

**2017 ACORN Conference & Trade Show  
Best Western Glengarry, Truro, NS**

**Workshop Title:** Fostering Farming Opportunities for New Canadians in the Maritimes

**Speaker:** Steve Law, Common Roots Urban Farm, ISANS

**Executive Summary:** New immigrants to Canada with an agricultural backgrounds face a variety of barriers when trying to farm in Canada. These challenges include language barriers, lack of resources to understand the farming season in Canada, land access, and transportation outside of cities. There is the desire to build more connections between these new immigrants and other farmers in Canada to overcome some of these barriers. The goal of this workshop was to start a conversation and connect folks who otherwise may not have met.

**Detailed Notes:**

Introduction:

Challenges faced by new immigrants to Canada who want to farm:

- Language is a challenge: both limited written and spoken English
- Proximity to others who share their linguistic or cultural background
- A significant barrier is understanding North American farming context, including its seasonal basis, size of farms, farming methods, and not knowing markets or how to market in Canada
  
- There are three groups of new immigrants to Canada in the room and they want to connect to farmers in Canada; there is a group which speaks Swahili, one which speaks Nepalese, and one which speaks Arabic.

Swahili group:

- All the newcomer farmers in this group come from Africa, including the Congo and Burundi
  
- Topic of the conversation: how immigrant farmers and Canadian-born farmers can come together and farm or create farming communities together
- Question: what would the newcomers like in terms of farming opportunities, how would you like to get involved?
- Answer: The first issue is that we had one long season back home but here there is very different seasons and this is challenging to understand
- Another issue is that we all live in the city here. This means that farms are very far from home, which is different from our home countries where we lived very close to our farms
- Back home all our food is organic and we don't have an idea of what people are using to farm here
- It is hard to find resources on farming in North America when your English is limited and you may not know the terms to use or search for to find what you want
- We have immigrated here to a new country and not fully settled but want to be able to farm
- We are wondering if there are people willing to help us with giving us by work/garden space

- Question: what kind of farming were you doing in your home country? what kind of farming do you want to do here? example: veggies, fruits, animals etc
- Answers: I was able to grow beans, rice, corn, potatoes, vegetables. Here the cold season is very different. We were mainly growing food for our own subsistence.
- In Burundi - September to May - we grew beans, corn, all types of vegetables; in the dry season we have gardens that are close to river. We also have cows, chickens and pigs and they just forage, we don't feed them anything extra. We grew coffee and trees for money. Back home we used to have a garden without using any chemicals, we want to know how it works here to protect garden?
  
- Question: do you use compost?
- In Burundi we dig a big a hole to put in grasses to leave it for a long time
- In Congo: we don't do that, we learned about in compost in the refugee camp, we didn't need it in the Congo because the soil is so rich
  
- Question: After the conference how would you like to be able to share information between us?
- We are from ISANS, you can contact us through Heather who works for ISANS (see later in notes for contact information)
- What do you like most about Canada and what do you find the hardest?
- Answer #1: We love Canada because it is peaceful but it is more challenging because here we have to go to school or our (cleaning) jobs and so we don't have as much time to go to our farms, run our own businesses
- Answer #2: it's peaceful here, which is good but the different (cold) weather is a challenge
- They all live in Halifax and have been here 2-4 years
  
- Question: Are there foods you would like to find or grow in Canada?
- Answer #1: I would like to grow beans and tomatoes that are better grown than the ones in Canada and corn for flour (difficult to grow in Canada)
- Answer #2: Rice: back home we used to farm rice in the winter, prepare the soil in the summer, and when the rains come we plant the seeds (also near the river)  
We want to get involved in the system of farming in Canada!
  
- Question: Have you been able to go visit farms in Canada?
- Answer: No, only to apple orchards.
  
- Question: Would you like to visit farms in Canada?
- [yes]
- Final question: How to make connections to between farmers and newcomers?

#### Synopsis of other tables:

- Topics discussed at the Arabic table: introductions, difference in harvest season length in Canada, season extension possibilities, bio-intensive farms, succession plans for farms, talked about the importance of value-added, transportation issues, and language barriers.
- Topics discussed at the Nepali table: need for land so newcomers can grow their own vegetables, as well as needing to work and earn some food for themselves; transportation to work on farms; taking people to work on farms such as when a strawberry farm, raspberry

farm, peach farm needs labour for different harvests; co-ops to have gardens and business to earn income, maybe to access more land within the city; and, some have family in city who are already working which makes it hard to uproot and move to the country.

Great Ideas:

- Is there any way to get information on the big picture of how many people might be in this position of having agricultural background and lack of access to land?
- ISANS (Immigrant Settlement Association of Nova Scotia), Common Roots
- Contact: Heather Asbil [hasbil@isans.ca](mailto:hasbil@isans.ca), [www.isans.ca](http://www.isans.ca)
- Cape Breton Local Immigration Partnership - Cape Breton is desperate for new people, especially farmers
- Via Campesina: international organization which exists in Canada but is less developed than in other parts of the world: they hold agro-ecology schools which are ways to share information "horizontally" with each other rather than through so-called experts and learn from one another
- Some folks have been waiting 3 to 5 years to pursue agricultural goals
- The group has the desire to keep the conversation happening
- Jayme Melrose is part of a co-op, which will have land available to newcomers at some point
- Maybe others do as well and they are encouraged to come together to share interpretation costs etc to host events to connect newcomers to land