

#IDW2026: Modernizing Farm Advisory Services: Linking Canadian Agriculture with Global Innovation

Speakers & Presenters

Ian Pringle
Executive Director
Farm Radio International



Ian Pringle is a media and communication specialist with nearly 40 years of professional experience in Africa, Asia-Pacific, the Caribbean, and Canada. Ian holds a MA in New Media and Society from the University of Leicester (2009) and a BA in English from McGill University (1991). Ian has worked for radio stations and media and cultural groups in Canada and internationally as well as CECI, UNESCO and the Commonwealth of Learning. Ian has taken progressively more senior roles in sectoral and organisational leadership. Ian recently assumed the Executive Director post at Farm Radio, after ten years as its director of programs, and a year of serving as deputy executive director.

Adeyinka Onikan
Head of Specialty Services
Farm Radio International



Adeyinka Onikan is a development professional and Head of Specialty Services at Farm Radio International, where he works on modernizing agricultural advisory services through participatory radio and simple tools such as IVR and mobile phones. At Farm Radio International, he supports governments, funders, NGOs, and private-sector actors to design, implement, and evaluate strategic communication and social and behavior change initiatives that strengthen community engagement and

social license. He brings global experience from African agricultural systems to Canadian conversations on innovation in extension and advisory services. He holds an Executive MBA and a master's in public health.

Carmina Marquez
**Partnership Analyst, Global Engagement, Partnership and Resource
Mobilization**
International Fund for Agricultural Development



Carmina Marquez is the partnership analyst of the Americas Liaison Office (ALO) and is responsible for IFAD's engagement with Canada and the United States. She manages bilateral relationships in both countries, which includes cultivating strategic partnerships with multilateral institutions, civil society organizations, academic and research institutions, and multilateral development banks in Washington, DC.

Marquez has over twenty years of experience in international development. She served as the Programme Administrator and Business Development Associate for The Aries Group, a US-based international consulting firm that provided advisory and technical assistance to foreign governments and other public sector clients in the areas of social sector programs, capital markets development, banking sector, and privatization and private sector development.

Marquez has two degrees from De La Salle University, Manila, in 1995 – Bachelor of Science in Management of Financial Institutions and Bachelor of Arts major in Humanities. She completed a Project Management Certification Course from Virginia State University in 2011.

Jahan-Zeb Chowdhury
**Lead Technical Specialist, Environment, Climate, Gender and Social
Inclusion Division**
International Fund for Agricultural Development



Jahan-Zeb Chowdhury is the Lead Technical Specialist for Environment and Climate at IFAD. He is responsible for ensuring that IFAD's climate finance target for core funding remains on track. He also oversees the other climate and environmental targets, including adaptive capacity, and manages several funds, including ASAP.

Prior to joining IFAD, Chowdhury was an Associate Partner at McKinsey & Co. in Washington, D.C. He has also held various roles with bilateral and multilateral development partners, as well as Ministries of Planning and Finance. Jahan's expertise focuses on climate strategies, national planning and budgeting.

Chowdhury completed his MPhil from University of Oxford.

Pieterneel Boogaard
Managing Director, Office of Technical Delivery
International Fund for Agricultural Development



Pieterneel Boogaard is Managing Director of IFAD's Office of Technical Delivery.

Prior to joining IFAD, Boogaard was with the Dutch Entrepreneurial Development Bank, where she led the Agribusiness, Food and Water and the Private Equity Divisions. Prior to this, she had a successful international career in finance and management in the private sector with ING Bank and KBC Bank.

Boogaard holds a degree in Law from the University of Leiden.

Alvaro Lario
President
International Fund for Agriculture and Development (IFAD)



Alvaro Lario is President of the International Fund of Agricultural Development (IFAD). A seasoned international development finance leader, he has more than 20 years of experience across academia, private sector asset management, World Bank Group and the United Nations, including as Associate Vice-President of Financial Operations at IFAD.

Under his stewardship, IFAD became the first United Nations Fund to enter the capital markets and obtain a credit rating, enabling the IFAD to expand resource mobilization efforts to the private sector.

Before joining the Fund in early 2018, he was the Treasury Capital Markets Lead and Principal Portfolio Officer at the International Finance Corporation, part of the World Bank Group, where he focused on local capital markets development and emerging markets investments.

President Lario received a PhD in Financial Economics from the Complutense University of Madrid after completing a Master of Research in Economics at the London Business School and a Master of Finance from Princeton University.

Honourable Randeep Sarai

Secretary of State, International Development



The Honourable Randeep Sarai has served in Canada's Parliament since 2015, representing the riding of Surrey Centre, and was appointed Secretary of State (International Development) on May 13, 2025. Over the course of his political career, he has held several senior parliamentary roles, including Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence.

In Parliament, he has participated actively in committee and interparliamentary work, including the Canada-Africa Parliamentary Association, the Canadian NATO Parliamentary Association, and the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. Before entering federal politics, Mr. Sarai practiced law in Surrey after being called to the bar in 2002, and was deeply involved in community initiatives, including co-founding Virsa – Supporting Youth Strengthening Families Society, leading crime-prevention and anti-polio efforts, and contributing to temple and food-drive initiatives.

Mr. Sarai holds a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science from the University of British Columbia (1998) and a Bachelor of Laws (LLB) from Queen's University (2001).

Patricia Peña
Associate Assistant Deputy Minister
International Assistance Partnerships and Programming, Global
Affairs Canada



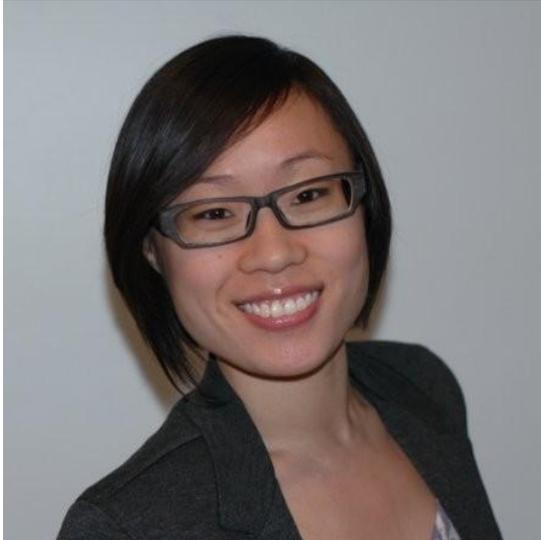
Patricia Peña has worked extensively in international development, diplomacy, and foreign policy, with a career spanning senior leadership roles at Global Affairs Canada and the former Canadian International Development Agency. She currently serves as Associate Assistant Deputy Minister for International Assistance Partnerships and Programming, where she leads a multi-faceted team responsible for the delivery of Canada’s international assistance and for strengthening impact, innovation, and engagement with multilateral, civil society, private-sector, philanthropic, and diplomatic partners.

Since joining the Government of Canada in 2007, she has served as Canada’s Ambassador to Chile (2017–2020) and as Director General for Foreign Policy and Director General for Economic Development. From 2007 to 2011, she held key policy and operational positions at CIDA, including Director of Democratic Governance and Human Rights and Director of Economic Development and Natural Resources. Prior to joining the Canadian public service, she spent nearly a decade in London, England, working in public sector institutions, most notably with the UK Electoral Commission, where she oversaw political financing regulation.

Ms. Peña holds an undergraduate degree in Political Science from the University of Toronto, and a Master’s degree from the London School of Economics and Political Science.

Flora Mak

Deputy Director of the Agriculture and Food Systems Division Global Affairs Canada



Flora Mak brings over 18 years of experience in international development and governance, advancing Canada's priorities in food systems, health and nutrition, and humanitarian assistance. As Deputy Director for Partnerships and Programs for Food Systems and Nutrition at Global Affairs Canada, she leads a team advancing Canada's institutional relationship with key multilateral organizations, including the Food and Agriculture Organization, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), and CGIAR, where she sits as Alternate Member on the System Council. Her team also manages a portfolio of grants and contributions

with Canadian food and nutrition partners, including Nutrition International.

Previously Ms. Mak has held a variety of roles across Global Affairs Canada business lines, including overseeing planning and results for Africa Branch and managing humanitarian assistance projects in response to the Syrian Refugee Crisis. Her earlier work supported development programming in Ukraine, Somalia, Kenya, and Zambia.

Ms. Mak holds a Master's of Public Administration from Carleton University and a Graduate Diploma in Climate Risk Management from the University of Waterloo.

Nikita Eriksen-Hamel
Deputy Director
Food Systems Practice, Global Affairs Canada



Dr. Nikita Eriksen-Hamel is Deputy Director of Food Systems Practice in the Food Systems and Nutrition Division of Global Affairs Canada. He leads a team of policy analysts and technical specialists who provide strategic, policy and technical advice to the Department's agri-food systems and nutrition programs and leads Canada's engagement in many multilateral and global policy fora.

In this role he has contributed to defining the strategic direction of Canada's agriculture and food systems portfolio for the past 17 years, including providing technical support to over 500 agri-food projects. He has had extensive field experience having worked and supported projects in over 30 countries, including being responsible for opening up Canada's diplomatic mission in Cotonou, Benin. In 2026, he is leading efforts to define Global Affairs Canada's approach to agri-food trade and development to support the Government's trade diversification and security agenda.

Nikita has a background in environmental engineering, ecological agriculture and soil science from the University of Waterloo, Wageningen University and McGill University.

Randy Jackiw
Assistant Deputy Minister
Ontario Ministry of Agriculture Food and Agribusiness



Randy manages a diverse range of functions in the Ministry, including centrally driven programs and regional operations, in an adept and effective manner, bringing robust management skills honed as a CEO in Agricorp to bear on corporate as well as Divisional issues. He spots and develops talent proactively. His contributions to horizontal, corporate-level management are always honest, effective and forthright, which helps advance both strategic and operational interests of the organization. He anticipates well and brings a high standard of judgment to problem solving.

Dr. Rene Van Acker
President
University of Guelph



Rene Van Acker is President of the University of Guelph, bringing decades of leadership experience as a scholar, administrator, and advocate for agricultural innovation and education. Previously serving as Professor and Dean of the Ontario Agricultural College (OAC), Dr. Van Acker was appointed Vice-President Research and Innovation (VPRI) in 2024. His contributions to U of G reflect a dynamic vision for institutional growth and excellence across research, education, and community engagement.

As Dean of OAC, Dr. Van Acker advanced a transformative strategic plan, Our Shared Priorities, and led the development of OAC's first infrastructure master plan in over 40 years. Under his leadership, OAC launched Canada's first Bachelor of Indigenous Environmental Science and Practice program and introduced or revised more than a dozen course-based master's programs, bolstering academic offerings and revenue. His initiatives also included OAC's first experiential learning strategy and Planning for Tomorrow, which expanded undergraduate enrolment by 50 percent.

Dr. Van Acker's impact extends to building platforms for research and innovation. He co-founded the Arrell Food Institute and the Guelph Centre for Urban Organic Farming while contributing to major projects such as the Guelph Turfgrass Institute, Bioproducts Discovery and Development Centre, and Honeybee Research Centre. His fundraising efforts have secured over \$100 million for OAC, including 27 chairs and professorships.

As VPRI, Dr. Van Acker spearheaded initiatives to strengthen U of G's research infrastructure, including advancing national innovation programs and establishing international research partnerships. He introduced a visioning process for the agriculture and food sector and developed a first-ever infrastructure priorities list for ARIO to guide investment in agri-food research.

A respected scholar, Dr. Van Acker has published over 160 peer-reviewed works with an h-index of 41 and remains an active faculty member, supervising graduate students and co-teaching OAC's capstone course. A proud U of G alumnus, he holds BSc and MSc degrees from the University of Guelph and a PhD from the University of Reading, UK.

Dr. Van Acker's service to U of G and beyond includes leadership roles in academic governance and organizations such as the Rural Ontario Institute and the Deans Council, Agriculture, Food and Veterinary Medicine. His collaborative approach exemplifies a commitment to advancing institutional excellence and addressing global challenges.

Dr. Christine Baes

**Professor and Acting Associate Dean of External Relations; Canada
Research Chair in Livestock Genomics
University of Guelph**



Dr. Christine Baes was born and raised on a dairy farm in Southwestern Ontario and learned to appreciate Canadian agriculture at a young age. After completing her Bachelors degree at Guelph, she went on to finish a Master of Science degree in Animal Welfare at the Universität Hohenheim and a PhD in Quantitative Genetics at the the Leibniz Institute for Farm Animal Biology and the Christian Albrechts Universität zu Kiel in Germany.

She became involved in various large-scale livestock breeding projects (swine, horses, dairy cattle, goats), and, together with her team, strives to bridge the gap between cutting-edge research and practical application of new knowledge. Dr. Baes has extensive knowledge in the areas of quantitative genetics and statistical

genomics as it relates to the genetic and genomic evaluation of livestock. She works with large data (SNP chip data as well as NGS data), and her programming experience includes FORTRAN, R, UNIX, and other languages. Dr. Baes has taught multiple courses on genetics, genomics, and statistics in Germany, Switzerland, and Canada.

In her spare time, she runs a small farm outside of Maryhill.

Dr. Ataharul Chowdhury
Associate Professor - Capacity Development & Extension
CDE Graduate Coordinator
University of Guelph



Ataharul Chowdhury is an Associate Professor and the Graduate Program Coordinator for the Capacity Development and Extension program at the School of Environmental Design and Rural Development at the University of Guelph. He previously served as President of the Association for International Agricultural and Extension Education (AIAEE). Dr. Chowdhury has led various collaborative projects with national partners (e.g., SSHRC/NSERC), regional partners (e.g., NAAN), provincial

partners (e.g., OMAF, LRIC), and international organizations (e.g., FAO/IFAD) to promote sustainable agriculture and rural development in remote and resource-poor communities. He is recognized for his pioneering research on enhancing the capacity of agri-food communities through knowledge mobilization, digital and participatory media, technology stewardship, and combating agri-food misinformation. Dr. Chowdhury's leadership in innovative research, community engagement, and knowledge mobilization has earned him several accolades, including the University of Guelph Research Excellence Award, the LRIC Early Research Career Award, and the Outstanding Leadership Award from AIAEE. Additionally, he serves as the editor of the Journal of Agricultural Education and Extension, a leading publication in agricultural extension and advisory science, and is a member of the editorial boards for several other journals.

Dr. Sylvia Sarapura
Associate Professor - Rural Planning & Development
University of Guelph



Sylvia Sarapura Escobar an Associate Professor in the School of Environmental Design and Rural Development, is an interdisciplinary scholar whose work advances the theory and practice of resilient food systems through an integrative One Health framework. Through her work, she centers on the interdependence of human, animal, and environmental well-being within complex agri-food systems. Grounded in systems thinking, participatory methodologies, and social justice-oriented inquiry, her research bridges critical scholarship and applied engagement across Canada, Latin America, Africa, and Southeast Asia.

A central contribution of her work lies in the development and application of participatory action research and action learning as catalysts for socio-ecological transformation. She conceptualizes participation as a relational and political process that strengthens agency, collective learning, and equity. This perspective has informed major CGIAR research-in-development initiatives, where she has advanced gender-responsive and socially inclusive approaches and contributed to more reflexive and contextually grounded institutional practices in international agricultural research.

Her scholarship also advances knowledge pluralism and the recognition of Indigenous and local knowledge systems in food system resilience. Research with campesino communities in the Peruvian Andes highlights how relational agroecological practices, including ancestral rotational land-use systems, sustain biodiversity, enhance food security, and support climate adaptation. Additional work on Farmer Field Schools in Latin America examines how participatory learning can be institutionalized within national extension systems, linking grassroots pedagogy with policy and institutional reform.

Methodologically, she has advanced participatory systems analysis to address complexity in agrifood systems, including research with Canadian producers using systems mapping and network analysis to support equitable sustainability transitions. Her research further incorporates intersectional feminist perspectives, examining how gender, age, ethnicity, and class shape agrifood participation, and includes collaborative work with rural youth in Colombia and First Nations communities in Northern Ontario focused on food sovereignty and community-led research.

Dr. Jean-Charles Le Vallée
Canada Country Representative
Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA)



Dr. Jean-Charles Le Vallée is the IICA Representative in Canada and Executive Secretary of the Cooperative Program in Research and Technology for the Northern Region (PROCINORTE).

Before joining IICA, Dr. Le Vallée was an agricultural economist at the World Bank and the first Coordinator of the Office for Food Security in Canada for the federal government. He has extensive international experience in diplomacy, leadership, teaching, and research in over 25 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, Southeast Asia, the Caribbean, and Latin America, working with Global Affairs Canada, USAID, the World Food Prize, IFPRI, FAO, Laval University, Cornell University, and Michigan State University.

Dr. Le Vallée has written extensively on food issues, including a book on the resilience of food systems in Belize and a book chapter in India on political will for food security. He later helped train agri-food SMEs in Colombia, Senegal, and Vietnam to grow their businesses and increase their food trade. In Canada, he contributed to the development of a national food strategy and published several global bulletins (with over 100 million media impressions) in 17 OECD countries on food industry performance; agri-food trade; health; food security; nutrition, diseases, and diets; food waste; and environmental performance.

Steve Tipman
Executive Director
Trade Facilitation Office (TFO) Canada



Steve Tipman leads the organization in fulfilling its mission of catalyzing economic growth through international trade. Directing the successful execution of TFO Canada's strategic plan, Steve is responsible for overall administration, operational management, and reporting to the Board of Directors.

With over 24 years of senior management experience in both the private and non-profit sectors, Steve has spent much of his career working in the areas of international trade and development. He spent eight years working at Livingston International, a trade services company focused on customs brokerage and compliance. He also served as a Vice President of fundraising, communications and marketing with CARE Canada and President and CEO of Volunteer Canada.

Steve is a member of the University of Quebec in Montreal (UQAM) School of Management Sciences International Program and sits on Blue Global Canada Institute's Advisory Group. Actively involved with Cooperation Canada, He is also a member of its Civil Society Policy Advisory Group, which is co-chaired with Global Affairs Canada and VIDEA. Steve holds an international master's in business administration degree from the University of Ottawa and is fluently bilingual in both French and English.

Dr. Dorothy Nyambi
President and CEO
Mennonite Economic Development Associates (MEDA)



Dr. Dorothy Nyambi is an international development and humanitarian leader with more than 25 years of experience advancing inclusive economic growth across Africa and the Global South. She is widely recognized for her expertise in systems building, impact investing, blended finance, and expanding access to capital for underserved entrepreneurs, especially women and youth within agri-food and other high-potential sectors.

As President and CEO of MEDA, Dorothy leads strategic initiatives that mobilize investment and catalyze enterprise growth across Africa (including the Mastercard Foundation Africa Growth Fund), Latin America & the Caribbean, and Southeast Asia. Previously, she served as Executive Vice President of the African Institute for Mathematical Sciences (AIMS) and held senior roles with the U.S. Peace Corps, World Health Organization, Right to Play, Catalyst+ and other global institutions. Bilingual in English and French, she has guided organizations through start-up, scale-up, and turnaround phases across multiple regions worldwide.

Dorothy also contributes to global governance and systems change as Chair of CAMFED Canada, Chair of the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) Board of Governors, a Board Member of Waterloo EDC, Chair of iiAfrica, IC member at BKR Capital (Canada) and a mentor with Board Room Africa. Her leadership centers on systems building through partnerships so finance and market systems can unlock opportunity and contribute to create dignified jobs and prosperity.

Omoneka Oyier

Director

Technical Areas of Practice, Mennonite Economic Development Associates (MEDA)

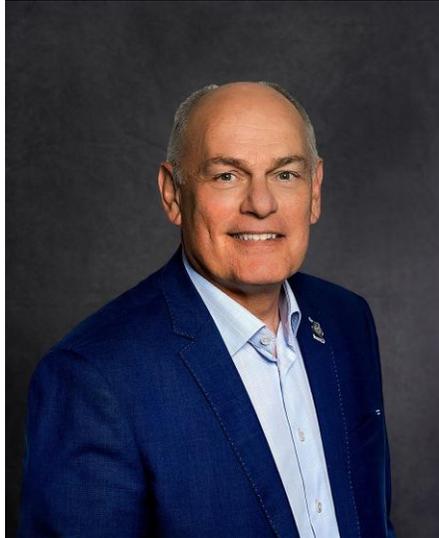


Omoneka (Omo) Oyier currently serves as the Director, Technical Areas of Practice. Omo brings a wealth of expertise as a seasoned professional with 15 years of experience, including 11 years at the International Finance Corporation.

Her background involves advising both private and public institutions on the development of financial inclusion strategies and the implementation of digital financial services targeting underserved segments, such as small and medium-sized enterprises, women, youth, and rural populations. Omo brings this extensive experience to the Business Value Creation team to advance MEDA's approach to increasing access to finance for agribusiness clients.

Omo holds a Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Texas and a Master of Arts degree in International Relations and International Economics from John Hopkins University, Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies.

Michael (Mike) Bossy
Chief of Exponential Opportunities
Bossy Nagy Group



Mike has been a trusted business advisor to clients for over 40 years. Mike is a strategic thinker and combines his extensive experience as a Chartered Professional Accountant with other select business designations to provide a spectrum of value-added services. These services include accounting, trust and estate planning, taxation, and business consulting, with particular emphasis on inter-generational farm transfers.

Mike is a graduate of Western University's Ivey Business School and is a Chartered Professional Accountant. He is also a Certified Agricultural Farm Advisor (CAFA), Kolbe™ Certified Consultant (KCC), a Kolbe™ Certified Youth Specialist (KYS), Kolbe™

Certified Team Specialist (KTS) and a Certified Executor Advisor (CEA).

Mike is the founder of what is now BNG Professional Corporation. BNG is a professional services firm dedicated to helping clients build better businesses. BNG has grown to a team of over sixty serving clients in three locations in South Western Ontario.

Mike's extensive community involvement includes posts such as president of the Tillsonburg District Chamber of Commerce, director of Tillsonburg Hydro, past member and chair of Tillsonburg's Economic Development Committee, chair of the Reliving the Legacy capital campaign, mentor for Tillsonburg Junior Achievement and facilitator of a Strategic Coach Goal Cultivator Community.

Mike was selected Tillsonburg's Citizen of Year for 2011 and is a recipient of the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal in 2012. Mike coached basketball for 20 years at Glendale High School and through the Ontario Basketball Association. Presently, Mike is involved as a director for the Downtown Tillsonburg Business Improvement Area.

Mike has spoken professionally on The Kolbe System™, intergenerational farm transfers and has also developed and delivered the Advanced Farm Management Program. He is an energizer of people and a source of pragmatic, creative solutions to issues that are seen as opportunities rather than problems.

Soraya Verjee
Canadian Partnerships Lead
Viamo



Soraya is the Canadian Partnerships Lead at Viamo, where she helps partners across the globe design and deploy AI-enabled voice-based solutions through basic mobile phones. Over the past 7 years with Viamo in various roles including Country Manager for Viamo Haiti and Global Projects Director she has played a pivotal role in expanding mobile-enabled access to lifesaving information and services across more than a dozen countries advancing impact in mental health, agriculture, women’s economic empowerment, health, disaster preparedness, and financial inclusion.

Prior to Viamo, Soraya worked with Oxfam, UNICEF and the Aga Khan Foundation across Asia, West Africa and the Caribbean, focusing on humanitarian response, fund development, monitoring and evaluation and community-based development.

Soraya holds a BA in Political Science from McGill University and an MA in Environment and Development from King’s College London. Soraya now gratefully resides on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded lands of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and Səlílwətaʔ (Tseil-Waututh) peoples in North Vancouver, British Columbia.

Angela Thayalaseelan
Global Product Executive
Enowé Inc.



Angela Thayalaseelan is a Global Product and Project Executive with several years of experience leading strategy, delivery, and transformation across technology-driven and impact-focused organizations. She specializes in scaling products and projects, aligning user needs with business strategy, and delivering measurable outcomes in complex, multi-market environments.

Angela brings practical expertise in building globally scalable, impact-driven solutions, with a focus on advisory content and climate-smart agricultural practices.

Dr. Ebenezer Miezah Kwofie

Ph.D. | Assistant Professor; Co-director, Integrated Food and Bioprocess Engineering Program | McGill University



Ebenezer Miezah Kwofie is an assistant professor of food systems sustainability and resilience in the Department of Bioresource Engineering on the Macdonald campus of McGill University. Prior to joining McGill as a faculty, he held a joint appointment at the Biological and Agricultural Engineering, Chemical Engineering, and the Food Science Department, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville. Between 2016 and 2020, he served as manager of International Food Systems Development projects at McGill, coordinating projects in Zambia, Malawi, Ethiopia, Bolivia, and Honduras. These projects were focused on enhancing

food systems sustainability and strengthening capacity of stakeholders (farmers, farmer cooperatives, food enterprises, Non-Governmental Organizations, local government departments). He completed his PhD at the Bioresource Engineering Department, McGill University, working on circular economy pathways for agro-waste utilization.

Dave Smardon
President & CEO
Bioenterprise Canada



Since 2005, Dave Smardon has led the development of Bioenterprise Canada, Canada's Food & Agri-Tech Engine, the leading national accelerator focusing solely on food and agriculture technologies. Bioenterprise Canada delivers significant impact to Canada's economy through Dave's vision of supporting innovative, high-growth food and agriculture businesses through funding programs and mentorship that match their potential. Dave is advocating for a united agricultural ecosystem nationally, mirroring the collaboration and cross-regional knowledge-sharing that has made other top-performing

countries global leaders in technology and commercialization.

His background in venture capital and corporate leadership includes Apple Computer Inc., and Texas Instruments, as well as angel investment and his own entrepreneurial pursuits. Dave is also an advisor for government, family offices, investment companies, and innovation centres nationally, where his leadership has influenced the progression of Canada's agriculture industry; an industry which is at the forefront of global innovation and economic development. This balance of finance and corporate experience, coupled with public interest ensures a healthy relationship with government, private sector corporations, and multi-nationals. Dave's leadership continues to educate the expanded agricultural ecosystem on the potential to adopt and expand emerging technologies in sustainability, digitization, and automation.

Jessica Wood
Executive Director
SeedChange



Jessica Wood is Executive Director at SeedChange. Formerly known as USC Canada, SeedChange is one of Canada's longest-serving international development agencies whose work is rooted in advancing human dignity, equity, and food sovereignty. Today, SeedChange upholds these principles by actively participating in a global agroecology movement to address intersecting social and environmental challenges. Jessica is a skilled facilitator and compassionate leader with experience supporting community-led initiatives across Canada and around the world. She believes that sustainable systemic change is possible when rooted in human rights, genuine partnership, and local knowledge.

Kelly Somerville
CEO
Livestock Research Innovation Corporation



Kelly is originally from Mountain Ontario (south of Ottawa), and graduated from the University of Guelph with a Bachelor's in Animal Science. Previously she worked for Cargill as a ruminant nutritionist working primarily with dairy herds, before returning to Guelph to take the role of Member Relations Manager with the Ontario Federation of Agriculture. Most recently, Kelly was working as a Programs Analyst with Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association.

Kelly also owns a small herd of purebred Angus with her twin sister under the prefix "Twin Valley Cattle Co." and is actively involved in showing and judging beef cattle. She is involved in several boards and show committees and is currently serving as vice president of the Ontario Angus Association.

Carla Berquo
Director, Canada's Food & Agri-Tech Engine
Bioenterprise



As the Director of Canada's Food & Agri-Tech Engine at Bioenterprise, Carla is responsible for all facets of the Engine, including its development, implementation and management, strategic partnerships, and membership growth and engagement. She is committed to working with communities, governments, industry, and all related partners as a catalyst for establishing long-term relationships, connectivity and collaboration in the food, agri-tech and related sectors across Canada.

Carla and her team provide member companies with customized services for them to keep growing and achieving their goals. Offering a mix of marketing, communications, events and partnerships, they help members feel part of a larger community, while encouraging Engine Insiders to get involved.

Carla brings a well-established track record demonstrating strong business acumen, team building skills, project management and marketing at large scale organizations across many global regions and cultures, including the UK, Asia, Africa, and the Americas. Her experience includes working with private sector, not-for-profit organizations, and various levels of government, leaving her perfectly positioned to lead Canada's Food & Agri-Tech Engine.

Serge LeVert-Chiasson
Managing Partner, Chief Compliance Officer
Sarona Asset Management



Serge LeVert-Chiasson leads the Sarona team, overseeing all business aspects and the compliance program as Chief Compliance Officer. He believes in the role of private businesses in fostering healthy economies. Before joining Sarona in 2009, Serge was VP of MEDA Investments, worked at Export Development Canada and Crédit Lyonnais, and founded Agro Capital Management. He serves on advisory committees, corporate boards, and was the founding chair of the Canada Forum for Impact Investment and Development. Serge holds an MSc in Accounting and Finance from the London School of Economics, an International MBA from the Schulich School of Business, and is a CFA charter holder.

Lindsay Wallace
Executive Director, FINCA Canada & Managing Director, Social Investment Strategies



Lindsay Wallace is the Executive Director of FINCA Canada and Managing Director of Social Investment Strategies at FINCA International. Lindsay focuses on building strategic partnerships to advance FINCA's mission and to strengthen FINCA's visibility and brand.

Lindsay brings over 25 years of experience in international development across education, agriculture, and financial inclusion, with a strong track record of advancing private-sector growth and business-driven solutions to alleviate poverty. She has held senior leadership roles at MEDA, where she served as Senior Vice President of Strategy, Communications, and Impact, as well as at Limestone Analytics, the Mastercard Foundation, and the United Kingdom's Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office.

Lindsay holds a Master of Arts in economics with a specialization in environmental studies from the University of Toronto, a Master of Public Administration from Carleton University, and a Bachelor of Arts in political science and economics from McGill University. She is also Board Chair of the Canada Forum for Impact Investment and Development (CAFIID).

Elizabeth Shelley
Program Development Officer
Canadian Foodgrains Bank



With over 11 years of experience in international development, Elizabeth has worked across humanitarian response, agriculture, and market systems development in crisis-affected and low-income contexts. Her early career included Ebola response programming in West Africa, followed by agriculture and rural market systems work in West and Central Africa, supporting smallholder farmers, value chain development, and food security outcomes. She has also led and managed complex, donor-funded programs across Africa and the Balkans, including trade and investment initiatives in Central Africa.

Elizabeth currently serves as a Business Development Officer with the Canadian Foodgrains Bank, where she works with member agencies and institutional donors to design and resource large-scale agriculture, livelihoods, and climate-resilient food systems programs. Her work is grounded in strengthening smallholder-focused market systems and advancing sustainable, locally driven agricultural development.

Theresa Rempel Mulaire
Senior Manager for Agriculture and Livelihood
Canadian Foodgrains Bank



Theresa Rempel Mulaire currently works as the senior manager for agriculture and livelihoods programming at Canadian Foodgrains Bank. Theresa's career has focused on facilitating economic and agricultural programming together with local partners in Asia and East Africa. Theresa is currently based in Winnipeg and has lived and worked internationally in Taiwan, China, Kenya, India and Colombia.

Dr. Ryan Gibson

**Professor, Rural Planning & Development, Regional Economic
Development, Director of SEDRD
University of Guelph**



Ryan Gibson brings a deep commitment to understanding and supporting rural communities, with a research program that explores how rural places adapt and thrive amid global economic, demographic, and policy transitions. His work spans rural and regional development strategies, governance and collaboration, philanthropy and wealth, public policy, and rural immigration and

mobility, with projects often grounded in community-engaged research and knowledge translation. Ryan's scholarship intersects academic inquiry with practice and policy, contributing to a richer understanding of rural prosperity and revitalization both in Canada and internationally.