
North Okanagan Food Security Assessment and Action Plan

March 31, 2007



North Okanagan Food Action Coalition

Hosted by First Nations Friendship Centre

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- Linda Boyd, Community Nutritionist, Interior Health
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- Diane Fleming, Coordinator, Good Food Box
- Jen Gamble, Coordinator, Shuswap Food Action Coalition
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- Buffy Baumbrough, Counsellor, City of Vernon
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Executive Summary

North Okanagan Food Security Assessment and Strategic Plan Project

Food Security has been identified as an issue in the North Okanagan for a number of years. It is about making sure everyone in your community has enough safe, culturally acceptable, nutritious food to eat all the time from a local food system. The North Okanagan Food Security Action Coalition, formed in September 2005, was established to provide a venue for dealing with this issue and is comprised of stakeholders from agriculture, government, health and social services, and community consumers. The Coalition was granted funding in 2006 to develop a food security assessment and action plan for the region.

The purpose of the project was to act as an environmental and policy intervention that addresses the issues of food security and access to healthy foods through a community food assessment, expansion of partnerships, and capacity building among stakeholders to develop a Community Food Security Plan. The key components of the plan were to include education, food policy for municipal governments, action projects including environmental interventions, and evaluation.

The methodology of this project was participatory to ensure that community input was included as well as to facilitate capacity building and mobilization to take action. A steering committee was convened from the membership of the Coalition to guide the development of the plan and to ensure sustainability of the work after the project was complete. The target population of the project is the North Okanagan Regional District including the communities of Vernon, Spallumcheen, Armstrong, Lumby, and Okanagan Indian Band.

Profile

Food Insecurity

Demographically, the North Okanagan Regional District in 2005 had 72750 population with a relatively high proportion of elderly people, single parents and persons without high school completion in comparison to the BC average. We have a higher proportion of people on income assistance and employment insurance than the BC average. People within the Okanagan Health Service Delivery Area (which includes North, Central, and South Okanagan) in 2003 are within the worst 20% of all health service delivery areas in BC in the rates of smoking women, physically inactive men and total people, and also men and total people eating less than 5 fruits and vegetables/day. Seniors in the North Okanagan are more likely to live alone than the rest of BC but are the most likely group within the region to vote.

Regarding food knowledge and consumption, the relatively large proportion of people on income assistance in this region is of particular concern considering that the percentage spent monthly, by a family of four on assistance, to ensure they have enough nutritious food is 41%. Positively the two schools within this school district that took part in Interior Health's School Food and Nutrition Policy Project showed improvement in their overall access to healthy foods.

Food Production

Food production in this region is not the same local industry it once was. The total number of farms in the region has decreased from 1234 to 1175 between 1986 and 2001 but the average farm size has increased from 49.3 ha in 1996 to 61.8 ha in 2001. Regional agricultural land use in 2001 was mostly for unmanaged pasture and crops. The top two crops were field crops and fruits, nuts, and berries. There were 23 identified food processors in the region.

In 2005 agriculture contributed 3.3% to the regional economy. The total farm operating expenses in this region in 2001 was larger than the total gross farm receipts. All food producer/processor respondents stated they have to supplement with off-farm income to meet expenses. Land tenure has shifted to a higher proportion of land being leased, which may be contributed to by the \$31,983 cost per hectare for cultivated land in NORD (2005-2007). The regional Agricultural Land Reserve has shown a net decrease of 6.2% but of note is the new agricultural area plan the Township of Spallumcheen is developing that will allow their community to ensure agricultural concerns are included in the development of the community.

Local food availability is affected by both retailers and processors/producers. All food producer/processor respondents stated that it was easier to export their goods out of the region due to the additional costs of selling locally like advertising, transport, storage, packaging, etc. All those respondents did show a commitment to sell locally and most do retail at least a portion of their product within the region. Current local production will not meet all of the region's nutritional needs but there is the capacity land-wise to do so.

This region is not utilizing all the resources currently available for non-farm production. Community Gardens and Gleaning, both past successful projects, do not currently function. Urban food-production and/or gardening space is not currently considered as part of Vernon city planning. Population density in Vernon still may allow for planning of urban green space.

Food Distribution

The North Okanagan has 50 identified local wholesalers, 36 identified mainstream retail outlets, and 18 alternative retailers. Local products available include organic and non-organic produce, meat, poultry and eggs, dairy products, non-dairy products, flour/cereals, medicinal herbs, ginseng, organic spelt, beer, and wine. There are 3.16 community food resources/10,000 population in this region that provide low cost or free services. Two successful and current community food resources are Community Kitchens and the Good Food Box.

Within most retail stores all consumer respondents stated that local and/or organic product are harder to find and more expensive. This region has a fairly healthy alternative retail industry including 21 identified farmgate stands. The Vernon Farmers' Market contributes \$1.2 million annually to the local economy.

Charitable resources in this community provide a number of free resources mostly to homeless or low-income clients. One program provides specific nutritional resources to expectant mothers. The group that is least able to meet their nutritional needs according to respondents are low-income families. All charitable resources have access policies based on the mandate of their programming. Most charitable food is donated by retailers and local producers/processors when it is not sold to consumers but one charitable resource states they receive too many sweets and not enough nutritious food.

Sustainability

Indicators of sustainability show that food action in this region can be enduring given the timing of this work and the mobilization of the community. Input can be made to the 2007 Vernon Official Community Plan review and Spallumcheen’s Agricultural Area Plan is new and can still be influenced. The work done by the School Food and Nutrition Policy Project, Interior Health has promoted district wide policy on healthy living. The success of the alternative retail sector, such as the Vernon Farmers’ Market, and community food resources, such as the Good Food Box and Community Kitchens, can support long-term food security if they are supported by the community around funding and service opportunities. The North Okanagan Food Security Action Coalition is mobilized and has the ongoing ability to influence these issues.

Issues/Solutions

The food security issues/solutions that were defined and prioritized by the community are:

Consumers	Social Service Providers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Work with restaurants to promote/identify local menu items ■ Consumer awareness campaign (guide) ■ Lobby for Buy BC with regional branding ■ Approaching retailers (small) about allocating space for local 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Sustainability for existing programs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Champion/agency ■ Umbrella agency/partnering ■ Municipal policy ■ Affordable housing policy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Including community gardens in policy
<p>Food Producers/Processors</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Increase Farmers Market possibilities ■ Improve consumer awareness ■ Municipal policy related to land use decision making 	

Action and Sustainability

From the prioritized issues, an action and sustainability plan was developed. The following 10 actions comprise the North Okanagan Food Security Action and Sustainability Plan.

Consumer Awareness

- Federal program in elementary school to look at food labels – expand on this program to include awareness of importance of local production;
- Eat Local Campaign including education about when foods are in season and a guide to source local products;

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- Restaurants serving local menu items;
- Local branding of products;
- Space for local product in small retail.

Farmers Market Possibilities

- Permanent structure or location;
- Coordinate with eat local campaign;
- Smaller version of market in downtown area.

Municipal Policy Related to Land Use Decision Making

Municipal Food Policy

Affordable Housing Policy

- Include food security in affordable housing strategy

Sustainability for Existing Programs

- Champion/Agency, Umbrella Agency

Sustainability of Food Security Coalition

- Partners for a safe and healthy community committee model

Introduction

Background

Food security is a situation when all community residents obtain a safe, culturally acceptable, nutritionally adequate diet through a consistently available local food system. Since 2005 local community groups have banded together to find solutions to improve our local food security. In September of 2005 the North Okanagan Food Security Action Coalition was formally established.

In February of 2006 the Coalition convened a food forum consisting of local stakeholders involved in either food production/distribution or social service delivery. The goal was to find solutions to improve access to healthy foods for all members of the community, while specifically working to improve access for people with low income. One of the recommendations from that forum was to conduct a needs assessment of local food security as a basis for solution implementation and policy development.

The Coalition applied for and was granted time-limited funds through Community Action for Health, Interior Health and in July 2006 a coordinator was hired to carry out the needs assessment as well as develop a strategic plan for continued action. The North Okanagan Food Security Assessment and Strategic Plan project was completed on March 31, 2007.

Purpose/Expected Outcomes

The initial purpose of the project, as defined in the funding proposal to Interior Health, was to act as:

An environmental and policy intervention that addresses the issues of food security and access to healthy foods through a community food assessment, expansion of partnerships, and capacity building among stakeholders to develop a Community Food Security Plan. The key components of the plan will include education, food policy for municipal governments, action projects including environmental interventions, and evaluation.

The expected outcomes of the project were:

- Community food security assessment to provide baseline statistics and indicators, gaps, and key issues to be addressed in the Community Food Security Plan;
- Build partnerships and develop capacity of the North Okanagan Food Security Action Coalition by bringing in key stakeholders to provide input to the Food Security Plan;
- The plan will provide food policy recommendations to the Vernon Official Community Plan (OCP) review (March 2007);
- Community Food Action Plan to increase public awareness, encourage environmental projects to increase accessibility, support sustainability of local agriculture, and encourage consumers to purchase locally grown and produced foods;
- Process evaluation; and
- Sustainability plan for coalition, Action plans, and projects.

This document meets the outcomes regarding a community food security assessment, a community food action plan, and a sustainability plan, and provides evidence toward the outcomes regarding building partnerships and food policy recommendations to the Vernon OCP.

Methodology

The methodology of this project was participatory, respecting the expertise of the North Okanagan community and their own direct experience. A participatory action research approach follows the general pattern of issue identification, reconnaissance or fact finding, planning, take action step, evaluate, amend plan, take action step, etc. The added benefits of using this method are that community participation also facilitates capacity building and mobilization to take action.

Prior to the beginning of this project a steering committee was convened from the membership of the Coalition. Representation on this committee encompassed both agricultural and social service concerns. The steering committee provided a continued community presence throughout the duration of the project ensuring that local expertise was built into the whole process.

Following the pattern of participatory action research, this project encompassed the reconnaissance and planning phases. A traditional literature search and a community interview/questionnaire/focus group process were undertaken to provide a baseline of information on local food security. Then the community was brought together at an action planning session to review the issues and possible solutions/actions that arose from the information gathered and to prioritize and refine next action steps.

The project also included an evaluative component to assess the effectiveness of the work as well as provide valuable insight for the next set of planning and action phases. A final process report was submitted to the Coalition from the project coordinator.

The target population for this project is the North Okanagan Regional District. This region includes the communities of Vernon, Spallumcheen, Armstrong, Lumby, and Okanagan Indian Band (OKIB). Originally the communities of Enderby and Splat'sin (Spallumcheen Indian Band) were to be part of the target group but as there were no respondents from those communities it was not appropriate to include them in the final analysis.

Timeline

The timeline of the project was as follows:

- Literature Search – July-September/06
- Focus Group Process – September-November/06
- Interviews/Questionnaires – November/06-February/07
- Data Analysis – February-March/07
- Community Action Planning – March/07
- Assessment, Plan, and Reporting complete – March 31/07

Food Security Profile

This profile was derived from a literature search, one focus group, individual interviews, and questionnaires. This research was based on food security indicators defined by the Provincial Health Services Authority, Province of British Columbia. Data sets included food insecurity, food production, food distribution, and sustainability. A full list of relevant indicators, data sources, and resulting data are attached in Appendix A.

A focus group process for community identification of issues and possible solutions was undertaken but was mostly unsuccessful. Meetings were set up for stakeholder groups defined by their background in food security. The groups were Food Insecure Consumers, Social Service Providers, and Food Producers/Distributors. Despite much effort put into advertising and networking by the committee and the coordinator there was not enough response to warrant hosting all the meetings. The social service providers group did go ahead as planned with 10 participants and information was gathered on current social service delivery, issue identification, and solution generation.

The interview questions/questionnaires were developed based on the stakeholder groups defined in the focus group process. The categories were general consumer, food insecure consumer, social service provider, food producer/processor, and food distributor/retailer. The question lists and their compiled answers, which include the interviews, questionnaires, and the focus group, are attached in Appendix B.

Food Insecurity

The North Okanagan is distinctive in comparison to the rest of BC in terms of the composition of the population and related issues around health and social statistics. The community shows some great strides within the school system around food knowledge and consumption but is lacking in its overall nutritional intake.

Demographics

The population of the North Okanagan Regional District in 2005 was 72750 with 86% living in the Vernon Local Health Area (Vernon, Lumby, OKIB) and 14% living in the Armstrong/Spallumcheen Local Health Area. The region's population shows a larger proportion of elderly people, single parents, and persons without high school completion in comparison to the rest of BC (see Table 1). It also presents a significantly higher proportion of recipients of income assistance and employment insurance benefits (see Table 2).

Table 1 Population Proportions (2005)

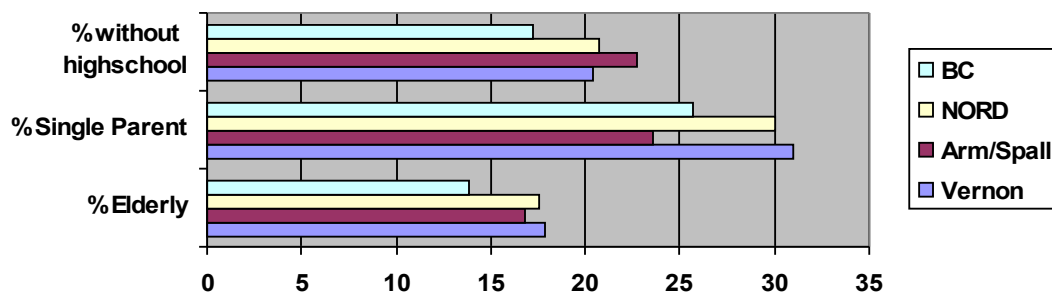
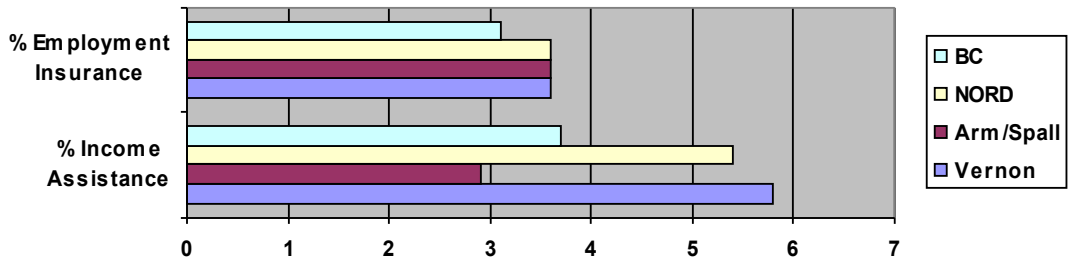
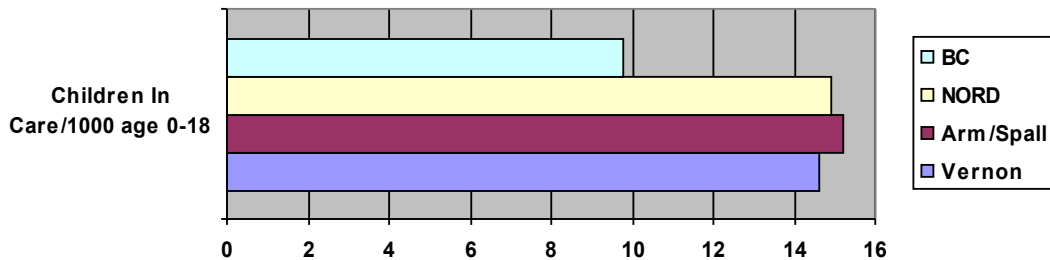


Table 2 Population Receiving Assistance and Benefits (2005)



The most alarming statistic is the North Okanagan’s significantly higher proportion of children in the care of the Ministry of Children and Family Development in comparison to the rest of BC (see Table 3).

Table 3 Children In Care (December 2005)



Health-related statistics found concerning the North Okanagan are for the Okanagan Health Service Delivery Area, which includes the North, Central and South Okanagan. In 2003, the rates of smoking women, physically inactive men, physically inactive total people, men eating less than 5 fruits and vegetables/day, and total people eating less than 5 f&v/day are within the worst 25% of all the health service delivery areas (HSDA) in the province.

Within this HSDA the Status Indian population is 2.6% in comparison to 3.3% for BC. The life expectancy of Status Indians in this area is 6.5 years less than other residents of the region. Of note is the significantly higher proportion of live births to teen moms, 150.1/1000 in comparison to other residents, 50.5/1000. On the positive side the rate of low birth weight per 1000 live births for the Status Indian population of the Okanagan is only 46.5 compared to 50.5 for other residents. Statistics specific to OKIB could not be included as the Band was not one of the respondents.

Social-type statistics of note within this region concern public transportation, seniors living alone and voting data. Accessibility of transportation came up as an issue through the interviews, questionnaires and focus groups. The key issues mentioned were:

- Buses do not run often enough to make using the bus efficient (e.g. Downtown to Okanagan Landing runs only every hour);
- Bus stops are not always in convenient places and require walking with packages; and
- It is hard to carry large quantities on the bus.

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Fares for public transit in this region are comparable to the rest of BC for a community of this size. Fares were not mentioned as an issue by any respondent.

Specific to the senior population of this region, a relatively large percentage live alone, 85%, in comparison to 80% for BC. As well the voter statistics show that the age group with the greatest percentage of eligible voters who voted and registered voters who voted is 65-74 years.

Food Knowledge, Preparation and Consumption

The recently released Cost of Eating in BC 2006 report showed that across BC the percentages of income spent on a monthly nutritious food basket are as follows (see Table 4):

Table 4 Percentage Spent on Food Basket Per Income Group, 2006

Family of 4 on social assistance	41%
Single parent with 2 children on social assistance	32%
Family of 4 on low earned income	29%
Family of 4 on average income	19%

This is particularly relevant considering the percentage of the regional population receiving income assistance and directly related to the statistic of men of this region being in the worst 25% of the province in eating <5 fruits and vegetables per day.

The nutritional choices at schools in this region are also of note. Silver Star Elementary and Seaton Secondary took part in Interior Health's 2003-04 School Food and Nutrition Policy Project and both schools showed improvement in their overall access to healthy foods. There were differences noted between the ease of implementation at the elementary level compared to the secondary level due to the necessity for consultation with and support by the students at the secondary level.

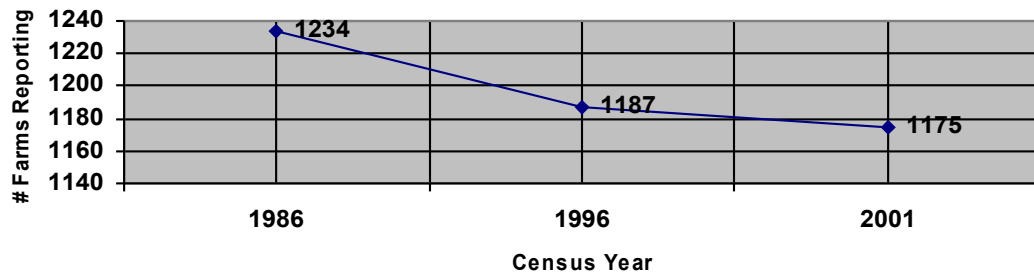
Food Production

The production of food in the North Okanagan is not the same local industry it once was. Non-farm production is not as prevalent as it was in the past. Production statistics show a shift in the way farmers work due to a number of factors, most significantly land costs. The region does boast a variety of food processors and a significant number of processors and producers are designated organic. Overall food production in this region is a different picture than expected considering orchards and farms are a significant part of the presentation of the North Okanagan to the rest of the world.

Production Statistics

The total land area of the North Okanagan Regional District in 2005 was 5771.7 sq. km, 95% within the Vernon Local Health Area and 5% within the Armstrong/Spallumcheen Local Health Area. The urban/rural split in 2001 was 67% urban and 33% rural. 1175 farms reported in the 2001 Census with 26 of these identifying as organic. Of note is that the total number of farms reporting has decreased between 1986 and 2001 (see Table 5).

Table 5 Census, NORD, Farms Reporting



In contrast, the total area of farms in the region has increased though from 58,571 ha in 1996 to 72,706 ha in 2001 and the average farm size from 49.3 ha in 1996 to 61.8 ha in 2001. Regional farm size in proportion to the BC average has changed as well; in 1996 NORD farms were 39% the size of the average BC farm while in 2001, NORD farms were 48% the size of the average BC farm. The majority of farms are in NORD were between 4 and 52 ha (2001).

Agricultural land use in the region in 2001 was mostly for unmanaged pasture (46%) and crops (29%). The most produced crop was field crops including alfalfa, tame hay and fodder crops, barley, corn for silage, and wheat. The second crop was fruit, nuts, and berries including apples, strawberries, and sweet cherries.

There were 23 identified food processors in the region providing a range of goods and services including milk and soy products, poultry and eggs, meats and sausage, produce, honey, ginseng, coffee roasting, spring water, wine, and beer.

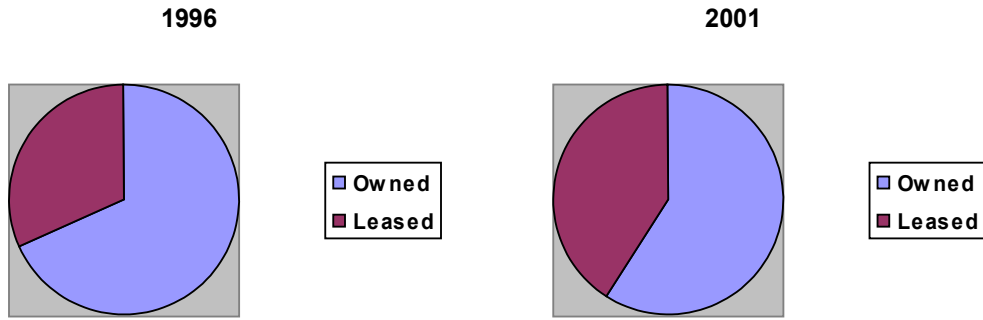
Food System and Community Economic Health

In 2005 agriculture contributed 3.3% to the economy of this region (3% in the Vernon LHA and 10% in the Armstrong/Spallumcheen LHA). Total gross farm receipts in this region reported in 2001 were \$83,993,442 (2000\$). Of note was that in comparison, total farm operating expenses, including wages, in the region were \$90,884,361. All food producer/processor respondents have to supplement with off-farm income to meet expenses.

Worth mentioning are the region’s agritourism operations that are not included in the total gross farm receipts but do contribute to the regional economy. There are five members of the BC Agritourism Alliance in this region, three of which are also identified as food producers/processors.

Land tenure in the region has also shifted between 1996 and 2001. As seen in Table 6, the proportion of leased/rented land has increased while that of owned land has decreased.

Table 6 Land Tenure



Contributing to this shift may be the cost of land. The 2005-2007 average costs per hectare in NORD are in Table 7:

Table 7 Average Cost per Hectare, NORD, 2005-07

Cultivated Land	\$31,983
Cultivated and Irrigated	\$67,927
Pasture	\$5,366

Most respondents who are food producers have identified land costs as prohibitive. One respondent informed about his situation where he has the equipment and the market to expand his production but is unable to find land he can purchase or even lease within a reasonable distance. All the plots around his are large acreages with large houses and are not developed for farming. As well his production is organic and it is hard to convince landowners to lease land to him for enough time to gain organic classification and then farm it.

Related to this are changes to the Agricultural Land Reserve. In this region, the ALR takes up 8.6% of the total land area. Of note is that since designation in 1974, there has been a net decrease in this region's ALR of 6.2%.

In the Township of Spallumcheen in 2006 they identified agriculture as needing more specific planning to contribute to the area's economic growth and started the process of development of an agricultural area plan. It is the only community in the region with an agricultural area plan.

Food System and Regional Environmental Health

It should be mentioned that overall environmental issues were identified in the questionnaires and interviews as well as in the Focus On the Future Final Report completed for the Investment Agriculture Foundation of British Columbia in 2006 but they were not clarified by the respondents or prioritized through the community planning process

Availability of Local Food

Local food availability is affected not only by retailers but also by food producers/processors as well. All food producer/processor respondents stated that it was easier to export their goods out of the region through large companies than sell locally. Selling locally incurs a number of additional costs, such as advertising, transport, storage, packaging, and retailing, which are paid for by the buyer when goods are sold to large companies for export out of the region. All food producer/processor respondents show a commitment to sell locally and most make an effort to retail at least a portion of their product in the local area.

Current local production will not meet all of the region's nutritional needs but there is the capacity, land-wise, to do so. It was mentioned by one respondent that not enough winter crops (e.g. root vegetables) are planted so availability of local produce is season dependent.

Non Farm Production

In terms of non-farm production this region is not utilizing all resources currently available. A community garden was run at a plot behind the John Howard Society but has not been functioning for a number of years. A gleaning project was successful in 2005/06 but funding was not continued and it has not functioned for the past year.

Urban food-production and/or gardening space is not currently considered as part of city planning in Vernon. Population density in the Vernon LHA (11.3) still may allow for planning of urban green space for food production but the density in Armstrong/Spallumcheen (39.3) may be prohibitive.

Food Distribution

Food distribution in this region encompasses not only mainstream wholesale and retail but also a thriving alternative wholesale and retail system. There are a number of farmers' markets and farmgate sales and the Vernon Farmers' Market is shown to be one of the most successful markets in the province. Low cost and charitable food services are available to the whole region.

Distribution Statistics

In this region there were 50 identified local wholesalers who provide a variety of goods from organic and non-organic produce, meat, poultry, eggs, dairy and non-dairy products, and flour/cereals to medicinal herbs, ginseng, organic spelt, wine, and beer. There are 36 identified mainstream retail outlets and 18 identified alternative retailers (farmers' markets, co-ops, etc.). The fruits and vegetables that are locally produced and most widely available are apples, strawberries, sweet cherries, plums, apricots, corn, asparagus, potatoes, zucchini, squash, and pumpkins.

The Vernon Farmers' Market in 2006 was the subject of a study by UNBC planning students to quantify the economic and community impact of the market on the community. The Farmers' Market has an estimated 1680 customers per market session and the average customer spends \$18.86 per visit. 2.68% of the Vernon LHA population shop at the Farmers' Market per session.

There are 23 identified community food resources that provide low cost or free services, which is 3.16 resources/10,000 population. Two identified programs, Community Kitchens and Good Food Box, provide nutritious food at low cost to any consumer in the community accessing their services and both programs are currently active. 17 charitable services in the community provide free food hampers or meals to low-income community members, which is 2 services/1000 low-income population.

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Community Kitchens provides at a low cost food and equipment for cooking and packaging, a location to cook and package, and education and support in preparation and storage. In 2005-06 they provided 94 kitchens (73 in 2004-05) and prepared 6330 food portions (4741 in 2004-05). This program has ongoing operational funding from Interior Health but it does not provide enough to meet the service demand.

The Good Food Box is a cooperative type program where \$7 or \$12 is paid per box, the money is pooled, and fresh fruits and vegetables are purchased in bulk that are shared equally between the boxes. Boxes can be picked up at 9 depots throughout the region and are available monthly. Operational funding for this program comes from short-term grants and donations and the program is always in fear of running out of funds to function.

Mainstream Retail

Within most mainstream retail stores, all consumer respondents said it was not easy to find products that are “organic” and/or “local”, though the organic designation is seen more often. As well consumer respondents stated that local and/or organic products are more expensive than other products.

Most large chain stores are in the north end of Vernon, with small chain stores located in four neighbourhood locations around Vernon and in the downtown cores of Armstrong and Lumby. All of these stores are on major public transit routes but the large chain stores, which overall are less expensive, are located in the north end of Vernon which is beyond reasonable walking distance from most low-income neighbourhoods in the community.

There are a total of 20 fast food outlets in the North Okanagan, which is 2.7 outlets per 10,000 population. Most fast food outlets are also in the north end of Vernon but there are three in Vernon that are easily accessible to low-income neighbourhoods and three in downtown Armstrong.

Alternative Retail

In the North Okanagan there no BC Cooperative Association registered food purchase cooperatives. Respondents did mention informal cooperatives and the Shuswap Food Action Coalition identified the Armstrong Food Co-op and Delivery Service. There are 21 identified farmgate stands in the region providing organic and non-organic produce, meat, poultry, eggs, and dairy products.

The Vernon Farmers’ Market is a very successful local alternative retail venture as shown in the UNBC assessment. The largest percentage of respondents to their assessment shop at the market weekly as shown in Table 8.

Table 8 Shopping Frequency at Vernon Farmers' Market



The overwhelming statistic from this study was the total economic impact of the Vernon Farmers' Market on the local economy, which was estimated at \$1.2 million annually.

Charitable Food Indicators and Food Diversion

Residents accessing charitable services at the Upper Room Mission are homeless or low-income, represent all age and gender groups, and receive a noon meal. The Prenatal Nutrition Program at the First Nations Friendship Centre provides nutritional information, certain food products, and vitamins to expectant mothers of all ethnicities. Data is not available from the Salvation Army Vernon Food Bank as they did not respond but a number of the low-income consumer respondents did access their service. Social service and food insecure consumer respondents state that the group that is least able to meet their nutritional needs are low-income families. They do not receive government assistance but they do not have enough income to provide sufficient nutritious food for themselves.

The Mission has an access policy that people receiving lunch must attend prayer services before it is provided. The Mission has noted that they are planning on changing that to volunteer attendance at services as there is precedent at other similar programs across the province. The only access policy at the Prenatal Nutrition program is that the client be pregnant or breastfeeding. Food insecure consumer respondents stated that the Vernon Food Bank limits access through providing one hamper every two months and clients must provide proof of income and expenses to prove they require charitable service.

Most charitable food is donated by retailers and local producers when it is not sold to consumers. Usually (but not always) this food is close to expiry. The Mission states they receive too many sweets (doughnuts) and not enough nutritious food. All food producer/processor and retailer respondents donated unsold product to charitable organizations. One producer respondent said they compost food that cannot be donated.

Sustainability

Food action in this region is sustainable given the timing of the work being done by the North Okanagan Food Security Action Coalition and this report. Residents currently are able to influence policy development by the City of Vernon through the 2007 review of their Official Community Plan. Spallumcheen's Agricultural Area Plan is another example of new municipal policy that positively influences food security.

Within the school system, the work done by the School Food and Nutrition Policy Project has promoted School District #22 to implement a district-wide healthy living policy and Healthy Eating Forums have taken place across the district. As well the work done specifically at Seaton Secondary and Silver Star Elementary has put those schools at the healthy eating forefront.

The success of the alternative retail sector in this region also promotes sustainability. The Good Food Box and Community Kitchens continue to provide low cost local food and there are seven local agri-food organizations that are active in the community. As well there are five food-related economic development initiatives or community-owned processing ventures in the region. The Vernon Farmers' Market continues to be a successful local venture in the region.

Residents access to grow or purchase food regionally increases in summer but there are still the issues of the lack of producers planting winter crops, the costs of selling product locally, and the lack of local planning for non-farm production. Positively the organization of stakeholders through the North Okanagan Food Security Action Coalition is mobilized and a model for sustainability of the group is being presented further on in this document. This group has the ongoing ability to influence these issues.

Emerging Issues/Solutions

The Food Security Profile outlined in the previous section has produced a listing of emerging issues and corresponding solutions and/or actions that can possibly be implemented. Most points were garnered from the interviews, questionnaires and focus group and data from the literature search was compared to ensure each point was consistent with gathered information. These points were presented to the community at the Food Security Action Planning Session held on March 7, 2007. The full lists of issues and solutions/actions are attached in Appendix C.

At the Food Security Action Planning Session, participants were organized into three small groups based on background and interest: Food Producers/Processors, Consumers, and Social Service Providers. Each small group participant was first asked to prioritize their top three issues and solutions from their relevant list by placing three check marks (✓) beside the points that they through were most important. The Social Service Providers also expanded on some points for clarity. The prioritized solutions for each group are as follows:

Food Producers/Processors

- Increase Farmers Market possibilities
- Improve consumer awareness
- Municipal policy related to land use decision making

Social Service Providers

- Sustainability for existing programs
 - Champion/agency
 - Umbrella agency/partnering
- Municipal policy
- Affordable housing policy
 - Including community gardens in policy

Consumers

- Work with restaurants to promote/identify local menu items
- Consumer awareness campaign (guide)
- Lobby for Buy BC with regional branding
- Approaching retailers (small) about allocating space for local

Future Action Plan

The final phase of the project was planning for future action on food security and for sustainability of the momentum created through this work. This was done at the Food Security Action Planning Session held on March 7, 2007. Each small group then took their prioritized solutions, analyzed them, and defined corresponding actions using the action planning tools attached in Appendix D. Each solution was expanded into specific, manageable actions with corresponding timeframes, potential partners, steps within the action, specific timelines for completion, and leadership.

The facilitators led each small group through the planning process and each group defined at least 3 actions that they felt were possible to achieve and that they themselves were willing to work towards. This kind of mobilization was a key reason for utilizing the action planning tools provided to the project by the Social Planning Council. Besides producing a workable plan with realistic goals, participants were encouraged to take part in the implementation of the plan. The fear that this report, like many others, will “sit on a shelf and collect dust” is dispelled by the actions already being implemented by those participants towards a more food secure North Okanagan region.

The priorities and corresponding actions defined at the Planning Session make up the Food Security Action Plan for the North Okanagan region. The priorities are to improve consumer awareness, increase farmers’ market possibilities, influence municipal policy related to land use decision making, influence municipal food policy, influence affordable housing policy, and promote sustainability of existing programs. The actions for each priority are listed below (the full action planning notes from the Session are included in Appendix E). Those solutions/actions that were not fully expanded are still included so that they can be worked on at a future date.

Consumer Awareness

Action	Federal program in elementary school to look at food labels – expand on this program to include awareness of importance of local production
Timeframe	Sept 2007
Potential Partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Federal bureaucracy that currently funds it • ActNow fruit & veggie snack program • School District 22, teachers • Community Nutritionist, Interior Health • Ag in the classroom? • BC Dairy Foundation – already active in education • Organic Association • Farmers Markets • Interior Vegetable Marketing Agency • Parent Advisory Committees
Action Steps	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Contact Interior Health 2. Get buy-in from School District & teachers – possibility of pilot project
Leader of Action Team	NO Food Action Coalition
Timeline	Begin spring 2007

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Action	Eat Local Campaign including education about when foods are in season and a guide to source local products
Timeframe	Spring/Fall 2007
Potential Partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interior Health • Union of BC Municipalities • Producers/Processors/Restaurants/Retailers (cooperatives) • City of Vernon • NORD • Community Foundation • Farmers Market • Organic Growers • Ministry of Agriculture • Investment Agriculture Foundation • Chamber of Commerce • Agri-Tourism • Media • Churches • Global Education Students (Fulton) • Sustainable Environment Network Society (SENS) • Shuswap Food Action Coalition
Action Steps	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Contact Jen Gamble – Shuswap Food Action Coalition 2. Hold planning meeting with stakeholders (requires steering committee (5-6 people) to set goals & write proposal for funding) 3. Secure funding – if unable to do so use volunteers (could go for small bits of funding if necessary) 4. Contact newspaper about a column 5. Lobby City to designate “farmers’ market day” 6. Promote city staff to develop workplace wellness policy that encourages buying local and at farmers’ market (in line with proposal already submitted to Interior Health by Greater Vernon Services)
Leader of Action Team	Wendy Aasen, NO Food Action Coalition
Timeline	July to end of October 2007 – 2-6 months

Restaurants Serving Local Menu Items

Action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with restaurants, caterers to serve/identify local menu • Invite Victoria chef to speak to farmers and restaurateurs and build relationships between farmers and chefs
Timeframe	Spring 2007
Potential Partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food Service association • Local restaurants • Local farmers • Farmers market vendors • Food Action Coalition • Other
Action Steps	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Wayne Seabrook to contact chef re. Availability and cost to bring him to Vernon 2. Wendy Aasen to search out funds
Leader of Action Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wayne Seabrook, Farmer’s Market manager • Food Action Coalition (Wendy Aasen)
Timeline	By March 14 th , 2007; funding search immediate and ongoing

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Local Branding of Products

Action	Lobby to enhance and bring back the BUY BC program with regional branding
Timeframe	Spring 07 – Spring 08
Potential Partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BC Ag Council • Ministry of Ag • Growers associations • Consumers • City of Vernon
Action Steps	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Investigate where it is at and look for partnering opportunities 2. Promote City to endorse and help lobby for Buy BC
Leader of Action Team	Wendy Aasen, Food Action Coalition, to put out some feelers
Timeline	Start soon, ongoing

Space For Local Product in Small Retail

Action	Approach local, independent retailers about allocating a “local” space
Timeframe	As opportunity presents itself
Potential Partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food Action Coalition • Consumers
Action Steps	Encourage consumers to create demand where they shop, Coalition members to approach
Leader of Action Team	Food Action Coalition
Timeline	

Farmers Market Possibilities

Action	Permanent structure (long term goal) or location (short term) that allows winter markets & cooking demonstrations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Possibly at Marshall Fields (want nodal development around it to support farmers market)
Timeframe	Long-term goal = 15 years Short term goal = 1 year
Potential Partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater Vernon Services (GVS) • City of Vernon
Action Steps	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop clear/concise proposal – 2 months 2. Contact Al McNiven, Director, Parks Rec & Culture, GVS – June 3. Delegation to GVS commission
Leader of Action Team	NO Food Action Coalition
Timeline	Begin spring 2007

Action	Coordinate with Eat Local Campaign
Timeframe	
Potential Partners	<i>(did not complete due to time limitations)</i>
Action Steps	
Leader of Action Team	
Timeline	

Action	Smaller version of market in downtown area <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Farmers need access; streamline process for farmers (less bureaucracy)
Timeframe	
Potential Partners	Service agencies facilitate administration of market
Action Steps	
Leader of Action Team	<i>(did not complete due to time limitations)</i>
Timeline	

Municipal Policy Related to Land Use Decision Making

The group did not define actions due to time limitations.

Municipal Food Policy

Action	Municipal food policy
Timeframe	
Potential Partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • City of Vernon • Food Coalition • Farmers, etc. • Food programs • NORD • GVS
Action Steps	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Focus group > Official Community Plan Review, City of Vernon (OCP) <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i) Review with Smart Growth (group coordinating OCP) ii) SPCNO & Food Coalition 2) Sending models to Jeremy Kinch, Manager, Planning, City of Vernon <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i) Linda Boyd to send ASAP 3) Public Open Houses - OCP <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i) Comments from Food Coalition
Leader of Action Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • City of Vernon, Jeremy Kinch, Manager, Planning • Smart Growth • Food Coalition – Wendy Aasen • SPCNO
Timeline	End of March 2007, beginning of April 2007 start

Affordable Housing Policy

Action	Include food security in affordable housing strategy currently being developed
Timeframe	
Potential Partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food Coalition • City of Vernon – Affordable Housing Committee • SPCNO – Partners for a Safe & Healthy Community <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Affordable Housing Strategy
Action Steps	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Ensure food security is included in strategy 2) Food Coalition can provide models/concrete suggestions <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i) Drop off for good food box ii) Community kitchens/gardens 3) Add Food Security Coalition members to interviews/planning for Affordable Housing Strategy
Leader of Action Team	Food Coalition, SPCNO, Affordable Housing Committee
Timeline	April 2007

Sustainability for Existing Programs

Action	Champion/Agency, Umbrella Agency
Timeframe	
Potential Partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Growers Associations • CMHA • Churches • Agency with a link to kids • People Place • New agency – create a non-profit society <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Personal champion o Business background o Financial agency
Action Steps	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Clarifying vision – what are we asking for <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. Partnerships that lead to an agency to champion food programs (umbrella) – focus > service delivery > sustainability 2. Create a strategy <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. Media campaign ii. Approach service clubs and personal contacts iii. Approach agencies
Leader of Action Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food Security Coalition <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Social Planning Council of the North Okanagan (SPCNO) o Okanagan Science Centre o Valerie Redstone (Community Kitchens, Vernon) & Diane Fleming (Good Food Box) o Community Nutritionist, Interior Health <p>Invited:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Linda Graves • People Place • Marilyn Evans (First Nations Friendship Centre Gleaners Project)
Timeline	Begin immediately

These 9 action areas provide a template for continued work on food security. More needs to be done to expand on those areas that time limitations kept the small groups from completing but this is a strong basis for the future.

Sustainability Plan

Sustainability of action on food security in this region has been built into the Action Plan with the inclusion of the last action item on sustainability for existing programs. As of this date an initial meeting of the committee that was struck at the Food Security Action Planning Session has already taken place and work has been initiated toward the creation of a champion/agency for food security in the North Okanagan.

A model for sustainability of the Food Security Coalition was presented at the Food Security Action Planning Session and there was general agreement to adapt it. It is based on the concept of time limited specific actions that are taken on by specific members of the overall committee with relevant expertise/experience. This committee model is borrowed from the currently functioning Partners for a Safe and Healthy Community action committee, facilitated by the Social Planning Council for the North Okanagan. The Partners committee has been extremely successful and the plan is that the Food Security Coalition, while utilizing the model for its own functioning, will become a partner in Social Planning's committee as well. The model is attached in Appendix F.

The community is mobilized and taking action. Positive outcomes can already be observed and eventually, if they stay at their current pace, the North Okanagan will be seen as a leader in creating and maintaining a food secure community.

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Appendices

Appendix A = Master Data List

Appendix B = Interview/Questionnaire/Focus Group Questions and Compiled Answers

Appendix C = Identified Issues and Solutions/Actions Presented to the Community
Planning Meeting

Appendix D = Group Action Planning Tools

Appendix E = Small Group Action Plans, Full Notes

Appendix F = Partners for a Safe and Healthy Community Committee Model

Appendix A

Master Data List

Appendix B

Interview/Questionnaire/Focus Group Questions and Compiled Answers

Appendix C

Identified Issues and Solutions/Actions Presented to the Community Planning Meeting

Appendix D

Community Group Action Planning Tools

Appendix E

Small Group Action Plans, Full Notes

Appendix F

Partners for a Safe and Healthy Community Committee Model