



Sustainable Farm Families Alberta

EVALUATION HIGHLIGHTS 2016-2017

SHARLENE WOLBECK MINKE AND BIRGITTA LARSSON

Evaluation Highlights 2016-2017

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 registered nurses (RNs) and farm facilitators that occur annually over three years. To support change, the participants also receive regular follow-up. While the specific content covered each year is different, every workshop includes a physical assessment, health and 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 2016-2017 sought to understand the impact of the program over time as participants proceed through the program. Multiple mixed methods were used to collect data from program staff, current workshop participants and people who did not return for subsequent years of the program.

1.0 How was SFF Alberta Implemented?

The core SFF Alberta team stayed the same, but more staff were added to meet the demand for workshops. People remain the greatest strength of the program; trusting relationships between participants and program staff are the key to engagement.

A total of 25 workshops were delivered to 408 participants between October and February. Of these, 340 (83%) participants were Hutterites from 17 Colonies across Alberta, which is nearly triple the Hutterite uptake from 2015-2016. Demand for workshops was so great SFF Alberta started a waiting list. To-date, 16 Colonies and 3 Local Producer groups are on the list for a workshop next year.

Few revisions were made to the curriculums for Year 1 and Year 3 workshops. In response to Hutterite-identified information needs, substantive changes were made to the 'Substance Misuse' curriculum in Year 2. In response to farmer requests, general information about Bill 6 was added to all Farm Health and Safety sessions.

As in previous years, participants strongly endorsed the Year 1 workshop. While Hutterite participants perceived the Year 2 sessions as relevant and informative, there was less alignment between the Mental Health and Substance Misuse content and Local Producers' needs. Year 3 results also indicated slightly lower levels of learning and relevance when compared to previous years.

Access to information and literacy levels are very different between Local Producer and Hutterite participants. Local Producers tended to view the workshops as a "good reminder," but often knew the information already. Hutterites, on the other hand, report "there is so much we don't know." They hold the workshop information in very high regard and regularly consult – and share – the resource binder.

2.0 What Difference Did SFF Alberta Make?

The physical assessment is consistently the most valuable component of the program. It influences initial attendance and motivates people to return. Following discussion of their personal physical assessment results, most people know what health risks to take action on.

Health and Well-Being

Health and well-being action plan goals from both Local Producers and Hutterites targeted similar lifestyle changes to improve physical and mental health:

- More physical activity
- Healthier eating
- Stress management or reduction.

A key difference between the two populations is that Hutterites intuitively understand that personal health is influenced by family, work setting and Colony-policy contexts. They know that action must occur at these different levels to support individuals' efforts to change. At each workshop, Hutterites develop personal and Colony goals. Most often, these goals reinforce each other. For example, one Colony identified sidewalk levelling as a goal, which improved the built environment for daily walking (individual goal of increased physical activity). Ultimately, the interplay between individual and Colony goals results in a Colony environment that facilitates change.

Farm Safety

Both Local Producers and Hutterites farm safety goals indicate they know improving safety takes more than a personal behaviour change. Local Producers' goals focus on:

- Farm work environment: *"Improve farm by cleaning up work areas" and "Build structure for chemical storage and flammable storage."*
- Group training and putting resources into action: *"Try some monthly tailgate training sessions" and "All employees go to a 2 day first aid course in Edmonton."*

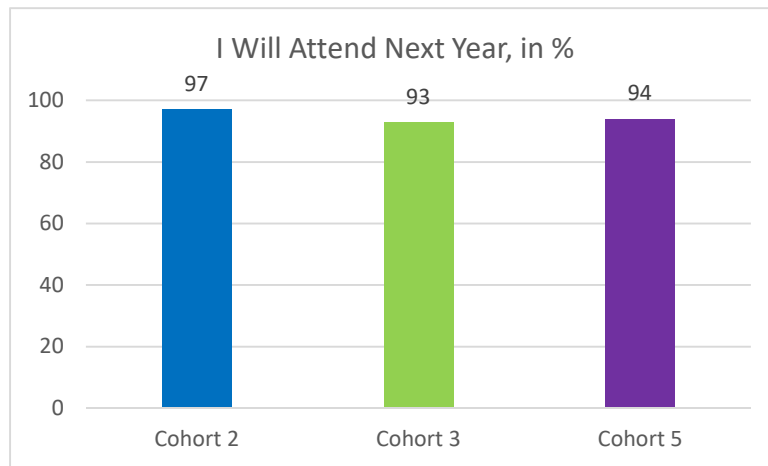
Hutterite goals target:

- Farm work environment: *"There will always be an adult with the kids when they are around machinery."*
- Colony built environment: *"Built fence around the dugout."*
- Unwritten Colony policies: *"No kids on trucks and tractors, it is not allowed anymore." and "One seat, one driver."*

A cumulative effect may occur, as key messages from another Farm Safety Centre program are evident in the Colony safety goals. To-date, all Colony-level goals have been achieved.

Overall, both Hutterite and Local Producer participants continue to understand – and buy into – the connection between health, well-being and farm safety: *"can't take care of the farm if you don't take care of yourself."* Participants continue to believe the workshop is a good investment of their time and overwhelmingly intend to complete the program (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Intention to Complete the Program¹



3.0 Recommendations

3.1 Keep – and strengthen – the focus on Farm Health and Safety.

- Ensure there are practical tools and strategies to help farmers make safety improvements.
- Ensure Bill 6 information comes directly from government stakeholders.

3.2 Facilitate the development of cross-cutting, multi-level Action Plan goals with all participants.

- Intentionally facilitate discussion of strategies to address multiple determinants and settings that influence health.
- Explore perceived relevance and usefulness of resources and referrals in future evaluation.

3.3 Strengthen the annual curriculum review.

- Focus on the Year 2 curriculum during the summer 2017 review, especially the Mental Health and Substance Misuse sections.
- Engage an external content advisor to review the curriculum revisions.

3.4 Consider strategically focusing resource allocation on Hutterite Colonies.

- Offer workshops to Local Producers to complete their program, but allocate future resources to Colonies.

¹ Cohort 1 completed the Year 3 of the program, so this question was not relevant to them.