

Food Systems

COVID19 Impacts and Response

Capital Region area report from CRFAIR



Weekly Briefing Notes - April 22, 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**. Some information has been provided in previous weeks, but information is updated weekly as information becomes available. We are working to do deep listening at the community level and relate this to regional provincial and national actions and decisions.

Food Production and Food Availability

Situation Unfolding

The situation for local farms continues to be similar to issues reported last week. Different scales and types of farms are impacted differently. Farmers reliant on restaurant sales and farmers markets are finding ways to shift their sales. Larger farms are dealing with labour shortages and challenges due to social distancing measures and missing their Temporary Foreign Workers. Some farms are still reporting potentially reducing planting due to labour shortages.

Most Farmers markets are shifting to their online sales as markets get up and going for the season, for example Esquimalt Farmers Markets will test the online sales and pick up this coming week. Direct Sales at farm gate markets are seeing increases in sales of 300-400%, but continue to find the pressures of social distancing measures and cleaning protocols very taxing. Reports are that small farms who have developed diversified and hyper local markets and invested in training workers are reporting that their sales are up and that they are working cooperatively with other farms and doing quite well.

Restaurants continue to be closed or have downsized operations opting for take out. Pressures are mounting to resume in-restaurant dining with distanced measures. There are a number of restaurants in Victoria that are involved with cooking meals for the folks being housed in tent cities or downtown. It is

estimated that restaurant sales are down 80% and there are efforts to encourage consumers to participate in a “Takeout Day” every wednesday. [Supporting restaurants during COVID-19 with #TakeoutDay](#)

Many are wondering about how the supply chains will hold up. Until now global supply chains have shown resilience, however supply chain issues are now emerging related to COVID19 outbreaks. The demand for food has been totally shaken up by COVID19 between two different supply chains. It may be hard to understand that as pressure increases daily on emergency food services across North America, why are we seeing dumping of fresh goods and tilling under millions of dollars worth of crops? It is due to the way that the supply chains are set up. The destination of much of the food produced is to wholesale markets- to packing plants, processing facilities, to suppliers of restaurants and institutions. As the pandemic impacts Canada and the US more significantly many of the facilities involved are facing closures and limited service, and this means cutting supply. [‘It hurts’: Farmers forced to destroy crops as oversupply wreaks havoc on food supply chain](#)

Food service orders are being stalled while direct to consumer sales are surging. But consumer demand isn’t nearly enough to absorb the sudden glut created by the widespread closures. Figuring out what to do to redirect foods to supermarkets or other direct to consumer sales requires that crops and products be treated very differently in their packaging and shipping as well as falling under strict health and safety guidelines.

The impact on meat processing is one of the big stories in Canada. Cargill who has two major processing plants supplying 55% of Canada’s Beef are now closed due to the outbreak. The High River, Alberta plant is a fully integrated beef processing facility where 2,000 employees process 4,500 head of cattle per day. [one person is dead and 515 people are sick](#) with COVID-19 due to the outbreak. The plant is now closed and this is going to have ripples up and down the supply chain from the farmers supplying the beef to potential shortages and inflation in prices for the consumer. News also broke this week that nearly 30 employees at a United Poultry Plant in Vancouver contracted COVID19 and the plant is now closed and under investigation.

Repercussions are also going to be felt from COVID19 measures on US fruit and vegetable imports. Roughly 70% of our fruits and vegetables come from the United States, and mainly California. It is projected that we could see increasing disruptions in fresh foods in the grocery stores and inflation triggered by shortages. This is related to worker shortages, trucking and even potentially protectionist policy that was demonstrated with medical supplies by US policy makers. And then there is the double whammy of an anticipated Climate-driven drought emerging in the western US. A study released this month by the Earth Institute of Columbia predicts “ a megadrought worse than anything known from recorded history is very likely in progress in the western United States and northern Mexico, and warming climate is playing a key role. This does not bode well for food production. [“https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2020/04/200416151750.htm](https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2020/04/200416151750.htm)

Even if we wanted to redirect our local farm produce from the limited restaurant and farm market sales into the grocery stores to replace anticipated shortages of US produce, currently only a handful

of farms on Vancouver Island have the required Canada GAP certification (health and safety regulations) they would need, let alone the quantity and consistency of supply.

Also as reported previously, fishers are dependent on export markets (97%) and restaurant sales, which are both closed. They do not have the proper licencing to prepare fish for direct to consumer sales, let alone the marketing contacts or channels. Skipper Otto is a community supported fishery that currently works with over 18 fisher families to distribute fish direct to consumer. They are able to keep the fishers working and are looking for additional distribution points across Vancouver Island. If you have a lead on potential distribution points, please contact Sonia Strobel, CEO of Skipper Otto <sonia@skipperotto.ca>

Home economics is heating up! Vancouver Island is not alone in reports that there continues to be a surge in growing and preparing food at home across Canada. People now have more time and energy to learn to cook and bake and to grow gardens at home. Growers and Garden supply stores are seeing increased seed and plant sales, and the staples are flying off the shelves at grocery stores. Monitoring social media feed for even a short period shows that short demo videos on “how to” cook are trending.

[Canadians are baking so much that Robin Hood flour is running out of bags — but not flour](#)

<https://www.shawspotlight.ca/video-play/victory-gardens.html>

Responses:

Below are a number of activities happening in response to COVID19 and related measures:

The Canadian Federation of Agriculture is reaching out to Canadian farmers weekly as the crisis continues to identify any issues being caused to farm businesses. - [bi-weekly survey](#)

Farmers accessing Temporary Foreign Workers: Doug Pepper Regional Agrologist distributed this information regarding Temporary Foreign Workers. “All TFWs that are going to farms must be in 14 day self-isolation at a provincial hotel in Vancouver. If any employer is planning on bringing in workers under the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAWP) WALI is organizing the collection of information and sending it to the province. Farm operators that employ temporary foreign workers must apply for authorization from the Province to receive temporary foreign workers and protect workers. The application process is now open, any farms that brought in TFWs from April 10th onward will need to fill in this form and have an on-site inspection”. [Apply for authorization](#)

As part of this application, farm operators must:

- Complete a mandatory COVID-19 workplace risk assessment

- Implement a mandatory COVID-19 infection prevention and control protocol to reduce the spread of the virus

More info:

<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/industry/agriculture-seafood/covid-19-response/temporary-foreign-farmworkers>

Other options for Farm Labour? CRFAIR is working to contact local MPS to explore the potential to leverage Canada Summer Jobs to decrease labour shortage impacts. As there is a delay in Temporary Foreign Workers, and the CERB and Student Benefits being offered by the Federal and Provincial governments are making it doubly difficult to find and hire local labour, there is the possibility to support farms with accessing labour through the Canada Jobs program(providing a 100% wage subsidy). There are valid concerns that young people are not accustomed to physical labour or skilled enough to add value to the farms, however there are efforts underway to see if proven farm training programs and mentorship from retired farmers could provide farms with additional training and support through these times.

Small business loan programs are also reported to be accessed by local farms, and one farm reports “spreading the loan money around” to other very small operations who could not apply themselves. https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/employment-business-and-economic-development/business-management/small-business/covid-19_small_business_supports.pdf

Processors enter into online grocery space: Good to Grow — a company that educates local food and beverage processors — has created an online grocery platform for delivery and curbside pick-up of locally processed products. BCLocalRoot.ca is a rescue mission in response to COVID-19, with two key goals:

1. To save local food processors who have lost significant sales due to market channel slow-downs and restaurant closures.
2. To provide a solution for consumers who are facing unprecedented challenges to accessing food.

Check it out: <https://bclocalroot.ca/>

Additional marketing power for local farms: a **FarmHub** is being developed in the Greater Victoria area to create new markets through direct delivery and wholesales in an effort to alleviate the loss of sales to restaurants and farmers markets and increase access to local produce in Victoria. This initiative is currently being developed in concert with local farmers to do farm pickups, aggregate farm produce and distribute into the rapidly changing direct to consumer and wholesale marketplace. Interested buyers and producers can contact susan@crfair.ca

Weekly Roundup on Food Access

Summary - 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 i by all three School Districts in the region The Rapid Relief Fund has now raised over \$5 million and other donations are supporting agencies in their ability to respond.

Global news reports on the [COVID-19](#) impacts on those experiencing food insecurity. Are more people going to become food insecure? [How the coronavirus pandemic is affecting food security in Canada](#)

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?

- There is a strong appreciation by the agencies of the food resources being provided by the Foodshare Network
- Some agencies are seeing a drop in visits, and there are concerns that families who are sheltering in place are not accessing the resources they need in fear of going and picking up food. Other agencies are reporting that they are finding increased requests for support so it may be that people are working to find access to resources that can be delivered

- many agencies are working to provide grocery store gift cards instead of handling food and distributing food
- some agencies are being asked to add significant numbers to their client lists
- agencies continue to see disruptions in volunteers as many are seniors unable to volunteer anymore, Shelbourne Community Kitchen reached out to the Restaurant industry for those who are laid off and that is working well, and there is also funding for students that volunteer and they may be another good source of volunteer effort
- Some of the churches who have been contributing are not able to contribute because they are not holding services and doing collections or unable to do their fundraisers
- Main Island food bank is seeing a 50% increase in folks accessing services. They are working to support many families who are seeing both parents without their jobs. They also serve a lot of seniors . They are also working with smaller grocery chains and larger food distribution networks to provide food and that is working quite successfully.
- some meal programs are also working to provide plant starts for gardens (Sooke)
- There is funding available for food programs but they are requiring the ability to respond very quickly and only certain agencies qualify. There is the needs to set up a list of funding opportunities and distributing to all the agencies to make it a little easier for agencies really working hard to respond -juggling the need to serve clients with making funding requests.
- Some agencies are looking at very high demand for services with needs tripling in the last month, some existing clients need more support, and some are new clients.
- purchasing from local farms is a priority for many agencies and there are opportunities with the new FarmHub being set up to channel local food to support these agencies.
- many agencies are also looking at increasing amount of food being distributed, the nutritional value as well as the durability of foods
- clients who are single parents are getting harassed for shopping with their children when they don't have other options , looking for delivery options

Food Resources in the Capital Region.

Food Resources in Capital Region List available at: https://bit.ly/CRD_FoodCOVID

If you know of any additions or changes to this list, please let Sonja know (Cordinator@foodsharenetwork.ca)

Other Resource Lists:

Also - if you are interested in knowing how to access other resources in the community - please see the other available resource lists that provide information on where to access food & other services eg: health services, shelter, financial services etc.

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 **Community Pandemic Resources:**
<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1-4MYDu7FLCpNoSzbu2QY8hYGHJSrCZ398nRXPVvUF2w/edit>

Active Community Resources:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1-4MYDu7FLCpNoSzbu2QY8hYGHJSrCZ398nRXPVvUF2w/edit>

IHRT Community Survival Services Handout:

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1R7KSy8lF0AOMRN77ibfqW0RUS8e3nJjTEu93jdTMEk/edit?fbclid=IwAR3w3f5pw5U6ropL2GY2i5qIRtcLXX0D-v1tyPTZ-irXyXHraJFGYwIz_1c

Victoria Foundation Rapid Relief Fund: Another round of funding was issued this week distributing over \$1 Million dollars to local charities.

Since March 21, the fund has raised almost \$5 million.

Zaman Velji, chairman of the board for the Victoria Foundation, which launched the fund along with the Jawl Foundation and the Times Colonist. says "Getting funds to smaller groups ensures help goes to as many people as possible". The focus is on "addressing the weakest links in our chain of social support at this time of heightened need," On April 21, the Times Colonist Reported that:

Contributions in the category of food access and supply are going to the Anawim Companions Society (\$5,000), the Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Victoria Foundation (\$107,000), Silver Threads Service (\$22,000), the Shelbourne Community Kitchen Society (\$20,000), the Victoria Community Food Hub Society (\$75,000) and the Victoria Rainbow Kitchen Society (\$60,000).

To apply: [Grant Eligibility - Rapid Relief Fund.](#)

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>

Western Communities: The Western Communities Food Roundtable of approximately 25 agencies met again to hear the advances made in doing a scan of resources in the Western Communities as well as an update on the success at securing funding to hire a coordinator(s) who can work to support better coordination and amplification of efficiencies and impact between the agencies who are working to provide food supports. A subcommittee has been struck to support the coordinator and some immediate actions were also identified, including working to bring greater support to Port Renfrew.

A list of Sooke/West Shore related services and supports during COVID-19 has been developed for families. It's [online here](#). It is updated weekly

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: .Starting on Monday (April 26) , the district will deliver ready-to-eat meals to families identified by each school as being in need. These are families that previously benefited from meals programs (breakfast programs or lunch programs offered through the school). The meals are being prepared by Truffles catering and distributed to families by priority of need. Some PACS have offered to volunteer their time to their schools and communities, however it was determined that the best course of action was to offer this opportunity to our own employees. Our bus drivers will be transporting and delivering meals. The frozen meals will be dropped off at three main locations and picked up by parents- the remaining meals will be delivered directly to families by staff. These are 5 frozen dinners, picked up once a week. Families with more than three children are offered two weekly portions.

Also by need of priority, the district would like to purchase gift cards to local grocery stores. This would give parents and families in need the opportunity to purchase basic need items like toiletries and additional food items that are not a part of the meal program.

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. The Good Food Box could increase its boxes to 500 but an additional capacity would need to be developed to move beyond this number, including adding extra packing days and staff costs.

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. Also many of the nations are participating in the Growing Together initiative as they are receiving plant starts and gardening support sponsored by the City of Victoria plant distribution program.

Update on the Growing Together initiative: This initiative of the Good Food Network is designed to support folks to grow food at home. Over 25 agencies are involved and the **growingfood-together.com** resource website is now live. The Growing Together partner agencies are gathering resources and support (thank you Rapid Relief Fund!!) to ensure people have access to the resources they need as well as mentorship and information to be successful home gardeners. The City of Victoria and its Growing in the City initiative are a program partner and will be supplying plant starts, My FED Farms provide garden kits and CRFAIR is supporting over 200 Seniors in Saanich to get growing through a generous donation from an anonymous donor. The Youth Food Network will be providing opportunities and support for youth with support from the Horner Foundation. 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. The first webinar this week had over 40 registrants for a webinar on navigating Food Resources in the Community. Contact Janelle Hatch for more info Janelle_Rondeau@hotmail.com