

EMILI Data Initiative

Online Engagement Activity
What We Heard



In Fall 2022 the EMILI Data Initiative launched a community brainstorming activity powered by [CoDigital](#) at EMILI's annual [Agriculture Enlightened](#) conference. We asked the following question:

What needs to be done to ensure that everyone in the Canadian agriculture and food sector has the tools, knowledge and skills needed to create value using data and digital technology?

Over the course of **four weeks** and with the help of **37 contributors** from across the agri-food industry, including growers, tech providers, consultants, non-profits, educators, and the public sector, we received **19 ideas**. Contributors also helped prioritize the best concepts with a total of **548 votes**.

Thank you to the team from CoDigital for their assistance with this project.

The [EMILI Data Initiative](#) works to build the data governance capacity of the Canadian agriculture and food sector to make use of data and digital tools in a responsible way that benefits everyone along the value chain. Through a unique combination of technology demonstration, applied research and data literacy training programs the EMILI Data Initiative works to strengthen the data ecosystem in Canadian agriculture.



How did it work?

The CoDigital Ideas Engine helps communities generate insight using a systematic process of idea submission, refinement and voting. In contrast to traditional polling, or public opinion research, the CoDigital platform encourages participants to submit their ideas and respond to the ideas submitted by their peers through edits, votes and ranking.

Using this platform provided a new way to engage with contributors, with the potential to go deeper than the highly structured answers typically seen in an online survey.

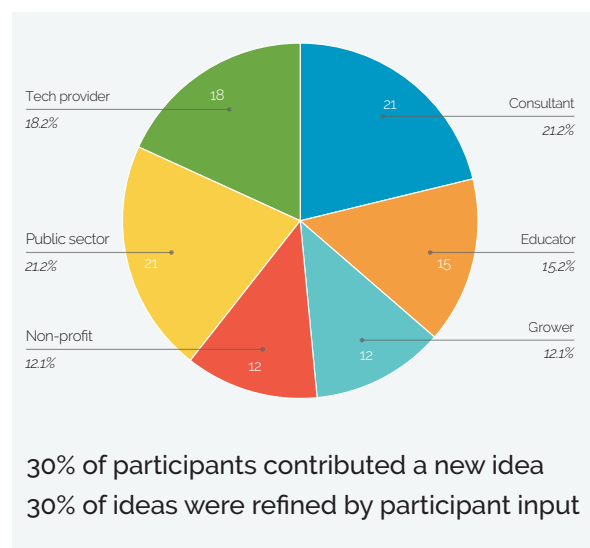
The CoDigital platform was used by the USDA for a similar, albeit larger scale, [online engagement project on digital agriculture in 2016](#). EMILI launched the online engagement project in-person at the Agriculture Enlightened Conference in Winnipeg, Manitoba. The activity was then promoted by email and on social media during the four weeks following the conference.

Community Engagement

Ideas flowed into the CoDigital platform throughout the duration of the project with spikes of activity occurring around the weekly reminder email sent out to participants. Participants came from all parts of the wider agri-food sector including growers, consultants/trusted advisors, technology vendors, educators, the public sector and non-profit organizations.

Overall 19 distinct ideas were generated by the community of participants. Based on the analytics provided by CoDigital, there was strong support for each of the 19 ideas and a good consensus among participants.

Overview of Participants Role in Agri-Food Sector"



The Top Three Ideas

- 1 Provide training, capital, and enabling infrastructure so that rural and agriculture communities can take leadership in, and benefit from, the development, implementation, and sustainment of the digital tools they need to adopt and use.
- 2 Provide supporting programs to allow innovative farm managers/operators and agtech entrepreneurs to connect with each other and lessen the risk to adoption.
- 3 Create a program to provide workshops or seminars to farmers and food companies to help understand the value of data and digital solutions. Follow up with a short term, data consulting engagement by an SME company funded through a government program.

The text of each idea is taken directly from the CoDigital platform to preserve the full intent of the participants who created the idea through the course of the online engagement project.

The full list of the 19 submissions can be found at the end of this report.

Key Themes

What can we take away from the ideas generated from this process? Four key themes emerged as important to the digital transformation of agriculture and food:

Education and Training: Knowledge, skills and training related to digital technology are foundational and need to be accessible to people working in the agri-food sector today. With the right knowledge base everyone working in the sector can play an active role in shaping the data and digital ecosystem.

Practicalities and Value: Successful adoption and use of digital tools requires a strong value proposition. This theme can be seen by focus on value creation and the desire for financial support.

Building Relationships: People working in the agriculture and food sector want to be actively involved in the design and implementation of digital technologies. This includes collaborating with technology vendors, as well as peer to-peer relationships that provide grassroots support and validation.

Quality: Numerous submissions mention standards and codes of practice as a means to deliver consistent, high-quality data. This points to a recognition that high quality data does not happen without investing time and effort.

Complete List of Submitted Ideas

The following is the complete list of ideas submitted by the participants in the EMILI Data Initiative's online engagement project. The text shown below was taken directly from the CoDigital platform without modification.



- 1 Provide training, capital, and enabling infrastructure so that rural and agriculture communities can take leadership in, and benefit from, the development, implementation, and sustainment of the digital tools they need to adopt and use.
- 2 Provide supporting programs to allow innovative farm managers/operators and agtech entrepreneurs to connect with each other and lessen the risk to adoption.
- 3 Create a program to provide workshops or seminars to farmers and food companies to help understand the value of data and digital solutions. Follow up with a short term, data consulting engagement by an SME company funded through a government program.
- 4 Develop a realistic model of the Canadian ag and food system with clear value at each stage of the system for digital technology, taking into account business model constraints. Use this to find scenarios to increase opportunity with data.
- 5 Provide improved data literacy training to primary producers, online and free of cost including cyber security awareness training.
- 6 Improve rural internet connectivity.
- 7 Create opportunities for startups to access shared environments and data to test innovative ideas.
- 8 Find a way for farmers to organize the data that they are creating on farm, or to hold and store the data and then decide who they want to share it (integrate it with) and sell it to. Data as an on-farm crop/revenue source.
- 9 A farmers' competitive advantage is with their know-how. Developing a better understanding of the value of their know-how and what it means to their yields/profitability could support increased adoption of ag tech solutions.
- 10 Identify the most pressing issues across sub-sectors and commodities where digitalization enables progress towards solving the problem and unlock value. Then get clear on who shares the problem and who can help solve it and let them do the work.
- 11 Establish a marketplace for data which would allow farmers to market and sell their data. Use blockchain or other tech with smart contracts to ensure data is traceable, tracked and has an expiry date. Data consumers would need a code of conduct.
- 12 Expand financial support offered by the government to encourage the adoption of digital tools.
- 13 Build awareness and excitement in the K-12 system and digital/tech post-secondary programs showcasing agriculture as an exciting career path of choice.
- 14 Ensure quality and integrity of service delivery within the agtech sector by either facilitating the development of standards, codes of practice or ethical guidelines for trade and operational activities within the sector.
- 15 Create a showcase and marketplace for farmers, government and companies to share ideas and connect on projects.
- 16 The development of a national data strategy to drive data consistency and language.

17 Establish an annual or semi-annual hackathon or similar event where companies, students, academics can work and learn about new tech and apply to specific challenges or scenarios targeted towards data and digital in food and ag.

18 Create a standardized program and/or platform for data capture and retention that is secure while able to be utilized by third parties for monetization/analysis. This program/platform should have single point user access from any networked device.

19 Educate people on the various levels of data quality. There is a myth that all data is valuable. Much like stored grain, data is worth much more if clean, consistent, organized and attached to good documentation.

