



BC Food Systems Network

2009 Gathering ~ Final Report

Introduction

The 2009 Gathering marked the 10th anniversary of the BC Food Systems Network. The most obvious change this year was the location. For the first time we gathered away from the shores of the Shuswap, and found ourselves in Chehalis, traditional Sto:lo territory. Sts'ailes Lhawathet Lalem (Chehalis Healing House) graciously hosted the Network in the midst of their soaring trees and natural beauty.

The number of attendees increased dramatically as a result of the change in venue. The location meant that the Gathering was much more accessible to those in the lower mainland. In the past, attendance has ranged from 95-105, this year the number was 146. These numbers may fluctuate in coming years but the fact remains that rotating the Gathering will open the possibility of attendance for a different pool of people every year thus increasing the number of individuals the Network is able to reach. As we move around the province the hope is that more communities will become connected to the food movement and support the work of the Network.

Moving the Gathering to a new region and the plan to continue to move it around the province naturally supports bioregionalism, this year's theme. A bioregion is an area defined by naturally occurring boundaries such as watersheds, terrain and soil. It is also cultural in nature and thus includes healthy associations between people, plants, animals and nature. These bioregions or eco-regions, could generally be self-sufficient with respect to local food systems and land use. When the local population makes choices that support the local ecology, economy and culture a bioregional consciousness is created.

Plenary

Friday Sept 25

The Chair of the BCFSN, Jen Cody, opened the morning by introducing the Gathering theme, bioregionalism, and noting that we were there to talk about but also to celebrate our regional differences. She then went on to introduce the plenary panel.

Gregoire Lamoureux, a practicing permaculturalist, who lives and works on his farm in the Slocan Valley, began the plenary with an introduction to bioregionalism. He spoke of food forests and harvesting with respect. The dwindling food resources and our response are of grave concern. He asked us to think about how we can live within the planet and protect it rather than detract from it.

Dawn Morrison, the coordinator of the Working Group on Indigenous Food Sovereignty, followed Gregoire by explaining how permaculture concepts were inspired by Indigenous culture.

Permaculture boundaries and traditional territorial boundaries of Indigenous people are very similar. The principles of permaculture enhance cross-cultural understanding and respect. Indigenous cultures have vast knowledge about food sovereignty and how to live on this land.

Heather Pritchard, from Farm Folk City Folk, rounded out the plenary panel. She took us all on a mental journey back to our homes to connect with our personal food world and its possibilities. The importance of connections and the maintenance of those are key concerns for vibrant bioregions.

After the presentations, discussion about defining bioregions and what that process should look like ensued. All participants then moved around the room to self identify with their bioregions. On the floor was a taped outline of the province that enabled everyone to move to the area in which they felt most comfortable. It also allowed for a very powerful visual image of the representation from around the province.

Saturday Sept 26

The Saturday plenary started with the reporting from regional discussions. A team of volunteers took the discussion notes and prepared a summary to give the entire group. There were many commonalities among the regions; most prevalent was the feeling that food related to a sense of self and sense of culture. Depending on the region different foods were valued and sources varied greatly especially between urban and rural residents. Feelings such as pride, self-confidence and belonging were strongly associated with becoming connected to our food system. Though the experiences from each group were very diverse, all valued the relationship to the land and to each other that healthy food created. The more personal time invested in our food the better we understand our food system.

Regional Outcomes

By allowing time for regional conversations, BCFSN is trying to facilitate the formation of cohesive bioregional groups. To further this and create a mutually beneficial relationship, the questions for the second regional breakout groups were: 1) How can each region support the work of the BC Food Systems Network?; and 2) How can the BC Food Systems Network support the regions? Below are some of the answers that were brought back to the larger group.

1) ***How can each region support the work of the BC Food Systems Network?***

REGIONS CAN:

- Develop tools that can be brought forward to the Network;
- Engage and communicate with immigrant populations that need to be connected to the Network;
- Bring remote perspective to provincial level;
- Act as representatives.

2) ***How can the BC Food Systems Network support the regions?***

THE NETWORK CAN:

- Support the creation of regional networks;
- Support change with education-possibly through teleconferencing/ videoconferencing;
- Develop advocacy resources, perhaps as templates;
- Build relationship links;
- Foster capacity building;
- Provide media representation on a provincial level.



Schedule

Friday Sept 25th

Session 1 (1:00pm-2:00pm)

<i>Cathleen Kneen</i>	Cathleen spoke of the importance of learning from our indigenous neighbours and how that shaped the Gathering and her current work.
VITFN & Feast for Change <i>John Rampanen & VITFN members</i>	Vancouver Island Traditional Food Network and the Feast for Change project have been vital in reclaiming traditional foods. Individual members shared their experience.
DIY- Design It Yourself <i>Azalea Erin Moen & Jamila Ali</i>	A “hands –on” session where participants crafted their own zines.
Birth to 7 <i>Yvette John</i>	Yvette spoke of the importance of these formative years and the traditional ways that have been passed on to her.

Session 2 (2:15-3:45)

Meat: Problems and Solutions for Environmental Health <i>Eleanor Boyle</i>	Livestock play a significant role in human food systems. Yet large-scale production and consumption of animal products can undermine the environment and human health. This session outlined problems and encouraged participants to discuss and debate potential bioregional solutions. In the presentation, Eleanor will summarize recent research and initiatives from various stakeholders.
Community Mapping <i>Pamela Tudge, Joan Gignac, Cheryl Thomas</i>	This session addressed ways to make food more accessible on a community level through different mapping styles. Online mapping, traditional food stories book and community involvement were covered by the panel.
The Indigenous connection to Salmon and Water <i>Trudy Jack</i>	Trudy gave a moving account of the ways in which water and salmon are vital to the traditional way of life and of how respect for the land is needed for our survival.

Saturday Sept 26th

Session 3 (11:00-12:00)

Setting Up Co-ops Discussion <i>Ilona Trogub</i>	After an introduction to the Golden Ears Co-op, the group went on to discuss models and resources for creating and sustaining co-ops.
Growing your own Community Garden <i>David Tracey</i>	David is a journalist by trade who became involved with Strathcona community Gardens, not knowing the extent and uniqueness of the garden. He spoke of the problems and solutions associated with the gardens. David also discussed the motivation behind starting a community garden and the many benefits.
T-shirt Reconstruction <i>Azalea Erin Moen and Jamila Ali</i>	
Linking Land, Forest, Plants, Animals and People in Non-Timber Forest Products Enterprise Development <i>Mary Stockdale</i>	Mary spoke about her time overseas as a community forester working with Non-timber forest products (NTFPs). She spoke of one group of Indigenous communities in the Philippines that developed a forest fruit jam-making enterprise to successfully achieve the communities' self-defined economic, ecological and social/cultural goals. The importance of such enterprise development being community-driven, and founded in traditional ecological knowledge and wisdom was also discussed.
Development of Traditional Foods for a Local Market <i>Sino Tallio</i>	This group was centered around the objective of lobbying the provincial gov't to put more money and research behind developing and cultivating locally available/"traditional" foods into varieties which the buying and/or consuming public would be more likely to accept.
Traditional Plants <i>Netta Zeberoff</i>	

Session 4 (1:00pm-2:00pm)

Creating Regional Dialogue Discussion <i>Linda Geggie</i>	
Permaculture <i>Gregoire Lamoureux</i>	This provided a more in depth explanation of permaculture theories and techniques.
School Food Systems: <i>Brent Mansfield and Joanne Bays</i>	Farm-to-School and School Gardens
Temporary Foreign Workers: A closer look at local food production <i>BC Multicultural Health Services Society, Agriculture Workers Alliance</i>	A look through the eyes of migrant workers at our food production system. The presenters delved into hard issues such as living conditions, working hours, and discrimination. These workers are put in a very difficult predicament, caught between trying to better the lives of their families at home and demanding respect for the jobs they do abroad.
Urban Aboriginal Issues Discussion <i>Dawn Morrison</i>	Indigenous and non-Indigenous folks share stories, experiences and strategies for action around food security in the Urban Aboriginal context (70% of Aboriginal Peoples live off reserve.) Folks discuss being caught between two worlds, working to access traditional foods, working to learn traditional and modern food skills and working to be food sovereign in places that are quite remote (physically or otherwise) from our home communities.

Session 5 (2:30-3:45)

Food Sovereignty 101 and an Intro to the People's Food Policy Discussion <i>Dayna Chapman</i>	Amanda Sheedy, coordinator of the PFPP, and Ron and Dayna, PFPP Animators, introduce the concept of Food Sovereignty and its 6 pillars, through PFPP promotional materials. Folks critique the pamphlets, share stories about what food sovereignty means to them and are guided through the policy submission template from the People's Food Policy Project. (More detail about the project and the process can be found at http://peoplesfoodpolicy.ca)
ESL, Eating in a Second Language <i>BC Multicultural Health Services Society Surrey/White Rock Food Action Coalition</i>	Stories and learnings from the perspective of those working with and living in BC's diverse communities
Building a Sustainable Food System in your Backyard: Back to Healthy and Easy Home Cooking <i>Laura Kalina and Cheryl Christian</i>	Moving from the backyard to kitchen, Laura Kalina and Cheryl Christian, authors of the Low Glycemic Meals in Minutes Cookbook will also highlight how eating more fresh, organic veggies, fruits, healthy proteins and fats (while avoiding processed foods) will not only reduce your carbon footprint but help you achieve a healthy weight and reduce chronic disease.
Decolonizing Soil: an Indigenous Perspective on Gardening <i>Harvest McCampbell</i>	One of the seldom-told stories of colonization is its affect on our soils, nutrient cycles, and the nutritional values of our food. Decolonizing Soil takes a gentle look at common thoughts about soil, the difference between scientific and indigenous values in regards to soil, and how our soils have been degraded through the colonization process.
BCFSN Workplan and Network Direction Discussion <i>Jen Cody</i>	

Session 6 (4:00-5:00)

"New Agriculture": Growing Young Farmers and Farmland Access Discussion <i>Jen Cody</i>	Along with sharing of experiences around innovative agriculture such as Community Farms and Spin Farming, a discussion on strategies for attracting and engaging new farmers took place.
Telling our Story with Video <i>Abra Brynne</i>	Abra demonstrated the use of the Network's new video cameras, talked about the ways in which this medium can be used to document and demonstrate our work, and showed a range of videos and digital stories that have been created by communities across BC to show their work on feeding their people.
Assessing the Vancouver Island Diet <i>Jen Fisher-Bradley</i>	Jen led a discussion of the Vancouver Island Diet as a model for bioregional food security organizations and a product evaluation system for consumers
Small Scale Farmer Solidarity Worldwide <i>Hanna Askew</i>	The topic of this workshop was how to show solidarity to small-scale farmers in Majority World (a.k.a. "developing") countries through policy change at the international level, while simultaneously advocating a bioregional approach to agricultural production and consumption in Canada.
Salmon Fisheries Discussion <i>Vincent Prince</i>	This discussion focused on the problems facing BC salmon and actions that need to be taken.

Some full session notes are available on the BC Food Systems Network website on the [Network Notes](#) page.

Outcomes

A number of networking opportunities have led to more substantial relationships beyond the Gathering. The following are all items that have come about as a direct result of the Gathering.

- Vancouver Island is now preparing for its first Traditional Food Challenge. After time to prepare, the Challenge will run next year for an entire year.
- A regional planning meeting will be held by the Vancouver Island Food Systems Network to create more collaborative work on the Island.
- In the Shuswap, a regional gathering has been held and a regional network created. A new listserv for the group is now being used.
- Work on Connecting Northern Food Systems has begun through teleconferencing.
- A Food Reclamation Project is also starting in the North.
- The initiative to create a food security co-op in Powell River was boosted.
- A new co-op listserv is already up and running.
- A number of other listservs are in the process of being created. This is an important opportunity to enhance communication within regions or on a certain topic.

Next Steps

One of the most powerful next steps came from the discussion on Salmon Fisheries. The group decided the most responsible action for the BCFSN to take would be a call for a moratorium on farmed Salmon. The wording must now be drafted and sent to the membership for approval.

Face-to-face meetings and presentations have also been acknowledged as very important to further the work of the Network. These inspire and motivate the grassroots action. Recognizing this and trying to balance this need with the carbon concerns around travel has generated a proposed information sharing aid. A coordination network for BCFSN members who are traveling within the province for other reasons but would be willing to do a presentation as well has been suggested as a way for everyone to share knowledge. This would be done by enabling access to information about the location and activities of Network members. However, the Network must find a way to facilitate these connections amid genuine privacy issues.

Evaluation

One of the unique aspects of the Gathering is the inclusiveness. Because all members are valued equally, every person can be seen as an opportunity for learning. This is one of the reasons that showcasing presenters from within the Network is important. Sharing the knowledge in the Network is a key element to furthering work around the province. Hearing the stories of presenters and Network members is inspiring and empowering. This modeling is one of the most effective ways to impart information and it's a technique the Network uses very well.

The modeling apparent in the Network also enhances the relationships & personal connections made at the Gathering. Networking opportunities remain one of the most influential aspects of the Gathering, as seen by the numerous outcomes reported above. These personal connections are a central piece of work that the Network facilitates.

Maintaining these connections is a part of the concern around holding the Gatherings every second year. While many can see the benefit of going to a bi-yearly gathering with regional gatherings in the "off" years, there seems to be a very deep concern from the more remote communities that this would leave them disconnected. Many of these communities do not yet have the resources to host regional meetings and are worried that their young movements would languish without the province-wide Gathering. The proposal to continue the yearly

Gatherings but include a day for regional discussions was well received by many and was the final decision.

2009 -2010 Board

As happens at each Gathering, the Annual General Meeting was held and the Board of Directors of the Network was selected.



Back Row: Dawn Morrison, Barbara Joughin, Carol Kergan, Linda Geggie, Jen Cody, Azalea Erin Moen, Ron Plowright, David Parkinson, Jen Gamble.
Front Row: Cheryl Thomas, Vincent Prince, Heather Pritchard, Dayna Chapman.
Missing: Trish Chung, Tanis Dagert.

Report written by Jen Gamble, the 2009 Gathering Co-ordinator, with assistance from Abra Brynne, BCFSN Communications Co-ordinator