



LUSH VALLEY

2019-20 ANNUAL REPORT

Celebrating 20 years in 2020!

We support the
Comox Valley
in gaining
food-systems skills
and knowledge
to increase
food security,
self-sufficiency,
& local food
production across
the region.



EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

In our last fiscal year (04/01/19 – 03/31/20), LUSH Valley turned 20 and continued to run diverse programs which celebrate and align with our vision of 'local food at the heart of community well-being.' Some important partnerships included:

- Indigenous Education, Vanier Secondary and School District 71's Healthy Student Meal Program. (See Healthy Foods Programs report)
- An 8-week Good Food Box pilot program. (See Good Food Box report.)
- BC Housing (Washington Apartments) supported the building of a new community garden on-site, and provision of gardening support and monthly community kitchens.

CV Food Policy Council (CVFPC): In October, with support from the Comox Valley Regional District, we initiated the new CVFPC. It is comprised of representatives across the regional food system and local elected officials. The CVFPC provides a forum for advocacy and policy development that works towards the creation of a food system that is ecologically sustainable, economically viable and socially just. Through our work, the Island Food Charter, urban agriculture policies, a request for a new regional Agriculture and Food Security Plan and related resolutions have been adopted or are under review.

Statistical Highlights:

- Reached 9,268 people in-person through programs, presentations and outreach
- 235+ workshops and engagement activities including cooking, food growing workshops and community meetings
- 177+ harvesting and gleaning events
- 27,000 lbs of local fruit and vegetables gleaned from farms, gardens and backyards
- 18,400 servings of local fruit and vegetables to members of our community
- Worked with 60 local partners, farms, and supporters, and over 250 volunteers
- Created and served over 25,015 meals across the Valley.

Our work was recognized frequently in news articles across the region. Our social media presence grew considerably with 30% growth on Facebook alone, reaching almost 2,300 followers as of March 31, 2020. We were featured in two short films, one with the CV Youth Media project, called 'Soup's On', and another as a finalist in the CV Chamber Awards non-profit category.

This year we spearheaded two important reports. The first was ***Closing the Loop in the Comox Valley: Poverty, Food Security, Housing and the Local Food Economy***. This report, funded by the Vancouver Foundation, was co-researched and co-authored by myself and the coordinator of the Coalition to End Homelessness.

Local Food for Comox Valley Schools, an Aggregation Feasibility Report and Business Plan, came through a partnership with the BC Ministry of Agriculture – which worked with a Steering Committee and an Agrologist. Based on community dialogue and research, the results highlighted a need in our community for LUSH Valley to act as a 'brokerage' and work towards local food aggregation and distribution to our many partners, including SD71. The findings were presented in our community, at a food access conference in the Okanagan, and through the BC Food Security Gateway's Community of Practice. With the results of the report we were able to secure 3 years of funding from the Vancouver Foundation towards this goal and have now promoted James McKerricher to a full-time, year-round position as our Food Access Manager.

In mid-March, the world was shocked with the onset of the COVID-19 Pandemic. We saw the importance of food security in a new light. We responded by developing two new food access programs, a podcast, and on-line groups such as 'Grow Food Everywhere' and 'Get Cooking Comox Valley'. Interestingly, this provided an opportunity to pilot one model of local food aggregation and distribution. (More on that in next year's report!)

In closing, the most rewarding aspect of my role is working with talented and caring staff, volunteers and partners. I am proud of the LUSH Valley team for bringing forward quality programs, supporting people to gain skills and become more food secure, and putting pressure on the status quo to ensure that the focus on local food systems and community food security continues for the next 20 years and beyond. Thanks to everyone for being a part of this work.



Maurita Prato

"Our partnership with LUSH Valley has had the single greatest positive impact on the community life of our tenants." – Bev Miller



FARM GLEANING

The second year of Farm Gleaning was a big success! We worked with 30+ new and old farming partners and, as always, it was a pleasure working with volunteers on farms to exchange labour for unsaleable produce.

Much of the produce was harvested from individual farms or collected after each week's Comox Valley Farmers' Market. We harvested 6,842 lbs of local produce ranging from greens, to peppers and berries, with a value of \$32,345.

Some of the local farms we worked with included Amara Farm, Bates Beach Farm, Clever Crow, Comox Valley Mushrooms, Cottage Farm, Eatmore Sprouts, Family Fam, Island of Eden, Merville Organics, Rockbottom Farm, Seaview Game Farm, & Sweet Spread, to name a few.

"The opportunity to see small farms up close and personal is a treat. I particularly appreciate the opportunity to meet the farmers and lend a hand in their efforts to contribute to more sustainable agricultural production. The bonus of coming home with veggies adds to the sweetness of the experience! Count me in for next year!" - Colleen.

FRUIT TREE PROGRAM

The 2019 season of the Fruit Tree Program worked with almost 200 volunteers to harvest fruit trees across the region. We coordinated 101 fruit tree harvesting events leading to 20,144 lbs of fruit harvested and delivered throughout our community.

"I think this is an amazing way to bring people together and to harness the power of the collective for the good of others, the environment and the hard-working fruit trees. Plus, having a variety of fresh fruit for personal canning is a bonus!" -

Janice

GOOD FOOD BOX PILOT



In 2019, we piloted a 'Good Food Box' program with funding support from SPARC-BC.

The 8-week program was focused on seniors and elders in our community, providing 40 to 50 individuals with an abundant weekly supply of fresh, local, organic produce from Amara Farm.

Recipients included individuals at the Wachiay Friendship Centre's Elders Lunch program, Elders of the K'omoks First Nation, tenants at BC Housing Washington Apartments and the John Howard Society's 'The Junction' supportive housing.

"The Elders truly love having fresh fruit and making jams and sauces always brings up stories of when they were young. I love knowing the local fruit is not going to waste and that the Elders truly appreciate it. They love to bake, and I know there was a lot of apple butter and sauce made this year." Gilakas'la - Naomi



LUSH VALLEY

STAFF

Maurita Prato – Exec. Director

Terri Perrin – Communications &
Program Manager

**Emma Hutchinson &
Birgit Ferguson** –

Community Garden Coordinators

James McKerricher – Fruit Tree &
Farm Gleaning Coordinator

Karen Comer & Holly Tripp –
Bookkeeper

Josh Wells – Summer Student

Nicola Stone – Summer Student &
ongoing admin support

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Jen Wrye – President

Michael Bergob – Secretary

Katie Phelan (Past Secretary)

Michael Williams – Treasurer

Karen Comer (Past Treasurer)

Directors at Large:

James McKerricher

Zack Haigh

Bridget Horel

PROGRAM SUPPORT:

Healthy Foods Facilitators

Lisa Cristall | Keiko Endo

Gloria Gietz | Rachel Halliwell

Emma Hutchinson

Jonathan Frazier | Jill Lamberts

Sonja Limberger | Dianne McLean

Kim Nanuan | Diana Newson

Alice Russell | Gaetane Palardy

Terri Perrin | Alberto Pozzolo

Aurora Schieszer | Masako Thir

Garden Workshop Facilitators

Karen Cummings | Wendi Gilson

Peter Janes | Dianne McLean

Terri Perrin | Jonathan Schut

Lynda Smith

HEALTHY FOODS PROGRAMS

In late March 2019, we welcomed Terri Perrin as the new Healthy Foods Program and Communications Manager.

Our Healthy Food Programs depend on collaboration with a number of partners' kitchen facilities. Many of these programs take place at the Lake Trail Community Education Society's classroom kitchen, and through a new partnership with Eureka Support Society. This year we started a 'pay-what-you-can' model for many of our Healthy Foods Programs that was a great success and allowed us to stretch our funding even further.

Community Kitchens: Topics included everything from vegetarian and vegan fare to fermentation, canning, multicultural programs and so much more! A total of 35 classes were offered with 360 participants and 25 Kitchen Assistant volunteers. We offered three FoodSafe certification programs with 64 participants.

Working with our partners at the Head Injury Society and BC Housing's Washington Apartments, we customized 14 Community Kitchens for their communities.

Dads' Night Out: Celebrating cooking and eating together, this program works with male identified caregivers and young children. Dads' Night Out was hosted seven times with 80+ participants and 10 Kitchen Assistant volunteers.

Young Cooks Programs: Young Cooks is a cooking immersion program for youth, offered as a 6-week after-school program or summer camp. We hosted four week-long summer camps and seven after school programs with a total of 83 students and 10 volunteers. We were pleased to partner with Laketrail School, Courtenay Recreation, Cumberland Village Recreation and the K'omoks First Nation.

Healthy Student Meal Program: Affectionately known as the 'Vanier Soup Program' this weekly soup and snack program serves 800 to 1000 students a week, and runs for the length of the school year.

LUSH Valley became the official program partner in April 2019, bringing funding, volunteers and local food into the program.

The program is a collaboration of students and staff at Vanier's Pre-Employment Program as well as Indigenous Support Workers and other staff across 14 regional schools. We purchase local veggies for the soup and provide volunteer support to deliver the ingredients to the schools each week.

Our efforts resulted in more than 1,300 pounds of veggies from Sieffert's Farm Market being added to the soup program!



SHARE THE HARVEST & COMMUNITY GARDEN PROGRAMS

The 2019 season was our fifth year coordinating the Share the Harvest Garden in downtown Courtenay. This allotment and common garden provides a welcoming space, hands-on mentoring and workshops to help people learn to grow food. The plots are prioritized for individuals that have barriers to accessing space to grow food.

We hosted three social service organizations. The CV Head Injury Society and the Immigrant Welcome Center both had their own plots. CV Mental Health and Substance Use had a weekly garden group facilitated by the garden coordinator with their own two plots.

During the 2019 growing season we hosted 30 work-parties, three meetings for plot-holders, 10 workshops, two potlucks, and six group tours.

Volunteer engagement included Puntledge School grade 6/7 class, the Courtenay Pathfinders, the Immigrant Welcome Center, LUSH Cooking Camp, the Canadian Conservation Corp (WWF), the Newcomers' Club, and Mental Health and Substance Use.

This was our first season of a five-year partnership with the City of Courtenay - who provided funding for coordination and the building of a garden shed. Our many projects included: building the shed, upgrading of the accessible bed area, native plant gardens, perennial welcome gardens, and the addition of eight new garden beds.

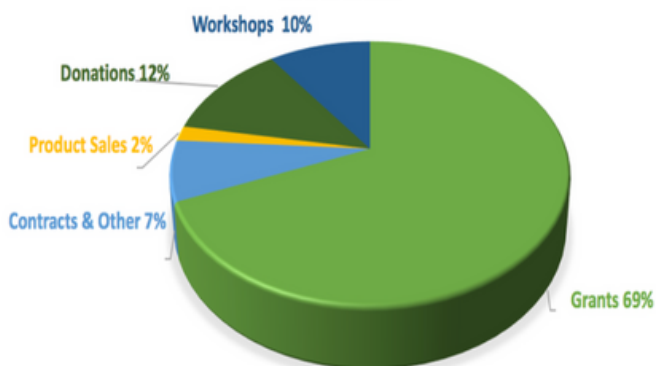
We also supported 12 tenants of BC Housing's Washington Apartments to fill and grow gardens in their new plots, through 10 seasonal workshops.



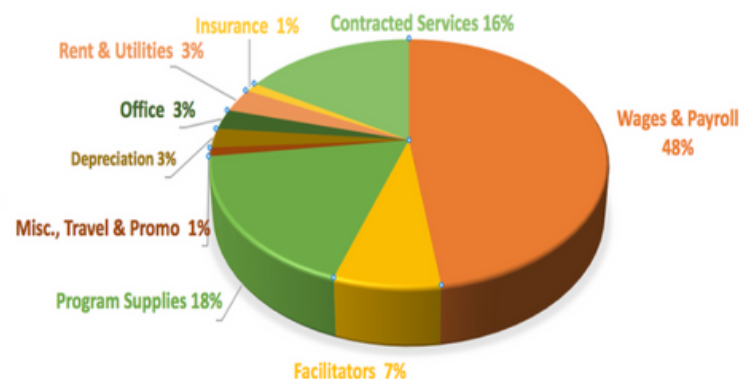
We affectionately sometimes refer to our volunteer teams as the 'LUSH Valley Locusts' because of their amazing ability to pick a field or fruit tree clean! This team is hard at work 'gleaning' blueberries at Bates Beach Farm, under the watchful eye of farm owner Mike Obal.

2019 - 2020 FINANCIALS

INCOME



EXPENSES





Maurita Prato, our Executive Director, touring the Share the Harvest Garden with MLA Ronna-Rae Leonard.

THANK YOU TO OUR VOLUNTEERS, MEMBERS & COMMUNITY PARTNERS!

2019-20 Major Contributors - \$5,000+ and/or in-kind (in alphabetical order)

100+ Women Who Care Comox Valley - BC Housing - BC Lottery Corporation
 BC Ministry of Agriculture - Benefaction - City of Courtenay - Comox Valley Community Foundation
 Comox Valley Regional District - Government of Canada New Horizons for Seniors
 Service Canada Social Planning & Research Council BC
 United Way Central & Northern Van. Island - Vancouver Foundation - Vancouver Island Health Authority

2019-20 Funders & Donors (\$500 to \$5,000 and/or in-kind)

Anderton Nursery - Coast Capital Credit Union - M. Carmichael - Early Years Collaborative - CV Lions Club
 Elders Take Action - Peninsula Co-op - TD Friends of the Environment - Vancouver Island Enterprises
 Vicky Husband - Whole Kids Foundation

Program Partners & Networks

(not including individual farms, producers or businesses)

BC Food Security Gateway - BC Housing Washington Apartments
 Black Creek Community Association - Coalition to End Homelessness - Community Food Centres Canada
 Comox Valley Growers & Seed Savers Society - CV Head Injury Society - CV Transition Society - Cumberland Recreation
 CV Community Health Network - CV Family Services - CV Farmers' Market - CV Food Bank - CV Immigrant Welcome Centre
 Coalition for Healthy Schools - Eureka Support Society - Farm2School - Food Not Bombs - Hornby Island Farmland Trust
 Indigenous Education - Island Food Hubs - John Howard Society - K'omoks First Nation - Lake Trail Community Education Society
 Mental Health and Substance Use (VIHA) - Mid-Island Farmers' Institute - North Okanagan Land to Table
 Northern Vancouver Island Chefs' Association - School District 71 - Wachiay Friendship Centre ... and more!



CONTACT US

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