

The Northern Regional Districts Regional Food Charter

The Comox Valley and the Strathcona Regional Districts are collaborating to present a vision for an integrated, localized food system that benefits all residents within the geographic borders of the Comox Valley Regional District and the Strathcona Regional District. The North Island Food Charter is intended to set out this Region's commitment to the development of a coordinated Regional food policy, and champion community engagement and participation in conversations and actions that enhance food security in the North Island geographical region.

The Food Charter¹ states a vision and identifies six key principles for a just and sustainable food system and to effect change:

1. Social Justice

- No one in the Region/s should go hungry as safe, nutritious food is a basic right of everyone.

2. Nutritional Foods are Essential for a Healthy Community Population

- Access to healthy foods and good eating practices, are important factors in determining the overall health of District/s residents.
- Income, employment, housing, transportation, health, recreation and agriculture policies must be congruent with attaining greater community food security for all residents within the Districts
- Neighbourhood access to nutritious food increases the likelihood that people will have healthy diets and therefore must be part of community planning.

3. Ecological and Social Health

- Fresh food produced close to home is an important part of the foundation of our District/s food system.
- Farmland should be used for food production using good stewardship practices.
- Local food products must be fostered through support for farmers markets, farm gate sales, local food outlets, and local products, including within our food service industry and public and non-profit institutions.
- Food must be produced, processed and distributed in a way that supports environmental sustainability, nutritional quality and safety.

4. A Sustainable Food System is part of Short and Long Term Planning

- Producing food locally/regionally is an important way to reduce greenhouse gas emissions associated with food transportation/food miles.
- Local farmland plays a multifunctional role in terms of protecting watersheds and wildlife and in providing green space as well as being essential for our long-term food production capacity. These values must be recognized and supported.

¹ Adapted from the Social Planning, Food Policy, Vancouver Food Charter VIHA Food Charter Draft and the Capital Region Charter

- Initiatives that encourage bio-diversity, soil fertility, soil conservation, zero-waste, and minimization of environmentally-persistent, unhealthy chemicals must be encouraged.
- Fresh water and marine eco-systems must be protected, and sustainable harvesting practices encouraged.
- A strong commitment to local food will support emergency preparedness and the resilience of our communities in the face of climate change, uncertain global food production, and environmental or economic disruptions.

5. Community Collaboration, Participation and Local Ownership

- Food brings people together in the celebration of family, friendship and community. It also strengthens links between diverse cultures and communities.
- Food security contributes to the physical, mental, cultural, spiritual and emotional well being of our region's residents.
- Domestic and local ownership of our food supply is critical for the region's future.
- Healthy local food systems involve the active stewardship of all sectors of the community: public, private, and voluntary.

6. Education, Knowledge and Skills

- Communities traditional, scientific, and Indigenous knowledge and practices must be respected and protected both in their own right, and because, they contribute to the genetic diversity and seed fertility that are the cornerstones of our ability to feed ourselves. This knowledge must be passed on to future generations.
- Future scientific research direction should emphasis increasing production to ensure local food security and maximizing nutritional value using new methods and traditional knowledge and skills.

Working towards these principles is the responsibility of individuals, organizations, business and community associations, institutions, authorities, and local and regional governments in the Regional Districts.

The Charter honours Canada's commitments to global and local food security. This includes the *United Nations Covenant on Social, Economic and Cultural Rights* specifying the right of everyone to adequate food, and *Canada's Action Plan for Food Security*. The Action Plan states: "the fundamental right of everyone to be free from hunger" and "food security exists when all people at all times have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life."

Definitions:

Food security: In a food secure community, the growing, processing and distribution of healthy, safe food is economically viable, socially just, environmentally friendly and regionally based.

Food system: The food system is the path of food from field to plate, including production, distribution, marketing, preparation, consumption and disposal.

Food miles: The distance between food's point of production and consumption, a broader definition includes all of the energy required from seed to plate. This measurement is increasingly recognized in its relationship to climate change.

Therefore, to develop and promote food security in the Regions as best we are able, we can:

1. Promote and support the right of all residents to healthy food.
2. Advocate for income, employment, housing, and transportation policies that support access to food.
3. Promote eating locally grown food as a way to increase consumption of fresh foods, reduce “food miles” and increase local economic stability.
4. Protect productive farmland in our region and support strategies to make it accessible for farming.
5. Protect our fresh water and marine eco-systems and promote sustainable harvesting practices.
6. Ensure appropriate quality and supply of water for agricultural and home gardening use.
7. Promote convenient access to healthy and affordable foods at the neighborhood level.
8. Work with consumers, municipalities, and institutions to promote healthy food purchasing practices that support local farm and food businesses.
9. Promote partnership, programs and policies that support rural-urban food links through farmers’ markets, and other rural-urban initiatives.
10. Support incentives to enhance environmental values, and recognize the multi-functionality of farms.
11. Support and encourage urban agriculture by supporting community gardens, backyard and rooftop gardens, city fruit trees and other initiatives.
12. Support strategies for regional waste disposal and composting systems that recycle nutrients for regional food production.
13. Support training and income-generating programs that promote farming and food security within a community economic development model.
14. Support health and nutrition promotion strategies that encourage and increase the health status and self-reliance of all members of the population.
15. Work proactively to achieve these goals through the Regional Food and Health Action Plan as well as support a regular community food security assessment on the Region’s progress towards food security.
16. Work proactively to achieve and support a Regional Food Council to support planning, policy and ongoing decision making in support of this Regional Food Charter

Everyone in the Region has a role in creating a healthy local food system.

These actions will be achieved by the choices of individuals and the actions both alone and through working together with local, regional, provincial, federal and First Nations governments, community-based organizations, community associations, farm organizations, food processing and food service businesses and organizations, Aboriginal peoples, immigrants and residents, business organizations, trade unions, educational and health institutions.

The Vision of this Charter will live and breathe through individual and collaborative support and action.

On behalf of _____, I/we, _____ support the vision of the Regional Food Charter.

Signed this _____ day, _____ month _____ year.

Number of Members _____