

Vancouver Food System Assessment



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CONTRIBUTING ORGANIZATIONS

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The long version of this assessment, with all appendices and maps, is available on-line at www.sfu.ca/cscd/food_security.htm

Both versions are living documents. As such we welcome comments, contributions and criticisms.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The City of Vancouver enjoys a diverse and vigorous economy and close proximity to rich and productive food producing lands and waters. Despite these advantages, food security is not ensured for any of Vancouver's citizens, and is a daily challenge for many of the City's most vulnerable residents. Community food security requires that all members of a community have, at all times, adequate access to safe, nutritious, culturally appropriate foods. Thus, food security can exist only within a system that is sustainable on economic, environmental and social dimensions.

This report presents a condensed version of our assessment of the current state of Vancouver's *food system*. It explores how that system might be transformed to enhance food security for all residents through community-led economic development and promotion of policies that build food system sustainability.

The purpose of the research summarized in this report is threefold:

- 1) to develop an assessment of food security in Vancouver by examining the availability, accessibility and acceptability of food provided through the charitable, community and retail food sectors
- 2) to explore how the food system in Vancouver might be transformed through proactive community economic development and promotion of policies that build food system sustainability for all residents.
- 3) to provide information and recommendations to inform and support the work of the Vancouver Food Policy Council and other agencies engaged in food-related work in the City.



Section 1: Overview of Food Security and the Vancouver Food System

Globally, the world food supply is vulnerable to a diversity of threats. These threats include climate change, loss of agricultural land to urban development, rising oil prices that drive up the costs of producing and transporting food, bio-terrorism, the threat of global pandemics, food safety issues such as food-borne pathogens, and a lack of the political will to address food security concerns. In addition, federal and provincial policies have encouraged BC farmers to focus on commodity production for export. A key approach to increasing food security is to reduce our bioregion's reliance on importing food and instead, encourage bioregional food production, processing and consumption.

There is no single set of practices that will ensure the food security of a community. Rather, food security exists when there is a comprehensive continuum of resources in the community's food system. The continuum of resources ranges from those providing short-term relief of acute food insecurity

A food system

includes all processes involved in keeping us fed: growing, harvesting, processing, packaging, transporting, marketing, consuming and disposing of food.

A key approach to increasing food security is to reduce a bioregion's reliance on importing food and, instead, encourage bioregional food production, processing and consumption.



...rity, through those that build the capacity of the community to feed itself, to redesigning the food system toward a more economically, socially and environmentally sustainable model.



.....
Food insecurity
can be measured on
a continuum from
1) feeling anxious
about lack of food,
2) compromising on
the quality of the
foods by choosing
less expensive op-
tions 3) feelings of
hunger and 4) not
eating at all.
.....

Section 2: Assessment of Food Security in Vancouver

While all of Vancouver’s residents are vulnerable to *food insecurity* due to the global trends outlined in Section I, the Strathcona/DTES, Grandview-Woodlands, Downtown and Renfrew-Collingwood neighbourhoods rank high in socioeconomic indicators related to food insecurity. Although a variety of food services are represented in the City’s food system, responding to a continuum of food security needs, there are gaps in accessibility to those services and limitations to their effectiveness in addressing food security issues.

Although charitable food resources are concentrated in areas where residents are more likely to be at risk, there are many gaps in service and concerns about the quality and appropriateness of the food provided. There is an uneven geographic distribution of community food resources such as community kitchens, community gardens, farmers’ markets and Good Food Box programs. These resources are generally not perceived as accessible to the most food-insecure. The retail food outlets are more highly concentrated in low-income areas, where overall food prices tend to be lower than in higher-income areas. However, fresh produce may not be as readily available and food costs consume a much higher percentage of family income in low-income neighbourhoods, even though prices may be lower.



Section 3: Opportunities for a Food-Related Social Economy in Vancouver

What can concerned citizens do to contend with the situation that this report describes? Community groups are initiating a continuum of strategies (see diagram in Political and Economic Redesign of the Food System section) in an effort to address very real concerns about the vulnerability of the food system in Vancouver. This report suggests that investment in community action can be an effective way to address the gaps in the current food system. These efforts need to harmonize with food policy to encourage reinvestment in bio-regional food infrastructure such as viable family farms and food storage and processing facilities. In particular, experience in other jurisdictions indicates that social enterprise, when coordinated with initiatives to regenerate lo-

cal food production and processing, creates opportunities to work towards a sustainable system.

This report suggests that a system-wide approach to addressing food insecurity could stimulate critical shifts in the local food economy. Arrangements with local food growers have the potential to allow charitable food providers to feed their clients more nutritious food. Furthermore, the development of food-related social enterprises can play a role in creating livelihoods for the unemployed and reduce the dependence on charity for feeding people at risk. Across Canada and internationally, social enterprise strategies are being used to achieve a wide variety of goals related to food security. In Vancouver, most food-based social enterprises take the form of catering services, cafés and coffee bars. Currently, these initiatives operate with little connection to each other or to a broader strategy to support this type of venture and thus are themselves vulnerable to market and social forces.

Several market trends indicate opportunities for niche markets for social economy. These trends include growing consumer awareness of and demand for local products, and an increasing demand for organic products and products that promote “health/wellness” and “lifestyle.”



Section 4: Recommendations For a Sustainable Food System in Vancouver

This report indicates a number of opportunities for enhancing the sustainability of Vancouver’s food system and for addressing food security issues while promoting economic, environmental and social sustainability.

SOCIAL ECONOMY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Convene a food and social economy congress to outline a comprehensive approach to *relocalizing* food production, processing and distribution. Such an approach would also help create jobs and other opportunities for participation by those most vulnerable to hunger.
- Improve government support for food-related social enterprises. In particular, Western Economic Diversification Canada should provide support for initiating and developing a grassroots-led social economy for the food sector. A Food Social Economy Development Program is suggested that could facilitate and/or co-ordinate:
 - Conducting feasibility studies for a food-related social enterprises
 - Mobilizing funding to support food-related social enterprises
 - Organizing enhanced training opportunities in partnership with The Canadian Food Industry Council
 - Promoting farm to school/campus/hospital/government programs
 - Developing infrastructure to support food enterprises
 - Encouraging urban agriculture

.....
Re-localization of the food system is a process by which the local food system plays an increasingly significant role in ensuring community food security.
.....



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE CHARITABLE FOOD SECTOR

- Enhance public accountability and transparency of the charitable food system
- Ensure that charitable food providers include capacity-building in their programs and services
- Explore existing hybrid models that link charitable food distribution with the social economy

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVING ACCESS TO COMMUNITY FOOD SECURITY RESOURCES

- Support farmers' markets in low-income neighborhoods and explore the potential of developing a wholesale farmers' market for the City.
- Publicize the importance of buying local food
- Increase the number and accessibility of community gardens

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE RETAIL FOOD SECTOR

- Improve access to retail food by establishing co-operative food stores and food buying clubs; establishing Good Neighbour Programs (encouraging stores to increase the availability of healthier food products); launching mobile stores, improving store shuttles and promoting healthy food vending
- Make the fresh and inexpensive produce available in Chinatown more accessible to surrounding neighborhoods

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CITY FOOD POLICY AND THE FOOD POLICY COUNCIL

- Continue to monitor Vancouver's food system using this report as a baseline for ongoing studies of food issues
- Develop specific knowledge about food supply relationships, channels and issues in the Vancouver bio-region
- Include the purchase of local foods in the City's Ethical Procurement Policies
- Promote sustainable food procurement for the 2010 Olympics
- Support a bio-regional and system-wide approach to Vancouver Food Policy Council projects
- Expand the role of urban agriculture in City-led developments, such as Southeast False Creek and the Woodward's building
- Review City by-laws related to food security to find ways to enhance the production and distribution of food within the City

INTRODUCTION

Food security can exist only within a food system that is sustainable on economic, environmental and social dimensions. Community food security has been defined as a "condition in which all community residents obtain a safe, culturally acceptable, nutritionally adequate diet through a sustainable food system that maximizes community self-reliance and social justice".¹ To achieve the goal of food security, a food system must provide a continuum of resources, ranging from short-term relief of acute food insecurity, through building the capacity of the community and its inhabitants to feed themselves, to redesigning the food system. This report speaks to the broad issue of food system sustainability and focuses upon the narrower issue of food security as a lens for assessment of current policies and practices related to the current food system.

The City of Vancouver possesses a continuum of food resources. The nature, number and distribution of these resources, however, do not always match the need. Even though the City is adjacent to some of the most productive agricultural land in Canada, Vancouver's reliance on imported food puts its food system at greater risk of disruption from forces as disparate as natural disaster, a global pandemic and political upheaval.

It does not have to be this way. Vancouver has the opportunity to redesign its food system in a way that will not only address social needs, but will improve food security for all its residents while conferring economic and environmental benefits on the entire Greater Vancouver region. The key to this transformation is shifting from:

- uncoordinated effort to collaborative action,
- reliance on charity to community self reliance,
- dependence on external sources to interdependence with local partners, and
- a food system based heavily on imports to one that supports and benefits from local food production and processing.

This report presents an assessment of the current state of Vancouver's food system. It explores how the system might be transformed to enhance food security for all residents through the proactive development and the promotion of policies and programs that facilitate investment in food system sustainability.

There were many issues that we were unable to address in this research, such as the role of transportation in accessing food resources, the availability of culturally appropriate food, and the distribution of local food, that are critical for creation of a sustainable food system in Vancouver.





Background for the Report

This assessment of Vancouver's food system is the latest step in a process that began in 1993. Participants in the process have included local experts in a broad range of fields associated with food security, authorities from across the nation and around the world, and a significant cross section of the community. Activities have ranged from the organization of conferences and workshops to the publication of studies and reports on various aspects of the food system.

A milestone in the process was the creation of the City of Vancouver Food Council in July 2004. The primary goal of the Vancouver Food Policy Council is to examine the operation of the local food system and provide ideas and policy recommendations for how it can be improved.

The current project arose from a gathering of food researchers with the desire to create a group of independent and co-operative consultants on food issues. Formed in February 2004, the Forum of Research Connections (FORC) was interested in participating in the City of Vancouver's application for funding to support research into the emergency and overall food systems in the City. In December 2004, funding was received from Western Economic Diversification Canada and the Environmental Youth Alliance, and a team of FORC researchers began work on the Vancouver Food System Assessment research project.

Purposes

The purposes of the research summarized in this report are threefold:

- 1) to develop an assessment of food security in Vancouver by examining the availability, accessibility and acceptability of food provided through the charitable, community and retail food sectors
- 2) to explore how the food system in Vancouver might be transformed through development and promotion of policies and strategies that build food system sustainability for all residents
- 3) to provide information and recommendations to inform and support the work of the Vancouver Food Policy Council and other agencies engaged in food-related work in the City

Methods

A multi-method approach, employing both qualitative and quantitative measures, was used to develop an understanding of Vancouver's food system. An extensive review of documents related to food security in the City and the province was conducted, while models and analysis from other jurisdictions were considered. Information and experiences were gathered from workers in and clients of the City's charitable food resources through a series of focus groups. A database of food-related resources was developed, and locations of these resources were mapped. The distribution of food resources was analyzed to determine areas where concentrations and gaps exist.

Food Security/Sustainability Continuum

There is no single set of practices that will ensure the food security of a community. Rather, food security exists when the food system in a community provides a continuum of resources ranging from short-term relief of acute food insecurity through building capacity to feed itself and leading to a redesign of the food system resulting in interdependence, resilience and sustainability.²

The Emergency Food Sector

With an upsurge in natural disasters and the vulnerability of Vancouver to floods and earthquakes, emergency preparedness should include plans for feeding the population in case of tragedy. Although this report does not address this component in depth, it is clear that attention to the development of an emergency food preparedness plan is of great importance.

The Charitable Food Sector

There may always be people who will need short-term relief in the form of food banks or soup kitchens. In the past, this sector has been referred to as the “emergency” food sector. However, the provision of food to the hungry in Vancouver is now rarely a response to an “emergency,” either natural or human-made; rather, it has become an institutionalized part of an increasingly privatized welfare system. Responsibilities that rest with higher levels of government have largely become the domain of non-profit societies and religious organizations. Therefore, in this report the part of the food system concerned with providing short-term relief is referred to as the “charitable” food sector.

The charitable food sector relies on food donated by major food companies and individuals. Much of this food would otherwise be wasted or dumped. Food wholesalers and retailers are increasingly creative and efficient at reducing waste. Some estimate that within five years charitable food organizations will have to purchase most of the food they provide. In any case, these donations do not address the underlying causes of food insecurity, nor do they tend to improve the nutrition and health of the people who depend on them. However well intended, these charitable activities obscure the failure of government to ensure food security for all citizens and perpetuate an unsustainable system



Capacity Building Programs

Programs such as community kitchens and gardens help address food security concerns in two ways: by empowering individuals to enhance their own food security and by contributing to the community’s capacity to feed itself. However, such programs require participants to time and commitment that may prevent them from being universally accessible. These programs cannot be provided without volunteers and grants. In the current political climate, participation by government in charitable strategies is shrinking; this trend is not expected to reverse.

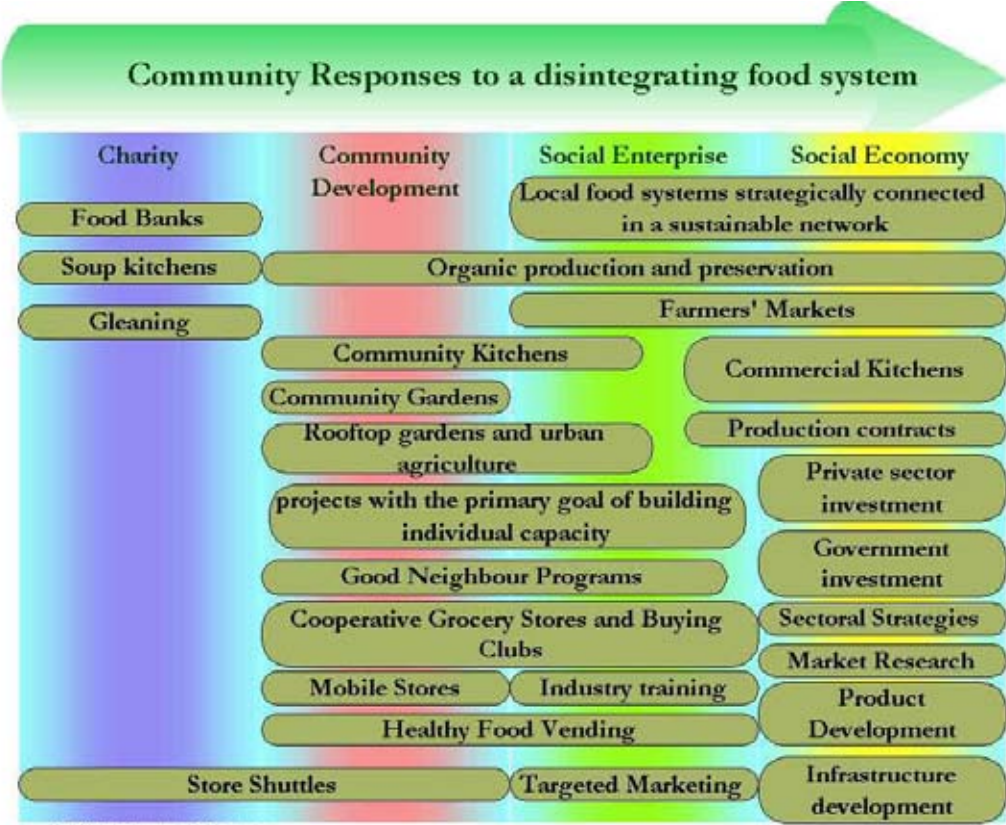


Political and Economic Redesign of the Food System

Redesign of the entire food system is broad in scope and requires time, resources, and community mobilization. It also requires taking advantage of the current market demands for local food. Political redesign can occur through social advocacy to address poverty and the development of alternative policies through food policy councils. Economic redesign can occur as values-based institutions help build needed infrastructure to help build a social economy in the food sector as well as to mobilize investment in local and bioregional food systems.

The greatest opportunity for redesign leading to sustainability lies in relocalizing the food system. Promoting interdependence between communities and their local food producers and processors can lead to economic sustainability by stimulating local agricultural and food-related business. It can enhance environmental sustainability by reducing the distance food must be transported to reach the consumer and protecting green space. Finally, this interdependence can support social sustainability by building social capital in the local food system.

Strategies to enhance food security and food system sustainability can function across food system categories and contribute in different ways. For example, community kitchens can play a role in community development by raising awareness of food issues and can provide training that contributes to food-related social enterprise.



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SECTION 1

VANCOUVER'S FOOD SYSTEM IN CONTEXT



The amount of food grown in the world in an average year is sufficient to feed everyone.³ Yet, due to waste and unequal distribution of food, part of the world's population is fed lavishly, part moderately, and part totally inadequately. Despite continuing commitments from the world's governments, progress in reducing world hunger has been slow. Indeed, over the past five years, the gap between the richest and the poorest inhabitants of most countries (one of the most significant indicators of national wellbeing and food security) has grown.

Community food security is "a condition in which all community residents obtain a safe, culturally acceptable, nutritionally adequate diet through a sustainable food system that maximizes community self-reliance and social justice."⁴ Given this definition, we are all food insecure. Supermarkets stock only about three days' supply of fresh food; if supply lines were disrupted by a natural disaster or other catastrophe, even the wealthiest among us would soon run out of safe, nutritious food.

A community is not food secure if only some, or even most, of its residents are adequately fed. In the United States and Canada, food costs calculated as a percentage of disposable income are, on average, the lowest in the world. Yet, in many jurisdictions, people receiving social assistance pay nearly four times as large a percentage of their income for food as people with an average income.



Greater Vancouver Food Bank Warehouse

Use of food banks is currently the primary marker of food insecurity in Canada. There were almost 10 times as many food banks in Canada in 1998 as there were in 1994, and in 2004, a record number of Canadians (841,640 people, including 317,242 children) used food banks, an increase of 8.5% since 2003. Having a job is no assurance against requiring the assistance of a food bank; people with jobs account for 13.3% of food bank users.⁵

Changes in government policies have had negative impacts on the economic and food security of Canadians. Some of these changes include the restructuring of employment insurance, restrictions on eligibility for social assistance, the decline in benefits in most provinces and the claw-back of the national Child Benefit Supplement.⁶

Because there is such a strong link between nutrition and overall health, any barrier to obtaining nutritious food - including not just income, but availability of culturally appropriate foods, mobility difficulties and other factors - can result in increased incidence of illness and death. Inadequate nutrition also affects an individual's ability to work and learn which, in turn, may result in reduced productivity leading to underemployment or unemployment.

Vulnerabilities and Opportunities in the Food System

Globally, the world food supply is vulnerable to threats as diverse as climate change, loss of agricultural land to overuse and urban development, rising oil prices that drive up the costs of transporting food, bio-terrorism, food safety issues such as food-borne pathogens, and a simple lack of the political will to address food security concerns.

A key approach to increasing food security is to reduce a region's reliance on importing food and, instead, encouraging local food production, processing and consumption. However, growth and continuing consolidation of agribusiness is hampering regional self-reliance, with food production increasingly

controlled by a small number of transnational corporations based in a few developed countries.

Since the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) was adopted, the Canadian food industry has become increasingly dependent on North American trade. Farmers and food processors rely more and more on American markets, while consumers get more and more of their food from American suppliers.⁷

By any account, B.C. has a considerable opportunity for economic growth and increased food security by replacing imports with local production. A feasible food production target for Canadian cities is 20% of the fruit and vegetables consumed.⁸ However, a complex assortment of regulatory structures governs agricultural production, processing and export in the Province. Some, including supply management, regulated marketing and marketing boards restrict B.C. food producers and small-scale food processors. At the municipal level, zoning and health regulations can make it difficult for farmers to bring their produce to local markets.

Urban agriculture, intensive plant cultivation and animal husbandry in and around cities, have the potential to provide as much food in the City of Vancouver as is currently produced in all of the Fraser Valley, which generates about 56% of B.C.'s total farm gate receipts. The City of Burnaby, with Canada's most extensive urban farming network of approximately 70 acres, produces 10% of all vegetables produced in the Fraser Valley.⁹

At present, there are few policies, programs or regulatory tools in place to support regional self-reliance or re-localization of the food system. However, planners and politicians are realizing that food security is a municipal issue. Communities are talking increasingly about locally based community food systems and community food security. Projects in many cities demonstrate creative approaches to local distribution of locally produced food.¹⁰ An example is a farm to campus project implemented by Hendrix College in Conway, Arkansas in 1987. By 1990, the college had increased its purchases of local food from 7% to 30%. Several new farms had been started to help supply its needs, and several others had expanded operations. This change redirected \$200,000 U.S. of the college's annual food budget back into the local economy.¹¹



Many groups throughout B.C. are also doing innovative and exciting work on food systems. Examples include: HEAL (Healthy Eating & Active Living) in

northern B.C, the Nanaimo Food Share society, Food for Kidz in Surrey, the Small Scale Food Processor Association, the B.C. Food Security Network and the Vancouver Food Policy Council. However, as is noted in a recent report by the Ministry of Health, in order to address current gaps and inequalities in accessing food "food security... needs to be addressed as a province-wide initiative."¹² Despite these initiatives, Canada and B.C. have a long way to go to achieve sustainable food systems. For food security programs to succeed, these kinds of sustainability must be a key element of program design.



SECTION 2

ASSESSMENT OF FOOD SECURITY IN VANCOUVER

Vancouver is the largest city in B.C. and the third largest metropolitan area in Canada. It has an excellent deep-sea port and ready access to rich agricultural lands on the Fraser River Delta and in the interior of the Province. The City enjoys a vigorous and diverse post-industrial economy. Sectors range from forestry through provision of management, legal and engineering services to marine technology and tourism. Vancouver also has a diverse population. Inhabitants range from the very wealthy to the desperately poor, and claim a broad spectrum of cultural and ethnic identities. In the late 1990s, English was the second language for half the students attending city schools, and the City continues to be an attractive destination for immigrants, in particular those from India and China.

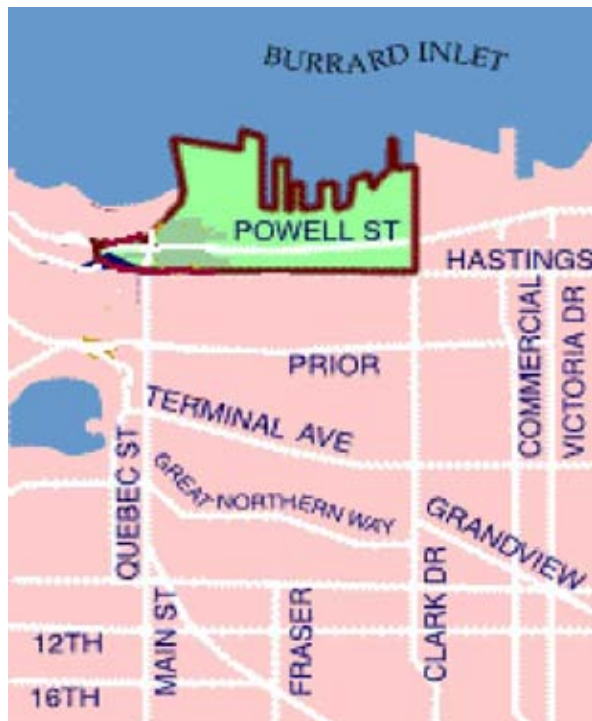
While Vancouver's food system is at risk for all citizens due to the global trends, federal and provincial policies, and local conditions outlined in Section 1, food security is at greatest risk for its most vulnerable residents. Although there are a variety of food services, which respond to a continuum of food security needs, there are gaps in accessibility to those services and their effectiveness in addressing food security issues.

This section examines demographic indicators of food insecurity in Vancouver's 23 neighbourhoods (see map 1) and discusses the availability, appropriateness and accessibility of food from charitable, community and retail sectors in those neighbourhoods.





MAP 1: VANCOUVER'S NEIGHBOURHOODS



MAP 2: THE DOWNTOWN EASTSIDE

The Neighbourhoods and the People

WHO ARE THE MOST VULNERABLE?

Human Resources and Skills Development Canada identifies those whose food security is at greatest risk to be people who are unemployed, receive social assistance, have lower levels of education, are in poor health, are recent immigrants, are aboriginals living off-reserve, are seniors or women, or live in single parent families.¹³ Also vulnerable are the homeless, street-involved youth, intravenous drug users, and those with mental or physical disabilities.¹⁴ Although these groups tend to be concentrated in the Downtown Eastside (DTES¹⁵), they live in other parts of the City as well. The following discussion examines the location and distribution of populations that may be particularly vulnerable to food insecurity (see map 2 for location of the DTES).

INCOME, EMPLOYMENT AND SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Among the strongest predictors for food insecurity are low-income, unemployment and social assistance. Overall, the Strathcona/DTES neighbourhood ranks highest in several socioeconomic indicators related to food insecurity. However, Grandview-Woodlands, Downtown and Renfrew-Collingwood neighbourhoods also contain vulnerable populations.

According to Census figures from 2001:

- Citywide, the average rate of unemployment is 8.2%. In Strathcona, 21.1% of the population is unemployed. In Grandview-Woodland the unemployment rate is 11.7%; in the Downtown area it is 10.4%.
- Citywide, 35% of households spend more than 30% of their household income on shelter. In Strathcona, 54% of households spend at this level. Downtown is next with 46%, while 42% of households in Grandview-Woodland spend more than 30% of household income on shelter.
- The average family income in the city of Vancouver is \$69,190 (average household income is \$57,916). The lowest level of family income is found in Strathcona at \$35,596 (\$21,778). Grandview-Woodland follows with \$46,501 (\$38,893), then Renfrew-Collingwood with \$49,625 (\$50,087) and Mount Pleasant with \$49,772 (\$41,467).

Over the past two decades, households that rely on welfare have lost considerable ground in terms of their standard of living.¹⁶ The income provided by social assistance in B.C. is 50% below the poverty line. Strathcona/DTES has the highest overall aggregate neighbourhood income from all government transfers, such as social assistance, at 41.1%, compared to the next highest neighbourhood aggregate of 15.6%. At 65.1%, Strathcona/DTES also has the highest percentage of people living in households whose income falls below the poverty line. In Grandview-Woodlands, 37.7% of the population lives in households whose income falls below the poverty line.¹⁷

Over the past two decades, households that rely on welfare have lost considerable ground in terms of their standard of living. The income provided by social assistance in B.C. lies 50% below the poverty line.

OTHER AT-RISK POPULATIONS

Many single parent households, particularly those headed by women, have low incomes and depend on social assistance. A third of all single mother households are food insecure to some extent, and families headed by single mothers are eight times more likely to report hungry children than other families.¹⁸ Citywide, 17% of households have a single parent. The percentage of families with a single parent is consistently higher in low-and middle-income neighbourhoods: 26% in Grandview-Woodlands and 24% in Strathcona/DTES.¹⁹



A recent study of homeless youth in Vancouver found that 59% of those 19 and younger and 49% of those between 19 and 24 reported being hungry because of lack of food at least once a month.²⁰

An estimated 12,000 injection drug users (IDUs) reside in the Greater Vancouver area. IDUs are more likely to be food insecure and to be at risk for problems associated with malnutrition arising from skipping meals and replacing fat and protein with carbohydrates in the form of sweets.²¹ Poor nutrition can put IDUs at higher risk of infections such as tuberculosis, sexually transmitted diseases and hepatitis C.²²

More than one quarter (27%) of Aboriginal people living off-reserve report at least some food insecurity and 24% experience a compromised diet. The majority of Aboriginals in Vancouver live on the east side, the highest percentage being in Grandview-Woodlands. Primary health problems for Aboriginal people include obesity and non-insulin dependent diabetes mellitus.

Higher percentages (12.7%) of very recent immigrants (0-4 years in Canada) are likely to be food insecure compared to the general population (10.2%).²⁵ As a group, recent immigrants to Vancouver, and in particular refugees, are less likely to be in the workforce and more likely to be receiving social assistance.^{26,27} In addition, they may find that foods used in their traditional diets are unavailable or expensive. Changes in lifestyle and working conditions, as well as pressure to integrate into a new culture, may result in changes in diet that have a negative impact on health.²⁸

Citywide, seniors make up almost 13% of the population, but that number rises to more than 20% in Strathcona/DTES and the high-income neighbourhood of Arbutus Ridge.²⁹ There are heavy concentrations of seniors living alone in Strathcona/DTES and Grandview-Woodlands, suggesting that this is an area where seniors may be particularly food insecure.³⁰ The cost of food is a major issue for low-income seniors who also facing high housing costs.

Risk of food insecurity is increased for people with disabilities. Either physical or mental disabilities can make tasks such as shopping, meal preparation and standing in line to obtain food services more difficult. About one quarter women and men with disabilities aged 15-34 experience food insecurity, compared with just over 10% of their non-disabled counterparts.³¹

FOOD INSECURITY AND HEALTH

Because nutrition and overall health are powerfully linked, barriers to accessing nutritious and culturally appropriate foods can result in increased illness and mortality. Access to food also affects an individual's ability to work and learn, which, in turn, may result in reduced productivity and increased rates of unemployment and underemployment.³²

Over the past 20 years, the percentage of Canadian adults who are obese has more than doubled, while rates of obesity in children have nearly tripled.³³ Obesity has been linked to a number of health problems including heart disease, stroke, some cancers, gallbladder disease, diabetes, osteoarthritis and hypertension. In 1997, it was estimated that the total direct cost of obesity to Canada's health care system was over \$1.8 billion.³⁴ A number of factors, including obesity, contribute to non-insulin dependent diabetes mellitus (NIDDM). There is evidence that highly processed foods may contribute to high insulin levels, often a precursor to NIDDM. Cardiovascular disease is the single greatest contributor to mortality in Canada and is one of the most costly diseases, placing a considerable burden on the healthcare system. Like NIDDM, diet has an important role to play in the prevention of cardiovascular disease, including hypertension and high cholesterol.

Nutrition has a direct impact on an individual's ability to resist the opportunistic infections associated with HIV and AIDS. Inadequate nutrition has been shown to contribute to the progress of HIV-related disease, and to mortality of those infected with HIV. A recent study found that one out of five people in B.C. who are HIV positive is also food insecure. This rate is five times the rate of food insecurity in the general Canadian population.³⁵

Overall, the area with the highest concentration of health issues that are either caused by or exacerbated by poor nutrition is the Strathcona/DTES neighbourhood. It is here that we see the highest prevalence of HIV and AIDS, hepatitis C, and other infectious diseases. There is also a higher rate of diabetes-related mortality than in other areas of the City, which may be an indication of poor management of the disease.³⁶ The DTES also has a high percentage of people with addictions, persons who are particularly vulnerable to both nutrition-related and infectious disease. The Strathcona/DTES neighbourhood is home to a high percentage of seniors who live alone, and a large number of individuals with mental or physical disabilities.

“After I pay my rent, I don't have enough money for good food so my children aren't healthy. They get colds and the flu all the time. I have to buy cold medicine for them which leaves me even less money for food.”

-focus group participant



Access to Food in Vancouver

Vancouver's food system includes emergency, charitable, community and retail sectors, which provide a continuum of food resources ranging from food banks and soup kitchens to supermarkets. Organizations in the emergency food sector, such as the Red Cross, serve individuals and families during and immediately after a natural or human-made disaster. The charitable sector provides short-term solutions to individuals experiencing severe food insecurity. Community food resources such as farmers' markets and community kitchens serve a broader population and address wider food security issues. As a major receiver and distributor of food, the retail sector plays an important role in food security.

THE CHARITABLE FOOD SECTOR

The number of people in B.C. who rely on the charitable food sector is rising. Food bank use increased 16% between 2003 and 2004,³⁷ due in large part to the reduction in social assistance benefits, the introduction of time limits and the increased restrictions on eligibility imposed in 2002.³⁸ In addition, rising housing costs mean that less money is available for food. The charitable food sector in Vancouver includes food banks and depots, low-cost or free meal programs and shelters that provide meals. These resources began as temporary or "emergency" responses to hunger, but have become a growing component of the food system.

Food Quality

In most cases, the main concern of charitable food providers is to alleviate acute hunger. They are not equipped to address chronic dietary concerns or individual preferences or requirements. Because many funders pay only for infrastructure and staff, most providers rely on donations of food, and so do not have the resources to address all the nutritional needs of their clients.

No information is available about the amount of unusable food received by Vancouver food banks. However, numerous reports from recipients of charitable food suggest that spoiled or outdated food is distributed at some locations.³⁹ Research from U.S. food banks found that food spoiling before it could be distributed and food donations that were already unfit for distribution is not uncommon.⁴⁰



In some instances, charitable food was unsuitable for recipients. In focus groups, older DTES singles reported that they could not use the dry staples they were given because their food storage facilities were infested with rodents or insects. Street-involved youth with little or no access to storage and cooking facilities received food requiring preparation: tins that need a can opener, soup that must be diluted and heated. If clients were unable to eat these

provisions, they used them as street currency, trading them for other food or drugs. Others reported that food from charitable sources did not consider their dietary needs: the diabetic client who received food laden with sugar, the client without teeth who was given food that needed chewing. Many focus group participants made use of the meal programs offered at community centres, faith-based missions and social agencies. While there was some criticism of “missionaries” coming to the DTES to distribute food, overall, there was support for initiatives specifically targeted at families and special needs groups.

Diet can be an important part of the treatment program for people with chronic health problems such as diabetes, high cholesterol and high blood pressure. Those with infectious diseases such as HIV and AIDS require special diets to prevent secondary infections. Two charitable food providers surveyed (Positive Outlook and A Loving Spoonful) provided special meals with non-medicated meat and organic vegetables to people with HIV and AIDS. Otherwise, food provided at meal programs ranged from excellent and nutritious to very basic, such as soup and a sandwich, depending on the donations received by the provider.

Distribution and Accessibility of Programs and Services

The distribution of charitable food resources affects how accessible they are to potential users. DTES contains the largest number of charitable food resources, followed by Strathcona (which shares a number of resources with the DTES), Grandview-Woodlands and Downtown. Six of the 23 Vancouver neighbourhoods have no charitable food resources.

The DTES also has the highest concentration of charitable food resources (measured as the number of resources per 1,000 low-income residents), followed by Strathcona, South Cambie and Downtown. Because of the concentration of resources within the DTES and nearby neighbourhoods, those who need food are attracted to the area.⁴² However, poverty exists in other neighbourhoods as well, and with few resources in those outlying areas, many who are in need of charitable food programs may not be served.

According to one service provider, “there is a denial of the depth of poverty in the outlying areas.” Women, the elderly, recent immigrants, those with physical or mental disabilities or illnesses such as HIV and AIDS may be unable or unwilling to stand in line to access food because of health or safety concerns.⁴² There are many reasons why those who need food may not use the resources available, including concerns about quality, storage and suitability of food provided and the stigma associated with ac-

“I’m a diabetic and not supposed to have sugar. All the food they give me is full of sugar and stuff I’m not supposed to eat.”

-focus group participant



.....
“I stand in line,
sometimes for
hours in the rain,
carry the food
home, only to find
that most of it is
stale or rotten.”

-focus group participant
.....

cepting charity. Women reported feeling uncomfortable in food lineups because of the potential for harassment or violence. Waiting in line at a food bank or for a meal poses a barrier to anyone who, due to physical or mental issues, are unable to stand for an extended period. Those who lack money to buy food also lack money to pay for transportation, a significant barrier for anyone who lives any distance from charitable food resources. Some in need resist any contact with social service agencies because of suspicion or previous negative experiences. Others are unwilling or unable to meet the requirements of the agencies administering the programs, such as participating in a religious service or abstaining from violent behaviour or drug use.

Because funding for charitable food programs is often provided only for a limited time, programs are unstable and there is a high rate of turnover in the programs available. It is difficult for service providers to know where to send clients, especially when lists of food resources are not maintained. Some services overlap, while other needs remain unmet.

THE COMMUNITY FOOD SECTOR

Community food resources include community kitchens, community gardens, farmers’ markets and Good Food Box programs. These resources are not intended as emergency responses to hunger, but as long-term approaches to addressing food security issues.

These programs typically require participants to invest more time and money than charitable food programs. Therefore, these programs may not be accessible to low-income residents unless special efforts are made to include them, such as through subsidies.

Compared to charitable food resources, community food resources are more evenly distributed throughout the City, and more neighbourhoods have at least one community food resource. DTES has the greatest number, followed by Mount Pleasant (another relatively low-income neighbourhood), Strathcona and Grandview-Woodlands. DTES has the highest concentration of community food resources in relation to population, followed by Strathcona, Mount Pleasant and Grandview-Woodlands. There are many neighbourhoods with only one or two community food resources.

Community Kitchens

A community kitchen makes cooking and food preparation equipment available to groups who meet regularly to cook meals. There are an estimated 34 community kitchens in Vancouver. The majority of kitchens are located in the DTES. There are no community kitchens in Sunset (a low-income neighbourhood) or Killarney (a middle-income neighbourhood), and few in Victoria-Fraserview or Marpole (both middle-income neighbourhoods).



Participants in community kitchens are encouraged to be involved in menu selection, shopping, food preparation and cooking. Most do not charge a fee, and food is typically provided through the Greater Vancouver Food Bank or other funders. Some kitchens are designed to address specific health problems, such as diabetes, HIV or hepatitis C, and a few provide food-related training to participants. Some provide services to particular populations such as new mothers, seniors, or those with mental health or substance abuse issues. Those focus group members who had participated in community kitchens found them beneficial. For example, one woman described her experience at a Community Kitchen, “We shopped for the food then she showed us how to cook it. We all had a great meal together. I learned a lot and it was fun.” On the other hand, focus group participants who were severely food insecure (e.g., intravenous drug users, homeless), did not see community kitchens as addressing their needs because, with most operating one day a week, they do not provide a steady supply of food.

Good Food Box Depots

The Good Food Box is a box of fruits and vegetables that is delivered twice a month to a neighbourhood depot. In order to support BC farmers, local produce is used whenever possible. Participants pay for their order ahead of time and pick it up on delivery day. It is estimated that the cost of a Good Food Box is 35% less than the same selection would cost at a supermarket. The service is largely volunteer-run, with funding provided by a variety of corporate sponsors, the Vancouver Agreement, the Vancouver Foundation and REACH Community Centre.



There are 16 Good Food Box depots in Vancouver, evenly distributed across City neighbourhoods. Focus group research revealed that middle-income participants had little interest in participating in a Good Food Box program. Participants felt that the range of produce in the Good Food Boxes was limited, and that the programs did not provide the flexibility of going to a supermarket, where the purchaser could control the quality, quantity and variety of their produce.

Farmers' Markets

Farmers' markets are open-air locations where farmers can sell their produce directly to the public during specified hours. Products are typically locally grown. Vancouver currently has four farmers' markets. Three are run by the Your Local Farmers Market Society, and are located in the Kensington-Cedar Cottage, Riley Park and West End neighbourhoods. The fourth is on Granville Island in the Fairview neighbourhood. Compared with other cities, Vancouver is poorly served by farmers' markets, with one market for every 158,750 people. Seattle has six markets (1:108,895 people), while Portland has 11 (1:48,101 people).

Although there is a high demand for more farmers' markets in the City, there are a number of barriers to their expansion. Some are regulatory. There is no zoning in the City for farmers' markets. At present, markets must apply for annual special event permits and for special accommodation under the provisions of the zoning bylaws. Few locations that are zoned appropriately also meet the required conditions with respect to size, grade and surface.



In addition, too few farmers are interested in participating in markets in the City. Although farmers typically receive higher prices when selling directly to the consumer, sales volumes tend to be lower, and farmers must often diversify their crops in order to appeal to customers. Furthermore, a growing number of farmers' markets throughout the Greater Vancouver Regional District means that the City has to compete for farmers.

All four farmers' markets are located in areas that border low-income areas, but none is actually in a low-income neighbourhood. People with low income in Strathcona/DTES would have the most difficulty getting to a farmers' market because none is located nearby. Although the time of year during which research for this study was conducted precluded price comparisons, the cost of food at farmers' markets may be an additional barrier to low-income residents.

Community Gardens

There are 20 Community Gardens operating in the City of Vancouver. Most of these are licensed through the Vancouver Parks Board, the City of Vancouver Engineering Department Greenways Branch or the Vancouver School Board. However, some are on private property but allow public access. The neighbourhood with the largest number of community gardens is Mount Pleasant, which has six, followed by Grandview-Woodlands with four, Strathcona and Kitsilano with three each, and the West End with two. Kerrisdale has one garden, while additional gardens are planned for Renfrew-Collingwood and Kensington-Cedar Cottage.

A survey of available space and waiting lists at Community Gardens showed that while three gardens had plots available, most gardens had waiting lists, one as large as 70. Obtaining access to land for community gardens is difficult and can take years; with changes in policy anticipated, more land may become available.

Interest in gardening varied among focus groups. The most severely food insecure said gardening was difficult due to "weather, birds and bugs," but some felt that there would be interest in a garden in the DTES. Low-income, working participants reported doing some gardening to save on food costs.

Obtaining space in a community garden can be difficult. Most gardens have waiting lists, one as large as 70.

Food was usually grown in small quantities due to space constraints, although at least one participant took advantage of space at a school garden. There was interest in community gardening, provided that the gardens were close to home, secure, and free or low-cost. Middle-income participants were less interested in gardening. Because most either were working or caring for children, few had the time to garden and felt that the amount of food produced would not be worth the effort required.



Strathcona Community Gardens

THE RETAIL SECTOR

The City of Vancouver has over 330 grocery stores ranging in size from large chain supermarkets such as Safeway to small shops specializing in foods from various cultures. Unlike other cities, where the concentration of grocery stores declines with neighbourhood income levels, lower-income areas in Vancouver tend to have higher numbers and densities of stores. However, access is not just about having a store close by; it is also about the quality, cost, and cultural acceptability of the food carried by the store.⁴⁴

Distribution of Retail Stores in Relation to Vulnerable Populations

Downtown, the West End and the DTES neighbourhoods have the highest number of grocery stores in the City. The highest concentration of grocery stores is in DTES, with one store for every 194 residents, compared with a citywide concentration of one for every 1,687 residents. Outside of the DTES/Downtown/Strathcona area, there are a number of neighbourhoods with low grocery store density but higher-than-average populations of people who are at risk for food insecurity. For example, the middle-income neighbourhood of Oakridge (population 11,795) had only one grocery store despite having a high percentage of elderly and Hastings-Sunrise, with a significant low-income population, has a ratio of one grocery store for every 4,151 people.

“I have to shop at the very cheapest place. If I’m not careful, we go hungry.”

-focus group participant



Despite the high concentration of retail food outlets in the DTES, the availability of quality food is restricted. Many stores in the DTES are convenience stores, with large selections of junk food and little fresh produce. There are larger stores in the Downtown, while Chinatown has a wide variety of foods and produce. However, many DTES residents are reluctant to shop outside of their immediate neighbourhood.

Food Costs and Availability

We compared food cost and availability in seven Vancouver neighbourhoods chosen to reflect a diversity of incomes.⁴⁵ Food price information was collected using Health Canada's Nutritious Food Basket, a list of 66 basic foods that was designed to represent the weekly groceries for a family of four, excluding convenience foods (e.g., prepared dinners) and non-nutritious beverages (e.g., coffee or soda).

The cost of the Nutritious Food Basket was highest in high-income neighbourhoods, lowest in lower-income neighbourhoods. However, low-income residents likely have difficulty affording food regardless of where they reside. The cost of purchasing the foods in the Nutritious Food Basket ranged from 7.3% of family income in Dunbar to 21.2% in Strathcona/DTES. Simply put, those with the lowest incomes spend the greatest percentage of their income on food. The cost of the Nutritious Food Basket for a family of four whose income was at the level of the Low Income Cut-off (for 2003) ranged from 21.5% to 29% in the seven neighbourhoods. Furthermore, a family of four on income assistance in Vancouver would need to spend between 41-51% of their income to purchase the foods in the Nutritious Food Basket.⁴⁶ Because the cost of housing is inelastic, people with low-incomes may opt to forgo nutritious food or limit their food intake.

For the most part, focus group participants preferred large supermarkets that provide the lowest prices for dry goods. However, many maintained that local produce stores and those in Chinatown offered the best prices on fruit and vegetables. Families in Strathcona/DTES made considerable use of Chinatown stores. Drug-involved people, on the other hand, reported that they were made to feel uncomfortable in Chinatown shops and that there were few places in Chinatown where they could go if they had money. They expressed anger that many store owners assumed that they were stealing even when they had money to pay for what they wanted. While some participants had access to private transportation to the supermarket, most were dependent on public transportation. All reported that it was not easy to use public transportation with groceries and children in tow. For people on social assistance, using public transportation was a significant drain on their resources.

.....
"It's not about lack of knowledge of where to shop or how to cook. It's about lack of access."
.....

-focus group participant

SECTION 3

OPPORTUNITIES FOR A FOOD-RELATED SOCIAL ECONOMY IN VANCOUVER



Food security depends on creating a food system that is sustainable on economic, environmental and social dimensions. The charitable food sector, in its present state, is inherently unsustainable on all three dimensions. However, experience in other jurisdictions indicates that developing the social economy, particularly when coordinated with initiatives to regenerate local food production and processing, creates sustainability in both the charitable food sector and the broader food system.

The social economy could provide a community response to establishing innovative strategies to enhance food security for all Vancouver's residents. However, citizens and organizations must be able to access the specialized support and resources required to engage in economic activities that will facilitate food sustainability.

UNDERSTANDING THE SOCIAL ECONOMY

The social economy is characterized by enterprises and organizations that are autonomous and private in nature, but where capital and the means of production are collective.

A social enterprise is a specific business that produces goods and services for the market economy, but manages its operations and directs its surpluses in pursuit of social and environmental goals.⁴⁷

Social enterprise is a component of the social economy. The social economy refers to business initiatives that are not a part of the public economy, or the traditional private sector. It is characterized by enterprises and organizations that are autonomous and private in nature, but where capital and the means of production are collectively held.⁴⁸ Other components of the social economy include co-operative development and community economic development. The social economy concept seems unfamiliar to many today, but, in various forms, it has always been part of Canada's socioeconomic landscape.

A social economy approach to addressing acute food insecurity could stimulate critical shifts in the local food economy. A co-operatively developed infrastructure with local growers could allow charitable food providers to feed their clients more nutritious food, while development of food-related social enterprises could create livelihoods for former charitable food recipients and reduce the dependence on charity to feed people at risk.

FOOD-RELATED SOCIAL ENTERPRISE IN OTHER JURISDICTIONS

Across Canada and around the world, social enterprise strategies are being used to achieve a wide variety of goals related to food security.

Social enterprise strategies


As noted above, adopting the social economy model to deal with issues traditionally addressed by the charity model can re-localize agriculture and improve the quality of food available to all eaters in the bioregion. It can also provide opportunities for individuals who encounter barriers to conventional employment.

Developing social capital allows food system organizations to support movement from dependence on government funding, volunteers and donations to interdependence with local consumers, farmers and processors.

Rebuilding local food systems also requires that organizations move from our current dependency on a centralized food system to a state of interdependency that focuses on the assets and needs of people in the bio-region.

Large, sophisticated buying clubs can influence local farmers to shift from chemical-intensive mono-cropping production practices targeted at using chemicals to satisfying a low-return, commodity market to more diversified, more natural farming which generates a higher rate of return while feeding local communities.





Small businesses in the food sector struggle because of many structural barriers. However, networks of small business with sophisticated infrastructure for product development, training, and marketing can become a powerful element of the mainstream economy. Partnership between social enterprise and mainstream business can assist both to achieve their economic goals while contributing to their communities.

Examples of organizations that have used social enterprise and broader social economy strategies successfully

The **Kauai Food Bank** in Hawaii operates a farm in partnership with a local college, on which Kauai family farms and food bank clients are taught to grow high quality produce. Through a for-profit arm, the Food Bank functions in the marketplace as a wholesale purchaser of a wide range of products from local farmers.

The Food Bank collaborated with the **Kauai Marriott Resort**, which wished to feature native cuisine prepared with locally grown produce on its menu. The collaboration featured a broad-based community economic development program in which food bank clients were trained to participate in the local, high-quality food system in order to generate an income. Once the Kauai Food Bank reached capacity, it was awarded government foodservice contracts, at market rates, for programs that served the special dietary needs of seniors and First Nations.

The **Appalachian Center for Economic Networks (ACEnet)** is a nonprofit community development corporation working to transform the economy of distressed Central Appalachian communities. ACEnet assists the start up and expansion of new businesses in the specialty food and computer technology sectors, helps businesses grow, and links networks of businesses, industry professionals and others. Services include provision of a 12,000 square foot shared-used manufacturing facility and access to patient and friendly capital for investment in the small businesses that are incubated.

Food Chicago collects and analyzes data to identify economic trends and community needs. They have used this information to develop programs such as workforce development, technical and consulting assistance, and a business innovation and training centre that includes a licensed shared-use kitchen. Food Chicago develops innovative approaches to retaining industry by mobilizing support of foundations, governments and industry stakeholders.

Équiterre provides support for a Consumer Supported Agriculture operation in Quebec. Customers prepay for 20 weeks' worth of organic fruit and vegetables grown by local farmers. The program has grown from one farmer and 25 partners in 1995 to 84 farms and 6,000 partners in 2004. Équiterre receives core funding from the province, but is considering enterprise models that could eliminate this dependency.

FoodShare, in partnership with the Toronto Economic Development Commis-

sion, has developed an incubator kitchen to help establish new food businesses. FoodShare promotes policies, such as adequate social assistance rates, sustainable agriculture, universal funding of community-based programs and nutrition education, that will make food a priority at all levels of society.

The **Toronto Food Policy Council** partners with business and community groups to develop policies and programs that promote food security and bridge the gap between producers and consumers. The Council maintains a powerful database that helps bring many complex food security issues into focus. Its economic development projects provide valuable baseline information that is used by other policy councils.

Vancouver's food-related social economy

At present, a food-related social economy in Vancouver exists in only the most nascent of forms. For example, there are few retail grocery stores, restaurants or coffee shops that are co-operatively owned. The **East End Food Co-op** and **Sprouts** (the U.B.C. Natural Foods Co-op) both operate education and outreach programs as well as retail stores. Interviews with local co-op businesses and associations suggest that there is room for growth in food-based co-op development, particularly in the areas of value-added foods, specialty products and organics.



Most local food-based social enterprises take the form of catering services, cafés and coffee bars. An example is Potluck Café, a cafe and catering business that generates revenue to support a cook training program and a free meal program for downtown eastside residents with multiple barriers. The training program involves participants that are primarily from the downtown eastside, who have a history of unemployment and barriers to employment, includ-

ing addiction and mental health issues. Other examples of food-based social enterprises include: Cook Studio Cafe, Lunch à la Kart, Ram Cam Youth Cappuccino Bar and Café Etico. During the course of this research, a local social enterprise, Lunch a la Kart, was forced to close down due to economic challenges. Lunch a la Kart was a lunch delivery service employing mental health consumers who delivered sandwiches to local businesses. A research project is currently underway to analyze why the organization had to close and to examine what supports or partnerships may have helped the enterprise to succeed.

There are at least six organizations in addition to the Potluck Café that pro-

vide cook or pastry training and as such are counted as 'training businesses' - a specific kind of social enterprise. They include: Aunt Leah's Independent Lifeskills Society, Cook Studio Café, Vancouver Community College, the Art Institute of Vancouver, Pacific Institute of Culinary Arts and the Northwest Culinary Academy of Vancouver. Most offer industry practicums and/or work experience in a commercial kitchen.

Most food enterprises are small programs working independently of one another. Currently, there is no organization responsible for the coordination, support and mentoring of social enterprises in Vancouver much less in the food sector.

Issues faced by social enterprise in Vancouver

In interviews with individuals engaged with social enterprises in Vancouver, participants identified a number of financial and operational challenges that can work against the success of their ventures. Non-profit financial challenges include access to "patient and friendly capital" (equity that is more creative and negotiable than are loans) financing for operations, and lack of commercial kitchen/production facilities. Many of the organizations have a charitable component and reported that although safe, nutritious food is essential to any food program, few funders will provide money to buy it. Shifting focus to become more entrepreneurial was seen as desirable, but a challenge for many organizations. Small profit margins in the food business make food-based social enterprise particularly challenging, as large volumes must be sold to break even.

Operational challenges were often a result of organizations that lacked sufficient business skills and expertise and did not know how to acquire them. At this stage of development in Vancouver, these organizations need support in the form of development funding, assistance with organizational development and business counseling. Assistance with legal issues such as corporate structure, accepted business practice and board risk mitigation is also required. So too is education in management skills and practices to reduce staff turnover and establish consistent product quality requires development. A common observation is that social enterprises in Vancouver lack a network through which to learn from one another and are unaware of available support services. Social enterprises often had difficulty connecting graduates of food training programs with long-term employment and overcoming employers' fears about hiring hard-to-house people.

At the same time, those involved with social enterprises identified several opportunities for success through collaborative effort by businesses and organizations that currently operate independently. Opportunities included working together to market the "buy local" concept and to educate consumers about the advantages of supporting local agriculture and food-based business. Benefit was seen in establishing an organization or website where people involved in food-based social enterprise or food distribution could communicate, share



Potluck Cafe

ideas and network. In short, a framework to link food-based social enterprises together and to develop the infrastructure needed to create a broad-based food focused social economy is in its infancy in Vancouver.

How could we grow a food-related social economy in Vancouver?

Many reports show that small-scale initiatives in the food industry are financially precarious and face significant barriers and challenges.⁴⁹ This is particularly true when they 'go it alone'. However, research done for the Small Scale Food Processor Association in B.C. identified a very strong demand in the marketplace for locally produced, high quality food and beverages, and an opportunity through collective effort to surmount those barriers and challenges and meet market demand.



Several market trends indicate a niche in the marketplace for social enterprise. They include growing consumer awareness of and demand for local products, and an increasing demand for organic products and products that promote "health/wellness" and "lifestyle." Local products are seen by the consumer to be healthier, to reduce environmental impact and to increase local economic capacity.

Dropping prices in the global commodity market suggest to small producers that investment in adding value is necessary to ensure ongoing profitability of their agricultural enterprises. At the same time, the proliferation of small-lot agriculture indicates that small-scale processing and marketing systems will be required to get products to the consumer.

Social economy strategies are important tools to facilitate the social and economic change required to ensure long-term food sustainability.

There is a substantial opportunity for producers and processors to add value to food and re-localize food systems.⁵⁰ Initiatives supporting this opportunity include municipalities including agriculture in their official community plans, regional nutritionists incorporating local produce into healthy food boxes, and economic development plans calling for more value-adding in many sectors, including food sectors. Some communities are forming food policy councils. Many Community Futures organizations are creating agri-food development plans. As First Nations reclaim their land, some are rebuilding sustainable food systems.

All these activities herald a potential shift in the culture of food production in B.C. away from commodity export and towards localized food systems. The current food system needs to change in fundamental ways if B.C.'s citizens are to consider themselves "food secure." Social economy strategies are important tools to facilitate the social and economic change required to ensure long-term food sustainability.



DEVELOPING A SOCIAL ECONOMY FOOD SYSTEM

Changes in the charitable food sector can lever substantial shifts in the local food economy. Through co-operatively developing an infrastructure with local growers, food-related social enterprises can in turn can create livelihoods for former charitable food recipients and reduce the need for dependence on charity. The following strategy for developing a social enterprise-based food system uses components described by the Canadian Community Economic Development Network (CCEDNet) in their analysis of social enterprise.⁵¹

CHALLENGES FACING DEVELOPMENT OF A SOCIAL ECONOMY FOOD SYSTEM

Flexibility: The charitable food system and those concerned with food sustainability and food democracy will find it challenging to shift toward an enterprise paradigm. This is not a particularly easy process. Support and education will be necessary. Some may not make the shift.

Building Social Capital Through Associational Partnerships: Vancouver has many groups concerned with poverty, food security and food democracy with co-op and community economic development. At present, there is no coordinating body to organize and focus the efforts of these organizations organizations towards participation in creating a social economy.

Alternative Ownership Models: There do not appear to be sufficient resources beyond those provided to Embers, a DTES grassroots community economic development organization, to develop enterprises that have low-income people as owners. The capacity-building resources required for organizations to assist social enterprise development are not consistently funded, and rarely is support provided long enough to see the launch of the enterprise into full operation.

Building Organizational Capacity: Some community groups feel that entrepreneurship is not consistent with their vision, or that the charity model is more ideologically appropriate for them. Others have not come to terms with the retraction of the social safety net and are investing in advocacy in the hope that government can be convinced to take up what they believe to be its responsibility. Still others are not convinced that economic democracy is possible and are waiting to see results before committing themselves. In addition, the failure of several food economy initiatives in Vancouver has persuaded some against the prospects for social economy strategies in the food sector.

OPPORTUNITIES SUPPORTING DEVELOPMENT OF A SOCIAL ECONOMY FOOD SYSTEM

Building Assets – Community Economic Infrastructure: The food manufacturing infrastructure has been decimated over the past several years as multinational corporations have closed plants in B.C.⁵² However, the large number of small scale food processors in the province underlines the potential for

adding value to food locally rather than shipping primary products to the U.S. for processing. Several communities in B.C. wish to build manufacturing kitchens. There are also smaller, privately held facilities that are willing to co-pack. Some groups in Vancouver have considered this concept.

Leveraging existing resources: A great deal of money is being spent by a myriad of non-profit organizations in Vancouver to support food programs. There is no apparent collaboration for purchasing. Development of a purchasing co-op for all community and municipal agencies that buy food could create price, quality and other efficiencies, and funds could be invested in ensuring purchase of local/regional products and services.

Building food sector enterprises: There are a number of emerging enterprises that have potential to succeed in Vancouver. The following concepts are presented as a basis for discussion:

- The urban ranch: a business that, in partnership with building owners, develops and farms rooftop gardens.
- Food Bank shared agriculture: many American food banks⁵³ have arrangements with local farmers, who supply nutritious food for hungry people and in turn are guaranteed a predictable livelihood.
- Provision of culturally appropriate food: with the number of First Nations people receiving charitable food services, development of programs providing First Nations' herbs, food and medicinals is badly needed.

• Value added food businesses operated by community organizations and individuals: because margins in the food business are small, it is important for social enterprises to focus on capturing and adding value to primary agricultural products. It is also critical to ensure that products are of interest to those willing to pay premium prices.

Building financial capital- Access to debt and equity: B.C. is well served by institutions willing to lend to community organizations and social enterprises. Credit Unions and Community Futures organizations have mobilized a great deal of capital that has assisted small business start-up all over the province. "Self-reliance loans" provided by both VanCity and Coast Capital Savings Credit Unions and by Community Futures organizations across B.C. provide funds based upon "character and strength of business plan." DTES businesses had access to loans through PEACH (Partners for Economic and Community Help), funded as part of the Vancouver Agreement.

There is a problem, however, in accessing long-term, "patient and friendly capital". Non-profit groups typically have little or no accumulated equity and may be barred from risking what assets they do have. Low-income communities can mobilize sweat equity, but hard cash is needed for start-up of most businesses. Businesses that require capital investment are thereby out of reach for B.C. social enterprises because there are few equity programs that will consider investment in social enterprise.



Building human capital- Industry-based training: Training is expensive, particularly for those without employment experience or with significant gaps in their employment record. Nevertheless, the demand for food service industry workers is projected to increase over the next 10 years. Some training businesses, such as Cook Studio Cafe, produce entry-level workers and are gaining industry support and investment, which in turn improves the potential for government funding. However, a comprehensive food industry training development strategy is required in order to meet the challenges of training people who have been marginalized to work in this competitive, low-margin but strong entry-level industry.



Building human capital- Self-employment training and opportunity development in the food industry: Several self-employment training programs report that their participants are interested in launching food enterprises; however, there is a lack of comprehensive information available about the industry and opportunities. There is room for a food business incubation centre operated on a for-profit basis.

REQUIREMENTS FOR DEVELOPMENT OF A SOCIAL ECONOMY FOOD SYSTEM

Shifting the charitable food system- Social value innovation: Shifting the food system from a charity to a self-sustaining model will require social value innovation throughout the system. The major shifts will be:

- engaging charity recipients in reinventing the system;
- shifting from competition to “co-opetition”-co-operation among competitors to achieve common goals-in the charitable food sector;
- shifting from the mode of charitable giving to an investment mentality;
- creating mechanisms for accountability throughout the system;
- building relations within the food shed (the agricultural region surrounding Vancouver) between food industry representatives and those interested in food and social enterprise.

Public/private partnership to foster growth in the food industry- Economic value innovation: Food Chicago brought together the city, private industry and the non-profit sector to facilitate a strategic development capacity plan within the food industry that has created and saved jobs, helped those with poor skills to upgrade, assisted companies to find investment and fostered entrepreneurship while providing sector support. A food institute capable of providing direction to an emerging local food industry in Vancouver would be invaluable.

The need for financial equity- Economic value innovation: There is a need for funds that can be used to foster economic action in the food sector. Cur-

rently many agencies actively raise funds, each for its own agency support and charitable goals. Developing a co-operative fundraising strategy could help engage the organizations now operating in the food sector in making the necessary shift from the charity approach to an investment approach.

Support for enterprise development- Economic value innovation: Many new enterprises can emerge when a supportive infrastructure is available. A food business opportunity centre would educate and support organizations, co-ops and individuals who wish to participate in the food industry as part of a social economy strategy. Development of shared commercial community kitchens, licensed to produce food for sale in Vancouver, could support street food vendors and sales of prepared food at farmers' markets. A commercial manufacturing kitchen has proven to be a major stimulator of organizational sustainability for several American food banks.



*Downtown Eastside
Community Kitchen Project*



SECTION 4

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR A SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEM IN VANCOUVER

The research conducted for this report indicates a number of opportunities to enhance the sustainability of Vancouver's food system and to address food security issues while promoting financial, environmental and social sustainability.



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FOOD-RELATED SOCIAL ECONOMY

1. CONVENE A FOOD AND SOCIAL ECONOMY CONGRESS

Representatives from social enterprise, co-op, food action and alternative (socially responsible businesses), and food industry organizations should convene to review this report and consider the creation of a Vancouver Food Economy Development Strategy. The strategy should outline a comprehensive approach to relocalizing food production, processing and distribution. It should also support creation of jobs and other opportunities for participation by those most vulnerable to hunger. In addition, the congress should stimulate engagement with the concept of social enterprise in the food sector by presenting theory, models, and practical examples. Focus should also be given to analysis of issues faced by social enterprises that have not succeeded.

2. CREATE A FOOD SOCIAL ECONOMY CENTRE

In its role as manager of the new Social Economy program, Western Economic Diversification Canada should provide support for initiating and developing a social economy within the food sector. A Food Social Economy Centre could take the lead in the following ways:

- Developing and supporting the relationships needed to catalyze a social economy in the food sector
- organizing/mobilizing technical assistance resources to support new initiatives
- developing a comprehensive infrastructure to support food enterprises
- conducting feasibility studies for food-related projects (such as a buying consortium for non-profit organizations to mobilize demand for local and fairly traded products.)
- mobilizing partners and funding/investment for food-related social enterprises
- organizing enhanced training opportunities in food-related businesses
- promoting farm to school/campus/hospital/government programs
- encouraging urban agriculture on an economic basis

3. CONDUCT FEASIBILITY STUDIES INTO KEY FOOD MANUFACTURING SOCIAL ENTERPRISES

As part of a strategy to redesign the food system, the feasibility of developing a food-manufacturing kitchen should be studied. This facility could be developed in partnership with existing industry groups and could support food entrepreneurship as well as develop and manufacture in-house brand products. Efforts should be made to seek out industry partners to invest in and use such a facility.

4. ENHANCE FUNDING AND INVESTMENT CAPITAL FOR FOOD-RELATED SOCIAL ENTERPRISE

A food system equity fund should be developed, drawing on social economy funds made available by and leveraged through partnerships with investing agencies such as credit unions and social capital funds. In addition, the Government of Canada should provide a loan loss reserve fund to support equity investment in food enterprises on the part of credit unions and Community Futures organizations.

5. ENHANCE TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES IN FOOD-RELATED BUSINESSES

In partnership with existing food-based training businesses and the food industry, a broad-based training business model should be developed. Governments should be encouraged to implement policies that allow trainees to receive on-the-job training without being disqualified from receiving social assistance or employment insurance benefits. Agencies that deliver self-employment training should be encouraged to meet with food CED groups such as local food social enterprises and the Small Scale Food Processor Association to develop a sectoral support strategy for self-employed food entrepreneurs.

6. DEVELOP A STRATEGY FOR THE FOOD-RELATED SOCIAL ENTERPRISE SECTOR

A strategy to develop social enterprises for the food industry should be pursued. The strategy should include securing resources for developing a leadership group to further map resources, develop a sectoral strategic plan and mobilize support for the plan.

7. PROMOTE FARM TO SCHOOL/CAMPUS/HOSPITAL/GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS

Partnerships should be developed whereby local farmers provide fresh produce, meat and dairy products to large institutional consumers of food such as schools, university campuses and hospitals.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE CHARITABLE FOOD SECTOR

8. ENHANCE PUBLIC ACCOUNTABILITY AND TRANSPARENCY OF THE CHARITABLE FOOD SYSTEM

Mechanisms must be put in place to enhance the accountability of the charitable food system. Food providers should be required to provide safe and healthy food in a manner that assures dignity of access and sensitivity to community issues. We suggest a voluntary code of responsible and ethical management practices. For example, programs and services must treat participants with respect - no line-ups, sensitive and well-trained staff, nutritious, clean and culturally appropriate food. Furthermore, each agency could adopt standards for the food distributed through the system - no “junk” food, only fresh, not expired, items, and ensuring that food storage places are not infested with vermin. A board comprised of both food providers and consumers should monitor this code and provide recommendations to participating agencies.

9. ENSURE THAT CHARITABLE FOOD PROVIDERS INCLUDE CAPACITY-BUILDING IN THEIR PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

In addition to providing emergency food, charitable food providers and food banks should adopt a broader strategy to include building community sustainability and supporting their clients in becoming self-reliant.⁵⁴

10. Develop hybrid models that link charitable and social enterprise efforts to provide healthy and affordable food. The Food Bank Farm in Western Massachusetts and STOP Community Food Centre in Toronto are two examples.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVING ACCESS TO COMMUNITY FOOD SECURITY RESOURCES

11. SUPPORT FARMERS’ MARKETS IN LOW-INCOME NEIGHBORHOODS

A strategy should be developed to make farmers’ markets more accessible to low-income populations, including strategies such as providing subsidies in the form of coupons, hiring neighbourhood residents, tailoring product mix to the needs, tastes and incomes of the community, and developing transit programs to bring people to the market.⁵⁵

12. EXPLORE THE POSSIBILITY OF DEVELOPING A WHOLESALE FARMERS’ MARKET

Wholesale farmers’ markets, such as the one being developed in New York City, enable local producers to achieve the economies of scale necessary to compete with imported product and build local economies.

13. PUBLICIZE THE IMPORTANCE OF BUYING LOCAL

A program should be developed to educate individuals and institutions about the benefits of buying local food: greater freshness and higher nutritional value, reduced pollution associated with transpor-

tation and enhanced economic security for local farmers and processors. A certification program for locally grown food should be developed, and local/regional branding efforts should be supported.

14. INCREASE THE NUMBER OF COMMUNITY GARDENS

A strategy should be developed to increase the number and accessibility of community gardens in Vancouver. Components of the strategy should include: amending the Comprehensive Zoning Bylaw to designate community gardens as a permitted use in all zones; incorporating community gardens as an option in the planning and redesign of facilities such as community centres and leisure areas; working with private landowners and other levels of government to identify where community gardens might be established on land or adjacent to facilities not owned by the city; and including consideration of community gardens in the evaluation of priority use of land owned by the city. A process to identify land owned by the city that could be used for community gardens should be developed and implemented.⁵⁶

RECOMMENDATIONS WITH REGARD TO THE RETAIL FOOD SECTOR

15. IMPROVE ACCESS TO RETAIL STORES

The City should examine a variety of ways to improve access to retail food. Consideration should be given to the following strategies: 1) supporting the development of co-operative food stores and food buying clubs; 2) establishing Good Neighbour Programs, in which stores serving low-income communities are encouraged to increase the availability of healthier food products;⁵⁷ 3) mobile stores, providing home delivery of groceries at competitive prices for seniors and others with barriers to mobility; 4) store shuttles that are free, do not require a minimum purchase and are available to those with low incomes; and 5) promoting healthy mobile food vending to improve the accessibility of healthy foods in neighbourhoods without quality grocery stores as well as near schools.

16. MARKET CHINATOWN FOOD RESOURCES TO SURROUNDING NEIGHBOURHOODS

Chinatown merchants are increasingly aware of the need to market their products to a non-Chinese market. There have already been efforts to make food more accessible through bi-lingual signage, discount coupons, and shopping tours of Chinatown. Other suggestions would be to provide lists of affordable meals available in Chinatown to surrounding communities and to conduct cooking demonstrations to introduce customers to unfamiliar foods. It is also recommended that representatives from the Chinatown merchants association and local community groups meet to discuss other ways in which this important food resource can be promoted within the surrounding community.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CITY FOOD POLICY AND THE FOOD POLICY COUNCIL

17. CONTINUE TO MONITOR VANCOUVER'S FOOD SYSTEM

Using this report as a baseline for ongoing studies of food issues, the City of Vancouver should implement a monitoring program for the food system. The program should monitor indicators related to food pricing, the availability and use of community food resources, the needs of populations vulnerable to food insecurity (e.g. through tracking food bank use), and food production and distribution in the GVRD. Organizations and agencies involved with food security should be strongly encouraged to share information openly.

18. PROMOTE SUSTAINABLE FOOD PROCUREMENT FOR THE 2010 OLYMPICS

Food provided to athletes and attendees at the 2010 Winter Olympics should be sourced locally wherever possible. Local food should be given a central role in efforts to showcase and use local products, providing markets for local farmers and opportunities to promote local foods to an international audience.

19. INCLUDE PURCHASE OF LOCAL FOODS IN THE CITY'S ETHICAL PROCUREMENT POLICIES

The City should seek local sources for some of the approximately \$3.7 million in food purchased each year on behalf of Parks and Recreation and the Community Services Group, which provides meals at Carnegie and Evelyn Saller Centres and at the Gathering Place. Sourcing some of this food locally would provide important markets to regional farmers and reduce the amount of greenhouse gas emissions related to food transport, consistent with the City's green procurement policy as it relates to food.

20. EXPAND THE ROLE OF URBAN AGRICULTURE IN CITY-LED DEVELOPMENT

More should be done to incorporate urban agriculture into new developments, including increasing the availability of garden, greenhouse and rooftop garden space and developing a package of incentives such as density bonuses and tax credits for developers who incorporate urban agriculture into their designs.

21. REVIEW CITY BY-LAWS

In light of the findings in this report, a number of City bylaws should be revised or reviewed, including: *Health By-law No. 6580*⁵⁸ regulates the keeping of livestock and other animals within the City. This by-law is being reviewed in relation to the keeping of bees. The keeping of ducks, chickens, squabs, quail and rabbits should also be considered.

*Distribution (and Marketing), License By-law No. 4450*⁵⁹ outlines licensing requirements for business operators, including farmers' markets, caterers, restaurants and food service outlets. Policies related to this bylaw should be amended to allow, for example, permanent indoor, year-round farmers' markets containing production and processing facilities.

*Street Vending Bylaw No. 4781*⁶⁰ regulates mobile food vending units. Policies should be amended to encourage sales of fresh, culturally diverse and nutritious food as an alternative to junk food. Consideration should be given to licensing vendors through a co-op which would offer training in areas such as customer service and food handling and safety.

Zoning and Development By-law No. 3575 regulates zoning and development. This by-law should be re-examined with a view to finding ways to be more supportive of farmers' markets.⁶¹

22. MAP BIO-REGIONAL SUPPLY-SIDE FACTORS

Because information about the sources of what we actually eat in Vancouver is very difficult to track due to the way agricultural information is managed, a primary research project working with Frazer Valley partners to map the flow of food and to track the import and distribution patterns of food is required.

OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS

23. REVIEW THE INFORMATION REPORT: SUPERMARKETS IN VANCOUVER⁶²

The 1998 report describing changes in food retailing in Vancouver between 1980 and 1998 should be updated, and ongoing monitoring of the distribution of grocery stores should be undertaken.

24. REESTABLISH FOOD SECURITY AS A COMPONENT OF THE VANCOUVER AGREEMENT

A major priority of the Vancouver Agreement is sustainable economic and social development to increase local business investment and to provide jobs for local residents. Given this mandate, food, food systems and food security should be reinstated as part of the Agreement and included in the five-year plan.

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City of Vancouver's Community Web Pages: Website http://vancouver.ca/community_profiles/

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