

Strengthening Yukon's Food Economy: A Framework for Sector Growth

Acting as a Living Roadmap, This Framework Will Guide Collective Efforts by the YAA to Fulfill Our Strategic Plan Goals and Priorities Between Now and 2027.

What are the Key Priorities?

The following framework priorities have been developed to align with and advance the Yukon Agricultural Association's (YAA) Strategic Plan Goals and Priorities for 2023–2027. Each priority is intentionally designed to support at least one of the five core goals:

1. Strengthening Agri-Food Supply Chain Stability

- Focuses on reducing bottlenecks in transportation, storage, and distribution.
- Enables producers to scale and diversify operations reliably.

2. Growing Yukon's Agri-Food Talent

- Addresses sector-wide labour shortages by supporting training, mentorship, and workforce development.
- Encourages youth and new entrants to explore careers in agriculture.

3. Growing Yukon's Critical Services Capacity

- Builds the technical and regulatory backbone needed for production, processing, and certification.
- Advocates for appropriate inspection, financing, and insurance programs.

4. Supporting Capacity-Building for Sector Organizations

- Invests in organizational development for YAA and other agri-food entities.
- Enhances governance, coordination, and long-term viability of sector leadership.

5. Advancing Public Education and Awareness of Yukon Agriculture

- Builds public support for Yukon-grown food and farming.
- Increases understanding of the economic, social, and environmental value of local agriculture.

Introduction:

Yukon's agri-food producers are facing severe pressures that threaten their viability. Yukon producers operate within unique and more demanding business models compared to other regions of Canada. These self-reliant structures arise from a lack of infrastructure and support services typically available elsewhere.

Without intervention, Yukon risks losing significant ground in local food security, economic diversification, and climate-aligned development. A coordinated, strategic, and partnership-based approach is needed to stabilize the sector and unlock its growth potential.

At-a-Glance: Key Sector Statistics

<i>Metric</i>	<i>Estimate / Value</i>	<i>Relevance to Framework Priorities</i>
Total Number of Farms	88	Baseline for growing sector capacity and talent
Total Farm Capital (Land, Buildings, Equipment)	\$112.4 million	Indicator of sector investment in agriculture
Total Operating Revenues (2021)	\$5.2 million	Indicator of sector economic scale
Total Operating Expenses (2021)	\$5.5 million	Reflects costs affecting sector growth and sustainability
Average Age of Farm Operators	54.5 years	Highlights need for talent growth and need for agri-force recruitment
Number of Paid Agricultural Workers	117	Indicator of employment in Yukon's agri-food sector economy
Number of Seasonal/Temporary Workers	97	Indicates labour demand and seasonal workforce dynamics
Farms Reporting Direct Sales	55	Baseline for current direct sales activity, highlighting potential for growth in local market availability, and expansion into retail sales channels.

Note: All data presented is sourced from the 2021 Census of Agriculture.

These figures demonstrate not only the economic potential of the sector but also highlight the critical need to support enabling organizations that provide sector-wide coordination, training, and representation for producers. Supporting this framework is vital to unlocking growth opportunities, addressing sector challenges, and ensuring a resilient and sustainable Yukon food economy.

Framework Goals:

To support Yukon's agri-food sector in scaling sustainably, the following goals must guide future development:

- Economic Growth & Investment Attraction
- Operational Stability for Key Producers
- Expanded Yukon-Based Food Supply
- Regulatory Clarity and Supportive Policy
- Local Market Development & Import Displacement
- Improved Access to Labour and Land
- Stronger Climate and Food Security Outcomes
- Strengthen Sector Organizations and Governance Capacity

Strategic Goals: Explained

1. Economic Growth & Investment Attraction

- **What it means:** Increase the size and value of the agri-food industry in Yukon by attracting new investment (local, national, or international).
- **Why it matters:** More investment can fund expansion, improve infrastructure, create jobs, and generate more local food production.

2. Operational Stability for Commercial Producers and Critical Services

- **What it means:** Ensure that existing commercial food producers and critical services can operate reliably without facing constant risk of shutdown due to financial, logistical, or regulatory pressures.
- **Why it matters:** These producers form the economic backbone of Yukon's food system, and if they falter, the entire sector is at risk.

3. Expanded Yukon-Based Food Supply

- **What it means:** Grow more food locally to feed people in Yukon.
- **Why it matters:** Reduces reliance imports, strengthening food availability and security in the North, both in the high density and remote regions.

4. Regulatory Clarity and Supportive Policy

- **What it means:** Simplify, align, and adapt regulations to better support Yukon's food production challenges.
- **Why it matters:** Current rules may be outdated, unclear, inconsistent, or designed for southern contexts, making it harder for Yukon producers to succeed.

5. Local Market Development & Import Displacement

- **What it means:** Strengthen the local food market and replace imported goods with Yukon-grown products, where possible.
- **Why it matters:** Captures more of Yukon’s annual food spending, keeps money in the territory, and reduces emissions from long-haul transport.

6. Improved Access to Labour and Land

- **What it means:** Address workforce shortages and improve availability of agricultural land for expansion.
- **Why it matters:** Many farms and food businesses struggle to find workers or secure suitable land to grow their operations.

7. Stronger Climate and Food Security Outcomes

- **What it means:** Align the sector’s growth with climate adaptation and sustainability, while improving Yukon’s overall food resilience.
- **Why it matters:** Climate change and global disruptions threaten food supply; building a local system is part of the solution.

8. Strengthen Sector Organizations and Governance Capacity

- **What it means:** Support the development of agriculture-focused organizations (e.g., YAA, regional or commodity associations, sector networks, youth groups) through stable funding, policy involvement, and recognition of their contributions.
- **Why it matters:** These groups are often the “glue” that binds producers, policy, and public awareness together. Without their leadership and capacity, coordination and implementation falter.

Strategic Response: A Collaborative Framework

Yukon's food sector won't grow on its own. It requires an organized, shared effort. This collaborative framework proposes a unified development strategy built on three core pillars:

Core Pillars for Sector Development

A. Sector Leadership & Coordination

Why it matters: Without informed leadership and coordination, Yukon will stay stuck in reactive mode, missing opportunities for growth and resilience. Including sector organizations ensures that government decision-makers fully understand the potential repercussions their policies may have on the agri-food sector

B. Policy & Program Development

Why it matters: Without tailored policies, programs, and sustained government support that reflect Yukon's agricultural context, producers will continue to face systemic barriers. Addressing these challenges and ensuring strong territorial advocacy for full inclusion in Canada-wide agricultural services and programs is essential to unlocking the sector's long-term growth and resilience.

C. Financial & Market Tools

Why it matters: Without access to capital, land, and labour, and a plan to build local market share, Yukon producers can't grow beyond niche status.

Summary: Why the “Collaborative Framework” Approach Works

This is not just about farming, it's about:

- **Economic development**
- **Food security**
- **Climate resilience**
- **Community empowerment**

Bringing together government, First Nations, local businesses, and investors under a shared strategy means Yukon can:

- Scale up production
- Keep more food dollars in the territory
- Reduce vulnerability to supply chain shocks
- Create jobs and land-based livelihoods

Why This Matters to Members

This framework directly impacts every Yukon agri-food producer by addressing the challenges that threaten your business's stability and growth. Strengthening infrastructure, improving access to labor and land, and advocating for supportive policies means more opportunities, better resources, and a stronger market for your products.

How You Can Get Involved

Your participation is vital to turning this framework into action. Here's how you can contribute:

- **Engage with YAA initiatives:** Attend meetings, workshops, and training sessions to stay informed and share your insights.
- **Provide feedback:** Help shape policies and programs by sharing your experiences and challenges with YAA leadership.
- **Volunteer:** Join committees or working groups to help drive key projects and advocacy efforts.
- **Promote local food:** Support "buy local" campaigns and encourage your networks to choose Yukon-grown products.
- **Connect and collaborate:** Network with fellow members to build partnerships and share resources that strengthen the entire sector.

Together, we can ensure that Yukon's agri-food sector thrives and continues to grow.

Conclusion

Yukon's agri-food sector stands at a pivotal moment. While significant growth has been achieved over the past decade, the industry now faces critical challenges, from policy gaps and infrastructure limitations to labour shortages and market barriers, that threaten its long-term sustainability and expansion.

At the same time, Yukon is uniquely positioned to capitalize on emerging enablers: strong Indigenous leadership and investment, increasing local demand for food security, untapped agricultural land, growing youth engagement, and heightened national and global awareness of the need for resilient, regional food systems.

By embracing a coordinated "Collaborative Framework" approach, bringing together government, Indigenous governments, producers, investors, and communities, this sector can transition from fragile to sustainable. Clear mandates, aligned policies, targeted investments, and pragmatic support mechanisms will be essential to stabilize current operations and unlock scalable growth.

With timely action, Yukon can build a resilient agri-food industry that supports economic prosperity, food security, environmental stewardship, and cultural vitality. This strategic moment offers an unprecedented opportunity to grow Yukon's food system in a way that benefits all Yukoners now and for generations to come.