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Sound Bites

The newsletter with a vision of regional food sustainability

Volume 2 Issue 5

Field to Table partnership project with the regional host—Lillooet Learns

The **Small Scale Food Processor Association** (SSFPA) sponsored and facilitated four regional **Field to Table Partnership Projects** in January, February and March 2003. The vision of the SSFPA is to create regional food sustainability.

The purposes of the workshops were:
 1.To document the agricultural assets in the host regions
 2.To develop a collaborative

workshop to start building support for small-scale growers and processors
 3.To introduce the concept of flexible marketing and/or manufacturing networks
 4.To start the development of sustainable business plans specific to regional agricultural assets, that can compliment provincial plans.
 A group of people involved in a community development action plan for

Lillooet and area approached the SSFPA requesting a Field to Table workshop be facilitated in their region.
Lillooet Learns was identified as a regional organization that would officially host the workshop.
 The SSFPA workshop: **“From Field to Table: Add Value and Visibility to Your Agricultural Products”** was held February 10 & 11, 2003 at the Fountainview Academy, south of Lillooet on Highway 12.

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- Day one=Issues and problems
- Day two=Strategies and action planning



Regional reports used for background by the SSFPA

The first day of the workshop was focused on the participants and existing regional research, and reports. The SSFPA reviewed reports to ensure that the workshop would build on decisions already made in the region.
 The reports reviewed by the SSFPA were:
 1. *The Lillooet Forest District*

- Community Development Action Plan, March 28, 2002.*
- 2. Agricultural Opportunities Scoping Workshop, March 9, 2002.*
- 3. Lillooet Land Use Plan, Gateway to Wilderness and prosperity, 2001.*
- 4. Potential Interest in Creating a GMO-Free Zone in the Upper Fraser Valley, BC, 2003.*

The SSFPA process then had the participants quickly review the results, and then vote on the parts of the research that concerned them.
 The second day of the workshop was designed around these results.



The business goals of the participants

There were 57 people that participated in the workshop. Some of those people were not able to be there for both days.

The quotes collected from the people describing their business goals were:

“to build a new house from the profit,” “help people make these food connections,” “to reach farm status,” “to certify as organic,” “to have a stable supplementary income,” “to be financially independent at home,” “to make good wine that people will pay money for,” “to support family and community,” “to make a profit,” “to provide employment for community members,” “to have a job I love,” “to do something good for the earth and for people,” “to reduce spending at grocers,” “to build a viable

small-scale food processing facility that can provide 2-8 Full Time Equivalent employees, and to prove we can do it here,” “a thriving, profitable business that supports our family values and employs other families locally,” “to provide the community with healthy organic food,” and “to have a hobby.”

Strengths in the Lillooet region

More than half of the people at the workshop agreed that the area has great growing conditions, a great climate mixed with solar gain for greenhouses

and is pollution free. Near as many people indicated that the diversity of the people, and their entrepreneurial lifestyles, is a regional strength. The

discussion around proximity to the Whistler Farmers’ market will require more research to determine if it is indeed a strength.

The history of the region confirms the great growing conditions, with stories of bumper crops of organic tomatoes and First Nations beans and potatoes.

Apricot trees grow in profusion and are considered as “weeds.”

The First Nations market garden group

A group of youth from the Fraser Canyon Indian Administration were eager participants in the workshop. They are in the early stages of creating a community garden and the goal is to replace “store bought” fruits and vegetables with their own produce. The group’s focus was on the assets in their community and building a vision for the future—the first step was to make sure their elders had nutritious food. The group connected with a regional Certified Organic representative at the workshop, to get help with learning to use organic growing methods.

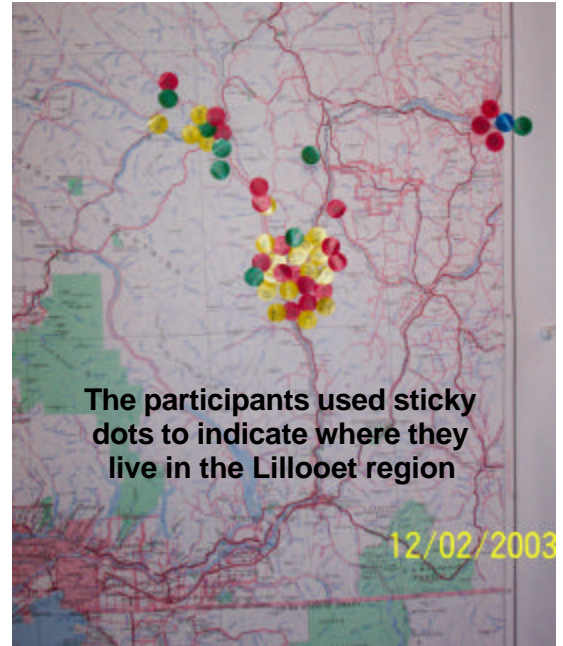
Challenges in the Lillooet region

The cost of water is a problem to many. This problem increases due to lack of snow cover in many winters. The lack of market information, and even where to get the right kind of training or education, were the main challenges identified by the participants. There are also a variety of challenges that relate to the diverse geographical differences within the area, and the centralization of rural agricultural support, and global commodity prices that are hard to compete with.

Threats in the Lillooet region

Many participants indicated that the main threat to community food sustainability is the “reduced support from the BC government.” The participants also indicated that there is “difficulty doing all the required things at once to create a local agricultural system.” About as many participants indicated that a threat is the “difficulty with access to finance.”

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The participants used sticky dots to indicate where they live in the Lillooet region



Participants shared their hopes for results, which were used to build an action plan at the workshop and the next steps.

- People asked for a way to contact local growers to buy direct
- People asked for resources to form a co-operative “to create a future that will give us economic and social autonomy.”
- People hoped to have a regional directory of help and growers and processors.
- People wanted to know what the government “regulations cost us and how can we share the cost?”
- People hoped to find information that is easy to read and is about the food value-adding they are doing. They said that they do not want to train to be a business person.
- People asked us “What is organic?” and “Where can we learn more about organic methods of farming?” and “Is there an organic wine sector?”
- People hoped to have access to

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organic growing information that is combined with production and expense and revenue values.

- People wanted to know how to set up a food marketing co-operative to reduce costs and use common branding.
- People wanted to understand more about how to get food products on the shelves of commercial volume stores.

Opportunities in the Lillooet region

- There are few processors in the area. The conference organizers have identified food production as a possible development focus to assist the people to reclaim their local economy in a more sustainable fashion.
- There were many growers who saw an opportunity to “create a local market gardeners co-operative.”
- There was broad consensus that there is an opportunity in “creating a value added association” in the area.
- An important opportunity is to document the Whistler market demand, to determine the feasibility of a targeted marketing strategy to that one market.

Next Steps

For the Small Scale Food Processor Association (SSFPA)

- To design and create a step-by-step plan for starting a small-scale food processing operation.
- Educational workshops on business planning, growing, processing, and marketing that is delivered in the rural area, with a need-to-know training flexibility.
- To partner with the Certified Organic Association of BC (COABC) to coordinate their educating SSFPA growers and processors that are interested in organics.
- General consensus is for the SSFPA to provide a marketing service to members.
- General consensus is for the SSFPA to organize a buying club for members.

For the small-scale food growers and processors

- “We just want to produce the food and sell it to someone else, we don’t want to be business people too.”
- We want to organize regional branding to make it easier to have a common label with each product and

can have a buying club and share the costs of services for nutritional labeling, SKU & UPC codes, commercial shared-use kitchen, transportation, promotion and sales etc.

For Community groups

- The Lillooet Agriculture Supplement 2003 is in the process of raising awareness of the agriculture sector by publishing a directory of local primary producers.
- “Create a local market.”
- Work on a “shop local” campaign.
- “Form a steering committee for storage, packaging, distribution operation, and be a broker that trains people locally in-house.”
- Work on replacing imported food.
- Work on regional marketing.
- Complete a “community asset mapping workshop, i.e. find all the backhauling opportunities etc.”
- “Map existing facilities and look at modifying them.”
- A group is meeting to organize a farmers’ market in Lytton for the 2003 harvest

For First Nations groups

- Emphasis on First Nations in branding
- Our big plan is at the Band Council and our next steps are:
 - ◆ Increase fruit production
 - ◆ Get Vendor’s licence
 - ◆ Put summer students to work
 - ◆ Have kitchen for value adding
 - ◆ Have irrigation and greenhouse
 - ◆ Feed community members first
 - ◆ Decide on equipment needed
 - ◆ Celebrate traditional methods of preparation
 - ◆ Create local First Nations market
 - ◆ Have a complete facility for storage, processing, labeling, packaging, distribution and training.
 - ◆ “Start establishing partnerships between first Nations and Organic organizations so that land can be brought into high quality productivity and allow us to replace foreign producers of organic, with organics that we make.”
 - ◆ Have a district and regional marketing manger and committee to find, establish and develop markets.

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The SSFPA thanks everyone that came and expressed themselves at the Field to Table workshop. Our purpose has been to address your hopes. Did we do this for you?

Fountainview Academy workshop site

The Fountainview Academy stated they are the largest organic carrot producer in BC. The carrot washer and sorting table provided the "seconds carrots" as the workshop refreshments.



The modern commercial kitchen feeds and trains the staff and students at the Fountainview Academy. This is where carrot juice is made.

The SSFPA would like to thank the Fountainview Academy for hosting the workshop and catering the nutritious meals. The staff and students we encountered also contributed to the success of the workshop.

The SSFPA would like to thank Lillooet Learns for sponsoring this event. They represent a concerned local group that has been working regionally to increase the quality of their rural lifestyle.



The Field to Table Partnership Project was funded in part by:



Participatory Workshop sessions

(Separate Sound Bites issues summarize the SSFPA sessions and can be found at

<https://www.ssfpa.net/DocsForms/DocsForms.htm>)

- The SSFPA presented the Living Inventory (LI). The intent of the LI is to provide a non-centralized way for small-scale growers and processors to find information, possible regional suppliers of goods and services, and opportunities to organize distribution methods. People that were interested were encouraged to activate an account to test the system. The SSFPA has planned outreach in the summer of 2003 to activate accounts for the suppliers of the goods and services which small-scale food growers and processors are asking for.
- The SSFPA presented a graphical model for shared services that small-scale food processors could organize at regional levels. The opportunity is to design a flexible manufacturing/marketing network according to regional assets and to be maintained by regional human resources.
- The SSFPA introduced the AFIF Margins Software designed for costing ingredients and documenting recipes' costs and margins on sales. The ingredient tracking function supports food safety recall strategies. The SSFPA plans to host this business tool for small-scale food processors on its website.
- The SSFPA described work being done to create access to finance, which is specific to small-scale food growers and processors. Look for this to be reported on during the summer of 2003.
- The Ministry of Agriculture Food and Fisheries presented the website "info-basket" and its search functions for information. <http://infobasket.gov.bc.ca/>
- The First Nations Agriculture Lending Association presented their agricultural loan packages and support they provide. <http://www.fnala.com/>