



LUSH VALLEY

Food Access and Local Food Systems- COVID19 Impacts Comox Valley Briefing June 8- July 31, 2020

*"Blessings to everyone involved in these beautiful bags of nutritional foods ♡
When I opened the first one it was so appreciated I cried happy tears for the love put into that
gift. ♡ Thanks for being an amazing, caring, dedicated group of people!"*
- Good Food Box recipient, April 26

*"Thank you, thank you! My kids and I were so grateful to receive your grocery delivery today.
Absolutely amazing! I was pleasantly surprised to see so many fresh fruits and veggies.
Thank you for convincing me it's okay to accept a donation during these trying times.
It really makes a huge difference for myself and my kids."*
- Good Food Box recipient, May 8

- Emergency programs registration has somewhat stabilized with minor fluctuations in recent weeks: ~1200-1400 across the valley.
- Some local farmers/[producers are having their best season.](#)
- LUSH emergency programs dealing with ongoing delivery challenges for programs due to loss of school buses (loss of 3 buses, drivers and support).
- Extension of CERB showing potential hiring challenges for food-system and charities workers - issues of overwork and burnout for staff are prevalent.
- Urban agriculture and gardening continue to be very popular - new municipal policy to support this continues to gain traction (Comox and Courtenay actively).
- Courtenay OCP process reopens, CV Food Policy Council (CVFPC) active as stakeholders.
- Two UBCM resolutions drafted by CVFPC and passed through CVRD: 1) Farmer's Markets as essential services 2) Food supply/security part of EOC.
- Business Case action plans and feedback request that local and provincial economic recovery focus on 'buy local' campaigns, consider local food and food security as economic drivers, and provide funds for more inclusive dialogue.
- Community Health Network and EOC after action dialogues and evaluation highlight the importance of food security in our emergency response.
- Concerns about 'second wave' and reduced emergency funding for food programs a 'perfect storm' for fall
- With recent announcements of students returning full-time to school in September, program leaders are working together to advocate and educate to ensure that school food programs can restart safely.
- Access to food continues to be a major barrier for those who are extremely marginalized (ie: homeless living in encampments or otherwise sleeping rough). Care-a-van are giving out 4x as much food as ever - food is the #1 request they get - with not enough funding to meet the increased need. They are predominantly seeing homeless seniors and youth.

More next page....

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COMOX VALLEY EMERGENCY FOOD PROGRAMS:

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- Working with over **20 agency partners**; now supported by **7 new positions** via Canada Summer Jobs
- Delivery issues continue - PW transit currently supports daily handydart vehicle and driver (but this is not secure); LUSH borrowing Habitat for Humanity's minibus for the season.
- LUSH purchasing **40% local food** (for emergency + other programs) to support local farmers
- Hot Meal Program: Currently serving **~1000 meals weekly** to over **500 individuals**; 13,000+ meals this year
- Hot Meal Program Evaluation (completed by program partners in July): Many partners appreciate that the program allowed them to keep supporting their clients when their own services had to be cut back due to COVID-19. The quality, diversity, and portion size of meals were generally well received, and those serving seniors also indicated interest in receiving additional meals to be reheated at a later time. 78% of respondents see a need for this program to continue for their clients over the next year.
- Good Food Box: **~480 households (=700 'units'- one weeks worth of fresh food- delivered)** receiving bi-weekly GFB, with a **waitlist** for new registrations. **10, 500+ GFB units delivered since April.**
- Good Food Box Evaluation (completed by GFB recipients in June): People were very grateful to receive healthy food that they normally wouldn't try or be able to afford. Of survey respondents **86% think there is a need for the Good Food Box to continue once the COVID-19 pandemic is over**, and only 18% predicted that their financial situation will improve over the remainder of 2020.

Other Groups providing emergency food services in the Comox Valley (stats unavailable): Cumberland Food Share, CV Food Bank, Salvation Army, Komoks First Nation, Black Creek Food Bank, Denman Island Education Society, Wachiay Friendship Center, Sonshine Lunch Club, CV Family Services and others. (Please send additional stats/info re these programs to: Maurita@lushvalley.org).

COMOX VALLEY FOOD PRODUCTION PROGRAMS & ACTIVITIES:

- Skipper Otto - Fishing and seafood CSF has started a Comox Valley pick-up location at Amara Farm.
- Canning classes, summer farm camp, permaculture, food safe, in-person (many outdoors and with new protocols) and on-line classes are open: <https://lushvalley.org/events/>
- Community Food Security in a Pandemic - E8: Local Food as an Economic Driver in the lens of Recovery; E7: Food systems inequality and indigenous food sovereignty
- Farm gleaning and fruit tree programs have started for the 2020 season with updated safety protocols (gleaned food helps stretch emergency food budget).

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PROVINCIAL FOOD PRODUCTION AND FOOD AVAILABILITY:

In the news:

- <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/cattle-seaweed-research-1.5662302>
- <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/migrant-workers-claim-cramped-quarters-a-problem-at-covid-19-stricken-okanagan-farm-1.5653779>
- <https://www.farmfolkcityfolk.ca/2020/04/bc-farmers-covid-19-response-report-we-care-we-want-to-help/>

We continue to see a surge of interest around regional food systems and local food supply. More people are growing their own gardens and sales continue to be strong. During Phase 3 (June to September according to the Restart BC plan) several measures will support food and agriculture businesses. Restaurant and food service establishments have now been approved for modified openings under new COVID-19 protocols. In phase 3, as people begin to travel in British Columbia, hotels and resorts are reopening, along with select entertainment activities. This is good news for many of the farms, food and beverage providers that have been limited by the closure of these markets. We are seeing a large upswing in travel. New Covid-19 breakouts (for example in Kelowna, recently) are revealing that we still need caution and impacts will continue to be felt across the sector.

Members of our agricultural and food security communities, including CV Food Policy Council (CVFPC) members, submitted one-page 'business action plans' to the regional Emergency Recovery Task Force. The CVFPC is asking for a broader dialogue around inclusive food systems as economic drivers. The provincial economic recovery paper, "Building BC's Recovery Together", was released on June 17th and took feedback until July 21st through a survey, town halls and idea responses. The survey included opportunities to voice the importance of food security and food systems issues.

An Open Letter to Premier Horgan and Minister Popham was sent last week on behalf of a coalition of academics and food security organizations urging the adoption of programs and policies to help build resilience in our food systems in the wake of COVID. <https://www.farmfolkcityfolk.ca/2020/07/announcement-open-letter-to-bc-government-calling-for-transformative-food-systems-change/>

Farmers: Farm producers continue to see strong direct sales, and farm outlet stores continue to report significant increases over last year. Concerns about labour shortages continue. Berry crops are coming on strong. Reports are that more consumers are interested in "putting up" for the winter and buying more in bulk. <https://infotel.ca/newsitem/okanagan-fruit-growers-need-locals-to-help-bring-in-the-harvest/it74258>

Farmers Markets: News from the BC Association of Farmers Markets - Throughout the pandemic, BCAFm has supported and promoted its 145+ member farmers' markets: including 60+ physical markets with modified operations and 60+ online markets. By peak season, 100+ summer markets and 70+ online markets are expected. They have also developed the BC

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Farmers' Markets Online initiative to provide access to a reliable and user-friendly online platform (identified Local Line). By securing \$85,000 (\$55,000 from the Ministry of Agriculture and \$20,000 from Vancity Credit Union), BCAFm was able to cover the fees and support 70+ member markets (including spring/summer/fall and winter markets) in operating an online market this season.

Fishers: We continue to see harvesters struggle as the vast majority of fish caught is destined to foreign and restaurant markets, which are still limited or closed. Challenges with ownership and quota in the fishery make our situation in BC more apparent. If we don't own the access to our own fisheries resources, we cannot direct them to local markets, and we might not even be able to fish them. There is a call from harvesters that the BC gov't needs to protect and promote fisheries access- putting it in the hands of independent harvesters and coastal communities, not owned or controlled by offshore entities, investors or corporations.

Beverage Providers: It is predicted that beverage providers like brewers, vintners and cideries have lost $\frac{1}{3}$ of their markets over the pandemic, have only achieved ~ 25% of regular sales, and are also predicted to be down 35% for the rest of the year. Some key challenges include staffing, lack of consistency in the supply chain and significant increases to distribution costs (near doubling). Direct-to-consumer sales are down, food service sales are down, no tour groups, no events, but showing some upswing in online sales. Although restaurant sales are expected to increase, many producers that supply and host events and celebrations are affected by cancellations.

Restaurants: After a mandatory two-month closure due to the COVID-19 pandemic, restaurants across B.C. are allowed to once again welcome dine-in guests. Many restaurants adapted by working to shift to take out ordering but are welcoming the new openings offered in phase 3. They will be limited to 50 percent capacity until further notice so that tables can be adequately spaced. Municipalities are looking at how to expand outdoor dining and patios to assist with social distancing and increasing restaurant capacity.