

Saanich Agriculture & Food Security Task Force

SWOT Analysis Notes

April 21st, 2016

What do you think are the top STRENGTHS, OPPORTUNITIES, CHALLENGES, and THREATS affecting farming and food security in Saanich?

Strengths and Weakness are internal factors – they represent resources and experience that is readily available for the local food system within the community.

Opportunities and Threats are external factors – forces that can impact the food system. The degree of control that we have over them varies.

STRENGTHS

1. Climate is very good.
2. Saanich is well-placed re. climate change.
3. Land provides year round capability for a diversity of food production.
4. Municipal water infrastructure and access is adequate.
5. Municipal mulch program produces a high quality end product that is a resource for food producers.
6. High demand exists for local food, including organic.
7. Close proximity to public markets.
8. Entrepreneurial spirit is strong.
9. Public land resources, edible boulevards, seed availability and support.
10. Large land base for farming and agriculture is available.
11. Good soil conditions.
12. Access to land for harvesting traditional foods.
13. Strong history of farming and agriculture in the region.
14. Municipality owns much farm land.
15. Availability of land for urban farming.
16. Building awareness and relationships.
17. Collaborative spirit exists between local governments, NGOs, and farmers.
18. Best practices and inspirational examples exist locally such as Halliburton Farm, Island Chef's Collaborative, GTUF, Life Cycles, CRFAIR, Food Share Network, Community Kitchens Network etc.
19. Healthy and diverse food options exist.
20. Wealthy population relative to many other communities.
21. "Foodie" environment, e.g. on par with Tuscany, Vermont.



WEAKNESSES

1. Education is lacking, especially around how food is produced.
2. Marketing around agri-tourism or local food branding is weak.
3. Intergenerational gap- aging population of farmers combined with rising cost of land in Saanich makes it financially prohibitive for young people to buy land and choose farming as a vocation.
4. Underuse of viable agricultural land.
5. Land base for food production (even if it were all farmed) is not sufficient to meet our population's needs in the event of an emergency.
6. Significant number of individuals and families live in poverty.
7. Urban/rural interface is poorly managed in some areas (e.g. urban encroachment, neighbour issues, fencing).
8. Key infrastructure is lacking (cold storage, processing, people/support).
9. Non-farm use of ALR is not being enforced through the local bylaw system (e.g. fill on farmland, contravention of soil deposit bylaw).
10. Slow and steady fragmentation and industrialisation of farmland locally.
11. Lack of connectivity within municipal departments, need for better communication.
12. Everyone (especially NGOs) are competing for same resources and funding.
13. Farmers not working together and undercutting one another.
14. No longer a critical mass of farms available to support agriculture services and infrastructure (e.g. storage, processing etc).
15. Local supply issues (not enough product for distributors and retailers to be able to offer local products).
16. Weak local regulations regarding wildlife (deer, geese control).
17. Local protection laws for non-farm status parcels outside the ALR are not as strong as the Provincial Right to Farm Act.

OPPORTUNITIES

1. Agri-tourism is popular in other regions of BC (e.g. Okanagan, Fraser Valley) and Vancouver Island is developing more regional farm-based programs here as well. The 100 mile diet trend is still popular, so can take advantage of this.
2. "Foodie" culture capital of Canada can be used as leverage locally.
3. Could create a program that educates realtors and new landowners who buy land within (or near to) the ALR land.
4. Branding local products does not have to be overly sophisticated or expensive. Stickers on products may be adequate.
5. Producers can coordinate to work collaboratively with distributors, retailers, and marketers on a contract basis. Policies in place already allow for contract growing and buying "1 offs" from local growers, however it is unclear if local growers utilize this opportunity.
6. "Food Discovery Centre" could be created that provides education around cooking, a café serving local foods, and a shared community kitchen resource.
7. Food bank can use past success in creating a garden patch for education and awareness purposes to create similar initiatives elsewhere.



8. The right players are present to create partnerships between the university, municipality, and non-profit food security organizations to develop food production demonstration sites, tourist opportunities, and team-based farming allotments (e.g. corporate teams & various organisations).
9. Protect the agricultural land base and environment for the future.
10. Encourage opportunities for individuals to access land for farming (e.g. leasing land, cooperative programs, etc.).
11. Partnerships with post-secondary institutes can be developed to meet research and labour needs.
12. Local procurement by companies & institutions would help to create stability of demand for farmers (e.g. FEED Comox Valley model).
13. Saanich could undertake an inventory of land owned by the municipality that could be made accessible for food growing
14. Tool sharing is a resource that is made available in many farming communities, including Comox, through the Farmers Institute there.
15. A community food hub could be created for processing and value-added resources (e.g. Salt Spring Island Farm Centre for Food Security). This would be a location where people can access free or low-cost foods, learn food skills (cooking, preserving food, etc), share community meals, etc.
16. Incentives for urban farming exist in other communities and could be replicated in Saanich. This could include providing more opportunities for individuals to grow/harvest their own food (e.g. boulevard gardening, on school grounds more community garden spaces, in parks, etc.)
17. Opportunity exists to establish a CRD-wide food security table and/or committee.
18. Align food safety with food security initiatives and reduce red tape related to permitting and licencing required to create value-added food products.
19. Have a local marketing whiz (could be a student) help Identify upcoming “hot products” (e.g. the next kale).
20. Knock-on effect of climate change could mean more support for local producers (e.g. expensive imported cauliflower due to California drought and low Canadian dollar).
21. Take advantage of this current window of opportunity (e.g. climate change, California, price of imported food).
22. Develop Ag Zone enforcement and compliance bylaws for the District of Saanich.
23. Incentivize farming through taxation, although the ability for local governments to do this requires some more research. There may not be much opportunity due to Provincial policies and regulations.
24. Local government could acquire land to lease back to farmers (City of Richmond has done this). Could be lease to own (LTO) although this may require some more investigation.



THREATS

1. Costs and affordability, both of farmland and farming inputs. Leasing costs reflected by cost of land is also high.
2. Rising food costs (in all regions of the province) - <http://www.phsa.ca/population-public-health-site/Documents/2015%20Food%20Costing%20in%20BC%20-%20FINAL.pdf>
3. Pressures of residential and industrial development on and near farmland.
4. Small, expensive land base tends to lead to intensive production.
5. Price of local food products is often higher.
6. Farmers have to wear so many hats (e.g. market their own products, not just produce them).
7. Many products, including greenhouse-grown produce, needs to go through a marketing agency (regulated through the vegetable marketing board) so there is not much independence in either marketing or sales.
8. When grown intensively, products are considered a commodity, therefore there becomes a need to differentiate the product (different varieties and production methods).
9. The demand for 2-5 acre parcels of ALR is high and often it is purchased by those who are retiring and want country living lifestyle without the labour involved in farming.
10. Taxation policy is not working to incentivize the land base for food production. Rather, it begets estate properties. Agricultural tax rates are low and taken advantage of by people who do the bare minimum to achieve farm tax status.
11. Farming is not necessarily regulated with food safety in mind. This becomes hard to sell to institutions (e.g. GAP certification requirements).
12. Dumping of farm products into our market from outside the area is an ongoing issue.
13. Liability and insurance problems persist around offering value-added, storage, and distribution options for local producers. How to reduce liability e.g. cold food storage?
14. Small farms are common in Saanich and small farms usually can't purchase inputs (e.g. seeds, soil amendments) in bulk therefore the overall profit margin is lower than big farms.

