

# British Columbia Organic Grower



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# In This Issue

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Editor's Note .....                          | 3  |
| COABC News Patch .....                       | 4  |
| Ask an Expert: BC Plant Health Library ..... | 6  |
| Organic Stories: Gabriola Food Hub .....     | 8  |
| Footnotes: Soil Stewardship .....            | 20 |
| COABC Order Form .....                       | 31 |



## Pedalling Super-Hyper-Local Produce

Graham Bradley is working to build a new food system on Gabriola Island with the Gabriola Food Hub. *Read more on Page 8.*

# Features

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Local Food Economies at Farmers Markets ..... | 11 |
| An Ode to the Farmer .....                    | 12 |
| Meat From Here .....                          | 16 |
| A North Okanagan Food System .....            | 24 |
| Interview: Why Nature's Path Left the OTA ... | 28 |



## Local Food Dreams

Eva-Lena Lang shares the story of a growing local food economy in the North Okanagan *on page 24.*

## BC Organic Grower

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Credit: Jean-Phillipe Marquis.

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# Editor's Note

## Bioregionalism: Building a Local Food Economy

By Darcy Smith

We live in a time of unprecedented choice—we can eat strawberries in January, fill up on avocado toast for breakfast every day, and enjoy flavours from around the world. But the increasing globalization of our food system has made us more food insecure rather than less. Many regions which once could have been self sufficient now rely on imports to feed their communities. We've all heard that Vancouver Island, cut off from food deliveries from the mainland, would run out of food in just three days.



Our last issues have looked at bioregionalism from the perspective of ecology: resilient seed, pollinator habitats, working with native wildlife, etc. Our Fall 2018 issue continues to explore bioregionalism with a focus on how BC's organic sector is building place based economies.

In our Organic Stories feature, Hannah Roessler takes us on a two-wheeled ride through Gabriola's local food economy, highlighting the Gabriola Food Hub, where relationships—to the land, to each other, to the local community—are key to success (page 8).

On page 11, Anna Helmer applies a little humour and literary style to rainy market days, and more seriously emphasizes the importance of the connection formed with consumers to any farmer's success. Josh Brown provides more farm poetry on page 12 with his "Ode to a Farmer," revealing what makes Cawston such a special place to live and farm (hint: it's not the work-life balance—or is it?).

Marjorie Harris keeps us grounded in the soil in this issue's Footnotes From the Field as she digs deep into topsoil, the history of agriculture, and the future of life as we know it (page 22). Emma Holmes is back for our Ask an Expert column, highlighting the BC Plant Heath Laboratory—if you're struggling to diagnose plant health issues, head straight to page 6.

On page 24, Eva-Lena Lang shares the journey to date of the growing North Okanagan Food System Initiative, including what's coming next. Stay tuned for future updates on this exciting initiative.

This issue also features an entry from the new Small-Scale Meat Producers Association (SSMPA), formed in response to the bottlenecks facing small scale meat producers in the province. Tristan Banwell explores how the current regulations limit the potential of local meat production, and thus the ability of farmers to feed their communities.

Finally, on page 28 we interview Dag Falck, Organic Program Manager at Nature's Path, on the organic food leader's sudden—but maybe not so surprising—exit from the Organic Trade Association this summer.

As I write this letter, my eyes are burning and my throat stings with the haze of smoke from forest fires burning across BC. My thoughts are with all the farmers tending crops and animals under these conditions, and with all those whose livelihoods and lives are at risk again this year. I hope that in the years to come, as local food systems and local food economies grow in strength and resilience, as more and more farmers turn to the wisdom of organic, regenerative practices, as consumers make ever more conscious choices with their dollars, that we will witness the earth give a great sigh of relief.

If you have a story to tell about organic food and farming, please get in touch. This magazine, a venue for showcasing positive stories—while also drawing our eyes to things that need our attention—gives me so much hope. Let's keep celebrating the organic sector and all the inspiring, determined individuals who wake up every day to leave the earth a little better than they found it. Reach out with your thoughts, letters, and story ideas to [editor@certifiedorganic.bc.ca](mailto:editor@certifiedorganic.bc.ca)—and be sure to visit us online at

 [bcorganicgrower.ca](http://bcorganicgrower.ca)



Pig at Tsawwassen Farm School.  
Credit: Jean-Phillipe Marquis





### Organic Price List

After a hiatus, the much-missed Organic Price List is once again being posted to the COABC website! It will be updated weekly moving forward.

The Organic Price List is an important market pricing reference for growers to use. Rodale does this in the US, and it is materially important to help growers get product sold without overcharging and losing sales, or worse, undercharging and eroding the market price for all other growers, which happens a lot and creates a lot of loss for farms.

Check out the Organic Price List here:

 [certifiedorganic.bc.ca/services/pricelist/20180803.pdf](https://certifiedorganic.bc.ca/services/pricelist/20180803.pdf)

### Celebrate Organic Week!

September 8 – 16

Canada's National Organic Week is the largest annual celebration of organic food, farming, and products across the country—and we have a lot to celebrate! Organic Week supports a growing organic sector, a transparent food system, and a sustainable source of food for future generations.

Organic Week highlights the benefits of organic agriculture in communities and across Canada. From pickling workshops, recipe contests, and educational seminars to farm tours and food & libation samplings, there is something for everyone. Look out for events in your community as well as local retailers, restaurants,



and farmers' markets showcasing organic products.

For more Organic Week Updates, check out:

 [organicweek.ca](https://organicweek.ca)

### COABC Accreditation Board Members Sought

The Accreditation Board (AB) of the COABC is seeking one new BCCOP Producer member and two new Certification/Inspection members for a three year term, starting in October 2018. Please help us spread the word by sharing with folks within your networks. Applications will be accepted until September 15, 2018 and can be sent to: [office@certifiedorganic.bc.ca](mailto:office@certifiedorganic.bc.ca).

View the Accreditation Board postings here:

 [certifiedorganic.bc.ca/contacts/jobposting.php](https://certifiedorganic.bc.ca/contacts/jobposting.php)

### COG: Join National, Support Local

A strong and sustainable organic sector in Canada depends on dedicated involvement in local organic food systems—and a strong national organization made up of farmers and consumers devoted to organics. Canadian Organic Growers (COG) is a collaboration between individuals from coast to coast to coast—farmers, consumers and everyone in between. For more than 40 years, COG has been building and transferring knowledge on organic farming so that our sector grows and becomes stronger. COG creates awareness within our sector and to the public about issues that directly affect organic farmers and farming.

By becoming a member of this national organization, you add your voice to the national voice—while also supporting COABC! COG allows members and supporters to direct a portion of their membership contribution to their regional organic organization. When you join COG for just

\$25, you can choose for \$15 of your membership to go directly to COABC, to support our programs and projects. If you haven't already, please join COG and support COABC.

You can also help by sharing with your friends and neighbours and encouraging them to join as well:

 [cog.ca/cog\\_news/cog-launches-join-national-support-local-membership-campaign](http://cog.ca/cog_news/cog-launches-join-national-support-local-membership-campaign)

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## KPU Place Based Food Systems Conference

*"Place-based to me means remembering—remembering where you come from so you may remember a little more about where you are and where you find yourself to be. Memories are held on the land."*

*-Pauline Terbasket, Executive Director, Okanagan Nation Alliance*

**F**ood systems experts from around the world gathered in Richmond August 9-10 to discuss place based food systems. Presenters included academics and researchers to activists and community organizers, all sharing information and inspiration.

The conference opened with a song and blessing from Kwantlen Polytechnic University's Elder in Residence, Lekeyten. Day one speakers Dr. William Rees, Dr. Wes Jackson, and Dr. Eric Holt Giménez lent context by highlighting the state of global agriculture, climate change, and capitalism. Though the facts presented are heavy, the common thread was a message of hope.

Much conversation centered on decolonization and Indigenous

food systems. Dr. Charlotte Côté opened the second day of the conference with a keynote on the concept that "everything is one," with food sovereignty as central to revitalizing place based food systems: "Land from an indigenous worldview is everything—it is a gift, not a commodity." Pauline Terbasket, Executive Director of the Okanagan Nation Alliance, followed her with the inspiring story of the return of the salmon to the Okanagan and the Syilx perspective on Original Foods.

The conference centered on how place based food systems can contribute to sustainable human economies and foster environmental stewardship and ecological integrity, as well as the critical role of policy and governance. The ultimate question raised: how can we increase the capacity of place based food systems?

The presentations were rich with successes and learnings, showcasing stories from right here in Coast Salish territories, to communities in Nanjing, Malawi, Guatemala, Oregon, and more. Conference proceedings will be published in a special issue of the Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development.

 [foodsystemsjournal.org](http://foodsystemsjournal.org)

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## AgSafe BC

**A**gSafe is BC's agriculture industry Health and Safety Association (HSA) working with farmers and ranchers to improve workplace health and safety practices. Based in Langley, AgSafe offers site-specific programs, safety training, and consultation through a team of

regional safety consultants and advisors.

AgSafe offers a Certificate of Recognition program for large and small employers. Recently AgSafe launched the Safety Ready Certificate of Recognition Self-Assessment website to assist organizations assess their readiness for an audit.

For more information about AgSafe services or agriculture workplace safety call 1-877-533-1789 or visit

 [AgSafeBC.ca](http://AgSafeBC.ca)


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## Young Agrarians Farmer Podcast Club

**D**o you spend a lot of time on a tractor, out in your garden, or hoeing rows in the fields? Many farmers are turning to podcasts to keep their brains occupied, and there's a lot of interesting podcast material out there. Thanks to the Young Agrarians Farmer Podcast Club, you no longer have to dig for the good ones!

Sometimes it just seems hard to choose the episodes that are going to be interesting. The Young Agrarians Farmer Podcast Club has sorted the wheat from the chaff and is sharing a weekly "best-of" list, by and for farmers!

Sign up for the YA Farmer Podcast Club for weekly recommendations delivered to your inbox, and find previous selections here:

 [youngagrarians.org/category/podcasts](http://youngagrarians.org/category/podcasts)



# The BC Plant Health Laboratory

## Plant Health Diagnostic Support for BC Producers



By Emma Holmes, P.Ag

While we always hope that every farmer has a successful season and bountiful harvests, the reality is that there are endless factors to potentially derail those harvests. For me, the hardest part of farming was finding my crops decimated by pests or struggling to survive after getting hit with a disease. My heart sank when I found my previously healthy cucurbits drooping and turning brown in the greenhouse one morning and I felt panic when the arugula I was counting on for my CSA box was eaten by pests before I managed to snag it for my customers.

When problems appear, an accurate and timely diagnosis is crucial. The BC Plant Health Laboratory, along with myself and colleagues at the BC Ministry of Agriculture (AGRI), are here to provide you with plant disease and insect identification support and management advice.

The Plant Health Laboratory is located in the Abbotsford Agriculture Centre and has been operating year-round since 1967. The lab is fully equipped with state-of-the-art diagnostic technology and knowledgeable staff to diagnose plant health problems affecting crops and plants grown in BC, including plant diseases, non-pathogenic disorders, and insect pests.

### Example from the Field

Chris Bodnar of Close to Home Organics had noticed his cucumbers had scorched stems. He guessed it had to do with sun scorching the stems after transplanting, and decided to bring a sample to the lab for diagnosis.

He followed the sampling steps detailed earlier in this article, and the lab was able to determine the cause of the scorched stems was actually Gummy Stem Blight, a cucurbit rot disease caused by the fungal plant pathogen *Didymella bryoniae*. Gummy stem blight can be seed borne, and can be introduced to fields with infected seeds, seedlings, or transplants.

On learning the root cause, Chris connected the issues with his cucumber crop to a previous incident. “I remembered that the problem started one season when I bought cucumber plants from another farmer. The plants had stem issues and I’ve had this problem ever since.” *Didymella bryoniae* survives season to season if host plants are present, and can survive at least two years in the absence of host plants. It also survives on infected crop debris and weeds. It may also be spread around during picking and other field activities.

Susan Smith, AGRI Field Vegetable Specialist, advised picking from the rest of the field before picking from the infected plants. She also recommended using dedicated picking equipment (knives) for that section and sterilizing thoroughly before and after using them. Soil sterilization (ex. Solarisation), sanitation (for seeds greenhouse starts), and crop rotation are the best methods of preventing infection. Overhead irrigation should be avoided. Fall disking of crop debris (as deep as possible) and extended rotations can significantly reduce the amount of inoculum in infested fields.

“I’m glad to have a better idea of how to manage this issue moving forward,” explained Chris. “By knowing the cause of these problems, we can better develop a management plan on the farm to reduce the likelihood of gummy stem blight in the future.”

## How to Take Advantage of AGRI's Diagnostic Services

### Send me your field snaps

If you come across an unfamiliar insect or plant health issue, please send me a picture with a description of the problem to my email, Emma.Holmes@gov.bc.ca. I will share internally to see if identification of the issue is possible with a photo alone or if we need a plant sample for further analysis.

### Submit a sample to the lab

Collect a sample that shows the problem. A whole plant with roots and soil is best. If the plants are small, send several. If insect damage is suspected, collect the insects. Refer to "How to Submit Plant Samples for Diagnosis" for detailed information on collecting and packaging a sample. Submit several plants or plant parts showing the various symptoms. It is better to submit too much of a specimen than too little (sending a whole plant, roots and all, doesn't hurt).

Instructions on how to package and send a sample to the lab are available on the Plant Health Lab Submission Form available through the following link:

 <https://bit.ly/2vUnKMT>

Fill out the lab diagnostic submission form as thoroughly as possible to assist us in getting a better picture of what is happening in the field. Send (drop in, mail, or courier) packaged samples along with a completed submission form and appropriate payment to the address on the front page.

### What information should you provide?

- Personal contact information (address, phone, fax, or email)
- Details on symptoms
- When problem was first noticed
- Indicate if the problem is spreading
- Number of plants or percentage of field affected
- Type of plant, age, condition of surrounding plants
- Site description (drainage, exposure, weather, irrigation etc.)
- Pesticide and fertilizer use (type, rate and date)
- Past and future crops grown on site

### Shipping samples

There are multiple options for getting your samples to the Plant Health Laboratory. All samples should be delivered to the laboratory as early in the day as possible, and as early in the week. Samples should be adequately packaged to ensure that they are well-preserved and in a suitable condi-

tion for analysis when they arrive at the lab. Please contact the laboratory with any questions.

 [gov.bc.ca/gov/content/industry/agriculture-seafood/animals-and-crops/plant-health/plant-health-laboratory](https://gov.bc.ca/gov/content/industry/agriculture-seafood/animals-and-crops/plant-health/plant-health-laboratory)

### Who may submit samples?

If you are a producer, home gardener, consultant, or industry group you can send samples to the lab.

### Who receives the diagnostic report?

Results are sent to the submitter unless otherwise requested. Information on individual submissions is kept confidential.


### What services are not available through the BC Plant Health Lab?

Analysis for soil, tissue, nutrient, or chemical residue is NOT available.

### What services are available through AGRI staff?

If an operator reaches out to AGRI then we are able to provide some extension in the way of information resources, management advice, and a farm visit if feasible. This can really vary depending on the location, whether the problem is ongoing, the type of operation and, of course, what the issue is.

Sometimes the issue at hand is something that is abiotic (i.e. not caused by a pathogen or insect pest). In those cases, what the lab can do is rule out a pest issue as best as possible. It is then up to the operator and AGRI staff to do some brainstorming (and this is often based on crop history, past management, and also information resources that AGRI staff are able to provide) about what the issue could be and ways to make some changes in management and come up with some management options.

The BC Plant Health Lab is a useful resource for producers across B.C. Please don't hesitate to be in touch with me at Emma.Holmes@gov.bc.ca if you have questions about the lab, or are interested in using it to get to the bottom of a plant health issue. 

*Emma Holmes has a BSc in Sustainable Agriculture and an MSc in Soil Science, both from UBC. She farmed on Orcas Island and Salt Spring Island and is now the Organics Industry Specialist at the BC Ministry of Agriculture. She can be reached at: Emma.Holmes@gov.bc.ca*





# A TWO-WHEELED RIDE THROUGH GABRIOLA'S LOCAL FOOD ECONOMY



*Graham Bradley on his electric cargo bike "Pepper" delivering the harvest from Gabriola Food Hub. Credit: Quinton Dewing*

*By Hannah Roessler*

Graham Bradley is a busy guy. I catch him on a rare day off to talk about the Gabriola Food Hub, but we end up delving into the importance of cultural shift, decolonization, green transportation, feeding passions, and systems thinking. The spill over into all of these topics comes as no surprise—so many of us land-based workers, dreamers, and thinkers recognize and ponder the layers of complexities and interconnectivities encountered when engaging on food systems work on any level. Graham is a dynamic individual who spans several roles in the food system on Gabriola Island. He is someone who is clearly driven to make a difference, and has fully invested his whole self into this pursuit.

Take his work with the Gabriola Food Hub (GFH), a collective marketing hub made up of three main partner farms: Heart and Soil Farm, Good Earth Farm, and 40x40 farm. Not only is he the founder of the GFH, but he is also the “aggregator, communicator, and distributor.” He is the guy who pulled the farms together and connects the farms to

various markets, and he is the one you will see delivering all the produce—he has roles in both the center of the hub, as well as the spokes.

Graham is quick to assert that he is not inventing something new, and is generous while listing off his many mentors. He names, with much gratitude, those who taught him about farming and marketing (Ferm Melilot in Quebec, Saanich Organics in Victoria, Ben Hartman’s Lean Farm approach, and more), those who helped him with legal agreements for land sharing (Young Agrarians and other generous legal advisors), his business mentorship through Young Agrarians (with Niki Strutynski from Tatlo Road Farm), the chef on Gabriola Island who last year solidly ordered produce from him every week (Kellie Callender from Silva Bay Restaurant). He even tells me about Josh Volk, the person who inspired him to build his delivery bike, named Pepper, on which he does all of the deliveries for the GFH. Something that I really appreciate about Graham is how much he obviously values the relationships that he is cultivating through his food growing—these seem to be his own personal heart hub from which all the other spokes of his work flow.



“It’s really just the geography that is key to making all of this work in the way it does.”



*Rosheen Holland, land partner, and co-farmer at Good Earth Farm*

While the GFH echoes other models of marketing that exist in the small scale organic farm world, there are of course differences. These are all tied distinctly to the difference in “place”—all the variations and oscillations in the GFH are distinctly their own, as they seek to find their own dynamic equilibrium. Each of the participating farms is striving to find what model of farming and marketing works for the particular scale and sites that they work and live within, in every realm. Every farm business has to find the right flow that works in their particular bioregion, and it’s clear that when Graham talks about the GFH, he is very much focused on the interconnected systems of ecology, economics, and community that are distinct to Gabriola Island.

Graham refers to what they at GFH are aiming for as “super-hyper-local”—and they’re not pulling any punches. He’s been working tirelessly with his partners, Dionne Pepper-Smith and Katie Massi from Heart and Soil, Lynn from Namaste Farm, Rebecca from 40x40 Farm (which Graham also co-manages), and his land partner and co-farmer Rosheen Holland at Good Earth Farm, to sell everything they grow right on Gabriola Island.

In the past, these farmers usually had to go over to Cedar on Vancouver Island to sell their produce at the market. Now, with the GFH entering its third year of business, those days are done as they move towards the super-hyper-local vision. Their biggest commercial customer is the Village Food Market, the largest grocery store on Gabriola Island. “We are actually managing to replace the lettuce [that is usually sold at the market], lettuce that comes from



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"Pepper" is the Gabriola Food Hub's electric cargo bike.  
Credit: Graham Bradley.

off-island, with our lettuce. It's exciting," says Graham. They also run a box program, which is really important to their business, and is something that they hope to continue growing.

Another approach that helps them realize this super-hyper-local vision is how all the farms work as a team, both together and with their environment. When I ask Graham if the farms do their crop planning together, he says "well, the farms plan it on their own." The GFH farms really embrace each of their unique microclimates, which allow different crops to thrive. They don't try to do it all, all the time, but they work with the strength of the local ecology of each farm site. Good Earth Farm tends to flood every year, but they find that their best spring crop is lettuce, and their best winter crops are storage crops: they do grow some chard, but harvest it, roots and all, and keep it in the cold room for continued harvest into winter. At 40x40 Farm, they are really focused on salad greens. At Heart and Soil, their site is particularly good for growing early on in the spring, and they "are a bit warmer so they grow loads of tomatoes," says Graham. "They don't have root maggot, so their radishes and Hakeuri turnips are so beautiful that we've stopped growing ours."

It's almost as though Graham frames the land as the ultimate leader of their little team: "it's really just the geography that is key to making all of this work in the way it does." And when it comes to enjoying the bounty of the island, they don't stop at just farms. "If I see grapes," Graham exclaims, with a fair share of eye twinkle, "and it's in someone's backyard, I will knock on the door and ask them if I can sell it for them."

This opportunistic approach and ability to be flexible is bound, as any farmer knows, to create quite a bit of extra

work. And in a busy farm season, it seems hard to imagine taking on extra bits and pieces. But it seems to fit in Graham's wider hopes for the food system on Gabriola. We had a long discussion about trying to think a bit more outside of the traditional agriculture box, hoping to understand the potential for managing the broader ecosystem for food in a careful way.

"I think we can have a full and complete food system here, we just have more to learn," says Graham, respectfully acknowledging the long term management of a food system by the Snuneymuxw, long before agriculture as we know it arrived to the island. Graham is keen to continue learning how to incorporate a broader vision, and in the meantime, on the peaty grounds of Good Earth Farm they are busy planting *Malus fusca* (Pacific Crabapple), relying on the embedded local knowledge of that native rootstock to help it withstand rainy winters.

With all the successful strides they've made, trying to effectively respond to the dynamic nature of a particular bioregion, of a particular place, must certainly be challenging. I ask Graham about this, and he names some common themes that most farmers struggle with: the desire for more restaurants to get on board with buying local produce, how small their market is, how difficult it is to rely on commercial clients, being burnt out and overworked, etc.

I am particularly curious about how he manages his own work-load, because as every other farmer I know, he seems to have several jobs and commitments. He is also the Chair of the Economic Development Advisory group on Gabriola Island, as well as the National Farmers Union Youth Advisor for BC. Graham is practically bursting with energy even as we quietly sit and chat, and he is so clearly committed to his vision of a better food system and green transport—but he admits to it being overwhelming at times.

Then he explains to me the moment of his day which feeds his energy and desire to push through and keep striving, and I'm left with a clear picture painted in my mind: Graham on Pepper, his bright red electric cargo bike, loaded with veggie boxes, ripping full speed down a hill framed with soaring trees, exuberantly singing Janis Joplin tunes to scare away the deer, and periodically yelling gleefully "the future is NOW (insert expletive)!" 🌿

Check out the Gabriola Food Hub:

🔗 [gabriolafoodhub.com](http://gabriolafoodhub.com)

*Hannah Roessler has farmed in Nicaragua, Washington, and BC on permaculture famers, polyculture cafetals, organic market farms and a biodynamic vineyard. She has an MA in Environmental Studies, and her research is focused on climate change and small-scale organic farming. She currently farms on the Saanich Peninsula on Vancouver Island.*

# Local Food Economies Thrive at Market Rain or Shine!



*Farmer market booth overflowing with veggies.  
Credit: Moss Dance.*

*By Anna Helmer*

The bell rings to start the market day. Relentless and demoralizing rain has been falling since the tents came out of the trailer and we began the set up, two hours ago. The gutters now strung up between the tents are working well, emitting a steady stream of water into the growing pool along the back curb and the tent side walls keep us relatively rain-free inside the stall. The very air seems wet, however, and little can be done about that. Tough morning at market so far.

I've been selling my family farm's produce at Vancouver farmers' markets for 20 years, so I know how to sell potatoes in the rain. It's just like how to do it in the sunshine, except it seems mentally harder. The difficulty lies in keeping the stall in a high state of readiness, even though it might be empty and you would prefer to be warm and dry elsewhere. Every sale matters—especially in the rain, if your farm depends on farmers' market sales.

I squeeze my way past the bins of backstock in the trailer where I have been changing out of sopping wet clothes. I have already traded a few hellos with the neighboring vendors, people I've seen every Saturday morning for years,

but there's been no time for more than that. I glance around to make sure all the signs are up and that the display is full: we've finished in time. It takes just as long to get set up in the rain as it does otherwise. Longer, of course, if you waste time regretting the situation.

The potatoes look good today, the red Chieftain and yellow Sieglinde sort of glowing in the dim light. My staff, who are making up \$5 bags of potatoes and carrots, wisely refrain from discussing the weather. The vast, dripping, emptiness out in the market fairway which would normally be filled with customers eager to start shopping, lining up in advance of the opening bell, is obvious enough.

It is undeniably deserted, and despite the potatoes doing their best to provide sunshine, it feels disheartening. I give my head a shake because I think it's too early to write this one off.

The first customer materializes. She's a rain-or-shine regular who gave up on regular grocery stores quite a few years ago. She is followed by another I don't recognize. A chef

*Continued on page 23...*



# An Ode to the Farmer



Josh Brown at Joshua's Trees Nursery in Cawston, BC.  
Credit: Sara Dent (@saradentfarmlove)

By Josh Brown

*..It was a few days ago at around 7 am when the sun peered over Fairview Mountain to kindly balance a rude 40 km/h south wind. It happened while I was neurotically leaning over the hood of my van trying to pick out a slightly different noise in the engine (of all things) hoping to hear something different each time, hoping to disprove Einstein's basic philosophy of insanity. After about 20 minutes, I didn't even know what I was looking for anymore, or if anything was even there in the first place. I'll have to keep an eye on it. At around 8 pm later that day, the sun was falling behind K Mountain, finally offering slight relief from a 30 degree (spring!?) day. The wind soothed new sun burns and the cooling soil felt nice in my hands. It happened when I went to check the water and gopher traps in the apple tree nursery and garlic crop. My new low emitter overhead sprinklers are a head scratcher right now as I try to develop a schedule with the new irrigation system. And after opening up a fallow field for the expansion of the nursery, gopher trapping has been relentless.*

This all started with a fallow field, for most of us here. As someone who is still very close to that moment, I can

speak to what it's been like to take that leap, and how special it has been to share the experience with likeminded people doing the same thing. I own a small-scale organic tree nursery in Cawston, a village nestled in the Similkameen Valley, and just outside the industrial fortitude of the Okanagan. Over the last 10 years farming for others, as well as investing in my own project here, this community has come alive in a most remarkable way, through compounded experiences with people who share a passion for designing a good life, and by people who quite literally design as a profession. This is an attempt to understand the mechanism by which I and likely many other organic farmers ended up living here and doing something we truly find meaningful, and why we stayed.

Perhaps if we stop and smell the roses a little more, we may be able to break pattern and follow a different path. That this narrative is like a little red thread that weaves its way, inductively, moment to moment, rose to rose, through disjointed chaos, and that we can surprise ourselves with how far we can actually go. There are moments we cherish, whose substantive merit eludes us less that moment in time when we stopped to notice it. But I'm beginning to think those moments do not drift far. The first time opening up a



*"Your work is your home... your local economy is also your community."*



*Emilie Thoueille at Organic Only Farm in Cawston.  
Credit: Sara Dent (@saradentfarmlove)*

piece of land like a blank canvas and feeling liberated by it. An evening with close friends whose intimacy is built on innumerable shared experiences over years, and feeling at home. Trying to erect multiple freestanding cold frame tunnels in the middle of a field in the windiest place on earth, and through constant repair and correction realizing how passionate and focused you are.

These moments and their respective rewards are fleeting, though they help us refine exactly what we are seeking and what feeds us, and over time they define and become us. I'm beginning to think that we don't actually make many long winded choices—you know, the big ones: where to live, who to love, who we are. Rather, if we slightly untether ourselves from those plans and expectations that we can gear toward so eagerly, and give ourselves the freedom to take notice to the moments we are in from time to time, letting them inspire us to deviate course a little, we may find ourselves doing something we truly find meaningful. And that is how I would describe the process of somehow starting out in Toronto 10 years ago, running a scooter business and living downtown, to now finding myself farming in the Similkameen.



*Organic Only Farm in Cawston.  
Credit: Sara Dent (@saradentfarmlove)*



Josh demonstrates bench grafting  
Credit: Emily Jubenvill

This is not just my story. I live in a community whose members' stories have grown, and continue to grow, unrestrained by fear of discomfort or by doing things differently. This is a sentiment I feel often, and is confirmed by the reaction I get from people who come here and experience the work in the fields, and who may have had the opportunity to join us at one of our potlucks, filled with fresh ingredients cooked by the local farmers whose hard work that day grew them.

There is something that happens when all the farmers get together here, where friendship, profession, and community are indistinguishable. Sometimes I feel that we have replaced a few of our older patterns, some of which did not feel organic, with others that do—for example, the nature of the work/life balance here, as well as the nature of the work itself.

*...It was a few days ago at around 2 pm, around the time when the heat of the day can make you irritable, that I needed to borrow a T-post pounder to build a deer fence for the nursery. The heat we have been getting so early in the year had pushed the buds from my newly grafted trees a lot quicker than I was expecting, and so I really needed to build that fence before all the new growth was a fawn's snack. Emilie Thoueille, who runs an extraordinary small scale organic market garden down the road from me, had one so I stopped in to pick it up. She invited me in for a coffee in the shade of her tiny home container conversion that*

*she built herself. My roommate, David Arthur, who also runs a small organic market garden on a shared lease with me, was over helping build a cooler out of another converted container, which they will be sharing to store their veggies. Our mutual neighbours across the road, Paul and Lauren, who have been unbelievably helpful over the years to all three of us, stopped in to say hi as well. Community is quite literally woven into the fabric of our lives and careers here, and I believe we farm to feed it. The deer fence could wait 15 minutes, because this was a special moment in the shade.*

Life here really is quite unbelievable, and my goal and that of so many other farmers I know is really just to be able to keep doing this. I recall a conversation I was recently having with Corey Brown from Blackbird Organics, a friend and mentor, about this valley and what makes life and farming in this small town so unique. He was describing how “we are essentially a community of entrepreneurs.”

And yet our homes and communities are a little more entangled in a mix of business and pleasure, so it is all being designed to work harmoniously. This is where the work/life balance disintegrates, when your work is your home as well, and your local economy is also your community.

“It returns to something that actually feels more comfortable and natural, yet needs to be relearned,” added Melissa Marr at Vialo Orchards, owner of one of the oldest organic orchards in the area. That level of interdependence, ownership, and accountability is pervasive, and it shows in the quality of the product and lifestyle experienced here.

In some ways I feel that what we are doing here in Cawston builds on an experience as old as time. That from rose to rose, moment to moment, we have come to find ourselves farming here. Though as off the beaten path as it has felt for some of us, it has in many ways reconnected us to a personal and social archetype, a self and a community, whose fire has been burning for a long time, and which feels more honest, organic, and sustainable.

I still see it in the passion and pride held by those in the generation before us who found themselves, years ago, in a similar moment to the one I'm experiencing. Farmers whose wisdom in both how to farm, and how to be, have been tantamount to our success, and the continuation of this movement, just as we hope to be for those who we will have the privilege of sharing this with in the future. These are farmers whose passion and story are cellared in the true nature of this lifestyle, in both its romance and its hardship. Those who have been here long enough to experience crop successes and failure, the strength to work 12 hours a day in 30 degree heat as well as those who have sustained togetherness, and union in the community, as well as prohibitive injury, fragmentation, and loneliness, the perfect apple year followed by a flooded orchard the next. Someone so in tune with those cycles, that they almost become



predictable, thus inhabiting a trust in its continued ability to provide.

As a matter of fact, sometimes I think the hard work and resilience of the organic farmers I know in Cawston would stand to bear that the pain is manageable when compared to the reward, and the rewards are unquestionably rich.

Josh Brown owns and operates Joshua's Trees, a certified organic tree fruit nursery in Cawston, BC, where he grows trees for orchardists as well as the retail hobbyist and backyard market. [joshuastrees.orgamics@gmail.com](mailto:joshuastrees.orgamics@gmail.com)



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# MEAT FROM HERE

## *Challenges to Localizing Meat Production*

*A pig munching on fresh corn (above). Pastured chickens thrive at Tsawwassen Farm School (facing page). Credit: Jean-Phillipe Marquis*

*By Tristan Banwell*

Consider for a moment the complexities of the industrial meat supply chain. Livestock could be born on one farm, sold and moved to another location for finishing, trucked to yet another premises for slaughter. The carcass will be butchered and processed at a different location, and sold at another (or many others), and could be sold and reprocessed multiple times before it ends up on a customer's plate. The farm, feedlot, abattoir, and processing facility could be in different provinces, or they could be in different countries. It is a certainty that some of the meat imported to Canada comes from livestock that were born in Canada and exported for finishing and/or slaughter before finding their way back to a plate closer to home.

A 2005 study in Waterloo, Ontario<sup>1</sup> noted that beef consumed in the region racked up an average of 5,770 kilometres travelled, with most coming from Colorado, Kansas, Australia, New Zealand, and Nebraska. The author concluded that imported beef products averaged 667 times the greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions of local beef, and

the emissions were at the top of the chart among foods studied. Meat production is low-hanging fruit for reducing pollution and improving the environmental footprint of agriculture, and not just through reducing transportation. Implementation of managed grazing and silvopasture ranked #19 and #9 respectively in terms of their potential impact on climate by Project Drawdown, in the same neighbourhood as other exciting forestry and agricultural innovations, family planning, and renewable energy projects.<sup>2</sup> Organic methods further reduce negative externalities by nearly eliminating inputs such as antibiotics and pesticides, which are used heavily in conventional settings.

Much of the agricultural land in our province is also well suited to livestock according to the Land Capability Classification for Agriculture in BC. In fact, 44% of BC's ALR lands are categorized in Class 5 & 6, meaning the soil and climate make them suitable primarily for perennial forage production. Looking beyond the ALR boundaries, 76% of all classified arable land in BC is in Class 5 & 6.<sup>3</sup> Of course, there is land in Class 4 and better that could also be best suited to livestock production, and livestock can be





*“Livestock production & direct marketing can be an attractive enterprise for a new entrant.”*

beneficially integrated into other types of crop and orchard systems. As farmland prices spiral higher, aspiring farmers could be looking further down this classification system for their affordable opportunity to farm. Livestock production and direct marketing meats can be an attractive enterprise for a new entrant, especially given the exciting opportunities for regenerative organic methods and an increasingly engaged and supportive customer base.

Unfortunately, there are numerous challenges facing both new and established small-scale meat producers in their efforts to implement improved methods and supply local markets. The cost-slashing benefits of economies of scale in livestock enterprises are staggering, and even the leanest, most efficient small livestock enterprise will incur disproportionately high production costs. Sources of breeding stock, feeder stock, chicks, and other outsourced portions

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*Tristan and Aubyn Banwell demonstrate pig butchering at Tsawwassen Farm School. Credit: Jean-Phillipe Marquis*

of the life cycle chain can be distant, and finding appropriate genetics for a pasture based or grass finishing operation can be next to impossible. Given the geographic fragmentation of the province, managing the logistics of other inputs like feed, minerals, equipment, and supplies can be a Sisyphean task.

The regulations around raising livestock, traceability, slaughter, butchery, and meat processing are complex and span from the federal level (Canadian Food Inspection Agency, Canadian Cattle Identification Agency, Canadian Pork Council) through provincial bodies (BC Ministry of Agriculture Food Safety & Inspection Branch, Ministry of Health, supply management marketing boards), regional groups (regional health authorities, regional district governments) and right down to municipal government by-laws. The tables are definitely tipped in favour of large-scale commodity producers, who have the scale to hire consultants and meet more expensive requirements, and who are beholden to regulators for only one product or species. For a small scale diversified livestock operation, compliance becomes expensive and time consuming as a producer navigates the rules, requirements, and permits for multiple species.

Should a farmer manage to jump some hurdles and establish an enterprise in compliance with regulations, they may find that their growth is capped not by the capacity of their land base or even their markets, but rather by regulatory factors and supply chain limitations. There are particularly low annual production limits in supply-managed poultry

categories—2000 broilers, 300 turkeys, 400 layers per year—and that is after applying as a quota-exempt small-lot producer. There is currently no path to becoming a quota holder for small pastured poultry operations. The sole quota-holding pastured poultry producer in BC is currently under threat from the BC Chicken Marketing Board, which requires a set production per six week cycle year round, rather than the seasonal production necessitated by outdoor poultry systems. The BC Hog Marketing Scheme allows a more generous 300 pigs finished per year, and there is no production regulation for beef cattle nor for other species like ducks, sheep, and goats.

Regardless of what livestock species a farmer raises, eventually they must go to market. For most commodity cow-calf operations and some other livestock enterprises, this can mean selling livestock through an auction such as the BC Livestock Producers Cooperative. However, many small scale producers prefer to maintain control of their livestock, finishing them on the farm, arranging for slaughter, and wholesaling or direct marketing the meat. This can help a farm retain more of the final sales price, but adds another layer of complexity around slaughter and butchering, as well as storage, marketing, and distribution.

In BC, there are five classes of licensed abattoirs in operation, including 13 federally-inspected plants, 63 provincially-inspected facilities (Class A & B), and 66 licensed Rural Slaughter Establishments (Class D & E).<sup>4</sup> Federally inspected plants are under jurisdiction of the CFIA and produce meat that can be sold across provincial and international borders. The two classes of provincially licenced

plants include inspected and non-inspected facilities. Class A and B facilities are administered by the Ministry of Agriculture Meat Inspection Program, have a government inspector present for slaughter, and are able to slaughter an unlimited number of animals for unrestricted sale within BC. Class A facilities can cut and wrap meat, whereas Class B facilities are slaughter-only with no cut/wrap capacity.

Class D and E slaughter facilities, also known as Rural Slaughter Establishments, are able to slaughter a limited number of animals per year without an inspector present after completing some training, submitting water samples and food safety plans, and having the facility inspected by a regional health authority. A Class D facility is limited to 25,000 lbs live weight per year, can slaughter their own or other farms' animals, and can sell within their regional district only, including to processors and retailers for resale. This class of licence is limited to 10 regional districts that are underserved by Class A and B facilities. Class E licences are available throughout the province at the discretion of Environmental Health Officers. This type of licence allows slaughter of up to 10,000 lbs live weight of animals from the licensed farm only, and allows direct to consumer sales within the regional district, but not for further processing or resale.

Despite multiple options for abattoir licensing, small farms are underserved and slaughter capacity is currently lacking in BC. Running an abattoir is a difficult business, with significant overhead costs and strong seasonality, and there is a shortage of qualified staff in most areas of the province. On-farm slaughter options may sound appealing, but the costs associated and low limits on the number of animals per year make small on-farm facilities a difficult proposition. Producers will find it difficult or impossible to have their livestock slaughtered throughout the fall, which is busy season for abattoirs for exactly the reasons producers need their services at that time. Some poultry processors are beginning to set batch minimums above the small lot authorization numbers to eliminate the hassle of servicing small scale producers.

Clearly, improvements can be made to increase the viability of local and regional meat production in BC. This year, meat producers throughout the province came together to form the Small-Scale Meat Producers Association (SSMPA) with an aim toward creating a network to share resources and to speak with a common voice to move systems forward in support of producers raising meat outside of the conventional industrial system.

The BC provincial government has reconvened the Select Standing Committee on Agriculture, Fish & Food, and the first task of this group is to make recommendations on local meat production capacity.<sup>5</sup> The SSMPA has been active in these discussions, as well as earlier consultations regarding Rural Slaughter Establishments, and looks forward to encouraging a more localized, place-based meat supply in BC.

To learn more or join in the discussion, visit:

 [smallscalemeat.ca](http://smallscalemeat.ca)



 [facebook.com/smallscalemeat](https://facebook.com/smallscalemeat)

To reach the Small-Scale Meat Producers Association (SSMPA), get in touch at [smallscalemeat@gmail.com](mailto:smallscalemeat@gmail.com). 

*Tristan Banwell is a founding director of both the BC Small-Scale Meat Producers Association and the Lillooet Agriculture & Food Society, and represents NOOA on the COABC Board. In his spare time, he manages Spray Creek Ranch in Lillooet, operating a Class D abattoir and direct marketing organic beef, pork, chicken, turkey, and eggs. [farmer@spraycreek.ca](mailto:farmer@spraycreek.ca)*

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# Intergenerational Soil Stewardship *Our Only Hope?*

*Onions at the Birds and the Beans Farm. Credit: Moss Dance*

By Marjorie Harris BSc, IOIA V.O. P.Ag

**S**oil, specifically topsoil, is the foundation of life on this earth. Earth is the only planet with healthy fertile soil on it that we know of yet, in the whole of the universe. Fertile soil is a little-understood mixture of biology and geology whose potential only exists in the topsoil layer. The topsoil layer is composed of the topsoil itself and organic matter in various stages of mineralization and humus production. Degradation and erosion of the topsoil depletes soil fertility, restricting plant growth, vitality, and micronutrient content.

The theme for this issue of the BC Organic Grower is: “Bioregionalism: building place based economies.” Agricultural philosopher Wendell Berry suggests that an agrarian economy is based on local adaptation of economic activity to the capacity of the land to sustain such activity.

This is a challenging idea because history shows us that farming as practised in the past and the present always causes topsoil degradation. Through the ages, soil degradation, or erosion, has steered the fate and course of human civilizations and ultimately caused the demise of those civilizations. This story has repeated itself throughout the world and in the history of every type of farming. In the words of Sir Winston Churchill, “Those who fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat it.” No greater historical comment can be made for agriculture: learn or be doomed. All farming societies exhausted their topsoils within 800 to 1700 years.

## Soil Conservation in the Canada Organic Standards

The Canadian Organic Standards speak to soil conservation and soil fertility specifically in the following sections:

The general principles of organic production in Annex B:

1. Protect the environment, minimize soil degradation and erosion, decrease pollution, optimize biological productivity, and promote a sound state of health.
2. Maintain long-term soil fertility by optimizing conditions for biological activity within the soil.

**Clause 5.4.3** Tillage and cultivation practices shall maintain or improve the physical, chemical and biological condition of soil, and minimize damage to the structure and tilth of soil, and soil erosion.

## Principle of health

*Organic agriculture should sustain and enhance the health of soil, plants, animals, humans and the planet as one and indivisible.*

We have run out of new lands to discover on planet Earth. In 1995, Dr. David Pimental of Cornell University calculated that we had already lost 30% of the arable land we were farming to soil erosion. With the advent of chemical and mechanical agriculture the soil erosion problem has



increased a hundred-fold in areas. As an example, in the past 150 years, one-half the fertile topsoil of Iowa has been lost to erosion.

Topsoil is a strategic and underappreciated resource. Soil can be conserved, made, and lost and it is the balance of these factors that determines the soils fertility. How we manage the soil resource in our generation will affect generations to come. As long as soil erosion continues to exceed soil production, it is only a matter of time before agriculture fails to support Earths humanity.

## What Can We Learn from the Trials and Errors of Our Ancestors?

Çatalhöyük, Anatolia (modern Turkey) was home to a Neolithic farming civilization that lasted around a thousand years starting about 7500 BC. Scientists have studied skeletal remains which have provided a highly informative record of human health. From the skeletal health record they have been able to divide this civilization into three distinct health time periods: Early, Middle and Late. During the Middle period the civilization reached its peak in population and health, and then as soil fertility was depleted the human skeletal health parameters demonstrated decline. By the end of the Late period 52% of human births resulted in infant mortality before the age of two months. Similar skeletal health studies have been conducted on the remains of other farming civilizations globally with outcome of human health declining in parallel with topsoil and soil fertility depletion, supporting the assumption that human health is interdependent on topsoil retention and soil fertility.

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Dr. David R. Montgomery succinctly identifies the problem and a potential solution in his book *Dirt: The Erosion of Civilizations*: “Sustaining our collective well being requires prioritizing society’s long term interest in soil stewardship; it is an issue of fundamental importance to our



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civilization. We simply cannot afford to view agriculture as just another business because the economic benefits of soil conservation can be harvested only after decades of stewardship, and the cost of soil abuse is borne by all.”

## What Does a New Sustainable Agriculture Ethic Require from Us?

In Dr. David Montgomery’s more recent publication *Growing a Revolution: Bringing Our Soil Back to Life*, he outlines solutions to soil conservation and topsoil rebuilding techniques he has witnessed applied in the field around the world. He identifies the main culprit of soil erosion in agriculture as the invention of the plow. The plow breaks the soil structure and exposes the underground community of biota to the surface. “The plow is the villain that set the seeds for soil degradation. Only deserts have bare earth and Nature tends to clothe herself in plants.”

Another challenge is that during one generation a farmer can seldom see the effects of topsoil erosion unless a dramatic natural weather event sweeps the soil away. During day to day farming it is difficult to ascertain the minimal yet additive effects of traditional tillage techniques. Fallow land tillage is a traditional technique that leads to desertification and needs to be abandoned and replaced with topsoil preserving methods. Topsoil conservation and rebuilding requires the focused consciousness of Intergenerational Soil Stewardship to guide agricultural sustainability.

## Soil is in a Symbiotic Living Relationship with Plants

When plants are actively photosynthesizing they release 30% to 40% of the sugars, carbon compounds, and proteins they manufacture through their roots into the root rhizosphere. The root exudes these nutrients to feed the underground community of fungi and microbes in exchange for micronutrients from fungi and microbial metabolites that act as growth stimulators and plant health promoters.

When plants are fed synthetic N, P, K they grow big on top of the ground but do not invest in growing a big root system and do not deliver as much nutritious root exudates to feed the underground microbial and fungi communities. As a result the plant does not reap the benefits of vitality factors and micronutrients. The plants overall health is less and the plant tissue has demonstratively less micronutrient content to pass on up the food chain. Micronutrient studies demonstrate that under conventional agriculture the plants have lost between 25% to 50% of their micronutrient content in the past 50 years.

The solution to successful topsoil building Dr. Montgomery observed while touring farms around the world required three things to happen at once: no till planting techniques, cover cropping, and adding organic matter to the soil. Dr. Montgomery has coined the method Conservation Agriculture and the methods can be applied in both conventional and organic farms—because when it comes

to soil conservation and restoration, everybody needs to get on board.

### Principles of Conservation Agriculture:

1. Minimal or no disturbance/direct planting of seeds (e.g., no till)
2. Permanent ground cover: retain crop residues and include cover crop in rotations
3. Diverse crop rotations: to maintain soil fertility and break up pathogen carryover
4. Livestock assisting in topsoil building: mimic bison grazing, move cattle in a tight herd to intensive graze (high disturbance), and move frequently to produce low frequency grazing.

Benefits of Conservation Agriculture, after a short transition period of 2 to 3 years to allow soil organic matter to build fertility:

- Comparable or increased yields
- Greatly reduced fossil fuel and pesticide use
- Increased soil carbon and crop resilience
- Higher farmer profits

*“This is not a question of low tech organic versus GMO & agro-tech....this is about ‘how to apply an understanding of soil ecology to the applied problem of increasing and sustaining crop yields in a post-oil environment’.”*

*“Agriculture has experienced several revolutions in historical times: the yeoman’s revolution based on relearning Roman soil husbandry and the agrochemical and green revolutions based on fertilizer and agrotechnology. Today, the growing adoption of no-till and organic methods is fostering a modern agrarian revolution based on soil conservation. Whereas past agricultural revolutions focused on increasing crop yields, the ongoing one needs to sustain them to ensure the continuity of our modern global civilization. The philosophical basis of the new agriculture lies in treating soil as a locally adapted biological system rather than a chemical system.”*

- Dr. David R. Montgomery

**Intergenerational Soil Stewardship:** Society on a global scale based on an agrarian economy adapted to its bioregion dedicated to topsoil conservation and restoration and the development of soil fertility.

*Marjorie Harris is an organophyte, agrologist, consultant, and verification officer in BC. She offers organic nutrient consulting and verification services supporting natural systems.*

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splashes his way in. I make sure his 20lb bag weighs at least 25. At the till, we'll be rounding down more than usual. The customers might not notice but I don't mind. I am feeling very benevolent towards anyone who turns up this morning.

Before I know it, an hour has passed, and I realize that the potato display tables are hidden from view by the backs of customers filling bags. The stack of now empty bins in the back has risen to a level I hardly thought possible when the opening bell rang. It's going to be a solid day, despite the rain, which might even be easing up a little.

One of my staff has been coming to market ever since she was a baby, and her mom worked for a farm vendor here before that. She's on the first till, and I jump behind the second one, a line-up having formed of dripping wet customers who thank us for being here today when they get to the front.

It bears repeating: the rain-soaked customers are thanking us and giving us money for potatoes. In fact, it's now so busy they are lining up to do so. This, right here, is what makes farmers' markets tick. People choose shopping in the rain over going to a grocery store. Farmers choose marketing in the rain over selling wholesale.

It's what leads to the fact that farmers can make a living on an acreage that would otherwise be insufficient because they can get full retail for their produce. The customers keep coming back for more because...well...I just don't know. Is it the quality of the product? The contact with an actual farmer? The coffee and crepes? It might be magic. Whatever the cause, it provides me motivation to keep farming, and to keep customer service and marketing standards high. It seems like a practical way of showing the customers that I really appreciate their business.

I love being a part of this special relationship, but I worry that it won't last. It's so much work, there is so much to learn, and there is so much competition for customers—and surely, they won't keep coming? I mean, sometimes they must quietly wonder if it is really all that great? The weather, the effort, the cost. All that cooking.

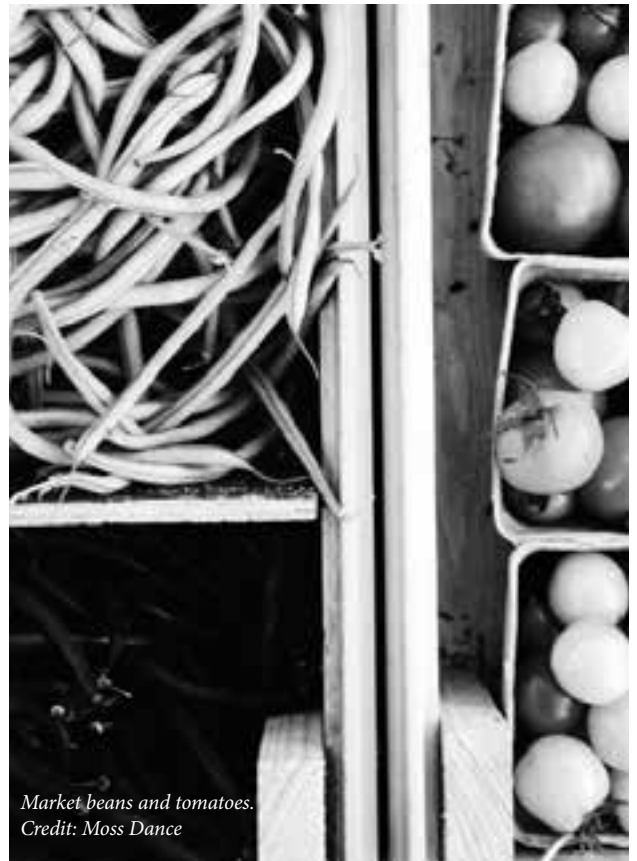
Customers. We need customers to make markets successful. We need to retain existing ones and win new ones who might also shop in the rain. The good news is that we are only tapping a tiny fraction of the people who buy food, so there are plenty more to be had. The bad news is that the competition out there is absolutely fierce, and nowhere else other than at farmers' markets are customers asked to go out shopping in all sorts of weather, probably park far away, and spend perhaps a little more than they really meant to.

Farmers' markets enjoy one major competitive advantage however, and that is something I have begun to call "mutual appreciation." This is an energy generated at the point of contact between primary producer and end consumer at market, most notably at the transaction stage. I take your money, you take my potatoes. We are both appreciative of the other. The feeling builds each week, from season to season and year to year and really can't be re-created in other retail environments.

The farmer can do much to cultivate the feeling of mutual appreciation in the stall. It's about a lot more than saying "thank you." Developing good customer service and merchandizing skills is of prime importance—pre-market preparation, and of course years of practice help too. In my opinion, it is important to put as much effort into selling the food as you spend growing it. These customers deserve that.

The farmer makes the magic that the people are coming back for. If you can also create this feeling of "mutual appreciation" in your stall, I think you'll be able to have both tills busy, even in the rain. 🌿

*Anna Helmer farms in the Pemberton Valley with her family, friends, and relations. Her book is called: A Farmer's Guide to Farmers' Markets and is available on amazon.com.*



*Market beans and tomatoes.  
Credit: Moss Dance*



# Growing the Local Food Economy in the North Okanagan



*A sheep surveys the North Okanagan landscape.  
Credit: Eva-Lena Lang*

*By Eva-Lena Lang, with thanks to Mary Stockdale*

Growing up on a family farm in the Mabel Lake Valley, in the North Okanagan, I experienced the many rewards and challenges that farmers can face. I left the region for several years, but whenever I returned for visits, I would notice new struggles confronting the farming community. Certain challenges stand out in my memory: the BSE or “mad cow disease” crisis in 2003, BC’s enactment of the new Meat Inspection Regulation, which came into effect in 2007, other policy and regulation issues, the impact of droughts and wildfires, and more.

I moved back to the North Okanagan in 2015 to work with COABC, with the hope of returning to farming as well as putting roots back down in the wider community. I became concerned about the long term health and sustainability of our communities, which have become increasingly disconnected from their farmers. I believed there was a need to rebuild the relationships between not only the farmers and their communities, but between all the different components of the regional food system: from farmers, to processors, distributors, retailers, chefs, and ultimately, consumers.

In 2015 I was taking a course in a community economic development (CED) program through SFU. I had learned about the concept of collective impact: “the commitment of a group of actors from different sectors to a common

agenda for solving a specific social problem.” Collective impact follows five conditions: providing backbone support, facilitating communication, identifying a common agenda, embarking upon mutually reinforcing activities, and monitoring success (Kania & Kramer, 2011).

I also learned about the Farm to Plate (F2P) Network in Vermont, which has been one of the most impressive examples of how to successfully apply the collective impact approach to make a “viable, sustainable, and resilient food system.” The Vermont F2P Network is an inspiring example of how a collective impact network has transformed Vermont’s food system, resulting in significant improvements over 10 years (2003-2013). Notable improvements include doubling local food production, increasing local food jobs by 10% and businesses by 15%, halting land loss in agriculture, and improving access to healthy food for all Vermonters.

Gathering around a kitchen table, a few community members and I, all food systems experts as well as from farming families in the region, discussed the Vermont F2P Network for one of my CED projects. We ended the discussion with the decision that it could, and should, happen in the North Okanagan.

In November 2016 we convened a meeting of 15 key North Okanagan food system stakeholders, to discuss the potential and explore the interest for building the region’s food system through collective impact. Recom-



Feeding chickens  
Credit: Eva-Lena Lang

mendations from the November meeting led to the following actions in 2017:

- We formed a working committee, under the guidance of the above stakeholders
- We selected Community Futures as our host organization
- We created a background report compiling and summarizing the recommendations of agriculture, food system, and food security plans that have been generated in the region over the past 10 years. This report was completed in December 2017 and was useful in planning a forum the following year.
- We hosted a forum in January of 2018, titled “Growing the Local Food Economy in the North Okanagan.”



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*Garlic grown by local hands.  
Credit: Eva-Lena Lang*

The forum began with our keynote speaker, Curtis Ogden of the Interaction Institute for Social Change in Boston, USA, presenting his work on regional food systems in Northwestern USA, including on the Vermont F2P Network. In particular, Curtis talked about the importance of working through networks, building authentic connection and increasing capacity, leading to increased strengths. Networks are beneficial as they produce outcomes through collaboration that organizations may not produce on their own.

The forum was attended by 85 participants, including the direct food system stakeholders, as well as supporting members from government, non-profit, and academic organizations. We presented the opportunities, challenges and recommended actions from the background report and used this as the basis for discussion in the forum working groups (i.e. Sustain Farmers, Support Processors, Develop the Middle, Engage Consumers, and Build the Network). Through conversations, each working group determined their priorities for short, medium, and long term actions focused on growing the local food economy.

The conversations at the forum were incredibly important and filled with great ideas for action. It was becoming apparent to us, however, that the best way to make these actions happen was through the development of a well connected, aligned, and coordinated network in the North Okanagan, operating through a collective impact approach. Since the forum, we have continued to ride the momentum, working on two parallel efforts: 1. Following up on the priority actions determined at the forum, and 2. Building a collective impact network across the food system, called

the North Okanagan Food System Initiative (NOFSI) Network.

The interim vision of NOFSI is a regional food system where farmland is protected and productive, farmers have access to land, regional farms and other food system enterprises are thriving, our food system is environmentally sustainable and resilient to climate change, more local food is produced and sold, and everyone has access to healthy good food. The goal of the North Okanagan Food System Initiative is to develop a collective impact network to achieve this vision.

NOFSI consists of a steering committee, a newly hired coordinator, and a network of food system stakeholders. Community Futures North Okanagan (CFNO) continues to act as our host organization. Currently, steering committee members represent key partner organizations such as Interior Health (IH), BC Ministry of Agriculture, University of British Columbia, Okanagan campus (UBCO), Food Action Society North Okanagan (FASNO), and the Regional District of North Okanagan (RDNO).

In May and June 2018, Liz Blakeway, the NOFSI coordinator, convened four working group meetings to follow up on the priority actions identified at the January forum. In the second half of these meetings, I facilitated a network mapping exercise to depict the current state of food system network in the North Okanagan. I also convened an overarching working group (the former Build the Network working group from the forum) to map, analyze, and make recommendations for building the NOFSI network. This work is a part of my Masters research at the University of



British Columbia Okanagan, working closely with supervisors Mary Stockdale and Jon Corbett as well as other expert advisors from the community.

The information obtained from this research and the priority actions identified at the follow up meetings will inform our transition to the next phase of our initiative. Starting in September, and with funding from the Real Estate Foundation as well as the Regional District of the North Okanagan, NOFSI will be working on:

1. Organizing annual forums and completing follow-up actions that focus on the following themes:
  - Growing the local food economy (this is underway, beginning at the January 2018 forum);
  - Promoting environmental sustainability across the food system (to begin at the planned January 2019 forum); and
  - Securing access to healthy local food (anticipated to begin at a January 2020 forum).
2. Building a network that functions to support and facilitate setting a shared agenda, initiates constructive communication, coordinates and supports working groups, and creates an environment that builds trust, alignment, and the ability to collaborate effectively.

During the first study group meeting in 2015, I discovered that there are other people in the North Okanagan who share my values and my understanding of what needs to be done to support a stronger regional food system. The conversation has continued, and it has been incredibly inspiring to see more and more passionate individuals become involved, building the momentum to implement this idea.

Each NOFSI member has their own story and reason as to why they want to see change. Many individuals who recognize the strong potential for profitable, diversified agricultural production in the North Okanagan, also want to support sustainable agriculture, the successful entrance of young farmers, and improved access to healthy local food for all our citizens. The success to date has been due to the commitment of members actively engaging in the network and a few very committed individuals putting countless hours of work into the development of NOFSI.

My study circle conversation in 2015 was a small way to try to make change happen, but it was a start. Inspired by Vermont's story, I continue to believe that we can make collective impact happen here, with the "collective" being our NOFSI network, and the "impact," a regional food system that is economically prosperous, environmentally sustainable, and socially accessible to all. 🌱

*Eva-Lena Lang grew up on a family farm, and has farmed all around the world. She is currently pursuing a Masters at UBCO to further her capacity to support the regional food system and small-scale farmers. Before starting her Master's, she worked with the Certified Organic Association of BC.*



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# Nature's Path Leaves Organic Trade Association as Protest to Save Organic



Credit:  Goran tek-en

*Press release by Nature's Path  
Interview by Darcy Smith with Dag Falck*

**T**his summer, Nature's Path surprised the organic world with the announcement that they were leaving the Organic Trade Association (OTA). The BC Organic Grower connected with Dag Falck, the Organic Program Manager at Nature's Path, to learn more about the values driving the decision and what it means in Canada. The original press release can be found [here](#) (facing page).

## Q&A with Nature's Path Organic Program Manager Dag Falck

**BC Organic Grower:** Why did Nature's Path resign from the OTA?

**Dag Falck:** Nature's Path Foods resigned from the Organic Trade Association (OTA) citing concern the OTA is shifting its commitment from supporting and representing the core principles of the organic food movement, to begin pushing a non-organic agenda which threatens the future of organic. Recent actions by the OTA that have driven the company's decision include misrepresenting organic food

companies and US consumers to support a vague and misleading national GMO labelling law, and allowing hydroponics to fall under the organic certification label where there is no organic agriculture nor soil present.

**BCOG:** What impact will this have on Canadian organic farmers?

**DF:** We don't anticipate our decision having any negative impact on Canadian farmers.

**BCOG:** Can you explain the issue with organic hydroponics?

**DF:** The industry needs a trade association that has a solid policy on hydroponics and acts with diligence and sincerity in implementing it. Unfortunately, the OTA has only added to the confusion by using the term 'container growing systems' when really talking about what we know as hydroponic. The threat to what organic represents has taken an enormous hit by now including hydroponic products in the US under the National Organic Program, and any loss of trust in the organic mark and what it means threatens organic business. Many are deeply disappointed that the US industry trade association is not working in step with organic advocates to protect and strengthen the original prin-

***Press Release: Company to invest in farming, research and associations that best reflect its vision for how organic can protect and enhance the health of both people and planet.***

**Richmond, BC (June 29, 2018)** – Today, Nature's Path Foods, North America's Largest organic breakfast company, announced its resignation from the Organic Trade Association (OTA) citing concern the OTA is shifting its commitment from supporting and representing the core principles of the organic food movement, to begin pushing a non-organic agenda which threatens the future of organic. Recent actions by the OTA that have driven the company's decision include misrepresenting organic food companies and US consumers to support a vague and misleading national GMO labelling law, and allowing hydroponics to fall under the organic certification label where there is no organic agriculture nor soil present.

*"Our departure from the OTA is an act of protest to raise awareness of our concern that the important role organic plays to support the health of consumers and our planet is being compromised," says Nature's Path founder and co-CEO Arran Stephens. "We believe giant food corporations, that also happen to own small organic brands, use the OTA to influence policy decisions to protect the best interest of their large, non-organic food portfolios."*

*In 2016, the OTA actively worked to pass the first-ever national, GMO food labelling law in the US (Stabenow-Roberts Bill) that pre-exempted strong, state-led GMO labelling laws. The OTA support of the new mandatory bill was without the knowledge or expressed consent of many organic members like Nature's Path. Currently open to public comments until July 3, 2018, the new law could exclude almost three-fourths of products with genetically engineered ingredients and use confusing new GMO terminology and symbols for on-pack disclosures.*

*"We believe organic can protect and enhance the health of people and planet. Organic can build a better world, free from food with chemical residues, free of toxic environments for farmers, and free of catering to big business at the expense of real people," adds Stephens. "We're alarmed the new bill works against our basic human right for food transparency which exists in 64 other countries around the globe with clear GMO labels."*

*As one of the first certified organic companies in North America and a founder of Organic Merchants in 1971, a predecessor of the OTA, Nature's Path will continue its investment to support the vitality and future of the organic food movement. The company will continue its membership with the Canadian Organic Trade Association, fund research by the Organic Center, Organic Farmers Association and the Rodale Institute plus continue to look at other groups to invest in supporting organic.*

*"We are committed to rebuilding what we believe is lost, by being a strong voice to ensure that organic continues to change food and agriculture for the better," says Stephens. "From using our social channels to raise awareness and action, to investing in research, farmers and organic associations that closer reflect our vision for organic, we will publicly work to protect and enhance the health of both people and planet."*

*As the proposed GMO bill closes for commentary on July 3, 2018, Nature's Path is calling for consumers to sign a petition to fight for their right to know what's in their food and help create a new food labelling law that helps keep them and their family safe. The company has launched a public campaign on its social channels to help bring consumers into action. To have their voices heard, consumers can visit:*

 **justlabelit.org**

ciples the organic movement was founded upon, namely fertile soil.

**BCOG:** What's the difference between OTA and COTA?

**DF:** OTA and COTA are independent in their operational practises, policy positions, and legal statuses. The OTA was founded in 1985 as a North American trade association, formed by Canadians and Americans together. The first office was formed in the United States and the intention was to run a North American wide association. As time evolved, a Canadian Advisory Committee (CAC)

was formed to better address issues specific to Canada. In 2007, after a few years of work by the CAC and OTA staff, the Canada Organic Trade Association (COTA) was founded as an independent not-for-profit in Canada and COTA's first Executive Director, Matthew Holmes was hired. The relationship with OTA evolved to one of "affiliation" formalized through a Memorandum of Understanding between the two organizations, recognizing each other's distinctness and legal and fiduciary independence as well as areas of collaboration. This agreement remains in effect today.



**BCOG:** Why is COTA important to the Canadian Organic Sector?

**DF:** Canada is the fifth largest organic market in the world, yet Canada is often overlooked on the world stage. Despite Canada's smaller population, the Canadian organic industry contributes to the global organic movement in a big way. Canada has unique organic growing conditions, many committed consumers, and a large export market for organic, so it makes sense to have our own trade association. Canada needs to ensure it keeps pace with innovations and advancements occurring in other countries; therefore, it is important for a trade association, like COTA, to work with the Canadian government and stakeholders to continue advancing organics in Canada and continue educating consumers. COTA has been critical to the industry in providing statistics, working on regulatory barriers and representing the sector, particularly with media and pulling together the industry to respond to issues.

**BCOG:** Is there any concern that Nature's Path leaving the OTA will create a void where previously Nature's Path was a strong voice at the table for maintaining organic integrity?

**DF:** As one of the first certified organic companies in North America and a founder of Organic Merchants in 1971, a predecessor of the OTA, Nature's Path will continue its investment to support the vitality and future of the organic food movement. The company will continue its membership with the COTA, fund research by the Organic Center, Organic Farmers Association, and the Rodale Institute plus continue to look at other groups to invest in supporting organic. Nature's Path is steadfast in its commitment to rebuild what we believe has been lost, by continuing to be a strong voice to ensure that organic continues to change food and agriculture for the better. From using social channels to raise awareness and action, to investing in research, farmers, and organic associations that closer reflect our vision for organic, Nature's Path will publicly work to protect and enhance the health of both people and planet.

**BCOG:** What measures are in place to make certain similar issues do not happen within COTA?

**DF:** Like any business, COTA understands the extreme importance of the composition of its decision making team. This, coupled with a strong governance practises, robust membership policies, and organizational bylaws (major decisions require 2/3-majority vote of the membership to be approved) ensure the association maintains its integrity and mission. In addition, COTA's Board of Directors has the ability to expel members that may cause risk to the association.

**BCOG:** What can people do to help make sure organic in Canada stays on the right path?

**DF:** The best thing individuals can do is stay engaged and participate in the discussion by providing their perspective as farmers, consumers, parents, etc. We must never lose sight of our desire to leave the earth a better place, and if something has a negative impact on our world, work to fix it, or re-evaluate how things are done.

Organic can protect and enhance the health of people and planet. It can build a better world, free from food with chemical residues, free of toxic environments for farmers, and free of catering to big business at the expense of real people. In an era where organic has become a profit opportunity we must guard against supporting profiteers who are only driven by that motive. They are not the best team players for creating change, and sometimes we must stand up and speak out when profit becomes more important than the original vision: a better earth for us, and all future generations. 🌱

To learn more about Nature's Path, visit:

🔗 [naturespath.com](https://naturespath.com)



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