

Food Systems

COVID19 Impacts and Response

Capital Region area report from CRFAIR



Weekly Briefing Notes - May 19th, 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? E-mail engagement@crfair.ca.

* **We are now moving to a twice monthly format, unless there are major new developments.** Please continue to provide us with feedback, we appreciate it. **Next Brief Scheduled for: June 1, 2020**

As we move into phase 2 and a gradual opening up of the economy and resuming some activities with new protocols in place we will see some important shifts to keep an eye on. In this report you will see some references to the impacts of these changes as well as find some new financial and planning resources related to COVID19.

On behalf of the BC Centre for Disease Control, we are pleased to distribute the BC COVID survey about the impact of the interventions as well as illness – and will help guide future management of COVID related situations locally and provincially. The survey closes May 31 available at [COVID-19 Survey](#)

Food Access

Generally we are still seeing a rising demand on food services, with an emphasis on delivered meals and hampers. Many organizations have set up “hubs” for pickup as well that are distributed for ease of access and ability to put in place social distancing. There is significant stress on the charitable sector as we are hearing of organizations having to reinvent the way they are providing services, loss of volunteers, staff layoffs, and fears of donor fatigue as the efforts continue. We are seeing an increase in collaboration between agencies in working to respond to the people they serve, with many agencies being asked to provide more food access even though it is not in their normal scope of services. Many of these agencies are working with food serving agencies to bridge gaps. As the economy starts to open up and we begin to see the ability to return to work, there will be additional work and focus on how to do that safely. There will be additional needs to focus on anxiety and stress with these measures.

A recently released survey conducted by the Victoria Foundation and Vancouver foundation of over 1000 non profits in British Columbia finds that 92% are seeing an increase in stress, half fear they will not be able to operate over six more months, and over half are also seeing an increased demand in their services. Read more

<https://victoriafoundation.bc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/no-immunity-report-hi-res.pdf>

The FoodShare Network members continue to feel stretched in terms of food availability and delivering the food to those making requests. The Food Rescue Project food availability has been down, but demand keeps rising and agencies are asking for higher volumes of food. Some highlights from members include:

- Stress and continued amplification of requests for services
- Lifecycles reports that the Seed Library is now open and planning to distribute through hubs at School District and School District 62
- School District 61 and 62 have their food hubs going for food distribution, and all the food is going out to families in their catchment. Truffles is catering meals as well as there is provision of fresh food. School Districts are reportedly winding down meal services over the summer except to schools with specific high need populations. They will be continuing to undertake school garden food production initiatives.
- Western Communities is ramping up a more coordinated approach to supporting communities with a Steering Committee formed from the Western Communities Food Roundtable. This group has now hired a coordinator to support coordination of the agencies and amping up distribution through various programs.
- The Westshore Teaching and Learning Garden was not successful in getting the \$12,000 from Food Banks Canada needed to run the garden over the summer and requires funding to continue food production in the garden.
- reports on the gulf islands that there continues to be significant pressure on food banks and food programs
- Over 36 agencies have signed up to receive funding through the Rapid Relief Fund program with the South Island FarmHub to receive fresh local produce, a recent survey went out to determine needs and produce required to assist with planning for the launch of the program in early June. [CHEK Upside: Rapid Relief Fund helps farms and local food security](#)

Resource of interest: [Food Security Planning Toolkit is finished and has now been posted to the FNHA public website. A Toolkit for the COVID-19 Pandemic](#)

Grow your own! The Growing Together Campaign is taking off aiming to support people with growing food in the Capital Region. There are approximately 20 organizations involved in the effort to provide training, mentorship, seeds, materials and supports to the community. The city of Victoria is a major partner with distribution underway of over 75,000 Seedlings around the region. Over 600 people have accessed web information services in the first two weeks since Growing Together was launched. There is a feature webinar on Monday May 20th 4:00-5:00 pm. Linda Gelkeson Linda will join us from her

home on Salt Spring Island to share “what’s happening in the garden” at this time of year, including what to plant right now. [Register here](#)

The City of Victoria also completed compost and leaf mulch distribution to Fernwood Vic West, Fairfield and Burnside Gorge with 30 cubic meters distributed through staggered pick up times at each site. The compost was distributed to backyard gardeners within 48 hours

For more information www.growingfood-together.com

Want to learn more about what is happening around food efforts across Canada?

[Breakout Meetings on Food and COVID-19 supported by the Food Communities](#)

[Network](#): Weekly ZOOM breakout meetings on Community Food Production, Assisting Farmers and Immediate Food Distribution, as well as a webinar this Friday: Direct Marketing in Pandemic Times (in French). If you haven't already done so, please register below.

- [Community Food Production](#): Wednesday, May 20, 12pm EDT

Click [here](#) to register, [Community Food Production Breakout Meeting Notes](#)

- [Farmer Support](#): Wednesday May 20, 2pm EDT

Click [here](#) to register, [Farmer Support Breakout Meeting Notes](#)

- [Immediate Food Distribution](#): Thursday May 21, 12pm EDT

Click [here](#) to register, [Immediate Food Distribution Breakout Meeting Notes](#)

We have note-takers at each meeting create a summary of comments on best practices, resources, questions, info, that will be made available to everyone on the website at [COVID 19 & Food /](#)

Food Production and Food Availability

[An interesting report comes from Western Agriculture](#): Grassroots Public Affairs surveyed 1,004 Canadians during April 16 to 20, 2020, and **they conclude that COVID-19 has made Canadians more aware and concerned about their food supply.** [READ More](#)

- 64% of Canadians believe that hunger and food insecurity will worsen in future as a result of COVID-19.
- 97% trust the quality of food grown or produced domestically.
- 92% endorse government support for the agriculture and agri-food sector.
- 87% believe that agriculture and agri-food is a leading economic driver in Canada.

As May hits we are into the final stages of heavy planting season for summer crops. Farms around the region have been making many adjustments based on COVID19. Some of the largest impacts (that have been reported on in previous briefs) are the shut down of markets (Restaurants and food services) that impact farmers. Even with Restaurants starting to come back on line, they are going to be running at limited capacity and will not be looking to make orders from local farmers as anticipated for 2020. In addition with Tourism drastically reduced this is going to further impact the culinary industry. High grocery store demand does not necessarily translate for local farms as very few sell to wholesale and retail markets, and some of those farms have experienced such high volumes at their own farm markets they have stopped selling into these channels. The BC Government supported provision of access by BC Farmer's Markets and their farmers to the on-line marketplace "Local-line" has had some success but many find operating an online store and the related marketing a challenge to set up and integrate into their planning when they are going full tilt in the fields. Local farmers markets are stretched for that extra coordination involved and are reaching out seeking additional financial resources from funders and the province to support their efforts to remain open. Some in our region have opted not to open for the season.

Some farms have banded together to concentrate sales at farm stands that are better situated for the social distancing protocols. Weekly direct to customer box sales are seeing a huge lift with many farmers increasing their customer base by 200-300%. The Rapid Relief Fund to support emergency food distribution agencies and school districts to "buy local" will be put into action starting in June through a new South Island FarmHub (www.sifarmhub.ca). Over 20 farms who have lost the majority of their sales to restaurants and food services will be selling both in bulk and also to weekly produce farm boxes that will be distributed to folks in need through the social service sector. \$250,000 has been awarded to the agencies in order to allow them to purchase fresh local vegetables that are in demand from local farms. <https://www.cheknews.ca/chek-upside-rapid-relief-fund-helps-farms-and-local-food-security-668444/>

Update on Inputs and Labour: Some small farms have found challenges in getting supplies, especially in terms of soil and seeds, however it seems that most suppliers are now "catching up" to the demand. In phase 2 some operations that have been previously quite limited will be able to respond to higher volume requests and having customers in store which should make getting supplies easier. Some of the demand for materials has been impacted by having so many people at home who are wanting to access materials and delivery for backyard and landscaping projects.

Many of the temporary foreign workers have now completed their quarantine in Vancouver hotels and are heading out to work on Vancouver Island Farms. This is welcome to many of the farms who rely on them, that have been struggling to get the work done, but also wondering about their plans for summer planting, maintenance and harvesting.

The Canadian government has opened up the application process for a pilot program to give temporary foreign workers who work in year-round roles in the agriculture industry a pathway to permanent residency. The three-year Agri-Food Immigration Pilot program, originally announced in July 2019, is aimed at helping employers in meat processing, mushroom and greenhouse production, as well as livestock-raising industries with filling needs for full-time, year-round employees. The government says it's prepared to accept up to 2,750 applications, with the application window running from May 15, 2020 to May 14, 2023. [Permanent Residency program](#)

Fish harvesters are seeing some support from the federal government, and good news for those who love local Spot Prawns, the season is delayed but will go forward starting on June 4, 2020.

Following you will see a number of reports and information about support programs, the phase 2 opening and some specific information important to the sector.

Restaurant "owners across the province have been given the green light to begin again inviting guests to enjoy scrumptious meals while sitting inside their brick-and-mortar establishments beginning Tuesday". https://api.secondstreetapp.com/m_c_t/23186770/74834800 BC's new restaurant safety rules laid out include distancing, strategic staff scheduling, and contact collecting. Patrons of reopened BC restaurants must dine in groups of no more than 6 and remain at least 2 metres from other tables or bar sitters. Establishments are also capped at half of their usual capacity and advised to retain for 30 days the contact info of every group that visitors. Here is a list of what is open in Victoria https://www.usedvictoria.com/news/Open-for-Business-Directory_139060

Restart BC and Government Supports: Many sectors, including Agriculture and Seafood, are encouraged to make plans and establish protocols on how they can operate safely in line with Public Health and Safety Guidelines. For more details, visit www.gov.bc.ca/restartbc

<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/industry/agriculture-seafood/covid-19-response#Restart>

On May 14 the Federal government announced some support for fish harvesters: The Government of Canada will launch the Fish Harvester Benefit, a program worth up to \$267.6 million, to help provide income support for this year's fishing seasons to eligible self-employed fish harvesters and shares persons crew who cannot access the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy

Last week the federal government pledged \$252 million in various COVID-19 funding and credit programs aimed at agriculture. Agriculture producers/industry has said this is not near enough.

Some of this support is in response to the situation with processing and the Meat packing operations. More than 900 of Cargill's 2,000 workers have tested positive for the novel coronavirus and one worker has died, making the plant the site of the largest single COVID-19 outbreak in Canada. The union that represents the workers is asking a court to stop work at the plant and has also filed unfair labour practice complaints against Cargill and the province

The government is also adding \$125 million to the AgriRecovery fund, a federal-provincial-territorial program aimed at helping farmers during disasters.

The government also announced \$50 million for a purchase program for surplus food, similar to what's available for some farmers in the U.S. Trudeau said the goal is to redistribute the surplus to food banks.

Also support from the Province for Buy Local initiatives: [Province providing \\$300k to Buy BC e-commerce initiative for farmers, food processors](#)