



LOCAL FOOD FUTURES FOR BRITISH COLUMBIA

Findings from Regional Dialogues

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

THE FUTURE OF FOOD IN B.C.

British Columbians are increasingly concerned about where their food comes from, how it is produced, its ecological and social impacts, and their own food security in the face of uncertain economic, environmental and climate futures. At the same time, the potential for developing a more robust B.C. food economy is at risk. Pressure to remove land from the Agricultural Land Reserve for non-farm uses, the corresponding high cost of agricultural land (in the Lower Mainland frequently \$100,000 or more per acre, see for example [Smart Farm Project](#)), the lack of effective policy and economic levers to put under-farmed agricultural land into food production, and limited local processing, storage and distribution capacity all mediate against development of a more diversified, resilient B.C. food system.

At a time when extended droughts are forecast for California, when the volatility of international economics and geopolitics affect the price and availability of food imports, development of sustainable, economically viable food systems in B.C. must be understood as a practical and forward thinking goal for British Columbians.

REGIONAL DIALOGUES

In November 2014, dialogues on the future of local and sustainable food systems were held in six B.C. regions, hosted by the Real Estate Foundation of B.C. in collaboration with the B.C. Sustainable Food Systems Working Group. Dialogues were held in: **Prince George, Cranbrook, Kamloops, Kelowna, Nanaimo and Richmond.**

The purpose of the dialogues was to:

- Understand how people are envisioning future, sustainable food systems for their regions;
- Identify regional priorities for action; and
- Gather recommendations for specific actions to advance sustainable, local food systems.

Dialogue participants were invited on the basis of their engagement with local and sustainable food systems in their regions, and were selected to represent: **food producers; community leaders; provincial health authorities; agrologists; First Nations; planners; government and academics.**

KEY FINDINGS

Across the province, people who are engaging with the concepts of sustainable and local food systems have similar visions for what these food systems can be. Characteristics commonly include: ***maintenance of regional and global ecosystems; social equity and access to nutritious food; and financial viability*** for people who work in all sectors of the food system from production to processing to distribution to food waste management.

Province-wide priorities for action

We identified four common priorities to advance sustainable and local food systems:

- Increase knowledge about sustainable local food systems among the general public and policy makers
- Expand local infrastructure for food processing, storage, and distribution
- Support and encourage established farmers and new entrants to all food system industries
- Protect, enhance and maintain access to agricultural land (foodland) and water

Dialogue participants want to see increased food literacy in people of all ages, cultural groups and professions. People need to know more about the food they eat, and have a better understanding of the positive role sustainable local food systems can play in local social, health, economic, and ecological systems.

Local food producers of all sizes need infrastructure to process their food, store it, distribute it, market it, and sell it into local and provincial markets.

Two concerns underscore the priority to *support and encourage established farmers and new entrants to all food system industries*:

- An insufficient number of new entrants to farming to take the place of aging food producers
- Established farmers and new entrants need on-going extension services and new mechanisms for increasing the financial viability of farming.

Participants at all dialogues expressed concern that agricultural land and water are under pressure from uses other than food production. They agreed that agricultural land (and water) must remain available for food production.

OPPORTUNITIES TO ADVANCE SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEMS IN B.C.

Opportunity 1

A number of Dialogue participants had limited knowledge of sustainable local food system work being advanced outside their regions.

- Expand and coordinate networks (such as B.C. Food Systems Network; Young Agrarians) that link people and ideas across the regions to share information about sustainable food system work being done, the lessons learned, and ideas for further innovation. The first step is the creation of a searchable inventory of sustainable food systems policy, actions and best practices.

Opportunity 2

Differences in regional and individual views on exact characteristics of sustainable and local food systems suggest a second opportunity for moving sustainable food systems forward in B.C.

- Develop of a province-wide vision that defines and describes sustainable local food systems, and is supported with regionally and provincially based evidence and data. A province-wide vision can be a cornerstone for coordinated and strategic action.

STAKEHOLDER ROLES

Critical actions for key stakeholders include the following:

Community Organizations and NGOs

- Develop and deliver food related programs at neighbourhood, school district and community scales
- Participate in regional and province-wide networks for sharing information and best practices

Industry Organizations

- Promote and market regional farmers and foods
- Participate in mentorship of new farmers
- Participate in regional and province-wide networks for sharing information and best practices

Educational and Research Institutions

- Develop and deliver extension services to farmers, including site specific research
- Develop and deliver skill training programs from farming to butchering to small business management.
- Research potential economic, social and ecological benefits of sustainable, local food systems in B.C.

Municipal and Regional Governments

- Identify and adopt bylaws and policies that support sustainable local and regional food systems
- Establish food policy councils and agricultural advisory committees
- Complete and update agricultural area plans, and develop and adopt formal food strategies.

Provincial Government

- Provide extension services to food producers who operate smaller and medium sized farms
- Implement policy and regulation to support smaller and medium scale food producers and processors
- Implement policy and regulation to reduce land speculation; reduce the number of exclusions from ALR; intensify food production on currently under-farmed agricultural land.

All Stakeholder Groups

- Collaborate on research and policy development to advance sustainable local food systems as identified in the four priorities
- Contribute to development of a local and provincial culture that celebrates food.

NEXT STEPS

The Sustainable Food Systems Working Group (SFSWG) plans to build on the Dialogue work to further refine priorities and actions at regional and provincial scales. Next steps for the Working Group are to:

- Host a webinar on April 14, 2015 to connect stakeholders from across the province; share findings from the Regional Dialogues; and continue the conversation about priorities for sustainable local food systems.
- Follow up with stakeholders to gather more detailed information how on to move forward on priorities
- Share findings with relevant provincial government officials and staff to inform the development and implementation of provincial strategies, in particular the Provincial Healthy Eating Strategy and the Ministry of Agriculture's Agrifoods Strategy.
- Convene a symposium of diverse stakeholders in fall 2015 to strategize ways to advance sustainable food systems policy and priorities in B.C.

REAL ESTATE FOUNDATION OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

The Real Estate Foundation of B.C. is a philanthropic organization whose mission is to transform land use attitudes and practices through innovation, stewardship and learning. The Foundation plays a key role in connecting with communities and organizations to share information on land use issues in B.C.. The foundation has a particular interest in land use initiatives that remove barriers and/or contribute to new approaches and practices for sustainable food systems in B.C.

B.C. SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEMS WORKING GROUP

The B.C. Sustainable Food Systems Working Group is an informal body of agencies collectively working to identify and address barriers, and contribute new approaches and practices to sustainable food systems in B.C.. Members of this group of non-profit, academic and philanthropic organizations have independent goals and approaches, but they share the aim of fostering healthy, resilient food systems in regions across the province, in ways that benefit communities, individuals, ecosystems, and local and provincial economies. The Working Group provides a forum for information exchange among agencies and leaders with interests in food system sustainability, and seeks to coordinate complementary research initiatives, community engagement and grant funded projects.

The working group consists of representatives from:

- B.C. Food System Network
- Capital Region Food and Agriculture Initiatives
- Farm Folk City Folk
- Institute for Sustainable Food Systems
- Real Estate Foundation of B.C.
- Vancity EnviroFund Program



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INTRODUCTION

This report provides a summary of findings from the Sustainable and Local Food Systems Regional Dialogue Series hosted by the Real Estate Foundation of B.C. in collaboration with the B.C. Sustainable Food Systems Working Group. In November 2014, dialogues on the future of sustainable, local food systems were held in six British Columbia regions. The purpose of the dialogues was to understand how people are envisioning sustainable food systems for their regions; to identify regional priorities for action; and to gather recommendations for specific actions to support and encourage development of sustainable, local food systems.

The findings from the Dialogue series are presented as province-wide priorities for action; actions to address the priorities; and region specific priorities and actions. This report comprises a compilation and synthesis of data collected at the six Dialogues. Detailed information about individual Dialogues can be found in Regional Summary Reports at refbc.com.

Priorities for action are similar across regions and many of the recommended actions are applicable across the province. Differences are revealed in discussion of priorities and reflect conditions such as regional climate, geographic location, and economic structure.

B.C. CONTEXT FOR SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEMS

Healthy, resilient food systems include farms of all sizes (small, medium and larger) that produce a diverse array of products, and sell into a range of markets from local to global. They have secured access to farmland and water. They also have robust local processing, distribution and retail infrastructure. In British Columbia evidence suggests that total farmland area is decreasing, that production diversity in land based agriculture is decreasing, and that aspiring new farmers are challenged to enter the field.

In 2011 B.C. had the lowest percentage of farms with operators under age 40, at 6.4%, in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2011). This statistic likely reflects the high price of land and start-up costs in much of the province. In regions where agricultural lands are under pressure from urban expansion and non-farm uses, land speculation drives up farmland prices. Although the total number of farms in B.C.

remained roughly the same between 2006 and 2011, there was a decrease in total farmland area (Statistics Canada, 2011). B.C. has seen a decrease in production of some of the foods British Columbians eat the most of for example, field vegetables. The local demand for field vegetables is largely being met by imports from California (Statistics Canada, 2011). By comparison, production of export crops like blueberries and cranberries has increased. In the Metro Vancouver region, a significant amount of farmland, in particular smaller parcels, is under-farmed.

B.C. land based agriculture is at a crossroads. It seems possible that in B.C. we are moving toward a system where larger producers (with the exception of supply managed commodity producers) target the competitive international market while small producers access direct market opportunities such as farmers markets and community supported agriculture.

Will we take action to increase the diversity of our farms in size and food commodities? Will we maintain the farmland we have and intensify its use for local food production? Will we develop local markets and infrastructure to support local producers of all sizes so they can process, distribute and market B.C. foods to all B.C. residents? Will we expand efforts to prioritize ecologically restorative food production so that the system can be maintained for the long run?

These are steps to take if we wish to build a resilient food system that can respond and adapt to uncertain global economics, geo-politics, and climate change effects.

Participants at the Regional Dialogues expressed a range of perspectives on the scale and methods of production they endorse, from organic neighbourhood gardens to medium sized farms using conventional production methods and targeting international markets. Still, most agreed that resilient B.C. food systems include robust local, sustainable food production, processing and distribution, of a wide range of products for consumption by B.C. residents.

METHODOLOGY

DIALOGUE LOCATIONS

The province was divided into regions using the six Agricultural Land Commission panel boundaries. Dialogues were held at a university or college in one centrally located community in each region.

| Dialogue Regions | | | | | | |
|-------------------|------------------------|-------------------|-----------------|----------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Dialogue Region | North | Kootenay | Interior | Okanagan | Island | South |
| Regional District | Buckley-Nechako | Kootenay Boundary | Central Coast | Okanagan Similkameen | Cowichan Valley | Sunshine Coast |
| | Fraser Fort George | Central Kootenay | Caribou | Central Okanagan | Nanaimo | Metro Vancouver |
| | Peace River | East Kootenay | Thompson Nicola | North Okanagan | Alberni-Clayoquot | Fraser Valley |
| | Northern Rockies | | | Columbia Shuswap | Comox Valley | Squamish-Lillooet |
| | Kitimat-Stikine | | | | Strathcona | |
| | Skeena-Queen Charlotte | | | | Powell River | |
| | | | | | Mount Waddington | |



DIALOGUE PARTICIPANTS

Eight invitee categories were determined in order to reach a spectrum of food system actors for each dialogue.

- Academics
- Agrologists
- Community Leaders
- First Nations
- Government Representatives
- Health Authorities
- Planners
- Producers

The dialogues were designed to accommodate approximately 15 people per session. We wanted to ensure that the sessions were truly dialogues; conversations where everyone had an opportunity to discuss issues of importance to them. We tried to locate and invite people from each regional district, but recognized that travel time and resources would likely limit attendance to people within a few hours of the dialogue location. This turned out to be true for the most part. In the North for example, most of the participants were from the Prince George area and several people were unable to attend due to inclement weather and road conditions.

Invited participants who could not attend the dialogues in person had the opportunity to submit their thoughts and ideas in an online format.

REGIONAL DOCUMENT REVIEW

With over 2.6 million hectares of agricultural land in the province, a substantial amount of information exists on agricultural production and land capability, and much work has been done at regional and local levels to consider the future of agriculture and food systems. To inform the framework of the Dialogues and to ensure that the work already taking place is not duplicated, the research team reviewed published food system related documents for each region.

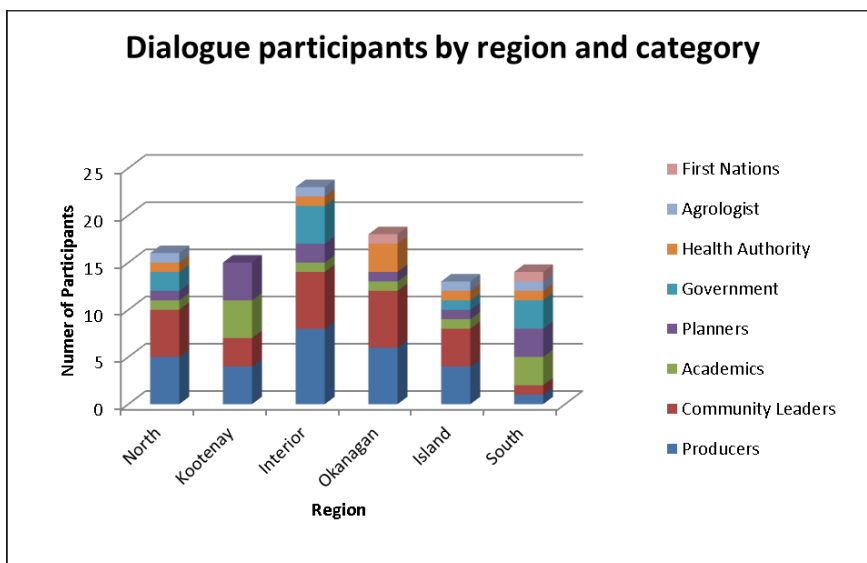
Due to the large number of regional districts and municipalities in the province, the research team limited their focus to reviewing agricultural plans, official community plans, food strategies and food studies recommended by Dialogue participants.

Out of 162 municipalities in British Columbia, 44 communities have some form of municipally developed agricultural plan/strategy. For many of the remaining municipalities, food system related information is found in official community plans or regional health authority documents. The areas with the most local agriculture documents were the South, Island and Okanagan regions. The Interior, Kootenay and North regions' information is predominantly found in documents prepared by health authorities and community organizations.

Although the regions differ in agricultural capability, a number of common challenges to agriculture and food production were identified in the documents:

- Aging farmers
- Access to affordable and skilled labour
- Farm profitability
- Lack of local infrastructure
- Land affordability
- Market access
- Protection of agricultural land
- Effects of climate change

This list of challenges served as a starting point for Dialogue conversations and opened the door for deeper discussions of regional priorities and actions.



DIALOGUE STRUCTURE, DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

The Dialogues were designed as three-hour sessions and were led by two facilitators. All of the Dialogues were hosted by the Real Estate Foundation of B.C. and opening remarks were presented by an REFBC board member or staff. At most Dialogues representatives from local funding organizations and members of the Sustainable Food Systems Working Group were present as observers.

Data from the Dialogues were collected in the following ways:

- Participant notes
- Group notes
- ‘Call out’ discussion notes on poster boards
- Facilitator notes
- Dot-mocracy voting for priority opportunities/challenges
- BCSFSWG observer notes

Dialogue participants were asked to discuss three main questions:

1. What defines a sustainable food system for your region?
2. How would you prioritize the opportunities/challenges in creating a sustainable food system in your region?
3. What actions should be taken to develop sustainable food systems in your region?

The participants were asked to consider questions 2 and 3 with the role of granting agencies like the Real Estate Foundation of B.C. in mind. In order to capture and report a broader view, we blended the information from the prioritization exercises with data from open discussions on opportunities and actions.



CONVERSATION 1:

DEFINITION OF A SUSTAINABLE, LOCAL FOOD SYSTEM

Dialogue participants were asked how they would define a future sustainable food system for their region. The following characteristics were common to **all six regions**.

Economically Viable

- Economically sustainable and provides a living wage for farmers and people who work in all stages of the food system
- Affordable and accessible for new entrants into the industry
- Adequate branding and marketing

Appropriate for the Region's Ecosystem

- The food system takes into account the ecology of the region; enhances regional bio-diversity; supports the organisms within the soil
- Focuses on regional crop varieties
- Adapts to climate change and is low carbon

Appropriate for the Region's People

- Culturally appropriate and socially just
- Inclusive, diverse, reliable, adaptable
- Accessible, affordable and supportive of the community
- Increases local food self-reliance

Food should be recognized as the most important renewable community energy system!

(North Dialogue Participant)

A number of food system characteristics were emphasized in **specific regions**:

A Complete System

The Interior, Kootenay and South regions identified a complete, closed loop system as an important food system characteristic. All aspects of the food system (production, processing, storage, distribution, waste diversion) are integrated.

Supportive Government

The Island, Okanagan and South regions identified the need for government to be structured to adapt, innovate and support the development of a sustainable food system. This occurs mainly through the development of food-friendly policy.

Education and Awareness

The Island, North, Okanagan and South regions identified food education and awareness an integral parts of a sustainable food system. The public is aware of the importance of a local food system, makes informed consumer choices, and food is valued appropriately. There is also adequate education for people in the industry including mentorship for new entrants, and extension programs.

Healthy and Nutritious

The North, Okanagan and South regions identified health and nutrition in their definitions. The local food system facilitates access to nutritious and healthy eating.

Long term View

The Northern and Okanagan regions defined their local food systems as being designed for the long term, perpetual and indefinite.

Inclusion of Indigenous Food Systems

The Interior, Island and South Regions all emphasized inclusion of traditional foods and indigenous hunting, fishing and gathering strategies. The food system integrates indigenous land use and access.

Food from the Land and Food from the Water

The Interior, Okanagan, Island and South region participants identified sustainable food systems as inclusive of food from the land and food from the water.

Sustainability is a philosophy of how you want to run your life, not just your food system.

(North Dialogue Participant)

Conversation 2:

For additional information on Regional Priorities, see the Regional Summary Reports at [Real Estate Foundation of BC](#)

NORTH REGION PRIORITIES

| REGION | PRIORITIES |
|--------|--|
| North | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Increase knowledge about and support for sustainable local food systems among the public and policy makers• Expand local infrastructure for food processing, storage, and distribution• Support and encourage established farmers and new entrants to farming and other food system industries |

In the North, participants discussed a lack of awareness among local residents and government staff and officials about how food can and is being produced in the region. They want consumers to recognize the value (financial and social) of locally produced foods and discussed media strategies to promote local food. One suggestion was creation of Agricultural Land Use Inventories that include the food production history of specific parcels of land.

Participants cited long distances between suppliers and producers, and to larger markets, as a challenge to be addressed through expansion of regional infrastructure for food processing, storage and distribution. It was reported that a lack of infrastructure (an egg washing station) had stymied efforts by a local hospital to purchase local products. Revision of health and safety regulations in support of smaller and local scale production was identified as important.

Participants noted that the availability and cost of land are not major challenges to farming in the North; instead, it is getting skilled farmers onto the land and profitable new farms running. New entrants lack on-farm training and mentorship, and business management and marketing skills. While there are already a number of established business advisory services in the North, a mechanism or process is required to encourage/ connect people to these services.



KOOTENAY REGION PRIORITIES

| REGION | PRIORITIES |
|-----------------|--|
| Kootenay | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Increase knowledge about and support for sustainable local food systems among the public and policy makers• Expand local infrastructure for food processing, storage, and distribution• Improve the financial viability of agriculture |

At the Kootenay dialogue, participants emphasized the need to *improve the financial viability of agriculture*. There are labour constraints because other industries in the region pay higher wages.

There was also emphasis on supporting mid-to-large scale farming recognizing that diversity in farm scales can benefit food system resilience. Mid to large scale farmers are increasingly under pressure to sell land for other uses; an effective means of resistance is for farmers to discover and implement profitable models of operation. One participant is engaged in research on payment to farmers for maintenance of ecosystem services as a means to improve the financial viability of farms (see [BC ESI](#)).

The participants also identified the need for *improved processing, storage, and infrastructure*. There is an increased consumer demand for local food but a lack of processing facilities, such as abattoirs, in the area. The participants suggested re-localizing processing infrastructure, and food and water testing to avoid the time and cost of sending products out of town. Also recommended was a regional food inventory: what foods are being consumed in the region and in what quantities? How much could the region's farms and farmland actually supply? And further, what models for food distribution are financially viable at the regional scale?



INTERIOR REGION PRIORITIES

| REGION | PRIORITIES |
|----------|---|
| Interior | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase knowledge about and support for sustainable local food systems among the general public and policy makers • Increase public and producer knowledge, and incentivize use of, ecologically sustainable food production practices • Protect and maintain access to agricultural land (foodland) and water |

At the Interior Dialogue, participants emphasized *increasing public and producer knowledge, and incentivizing use of, ecologically sustainable food production practices*. Participants wanted to see education of school children, of backyard and neighbourhood gardeners as well as small scale and commercial producers. There was significant focus on urban agricultural production and a desire to see that urban food producers are not left out of considerations for education and incentives for ecologically sound production practices (for example, incentives for wise water use).

Incentives for commercial growers (for example, payment for ecosystem services) were identified as potential additions to the Ministry of Agriculture Environmental Farm Management Plan program that could help to improve the financial viability of farming.

Participants emphasized inclusion of multi-cultural and Indigenous food system knowledge and preferences. As a way to use inclusive terminology the participants suggested *foodland* as an alternative to agricultural land. *Foodland* encompasses designated agricultural lands as well as lands for traditional and Indigenous harvest and gathering.

The participants identified challenges around competition for labour from higher paying resource industries (such as mining) and low wages for farm and food system related work. They also reported competition for land from golf course and other recreational development uses.



OKANAGAN REGION PRIORITIES

| REGION | PRIORITIES |
|----------|--|
| Okanagan | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Increase knowledge about and support for sustainable local food systems among the public and policy makers• Expand local infrastructure for food processing, storage, and distribution• Protect and maintain access to agricultural land and water |

Participants at the Okanagan Dialogue proposed education and training for people working in all areas of the food system, as well as for policy makers and consumers.

Urban agriculture was a central topic of conversation. Participants wanted to know how other jurisdictions are incorporating urban agriculture through policy and bylaws. A specific concern was strata corporations that restrict or ban the growing of vegetables and other non-food friendly restrictions.

The Okanagan participants were interested in opportunities to expand agri-tourism, to connect culinary tourism, culinary arts programs and local producers. They also discussed ways to increase the number and type of retail opportunities open to local food producers, for example, local co-ops working with larger scale retailers.

The participants discussed threats to *protecting and maintain access to agricultural land and water* from pressures by large industry and development including housing and golf course expansion. In terms of water protection, one recommendation is a water reserve that maintains water specifically for food production. Participants reported that food producers can face competition for water from the wine industry.



ISLAND REGION PRIORITIES

| REGION | PRIORITIES |
|--------|---|
| Island | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase knowledge about and support for sustainable local food systems among the public and policy makers • Support and encourage established farmers and new entrants to farming and other food system industries, including site specific research related to production and land tenure research • Expand local infrastructure for food processing, storage, and distribution |

Participants at the Island Dialogue identified a priority to *support and encourage established farmers and new entrants to farming and other food system industries*, and made a point of including *site specific research related to production and research on land tenure*. Much discussion centred on the need for and value of on-going research to support farmers with regionally appropriate and site specific information. For example, research is required on crop varieties that can extend the growing season; varieties to increase diversity of market product; and research on site specific production challenges, such as waste water capture. Research on land tenure options was viewed as a critical step in bringing new entrants into farming and contributing to intensification of agricultural land use.

The Island participants stressed the need for more mentorship opportunities in their region. Specifically, more business development programs, and more opportunities and networks for knowledge exchange among farmers. Participants suggested research into ways actors from different sectors of the food system could connect and learn about how to better align their products and services; for example, food producers, food processors and food distributors.



SOUTH REGION PRIORITIES

| REGION | PRIORITIES |
|--------|---|
| South | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase knowledge about and support for sustainable local food systems among the public and policy makers • Protect and maintain access to agricultural land (foodland) and water • Develop a regional (multi-regional) (provincial) vision for a sustainable food system. |

A top priority for participants at the South Dialogue was development of a regional, multi-regional, and provincial vision for a sustainable food system. This vision was identified as a critical starting point for a multi-faceted effort toward development of sustainable food systems. With a cohesive vision efforts at education of the public, food system actors, policy makers, local government officials, land developers and the media can be coordinated; an effective outreach and action strategy can be designed.

Participants identified development pressure and land speculation as reasons for the inflated cost of agricultural land in the South.

South Dialogue participants wanted to be clear that ‘protection’ does not mean sealing land off from use, rather it means using the land actively and intensely for food production. They felt this message needs to be shared with local government, policy makers and the public as part of a strategic education and outreach campaign.

South Region participants also stressed the importance of integrating multi-cultural and indigenous food system knowledge and preferences into a local food system vision. As at the Interior Dialogue, participants suggested *foodland* as an inclusive, appropriate descriptor for the lands that must be protected for food production and harvest.



CONVERSATION 3:

PROVINCE-WIDE PRIORITIES

At each Dialogue participants discussed and identified regional priorities for action on sustainable food systems. In selecting priorities, participants were asked to keep in mind the ways granting agencies might effectively support sustainable food systems. Four priorities were common across the province.

| Province-wide Priorities for Action |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Increase knowledge about sustainable local food systems among the general public and policy makers</i>• <i>Expand local infrastructure for food processing, storage, and distribution</i>• <i>Support and encourage established farmers and new entrants to all food system industries</i>• <i>Protect, enhance and maintain access to agricultural land (foodland) and water</i> |

Increase knowledge about sustainable and local food systems among the public and policy makers.

Across the Dialogues participants expressed the desire to see an increase in food literacy and knowledge in people of all ages, cultural groups and professions. A common sentiment was that regional residents, business people, and local government lack connection to the food they eat, knowledge about the food they eat and insight into the positive role sustainable local food can play in local social, health, economic, and ecological systems.

The perceived outcome of having a knowledgeable public is that it will actively support sustainable local food systems through: choosing to purchase local and sustainably produced foods; and by choosing to engage in local food systems as actors, for example as new entrants to farming, local food processing, distributing, marketing or retailing. Policy makers, both elected officials and staff at various levels – provincial, regional and municipal - were singled out as specific targets for education. With knowledge about the economic, ecological and social opportunities associated with sustainable food systems policy makers may be more likely to champion and mandate sustainable, local food related policy and programs.

This priority also reflects the sentiment expressed by a number of Dialogue participants that British Columbians in general do not celebrate and participate in a “culture” of food. It is anticipated that increased knowledge about food systems and in particular sustainable local food systems will help to stimulate and develop interest in regional and provincial food cultures (Vancouver Island cheese; Okanagan fruit and wine; True North Fraser products), and local celebrations of food (Salt Spring Island Apple Festival; West Kelowna Farm Loop).



Expand local infrastructure for food processing, storage, and distribution

A food system is comprised of more than food producers. If sustainable and local food systems are to function, local food producers of all sizes need infrastructure to process their food, store it, distribute it, market it, and sell it into local and provincial markets. Discussions at several Dialogues centred on the loss of regional processing capacity; the challenges for smaller scale food producers in selling to larger retailers; the profit margins associated with various production methods and markets; and the need for production clusters large enough to support suppliers, processing and distribution infrastructure.

Support and encourage established farmers and new entrants to all food system industries

This priority reflects two concerns that were raised at all Dialogues: 1) an insufficient number of new entrants to farming to take the place of aging and retiring food producers and 2) established farmers and new entrants are in need of on-going support in the form of extension services and innovative mechanisms for increasing financial viability of farming. In setting this priority, Dialogue participants also acknowledged that food systems require more than food producers. Local food processors, distributors and retailers are all critical to a sustainable regional food system and at present, can be challenged financially to operate at the local scale.

Protect, enhance and maintain access to agricultural land (foodland) and water

This priority reflects a perspective shared by participants at all Dialogues that agricultural land must remain available for food production and should be used intensively for food production. Participants expressed concern that agricultural land and water are under pressure from uses other than food production. It was also noted that “protection” may connote sealing off from use, and that in communications with the public and with policymakers it should be made clear that land is to be protected from non-food uses so that it can be used intensively and in diverse and innovative food production.

The role of the ALC and recent changes to the ALR were discussed at all six Dialogues. Some participants stressed that water should be protected not only for use in land based agriculture but also for aquatic food systems. Others pointed out that land in urban areas should not be overlooked for designation and protection as food producing land.

Participants at two Dialogues proposed the term *foodland* in place of agricultural land because it encompasses designated agricultural lands as well as lands for traditional and Indigenous harvest such clam gardens and berry picking.

PROVINCE-WIDE ACTIONS

For each of the province-wide priorities, Dialogue participants recommended possible actions ranging from general food systems research to specific bylaw changes and local food education programs. The tables below present a number of these actions, selected on the basis of their applicability across regions and clear link to the priority. Both broad and detailed actions are included to illustrate the levels at which action can and should be taken. The actions are grouped under the categories education, policy and research. Stakeholder groups who might best pursue the actions are also identified. The full action lists as developed at each regional Dialogue can be viewed in the Regional Summary Reports.

| Actions to increase knowledge about sustainable local food systems among the general public and policy makers | |
|--|---|
| ACTION | ACTOR |
| EDUCATION | |
| Develop an education and outreach strategy around sustainable, regional food systems targeted toward policy makers and other professionals who may be in charge of framing the idea for the public. Specific action: Develop materials such as a toolkit for policy makers: <i>Talking points on the economic importance of agriculture in your region.</i> | Community and NGOs Industry Organizations Educational/Research |
| Develop an education and outreach strategy to the public and local businesses about benefits of sustainable food systems. | Municipal Government Regional Government |
| Promotion and marketing of regional food producers and food and food products. | Industry Organizations Municipal Government Provincial Government |
| Promote and support partnership models for food system education in schools, including community-university research action research partnerships. Example of partnership model: Think & Eat Green @School Project | Community and NGOs Industry Organizations Educational/Research Municipal Government |
| Establish partnerships between schools and local organizations to develop and implement programs to increase student knowledge and skills related to food systems (ex. manage gardens on school grounds). Example: Fresh Roots BC | Community and NGOs Municipal Government |
| POLICY AND REGULATION | |
| Develop and implement food system education as mandatory public school curriculum | Provincial Government |
| RESEARCH | |
| Research the synergies between climate change, public health and local economy to use in public outreach campaigns on the value of sustainable regional food systems | Community and NGOs Industry Organizations Educational/Research Provincial Government |
| Provide regionally and provincially based evidence on the social, economic and environmental benefits of a sustainable local food system Example: Southwest BC Bio-regional Food System Design Project | Community and NGOs Industry Organizations Educational/Research Provincial Government |
| Identify ways to learn from traditional (Indigenous) knowledge about food systems Example: BC Food Systems Network , Indigenous Food Systems Working Group ; Southwest BC Bio-regional Food System Design Project | Community and NGOs Industry Organizations Educational/Research First Nations Municipal Government Regional Government Provincial Government |

| Actions to expand and support local infrastructure for food processing, storage, and distribution | | ACTOR |
|---|--|--|
| ACTION | | |
| EDUCATION | | |
| Create mentorship and internship opportunities for food processors, distributors, and others. Example: Small Scale Food Processors Association | | Industry Organizations Provincial Government |
| Develop and distribute pamphlets and on-line information for food processors on how to meet health and food safety standards | | Industry Organizations Provincial Government |
| POLICY AND REGULATION | | |
| Implement policy and municipal bylaws that permit on-farm processing facilities Find examples of bylaws in B.C. municipalities that could be adjusted or adopted. | | Municipal Government Provincial Government |
| Build and dedicate permanent (year round) Farmers' Market facilities that include coverage, storage, etc. Research appropriate sites for permanent Farmer's Market sites Research policy and zoning requirements; Develop handbook for municipalities on steps to creating and dedicating permanent Farmer's Market facilities. Example: Kaslo Food Security Project | | Community and NGOs Industry Organizations Educational/Research Municipal Government |
| Develop provincial, regional and local policy to reduce food waste throughout the food system from farm to plate Research possibilities for intervention in the system to reduce food waste; Best practices research on food waste reduction; Pilot and demonstration projects; | | Community and NGOs Industry Organizations Educational/Research Municipal Government Regional Government Provincial Government |
| Revise food safety regulations to reflect needs of small scale producers and processors Collaborate with small scale food producers and processors to identify potential changes to health and food safety regulations | | Industry Organizations Educational/Research |
| RESEARCH | | |
| Map regional food assets and infrastructure. Identify the gaps. | | Community and NGOs Educational/Research |
| Explore and pilot models of: Cooperative financing and operation of processing infrastructure including machine sharing, co-packing and co-processing facilities. (Example: Saltspring Island Abattoir) Funding mechanisms to establish local shared facilities such as commercial kitchens, test facilities, storage facilities Financially viable local processing enterprise Financially viable local distribution system such as a 'regional food broker' (Example: Distribution System Feasibility Study) | | Community and NGOs Industry Organizations Educational/Research |
| Identify regional products around which producer clusters can form. Multiple producers working together can develop economies of scale that can support appropriate infrastructure | | Industry Organizations Educational/Research |
| OTHER | | |
| Large retailers adjust practices and procedures to allow the incorporation of more local product Example: Choices Market | | Community and NGOs Industry Organizations |
| Local co-ops link with the larger retailers to help increase local product in retail | | Community and NGOs Industry Organizations |

| Actions to support established food producers and new entrants to all food system related industries | | ACTOR |
|--|--|-------|
| ACTION | | |
| EDUCATION | | |
| <p>Develop and expand on-going, extension services to farmers Develop programs with faculty who can provide extension services to farmers in their regions; reinstate funding for Ministry of Agriculture staff to provide extension services and resources or create new positions, for example, Agricultural Liaison Officers</p> | <p>Industry Organizations Educational/Research Provincial Government</p> | |
| <p>Develop and implement mentorship programs, workshops and field days where new entrants learn from people working in all areas of the food system. Example: Beyond the Market</p> | <p>Industry Organizations Educational/Research Provincial Government</p> | |
| <p>Develop accredited training programs for farmers and other food system related trades; Develop curriculum and programs; establish accreditation criteria Example: Kwantlen Polytechnic University Richmond Farm School</p> | <p>Industry Organizations Educational/Research Provincial Government</p> | |
| <p>Establish funded training programs and continuing education programs for people who want to learn farm skills. Develop curriculum and teach training programs and continuing education programs; Fund training programs and continuing education programs for people who want to learn farm skills.</p> | <p>Educational/Research Provincial Government</p> | |
| <p>Develop/expand mechanisms and networks for local producers to share information about best practices. Develop and maintain web portal of information that includes province wide and regionally specific materials and information about farm business advisory services (Smart Farm B.C. and business planning boot camps); establish farmer's institutes Example: Pemberton Farmer's Institute; Young Agrarians; Young Agrarians Land Access Guide</p> | <p>Community and NGOs Industry Organizations Provincial Government</p> | |
| POLICY AND REGULATION | | |
| <p>Develop consistent production standards and regulations across geographic locations.</p> | <p>Industry Organizations Provincial Government</p> | |
| <p>Revise the regional quota system so that smaller producers are supported. Research options for revising regional quota system.</p> | <p>Industry Organizations Educational/Research Provincial Government</p> | |
| <p>Develop more regional agricultural plans and establish more agricultural advisory committees.</p> | <p>Municipal Government Regional Government</p> | |
| <p>Develop best practices toolkit for local government: how to establish and run a food policy council</p> | <p>Educational/Research Municipal Government</p> | |
| <p>Institute program of payment for maintenance of ecosystems services on farms. Example: BC ESI Research policy, regulations and mechanisms for program of payment for maintenance of ecological services on farms</p> | <p>Industry Organizations Educational/Research Provincial Government</p> | |
| <p>Expand the Farmers' Market Nutrition Coupon program.</p> | <p>Provincial Government</p> | |

| Actions to support established food producers and new entrants to all food system related industries (Continued) | |
|---|--|
| RESEARCH | Education/Research |
| <p>Research land tenure options including zoning bylaws to increase access to farmland for new entrants Examples: Community Farms Roundtable and The Smart Farm Project.</p> | <p>Industry Organizations Provincial Government</p> |
| <p>Develop an innovation fund or other financial mechanism producers can access to lower the risk of innovation and experimentation.</p> | <p>Education/Research Provincial Governments</p> |
| <p>Increase number of local food procurement policies and contracts among public institutions and governments. Research mechanisms and prepare best practices toolkit for public institutions and governments.</p> | <p>Educational/Research Municipal Government</p> |
| <p>Develop municipal toolkit of best practices for developing and implementing food systems friendly policy and bylaws. Inventory current practices in B.C. and other provinces; include examples of policy and bylaw language in the toolkit.</p> | <p>Educational/Research Municipal Government Provincial Government</p> |
| <p>Conduct a supply/demand analysis: regional food need compared to current and possible future production in each region. This research could inform regional and provincial food system related policies and planning. Example: Southwest BC Bio-regional Food System Design Project (see Methodology, Phase II)</p> | <p>Educational/Research Municipal Government Provincial Government</p> |

| Actions to protect, enhance and maintain access to agricultural (foodland) and water | |
|--|--|
| ACTION | ACTOR |
| EDUCATION | |
| Develop ALR fact sheets for realtors, chambers of commerce, and municipal planning staff to share with prospective and recent purchasers of ALR land so that accurate information is shared about the role and purpose of ALR land. Example: Islands Trust | Municipal Governments |
| Update Agricultural Land Use Inventories across the province and make them accessible to the public, industry, local governments and others who may be contemplating non-farm uses on or near agricultural land. | Provincial Government |
| Develop and implement strategy to promote culture of celebrating food Example: Slow Food Canada | Community and NGOs Industry Organizations Municipal Government |
| POLICY AND REGULATION | |
| Inventory municipal policies to ensure they protect farm land rather than designating it for other uses to meet "community needs" Example: Surrey's Protection and Enhancement Strategy | Municipal Government |
| Develop and implement policies that discourage the purchasing of farmland for speculation | Municipal Government Provincial Government |
| Create updated buffering and setback bylaws for new developments adjacent to agricultural land. | Municipal Government |
| Implement policy that requires food growing space in all housing developments, including multi-residential. | Municipal Government |
| Create a municipal goal to increase buying and eating locally (Example: Richmond Agricultural Viability Strategy) | Municipal Government |
| RESEARCH | |
| Conduct research on the recent changes of the ALR/ALC and the potential impacts to foodlands and water. | Community and NGOs Educational/Research |
| Conduct evidence based research to establish the value of the ALR and to identify ways to strengthen protection of agricultural land | Community and NGOs Educational/Research |
| Research feasibility and potential impacts of eliminating the application for removal process for ALR land. | Educational/Research |
| Municipal Policy and Bylaws Develop a comprehensive set of food-related policies and zoning bylaws that can be adopted by local municipalities. Use existing examples from B.C. communities and include sample bylaws and policy language for adoption Research how urban zoning, policy and design could be re-thought for food friendly neighbourhoods: allow food production, processing and retail and publish the information. Examples: Farmland access Research Project ; Urban Farming Guidebook | Community and NGOs Industry Organizations Educational/Research Municipal Government |
| Develop a handbook of policy, zoning and design that integrate agriculture into all land use designations including parks, on top of parking lots and other. The handbook could include existing examples of integrating urban food production such as Shifting Growth community gardens; City of Richmond bylaw for community garden at Terra Nova municipal park | Municipal Government Regional Government Provincial Government |
| Identify opportunities in policy and regulation for waste water capture and reuse for food production. | Municipal Government Regional Government Provincial Government |

DISCUSSION

From the Dialogues we learned that across British Columbia, people who are engaging with the concepts of sustainable and local food systems have similar visions for what these food systems can be. Characteristics commonly include:

- maintenance and integrity of regional and global ecosystems;
- social equity and access to nutritious food; and
- financial viability for people who work in all sectors of the food system from production to processing ; from distribution and sales to food waste management.

In general, sustainable regional food systems are viewed as being in relationship with, but not wholly dependent upon, global food trading systems.

The similarities among visions reflect the similarities in work being done across the province to promote and develop sustainable and local food systems. People in all six regions are taking action. They are establishing food policy councils (for example, City of Kamloops; City of Vancouver), writing local food strategies (Capital Regional District; Metro Vancouver; City of Vancouver), including food related policy in municipal bylaws (City of North Vancouver) and in agriculture area plans (East Kootenay Regional District; Sunshine Coast Regional District), developing regional mentorship and farmer training opportunities ([Beyond the Market](#) Prince George; [Young Agrarians](#)), and engaging in

food education ([Think and Eat Green at School](#)), research and demonstration projects, to name just a few. However, we also learned that many Dialogue participants have limited access to the sustainable, local food system work being advanced in other B.C. regions. At one Dialogue participants suggested research on how European cities handle backyard chicken bylaws. No one was aware that backyard chicken bylaws already exist in some B.C. municipalities (for example, the [City of Vancouver](#))!

Province wide Sustainable Food system Definition

(Drawing from Dialogue findings)

“A sustainable food system is appropriate to a region’s ecosystems and its people. It is economically viable and functions with a view to the long term. “



OPPORTUNITIES FOR ACTION

Opportunity 1:

There is a tremendous opportunity to advance sustainable food systems in B.C. by expanding and coordinating effective networks (such as BC Food Systems Network; Young Agrarians) to link people and ideas across the regions to share information about the work that is being done, the lessons learned, and ideas for innovation. Important groundwork for this opportunity is creation of a searchable inventory of B.C. examples that includes but is not limited to:

- Municipal and regional food system related policy and bylaws
- Municipal and regional food strategies
- Roles and mandates of food policy councils
- Research studies, trials, and demonstrations, and their results
- Partnership models for food education in schools
- Community education programs, workshop curriculum and delivery methods
- Industry organizations such as farmers institutes

Opportunity 2:

It is also apparent from Dialogue data that people thinking about sustainable and local food systems have a range of views on specific food system characteristics. Should food be produced organically, conventionally or through a combination of both? To what degree should a sustainable food system be integrated with global trading systems? Should food producers or government be responsible for ensuring food access is equitable among British Columbians of all income levels? A province-wide vision would help to answer some of these questions and could unify efforts toward sustainable food systems throughout the province.

Develop a province-wide vision that defines and describes sustainable local food systems. As participants at the South Region Dialogue proposed, a province-wide vision can be a cornerstone for coordinated, effective action toward sustainable local food systems in all B.C. regions and for the province at large. With a well-defined vision and a common set of principles supported by regionally and provincially relevant information about associated economic, environmental and social characteristics, the work of those engaged in promotion and development of sustainable regional food systems will be made easier and more effective.

Common language around the goals and benefits of sustainable food systems can be developed and used province-wide in strategically targeted outreach campaigns (local government officials and staff including local economic development officers, engineers and planners; development and real estate professionals; provincial Ministries of Agriculture and Education).

The common vision, concepts, information and language can be disseminated through province-wide networks developed in Opportunity 1).

PRIORITIES

Culture Shift

The four province-wide priorities are of two types. The priority to *Increase knowledge and support for sustainable and local food systems among members of the general public and policy makers* aims at moving sustainable and local food systems from the periphery of public and policy realms into the mainstream, and creating a cultural norm of valuing and celebrating food and food production. Actions to support this priority (page 17) centre around broad and deep education of the general public about sustainable food production, nutrition and economics; and education and outreach to various professional groups and policy makers including local government staff about the value of advancing sustainable, local food systems, and how to communicate that value to the public and others.

At all Dialogues, in discussion of culture shifting, we heard a call for increased and targeted food **marketing**. Individual farmers should market their stories; local economic development officers should market regional food histories and current production; the province should expand its efforts to promote B.C. products to B.C. consumers.

Food System Structure and Function

The second priority type is directed toward changes in food system structure and function:

- How, where and under what regulations is local food processed, stored, distributed and sold? (Page 18)
- How will new farmers access land, and financial and extension resources? (Page 19)
- How much land and water will be available for food production, for how long, and under what regulations? (Page 20)

The two types of priority (culture shift and, system structure and function) are mutually reinforcing. A mainstream public that is knowledgeable about, and places value on, sustainable food systems is likely to support food and foodland-friendly policy, regulation, research and programs; to seek out local food vendors; and to engage in innovative and creative ways to realize social, environmental and economic benefits of sustainable local food systems. Likewise, as actions to *expand local infrastructure for food*

The four province-wide priorities are to:

- *Increase knowledge about sustainable local food systems among the general public and policy makers*
- *Expand local infrastructure for food processing, storage, and distribution*
- *Support and encourage established farmers and new entrants to all food system industries*
- *Protect, enhance and maintain access to agricultural land (foodland) and water.*

processing, storage, and distribution (for example, cooperative processing facilities like [Saltspring Abattoir](#); food hub studies like [North Fraser Agri-Food Distribution Hub: Pre - Feasibility Study](#)); actions to *support and encourage established farmers and new entrants to all food system industries* (for example, development of farmer training programs like the [Richmond Farm School](#); [Tsawwassen First Nation Farm School](#)); and actions to *protect, enhance and maintain access to agricultural land (foodland) and water* (such as policies to stimulate use of under-farmed land) are implemented and shown to be successful, they will contribute to increased public awareness and may increase support for sustainable and local food systems.

Food Systems = farmers +

From Dialogue participants we heard clearly that sustainable local food systems are about more than growing food production. Smaller scale producers need access to local and regional infrastructure for food processing, storage and distribution. They need access to a range of markets. Farmers' markets should have year round permanent facilities. Throughout B.C. large distributors, retailers and most public institutions are not set up to accommodate smaller scale producers, but they could be. Provincial health and safety regulations are sometimes added barriers, but they don't have to be. Advancing sustainable local food systems in B.C. will require shifts in ideas, and in the structure and operation of our food systems from field to plate to field.

STAKEHOLDER ROLES

Key stakeholders have roles to play in advancing sustainable food systems as outlined through the province-wide priorities. Critical actions include the following.

| Stakeholder | Role |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| Community Organizations and NGOs | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and deliver food related programs at neighbourhood, school district and community levels • Collaborate with educational institutions/government/industry organizations on research and policy development • Participate in development of effective regional and province-wide networks for sharing of food system related information including best practices for farmers, food processors and retailers |
| Industry Organizations | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote and market regional farmers and foods • Participate in mentorship of new farmers • Pilot cooperative models of smaller scale processing and distribution systems • Participate in development of effective regional and province-wide networks for sharing of food system related information including best practices for farmers, food processors and retailers |
| Educational and Research Institutions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and deliver extension services to farmers, including site specific research • Develop and deliver skill training programs from farming to butchering to small business management. • Research policy to protect agricultural land and water; to intensify use of agricultural land for food production; and to increase access to agricultural land for new farmers. • Conduct research on the potential economic, social and ecological benefits of developing sustainable, local food systems in B.C. and its regions |
| Municipal and Regional Governments | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement bylaws and policies that support sustainable local and regional food systems including local food processing, storage and distribution capabilities • Establish food policy councils and agricultural advisory committees • Complete and update agricultural area plans and develop formal food strategies. |
| Provincial Government | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide extension services to food producers with smaller and medium sized farms • Implement policy and regulation to support smaller and medium scale food producers and processors • Implement policy and regulation to reduce land speculation; reduce the number of exclusions from ALR; intensify food production on currently under-farmed agricultural land. |
| All Stakeholder Groups | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborate on research and policy development to advance sustainable local food systems as identified in the four priorities. • Contribute to development of a local and provincial culture that celebrates food. |

REGIONAL DIFFERENCES

Regional differences

B.C. regions have food system priorities that reflect their unique geographies, economies and demographics. While the **high cost of land** was identified as a major hurdle for aspiring new farmers in the South and Island regions, in the Kootenay and North regions it was rather the lack of farm skills training and relatively low wages of farm work compared to other local industries (mining, forestry). Regions with higher populations such as the Okanagan, Island and Interior have larger local markets than the North and Kootenay regions. Food producers in the latter regions can be challenged by **costs of transportation** in accessing larger, distant markets.

Regional differences serve as reminders that some actions to advance sustainable food systems will be **province-wide**, for example, changes to provincial health and safety regulations for food processing. Others will be **region specific**, such as agricultural extension services; and public outreach and education campaigns.

A good representation of current thinking

The findings in this report reflect the views of individuals who participated in the Dialogues. Participants were selected from eight actor categories (see figure, page 7) and based on their roles as engaged and knowledgeable regional food system actors. As such, the findings are thought to offer a good representation of the current thinking among engaged sustainable and local food system actors in each region. For each Dialogue, we found that participant priorities and actions converged well with those we had identified from regional documents (such as agricultural area plans, health authority reports and local food strategies). This convergence increased our confidence in the findings.

Some limitations

The actions suggested by Dialogue participants ranged from general to specific and do not in themselves comprise comprehensive suits of action to achieve identified priorities. This outcome reflects the limitations to what can be accomplished in a three hour session. The Dialogues were starting points for some participants and continuations of on-going conversations for many others. Among the regional food system documents we reviewed (agricultural area plans, food strategies, Provincial Health Authority reports), a number contain carefully developed goals, strategies and detailed actions for moves to support more local and sustainable food systems. They represent rich beds of ideas and examples of on-going action that should be harvested for sharing as part of the groundwork for Opportunity 1 (page 24).

The Dialogues included only two self identified First Nations participants. In future sustainable local food systems work, efforts to engage First Nations should be increased.

NEXT STEPS

The six dialogues held in November 2014 are just the first steps in gaining a comprehensive understanding of what sustainable, local foods systems could look like across B.C. and the priorities that should be addressed to achieve them. The Sustainable Food Systems Working Group (SFSWG) plans to build on the Dialogues and take action to address some of the priorities. The SFSWG will:

- Host a webinar on April 14, 2015 to share findings from the Dialogues, continue the conversation about priorities for sustainable local food systems, and to connect stakeholders from across the province.
- Carry out targeted follow up with relevant stakeholders to gather more information how on to move forward on some of the priorities
- Share findings with relevant provincial government officials and staff to inform provincial strategies, in particular the Provincial Healthy Eating Strategy and the Ministry of Agriculture's Agrifoods Strategy.
- Convene a symposium in fall of 2015 to bring together a diverse group of stakeholders to strategize ways to advance sustainable food systems policy in B.C.