

# Food Systems

## COVID19 Impacts and Response

### Capital Region area report from CRFAIR

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#### **Briefing Notes - July 17th, 2020**

Organizations and individuals who are working across the food system have been meeting online to gather information about what they are seeing happen around 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 provide you with updates, please be aware that this information is being gathered from multiple sources and we are doing our best to ensure accuracy of information.

**Would you like to contribute to, receive updates, have corrections?** E-mail [engagement@crfair.ca](mailto:engagement@crfair.ca).

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

## Food Access

Currently food service agencies are signalling a continued heavy demand for services. The most recent update (as of July 13th) from community service providers about their services is available here: [https://victoriahomelessness.ca/covid19\\_serviceproviderupdates/](https://victoriahomelessness.ca/covid19_serviceproviderupdates/)

Here are a few other key up to date resources:

- [Active Community Resources](#), produced by people from multiple organizations (coordinated through the Victoria Women in Need Community Cooperative)
- [Street Community Survival in COVID Times: What's Open / Closed / New / Different in Lkwungen Territory \(aka 'victoria'\)](#), (produced by the Indigenous Harm Reduction Team)

These provide detailed resources available to a wide range of communities.

From Foodshare Network zoom meetings this past week we are hearing about an uptake of services and potential contributing factors. Early on we found that some agencies were reporting decreases in their services and this was attributed to anecdotal evidence provided by program participants that the CERB payments were providing a basic level of income that has lessened the need for food support. This however, has shifted again and potentially due to people anticipating the end to their support payments and wanting to stock up in preparation of tighter budgets in the months to come. We do not know if this is the reason but agencies are talking to participants to determine shifts in needs.

One of the key things we are seeing through the FoodShare Network is expressions of concerns about agency and worker burnout from a heavy demand period of shifting operations and supporting more requests. While there has been significant food relief funding, that support is limited and there are conversations about how to sustain levels of support and service in response to the community need going forward. How will staff and volunteers deal with issues of considerable overtime and stress?

The FoodShare Network is undertaking a survey of the 70 emergency food organizations in the network to understand current food provisioning services and needs in the community going forward. This will also give us an up to date count of the number of individuals in the region being served. The Food Share Network has also received a grant through the Good Food Access Fund to enable purchase of more food for distribution through the Food Security Distribution Warehouse. This means there will be more and different types of food flowing through the warehouse soon.

As the months pass since the pandemic hit, we are now seeing the **fruits of an increase in collaboration between agencies** in working to respond to the situation. For example the Western Communities Roundtable has hired a food security coordinator to support work between the agencies, as well as launched a Western Communities Food Security Initiative that is reaching out and supporting families over the summer in a coordinated response. This initiative is also tapping into the rescued food of the Food Security and Distribution Center as well as the Farmbucks program that is purchasing from local farmers. The Good Food Box has also expanded operations and is now providing free boxes that are being distributed across the region.

**The Growing Together initiative** - This campaign has brought over 20 agencies together to actively support people to grow their own food for physical and mental health and greater fresh food access. The project was able to leverage the following:

- Collaborative landing page [www.growingfood-together.com](http://www.growingfood-together.com) with information and support for people to connect to resources and learn to grow food
- social media communications inspiring people to grow video
- 10+ “how to grow” videos - <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCmwoNp54WTbURgY0qU5VWzg>
- Garden mentor matching over 100 new gardeners to mentors
- Supporting access to vegetable starts, seeds and garden kits -with over 55,000 starts distributed
- Six community organization special growing projects supported with small grants

*“You got this and we are here to help you”* as the central message of the Campaign - Watch this short video by Jen Rashleigh: [Growing Together Video Clip-You can do it](#)

There has also been the launch of a new **Emergency Community Support Fund**. In this region, United Way Greater Victoria and The Victoria Foundation are now accepting funding applications for the Emergency Community Support Fund (ECSF) funded by the Government of Canada. The \$1.635 Million in funding provides financial support to local charities adapting their frontline services to support vulnerable citizens during the COVID-19 pandemic. Grants can be used for a variety of purposes, including to cover staffing or resource needs, purchase assistance and more. Funding will be issued on

an ongoing basis until **July 31, 2020** or until funds are fully allocated. For more information including the link to the shared application portal, please go to <https://uwgv.ca/ecsf/>

## Food Production and Food Availability

We continue to see a surge of interest around regional food systems and local food supply. More people are growing their own gardens and sales continue to be strong. During Phase 3- which covers from June to September- according to the Restart BC plan, there are a number of measures that will support food and agriculture businesses. Restaurant and food service establishments have now been approved for modified openings under new COVID-19 protocols. In phase 3, people can begin to travel in British Columbia, hotels and resorts are allowed to reopen and select entertainment activities. This is good news for many of the farms, food and beverage providers that have been limited by the closure of these markets. We are seeing a large upswing in travel. New Covid-19 breakouts, for example the recent one in Kelowna, are revealing that we still need caution and impacts will continue to be felt across the sector.

The South Island Prosperity Project has recently launched the Rising Economy TaskForce. There are sub task force committees, and one is focused on Beverages, Food and Agriculture. The task force will provide recommendations for key “recovery” efforts that could have significant impact over the short term (18 months). This work is dovetailing with the work of the [Closing the Supply Gap](#) project which is currently working to engage grocery retailers to determine new pathways for sourcing local produce and selling through their outlets.

An [Open Letter](#) to Premier Horgan and Minister Popham was sent last week on behalf of a coalition of academics and food security organizations urging the adoption of programs and policies to help build resilience in our food systems in the wake of COVID. Read a media release and the letter [here](#).

**Farm producers** continue to see strong direct sales, and those with farm outlet stores continue to report significant increases over last year. Concerns about labour shortages continue. The berry crops are coming on strong. Reports are that more consumers are interested in “putting up” for the winter and buying more in bulk.

The new South Island FarmHub has doubled sales in its second month of operation with the help of the Rapid Relief funding. The Rapid Relief Fund has enabled local charities and the School Districts to purchase local produce from the SIFH for their programs (the \$250,000 is anticipated to leverage half a million in sales this year). Participating farms are pleased with the quick launch of the program and the ability to sell some of their crops destined to restaurants, where sales continue to be limited but are on the upswing. To support the South Island Farm Hub and sign up for the *new* home delivery box program <https://www.sifarmhub.ca/>.

To see where to purchase local produce and what is in season <https://islandfarmfresh.com/>

To see a comprehensive listing of programs and supports available for the farm community, find these links provided by the Young Agrarians. [COVID-19 Resources for Farmers](#)

**Farmers Markets:** [News from the BC Association of Farmers Markets](#) - Throughout the pandemic, BCAFM has supported and promoted its 145+ member farmers' markets. This includes 60+ physical markets with modified operations and 60+ online markets, and by 2020 peak season, BCAFM is expecting 100+ summer markets and 70+ online markets. They have also developed the BC Farmers' Markets Online initiative to provide member markets access to a reliable and user-friendly online platform (identified Local Line). By securing \$85,000 (\$55,000 from the Ministry of Agriculture and \$20,000 from Vancity Credit Union), BCAFM was able to cover the fees and support 70+ member markets (including spring/summer/fall and winter markets) in operating an online market this season. "As member markets continue to modify their operations and were limited to food only vendors, we understand that the work and time required from market organizers has increased while operating revenues have been reduced. In order for the BCAFM to plan the future collaboratively with its members, we prepared a short survey to gather information and suggestions member markets have so that we can better support them and develop the next steps as we move together through this extraordinary season and year. Results are upcoming".

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

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

**Fishers:** We continue to see harvesters struggle as the vast majority of fish caught is destined to foreign and restaurant markets, which are still limited or closed. Challenges with ownership and quota in the fishery make our situation in BC more apparent. If we don't own the access to our own fisheries resources, we cannot direct them to local markets, and we might not even be able to fish them. There is a call from harvesters that the BC gov't needs to protect and promote fisheries access- putting it in the hands of independent harvesters and coastal communities, not owned or controlled by offshore entities, investors or corporations.

The BC Government has launched a new [B.C. Farm, Fish and Food Job Connector](#) showcasing the current job vacancies throughout the province, including those for: Crop and seafood harvesters, Food processing and farmworkers, Agrolgists, Large machinery operators, and Marketing specialists. For the [Farm, Fish and Food Industry](#), the website has sector specific information and guidance to support business adaptation in terms of recruitment and human resource management in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Spot Prawns** are now available and in season. The fishery has been severely limited this year based on their biggest markets, traditionally being China and Japan, being shut down.

<https://www.cheknews.ca/b-c-spot-prawn-prices-plummet-due-to-covid-19-682766/>

The season that opened late this year, on June 4th, ends tomorrow. There are 264 licensed spot prawn harvesters that fish the coast from Vancouver to Alaska. According to Christina Burridge, executive director of the B.C. Seafood Alliance, about 1.5 million pounds of frozen spot prawns go to Asian market annually for celebrations like the Lunar New Year. This year there were even more bought and sitting in freezers waiting for the Tokyo Olympics. This means that there is now more available for domestic markets but that prices are expected to be cut by approximately 50% or more.

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

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

**Agritourism:** As with other operations there are specific protocols in place for on farm visits, markets and farm stands. With this in mind and the safety of everyone a priority. Flavour Trails (a regional agritourism program) has been launched for 2020 in a re-imagined way. This year's North Saanich Food and Farm Festival (the central activity of Flavour Trails) offers you a season-long, self-guided Flavour Trail route. With a mobile "Flavour Trails road map" in hand, You can peruse the map and check out the "Meet Your Makers" digital stories to get a sneak preview of the farms [www.flavourtrails.com](http://www.flavourtrails.com). There are indications that there will be continued interest in agritourism development as it is seen as a recovery strategy. This could mean looking at an expansion of Flavour Trails and other activities.