



# Sustainable Farm Families Alberta

## EVALUATION HIGHLIGHTS

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Sustainable Farm Families (SFF) Alberta is based on Sustainable Farm Families™ (SFF™) Australia.  
<http://www.farmerhealth.org.au/sustainable-farm-families/sff-programs>

## Evaluation Highlights

Sustainable Farm Families (SFF) Alberta is a multi-faceted health education program operated by the Farm Safety Centre. Developed specifically for the rural farm context, the program consists of workshops facilitated by nurses and farm facilitators that occur annually over three years. While the specific content covered each year is different, every workshop includes a physical assessment, farm safety information, and farmer-to-farmer discussions. Throughout the workshop, participants are encouraged to commit to making changes in their lifestyle and farm safety practices by creating 'action plans'.

The evaluation of SFF Alberta in 2015-16 sought to understand the impact of the program over time and the cultural adaptations required for the Hutterite context. Multiple mixed methods were used to collect data from program staff, current workshop participants and people who did not return for Year 2 of the program.

### 1.0 How was SFF Alberta Implemented?

In its second year, SFF Alberta continued to operate in a nimble way that was responsive to participants' interests. Several quality improvements were made to the 2015-16 workshops, based on previous evaluation results and immediate participant feedback. Most importantly, the year one workshops were successfully adapted to the Hutterite cultural context. Hutterite leaders and participants clearly trust and respect the SFF Alberta team.

For the purposes of the evaluation, participants were divided into three cohorts:

#### **Cohort 1 – Local Producers and Hutterite Producers Returning for Year 2 (n=33 people)**

- Four Year 2 workshops occurred in southern and central Alberta
- Cohort 1 includes the Hutterite participants who completed Year 1 workshop in 2014-2015 (only males)

#### **Cohort 2 – Local Producers in Year 1 (n= 45 people)**

- 4 workshops in southern and northern Alberta

#### **Cohort 3 – Hutterite Producers in Year 1 (n= 123 people)**

- 5 on-colony workshops in southern and northern Alberta
- Individuals from both Dariusleut and Lehrerleut colonies participated

#### **Additional Requests**

- 4 additional colonies requested on-colony workshops after the completion of the 2015-16 schedule<sup>1</sup>

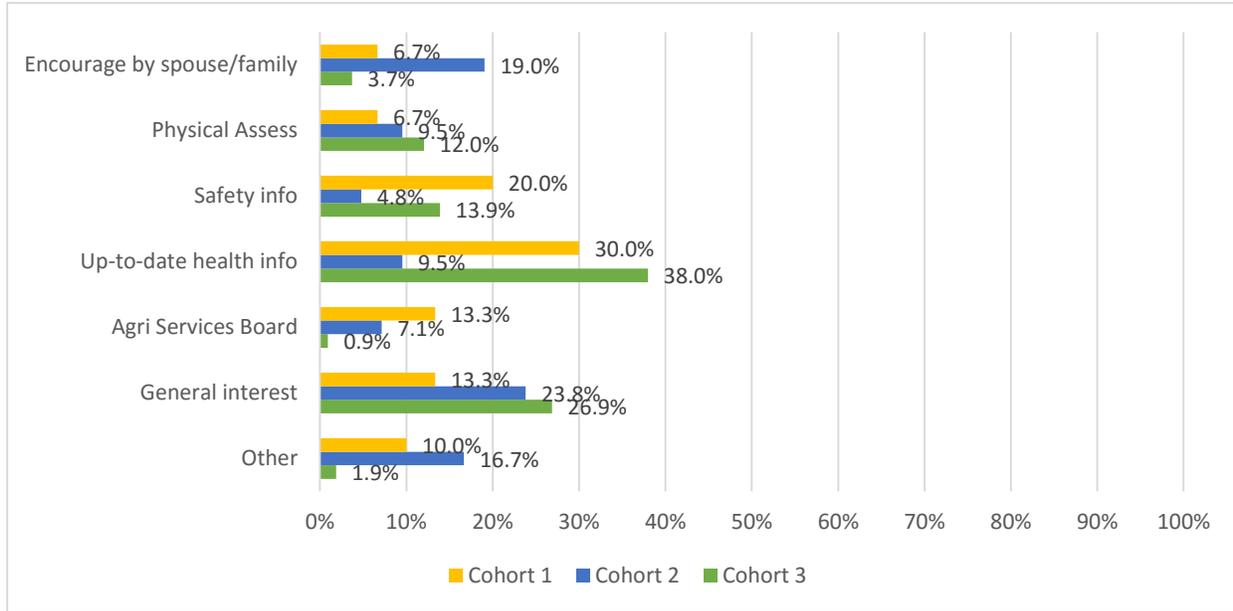
SFF Alberta effectively engaged a wide range of farmers in the workshops. In fact, the number of workshops completed in 2015-16 (n= 13) was more than triple the number in 2014-15 (n=4).

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<sup>1</sup>On-colony workshops were completed with two particularly keen colonies after the conclusion of the SFF Alberta 2015-16 year. Evaluation data from these workshops will be part of the 2016-17 evaluation.

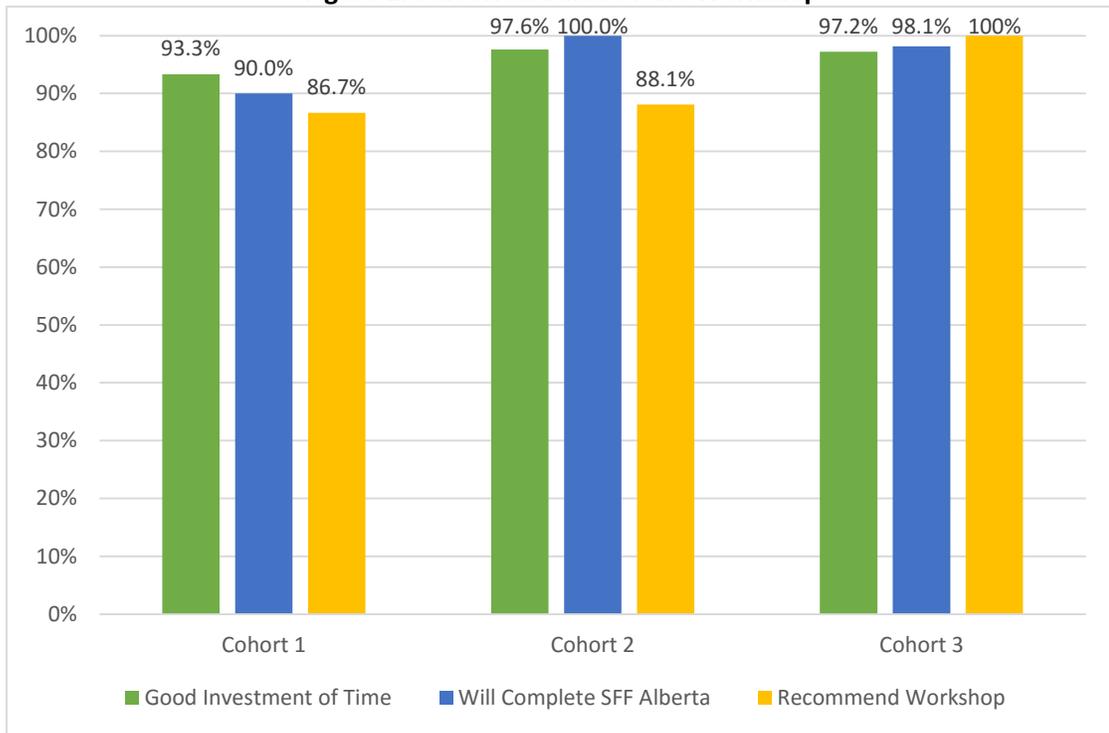
Reasons for attending the workshops varied across the cohorts and individuals, suggesting that the motivation to attend is quite personal (Figure 1).

**Figure 1: Reasons for Attending SFF Alberta Workshops**



As in 2014-15, the 2015-16 participants had an enduring interest in farm safety, but once exposed to other health content reported that they understood the link between health and farming. The content was relevant to their lives, the workshop was a valuable investment and they planned to come back to continue the program (Figure 2). Most Cohort 1 participants (82.5%, n= 33 of 40) returned for the second year of the program. Seven participants were unable to participate because of scheduling conflicts.

**Figure 2: Perceived Value of the Workshop**



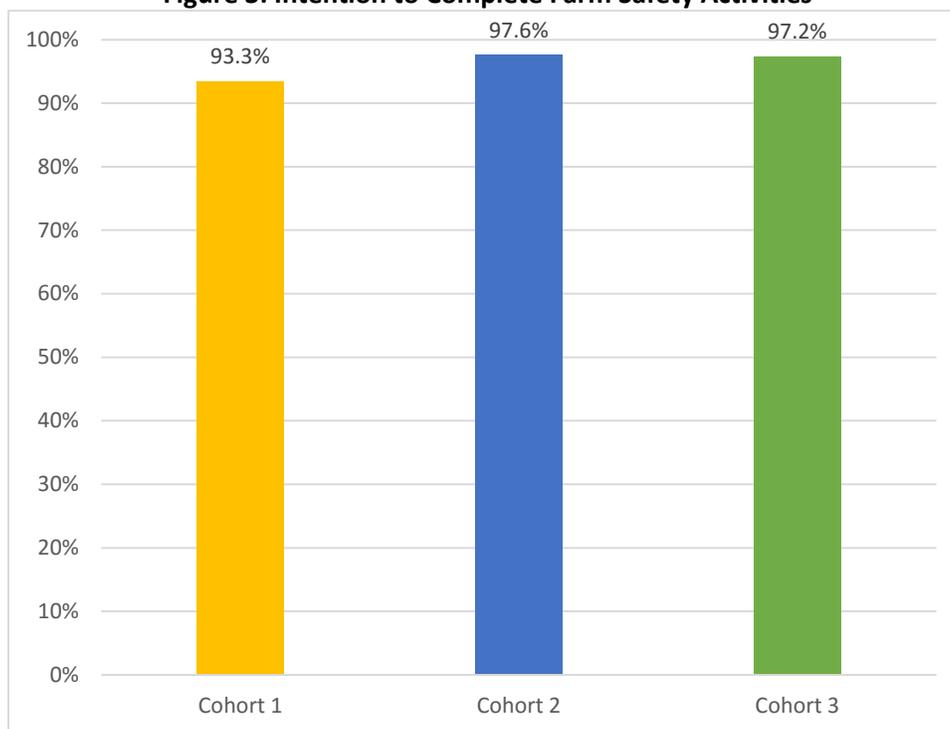
Overall, the Farm Safety Centre and SFF Alberta effectively engaged new and returning participants in the program.

- Once people attended the workshop, they wanted to continue the program.
- Recruitment translated into commitment to the SFF Alberta program.

## 2.0 What Difference Did it Make?

As in 2014-15, the 2015-16 SFF Alberta participants in all three cohorts identified great gains in knowledge of health issues and farm safety. They valued the physical assessment process, relevant information/content, and practical resources and tools shared in the workshops. Nearly all participants in all three cohorts intended to complete some of the suggested farm safety activities (Figure 3).

**Figure 3: Intention to Complete Farm Safety Activities**



Across the cohorts, mental health and stress management were identified as key issues for participants. Some participants saw a link between mental health and farm safety:

*“Equipment part is not the dangerous part – it’s the anxiety in the mind that creates the problem”*  
(Cohort 1 participant)

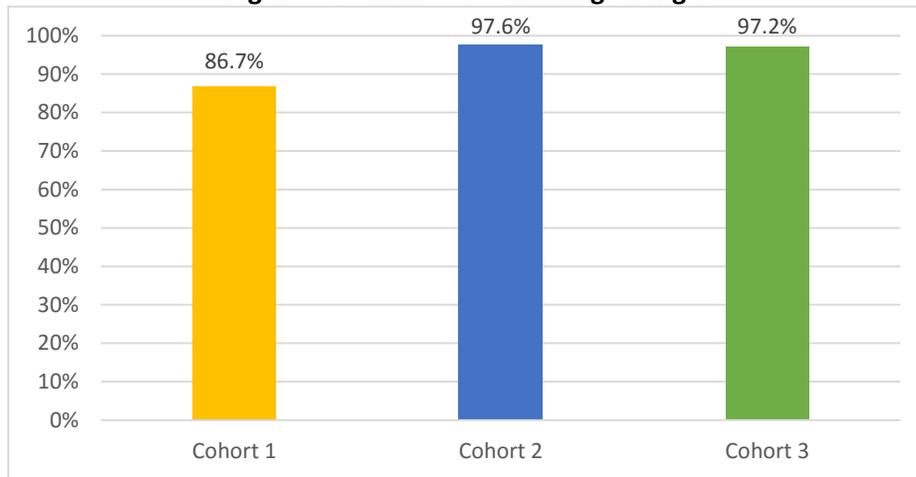
Participants’ action plans for their health and farm operation were very personal and relevant to their unique context. The most common action plans related to healthier eating and increased physical activity, improved farm safety practices, and better mental health and stress management. Twelve months after completing the initial workshop, Cohort 1 participants believed they had fulfilled their action plans related to healthier eating and farm safety practices:

*“We felt like we made lots of changes with diet – more fruits and veggies, eating more regular meals, healthy snacks.”* (Cohort 1 Participant)

*“I set up standard operating procedures, outfitted main equipment in fields with first aid kits and fire extinguishers, and helped others [farmers] in the area to make safety changes”* (Cohort 1 Participant)

Participants in all cohorts were very determined to achieve their action plans over the next year. This is similar to the level of commitment expressed by participants in 2014-15.

**Figure 3: Committed to Making Changes**



Cohort 1 participants' action plans did not relate to weight loss or specific health status improvements (e.g., lower fasting blood glucose levels). Due to quality improvements in the physical assessment, the 2015-16 measurements for weight, BMI and waist circumference are the new baseline measures. Overall, most Cohort 1 participants had normal values for fasting blood glucose, cholesterol and blood pressure in 2014-15 and 2015-16.

### 3.0 Conclusions

After two years of implementation, it is clear that Sustainable Farm Families (SFF) Alberta is on the right track. Interest and participation in the program continue to grow.

Once farmers participate in SFF Alberta they:

- Believe the program's health and safety information is useful and relevant to their farm operation
- Understand the link between farm safety and their own health
- Intend to complete the farm safety activities they learned in the program
- Want to attend the next year's workshop
- Think the program is a good investment of their time
- Recommend SFF Alberta to other farmers

SFF Alberta has built a cultural bridge into a group of family farms that often do not engage in traditional Health and Safety training. Hutterite colony members' trust of the Farm Safety Centre initially opened the door for the SFF Alberta workshop. Then SFF Alberta carefully listened to Hutterites and adapted the program to be respectful of Hutterite culture. SFF Alberta has built a trusting relationship with Hutterite communities that is valued and unique.

#### 4.0 Next Steps

SFF Alberta has the necessary components for success in place. The relevance and value of the program to local producers and Hutterite farmers has been demonstrated. Overall, the program should keep doing what is working well.

Participant feedback indicated mental health and stress management are key priorities among participants. Content on alcoholism and substance use could be integrated in future workshops.

SFF Alberta adopted a developmental approach over its two years of implementation, allowing it to nimbly adapt to participants' priorities and multiple cultural contexts. At this point, the core activities of the program are clear and consistent; the necessary components for success are in place. It is now appropriate to define the relationships between SFF Alberta activities and the anticipated outcomes.

We suggest SFF Alberta should devote time and resources to developing a program logic model, which would explain the program theory and identify the intended impacts of the intervention. This would become the road map for all future work and would allow systematic tracking of the SFF Alberta contribution to farm health and safety.