

FARMER MEET-UP, SOCIAL & DISCUSSION GROUP

November 8, 2015 – Event Summary

Overview

The Alberni–Clayoquot Regional District hosted a free public event on November 8, 2015 from 1–4pm. The ‘Meet-Up’ was designed to bring together local stakeholders within the agricultural industry, specifically those interested in;

- Increasing the amount of local agricultural products in regional restaurants,
- Brainstorming ideas for a regional farmer co-operative, and
- Exploring options for land leasing/linking



A total of 39 residents representing about 21 business' or organizations attended the workshop. They self-identified as buyers (10), producers (19), and foodies or aspiring farmers (10). The City of Port Alberni provided the venue (Echo Field House). The event was catered by Harvest Thyme Fine Foods and featured local agricultural products including eggs, greens, squash and apple juice.

The time allotted to the event was insufficient due to a wonderfully large turnout and active discussion. The opportunity to discuss and network around land leasing and linking in particular was limited, and many of the participants had to leave before the final hour. ACRD Agricultural Workers are investigating a follow up workshop to be held in the New Year. Please stay tuned!

Food Charter

The event opened with a recital of principles of the [Alberni Valley Food Charter](#). This charter was put forward in 2012 and endorsed by the Alberni Clayoquot Regional District, the City of Port Alberni, Alberni Valley Social Planning Council, the Alberni Valley Transition Town Society, and the ACRD Agricultural Development Committee.

These principles consist of Community Economic Development, Ecological Health, Social Justice, Collaboration and Participation, and Celebration. Each were identified as important in the expansion and success of our local food system.

Restaurant Panel

Opening statements from panel featuring 4 local business' was followed by discussion and questions by the larger group. The panel was asked to describe their highest aspirations for the process of securing and using local food and to describe what has worked best in their experience.

Starboard Grill:

- Currently buys some local products but it can be difficult to coordinate.
- Has one main supplier, enjoys going to the farm to pick up produce weekly.
- Biggest hurdle is time, especially during the busy summer season. A set schedule is much easier to coordinate with local producer (ie. Call or email on the Wednesday with what is available, quantity and pricing and then pick up day being Saturday).
- Local means a lot and paying a bit more is compensated by great taste.
- Knowing producer is key in establishing relationship
- Hard to get to the Farmers' Market
- Difficult to supplement set menu with local ingredients due to variation during growing season but uses the 2 week feature menu to highlight local agriculture.

Drinkwaters:

- Conveyed many of the same sentiments as Starboard Grill.
- Key issue is scheduling
- Would like to see a central location of amalgamated products to make purchases from
- With regards to pricing, the food philosophy that guides their buying policy is "Buy local wherever possible". Price is not the most important factor when taste is involved.

Emerald Coast Winery:

- Looking for products (ie. Preserves, canning) that have a shelf life to sell from their wine shop and tasting room.
- Ran a Farmer's Market on Wednesday evening in the past but it was difficult to recruit steady vendors.

Swept Away Inn

- A weekly list with pricing of what is available is incredibly helpful (ie. Healthy Harvest Farm)
- Feels hard to be socially responsible when scoping out farmers' market products before market officially opens
- Would like to see consistency with quality, quantity, price point and delivery

A theme that continued to emerge when the restaurant owners/chefs were speaking was that local is important. A centralized collection place for products would be helpful, as for some it is hard to get to the farmers' market. A schedule for phone calls to organize purchases, deliveries and pickups is best. Although there is a potentially higher price point for local products this is offset by taste. Their very small profit margins must be considered as well.

From dialogue within group:

- Education from farmer to chef, and then onto the servers to pass onto the consumer is desirable and helpful. Servers are sales people and there will be a bigger buy in from the public by educating the consumer.
- There is a disconnect between institutional buying (ie. Hospital) and the public. Increased institutional buying is desirable.
- Would like to see more local food incorporated into the school district's lunch programs. Sherry Lyons is currently actively promoting school garden initiatives.
- Plethora of options available to streamline ordering local and delivery such as web based platforms. Reference to the [Cow-op in the Cowichan Valley](#).
- Farmers request specifics with regards to how much product is needed by restaurants in season
- Caterers need to be able to plan ahead for large events, farmers need ample notification in order to plant for special events
- Best to make arrangements with restaurants in winter
- Waste free world; buying local reduces packaging
- Further discussion about options for local animal processing and purchasing local marine products was desired

Questions raised

- How to market/price a specialty product? (Biodynamically produced items)
- What are the legalities of purchasing whole and/or live animals (including animal for pig roast)
- How does one get a commitment from the restaurants in relation to amount of product purchased and vice versa
- How does farmer grow a quantity that meets the demand of restaurant/institution?

Regional Branding Campaign and Branding Agreement

Branding Campaign

Olivia Szostek is a UBC student who has written a paper outlining options for a regional branding campaign. She spoke to her expansive ideas for a branding campaign including a comprehensive website and various merchandising opportunities (swag items such as bags, water bottles, decals). She suggested updating the existing 'What's on Your Fork?' logo to establish a sense of place but retaining 'What's on Your Fork?' as a tagline. Her two suggestions for a brand title are:

- 1) Route 4 Farms
- 2) Port to Pacific

The Port to Pacific title evoked the greatest response, and led to discussion around how to include marine products in the branding campaign. Participants pointed out that it was very difficult to legally purchase local marine products directly due to processing and inspection regulations. One participant pointed out the "[Ha'oom Nu-](#)

[chah-nulth Wild Seafood](#)" program. They are legally selling coho and gooseneck barnacles.

Regional Branding Agreement

If a logo or other 'brand' is made available to restaurants, farmers, and retailers for use on menus, doors, or products, there will need to be some agreements in place as to its use. To garner feedback about what those agreements could be locally, the Cowichan Branding Guidelines (appendix 1) were read aloud and conversation ensued.

Key points:

- Logo would be used for farms, businesses and events
- Processed food products would need to be 50% local ingredients
- 50% of ingredients in a meal would need to be local
- Moveable labels for menus would be helpful due to the seasonality constraints of produce.
- Consumers like to see the structure and accountability that guidelines create
- For door labels, a blanket mission state might work – that a commitment to purchase local ingredients is followed whenever and wherever possible

Questions raised;

- What is brand value?
- How do you factor in accountability, how to monitor
- How to keep monitoring process simple
- How can one imbue the idea of sustainability into a label/logo?

Cooperatives

The room was split into three groups and they individually brainstormed what some of the components of a cooperative looked like. What is the most important to a successful cooperative? Purpose, operations, members, etc.

Then each individual within the group picked their top three and wrote down onto a sticky note and put onto the table. Any redundant sticky notes were removed and then all individuals within the group voted on their top three choices. Then the top three sticky notes within the group were shared with the larger group.

Final top three important co-operative qualities from each of the 3 groups:

- Cost: supply chain discounts and purchasing power (2 groups)
- Education – info and technique sharing, mentorship (2 groups)
- Resource sharing (tool and otherwise) (2 groups)
- Filling labour shortages
- Facilitator/Coordinator Position
- Delivery vs. pickup

Group 1

- Paid coordinator position
- What's available; forecasting

- Web-based buying platform
- Ease of access
- Replicate successful Models: Saanich Organics; Merville Organics; Cow-Op
- Education on product, marketing, techniques, rotating workshops to promote agricultural production
- Labour pool to provide training
- Inventory of land and resources
- Integrity
- Advertising and marketing standards which have guidelines
- Community storage, root cellars, freezers and commercial kitchen
- Tool shares

Group 2

- Harmonized pricing
- Sharing land
- Sharing equipment
- Group buying for inputs to increase purchasing power
- Access to casual labour
- Shared costs for technical and professional support
- Better balance with supply and demand brokerage
- Knowledge sharing; mentorship
- Centralized access with products in one space thus ease of distribution
- Networking and being able to share, rent, barter, tools
- Combined selling power to capture larger buyers

Group 3

- Plan for planting crops
- Filling labour shortages
- Assured sales of product
- Cost of product (consistency between farms)
- Tool share for specialized items
- Central localized source for produce
- Consistency of supply
- Central marketplace
- Who will manage and be responsible?

Land Leasing

- [Young Agrarians](#) offers templates for land leasing agreements and other resources, including the comprehensive [Land Access Guide](#).
- Many participants expressed interest in land however most of the landowners had left prior to 4pm.
- Participants looking for land included; people looking to purchase land to farm, those looking for mentoring and/or work opportunities, and those with specific farm business projects underway who need access to land
- Some of the identified issues from people wanting to lease land are:
 - Access to water
 - Need more supports
 - Lack of publicly available and up to date database
 - Understanding of what amenities are onsite

Summary

The purpose of the event was to facilitate networking and relationships within the regional agricultural industry. Discussion was lively, positive, and engaging. There is evident of significant interest in further discussion and similar events. ACRD Agricultural Support Workers are working towards offering another similar event in the new year.

We would love your feedback, comments and suggestions! Please contact us, and thanks for coming out to support and contribute to the growth of our local agricultural industry.

Contact Us...

Agricultural Support Workers

Anna Lewis

▶ amirakoel@yahoo.ca

▶ (250) 735-0520

Heather Shobe

▶ heather@edentreefarm.ca

▶ (250) 724-2175

ACRD Office

Alex Dyer, Planner

▶ adyer@acrd.bc.ca

▶ (250) 720-2708

▶ 3008 5th Ave

Port Alberni, B.C.

V9Y 2E3

Please email Heather to join an ACRD agriculturally related email list and stay up to date on the Agriculture Plan Implementation Project.

Appendix 1



Brand Usage Agreement

Agriculture Brands

Welcome to the Cowichan brands for agriculture and thank you for helping us build a strong regional agricultural presence. The brand is available to any business in the Cowichan Region and is free of charge, but we do ask that you agree and comply with some simple rules of usage.

1. The brand may only be used by farms and businesses located in the Cowichan Region.
2. The brand may not be altered in any way including shape, colour, minimum size or wording.
3. The brand can only be used for food products that are grown or manufactured in the Cowichan Region.
4. If the brand's intended use is on a manufactured food product, at least 50% of the ingredients must originate from the Cowichan Region.
5. If the brand's intended use is to promote the local ingredients in prepared meals, at least 50% of the ingredients must originate from the Cowichan Region.
6. The brand cannot be used for any product outside the intended use as described in this agreement without consent from Economic Development Cowichan.



Cowichan Grown Logo

**Celebrate food.
Celebrate life.**



Cowichan Grown Logo Plus Tag Line