

Expanding the Influence of Regional Agricultural Support

Final Report for the Alberni-Clayoquot Regional District's
'System Change' Test Project (2021-2024)

July 2024



Family Farms Day 2023, Rages Farm

Photo: Michael McGregor

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ALBERNI-CLAYOQUOT
REGIONAL DISTRICT

*Primary Project funding by the Vancouver Foundation
Report by Heather Shobe, for the Alberni-Clayoquot Regional District*

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Executive Summary

The Alberni-Clayoquot Regional District's System Change project (2021-2024) aimed to empower regions in supporting local harvesters and producers.

The 'system change' approach included wrestling with questions like: *What gives a system power?* and *What leverage points will work to change problematic dynamics?* The ACRD had three years to 'test' whether a particular approach and set of activities could positively influence to BC's systems of agricultural support to better serve regional producers.

The term 'agriculture' is used reluctantly.

In this project, agriculture refers to more than just the field-based cultivation of crops. It's also inclusive of marine production, traditional Indigenous food system practices, and other means of food harvest and cultivation. *In essence, it refers to the way by which we bring food to the table.*

About this report:

This report is in three sections. The first covers **three primary learning points and the project's overall outcomes**. The second provides **three recommendations for everyone along with specific recommendations for a variety of populations**. Finally, section three highlights **areas with forward momentum** where continued system change work is possible. Appendices 1 and 2 detail the project's activities and provide links to its various publications. A [video presentation](#) is also available.

Project Results:

Project activities succeeding in: increasing the knowledge and tools available to support producers across BC; building relationships between key agents; and changing narratives about regional roles in agri-food planning. Continued systemic change is an essential part of ensuring a long-term supply of local food for our tables, and readers are encouraged to consider the recommendations and findings when developing and designing future policy and programs.

Public Statement:

"The ACRD's System Change project sets out to test a regional model for food system and agricultural support. Strong regional structures will influence Provincial frameworks and ensure accommodation of the unique contextual realities of BC's various geographical regions and producer populations.

By bridging and supporting local organizations, building a BC-wide network of regionally-driven organizations, and engaging in targeted education and resource development, we will support change in the way producers, Indigenous stakeholders, and communities are supported within Province-wise agricultural frameworks, ensuring efficacy, long-term sectoral growth, and diverse cultural relevancy."

The Alberni-Clayoquot Regional District's food system work is based within the traditional territories of Ahousaht, Ditidaht, Hesquiaht First Nation, Huu-ay-aht First Nations, Hupacasath First Nation, Tla-o-qui-aht First Nation, Toquaht Nation, Tseshaht First Nation, Uchucklesaht Tribe, and Ucluelet First Nation.

We offer gratitude for our uninvited presence here and for Nuu-chah-nulth stewardship of these lands over time immemorial.

Project In Brief

Project Partners and Participants

Recruited from across BC, participants included: local governments; the Province of BC; various agri-food organizations and farmers' institutes; primary producers, processors, and food businesses; Indigenous food system advocates; marine producers; academics; and others.

The Vancouver Foundation contributed \$300,000 over three years. Other formal partners included a 'Core 8' group of regionally-based agricultural support organizations, academic institutions, and the BC Ministry of Health. Over the course of the project, the ACRD partnered with the Nuu-chah-nulth Tribal Council to work towards Nuu-chah-nulth food sovereignty solutions, and the BC Ministry of Agriculture and Food supported and participated in project activities.

Project Activities

Activities were divided into two streams, one internal and one external to the region.

Stream 1 - Local activities:

- 1) Supporting local agri-food organizations to expand their capacity through core funding and mentorship
- 2) Strengthening local agri-food networks to foster collaboration, partnerships, and knowledge sharing
- 3) Working in partnership with the Nuu-chah-nulth Tribal Council to support Nuu-chah-nulth Food Sovereignty solutions
- 4) Examining and improving ACRD's own internal agri-food structures and programs

Stream 2 - External activities

- 1) Building a network (conference calls and events) of other BC organizations who support agriculture using a regional approach
- 2) Contributing to development of supportive resources, data, and programs
 - Yr 1 - developing tools and measuring the impact of regional agri-food support
 - Yr 2 - supporting producer access to extension and research support
 - Yr 3 - building an online database of supportive resources; convening Farmers' Institutes from across BC in an online gathering
- 3) Engaging regional districts and planners from across BC to investigate and share perspectives about regional roles in agricultural planning

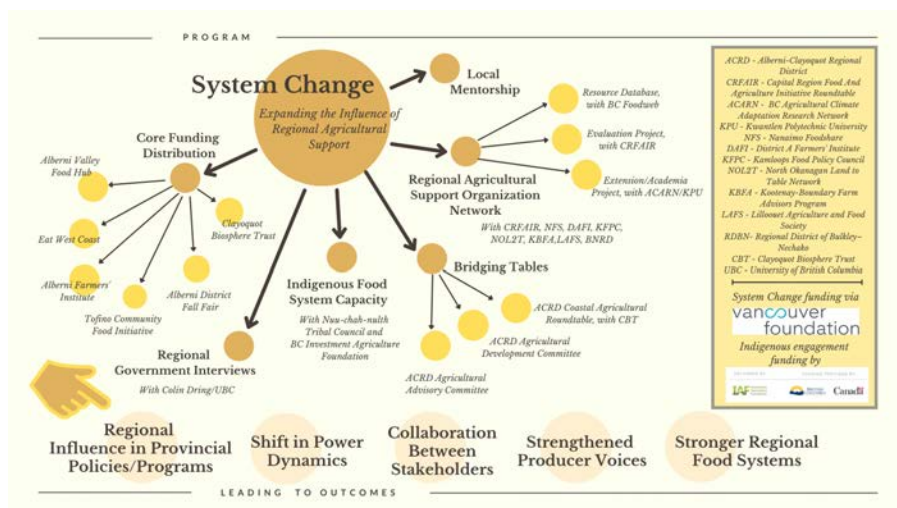


Image 1: System Change Project Map, With Primary Partners

Summary of Key Findings and Impacts

Project results are summarized below. These ideas and outcomes are further explored in the body of the report.

Three Key Truths: What's been reinforced as learnings (see page 8)

1. Food is foundational. It's central to culture and community, yet food security is critically at risk.
2. Things are changing. But slowly - things still need to change!
3. We are not alone. We're all tapped out, and we need to work together.

Systemic Impacts (see page 11)

The effort that went into this project was rewarded with significant and positive impacts on the agri-food system within the Alberni-Clayoquot region. Feedback from external stakeholders indicates that the project was also of benefit to others.

Project activities influenced BC's system of agricultural support by spurring changes to:

1. Its 'building blocks' (knowledge and capacity; concrete tools; relationships & collaborations)
2. Its 'stumbling blocks' (policies and practices)
3. Its potential future (narratives, culture, and societal aspects)

Examples of key outcomes and systemic impacts:

1. A permanent staff person to support agri-food initiatives in the ACRD
2. A clearer sense of the Alberni-Clayoquot region's agri-food system and permanent networks to help connect its various components
3. Stronger relationships and avenues for communication & collaboration between:
 - Alberni-Clayoquot residents and the Ministry of Agriculture and Food
 - Regionally-driven agri-food organizations from across BC
4. Stronger agri-food organizations within the ACRD, with more staff and overall capacity
5. Increased interest from other regional districts in exploring and expanding their role in agricultural planning
6. Improvements to extension services for producers across across BC
7. A more rounded and inclusive understanding about what contributes to 'agriculture' in BC, such as marine production, Indigenous food systems, and small-scale production
8. Increased equity and effort to compensate producers for their contributions to meetings and consultation processes
9. A reduction in silos between the various ministries and organizations who are involved in agri-food issues (i.e. health, social services, environment, water, etc)

"What excites me is that more organizations involved in social services have a mandate to work with food security, then hopefully engage with farmers."

- Project participant

Summary of Recommendations

Much work remains to foster a system of agricultural support that ensures that the people who bring food to our tables have what they need in order to thrive.

The recommendations in this report include those which can be considered by everyone, and those that are specific to various actors within BC's food system.

For Everyone:

General ways that everyone can help to reduce the burden on producers (see page 16):

1. Educate instead of regulate.
2. Turn meetings into celebrations.
3. Turn grants into gifts.

For Particular Groups

Examples of key recommendations for the following particular groups (more on page 18):

1. Local and regional governments
 - Consider a 'Local Food System Support Framework' as an alternative or addition to an Area Agricultural Plan.
2. Province of BC
 - Include a list of regionally-based agri-food organizations under 'Industry Contacts' on the Ministry of Agriculture and Food's online database.
3. Regional agri-food organizations
 - Establish long-term mechanisms and structures for direct engagement with producers, harvesters, and processors (*note that building these relationships takes time*).
4. Harvesters, producers, processors, and food system businesses
 - Create partnerships with others to broaden your participation within the food chain (*for example, partner with a producer, processor, restaurant, or distributor*).
5. Networks
 - Have a clear mandate and purpose, and stick to it (*redundancy in networks reduces efficiency and causes competition for resources*).



Image 2: From Final PPT Presentation, June 2024

Section 1: Evolution to Evaluation - Beginnings, Learnings & Impacts

Beginnings: Where it started

About the Region: Alberni-Clayoquot Context

Located on Vancouver Island, and on the traditional territory of ten Nuu-chah-nulth Nations, the Alberni-Clayoquot region is home to about 30,000 people. It's split in half geographically by a mountain range and accessible by a single paved road through a second mountain range. 18% of the population is Nuu-chah-nulth, and many communities are remote or boat access only.

As per the 2021 Federal Agriculture census, there are 76 farms. Half of them gross less than \$10,000 per year; only two gross over \$1 million each. Much of the communities' food sources and economic generation from food harvests comes from the sea.

History of ACRD's Agricultural Support Efforts

The ACRD published their Agricultural Area Plan in 2011. Three years later, they hired a team to implement its recommendations. Their approach was unique, hiring a team with strong community connections and a passion for supporting the local food production, but little experience as government consultants.

With a budget of about \$30,000 and a set of five general objectives, consultants engaged the farming community in the general work of research, building relationships, determining direction, and applying for grants. In essence, they worked with what was later called for more broadly in this system change project - 'core funding'. Leveraging the energy and efforts that already existed in the community, they were able to accomplish enough that the contract and budget for agricultural support continued from year to year. A series of small projects is now the basis for much larger ones and an extensive database of local research.

For more details about ACRD's agricultural support efforts, see page five of their [2020 System Change 'Develop' project report](#).

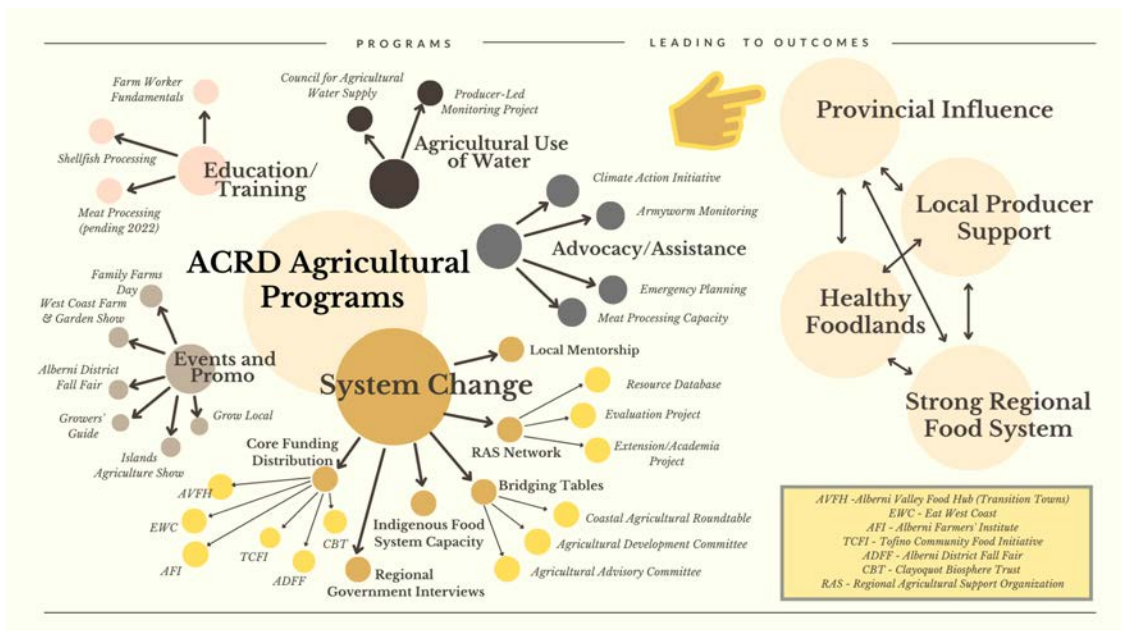


Image 3: Map of ACRD Agri-Food Programming 2021

Why This System Change Project? The ‘Pressing Issue’

The Vancouver Foundation defines a systems change project as *“one that aims to influence or change the systemic beliefs, behaviours, attitudes, resource flows, and/or policies that have contributed to the pressing issue.”*

The Alberni-Clayoquot Regional District’s pressing issue was that *ongoing efforts to support producers were being met by barriers which the region had little means or power to change*. Over time, it had become clear that there were regulations and systemic hurdles hindering the ACRD’s effort to support local food production. It also became clear that other regions were struggling with the same issue.

Regionalized agricultural support was not well-established as an asset within the structure of the larger systemic agricultural support frameworks. Power (in the form of money, the right to make decisions, and the authority to enact policy) was wielded almost solely from a top-down (Ministry of Agriculture), rather than bottom-up (producer and community) approach. This power structure was negatively impacting producers, and there didn’t seem to be a clear pathway for community input into the decisions affecting them.

An example was the ACRD’s 2018-2020 lobby to the Province for ‘regional designation’ under the Meat Inspection Regulations. While successful, it took 3 years and a very significant effort. In part, it was challenging to find the right channels to directly engage with the Ministry of Agriculture about regulatory changes.

Within the same timeframe, communities around BC had fought back against what they felt was a lack of public consultation prior to policy changes about residential dwellings in the Agricultural Land Reserve. It was a clear indication that communities across BC were feeling a lack of agency in the decision-making processes that affected them.

The ACRD’s System Change ‘Test’ project set out to increase that regional agency and capacity.

What We’ve Learned - Three Truths

As the project closes, it’s clear there have been tangible outcomes and systemic impacts to the ways agricultural endeavours are supported in BC. Three key truths have also become evident.

1) Food is Foundational - Food Systems are of Critical Concern to Many

Despite its efforts, the ACRD still lost 18% of its farms between 2016 and 2021. While that’s less than all other island regions except Comox (who was only down 16%), the local food system is still in dire straights. Agriculture is a primary component of any food system, and food producers and harvesters are suffering.

It’s essential to meet producer needs so they can continue to provide their essential services. Unfortunately, producers don’t often have time or funding to attend the meetings where the decisions affecting them are made. And organizations that focus strictly on the agricultural component of the food system are still the minority. While becoming less persistent, there’s often conflict over the number of food security voices, as opposed to producer ones, at meetings like the ACRD’s Agricultural Development Committee. Producers are the minority at these tables, and compensation and more recognition for their contributions are needed.

Still, the other voices present are trying to support producers in a myriad of ways. And it's not just about economic development. For example:

- 1) BC Ministry of Poverty and Social Development
 - Provided \$14 million towards the Critical Food Infrastructure Fund
- 2) BC Ministry of Health:
 - Provides core funding to organizations working to support regional food security (including primary production) through their Community Food Action Initiative
 - Supports the BC Farmers Market Nutrition Coupon program, which directly provides about \$7 million per year to consumers for direct farm purchases
- 3) Emergency preparedness departments
 - Are considering producers as they plan for local food access during emergencies
- 4) Water and Land departments
 - Are recognizing the importance of water for agriculture and considering how to ensure producers have a priority for supply
- 5) Local agri-food organizations
 - Are developing programs and purchasing healthy farm products directly from producers for distribution to people in need

"It's not just about profitability or resilience; we want food production on our landscape as part of our culture." - Project participant

2) The System and the World Around Us are Changing

Like it or not, and for better or worse, things are changing. Following are some of the societal and systemic changes of note. Those within the ACRD are evident in other regions as well.

- 1) Producers, along with various other groups, are clearly and vocally fed up.
 - In part, they're talking loudly about the red tape of bureaucracy, an excess of managerialism and regulation, and the slow pace of change.
 - Some are quitting; others simply going underground to avoid rules and paperwork.
- 2) There are more food policy councils starting up and more lobby efforts at national, provincial, and regional level (think National Farmers' Union, BC Agricultural Commission, and Small-Scale Meat Producers' Association).
- 3) There's a sense of urgency and consistent public messaging about 'crises': housing; banking; personal finance; climate; etc. Funding requests are growing as the pressure rises.
- 4) There's a move towards trust-based philanthropy, social justice, and inclusivity.
 - Diversity/equity/inclusion of all individuals
 - BC's ratification of the UN Declaration of Rights of Indigenous Peoples and related review and revision of all provincial policies and Acts
- 5) Concurrently, there's a movement towards a kind of 'de-personalization'.
 - Artificial Intelligence and agri-technology reducing the need for human effort
 - Organizational managerialism reducing the importance of individual persons in favour of a group

- 6) A positive change is that **more people are employed with government and other organizations in roles that support food security and agriculture** - capacity for food system work is growing.
 - Ahousaht (the biggest Nuu-chah-nulth Nation within the ACRD's geography) now has a staffed foods department and an upcoming foods strategy.
 - The Alberni-Clayoquot Regional District has an agrologist on staff, with a mandate to support agri-food system.
 - Local agri-food organizations have increased their paid staff capacity and numbers of programs.
- 7) **Silos between government departments are being acknowledged**, and they're starting to be broken down.
 - A recent presentation by the BC Ministry of Water Lands and Resource Stewardship acknowledged "fragmented governance" and that "each Ministry was doing good work, but sometimes competing".
 - The Province has a Cross-Government Food Security Steering Committee.

3) **Working Together is the Solution - We are not alone**

The third key truth is that *no one who's doing the work of supporting a food system is doing so alone*. Bridging the divisions between us, either by finding common ground or simply by allowing each other to be different, is a critical element in our ability to work together.

The following have proved effective in collaborative efforts towards agri-food system support:

- 1) **Cultivating empathy for each other**
 - Every organization and individual has limitations - each are strapped and hampered in their own particular ways.
 - Empathy opens doors for moving forward.
- 2) **Taking agency**
 - The limitations of others requires that communities take agency themselves - *to stop asking and to start doing* is a sometimes a viable avenue forward.
- 3) **Releasing some level of control over what others can and can't do**
 - Allowing individuals and communities to try out what they feel will be of benefit will require trust, but may lighten the load of the controlling party.
 - Releasing control helps to build capacity and skills in others. Organizations may develop new understanding about the challenges of holding power if liability is delegated as well.
- 4) **Using networks is an effective and productive platform** for connectivity, as indicated by:
 - Sonia Furstenau, in her address to 2023 UBCM (*that working together at regional tables is important, and that governments have to empower those tables*).
 - A Bioregional Food Planning study by KPU's Institute of Sustainable Food Systems (*that funding for agri-food networks is needed, and that communities benefit by opportunities to get together and talk about their work, and to be acknowledged and feel supported in it*).
 - A Province of BC [press release](#) (*"investment in a provincial network will help to elevate non-profits in B.C. through improved co-ordination, research, visibility and ability to advocate."*).
 - Network participants themselves (*"I really like connecting in with a group of like minded people working on food and farming across the province. I find it very uplifting to know that there are others doing the same work, and to talk about the successes and challenges we all face in our slightly different but similar roles."*).

Empathy for the Ministry of Agriculture and Food?

Multiple project participants have noted that their sense of empathy for the Ministry of Agriculture and Food (AF) has grown. Why? Growing understanding that:

- ▶ Staff get pulled out of regular duties for 'firefighting' (ie: wildfires, Avian Flu, flooding, or a PR scandal).
- ▶ AF is bound by economic drivers - their budget is based on production and dollars (*despite the fact that about 50% of BC farmers make less than \$10k/year*).
- ▶ Provincial rules about how and when they share information cripples AF's ability to be transparent and to work with others in developing programs

Arguably, these things should change. But right now, it's what they are dealing with. Understanding their limitations can help others to move forward without them - or with them, in new ways.

Project Results - Systemic Impacts & Shifts

The Vancouver Foundation describes three levels of potential outcomes from system change work:

- 1) Changes to **knowledge and capacity**; tools and products; and relationships and collaborations (the building blocks which can be local and directly influenced),
- 2) Changes to **policy and practices** (the stumbling blocks which are slower to change, more significant, and often met with resistance), and
- 3) Changes to **narratives and cultural shifts**; and societal transformation (long term, generational shifts; the blocks to an alternate future).

DIAGRAM. Systems Change Outcomes Framework



© 2018 by MetaLab, Tatiana Fraser and Juniper Glass. Adapted from Williams, S. (2017) *Evaluating Sustainability Transition Experiments in Times of Rapid Change*. International Sustainability Transitions 2017. Gothenburg, Sweden.

Image 4: System Change Outcome Framework, From *Evaluation of Vancouver Foundation System Change Grantmaking*

Following are some of the outcomes achieved within each of these levels. While these impacts aren't all solely correlated to this project, they've been achieved as part of the same wave of changes. They are mutually supportive and reinforcing.

Changes to: knowledge and capacity; tools and products; and relationships and collaborations

1. Knowledge / Tools (see Appendix 2 for links):
 - A new **online resource database** for local agri-food system interests (*"Thanks SO much for putting something like this together...I had no idea there were so many people we could connect with for help in food security/sovereignty work on the land."* - Alberni-Clayoquot resident)
 - New **resources for discussion about regional district roles in agri-food planning, producer extension services, and academic collaboration**
 - An **increase in dissemination of information** through online channels (e-newsletters, websites, and social media), both within the ACRD and from the Ministry of Agriculture and Food (via Regional Agrologist staff and regional e-newsletters)
 - An increase in **understanding about the history, make-up, mandates, and value of agri-food organizations**, including farmers' institutes, across BC
2. Capacity:
 - **Food has a voice within the power structures of local governments.** The ACRD's new Sustainability Planner brings it to every meeting, every project, every discussion that the regional district takes part in. Ahousaht now has a foods department and staff.
 - **Local agri-food organizations have increased their staff numbers and program capacity** with the help of core funding and mentorship.
 - **New networks support various food system elements**, e.g.. Alberni-Clayoquot School Food System Network and the Nuu-chah-nulth Food and Nutrition Sovereignty Network.
 - The Ministry of Agriculture and Food has **increased its capacity for on-the-ground producer support** through its Regional Extension program.
 - The Province has created a **Feeding Futures fund** to support local school food programs, including gardens and access to local products.
3. Relationships/Collaborations:
 - **Staff from Ministry of Agriculture and Food are directly engaged in ACRD** and other regional committees and are better connected with individual producers and organizations.
 - **Structured networks are bringing people together** to learn from each other and work together on collaborative programming and multi-sector infrastructure.
 - **Regional agri-food organizations from across BC have developed mutually supportive relationships** and have developed a stronger, shared voice for lobby efforts.
 - The ACRD has **engaged in formal partnership with the Nuu-chah-nulth Tribal Council** to work towards Nuu-chah-nulth food sovereignty solutions.
 - The ACRD has **developed an active and ongoing relationship with two academic institutions** - the Institute for Sustainable Food Systems and North Island College.
 - **Farmers' Institutes from across BC have come together** to discuss shared priorities and learn from each other; Ministry of Agriculture and Food indicates more support is coming.
 - There's a general **narrowing of the gap between producers and food security organizations.**

Changes to policy and practices

1. Within the ACRD:
 - Terms of References, structures, and **processes for the ACRD's agri-food committees have been updated and streamlined** for clarity, transparency, and greater permanency (ongoing).
 - **Direct consultation with producers is increasing** and their feedback is being incorporated (such as in recent consultations about zoning bylaw updates).
 - **ACRD is actively engaged with the Alberni Farmers' Institute** to determine how it can better include producers where matters may affect them.
 - **More local social services organizations are directly working with producers and Indigenous communities** to support food security.
2. Within and external to the ACRD:
 - There are **clearer points of connection between multiple levels of government, producers, and organizations** (networks, email communications, etc).
 - **Producers are being given more opportunities and are providing more input** about regional, provincial, and organizational agri-food programs and policies.
 - **Agriculture stakeholders are more commonly being invited to participate in non-agri-food tables** which are of concern to them (such as water and emergency planning).
 - **The Ministry of Agriculture has reached out directly to farmers' institutes** with attempts at engagement, collaboration, and support.
 - **Regional Agrologists are more actively engaged within communities** and with producers directly.
 - **Producers are more commonly being offered honoraria and compensation** for contribution of their expertise (e.g.: within the Province's Regional Extension Program).

"All these organizations pushing the government saying - 'Hey, we could use some extension, our producers could really use some boots on the ground support!', and we're seeing that now! I'd like to credit (the System Change project) with some of that action." - Project participant

Changes to narratives and cultural shifts; societal transformation

1. About the value of farming:
 - *"That it's not just about profitability or resilience, but that we want food production on our landscape as part of the culture."* - Project participant
2. About the value of various agri-food system components which make up a community's agricultural landscape:
 - A reduction in elitism against small producers and so-called 'hobby farmers'
 - The meaning of the word agriculture shifting to include marine, Indigenous, and other methods of bringing food to the table
 - A growing idea that regional governments have a role in agricultural planning
 - A growing respect for the value of regional organizations supporting agri-food production
 - A growing recognition for the need for and value of producer contributions to networks
 - A growing recognition that bottom-up AND top-down approaches are equally important

3. About the power, agency, and unique character of each individual and community:
 - That strong voices and independent action can help change the system for the better
 - That it's assumptive to expect everyone to approach things in the same way - that forcing others to work in a particular way can be unhelpful
 - That it's important to meet people where they are at - often, on the farm or in community
 - That building relationships is fundamental and requires long-term funding and time frames
4. About working together, better:
 - Acknowledgement of and attempts to breakdown silos between issues like agriculture, food security, water, sustainability, and emergency planning
 - An increase in empathy and understanding of other's perspectives and limitations



Section 2: Recommendations

What is needed as we slide into the chaos of a changing system and an at-risk food system?

This section shares three broad recommendations that are applicable to everyone, followed by recommendations for specific agri-food system players.

For Everyone: Three Ways to Continue with Systemic Shifts

1) **Educate Instead of Regulate**

Shift from putting energy into rules into putting energy into education. Why?

1. Because few rules will be appropriate in all situations (think of non-use taxes on ALR lands and the clear differences between the needs of small and industry-scale operations or between remote and urban communities).
2. Because in changing times, new approaches are needed. The old rules may not fit.
3. Because bureaucracy takes further time and critical resources where capacity is already strained.

It's unlikely that rules will disappear forever. But could the problem be solved by education, promotion, public engagement, or discourse? Focus there first. Would giving the tool of knowledge to communities *help good decisions to emerge from within communities*? Likely. And leadership, experience, and knowledge can be fostered to support that.

What are some tools for education?

1. Formal educational like micro-credential programs
2. On-the-ground workshops and activities
3. Info sharing through the media, newsletters, and online
4. Mentorship
5. Getting out onto the farm and into communities, listening and answering questions

What kind of education is important to focus on?

1. Safety
 - Safety is often used as the rationale for making rules, but people break rules or can't comply. Education can always make a difference.
2. Governance and leadership
 - Good governance helps organizations to be more functional, successful, and sustainable.
3. Business and financing
 - Financial independence is key to any sustainable practice; grant funding is undependable and under tremendous and growing competition.
4. Self-education.
 - Learn more about the experiences of others.
 - Find out what motivates the community being targeted. What education, programs, or types of support might make additional rules or bureaucracy unnecessary? What other solutions are out there?
 - When crafting a policy, make sure that the impacts of that policy are *deeply* understood. Talk to those who will be affected, first.

2) Turn Meetings Into Celebrations

It's not a secret that farming isn't an easy way to make a living. Food producers have to enjoy their work. Meetings can take a lot of time and energy, sometimes for not a lot of impact (especially from the producer point of view). And yet, producers need to be part of the decision-making

So how do you make a meeting a celebration?

- 1) Focus on solutions and *then action them*.
- 2) Allow what works - have the flexibility and courage required to adapt rules for what is needed. Say yes. Then celebrate! Call it a trial if that helps.
- 3) Do what you do and allow others to do what they do. Trust, and try to lift each other up rather than stepping on each other's toes.
- 4) Know that bringing people together will translate into action - you are making progress!
- 5) Work to understand the limitations of others.
 - 1) Trust and empathy can unlock the door to productive collaboration.

Wherever possible, have fewer meetings and make them more engaging, celebratory, and purposeful. What project participants unfailingly requested were more in-person opportunities and annual events that combine relationship building and celebration with productive working efforts.

In March 2024, Ahousaht hosted an Island Indigenous Foods Event in Tseshaht traditional territory, seeded by \$20,000 of the system change project budget. That 'meeting' was certainly a celebration - a celebration of Indigenous foods, a celebration of many Nations coming together, a celebration of still being there - fighting for and teaching about cultural foods and traditional food systems.

The event featured a focused session on planning for emergency food security and Indigenous food sovereignty. The 'meeting' was embedded within the celebration, and by all reports, a grand success. Planning is in the works for further celebrations in the coming years.



Image 5: Island Indigenous Foods Event 2024 - Photo: Melody Charlie

2) Turn Grants into Gifts (Make it Easy!)

Gifts don't come with expectations, and their purpose is not to make the giver look good. Gifts are given as an expression of care and because things are needed.

Grants can be offered more in the spirit of gifts when the grantor offers clarity about their expectations and desired outcomes, and then, as much as possible, gets out of the way. Grant projects that are free of rigid expectations and that offer flexibility for grantees to adapt the activities as needed are opportunities for grantee empowerment and learning. Sometimes, the best way to learn is by making mistakes. Grants that are onerous in terms reporting and material or activity approvals take focus away from the work in order to please the funder.

Certainly, continue to work with grantees - offer more gifts! Gifts like support, advice, feedback, more knowledge, and education. But if an organization is not trusted to do decent, well-meaning (though likely imperfect) work, then don't fund them.

Vancouver Foundation's granting approach (multi-year funding with limited reporting required and flexibility to change project activities) allowed the ACRD's system change project to adapt as needed and enabled it to include elements that weren't originally proposed, such as supporting a BC-wide gathering of farmers' institutes, without losing time and budget for approvals.

How else can we gift?

1. Assist with or complete bureaucratic processes on behalf of those you are trying to support.
 - Paperwork may not be their area of expertise, in fact, it may be an enemy!
 - Screening grant opportunities and forwarding the best ones will reduce the time and energy producers spend looking.
2. Give the gifts of support, advice, feedback, more knowledge, or education.
3. Create programs that do not require producer application or reporting.
 - For example, the BC Farmers' Market Coupon Program, which increases sales opportunities at farmers markets for all producer vendors
4. Provide human capacity when there is an identified need for support.
 - For example, Farm to School BC heard a desire for for district-wide collaborative work to support Alberni-Clayoquot school food systems and offered a staff person to facilitate meetings, build strategies, and arrange educational days. There is no cost and no reporting required by participating organizations.
5. Provide core funding and general mentorship to organizations. The ACRD provided core funding to five local agri-food organizations for three consecutive years:
 - Two of them became formal non-profits and significantly increased their staffing complement and number of programs.
 - The Alberni Farmers' Institute increased its membership and organized events, workshops, fundraising initiatives, and public engagements. They continue to strengthen their governance and to be more active in the community.
 - Notably, it was the smallest, most vulnerable organizations who seemed to benefit the most from this influx of core funding.



Image 6: From BCFMA

Recommendations for Specific Groups

Following are recommendations for specific food system actors.

Local and Regional Governments (ACRD & others)

1. Staffing
 1. Use funding avenues related to hydrology, environment, ecosystems, climate action, or agrology to embed agri-food support into government structures and programs.
 - Hire staff with related experience or qualifications.
 - The Local Government Climate Action Program can provide funding for staff.
 2. Look locally: build skills and expertise within your own unique community.
 3. Don't be afraid to start with small programs and build from there.
2. Support your community's agri-food organizations to increase *their own* capacity and impacts.
 1. Provide core funding and mentorship to key agri-food organizations.
 2. Aim to develop leadership and organizational capacity from *within* the farm community.
3. Facilitate Connections.
 1. Show up! Listen to & engage with the public and network participants in a variety of ways.
 2. Establish networks to bridge agri-food businesses and organizations with each other and with governments.
 3. Acts as a channel; forward concerns & recommendations to higher levels of government.
 4. Involve industry & academia in specific initiatives to support local interests.
 5. Engage outwardly with other regional districts and the Province to encourage the continued growth and influence of local agri-food voices.
 6. Ensure farmers' institutes are included in correspondence whenever planning processes may affect involve their members or the agricultural land base.
4. Consider a 'Local Food System Support Framework' (LFSSF) as an alternative or addition to an Area Agricultural Plan. A LFSSF could:
 1. Act as a backbone within the context of an ever-changing system; (a 'plan' implies a linear process from one defined place to a known end result)
 2. Include everyone, with the entire community and 'food' as its foundation (rather than just the agricultural 'limb' of the food system)
 3. Establish the connectivity between actors and resources that helps to stimulate synergistic and spontaneous action; (a 'plan' requires dedicated resources for implementation)
 4. Support programs and policies to be flexible, adaptable, and responsive
 5. Make the underlying structures, resources, and actors of a local agri-food system visible
 6. Provide clear channels for community members' input, needs, and frustrations
 7. Be a viable tool for collaboration towards desirable community outcomes

A Local Food System Framework says - 'We're all in his together, and food is critically important. This is who we are, and here's how we do things in our region.'

It could include:

- ▶ A picture of the entire food system and all it's parts and players, both locally and externally
- ▶ Clear linkages to climate action, food security, reconciliation, watershed and other related tables or initiatives
- ▶ A structural map of local networks, their particular focus areas, & how they connect to & nest within each other
- ▶ Routes to a 'master network', where all are represented, big policy decisions are made, and higher levels of government can engage with the broadest community
- ▶ Links to avenues for information, resources, education, public engagement or support
- ▶ Processes and tools for monitoring progress and adapting over time
- ▶ Desirable outcomes that community members can collaborate in developing & reasons why they're important

Provincial Government

1. Tools
 1. Include a list of regionally-based agri-food organizations under 'Industry Contacts' on the Ministry of Agriculture and Food's online database.
 2. Provide physical spaces for agri-food network meetings and events.
 3. Continue to share regional e-newsletters; including information for both small and large-scale producers and in rural and urban areas.
 4. Participate in regional committees and agri-food activities.
 5. Lobby the Federal government to ensure that regional and marine programs are included within Sustainable Canadian Agricultural Partnership (SCAP) funding.
 6. Increase dedicated staff time or provide funding in order to adequately administer and support BC's 30+ farmers' institutes (FI) and the farming communities they represent.
 1. Implement a clear structure and annual timeline for an FI Advisory Board meeting with the Minister of Agriculture and Food.
 7. Continue to enhance the Regional Extension Program to ensure producers have direct, on-the-ground connection and support from Ministry of Agriculture staff.
 1. Expand the program to offer support for marine and Indigenous communities.
 2. Expand the program to include staff capacity to support grant and program applications.
2. Attitudes - *Learn, Trust, and Recognize*
 1. Learn about the issues facing regions and the organizations working to support them
 2. Trust that organizations and producers/ individuals know what would best support them; share power and authority with them where possible.
 1. Provide information and education about external complications that they may not be aware of.
 3. Trust the good intentions and honesty of the producer community.
 1. There will always be an occasional 'bad apple', and there needs to be a plan in place to deal with them. But does the whole bushel need to be managed in the same way?
 2. Recognize fear-based thinking and minimize fear-based decisions.
 4. Recognize the good work being done in communities by:
 1. Responding positively to requests (*find at least some aspect to say 'yes' to*);
 2. Sharing in celebration and publicly acknowledging work being done by others;
 3. Providing core financial support to regional organizations & farmers' institutes.
3. Breaking down Silos
 1. Share existing data and priority challenges with other ministries.
 2. Be clear about your ministry's focus area and budgetary mandate; point out gaps that other ministries could help to fill.
 3. Meet regularly with cross-ministerial committees to develop collaborative solutions and to ensure policy and programs are complementary rather than conflicting.
 4. Ensure policies about agricultural land are integrated with programs to support the people producing on those lands.

Regional Agri-Food Organizations and Farmers' Institutes

1. Reach out for support and work with others.
 1. Apply for grants and programs that support core operations; include a minimum 10% administration fee where allowed to help support basic operating expenses.
 2. Seek partnership from industry, academia, and business.

3. Participate in government networks and consultation processes.
 4. Resist duplication - use existing research and tailor it to your needs; make your own research accessible to others.
 5. Approach local government with curiosity and trust - foster a team approach. You both have a vested interest in your community and its food.
2. Listen and learn.
 1. Make relationships the priority.
 2. Meet producers and Indigenous communities where they're at - get out on farm or in community to build relationships and understanding.
 1. Bring food.
 2. Say how long you'll be there (keep it short unless invited to stay longer).
 3. Listen! Focus on hearing from them, then follow up with your own ideas later.
3. Set up clear organizational structures, roles, responsibilities, and governance.
 1. Take risks, within this container of safety.
 2. Craft a clear and defined mandate.
 3. Establish long-term mechanisms and structures for direct engagement with producers, harvesters, and processors (*note that building these relationships takes time*).
 4. Include social enterprise efforts as a means for financial resilience and self-sufficiency.

Harvesters, Producers, Processors, and Food System Businesses

1. Create partnerships with others to broaden your participation within the food chain (for example, partner with a producer, processor, restaurant, or distributor).
2. Participate in agri-food networks, organizations, and events - both locally and elsewhere.
3. Participate in consultation processes; respond to surveys and make your perspectives known.
4. Plan for resilience - how will you keep going when met with (inevitable) adversity?

Networks

1. Have a clear mandate and purpose, and stick to it.
 - Redundancy in networks reduces efficiency and causes competition for resources.
2. Link to other networks which have related but different purposes.
3. Collaborate with others when needs outstrip your own resources or expertise.
4. Understand the pathways and connections between various related networks and to the highest level table where big decisions are made.
5. Work to understand the limitations of others.
 - Trust and empathy can open the door to productive collaboration.

Section 3: Forward Momentum

The ACRD's system change project is ending, but many of its partners and collaborators are continuing on with related work. Following are some of the many people and opportunities eager to welcome you in joining their efforts.

Avenues for Continued Engagement

Increasing Regional District Capacity for Agri-Food Support

- Amy Needham, Sustainability Planner for the ACRD,
 - Inquire about regional district agriculture services and staffing - anneedham@acrd.bc.ca
- Noah Brotman, Capital Regional District
 - Welcomes discussion about regional agriculture programs - nbrotman@crd.bc.ca
- Planner conventions and networks
 - Discuss options and models for regional agri-food support and development of a network of regional district staff involved in agri-food support.

The **VICC Climate Leadership Steering Committee** formed in 2019 as a venue to support regional collaboration on climate action in the Vancouver Island and Coastal Communities region.

A paid facilitator is funded by each participating regional district; staff simply shows up to learn from and collaborate with one another.

It's a model that could work well for agricultural and food initiatives.

Continuing a BC-Wide Network of Organizations Supporting Local Agri-Food Systems

- Many participating organizations want to continue working with a BC-wide network focused on systemic change and regional agri-food efforts.
 - It's seen as a place to connect, learn & share knowledge; to be inspired and to build leadership.
 - An annual in-person gathering of organizations is an identified goal.
- The BC Food System Network has filled a similar role in the past, and some board members are looking to renew and revitalize its efforts.
 - Those who have indicated interest will be contacted as progress is made, and a public announcement will be made as appropriate.
 - Reach out to ACRDagriculture@gmail.com or ccdring@gmail.com to stay in the loop.

"It has been a pleasure to be on these calls, to develop relationships with others working in this realm across the province, and to learn how they are each approaching this work. It is a very valuable opportunity." - Participant

Academic and Educational Opportunities

- Jenny Horn, Vancouver Island University
 - Looking for indication of interest in collaborating on a micro-credential certificate program in agricultural planning. Contact jenny.Horn@viu.ca
- Colin Dring, Public Scholar
 - Continues to work in the fields of community food security, agricultural and food system planning, community development, and agri-food policy with a lens of social justice and food system sustainability. Contact ccdring@gmail.com
- KPU's Institute for Sustainable Food Systems
 - Conducting a suite of bioregional food system projects (currently Vancouver Island) in an effort to address food system challenges. Projects are informed by community consultation and guided by regional advisory committees. Contact Kristi Tatebe kristine.tatebe@kpu.ca

Farmers' Institutes

- Under the Farmers' and Women's Institute Act, Farmers' Institutes have a unique and important ability to advise the Minister of Agriculture directly on matters of interest to them.
- Farmers' Institutes's (FI) want routine opportunities and solid mechanisms to engage with and learn from each other, in-person where ever possible.
- Find and connect with [your local institute here](#).

"There needs to be a better, more efficient way to facilitate networking between FIs and on behalf of FIs."

- Participant at BC Farmers' Institutes Online Gathering November 30, 2023

Province of BC - Ministry of Agriculture

- Reach out to your Regional Agrologist, one of their two new Seafood Industry Advisors, the BC Indigenous Agriculture Development Program, or the Superintendent of Farmers' Institutes
- Participate in the Ministry of Agriculture and Food's Regional Extension Program

"I hope you look at us as partners and collaborators for improving the food security for all people in the Province"

"Anyone (i.e. large or small scale) who want to succeed as a farmer can reach out to the Ministry for support, and we'll do our best."

- Regional Agrologist, BC Ministry of Agriculture

The health of our food system remains on the edge of a precipice. But things are changing, and no actor is alone in their efforts to change it.

Production and harvest is a foundational component of a local food system. The value of the people who engage in this essential work is becoming more recognized, and a regionalized approach is helping to ensure that the diverse voices and varieties of culture that bring food to our tables are supported in the ways that they need to be.

Project Recap

Three Key Learnings:

1. Food is foundational.
2. Things are changing.
3. We are not alone.

Project Activities Resulted in Systemic Changes to:

1. Knowledge, tools, and relationships;
2. Policy and practices; and
3. Narratives, culture, and society at large.

What We Can Do Now:

1. Educate instead of regulate.
2. Turn meetings into celebrations.
3. Turn grants into gifts.

Continuing the Push for Change: the Future of BC Agri-Food Support

As Bob Collins, one of the ACRD's most well-known producers, so adeptly pointed out: all of this 'system change' work - the governance and core funding and meetings and problem-solving; all this 'support for food and farmers' - is moot without farmers.

We need to keep talking about the challenges facing producers and agricultural production. And we need to do so in a spirit of collaboration and a spirit of giving. Listen closely, reduce the barriers to production, and continue to search for new and streamlined ways to meet the pressing needs of BC's agricultural producers. Trust, goodwill, and a healthy dose of respect for one another will help us to sit together at an abundant table to which we've all contributed.

The system isn't broken, it was built this way. And we can re-build it.

Thank You!

To the many people and organizations who have participated in this project and to the Vancouver Foundation and other financial supporters, Thank You! for:

- Listening or contributing in the past, and for the conversations that will follow
- Being part of a progressive and boundary-pushing body of work, even when it felt uncomfortable
- Any movements you've made towards a different future and different ways of doing things
- Any tangible supports (financial or otherwise) that you've lent to this project
- Taking up the deep and difficult work of supporting local food systems

A special thank you to:

- The Alberni-Clayoquot Regional District for taking on this project and the Ministry of Agriculture and Food for continuing to engage with it. It's been a privilege and honour for me personally.
- The Core 8 group of regional agricultural support organization - I've learned so much from you, and I hope it continues. (CRAIR, DAFI, KBFA, KFPC, LAFS, NFS, NOL2T, & RDBN)
- The many organizations and individuals supporting agri-food security here in the ACRD. You're helping to make our 'village' stronger and healthier, and I'm glad you're part of it.

Most importantly, thank you to all the producers and harvesters, of all scales, who are fighting battles that few understand in order to put food on our tables. Even if it is a passion project, and even if you are some of the luckiest people in the world to be doing such meaningful and important work - I know how tough it can be.

Heather Shobe
System Change Project Coordinator

Thank YOU!

to the many organizations and individuals involved in this work, including: Ahousaht, Alberni-Clayoquot Health Network; Alberni-Clayoquot Regional District; Alberni District Fall Fair; Alberni Farmers' Institute; Alberni

Valley Food Security Group; Alberni Valley News; BC Agricultural Climate Adaptation Research Network; BC Cooperative Association; BC Dairy; BC Food Web; BC Ministry of Agriculture and Food; BC Ministry of Health; Canadian Seafood Processing; Capital Regional District; Capital Region Food and Agriculture Initiative Roundtable; Center for Seafood Innovation; City of Port Alberni; Chase and Area Farmers' Institute; Clayoquot Biosphere Trust; Climate Adaptation Initiative; Colin Dring; Community Futures Alberni-Clayoquot; Comox Valley Regional District; Country Life in BC; Danford Consulting; Department of Fisheries and Oceans; District A Farmers' Institute; District of Saanich; District of Tofino; District of Ucluelet; Ditidaht; Dock+ Food Processing Hub; Eat West Coast; Farm 2 School BC; Hesquiaht First Nations; Hupacasath First Nation; Huu-ay-aht First Nations; INEO Employment Services; Investment Agriculture Foundation of BC; Institute of Sustainable Food Systems; Island Health; Kamloops Food Policy Council; Keefer Ecological; Kootenay-Boundary Farm Advisors; Kwantlen Polytechnic University; Lillooet Agriculture and Food Society; Maaqutsiis Hahoulthee Stewardship Society; Nanaimo Food Share; North Island College; North Okanagan Land to Table Network; Nuu-chah-nulth Tribal Council; qathet Regional District; Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako; Regional District of Central Okanagan; Regional District of East-Kootenay; Regional District of Nanaimo; Richmond Sharing Farm; Royal Roads University; School District 70; Shaw Spotlight; Shelter Farm; Simon Fraser University; Small Scale Meat Producers' Association; Spirit Square Farmers' Market; Squamish-Lillooet Regional District; Tla-o-qui-aht First Nation; Thompson Rivers University; Tofino Community Food Initiative; Tofino-Ucluelet Culinary Guild; Toquaht Nation; Township of Langley; Tropospheric Measurement Systems; Tseshaht First Nation; Uchucklesaht Tribe Government; Ucluelet Local Food Society; University of British Columbia; University of the Fraser Valley; Vancouver Foundation; Vancouver Island University; Young Agrarians; and Yuułu?iŋatŋ Government.



Appendix 1: Project Details

Project Overview and Objectives

Vancouver Foundation's(VF) System Change grants support “projects that take action to address the root causes of pressing social, environmental or cultural issues by influencing the behaviours of populations, organizations, and institutions.”

VF previously provided \$20,000 for the ACRD's System Change ‘Develop’ project (2019-2020). That project explored the pressing need and assisted in development of the project plan. They then provided \$300,000 for this subsequent ‘Test’ project (2021-2024) which included a particular focus for each year and a set of activities both within and external to the Alberni-Clayoquot region.

System Change ‘Test’ Project - Overview	
Annual Focus	<p>Year 1 - Evaluating the impact of regional agricultural support</p> <p>Year 2 - Supporting producer access to extension services and research support</p> <p>Year 3 - Compiling a comprehensive and accessible database of resources for regions across BC</p>
Annual Activities: Local	<p>Distribution of core funding to local agri-food organizations and governments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alberni Farmers’ Institute (AFI) - \$4000 • Alberni District Fall Fair (ADFF) - \$4000 • AVTTS Alberni Valley Food Security Society (AVFSS) - \$7500 (matching Island Health) • Eat West Coast (EWC) - \$7500 (matching Island Health) • Clayoquot Biosphere Trust (CBT) - \$2500 (to administer the Coastal Agricultural Roundtable) • Tofino Community Food Initiative (TCFI) - \$4000 • \$20,000 to support Nuu-chah-nulth Food Sovereignty <p>Mentorship and support to local organizations, to help increase capacity and impact</p>
Annual Activities: Across BC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meetings with a network of other regional agri-food organizations, learning and sharing • BC-wide forums and events, with an annual focus • Research and action to increase regional roles and influence, including within regional government

Specific Objectives Included:

1. Enhancing the ACRD's ‘bridging’ role between various regional committees; the region & the Province, & regional agri-food organizations across BC
2. Distribution of core funding to local agri-food organizations; mentorship to help increase organizational capacity and skills
3. Supporting ACRD's 10 Indigenous communities to create culturally-appropriate structures, roles, and plans for food system work.
4. Establishing broadly acceptable evaluation metrics for regional agri-food organizations
5. Supporting producer and organizational connections to academia and technical extension services
6. Establishing a comprehensive & accessible database agri-food resources and initiatives
7. Engaging regional districts & planners in rural agricultural planning via academic interviews and education
8. Developing a BC-wide network of regional agri-food organizations via routine conference calls & in-person annual events focused on topics #4/5/6 above

Year 1 Focus - Demonstrating the Value of Regional Agricultural Support

Discussions with other regionally-based agri-food organizations explored their major initiatives, funding and staffing models, primary successes and challenges, connections to the Province and Regional governments, impacts at the Provincial level, and cultural dynamics. [A project report on this topic is linked here.](#)

We learned that:

Mandates & Roles

- Most are strongly engaged in outreach, education, and networking within their regions, including with primary producers.
- They often work to implement Area Agricultural Plans, often with a strong focus on the smaller / startup growers.
- They support the unique nature of their region's context, producers, and priorities.
- Their focus often includes community health, food security, and food system issues.
- Most operate as non-profit organizations or charities. Regional district involvement is rare but highly valued.

Local Challenges

- They struggle with core funding and rely heavily on time-bound, project-based grants.
- Major challenges include: infrastructure and regulatory issues; volunteer recruitment and compensation; the need for professional development, marketing, technical and advocacy support; and sector in-fighting (big vs. small scale, organic vs. conventional, etc.).

External Connections

- They have had few formal connections or routine engagements with other regional agri-food organization, but there's widespread interest in participating.
- Their connections to the Province are largely tied to project-based grants.
- They're interested in working with academic institutions, but connections are limited.

Policy and Process Complaints

- They're often frustrated by processes that, by their nature, exclude producers (surveys in mid-summer, lack of funds for participation in projects or on committees).
- They note that producers are frustrated and often seek help navigating bureaucratic complexity, grant applications, and the myriad of resources available to them.
- They share a sense of frustration that provincial policy and regulations doesn't scale down to small-scale and / or rural producers - that Provincial supports do not fit regional needs .
- They share a sense of not being 'seen' by the Province. They want to know '*What makes us worthwhile, from a Ministry of Agriculture and Food perspective?*'

Lessons Learned, Year 1:

1. CORE funding is needed for organizations supporting agriculture at a regional level
2. BRIDGING ROLES are needed at both the regional and provincial levels
3. REGIONAL AGRICULTURE SUPPORT helps to:
 - Increase small farm economies/capacities;
 - Increase production and consumption of local foods;
 - Increase equity and access to culturally-appropriate foods;
 - Ensure food harvests are sustainable, regenerative, and adaptive to climate change;
 - Ensure producer voices are included in development of policies and programs.

Year 2 Focus - Extension and Research Support

The second year focused on supporting producer and organizational connections to academic and technical extension resources.

A series of activities supported discussion and development of recommendations:

- On online forum explored what was currently available.
- A second online forum was held to discuss and brainstorm solutions.
- An in-person event brought together producers, government, academic institutions and organizations from across BC to generate a shared narrative and forward paths.



Image 7: From: Extension & Research Event Presentation, Jan 27, 2023

Year 3 Focus - Regional Resource Database

The third year intention was to create a database of resources that would be useful to organizations from across BC who supported agriculture at the regional level.

Discussion and consideration of options led to a decision to create a localized database that would support producers and agri-food organizations within the Alberni-Clayoquot region and which would be hosted on the ACRD's website. These could still be useful to other regional organizations, either for mimicking on their own sites or for sharing with their networks. Currently in a simple chart form, this resource will be amended for visual and intuitive appeal.

Notable challenges

- Many databases already existed; the amount of information available is staggering.
- A comprehensive and province-wide database would have significant cost.
- There's a need for specificity about who the resources are intended for; the potential audience is huge.
- Keeping links and resources up-to-date is a challenge that many organizations grapple with.
- The Ministry of Agriculture and Food hosts a very comprehensive online database, however it almost exclusively links to 'ministry-approved' information or programs & organizations they are formally affiliated with. As such, it shares information that is aligned with the Ministry's perspective only.

Other Project Highlights

Activities to explore and enhance regional government roles in agri-food planning was threaded through the project. Another project element, to explore and enhance the role and capacity of BC's farmers' institutes by bringing them together for an online event, was added after it was indicated in the second year.

Regional Government Roles in Agri-Food Planning

- With the support of public scholar Colin Dring, seventeen regional districts from across BC were engaged in academic interviews about their perspectives on the role of regions in supporting agriculture.
- Findings and recommendations were shared on webpages and through online and in-person engagements.
- Regional district staff were keenly interested and active participants throughout the course of the project.
- The ACRD shared information about their own process towards hiring a permanent staff member whose role explicitly included agri-food support.



Image 8: Infographic of Colin Dring's Research Results

Strengthening Farmers' Institutes

- The Alberni Farmers' Institute was provided with core funding as part of the initial project plan and received additional support to distribute honoraria to producers for meeting participation.
- Invigoration of farmers' institutes across BC was recommended at the year two in-person event and the Ministry of Agriculture and Food indicated support for related activities.
- In year three, the ACRD hosted an online gathering of farmers' institutes from across BC to learn from each other and help develop recommendations that would support their invigoration.

Appendix 2: Project Publications

Annual Reports

- [Year 1](#)
- [Year 2](#)
- [PPT Presentation, Year 3](#)
- [Video Presentation, Year 3](#)

Demonstrating the Value of Regional Agricultural Support, Year 1 Focus

- [Demonstrating Value, Full Report](#)
- [Evaluation Framework](#)
- [Monthly Evaluation Tool](#)
- [What Makes This Network Important?](#)

Extension and Research Support, Year 2 Focus

- [What's Available?](#) Summary of online forum, May 2022
- [Brainstorming Solutions](#) - Summary of online forum, October 2022
- [Presentation for In-person Event](#), January 2023
- [In-person Event Summary](#), January 2023

Regional District Roles

- Academic research with Colin Dring - *Agricultural Supports and Challenges, Exploring the Role of BC Regional Districts*: [webpage](#), [infographic](#), [policy brief](#), and [full report](#)
- ACRDS's agri-food staffing processes: [A picture of a permanent staff position for agricultural support](#)

Farmers' Institutes

- [Presentation for Online Gathering](#) - November 30, 2023
- [Summary of Online Gathering](#) - November 30, 2023
- [Overview of FI Rules and Regulations](#)

System Change 'Develop' Project (2019-2020)

- [Summary of In-person event](#) (2019)
- [Final Report](#) (2020)