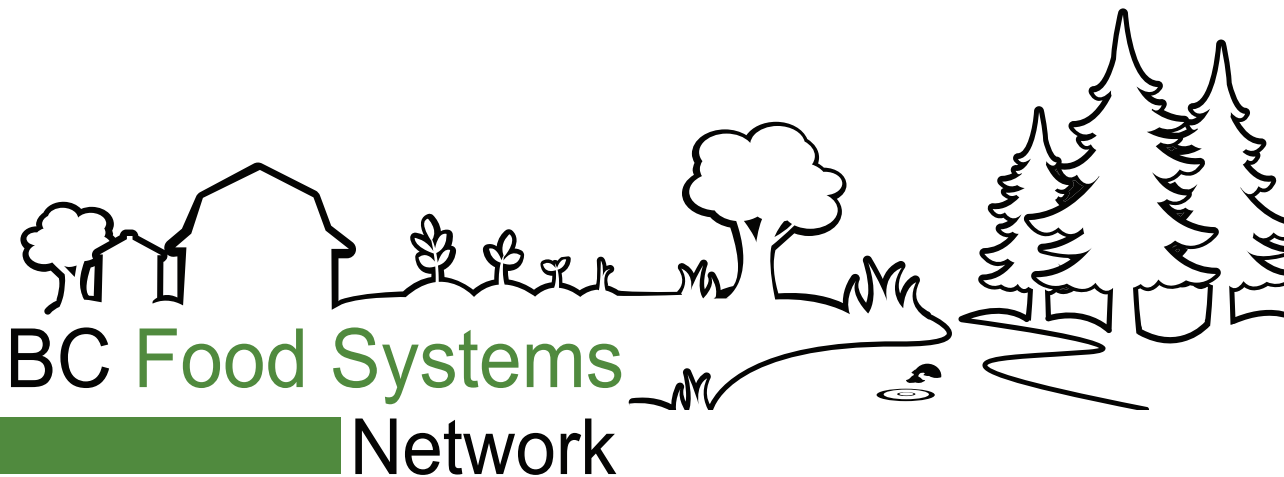


Food Security



A Primer for Municipal and Regional
Candidates

October 2008



www.fooddemocracy.org

Food Security: A Primer for Municipal and Regional Candidates

1. The Purpose of This Primer

The BC Food Systems Network is an association of individuals and organizations promoting food security. We have prepared this primer for the 2008 municipal and regional elections to help candidates and their prospective constituents understand food security and how it affects their region or municipality.

2. What is Food Security?

Food security means people's ability to secure nutritious, affordable, culturally appropriate food through just and healthy systems. Food connects our kitchen tables to larger issues including food safety, multiculturalism, nutrition, environmental sustainability, community development and social justice.



What you can do: Think about food in the bigger picture of food security, and look for the connections in your community among local health authorities, farms, healthy ecosystems, food banks, schools, parks, water and waste systems, grocery stores, restaurants, tourism businesses, and so on.

3. How Does Food Security Affect my Constituents?

Some of your constituents are struggling with poverty and rising food prices, worrying about their own health and that of their families. Most health problems are associated with the inability to afford a healthy diet. First Nations communities are devastated by declining fish stocks, damaged watersheds, and diminished access to traditional food sources. Those living in geographically isolated communities have limited access to healthy affordable food. Many farmers are dealing with rising costs of land, fertilizers, feed, and other inputs, and competing against artificially low global food prices. Many of your constituents work on the frontlines of poverty and need. Others are increasingly concerned about the environmental impacts of large-scale agriculture which depends on fossil fuels for chemical inputs, processing, and shipping food around the world.



What you can do: Consult your local food security group for ideas. Municipal and regional governments in other parts of the world have solved food problems in elegant ways. Local policy mechanisms (e.g., taxation) may be able to address some of these concerns. It is your responsibility to understand and address the food security needs of the people in your community.

4. Food Security and Peak Oil

The end of cheap oil is already a threat to food security: transport costs are rising and the competition for available farmland between food-based fuel (ethanol) and actual food is driving up the prices of crops. But the biggest threat is a permanent year-over-year decrease in agricultural yield as the Green Revolution goes into reverse. Current industrial farm yields depend on natural-gas based fertilizer and oil-based herbicides and pesticides in addition to the oil, gasoline, and diesel needed to plant, harvest, transport, and process food. As gas and oil peak (within the next 7 years globally, and in less time in North America) fossil fuel inputs will become less and less affordable. Yields will fall, and an artificially-fed human population will find itself in permanent and increasing food shortage. We have an extremely short time frame in which to begin raising most of our food locally and in much greater abundance, with organic (non-fossil-fuel-based) methods. Local farmland must be protected at all costs, and additional farmland reclaimed from development, in addition to pursuing a range of other initiatives from making home gardens a priority to adaptive re-use of buildings and rooftops for our own food production.



What you can do: Educate yourself about peak oil and about the dependence of much of the world's agriculture on fossil fuels. Assure that marine environment that support shellfish, fish and other marine food completely recovers.

5. Food Security and Climate Change

We are all becoming increasingly aware of human effects on the natural world. The worldwide contribution of agriculture to climate change, including deforestation for farmland and other land use changes, is estimated to be between 17% and 32% of all human-induced greenhouse gas emissions. This figure does not take into account the

contributions to greenhouse gases from refrigeration, freezing, processing, and transportation. Transportation alone accounts for a great deal of greenhouse gases: studies suggest that the average meal travels 1500 miles from the farm to your plate.

Solutions include reduction in chemical inputs; reduction of practices that lead to topsoil loss; support for production and diets with less meat; support genetic diversity inherent in locally adapted indigenous food systems; support for the development of a strong local food economy.



What you can do: Talk about these issues with your local farmers and the people who support them. Listen to what they have to say. Visit your local farmers' market. Start a dialogue about encouraging a truly sustainable local farm economy. We need decision-makers who can lead the way towards a sustainable economy – and food is central to any local economy. Encourage local seed saving to ensure that seeds adapted to local climate change are available.

6. Food Security and Social Justice

One in six children in BC lives in poverty. Rising costs of gas and other fossil fuels are making it harder for low-income folks to eat healthily, and we can expect this to get worse as time goes on. One strategy is to rely on low-cost, high-calorie foods which require little preparation. This strategy backfires by increasing obesity and diet-related chronic diseases such as cardiac disease and diabetes. These are societal costs we cannot afford. In a province that produces such an abundance of food, it is unacceptable that so many of our friends and neighbours are hungry.



What you can do: Lend your support to local efforts that provide everyone with healthy food choices. Work for the food bank while seeking policy reform that will make it obsolete. Support those who encourage people to grow and prepare their own food and protect Indigenous food gardens and systems. Get to know the community kitchens, food pantries, community gardens, food cooperatives and food-buying clubs, and community-supported agriculture (CSA) programs in your community. Bring attention to the epidemic proportions of diabetes in Indigenous communities resulting from a lack of access to healthy culturally-adapted Indigenous foods. Address the declining health, abundance, and access to traditional foods in the forests and waterways.

7. Food Security and Regulation

Our ability to produce and eat high-quality local food is affected by government regulations at all levels. The Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR) is a provincial policy designed to benefit agriculture in BC, by reserving land for agricultural purposes and regulating development. The ALR should be maintained and strengthened. However the ALR, while restricting uses of farmland, no longer has companion policies that support the ability of farmers to earn a living wage for producing food. At the same time many other policies, including food safety regulations (on meat and other products), water and waste regulations and more, make farm and food businesses more and more challenging to operate sustainably. Policy frameworks and regulation need to take regional and community scale and requirements into account.

A recent regulation that has endangered community food security is the Meat Inspection Regulation (MIR) under the *BC Food Safety Act*. The age-old practice of processing meat on the farm and selling it from the farm gate has now become illegal, even though there is no evidence that this was ever unsafe. Small farm and food businesses are being punished for the sins of the huge ones. The MIR sets the bar for provincially licensed abattoirs so high that most operators cannot meet it. When the processor is lost, the producer and often the farm are lost, not to mention the butcher, meat counter and restaurant. Community economies are damaged; remote communities lose their self-reliance.



What you can do: Work with local food producers and processors, credit unions, Community Futures, and others on land use and taxation mechanisms that can assist farm and food businesses to flourish in your area, while supporting necessary steps to excellence in food safety in a financially affordable context.



What can you do?

- ✓ Support the formation of a food policy council in your community. These coalitions of organizations, elected officials, and others in the community work together to make the local food economy stronger and fairer.
- ✓ Help create a food charter in your community, such as those in Kaslo, Vancouver, and Victoria.
- ✓ Support local food security through community gardens, farmers' markets, community kitchens, composting programs, and other initiatives.
- ✓ Increase support for local farmers through buy-local initiatives, agri-tourism initiatives, or tax incentives.
- ✓ Support regional composting programs.
- ✓ Bring food and farming into the classroom; support school gardens and other programs.
- ✓ Engage the land use, water, and waste infrastructure in relation to farm and food businesses through zoning and taxation mechanisms (e.g., how can farmers be rewarded for the social and ecological benefits [such as carbon sinks] their farms provide?)
- ✓ Find the groups in your region or municipality working on food security and coalitions of organizations building skills and resources. Ask the BC Food Systems Network for help. Find out what the specific concerns are about food security in your region. And then think about how local government can become part of the solutions.

For More Information

BC Food Systems Network: <http://www.fooddemocracy.org/>; info@fooddemocracy.org

Farm Folk/City Folk: <http://www.farmfolkcityfolk.ca/>

A Seat at the Table: Resource guide for local governments to promote food secure communities:
<http://www.phsa.ca/HealthPro/PopPubHealth/default.htm>

Growing a Healthy Future for B.C. Families (The 2008 BC Agricultural Plan):
http://www.al.gov.bc.ca/Agriculture_Plan/

Food Policy Councils: <http://www.fooddemocracy.org/policy.php>

Vancouver: <http://www.city.vancouver.bc.ca/commsvcs/socialplanning/initiatives/foodpolicy/>

Toronto: http://www.toronto.ca/health/tfpc_index.htm

Food charters:

Vancouver: <http://www.city.vancouver.bc.ca/commsvcs/socialplanning/initiatives/foodpolicy/policy/charter.htm>

Capital Region: http://www.communitycouncil.ca/pdf/CR_Food_Charter_Final-2008-06-10.pdf

Kaslo: <http://nklcss.org/foodcharter.pdf>

Peak oil: <http://www.energybulletin.net/primer>