

Food Systems

COVID19 Impacts and Response

Capital Region area report from CRFAIR



Weekly Briefing Notes - May 19th, 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 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? E-mail engagement@crfair.ca.

* **We are now moving to a monthly format, unless there are major new developments.** Please continue to provide us with feedback, we appreciate it. **Next Brief Scheduled for: July 7, 2020**

Moving into phase 3 and a gradual opening up of the economy and resuming some activities with new protocols in place we will see some important shifts to keep an eye on. In this report you will see some references to the impacts of these changes as well as find some new financial and planning resources related to COVID19.

Food Access Update

In Phase 3 we anticipate a continued increase in demand for food services, however there is an important dynamic to highlight. As reported at the Western Communities Food Roundtable some agencies like the Goldstream Foodbank, are seeing a decrease in demand for services. Part of this is attributed to people sheltering in place and not getting out to pick up meals, however there has not been significant calls for delivery of food to the foodbank. There is anecdotal evidence from program participants that the CERB payments are providing a basic level of income that has lessened the need for food supports. Other agencies, however, are seeing a rising demand for delivered meals and hampers. It will be important to monitor this dynamic and also anticipate that when the CERB payment supports end, we may need to be prepared for a new wave of demand. An important question the agencies are working through at present is how to connect with individuals and families who are needing support who have not accessed food resources in the past and are not aware of the resources available. There is a listing of resources available that is being distributed however, getting it into the hands of people who need this information is a new challenge.

As the weeks pass since the pandemic hit, we are now seeing the **fruits of an increase in collaboration between agencies** in working to respond to the situation. For example the Western Communities has

hired a food security coordinator to support work between the agencies. An environmental scan of services has now been completed (possibly the first time a comprehensive scan has been done), funds have been secured for increased meals and services, as well gaps in services have been identified (families with children not yet of school age) with strategies developed by the agencies to reach and support these communities. This is also evident with the Growing Together Campaign that has brought over 20 agencies together to actively support people to grow their own food for physical and mental health and greater fresh food access. This past weekend over 6000 plant starts were distributed in Saanich to seniors and 96 were paired with garden mentors. The veggie and plant starts distributed at school hubs revealed that approximately 50% of the people accessing the veggie plants were first time growers. These are just a few examples of what can be accomplished with inter-agency collaboration. Also the South Island Farmhub was launched and \$85,000 was distributed in Farmbuck credits to 20 agencies in the region. The Cool Aid Society made their first orders of fresh produce from local farms, with first deliveries happening this week.

The FoodShare Network is undertaking a survey of the 70 emergency food organizations in the network to understand current food provision services and needs in the community. This will also give us an up to date count of the number of individuals in the region being served. This information will be reported out in the next briefing report.

The Food Share Network has also received a grant through the Good Food Access Fund to enable purchase of more food for distribution through the Food Security Distribution Warehouse. This means there will be more and different types of food flowing through the warehouse soon.

There has also been the launch of a new **Emergency Community Support Fund**. In this region, United Way Greater Victoria and The Victoria Foundation are now accepting funding applications for the Emergency Community Support Fund (ECSF) funded by the Government of Canada. The \$1.635 Million in funding provides financial support to local charities adapting their frontline services to support vulnerable citizens during the COVID-19 pandemic. Grants can be used for a variety of purposes, including to cover staffing or resource needs, purchase assistance and more. Funding will be issued on an ongoing basis until July 31, 2020 or until funds are fully allocated. For more information including the link to the shared application portal, please go to <https://uwgv.ca/ecsf/>

Growing Together Update: This is a collaboration between groups supporting food access and food literacy across Greater Victoria. The program to support people to successfully grow more food at home is now in full swing. The City of Victoria, and partnering organizations, have started to distribute the veggie plants this past week. It is so exciting to see people receiving these plants and getting them into their gardens. Lisa, the coordinator got to attend one of Lifecycles / Farm to School BC distribution sites. Also, almost half of the people picking up starts on that day, identified that they were growing food for the first time! <https://www.growingfood-together.com/get-growing-victoria>.

Here is a link to a brand new 2 minute video that Growing Together team member Jen Rashleigh produced that hopes to inspire and give confidence to people to try their hand at growing their own food. Please share widely [You Can Grow Food Video!](#)

The program is also supporting the **Seedlings for Saanich Seniors** - 6000 veggie plant starts were distributed to seniors in Saanich on Sunday May 31st. **Growing Together Videos** - Holly and the education team have been hard at work curating and posting as well as creating videos for the Growing Together website. We are really looking to expand our content of videos and reach out to a diversity of people to help create videos. Do you know someone who would be interested in making a video? Get in contact with Holly at: getfedvictoria@gmail.com- Here is their very first video: <https://youtu.be/XGeIQab2ZIs>

Food Production and Food Availability

We continue to see a surge in interest around regional food systems and local food supply. More people are growing their own gardens and sales continue to be strong with shortages around baking supplies that demonstrate more people delving into cooking. Hot social media apps like Tik Tokc are burgeoning with home cooking and gardening demos but also of interest is the growing following of posts by farmers (try #farmers or dafarmlif@).

This weekmarks the beginning of Phase 3- which covers from June to September. According to the Restart BC plan, this phase contains a number of measures that will support food and agriculture businesses. The key thing is that restaurant and food service establishments have now been approved for modified openings under new COVID19 protocols. In phase 3, people can begin to travel in British Columbia, Hotels and resorts are allowed to reopen and select entertainment activities. This is good news for many of the farms, food and beverage providers that have been limited by the closure of these markets.

The South Island Prosperity Project has recently launched the Rising Economy TaskForce. There are sub task force committees, and one is focused on Beverages, Food and Agriculture. The task force met for the first time and are currently undertaking the first phase of the initiative which is a situational analysis. *If you are able please fill out the Situational analysis survey (Due by Monday June 8st)* Please see the attached link : <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/CCS86L7>

Here is an update on the different sectors for June

Farm producers continue to see strong direct sales, and those with farm outlet stores report significant increases over last year. Even as the temporary farm workers start to arrive, there are still concerns with labour shortages, especially as the berry season is upon us. Strawberries are a key crop for Saanich peninsula farmers and they are harvested by hand, so labour is a significant need at this time. It is anticipated as phase three measures increase an opening of the economy that there will be some rebound in sales. The new South Island FarmHub is already seeing orders coming in from local restaurants as they start to amp up their services, however, sales are expected to be down to 30% of anticipated over the season for food service establishments. The infusion of Rapid Relief Funds to support charities to purchase local farm product through the SI FarmHub is hoping to bridge this gap in demand for the 27 farms now involved.

Farmers Markets: News from the BC Association of Farmers Markets: “(BCAFM) recently launched a BC Farmers' Market Online initiative, in addition to modified physical market operations, to support 145+ member markets. Roughly 80 farmers' markets are now using the platform including on Vancouver Island and Gulf Islands. It looks like Farmers markets that were originally not going to open have shifted their tune in light of the news that crafters and vendors of non food items, who make up many of the markets vendors will be able to be part of local markets. Here are two articles about the Goldstream Market and Sooke Country Market around their June market plans.

<https://www.saanichnews.com/news/craft-vendors-allowed-to-re-join-goldstream-farmer-market/>

<https://www.goldstreamgazette.com/community/sooke-country-market-returns-for-25th-year/>

Processors: Good news in light of the continuing struggles and repositioning of national meat processing facilities is the work underway to add capacity to regional meat processing. The South Island Prosperity Partnership (SIPP) announced \$12,500 in funding towards a ‘feasibility study’ for a local abattoir earlier this month, which will also be partly funded by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada and the province through the Investment Agriculture Foundation of B.C. The abattoir study will be conducted by [Greenchain Consulting](#), exploring options for keeping meat processing local.

<https://www.vicnews.com/news/study-looks-at-feasibility-of-vancouver-island-abattoir/>

Small Scale Processors are constantly working to adapt to COVID 19 and on June 4th there is a special webinar aimed at providing information about industry guidelines for COVID-19 and how to build or upgrade a COVID-19 Safety Plan. Manufacturing Safety Alliance of BC CEO Lisa McGuire, will give insight into rethinking the workspace and safe operations in preparation of reopening operations.

One of the things we have heard from Candace Appleby of the BC Small Scale Food Processors Association is that many processors are not able to qualify for the Government wage subsidy programs due to the majority of their income coming from markets and christmas fair season. They currently do not show a drop in sales that would qualify them, and this is a challenge.

Fishers: We continue to see harvesters struggle as the vast majority of fish caught is destined to foreign and restaurant markets, which are still limited. The Canadian Independent Fish Harvester’s Federation has been asked to comment on the emergency response package for harvesters. They are asking that the CERB be extended and that the government seriously consider implementing a guaranteed minimum income for all Canadians.

The BC Government has launched a new [B.C. Farm, Fish and Food Job Connector](#) showcases the current job vacancies throughout the province, including those for: Crop and seafood harvesters, Food processing and farmworkers, Agrologists, Large machinery operators, and Marketing specialists.

For the [Farm, Fish and Food Industry](#), the website has sector specific information and guidance to support your business as you adapt your recruitment and human resource management in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Beverage Providers: It is predicted that beverage providers like brewers, vintners and cideries have lost ⅓ of their markets over the pandemic and have only achieved about 25% of their regular sales. They are also predicted to be down 35% for the rest of the year. Some of the key challenges they are having are with staffing, lack of consistency in the supply chain and significant increase to distribution costs (near doubling). Direct to consumer sales are down, food service sales are down, no tour groups, no events, but showing some upswing in online sales.

Restaurants: After a mandatory two-month closure due to the COVID-19 pandemic, restaurants across B.C. are allowed to once again welcome dine-in guests. Many restaurants adapted by working to shift to take out ordering but are welcoming the new openings offered in phase 3. They will be limited to 50 per cent capacity until further notice so that tables can be adequately spaced. Municipalities are looking at how to expand outdoor dining and patios to assist with social distancing and increasing restaurant capacity.

[Saanich looks to help restaurants increase capacity with outdoor seating](#)

BC Agri-Business Planning Program: Applications for the [B.C. Agri-Business Planning Program](#) is now open to support producers and food processors through two business planning streams:

1. COVID-19 Business Recovery Planning (eligibility expanded to include seafood producers and processors.
2. Specialized Business Planning

The funding provides up to \$5,000 in business planning services and coaching for individuals, and up to \$20,000 for groups.

Potential changes to the ALR,

There are also a few issues that the agriculture and food organizations are paying attention to, including the news reported in Country Life BC that:

“Wes Shoemaker has been appointed to lead the development of an agri-industrial zone within the Agricultural Land Reserve, and a role that positions him to become “Commissioner for Agri-Industrial Lands,” as recommended by the province’s Food Security Task Force earlier this year. The commissioner would oversee designation of 28,500 acres within the ALR for the new zone and be responsible for attracting companies to locate within the proposed zone. However, the Agricultural Land Commission and others are pushing back against the move, with ALC chair Jennifer Dyson saying, the commission “would like to be consulted before any decision is made about potentially increasing the impact of processing and retail facilities on the agricultural land base.” Lana Popham says the new zone would be minimal: “We’re just looking for ways to find a place for that to happen. It’s not necessarily on the

Agricultural Land Reserve ... it's [not] going to take away from the parts of agriculture that we believe in so much". Island farmer, Arzeena Hamir long, a time food and farmland activist, has expressed concerns that this measure " goes against the very findings of the ALR/ALC Revitalizations Committee. The ALR is for farming first and we certainly should not be sacrificing valuable land in the Fraser Valley for industrial processing".

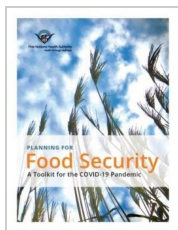
Resources of interest-Food and Agriculture and Covid-19

The BC Food Security Gateway is posting [credible resources on Covid-19](#), including [funding opportunities](#).



[Growing Resilience and Equity: A food policy action plan in the context of COVID-19](#)

Food Secure Canada's policy action plan for renewing the country's food system in response to Covid-19. [Read More](#)



[Planning for Food Security: A Toolkit for the COVID-19 Pandemic](#)

Toolkit includes ideas, templates, tools and information to support planning for food security during pandemic and beyond. [Read More](#)

Food Communities Network On-line Meetings,

Community Food Production

Wednesday, June 3 and 17

9am PDT, 10am MDT, 11am CDT, 12pm EDT, 1pm ADT

Register [here](#).

[Community Food Production Breakout Meeting Notes](#)

Farmer Support

Wednesday June 3 and 17

11am PDT, 12pm MDT, 1pm CDT, 2pm EDT, 3pm ADT

Register [here](#).

[Farmer Support Breakout Meeting Notes](#)

Immediate Food Distribution

Thursday June 4 and 18

9:30am PDT, 10:30am MDT, 11:30am CDT, 12:30pm EDT, 1:30pm ADT

Register [here](#)

[Immediate Food Distribution Breakout Meeting Notes](#)

Food Policy

June 9 and 23

3pm PDT, 4pm MDT, 5pm CDT, 6pm EDT, 7pm ADT

These meetings are to share policy directions across members of Food Policy Councils, Alliances, Strategies, etc.

Register [here](#)

Note-takers at each meeting create a summary of comments on best practices, resources, questions, info, that will be made available to everyone on the website at [COVID 19 & Food / Alimentation au temps du COVID-19: Resources sharing / Partage de ressources](#).

