



Yaffle Connects

Separated

at Birth:

Reflections on Agriculture in Iceland and Newfoundland and Labrador

Presentation by Dr. Ivan Emke

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Reflections on Agriculture in Iceland and Newfoundland and Labrador

While Iceland has a smaller population than NL (and a similar geography and climate), they produce almost 40% more food domestically. What can we learn from them about self-provisioning?

Dr. Ivan Emke, Honorary Research Professor and Facilitator, *Kitchen Table Communications*, joined us for a Yaffle Connects session which explored some intriguing insights about the food and culture of these two places. The following summary report outlines Dr. Emke's main points and contains an overview of the question-and-answer period that followed his presentation.

“In Newfoundland, farms are almost invisible, but [in Iceland] you can see them everywhere.” – Dr. Emke



SESSION SYNOPSIS:

In his presentation, Dr. Emke considers the various similarities between Iceland and NL (geography, climate, history, traditional culture, etc.), and contrasts these places with how different they are in their agricultural outcomes.

For example, Iceland considers agriculture to be a profitable sector, as well as part of their culture of self-provisioning. NL, on the other hand, has far less reliance on internal production, and imports most food eaten in the province. Furthermore, Icelandic farmers receive more explicit representation and marketing, and thus more public notice than NL farmers; in Iceland there is a much higher demand for local goods, lending them more bargaining power in the food market.

Dr. Emke concludes by pointing to the differences between Iceland and NL, remarking on how Iceland's independence as a country allows them policy freedoms that NL, as a province, does not have. He does, however, suggest that NL should start looking to Iceland for inspiration on how to progress in the agricultural sector moving forward.

[WATCH THE ENTIRE PRESENTATION HERE](#)



KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- Iceland and NL are very similar – they’re close in population numbers, land area, and climate, and there’s even a history of Nordic farming settlements in NL; however, Iceland’s agricultural profits are nearly four times those of NL’s.
- In Iceland, agriculture is seen as a profitable sector; there are government subsidies for farming of animals and food animal products, and farmers’ co-ops have a much stronger presence in the market due to the high demand for local goods.
- Iceland also has far more production of secondary dairy products, such as cheese and yogurt, not just milk production; while NL has the highest milk production in all of Canada (higher than Iceland, as well), almost all of it is shipped elsewhere for processing.
- Tradition plays a large role in Icelandic farming and food production; there is a history of self-sufficiency within the island, and native seabirds, sheep, and horse are all part of the Icelandic diet.
- NL has a similar history, but has instead moved to importing food rather than eating what’s locally grown.
- Due to an increased tourism industry in Iceland, consumption of pork and poultry has also increased dramatically, and Icelandic farmers have been forced to import these meats since they can’t produce enough to meet the demand.
- There are government protections for Icelandic sheep; no other breeds are allowed to be brought in, and there’s a system of free-grazing in place where the sheep are let loose on the mountains during the summer and their meat harvested before winter. These sheep are highly valued on the food market.
- Iceland also has very successful “agri-tourism,” where tourists can visit working farms, eat what they produce, and see the farm in action (see picture, below).

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- The differences between Icelandic and NL agriculture are due, in part, to Iceland's longer history of farming and self-provisioning, as well as their status as a country; they can make their own regulations on food production whereas NL has to work within Canadian laws, which do not favour consuming food only coming from inside the province.



Friðheimar, a restaurant and greenhouse in Reykholt, Iceland

QUESTION AND ANSWER PERIOD:

Paraphrasing Dr. Emke's responses

Q: DO ICELAND AND NEWFOUNDLAND HAVE ANY POTENTIAL POINTS OF COOPERATION WITH THEIR FOOD INDUSTRIES?

NL has a lot of unused raw materials (such as vegetables and milk); we could ask Iceland for advice on how to begin secondary processing, or how to start agritourism. Moving forward in agriculture, we can look to them for how to innovate our systems.

Q: WHAT ARE THE POLITICS OF AGRICULTURE IN ICELAND WHEN COMPARED TO NL?

The Icelandic farmers' association has a long history of funding, and they have an established presence in the community; in NL there's no proper system for meat production, no co-ops, and no federal regulations for meat production, as compared to Iceland's near self-sufficiency in the meat market. In NL, there is little organized support for traditional hunting/farming whereas in Iceland these are much more highly valued. Icelandic government is also much more transparent and open to collaborative policies with non-governmental organizations such as farmers' associations.

Q: WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN SEABIRD HUNTING IN ICELAND AND NL?

While both have seabird as part of their food culture, Iceland's self-provisioning laws included the right to hunt seabirds, and this remains a popular activity; it's both tradition and a way to go into the wilderness, which is an important part of Icelandic culture. There is a very strong safety infrastructure in Iceland, so there is little risk associated with going into the wilderness and hunting. This infrastructure also plays a role in sheep farming: farmers have a culture of cooperation rather than competition; in NL farmers are less overtly connected, to each other and to the market.

Q: WHAT SORTS OF OPPORTUNITIES COULD NL LEARN FROM ICELAND?

A: Iceland has agricultural universities where farmers learn their trade in a professional setting and get to know other farmers; when these farmers interact, it broadens the view of what's possible in agriculture. Producers push their products to restaurants and stores themselves, whereas in NL there is much less locally consumed food.

Q: WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN FARM MARKETING IN NL AND ICELAND?

A: In Iceland, farmers hire professionals to market their farms and food; we do this in NL, but for tourism, not farming.