



MY MEETING NOTES

Unlocking Opportunities in Canadian Agri-food Extension: Highlights from APIRAS & AESA Panel Discussion



In this meeting note, Ayush and Alagu share the highlights from the APIRAS & AESA Panel Discussion organised on July 23, 2025.

CONTEXT

The panel discussion, "Higher Studies and Career Opportunities in Agri-food Extension and Advisory in Canada", was conceptualised by the Asia-Pacific Islands Rural Advisory Services Network (APIRAS) and Agricultural Extension in South Asia (AESAs) to help young students, graduates, and early-career researchers identify suitable academic and professional opportunities within the global agri-food system. It built upon a previous session (a panel discussion on "Beyond Traditional Roles: Career Options for Extension Graduates") that addressed the persistent gap between academic training and practical skills in agricultural extension, particularly in the Indian context, aiming to explore in-demand competencies and the evolving global job market.

The poster features the AESAs and APIRAS logos at the top left. The title "Higher Studies and Career Opportunities in Agri-food Extension and Advisory in Canada" is prominently displayed in red. A large red maple leaf is on the right. Below the title, the date "23rd July 2025" and time "07:00pm (IST)" are listed, along with the "Google Meet" link. A QR code and the text "Scan here to REGISTER YOUR INTEREST" are at the bottom left. The "Our Speakers" section shows four circular portraits with their names and titles: Ataharul Chowdhury (Associate Professor, University of Guelph), Edward Kusi Asafo-Agyei (Senior Policy and Programme Analyst, Government of Manitoba, Canada), Sultana Yeasmin (Assistant Director, Ministry of Social Welfare in Bangladesh and MSc CDE student, University of Guelph), and Kamshajini Raveenthiran (Lecturer, University of Jaffna, Sri Lanka and MSc CDE student, University of Guelph).

THE PANEL

The panel comprised distinguished representatives with diverse backgrounds: Professor Ataharul Chowdhury (Associate Professor, University of Guelph), Mr. Edward Kusi Asafo-Agyei (Senior Policy and Program Analyst with the Government of Manitoba), Ms. Sultana Yeasmin (Assistant Director at the Ministry of Social Welfare in Bangladesh), and Ms. Kamshajini Raveenthiran (Lecturer at the University of Jaffna, Sri Lanka). This mix included a university professor, a Canadian government official, and two emerging professionals from South Asia, offering balanced insights.

THE AUDIENCE

Out of 305 registrants, the majority were students, scholars, faculty, or academic staff, while the remainder were extension professionals. Notably, 90% expressed interest in career opportunities in agricultural and food extension/advisory services in Canada. Their main motivations for participating were to explore job prospects and gain a better understanding of the Canadian agricultural and advisory services system.



Screengrabs from the discussion

PANEL DISCUSSION AND QUESTIONING PROCESS

Dr. Rasheed Sulaiman V (Focal point, APIRAS & AESA) served as the moderator for the panel discussion, guiding the conversation by posing well-structured questions to the panellists. These questions were thoughtfully developed from the responses collected through the registration form. The insights gathered from these responses helped identify the top concerns and expectations of the participants. Based on these, targeted interview questions were prepared and directed to each panellist. Dr. Rasheed facilitated the discussion by addressing the questions to the most relevant panellist, aligning them with the panellist's journey and area of expertise, ensuring an engaging conversation.

THE THEMES OF DISCUSSION

1. Canadian Extension and Advisory Services: Canada's system is pluralistic, decentralized, and innovation-driven, involving public institutions, private enterprises, academic bodies, non-profits, and civil society organisations. No single institution holds exclusive authority. Federal and provincial agencies collaborate with universities (e.g., University of Guelph, University of Manitoba), producer organisations, private firms, and NGOs to meet goals through shared efforts. Public institutions play a crucial role in regulation, coordination, and quality assurance.

2. Evolution of "Agricultural Extension Education" as a discipline: The field has evolved significantly from "Agricultural Extension Education" in the 1990s to "Rural Extension" and then to "Capacity Development and Extension" at the University of Guelph, which is now the only university in Canada

retaining an agricultural extension graduate program. Other interdisciplinary programs like International Development and Rural Planning and Development also produce graduates for extension services.

3. Studying Extension in Canada (University of Guelph's Capacity Development and Extension Program)

- **International Student Presence:** Since 2010, there has been a steady increase, with international students often comprising half or more of the total student population in the past five years.
- **Program Structure:** The MSc program offers a thesis-based and a new course-based stream, focusing on developing skills and competencies for the job market, including an internship course. The PhD in Rural Studies is an interdisciplinary collaborative program.
- **Teaching Methodology:** It contrasts sharply with traditional Global South approaches (syllabus-based, memorisation). The University of Guelph emphasises assignment-based, real-world problem-solving, critical, and reflective learning, with unique challenges for each assignment. Classrooms are highly practical and participatory, fostering soft skills and community engagement. Abundant academic support resources are available.
- **Curriculum Relevance:** The curriculum is regularly revised, with comprehensive program reviews every five years and annual updates to course content to align with current developments in the field.

4. Job Market for Extension Graduates: The traditional "extension agent" role is fading, with new terminologies describing relevant positions; job seekers should focus on job descriptions rather than titles. There are "uncountable" opportunities in Canada's private and non-profit sectors. Core competencies in demand are transferable skills and functional capacities like community mobilisation, engagement, capacity development, and facilitation, rather than rote definitions. The Capacity Development and Extension program equips graduates for diverse domains beyond traditional agriculture, including non-profits, social work, the private sector, value chains, and marketing companies. The program boasts a high employment rate of over 8 to 9 out of 10 students securing jobs after graduation.

GETTING READY TO STUDY AGRICULTURE AND FOOD EXTENSION IN CANADA

If you want to study in the field of extension in Canada, consider these points:

1. **Research Programs Thoroughly:** Explore the programs and universities that are highly relevant and interdisciplinary. Be aware that the University of Guelph is currently the only university in Canada offering a graduate program specifically in agricultural extension.
2. **Meet Academic Requirements:**
 - a. Aim for a minimum B+ grade (Canadian equivalent necessary for admission at the University of Guelph) in your previous academic qualifications.
 - b. If you do not meet the B+ threshold, consider if you have extensive professional experience (typically 5-10 years) in relevant institutions, as this may be considered for alternative admission.
3. **Prepare for Language Proficiency:** Submit scores from recognised international language tests such as IELTS or TOEFL as a key requirement.
4. **Craft Strong Application Materials:** Ensure your CV is comprehensive and your letters of recommendation clearly demonstrate your competencies, motivation, and potential to succeed, especially for PhD applications.
5. **Secure a Supervisor First (for PhD applicants):** For a PhD, the first and most essential step is to secure a supervisor, which often goes hand-in-hand with identifying potential funding opportunities.
6. **Plan Your Finances Strategically:**

- a. Be aware that upfront scholarship and guaranteed funding opportunities are currently limited in Canada, reflecting a global shift.
- b. However, once you are in Canada, opportunities for assistantships or small grants often arise depending on your performance.
- c. Be prepared for the possibility of self-financing your studies, as panellists Sultana and Edward did. Kamshajini was able to secure a highly competitive full scholarship.



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And, once you are there in Canada,

1. Be Proactive and Utilise Resources:

- a. Actively search for internships, research opportunities, and funding. Do not be discouraged by initial rejections; keep trying.
- b. Make full use of university academic support resources such as library services, writing support, and speaking assistance, which are particularly helpful for international students.

2. Embrace New Learning Methodologies: Be ready for a significant shift from memorisation-based learning to an assignment-based, real-world problem-solving approach with unique challenges. Participate actively in group projects and community engagement.

3. Engage with Opportunities: Seek out mentorship programs, collaborative research projects, and participate in relevant summits and events to enhance professional growth and networking, as highlighted by Kamshajini.

Relevant links to explore more about the University of Guelph

MSc Capacity Development & Extension Program	https://graduatestudies.uoguelph.ca/programs/cde
Graduate Studies - Funding Management	https://graduatestudies.uoguelph.ca/current/funding/managing
Graduate Studies - Arrell Scholarships	https://graduatestudies.uoguelph.ca/current/funding/scholarships/internal/arrell-scholarships

HOW TO FIND A JOB IN AGRI-FOOD EXTENSION IN CANADA

1. **Broaden Your Job Search Terminology:** Do not limit your job search strictly to terms like "extension" or "advisory services," as the traditional understanding of an "extension agent" is evolving. Instead, focus on the job description or content, as many positions involve extension-like responsibilities under different titles.

2. **Explore Diverse Sectors:** Opportunities are abundant in Canada's private and non-profit sectors, beyond conventional public sector roles. Actively research these options. Graduates from the University of Guelph's program have secured jobs in government agencies like the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) and Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC).
3. **Develop and Highlight Transferable Skills:** Employers are increasingly seeking functional capacities such as community mobilisation, engagement, capacity development, and facilitation. These operational, delivery-oriented skills are more in demand than theoretical knowledge of extension history. The Capacity Development and Extension degree trains students to apply these skills across various domains.
4. **Consider Diverse Fields:** The training received in Capacity Development and Extension can be applied across a wide range of domains beyond just agriculture, including non-profits, social work, private sector industries, value chains, and marketing companies. While direct entry into fields like veterinary or medical may require additional certifications, other rural development sectors are accessible.
5. **Leverage Internship Opportunities:** If pursuing a course-based Master's, the internship course can directly place students into relevant job roles, and many have successfully secured full-time positions through such placements.
6. **Utilise Specific Job Search Resources:** Make use of relevant online platforms such as:

Platforms	Link
AgriLink	https://agrilink.ca/
Canadian Agriculture Human Resource Council	https://cahrc-ccrha.ca/programs/agri-jobs
AgCareers	https://www.agcareers.com
CharityVillage	https://www.charityvillage.com
WorkCabin	https://www.workcabin.ca
Job Bank Canada	https://www.jobbank.gc.ca
Devex	https://www.devex.com

Additionally, conduct broad Google searches for "extension and advisory service organizations in Canada".

ENDNOTE

This panel discussion enhanced participants' understanding of opportunities available to agriculture and food extension professionals worldwide, with a particular focus on Canada. Despite minor issues during the event, the insights shared by the panellists will help many aspiring agricultural extension professionals from the developing South.

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