



BC Food Systems Network

Report from the 15th Annual Gathering of the BC Food Systems Network



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The 15th annual Gathering of the BC Food Systems Network reconnected and energized participants from all over the province. This year's theme "Food from the Water, Food From the Land" inspired two full days of stimulating presentations and workshops. The experience was shared by 153 participants from British Columbia and beyond, including over two dozen children and youth. Sessions addressed a broad range of topics, including aquaculture, the GE Free movement and improving school food systems.

Shawnigan Lake, which is situated in the Cowichan Valley on Southern Vancouver Island, provided a beautiful setting for the event. This valley is rich with delta soils from the Cowichan, Koksilah, and Chemainus Rivers, and it stretches from the Malahat Mountain in the south to the rich farmlands of Yellow Point to the north and across Cowichan and Nitnat Lakes through the western forestlands. The area hosts a wide array of art, music, and natural delights and is home to a lively local food scene including dairy, vegetable, fruit, berry and wine production. The valley is also renowned for its wild fisheries, food foraging opportunities and natural beauty.

According to the tradition of the Network, the Gathering engaged with the Indigenous community on whose land we met, the Cowichan Tribes of the Coast Salish people, seeking permission and collaboration. We learned about their traditions and ways on the land and the water from Robert George and Estelle Sinclair, the two elders who opened our Gathering with song, stories and drumming.

The Gathering also played host once again to the 7th annual meeting of the Working Group on Indigenous Food Sovereignty. The integration of the Working Group meetings into the BCFSN Gatherings has helped to build strong connections and collaborations between the two groups, much to our mutual benefit.

The following is a summary of the highlights of the 2013 BCFSN Gathering.

Walking Tour of O.U.R Ecovillage

Brandy Gallagher and the community at O.U.R. Ecovillage warmly welcomed the Network for an afternoon at the farm. Participants were treated to a fabulous lunch made from food produced at the Ecovillage, as well as an informative tour and discussion about the history and operation of the farm.

O.U.R. ECOVILLAGE is a sustainable learning community and demonstration site located in the Cowichan Valley. They base their work on Permaculture principles and offer learning opportunities for Natural Building, Sustainable Food Production and Leadership.

O.U.R. ECOVILLAGE began operations in 1999 with a vision to create a model demonstration sustainable village community rooted in social, ecological, and economic well being. O.U.R. Ecovillage is the host site for O.U.R Community Association, a registered nonprofit society dedicated to the promotion of sustainable community living. People from all walks of life and all ages are able to benefit from educational programs facilitated within O.U.R developing site.

Evening with Alexandra Morton

The Network welcomed the local community to an evening featuring longtime marine biologist Alexandra Morton. This interactive discussion provided a rare opportunity to speak with Alexandra Morton about the critical work that she is doing to protect the wild salmon stocks on the West Coast of Canada. Alex is a powerful advocate for the protection of wild salmon and strongly opposes salmon farming.

The film “Salmon Confidential” documents her efforts to inform government and individuals about the value of wild salmon for many indigenous communities and to the eco-systems of the province and bring some balance and reason to the salmon farming debate. During her presentation, Alexandra shared her conviction that salmon farming is impacting wild salmon populations worldwide because (like all feedlots) it intensifies disease and this is lethal to wild fish.

Tasting Tour of Cowichan Bay

Gathering participants were treated to a tasting tour of Cowichan Bay, North America’s first Cittaslow community. Cowichan Bay celebrates their history and traditions by promoting craftsmanship and environmental stewardship; maintaining the community’s distinct character, and engaging community members in creating and sharing a good life.

The easy walking tour was led by culinary filmmaker Nick Versteeg, and may included samplers at True Grain Bakery, Hilary’s Cheese Shop, Cowichan Bay Seafoods, the Morning Mist Ice Cream shop and a visit to the Maritime Centre/ Wooden Boat Society. For a sample of the delights of Cowichan Bay, please check out Nick’s film “[Once Upon a Day](#)”.

Advocacy and Research Priorities for the Network

Participants at the annual BCFSN Gatherings bring with them a rich array of ideas regarding Education, Research and Advocacy priorities for achieving Food Security in their regions, the province and across the country. Participants in the Gathering are in a unique position to help the Network (and its members or partners) to strategize for further action, to reflect the current priorities to potential funders, and to identify community-based research, education and partnership possibilities.

This year we invited people to take part in a Rapid Market Assessment (RMA) exercise over the weekend, where Post-It-Note brainstorming and concept mapping identified key themes, which were then used to identify priorities in a quick and easy “Dot-mocracy” poll at the closing plenary.

Session Summaries

The workshops covered a broad range of content, from hands-on permaculture training at the nearby O.U.R Ecovillage, to an interactive roundtable on community farms and a technical presentation on aquaculture and fish farms.

The following sections provide an overview of the individual program session.

1. Regenerative Food Production on Land and Water: Moving beyond Sustainable Farming - Elaine Colding

Elaine Colding is a Permaculture Design Consultant with Vancouver Island Permaculture with more than 30 years of experience organic gardening and green living.

Permaculture is a science based system of environmental design. Permaculture designs re-create the abundance, diversity, and stability of natural systems. Using permaculture design principles and restorative practices maximizes productive yield; sequesters carbon; increases soil fertility; builds bio-diversity; and reduces resource dependence.

Regenerative production can make a significant contribution to both community and global health. Small scale intensive systems of cultivation produce the highest per acre yields. They reduce fossil fuel dependence, minimize land and resource use, and reduce the need for irrigation. Large scale extensive production systems can restore damaged ecosystems, sequester carbon, and increase fertility and biodiversity.

Regenerative practices can also be applied to aquatic systems. Aquatic and semi-aquatic ecologies are the most productive systems available to us. Incorporating aquatic systems and the effective use of existing water resources can increase the productive potential and fertility on any site.

2. Aquaculture: Get the Facts and What is Slow Fish? Panel includes Michelle Mesmains, Dr. John Volpe, Richard Armstrong & Richard Bussanich

Michelle Mesmains, coordinator of Slow Fish International discussed the Slow Food/Slow Fish movement as well as issues including: privatization of the oceans which deprive coastal communities of access to fish; co-management of coastal resources and forage fishing. Although there has been significant

challenge finding consensus, the Slow Food Foundation for Biodiversity was created in 2003, and supports bringing fishers to the Terra Madre network.

Dr. Volpe Associate Professor, Marine Systems Restoration and Conservation, Director of College of Environmental Studies, University of Victoria spoke on the future of aquaculture, and discussed two indicators of environmental impact. The GAPI project identified the ten most common variables (input, discharge and biological issues) in order to produce a comprehensive “consumer’s report”.

The other study assessed the reliability of the claims of various standards and certifications vs. the GAPI tool to see how much ecological value they added over the world norms. The US national Organic standard was by far the best while the Canadian Organic standard provided no ecological value-add over the GAPI minimum. Asian aquaculture products were found to be particularly bad.

Richard Bussanich, a biologist with the Okanagan Nation Alliance, spoke about the return of the traditional salmon fishery in Osoyoos Lake. For over 75 years there have not been any salmon in Skaha and Okanagan lakes, due to 9 dams in the Columbia system and to development, forcing traditional fishers to go to the Fraser system. In the last 3 years over 100,000 fish have come back into the river from Osoyoos Lake and the people have begun harvesting again. An artisanal fleet that uses traditional methods now fishes on Osoyoos Lake, and provides fish “lake to plate” in 24 hours for high-end restaurants and shops.

The session was rounded off with Richard Armstrong, an Elder from the Penticton Indian Band, of the Syilx/Okanagan Nation, and a Traditional Ecological Knowledge Specialist. Mr. Armstrong spoke about the difficult journey of the salmon that begins and ends inland, away from the coast. He also spoke of the need for spiritual recognition; to talk to and than the river, the trees and the salmon and to be the caretakers and speak for those who cannot speak for themselves.

3. Weaving Partnerships for School Food System Change

Presenters:

- Sarah Carten, Community Nutritionist, Vancouver Coastal Health
- Ilana Labow, Co-Director, Fresh Roots Urban Farm Society
- Ian Marcuse, Community Food Developer, Grandview Woodland Food Connection
- Brent Mansfield, Community Liaison, Think&EatGreen@School Project, Faculty of Land and Food System, UBC; Co-Chair, Vancouver Food Policy Council
- Kevin Millsip, Sustainability Coordinator, Vancouver School Board

This workshop explored numerous school food system initiatives in Vancouver, including school gardens, school farms, food preparation activities in the classroom, Farm to School, and school food policy. Presenters shared experience and observations regarding the changes taking place among students and staff, and at a district and regional level. The panel discussed the development of innovative partnerships that overcome challenges and open up new areas of possibility.

Presentations were combined with activities and discussion to discover how schools and communities can continue to work towards healthier, just and sustainable school food systems.

4. Advancing First Nations Food Policy (Karen Fediuk)

The First Nations, Food, Nutrition and Environment Study (FNFNES), assesses diet quality, household food insecurity and the chemical safety of food, tap water and surface water in 100 First Nation communities across Canada.

The project has increased the baseline knowledge of First Nation communities regarding dietary quality and chemical safety of traditional food. It has also corroborated the shockingly high prevalence of food insecurity among First Nations households situated on-reserve in British Columbia (41%) and Manitoba (38%) with similar trends so far observed from Ontario.

Given the extremely high rates of food insecurity in First Nation communities, FNFNES is working with community partners (the Assembly of First Nations, Food Secure Canada, Farm to Cafeteria Canada) to develop sustainable food interventions to improve dietary quality on-reserve and promote stewardship of the environment.

5. Inclusion of Traditional Foods in Childcare Programs (Kirsten Beverlander)

Kirsten Bevelander, with the BC Aboriginal Child Care Society, began the session with a video entitled From Seed to Cedar (www.seedtocedar.com). This session discussed regulatory barriers to inclusion of traditional foods, which is seen as major barrier to teaching food culture and providing healthy, culturally appropriate food to children in daycare. Family resource programs struggle with similar issues around food sharing and potlucks, even though giving and receiving food is seen as very important to a community.

Environmental Health regulations require that all food served comes from “approved source” – even if prepared in a commercial kitchen by staff with FoodSafe. This regulation means that food from the daycare garden, as well as fish and meat (i.e., wild traditional foods) are not permitted even though they are highly culturally relevant foods.

BC Aboriginal Childcare Society is hosting conference in October to discuss these issues and find ways of doing traditional food safely. Some of the goals of this conference include reducing tension and mistrust, and providing consistency and clarity with respect the how regulations are interpreted by EHOs.

6. Food Literacy Definition (Aaren Topley)

Food literacy is the ability to understand and use food and involves interactions between Hand (skills) | Heart (connections, feelings, social) | Mind (savvy, labels, knowledge). Food literacy is a term that is being used in a range of fields now to describe the work being done to promote food security and sustainability. Aaron provided an overview of a University of Victoria project titled “At the Table: A Coordinated Approach to Food Literacy”, and then discussed what participants see as the successes and challenges in delivering food literacy programs in their communities. A breakout session was used to explore the question: What does food literacy mean to us? Participants also generated ideas about how food literacy initiatives could work more effectively.

7. Funders Table (Facilitator: Linda Geggie)

During this roundtable discussion with funding organizations, participants shared an overview of their agency’s funding priorities. The following questions were also discussed:

1. What would be the value of a more networked approach to our work?
2. What is standing in the way of working together?
3. What would help us work more effectively together?

Participants at the Table included:

- Barb McMillan, Community Foundations of Canada
- Claire Gram, Vancouver Coastal Health
- Analisa Blake, Vancouver Island Health Authority
- Melaina Patenaude, Breakfast Club of Canada

The following issues and “next steps’ were identified:

- How do we deepen and strengthen our relationships with our funder community? Some relationships ended when Cathleen left in 2006
- We are focusing on building relationships
- Some of the funders will join us tomorrow at Board retreat
- Just submitted a joint application to the Real Estate Foundation to explore this further in the fall

8. Access to Local Food – Can Governments Make Local Food Access Illegal? (Nadine Ijaz)

Small-scale organic dairy farmers in BC and Ontario are currently involved in court cases challenging their private 'herdshare' contracts with raw milk consumers. Despite little scientific evidence to support Canada's antiquated federal and provincial laws making sale and distribution of raw milk illegal, Canada remains the only G-8 nation to completely prohibit informed consumers from acquiring dairy products of their choosing, directly from farmers. Other Canadian laws make it difficult or illegal for farmers to sell eggs and meat directly from the farm.

This session was a combination of history, politics, law, activism, on the ground farming practice, and underground milk distribution stories intended to raise important questions as to what we can do here in BC to preserve farmer and consumer rights to produce and choose local, sustainable foods within regulatory frameworks which privilege large-scale, industrial food production and threaten indigenous foodways.

9. 7th Annual Working Group on Indigenous Food Sovereignty Meeting

This meeting was hosted by Dawn Morrison and provided updates of Indigenous food related action, research and policy reform happening within the extended Indigenous Food Systems Network.

The session also concentrated time and energy to discuss WGIFS business and organizational development, and will lead into a discussion on working across cultures to build allies between Indigenous peoples and settlers in support of Indigenous food sovereignty.

The following projects were discussed:

1. Dawn Marsden & Ashley Norton, First Nations University of Canada – Exploring and Revitalizing Indigenous Food Systems in Saskatchewan
2. Ellen Simmons, Manager – Syilx Agriculture Project & Indigenous Peoples Biocultural Adaptation to Climate Change Assessment Web portal
3. Norine Messer, Dawn Foxcroft, Michelle Colyn, Uu-a-thluk a Nuu-chah-nulth Aquatic Resource Management Organization – "The Ocean is Our Garden: Fishing Rights for Nuu-chah-nulth"
4. City of Vancouver Year of Reconciliation - Vancouver Food Policy Council & Indigenous Food Sovereignty meeting
5. Southwest BC Bioregional Food Systems Design and Planning Project – Indigenous Participation, Dawn Morrison

6. Vancouver Native Health Society - Tu'wusht Garden/Kitchen Project – Dawn Morrison & Michael Jacko
7. Revitalizing the Grease Trails Research Project - Project Update & WGIFS Research Strategy and Protocol Workshop, Erika Mundel, Hannah Wittman, Dawn Marsden and Dawn Morrison
8. 2nd Annual Indigenous Food Sharing Gathering – Call out for host
9. WGIFS – organizational development, revisiting original purpose, goals and objectives, moving towards formalizing cooperative structure?
10. Indigenous Food Systems Network Website maintenance
11. Think Tank Decolonization and Land in the Commons: Re-imagining a Just Land and Food System & Canadian Association of Food Studies Conference (Indigenous Food Sovereignty and Indigenous Fisheries Governance – Dawn Morrison & June Quipp, Cheam
12. Karen Fediuk, First Nations Food Nutrition and Environment Study
13. Indigenous Food Sovereignty and Settlers as Allies – Co-facilitated by Kate Kittredge and Dawn Morrison

10. Community Farms Roundtable – Shared Farming on Shared Land / Growing New Farmers (Heather Pritchard, Linda Geggie)

This roundtable discussion focused on approaches to shared farming on shared land as a way of providing new farmers with access to land when cost is prohibitive. The group discussed the continuum in the land access/new farmer work underway:



Discussion about incubators (such as the Richmond Incubator Farm, Haliburton and Saanich Organics and Vancouver Island University’s proposed agricultural field school) addressed a number of topics, including First Nations perspective on land ownership, zoning, investors and training.

The group then talked about innovative ways of getting people on the land to ensure stable places for farmers to live and steward the land. Discussion topics included:

- the OUR Ecovillage model – comprehensive development zone precedent, has informed many others, including Yarrow (not ALR) and Glenora (ALR)

- Community farm establishment on ALR vs. non-reserve land and the need for special community farms designation
- Housing, and subdivision implications to farmland preservation
- Worker cooperative on cooperatively owned land
- Community farmland trust/coop - start building coop with successful existing community farms
- Advantage of charitable status – can give tax receipts, put covenants on the land and capable of fundraising
- Community land trust model needs to take conservative approach with respect to land acquisition – only take on new land once funds secured
- Possible use of a community investment fund

Finally the group addressed the five ways to own land in common – in order to finance, own and govern the land and deal with zoning and permitting/coding issues (water rights, building). The roundtable explored the challenges of these models with regard to zoning and financing for each, citing various examples.

Resources mentioned during session:

- OUR Ecovillage – contact Brandy
- [Community Farm Program](#)
- [Videos on Growing Young Farmers Program](#)
- [Linking Land and Future Farmers](#)
- City of Richmond as a model for setting up incubator farm in conjunction with city (Harold Steves and Dave Semple)
- [Richmond Foodland Asset Report](#)
- [CR-FAIR policy discussion papers on land access, conservation, incubators](#) (incubator report Linda mentioned is still in draft but there are other relevant policy papers currently available)
- Deborah Curran: [British Columbia's Agricultural Land Reserve: A Legal Review of the Question of 'Community Need' \(2007\)](#) (referred to by Brandy)
- [GIS and Agricultural Land Use Inventories from BCMAL](#)

**11. Incredible Salad Formula (Annette Anderwald) / Pi’Kwun
Demonstration – Traditional Coast Salish Salmon BBQ (Jared Williams)**

Jared “Qwustenuxun” Williams, a proud member of the Cowichan First Nation, demonstrated the traditional Coast Salish method for preparing BBQ salmon. Raised with strong teachings of respect and reverence for the forest and traditional food system Qwustenuxun is now the head chef at the Cowichan Elders Building. With roots in Hul’qumi’num language and culture Qwustenuxun has spent many years gathering, nearly forgotten, knowledge about different traditional cooking and harvesting techniques. From picking berries, to producing medicines, even making traditional tools from plants used for generations Qwustenuxun's love of his culture and traditional foods runs deep.

Annette Anderwald presented “The Incredible Salad Formula” - not a recipe, but a concept which serves to create unique and tasty, not to mention healthy, salads. It is the foundation for creating a different salad everyday based on what is in your fridge and cupboard. In this workshop participants cut, chopped, assembled and mixed three different salads based on Annette’s master formula.

12. Plant Identification Workshop (Sharon Niscak and Bill Jones)

The workshop shared traditional ecological wisdom with a focus on the traditional plants and foods that are part of our regional environment. Sharon discussed the use of plants that are currently and were traditionally used as sources of food and medicines and common foods available in the marketplace. Bill Jones, a well-known chef and author from Vancouver Island shared his experience foraging for local fungi.

Constituents of the plants and precautions were discussed along with ethical collecting methods. The focus was evidence based with reference to traditional use and scientific studies. The importance of respect for creation and a reciprocal relationship with the land is fundamental to sustain present and future generation’s needs. Respect for the gifts that we have been given and appropriate was also strongly emphasized in the workshop.

13. Bio-Regional Food System Design and Implementation Plan (SWBC Bioregional Food Systems Plan -Andrew Frank)

Researchers at Kwantlen Polytechnic University’s Institute for Sustainable Horticulture are leading an initiative to engage communities throughout south-west BC in the development of a Bio-Regional Food System Design and Implementation Plan. Andrew Frank presented the plan and facilitated a discussion about its key points.

Predicated on small scale, human intensive, alternate market agriculture the design and plan will offer a realistic, tangible vision and achievable roadmap of prioritized steps that can be taken by farmers, entrepreneurs, consumers, governments, and Indigenous communities. The Bio-Regional Food System Design and Plan will reflect aspirations for decreased ecological footprint and increased self-reliance, biological diversity, and economic vitality within the food system. Methods, key objectives and anticipated outcomes of the South West BC Food System Design and Planning Project will be discussed.

14. Seeds for Food and Bees: Join BC Seeds in a Roundtable Discussion (Heather Pritchard, Jen Cody, Rupert Adams)

BC is on the cutting edge of developing healthy viable seed security in Canada. This roundtable discussion shared information about networks and supports developing on local, provincial and national levels that are supporting seed

security. You will learn and develop ideas and strategies that will enhance your ability to support seeds and bees in your community. Pollinators are a critical element in seed security. We intend to discuss the strategies and policies that affect developing healthy pollinator populations. And look at where these overlap with strategies that support seeds.

Closing Plenary

The closing plenary was led by Linda Geggie and Abra Brynne. The group reflected on the importance of taking ideas home to share with family. The Network is based on richness of the membership and what happens here is based on who we are. Linda thanked sponsors, volunteers, the Gathering Committee, the Gathering Coordinator and the Board of Directors.

Jenny Horn summarized the information gathered by the research team, and discussed how that data would be grouped into the following five themes: action, research, advocacy, policy and education. Each person was then invited over lunch to use adhesive “dots” to identify their priorities for the coming year. The research group will then send this information out and invite further feedback.

Linda Geggie then led the plenary through a guided reflection, encouraging participants to take a few moments before preparing for the journey home to remember what we did and what we are taking away with us from the Gathering. She encouraged us to remember our reasons for coming, or experiences throughout the weekend, the relationship that were created or deepened; the meals we shared and the important issues we discussed. She closed the session by asking everybody to share about what they see differently as a result of this experience, and what they hope to follow up on once we return home.

Conclusions

This year’s Gathering was two nights instead of the usual three and despite high attendance, evaluation feedback suggests that a return to the three night format would be preferred. This would give participants more time to socialize and connect with colleagues and friends and would permit a more relaxed schedule.

The board decided that the 2014 Gathering would be held in the interior, possibly in the Okanagan. The Gathering Committee will begin research potential sites for the 2014 Gathering shortly. Priority will be given to locations that will provide opportunities to include local farmers and give the Network greater control over food choices and preparation.

2013 Annual General Meeting of the BC Food Systems Network

The Annual General Meeting was chaired by Abra Brynne, on behalf of Network President Dayna Chapman who was unable to attend this year's Gathering. Abra also delivered the report from the Chair, which reviewed some of the activities and projects undertaken by the board over the past year, including representation on the Certified Organics Association of BC board of directors and the Food Secure Canada Steering Committee; and good relationships with government, academia and industry.

Those in attendance also heard reports from the Treasurer; the Communications Coordinator; the Working Group on Indigenous Food Sovereignty; as well as the Fundraising, Policy and Gathering committees.

Finally, Board elections were held. The 2013/14 Board of Directors are:

Abra Brynne	Diana Collis
Linda Geggie	Colin Dring
Arzeena Hamir	Carla Lewis
Jenny Horn	Brent Mansfield
Carol Kergan	Rick McCutcheon
Wanda Martin	Dawn Morrison
Erika Mundel	Nicholas Scapillati
Rosemary Plummer	Tasha Sutcliffe
Cheryl Thomas	Aimee Watson
Sarah Carten	Molly Wickham
	Hannah Wittman

The Network acknowledged the contributions of the outgoing directors (Dayna Chapman, David Parkinson, Diana Penner, Alanna Clempson, Francesca Gesualdi and Carol Murray) as well as Linda Geggie, Jenny Horn, and Wanda Martin, along with bookkeeper Erika Simms and longtime member Kathleen Gibson.

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- Vancity
- Real Estate Foundation of British Columbia
- United Food and Commercial Workers
- Vancouver Island Health Authority
- Vancouver Coastal Health Authority
- Canadian Union of Public Employees
- Communities First: Impacts of Community Engagement
- Vancouver Island University
- Cowichan Valley Economic Development Commission
- Silk Road Tea
- OUR Ecovillage
- Olive the Senses
- David Pollack – Farmer
- Granola King
- Natural Pastures Cheese Company
- Tree Island Yogurt
- Thrifty Foods, Mill Bay

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- Communities First
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- Canadian Union of Public Employees British Columbia
- Communities First: Impacts of Community Engagement
- Vancity
- Cowichan Grown
- Vancouver island Health Authority
- Vancouver Island University
- United Food and Commercial Workers – Agricultural Workers Alliance