

Saanich Agriculture and Food Security

Appendix 2:

Summary of Stakeholder Input - Agriculture & Food Security Strengths & Challenges

Healthy Saanich Advisory Committee

Notes from Healthy Saanich April 27 meeting

- Wildlife management (deer and geese) will need to be addressed within a food security plan.
- Saanich has the land base to significantly increase local food production.
- Underutilization of rural land for food production.
- Protection of larger urban lots to preserve the ability of these lots to produce food could be considered.
- The OCP outlines the placement of a community garden in each of the local areas.
- Revisiting the roadside stand culture of the past to connect the public with the local farmers.
- Partnerships with stakeholders will be vital for food security.
- Gardens for students, farm to forks programs in schools and offering recreation programming around gardening could be offered.
- Access to local foods often require the use of a car. Local produce/farm stand “Pop Ups” along the Galloping Goose/Lochside Trails should be explored.
- An Agriculture and Food Security open house is schedule for May 26, 2016 at Saanich Commonwealth Place from 3:00 pm – 7:00 pm.

Peninsula & Area Agricultural Commission

Notes from June 9, 2016 meeting

Issues to be addressed in the Saanich Agriculture & Food Security Plan

- Non-farm use on agricultural land
 - Tourism / weddings / breweries
 - Potential increase in land value
- Agriculture as an excuse to do other things
- Impacts of use on future food production
- Equine community is important for overall agriculture viability – demand for hay production. Keeps land open and allows use of land that might otherwise be unproductive
- Cost of local products (is increasing due to lack of competition. Some products are not available locally any more. E.g. Top Shelf Feed is the only feed supplier.)
- Encourage local producers to support each other. “closing the circle”
- Small land base on the island
- Pressure from development potential

- Growing land is available, but economics is a challenge (\$80,000-100,000 / acre)
- Co-op lands is example of economic reality
- Cost of land is not consistent
- Need a strategy to encourage and assist new farmers (e.g. economic aid)
- Many new farmers are 50+ and purchase on Vancouver Island after moving from larger cities on the mainland.
- Desire for estate property (potential to lease the land from them for farming)
- Shortage of organic matter on farms.
- Loss of organic matter in our soil is an issue.
- Saanich green bin material goes up island to Cobble Hill.
- Local organic material should be composted and made available to the local farms.
- Urban areas need to work harder to make compost available locally.
- (Composting facilities need to be set up and operating properly.)
- Study of how farms could make a composting system work.
- Cost of land makes green manure challenging.
- Cold storage is expensive
- Commercial kitchen would be useful (to people wishing to do value added processing.)
North Saanich has indicated this in their plan.
- Only so much product can be taken at one time (when there is) no storage (available).
- (Increase the) viability of farms e.g. Galey.
- Farms need more support.
- Bonafide farmers need flexible (governance to support farming e.g. allow) farm worker housing.
- (Local Governments need to) follow through on issues brought (forward) by PAAC e.g. response to letters.
- Long term task force to work through issues is needed.
- Big issues have not been dealt with (proper management and operation of a composting facility on the peninsula; plan drainage from proposed development with agriculture industry in mind; agrologist extension officer available to the peninsula and island; farm worker housing)
- Educate the politicians.
- North Saanich, Central Saanich & Saanich need to work together.
- Governments need to be more open to solutions not react with “that won’t work”.
- Boots on the ground think tank.(?)
- Need for Regional agrologist.
- Co-operation with other groups that are already working on initiatives.
- Ease up on water restrictions (e.g. set restriction one month later and finish earlier.
Sooke water storage is more than adequate and the less water that is used causes water rates to increase for all, including farmers.)
- Water program should be (based) more on science.
- Potential threats to well water include storm water miss-management, soil deposition, etc.
- Storm water management e.g. McCue Creek / Martindale Flats –Central Saanich

- Use of Panama Flats?
- Use of parklands for agriculture.
- Ombudsperson to settle disputes.
- Educate the public and neighbours about the possible impacts of living near farms.

Environment & Natural Areas Advisory Committee

Notes from June 28, 2016 meeting

- Review the Regional Food Strategy being presented by the CRD.
 - P. 41 of the draft strategy “Principles: III. Avoid urban/agricultural land use conflict, mitigate where avoidance is not possible.” This statement seems to go against the recent train of thought where urban agriculture should be promoted and embraced? E.g. urban hen keeping.
- ALR needs to be strengthened.
- Use tools such as covenants, education, recognition, alter the tax structure, or perhaps the municipality could encourage and support the environmental farm plan approach.
- Food security – the definition should include mention of “economic and physical” accessibility. The wording of the definition from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations includes this detail. “Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life”. (World Food Summit, 1996)
- Need to address the difference between food security and food self-sufficiency in order to be clear as to what is actually attainable. Local food is important but may only be one small part of improving our food security.
- A major barrier for people purchasing healthy food is affordability and knowledge on preparation.
- Seattle and Washington State have been involved in surveying residents on their ability to access healthy food. See 2011 study “Healthy Food Access in WIC Households” “Food insecurity is more common in urban areas compared to rural areas, and it tends to be associated with an event that puts stress on the household budget.”p.3
 “The main determinants of physical access to healthy food include income level, distance to a healthy food provider, living in an ethnically dominated neighborhood, and living in a rural area.”p.4
- A major barrier to local food production being economically viable is competition from outside the local area and the price point that consumers will accept.
- Public attitude and values will be the largest influence for change.
- There is a new trend in constructing residential development around farmland (farmland trust idea).
- View the documentary “Symphony of the Soil”.

- We need to look at history to understand where we have gone wrong in the past and learn from any mistakes (e.g. site, soil and water contamination).
“Low income and ethnic minority neighborhoods tend to have less supermarket chain stores.”p.4
- We need to protect the land from use that “denudes” the soil.
- Tax structure changes could recognize or benefit land owners who retain their forested lands on, or next to agricultural land to retain diversity and beneficial plant and wildlife ecology.
- Any land can be brought back into production but it would take years and is very expensive versus protection in the first place.

Farmers and Retail

Farmer

Farmworker Housing

- Check Abbotsford farm worker housing approach.
- Farm worker housing should be allowed for bona-fide farm operation. Look at site specific zoning for a particular lot.
- Foreign workers are often employed for harvesting/maintaining fields – accommodation is a challenge
- Foreign workers provide consistent production and hours

Mixed use in rural areas

- Conflict between farm use and non-farm use needs to be addressed e.g. recreational trails through farm lands; farm machine crossing or travel on roads; soil deposit for non-farm purposes; changes in hydrology due to development on neighbouring lands.

Non-Farm Use of Agricultural Land

- Non-farm use on existing farm land is a problem e.g. non-farm use of farm buildings (bowling alleys, gym space).
- High land prices discourage farm use and encourages purchase of agricultural land for investment instead of farming.

Panama Flats

- Panama Flats needs to be brought into production.

Farm Economics

- Growing produce is only profitable when it is sold at the farm market right on the property
- Cost of feed and seed needs to be able to be reflected in the price of farm products.
- Input of improvement to farm land including drainage, fencing, farm buildings is not economical when land prices and land speculation is high.
- Economics of vegetable production is challenging, particularly as it relates to “hour metre” on equipment - increasing transitioning to production of berries.

Storm water Management

- Dwindling aquifers and development of water retention needs to be addressed for the near future. Elk and Beaver Lake weir control needs to be controlled more efficiently to service the surrounding farmland.

General

- Farmers losing trust the Agriculture Land Commission and government.

Communications

- Farmers in the area need to be consulted prior to transportation interruptions and changes in order to ensure that access from the farm to the markets is not cut off.

Wildlife Management

- Fencing is not stopping the deer and geese from entering the fields. Wildlife management through firearms is proving more success.

Public Education

- Lack of awareness of agriculture and where our food comes from
- Should be an important part of teaching for school age children

Agri-Tourism

- Strong interest in agri-tourism offerings. Sees this as a major contribution to the community.
- Significant money invested in trains and other agri-tourism infrastructure
- Issues with building train station due to fire suppression requirements

Lease of Lands for Farming

- Multiple parcels leased in the community from different property owners
- Leases are on a year to year basis. This makes it challenging to make investments for drainage, fencing, etc.

Retail

- Uvic has established Food Security courses
- Future food production depends on the amount of available land, whether it is free from development or whether an owner allows their land to be part of the pool of land for growing.
- Challenge is in the amount of time it takes to communicate and network between food growers and retailers. May need a dedicated person that spends a lot of time calling farmers and suppliers.
- Communication is important in helping retailers find out what the farms are planning to plant and helps farmers to be aware of what products are in demand for their future crop planning.
- Pricing products and differentiating between which product comes from which farm at the till is a challenge when selling products from many local producers.
- In the past food coops used to handle the pricing and middle man logistics.
- There are two coops still in existence – e.g. Vancouver Island Coop and Growers Coop on the Saanich Peninsula.