



# BC Food Systems Network

## 2010 Gathering - *Final Report*

### Introduction

The Network Gathered this year in the village of Ymir (20 minutes outside Nelson). The village, nestled in the Kootenay mountains and on the banks of the Salmo River, was a perfect setting for our three days of presentations and discussions.

The number of people attending the Gathering was down this year, which created an intimate atmosphere for the discussions and an opportunity to get to know each other better. As the Gathering moves around the province, a fluctuation in the number of attendees is to be expected, as is evident by comparing last year and this year. The total number of attendees was 55 this year. While the location may have been a barrier for some, it is important to realize that others were able to attend because of the location.

The theme for this year's Gathering was **WATER**. Water is the foundation of life. Every living species relies on it each day for sustenance; we swim in it, eat food from living organisms that must have water to exist, and many of the materials used in our everyday lives would not be available to us without water - from the shoes on our feet to the fuel in our vehicles, the book in our hands and the fabric that clothes us. Yet for such an essential component of life, it is often taken for granted by the 60% of the world's population that can turn on a tap to acquire all that they might want or need. By choosing water as our 2010 Gathering theme, we seek to foster an environment where water resources are not only acknowledged but cherished as an essential element of life and a sustainable food system.

A big thank you goes out to the community of Ymir. Everyone was very welcoming and many community members joined us for our Saturday evening feast, which probably doubled our

number. Thanks also, to Julie March and Belinda Hook, whose amazing cooking kept us well fed all weekend.

## **Program**

**The Water Plenary**, Friday morning, featured two speakers with very different experiences around water.

The first speaker, Kindy Gosal of the Columbia Basin Trust, spoke about water in the context of climate change. Kindy recognized the spiritual connection that exists to water and commented that the opportunity to preserve our water is still available. There is only a finite amount of water therefore it is imperative to protect the cycle that cleanses water. He went on to talk about climate change and the impact humans are having on the environment. The glacial melting is startling and Kindy recommends that, at this point, humans must focus on how to adapt to life without glaciers.

The second speaker, Marilyn James of the Sinixt Nation, passionately related her connection to water. The Sinixt were declared extinct by the Federal government as a political move to make the signing of the Columbia Basin agreement possible. This created numerous problems for the nation. Water was used as a tool of oppression and Marilyn foresees this happening again. Everything is connected, we must pay reverence. We are responsible for our territory, we owe the fish and the water. We must stand and fight to protect them. Marilyn wrapped up by urging everyone to stop waiting for a saviour to come along and start doing the work ourselves.

**The Migrant Workers Plenary**, on Saturday, focused on issues facing the workers while on BC farms. Raul Gatica of the Surrey Agricultural Worker's Alliance, described the situation facing migrant workers in BC. In light of the conditions endured by migrant workers, a reassessment of our local food system is necessary. The workers have no rights, they are not allowed to unionize and they are forced to pay into benefit programs which they are not allowed to access. The fear instilled by the Mexican Government, the Canadian Government and the employers prevents the workers from launching complaints. They are threatened with the loss of their jobs and deportation. This would be devastating for their families back in Mexico who rely on the money from these jobs to feed their children. Raul has seen firsthand, the poor working conditions, the refusal of workers to stand up for themselves and he states simply "if we don't know what's happening in the fields, we will never know the true cost of our food".

**Open Space Technology** was incorporated into the schedule for the first time. The Gathering has always provided space for individuals to discuss issues outside of the sessions but Open

Space provided a way to include discussions in schedule and gathering the information. This feedback is very valuable to the Network board because it provides direction from the membership. The ideas will be incorporated into the board plan over the next year. A few items were discussed in a number of groups. These include; the creation of a BCFSN day which could raise awareness and fundraise for the Network, a policy/advocacy team that address issues in a timely manner and an increase in communication methods (social media).

### **Session #1**

**Water- The Many Health Authority Perspectives** (Ron Plowright): This session explored some of the perspectives of the Health Authority on the issue of "water": Health/Healthier Choice, Access/"Food Security", Quality and Environmental Impact.

**Healthy Eating and Food Security: Assessing "Promising Strategies for BC"**(Abra Brynne): During this workshop, we reviewed the strategies proposed in the report and compared them against our lived experience of what has worked and not in our communities.

**Community Seed Collectives** (Heather Pritchard): This roundtable discussed "Community Seed Collectives" possibilities in BC.

**Indigenous Food Systems Network Website Launch** (Dawn Morrison & Neskie Manuel): The IFSN Website promotes the creation of an online community focusing on Indigenous food related action, research and policy reform through the newly launched indigenous Food Systems Network website

**Nature Walk** (Keith Davis): Keith led a nature walk in the area surrounding Ymir.

### **Session #2**

**Living off the Land** (Minnie Kenoras): Minnie spoke of her own experience living off the land. She held up the ideal of self-sufficiency as a goal that we could reach.

**Water Act Modernization: Commons or Commodity** (Nelle Maxey): This workshop looked at how water is currently managed in BC, what changes are being suggested by the WAM initiative and whether such changes will actually protect our water sources and protect our water rights. This presentation is available on [www.fooddemocracy.org](http://www.fooddemocracy.org).

**Making Real Stuff Happen** (Andre Piver): Participants were invited to share their experience with projects, both successful and unsuccessful, in order to spark a brainstorming session.

**Not just Green** (Natalie Gibb): In this workshop, we examined how the alternative food movement in BC might work foster more equitable relationships with farmers of colour.

**Inter-regional meeting with Regional representatives** (David Parkinson): Regional representatives were invited to discuss ways in which the various networks and regions could co-operate.

**Bread Making** (Cheryl Thomas): Instruction on how to make bread from a basic old-fashioned recipe.

### Session #3

**Working Group on Indigenous Food Sovereignty Meeting** (Dawn Morrison): The meeting allowed time for reflection and lessons learned over the last year, as well as a discussion of key messages to carry into various food security forums and networks in the upcoming year.

**Co-op Development** (Carol Murray): This session focused on the basics of co-op development and explored the main things to consider when forming a co-op.

**Post oil Resettlement in BC** (Rick Balfour): This session explored Strategic Sustainable Planning on Global Impacts of Peak Oil and Climate Change, as well as the role of water in food production, settlement, new ways of raising food and looking at human community patterns.

### Session #4

**The Kaslo Food Hub** (Aimee Watson): This tour of the Kaslo Food Security Project gave valuable information about the programs they have up and running in their community.

**Shared Harvest** (Erin Nichols): This session shared the new FarmFolkCityFolk networking website for local food and agriculture called Shared Harvest for Metro Vancouver.

There are full notes from many of the sessions available in the Session Notes document on the website.

## Annual General Meeting

The AGM heard reports from the Working Group on Indigenous Food Sovereignty, Communications Committee, the Chehalis Gathering Committee and the Treasurer.

Retiring board members, Heather Pritchard, Dawn Morrison and Ron Plowright were recognized and thanked for their efforts in moving the Network forward. Abra Brynne was also thanked for her commitment as she is stepping down as the Communications Co-ordinator. All will be greatly missed.

In new business, membership fees were discussed and finally voted upon. The BCFSN now requires an annual membership fee in order to be a member in good standing. The new fee structure is a sliding scale ranging \$5.00 (low-income) to \$30.00(regular individual).

Finally, the board elections took place. The 2010-2011 board includes:

- Dayna Chapman;
- Trish Chung;
- Jen Cody;
- Jen Gamble;
- Linda Geggie;
- Christine Glennie-Visser;
- Arzeena Hamir;

- Carol Kergan;
- Kerensa Medhurst;
- Azalea Erin Moen;
- David Parkinson;
- Judy Stafford;
- Cheryl Thomas

Please see the Session Notes document to view the minutes of the AGM.

## **Outcomes**

One tangible outcome of this Gathering is the statement regarding water (below).

**Water** is the basis of all life.

~therefore~

- 1) All living beings must have access to clean, safe water.
- 2) No food system exists without water
- 3) Water must never be commodified
- 4) Because the amount of fresh water is finite, we have the responsibility to be good stewards of our water supply

**Our food system must not undermine our ecosystem**

This statement will be passed on to the Policy/Advocacy Committee. It will be open for discussion by the membership and then approved. This is intended to be a living document for the Network to use and revisit at any point.

Another outcome is the recognition that the issues of diversity and migrant workers are vital for the network to address. The statement crafting team will continue to work on a draft document that can go to the Policy/Advocacy team.

## **Next Steps**

The network has made a commitment to implement teleconference calls between the regions. This will connect the people involved in community food work around the province and provide another way for the Network to share information on an ongoing basis.

The board will create a Policy/Advocacy team to address issues that arise between Gatherings. This team will evaluate issues and create position statements for the membership to endorse.

The suggestions from the Open Space will be, as much as possible, included into the Network work plan. Members are encouraged to volunteer for any area of interest.

## **Evaluation**

The Network has a long tradition of inclusiveness and this has facilitated a space where marginalized voices are not only heard but are highly valued. This year was no exception. The plenaries featured two such voices. Both Marilyn James and Raul Gatica had stories that were disturbing but important to hear and recognize. The willingness of the Network to delve into difficult issues facing our food system helps create meaningful change.

The BCFSN Annual Gathering is very different from an average conference. The people attending set the mood and, in fact, become the substance of the Gathering themselves. The connections made add so much to the program that the total value of the event cannot be measured by the schedule in the welcome packet. The opportunity to connect with others and re-energize is a unique benefit of the Gathering. The smaller number of attendees this year, made this Gathering very personal. The intimate atmosphere allowed participants time to relax, talk and network!