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Authors: Abdul-Rahim Abulai & Abigail Oppong

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Understanding the Agriculture Policy Environment In Newfoundland and Labrador- A focus on Farmer Attraction and Retention Interventions

Abdul-Rahim Abdulai

University of Guelph
Guelph, Ontario, Canada.
aabdulai@uoguelph.ca

Abigail Oppong

Memorial University of Newfoundland
Corner Brook, Newfoundland and Labrador, Canada
abigailoppongk@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper examines agricultural policy interventions in Newfoundland and Labrador. We focus specifically on efforts geared towards building the capacity of agriculture through the attraction and retention of people into the industry. We found that the agricultural policy environment is a complex structure of private and public actors, who intervene both collaboratively and distinctively to make farming attractive to the general public and to keep farmers in the industry. These efforts manifest through financial incentivizing, informational and resources support, skill development and capacity building, land reforms, institutional support, and changes in program requirements and operational mechanisms. However, despite the multi-actor driven diverse agricultural policy actions that target various industry capacity sectors, structural limitations in the policy environment, including unclear policy language, red tape, stringent program requirements, a one-sided focus of policy actions, and lack of partnership and silo approach to farm programs undermine how beneficiaries perceive, accept, and participate in policy interventions. More importantly, these challenges reveal the (in)effectiveness of policy actions by highlighting the lack of room for experimentation, inflexibility, and lack of even playing grounds for beneficiaries. Through these findings, this paper contributes to the literature on agricultural policy and policy evaluations by providing empirical case evidence of the dynamics in policy environments and how that could be improved.

Keywords: farmer attraction, farmer retention, agricultural policy, policy evaluation, rural policy

1.0 Introduction

Demographic challenges in agriculture have made farmer attraction and retention—deliberate efforts by decision-makers to bring people into farming and to keep them longer—a priority in agricultural policies across the globe. It has become crucial to attract and retain farmers to keep pace with rising food needs (Hamill, 2012), and

Newfoundland and Labrador (NL) is not an exception to this push. In NL, such policies represent the recognition of a need for urgent action to make farming attractive and accessible in the face of challenges. Financial incentivization, land reforms, agricultural education and promotional activities are just a few of the growing scope of strategies/interventions that have become commonplace in agricultural policies. Yet, as Tongs (2008) argued, even though there are continuous efforts in farmer attraction and retention, there is little research to provide a comprehensive view of the nature and dynamics of interventions, especially from the policy perspective. This article attempts to expand the literature by assessing the nature of policy interventions and the potency of policy from the perspectives of stakeholders in NL.

NL has one of the most underdeveloped agricultural sectors in Canada (Food First NL, 2016; Carter & Temple, 2011; Quinlan, 2012). New farmers face a range of obstacles to entering the sector (Food First NL, 2015a; 2015b), including a lack of infrastructure to promote and support labour development; limited diversity of policies; and limited financial support to farmers (see NL Natural Resources, 2012; Quinlan, 2012). Hence, the sector is experiencing a demographic challenge with an ageing farmer population and a declining number of farmers and farms, which is among the most significant decreases in any part of Canada. Statistics Canada (2017) showed that the farmer population is ageing in NL (from 46.6 years in 1991 to 55.8 years in 2016). The number of farm operators (780 in 2001 to 500 in 2016) and farms (643 in 2001 to 407 in 2016) is declining as well (Statistics Canada, 2017; 2016a; 2016b; 2015). To overcome these challenges, deliberate efforts in policy and practice are needed. These deliberate actions are what are interchangeably referred to as policy interventions or policy actions in this paper.

Here, we assess the policy environment within which interventions to attract and retain farmers operate. We argue that despite the multi-actor-driven diverse policy actions which target various capacity sectors of the industry, attraction and retention of people are compromised by structural issues. Some of these issues include subjective policy language, red tape, stringent program requirements, and a one-sided focus on conventional farming, and a lack of partnership and silo approach to farm programs. We expand on this point by examining policy documents and interviewing stakeholders in the industry. In what follows, we conceptualize farmer attraction and retention and show the drivers to action to attain that goal. Policy evaluation, our approach to this paper, is discussed to highlight the essence of complexity, participation, and reflexivity in the policy process. We then outline the methodology, which was built on a qualitative approach. The six main areas of interventions are highlighted before the perceptions and knowledge of stakeholders on the identified interventions are presented. Our discussion positions our work within the broader literature of policy evaluation and agricultural policies, and we conclude with recommendations to strengthen agricultural policy environments and policy-making broadly.

2.0 Policy Evaluations

Our approach is one of an evaluation, where we focus on assessing the dynamics of policies through the eyes of key stakeholders (Posavac, 2015). Evaluation, in this sense, refers to assessing specific policies or broader environments with some standards. Over the years, many approaches have been forwarded in the evaluation of policies, programs, plans, and frameworks. Evaluation theory has grown

extensively in the last couple of decades, gaining prominence in fields like international development, policy and planning, economics, and health care (Alkin et al., 2012; Mertens & Wilson, 2018; Misuraca et al., 2013). The ability of a policy to help attain specific goals, the cost-effectiveness of delivering a policy, the ability to attain goals with less cost, impacts on diverse groups, social acceptance of the policy, compatibility with other policies, and the legality of policy provisions are a few areas of evaluating policies (Christie, 2003; Leroy & Crabb, 2012).

According to Huitema et al., (2011), two broad assumptions mostly guide policy evaluations: rationalistic and constructivist views. The rationalistic school views policies as a means to an end or an instrument to an overreaching goal. Hence, when policies are made, they are done to attain a goal, for example, to attract and retain farmers or to aid food security efforts. In this sense, the evaluation of policies aims to understand the current state of interventions to inform future policies. The process of evaluation in this school mainly involves collecting data and facts to assess how policy interventions contribute to the ultimate pre-defined goals.

On the other hand, constructivist evaluation argues for policies that follow their pathways without pre-defined ends. Hence, evaluation in this field aims to equip actors with information to make sense of their environment. In this school, "the claims, concerns, and issues identified by stakeholders are thus at the very heart of the evaluation, not the goals embodied in the policy" (Huitema et al., p. 184). These two schools of evaluation provide evaluators with the base assumptions to assessing interventions in social systems. However, like any approach to interpreting the social world, the limitations of these views preempted the emergence of what Huitema et al. (2011) described as the middle ground. This school of thought is created around the complexities of the policy environment, reflexivity in policy processes, and participation of diverse actors in evaluation.

The core of new approaches to evaluation is reflexivity and participation. Reflexivity allows for researchers and policymakers to adapt situations as processes dictate to evaluate policies. On the other hand, participation emphasizes including diverse voices and claims in the evaluation process. These two elements of evaluation are central to our approach to understanding the agricultural policy environment in Newfoundland. While acknowledging the complexities of the policy process and within policy environments, we adapt reflexivity that allows for a grounded theory approach, where no pre-defined criteria are used (Lessard, 2007; McGhee et al., 2007). Meanwhile, we build on claims, concerns, and issues noted by diverse actors in the agricultural policy environment, to allow for participation in our approach. This approach allows us to use a more descriptive method to present the diverse claims and contestation on interventions that aim to attract and retain farmers in the province.

3.0 The What and Why of Farmer Attraction and Retention

Existing research does not offer a well-defined meaning for farmer attraction and retention. However, the terms 'attraction' and 'retention' are used in organizational management theory and practice to describe efforts to pull people into and maintaining them in an organization (see Aruna & Anitha, 2015; Vidal-Salazar et al., 2016). It is primarily employed to examine the ability of firms to court the interest of potential employees to recruit them (Anitha & Begum, 2016; Vidal-Salazar et al., 2016). Inferring from the widespread usage of attraction and retention, the term is employed to describe the process and act of evoking the interest of people to enter and stay in agriculture.

There is evidence, both in academic spheres and in policy circles, of invigorating attention to human resource issues in agriculture, which employs about a third of the world's working population (World Bank, 2017). However, there are limited studies on the reasons behind the policy interests. But, there are highlights in a few academic and agency commissioned studies that may be suggestive in this regard.

The need exists to attract and retain people in any field of economic activity to ensure its sustainability (see Berlin et al., 2013; Chand & Tung, 2014; McCollum & Findlay, 2017), and agriculture is no exception to this proclamation. For the sector to stand the test of time and remain relevant to human society, it must be able to attract and retain people. The issue becomes more critical for agriculture when current statistics are taken into consideration. In many countries, farmer populations are declining, and the average age of farmers is rising—a fundamental problem area that has informed this research. For example, the average age of farmers in the world is about 60 years (Vos, 2014, February). Meanwhile, in Canada, the average age rose by about 1.5 years to age 55 between 2011 and 2016. The number of farm operators and the number of farms declined by about 35% and 37% between 2001 and 2016, respectively. Likewise, the number of farmers who are under age 35 has declined by over 70% since 1991 (Qualman et al., 2018). Farmers getting older coupled with a declining number of young farmers, has necessitated efforts to attract more people. The drive to sustain the industry by ensuring it does not lose pace with the food demand of the world has therefore called further attention on deliberate efforts to attract and retain farmers.

Also, the challenge of feeding the world lies in the hands of agriculture, and having more hands to produce food is one way to respond. Despite the role of systemic issues like food waste and distribution in contributing to the current food crises, the FAO estimates the need to increase global food production by 60–100% by 2050 (FAO et al., 2017; FAO, 2017). The challenge of food insecurity is a current and future problem at the doorsteps of every nation, region, and community, including in Canada and NL. Farmer attraction and retention is reflected in the long list of interventions that could boost agriculture and lead to food security. The imperative of farmer attraction and retention, and its link to food security, is argued by Hamill (2012), who stated that attracting and retaining people, especially the youth, is central for agriculture to keep pace with rising food needs. The view is also shared by many other writers who have highlighted the need to attract more people into agriculture (Susiliwati, 2014) as a step to increasing food production and working towards food security.

Lastly, agriculture is gaining attention partly due to its role in employment creation and, more broadly, economic development. Skeptics note, however, that agriculture needs innovation and diversity to facilitate economic growth, which the old generation of farmers cannot be entrusted to provide (“How to inspire a generation of farming entrepreneurs,” 2014). Thus, many efforts in farmer attraction and retention have placed youth at the forefront of the action. Related to the youth drive to farmer attraction and retention is unemployment, especially, in developing countries where many young people are unable to find work (Mwaura, 2012). With many countries facing an uphill task of employing the youth, agriculture provides a potential area to capitalize on to solve the problem of unemployment and provide new career pathways for the younger generation.

The ensuing review has drawn on the literature to conceptualize the notion of farmer attraction and retention while outlining the drivers to the policy interests. The issues

noted in this section give us a sense of what is at stake and could, in part, be motivating the efforts to attract and retain people into agriculture. Direct forces like food insecurity as well as indirect factors like demographic challenges, sector sustenance, and youth (un)employment all contribute to reinforcing the need for more farmers. However, current efforts to attract and retain farmers must also be evaluated in light of their potency in delivering their intended targets.

4.0 Methodology

The study employed a qualitative approach, i.e., qualitative viewpoints, data collection, and analysis techniques were used (Flick, 2014; Marshall & Rossman, 2014; Bergman, 2008). The choice of a qualitative approach was influenced by the need to reveal the nuances embedded in policy environments and to echo the voices of participants (Ashworth, 2015). The qualitative approach is touted to provide such breadth of analysis that reveals the complex nuances in social contexts (Smith & Chudleigh, 2015). The specific qualitative method of data collection applied was interviews and document reviews. The choice of interviews was based on its ability to provide in-depth and detailed data and its potency to provide a more relaxed atmosphere for participants without undermining the quality of data (Boyce & Neale, 2006). Specifically, we used semi-structured interviews, described as the use of predetermined questions the researcher is free to seek clarification (Holloway & Wheeler 2010). We emphasized understanding the nuances in farmer motivations and the practicability of methods in terms of time and resources. Hence, convenience sampling built on tenets of giving every member a chance to participate was used with the intention to not be overwhelmed with large data. Hence we focused on using convenience sampling to select participants to obtain responses with information power (Malterud et al., 2016). The use of convenience sampling meant the researchers interviewed farmers who were readily available and showed interest in participating. While this technique could be limited in undermining the voices of certain farmers and officials, researchers made deliberate attempts to solicit participation from as many diverse farmers as feasible within the frame of the research. Hence, 13 farmers and seven policy officials were interviewed. Interviews were undertaken in an approximately six-months period in 2017 and 2018. Each interview lasted an average of 45 minutes, with a minimum of 30 minutes and a maximum of 2 hours. Conversations were deep and detailed as participants shared experiences with policy interventions in the cause of their farm life and policy careers. We also reviewed the agricultural policy and program documents from government and private organizations in the province for insights on interventions. All known agricultural policies and plans over ten years before the research was sourced from an online and in-person request from officials. We further web searched sites of government and non-government institutions known to work with farmers to source policy materials. These materials were analyzed together with the interview transcripts.

Data collected was processed through a series of steps: editing, organizing, and deductions. Express Script Version 6, with the support of Microsoft Office Word and Nvivo 11 Software, was used to analyze the interviews. All interviews were transcribed with ExpressScribe and a Transcription pedal. Transcripts and documents were uploaded to Nvivo for onward coding. The coding was in two stages. First, we printed the documents and transcripts for manual coding. This stage allowed us to pay closer attention to the materials. Second, we uploaded the materials on Nvivo for a more tailored coding of quotes to match themes. In both

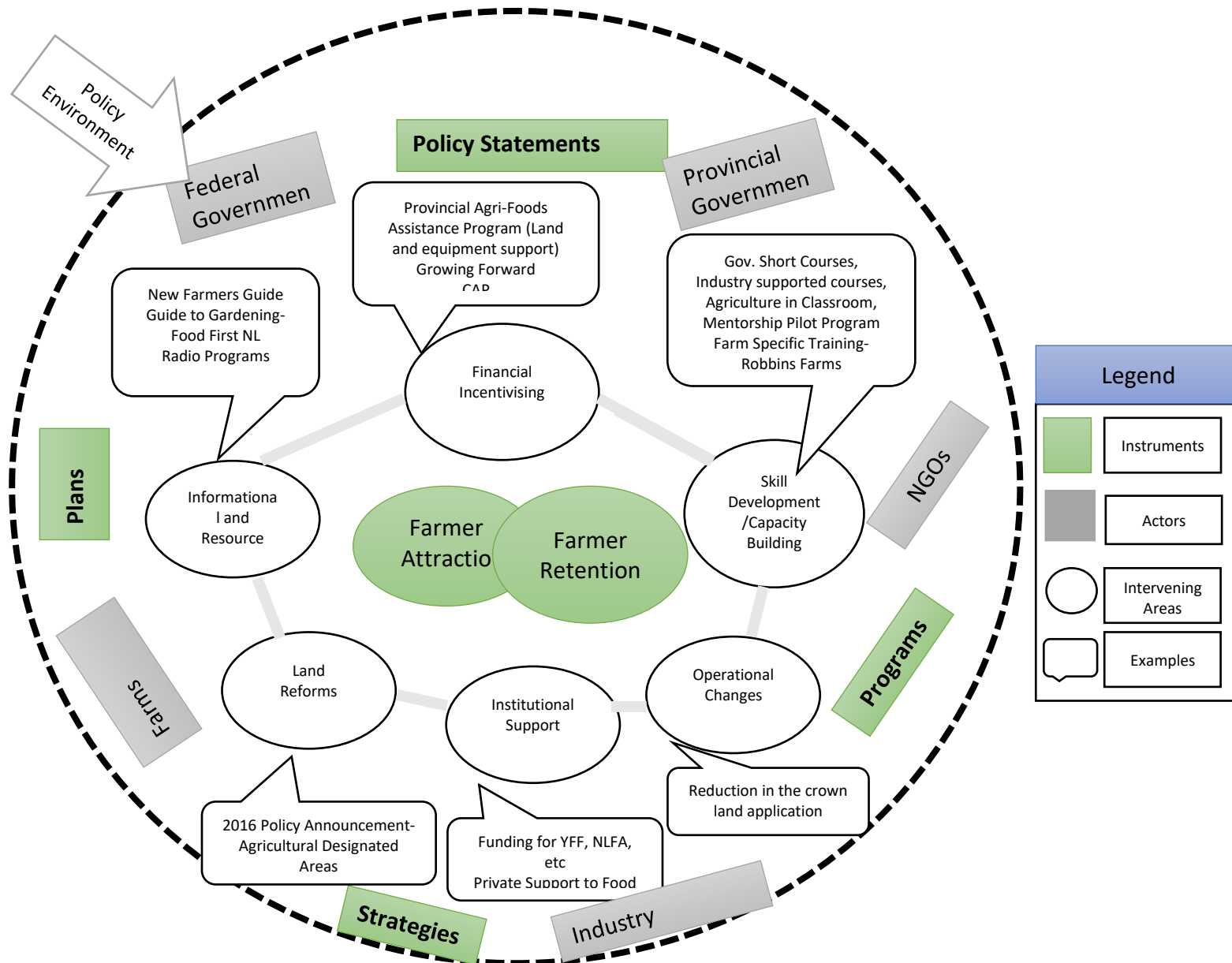
stages, we coded for programs, perceptions, and experiences. We used emergent themes to identify critical issues. Themes were later clustered to create broader themes to focus on the findings and discussions.

5.0 Overview of Policy Interventions for Attraction and Retention of Farmers in NL

The provincial government of NL and others all profess to boost agriculture in the province (Food First NL, Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, & NLFA, 2017). Their efforts are in line with renewed commitments towards food security and sovereignty and agriculture-led economic development in the province. The Growing Forward 2 and the new strategy Canadian Agricultural Partnership (CAP) are policy commitments from the governments—federal and provincial—to develop the agricultural sector (The Government of Newfoundland, 2016). These commitments have, for over a decade, provided the needed policy directions, financial resources, and research and have laid the foundations for the development of agriculture in NL. The agricultural sector work plan in NL, launched by the provincial government in 2017, reiterated these policy commitments. Diverse on-the-ground activities accompany these commitments by farmers and non-government institutions, all aimed at attracting and retaining people in agriculture and expanding the capacity of the industry. By adding more farmers in the province, stakeholders envision the potential to create opportunities to diversify economic activities for the developmental prosperity of the province. Since agriculture plays a minor role with huge potential to grow, attracting more farmers would create employment in a region in dire need of alternative economic pathways for its people and economy.

Our policy document reviews and interviews revealed two broad themes and six areas of interventions. The two broad themes are direct and indirect interventions. Direct interventions are policy actions that provide support to the end-user—the potential farmer or the current farmer. Indirect interventions are institutionally based, where institutions are supported to create, implement, and direct actions to attract and retain farmers; for example, an organization is provided funds to implement a program. Within these themes are the six explicit foci for farmer attraction and retention: (1) financial incentivizing, (2) informational and resources (3) support, (4) skill development and capacity building, (5) land reforms, institutional support, and changes in program requirements, and (6) operational mechanism (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Farmer Attraction and Retention Policy Environment in NL.



Source: Abdulai, (2018).

Providing financial support for various farming activities, either in loans or grants, is central in the province. Financial incentives are provided through both federal and provincial government programs and, in some cases, third-party party institutions. For example, the Provincial Agri-Food Assistance Program in Newfoundland and Labrador was created and operated by the provincial government. It provides grants covering up to 50 percent of different project costs for farmers (see Forestry and Land Resources, Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2018). The Canadian Agricultural Partnership, a federal-provincial initiative, also financially supports farmers through different grant schemes. For many farmers in Newfoundland, financial support from the government is crucial to sustaining interest in agriculture. How financial schemes contribute to the attraction and retention is engrained in its role in helping interested people set up and support existing farmers with the purchases of inputs or undertake different projects. For instance, there exists financial support to facilitate land and infrastructure purchases for farmers. Farmers expressed different opinions about such actions and how they contribute to attraction and retention, which will be expanded on in the later section on structural issues. Providing financial support for farmers to make agricultural in Newfoundland and Labrador speaks to the broader government's commitment—in Canada and the world—all over, to support farming through financial schemes.

Another key intervention area identified was education, mentorship, and hands-on experiences provided by different actors in the province. Some education and human resource capacity-building efforts are employed by the government, NGOs, and industry associations in the province. One such activity is targeted actions through formal education, which is child-focused, for example, *Agriculture in the Classroom* programs. Other programs focus on potential and existing farmers. Short courses provided by the government agricultural department (AAFC) and industry groups typify this approach to attract farmers. Examples are the annual workshop and capacity building sessions organized by the Newfoundland Federation of Agriculture (NLFA) and the Young Farmers' Forum (YFF) at their general meetings. Also, the introduction of the mentorship program by the YFF (Young Farmers' Forum, NL, 2017) speaks to education, albeit from a different perspective, focusing on hands-on experiences. Another dimension to education is formal training in higher education, an aspect that has gained attention in the province in the last couple of years. Current efforts to establish an agricultural-focused campus or research hub at the Grenfell Campus of Memorial University speak to this point. However, such measures are still in infancy, and farmers lamented extended neglect of higher-education opportunities within the province and called for designated educational courses in food and agriculture. Beyond the efforts of the government, specific farms also run programs that build capacity in agriculture and aim to train young people to become interested in farming. For example, the Robbins Family Farm and Gardens run a summer camp for children that provides them with hands-on experiences and expose them to agriculture at an early age.

Linked to education and capacity building are information and resource support. Information and resource support are manifested in campaigns that reach out to people to trigger interest or/and sustain motivations in farming. These programs are done through print, social media, TV, radio, and other avenues. Policy actors shared experiences regarding such actions in their efforts to attract and retain farmers:

One of the things is that we developed this new Farmer Guide. This is a resource that takes people through all the steps for starting a farm and

what they have to do to start a farm business. So, it takes them through the process, gives them, connects them with resources [...]. The new Farmer Guide is one thing. We do awareness campaigns on social media. We developed a new video that highlights farming as a career for young people, so we are trying to get young people into agriculture (Official 03).

The guide, like other informational support, is targeted mainly at potential farmers and new entrants. Also, government agricultural representatives provide information to potential and established farmers on a wide range of issues of interest, mainly on services and sources of support. Likewise, Food First NL embarks on different campaigns and has resources that cut across different aspects of food. These resources help create awareness and introduce people to agriculture, directly and indirectly. The theme of information shows that policy actions for attraction and retention of farmers are not only within the frameworks of government, but other institutions as well contribute to the cause. Also, just like education, informational needs create awareness—a prerequisite to active participation (Lim et al., 2018) and interest in farming.

Another aspect of interventions evident in policy documents and confirmed by actors was land-related efforts and policies. Noted as one of the barriers to entering agriculture in Canada (Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, 2010), governments make efforts to ensure access to land. *Agricultural Designated Areas*, an initiative announced in 2017, is an example of how the government of NL is employing changes to increase access to land. Agricultural Designated Areas designates some areas for agriculture and makes it easy for people to access them for farming. Similarly, the government continued to announce new plans to make more land available for young farmers (“Grow your own”, 2017). These interventions and many others tend to increase the availability of land for agriculture. Respondents noted how important those initiatives are to their industry; some, mainly existing farmers, attested being able to expand farms through those initiatives.

Related to land access were also the changes to program requirements and operational procedures for agricultural programs. Procedural changes and policy actions are evident in many aspects of the province's agricultural sector. An example was a reduction in Crown Land application time—a change farmers hope can “bring positive gains to the industry by reducing the time it takes to get land into production” (Farmer 12). Officials noted that with the coming into being of the *Agricultural Areas of Interest*, it becomes easy to identify farmland, and the ease that comes with that is equally essential in developing interest in the populace. Changes within the institutional setup are employed to improve processes and reduce bottlenecks in land access for agriculture.

Linked to the whole idea of institutions and interventions are the last theme and a specific piece of intervening area—institutional support. This indirect intervention focuses on ‘helping the helpers.’ For example, the new farmers' guide by the YFF was a government-funded project to facilitate the attraction of farmers; “Growing Forward two programs [provided us funding], and that is why we have their logos on everything. With the publishing and printing, and so we get support from that program, which is federal-provincial” (Official 2). The NLFA, YFF, and other entities are supported by the government to carry out activities to support the agriculture industry in the province. The institutional support schemes highlight how government can work in partnership with other agencies to facilitate the development of the agricultural sector. The idea of

partnering to support agriculture is evident in other provinces, for example, the partnership between the Government of Nova Scotia and Perinea. Such interventions could help reduce the burden on the government in some areas, as argued by Delmon (2017).

Like in other parts of Canada, plans are used to move forward the agenda to attract and retain farmers. These are strategies that go beyond one component and encompass the development of the entire agricultural industry, province-wide or regionally. The strategies are essential because attracting and retaining farmers are elements embedded in such broad policies. The broad scope of such interventions also leads to the general capacity building of the agricultural industry. In Newfoundland, *The Way Forward in agriculture and the Humber Valley Agricultural Strategy* (see Dolter, 2018; Dolter & Abdulai, 2017) are typical examples of this line of interventions.

The intervention areas discussed have highlighted the foci for policy towards the attraction and retention of farmers in NL, including financial support, informational and resource support, education and training, land reforms, institutional capacity building, and changes in the operational mechanisms. Beyond the efforts discussed thus far, a careful look at these interventions reveals a spiral effect of the policy. The spiral effect describes how policy actions in one area can ultimately influence an entire system, a situation that manifests through how attempts to attract people leads to strengthening other pillars of the industry's capacity, including financial, human resource, infrastructural, and technological aspects. Going forward, a careful analysis of interventions at the design stage could facilitate making choices that effectively maximize this spiral effect and lead to overall development within the sector.

6.0 Intervening for Whom? Understanding Stakeholder Perceptions and Assessment of Policies

The success of any policy intervention can be assessed by its impacts. The ability of interventions to produce outcomes for which they are intended to further the process of goal attainment is equally crucial. The policy environment discussed in the previous section relates to building the agricultural capacity in the province and directly or indirectly aims to create awareness, prepare, train, and enhance existing capabilities to motivate people to enter and stay in agriculture. Hence, to partly evaluate whether interventions identified in policy documents and interviews resonate with intended beneficiaries, we sought the views of farmers, mainly focusing on awareness, benefits, and general perceptions. Here are some farmer testimonies:

[...] Out, the provincial department of Agri-food then will put off a lot of short courses where you could go probably for a week, and there will be something about, learn some of the basics about soil structure, fertility and stuff like that (Farm 01).

[...] Yea I think all of them are doing a great job. And the celebration of agriculture, Food First NL, and the young farmers... Young farmers are for workshops. If you want to be a farmer, meet a farmer, and we will show you how to farm. And Food First, NL held their conferences in St John's where they talk about food, cooking, production and they brought

up people from everywhere, and that wasn't agriculture at all, but that was cool (Farm 04).

The provincial government assisted through Growing Forward. We got some grants to help with clearing the land, and then taking the rocks off the land and also a little bit of going to conferences and learning more about agriculture, especially from the organic stuff. So, the government did assist. Not on a significant level but a fairly decent level. They could have assisted more [...] (Farm 03).

All interviewed farmers had heard of identified interventions, and most had benefitted from them at some point. For most farmers, the policy interventions are known to them mostly through their representatives and their occasional participation in conferences. Also, government farm representatives that interact with the farm community in different capacities play a crucial role in making policies known to potential beneficiaries. The attestation to the existence of the policy actions across different stakeholders is commendable in the sense of policy visibility—the extent to which policies are known to intended beneficiaries (Mettler & Koch 2012; Soss & Schram, 2007), which could further maximize impacts. Paul Pierson theorized about policy designs and emphasized the need for visibility, arguing that the design process can make government actions visible or otherwise to the general citizens (Pierson, 1993). Likewise, Mettler and Koch (2012) emphasized the essence of policy visibility in enhancing citizens' awareness and views about policy actions and processes. Visible policies are more likely to be patronized and utilized by beneficiaries, and the case of agricultural interventions in this study alludes to such claims—farmers' attestations to being aware and, in most parts, finding utility in them.

However, the visibility of policies may not be enough to communicate whether they are effective or not. The mere presence of policy interventions may not attract and retain farmers; hence, how such efforts are designed and implemented is equally important. A policy may only be effective when actors are satisfied with its outcome and it meets its aims.

The continuous decline in the number of farmers and a seemingly dysfunctional agricultural industry (Quinlan, 2012) despite existing efforts brings to light embedded issues in the policy environment. The research revealed some of the structural issues of policy design and approaches and implementation strategies, which hinder the realization of policy goals, despite high visibility.

6.1 Structural Issues in Farmer Attraction and Retention Policy Environment

Weak policy conception and design, which is the blueprint of policy action and how policy is conceived (Sabatier & Weible, 2014), was identified to undermine the effectiveness of interventions to attract and retain the farmers in NL. Specifically, the government's concentration on putting money in people's pockets, rather than taking a comprehensive approach to attraction and retention was noted as a weak conception: “[...] You know, throwing more and more money to something is not necessarily the thing to do, it's about how you want that money spent” (Farm 10). Despite the role of money in supporting other components of the industry, respondents spoke strongly against this approach, noting that things must be done differently. As another interviewee noted: "Well,

I tell ya, for the government, it's not only financial, it has to be...they have to have a community" (Farm 08). The respondent affirms the financial focus of the government, but that should not be at the expense of other needed motivation-facilitation elements—for example, the community. The main issue is with the direct channelling of money to farmers, which some may take advantage of to exploit. Yet, the issue of inadequate conception through tilted attention goes beyond financial support; it applies to land as well. Respondents argued that the government had emphasized just providing land, underscoring other elements:

That's what I'm talking about—the puzzle, the government can't just say we are going to give away land, and we are going to make farmers. Farmers got to have buildings, get to machinery, get to the labour force. (Farm 01).

As the respondent noted, the mere provision of land may not attract and retain farmers if other vital elements are not established. Hence, both social and institutional support systems are needed to attract people into agriculture.

Another emergent theme was the weak monitoring of existing interventions, a point which ties the financial and land interventions together. The availability of funds and land may not be enough to achieve the goals of farmer attraction and retention if implementation arrangements are not properly designed. A respondent cited an example of how people took advantage of government support for U-pick initiatives to join farming, but only temporarily until the project finances were exhausted about a decade ago. Government and non-government representatives acknowledged and lamented the weak monitoring, attributing it to the lack of funds and inadequate human resources personnel. The lack of monitoring does not only impact the government coffers, but it impacts farmer motivations as well:

You know, in the first to five years when people are getting established. It's not those that are established that need the help, it's those that are trying to get off the ground because there is so much overhead. It seems like there is something missing from when the first start-up. I just feel like it was good when we first started, the support seems to be there, there was help there, and then, I don't know what happened,, but all those information sessions went away (Farm 06).

As a respondent explained, farmers depend on the services of the government. When there is inadequate personnel to monitor the progress of their farms, it makes them feel abandoned, dampening their interest in farming. The issue of monitoring also emphasizes the role of 'the how' in policy success, where it is not the presence of interventions that matters. Still, equal attention is needed on how they are applied. Though there are existing support systems, the application techniques can hinder the success of such efforts. For the respondent above, failing to get support at the early stage led to a loss of hope in government, a situation that will, for years, nurse skepticism towards interventions.

Also, the respondent's claim that there is a lack of support at the beginning and government only helps those already established relates to the idea of concentration on successful farmers and neglect of the attraction component. One farmer noted, "There are agricultural programs that will help out, but they don't help beginner and new entrants as much as they do for established operations." Limited support to beginners was also evident in how the province

defines new entrants. The provincial Agri-food Assistance Program 2018–2019 guide stipulated:

For this program, a New Entrant is defined as someone intending to establish an agribusiness in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador or who has been operating an agribusiness for less than six years regardless of the level of agricultural sales (Newfoundland and Labrador, Department of Fisheries, Forestry and Agrifoods, NL, 2018, p. 1).

Such a definition holds consequences for the demographic progress of the industry, as interested people may not obtain the needed support to enter the sector, and new entrants who make it may not be able to survive in there for long. Also, in some instances, farmers need to gain a gross revenue of \$15,000 a year, have a five-year business plan done by a professional, and must bring in significant investment. These are a few of the blockages respondents noted—which are also evident in the provincial Agrifoods Assistance program (Newfoundland and Labrador, Department of Fisheries, Forestry and Agrifoods, 2018). Some officials did justify these requirements, noting that those are the only ways they could determine if a person is serious about farming, a point which they backed by what exists in other provinces in Canada. Also, officials argued that the government only wants to support farmers who make a significant impact on the sector. Yet, backing only successful farmers puts new entrants at a disadvantage, a sentiment expressed by both farmers and some officials. However, the government “needs to find value for money,” as another official justified. Yet, respondents also noted that existing policies discriminate against specific categories of farmers, especially smaller farms and non-conventional operations. The government's inability to separate large and small-scale farmers puts the ‘little guys’¹ at a disadvantage. The issue is extrinsically linked to the earlier view on making a significant contribution to the industry. This requirement makes a small farmer unable to compete with the larger ones. The skewed attention also manifests as support for conventional farmers, as organic producers claimed to have limited interest from government policy.

Also related to the program requirements, and possibly a transition between policy and its implementation, are the loopholes in policy language. The use of language like “bring significant investment”, “make an impact”, and many others in the policy documents are left undefined, creating scenarios that leave individual decisions to the discretion of officials.

[.....] when I did my assessment, I strongly encouraged this application to go through, but unfortunately, it goes through an implementation committee where people see all the applications across the province. And unfortunately, her project was not going to have big enough impact, and so they denied the funding. So as a new farmer who is in their 20s, I guess it's a discouraging situation where they feel we were not there to support them in expanding, although we [some officials] thought they were doing everything right.[.....] And she may or may not get this piece

¹ ‘Little guys’ is an industry jargon for small farmers in the province.

of land, and now this piece of land is only about 5 acres but just moving from one to five, this may be a lot of work to her[], the project that she had was just judged too small to have an impact, a significant impact on the agricultural industry (Official 01).

Narrating the story of the young farmer, the respondent points to how the language of agricultural policy can obscure implementation in the real world. As Yanow (1993) has argued, policy communication, which reflects in the language, among other elements, plays a role in implementation. When a policy is not written well, it leaves loopholes in interpretation and could undermine the success of the implementation.

In terms of implementation, many issues undermine agricultural interventions. One such issue is the lack of advertisements for programs. Farmers argued that there is a limited advertisement of initiatives outside the realms of the industry, which makes it difficult for people to even know of the support systems available, a claim an official subtly confirmed, but defended, stating that:

[...] it depends on the individual. They have to be motivated to contact us. They are gonna need an information service if they contact us, but we don't go knocking on their doors saying, who wants to be a farmer? (Official 05).

The officials defended the government's approach of not reaching out to people interested in farming. According to the official, they will instead prefer to be contacted; only then can the commitment of the person be known.

Another issue with implementation was the lack of coordination in intervening policy, a situation the researchers observed working with the industry. The lack of coordination is reflected in two spheres: (1) the silo thinking approach applied to each farmer, and (2) the lack of partnerships among policy actors. For the silo thinking situation, farmers argued that, “the government deals with each person individually with limited collective help” (Farmer 02), a situation they think can be improved if actions were more collective. The research could not ascertain why the government adopts such an approach to agricultural policies, but this could be attributed to the individual nature of farm business and possible in-house competitions within the industry. However, some officials also noted that farms are independent operations and should be treated as such. The second component of this theme relates to lack of partnership, an overreaching issue that reflects how institutions work together in the cause of attracting and retaining farmers. Both officials and farmers acknowledged that there was limited synergy among different interventions, especially between the farm community and institutions. For instance, while different farm-level activities work in educating and mentoring interested people, limited knowledge of these initiatives among officials in the industry was evident.

Finally, government actions—specifically red tape—was raised by respondents as inhibiting the success of intervening policies. A respondent, describing the experience of entering into agriculture, noted that:

With the government, there were a lot of red tapes. Having someone take you seriously was also a challenge. No one took you seriously, and when you say I am going into farming, they will look at you and laugh (Farm 04).

Hence, there is red tape in accessing support, a point confirmed by the time it takes to get land approval, as well as the program requirements raised earlier in this paper. Red tape is not new to policy, especially in the government arena (Bozeman & Anderson, 2016; Kaufman, 2015), but researchers have worked in many ways to contribute to reducing its impacts in practice. A contextual study in NL on how this manifests in agriculture and how it can be minimized would contribute to enhancing policy outcomes in the long run.

7.0 Discussion

Our paper explores the agricultural policy environment, with a focus on interventions that directly or indirectly aim to attract and retain people into agriculture.

The revelation of mixed experiences, mostly speaking to policy design, implementation, and mechanisms, shows the need for participation in policy evaluation. As Mettler and Koch (2012) confirmed, one way to evaluate policies is to assess their visibility to beneficiaries. Our research revealed high levels of visibility of agricultural interventions in the province. However, the visibility of policy may mask inherent issues affecting their true effectiveness. This finding calls for broader evaluations that are reflexive enough to incorporate emergent issues in the policy circle. Hence, an evaluation that equips stakeholders with information on policy environments, as argued by the constructivist school (Huitema et al., 2011), could broaden policy evaluation mechanisms. However, that must always be complemented by the rational approach to how policy interventions meet their pre-defined goals (Huitema et al., 2011).

Further, our study showed that if policies are properly designed and implemented, agricultural interventions will attain their broader goals. Yet, a lack of sensitivity of policies to the environment of beneficiaries undermines their impacts. When policies are designed within the projections of the elite policymakers or when implementation processes are rigid, they turn to push beneficiaries away from participation. Attraction and retention of people in agriculture, therefore, need more than just the mere existence of efforts; how we design such efforts will be crucial in the ability to create the desired outcomes. In the case of NL, half-policy actions, rigid and stringent requirements lead to a loss of trust in government interventions in general, affecting how beneficiaries engage with them. To obtain buy-in from farmers and potential farmers, farmer attraction and retention policy actions must respond to the issues identified. The use of reflexivity in policy evaluation, coupled with the active participation of farmers and other potential beneficiaries in all stages of the policy cycle, will be crucial in this process.

Broadly, agricultural policies and interventions are crucial to shaping the sector to meet its goal of food security and economic development in NL and beyond. As shown in this paper, the ability to have more people interested and attracted to farming and sustainably staying in the sector will contribute to the development of the agri-food sector in many ways, including more farmers to produce jobs, employment opportunities, food security and overall economic growth. That being said, the mere presence of intentions or actual interventions is unlikely to have any meaningful contribution to these potential outcomes. How we approach agricultural policies or farmer attraction and retention policies, as discussed here, like any other policy, is crucial for the outcomes they engender. The making of policies, their design, and implementation arrangements and mechanisms all contribute to how they affect their end goals. As we have shown, NL's farmer attraction and retention have had mixed impacts on, and reactions from, the intended beneficiaries. Farmers

perceive these interventions variedly, partly due to their mixed experiences with these policy actions.

Our key findings help raise some critical issues for policy processes, agricultural policies, and farmer attraction and retention efforts. Our research is essential to agricultural policy processes and structures in NL, Canada, and beyond. For farmer attraction and retention policies to produce their intended outcome, the need to develop interventions with farmers will be crucial.

8.0 Conclusion

This paper has examined policy interventions that are specifically aimed at attracting and retaining farmers in Newfoundland and Labrador and enhancing the capacity of the agricultural industry in general. The study makes two significant contributions. First, we provide a practical examination of the agricultural policies environment, and farmer attraction and retention interventions in particular. Through the evaluations, we have argued that, despite the multi-actor driven diverse policy actions that target various capacity sectors of the industry, farmer attraction and retention will not be achieved if the structural issues embedded in the policy environment are not overcome. Our argument is premised on the notion that structural issues in how policy approaches problems, how they are designed and implemented undermine their potency in achieving their overreaching goal. These structural issues are context-driven and do undermine how beneficiaries perceive, accept, and participate in policy actions. Hence, agricultural policy design and implementation must be sensitive to the social, cultural, economic, political environments in which it operates and contextualize such factors to be effective. Second, our practical evaluation contributes to larger literature on general policy processes. The NL case study adds weight to broader policy evaluation research, including the need to consider inputs from multiple actors through rationalistic and constructivist lenses. Thus, the need for the inclusion of beneficiaries in policy design and implementation while paying attention to the mechanics of policies is critical.

The conclusion in this paper advances farmer attraction and retention policies and practice, as well as further research within local policy environments. The research can also facilitate policy making and implementation in general to maximize the benefits of intervening actions targeted at solving societal problems. The highlights on the diversity of assessment of policy interventions bring to light why implementation actors must be wary of the environment, and this is important for the practice of policy at the local level. Likewise, the need for further research on how to overcome structural issues within policy settings and to understand the direct impact of such issues at various stages of the policy cycle is crucial for strengthening public and private policies.

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