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## New BC Food Systems Network Gives Government Something To Chew On

Food banks and self-help projects have sprung up all over BC to try to deal with the growing problem of hunger. There is increasing understanding in the health-care system about the role of nutrition as the basis for health. And more and more farmers in BC are moving to organic production for the sake of the long-term well-being of the soil as well as the wholesomeness of the food they grow.

These groups recently came together in Sorrento to form the BC Food System Network. Laura Kalina, Chair of the Kamloops Food Policy Council, was enthusiastic about the new group. "We have been working here in Kamloops for nearly ten years to coordinate our work for a just and sustainable food system," she said. "This network will allow us to share information and help each other in creating a healthy food system for all of BC."

"Agriculture is not just an industry producing food as a valuable commodity," said Cathleen Kneen, organizer of the weekend meeting at the Sorrento Conference Centre on Shuswap Lake. "Agriculture and food are the basis of life, health, and the economy. Trade is all very well, but any jurisdiction that can't feed its people is economically and politically vulnerable," she added. "Feed the family first, and then trade the surplus."

Participants were told that 90% of the food consumed on Vancouver Island comes from off the Island. In Prince George, supermarkets have only two days supply of fresh food. All over the province, 60% or more of the food is imported, while a similar proportion of BC's fruit and fish is exported. There is also a high degree of concentration – there are only three major supermarket chains and two of them are controlled outside of the province. This means that critical decisions about BC's food system are made on the basis of the bottom line of these corporations, not the needs of BC's farmers or consumers. The struggle for nutritional health and an end to hunger has to be considered in this context. According to the BC Food Systems Network, this means that food policy must be developed through a transparent process. The community must be included as partners in decision making processes at all levels of government.

"It's hard for ordinary people like me to think in terms of policy," Kneen commented. "But it's really clear that we need to make the connections and consider the social, environmental, agricultural and health impacts of what we do, not just the economic impact. It needs to be holistic. It is outrageous that people are going hungry when there is so much food produced in this province," she added. "But it's because we are so dependent: we import from 60% to 90% of the food we eat, and we export most of what we grow. We can't get rid of hunger in the long term until we regain control of our food system."



**BC Food Systems Network**

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