



Courtesy of Dimitrios Tellidis, Agronomist

# Rural Innovation In Manitoba:

## Reducing Barriers to Commercialization and Growing Capacity in the Agri-food Sector

*A place-based approach to facilitating commercialization*

### BACKGROUND

While there is creativity, thinking and science across Canada, the Conference Board of Canada reports an “innovation gap” that is mostly related to commercialization – the transformation of ideas and knowledge into value<sup>1</sup>. This “innovation gap” is complex, not well understood and can be largely attributed to systemic barriers. Three such barriers are access to venture capital, fragmented services to innovators and commercialization, and a wide-spread risk-averse culture. The research and activities undertaken in this project aim to close the knowledge gap that exists around understanding the complex of issues that slow down innovation in the Manitoba Agri-Food sector.

This applied research project is funded by the Canada and Manitoba governments through *Growing Forward 2*, a federal-provincial-territorial initiative. It attempts to create new knowledge that enhances the process of innovation by addressing barriers and opportunities in commercialization in Manitoba’s Agri-Food sector, and improves

capacity in organizations so they can facilitate innovation. Often innovation services and processes are located in larger urban areas where both density and specialization exist. This project aims to focus on innovation in rural Manitoba, a less studied area, where limited information exists about the commercialization aspects of innovation.

### PURPOSE

The purpose of this project is two-fold. First to identify and address systemic barriers impacting on the commercialization cycle as experienced by selected innovators and stakeholders involved in the Manitoba Agri-food industry. Second to investigate the innovation culture and risk-adversity in Manitoba’s Southwest region within the context of the Manitoba Agri-Food industry.

The project will determine the commercialization gap that exists in Manitoba’s Agri-Food industry based on recent experiences of Agri-Food Innovators and aims to enhance existing capacity and leadership in Manitoba’s Southwest region for commercialization activity in the Agri-Food industry.

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<sup>1</sup> Conference Board of Canada. 2012. Innovation Metrics and Management.

## SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A variety of information sources will be used to develop empirical evidence to address the systemic barriers to innovation and commercialization from a rural perspective. In addition to literature reviews and contacting innovation centers and organizations supporting innovators and entrepreneurship development, this project has two principal sources of information. First, in depth interviews with 3-5 Manitoba Agri-Food innovators and associated Manitoba Agri-Food stakeholders (25 interviews) will be conducted. Second, a survey of approximately a sample of 460 individuals will be conducted (including households, youth, immigrants and SME owners) in 3-4 communities in Manitoba's Southwest region.

## PARTNERSHIPS

This project is made possible through partnerships with many individuals and organizations. The numbers of project partners is expected to increase over the duration of this project. The partners' list includes but is not limited to: Southwest Regional Development Corporation, Community Futures Westman, Innovate Manitoba, Manitoba Food Development Centre, Life Sciences Association of Manitoba, Westman Agricultural Diversification Organization, representatives from all levels of government, producer and Agri-Food associations and NGOS. These organizations will have key roles, including assistance with the selection of Manitoba Agri-Food innovators and stakeholders, suggestions on the tools to collect data on the road to commercialization and barriers, participating in roundtable discussions and assisting the research team through their knowledge, experiences, networks and contacts.



## RESEARCH PRODUCTS AND DISSEMINATION

This research project will generate a variety of research products over its two-year duration such as research reports and organized information resources (e.g. resources of innovation programs, strategies and tools from both existing websites and networks but also gained from interviews and roundtables, inventory assets to better utilize infrastructure and knowledge of commercialization). The project will apply a variety of modes (website, webinars, and print) to disseminate this research. This research will produce a comprehensive package of strategies, tools and support programs available to Agri-Food innovators in Manitoba and Agri-Food sector stakeholders involved in innovation and commercialization (including scientists and researchers, economic and business professionals, financing agencies, patent lawyers, business advisors, government agencies organizations). The Rural Innovation in Manitoba research project will assist in enhancing exporting and manufacturing opportunities as well as in facilitating entrepreneurship in rural Manitoba.

