



MY MEETING NOTES

Canadian Agri-food & Rural Advisory, Extension and Education (CAREE)

29-31, October 2025

University of Guelph, Canada



In this note, Kamshajini Raveenthiran reflects on her transformative experience at the Canadian Agri-Food and Retail Advisory, Extension, and Education Conference, held at the University of Guelph, Canada, from October 29 to 32, 2025.

CONTEXT

The CAREE Conference is an annual gathering that brings together students, faculty, researchers, and practitioners working in agricultural extension, rural development, and community engagement. I chose to attend because it aligned closely with my academic interests and provided an opportunity to present my research to a broader audience. More importantly, as an international student, I saw this conference as a chance to understand the Canadian advisory ecosystem better and to engage more actively with a community I had been trying to learn about since arriving in Canada in 2023. Starting the conference with this purpose in mind helped me approach each session with intention and curiosity.



Greetings & Opening CAREE 2025

MY PARTICIPATION

I participated in the conference in three capacities: as a participant, a presenter, and a volunteer.

As a participant, I attended sessions covering a wide range of issues, including digital innovation, sustainability, rural development, food system transitions, equity, and Indigenous knowledge. Each presentation offered new insights and broadened my understanding of how research intersects with real-world community needs.

Many discussions resonated deeply with my master's research in Vavuniya, Sri Lanka, especially themes around digital access, trust, and the changing role of advisory services. Listening to others describe their

work helped me see parallels between Canadian and Sri Lankan contexts, particularly the challenges farmers face when navigating digital tools, information systems, and institutional support. This made me feel connected academically and personally, bridging the gap between the field experiences I carried from home and the scholarly conversations happening at the University of Guelph.



Moments from Parallel Session 1: ICT Adoption & Precision Technologies

Presenting my abstract, *“Clients’ Dissatisfaction Voices from the Field: Dairy Farmers’ Digital Journeys in Vavuniya, Sri Lanka,”* was a moment of genuine pride and responsibility. Bringing the lived experiences of Vavuniya dairy farmers into a Canadian academic space felt powerful. I wanted to ensure that their frustrations and insights were communicated respectfully and accurately. The audience’s questions and feedback pushed me to deepen my theoretical framing, especially around trust, risk perception, and digital behaviour. Their engagement helped me refine how I articulate my findings in my thesis and future publications. It was also encouraging to see how relevant the farmers’ stories were to broader conversations on digital agriculture, misinformation risks, and advisory gaps, like issues that cut across geographic boundaries.

Moreover, during the roundtable discussions, I engaged as a learner, carefully listening to the panellists and participants as they described how the Canadian advisory and extension ecosystem functions in practice. These conversations helped me analyse and understand the system more deeply, especially how advisory actors collaborate, respond quickly to change, and support innovation. As I reflected on the discussion, two quotes from the panellists stood out to me as essential learning points.

The first was: **“Speed of tech drives adoption. Adoption drives transformation,”** which highlighted the critical role of timely action and technological readiness in advisory work.

The second was: **“Farming is more than a practice; it is a business at its core,”** which helped me recognise the broader economic and managerial dimensions of farming within the Canadian context.

Hearing these perspectives expanded my understanding and strengthened my appreciation of how advisory services support farmers as both practitioners and business decision-makers.

My volunteer role added an entirely different dimension to the experience. I was actively involved in preparations leading up to the event, participating in team meetings, planning sessions, and discussions that shaped the conference’s flow. These behind-the-scenes activities gave me insight into the amount of coordination and decision-making required for a successful academic event.

On the day of the conference, my responsibilities included note-taking during sessions, guiding participants to the correct rooms, assisting presenters, and managing the capacity development and extension booth. This booth allowed me to interact directly with participants interested in advisory systems and capacity-building initiatives, which aligned closely with my research interests.

These tasks required attentiveness, multitasking, and clear communication, but they also made the experience lively and enjoyable. There was a strong sense of teamwork among the volunteers, and I appreciated the informal bonding moments, such as pizza breaks, quick coffee breaks, and casual hallway conversations, that made the day feel warm and communal. These small interactions made me feel more connected to the people around me and helped me open up socially in ways I never did when I first arrived in Canada. I noticed that I communicated more naturally and comfortably, and I felt less pressure to “perform” academically in every moment. Instead, I was able to enjoy being part of a community. These interactions strengthened my confidence in building relationships and helped me feel more rooted within the university environment.



CAREE Volunteer Team

One of the most valuable outcomes of volunteering was gaining real exposure to advisory networking within the Canadian extension system. Through direct interactions with extensionists, practitioners, researchers, and students interested in agricultural advisory, I gained a clearer understanding of how knowledge flows, how partnerships are built, and how services are delivered to farmers. This exposure was something I had been seeking since I arrived in Canada in 2023. Experiencing it in 2025 felt rewarding and reaffirmed my commitment to contributing to global conversations on extension, advisory services, and rural development.

Volunteering at the conference was not just a list of tasks. It was a learning experience that challenged and strengthened me. Managing the booth, guiding participants, taking notes, and supporting the presenters required quick thinking, coordination, and clear communication. There were moments when I had to multitask under pressure, and I surprised myself with how calmly and effectively I could handle

unexpected situations. These responsibilities helped me recognise qualities in myself that I had not fully acknowledged before, such as leadership, adaptability, and the ability to contribute meaningfully to a team. This experience gave me confidence that I can take on more complex roles in future academic and professional settings.

As a volunteer, I was particularly impressed by how the team collected real-time data during the conference by interviewing both international and Canadian extensionists and gathering participant feedback. Observing this process showed me how effectively the organising team worked together, including managing the audience, engaging participants, and taking every opportunity to learn from the community. The booklet, combined with their professionalism and gracious hospitality, made the entire experience highly informative, well-organised, and genuinely memorable.

MY REFLECTIONS

Overall, the CAREE Conference was not just a single-day event but a milestone in my personal and academic development. It strengthened my confidence as an emerging scholar, allowed me to share my field experiences with a new audience, and provided meaningful insights that will shape my thesis and future research. It also gave me a sense of community, something especially important as an international student navigating a new academic culture.

Reflecting on the entire experience, I see how much the CAREE Conference contributed to my personal transformation. Before attending, I often questioned whether I truly belonged in academic spaces in Canada, after participating fully as a presenter, volunteer, and learner. I left the conference with a stronger sense of identity and purpose. I realised that I am becoming a more confident, resilient, and connected scholar. This experience reminded me that growth happens gradually through conversations, teamwork, challenges, and moments of courage. The conference was more than an event; it was a milestone that helped shape who I am becoming in my academic journey.



Closing the Circle: Reflections from the Final Session at CAREE 2025

Beyond the sessions themselves, I was also impressed by how well the conference was organised for participants. During discussions, many attendees appreciated how the CAREE conference website platform supported the audience: it provided clear information, quick updates, and user-friendly access to schedules and session details. Participants also highlighted the prompt responses from the organising team, the quick guidance they received when they had questions, and the way the platform allowed them to see other participants and build networks even before the conference began. In addition, social media advertisements and online engagement helped generate excitement and visibility for the event. Observing all this gave me a practical example of how a well-designed conference communication system can make participants feel welcomed, informed, and connected.

Another impressive element of the conference was the booklet provided to all participants. It included thoughtful messages from the committee members and the keynote speaker, an overview of their networks and collaborators, and a position paper outlining the group's vision, mission, and the concept of Extension 4.0. The explanation of Extension 4.0, highlighting digital innovation, participatory approaches, systems thinking, and farmer-centred knowledge exchange, was especially relevant to my research interests. In addition, the poster presentations and competition added great value to the event, and the gifts awarded to the winners reflected the organisers' effort to celebrate student contributions.

Another memorable moment was during the dinner gathering, where the conference organisers informed us about their new journal initiative. Hearing this announcement in such a warm, communal environment was truly impressive. As a participant, I felt inspired and proud to be part of a team and community that is actively building new academic platforms. It made me realise that the CAREE community is not only hosting events but also shaping future scholarly conversations, and I am fortunate to be part of this growing network.



Celebration of shared vision in the CAREE dinner and inauguration of the CAREE journal 2025

Key Takeaways from the [CAREE](#) Conference

- **Exposure to Canadian Extension Actors:** I finally met extensionists, practitioners, and professionals whose work I had previously only read about. This direct networking reshaped my understanding of advisory systems in Canada.
- **Enhanced Understanding of Advisory Networks:** Interactions at the conference helped me see how extension flows through partnerships between universities, government, and community organisations.
- **Sense of Belonging:** As an international student, the conference made me feel more integrated into the academic and social life at the University of Guelph.
- **Valuable Conference Materials:** The booklet with committee messages, networks, and the Extension 4.0 vision. It was informative and impressive.

- **Growth in Academic Confidence:** Presenting my abstract strengthened my ability to communicate field experiences and theoretical insights effectively.
- **Practical Experience Through Volunteering:** Managing the booth, guiding participants, and joining planning meetings taught me organisational, teamwork, and communication skills.
- **Poster Competition:** Engaging poster presentations with thoughtful gifts for winners highlighted student contributions.
- **Team Data Collection:** Observing the team interview extensionists during the event demonstrated strong teamwork and strategic learning.
- **Warm Hospitality:** The welcoming environment, shared meals, and positive interactions created a strong sense of belonging as an international student.

ENDNOTE

Participating in the CAREE Conference at the University of Guelph was one of the most enriching and transformative experiences of my academic journey as an international graduate student. It sharply contrasted with my early experiences in Canada, when, in 2023, I had minimal exposure to extensionists and advisory actors and mostly relied on course readings, webinars, and online materials. I often felt like an outsider observing a system I did not yet fully understand. The 2025 CAREE Conference completely changed this. I finally met researchers, practitioners, community partners, and extension professionals across disciplines, giving me a grounded and practical understanding of how the Canadian advisory landscape operates. It was also at this conference that I realised how much I had grown emotionally. Whereas I once felt hesitant, quiet, and unsure of my place, I now let go of self-doubt, talk confidently, ask questions, and participate fully without fear of being “out of place.” This shift from feeling like an outsider to feeling genuinely included was one of the most empowering parts of the experience.

Kamshajini Raveenthiran is a PhD student at the University of Guelph and a lecturer at the University of Jaffna, whose work focuses on digital extension, rural innovation, and sustainable agri-food systems. Her research aims to enhance advisory services and promote farmer-centered development. She has gained international experience through organizations like LRIC, CIRCLE, the CARE Sufficiency Project at Sciences Po, and the Linnaeus-Palme Program at SLU. Kamshajini was an Arrell Scholar and actively contributed to cross-disciplinary initiatives such as WELL-E (raveentk@uoguelph.ca)

AESA Secretariat: Centre for Research on Innovation and Science Policy (CRISP)

Road No 10, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad 500034, India

www.aesanetwork.org

Email: aesanetwork@gmail.com