

April 15, 2003



## Sound Bites

The newsletter with a vision of regional food sustainability

Volume 2 Issue 7

# Field to Table partnership project with the regional host—LifeCycles Victoria

**The Small Scale Food Processor Association (SSFPA)** sponsored and facilitated four regional **Field to Table Partnership Projects** in January, February and March 2003.

This issue of Sound Bites summarizes the results of the Southern Vancouver Islands event.

The purposes of the workshops were:

1. To document the agricultural assets in the host regions
2. To develop a collaborative opportunity 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 to support local producers and processors.

**LifeCycles**, the host for the south Vancouver Island event, is a Victoria based non-profit youth driven organization focusing on proactive projects creating food security. Their main program areas are Urban Garden Creation, Food and Agriculture Education, Food Distribution and Youth Capacity Building.

The SSFPA workshop: **“Field to Table Partnership Project”** was

held Jan 21-22, 2003 at the Horticultural Centre in Victoria—a particularly amenable and relevant location! Other partners in planning this event were Future Corp Cowichan and CEDCO Victoria. The Island Farmer’s Alliance provided outreach assistance. A planning committee met several times to plan logistics and outreach. A common data base of local agricultural organizations, growers and processors was assembled. It was recognized that more outreach work would be required to get a full picture of all those involved and /or interested in value-adding activities in the South Vancouver Island region.  
www.lifecyclesproject.ca OR 250-383-5800

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## Building upon the knowledge held in the region

The first day of the workshop was focused on a situational analysis through the collaboration of participants and by including information from recent reports. It was noted that many groups on the Island are working on projects related to agricultural economic development and that activities have been increasing over the past few years, as people have become more aware of the issues and opportunities for a local food economy.

1. Participants talked about the heavy reliance on food brought from the mainland and re-

flected on the loss of farmland

2. Participants spoke of a history of vibrant agriculture on the island and the importance of becoming sustainable once again, both from the point of view of a revitalized agricultural economy and also from the point of view of food security for the region.

3. There is a growing market for value-added food in this region.

4. Challenges exist around smallness of scale and capacity to produce at commercial volumes

**Regional Needs were identified** in order to develop a

clear focus for discussion. Participants were interested in talking about:

1. Access to finance
2. Business planning
3. Marketing capacity
4. Time management
5. Transportation issues
6. Getting organized, working together to find ways of moving a small-scale agenda forward
7. Adapting HACCP to the small-scale food processor situation

**Many assets were identified** in the region. The second day of the workshop built upon this knowledge identifying solutions and charting next steps .

### Sound Bites:

- **Day one: Issues and problems**
- **Day two: Strategies and action planning**

## The workshop hopes voiced by participants

Twenty two participants attended the workshop, most of whom were able to attend both days. People wished to discuss the following: “access to financing,” “business skills mentoring,” “business planning help / expertise,” “new business models,” “products that I could buy cooperatively,” “learning about import-export trade,” “marketing contacts,” “cross marketing,” “cooperative marketing,” “ensure that regulation is appropriate, realistic, recognizes value of unconventional operation,” “better access to markets” “deal with regulatory people,” “HACCP

guidelines—adapt to small scale,” “specifically meeting food inspection guidelines,” “sources of information suppliers,” “networking,” “available products,” “new product ideas using locally produced ingredients,” “professional canning,” “processing for poultry,” “learn what is necessary to set up a small added value processing plant,” “learn how to integrate small-scale agriculture with viable community economic development,” and “starting a community garden”.

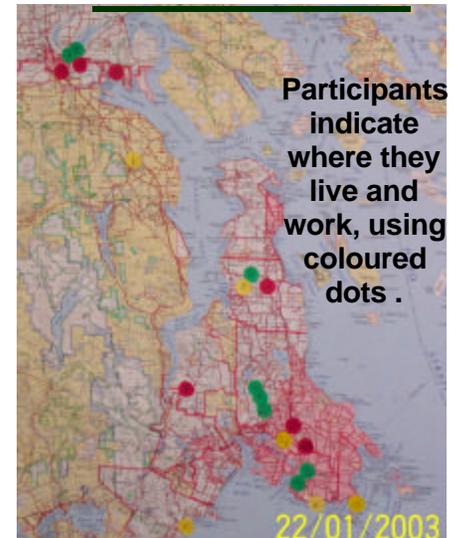
NOTE\* HACCP is ‘Hazards Analysis & Critical Control Points’

## Strengths in the Southern Vancouver Islands Region

- Vancouver Island has rich soil and a temperate climate.
- The opportunities for a revived agricultural and agri-food sector are strengthened through growing numbers of agricultural producers and community partners interested in promoting local food consumption and regional food sustainability.
- The work of the Island Farmers Association, the BC Farmer’s Market Association, the Direct Farm Marketing association and the BC Agricultural Tourism Association were

- noted as important in our region.
- The Capital Region Food and Agricultural Information Roundtable (CRFAIR) and its Buy Local campaign were celebrated.
- Farm Folk/City Folk’s ‘Feast of Fields’ brings focus as does ‘Eat’ Magazine.
- Participants agreed that there is a vibrant market for healthy, locally grown and produced food in this region.
- Quality niche foods and import replacement were talked about as

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Participants indicate where they live and work, using coloured dots .

having strong potential.

- Consumers have concerns about food sustainability.
- Local retailers are showing interest in providing local food, organic food and value-added food.
- Some stores are setting up local displays and promotions and Small Potatoes Urban Delivery (SPUD) , has a business commitment in Victoria.
- Thrifty’s and SPUD have production agreements with growers coming on-stream.



## Threats in the Southern Vancouver Islands region

- Most participants agreed that a lack of coordination and developed ways of working together were a threat to their ability to grow their businesses.
- Issues such as “new regulations for labelling” “cost of barcodes” “cost of doing business” and “liability insurance” were troubling .
- Waning government support was also seen as threatening to local agricultural economies.
- The biggest threat is the pressure on land prices from urban development and the constant threat of loss of Agricultural Land Reserve lands.

## Challenges in the Southern Vancouver Islands region

- There is a lot of competition due to the large proportion of value-added food that is imported to this region from places with lower labour costs.
- Many of the participants felt challenged to meet marketing and business needs because of smallness of scale.
- There was discussion of how incoming policies and regulations favour the interests of multi-nationals and large scale food processors.
- Many participants felt that small scale processors did not have a ‘profile’ with government and this reduced chances of getting development support.

- Agri-tourism and Eco-tourism are both strong
- Import replacement, quality niche products
- “Co-opitition” in sharing services and coordinating commercial kitchen
- space, buying clubs, shared shelf space or store fronts
- Regional branding
- Coordinated distribution to retailers and restaurants
- Collaboration for transportation and distribution
- Growing relationships with community partners for marketing, business and finance.

## How do we get to the market?

- Direct farm market—the market comes to us
- Managed agri-tourism is important to protect our personal space and insurance
- Two stores on Salt Spring Island and the farmers’ market
- Chef’s contract direct from suppliers
- Sell juice to Sooke Harbour House
- Cause marketing
- Advertise in Metchosin Producers’ Association Brochure
- Market collectively
- Display garden brings in the tourists
- Cowichan Valley Gourmet Trail
- We are part of an Eco-tourism project
- Our family name has a long history of providing ethically produced products
- We use an outside sales force/ agents, brokers & distributors, depending on the market we are trying to reach
- Telephone/e-mail
- Brochures, Trade Shows, Articles in trade magazines
- Competitive pricing, but don’t undersell
- You need a unique product—get a book written on your product specific to the industry
- Magazines
- Thrifty’s
- Functional website with e-commerce
- Know the customers and make products for them
- 50% wholesale and 50% retail
- Build goodwill
- Strategies by instinct
- Supplier Driven Marketing—taste tables
- We give informational interviews
- Started with UPC codes when we wanted to reach commercial volumes
- Co-operative advertising
- Local cable company ads
- Local writer includes my product in her book
- “court the media” and send them background information
- Chose wholesale focus
- “Voice-to-voice” contact with retailers
- Better restaurants carry specialty foods
- Mail order
- CBC radio
- Customer loyalty
- Distributor
- Brag about “awards” of the product
- Be a resource at schools
- Carry other people’s products
- Store front in Victoria
- Donate product to non-profit

## Next Steps

Participants wished to see the following actions flowing from this workshop:

### For the Small Scale Food Processor Association (SSFPA)

- Investigation of the possibility of a regional collective or cooperative marketing company through SSFPA and/or provision of brokering and distribution services that reflect the needs of SSFP’s
- Investigation of possibility for co-ordination/ provision of affordable lab services on the Island.
- Further development by the SSFPA of the Living Inventory web system to make it more user friendly and to include more material
- Develop links on SSFPA website to other association databases. Establish events calendar.
- Coordinate flow of information through web site.

- Outreach to growers and producers to get them involved
- Develop marketing and business planning workshops at market rates with member discounts.
- Training and collaboration regarding UPC codes
- Facilitation of programs that assure access to finance that is appropriate to small scale and agriculture

### For Community groups

- CEDCO Victoria to continue development of access to alternative financing for small scale agricultural producers and processors.
- CEDCO Victoria to invite SSFPA representatives to participate in the Agricultural Strategy being developed relating to the Community Investment Fund.
- Future Corp in Cowichan to look at

- providing specialized business planning services for small scale agriculture in their area
- Future Corp to consider sponsoring a SSFPA workshop in their area.
- LifeCycles to work with SSFPA to assist their clients to increase their capacity as small scale food processors.

### For Partner Groups collectively

- To investigate the feasibility of creating a shared –use commercial kitchen in the Victoria area and/or in the Cowichan area to facilitate processor development, increased capacity and increased community economic development.
- Follow-up discussion regarding regional branding and marketing should be held with all relevant associations .

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Thanks to everyone who came and expressed themselves at the Field to Table workshop. Our purpose has been to address your hopes. Did we do this for you? Please Provide feedback to us at [ssfpa@pacificcoast.net](mailto:ssfpa@pacificcoast.net)

## Members' corner

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, and 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.
- Lifecycles spoke about the programs available for youth and their community economic development strategy vis-à-vis agriculture and value added.
- Future Corp described how its programs could fit the needs of the agricultural sector and small scale food processors in the Cowichan Valley. <http://www.futurecorp.ca/>
- CEDCO Victoria presented information on the new Greater Victoria Community Investment Fund program. For further information see [www.cedco.bc.ca](http://www.cedco.bc.ca)



The SSFPA would like to thank LifeCycles for partnering to host the Victoria Field to Table workshop