IVEY BUSINESS SCHOOL

Centre for Building Sustainable Value

Food and Collective *Regeneration*

Scaling regenerative agriculture through regional collective action and cross-sectoral engagement in Southwestern Ontario.

Report

Lighthouse Event, February 5, 2026 · Ivey Business School, London ON
Prepared for the Advisory Committee, CAP Farmers, STP Companies, Policymakers, Indigenous Partners

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Why This Matters

Regenerative forms of agriculture represent ways of farming that work with nature instead of against it. Regenerative farmers build healthy soil, grow diverse crops and integrate livestock whenever possible, and strengthen ecosystems and local communities around them. Input costs can drop by as much as 60%, yields become more resilient to drought and floods, water quality improves, biodiversity recovers, and rural communities gain strength and resilience. But despite all these potential benefits, only about 1.5% of the world's farmland is managed regeneratively.

The reason it hasn't scaled is because everything around the farm was built for the old model. Banks don't know how to lend for it because their risk models were designed for conventional operations. Supply chains can't handle the diversity of products it creates, and infrastructure for regional processing and distribution is often weak. The knowledge needed to holistically manage a complex regenerative farm system is scattered and informal. And government policy still rewards volume and specialization over ecological health, with a void of policies supporting institutional food services to source locally. These barriers feed into each other, creating a loop that is very hard for any single actor to break alone.

Regenerative agriculture fails to scale because the surrounding financial systems, supply chains, knowledge infrastructure, and policy frameworks are designed for conventional farming, creating systemic barriers that no single actor can overcome alone.

That is why Ivey's Centre for Building Sustainable Value launched two programs in Southwestern Ontario designed to break this loop from multiple directions at once.

Collective Action Program (CAP)

Works with farmers across Middlesex County to build a peer-learning community. Farmers share practical know-how, run on-farm experiments, and grow their collective agroecological intelligence through intra-cohort mentorship. They also explore ways to build value-adding operations and build stronger and more engaged customer bases. The cohort spans nearly 3,000 acres across dairy, beef, cash crops, horticulture, and floriculture, with farm sizes from 3 to 900 acres.

Systems Transformation Pathways (STP)

Brings agri-food companies, processors, retailers, and financial actors together as partners in redesigning how regenerative products are valued, purchased, and financed from both the demand and supply side. The goal is to build market conditions that make regenerative farming economically sustainable beyond the farm gate.

THE SHARED GOAL

A significant increase in regional farmland managed by viable, differentiated farms that produce high-quality products while healing the land and strengthening their communities.

This work only succeeds if every part of the system moves. Farmers need a community where risk and learning are shared. Companies need differentiated regional products. Financial institutions need data to build products reflecting how regenerative farms actually perform, economically, socially, and ecologically. Policymakers need a working demonstration of food system transformation. And Indigenous partners need space for stewardship traditions that conventional agriculture has long excluded.

The Lighthouse Event

On February 5, 2026, CAP farmers and STP companies came together for the first time. Around 60 attendees from approximately 40 organizations joined a full-day convening at Ivey Business School in London, Ontario. The room included regenerative farmers, agri-food procurement leaders, processors, retailers, local policymakers, Indigenous partners, and academic researchers. It was an uncommon mix, and that was the point. Systems-level change requires the people who sit at different points in the system to see and hear each other.

How the Day Unfolded

The morning opened with community building over coffee, followed by presentations sharing insights from both cohorts. Participants then split into parallel workshops. CAP farmers deepened their understanding of shared challenges and opportunities at the farm level, while STP companies and changemakers explored their role in enabling the transition from the value-chain side.

A live-streamed international panel brought the morning to a close with five speakers from four continents. Yanniek Schoonhoven represented EARA, a European farmer-led regenerative "mycelium" network. Rodrigo César Paes Barroso spoke for GAAS, a Brazilian movement now spanning over 1.5 million hectares managed under regenerative practices. Carolina Iatesta Domenico shared Natura's approach to community procurement across 52 communities in the Amazon. Max Cooper of Producers Trust presented a systems-design perspective on why regeneration fails when surrounding infrastructure is not redesigned. And Tina Owens from Transformational Investing in Food Systems addressed the gap between on-farm resilience and how financial models currently price risk. The panel was moderated by Prof. Jury Gualandris, the Abell-Hodgson Chair in Regenerative Agriculture and BSV Academic Director.

Lunch was a farm-to-fork experience sourced entirely from local regenerative producers, functioning as a live demonstration of what a regional supply chain can look like in practice. Farmers asked company representatives direct questions about pricing, purchasing power, and what it would take to build long-term offtake relationships.

The afternoon brought both cohorts together for the first time in an integrated workshop. Farmers and companies worked side by side on shared action plans, exploring three questions that proved especially productive. What is the actual problem? What can we do together in the next six to nine months? And how is what we are building here different from any individual farm trying to sell direct?

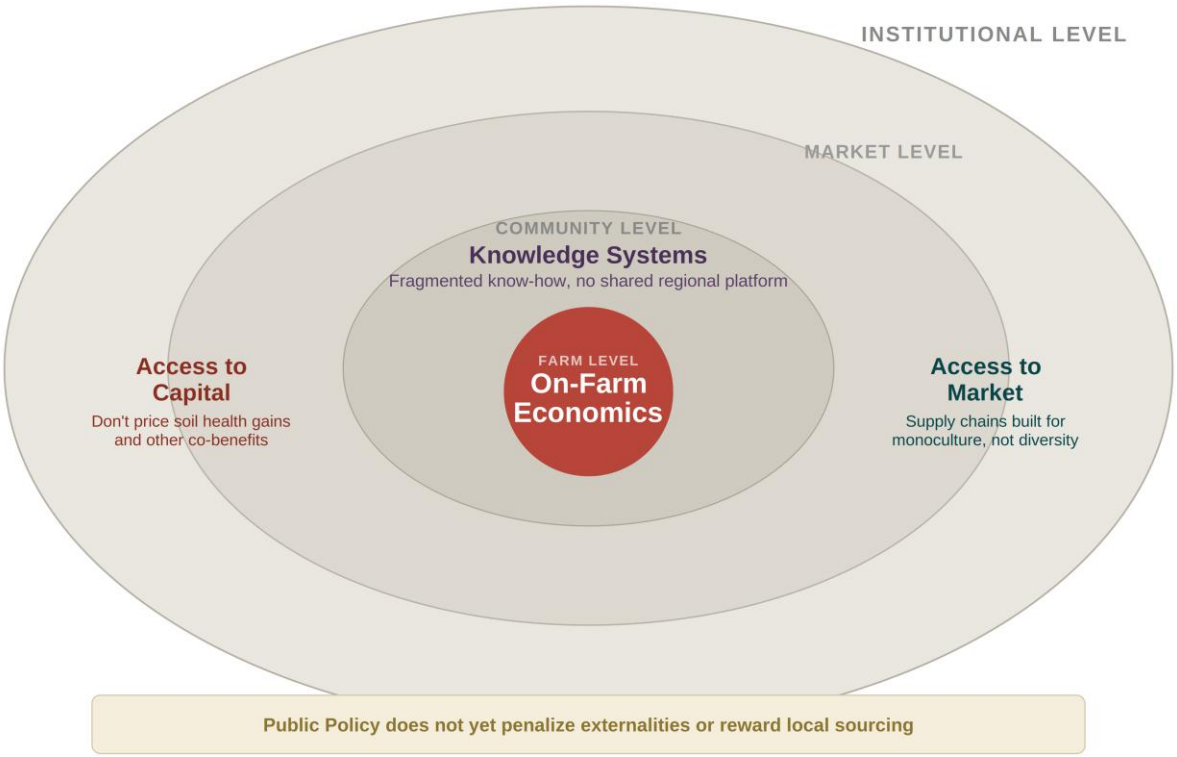
~60	~3,000	5	4
Attendees from ~40 Organizations	Acres Managed by CAP Cohort	International Panelists	Continents Represented

The event aimed to build relationships between farmers and companies by enabling each to understand the other's perspective, and to elevate the visibility of CAP and STP for greater financial and organizational support. The expected long-term outcome was instead something harder to manufacture: new ideas, working relationships, and enacted behaviors. This kind of coordinated cross-value-chain convening is what makes scaling regenerative agriculture possible, by aligning production, value chains, markets, and knowledge rather than treating them in isolation.

Ecology of Problems

Through workshops, CAP farmers mapped the barriers keeping regenerative farming from scaling. What they found was not a single problem but four barriers that feed into and reinforce each other, making the whole system resistant to change even when some individual actors want to move forward. Practitioners across European agricultural regions have independently arrived at the same conclusion.

At the centre sits the farm itself, where the economics of transition are genuinely difficult. Regeneration can cut synthetic input costs by up to 60% and stabilize yields, but it can raise labour costs, demands heavy upfront investment for new equipment, cover crops, and trees, and produces a diversified product mix requiring fundamentally different knowledge and management systems. Three system-level barriers surround the farm. Knowledge about regenerative farming is fragmented with no shared platform. Financial institutions do not know how to assess regenerative benefits when pricing risk. And supply chains built for commodity distribution cannot handle diverse, smaller-volume products. Policy sits underneath all four.



The most important insight is that the real bottleneck is not a shortage of willingness, money, or talent. It is a shortage of coordination. In Lleida, a farming region in Catalunya, cooperative networks, research institutions that farmers trust, and regional development finance are all in place. But each actor is waiting for someone else to go first. Banks are willing to lend, buyers are willing to purchase, and farmers are willing to transition, but without a coordinating body to align them, nobody moves.

The bioregional scale turns out to be the right level for solving these interconnected problems. It is small enough for people to know and trust each other, and large enough to pool supply and reach demand. What BSV is building through CAP and STP is the missing coordination function for

Southwestern Ontario, the actor that can hold offtake commitments, working capital, technical advisory, and bank facilitation at the same time so everyone can move together. These two projects scale “deep” to create dense coordination within the region, and can then be “scaled out” in other regions through replication.

Ecology of Solutions

Just as the problems reinforce each other, the solutions need to as well. CAP farmers and STP companies have developed four interventions that work in sequence, where progress on one creates the conditions for the next. European practitioners are independently converging on a similar set of priorities, including independent transition advisory, transition-compatible offtake, debt redesign, regional processing, and decision-grade evidence systems. BSV’s approach aligns closely but adds something those frameworks have not yet named. It starts by building the social structure within a specific region that makes intelligent coordination possible in the first place.

The first layer builds the social foundation. Farmers learn from each other, mentor each other, and map out who knows what across the cohort so that expertise flows where it’s needed. The second layer creates the evidence base. Farmer-owned data on soil health, yields, water quality, and ecological outcomes gives financial institutions the proof they need to design lending and insurance products that reflect the lower risk and greater co-benefits of regenerative operations.

The third and fourth layers tackle market access from both sides at once. On the supply chain side, farmers are exploring how to pool products from multiple farms, route them through underutilized regional processing facilities, and serve institutional buyers like local schools. Farmers are considering partnerships with local players, often medium-size companies and associations operating in their County. Farmers are also considering building frugal reverse supply chains, tapping into food waste streams from the City, cycling back organic inputs substituting for ever more expensive synthetic inputs. On the demand side, consumer education builds the informed purchasing that sustains it all long-term and creates space for volunteerism and agritourism on farms.

Five Lessons from the International Panel

1. Shared principles over uniform practices

EARA unites European farmers under common values. What works in southern Spain is nothing like a Dutch wetland.

2. Capacity before growth

Brazil's GAAS covers 1.5M hectares but started with one farm. Trust first, structure second, scale after.

3. Supply chains built for resilience

Natura has dedicated community teams across 52 communities. Simplification kills the relationships sourcing needs.

4. Redesign systems around farmers

Producers Trust found regeneration fails because surrounding systems push all volatility onto producers.

5. Financial models must recognize resilience

"Cover crop risk reduction is comparable to insuring a non-smoker versus a smoker. Actuarial models have not caught up."

— Tina Owens, TISF

Reflections & the Road Ahead

What We Heard

Honest feedback surfaced alongside genuine energy throughout the day.

- The CAP presentation landed well. Concrete farmer stories connected where abstract framing did not.
- The STP framing was perceived as high-level. Engagement increased when language became operationally grounded.
- The international panel gave participants a powerful sense of not being alone, and access to use-cases demonstrating that regeneration is possible. The farm-to-fork lunch demonstrated a regional supply chain in action.
- The attendee mix was unusual and valuable. Strategy consultants, TNC, Indigenous partners, and farm-level innovators all contributed. But such level of diversity needs careful facilitation, and time to give fruits.
- The integrated workshop was the highlight but felt compressed. Both cohorts wanted more cross-cohort time and clearer next steps.
- The distinction between process (how to convey different organizations to develop collective, coordinated decision making) and content (how regenerative farming happens and what solutions can support its uptake) was useful to participants, and should be maintained.

Next Steps

2026	STP: A report summarizing insights from this cohort will be released in summer 2026. CAP: Ongoing workshops supporting farmer-led projects. Farmers will tap into STP companies if and when needed.
Spring 2027	CAP: By Spring 2027, the community should be self-sustaining. We will measure the stickiness of community relationships, the community's self-governing capacity, and any social and ecological benefit emerging on and off farms.
Dec 2027	Potentially: Adaptive scaling and replication for broader regional and national impact.

A Message for Every Stakeholder

Whether you grow the food, buy it, finance it, or shape the rules around it, scaling regeneration is not something any one of us can do alone. The path forward is building relationships and collective intelligence at a regional level, so regenerative agriculture can grow without losing what makes it work.

Watch the full panel → youtu.be/cU9dp4tINTk