

## **Summary: Land Access for Farmers, A Community Networking Event**

**January 24, 2016 at the Echo Center in Port Alberni**

### **Part 1: Local Community Initiatives**

#### **1. City of Port Alberni Mayor, Mike Ruttan: (Food security, Local initiatives and Economic Opportunities)**

- Within 2 generations we have gone from being a food sovereign island to producing only 5% of our local food.
- Hay is currently our biggest crop and the average of farmer is 55.
- Vancouver Island has incredible assets geographically, and Port Alberni hosts the most diverse climate on Vancouver Island.
- In an emergency, Vancouver Island has only a 5 day food supply.
- The City of Port Alberni has a very proactive agenda with regards to food. The recently founded Food Security and Climate Disruption Committee makes recommendations to city council. Latest recommendations include planting fruit trees, nut trees, and gardens along bike lanes. In addition, it was recommended that the city implement a pilot kitchen/yard waste pickup compost pilot project. The full report can be [viewed online](#) (scroll down to the bolded page number 31).

#### **2. Sherry Lyons (School Gardens)**

- Actively seeking assistance to grow and maintain the Alberni Elementary School garden
- Following are different ways to help:
  1. Write to the School District 70 Board requesting that they endorse school gardens and create a district wide school garden policy.
  2. Experienced gardeners can commit to maintaining the garden throughout the summer months in exchange for produce.
  3. Experienced gardeners can volunteer to help kids and teachers in an outdoor classroom context during the school year.
- The garden has operated using organic principles since inception and there is a compost onsite.
- Conversation ensued around the development of a template for letters and petitions, in both hard copy and electronic format. (AV Chatterbox/Alberni.ca and Survey Monkey were all suggested).
- Please contact Sherry to assist (list of contacts attached).

#### **3. Janette Cormier (Dry Creek Community Garden)**

- The Young Professionals of the Alberni Valley started the Dry Creek Community Garden in 2013.
- Have a lease in place with the city for the site (\$1/year plus the city supplies water).

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- There are currently fourteen 4'X6' beds that are rented out at \$25/year and a wait list of 6 people looking for beds.
- There are 6 communal beds with perennial fruits and herbs.
- The community garden was built with the potential for expansion but would need someone to spearhead an expansion project.
- There is a plan to plant nut and fruit trees as well.
- The city was instrumental in the development of the community garden and local businesses were highly supportive of the initiative, with donations and/or reduced costs for materials.

### **4. Maggie Paquet (Establishing Allotment Gardens in Port Alberni)**

- Ideally, each neighbourhood in Port Alberni would have its own allotment garden. Could perhaps be combined with compost project.
- Maggie has identified 5 potential sites across north and south Port Alberni.
- Criteria used to assess spots:
  1. Is it big enough?
  2. Are there no neighbours too close?
  3. Is there access to water?
- The low Canadian dollar and extended drought for our southern neighbours is affecting our food chain could be used as an opportunity to mobilize people towards greater food production.
- There are many associated health benefits from knowing where your food is coming from.
- Probably room for a dozen gardens within municipality.
- One could collectively sell excess produce to raise funds for reinvestment.
- Vision for allotment gardens:
  - 4 X 10,12,16, or 20 foot beds.
  - Rules of engagement for each garden,
  - People sign agreement and do required maintenance,
  - Each plot would have some wheelchair access,
  - No pesticides and organic principles followed,
  - Include specialty gardens (i.e. Herb/pollinator/First Nations)
- Maggie will continue her reconnaissance of identifying potential sites and then take the initiative before the city.

### **5. Anna Lewis (Opportunities with CMHA Healthy Harvest Farm)**

- Healthy Harvest is run by Canadian Mental Health and provides clients with an opportunity to learn and grow in a supportive, low stress environment. The

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operation provides 6 people with a small monthly stipend as a supplement to their disability cheque.

- The farm runs a small box program and attends the occasional farmers' market. Currently focussing on expanding the onsite self-serve farm gate sales stand.
- Have large unheated greenhouse and outside beds.
- Many opportunities for community member to volunteer and learn. Anna has no problem delegating tasks! There is always lots to do.
- Follows the biodynamic calendar whenever possible and grows organically, using soil blocking techniques and compost.
- Produce stand is open 9-1 weekdays (currently only 2X per week but by March back up to 5).

### **6. Gary Swann (Apprentice Opportunities with Leda Farm)**

- Every Tuesday is 'Woofers Tuesday' from 9-12. Volunteers are welcome to help and learn biodynamic growing techniques.
- The farm follows the biodynamic calendar, which can be ordered via the farm.
- If federal funding is granted for a student in May, it will be an excellent opportunity for someone continuing on to further education, and between the ages of 15-30, to gain farming experience.
- Gary often hosts educational workshops onsite or in the community
  - He will be giving his annual biodynamic talk at North Island College, 7-9pm on February 25th.
- Leda farm is beginning to offer biodynamic preparations for sale. If you participate in a barrel compost workshop you will receive a cup of compost (enough for a vast quantity of land).
- "I consider the Biodynamic preparation recipes to be the greatest gift any one man (Dr. Rudolph Steiner) has given to humanity." -Peter Baachus.

### **7. Rick and Jane Jorgensen (View Street Market, Online Forum for Local Opportunities)**

- February 1<sup>st</sup> is the launch of their online website providing a web-based platform to buy local products.
- Provides a full, comprehensive profile service to farmers including uploading pictures, inventory, etc.
- Will also provide a platform for agriculturally related information/links/events
- Will have a farm gate sale site at their View Street home and a distribution and pick-up location
- Urban farm operation, showcasing what can be done within city limits

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### **8. Heather Shobe/Anna Lewis (Alberni-Clayoquot Regional District Agricultural Initiatives)**

- Heather and Anna are currently contracted by ACRD to support the regional agricultural industry
- Near end of current term, final report will be published and available online or via email list by the end of March
- Projects:
  - Applied for funding for a project in support of Agricultural Use of Water to:
    - provide cost analysis of reduced water rates for agricultural users, and
    - develop policy and procedure for a rainwater harvesting rebate program for cisterns and larger on-farm systems, possibly featuring an on-farm pilot project
  - Abattoir Feasibility Study
    - ACRD will be hiring consultant to complete a feasibility study for a local abattoir (slaughterhouse)
    - Livestock census underway – input is critical
    - Livestock survey can be completed [online at Survey Monkey](#) or in person
  - Events
    - [West Coast Farm and Garden Show](#), Feb 27/28 at the Tofino Botanical Gardens
      - Opportunity for farmers to connect with West Coast buyers
      - Looking for donations of local food in exchange for tickets
      - Educational Workshop/Conference Series, \$20/weekend
      - Carpool stipends available through Marcus Lobb
    - [Island Agricultural Show](#), 2017
      - Looking for volunteer help and ideas/support for planning conferences/events/speakers
      - Planning meeting February 2nd, 7pm at the ACRD office, everyone welcome to attend
      - Great opportunity to showcase, provincially, all the assets of the Alberni Valley

### **9. Marcus Lobb (Alberni Valley Transition Town Society – Regional Food Hub Roundtable Project)**

- Marcus has a contract with AVTTS as their Food Group Coordinator and is continuing work on the regional 'Food Hub' initiative with funding from Vancouver Island Health Authority.
- Will be hosting a series of community roundtables for food security organizations and is seeking input from farmers and others with food security in their mandate
- The roundtable process will lead to the development of a Community Food Action Plan for implementation.
- Marcus is arranging ride shares and has a carpool stipend available for attendance at the West Coast Farm and Garden Show.

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### Part 2: Land Leasing and Opportunities

#### 1. Heather Shobe (Land Leasing: Policy, Technicalities, and Best Practices)

The Young Agrarians organization has done significant work to increase land leasing opportunities for youth. They have, free on the internet, a [Land Access Guide](#) which covers many of these points and more, and includes examples lease agreements.

- Arranging contracts and leases, even when barter is involved, is perfectly acceptable from a legal standpoint and there are way to report those costs and arrangements on things like tax returns and business plans.
- There are many modes of accessing land– leasing, licenses, renting, co-operatives, crop sharing, incubator plots, allotments, community farms as per earlier. Consult the Land Access Guide
- Land can be leased either as a partial portion, or as a whole piece.
  - for example, someone can own and live in a house on 20 acres and lease only a portion, say 2 acres, of that land.
  - alternately, they could lease the whole property, house included.
- Land can be leased either on a long term basis, or on a short term basis.
  - A year to year lease can include an ‘option to renew’
- Care needs to be taken when leasing a portion of a parcel of land for a long term.
  - If a portion (not the entire parcel), is leased for 5 years or more, it needs to go through the subdivision approval office
  - Alternative would be to lease year to year with option to renew
  - If it is the entire portion being leased this requirement does not apply.
- Make sure you comply with zoning bylaws
  - info can be found on the [City of Port Alberni website](#), with new zoning bylaws to address agricultural operations
  - Also on [ACRD website](#) and in [Alberni Agricultural Plan](#)
- Farm Status for property tax purposes
  - Land owners can apply to the [BC Assessment Authority](#) to have property classified as Farm Status and thus receive certain benefits
  - Benefits are reduced property taxes, ability to use marked gas, (cheaper/better quality) for farm vehicles, and certain PST benefits
  - To be eligible, you must be farming the land, and be able to show sales receipts
    - If less than 2 acres, you must show \$10,000 of receipts
    - If more than 2 acres, you only need to show \$2500 of receipts
  - If a person is leasing property to farm, the owner can still apply for farm status, and this could make offering a lease more attractive.
  - If it is a lease for farm tax purposes, the lease must be at least 2 acres in size (ie, you can’t lease a small plot and have it rated farm status).
  - an example of savings, and this will vary, would be about \$1000–2000/year for 2–3 acres.
  - This is significant to a home owner who has land available.
  - Farm status is actually a pretty easy procedure – need to have diagram of property, answer some questions, be willing to show receipts. [More info online](#)

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- One of YA's main findings has been that clarity or goal/vision on both sides is the biggest indicator of a successful land leasing match
  - Farmers
    - what crops? what seasons? what focus? what market? what scale? what resources do you need – tools/buildings/water/soils, need for financial security, time available
  - Leassors
    - how much privacy do you want? Do you want to mentor? What can you offer –water/buildings/equipment?
- Key points to discuss
  - Water
    - accessibility –well/city/how much available?
    - cost
    - At minimum a farmer will generally have to pay a land owner the costs for water. If on municipal or regional system, it may be significant
    - In on a well, the owner will have to know whether his reserves are high enough to support an ag operation
  - Soil
    - type/suitability for planned crops
  - Structures/equipment
    - what will you need/what can you offer?
  - Privacy issues
    - some will want to be talkative best friends and others will want total privacy. If not addressed, you may be in for a surprise.
- Work within your term
  - If a long term lease, and/or you will be putting in substantial financial improvements, like fencing/buildings, it is strongly recommended to consult a lawyer and draft an agreement.
  - If short term, and without cash input it is less important, but the labour and effort you will put into good soil can be devastating to lose nonetheless
- Young Agrarians will be presenting a workshop at the [Island Agricultural Show](#) in North Cowichan February

## **2. Anna Lewis (Current Local Land Leasing Opportunities)**

1. **Vaughn Chase:** 2 acres of trellised grapes. Vaughn is interested in having someone look after the grapes in exchange for all the grapes produced. There is also another 10 acres that is currently unused and could be leased/rented if the right leasee was found.
2. **Craig Bowerman:** 50+ acres (likely about 80 acres) located out towards Franklin River. At one time this property produced a huge quantity of potatoes and other vegetables that were sold into grocery stores. The outbuildings are somewhat dilapidated but there is cold storage that could hold 500 tonnes of potatoes. There is a farmhouse onsite that is currently rented but could possibly be negotiated.

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3. **Kathy and Kerry of Avalon Farm:** Land has been organically managed for the 13 years they have owned the farm.
  - General assets include:
    - Water source: Seasonal creek / dug well into permanent Water table
    - Infrastructure: Haying Machinery, 2 Tractors, Front end loader, back hoe, 1 ton flat deck truck
    - Small cabin and RV – farm worker accommodation
    - Irrigation systems set up to all garden areas and blueberry fields
  - There are 3 different areas available for consideration.
    1. Spring, summer, fall grazing: 14 acres.
      - a. Needs fencing improvements
      - b. Currently horse pasture
      - c. Low ground, not good for winter pasture
      - d. Could be prime potato growing area – peat soil. Currently in pasture grass
    2. Five acre Organic Hay field
      - a. Could be partially sectioned off for vegetable crops
      - b. Higher land, good drainage
      - c. Higher pH – good for mixed crops
    3. 1.5 acres Certified Organic Blueberries
      - a. Very successful, fully subscribed market, young plantation with great potential
      - b. Would consider a partial lease – or profit sharing model, as they'd like help in the growing/production end!
4. **Apprenticeship/Mentorship opportunity at Arrowvale Farm:** Although not interested in leasing land, Ann Collins is willing to provide mentorship in exchange for labor for person interested in learning the ins and outs of farming. Large, mixed farm with greenhouse, berries, vegetable garden, and variety of animals.
5. **Anonymous person (please contact Heather):** Looking for between 2 and 100 acres of land for the purpose of forage. Has some, but not all, haying machinery.
6. **Anonymous family (please contact Heather or Anna):** Looking for land access in the form of a rent-to-own. Wanting to deal primarily with livestock so looking for a sizeable acreage.

### 3. Jen Fisher-Bradley (Agricultural Development of Leased Land on Upper Argyle) – MIRABEL BLUFFS

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- Remainder of Lot 47, City of Port Alberni, North Argyle Area; property leased to Stephen Fisher–Bradley since August 2010
- Goal: find people to collaborate with, long term, in order to do mixed farming, using principles of permaculture and finding ways of producing food to sustain human life in a rapidly changing climate.
- This odd shaped lot of land, within the city limits, was logged about 15–20 years ago, going by the size of the Alder trees that have filled in much of the roads. Soils are light and sandy, though it has swamp; most of the area is higher elevation and very well drained. It is bordered by Crown Land and city land.
- Highlights: on bus route, road and trail access; Future Development Zoning allows for non–intensive agriculture; urban/rural setting with farm market as a permissible use; drive–able roads [needing work] and extensive trails; Hugelkultur materials close at hand; leaseholder is established with owner and neighbors since 2010; light soil, well drained; water accumulation in swamps, can be easily modified to retain water through summer and unlikely to be developed into residential due to lack of access road
- Challenges: water, (there are 3 swamps that can be reinforced to hold water through summer); raw land (clear cut but has never been farmed before); predators (bear, cougar, wolf, deer and rogue dogs); residential (on two sides so noise can be an issue without good planning); not much parking at this time (this challenge can be easily remedied with some effort); insurance.
- Potential for mixed farming, permaculture, food forest, urban farm school

### **4. Serge Landry (Seeking Small Plot Lease for Urban Agriculture Business)**

- The City of Port Alberni’s new backyard chicken and farm gate stand bylaws were the reason for staying in Port Alberni instead of moving to Courtenay
- Looking for small plots of land or yard space in North Port for SPIN style farming operation
- Looking into permit to pump water from river
- Would like to explore charitable partnerships and collaborations, particularly with seniors.
- Currently has 1000 square feet of gardens with plans to turn under another 1500 of lawn and a good market site on the Kitsuksis walkway.
- Has farm help arranged for this year to assist with labor

### **5. Janette Cormier (Seeking Land to Purchase or Long Term Lease)**

- Ideally looking to purchase acreage 10+ acres with or without buildings
- Goals: orcharding and permaculture–style agriculture
- Need a workshop for natural tanning of hides
- May build clinic space (acupuncture/herbology) on acreage
- Looking to create a space for professional education in medicine making

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### **6. Josiah Gadsby (Seeking Land to Lease and Mentorship)**

- Looking for a small plot of land between 1/3–1/2 of an acre
- Interested in mentorship opportunities and developing relationships with the agricultural community
- Produce is to be grown for the View Street Market

### **7. Wayne Smith (Opportunities with Alberni Valley Tractor Club and Grain Production)**

- Member of the Alberni Valley Vintage Tractor Club which owns many low tech tractors and implements
- Approximately 20–30 members (mostly farmers) who are looking to increase membership
- Incredibly supportive community who would be able to bestow wisdom to up and coming farmers
- Naesgards family has 40 acres that they let the tractor club use (this land needs to maintain farm status which it currently barely does with its hay sales) and would be open to discussions around sectioning off a portion to be cultivated for other agricultural ventures. Good land, which has been rock picked, leveled, and has irrigation.
- Wayne will advise Agricultural Support Workers of the Tractor Club's next meeting (sometime late February, early March) and encourages any interested candidates to attend

## **Items Added to the Parking Lot (Questions for Future Discussion)**

- There was a request for further discussion about implementation of a regional composting program
- One attendee noting that she drove to the Comox Regional District annually to purchase yards of SkyRocket compost product, which is created using biosolids.

## **Speaker and Opportunity Contact List**

<b>Speaker Name and Organization/Topic</b>	<b>Phone Number</b>	<b>Email</b>
<b>Mike Ruttan</b> - Mayor, City of Port Alberni	250-720-2827	<a href="mailto:mike_ruttan@portalberni.ca">mike_ruttan@portalberni.ca</a>
<b>Heather Shobe</b> - ACRD Agricultural Support Worker	250-724-2175	<a href="mailto:heather@edentreefarm.ca">heather@edentreefarm.ca</a>
<b>Sherry Lyons</b> - School Gardens	250-720-0042	<a href="mailto:havenacres@shaw.ca">havenacres@shaw.ca</a>

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Speaker Name and Organization/Topic	Phone Number	Email
<b>Janette Cormier</b> - Dry Creek Community Gardens / Seeking Land to Purchase	778-421-3443	<a href="mailto:cormier.ja@gmail.com">cormier.ja@gmail.com</a>
<b>Maggie Paquet</b> - Allotment Gardens	250-723-8802	<a href="mailto:maggie_paquet@telus.net">maggie_paquet@telus.net</a>
<b>Anna Lewis</b> - CMHA Healthy Harvest Farm and ACRD Agricultural Support Worker	250-735-0520	<a href="mailto:amirakoel@yahoo.ca">amirakoel@yahoo.ca</a>
<b>Gary Swann</b> - Leda Organic Farm	250 723-7692	<a href="mailto:gswann@shaw.ca">gswann@shaw.ca</a>
<b>Rick and Jane Jorgenson</b> - View Street Markets	250-918-9977	<a href="mailto:info@viewstreetmarket.ca">info@viewstreetmarket.ca</a>
<b>Marcus Lobb</b> - Alberni Valley Transition Towns Society, Food Hub Coordinator		<a href="mailto:marcuslobbfoodhub@gmail.com">marcuslobbfoodhub@gmail.com</a>
<b>Vaughn Chase</b> - Chase and Warren Winery		<a href="mailto:chaseandwarren@shaw.ca">chaseandwarren@shaw.ca</a>
<b>Craig Bowerman</b> - 50 acre parcel with home		<a href="mailto:bowermanexcavating@shaw.ca">bowermanexcavating@shaw.ca</a>
<b>Ann Collins</b> - Arrowvale Farm, Apprenticeship opportunity		<a href="mailto:info@arrowvale.ca">info@arrowvale.ca</a>
<b>Cathy Burkosky</b> - Avalon Farm, partial lease	250-724-6721	<a href="mailto:avalonfarm@shaw.ca">avalonfarm@shaw.ca</a>
<b>Person Seeking Hay Field</b> - Contact Heather Shobe	250-724-2175	<a href="mailto:heather@edentreefarm.ca">heather@edentreefarm.ca</a>
<b>Jen and Stephan Fisher-Bradley</b> - Leased Land on Upper Argyle	250-724-7308 (H) 250-730-9413 (C) 250-730- 9412 (C)	<a href="mailto:humandignity@shaw.ca">humandignity@shaw.ca</a>
<b>Serge Landry</b> - Seeking Small Plot Lease for Urban Agriculture Business	250-777-3833	<a href="mailto:talismanfamilyfarm@gmail.com">talismanfamilyfarm@gmail.com</a>
<b>Josiah Gadsby</b> - Seeking Land to Lease and Mentorship Opportunities	250-204-7484	<a href="mailto:jgadsby@live.com">jgadsby@live.com</a>
<b>Wayne Smith</b> - Alberni Tractor Club	723-9988	<a href="mailto:pleasantvalley@shaw.ca">pleasantvalley@shaw.ca</a>