Planning for the Impacts of Climate Change on Traditional Agricultural Communities:
A Case Study of the Mennonite and Amish of Southwestern Ontario
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Purpose

- Understand Mennonite and Amish methods of agricultural production and how they might be jeopardized by climate change
- Determine the degree of Mennonite and Amish understanding of climate change related risks and how they are adapting to perceived risks
- Identify planning policies that support Mennonite and Amish practices and how these policies affect the ability of this group to respond to climate change
- Identify opportunities for Mennonite and Amish groups to comfortably engage in the public process

Methodology

Geographic Focus: Southwestern Ontario: Counties of Huron, Perth, Bruce, Grey, Wellington, and the Region of Waterloo

- Interview Mennonite and Amish farmers to determine climate change risk perceptions, agricultural production methods and possible adaptation strategies
- Utilize existing literature to compare conventional agricultural production methods to traditional Mennonite and Amish production methods
- Conduct focus groups with municipal planning staff to explore possible policy changes which promote agricultural sustainability and cultural sensitivity

Findings

To cope with climate variation in the Mennonite and Amish community, production flexibility and crop diversity are emphasized. The production methods used by Mennonites and Amish, as compared to a conventional average Canadian farm are much more diversified and rely very little on intensive production methods. An element of adaptability exists which allows for an increased level of resiliency which protects against external factors which result in crop loss. Theirs is a system extremely reliant on weather patterns and more vulnerable to climatic variation. This climatic vulnerability exists in part because possible mitigation and adaptation measures utilizing high technology or government support programs are not utilized.

As a result the Mennonite and Amish have adapted coping measures to maintain farm, community, and family sustainability in spite of weather related events such as crop loss.

Conclusions

The Mennonite and Amish possess an invaluable source of low input agricultural production knowledge. The number of Canadian farmers with extensive practical knowledge of low input agriculture production methods is extremely low.

Practical knowledge of marginal, low input agricultural production is invaluable and may serve to inform the adaptation of the conventional Canadian agriculture sector in the face of an uncertain, changing climate.

Questions of Adaptation

Are the lessons learned from Mennonite and Amish agricultural production systems be transferable to average conventional Canadian farms?
To what degree are the adoption of Mennonite and Amish climate change adaptation measures suitable for the rest of the Canadian agricultural sector?