



Alison Blay-Palmer  
ablaypalmer@wlu.ca



Wilfrid Laurier University

---



---

# Research Projects

---

- ❖ International:
  - ❖ RUAF - FAO City-Region Food Systems
- ❖ Social and informal economy of food
- ❖ FLEdGE:
  - ❖ 7 research nodes across Canada
  - ❖ International advisory committee





# Sustainable City Food Systems

- ❖ Green, Fair, Local, Engaged
- ❖ What is a *food SYSTEM*?





# Our research method

- ❖ Participatory
- ❖ Community-driven
- ❖ Through advisory committees
- ❖ Bottom up
- ❖ Food hub project





---

# What is a food hub?

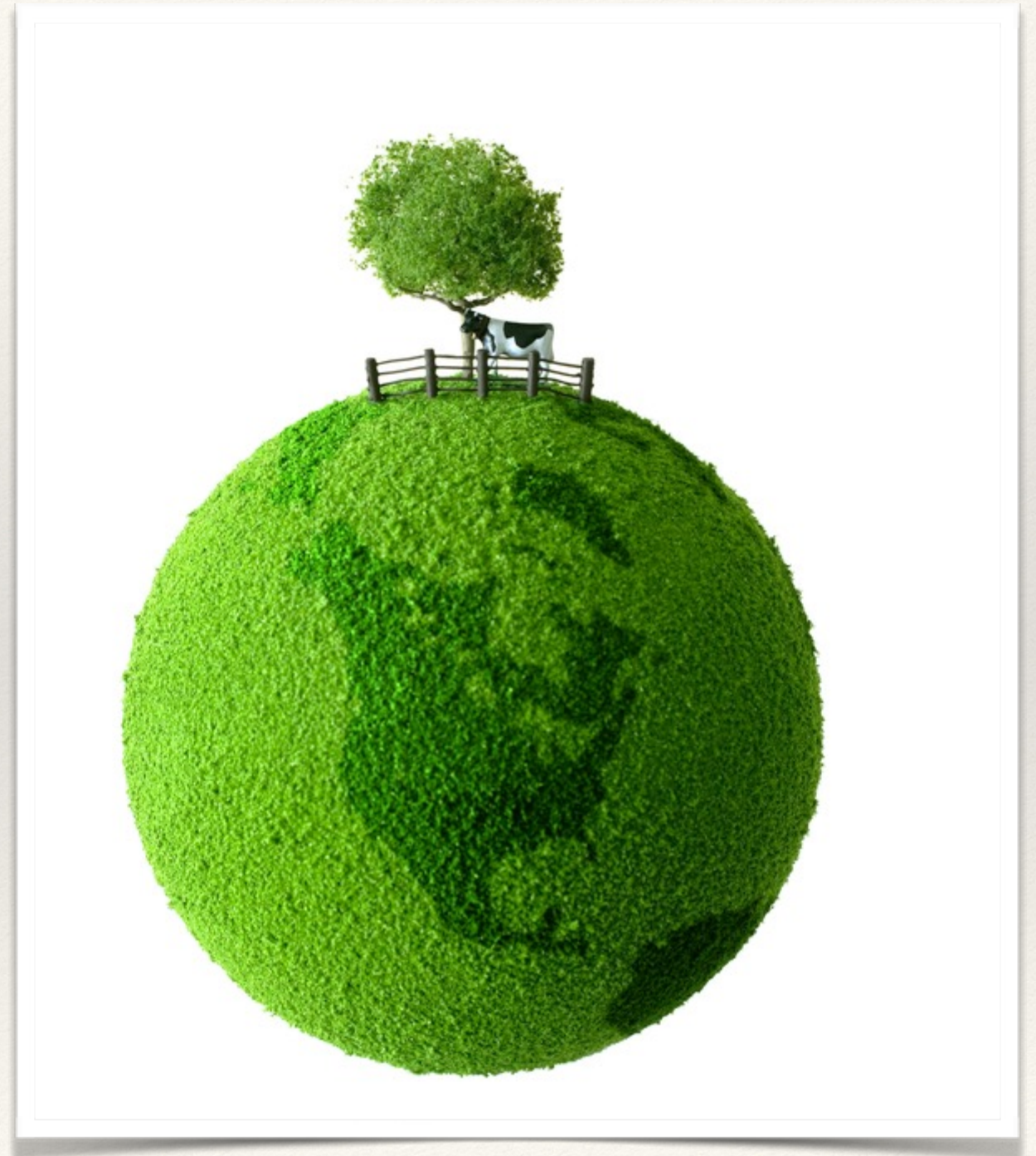
---

- ❖ “Food hubs are actual or *virtual* spaces through which local and/or sustainable food is **collected and distributed** to processors, retailers, restaurants, or other organizations. Food hubs can also provide space for other food-related activities including food preparation, handling and/or processing, education and skill-building, and increasing food access.”



# Climate change and food hubs

- ❖ More local food production for local markets
- ❖ Shorter food chains
- ❖ Increased understanding about the food system and how to prepare food





# Niagara Local Food Coop (Christy)

- ❖ Producer - consumer cooperative
- ❖ Virtual farmers' market





# Niagara Local Food Coop

- ❖ Bi-weekly, centralized distribution
- ❖ Benefits
  - ❖ “We are becoming a more food conscious society. [Our work] gets people thinking about the food and the impact. Not only about what they are eating but where what they are eating is coming from.” (Paula Riele, Market Coordinator)





# Open Food Network

- ❖ Being piloted in Canada
- ❖ Open network platform
- ❖ Theresa Schumilas:
  - ❖ [tschumilas@rogers.com](mailto:tschumilas@rogers.com)





# Plan B (Pratley)

- ❖ Entrepreneurial family-run multi-farm CSA (hub?)





# Plan B

“We have to turn 25 weeks of harvest into 52 weeks of income... You have to get creative with your business model real fast.”





# Plan B

- ❖ Benefits:
  - ❖ Plan B
  - ❖ Small-Scale farmers
  - ❖ Farm workers





# Jumping points

- ❖ “Farms like ours, one thing that is different is that thinking of the farm as a food hub, and finding those places. So say you have your urban centre here, and then you have your more rural [areas]... You need these sort of mid-points... We are halfway between really rural Ontario and the urban parts, so, it is sort of like that **jumping point.**” (Melanie Golba, Owner)





# Limits to growth

- ❖ Lack of organic produce especially fruit
- ❖ Lack of processing facilities
- ❖ Access to capital/infrastructure
- ❖ Market concentration

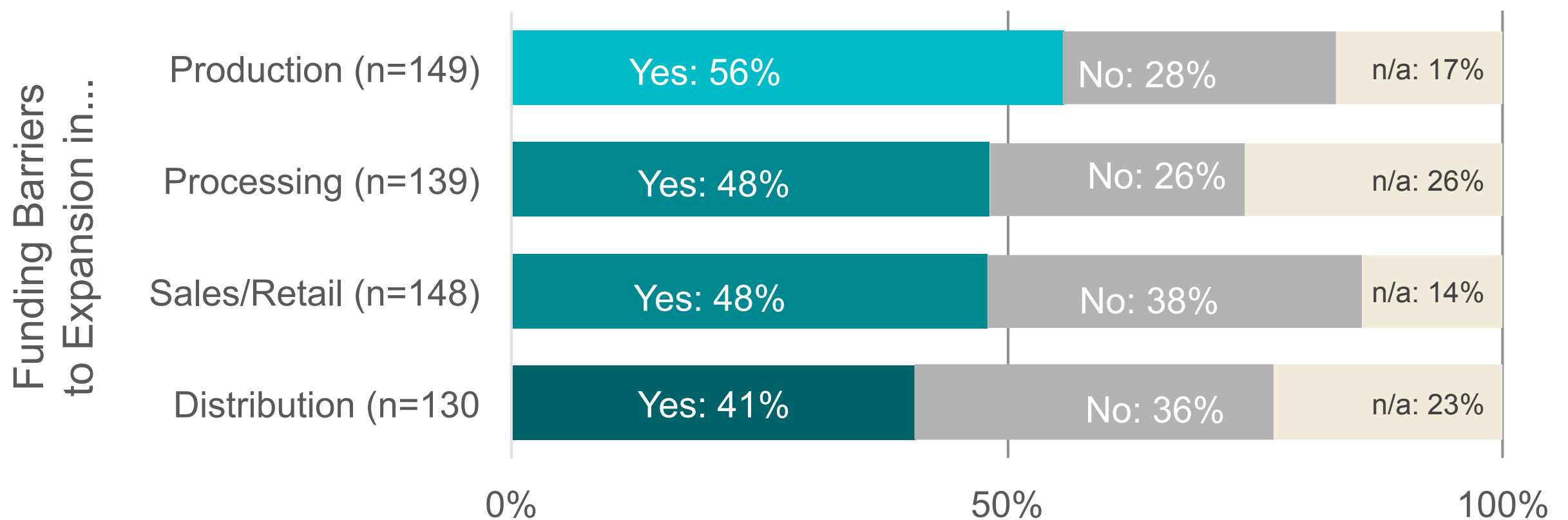




Over half of respondents reported funding barriers to expansion into **production**.

About half of respondents reported funding barriers to expansion into **processing and retail sales**.

Just under half reported funding barriers to expansion in **distribution**.

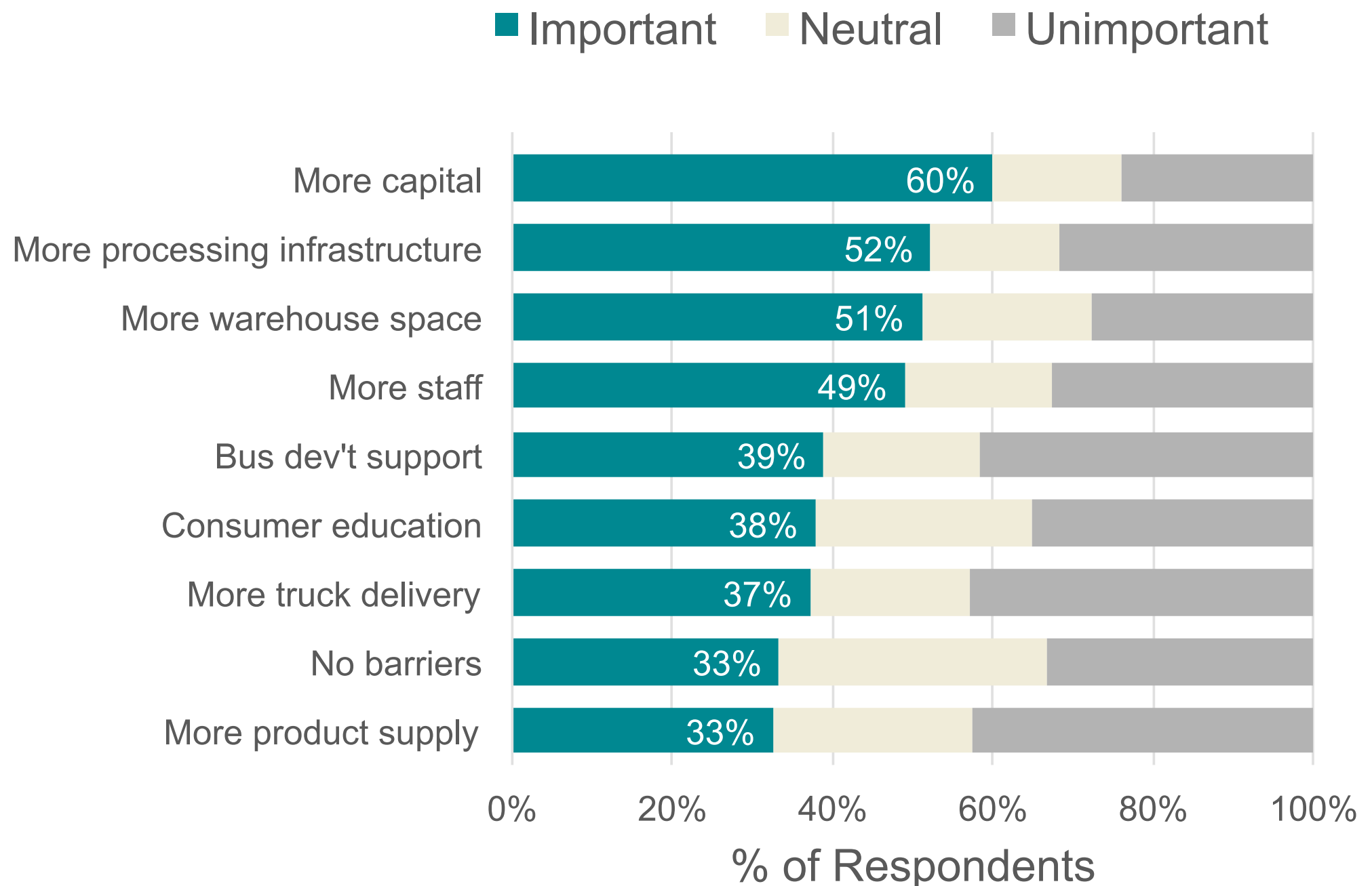




Access to capital, processing infrastructure, warehouse space, and staff are the most important barriers to expansion for processors and distributors.

Barriers like business development support, consumer education, truck delivery, and product supply are simultaneously important and unimportant to different producers.

Barriers to Expansion for Processors and Distributors





# Takeaways

- ❖ Common problems from global steam roller
- ❖ Place-based solutions
- ❖ Networks and communities are key
- ❖ No template





# Grateful to supporters



Social Sciences and Humanities  
Research Council of Canada

Conseil de recherches en  
sciences humaines du Canada

Canada



BALSILLIE SCHOOL  
OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS



Ontario

Ministry of Agriculture,  
Food and Rural Affairs

Centre for  
Sustainable  
Food Systems

