



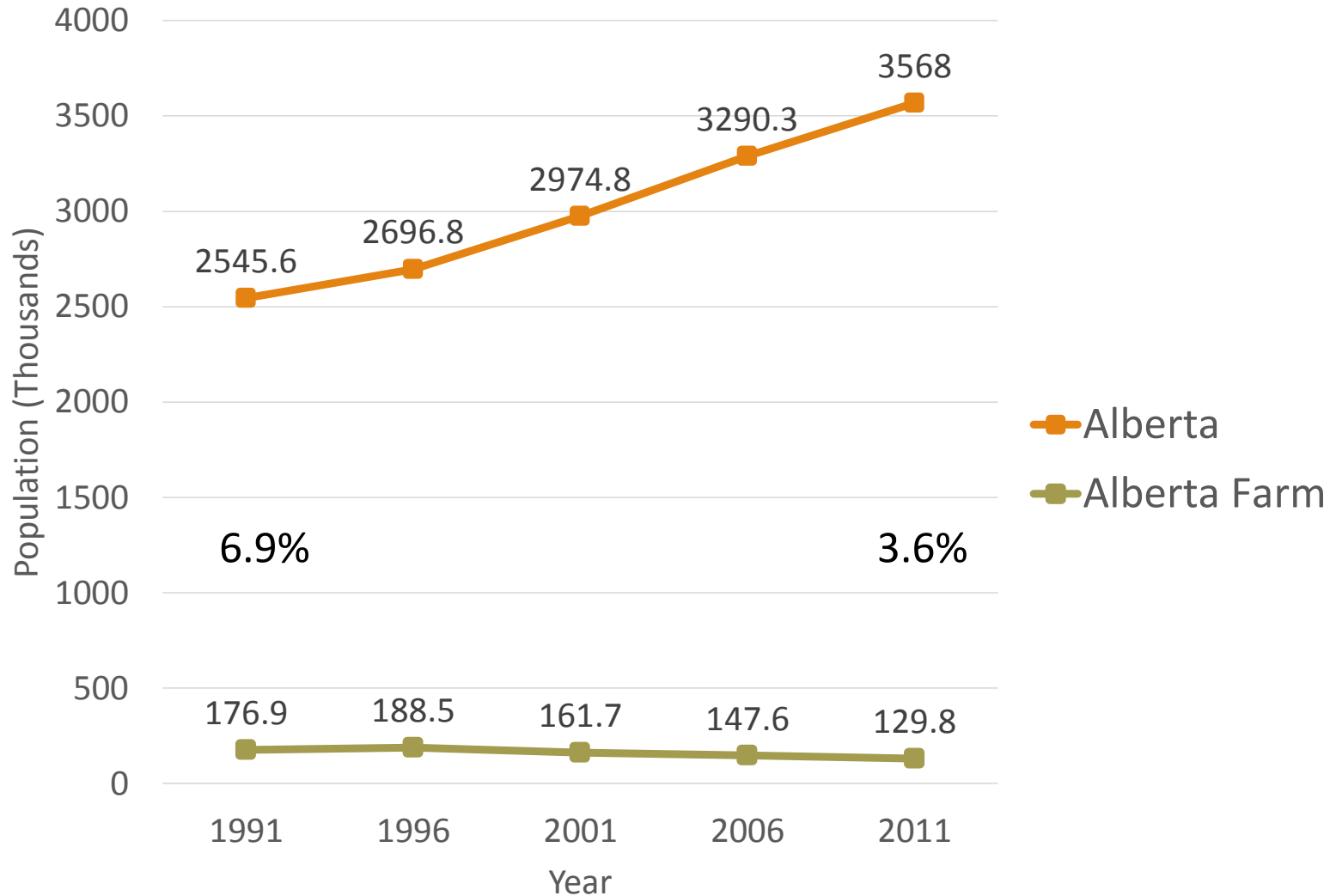
Hosting an In-Class “Rural Café”: Employing Agricultural Speed Dating to Build Ag Fluency

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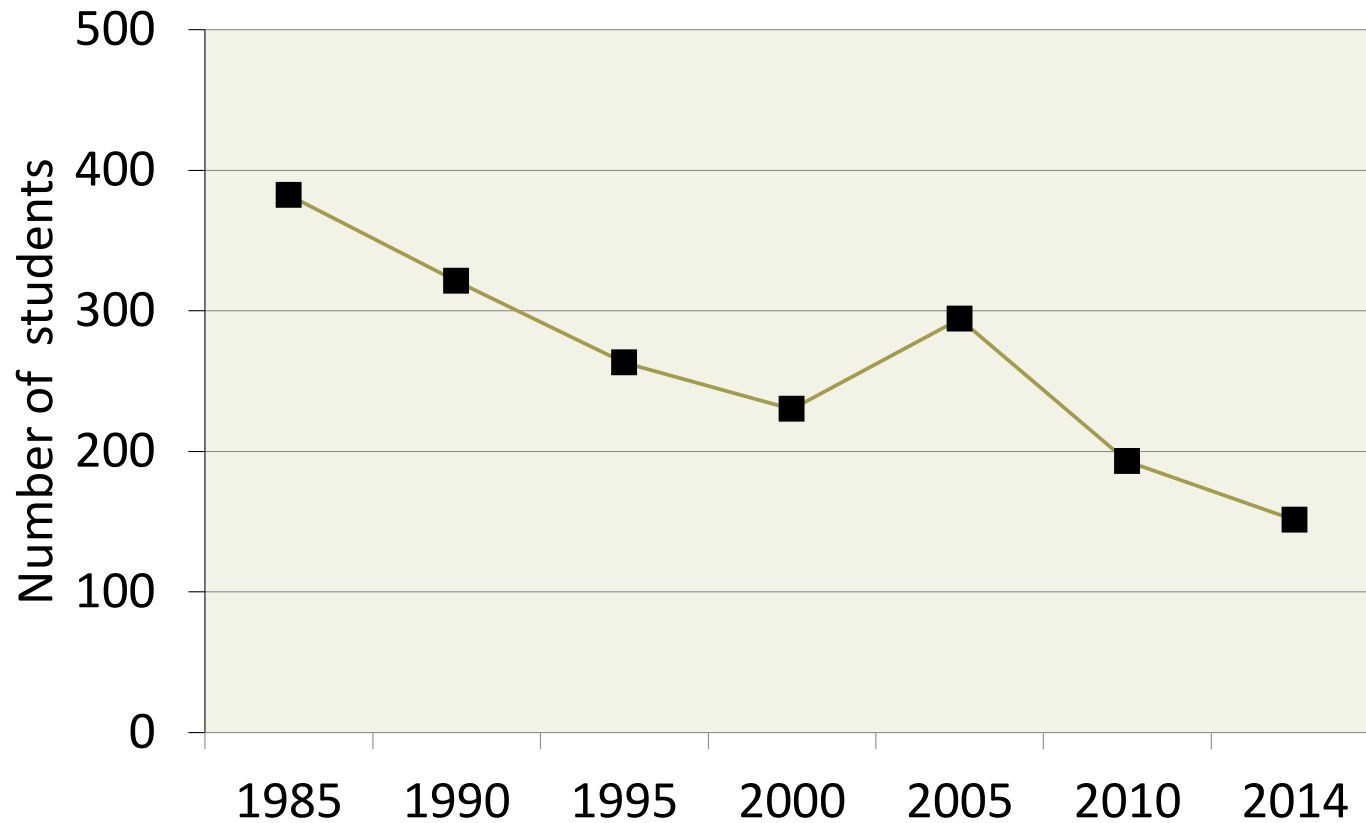
The Problem....

How can you grow ag-fluency in a population of undergraduate students who are primarily urban or international?

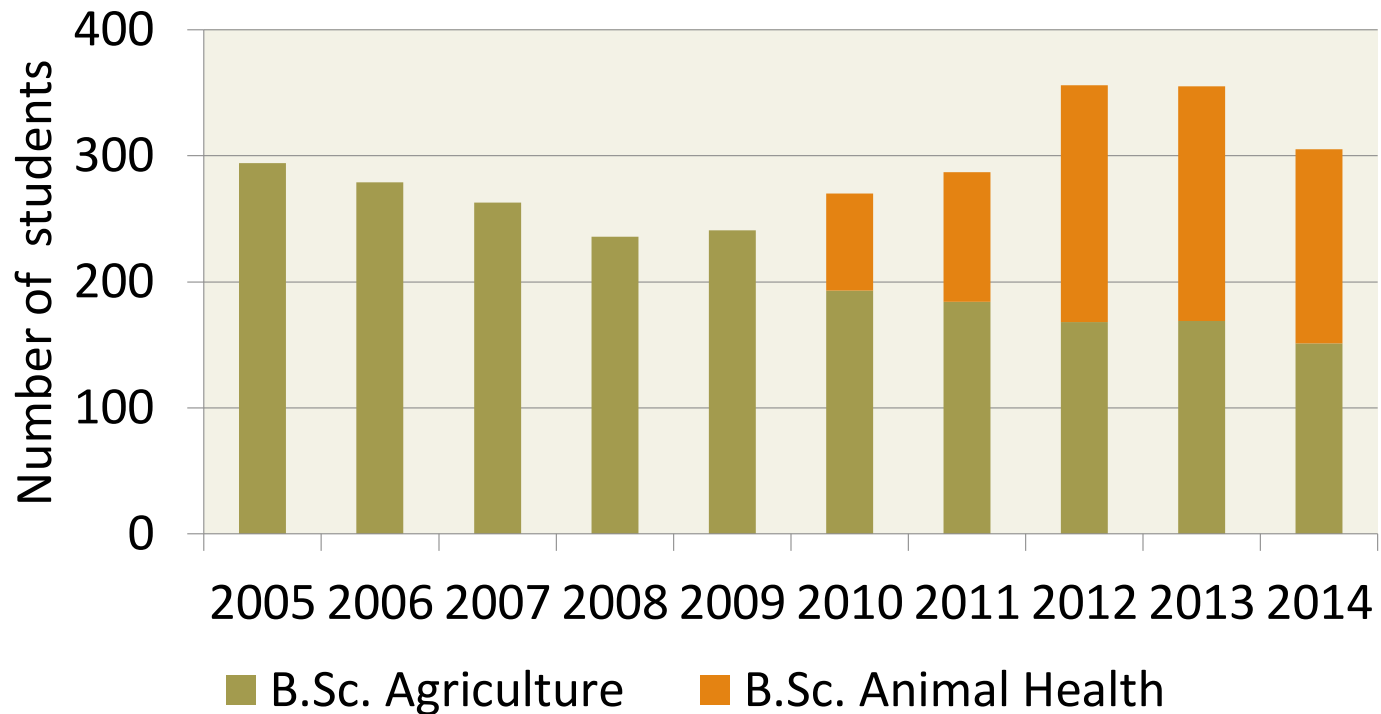
Alberta's Farm Population



Enrolment in B.Sc. Agriculture Program at the University of Alberta (1985-2014)



Enrolment in B.Sc. Agriculture and the B.Sc. Animal Health Programs at the University of Alberta (2005-2014)



Objectives:

- To provide students with the opportunity to learn about the realities of animal agriculture in Alberta by first-hand interaction with poultry and livestock producers.
- To provide a framework for students to learn about key issues facing Alberta poultry and livestock producers to build ag-fluency.
- To assist students to build and refine communication skills (individual and within small groups) by interacting with Alberta producers in a structured setting.

Options to Build Ag Fluency

Take students out to meet farmers on their farms.

- Time table issues
- Expensive travel
- Risk management
- Contact would be limited to 1 or 2 producers

Options to Build Ag Fluency

~~Take students out to meet farmers on their farms.~~

Bring farmers onto campus to meet students in their classrooms.

Project Outline:

- A rural café was held at Alumni House of the University of Alberta in the afternoons of March 16, 17 and 18. Coffee and cookies were served.
- Six or seven Alberta animal producers were invited to attend the rural café each day. Several producers brought other family members.
- At each lab session (Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday) each student was randomly assigned to five table groups (four to six students per group).

Producers Participating in the Rural Café

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday
Beef	Beef	Beef
Dairy	Dairy	Dairy
Swine	Swine	Swine
Sheep	Sheep	Sheep
Table Egg Layers	Turkeys	Broiler Hatching Eggs
Dairy Goats	Organic	Bison
	Broilers	

Project Outline:

- Each farmer was seated at a table with chairs for six students. Each group of students had 25 minutes to engage in conversation with a producer. At 30 minute intervals, each group of students rotated so that by the end of the afternoon, each student group had a chance to meet with all six producers.
- Each student served as table host and commentator for one farmer (key responsibility but not the sole one).
- The students prepared a list of potential questions for the producers, around the general topic of “**what makes or breaks your operation**”?



Project Outline:

- Students were encouraged to record the conversations rather than be occupied with taking notes.
- The following week, the six students who were the table hosts for each farmer got together as a group in the lab session to prepare a summary of what their producer had to say.
- Two weeks after the rural café, students presented a summary of the producer comments to the entire lab session.

[2015.mp4](#)

mp4



Feedback:

- Students:
 - very positive overall
 - 25 minutes seemed too short for meaningful dialogue
 - Class presentations were too short
 - Too many marks for a short presentation
- Producers:
 - very positive feedback
 - would have like more time for group discussions
 - would have liked flex time to follow-up with individual students (employment, career options etc.)

Future Considerations:

- Host the Rural Café in a rural area
- Have the students identify and invite producers they know
- Extend the event with a reception after the dialogue sessions to provide time for one-on-one conversations
- Host a “Careers in Agriculture” based Rural Café at the end of the term to help students see where they might fit into the agricultural scene



Funding Sponsors

Alberta Milk

Alberta Pork

Alberta Egg Producers

Alberta Turkey Producers

Alberta Chicken Producers

Alberta Hatching Egg Producers

Ancillary Services, University of Alberta

Faculty of Agriculture, Life and Environmental Sciences