



LUSH VALLEY

Food Access and Local Food System- COVID19 Impacts Comox Valley Briefing April 18-24th, 2020

Highlights of community needs:

- Small and midsize CV farmers indicate need for labour, marketing, delivery and aggregation support.
- Comox Valley food relief subcommittee (of the CV Food Policy Council) has started- with a focus on preparing our community for potential food supply disruption. Municipal decision makers may be asked to join this conversation. (ex. City of Victoria has a food security working group).
- Support for policy and/or incentives to increase local food production (ex. additional City land for community gardens).
- Considerations for longer term funding for emergency food programs (community need for programs continues to increase funding runs out for most programs in June/July)

Comox Valley Emergency Food Programs

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1. Hot meal program: 441 clients. 777 hot meals + frozen deliveries this week.
 - Emergency meals delivered to date (since April 1 launch): 2431
2. Good Food Box(GFB) each GFB=2 bags full of groceries: 450 clients. 321 delivered this week
 - GFB deliveries to date (Since April 8 launch): 591
 - SD71 Educational Assistants support GFB food packing and call center
 - Student First buses assist GFB delivery with 3 drivers and 3 vehicles
3. **Cumberland Food Share** approx. 50 Good Food Boxes delivered in Cumberland
4. **CV Food Bank** continues to remain open and serving clients
5. **Salvation Army** approx 40 Hampers delivered
6. **Komoks First Nation**- food distribution to their members

Comox Valley Food Production Programs/Activities (LUSH & CVFPC)

1. Grow Food Everywhere- Community gardens, food growing supplies and education.
 - 1000 followers on facebook group
 - Weekly on-line food growing tutorials- distribution of seeds and compost
 - Started: [Community Food Security in a Pandemic Podcast](#)
 - Supporting Share the Harvest Garden, working to open other community gardens (currently 20 person waitlist and growing)
2. Farmer meeting with 28 in attendance to understand how farmers are dealing with COVID-19 locally and what kinds of supports are needed. Farmers are doing well with the start of the season, but many have identified additional needs. A survey will go out to farmers next week to get more details and create a plan for support.
3. A prioritized list of municipal food policy (relevant to current situation) is being developed.
4. CV Food relief subcommittee formed to focus on food supply chain disruptions and preparations.

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Island Wide Provincial, Federal, Global Food Supply information:

Restaurants continue to be closed or have downsized operations opting for take out. Pressures are mounting to resume in-restaurant dining with distanced measures. It is estimated that restaurant sales are down 80%. Until now global supply chains have shown resilience, however supply chain issues are emerging related to COVID19 outbreaks. Pressure increases daily on emergency food services across North America, at the same time we are seeing dumping of fresh goods and tilling under millions of dollars worth of crops. This is due to the way that the supply chains are set up. The destination of much of the food produced is to wholesale markets- to packing plants, processing facilities, to suppliers of restaurants and institutions. As the pandemic impacts Canada and the US more significantly many of the facilities involved are facing closures and limited service, and this means cutting supply. Farmers are forced to destroy crops as oversupply wreaks havoc on food supply chain. Figuring out how to redirect foods to supermarkets or other direct to consumer sales requires that crops and products be treated very differently in their packaging and shipping as well as falling under strict health and safety guidelines. Currently only a few farms on Vancouver Island have the required Canada GAP certification (health and safety regulations) they would need to supply grocery stores.

The impact on meat processing is one of the big stories in Canada. Cargill who has two major processing plants supplying 55% of Canada's Beef are now closed due to the outbreak. The High River, Alberta plant is a fully integrated beef processing facility where 2,000 employees process 4,500 head of cattle per day. One person has died and 515 people are sick with COVID-19 due to the outbreak. The plant is now closed and this is going to have ripples up and down the supply chain from the farmers supplying the beef to potential shortages and inflation in prices for the consumer. News also broke this week that nearly 30 employees at a United Poultry Plant in Vancouver contracted COVID-19 and the plant is now closed and under investigation. Reports of factory workers lacking access to personal protective equipment is mounting.

Repercussions are also going to be felt from COVID19 measures on US fruit and vegetable imports. Roughly 70% of our fruits and vegetables come from the United States, and mainly California. It is projected that we could see increasing disruptions in fresh foods in the grocery stores and inflation triggered by shortages. This is related to worker shortages, trucking and even potentially protectionist policy that was demonstrated with medical supplies by US policy makers. And then there is also an anticipated Climate-driven drought emerging in the western US. "

<https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2020/04/200416151750.htm>

Fishers are dependent on export markets (97%) and restaurant sales, which are both closed. They do not have the proper licensing to prepare fish for direct to consumer sales. Skipper Otto is a community supported fishery that currently works with over 18 fisher families to distribute fish direct to consumers. They are able to keep the fishers working and are looking for additional distribution points across Vancouver Island. If you

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have a lead on potential distribution points, please contact Sonia Strobel, CEO of Skipper Otto <sonia@skipperotto.ca>

Vancouver Island is not alone in reports that there continues to be a surge in growing and preparing food at home across Canada. People now have more time and energy to learn to cook and bake and to grow gardens at home. Growers and Garden supply stores are seeing increased seed and plant sales, and the staples are flying off the shelves at grocery stores. Canadians are baking so much that Robin Hood flour is running out of bags — but not flour. This CV video highlights the parallels between ‘war time, victory gardens’ and our current uptick in food gardens

<https://www.shawspotlight.ca/video-play/victory-gardens.html>

Responses:

The Canadian Federation of Agriculture is reaching out to Canadian farmers weekly as the crisis continues to identify any issues being caused to farm businesses. - bi-weekly survey

Farmers accessing Temporary Foreign Workers: Doug Pepper Regional Agrologist distributed this information regarding Temporary Foreign Workers. “All TFWs that are going to farms must be in 14 day self-isolation at a provincial hotel in Vancouver. If any employer is planning on bringing in workers under the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAWP) Farm operators must apply for authorization from the Province to receive temporary foreign workers and protect workers. The application process is now open, any farms that brought in TFWs from April 10 onward will need to fill in this form and have an on-site inspection.

<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/industry/agriculture-seafood/covid-19-response/temporary-foreign-farmworkers>

Farm Labour

With a decrease in WOOFERS (an international volunteer program for organic farm labour) a delay in Temporary Foreign Workers, and the CERB and Student Benefits being offered by the Federal and Provincial governments it is difficult for some to find and hire local labour. There may be the possibility to support farms with accessing labour through the Canada Jobs program (providing a 100% wage subsidy)-however currently the program is closed to new applicants- so the potential is unclear. Some farmers (around the province, although we haven’t heard it from farmers here) are raising concerns that young people are not accustomed to physical labour or skilled enough to add value to the farms. LUSH Valley is working on a program to link their volunteer base of farm labourers (trained through our farm gleaning program in the last 2 years) with farmers in need of labour.

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