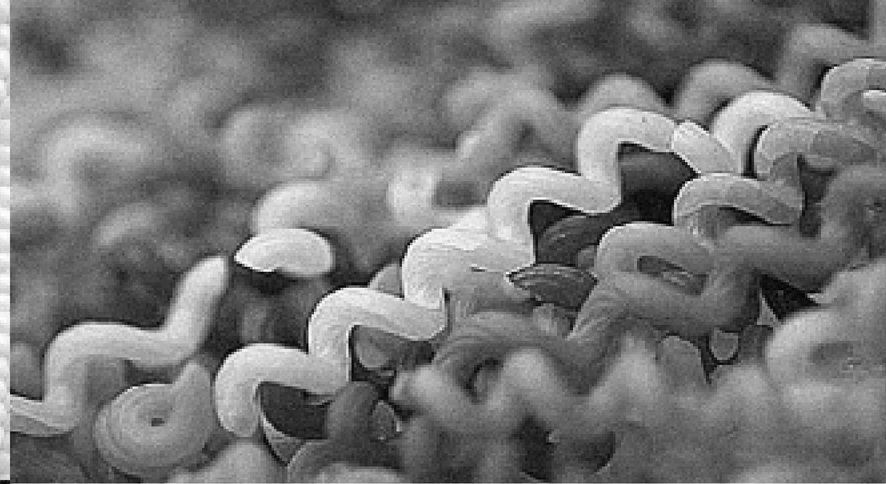

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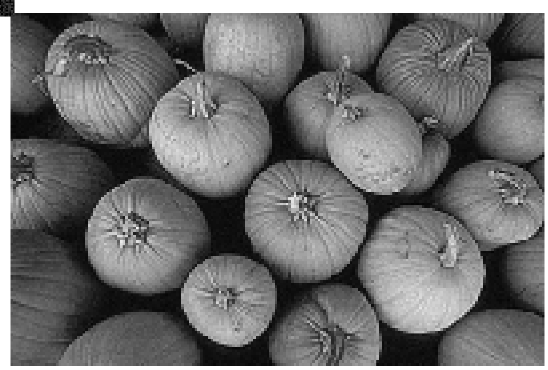

a baseline assessment of

food security

in British Columbia's Capital Region

by Emily MacNair

for the Capital Region Food & Agricultural Initiatives Roundtable (CR-FAIR)

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Small Scale Food Processor Association
Vancouver Island Health Authority

CR-FAIR's 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.

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This baseline assessment examines the state of food security in British Columbia's Capital Region as of January 2004. Food security exists when there is universal access to food that is healthful, nutritious, safe, and culturally acceptable. In addition, in a food-secure community, the growing, processing and distribution of food is regionally-based, socially just and environmentally sustainable.

While many food security initiatives tend to focus on either hunger or food production, this assessment bridges the spectrum of food issues, encouraging a holistic approach to the food system.While the work of this assessment is preliminary, it provides clarity about the current strengths and weaknesses of the Capital Region's food system.

Indicators are used to evaluate the Capital Region's food security assets and challenges within three different areas of the food system:

- Community food production resources
- The food distribution network
- Individual and household food security

The assessment provides baseline information that is based on both quantitative and qualitative data. At the end of each of the three sections, there is a summary table outlining the indicators and their status within our Region. The findings for each section are summarized below.

Part 1
Community Food Production Resources

The food production resources in the Capital Region include a rich diversity of farming operations, many of which are providing high quality fresh foods to local people. The most pressing concern in relation to food security is the need to increase the amount of food being grown within the Region and on Vancouver Island. There is a considerable quantity of agricultural land not under cultivation and there are not enough professional farmers (particularly young farmers).

Ensuring that agricultural land is not lost to development and that farmers can afford land, either through purchase or leasing arrangements, is paramount. Currently it is citizen and nonprofit efforts that are making the difference in these areas – governments are lagging behind in taking responsibility for a consistent approach to protecting farmland.

Another challenge lies with the prices of imported food. Considerable marketing and consciousness-raising is required for consumers to recognize the real costs of sustainable food production. The increased production of vegetables over the past decade shows that producers within the Region recognize the potential to market locally grown produce.

There are, however, many challenges facing farmers on Vancouver Island and the Gulf Islands. More infrastructural support is required for meat and poultry producers – both with respect to processing and regulations.

Part 2
Capital Region Food Distribution Network

The increasing diversity of retail distribution resources in the Region is a sign of growing consumer awareness about the superior quality of foods being produced locally. Distribution options such as farm gate sales, farmers' markets and box programs ensure that farmers engaged in sustainable (and labour intensive) practices can market their products for a fair price. These distribution resources also provide incubators for new small scale producers, ensuring that they can continue to participate in the market.

Unfortunately, the small retail distribution resources are not accessible to the majority of consumers who continue to shop at large grocery stores and are not exposed to locally produced foods. The limited local food production described in Part 1 is a significant part of the problem.

Some retailers argue that the limited availability of local food in grocery stores is due to consumers' unwillingness to pay the higher prices required to support local producers. Evidence to the contrary may be found in the tremendous popularity of organic foods (which involve a considerable premium) and in the aforementioned success of sales of local foods through other means.

Nonetheless increased marketing and education about the importance of local food is a key factor in altering the food system. So long as the issues around local food (particularly pricing) remain invisible to the average consumer, there will not be a critical mass of public concern about the food system. At the same time, without access to local foods, consumers simply cannot vote with their dollars. Increasing local production is vital to increasing the amount of local food flowing through retail outlets.

For low-income citizens, many of the distribution resources discussed are not an option for accessing food. For these consumers, supplemental nutrition and community food programs can be the only means for avoiding charitable food distribution. Cutbacks to these programs remove constructive community-based solutions to hunger and malnourishment.

Part 3
Individual and Household Food Security

An assessment of household and individual food security reveals that thousands of people throughout the Capital Region are currently unable to meet their basic nutritional needs. The people experiencing food insecurity include working adults, unemployed and underemployed adults, youth, children and senior citizens.

Individuals and families who are living on low income are far more likely to experience food insecurity, particularly when faced with the Region's high costs of housing and transportation. In light of these challenges, ensuring universal and sustainable food access appears a lofty goal. However, the need for a new approach is becoming increasingly evident.

This approach must address hunger by means that are far-sighted, collaborative and creative – including partners from government, health and social services, non-governmental organizations, community groups and the private sector. Charitable and emergency food services do not provide an adequate resolution to the challenges of food insecurity.

The rapid growth of emergency food services in the Region – both in terms of the number of agencies providing these services and the number of people requiring assistance – reflects a hunger problem that is increasing in severity. Shrinking budgets and continuous cutbacks are damaging the ability of social and health programs to meet the needs of those who are hungry.

Action Recommendations

Because this report is just one step in moving toward a food-secure Region, the final recommendations are action-oriented. Based on the findings of the assessment, the recommendations provide priorities for action for individuals, community organizations and governments throughout the Region.

While many food security initiatives tend to focus on either hunger, or food production, this baseline assessment bridges the spectrum of food issues, encouraging a holistic approach to the food system.[i] While the work of this assessment is preliminary, it provides clarity about the current strengths and weaknesses of the Capital Region's food system.

The Capital Region's food security assets and challenges are unique in a number of respects. Its island geography means that dependence upon imported food leaves communities particularly vulnerable to a disruption in food supply. Any disruption of transport routes – an unexpected stoppage of transit services, a natural disaster or a temporary closure of the border with the United States – would quickly lead to food shortages for the residents of Vancouver Island and the Gulf Islands.

Compared with many urban areas in North America, the Capital Region has a small population (325,754) and high quality agricultural land in close proximity. However, the Region's rapid loss of agricultural land to uncontained sprawl is a challenge shared with many cities. With thirteen municipalities and three electoral areas, intergovernmental and cooperative approaches are vital to achieving food security within the Capital Region.

Municipalities and community groups across North America (most recently the City of Vancouver) have placed food security on their agendas, building partnerships between sectors and developing strategic approaches to resolving the challenges of creating food secure communities. It is the hope of CR-FAIR that this assessment will provide the impetus to begin a similar broad-based initiative in the Capital Region.

Method

Although this assessment does not involve new research data, many sources of existing documentation and data are utilized including:

- Statistics Canada, Census and Census of Agriculture
- Community Social Planning Council, CR-FAIR and other non-profit agencies
- Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries
- Capital Regional District Planning Services
- Vancouver Island Health Authority and dietician associations
- Vancouver Island Agri-Food Trust

In addition, informal interviews have been conducted with individuals involved in various aspects of the food system including farmers, organizers of food access programs and food distributors.

Report structure

The assessment follows the food system through three stages: production, distribution and access. Baseline information is provided for each stage using indicators and statistical measurements. Qualitative data is also used to establish the baseline, particularly for the distribution network which remains a relatively under-researched area.

Part 1 focuses on community food production resources, primarily agriculture. Indicators involve farms and farmers, as well as major agricultural products. More abstract indicators, such as agricultural education opportunities are included, as well as supplementary production resources such as community and backyard gardens. Due to constraints in the scope of the report, some important elements of local food production, such as the fisheries industry and food processing are not included.

The distribution network is discussed in some detail in Part 2. Various methods of distribution including retail, restaurants and community food programs are profiled. Currently there is limited data available for examining how the distribution network influences food security. As a result, the evaluation is focused on the assets and challenges for different modes of distribution.

The final part of the report evaluates household and individual food security, primarily focused on the presence of hunger and malnutrition in the Capital Region. The evaluation of household food security is based on secondary indicators such as poverty, access to emergency food resources and challenges meeting basic needs.

i See Glossary for full definitions of food system and food security.

Part 1: Community Food Production Resources

All aspects of food security are dependent upon sufficient local production of nutritious food. While fifty years ago farmers on Vancouver Island produced an estimated 85% of the Island's food supply, today "Island producers provide about 10% of the food consumed."[1] While agriculture is the second largest primary industry in British Columbia, the majority of the employment and income in this sector are concentrated in the Lower Mainland and Thompson-Okanagan.[2]

In addition to experiencing a reduction in agricultural production, Vancouver Island communities are also losing their farmland to development at a rapid rate. Yet southern Vancouver Island and the Gulf Islands have the ideal climate for agriculture and tourists are increasingly drawn to the area to enjoy its culinary and agricultural delights.[ii] Encouraging the agricultural sector is one of the primary recommendations of the recently released Economic Blueprint – an evaluation of the economic potential of the Capital Region.[3]

A comprehensive analysis of local food production resources requires examination of all areas of food production; it is beyond the scope of this report to do justice to this ambitious task.[iii] Therefore, acknowledging the necessity of further studies, this assessment of production focuses on farm-based agriculture.

In addition to agriculture, resources for food production include other types of food production such as backyard and community gardens. It is difficult to measure these food resources because no data has been collected. Due to the ideal growing climate, household food production is likely relatively high in this Region. These efforts are complimentary to local agriculture because they create educated (and selective) consumers. Household food production also has tremendous potential to assist low-income people to meet their nutritional needs.

The geographic boundaries for community food resources are not rigid. In order to feed the population of the Capital Region, it would clearly be necessary to extend the "foodshed" beyond Regional boundaries.[iv] In striving for food security, the agricultural support for the Region would include the rich agricultural resources of southern Vancouver Island and the Gulf Islands, and potentially the rest of the Island.

The assessment of production resources will utilize statistical indicators to develop a baseline for the health of the production system within the Capital Region. Statistics Canada's Census of Agriculture provides the backbone of quantitative information.

The following indicators provide the structure for the evaluation of community food production resources:

- Number of farms
- Availability of agricultural land
- Farming employment and income
- Farmers
- Overall trends in production
- Community and backyard gardens
- Agricultural education
- Agri-food organizations and programs

ii Two books have recently been published to celebrate the food of the Islands. Rosemary Neering's *Eating Up Vancouver Island* (Whitecap Books: 2003) and Elizabeth Levinson's *An Edible Journey* (Touchwood Editions: 2003).

iii While the fisheries and food processing are clearly significant aspects of the food system, they are not discussed within this report.

iv Please see the Glossary for a definition of foodshed.

Why does local food production matter?

There is much debate about what qualifies as a sustainable food source. While this is a complex issue, there are two general areas of concern. The first is *where* food is produced and the second is *how* it is produced. While both of these questions are fundamental to any food security assessment, this report focuses heavily on *where* our food comes from.

> "Several studies have shown that the average distance food travels from farm to plate is 1,500 miles. In a week-long (or more) delay from harvest to dinner plate, sugars turn to starches, plant cells shrink, and produce loses its vitality."
>
> – 10 Reasons to Buy Local Food, Minnesota Food Association

With so much of the food supply of the Islands imported from elsewhere, the first and most significant challenge to the Region's food security is increasing the amount of food that is grown and processed close to home.[4]

Local food is fresher and more nutritious. Beyond the potential to be cut off from an imported food supply, one of the primary reasons to emphasize local food production is food quality. Fresh fruit and vegetables lose their nutritional value over time. "As soon as a vegetable is harvested, chemical changes begin. Growth stops, but enzymes continue to act, altering nutrient content along with texture and taste."[5] While post-harvest conditions do matter, within 24 hours of picking, produce such as spinach and asparagus lose 50% of its vitamin C content. Imported foods are much more likely to have been harvested, slaughtered or processed days (or weeks) before purchase.

Local food gives consumers more confidence in their food choices. It is increasingly difficult for consumers to trace food to its origins or to access important information about growing/processing conditions. As a result of the "mad cow" scare, the health impacts of production practices have become particularly prominent with regards to meat. However, changes in large scale commercial operations are slow and regulations constrain producers shifting away from conventional practices. The popularity of free range and organic products points to consumer support for new approaches.

Local food can help to reduce environmental damage and depletion. In addition to all of the energy inputs of production and processing, the global food system requires immense amounts of energy (fossil fuels) to "move agricultural products from field to table."[6] With foods traveling long distances, every mouthful represents extra pollutants and extra resources used on packaging. On the positive side, local farming can be highly compatible with biodiversity and green-space preservation goals. The Land Conservancy's Partners in Conservation project is evidence of these links.

Yet imported foods have marketplace advantages, the greatest of which is lower prices. The price differential has everything to do with production practices – the large scale production, the low quality ingredients, the use of preservatives and the poorly paid labour. Sustainable production practices mean a more time and labour-intensive farming operation. Yet Canadians have become so accustomed to paying a minimal amount for food that "farmers now spend 86 cents in operating expenses for every dollar they make from receipts of agricultural products, up from 83 cents in 1995."[7] In order for local farming to thrive, consumers must pay a price that is reflective of the costs of production – the real cost of food.

Seasonality of food and climatic limitations are other challenges in altering dependence upon imports. Popular produce items such as bananas and citrus fruits do not grow in this climate zone. In addition, there is a very limited diversity (and currently supply) of locally produced foods in the winter. Consumers have become accustomed to accessing all types of food at all times. To move towards food security, consumer expectations must shift and the diversity of local products must increase.

Number of farms

According to a 1999 BC Assessment survey, there are about 3,900 farms on Vancouver Island and the Gulf Islands.[8] The primary agricultural production and processing areas are the Cowichan Valley, the Comox

Valley, Port Alberni, the Saanich Peninsula and the Gulf Islands. The Capital Region remains a substantial contributor to Island agriculture with approximately 974 farms.

Table A

Total farms and farm area (in acres) in the Capital Region 1991 – 2001[9]

(*= number of farms reporting)

Year	Total farms	Total area of farms	Land in crops
1991	891	34, 718	7,888 (569*)
2001	974	38, 322	12,966 (676*)

Between 1991 and 2001, the number of farms increased by more than 80. During the same time period there was minimal change in the average size of farming operations. Relatively small farms characterize the Capital Region's agricultural base. In 2000, 468 farms reported a land base of less than 10 acres and 850 farms were less than 70 acres. Only 61 farms were utilizing a land base of more than 180 acres.

Availability of agricultural land

The most straightforward way to measure agricultural land is to use the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR). With a few exceptions, the majority of viable agricultural land on Vancouver Island and the Gulf Islands is located within the ALR. According to the BC Assessment Authority, only about half of this (ALR) land is currently being utilized for agriculture.[11]

The ALR land in the Capital Region is concentrated within a few municipalities. The Gulf Islands contain by far the largest proportion of ALR land in the Capital Region – close to 6,000 hectares and almost 45% of the total.[12] Central Saanich contains about 19% of the ALR land, about 2,400 hectares. Saanich, Sooke and North Saanich each have around 10% of the Region's agricultural land.

Overall, the agricultural land on Vancouver Island is disappearing rapidly. Between 1974 and 1999, 25,000 hectares of farmland were excluded and 8,000 hectares included, for a net total loss of 17,000 hectares.[13] At 12.9%, the rate of ALR removal on the Island is higher than in any other part of the province.

The development and conversion of farmland to other uses has not slowed in recent years. Between April of 2002 and April 2003, the Vancouver Island ALR lost more land than any other region.[v] During this one year period, 327 hectares were excluded from the reserve and 3 hectares were added (while removing the most, the Island has also added the least). The overall area of land left in Vancouver Island's ALR is 103,319 hectares.

The Capital Region's land reserve has fared no better with almost 2,000 hectares (out of 19,595 hectares) removed between 1974 and 1999. Of the 903.8 hectares excluded as the result of individual land owner applications, 545.2 hectares were considered prime (classes 1-3) agricultural land.[14] Only Greater Vancouver has lost a similar proportion of high quality agricultural land.

Although a fundamental principal behind the Regional Growth Strategy is to concentrate growth and development in selected areas and to protect rural areas outside containment boundaries, there are many ALR removals each year within the Capital Region. Even those municipalities with policies addressing agricultural land and/or growth containment have failed to take a consistent and firm position with regard to the development of agricultural land.

Table B

Farm sizes in the Capital Region (in acres), 1991 – 2001[10]

Year	Total Farms	< 10	10 to 69	70 to 129	130 to 179	180 to 239	240 to 399	400 to 559	560 to 759	760 to 1,119	1,1120 to 1,1599	1,600 & over
1991	891	447	349	40	22	12	8	4	3	2	2	2
2001	974	468	382	63	21	13	11	5	5	3	3	0

v While the Okanagan Region did lose more land overall, virtually all the land removed (1102 ha out of 1162 ha) was a mountainous parcel taken out of the ALR due to its poor growing capability. In addition, the Okanagan Region added 455 new hectares to the ALR during the same period.

Citizen groups have organized repeatedly to object to the loss of farmland in a number of areas of the Capital Region including Saanich, the Gulf Islands, Central and North Saanich, Sooke and Metchosin. However, these efforts are largely ad hoc and reactionary – responding to each proposed development as it arises. In partnership with several other groups, Farm Folk/City Folk recently developed the BC Farmland Watch Network in order to coordinate and share information about threatened farmland across the province.[vi]

The cost of agricultural land

Accessing agricultural land in the Capital Region has become increasingly difficult for farmers, particularly those just starting out. The value of real estate in the Region has sky-rocketed and in many areas developments are continuing to sprawl onto agricultural land. As the pressures on agricultural land have grown, rural property prices have increased to the point where those who wish to farm can no longer afford to purchase land.

Some agricultural landowners are willing to lease land to farmers, but identifying these owners can be a challenge. The local organization Linking Land and Future Farmers helps to connect landless farmers and land owners. However, many agricultural land owners would prefer to maintain their property uncultivated in order to sell it at inflated prices to developers. The high prices of farmland and its rate of destruction could undermine the capacity of the Capital Region to improve its food security in the future.

Farming employment and income

On its own, agriculture has become a relatively small employer – 2% of the provincial labour force and only 1% of the labour force in the Capital Region.[15] However, this sector is not only vital to food security, but is also an indirect economic driver through secondary industry including food retailing, processing, restaurants and tourism.[16] A range of "agritourism" attractions such as farm tours, festivals and farm accommodation are also becoming associated with the farms of the Region.

The great majority of Canadian farmers gain only a small proportion of their income from farming. "Farm families depend on non-farm income more and more with each passing census. In 1980, 21.5% of farm census families on unincorporated farms earned 75% or more of their total income from net farm income…by 2000 the figure had slipped…. to 7%."[17] Overall, less than 18% of Canadian farming families are depending upon their net farm income for more than half of their family income.

The Capital Region clearly follows a similar pattern. The average wage for individuals working full time in agriculture (in the Capital Region) dropped from $26,218 in 1995 to $24,498 in 2000. In 2000, the average income for full-time farmers and farm managers in the Region was about $14,000. Unsurprisingly then, a substantial number of the farmers are not relying on agriculture as their sole source of income.

In 1995, 57% of the Region's farms reported receipts of under $5,000. In 2000, the number of farms with less than $5,000 had remained relatively stable with 53% of farms in this category.[18] Farms with over $25,000 in receipts were far less common, about 13% of all farms in the Region. While the number of farms with high levels of income (and production) may be relatively low, the total of gross farm receipts has increased considerably over the past decade – from $37,632,900 in 1990 to $50,317,248 in 2000.

The income statistics point to the current economic challenges of farming. While it is vital for farmers to have options for supplementary income, it is also important for farming to be an economically viable profession. Conventional economic wisdom (and much provincial and federal policy) advocates a "bigger is better" approach to agricultural production, supporting large economies of scale, an export orientation and supply management.

This industrial orientation does not focus on feeding local people, nor does it protect farmers from what have proven to be risky investments in commodities for export. Large industrial farms also come with increasingly evident environmental costs (reduction in soil fertility, pollution of groundwater, destruction of wild-life habitat and biodiversity).

Although the Capital Region is not immune to these problems (and indeed experiences some of them) its small and diversified farms have a distinct advantage

vi See: www.ffcf.bc.ca/BCFarmlandWatch.html over regions committed to large industrial farms. The Region's farms point to a new approach that does not focus on maximum production of a single crop, but instead on farming as an ecologically sound practice with a commitment to high quality food. However, the viability of these farms depends on educated consumers, who are willing to pay prices reflective of the inputs and labour involved in quality food production. It also requires government policies and programs that support a community-based, rather than export-oriented, food system.

Farmers

Just over 100 years ago, 22% of the population of British Columbia lived on farms. At the time of the 1991 Census, about 1.5% of the population was living on farms.[19] While agricultural production has intensified, these numbers are representative of a dramatic shift to urban living and the extent to which food production rests in fewer and fewer hands. Over the course of three years, between 1998 and 2001, farm employment in Canada dropped 26%.[20]

The Capital Region faces a serious challenge with regard to the number of farmers as relatively few young people are choosing to farm. In 2000, the average age for farmers in the Capital Region was 53. This number is consistent with farmers across the country (the overall Canadian average is 50) and points to a major gap in food security, in the economy and in the transfer of knowledge. Of the 1,450 farm operators within the Capital Region, only 95 are under 35 and 600 are over 55.

With 40% of farmers nearing retirement, it is vital to improve the viability of farming as a livelihood and to provide incentives for young people to enter farming. Exploring opportunities to increase the participation of young people in farming should be an immediate concern of decision-makers, community groups and educational facilities throughout the Capital Region.

Overall trends in production

Over the past ten years the Region has seen growth in the amount of land dedicated to fruits and vegetables and a simultaneous reduction in numbers of cattle, sheep and poultry.[21] The primary commodities of the farms of the Island include dairy, beef, vegetables, grapes and berries. About 63% of the farm operations on Vancouver Island are livestock and dairy focused and almost 30% focus on vegetable and fruit production. While 878 acres of agricultural land in the Region are devoted to vegetables, almost 9,000 acres are devoted to growing hay.

Table C
Agricultural commodity trends in Capital Region, 1991 – 2001[22]

Indicator	1991	2001
Total area of farms (acres)	34,718	38,322
Fruit trees (acres)	312	634
Vegetables (acres)	558	878
# of Cattle	5,169	4,751
# of Poultry	665,179	638,523
# of Sheep	9, 493	9,247

Table D shows changes in the amount of acreage dedicated to particular vegetable crops. The table points to two major trends – the first is an overall increase in production of most vegetable crops and the second is a strong focus on some crops (such as corn) over others. While this may reflect the higher market return of particular crops, it also points to the importance of cooperative and coordinated approaches to improving the availability of a diversity of local foods.

Organic Production

The number of certified organic producers in British Columbia is growing rapidly. In 1992 there were 154 certified producers and by 2001 there were 430.[24]

Table D
Total acres of vegetable production in the Capital Region, 1991 – 2001[23]

Vegetables	1991	2001
Asparagus	0	9
Beans (wax/green)	9	23
Beets	16	24
Cabbage	81	79
Carrots	55	86
Corn	87	220
Lettuce	44	66
Dry Onions	25	29
Shallots/Gr. onions	4	6
Spinach	7	3
Tomatoes	20	17
Potatoes	246	133

Compared to other regions of British Columbia, the Capital Region has a relatively high proportion of organic producers. Of the 51 farms producing certified organic products within the Statistics Canada Vancouver Island/Coast Region, 25 are located in the Capital Region.[25] This is more farms than in either the Fraser Valley Regional District or the Greater Vancouver Regional District. Indeed, the only regional district in the province with more organic producers is the Okanagan-Similkameen Regional District.

However, the demand for organics far exceeds the local supply. Many small organic producers describe a situation where they are turning away eager potential customers – particularly those seeking specialized high-value produce such as mixed greens. It is partially the considerable consumer interest in organic locally produced foods that explains the distribution challenges described in Part 2 – established producers can easily sell their produce (for good returns) through small distribution resources. Unsurprisingly, this lessens the appeal of supplying large retailers.

Although at 2%, BC has a higher percentage of organic farms than the other provinces, there are only 23,500 acres of certified organic farmland in the province.[26] Prior to the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements Conference hosted in Victoria in 2002, Alex D. Campbell of Thrifty Foods commented that "locally, organic farmers are getting left behind. B.C. has [about] 1.5 percent (of its agricultural production) organic while California is around 12 percent… we're trailing dramatically."[27] This translates into large proportions of organic food being imported by retailers who recognize that consumer demand is high.

Poultry and meat production

There is currently a diverse meat and poultry industry on Vancouver Island and the Gulf Islands that includes large scale commercial producers (primarily in poultry) and smaller (unregulated) producers selling meat or poultry at the farm gate. Particular challenges for Vancouver and Gulf Island producers revolve around transportation and processing costs.

A significant issue for commercial producers of poultry and meat on Vancouver Island has been the closure of federally inspected processing facilities. In need of investment for updating and improving its infrastructure, Vancouver Island's only government inspected poultry plant (located in Sooke) was closed in 1999. This "left thirty commercial chicken growers without local processing and with no choice but to send hundreds of thousands of chickens per week to the mainland for processing."[28] The increased costs associated with transit have contributed to the reduction to about twelve commercial chicken producers on Vancouver Island today.

Besides its impact on producers, the poultry plant closure affects other parts of the Region's food system. When chicken producers leave the business their production quota is reassigned (off the Island) and will be extremely difficult to replace. In addition, consumers are unable to demonstrate their loyalty to Island-grown chicken because it is no longer identifiable as Island produced.

The commercial hog industry has faced similar difficulties. In a 1995 study of challenges and barriers to growth in the hog industry, the cost of transporting feed (and elimination of the Federal Freight Assistance Program) was a major concern.[29] With the closure of the Island Meat Packers Plant in Victoria (in 1993), the need for investment in the Port Alberni slaughter facility was identified. This investment and the overall growth required for the Island industry to compete with large and efficient prairie operations never occurred.

For commercial poultry producers, reopening a federally inspected plant is a top priority. Yet the need for a large and federally inspected facility has not, to date, been an issue for those involved in small scale (often free-range and organic) poultry production. According to "conservative estimates [these producers provide] 100,000 chickens annually as well as other kinds of fowl that fall below the sight of the marketing boards and quota system."[30]

Many consumers support small producers of poultry and livestock. Knowing the farmers and where their meat/poultry is coming from (and how it has been raised) builds a relationship of trust that local consumers and chefs are willing to pay for. This "secondary" industry provides an alternative model to industrial meat and poultry production.

Small mixed farm operators have traditionally been allowed to use small local abattoirs (such as one currently located in Duncan). These regulations have protected farm gate sales and allowed farmers to sell meat and poultry to local consumers. All of this may change with the proposed changes to the Meat Inspection Regulation under the Food Safety Act which – due to the increased concerns about meat safety – "will require veterinary inspections of animals before and after they're slaughtered, and the regulations for big abattoirs that supply major supermarket chains will be the same as the rules for the farmer down the road where you've always got your roasting hens."[31]

The proposed regulation would require small producers to foot the bill for transport costs.[32] Overall, such changes will likely drive the small scale meat producers on both Vancouver Island and the Gulf Islands out of business. Local producers are recommending that the government look at regulatory alternatives. Models for small scale inspection (such as training butchers to inspect meat or using mobile federally inspected abattoirs) would not cause the pollution and economic hardship of the proposed regulation changes.

Dairy and Eggs

Although there are about 70 milk producers on Vancouver Island, and dairy is the largest agricultural sector on the Island, milk producers fulfill only about half of the demand for milk on the Island. However, Island Farms Dairies currently sells about 25% of its product on the mainland.

Of the Island's milk producers, approximately 80% are members of the (Victoria-based) Island Farms Dairies Co-op Association.[33] Most of the remaining 20% provide milk to Dairyland, based in Vancouver. Both dairies produce a range of products including yogurt and cheese.

Milk production is managed on a quota basis in British Columbia. However, when it comes to setting a fair price, Vancouver Island and Gulf Island producers have faced the added challenge of higher shipping costs for animal feed. As a result, the Dairymen's Association has undertaken studies to explore how intensive grazing practices might lower input costs for farmers and capitalize on the climatic advantage of the area.[34]

There are also a number of successful small processors of dairy products located on Vancouver Island and the Gulf Islands, including ice cream and cheese producers within the Capital Region.

Commercial egg production in British Columbia is regulated through the BC Egg Marketing Board which, in turn receives provincial quota allocations from the Canadian Egg Marketing Agency. There are eleven commercial egg producers on Vancouver Island (out of 131 registered producers in British Columbia). These producers have about 245,000 laying birds. Commercial egg production accounts for 95-98% of provincial egg production – the remainder is produced by small "backyard" flocks.[35] Flocks of 99 layers or less are not required to be registered.

Like the meat/poultry industry, there are many small (generally organic) egg producers on the Islands that participate in a secondary, unregulated industry. However, there is ongoing debate over how to manage organic egg production in British Columbia. The Egg Marketing Board is in the process of attempting to bring organic producers into the quota system. Organic egg producers argue that they cannot afford the costs of quota acquisition in combination with the higher costs associated with the production of free-range organic birds (versus the more "efficient" and lower cost industrial egg production). Unless the egg marketing system can become more flexible and responsive, it will be difficult to maintain or initiate viable organic egg operations in the Capital Region.

Community and backyard gardens

In addition to evaluating the current contributions of local agriculture to the food security of the Region, it is also important to assess the production capacity of individuals and families. Cities across the United States and Canada are increasing the self-sufficiency of their residents, particularly low-income residents, through urban food gardening including community gardens, rooftop gardens and backyard gardens.

Community gardens provide direct access to fresh vegetables and fruit and they are low cost – most participants pay a nominal annual fee to cover garden expenses such as water and shared tools. Community gardens engage diverse participants and provide skill-building, social and recreational opportunities.

There are about 15 community gardens in the Capital Region, with more in the planning stages.[36] It is difficult to measure how many people participate in community gardens but estimating by number of plots, there are likely between 400-450 community gardeners. The numbers of people accessing food through the gardens is higher because many gardeners share with family, friends and local emergency food services.

All of the Region's community gardens include both food and ornamental plants although many garden plots focus on intensive vegetable production. In a Toronto community garden, it was found that an experienced vegetable grower could harvest almost 40 kg of vegetables between May and October.[37]

Backyard gardening is even more difficult to measure in terms of its impact on local food consumption. Many backyard gardeners grow only a small portion of the food they consume, but may specialize in favorite foods such as greens or tomatoes. Numerous backyard gardens in the Region also include fruit trees. The potential for increasing food production in the Capital Region's urbanized areas is significant.

Agricultural education

The University of Victoria does not offer any education relating to agriculture. Considering that southern Vancouver Island remains one of the hubs of farming in the province, this is a substantial gap. Camosun College offers two farming-related (three if beekeeping is included) courses through their Horticulture Continuing Education classes. What is unique about these classes is that they offer formal education (from certified organic farmers) about organic farming practice – something that many large university agriculture programs fail to provide.

Overall, the opportunities to learn about farming through educational institutions in the Region are extremely limited. There are however, other educational options available for farmers, most of them emerging from the nonprofit sector. About thirteen local farms participate in SOIL – Stewards of Irreplaceable Land – through which farmers will take on apprentices in order to educate them about a range of farming / cultivation activities. Workshops addressing topics such as composting and permaculture are available through the Compost Education Centre (in Fernwood). Organic producer associations (see the following section) also offer periodic workshops.

LifeCycles offers training to young people (between 16-30 years old) with an interest in starting sustainable agri-food businesses, including market gardening and small-scale processing.[38] The Youth Community Entrepreneur Program provides skills, tools and support for its participants as they move from planning through to start-up of sustainable community micro-businesses.

Agri-food organizations and programs

The farmers of Vancouver Island and the Gulf Islands have become increasingly concerned about their future viability. A number of organizations and campaigns have emerged as a result. Groups such as the Island Farmers' Alliance and the Southern Vancouver Island Direct Farm Marketing Association are focused on providing marketing, advocacy and informational resources for all kinds of farms.

Producer associations and organizations tend to be provincial in reach. There are many producer organizations that are specific to a particular agricultural commodity such as chicken or strawberries. Many of them belong to the BC Agriculture Council which promotes and advocates all BC producers. Organic producers may find support through local chapters of the national Canadian Organic Growers (COG).[39] The Island and South Island Organic Producers Associations (IOPA and SIOPA) provide information and assistance to organic growers across Vancouver Island. Island Natural Growers (ING) provides the same for organic producers on the Gulf Islands.

There are innovative locally developed organizations that support farmers seeking land – Linking Land and Future Farmers matches land owners and farmers seeking land. Haliburton Community Organic Farm (still in its start-up phase) will lease small parcels to farmers willing to participate in the farm's community education goals. There will also be mentoring opportunities for new farmers. The BC Land Conservancy's Conservation Partners program provides promotion (through product labeling) for farmers protecting biodiversity and habitat on their properties.[40]

One of the most substantial sources of support for farmers *can* be government. However, these relationships are complex, varying from one level of government to another and with respect to the type of farming operation. At the provincial level, a 45% reduction in the budget for the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food is underway.[41] This has meant the closure of district offices in Sidney and Courtenay with relocation of staff to urban locations. It has also resulted in the elimination of funding for a number of supports, including financial support for the promotion of BC agriculture. Direct advisory services have been eliminated in favour of electronic services.

On a brighter note, the "Islands Agri-Food Initiative" will become active in 2004. With $1.7 million in federal-provincial funds (earmarked in May 2000), the Initiative will receive, evaluate and support proposals for projects intended to revitalize the agri-food sector on the Islands. The goals stated in the Initiative's *2003-2008 Strategic Plan* include: enhancement of marketing and promotion of the agri-food industry, facilitation of the development of strategic partnerships throughout the sector and support for the growth of agri-food processing as a catalyst for rural community development.

Conclusions

The production resources of the Capital Region include a rich diversity of farming operations, many of which are providing high quality fresh foods to local people. The most pressing concern in relation to food security is the need to increase the amount of food being grown within the Region and on Vancouver Island. There is a considerable quantity of agricultural land not under cultivation and there are not enough trained and skilled farmers (particularly young farmers).

Ensuring that agricultural land is not lost to development and that farmers can afford land, either through purchase or leasing arrangements, is paramount. Currently it is citizen and nonprofit efforts that are making the difference in these areas – governments are lagging behind in taking responsibility for a consistent approach to protecting farmland.

Another challenge lies with the prices of imported food. Considerable marketing and consciousness-raising is required for consumers to recognize the real costs of sustainable food production. The increased production of vegetables over the past decade shows that producers within the Region recognize the potential to market locally grown produce.

There are, however, many challenges facing farmers on Vancouver Island and the Gulf Islands. More infrastructural support is required for meat and poultry producers – both with respect to processing and regulations.

One tool for increasing consumer awareness of the significance of local production is through the distribution network. Part 2 provides an overview of food distribution approaches in the Capital Region, from grocery stores to farm gate sales to community kitchens. A range of distribution resources are required for a healthy food system, but some are more accessible for local producers than others. Part 2 will explore the assets and challenges of various aspects of the food distribution network.

Summary Table 1

Indicator	Status
Farms	• 974 (based on 2001 census), mostly small
Agricultural land	• Highest ALR land removal rate in BC • Top-quality agricultural land disappearing steadily • Land costs prohibitively high for farming
Farming employment and income	• Imported food driving food prices down • Most farmers require off-farm income
Farmers	• Aging, not being replaced – loss of knowledge / skills
Production trends	• Increased interest in, and demand for, regional food • Demand for organic foods growing – far beyond supply • Viability of meat production – particularly small scale/ organic – affected by (food safety) regulations and access to processing facilities • Supply-managed marketing systems not designed for/ work against specialty (e.g. organic) products
Community and backyard gardens	• Potential not measured, unrecognized as food resource
Agricultural education programs	• Limited, mostly in non-profit sector
Agri-food organizations and programs	• Growing number of committed and active groups • Need for coordinated efforts amongst groups • Primarily voluntary/non-profit organizations that must struggle for core funding

Part 2: The Food Distribution Network

There is a growing diversity of food distribution resources in the Capital Region. The food distribution network includes wholesalers, retailers, restaurants, farmers' markets and farm-gate sales, each with its own approach to the transportation, handling and pricing of food. The means of distribution affect food security both with respect to the accessibility of food and in terms of production practices (whether they are sustainable and local).

While the means through which food is being distributed are diversifying and focus on local foods is increasing, there remains a chasm between the amount of food *produced* locally and food *consumed* locally. In addition, the distribution resources focused on local food are also the most difficult for many people to access.

The efficacy of the food distribution network is integral to the entire food system. Yet without sufficient supply, distribution resources cannot provide consumers with local produce. Likewise, without consumer demand, distributors will not be able to sell local foods. However, by serving as the interface between customers and food products, distributors have the power to influence both producers and consumers.

While it is challenging to develop quantitative measures for distribution, it is possible to evaluate the degree to which various forms of distribution contribute to (or detract from) food security. Utilizing the indicators recommended by the Community Food Security Coalition the following resources of the Capital Region food distribution network will be evaluated:[42]

- Wholesalers
- Retailers (including grocers, community markets, box programs etc.)
- Restaurants
- Emergency food services
- Supplemental nutrition and community food programs

These resources will inform the assessment of distribution networks within the Capital Region. However, the thrust of this evaluation is qualitative. Informal interviews were held with participants in most areas of distribution. Methods of distribution including wholesale, various types of retail, and community-based approaches will be described with an examination of the assets and challenges to food security within each approach.

Wholesalers

Currently wholesalers and large retailers are the backbone of the North American food distribution chain and Vancouver Island is no exception; the majority of residents in the Capital Region purchase their food through these distributors. There are 6-7 large fresh food wholesalers located on Vancouver Island, including B&C, North Douglas, Islands West and wholesalers for Thrifty Foods and Fairway Market. Wholesalers market to a range of distributors including restaurants, institutions and retailers. Some wholesalers market primarily to businesses on Vancouver Island and others are doing a proportion of their sales on the Lower Mainland. B&C Food Distributors is located on the Saanich Peninsula and, with 98 employees, is the largest independent wholesaler in British Columbia.[43] North Douglas SYSCO Food Services has 2,500 customers on the Island and mainland.[44]

In part due to the quantities they distribute, most wholesalers purchase from large (often non-local) suppliers.[vii] There are ways for local producers to work with wholesalers, but large quantities of product are required (see description of Island Vegetable Cooperative Association below). Generally wholesalers do not prioritize local food although some provide Island and/ or BC grown products.

Yet even those restaurants and retailers committed to local producers still utilize wholesalers for a proportion of their food supply. Restaurants with a focus on local food (and willing to deal with multiple small producers) likely require wholesalers to provide them with quantities of staples such as potatoes and carrots.

The Island Farms Dairies Cooperative Association and the Island Vegetable Cooperative Association (Saanich Peninsula Vegetable Growers) provide examples of how farmers on the Island ensure that their products are distributed through wholesalers.[viii] Island Farms Co-op has successfully joined together almost 60 farmers (80% of Island milk producers) and supplies dairy products to wholesalers and retailers throughout Vancouver Island and the Lower Mainland.[45]

The Island Vegetable Cooperative is made up of primarily larger farms that sell regulated and unregulated vegetables to a number of wholesalers on the Island. Generally the Cooperative does not market directly to retail. The Island Vegetable Co-op sells about 5,000 tons of produce each year and 80% of this is marketed locally with some being shipped to the Mainland.

Overall, wholesalers play a very important role in the Capital Region's food distribution. Food security assets and challenges include:

Food Security Assets

- Convenient/cost effective and efficient means for transporting quantities of food
- Currently transports the majority of food to Vancouver Island
- Allows retailers, restaurants and institutions to "one-stop shop" for much of their food

Food Security Challenges

- The bulk of the food moving through wholesalers comes from large producers (often not local) focused on the bottom line rather than environmental or social impacts
- Difficult for small producers to sell through wholesalers
- Foods sold through wholesalers are generally not priced at real cost of production

Retailers

The Capital Region is home to many food retail outlets including chain retailers, small scale specialty stores and convenience stores. There are approximately 140 general grocers in the Region, including large stores (4 or more check-out tills) and those small stores that provide sufficient grocery options for a nutritious diet. Grocery stores are the primary means through which most people acquire their food. They are also economic drivers – Thrifty Foods is currently the largest private sector employer on Vancouver Island.[46]

Due to its tourism trade and the loyalty of local consumers, the Region is also home to a tremendous diversity of specialty food stores. Specialty stores offer consumers specific types of food products such as baked goods, fish and meat and various ethnic foods.[ix] For instance, there are a remarkable number of independent bakeries in the Region – about 70 – most of which are food processors as well as retailers.

Consumers in the Capital Region may also purchase food products through a range of other means including farmers' markets, farm gate sales and home delivery box programs – these alternative distribution networks have grown significantly over the past decade. The various retail options will be discussed in more detail below – providing an overall picture of how food is being distributed in the Region. Many connections will be made between distribution, production and consumption as these are closely linked and interdependent aspects of the food system.

Grocers

The largest grocery retailers in the Region are those associated with chains. These retailers include:

- Thrifty Foods (11 stores)
- Fairway Markets (6 stores)
- Safeway (4 stores)
- Country Grocer (3 stores)
- Save On Foods (2 stores)

The degree to which retail chains offer locally produced foods is partially dependent upon corporate priorities. In some cases, there is significant interest in local product and in others (often if chain headquarters is far from the Island) local foods are not a purchasing consideration. Grocery stores distinguish themselves, and develop a loyal customer base, by creating a specific niche. Some stores market the cost savings they

vii Some small wholesalers focus on providing local products – such as Salt Spring Dairy Service who distribute organic milk, cheese and tofu products from small producers.
viii The Island Farms Dairies Cooperative Association will be discussed in more detail in Part 3.
ix It is impossible, within the limited scope of this report, to do justice to the complexity of the Region's food retail market. As such, small retailers will not be discussed further. The retail portion of the food distribution network requires further study.

provide and others prioritize the quality and freshness of their food. For consumers with minimal dollars for food, the least expensive options remain most appealing. However, in many cases the cheapest foods are not produced on Vancouver Island or the Gulf Islands.

For grocers with an interest in providing more local food, there are very few producers on the Islands generating sufficient volumes. The exceptions tend to be Vancouver Island dairy products and eggs, which most grocers do sell.[x] With respect to produce, Thrifty Foods sells produce from approximately 300 growers within British Columbia and 16-20 of these growers are located on the Saanich Peninsula. Overall, about 30% of Thrifty Foods' produce is sourced in British Columbia and of this about 5% is grown within the Region.

Some very popular food items, such as bananas and citrus fruits, are simply not grown in B.C. Only a handful of crops grown within the Region (such as apples, potatoes and carrots) are available twelve months of the year and these are in limited quantities. The two largest growers in the Region are producing about 90% of the local food sold through Thrifty Foods. This is partially due to quantities and partially due to regulations. Government inspection processes for retailers are managed by tight regulations and partner production operations are required to undergo regular inspection.

In addition to chain retailers, there are a number of large independent and locally owned grocery stores including Red Barn Market, Pepper's Foods, Market on Yates, Lifestyles and Oxford Foods. Independent stores vary considerably in their commitment to purchasing local foods. However, because they don't require the same volumes as chains with centralized purchasing, it may be easier for single stores to stock local foods.

In some cases, local growers have signed contracts with large retailers to provide specific products over a period of time. This step requires a relationship of trust; the grocer must rely on one producer for sufficient quantity and quality of stock and the producer must rely on the grocer to price, handle and represent the product fairly. In addition, producers must invest heavily in the production of a single crop which can be a risky venture.

While local foods remain a relatively small proportion of the food in grocery stores, the organics market has grown by leaps and bounds. The popularity of organics shows that many consumers are willing to pay a premium for food that they consider to be a healthy lifestyle choice. Some grocers, such as Planet Organic and Lifestyles, focus exclusively on the organics market. Other retail distributors are moving to meet a growing consumer demand for organics. Thrifty Foods has made a public commitment to dedicating 50% of its produce department to organics by 2010.[xi] Only a small proportion of organics are being grown locally and within British Columbia; much is imported from the United States.

For most consumers in the Capital Region, grocery stores provide consistent and reliable access to food. Food security assets and challenges include:

Food Security Assets
- Flexible hours for shopping which is important for ensuring broad accessibility; in addition grocers may offer free delivery for purchases over a minimum price
- Most large grocery stores are on public transit routes
- The most convenient "one-stop shop" option for households with limited time
- Some retailers focus on low prices which is helpful to low-income customers
- Large grocers have enough influence over the local marketplace to affect the food market (in positive or negative ways)
- If grocers are committed to educating their customers about nutrition and health, they have tremendous potential to reach a broad audience

Food Security Challenges
- The small scale farming activity that is characteristic of the Region is difficult to mesh with the priorities/demands of large retailers
- The priorities for large retailers are consistency of product, products that are regulated/inspected and products that are labeled and packaged in particular ways
- The low prices of many commodities are not reflective of the costs of producing food in a sustainable way
- Dealing with a single wholesaler is easier (for retailers) than working with multiple small producers
- Limited local production remains a primary barrier for those retailers willing to support local growers and producers

x Both local dairy and meat production will be discussed in more detail in Part 3 of this report. Very small quantities of local meat are sold through large retailers on Vancouver Island.
xi This is in keeping with the national trends where organic retail sales are anticipated to grow 20% each year to 2005 to become a $3.1 billion industry. However, the organics industry is already deeply entrenched in an export mentality with many large scale crops (such as grains and oilseeds) being sent to the United States. Information from: Canada's Agriculture, Food & Beverage Industry, Canada's Organic Industry. http://ats-sea.agr.ca/supply/e3313.pdf

Table E

Community farmers' markets of the Capital Region

Name	Municipality	Foods	Months	Days	Times	# of farmers	Organic or other
Esquimalt Country Market	Esquimalt	V, F, B, E, P	June – Sept	Sat.	10 am – 2 pm	2 farmers	Certified / non
James Bay Community Market	Victoria	V, F, B, E, P, C, FI	May – Oct	Sat.	9 am – 3 pm	12 farmers	Certified / non
Mayne Island Farmers' Market	Southern Gulf Islands	V, F, B,E, P, C, FI, CH, BF	June – Sept	Sat.	10 am – 1 pm	6 farmers	Certified / non
Metchosin Farm Market	Metchosin	V, F, B,E, P	May – Oct	Sun.	11 am – 2 pm	approx. 24 farmers	Certified / non
Moss Street Market	Victoria	V, F, B, P, C	April – Oct	Sat.	10 am – 2 pm	24 farmers	Certified organics only
Pender Island Farmers' Market	Southern Gulf Islands	V, F, B,E, P, C (meats by order)	April – Dec	Sat.	9:30 am – 1 pm	approx.25 farmers	Certified / non
Peninsula Country Market	Central Saanich	V, F, B, P, E,C	June – Oct	Sat.	9 am – 1 pm	approx. 20 farmers	Certified / non
Salt Spring Island Market	Salt Spring Island	V, F, B, P, C, FI	April – Oct	Sat.	8 am – 3:30 pm	approx. 20	Certified / non
Sidney Summer Market	Sidney	V, F, B, P, E,C, FI	June – Aug	Thurs.	5:30 pm- 8:30 pm	10 farmers	Certified / non
Sooke Country Market	Sooke	V, F, B, P	June – Sept	Sat.	10 am – 2 pm	1 reg. farmer + market gardeners	Non-certified organic

V = Vegetables
F = Fruit
B = Bread / Baked Goods
P = Preserves
E = Eggs
C = Cheese
FI = Fish
CH = Chicken
BF= Beef

Community Markets

Community markets are a growing distribution niche; they provide local vegetables, fruit, eggs, cheese, and a range of other products for an increasing number of households within the Capital Region.[xii] These markets signal a shift in the preferences of consumers from the "one-stop shop" to a different retail experience – purchasing products directly from farmers and shopping in a community-oriented environment.

When the Moss Street Market started in 1992, it was one of the first farmers' markets in the Region. Now the number of markets has increased to 10 and there appears to be demand for more. Although the markets tend to be summer-focused, some now operate six or seven months of the year. The established markets see more committed customers each season. About 1000 people attend the Sidney market each week. Community markets are becoming community assets, socially, economically and with respect to food – attractive to locals and tourists alike.

Table E (above) provides information about each market, showing the basic products sold, the months, days and hours of operation and the numbers of participating farmers.

Regarding the role of community markets, food security assets and challenges include:

Food Security Assets
- Provide an opportunity for consumers to purchase fresh local foods each week
- Serve as an interface between producers and consumers
- Enable farmers to price their foods according to the real costs of production
- Producers who otherwise struggle to market their products – small scale producers and those just starting out – can participate in farmers' markets

Food Security Challenges
- A challenge for consumers is the limited times and locations of the markets as well as their seasonal nature
- Some of the newer farmers' markets need publicity but have small to non-existent advertising budgets
- Some markets have a small number of farmers and food products available – if farmers can (more conveniently) sell their produce at their farm gates or through box programs, they may forgo the markets

Food Box Programs

Approximately 12 box programs currently operate in the Capital Region. The common intention of all box programs is to deliver food (generally organic produce) to households on a weekly/bi-weekly or monthly basis.[xiii] The programs vary, each with a slightly different clientele and product options. Box programs

xii There is decreasing diversity of products available at some local markets because of the rigor of inspection processes which require specific processing/packing and selling conditions.

xiii A couple of the box programs that are from local farms require box pick-up.

have gained considerable popularity as a distribution method.

The Community Fruit and Veggie Box
A number of community groups participate in this volunteer-run fresh produce buying program. This box is intended to increase access to nutritious produce amongst low-income people in the Region. By pooling dollars and bulk-buying, participants are able to have a monthly box for anywhere from $5 -$15.

The Good Food Box
The Tsartlip First Nation has developed a variation of this box program, with participation from several other First Nations communities. Some communities have utilized chronic disease prevention funding to ensure 100% participation in the box program.

In March of 1997, Fresh Piks Organics (a Victoria-based box program that has since merged with Small Potatoes) had 24 customers. By the following summer the business had expanded to serve 650 households in the Region.

According to a 2003 survey of 10 of the box programs between 1,500 and 1,700 households in the Region regularly receive food boxes.[47] Another 400 households participate in the Community Fruit and Veggie Box and the Tsartlip Good Food Box.

There are several distinctions between the types of box programs available. Some are organized by volunteers and are intended to reduce costs for participants through collective purchasing (see text box). The primary aim of these box programs is to keep food costs low while providing access to fruits and vegetables.

A number of food boxes provide a means for local, primarily organic, small scale farmers to market their produce, eggs and in a few cases poultry. These boxes may be produced by a single farmer or, as with Saanich Organics, a collective of farmers. Most local boxes cannot be customized – the content is determined by whatever is fresh and seasonal. These boxes contain 100% local food. Sometimes local farmers' box programs require advance payment to cover costs for farmers at the start of the growing season.

A final type of box program comes closer to an alternative to the grocery store, offering customers what is essentially a grocery store selection of organic products and delivering them. The local content is considerably lower in these boxes – in some cases it is negligible and in others may range from 10% - 50% depending on the time of year.[48]

Box programs are providing a new kind of distribution option for local farmers to reach Food security assets and challenges with box programs include:

Food Security Assets

- For those with difficulty meeting their nutritional needs – for financial or mobility reasons – box programs can ensure that healthy food is received regularly. The Tsartlip Nation's Social Development office will automatically deduct the amount that social assistance recipients require to cover the monthly fee for food boxes.
- Allow farmers to "pre-sell" their produce or to sell whatever is in-season, while guaranteeing consumers access to fresh local foods
- Facilitate the participation of small scale farms in the retail market
- Through local box programs, farmers receive a fair return on their produce

Food Security Challenges

- Box programs from local farms often don't provide consumers with choices
- Boxes from local farms are often too costly for consumers with limited budgets
- Box programs *without* the local focus include a substantial amount of imported food – the same number of "food miles" as store-bought food[xiv]

Food Cooperatives

There are a few food-related cooperatives within the Region. The Island Vegetable Cooperative Association and Island Farms Dairies Cooperative Association are examples of how producers can pool their production resources and sell collectively. Buying cooperatives are an effective way to increase consumer power – box programs and community kitchens are cooperative approaches to buying food but are generally not

xiv See Glossary for definition of food miles.

formalized as cooperatives.

The successful Growing Circle Food Cooperative on Salt Spring Island serves as a model for how cooperative distribution can be compatible with consumer access to food and support for local producers.[49] The Cooperative is meeting both of these objectives with its unique structure as a multi-stakeholder cooperative. There are 750 members, both producers and consumers, which is an impressive proportion of Salt Spring's population of 10,000. However, presently the Cooperative relies heavily on the considerable dedication of its staff to function effectively.

Incorporated in 2001, Growing Circle started with three member producers and today there are 80. The Cooperative provides a consistent marketplace for consumers to access local products and a place for producers to sell. One of the most remarkable things about the Co-op is the number of small scale processors involved. About half of the producer members are growers and the other half are value-added processors; in addition to fruit and vegetables the products include cheese, flour, smoked salmon, tofu and locally roasted coffee.

Food security assets and challenges for cooperatives include:

Food Security Assets

- Growing Circle provides a local market for suppliers to sell their products and ensures that these products are maintained in optimum conditions for freshness
- Producer cooperatives enable small producers to pool their resources (and sell in larger quantities) and to improve leverage within the market as a collective
- Cooperatives focused on retail distribution (like Growing Circle) nurture customer loyalty, but (unlike markets) do not require farmers to act as sellers
- As part of its mandate the Growing Circle Co-op educates consumers, sharing information about nutrition and the importance of local food
- Buying cooperatives allow consumers to stretch their dollars and/or to support local producers

Food Security Challenges

- One of the primary challenges within the multi-stakeholder food co-op model is ensuring that there is a balance between fair returns for producers and affordable prices for consumers
- Cooperatives are a self-help model for managing business and consumption; the dedication and participation required can be alien to members. In the case of a multi-stakeholder cooperative such as the Growing Circle members must continuously support the Co-op, particularly with their dollars

Farm Gate Sales

Farm gate sales are a long held rural tradition in which consumers visit farms and purchase fresh food directly from the farmer. Many farmers in the Region rely primarily on farm gate sales in combination with box programs and/or local farmers' markets. The Southern Vancouver Island Direct Farm Marketing Association lists 49 farms within the Capital Region that are selling products from their farm gates.[50] In addition, there are a number of small organic producers in the Region that are not listed.

The food security assets and challenges for farm gate sales include:

Food Security Assets

- For farmers, gate sales provide a fair return on their produce without the loss of time/profit involved in packing, transporting and selling at markets or to retailers
- For consumers, farm gate sales provide an opportunity to develop a relationship with a producer and with a particular farm
- Trips to the farm gate are educational for people who otherwise have no contact with farming or food production
- Food purchased at the farm gate is extremely fresh (high quality/nutritional value)

Food Security Challenges

- Utilizing farm gate sales as a regular source of food is not viable for low-income people (distance and cost) and is logistically challenging for many working people living any distance from farms
- In addition to travel distance to farms, consumers will also require supplemental trips to grocery stores which mean more car travel, local traffic and air pollution

Restaurants

Restaurants play an important cultural, social and economic role in the Region. They range from home-grown small businesses to franchises and include approaches spanning from fast food to fine dining. It could be argued that restaurants do not contribute to food security because they are "luxury" or lifestyle enhancing, but not vital to feeding the population.

However, this would oversimplify of the role of restaurants and "eating out" in the diets of many Canadians. In each of the last three years the average household in Greater Victoria has spent between $1,200 and $1,400 in restaurants.[51] This is about 2.4% (in 2001) and 2.7% (in 2000) of total average household expenditure. These numbers point to restaurants as important food distributors and influencers of consumer choices.

According to the *Greater Victoria Economic Development Opportunities Blueprint,* there are approximately 615 restaurants in the Capital Region.[52] As with retail, it is impossible to make generalizations about the restaurants within the Capital Region. Although food is an increasingly essential aspect of the Region's tourism trade (through restaurants, coffee shops and agri-tourism) the majority of restaurants do not focus their menus on local foods.

The degree to which restaurants source their food locally depends on the philosophy and approach of the business. As the popularity of restaurants providing local food grows, more are attempting to increase their local offerings.

Key factors are flexibility of menu and the commitment to take the extra time and effort required. Sourcing from local producers creates seasonal menus and purchasers must be willing to work with more and smaller suppliers. Chefs with an interest in local food have formed the Island Chefs' Collaborative (ICC), a nonprofit group that supports and promotes local agriculture.[53]

ICC has members across the Island, although the bulk of its participants are located within the Capital Region.

Food security assets and challenges regarding restaurants include:

Island Chefs' Collaborative: Mission Statement

"…We believe that food nourishes us both in body and soul, and that the sharing of food immeasurably enriches our sense of community. We believe that good food begins with unpolluted air, land, and water, and is dependent on environmentally sustainable farming and fishing. We are frustrated with the abundance of mass-produced and toxic foodstuffs overwhelming today's marketplace; in response we emphasize locally-grown, organic, seasonal and minimally-processed ingredients.

We support growers and producers who rely on sustainable farming practices, and we are committed to utilizing their products by educating our customers to help to further their efforts."

– http://wwwvictoriafestivalofwine.com/icc/

Food Security Assets

- A small (but growing) segment of the restaurant industry is providing food that is harvested and/or processed close to the plate
- Restaurants that are concerned with their food sources can raise awareness amongst their customers about the quality of local food
- Due to the often limited quantities required, small producers can sell to restaurants
- Restaurants supporting local producers pay a fair price for local foods

Food Security Challenges

- Fast food contributes to poor nutrition and diet-related health problems
- Fast food encourages a devaluation of food in terms of cost and quality but is increasingly prevalent; it is entering schools and influencing the food choices and health of children and youth
- Offering diverse local foods is more costly than sourcing through a wholesaler
- Many of the restaurants currently using local produce are high-priced restaurants, placing them out of reach of many consumers

Emergency food services

Emergency food services provide food free of charge for those in need, either in the form of meals or groceries. These services distribute a considerable quantity of food in our communities on a daily, weekly or monthly basis. Part 3 will discuss the numbers of individuals and households in the Region for whom emergency food is a necessity. Some emergency food agencies purchase food from local growers to supplement the (majority of) food donated by the public and local and national food businesses.

There are currently about 25 sources of emergency food throughout the Region. This includes large food banks that distribute hampers and groceries as well as churches, community centres and outreach programs which serve hot meals. There are also additional community organizations with food "cupboards" – providing a limited quantity of food items based on availability. Thousands of people in the Capital Region are relying on these services for their daily food needs.

Food security assets and challenges for emergency food services include:

Food Security Assets

- Emergency food resources are a vital aspect of a currently dysfunctional food system – without these services, many people would be starving
- These services draw public/community attention to the fact that people are going hungry

Food Security Challenges

- Food security and emergency food are fundamentally at odds with one another. In a food secure Region, these organizations would become obsolete.
- While many emergency food services endeavour to provide nutritious food, fresh fruit and vegetables are at a premium; the healthiest food is generally not available to those most in need
- Food banks generally provide a three to five-day food supply that consists of basic staples; most offer hampers only once per month and although others may provide a daily meal it is on a first-come-first serve basis
- Although there are emergency food services in all parts of the Region, most are located in the City of Victoria which can make access a challenge
- A charitable approach to food distribution does not empower people or increase their skills/coping abilities. A shift toward self-help, skill-building and empowerment is fundamental to ensuring that people can feed themselves.

Supplemental nutrition & community food programs

The Capital Region has a range of programs that are intended to ensure that people who would otherwise have inadequate diets, have access to nutritious meals and/or education about nutrition. Often supplemental nutrition programs are aimed at specific "at-risk" groups such as senior citizens, children and pregnant or nursing women. Some of these programs are funded through nonprofit agencies, some receive government funding and many a combination of both. Some types of programs are described below.

These programs are distinct from emergency food because they involve either costs to participants or they possess a self-help/educative approach to food and nutrition. The latter model of food assistance is enabling and preventative – providing skills and knowledge for people to help themselves. A targeted approach to meal programs ensures that those who cannot feed themselves do not become vulnerable to diet-related illness or hunger.

Unfortunately, provincial cutbacks are reducing supplemental nutrition/community meals programs and more people are turning to emergency food. For example, last year the Blanshard Community Centre lost the funding for its non-profit food store. For seven years the store was an example of an innovative solution to hunger, providing employment training and nutritious food at cost (about 25% less than through grocery stores) to residents in the neighbourhood. The loss of such programs sends people into crisis and to emergency food providers.

The rapid increase of families and individuals in crisis in the Region (a result of reductions in social services) has led some agencies to shift away from prevention and empowerment-oriented food programming toward crisis management.

Community kitchens

Community kitchens are a "self help and mutual aid approach that enables individuals to feed themselves and their families in a dignified manner."[54] Most community kitchens operate on similar principles – they bring together individuals and families to plan, purchase and prepare meals which can then be taken home to eat.

A central premise of the community kitchen is that it allows those with limited income to stretch their dollars (similar to the food boxes programs for low-income people) through bulk buying while providing a community environment for learning to make nutritious meals and improving food preparation skills. Community kitchens require participant commitment (often for six months) with the goal of transitioning into self-sustaining groups.

Over the past five years, St. Vincent de Paul has provided funding for six community kitchen initiatives in the Region.[55] Currently there are community kitchens offered through several agencies in the Capital Region including: Fernwood Community Centre, Saanich Neighbourhood Place, Cridge Centre (for clients only) and Esquimalt Neighbourhood House.

The Esquimalt Neighbourhood House recently shifted the approach of its community kitchen to a "cooking show." Instead of each person handling a small part of preparing the meal, the program demonstrates the preparation of the meal from beginning to end – allowing people to see the entire process. Following the demonstration, participants can take home the recipe and groceries and replicate the meal. This format facilitates participation of more people and allows those with infants and small children to take part.

Seniors' services: Silver Threads & Meals on Wheels

Maintaining a nutritious diet can be a challenge for senior citizens, particularly those living alone, with mobility challenges or with minimal income. There are a number of services and programs focused on the health of senior citizens in the Capital Region; two that provide regular nutritious meals are Meals on Wheels and Silver Threads.

For nominal fees, Meals on Wheels delivers hot meals to senior citizens (more than 8,000 meals each month) throughout the Region five days a week. Although the program is available to anyone, most of the clients are elderly (many over the age of 80) and have limited mobility.

Silver Threads (located in Saanich, Esquimalt and Victoria) offers a range of services for senior citizens including counseling, recreation and fitness and social events. The meals provided are part of ensuring overall health and well-being. At some branches lunches are daily and at others they are weekly (all require payment). Some of the Silver Threads provide regular hot dinners, particularly on holidays.

Best Babies

Best Babies is part of the provincially and federally funded Pregnancy Outreach Programs, operating throughout British Columbia. Best Babies programs vary somewhat from one location to another but all offer drop-in meals/snacks and provide access to some food items and/or food vouchers. Education about nutritious food is a focus including breastfeeding information, preparation of baby food and community kitchens.

The Best Babies programs are also offering innovative options for participants such as food vouchers that are redeemable at the local community market (through Esquimalt Best Babies), community kitchens and the opportunity to grow food in a community garden plot. There are five different locations throughout the Capital Region where new and expecting mothers can seek nutritional assistance and information: Esquimalt Neighbourhood House, Fernwood Community Centre, Native Friendship Centre (downtown), Western Communities (contact Esquimalt Neighbourhood House) and Peninsula Community Services.

LifeCycles Fruit Tree Project[56]

The Victoria Fruit Tree Project is coordinated by LifeCycles, a nonprofit organization based in James Bay. The Project has effectively identified a source of fresh local food that was previously being greatly underutilized. Recognizing that many households were not harvesting their backyard fruit trees, in 1998 the Fruit Tree Project began to pick and distribute the fruit from private trees. In 2002, the Project harvested and distributed 20,000 pounds of fruit.

The fruit harvested includes: cherries, plums, apples and pears. Fruit is shared between homeowners, volunteers and emergency food distributors. One third is utilized for processing into juice and apple sauce that can be sold to raise funds for the project.

Food security assets and challenges for supplemental nutrition and community food programs include:

Food Security Assets

- Meal programs serving vulnerable populations (senior citizens/children etc) help to ensure that these groups have healthier diets
- Programming that educates about nutrition and cooking equips individuals and/or households with the tools to eat well and stay healthy
- Innovative food programs such as the Esquimalt Neighbourhood House "cooking show" generate enthusiasm about, and interest in, food
- Innovative distribution approaches such as community kitchens and the Fruit Tree Project provide low-income people with dignified (and enabling) options for accessing low-cost food

Food Security Challenges

- In the current funding environment, more dollars are directed at crisis management than at prevention – funds for preventative programs are difficult to acquire
- Self-help programs such as community kitchens require some capacity from their participants (willingness to commit to participation and to sustain the kitchen over the long-term). Within the current environment of crisis (described in Part 3) many individuals and families cannot make this commitment
- Local food is not the focus of many of these community food programs (in part because of cost)

Conclusions

The increasing diversity of retail distribution resources in the Region is a sign of growing consumer awareness about the superior quality of foods being produced locally and sustainably. Distribution options such as farm gate sales, farmers' markets and box programs ensure that farmers engaged in sustainable (and labour intensive) practices can market their products for a fair price. These distribution resources also provide incubators for new small scale producers, ensuring that they can continue to participate in the market.

Unfortunately, the small retail distribution resources are not accessible to the majority of consumers who continue to shop at large grocery stores and are not exposed to locally produced foods. The limited local food production described in Part 1 is a significant part of the problem.

Some retailers argue that the limited availability of local food in grocery stores is due to the consumers' unwillingness to pay the higher prices required to support local producers. Evidence to the contrary may be found in the tremendous popularity of organic foods (which involve a considerable premium) and in the aforementioned success of sales of local foods through other means.

Nonetheless, increased marketing and education about the importance of local food is a key factor in altering the food system. So long as the issues around local food (particularly pricing) remain invisible to the average consumer there will not be a critical mass of public concern about the food system. At the same time, without access to local foods, consumers simply cannot vote with their dollars. Increasing local production is vital to increasing the amount of local food flowing through retail outlets.

For low-income citizens, many of the distribution resources discussed are not an option for accessing food. For these consumers, supplemental nutrition and community food programs can be the only means for avoiding charitable food distribution. Cutbacks to these programs remove constructive community solutions to hunger and malnourishment.

Summary Table 2

Indicator	Status
Wholesalers	• Often not visible to consumer but critical to distribution • Mostly imported foods traveling long distances to the region (many food miles)
Retail – grocery stores	• Visible, accessible, can educate consumers • High proportion of imported foods (in part because of limited availability of local food and lower prices • Difficult for local producers to access (quantities required, regulations etc.) • Some local retailers demonstrate commitment to regional food system and local producers
Retail – farmers' markets	• Increasing in number and popularity • Direct producer-consumer link • Fair prices to farmers • Lack broad accessibility (due to limited times/locations)
Retail – box programs	• Local, fresh fruits and vegetables direct to people • Fair prices to farmers • Some are affordable option for low-income people • Limited consumer choice with local boxes
Retail – cooperatives	• Can increase producer/consumer power • Require member support • Fair prices to farmers
Retail – farm gate sales	• Many local farm stands doing well • Direct producer-consumer link, brings consumer to the farm (learning opportunity) • Fair prices to farmers • Not accessible to everyone (transport)
Restaurants	• Some chefs and restaurants increasing profile of locally grown/raised food products • Local food focused restaurants provide fair prices to farmers • Local food restaurants not broadly accessible (costs) • Fast food contributing to diet-related health problems
Emergency food services	• Increase in numbers reflects growing number of hungry residents – "barometer of hunger" • Undermines self reliance of clients – not a long term solution to hunger
Supplemental nutrition and community food programs	• Focus on public health and increasing self reliance • Budgets are being cut and programs are defaulting to crisis management

Part 3: Individual and Household Food Security

A measurement of the degree of individual and household food security is essentially a measure of the opposite – the extent of food insecurity. Assessing how many people are unable to meet their nutritional needs does not address whether food sources are sustainable. Nonetheless, the extent of hunger and malnutrition is an integral part of measuring food security.

> The Canadian Food Bank Association's 2003 *HungerCount* report finds that "in every region, food banks report that inadequate minimum wage and social assistance rates, followed closely by high rents, are among the primary reasons for the growing demand for emergency food assistance."
>
> – *HungerCount 2003*, p.17

Information about the affordability and accessibility of food is utilized for this baseline assessment. Depending on their scope, studies of household and individual food security may involve substantial (financial, professional and volunteer) resources and may collect data through intrusive and time-intensive measures such surveys and observation.[57]

However, "indirect indicators" can provide accurate and legitimate information about "financial resource constraints… resource augmentation strategies [such as emergency food usage]… and indications of programmatic activities at the community level that… suggest the presence of local problems of food insecurity."[58] Indirect indicators will provide data for this assessment of household and individual food security. These indicators offer important insight into issues of food insecurity because, rather than isolating the issue of hunger, they offer contextual information, generating an understanding of *why* people are struggling to meet their nutritional needs.

The following indirect indicators will be used to evaluate hunger and malnutrition in the Capital Region:

- Income
- Cost of housing
- Cost of nutritious food
- Accessibility of transportation
- Emergency food services

Why does household food security matter?

Household food security is not just a reflection of the economic status of particular individuals. It is a measurement of the health of an entire community. Studies conducted both in Canada and the United States, have documented the negative consequences of food insecurity. According to the *2001 National Population Health Survey*, food insecurity in Canada is significantly associated with poor health, chronic health conditions, obesity and depression.[59] For both adults and children, food insecurity increases the potential for illness and general feelings of poor health.

Adults with insufficient food access are more likely to have both calcium and vitamin E intakes of less than 50% of the recommended amounts. Other nutrient and food group deficiencies may also exist and "the health effects of these low intakes may not be apparent immediately, but over the long term they could increase these adults' risk of developing chronic diseases, including cancer and heart disease, and contribute to ill health."[60]

"The total direct cost of obesity in Canada in 1997 was estimated to be over $1.8 billion. The three largest contributors were hypertension, type II diabetes mellitus and coronary artery disease. The economic burden of diabetes alone in BC in 1993 was $80 million, including direct and indirect costs. Cardiovascular disease accounted for 40% of deaths in BC and cost $2.25 billion in 1993."

– *Cost of Eating in BC* 2001, p.7

Insufficient nutrition is associated with an increased likelihood of diet-related health issues such as diabetes, hypertension, and cardiovascular disease. Studies of the links between diabetes and food insecurity, show that patients experiencing food insecurity require more medical interventions – physician phone calls and clinic visits – and face more difficulty in managing the disease.[61] This translates into increased strain on the medical system that could be avoided if issues of food insecurity were addressed.

For pregnant women and their families, food insecurity can have particularly detrimental effects. Low birth weights are significantly related to low socio-economic status. For children – still growing and developing at a rapid rate – the implications of food insecurity are profound. Children from food insecure households are more likely to experience stomachaches, headaches and to develop colds.[62]

In addition to physical effects, food insecurity has also been associated with increased levels of social difficulty. For children between six and eleven this means trouble getting along with other children and for food insecure teens there are higher incidences of suspension from school, difficulties socially and even higher risks of suicide.[63]

Malnourished children also struggle with participating and excelling in school. According to the Canadian Living Foundation, "research tells us that there is a strong link between nutrition and learning. Kids who don't get enough to eat are tired, have short attention spans, and can't learn or solve problems as well as classmates who eat nutritious meals."[64] When children are deprived of sufficient nutrition, they score lower in tests in all areas including reading, arithmetic and general knowledge.[65]

Income

The average household income for the Capital Region in 2000 was $55,144. The average fluctuates considerably from one municipality to another with Victoria at $42,323 and North Saanich at $81,989. In 2000, there were 27,670 households in the Region with annual incomes of under $20,000.[66] The lowest average incomes are in Victoria and Esquimalt. At 7.1%, the unemployment rate for the Region remains average amongst Canadian cities.[67]

There are 46,000 families in the Capital Region with children, including 16,500 children under the age of 14.[68] There is a considerably higher rate of poverty amongst single parent households which comprise about 10% of the Region's families. More than 60% of single parent families have incomes under $30,000.[69] While in 2000, the average income for Canadian two-parent families was $79,983, the average income for single parent families was $36, 837.[70] Amongst dual parent families in the Capital Region, there are estimated to be 8,875 families experiencing poverty.[xv]

There are more than 50,000 people in the Region living in poverty including 9,000 children. Of those experiencing poverty, 21,400 are employed and are therefore defined as "working poor."[71] First Nations communities in the Region are experiencing comparatively high levels of unemployment and poverty. For example, within the Tsartlip community, 40-50% of adults are receiving social assistance. Between 1995 and 2000, the Capital Region saw a slight decrease in the overall number of residents categorized as low-income from 15.4% to 14.4%.

While the percentage of low-income households in Greater Victoria is lower than in some other western Canadian cities (Vancouver, Edmonton and Saskatoon) these cities have seen a more substantial reduction in the proportion of low-income households. During a five year period when the percentage of low-income households dropped 1% in Greater Victoria, it dropped 3.4% in Saskatoon, 5.1% in Edmonton and 2.5% in Vancouver.[72] The comparative statistics suggest (particularly with the minimal population growth in the Region) that low-income people within Greater Victoria are finding it relatively difficult to alter their circumstances.

xv Community Council provides an important discussion of the difficulty of defining poverty and the diversity of definitions used in Canada, some of which are relative and some absolute. This discussion may be found at: http://www.communitycouncil.ca/MEASURING%20POVERTY.pdf. Within this Assessment, both poverty and low income are used as referenced in other documents. The most commonly utilized definition of poverty relies on the Low Income Cut-Off measure, a comparative standard set annually by Statistics Canada.

Cost of Housing

One of the substantial challenges for low-income individuals and families in the Capital Region is finding affordable housing. Owning a home is prohibitive for many people and rental housing is both limited and expensive. More than 22,000 households in the Region are spending over 30% of their income on shelter and almost 5,600 families are spending half or more than half of their income on housing. [73]

Quick facts about the cost of housing

A single man who receives the $510/month Income Assistance available to him earns less than $7,000 annually. The cost of an average bachelor apartment in the Region is $501 a month.

A single person working full time at minimum wage earning the maximum before taxes of $19,960 cannot afford to pay the average rent in the Capital Region while meeting other basic needs.

Making Room 2003, p.12

While the costly housing in the Region has been well-documented, the implications for meeting basic food and nutrition needs have been less understood. For those with limited financial resources, meeting nutritional needs is often a secondary consideration to retaining shelter.

The average monthly rent for an apartment in Greater Victoria is $648, meaning that a single person is required to earn about $26,000 annually, to pay for his/her shelter and to meet other basic needs.[74] According the 2002 data from the Multiple Listing Service, the average selling price of a home in Metro Victoria is about $270,864. In 1987, the average cost was $110,135. Rental costs have also shot up within Greater Victoria. As those with low-incomes are dedicating larger proportions of their limited budgets to housing, there is less money left over for food and other necessities.

Cost of nutritious food

According to Statistics Canada, in 2001 the average household in the Capital Region spent $5,255 on food. Capital Regional Planning Services estimates that this translates into about 11.9% of the average household income spent on food.[75] However, for households earning less than $20,000 a year, this expenditure would require more than a quarter of their income.[xvi]

For a more precise measurement of food costs, each year the Vancouver Island Health Authority Prevention Services Nutrition Program calculates the cost of purchasing nutritious food in communities on Southern Vancouver Island. The resulting "Food Basket" is an estimation of the cost of a nutritious diet for various individuals based on age and demographics. Costing is based on energy and nutrient recommendations from the 1990 Recommended Nutrient Intakes for Canadians. Foods are priced in six local grocery stores and are selected based on the frequency of purchase by Canadian consumers and for their nutrient values.[76]

The percentage of income required to feed a household varies considerably depending upon household size and income. The chart below uses the Nutritious Food Basket calculations for 2002 and 2003.[77] This spring, the cost of feeding very young children (from 1 to 6 years of age) ranged between $66 and $96 per month. As children enter their teenage years the cost increases to a range of $140 to $200 each month. For adults to purchase nutritious food costs between $130 and $192 a month and costs are particularly high for pregnant women to meet their nutritional needs.

Table F
Income assistance rates & food costs for a family of four in the Capital Region[78]

Year	2003	2000
Provincial monthly shelter allowance	$590	$650
Provincial monthly support allowance	$401	$401
Monthly cost of healthy food	$594.86	$573.89

xvi Measuring the cost of food is not intended to address the issue of whether or not food is reasonably priced. Low food costs are not an indicator of a sustainable food system. What is significant about the cost of food is the degree to which low-income people are able to meet their nutritional needs without resorting to emergency means. Food cost is relevant then, when it is understood in relationship to the incomes of individuals and families.

While the government assistance for families has decreased, the cost of nutritious food has increased. The chart shows that in 2003 a family of four required almost $600 per month to meet their nutritional needs. For a family receiving income assistance and paying the minimum for shelter (and often this affordable housing is not available) less than $300 dollars a month will remain for *all* of their monthly expenses including clothing, transportation and food. A family in this position is virtually guaranteed to become reliant on emergency food resources.

Accessibility of transportation

Aside from food costs, another indicator of food security for individuals and families is availability of transportation, or physical access to appropriate food resources. A number of different groups may face difficulties accessing adequate transportation. Lack of accessible transportation may be a serious barrier to food – both at the retail level and with respect to emergency food.

According to Todd Litman of the Victoria Transport Policy Institute, approximately 20% of Canadian households do not own a private automobile. Half of this group is unable to afford ownership and the other half includes those with disabilities constraining mobility.[79] The "transportation disadvantaged" (a term employed by North American transit planners) may include those with physical and mental challenges, low-income people and those who, for a range of reasons, do not have a driver's license (age, language barriers etc.)[80]

The transportation alternatives are limited: taxis are expensive, cycling and walking are only viable within a relatively small radius and public transportation may be too costly, physically challenging or logistically inconvenient (due to bus routes and/or distances from stops to destinations).

While some neighbourhoods within the Region have numerous one-stop grocery stores within a relatively small radius, others have none. In addition, the vast majority of the emergency food resources available within the Capital Region are concentrated within downtown Victoria – for those requiring these resources, proximity is a significant issue. The relationship between transportation and food security has been well-documented in the United States.[xvii]

The public transit routes of the Capital Region have been repeatedly reduced over the past few years. Since September 2001, the Victoria Transit Commission has approved cuts for almost 40,000 service hours, resulting in "passenger crowding, chaotic rescheduling, and reduction of established routes."[81] For elderly transit users in a number of neighbourhoods, reduced route options have created a serious mobility problem.[82]

Because food access is a regular concern – on a weekly or in some cases a daily basis – public transit can be expensive. Currently, it costs an adult between $3.50 and $5.00 to travel to and from their food resource (depending on zones). For seniors and youth it costs between $2.20 and $3.50. For a monthly bus pass adults pay $55. These rates are prohibitive for people already struggling to meet their monthly expenses.

There are some assistance options available for those who cannot afford public transit. The BC Transit Ticket Assistance Program, a partnership between BC Transit and Community Council, provides bus tickets for those in emergency situations. "Last year [2002] close to 30,000 free tickets were distributed… The Victoria Regional Transit Commission contributes 15,000 tickets per year [and] over 30 social service agencies purchase another 15,000 and… distribute all the tickets free of charge."[83]

Because these tickets are intended for use in exceptional situations, a high percentage are used for financial or health emergencies, but 16% of the tickets distributed between 2001 and 2002 were used for meeting basic needs, including trips to the food bank.[84] The number of free tickets being requested has grown steadily since the program's inception and Community Council and participating agencies have recently recommended that the program be expanded. Even if the number of tickets is increased, this program is not intended to subsidize those requiring regular, affordable transit.

The University of Victoria's U-PASS is a subsidization program through which students pay a mandatory ($51) fee with each semester and in return receive a four-month pass for all Greater Victoria bus routes. This is a tremendous savings over the regular $55 per month adult bus pass and provides students with an affordable transportation option.

Nonetheless, being able to pay the fare does not

xvii For a full discussion of the findings of this research see: *Transportation and Food: The Importance of Access*. Centre for Food and Justice, October 2002: http://departments.oxy.edu/uepi/cfj/resources/TransportationAndFood.htm necessarily make public transit a viable option for acquiring food, particularly for the elderly, those with mobility challenges and single parents with small children.[xviii] BC Transit does provide limited alternatives for those who cannot use regular public transit – a door-to-door transit service with booking and eligibility requirements and a taxi subsidization service – but they are intended primarily for people with disabilities.

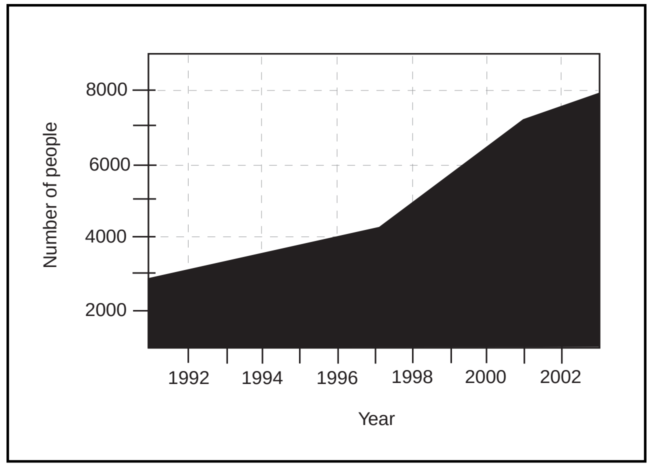
Emergency food services

In communities across British Columbia, including the Capital Region, the numbers of organizations offering emergency food services is on the rise. This increase addresses the growing need in communities across the province which has a 20% low-income rate and has seen an increase of 22.9% in food bank use since 1997.[85] The 20 agencies listed as emergency food providers in the *Capital Region Food Resources Directory* are only a partial representation of the organizations now offering emergency food in the Capital Region.

Yet despite the increase in emergency food resources, organizations involved in social services in the Capital Region are seeing rising levels of stress and difficulty amongst their clients. The Community Council has reported that the government cutbacks are impacting social and health-related programs and services with 61% of agencies reporting higher numbers of people seeking assistance with basic survival needs. Ninety-one percent of these agencies are seeing evidence of increasing levels of stress amongst those they serve.[86] Forty percent of agencies have seen a decrease in funding and 26% have reduced programs and services.

In July of 2002, Community Council spoke with a range of social service agencies in the Region about their circumstances: "the number of parents asking for food and clothing at [one] serving agency [had] almost doubled in four months."[87] One of the Region's neighbourhood houses reported a leap in the number of families in major crisis from 12 families in a month to 49 families.[88] Food banks were reporting that 30% more people were requesting food than in April of 2002.

Graph A: Sidney Lions Food Bank 1991-2003



Similar anecdotal information was collected through conversations with almost 70 organizations during the development of the *Food Resource Directory* in January of 2003. Based on these discussions it is evident that "the number of people in need of access to nutritious food has grown at an alarming rate… Organizations providing food resources are currently unable to meet the needs of those who require assistance."[89]

The place where the increase in hunger has been most evident is amongst emergency food services such as food banks and free meal programs. In one day in October of 2003, the Victoria Cool Aid Society turned away a record number of 73 people seeking food from their drop-in meal program.[90] Many people are relying on these services for day-to-day survival, not just in one-time crisis situations.[91]

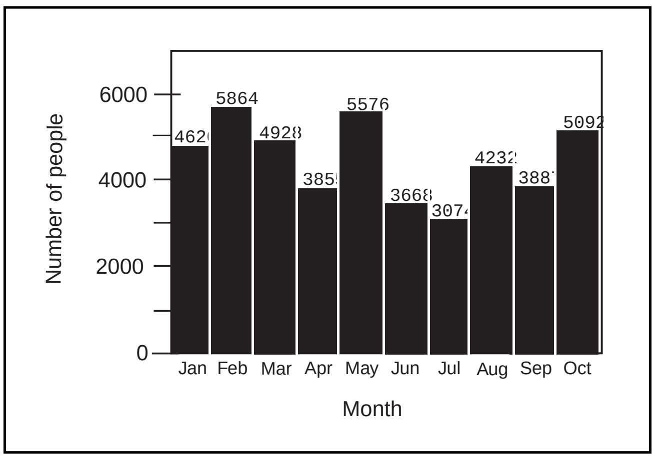
While emergency food services provide a tremendous (and currently vital) service for families and individuals facing hunger, they are not considered to be part of a secure food system. Often emergency food suppliers cannot offer balanced nutrition and fresh fruit and vegetables are scarce. This is largely a reflection of their dependence upon donations and volunteerism. A charitable approach to food distribution also does not generate or improve self-reliance. Regardless of the sensitivity of staff and/or volunteers the charitable nature of emergency food services is not a dignified means of accessing food.

Graphs A and B depict the growing numbers of people seeking emergency food in the Region. The Sidney Lions Food Bank has seen its numbers of

xviii Other alternatives to public transit include the free delivery services offered by some large retailers and box programs that are increasing in their diversity and price range. These food resources are discussed in more detail in Part 2 of this report.

clients increase incrementally since 1991. The number of people seeking emergency food more than doubled over the course of a decade and in each of the past two years there have been over 8,000 people seeking emergency food. Approximately 40% of those served by this food bank are under the age of 16. Sidney Lions has also seen growing numbers of senior citizens in need – about 6% of their clientele.

Graph B: Mustard Seed Food Bank 2003



The Goldstream Food Bank serves Colwood, Langford, Highlands, East Sooke, Metchosin and View Royal. Over the past year the Goldstream Food Bank has experienced a rapid increase in levels of need in those communities. Between 2002 and 2003 the numbers of people seeking food have increased by almost a thousand people – from 7,156 people in 2002 to 8,036 people within the first nine months of 2003.

Similarly, there have been increased numbers of people seeking assistance at the Mustard Seed Food Bank. In 1990, three large distributors of emergency food hampers in the Region (Mustard Seed, St. Vincent de Paul and Juan de Fuca Community Food Bank) provided 12,566 hampers for people in need. Between January and December of 2003, more than 18,000 hampers have been distributed at the Mustard Seed *alone*. Almost 900 new families have sought assistance from the Mustard Seed during the same period. The total numbers of people assisted at the Mustard Seed each month is portrayed in the graph above.

School Meals Program

As part of the provincially funded Social Equity Programs, School Meals ensure that children and teens that are undernourished receive at least one balanced meal each day. Although the program remains universal (accessible to anyone) in elementary schools, it is intended to meet the needs of families who are struggling to feed their children.

The School Meals Program operates in School Districts 61 and 62, serving 12 schools. In the 2002/2003 school year, 1,231 children in Greater Victoria were fed through the Program and another 365 children in Sooke received meals. Overall, the School Meals Program feeds almost 1,600 children each weekday – providing 1,150 hot meals and 346 cold meals.

Provincial cutbacks to this program occurred before the 2002/2003 school year. This resulted in the shifting of funds, including the removal of hot meals for secondary school students. However, the overall number of meals served has actually increased (due to a reallocation of funds by the regional program coordinators) as more schools have joined the program. Funding for the program is only guaranteed for the 2003/2004 school year; it is unclear whether government will provide further funding.

In addition to funding from the provincial government, the Board of Trustees contributed almost $300,000 to the 2002/2003 School Meal Program. The coordinators of the School Meal Program have encouraged parents to pay what they are able to afford. This approach helps to ensure that families with the ability to pay are covering costs, while the children of families who cannot are able to benefit from the program. Overall, in 2001/2002, parent contributions paid 17.6% of the total cost of the program.[92]

The combined funds are used to implement the universal meals program for elementary schools in which lunches are made available on a daily basis – four days with hot meals and one day with a cold meal. Middle and secondary schools receive cold meals 5 days per week and these are distributed to the students identified as most in need by the school principal. This adjustment is in an effort to save money while still meeting the "needs of the neediest." The combination of the high rate of usage of the program and the percentage of payment received reveals a relatively high level of need amongst children and youth in the schools targeted by the Meals Program.

Conclusions

An assessment of household and individual food security reveals that thousands of people throughout the Capital Region are currently unable to meet their basic nutritional needs. The people experiencing food insecurity include working adults, unemployed and underemployed adults, youth, children and senior citizens.

Individuals and families who are low-income are far more likely to experience food insecurity, particularly when faced with the Region's high costs of housing and transportation. In the face of these challenges, ensuring universal and sustainable food access appears a lofty goal. However, the need for a new approach is becoming increasingly evident.

This approach must address hunger by means that are far-sighted, collaborative and creative – it must include partners from government, health and social services, non-governmental organizations and community groups. Charitable and emergency food services do not provide an adequate resolution to the challenges of food insecurity.

The rapid growth of emergency food services in the Region – both in terms of the number of agencies providing these services and the number of people requiring assistance – reflects a hunger problem that is increasing in severity. Shrinking budgets and continuous cutbacks are damaging the ability of social and health programs to meet the needs of those who are hungry.

Summary Table 3

Indicator	Status
Income	• More than 50,000 people in the Region live in poverty, including 9,000 children • Proportionally, the number of low-income households remains steady (is shrinking in other Canadian cities)
Cost of housing	• Housing prices are among the highest in Canada and vacancy rates among the lowest • 22,000 households spend more than 30% of their income on housing • High housing costs shrink food budgets
Cost of nutritional food	• Households on social assistance cannot afford to meet their basic needs and are relying on emergency food • More cuts to partial or full social assistance cuts are coming in spring 2004
Accessibility of transportation	• Costs and cutbacks associated with public transit negatively impact accessibility of food resources • Students have affordable public transit option with U-PASS
Emergency food services	• Increased levels of need: food bank use up more than 30% in past year • Turning away record numbers of people (while at same time funding is being reduced) • Limited accessibility (locations and food availability)

Recommendations for action

The complexity of the food system – all of the ways in which food influences our communities, our environment and our lives – deserves far more attention than a single report can provide. Further research is required to fill in gaps and to expand on many of the issues only touched upon in this assessment. However, it is action, not research that will ultimately lead to much needed changes in our food system.

Because this report is just one step in moving toward a food secure region, its recommendations are action-oriented. Based on the findings of the assessment, the recommendations provide priorities for action for individuals, community organizations and governments throughout the Region.

Individuals can…

- Buy from local farmers whenever possible – request more local foods at your grocer
- Visit local farms and learn how food is produced and processed
- Support the organizations that support farmers (see "Agri-food organizations and programs")
- Encourage local and provincial governments to assist farmers with access to land and with improvements to regulations
- Support (with dollars) retailers and restaurants that are committed to providing local foods
- Ask local officials to make food an important issue on the local/regional government agenda
- Express concerns to the provincial government about cutbacks to social assistance
- Grow food in the backyard or the local community garden
- Support (or organize!) community food programs e.g. community kitchens, food boxes for low-income households

Community groups and organizations can…

- Raise consumer awareness about the importance of buying local foods
- Explore options for community food programs – find innovative ways to meet food needs such as buying clubs, community kitchens and community gardens
- Develop partnerships amongst organizations, government and the private sector to meet food needs and improve our agri-food system
- Encourage local and provincial governments to assist farmers with access to land and with improvements to regulations
- Support and initiate community affordable housing projects – affordable housing options improve the ability of low-income people to meet food needs
- Express concerns to the provincial government about cutbacks to social assistance
- Promote agricultural education within the Region

Local governments can…

- Make firm policy commitments to protect agricultural land, develop an Agricultural Advisory Committee, ensure a coordinated approach
- Support proposed developments to provide affordable or mixed income housing
- Develop more collaboration amongst organizations, government and the private sector to meet food needs and to improve our agri-food system
- Explore opportunities to increase the participation of young people in farming – provide educational facilities to increase the agricultural education offerings
- Provide support (through policy/staff time/promotion) for urban food production, community and rooftop gardens
- Promote agricultural education within the Region
- Express concerns to the provincial government about cutbacks to social assistance
- Support and/or implement educative/empowerment-oriented community food programs

Glossary

A range of **food security** definitions, including the United Nations' definition, are available at the Ryerson's Centre for Studies in Food Security web site: http://www.ryerson.ca/~foodsec/resources_05.html#definitions

Residents of a **food secure community** have universal access to food that is healthful, nutritious, safe, and culturally acceptable. Food is acquired through dignified means and from non-emergency sources. The community has created "a system of growing, manufacturing, processing, making available, and selling food that is regionally based and grounded in the principles of justice, democracy, and sustainability" (From the Community Food Security Coalition, http://www.foodsecurity.org)

The **food system** is the path of food from field to plate including "production, distribution, marketing, preparation, consumption and disposal" (*Community Food Security 101: What's the Food System Got to Do with It?* Arizona Food Banks and Community Food Bank of Tucson, January 2003).

The term **foodshed** "describe[s] the flow of food from the area where it is grown into the place where it is consumed. Recently, the term has been revived as a way of looking at and thinking about local, sustainable food systems." For more information about foodsheds see: http://www.foodshed.wisc.edu/foodshed.htm

The term **food miles** refers to the distance traveled by a particular food item from farm gate to dinner plate. In the case of processed foods, food miles can be composite "taking into account their ingredients and the materials for their packaging." Generally, food miles measure the amount of fossil fuels and air pollution involved in transporting food. For more on food miles see: "Measuring by the mile." http://www.mcspotlight.org/media/reports/foodmiles.html

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