succession and are increasingly misaligned with contemporary, non-familial models of entry, producing both practical constraints and forms of tenure insecurity for new farmers.

Finally, participants repeatedly emphasized that many challenges facing ALTS ultimately lie beyond the capacity of individual organizations to solve, aligning with Rotz et al. (2019) who argue that nonprofit organizations play an essential role in supporting farmland access but lack the scale and institutional authority to counter broader processes of financialization and consolidation. The findings of this research support that conclusion, as ALTS are creating important alternatives but they continue to operate within unfavourable policy environments.

## 7.4 CONCLUSION

Perhaps the most significant lesson from this research is that there is no singular alternative land tenure model. Rather, Agricultural Land Tenure Systems represent a diverse and evolving collection of experiments responding to different social, economic, environmental, and political contexts. They frequently combine and adapt different legal and organizational structures for land ownership, access, and governance—for example, farmland owned by a non-profit organization and leased to a farmer cooperative, or publicly owned land leased to a nonprofit. Some projects prioritize improving farmland affordability and secure tenure for new farmers. Others focus on collective ownership, community governance, food security, ecological stewardship, or creating more inclusive and accessible pathways into agriculture. Still others seek to challenge dominant assumptions about land as private property and instead reimagine land as a shared community resource.

This research also provided valuable opportunities to build relationships beyond academia. Working alongside the National Farmers Foundation showed me the importance of collaborative and community-engaged research. Rather than viewing research as something conducted on communities, through my research I aimed to co-produce knowledge alongside colleagues, farmers, and organizations whose experiences and expertise shaped every step of the process. I hope that both the database and this report contribute not only to academic discussions but also to farmers and organizers seeking to learn from one another's experiences building ALTS.

While this research highlights the potential of ALTS to challenge some aspects of the dominant farmland system, broader questions remain about whether and how these models can meaningfully confront the accelerating concentration and financialization of farmland, expand beyond localized initiatives, contribute to broader transformations in agrarian systems, and engage with the ongoing colonial relations that continue to shape land access and control in Canada. This study was primarily concerned with developing an empirical foundation for understanding ALTS in Canada: identifying what models exist, how they are structured and governed, and the motivations, successes, and challenges experienced by those building them. An additional chapter was originally envisioned to bring these empirical findings more explicitly into conversation with the theoretical framework developed in Chapter 3, including questions of private property, land imaginaries, critical agrarianism, and colonialism. Given the breadth of the empirical material and the scope of this MRP, that analysis was ultimately beyond the scope of the final version. Future research could therefore build on this empirical foundation to examine more explicitly what ALTS reveal about changing social relations of farmland ownership and control, whether alternative tenure arrangements meaningfully disrupt dominant property relations or reproduce them in new forms, and how these initiatives relate to broader struggles for decolonization, food sovereignty, and agrarian transformation.

Returning to my theoretical framework, this research also calls into question the continued romanticization of the small, privately owned family farm as the ideal foundation of Canadian agriculture. Historically, settler family farming was made possible through the dispossession of Indigenous peoples and the conversion of Indigenous territories into private property. Today, the financialization of farmland and rising land values have further limited who can acquire and sustain a farm. Many small-scale farms today are not economically viable through farm income alone and may depend on inherited land or wealth, family support, off-farm employment, or other circumstances that are not equally available to all aspiring farmers. As a result, access to small-scale farm ownership often reproduces existing inequalities rather than provide an equitable pathway into agriculture. This does not diminish the important contributions of small-scale farmers, but rather highlights the need to move beyond the assumption that expanding private farm ownership is an adequate solution to contemporary agrarian challenges. ALTS offer one potential means of developing more equitable and collective approaches to land access by reducing reliance on individual wealth and ownership while challenging the exclusionary and commodified relations through which farmland is commonly governed. In this sense, ALTS reflect elements of critical agrarianism and land imaginaries by experimenting with alternative ways of organizing relationships between land, people, and agricultural production beyond the dominant private property model.

While ALTS alone may not solve the complex challenges facing Canadian agriculture, they provide valuable lessons into how land access, governance, stewardship, and can be structured differently, even while struggling against broader systems that continue to privilege private property and short-term profit motives. In particular, they point toward possibilities for reclaiming farmland as a resource for feeding people and sustaining communities, rather than treating it primarily as a speculative asset for investors, developers, or large-scale commodity production. By documenting these initiatives and the experiences of those building them, this research contributes to a growing conversation about the future of farmland succession and access in Canada and beyond.

The words of the late Brewster Kneen in his book *From Land to Mouth: Understanding the Food System Second Edition* (1995) are as relevant today as they were then:

> As we rethink the food system, the rapid decline in the number of family farms could be viewed as an opportunity rather than a disaster, encouraging us to recognize that the private ownership of the means of production, including land, may itself be a major cause of the destruction of those elements of the family farm that we value. The profound need for human community, and the real practical need for security of tenure on the land, may compel us to create what are, for this culture, novel forms of farm organization, such as co-operatives and land trusts. (p. 131)

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**Appendices**

Appendix 1: Agricultural Land Tenure Systems (ALTS) Database Entries

| **Farm Name** | **Province** |
|---|---|
| Ellis Nature Centre | Alberta |
| Farmland Legacies - Mayerthorpe Farm | Alberta |
| Grow Calgary | Alberta |
| Farmland Legacies - Lloydminster Farm | Alberta |
| Besties Cooperative Farm | Alberta |
| Edmonton Urban Farm | Alberta |
| Waldron Ranch | Alberta |
| Good Note Community Farm | Alberta |
| Highfield Farm | Alberta |
| Westwood Farm | British Columbia |
| Blueberry Commons Farm Cooperative | British Columbia |
| Gabriola Commons | British Columbia |
| Glen Valley Organic Farm | British Columbia |
| Haliburton Community Organic Farm | British Columbia |
| Lohbrunner Community Farm | British Columbia |
| Senden Sustainable Agriculture Resource Centre | British Columbia |
| Cowichan Farm & Food Hub | British Columbia |
| KPU Farm | British Columbia |
| Tea Creek | British Columbia |
| cə̀lisələm Tsawwassen First Nation Community Farm | British Columbia |
| Horse Lake Community Farm Coop | British Columbia |
| Ceres Circle Farm | British Columbia |
| Fraser Common Farm Cooperative | British Columbia |

| | |
|---|---|
| Helen's Acres Community Farm | British Columbia |
| ntámłqən Community Garden & Food Hub | British Columbia |
| FED Urban Farm | British Columbia |
| OUR Ecovillage | British Columbia |
| Park Avenue Farm | British Columbia |
| Wyndlow Acres Farm | British Columbia |
| Burgoyne Valley Community Farm | British Columbia |
| Cast Iron Farm Co-operative | British Columbia |
| Elk Root Conservation Educational Demonstration Farm | British Columbia |
| Linnaea Farm | British Columbia |
| Madrona Farm | British Columbia |
| Providence Farm | British Columbia |
| Sandown Centre for Regenerative Agriculture | British Columbia |
| sncəcmałqtn Agricultural Park | British Columbia |
| The Root Food Hub | British Columbia |
| The Sharing Farm | British Columbia |
| Yarrow Ecovillage | British Columbia |
| Newman Farm | British Columbia |
| University of British Columbia Farm | British Columbia |
| Kakwa Ecovillage Cooperative | British Columbia |
| Metanoia Farmers Worker Coop | Manitoba |
| Northern Sun Farm Co-op | Manitoba |
| Myriad Village | Manitoba |
| Prairie's Edge Eco-Village | Manitoba |
| Ploughshares Community Farm | Manitoba |
| South Knowlesville Land Share | New Brunswick |

| | |
|---|---|
| Ferme Terre Partagée | New Brunswick |
| Hayes Farm | New Brunswick |
| Toasa Cooperative | New Brunswick |
| Open Sky Co-operative Farm | New Brunswick |
| O’Brien Farm | Newfoundland and Labrador |
| Collective Acres Farm | Nova Scotia |
| Tatamagouche Community Land Trust | Nova Scotia |
| Crows' Commons | Nova Scotia |
| Malvern Urban Farm | Ontario |
| Neighbourly Farm | Ontario |
| Roots Farm & Retreat | Ontario |
| The New Farm Centre | Ontario |
| Urban Fresh Produce | Ontario |
| Albion Hills Community Farm | Ontario |
| Everdale Farm | Ontario |
| McVean Farm | Ontario |
| Woodbine Cares Community Garden | Ontario |
| YMCA Cedar Glen Outdoor Centre Farm | Ontario |
| Rama Community Farm | Ontario |
| County Left Farm | Ontario |
| Pamoja Farms | Ontario |
| The Living City Farm | Ontario |
| Whole Village | Ontario |
| Clearwater Farm | Ontario |
| Amma Canada Farm | Ontario |
| BeetBox Co-operative Farm | Ontario |

| | |
|---|---|
| Flemo Farm | Ontario |
| It’s Giving Farm | Ontario |
| Edwin Binney’s Community Farm & Education Centre | Ontario |
| Ignatius Farm | Ontario |
| Eminidowang Kiitigan – Spirit Garden for Everyone | Ontario |
| Kenhte:ke Seed Sanctuary and Learning Centre | Ontario |
| Black Creek Community Farm | Ontario |
| KNEF Community Farm | Ontario |
| Toronto Black Farmers and Growers (Downsview Park Farm) | Ontario |
| Many Hands Urban Farm Collective (Downsview Park Farm) | Ontario |
| Morninglory Farm | Ontario |
| Lothlorien Farm | Ontario |
| Bourgeois Farm | Ontario |
| Camphill Farm | Ontario |
| Huronview Demo Farm | Ontario |
| Just Food Community Farm | Ontario |
| Sunnivue Farm | Ontario |
| The Indigenous Food Sovereignty Garden | Ontario |
| L.M. Montgomery Sea Shore | Prince Edward Island |
| Tourne-Sol Cooperative Farm | Quebec |
| Hudson Heartbeet Community Farm | Quebec |
| Agricola Cooperative Farm | Quebec |
| Montcalm Project | Quebec |
| La Ferme Trotteuse Coop | Quebec |
| Ferme aux Petits Oignons Coop de Solidarité | Quebec |
| La Ferme Coopérative aux Champs qui Chantent | Quebec |

| | |
|---|---|
| Coop les Jardins de la Résistance | Quebec |
| Projet d'Agro-parc | Quebec |
| Biblioterre | Quebec |
| Ferme Coopérative du Moulin | Quebec |
| La Cité Écologique de Ham-Nord | Quebec |
| Ferme de la Colline du Chêne | Quebec |
| Farmland Legacies - St. Benedict Farm | Saskatchewan |
| Farmland Legacies - Melville Farm | Saskatchewan |
| Farmland Legacies - Humboldt Farm | Saskatchewan |
| Farmland Legacies - Nipawin Farm | Saskatchewan |
| Farmland Legacies - Wynyard Farm | Saskatchewan |
| Farmland Legacies - Netherhill Farm | Saskatchewan |
| Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in Farm | Yukon |

Appendix 2: Sample Agricultural Land Tenure Systems (ALTS) Database Entry

**Farm Info**
**Name**: Tatamagouche Community Land Trust
**Address:** 49 Alex Cox Rd., Tatamagouche, Nova Scotia, B0K 1V0
**Website URL:** waldegravefarm.com
**Parcel Identification Number (PID):** 20025086
**Acres**: 100
**Farmland Uses:** Horticulture, Housing

**Farmland Ownership**
**Land Owner:** Tatamagouche Community Land Cooperative Ltd.
**Entity Type:** Co-operative (provincial)
**Registered Charity:** No
**Date Ownership Received:** 2005

**Interests in Farmland**

1) Lease
**Interest Holder:** Private family
**Entity Type:** Private
**Interest Received From:** Tatamagouche Community Land Cooperative Ltd.
**Date Interest Received:**
**Duration of Interest (years):** 20

2) Lease
**Interest Holder:** Waldegrave Farm
**Entity Type:** Sole proprietorship
**Interest Received From:** Tatamagouche Community Land Cooperative Ltd.
**Date Interest Received:** 2010
**Duration of Interest (years):** 25

**Farmland Governance**

**Summary of Governance Structure:** The Tatamagouche Community Land Trust is governed by the Tatamagouche Community Land Cooperative Ltd., an eight-member cooperative that collectively owns and manages the land in trust for agricultural use in perpetuity. Agricultural operations are carried out through long-term lease agreements with independent farm businesses, including Waldegrave Farm and a beef farming operation. This model separates land ownership from farm operations, providing secure land tenure while ensuring long-term ecological stewardship of the land.

Appendix 3: Interview Guide

1/ Please tell me about how you are involved in [FARM NAME].

> Prompts: What is your role? When did you become involved? Did you do this on your own or as part of a group?

2/ Why did you engage in this project? What problems were you trying to solve by engaging in this model? What did you think you would accomplish?

> Prompts: Is this model helping to make land more accessible for new or younger farmers? Does it support intergenerational transition? Do you see it addressing farmland consolidation or speculation? How, if at all, do you see your initiative contributing to addressing challenges around farmland succession and tenure issues in Canada? How, if at all, does your model provide long-term tenure security for farmers?

3/ Can you explain how the land tenure model (legal structure of ownership and governance) on the farm actually works? How is it different from conventional farm tenure/ownership?

> Prompts: What rights/entitlements and responsibilities/obligations do you have related to the farm? Who makes decisions about the farm (how it is used, who can participate in the tenure model, whether or not it can be sold, etc)? How, if at all, does your model provide long-term tenure security for farmers? (If the org doesn't own the land – Do you have long-term plans for ownership of the land?)

4/ In your experience, has the alternative land tenure model been a success? What have been its major accomplishments?

5/ What do you think have been the most important benefits of the arrangement for those who are participating (farmers, landowners, others), for rural communities and the general population?

6/ Have you considered social justice goals in relation to your initiative such as: equity and inclusion for those who have been marginalized in or excluded from agriculture (women, queer and transgender folks, BIPOC) / land reconciliation with Indigenous peoples? If so, could you tell us how?

7/ What challenges have you encountered in building and operating the tenure model? Are there drawbacks to the arrangement you've adopted?

8/ In your experience to date, what kinds of future changes would you like to see with the model?

9/ Based on your experience, do you think there is much potential for your model, or other kinds of alternative land tenure models to become more widespread in your region/municipality/ province? What kinds of policies or program incentives do you think could be created to make models such as yours more attractive to those who want to start or continue to farm?

10/ Do you see your initiative as part of a broader network or coalition - locally, provincially, or nationally?

> Prompts: Are you working with other organizations, farms, or initiatives with similar goals? Do you share knowledge, strategies, or resources? Has this network been important to your work?

11/ My last question is very open-ended. In addition to what you've already said, what would you like to add that would help us better understand your experience and knowledge around the "what, why and how" of alternative land tenure models?