

**District of Saanich
Agriculture and Food Security Plan**

Key Themes Study

September 2016

Introduction

A variety of public engagement tools were used to solicit feedback for the District of Saanich Agriculture and Food Security Plan (AFSP) between February and July of 2016. The accompanying *Engagement Summary Report* details these activities. They included a community survey that was distributed and made available online between May and July 2016, which received 289 responses; an open house that was held on May 26, 2016, where issues of concern were raised by over 40 attendees; three Task Force meetings; and several meetings between District staff and community organizations, as well as individual phone calls and emails.

The goal of the engagement was to obtain feedback on a draft vision statement for the AFSP and to receive input on a Strengths Weaknesses Opportunities Threats (SWOT) analysis to identify issues and opportunities for improving the local food system.

Vision Statement

As a result of this input, the vision statement has been revised to the following:

By 2030, Saanich is home to a thriving, accessible, and environmentally responsible food system, which is renowned for its vibrancy and resiliency. Our food is celebrated and recognized for its role in nourishing people, livelihoods, and relationships. Saanich is seen as a leader in advancing food security, including initiatives toward greater food self-sufficiency on the South Island, as well as dignified access to affordable, healthy food for all people. Ecosystems flourish as a result of responsible land and water stewardship on both urban and rural agricultural lands, which form the centre of our community. We protect and support our farmland and are proud to provide a vibrant agricultural legacy to future generations.

In Saanich, food security starts in our backyard.

Key Themes

The themes presented here reflect both the vision statement and the amalgamated feedback received during engagement events. The themes will be used in the Plan to identify issues and challenges facing agriculture and food security in Saanich. In order to remain focused on issues that the District is able to provide leadership on, priority was given to themes that can be tackled by local government. Other issues and challenges that were identified, while important, remain out of scope for this Plan. However, they are included in the Appendix.

The following five key themes were identified and are presented according to the order in which they are referred to in the Vision Statement.

1. Connecting Gaps in the Local Food System to Improve Food Self-Sufficiency
2. Strengthening Local Awareness of the Local Food System
3. Improving the Interconnection between Food Production and the Environment
4. Managing Land Use to Protect and Support Farmland
5. Supporting Multigenerational Farmers and Emerging Farmers

This report provides context for each theme, references to feedback on the topic received during the engagement events, and framework for potential action. The report forms a basis for the development of specific recommended actions through which the District of Saanich can provide leadership.

1. Connecting Gaps in the Local Food System to Improve Food Self-Sufficiency

The main components of the local food system include: production, storage, processing, distribution, retail, and waste management. Gaps, or weak links, may exist between various components of any community's food system.

Urban Food Production Opportunities

Many respondents to the survey cited the need to expand urban food production opportunities, in particular: increased number of community gardens; increased number of school gardens; edible landscaping and agriculture in District gardens and parks. Urban agriculture was raised repeatedly by a number of stakeholders. One possible route for the District could be to streamline some policies and bylaws currently in place that support efforts to increase food production in urban areas.

Barriers to Local Food Access

Even with increased availability some barriers to improving food self-sufficiency remains. For non-farmers, 51% of respondents mentioned that cost and seasonality were major barriers to purchasing local food. While it is difficult for the District to provide leadership in influencing the price of food, it can play a role in continuing to support local non-profit organizations with mandates to improve access to fresh, local, healthy foods for at-risk sectors of the community.

Supporting Infrastructure

Another concern raised by local farmers and other stakeholders was the limited supporting infrastructure for agriculture, including secure processing facilities, cold storage and distribution opportunities. The District can play a role in establishing regulations that support these initiatives through zoning and Official Community Plan (OCP) amendments.

2. Strengthening Local Awareness of the Local Food System

Education and awareness of the needs of agriculture and local food system for community members, awareness of local food; and the availability of supportive professional development agrologist extension services for farmers are understood to be important in enhancing local agriculture and increasing food security.

Retail Opportunities for Local Food

One of the main issues that arose during engagement in Saanich was the lack of ability to easily find and purchase affordable local food. The lack of a permanent year-round farmers market was identified several times. Increasing opportunities to sell produce from farms in urban areas through produce stands, or pop-up retail, was also mentioned. The District can encourage this by identifying locations, providing tax breaks, incentives, and local purchasing agreements.

Education and Outreach

Support for local agriculture appears to be strong in the District. Almost all of the survey respondents (97%) indicated that they “always” or “sometimes” buy locally grown items when they have an option. However, only 10% self-identified themselves as a farmer or food producer, and over half (57%) indicated that their knowledge of the local food system was “limited” or “very limited.”



Education of community members in regards to agriculture and educational needs for farmers were both key concerns raised by stakeholders in meetings and in the community survey. Education is needed in a variety of forms for a variety of target audiences:

- Residents (for the role of food producers and importance of fresh, healthy food);
- Real estate industry (for selling properties adjacent to working farms);
- Farmers (regarding innovative techniques to minimize impacts on the environment);
- Politicians (for decision-making and regulation of farms and farm land uses); and
- Public (to encourage local gardens, support of local farming, and the importance of sourcing local food).

Opportunities for education was mentioned by 50% of the survey respondents. In particular farmers indicate the need for agrologist extension services to provide advice to farmers region wide and education in the community for minimizing urban-rural conflicts. Farmers themselves indicated they would like opportunities to enhance professional development, yet lack the time. Stakeholders also mentioned the need to reinforce primary, secondary, and post-secondary curriculum to bolster the amount of information about the local food system in the education system. It remains challenging for the District to play a lead role in this area, however providing a forum for discussion between food producers and educators remains one possibility.

Branding for Local Products

Apart from education, the District could play a role in assisting local food producers with a simple branding exercise to create a logo and tagline that could be used collectively by Saanich farmers. The use of a single brand to identify Saanich-grown food and food products could help solidify support from the public while enhancing their understanding of the local food system.

3. Improving the Interconnection between Food Production and the Environment

The Saanich Peninsula is one of the best growing regions in Canada. With its mild climate and good soil, it can support a wide variety of crops. However, there are still some environmental challenges facing farmers in the region.

Wildlife Concerns

Deer and waterfowl pose threats to farmer's livelihoods in the region. Over 40% of survey respondents cited wildlife crop damage as a significant challenge to agriculture in the region. The CRD has developed a Regional Deer Management Strategy¹ in collaboration with municipalities, electoral areas, provincial wildlife authorities, stakeholders, and farmers to reduce human-deer conflicts. The District of Saanich may have an opportunity to play a role in reducing deer populations through landscaping alterations, education, removing regulatory barriers for fencing and adapting bylaws for hunting and feeding. Similar measures can be put in place for geese and duck populations. A Regional Canada Goose Management Strategy² was also developed by the CRD to provide guidance to municipalities and create tools to reduce Canada geese impacts.

Water Management

Concerns over water resource management were also raised during the public engagement activities. Issues such as stormwater management and irrigation requirements were cited. The Saanich

¹ <https://www.crd.bc.ca/project/regional-deer-management-strategy>

² <https://www.crd.bc.ca/project/goose-management>

Peninsula receives a surplus of water in the winter and a deficit in the summer, leading to flooding and drought issues, depending on the time of year. Current water management measures could be reviewed with an eye for supporting the farming community and removing barriers to production. Certain areas within the District also experience significant flooding problems, which can lead to crop loss or inability to access fields in the early spring, therefore, stormwater management strategies should be revisited.

Climate Change

Several stakeholders also had concerns regarding mitigating the harmful effects of climate change in the Saanich region. Water and climate change are closely tied to emergency planning as well. As a result of climate change, farmers are expecting to deal with emergency weather events such as drought more frequently. Other emergencies, such as storm events or earthquakes, would shine a light on the need for local food to sustain the Saanich residents during the emergency. Therefore, consideration should be given to farming operations from an emergency preparedness perspective as well.

Composting

Another topic discussed frequently was the need for local commercial scale composting for farmers. This issue was identified by the Saanich Parks Department, the Peninsula and Area Agricultural Commission, the Task Force, and 37% of survey respondents. There is a lack of regional composting facilities and accessing fertilizer is challenging for farmers. Implementing a composting program would help provide this resource and reduce the green waste in local landfills. Composting on farm can also be encouraged and incentive programs such as the Environmental Farm Plan (EFP) are opportunities that can help cover some of the costs. Providing adequate farm inputs, such as organic fertilizer, helps to support the local farming community and make farming in the region more cost effective.

Farming and Natural Ecosystems

Stakeholders and survey respondents commented on the importance of the natural ecology of the land and environmentally sound farming practice to help replenish the soil, recharge water sources and provide habitat for natural pollinators, beneficial plant and wildlife diversity. A balance of farm use and retention of the natural ecosystem can support healthy farming. The District may wish to encourage land owners and farmers to retain a diverse land base and consider the benefits of protecting the natural ecology of the land.

4. Managing Land Use to Protect and Support Farmland

The jurisdictional area of Saanich is 10,378 ha, with the ALR representing 1,872 ha or 18% of the total area. There are many additional farms outside the ALR, reflecting the fertility of the soil and the climate of the Saanich peninsula. The majority of the farmland is located in the Blenkinsop Valley, Cordova Bay and Rural Saanich, with a few farms located in the other Saanich Local Areas. While this indicates that there is an opportunity to increase food production around the community, it also points to a non-contiguous zone of active farming within the District. This can prove difficult when trying to manage differences in urban and rural expectations for those living adjacent or near to farming operations. In addition, Saanich is a desirable place to live and population growth has been steady for years, which puts pressure on the urban growth boundary. With real estate prices in the Lower Mainland climbing rapidly, residents are looking to relocate and many are choosing southern Vancouver Island.

Farming at the Urban:Rural Edge

The lack of a clear buffer between farming and non-farm areas can lead to conflicts between urban and agricultural neighbours. The CRD's Regional Food Strategy notes one of its core principles is to "avoid urban/agricultural conflict, mitigate where avoidance is not possible." During meetings with the

Task Force and various local committees, stakeholders noted that competing non-farm uses are one of the top challenges to farming and food production in the District of Saanich. This may be related to the fact that the agricultural community in Saanich saw a substantial reduction in profitability between 2006 and 2011 (for which the latest figures are available) when the gross margin dropped from 8.3% to 2.6% and revenue per hectare declined from \$8,080 to \$5,519. Additionally, 68% of farmers included in the Census of Agriculture were making less than \$10,000 in gross farm receipts in 2011. Therefore, in an effort to remain financially viable, farmers are looking to diversify their income. While some of these activities are permitted under the *Agricultural Land Commission Act* at the provincial level, many can be regulated at the local level.

Agri-Tourism

In the survey conducted over the summer of 2016, 26% of the farmers who responded indicated that they took part in agri-tourism. The majority of those respondents were selling their products at the farm gate and/or at farmers markets. A well-defined agri-tourism strategy for the District may help to provide clarity regarding what types of activities are and are not permitted, and which specific regulations apply. In addition to farm gate sales, the following activities may become part of an agr-tourism strategy:

- Agri-tourism events including weddings, educational tours;
- Agri-tourism accommodation in the form of bed and breakfasts;
- Tasting rooms, restaurants, cafes; and
- Processing of farm products in the form of wineries, breweries, distilleries, or other value-added goods.

Non-Compliance with the ALC Act

Apart from permitted agri-tourism activities, some types of non-farm use of the ALR reflect non-compliance with the *ALC Act*. The need for additional farmland protection opportunities was identified throughout the community engagement process. These additional initiatives will help to limit non-farm uses on agricultural land and minimize conflicts between producers and non-producers. This may include addressing issues such as too many residences on the property, parking for non-farm vehicles, non-agricultural industrial use of farmland, and others. Unfortunately, enforcement measures can be onerous and difficult to manage with limited financial support and personnel. The City of Kelowna's ALR compliance and enforcement strategy has been in force for the last two years and has already resulted in successful changes. This strategy may provide some useful direction for the District of Saanich.

Furthermore, local OCP and zoning bylaw documents can offer robust growth management and farmland protection policies, which help to offer clarity regarding the process for applications for ALR subdivision, exclusion and non-farm use and also outline support for protection of the ALR boundary.

5. Supporting Multigenerational and Emerging Farmers

The average age of farmers in the Saanich region was 57.3 years in 2011 and climbing. Furthermore, 60% of local farm operators were over the age of 55 and only 4% were under the age of 35. Luckily, the number of farmers under age 35 is increasing.

Succession Planning for Farms

Succession planning and the need to support new farmers was noted by 45% of the survey respondents as a significant challenge for farmers in the Saanich region. Strategies can be developed to encourage young farmers and make it possible for them to earn a living as a farmer. Over 200 young people attended a Farmer2Farmer workshop in the spring of 2016, indicating that they are eager to farm but lack the land they need.



Farm Worker Housing

Stakeholder comments identified the need for farm worker housing for seasonal workers on the farm. Farm worker housing is not currently permitted in zones A-1, A-2, or A-3 in the District of Saanich. Although Saanich farms are in close proximity to residential housing some farmers in the area find it difficult to retain farm workers due to lack of housing. Temporary rental housing for seasonal farm workers is more difficult to find. Rental housing off the farm and transportation for the worker also creates added expenses for the farmer. On the other hand, construction of farm worker housing on the farm opens the possibility for the structures being converted to other non-farm uses in the future. Central Saanich has recently completed a study and recommendations on how the District may address farm worker housing requests.

Affordable Access to Land

The cost of farmland in most regions of BC is prohibitive: not only for new farmers but also for those who are taking over longstanding family farm businesses. Total farm capital in land and buildings nearly doubled in Saanich from 2006 to 2011, from \$221 million to \$406 million, according to the Statistics Canada, reflecting a sharp rise in property values rather than an increase in the value of the farm businesses themselves. These costs make acquiring and owning farmland very costly. A total of 73% of respondents to the survey noted high cost of farmland and capital inputs as a significant challenge in the District of Saanich. Farmers responded overwhelmingly through the survey and one-on-one interviews that the cost of land, taxes, and inputs are some of the top concerns facing agriculture in the area. For agriculture that includes land, plants, animals, equipment, labour, training, permits, licenses, or technology. Interest rates are currently relatively low, and now would likely be a good time to invest in the agricultural sector.

Alternative Tenure Arrangements

Land tenure can be an indication of farm stability. Despite the association with long term instability, leasing (or licensing) farmland can be one of the most affordable ways for farms to become established. During the survey, 81% of producers indicated there was difficulty in accessing land for agriculture. There were concerns raised in comments about the limitations to land tenure and leasing and that the length of land rentals restricted the inclination or ability for farmers to invest in the farm business. With appropriate policies and community initiatives in place, some of the burden of accessing land can be alleviated. In order to ensure land continues to be farmed and accessed for farming, the District can explore opportunities such as land trusts or zoning for the use of municipal land for agriculture. Local planning documents can also continue to offer support for farmland protection policies and growth management tools.

