



Food Systems COVID19 Impacts

Capital Region District Area report from CRFAIR

Briefing Note March 30, 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 and 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 and comes from multiple sources. We are doing our best to ensure it is sound information and the situation is also changing quickly.

Are you a leader/ food systems actor that would like to receive updates, and 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 **Farming and the food supply chain**

Also Please see the following link, for a news release that includes among a number of measures, a list developed by the Province in consultation with the Provincial Health Officer, that defines essential services British Columbians rely on in their daily lives in the context of COVID-19 response and recovery: [COVID 19 News Release](#); We have included the list of essential services related to food systems at the end of this brief. In addition the CRD has now set up its Emergency Operations Center and they are currently in assessment mode in terms of supporting Municipal Response.

Weekly Roundup on Food Access

Members of the FoodShare Network Steering Committee are meeting regularly. 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.

Situation Unfolding:

This past week has seen many organizations who provide emergency food relief and meal programming return to providing services. Organizations are all grappling with making internal changes to the way they provide services as well as putting into measures to limit the spread of COVID19. Some of the key issues are lack of ability for clients to practice hand sanitization (lack of hand sanitizer supply and handwashing access), a steep drop off in volunteers and staff, initial limits to food availability due to

consumers greater purchasing of supplies. In addition many of the funding mechanisms such as thrift stores that fund these agencies have needed to be closed. There have also been concerns over transmission of COVID19 through food donations, and working to get information on best practices.

There is real concern about the food needs in social housing and concerns around outbreaks, with many of these agencies serving very vulnerable populations, and being very understaffed at this time. BC Housing is looking for access to frozen meals for residents.

Responses underway:

Surveys were done of the agencies to find out what are their current needs and programming and a number of responses have been mounted

- an up to date listing of food programming and services in the region: [PANDEMIC COMMUNITY RESOURCES](#)
- a call out and tracking of shared volunteers between agencies-word is the Rotarians are really stepping up!
- sharing information on how to acquire masks, gloves, gowns and sanitizers etc.
- distribution of information on food safety and donations
<http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/covid-19/community-settings/food-banks>
- press release and appeal for cash donations, and gift cards as opposed to food

The Mustard Seed Food Security and Distribution Center received an influx of donations from restaurants and businesses closing this past week and they have been able to increase their distribution again to the FoodShare Network, with strict restrictions on who can enter the warehouse as well as for outside warehouse food pick up. They are in need of drivers who can assist with agencies who are unable to pick up their food. This week they have an abundance of produce and registered agencies can arrive 9 am to 12 pm -no appointments necessary.

As many agencies can not open their doors for services due to protocols for social distancing, **camp**s have been set up in the City of Victoria at Topaz and Royal Athletic Park with the Downtown Chamber and other agencies stepping up to support hot meals.

Restaurants are also chipping in to support-partnering with Coalition to End Homelessness with the **Boxes of Hope program** taking 200 hot meals out to isolated folks in need.

The Rapid Relief Fund: Victoria Foundation, Times Colonist and Jawl Family have implemented the Rapid Relief Fund and agencies have already been granted resources to support with the additional burden on their services. The Fund is currently closing in at \$3 million with donations being matched by various donors - see the [Rapid Relief Fund](#).

(In less than a week the fund collected an amazing \$1 million to disperse to five local groups representing more than 80 organizations: the Mustard Seed; Stan Hagen Centre for Families; Salvation Army Addiction & Rehabilitation Centre; the Food Share Network; and the Coalition of Neighbourhood Houses Capital Region. The fund continues to seek donations and will be released on a rolling basis,

throughout the outbreak and recovery phases of the crisis, making it possible to move resources quickly and adapt to evolving needs)

First Nations communities and supports: There have been 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. The ~~SW~~ ~~ENENITEL~~ 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.

There has also been the creation of a Community Food Network across Canada and they are conducting a [COVID-19 impacts survey](#). In addition the [BC Coalition for Healthy School Food](#) is conducting a survey to share how BC school food programs (breakfast, lunch, snacks or other) are affected by and responding to school closures and the COVID-19 crisis. If you know of any other organizations that are exploring other methods of food delivery and programming to students affected by school closures, please feel free to share this survey link with them. Farm to School BC is also exploring how to connect teachers to students to do backyard or indoor food growing during the school closures.

Supporting Families in need through the Schools: There is planning underway for Truffles who hold the School Food Contract in SD61 and SD62 to deliver the meals for pick up by the families at the schools-with five days worth of meals packaged up for pickup. In SD62 they are looking at similar services.

Community Gardens have been deemed an essential service and while some had temporarily closed, they are opening up with cancellation of work parties but working to implement guidelines quickly developed and produced by the **City of Victoria, for more info aharned@victoria.ca**

Growing Together Campaign: Campaign is being mounted by a network of organizations looking to engage and support people to grow food at home both to support access to fresh and healthy vegetables for their own food but also to “grow a row” for fresh foods distribution to their neighbors and agencies that support folks in need. The coalition of groups from the [Good Food Network](#) are e-meeting to launch and coordinate this effort, including setting up a fundraising campaign to help folks with seeds and expertise. If you would like to be involved please email engagement@crfair.ca. A series of very local videos are currently being created to make gardening accessible and easy to do based on local conditions by the Victoria Urban Food Table. The Food Eco District is working to support folks with creating 500 gardens for those who need a hand in Greater Victoria. **The City of Victoria** is discussing significant measures to convert its city greenhouses to growing vegetable starts instead of its normal flower baskets which could result in the ability to distribute 100-150,000 starts in Victoria. They are also discussing the distribution of leaf mulch to support backyard food production.

Western Communities Roundtable will be holding a Rapid Assessment and Relief focused meeting this week to determine the resources, gaps and emergency food response to families and individuals in

the WestShore and Western Communities. Part of this will be to create an emergency food support list to add to the FoodShare list of food access availability.

Weekly Roundup on Food Production and Availability

The Situation Unfolding

Retail: There do not seem to be significant shortages of any food items at this time in grocery stores. Stores are implementing social distance protocols ensuring there are limited numbers in the stores, wiping high touch surfaces, closure of deli and bulk items, plexiglass between customers and servers as well as using paper and plastic grocery bags, no outside bags permitted.

Supply Chain: BC Government stepping up action on supply chain coordination establishing a new Provincial Supply Chain Coordination Unit to co-ordinate goods and services distribution; taking a more active role in coordinating essential goods and services movement by land, air, marine and rail; and suspending any bylaws that restrict goods delivery at any time of day.

Food and Agriculture businesses, workers and support services have been deemed essential services by the Province. In addition **temporary foriegn workers** have been exempted under border closures with an enforced 14 day isolation upon arrival in Canada. However there are concerns about lockdowns in countries of origin of the workers like India, and also the ability of the workers to get to Canada as airlines shut down.

Fisheries have also been deemed an essential service and are really feeling the impacts. Currently 87% of fish are exported and these markets are closed as well as restaurants. Halibut is currently open and while fish counters are largely closed at grocery chains, they are cutting and wrapping halibut. There are efforts to look at supporting coastal community fishers and how to redirect local fish to local markets.

Marketing Channels: With many marketing channels like restaurants closed. Local Farmers are getting organized and creative about their marketing. Some farms are coordinating with farm gate outlets that can handle higher volumes and social distancing. Others are responding to or setting up online marketing services and buying clubs. Some farms are shifting from restaurant and outlet sales to more direct to customer box programs. Also an e-meeting will be held this week to determine the interest and capacity to set up a new marketing channel for local farms to supply bulk product institutions, retailers, and processors.

Farmer's Markets: According to the BC Association of Farmers Markets (BCAFM) they will move to an online model to continue providing consumers with locally grown and prepared food products during the COVID-19 pandemic. "Moving farmers markets online will help ensure the health and safety of vendors and consumers, while still providing the same fresh and local food that families all over the province count on." - Lana Popham Minister of Agriculture.

We have seen that the Moss Street Market , for example, has opened its online platform. However it will still be open, as will the Esquimalt Farmers Market restricting the vendors to food only, to social

distancing measures, to no handling of product, and of course asking anyone with symptoms to stay home.

Local Produce Availability: Spring season harvest and storage crops currently available at the local farm stand.

- Beets
- Cukes
- Broccoli
- Cabbage
- Carrots
- Chard
- Collards
- Garlic
- Kale
- Leeks
- Parsley
- Potatoes
- Rutabaga
- Salad Greens
- Turnips
- Winter Squash
- Vegetable Seeds

Farm Service Supply Stores: Supplies and Services are different for each operation. For the most part feed and supply stores are still open and are working to ensure that feed and inputs are available. Top Shelf Feeds is open with special protocols in place. Integrity Sales is open for telephone and email orders for pick up, but their store is not open. Buckerfield stores are open. Island Tractor is open with parts, service, sales, and delivery services. Some Garden supply stores are temporarily closed but say they will re-open in April. Smaller operations are using Used Victoria and other buy and sell sites.

Provincially Designated Essential Services:

Vulnerable population service providers

- businesses and non-profits that provide food, shelter, social and support services, and other necessities of life for economically disadvantaged or otherwise vulnerable individuals, such as:
 - food banks, community kitchens, and voluntary and community service providers;

Food and agriculture service providers

- food cultivation, including farming, livestock, aquaculture and fishing, and businesses that support the food supply chain, as well as community gardens and subsistence agriculture;
- food processing, manufacturing, storage and distribution of foods, feed products and beverages;
- workers essential to maintaining or repairing equipment in food processing and distribution centres;
- workers, including temporary foreign workers, to support agricultural operations to enhance food security;
- retail: grocery stores, convenience stores, farmers markets and other establishments engaged in the retail sale or provision of food, pet or livestock supply, liquor, cannabis (including producers), and any other household consumer products, such as cleaning and personal care products.
 - includes stores that sell groceries and also sell other non-grocery products, and products necessary to maintaining the safety, sanitation and essential daily operation of residences. such as home supply, hardware, building material stores, pawn brokers, and garden centres and nurseries;
- farming supply, including seed, fertilizer, pesticides, farm-machinery sales and maintenance;
- inspection services and associated regulatory and government workforce and supporting businesses required for slaughter of animals, dairy production and food safety; and
- businesses that provide for the health and welfare of animals, including veterinarians, farms, boarding kennels, stables, animal shelters, zoos, aquariums, research facilities and other service providers.

