

Islands Good Food Initiative

“Contending with the Local Food Access Puzzle”

Final Project Report to the
BC Medical Services Foundation



Sponsored by Nanaimo Foodshare



Prepared by Edible Strategies Enterprises, August 2007

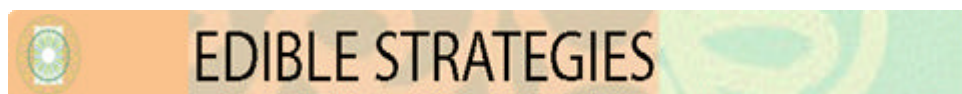


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Valerie Hunter
Program Manager
BC Medical Services Foundation
By courier



August 10, 2007

Dear Valerie:
Re: your file: BCM06-0132

Please find enclosed the final report of our community based research project.

The 'Solving the Food Access Puzzle' study could not have been possible without many people (and the food purchasing organisations they represent) willing to participate in open and sometimes candid ways.

On the planning side, we would like to thank the Vancouver Island Good Food Box Collective (VIGFBC) for developing a Terms of Reference so that Nanaimo FoodShare could act as the sponsoring agency to provide administration and oversight for the BC Medical Services Foundation grant. The VIGFBC are: Nanaimo FoodShare; Cowichan Tribes; Victoria GFB; Gabriola Island People for a Healthy Community; & Providence Farm.

On the survey side, we found out that 97% of the organizations have health as part of their mandate, and we are very pleased to have completed surveys from 114 organizations that each purchase at least \$20,000 of food every year. Collectively they represent over \$10million in annual food purchases. A majority of these people want to be included in the next steps in creating a short distance food system that can meet the demand for local and nutritious food and beverages.

The ethical purchasers for the institutions can link up with the smaller community non-profit organizations in an alliance that can benefit many non-profit community development programs like community gardens, community kitchens, and gleaning for example.

The report and appendices are full of the results of the insightful and detailed efforts of the Research Coordinator, Darlene Gage, with the help of the community researchers, Cathy DiBernardo; Debi Brummel, Jane Marston, and Jen Freeman...great work!

We would like to thank Sandra Mark (Principal Researcher) and Frank Moreland from Edible Strategies, who undertook the project and prepared this final report.

We finally express our deep and healthy gratitude to the BC Medical Services Foundation, a division of the Vancouver Foundation, which provided funding for the project.

Sincerely
Marjorie Stewart
Chair, NFSS

Abstract

The members of the Vancouver Island Good Food Box Collective were curious about why getting access to local food to provide to their clients was so problematic. Their goal is to increase the consumption of locally produced fruits and vegetables because of the known positive outcomes for individual and community health. Funding for a community based research project was obtained from the BC Medical Services Foundation in 2006. A series of enquiries found that the reason for less than 10% of the food we eat on Vancouver Island being raised here is an urgent and persistent farm income crisis. This crisis is an outcome of globalization and industrialization food systems, entrenched over the past 40-50 years. The production cost of local food is much higher than imports coming from countries that are unfairly subsidized, and/or where labour and environmental standards are questionable. The impact of this system that depends upon oil for production and transportation is under serious question by health, environment and communities where local economies have been decimated as local food production supply chains have withered.

There is a groundswell of activity promoting the benefits of eating locally produced food thus emphasizing demand, but there is little assistance to farmers and communities to solve production problems and supply the demand.

This study emphasizes a need for activists to shift to 'supply side' action where the real problems are situated.

We found that there are many innovative approaches to solving this puzzle in the western world. 'The Islands Good Food Initiative' is working towards implementing best practices gleaned from many of these sources.

The study had a major focus on practices in institutional food purchasing, since many public dollars are expended on providing food for residents, clients and patients. The hypothesis for the study was that mobilizing the buying power of public and community sector purchasing could become a tool for change.

A data-base of over 600 agencies/institutions was created and outreach to them resulted in participation of 114 agencies. The purchasing power of this group alone was over \$10 million dollars per year. 51 purchasers met in 5 meetings up and down Vancouver Island. They agreed that purchasers and other officials in their agencies need a lot more information about the impact on the health of their clients resulting from their purchasing decisions. They agreed that working strategically with local farmers could help focus a 'friendly' demand and together, and with other partners, it would be possible to both tackle many of the major problems farmers are facing and also provide healthier food for clients.

Results of studies of farming on Vancouver Island and the Gulf Islands indicated that farmers wish to increase their ability to produce and distribute good food to people in their communities but that they need partners to help solve what are in fact, system-level issues.

The study showed that although the level of awareness in the general population about the benefits of local food consumption is increasing, those who purchase food for agencies and institutions, along with the cooks and agency policy makers in their agencies, wish to learn more about the benefits and issues facing local food access. The participants saw that they could use their purchasing power and decision-making processes and criteria in ways that could leverage the efforts of other local partners working to re-create a local food system on Vancouver Island. This community based research project facilitated discussion and networking and began a process of collaborative knowledge-building that will be the basis for further organizing and strategic action aimed at increasing the viability of the local food system on Vancouver Island and the Gulf Islands. It was agreed by all participants, that meeting this goal could have substantial impact on the health of the population as well as the health of communities in the region. The study calls for partners to work together towards a vision aimed at improving individual and community health and reducing the vulnerability of the current food system on Vancouver Island and the Gulf Islands.

Background

In 2005, the Vancouver Island Health Authority (VIHA) provided a small grant to a group of Good Food Box providers on the Island encouraging them to consider how they could sustain the operations of their programs. A report was prepared "The Good Food Box Story" (Appendix J) that suggested that the program was not sustainable in its current form but if they linked with other publicly-funded food purchasers and with local farmers, it might be possible to create a financially viable social enterprise. This work led to creation of the Islands Good Food Initiative that has been taking action on a number of fronts¹. Although the interest in Good Food is growing, it was clear that there was no central organizing strategy that could link the efforts of community groups, institutions and locally owned food businesses, all of whom shared some of the same values and vision.

Project Objective, Methodology and Process Undertaken

The goal of the Islands Good Food Initiative Research Project "*Contending with the Local Food Access Puzzle*" was to generate and provide strategic information and knowledge to players in the local Islands food system who wished to increase its sustainability.

Objectives

General

- To work with non-profit, community, First Nation and public institutions on Vancouver Island and the Gulf Islands:
- To directly contact those people responsible for purchasing in all major and 10% of smaller organizations (a database of 700+ organizations was identified in the proposal development phase) and generate their participation in completing a questionnaire.
- To ascertain stated health impact intentions of these organizations.

- To identify their collective purchasing power and report back to them
- To develop purchasing profiles of each organization.
- To identify food system business concerns of locally-owned ethical businesses on the Islands.
- To prepare results of inquiries for presentation to CEO and Board level members of participating organizations in order to identify common themes and issues and generate commitment to work on solutions.
- To consider the potential of co-operative action to take advantage of opportunities in order to solve common problems collectively.

With farmers

- To ascertain levels of interest from Vancouver Island farmers and First Nations about growing food crops on production contracts for bulk/case-lot purchase.
- To identify problems and issues faced by Vancouver Island farmers and First Nations wishing to increase local food production in non-formal kitchen discussion groups
- To provide this anecdotal information in a feedback loop to local farm organizations and First Nations.

With Food system businesses

- To identify factors needed to set up a food distribution system promoting local produce.
- To define supportive infrastructure needed to support that system.
- To identify factors needed to provide financing to support these systems.

With All Participants

- To facilitate inter-sectoral discussion of food system issues on Vancouver Island.
- To test interest in collaborative problem solving.

Process & Methodology

Research questions

- Do non-profit, community and public institutions that provide food for their clients have a stated intention to promote health?
- Do these groups understand the importance of buying food locally as a strategy to increase the nutritional value of food, food security and food sustainability?
- What barriers are there for these groups to buying locally?
- What incentives do these groups require to make a shift in their food buying processes?
- Would these groups come together to link their buying power in the service of building a more sustainable food system on Vancouver Island?
- What barriers do farmers face in growing food crops for local consumption?
- Can problems with access to supply of local food products now facing individual, locally owned food suppliers and businesses be overcome through co-operative action?

Methodology

This research was designed as a knowledge building and sharing process. Several techniques were woven together in the research design as follows:

Literature Review Phase

This project called on several strands of knowledge related to healthful eating, food systems, food security and analysis of community-based responses to household food insecurity. Literature on health and food, on farm issues on Vancouver Island and the Gulf Islands, on public purchasing and on the food localization movement are documented in various sections of the report.

Primary research—Institutional and Agency outreach phase

A database of approx. 650 non-profit and public agencies that serve food on Vancouver Island was utilized as the starting place for outreach during the primary research phase. Initially, the Research Coordinator began to systematically phone each agency on the database in order to determine a) the name of the person in charge of food purchasing, b) whether that food purchaser felt that their agency would be interested (or able) to participate in the research, and c) if the agency spent over \$20,000/year on food expenses (agencies that spent over that amount were then asked to participate in a face to face interview, if they spent less than that amount, they were asked to fill out the on-line survey). It quickly became evident that the process of contacting each agency, finding the right person (the primary food purchaser) at the right time of day, and enlisting their participation in the process, was going to take more time than the project time-line allowed. To address this, a second researcher was contracted to make initial phone calls and enlist participation.

These efforts resulted in the participation of over 300 agencies, and of those agencies, 122 participated in either a face-to-face interview (52) or the online survey (70). Many of the agencies that were contacted were either unable to participate (primarily because their food purchasing was controlled via a central purchasing agency) or were unwilling to participate (the factors here included the fact that many only served a very small amount of food to clients (such as snacks) or that they were unwilling to participate in surveys in general).

Five community researchers (4 researchers plus the Research Coordinator) conducted 10 in depth face-to-face interviews, each in their own geographical region (Capital, Cowichan Valley/Port Alberni, Central Island, North Island and First Nations communities). Most researchers were women involved as grass-roots food purchasers through the Good Food Box program. All went through a training process that ensured they fully understood the process and content of the interviews. Careful attention was paid to ensuring that confidentiality and neutrality were core values in the approach. Mock interviews were conducted and feedback (both written and verbal) was provided to each researcher.

Meetings of all the researchers and the principals took place both before and during the research phase to ensure common understanding, approach and goals. Stories of challenges

and successes were shared, along with reports of interesting stories and lessons learned during the process.

Constant communication was maintained between the Principal Researcher (Sandra Mark) and the Research Coordinator (Darlene Gage), via email, telephone and weekly meetings. The Research Coordinator then relayed decisions and directions to the community researchers via phone and email. Weekly contact with each researcher took place during the entire project, and often more than once a week. Two home visits also took place between the Research Coordinator and the First Nations researcher, as more personal contact was seen as a key to the success of this element of the work. Some researchers were also more adept than others at electronic communications, so personal outreach and mail communication was often required.

The results of the research were tracked through an online program called "Survey Monkey". This allowed for both online participation in a short version of the survey (Appendix E) and a face-to-face, long version of the survey (Appendix F) that was input by the researchers after each interview took place. Paper copies of all of the 52 completed surveys were gathered by the Research Coordinator, and have been placed under lock and key at Nanaimo Foodshare (271 Pine Street, Nanaimo, BC, V9R 2B7) and will be kept there for the next 7 years. All paper copies are anonymous, and there is no way to connect a completed survey to a particular person or agency.

Key Informant Focus Groups: Community Meetings/ Appreciative Inquiry

People from each of the target groups were invited to 5 regional meetings to consider the information gathered and to identify themes, concerns, issues and possibilities. Meetings took place in Victoria, Duncan, Nanaimo, Courtenay and Chemainus (for First Nations participants). Each community researcher was responsible for organizing the meeting in their region, in collaboration with the Research Coordinator. Personal invitations were sent to each agency with which the researcher had had a face-to-face interview. Other contacts within the researchers' networks were also contacted via email and invited. General media releases were created and distributed in each region, which resulted in dozens of Public Service Announcements (both on radio and in print), some articles in local papers, and at least two feature-length articles in Victoria and Nanaimo. (See Appendix I)

Centrally located meeting facilities were secured in each region, and the Principal Researcher and the Research Coordinator traveled to each location to present the findings of the research, discuss some of the obstacles and opportunities in the food system on Vancouver Island, and listen to feedback from agencies, food purchasers and other interested parties. Each local researcher also made a presentation about their experiences on the project and the things they discovered about the agencies in their area and their relationships to food. A great deal of time at each meeting was devoted to receiving input from the participants using open-ended questions such as "How can we overcome the barriers to localizing our food systems?" and "What would it take for your agency to switch to purchasing local foods?" Rich feedback was generated through this approach, which has been detailed in Appendix G.

Several common themes emerged in each meeting. The primary theme centred around the need for more and deeper education about the benefits of local foods for members of the food-purchasing group, and everyone involved in the food purchasing decision tree in each organization. The participants also wished to better understand the obstacles that are preventing more access to local foods. They expressed the need for a central point for purchasing local food and local food products since they do not have time to deal with individual producers. Key characteristics of this type of service mentioned included: the need for industry sized packaging, reliability of ordering and delivery and the need for strong personal working relationships between purchasers and purveyors of food products. Of great interest to the research team was the fact that the people who are making purchasing decisions are not often in a position of power in organizations and thus often feel unable to influence policy decisions within their organizations. They are also not often included in educational activities. They found that participating in the research project and in the community meetings provided them with critical knowledge to which they had not previously been exposed. They felt that all institutional purchasing agents should have the opportunity to gain this knowledge.

Most participants at the meetings gave positive feedback about the possibility of their organization or agency being able to purchase more local foods if the appropriate services were in place, and all but one person signed up to be involved in a direct manner (beyond just receiving updates) in this on-going initiative to produce and distribute more local foods.

Farmer Outreach

To gain an understanding of the issues faced by farmers, we collected and summarized the results of other recent studies and media reports (see Appendix M). Our original intent to meet systematically with farmers in formal focus groups was shifted early in the research process as farmers expressed that they were fatigued by the number of times they are being asked to participate in various community studies dealing with 'food security'. A student on practicum held a series of informal conversations with farmers in the Nanaimo region and provided her anecdotal report on farmers' issues. As well, we engaged farmers in meetings with a buyer of local food (Small Potatoes Urban Delivery) in a series of meetings to assess their response to more direct discussions about production and prices. Members of the research team attended farmers' meetings and workshops that occurred during the research period.

Summary of research findings

The research produced findings on several fronts. Summaries are found in each of the following sections and details are in the related appendices.

Food System Vulnerability

We found that the problem of how to access more local food is situated in a complex context related to structural vulnerability of our food system. Our food system is now globalized as a result of policies supported by the Government of Canada in its trade relations with other

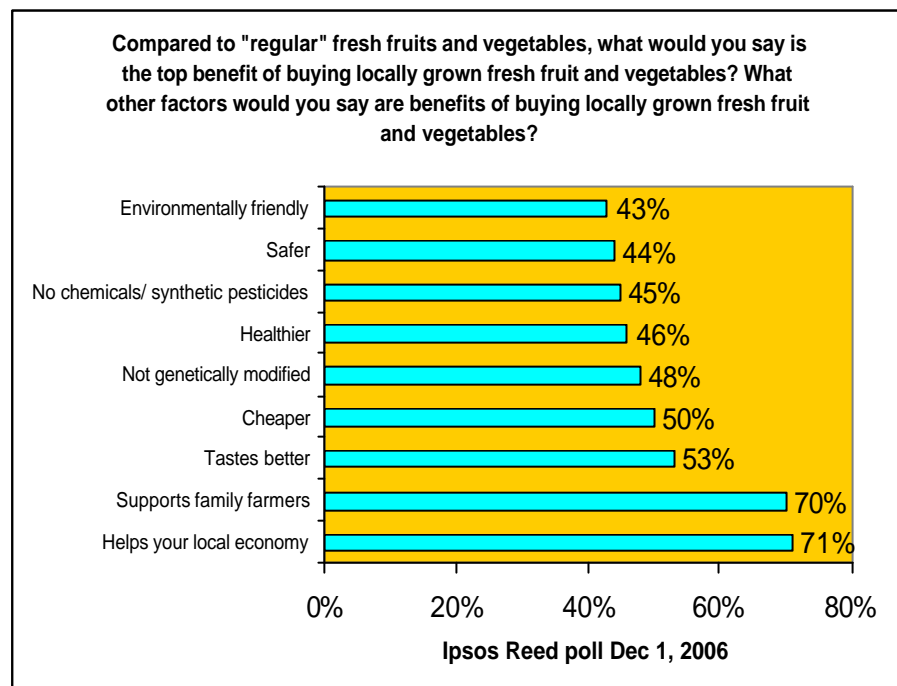
countries. The globalized, industrialized food system has almost stamped out local food systems arguably causing poverty and hunger in communities throughout the world.²

Many factors are contributing to a growing awareness of the insecurity of the BC food system. A recent report was entitled "BC's Food Self-Reliance: Can BC's Farmers feed our growing population?"³ This report found that BC farmers grow 48% of the food grown in BC and the rest of the food consumed is imported.

When comparing current production to recommended consumption from Canada's Food Guide, BC's food self-reliance drops to 34%...to maintain the current level of self-reliance through to the year 2025; farmers will need to increase production by 30% over 2001 levels.

The Food System Localization movement: Demand Side growth

In December 2006, Ipsos Reid⁴ conducted a Canada-wide poll, testing consumer behaviour vis-à-vis local food purchasing. The results are summarized in the accompanying chart that shows why consumers are driving a trend towards eating local. More results of the poll can be found in Appendix N.



Consumer awareness, health system awareness and indeed awareness in public policy of the relationship between healthy eating and health status has largely been facilitated through action at the community level by groups of citizens who are concerned with 'food security'⁵ by groups and professions promoting healthy eating and by the organic movement and the slow food movement all of which advocate for the importance of a vibrant local food economy. The Fair Trade movement⁶ has had an important influence as has the international work on Food Sovereignty carried out by Via Campesina, a global movement of organizations representing small and medium sized farms.⁷ These organizations and others have brought together farmers from northern and southern countries to share their concern with how international trade agreements have benefited transnational food and pharmaceutical corporations but have decimated local food economies. The National Farmers Union in Canada has allied itself with these movements especially with respect to the Farm Income Crisis in Canada.⁸ More recently citizen movements demanding that Genetically Modified organisms should be banned from food products or at least clearly labelled and anti-factory farming movements have

highlighted concerns with the industrial food system. On the lighter side, the '100 mile diet'⁹ has galvanized interest across the country from folks who are concerned with the food miles embedded in their food products and local 'chapters' are springing up to promote these ideas.

Rationale behind the food localization movement

The trend to food localization is a reaction to the centrally-controlled globalized food system. This system has provided 'cheap food' for people in northern economies but it has also provided 'empty food' with over-processing and over-packaging being a serious concern. The globalized food system is dependent upon cheap oil in order to accommodate the huge 'food swap' that sees products grown in one place, shipped to a central location for processing and packaging (often in another country) and then shipped back to where it was grown. The farmer receives a very small percentage of the price paid by consumers in this approach—this is the basis for the farm income crisis.

For many years Canadian Farm incomes have been in decline. Since 2002 however, farm incomes have continued to decline to their worst in recorded history.¹⁰

However, with the peak oil crisis looming and with the issues of climate change having surfaced in the public arena, the foundations of the globalized food system are in question. Richard Heinberg, one of the world's foremost prognosticators on the effects of peak oil and climate change has this to say:

Clearly one of the great challenges of the energy descent is going to be with regard to food, feeding ourselves and our communities...Industrial agriculture—as we have it today based on large fuel fed farm machinery with transportation of food over long distances and so on—is simply not going to be possible. So smaller scale, horticultural, perennial food production by way of Permaculture is, I think, going to be the way forward.¹¹

Those involved in the food localization movement are not working to 'take over' the dominant system but rather are working to create alternatives and to begin to rebuild a local food infrastructure as well as to encourage people to grow their own food; to reclaim old orchards and farmlands as community initiatives; and to buy direct from farmers. At the same time, community organizations are mobilizing policy contributions in hopes that international trade agreements will allow production of a domestic food supply to become viable in the marketplace once again.¹² Until the market forces come into balance so that farmers can earn satisfactory income from their efforts, citizen and community efforts are needed not only to raise consciousness but also to work with farmers to encourage them to stay in business and to encourage new farmers and farm labourers to engage in this industry. In the meantime, innovative approaches are being tried and public and consumer education is in progress.

According to Richard Heinberg,

Right now we are talking about a very few communities who are making some groping experimental steps in the direction of energy transition, but very soon, every town, every city in the world is going to be faced with the need for making the same kinds of choices. So having at least a few communities that have undertaken the process voluntarily and proactively and that have tested out the options and found ways of doing this successfully is going to be very important. These towns will show the way for the rest of us.¹³

Values Challenge in re-localizing the food system

One of the hidden challenges to re-localizing the food system, is what kind of food system can we localize? Can we localize food with the business models and strategies that have actually

created the emerging problems from an addiction to cheap oil and long distance supply chains with a single thrust of exploiting the largest economies of scale physically possible?

Conscious Consumers are asking for farms to be sustainable, meaning the form of production will not deplete the land, will contain healthful nutrients, and will economically contribute to the farmers' quality of life.

Approaches taken to re-localize the food system

Efforts in many communities across Canada are being made to categorize and map the kinds of on-going initiatives that have the goal of re-localizing the food system. The following chart attempts to summarize the current development scenario from the point of view of considering the forces at work in society that encourage and support a move to a more localized food and agriculture system.

Forces shifting the paradigm to local ecological agricultural practice

Drivers for change		Responses			
Concerns emerging in Civil society		Re: EXTERNAL POLITICAL PRESSURES Peak oil Climate change International trade policy issues 'Great Food Swap'	Re: INTERNAL POLITICAL PRESSURES Escalating Health budgets Increase in chronic disease Increase in malnutrition, obesity and diabetes Concerns re: Factory Food and food safety disasters Public concern re: GMO and Terminator seeds Increasing incidence of hunger Growing awareness of food system vulnerability 'food insecurity' Increase in insurance		
Civil Society Dialogue and problem identification		Food policy councils	Food Charters	Seedy Saturdays	Slow Food
		100 Mile Diets	Rural/urban events	"Feast of Fields"	
Civil Society Response	Charitable response Food banks Soup kitchens	Community action Community gardens Community kitchens Good Food Box programs Gleaning programs Buy Local Campaigns Buy Local events Slow Food 100 mile diet promotion food product incubation	Funder's response -food security portfolios -supporting ecological practice -supporting 'buy local' -supporting renewable energy development -support for development of value-added food social enterprises and coops -support for moves to local food certification -support for move to ecological agriculture	Advocacy Response -anti-GM -anti-pesticide -seed saving -water saving -remove junk food in schools -provide nutritious school lunches -remove trans-fats	
Consumer Response	Increase in purchase of organic food Increase in interest in local food Increase in demand for local food in hotels and restaurants Increase in willingness to pay premium prices for premium products				
Market Response	Branding of local food and products Quality assurance certification to differentiate ecologically-sustainable products in the market place Increased investment in innovative food businesses focused on local/regional and specialty foods Highlighting local food in retail and restaurants				
Farmer Response	Move to Organics Move to more ecological farming practice	Move to sell Direct to Consumer Farm Gate sales Farmer's Markets Chef/farmer connections Consumer shared agriculture CSA Agri-tourism	Move to Value-adding New Gen manufacturing coops Value-adding coops Value chain coops	Advocacy Response Pressure on govt policy locally, provincially and federally to remove barriers to local food production	
Gaps, Barriers and Challenges	MARKET GAPS: Labour (farming and food processing) Access to Finance Skill-specific training programs for ecological farm and ag workers Lack of local /regional manufacturing infrastructure Lack of local distribution infrastructure Lack of Merchandising and Marketing strategies for Small and Medium Enterprise (SME) production Lack of technical assistance for business planning for SME initiatives POLICY GAPS: current policy supports 'commercial farming'—ie, for those with over \$250,000 gross income. The rest of farming is not considered—in fact is being categorized as 'hobby or lifestyle' farming. This eliminates most people who call themselves farmers in Canada. (NFU Data) Provincial and Municipal Policies do not favour family farming in fact, SME food processors are being asked to build facilities to standards that are unsustainable financially.				

Strategic market considerations in re-localizing the food system

Because they are often small and poorly funded/financed, many localization efforts face challenges in becoming sustainable over time. There are some interesting trends emerging however, which are more strategic and have better hope of finding an economic base during the time of transition while oil sources deplete and new systems emerge.¹⁴ These trends are as follows:

Shortening of supply chains

The typical supply chain in Canada has a trans-national corporation selling the inputs to the farmer, and then buying the products, making them the 'price setter' and farmers as price takers. When farmers can sell 'direct' they can make more money by shifting to being a price setter. Farmer's markets, farm gate sales, Community Shared Agriculture models and Agri-tourism initiatives are springing up all across the country. When there is a strong urban market for farmers, they can make more money.

Focus on Social Enterprise

It is clear that community has had a major role in shifting the awareness of the issues facing our food system and community is leading in developing new approaches. Until the market rebalances to support local producers, that extra 'community factor' is of major importance to enterprising initiatives that intend to work within the marketplace. Therefore, the 'social enterprise' model can move towards economic sustainability as well as supporting social goals such as environment and health and thereby attract community and government funding to assist with development and implementation phases of their ventures.

Focus on Adding Value

Farmers receive a very small percentage in any food product from their labour and investment in growing the raw product. Many farmers have begun to realize that they can capture the margins if they invest in adding value to their produce. Individual farmers are taking this route, as are groups of farmers forming 'new generation co-ops'¹⁵ that pool investment to allow them to create the capital necessary to build processing and distribution facilities.

Linking local food development to tourism and gastronomy

Farmers, community organizations and food service industry actors are finding that promoting local food through tourism and gastronomy activities can create synergies that create value for farmers.

Focus on Quality

Astute producers and food processors understand that the economic margin is much higher on a product that can demonstrate the highest quality. For example, the local/provincial wine industry made a quality decision and established quality criteria and authentication through the Vintners' Quality Assurance program. (VQA). The branding and the clear improvement in quality have increased prices and volumes sold of BC Wines as was also accomplished in Ontario where the VQA was developed. Quality standards and authentication programs that celebrate domestic food production and are linked to branding and marketing are emerging across Canada—the latest being researched by the Canadian Agriculture Council¹⁶.

Focus on Specialty Niches

The Specialty market combines the benefits of high quality with a unique characteristic of interest to specific groups of high-end purchasers. The discovery of niche markets that serve a large number of market channels is generating enough margin for producers that they can become economically viable at the relatively small scale in a relatively short time frame. Ethnic, gourmet and local specialties lead this category.

Focus on the Value Chain

The whole agri-food industry is fascinated with the concept of the value chain.

A food value chain is formed in response to consumer demand to meet specific market opportunities while benefiting all parties. "A value chain is a mechanism that coordinates operations to maximize efficiency and effectiveness in relation to an identified market opportunity, identifies and removes bottlenecks, and drives out unnecessary cost. The aim is to increase the value that consumers perceive a product to offer, hence the name 'value chain'¹⁷."

The idea is to organize the Value Chain partners' business logistics in service of quality and specialty in order to lower transaction costs, organize supply to better meet demand and to market the product in the strongest markets. The increased efficiencies gained through organizing all participants and the reduced costs of doing business for all participants in the Value Chain is attractive, because its goal is to get a better return to the farmer and a higher value product into the marketplace to meet the demand that is not being met by existing food systems.

Discussion and Commentary

The trends above speak to the spirit of innovation that pervades those promoting the re-localization of the food system. These trends also show that without an economic result, farmers will not be encouraged to continue to grow food. It should be noted that the trends discussed above all function AT THE HIGH END of the market and cannot be expected themselves to facilitate a massive shift in the food system. These approaches can give hope to producers and increase public awareness of the values inherent in 'eating local'. We were intrigued to learn of the local food system in Emilia Romagna in northern Italy. Professor Stefano Zamagni, the guru of cooperative economics, counsels that re-localization requires a focus on quality that will attract high-end dollars thus supporting the investment needed in infrastructure. 'After quality comes quantity'. The Emilian example bears considerable study by food localization activists.¹⁸

Vancouver Island Agri-Food profile—Supply side crisis

Agri-food business on Vancouver Island and the Gulf Islands has long been a significant contributor to the local economy and ambiance of Island communities. Agricultural production and processing exists throughout the Island, with production centred in the Cowichan Valley, the Comox Valley, Port Alberni and the Saanich Peninsula. Most of the agricultural land is in the Agricultural Land Reserve, although only about 1/2 of agricultural land is, according to the BC Assessment Authority, actually being used for agricultural purposes.¹⁹

The Island produces a range of agri-food products. These include tree fruits, vegetables, berries and grapes, specialty crops, dairy, chicken, egg, hogs, lamb, beef, other specialty livestock, aquaculture, Christmas trees, honey and floricultural and nursery products.

Beyond the direct impact of agricultural production, the Island agri-food sector also makes a significant contribution to various secondary industries such as food retailing, inputs (e.g. feed, fertilizer), processing, tourism, restaurants and hotels. These industries in turn contribute significantly to the economic well-being and lifestyle of Vancouver Island and the Gulf Islands.

However, according to the 2006 Canadian Census report on Agriculture, there has been a drop in the number of farmed hectares on the Island due to the continued pressure for real-estate development and farm consolidations. In 2001 there were 60,000 hectares in production and in 2005 it was 53,756 hectares. The total number of farms has remained stable since 2001 (4,230) due to increased numbers of small farms. Island farmers' revenues increased from \$138.5M in 2001 to \$163.7M in 2006 but the costs to farmers to make this income was \$155 M, therefore Island farmers shared only \$8.7M revenue. "When we look at the ratio of expenses to sales, farmers across the country are spending 90 cents for every dollar [they make]" said Steve Danford, analyst with the agriculture census and Statistics Canada.²⁰

Another problem facing Island farmers is the demographic challenge. In Canada, the average age of farmers is 52 years but in the Capital Regional District, its 55.3 years and on the Island overall its 54.6. Steve Thompson from the BC Agriculture Council said "It's a serious concern as it points to the fact that we are not getting renewal in the industry in terms of succession and new entrants".²¹ Thompson further said, "The only way to entice young people back to the farm is to ensure it is a viable business". This is very difficult for Island farmers whose costs for production include increased transportation costs and very high land costs.

In contrast, the successes of Island farming emerging from the Statistics Canada Agricultural study show that there has been a growth in the organic sector with 76 organic farms, up from 51 in 2001. There are now 134 farms, up from 98 and grape farming reached 206 hectares from 112 hectares in 2001.

Agency and Institutional Food Purchasing Research Results

The hypothesis of this component of the community based research project was that if institutional and agency food purchasing (all of which uses public dollars) could be focused as a friendly and flexible market²², some of the problems reported above could begin to be addressed. The major learning from this piece of the work is as follows:

The Literature Search

To broaden our understanding of the context for institutional purchasing of local food we carried out a short search to find if other initiatives were in place that we might learn from. The first example is Local Flavours Plus in Toronto that negotiated the first contract for institutional purchase of local foods with the University of Toronto. Local Flavours Plus has

developed a branding, quality and marketing strategy. For further information check http://www.localfoodplus.ca/main_UofT.htm

Since Local Flavours Plus began their project, several other Canadian universities have taken up the idea. For example, we found that the University of Victoria had included a target of 10% local product in their spring 2007 call for proposal.

We found a very well documented study from Food Links UK of a research and demonstration project that considered the impact of institutional purchasing as a tool for increasing local food sustainability. This study not only sets benchmarks, it provides signals regarding many of the technical issues that need to be considered when local food is substituted for imported food for institutional use.

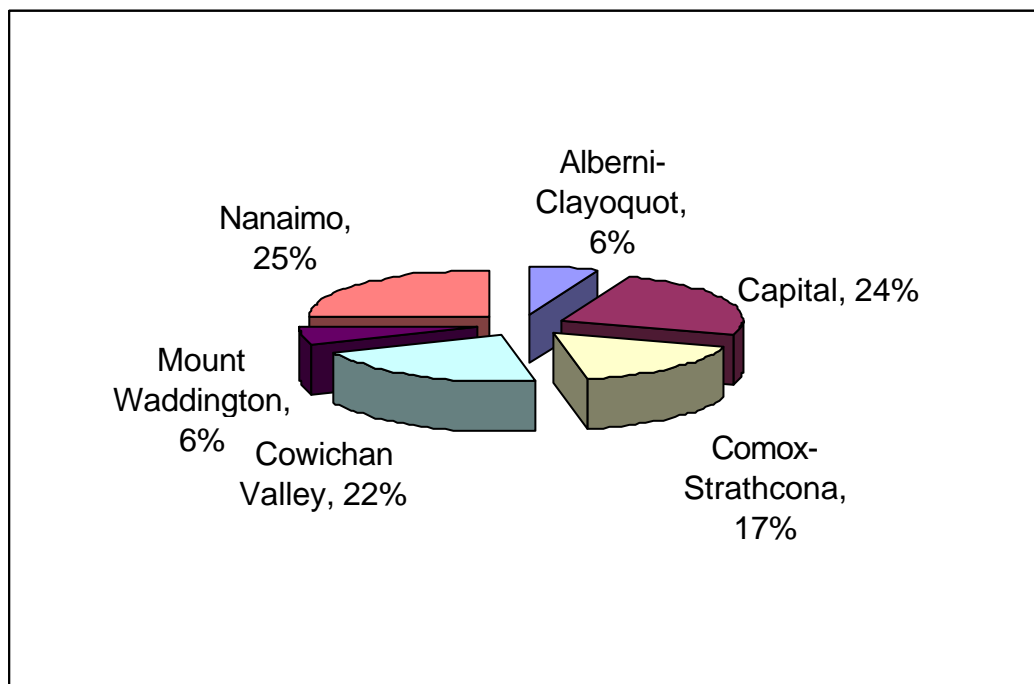
Several American examples were also noted—enough to show that a trend in local food purchasing by institutions is emerging and our current study can form a useful addition to a growing practical knowledge base. A listing of these resources can be found in Appendix R

Survey

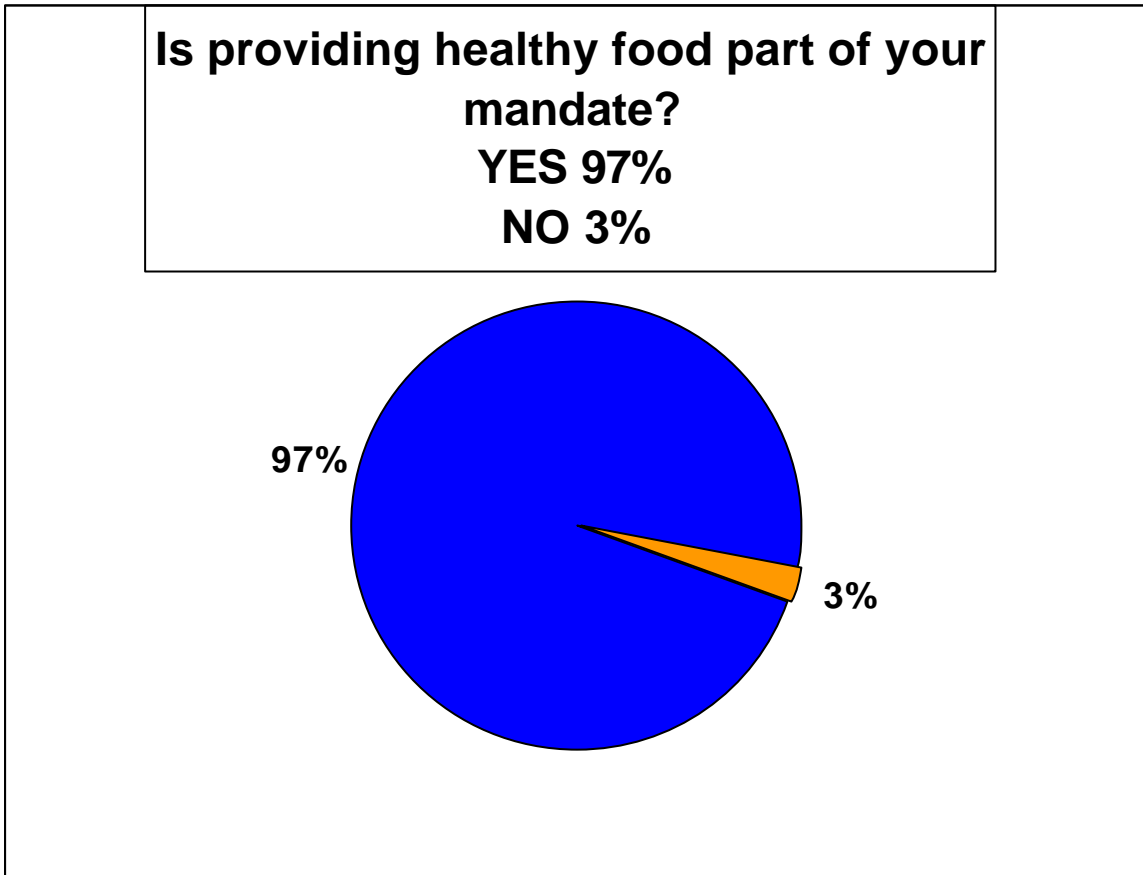
We listed as many agencies as we could identify on Vancouver Island that would provide food as part of their mandate—we have 650 agencies on the data base. Of these, we were able to contact 300. Of the 300 agencies contacted, we have information from 114—52 face-to-face interviews and 62 on line responses.

Since our survey was not randomized, we can't extrapolate results to the whole group but there are some very strong trends that we can treat as valid and reliable.

The regional representation of this survey was:



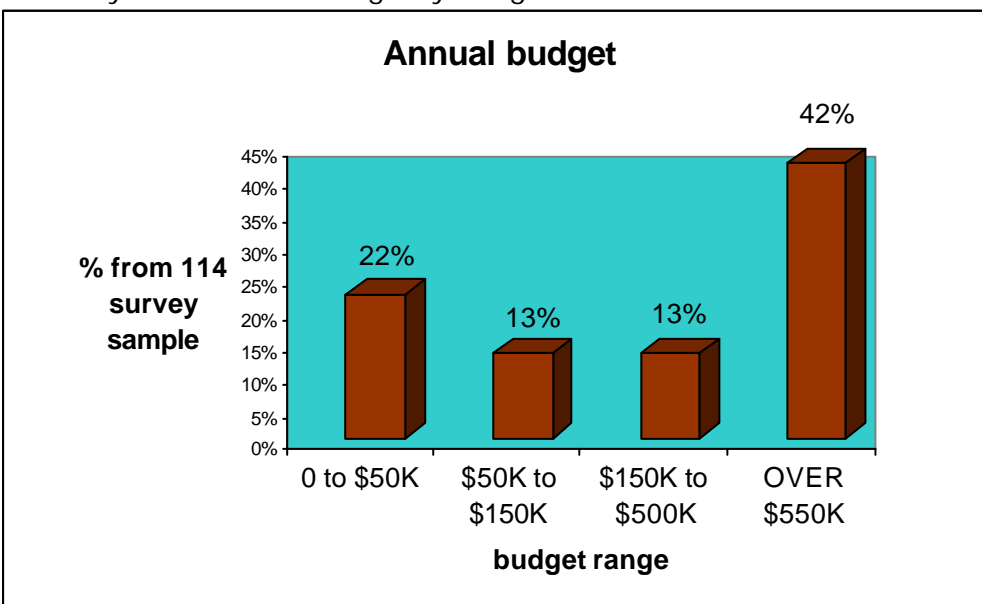
A highlight of the questions and significant responses are as follows:



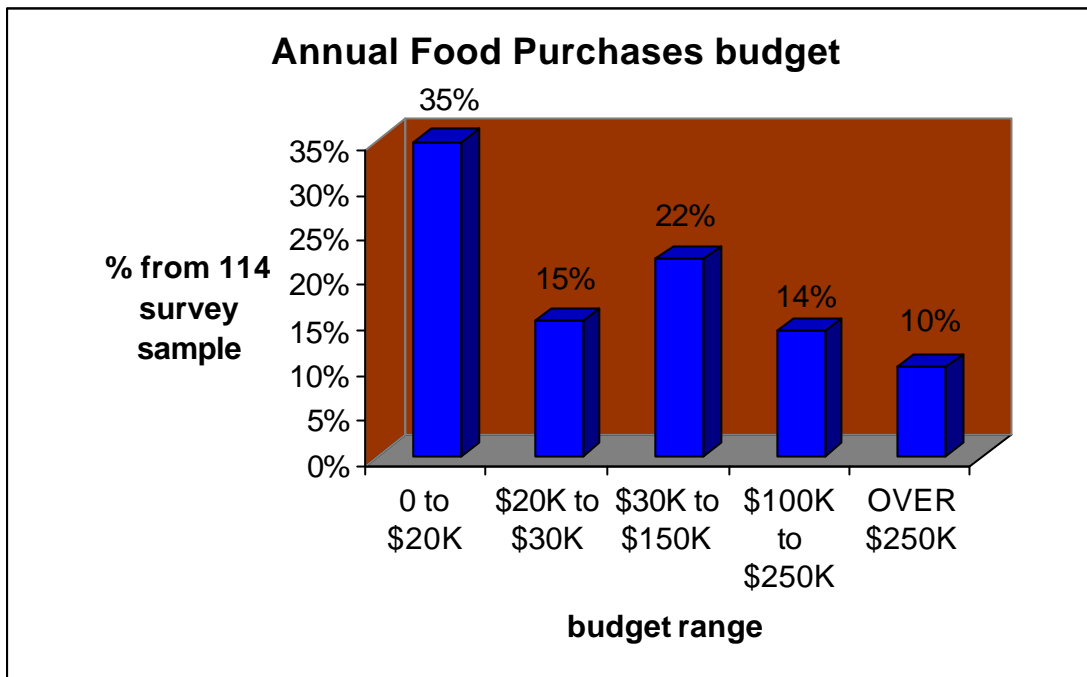
Do you provide education about nutrition as part of your mandate?

72 responses or 63% indicated YES

What is your total annual agency budget?



What is your approximate annual budget related to FOOD PURCHASES?



Therefore, the range of the total food purchasing power of everyone surveyed is from \$6,240,000 to \$10,560,000

Responses indicating preferences of food purchasers:

- 54% indicate that finding cheaper food would improve their experience
- 66% indicate that finding local food would improve their experience
- 81% indicate that finding nutritious food would improve their experience

The majority of food provided to the end user comes from food service infrastructure and food service, in contrast to food accessed in the mainstream retail systems. Food service includes not only restaurants and hospitals, but the sector also prepares food for lunch programs, soup kitchens, cafeterias, meal programs or congregate dining.

One out of every three do not have enough food storage

92% of the organizations have food safe training

53% have a qualified chef

51% have a commercial kitchen

98% want to know the food is fresh

56% want to know the food is local

50% want to know the food is pesticide free

The meetings: Appreciative Inquiry

5 meetings were held to give an opportunity for interviewees to hear about the consolidated results of the survey and to discuss matters amongst themselves. 51 people participated in these meetings. A feedback form was provided with the following results:

Have you gained some knowledge about the food system?

Yes – 40 No – 1 Maybe – 0

Do you believe that the non-profit and public sectors are ready to take a lead role in advocating for more access to local foods?

Yes – 29 No – 1 Maybe – 12

Do you think that working to improve access to local food will have a health impact on your clients?

Yes – 35 No – 1 Maybe – 1

Is your agency able to take some action on increasing access to local foods for your clients?

Yes – 24 No – 1 Maybe – 13 (Comments: “Depends on cost and accessibility”, “ Not sure, not my realm”)

When asked if they would be willing to participate in follow-up, all but one person signed up to receive further information.

The discussions held at the meetings were wide ranging and provided a rich source of ideas. The full report is found in Appendix G. A thematic summary of the discussions is as follows:

Discussion and Commentary

97.4% of Island agencies have a mandate to provide healthy food to their clients. This is a very strong indicator of the stated food policies of Island agencies, and provides a basis upon which to pursue further education, cooperation and access to healthy, local foods.

Food purchasing decision-making is a complex process within agencies and institutions. Decision-making incorporates a dynamic between the cost of food and the nutritional value of the food. The vast majority of purchasers would prefer to be able to make food purchases that are healthy and to look at price as a secondary factor. Some agencies appeared to have more leeway to ensure health as the primary goal but it was abundantly evident that even those who were severely constrained by budget were looking for healthy options. From these comments we found that there is a significant power differential in many agencies between those who purchase and those who prepare foods. Members of both of these groups expressed a lack of power in relation to budgetary decisions. This situation was exacerbated for those agencies that are supplied through a central purchasing function. The advice participants provided to the researchers was that the people who make the budget decisions need to be involved in these discussions along with those that do the actual purchasing and with those that who prepare the food.

Participants said that being part of this research was itself an educational experience and would influence their food-purchasing decisions in the future. However, there are substantial technical barriers facing food purchasers where coordinated effort is needed if change is to be made. The participants in this research were highly motivated to work together to increase the

knowledge within their sector and to find ways to increase purchasing of local food and food products.

As we expected there is substantial purchasing power represented by publicly funded agencies' food purchasing budgets. Mobilizing and coordinating this power represents a major opportunity for those involved in the Islands Good Food Initiative. In Britain where the food localization movement has progressed further than in Canada, studies of the impact of local procurement are showing substantial results.²³

It is now a central objective of Government that rural policy should have as its outcome sustainable development. The Rural Strategy published in 2004 defined this as meaning that environmental, social and economic considerations should be addressed at all times, to provide "a better quality of life for everyone, now and for generations to come...including thriving economies and communities in rural areas and a countryside for all to enjoy"...In Northumbria a...benchmarking exercise showed that if the County Council were to increase the proportion of its procurement budget expended locally by 10%, it would not only result in an extra £34M to the local economy and community but incorporate a £9.5 m annual efficiency gain. This has encouraged the County to take proactive steps to encourage more local businesses to tender. As a result, expressions of interest were 5 times as many as were previously received in 1999 when the contract was last renewed and 4 of the 7 food category contracts were awarded to local suppliers. p 2.

Farmer Outreach Results

As part of this study, we wished to get a farmer's viewpoint but initial background research suggested that we should adopt a cautious approach because of problems that recent researchers have expressed with farmer attitudes to research. This is underlined in a quote from a study carried out in 2000 by Junger for the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries which summarizes the major reason that farmers express resistance regarding studies and research:

Significant time and effort has been spent in recent years assessing the challenges and opportunities facing the Island agri-food sector. Industry members have devoted considerable effort to a number of workshops and studies that have clarified the issues and identified proposed recommendations and actions...

What is less clear is the extent to which the many suggestions and recommendations have been acted upon or coordinated, or what the challenges to implementation are that must still be overcome to see further tangible progress. (P19)

In the time period of this community based research project, many more studies have been carried out. The issues remain the same with few substantial changes in evidence. Because of the fatigue with research in evidence amongst farmers, we decided to gain more detailed background knowledge on the food supply side of the puzzle mostly from secondary sources and by participating in meetings organized by farmers themselves. We had hoped to have a funded component of the research in place but this did not materialize. Instead, a practicum student from the University of Victoria's School of Social Work, Jacoba Kawahara agreed to focus her studies on the issues and concerns facing farmers on Vancouver Island.

Review of recent local studies

A content analysis of documents and event minutes was used in order to develop an in-depth identification of the issues facing farmers on Vancouver Island. The results are summarized in the chart below. However, a recent and particularly useful report done for Nanaimo Food Link in 2005 entitled "Local Food for Local Bellies²⁴" reported on a series of interviews conducted with farmers in the Nanaimo region. The concerns that were identified are common to all other reports and studies and are summarized below:

Abattoirs

The BC Government's new regulations regarding standards for abattoirs is resulting in fears that there may not be affordable or local slaughter facilities for small scale meat producers. Although attempts are being made by the government through the Meat Enhancement Strategy to assist with plant upgrading, a stable plan that addresses farmers' fears is not in place. The situation has worsened in the last month when new, more stringent regulations were announced. The BC Food Processor Association, Meat Industry Enhancement Committee produced a submission requesting that the most recent regulations be changed and held back or this might spell the end of almost all meat processing on the Islands.

Prices: Imported product prices are artificially low. Farmers need to receive prices that cover their costs of production and depreciation. High-end customers (such as chefs at high end resorts) are willing to pay higher prices but farmers find they have to constantly educate consumers about the price issue. National Farmers Union research shows that this price squeeze has translated into a farm income crisis requiring most farmers to earn income by working off the farm.

Government and Regulations

Because the provincial government no longer provides field services, communication links between farmers and the provincial government have been weakened. Because the Government of BC is developing a new Agriculture Strategy, to be announced in the fall of 2007, many farmers have met with the committee in its Vancouver Island consultations. (Summarized below). As well, many farmers are frustrated with the impact of federal agriculture policies that favour large scale and export producers. Farmers would like to see production of local food as a value in the federal policy. Efforts to influence the new Agricultural policy framework in development in 2007 have been made by Island farmers and other organizations.

Marketing and Business acumen

Many farmers are not able to devote time to business planning or increasing their marketing sophistication. Resources to assist farmers to benefit from new markets etc. are needed.

Running the farm: Issues with farm labour are critical—availability of skilled labour is a big problem but also the cost of labour is a problem. With an overall labour supply problem in evidence in most sectors in the BC economy, farm work, which is poorly paid and physically challenging is not attractive to job-seekers.

Education

Farmers constantly experience the need to educate consumers about farming and the economic realities they face. Although consumers are becoming aware of the benefits of

buying local food, there is a great deal of education necessary for consumers to fully understand how important a lively food economy is for personal and community health.

The Future

The average age of farmers is going up and without an economic attraction; young people are heading for other careers. The price of land is escalating and the ALR is under pressure in many areas as a result. Without policies that support the local food system, farmers are concerned for the future of farming and our ability to feed ourselves in the future.

The following chart depicts the results of a content analysis of recent research reports pertaining to Island agriculture. An annotated bibliography of the articles is found in MN. The shaded boxes in the table indicate that this issue was identified in the report.

Vancouver Island and the Gulf Islands Farming Issues

STUDIES CITED--	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	#6	#8	#10	#11
ISSUES identified									
Land prices									
Labour availability, wages and training									
Government Regulations									
Low food prices due to cheap imports									
High costs of production									
Lack of business acumen									
Lack of local distribution infrastructure									
Lack of marketing acumen									
Low farm income									
Limited local production									
Lack market access									

Many of the issues of concern to farmer have legal implications. Trade rules and food industry management through marketing boards were often mentioned as problematic to farmers. For example, currently on Vancouver Island farmers only have quota for raising 20% of the chickens consumed on the island.²⁵ Quota holders have been sold to mainland interests particularly after the loss of the major chicken processing plant in 2002. A new chicken processing facility opened in Cowichan Bay in 2006 and now there are challenges finding enough chicken to ensure that this new operation will succeed financially. The marketing board issue is a complex. We could not find any credible and critical examinations of this issue that arises in many conversations with farmers as an impediment to local production on Vancouver Island.

To try and understand these issues in more depth, we contacted the Environmental Law Clinic at the University of Victoria. A professor there, Chris Tollefson, was interested in the questions we raised and a student was recruited to do initial research for us as part of their special projects program. Kendra Milne consulted with the researchers in depth and produced two memos found in their entirety in Appendix Q. In summary, the memos:

- 1) lay out a brief map of agricultural regulation relating to food production and distribution in Canada,
- 2) examine how the British Columbia supply management system may bar increased local food production and distribution,
- 3) examine how inter-provincial and international trade agreements may restrict local food production
- 4) summarize key cases that challenged trade agreement provisions on an environmental basis,
- 5) examine possible room for a domestic support program geared towards encouraging local, sustainable agriculture; and
- 6) examine other ways in which local food distribution could be encouraged or supported and how these initiatives have been interpreted in trade disputes.²⁶

This study showed us that the intricacies of the legal aspects of food production need to be understood by local food advocates and some issues may need to be taken up in support of farmers who wish to have influence on changing the laws and regulations. For example, currently, the move of the provincial government to require small scale meat processors to comply with the same level of regulation as feedlot processors will force many farmers out of the market—this is of particular concern on Vancouver Island where many farmers report that they have ceased growing animals as there will shortly be few or no processing facilities available to them.

Commentary and Discussion

It was clear from the literature search, from informal meetings with farmers and from participation in Farmer's Institute Meetings and Island Farmers Alliance meetings that farming is in crisis on Vancouver Island. The crux of the Local Food Access Puzzle is the farm income crisis precipitated by a series of factors emanating from the globalization of the food system and Canada's agricultural policy position that favour cheap imports over locally produced food. Over the last 40-50 years, a vibrant local food economy on the Islands (where 85% of the food consumed was locally produced) has been decimated (now less than 10% of the food consumed on the Islands is locally produced) and little infrastructure remains. Rebuilding this infrastructure will take investment (thus access to patient and friendly capital), a rejuvenated labour strategy, and coordination of effort between all interested parties.

All of our research activities related to farming confirmed that there is a crisis in supply of food produced by farmers on Vancouver Island—part of the overall trend witnessed across BC and across Canada—indeed, the globalized food system has decimated local food production systems around the world.

There is growing demand for local food and farmers are considering how to respond—but they need assistance with access to finance, access to labour, access to food system infrastructure (such as transportation, warehousing, food processing, etc.)

The key to increasing supply lies in finding ways to redress the farm income problem—if farmers cannot make a decent living they cannot be expected to resist pressure to sell their lands for high prices to the retiring wealthy who are creating 'estates' from what used to be food-producing lands.

From this examination, it is clear that there are major systemic, economic and social forces at work placing a downward pressure on farmers' desire/ability to produce food and that without a serious and concerted effort by all players (government, institutions and civil society); we are in great danger of losing our ability to feed ourselves in our region.

Food and Health Research Results

More and more evidence is accumulating that shows the higher nutritional value of local food, especially that which is organically grown. The Vital for Life Report carried out during the development phase of this research project summarizes this research. Appendix O

The scope of Vital for Life is to provide an overview of the literature about the various ways in which fruits and vegetables impact health. Research shows fruits and vegetables to be a complex source of vitamins, minerals and photochemicals needed for optimal human health. Different types of packaging techniques and agricultural methods have been reported to significantly influence the nutrient levels found in fruits and vegetables. Studies have also shown an association between agricultural methods which use chemical pesticides and their influence on chronic health conditions like breast cancer and non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. As a result of this research, consuming between 5 and 13 servings of fruit and vegetables per day is considered vital for maintaining health and preventing or delaying chronic health conditions such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes and cancer.

The results of this enquiry underline the importance to public health of programs 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.

VITAL FOR LIFE: IMPACTS OF EATING FRUITS & VEGETABLES
Prepared by Rachel Reaugh for Edible Strategies

Commentary

As more studies are completed, showing the personal and community health impact of local food consumption, the argument for public policy that supports the food localization process becomes more urgent. There have been recent indications that new agricultural policies at both federal and provincial levels are now considering more support for food localization. It is hoped that a subsidy level equal to the American food subsidy²⁷ will be considered to help ensure that people can afford to eat healthy food. An investment in ensuring that vulnerable

populations do not have economic barriers to good food consumption would have high impact and a huge cost benefit ratio in terms of health system spending.

Challenges that arose in this research

Institutional Research Component

The challenge of contacting over 650 agencies across Vancouver Island and the Gulf Islands proved much more onerous than anticipated. Original projections sought to have 10% of 650 agencies participating in the online version of the survey, and 70 agencies did in fact fill out that survey. The amount of time and energy projected to reach those agencies was underestimated, because of the unexpected challenge in tracking down the person in charge of food purchasing at each agency. Often 2 to 4 phone calls were necessary to reach the right person. An additional hindrance was the fact that the online research was based in a survey format, which may have discouraged some people from participating. The majority of the phone messages left for food purchasers were not returned, and this might be attributed to resistance to the large number of surveys and other telemarketing efforts that are taking place these days.

The low return rate of the phone invitations to participate in the online survey was partially overcome by hiring another researcher to undertake phone calls to agencies. This allowed for 2 people to work on this outreach in a relatively full time manner for about 2 months. This resulted in well over 300 agencies contacted across all the Islands, and of those agencies contacted, 70 actually filled out the online survey. When combined with the 52 in-person interviews, this resulted in approximately a 41% participation rate in the overall research.

A deeper obstacle in this work was the practice of centralized food purchasing. A large portion of our database of agencies on the Island consisted of organizations and services that are required to order their food from distributors which are under contract to the major health agency (hospitals, senior care facilities, mental health facilities, services for people with disabilities, etc). This factor resulted in the majority of these agencies refused to participate in the research, as very few of them felt that they had any control over the kind of food they were permitted to bring into their agencies. Line employees interviewed by phone expressed a lack of power to influence healthy practices for their clients. Many expressed a strong desire to improve the quality of the food served to their clients and also in supporting more local food production, but simply felt that their hands were tied regarding any part of the decision-making process related to food. Attempts to meet with upper level policy makers to discuss these issues proved fruitless during this research phase.

One further issue that was encountered during the process was the fact that many of the food purchasers we spoke to tended to be the cook or chef in the agency, and they often expressed a frustration about the powerlessness they felt in relation to feeding people proper food. They expressed a desire to serve nutritious, fresh foods, but felt that other administrators and policy-level staff/board had more control over the budgets that they did. This prompted a shift in the way in which each agency was approached. A subtle but important part of connecting to the right person was shifting the question from "Can I speak to the person in charge of buying

food for your agency?" to "Can I speak to the person in charge of setting food policy or budget policy in your agency?" This approach netted more administrative and management level participation than direct kitchen staff, and seemed to result in more of a sense that shifts around food purchasing would be possible. When a manager gets excited and committed to an idea, the possibility for change is increased. It was telling however, to see that personnel from agencies who are involved in discussions of food and health are not always the personnel making the purchasing decisions—this disconnect can have serious repercussions for agencies who are speaking about food and health but whose actions may not be in alignment.

As a result, probably the major challenge that this research itself has created is a need and demand for assistance by agency and institutional food purchasers in educating themselves and their colleagues on these matters. It was unexpected and unintended but an encouraging result to have them call for assistance in organizing their voice and their economic power and assisting them to plan and take action. There is no existing body that brings together agency and institutional food purchasers in this way and no existing resources to support this kind of organizing effort. Clearly, purchasers have a lot of power in the marketplace and educating them about how to use this power to influence policy and production could have enormous benefits for local producers. Solving the puzzle about how to take advantage of this huge resource will be a next major step for the Islands Good Food Initiative.

First Nations Research Component

The challenges of working in a First Nations context were relatively minor once an appropriate First Nations researcher was contracted to work on the project. It was essential that a First Nations person conduct this research, as previous attempts to gather information about First Nations food practices resulted in very little clear data or information. It was made clear to us during this phase that there are many First Nations ceremonies, groups and practices that are centered around food, and that many of these ceremonies are kept discreetly within each First Nations community. This information only emerged once a First Nations person (who is respected in her community) directly approached those people involved in food preparation and event organizing and spoke with them in person. The promise to keep the information confidential was also a key element in generating participation in this context. However, this research can only be seen to have scratched the surface re: the question of food system issues vis-à-vis First Nations on the Islands. There was considerable interest shown in continuing the process but resources were unavailable to continue or deepen the inquiry.

Farmer Outreach Research Component

As noted above, we found that behaving as researchers discouraged farmers who are already very discouraged so we quickly dropped the idea of using focus groups as we had planned. By attending meetings of farmers' organizations and studying results of other reports, we were able to find out what we needed to know. The principal researcher 'tagged along' with meetings held with farmers where prices were being negotiated—a different dynamic was in evidence at these meetings. From this we concluded that unless we have something to offer of a practical nature, we shouldn't bother farmers who are tired of educating others and seeing no results from their efforts. This experience underlined the importance of working with the institutional partners as buyers and with investors in order to bring markets and financing to farmers—this approach is clearly what will engage farmer's interest.

Opportunities that arose in the process of this research

This community based research project was very rich in opening the door to opportunities for participants and for the Islands Good Food Initiative. Some opportunities (such as the access to finance studies and the legal issues study noted below) were acted on immediately. The opportunities for creating and strengthening connections between people and institutions involved in or wishing to be involved in food localization led to immediate results as reported below. Other opportunities uncovered will be integrated into the Islands Good Food Initiative or communicated to others who may be able to take them up.

Institutional/Agency Purchasing Component

It is clear that institutional/agency food purchasers would be eager to work together to use their considerable buying power in the marketplace as a tool in influencing re-localization of the food system.

Institutional/agency food purchasers showed that they wish to be more fully educated on these matters and they wish to reach out to their colleagues on the Island to ensure that this education is more broadly shared.

The British project in Best Practice in sustainable public-sector food procurement is a wonderful model that, if replicated at least in part, could galvanize new approaches to food purchasing by institutions and agencies in BC. (See Appendix R)

Officials from VIHA have opened discussions with us regarding the possibility of piloting local food purchasing for an institution to discover the challenges and opportunities and test the feasibility of incorporating local food and food product purchasing into their policies.

A group of agency purchasers (The Associations for Community Living) on the Island have stepped forward to consider how they can be part of the solution and are actively considering development of regional manufacturing facilities as a result of what they learned in this study. This led to commitment from three of the ACL's on Vancouver Island to participate in business planning for which a grant has been received from the Vancouver Foundation Disability Supports program.

There is substantial opportunity for First Nations to use their land and labour to grow food and develop food products. Substantial development work will be necessary to bring these opportunities to fruition.

Farmer Outreach Component

There are many farmers looking for options to increase the value of their work—support is needed to help them organize themselves.

There is an opportunity for the Islands Good Food Initiative to work with farmers to help them cooperatively overcome the barriers that they face.

Farmers made it clear that if they had a source of consistent and capable labour, they would be able to increase their production and shift to organic production methods. This opened the opportunity of considering how a labour strategy could be developed as a result of this work. Subsequently, the Nanaimo Association for Community Living has taken leadership in developing the concept of a farm labour and food service facility labour pool as a worker coop. Funding for a feasibility study is under negotiation with the Canadian Worker's Coop Federation.

Farmers carry an inordinate debt load.²⁸

Farm Debt in 2005: \$51 billion

In the decade of 1996 to 2005 Farm Debt has grown a total of 85%

Farm long-term debt-to-equity ratios are increasing, indicating farmers are increasingly leveraging their farm to survive.²⁹

Expecting farmers to finance a substantial scale-up of local food production and preservation is not realistic. An opportunity for social economy investing clearly emerges. As part of this project, and to learn more about how to address this problem, meetings were held with government and foundation funders who are interested in food and health and social enterprise. This has resulted in an ongoing process looking at developing a local food system financing strategy. For presentations and results of this work see Appendix P. We see this as a major result of this community based research project.

Meetings coordinated by the principal researcher with friendly funders (led by Eva Cheung Robinson of the Vancouver Foundation) held in conjunction with food localization projects in Vancouver resulted in increased awareness by these funders of the issues facing those involved in the food localization movement with commitments being made to work towards an expanded capacity for funding and financing local food projects and social enterprises. From these meetings, the food advocacy organizations in Vancouver have formed a collaborative effort and have developed an action plan to build a local food infrastructure there. The learning connection between the lower mainland work and the Island work is important as both initiatives are breaking new ground.

Legal barriers

Many farmers reported concerns with legal barriers that they report impede their access to local markets. An opportunity arose during the process of this research study to work with the University of Victoria Environmental Law Clinic. This has created the opportunity for further investigations from a legal standpoint of trade and supply management issues.

Food Localization Component

There are many groups taking action to educate consumers about the benefits of local food. There is an opportunity to bring these groups together to increase the strategic potential and the impact of their interest.

Non-profit groups who participated in this project are interested in working together to create and support development of farm and food manufacturing labour pools. Further work to test the feasibility of these ideas must be carried out.

First Nations Component

Carrying out a similar study entirely focused on First Nations food issues on Vancouver Island and the Gulf Islands would be a valuable exercise. First Nations communities were self-sufficient in food a very short time ago, but most have lost this capacity due to loss of traditional land access and consequent impoverishment, leading to seduction by the globalized, cheap and junk food system. As the healing process within First Nations continues, interest in native food production and providing healthy food especially for pregnant women, children and elders is of utmost concern. We could not discern if there were any system-level initiatives such as the current research project were in play—but we believe, and the indigenous participants stated that this process was valuable and should be more broadly implemented.

First Nations have a great deal of the arable land on Vancouver Island in their control. Much is no longer being used for food production. They also have a lot of unemployed persons. They also have access to finance. There are huge opportunities in food and food product production that they could tap but development support is required.

CONCLUSIONS

Citizens and community organizations concerned with health, climate change and food security have fastened upon the challenge of re-localizing the food system as a major priority for social change. The analysis presented here points out that making these changes is not a simple or straightforward task primarily due to the influence of the globalized food policy framework that has hollowed out local food system infrastructure, capacity and competence. While much attention is being paid to this problem, many of those advocating an increase in consumption and accessibility of local food products are not aware of the technical difficulties that must be overcome at many levels in order to reach this goal. This brief analysis has pointed out that there are some pieces of the local food access puzzle that need to be addressed in public policy and in the economic realm if there are to be the system shifts required to facilitate the health, social and environmental outcomes desired by citizens and by health advocates. Food security advocates must better understand these issues so that a more powerful change strategy can be mounted. It is interesting that this study itself came from a demand-side concern—i.e., how to increase local access to food but on the assumption that by aggregating demand from the community and public sectors, the problems could be magically solved. However, while our research shows some clear opportunities to work more strategically on the demand side, a major shift to supply side tactics is what is urgently needed.

What emerged from this study is the realization that a new version of a local food system needs to be built and that there is a great deal of interest and energy to work on this puzzle from consumers, institutional purchasers, funders and financiers, community economic developers, health workers, community food activists and farmers. Unlocking this energy will require a considerable effort to coordinate activities and ensure that they are strategic and comprehensive. We also learned that there are many localities in North America and Europe contending with this same puzzle. We can learn from their efforts and we can contribute to

what is in fact a groundswell of effort to reclaim our ability to ensure that we can feed ourselves in a more sustainable and healthy fashion into the future.

Impact of this study on health and health care in BC

Overall, the potential impact on health and health care in BC generated from the knowledge gained through this project is considerable; however, further work is necessary in order to create operational strategies that incorporate this knowledge. Healthy eating is commonly agreed to be a key factor in promoting health (both in terms of prevention, cure and recovery from illness). The cornerstone of healthy eating is increasing one's intake of fresh vegetables and fruits – once again an area in which a wealth of research exists that shows most North Americans do not eat enough fruits and vegetables. Eating local fruits and vegetables can substantially improve population nutrition, thus impacting health.³⁰ If the long-term results of this project are realized, Vancouver Islanders will be provided with a substantial increase in their access to local foods. Consequently, clients in the public system who receive their food from a non-profit or public agency will also have increased access to local, more healthful foods. Public education about the health benefits of local food may also increase the amount of local foods that people eat, as they will have more awareness of its benefits.

Of the 40 regional meeting participants who filled out a feedback form at the end of the meetings, 35 agency representatives said that working to improve access to local foods would have a beneficial health impact on their clients. Only one agency representative said they did not think this work would have a beneficial health impact on their clients, and one thought that “maybe” there would be an impact.

On the regional policy front, there was enough participation from health agencies to believe that a mobilization of forces is underway within the health system. The voices that are asking for a serious look at policies to be taken, especially in relation to the health benefits of fresh, local food, are increasing. While agencies required to participate in central purchasing participation rates were much lower than initially hoped for, this project did focus attention on the issue of food and its relationship to health, and may have some impact on future policy changes regarding food and food purchasing. Pressure from within and without will be necessary to change these policies in all agencies and institutions and this research project proved itself a factor in influencing the debate. The simple act of asking questions is having a ripple effect that is hard to measure but on an anecdotal level, all of the community researchers reported observing this effect.

Copies of presentations and/or papers

The following Appendices that accompany this report are titled:

- A PowerPoint presentation summarizing the results of the research project. This was presented to non-profit and public agency representatives at a series of 5 regional meetings held across Vancouver Island in April 2007. (Appendix A)
- A PowerPoint presentation presenting some analysis around the current food system and the barriers that are impacting the creation of a sustainable food system. This was also

presented to the non-profit and public agency representatives at the community meetings. (Appendix B)

- A Monograph entitled "The Vancouver Island Good Food Business Network Initiative", which outlines efforts to provide access to local foods through the creation of a new social enterprise Coop on Vancouver Island. (Appendix C)
- A copy of a brochure that was created for dissemination to research participants and community agencies that was considering participation. (Appendix D)
- The short survey results (Appendix E)
- The face-to-face survey results (Appendix F)
- Regional Community Researchers and their final reports (Appendix H)
- A copy of the Monograph "The Good Food Box Story" (Appendix J)
- Food Localization review (Appendix L)
- Vancouver Island Farming Study (Appendix M)
- Ipsos Read Dec 2006 poll highlights (Appendix N)
- 'Vital For Life: Impacts of Eating Fruits and Vegetables', (Appendix O) & http://www.ediblestrategies.com/fsd/gfb_2006_Vital_for_Life.pdf
- Funders Meeting (Appendix P)
- UVic Environmental Law Centre's 2 new memos recently released by Environmental Law Clinic (ELC) student Kendra Milne may prove to be useful tools for groups wishing to advocate for more positive policies (Appendix Q)
- Institutional food buying Best Practices (Appendix R)

Dissemination Activities

Dissemination of information took place through a variety of methods:

- Phone calls and face to face interviews with research participants
- Community Meetings in 5 regions across the Island
- Follow up emails to hundreds of agencies that expressed an interest in hearing about the project and its results.
- Description of the project in the Monograph "The Vancouver Island Good Food Business Network Initiative" (Appendix C) that was circulated to all Islands Good Food Initiative participants and made available to institutional purchasers who attended the regional meetings.
- Project summary 2-pager circulated to all participants is Appendix K
- The reports generated from these regional meetings are attached Appendix G
- Press and Media Releases are attached as Appendix I
- A press conference is planned for September, 2007 at the offices of Nanaimo Food Share to facilitate further public discourse on these topics

Advancing skills of researchers

As primary researcher, I was amazed to discover that the people who have the purchasing power in agencies and institutions are rarely the people attending meetings and workshops on the links between food and health. The regional meetings held with those who had participated in the face to face interviews showed how eager these people were to have this information and to see themselves as part of a solution. In fact, for some of them, this meeting was the first they had attended where they had a chance to discuss these issues! I

was also very pleasantly surprised to see that all the purchasers wished to make their decisions based first on health concerns. They feel that they have to make these decisions based upon budget imperatives but were excited and enthusiastic to learn that there may be ways to work together to meet both budget and health through collaboration with each other and with local food system actors. It's clear that these people need support and information so that the power they wield can be focused to help shift the system.

I was also moved to see how isolated farmers are in attempting to deal with the overwhelming problems they face in efforts to grow good food for us. The fact that few people really understand what they are up against is sad. Food security workers have counted on farmers to provide them with cheaper food, but when we look at the equation, it is unfair to ask people who are often subsidizing their food production with other off-farm work, to subsidize low income people as well.

The 4 community researchers involved in the project prepared reports that outlined their experiences with the project. The reports are attached as Appendix H. A summary of their self-reported skill enhancement outcomes are outlined below:

While doing this research project, I was able to enhance my interviewing skills using critical thinking and effective listening. I also learned the importance of keeping personal bias out of this community research.

My "cold call" skills were enhanced. Using the words "sponsored by the BC Medical Association." in the first sentence of a call provided credibility to the work and receptionists responded more favourably to passing me on to the person in charge of food purchasing.

As I spoke with other purchasers (part of the duties in my other job) I learned tips to make the practice easier and less time consuming. Also, I noted best practices and new ideas in other places and will be able to utilize these in other aspects of my work. I learned of many new agencies and programs available in other communities that I didn't know existed and can now utilize those experiences in my community.

My listening, reporting and recording skills were also enhanced by this work.

I enjoyed this research approach and feel that speaking with colleagues, whose tasks I was familiar with, enhanced their experience; I was not someone from "outside", but rather someone facing the same or similar issues, and that worked to build trust.

By being a part of this research, I had to go through my first press release. I now have press release contact information and have gone through the hoops of making my 'first contact' with people in the news and print world. This will consequently make it so much easier next time I need to do something like this, which people are wanting me to do all the time with my other work anyways.

I learned the importance of being unbiased when delivering interviews. I think community based research brings a sense of power into the people of our community who may not have

gone the university research route: i.e. you don't have to have a degree to research what needs to be done in this world.

I was able to practice more of my supervisory skills in relation to coordinating the activities of the research team. Providing daily feedback, training and advice to the community researchers made me a stronger leader and have increased my confidence as a manager. These skills should prove very valuable in my work as a community economic development officer.

My ability to analyze the food system and understand the complex influences involved in both propping up the current system and also tipping the system towards sustainability were deepened. This analysis comes at a crucial point in the evolution of a sustainable food system in Canada. Recognizing the multiple factors that need to align in order to renew our food system

The most important skill for any researcher is an open and easygoing personality. I have the ability to communicate easily with people. This is an asset when interviewing people.

I learnt if I went into the interview with an open and friendly manner people were receptive.

Time is important, so I did not rush any of the interviews.

I answered all questions they asked respectfully.

If there was a problem with a misunderstanding of one of the questions I assumed responsibility for it, and asked if they could share with me another way the question could be asked so it would be better understood by them.

I always try to work with a sense of humour.

I used the concept of affirmation in my interviews. I think people need this when they are unsure of questions or procedure.

I found doing face-to-face interviews was a challenge and a rewarding experience.

The challenge was to know your project thoroughly before you go into the field.

I found my sense of humour helped us as women to work through some of the questions that they did not know how to answer or felt uncomfortable answering.

I found a willingness for people to share especially women to women, they had to be made comfortable with the project and feel as if it was unthreatening before they shared openly.

Know your project and how to explain it quickly and efficiently.

The best stories

I have a couple of stories to relate that will stay with me for a long time to come. I particularly enjoyed hearing that a school chef/instructor, knowing the importance of healthy choices, does his best to use only fresh ingredients. This instructor, knowing that young people prefer fries and pop to salad and juice, increased the price for the unhealthy items to offset the more expensive (more nutritious!) soup/salad/juice items. This has helped to turn the students towards healthier foods more often than not. This instructor was also quite upset to say that he had to use a wholesaler instead of accessing more local foods due to cost mostly and also short supply.

My other story had me speechless and I cannot prove or disprove it but would like to share it as well. I was told that a local institution brings in their pre-toasted toast from Calgary! How that can be cost effective boggles my mind. It points to what some big coffee chain do purely on a per piece cost and that is partially pre-bake some foods in Ontario and redistribute to all their stores, Canada wide. They then finish cooking it onsite and refer to it as fresh baked every day. As a consumer I would think that fresh baked every day meant it was made fresh, start to finish, on site. I have learned to question the wording of things. Some people believe that by shopping at a local store... they are shopping locally. We need to help educate one another in this regard.

The best story I heard while researching for this project has been that institutions such as schools are finding that their students are pressuring them to purchase locally grown foods. The second best is in the research findings, which scope out the tremendous purchasing power in all of our community agencies and institutions and the fact that if this purchasing was combined, that the smaller agencies could benefit immensely!

The best story I heard was of this school whose students are growing food for their school cafeteria. This same school also bought free-range turkeys for their Christmas time meals – I thought this was incredible.

The best story I encountered was with a group of college students who sat down with me before an interview to discuss how they could increase their own access to local foods. They invited their college administrator and the (seemingly resistant) chef in the cafeteria to the meeting. While at the outset it appeared that the students were frustrated with the food processes at the college, and had been working for a long time to lobby the administration to increase its commitment to local and organic foods – by the end of the meeting there was a meeting of minds, particularly when the opportunity to access local foods through a proposed central purchasing portal was presented. The disconnect seemed to be around the student's demand for healthy, local food on the one hand, and the seeming inability to access convenient and cost effective local foods by the cafeteria company on the other hand. When it seemed as though the concerns of the cafeteria company (from a logistics and budgetary perspective) could in fact be dealt with, the willingness to put the energy into attempting to access more local foods increased, and the participants left the meeting with a common agreement to continue to work towards the goal of more local foods being made available on campus.

Proposed additional research

Institutional Purchasing Component

We would like to propose that the current research initiative be followed by an action research project to engage food purchasers and agency/institutional decision-makers in working together to see how the needs that have emerged for education, organizing and strategic action could be met. Creating more connections and collaborations and developing a common vision and action plan would enable a systems level intervention in the Vancouver Island food system. The more “tipping point” leaders that can be brought on board with this initiative, the better its chances for success and for a sustainable ongoing organizational network to emerge. Part of the work needed is to shift internal agency policy and decision-making to facilitate making the healthiest food purchasing decisions possible. On the issue of agency leaders, it became clear during this project that the people who purchase the food in these agencies are often not the ones who have a great deal of control or power to influence the decision-making around food and food purchasing. When asked what the major criteria were that they used to choose the food they buy, many said that the agency demanded that the bottom line was the most important issue, but that on a personal front they place nutrition and freshness at the top of their list of criteria. If another layer of research were pursued, it would make more sense to bring in the policy-level managers and administrators and engage them directly in terms of their agencies’ policies and priorities. This would result in more possibility for internal shifts within the agency and greater commitment towards collaborative efforts to help the shift to local food sourcing.

We believe the best way to accomplish the above tasks would be to design a research and demonstration project with one agency willing and able to participate to focus efforts but with a committee of partners involved in the project design and process.

First Nations Component

There is enough interest and participation within Island First Nations communities to support a deeper research process. Understanding the reasons why First Nations are not pursuing agriculture as a livelihood or why communities are not branding and localizing their food production is a key question. This research would have the benefit of mobilizing the leaders in this field to take action, and would also serve as an educational mechanism to raise the levels of awareness of traditional First Nations agriculture practices. Of course, education about healthy eating is also a priority with First Nations communities, and this research would come together naturally with those efforts.

Farming Component

The farm income crisis is the crux of the local food access puzzle. Farmers are showing interest in alternatives and in working collaboratively. An action research project led by the farmer’s committee of the Islands Good Food Initiative to study how they could fill institutional and agency purchase demands while gaining premiums in a very practical fashion could help unlock the puzzle in a very direct fashion.

Legal Component

Many farmers and reports on farming suggest that the current marketing board system is counter-productive to local food production. We could not find studies that investigated these claims in a critical way. Further investigation of the way laws and regulations impede local production is needed. We also need more information about alternative legal routes others have taken to address these issues.

Recommendations for the Islands Good Food Initiative

Develop a communications plan to ensure that all players in the food system increase their awareness of the income and infrastructure issues that put downward pressure on farm production ability. Include in this plan information about the benefits to health, climate and community of local food production and consumption.

Ensure that all local food advocacy organizations are made aware of the fact that asking farmers to provide food 'cheaply' only exacerbates the problem of food security in the long run. Farmers must receive a proper income from their work and investment and food security organizations need to understand and promote this.

Continue to clarify and respond to the learning and research needs of all partners in the Islands Good Food Initiative; hold educational events whenever possible to bring new and strategic knowledge to a broader audience.

Follow up with Institutional and Agency purchasing agents who have indicated interest in learning more and assess their potential for leadership to organize their sector for education and strategic partnership. Work with these agents to reach out to cook/caterers and agency policy personnel to increase their knowledge and overcome barriers to local food purchasing.

Follow up with First Nations to build interest in the Islands Good Food Initiative from the First Nations perspective. Conduct community based research with this group to further the knowledge built during this initial phase of the work.

Focus work on assisting farmers to organize and to learn how to meet high value markets.

Continue efforts to build a local food system infrastructure on Vancouver Island and the Gulf Islands so as to make it possible for agencies and institutions to be able to order and purchase locally produced food and food products.

Develop a research and demonstration project with a Vancouver Island Health facility to learn how a local food purchasing policy would influence individual and community health outcomes. Pay close attention to the British study "Best Practice in sustainable public-sector food procurement" produced by *foodlinks UK* in the design of this project.

ENDNOTES

1. See Good Food Business Network Monograph Appendix C.
2. There are many excellent books and articles that expose these problems. For a community perspective see the Growing Hope issue of the Making Waves magazine found at http://www.cedworks.com/mw1702e_02.html
¹http://www.agf.gov.bc.ca/resmgmt/Food_Self_Reliance/BCFoodSelfReliance_Report.pdf
3. A more detailed summary of the Ipsos Reid poll is available in Appendix N
4. The term 'food security' is problematic for several reasons however the definition accepted by Food Secure Canada is as follows and will be the one we use in this report unless otherwise explained. "Food Secure Canada recognizes that food security requires that adequate amounts of safe, healthy, nutritious, culturally acceptable food be accessible to all in a dignified manner; that food producers earn a fair return on their labour, and that food production, harvesting and distribution methods sustain the environment. In a society in which most people purchase their food, they must have adequate funds to do so, and full information about what they buy." Retrieved from <http://www.foodsecurecanada.org/about.html>
5. The Fair Trade movement advocates that farmers should be fairly recompensed for their labour—the Fair Trade movement focuses primarily on products grown in southern countries where human rights abuses are rampant in the agricultural sectors especially for exotic crops imported by northern countries such as chocolate, coffee, tropical fruit etc. Fair Trade advocates' slogan is "Trade not Aid". They show that free trade has been a disaster for southern agriculture. For further information see <http://www.transfair.ca/en/fairtrade/history/>
6. For an explanation of the work of Via Campesina see <http://www.nfu.ca/international.html>
7. see [http://www.cfa-fca.ca/upload/Measuring%20the%20Farm%20Income%20Crisis%20General%20\(March,%202007\).pdf](http://www.cfa-fca.ca/upload/Measuring%20the%20Farm%20Income%20Crisis%20General%20(March,%202007).pdf)
8. <http://100milediet.org/>
9. 2007, Measuring the Farm Income Crisis, Canadian Federation of Agriculture
10. Heinberg, Richard found at www.transitionculture.org.
11. For example 2007: Growing Hope: Canadian Agriculture and Agri-food policy recommendations from the "Community Voice" prepared by Edible Strategies under the auspices of the Canadian CED Network summarizing input from CED organizations across the country. http://www.ediblestrategies.com/fsd/2007_Growing_Hope_Canadian_Agriculture.pdf
12. Op cit.
13. The summary was gleaned from a companion research project conducted by Michael Heasman with the assistance of Sandra Mark and Frank Moreland of Edible Strategies Enterprises. This report is as yet unpublished.
14. "A New Generation Co-op (NGC) is a form of business arrangement that encourages agricultural producers and processors to expand the scope of their businesses. Sometimes described as hybrids between traditional co-ops and limited companies, NGC's may be one way to help bridge the gap between commodity-oriented primary producers and consumer-focused markets" retrieved from [http://www1.agric.gov.ab.ca/\\$department/deptdocs.nsf/all/bmi6646](http://www1.agric.gov.ab.ca/$department/deptdocs.nsf/all/bmi6646)
15. Canadian Agricultural Council's 'Green Leaf' labelling program. The Green Leaf will not provide certification for special attribute foods like organic, and will not discriminate against petroleum or GMO based farming methods. For details see [http://www.cfa-fca.ca/upload/CFA-ACAAF%20Green%20Label%20Project%20Final%20Report%20\(June,%202007\).pdf](http://www.cfa-fca.ca/upload/CFA-ACAAF%20Green%20Label%20Project%20Final%20Report%20(June,%202007).pdf)
16. 2006 Martin Gooch Value Chain Drivers George Morris Centre
17. http://www.gnn.tv/print/2384/A_Market_Without_Capitalists
18. <http://www.cooperativegrocer.coop/articles/index.php?id=483>
19. http://cordis.europa.eu/paxis/src/emilia_romagna.htm
20. Information referenced in "Specialty Poultry Feasibility Study", prepared by the Community Futures Venture Centre, Cowichan, July 2000.
21. As reported in the Canada.com network 18/05/2007
22. Steve Thompson, BC Agriculture Council as reported in Canada.com on 10/05/07
23. A 'friendly and flexible' market is needed to help invest in rebuilding the lost infrastructure; as well, willingness to work with partners to scale up production on an incremental basis is needed.
24. 2006. Foodlinks UK. Best Practice in sustainable public-sector food procurement found at <http://www.localfood.org.uk/library/Defra-FLUK%20best%20practice%20final%20June%2006.pdf>
25. Local Food to Local Bellies http://foodlinknainimo.com/index_files/LocalFood.pdf
26. Summary from Press Release from the Environmental Law Centre, University of Victoria, July 12, 2007
27. CFA Commentary, June 2007 retrieved from http://www.cfa-fca.ca/pages/index.php?main_id=385 "Canadian Fed of Ag In its last submission to the WTO, the US reported US\$72 billion in total domestic support, equivalent to 36 per cent of its total value of production. In contrast, Canada's support totalled Cdn\$3 billion or 14 per cent of its value of production."
28. For information on Farmer's Debt in Canada see http://dsp-psd.pwgsc.gc.ca/collection_2007/statcan/21-014-X/21-014-XIE2007001.pdf

29. See report at [http://www.cfa-fca.ca/upload/Measuring%20the%20Farm%20Income%20Crisis%20General%20\(March,%202007\).pdf](http://www.cfa-fca.ca/upload/Measuring%20the%20Farm%20Income%20Crisis%20General%20(March,%202007).pdf)
30. See 'Vital For Life', Appendix O