

Table Matters...

A Community Discussion about Food Security on the North Shore

On October 23, 2009 members of the community, politicians, municipal staff, gardeners, business, Vancouver Coastal Health staff and many others came together to initiate a wider discussion about what food security might look like on the North Shore. After presentations from Devorah Kahn (City of Vancouver), Arzeena Hamir (Richmond Food Security Society) and Ron Plowright (Fraser Health), who outlined the diverse strategies being pursued in their own communities, participants sat down with regional and local experts to share ideas and develop actions around those ideas.

Summary of Main Ideas – from action items, ideas, themes, & recommendations

1) North Shore Networking

There was strong support to keep building a network of people interested in food security and urban agriculture on the North Shore. Ways to develop the network could include monthly/quarterly meetings, annual festival, or occasional potlucks. Small area network development will be important to join community members in working on food issues within their neighbourhood/municipality. Not only do we need to connect with each other, but we must also work towards broader public awareness about urban agriculture and invite new people into the network through use of media, community ambassadors doing education workshops, offering opportunities for youth involvement, and finding and sharing stories about food gardening and gardeners specifically on the North Shore.

ACTIONS	Person / Group Responsible
Coordinate Annual meeting and Quarterly Meetings,	Smaller Meetings: Community Volunteers? Annual Meeting: Coordinating Committee
Develop small area networks	

2) Resources - Directory/Inventory

One of the primary objectives we generated through the discussion was sharing information. This involves making it easier for residents to find out about projects, information and contacts through the creation of a resource directory. A web site could be used to house information. Connecting people electronically could happen by sharing samples of newsletters across listserves (eg. Among NSRP, VCH, EGP, Ecourbia listserves).

ACTIONS	Person/Group Responsible
Identify funding for development / maintenance of website	Ecourbia? Plus volunteers?
Compile information and resources to appear on the site	
Create Resource Directory	
Share contact information among newsletters	VCH

3) Municipal Council Involvement

Participants suggested finding champions in municipal government to mobilize staff to include urban agriculture in planning. Developing connections between grassroots organizations and city councils was highlighted as being very important, as was advocating for municipal policy statements to enable the use of boulevards and available land for food growing. Asking Councils to include urban agriculture policy in new/renewed developments was also identified as key. Finding and using terminology that fits with the current municipal planning/architecture models but shifting it slightly to include food was a suggested strategy.

We need to promote composting on apartment building grounds, pick up of food waste to create compost and allow residents access to compost (especially those in apartments).

ACTIONS	Person / Group Responsible
<i>Identify municipal staff/council champions</i>	
<i>Mobilize organizations to engage with municipalities</i>	
<i>Participate in OCP and planning processes</i>	
<i>Municipalities 101 (education for grassroots groups on how to best engage in municipal processes)</i>	

4) School Gardens

Support for school gardens was emphasized as a priority and included ideas such as integrating school gardens into community gardens to provide year-round gardeners. Other ways to support school gardens during the summer were: involving seniors, summer school students, or having families adopt a garden for 1 week. It was pointed out that teaching orchards would fit better with the school year and might avoid some of the problems typically faced by school garden programs. Keeping the 'Farm to School' program in mind and looking for opportunities to implement it on the North Shore would benefit both local farmers and children. Working to increase the integration of school gardens into the curriculum is important as is promoting success stories about how school board, PAC and unions work together to allow gardens.

ACTIONS	Person/Group Responsible
<i>Compile and share existing school curricula</i>	
<i>Identify sites to integrate community and school gardens</i>	
<i>Participate in upcoming youth MetroVancouver symposium and "Students Summit on Food Security"</i>	
<i>Pursue "Farm to School" initiative</i>	

5) Community Garden Development

Community Gardens were identified as an effective way to engage citizens and politicians about local food. We need to advocate within municipalities to gain support for community gardens (especially in less food secure neighbourhoods) and consider new types of community garden and urban agriculture initiatives. Farm gardens and greenhouses were also identified as potential strategies. We need to consider how to overcome barriers such as prevention of theft, residents’ resistance to use of public land for growing food and wildlife management.

ACTIONS	Person/Group Responsible
Support existing initiatives (i.e. CNV Urban Farm and community gardens)	
Identify North Shore sites appropriate for growing food	
Identify and compile best practices including examples of larger scale production	
Develop support for community gardens in municipal governments	

6) Programs to optimize use of food/local food

A number of strategies were identified to increase access to local food: a year-round farmers market (indoor in winter), better promotion of current farmers markets, and a food exchange or urban food growers’ co-op where residents can trade or buy local food. Promotion of food trading among neighbours (2-block diet) and reducing barriers to selling of backyard produce were also identified. Participants were looking for additional ways to access food growing expertise and advice. Increasing community awareness of existing food programs, particularly for those at risk in the community was identified as very important, as was promoting aboriginal food sovereignty (including access to forests and community gardens for harvesting and growing traditional plants). Currently a great deal of food ends up in the waste stream. To overcome barriers to donation it is important to create and strengthen relationships with retailers, emphasizing the advantages of reducing retail food waste.

ACTIONS	Person/Group Responsible
Promote existing farmers markets	
Develop venue for Food Exchange	-Visioning workshop for New City Market –A food hub for Vancouver Jan 7 -‘Shared Harvest’ project currently underway for the region.
Identify barriers to selling backyard produce	
Create a ‘food donation’ toolkit for retailers (advantages and ‘how-to’ safely donate)	
Promote Aboriginal Food Sovereignty	

7) Education

The discussion returned again and again to the challenge of public education. Promotion, awareness-raising, and hands-on workshops by community ambassadors were key ideas. Participants were looking for additional ways to access food growing expertise and advice. Community ambassadors would be one method of meeting that need with experienced food gardeners who share their expertise with others in the community, much like master gardeners. Improving communication through media to increase the reach of information about food programs, local food, farmers markets and food growing workshops was recommended. Educating consumers about the importance of local and sustainable food is important, as is education around bears (particularly for gardeners and composters).

ACTIONS	Person/Group Responsible
Increased promotion of existing education opportunities.	
Engage media in promoting urban agriculture and food security	
Community workshops on gardening	GardenSmart (NSRP, EGP, LCEC)
Bear education	
Increase number of community ambassadors who are lay educators	

8) Training – Farming Initiatives

We had enthusiastic discussion about the long-term possibility of developing a North Shore Farmer's Institute that could both nurture young farmers and engage the community in Urban Agriculture. Other training opportunities including starting a North Shore 4H club, or partnering with existing institutions such as Capilano University around developing a farm / urban agriculture program.

ACTION	Person/Group Responsible
<i>Compile 'Best Practices' for farmer's institutes</i>	
<i>Conduct feasibility study</i>	
<i>Identify potential partner programs</i>	
<i>Start 4H Club</i>	

Notes compiled by Margaret Broughton and Heather Johnstone. Please send your feedback or progress notes to Margaret Broughton at Margaret.Broughton@vch.ca.

Thank you to all the volunteers who took notes.