



COWICHAN FOOD SECURITY PLAN



2010 Edition

Prepared by Cowichan Green Community





Katy Erlich at Alderlea Farm

All the flowers of all the tomorrows are in the seeds of today.

- Indian Proverb

Acknowledgements

Community Supporters and Volunteers

Thanks and gratitude goes out to all community members who have participated in the creation of the Plan since its beginning in January, 2006. All have helped to shape our understanding of food security in the Cowichan Valley and guide our work towards community resilience.

2008 Steering Committee:

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Cowichan Food Security Coalition

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Susan Smith, and Jessica Kerr.

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Executive Summary



Food Security means that ALL members of our community have access to enough nutritious, safe, ecologically sustainable, and culturally appropriate food at all times.

As food security-related education, advocacy, and research continue in our community and beyond, more and more people are awakening to the importance of building resilient local food systems. Since the Cowichan Food Security Plan was developed in 2007, Cowichan has seen the development and expansion of community gardens, increased participation in food share and fruit gleaning programs, growing farmers markets, and the official designation of North America’s first official *Cittaslow* or “Slow Town” – Cowichan Bay.

However, we still have a long way to go before we can consider ourselves a food secure community. Local farmers are struggling to make a fair living, Vancouver Island continues to lose food production quota to the mainland, and many of our neighbours lack access to sufficient, healthy food on a daily basis. Like the rest of Vancouver Island, 80-90% of our food is directly dependant on oil inputs for long-distance transport via truck and ferry, and a

mere 2-3 days worth of food is stockpiled in case of crisis; in short, Cowichan’s food system is both environmentally unsustainable and extremely vulnerable to rising oil prices, climate change, and emergency situations.

The Cowichan Food Security Plan (the Plan) was developed in 2007 and updated in 2010 to track food security developments in our community and to highlight collective and individual barriers that still exist. The planning process continues to foster relationships among community sectors, organizations, and individuals, and the Plan’s recommendations are firmly grounded in the knowledge and values of the people of Cowichan. As a living document, it will evolve and change as our community grows. It is our hope that the Plan will function as an educational tool, raising awareness and helping to guide the community in our ongoing work to create a truly sustainable and food secure Cowichan.

Our Vision

Our vision is of a Cowichan-wide community connected through the pleasures and the security of growing and eating locally produced food. Our food system will be economically viable and ecologically sustainable; our community will grow, harvest, process, preserve, and distribute food to all of its members while minimizing waste. A thriving local food culture that celebrates eating locally and eating together will support us in living healthier, happier, and richer lives - connected to the land, to growers, and to each other.

Cowichan Food Security Coalition

During the Plan's initial development, the Steering committee quickly recognized the need for a local coalition of individuals involved in food security work. Through networking and information-sharing, this coalition could increase communication around food security developments and maintain momentum generated by the Plan. As a result, the Cowichan Food Security Coalition (the Coalition) was formed in 2008. Composed of community stakeholders and hosted by the Cowichan Green Community, the Coalition's members continue to monitor the status of food security in our community and work to implement the Plan's recommended actions:

1. Develop and promote the Cowichan Food Charter;
2. Organize educational opportunities for the residents of Cowichan to kick-start household-level food production and processing;
3. Encourage gardening and other food production activities at the individual, household, and community levels;
4. Establish a food security research program to identify ways of increasing food security;
5. Advocate for policies that enhance food security, and lobby against policies that undermine it;
6. Develop a plan to support local farmers.

The Coalition continues to welcome new members. Contact Cowichan Green Community for more information.


The Cowichan Food Charter

A food charter is a statement of values and principles that guide decision-making and orient council policy towards food security. A growing number of communities across BC and Canada – from small municipalities like Saanich, Salmon Arm, and Kaslo, to major cities like Vancouver and Toronto – are officially adopting their own food charters to support the development of sustainable and socially just local food systems.

The Cowichan Food Charter (the Charter), was created by the Plan’s original Steering Committee and updated in 2009 with input from the community. On Monday, January 18th, 2010, the City of Duncan became the newest municipality in Canada to officially adopt a food charter.

To sign the Charter is to firmly state that food, health, and the environment are connected, and that they are integral to the wellbeing of our whole community.

◊ THE COWICHAN FOOD CHARTER ◊



Food security exists when ALL members of our community have access to enough nutritious, safe, ecologically sustainable, and culturally appropriate food at all times.

THE VISION

Our food system will be economically viable and ecologically sustainable; our community will grow, harvest, process, preserve, and distribute food to all of its members while minimizing waste. A thriving local food culture that celebrates eating locally and eating together will support us in living healthier, happier, and richer lives - connected to the land, to growers, and to each other.

We support this vision by proclaiming that:

- ◊ We have a collective obligation to ensure that everyone has access to sufficient, high-quality food;
- ◊ For Cowichan to thrive, local farmers and food producers must earn a good and fair living;
- ◊ Food security requires cooperation and communication among the community, farmers, and all levels of local government.

In Cowichan’s food-secure future:

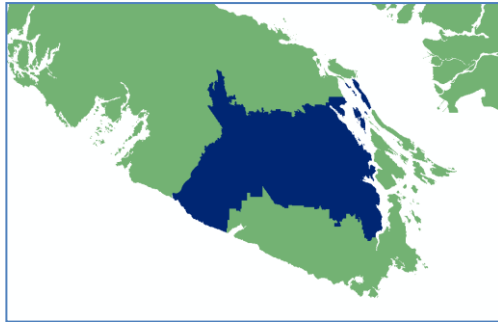
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. There will be no more chronic hunger, and no more malnourished children; 2. Farmers will be better connected to consumers through farm markets, Community Supported Agriculture, and school and work lunch programs; 3. Farmers’ roles as environmental stewards will be protected and financially supported; 4. Agricultural resources including water, land, and the knowledge of farmers will be protected; 5. Regulations will strengthen the capacity of local farmers to produce and reach their markets; 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. A “Buy Local” campaign that promotes local food production and consumption will be expanded; 7. Traditional teachings about food preservation, seed saving, eating seasonally, and eating locally will be encouraged and supported; 8. Institutional buyers such as hospitals and universities will have the flexibility and incentive to buy more local products; 9. Ongoing research will ensure long-term food security in the face of a changing climate.
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THEREFORE, I/WE THE UNDERSIGNED declare my/our commitment to promote and support these values in moving toward a food-secure Cowichan that honours social justice, ecosystem health, and community wellbeing.

Name/Organization: _____ Signature: _____

December 2009 Version

About the Cowichan Valley



The Cowichan Valley Regional District, located on Vancouver Island between Nanaimo and Victoria, BC, is home to a diverse group of

peoples living in many jurisdictions, including Cowichan Tribes reserve land, the City of Duncan, the municipality of North Cowichan, and the towns of Lake Cowichan, Chemainus, and Ladysmith.

With a moderate climate and long growing season by Canadian standards, it comes as no surprise that Cowichan possesses a strong agricultural history. The Cowichan Co-operative Creamery, set up in 1895, was the first dairy co-op in BC and a major hub of the community until 1988. By the late nineteenth century farmers were producing a wide variety of crops on numerous small farms that were consumed locally and exported to other communities.¹

Today, with rapidly increasing population and development in Cowichan, challenges to food production are growing. These include:

- The rising cost of land;
- Aging farmers and few young people taking their place;
- Increased use of farm land for non-food crops and animals;
- Increasing government regulations (especially for meat processing plants);
- Water shortages;
- Increased urban and suburban development.

But while co-ops like the Creamery no longer exist, the good soil and talented farmers of Cowichan continue to produce a diverse selection of high-quality products, many of them sold to loyal customers who value locally produced foods. With collective dedication, investment, and supportive policy, Cowichan can reinstate itself as one of the major food baskets of Vancouver Island.

¹ Cowichan Agricultural Area Plan – Status of the Industry Report, 2009

✧ FOCUS GROUP SESSIONS ✧

· experience · expertise · perspective · vision ·



Four groups of local professionals were brought together in 2007 to explore and discuss the food security-related challenges and opportunities they face as individuals and as organizations:

1. Farmers and food producers
2. Commercial & institutional food buyers
3. Community service providers
4. Local government

Discussions hinged on the identification of concerns and barriers to food security in the Cowichan Valley, actions being taken by members of their sector to enhance food security, and community supports needed to achieve food security goals. The issues that were raised were revisited in 2009 to track updates and recent developments.

Water Issues in the Valley

“At lower elevations along the east coast of Vancouver Island, Cowichan, the warm land, has climate and soils that are well-suited to many different agricultural enterprises. There are 32,830 hectares (ha) of arable land. Of this, 9421 ha are considered prime agricultural land. However, about 80% of this area requires irrigation to produce high-value crops; only about 2465 ha are currently irrigated. Access to water for irrigation is a significant concern.”

- Cowichan Agricultural Plan - State of the Industry Report (14)



Focus Group #1: Farmers and Food Producers

Concerns & Barriers

- **Economic viability of farming:** The high cost of land combined with perceptions that farming is not a high-status or desirable career discourages younger people from choosing farming as a profession.
- **Water management:** Many farms currently lack access to adequate quality and quantity of water, and yet the “Cowichan Basin Water Management Plan” advocates for a 10% reduction in agricultural water use by 2010 and 20% by 2015.
- **Lack of support systems:** A lack of support systems protecting farmers, their families, and their investments in land and equipment leaves farmers’ livelihoods vulnerable in the face of illness or emergency.

Farmers Taking Action

Farmers and commercial food producers identified a number of actions they could take, or are taking now, to address these concerns. These include:

- **Increasing farm infrastructure:** Greenhouses and poly-tunnels allow planting to begin earlier in the spring and extend later into the fall – even all year for some crops.
- **Creating processing & cold storage facilities to “lengthen the season”:** Increasing the value of a product and extending shelf life via processing makes local farming more viable. The establishment of cooperative processing and cold storage warehouses is needed. A number of food processing facilities are under development in Cowichan, but are not yet operational.
- **Better distribution systems:** The Small Scale Food Processors’ Association (SSFPA) focuses on facilitating the distribution of local food products and services. Local Flavours and Products Co-operative emerged as an effort to financially support the SSFPA. Expansion of these programs and others like them is necessary.

- **Alternative business models:** Through CSAs consumers prepay for produce that is then delivered throughout the growing season. This ensures a market base for farmers' products while the rewards and risks of farming are shared. Farm-gate sales and farmers markets also facilitate producer-consumer relationships.
- **Better marketing:** Branding can highlight and promote local produce in the marketplace.

Community Taking Action

Farmers and other food producers can overcome the challenges they face with help from the community:

- **Increased knowledge, interest, and initiative** from local politicians about food security and agricultural issues.
- **Fair water policies for agricultural use** including the prioritization of water for agricultural use when dealing with new developments and the creation of water containment systems for agricultural purposes (i.e. retention ponds).
- **The appointment of a CVRD Agriculture Coordinator** who could communicate with other organizations on behalf of farmers regarding such issues as over-regulation, local government funding, training, land issues, labour shortages, etc.
- **'Buy local first' policies** within government institutions.
- **Funding** directed at agricultural training and farmer support.
- **Policies and regulations suited to small-scale growers and producers** - the current quota system is deeply flawed and biased against small-scale production.
- **Creation of year-round food processing facilities** and opportunities.
- **Better working relationships between farmers and schools**, including the development of agricultural programs in schools.
- **More opportunities for interaction** between farmers and the general public.
- **Better appreciation** of the role of farmers and farming in maintaining green space and in promoting environmental and aesthetic values.

Cowichan Agricultural Society

The Cowichan Agricultural Society has been promoting healthy, vibrant, viable agriculture in the Cowichan Valley for over 135 years. Visit their new website for information about local farmers, products, and upcoming events:

www.cowichanfarmers.org

Island Farmers Alliance

Created by the Cowichan Agricultural Society and now functioning as an independent organization, Island Farmers' Alliance (IFA) has a mandate to strengthen unity among Island producers and to ensure the sustainability of Island agriculture.

www.islandfarmersalliance.org



Branding regional and Island products with an easily recognized logo, like this IFA "Rooster Booster", is an important part of marketing local food.

“A number of factors suggest that the structure of farms will change in the future. The price of farmland is prohibitive for many new farmers. Retiring farmers are finding it challenging to sell and/or pass the farm on to the next generation. Large dairy farms have millions of dollars of assets and buyers are scarce. These factors suggest that there will be creative new structures for farm businesses in the future. These may include corporations (with nonfamily shareholders), increased leasing (which may allow aging farmers to remain on their land and keep farm classification,), leasing of small plots within a larger acreage, cooperatives, Community Supported Agriculture (CSAs), and perhaps other structures where consumers support a local farm through some form of investment.”

- Cowichan Agricultural Plan – State of the Industry Report (30)

“If farmers can’t make money, then farmers won’t support the Agricultural Land Reserve, and then farmland is finished.”

- Corky Evans, former NDP critic for agriculture and lands

Our Community Counts: Farming and Eating in the Cowichan Valley²

Percentage of land in Cowichan considered prime for agriculture: **2.7**

Percentage of the area’s soils that could be improved if irrigated: **66**

Cubic feet of water *per second* that the Catalyst Paper mill has license to use all year: **100**

Total hectares farmed in the Cowichan Valley in 1991: **18,628**

Total hectares farmed in the Cowichan Valley in 2006: **11,559**

Total number of farms in the Cowichan Valley: **700**

Percentage of these farms raising only horses: **14.4**

Percentage of farms reporting annual incomes of less than \$25,000: **76**

Overall percentage of revenue earned from products sold directly to consumers: **17**

Percentage of our food dollars spent on products that have passed through mass-distribution systems: **75**

Average age of famers in the Cowichan Valley: **54.4**

Percentage of Valley farmers under the age of 35: **5**

Percentage of farm operators that are female in Canada: **27.8**

Percentage of farm operators that are female in the Cowichan Valley: **41.4**

Percentage of farms in the lower mainland who report using pesticides: **37**

Percentage of farms in Cowichan who report using pesticides: **23**

Number of certified organic farms in the Cowichan Valley: **16**

Number of local farms who identify themselves as ‘non-certified organic’: **181**

² All statistics from the Cowichan Area Agricultural Plan – Status of the Industry Report, 2009

Focus Group #2: Commercial & Institutional Purchasers

Commercial and institutional food buyers, making large and regular food purchases, have enormous clout in the industry. Increasing the amount of local food these purchasers incorporate into their budgets can jumpstart local food production and help create a stable, reliable market for farmers' products.

Concerns & Barriers:

- **Regulations:** Large-scale institutional food buyers are constrained by regulations developed to ensure the safety of food (of particular relevance is the Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points), and provincial mandates related to how they do business.
- **Funding:** Resources allocated to food preparation in the health care system and educational institutes are minimal.
- **Access:** Large organizations have difficulty relying on small producers to guarantee reliable supply, quality, and consistency of food. Confusion currently exists around the availability of local meat due to recent changes in regulations of slaughtering and butchering. Businesses and institutions committed to buying local food must build their own food supply networks, requiring large inputs of time and energy.

Commercial & Institutional Buyers Taking Action:

To address the barriers to food security, participants in the Commercial and Institutional Food Buyers focus group identified the following actions they could take, or are taking now. These include:

M.U.S.H: The Big Four Institutional Purchasers

Municipalities: While the City of Duncan does not purchase food, by officially adopting the Cowichan Food Charter in early 2010, the City has dedicated itself to supporting the local food system through wise policy and planning.

Universities: The new Vancouver Island University (VIU) Cowichan Campus is taking note of the model the University of Victoria has developed for sourcing local food (see p.15 sidebar). VIU Cowichan purchasers report that efforts will be made to purchase local products for their small cafeteria.

Schools: A "Farm to School" pilot program was launched successfully in 2008 in the interior of BC. A lack of funding is the main barrier to its continuance and expansion throughout the province. As most Cowichan schools do not currently provide lunch, a lack of school kitchens is also an issue.

Hospitals: Budget cut-backs leave hospitals more dependent on pre-processed and frozen foods that can be reheated and served with minimal specialized facilities or staff. Efforts will be made to buy local food as funding and buying programs improve.

Food Miles & Carbon Footprints: The University of Victoria Leads the Way

The *University of Victoria Sustainability Action Plan: Campus Operations 2009-2014* states that UVic will “work with local farmers and producers to enhance production and supply of produce in the local community through purchasing programs and initiatives.”

The result of this commitment: of the 153 most commonly purchased food items, all 20 that can be produced on the Island – things like apples, eggs, and lettuce - are being purchased locally. This accounts for over 37% of UVic’s food budget, and provides enormous incentive for local farmers to increase production. In a groundbreaking study, the individual carbon footprint of obtaining every food item has also been calculated, and a value has been assigned to the greenhouses gasses emitted en route from farmer to distributor and distributor to UVic. Purchasers take these figures into account, and as a result the carbon footprint of eating at UVic is getting a little smaller every year.

- **Official adoption of the Triple Bottom Line:** Institutions can adopt a mandate to consider people and the planet as well as profit. Under the Good Samaritan Law, some Vancouver Island Health Authority locations have also begun to donate unused food to emergency food providers.
- **Intentionally staying small:** The Community Farm Store in Duncan, feeding approximately 300 – 400 families, has committed to selling organic (certified or not) local foods. To make this more feasible, the Farm Store has opted to remain small, personal, and community-oriented.
- **Connecting with farmers:** The Island Chef’s Collaborative (ICC) is committed to supporting local farmers and promoting local food whenever possible. Chefs meet with farmers to share ideas and plan crops, allowing chefs to incorporate more intriguing, fresh ingredients in their menus and farmers to count on a guaranteed buyer for their produce. The ICC hosts an annual “Defending Our Backyard” dinner to celebrate local food and drink, and to raise money for their scholarship program. Food producers can apply for this scholarship to fund the development of farm infrastructure that will help them increase production.

Community Taking Action:

Commercial and institutional food purchasers can overcome the challenges they face with help from the community:

- **Re-evaluation of the meaning of ‘food’** within government policy such that fresh, locally grown foods are valued for their health benefits, sustainability, and role within the local economy.
- **Pro-local regulation** that encourages institutions to buy directly from local producers.
- **Increased preservation of local foods** as well as less demand for off-season produce.
- **Investments in infrastructure** and programs to increase local food production.
- **A centralized, accessible facility** to connect growers/producers and buyers - a ‘one-stop’ warehouse for purchasing local produce with a broker to facilitate sales.
- **Better communication** from farmers as to what local foods are available, or could be available, in every season.

- **Market research** into what local produce is being grown (to be communicated to buyers) and what produce buyers would like to purchase (to be communicated to farmers).

Focus Group #3: Community Service Providers

Community service providers – organizations such as food banks, community kitchens, and emergency shelters – provide assistance to individuals who are most vulnerable to food insecurity. The people who run these organizations offer insight into specific issues that must be addressed to achieve food security for everyone.

Barriers & Concerns:

- **Loss of skills & empowerment around food:** In general people today know much less about food preparation than previous generations, leaving them dependent on often unhealthy and more expensive packaged foods. Poor eating habits are picked up by children and can lead to health risks in the future.
- **Lack of storage and access:** Inadequate freezers, cold storage, and even cupboard space is often compounded by a lack of adequate transportation options, particularly for those with mobility challenges.
- **Lack of funding for organizations:** Participants expressed concern about the viability of their organizations, collectively and individually. Front-line positions are frequently filled by unpaid volunteers, and staff members are often overworked and struggling with burn-out.

Service Providers Taking Action:

- **Solidarity:** Cooperation with other organizations provides staff support, reduces burnout, and eases the competitive funding environment. Service providers are also gaining support and strength from relationships with other local initiatives

Community Kitchens: Empowering Food Choices

Give a family food, you feed them for a day; teach a family to cook, you feed them for generations.

With this in mind, Cowichan Community Kitchens was created. Community Kitchens help small groups of people plan meals, shop, and cook together in a public or home kitchen. The atmosphere of the kitchen is positive, and the experience can increase the confidence people feel around preparing food. Sharing costs and tasks means savings of money and time, and eating together builds a sense of friendship and community around food.

Community Kitchens operate from a number of locations throughout the Valley. To find out more or join a group, contact the House of Friendship:

Phone: 250-748-2242 (ext. 134)

Email: ck.hof@shawcable.com

Giving Local Food

Preserving local food during the summer and fall is essential to enjoying local food throughout the winter.

There is a common misconception that donations of homemade preserves and prepared food cannot be accepted by food banks. In fact, as long as the jars, cans, or frozen goods are clearly labelled with **ingredients** and the **date of production**, they are greatly appreciated. Freezer space is often at a premium, so canned and dried goods are generally easier to store.

We can all share the wealth we have; next time you make a batch of tomato sauce, pickled beans, or wild blackberry jam, label a few jars carefully and deliver them to a food bank or community kitchen. The whole community will benefit.

“The good we secure for ourselves is precarious and uncertain until it is secured for all of us and incorporated into our common life.”

- Jane Adams

like community gardens, community kitchen programs, wild foods workshops, permaculture & sustainable-living demonstration sites, and gleaning programs that deliver fresh produce to their doors.

Community Taking Action:

Local service providers can overcome the challenges they face with help from the community:

- **Support and value** front line food security workers.
- **Redefine ‘progress’ and ‘growth and development’** so that a focus is placed on food security and community well-being.
- **Encourage and facilitate cooperation** between organizations.
- **Review zoning** to allow more space to grow food.
- **Establish a food security infrastructure**, including one or more warehouses for cold storage of local produce.
- **Create and/or increase mentoring** and educational opportunities for farmers, including apprenticeship programs.



- **Institute a “Finance, Ownership, Governance”** model to facilitate co-ownership of buildings and land (see p.31)
- **Create a public demonstration site** or Food Security Commons to provide space for education, re-skilling, empowerment, planning, etc.

Focus Group #4: Local Government

Barriers & Concerns:

- **Lack of available land for farming:** This includes land that is prohibitively expensive as well as agricultural land that is used for horses, wine grapes, etc.
- **Coordination:** Coordinating efforts on a regional scale is difficult, given that there are so many jurisdictions within the Cowichan Valley.
- **Water issues:** These include flooding of agricultural lands, lands lacking groundwater for irrigation, potential contamination of run-off water, and an absence of water management plans that address the requirements of agriculture.
- **Farm labour shortage:** A perception of farm labour as backbreaking and low-paying also discourages young people from seeking out work and careers in agriculture.

Local Governments Taking Action:

City of Duncan

- **Considering urban chickens:** a bylaw is being considered that would permit up to four laying hens per city lot. Decisions on this issue will be made in spring of 2010.
- **Increasing community green space:** City Council is exploring a potential requirement that future multi-use buildings have green space/agricultural areas, as well as a potential tax break for those who grow food instead of grass. This will also be determined in spring of 2010.

Cowichan Valley Regional District (CVRD):

- **Cowichan Region Agricultural Area Plan: State of the Industry Report:** This new document provides an in-depth look at the current state of the agricultural industry, detailing assets and limitations and how these are likely to shift in the future.
- **Cowichan Valley Regional District Agricultural Overview:** This inventory of land, land use, agricultural products, land management practices, and the economics of local farming also helps us understand the strengths and

What is Quota?

'Quota' is essentially a license to produce and sell a specific amount of a given agricultural product, namely dairy, poultry, eggs, meat, and vegetables. A system of supply management, quota was developed in the 1960's with the aim of establishing marketplace stability and consistent production. However, only a certain amount of quota is available every year, and the cost of purchasing quota is extremely high. Smaller and newer producers often cannot afford to purchase a license to produce more food, even if there is a market for their products. Quota has therefore, over time, become concentrated in the hands of large-scale producers on the mainland.

Now, farmers on Vancouver Island hold considerably less quota per capita than BC as a whole, and, as it stands, less quota than is needed to feed our population. In short: **Vancouver Island farmers are currently *not allowed* to produce enough food to feed us.**

Along with revisions to the quota system, many more small producers operating under quota minimums (for example, raising 99 chickens or less) will be needed.

Urban Chickens: Myths & Realities

Some city dwellers are concerned that raising chickens in urban areas will spread diseases, attract pests like rats and racoons, or create excess noise. When properly cared for however, laying hens are harmless and even pleasant additions to backyards, providing communities with a sustainable, low-impact source of fresh, local eggs all year round. Chickens are experts at keeping backyard garden plots free of pests, and also help to reduce the urban garbage stream by consuming household scraps.

Ensuring that all chickens are registered and that homeowners have completed standard training in raising poultry means that everyone involved remains safe, healthy, and happy. Visit urbanchickens.org or citychickens.com for more information on how to keep backyard chickens. **Cowichan Feather Fanciers Poultry, Waterfowl & Pigeon Club** offers support and education for local residents: cacklershill@telus.net

weaknesses of the Cowichan agricultural sector.

- **Consideration of a new Agricultural Coordinator position:** This individual could facilitate communications between relevant stakeholder groups and address issues related to farming, i.e. matching farmers with available land, addressing the farm labour crisis, etc. This will be considered in the 2010 budgeting process.
- **Facilitating farming succession:** The creation of a local mentorship program could lead to gradual property ownership for new farmers.

Municipality of North Cowichan

- **Official Community Plan:** The most recent Official Community Plan of North Cowichan, slated to be completed in April, 2010, will address the protection of agricultural land, support for farmers, farmers' markets, and urban agriculture.
- **North Cowichan Strategic Agriculture Plan:** This document guides North Cowichan's agricultural policy.
- **Agriculture Advisory Committee:** This group is concerned with identifying and removing barriers to the economic wellbeing of farmers in North Cowichan. Members look at applications to the Agricultural Land Commission pertaining to agricultural land use and related broader policies, but are not necessarily concerned with local *food* production.

Community Taking Action:

- **Increased communication from the community** in the form of letters, calls, and meetings with political leaders encourages positive change.
- **Increased public education** surrounding food production, distribution, and regulations that impact farmers leads to more productive and informed dialogue.
- **Active advocacy** combined with the recognition that issues are often complex and take time to change.

☼ COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT ☼

· collaboration · creativity · engagement ·



The first public workshop organized during the creation of the Cowichan Food Security Plan, held in February 2008, was attended by 52 community members. Individuals were asked to participate in a series of discussions based on questions surrounding food security. These discussions were an essential component of the original Plan, and excerpts and points from the workshop are included throughout the following sections.

For the 2010 update, we have focused specifically on the question: *how will we know we are on track towards food security?* Participants responded by compiling a set of indicators, or questions to keep asking ourselves as a community. Answers and updates have been gathered from many sources in the Valley, giving us an idea of where we have progressed and where work remains to be done.

Our global food system is terribly broken.

Together, we can fix it!

- Grassroots International

The Big Picture: International Food Security

“There are an estimated 50 million refugees and internally displaced people in the world today. Their number is increasing by 12% each year and at any one time about 2 million are new mothers. Increasingly, urban centres in both the industrialized and developing world consist of large populations of unemployed and working poor for whom artificial feeding is an unaffordable choice. Food banks in North America, besieged with requests for infant feeding products are by and large unable to respond. In the war zones of Iraq and Bosnia infant mortality rates rose significantly, in part due to a dependency on unavailable artificial baby milk supplies.”

- *Infant Feeding Action Coalition
Canada*

The Beginning of Food Security: a Note on Breastfeeding

Studies continue to show that breastfeeding increases immunity, boosts cognitive development, and supports healthy growth for babies. Breastfeeding is free, natural, and environmentally friendly – no processing, packaging, shipping, storage, distribution, or heating required. Conversely, the costs and associated health risks of using formula can place serious stress on mothers and families – purchasing formula can consume 20-90% of a low-income family’s wages, and formula-fed babies suffer increased infections and require more frequent hospital stays³.

Statistics reveal that mothers who can least afford these costs and stresses– those relying on welfare, employment insurance, or workers compensation – are using formula the most. One of the most important things we can do to ensure that all children in our community are as healthy and safe as possible is to support and encourage breastfeeding mothers. Several excellent local programs offer breastfeeding and nutritional support to mothers and families in our area:

Healthy Beginnings: Relaxed and informal drop-ins for moms, dads, grandparents, and caregivers in Duncan, Shawnigan Lake, Chemainus, Lake Cowichan, and Tsewultun. Call (250) 746-6184 for more information.

Born Healthy: Support for pregnant women and new parents in Ladysmith. Call (250) 245-3079 for more information.

Healthiest Babies Possible: Supporting women to have healthy pregnancies and improved lifestyles, with a focus on nutrition. Call (250) 748-2242 for more information.

³ World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action: www.waba.org

Towards food security: how do we know we're on track?

How much land is currently under production for food? Is this shifting?

There are currently 700 farms in the Cowichan Valley. 11,559 hectares of land is being farmed, down 38 percent from 1991 levels⁴. Trends are moving towards smaller, more intensively-run farms, and organic (both certified and uncertified) growing practices are on the rise. As pointed out in previous sections, the fact that farmers on Vancouver Island have lost quota, or license to produce food, to larger operations on the mainland seriously impairs our ability to achieve food security in our communities; we need more farmland to be in production, but first we need the right to produce.



Wine grapes are one of the fastest growing crop categories in the ALR.

A growing percentage of prime farmland in Cowichan is now being used to produce wine grapes. While many vintners are supporting and promoting the development of a thriving Cowichan food culture, these grapes aren't for eating. One potential solution to this problem is turkeys - successfully integrated into vineyards in other areas, turkeys feed on insects and pests while leaving vines and grapes unharmed. Turkeys can then provide the community with a high quality source of food.

Farmers' Markets in Cowichan

Duncan Farmers Market in the Square

Craig Street, downtown Duncan

Saturdays 10:00 am – 2:00 pm

March to October

☼ For the first time, the Duncan Farmers' Market will continue indoors for the winter, beginning January 9th, 2010. It will move to the main floor of the Island Savings Centre, 2687 James St., Duncan.

Cobble Hill Farmers' Market

Cobble Hill Hall at Watson and Fisher Road

Sundays 9:00 am - 2:00 pm

May to October

Cowichan Station Pocket Market

St. Andrew's Church, 2475 Koksilah Road

Wednesday evenings 3:00 – 6:00 pm

In season (watch for announcements)

☼ This new little market springs up when fresh produce is available in the summer.

⁴ Area Agricultural Plan – Status of the Industry Report (17)

Farmers' Markets in Cowichan continued...

Chemainus Wednesday Evening Market

Waterwheel Park, Chemainus
Wednesdays 5:00 pm – 8:30 pm
May to September

Crofton Farmers' Market

Beside the Ferry Terminal, Crofton
Saturdays 8:00 am – 1:00 pm
May to September

Honeymoon Bay Outdoor Market

Southshore Road, Honeymoon Bay
Saturdays 10:00am - 2:00pm
(Sundays on long weekends)
May to September

Fact: A regional diet uses 17 times less oil than the typical American long-distance diet.

*Yes! Magazine: Food for Everyone
Spring 2009*

How many people identify themselves as personal or commercial growers?

In the 2006 local census, 1075 people reported themselves to be “farm operators”, but the Area Agricultural Plan notes that there is an “emerging group of ‘producers’ who should also be considered” – backyard gardeners. In the spring of 2009, vendors at the Duncan Farmers’ Market experienced significant increases in sales of bedding plants,⁵ while the owners of West Coast Seeds in Ladner, BC reported that 2009 sales hit records. The Community Farm Store & Dinter’s Nursery also saw both seeds and bedding plants fly off shelves. More people are taking up food production in their backyards, on their patios, and in their allotment beds. This trend needs to continue and intensify if we as a community hope to decrease our dependence on imported foods.



Fresh bread and produce from Shawl Farm

West Coast Seeds, generally a supplier of personal growers, found that bulk quantities of seeds were also selling out in 2009, indicating that more people are starting up small-scale farms using heritage and organic seed. This is in keeping with the local trend towards smaller, more intensively run organic farms. Highest increases in seed sales came from new gardeners /farmers and people under 40 years of age.

⁵ Area Agricultural Plan – Status of the Industry Report (23)

Is there a change in availability of local produce in grocery stores?

Nicolette Genier, owner of Duncan’s Community Farm Store, reports that sourcing local produce is definitely getting easier. Food items that were previously ordered from the mainland can now be sourced from farms on the Island. In 2009 local producers brought in more than enough farm eggs to satisfy demand, and for the first time this summer the Community Farm Store was able to offer 100% local greens and cabbage all season long. Availability of local meats has also increased, though sourcing Canadian, and especially local, beans, and grains continue to be difficult. This is a major niche that will need to be filled by local farmers in the coming years.



Young barley at Makaria Farm

Nicolette now meets with all local growers who supply the Farm Store to discuss and plan the coming year’s crops. Communication like this benefits both growers and purchasers – growers know there is a market for their products, and buyers know what to expect and when for their store shelves or restaurant menus.

Island Grains

“Island Grains is a new form of community-supported agriculture. It is a club, a workshop, an experiment, and a movement. It is a way for eaters to be growers, to face the same challenges as our farmers, to learn to fear the weather, and to understand the value of food. It’s a resource for families, individuals, groups, risk-takers and food enthusiasts.”

Island Grains was created by Brock McLeod and Heather Walker of Makaria Farm to encourage and support the development of small-scale grain growing here in the Valley. One of the weak links in the food security picture, grains are surprisingly easy to grow in small plots and often don’t require specialized equipment to harvest. The instant success of the program (within four weeks the 2009 workshops were filled to capacity by 51 families) demonstrated that people are ready to get involved. The Island Grains website offers information and tips for beginners, and workshops facilitated by experts like Dan Jason of Salt Spring Seeds are helping people get started on their own grain projects.

For more info, visit: www.islandgrains.com

The Importance of Choice

Being able to choose from a wide variety of healthy and seasonal fresh food is an important aspect of food security. Eating locally needs to be a rich and enjoyable experience in order for a thriving local food culture to evolve.

Luckily, Cowichan boasts a moderate climate well suited to growing a wide variety of foods. Microclimates created with poly-tunnels, cold frames, greenhouses, and cob walls can even support delicate citrus trees! As the climate continues to shift and weather becomes less predictable, drought-tolerant crops will prove especially valuable. The more experimentation and research growers do now, the more diversity and choice we will all be blessed with in the future.

Fact: Since 1900, 75 percent of vegetable varieties have disappeared worldwide.

*Yes! Magazine: Food for Everyone
Spring 2009*

How diverse are the choices available? Are there new crops being planted?

In addition to our favourite berries, fruits, vegetables, meats and cheeses, many farms in Cowichan are raising plants and animals that are new to the Valley. Evelyn, Jay, and Jesse Pereira of Terra Nossa Family Farm harvested their first fresh goji berries in 2009, and have inoculated young oak trees on their property with perigord truffle spores.

Heather and Brock of Makaria Farm, along with members of their Island Grains club, have planted barley, quinoa, Red Fife wheat, lentils, and other pulses. Edamame (fresh soy beans) were also a popular staple at their market stands this year. Jim Halverson of Springfield Farm in Maple Bay has planted hundreds of European chestnut trees that will bear nuts in several years. Maureen McInnis at Maple Grove Farm on Gibbins Road successfully grew sweet potatoes recently – a feat that had previously been thought impossible. Nick Versteeg of Laughing Geese Farm provides salsify to artisan chefs like Brad Boisvert from Amusé Bistro in Shawnigan Lake, while Dr. Bill Code of Code's Corner



Ripe goji berries at Terra Nossa Family Farm

Farm is growing peanuts and more sweet potatoes. Lemon cucumbers, purple potatoes, striped tomatoes, yellow carrots – rare, heritage, and exotic foods are all arriving and thriving in Cowichan. These are just a few examples - there are likely many more. Visit farmers' markets and stay in touch with the creative genius of Cowichan's growers.



Mapping and Food Security

Though agriculture is such an important part of Cowichan's physical and cultural identity, many of us aren't aware of the diversity of plant and animal foods that farmers are producing here. Others have an idea, but aren't entirely sure just who is growing what, when it is available, and where it can be purchased. Farmers

are often too busy growing food to spend time marketing it, and as a result the gap between local growers and local eaters is larger than it needs to be. Cowichan Green Community's Food Security Map will narrow this gap by disseminating information about where local food is grown and sold, which farms have CSA's, who runs farm stands, who sells what at the farmers' market, etc. Local farmers will gain greater visibility within our community while consumers will access local food more easily and more often.

In addition to helping farmers market their products, the map will piece together a broader picture of food security in Cowichan. "Food deserts" - areas in the community without grocery stores or real food markets – can be clearly identified, gaps between farms and/or markets and public transportation routes can be addressed, missing links in the local food system, such as grains and beans, can be highlighted. The map will also show where emergency food can be found and which neighbourhoods have community gardens where people can learn to grow their own. Watch for Cowichan's Food Security Map in early summer, 2010.

Outcomes of the Food Security Mapping Project

- 1) An interactive online map of food resources in the Cowichan Valley. This map will be updated annually;
- 2) An outdoor mural map directing those in need to emergency food services;
- 3) A tourist-friendly fold-out map that will provide an overall summary of where food is grown, purchased, processed and distributed in the Cowichan Valley.



FruitSave bliss: hundreds of pounds of golden plums in a backyard near Quamichan Lake.

“In our food security planning we need to remember that we have assets to build upon. There is already a network of people working on this issue in place. We have productive land and a benign climate. We can do more to help ourselves here than people can in other places.”

- 2007 Workshop participant

Is participation in FruitSave and Grow-A-Row increasing?

In 2009, **FruitSave** got off to a late start. Nevertheless, between August 10th and the end of October, almost 4000lbs of fresh plums, pears, quince and apples were harvested by 24 hard working volunteers from 33 backyards. Approximately 3000lbs of this fruit was distributed to eight local service providers.

A total of 71 backyards are now registered in the CGC FruitSave Backyard Fruit Tree database. 17 new backyards were added – many with multiple trees - though 22 backyards were lost due to homeowners moving, trees dying, or trees being cut down. With the help of Providence Farm, **FruitSave Community Apple Cider** was produced for the first time from windfall apples that would normally go to waste. 167 jugs of cider were pressed and flash-frozen, now providing the program with an ongoing source of funding. With an early start and a good growing season, FruitSave could hit records in the 2010 season.

The **Kinsmen Park Neighbourhood Community Garden** contributed purple beans, squash, kale, rainbow chard, parsley, lovage, rosemary and other herbs to the Cowichan Valley Basket Society. Bird’s Eye Cove Farm and several families involved with the FruitSave Project also donated produce from their gardens. As more people discover that this is an option, interest in sharing increases. **Grow-A-Row**, another Cowichan Green Community Initiative that encourages families to grow an extra row in their garden for the food bank, will require increased infrastructure in the coming years.

Are more community garden plots available?

Kinsmen Park Neighbourhood Community Garden expanded by 16 plots in the summer of 2009, making a total of 34 plots. The new garden is built in the shape of a sun and features earth walls made from recycled coffee sacks and local soil. It includes a central permaculture herb spiral where people are welcome to harvest fresh herbs and flowers.

Warmland House, the new emergency shelter and transition housing on Lewis Street, is having transforming its lot into a garden with the help of CGC. Circular raised garden beds (made with clean sandbags reclaimed from the 2009 Cowichan floods), a greenhouse, a composting area, and a medicine garden will be completed in March, 2010

Jubilee Community Garden, now in its fifth year, rents its 40 beds consistently and is currently compiling a waitlist for the 2010 season. The garden coordinator notes that if any expansions were undertaken they would likely be made in the communal gardens. These gardens are used by kids from Khohemum Elementary who plant greens and vegetables to give to a local women's shelter and food bank.

Providence Farm's 95 beds were all rented in the 2009 season and continue to flourish. Here master gardeners rub shoulders with those who are just learning to grow food. Each year a waitlist develops and the gardening community grows.

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church at 531 Herbert Street, Duncan, continues to rent its 30 garden plots to the community, 11 of which are built up for easy access by elders and the disabled.



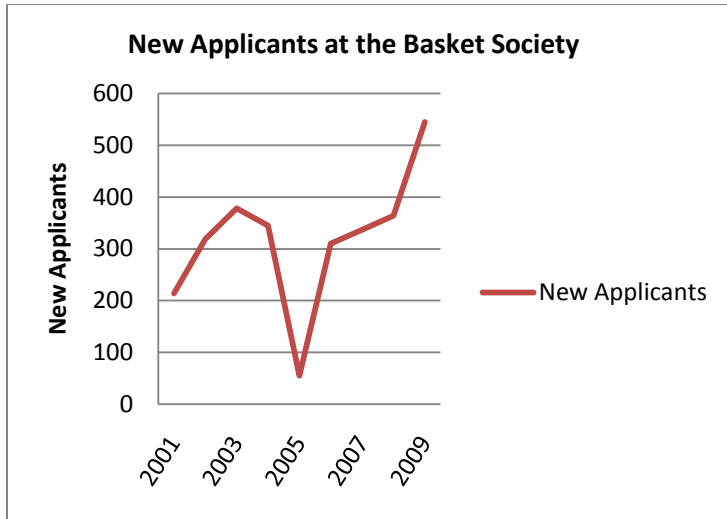
New beds at the Kinsmen Park Community Garden



Jubilee Community Garden in full bloom

Gardening is a way of showing that you believe in tomorrow.

- Anonymous

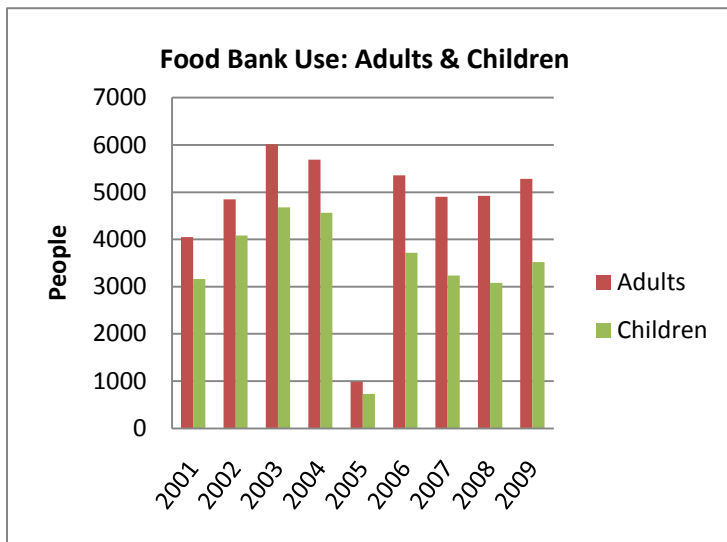


How many people attend the food bank? Is this number increasing?

Statistics show that food bank use both across Canada and in Cowichan is on the rise, and sadly, local food assistance programs have been setting records in 2009. Rising food prices and another economic downturn mean that more and more people are finding it difficult to obtain adequate nourishment on a daily basis.

In a December, 2009 interview with the Cowichan News Leader Pictorial, Betty Ann Devitt, manager of the Cowichan Valley Basket Society, explained that “we typically give out between 30 and 40 food hampers per month, but since Dec. 1, we have given out 124 baskets. That goes to feeding 207 adults and 149 children.” Chemainus Harvest House and Duncan Salvation Army are also seeing more people walk through their doors, many of whom are requiring assistance for the first time.

Sobering statistics such as these serve as reminders to all of us: though more local food is being grown, it remains inaccessible to many of our neighbours.⁶



⁶ Note that statistics from 2005 are likely flawed. In spite of this, a general upward trend is apparent.

Our Community Counts: Food Bank Use in Canada & Cowichan⁷

Number of people in Canada needing aid from food banks in March, 2009: **800 000**

Percentage of Canada's population that used a food bank in 2009: **2.4**

Percentage of these people who were first time users: **9**

Percentage of 2008 food bank clients who were seniors: **13**

Bowls of soup served at the Cowichan Valley Basket Society in 2008: **49 790**

Bowls of soup served at CVBS from 2001 to 2009: **456 069**

Percentage of 2009 CVBS clients who are children: **40**

Is local produce more available at food banks?

Yes. Betty Ann Devitt reports that donations of fresh fruits, vegetables, and eggs are on the rise at CVBS. "We have an incredibly supportive community here in the Cowichan Valley," she says. Local food donations come mainly during the summer and autumn months; now we need to focus on the *preservation* of local foods so food banks can build up a supply that lasts all year. Subsidized community garden plots for low-income families can also go a long way towards providing local, healthy food for families during much of the year.

⁷ Statistics taken from Food Banks Canada & Cowichan Valley Basket Society records

"On behalf of the Cowichan Valley Basket Society, I want to thank all the members of the community. The wonderful donations of fruits, vegetables, and eggs have certainly added to the health of our clients. We have been able to serve fruit salad and green salad and coleslaw as well as the soup and sandwiches in the kitchen – what a great treat it is from our usual menu. Families benefit as well with apples, pears, plums, and peaches to add to their take-home boxes – with school back in progress it makes for healthier lunches. We are also able to add fresh eggs to their hampers which certainly makes a big difference from pasta."

- Letter from Betty Ann Devitt,
Manager of the Cowichan Valley Basket
Society



Ripe yellow plums taken to the Basket Society

Food Security is Community

Enjoying and valuing the acts of growing, preparing, and eating food together are all essential aspects of food security. Rituals surrounding food, from family dinners to seasonal celebrations, connect people to each other, to farmers, and to the land itself. Community kitchens, community gardens, seed-swap days, composting centers, and workshops all provide open space for elders and youth alike to develop diverse and resilient relationships.

The reduced pollution, good water management, and preservation of biodiversity that go hand in hand with skilful farming keep Cowichan a safe and beautiful place to live.



Learning and sharing at Shawl Farm

How would we change our food system if we were 'Monarch for a day'?

- **Link food security with public health** and allocate funds from the health budget to promote eating locally and support farmers in using land to grow food.
- **Change taxation** to support a viable, sustainable agriculture system; remove subsidies to cheap food imports.
- **Change regulation** to support small-scale producers and ensure that new and small-scale farmers have access to quota.
- **Create honest labelling** that clearly identifies the point of origin of food, how it was produced (i.e. what sprays or fertilizers were used), how many miles it travelled to market, etc.
- **Eliminate all regulation in direct consumer-producer relationships** to encourage and enable consensual food transactions between food producers and buyers.
- **Restore a vibrant food culture** with celebrations and festivals of local food in every season.
- **Implement local buying initiatives and subsidies** for schools, hospitals, prisons, and food banks.
- **Plant gardens, build greenhouses,** and start kitchens in every school.
- **Create education policies** that promote farming as a vocation.
- **Begin media campaigns** that raise awareness of food security issues.
- **Distribute free seed** to those who need it assist them in growing their own food.

What are our outlets for communication about food security?

- **Local publications:** Newspapers, magazines, and radio stations can distribute food security information to specific groups: seniors, students, families, etc.;
- **Public art:** Banners, murals, logos, bumper-stickers, etc. are easy ways to disseminate ideas and create a sense of community. The Cowichan Green Community Food Security Mapping Project is designing a food map mural to educate and beautify our community.
- **Education:** Workshops, kiosks at events, a year-round indoor farmers' market, cooking classes, recipe-swaps, four season gardening programs - can all raise awareness about supply chain scenarios, food dollar economics, healthy food, gardening, and preserving.
- **Associations:** A coalition or educational resource position that focuses on harmonizing the efforts of various food security efforts will be essential in our community; a new organization, potentially called WE GROW, which aligns people around their shared interest in and passion for growing food could also nourish a local food system.
- **Websites:** Regularly updated food security sites are powerful tools for connecting people and sharing information about local food security developments.
- **Storytelling:** Sharing local agricultural and gardening history through stories carries wisdom forward through the generations, and encourages youth to begin imagining what their own roles within a local food system may be.
- **Local food billboard:** This community billboard could utilize a plotting scheme that tracks how much local food is being consumed in the Valley.

Finance, Ownership, Governance

Food security cannot exist if individuals or families are struggling to afford shelter. Many people are also interested in growing food, but find that land in Cowichan is prohibitively expensive.

Members of O.U.R. Ecovillage in Shawnigan Lake have worked for many years to break down barriers to group ownership of property, and their alternative system of land ownership – Finance, Ownership, Governance - may inspire others to investigate the possibilities of community living. Residents of the O.U.R. now grow organic food on 25 acres of shared land and hold workshops, celebrations, and events to build community and teach permaculture principles and practices.

For more information, visit the O.U.R. website: www.ourecovillage.org

“Co-operation and sustainability are two philosophies which work much better together than alone.”

- Center for Co-operative and Community-Based Economy, University of Victoria



In 2009, beautiful Cowichan Bay was officially designated Canada's first *Cittaslow*, or "slow town" by Slow Food International. Slow towns are dedicated to preserving and celebrating their unique rural heritage, diversity of cultivated and wild foods, and high quality of life.

"I want Slow Food not to merely be a gastronomical organization but to deal with problems of the environment and world hunger without renouncing the right to pleasure. In fact, many of the foods that Slow Food is protecting, although as delicacies today, were peasant foods that were brilliant strategies to stave off hunger and contain worlds of knowledge about intelligent use of the environment. Their preservation and development may mean more than a few good meals."

- Carlo Petrini, founder of Slow Food International

What can shoppers/consumers/citizens do to encourage food security?

- **Be verbal:** Talk to produce managers, restaurant owners, farmers, etc. about food security; demand a 100 mile food display in every store.
- **Be political:** Demand transparent labelling and clear certification, etc.; put pressure on the Department of Agriculture to expand services to farmers during the growing season.
- **Buy local food:** Vote for food security with every dollar; join a CSA program.
- **Boycott:** Refuse to buy products that are not safe or nutritious.
- **Increase self sufficiency:** Grow food, buy and share freezers, learn to preserve food, support breastfeeding mothers, etc.
- **Make connections:** Share information on how food choices are connected to ecology and social justice through events, media, and storytelling.
- **Support food programs in schools:** Help develop food security curriculum and food gardens in schoolyards.
- **Support co-ops and collectives:** Help organize public storage and freezers, a surplus food depot to buy/swap food and preserving equipment, and processing co-ops.
- **Support the Women's Institute:** Get to know what initiatives and educational programs these wise women are offering – learn new skills, develop community.
- **Celebrate!** Gathering together to share food, stories, music, and games knits our community back together, creates relationships of resilience, and generates enormous positive energy around the food that we enjoy.

Grow Your Own

It is becoming clear that to achieve food security in Cowichan, more of us need to start growing food. Discovering the world of seeds is an exciting and inspiring part of learning how to garden. **Seeds of Diversity** is a Canadian charitable organization run by volunteers, dedicated to conserving biodiversity and traditional knowledge of food crops and garden plants. Their website provides valuable information about heritage seeds, seed saving, plant diversity, garden history, and garden heritage, and offers a public database cataloguing over 19,000 cultivars of Canadian vegetables, fruits, grains, and ornamentals. Members from coast to coast collect and share over 2400 varieties of heritage fruits and vegetables through a national seed exchange. One of the major forums for this ongoing exchange is **Seedy Saturday**. Seedy



2010 marks the 20th anniversary of Seedy Saturdays in Canada.

Saturdays, organized in the early spring by dozens of communities across Canada, give small-scale growers a chance to buy, sell, and trade seeds with each other. Duncan, Cobble Hill, Denman Island, and Salt Spring Island have Seedy Saturdays every year. These events are wonderful celebrations of local food and the diverse group of people who grow it. Visit www.seeds.ca to join Seeds of Diversity, donate, access the database, purchase books, and to find a complete list of Seedy Saturdays across Canada.

A Few Local Seed Companies...

Full Circle Seeds (Sooke, BC): Certified organic, specializing in heritage and hard-to-find varieties.

www.fullcircleseeds.com

Salt Spring Seeds (Salt Spring Island, BC):

Certified organic and heritage seeds, specializing in grains and beans.

www.saltspringseeds.com

Seeds of Victoria (Victoria, BC): Certified organic and heritage vegetable and flower seeds.

www.earthfuture.com/gardenpath

Two Wings Farm (Victoria, BC): Certified organic.

www.twowingsfarm.com

West Coast Seeds (Ladner, BC): Untreated, heirloom, heritage, and certified organic seeds available in small quantities and bulk.

www.westcoastseeds.com



Feasting for Change

The **Feasting for Change: Reconnecting to Food, Land, and Culture Project** was begun by people working collaboratively to help aboriginal communities in South Vancouver Island enhance their food sovereignty. Elders and other community members come together at culturally significant sites to honour and celebrate the connections between traditional food, health, and culture. Through storytelling and knowledge sharing, community-specific food security issues can be identified and appropriate actions can be planned on the ground level.

For more information about Feasting for Change, please contact:

Fiona Devereaux, RD, Community
Nutritionist for Aboriginal Health
Fiona.devereaux@viha.ca

“Harvesting wild foods and preparing them for winter storage were difficult and time consuming tasks. That First Peoples were able to subsist or, in many cases, thrive on a diet of wild plants and animals is a tribute to their ingenuity and industry.”

- Dr. Nancy Turner, University of Victoria,
from [Food Plants of Coastal First Peoples](#)

Wild Plants of Cowichan

Wild foods have an important role to play in local food security; they are often resilient to pests and drought, can flourish in marginal soils, do not require inputs of human labour, and commonly possess very high concentrations of important vitamins and minerals. Learning proper identification and respectful harvesting techniques is essential – and there are people in our community who have knowledge to share. Thanks to local expert Roger Foucher, wild plant education is now being incorporated into school curriculum at Chemainus High. Roger is teaching a group of enthusiastic youth how to recognize and use wild plants for food and medicine, and is building demonstration gardens to display families of plants with specific healing properties.

The **Edible Wild Plants Program**, initiated by the Nanaimo & Area Land Trust, is another example of wild food education taking root in our area. Project activities include development of a wild food demonstration garden, distribution of literature about



Chanterelles are one highly valued wild food found in Cowichan’s forests.

growing, harvesting and eating wild food plants, presentations, workshops, and guided walks for the community and for schools, the creation of a cookbook of wild foods recipes, and propagating the most popular and versatile species of wild food plants in nurseries. To learn more about the project, or if you have wild food plants on your property that the team could harvest or salvage, contact the Nanaimo & Area Land Trust:

edibleplants@nalt.bc.ca 250-714-1994.

Conclusion



As an island community heavily dependant on imported foods in an age of increasing oil prices, Cowichan’s food system is especially fragile. Historically a center of food production, much of Cowichan farmland has now been subdivided, developed, or remains too costly for farmers to buy. Too many people struggle to afford food on a daily basis, and the long supply chains and heavy processing of industrial foods are eroding our personal health, our social fabric, and the integrity of our ecosystems.

Achieving food security in the Cowichan Valley requires both a dramatic enhancement of the agricultural production of food, and a dramatic increase in the number of individuals, families, and households that grow and preserve food. Boosting local food production while safeguarding the health and integrity of the Cowichan ecosystem will require changes in public policy, the provision of educational opportunities, and appropriate community development.

As stated in the Cowichan Food Charter:

- 1) We have a collective obligation to ensure that everyone has access to sufficient, high-quality food.
- 2) For Cowichan to thrive, local farmers and food producers must earn a good and fair living.
- 3) Food security requires cooperation and communication among the community, farmers, and all levels of local government.

We all have roles to play in the transition to a more socially just and sustainable future; indeed, we will need the energy and expertise of everyone in the community to successfully cultivate food security. The first step in this collective evolution is recognizing that achieving a high degree of food security is essential to our wellbeing and our future. The most essential conviction is that it is possible.

Appendix A: Food Security Planning History

In 2005, the Vancouver Island health Authority (VIHA) announced its Community Food Action Initiative (CFAI) in Cowichan. The CFAI is part of the Healthy Eating Component of ActNow BC, whose purpose is to “increase food security in BC by supporting the implementation of community, regional, and provincial initiatives that improve access to healthy foods for all members of the community, while specifically striving to improve access for people with low income.”

In January, 2006, a group of community stakeholders met, inspired by a meeting between the agricultural community and local MP, Jean Crowder. They focused on concerns regarding the viability of agriculture in the Cowichan Valley. These community stakeholders included non-profit service providers, agricultural, environmental, and economic development groups, municipal planning officials, members of regional and provincial government, and a VIHA representative.

All who attended the meeting agreed that creating a community food security action plan would benefit Cowichan. They resolved to begin with the first of four CFAI components, Community Capacity Building. Cowichan Green Community (CGC) was nominated by the group to prepare a proposal for this funding and take the project forward with a steering committee of community representatives.

The “Planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hope” (PATH) process involved two visioning sessions – “Grounding in the Now” and “The Future in Five Years”. The farmers, service providers, agricultural groups, municipal and provincial government, labourers, small-scale processors, wild/whole food plant advocates, public educators, community nutritionists, and community members in attendance represented a wide variety of food security stakeholders.

Building on the work of this initial community gathering, CGC established a Food Security Planning Team in 2007. From four focus groups and a public workshop the Cowichan Food Security Plan emerged. Updated in 2010, the Plan continues to provide a roadmap towards a vision of holistic food security for all members of the Cowichan community. Along with the Cowichan Food Charter, the Plan stands in solidarity with similar food security documents written by communities across Canada and the world. These declarations and action plans are positive steps toward the creation of a national food policy based on community input and not the expediencies of federal trade policy. They also represent the growing level of awareness and community evolution surrounding the way we grow, share, and eat our food.

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