

Note on nomenclature: Food Box programmes go under a variety of names in different communities—for the sake of simplicity, the GFB title will be used throughout this monograph, without implying that this is the best name.



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The Good Food Box (GFB) Story: The sustainability challenge

We dedicate this monograph to the many volunteers and GFB Coordinators who keep this programme going through passion and concern for the health of the people in their community.

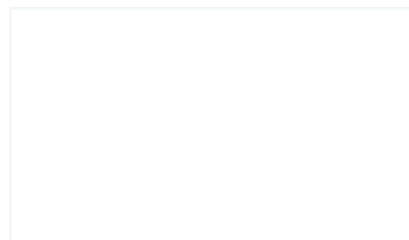
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Introduction: Why this monograph?

This monograph is meant to reflect the aspirations of many people who work in their communities ensuring that people have access to fresh, nutritious food. As research rolls in making a strong link between how important eating fruits and vegetables is for good health, the stories that GFB people— people who work/volunteer in GFB programmes— tell take on new dimensions.

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Fresh is Best

"It's really getting back to that idea that fresh is best," Verna P. says of the Good Food Box.

Verna is Elders Nurse for Cowichan Tribes. She takes a holistic approach to her responsibilities, and she says the Good Food Box fits right in.

Years ago, the diet of First Nations peoples changed with the seasons, according to what indigenous fruits and vegetables were available at different times of the year. The seasonal variation in the Good Food Box reflects that same tie to the earth's rhythms, Verna says.

She says that the educational value of the Good Food Box programme is subtle, but effective. After somebody has been getting the Good Food Box, she sees them begin to change from going down the middle aisles in the supermarket, stocked with processed foods, to the outside aisles where the produce is found.

"It's just an awareness. It's very subtle, but you really see the light go on. It's reinforcing the talk; be kind to your body, be good to your body, and this is a way to do it."

The Good Food Box gives the elders a special way to connect to community and family, Verna says, often the family Christmas dinner is held at the elder's home.

"Sometimes elders don't have a lot to give," Verna says, but the Good Food Box provided to elders at Christmas time contains almost everything needed for a special meal. ***"The elders just love it!"***



Verna

Why this Monograph? continued

GFB supporters, coordinators and volunteers know how important this programme is for the customers by getting them access to healthful food, but also by influencing ongoing eating behaviour by increasing overall consumption of fruits and vegetables. The health benefits are visible at the community level. But most of these programmes live with the threat of closure due to insufficient operating funds. This monograph will explore the questions that face these programmes and make a variety of arguments and suggestions about how these programmes could become sustainable and thereby move them from the margins to become a force for facilitating public health and local food sustainability.

The hope: We hope that this monograph will encourage existing GFB organizers simply by helping them realize that all the problems they are facing are common to most of the groups involved. We also hope that people will be inspired by ideas that other programmes are incorporating. But the most important thing we hope for is that the value and worth of the programme will be very apparent to funders and policy people who are considering ways to mitigate today's and future escalating health costs related to chronic disease conditions. Our goal is to create long-term investment for this programme to replace the short-term project funding situation that GFB programmes currently face.

Scientific research demonstrates that consumption of fruits and vegetables is necessary for personal and public health. Research provides clear evidence that shows if people change to a high fruit and vegetable diet, future savings to our overall healthcare system would be dramatic as would improvements to quality of life. This research also shows that dietary practice with protective levels of fruit and vegetables is problematic in our society. See the Vital For Life document for why it is problematic.

The results of this enquiry underline the importance to public health of programmes that materially support increased fruit and vegetable consumption.

If we truly care about the health of ourselves and others we need to seriously re-evaluate the infrastructure we have created around food growth, production and distribution. ¹

GFB Story Research: What is the Good Food Box (GFB) programme?

The GFB is a community-based programme for purchasing healthy fruits and vegetables. The programme is organized in most cities and towns across Canada and provides an opportunity for people to pick

up a box of produce at a local depot, generally once a month, at a low price. Organizations that coordinate the GFB programme most often have a mandate to serve low-income people and others who cannot easily access healthy foods, although most programmes make their box available to anyone who wishes to purchase it.

How did the programme start and grow?

“The GFB is a response to the position held by most anti-hunger activists that food banks are not a sustainable food distribution mechanism, and that food bank recipients often feel that their self-esteem is damaged by having to rely on charity in order to get the food they need to live.”²

The first GFB programme in Canada was formed in 1993 as part of the Field to Table project of Toronto FoodShare. This first GFB programme was formed with many of the same principles of other “buying club” models, namely the *Seikatsu Club* of Japan, a programme called *Share Box* in the U.S., and projects run by the *Brazil Citizens Action Against Hunger* and *Poverty for Life*. The GFB programme was started in response to the need for a more efficient and sustainable “buying club” type programme that would be capable of serving a large number of people.

There are now over 44 programmes listed under the Ontario GFB Network, approximately 35 communities in BC with access to a GFB programme, and over 20 additional GFB programmes across Canada (other than Ontario and BC). There is at least one GFB programme in virtually every province. They range from groups that can distribute 10 boxes per month to those that have delivered 4,000.

The programme has grown due to the increasing awareness in communities around the need for food security and the link between good health and eating of fruits and vegetables. More people are realizing how many people are hungry in their communities because of marginalization and poverty, and also how vulnerable the local food system is to changing global forces that could negatively affect every eater in Canada. Ensuring that all citizens can eat healthy foods is also recognized by a growing number of people as the cornerstone to community health.

The GFB programme relies on the passionate commitment from volunteers and Coordinators to make the programme work. The time and energy needed to run this programme is quite high but the community spirit and sense of service to others keeps those involved going, often in the face of formidable hurdles and lack of secure funding.

A difference

“I know it’s making a difference!” says Susan C. of the Good Food Box she receives each month from People for a Healthy Community on Gabriola Island.

Susan has multiple health problems, including diabetes and kidney disease. She has special dietary requirements as a result.

Unable to work because of her poor health, Susan has a hard time meeting those requirements. It would be a lot harder if it weren’t for the Good Food Box.

“It’s the kind of food I’m supposed to be eating, natural foods, no processed foods! A certain amount of carbohydrate is supposed to be coming from my vegetables, and that’s impossible when you have no money to buy vegetables all the time.”

Susan also relies on the local food bank, but ***“even though we do get a great deal of food through this food bank, a lot of it is very high carb food for me. What we get through the Good Food Box is a lot of vegetables and fruits.”***

Most of the fruit is eaten by Susan’s son, who is living with her right now to give her a hand, while the vegetables go raw into salads. For a week after the Good Food Box arrives, Susan eats the way she knows she needs to eat all the time.

“It’s made a difference, simply because of the amount of decent food that I can manage to get in me, at least for a week!”



Susan

Juicing For Life

"I was juicing for life."

The heavy-duty pain medication Joanne F. had to take while undergoing treatment for cancer was a threat to her liver function. To combat the problem, she learned at the cancer lodge to cleanse her liver of toxins by drinking the combined juice of several fruits and vegetables.

When she got home to Gabriola Island, she made the juice from the contents of her Good Food Box. ***"It was good to have the raw vegetables, because I couldn't have bought them at the store."***

Unable to work and getting little help from the government, buying fresh produce ***"was something I couldn't really afford to do, but something I needed to do."***

When you have a low income and have to choose between paying for shelter and paying for food, fruit and vegetables become a luxury, Joanne says. The food you buy ***"usually ends up being pasta or something because it's cheaper and goes further."***

That's where the Good Food Box really makes a difference, helping to bring the price of fresh produce within reach of those who need it. Now, six months after her last treatment and having just returned to work, Joanne still gets the Good Food Box.

"Now it's a habit." she says and one she's happy to have.

Joanne says the fresh fruit and vegetables give her energy to do her job and get on with her life.

"I feel more healthy when I can have food like that."



Gabriola Raw Food Demonstration

What are the challenges existing GFB programmes face?

This section is from GFB programme interviews in 2005 and 2006 and summarizes various responses from the people doing the work in communities.

Not Financially Sustainable

Research has shown that there are not any truly self-sustaining GFB programmes in Canada. Market-based buying clubs cover costs from revenues and members. The common GFB model seems to be that the cost of the food itself plus 5-10% is covered by the consumer, and the other operational costs (one paid staff coordinator, start-up capital, administration, etc) are supplemented by funding via an umbrella non-profit organization, or grant funding. Virtually all GFB programmes use some kind of government and/or foundation funding and donations to pay most of the administrative and operational costs. These subsidized costs usually include wages for one coordinator (part-time position), transportation, rental of space, promotional materials, etc. Many programmes have gotten "one time" funding or grants from organizations like the United Way, which were great to help with start up, but leave them struggling to find new sources of income in their second or third year.

Can't Grow the Programme

Growth in a market-based buying club is done by increasing sales and decreasing costs and increasing efficiencies. The GFB programme is limited in its growth by lack of resources to plan and implement marketing, lack of infrastructure to manage increased numbers of boxes or to add operating efficiencies. The programme has not been able to grow without adequate grants or long-term government, foundation or municipal/band funding.

Not Large Enough to Purchase Bulk Orders

Even when an organization is buying enough to buy wholesale, this in itself may not provide sustainability for the programme. FoodShare Toronto has substantial purchasing power, but still relies on grants, volunteers and donations for up to 35% of the costs of their programme.

Dependant on Volunteers

Most programmes have survived as long as they have because of the dedication of their volunteers. Having a central core of active volunteers is a key operating the GFB. Often, volunteers have to leave for various reasons, which puts more work on less people. The burn-out factor among volunteers and Coordinators can be very high.

High Transportation Costs and Lack of Storage

Transportation and storage costs have no way to be covered in the current GFB model, but are an important consideration for market-based Buying Clubs which arrange to have these costs covered through product sales or through “in-kind” resource donations from other organizations.

Stigma Attached to the Programme

Several GFB programme coordinators expressed that while they say the GFB is for everyone regardless of income, they find they have to make a concentrated effort to ensure that using the GFB does not conjure up the same stigmatization for the consumers as charity model programmes (food bank, hamper, etc.) often do. This is particularly hard to avoid when the GFB programme is housed in the same organization as the charity programmes (i.e.; Salvation Army and other Churches). A common word of advice from GFB coordinators is to be mindful of how to market and give image to a GFB programme without stigmatizing the poor.

What kinds of innovations are occurring across the country?

Creating a Central Network

Many groups in Ontario and now in BC have banded together in Networks. This enables them to centralize the funding and infrastructure in one spot instead of many, allowing for one paid person to do the food ordering and coordinating of distribution. Local groups still organize the distribution in their areas, but now they don't have to spend time finding food sources and administering the programme so intensively. These efficiencies will need to increase sales to reach effective levels to make a difference.

Sponsoring A Box

Reaching out to the business community and individuals, asking them to “Give the Gift of Healthy Eating”, has become a way for programmes to bring in donations. Knowing that their money is going directly into the sponsorship of a healthy food box is a strong motivation for some donors.

Please Join

“Please, people, join, because it's well worth it!” That's the plea of Dee B., a Nanaimo FoodShare Good Food Box volunteer and customer. Dee has been with the programme from the start. Volunteering is a way she gives back to the community. ***“If you don't give back to your community, they're not going to help you. And when you need help, lots of people are there.”***

Dee knows about needing help. When the Good Food Box started, Dee and her husband were living on his disability pension and ***“a little bit of social services.”***

Dee is diabetic and has to make sure she has fresh fruit and vegetables in her diet.

“I was only allowed \$15 a month from social services to buy fruits and vegetables, and that wasn't enough.”

Being able to spend \$10 a month to receive the bounty of the Good Food Box made a big difference. ***“I've found that it's helped a lot.”***

Dee's financial situation has eased, but she still relies on the Good Food Box to keep her diet healthy. ***“I just can't afford to go out and buy fruit and vegetables at the stores, the prices are much, much too high.”***

Besides, she enjoys volunteering at the Good Food Box.

“I really appreciate the camaraderie when we're here. It's a big sense of community.”

And it's a way to help keep the programme going.

“It can't run without volunteers.”



Dee

Beyond Affordable

For Cathy D., Nanaimo FoodShare Good Food Box coordinator, and her assistant Kathaleen T., the value of the programme goes far beyond affordable nutrition. Cathy and Kathaleen see tremendous potential in the programme as a training venue for adults with developmental disabilities.

"My core volunteers are adults with developmental disabilities." Cathy says.

That core group is involved in every aspect of the programme. They take orders, pack boxes, make the lunch and help promote the Good Food Box to the public.

While they're at it, they are getting hands-on experience and real-life training in life skills, work skills and social skills. Cathy says, ***"I have folks that don't really deal with math much, but one day I found the bank deposit was all done up without my help. All the cheques were listed, all the cash was there, everything was added up and it was all correct. That's exciting!"***

Kathaleen says the Good Food Box helps bridge the gap between adults with developmental disabilities and the broader community. The programme is ***"a good way of networking, because there's people from all different agencies, and just everyday people that volunteer as well. They get to know adults with developmental disabilities as people, Kathaleen says, they're part of the community. They belong."***

Moreover, ***"they understand that you need to give back to your community that you live in, which is really important."*** Cathy concludes.

Kathaleen says that it's a challenge for people with developmental disabilities to live in a community because they don't know how to reach out. The Good Food Box facilitates that transition.

Membership Fees

Some programmes also charge a one-time or yearly membership fee in addition to the cost of the boxes to help offset administrative costs.

Increasing Purchasing Power

Some programmes act as a kind of "broker" selling wholesale produce outside of the programme. It is contrary to the value of buying local though, as the majority of cheap food from a wholesaler is imported. FoodShare Toronto is able to get really good prices from wholesalers because their orders are commercial volumes, and as a result smaller organizations can buy their food from Foodshare Toronto. Many of the organizations that some GFB projects partners with also administer the region's other main food security initiatives, such as the community kitchens and gardens, as well as the food banks and soup kitchens. This creates concentrated purchasing power, as the Community Kitchen will order food from the GFB programme – or the GFB will use produce from the community garden. In some cases the partnership with the Community Kitchen is one in which consumers can experience cooking with the food from the boxes together and/or in a "cooking class". One programme in NE Saskatchewan has found this particularly beneficial in increasing box purchases in a couple of the First Nations communities they serve.

Some programmes are providing boxes more often—even weekly, thus increasing purchasing power and providing needed nutritional services.

Buying Local

Many GFB programmes are working more closely with local farmers and producers in an effort to make the process beneficial to both parties. These efforts are also closely linked to local 'food security' initiatives, as it strengthens local farms and creates more demand for local foods.

Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)

The *Equiterre* organization in Quebec is heavily involved in *Community Supported Agriculture* and currently has a network of 75 CSA farms. CSA is a way for farmers to get the capital they need at the beginning of the growing season from people who want access to their produce. They are studying the possibility of using Micro-Credit lending to Pre-paying for the produce provides that capital help make their CSA's more accessible to low-income people. They are interested in how it might work to have an umbrella organization buy the CSA shares at the beginning of the season and then have the consumers make payments each time they get a box of food (weekly, bi-weekly, etc) so that by the end of the cycle the consumers have paid for the share they received, as well as receiving food directly from that farm.

What are the benefits of the GFB Programme?

The Need Grows

The need for food programmes for marginalized populations seems to grow every year. Rising housing costs and unemployment are sending more and more people into poverty and homelessness. This need is felt in rural and urban communities across the country. The GFB is a popular programme that gets straight to the point as it is delivered right where the problems manifest.

Promotes the Consumption of Healthy Food

For those who are in need of some kind of food assistance, access to *healthy* food is often an added issue. Agencies providing food are often given donations from grocery stores and restaurants – and the quality of this food can sometimes be very low. Additionally, the infrastructure to deliver fresh foods is limited, which requires agencies to fall back on canned goods and dried foods. By now, most people understand the health hazards of a diet full of processed foods – they are often high in fat and sugar and low in nutrients.

The GFB approach asks the question, “*Doesn't everyone deserve to be healthy, regardless of income?*” This adds anti-poverty work that must be done at the same time as feeding people that are hungry. Getting good food to hungry people is often cited by Coordinators and volunteers across the country as the main reason they are involved in the programme. Public Health Nutritionists have become involved in response to evidence of inadequate consumption of fruits and vegetables by Canadians and by the lack of high quality fresh produce available from organizations that distribute charity food e.g. food banks. As they watch their neighbours and fellow citizens go hungry, and then bring home a box of macaroni and cheese, these organizers feel spurred to come up with programmes that bring health benefits to those without economic access to healthy food. Diabetes, heart disease, obesity and other health risks have proven to be greatly affected by diet, and many citizens are working hard to ensure that everyone in Canada has access to healthy foods, regardless of income.

Building Community

Every month, people come together to sort and box all the produce for pick-up. This time spent together creates a strong sense of community – “*people helping people*” is at the heart of all the GFB programmes and is another main reason why they continue to exist in the face of financial difficulties. Some volunteers have been working with a programme for years, and talk about it as a central part of their lives.

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A Big Hit

Donae C. likes the fact that her two girls have the Good Food Box to pick from before they go looking for chips or cookies in the cupboard.

The local raspberries in this week's box, she knows, will be a big hit.

“They'll be gone by today, maybe tomorrow at the latest, it's just nice for them to have something fresh and local to choose from.”

It's great, too, that the selection in the box is constantly changing, because it gives her a chance to introduce her daughters to foods they might not be familiar with.

Donae volunteers with the Good Food Box programme, ***“and I drag my kids along whenever I can.”***

Samantha, age seven, is with her today, helping to make sure that every Good Food Box has a big bunch of celery and a stalk of bananas. Samantha isn't crazy about the blueberries in today's box, ***“but I like raspberries,” she says.***

Donae says volunteering is a great experience because ***“everybody's so nice and we get along. We work really well together. I love everybody that comes here!”***

In fact, the sense of being involved with a community effort is as important to Donae as is the affordability and quality of the Good Food Box.

“It's my friends, and it's good food, and it's for everybody; and more people need to know about it. That's what it's all about”



Donae and Samantha



Kathaleen says the Good Food Box helps bridge the gap between adults with developmental disabilities and the broader community. (See p.6)

The GFB programmes are true grass roots expressions that show response to need that works on many levels but lacks institutional commitment in public policy.

Building Community (Cont)

This working together helps to break the isolation that many people feel in the modern world, and often volunteers will eat a meal together while they work. Society also benefits from the job skills training and mentoring that volunteers receive.

Community Economic Development

Buying local foods is a cornerstone of some community economic development. This approach calls for a strengthening of local economies through support for small business and the need to make links between the economy, education, healthcare, transportation, etc. Given that most food travels thousands of miles before reaching our tables, the need to “buy local” becomes evident. Local farmers continue to struggle to make a secure living, and the degree to which purchases reflect support for local producers, the stronger local economies will become.

Why is sustainability of the programme such a concern?

In the past year in BC alone, five GFB programmes have folded and three more may fold very soon. Invariably, the cause for these closures relates to a lack of adequate funding to secure a qualified coordinator who can keep the central functions of the programme operating and grow the programme. Lack of proper funding creates frustration and burn-out for both volunteers and for the underpaid Coordinators. Most funding agencies provide one-time only grants, and core funding to ensure the long-term sustainability of an organization or programme is almost unheard of today. Constantly shifting government and agency priorities mean that even long-term funding can disappear almost overnight, leaving programmes vulnerable to outside influences.

This issue is at the heart of the sustainability question for the GFB approach in Canada.

Technical Analysis of Research

Analysis of the GFB Programme:

In order to understand the operating nature of this programme, the function and results will be looked at through various lenses. Through this analysis, we arrive at ways that might be used to provide strategic supports to the programme so that it could function sustainably on an ongoing basis.

The GFB is a small programme

The GFB is most often a small programme offered through the auspices of a community agency that has a wide mandate to promote the health and well-being of people in the community. This often means that the direction of the programme relies on infrequent get-togethers of programme professionals who value the programme, but have little time to devote beyond the meetings and carrying out specific tasks for each GFB delivery cycle.

The GFB generally does not have a core budget but rather those involved try to cover the out-of-pocket expenses through ongoing grant-seeking, fund-raising and in kind donations. Substantial volunteer effort from professionals for planning and fundraising and from community folks at the logistical level is required to carry out the programme.

Some GFB programmes have a sponsoring service club that brings with it some administrative operating support and a reliable group of pack/deliver volunteers. Some First Nations sponsor the GFB programme and cover core-operating costs. Most GFB programmes rely on programme recipients as volunteers—this is consistent with good practice - focused on engaging people rather than simply providing charity. However, the lives of low-income people are often not conducive to the reliability that the programme requires. Other programmes take advantage of partner work-opportunity groups where the volunteers are being supervised to carry out the GFB tasks as part of a work entry/reentry initiative. This can provide the reliability necessary but the staff supervisor can become the de-facto programme co-coordinator—often outside their job description and often without key supports being available such as adequate facilities and food-safe/work-safe systems.

The GFB is a Buying Club

A Buying Club brings people together who wish to access a particular product or service more effectively and at reduced cost. Generally Buying Clubs work out price points for their members based upon a break-even budget meaning that the 'costs of doing business' (CODB) are fully covered by the prices paid by the members. Members benefit by receiving quality goods directly and often at an attractive price.

A Happy Place

"It's a happy place to be, and I look forward to it every month," says Violet. ***"If I'm incapacitated, I come and I just sit and watch."***

Violet also loves the quality and value of food they get in their box.

"There's such a healthy variety of food that sometimes you wouldn't even go out and buy for yourselves. I'm supposed to be eating lots of oranges and bananas, and there's always bananas and oranges."

Jack says that the Good Food Box encourages him to eat fresh produce he might not go to the trouble of buying otherwise.

"There's apples there, I cut them up and eat them, bananas, I put them on my cereal," he says.

Violet often brings her grandson, Tristan, with her to volunteer at the Good Food Box. Tristan is a lacrosse player, and he figures eating from the Good Food Box gives him an advantage in his sport.

"It certainly helps us out, like keeping us like energized," Tristan says.

For Violet, Jack and their grandson Tristan, the Good Food Box not only makes it easier for them to enjoy good nutrition in their own home, it provides an opportunity for them to contribute to their community.

"The kids have got to know what community spirit's all about," Jack says.



Tristan and Violet

Committed

Mariah W. is so committed to the Good Food Box that she not only volunteers at the Victoria packing depot, she wants to organize a distribution depot in her own neighbourhood.

A disability prevents Mariah from holding down a job, and high rents in Victoria eat up a disproportionate amount of her income. Still, Mariah knows how important fresh fruit and vegetables are to her health, so she is grateful for the Good Food Box.

Not having to buy produce at full price frees up cash that she can then spend on other necessities, like shoes, Mariah says.

"I like to see programmes like this so other people in the same situation as myself can benefit and get the food they need at a price they can afford."

Mariah especially appreciates the variety of fruit she receives in her Good Food Box. When she was a single mom raising three children, Mariah preserved all the fruit she could get for the kids. As a result, even though her children are grown and gone, she's not in the habit of buying fruit for herself.

"Now it just comes in the Good Food Box and it's in my refrigerator, and it's like wow! Surprise! Fruit for me! It's a joy."

Volunteering with the Good Food Box is another joy.

"It's just fun to be with other people and doing the sorting. It doesn't feel like work, the time goes quickly, and we all benefit from it."



Mariah

The GFB is a Buying Club (continued)

How does the GFB stack up to other Buying Clubs? The majority of GFB programmes are providing food to low-income people. The programme wishes to operate in a dignified way so the programme is not restricted to only low-income people and has no means-test (proof of low-income) involved. However, since the marketing of the programme is handled through social and health service agencies that work primarily with low-income people, de facto, this programme is one that caters to low-income people. Many of the programmes are providing food for very poor people and there is a desire to offer the food at a very low price. In practice, this means that most GFB programmes cannot cover their CODB. In fact, the usual practice is for a volunteer professional to act as a 'side-of-the-desk' fundraiser. Planning, ordering, payment collection, bag packing and delivery often require the time of a devoted group of volunteers. If a programme has some funding, a 'coordinator' is hired who recruits and manages volunteers and carries out many of the above tasks, often for a very low wage. It is easy to see that a lot of very expensive professional and volunteer time is subsidizing the programme. Without a paid coordinator to manage the many tasks and people involved, programmes often have to close as key professionals or volunteers move on.

The bottom line is that the GFB programme is a highly subsidized Buying Club subject to the vulnerability of a professional and community volunteer force. Examining several GFB programmes, issues such as liability insurance, food safety and worker/volunteer safety cannot be properly attended to due to lack of funds. Thus, not only can the GFB programmes be handicapped due to the nature of the volunteer planning and work force, it can be vulnerable because of lack of funds to ensure business or logistical efficiencies.

The GFB is a Public Education Programme.

How does it stack up to other public education programmes? Public Education programmes provide information to people about desirable behaviour as established through an accountable public process. These programmes tend to be information-based making a rational argument intended to persuade people to change their ways. GFB participants benefit from regular newsletters that provide a lot of good information about available services and the food in the box, bag or basket. Particularly if the food is 'new' or 'unusual', recipes and background facts on the food are usually provided for participants. People will be made aware of events and community opportunities that can support them in their efforts to eat good food. Often GFB Programmes will be operated side-by-side with Community Kitchen programmes that provide an opportunity for 'Cooking out of the Box' activities - to teach people new ways of using more fruits and vegetables and/or Community Garden projects where people learn to grow their own.

Canadians continue to be extremely interested in nutrition but interest is not being translated into healthy eating:

- * only 30% of Canadians eat at least 5 servings of fruit and vegetables a day;
- * only 44% are aware that Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating calls for 5-10 servings of fruit and vegetables each day.
- * only 7% of Canadians are aware that eating fruit and vegetables can reduce their risk of cancer.
- * only 2% are aware of the protective effect of fruit and vegetables on heart disease; 1% aware of stroke prevention capabilities retrieved from http://www.5to10aday.com/en_about_main.asp, September 23, 2006

The GFB is a Social Marketing Programme.

How does it stack up to other Social Marketing Programmes?

A Social Marketing Programme is a programme or campaign that seeks to change people's behaviour to meet social, health or environmental behaviour standards.³ These programmes use the tools of marketing from the business world in order to persuade and influence people to adopt more healthful, more environmentally friendly or more socially aware behaviours. The desired behaviours are generally identified through a public process wherein goals and values are debated and agreed upon in an accountable fashion. Rather than simply providing the information about the best behaviour such as occurs in Public Education Programmes, social marketing campaigns use a variety of approaches that attract people to make the changes by appealing to their core values and applauding changes in the public arena. The 'pitch' is to the emotional rather than the rational as pedagogically, this has been shown to have the best results in facilitating change. The best-known and most effective social marketing campaigns are 'Partici-paction' that encouraged Canadian citizens to do more exercise and the 'Blue Box' programme that has changed peoples' awareness and behaviour about recycling. It is interesting to note that social marketing programmes seek to change behaviour first— assuming that attitudes will change as people engage in the more effective behaviour.

A community of practice has grown up around the use of Social Marketing techniques with very sophisticated design and evaluation components built in. The effectiveness of these programmes in influencing behaviour change has been demonstrated over and over again.

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Nutrition Matters

Before Jennifer W. got pregnant, she couldn't have cared less what she ate.

"When it was just me it was whatever, I can live off Mr. Noodles and Kraft Dinner and hotdogs and it was no big deal."

That changed when she learned she was expecting. Now nutrition mattered, and it has continued to matter since the birth of her son three years ago.

"I want to feed my son healthy foods and eat healthy myself, Now I have someone to look after, and I have to be healthy to do that."

Jennifer was introduced to the Good Food Box through the Victoria Best Babies programme, and has been buying a Good Food Box ever since.

"It's a good deal," she says.

The affordability of the Good Food Box has been important to Jennifer. She was on social assistance when her son was born, then going to school and is now working, but paying off student loans. The Good Food Box has made it possible for her to keep on having the fresh vegetables and fruit she knows she and her son need for health.

Jennifer would like to see a lot more people getting the Good Food Box and reaping the benefits of collective buying.

"A lot of people think that it's just for people that are on welfare or are really poor, but it's helping other people when you're buying into the Good Food Box because they're able to buy more produce for less cost."



Jennifer



Victoria



Providence Farm GFB



Nanaimo GFB

Social Marketing Programme (continued)

Hearing GFB participants talk about the effect this programme has had on their lives is like listening to a typical participant in a social marketing programme. The participants speak in emotional terms of the value the programme brings to their lives. They speak of what they learned and how they have not only enjoyed their GFB every month, but that they have increased their overall consumption of fruits and vegetables. Their stories show that they understood how the healthy food they were eating was making a difference in their lives and in the lives of their children. This is a huge impact from a very small programme. However, to date, no 'formal' research has been done to demonstrate this impact. Anecdotal evidence abounds. The personal stories tucked into this booklet are examples—but every GFB participant or volunteer speaks about their observations—it is this evident impact that keeps them working on the programme in spite of the challenges they face.

The Bottom Line is that the GFB programme holds the elements of a powerful social marketing programme but it has not yet been conceptualized in this way and it is not recognized or supported in public policy as such.

The GFB wish is to provide local food.

Local Food is Better: Part of the awareness of most GFB organizers is the importance of providing local food to participants. In this context the word 'local' would refer to the 'bio-region' where the source of growing and processing the food is in appropriate scale and in a close proximity to the end consumers. Eating locally means that the food will be fresher. The miles the food traveled to reach the GFB programme will be much shorter when we buy local as this incorporates a climate change savings. Eating locally means that farmers will be able to keep on growing good food. And eating local food strengthens rural economies and builds strong community relationships.

However, the Canadian food system has fallen victim to the processes of economic globalization. It is often very difficult indeed to source local food products since farmers have been encouraged through government policy to grow commodities for export. Imported food that arrives in our food system is very cheap due to scale, and reduced labour and environmental standards in the southern countries where much of it is produced. These factors and others such as the pressure on land prices; farm succession issues and lack of food production infrastructure have pushed a lot of farmers off the land. The good news is that as consumers have become more conscious of the looming effects of the energy slump, food-related and other disasters and pandemics, more and more consumers are anxious to buy local food. A definite shift in the market place is happening. Can the GFB programme take advantage and mobilize this 'market demand'?

Development Strategies for Consideration by GFB sponsors.

Consider scaling up the programme and developing it as a stand-alone integrated food organization on a regional basis:

The majority of GFB programmes are very small and thus reach only a small number of people. Planning for a GFB programme that actually meets the need and demand for a local food programme available to everyone could be considered. As well, bringing local food programmes together under fewer administrations would lead to more efficiencies and synergies allowing a scale of operation that is more viable financially and organizationally. Toronto Food Share demonstrates this integrated approach. CHEP in Saskatoon has recently incorporated and plans a comprehensive food systems approach operated as a social enterprise. Nanaimo Food Share is developing a comprehensive strategy. The Vancouver Island GFB Collective and the South Fraser Harvest Box collective are working towards developing these efficiencies.

Consider linking programmes in a region and provide a central buying, packing and distribution system:

People enjoy coming together to sort bulk purchased food into box lots—for a while. As well, when the amounts are low, efficiencies such as storage, cooling, pallet-jacks, conveyor belts, loading docks are not affordable so food-handling conditions can be less than optimal. Large projects such as Toronto Food Share and Equiterre have invested in facilities and provide boxes and bulk pallet sales delivery in a fashion that recognizes food safety and work safety practices. The pre-packed boxes do reduce the need for volunteers in each community to pack and it also reduces the need for co-ordination of those volunteers—a major cost factor. Some organizations that buy bulk pallet sales re-pack and distribute in-house to their diverse programmes. There are many, less challenging jobs that volunteers could be deployed to do to support a redesigned programme such as marketing, home delivery and public education, etc.

In the past year in BC alone, five GFB programmes have folded and three more may fold very soon.

Invariably, the cause for these closures relates to a lack of adequate funding to secure a qualified coordinator who can keep the central functions of the programme operating and grow the programme.

Recognize that the GFB programmes in their present form cannot make up for gaps in income without ongoing subsidy to low-income people:



Providence Farm GFB Volunteers

The wish to feed hungry people in a dignified fashion underlies the motivation for most GFB programmes. Addressing the income subsidy component of the GFB through the internal operation of the programme is difficult since 'margins' between cost and price are so small. In the USA, their 'food stamp' programme is used to bridge some of this gap for GFB programmes. This does not address the dignity issue. Clearly most GFB programmes subsidize this gap through volunteer effort and offering prices lower than the cost of doing business. Setting aside the welfare policy issue, as this cannot be solved by a small programme such as the GFB when many social advocacy organizations have not been able to make headway on this file, the question becomes is there a more reliable way to generate funds to cover the income gap?

Consider increasing the efficiencies of the Buying Club through a business lens -the Social Enterprise approach:



Providence Farm GFB Volunteers

A Social Enterprise is a business operation set up to meet community and social goals. These businesses can benefit from investment from government, foundation and private sources. Social Enterprises can be operated as the business arm of non-profit organizations, as a co-op or simply as a non-profit organization. The appeal of the social enterprise approach is gaining currency in Canada—there are now many resources for assisting with business development, technical assistance and financing for this type of business. There are a growing number of food related social enterprises emerging—many are training businesses that provide specific industry skill training in a business atmosphere. Potluck Café in Vancouver is an example of this approach, where on-the-job training in restaurant and catering skills is provided in a busy non-profit business centre that has a mission to assist low-income and homeless people in the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver to have access to better nutrition.⁴

For further information go to:

<http://www.potluckcatering.com/>



Cowichan Tribes GFB

The Vancouver Island GFB Collective is in the process of **planning a social enterprise** in partnership with local ethical small and medium entrepreneurs (SME's) and other non-profit agencies. The South Fraser Harvest Box in the Fraser Valley is considering this approach as well. In all cases, the groups are developing the concept of a comprehensive food business as a 'community shared agriculture' project, purchasing from local farmers and catering to high-end consumers willing to pay a premium price for local food as well as to an expanded GFB customer-base.⁵

Consider a collective effort to carry out formal impact research:

When asked, public health officials say that they recognize that communities find the value of the box programmes but they say there is no 'formal' impact and cost-benefit research to assist them to promote the GFB to government.

A provincial collective of GFB programmes can consider banding together to submit proposals to carry out this kind of research in partnership with existing programmes to give them a formal opportunity to show the importance and benefit of these programmes.

Consider creation of a GFB-led high profile Social Marketing Strategy:

Governments are very concerned about health care costs—mostly to deal with effects of chronic diseases that can be mitigated through better nutrition. Efforts to encourage healthy eating are gaining currency but research shows that people are still not eating a healthy diet.⁶ Because the GFB programme has already been 'field tested' it can be argued that the programme could deliver needed behaviour change efficaciously. A strategic effort bringing together all the GFB programmes in the province to consider how to reposition the programme under the social marketing banner could lead to some major gains for the programmes and for those concerned with the health of the population. A proposal to government health authorities for an initiative to 're-brand' the GFB as a social marketing programme with the resources it would need to launch and evaluate a well-designed strategy could then be crafted collectively.



GFB Volunteers



GFB Volunteers



GFB Volunteers



Nanaimo GFB Volunteer Team



Victoria GFB Tsouke Depot



Providence Farm GFB Volunteers

Consider joining with others to carry out public education:

Although most people would say they ‘know’ what they should be doing for their health, they often don’t put the ideas into practice. The beauty of the social marketing approach described above, is that those techniques do lead to desired behaviour changes. However, there is a fast growing knowledge base that many people may not be aware of, so public education programmes like the 5-10 programme that was piloted by the Canadian Food Producers Association in partnership with the Canadian Cancer Society and the Heart and Stroke Foundation could be very valuable. This type of programme could extend its reach through partnership with community based groups such as the GFB that have access to large networks of people to whom they can effectively deliver such information. A collective approach between the GFB programme and the agencies involved in the 5-10 programme could lead to a mutually beneficial partnership.

Consider working with local farmers and other local food businesses to strengthen local food systems

Many people involved with GFB programmes are also involved in local food security/sustainability initiatives. The importance of buying local food is clear to them as a factor in good health and to support local grower’s survival. Many GFB discussions with farmers include a request for low prices—this request of course will not fulfill the goal of sustaining the farmer. Farmers need to receive fair prices for their food—but if they are contracted on a Community Shared Agriculture (CSA) basis as is happening through Equiterre in Quebec, not only do they benefit from a new market, they also gain confidence in their own ability to survive. Creating these kinds of relationships with farmers should benefit the GFB’s goals as well as the farmer’s goals.

The price problem must be solved in a different way than asking the farmer to become another volunteer. The Equiterre suggestion to set up peer lending so low-income folks can participate in the advance payment that the CSA requires. See the Equiterre story in Making Waves, the Growing Hope edition at <http://www.cedworks.com/waves02.html>



The Good Food Box At Work

Connecting

Would like to be on an email list to receive this project's reports and updates in e-newsletter format showing the size of file to download for the benefit of slow internet connections?

Would you come to a provincial meeting of GFB programmes to discuss the "GFB analysis" in this monograph?

If you would like to receive one of the above items simply check the item(s) you would like to receive or participate in, and then complete your personal information on the reverse side of this form, and then cut along the dotted line, place it in an envelope, and mail it to:

Pamela Kheong
Fraser Health Authority,
Public Health Nutrition Programme/South
3rd. Flr., 11245 84th Ave.
Delta, BC V4C 2L9



Providence Farm GFB Volunteers



Providence Farm, Duncan, BC

Connecting

Please Place Your Personal Information Here

Name: _____

Address: _____

Email: _____

Website: _____

Phone: _____

Organization (if applicable): _____

Recommendations:

Recommendations to GFB sponsors

From this analysis, it is clear that GFB programmes would have a lot to gain from working collaboratively at the regional, provincial and national levels.

RECOMMENDATION 1: That GFB programmes set up regional networks in BC for mutual learning and potential collaborative programme activities.

RECOMMENDATION 2: That leaders in the GFB system in BC submit a proposal to funders to facilitate a provincial meeting of GFB programmes in BC to allow them to meet, learn from each other and consider the development approaches and recommendations in this report.

RECOMMENDATION 3: That leaders in the GFB system in BC submit proposal to funders for support to carry out formal impact and cost-benefit research in partnership with all existing BC programmes.

RECOMMENDATION 4: That leaders in the GFB system in BC participate as observers and commentators in the pilot projects from the Vancouver Island GFB Collective and the South Fraser Harvest Box group that are testing the social enterprise model.

RECOMMENDATION 5: That leaders in the GFB system in BC meet with the sponsors of the 5-10 programme to consider the possibilities of working together for mutual benefit.

RECOMMENDATION 6: That the organizers of GFB programmes consider the results of the above actions and pilots and work together to design a Sustainable GFB Development Programme for which they would seek government and foundation support to ensure that all areas have the opportunity to have access to the programme supports.

*Local Food is Better:
Part of the
awareness of most
GFB organizers is
the importance of
providing local food
to participants.*

Text Notes

1 2006. Reaugh, Rachel. Vital for Life: Impacts of Eating Fruits & Vegetables. Vancouver Island Good Food Box Collective commissioned report. BC Medical Services Foundation & Coast Capital Credit Union. Go to ESEL's website for GFB reports at <http://www.ediblestrategies.com/gfb.html>

2 Scharf, Katryn. The Good Food Box: A Case Study of an Alternative Non-Profit System for Fresh Fruit & Vegetable Distribution From: Toward Hungerproof Cities (IDRC), Mustafa Koc, Rod MacRae, Jennifer Welsh. (eds). Retrieved from <http://www.foodshare.net/goodfoodbox12.htm>

3 Social Marketing is “the application of marketing technologies developed in the commercial sector to the solution of social problems where the bottom line is behaviour change.” It involves: “the analysis, planning, execution and evaluation of programmes designed to influence the voluntary behaviour of target audiences to improve their personal welfare and that of society. http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/ahc-asc/activit/marketsoc/index_e.html.”

4 Social Enterprise resources

5 For further information go to: <http://potluckcatering.com/>

6 For further information go to www.ediblestrategies.com GFB section. See Kauai Fresh article in Making Waves, Growing Hope issue at <http://www.cedworks.com/waves02.html>

Recommendations to officials in the Health System in BC:

The GFB programmes are true grass roots expressions that show response to need that works on many levels but lacks institutional commitment in public policy.

RECOMMENDATION 1: That public health officials respond quickly to proposals from GFB leadership to support them to develop a provincial GFB strategy, to develop impact and cost-benefit research and to consider developmental models that include benefits to farmers as well as consumers in BC.

RECOMMENDATION 2: That public health official's work with GFB sponsors and technical assistance providers knowledgeable about social marketing campaign design, to develop and launch a *Good Food Social Marketing* programme in BC. To conserve resources, this campaign could partner with those organizations that piloted the 5-10 programme and bolster its design to include more partners and more social marketing tactics aimed at grass-roots people in BC.

RECOMMENDATION 3: That the Ministry of Agriculture of BC should be made aware of community group's efforts to facilitate relationships with farmers in order to support their efforts to fill the growing demand for locally grown food and should include a Local Food Development Plan in their new plan for agriculture in BC.

RECOMMENDATION 4: That the Ministry of Health should work to document low-income related barriers to health and consider the GFB Programme as a mechanism that demonstrably benefits health status. GFB programmes would represent a very high cost/ benefit ratio as an ongoing, partially publicly funded health programme. Since it is operated by grass-roots organizations that know how to work with the people who most need nutritional support, a partnership between the Health Ministry and the community could scale up delivery of this programme across the province. Since GFB sponsors are considering how this small programme can also support farmers and bring in local ethical business participation, a grass-roots, public/private/community/farm partnership model could have multiple positive impacts in BC.