



Final Report, Phase 1:
Putting **Food** and **Food**
Policy On the Table

Dear Community Members,

September 19, 2006

Dear Community Members,

On behalf of the CRD Roundtable on the Environment and our partner, the Capital Region Food and Agriculture Initiatives Roundtable (CR-FAIR) please find enclosed a copy of the “Report Putting Food and Food Policy on the Table-Phase I”. This report summarizes the collaborative work that was undertaken in 2005-2006. It reflects the progress and success that can and is being achieved through the combined cooperation and collaboration of a large number of citizens, community organizations, and government agencies.

As a result of this work, we now have a clearer view of the scope, importance, and actions that need to be taken in order to advance local food security in our region. Fifty years ago, farmers on Vancouver Island produced an estimated 85% of the Island’s food supply. Now, Island producers provide only about 10% of the food consumed. This means most of our food travels long distances and uses large amounts of energy to reach local tables. The need for local food security is growing in importance due to such global factors as energy/transportation costs and climate change.

Food security is a prerequisite to healthy eating, and there is a mounting body of evidence that shows that local food is more nutritious and contributes significantly to better human health. As a result, food security is becoming an integral focus of both government and non government organizations in the pursuit of health promotion and disease prevention.

We hope that you find this report informative and that you will consider becoming involved over the next several months to help shape a Food and Health Action plan for implementation in the coming years.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Judy Brownoff". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "J".

Judy Brownoff
Chair, CRD Roundtable on the Environment

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Final Report — Phase 1



Putting Food and Food Policy on the Table

I. Introduction

Local citizens, public health professionals, community organizations, and governments are facing immense challenges in addressing food security in the Capital Regional District (CRD). Food security is the condition in which all people at all times can acquire safe, nutritionally adequate, and personally acceptable foods in a manner that maintains human dignity. Having a sustainable and secure local food and agriculture system is vital to achieving regional food security.

The Facts:

- ▶ There is only a three-day supply of fresh food in our food stores
- ▶ Food travels 2,000 km from field to plate, incurring significant fuel and environmental costs and losing nutritional value
- ▶ Economic pressures are forcing arable land in the region out of agricultural production and we are losing our food resources
- ▶ The average age of farmers is 58, they are leaving farming faster than they are being replaced.
- ▶ Global warming creates a great deal of uncertainty for food production worldwide due to a rise in sea levels, droughts, and changing rainfall patterns and water availability.
- ▶ Our food system is energy intensive, our ability to produce, process, and distribute food is limited by quantity, availability, and price of various energy sources.

To address these challenges and to advance food security and healthy living in the Capital Region, the Capital Region Food and Agriculture Initiatives Roundtable (CR-FAIR) and the CRD Roundtable on the Environment Healthy Communities Sub-Committee (RTE HCSC) have partnered to develop a regional vision, framework and plan of action.

The Healthy Communities framework is based on the belief that the major determinants of health are shaped by environmental, social, economic, political, and cultural conditions, and the behaviors they affect, rather than in the provision of health care. The cornerstones of the Healthy Communities movement are community involvement, political commitment, inter-sectoral partnerships, and healthy public policy. The focus of Phase 1 has been food security.

CR-FAIR and the RTE HCSC hosted two working sessions called “Putting Food and Food Policy on the Table” on March 6, and March 13, 2006 to discuss building food security in the Capital Region and to identify key actions that could be taken both at the community and local government levels. The following summarizes the dialogue generated by questions passed to working groups at both the community and governance working sessions.

Who are CR-FAIR and RTE HCSC?

CR-FAIR is a consortium of representatives from local food producers, food banks, community groups, community kitchens, food retailers, community gardens, nutritionists and other health professionals, the hospitality industry, unions, educators and government. Their mission is to increase knowledge and bring about positive change in the food and agriculture system within BC’s Capital Region by expanding awareness and communication, bringing people together, supporting program initiatives, and promoting long-term change. Their vision is a “sustainable and secure local food and agriculture system that provides safe sufficient culturally accepted nutritious food accessible to everyone in the Capital Region through dignified means”.

The RTE HCSC consists of members from diverse backgrounds drawn from the community as well as from various governmental agencies. Their goal is to develop a Healthy Communities decision making framework for the RTE, with food security as their initial focus. This will be done through partnerships with CR-FAIR, VIHA, NGO’s, government, First Nations, businesses and institutions.

II. Opportunities and Challenges

Land

In the Capital Region there is excellent potential to grow food due to available and protected land, excellent climate, and a good supply of quality water. Yet, these lands are irreplaceable and limited in supply. Existing land is also underutilized for agriculture, unaffordable for many farmers to purchase, under constant development pressure, and continues to be excluded from the Agriculture Land Reserve.

Farming

There is a vibrant and talented farming community, as well as young people who want to farm, and considerable training and support programs for new farmers. However, farmers and those who wishing to enter the profession do not have access to land for farming due to availability and cost, and often farming does not generate a sufficient income.

Food processing and distribution infrastructure for small to medium scale food and farm operations

Some participants expressed that due to regulatory regimes put in place by higher levels of government, trust





has been replaced by regulation and as a result smaller, local operations are squeezed out. Our ability to respond creatively at the community and government level is diminished. There were especially pressing concerns about the introduction of the Meat Enhancement Strategy and its consequences for on-island meat processing facilities.

Consumer market for local high quality foods

Interest in local food is growing due to health, environmental, and cultural interest, as well as culinary tourism. However, local food producers have a difficult time competing within a heavily subsidized global “cheap” food economy. There is still a disconnection between our food buying choices, what we are eating, and effects on our health, our communities and our environment. There is still a lack of research and education related to the economic, social and environmental benefits of eating locally produced foods, and the adverse affect of poverty and low income levels on accessibility to healthy, nutritious food.

Access to adequate and healthy foods

Access to adequate healthy food is tied to income levels. This greatly affects both those on income assistance and the working poor. Accessibility is also affected by the proximity of grocery stores and markets to where people live, and by the availability of nutritious foods at those locations.

Food, health, public policy, and decision making

Governments at various levels are adopting policies in regards to healthy living and food security.

Provincial:

- ▶ ActNow (increase the number of British Columbians consuming at least 5-10 fruits and vegetables a day by 20 percent)
- ▶ Ministry of Health now includes food security as one of its Core Functions

Regional and Local:

- ▶ Vancouver Island Health Authority Community Food Action Initiative funds and supports food planning and local food security.
- ▶ The RTE HCSC is currently focusing on food security and has partnered with CR-FAIR to better link com-

munity needs with municipal and regional decision making.

- ▶ CR-FAIR created a draft Regional Food Charter in 2004 and has presented it to municipalities for their input and support. The municipalities of Victoria, Saanich, and Metchosin were supportive of the idea and Central Saanich adopted the Food Charter in principle.
- ▶ CR-FAIR delivered their recommendations to the Regional Development Planning Advisory Committee (DPAC) and CRD Roundtable on the Environment (RTE), and hosted public forums on the concept.

However, there is a lack of resources for a coordinated approach within the CRD (e.g. need to make presentations to each municipality and electoral district in the CRD, no centralized decision-making, and confused and mixed messaging as far as the public is concerned). In addition, much of the decision making that affects local food systems is done at the provincial and federal level, leaving local decision makers with little control over big issues.

III. Actions

Land and infrastructure

In order to increase consumption of local food and meet the demands of a growing population, participants suggested that we not only need to grow more food, but we need the infrastructure to store, process and distribute it.

Suggested actions:

- ▶ Prohibit removal of agriculture land from ALR
- ▶ Develop official community plan in regards to government land use and growth strategies and urban containment boundaries. The plan should clearly identify agricultural land and local food production/processing methods.
- ▶ Develop demonstration development project where cluster housing protects farmland and supports need for more housing
- ▶ Support farmer training programs and improve farmers' opportunities to access farm land
- ▶ Develop/support Community Abattoirs (that will comply with changes in regulations to the Meat Enhancement Strategy)
- ▶ Develop a local wholesale operation that will buy

from small farms and processors to better meet the needs of the retail sector.

- ▶ Develop and implement incentives to encourage farmers to protect biodiversity and water supplies.

Urban food production

Urban food production was consistently identified as a way to enhance our ability to produce food and improve access to fruits and vegetables for all, including people living on low income.

Suggested actions:

- ▶ Make land and infrastructure available for community and rooftop gardens by improving accessibility of institutional and municipal land, developing supportive land use and community gardening policies, and building codes as well as criteria for new development applications.
- ▶ Bring community garden awareness/support to people (e.g. via a mobile teaching and mobilization unit).

Continue to build access

Income levels often determine our ability to access a healthy diet. With over 50,000 people living in poverty in the Capital Region there is a need to increase the

availability of local healthy food for people living on low income.

Suggested actions:

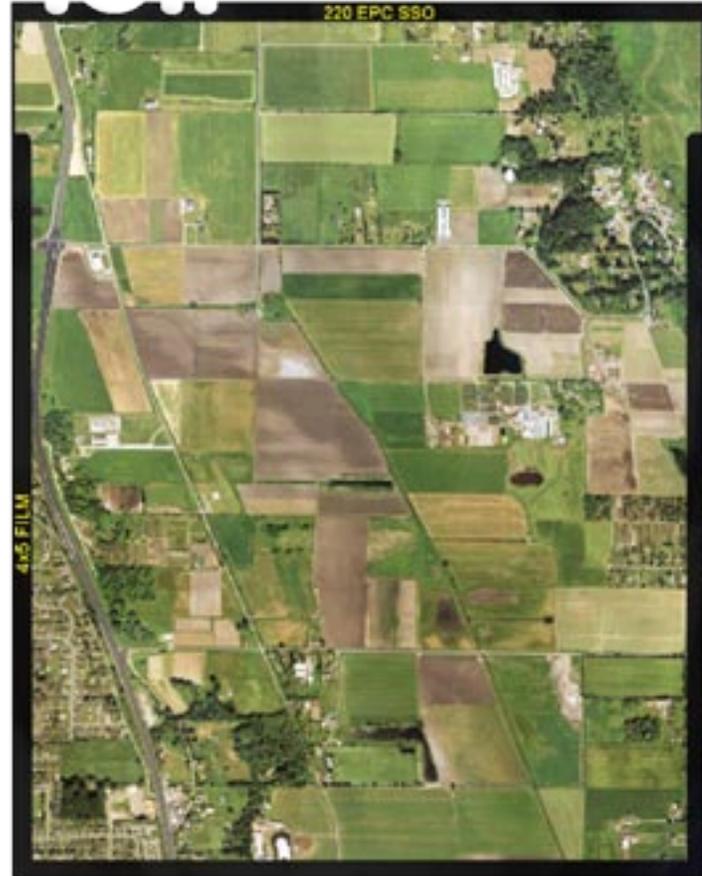
- ▶ Build infrastructure for healthy food initiatives
- ▶ Build on already existing community programs such as the Good Food Box, Community Gardens, and the Fruit Tree Project
- ▶ Move beyond looking at “how do we get more food into food banks” to pursuing economic and social strategies that not only promote secure housing, but also adequate access to healthy food (keeping in mind social assistance rates and minimum wage).
- ▶ Build the capacity of the community to access healthy foods (e.g. strengthening communities’ ability to grow, buy, and prepare healthy foods).

Education/Awareness

The need for education on many levels was identified by all groups. This includes educating the consumer on why buying local is important (health, environmental, economic, social and cultural), as well as what is available and where.

Suggested actions:

- ▶ Support and strengthen school programs



- ▶ Hands-on practical education via farmers markets, farm tours, agritourism, demo sites etc.
- ▶ Education program for those who sell and serve food (supermarket and restaurant staff)
- ▶ Education for decision makers about agriculture and food system
- ▶ Develop or use a local brand that people can readily identify as from Vancouver Island

Develop procurement policies for local food

With the goal of producing more local food institutions and local government should create policies that give preference to buying local product where and when available.

Develop local food policy and regional food action plan

Forum participants consistently recommended that work continue on a regional action plan and regional food charter/policy, and that this work be done collaboratively by individuals, organizations, institutions and government. The idea for an interdisciplinary food council was also put forward.

Work collaboratively with local decision makers

Suggestions were made by municipal councillors on ways community groups could work more effectively with local decision makers.

Suggested actions:

- ▶ Continue the dialogue
- ▶ Continue to educate each other, and make government aware of information and resources available in the community.
- ▶ Funnel comprehensive information to decision makers in a more unified vision e.g. a food action plan
- ▶ To better learn the language of decision making and the way government decisions are made so we can understand the tools we have available to us.



IV. Next Steps (Phase II 2006/07)

A healthy city has been defined as one that is “*continually creating and improving those physical and social environments and expanding those community resources that enable people to mutually support each other in performing all the functions of life and in developing to their maximum potential*”.

This idea is the basis from which our work and vision on food security springs. That is, a city, a region seeking to plan and work together in proactive and positive ways to advance our collective vision and reality of regional food security.

CR-FAIR and RTE HCSC will continue to work collaboratively to develop a vision, framework and Food and Health Action Plan for the Capital Region. In order to address the food system holistically and for the plan to resonate with and meet the needs of diverse sectors several overlying objectives and planned activities have been identified for the 2006/2007:

Objectives

1. To continue to build a wider circle of community voices and decision makers into all aspects of a Food and Health Action Plan
2. To support and interconnect related community



based, government, and private sector initiatives through the process

3. To better link community needs and initiatives with local decision making and build supportive governance frameworks.

Activities 2006/07

1. Strategic working sessions

Project champions, CR-FAIR and RTE HCSC members will form strategic delegations to meet with various organizations, government bodies and representatives, individuals, the private sector, institutions and community groups to explore and prioritize their specific areas of influence and identify actions related to:

- a) Maintaining and expanding food producing land, farming and infrastructure.
- b) Increasing urban food production.
- c) Increasing access to and affordability of healthy foods.
- d) Increasing awareness and knowledge about our local food system and methods to grow and prepare healthy diets.
- e) Advocating for the development of institutional

procurement policies for local food (institutional and local government policies that give preference to buying local product where and when available).

The information gleaned from the strategic working sessions will be used to formulate needs, assets and actions for the Food and Health Action Plan.

2. Collate information gathered to develop strategic Food and Health Action Plan

Information will be collected during the summer and fall 2006 and collated to create a Food & Health Action Plan. This Plan will lay out the background issues, strategic actions, proposed outline and outcomes for the Plan. The Plan will then be taken forward for endorsement and support for the next stage of implementation.

3. Food charter for the CRD

Over the past two years CR-FAIR has developed a proposed "Capital Region Food Charter." This has been done through public consultation as well as meetings with local groups, networks and government representatives and bodies. The purpose of the Food Charter is to provide an overall vision to guide work done in food security at the community,

Tough Decisions



institutional and government levels.

CR-FAIR and the RTE HCSC will work in conjunction to finalize and promote the Capital Region Food Charter to local governments. We will conduct research to assist in targeting the Food Charter to diverse backgrounds, build consensus and gain written support for the Charter through presentations to regional governments.

4. **Regional Food Policy Council**

CR-FAIR and the RTE HCSC will work together to research and explore structural arrangements for a regional food policy advisory or council.

5. **Strengthen food systems network in BC's Capital region**

CR-FAIR will, through a series of meetings, conduct internal strategic work to identify how best to support and advocate for the wide range of community food security groups and projects working in the Capital Region.

6. **Support related community based, government, and private sector initiatives through the Planning process**

As a regional, multi-sectoral partnership, CR-FAIR and RTE HCSC will support the work of individual local food actions by sharing information with and about them across the region, encouraging connections amongst projects, tracking successes related to food security, and communicating successes and gaps to decision-makers. The first step will be to make information on food security available on CRD and Community Council websites.

7. **Regional Forum**

A Regional Celebration forum will be held in February 2007 to report back on progress, celebrate accomplishments, and to jointly develop a Food and Health Action implementation plan for the region.

We look forward to your participation.

V. Acknowledgements

This report is published by the Capital Regional District (CRD) Roundtable on the Environment. A great deal of hard work and public consultations went into this report through the partnership of the Roundtable's Healthy Communities Subcommittee (HCSC) and the Capital Region Food and Agriculture Initiatives Roundtable (CR-FAIR) a program of the Community Council.

Members of the Healthy Communities Subcommittee (HCSC) include:

Mike Romaine (Subcommittee Chair)
 Dean Fortin, City of Victoria Councillor
 Sonya Chandler, City of Victoria Councillor
 Linda Adams, Islands Trust
 Christine Bender, Vancouver Island Healthy Authority
 Kevin Brown, consulting biologist
 Lee Fuge, CR-FAIR
 Nancy Falconer, Canadian Cancer Society
 Tracy Cullen, Vancouver Island Healthy Authority
 Dean Rebneris, market gardener
 John Pendray, farmer

Member Organizations of CR-FAIR include:

BC Government Employees' Union
 Canadian Cancer Society BC & Yukon Region

Certified Organic Associations of British Columbia
Growing Green Project
 Healthy Communities Sub-Committee
 Inner City Aboriginal Society
 LifeCycles Project Society
 Ministry of Agriculture and Land
 Small Scale Food Processors' Association
 The Land Conservancy of BC
 Vancouver Island Health Authority
 Vancouver Island Public Interest Research Group

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Contacts

The successful implementation of a Food and Health Action Plan requires the involvement of all sectors of our community. We look forward to your participation.

Further information on this Food Security project, including ways to be involved, can be obtained from either of the following web sites and contacts.

Roundtable on the Environment

www.crd.bc.ca/rte

telephone: CRD Hotline 360-3030

E-mail: hotline@crd.bc.ca

The Community Social Planning Council of Greater Victoria

www.communitycouncil.ca

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