

May 2021

# Putting Healthy Food on Our Tables

## Sooke Region Food Security Report

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Christine Bossi  
Sooke Region Communities Health Network  
& Martin Bissig  
Food Security Specialist



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## **Executive Summary**

### **Subject Matter**

The report addressed food security under the federal and provincial poverty reduction strategies. Funded through a grant from Union of BC Municipalities, the aim is to provide a report on the present food security situation in the Sooke Region, which in turn will contribute to a strategic plan to tackle this important issue. The content of this report is to benefit stakeholders in different sectors, as poverty touches upon all aspects of community living.

### **Methods of Analysis**

Tools developed were online public surveys with the same survey provided in paper form for individuals that might not access the internet, and some individuals of varying food insecurity and life situations participated through individual interviews online or by phone. The data collected provided the main core of the results of this report, which was supported by academic literature and factual information. As food security is inter-linked with many aspects of poverty, their impacts needed to be explored further in our local context.

### **Findings**

The lack of availability to food, including fresh produce, was not seen as an issue, but firstly the lack of disposable income and secondly transportation. Once the main bills were paid, of which housing was the main expense, food was the variable variable in a low-income household. Food service providers, the Sooke Food Bank in particular, were de facto supplementing necessary income for many to survive in our community. Around 15% of the households in Sooke and the Sooke Region in general are of low-income, many of which consist of children and seniors. The necessary household income to manage with the cost of living in a BC community of a population under 30,000 is \$42,408.00.

Income and employment are not the only factors in managing financially, but also a range of physical, psychological and socio-economic factors. An individual experiencing poverty

has a myriad of complexities that may hinder one from securing a liveable income and getting food on the table. The feeling of shame or mental health issues may hinder individuals in difficult situations to seek help. At times they are not aware of the supports that exist that could potentially assist them.

The pandemic has only exacerbated the whole poverty situation, which demands more reliable income streams and support services.

### **Recommendations**

- Efforts should be made to ensure as much money in people's pockets as possible in order to cover more than the cost of living, but to assist them to come to a level where they feel secure and are able to plan for the future (employment, income tax, benefits, child care etc).
- Local and regional authorities need to find creative ways to make life easier for its population whether it be amending by-laws through a food security and equity lens, leading discussions that are outside of their normal mandate and scope, or through advocacy with the provincial and federal government.
- Address the impact of discrimination on individual and group circumstances through safety practice, intersectional practices, representation in community development and decision-making processes, including efforts towards reconciliation.
- Increase existing and encourage other relevant services to support low-income households in a motivating manner to reduce stigma, while not adding onto the burden that is already being experienced by these individuals and families.
- Housing is an important contributor to poverty in the region. Densification of the town core with affordable rental housing units would allow for better accessibility to amenities, services and transportation. Explore alternative housing arrangements such as cooperatives, co-housing, makerhoods etc.

- Create an environment where it is possible to easily physically access healthy food provision and services, as well as deter unhealthy food options in the community in order to uphold equitable community values.
- Develop a healthy food culture where healthy products are promoted, communal food gatherings facilitated, cooking and food preservation sessions continued and sensitization of nutritional and traditional food culture to encourage healthy eating habits and community spirit.
- Efforts need to be made to become more self-reliant by increasing local food production through increased farming on existing space, using unused farm lots, increasing greenhouse growth on industrial land, and coordinating neighbourhood growth initiatives, while reducing climate change through a sustainable circular economy.
- A regional coordinating body such as a Food Policy Council including both beneficiaries and food producers/providers should be established in the region, in order to provide a more holistic approach to food and economic growth, self-reliance and healthy living.
- A regional food hub could increase the growth of food production and processing locally, while providing employment opportunities.

## Acknowledgement

Scia'New, T'Sou-ke and Pacheedaht First Nations upon which unseated territories the Sooke Region exists and thrives

District of Sooke, including the members of the Land Use, Climate Action and Community Economic Development Committees

Capital Regional District

Sooke Food Bank

Meals on Wheels

Sooke Farmers' Market

Sooke Family Resource Society

Sooke Holy Trinity Anglican Church - Vital Vittles

Sooke School District (SD62)

Sooke Region Chamber of Commerce

Sooke Region Food CHI

Sooke Region Communities Health Network

Worklink Employment Society

*A special debt of gratitude to:*

All community members who contributed to this consultation

All Sooke Region Farms who have contributed to all of the consultation processes and strategic plans in the past including this one

Resident Food Experts with important experiences from near and afar

Union of BC Municipalities for funding this project



## Introduction

Under the auspices of Poverty Reduction, a grant was applied for and attained through the Union of BC Municipalities to conduct a local literature review on food security, facilitate a public consultation with documentation that in turn would support a community strategic plan accordingly.

The purpose of this report is to provide the District of Sooke and the rest of the Sooke Region's authorities, various sectors and community members with representative data that will provide insight on how to support such an important issue as food insecurity in a holistic manner.

This report relied heavily on the "Community Food Systems Assessment - A Companion Tool for the Guide"<sup>1</sup> in order to be able to document the necessary empirical information to support practical solutions by building upon the past efforts in food and service provision development leading to sustainability and accessibility.

The definition of Food Security and its association to poverty will be stated, as well as exploring regional environmental and health-related indicators. Next, the report will map social/cultural and local food indicators including elements of food procurement. Finally, food policy indicators will be addressed, with the report concluding with its recommendations.

## Geography

The Sooke Region is on the South Western corner of Vancouver Island, British Columbia. The area along the Juan de Fuca Strait includes from left to right on map 1: Pacheedaht First Nation, Port Renfrew, Jordan River, Shirley, Otter Point, District of Sooke, T'Sou-ke First Nation, Scia'new First Nation and East Sooke. The District of Sooke is a municipality, while

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<sup>1</sup> [Community Food Assessment Guide for Regional Health Authorities in British Columbia](#)

the other communities with the exception of the First Nations are under the Capital Regional District (CRD).

A community previously consisting of forestry and fishing, is developing into a bedroom community for people working in the Westshore or the City of Victoria, while also attracting young families and retired seniors.



Map 1: Sooke Region

## Consultative Approach

A food security consultation took place during January and February 2021, almost a year after the Covid-19 pandemic started. A *survey* was shared online, where all community members within the Sooke Region were invited to take part and 157 from all adult age ranges and income levels participated. A hard copy version of the same survey was distributed at the Sooke Food Bank and Sooke Shelter and 40 and 12 surveys were completed respectively. Questions addressed food and financial needs, how their situation could be improved if desired, and their willingness to produce, prepare and preserve food.

In addition, 15 *individual interviews* took place by phone and zoom adhering to pandemic restrictions. Interviewees were aged 22 to 72, with a predominance of women over 50. These qualitative data interviews provided necessary substance to the quantitative data

from the surveys. Questions were more open-ended providing the interviewees the freedom to express their concerns about their own situation or that of their family members.

Equally important was the *input of food service providers and producers*. An online survey with 12 food service agencies and food producers, followed by a few discussions took place to offer insight on realities before and after the pandemic, as well as their opinions as to possible improvements.

Before proceeding with the survey results, first a clarification of terms and circumstances.

## **What is Food Security?**

According to the provincial Food Security Evidence Review (2013), Food Security means that all people at all times have physical and economic access to adequate amounts of nutritious, safe, and culturally appropriate foods, which are produced in an environmentally sustainable and socially just manner, and that people are able to make informed decisions about their food choices.

Community food security, the major focus of this paper, exists “when all citizens obtain a safe, personally acceptable, nutritious diet through a sustainable food system that maximizes healthy choices, community self-reliance and equal access for everyone.”<sup>2</sup>

Household/ individual food insecurity is defined as “the inability to acquire or consume an adequate diet quality or a sufficient quantity of food in socially acceptable ways, or the uncertainty that one will be able to do so.”<sup>3</sup>

Food security is a complex issue that recognizes the importance of human health and social equity, environmental health and sustainable food production, and economic vitality for both producers and consumers. Health is determined by complex interactions between

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<sup>2</sup> [Food Security - Evidence Review \(2013\)](#) - p. 1

<sup>3</sup> [Food Security - Evidence Review \(2013\)](#) - p. 2

social and economic factors, the physical environment, and individual behavior. This requires a focus on partnerships and inter-sectoral cooperation, finding flexible and multidimensional solutions for complex problems, and public involvement and community participation.<sup>4</sup>

This is reinforced by both federal<sup>5</sup> and provincial<sup>6</sup> respective Poverty Reduction strategies. In 2010, the Provincial Health Services Authority (PHSA) noted that, based on the evidence of the relationship between food security and health, food security is a key public health priority in British Columbia.<sup>7</sup>

Low income, especially among vulnerable people (e.g., families headed by single females, indigenous peoples, homeless individuals and new immigrants) is one of the key contributing factors to the lack of individual and household food security. In the larger context of community food security, many additional factors impact the population as a whole, including food quality, food availability and accessibility, and multiple issues that impact the sustainability of the food system itself.

Because of the broad and complex range of these factors, a collaborative, multi-factorial approach is necessary not only at the regional and local levels but also at the provincial, national and international levels. The overall goal of the core public health program on food security is to increase food security for the population of British Columbia.

## **Social Determinants of Health**

Social Determinants of health<sup>8</sup> are the broad range of personal, social, economic and environmental factors that determine individual and population health. The main determinants of health include:

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<sup>4</sup> [Food Security - Evidence Review \(2013\)](#) - p. 17

<sup>5</sup> [Canadian Poverty Reduction Strategy](#)

<sup>6</sup> [TogetherBC, British Columbia's first-ever poverty reduction strategy](#)

<sup>7</sup> [Food Security - Evidence Review \(2013\)](#) - p. 7

<sup>8</sup> [Social determinants of health and health inequalities - Canada.ca](#)

1. Income and social status
2. Employment and working conditions
3. Education and literacy
4. Childhood experiences
5. Physical environments
6. Social supports and coping skills
7. Healthy behaviours
8. Access to health services
9. Biology and genetic endowment
10. Gender
11. Culture
12. Race / Racism

**Social Determinants of Health**<sup>9</sup> refer to a specific group of social and economic factors within the broader determinants of health. These relate to an individual's place in society, such as income, education or employment. Experiences of discrimination, racism and historical trauma are important social determinants of health for certain groups such as Indigenous Peoples, LGBTQ and Black Canadians. It has been scientifically proven that racism and discrimination actually takes years off one's life, due to the constant stress involved.<sup>10</sup>

### **Sooke Community Health Statistics**

Provincial health authority figures follow geographical areas of responsibility. The Sooke Region falls under Sooke and Esquimalt, therefore numbers for the various parts of the Sooke Region were not attainable without including the much larger Westshore and Esquimalt communities. However, there was a subsection for Sooke proper, which will be used here<sup>11</sup>.

Overall, Sooke's numbers around education, employment, life expectancy, chronic disease, maternal health, students fresh produce consumption and childhood vulnerability were

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<sup>9</sup> [Social determinants of health and health inequalities - Canada.ca](#)

<sup>10</sup> [Health inequalities are 'direct result of institutional racism'](#)

<sup>11</sup> Island Health Community Health Profiles  
[communityhealth.phsa.ca/healthprofiles/healthreportcomparisonbc/sooke](http://communityhealth.phsa.ca/healthprofiles/healthreportcomparisonbc/sooke)

similar to the provincial average. Sooke had some percentage points in its favour with teenage smoking, while being at a disadvantage with regards to affordable housing.

Though hovering around the average may seem reassuring, the numbers are not necessarily positive overall and there is always room for improvement with regards to health and wellbeing.

Direct information from the three First Nations regarding these areas were not available. However, the First Nations Health Status Report (2015)<sup>12</sup> revealed that indigenous of Vancouver Island are three times more likely to have diabetes and osteoarthritis and two times more likely to have hypertension than their peers aged 50-64. Asthma and hypertension saw an increase in females.

With the opioid epidemic, there is a common understanding that the entire population, no matter of origin, has seen an increase in overdoses and deaths, especially during the pandemic.<sup>13</sup>

## **Vulnerable Populations**

The groups who are most vulnerable to food insecurity are: female headed single families, indigenous peoples, marginally housed and homeless, and new immigrants.<sup>14</sup> There is a clear linkage between income levels and food security, with the prevalence of food security rising to almost 50% in the lowest income group.<sup>15</sup> Among low-income groups, food insecurity is experienced disproportionately by some population sub-groups. The 2007-2008 Canadian Community Health Survey found that:

- People in the lowest income decile had quadruple the rate of food insecurity compared to the national average (of 7.7%); 56% of those receiving social assistance and 25% of those receiving workers' compensation/employment insurance were food insecure.

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<sup>12</sup> [First Nations Health Status & Health Services Utilization](#)

<sup>13</sup> [Overdose Deaths Accelerating During COVID-19 | CDC Online Newsroom](#)

<sup>14</sup> [Food Security - Evidence Review \(2013\)](#) - p. 6-7

<sup>15</sup> [Food Security - Evidence Review \(2013\)](#) - p. 3

- Approximately 21% of indigenous people living off-reserve experienced food insecurity.
- Some 13% of recent immigrants experienced food insecurity.
- More households with children reported food insecurity compared to the average household (9.7% versus 7.7%). Those with young children and greater than three children at home were most affected (11% and 14% respectively). Core Public Health Functions for BC: Evidence Review Food Security Population and Public Health, Ministry of Health.<sup>16</sup>
- Some 25% of households led by female lone parents were food insecure, which was twice the rate of households led by male lone parents (11.2%) and four times the rate of households led by couples (6.3%)

## Federal Statistics

According to the Statistics Canada Health Fact Sheets on Household Food Insecurity, in 2017/2018, 8.8% of Canadian households - approximately 1.2 million - experienced some moderate or severe food insecurity due to financial constraints.<sup>17</sup> Food insecurity exists when household members report having issues with the quality or quantity of food consumed (moderate food insecurity) or having experienced reduced food intake or disrupted eating patterns (severe food insecurity). These kinds of household food insecurity have been associated with a range of poor physical and mental health outcomes, for example, multiple chronic conditions, distress, and depression.

Moderate and severe household food insecurity varied by family type. The proportion of households that experienced food insecurity was over twice as high for lone-parent families with children than for couples with children. Among households with children, female lone-parent families were the most likely to experience food insecurity (25.1%), followed by male lone-parent families (16.3%) and couples with children (7.3%)<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> [Food Security - Evidence Review \(2013\)](#) - p. 11

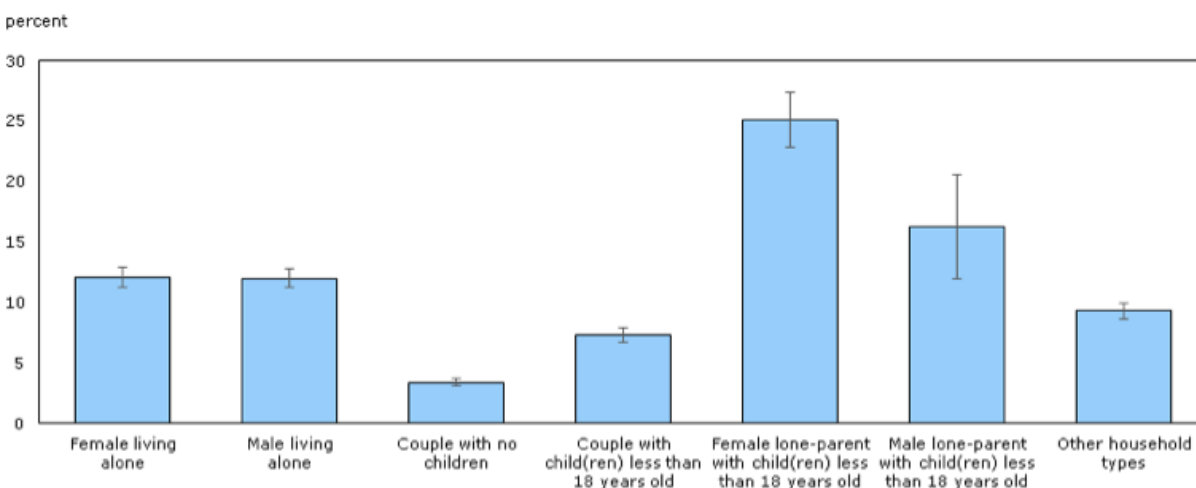
<sup>17</sup> [Health Fact Sheets Household food insecurity, 2017/2018](#)

<sup>18</sup> [Health Fact Sheets Household food insecurity, 2017/2018](#)

Households in Canada consisting of a couple living alone were the least likely to experience food insecurity (3.4%). Among single-person households, females and males experienced a similar rate of moderate or severe food insecurity (about 12%, chart 1).

Households who were renting their home had higher rates of moderate or severe food insecurity than those that owned their home. In 2017/2018, 19.1% of households who were renting experienced food insecurity compared to 4.2% of households who owned their home.

**Chart 1**  
**Household food insecurity (moderate or severe), by household type, Canada, 2017/2018**



**Source:** Canadian Community Health Survey, 2017/2018.

*Chart 1: Household Food Insecurity Canada (2017/2018)*

Household food insecurity (moderate or severe) differs between provinces and territories. Food insecurity was highest among households in Nunavut with 49.4% experiencing food insecurity (about 25.8% moderate and 23.7% severe food insecurity). Of the 5,800 households with children in Nunavut, 62.4% reported food insecurity among the adults and 42.7% reported food insecurity among the children.

Rates of food insecurity (moderate and severe) were also higher than the national average (8.8%) in Nova Scotia (10.9%), Manitoba (10.2%), Yukon (12.6%), and Northwest Territories



(15.9%). Quebec (7.4%) was the only province/territory with a lower proportion of households experiencing food insecurity than the average. All other provinces including BC had rates of food insecurity similar to the national average.

In addition to the moderate and severe food insecurity, 4.0 % are marginally food insecure on the national level, which means that a total of 12.7% are in a food insecure situation.

12.4 % of British Columbians are food insecure in 2018 (marginal 3.7%, moderate 5.5% and severe 3.2%).

In 2017/2018, around 1.6 million out of 14.3 million households (11.9%) in Canada relied on government benefits as their main source of income.<sup>19</sup> Just over one in five (22.5%) of these households were food insecure. For households that relied on other sources of income (such as wages and salaries, job-related pensions, etc.), the rate of food insecurity was much lower, at 6.8%.<sup>20</sup>

### **Sooke Region Demographic Statistics**

As Sooke is the main hub in the region for services and amenities, but most of the agricultural land surrounds it, it was deemed essential to include the entire Sooke Region in this analysis.

According to the 2016 census, "Juan de Fuca 1" depicts East Sooke, Otter Point, Shirley and Jordan River only. There was no option to identify these communities separately. Port Renfrew and the District of Sooke were distinct, as well as the three First Nations in the region, namely Scia'new (Beecher Bay), T'Sou-ke and Pacheedaht ("Gordon River 2" in census) .

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<sup>19</sup>[Health Fact Sheets Household food insecurity, 2017/2018](#) - Stats Canada

<sup>20</sup>[Health Fact Sheets Household food insecurity, 2017/2018](#) - Stats Canada

## Sooke Region Food Security Report (May 2021)

Dem. Indicators (2016)	Scia'new FN	T'Sou-ke FN	District of Sooke	Juan de Fuca 1	Pacheedaht FN	Port Renfrew	Total
Population	129	225	13,001	4,670	111	144	18,280
Pop. % growth/decline	-60.20%	0.027	0.137	0.102	0.156	0.036	N/A
Pop. density km2	49	301.5	229.6	21.1	116.3	16.6	N/A
Single parent household	10	15	550	130	5	0	710
Seniors	15	15	2,150	905	10	30	3,125
indigenous	125	215	865	370	85	105	2,765
No certificate or degree	40	45	1,765	555	25	10	2,440
Recent immigrants	0	0	125	15	0	0	140
School-aged children (5-19)	35	55	2,355	650	15	10	3,120

*Table 1: Demographic Indicators Sooke Region*

With the exception of Scia'new FN, all of the communities experienced population growth. Sooke has a relatively high growth rate of young families and seniors in BC contributing with people of resources but also the potential for further vulnerability through the emergence of more single parent households and elderly aging in place.

Recent immigrants to the District of Sooke are from developed countries with English as either their first or second language.

Interesting to note the population density on the First Nation reserves.

### **Sooke Region Income Statistics**

The numbers included are also found through Statistics Canada, but from 2015. It will be very interesting to receive the new numbers expected this year, 2021, especially with the inclusion of numbers from the pandemic.

The Low Income Cut-Off (LICO) is when a family spends 20 percent more of its income on necessities (food, shelter and clothing) than the average family does.

## Sooke Region Food Security Report (May 2021)

Econ. Indicators (2015)	Scia'new FN	T'Sou-ke FN	District of Sooke	Juan de Fuca 1	Pacheedaht FN	Port Renfrew
Median total household income	\$36,224	\$41,088	\$71,796	\$76,288	\$40,640	\$61,760
Median after-tax total household income	\$35,200	\$39,168	\$62,359	\$66,400	\$39,424	\$53,120
% Ind. low income after-tax (LIM-AT%)	N/A	N/A	14.40%	15.30%	N/A	N/A
% Minors low income (0-5)	N/A	N/A	19.20%	19.60%	N/A	N/A
% Minors low income (0-17)	N/A	N/A	18.30%	20.30%	N/A	N/A
% Seniors low-income	N/A	N/A	11.30%	11.10%	N/A	N/A

*Table 2: Economic Indicators Sooke Region*

It is interesting to note that both the District of Sooke and Juan de Fuca 1 have similar numbers across the board. Sadly, large percentages (14.4% for DoS and 15.3% for JdF) of the population are deemed to be low income, but even higher numbers among the most vulnerable of the population, firstly children (18.3% and 20.3%) and then seniors (11.3% and 11.1%).

### Consultation Survey Income Statistics

Among the 157 survey respondents in the community, household make-up and income sources were revealed.

### How is your household?

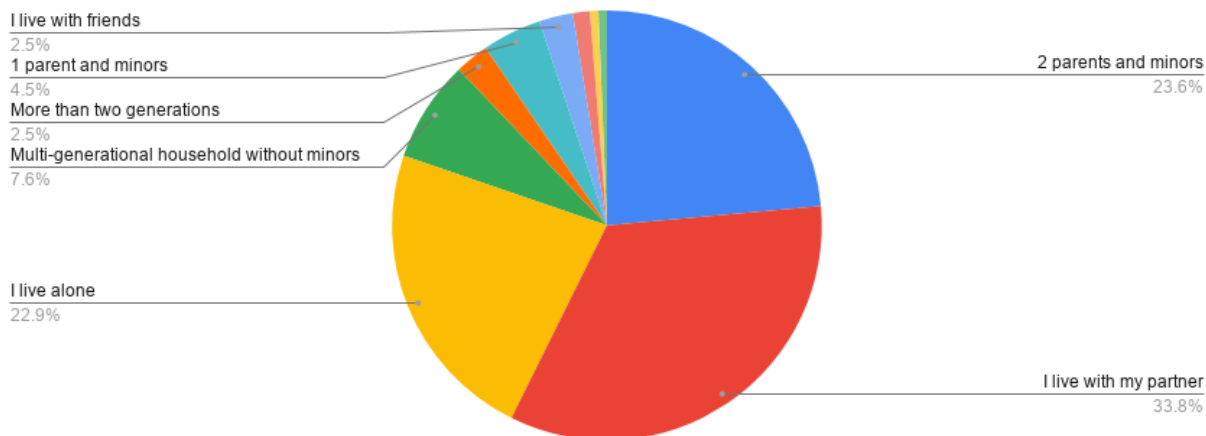


Chart 2: Household

The majority of respondents were living in households with 2 parent families with children, couples and individuals living alone. The remainder were either in multi-generational families, single parents or living with friends. Two respondents answered Sooke Shelter. It is unfortunate that more from these latter groups did not take part in the survey, as these are the individuals pre-identified as most vulnerable.

### What is your regular source of income (pre-COVID)?

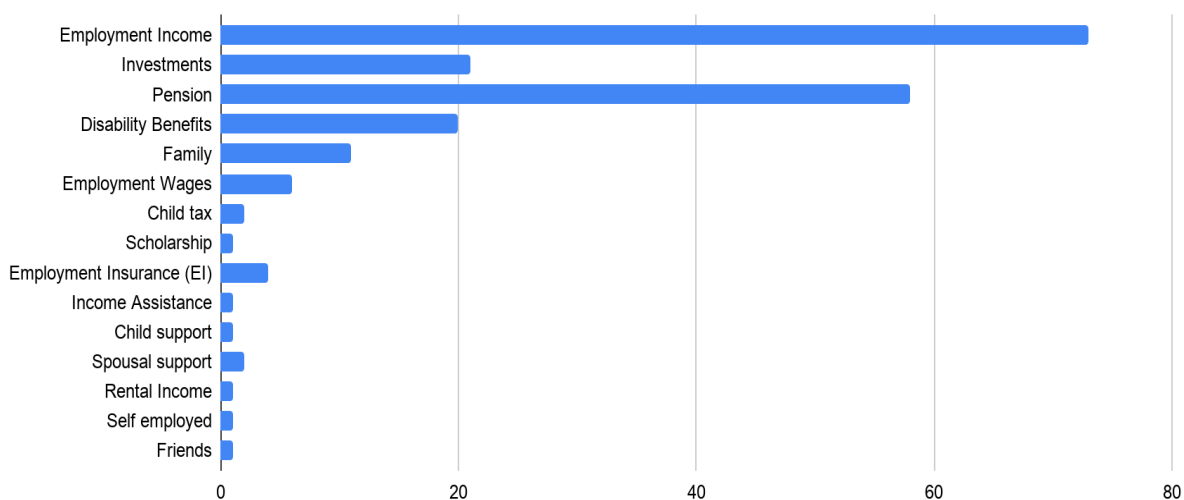


Chart 3: Income Source

Among those who responded to the survey, most gain their income from employment whether wages or self-employment. The seniors benefit from pensions and quite a few from investments. This is the generation that perhaps could afford to make investments, while the younger generation have not had that luxury.<sup>21</sup> Increased university fees and debts of one's own and then the future of one's children's post-secondary fees can be daunting and may not permit much saving, let alone managing daily life. It could also be that there is no longer a saving culture due to low interest rates and refinancing solutions.

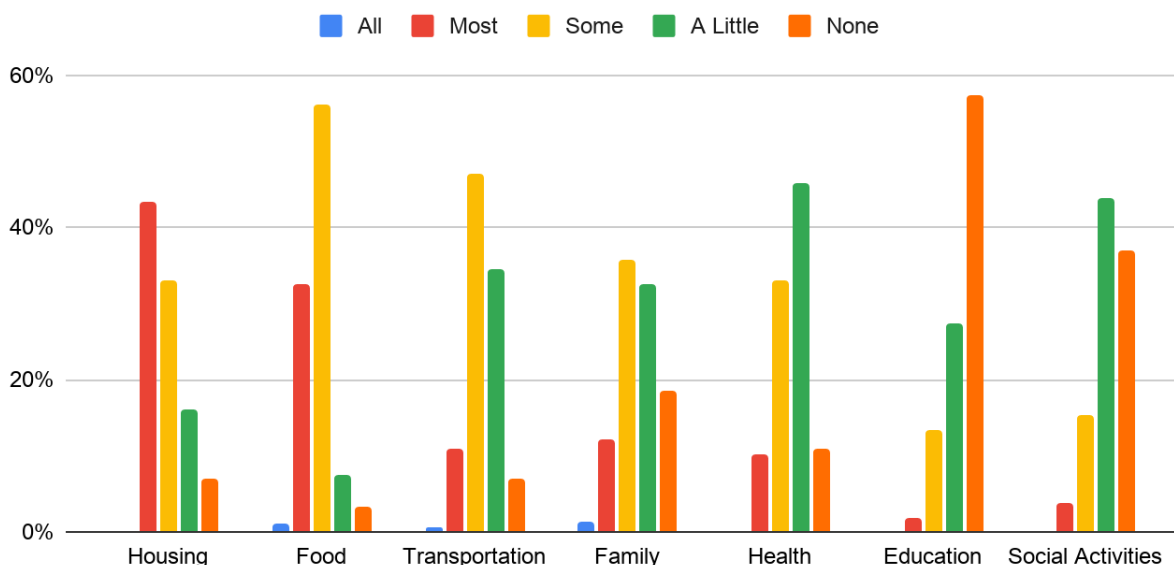
There were around 15% that relied on family for assistance. It was commented in the interviews that people in difficulty need to stay in the area where they live even if it is unaffordable because of their reliance on social networks. This statistic would support the statement that the family link is still somewhat strong. A few individuals consulted explained how they as seniors were paying for medication and treatment for chronic illnesses of their adult children, or that there was mental illness in the family and needed care. Missed credit card payments due to reduced employment led to loss of housing. There are many life situations that could lead to downward mobility, and some members of our community were fortunate enough to be able to rely on their families.

Among those interviewed were some who had previously lived in Victoria but moved to Sooke due to its relative housing affordability. Cities are pricing out the urban poor, who then move to the suburbs or in this case a rural community. The safety nets in rural areas are not as secure as in urban centres, which may cause further issues for these individuals, a loss of their social network and an extra burden on the already service poor communities themselves.

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<sup>21</sup> [It may take millennials 29 years to save enough to afford a home in Canada's biggest cities](#) - Financial Post

## What do you spend your money on?



*Chart 4: Income Expenditure*

Obviously because of the nature of housing expenses, it would amount to the greatest deduction in one's income. However, it is important to note how there are a number of people who spend much of their income on food, transportation and health. In discussions with some seniors who had already paid off their mortgage, they would spend most of their money on food after utilities. It was a way to treat themselves as they did not take part in many activities outside of the home. This may explain the discrepancy with the established theory that food is the last necessity to be covered. Social activities are a luxury that not many can afford, or the lack of spending can also be due to the lovely nature that can be explored for free in our region.

When consulting with the Sooke Family Resource Society, it was acknowledged that their clients, who were low-income households with young children either with two parents or one only, were living from month to month. They lived for the child tax that would come every 20th of the month. They live upon what is in the account that day. Transportation and child care are major concerns with regards to getting around to find cheaper food than

what can be found in Sooke, let alone medical appointments etc. Due to their financial situation, they are normally not in possession of credit cards, which limits online purchases and deliveries from box stores located in Langford that are more economical. Food is seen as a variable after the bills are paid, which is devastating especially with growing children requiring nutrients regularly. These individuals rely heavily on the Sooke Food Bank, Cobb's Bread donations, the BC Farmers' Market coupon program<sup>22</sup> - an initiative that creates a mutual benefit for low income families (fresh produce) and farmers (receive full price for their food) and the Sooke Country Market (promotion of its members to the community), Give Food Get Food program<sup>23</sup>, Farm Bucks (50% subsidized of local farm produce through the South Island Farm Hub) and the Good Food Box<sup>24</sup>. The latter four provide fresh food produce, where the Food Bank has a tendency to have more tinned goods with occasional fresh greens though efforts are made to improve upon that situation. The Sooke Baptist Church's Grace Gardens and the Sooke Region Food CHI Sunriver Garden donate regularly to the Food Bank when in season. It was added that the need for fresh produce outweighed the availability. It was urged that these programs increase capacity as only few families have access to these programs to date.

## **Social Assistance**

To provide some better understanding as to what kind of benefits are available and how much one may receive, one may refer to the Social Assistance Rate Table found on the BC government website.<sup>25</sup>

Everyone who is on a "fixed income" of some sort, feels the constraints of added expenses. In talking with various community members, it was evident that there was much suffering taking place in private despite getting financial assistance. One had problems making ends meet. There was not always awareness of benefits available or dissuaded by the bureaucratic hoops one had to jump. Having several issues to

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<sup>22</sup> [How It Works - Nutrition Coupon Program](#) - BC Farmers' Market

<sup>23</sup> [Givefoodgetfood.ca](#)

<sup>24</sup> [The Good Food Box](#)

<sup>25</sup> [B.C. Income Assistance Rate Table](#)

address that happened to fall across several ministries, created serious complexities and frustrations. The lack of affordable and appropriate housing was also a major complaint, especially among this group, as this was the biggest expense. The Sooke Family Resource Society confirmed that many young families needing assistance hesitate to reach out as they fear judgement and their parental skills questioned. Many individuals do not want to be perceived as weak or seeking handouts, as this is highly stigmatized.

During the Accessibility consultation held in Sooke in November 2019, it was stated that it was a struggle for individuals with disabilities to earn money because as soon as they earned more than the cap, their disability payments were reduced. As living with disabilities is a costly affair, every dollar counts. To quote Dr. Roy Brown<sup>26</sup> : “Almost all of us will experience a disability issue sooner or later in our lives”.

So, people are in need of more money to survive, and if they try to find additional funds through employment, then they feel they are penalized. However, the employment they might gain in their present predicament is not enough to cover the cost of living. What is even more discouraging is seeing seniors, who are supposed to enjoy their “golden years”, having to work again so they can support themselves or their families (grandchildren), often in low-paying jobs previously reserved for youth.

In addition, if one does not have a physical address, one cannot attain benefits, penalizing an extremely vulnerable population, namely the homeless.

Employment opportunities vary and with the gig economy, where it is more difficult to make ends meet on a regular basis. Worklink in Sooke has confirmed that as a result of the pandemic more people are considering working from home as entrepreneurs in the hope of creating better job security for themselves. Fortunately, Worklink<sup>27</sup> has various support

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<sup>26</sup> Dr. Roy Brown is Emeritus Professor of the University of Calgary, and Emeritus Professor of Flinders University, Australia. He also holds the position of Adjunct Professor at the School of Child and Youth Care, University of Victoria and SRCHN Board Director

<sup>27</sup> <http://www.worklink.bc.ca/>



programs for those who are unemployed, underemployed, precariously employed or need to (re-)enter the workforce. It provides self-employment services (50-52 weeks covered living expenses as well as business coaching), skill enhancement and assistive technology. It also has employer services and employer-community partnerships to create jobs. Worklink is presently considering the prospect of a business hub in conjunction with its future new office building, where meeting space could be made available for home businesses and entrepreneurs.

## Pandemic Benefits

Doing a consultation during a pandemic has its challenges, not to mention not being able to meet with the community members being consulted. Also, the data becomes somewhat exceptional and it is difficult to estimate how relevant that information will be once the pandemic is over. There was some curiosity about how the benefits provided by the government would affect the daily lives of Canadians.

Have you received special COVID 19-related economic benefits?

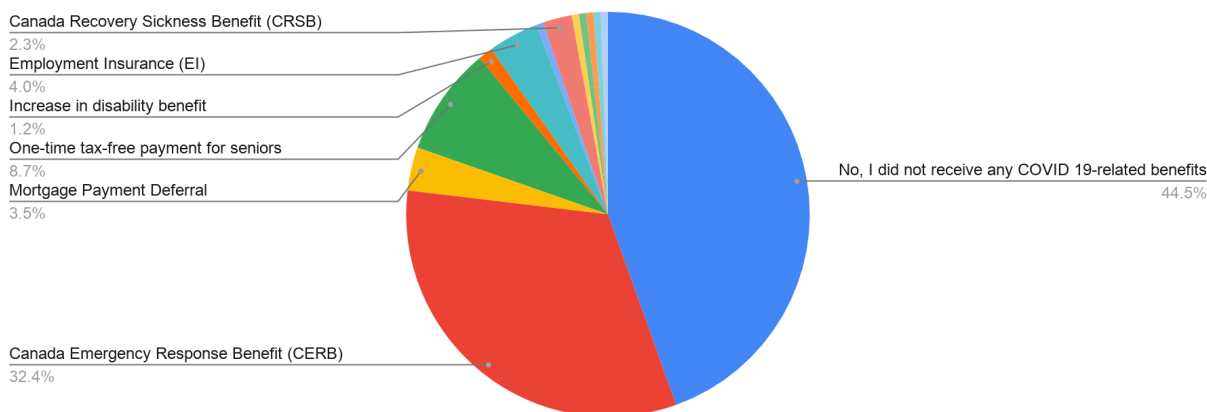
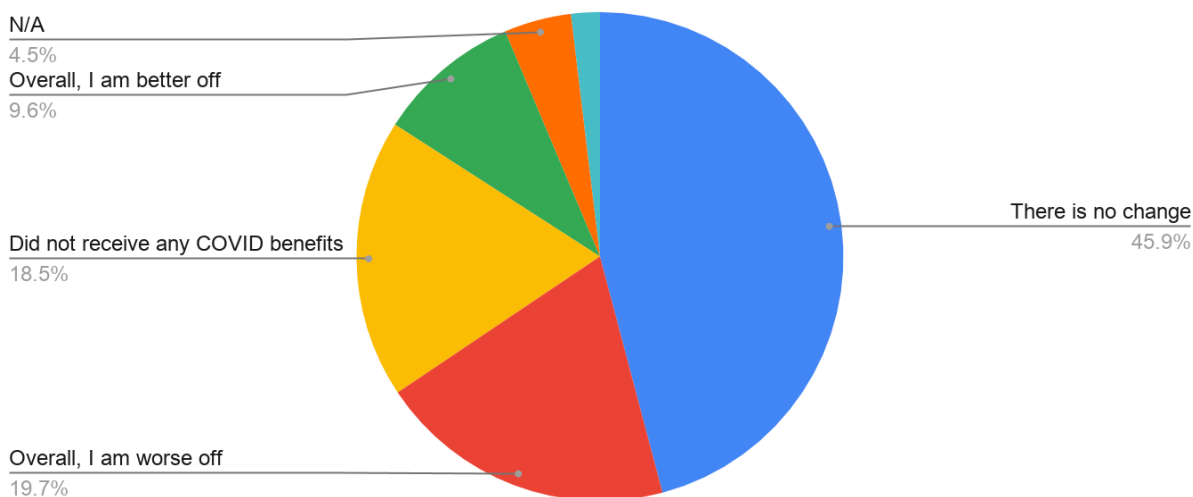


Chart 5: Covid-19 Benefits Reception

Indeed, there were numerous Sooke Region residents that received Covid-19 subsidies in one form or another, though 44.5% of those did not.

When asked if their situation changed as a result of the extraordinary benefit, 45.9% claimed that their circumstance did not change and almost 20% were worse off. Almost 10% claimed to be better off, which was interesting. It begs the question as to how poorly they were doing financially before the pandemic.

If you received COVID 19-related economic benefits, how did your financial situation change compared to before the pandemic?



*Chart 6: Financial Situation Change Due to Covid-19 benefits*

Among those who responded, there was one that mentioned how the extra benefit actually bumped the family into a higher tax bracket and were now no longer eligible for stipends for their children's activities. In that situation, the respondent stated they were worse off though they had more funds.

## Housing Stress

As housing is a major expense and this expense affects food security, it is only appropriate to evaluate what housing costs are in the region. Unfortunately, there is no data for the First Nations, but the other information will provide some indication of cost.

## Sooke Region Food Security Report (May 2021)

Housing (2016)	Scia'new FN	T'Sou-ke FN	District of Sooke	Juan de Fuca 1	Pacheedaht FN	Port Renfrew
Median monthly cost of owned dwelling	N/A	N/A	\$1,428	\$1,257	N/A	\$501.00
Owner households paying more than 30% of income	N/A	N/A	22.30%	21.90%	N/A	N/A
Median monthly shelter cost for rented dwelling	N/A	N/A	\$1,061	\$994	N/A	N/A
Tenants paying more than 30% of income	N/A	N/A	47.60%	38.50%	N/A	N/A

*Table 3: Sooke Region Housing (2016)*

Again, these numbers are from 2016. Though housing affordability was already an issue back then, it has become increasingly desperate.

It is evident by the amounts that the closer one lives to the services and amenities, the higher the cost of housing. The median dwelling price in Port Renfrew is a third to that of Sooke proper.

Over one fifth of all house owners spend more than a third of their income on housing. Though mortgage costs exceed rental costs, it is clear that the high percentage rate of renters who are using more than 30% of their income on just rent is alarming, especially District of Sooke at almost 50%, with Juan de Fuca 1 at almost 40%.

Real estate is generally thought to be an investment out of the lower class through wealth accumulation, as the equity will be handed on to the next generation to provide them with a better starting point in life. However, with such high housing prices despite a low interest rate, there is the possibility of becoming house-poor, where all is invested into the house and not saved for retirement.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>28</sup> [No, it is not OK to be 'house poor'](#) - The Globe and Mail

The District of Sooke Housing Needs report (2019) confirmed that the majority of the population could not afford to own a house, a townhouse nor an apartment. Therefore putting a lot of pressure on the rental market.<sup>29</sup> The report's findings were as follows:

1. Address market-rate housing needs for all age cohorts
2. Address non-market housing needs
3. Enhance supply of rental housing
4. Enhance housing affordability
5. Facilitate development of vacant land
6. Prepare for anticipated growth in population aged 65 years and older<sup>30</sup>

## Alternative Housing Options

**Cooperative housing** is nothing new, but by joining forces individuals may get the opportunity to get more for their limited income through pooling and sharing resources. Monthly housing charges are set by the members to cover the costs of running the co-op. A member's right to live in the co-op is protected as long as they're following all of the rules. Community. There is a strong sense of community because members actively participate in all aspects of running the co-op<sup>31</sup>.

Adapting present builds and single family houses to accommodate inter-generational or peer **Co-Housing** could lower individual housing costs through this shared model, while reducing isolation. The **Co-Caring** models practiced at Sooke Harbourside and West Winds, where seniors support each other, are not particularly affordable but may be seen as an investment to enable aging in place. The future Sooke Region Elders' Complex with 79 affordable rentals and a seniors activities and resource centre will provide support for the

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<sup>29</sup> Sooke [HOUSING NEEDS REPORT](#) - p. 71

<sup>30</sup> [HOUSING NEEDS REPORT](#) - p. 75

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/en/professionals/industry-innovation-and-leadership/industry-expertise/affordable-housing/co-operative-housing-guide>

tenants and the general seniors' population. It is through subsidies that the rentals are made affordable. Other pending affordable housing buildings funded by the CRD, including 45 shelter rate units, are scheduled for Sooke in the next few years.

An interesting option of combining housing, employment, amenities and perhaps even child care in one location, namely **Makerhoods**. Makerhoods integrates affordable living, space for light manufacturing, the creative explosion of the "maker movement," business support and a shared digital platform in support of a completely new paradigm to catalyze economic development.<sup>32</sup> One Makerhood could be on a regular one family home lot and have the same footprint. In these smaller living spaces, incorporated with work space, shops to sell the wares and other amenities, this creates an affordable living arrangement, lower transportation and carbon emissions and an attractive town addition. As the Sooke Region has numerous small enterprises, many of which cannot afford the present commercial space, this could become a vibrant colony of like-minded individuals that could collaborate, share resources and inspire each other.

Though affordable housing is important to contribute to disposable income, **renters' rights** cannot be understated. Landlord and renter relationships can be either positive or disruptive for a myriad of reasons. However, in conversations with service providers, some landlords are abusing the vulnerability of some tenants leading to insecure housing contributing to anxiety about one's future. RentSmart<sup>33</sup> is a non-profit that provides educational sessions for renters and landlords to reduce the risk of homelessness through rights and obligations sensitization.

## Number of Homeless

As stated in the recent Sooke Region Homelessness Report as defined by the Government of Canada<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> <https://www.makerhoods.com/>

<sup>33</sup> [Rent Smart | Housing Education | Homelessness Prevention](#)

<sup>34</sup> [Sooke Region Homelessness Report | srchn](#)

**Chronic homelessness** - refers to individuals who are currently experiencing homelessness and who meet at least one of the following criteria:

- They have a total of at least six months of homelessness over the past year
- They have a recurrent experience of homelessness over the past 3 years, with a cumulative duration of at least 18 months.

Various typologies of homelessness that are referred are:

**Unsheltered** - absolutely homeless and living on the streets or in places not intended for human habitation.

**Emergency Sheltered** - including those staying in overnight shelters for people who are homeless, as well as shelters for those impacted by family violence.

**Provisionally Accommodated** - referring to those whose accommodation is temporary or lacks security of tenure.<sup>35</sup>

In rural areas, homelessness is less visible and harder to identify, as many find spots to camp out in the forest etc. A local primary school teacher observed too often how parents would have to choose between housing and food, leading to families temporarily living in cars.

On March 11, 2020, Sooke Shelter Society facilitated a homeless Point in Time count, where 37 individuals were identified<sup>36</sup>.

- 18 spent the night of someone else's place
- 9 slept outdoors unsheltered
- 6 slept in vehicles
- The remainder (under 6) slept in other locations.

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<sup>35</sup> Canadian Observatory of Homelessness, 2017

<sup>36</sup> [Sooke Region Homelessness Report | srchn](#) - pages 18-19

Among them, 64% were male, 27% were female and 11% identified as LGBTQ2S+. From the same population, 17% were youth, 55.6% adults and 28% seniors. With regards to illness, 78% were using substances, 65% had mental health issues, 43% had other ailments and 46% had physical disabilities.

Sooke Shelter Society<sup>37</sup>, a local grass-roots volunteer support group for individuals experiencing homelessness, had 73 clients from January - July 2020 (p. 16). Among the 73 clients:

- Youth represented around 13%, adults 74% and seniors 13%
- 74% were living rough, in a car, camper and/or staying temporarily with others, A little over half were male and the rest female
- 29% were experiencing hardship, lower income or living in poverty, among them 74% were male and 26% female

### **Hidden Homelessness<sup>38</sup>**

For the homelessness report, a survey was conducted online and a visit to the Food Bank where 46 respondents contributed. Most identified as White Caucasian, where 35% of the total were male while 65% were female. It is known that many youth, especially those transitioning out of foster care, tend to couch surf. With low youth representation (3.6%) in this survey, adults dominated with 89% and elderly at 7.27%.

When asked where they slept the previous night, the answers were:

- 2% slept in nature
- 9% stayed with relatives
- 41% had a private rental
- 39% had own accommodation
- 9% "other" included motorhome, boat, friends

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<sup>37</sup> Sooke Shelter Society - <https://www.sookeshelter.org/>

<sup>38</sup> [Sooke Region Homelessness Report | srchn](#) - page 19

Though the grand majority of respondents were housed, they felt that they were one pay cheque away or a crisis away from eviction.

The Sooke COVID Shelter was established in June 2020 as a response to the pandemic. It was seen as important to house homeless individuals to reduce community spread and simultaneously provide much needed support for this population. In March 2020, 38 individuals were identified, 24 of whom completed the intake for service, 5 were referred to a motel in Victoria and 19 accessed the emergency shelter at Seaparc Leisure Centre. In July, the location was moved to Otter Point Road. As of September 2020, there were 15 clients, 60% male and 40% female. Five residents identified as indigenous and one was a veteran. As of April 2021, the shelter will become a more permanent fixture on West Coast Road at the Hope Centre, where there is more much needed capacity and support.

## **The Complexity of Being Vulnerable**

As can be seen in this section, there are many life situations that can lead to a situation of poverty. Such circumstances may happen to anyone. What was made very clear through the individual interviews was the distress such situations brought on, leading to depression and other mental health issues. One feels trapped. One is not able to plan the day, let alone one's future. Mobility issues due to injury or other ailments adds to the isolation. Also, not eating nutritious meals regularly, especially if one is taking medication, may lead to a continuation of a downward spiral.

Though all those consulted started out by saying that they did not need help, admittedly partially due to not wanting hand-outs, it was gradually concluded that they all would have appreciated some guidance to navigate the system, including those who considered themselves to be strong personalities. Examples of guidance would be to have someone who could advocate to help gain benefits, get appropriate medical attention, attain affordable housing, get assistance with income tax returns<sup>39</sup>, gain employment and help

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<sup>39</sup> See the Sooke Region Volunteer Centre for its annual free tax clinic



identify their rights. A navigator to find ways to get more money in the pockets of individuals, as well as facilitate necessary support. To be able to help such individuals, who might be “hiding”, is difficult and may be achieved through trust-building through present support services.

Attempts must be made to create an equitable playing field, i.e. what is right, just and fair. Provincial Equity Guides exist and should be utilized in all community planning, including socio-economic and indigenous policies and practices.<sup>40</sup>

## Population That is Food Insecure

In Canada, 4 million people are food insecure.

1 in 6 Canadian children under the age of 18 is affected by household food insecurity. Households with children led by female lone parents are especially vulnerable to food insecurity; one-third of these households are food-insecure.<sup>41</sup>

44% of Canadians say it would be difficult to meet their obligations if their pay was delayed by one week.<sup>42</sup>

12% of British Columbians are food insecure.<sup>43</sup>

## Market Basket Measure

Statistics Canada uses the cost of the Nutritious Food Basket, aka the Market Basket Measure (MBM), to determine the low income thresholds of poverty based upon the cost of a basket of food, clothing, shelter, transportation, and other items for individuals and families representing a modest basic standard of living. A family with disposable income

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<sup>40</sup> [Supporting Equity in Planning and Policy Action Guide](#). - Plan H

<sup>41</sup> [Household Food Insecurity in Canada – PROOF](#)

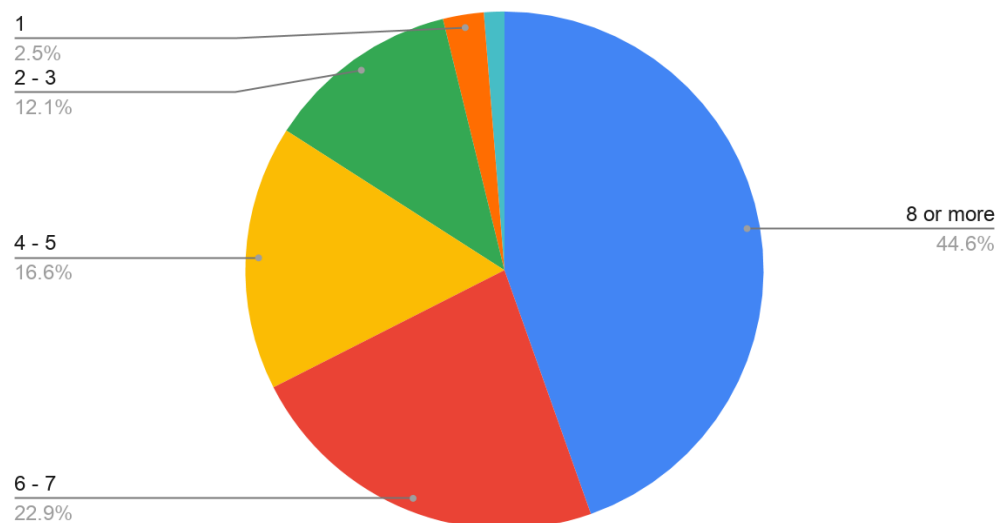
<sup>42</sup> [Survey Finds Employed Canadians Failing to Take Advantage of Improved Financial Picture to Reduce Debt or Save More for Retirement](#)).

<sup>43</sup> [Household Food Insecurity in Canada – PROOF](#)

less than the poverty threshold appropriate for their family's size and region would live in poverty. According to the MBM (2018) for a rural community in BC is **\$41,463.00**, and a BC community with a population under 30,000 is **\$42,408.00**. This is similar to an equally sized community in Saskatchewan and the Maritime provinces, and interestingly to that of the City of Toronto.

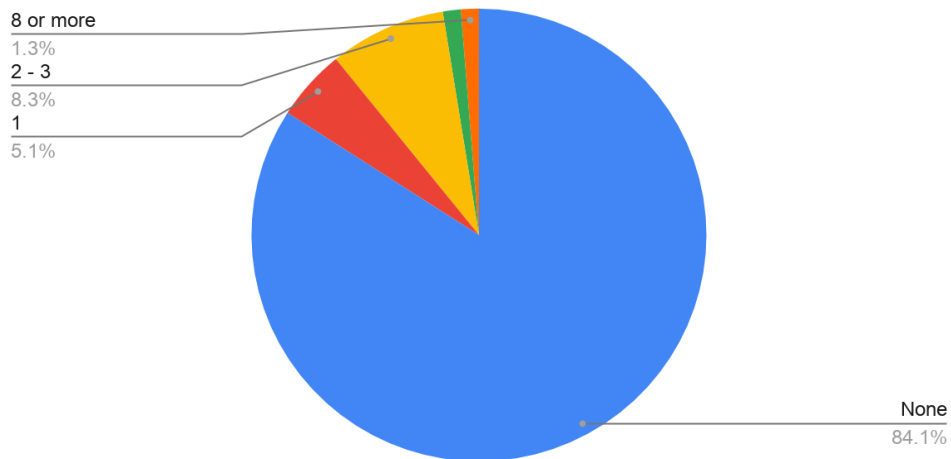
During our consultation for this report we asked about community members' food consumption frequency and potential sacrifices towards having a "satisfying meal".

In the last 7 days, how often did you have a satisfying meal?



*Chart 7: Meal Intake*

In the last 7 days, how often did you not eat so that someone else in your household could?



*Chart 8: Meal Sacrifice*

Sadly, there were community members who had to sacrifice their own meals so that others in their household could eat. Though this consultation did manage to have a wide range of age groups, it would be the population with families that would most likely find themselves in this situation or a partner with an ailment that needed to be prioritized. Understanding that single family households led by women are of the most vulnerable families, and not well represented in this survey, it can be estimated that this issue is an alarming one that needs to be addressed more than at present.

When asked about how their situation could be improved, the answers were mostly on the financial conditions.

### What would most improve your situation?

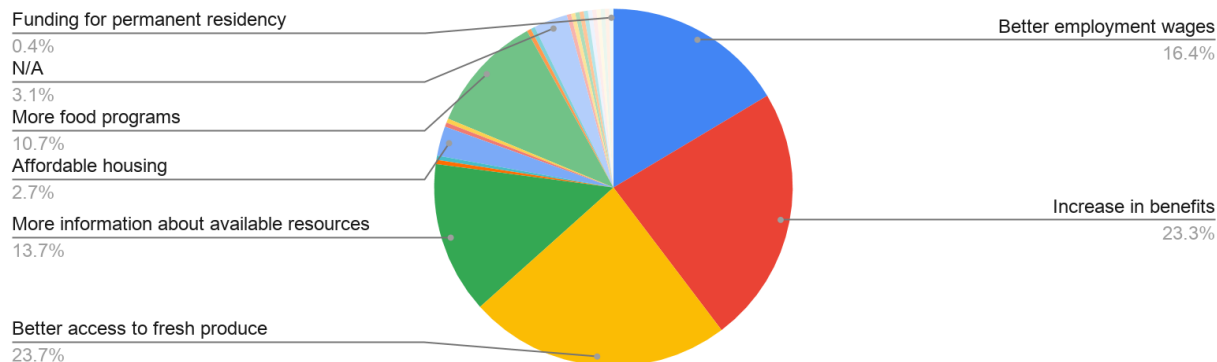


Chart 9: Situation Improvement Conditions

An increase in financial standing was the dominating influence totalling almost 40%, followed by better access to fresh produce at nearly 24%. Interestingly, affordable housing was only at 3%, while more food programs were at nearly 11%. Having more affordable housing would put more money in one's pocket for disposable income.

Returning to the Market Basket Measure, a Sooke household with less than \$42,408.00 and a Juan de Fuca resident with a household income less than \$41,463.00, would then be considered food insecure.

Econ. Indicators (2015)	Scia'new FN	T'Sou-ke FN	District of Sooke	Juan de Fuca 1	Pacheedaht FN	Port Renfrew
Median total household income	\$36,224	\$41,088	\$71,796	\$76,288	\$40,640	\$61,760

Table 4: Median Household Income (2015)

## It's About Income Not Food Supply

Graham Riches, Emeritus Professor of Social Work, University of British Columbia<sup>44</sup>, exclaimed how governments must own and act on the national public health data that food insecurity is an income problem, not a food problem. Covid-19 made this abundantly clear.

<sup>44</sup> [Canada must eliminate food banks and provide a basic income after COVID-19](#)

Nationwide, Covid-19 has produced a spike from 10.5% to 14.6% of the number of Canadian households reporting they are food insecure. Unsurprisingly, the key public policy pandemic response is income-based. The Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) has to date gone to 8.7 million people at a cost of \$72.5 billion. An additional \$37 billion has been allocated to the CERB transition plan for the establishment of new sickness and care benefits.

The adequacy of workplace benefits will be critical given that pre-pandemic, 65% of food-insecure households relied on employment income, according to federal food insecurity data<sup>45</sup>.

Those who face the biggest challenges, however, are Canadians ineligible for the new EI/CERB benefits, including the two million currently dependent on provincial social assistance. National data also shows even before the pandemic struck, 60% of social assistance households were already food insecure<sup>46</sup>.

“Beyond COVID-19,” he explains, “we should no longer tolerate the inequities of corporate charity and the stigma associated with relying on society’s leftovers for those in need. It’s long past time to reframe food insecurity as a matter of income security, and to ensure public policy is developed with human rights in mind.”

Riches concludes, the pandemic is not the ideal time to propose exiting food banks as a response to widespread food insecurity. Food bank use after all is surging<sup>47</sup>.

The Sooke Food Bank has indeed seen a surge during the pandemic, including the working poor dropping by on their lunch break to pick up food or individuals finding themselves for the first time in a Food Bank queue, which corresponds with observations from across the country.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> [Household Food Insecurity in Canada – PROOF](#)

<sup>46</sup> [Social assistance5](#) - Proof

<sup>47</sup> [Canada must eliminate food banks and provide a basic income after COVID-19](#)

<sup>48</sup> [The Working Poor in the Toronto Region: A closer look at the increasing numbers | Metcalf Foundation](#)

Anecdotally, while the survey was being conducted at a Food Bank day, it was noted that there were so few clients (40) that particular day when there was normally a line up around the block. The explanation was that it was family allowance day, meaning that when the cheques were received the families went to the stores to purchase goods. It was further confirmed through individual interviews that the Food Bank had become an income supplement as food was the last of the necessities to be addressed when all the bills had been paid. If the money was in hand, food banks would not be visited and therefore no longer necessary. Unfortunately, our society still desperately needs food banks and other food support services as a plaster on a deep wound that society still needs to remedy.

To note, Old Age Security and Guaranteed Income Supplement were identified as a key driver of substantial decreases in food insecurity among the poorest seniors in Canada.<sup>49</sup> On the other end of the generational spectrum, the rate of severe food insecurity dropped by one-third among low-income families after the introduction of the Canada Child Benefit (CCB) in 2016.<sup>50</sup> If one is raised in poverty, then one is most likely to remain in poverty.<sup>51</sup> Providing the necessary support in life, especially early on, is an investment in society.

## **Universal Basic Income**

Basic Income Guarantee<sup>52</sup> ensures everyone an income sufficient to meet basic needs and live with dignity, regardless of work status.

A form of BIG was established in 1967 with income guarantees for seniors. Shortly afterwards, in 1971, the idea of a wider basic or guaranteed annual income was the key recommendation in a Senate report on poverty (the “Croll report”)<sup>53</sup>. Also in the 1970s, both Canada and the United States ran extensive pilot programs, including a unique site in

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<sup>49</sup> [Food Insecurity in Poor Canadian Seniors is Greatly Reduced when Guaranteed Annual Income Kicks in](#)

<sup>50</sup> [Canada Child Benefit helped reduce severe food insecurity, U of T study finds.](#)

<sup>51</sup> [Just the Facts - Poverty in Canada](#)

<sup>52</sup> [About Basic Income](#)

<sup>53</sup> <http://www.albertasenator.ca/flashblocks/data/BT%20Poverty/Croll%20Report%201971.pdf>

Dauphin, Manitoba<sup>54</sup>. A Senate Committee in 2009<sup>55</sup>, noting growing inequality and persistent poverty in Canada, said it was time to put a guaranteed income back on the public agenda.

The current BC government studied basic income. A report from January 2021 concluded that there are better options available, namely a reform of the existing support programs. “The needs of people in this are too diverse to be effectively answered by a cheque from the government.”, but rather social support needs to be fortified.<sup>56</sup>

## Living Wage

Currently, the minimum wage in BC is \$14.60/hour. With such wages, families often have to make choices between necessities, including food. In 2019, a living wage for Greater Victoria was calculated to be \$19.39/hr.<sup>57</sup> The pandemic reaffirmed how unsteady retail and restaurant employment is and how women were the ones to suffer the most from this. The increasingly non-committal employment practices of irregular hours, part-time and contract work and not paying employment benefits across the board, have led to precarious living conditions. There is still much to be achieved with regards to increasing living costs but not equally rising wages.

It could also be argued that underemployment, as well as poor pay, is a factor leading to downward mobility.

## Affordable Care

The pandemic also reinforced the need for affordable quality **childcare**. Women were often the ones to stay at home with children who were learning remotely. The scenario of single parent households under such circumstances or of family illness, is a frightening

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<sup>54</sup> [A Canadian City Once Eliminated Poverty And Nearly Everyone Forgot](#)

<sup>55</sup> [IN FROM THE MARGINS: A CALL TO ACTION ON POVERTY, HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS](#)

<sup>56</sup> [Guaranteed basic income in BC not the best way to a more just society, expert panel finds](#)

<sup>57</sup> <http://livingwagecanada.ca/index.php/living-wage-communities/british-columbia/>

one. If one wants to work near home and not have the luxury of a home office situation, chances are one has to take an ill-paying job in Sooke or commute to Westshore and Victoria.<sup>58</sup> However, without decent wages women are not attracted to (re-)joining the workforce, unless they desperately need to and then may become vulnerable to unsteady contracts, leading to food insecure households. For a positive model, one could look to the Nordic countries that have been frequently ranked the “best places to have children” for their parental leave and highly subsidized childcare system, which has been a great equalizer with regards to gender and socio-economic equality and child development.<sup>59</sup>

Care is not only childcare. There are many individuals and families who are dependent upon **individual care** to function, whether they be people with born or acquired illness or simply aging. This can become a very costly affair if one does not have a family network one can rely upon. Services in the region are few. It has been complained that agencies that actually send home help tend to send different individuals each time due to scheduling, which leads to additional anxiety among clients.

## Charitable Services

The charitable services listed below include the Food Bank, warm meal services and other services that are connected with food for clients in one way or another in the Sooke Region.

### Food Banks

Though it was argued earlier that food banks are an indication of our society not meeting the financial challenges of its citizens, it must be clearly stressed how important the food banks are while systemic change is brought about.

#### Sooke Food Bank

- *Number of members per month: 700+ (⅓ of clients are seniors, increase in working poor and young families)*

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<sup>58</sup> [B.C.'s working poor: Affordable child care key to lifting families out of poverty](#)

<sup>59</sup> [Why Nordic nations are the best places to have children](#)



## Sooke Region Food Security Report (May 2021)

- *Availability:* 3 days a month but available 24/7, also during COVID. Delivery is provided twice a month. Estimated value of food is \$290,000. Milk money, Back Buddies, \$50.00 Walmart gift cards for school kid shoes and Christmas programs are additional projects. Clients may access some household goods, clothing and books, as well as important resource information, a gentle ear to listen and potential referrals to services and benefits.
- *Demographics:* Accommodates demographics of all types, with a noticeable recent increase of working poor and young families. It is acknowledged that there is a stigma attached to visiting the Food Bank, but it is a trusted agency with many vulnerable individuals
- *Origin and quality of food:* Donations from the public and local stores, fresh produce from community gardens and during covid local farmers, purchases from grants and donation funds. There is a predominance of non-perishable items, but fresh produce is procured. A recipe sheet accompanies fresh food boxes to inform those who are not familiar with certain fresh produce.

The Sooke Food Bank saw a surge in clients already before the pandemic, which was only exacerbated by Covid-19. The present location in the Sooke Community Hall is no longer appropriate for the high demand in food distribution. There have been calls for a new location with more space, as well as a paid staff member to run the operations, which is presently on a volunteer basis.

## Community Hot Meals

### Meals On Wheels

- *Number of members per month:* 30 each time, 45 in the summer
- *Availability:* Warm meals prepared and delivered three times a week (Mon., Wed. and Fri.)
- *Demographics:* Seniors and vulnerable individuals
- *Origin and quality of food:* Meals prepared in the community hall kitchen. Food by donation, through the Food Bank and small fee \$6/meal.

### Vital Vittles - Anglican Church

- *Number of members per month:* 51-75
- *Availability:* 4 times a month - Fridays
- *Demographics:* General public, families, homeless, individuals with disabilities, seniors
- *Origin and quality of food:* Warm meals prepared in the church kitchen. During Covid people could pick up meals at a designated window. Provides informational resources.

#### Big House Community Breakfasts - Sooke Baptist Church

- *Number of members per month:* 80
- *Availability:* Not during Covid, otherwise on Monday and Wednesday mornings
- *Demographics:* General public, families, homeless, individuals with disabilities, seniors
- *Origin and quality of food:* Warm meals are prepared in the communal kitchen

#### T'Sou-ke First Nation

- *Number of members per month:* Open to nation members and guests
- *Availability:* Weekly on Wednesdays
- *Demographics:* First Nation members and guests
- *Origin and quality of food:* Warm meals are prepared in the communal kitchen

#### Pacheedaht First Nation

- *Number of members per month:* Open to nation members and guests
- *Availability:* Weekly
- *Demographics:* First Nation members and guests
- *Origin and quality of food:* Warm meals are prepared in the communal kitchen.

#### Scia'new First Nation

Information was not attained for this report, but it is presumed that this nation follows a similar practice.

### **Shelter With Meals**

#### Sooke Shelter

- *Number of clients per month:* Fluctuates around 20
- *Demographics:* Adult homeless population in Sooke, both genders.
- *Origin and quality of food:* Catering from local restaurants and donations from the Food Bank, provides service information

### **Other Agencies**

#### Sooke School District

- *Number of members per month:* 100+
- *Demographics:* school children and youth
- *Origin and quality of food:* Meal programs, gardening programs, food garden plots, weekly supplement informal service "Backpack Buddies". Some elementary schools: Sandwiches, snacks etc for those without breakfast or lunch. Select schools have daily lunch meals provided to some students; monthly fruit and vegetable program for schools, weekly supplement services (e.g., Backpack Buddies), as needed food provision to those needing some

## Sooke Region Food Security Report (May 2021)

extra nutrition. Information services provided. Grocery store gift cards are provided to some families. The local high school has a culinary arts program and two of the schools have vegetable garden plots.

### Sooke Shelter Society

- *Number of members per month:* 76-100
- *Demographics:* adults experiencing homelessness or near homelessness
- *Origin and quality of food:* Upon demand provides gift cards, provides service information

### Sooke Family Resource Society (SFRS)

*Number of clients per month:* 100+

*Demographics:* Indigenous, families, children and youth

*Origin and quality of food:* Food program, meal program, food gardening support, good food box to Sooke and Pacheedaht (twice a month), provides service information

### Better at Home under Sooke Region Communities Health Network

- *Number of members per month:* 70
- *Availability:* Weekly during Covid
- *Demographics:* Seniors registered with the Better at Home program
- *Origin and quality of food:* Purchases are done at the local grocery stores

### Sooke Embrace Facebook Group

If one is looking for immediate and quick assistance, Sooke Embrace has revealed itself to be a trusted source for many who do not have time to go through hoops, bureaucracy or are intimidated by service providers. Requests can be made by the needy. In turn, the generous and philanthropic advertise meals, clothing etc. for quick and easy pick-up. This Facebook group is an important addition to the Sooke support scene, having carved out a niche where it has a broad outreach. This has revealed itself through its membership, activity and local research<sup>60</sup>.

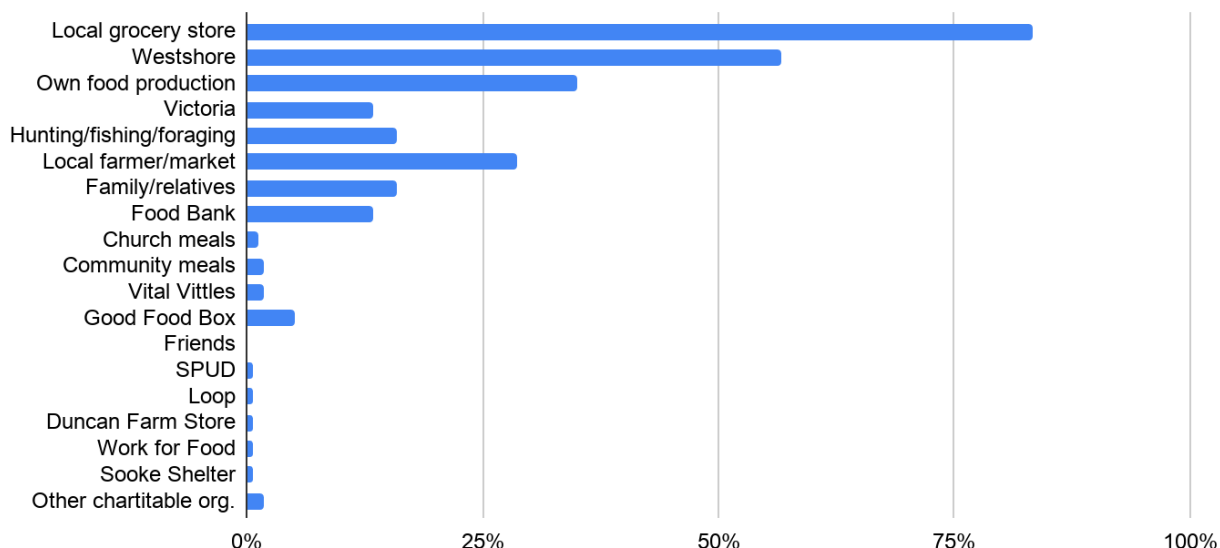
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<sup>60</sup> Living on the Edge - Homelessness in the Sooke Region - Feb. 2021  
<https://www.sookeregionchn.org/sooke-region-homelessness-report>

## Food Procurement

In the survey, respondents were requested to provide details about how/where they got their food, many respondents did have multiple food sources.

### Where does your food come from?



*Chart 10: Origin of Food Procurement*

Among the top three were the local grocery stores, Westshore (where the box stores are located) and gardening. The local farmer or farmers' market along with hunting, fishing and foraging were next in frequency. A variety of charitable food and meal distributors were in small numbers. It is assumed that if the surveyor had visited the Food Bank on a busier day, those numbers might have been higher.

Returning to the gardening aspect of food procurement, the survey sought to understand gardening practices in the community.

When asked regarding any barriers that were encountered when procuring healthy food, the majority of respondents replied that they did not experience any barriers. However, almost 30% stated that they could not afford it and almost 10% stated that they could not find it.

### What are the barriers you face to get nutritious food?

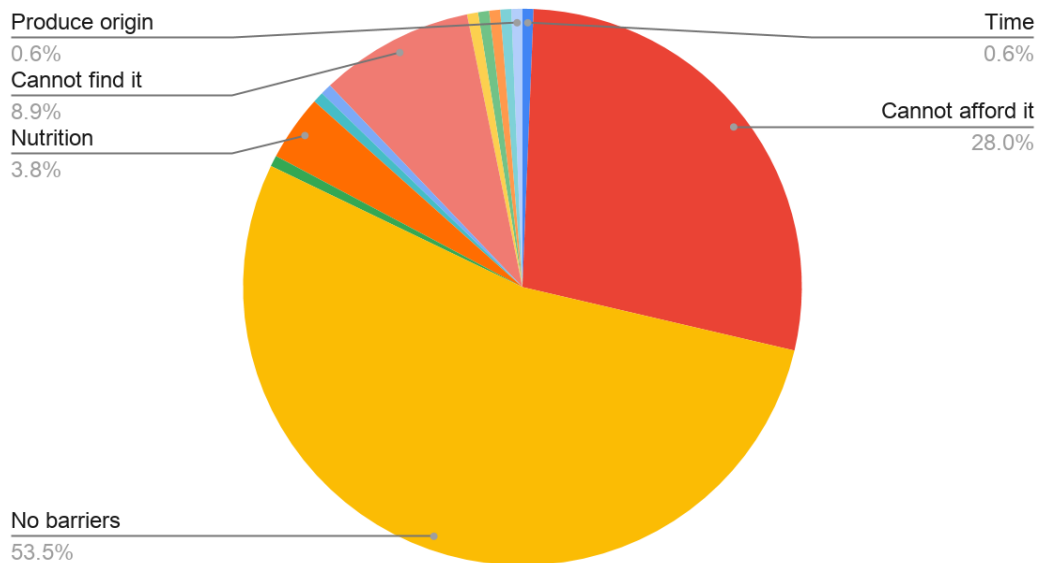


Chart 11: Barriers to Healthy Food

This data would confirm that affordability is a major issue to attaining nutritious food. If finances are lacking, it could be suggested that gardening could be an alternative.

### Do you have access to a food garden?

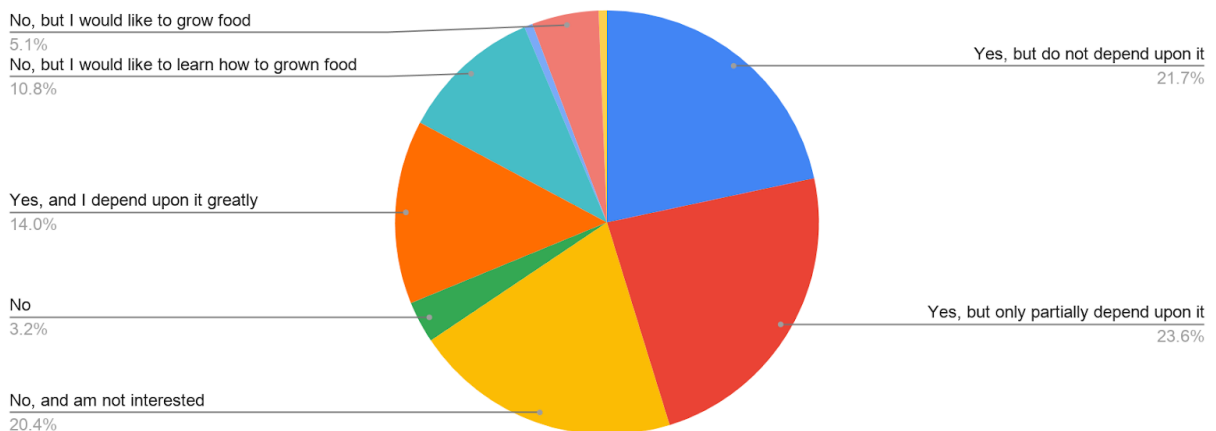


Chart 12: Food Garden Accessibility

With regards to gardening, 14% depend upon gardening greatly and almost 24% partially depend upon it. 20% were not interested at all. It should be stated that some respondents expressed their inability to garden due to lack of time or restricted mobility issues. Over 10% stated that they did not have access to a garden and would like to learn. 5% stated that they did not have access to a garden but would like to. Perhaps some garden matches could be arranged through the Young Agrarians<sup>61</sup> to have the able-bodied garden on the not-so-able-bodies' gardens and a share in the crops.

It was suggested by Sooke Family Resource Society that individuals and families that are feeling overburdened, should not be pressured to garden unless they really wanted to. The fear of failure in "one more thing" when their life situation is so complex should be understood and not judged. Gardening may contribute to alleviate food insecurity to a certain degree, but perhaps not sufficiently to balance out other personal concerns.

Once the crops are harvested, then comes preparation and preservation.

## **Food Safe Community Kitchens**

There are several food safe community kitchens available in the community, but most are reserved for the associated members, and often insurance formalities and custodial requirements may be a barrier for those requesting to use the facilities.

1. Sooke Community Hall
2. Sooke Baptist Church
3. Anglican Church
4. Sooke Child, Youth and Family Centre
5. St. Rose of Lima Catholic Church
6. Edward Milne Community School
7. T'Sou-ke First Nation
8. Pacheedaht First Nation
9. Scia'new First Nation
10. Shirley Hall
11. Knox Church
12. East Sooke Community Hall

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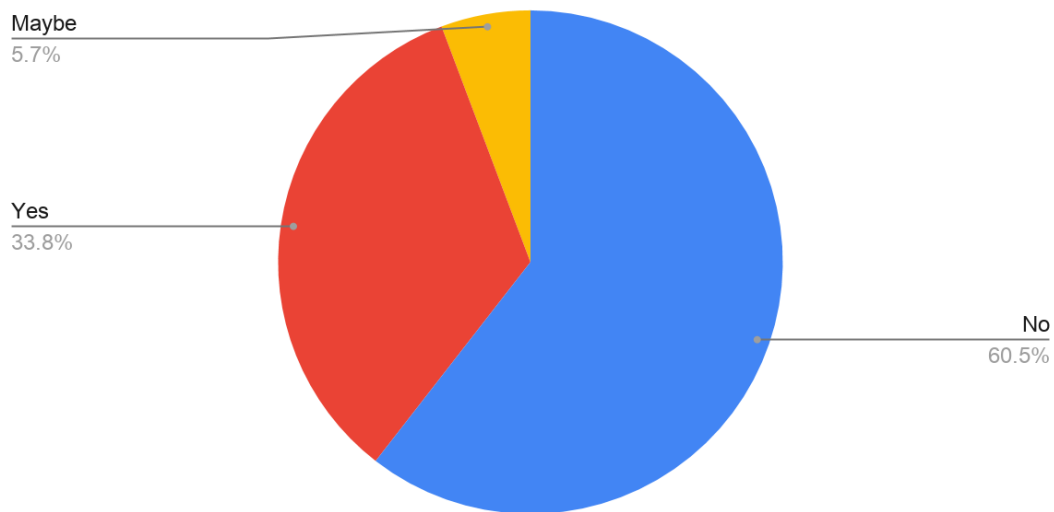
<sup>61</sup> Young Agrarians - <https://youngagrarians.org/>

13. East Sooke Fire Hall
14. Sooke Region Museum

The regional hotels, restaurants and the two main grocery stores are naturally included in this selection.

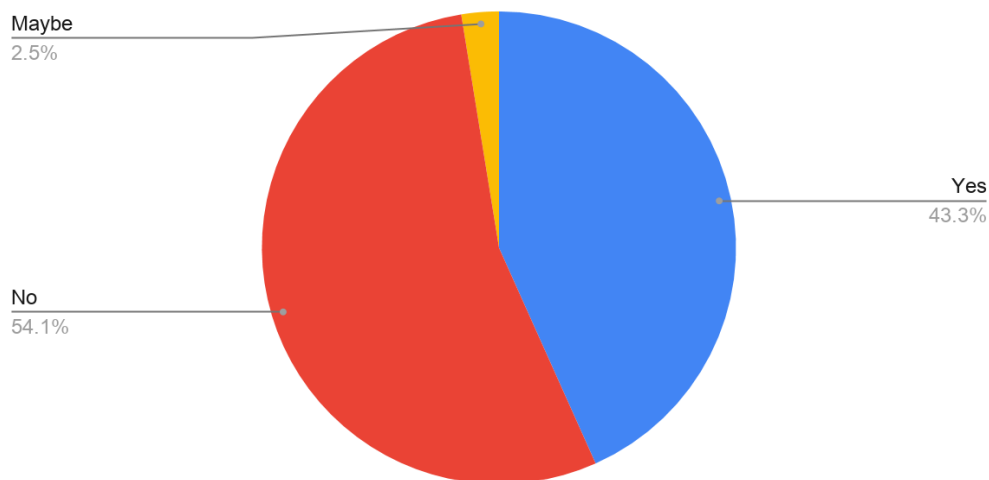
The question as to interest around accessing such kitchens was put to community members.

If you were provided with free or reasonably priced and COVID-safe cooking classes, would you be interested?



*Chart 13: Cooking Class Interest*

If a food-safe kitchen would be made available to the community for cooking, canning etc, would that interest you?



*Chart 14: Access to Food Safe Community Kitchen*

When formulating the question, it was hoped that the survey participants would comprehend that social gatherings were not meant for during the pandemic. Unfortunately, it was not understood as such by all. Despite this mishap, almost half expressed an interest in cooking classes and access to a food safe kitchen for making preserves etc. There were a couple of suggestions to facilitate cooking classes online so that everyone could cook from their own kitchens using their own utensils. An excellent option, albeit with limited community connection. Interestingly enough, some youth surveyed in the recent Youth Activities Consultation (2021)<sup>62</sup> expressed an interest in participating in family cooking class sessions so that they could connect more with their families and learn at the same time.

<sup>62</sup> <https://www.sookeregionchn.org/youth-activities-consultation>



## Social/Cultural Indicators

Indigenous Peoples' cultural practices and traditional food systems are mutually supportive and both are vital for their food security and overall well-being, yet these systems are being degraded or destroyed for a number of reasons.<sup>63</sup> It also could be argued that through modernity and convenience all of our health and food systems do require improvement.

### Availability, Accessibility and Acceptability of Food Resources

Vancouver Island is known for its more alternative lifestyle choices, where there are certainly many people that embrace organic foods and the natural environment. There are also those who simply do not have the time or energy to assemble wholesome meals or even afford the raw produce to prepare with. In any case, the items are available in Sooke. It is more a question of preparation time and skills and affordability.

Interpreting the numbers for foraging, fishing and hunting in chart 9, there seems to be some activity in the community on that score. So it can be assumed that there are no particular barriers for those with an interest and knowledge of that type of food procurement. To note, in several provinces the food banks accept meat from hunters. The Fair Chase Food – GOABC's Meat Donation Program hunters in BC share bounty with local food charities.<sup>64</sup> A guide for food banks is also available on how to accept these donations.<sup>65</sup>

With regards to fishing, in years past the local community could buy locally fished fish at the wharf from the local fishing boats coming in. Currently it has to be sold to middle men and then is bought back and sold in the community at an inflated cost. It is understood that this is due to licensing from the province. However, it is an ongoing sorrow to many that local fish is not readily available to the community.

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<sup>63</sup> [Cultural indicators of Indigenous Peoples' food and agro-ecological systems\\*](#)

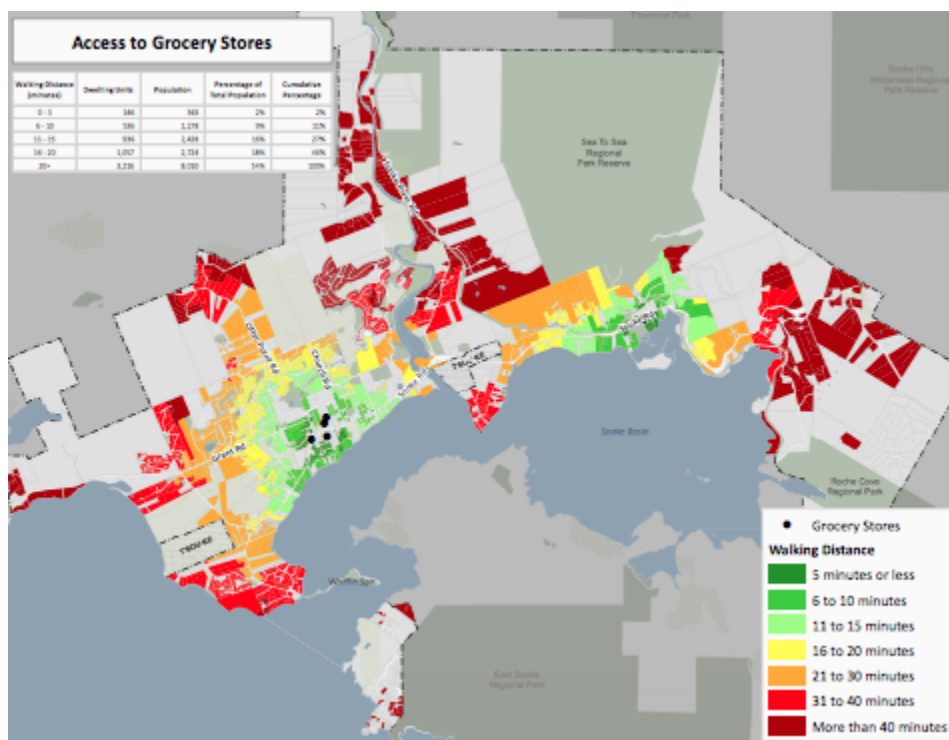
<sup>64</sup> [Responsible Food - Wild Harvest Initiative - GOABC in BC Canada](#)

<sup>65</sup> <https://www.foodbankscanada.ca/Safe-Food-Handling/Be-Prepared-to-Handle-Hunted-Game.aspx>

## Sooke Region Food Security Report (May 2021)

Once outside of Sooke proper, there are no all year round food stores, with the exception of East Sooke. Delivery options exist through Western Foods, but one has to go to the store first and pick out the items. Thrifty's, located in the Westshore, delivers to Sooke only. During the pandemic, the local Seniors Better at Home program<sup>66</sup> and Sooke Family Resource Society were doing grocery shopping for their respective clients. The Sooke Food Bank started door-to-door delivery during the pandemic for its clients, adding Port Renfrew to its route.

Residents in rural areas usually have a garden and preserve their produce, if they are able-bodied. There is the tendency for some to stock up on food through big purchases in Langford at the box stores there, where prices are lower. One would need a vehicle and strong arms to push the shopping cart through long aisles to manage those trips.



Map 2: Access to Grocery Stores in Sooke (OCP 2010)

<sup>66</sup> <https://www.sookeregionvolunteers.org/sooke-region-better-home-program-0>

As one can see by the map above, green indicates proximity to the grocery stores cluster in the Sooke core (the green core to the left), while red shows a much longer walk. It should be mentioned that due to lack of sidewalk continuity, distances are not the only obstacle here. The green cluster to the right on the map does have a fresh produce market store next to a gas station sweet shop. The inner core of Sooke hardly has any housing. Taking those elements into account, most of the inhabitants in Sooke are either in the orange or red zones, which creates a car dependency and a barrier.

Those living in the rural areas are car dependent in any case, due to lack of bicycle paths and the distance from Sooke core.

Three public bus routes go to the Sooke core with bus stops across from both grocery stores, arriving from Victoria/Westshore (driving a circular route around the older residential area), East Sooke and Otter Point. In a past study done with senior citizens<sup>67</sup>, concerns were raised about ascending and descending the bus with grocery bags. Families with young children in tow might also find using the bus to grocery shop challenging. At times bus stops were next to a ditch with no sidewalk, making it difficult to walk. The East Sooke and Otter Point routes operate only twice on weekdays during the day, so this is not always convenient for everyone, but the option is welcome.

## **Values placed on healthy eating, food and nutrition buying habits**

When looking at Sooke's image, it could be argued that its appearance provides some contradicting value statements around health. The region promotes itself as a natural outdoors paradise, which indeed it is. However, with the numerous fast food and commercial chain stores lined up along the main road when one drives through the town, the signal is another. Grocery stores have healthier items on the outer rim of the establishment, while all the "cheaply" priced processed items cover all of the aisles in between. Sweets and snacks surround every shop till, and vending machines are equally

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<sup>67</sup> [Published Reports](#) - Seniors Managing at Home (2016)

stocked with processed foods. Sporting events serve hot dogs and hamburgers along with soda pop.

Parents are encouraged to provide their children with homemade nutritious lunches, but time and again messages are sent home about disposing of plastic wrappers from processed food items or reminders not to bring sweets to school.

There is one natural food store.

The *Sooke Farmers' Market* was for years located on the side of a road in an inhospitable lot. Fortunately, it has been moved to a more accommodating location at John Phillips Memorial park next to the town hall. However, there are calls for a roofed all-year round market, which could further promote farmers and fresh produce consumption, as well as provide some community spirit during rainy days.

### **The Influence of Retail and Restaurant Chains**

When driving along the highways of North America, one cannot avoid the clusters of retail and restaurant chains in cities and towns, Sooke included. Brand is the factor which has an impact on the consumer purchase decision-making process. Brands provide information about products and create associations that affect the mind of the consumer in purchase process<sup>68</sup>. The predominance of such entities have a negative influence on our eating habits and may lead to chronic diseases, in addition to contributing to community poverty in general .

Public policy has played a major role, particularly through tax incentives and other development subsidies that give national chains a significant advantage. To note, local businesses do have more of a tendency to invest locally, provide more employment and keep the money locally than chains would<sup>69</sup>. Some would state that the nature of corporate retail and restaurant chains, where funds are not re-invested locally but rather return to

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<sup>68</sup> Henrieta Hrablik Chovanová et al. / Procedia Economics and Finance 34 ( 2015 ) 615 – 621 - p. 618

<sup>69</sup> <https://ced.msu.edu/upload/reports/why%20buy%20local.pdf>

headquarters is an “extraction economy”<sup>70</sup>. Picturesque and quaint communities like Chemainus, BC have older town cores that incorporate smaller retail spaces that do not accommodate the bigger box stores, yet encourage local businesses and walkability. Meanwhile, a growing number of communities are adopting land use rules that deter chain stores and actively encourage local ownership<sup>71</sup> to promote the local economy. Commissioned by the British Columbia division of the Canadian Union of Public Employees, a study<sup>72</sup> analyzes the economic impact and market share of the province’s independent retailers and restaurants. With regard to economic impact, the study finds that, for every \$1,000,000 in sales, independent retail stores generate \$450,000 in local economic activity, compared to just \$170,000 for chains. Among restaurants, the figures are \$650,000 for independents and \$300,000 for chains. Across both sectors, this translates into about 2.6 times as many local jobs created when spending is directed to independent businesses instead of chains. The study concludes that a shift of just 10 percent of the market from chains to independents would produce 31,000 jobs paying \$940 million in annual wages to BC workers. With regard to market share, the study finds that while BC’s independent retailers captured just over half of all retail sales as recently as 2003, they have since lost ground. By 2010, independents accounted for 45 percent of BC’s overall retail sales and only 34 percent of the market with automobile and gasoline sales excluded. Although BC has a reputation for innovative planning initiatives, on this measure it lags the rest of Canada, where independents account for 42 percent of retail spending. Among restaurants, BC’s independent sector accounts for 72 percent of full-service dining and 19 percent of limited-service dining.

In discussion with the Sooke Region Chamber of Commerce, it was explained how the high rents for retail space was actually leading to the inability of local shop owners to manage, let alone hire staff at minimum wage. Some accounts of local shop owners report a living below the poverty line.

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<sup>70</sup> [The End of the Extraction Economy](#) - Strong Towns

<sup>71</sup> [The Impact of Chain Stores on Community – Institute for Local Self-Reliance](#)

<sup>72</sup> “Independent BC: Small Business and the British Columbia Economy” [PDF]. *Civic Economics*, Feb. 2013.

There are larger communities in the U.S. that have banned chains of all types, but that has proven to be costly for low-income families that rely on the low prices that chains offer.<sup>73</sup> Indeed, our survey and consultations have shown that the need for cheaper food options is vital for low-income families in our community, as the present Sooke prices are too high despite having chains. If transportation was not an obstacle, busing being too cumbersome with multiple shopping bags, Sooke Region low-income families would prefer driving to the box stores in Langford where they get more for their money as confirmed by Sooke Family Resource Society.

Fast food restaurants have been highly scrutinized for serving high fat and energy-dense foods, which are low in nutritional value and have been linked to overconsumption and weight gain<sup>74 75</sup>. In addition, fast food drive-through services provide a convenient and easily accessible way for individuals to purchase and consume foods without exiting their vehicle, also contributing to physical inactivity and distracted driving<sup>76 77</sup>. In the last several years, fast food related bylaws, restrictions, and/or policies have emerged as a topic of interest in Canada, specifically pertaining to the adoption of municipal bylaws banning fast food drive-through services. However, little is known regarding the extent and spread of these bylaws among Canadian municipalities.<sup>78</sup> The simplicity of drive-thrus are well-known. Perhaps healthier ready-made and affordable meal services with pick-up, delivery or home preparation options could be developed as a local enterprise.

With regards to the visibility of large corporate signs, especially when the store occupies the whole width of a block can be perceived as an eyesore, but also a direct/indirect influence of shopping habits. In some areas of Toronto, they have started to place the

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<sup>73</sup>[Retail revolution: should cities ban chain stores? | Cities](#) - The Guardian

<sup>74</sup> Story M, Kaphingst KM, Robinson-O'Brien R, Glanz K. Creating healthy food and eating environments: policy and environmental approaches. *Annu Rev Public Health*. 2008;29:253–72.

<sup>75</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The surgeon General's vision for a healthy and fit nation. 2010.

<sup>76</sup> Feldstein LM. Zoning and land use controls: beyond agriculture. *Maine Law Review*. 2013;65:467–90.

<sup>77</sup> Sallis JF, Glanz K. The role of built environments in physical activity, eating, and obesity in childhood. *Futur Child*. 2006;16:89–108.

<sup>78</sup> <https://bmcpublichealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12889-018-5061-1>

larger store above smaller retail and restaurant spaces, in order to reduce dominating signage at the ground level as well as provide a less alienating facade. It would be recommended that signage by-laws be applied to limit exposure and provide equal signage space to local amenities and provide proper connecting sidewalk interface to allow for accessibility. By making the larger stores have equal visible storefront space by having the main area of larger stores removed from the ground floor or the larger stores operate more in depth of the structure, there will be a more aesthetically pleasing appearance through smaller scale and physician accessibility as there will not be such great distances between vendors<sup>79</sup>.

When entering most of the retail chain stores in Sooke, one is surrounded by unhealthy consumables also when the stores in question are not related to food products at all. Addressing the retail food environment begins with checkout, where the vast majority of purchases are unplanned. By rethinking checkout, retailers could support their customers' health, rather than pushing the consumption of extra—and often unwanted—calories from candy, soda, and other junk food and sugary drinks. High rates of obesity, diabetes, and heart disease, the retail environment should be shaped not only by economic drivers but also by public health considerations<sup>80</sup>. It would be recommended to place sweets and snacks away from tills to prevent last minute impulse buys and exposure to children.

### **Nutritional Initiatives**

In consultation with Sooke Family Resource Society, it was confirmed that low-income households were indeed aware of nutritional practices, but fresh produce affordability was their main obstacle. The processed foods are cheaper and filling; staving off hunger. Increasing existing fresh produce programs would be an important community value statement. The cost included in subsidized programming is still an obstacle for many in the low-income category.

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<sup>79</sup> [Retail Design Manual](#) - City of Toronto (2019) - p. 21

<sup>80</sup> [Temptation at Checkout](#) - Center for Science in the Public Interest

In the past, Island Health Public Health Nutrition Program tried to address the snacks and vending machines at the tills as well as in the schools. They did not have much success but might be willing to engage on this after the pandemic. There was a very detailed policy about food and Island Health worked with the schools to decrease the amount of unhealthy foods being consumed as well as sold for fundraising. There was a really successful snack program at Ecole Poirier but when the teacher who coordinated it left it was discontinued.

The “Healthy Schools, Healthy Communities” roundtable facilitated by SD62 and Island Health work together with partners to improve the health of the children through educational and food programming.

Seaparc Leisure Centre does aim towards a healthier environment for recreation facilities through the “Stay Active Eat Healthy” *healthy food and beverage approach*.<sup>81</sup> Perhaps something to be adopted throughout the region including the district.

### **Creating food sharing opportunities**

Creating **social eating spaces** in public places and restaurants would encourage friends and families to eat together. There are picnic benches in some public parks and park benches at scenic spots. During the pandemic, restaurants were provided with some flexibility with regards to outdoor dining seating, which created an endearing ambiance that invited more restaurant dining. However, as most of the restaurants are along the main highway, noise and fumes from passing cars were off-putting. Shrubbery to create a barrier might be a temporary solution, but a more well-planned approach for future establishments would be advisable. The key is to make social eating spaces inviting and visible for frequency of use for meal sharing opportunities.

In the survey, people were asked if they were interested in **communal eating gatherings**. Some were a bit confused about this activity - “If I have a kitchen, why should I go to

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<sup>81</sup> [Everything Else - Stay Active Eat Healthy](#) - BCRPA



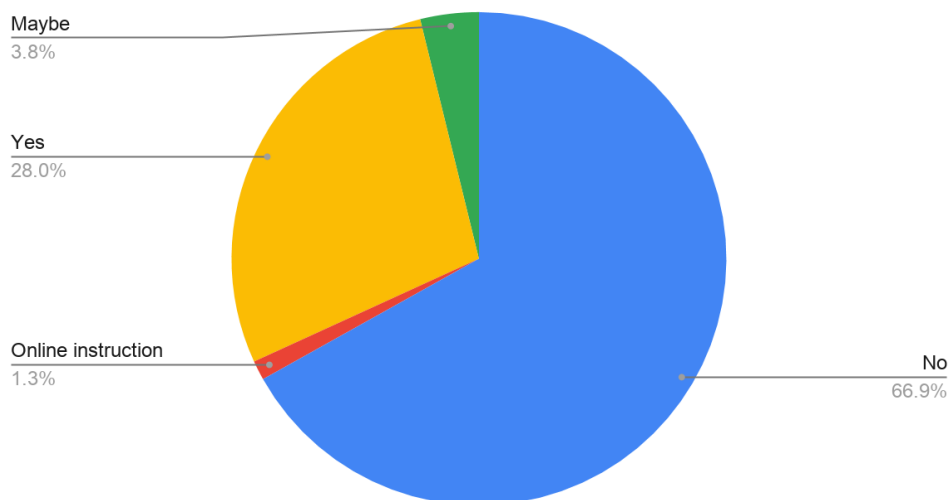
another one?” appeared more than once. On the other side of the coin, there were many participating in the survey who would like to facilitate such sessions.

For a few years the Military Family Resource Centre had a monthly meeting in Sooke that took place over a supper. It was very popular but was cut for reasons not understood here. Pre-pandemic, Sooke Family Resource Society gathered the parents of their preschool children for common meals and cooking classes. This was also an opportunity to inform families about resources and make a connection between peers.

Creating such opportunities can teach about nutritional meals and be introduced to other food cultures. With three First Nations in the region, there is a richness of culture and gastronomy that most non-indigenous have not experienced. Use of nature in ways that have been for generations are being passed on. Their regular communal meals encourage conversations among generations to run freely and connections are strengthened. Also, simply learning to appreciate fresh produce and the amount of work and resources that go into it, provides a more mindful approach towards agriculture and food waste.

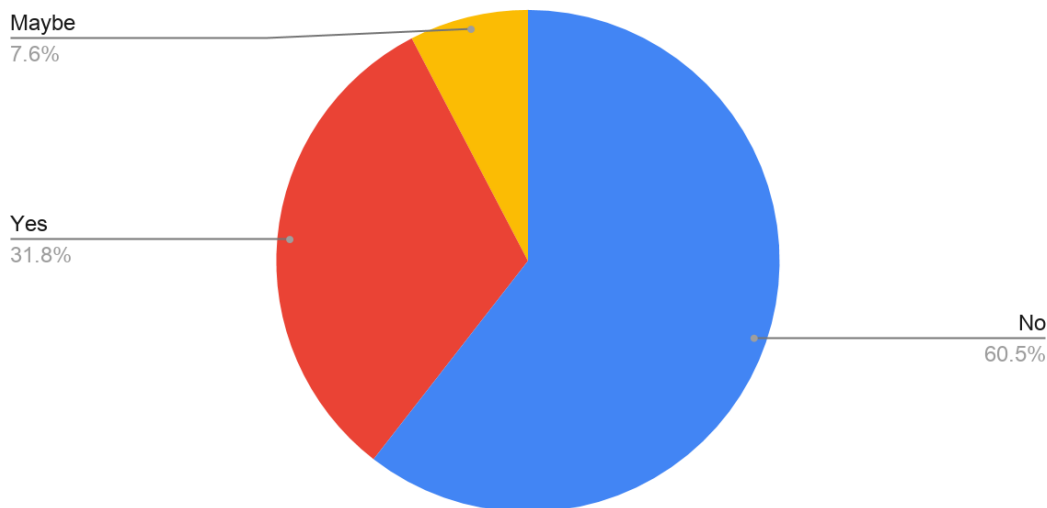
The District of Sooke Climate Action Committee's Education Working Group is working on Engagement and Social Mobilization, which support this approach.

Would COVID-safe cooking get-togethers interest you?



*Chart 15: Cooking Get-Togethers*

Would COVID-safe potluck dinners with fellow community members interest you?



*Chart 16: Potluck Dinners*

Almost a third were willing to meet for communal meals, either for cooking sessions or potlucks. Referring back to Indigenous food culture, the rest of the community will have a better understanding of rituals, practices and community connection, and perhaps even improve upon eating habits as well.

## **Availability of culturally relevant and/or traditional food**

### **Indigenous Food Culture**

First Nations have deep traditions in hunting, fishing and foraging. The Sooke Region is fortunate to be located by the sea and surrounded by forest. Some traditions, stories and language have been lost due to residential schooling and past federal policies. However, a resurgence in interest from not only the Indigenous themselves but also others in the region, can help strengthen and grow the old practices.

The T'Sou-ke First Nation has presently one community greenhouse, the Ladybug Garden<sup>82</sup>, where elders are provided with produce directly while some is used for the weekly Wednesday community meals. There are an additional three larger greenhouses, previously used for wasabi cultivation<sup>83</sup>, that will be transformed for community food production. To note, the wasabi crop included 15,000 entities harvested annually.

This nation also has a fisheries program that coordinates activities and advises on fisheries, seafood and habitat throughout the territory.<sup>84</sup>

The T'Sou-ke First Nation engaged consultants from the University of Victoria to do a feasibility study on aquaculture. The study indicated that oyster and clam cultivation in the Sooke Basin was ideal for ecological, economical and cultural reasons. Presently, there are 8 hectares of oyster and clam cultivation taking place. With some external investment, this project is entirely owned and operated by the T'Sou-ke Nation. There are four million oysters per harvest with the capacity to grow 32 million.

It was discovered that the well-sought after abalone clams grew naturally in the basin, but these could not be harvested due to natural protection. It would be suggested that actual cultivation could be an enterprise worth pursuing. The same feasibility study showed that the Sooke Basin was not favourable for seaweed cultivation, but rather in sheltered areas in the Juan de Fuca Strait.

The T'Sou-ke host initiatives such as the "Zero Mile Diet" and the "10 Mile Diet", where ingredients of meals are either collected around one's home or within a 10 mile radius. Banquets are held to celebrate what is locally harvested.

The T'Sou-ke Nation, working with three other First Nations in BC, is starting a three-year assessment of how to build Food Resiliency in the face of climate change looking at traditional resources. This project is funded by a grant from ECCC Federal Department of

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<sup>82</sup> [Ladybug Garden & Greenhouse](#) - T'Sou-ke Nation

<sup>83</sup> [T'Sou-ke Going Green... Really Green](#)

<sup>84</sup> [Fisheries](#) - T'Sou-ke Nation

Environment and Climate Change Canada. Workshops are taking place addressing how to live off the land. It would seem that only one generation ago, the T'Sou-ke were doing just that. A three-year plan is being formulated. Here is a program they are working on for the coming year around building resiliency around food security:

1. Digging the clam beaches between docks in the basin and inner harbour and do a clam survey and work towards making it a yearly event with membership, perhaps even paddling to the clam digging sites.
2. Measure the health of the community by introducing traditional foods, clams, oysters, crab, stick-shoes, goose-neck barnacles, salmon, cod halibut.
3. Do some community work on their territory seasonally harvesting in the food forest with the seasons like the roots, shoots, berries and medicines.
4. Look into how this project can play a role in bringing down adverse effects of diabetes, measure future health concerns and increase health from hiking in our territory.
5. This project could strengthen them in their territorial rights in title and their Douglas treaty rights.
6. Advocate for the environmental health of their territory in a good way.
7. Over time a routine with the seasons in the harvest within their territory would be established.
8. Growing food at home plays a role in a lightfoot print approach towards the zero mile diet and over time hopefully routine.

To understand Indigenous food practices, the best way is to actively engage with the three First Nations in the region. In addition, reports such as "T'Sou-ke Traditional Food Resource Study - ... and that's the way we did that"<sup>85</sup>, "Cultivating Food Sovereignty - Indigenous Food Systems on Vancouver Island"<sup>86</sup> and "Traditional Foods: Are they Safe for First Nations

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<sup>85</sup> "T'Sou-ke Traditional Food Resource Study ... and that's the way we did that", by Melinda Jolley in collaboration with Quaqua-yuk (Frank Planes) and Gordie Planes (April 2000)

<sup>86</sup>[Indigenous Food systems on Vancouver Island](#)

Consumption?”<sup>87</sup> can be an educational opportunity for those who wish to understand more.

Indigenous Tourism BC<sup>88</sup> promotes an initiative called “Living Legends: Experiencing Culture Through Food”, which states that “each living plant and creature requires nourishment. The experience of gathering together to enjoy a meal is a celebration of success and survival. When we explore the food of another culture, we learn about available ingredients, seasonal practices, and local preparation techniques.” This is not only a learning opportunity for the region to understand and use the bounty that surrounds us throughout the year, but also a niche tourism activity involving culture and nature interpreters that is worthy of coordinating efforts in the Sooke Region to achieve.

### **Ethnic Food Culture**

With regards to ethnic food needs, there are few immigrants in the Sooke Region. However, Sooke does have several Asian restaurants that are frequented often by the local community. The City of Victoria does have a larger and more diverse population, where there are shops and restaurants accommodating all tastes. Various cooking sessions have been conducted by Sooke Region Lifelong Learning<sup>89</sup>. “A Taste for India” was particularly popular.

Though the region is not culturally diverse as compared with other parts of Canada, healthy food cultures could still be adopted. Of particular interest might be from cultures with similar climate and conditions, in order to use or cultivate relevant locally found produce. Japan has a very similar setting to ours and has used millenia to perfect their fished and foraged cuisine, which has proven itself to be very healthy indeed. Sooke having a sister city

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<sup>87</sup> [Traditional Foods: Are they Safe for First Nations Consumption?](#)

<sup>88</sup> [https://www.indigenousofbc.com/stories/experiencing-culture-through-food?gclid=CjwKCAjwxuuCBhATFiwAIIlZ0RblZsjmulwsluSPXt2c-O9twwwXOwAoktGOHCNAys6MsNR0gmCglhoC-78QAvD\\_BwE](https://www.indigenousofbc.com/stories/experiencing-culture-through-food?gclid=CjwKCAjwxuuCBhATFiwAIIlZ0RblZsjmulwsluSPXt2c-O9twwwXOwAoktGOHCNAys6MsNR0gmCglhoC-78QAvD_BwE)

<sup>89</sup> <https://www.sookeregionchn.org/sooke-region-lifelong-learning>

in Japan may seize upon this as an opportunity. Other eating cultures may be equally identified and explored with further community discussion.

## Local Food Indicators

### Food waste

In this report, it has been stated that food availability is not the issue, but rather finances. With food waste, it is argued that hunger is not a scarcity problem, but rather a logistical problem.

It is understood that the local grocery stores donate fresh produce to the Sooke Food Bank. It is doubtful that all of the food waste is being donated, as it is deemed too foul or there is a lack of capacity to distribute. A suggestion would be to sell unbunched items (“singles”) for a lower price to get rid of them before expiry.

Another suggestion would be to have a depot to sell “unwanted goods” that are still edible but discarded for whatever reason by distributors or stores at a cheaper rate. There is an app called Flashfood<sup>90</sup> that works directly with Loblaws chain to offer food discounts of up to 50% on a daily basis. A similar app in Toronto, called Feedback<sup>91</sup>, lets restaurants post about discounted meals after peak times.

Or turn it the other way around, where stores replace all its quantity discounts [like buy two get the third free] with single item discounts to minimise food waste.<sup>92</sup> People can also be encouraged to write shopping lists or take pictures of the content of their fridge before heading to the store to avoid impulsive purchases.

The Loaves and Fishes Food Bank in Nanaimo accepts absolutely all donations from all over. They refuse nothing. They proceed to sort out the goods, whereupon some are

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<sup>90</sup> [Flashfood | Save money and reduce food waste](#)

<sup>91</sup> [FeedBack App | Diverting excess food by offering discounts](#)

<sup>92</sup> [How did Denmark become a leader in the food waste revolution?](#) - The Guardian

distributed to food bank clients, then next are the farmers that take what they can for animal feed and composting. Apparently the animals do not appreciate citrus and onions. Items that are packaged end up in the landfill. However, this process has reduced the amount of food waste that ends up in the landfill.

**Food Share Network**<sup>93</sup> was developed by the Mustard Seed in Victoria and is an interface between food suppliers and agencies that require food for distribution to clients through the Give Food Get Food project. The Food Rescue project of perishable items from food producers and sellers was originally designed for emergency food needs, but has developed beyond that. All rescued food is repackaged through a packaging centre under Food Safe guidelines. 40 agencies benefit from this program.

At certain universities and workplaces, there is a system to post pictures of leftover food from events that are immediately picked-up for consumption by colleagues. A similar approach is being followed by Sooke's own facebook group, **Sooke Embrace**. Meals are prepared and followers needing a meal answer the call. Perhaps local restaurants and food stored could do the same, especially since such philanthropic gestures are exempt from liability.

## **Distance that food travels from farm to fork**

The issue of food waste once the product has entered the food store and is no longer deemed a desirable product, has now become well-known. However, it is worth noting that over one third of food produced across the whole food chain is wasted; with 51% of this waste occurring before it reaches the consumer.<sup>94</sup> The more the produce travels to get to our tables, the more spoilage there is. If the origin of the fresh produce found in the local grocery stores were tracked, as most of them are imported from the United States, Mexico, and even further afield, there would be plenty of air or land miles to be reckoned with.

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<sup>93</sup> [Givefoodgetfood.ca](http://Givefoodgetfood.ca)

<sup>94</sup> [Innovation for a circular economy - Agri-TechE](#)

Having a bigger and more varied local produce production would save on CO2 gas emissions and provide tastier meals as the fruits and vegetables are harvested closer to readiness. Unfortunately, the success of large scale transportation encourages import over self-sustaining.

## **Food flow analysis**

As most of the produce, fresh or otherwise, do not originate nor are processed in the region, a food flow analysis from farm to processor to store is rather complex and very much outside of this scope. It should also be stated that even if produce in major farming areas are headed *per se* directly to the store, there is still a stop at the packaging plant, where further waste is produced. The nutritive value drops the longer the trip and the more stops it makes towards its final destination - our tables.

## **Ability of local agriculture to meet nutritional needs of residents**

Through round-table discussions with local farmers, it was acknowledged that the commercial farmers are not able to meet demand. They are producing at full capacity and still they are constantly being approached by community members to buy their produce.

Food grown on local farms go to either Victoria or local markets, local restaurants and hotels. Some are sold at food stalls on farm property. With Covid and the increased interest in buying locally, residents have been able to order from the individual farmer through referring to the online Food CHI Farm Guide<sup>95</sup>, where pick-up and delivery options were made available.

The Sooke Country Market has online ordering through the Local Line website<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> <http://sookefoodchi.ca/farm-guide/>

<sup>96</sup> <https://localline.ca/sooke-country-market>



When referring to the Agricultural Census 2016, the Sooke Region is grouped with Saanich excluding the Saanich Peninsula (Juan de Fuca 2).<sup>97</sup> It is therefore not easy to discern the actual farm numbers, crops etc from that data, other than the fact that there are increasingly fewer farms. When referring to the Sooke Region Food CHI Farm Guide,<sup>98</sup> understanding that this does not include all farms, there is a predominance of greenhouse and green produce and very little farm animal production.

### **Percentage of food consumed in the region that is grown and processed in the region**

There is no real data on this point. It is suggested by the content of the grocery store shelves, namely processed goods, come from Eastern Canada and the United States. In peak growth season, the stores may have fresh produce from the Okanagan Valley and other parts of BC, in addition to import produce.

### **Availability of local compared to conventional produce in retail stores**

As local farmers are at capacity and sell either to markets, restaurants, hotels and some community members, there is often no produce to provide to the supermarkets even if there was a willingness to sell them. From a retail point of view, there might also be some concerns around regularity and sustainability throughout the year due to the short growing season, and upholding regular supply chains to keep prices down.

### **Price of local produce compared to imported food**

Local produce is much more expensive than imported produce. An imported head of lettuce in season is \$1.50 in the grocery store, while a farm stand equivalent would be between \$3.00-\$7.00. However, it will be argued that the taste of the local lettuce will be

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<sup>97</sup> Statistics Canada. [Table 32-10-0403-01 Farms classified by farm type](#)

<sup>98</sup> <http://sookefoodchi.ca/farm-guide/>

more delicious and contain more nutrients as it was harvested more recently and at peak maturity and grown organically.

In the Sooke Region, local farmers' goods are generally considered niche producers for those who can afford to spend more for quality. Though it is understood that it is expensive to farm in the Sooke Region and the high produce prices cannot compete with imports, the fact remains that most people in our community do not have the disposable income to buy locally grown produce at the existing prices.

Farmers have voiced their concerns over restrictive by-laws that limit operations whether it be water taxes, the option to have tiny homes and modular units on Agricultural Land Reserve land to reduce start-up costs, the cost of farm hands or the lack of encouragement for young farmers to earn a living off the land in an area where property prices are so high, and yet many settled farmers on of retirement age not using their land at capacity and lack succession planning.

Indeed, the wide procurement of local foods for the masses is a conundrum. Though there might not be any silver bullet, through local coordination and ingenuity some measures may be found that could at least increase local food production that could benefit customers of also lesser means through subsidies, a voucher system etc. See section under "Potential Initiatives" for some suggestions.

## **Food Policy Indicators**

### **Food Policies**

#### **District of Sooke**

Identified agricultural strategies and policies for the District of Sooke are identified below:

- District of Sooke Agricultural Plan "Community Roots" (2009)<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> [Agricultural Plan](#) - District of Sooke

## Sooke Region Food Security Report (May 2021)

- District of Sooke Official Community Plan (OCP) (2010)<sup>100</sup>
- Ongoing consultations by the District of Sooke OCP including “Picture Sooke” campaign (2021)<sup>101</sup>

Food Security is addressed in Section 4.5 of the current OCP about Agriculture and Food Security Official Community Plan (OCP) Bylaw.<sup>102</sup> Gardening and growing of food is a permitted use in all zones. In single family, multi-family (the more urban areas) prohibits livestock and male poultry is prohibited on lots less than 2000m<sup>2</sup>, but the keeping of 6 female poultry is permitted on lots over 600m<sup>2</sup> (provided conditions are met).

Agricultural plans were made over a decade ago and unfortunately there does not seem to be much progress in advancing the recommended strategies for the district. The conclusions and recommendations remain very sound, albeit some data requires updating. There is hope that with this OCP that there will be some empirical progress on that score.

### Local initiatives to increase food production

- *Sooke Farmers’ Market*<sup>103</sup> at Memorial Park - a seasonal weekly food and artisan market
- Community Gardens: *Sunriver Garden* and *Grace Garden* (Sooke Baptist Church) which surplus produce go to the Sooke Food Bank
- *Sooke Food CHI*<sup>104</sup> - working to create vibrant, sustainable food systems for the area including a Farm Guide, Apple Fest, Food Tree program, Seedy Saturday and the FED Garden<sup>105</sup> grow bag project.

## Capital Regional District (CRD)

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<sup>100</sup> [District of Sooke Bylaw No. 400 Official Community Plan, 2010 Page 1 of 212](#)

<sup>101</sup> [Official Community Plan \(OCP\) Review](#)

<sup>102</sup> [www.civicweb.net](http://www.civicweb.net)

<sup>103</sup> [Sooke Country Market](#)

<sup>104</sup> [Sooke Region Food CHI Society | Food Community Health Initiative](#)

<sup>105</sup> [My FED Farm Garden \(Backyard or Patio\)](#)

- Capital Regional District Food and Agricultural Strategy - “Setting Our Table” (2016)<sup>106</sup>
- Regional Foodlands Access Program - Feasibility Study (Executive Summary)<sup>107</sup>

As the CRD is mostly rural, agriculture is of priority and has therefore provided policies on indigenous interests, land protection, securing the agricultural base and economic development, while including climate change and ecological aspects to their strategic plans.

The Sooke Region Farmland Trust’s objectives are to save local farmland from development and to return it to productive use by seeding the possibilities for a new generation of farmers.

## Food Round Tables

School District 62 has actively promoted Healthy Eating<sup>108</sup> policies as well has co-established with Island Health the “Healthy Schools Healthy Communities” network, where food security is discussed.

Island Health promotes food security through the provincial Community Food Action Initiative<sup>109</sup>, which aims to increase community food security for all British Columbians. The primary objectives are to increase awareness of food security, improve access to local and healthy food, promote food knowledge and skills, increase community capacity to address local food security, and develop policy to support community food security. Through this initiative, Food Security Hubs<sup>110</sup> have been established to develop community partnerships for the purposes of building community food security on Vancouver Island. Examples are the Capital Region, the Cowichan Valley, the Nanaimo region and the Comox Valley.

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<sup>106</sup>[Setting Our Table](#) - CRD

<sup>107</sup> [Regional Foodlands Access Program Feasibility Study and Business Case](#)

<sup>108</sup> <http://healthyschools.sd62.bc.ca/#healthy-eating>

<sup>109</sup> [Community Food Security](#) - Island Health

<sup>110</sup> [Food Security HUBS](#)

**Capital Region Food and Agricultural Roundtable (CRFAIR)**<sup>111</sup> brought together diverse organizations which were involved in the food system in different ways. The first ten years of our work focused on learning and networking, and undertaking public education to make food systems and food security issues a public priority. As the roundtable grew, CRFAIR established the Food Access Working Group, the Food Policy Working Group, the Farmlands Working Group, and the Food Literacy Working Group. Each of these working groups was made up of key stakeholders and experts who identified priorities and undertook research, education and action based projects to address key issues. It has now developed into a Food Security Hub and is supported financially by Island Health, as cited above.

The Capital Regional District has built numerous water fountains to deter pop drink consumption and plastic water bottle waste. In addition, the CRD facilitates the Regional Outcomes Monitoring (ROM) Collaborative, and; the development of an online mapping resource to identify inequities in the region through the visualization of local data and community assets. It promotes community health and wellbeing.<sup>112</sup>

A similar health initiative exists in the Sooke Region, namely the Sooke Region Communities Health Network<sup>113</sup>, but the aspect of food security is being addressed only now. The Sooke Food CHI<sup>114</sup>, mentioned earlier in this report, has promoted the agricultural and gardening aspect in the region.

Two unofficial food security gatherings between food producers and consumers took place in 2015 and 2016 as a result of lack of activity on that front in the region. It was ascertained that the existing farmers were already at capacity and that it would be in everyone's interest to increase local food production, to promote commercial industry in this sector

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<sup>111</sup> [CRFAIR](#)

<sup>112</sup> [Community Health & Wellbeing | CRD](#)

<sup>113</sup> [www.sookeregionchn.org](http://www.sookeregionchn.org)

<sup>114</sup> [Sooke Region Food CHI Society | Food Community Health Initiative](#)

through agritourism, but also to diversify our food through understanding our environment, our Foodshed.

## **Foodshed**

Food self-sufficiency seems like a dream due to our short growing seasons and dependency upon imported goods for more of our food consumption. The City of Campbell River's Sustainable Official Community Plan<sup>115</sup> has a chapter committed to food security and food self-sufficiency. By 2031, Campbell River will be at least 10% self-sufficient in food, a community garden will exist in every neighbourhood and the local farmers' market will be an important direct marketing opportunity for local producers. By 2060, it will have 50% food self-sufficiency with a largely self-reliant agriculture and food system, and food stores with healthy food within a 10-minute walk of nearly all homes. There are communities on the island that are dedicating themselves to his concept.

In order to take these steps in the Sooke Region, an overview of our Foodshed is required. A Foodshed is a catchment area for our food, which is geographical, financial and cultural. It's both natural and human-built, and its food source is from both land and water by traditional and conventional means. It is the entirety of a system that moves from the source to the consumer.

A Foodshed working group consisting of farmers and interested parties, gathered in 2015 came with the following.

Problem analysis:

1. The demand for local product is exceeding supply
2. Consumers are detached from agriculture, lack of awareness
3. No organized produce sales organization in the region
  - a Farmers' Market has been established since then
4. High cost of small farmers' input due to low quantity purchase
5. Lack of infrastructure to facilitate production at a lower cost

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<sup>115</sup>[https://www.campbellriver.ca/docs/default-source/Document-Library/plans/scr-framework-integrated-community-sustainability-plan.pdf?sfvrsn=8bf58d09\\_1](https://www.campbellriver.ca/docs/default-source/Document-Library/plans/scr-framework-integrated-community-sustainability-plan.pdf?sfvrsn=8bf58d09_1) - p. 59

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6. Strict regulations and legal structures inhibit growth and entrepreneurship
7. No succession planning
8. Lack of possibilities for young potential farmers to start in agriculture due to extremely high start-up costs
9. Traditional food gathering practices are not understood by most

Strategic priorities identified by the same group:

1. Understand what is challenging the abilities of the Sooke Region to produce enough food
2. Create a coordinated and managed Foodshed
3. Promote local produce
4. Get consumer buy-in
5. Create opportunities for local businesses and tourism sector
6. Create other beneficial opportunities in the region
7. Regional sales of local food, i.e. a community food store or cooperative
8. Reduce cost for farmers
9. Access locally grown seedlings
10. Increase availability of service of mechanics, bailing etc
11. Reduce cost of infrastructure, i.e. a cooperative machinery pool, abattoir
12. Food processing facilities
13. Understand legalities to facilitate growth
14. Establish succession in farming as an occupation
15. Increase interest in farming as an occupation
16. Maintain/increase agricultural land percentage in the region
17. Promote cooperative farming
18. Promote tenure
19. Research financial incentives
20. Find non-intrusive/non-destructive ways to benefit more from the natural bounty in the region
21. Promote agri-tourism

In turn, community members had an opportunity to chime in. In 2016, the Sooke Region Health Summit was organized where community members addressed four main topics, namely physical and mental health, age-friendly community, socialization and food security.

The five key findings from the Foodshed working group were:

1. Significant concern exists over the high cost of healthy food (including organic), especially for low income families in the Sooke Region

2. Service agencies, including the Sooke Food Bank and churches, are straining to meet the demand for healthy food
3. Many families lack the opportunity and/or skills to grow or prepare healthy food
4. The limited availability of locally produced healthy food is linked to restrictive or prohibitive regulations and the high costs of production (land, labour, inputs)
5. Potentially productive land is underutilized in the Sooke Region.

We could also include regenerative farming as a way to capture CO2.

These align with most recommendations made in District and CRD strategies, with some room for holistic visioning. The ideas and willingness are present in the community. It is time to move forward with practical implementation.

## Food Policy Councils

In 2019, the Federal Government, through Agriculture and Agri-food Canada, published a “Food Policy for Canada”<sup>116</sup> where a roadmap for 2019-2024 is laid out to improve upon the six following points:

**1. Vibrant communities:** Improved community capacity and resilience to food-related challenges. Innovative community-led and community-based initiatives contribute to vibrant and resilient communities that support individuals and households facing immediate and long term food-related challenges by providing culturally diverse solutions in an inclusive manner.

**2. Increased connections within food systems:** Increased governance spaces and partnerships that connect multiple sectors and actors across the food system. Increased collaboration on food-related issues across sectors of government, society, fields of work, and academic disciplines is a central component of food policy. Increased connections across the Canadian food system will strengthen our ability to make progress together on food-related issues and adapt to emerging needs.

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<sup>116</sup> [Agriculture and Agri-food Canada: Food Policy for Canada - Everyone at the Table](#)



**3. Improved food-related health outcomes:** Improved health status of Canadians related to food consumption and reduced burden of diet-related disease, particularly among groups at higher risk of food insecurity. The food that Canadians eat is a key determinant of their health and wellbeing. Everyone involved in the food system can work together to make it easier for people living in Canada to have sufficient access to safe and nutritious food, maintain a healthy diet that is culturally diverse, and reduce the burden of diet-related disease.

**4. Strong Indigenous food systems:** To be co-developed in partnership with Indigenous communities and organizations. The Food Policy for Canada will help advance the Government of Canada's commitment to Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples, build new relationships based on respect and partnership, and support strong and prosperous First Nations, Inuit and Métis food systems – as defined by communities themselves.

**5. Sustainable food practices:** Improvements in the state of the Canadian environment through the use of practices along the food value chain that reduce environmental impact and that improve the climate resilience of the Canadian food system. It is essential to maintain the health of our natural resources so that we can continue to provide food for future generations. Greater efforts to develop and maintain sustainable food practices will help make better use of natural resources, lower greenhouse gas emissions, and create efficiencies and financial savings across the food system.

**6. Inclusive economic growth:** Improved access to opportunities in the agriculture and food sector for all Canadians within a diversified, economically viable, and sustainable food system. There is tremendous potential for economic growth within Canada's food system given the growing global demand for high-quality food that is nutritious and sustainably-produced. Canada is well-positioned to supply this demand while maintaining an increasingly diversified and inclusive food and agriculture sector.

By having a coordinated body such as a Food Policy Council to look at our food systems holistically and not only from the provider or beneficiary perspective, a more comprehensive food provision could be established.

Food CHI members met with several other non-profits in early 2020 and the group had identified the creation of a Sooke Region Food Policy Council. At that time, the District of Sooke was not in the position to act on this initiative. Now with the new financial incentives from the province and grant funders, this would be an ideal time to establish such a council for the region. It is recommended that the Sooke Region Food Policy Council either fall under the District of Sooke's Community Economic Development Committee with representation from the CRD or a separate entity with strong representation by the District of Sooke and the CRD.

## **Food Hubs**

In 2021, the province of BC invested \$2.1 million in the development of an island-wide food hub network.<sup>117</sup> This is to establish the economic stability and growth of small and middle-sized businesses and farms in the hope to reduce food insecurity. Port Alberni is showing some success already with seafood processing and access to a commercial kitchen where food processors may refine and develop new products.<sup>118</sup> The new additions Cowichan Valley and Victoria (South Island) will support farming and food processing, while Bowser will focus much like Port Alberni on seafood processing. In Cariboo, their food hub includes rental opportunities for the food safe kitchen, while also benefiting from workshops and training.<sup>119</sup>

There are many independent entrepreneurs, agricultural, artisanal and others, in the Sooke Region that would greatly benefit from such occasional rentals as this would reduce investment costs. Such activities could also provide the community exposure to ocean and

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<sup>117</sup> [Province invests \\$2M in three Vancouver Island food hubs – Sooke News Mirror](#)

<sup>118</sup> [Port Alberni food hub opens commercial kitchen space – BC Local News](#)

<sup>119</sup> [B.C.'s newest 'food hub' opens in Cariboo region to support food entrepreneurs](#) - CBC News

land produce, and hopefully provide an affordable and healthy food option. As identified earlier in this report, there are numerous food safe kitchens in the Sooke region of varying sizes, which could be potentially utilized with the understanding that there are liability and availability issues to be resolved for such use.

As the South Island Food Hub in Victoria is partners with the Capital Region Food and Agriculture Initiatives Roundtable (CRFAIR) and the Foodshare Network to promote a healthy and sustainable food system in the Capital Region with a focus on land agriculture, it might be suggested that the Sooke Region could be sidelined due to the Sooke curve geographical divide, as has happened in the past with other Western Community collaborations. A couple of Sooke farmers are already actively participating in the South Island Food Hub, and in April 2021 delivery of produce along aggregation points on distribution routes were being considered.

It would depend upon this region's commitment and leadership representation on how this would be organized. A choice would have to be made whether to actively join this group or to have a separate Sooke Region Food Hub or a "sub-hub" in order to allow for larger collaboration opportunities, while developing local solutions with both land and sea. The latter is being highly promoted by the federal government through their Federal Blue Economy Strategy (2021).<sup>120</sup>

Sooke Region Food CHI also reached the understanding that the Food Hub may not be ready for a full scale processing of foods yet, but it is agreed that the concept of a Food Hub is timely with the funds from provincial and federal governments. There is a community willingness to work together to help pull some of these items together and implement them now. Like many many initiatives in our community, it is through interaction and smaller successes the hub will be strengthened in capacity to be able address the bigger items with time.

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<sup>120</sup> Fisheries and Oceans Canada - [Canada's Blue Economy Strategy](#)

## Potential Initiatives

There are many exciting and feasible agricultural models that could be implemented in the Sooke Region, including the District of Sooke. The following are just a few that could be considered. Some are already taking place on Vancouver Island or elsewhere in Canada. The approaches are feasible through clear goal setting and community collaboration, including the various authorities.

### Community Supported Agriculture

For over 25 years, Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)<sup>121</sup> has become a popular way for consumers to buy local, seasonal food directly from a farmer.

Here are the basics: a farmer offers a certain number of "shares" to the public. Typically the share consists of a box of vegetables, but other farm products may be included. Interested consumers purchase a share (aka a "membership" or a "subscription") and in return receive a box (bag, basket) of seasonal produce each week throughout the farming season.

There are several CSAs in the Sooke Region already. To note, CSAs can also benefit from the sea as well as land. A CSA fishing boat would bring fish from the Juan de Fuca Strait back to Sooke Region tables.

### Cooperative Farming

Farming and agricultural co-ops<sup>122</sup> were among the first co-operatives in Canada. Today, this sector is a key player in Canada's cooperative and mutuals movement, and is undeniably a heavy weight in this sector of the Canadian economy. This well-developed sector offers established co-op models that fall into three groups: processing and marketing co-ops (384), such as dairy co-operatives; farm-supply co-ops (182), such as seed

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<sup>121</sup> [Community Supported Agriculture - LocalHarvest](#)

<sup>122</sup> [AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD \\$6 billion \\$15 billion](#) - Cooperatives and Mutuals Canada

co-ops; and farm support co-ops (693), such as farm equipment co-ops. Particular to this sector, a majority of agri-food co-operatives are constituted as producer co-ops.

Farm cooperatives could be arrangements between fellow farmers to farm a piece of land that they could not afford to purchase on their own. An example of which can be found in Sooke where several families joined together.

### Cooperative Food Purchasing

Through buying in bulk, the prices could be reduced for members, including low-income earners. **Bulk buying clubs** are often smaller, more informal groups of friends or neighbours that come together to buy food in bulk to save money. **Community Food Smart** is a bulk food buying club organized as a partnership of organizations, working together to provide their members with the opportunity to obtain nutritious fruits and vegetables at the lowest price<sup>123</sup>.

### Cooperative Businesses

A **Business Cooperatives**, also known as a co-op, is a type of organization that is both owned and controlled by its members, who also happen to use the services and products of the cooperative. These businesses are different from other types of companies, because they are formed and operate for the benefit of their members<sup>124</sup>. **Workers Cooperatives** have proven to be an effective tool for creating and maintaining sustainable, dignified jobs; generating wealth; improving the quality of life of workers; and promoting community and local economic development, particularly for people who lack access to business ownership or even sustainable work options<sup>125</sup>. **Newer cooperatives** often have different goals than their predecessors. They want to go beyond serving their members to do good in the broader world. They can adopt complex, multi-stakeholder ownership structures to address complex challenges<sup>126</sup>. The cooperative business model could apply to food related operations, service provision, banking etc.

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<sup>123</sup> [Start Your Own](#) - Community Food Smart

<sup>124</sup> [The Advantages of a Cooperative Business](#) - Small Business Chron

<sup>125</sup> [The Benefits of Worker Cooperatives | Democracy at Work Institute](#)

<sup>126</sup> [How to Adopt a Cooperative Business Model — NBS.](#)

## Ecovillages (Farm Villages)

An *ecovillage* is an intentional, traditional or urban community that is consciously designed through locally owned participatory processes in all four dimensions of sustainability (social, culture, ecology and economy) to regenerate social and natural environments.<sup>127</sup>

Ecovillage projects can be educational centres, green schools, permaculture centres and agro-ecological farms, transition initiatives, social and community enterprises, online communities, etc. There are 42 ecovillages in Canada, with several in BC.

## Rainwater Catchment

Rainwater harvesting is the collection and storage of rainwater for potable and nonpotable uses. With the right controls in place, harvested rainwater can be used for irrigation, outdoor cleaning, flushing toilets, washing clothes, and even drinking water.<sup>128</sup>

As for farm utility, there are 8 different methods:<sup>129</sup>

1. Swales
2. Rain barrel system
3. Keyline design
4. Vallerani system
5. Imprinting
6. Trincheras
7. Gabions
8. Water retention landscapes

Depending upon the property, the easiest way is probably the rain barrel system as they can be filled up quickly in our climate zone during the long rainy season, and a micro-drip irrigation system.

One good property of rainwater is that it is a soft form of water and does not impact plants negatively. Unlike hard water, that adds calcium carbonate to crop plants, forming a

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<sup>127</sup> What is an Ecovillage - <https://ecovillage.org/projects/what-is-an-ecovillage/>

<sup>128</sup> [Rainwater Harvesting](#)

<sup>129</sup> [Rainwater Harvesting: 8 Methods](#)

coating on the roots/leaves. Also, rainwater is a preferable source of drinking water for livestock compared to chlorinated water.<sup>130</sup>

The Regional District of Nanaimo developed a rainwater catchment guide for homeowners.<sup>131</sup>

## Pollinator Hedgerows

Establish hedgerows, buffer strips and other meadows for native bees and pollinators.

## Aquaculture

*Aquaculture* is the farming of aquatic organisms, e.g. fish, molluscs, crustaceans and aquatic plants. Farming implies some sort of intervention in the rearing process to enhance production, e.g. regular stocking, feeding, protection from predators, etc. Farming also implies individual or corporate ownership of the stock being cultivated. The T'Sou-ke Nation have been harvesting from clam and mussel farms for years, along with other traditional ocean harvesting activities.<sup>132</sup>

### Seaweed Farming and Processing<sup>133</sup>

Kelp captures carbon dioxide, and then they actually help bury it in a place from where it's very difficult for it to come back into the atmosphere.<sup>134</sup> Not only is seaweed used as food for human consumption, but is also used as fertilizer, animal feed, fish feed, biomass for fuel, cosmetics, integrated aquaculture and wastewater treatment.<sup>135</sup> Interestingly, livestock fed with some seaweed in their feed (80g) had reduced methane levels by 82%.<sup>136</sup> If the region wants to develop beyond a primary resource sector, a seaweed processing plant

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<sup>130</sup> [Rainwater Harvesting for Sustainable Agriculture - The Permaculture Research Institute.](#)

<sup>131</sup> [Rainwater Harvesting](#)

<sup>132</sup> [Fisheries](#) - T'Sou-ke Nation

<sup>133</sup> ['Regenerative ocean farming' could be coming soon to a coast near you](#) - CBC News

<sup>134</sup> [Why seaweed might be the next key asset in the fight against climate change](#) - CBC Radio

<sup>135</sup> [OTHER USES OF SEaweeds](#) - FAO

<sup>136</sup> [Feeding Cattle Seaweed Reduces Their Greenhouse Gas Emissions 82 Percent](#) - Uni. of Calif. Davis

would cost around \$1.2 million dollars. This plant would dry and make flakes out of the seaweed to facilitate transport.

The biggest obstacle hindering the expansion of seaweed aquaculture is the length of time it takes to secure licences from the federal and provincial governments and agencies.<sup>137</sup>

### **Vertical Farming<sup>138</sup>**

There is the option to attain more land for agricultural purposes. If farming activities are to increase, then that might be the way to move forward. However, it is possible to increase the amount of produce with high-density farming on land that is not necessarily agricultural land. This project can be established in an industrial zone, waste land or even mall rooftops.

*Vertical farming* is a new form of urban agriculture that can be grown in industrial zones or building rooftops. A vertical farm is able to use 95% less water, because it is recycled. Because production is indoors, there virtually is no need for herbicides and pesticides. Vertical Farming makes the year-round cultivation of food possible and adaptable to a variety of crops. The primary focus of all functions in and around vertical farming is on optimal plant growth while maximizing the use of natural resources, such as the sunlight. This is why vertical farm production is no longer dependent on using fossil resources.

*Hydroponics* is when a plant is fed using a water and nutrient mix and is not supported in soil. Sometimes the roots of the plants will be suspended in an inert substance like volcanic glass or coconut husk mixtures that retain water and structure to support the plant roots.

*Aeroponics* is similar to, and often sub-categorized under hydroponics. Plants are fed using water and nutrient mixtures, but it is applied via mist or vapour on the exposed roots of the plant.

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<sup>137</sup> [Should Canada be hungry to farm seaweed?](#) - National Observer

<sup>138</sup> [VERTICAL FARMING.](#) - Vertical Farm Institute



*Aquaponics* integrates aquaculture and hydroponics into one production system.

Aquaponics relies on the food introduced for fish, which works as the system's input. As fish eat this food and process it, they transform it into urine and fecal matter, both rich in ammonia, which in sufficient quantities can be toxic to plants and fish. Afterward, the water (now ammonia-rich) flows, together with uneaten food and decaying plant matter, from the fish tank into a biofilter. Afterward, inside this biofilter, bacteria break everything down into organic nutrient solutions (nitrogen-rich) for growing vegetables.<sup>139</sup>

The two recirculating systems in which fish and plants are produced in separate units. Smart software and sensors continuously take measurements and interconnect the two cycles, whenever needed, to make optimum use of synergies, whilst still creating the best growth conditions for both units. The aquaponics approach is profitable if facilities are sufficiently large. The main obstacles for commercial aquaponics are the high investment costs.<sup>140</sup>

Using soil and substrate mixtures for planting is a method well known to any farmer. In vertical farming however, instead of requiring large surface areas exposed to the sun, plants are grown on shelves using high-efficiency LED lights and hydrated using a water recycling system.<sup>141</sup>

### **Mushroom Farming and Processing<sup>142</sup>**

BC is the second largest producer of mushrooms in Canada after Ontario, but there are hardly any mushroom farms on Vancouver Island despite its favourable conditions. Mushrooms are very diverse in not only species but also in uses.<sup>143</sup>

1. Ethanol fuel
2. Crop companionship

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<sup>139</sup> [What Is The Aquaponics System? Definition, Benefits, Weaknesses](#)

<sup>140</sup> [Combined production of fish and vegetables can be profitable](#) - Science Daily

<sup>141</sup> [Vertical Farming: Growing Up?](#) - Crop Tracker

<sup>142</sup> [Six Steps To Mushroom Farming | How To Do Mushroom Farming](#) - Mushroom Council

<sup>143</sup> [9 mushroom uses: Surprising uses for the fungus that improve your life](#) - Inverse

3. Skin care
4. Tea
5. Vegan leather
6. Fight cancer
7. Hair loss
8. Building materials
9. Burial suit
10. Styrofoam substitute.<sup>144</sup>

Though the health and hair benefits may be debatable, there are definitely some processing and commercial opportunities to explore, in addition to primary resource production.

### **Solar Greenhouse<sup>145</sup>**

The core LUMO technology is a light-altering dye that converts green light to red light. Red light has the highest efficiency for photosynthesis in plants. The absorbance of chlorophyll a and b, two pigments found in plants that are critical to photosynthesis, highlights the fact that plants absorb in the blue and red portion of the spectrum, and not in the green. In extensive plant trials, crops under LUMO have experienced positive growth responses, including increased yield, faster time to maturation, and disease resistance. The greenhouse structure is leveraged as the LUMO solar panel racking system, which reduces installation and material costs and creates eligibility for up to 30% in ITC solar energy incentives, MACRS solar depreciation and an additional 25% USDA REAP grants. The LUMO allows commercial growers or investors to produce more revenue with 20% to 30% less capital input on new greenhouse construction, and LUMO solar panels come for FREE.

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<sup>144</sup> [Company Uses Mushrooms to Grow Plastic Alternatives](#) - JStor

<sup>145</sup> Solar greenhouses [Soliculture](#)

## **South Island Abattoir**

Transportation to Nanaimo is a trial for animals before slaughter. Stress is known to affect the quality of the meat, in addition to unnecessary cruelty to the animal. A mobile abattoir was suggested in the past, but apparently this was not deemed food safe. A second best option would be to have an abattoir on the South Island.

## **Young Agrarians<sup>146</sup>**

A spin-off from L'art terre in Quebec, Young Agrarians developed in BC as a landsharing or lease agreement between an established farmer perhaps wanting to retire and a young potential farmer. Retiring farmers often need to sell the farm in order to retire. However the younger generation is not able to afford to buy larger properties, especially on Vancouver Island with its high property costs.

Young farmers are recommended to work on someone else's farm for a few years first and then develop a business plan.

Young Agrarians match established and new farmers. Through the match, the established farmer may mentor the aspiring farmer. It developed a "Transition Tool Kit", a "Land Listing" and a "Land Access Guide". Legal assistance when drawing up contracts is provided. The website also offers garden space sharing, where owners not able to cultivate can benefit from the bounty of someone else's efforts on the owner's plot.

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<sup>146</sup> [Young Agrarians - Growing the next generation of farmers and food lovers in Canada!](#)

## **Circular Economy Applied to Agriculture<sup>147</sup>**

Farming is energy intensive and a major pollutant, especially where animal production is concerned. As livestock production has been decreasing in the region, that does minimize the adverse effects such activity has on the environment.

1. Water reuse (recycling irrigation water) and/or water re-catchment
2. Precision agriculture
3. Bio-fertilizer
4. Biofuel

Within the agricultural realm, the circular economy approach suggests that the industry can achieve greater sustainability simply by keeping more resources and materials in use for as long as possible. This can be achieved in a number of different ways, including increased product durability, reuse and recycling.<sup>148</sup>

## **Fondaction<sup>149</sup>**

This is an investment fund dedicated to the circular economy, including sustainable agribusiness. Developed in Quebec and for Quebecers, this is a model that should be encouraged in BC. More than 177,000 Québécois invest with Fondaction. Various instalment options make retirement savings accessible to everyone.

Available in close to 2,500 workplaces, Fondaction offers retirement savings by payroll deduction to about 50,000 unionized and non-unionized workers. These people save with every pay without upsetting their budget. They enjoy immediate tax savings, reducing the impact on their take-home pay.

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<sup>147</sup> [Circular Economy: Waste-to-Resource & COVID-19 | Land & Water | Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations | Land & Water](#)

<sup>148</sup> [Agriculture and its contribution to circular economy – Cleanfarms.](#)

<sup>149</sup> [Affordable retirement savings for everyone \(RRSP\)](#) - Fondaction

By investing in Fondation, shareholders improve their financial situation at retirement. They accumulate shares and enjoy tax credits from the governments of Canada and Québec, in addition to the tax benefits of a registered retirement savings plan (RRSP).

## Recommendations

This report is for the community as a whole or to be used by independent entities for their respective purposes. Some recommendations seem self-evident as to who should address them, while others will require some more thought and task allocation between different community entities. They may require advocacy at higher levels than the Sooke Region, while others will be related to by-laws and regulations or even grass-root initiatives. It is advised that through a community impact approach<sup>150</sup> a patchwork of political authorities, businesses, service providers and community members contribute through coordinated activities to reach community established goals with this report and others that already exist and are readily available. With the exception of proposed infrastructure, building and industrial projects, the **grand majority of the recommendations are short-term activities with long-lasting rewards**. The platforms to address these issues have been suggested in the body of this report as well as in the recommendations listed below.

### Poverty Reduction and Food Security

- When undertaking a review of the zoning bylaw following OCP adoption, consider revisions to the zoning bylaw in the context of poverty reduction or equity lens.
- Address the impact of discrimination on individual and group circumstances through safety practice, intersectional practices, representation in community development and decision-making processes, including efforts towards reconciliation<sup>151</sup>.
- Advocate for policies that would entail a living wage and fair working conditions.
- Support and grow services that support low-income households, providing programming that is motivating rather than stigmatizing the different affected groups, and not over-burdening already weary households. Holistic support should be guided by social determinants of health.

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<sup>150</sup> [What is Collective Impact?](#) - Collective Impact Forum

<sup>151</sup> [Racism Consultation Survey Report - ICA Victoria](#)

- Build affordable housing rental units that are close to the town core or public transportation route. From an ecological and social services aspect, apartment blocks are preferable.
- Create a community service navigator system where community members, especially the most vulnerable, can consult to attain appropriate benefits, advice and services, including housing, income tax and mental health, to support them in their individual circumstances compassionately while increasing in-pocket funds.
- Improve physical accessibility to healthy food sites through sidewalk and bike connectivity and public transport.
- Promote food vouchers for the most vulnerable to purchase produce with local farmers and farmers' markets.
- Advocate for affordable but also appropriate housing where renter and landlord rights are equally upheld.
- Promote option to have a common online platform where food providers including restaurants and producers can advertise food that is still consumable but no longer sellable.

### **Community Spaces**

- Encourage "healthier" local businesses that keep the region's money in the region.
- Continued promotion of healthy food at vending machines, meals served at various institutions and food stands at public and sporting events.
- Encourage sales and use of products that are transformed from locally grown or "abandoned" produce to avoid waste and stimulate local commerce.
- Create inviting social eating spaces in public places and at restaurants, including options for coverage for those rainy days.
- Address the possibility of a covered Farmers' Market so that local fresh produce could be sold all year round, as well as providing a venue for local entrepreneurs to sell their wares.

- Adopt and promote healthy food and beverage consumption and sales' policies for public buildings, recreation centres and social/sporting events.
- Pass or amend policies restricting food and beverage marketing in all settings frequented by children (e.g. libraries, recreation centres, parks.)<sup>152</sup>.
- Influence shops that sell unhealthy snacks to place these items in one location away from the till to reduce impulse buying and overexposure to children.
- Adopt and promote healthy workplace and organizational eating policies (e.g. serve healthy foods at local government meetings and events using the Eat Smart, Meet Smart guidelines)
- Increase access to and beautify water fountains/hydration stations.
- Promote permits and incentives for healthy food retailers, especially in underserved neighbourhoods.
- Promote a farm to school and farm to cafeteria program.
- Promote use of food safe community kitchens, including this item in the zoning by-law. At present, small-scale processing of craft or artisan items are permitted with restricted floor areas of 200m<sup>2</sup>.

## **Agriculture**

- Follow recommendations from Sooke Agricultural Plan 2012 and DoS OCP 2010.
- Inventory of farms - number, types, dormant farmland, brown fields etc., and explore ways to utilize them to the benefit of the community or to increase employment in a sustainable manner
- Enable green houses including vertical agriculture and hydroponics in industrial zones and on buildings (rooftop agriculture). To determine if this can be supported.
- Stimulate ideas around how new farmers may reduce starting costs through housing and equipment storage on ALR land.

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<sup>152</sup> [Healthy Eating & Food Security](#) - Plan H (p. 3)



- Create infrastructure (i.e. water and sewage) to facilitate greenhouses and similar food producing and processing operations at the industrial zone.
- Establish aquaculture farming and processing.
- Promote and facilitate farming mentorship programs including the Young Agrarians Program.
- Promote cooperative farming and fishing, where farmers and fishermen can get capital up front and community members have a more steady supply of local produce.
- Establish rainwater catchment infrastructure to reduce water use for gardens and agriculture.
- Increase property taxes on agricultural land not used for agricultural purposes, if no valid reason can be provided, to avoid brown fields and encourage land leasing to young farmers, or have a two-tier system for example \$3,500 vs \$10,000 income threshold where there is a bigger tax break to encourage farmers to produce even more on their land.<sup>153</sup>
- Support local agriculture by protecting existing Agricultural Land Reserve and adding land to this reserve where appropriate (see Sooke Region Farmland Trust).

## **Food Gardens**

- Promote and facilitate gardening mentorship programs, including the FED program and the Sooke Garden Club.
- Promote and coordinate neighbourhood fruit tree cultivation and produce sharing programs.
- Promote neighbourhood garden surplus exchanges.
- Subsidize, promote and coordinate gardening programs where those who are able bodied and willing without gardens can cultivate gardens of those who do not have time or are not able to garden, with a share of the crop.
- Designate areas for urban community gardens, edible landscapes and local food markets and offer access to underutilized local government properties

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<sup>153</sup> [Encouraging Agriculture Production through Farm Property Tax Reform in Metro Vancouver \(2016\)](#) - Metro Vancouver (p. 15)

- Tax reduction for having sizable gardens (size to be determined) over lawns
- Promote food skills programs such as food preparation, preservation and appreciation, and budgeting for food expenses facilitated through Food Safety courses<sup>154</sup>, Indigenous workshops and social programs.
- Include neighbourhood fruit tree schemes with a potential tree management by-law in coordination with FoodCHI's fruit gleaning project to reduce human-wildlife interaction.

## Collaborations

- Establish a **Sooke Region Food Policy Council** - facilitated by both the District of Sooke and the CRD partnering with food producers and providers, businesses, health authorities and service agencies.
  - Engage a regional Food Security Coordinator to holistically coordinate activities from the beneficiary and producer/provider angle.
  - Improve food systems, including indigenous communities
  - Sustainable food practices
  - Viable local food systems
  - Address regional food waste
  - Trainings in private food production, preparation and preservation
  - Working group under the Food Policy Council - work with First Nations, Farmers and local businesses to promote agri-tourism on land and water.

*Potential partners: Sooke Food Bank, Sooke Region Food CHI, District of Sooke, CRD, T'Sou-ke First Nation, Scia-new First Nation, Pacheedaht First Nation, School District 62, Transition Sooke, Island Health, Local churches, Sooke Family Resource Society, Sooke Region Communities Health Network*

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<sup>154</sup> [Food Safety Courses](#) - Province of BC

- Create a **Sooke Region Food Hub** where food safe kitchens and larger industrial processing can handle what is harvested from land and sea, to stimulate local food production and entrepreneurship, as well as local food consumption, taking advantage of federal and provincial funding streams. This hub might be placed under the Sooke Region Food Policy Council.
  - Evaluate the need of a centralized refrigeration facility for temporary storage.
  - Establish a cooperative machines and tool park for farmers and entrepreneurs.
  - Develop a network food safe kitchens for entrepreneurial use

*Potential partners: Sooke Food Bank, Sooke Region Food CHI, District of Sooke, CRD, T'Sou-ke First Nation, Scia-new First Nation, Pacheedaht First Nation, Sooke Region Chamber of Commerce, Worklink Employment Society*

- Create a **Business Hub** where independent entrepreneurs and students can come and share information resources, get training and mentorship, have access to meeting space and hi-speed internet and to share ideas to grow new and existing businesses.

*Potential partners: Worklink Employment Society, District of Sooke, CRD, T'Sou-ke First Nation, Scia-new First Nation, Pacheedaht First Nation, Sooke Region Chamber of Commerce*

- Through the **Community Economic Development Committee** address:
  - Poverty reduction lens to improve upon the general well-being of the population.
  - Promote various economic business models to enrich the community's financial and social well-being.
  - Circular economy initiatives in conjunction with relevant sector actors in an environmentally sustainable manner.
  - Blue economy initiatives in conjunction with relevant sector actors in an environmentally sustainable manner.

- Encourage a BC equivalent foundation activity such as “Fondaction” in Quebec that funds circular agri-economy in local communities.
- Advocate with Statistics Canada, Island Health and other similar data collecting entities to provide data that reflect the same and smaller communities to simplify data analysis at the local level.
- Through the **Land Use Committee** (continue) to address
  - Densification of housing in the town core, better sidewalks, bike paths and solid bus stops to enable easier access to amenities and necessary services, especially for those with mobility issues.
  - Exploring smart ways of adapting present builds for inter-generational or peer co-housing leading to lower individual rents and reduction of social isolation.
  - Promote Makerhoods where affordable housing, light manufacturing with amenities may be combined to encourage entrepreneurship.
  - To increase the amount of affordable commercial space for much needed commercial and support services.
  - Keep a poverty reduction and good food practices lens with regards to land use in the commercial as well as the agricultural sector.
  - To actively take part in the Food Hub and Food Policy Council.
  - To activate spaces to congregate as a community.
  - Explore extensive water catchment infrastructure
- Through the **Climate Action Committee** (continue) to address
  - Distance food travels from farm to fork, food waste etc.
  - Explore collaborating with T’Sou-ke First Nations on their food resiliency project in the face of climate change.
  - Explore initiatives to improve food culture, along with food security.
  - Encourage more local transit and rideshare to increase access to amenities and services.

- Encourage fruit trees to contribute to neighbourhood food security as well as the carbon sink.

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