

# Food Security

Regional Sustainability Strategy Policy Options Series | Fall 2010

Throughout the Capital Region, people and organizations are taking a new interest in food – edible gardening, learning about nutrition, supporting local farms and sustainable food options. Local governments are involved in initiatives, looking for new ways to enhance food production and distribution and recycling of organic wastes. What are the links between food, health and wellbeing? Can we do more to protect the viability of local agriculture? How can we reduce the impact of food production on climate change?

This is one of nine papers that aims to challenge our thinking about being a sustainable region, of which food systems should play an integral role. The paper sketches out the current context, key drivers and good practices from other communities. It also compares current policy and practice against more aggressive approaches to enhance and secure local food production and our accessibility to local produce. Three policy directions are presented.

Your feedback is welcome.

## A Regional Context

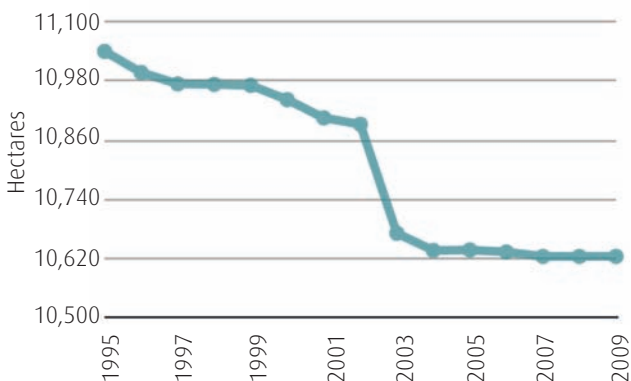
Productive agricultural land in the region has been reduced substantially over the past three decades, resulting in nearly 1,500 hectares removed from the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR) between 1974 and 2009. With over 12,000 hectares in 1974, the ALR in the Growth Management Planning Area (excluding the Gulf Islands or Indian Reserve lands) has dropped to 10,600 hectares by 2009, as shown in Figure 1.



“... In our vision, sustainable food systems ensure nutritious food for all people, shorten the distance between food consumers and producers, protect workers’ health and welfare, minimize environmental impacts and strengthen connections between urban and rural communities...”

*San Francisco Healthy and Sustainable Food Directive*

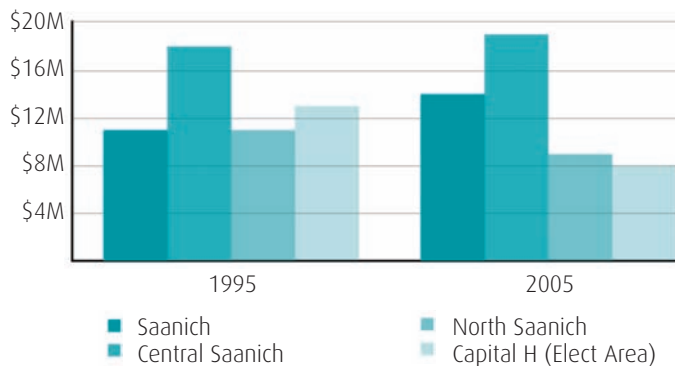
Figure 1: Net Change in Agricultural Land Reserve Lands (GMPA), 1974-2009



Source: Agricultural Land Conservancy

In 2005, there were 735 farms reporting farm-related income in the CRD (excluding the Gulf Islands). In total, they produced \$49 million in farm receipts, up from \$46 million in 2000, but still less than the 1995 total of \$54 million (a 9% decline). Between 1995 and 2005, there was a net loss of 54 income-reporting farms, most of which (44 farms) were in the Capital H electoral area.

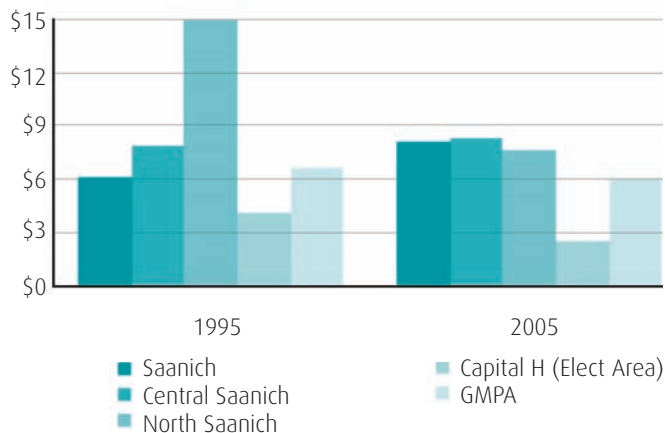
Figure 2: Gross Farm Receipts, 1995 and 2005



Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Agriculture

In 2005, the total value per hectare of gross farm receipts grew to \$6,000 (from approximately \$5,000 in 2000), which was a significant drop from \$6,600 per hectare a decade earlier. One third of the farms in 2005 (242 farms) produced gross annual farm receipts of more than \$10,000, amounting to 96% of total earnings. The remaining farms (with less than \$10,000) produce less than 4% of the gross farm receipts. Smaller farms (<2.2 hectares) produced more than three times the value per hectare (in gross farm receipts) than large farms (>4.2 hectares).

Figure 3: Total Value Per Hectare (in \$1,000s), 1995 and 2005



Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Agriculture

There are a minimum of 34 community gardens and approximately 1,000 plots throughout the CRD. Some were established as far back as the 1970s, while others were implemented this year.

Community Gardens in Capital Region KEY STATISTICS	
Gardens	34
Total Land Area (estimate)	<10,000 s.f.
Plots (estimate)	<1,000
Plots Per Garden	7 to 137
Participants Per Garden	6 to 80
Average Number of Participants Per Garden (estimate)	39

Source: CR-FAIR, Regional Food Security Assessment Report, 2010



# What's Driving Food Security Planning in the Region?



**1995** | The *Farm Practices Protection (Right to Farm) Act* protects farmers from nuisance lawsuits and bylaws when they are using normal farm practices. It provides that zoning and rural land use bylaws created by local governments are subject to provincial standards.

**1996** | The *BC Land Title Act* and *Municipal Act* (now the *Local Government Act*) pursued edge planning principles by developing flexible legislative mechanisms for local governments to support compatibility along agricultural and urban boundaries. This included changes to development permit areas, farm bylaws and the decision making capacity of local approving officers.

**1996** | The *Water Act* is the principal law for managing the diversion and use of provincial water resources. The Act asserts provincial control over all surface and groundwater in BC. A license for irrigation or other purposes is required to use water for farming. In this region, the CRD supplies bulk water to municipalities, who retail it to consumers. Agricultural users pay an agricultural water rate.

**1998** | The Guide for Bylaw Development in Farming contains flexible bylaw standards affecting agriculture on land within the ALR. Local governments are also encouraged to apply the standards in the Guide to farming areas outside the ALR. The Guide states that when a local government wants to vary from the standards, they should consider the impact on current and future farm operations. The standards describe permitted uses of farmland, minimum lot sizes, the percentage of a lot that may be covered by buildings, set-backs, edge lot lines and more.

**2002** | *Agricultural Land Commission Act* replaced the *Agricultural Land Reserve Act*, *Land Reserve Commission Act* and the *Soil Conservation Act*. It incorporated elements of the former acts and established the Provincial Agricultural Land Commission.

**TODAY** | Food-related challenges continue to affect many of us. Children from all social groups are regularly exposed to unhealthy food marketing. Many people, young and old, lack basic food skills and information. The nutritional needs of seniors are linked to their health costs and capacity for independent living. The viability of local agriculture and rural communities has been put at risk with the continued loss of ALR land to development. There is a lack of appropriately zoned and well equipped land for fresh food distribution centres. The food system's high energy inputs account for a large part of greenhouse gas emissions affecting climate change and, over time, reliance on long-distance, energy-intensive approaches will become more difficult.

Provincially, there are 42 agricultural advisory committees at municipal and regional levels and 33 completed agricultural plans with 13 more underway.

## Edge Planning

Edge Planning areas are defined as: Urban and agricultural land situated near the ALR boundary that requires special management in the spirit of shared responsibility.

"The Objective of edge planning is [to] establish a framework of land use policies, regulations and programs that enhances optimum land use and compatibility along both sides of the urban Agricultural Land Reserve boundary"

Ministry of Agriculture and Lands,  
*Guide to Edge Planning*

## Taking Steps Regionally

**2003** | Under the existing Regional Growth Strategy (RGS), food policy focuses on securing agricultural land for economic security and environmental protection. Protecting land for agricultural uses is identified as a significant goal, with a specific objective of increasing economic activity through high-value and specialized agriculture.

**2006** | A subcommittee of the CRD Roundtable on the Environment was formed to investigate the pros and cons of adopting a Healthy Communities approach to decision making, using food security as a case study. The Healthy Communities Subcommittee (HCSC) continued to pursue food security, and eventually became the Food & Agriculture Subcommittee to reflect its focus.

**2008** | The Capital Region Food and Agriculture Initiatives Roundtable (CR-FAIR) developed a Regional Food Charter to help work towards the vision of “A sustainable and secure local food and agriculture system that provides safe, sufficient, culturally accepted, nutritious food accessible to everyone in the region through dignified means.”

**2008** | The Capital Region Food and Health Action Plan was developed by the CR-FAIR. It identifies priority actions needed to realize the vision of the Regional Food Charter.

Today, food security and food system programs are run by a host of organizations, businesses and individuals. Many organizations do creative and effective work on food access, urban agriculture and strengthening communities. Regional food security work is implemented through informal partnerships between the CRD Roundtable on the Environment, HCSC, Vancouver Island Health Authority (VIHA) and CR-FAIR. Examples of this collaboration include pilot projects for local food procurement and urban agriculture initiatives at a number of municipalities.

### Capital Region Food and Health Action Plan: Priority Actions

- Protect farmland.
- Encourage innovation and diversity in industry.
- Meet climate change obligations.
- Strengthen food system infrastructure and organizations.
- Improve population health and regional food security.
- Establish a Food Policy Council.

### Capital Region Food Charter: Principles for Food and Health

- Nutritious food is essential for a healthy population.
- Localized food systems contribute to the social and economic health of the community.
- A sustainable food system fosters resilience to global warming and supports long term environmental health.
- Planning a local food system is part of planning for the future.
- Healthy food systems are integral to a resilient community.



## What's Happening Elsewhere?

The following case examples present a variety of food and farming related initiatives, offering some ideas and lessons for the Capital Region.

### Farmland Protection | Metro Vancouver, BC

Expanding the agricultural land base into regional parks is an approach taken by local regional governments to protect certain lands from urban development. To promote urban agriculture, the City of Richmond purchased 296 acres of agricultural land. They also partnered with Kwantlen University's Institute of Sustainable Agriculture to operate a Richmond Farm School at the Terra Nova Rural Park. Metro Vancouver is establishing an experimental farm at Colony Farm Regional Park in Coquitlam.

### Replacement Policy | Surrey, BC

To discourage the development of prime farmland for commercial and residential use, Surrey requires that every acre of farmland removed from the Agricultural Land Reserve for development be replaced with two acres.

### Community Farms Program | British Columbia

The Community Farms Program was set up in 2007 by the Land Conservancy of BC and Farm Folk City Folk. The program promotes a Community Farm model where multiple farm businesses operate collaboratively on land held in trust by a society or cooperative. Farm businesses can hold long-term leases and have the option to build equity in their business.



### Island Chefs' Collaborative | Vancouver Island, BC

A group of chefs concerned about the future of independent farms formed the Island Chefs' Collaborative in 1999. They hold annual meetings to connect chefs and farmers and work to increase consumer awareness of locally produced foods.

### Municipal Involvement in Food | Portland, OR

Portland's Parks & Recreation office manages 32 community gardens throughout the city – 60% on parkland and the rest on private or institutional land. The City supports food production through an urban agriculture workshop series, no cost summer gardening camps for children, a City-owned dairy farm and a 700 s.f. vegetable garden at City Hall which promotes growing and sharing produce. The City's policies allow the keeping of bees, pygmy goats, rabbits and chickens. A Produce for People program provides food to charitable organizations.

### Organic Waste Collection | San Francisco, CA

San Francisco has one of the first large-scale urban organic waste collection programs in the US. The program collects over 400 tonnes of food scraps, yard trimmings and soiled paper every day from households, restaurants and other businesses.

### Community Gardening | Seattle, WA

Through the P-Patch community garden program, over 1,900 garden plots serve more than 3,800 gardeners on 23 acres of land. The gardens are an integral part of neighbourhood development, particularly in low-income, immigrant and youth populations. A Parks and Green Spaces Levy provides \$2 million in new funding for the program and community gardens are recognized as a recreational use in parks and open space. The co-location of community gardens with other amenities is encouraged. A unique program allows gardeners at three garden sites to sell their produce to a list of buyers. Boulevard gardens are permitted, as are small animals, farm animals, domestic fowl and bees, subject to restrictions.

"The overall intent of this local food action initiative is to improve our local food system and in doing so, advance the City's interrelated goals of race and social justice, environmental sustainability, economic development, public health and emergency preparedness."

*Seattle City Council  
Local Food Action Initiative*

## Policy Options: Where Are We Now?

The 2003 Regional Growth Strategy (RGS) considered food security from the perspective of protecting agricultural land and economic prosperity for farmers. The Status Quo policy outlines relevant policies from the RGS as well as current policy around environmental stewardship and reducing emissions.

Goal	Status Quo
<p><b>Protect the land base for food production by securing and expanding the region’s farmlands.</b></p>	<p>All ALR lands are designated as renewable resource lands.</p> <p>Continued use for agricultural purposes is supported through a no net loss approach.</p> <p>Strive to preserve agricultural lands.</p>
<p><b>Increase the viability and diversification of food production while preventing non farm use of agricultural land.</b></p>	<p>Regional food security group established to examine ways to increase farm viability and diversification while preventing non-farm use of agricultural land. Identified diversification and complementary uses include small scale processing, markets, value added activities and urban agriculture.</p>
<p><b>Build food processing and distribution capacity to expand the (local) food supply.</b></p>	<p>Complete recommended study on regional food production and distribution capacity that looks at both urban and rural food systems.</p>
<p><b>Increase food self sufficiency and community resilience.</b></p>	<p>CRD Roundtable on the Environment developed a Regional Food Charter – creating a framework for the development and promotion of food security initiatives.</p>
<p><b>Work toward environmentally sustainable food systems.</b></p>	<p>Explore ways to measure GHG emissions associated with the food system and set targets for reduction. Explore best practices in natural resource management related to food systems.</p> <p>Recognize the value of farmlands in supporting ecological systems and the stewardship role played by the farm community.</p>

## Policy Options: Where Could We Go?

To achieve the region’s goals for agricultural viability and food security, the CRD alongside stakeholders and member municipalities will need to work together to enhance programs and explore new opportunities. Two policy bundles are presented as alternatives to the Status Quo – Moderate Change and Significant Change.

Moderate Change	Significant Change
<p>Conduct inventories of lands with capability for food production and identify additional strategies for the protection of these lands.</p> <p>Strengthen farm land protection policies, generally.</p>	<p>Prioritize inventoried lands with agricultural potential for protected status through land use designation.</p> <p>Establish targets to increase designated farmland in the region and implement strategies for protection. Support initiatives that create access to land for farmers, e.g., a farmland acquisition levy or enabling community farms.</p>
<p>Support a range of agricultural and complementary uses in the ALR.</p> <p>Promote value-added activities that enhance farm viability. Identify on-farm diversification and complementary uses (e.g., small-scale processing, farm gate markets, agricultural products).</p> <p>Encourage direct marketing through zoning and bylaws, i.e. farm gate sales and local markets.</p>	<p>Develop and adopt policies that promote food production and agriculture related uses.</p> <p>Establish regional standards for permitted on-farm uses for agriculturally-zoned lands.</p>
<p>Establish policies that restrict farm fragmentation through subdivision.</p> <p>Support policies that encourage opportunities for urban agriculture.</p> <p>Promote edge planning principles through education and outreach to increase agricultural awareness and to ensure suitable land uses are located adjacent to farmland.</p>	<p>Local governments collaborate to implement a strategy to strengthen food production and distribution capacity.</p> <p>Encourage the development of local agricultural cooperatives and marketing boards.</p> <p>Define edge planning areas and develop policies on compatible uses to increase long term security of agricultural uses.</p>
<p>Promote partnerships to assess needs and opportunities for supporting local food access and education.</p> <p>Develop local procurement policies that set targets for increasing food purchased from local sources.</p>	<p>Develop a regional strategy to link local governments to the wider food system.</p> <p>Create and implement policy tools that support local agriculture (e.g., “teaching” gardens or nutrition courses for at-risk groups).</p>
<p>Support efforts to achieve GHG reduction, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exploring regional support for redistribution of compost from regionally collected food waste.</li> <li>• Encouraging institutions and consumers to buy local, reducing “food miles”.</li> <li>• Promoting urban agriculture through greater use of residential gardens for food production and greater availability of community gardens.</li> </ul>	<p>Implement the CRD Community Energy Plan components that pertain to food and agriculture – focusing efforts on increasing soil health, water quality and supply, waste and recycling, procurement and transportation related to the food system.</p>

*\*The Significant Change approach builds upon and enhances the options presented under Moderate Change. The effect is often cumulative, with policies under Moderate Change generally assumed to be included under Significant Change.*

## What Do You Think?

The CRD Roundtable on the Environment and CR-FAIR have been actively working together, alongside the CRD and other partners, to advance local food security and the concept of healthy communities in our region. The Capital Region Food and Health Action Plan provides a framework of action – outlining how we need to mobilize to become “food secure”.

- How should the Regional Sustainability Strategy address the issue of food security and encourage food production in the region?
- What can municipalities do to strengthen farmland protection?
- Should we consider implementing new measures that build the food processing and distribution capacity of local farms?

Notes:

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Feedback

The CRD values your input in developing the Regional Sustainability Strategy. Please submit your comments on this policy paper via [sustainability@crd.bc.ca](mailto:sustainability@crd.bc.ca).

For in-depth information, **visit [www.crd.bc.ca/sustainability](http://www.crd.bc.ca/sustainability)** to view notices on upcoming consultations, discussion papers, and the overall progress of the Regional Sustainability Strategy.

Regional Planning Division  
625 Fisgard Street | PO Box 1000  
Victoria, BC | V8W 2S6 | **250.360.3160**

**[www.crd.bc.ca/regionalplanning](http://www.crd.bc.ca/regionalplanning)**



Making a difference...together

## Regional Sustainability Strategy

The CRD, together with member municipalities, stakeholder groups and residents, is working to developing a vision and a planning framework to promote sustainability and create a lasting legacy for future generations. This will lead to the CRD’s first Regional Sustainability Strategy, a broadly ranging document that charts a course to a complete and inclusive community, committed to sustainable practices socially, environmentally, economically and financially.

The Strategy has its foundations in earlier commitments by the CRD Board and member municipalities through the Regional Growth Strategy, adopted in 2003.