



BC Food Systems Network

Report on the 14th Annual Gathering
July 5-8, 2012

Introduction

The Network Gathered this year at Camp Fircom on Gambier Island situated in the Howe Sound, a short water taxi ride from Horseshoe Bay. The Network is grateful to the Coast Salish people for allowing us to be together on their traditional territory. The scenic beauty of the location and the physical separation from the mainland and the responsibilities of everyday life allowed participants from diverse backgrounds the opportunity to share knowledge, strategies and successes.

This year's Gathering attracted a record turn-out of approximately 100 adults and 25 children. The weekend was a family-friendly celebration of community with activities such as early morning yoga practice, nature walks, campfires, canoeing, skills demonstrations, swimming, singing, conversation, quiet contemplation and delicious food. The three-day event included workshops, dialogue and a celebration of the many community-level projects currently underway throughout the province.

There was also free time and open space for catching up with old friends and meeting new ones; for listening to experts and sharing expertise. Down time and relaxation gave us the opportunity to recharge our batteries in the company of others whose future vision provided inspiration. As always, we were pleased to embrace new partners and new ideas.

The high turnout was due largely to the proximity of the Gathering to the lower mainland, bringing individuals from the Vancouver area, the Sunshine Coast, Vancouver Island, remote coastal communities and other places throughout the province. As always, the timing of the event was ideal for some participants but posed difficulty for others, particularly those directly involved in farming. Nearly one third of all attendees received

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some form of financial support from the Network, a truly amazing testament to the inclusiveness of the provincial food movement.

This theme of this year's Gathering was Reclaiming the Food System: Policy and Practice. Policy defined as set of guidelines that inform decision making. Food policy affects everybody and we can all play a role in making it better. Workshops and sessions provided a balance of these two thematic areas and stimulated considerable discussion about how to inform policy decisions and nourish a brighter future.

The Gathering was attended by a fascinating cross-section of food activists and policy makers, including representatives from a number of First Nations communities and food initiatives. There was also a strong youth delegation, including a number of young farmers. There were policy makers from local and provincial government agencies as well as representatives from a number of non-government agencies and community action groups. The Network was pleased to renew relationship with labour organizations in BC and was very happy to have representatives from the Agricultural Workers Alliance and the BC Government Employees Union in attendance.

Camp Fircom

Camp Fircom is working hard to increase its sustainability and environmental impact by increasing the intensity of its current vegetable production area and converting additional land to productive use. This added space will also be used for teaching and as a demonstration of their "100 metre diet". Children and families visiting Fircom will have an opportunity to contribute directly to their meals.

Fircom strives toward "zero waste" through careful composting, product sourcing, electrical energy alternatives, and intensive growing. This is a considerable challenge for a facility with new people on site each week, but staff did an excellent job helping us to learn and support their systems. All non-compostable garbage, including recycling, was removed by Network members at the end of the Gathering.

The Network also partnered with Camp Fircom to provide volunteer labour for Fircom Farm. In exchange for every hour of volunteer help provided Fircom agreed to offset our total accommodation cost for the Gathering. In total Gathering participants put in over 70 person hours of labour. Many thanks go to those hard working individuals.

The Gathering began on Thursday evening, as people started arriving at the dock from the mainland. We were led in an Opening Circle by Sara Dent from the Young Agrarians, followed by an evening of meeting friends, both new and old.

Opening Plenary

Dayna Chapman opened the day with a welcome and introduced Sacheen Pointe from Ahousat who gave a welcome to Coast Salish territory and led the group in an opening prayer. Dawn Morrison of the Secwepemc people spoke on behalf of the elders in

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attendance representing the Urban Aboriginal Garden Project on the importance of food to nourish us and the work we do together. Dayna then discussed the theme of this year's Gathering "Reclaiming the Food System: Policy and Practice" in the context of what each of us can do to contribute to the policy conversation.

Abra Brynne spoke next about personal food choices and how they affect our evolving sense of food policy, particularly as they relate to justice - understanding the values that underlie food decisions guides how and when we speak to government. The purpose of the BCFSN Policy Working Group is to capture these needs and values and translates them into a policy message to decision makers. The more we can work collectively, the more effective we will be in influencing policy at all levels. Consultations currently underway that we can participate in include the Agricultural Waste Control Regulation, and the Agricultural Land Commission fee structure. Finally, Abra invited members to join the Network's Policy Working Group.

Amanda Sheedy provided an update from Food Secure Canada, which was formed in 2005 and recently hired its first full-time staff. Food Secure Canada is the voice of the food movement at the national level. The three key principles of the food movement are:

- Healthy food for all
- Zero hunger
- Just and sustainable food systems

Amanda talked about the People's Food Policy Project, which is based on 7 pillars of food sovereignty, and was completed and published last year. The results of the country-wide kitchen table conversations were taken to 10 policy writing teams. The papers were then reviewed by the 2010 assembly before being finalized and published on the FSC website.

Amanda then spoke about the recent visit to Canada by the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food and the federal Government's denial of hunger in Canada. The FSC prepared a submission and presented it to the UN Special Rapporteur.

FSC continues to work on national food policy and animate four networks:

1. Children and food
2. Sustainable local food
3. Provincial networks group
4. Northern food network – there are protests in Nunavut around the high prices of food

FSC's approach is the most inclusive and comprehensive - to present a united approach to the federal government. There needs to be a way to retain our national voice and nurture an effective working relationship with government agencies while at the same time avoiding burnout. Amanda then reminded everybody that the FSC's biennial Assembly will be held this November 1-4 in Edmonton.

In keeping with Gathering tradition and in response to an emerging dialogue, somebody suggested a small group discussion be held later in the afternoon on the topic “How do we stay true to our principles while doing this work?”

Linda Geggie then spoke about her work coordinating the Capital Region Food and Agriculture Initiatives Roundtable (CR-FAIR), making public education a priority in an effort to create links at local, provincial and national levels of government. Issues addressed have included:

- watershed management related to agriculture;
- public produce project in Kamloops in a city park
- Vancouver Food Policy Council which has led the city will soon review impact of all its bylaws on sustainable food
- GMO ban in Richmond

CR-FAIR’s work on a Regional Food Charter describes food as a planning issue and a number of municipalities have adopted the charter. This shift has also been seen in planning schools such as the School of Community and Regional Planning at UBC and its Faculty of Land and Food Systems where students are now looking at food and planning together. As a result, we are seeing more and more food components in Official Community Plans.

There have also been shifts at the regional level as Regional Growth Strategies have become Regional Sustainability Strategies. CR-FAIR has been asked to lead the engagement strategy about food under the title of Municipally Enabled and Supported Agriculture.

Jen Gamble spoke about the Salmon Arm Eat Local project which became popular and gave the group the idea of moving into food policy. However, the group did not want to tie success of their project to their local government. Instead they created a Food Charter with consultations, based on what they had learned. They then made the Charter a motherhood statement everyone could adopt and left a space for those who would sign on to include what they would do. The objective was to create an empowering document. Although in the end the council adopted the charter, the key lesson from this experience is that the document does not need to be dependent on the organization to push it forward.

Linda Geggie suggested people think about the Gathering as a brains trust in which we can learn from others’ challenges as much as from their successes. The Gathering is a place to meet new people, ask questions, gather ideas, consider our challenges and seek out advice and to engage in dialogue, large or small, throughout the weekend.

Workshop Sessions

A Summary of the discussion can be found in the detailed session notes.

Session One (Friday 1:00pm to 2:30pm)

Food Systems and Trade Agreements: Beyond Public Policy and Towards the Commons (Harjap Gewal, Council of Canadians):

This session looked at the role of the Council of Canadians as well as various trade agreements including NAFTA and CETA which concentrate power at higher and higher levels, thereby excluding the people from the decision making process. An alternative to this model is a Public Trust Doctrine where resources are managed by trustees and stewardship required providing for future generations.

Organic Certification: Exploring Issues, Challenges and Options for Small Scale Farmers (Jen Gamble and Gunta Vitins):

The group, made up primarily of young farmers, looked at the benefits of organic certification (such as higher revenue, clarity of standards, healthier ecosystems, and a unified voice); then addressed the issues, challenges and barriers to the organic certification process such as cost and the trust relationships between farmers and “government” institutions, cost/benefit concerns and contamination, among other things. The group then discussed ways of minimizing these barriers in order to collectively identify potential options and solutions.

Session Two (Friday 3:00pm to 4:30pm)

Funders and Food Systems: Realizing our Shared Goals

This panel discussion included representatives from a variety of funding agencies and Heather Pritchard from FarmFolkCityFolk. Participants included:

- Hedy Rubin, Real Estate Foundation
- Leanne Sexsmith, Real Estate Foundation
- Claire Gram, Vancouver Coastal Health
- Heather Pritchard, FarmFolkCityFolk
- Barbara McMillan, Community Foundations of Canada

Heather spoke about how FarmFolkCityFolk’s diversified funding sources, which include 27% from grants (12% from government and rest from foundations) plus a variety of other sources. She also provided advice to organizations seeking to secure funding stressed the importance of developing ongoing relationships. Representatives from the Real Estate Foundation and VCH spoke about how their agencies provide funding for projects related to sustainability, food and fresh water.

Barbara McMillan provided advice for identifying potential funders and preparing grant proposals, stressing the importance of performance measures to illustrate accountability; research to illustrate the need; understanding the funder's requirements and being a passionate ambassador of the program. It is essential to highlight your own accomplishments (make the story come alive) as well as support from other organizations and volunteers.

Policy on our Plates – Digesting the Moose (BCFSN Policy Working Group – Abra Brynne, David Parkinson and Linda Geggie)

Policy is the overarching mandate out of which emerge Acts, regulations and codes. If we focus our policy lens on the BCFSN mission statement, how do we engage with government to make this more real?

Examples included the Food Safety Act and the Meat Inspection Regulation (MIR) which made it illegal to slaughter animals and sell meat without a licensed, inspected facility; the Agricultural Waste Control Regulation under the Environmental Management Act and the Agricultural Land Commission Act.

The process for establishing policy priorities and creating policy was then discussed from identification of problems through research and analysis, review, consultation and decision making. This part of the workshop also looked at how legislation is drafted, passed and implemented.

Linda Geggie then led a conversation about BCFSN Policy Working Group priorities and ways to formalize our role in the policy process and identify where we can usefully intervene. Questions included:

- Where can/should we mobilize?
- Would it be best to work on a food policy for BC or focus in on some key pieces?
- With whom can we partner?
- Are we reactive or proactive?
- Should we create a series of position papers (theses)?

It is important to be talking with all the political parties before May 2013 and to develop an action plan in order to educate our politicians; then follow up and ensure recommendations are implemented.

Occupy Sesame Street: Changing the Systems that Feed our Kids (Joanne Bays, Farm to Cafeteria):

The session included an update on the Farm to Cafeteria project and a discussion of key factors that contribute to the success of these programs, the outcomes of which include increased support for local farms and improved nutrition. Joanne also talked about ways to expand the program to get local food into more schools

(and hospitals) by creating local food hubs and essentially redesigning the way we feed our kids. Need to look at the particular needs and capacity of each community and creative sources of distribution and funding. Farm to School Canada has developed a National farm to school survey and strategic plan which looks at advocacy for the program, policy and profile.

Walking in the Footsteps of our Ancestors – The Rampanen Family’s Experiment with an Indigenous Diet (Nitanis Desjarlais)

Nitanis shared a fabulous slide show as she spoke about her family’s experience giving up colonial foods in favour of a pre-contact indigenous diet based on hunting, harvesting, collecting and preserving. The process was challenging and extremely time consuming but it was a way to reconnect with the land and traditional food sources and way of life. The elders say “when the tide is out, the table is set”.

The experiment highlighted the importance of the spiritual relationship with food, and although Nitanis would like to repeat the experiment, she wishes she had a community to share the experience with. It is about taking a step beyond green and organic – going wild – taking a step outside the fence, and the need to work with ecosystems to repair the land.

Session Three: (Saturday 9:00am to 10:30am)

Growing Local Food Co-ops: Sharing Success Stories (Carol Murray, Abra Brynne, David Parkinson, Heather Pritchard and Jen Cody)

Leading experts in local food co-ops presented stories of their successful co-op initiatives in this inspiring and dynamic workshop. Abra, Carol, David, Heather & Jen shared their experiences with and plans for the Kootenay Country Store Co-op, regional food hub co-ops, Skookum Food Provisioners, Glorious Organics Co-op, community farm co-ops, and Growing Opportunities Co-op. Participants learned why the co-op model has been so important to the local food sector and to these co-ops in particular and gathered first-hand tips and strategies for developing or enhancing their own local food co-ops.

The Role of Municipalities in Strengthening our Food System (Linda Geggie)

The mission of the Capital Region Food and Agriculture Initiatives Roundtable (CR-FAIR) is to strengthen the food and agriculture system in the CRD and its Regional Sustainability Strategy. Agriculture in an urban context requires building relationships with local government and understanding some of the factors that may support or impede your project. Land ownership and ag-foods are often addressed in Official Community Plans but there also needs to be a way to deal with conflict and achieve change. Municipalities can issue stand-alone plans

and strategies in addition to the OCP – which are prone to change when councils change.

Several examples of Municipally Engaged and Supported Agriculture (MESA) were discussed as ways to make municipal lands available for food production but what farmers really need is long-term leases with fencing and irrigation. It is important for people to see food grown and purchase fresh local food near where they live.

Local Food Project Gives Food for Thought (Jenny Horn)

A local food project was undertaken by five universities on Vancouver Island (UVic, VIU, North Island College, Camosun College and Royal Roads University), community, government and industry. The project focused on local food by mobilizing activity, obtaining funding for public outreach and then making public needs information available to the community. Sixty-one students from the five campuses worked with community partners to look at:

1. Urban agriculture
2. Institutional purchasing
3. Climate change
4. Indigenous foods
5. Communications facilitation

This project made research relevant to the community; transformed universities into models for sustainability in the community and allowed universities to take active role in building healthier Island communities.

Vancouver Island Health Authority Aboriginal Health – Summary of Projects (Fiona Devereaux and Nitanis Desjarlais)

The Vancouver Island & Coastal Communities Indigenous Food Network (VICCIFN) is a collective of members with a shared vision of a healthy future based upon reconnecting with First Nations cultural teachings and practices.

The session provided an update and discussion of the work currently being done by the VICCIFN, including:

- Annual Traditional Foods Conference
- Digital Harvest Project
- Sharing Our Voice
- The VICCIFN Working Group

Session Four (Saturday 1:30pm to 3:00pm)

The Ark of Taste (Joanne McMillan, Slow Food Vancouver)

What is the Slow Food Ark? Joanne led a discussion about ways to identify (and nominate) foods that are at risk of extinction, are closely linked to specific communities and cultures and are threatened by industrial standardization. The presentation also included an update on Slow Food Vancouver's recent projects and activities.

Indigenous Food Related Action in BC – Current Projects, Situations and Concerns (Dawn Morrison)

Dawn Morrison is a member of Secwepemc, representative of the Working Group on Indigenous Food Sovereignty (WGIFS). Dawn is also Program Coordinator for the Urban Aboriginal Garden/Kitchen Project at UBC Farm, a program which addresses issues of urbanization and poverty by reconnecting people with the land, cultural knowledge and traditional healing.

Dawn talked about status of the working group and some of the challenges it is facing, including funding and time constraints, as well as the need to develop an appropriate research methodology. She also spoke about its relationship with the BCFSN particularly with respect to finding the intersection between sustainable agriculture in settler communities and restoring and maintaining healthy functioning Indigenous land and food systems. It was agreed that the working group would like to explore the extent to which the BCFSN is willing to advocate for the establishment of hunting, fishing and gathering land reserves (land reform) for Indigenous peoples?

Community Food Security Mapping (Analisa Blake, Vancouver Island Health Authority):

This workshop considered the benefits of an open source mapping resource to avoid the current duplication of effort. A range of community resource mapping initiatives were introduced, including the example set by New Westminster and reviewed for complexity (in terms of themes, types of resources, resource details, interactivity and ongoing maintenance). The group participated in an exercise of classifying and organizing food security programs and services into functional categories.

Innovation in the City: Strategic Partnerships, Sustainability for Vancouver Neighbourhood Food Networks (Zsuzsi Fodor, Stephanie Lim and Ian Marcuse):

Food networks were initiated through the Vancouver Coastal Health Authority (VCH) and while each has a different structure and funding model, all are linked and contribute to a shared infrastructure of kitchens, gardens and markets. They are embedded within existing community infrastructure and focus on community development. Each network strives for financial, relational and developmental sustainability.

The origins and initiatives of three networks were discussed in detail. These were the Grandview Woodland Food Connection, Renfrew Collingwood Food Security Institute and the Westside Food Collaborative. This was followed by a discussion of creating broader partnerships between neighbourhoods and other key players, project evaluation and funding sustainability.

Session 5 (Saturday 3:30pm to 5:00pm)

Interactive Workshop Community Building (Sara Dent and Aandreyah Vargas):

Sara and Aandreyah provided some background on the Young Agrarians project and led an interactive workshop on the theme of the young farmer and the food movement.

Livestock and Meat Systems in BC – Meat Inspection Regulation under the Food Safety Act - Where's the Beef? (Kathleen Gibson and Abra Brynne)

This session looked at the problems small scale farmers face with respect to the Meat Inspection Regulation (MIR). These included:

- The 'steady supply' of problems when working with small scale farms
- The tendency to have 'problems disappear' – to go underground
- Size and cost
- Small and remote - enabled the licensing of C and D licenses
- Inspections (inspectors are to be there before you start slaughter, not lab work only visual inspection)
- NIMBY is not 'really true' as the information is not explained in detail
- Business Plans and Education
- Graduated licensing - Sec 23 of the Act

The group discussed the merits of education regarding issues such as mutations, food borne risks, etc. as opposed to regulation and the possibility of a 'geographical allowance'. In some circumstances when the regulations were impossible the Ministry made changes, however, this was a labour intensive process.

Embedding Food Security in Public Health – What's the Impact? (Claire Gram and Barbara Seed)

In the mid 2000s, food security policy, programs and infrastructure were integrated into Public Health and other areas of government in British Columbia, including the adoption of food security as a Core Public Health program.

Barb presented a policy analysis of this integration completed as her PhD dissertation. It merged findings from forty-eight key informant interviews conducted with government, civil society, and food supply representatives

involved in the initiatives, along with over 55 relevant documents and participant/direct observations. Findings on Public Health's engagement of civil society draws mostly upon the Community Food Action Initiative, as it was the only program that intended to involve food security civil society activists. Claire looked back at an evaluation of the outcomes of 5 years of funding through the Community Food Action Initiative (CFAI) in communities across Vancouver Coastal Health to show what has been accomplished. Overall they found that having secure (if small) funding over an extended period of time (5 years) yielded very strong outcomes for participants across all income levels.

Together the group engaged in a dialogue about the impacts across the province and the opportunities and challenges that have taken place as a result.

Fresh Organic Spelt Pasta Workshop by Foodwisdom (Francesca, Antonietta and Maria Donatella Gesualdi)

In this session co-facilitated by 9 year old Maria Donatella Gesualdi, people of all ages (but mostly kids) learned how to make (and eat!) their own homemade pasta. The workshop was an amazing success.

Closing Plenary

Herb Barbolet, a Network elder gave the closing address. Herb has been an instrumental part of the food movement in BC for many years and played an integral role in the creation of the Farmland Defence League, Community Alternatives Society, Green dollars; co-op restaurant on Granville Island; Fed Up Co-op and the BC Association for Regenerative Agriculture (the first organic certifier in the Lower Mainland). 1990 he started FarmFolk/CityFolk to educate people on how to appreciate the real value of real food. When he left FFCF he helped start Vancouver Food Policy Council and then moved to his current position at Simon Fraser University.

Herb spoke about agriculture and food systems and a search for alternatives to globalization, corporatization and corrupt capitalism noting that the world is in more severe crisis than ever before and most people seem not to notice. Food and agriculture have been fundamentally altered since WWII. In the 1950s all agriculture was organic, and mega food corporations did not exist.

China and other nations are grabbing lands for food and rich countries continue colonization by way of money rather than guns; the wars over oil are also wars over food. The era of cheap food is coming to an end. The latest projections suggest the world will have to produce 70 % more food by 2050 to feed the global population and governments are not taking action.

Robert D. Kaplan says we may also be seeing the beginning of the end of many nation states and re-tribalism. This sort of destabilization has the potential to bring us to the forefront of anarchy. The recent Burnaby conference on the Tragedy of the Market

addressed the loss of the commons and ways to reclaim it from governments and corporations. The commons is more than just physical space – it includes head space – personal vs. collective accountability and responsibility.

Despite these warning signs, Herb is optimistic. In order to survive as a species we must rework how we relate to each other. Naomi Klein said it's our job to create a positive future – people change when there is no other choice, at which point they change according to the messages and models available to them. Our vision, goals and objective must become more focused on systemic change and paradigm shift, so that when reality hits, governments and others will realize change is essential, and “shift happens”.

The good news is the emergence of Occupy, Transition Towns, food hubs, and much more. We need to visualize the dominant global food systems without the existence of arbitrary boundaries. Few of the 99% know or care what a just and sustainable food system is and, because of this, rational approaches to finding solutions will not work.

Despite the corporate agenda to control food, communities have altruistic tendencies. The 100 Mile Diet and “locavore” became important because those concepts won hearts and minds – urban agriculture won't feed the world but it does build community and gets people involved in collaborative work as do the arts and performance events organized around real food, for example.

Herb sees two possible just and sustainable food scenarios:

1. What if FN occupied an area like a watershed and restored the streams and re-introduced wildlife, tree canopy, berries and did value-added crafts and other products (including medicines) and traded them up and down the coast by water or road – the latter being economic development projects in an economy that builds quality of life and doesn't need a lot of money
2. Urban example – food hubs to connect rural and urban – organize production around the seasons, provide processing – farmers bring product in to a network of hubs – McConnell is funding – can get help from the wisdom of many immigrant communities

Kissinger said “control oil and you control nations; control food and you control people” Why should organic producers have to pay to provide healthy food while those who provide poisoned food get subsidies? We are the progressives who believe in peace, order and good government – the radicals are the ones who are buying the world.

Annual General Meeting

The Annual General Meeting heard a report from Dayna Chapman, Board Chair, highlighting the many activities and projects that have been undertaken by the board in the past year. David Parkinson presented reports from the Treasurer and the Communication Committee. Abra Brynne, chair of the Policy Working Group report summarized the work done over the past year, including the Network's participation in

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the consultation process for the federal government's Growing Forward initiative. Dawn Morrison, Chair of the Working Group on Indigenous Food Sovereignty, reported on the status of the Working Group and its activities during the last year.

Outgoing directors Trish Chung, Jen Gamble, Azalea Erin Moen and David Tracey were recognized for their contribution to the Network. Finally, Board elections were held. The 2012/13 Board of Directors are:

- Abra Brynne
- Dayna Chapman
- Linda Geggie
- Arzeena Hamir
- Carol Kergan
- Erika Mundel
- David Parkinson
- Diana Penner
- Cheryl Thomas
- Alanna Clempson
- Francesca Gesualdi
- Jennifer Horn
- Wanda Martin
- Carol Murray
- Rosemary Plummer

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- United Food and Commercial Workers Union
- Agricultural Workers Alliance
- Salt Spring Coffee
- Hospital Employees Union
- Canadian Union of Public Employees
- Interior Health
- Natures Path Organic