



LUSH VALLEY

Food Access, Local & Global Food System – COVID-19 Impacts Comox Valley Briefing Note covering April 4 to April 10, 2020

Local Activities

LUSH Valley- Food Share Emergency Response:

1. Hot meal program- 700 meals to the vulnerable sector and 200 frozen for later distribution.
 2. Good Food Box (healthy hamper) delivery program, launched Wednesday April 8th, delivers a week's worth of fresh (fruit, veg, dairy and eggs), canned and dry goods (two grocery bags for each delivery).
- Completed 90 deliveries (Wed and Thursday- no deliveries on holiday Friday)
 - Received lists from most participating SD71 schools of students and families in need. We started receiving lists of students on Tuesday April 7th, made deliveries to 43 the next day. The registration for this program is now at roughly 425 families in need and growing.
 - Organized volunteer call centre to contact families prior to delivery.
 - Student First regional school buses and drivers supported half of the deliveries with a driver and buss. They are committed to helping and are finding 2 buses and 2 drivers to help with deliveries ongoing (possibly more).
 - Plan for 250 deliveries next week (with the goal scaling to 1000 weekly deliveries in May, once we have the system, staff/volunteer and funding capacity)
 - BC Fruit and Vegetable + Milk Nutritional Program (a program throughout BC with distribution through SD71 in our region) food has been redirected to the Good Food Box, for distribution to students and families.
 - Food orders for both emergency programs are made through distributors and local producers minimizing pressure on local grocery stores.
 - Grow Food Everywhere program. Education on gardening and food growing. and (working towards) distribution of seeds and soil, and the running of the Share the Harvest community garden (access to beds only, no tool sharing or in person workshops).
 - Ordered seeds for distribution event in May
 - First on-line gardening workshop had 25 in attendance
 - Working on a garden mentoring program for new growers
 - Planning a local farmers resource sharing and support meeting

Comox Valley Food Policy Council:

- Providing guidance to the LUSH Valley Emergency Response
- Thinking ahead regarding the possibility of food supply disruptions, policy alternatives and best practices.
- Continued collaboration with agencies, local governments and supporters across the region.

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Other Agencies/Groups:

- CV Food Bank is reopened, is limited in terms of taking on new clients and making deliveries.
- Cumberland food share started their hamper delivery program this week
- K'omoks First Nation has also started a food bank program

Suggested next steps and/or support requested:

- Advanced planning arm of the EOC and local and regional levels of government- to work together with the CV Food Policy Council- to plan for possibility of disruptions in our food supply- using the 'food security in a pandemic'- tool as a template for precautionary planning (see list of articles below).
- Delivery driver and warehouse support for our emergency food programs. One driver makes about eight food deliveries an hour to separate addresses, we have 2,000 food deliveries to make a week.
- Potential to partner with CUPE Local 439 for support of warehouse staff and/or drivers
- Suggestion to follow the Strathcona Regional District protocol as outlined here: <https://srd.ca/projects/srd-delivers/>

SRD is offering temporary assistance – to support qualifying organizations (pre-existing or emergent) to cover the costs of:

- Obtaining an online FoodSafe certification for the Service Delivery Driver(s);
- Paying the Service Delivery Drivers a living wage of \$20 per hour;
- Paying the cost of mileage at \$0.59 per kilometre on paved roads and \$0.68 per kilometre on Forest Service Roads;
- Rental of a central food distribution site;
- Procuring sanitization supplies to ensure the cleanliness of the Service Delivery vehicles; and
- Paying third party costs of land or water transportation (Vehicle Rental, BC Ferry or Water Taxis).

Summary of Food Production and Availability (notes from the Capital Regional District)

Summary - We are moving into the planting season and there is great uncertainty in the farm sector. Wholesalers are approaching farmers who are able to produce at scale to increase contracts with fears around the evolving situation with global supply chains. In particular concerns if foreign farm workers don't show up in the U.S. and Canada soon, then indeed, there will be a production shortfall in the coming months, which will place even greater stress on our food supply chains. Also compounding this is if there's a COVID-19 outbreak amongst farm workers in the US or Canada (recently at Bylands Nursery in the Okanagan), it could also have significant impacts. There is also evidence that some countries are holding feed, rice and grains.

Smaller scale farmers that make up the majority of our regional farms sell 97% through direct sales. With some local farm markets not opening and restaurants closed, there are real concerns about farmers marketing channels. BC Farmers Market Association and the Province have implemented an online sales system and support for BC growers, however many farmers we have been in contact with are finding it challenging to adjust to learning new technologies in the height of their busy period.

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Seed, supplies and feed services seem to be keeping up with demand to support farms. However seed producers are prioritizing large orders and smaller growers are waiting a month or more for seed deliveries.

There has also been the creation of a Community Food Network across Canada and they are conducting a [COVID-19 impacts survey](#).

Provincial, National and Global Food Security News:

Provincial updates:

Provincial Work on Supply Chains: BC Government stepping up action on supply chain coordination establishing a new Provincial Supply Chain Coordination Unit to co-ordinate goods and services distribution; taking a more active role in coordinating essential goods and services movement by land, air, marine and rail; and suspending any bylaws that restrict goods delivery at any time of day.

The Ministry of Agriculture (AGRI) is involved in the overall provincial response and participates in provincial x-ministry working groups including the Retail Working Group, Supply Chain Working Group and the Food for Vulnerable Populations Advisory Committee.

Additionally AGRI has activated a number of ministry advanced planning units for Market Access & Distribution, Industry Outreach and Issues Management, Agriculture Labour, Business Supports, Seafood Sector, etc. that are all working to address issues and consequences resulting from the COVID-19 situation.

Farmer's Markets: According to the BC Association of Farmers Markets (BCAFM), markets will move to support their farmers with access to an online model to continue providing consumers with locally grown and prepared food products during the COVID-19 pandemic. This is being supported by the Ministry of Agriculture. We have seen that the CV Farmers Market, for example, has opened its online platform. The market will remain open, with safety protocol followed.

Fisheries: Currently 87% of fish are exported and these markets are closed as well as other major market-restaurants. Halibut is currently open and while fish counters are largely closed at grocery chains, they are cutting and wrapping halibut. There are efforts to look at supporting coastal community fishers and how to redirect local fish to local markets. The Buck Suzuki Foundation reports that local fishermen are supporting Indigenous communities to bring fish as coastal communities' struggle with local food supply. A Facebook group has been set up to support fishers:
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/534898490756891/>.

Restaurants: Restaurants are still closed for dining, but some are moving to more online orders as well as even providing groceries. The Federal government wage subsidy should provide some relief to workers but there is fear that many restaurants will not make it through (<https://globalnews.ca/news/6690673/bc-restaurants-coronavirus/>).

Retail: There have been significant changes in retail protocols. There do not seem to be significant shortages of any food items at this time in grocery stores. Stores are implementing social distance protocols ensuring there are limited numbers in the stores, wiping high touch surfaces, closure of deli

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and bulk items, plexiglass between customers and servers as well as using paper and plastic grocery bags, no outside bags permitted.

Marketing Channels: We continue to see creative solutions evolving. With many marketing channels like restaurants closed, local farmers are getting organized and creative about their marketing. Some farms are coordinating with farm gate outlets that can handle higher volumes and social distancing. Others are responding to or setting up online marketing services and buying clubs. Some farms are shifting from restaurant and outlet sales to more direct to customer box programs.

Farm Service Supply Stores: Supplies and services are different for each operation. For the most part feed and supply stores are still open and are working to ensure that feed and inputs are available.

Garden supply stores seem to be reopening. Chick deliveries seem to be uninterrupted with both egg and meat bird deliveries arriving.

Supporting local farmers: LUSH Valley and other agencies are looking at ways to support local farmers through making linkages to the emergency food efforts rapidly being deployed, as well as raising money to purchase local seeds and starts from local farmers for backyard growing campaigns and efforts. This includes setting up support for an aggregation portal and deliveries towards these efforts.

Cost of food and food supply disruptions:

<https://theprovince.com/news/covid-19-grocery-prices-start-to-rise-as-cost-increases-take-hold/wcm/0f10082f-bda2-4ef6-901c-20933ffa2ab0>

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-03-24/countries-are-starting-to-hoard-food-threatening-global-trade>

Beef prices - linked to the sinking Canadian \$ are steadily rising. (Note: the Comox Valley has a large number of beef farmers. Local meat prices are probably not rising as fast)

With the collapse of the restaurant industry, many growers in Florida are ploughing under their crops.

<https://www.treehugger.com/green-food/coronavirus-and-future-food.html>

In BC, there is currently a glut of potatoes and milk due to the lack of restaurant orders but with an uncertain market, farmers may choose not to grow. Food security experts warn of food shortages, higher prices due to global pandemic

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/food-security-covid19-trudeau-1.5520492>

Food and Agriculture organization of the United Nations (FAO): COVID-19 and the risk to food supply chains: How to respond? <http://www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/ca8388en> This article indicates that distribution of food and keeping supply chains open must be a priority and suggests: 1. Supporting local farmers and growers to grow more. 2. Supporting vulnerable populations with emergency food delivery and funds. 3. Keeping vigilant about logistical 'bottle necks' of food distribution in order to address potential issues.

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FAO article: **Ample supplies to help shield food markets from the COVID-19 crisis**

<http://www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/ca8445en>

Specific to the global production of cereal grains- while there is some food supply decrease, we are still within the 'comfortable' range of production- logistics of distribution of supply is where we must focus efforts.

Suggestions for local governments to prepare their communities for potential food supply interruptions:

Port Moody directing staff to look at converting public space into an urban farm:

<https://www.tricitynews.com/news/port-moody-council-floats-urban-farm-to-feed-residents-if-covid-crisis-lasts-1.24115279>

Municipalities led by advanced planning and EOCs can help reduce possible food emergencies by paying close attention to what is happening globally, nationally, provincial and locally and building community resilience. Focusing on increasing local production of fruits and vegetables, where there is more likely to be distribution disruptions (perishables).

The way to build resilience is to communicate, plan, prepare, and invest time and money long before a disaster is present in your municipality. Your immediate actions can help reduce the negative impact that a pandemic, or other emergency, may have on the food security of your municipality. Suggested actions include:

- Acting early to support an increase in local food production.
- Finding a location and starting to stockpile food for the community.
- Communicating to your community about the ways they can prepare on the household level. (slow stockpiling of non-perishables) building skills to grow and preserve food.
- While restaurants are closed act quickly to redirect food to emergency programs, for processing and/or for community stockpiling.

Please refer to “Food Security in a Pandemic” attachment for municipalities for in-depth guidance, proposed planning, and actions.