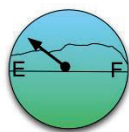


ALBERNI VALLEY TRANSITION TOWNS SOCIETY  
IN PARTNERSHIP WITH ISLAND HEALTH

**ALBERNI VALLEY**  
**FOOD SECURITY ACTION PLAN FRAMEWORK**



Marcus Lobb, BA - August 2016



Alberni Valley  
Transition Town Society

Acknowledgements

Many people were instrumental in the development of food security as a concern here in the Alberni Valley. As well, a number of people were very important in bringing this document to life. Here is a short list of those who need to be thanked for all their effort.

Sarah Thomas, Charles Thomas and Guy Langlois - Previous Food Hub Coordinators

Edna Cox - Interim Food Hub Coordinator, member of Food Group

Dan Shubart and all the members of AVTTS

Heather Shobe and Anna Lewis - ACRD Agricultural Support Workers

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**Funding for the drafting of this document and other work the Alberni Valley Food Group accomplishes are graciously funded through the Community Food Action Initiative via Island Health, as well as through grants from the ACRD and City of Port Alberni.**

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## Summary

The Alberni Valley Transition Town Society (AVTTS) is a developing food hub in conjunction with Island Health. As a developing Food Hub, AVTTS is

working to create partnerships and strengthen inter-agency collaboration to support initiatives and action towards greater food security in the Alberni-Clayoquot Region. Core functions of the hub are to build community awareness and knowledge about food and food systems, develop partnerships in the community and across the island and build capacity to increase food security.

The Alberni Valley Food Group, made up of food-concerned individuals, works under the umbrella of its head organization, the Alberni Valley Transition Towns Society (AVTTS). The Food Group's mission is in-line with Food Secure Canada's goal of a food secure Canada, focused on achieving a food secure Alberni Valley.

In 2012, AVTTS developed a Community Food Assessment which serves as an inventory and directory of where we are with Food Security in the Valley. This document set into motion a guideline and framework for the basic needs of our community. In the four years that have passed since the the CFA was published, we have better come to understand the short and long term goals for our community.

The Action Plan Framework you are currently reading is based on the direction and effort of many individuals, especially those who have drafted previous documents following a series of public round table events that brought together key stakeholders in the community to discuss food security issues. Two events that took place in 2015 and 2016 solicited a large swath of information, most of which is collected in the report from the AVTTS Alberni Valley Food Security Workshop from May, 2015. This Action Plan Framework attempts to organize and condense the findings of these round tables into a cohesive set of goals, both long-term and short.

## Introduction

This document was completed over the course of three months during the summer and fall of 2016. The drafting of this action plan followed the example of the Food Security Continuum as recommended by Analisa Blake of Island Health, and

utilized by other Island Food Hubs. This model approaches the question of Food Security on three levels: **Short Term Goals, Capacity Building, and Re-design.** These benchmarks should be seen as a stepping stones, with the **Short Term Goals** being actions that have recently been initiated, or that could be initiated relatively quickly and without the need of large funding or time commitments. **Capacity Building** and **Re-design** are larger steps in overall food system improvement, that will require larger financial inputs and efforts.

The Alberni Valley is a geographical area that encompasses multiple rural districts, First Nations communities, and a multi-cultural city center. Any attempt to isolate First Nations or any other groups as needing unique food security attention is primarily a result of economic and cultural factors that are worthy of stand-alone attention. Settler-Canadians often focus their food security discussion on access to agricultural production modes, whereas in many First Nations communities the land itself and the rights to harvest from the land and water bodies are the first and foremost concern of food security. The definition of food security itself can mean very different things to different people. With this in mind, working with different groups can be complex, and require unique steps.

The Alberni Valley is like many small British Columbia communities. It has high rates of unemployment and therefore poverty; the result of which are poorer health statistics and lower rates of high-school graduation. Nutrition plays a vital role in the development of our youth and should continue to remain a point of focus moving forward.

## Previous Documents and Research

Over the past 5 years a great deal of work has been accomplished by the Food Group, that has brought us to this point. Three such documents that were referenced in the process of drafting this action plan must be mentioned. Keeping these documents alive and appreciated is important, as too often we watch as valuable written work is simply filed away and forgotten once it has been printed. A goal of this Food Action Framework has been to aspire towards goals that are

feasible, both in the short and long term. Success leads to inspiration, which leads to the expansion of our collective imagination, and from that we discover new and innovative ideas. Here are three documents that were vital in the development of the food action plan and previous work.

**Building a Resilient Food System: A *Community Food Assessment***

Funded in part by VIHA's Community Food Action Initiative, this 50 page document was created by the Alberni Valley Transition Towns Society Food Group in 2012 and 2013. The assessment focuses on and carefully lists a multitude of food security related initiatives and offers recommendations to ensure a food secure Alberni Valley.

**Food Security Survey: *Summary Report***

Students of Vancouver Island University completed this survey for the ACRD and AVTTS in the fall of 2013. The document provides household data related to food purchasing and food related decision making while also considering some of the needs of over 2000 homes, while providing an ample measurement of how our citizens fare in regards to food security. The final pages of the document offer recommendations put forward by the survey recipients.

**AVTTS Alberni Valley Food Security Workshop: *Summary Report and Next Steps***

In the Spring of 2015, Food Hub Coordinator Sarah Thomas hosted a "Food Security Round Table" event with the goal of building connections between local organizations and community partners who share an interest in food security. Thirty organizations and agencies were represented, for which this document highlights the conversation and recommendations made by those in attendance.

**Alberni Valley Agricultural Plan** - Drafted in 2011 for the ACRD, this large document is a profile of agricultural industry in the Alberni Valley. The article highlights current production, soil and water statistics, and address where the industry currently stands relative to its potential and a vast amount of other information.

**Other documents of note:** Abattoir Feasibility Study (2016), A Regional Buy Local Brand for the Alberni Valley and West Coast Communities (2015), Shellfish and Aquaculture Producer Survey (2015), ACRD Farmer Survey (2014).

## Food Security: A definition

Food Security is a term that is currently being replaced with a more active and participatory term: **Food Sovereignty**. Food Secure Canada, in their document *Resetting the Table: A People's Food Policy for Canada* define Food Sovereignty as “the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and the right to define their own food and agriculture systems”. Food Security is the goal, whereas Food Sovereignty is the process, the ways in which we define our idea of how we will achieve security.

Food Secure Canada also recognizes the *Seven Pillars of Food Sovereignty* that were drafted during the 2007 symposium on Food Sovereignty held in Mali. These seven pillars are useful to highlight the key points to achieve a food sovereign Alberni Valley.

### **1. Focuses on Food for People**

- Puts people's need for food at the centre of policies
- Insists that food is more than just a commodity

### **2. Builds Knowledge and Skills**

- Builds on traditional knowledge
- Uses research to support and pass this knowledge to future generations
- Rejects technologies that undermine or contaminate local food systems

### **3. Works with Nature**

- Optimizes the contributions of ecosystems
- Improves resilience

### **4. Values Food Providers**

- Supports sustainable livelihoods
- Respects the work of all food providers

### **5. Localizes Food Systems**

- Reduces distance between food providers and consumers
- Rejects dumping and inappropriate food aid
- Resists dependency on remote and unaccountable corporations

#### 6. Puts Control Locally

- Places control in the hands of local food providers
- Recognizes the need to inhabit and to share territories
- Rejects the privatization of natural resources

#### 7. Food is Sacred

- Recognizes that food is a gift of life, and not to be squandered
- Asserts that food cannot be commodified

## Existing Food Security Initiatives / Organizations

Port Alberni has a number of successful and vibrant food security projects that are helping to connect our citizens with affordable and local food options. The following initiatives should be supported by the Food Group and Food Hub Coordinator moving forward.

1. **Healthy Harvest Farm** - Until recently this project was under the umbrella of the Canadian Mental Health Association. Financial support from the CMHA is no longer guaranteed moving forward and will need the support of the community to continue providing local organic produce and a stress-free work environment for those who have been utilizing the program. Healthy Harvest has a successful farm gate sales stand, a food box program and relationships with restaurants in Tofino and Port Alberni. The most important contribution this project has made to the community has been in the offering of a caring and supportive work environment for those living with mental health issues.
2. **Hupacasath Community Farm** - The Hupacasath Community Farm project is an emerging social initiative established by Hupacasath First Nation. This project aims to improve the health and nutrition of community members while building skills for food self-reliance in the future. Currently in its third season, the garden was able to support a food box distribution program for the second straight year, where every on-reserve household in the community received a weekly box of fresh, organic fruits and vegetables. Further, the proximity of the garden to the Hupacasath Youth centre allows it to act as a great educational tool for the community. Hupacasath youth



have learned skills in gardening workshops from seed planting through to harvesting and cooking of produce.

3. **Food Security and Climate Disruption Committee** - The Food Security and Climate Disruption Committee is a Standing Committee of Council appointed for the purpose of making recommendations to Council with respect to urban food security and climate change concerns affecting the community. The committee is made up of representatives from the community at large; Alberni Valley Transition Town Society and the Alberni Environmental Coalition. Meetings are open to the public, and are held on the first Thursday of each of month. For more information contact the City of Port Alberni website.
4. **Local Farmers Markets** - As of 2016, Port Alberni is currently home to four public markets: Sunset Market, Cherry Creek Market, Uptown Market and the Spirits Square Market. Much has been made of the need to join these markets together, to make for one or two larger markets, however it appears that the markets will maintain their locations and respective days of operation. As local food production begins to increase in the Alberni Valley, we may come to relish the variety and geographical spread of our farmers' markets.
5. **Emergency Food Distribution** - Port Alberni has a number of organizations that work in food recovery and distribution. Each organization offers its own unique service, and as of 2016 the following have been working with our Food Group: Bread of Life, Port Alberni Shelter Society, Kuu-us Crisis Line, Salvation Army, and ACAWS, Port Alberni Friendship Center, as well as some local First Nations communities have food box deliveries.
6. **The Alberni Valley Gleaning Project** - This program functions by connecting tree owners who have unwanted or excess fruit with volunteer pickers who help themselves and, in turn, help those in need. Fruit harvested by the volunteers is shared - 30% for the property owner if desired, 30% for the pickers, and 30% as a donation to charities and other organizations in need. In 2014, the program collected and put to use over 10,000 pounds of

fruit. The Alberni Valley Gleaning Project does more than just harvest and share fruit, it also helps to remove bear attractants and foster community resilience and social well-being.

7. **Agricultural Development Committee** - This group of farmers, citizens and ACRD staff meet bi-monthly to discuss topics related to local agriculture. The group has had involvement with a number of events and documents that are related to our local food system including the Island Ag Show, the Growers Guide and the Alberni Valley Agricultural Plan, to name but a few.

## Short Term Goals:

Goals described as short term would be defined as immediate solutions and plans to help improve local food security here in the Valley. These goals are designed to set into motion initiatives that will lead to larger social changes in our community. These goals / initiatives are steps that have been or will be initiated in the near future. Education and communication are paramount to this success.

1. **Develop a series of working groups that will focus on select topics related to food security.**
  - a. Among these possible group themes we have isolated the following as relevant in both a short term and long term sense: School Food Reform, Food Recovery and Distribution, Local Farmers, First Nations Food Rights. To date we have made progress in all of these categories, but to a lesser extent with First Nations Food Rights.  
*Groups Involved: Bread of Life, Port Alberni Shelter Society, Kuu-us Crisis Line, Port Alberni Friendship Center, ACRD Agricultural Development Committee, Port Alberni Food Security and Climate Disruption Committee.*
2. **Further engage School District 70 personnel to discuss the need for increased healthy food options in the cafeteria system and educational gardens at all schools.**
  - a. Issues related to CUPE and who will maintain the gardens has been the main issues that are slowing the process of school garden

development. Researching other school districts to determine their strategies and coordination techniques is needed to move forward.

- b. It appears that our local elementary schools make decisions related to food offerings rather than following guidelines from the district. Working directly with school principals or parents may be the quickest method to impact the options in school cafeterias. We have met with and discussed this process with Community Nutritionist Helene Dufour, who is a leader in improving school food options.
- c. One program that we could look to engage with is B.C. Agriculture in the Classroom, a government sponsored initiative that seeks to support implementation of agriculture into school curriculum.

### **3. Develop a series of school workshops on the broad topic of Food Security.**

- a. We have already made strong ties with Vice-Principal David Maher at A.D.S.S. and with his guidance we will connect with the appropriate teachers to offer class presentations that inform students of food security issues and the value of local food systems.
- b. As of Fall 2016 we have been contacted by two ADSS teachers at the school: Sarah York and Tim Crosby. As well, we have met with Helene Dufour (Community Nutritionist, VIHA) about creating a Pro-D day presentation on both Food Systems, cafeteria reform and school gardens.
- c. Having a presentation that can be used in all schools yearly could be valuable, but Helene Dufour also mentioned that speaking directly to the teachers could have the biggest impact. These presentations should focus on the positive and creative ways in which the food system is changing in other places around the world, such as France, Norway and Finland. It has been recommended that the fall is the best time of year to engage with this type of effort as it gives teachers more time.

*Valuable Websites:* <http://www.nourishlife.org/> and <http://www.eufic.org/article/en/artid/School-lunch-standards-in-Europe/>

### **4. Create an active media presence.**

- a. Highlight the happenings in the community and post new reports, policy changes and other relevant issues related to local food security.
- b. Link food agencies together.
- c. Support better communication through a group of young farmers who meet a few times a year. This incoming generation of producers will play a key role in long-term food security initiatives\
- d. Develop a vibrant social media presence that looks to promote any food related event taking place in Alberni Valley.

### Capacity Building:

Actions and steps needed to enable our community to build the capacity to make lasting change. These programs will better situate our community to successfully move towards a food sovereign state. Stakeholders will establish programs that enable the wider community to engage in the cause, which will empower and inspire those new to the topic. Some of the above projects are already underway, although only just recently. These projects were all considered to be high priority at the Food Security Round Table events that we have hosted over the past few years.

1. **Development of a unified food recovery project.** *(During the summer of 2016 research was completed that identified that our current food recovery programs were not sufficiently recovering grocery store food waste at a level to meet the needs of our citizens. We compared this with that of Nanaimo's Loaves and Fishes who were successfully serving hundreds of people each week on recovered grocery store waste. After a presentation and visit to Loaves and Fishes, it became widely apparent that we need to increase our food recovery capacity.)*
  - a. Based on the success of Loaves and Fishes *Food for U* program, our local emergency food providers have come together to discuss the need for improvement in the area of food recovery. To date we have held one group discussion, and have had two group tours to visit the Loaves and Fishes operation. Organizations that have been involved

are the following: Bread of Life, Kuu-us Crisis Line, Port Alberni Shelter Society, Salvation Army, ACAWS, The Alberni Valley Gleaning Project and many other smaller organizations. Of the groups who have attended, The Salvation Army has expressed a keen interest in the development of such an initiative as well as the Family Guidance Association.

- b. The next stage will be to hold a planning meeting to determine our path of action, and contact Food Banks Canada for help with direction. The Salvation Army has specifically shown an interest in supporting the project and the Shelter Society has considered the expansion of their food recovery operations. As well the Port Alberni Family Guidance Association has contacted us regarding the desire to provide financial assistance should the project moved forward.
- c. Continued support of the Alberni Valley Gleaning Project, and coordination with emergency food distribution centers. The Gleaning Project has material assets and skills in food recovery that are valuable and needed in Port Alberni.

## **2. Development of more small-scale farmer training.**

- a. One such project, which is being led by the Port Alberni Shelter Society, received a development grant as part of the B.C. Rural Dividends Granting Program in the summer of 2016. This project is designed to act as both an educational training site for prospective young farmers in Port Alberni, as well as a productive farm operation with the goal of serving lower income families first and foremost. Although still in development, the project has looked at parcels of land in the range of 3 to 5 acres. The goal of creating incubator plots that other farmers can rent for starting their own farming ventures. The project will apply for full funding through the B.C. Rural Dividends Fund at the end of October.
- b. ACRD Ag Support Workers Heather Shobe and Anna Lewis have made recommendations that the training component being extended to incorporate A.D.S.S. and/or North Island College. If the project can procure the funding to research the feasibility of such a program, then it will follow these recommendations.

### **3. Increased food options and education in schools:**

- a. Currently our School District is moving slowly in regards to the establishment of school gardens at our elementary schools, a product of union issues and roles related to maintenance. We need to work with the Board of Directors and the Parents Association to better support the process. Offering presentations on Food Security at the high school and in our elementary schools as mentioned above may be helpful. Rosemarie Buchanan (Trustee S.D. 70) and Greg Smyth (Superintendent) have both shown a commitment to working on the school garden issue.
- b. Working with other Food Hubs to identify their strategies is key. The idea of creating an island-wide overhaul of cafeteria options is something that has been discussed with other Food Hubs.
- c. Allowing access to healthy food trucks at the high school to give students more diversity in their lunch options could be a short term solution, however the logistics of this may not be so straight-forward. This idea could be one short-term option that would at least offer some alternative to the deep-fried focused menu currently being served in the ADSS cafeteria. It should also be noted that the cafeteria has been working to offer more fresh salads.
- d. Researching grants that would help make healthy options more affordable in school cafeterias. This past Autumn Marcus Lobb and Vice-principal David Maher along with garden coordinator Sherry Lyons drafted a *Farm to Cafeteria* Grant that would have linked farms with the cafeteria and promoted a discounted healthy options program. The grant was unsuccessful, likely due to the short time the team had to draft and submit (one week).

### **4. Support for First Nations Food Rights:**

- a. Publicize all First Nations food events through our social networks
- b. Work in tandem with NTC Health Officers and the First Nations Health Authority

- c. Promote First Nations granting options and offer support for the development of any new projects. There is an abundance of grants available for First Nations peoples, keeping track of due dates and granting streams should be a priority of the Food Hub Coordinator.
- d. There is much needed in the way of developing connections with our First Nations food systems at this point in time, which leaves this section short of meeting its goal.
- e. *Important people and organizations to work with: Nitanis Desjarlais, Norine Messer, Vancouver Island and Coastal Communities Indigenous Food Network (VICCIFN), Port Alberni Friendship Center.*

#### **5. Create more community growing spaces**

- a. Develop more community gardens in multiple locations throughout the city. Consider developing a collective garden model, in which everyone works together to grow the veggies and shares in the harvest. This model is very popular in Montreal and is a great way of building community.
- b. Look to create different models of gardens such as an Indigenous Plants Garden, a Medicinal Plants Garden or a Therapeutic Garden.
- c. Charlotte Rampanen, who works in Health and Human Services for the Uchucklesaht Nation and has attended multiple events we have hosted. She has shown an interest in starting a community garden in 2017.

#### **7. Develop a Grants registry for food related projects**

- a. Create a small pool of funding that can be opened up to the community to inspire creative new projects to get off the ground. Create a grant that people can submit proposals to and have a group of AVTTS members vote on where the funding should be provided.
- b. Continue to act as umbrella organization for these new projects and leverage these new engagements to acquire more funds and create more publicity for the Food Group and AVTTS as a whole.

## Food System Redesign

Community food system redesign is the result of actions and planning that enhance and improve the community food system by setting into motion examples shown in this report. We have chosen to focus on the short term and capacity building initiatives in our community, but we have listed two items that we regard as having immediate importance and the need for long term investment.

### **1. School-Cafeteria Food Menu Overhaul:**

- a. Work in tandem with other Food Hubs to develop more healthy options with similar cost accessibility
- b. Connect with farmers who could provide for school districts
- c. This step will need the buy-in of multiple, or all the communities on Vancouver Island, and should be led by Island Healthy and its Food Hub Coordinators.

### **2. Support an Island-wide Food Security Hub**

- a. By working with other Hubs on the Island share information and resources, develop partnerships, collaborate on larger funding initiatives, minimize duplication of services and make a larger impact at the policy level.
- b. As of fall 2016 our Food Hub Coordinator was awarded funding to help lead the food group conversations in tandem with the West Coast Food Hub Coordinator.



## **Conclusion**

This food action plan is intended to help guide the Food Group and other citizens to find avenues for which they can participate in improving our local food system. There are many suggestions for ways we can begin to re-shape our food system, however we need not be burdened by the volume of suggestions made. Small steps lead to big change, and sometimes, especially in a smaller community, it only takes one champion or one prized initiative to set off a whirlwind of positive activity.

Perhaps our biggest asset here in the Alberni Valley is the expansive agricultural potential we have right under our noses. We are sitting on literally hundreds of acres of untapped resources in our arable land base. Too much acreage is sitting unused, or growing low value crops such as hay. These parcels of land need to be made available to the next generation of farmers. Land on Vancouver Island is some of the most sought after land in North America, and the rising cost is proving to be even more challenging for new farmers to begin their careers. As well, fishing rights and access to land for harvesting of traditional foods has long been obstructed by bureaucracy and dated colonial histories. A deeper understanding of the scope of food insecurity and its impact on society is very important at this point in time.

While it is true that there a number of pressing needs in our community, we should be excited about all of the motivated individuals who are currently working towards improving our local food systems.

