Migrating Mennonites: Understanding the Impacts of Anabaptist Farmers on Local Food in Northern Ontario

By: Sara Epp and James Newlands

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Funding Partner

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Outline of Presentation

- Starting premise
- Overview of research project
- Movement of Mennonites
- Methods
- SWOT Analysis
- Reflections
- Moving forward
Starting Premise

• Northern Ontario lacks access to local and healthful food
  – Lack of access impacts food sovereignty/security, which are heightened in northern communities

• Important to understand food access limitations and how access to local food can be improved
Project Overview

- The larger research project will identify systems currently in place to produce and distribute local food.
- Will assess the potential expansion of the agricultural sector and opportunities to create a network for food production and distribution.
- Look to existing community linkages and opportunities to create partnerships between communities to improve distribution systems.
Project Overview

- Need to understand challenges faced by farming community
  - Existing and new farmers, including migrants from the Anabaptist farm community, young farmers and immigrants

- Seek to understand the impacts of these farmers on local food and their role within a local food network
A Mennonite migration is transforming agriculture - and diets - in the north

By TIM ALAMENCIAK

Mennonites Moving to Northern Ont. Rework Old Farmland

By ERICK WHITE

Feeling North Bright Future for Farming in the North

By BENJAMIN AUBE

TIMMINS - This part of the province may be witnessing a slow tide creeping back up towards the Arctic watershed. It has the potential to turn into a wave that could shape the future of Northeastern Ontario's economic and cultural landscape.
Data Collection

- Interviews in Algoma conducted in mid-April 2016
  - 12 interviews with members of the Mennonite community
  - 1 interview with a member of the Amish community

- Focus group in November 2017
  - 7 Mennonite farmers attended
SWOT Analysis

- Based on interviews from April 2016
- Reviewed during focus group in November 2016
- Revised based on the findings from this focus group

A SWOT Analysis of the Algoma District Anabaptist Community’s Evolving Contributions to Local Agriculture

Abstract

The following paper explores the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats associated with the expansion of agriculture in northern Ontario by members of the Anabaptist community. To facilitate, this paper focuses on interviews conducted by Jamie Hawkesworth in April 2016, followed a focus group facilitated by Tim, Tige, and James Handfield in November 2016 with the Anabaptist community. This SWOT analysis was shaped based on feedback and further discussion with participants. The research is part of a larger project on the expansion of agriculture in northern Ontario and the Anabaptist community.

Authors

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Strengths

- Lower cost of land
- Abundance of workable or cleared land that is under- or unutilized
- Some agricultural products grow well
- Good soil qualities and longer summer days
- Assistance provided by OMAFRA, RAIN and Scotiabank
Weaknesses

- Distance to markets, suppliers and grain mills
- Limited local suppliers, veterinarians, transportation/shippers and abattoirs
- Logistics to markets
- Low levels of competition
- Shorter growing season and fewer heat units
- Lack of research relating to northern farming
- Size of operations
Opportunities

- Connections with Mennonite communities in southern Ontario
- Climate change
- Promotion of locally grown food
- Expanded usage of greenhouses
- Local food auction
- Growth of Mennonite community
Threats

- Lack of labour force
- Transportation costs
- Speculators holding land
- Increases in taxes
- Changes to product regulations
Reflections

- There is immense potential but a lot of initiatives are informal and not well-communicated
- Sense of optimism and recognition of the importance of agriculture in the north
- Expansion of the Mennonite community will continue and so will availability of local food
Next Steps

- The final SWOT Analysis will be shared with the Anabaptist farmers, contacts in Algoma and other interested parties.
- Research in the north will branch out to other farmers and will begin later this spring.
  - Survey
  - Interviews/focus groups
- All research activities will be updated on the project website: www.enhancinglocalfood.com
Questions?

The Research Team