

FEASTING FOR CHANGE: RECONNECTING TO FOOD, LAND AND CULTURE

Submitted by Fiona Devereaux

The Feasting for Change Project is a broadly representative group composed of interested parties who are working collaboratively to support Aboriginal Communities in South Vancouver Island to enhance their food sovereignty.

Food Sovereignty is the state of being in which ‘all community residents obtain a safe, culturally acceptable, nutritionally adequate diet through a sustainable food system that maximizes community self reliance and social justice.’ Hamm and Bellows 2002

The purpose of the Feasting for Change: Reconnecting to Food, Land and Culture Project is to bring Aboriginal Peoples in South Vancouver Island together around Traditional Food Feasts to discuss food security and food sovereignty in their communities. The goal is to identify community-specific issues around food and inspire action to address these issues.

Below are some examples of how this program has evolved.

Example 1: *The Aboriginal Health Diabetes team makes their way to the door of one of the local Elders who has diabetes. As he opens the door he softly gestures to the team as he points out past the fields to the bay in front of his house. He says, “You see this? When I was growing up, this was my grocery store.” They pause to listen as he passionately tells of a time “before diabetes...when diabetes prevention was woven into the fabric of everyday life.” He talks about the challenge of managing this disease and how it continues to affect so many people in his community.*

Not surprisingly, this was not the first time the team had heard such a story - a story about a time when activity and healthy living was a part of the Aboriginal culture. Over the years of visiting Aboriginal people in their homes, attending sharing circles, and listening to their stories, they began to identify a common theme—the connection between food, culture, and healthy living. What they saw was the hope that this way of life could be revitalized, and in doing so, the epidemic of diabetes could be brought under control.

Example 2: *In May (2007) invited representatives from each First Nation took part in a Feast to be held at the T’Sou-ke First Nation. They shared crab, halibut and other traditional foods as they came together to discuss what could be done to inspire people to take charge of their health, culture, and community. The T’Sou-ke hall was packed with families and the energy was palpable—people were excited and hopeful for a healthier, more vibrant future. Elders and young-ones alike shared their stories and ideas about what it would take to “bring people together” and “get back to the basics” by utilizing traditional knowledge and expertise within the community. As the ideas percolated it was clear that the knowledge to accomplish this already exists. What emerged from this gathering was the innovative idea of having these Feasts in each community and inviting select people from other communities.*

Example 3: On July 6th and 9th (2007) the Pauquachin First Nation hosted the 2nd community event. A plant/berry gathering day and a huge community feast were the focus. People shared stories and skills throughout the two days. People learned how to identify common berries and plants, how to harvest and dig for clams, how to cut and prepare fish and how to cook fish heads. People ages 1-90 years shared fish heads, baked fish, clam chowder, fresh berry crumble and a traditional tea made by a local Elder.

The Pauquachin Feast also sparked some positive energy for change. This community is planning to serve more traditional foods at their weekly community lunches, have planned a community fish cleaning and canning day, and have organized some berry picking events to store up for the winter.

Example 4: On Aug 24th the Tsawout Community hosted an amazing Seafood Festival showcasing a traditional pit cook, crab and salmon feast, sea urchins and a salmon ceremony. The festival organizers wanted to highlight and showcase the traditional food practices to help encourage community members to use their traditional land and ocean.

Examples 5: On Oct 26th and Oct 27th the Songhees community hosted a feast at the Pauquachin Nation. This event was a collaboration with UVic and Dr. Nancy Turner. On the Friday Nancy took her 60 students and other interested people out to T'Sou-ke to collect materials for the pit cook, plant identification and weaving activities. On the Saturday Cheryl Bryce and Nancy shared their knowledge with her 60 UVic students and the 50 community members for a daylong event of learning, feasting and friendship. We feasted on crab and halibut donated by T'Sou-ke Nation, salmon from the Songhees Health Counselor Frank George, smoked salmon caught through gaffing at Goldstream, salmon chowder make by Joan Henry and delicious variety of veggies cooked in the pit that were donated by UVic.

Examples 6: On January 25th and 28th the T'Sou-ke Nation and Pauquachin Nation hosted feasts in honour of invited guest Dawn Morrison of the Secwepemc Territory. Dawn is the coordinator of the Working Group on Indigenous Food Sovereignty in BC. Dawn has been asked by the Public Health Association of BC to travel to many Aboriginal communities in BC to provide information around food sovereignty and find out what are the concerns and hopes around food. The information from these meetings will be summarized in a report. This goal of this report is to document the concerns of the communities, raise the awareness of decision makers and the highlight the great THREAT to the food supply. The report will also share the ideas, plans and initiatives for change.

Upcoming Feasts and Events are planned for Pacheedaht, Scianew and the Urban Community.

The Pacheedaht, Pauquachin and Scianew communities are planning to have monthly gathering activities. Below is what the Scianew community has planned:

- April - Initial feast to bring community together
- May - Clam digging
- June – Sea urchins and other sea life gathering and demonstration
- July – Orchard revitalization

August – Berry picking and preserving
September - Canning fruit and fish

We have received funding for our project through Vancity and greatly thank them for their support. The expected outcomes of this project are many, below are the main ones:

- Increased Community Capacity Building
- Knowledge Translation from Elders to Youth, and between Communities.
- Cultural Pride and Enhanced Self Esteem
- Sustained Energy, Ideas and Knowledge to propel further projects.
- Modelling to other communities.

To join our group or for more information please contact:

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