

# Accessing Local Food

For local economic sustainability,  
Food Security for all  
and  
For health

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# Do you want to 'eat local'?

- Then you are amongst the 74% of Canadians who are looking for local food to purchase. A recent Ipsos Reid survey said we are looking for local food because
  - We think its healthier
  - We think its better for the environment
  - We think its better for the local economy

We can't always find local  
food

In fact, in BC, we import a  
significant amount of the  
food we eat

# A recent BC Ministry of Ag report gives us this picture

- For the Fraser Valley:
  - 53% of what is consumed (including fish) is locally supplied
  - If we take out fruits, veg and sugar that we can't grow its 61%
  - If we ate according to Canada's Food Guide the Fraser Valley would only supply 34% of its own needs

We are worried about many aspects of an increasingly vulnerable food system:

- hunger
- malnutrition
- the vulnerability of the local food system to disaster
- food miles contribution to climate change
- food chain disease
- the farm income crisis
- the farm labour crisis
- the withering away of rural communities
- threatened local economies

# More worries affecting the food system

from Tim Lang's "Food Wars"

- Climate change
- Ozone depletion
- Contamination from chemical and radon pollution
- Food safety
- Water shortages
- Top soil depletion
- Oil shortage
- Unemployment
- Supply regularity and uncertainties
- Poverty and inequalities
- Urbanization
- Wars and political uncertainties
- Healthcare costs

# Community Groups are taking action:

- Charities are trying to deal with the poor diets of low-income people
- Community groups are developing food and agriculture programs such as community gardens and community kitchens. They are taking up 'buy local campaigns' and 100 mile diet projects.
- Community groups are developing social enterprises and co-ops to intervene in the food economy
- Local entrepreneurs are developing new food products and food businesses

# Some Consumers are responding by changing their behaviour

The 'Conscious Consumer' wants to

- Buy Local
- Buy organic
- Buy Fair Trade

But this isn't enough: there are major barriers facing localization of the food system

# Farmers are having trouble producing food for local markets

- Current policies favour commodity-export production
- The food system has been centralized into the hands of a few big companies. Local food distribution and manufacturing systems are weak or non-existent
- Farmers face very high land and labour costs
- The majority of consumers are used to very low priced food—Canada has the second lowest food costs in the world
- Farmers are aging and are not being replaced as they retire since young people are not attracted into a profession that has been in major trouble for the last several years

# Local food distribution systems have withered

- Local farmers have problems serving large retailer's demand
- Local distributors have been 'bought out' by multi-national companies who require volume sales
- Most communities are without warehousing, cold storage and freezer capacity that would facilitate production scale-up.

# Food processing was 'hollowed out' in the 1980's

- Small scale food processors abound with wonderful products that they have tested through farmer's markets and small local markets
- Support for them to 'scale up' to commercial viability is minimal
  - Co-packing facilities are needed
  - Access to capital is problematic
  - Access to labour is problematic
  - Access to merchandising, marketing and other technical services is problematic

This does not sound promising

What can be done?

# Community Food Innovators are coming up with new ideas

Consumer-direct marketing approaches such as 'Community Shared Agriculture' where farmers pre-sell weekly food box production are taking off

Producers are getting together to create new-gen co-ops where they own a value-adding plant cooperatively

Groups are getting together to create value chains to spread the risk and rewards across a range of links in the food chain

# They face barriers

- Finding technical assistance
- Finding information
- Finding financing that facilitates their efforts
- Shifting folks to a culture of cooperation AND competition rather than a culture of cooperation OR competition

# And central to these is Access to Finance

- Most banks and credit unions report that they no longer have agricultural specialists in their ranks
- Awareness of the emerging 'ecological food economy' has not translated into a deal stream as yet

# Financing opportunities are emerging

- Every region/food-shed will need capital infrastructure such as warehousing, coolers, freezers, appropriate technology, community-owned manufacturing facilities etc.
- Land acquisition using alternative approaches
- Business start ups in the specialty food sector

# Funders and Friendly Financers

- Groups working towards food social enterprises and coops are approaching charitable funders to help them carry out basic research and business planning
- Individuals, groups and co-operatives are gearing up to invite financial institutions and investors to get involved

# It's a struggle

Should we be depending upon individuals and small groups of local people to themselves take on the task of rebuilding our food system when food system vulnerability has become a major social problem?

# NO

Foundations and governments have been funding community groups to get involved in rebuilding the food system—but most of this work suffers from the same lack of strategy and infrastructure as do market-exposed businesses

# The Ask

- Is there interest in this group to study the role of funders and financiers in re-invigorating the food system?
- Lets talk about this.