

Eating Cowichan, one bite at a time

Every year, thousands of tourists flock to the Cowichan Valley for a taste (literally) of the country life.



Boasting over 600 farms, North America's first Cittaslow slow food Community (Cowichan Bay) and one of BC's largest farmer's markets, the Valley is a mecca for food enthusiasts. This fact has not gone unnoticed. Last summer Gourmet Magazine called the Cowichan Valley, "the Provence of Canada".

But our paradise is not without its problems. Despite having deep historical roots in agriculture, a passion for good food and a growing reputation as a major agritourism destination in BC, the Cowichan Valley does, like so many other communities exist in a state of food *insecurity*. Over the years, the total amount of land farmed has shrunk, communities have increased their reliance on food imports and use of food banks and meal programs is on the rise. It is said that if the ferry service ever shut down, Vancouver Island grocery stores

would have only a three day's supply of fresh food.

These are heavy clouds that hang over our heads, but they serve as powerful reminders of the importance of community initiatives, such as those undertaken by Cowichan Green Community to address these issues.

Founded in 2001, originally as an environmental outreach project, Cowichan Green Community (CGC) has blossomed into a hub for food security and sustainability initiatives in the Valley. Among its many achievements to-date are the recently completed [Cowichan Food Charter](#). With over 250 individual signatories so far and more than 20 groups, businesses and governing bodies that have signed on, the Food Charter is a statement of values and principles to guide the formation of community food policy. In essence, it is a promise to consider the best interests of both food eaters and growers, when making decisions that affect the future of food in the Cowichan Valley.

CGC is also spearheading the [Cowichan Local Food Map](#), a project that will better connect consumers



In this photo: CGC's new greenhouse at Warmland House Community Garden

with local food producers by providing, among other things, a tourist-friendly print map directing customers to where this food is grown and sold. [Warmland House Community Garden](#) is another CGC project receiving a lot of attention these days. Located on the grounds of the newly built Warmland House shelter facility, this community garden is designed to provide fresh, healthy and locally grown produce for residents and the surrounding community, as well as bridge the gap between those in need of emergency housing and other Valley residents.

But this is just the tip of the iceberg. From its office at 181 Station Street, Cowichan Green Community is hatching all kinds of new ideas, such as its newest

initiative Ceres Edible Landscaping. Set up as a social enterprise business, Ceres will provide consulting, design and building services for anyone interested in converting their property into their own mini produce department, full of fresh and alive, ready-to-eat goods. Building on the momentum of recent successes and existing projects such as [FruitSave](#), an initiative that organizes volunteers to harvest urban fruit trees and share the fruit with the community, CGC is helping to green the way as our community moves through 2010 and beyond.

So what might Cowichan look like in 10, 20, 100 years? Hopefully and with the help of CGC, it will be ever more the local food utopia it holds the promise to be. Every bite counts and makes all the difference as we strive to make Cowichan a vibrant and healthy local food community.

For more information about Cowichan Green Community and our programs, please call 250.748.8506, visit www.cowichangreencommunity.org, or stop by our office at 181 Station St, Duncan.

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In this photo: a CGC volunteer picks plums for FruitSave