

South Okanagan Similkameen Food Security Summit

Background Report

September 2024

Prepared for: **The Community Foundation
of the South Okanagan Similkameen**



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Background Report

Introduction

As part of its commitment to improving food security, the Community Foundation of the South Okanagan Similkameen (CFSOS) is hosting the 2024 South Okanagan Similkameen Food Security Summit. The CFSOS Board has identified 'Food Security' as a key pillar for the organization and is committed to increase its support for a regional food system that is more resilient, sustainable and accessible to all.

Unfortunately, food insecurity is a significant and growing problem in our region affecting more and more people. Fortunately, many individuals and organizations across the region are working on solutions.

The 2024 South Okanagan Similkameen Food Security Summit will provide an opportunity for interested individuals and organizations to gather and envision a regional food system that contributes to improved food security across the region. The summit will not only provide an opportunity to share ideas and envision a more 'food-secure future' but also to discuss practical steps to make it happen.

Previous regional and local forums and summits (see next page for a list) have brought people and organizations together to discuss food security. This backgrounder provides a summary of the different dimensions of the regional food system along with potential solutions previously discussed. Some progress has been made with various initiatives, yet there remain significant challenges.

A priority now is to come together as a region and envision a secure, resilient, sustainable and healthy regional food system that contributes to improved food security. The summit represents a renewed commitment to a journey towards a food secure region. The CFSOS is prepared to play a key role by coordinating and supporting meaningful and practical steps along the journey, all consistent with our Mission and Domains of Service (below).

The Community Foundation of the South Okanagan Similkameen

Giving Choices. Funding Change.

Our Vision

A healthy, caring, inclusive and thriving South Okanagan Similkameen region.

Our Mission

We facilitate partnerships, empower others, and inspire citizens to make our communities better.

Our Domains of Service

- As Brokers, we achieve our goals through supporting others to achieve their goals
- As Catalysts, we lead and engage in social change
- As Facilitators, we encourage and challenge others to collaborate to achieve community impact
- As Advocates, we engage leaders in imagining and pursuing a better world for all.

References

This background summary was compiled based on discussions with Kevin Ronaghan, of the CFSOS, and a review of a series of reports (listed below) documenting previous food-related forums in the South Okanagan and Similkameen. It is meant to be broadly representative of the major themes and ideas covered in these reports (it is not meant to be comprehensive in terms of capturing all the details from the previous forums and reports).

1. *Food Security Strategy*. August 2022. City of Penticton
2. *Okanagan Similkameen Food Security Forum Report*. April 12th, 2018. Keremeos, BC. Hosted by the Okanagan Similkameen Healthy Living Coalition (OSHLC) and facilitated by BC Healthy Communities.
3. *Food Secure Oliver Background Report V 2.0*. Spring 2017. Janine de la Salle and Ione Smith. Community Food Action Initiative, Interior Health, Town of Oliver and Plan H.
4. *What's Cooking? A Feast of Community Ideas in Support of Food Security*. May 2008. Christine Schwarz and Michou Szabo. Food Security South Okanagan Similkameen Project.
5. *South Okanagan and Similkameen Food Security Forum. Discussion Notes*. November 30, 2006. Unattributed.

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The South Okanagan Similkameen Food System

Overview

The idea of ‘food security’ is a central goal for the region. **Food security** means:

- everyone has equitable access to food that is affordable, culturally preferable, nutritious and safe;
- everyone has the agency to participate in, and influence food systems; and
- that food systems are resilient, ecologically sustainable, socially just, and honour Indigenous food sovereignty.¹

Unfortunately, more and more people are facing food *insecurity* for various reasons, including food price inflation along with rising housing costs and other household expenses, physical access to food and other barriers. Food insecurity disproportionately impacts people experiencing homelessness, single parent families, people experiencing mental illness or domestic abuse and other members of the community facing discrimination or marginalization.

The South Okanagan Similkameen (SOS) Regional Food System has the potential to grow and change to help increase food security across the region. A provisional long-term goal for our regional food system is a system that is secure, resilient (to climate related events such as floods, wildfires, rockslides) and sustainable – and able to significantly contribute to food security across the region.

The ‘food system’ has many dimensions, extending from ‘farm to fork,’ and beyond. The main dimensions of the food system – and some key challenges and activities for each – are summarized below. These have all been previously discussed at regional and local food-related forums and meetings in the South Okanagan Similkameen over the past few years.

Dimensions of the South Okanagan Similkameen Food System

Production and Stewardship (Includes growing, raising, hunting, fishing and harvesting, along with stewardship of the land, water, soil and ecosystems). Some of the challenges identified for food production and environmental stewardship have included:

- Loss of agricultural land, especially small parcels for regionally focused producers.
- High cost of land (e.g. local urban land development policies and economics)
- A current lack of production diversity (e.g. emphasis on grapes, apples and cherries).
- Low seed and crop diversity.
- Historic pesticide and fertilizer use (accumulation and runoff has degraded land, soil and water).
- The impact of climate change: e.g. changes in air quality, temperature fluctuations, flooding, droughts, water supply.

¹ Working definition supplied by Interior Health and the BC Center for Disease Control available here: http://www.bccdc.ca/Documents/FoodSecurity_FoodInsecurity_Definitions_FINAL.pdf

Ideas for improvement have included:

- Increase food production on available land (e.g. provincial incentives for local production/consumption, acquisition of agricultural land, improved access to water, production/preservation/processing for 12-month consumption).
- Promote more sustainable farm systems (e.g. climate change adaptation and resilience, water conservation, biodiversity, seed saving, composting). There is a need for landscape restoration, regeneration and habitat restoration projects.
- Collaborate with researchers on bioregional crop information and adapted varieties.
- Support ‘teaching farms.’
- Promote Indigenous knowledge of food systems
 - Consider ‘natural foodlands,’ including food from hunting and gathering
 - Continue to support Indigenous-led habitat restoration and salmon recovery, including as a socio-cultural and economic development opportunity. Protect waterways and watersheds.
- Make land available for edible landscapes, urban agriculture, school and community gardens and backyard farming projects.

Food Processing and Storage (includes washing, packaging, community/commercial kitchens, warehousing, cold storage). *Some of the challenges identified:*

- Lack of local abattoirs
- Uncertainty with tree fruit storage
- Concerns with water supply and reliability

Ideas for improvement have included:

- Diversify and coordinate crops for regional consumption
- Collaborate for improved aggregation, storage, food preservation and distribution channels
- Build off the agricultural industry and businesses that focus on food preservation, processing, and distribution
- Promote and support post-production activities, e.g. tax exemptions, zoning permissions, food hub, local food co-op, equipment sharing and farm to school program
- Increase capacity for emergency food relief (e.g. community kitchens, storage facilities, food banks, and coordination with disaster planning organizations)

Food Distribution (includes distribution hubs, aggregation, transport networks, proximities, etc.). *Some of the challenges identified:*

- Lack of aggregators for certain products

- Lack of coordination between producers (e.g. crops and product offerings not well-matched to local/regional market demands and community needs)
- Separate and uncoordinated food distribution channels

Ideas for improvement have included:

- Define priorities and coordinate more efficient ways for delivery
- Create a coordinated regional distribution network (see ‘systemic solutions’ below)

Communications, Marketing and Sales (Includes communications and marketing activities related to buying and selling of food, including promotion of local food and local food actors). *Some of the challenges identified:*

- Low produce prices (e.g. apples)
- Lack of access for small producers to major retail grocery store
- Lack of public awareness of the regional products available, where and when

Ideas for improvement have included:

- Promote regional, healthy, fresh food. This could include programs focused on product information, favorable pricing, vouchers, food-related social programming
- Enhance the economic viability of farm products through coordinated regional marketing and promotion and producer supports

Food Access and Consumption (Includes consumption, public health and nutrition, food culture, overcoming barriers of various types). *Some of the challenges identified:*

- Lack of access to a range of fresh, healthy and affordable food, including barriers to physical access to stores (e.g. distance, mobility)
- Rising cost of housing and other household needs restricts food access
- Increasing food insecurity with a growing percentage of the population, disproportionately affecting low-income households, lone-parent households, the elderly, individuals belonging to the 2SLGBTQI+ community, and unemployed. Children are particularly at risk.
- The Canadian Community Health Survey indicates 8.4% of the population of the Okanagan Health Services Delivery Area (HSDA) experience food insecurity²

Ideas for improvement have included:

- Improve physical access to fresh food (e.g. incentivize food retail, healthy corner store, produce delivery programs, co-locate farms/gardens/stores, ...)

² from Statistics Canada, “Canadian Community Health Survey – <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/en/catalogue/82C0022>)

- Improve capacity of, and access to, charitable food programs (e.g. youth-supported, student serving, free grocery store, government subsidies, coordinate/communicate, food rescue, 'seconds' distribution and processing, etc....)
- Engage and celebrate different cultures and food with community food events. Celebrate in season produce, meats and other local products (e.g. harvest festivals)

Food Waste and Recovery. Includes gleaning, re-packing, composting and disposal. *Some of the challenges identified:*

- Excessive food waste and lack of community composting programs

Ideas for improvement have included:

- food waste reduction programs
- expand local gleaning initiatives

Key Food System Participants

There is a diverse range of people and organizations across the South Okanagan and Similkameen region making the food system 'work.' Some of the main actors are summarized below.

Private Sector:

- Landowners, farmers, orchardists, ranchers, fishers, harvesters, gleaners, gardeners, beekeepers.
- Equipment and material wholesalers and retailers.
- Value-added producers: e.g. prepared meals, butchers, bakers, etc..
- Community gardeners and urban agriculturalists.
- Farmers' Markets, Farm / CSA Box aggregators and distributors
- Food wholesalers, retail markets, grocery stores, ...
- Industry associations
- Vineyards and wineries

Governments

- Indigenous governing bodies
- Federal Government
- Provincial Government. E.g. Ministries of Agriculture and Food; Health (incl. Interior Health); Social Development and Poverty Reduction; Environment and Climate Change Strategy; Water, Land and Resource Stewardship.
- Regional District of Okanagan Similkameen
- City Of Penticton
- Municipalities: Summerland, Oliver, Osoyoos, Keremeos, Princeton

Civil Society Organizations

- Food-focused: e.g. Food Banks, Food Access Programs, Organic Producers Association, Community Gardens, Farmer's Markets, Gleaning Organizations
- Land Stewardship: e.g. Okanagan Similkameen Stewardship Society, Young Agrarians, ...
- Foundations
- Other (Food Security-related): e.g. access societies, parks and recreation societies, churches and faith-based organizations, ...

Educational Institutions

- Schools In districts 67, 53 and 58 (Princeton)
- Higher Education and Research (e.g. *En'owkin* Centre, Okanagan College, Kwantlen University, UBCO, Summerland Research Station (Pacific Agri-Food Research Centre)
- Other food-based education organizations and programs (e.g. food banks and other education and research)

Systemic Solutions

The previous section described key food security and food system issues across six, interdependent food system dimensions. However, previous South Okanagan and Similkameen food security forums have emphasized the need for more ‘systemic solutions’ as opposed to those focusing on only one dimension or reactive programs and projects responding to ‘food emergencies.’

The idea is that a secure, resilient and sustainable regional food system will be more capable of improving food security across the region. To develop such a food system will require a coordinated and committed regional approach. Many conversations have focused on the various aspects of a system-wide approach. Strengthening the networks and collaborations may be the single most important ‘key’ to success.

The summary below lists some of the *system-wide* solutions that have been discussed, in terms of:

- networking and collaboration
- mapping the systems
- building the (human) capacity
- planning and policy
- infrastructure development
- enhanced funding
- external relationships

Networking and Collaboration (e.g. forming, coordinating and supporting networks, specific collaborations. Includes logistics, avoiding redundancies, food sharing). *Past discussion topics included:*

- *Networking and Community Building*
 - Improve access to food system people, places, resources
 - Reduce duplication with processes and actions
 - Work with Indigenous organizations, learn and collaborate on food security and sovereignty (forums, cultural gatherings, etc.). Use Indigenous knowledge to inform practices
 - Shared values emerge around food sovereignty (e.g. diversity, how to grow food, how to share it).
 - Provide space for knowledge sharing (and ‘don’t reinvent the wheel’)
- *Convene a Regional Food ‘Collaborative’:*
 - Convene, support and coordinate a regional food system ‘alliance’ / or ‘consortium.’
 - Continue this discussion. Provide opportunity to meet in person with groups throughout the region (forums)

- Provide a ‘bee’s eye view’ with the potential for “human pollinators” (i.e. idea sharing). Highlight the connections between all the work happening
- Community Foundation of the South Okanagan Similkameen is well-positioned to lead the collaborative and support/coordinate funding efforts (e.g. in collaboration with other organizations, including local and regional governments).
- Support specific collaborations focused on public health and food insecurity issues:
 - e.g. with indigenous organizations, local/regional governments, community organizations, provincial and federal governments
 - consider, for example: the high cost of housing, social isolation and other confounding factors.
- *Strengthen ‘weak links’ in the food system:*
 - e.g. coordinate aggregation of produce
 - e.g. support abattoir creation
 - create more access to more affordable agricultural land (e.g. farm lease, land stewardship, public gardens)
- *Support Practical Collaborations:*
 - e.g. diversify and coordinate planting plans and consumer needs, across the region
 - e.g. produce, save and share locally adapted seeds

Mapping the Systems (e.g. system mappings, reviews, assessments, analyses of current food system):
i.e. knowing what exists and building on it. *Past discussion topics included:*

- *Map food system human, land, materials, other assets:*
 - create an organizational directory: what is happening relating to food security/food systems in each geographical location
 - geo-locate food system assets and services (e.g. including farmers, government departments, civil society and other organizations and their main activities/services/products).
 - establish online platform for a food system database of actors and their products and services. Use ‘centres of gravity,’ website and info portal.
 - Establish shared food system measurements and metrics (e.g. KPIs)?
 - Condensed database: understand/identify list of who can share stories on the meaning of food sovereignty
- Provide a single point of contact – shared communication mechanisms such as website and on-line platform, volunteer database; i.e. United Way Food Link
- Host a series of targeted forums and workshops to share information. Build on existing activities to grow and reach more people.

- Integrate with existing collaborations and networks.
- Use data ('environmental scan') of what is going on in the region to help with funding applications.

Building the (Human) Capacity (i.e. building the human capability to enhance the regional food system – e.g. through learning, training, fair wages, improved work conditions, organizational development, etc.). *Past discussion topics included:*

- *Food Security Learning:*
 - *in Schools and Childcare:* school gardens, outreach program on food literacy including healthy food, food preparation, sustainable food systems, seed saving, etc. Reconnect children with the source of their food.
 - *In collaboration with post-secondary institutions:* e.g. *En'owkin* Centre, Kwantlen, OC, UBCO.
 - *in the community:*
 - e.g. food charter, Indigenous knowledge: (e.g. salmon regeneration), urban ag., seasonal eating, gardening, food security, health.
 - E.g. series of newspaper and online articles
 - E.g. including accurate information to dispel myths
- *Practical, Applied Learning Programs:*
 - Food system education (e.g. schools, colleges, university)
 - E.g. bioregional crop info, adapted varieties, seed sources/seed sharing, practical knowledge sharing, ...
 - Food-related trades training
 - Pilot projects and learning:
 - Use an action-focused project to do something meaningful and learn together.
 - demonstrate authentic, early progress, e.g. to show something is being done and is more than planning.
- *Leadership and Organizational Development*
 - Support skill sets to navigate and deal with diverse partners (e.g. including balancing global food system partners with regional food system priorities)
 - Need involvement from many levels, from leadership/decision makers to people on the ground
 - Provide training and organizational development with regional core funding (sustainable \$)
 - Integrate with public/nonprofit partnerships (e.g. school gardens, school programs to leverage funding).

Planning and Policy (i.e. regional food system direction-setting, e.g. through visioning, food security planning, goal setting, strategy development along with local and regional policies that support food security). *Past discussion topics included:*

- *Establish regional and local food system planning and/or policy group(s)*, including public, private and ‘third sector’ representatives. Activities could include:
 - Reconciling perspectives on food sovereignty, collective vision, sustainability goals
 - Establishing a regional approach to more sustainable practices, including shared regional vision and strategic goals for:
 - food security and food sovereignty (incl. food-related social determinants of health)
 - land, water and food system resilience and sustainability
 - Public engagement, awareness-building, research and learning
 - Work with regional and local food policy councils
 - Advocacy to reduce policy barriers to food: e.g. unnecessary regulation of farming, barriers to water access/licensing, etc.
 - A coordinated regional appeal to multiple ministries’ support of different aspects of food security (e.g. AgriStability, Feed BC, Buy BC, Tree fruit Stabilization, Poverty Reduction).
 - Connect farmers with researchers
 - Explore the supporting and/or leading role of the regional district
- *Develop policy positions and advocate with relevant authorities*
 - E.g. public policy to support sustainable food systems (e.g. regional perspective and goals, permitted and encouraged crops/products, diversified uses, secondary dwellings on agricultural land, small scale abattoirs, veggie processing, institutional purchasing, etc....)
 - E.g. policies to support urban ag. (e.g. enabling policies and strategies for land, community and backyard gardens, sharing, composting, chickens, bee).
 - E.g. enabling innovation: changing systems, more equitable funding models, etc.
 - Support food policy committees

Infrastructure Development (i.e. the physical infrastructure, equipment and materials needed to maintain and enhance the regional food system: e.g. developing, coordinating and sharing infrastructure, equipment and materials). *Past discussion topics included:*

- Carry out infrastructure needs assessment and establish prioritized and economical regional food system infrastructure projects (e.g. infrastructure with both local and regional significance, such as food hubs or aggregated storage infrastructure, greenhouses to extend growing season).
- E.g. support an equipment sharing program (e.g. mobile juicer for gleaning programs, tractors)

Enhanced Funding (i.e. accessing increased funding sources and amounts, catalyzing market-based entrepreneurs and innovations, region-wide funding applications, funding application collaborations).

Past discussion topics included:

- Consider region-wide funding (e.g. larger regional food system grants, with more impact, may be available from provincial and national scale funders)
- Leverage larger funding support by partnering with academia/government foundations.
- Researchers can supply data to help support and advocate for funding.
- Avoid duplication and redundancy of resources and funding
- Leverage public/nonprofit partnerships to increase funding (e.g. school gardens, school programs, etc.).

External Relationships (i.e. collaborations and advocacy *beyond the region* to ‘change the rules of the game’ – e.g. through shared food security advocacy with other regions and national organizations for greater impact, public education, lobbying for better provincial and federal policies, etc.).

Past discussions have touched on global-local food system connections and the frustration with the market-based global food system that both undercuts the prices farmers receive for their products and is unable to deliver healthy and affordable fresh fruits and vegetables to the most vulnerable members of the community.

There has been some discussion of changing the rules of the game as well as exploring how to reconcile the interests (and support) of the global food system partners with regional food security.

A Systems Synopsis

From a systems perspective, all these potential ‘solutions’ listed above can be categorized into one of three different ways of influencing the food system (and in so doing, the regional food system’s ability to improve food security). The three different ways of influencing the food system include:

- market-based choices (i.e. land decisions, equipment and materials purchasing, product/service innovation, workforce management, marketing and sales, pricing, distribution channels, financing, insurance, etc.).
- public policy influence (e.g. improved legislation, regulations, bylaws, taxation and funding that, in turn, influence market-based choices and civil society organizations).
- civil society/community influence (e.g. actions of foundations, civil society organizations, donors, and volunteers), that can, in turn, influence public policy (e.g. ‘the rules of the game’) and even market decisions.

While food security forums tend to focus on the third of the three, the first two may hold more power and leverage over food system outcomes. As such, any systemic pursuit of a more food secure region will also consider ways of positively influencing public policy and activities in the market (i.e. the economy).