

FROM PROSPECTORS TO PRODUCERS

A HISTORICAL EVOLUTION FROM THE GOLD RUSH TO TODAY

**YUKON
AGRICULTURAL
ASSOCIATION**





Contents

- 01. Context of the Yukon
- 02. Origins
- 03. Agricultural Development
- 04. Where We Are Today
- 05. Future Prospects

Agriculture in Yukon highlights resilience and adaptation in practice. Trace the sector's evolution from the Gold Rush era to today, examine the environmental, political, and economic forces that have shaped its development.



%

~ 4.8% Canada's landmass



↕

~ 95% Imported Food Products

Size and Population

Demographics

~47,000 people

17 communities

14 First Nations

~88 farms

Land

47,900,000 hectares

~135 farm operators

~10,300 hectares cultivated

Soils and Climate

Yukon's mountainous terrain, cold semi-arid climate and permafrost-affected soils create unique agricultural conditions requiring specialized approaches and adapted practices.

Less than 2% of the Yukon's land base is considered suitable for agricultural development.

Daylight and Temperatures

Winter

5–11 hrs | -40°C to -13°C

Spring

12–16 hrs | 5°C to 15°C

Summer

18–22 hrs | 6°C to 26°C

Autumn

9–13 hrs | -3°C to 19°C



Soil

Yukon soil is typically shallow, slightly acidic to slightly basic, and low in organic matter.



Majority of agriculture soil in Yukon is classified as class 5 soil.



Climate Change and Yukon Agriculture



Temperature

Annual average temperature has increased by 2°C over the past 50 years.



Precipitation

Annual precipitation is anticipated to increase from 5% to 20% by the end of the century.

What does this mean?

Climate change presents challenges and opportunities. This ranges from longer growing seasons, better microclimates, and new crop possibilities to increases in natural disasters such as fires, floods, and extreme cold events.



Accessibility Paradox

Yukon producers faces challenges due to extreme isolation, limited support services, single-road dependency, and high transportation costs.

While Yukon producers technically have access to service providers, federal programs and national institutions that address these gaps, most of these services are delivered through southern regional offices with Yukon as a client, making them difficult to access and poorly aligned with northern realities.

Milestones for Yukon Agriculture

From the Gold Rush that first brought settlers north, to the Alaska Highway opening new access, to the creation of Yukon's first agriculture policy formalizing the sector, Yukon agriculture has now entered a phase of intentional growth focused on food security, northern innovation, and sustainable expansion.

1898

Klondike Gold Rush

The kickstart of Yukon agriculture.



1982

First Agriculture Policy

Setting the stage from oversight to intentional.



1940's

Alaska Highway

Greater accessibility, but a shift in how investment in local agricultural production takes shape.



Agriculture Born from Necessity

As Yukon's population fell from 27,000 in 1901 to 8,500 by 1911, demand for imports dropped and local production expanded; by 1906 most vegetables in Dawson were locally grown, and by 1911 about 200 acres were under cultivation.



Mid - Late 1800s

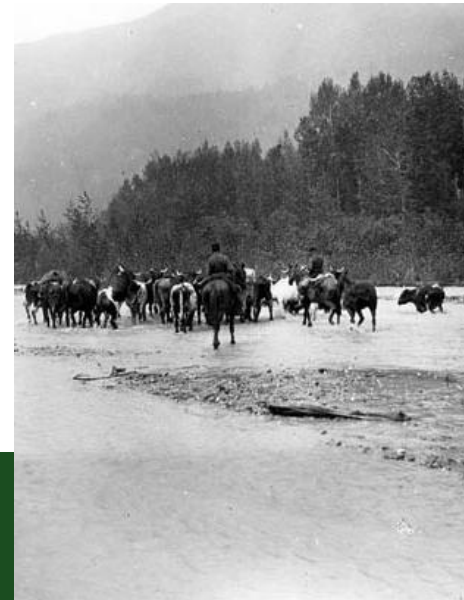
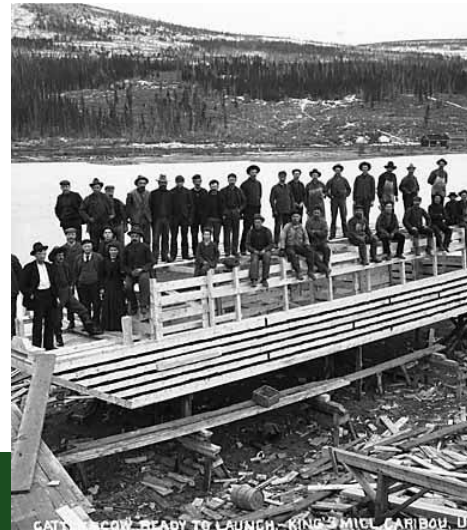
Early newcomers faced long, unreliable supply lines that made nutritious food scarce and expensive, creating immediate demand for local production.

Klondike Gold Rush 1896 - 1899

Establishing around Dawson City producer gained a market of tens of thousands of newcomers.

The Klondike Cattle Drive

Beef shipments to Dawson City sold for two to four dollars a kilo, helping prevent famine in the booming town during the winter of 1897–98, when gold was easier to find than food.

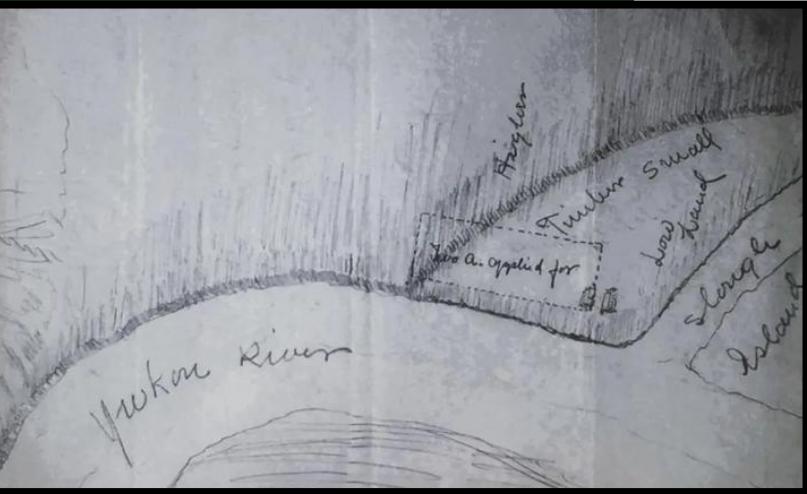


1898

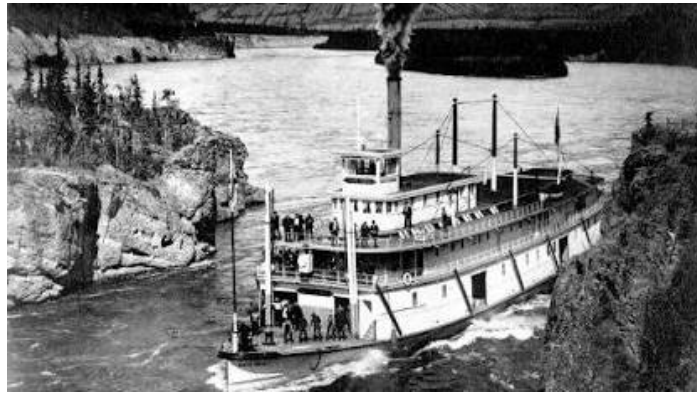
Jim Cornell was the first to try driving cattle from the Chilcotin to the Klondike, setting out in May 1898 with one hundred head.

1900-1950

White Pass & Yukon Route railway and sternwheeler fleet



Sketch submitted with Harris Welch's application in August 1903 for two acres of land covering his barn. North is to the left.



Farmer & Importers

The White Pass & Yukon Route railway and sternwheeler fleet provided a reliable Yukon transportation system from 1900 to the early 1950s that benefited both local farmers and importers.



Klondike Highway

The construction of the highway ended the sternwheeler era. Farms that were flourishing along rivers no longer had a cheap and easy way to get their produce to market.



Outfitting & Agriculture

Outfitters rely heavily on horses. By 1966, the Yukon had 22 outfitters.

Those horses still needed winter feed and shelter, so outfitters often boarded them, sometimes on farms in northern B.C. or Alberta; but just as often on Yukon farms, giving local farmers both steady income and a reliable market for their hay.

1944-1969

Haines Junction Experimental Farm



Interest

The Alaska Highway's construction in 1942 renewed federal interest in northern agriculture, leading to the establishment of the Yukon Experimental Substation near Haines Junction.

Experiments

The station tested crops and livestock under challenging conditions, identifying soil infertility, frost, and low rainfall as key barriers to production.

1970 - 1990

Era of mapping, feasibility, and land change.

Kutchin Consultants

Contracted to conduct surveys and research.

The 1983 recommendations included: 'Assist with the establishment of farmers markets', 'Provide storage facilities for root vegetables', and 'Assist with land clearing, fencing, and irrigation projects.'

Kutchin Consultants:
6 Sunset Drive North
Whitehorse, Yukon, Canada

John Hoyt's role

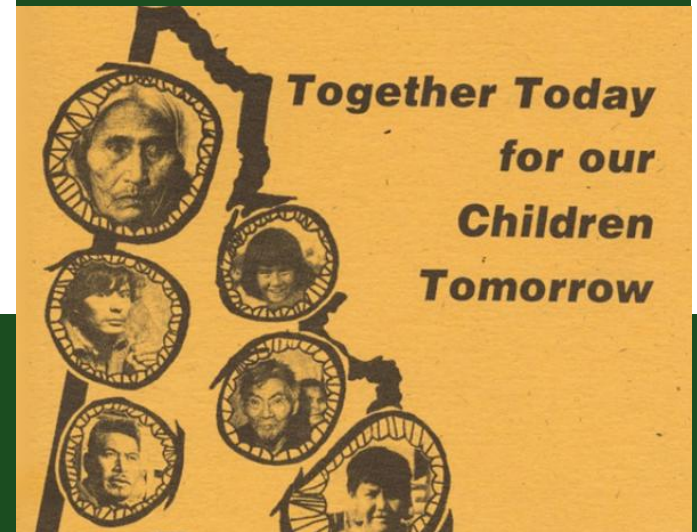
Special Assistant to the federal Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs from November 1977-May 1979.



From left to right: John Hoyt, consultant; Dr.

Chief Jim Boss

In 1902, Ta'an Kwäch'än Chief Jim Boss wrote to the federal government seeking recognition and fairness, an early step in the journey towards the 1993 Umbrella Final Agreement.



Agricultural Policy Evolution

Together, these four policy milestones trace Yukon agriculture's evolution from establishing basic land processes to defining a modern, sustainable, community-focused sector under territorial leadership.

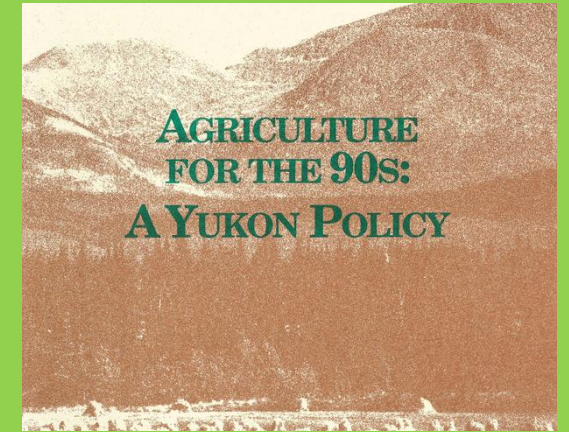
Between 2011 and 2021, total farm capital in Yukon rose from \$86.5 to \$112.4 million

1982 Yukon Agriculture Policy Framework

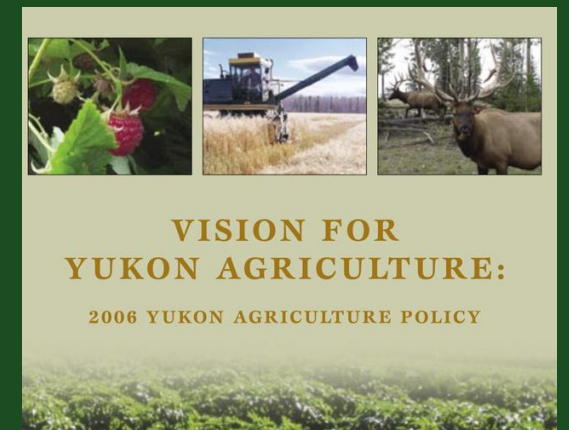
Yukon's first territorial agriculture policy established foundational goals and marked the shift from federal oversight to territorial leadership.



1990 Agriculture for the 90s



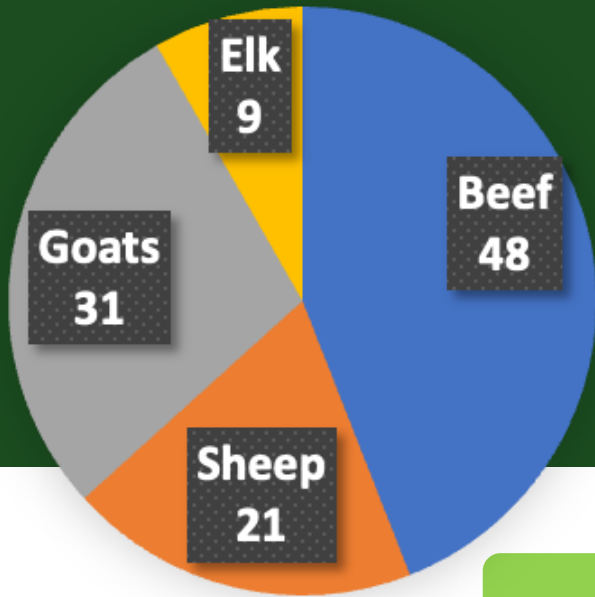
2006 Vision for Yukon Agriculture



2020 Cultivating Our Future



Meat Production



Where we are today

Swine
328

Poultry
1928 broilers
175 turkeys

Dairy

10,000 L milk
1,076 L heavy cream
220 kg butter

Eggs

133,800 dozen eggs

Vegetable

575,000 lbs potatoes
238,000 lbs carrots
48,000 lbs cabbage
36,000 lbs beets
8,500 lbs parsnips

Yukon producers deliver a modest but telling annual output: all vegetable, egg, and dairy production numbers listed here come from just three operations, while meat totals reflect inspected slaughter in 2025.

Because the Yukon operates outside national quota systems, producers in these sectors are ineligible for federal programs tied to risk management, financing, and long-term sector stability.

Arctic Sovereignty



Northern Food Production

Strengthening local agriculture reduces reliance on long supply chains and improves northern food security, supporting Canada's ability to sustain Arctic communities.



Climate-Adapted Agriculture

Yukon's cold-climate agriculture, research, and innovation strengthen Canada's northern climate-adaptation strategy.



Community Stability

A growing agriculture and agri-food sector anchors population, employment, and infrastructure that reinforce Canada's continuous northern presence.

What does this mean?

Yukon's agricultural growth directly strengthens Canada's Arctic sovereignty by supporting food security, climate-adapted innovation, and stable northern communities essential to maintaining a sustained presence in the North.

Active Organizations

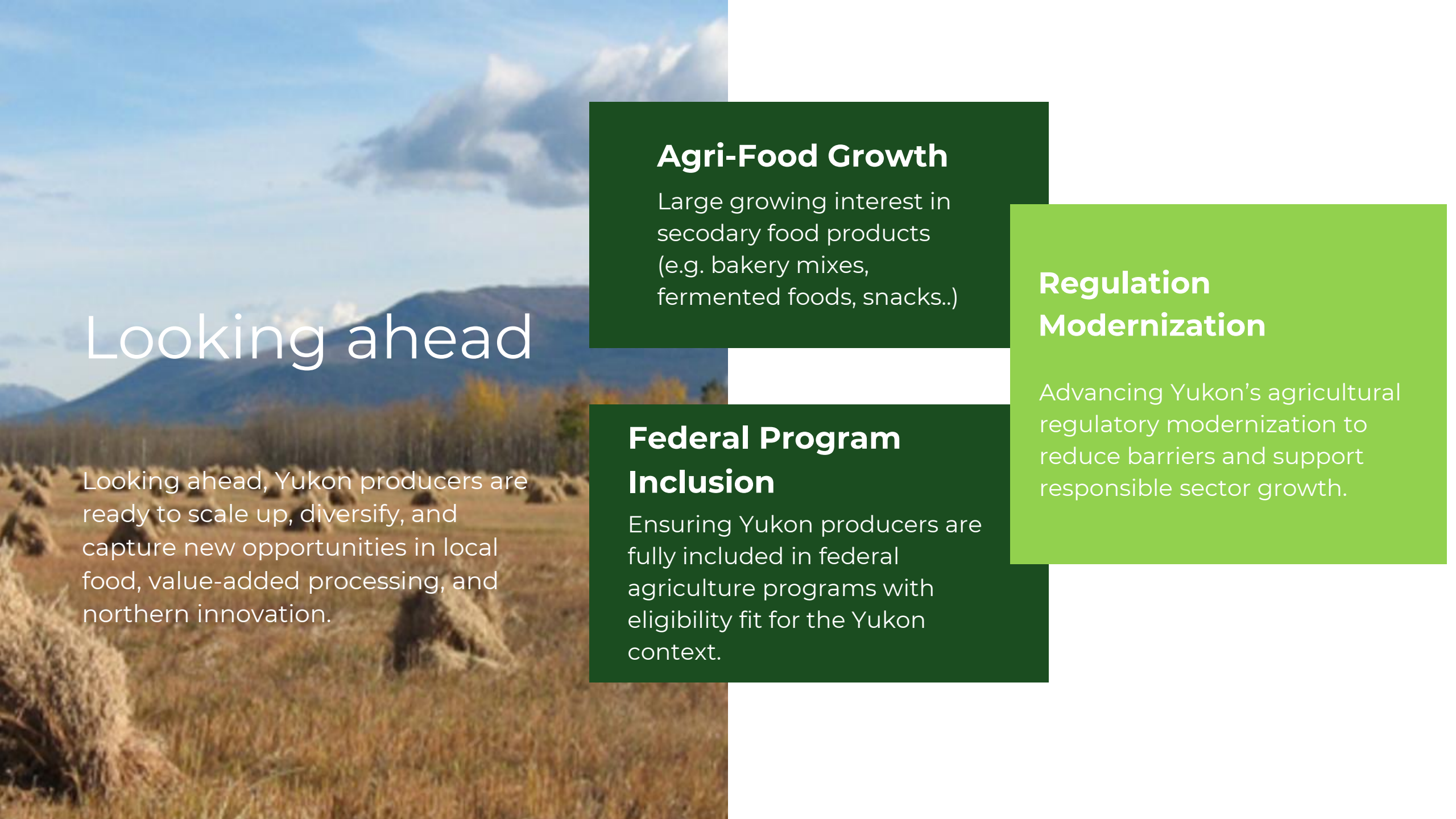
Growing consumer demand for local food combined with strong organizational networks has created momentum for agricultural sector development and food security initiatives across the territory.



All producers, whether they are members to the YAA or not, can broaden their market reach through the Yukon Farm Guide.

Yukon Agricultural Association
Growers of Organic Foods Yukon
Central Yukon Agricultural Network
Game Growers Association
Yukon Food Security Network

Territory-wide producer representation
Organic growers and advocates
Regional producer collaboration
Farmed game and specialty livestock
Community food access and resilience



Looking ahead

Looking ahead, Yukon producers are ready to scale up, diversify, and capture new opportunities in local food, value-added processing, and northern innovation.

Agri-Food Growth

Large growing interest in secondary food products (e.g. bakery mixes, fermented foods, snacks..)

Regulation Modernization

Advancing Yukon's agricultural regulatory modernization to reduce barriers and support responsible sector growth.

Federal Program Inclusion

Ensuring Yukon producers are fully included in federal agriculture programs with eligibility fit for the Yukon context.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Yukon Farm Fair

September 5th, 2026

Celebrate and learn about our
local producers.

North of 60 Agricultural Conference and Banquet.

November 20-21, 2026

Experience a 90% local menu
from Yukon producers.

203-302 STEELE STREET
WHITEHORSE ,YT

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