



## Acknowledgements

The author would like to acknowledge the participation of the following people and organizations in contributing to the development of the Strathcona Food Security Project reports.

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The Strathcona Food Security Project reports were funded through the Community Food Action Initiative of Island Health.

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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 to 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 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 second 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 *Food Security Networking Hub Feasibility Assessment* explains the Island Health Food Security Networking Hub model and how this could be applied in Strathcona. Food Security Networking Hubs are an Island Health program that is funded through the Community Food Action Initiative (CFAI) of the BC Ministry of Health.

Hubs act as connectors and leaders within a region – identifying opportunities for collaboration and alignment between the many stakeholders who are working to improve food security. Food Security Networking Hubs’ main functions are networking and communication, and support for identification and development of **collaborative** projects based on collective priorities. Hubs are composed of two parts: an overarching Food Action Committee which sets strategic direction, and a Hub Agency which supports implementation of the strategy collaboratively with partner organizations. The CFAI currently allocates funding of approximately \$10 000-\$15 000 annually within each regional district to support the Food Security Networking Hub program.

There is significant community interest in developing a Food Security Networking Hub in Strathcona. Many stakeholders have expressed an interest in working with a Hub to improve food security in their communities.

Developing a Hub in Strathcona will not be without challenges. Some of these include limitations in funding and resources. Recommendations to address these challenges include guidance on developing the Hub, ensuring a wide range of representation on the Food Action Committee, allocating the Hub Agency opportunity, pooling regional funding to broaden the Hub’s functions, and integrating an Agricultural Advisory Body with the Food Action Committee.

The *Food Security Networking Hub Feasibility Assessment* finds that the implementation of a Food Security Networking Hub in Strathcona is feasible, and gives guidance towards its establishment and operation.

## 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 to 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).

Strathcona residents face many barriers to food security. There is a particularly acute need for improved food security within remote communities and for low income residents. There is currently excellent food security work being carried out in some Strathcona communities, but it is fragmented. A detailed analysis of Strathcona’s food security needs is available in the companion document *Strathcona Food Security Project: Food Security Needs Assessment*.

Bringing a Food Security Networking Hub to Strathcona would be beneficial to the region to help ‘connect-the-dots’, share best practice and develop partnerships to bring greater food security to all residents.

### 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 second 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. Food Security Networking Hubs Context

### 2.1 The Community Food Action Initiative

The Community Food Action Initiative (CFAI) is a health promotion initiative that aims to increase community food security for all British Columbians. The primary objectives of the CFAI are to increase awareness of food security, improve access to local and healthy food, promote food knowledge and skills, increase community capacity to address local food security, and develop policy to support community food security. The CFAI supports actions that build food security in BC with funding from the BC Ministry of Health, implementation by the five Regional Health Authorities, coordination by the Provincial Health Services Authority, and guidance from a multi-sector, provincial advisory committee (BC Ministry of Health, 2013).

### 2.2 The Island Health Food Hub Model

Food Security Networking Hubs are a key component of Island Health's Community Food Action Initiative which has been active in some Island Health communities since 2006. Food Security Networking Hubs act as connectors and leaders within a region – identifying opportunities for collaboration and alignment between the many stakeholders who are working to improve food security in the region. The coordination and animation provided by Food Security Networking Hubs support collective action toward a common set of goals and priorities for a region and improve the capacity of stakeholders to address their own aims related to food security.

A Food Security Hub is guided by a Food Action Committee which sets its strategic direction, and is open to membership from a diverse range of stakeholders including:

- Regional, municipal and First Nations governments
- Isolated and rural communities
- First Nations/Aboriginal organizations/ groups
- Community Social Planning Councils
- Healthcare organizations and service providers
- School districts, schools and youth
- Economic development/chamber of commerce
- Recreation and parks organizations
- Mental health and addictions services
- Universities and colleges
- Farming/food industry
- Non-profit sector
- Housing and homelessness initiatives

Coordination for the overarching strategy of the Hub and administration of the CFAI funding is led by a Hub Agency, an established non-profit organization or institution with links to the rest of the community and with an interest in food security or a specialization in community development.

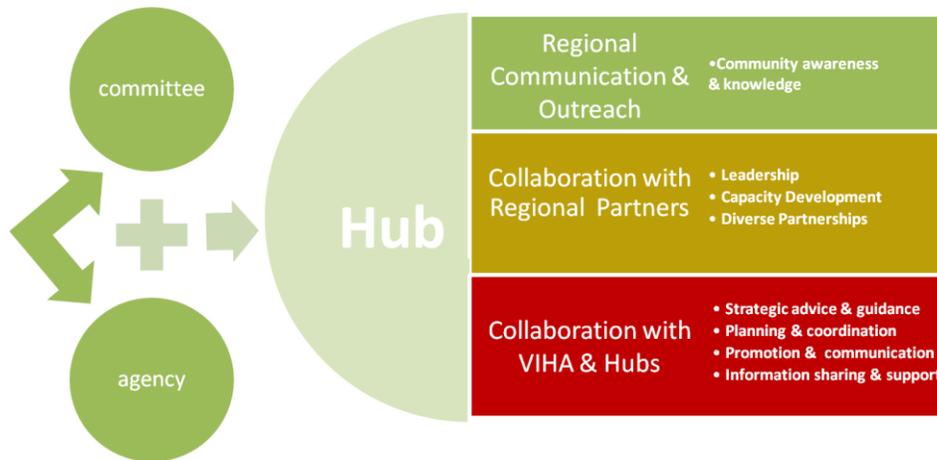


Figure 1: Food Security Networking Hub functions

The choice of the Hub Agency is determined locally by the Food Action Committee, and is subject to several criteria that Island Health has found to be necessary for the successful functioning of the Hub, including that the Hub Agency is:

- A local non-profit or public sector organization;
- Financially independent of the CFAI funding (i.e. does not require the CFAI funding to sustain operations);
- A community leader in regional communication and outreach, and working collaboratively with regional partners.

Together, the committee and the agency function as the Food Security Networking Hub (Figure 1).

The proposed CFAI 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 support covered by the Hub funding could also entail the pursuit of additional funding for collaborative partnership projects. The hub model aims to support work that falls within the scope of its members existing mandates and to seek ways to maximize the impact of existing work rather than creating additional workload for any one organization. Committee members and interested community organizations would be welcome to come forward to provide leadership, staff support and/or funding to support collaborative projects that align with their organization's mandates.

## **3. Feasibility of a Strathcona Food Security Hub**

### **3.1 Community Interest in Hub Development**

There is significant community interest in increasing food security in Strathcona and support for developing a food security hub. There is some understanding in the Strathcona communities of the scope of the Island Health Food Security Hubs program within the segment of the population reached by the public consultations and media coverage. However, once a Hub is established, more work can be done to promote the Hub and its benefits to all sectors of the community.

Through the Strathcona Food Security Project's public consultations, there was some skepticism at the allocation of funding for the partnership development and support functions of a Hub rather than direct project funding, but overall support was high, and many stakeholders are interested in having a Hub in Strathcona and being involved with its work.

### **3.2 Stakeholder Interest**

A number of stakeholders have expressed an interest in being involved with the work of a Strathcona Food Security Networking Hub, including:

- City of Campbell River
- Strathcona Regional District
- Campbell River Social Planning Committee
- North Island College – Lettuce Grow program
- Campbell River and North Island Transition Society
- Campbell River and District Food Bank Society
- Greenways Land Trust (Campbell River)
- Salvation Army (Campbell River Branch)
- Campbell River Family Services Society
- Zeballos Initiative for Produce Society
- Ehattesaht/Chinehkint First Nation
- Quadra Circle
- Linnaea Farm Society (Cortes)
- Sayward Farmers Institute
- Clayworks Cafe (Gold River)
- Island Health Public Health and Aboriginal Health programs

It is anticipated that once a Hub is established, other stakeholders may also express an interest in working with the Hub to advance food security in Strathcona.

### **3.3 Potential Organizations that Could Function as a Hub Agency**

While there is some food security work occurring in Strathcona, there are no organizations in Strathcona that are currently undertaking the communication and coordination work of a Food Security Hub on a regional basis. However, there are several organizations that would be capable of growing into the Hub Agency role.

The non-profit agencies who work partially or wholly towards broad community food security development in Strathcona are the Linnaea Farm Society (Cortes), Greenways Land Trust (Campbell River), Zeballos Initiative for Produce Society, and the Tahsis Community Garden Society. All of these organizations are small and geographically based in their local communities, although Greenways Land Trust does cover some portions of the Strathcona Regional District south of Campbell River. These organizations offer capacity-building programs to all segments of their communities.

Of these organizations, Greenways Land Trust and Linnaea Farm have established financial sustainability as they have both been operating for over 15 years. In addition, Greenways Land Trust has been involved with food system redesign by assisting the City of Campbell River with its Community Garden Policy. Linnaea Farm has many years of experience with food initiatives as well as a strong educational program and operates a Community Supported Agriculture program.

Many other agencies involved with food security are larger and have a broader geographical base (although most of these restrict their programming to just Campbell River and Gold River). However, their programs tend to be targeted to vulnerable populations to promote social and health goals, and they do not have a broader community mandate at this time. Agencies such as Campbell River Family Services, Campbell River and North Island Transition Society, the John Howard Society of North Island and the Salvation Army are examples.

### **3.4 Challenges to Developing a Food Security Hub in Strathcona**

There are several challenges to developing a successful Food Security Hub in Strathcona. The Strathcona Regional District is the province's newest regional district, formed in 2008 after the provincial government restructured the Comox-Strathcona Regional District, so it lacks an established identity. In general, it is sparsely populated, with many of its remote communities (some of those in greatest need of food security) having limited or non-existent services from the non-profit sector due to the significant resources required to provide services in those communities. Concern was raised during the consultations that the Hub risks becoming a Campbell River-focussed opportunity.

As detailed in the *Strathcona Food Security Project: Food Security Needs Assessment*, the region performs below average in its economic profile, so with some notable exceptions such as the Quadra Community Kitchen program, there are a limited number of people with enough time, energy and personal resources to enable volunteer-led community projects. These types of projects require a high

level of commitment, for example leading projects, obtaining funding, starting a non-profit society or starting a social enterprise.

The Hub Agency is likely to find it difficult to communicate the Hub's role. The CFAI funding for the Hub is approximately \$10 000-\$15 000 annually, and is limited to networking and collaboration support. Partner organizations are relied upon for on-the-ground project delivery. During the public consultation, it was found that the Hub role is difficult for members of the public to understand. Efforts were made during the consultations to manage expectations for the development of a Hub, but the enthusiasm of the communities for new resources, coupled with the 'behind-the-scenes' nature of the funding, may lead to confusion and frustration in Strathcona without sustained, clear and consistent communication of the Hub's role from the Hub Agency and Food Action Committee.

Practically, it will be difficult to staff a Hub coordination position with such limited funding. The agencies most likely to take on the Hub Agency role are very small, and recruiting part-time staff with the skills necessary to enable success of the Hub, especially in a region where supplementary skilled employment is difficult to obtain, could lead to burnout and high turnover, making collaboration, communication and outreach inefficient.

The establishment of a Food Security Hub in Strathcona may create further competition for scarce funding opportunities for all of the Food Security Hubs Island-wide.

### **3.5 Recommendations for Developing and Implementing a Food Security Hub in Strathcona**

Although the development of a Strathcona Food Security Hub faces some challenges, it is also a fantastic opportunity to begin a coordinated effort to improve food security in Strathcona for all of its residents. The likelihood of success of the Hub can be improved by the following:

#### **3.5.1 Development of the Food Hub**

The Food Security Hub will benefit from the input of all stakeholders who are interested in enhancing food security in Strathcona.

#### **Food Action Committee Responsibilities**

The Food Action Committee will be responsible for setting the strategic direction of food security initiatives undertaken by the Food Security Networking Hub. Committee representatives will also be responsible for communicating food security activities happening in their areas and within their

organizations, seeking to develop partnerships for action to improve food security, and communicating the role of the Hub to the broader community.

### **Food Action Committee Representation**

Representatives to form the Food Action Committee should be gained by invitation from the Project Steering Committee to organizations who have expressed interest during the public consultations. A terms of reference document and the guiding principles for the Food Action Committee should be agreed upon at the first meeting and include details such as how representatives are chosen, how decisions are made, and an election of the Committee Chair. To ensure transparency, the Committee Chair should be independent from the Hub Agency.

It is suggested that at least one representative from each of the major population centres should be sought: Quadra Island, Cortes Island, Campbell River, Gold River, Sayward, and at least one representative from the small, remote communities of Tahsis, Zeballos and Kyuquot. In addition, additional representatives from the short-term relief, capacity-building, and food system redesign sectors (as described in the *Needs Assessment*) should be sought. Strathcona is home to many different First Nations, so a First Nations representative should be invited to ensure that the Committee's work is aware of and respectful towards First Nations perspectives and concerns. However, it would be impractical and culturally inappropriate to ask one First Nations representative to speak for all First Nations in Strathcona, so each regional community representative should be responsible for ensuring that the First Nations needs (and those of other minority groups) in their community are brought to the table. The Committee can also ask the Vancouver Island and Coastal Communities Indigenous Foods Network for assistance with any specific issues.

To enable effective decision-making, the Committee should be limited to 12 community representatives, but to enable transparency, the meeting should be open to all who wish to attend. Sub-committees could then be formed by any interested parties for project work or community-specific issues, as long as the sub-committee lead is a member of the Food Action Committee. Further details should be determined in the terms of reference.

### **Food Action Committee Operation**

To enable a smooth setup, it is envisaged that the Food Action Committee will meet monthly during its first year of operation. After the first year, the frequency of meetings could stay monthly, or could decrease to bi-monthly or quarterly depending on the amount of funding and energy of the Committee. Because Campbell River is central to most of the population of Strathcona, it would be practical to hold most of the meetings in Campbell River, but for the best engagement, meetings should be rotated around the other population centres, with funding for any necessary travel expenses to be reimbursed by the CFAI funding.

## **Hub Agency Allocation**

Several organizations within Strathcona could potentially function as the Hub Agency, including organizations that have not yet been involved with the Strathcona Food Security Project. It is recommended that a call for expressions of interest by the Food Action Committee, once it is established, is the fairest way to allocate the opportunity. Objective criteria such as the *Island Health Food Security Hub Sustainability Criteria* should be used to determine the best organization to take on the Hub Agency role.

Because Campbell River is the main ‘hub’ of Strathcona, it is recommended that the Hub Agency be located in or near Campbell River for ease of communication and arrangement of meetings, etc.

## **Hub Agency Responsibilities**

To enable the communication and outreach role of the Food Security Hub, the Hub Agency, with the assistance of the Food Action Committee, should be responsible for producing regular communication and organizing an annual information-sharing gathering as funding permits. The Hub Agency would also be responsible for administration of the Committee, assisting community groups in finding resources and appropriate contacts for projects, and acting as a liaison between community groups, the Committee, and other agencies.

### **3.5.2 Ensuring a wide range of representation from all of the Strathcona communities on the Food Action Committee**

Although Campbell River is the main population base of Strathcona, many of the remote communities face an equal or even greater need for food security. The Food Action Committee must have a wide representation inclusive of the outlying communities. If a geographically wide range of agencies and groups cannot be enlisted, strong representation from the Strathcona Regional District government should be sought. The Committee should plan to meet in an outlying community every few meetings to ensure that they are well represented.

### **3.5.3 Pooling regional funding for improving food security in Strathcona**

As documented in *Strathcona Food Security Project: Food Security Needs Assessment*, there are significant populations of people at risk of food insecurity in Strathcona, and the costs of doing nothing ultimately fall on society, and particularly for service providers at a regional level. While helpful, the CFAI funding is limited and efforts to improve food security would be much greater if regional resources were pooled through a central non-profit or public sector agency such as the Hub Agency. Obtaining enough regional funding from local government, school districts, Island Health, and others to enable a

full-time position responsible for food security project development would enable much more action to be taken on a regional scale by reducing duplication and taking advantage of economies of scale. Additionally, obtaining external project funding to allow a broadening of the Hub's mandate would also be extremely helpful for taking action.

The fantastic successes of the Produce Availability Initiative in Remote Communities in Zeballos and Tahsis highlights how community food security can be improved when adequate funding is made available. These communities now have flourishing community gardens and a variety of food and nutrition programs in their schools. However, it remains to be seen whether these successes can be sustained once the Produce Availability Initiative funding has ended.

#### **3.5.4 Consider integrating an Agricultural Advisory Body with the Food Action Committee**

The City of Campbell River's Agriculture Plan has identified a top priority of creating an independent agricultural advisory body to advise the City on how to increase the amount of local agricultural production. In order to reduce duplication, the proposed role of this body could be taken on by the Food Action Committee, or structured as a sub-committee with a Campbell River focus. This sub-committee could be administered by the Hub Agency and funded by the City. Local agriculture faces very different challenges in the various Strathcona communities, so for effective action, it is probably best to keep the needs of Campbell River area agriculture separate from those of the Discovery Islands and Sayward.

## 4. Conclusion

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.

Bringing a Food Security Hub to Strathcona would be beneficial to the region to help develop partnerships and improve communication. The *Food Security Networking Hub Feasibility Assessment* details the Island Health Food Hub model, gives indications of community and stakeholder interest, details potential agencies that could act as a Hub Agency, and identifies challenges to introducing the Food Hub model to Strathcona. Recommendations to address these challenges include guidance on developing the Hub, ensuring a wide range of representation on the Food Action Committee, allocating the Hub Agency opportunity through an open call for interest, pooling regional funding to broaden the Hub's functions, and integrating an Agricultural Advisory Body with the Food Action Committee.

Building a comprehensive Hub with both communication/partnership development and project development responsibilities, funded through a regional partnership, would enable more action towards improving food security in Strathcona as a whole. The *Food Security Networking Hub Feasibility Assessment* finds that the implementation of a Food Security Networking Hub in Strathcona is feasible, and gives guidance towards its establishment and operation into the future.

## References

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