



# MEDIA RELEASE

## ***The farm sector faces a looming succession crisis: Matchmaker platform offers creative solutions***

The FarmLINK.net platform is a cross between Realtor.ca and eHarmony: farm-seekers can find detailed property facts as well as the terms of lease or succession arrangements, while retiring farmers and farmland owners can learn about the aspirations and values of the farmers they might work with and to connect with each other through a confidential message system.

*"For both sides, it is very much like online dating, with dreams, business deals and productive landscapes all in the mix." - Christie Young, Founder of FarmStart and Strategic Lead for FarmLINK.net*

This kind of online relationship building is new to many farmers, but Young feels that if farm communities want to remain vibrant and viable, they will need to find new ways to attract and support new and young farmers. While farming communities are aging, structural, economic and practical challenges are preventing new and young farmers from getting into the sector. Runaway farmland values are putting farmland out of reach of the next generation of farmers. New entrants struggle to access the farmland they need to get their farm dreams off the ground.

- Between 1991 and 2011, the number of farms where the oldest operator was less than 40-years-old declined almost 75 per cent from 74,159 to 20,299 farms. In 2011, more than half of all farms had operators 55 years or older (compared to 37.7 per cent in 1991) (Beaulieu, 2016)<sup>1</sup>
- The 2016 Census of Agriculture shows only 8% of farms reporting have a written succession plan meaning 92% of farmers have no written plan for who will take over when the operator retires (Stats Canada, 2016)<sup>2</sup>
- This means that over 72 million acres of farmland across Canada could be transferred out of the hands of farmers in the next decade.

Retiring farmers without successors feel they have few options, but to put their farms on the market and sell to the highest bidder. Whether the land is lost forever to aggregate, industrial or urban development, or simply consolidated into larger operations, Canada's farm communities - and the consumers who rely on them - are facing an unprecedented structural and demographic shift. Yet, many retiring farmers would rather sell to a new generation, who will love and steward their farms as they have. They just don't know how to go about it.

*"What's needed is a strategic disruption to (the) current system of farmland market exchange to stop the pattern of speculation and crisis farm sales. We need new tools that offer alternative farm transfer options for farmland owners and new opportunities for new farmers to get on the land." - Keeley Nixon, Program Lead at FarmLINK.net*

FarmLINK.net is a newly improved national platform aiming to shake up the farm sector and become the most effective, easy to use, and dynamic farm-linking tool connecting farm-seekers, farmland owners and rural regions looking to attract a new generation of farmers.

- Since 2014, there were over 3,000 users on FarmLINK.net matchmaking platform, primarily in Ontario.
- After almost a decade in operation, FarmLINK.net now offers a smoother listing process, more resources, confidential messaging, and a FastMatch feature.
- A resource database, a blog and free webinars also help new farmers develop business plans and help landowners explore and consider the range of land leasing, transfer and succession options.

FarmLINK.net is a project of FarmStart, a groundbreaking Ontario based organization that developed and offered innovative programs and services to support a new generation of farmers for over 10 years. In the redevelopment of FarmLINK.net, FarmStart joined forces with Linking Land and Farmers, a British Columbia non-profit society that supported land matches and provided land access resource in the Lower Vancouver Island region for over 20 years.

Funding for the redevelopment was provided in part from the Echo Foundation and Growing Forward 2 (GF2), a federal-provincial-territorial initiative. The Agricultural Adaptation Council assists in the delivery of GF2 in Ontario.

For more information and media interviews contact Outreach & Engagement Lead Mel Luymes: [mel@farmlink.net](mailto:mel@farmlink.net)

<sup>1</sup> Beaulieu, M. (2016) Statistics Canada: Demographic Changes in Canadian Agriculture. Agriculture Division. Available from: <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/96-325-x/2014001/article/11905-eng.htm>

<sup>2</sup> Statistics Canada. 2016. Table 004-0237, Census of Agriculture, total number of farms and farm operators. Table 004-0245 Census of Agriculture, farms reporting a written succession plan for the operation.