

Strathcona Food Security Project



Food Security Action Plan Framework

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Executive Summary

The Strathcona Food Security Project is a joint initiative between Island Health and North Island College that is exploring food security in the Strathcona Regional District. The Project is working within a broad definition of food security, including the concept that a community is “food secure” when everyone obtains a safe, personally acceptable, nutritious diet through a sustainable food system that maximizes self-reliance and social justice (Hamm and Bellows, 2003).

The Project undertook research and public consultation in the autumn of 2013 to obtain views about food security from the written evidence base as well as residents and service providers in Strathcona. There are three documents that are the result of this work: a *Food Security Needs Assessment*; a *Food Security Networking Hub Feasibility Assessment*; and, an *Action Plan Framework*; of which this document is the third in the series. In addition to these documents, the web-based *Island Health Community Food Atlas* has been updated to reflect current food security services and programs in Strathcona.

The *Action Plan Framework* lays out the broad objectives for an Action Plan to consider in three categories: short-term relief, capacity-building, and food system redesign. The Framework gives examples of the kinds of actions that could be pursued by the Food Action Committee to fulfill the objectives.

The Framework is not prescriptive because the actions pursued will be determined by the mandates, energy, resources and desires of the organizations that will comprise the recommended Food Action Committee and their partners. The proposed Island Health funding towards a Strathcona Food Security Networking Hub would be specifically earmarked for network coordination, regional communication and for identification/development of collaborative projects identified by the committee.

The *Action Plan Framework* is based on wisdom gathered from the Strathcona communities and the available evidence which can guide the development of an Action Plan by the Food Action Committee of a Strathcona Food Security Networking Hub.

1. Introduction

The Strathcona Food Security Project is a joint initiative between Island Health and North Island College that is exploring food security in the Strathcona Regional District. The Project is working within a broad definition of food security, including the concept that a community is “food secure” when everyone obtains a safe, personally acceptable, nutritious diet through a sustainable food system that maximizes self-reliance and social justice (Hamm and Bellows, 2003).

As documented in the companion document *Food Security Needs Assessment*, the communities of Strathcona have real food security needs. Remote communities and low-income families struggle to put healthy foods on the table. Some of the youngest members of our communities go to school without enough food to get through the day. Almost everyone relies on imported food to meet their basic needs.

However, there are some fantastic things blossoming in our communities as well. People are coming together to help one another, share their knowledge and build a better future. First Nations communities are reinvigorating their food traditions. Food skills are being shared with some of our most vulnerable community members. Land that has been abandoned for decades is starting to produce food once again. By coming together and learning from each other, Strathcona can start to work towards comprehensively addressing its food security needs at a community and regional level into the future.

The *Action Plan Framework* is based on wisdom gathered from the Strathcona communities and the existing available written evidence which can guide the development of an Action Plan by the Food Action Committee of a Strathcona Food Security Networking Hub.

1.1 The Strathcona Food Security Project

The Strathcona Food Security Project undertook research and public consultation in the autumn of 2013 to gather information from residents and service providers in Strathcona about what is currently happening around food security, and where gaps in provision exist. There are three documents that are the result of the public consultation, of which this document is the third in the series:

- The *Strathcona Food Security Project: Food Security Needs Assessment* details the research and public consultation undertaken by the Project, the socio-economic and environmental context of Strathcona, and the assets and gaps in the provision of short-term relief, capacity-building and food system redesign for food security in Strathcona;
- The *Strathcona Food Security Project: Food Security Networking Hub Feasibility Assessment* explains the Island Health Food Security Networking Hub model and how this could be applied in Strathcona; and,

- The *Strathcona Food Security Project: Action Plan Framework* recommends overarching objectives to improve food security and gives examples of the types of actions which could be implemented to improve food security in Strathcona.

In addition to these documents, the web-based *Island Health Community Food Atlas* has been updated to reflect current food security services and programs in Strathcona.

2. Development of the Strathcona Food Security Action Plan

The Strathcona Food Security Action Plan has been split into two separate phases: a *Food Security Action Plan Framework* and a *Food Security Action Plan*. The purpose of this document, the *Action Plan Framework*, is to lay out a high-level strategic overview of the objectives (i.e. the types of action) that the Strathcona communities have voiced throughout the consultation of this project that they would like to see prioritized over the next several years. It builds upon the key findings of the *Food Security Networking Hub Feasibility Assessment* and the *Food Security Needs Assessment*.

The *Action Plan Framework* is intended to guide the development of a detailed *Food Security Action Plan* by the proposed Strathcona Food Security Networking Hub, which will be a living document that can be updated and prioritized as necessary by the Hub according to circumstances, such as the availability and resources of contributing partner organizations and opportunities for funding.

While it is envisaged that Island Health will provide a small amount (between \$10 000 - \$15 000) of annual funding to support networking, communication and collaborative support for the Hub, unless additional funding is attained for the Hub, project development must be led from within the existing resources of the Strathcona communities. **The number of actions which can be pursued will be dictated by the amount of resources available, and it is stressed that the *Action Plan Framework* is only a guide to the types of actions which could be pursued by the Food Security Networking Hub.** The actions within the *Food Security Action Plan* developed by the Hub will be prioritized depending on the interests of the participating organizations and the resources available to take action.

3. The Action Plan Framework

The *Action Plan Framework* is organized into three categories: short-term relief, capacity-building, and food system redesign. Short-term relief programs and services provide food to relieve hunger, while capacity-building programs empower participants to improve their own food security over the long term, and food system redesign focuses on long-term societal change to enhance food security for a broad population. Working to improve food security by focussing on all of these categories is essential for enhancing food security for Strathcona’s residents now, as well as continuing to build upon strengths into the future.

All actions within the final *Action Plan* should seek to ensure that services and programs are designed to encourage healthy eating for everyone, reduce social stigma towards accessing services, and take advantage of opportunities to integrate food security programs with other services.

3.1 Short-term Relief

Short-term relief programs and services provide food to relieve hunger. Some of these programs, particularly meal provision, are designed to provide additional social value, such as social support, access to other service providers, and contributing to a sense of community. Examples of the objectives and actions for enhancing short-term relief programs and services in Strathcona which could be pursued if sufficient resources are available include:

- 1. Address gaps in short-term relief in remote communities through community-specific programs:**
 - a. Develop community meal programs with local organizations, and ensure provisions are made to enable access by vulnerable populations.
- 2. Address barriers to accessing healthy food, particularly for low income and vulnerable community members:**
 - a. Investigate a ‘Grow a Row’ program linking local producers to food banks.
 - b. Explore joint purchasing programs such as bulk buying, a Good Food Box program, or food co-ops tailored to remote communities and low-income community members.
- 3. Increase the quality and quantity of school meal provision:**
 - a. Connect Parent Advisory Councils with community nutritionists.
 - b. Work with interested community organizations to develop more breakfast programs for schoolchildren.
 - c. Explore options for Farm to School programs.

3.2 Capacity-Building

Capacity-building programs are developed in the community, by the community, to improve the availability and access to food. Programs have the ability to empower participants through education and training, and help raise awareness of food issues. Examples of the objectives and actions for capacity-building programs and services in Strathcona which could be pursued if sufficient resources are available include:

- 1. Broaden access to educational programs for food security to remote areas and vulnerable populations:**
 - a. Expand Lettuce Grow in terms of geographic scope and topics – capitalize on local knowledge and connect with other community organizations.
 - b. Develop a wildcrafting mentor program – teach the methods and ethics of wild harvesting, including fishing, hunting and gathering.
- 2. Expand educational programs to address a wider range of food security issues:**
 - a. Offer programs on healthy eating, cooking and food preservation.
 - b. Examine the value of farmers and the true cost of food.
 - c. Make food safety regulations more accessible to food producers, processors, and sellers.
- 3. Increase food education in schools:**
 - a. Lead by example with healthy school meal provision.
 - b. Develop school cooking clubs.
 - c. Investigate farm tours and other programs examining issues around sustainable food.
 - d. Fun food skills education (smoothie bike program for overripe fruit, etc).
 - e. Schoolyard gardens and greenhouses
- 4. Build capacity by expanding experiential learning opportunities through community gardens, community kitchens, and hunting, fishing and gathering programs:**
 - a. Develop a system for skills/labour/land bartering and mentoring to connect older farmers with younger generations.
 - b. Develop an ‘incubator farm’ to teach farming skills and make land available to new farmers.
 - c. Increase the number of community gardens and community greenhouses.
 - d. Increase the number of community kitchens, particularly for vulnerable youth and remote communities – where feasible, encourage self-organization similar to book clubs with guided materials and resources for the general population.
 - e. Investigate a community fruit press.
- 5. Broaden access to local foods, including agricultural, aquacultural and responsibly-harvested wild products:**
 - a. Develop a community fruit-gleaning program.
 - b. Investigate the need for local food storage facilities – e.g. a community root cellar.
 - c. Develop more food-only farmer’s markets.

- d. Develop home gardener’s fruit and veggie exchanges or other opportunities for bartering.
- e. Integrate food bearing plants (including indigenous/traditional food plants) within municipal green space and landscaping of private property, through community orchards, food forests, edible landscaping and community gardens.

6. Support First Nations’ traditional food programs:

- a. Include traditional foods education in school cooking classes.
- b. Investigate elder/youth gathering and processing days.
- c. Integrate traditional food plants into existing community gardens

3.3 Food System Redesign

Community food system redesign is comprised of actions that enhance the community food system by integrating key elements and improving the potential for long term change and sustainability. Examples of the objectives and actions for community food system redesign in Strathcona which could be pursued if sufficient resources are available include:

- 1. Develop a Food Security Networking Hub as described in the *Food Security Networking Hub Feasibility Assessment* to enable the sharing of information and resources, expand working partnerships, minimize duplication of services, leverage funding, and represent food security issues at a strategic level:**
 - a. Enable greater action through obtaining additional core funding contributions for the Hub from regional agencies, including local government, the school districts, social services, etc.
 - b. Build on core funding with project-specific funding.
 - c. Develop a Grants registry for local food projects.
- 2. Work with local governments, First Nations, School Districts 72 and 84, Island Health, and other government agencies to enable policies and regulations to increase food security:**
 - a. Develop organizational food policies around procurement of healthy, sustainable food and access to food within the mandates of the organizations.
- 3. Work with higher-level government agencies (provincial and federal) to expand opportunities for sustainable local food production.**
 - a. Expand the SlaughterSafe program to all rural areas of the Strathcona Regional District (including Sayward).
 - b. Ensure management (including conservation, enhancement and allocation) of fisheries resources take account of local food requirements, including recovery of fish populations to a point where they can be harvested sustainably by local people, and adequate food fish for First Nations.
 - c. Develop a small-scale, managed commercial hunt (with strong First Nations involvement) for species which can be harvested sustainably to allow non-hunters access to wild game.

- d. Protecting the Agricultural Land Reserve and potentially carrying out land swaps with the Forest Land Reserve to enable better use of potential agricultural land.
- e. Better education for producers and consumers about how and why our food system is regulated.

4. Support more local food production and harvesting within Strathcona:

- a. Conduct a food market analysis, including processing and value-added, to identify potentially profitable food businesses.
- b. Make soil analysis more readily available so that future farmers can identify potentially productive areas.
- c. Increase the availability of Good Agricultural and Collecting Practices food safety training workshops to enable safe food production suitable for scaling-up into larger businesses.
- d. Examine the feasibility of a mobile slaughter facility.
- e. Investigate registries for food-sector development: land available for farming registry, commercial kitchen registry, etc.
- f. Revise zoning bylaws to encourage agriculture, e.g. smaller parcels in rural zones to enhance affordability.
- g. Ensure that the development and management of natural resources takes into consideration the importance of providing traditional plants and medicines to First Nations communities as well as the broader Strathcona community.

5. Investigate the potential for food-sector community economic development/social enterprises:

- a. Examine direct-exchange food businesses, e.g. shellfish farmers exchanging products for grains grown in Northeastern B.C.
- b. Market and promote food tourism.
- c. Conduct a feasibility study for a Strathcona Community-Supported Fishery or other alternatives for residents to access local fish and support local fishermen.

4. Conclusion

As detailed in the *Food Security Needs Assessment*, Strathcona has some wonderful food security assets, but also a real need for improved food security that is inclusive of all of our community members. We can continue to build on our successes into the future and deliver a more equitable and sustainable food system in Strathcona, but it will take a sustained and coordinated effort from every facet of our community. Strategic planning will help to focus our energy and deliver change.

This *Action Plan Framework* is intended to guide a Strathcona Food Security Networking Hub in developing an achievable Action Plan for the future. It lays out a roadmap for the creation of a detailed Action Plan by the Food Action Committee of the Hub in three themes: short-term relief, capacity-building and food system redesign. All three themes must be addressed in order to enhance food security in Strathcona into the future.

Potential actions are given for each food security objective within the three themes, and progress towards these objectives will be greatly enhanced by the provision of additional funding and resources as detailed in the *Food Security Networking Hub Feasibility Study*. This would allow the Food Security Networking Hub to take on a greater role in project development and delivery in partnership with Strathcona communities into the future.

As one survey respondent wrote, *“You cannot do anything about us (the people who have not enough money to shop properly). I enjoy healthy food, but cannot usually afford it.”* We must do better. There are many opportunities for the communities within the Strathcona region to work towards ensuring that everyone has access to healthy, nutritious food produced ethically and sustainably into the future.

References

Hamm, M. And Bellows, A. 2003. Community food security: background and future directions. J Nutr Educ Behav. Jan-Feb; 35(1):37-43