



Summary Report

Your Local Food Future: A Kootenay Region Dialogue

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On November 13, 2014, the Real Estate Foundation of BC in collaboration with the BC Sustainable Food Systems Working Group hosted a dialogue on sustainable and local food systems Cranbrook, BC. The purpose of the dialogue was to bring together food system thought leaders from the Kootenay Region to discuss priorities for education, research and policy to support a sustainable food system future. The dialogue was one of six held throughout the province. Dialogues were also held in Prince George, Kamloops, Kelowna, Nanaimo and Richmond.

Invitations to the Cranbrook dialogue were sent to thirty people with the aim of gaining representation from food producers, processors, academics and researchers, planners, regional health authorities, regional agrologists, First Nations, community organizations, and others engaged in local food system activities.

At the dialogue, three central questions were posed for discussion:

1. What defines a sustainable food system for your region?
2. What are the opportunities for/challenges to development of a sustainable food system for your region and how would you prioritize them?
3. What are the priority actions that should be taken?

This document summarizes the information gathered at the Cranbrook dialogue. Information was transcribed from attendee materials (Post- it notes, worksheets and poster paper), and from notes taken by facilitator Caitriona Feeney.

A comprehensive report on the findings from all six region dialogues will follow in early 2015.

Dialogue Location: Cranbrook, B.C., College of the Rockies Campus

Date: Thursday, November 13th, 2014

Facilitators: Caitriona Feeney; Cornelia Sussmann

Number of Attendees: 10

Attendee Names and Affiliations:

Allison Bell, Educator

Shannon Duncan, Wildsight; Cranbrook Food
Action Committee

Gerri Gardiner, College of the Rockies

Kerri Hobbs, College of the Rockies

Adrian Leslie, Selkirk College

Karen Macleod, Planner RD of East Kootenay

Sharon Malmberg, Food Producer

Mike Malmberg, Food Producer

Lars Sander- Green, Wildsight

Dave Zender, Food Producer

Observers:

Riley Wilcox, Cranbrook and District Community
Foundation

Jack Wong, Real Estate Foundation of BC

Kelly Lerigny, Real Estate Foundation of BC

Dr. K. Mullinix, BC sustainable Food Systems

Working Group; KPU

Conversation 1: What defines a sustainable food system for the Kootenay Region?

What we heard:

A sustainable food system for the Kootenay region has agriculture that is rooted in functioning local ecosystems. The system includes wildlife and recognizes ecosystem cycles like fire cycles and predator/prey cycles. It produces food for the local community and contributes to local food security. The system is financially viable for food producers, processors and retailers, and financially affordable for local consumers. A sustainable food system has access to a secured local land base. It is supported by a community that is knowledgeable about food systems. A sustainable food system is linked to global or extra-local food systems.

Some of the participant comments we recorded:

Grounded in regional ecosystems capacity

- What can be produced in the region is produced in the region
- Food production is relevant to the ecology of the area and the climate
- Connected to local places: seasonal, appropriate land use
- Produced in a way that restores soils as opposed to degrading soils; provides ecosystem services that benefit local ecology by maintaining water quality, wildlife habitat
- Low carbon: any sustainable system must reflect the realities of climate change and greenhouse gas emissions

Feeds the local community

- Systems must provide food products to the local community
- Systems that align with local demand
- Integrated with the community landscape
- Food security is important
- Connection between rural and urban populations

An Integrated system with inter-related outcomes

- Agriculture, ranching, farming, processing and producers, distributors, NPOs, funders and environmental agencies work collectively toward an integrated system that can provide food and economic security to the region in which the food is produced, harvested and processed
- Environmentally sustainable practices produce accessible, affordable food that is also profitable for producer to earn a living.
- Integrates producers and consumers within the system so that economic, social and environmental returns are recognized
- Environmentally aware growth, production and utilization of food that secures and promotes a healthy lifestyle
- An aware and actively engaged community is involved in collaborative food system related efforts rather than in competition.
- Healthy for people, for environment

Financially viable

- Economically sustainable and provides a living wage for farmers and people who work at all stages of the food system
- Financial profitability is a critical element of sustainability.

Long term

- Truly sustainable in the sense that we can keep doing it indefinitely

Conversation 2: What are the opportunities for/challenges to sustainable food systems in the Kootenay region and how would you prioritize them?

Attendees were presented with a list of opportunities for/challenges to sustainable food systems compiled from Kootenay region publications such as Agriculture Plans, Food Systems Reports, and Official Community Plans. Attendees were asked to add any missing opportunity/challenge areas, and then to prioritize the complete list.

Prioritized list of opportunity/challenge areas

The number in brackets indicates the number of attendees who identified the opportunity area as a top priority for action.

1. Financial viability of agriculture (7)
2. Education for public, policy-makers, and producers (6)
3. Processing, distribution and marketing infrastructure (4)
4. Labour constraints (3)
5. Lack of industry cluster that could draw suppliers and others (3)
6. Funding for accommodating ecosystems on farms (2)
7. More funding streams for agriculture (eg. Columbia Basis Trust) (2)
8. Accessibility to local food for people of all incomes (2)
9. Local food in restaurants and stores (1)

Discussion notes

In discussion about the priority opportunity/challenge areas for sustainable food systems in the Kootenay, the following issues were highlighted and information shared.

Financial viability of agriculture

- Developing a financially viable system for food producers and others in the system is part of dealing with all of the other challenges.
- The Columbia Basin Trust is working on a funding stream for agriculture and food for 2016
 - They currently have a survey online: Our Trust Our Future
- Future climate change represents both financial challenges and opportunities. We need to identify what the opportunities will be.
- Cooperation would be helpful. Producers get together to discuss crops/production, for example the Kootenay Co-op in Nelson.
- Labour constraints impact the current financial viability of farming. It is tough to get farm labour in this region. Other industries pay more.
- We need farm training opportunities that pay a living wage; perhaps some supported programs, for example people who are on EI and want to retrain.

- The middle- large scale family ranches are part of agriculture. We need to have that focus as well as smaller scale
- There is pressure for land to change to golf courses. Once we go there we can't get the land back.
- New people are not entering the field. Who is going to farm in the future?

Education for public, policy-makers, and producers

- We need public education, at all levels, on food systems and sustainability
- It would be good to have something like a 4H club but more about food production
- Look at Windermere District Farmers Institute and the work they do
- Policy makers need to be educated about food systems and sustainability
- Programs where farmers bring kids out to the farm; mentorship of youth

Processing, distribution and marketing infrastructure

- We need access to commercial kitchens
- There are barriers to having local food on restaurant menus and in food stores
 - It would be good to have a food broker who could liaise with chefs and owners and make access to local food easy for chefs and owners. An example of that kind of broker is in Missoula, Montana
- Improving distribution networks is an opportunity to explore
- Increased demand for local food
- Lack of processing and abattoirs in the area
- Re-localize processing infrastructure
- Waste recovery is important
- We need facilities to test food and water. Now we have to send it out of town for testing and that takes too long.

Payment for ecosystem services

- There are restrictions for farmers in accommodating ecosystems on farmland
 - We could add to the financial viability of farming by identifying and monitoring ecosystem services farmers maintain on their land, and pay them for maintaining those services.
 - It is tough to get farmers to invest in the ecosystem services without help such as funded programs and monitoring
 - There is a challenge to maintaining ecosystem services when the landscape becomes fragmented.

Discussion around other opportunity/challenge areas included the following information and comments.

Food security and accessibility

- What does food security actually mean- how can we feed ourselves if the roads close?
- A project I have always wanted to see done would be: analyze what the regional demand is for food, based on Canada Food Guide, and compare that to what we currently produce. Then we could figure out roughly how much of our demand we could actually meet in this region
- Food needs to be accessible to consumers of different income brackets
 - The nutritional coupon program at farmers market is good
- It would be helpful to reduce the amount of waste; increase waste recovery

Water

- Water and irrigation are issues of concern
- The City of Cranbrook is one of the biggest per capita water users in BC
- The provincial government used to inspect dams and maintain them on farmland. Now the cost is being transferred to farmers. If it is going to cost \$30,000 to inspect and repair a dam, some farmers will just take the dams down.

Conversation 3: Actions for Prioritized Opportunity/Challenge Areas

Dialogue attendees ranked the following three opportunity/challenge areas as the most important for immediate action.

Prioritized Opportunity/Challenge areas

1. Financial viability of agriculture
2. Education for public, policy-makers, and producers
3. Processing, distribution and marketing infrastructure

Attendees offered specific ideas for action in each of the three areas.

Ideas for Action

Financial viability of agriculture

- Fund continued research and pilot projects on paying farmers for on-going maintenance and enhancement of on-farm ecosystem services
- Connect producers to land through land sharing program
- Incubator farmer/food producer group: hires a professional manager who works with individuals and the group on financial strategies and plans. The group would then decide where and how to target their resources.
- Look at Kaslo Food hub to see what they are doing successfully
- Set up an innovation fund for producers so they can experiment and innovate with lower risk of financial penalty. For example, trials of new crops.
- Get an economist to look at the financial viability of a few local food enterprises: report on financial viability of local vegetable production, beef production etc.
- Get a group of food producers work together to reduce some costs of production; start a buying group
- Create land trust for agricultural land. The trust purchases farmland at a fair price and holds it in trust. Trust then leases the land to young farmers at an affordable rate. Could be a lease-to-own situation created by REF BC.
- Subsidy is an often maligned term, but there are innovative ways to support farmers and we need to research and identify what these are.
- Research to identify specific products around which clusters can form – leads to multiple producers working together and develop economies of scale so they can afford proper infrastructure

Education for producers, public, and policy makers

Producers

- Programs like internships, grants, or other to fund students to learn and practice on farms to secure future sustainable practices.

- Workshops, educational events, networking etc. for small producers and budding farmers
- Continuing education opportunities and funding for people who want to learn the skills to become farmers
- We need some funded farm training programs that pay decently
- Develop a mechanism/tool/organization for local producers to share information about best practices
- Business education programs, part time or sessional on agriculture, including marketing, succession planning, production, harvesting
- On the ground education of trainable skills for farmers;
- We need information from economic studies on regionally appropriate food production enterprises and local processing enterprise, distribution or marketing infrastructure
- For producers we need some information/research on the potential impacts of climate change: how will growing degree days and frost free days change? What crops should they consider growing in a changing climate?
- Fund a position, like an Agricultural Liaison Officer, who can bridge information gaps and act as a resource for producers, government and prospective producers.

Public

- Get food education in schools as primary curriculum not just as supplemental or voluntary; a core teaching area in the school system that is valued as highly as math, science and English.
- Develop programs that show public where, how and when local food is produced, how to access it, and how to eat seasonally and preserve local food.
- Use public spaces (gardens, kitchens) as platforms for sharing local knowledge; host guest presenters.
- Promote connectivity between existing organizations for example, Kootenay Local Agriculture is promoted in the west but not east region
- Education needs to be systematic and adequately funded.
- Fencing: a huge barrier to operation is maintaining fences for protection from highways. Youth group that could come out and learn skills like aquad, chainsaw, farm work and be paid to do so.
- Programs where farmers bring kids out to the farm; mentorship of youth

Policy Makers

- Food systems should be a priority for all levels of government.
- Promote food policy councils for all municipalities and regional districts.
- Policy-need people to champion the policy in the Official Community Plansf
- Develop easy talking points for policy makers, on the economic importance of agriculture in their own regions

Infrastructure for processing, distributing and marketing

- Create a hub to house equipment and provide services for producers; this would also provide networking opportunities
- Provide seed funding to identify the right scale for effective cooperation in marketing and distribution. This would be more efficient for small farmers who have limited time to devote to marketing and distribution.
- Funding mechanism to help establish local shared facilities such as commercial kitchens, test facilities, storage facilities
- Pilot mobile facilities for use among communities
- Identify and propose removal of legislative barriers to small scale processing – egg grading, mobile abattoirs etc.; for producer coops so they can work together to form, for example, certified community kitchens for processing
- Economist to look at and report on financial viability of some local processing enterprise, distribution or marketing infrastructure. Gather data from local producers to populate hypothetical model developed by focus group.
- Create a distribution and marketing model for bringing together producers and suppliers. Model could be replicated in all regions.
- Find funding sources to help develop local distribution networks and new markets
- Explore and pilot new approaches to marketing, retail and distribution at the right scale for local producers
- Mechanism for supporting the set-up of local infrastructure. For example, a local abattoir could reduce costs for producers.

What happens next?

In February 2015 a comprehensive report on the information gathered at all six regional dialogues will be released to the public. The report will summarize findings and identify region specific as well as pan-regional priority areas for action toward sustainable food systems. As a dialogue participant/invitee, you will receive an emailed copy of the report. The Real Estate Foundation of BC will be hosting a webinar to share findings from the dialogues. Information on the date and registration for the webinar will be emailed to you in January of 2015. If you have any questions or comments about this summary, the up-coming comprehensive report, or the dialogue series in general, please do not hesitate to contact us.

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