

## Group III – Producer Focus Groups

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### Focus Group Sessions

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The Central Region of Alberta has a large number of *producers*. It would be difficult to interview the majority of them; therefore, to get a broad perspective from a number of different farm operations, focus groups was the method used to gather information. The advantage of a focus group setting is that it creates an environment for individuals to share and build on each others' ideas, to identify commonalities and differences between farm operations, and potentially create some new connections among the group's participants.

#### Criteria for Producer Selection for Focus Groups:

- Businesses within the Central Region. (*See Appendix A*)
- They must have a product in the market and be able to quickly scale-up production.
- It would include businesses exploring the retail, restaurant/chefs, or foodservice market. Although they are dealing with relatively small quantities, further trucking or storage is needed beyond the growers' usual responsibilities (e.g., businesses that may be selling at the farmers' markets and/or through on-farm sales and are ready to move into other markets that require expanded distribution/logistics [trucking and storage]).
- Includes all of the commodities or value-added products (i.e., protein, grain, horticultural crops, honey, etc.).

Two focus group sessions were held in Red Deer on November 10, 2010 to identify the main challenges producers are facing in distributing their products in the Alberta market. Eleven participants, representing nine farming enterprises, took part in these sessions, which included producers of fruit, vegetables, greenhouse crops, beef, bison, elk, pork, lamb and chicken, as well as grain millers, and honey producers.

The questions asked of participants in the focus groups, focused around these themes:

1. Market types in which they currently sell.
2. Potential for expansion of local food products into other local markets.
3. Challenges to local food expansion (i.e., general challenges and those related to logistics).
4. Solutions to these challenges (i.e., general challenges and those related to logistics)
5. Industry strengths (i.e., organizational, networks, etc.)

## Summary of Producer Focus Groups

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(The responses below indicate that at least one business responded with these words.)

### 1. Please describe the types of markets you are in. At which locations are these markets?

Currently, how are you getting your product to market?

- **Farm Direct sales** – Farms located within the Central Region
  - consumers/buyers come to farm
- **Farmers’ Markets** – In nearby communities in the Central Region, as well as urban centers (Calgary, Edmonton)
  - use own trucks, coolers or freezers (reefers).
  - rent the trucks out to the business partners (co-op) to do deliveries.
  - hire trucks (reefers)
- **Restaurants** – Red Deer, Banff, Jasper, other locations
  - use own trucks for delivery.
  - hire a transport (carrier) company.
  - some chefs pre-order and pick up at the Farmers’ Markets.
  - some buyers pick up from the farm
- **Home delivery/direct to end user (businesses)**
  - use own vehicles, own freezer trucks
  - some producers have their customers pre-order, and then take products to a central delivery point in an urban center, such as Edmonton, Calgary, and Red Deer; this is a planned delivery schedule within a specific time period (i.e., monthly, every 8 weeks, etc.)
  - if the customer wants delivery to the door, then the producer will charge an extra fee for this service
- **Retail** – includes local grocery, specialty retail, etc.
  - largely dealing with stores in Edmonton, Calgary, and Central Alberta
  - use own vehicles, reefers, or Farmers’ Market trailer
  - deliver to a federal processing plant; then it moves directly from the processing plant to the retailer’s storage facility, then to the retail store through *their system*
- **Convenience stores**
  - use own trucks for delivery
- **Export market** – United States, European Union, Japan, etc.
  - have on-farm pick up
  - deliver to a carrier (trucks)
  - fill a 20-foot Sea-Can (container)

**2. Are you considering either expanding your business or entering a new market, where you know there is an assured demand for your product?**

- **Strong demand** – The majority of the producers stated that demand was strong and greater than supply; it was difficult to keep up with their current customers (i.e., vegetables, flour, honey, various kinds of meat products). Examples of comments: they were “growing so quickly” and it was hard to keep up with their current demand and facilities, “a good opportunity to expand exponentially ... sales are growing,” and “they advertised and had a huge response ... so they stopped” since they could not provide to more customers.
- **General comments regarding entering or expanding into new markets**
  - **identify your customer** – Know which customer you want to serve, and where you want your farm to be in the future (i.e., want to sell locally and close to home, or to restaurants, or export, etc.). It makes a difference when making decisions.
  - **test demand** – Before producers assume they have a new buyer or a new market, they need to test it to ensure it is secure enough to launch into. Is it a *real demand*, or an *expressed demand*? Producers will go to a lot of trouble getting labour in place and incur other expenses “but if it’s not sold, it’s garbage ... therefore we need markets.” “There is a *disconnect* in the local food market.... Lots say they want *local* but will not pay the cost.”
  - **awareness of consumer needs** – Consumer preferences vary. Producers mentioned some of the factors that consumers are considering when purchasing products: convenience, value, cheaper, want to connect with a producer or a farm, etc. While some consumers choose the cheapest product, others will go out of their way to buy something more expensive, but of value to them.
  - **awareness of regulations** – Several were listed such as, Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP), the Alberta HACCP Advantage (AHA), and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA).

**3. a) What are some of the biggest challenges or barriers you face getting into these markets (i.e., challenges with expansion, in general)?**

- **Growth management** – Many stated that growth is a challenge. As demand is growing and they are getting bigger, they have their own management issues within their facilities (buildings, storage, etc.), management of relationships, as well as other implications due to expansion, such as “it would not take long to max our processor out.” Since these are smaller businesses, it is a big decision to decide whether or not they should expand or just make sure they can maintain the client base that they have.
- **Time constraints, in relation to the market channel**
  - **on-farm sales** – People coming to the farm means that time is involved. Some farms enjoy people coming to the farm, while others find it can interfere with the work and they can’t afford the loss of time.
  - **staff to do marketing** – To expand into new or additional markets means that more time is needed. “If we had someone on the road full time (*for marketing*) then we could do a lot more” (i.e., whether it is convenience stores, restaurants, etc.).
  - **preparation time for specific markets** – Producers need to build in time for coordination and product preparation. Buyers and customers also need to be aware of

this lead time that is needed by producers. For example, in the home delivery market the grower may need to start preparing a week prior to the delivery date.

- **small business limitations** – Producers want to make sure they can maintain their current customers and the quality of the product. There are regulation requirements, distances to travel in Alberta, as well as time needed for marketing and distribution, etc., “Being a small company, how can you do it all?”
  - **need more of a work/life balance** – Some stated that they wished they “did not have to work every weekend and every holiday.” Being part of a grower group helps, since they can share the workload. They also can share the labour (i.e., workers from Mexico).
- **Volume, viability, and knowing your customer**
    - **volume of sales to restaurants, transportation costs** – Some found that there wasn’t enough volume to sell into restaurants to be a viable market and still be able to pay their bills, unless the volume of sales was greater. It also takes more of their time to deal with this market. “The demand is there (*for local*); restaurants are asking for it ... but hard to do it because of no time to run around.” Producers face this dilemma: If they sell into retail, then the returns are lower, although they would sell more volume, “but, if we work with a chef, they are more open ... but they don’t buy enough.” One producer commented that an indirect benefit of working with a chef was that they “direct more traffic (*business*)” to the farm.
    - **convenience and value** – There has to be value for the producer (i.e., returns) and value to the consumer. For example, if transportation to the city is required to drop off product, then the returns must be worth the producer’s time and the consumer must be happy with the price they are paying.
  - **Labour** – Finding labour can be a challenge since a lot of Canadian workers “did not want to do field work.... not willing to do (*this type of*) physical work” compared to offshore labour.
  - **Scale/large retail market**
    - **lack of purchasing power** – Larger businesses “do not want to deal with small producers....” Producers found that they are expected to buy large amounts of supplies; “way too many bags” for their packaging needs.
    - **differentiation, limited resources (retail)** – “You are competing with other products on the market.... How can you differentiate your product?... [N]o money to wine and dine people ....” (i.e., compared with larger businesses).
    - **cost is a related issue** – “Not one (*grower*) is large enough to be a reasonable cost, and compete with the US,...” or other countries (e.g., competition from California).
    - **packaging** – Expansion into retail may mean more packaging costs.
  - **Appropriate pricing** – Some producers set their price too low. In some cases, this meant they went out of business, and at the same time it compromised pricing for other growers.
  - **Financing**
    - **loans** – Producers expressed difficulty in getting a relatively small loan for a direct market operation, while it would be much easier to get a loan for something large or more common. “[T]o get a loan for a freezer or buy a truck to sell our own meat, typical lenders will not give support to direct marketers ... even if the business is reputable, and

has good (*credit*) rating ... but not so with a chicken barn.” They commented that banks generally do not want to deal with small accounts, unless there is collaboration.

- **business assets, not fully valued as collateral** – “You build it (*equipment*) or buy it, but no one else will buy it so it’s worth nothing, yet it costs you (*the producer*).”
- **Entering Farm Direct Sales** – Considered as the most difficult by some. Facilities and infrastructure is very expensive; “need a nice place or customers will not come back.”
- **Equipment** – Comments ranged from, “being difficult to find equipment for expansion” to being more costly in Alberta compared to other parts of Canada or other countries. As a result, producers may decide to build their own equipment.
- **Lack of value chains** – “No economical chains to get product to market if distance is a problem.”
- **Education and promotion costs** – Buyers may require training on how to use certain products; may need to experiment or trial the product before they commit to buying. This means more time on the road for the producer and a donation of product.
- **Technology** – Use of computers for marketing (i.e., web pages). “Technology is challenging (*for some growers*) because they are not good at it,” or do not have the time to get to know the technology.
- **Paperwork**
  - **for accessing funds** – “Smaller companies do not have the resources...” compared to large companies that can afford to have staff or hire a consultant. (Note: It was pointed out that Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development (ARD) can assist producers with this application process.)
- **Meat processing issues** – Several challenges were raised, which are interrelated.
  - **loss of infrastructure (*local abattoirs and meat cutters*) and increased distance** – Some producers stated that *after supply*, the next challenge is *abattoirs* (i.e., the lack of abattoirs, especially federally-approved plants, and the minimum number of head required for slaughter). “We must discuss the past ‘gutting of the local market’. Is there a way to put *local* into a different category? We’ve lost half of the local abattoirs; every town had one or two abattoirs and two to three meat cutters.... Either ‘you get big or get out’ .... We can’t have a local rural meat system without a local processing system (*e.g., drive 300-350 km to get meat killed or processed*). Need a shift in direction, in capacity, if we want a local food system.”
  - **scale, aging, cost of transportation** – Federal plants are dealing with livestock in large numbers and could slaughter up to 300 per hour and may do a double shift at the plant. Once the animal is slaughtered, it is cut into primal cuts, then bagged and chilled overnight. It then has to be shipped to a freezer/storage unit. (*Personal communication, provincial specialist, Dec 21, 2010*).
  - **the “system”** – Makes Alberta products costly to get to market. “It’s hard to find someone to do small numbers (*i.e., head-of-livestock for slaughter*). Provincially it’s relatively easy, but a federal processor is much harder.” Some federal plants require a minimum slaughter of 50-head which is too much for a small producer (versus a

provincial plant, which may only require eight-head). “Federal plants do not age the meat, therefore it must be then shipped into the federal storage system (*and hung for 21 days or more to age*), and later shipped to a federal processor. It may have to go to yet another processor that will cut steaks, since some plants only do boxed packaging and will not do cuts.” In some cases the meat had to be shipped to BC. “There isn’t one plant that does it all, and the process is very costly and time consuming.” “The cost is impossible. The consumer will not absorb that.” This makes it more difficult to compete with imports (of meat, etc.), “the stores can’t afford it from Alberta.”

- **federal vs provincial regulations** – Federal regulations will be more stringent than provincial regulations; there may be additional requirements made by an individual facility as well. (*Personal communication, CFIA and provincial specialist, Dec 21, 2010*). Producers stated, “There is a huge difference between the federal and provincial regulatory system.” They also described the interface between federal and provincial plants as “hard” and “way too much work.”
- **paperwork for regulations** – “The paperwork for a local small facility is onerous and it’s time consuming ... trying to bring it up to federal standards.” “Regulations are suffocating the local market.” “The local market needs different regulations ... needs local processing.” (i.e., especially with meat products.)

**3. b) What are some of the biggest challenges or barriers you face in the area of logistics (i.e., transportation /or storage)?**

- **Delivery to restaurants** – It is a challenge to get there without product going bad. To hire a delivery company has its challenges; “they charge way more than what it is worth.” They found that Greyhound was also too expensive. “It makes sense ...” to have chefs purchase at the Farmers’ Market, since the producer “can bring extra product to the market ...” for them. “Restaurants may take only eight bags of spinach ... not worth it to deal directly with the restaurant, but if they have chefs come for more products (*to the farm or to the Farmers’ Market*) then it makes sense ....”
- **Distance and costs** – Alberta is vast and therefore more difficult to get to a larger population base. “The distribution system is not developed for small producers (*compared to California*).” “There’s a distance, to get to a market of one million consumers ....”
- **Distance and market options** – Due to location, some market channels are not feasible to certain farm operations, and they will need to look at other marketing and logistical arrangements to get their product to market. For example, Farmers’ Markets may not be an option to a producer if the farm is not closely situated to a large population. “There are no (*value*) chains close by ... others cannot necessarily follow the same path (*as them*), since it’s too costly... abattoirs are closing up.”
- **Large retail system**
  - **difficult entry** – Producers found it difficult to enter this market. A producer’s view of this market, “It’s labour, scale and mechanization ... the distribution (*system*), through grocery, is locked in.”
  - **year-round** – “The present distribution system only works (*for product that is*) all year round” and is not set up for smaller suppliers with seasonal product available.

- **large-scale system** – “Chain stores have a system that is unfriendly to local, small producers.” “If they (*buyers*) do not buy (*from local producers*) in the summer, they won’t in the winter” (i.e., product is fresh in the summer versus stored product in the winter month). As a result, some producers have chosen to sell products to smaller grocery outlets, such as the local Co-op store, etc. Another perspective is that retailers may prefer to buy from the same source all year.
- **relationships and practices** – Some farm operations spent large amounts of money and were promised promotion of their product. In the end, the deal was rejected and they did not get refunded.
- **costs**– In general, producers found the large retail market costly, compared to the returns they made. For example, “they have three levels of margin,” it was too costly to go through several other companies in order to get product into the store, and they were going broke in the process. There was a larger margin selling direct to consumer.
- **Carriers (transportation companies)**
  - **backhauls** – Participants recognized there are many companies out there; an opportunity to piggyback (i.e., backhauls where trucks are not full), but have difficulty finding those opportunities.
  - **costly** – according to some producers, hiring carriers (transport companies) can be very expensive.
  - **relationships and practices** – At the same time, there was skepticism due to bad experiences, shady practices (i.e., boxes missing, product going bad), or companies that would not get back to the producer in a timely manner.
- **Freezer storage/distribution**
  - **storage capacity and rules** – Some stated that storage is a big issue. Most producers start with a chest freezer, and grow from there; they cannot enter federal storage if their product is provincially inspected. “They lose inspection status if they mix provincial and federally inspected product, therefore would need a separate facility” for each.
  - **fee structure** – “...product may be in one day of the month, but charged the whole month... and based on a whole pallet (*even if only a few boxes*).”
  - **fresh versus frozen** – For the most part, the producers in the focus groups discussed frozen or non-perishable product, but recognized there are even greater challenges in dealing with fresh product.

#### 4. a) What solutions are needed to overcome these challenges or barriers to expansion (in general)?

- **Quebec ‘s retail model** – This was an example cited, where producers are considered to have “more control of the retail system,” and retail is strongly encouraged to purchase Quebec’s local product.
- **Contacts in the system, networks**
  - Need a list of buyers who want to buy local.
- **Creating a win-win for all stakeholders** – Retail “asks for *local* product, but this creates a problem for producers....It’s the whole system or none.” Some suggested dealing with local rural stores.

- **Equipment** – Some producers build their own equipment; may need to create partnerships, or have greater contact with businesses in other parts of Canada or the USA, to custom build equipment for Alberta’s producers. Some producers do offshore purchasing.
- **Marketing/branding**
  - **marketers needed** – “Hard to produce and market it too ... *(as well as distribute).*”
  - **create consumer demand** – without it the market cannot grow.
  - **branding** – for Alberta products; producers like the branding programs in Ontario and Quebec.
- **Technology (for marketing)** – Use the technology available to better engage the consumer. There is a need for someone to help growers design/maintain web pages, interact with the public or help market the business in other ways (e.g., Facebook, blogs, other forms of social media). A helpful toolkit is needed, such as “an info packet as to how to affordably advertise on Google ....”
- **Government’s role**
  - **information transfer** – Producers would like to see government specialists travel more (within Canada and abroad) and bring back information to producers, in a variety of areas (e.g., technology, marketing of local food, etc.).
  - **educational role** – Informing the public (e.g., benefits of grass-fed beef, awareness of media messages regarding local food, etc.).
  - **continued support for effective markets (i.e., Farmers’ Markets)** – Producers consider Farmers’ Markets as being good for Alberta producers, and recognized the value of Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development (ARD) supporting this market. They suggested that certain Farmers’ Markets could be built up (i.e., through advertising, management, etc.). Some locations do not have a huge population base to draw from, or may be located further from the city, compared to popular markets such as “Millarville (SW of Calgary) where they can get 2,000-3,000 people per day.... In rural areas, it’s hard to advertise the market to get more people out.”
  - **one-on-one mentoring** – Producers have benefited in the past from someone observing their operation and providing tips; “want fresh eyes looking at their business.” Successful examples included: Jane Eckert visiting Alberta farms and programs in other provinces where agriculture staff gathered various ideas and shared this information with producers.
  - **rules simplified** – Producers are concerned that they could be “regulated out of business,” while greater demands are placed on them, such as extra paperwork, time demands, etc., when their resources are already limited,
- **Industry’s role**
  - **leadership** – In order to develop a local food system, “someone has to lead it ... and all are too busy.... Need to get ‘bang for your buck!’.... There are very few growers to work on this.”
  - **trust/networking/collaboration** – Producers need to work together, but first they need to trust one another. They need to realize that “the market is big enough for all of us” and by meeting with each other they can discover new opportunities, find solutions to problems, prevent others from making unnecessary mistakes and collaborate towards a



bigger goal (or market). “The main ingredient is passion, not knowledge ....” Knowledge can be learned and shared but it still has to be applied differently for the next producer. Knowing one’s own strengths and weaknesses are important, as well as finding a way to fill the gaps. As producers, they need to “not see each other as competitors, but as ‘more people, to tell the story’ ....” about local food.

- **bridging the gap** – Each participant is doing their part towards building a local food system for Alberta. The question is, “how do you bridge the gap of getting a small producer to the next stage?”

#### 4. b) What solutions are needed to overcome logistical challenges or barriers (i.e., transportation and/or storage)?

- **Funding and programs** – Opinions varied widely among the focus group participants.
  - “We need funding for infrastructure to help us set up a new distribution system ....”
  - Some producers would like to see programs to subsidize employees, since “they have to sell so much to hire full-time staff.”
  - Others prefer not to go to government as they view the money often going to big business, or that it is a cumbersome process, or they may feel restricted by the parameters laid out, compared to what they want to do with their business.
- **Distance, economies of scale** – In order for the local food system to work, there needs to be some way to manage the challenges of distance and scale for smaller producers.
  - **Value chains, especially in more remote areas** – “We have to develop the *whole value chain* here ....” learn from mistakes, trial and error, from other locations where it’s already developed (e.g., California). Co-packing is also something to consider, as it is part of the value chain. Create a value chain, so that buyers only need to deal with one person. Examples include:
    - UK model - where producers are growing 3,000-4,000 acres of potatoes, but they have one contact person for buyers.
    - Bison producers – marketing for 40 farms. A certain amount is charged per pound on rail.“People have to believe in their product and know their skill sets.... but need to understand their limitations. Someone needs to take it up the chain... [T]he rest need to focus on production. A value chain works on trust.”
  - **need a point of contact, to sell at a particular store** – “It’s very time consuming to find the right person to talk to.” (e.g., bison producers, honey industry, and UK model all have a contact person for their business dealings.)
  - **collaboration versus competition** – “Maybe associations could ban together...could sell various products,” (e.g., vegetables, flour, meat, honey) rather than one type of product.
  - **common drop off points** – This included, “to *stage* or *share* truckloads” for a greater volume of supply and sales. “A truck going to 10 farms is too much. Need *central* gathering *spots*.... growers in a coop, stage (*coordinate*) truck loading.... The truck goes to one farm and other farmers meet there.” They were able to stage several B-Trains to go to USA this way. If a central drop off point is created then it needs to be “truck friendly,” a good loading dock, where they can turn trucks around.

- **Informal and formal business structures**
    - **collaboration** – Arrangements where there is collaboration and sourcing from many producers to fill a market and not necessarily having a formal cooperative structure (various Alberta examples).
    - **formal co-operative** – Where producers can buy bulk packaging supplies, containers, etc. By working together the industry can better compete with economics of scale.
    - **commissions** – “Set up a commission for horticulture, beef, etc. and create a distribution center to deal with all products (e.g., veggies, meat, etc.)”
  - **Sharing knowledge/experience/mentorship** – “So many producers out there are lost ... because they don’t know how to move forward.” This again builds on the theme of trust and collaboration and the need to not view other producers as competitors.
  - **Relationship with abattoir** – Developing a relationship with an abattoir is essential.
  - **Set up a distribution centre for volume sales** – Vendors at a particular market (e.g., as a separate business or as part of a farmers’ market membership) could pay a membership towards a separate facility, such as a distribution centre. This facility would allow producers to bring extra product; it would have a wide variety of products in order to meet buyers’ needs. “This way, if producers get an interested buyer that needs volume, they can go to this facility to get what they need...Someone needs to oversee this (from a 50,000 ft view). Membership is needed. Standards are needed too. If after a week, product is not sold, it is discounted. It acts as a distribution center, a centralized drop off, so buyers do not have to go to a number of farms.”
5. **As part of the solution, are there industry networks, or organizational structures currently in place, which can further advance the local food market (i.e., what are the strengths of the industry)?**
- **Trade shows, fairs** – Create opportunities for further networking and contacts, to link producers to equipment dealers, and potential business opportunities.
  - **Commissions/check-off system** – This has allowed some industry groups to fund various research projects and advance as an organization.
  - **Farmers’ Markets** – “Could work with what we have.... These markets work well!” Alberta producers see this market outlet as being profitable, “It’s the best in Canada.... It’s a good place to trial a product” (i.e., at a smaller market) to find out if they want to pursue this venture. It “acts as an incubator, and it has a good profit center ....” Some see it as the “most consistent market type and best profit center,” while others see direct-farm sales as even more profitable. Some suggested linking a distribution center with the farmers’ market. (See example mentioned above, “Set up a distribution centre for volume sales.”)

## Highlights from Producer Focus Groups

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Producers are currently selling into a variety of markets: Farmers' Markets, on-farm sales, restaurants, home delivery, retail, convenience stores, export, etc. Demand for local food is very strong. At the same time, market research and testing the market is wise to do to ensure that the commitment is there and that it will be a sustainable market in the long term, before making a major shift in operations. Some of the key challenges and opportunities are summarized below:

- Time constraints and small business limitations were a common theme, which includes staffing, distance to travel in Alberta, marketing, resources, etc.
- Growth management can be a challenge, given a producer's or processor's current facilities and capabilities. It also impacts their time, management of relationships, labour, and work/life balance.
- Retail is a challenge for many producers due to the scale and volume of product needed, costs involved, competition with other products, and the lack of purchasing and marketing power. (Some producers made reference to a Quebec model where retail is strongly encouraged to buy local and producers have more control over the retail system. This may be something to research further.)
- In general, financing for direct marketers that are selling into niche or relatively new markets is difficult, since these types of businesses are not well understood by most financial institutions (i.e., financial institutions are more familiar with conventional and large-scale agriculture).
- Education/marketing is needed for buyers. Buyers may require products on a trial period or need training on how to use these products, which means extra costs to the producer.
- Technology can be a useful marketing tool to engage the consumer. Producers could use assistance in designing and maintaining web pages and general marketing. A toolkit on "how to affordably advertise on Google" would be beneficial.
- Marketing/branding is needed to help create consumer demand. At the same time, producers find it hard to find the time or resources to do the kind of marketing they would like.
- Meat products present some challenges, which include the lack of infrastructure and additional costs required to transport to the appropriate facilities for slaughter, aging, etc. Scale can also be an issue if the slaughter minimum is too high for smaller farm operations.
- Storage facilities may not be ideally set up for small to medium-sized producers. Fee structures are generally set up for larger volumes (i.e., charged for a full pallet, whether or not it is full; charged a full monthly fee, even if the facility is used one day in a month).
- Other models could offer innovative ideas on local food systems. Research into models from other parts of the world and information sharing may uncover new systems being developed for local markets that ensure high food safety standards.
- Restaurant chefs are looking for local product. The challenge is that volumes may not be great enough for this market to be feasible and to warrant the cost of delivery and time involved. If the farm is not situated close to a larger population then distance is an additional concern. If producers can collaborate and sell into several restaurants, or coordinate larger orders, then this market could become more viable.
- There is a general lack of awareness of buyers who want to buy local food. To sell at a particular store, producers also need a point of contact, since finding the right person can be a challenge.
- Working more closely with carriers (trucking companies) is an area that could be developed, to further expand the distribution of local food. There is a lack of awareness of carriers those that will work with smaller producers, those that are affordable and reliable, and/or those that wish to coordinate backhauls.

- Collaboration may be needed in obtaining equipment, purchasing supplies, marketing and distribution of food. This may be informally or formally structured (i.e., cooperative, partnership, commission, etc.).
- Distribution can be achieved through greater collaboration using common drop off points. These drop off points are a place to stage deliveries/truck loading, with facilities that have good loading docks and space for trucks to turn. Some suggested that this could be linked to memberships with the farmer's markets.
- Industry can play a role in leadership, creating networks, aiming for collaboration versus competition, and a greater sharing of knowledge.
- Government can play a role in information transfer, education, support, mentoring, and simplification of policy or regulatory hurdles. Additional funding of programs for local food market development may be helpful.
- Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development should celebrate and continue to support the farmers' market program with committed staff, as well as staff to assist in the facilitation of small business development, through mentoring, sharing other successful models, etc.