

→ - YOUNG AGRARIANS - ←



Navigating Farm Transition Conversations Tool Kit Edition 1.0

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This toolkit was produced on Treaty 2 territory, the traditional lands of Anishinaabeg, Cree, Assiniboine, Sioux, Dakota, and Dene Peoples, and the homeland of the Métis Nation – as well as Treaty 6 territory – home of the Cree, Blackfoot, Métis, Nakota Sioux, Iroquois, Dene, Ojibway/Saulteaux/Anishinaabe, Inuit, and many others.

Young Agrarians recognize the Indigenous rights and title to all lands in what is today known as Canada. As we live and work in the context of and in response to a colonial land title system, it is important to acknowledge the historical and on-going impact of agriculture on Indigenous lands and food systems. In this context, we believe that it is our collective responsibility to position reconciliation, ecology and land stewardship at the forefront- if we are to sustain the Earth's ecosystems in today's rapidly changing climate.

The colonial land title system treats land as a commodity rather than a relationship. There is no reconciling the commodification of land with land as cultural and spiritual home. As an organization working with new and young farmers, it is important to recognize this seemingly unsolvable contradiction. Further, as we live in an inherently complex regulatory environment within an increasingly inflated land capital system, any solutions we create to ensure future generations can access the land to grow food are likely to be complex as well. There are no simple solutions to land transition in the cultural, political, and socio-economic context we live in today.

This toolkit was created with the intention that, through the concepts and stories it explores, landholders and farmers will be able to envision future transitions for the land, and better understand the central nature of relationships - to grow future healthy farms and food systems. In the context of Indigenous and settler groups working together, we believe that it is through relationships that cross-cultural spaces emerge and the giving back and re-opening of lands for food provisioning can be nurtured. It is our hope that there will be more pathways to reconciliation across these lands.

While this guide is primarily focused on land succession within the land title system, we will endeavour in the coming years to cultivate organizational capacity for working within cross-cultural frameworks to support farmers in our network to engage in reconciliation processes within their communities.

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PRODUCER & WRITER

Dana Penrice, Prairie Program Manager, Young Agrarians

CONTRIBUTORS

Lilli Klamke, Alberta Peace Program Manager, Young Agrarians

Alex Pulwiski, Central Alberta Program Manager, Young Agrarians

Kolby Peterson, Alberta Apprenticeship Coordinator, Young Agrarians

Sara Dent, Executive Director, Young Agrarians

Darcy Smith, B.C. Land Program Manager, Young Agrarians

ILLUSTRATOR

Janice Wu

SOURCES

The Farm Transition Café and this accompanying tool kit use principles and concepts from the Art of Hosting and Human Venture Leadership.

The Navigating Farm Transition Conversations Tool Kit Edition 1.0 was updated November, 2021. The Navigating Farm Transition Conversations Tool Kit is Copyright © 2013- 2021 by Young Agrarians. All rights reserved.

We hope that you'll share it and reference it (just as long as you do not sell it). Please contact land@youngagrarians.org if you are interested in adapting the Navigating Farm Transition Conversations Tool Kit.

Send us notes with suggestions on what the next edition should include and let us know if you spot any rogue errors.

Information in this tool kit does not constitute legal advice. It is highly recommended that the legal and tax implications of the potentially relevant organizational structures below are discussed with a lawyer and account/tax expert respective to the specifics of your situation.

ABOUT YOUNG AGRARIANS

Young Agrarians works to grow the next generation of farmers and food lovers through a Grow-a-Farmer Strategy that aggregates resources and opportunities online, provides educational and networking events on and off farms, facilitates mentorships, coordinates on-farm apprenticeships, and provides land access programming. Young Agrarians is a program of Agrarians Foundation, a federally registered charity. Young Agrarians Alberta is a project of Organic Alberta.

PURPOSE

Did you know that 92% of farms in Canada don't have a transition or succession plan? At the same time, there's a growing movement of new and beginning farmers seeking land and farm opportunities.

How we steward the transition of farm land and businesses from one generation to the next is going to have a major impact on the future of agriculture and the food system. It's time we get the conversation started.

The purpose of this tool kit is to open up the conversation about farm transition between the generations. It is designed for both parties involved and for those involved in in-family or out-of-family farm transitions.

NEMAWASHI: PREPARING THE GROUND FOR FARM TRANSITION

Another way to describe the purpose of this tool kit is captured in the Japanese term 'nemawashi' which is the process involved in preparing the soil for transplanting. A wikipedia page describes it as: "an informal process of quietly laying the foundation for some proposed change or project, by talking to the people concerned, gathering support and feedback, and so forth".

HOW TO USE THIS TOOL KIT

Every farm transition is unique and so the tools that will be required to steward it will be unique. Take from this tool kit what you feel is appropriate and suitable to your situation. We won't be offended if you skip over some of it.

PREPARING THE GROUND

In our Farm Transition Cafés, we intentionally work to set up the space for meaningful, productive conversations by collectively agreeing to some guidelines. We know that farm transition involves the emergence of thoughts, ideas and emotions and we want to provide space for that to emerge, when and how it needs to.

You may want to borrow from this to set up the foundations for good communication as you take this home to the people involved in your farm transition. But it also might be too formal, so use the tools if they make sense.

HELPFUL GUIDELINES FOR CONVERSATIONS¹

- Recognize the experience and wisdom of all the people in the room
- Be intentional: speak when you have something to say
- Be attentive: listen to understand
- Be inquiring: ask questions to understand more deeply
- Suspend assumptions and judgments
- Welcome all voices
- Ask the group if they have any other guidelines to suggest to help make the conversation productive.

TALKING PIECE

Indigenous cultures around the world have known the power of a talking stick². Using one can ensure that everyone has the chance to speak and encourages everyone to listen. It can avoid instances of people talking over or past one-another. Farm transition conversations can get tense and even heated

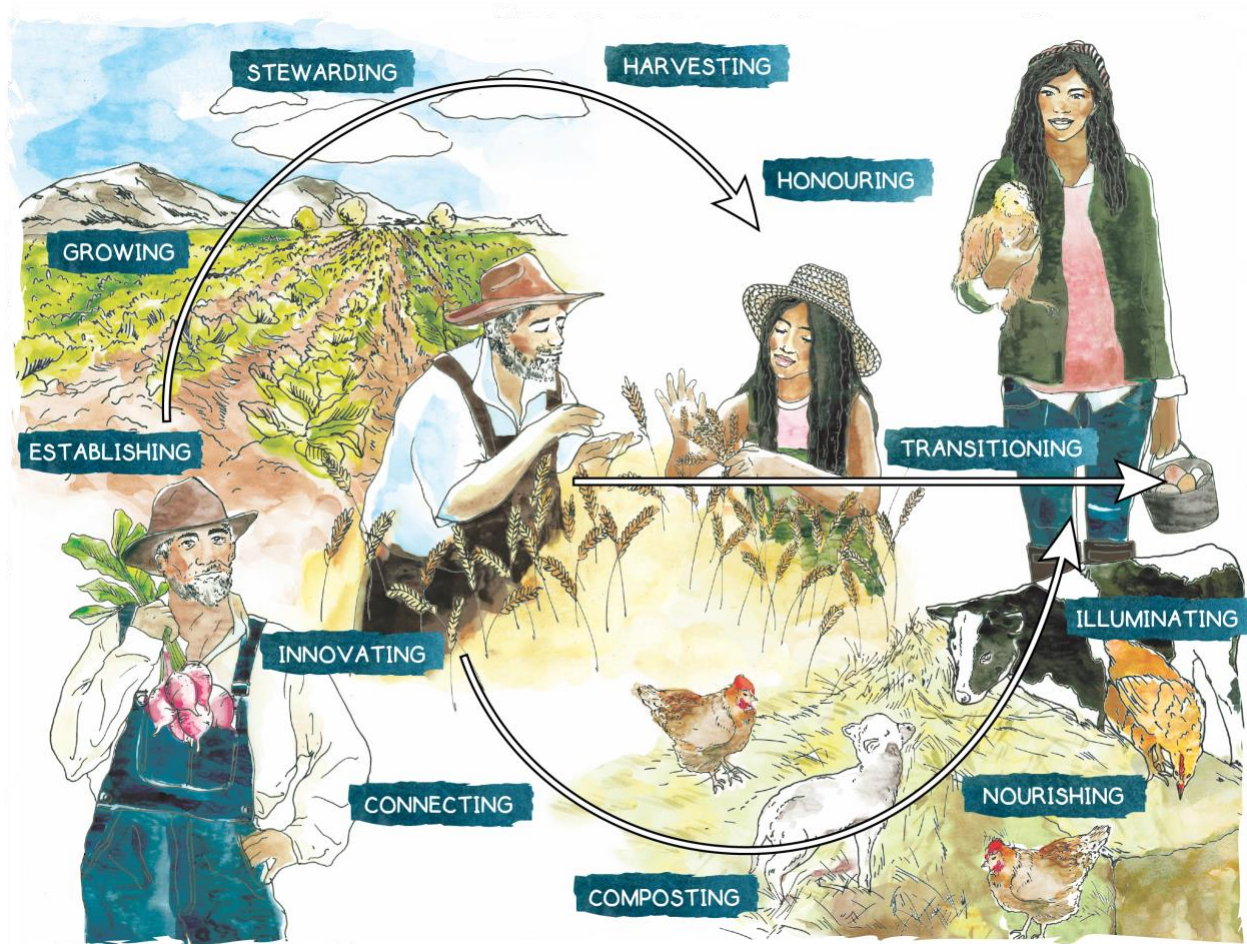
¹Adapted from the Art of Hosting

²Talking stick. (25 August 2020). In *Wikipedia*. Retrieved from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talking_stick

sometimes and the concept of a talking piece can help build trust and respect by providing the opportunity for everyone to contribute to the conversation.

WHAT IS FARM TRANSITION?

A note about language; there's lots of language used interchangeably. Farm transition, farm transfer, farm succession. Don't get hung up on this. What's really important is that the farm is going through a process of transition and change and we want to figure out how to manage and navigate that well. Here's one way to describe that process³:



Just like the ecosystems that we work with, farms and businesses have life cycles. There are phases of new beginnings, growth, abundance, disturbance, and even death. Sometimes there is a view that farms

³ Adapted from the Berkana Institute Two Loop Model, Art of Hosting

should just go on in the state that they are in but healthy farms ebb and flow through a cycle that allows for adaptation.

- 1) Establishment – the start-up phase, creating structures; both physical and business structures on the farm, setting up the patterns of who does what.
- 2) Growing – investing, taking new opportunities, finding new markets, establishing new enterprises, building new relationships.
- 3) Stewarding – maintaining the business, carrying out routines, a feeling of “this is the way we do things ‘round here” (which isn’t necessarily a good or bad thing!)
- 4) Innovating – potential new farmer comes along, may be exploring new ideas, feels that “another way is possible” (which also isn’t necessarily a good or bad thing).
- 5) Connecting – as they explore new ways of doing things, potential new farmer connects with others, build a network of support.
- 6) Nourishing – potential new farmer is gaining skills, testing, gaining experience, maybe they do a YA apprenticeship, start exploring the resources required.
- 7) Illuminating – new farmer and landowner start making it real, they are planning and laying out the future.

But there are a number of other really crucial dynamics that need to be thought about in transition.

- 8) Composting – in this process the resources, assets of the old business or farm are redeployed into the new one.
- 9) Harvesting – learning from the way the land and business has been managed, learning from the previous generation.

- 10) Honouring – honouring the previous generation, the business and the farm for what it has been and what it has given to future generations

- 11) Transition – bringing everyone along, making sure everyone is engaged in this new way of doing things, taking on new roles. (Older generation becomes mentor, new farmer becomes decision maker)

REFLECT:

Where do you see yourself on this diagram?

What has been your experience there?

Where do you see yourself moving to?

WHAT IS BEING PASSED ON?

One of the most important things that you can pass on, isn't the land, the assets, the business but it is your wisdom and your ideals, your way of being in the world.

CULTURE - The ground out of which human beings grow. Like soil, culture can have healthy and unhealthy elements.

How do we pass on the best of our culture to the next generation and minimize the unhelpful elements?

REFLECT:

What is it besides the assets and the business do you want to pass on to the next generation? /
What would you want to have passed on to you?

What don't you want to pass on? / What don't you want passed on to you?

WE ARE ALL LEARNING

The skills that have gotten us here, won't be the skills needed going forward.

“Thinking people all recognize that the roads ahead are arduous, that the best-conceived actions will give rise to further problems that require yet more skill, wisdom and breadth of conception.”

- *Surpassing Ourselves: An Inquiry into the Nature and Implications of Expertise* , Carl Bereiter & Marlene Scardamalia

REFLECT

What skills do you think are needed for a successful transition?

What value and skills can you bring to the transition process? (not to the farm, to the process?)

What areas do you want to work on?

What areas do you want help, possibly bring in advisors?

CONVERSATIONS TO HAVE

Farm transition could be described as one long series of conversations. Starting the conversation can be hard, but there are a number of conversations that need to happen so there are lots of entry points to start from. These are conversations to have with those involved in the transition but they are also conversations to have with yourself.

These conversations might happen at different times in different places. Lots of farmers aren't used to formal meetings, so don't be surprised if they happen while fixing machinery, driving through the pasture or while weeding a row of carrots. These conversations also don't generally happen one at a time or in one moment. They evolve and build over time.

Remember, it can take a long time to get to know each other, especially for those outside of the family, but this can also be true if it is a family member that has been away from the farm for a while. This is all about setting the foundation and sharing expectations which doesn't happen overnight.

Big Picture – What drives you in life? What motivates you to get out of bed in the morning? What feeds your soul? What do you need in your life to make it meaningful? What makes you come alive?

Intention – Why are you taking this course of action? Why farming? What else would / could you be doing?

Situation / Context – What is the context? What is your sense of the situation? What's currently working or not working? What questions do you have of everyone involved? What information do you need that would be helpful? Assessing?

Decision Making – Who are the decision makers? What role/responsibility does everyone want to take on? Do they have the skills to do it and if not how can they develop them? Who has veto power and over what? How are decisions made? What do we do when we don't agree? What makes sense now, what do we want to move towards in the future?

Planning – How would it actually work? How will it unfold over time? What would the relationship look like? What would the business and land agreement look like? What would be the overall plan?

Working - What does the season-to-season, month-to-month, day-to-day look like? What resources do you bring / what do you need?

Learning / Self-Improvement – What would you need / want to learn to make this work? What skills do you bring to the transition? What aren't you good at?

TIPS FOR NAVIGATING CONVERSATIONS

In transition, everyone has a lot to learn. We forget that this is the first time around for everyone involved. The learning curves are huge for the new generation as they are for the older generation in how to support and mentor. We are all learners and teachers in this.

You're probably not going to get it right on the first try. We expect that it will not be 100% perfect and it never is. Conflict will happen but with a good foundation, you can work through it.

Here are a few tips for navigating the conversation:

- Work to develop an understanding the people involved and how they came to think the way they do
- Build trust by growing a repertoire of exploratory conversations, strive to always end off on a good note
- People don't learn well when they are threatened, watch for signs of "violence or silence"⁴
- Practice endless patience

NEXT STEPS

⁴ Crucial Conversations Tools for Talking When Stakes Are High, Second Edition by Kerry Patterson, Joseph Grenny, et al.

REFLECT

Who do you need to have a conversation with? Yourself, you farm partner, your family, the previous or next generation?

OTHER RESOURCES FROM YA:

B.C. Transition Tool Kit for Non-Family Farm Transfer -

<https://youngagrarians.org/bc-transition-toolkit-for-non-family-farm-transfer/>

Land Access Guides and Lease Templates

<https://youngagrarians.org/tools/land/>

CONTACT US

Dana Penrice

prairies@youngagrarians.org

www.youngagrarians.org

