

Food Systems

COVID19 Impacts and Response

Capital Region area report from CRFAIR



Weekly Briefing Note - April 16, 2020

Organizations and individuals who are working across the food system have been meeting online to gather information about what they are seeing happen in terms of food and food systems in our communities. CRFAIR has been requested by a number of government agencies, institutions, and local decision makers to provide information on what is “happening on the ground” in terms of the impacts of COVID19 and the measures being taken to control its spread. We are working to respond to provide you with weekly updates, please be aware that this information is being gathered quickly in a dynamic situation and comes from multiple sources and limited capacity.

Would you like to contribute to, receive updates, have corrections or be included in meeting invitations for various impact area action groups? E-mail engagement@crfair.ca.

Following you will see two sections, one focused on **Food Access**, and a second on **Food Production and Food Availability**. We have added a “summary” overview in each section. Some information has been provided in previous weeks, but information is updated weekly as information becomes available.

Weekly Roundup on Food Access

Summary - As Emergency Operation Centers work through the many areas of responsibility that they have there are some that are thinking about food security and the next stage of the pandemic cycle. Due to the unprecedented measures taken to social distance and control the spread it is still unknown how the Federal and Provincial government supports in play will impact the ability of the region to remain stable and control severe economic impacts. On Thursday, Linda Geggie, Executive Director of CRFAIR provided an update to the Vancouver Island Region Provincial Emergency Operations Centers (VIR PREOC) daily call of emergency managers across Vancouver Island to provide them a summary of collaborative food relief efforts on the ground as well as concerns on the horizon of having increased pressures on the systems of support. There are varying degrees with which emergency on call centers in communities across the island are dealing with food systems beyond relying on Supply Chain management by Emergency Management BC/PROVBC. Some centers are beginning to consider food relief efforts (City of Victoria has a food security working group). Each center varies as to the focus it has on food as part of their emergency management role.

Currently over 50,000 people in the Capital Region are being served by emergency food support systems, and there has been a concerted effort to house and feed the most vulnerable of downtown street involved populations through provision of temporary shelter in tent cities and hotels , as well as meeting food needs and health and safety supports.

Agencies are gathering data to better understand potential economic impacts and using income as a primary indicator of potential food insecurity. It is important to determine areas of vulnerability in communities and ways to best support them. A first wave of response has been facilitated through continuing school meal programs in School District 61 and 62 feeding over 1300 families through weekly pickups of prepackaged meals for the week. The Rapid Relief Fund has now raised over \$4 million and other donations are supporting agencies in their ability to respond.

Impacts and Responses

In the Capital Region there is a network of over 70 emergency food providers who are part of the FoodShare Network, they work together with the operational partner the Mustard Seed to undertake the Food Rescue Project through the Food Security and Redistribution Center on Viewfield Road in Esquimalt.

Members of the FoodShare Network Steering Committee are meeting regularly to assess the evolving situation and support each other. Below are the key issues identified and current actions being explored and “in action” to ensure that everyone who needs food in the region is getting what they need.

Donations are rapidly growing to support emergency food distribution. This is happening through the Rapid Relief Fund, appeals to citizens to donate food,

What is the Food Share Network noticing this week?

- Many places that deliver food relief and services are reopening as they are able to reconfigure their programs and services to be able to ensure social distancing and COVID 19 protocols are in place.
- There are currently sufficient food donations to the Food Security Distribution Centre as many restaurants and other outlets curbed their operations. The warehouse has implemented strict COVID-19 protocols and is open weekdays to support donations and distribution efforts. New agencies are being brought on to expand distribution capacity.
- It is anticipated that more young adults will be seeking to access food resources in the coming weeks. University and college classes are ending, and students may have trouble finding summer jobs. They may be seeking more support due to lack of income..
- Food supplies through food distributors (eg: Sysco, Gordon Foods etc) seem to be down. Many orders are coming in with fewer items than expected. Many agencies are doing more purchasing through the Real Canadian Wholesale Club to compensate.

- More agencies are looking at distributing grocery store gift cards to their clients/community to provide them with more choice in the foods they consume, and to decrease the number of people that are touching the food that is being distributed. However, this is relatively expensive and uses up funds pretty quickly.
- Some agencies are seeing changing demographics coming through their food delivery streams, including more people without access to a kitchen who need food that can be eaten without preparation.
- PEERS identified challenges in serving a homeless population that don't have a cell phone. Makes it hard to deliver food to individuals if they cannot be contacted. They are trying to distribute cell phones to their clients to facilitate communication.
- It was identified that some car dealerships have offered to support food deliveries at no charge for communities in need.

Emergency Access List: A list of available foods and distributing agencies around the region is being updated weekly. A second list for the School District 62 area has also been compiled. A list of food programming and services in the region can be found here: [PANDEMIC COMMUNITY RESOURCES](#)

Victoria Foundation Rapid Relief Fund: Over \$2.4 million have gone out with priority for food security, meal programs, homelessness, and more from the Rapid Relief Fund that has now raised over \$4 Million. The RRF intake form is now open on the Victoria Foundation website <https://victoriafoundation.bc.ca/grant-eligibility-rapid-relief-fund/>.

The Victoria Foundation has also launched a Rapid Relief Fund Needs Assessment: so that community organizations can also let the Victoria Foundation know what their needs are: <https://victoriafoundation.bc.ca/grant-eligibility-rapid-relief-fund/> for info email directly at: RRFGrants@victoriafoundation.bc.ca

Federal Funding has also been announced in support of these efforts: <https://pm.gc.ca/en/news/news-releases/2020/04/03/prime-minister-announces-support-food-banks-and-local-food>

The Government of Canada will provide funding to national, regional, and local organizations across Canada that are able to reach people and communities experiencing food insecurity. These organizations – including but not limited to Food Banks Canada, Salvation Army, Second Harvest, Community Food Centres Canada, and Breakfast Club of Canada – will work with partners to meet the urgent food needs of Canadians, including Indigenous peoples and Northern populations. Funding will be delivered through the Government of Canada's Local Food Infrastructure Fund.

The \$100 million investment is divided as follows:

- \$50 million to Food Banks Canada
- \$20 million divided evenly between Salvation Army, Second Harvest, Community Food Centres Canada, and Breakfast Club of Canada

- ***UPDATED-\$30 million** for local-level organizations who serve people experiencing food insecurity is being **put on hold** and looking towards involving MPS to weigh in on the best way to distribute these funds.

Western Communities: There is a collaborative effort ramping up in the Western Communities. Last week the Western Communities Roundtable held a Rapid Assessment Response and Recovery meeting that was attended by School District 62 Healthy Schools Coordinator, Trustees, City of Langford, City of Colwood, MLA Mitzi Dean, emergency food providers and networks, Lohbrunner Farm and many others. Key concerns are that many vulnerable families may not be able to access current supports and services. Another concern is that the Luxton and Goldstream Farmers markets are looking at not opening which are two community access points for local food as well as ways for local farmers to sell their goods. A steering committee has formed to better understand the evolving needs and develop action strategies through schools, community agencies and the *West Shore Child, Youth & Family Centre* to support residents. **Update** - A first draft of the Initial scan of Western Communities resources and available food services has been completed based on information available. The next step is to add other organizations not yet identified. This work will enable the roll out of emergency response programming in the WestShore and WEstern Communities and help to identify areas with gaps.

Downtown Core: There is a significant effort underway called Boxes of Hope working to provide meals to people in emergency housing in the downtown core This effort is being mustered by several local Victoria restaurants, the Jawl Family Foundation, the Coalition to End Homelessness and the Downtown Victoria Business Association. Every \$10 donated provides a warm healthy meal to someone in need, supports our local restaurant community and helps to keep restaurant staff employed. Boxes of Hope launched March 20, 2020 and is currently delivering 200 meals each night, with anticipated capacity growing to 1000 over the next few weeks.

Seniors: Safe Seniors, Strong Communities initiative is underway. The Province, in collaboration with bc211, Better at Home, and United Way's across the province, recognize that community agencies and individuals are eager to mobilize to aid our seniors in the community whose vital support systems have been disrupted by COVID-19. The Safe Seniors, Safe Communities program allows volunteers to be connected with seniors in their region who need help with grocery shopping, meal prep and prescription pick-up or to receive friendly check-in calls. They are directing seniors in need of support or folks wishing to volunteer, to call or text 2-1-1 or visit bc211.ca to register.

School District 62 has a contract with Truffles to cater their meal programs. They are currently shifting to use three community drop off sites to deliver meals to 300 students who are regular participants in the daily meal programs. They are providing packages of five meals to each student/family for the week in the weekly drop off. SD62 has also created a resource for the district on key community supports for food, housing, and other services. An attempt is underway via principals to get a better sense of need/opportunities/barriers as they've been asked to reach out to families for feedback. They are also

working to produce a brochure that provides information and connects folks with the fuller [list of community services](#) we've developed for SWS folks.

School District 61: Starting April 3, deliveries will commence to the students in the 20-30 schools that normally have daily lunch programs in the district. The School District is continuing their contract with Truffles to drop off weekly packs of 5 meals to the students as well as a supplemental family meal to a few schools acting as hubs for pickup for over 1000 families. The process is rolling out very smoothly, and looking to expand. One of the challenges is supporting families who are not able to come pick up food. Staff have been supporting families with food deliveries.

School District 63: At this time School District 63 is assessing the needs of its families and the best way to support them.

Good Food Box Program: The Good Food Box program that is operated by Fernwood NRG and provides grocery boxes to people throughout the region, and also provides subsidized and free boxes through the Gift of Good Food Program is under pressure to expand. Additional resources are being allocated and planning is underway to determine how this program can be amped up to serve more broadly, with hopes for expansion to the WestShore.

Volunteers: Many agencies have lost their employees or volunteers, there is an effort underway to reach out to volunteers and there are now over 100 on the list! These folks can help with food preparation, delivery etc. Contact coordinator@foodsharenetwork.ca

First Nations: There are ongoing meetings to determine best responses with First Nations Health Authority, Nations Health Directors and other supporting agencies to understand what is happening in communities. Some communities on the island are closing their communities to protect elders. There are emergency funds going to support some of the programming, however some important programming like Head Start has been suspended as nations work to put in place proper systems. The [ŚW,ØENENITEL](#) Initiative supporting access to traditional foods and medicines put out a call for funding and has received over 20 proposals with disbursements to community members and organizations underway to support access to traditional foods and medicines. Efforts are underway to expand this program up the island.

Update on the Growing Together initiative: This initiative of the Good Food Network is designed to support folks to grow food at home. The initiative may also expand to encourage folks to grow extra food to share with those in need through donations to the FoodShare (emergency food) Network if it can be deemed possible within responsible COVID-19 protocols. Several Agencies have already signed on to support the efforts and more are welcomed to connect. These agencies are gathering resources and support to ensure people have access to the resources they need as well as mentorship and information to be successful. The initiative will be formally launching next week.

Currently CRFAIR is supporting the coordination efforts, developing a communications plan, a landing page (growingfood-together.com), and a system for requesting support, volunteering or donating to the initiative. For more information e-mail growingtogether@crfair.ca.

The Food Literacy Working Group of the Good Food Network has cancelled its annual June Food Literacy Roundtable, however they are launching a series of webinars over the next period to provide a venue for continued learning. Contact Janelle Hatch for more info Janelle_Rondeau@hotmail.com

Canada Summer Jobs Update: Many community food organizations and local businesses provide summer jobs for students through the Canada Summer Jobs program and are hopeful that students will be approved. New updates to the program - <https://pm.gc.ca/en/news/news-releases/2020/04/08/changes-canada-summer-jobs-program-help-businesses-and-young>

Weekly Roundup on Food Production and Availability

Summary - As we move into the planting season there is great uncertainty within the farm sector. Wholesalers are approaching farmers who are able to produce at scale to increase contracts with fears around the evolving situation with global supply chains. Reports that major US produce suppliers are facing labour shortages and disruptions and imports will be down 30% (if not more if we see any duplication of protectionism as evidenced by the recent actions around medical supplies). Closing and curtailing of meat packing is also a concern for BC meat supply. From conversations with local larger scale farmers we are hearing they are focusing on direct sales as evidenced by Michell Farms - of the Island Vegetable Growers Cooperative -who are not selling any wholesale at this time. In conversations with Michell's and other farmers it is reported that their farm stand/stores sales are up 300-400% and staff are fairly exhausted with demand and attention to COVID Protocols. There are significant concerns if foreign workers do not arrive soon. Even with Federal programs in place it is uncertain if workers will arrive. Many large scale producers in the lower mainland are curbing planting due to predicted labour shortages. Expect lower local produce supply this summer season.

Smaller scale farmers that make up the majority of our regional farms sell 97% through direct sales. With some local farm markets not opening and restaurants closed, there are real concerns about farmers marketing channels. BC Farmers Market Association and the Province have implemented an online sales system and support for BC growers to allow for farm market sales, however many farmers we have been in contact with are finding it challenging to adjust to learning new technologies in the height of their busy period. Anecdotally, the Cow- Coop who does online sales and delivery to pick up depots (with approximately 30% of their sales in the Capital Region) have increased sales five times their normal seasonal average. Seed, supplies and feed services seem to be keeping up with demand to support farms.

There is unprecedented activity by **individuals and families to grow their own food** with reports of shortages of basic supplies like soils and seeds. Gardening Stores are working very hard to put in place call and email orders. The City of Victoria is supporting residents with seedling starts and the City of Nanaimo in concert with the construction industry has offered soil for would be gardeners and saw line ups of over 3.5 km long to access the soil. A region wide Growing Together Campaign to support backyard growers with support is being launched by over 25 agencies from around the Capital Region.

Fisheries, Restaurants and other food services are all experiencing impacts that are detailed below.

Impacts and Responses

Provincial Work on Supply Chains: The BC Government is stepping up action on supply chain coordination establishing a new Provincial Supply Chain Coordination Unit to co-ordinate goods and services distribution; taking a more active role in coordinating essential goods and services movement by land, air, marine and rail, and suspending any bylaws that restrict goods delivery at any time of day. The Ministry of Agriculture (AGRI) is involved in the overall provincial response and participates in provincial cross ministry working groups including the Retail Working Group, Supply Chain Working Group and the Food for Vulnerable Populations Advisory Committee. Additionally AGRI has activated a number of ministry advanced planning units for Market Access & Distribution, Industry Outreach and Issues Management, Agriculture Labour, Business Supports, Seafood Sector, etc. that are all working to address issues and consequences resulting from the COVID-19 situation.

April 13, 2020: Government of Canada – Keeping Canadians and workers in the food supply chain safe
<https://www.canada.ca/en/agriculture-agri-food/news/2020/04/keeping-canadians-and-workers-in-the-food-supply-chain-safe.html>

Retail: There have been significant changes in retail protocols. There do not seem to be significant shortages of any food items at this time in grocery stores. Stores are implementing social distance protocols ensuring there are limited numbers of shoppers in the stores, wiping high touch surfaces, closure of deli and bulk items, plexiglass between customers and servers as well as using paper and plastic grocery bags.

https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/health/about-bc-s-health-care-system/office-of-the-provincial-health-officer/covid-19/covid-19_guidance_to_grocery_stores_march_28_2020.pdf

Restaurants: Restaurants are still closed for dining but some are moving to more online orders as well many are exploring providing grocery boxes to their customers. looking to distribute coffee, baked goods, produce and prepared meals through pick up and delivery. The Federal government wage subsidy should provide some relief to workers but there is fear that many restaurants will be impacted significantly and even close. Some local restaurants are linking with emergency food supply efforts such as the Boxes of Hope initiative.

The blog Tasting Victoria has compiled a list of which restaurants are open in Greater Victoria.
https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1Xoj_hsZMzgeqr9IF2no9fvGwCqlo4icHQBunmIN4tgQ/edit#gid=1417170402

Fisheries: Currently 87% of fish are exported to Europe and Asia and these markets are closed to Canadian Fisheries as well as another major market - restaurants. There are efforts to look at supporting coastal community fishers and how to redirect local fish to local markets. T Buck Suzuki Foundation reports that local fishermen are supporting Indigenous communities to bring fish as coastal communities. However, another barrier is that fishers are finding it hard to even find ports that will

allow them to land. Fishermen are applying for vendors licenses to market directly to the public, currently they are only allowed to head, gut and tail, as they do not have full processing licenses.

Farm Sector:

The Province has provided guidance farms and farmworkers for COVID 19 protocols on April 6, 2020

<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/health/about-bc-s-health-care-system/office-of-the-provincial-health-officer/covid-19/covid-19-pho-guidance-farms-farm-workers.pdf>

Agriculture Human Resources council also provides resources:

Council<https://cahrc-ccrha.ca/programs/emerging-agriworkforce-issues/information-and-updates-coronavirus-covid-19>

The Canadian Government just announced that a \$59 Million Fund has been established to support Farmers, fish processors who will be eligible for \$1,500 per employee to cover costs of mandatory 14-day self-isolation -

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/temporary-foreign-workers-quarantine-funds-1.5530842>

Farmers Marketing Channels: As many rely on market channels that are impacted by COVID19 we continue to see creative solutions evolving. Local farmers are getting organized and creative about their marketing. Some farms are coordinating with farm gate outlets that can handle higher volumes and social distancing. Others are responding to or setting up online marketing services and buying clubs. Some farms are shifting from restaurant and outlet sales to more direct to customer box programs.

CRFAIR and other agencies are looking at ways to support local farmers through making linkages to the emergency food efforts rapidly being deployed, reaching out to restaurants and agencies who are preparing emergency meals and asking them to purchase from local sources, as well as raising money to purchase local seeds and starts from local farmers for backyard growing campaigns and efforts. This includes potentially setting up an aggregation portal towards these efforts (contact: susan@crfair.ca).

Farmer's Markets: According to the BC Association of Farmers Markets (BCAFM), markets will move to support their farmers with access to an online model to continue providing consumers with locally grown and prepared food products during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Here is the latest information <https://bcfarmersmarket.org/bcafm-update-on-covid-19/>

This is being supported by the Ministry of Agriculture. We have seen that the Moss Street Market, for example, has opened its online platform. However, it will also remain open, as will the Sidney and Esquimalt Farmers Markets, restricting the vendors to food only, to social distancing measures, to no handling of product, and of course asking anyone with symptoms to stay home. We have heard that at present the Goldstream and Luxton Markets are not going to be running this year.

Local Produce Availability: Spring season harvest and storage crops currently available at the local farm stand.

- Beets
- Cukes
- Broccoli
- Cabbage
- Carrots
- Chard
- Collards
- Garlic
- Kale
- Leeks
- Parsley
- Potatoes
- Rutabaga
- Salad Greens
- Turnips
- Winter Squash
- Vegetable Seeds

Farm Service Supply Stores: Supplies and services are different for each operation. For the most part feed and supply stores are still open and are working to ensure that feed and inputs are available. Top Shelf Feeds is open with special protocols in place. Integrity Sales is open for telephone and email orders for pick up, but their store is not open. Buckerfield stores are open. Island Tractor is open with parts, service, sales, and delivery services.

Garden supply stores seem to be reopening with online orders and pickups and some locations open for controlled shopping. They are reporting a very high amount of interest from the backyard grower.

There are some delays and shortages for soil and amendments delivery due to high order volumes.