

The BC Agriculture Climate Adaptation Research Network (ACARN)

Strategic Plan
2019-2023

Background

The British Columbia (BC) Agricultural Climate Adaptation Research Network (ACARN) was initiated in December of 2015 to improve linkages and collaboration among agriculture researchers, industry groups, specialists and policy-makers across the province. The aim of this collaboration is to develop an effective network approach to address climate adaptation research needs in the BC agriculture industry by enhancing regional/provincial research projects, promoting interdisciplinary research, and improving the efficient use of climate adaptation resources. Moreover, the establishment of a centralized research network, which promotes stronger linkages between industry groups and researchers, could enhance the strategic development of research projects that address industry priorities.

The network received two years of funding from a private donor to establish the network between May 2017 - 2019. During this time, ACARN expanded its membership from 18 to 108 members. Key accomplishments included hosting two annual provincial workshops and co-hosting four regional workshops that connected individuals working at the nexus of agriculture and climate change adaptation research across the province. The network has also completed several climate change projects and submitted numerous proposals, which have brought together over 40 collaborators dedicated to fostering increased cross-sector collaboration on climate change research, education and extension strategies in the BC agriculture sector. Through this work ACARN has been able to surpass its external funding target by 350%.

Since its inception, ACARN has worked closely with the BC Agriculture and Food Climate Action Initiative (CAI), and the two organizations partnered to develop a four-year strategic plan to build off this early success and strengthen the network.

Mission

Enhance climate change adaptation research for the BC agriculture industry by coordinating activities, promoting the sharing of research information, expertise, and resources in the province.

Vision

ACARN is a provincial hub that fosters a collaborative approach for agricultural climate change adaptation research, education, and extension strategies in British Columbia.

Near-term Objectives

ACARN will be focusing on 5 primary near-term objectives during the 2019-2023 funding cycle.

- 1. Strengthen cross-province collaboration and sustain the network**
- 2. Share research information, expertise and resources**
- 3. Coordinate network research projects**
- 4. Enhance the accessibility of applied research outcomes**
- 5. Train future researchers and outreach specialists**

Each objective contains specific activities which will be further described in the following section. The timeline of these activities are detailed in table 1 and each year an annual work plan with updated activities and timelines will be submitted to the Steering Committee for approval.

Objective 1:

Strengthen cross-province collaboration and sustain the network

Activity 1.1 - Strengthen the ACARN network

Update the ACARN strategic plan with input from Steering Committee members to prioritize objectives and activities for the next four years and share this vision with the BC agriculture sector through various outreach activities.

Activity 1.2 - Increase provincial-regional collaboration

ACARN is already working in collaboration with many organizations across British Columbia to enhance the mobilization of information and resources among agricultural regions of the province. ACARN will work to formalize these linkages by working with NGO, government, industry, and academic partners to strengthen provincial-regional collaboration and co-develop new models to improve provincial-regional collaboration.

Activity 1.3 - Secure long-term funding to sustain the network

The network will work with government and industry partners over the next four years to secure long-term funding from federal and provincial funding sources to sustain ACARN beyond the current funding cycle.

Objective 2:

Share research information, expertise and resource

Activity 2.1. Host annual workshop

Continue to host an annual provincially-focused workshop in a different agricultural region of the province. The goal of the annual provincial workshop will continue to be the facilitation of information exchange across academic, industry and government groups working in agriculture and climate change adaptation in British Columbia.

Activity 2.2. Expert database interface update and expansion

Improve the usability of the ACARN membership database, both the user interface and the functionality of the database, to make information on researchers, policy-makers, industry specialists, producers and students working in agriculture and climate change adaptation more accessible. Once the database is improved, work to increase ACARN membership.

Activity 2.3. Data-sharing initiatives

Continue to support data-sharing initiatives among ACARN members by coordinating working groups focused on specific data themes (e.g. BC Agricultural Soil Data-sharing Working Group and BC Agriculture Climate/Weather Station Data Working Group).

Activity 2.4. Enhance membership communication and knowledge mobilization

Enhance existing communication channels between the Coordinator and members to better capitalize on the new linkages formed under this network, including a quarterly member e-newsletter and exploring opportunities for other online tools and communication channels that can improve knowledge mobilization and information sharing.

Objective 3:

Coordinate network research projects

Activity 3.1 Scope and track funding opportunities

Create a formalized structure for receiving information on potential funding opportunities related to agricultural climate change adaptation research and for communicating this information out to ACARN members.

Activity 3.2 Collaborative research projects

Continue to support the establishment of joint, coordinated climate adaptation research projects that are transdisciplinary, provincial (or regional) in scope, cross-commodity and/or multi-institutional (e.g. PICS Theme Partnership, NSERC Collaborative Research Training Experience Program and SSHRC Partnership Grant).

Objective 4:

Enhance the accessibility of applied research outcomes

Activity 4.1. Develop extension tools, resources and strategies for researchers

Develop strategies to enable more researchers to convert their research findings into short briefs that are easily accessible to producers, policymakers and other end-users. Work with other organizations to develop hands-on opportunities for knowledge transfer between researchers, students, and producers.

Activity 4.2. Host annual regional knowledge transfer workshops

Collaborate with CAI to host an annual regional knowledge transfer workshop to continue building both regional and provincial relationships for climate adaptation research in BC.

Activity 4.3. Support collaboration across the province and across institutions to improve extension for climate change adaptation

Compliment other extension providers by supporting provincial collaboration to improve coordination among extension initiatives across the province and increase access to climate change adaptation resources.

Objective 5:

Train future researchers and outreach specialists

Activity 5.1. Involve students and new professionals in sharing and research

Involve students and postdoctoral researchers in ACARN events to encourage participation in research sharing, extension and network discussions. Develop a strategy to increase opportunities for undergraduate student involvement.

Activity 5.2. Develop agriculture and climate change training resources

Build from the success of the BC Agriculture and Climate Change Education Series (delivered across 8 educational institutions) to develop additional resources to train students and aspiring professionals in this emerging area of practice.