

**Public Consultation Summary Report**  
**Regional District of Nanaimo**  
**Agricultural Area Plan**



January 11, 2012

Prepared by:



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*fostering resilient communities*

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# Table of Contents

Executive Summary.....	3
Introduction .....	4
Objectives .....	4
Methodology.....	4
Findings .....	8
Vision for the Future of Agriculture in the RDN.....	8
Barriers and Opportunities to a Successful Local Agricultural Industry .....	8
Biophysical .....	8
Economic.....	9
Education .....	10
Marketing.....	11
The Role of Local Government in Supporting Agriculture .....	12
Conclusion.....	14
Appendices.....	i
Appendix 1 - Filming Schedule for Video Footage .....	i
Appendix 2 - Full list of issues addressed at open houses .....	iii
Appendix 3 - Full list of issues addressed at focus group session #1 .....	xiii
Appendix 4 - Copies of email Correspondance .....	xviii

## Executive Summary

From the onset of the Regional District of Nanaimo’s Agricultural Area Plan, a concerted effort has been made to identify key stakeholders and reach out to the agricultural community. The objective is to ensure that their input has been heard and addressed when moving forward with the next steps of the plan, in particular the development of policy and regulatory recommendations.

This document outlines the methodology that was used to ensure that a wide breadth of the agricultural community was included and presents the initial findings from the outreach activities. A wide variety of techniques were used, from attending events to interviewing stakeholders for a video tool to hosting open houses and a focus group session.

While many farmers are currently frustrated with a number of economic and regulatory barriers currently in place, they are also optimistic about the future in general and are keenly aware of solutions and opportunities to help enhance farming at the local level. High level priorities are to increase the visibility of local farms and connect with the public to educate them about the agricultural activities occurring in the RDN. Farmers would also like to see more support from local government in the form of support staff, a reduction of regulatory hurdles, and more incentives to farm with stewardship in mind. A full account of all feedback is provided in the appendices.



## Introduction

Public input is a critical requirement for the success of any plan. As such, a concerted effort was made to connect with all members of the food system from the start of the Agricultural Area Plan process, including farmers, processors, retailers, restaurateurs, and consumers. This report documents the outreach activities and resulting feedback and inputs from the community and the Agricultural Advisory Committee on the vision, barriers, and opportunities for agriculture in the RDN. The consulting team would like to thank staff at the RDN and members of the Agricultural Steering Committee for their support throughout the public consultation process.

## Objectives

- Develop and refine a vision for agriculture in the RDN;
- Identify barriers and opportunities to agriculture in the RDN;
- Engage a wide variety of members of the food community: farmers, chefs, stores, non-profits, and more;
- Utilize innovative engagement tools such as video and website platforms to connect with a greater sector of the food community;
- Engage RDN residents in meaningful conversations related to agricultural planning; and
- Use all of the input and feedback to develop meaningful and appropriate policy and planning recommendations for the Agricultural Area Plan.

## Methodology

The public consultation process began in earnest in the fall of 2011 and will be ongoing throughout the AAP planning process. The bulk of the outreach and consultation occurred in October and November 2011. Key elements of the public consultation process included:

1. **Stakeholder identification** – With the assistance from members of the Agricultural Steering Committee, a thorough review of all existing materials and identification of key stakeholder groups in the area was undertaken.
2. **Website and on-line components** – A website was created to highlight the Agricultural Area Plan, advertise upcoming events, and to provide ways for the public to contribute feedback. <http://www.growingourfuture.ca> The website also provides a platform to publish a future survey (to gain feedback on the draft recommendations) and to showcase the finished video created to highlight agriculture in the RDN. The information, survey, and video will remain on the website for the duration of the AAP process.

3. **Development of Communications Videos** – In early October, members of the consulting team traveled throughout the RDN to interview some of the key players in local agriculture. Farmers from Cedar, South Wellington, Whiskey Creek, Qualicum, and Coombs were interviewed (see Appendix 1 – Filming Schedule). Additionally, footage was captured at farmer’s markets, a local food store, a restaurant, and other locations. Four short videos were created to support the Open House under the themes of Vision, Barriers, Opportunities, and Role of Local Government. A final, longer, video was created to explore the Farm to Plate connection. These videos can be posted online, viewed at public meetings, used by the RDN in promotional materials, and distributed on DVD. Communications videos creatively and concisely encourage citizens to get involved and learn more.
  
4. **Engaging with Producers and “Eaters”** – Members of the consulting team engaged with local markets and community food groups in the lead-up to the Open Houses to ensure that vendors, consumers and local foodies were aware of the AAP process and its consultation opportunities. Participation in local events ranged from simply attending and talking to people to hosting a booth and distributing postcards and brochures. Additional conversations have taken place between the consultants and members of the community online, by phone and at face to face meetings. This varied approach offered a number of opportunities for RDN residents and interested groups to ask questions, get informed and become directly involved in the AAP. In addition to these outreach endeavors, public input will continue to be gathered for the duration of the AAP process. Events that the consultant(s) attended include:
  - Coombs Fair – August 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup>, 2011 (Lainya Rowett and Lisa Bhopalsingh)
  - Vancouver Island Exposition (VIEEx) – August 20<sup>th</sup>, 2011 (Lainya Rowett, Andrea Lawseth, and Lone Smith)
  - Qualicum Beach Farmers Market – October 8<sup>th</sup>, 2011 (Jon Frantz and Andrea Lawseth)
  - Let’s Eat Local event in Parksville on October 12<sup>th</sup>, 2011 (Andrea Lawseth)
  - Nanaimo-Cedar Farmer’s Institute meeting – October 13<sup>th</sup>, 2011 (Andrea Lawseth)
  - Cedar Farmers Market – October 1<sup>st</sup> and October 16<sup>th</sup>, 2011 (Jon Frantz and Andrea Lawseth)
  - Community Roots Festival – October 29<sup>th</sup>, 2011 (Joanne McLeod)





5. **Public Open Houses** – In partnership with RDN staff (Lainya Rowett, Senior Planner; Kim Farris, Planner; Robert Stover, Planning Technician) and members of the Steering Committee (Joanne McLeod, Andy Brown, Joe Burnett, Albert Benson, Richard Thompson), the consultants hosted two open houses: in Cedar on November 2<sup>nd</sup> and Errington on November 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2011 (both events ran from 6pm-9pm). Approximately 30 people attended the Cedar event and approximately 40 people attended the Errington event.

The format included both presenting information to local residents and stakeholders and facilitating exercises that gather information in return. Maps and satellite images along with information storyboards were posted to present the visual components of the land use inventory and the planning process. Participants were invited to place a sticker on the maps to locate their farms.

The consultants welcomed the participants to the event and introduced a guest speaker. The purpose of the guest speaker was to spark interest and inspire participants. As such, speakers were chosen based on their experience with Agricultural Area Planning on Vancouver Island. At the Cedar Open House Mayor Alice Finall from the District of North Saanich spoke of their award-winning 2011 Whole Community Agricultural Strategy. At the Errington Open House Gary Rolston from the Comox Valley Economic Development Commission spoke of the success that the 2002 Agricultural Area Plan has had on the Comox Valley.

The consultants then provided a brief presentation on the Land Use Inventory results, followed by a World-Café-style facilitated breakout discussion. The format was designed so that four tables with agricultural discussion topics were set up around the room. A facilitator/note-taker was present at each table and presented participants with a question to stimulate discussion of each topic. These topics and related questions were:

- **Vision for the Agricultural Plan:** In 20 years what will farming ideally look like in the RDN? How and where will you get your food? What problems would you like to see resolved?
- **Issues and Constraints:** What aspects of the current food system are making it difficult for a successful local food system to evolve? What partnerships need to emerge?
- **Opportunities and Solutions:** What are some of the benefits to farming in the RDN? What would a logo for local food look like? How could local farming operations be diversified?
- **Regional Government's Role:** What are the differences in federal, provincial, and local agricultural policy? What are some local opportunities and potential collaborations that could be achieved by partnering with provincial and federal agencies?

Every 15 minutes participants were invited to move to a new table, ensuring that all participants were able to participate at each table over the course of one hour. For a full list of issues addressed, please see Appendix 2.

An 'exit survey' was prepared for the participants to evaluate the event. Efforts were made to ensure that locally-sourced refreshments were served.



6. **Focus Group Sessions** – The first in a series of three focus group sessions was held on Friday November 4<sup>th</sup>, 2011 from 9:30am to noon at the RDN Administration office building located at 6300 Hammond Bay Road, Nanaimo, B.C. The purpose of the session was to review and refine the preliminary results from the Open Houses with a small group of invited guests (11 participants plus the consultants). Many of the Focus Group attendees had not been to the Open Houses, so new perspectives and input was brought forward. The feedback received at the focus group session will be used to inform the development of the draft recommendation for the AAP. The format of the focus group session was informal, taking an interactive discussion approach. At least six themes were identified at the Open Houses and were listed and participants were invited to discuss each of them for approximately 20 minutes each. Efforts were made by the facilitators to ensure that all participants were given an opportunity to contribute to the discussion (see Appendix 3 for a full list of issues addressed at the Focus Group session).

Each focus group participant received background information and a list of preliminary questions and topics to consider via email approximately one week prior to the session.

Future planned focus group sessions include:

- Draft recommendations (January 2012); and
- Draft implementation strategies (March 2012).



## Findings

### Vision for the Future of Agriculture in the RDN

Those who spoke to the future of agriculture presented both hopes and concerns. The concerns were centered on climate change and the unknown impacts it would bring and necessary adaptations that would therefore need to be adopted. Peak oil and/or peak energy was mentioned by many as a key motivator to build more resilient communities with a food system that relies less on imports. There is a sense that eventually the cost of local production will be lower than that of imported food.

Many pictured the future agricultural landscape of the RDN to be permanently protected from development and more diversified. Small and medium-sized farms will be more profitable so that younger generations will be interested in taking over the family farm and new, young farmers will be interested in joining a thriving industry. This would involve apprenticeships, and other farmer training programs and more collaboration between farms and between communities to promote shared infrastructure and develop value-added farm products. The vision includes more community involvement in the food system – by bringing youth into the agricultural community through education both at school and through on-farm demonstrations, so that local food production and producers can become more valued and celebrated.

Other elements of the vision include alternative land tenure arrangements, including new options for housing for family and workers on farmland. Institutions and all levels of government would also provide expertise and support for agriculture – this would include hiring a local extension officer, creating zoning bylaws that are of benefit to agriculture, promoting local agriculture through marketing, and providing incentives for sustainable farming techniques, as well as locating a permanent year-round access point for consumers to shop for local food products.

### Barriers and Opportunities to a Successful Local Agricultural Industry

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#### BIOPHYSICAL

Water was highlighted as growing challenge, both the access to water for irrigation and the problem of inadequate drainage during the wet winter months. A lack of knowledge and/or experience regarding local soil conditions and groundwater resources was also noted.

There were concerns expressed regarding land clearing, road creation, forestry, and/or development that happens uphill from farmland, as silt and runoff negatively affects the valley bottoms. There is a role for the RDN to educate forestry, real estate, and development industries about these effects.

Most farmers agreed that the RDN's climate was good year-round for farming. Opportunities include developing a research station to test crop varieties (experimental crops) and conduct studies on soil capability. Drainage improvements in some parts of the region are also an opportunity. When upgrades to pipes and other infrastructure is occurring, greywater piping should be installed, as the wastewater that is now being discharged could be recirculated for irrigation. Irrigation systems could be created for multiple farms to establish a communal/area-wide irrigation system. Information regarding composting and the availability of compost could be distributed to farms that need to improve soil structure.

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## ECONOMIC

The primary economic barrier raised amongst the stakeholder was the high cost of access to land and inputs (insurance, land improvement, machinery, fertilizer, irrigation, drainage) – these are key challenges for anyone interested in getting into farming. Labour was also highlighted as a key barrier. Labour demands are too high for a farm to address on their own, yet the cost of hiring workers is also a challenge due to the expense and the lack of on-site housing. A lack of community-scale facilities (e.g. Processing, abattoirs, storage) makes it more expensive for farmers to produce value-added products because everything needs to be done 'on the farm.' The cost of transporting goods, whether locally, regionally, or off the Island, is also problematic. The cost of fuel and the cost of ferries continue to rise. Furthermore, the nature of short-term lease agreements is problematic. When farmers are considering investing in infrastructure upgrades there is little incentive to do so if a lease can only be a maximum of three years. There is also a need to communicate with Island Timberlands about their plans for farmland. The company owns a large portion of farmland in the RDN and there is wariness from farmers about the objective of Island Timberlands to maximize revenues from farmland.

New and existing tenure agreements were identified as possible solutions to help deal with the high cost of purchasing farmland. Ideas that were brought to the table included: farm stratas; cooperatives; corporations; formalized apprenticeships; and licensing or leasing from the RDN on publically-owned lands. Many businesses located in agricultural areas could benefit financially from leasing out unused portions of their properties. Participants felt that the RDN could support alternative tenure arrangements and put forth ideas and concepts to provincial agencies.

Similar ideas were brought forth regarding alternative arrangements for sharing machinery (planter, sprayer, etc.) as well as other inputs (seed bank) to help reduce costs for new farmers. While some limitations will apply (the timing of machinery usage means that not all can be shared, and at a certain scale of farming purchasing machinery will be necessary) it was felt that agreements between neighbours or small groups of farms regarding shared machinery could be successful. Other benefits of forming a network or cooperative group of farmers include better communication and collaboration between farmers to market products.



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## EDUCATION

The public's general attitude toward food was seen as a major challenge: people want cheap food and want to access it easily and will not often go out of their way to buy directly from a farmer. Instead of buying and eating what's available, consumers buy and prepare what they are used to. Furthermore, consumers (and retailers) demand a consistent supply of products, which is a challenge for most farmers. There is a need for a change in thinking regarding purchasing habits – within the global marketplace local producers are competing with cheap imported food. The public also needs to be educated about the important role of aquaculture (particularly shellfish and land-based finfish production) not only as a sustainable form of food production but as a key component in the economic output of the food industry.

A lack of education, both for new and existing farmers as well as the general public was highlighted as a barrier, but one that has the potential to be addressed. Apprenticeships, mentoring, incubator farms, and other farm-based employment programs are needed so that new/emerging farmers can gain experience and decide if farming is something they want to get into before they have to purchase land. The school district needs to add agriculture into the curriculum to elevate the value of farming and food production within society generally. This education needs to be extended up to the University and College level.

Farmers felt that there were many opportunities to address the educational needs of both farmers and the general public. Workshops, such as Growing Forward put on by the BC Ministry of Agriculture, sessions hosted by the BC Association for Farmers Markets, or the Canadian Farm Business Management

Council, on topics such as: creating value-added products; funding opportunities; and developing business plans are often offered during busy times of year or at locations far from Nanaimo. It would be helpful to either host them more locally or to be able to participate through webinars. Inspirational speakers for farmers could be invited during the winter (non-growing/harvest) season. A local agricultural advocate, such as an extension officer, could work to implement the Agricultural Area Plan, and could also be tasked with helping to educate young farmers. There is interest in reviving the 4H program, but changing it to also include urban agriculture programs. At Nanoose Edibles Organic Farm, some staff participate in an apprenticeship program with a set salary and bonus system. The apprenticeships cost money to administer but are an investment in the future of farming.

Farmers are interested in connecting with students at the elementary, highschool, and college levels through school visits/presentations, farm tours, or formalized mentoring. This could be done in part by supporting the provincial Ag in the Classroom program. Many felt that an educated general public would be an ally to local farmers because they would lobby retailers to supply local food in stores. There is an opportunity to align with VIHA, dieticians, and nutritionists to explain the health benefits of eating fresh local foods to the public.

There are also opportunities to connect with the public outside of schools, such as rotary clubs, community gardening associations, and other community groups. The use of mainstream and social media is increasingly important in promoting local agricultural business.

There are some government and industry-based training programs that local farmers can connect with, including industry training authorities (e.g. for dairy technicians); Step-Up, a federal mentoring program; and Willing Workers on Organic Farms (WWOOFers). Farmers all agreed that they can't train new farmers for free and that they need to be compensated for their time.

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## MARKETING

Lack of marketing was also noted as a “solvable” challenge. Without marketing/branding for local RDN farms and products there is a limited ability to reach key markets. Farms need signs pointing to their location along the road. Many farmers complained about the removal of signs by Emcon, a highway maintenance company, particularly along the Port Alberni highway vicinity of Electoral Area F. When farmers complained to Emcon they were told that the company was simply following RDN bylaw (Bylaw #993: <http://www.rdn.bc.ca/cms/wpattachments/wpID1630atID2126.pdf>). This bylaw prohibits any signs (other than real estate, election signs, and a couple of other exemptions) that advertise a home-based business. A lack of a local food guide or directory, similar to what is produced in the Comox Valley and the Farm Fresh Guide for Southern Vancouver Island, is a challenge. This would assist not only the public but also farmers get to know what types of activities are occurring in their area and potentially create opportunities for collaboration and cooperation. A one-stop website that would act both as an educational tool and a guide to local farms would be a great asset. In addition to marketing the location

and type of farms in the area, many noted the need for advertising the nutritional value of eating fresh, local food.

There was general consensus that increased marketing was seriously required to help promote local foods and enhance the economic viability of local farms. Consumers are interested in local food, but aside from seasonal farmers markets, are unsure how to procure it. Many farmers had long lists of ideas for increasing agritourism such as: harvest festivals; circle farm tours; e-newsletters and listservs; directories and guidebooks; a website; local farm map; a Farmer's Market Association, and more.

There is an opportunity to set up a year-round indoor farmers' market at the VIEx grounds, without crafters involved. It would be similar to year-round markets in Edmonton, Ottawa, London, and Europe and would include a retail farm market on site. The RDN could support this by offering low (or zero) rent for the building space. Farmers would like access to a commercial kitchen so that processing can happen centrally. This could also be located at VIEx.

By working together, local farmers felt they could guarantee a larger quantity and consistent product of local food for universities and food purchasing services

## **The Role of Local Government in Supporting Agriculture**

Participants identified a number of government policies and regulations that posed challenges to farmers. These included federal policies (such as Fisheries and Oceans Canada becoming involved when fish are found in farm ditches); provincial regulations (such as the new meat regulations, cost of inspections, farm tax assessments, and quotas); and local/regional regulations (such as building permit requirements). The Vancouver Island Health Authority (VIHA) was also identified as a potential ally, but pose a current regulatory barrier. VIHA is thought to make marketing prohibitive due to processing and food safe regulations, which vary from region to region. The inability to sell fresh meat at the farmer's market is another food safety regulation barrier.

In addition to creating policies that support year round farmers markets and general marketing, farmers felt that the RDN could leverage local food production by fostering better relationships between farmers and their neighbours, such as by putting up signs in farming areas and/or educating realtors about the Right to Farm Act (Farm Practices Protection Act). Providing incentives such as carbon credits or other monetary assistance for farms that follow the Environmental Farm Plan was also suggested. Developing a local food charter, to be adopted by the RDN and other institutions in conjunction with a local food procurement policy, would go a long way to supporting local food production.

Examples of other ideas for the RDN include:

- Provide comments on every ALR application being forwarded to the ALC, or directly say "no" outright and refuse to pass applications on to the ALC;

- Hiring an agricultural extension officer to assist farmers in navigating the regulatory framework, to lobby for farmers at the local and provincial level, play a role in the economic development of agriculture, and develop marketing and educational tools. This suggestion was supported by all of the stakeholders that we spoke with;
- Put up signs clearly indicating location of farms: along highways and smaller roads. These would be similar to the “Wine Route” signs or “Circle Farm Tour” signs in the Fraser Valley;
- Education of the real estate and development industry regarding the Right to Farm Act. This could involve producing a brochure and communicating with realtors, and lobbying for disclosure statements to be included for property sales adjacent to farms;
- Enforce vegetative buffer widths for all developments and redevelopments (on urban-side) when occurring next to the ALR;
- Ensure that all local policies and guidelines are supportive of agriculture. For example, remove guidelines prohibiting livestock rearing on aquifers (as was included as a guideline in RDN OCP in Cassidy) as this is problematic for farmers.
- Create and support a regulatory framework for the development of a permanent year-round farmers’ market at VIEx or other similar central location;
- Allow for agriculture to be an allowable home-based business;
- Consider local tax incentives for agroecological stewardship (e.g. for farms that are members of the Environmental Farm Program);
- Reduce the regulatory requirements for farmers to create water holding tanks, detention ponds, or other water-related infrastructure on ALR land;
- Make agriculture an “allowable use” in every zone;
- Open up land in regional parks for a farming apprenticeship program or incubator farm;
- Provide incentives to clear land that is currently treed in order to make way for new farms;
- Examine nuisance bylaws to make sure that farming isn’t hindered by nuisance complaints.





## Conclusion

It is clear that those involved in agriculture in the RDN are passionate about food production. The attendance at events coupled with phone conversations and emails indicates that farmers are keen to see barriers removed so that their livelihoods can be enhanced and made more viable. The feedback received throughout this public engagement process will be used to develop draft recommendations towards the Agricultural Area Plan.

While, due to volume, not every suggestion heard from stakeholders will be included in the plan, all efforts will be made to ensure that the spirit of the recommendations are adhered to in the next steps of the process. Furthermore, public consultation will be ongoing up to the development of the Final Agriculture Area Plan.

## Appendices

### APPENDIX 1 - FILMING SCHEDULE FOR VIDEO FOOTAGE

Oct 2 <sup>nd</sup> - Sunday AM (9-11) CEDAR	Sunday Midday (12-2) CEDAR	Sunday PM (4-6) CEDAR
<p>Name: Cedar Farmers Market</p> <p>Location: 2312 Yellow Point Rd</p> <p>Topic: Interview shoppers</p>	<p>Name: Joanne McLeod</p> <p>Location: Cedar Farmer's Market</p> <p>Topic: Context, history of RDN farming</p>	<p>Name: Maureen Pietrzyko</p> <p>Location: Hiebert Farm, Cedar</p> <p>Topic: Small scale organic veggies and alternative crops</p>
Oct 3 <sup>rd</sup> - Monday AM (10-12) NANAIMO	Monday Midday (1-3) NANOOSE	Monday PM (3-5)
<p>Name: Nanaimo Foodshare Youth Group</p> <p>Contact: Crystal Dennison</p> <p>Topic: Youth and farming</p>	<p>Name: Colin and Diane Springford</p> <p>Location: Springford Farm, Nanoose Bay</p> <p>Topic: Livestock farming</p>	<p>Name: Tigh-Na-Mara Resort and Spa</p> <p>Location: Parksville</p> <p>Topic: Using local food at the restaurant</p>
Oct 6 <sup>th</sup> - Thursday AM (10-11:30) CEDAR/SOUTH WELLINGTON	Thursday Midday (12-2) PARKSVILLE	Thursday PM (3-5) ERRINGTON
<p>Name: Rod Plecas</p> <p>Location: Plecas Abattoir</p> <p>Topic: Medium scale processing</p>	<p>Name: Thrifty's Food (note: this interview was cancelled due to the unavailability of the produce manager).</p> <p>Name: Dr. Jenny Horn (Heritage Food Co-op and Vancouver Island Farmers' Alliance)</p> <p>Topic: Local food procurement, retail, institutional purchasing</p>	<p>Name: Jason and Elaine Fox</p> <p>Location: Silver Meadows Farm Errington</p> <p>Topic: Dairy operation and farm gate sales, large scale</p> <p><i>Note: not able to conduct a full interview (too busy)</i></p>

Oct 7 <sup>th</sup> - Friday AM (9-11)	Friday Midday (12-2) WHISKY CREEK (SOUTH OF QUALICUM BEACH)	Friday PM (3-5)
<p>Name: Lorne and Barbara Ebell</p> <p>Location: Nanoose Edibles Organic Farm</p> <p>Topic: Cooperative farming</p>	<p>Name: Lori Gillies</p> <p>Location: The Cluck Stops Here Whiskey Creek</p> <p>Topic: small scale abattoir</p>	<p>Name: Heaven on Earth Foods</p> <p>Location: Qualicum Beach</p> <p>Topic: small scale local food retailer</p>
Oct 8 <sup>th</sup> - Saturday AM (9-11) QUALICUM BEACH	Saturday Midday (12-2) QUALICUM BEACH	Saturday PM (3-5)
<p>Name: Qualicum Beach Farmers Market</p> <p>Topic: Interview shoppers</p>	<p>Name: Clarke &amp; Nancy Gourlay</p> <p>Location: Little Qualicum Cheeseworks</p> <p>Topic: Successful value- added dairy farm.</p> <p><i>Note: not able to conduct a full interview (too busy)</i></p>	<p>Name: Old Dutch Inn</p> <p>Location: Qualicum Beach</p> <p>Topic: Using local ingredients at the restaurant</p> <p><i>Note: not able to conduct a full interview (too busy)</i></p>

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## APPENDIX 2 - FULL LIST OF ISSUES ADDRESSED AT OPEN HOUSES

### Visioning Round Table Comments - Cedar

- Farmers as stewards of the land – not just producers
- Effect of climate change
- Eden project – climate revolution
- Hard to tell what’s going to happen
- Maybe need to live into our future
- Running scared into a future where farming is more intensive
- More like France
- Economically viable
- Farms will grow more trees (climate change)
- Mixed farms systems suitable
- Community involvement in food system – composting to bring waste nutrients back to farms
- Struggle between urbanization and production
- Challenge is water – utilizing techniques that reduce water use
- A farm that my kids can take over
- A place where young people can farm
- Alternative land tenure arrangement
- Food/agriculture will be valued
- RDN values agriculture
- More collaboration with other communities – working together to achieve success – support each other – more processing
- Young people involved, ability to make a life, access to land, apprenticeships, community programs
- RDN involvement – use, proactive
- Farmers and farms being valued like doctors
- Celebrating our farming and farmers
- Farming has to be valued
- Support for new and young farmers – education
- Broader understanding (vision) of what farming is and what it could be
- Farming as a viable and important profession being introduced to people – young people
- People know where their food comes from
- Self sufficient communities (prepared for the future)
- Community water system – supportive infrastructure for farming
- Farming as a viable important activity because it protects us from the future
- Agriculture is a perfect vehicle to help us respond to future challenges
- Economic
- Great growing climate could supply a larger market
- Need to refrain and develop and agricultural land strategically
- Institutional support for agriculture

- Organized to take advantage of these larger markets (coordinated approach, support to make this happen)
- Agricultural training in schools
- Embraced by community
- Connecting health to farming
- Associated supportive technology/infrastructure (cooperative participation)
- Farm socials/think tanks
- Farming is valued – providing necessary goods and services
- Gleaning
- Deal with liability issues

#### Visioning Round Table Comments – Errington

- Diversified – local market
- Local sales – includes fish
- Connect to the history
- Working together
- Creating a cooperative
- Convenient access for eaters
- Produce more of our food ourselves
- Government support for local production – working with smaller operations
- Work with our assets – local knowledge
- Economically viable
- Intensively farmed smaller scaled production systems
- Farms that improve the fertility that build soil – healthy farm practices
- More support for farmers
- Economically viable
- Future work/job opportunities for children
- Living more in balance with the environment more sustainable
- Innovative approaches
- Food in grocery store is from Errington
- Local food is available everywhere
- There is an appreciation for the quality of local food
- Food (local) is provided door-to-door
- Permanent farmer’s market
- Good local food is understood as connected to health
- Local food is convenient
- Families can have more housing to support and house families that are working on the farm
- Farmland is protected
- Cost of local production is lower than imported food
- More household self sufficiency
- More cooperation between farmers
- Vision for the “Oceanside” region – 1,000 acres of fruit vineyards
- Collaboration – working together to achieve bigger results
- Value-added approaches

- Strata farms
- Futurefarms.ca
- Myvillagedesign.ca
- Profitable farms
- Cooperative efforts between farmers in the farm community
- Shared infrastructure and machinery
- Government working together to support multi-generational farms that are economically viable
- RDN being supportive of young farmers
- We won't have a choice – will be forced to provide and grow our own food – we're currently living on a "cruise ship" – it will be a necessity – tie it to the education of our children
- Farmers and farming being a noble profession
- Small scale intensive production
- More incentive
- Agriculture zoning bylaws that are positive for agriculture
- Integrated process between local government and the province
- Continued participation of the community in the development of the agriculture plan/vision
- Need to prepare for a very different future
- Local marketing
- Shorter term vision – 5 yrs
- More agritourism – using agriculture as a vehicle to encourage more tourism – links to education
- RDN as a destination for ag tourism
- Producing 80% of our food
- Local production for restaurants
- Educational programs in schools (K-12) about the hidden costs of cheap food (fuel, carbon footprint), expanded programs and skill, immersion
- Direct support from RDN
- More local infrastructure to support farmers, including vets
- Local agriculture extension for youth and adults – supports ag skills
- Leadership from RDN – increase local resilience – benefits future of RDN
- Information of the total cost of food products
- That there is an understanding that agriculture is more than food production
- Better communication to farmers – celebration of farmers
- RDN identify ag land as an amenity – rezonings
- Resources available for young farmers
- RDN provides one stop shopping for aspiring farmers
- RDN removes bureaucracy
- Farmer institutes – role for?

#### Barriers Round Table Comments – Cedar

- Public attitude toward food – people want cheap food – cheap imports trucked in only 5% is grown locally
- Access to land/cost of land and inputs (machinery)
- Access to water



- Lack of knowledge/experience about agriculture/soil conditions
- Government regulations (e.g. Slaughtering, public health quotas, costs of inspections) – all favour larger agricultural operations
- Access to market and access to growers
- Lack of labour
- Lack of marketing (agriculture directory maps)
- Cost of insurance
- Lack of facilities (e.g. Slaughter houses)
- Lack of education and connection to schools and young people
- Conflicts with adjacent neighbourhoods/public expectation
- Limited ability to sell to key markets
- Lack of support from senior levels of government (MoE, MoAg)
- Taxation system determines products
- Local conditions of soil

#### Barriers Round Table Comments – Errington

- Signage to direct consumer
- Responsibility lies with consumer
- Resource – local food guide
- Direct marketing products to consumers
- Land prices too high for new farmers
- Very few programs to link land with people – live and utilize land available
- Need to get more people on smaller parcels
- Is there a compromise with long-term leases
- Move away from term “agriculture” to “food production”
- SPIN farming as a way to intensify
- Water availability
- Human nature doesn’t allow the society to change
- So much work – labour demands are too high
- Migrant labour is being brought in
- Barriers are within consumers’ own minds – not eating what’s available – not well prepared
- Consumers want a consistent supply
- Very little nutritional value information on local food – not encouraging
- Lack of certified slaughterhouse due to new regulations
- VIHA has rules that make marketing prohibitive – processing and food safe regulations – vary from region to region
- Other levels of government interfering with farming – DFO water restrictions
- Cost of improving land
- Water rights – unequal weight within RDN
- Fresh meat at the farmers market – VIHA regs
- Recognition that ag is not just about food – lack of processing facilities – production
- Lack of education/mentoring relationship for young farmers (hard to find the information, nothing at VIU for this yet)

- School district not interested/able to add ag into the curriculum
- Imports that are produced/processed elsewhere
- Need a change in thinking about purchasing habits
- Meat regulations – all levels of government to recognize commercial agriculture lobbying for health is affecting local slaughterhouses by favouring large-scale provincial and national operations as opposed to smaller businesses serving local and regional communities
- Barriers for small producers – can only sell on the hoof
- Need larger meat processing plants
- Lack of marketing plan – interactive website
- ALR has made it too expensive – has jacked up land prices
- Some participants noted that if marijuana was legalized then farmers could be producing this and earning the income
- VIHA regulations require commercially licensed facility
- Overstepping with slaughter regs – washrooms
- Prevention of beehives transporting to island – this has been lifted
- Need more inspections at the borders (i.e. sudden oak death)
- Free market in ag goods needed (more movement of goods, do we want imports, need a policy in place to supply locally)
- Deregulation is a barrier
- Accessing local markets – to get products there
- Government subsidies?
- Need more education about the nutritional value of local food (government to help promote this)
- Signage to lead people to farms – directories are better idea – website
- Select standing committee – 1999
- Who is responsible? Agriculture is not. The community is.
- More financially viable to purchase locally – cost of local food is too high
- Global marketplace – competing with cheapest food
- Education for farmers – apprenticeships and indenturing (system to stay long enough so they can become good at it) – Youth Employment Program
- Ferries – cost of transporting ag products
- Neighbours – conflicts with rural/urban
- Growing market for large farm producers (something past the farmers market)
- More cooperative structures
- Trying to get young people into farming – farming is not an option
- Grant programs for young farmers
- Young farmers not sticking it out to see the benefits
- Older generation doesn't know how to communicate with generation X or the younger generations
- Lack of access to large animal vets

#### Opportunities Round Table Comments – Cedar

- Hobby vs. Career – farm size may not be viable for a career
- Strata idea – centre of farm with houses
- Cooperative

- Quality of life
- Water – some aquifers are stressed
- Old co-op store could be used to promote locally grown food through a market or similar endeavour
- Year round good climate
- People want local food here
- Farmers markets are opportunities
- Community allotments where people could rent out plots on unused land – what happens when people move or retire?
- Economic opportunities – need to learn to be cooperators and farm together in cooperation – marketing co-op, have power and enough people, not every farm needs to go to market, quality needs to be high
- Can't share haying equipment, but could share other equipment
- Can guarantee a larger quantity and consistent product for universities and food purchasing services
- Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) box program – very good for the buyer – break-even situation, good for new farmers to learn about the business
- Take ag into the schools – don't just talk about it, let them experience it (Foodshare has some examples)
- Agritourism!?! Harvest Bounty Festival – events are successful, but you don't necessarily get repeat customers.
- Businesses that have land that can be used
- Email mailing list and newsletters
- Food charter – Pat Reichert – food brokering service (Senior's Centre)
- Vegetable marketing board
- Apprenticeship programs – if grandkids won't farm, who else is available?
- RDN set up a Farmers Market Assn to be set up at VIEX grounds – low to no rent
- Access to commercial kitchen so people can process at a central point
- Too expensive to process on site at farm
- Something that can be used in the winter
- Most farmers are still quite independent
- To create value-added product it is too expensive and time consuming
- Full scale butcher shops
- Have a retail farm market on site – Saturday market and customers are coming to you – you don't need to bring product to them - keep crafters out of this
- Murray (Maida) can't lease out 20 acres?
- Farmers want own their own land
- Strata titled dwellings on rock bluff – all farmed to strata rules – benefit: everyone could get farm status - RDN could support this and put forth to ALC
- Need to look at different land ownership models – corporation model, block of 2000 acres (commercial/residential)
- Way too expensive to buy land outright plus equipment
- Entire parcels were put in ALR – need to go through each and determine what % are arable
- Sharing machinery (planter, sprayer, etc) at a certain scale need your own
- Key for economic opportunities is marketing: the more food is available locally the more people will purchase locally
- Ottawa farmers market is very successful – Why? Tourist destination, size of the city makes it successful, not a sprawling metropolis, easy to access, can get food to eat

- Most successful people in our area are doing everything on site
- Contact with young people at highschool level – need to get young people involved, mentoring is very important
- Need to have passion for farming – start here – example/teaching farm - many different ways to farm (a way to show people possibilities)
- Form a network and get people to communicate
- Community seed bank
- Needs to be more money
- Need to know how to market – educations opportunities (BCAFM) (local educational opportunity)
- Inspirational speakers for farmers
- Green Community Map – a food security map like Cowichan:  
<http://www.cowichangreencommunity.org/content/food-security-map>
- How to do value-added
- More opportunities for education for farmers
- Insurance costs are prohibitive – need to address this
- Why farm? Basic to feed people, allows us to keep the land , ag production can help with farm status, something to do with your own hands, sense of accomplishment
- Agritourism – get kids out to the farm – develop the passion
- Need to also work with older students
- Revive the 4H program – change it to suit urban ag programs and focus
- Revitalize Ag in the Classroom
- A local agricultural advocate – RDN representative – someone to work in extension and work to move food security plan forward, this person could educate young farmers
- Young farmers need support in a business model – need to adapt with the times
- Allow young farmers the opportunity to lease a farm and get used to farming

#### Opportunities Round Table Comments – Errington

- All barriers are opportunities
- Education of consumers – necessity of local food production, value of local food, new understanding
- Reduce cost of production and increase volume to market
- Experimental crops/research on soil capability
- More local farmers markets (year round) – better connections between farmers and consumers, better relationships between farmers and neighbours (adjacent land uses)
- Leasing of fallow private land for agricultural use, local investment/shares in agr land
- Cost-free programs (accessibility and timeliness of programs offered to farmers)
- Less government regulations – better connections between local government and the farmer: get out of the office and go see the farm
- More money spent on agriculture no on bureaucracy
- Marketing by RDN (how to find your local farmer)
- Lobbying by consumers to retailers for local food
- Carbon credits and carbon tax – pay farmers for farms who produce local products
- Drainage improvements
- Farm master plans – crops, strata farms
- Create tools and seed money for new farmers

- Sell benefits of farming to community health (health areas)

#### Local Government's Role – Cedar

- Water: limiting factor, opportunity for RDN to store winter runoff for irrigation, allow detention pond development and digging
- Especially an issue with forestry effects on ag lands
- Would like to be able to build holding tanks
- Wildlife predation is a big problem
- Buying locally – can't be scattered (hit and miss), allow farm gate and markets in bylaws
- Need to encourage ag as a home-based business
- Tax shift off of conventional industry to support growers
- Better tax breaks for those involved in food production
- Jurisdiction problem with regards to water (creating water holding tanks)
- Reluctant to comment on ALR exclusion applications
- More direct to say "no" to ALC exclusions
- Permanent farm market – good idea
- Layers of bureaucracy needs to be reduced
- Less meetings, more farming
- Farming doesn't get attention at Board's Council meetings – more reactive than proactive
- Compost collection – production – add sand to it, sell it to Alpine
- Lack of info on soil structure – education about compost availability to farms who need to improve soil, give it to them for free in exchange for creating cooperatives on their properties
- Agriculture as an allowable use in every zone
- Common tools: bean threshing machine – tool co-operative, have RDN help secure spot at Works Yard, or similar
- Provincial/municipal support at education/curriculum level
- Farmers' markets - one big year round venue
- Connections between food/ag at school
- Apprenticeships for kids/youth
- Support right-to-farm act, more direct support from RDN
- Education for realtors, disclosure statements for adjacent farmland (ALR and others)
- Develop a brochure for realtors
- Ability to strata property into smaller sections, increase ability to get people on to the land with covenant
- Allowing a second dwelling on ALR (restricted to family members)
- Historically the role of government has been to reduce farming on the island
- Need government to understand that can't sell to grocery stores, schools
- CSA and markets are expensive
- Food procurement policy for the RDN
- Funding for ag has been gutted at all levels
- Regional agricultural support officer
- Recognition of value of farmers: fewer roadblocks, less anti-ag bias, value of land itself (whether actively farmed or not)

- Farm signage – need more signs for Cedar Market and for individual farms
- Agritourism
- More university/vocational programs
- Need a farmer’s market and processing area (for water quality and foodsafe) to get access to community kitchen at fairgrounds, VIEX, year-round Saturday market, good parking and transit
- Like Barrel Market in London, Dijon, include butcher shops
- Could be at VIEX, contemplating fairgrounds redevelopment
- Promote alternate landownership and land uses: corporations (shares), cooperatives, strata, cluster houses.
- Survey of land capability on farms – could put buildings on less arable parts
- Objective 3<sup>rd</sup> party assessment of sub pieces that could have strata or other
- Irrigation water – municipal system upgrades, create non-potable pipe system for irrigation
- Infrastructure plan, low flow drip lines
- Parklands – RDN – that used to be farmed: put an apprenticeship program, incubator farm
- Forested lands should be assessed as farmland

#### Local Government’s Role – Errington

- Carbon fixing incentives
- Water efficiency incentives
- Tax breaks so that farmers get more \$/product
- Incentives for growing heritage seeds vs GMO
- Too many rules and regulations (ALR) without supporting programs that were originally in place
- More resources for starting an actual farm – more incentives to clear land
- Supporting farmers markets – help develop local markets (year-round)
- Must run it as a co-op (Milwaukee growing)
- Food charter for local area
- No Lantzville issues wanted here
- Agricultural production as an allowable use in every zone
- Lobby province to change meat license
- Agricultural support officer for advertising and marketing
- Farmers unions
- Culinary connections
- Support for fishing and mixed use farm, questions/answers, help with regulations, walk through the process
- Liaison officer, someone who could help with explaining all the legislation
- Education from Kindergarten to college, education for realtors
- Better definition of agriculture
- Local research station with crop trials
- Need to match what climate and soils are good for the area and can be produced
- Need to identify what can grow here and what can’t
- Strata farming, partnerships, co-operatives
- Farm labour: housing (seasonal), caretaker housing
- Machinery co-op (set it up, run it, house it)
- Food processing



- Appropriate technology
- Stop imposing regulations: building permit issues (if zoned ag, but not farm class) need a permit for it.
- Needs to lobby VIHA to make it easier to sell/process yourself
- VIHA and food security (on website) get them to the table
- Need an ombudsman/support officer
- Enforce green strip boundaries for ALR boundaries (buffer strips) RDN lack of support for maintaining urban-side buffers, etc
- Water resources important but not being respected by forestry/logging
- Get private industry/logging companies to share knowledge on aquifers
- Regulate water and logging
- Education about local food supply info in newsletters, school programs
- Work with developers and real estate industry
- Water for farming: water deficient in the summer, should capture runoff and get support for that – not impede detention ponds
- Examine nuisance bylaws to make sure that farming isn't hindered by nuisance complaints
- Lack of animal control (dogs killing lambs)
- Rabbits predation on crops (deer, elk, geese, domestic, feral, wild animals)
- Facilitate leadership to distribute produce to market: farmers' markets, CSA, farm gate, home deliveries
- Removing barriers: parking, bathroom area
- Keep local government out of hair: City of Parksville, Nanaimo, Qualicum Beach can all outvote RDN
- Water and hydro rates too high
- Need regional, municipal, and provincial governments to work together to make it feasible to farm: regulatory, economic
- Dedicated staff to have help to wade through policy/process/paperwork
- Farmers don't have time for paperwork and meetings
- Keeps people from farming
- Mandate of RDN about farming?
- Revitalize farmers' institute
- Don't necessarily want ag support officer
- Create district municipality for Electoral Area, too many controls, building inspection permit
- Offer a portal to minimize regulations and streamlined
- People feel imposed upon
- Accept accountability for product produced – against lobbying from commodity industry
- Level of government that enables rather than stymies farming
- Provincial growing forward workshop example of good one – hold it at local venues

### Topics

- Water
- Direct support from RDN
- Land tenure models
- Infrastructure, mechanization, diversification, machinery
- Education
- Aquaculture
- Marketing – logo

### Water

- Shellfish – intertidal and deep water
- New highway caused closures until vegetation came back
- Attitude of DFO is problematic – can't even dig a ditch
- Upland activity (everything that happens) affects water quality: new highway, clear cutting – effects are devastating to water quality
- If you create habitat and the fish find it, you can't ever destroy it – need DFO permission
- Ag liaison officer could go to bat for that and other farmer's issues.
- Took two days on the phone trying to get information on irrigation ponds – needs to be an easier portal for regulatory information
- One-stop phone number for policy info
- Without proper support, "illegal" activity is encouraged
- Liaison officers could help with drainage issues (timely) same person could help with drainage issues (a liaison for dealing with complaints and other agency involvement)
- Water licenses are confusing
- No livestock rearing on aquifers (no chemicals, fertilizers, manure spreading) was included as a guideline in RDN OCP in Cassidy – problematic. Best practices/guidelines may be taken as regulation. Best to leave "guidelines" like that out of the OCP
- RDN doesn't have a lot of test wells. We need to know what's happening in terms of quantity and also quality.
- Options for partnering -Harmac
- Nanoose Edibles - When lots were cleared on ridges above farmland it had negative effect on ½ acre pond for irrigation, devastating runoff and erosion effects
- Needed to educate the new owners about the Right to Farm Act and about how their activities were damaging the farm
- Partnered with a landscaper to help solve problems.
- Use of the water balance model will be helpful, could get RDN (water protection division) to come speak to the group next meeting, interested in combining forces

- Greywater infrastructure should be installed; wastewater is now discharged but could be used as good irrigation, possible grey water usage on farmland.
- Irrigation systems for multiple farms, off-stream and well water, combining veggie farms to establish a communal/area-wide irrigation system
- Low-flow systems/drip – put in infrastructure and people will use it
- Little Qualicum Cheeseworks – no issues with water

### **Direct support from RDN**

- Farm building legislation has been chuck out: still need a building permit but no longer need an inspection
- If in the ALR, but don't have farm status, you still need an inspection
- Lori's farm status was taken away because her application was ½ hour late, couldn't get status back (under 2.5 acres), all files are being re-assessed right now in Southern Vancouver Island
- Responsible for paying full taxes, until proof of farming
- Farms that have received status years ago, many have never been reassessed
- Estates being built on farmland but still receiving tax status
- Would like to have a legal reading on ability to have signs for farms put back up
- Along Port Alberni Hwy, signs taken down by many businesses – MCON has a heap of signs, said bylaw is now being enforced
- Private land and signs – RDN Bylaw
- Municipal bylaws within city limits
- Ministry of Transportation, highways
- Need a big sign for farms that could be added to the "Gas, Food, Lodging" sign
- Signs similar to Wine Route signs in the Fraser Valley and Cowichan would be good
- Temporary signs are allowed on private land but they need to be professionally made and removed over the weekend
- General support person for agriculture via agri-tourism would be great
- Needs to be disclosure by realtors for sales adjacent to farms
- Enforce buffers on urban-side when next to ALR
- Agri-tourism, circle farm tour, support officer would help. Support officer would need to have a background in agriculture, recommendation to enhance economic development for agriculture.

### **Land Tenureship**

- Community garden plots possibly on RDN lands/parks
- Need workshops on land tenure and ownership models
- Long term leases available but can't register on title, so 3 year max, need a mix of own/lease (Land Title Act). Need a law so that it is not deemed a subdivision.
- Barrier for leasing arises when you want to do leasehold improvements or infrastructure
- So far fairly easy to find good land to lease
- Write investment/amortization into lease

- Nanoose Edibles: Soil Farm Apprenticeship Program: Staff goes through farm apprenticeship in the cooperative (Nanoose Edibles), set salary and bonus system, at the stage of looking at legal paperwork, co-ops take over responsibility to enhance farming and increase own salaries but don't buy in, apprenticeships cost money – they are an investment, always at the training level, so it looks like farm isn't making money
- Forest Lakewood bought lots of land in their area, largest ag owner on the island (mostly being farmed for hay) for climate change credits, this makes it more difficult to buy land
- Island Timberlands cleared land in Cassidy over aquifer and said it would be sold in 20 acre lots (near airport), possible processing or subdivision
- Airport – who has jurisdiction over this?
- Do we need more farmland?
- Not allowed to own ag land unless you are Canadian in some provinces
- Would like RDN to lobby province to make sure foreign investors don't buy up farmland
- Island Timberlands want to maximize revenues from commercial development area , if it's in the ALR
- Farming coming to Island Timberlands with their business plan
- Make Island Timberlands come up with specific farming plants for their land – farming first
- Urban farming on non-ALR land (garden plots in RDN) should be explored

## Aquaculture

- Largest legal agricultural activity in BC in terms of revenue (\$1 billion), a large piece of this is farmed salmon
- Baynes sound – small piece in RDN, rest in CVRD
- Comox has issues (with Islands Trust – sustainability initiative, don't want anything to happen), that makes shellfish farming difficult. RDN shellfish farmers are better off.
- Licensing recently switch from Province to DFO
- Largest constraint (shellfish and finfish) is that it's on Crown Land, 10 year leases only
- Most also claimed by First Nations (13 FN have claimed the Baynes Sound area)
- Have to apply for an amendment just to put ball floats on, has taken more than 4 years, tied up in FN consultation
- DFO understands management of fish and habitat but not private property. Court cases happening all over Canada.
- Aquaculture doesn't really seem fit anywhere, no legislation that governs it, even though founding pillar of Canada
- Finfish farms are moving ahead because of partnerships with local FN
- Lots of room for growth in aquaculture, world demand is very high (increase in land-based systems)
- Lack of consumer understanding of what happens on fish farms
- Lots of opportunity for land-based fin fish operations (char, trout, tilapia)
- Boats on tenure comes under DFO
- World demand for seafood very high and ocean can only produce so much
- Expansion of land and water-based aquaculture will take a change in public perception
- RDN – level of zoning over the water, questionable/disagreement over jurisdictional, Province has jurisdiction over sea bed and surface, DFO owns deep water

- Need some accommodation from RDN over surface of water jurisdiction, height restrictions of 1m off the water

## Education

- People like views unimpeded, especially with homes on the hill
- Aquaculture is a very visible farm activity – people against this are in upland areas
- Shellfish operators need a “social” license – need public education
- Need to get local people onside with local food production
- Need a video/educational package to bring into schools
- Letting people know what you are doing brings them on board
- Schools, rotary clubs, tours of shellfish and greenhouses, all types of farms
- Education is key to farming business
- Education of children – need to target kindergarten level – set foundation for value of agriculture before “supermarket habit” is established
- Radio, books, TV, do a good job at educating young adults – use mainstream media to promote
- Behooves us to hire summer students to work on the farm, end up being ambassadors
- Horticulture program is not a good export of hands-on students. More time needs to be spent on farms. Less plans, theory, bookwork – more applied.
- Best students who work on the farm are in sports: action-oriented, take instructions, be on time
- Industry training authority (e.g. dairy technician), highschool students get credit and paid, farm gets a tax credit
- Agriculture in the classroom doing a good job of bringing fruits and vegetables into schools
- Step-Up: federal government mentoring program, for Canadians. Government gives you \$2,000 if you teach them for 8 weeks (WWOOFers, etc). People getting into farming. You can do two a year.
- Need to pay farmers to teach new farmers, need agreements between farmers and government to help support costs of apprenticeships
- Professional development programs for farmers: Growing forward workshops
- Agro-webinars – RDN could advertise, Canadian farm Business Management Council
- Disclosure sheets for realtors
- Proactive measures, municipal signs about active farms: you are entering a farming area
- Education for consumers about fair rates for local food, health benefits
- Partner with dieticians, nutritionists, VIHA
- RDN website, map with links to farms
- Develop a food map (Cowichan Valley food Map)

## Infrastructure

- Need a tool co-op for equipment that is not time-sensitive, RDN could house equipment
- Tool co-op could be problematic, too challenging, safety factor, but might work for vegetable farming
- Should be industry responsibility

- Better as a co-op for 5-10 farms
- Saskatchewan has done something similar, need training first
- Equipment field days, co-op could even be just 2 neighbouring farms
- Doesn't have to be large equipment, hand tools are need as well
- Elephant in the room is that no one can afford to farm because no one can buy land
- Farm Credit Canada can provide some funding/loans
- Year round farming, no one can buy land, hard to make ends meet
- Worried about getting people into farming because land costs so high
- Land speculation is driving up the cost of farm land
- Greater role for AAC in saying no to applications for ALR exclusions. Could have a "no first" policy
- RDN need to show complete support for agriculture, can say no to exclusion applications and provide comments on all applications before forwarding them onto the ALC. Ag advisory committees can play a role
- Need to increase zoning in urban containment boundary
- Create a year round farm market in Beban park, commercial kitchen, root cellars

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APPENDIX 4 - COPIES OF EMAIL CORRESPONDANCE

*(Names have been withheld to protect the anonymity of the comments)*

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Morning lone,

Some random thoughts in no particular order.....

Although I am glad to see that the RDN feels that agriculture is important enough to address directly, I worry about the direction that this may take.

I am 62 years old and have made my living in agriculture, in whole (since 1992) or in part for all of my life. Most of my childhood was spent on a small mixed farm in Errington. I am a grass-fed, all natural, beef producer in the main, and mixed farmer, (eggs, meat birds, fruit and produce) in a small way. I have recently re-located to 66 acres in Hilliers (part of the old Doukhobor settlement), after ranching successfully in the Cariboo for 17 years. While there, I served on/in multiple spear-head groups, focus groups, committees, associations, etc., all of them agriculture related. I am absolutely committed to, passionate about and am a vocal advocate for small-scale sustainable agriculture. It is healthy for the economy, healthy for the planet, healthy for the animals, and healthy for the people.

I am trying hard to find a positive position to take here and finding it mightily difficult!

In general, I have seen and heard alot of well-intentioned folks, both farmers and bureaucrats/consultants, engage in consultation of all sorts; the result of which is another report, another study, another recommendation, another media opportunity, etc.....but no real on-the-ground change, no more government dollars going directly to where it's needed (and I'm not talking subsidies!...(being a veteran of the NISA/CAIS/Agristability Suite boondoggle)).

...

Before I rant any more, I would appreciate something from your end to see if we could initiate a more positive dialogue than I have begun.....<:-)).....I was not a negative voice at the work-shop, and was happy to see that many of my suggestions were considered valuable by both attendees and consultants. Thanks for the ear...gotta go milk.....

-----

Hi Again lone,

One more thought.....milking a cow/goat can be an introspective event!

....the most common situation; i.e. a young couple/family wanting a small farm with which to help feed their family, experience the thrill of growing food and learning how to provide healthy alternatives to imported, packaged, genetically modified, chemically ridden, corporately managed and profit-driven food stuffs.

It is these innovative, passionate, eager, energetic young folks, who are willing to begin in a small way, learning as they go along, feeling the pride of accomplishment in something valuable and real, hopefully being mentored by an old hand or two; that need encouragement and a realistic example clearly before them, that their dream can be a reality. These are the people that build a community.

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Hi lone,

I thought the attached file, a review of the ALC document 'Moving Forward...' might be of interest as you move forward on the RDN's Agricultural Area Plan. The info is being circulated via the Nanaimo - Cedar Farmer's institute listserve. I have also attached a summary copy of my personal position on Agriculture and rural lands, fyi, which I expect to revise and submit with more detail in the near future.

I would add that I believe it would be useful, to make a better AAP, if efforts were made to reach out to neighbouring jurisdictions and Island residents for input - to encourage others on the Island to be on the listserve and to contribute, etc.

For instance, I know that the CVRD has also done a lot of work on their 'AAP' ...and I'd hope that CVRD residents (some being NCFI members) might be welcomed to offer their observations and comments to this RDN AAP. We in the RDN could learn a lot from our regional neighbours of the mid island, and I think we should reach out to them - and look for cooperative inter-regional policies and initiatives - as well as those particular to the RDN.

With food security a major Island issue it's worth considering what we might do together, as mid island communities, to advance forward-looking plans that will address agricultural needs and issues.

cheers,

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lone,

Thanks for your quick reply, and open invitation for folks to contribute. I have circulated your remarks to some NCFI members, and to a mid island communities exchange listserve - and hope folks will contact you further. I similarly circulated the article below.

I believe the article is a good example of what might be recommended in the RDN's Agricultural Area Plan. The article speaks to matters that were discussed at the October meeting of the Nanaimo-Cedar Farmer's Institute, about payments to farmers for 'environmental goods and services'.

I myself have for several years now been suggesting that funding for this type of program could come from the Carbon Tax - that the UBCM want returned to local governments (under Bill 27). Our 'Yellow Cedar' project actively advocated to the RDN, and the provincial government, for such incentives to be put in place as a means to offset direct and indirect costs that farmers and landowners bear for society's benefit. If you wish I'd be happy to provide additional information about this project.

I also think there's more opportunities, such as this, that could help farmers to make farming viable again - in the mid island and elsewhere. I encourage you then to add these remarks and suggestions to the recommendations to



be made in the RDN's AAP.

Thank you also for your work in considering the other agricultural plans from mid island regions. I look forward to reading your report and participating further as the AAP progresses.

all the best

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Dear Ione,

I believe you are the lead member for the consulting team of the Nanaimo Regional Agricultural plan and you are holding 'Open Houses' for input into the plan.

Unfortunately I would not be able to attend these but would like to participate in some way.

I am a vineyard owner/operator in Southern France and hope to relocate early next year to Vancouver Island to plant an organic vineyard somewhere on the Island.

Gary Rolston in Comox has been helping me with my enquiries there and we are in fact meeting in Bordeaux later in November to discuss further. One of the things we have been discussing is my desire to lease land from farmers or land owners on a long term basis for plantations. This is commonly practiced here in France as it reduces the cash outlay for land, benefits the lessor who generates income from the land and sees the land value increase. It also puts land back into true farming rather than landscape or hobby use.

It would enable younger farmers to start 'farming' without having to finance expensive land purchase.

I have heard from Gary however, that there is a problem with this scenario; regulations regarding leases of over three years are considered sub divisions if they are not full parcels.

Could a change in regulations be considered in the plan?

I would be pleased to have your thoughts on this.

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Hi Ione,

I hope your Open Houses are going well!

Thank you for the linked document. I hadn't come across this before and it's answered a lot of my questions regarding leases.

I think my confusion arose over leasing an area of less than a whole parcel for more than three years.

Under section 73 of the Land Title Act this would require sub-division. I was led to believe this was difficult to obtain.

I am actively searching out suitable land for vineyard cultivation around the Nanaimo area and would welcome any help with this. Initially I'm looking for a production area to plant the vines, either from land owners or other farmers on a leased basis.

Then I would like buy some land in a good location for agro-tourism to construct a winery/home and vineyard.

My wife is visiting VI in 10 days' time and is being shown around Comox Valley by their Economic Development Department staff.

I would be pleased to hear about the results of the Open Houses and their impact on the agricultural plan.

Kind regards

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Dear Ione:

I just had a very interesting discussion with Lainya about the linkages between building rural resilience and the draft agricultural plan that you are working on with RDN staff and Advisory Committee. Lainya explained that the primary purpose of the public consultation phase of the project is to pose the questions; "What is the vision of agriculture in the region? What are the challenges and solutions? How can we increase food productivity and viable food production in the RDN"?

As with draft OCPs, RGS etc, I am very keen on having a link with emergency planning (this includes response, recovery, mitigation and preparedness). In the part of the project that addresses the identification of challenges, I wondered if you had considered:

- The impact of climate change
  - o Increase of fire season by about 3 days/year. Our Hazard Vulnerability Risk Analysis pegs Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) fire as our number one threat. We have identified areas that are at extreme or high risk of WUI based on fuel density. Agricultural lands, in addition to a network of greenspace/firebreaks is one method of WUI mitigation and protection of farms – has this been considered? What about mention of vegetation management on farms in areas identified at high risk of WUI. Mitigation saves future economic losses and property damage...
  - o More extreme weather, potential for crop failures
  - o Crop loss due to a flood or other emergency (defined per the Emergency Program Act) - can be eligible for federal Disaster Financial Assistance.
- In the recommendations is it possible to consider some form of encouragement like a rebate to farms that have an environmental farm plan? What about a mention of emergency planning for farms or livestock evacuation planning
- I am working on identifying our regional capacity to evacuate, transport and house livestock during a natural, human caused or disease event. If you have any data collected that I may find useful...or perhaps I can share my information with you.
- I am using IAFBC funding to conduct a GIS study to identify lands in our region that could be used as emergency disposal or composting sites for mass livestock carcass disposal. Is carcass disposal considered in the draft?

- This is just FYI: [http://www.fcc-fac.ca/en/aboutus/responsibility/agrispiritfund\\_e.asp](http://www.fcc-fac.ca/en/aboutus/responsibility/agrispiritfund_e.asp) Farm Credit Canada, Agrispirit grant for a capital project, up to 25,000. Can be used for a community garden project, just fyi. Next grant intake May/12.

Apologies this is a bit of a rambling email, I just wanted to toss out some thoughts about identifying common indicators for resilience – ensuring local food supply and supporting ‘backyard’ resiliency. Anything that helps a person to survive on their own for a period of one week to a month..... having your own food sources, considering alternative energy, water sources etc.

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I did not realize until I began to look into it more, that the term “food security” carries a larger meaning and is now being used to describe a movement with social, political and economic implications. I think both you and the RDN should be careful to understand the background and orientation of this and groups such as Food Secure Canada <http://foodsecurecanada.org/background> . These groups are dedicated to much more than food and agriculture. When I read the various press releases about the AAP and nebulous statements like “It will reflect the community’s identity and values, will align with other plans such as the Regional Growth Strategy, and will be translated into implementable actions,” I get the strong sense that this same food security agenda is driving the Agricultural Area Plan. Hopefully the RDN is not involved in promulgating the same bandwagon: from Food Secure Canada:

#### Background

“The importance of food to human health and the economy is well understood and profound. As one of the vital elements of human existence, from production to consumption, food involves many of the most important cultural, social, and economic activities of human societies.

The Rome Declaration on World Food Security and the World Food Summit Plan of Action in 1996 called for each nation to develop and implement a national plan of action to achieve food security domestically and internationally. The Action Plan for Food Security is Canada 's response to the World Food Summit (WFS). The Plan recognized the important role played by civil society "in social, political and economic reform, through public education, advocacy and participation in public policy formulation." The Action Plan also recognized that food security implied access to adequate food and sufficient food supplies and that poverty reduction, social justice and sustainable food (and wild food) systems are essential conditions for a food secure Canada .

Food insecurity affects many and presents itself in many different forms in Canada. The problems are evident in the number of people using food banks, the financial problems of farmers and fishers and their communities, diabetes rates among aboriginal people, widespread obesity in children and adults, and pollution and habitat destruction associated with the food system. FSC helps create opportunities for its members to address these problems, in local, national and international arenas.

#### Perspective

Food Secure Canada recognizes that food security requires that adequate amounts of safe, healthy, nutritious, culturally acceptable food be accessible to all in a dignified manner; that food producers earn a fair return on their labour, and that food production, harvesting and distribution methods sustain the environment. In a society in

which most people purchase their food, they must have adequate funds to do so, and full information about what they buy.

We recognize that food security includes many evolving concepts that require on-going discussion and development. This is particularly so regarding rights and entitlements, social justice and respect for the sovereignty of Canadians in relation to the food system (e.g., aboriginal relations to traditional lands, farmers' maintenance of biodiversity through breeding and seed saving, workers' authority in relation to their working conditions and remuneration). These basic elements of food security require a fundamentally new direction for Canadian and world food and health promotion systems.

We endeavor to work in solidarity with communities throughout the world who are striving for justice, equity and environmental sustainability in the production, processing and consumption of food. We believe that there is an increasing need for informed citizen participation in important decisions dealing with food policy, food safety, health and poverty reduction.”

I am also puzzled by the RDN's current rationale for an Agricultural Area Plan:

“An Agricultural Area Plan is a strategy and policy framework to guide ongoing agricultural-related decision making within the Regional District of Nanaimo. Despite an active agricultural industry, farmland protection and the promotion of agriculture as a viable economic sector emerged as significant issues in the Nanaimo region. To address these concerns, the Plan will provide an opportunity for local government, citizens, and the agricultural community to work together to articulate a shared vision for the future of agriculture in the region and the steps needed to achieve this vision.”

Since when did Nanaimo have and "active agricultural sector"? Since when did agriculture's promotion emerge as a "significant issue"? I'm not sure if the RDN looks at statistics but here is one from the Ministry of Agriculture <http://www.agf.gov.bc.ca/resmgmt/sf/agbriefs/Nanaimo.pdf>

In 2001 the gross farm receipts were \$16,612,719. That is about the equivalent of 40-50 small businesses (50 x \$300,000). I am not a planner or statistician but I find it hard to understand how this can be equated to an active economic sector. In the US, there are approximately 2,000,000 farmers, less than 1% of the population. How many active farmers are there in the RDN?

As I said in a previous email, what an AAP hopes to achieve is a mystery to me. The problem with local agriculture is that there is no money in it. Until the RDN is prepared to subsidize farmers (single farm payment) [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Single\\_Farm\\_Payment](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Single_Farm_Payment), nothing will help. Surely the RDN realises the problem will not be solved locally. Honestly, how will these goals help?

- Establish a guiding vision for agriculture;
- Increase public awareness of agriculture in our region;
- Discuss the issues facing our farming community;
- Identify trends, constraints and barriers to viable, local agriculture;
- Discover practical solutions to strengthen opportunities for agriculture; and
- Develop recommendations and an implementation strategy for the Agricultural Area Plan.

I do not want to be negative. I'm sorry to be critical. To me however the AAP will accomplish little and in reality its true goals are:

- Create the perception that the RDN is doing something something politically correct.
- Absorb a bunch of community and bureaucratic time.
- Create employment for those being paid to participate.
- Consume tax dollars yet change nothing.

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Hello lone,

Thanks for the links to the sites related to AAPs. While I am skeptical as to the real purpose and efficacy of an AAP, I will persevere and perhaps in time come to an appreciation of their value.

My initial confusion has stemmed from a poor understanding of what an AAP actually is. For example:

“The primary objective is to ensure that the agriculture capability of the region is assessed as part of a secure food supply for the region and identify priority actions and anticipated future changes.”

“Establishing a future vision for agriculture and food system will be a key outcome of this process. The creation of the AAP will serve as an important tool in achieving the goals of encouraging, protecting and celebrating farming and food production in the region and will align with other plans such as the Regional Growth Strategy and Area OCP’s.”

The RDN outline its AAP as:

“A central goal of this process is to engage people who are interested in local food - whether you're growing it, preparing it, selling it or eating it!”

“An Agricultural Area Plan is a strategy and policy framework to guide ongoing agricultural-related decision making within the Regional District of Nanaimo. Despite an active agricultural industry, farmland protection and the promotion of agriculture as a viable economic sector have emerged as significant issues in the Nanaimo region. To address these concerns, the Plan will provide an opportunity for local government, citizens, and the agricultural community to work together to articulate a shared vision for the future of agriculture in the region and the steps needed to achieve this vision.”

Key Goals of the Agricultural Area Plan

- Establish a guiding vision for agriculture;
- Increase public awareness of agriculture in our region;
- Discuss the issues facing our farming community;
- Identify trends, constraints and barriers to viable, local agriculture;
- Discover practical solutions to strengthen opportunities for agriculture; and
- Develop recommendations and an implementation strategy for the Agricultural Area Plan.

I would like to compare these, in my opinion extravagant and nebulous statements , with those in a document you recommended: [An Evaluation of the Investment Agriculture Foundation Local Government Agricultural Planning Program](#). In terms a defining the scope and purpose of an AAP, the document's authors are more pragmatic:

For the purpose of this evaluation project, the researchers have distinguished between agricultural plans and Agricultural Area Plans (AAPs). The former refers to the general process concerning agriculture. The scope and contents of an agricultural plan can be very broad, covering all aspects of agriculture, from a shared vision to

economic development, healthy communities, food security, land uses, and on-farm activities. An AAP, on the other hand, is a local government policy tool for agricultural land use planning that is intended to be formally adopted as a sub-area plan of an Official Community Plan.

The Local Government Act makes provision for municipalities and regional districts to develop official plans. As a matter of practice<sup>11</sup>, local governments have also developed sub-area plans that provide a greater level of detail for addressing objectives not sufficiently covered in an OCP. These sub-area plans are often referred to as neighbourhood or local area plans. When applied to agricultural lands they are referred to as Agricultural Area Plans.

The key points can be summarized as follows:

- An AAP is a sub-area plan applied to a farm area(s) that will be predominantly, but not necessarily exclusively, in agricultural use; will be geographically smaller than the full jurisdictional area of either a municipality or regional district; and may involve two or more jurisdictions;
- The general legislative status of an AAP and means of adoption is similar to an OCP as prescribed in the Local Government Act although there is a need for policy consistency with an adopted OCP;
- The primary purposes of an AAP are to express agricultural policy at a level of detail that can effectively deal with issues important to the farm community, enhance the potential for land use and resource compatibility and clearly define agriculture's place in the larger community;

An AAP is intended to achieve:

- an enhanced understanding of agriculture as a basis for determining issues important to the farm community and establishing solution-oriented policies;
- greater focus on the farmland base and agricultural issues;
- inclusive planning processes where members of the agricultural community are full partners in the plan's development; and,
- improved local and Provincial (and Federal as appropriate) policy integration.

To summarize by paraphrasing the above:

An AAP is a local government policy tool for agricultural land use planning that is intended to be formally adopted as a sub-area plan of an Official Community Plan. A sub-area plan provides a greater level of detail for addressing objectives not sufficiently covered in an OCP. These sub-area plans are referred to as neighbourhood or local area plans. When applied to agricultural lands they are referred to as Agricultural Area Plans. The primary purpose of an AAP is to express agricultural policy at a higher level of detail than an OCP. An AAP is generally intended to achieve an enhanced understanding of agriculture and a greater focus on the farmland base and agricultural issues.

Without going further, how do you feel about this summary so far? Would you agree with the basics of it or do you feel I have missed something significant?

Sincerely,

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Dear Sir,

I had hoped to be able to attend one of the info sessions, but was unable due to work commitments. I hope however that our story may be of benefit to your project so I am sending it along.

I want to farm, it's something I grew up with and something I've always wanted to do. And I also wanted to have a farm based business. I consider myself to be good at marketing and good with ideas. I have a decent job and though this would provide enough funds to start up. The challenge is money and capital to make those ideas a reality. With the cost of land and lack of funding to help new farmers or farming ventures, owning property is outside my reality even though I have a decent blue-collar job.

I thought we were fortunate to find a business that was for sale, on a farm where we were able lease the land as well as the kitchen space. Our business was the Tartan Pie - a small bakery and a great local farm based business as we were able to use local ingredients in our pies and make a really good home-made pie as well as other baked goods.

I was astonished when I went to purchase vegetables for a vegetarian pie - the only local vegetable was squash from Sannich, the remainder of the vegetables being from Washington or Mexico. It's my belief that with our amazing climate we should be able to supply our own vegetables on the island. So the next year, we decided we'd grow our own vegetables. We made a deal with the land-owner to lease a portion of the land. Though the rent was relatively inexpensive the cost to work the soil and fence the area was quite high. We tossed around ideas of how to make it all work and I settled on the idea of a CSA garden. I mentioned it to a handful of people and within a few weeks we were able to start a small CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) program where 8 people signed up at \$500 full share and \$300 half share for veggies through the summer and fall. To have that support was great, and it meant that we didn't have to rely on markets to sell produce and it helped with the start-up cost. We didn't make a dime though and still put a lot of money into the venture - but we believed it would be at least a 5 year project and starting small would give us the numbers necessary to see if it'd be worthwhile. We couldn't have started on a worse year for growing, we did have adequate veggies for the CSA customers. A few weeks were rather lean, but many weeks were abundant. They all seemed to be happy with the outcome.

The current land-owner is well aware of the 'value' in growing local food and supporting local business and was eager to work with us. Unfortunately the health of the land-owner is failing (he's 84), his wife just passed away and his kids are taking over. Although the property was for sale, we were quickly denied a mortgage and didn't come close to qualifying for it at the price it was listed at even with my job as an officer in the marine industry - and the newer income from the business didn't count. And now that the 'family' is buying the property, the vision of the kids doesn't match that of the land-owner - I believe they see dollar signs and want to sell the land for development, or turn the pie shop space into a restaurant and rent out every other nook and cranny on the property for money - in a nutshell they want us gone. All the money we put into building a business, and building the farm will be gone. As is our capital - everything we earned went back into both the farm and the pie shop. Now we have a pie shop with a good name, a great web presence and wonderful and loyal customer following - and nowhere to go! We've looked for a suitable location and haven't found anything - everything will be in storage by the end of October.

We've moved back to Gabriola Island (where my job is), and have been offered a commercial location for our pie shop. However, in crunching numbers, we would not be able to make a go of our shop here at those rates without sacrificing using local products and that's what we based our business on and part of who we are. The commercial lease rates on Gabriola Island are the same as in Nanaimo, but the demographics are very different. And farming, the farms here are generally bought for 'estates' and people are relatively unwilling to rent out land, especially longer term. Meaning we're also 'farmless' even though our CSA clients are interested in another year!

What have we learned from all of this? Renting land is a risky investment. Even though we had a great relationship with the current owner, the relationship with the kids is very different as their motivation is very different. And we didn't put the full investment into the soil that we may have it was ours - compost, manure, cover-crops are all valuable but expensive and something not worth doing if the land is not yours long term. It's best to buy land so that the land can be built up over the long term - however the catch is that the cost for farm land is prohibitive for someone starting out. So many farms are sitting being used not as farm land but are used as estate properties. Farm mortgages are hard to get and require 25% down; if someone's fortunate to have that kind

of capital, it still means that the owner must also work outside the home, which takes away from the enjoyment of farming.

The nail in the coffin so to speak was when the property did go on the market for sale, it essentially killed our business. Our sales were right on track right until the "for sale" sign was put beside the Tartan Pie sign a the road - people thought we were for sale and it was amazing what people came up with. I'd see them at markets and the stories of what they thought might be happening were quite something. And I also believe the realtor misrepresented what was for sale as over 1/2 of the photos were of our kitchen, business or farmed area. It was disheartening - but that's a whole story on it's own!

With regards to the CSA - I haven't finished working the numbers but I estimate that a CSA of atleast 50 people is needed to make the chance of a profit, any fewer participants and you can't afford to hire the help that is required to make this a success. And the first few years will not generate a profit - period. And I don't see that a CSA alone would pay for the mortgage on a farm, though it might.

We've learned that running a farm-based business is a far more of a challenge than we thought. The location, even though we were very visible, is a limitation. People are so used to malls that if it's raining or too hot, nobody stops by. And the expectation of customers is also a challenge as consumers want you to be there regular business hours, have everything in the store, but want you to charge big chain prices, even though they are only coming to you sporadically. And although we marketed the fact we used local berries and veggies when available, consumers didn't see the value in this though I must say a dedicated percentage did. There were still many people content in getting a better deal at a grocery chain in Nanaimo with a \$6 pie trucked from Nova Scotia.

Would I do it again? Yes. Only if we owned the property.

I don't think there are many like us (my husband and I), who are willing to give up free time, holidays and money to do something that we feel is good for the community and for the local food supply. We were committed - I was working 18 hour days most days of the week, combining the work that paid for everything (away from the farm/business) and the work that I actually liked to do (the farm and the business). My husband put in probably as many hours without the reward (towards the end) of taking home a paycheck. What would help us?

1. Access to funding. There is none - unless you have 25% down and/or capital already.
2. Access to farming or farm based business discounts - for example, the small business rates for BC Hydro are very high and drastically cut into the bottom line. A reduced rate negotiated by the government would be beneficial.
3. Access to resources - right now a community or shared kitchen that's VIHA approved would mean that my husband would still be able to make pies instead of being out of work.
4. More local marketing around the value of locally grown and made foods. Encourage people to buy local.
5. Access to long term lease agreements with landowners or even municipalities to use vacant and unused land for farming ventures. I'm not talking a small garden plot, but larger scale allotments of an acre or more.
6. More support for farming by municipalities. Watching the Dirk Becker saga definitely makes one wonder if it's all worth it!

I hope this is helpful in some way to those who are making decisions that impact the farm community. It's tough to get in. And the old farmers are all leaving. Where will that leave us?

Regards,

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