

## Food without Fossil Fuels: Re-establishing Local Co-operation and Interdependence

### INTRODUCTION

The 9<sup>th</sup> Annual Sorrento Gathering of the BC Food Systems Network may have been its biggest yet. Over 120 people from across the province attended the 3 day event from September 12-14 2008. The Gathering was held in its habitual location at the Sorrento Centre on Shuswap Lake, in Secwepmc Territory. As usual the Sorrento Gathering attracted a dynamic and diverse group of people, young and old, from different professions, cultures, and regions around the province, with a common interest and concern: food.

The global food system is highly dependent on the use of fossil fuels for the production, storage, packaging and transportation of food. Not only does the use of fossil fuels pollute the air, land and water resources upon which we depend for food, but the resulting emissions of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere are rapidly changing our planet's climate. Changing climatic factors and environmental degradation are already negatively impacting our ability to acquire and produce adequate food supplies in many regions. Such fossil fuel dependence can be significantly decreased by reducing the distance food travels from the land to our tables by strengthening local food networks and adopting sustainable, chemical-free organic methods of producing food. The timely theme of this year's Gathering, *Food without Fossil Fuels: Re-establishing Local Cooperation and Interdependence*, sparked much interest and discussion and culminated in three busy days of presentations, workshops, discussions and shared meals.

As has been the case in past years, there was a concerted effort to minimize the ecological (and carbon) footprint of the conference. Efforts were made to coordinate carpooling for those traveling from afar. Food for the conference was primarily organic and was all sourced locally, while a great deal of food was also donated by participants from their own regions for the Harvest Feast. Food was purchased from the following local food suppliers: Bastion Farm, D Dutchman Dairy, DeMilles Farm Market, Farmcrest Foods Ltd., Notch Hill Organics, Nature's Bounty, Okanagan Sausage, Pete Murray's Corn Farm, Sudoa Farms, Sweethaven Farms, and Oso Negro Coffee.

This year's event was made possible through generous sponsorship from: Vancouver Coastal Health, Interior Health Authority, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, Fresh Choice Kitchens, First Nations Agricultural Association, Nelson and District Credit Union, BCGEU, BC Healthy Living Alliance, Canadian Cancer Society, SPEC and Oso Negro Coffee.

## OPENING CIRCLE

The Gathering officially began with a welcoming from Secwepemc Elders, followed by welcome and introductions from BCFSN Chair Jen Cody. The Opening Panel was introduced, and included: Jacqueline Jones, Cliff Stainsby, Rick Balfour, Brewster Kneen and Patrick Steiner. Cliff opened the discussion by addressing this year's theme – why are we talking about fossil-fuel free food systems? Food is part of the problem. Agriculture accounts for the greatest percentage of fuel and water use compared to other industries. In particular, meat production accounts for 18% of greenhouse gas emissions. Oil and gas are also used in transportation, spraying, fertilizer production, drying and pasteurizing. There has been a 3% yearly increase in greenhouse gases being emitted into the atmosphere. Energy prices are rising and will become more unpredictable and the population continues to increase.

Brewster Kneen pointed to the dominant capitalist culture as the root of the problem. We can make the economy grow, but at what expense? What are we not accounting for? In theory we accumulate wealth to address the needs of the people, but in reality only certain people benefit from this wealth. Looking at the issue of fossil fuel use and climate chaos from an investor's perspective is radically different from looking at it from a social perspective – for instance investors see buying land in other countries to produce biofuels as a solution, yet this is merely a way of avoiding the problem rather than looking closely at how we produce and cook our food.

Patrick continued the discussion by noting the need to reduce fossil fuel use in agricultural production. A huge percentage of fuel use comes from transporting food from rural areas to urban centers. We need to decrease the distance food has to travel, and look to places like Cuba who have done this successfully. We need to look for other kinds of power in agricultural production – earthworm power to recycle organic wastes, people and animal power for labour rather than using machines. Only 1 – 1 ½ % of the population in this country are farmers – we need more people out farming to feed a growing population and we need to use land more efficiently by growing more on less.

Rick Balfour, an architect by profession, brought the global scale impacts of our fossil fuel dependence into perspective. He spoke of the challenges we will face as a global society in the years to come, and using the analogy of a plane crashing, posed the question – how do we find the best landing? The way that our cities and towns are currently organized is possible only with cheap oil; they were not planned with sustainability in mind. Rick added that we need to recreate sustainable community patterns and stressed the importance of acting now to mitigate these impacts.

Jacqueline Jones discussed her role as a community health nurse to create awareness - for herself as well as co-workers, clients and family. She spoke of the importance of how we eat as individuals and the link between what we eat and our health outcomes. In her own life, as well as at work, she encourages those around her to procure their own food

through home gardens, hunting, fishing and berry picking. She spoke of the need to use a more gentle approach and to speak up in creative and smarter ways; for instance, by encouraging co-workers to buy local, go out berry-picking or trade moose for salmon. She noted an increase in interest as people learn the Secwepemc language and value traditional foods.

Some of the underlying questions that arose from the opening remarks included: how do we feed people in urban areas; how do we get the decision makers on board and enacting policies that favour fossil-fuel free food systems; and how can we address the unique needs of indigenous food systems?

As a group, several ideas regarding how we can work together to transition away from this fossil fuel dependence were suggested. Embedded in this discussion was a general sense that we need to look back in order to move forward. We need to get our hands dirty and get to know the land again, to replace mechanized power with people power and to readopt and honour traditional practices such as the 3 Sisters Gardens (corn, beans and squash) and saving our seeds. We need to get our children directly involved in food gathering and food production. Much of the discussion centered on the question of how to foster community. Making connections, networking, communicating openly and respectfully, and sharing food were all mentioned as ways to do this.

## PLENARY

This year's Plenary included an overview of the role that the BC Food Systems Network plays in advancing food security/sovereignty in British Columbia. It became clear through this discussion that a key role and strength of the Network is relationship building and networking. The Network helps to link people across the province with similar interests and concerns in a number of ways, including organizing a yearly Gathering to facilitate networking between different regions around the province and posting links and useful resources on their website to raise awareness about food system issues. Also, information sharing is facilitated through the listserv, where members can keep each other informed about events and useful literature, post questions or engage in thoughtful discussions.

In addition to clarifying the role of the Network, a list of projects and/or issues of concern was compiled to link particular projects or concerns with people willing to work together to address them. Below is a sample of projects and campaigns that were mentioned:

- Protecting Indigenous foods and medicine gardens
  - Environmental scans inclusion
  - Women's food systems
  - Clean up of environment

- Impact of cattle on traditional foods
- Declining Salmon population
  - Draft letter
  - Address policy issues
- Run of River Projects
- Healthy Water Systems
  - Coal Bed Methane Project (Princeton)
  - Water as a keystone to food sovereignty
- Farm Tax Assessment Review Panel
  - Draft key messages
- Ministry of Agriculture and Lands (MAL) underfunding
  - i.e. Farmer's Institute, no heritage chickens
- Address land speculation and development
  - i.e. green utility, farm loan schemes
- Chickens in every backyard
- Letter of Support for UBC Farm from BCFSN as provincial issue
- BCFSN to support Vancouver Community Garden to expand their network/info
  - Find out who other groups are
- Toolkit for new immigrants
  - Bring to the table immigrant experience and knowledge
- Package for community groups to run their own seed saving workshop
  - Seed folks to develop with Patrick
  - Work with network to distribute
- Toolkit for school-based community gardens and agriculture in the classroom
- People's Food Policy Project (with Food Secure Canada)
  - Food Sovereignty Framework
- Analysis of low carbon impact farming
- Depth of analysis of food issues
  - Articulate important issues
- Involvement with Park Development
- BCFSN to push for a Youth Corp
  - Train youth in seed saving, creating community gardens and helping farmers
- Genetic Engineering concerns

At the time of the Conference, both federal and municipal elections were a matter of months away; therefore, getting food issues on the radar during election time generated much discussion and a number of action items specific to elections arose:

- Develop an election toolkit
  - How do we get food on the radar during elections?
- Climate change – non partisan signs available
- How to run an all Candidates Forum

- From meat regulations group to website
- Sponsors get first crack at quest
- Round tables
- All Candidate public fundraiser
  - Volunteer-run to support candidates
- Provincial Health Officers Report
  - “Cost of Eating” report
- Networking forum for candidates to meet and learn
- Set of one pagers to help educate candidates
- Questions for candidates
  - Will you support a moratorium on ALR removals?
  - Questions RE abattoirs
  - What are you doing to ensure that residents have affordable housing?

Lastly, during the discussion a number of resources were mentioned that may be of interest to some. Many of these can also be found on the BCFSN website ([www.fooddemocracy.org](http://www.fooddemocracy.org)).

**Resources:**

- Public Service Broadcasting for a Post Carbon World: [www.globalpublicmedia.com](http://www.globalpublicmedia.com)
- Post Carbon Institute: <http://postcarbon.org>
- Relocalization Network : [www.relocalize.net](http://www.relocalize.net)
- Stewardship Canada: [www.stewardshipcanada.ca](http://www.stewardshipcanada.ca)
- Farm Folk/City Folk: Lending Library for books and DVDs
- Guerilla Gardening: A Manuelfesto by David Tracey
- Community Cookbook from 100 mile

When the group gathered all together engaging in discussion, the wealth of knowledge, skills and resources that we all have an opportunity to draw from as a part of this network revealed itself clearly. It is evident that the strength of the BCFSN lies in the unique and diverse perspectives that each of us brings to the table.

**WORKSHOPS/SESSIONS**

This year’s Gathering looked at the issue of food systems without fossil fuels from multiple angles. This theme proved to be a complex and massive topic to unpack. As usual, the Gathering offered a range of theoretical, practical and hands-on workshops, panels and presentations to facilitate thoughtful discussions. (A copy of the schedule can be found on Page 9 of this document).

A series of presentations laid out the big picture of the global food system’s dependence on fossil fuels in food production and distribution and its impact on food systems in British Columbia (*From Global Impacts to Local Transformation, Breaking Global Dependency*). Strategies to disconnect from the global food system included choosing locally- and sustainably-produced foods and linking communities through the

reestablishment of railway systems and material interdependence. The *Consuming Less Energy* discussions emphasized the need to find ways to decrease fossil fuel consumption in our food systems and presented some key strategies to move towards this goal relating to organic gardening techniques and seed sovereignty.

It is evident that the global food system cannot continue on this consumptive and unsustainable path much longer as oil becomes scarcer. As the impacts of this dependence on climate change become more and more obvious in the eyes of the general public and detrimental to our survival, strategies to increase food security in a post-carbon environment will be invaluable and are already happening around the province and abroad. Various projects aimed at increasing local food security/sovereignty from around the province were presented to inspire others who may wish to start a similar initiative in their own region. Examples included growing food in small spaces such as rooftop and container gardens (*Food Gardens for Small Spaces*), community capacity building around small-scale food production (*Lawns to Gardens, Green Thumbs Project*) and mobile farmers markets (*Pocket Markets*). One hands-on workshop showed participants how to change bicycle tires and use panniers and discussed how choosing alternative transportation methods such as bicycles can decrease fossil fuel use in our food systems (*Food for Fuel – Bicycling across Canada*). A number of presentations highlighted examples or models of self-reliance from at home and abroad (*Cuba's Food System, Lonesome Duck Ranch, Doukhobor Farm*). Rural and remote areas experience particular challenges when it comes to decreasing fossil fuel dependency; thus, a roundtable discussion was held to explore key issues and strategies for rural communities to support each other and ensure their voices are heard.

In addition to overcoming a lack of knowledge and skills around food production and acquisition, another challenge to building strong local food systems is having access to land. This is a problem for farmers old and new, as the percentage of good quality land designated for agriculture is decreasing. This is also an issue for many First Nations as much of their traditional territories have become privatized and infringed upon by rural and industrial developments and contaminated by industrial activities. An overview of how Community Farms may be a viable solution to increasing the accessibility of agricultural land while at the same time protecting it in perpetuity was presented (*Creating Community Farms*). Community farms can serve multiple purposes, including sustainable food production, education, recreation and conservation to name a few. This session was followed by a visioning exercise to help develop a sustainability plan for Colony Farm – a parcel of land managed by Metro Vancouver Parks that currently holds 500 community garden plots (*Colony Farm*). Input was sought to develop a plan where sustainable agricultural activities, wildlife habitat, recreation and environmental education could co-exist on Colony Farm.

As much as grassroots action is a key component to raising awareness and skills to strengthen local food systems, action at municipal, provincial and federal levels are also critical. A brainstorming workshop was facilitated to highlight priorities, resources and

strategies for bringing food issues into the fore of community planning and elections (*Food Policy, Municipal Elections and Official Community Plans*). Furthermore, two presentations outlined the importance of food mapping (both agricultural and indigenous local food systems) as tools to better understand the food resources available in each region and to aid decision makers and stress the importance of including food and water into the planning process (*Food, Land and Ecosystems – On the Map*).

With all of this talk about food and food systems it is worth asking the question – *What Food is Best* in a post-carbon food system? An information session on the nutritional values of a Paleolithic Diet looked at Indigenous foods in relation to human and environmental health. Additionally, in *Food for All*, optimal food choices for decreasing our fossil fuel dependence were outlined.

Transforming food systems requires action from the ground up, the top down and everywhere in between, and can be facilitated through the use of various media. The internet can be a valuable vehicle of change, when one knows how to use it to its potential to reach those who may not otherwise be able to access this information (*Bits and Bytes*). Not only can the vehicle we use to express our ideas impact who we reach, but the language we use to get our message across can impact the overall outcome. The *Language of Activism* workshop facilitated a discussion about the power of the words and language we use in transforming the industrialized food system. At the core of both industrial and ecological models of food systems are different underlying worldviews. Industrial food systems are based on the separation of people and nature and use words that reflect this, while ecologically-based food systems are predicated on the interrelationships between people and nature. To transform the industrialized food system into food systems that are based on ecological values we need to pay attention to the words we use so that our language is aligned with our values and the food systems we wish to create.



<b>FRIDAY</b>
<b>Welcome from Secwepemc Elders and BCFSN Chair</b>
<b>BCFSN Plenary</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Overview of activities, successes, challenges and needs of Network</li> <li>- Food security work underway in BC</li> </ul>
<b>Global Dependency, Relocalization and Moving Beyond Fossil Fuels</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- From Global Impacts to Local Transformation – From the Ground Up (<i>Rick Balfour and Andre Piver</i>)</li> <li>- Breaking Global Dependency, Reconnecting BC with REAL Food (<i>Lynn Wytenbroek</i>)</li> </ul>
<b>Journeys of Self Reliance</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A Year in Provisions: A Journey Towards Self Reliance and Food Sovereignty at Lonesome Duck Ranch (<i>Kristeva Dowling</i>)</li> <li>- Cuba's Food System: No Choice but Self-Sufficiency and Sustainability (<i>Colleen O'Brien</i>)</li> <li>- Healing, Practices and Culture on a Traditional Doukhobor Farm (<i>Netta Zeberoff</i>)</li> </ul>
<b>Education &amp; Communications for Transformation</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Language and Activism: Transforming the industrial paradigm in Food System Discussions (<i>Dawn Morrison</i>)</li> <li>- Building Community Food Security with Bits &amp; Bytes: Fostering Social Change and Food Security through Internet Media (<i>Abra Brynne</i>)</li> <li>- Food Security and Remote Communities: A Round Table Facilitated Discussion (<i>Dayna Chapman</i>)</li> </ul>
<b>Consuming Less Energy: A Series of Presentations</b> ( <i>Brewster Kneen, Rebecca Kneen, Patrick Steiner</i> )
<b>Food for Fuel: Bicycling across Canada</b> ( <i>Neskie Manuel</i> )
<b>Harvest Feast Celebration and Dance</b>
<b>SATURDAY</b>
<b>BCFSN Plenary</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Re-evaluate with new information from Friday Plenary</li> <li>- Identify new priorities and strategies for advancing food security through the Network</li> </ul>
<b>BCFSN AGM</b>
<b>Health, Global Warming and Sustainability &amp; Food Systems without Fossil Fuels: What Food is Best?</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Health and Nutritional Values of the Paleo Diet: Healthy Indigenous Foods (<i>Sharon Niscak</i>)</li> <li>- Food for All: Sustainable Food Production for us and the Planet (<i>Lynn Wytenbroek</i>)</li> </ul>
<b>Marketing &amp; Projects for Increasing Food Accessibility &amp; Security</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The Green Thumb Garden Project (<i>Jen Gamble</i>)</li> <li>- UK Transition Town and Allotments (<i>Carol Kergan</i>)</li> <li>- Lawns to Gardens Community Awareness Program (<i>Aimee Watson</i>)</li> <li>- Pocket Markets (<i>Arzeena Hamir</i>)</li> <li>- Demonstration Rooftop and Container Food Production in Vancouver (<i>Tara Moreau</i>)</li> </ul>
<b>Creating Opportunities for Farming</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Creating Community Farms (<i>Heather Pritchard, Hanna Wittman, Ramona Scott</i>)</li> <li>- Colony Farm: A Visioning Exercise (<i>Will McKenna</i>)</li> </ul>
<b>Food Policy, Municipal Elections and Official Community Plans</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Engaging Municipal Government for Food Security (<i>Linda Geggie and Jen Cody</i>)</li> <li>- Developing Organization Food Policy (<i>Ron Plowright and Deirdre Goudriaan</i>)</li> </ul>
<b>Food, Land and Ecosystems: On the Map</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Foodshed and Watershed Mapping in the North Thompson Valley (<i>Cheryl Thomas</i>)</li> <li>- Mapping Indigenous Land and Food Systems in BC (<i>Sharon Niscak and Dawn Morrison</i>)</li> </ul>
<b>Rejuvenating and Community Building Activities</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Food as Medicine (<i>Trudy Jack</i>)</li> </ul>



## HARVEST FEAST

An evening of feasting and celebrating has always been an integral part of each year's Gathering. While last year traditional indigenous foods were the focus of the feast, this year all participants were invited to donate foods from their regions. An abundance of food started flowing in on Thursday evening, including salmon, buffalo roast, curry tofu stew, sea buckhorn berry juice, soapberries from the Secwepemc area, huckleberries, fir bough tea and mint tea, and a variety of fruits and every kind of vegetable imaginable to name but a few. In keeping with this year's theme, all of the food donated was grown, fished, hunted or preserved by those who brought it.

On Friday, several dedicated volunteers spent the day chopping, slicing, mixing and preparing this amazing mix of food. As it was difficult to know what foods would be arriving, it was also very difficult to plan meals ahead of time. The cooks did an incredible job using their own creativity and initiative in the kitchen. Many of these experienced cooks are involved in community kitchen projects in their own communities and were familiar with cooking in such large quantities. Preparing a feast for over a hundred people was by no means an easy task, and the lack of a solid meal plan with a kitchen full of fresh unprepared foods proved to be very challenging. However, the preparation of the feast provided an excellent example of people coming together to share and prepare food – something that many communities will likely face in the future, but under circumstances of lack rather than the abundance of food with which we were blessed at our Gathering.

The end result was astounding - tables of food filled with delicious, nutritious and lovingly prepared dishes of all kinds stretched from one end of the Sorrento Hall to the other – a testament to how members of the BCFSN work together collaboratively to make amazing things happen. In following with Secwepemc tradition, the meal was first blessed by an Elder from the community. Members of the Secwepemc community gathered on stage and welcomed all of the guests. An offering from each dish was collected on a plate, upon which the Elder prayed and blessed the food. The food was then offered to the forest to feed and thank the land and to ensure there is more food in the future. And thus the feast began.

After everyone was well nourished, tables and chairs were moved aside to make room for an evening of dancing thanks to music supplied by a live band, and the chance to taste locally brewed beer from Crannóg Ale.

## EVALUATIONS

On the whole, the feedback from those who attended was another great Gathering put on by the BCFSN that was both informative and inspiring. Many people recognized the incredible level of organization and work necessary to make the Gathering happen year after year, especially as both the BCFSN and the Gathering grow in size. With this in mind, some suggested involving more people in organizing the event, such as

designating a facilitator/mediator for each presentation to keep things on schedule, along with a volunteer coordinator. Designating a volunteer coordinator specifically to help organize all of the food donations coming in from different regions for the Friday night feast would also be helpful for those volunteering to do the cooking so that a meal plan can be prepared the night before.

There was a general sense that the number of workshops and speakers was overwhelming for such a short period of time. Slowing down, planning fewer talks so that sessions do not overlap and including more hands-on workshops may leave time for everyone to fully digest the wealth of information and to truly appreciate the unique skills and viewpoints that everyone contributes to this event. Since food is what brings us all together in our daily lives - but also for this yearly event - a few people suggested that cooking and eating have more of a presence by including workshops around food preparation and including food samples in presentations and discussions.

Connecting people from around the province who are passionate and/or concerned about food was seen as the principle role of the BCFSN, and was also pinpointed as something that the Network continues to do well. Many people appreciated being able to put faces to names and projects, and gaining a better sense of the diverse array of people and projects working towards more just and sustainable food systems in British Columbia. Some people left the Gathering with a better sense of the role fossil fuels play in food systems and how this affects climate change, some left more aware of the issues faced by small farmers and rural communities or by Indigenous Peoples working towards regaining their food sovereignty. Others left without gaining new information but appreciating the opportunity to network with other people who share some of their values or challenges.

## NEXT STEPS

These are dynamic times – the climate is changing, our political environments are being reshaped and awareness about the importance of building strong, healthy and sustainable food systems is growing. Keeping each other well-informed, helping each other to build the capacities within our communities to create positive changes and energizing each other to continue the valuable work we are all doing is what brings us back to gather year after year.

