



**Agricultural Management Institute
AMI #009
Farm Business Awareness Program
Final Report**

November 2006

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Submitted by:

**ACC Farmers' Financial
100 Stone Road West
Suite 101
Guelph, Ontario
N1G 5L3**



Submitted to:

Agricultural Management Institute
Agricultural Adaptation Council
Ontario AgriCentre
Suite 103, 100 Stone Road West
Guelph, ON N1G 5L3

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**Final Report
Farm Business Awareness Program – AMI #009**

Enclosed is the final report for AMI #009 submitted by ACC Farmers' Financial (ACFF).

On behalf of ACFF, I would like to thank the Agricultural Management Institute (AMI) for the funding support provided to the project.

As a result of the project, ACFF has experienced a cultural shift in thinking and adopted the farm business management theme as a cornerstone in our core values.

The funding by AMI has advanced our role in promoting good business management practices to our clients and producers in general.

Thank you to the AMI board for their support and co-operation on this project.

Yours truly,

Brian Hughes
CEO and General Manager
ACC Farmers' Financial
100 Stone Road West
Suite 101
Guelph, Ontario
N1G 5L3

Final Report Sections

- Section 1** – **Final Report Outline**
- Section 2** – **SWOT and GAP Analysis**
- Section 3** – **Market Research**
- Section 4** – **Meeting, Let's Talk DVD, Relationship Development and Newsletter Activity Matrix**
- Section 5** – **Implementation and Activity Results**
- Section 6** – **Farm Business Planning Producer Survey (separate PDF)**



Demonstrating the pathway to farm business management bliss...

AMI #009 - Farm Business Management Awareness Project

Section 1 - Final Report Outline

- **SWOT and Gap Analysis** – The foundation for our plan and strategies to create awareness evolved from a look at the current status of farm business management awareness. From this we identified the possible opportunities and challenges that exist with awareness of farm business resources. Information from industry was gained by developing strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats and doing gap analysis with several industry sources.
- These results are documented and referenced and have been used to develop strategies, tactics, recommendations, and next steps for creating awareness and uptake in this report.
- **Market Research and Education** – Education and market research was conducted on several levels. We leveraged industry contacts to gain insight into current awareness activities and potential opportunities.
- We also identified the need for qualitative market research on the barriers, sensitivities, and opportunities related to agricultural business management skill development. This is personal - a component of farm management that producers feel uncomfortable with and almost fearful. To address this we need to know why, how and who. More on how producers feel, why they aren't using farm business management resources, who they are influenced by, and what would motivate them to take action.
- Results from industry and producer market research are documented and referenced. Analysis of results and trends identified were used to generate recommendations and next steps for a strategic marketing plan, data/information strategy and incentive strategy.
- **Planning** – We used results from the SWOT assessments (opportunities and areas for improvement identified above) and gap analyses, education/market research and experiential results to guide campaign implementation. Activities and strategies are documented in a matrix that could form the basis of a strategic marketing plan for farm business management resources in Ontario.
- **Implementation** – We have turned activities and action plans into client awareness. And we have also gained experience to build a recommended approach for the future.

- Our approach is documented with examples, pitfalls, and successes. This experience was used in developing recommendations for a strategic marketing plan.
- **Analysis and Feedback Loop** – Qualitative and quantitative results against farm business management awareness project objectives are discussed in this report. We've also assessed the "assessment system" to build recommendations and methods to measure results against plan and strategy objectives, to form benchmarks and adjust planning for continuous improvement.



Section 2 - SWOT and Gap Analysis

The foundation for our plan and strategies to create awareness evolved from a look at the current status of farm business management awareness. From this we identified the possible opportunities and challenges that exist with awareness of farm business resources. This process also guided the direction of our work as we gained insight into the challenges and opportunities that existed – as well as potential strategies that would support opportunities and meet challenges. Information from industry was gained by developing strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats and doing gap analysis with several industry sources. Meetings and discussion was pursued throughout the process as we determined the need to gain insight. Here are the results of our meetings:

May 17th Champions Meeting

On May 17th ACC Farmers' Financial hosted a working lunch at the Agri-Centre in Guelph with 35 executive staff participants from various farm groups to understand the industry's level of awareness and commitment to awareness of farm business management on behalf of their membership. This was an excellent opportunity to develop a better understanding of gaps, opportunities and challenges related to advancing farm business management awareness. Meeting objectives follow:

1. Inspire and motivate farm organizations to communicate and promote farm business management. Create an atmosphere that will involve adult learning and self-discovery that will answer:
 - What is farm business management?
 - What is in it for me (my membership)?
 - How do I get involved?
2. Create greater awareness of ACCFF and reasons why they are advocating farm business management awareness.
3. Use meeting to conduct information gathering
 - Tell us programs/tools needed
 - Tell us what they are doing to fill need
 - Tell us how to communicate with their growers

SWOT and Gap Analysis – Section 2

4. Close the loop

- Close the loop between self-identified needs and programs currently available (database)
- Add FBM programs initiated by Champions to our database
- Share and compare communications plans

Reference: FBM Section 2 Appendix 1 May 17th Invitation & agenda

At the interactive working lunch participants:

- developed a list of risks that their members encounter
- listened to a short presentation on ACCFF and campaign objectives by Len Davies
- listened to a short presentation on awareness tactics and strategies by Julie Harlow
- worked in a group to answer a series of questions
- shared answers with all participants

Champions' Meeting Results and Conclusions:

Risks being faced by producers:

- Economic viability with current market prices
- Weather
- Compliance with regulations
- Health and safety
- Rising costs
- Globalization
- Disconnected consumer
- Information management challenges
- Changing trends
- Returns against asset values
- Succession
- Declining political clout – rural issue
- Bio-security – animal health
- Urban growth and development
- Changing industry structure
- Making decisions

Conclusions:

1. Risks and challenges being faced by producers today are multi-faceted and complex
2. Producers feel overwhelmed and out of their element in the desk chair
3. Need a team of advisors to help and producers are reluctant to ask

Questions for working lunch:

1. You know that many of your members could use help with managing their farm businesses. What tools or services would help them do this better?
2. What tools or services are you already offering to your members?

SWOT and Gap Analysis – Section 2

Highlights from Working Lunch Questions:

Many common tools or services were presented by the six working groups. All results are listed in the meeting notes referenced above. Highlights include need for succession planning, retirement planning, market access, marketing, cost management, price risk management, and human resources management.

Many farm groups currently provide programs and services to help their members mitigate risks and fill some needs expressed in comments from the first question. Many participants did not know what other groups were doing. Many were surprised at and unaware of the resources available through AAFC, OMAFRA, CFBMC, and others.

Comments also highlighted the need to address the challenges and barriers associated with awareness and uptake of farm business management programs. Challenges and barriers outlined related to **accessibility, urgency, communication, motivators, collaboration, information overload, and industry leadership.**

Conclusions:

1. **Need to create urgency and motivation**
2. **Need to increase accessibility**
3. **Need to collaborate in marketing and communications**
4. **Need industry leadership**

Questions for Small Group Discussion:

1. How are you going to be able to use the “Farm Business Management Awareness Project” within your organization to help your members? What will you do?
2. How should we communicate this program to your members and others in the agricultural community? Should we use newspapers, email, internet, or radio? Please provide specific suggestions

Highlights from Small Group Discussion Questions:

The groups expressed the need for more collaboration. Resources are somewhat constrained making a collaborative effort very attractive to “use existing information in our materials instead of re-inventing the wheel” as one participant suggested. Collaboration was a recurrent theme.

Another recurrent theme was the need for sensitivity in communications approach. One participant suggested we “target it as “leveraging your business planning resources” to producers. It would acknowledge that producers are already planning.” It was also suggested that fear tactics don’t work with something you are afraid of or overwhelmed with – suggesting we work to facilitate messaging collaboratively and strategically through farm groups and using proven tactics such as farm radio or print publications. Frequency is important, and to the extent possible, personal contact is important.

Conclusions:

1. **A strategic and collaborative effort is needed**
2. **Sensitivity in communications is important**
3. **Personal/relationship oriented approach is desirable**

SWOT and Gap Analysis – Section 2

4. Need overall marketing and communications plan for farm groups

Other Input:

Comments and feedback from industry members at or in anticipation of our May 17th meeting necessitated further discussions with key industry members like the Ontario Agricultural Business Association, Centre for Rural Leadership and Canadian Farm Business Management Council.

May 17th Ontario Agricultural Business Association Meeting

Early on May 17th Julie Harlow met with Dave Battenham, Executive Director of OABA to gain opinions and ideas on resource gaps and to create awareness of the project.

Dave is a farm business management advocate. He sees the benefit of advancing farm business management awareness to producers, his members, and the industry. He has many ideas on how to increase awareness and uptake in farm business management programs. One suggestion was to develop a certification for farm business management. Courses offered by OATI, CFBMC or others would contribute credits towards certification. The motivation to gain certification would be discounted financing rates, or services charges. This would require the cooperation of institutions that finance producers. It would also require cooperation between farm educators to develop a curriculum and certification process.

Another suggestion was to tie farm business management program uptake to access of business risk management programs, i.e. CFBAS = CAIS.

We also discussed the ideas of forming a coalition of both public and private organizations that are involved in farm business management education or services. The coalition would form the structure and facilitate working together with common objectives to create communications, marketing and leadership synergies in farm business management in Ontario.

Conclusions:

1. **OABA members see benefits of advancing farm business management awareness**
2. **Producers need motivation to seek training and to access programs i.e. certification for producers that seek to advance their skills, or connect to access of business risk management programs (CFBAS = CAIS)**
3. **Formation of coalition of public and private organizations involved in farm business management education and services need to facilitate advancement of farm business management awareness and skills development**

May 31st Canadian Farm Business Management Council Meeting

On May 31st Julie Harlow met with Wendell Joyce, Executive Director of the Canadian Farm Business Management Council to discuss the project and gain the Council's participation.

Wendell observed that the farm crisis has helped some to dig deeper, look for programs, and take action. Saskatchewan, for example is well down the road with Canadian Agricultural Skills Service. He commented that a lot of people are feeling powerless, and because of this it often starts with a spark – now we have to determine what the spark is. I reported that our findings suggested that market research was required to get that kind of qualitative information. Wendell

SWOT and Gap Analysis – Section 2

was very interested in our proposed market research project top-up – they too feel that there is a gap in qualitative information around awareness and uptake of farm business management resources by producers. He was interested in collaborating on research as well as the outcome if proposal accepted

Wendell also offered approach and tactical suggestions for our awareness campaign. He feels that farmers hearing from farmers is effective, but many producers don't like to "flaunt" their management skills especially in the present environment, so this may present a challenge. He also suggested that stories of challenge and adversity are valuable – producers need to know what others went through, that set-backs may be part of the process. Wendell also observed that peer learning is an effective approach, as producers like to have somebody they can identify with.

Conclusions:

- 1. Many producers are feeling powerless, and because of this it often starts with a spark – now we have to determine what the spark is – qualitative market research is required**
- 2. CFBMC interested in collaboration and working with Ontario organizations to advance farm business management awareness and skill development**

June 9th Centre for Rural Leadership Meeting

On June 9th Julie Harlow met with Rob Black, Executive Director of the Centre for Rural Leadership to gain their input and participation in the farm business management awareness project.

Rob recently joined the Centre for Rural Leadership as Executive Director. One of the feature programs of the Centre is the Advanced Agriculture Leadership Program. Future direction of the Ontario Agriculture Training Institute (OATI) has also come under responsibility of the Centre. At present all OATI programs are on hold. The Board of the Centre for Rural Leadership will undertake a strategic visioning process in order to determine the future of OATI. Rob is very interested in the process, strategies and tactics that we are undertaking in this project as he sees potential application to OATI's future.

We also discussed a proposed meeting on June 22nd to discuss the concept of a centralized portal, or method of facilitating access to programs via web-tool. Rob mentioned 'farm choices' a profiling tool developed by OATI to help develop an outline of their business, with potential to stream clients to training, programs, and resources in future.

Conclusions:

- 1. Results of this project could present opportunities to the future of the Ontario Agricultural Training Institute (OATI)**
- 2. OATI assets and resources have potential application to strategies and tactics for farm business management awareness and skills development both in Ontario and nationally**

SWOT and Gap Analysis – Section 2

How do we do it?

Suggestions:

- Business information bundles
- Establish small working committees to review key issues
- Portal good for consolidating information, but need to include non web users
- Wealth of information and resources not being engaged and even the exchange of information within groups on this project is a good step. A need to take the national lead and provincial lead
- One challenge – marketing is critical to get improved uptake. Communication efforts seem effective, but improve marketing
- Value needs to be defined to producer to facilitate uptake, uptake not happening
- Awareness fine and good, need to create incentive strategy to pull people

Action Plan:

All agreed that collaboration in the Farm Business Planning Awareness Campaign would be a worthwhile initiative. It was agreed that several actions can be taken to work towards a co-operative effort in farm management information.

Next steps from the June 22 meeting are summarized as follows:

- Create a definition of a portal and how it would function
- That several small strategic committees out of this group be formed to contribute ideas and workable solutions to recommend on how to improve access to farm business planning. Note: See working committee descriptive in next section.
- That the working committees meet by conference call in August. Then another meeting of this complete group in Guelph with a web link for off site participants to form recommendations for future

Conclusions:

- 1. Challenges and barriers to advancing farm business management skills more strategic than tactical (like a web portal) they include:**
 - **Marketing and communications**
 - **Information management**
 - **Incentives**
- 2. Collaboration is critical**
- 3. Need provincial and national leadership**

August 23 - SWOT Analysis of Marketing, Information Management and Incentives

On August 23rd working committees met via conference call to analyze the current status of marketing, information management and incentives. The working committees were small and strategic and offered recommendations on actions to promote access to farm business planning information. The committees were defined and coordinated by ACCFF and met by conference

SWOT and Gap Analysis – Section 2

call to develop a Strengths Weaknesses Opportunity and Threats (SWOT) analysis for the following strategic issues:

- 1) **Marketing and Communications:** Provide a vision for a collaborative strategic marketing and communications plan for farm business management. How can groups work together on marketing and communications to achieve objectives.
- 2) **Data Management:** Determine how we can use producer data to:
 - ❖ Identify trends and risks
 - ❖ Develop training and management strategies
 - ❖ Aid in farm business management decision making
- 3) **Creating Incentives:** To provide advice and consultation on the use of incentives to create a pull to various farm business planning services and to offer innovative ideas on how the various organizations that provide these services can work together.

SWOT Summary - Marketing and Communications Working Group

Marketing and Communications: Provide a vision for a collaborative strategic marketing and communications plan for farm business management in Ontario. How can groups work together on marketing and communications to achieve objectives?

Strengths

- Good quality programs
- Motivated farm organizations
- Strengths not immediately apparent
- Still getting up to speed on assets of OATI, but knows there is some value there when it comes to farm business management resources
- OATI – webinars and hardcopy resources developed including Farm Choices (engages in profiling producers)

Weaknesses

- Low program uptake
- Piece meal marketing and communications programs
- A lot of small organizations that do not have resources to develop their own training resources
- Multiple one off's (no consistency/repetition)
- No strategic marketing plan or multi-year strategy
- Lack of funding for regional education programs like OATI
- Making an upfront investment in resources (in hope of getting funding) is difficult for small groups like CRL who are fully engaged in the funded portion of their business (AALP)
- No sustainability
- Feels too many organizations and layers as it – therefore does not feel the solution is to create another organization

Opportunities

- Work together to develop strategic marketing plan for industry to achieve objectives
- To develop relationships with other farm organizations to create cross awareness

SWOT and Gap Analysis – Section 2

- One way to start would be to have a series of get-togethers, regular but brief to create an opportunity to start the discussion

Threats

- Status quo
- Competition between organizations
- Another layer not attractive – 345 rural organizations in Ontario already

Conclusions:

1. Ample good quality resources available
2. Need a strategic marketing and communications plan to achieve objectives
3. 18-24 months needed to implement a marketing plan to achieve results
4. Champion needed; Farm business planning advocate in Ontario
5. Should be collaborative effort with organizations and private sector (business approach)
6. Business influencer segment should be included in strategic marketing and communications plan
7. Should also investigate other opportunities such as embedding concept into production information transfer

SWOT Summary - Information Management Working Group

Data Management: Determine how to use producer data and existing resource materials to:

- ❖ Identify trends and risks
- ❖ Develop training and management strategies
- ❖ Aid in farm business management decision making

Analysis of the current strengths related to information management including tools and strategies available to assist producers in trend and risk identification, training and management strategies and decision-making aids. Gaps were identified under weaknesses.

Strengths:

- I.e. Information available to producers is increasing exponentially

Weaknesses:

- Information available to producers is increasing exponentially

Potential information and data management opportunities to facilitate producer farm business management skills are listed under opportunities. Challenges that may exist to take advantage of opportunities are listed under threats.

Opportunities:

- Web technology

Threats:

- Status quo

SWOT and Gap Analysis – Section 2

Conclusions:

1. Accessibility a challenge
2. Producers have information overload making tools such as an agricultural business portal a potential part of the solution
3. Also perceive that producers may find it difficult to apply information and tools in their own decision making
4. Benefits to producers need to be apparent and communicated
5. Coordination of information needed i.e. Farm Data Team
6. More investigation needed

SWOT Summary – Creating Incentives Working Group

Creating Incentives: Provide advice and consultation on the use of incentives to create a pull to various farm business planning services and offer ideas on how the various organizations that provide these services can work together to achieve this.

Incentives and dis-incentives currently available that increase/decrease awareness and uptake of farm business management in Ontario are listed under strengths and weakness.

Strengths:

- Low cost for producers to engage Canadian Farm Business Advisory Services

Weaknesses:

- Current incentives not working to satisfaction

Potential incentive opportunities that will motivate program uptake and improved farm business management skills are listed under opportunities. Challenges that may exist to take advantage of these opportunities are listed under threats.

Opportunities:

- New APF discussions on-going

Threats:

- Producers slow to change

Conclusions:

1. Question whether current incentives are working
2. Producers are frustrated with current incentives
3. Tangible benefits lacking
4. Weak due to focus on risk management programs
5. Need further analysis to develop and define gaps
6. Questions whether advisors are aware of programs
7. Tied to communications issues
8. Need an FBM facilitator for Ontario
9. Need to explore business incentive link to private sector

SWOT and Gap Analysis – Section 2

September 6th - Where to from here?

On September 6th we held our final meeting with farm business management stakeholder groups to discuss findings, conclusions, and next steps for marketing and communications, information/data management, and incentives strategies. Here are the results of the discussions:

Marketing and Communications

- We preach more to the converted at this time, need to reach those yet to be converted using non-traditional methods.
- Example used to get increased awareness with those yet to discover farm business management resources is to piggy-back with hardware supplier customer meeting such as John Deere
- Another suggestion was to piggy-back business management information with production information. Idea is that producers are comfortable working with production information therefore would extent that mind-set to farm business management if an extension or grouped with production management info or tools.
- Ensure that farm business management resources are communicated and facilitated strategically through tax planners, lenders, accountants and other farms business advisors and influencers
- Lenders (Canadian Bankers Association, FCC) influential prospective partners to communicate to advisors
- Acknowledge trend away from medium sized producer to more polarized sized producers. Trend towards small or larger operations. Small producer may have off-farm income and objective of having a farm business is life-style
- Other statistics noted: 70-80% of producers (under age 40) have computers
- Acknowledge that we need a champion in Ontario to continue momentum of farm business management awareness project
- Wendell Joyce shared that potential solutions are about to be explored in Quebec as they advocate an increase in farm business management awareness
- Also acknowledge that we need a strategic plan to drive marketing and communications with a sustained effort of 18-24 months to get results
- Network and relationships initiated through this project should be continued as many opportunities for synergies exist and should be explored

Data Management:

- Acknowledge that recommendations and next steps for this strategy are less clear maybe due to overlap with other strategies i.e. portal could be considered a marketing and communications tactic
- Feel that a farm business management resource portal would be extremely impactful with under 40 segment
- It was proposed that specific recommendations may be too early in evolution of a data management strategy – next step could be gap analysis to examine what we have, what works/doesn't work first before developing strategy
- This recommendation re-iterated: what have we got, what are the opportunities that can be access

SWOT and Gap Analysis – Section 2

- It was suggested that the industry needs coordination of information gathering and management in order to create info management efficiencies across the value chain
- This tool could be relatively simple from the user prospective. Challenge would be to coordinate the players
- Other challenge includes trust and security

Incentives:

- Initially discussed motivation as an incentive
- Jason Bent suggested that we add sensitivity to frustration being experienced by producers therefore we should be extra careful with positioning incentives tied to skills development so as to not suggest that producers are bad managers
- Also acknowledged the power of farmers speaking to farmers to relay their experiences and motivate others
- Producers are concerned about today – look to advisors for solution for longer-term
- CAFA advisors (and beyond) can give some wheels programs and benefits to provide motivation
- Government, industry and private sector each have a role to play

SWOT and gap Summary Conclusions:

- **Need a strategic collaborative communications plan implemented for 18-24 months to achieve results.**
- **Communications should be a collaborative effort with organizations and private sector (business approach). Focus on clear, sensitive, value oriented communications.**
- **Should also investigate other opportunities such as embedding concept into production information transfer**
- **Producers have information overload making tools such as an agricultural business portal a potential part of the solution**
- **Tangible benefits lacking must be clarified and appropriately communicated**

Appendices

- Appendix 1 May 17th Invitation Champions meeting
- Appendix 2 May 17th Power point presentation
- Appendix 3 May 17th Meeting notes
- Appendix 4 May 17th Call report – Ontario Agri-Business Association
- Appendix 5 May 31st Call report – Canadian Farm Business Management Council
- Appendix 6 June 9th Call report – Centre for Rural Leadership
- Appendix 7 June 22nd Invitation and agenda - FBM portal discussion
- Appendix 8 June 22nd Participants' organization descriptions
- Appendix 9 June 22nd Meeting notes
- Appendix 10 August 23rd Invitation – Three Strategy Discussion
- Appendix 11 SWOT Outlines for Three Strategy Discussions
- Appendix 12 August 18th SWOT Discussion with Rob Black
- Appendix 13 Sept 6th Three Strategy Discussion Notes – Where to from here?
- Appendix 14 Sept 6th Power point presentation



Section 3 - Market Research

Producer Market Research

We were successful in gaining the support of commodity organizations to take action to make their members aware of the benefits of farm business planning programs. This point was well illustrated at our May 17, 2006 Champions Meeting, which was held with farm organization executive. The meeting was a working facilitated session with one key outcome being the pursuit of additional market research with producers. Our original proposal was to hold information meetings and other methods to engage producers (i.e. mail survey). ACC Farmers' Financial followed through on a number of these original strategies, but the key take away from the May 17, 2006 meeting (and many meetings after) is that **additional market research is required with a personal approach**. This research should be qualitative in nature to measure opinions, attitudes and motivation. Results will also help to determine high impact marketing and communications strategies to continue to engage producers in farm business management.

The input and direction we received indicated that additional information on farmer perceptions and attitudes toward farm business planning would be required. During the project we collected good input from the farm organizations, advisors, and some ACCFF customers, but needed to confirm these insights and test messaging that can address this topic in the farm community. The topic of farm business planning is very personal and private. The recommended research approach was one on one phone interviews and in person visits with producers at their farm. Focus groups and mail survey would not be as effective in this situation.

The results, highlights, and recommendations appear in Farm Business Planning Producer Survey Report, completed by AdFarm for ACC Farmers' Financial.

Advisor Market Research

Farm Business Advisors have a great deal of influence on the perception and attitudes of public and private farm business management resources with their producer clients. As well as creating awareness the Advisor can influence producers to take action. Logically this is one key to advance development of farm business management skills

Purpose of Advisor Market Research

We had the benefit of gaining first perceptions from Advisors at our May 17th, 2006 meeting. Their perceptions were in line with that of farm organization participants i.e. awareness of available farm business management resources was limited. To test opinions and attitudes further, we worked with Barry Fraser, a farm business advisor located near Chatham, Ontario.

Market Research – Section 3

Barry Fraser personally interviewed six farm business advisors in the Chatham-Kent area. The purpose of the research interviews were:

- To gather information from farm advisors re: behaviors, opinions, attitudes, and beliefs
- To determine the level of knowledge/awareness advisor's clients have about farm business planning resources
- To understand advisors and their clients' experiences with farm business management.
- To test messages, terminology and delivery of future farm business management products and services to farm clients

Advisor responses to questions about farm business planning programs and resource **awareness:**

- Producers are generally unaware of available programs and resources
- Producers don't know where to start
- Producers most likely would not access programs/resources even if they knew about them
- Producers understand the value that production management brings to their operation, but generally are not clear on the value that farm business planning/management brings
- Advisors see this attitude changing, but find producers still uncomfortable with concept
- Producers are comfortable with accessing professional advice, especially related to production and taxes

Advisor perceptions to producers' skill level, prevalence, and circumstances related to applying specific farm business management/planning practices:

- Relationship management skill level: average
- Staff management skill level: average to above
- Financial management skill level: below average to average
- Risk management skill level: average to above average
- Marketing skill level: average to below average
- Innovation: above average to average
- Production: above average
- Strategic or business planning application level: below average
- Succession planning application level: below average to average
- Prevalence of formal business plan: no formal plans to very few
- Future plans to create formal business plan: Don't anticipate business plans to be established unless forced by circumstances
- Circumstances that would cause Producers to create a formal business plan include: financial hardship, death, at request of bank, at request of children
- Perception that producers feel farm business planning is time consuming and overwhelming

Market Research – Section 3

Conclusions:

- 1. There is a lack of producer and advisor awareness of farm business planning programs and resources**
- 2. Producers (and some advisors) think there are many programs available but don't know where to start**
- 3. Producers are generally comfortable accessing professional advice, especially for production and taxes**
- 4. Producers are innovators and very good at production, but need to progress in area of farm business planning**

Appendix:

Appendix 1 Advisor Interviews



Section 4 - Campaign Implementation and Activity Matrix

This is an important project to ACC Farmers' Financial due to the potential benefits for our customers. Improving business management awareness and skills is an important driver to survival and prosperity in farming today.

Early last year I was related some anecdotal results on a study done by a major Canadian bank on why farm businesses do not participate in succession planning (a component of farm business management). Results show that farmers felt in control of most aspects of their business except when it related to farm business planning. They felt very much out of their element almost fearful. They did not know who to engage, where to start, or what the process involved. Due to these results the solution needed to be very relationship oriented, consultative and facilitative.

We took this information as relevant when developing this proposal. Our strategies and tactics are high on relationship, consultative and facilitative.

Let's Talk – a program initiated through this project was developed to increase producer awareness of the many tools and resources developed by government; farm organizations, educational institutions and the agriculture industry that can help mitigate farm business risks.

The goal of the Let's Talk program is to increase the awareness of farm business practices so that more farms prosper and grow. Let's Talk communications are designed to get the conversation going by raising producers' awareness of how they can get started and tap into the wealth of knowledge to the benefit of their farm business.

The attitude is casual and personal in order to open up the conversation of an uncomfortable and personal topic.

Here is an overview of the **strategies and tools** that were used to achieve project objectives:

1. Worked with industry to identify the need for strategy and collaboration and developed a vision for a collaborative strategic marketing and communications plan for farm business management. We identified how groups can work together on marketing and communications to create synergies and meet objectives.
2. Worked with industry to identify the need for this strategy and determined the next steps for efficient and effective use of producer data to:
 - Identify trends and risks
 - Develop training and management strategies

Campaign Implementation and Activity Matrix – Section 4

- Aid in farm business management decision-making

3. Worked with industry to identify the need for incentives and determined the next steps for the use of incentives to create a pull to various farm business planning services. We also offered ideas on how the various organizations that provide these services can work together to advance this important motivating factor.
4. Developed and distributed a Farm Business Planning 5 minute video (farmers speaking from experience to farmers) to create awareness and get the discussion started
5. Provided ACC Farmers' Financial customer service staff with tools to promote awareness with current and prospective customers
6. Delivered information via direct mail to increase ACCFF customer awareness – mailed 5200 Farm Business Planning videos and how-to-cards to ACC Farmers' Financial customers on July 27th.
7. Enhanced producer meetings and created additional awareness – with Len Davies, a farm business management expert with over 30 years experience. Len presented at several producer and influencer meetings including: Canadian Association of Farm Advisor's Ontario Annual meeting, OSCIA Twilight meetings in Nipissing and Temiskaming, and CAFA Chapter meetings in Kent/Essex.
8. Delivered information via direct mail to farm groups and encouraged use with staff, board, and membership – Farm Business Planning videos, how-to-cards, and project backgrounders went to over 50 industry groups in August
9. Worked with others such as Canadian Association of Farm Advisors to develop a vision and plan for creating awareness with farm advisor influencers.
10. Canadian Farm Business Management Council, Ontario Federation of Agriculture, The Centre for Rural Leadership and many others to create synergies, and an awareness network.

Activity Matrix

The activity matrix reports activities related to awareness strategies and tactics implemented for the project. Many strategies and tactics were used for multiple interest groups or market segments. They were re-tailored to ease up-take for each market segment. We segmented our target audience as follows:

- Producers and growers
- Farm organizations (approx. 40 organizations)
- Advisors
- Industry groups
- Farm business planning stakeholder groups
- Media
- ACC Farmers' Financial

The matrices show some areas of concentration or a lot of activity around certain tactics or market segments. Some of this was deliberate, some happenstance. For example we deliberately distributed the Let's Talk DVD widely due to the expected impact of this tactic. We did not plan or anticipate engaging in as much activity with CAFA as we did. We revised our plan to work closely with CAFA due to project findings demonstrating the strong influence many advisors have with their farm clients. These finding suggested that advisors can get their farm clients to sign up for programs, resources, and training. So it made sense to create awareness with advisors to link to producers. CAFA also saw greater awareness of farm business

Campaign Implementation and Activity Matrix – Section 4

management programs as an opportunity for value-added communications with their members. These factors worked together to ease the activity.

All findings suggested that collaboration was required therefore meetings were an appropriate tactics to establish relationships and gauge direction for the campaign.

Another area of concentration of activity was around market research, SWOT and gap analysis. This is due to the lack on information on feelings and perceptions of farm business management from producer and influencers (all other industry segments).

Tactical conclusions and recommendations will be presented in Section 5.



Section 4

Meeting, Let's Talk DVD, Relationship Development and Newsletter Activity Matrix

Market Segment	Meetings	Let's talk DVD	Relationship development	Newsletter
Producers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OSCIA Twilight meetings in Nipissing and Temiskaming 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mailed to 5300 ACC Farmers' Financial clients 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Worked through producer groups to develop relationships with producers/growers • Broadened scope of relationship with ACCFF customers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ACC Farmers' Financial Fall Newsletter "Let's Talk Edition" delivered to 5300 producers in September
Farm Organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May 17th Champions meeting • Sept 27th Market research results webinar 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mailed with backgrounder to 50 farm organizations in Ontario • 110 copies of DVD distributed to OFA directors and regional reps 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Used all tactics outlined here to develop relationships as well as: • Group specific strategies (i.e. OFA) • Interaction during other project work 	
Industry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May 17th 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Industry groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Made initial 	

	<p>Champions meeting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OABA meeting with Julie Harlow 	<p>included in above</p>	<p>contact with OABA</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular updates and invitations to participate distributed to OABA 	
<p>Farm business management stakeholder groups</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May 17th Champions meeting • Jun 22nd Portal strategy meeting • Aug 23rd Gap analysis meeting • Sept 6 next steps for FBM development strategies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DVD stakeholder groups • Additional copies provided to OMAFRA for their staff (40 copies) • Provided 100 copies for AMI Think Tank 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broadened scope of relationship with OMAFRA, AAFC, FCC, OFA, Farms.com and others • Established new relationships with CFBMC, CRL, OIA, and CAFA • Anticipate many new partnerships/ventures to develop as a result 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inserted CASS article in ACCFF fall newsletter to 5300 producers
<p>Farm Advisors</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May 17th Champions meeting • CAFA conference June 1st • Jun 22nd Portal strategy meeting • Aug 23rd Gap analysis meeting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DVD mailed to 160 CAFA members in Ontario 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ON CAFA conf sponsor • Advisor market research proposal and implementation • Proposal partners for CAFA TV 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project discussed in CAFA enewsletter

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sept 6 next steps 			
ACC Farmers' Financial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Senior staff attended May 17th Champions' meeting • FBM project all staff update meeting and backgrounder, Aug 3rd • CAFA conf June 1st • Senior staff: Jun 22nd Portal strategy meeting • Senior staff: Aug 23rd Gap analysis meeting • Senior staff: Sept 6 next steps • Senior staff participated in webinar Sept 27 • All staff market research presentation Oct 24th 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DVD distributed to all staff • Staff distributed to potential customers in office 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff update – Aug 3 • Market research presentation - Oct 24 • Staff backgrounder 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Copy of newsletter distributed to all staff



Section 5 – Implementation and Activity Results

We will now discuss highlights and lowlights of tactical implementation of the farm business planning awareness campaign to individual market segments including:

- Producers and growers
 - 5300 ACC Farmers' Financial customers
 - Other producers and growers
- Farm organizations (approx. 40 organizations)
 - Both provincial and federal organizations included
 - Have office or representation in Ontario
- Advisors
 - Canadian Association of Farm Advisors with 160 members in Ontario
- Farm business planning stakeholder organizations
 - Ontario Ministry of Agriculture Food and Rural Affairs
 - Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada
 - Agricultural Management Institute
 - Canadian Farm Business Management Council
 - Centre for Rural Leadership (AALP and OATI)
 - Ontario Institute of Agrologists (OIA)

- Canadian Association of Farm Advisors (CAFA)
- Farm Credit Canada
- Ontario Federation of Agriculture and others
- Industry
 - Ontario Agri-Business Association and CAFA membership
- ACC Farmers' Financial
 - Senior Management and Customer Service Staff

Meetings

Highlights, May 17th Champions' Meeting

We were looking for a high relationship tactic to engage farm groups in farm business management awareness in Ontario. A meeting was a great way to relate and engage others. On May 17th we designed a 2 hour working lunch with senior staff from farm organizations in Ontario to gauge awareness, activity, and commitment in the area of farm business management. A highly interactive workshop is a resource intensive tactic due to the planning and facilitation required. Although intensive it was a very efficient, effective tactic due to the interactive, high in relationship format. The information gained paved the way for the project.

Highlights and Lowlights, June 22, August 23, September 6 Ag-Google Discussions

Some of the major challenges to more uptake of farm business management by producers were identified including: information management, ineffective marketing and communications, and lack of clear incentives. We held a meeting on June 22 with farm business management stakeholder organizations. One recommendation from this meeting was to form working groups to look at each of the three challenges outlined above. Each of the three working groups drilled down and came up with recommendations and next steps for each challenge as follows.

Marketing and Communications Challenge

Next steps and recommendations:

- ✓ Strategic marketing to achieve objectives
- ✓ Champion needed; FBM Entity
- ✓ Meet to start the discussion
- ✓ Work with organizations and private sector (business approach)
- ✓ Business influencer approach
- ✓ Embed into production info transfer
- ✓ 18-24 month marketing plan required

Data/Information Management Challenge

Next steps and recommendations:

- ✓ Convert data to knowledge and decision tools

- ✓ Ag Business Portal
- ✓ Template business plans, case studies
- ✓ Benchmarking parameters
- ✓ Co-ordinate resources
- ✓ Farm Data Team

Producer Incentives Challenge

Next steps and recommendations:

- ✓ FBM facilitator for Ontario
- ✓ Increase CFBAS consulting fees
- ✓ Education plan for advisors
- ✓ Business incentive, link to private sector

Overall meetings were a great way to achieve results, especially when interaction was emphasized. We observed some limitation in achieving results when meetings were held by conference call or remotely even if video link established as it is just not like being there. We also observed a reluctance by some to use the technology

Highlights, Communicating Producer Market Research

We communicated results of the producer market research through a series of meetings including:

- Sept 22nd Presentation to Clarence Haverson, Jennifer Taylor – OMAFRA and Bruce Riddell – AAFC
- Sept 25th Presentation to AMI panel
- Sept 27th Webinar to farm organizations, stakeholder groups, and industry
- Oct 13th Presentation to AMI Board
- Oct 23rd Presentation to ACC Farmers' Financial staff

Many found the findings applicable and valuable. Communications to all groups involved in the project provided value-added to them, credibility to the project, and common context going forward.

Lowligh, Producer Meetings

Len Davies, a well known Farm Advisor presented farm business management information to two regional Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association twilight meetings this summer. The first occurred in Nipissing with 35 producers in attendance and the second occurred in Temiskaming with 58 producers in attendance. Although both these meeting went relatively well. Len himself seemed dissatisfied with the results. He felt the topic of farm business management in general was too broad and needed to be focused and concrete to get results.

Another challenge related to timing. Implementation of this campaign occurred when producers do not traditionally think about farm business planning. And most farm meetings occur in winter months.

Another strike against meetings of this kind when discussing farm business management is their public nature. Producers take farm business management personally – so it makes sense that tactics that speak to them or touch them directly are effective.

Let's talk DVD

The idea behind the Let's Talk DVD was to get producers to relate to other producers with concrete and motivating examples. Producers accessing CFBAS discussed their results honestly and personally in this 5 minute video. We had a lot of positive feedback including a high recall rate from ACCFF customers. Well over 1/3 of customers recalled getting the DVD – which is an outstanding response for a tactic of this type. We have also received multiple comments and telephone calls. Including some exposure by a regular contributor to OntAg (an pseudo-chat line for issues in Ontario agriculture). Mind you not all were positive, but even negative responses count towards raising awareness.

We also distributed the DVD through other channels including OMAFRA and AAFC who continue to request additional copies.

Copies of the DVD were also distributed to the Agricultural Management Institute, Ontario farm organizations, and 160 Ontario CAFA members. We also developed a small display with DVD's outside ACC Farmers' Financial offices in the Agri-Centre for visitors and other tenants. We continue to refresh this supply as the DVD's continue to be in demand.

Relationship Development

Highlight, Leveraging ACC Farmers' Financial relationship network:

1. ACC Farmers' Financial 5,300 producer client base
 2. Commodity group relationships
 3. Farm agri-business relationship
 4. Business influencers (i.e. CAFA)
 5. ACC Farmers' Financial staff
-
1. We used new ways to “connect” with and to broaden the scope of our relationship with our 5,300 producer clients. They noticed – our Customer Service Representatives have been receiving calls asking about the Let's Talk DVD. We've had air on OntAg and pick-up by the Ontario Farmer – and producers are noticing. Our customers are starting to re-shape their perceptions and expectations of ACC – momentum is building.

2. ACC Farmers' Financial has long standing relationships with many of Ontario's farm organizations due the Commodity Loan Program, Advance Payment Program, Spring Advance, Eleview, ACCFARMS and management projects. Each program and experience builds on the other to expand and deepen the impact of each relationship. Long standing relationships with farm organizations has created many communications synergies for the farm business management awareness project.
3. We connected with agri-business through the Ontario Agri-business Association. ACCFF has a long standing relationship with OABA through the Commodity Loan Program and Eleview. OABA were a willing and valuable participant in our strategy building sessions. Other opportunities for synergies were not explored due to time constraints.
4. We developed a close relationship to the Canadian Association of Farm Advisors due to their ability to link programs to producers. As Farm Business Advisors, CAFA members have a great deal of influence on farm business management. We partnered with the Canadian Association of Farm Advisors, using strategies and tactics developed through the "Let's talk" farm business management awareness campaign to link programs to producers.
We created a value-added proposition for CAFA advisors to talk to clients about:
 - i. Farm business management
 - ii. Programs and services available
 - iii. How to get startedWe feel that this strategy has a lot of value in the long-term, as we get lines or communications, targeted communications, and communications resources like Letstalkfarmbiz.com established.
5. ACC Farmers' Financial senior staff were involved in both strategy and tactical development. Strategy development for this project almost mirrored a redefinition or increase in scope of the ACC Farmers' Financial "brand" to include ACCFF as a farm business management advocate as well as financier. The goal project is to increase the adoption of farm business practices so that more farms prosper and grow – a goal which is in concert with ACCFF vision for their customers.

We also recognized the importance and value that ACC Customer Service Staff can add to producer communications. Therefore staff were updated regularly and encouraged to refer customers to programs like CFBAS. Customer service staff also helped to distribute Let's Talk DVD's to new customers.

Newsletter

Highlights, ACC Farmers' Financial Fall Newsletter

Market research reinforced our belief that producers consider industry newsletters a good source of management information. We implemented our plan to highlight farm business management in ACC Farmers' Financial's fall newsletter. This newsletter followed a direct mail campaign to ACCFF customers in the summer. The same information card was included in the newsletter as was included in the direct mail. Repetition of messaging to those customers is required to increasing the likelihood of cutting through information overload.

Highlights, Other Newsletters

An article for farm business management awareness appeared in CAFA's electronic newsletter in July to 160 advisor members in Ontario and Farm Credit Canada's electronics newsletter to 1200 producers and industry in August.

Lowlights, Newsletters

We missed the opportunity to more widely distribute information through newsletters due to lead time associated with this tactic as many organizations plan content for their publications months or even a year in advance. We also had limited resources but recommend this tactics in future with the following guidelines:

- Articles be tailored to the organization i.e. soybean related for Ontario Soybean Growers
- Articles should be focused to one program, tool or concept to facilitate uptake
- Articles should be supported through other tactics

Market Research

Highlights, Producer Market Research

We were successful in gaining the support of commodity organizations to take action to make their members aware of the benefits of farm business planning programs. This point was well illustrated at our May 17, 2006 Champions Meeting, which was held with farm organization executive. The meeting was a working facilitated session with one key outcome being the pursuit of research with producers. A key take away from this meeting was that qualitative market research was required with a personal approach. The research was qualitative in nature to measure opinions, attitudes and motivation. The information gained will help to determine winning marketing and communications strategies to engage producers on farm business management.

Highlights, Advisor Market Research

Advisor market research confirmed several insights that will be useful in developing marketing and communications strategies that have impact indirectly to producers. Producer market research established that advisors are extremely influential when adopting additional management strategies. The research told us that less than 1/5th of producers had a business plan, but of those that had one it was initiated by an advisor (usually their accountant or banker). Our advisor market research told us that advisors are generally unaware of the programs and resources available to producers.

Highlights, SWOT and Gap Analysis

Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats or other forms of gaps analysis were used extensively during the campaign to guide strategy and tactical development. They were suitable due to the strategic nature of the challenges identified through this project. The challenges as discussed earlier include ineffective marketing and communications, information overload, and perceived lack of incentives.

Direct Mail

We worked with AdFarm to develop a direct mail package to ACC Farmers' Financial clients. This package included the mailer itself with two sleeves, one containing an information card, the other containing the Let's Talk DVD (see picture page 1 of Section 5). A month later our market research tested recall for the direct mail campaign. Of the total sample 40% remember receiving the direct mail piece. Of that 29% actually watched the DVD, comments included:

- Well done
- Good interviews
- Poor testimonials
- One producer has taken action due to the video

Other comments:

- Did not have time to watch due to field work but plan to
- Some had technology issues with DVD

Here are additional comments from an ACC Farmers' Financial client emailed to Julie Harlow:

"I got my CD in the mail yesterday and put it into my computer this morning. It looks great. I found that it made a compelling case for calling and getting involved. The video is really well done and the messaging is clear. The only point of clarity that I wonder about is whether farmers will ask, "Who is the Canadian Farm Business Advisory?" Perhaps that question may lead some to make an inquiry. The addition of FCC and CFBMC on the mailer helps to add credibility. Just thought I would provide some feedback."

Internet

Ag-Google, Highlight

Market research and gap analysis led us down an alternate path than originally planned. Original project plans called for a program compilation CD. But with the amount of change occurring in the field of farm business management this did not make sense as information would become dated quickly. Two alternate strategies or tactics manifested. The first was the Let's Talk DVD discussed above. The second was development of a concept for an ag-google site for Ontario farm business management resources.

We heard many times during the awareness project that producers:

- feel overwhelmed
- don't know what is available to assist
- don't know where to start
- have a limited scope of reference
- have advisors that are unaware of resources
- are not aware of programs that fit their needs

Market research shows that between 60-80% of producers have access to the internet. So it made sense to create an internet based tool that streamlines, gives a starting point, can be used by advisors, and brings together resources that are applicable, and available to Ontario producers. This is the vision behind Letstalkfarmbiz.com – an agricultural portal that facilitates linking producers to programs. We have completed phase 1, a conceptual design of the portal. Here's the homepage:

Publicity

Although we did not actively pursue publicity as we felt it was not appropriate due to the impersonal nature of many media and the lack of control over messaging. We didn't want to be controversial just create awareness. But we did receive exposure in Ontario Farmer and OntAg. William McClounie was interviewed by the Ontario Farmer and subsequently contacted by a reader. We were happy for the exposure due to OF's large readership and the comments from a producer who had read about our project in the Ontario Farmer.