



Stage 1 Lesson 1: Canadian Entrepreneurs



Alison Leroux - Agriculture and Food

Biography

Allison Leroux is a graduate of the University of Guelph, where she studied Animal Biology and Agriculture. Working on farms, in urban agriculture, and community gardens helped her understand how food systems, land stewardship, and community are connected. She combined her family's pizzeria business experience with her agricultural studies to launch "Crowded Table Pizza," a farm-to-table pop-up she began in her third year of university. Her business focuses on sustainability and community by sourcing ingredients from local farmers.

Leroux is also a musician who plays the fiddle. She notes that food and music do the same thing—bring people together. She has been recognized for her volunteer work with the Lieutenant Governor's Ontario Heritage Trust Award for Youth Achievement.

She plans to continue growing her business and connecting with people through food and music.

Challenges: The pandemic happened while Leroux was starting university, so it was hard to become part of the community. But even though she did not come from a farming background, she was welcomed.



Brian Tischler - Agriculture and Technology

Biography

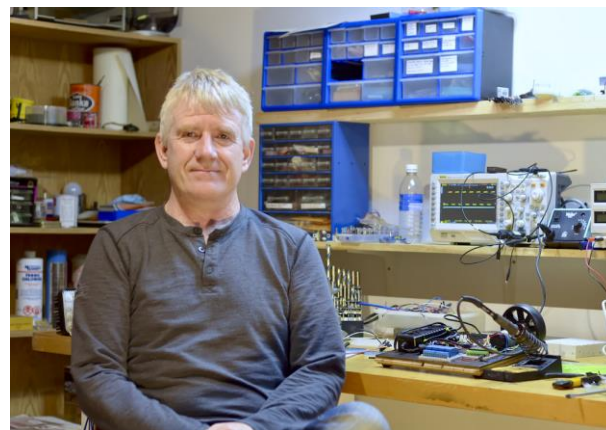
When he bought his family's farm in the mid-1990s, Alberta grain farmer Brian Tischler didn't know his passion for farming would lead him to developing open-source software (open-source means it's available online for free). He created AgOpenGPS and AgraBot to bring low-cost precision agriculture and autonomous agricultural vehicles to farm fields.

He started with a problem: after harvesting a grain crop, tall stubble is left behind. But the stubble made it hard to see where he had seeded before. He thought, since he had GPS, he should be able to figure out exactly where the air seeder had gone. That let him map the field and he could tell where to turn the seeder on and off to drop seeds where they were needed. That's how AgOpenGPS started.

Then people asked if he could write software that would steer a tractor. It seemed impossible, but he figured it out with feedback from people who wanted the product. He developed a steering system called AgraBot that can be added to an existing tractor with GPS.

Today, farmers around the world use Tischler's software to create low-cost systems that help them work more efficiently as they farm sustainably.

Challenges: When Tischler looked for a solution to the first problem, he couldn't find any open-source agriculture information. So he made his own, using skills he had from his earlier career in medical technology and from game programming. He also believes in collaboration and DIY solutions so he shared his work on a platform that allows people to share their code.



Brian Tischler in his "robot room" where he brings big concepts to life. Photo: Supplied

Curtis Stone - Urban Agriculture

Biography

Curtis Stone is a farmer in Kelowna, BC. You might be surprised if you saw his farm! It is in the city, on only 1/3 acre of land and is called Green City Acres. It is a profitable business that has allowed him to purchase several plots in downtown Kelowna.

Stone started his farm in 2010 to change the way we think about farming by growing food on residential lots that are not being used. It's not suitable for growing grains; he specializes in annual vegetables like microgreens and salad greens, quick-growing crops with short growing cycles that allow him to have multiple plantings in the same spaces. He grows for local restaurants and farmers' markets, helping people buy their food locally.

By showing that farming in an urban space of less than an acre can make a living, Stone has become prominent in the growth of urban farming. Part of the secret to his success is knowing that farmers have to be good at business.

Challenges: At first, few people believed that small-scale farming could work. It takes start-up money to get a business going; Stone had to overcome financial difficulties and issues with getting land in the city. He had to innovate by selling directly to consumers.



Curtis Stone with some fresh kale at one of his Kelowna urban farming operations. Stone is an expert at farming profitably on small parcels of land.

Arlene Dickinson - Media and Investing, including agri-food

Biography

You may know Arlene Dickinson from Dragon's Den where she showed an amazing ability to recognize the potential for businesses to become successful. She is among Canada's most successful entrepreneurs. She has helped businesses grow from start-ups to multi-billion-dollar corporations and has invested in several agri-food startups such as Three Farmers Foods. After leaving the Den in 2017, she started District Ventures Capital, a fund that helps entrepreneurs and fast-growing companies in the food and beverage and health and wellness sectors.

Dickinson was born in South Africa and came to Canada as a child in 1959. Her family had basically no money when they settled in Calgary. As an adult, she worked hard, mainly at sales and marketing jobs. When she lost a job in advertising, a friend offered her a position with his new marketing firm, Venture Communications. She started out as an unpaid partner but within 10 years, she owned the company. It became one of Canada's largest independent marketing firms, with offices across the country.

Challenges: Dickinson had to overcome poverty and personal problems. She didn't feel smart enough to go to university, even though she got very good marks at school. Her self-esteem was low but when she realized it was holding her back, she used perseverance to reshape her view of herself. She realized the problems early in her life did not determine who she would be.



Picture from her website [Arlene Dickinson](#)
- [Arlene Dickinson](#)

Viola Desmond - Beauty Products & Activism

Biography

Viola Desmond was born in 1914 in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada. As a young girl, she dreamed of owning a beauty business, but in the early 1900s, Black women in Canada had few opportunities. Many beauty schools refused to accept Black students. Viola didn't let this stop her. She travelled to Montreal, New York, and Atlantic City to study beauty and skincare. After completing her training, she returned home and opened her own beauty salon, which catered to Black women. She later started a beauty school to train other young Black women in hairdressing and beauty care. She even developed her own line of beauty products - a rare achievement for a Black woman at the time.

Despite her business success, Viola faced racism and segregation. In 1946, she was arrested for sitting in the whites-only section of a movie theatre in New Glasgow, Nova Scotia. She refused to move and was forcibly removed, fined, and jailed overnight. Even though she lost her court case, Viola's bravery helped inspire the fight for civil rights in Canada. In 2010, the government officially apologized, and in 2018, Viola Desmond became the first Canadian woman to appear on the \$10 bill.

Challenges: Viola faced racial discrimination in both her personal life and business. She was denied opportunities because of her skin colour, and her refusal to accept segregation led to legal struggles.



Fill in the following table

Entrepreneur	Challenges they faced	Character traits that helped them succeed