

# FARMERS. MARKETS AND LOCAL FOOD SYSTEMS<sup>1</sup>

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## Case Summary

There is a movement towards strengthening the local food system on Vancouver Island. This case study addresses a key component of the local food system: food distribution by local agricultural producers. In particular, it concentrates on farmers' markets, an important aspect of food distribution. Given the links between local food systems and sustainability and the desired role of farmers' markets in local food systems, studying farmers' markets can offer insights into the barriers and opportunities that exist for strengthening local food systems and achieving sustainability outcomes. Though it is necessary to be realistic about the ability of farmers' markets to alter the industrial food system, farmers' markets also have the potential to be instrumental in supporting the local food system.

The study considers the creation of a farmers market in the Royal Oak area of Saanich, BC. However, before implementing the market, it is advised that further research and consultation be undertaken with respect to concerns such as location, scheduling, products offered, features, and types of marketing. As well, key issues, such as CRD health regulations, accessibility and inclusion of low-income consumers, and market standards regarding local and organic products, must be addressed by related stakeholders, partners, and the market committee.

## Sustainable Development Characteristics

Farmers' markets, through their potential to sustain and support the local food system, can contribute to sustainability goals. This does not mean that local food systems are inherently more sustainable than industrial food systems, but that they are more apt to acknowledge the importance of relying on locally available resources and recognizing interdependencies between local producers and consumers. This can then lead to more sustainable practices. Local food system practices such as farmers' markets are directly tied to place and time as well as social, economical, ethical and physical systems within which they are located. The impacts of these practices cannot be distanced and externalized in the same manner that they often are in the long-distance, industrial food system. Local food practices adapt to fit natural parameters and constraints which are perceived as limits to be respected, not obstacles to be overcome (Kloppenburger et al., 1996). In industrial food systems, natural parameters often are not even perceived due to the wide distances between causes and effects.

Local sustainability is directly related to contextual embeddedness. For instance, Kloppenburger et al. (1996) explain that a community which depends upon its community members, neighbouring lands, and native species to provide for most of its needs has to make sure the resources it uses to satisfy those needs are maintained in a healthy state. In this situation, impacts related to food practices, such as soil erosion and water

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<http://www.crcresearch.org/case-studies/crc-case-studies/farmers-markets-and-local-food-systems>

consumption, are issues of immediate concern. Thus farmers' markets, through their contextual embeddedness, have more potential to instigate sustainable practices within the local area where they occur than do industrial food systems. Farmers' markets encourage local food security through their promotion and support of local food production. The more food that is grown on Vancouver Island, the more the residents of the island will be buffered in the event of disruptions of long distance food supply such as weather events or political instabilities. Local food production and distribution can assist in fostering food security for the local region.

Through reducing the distance that food is transported, farmers' markets decrease "food miles". The distance food takes to travel is directly related to the amount of fossil fuels required to get it there. Since fossil fuels cause pollution and directly impact climate change (Hegrl et al., 2006), reducing the distance that food travels translates into environmental (and related socio-economic) benefits.

In the Greater Victoria Capital Region, there is a high proportion of organic producers compared to other regions in BC (MacNair, 2004). This benefits the region since organic practices have various sustainability benefits. One of these benefits is supporting the land on which food is produced; for example, through prevention of soil erosion (Arden-Clarke & Hodges, 1988). These sustainability benefits are realized to a great extent in the Greater Victoria Capital Region due to the fact that it comprises a large number of organic producers, with 25 certified organic producers in total (Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection, 1999 as cited in MacNair, 2004). The Region has the second highest proportion of certified organic producers than any other region in British Columbia (next to the Okanagan-Similkameen Regional District), with this number increasing at a rapid rate (MacNair, 2004). This trend is exemplified in the present study, whereby 55% of producers employed organic practices (although not necessarily certified organic). Thus, the emphasis by local producers on Vancouver Island on organic practices contributes to sustainability benefits for the region.

Farmers' markets can encourage human wellbeing through various means. One way they can accomplish this is through educating consumers about health. The type of food that is offered at farmers' markets can also sustain human health. For instance, farmers' markets often feature organic foods. Organic produce has been found to contain higher levels of antioxidants, substances attributed to cancer-prevention in humans, than non-organic foods (Benbrook, 2005). Locally-produced and sold foods also have health benefits. When local produce is purchased locally, it is likely to be consumed much sooner after harvest than non-local produce and therefore have higher nutritional value when consumed (MacNair, 2004).

On a broader level, farmers' markets can support the health of communities through emphasizing a 'healthy-community' approach in their operations. With this approach, decisions are made with the aim of improving the wellbeing of the community as a whole. This community-health approach extends the notion of health beyond individuals to an interconnected network of people who together help to support the wellbeing of the entire community. A focus on community health can have broader-reaching and longer lasting benefits for people's wellness than simply concentrating on individuals because of the benefits that arise from having the support of an entire network of people. On both a community and individual scale, farmers' markets can assist in sustaining human health and wellbeing. This occurs through various means including health-related education that can occur during producer-consumer interactions, healthy products offered at the

market, and the ability of the market to have a 'healthy-community' approach in its operations.

### **Critical Success Factors**

The continued success of local farming in the Royal Oak area of Saanich requires changes and improvements in the following:

- (1) Advertising, sales, and education: improving these aspects will assist producers in raising awareness about their farm operation and products. It will also enable consumers to better locate products that they are interested in and understand production practices of producers (such as organic practices and local production). This has the potential to influence purchasing decisions made by consumers.
- (2) Product and production method: suggestions by producers include increasing efficiencies in production methods, adapting to meet consumer demands, and adopting practices that are more sustainable. These choices have the potential of increasing sales for producers as customers' needs are better addressed. They may also result in greater satisfaction for consumers as they are able to purchase products that in sync with their demands.
- (3) Construction and labour: Improved farm infrastructure will allow producers to run farm operations more effectively and better display products to customers on-site, thus keeping down costs and improving product marketing. Such practices will also benefit consumers through lower prices. Other concerns on behalf of producers include recruiting, keeping, and adequately paying labour power. This is a serious issue as adequate labour is necessary meeting production requirements for consumer demands and maintaining product quality standards.

The success of farmers markets in this same area would rely on the following:

- (1) **Participation.** Producers in this study suggest that farmer's markets are ideal for producers who:
  - (a) cannot or do not want to exclusively sell products from their farm stand,
  - (b) are new producers or are new at selling their products,
  - (c) are small-scale producers but have enough production to sell their products,
  - (d) prefer selling products direct to the consumer,
  - (e) are interested in educating consumers about local food production, organics, and general farm operations,
  - (f) are able to take time away from their farm to be at a market,
  - (g) can afford market stall fees,
  - (h) would benefit from using the market as a means to advertise their farm operation,
  - (i) are confident they will be able to make enough profit at the market to cover the input costs of participating in the market (such as labour, time factors such as driving time, and market stall fees),
  - (j) can make the commitment to attend a market on a regular basis, and
  - (k) enjoy interacting with customers.

(2) **Organization.** Producers discuss several factors to consider with respect to organizing a farmer's market. These include:

- (a) funding for the market,
- (b) a manager to run the market,
- (c) market volunteers,
- (d) support from other farmers in organizing the market,
- (e) formation of community committees,
- (f) land/site acquisition for a market,
- (g) a critical mass of producers to participate in the market, and
- (h) standards of quality control for market products.

(3) **Location.** The most important aspects of location according to producers include:

- (a) adequate parking for customers,
- (b) facilities (such as bathrooms),
- (c) location in a busy/central area,
- (d) access to the market for customers (including public transportation, cycling and pedestrian access),
- (e) location away from competition/Conflict of interest with nearby business (such as grocery stores and country markets),
- (f) aesthetic beauty/ambience of site,
- (g) location near traffic or "lines of flow",
- (h) location on well-known site, and
- (i) visibility of market to potential customers.

(4) **Market scheduling.** If the market were to be during the weekend, participants recommend having it in the morning until mid-day or early afternoon. If the market were to be during the weekday, participants recommend running it in the afternoon or evening. Overall, participants prefer to have the market four times a month on a regularly scheduled day during the summer months of the year (such as May-October). One exception to this is if a pocket market were to be set up which could be run all day for the entire year.

(5) **Products offered.** Producers wish to sell a variety of fruit, vegetables, animal products, and other items at the proposed market. All producers are in favour of having farm produce and prepared food at the market. Producers mention having limits to the number of craftspeople, required standards, and a local emphasis. Producers have differing opinions on organics at the market, from the belief that an organic market would be elitist to concerns that non-organic products would compete unfairly with organic products.

(6) **Market features.** All producers are in favour of having the following market features: activities for children, parking facilities, public transportation, and food demonstrations. The majority of producers believe that music would be a beneficial feature, provided that it supports the market atmosphere.

(7) **Market type.** There is much conjecture by producers regarding market type. Many producers appear to be unsure about how a cooperative market would operate. This could be due to the fact that there are few, if any, examples of cooperative markets in the local area. Individual stalls are favoured because producers believe they are

easiest to manage and allow for a more direct relationship between producers and consumers.

For success in a wider sustainable community development context the market organization should:

- (1) **Foster Accessibility and Inclusion.** The market should be accessible for and inclusive of low income consumers and marginalized groups. "Food policy councils" and related initiatives, are being developed in a variety of cities across Canada, including Toronto, Vancouver, and Victoria. These initiatives work to connect food system issues to other key factors affecting local communities such as economic development and nutrition and public health (Dahlberg, 1993 as cited in Kloppenburg et al., 1996; MacNair, 2004; The Toronto Food Policy Council, 1993 as cited in Kloppenburg et al., 1996). In the Greater Victoria Region, the Capital Region Food and Agriculture Initiatives Roundtable has been established to deal with such issues.
- (2) **Consult with Stakeholders.** Consultation with local businesses, community members, other farmers' markets, producers, consumers, and other relevant stakeholders is recommended in order to make the market a success. These parties may offer a wealth of advice, often based on practical experience in the local area. Colihan and Chorney (2004) mention the following issues in which stakeholders may offer assistance: training and mentoring in marketing, merchandising, food safety, bookkeeping, food processing, personnel management, legal issues, team building and community development. Consultation also ensures that relationships with the market are positive, thus decreasing potential for conflicts in the future. Consultation allows for relationship-building amongst affected parties.
- (3) **Consumer preferences.** Notably, consumers are one of the most important factors in a farmers' market. For instance consumers' preference for food choice may act as a deterrent to farmers' market patronage. Understanding consumer preferences may allow the proposed farmers' market to better address and find solutions to meeting these needs, such as promoting the development of regional palates based on "moving diets" of locally and seasonally available food (as suggested by Kloppenburg et al. , 1996).
- (4) **Form Partnerships.** Partnerships between any farmers market and groups such as municipalities, service clubs, chambers of commerce, community organizations, local agriculture groups, business improvement associations, government planning departments, economic development agencies, consumer groups, and non profit organizations, can provide significant advantages to a market in the form of funding, expertise, public support, and market space (Colihan and Chorney, 2004). For example, incorporating the market into the Royal Oak community development plan would potentially enable the market to be considered in a range of different planning and fiscal considerations. As well, Lifecycles Project Society is currently researching the pocket market concept and would be a valuable resource regarding providing expertise in this regard.

## What Didn't Work?

- **Political support for the Industrial Food Model:** Local food system movements are embedded in, and constrained by, the rules, interests and policies of local, national, and international governments. Governmental influences on local food systems include the creation of municipal bylaws related to agricultural land use, provincial changes to land designations such as land included within the Agricultural Land Reserve in BC, and food production and export decisions made by international governments that affect the purchasing choices of local consumers.
- **Cultural Habits:** Currently, consumers have a high degree of choice in selecting food products and are able to purchase food from anywhere in the world. They are also accustomed to spending a small amount of their total income on food products. It is difficult to overcome these cultural habits and encourage consumers to accept local food constraints, such as limited options in the wintertime and spending more of their household income on local food products.
- **Urbanization:** Producers in the Greater Victoria Capital Region could have difficulties due to their close proximity to the urban core. Such constraints include urban development pressures and the high cost of land. For instance the cost of property in the Victoria CRD has doubled in the past five years (Hill, 2007). High land costs can make it very difficult for people interested in participating in local food production to purchase land for farming purposes. Urban constraints such as high land costs can thus pose significant obstacles for local food practitioners.
- **Commodification of Relationships:** Farmers' markets may actually mimic the industrial system through similar commodification of food and commodified relations between consumers and producers. It is likely that various motivations exist simultaneously and possibly in a contradictory way, among producers and within single individuals. Hinrichs (2000) discusses how there is a tension in the way producers perceive farmers' markets, a friction between contextual embeddedness and commodification.
- **Lack of Accessibility for Less Affluent Consumers and Producers:** Depending on their emphasis and management, farmers' markets can be difficult to access for less affluent consumers. This occurs because farmers' markets can tend toward emphasizing expensive specialty goods, exclusive products, and high-priced niche market foods, described as 'yuppie chow' by Feagan et al. (2004). These products are difficult to purchase by those with less disposable income. Producers may also face accessibility challenges when selling their products through a farmers' market. Many of these challenges are impacted by those who manage the market. For instance, if market stall fees are set high and regulations prohibit producers from sharing stalls, this could deter lower-income producers from participating in the market.
- **Minimal Public Understanding of Local Food Systems:** Although participation by both consumers and producers in farmers' markets may symbolize broader support for the local food movement, Feagan et al. (2004) believe that there is a gap regarding the conceptual leap that needs to be taken with respect to consumer food choices being a direct response to broader sustainability objectives. Ideally, when the public interacts directly with producers, they will become more

aware of these implications, such as by understanding the beneficial effects of growing local food on their community. However, the average farmers' market consumer may not understand the broader context of the local food movement and sustainability implications as these issues may be complex to understand or obscured by the distances created by the industrial food system.

- **Food Security:** Although increasing local production and supply of food would protect Vancouver Island from disruptions to outside transportation routes, a food system that depends exclusively on local sources without outside connections is vulnerable to political, social, and environmental events that could wipe out the resident food supply. Examples of such happenings include pest outbreaks, natural disasters, and quarantines. Greater reliance on local food alone can lead to decreased food security if there is not a connection to outside production sources.
- **Exclusionary Tendencies:** The local food movement, like any movement, has the potential of becoming overly exclusionary and dogmatic. As Hinrichs (2003, p. 37) explains, "defensive food system localization tends to stress the homogeneity and coherence of "local", in patriotic opposition to heterogeneous and destabilizing outside forces,... localization becomes elitist and reactionary, appealing to narrow nativist sentiments." Thus, although the local food movement has much to offer, it must be wary of extremism and be inclusive of other perspectives and points of view.

### **Financial Costs and Funding Sources**

Overhead and management vary in complexity based on the value of the real estate upon which they locate and the size of the market (Colihan & Chorney, 2004). Farmer's markets can be located in permanent structures, sheds, or open-air at a wide range of locations (Colihan & Chorney, 2004). There are various forms of farmers' markets including farm produce, craft, organic, and combinations of these forms, as well as different types of marketing, including co-operative tables, individual stalls, and marketing board ownership. In many cases public funding has helped to establish the markets and in a large number of cases, public funding, in one form or another, supports the operation of the markets (Lapping, 2004).

### **Research Analysis**

#### **Supporting the Local Economy**

Farmers' markets aid in supporting the local economy in many ways. One of these ways is farmers' markets' ability to flexibly respond to consumer demands. For instance, farmers markets are able to cater to niche and specialty markets such as the needs of senior citizens and ethnic communities. The direct interaction that local producers have with their customers at farmers' markets means that they are able to immediately determine and meet consumers' needs.

Farmers' markets also aid in supporting the local economy through what Lapping (2004) describes as the 'multiplier effect.' This phenomenon occurs when money spent at farmers' markets is circulated in the community, leading to multiplying effects within the local economy. For example, when farmers' markets are located next to local businesses, there are often spillovers to the businesses from market patrons (Lapping, 2004). As

such, the establishment of a farmers' market can result in increased economic growth in the area in which it is located.

### **Formation of Social Capital**

The interactions that occur between producers and consumers at farmers' markets often go beyond economic capital gains and can lead to 'social capital' formation (Hinrichs, 2000; Lapping, 2004). Social capital is based on the premise that social networks have value. It refers to the "collective value of all social networks and the inclinations that arise from these networks to do things for each other" (Putnam, 2000). The capacity to come together creates a social space where community, friendships and social networking are fostered. This social space was important for producers in the study. Through direct social interaction, farmers' markets aid in re-creating linkages between producers and consumers. They "shrink both the physical food chain and the sociocultural distances between the two" (Feagan et al., 2004). The social networks that are formed as a result of direct interactions at farmers' markets are thus essential for personal wellbeing and the formation of social capital.

### **Shaping the Food System**

Local production and participation in farmers' markets can influence the food system in broader ways than building social and economic capital. One way that farmers' markets shape food systems is by fostering free enterprise and ethically-grounded economic behaviour. Farmers' markets can be a way of supporting the economic viability of producers who wish to operate outside of the industrial food system (Lapping, 2004). By providing producers with opportunities to sell their goods locally, farmers' markets enable them to operate in a way they consider ethical, while opening a path for others to do so as well.

The context of 'food democracy' is useful for understanding this influence. Food democracy is the idea that people "can and should be actively participating in shaping the food system, rather than remaining passive as spectators on the sidelines ...[and] having power to determine agro-food policies and practices locally, regionally, nationally, and globally" (Hassanein, 2003, p. 79). Although not explicitly labelled as such by producers in the study, many of their comments appeared to express a desire to shape the direction of the food system. Through supporting fostering free enterprise and ethically-grounded economic behaviour, promoting the economic viability of producers who wish to operate outside of the industrial food system, and fostering active attempts to create change in the food system, local production and participation in farmers' markets can shape the food system.

### **Enhancing Consumer Understanding of Local Food**

As discussed in the previous section, local producers often influence and support the local food system. One of the ways this occurs is through educating consumers. Several producers in this study expressed the desire to educate people about how food is produced on the farm and about the sustainability benefits of local food production. Direct educational exchange such as this has the potential to influence how the public understands food systems, makes consumer choices, and understands the importance of local food. This has clear implications for sustainability.

## Detailed Background Case Description

### Introduction

There is a movement towards strengthening the local food network on Vancouver Island. The Economic Blueprint, an evaluation of the economic potential of the Capital Region, has listed encouraging the agricultural sector as one of its key recommendations, including supporting the purchase of local farm products (Thornton, 2003). The Capital Region Food & Agriculture Initiatives Roundtable (2004) states, “The most pressing concern in relation to food security is the need to increase the amount of food being grown locally on Vancouver Island.” There is also an increasing interest in, and demand for, regional food by consumers in the Capital Region (MacNair, 2004).

### Geographical context

The Royal Oak neighbourhood is located on Vancouver Island in British Columbia, Canada. It is in Saanich West, in the District of Saanich on the Saanich Peninsula, immediately north of the municipalities of Victoria and Oak Bay. The District of Saanich was incorporated on March 1, 1906 (The Corporation of the District of Saanich, 2006). With an area of 11,179 hectares, it is the largest of the core municipalities making up Greater Victoria (The Corporation of the District of Saanich, 2006). Saanich has become a major residential area while also maintaining an important agricultural base. Half of its residency is urban and half is rural and agricultural (The Corporation of the District of Saanich, 2006). With a population of 103,654, it is the most inhabited municipality on Vancouver Island and the seventh most populated in the province (Statistics Canada, 2002).

The Royal Oak neighbourhood is divided into three main areas: Broadmead, Viewmont, and Falaise (see Figure 2). The Royal Oak area is represented by three community associations: the Broadmead Area Resident’s Association, the Falaise Crescent Community Association, and the Royal Oak Community Association. The population of Royal Oak is growing substantially; it grew from 3,445 people in 1986 (The Corporation of the District of Saanich, 2003) to 17,490 people in 2001 (Government of British Columbia, 2001). Agriculture has traditionally played a key role in Royal Oak’s economy, has added to the local food supply and has provided rural viewsapes (The Corporation of the District of Saanich, 2003). However, recent suburban development has displaced agricultural uses and fragmented agricultural lands.

### Local Food

An alternative to the industrial food system is the “local” food movement. Local food is more than the name implies, which is food grown, caught or processed in its regional area (Burros, 2006). According to community nutritionist Gail Feenstra (1997, p. 28 as cited in Hinrichs, 2000), local food systems “are rooted in particular places, aim to be economically viable for farmers and consumers, use ecologically sound production and distribution practices and enhance social equity and democracy for all members of the community.” This system incorporates food production, processing, distribution and consumption with the aim of increasing the environmental, nutritional, economic, and social wellbeing of a specific locale (Wilkins & Eames-Sheavly, n.d.) There are four main aspects that distinguish local food systems from the industrialized food system (Wilkins & Eames-Sheavly, n.d.):

- (1) **Food security.** Local food security refers to food access within a community context, with a particular focus on low-income households. In a local food system, food access is increased due to the growth and sale of grown food within the community. On the other hand, in an industrialized food system, food consumption is highly dependent upon food grown across the world.
- (2) **Proximity** describes the distance between different parts of the food system. Proximity is increased in local food systems where producers and consumers have a much higher potential for interaction than in the industrialized food system.
- (3) **Self-reliance** describes to what extent a community is able to meet its own food requirements. In the local food system, food is grown for local needs and not for export as in global food systems. This ensures that the community is able to support its own food requirements.
- (4) **Sustainability** refers to following food system practices that respect the ability of future generations to meet their food requirements. This includes environmental protection, profitability, ethical treatment of food system workers and other living beings, and community development. Local food systems meet these criteria to a much greater extent than industrial food systems, due in part to having to deal with direct consequences of food system decisions.

Local food systems include an array of market arrangements, including roadside farm stands, U-pick operations, community-supported agriculture, farmers markets, etcetera (Hinrichs, 2000). They are explicitly and beneficially linked to the needs and interest of local households, neighbourhoods, and communities, such direct agricultural markets favour locality and seasonality over distance and durability (Friedman, 1993). Tailoring food production and its consumption to local conditions is believed to be a key factor in developing sustainable food systems (Cavallaro & Dansero, 1998 as cited in Feagan et al, 2004; Feenstra, 1997; Halweil, 2002).

According to the Greater Victoria Capital Region Food & Agricultural Initiatives Roundtable, there is an increasing interest in, and demand for, regional food by consumers (MacNair, 2004). One of the ways of meeting this demand is to support local producers in their production of food and in their distribution of their products. A key means of accomplishing this is the establishment of farmers' markets. This research will focus on farmers' markets and related marketing aspects of these markets.

### **Re-Emergence of Farmers' Markets**

There has been a dramatic increase in farmers' markets in Britain and North America in the last 10-20 years (Connell et al., 2006; Hinrichs, 2000; Sommer et al., 1980). According to Colihan and Chorney (2004), the province of British Columbia (BC) in Canada is a high-growth region for farmers' markets. In BC, there are about 100 known markets, up from 60 known markets in 2000 (Connell et al., 2006). Several communities, including Vancouver and Victoria, have multi-market locations (Colihan & Chorney, 2004). There are various explanations for this renewed interest in farmers' markets. These include:

- (1) lower prices to consumers (Sommer et al., 1980),

- (2) higher profits for local growers and a desire to support them (Colihan & Chorney, 2004; Hinrichs, 2000; Sommer et al., 1980),
- (3) consumer demands outside of the dominant retailing food environment (Baber & Frongillo, 2003; Hinrichs, 2000; Holloway & Kneafsey, 2000 as cited in Feagan et al., 2004).
- (4) an exciting shopping experience for consumers (Sommer et al., 1980),
- (5) a means to help revitalize urban areas (Baber & Frongillo, 2003; Colihan & Chorney, 2004; Sommer et al., 1980),
- (6) an increased interest in food quality by consumers (Baber & Frongillo, 2003; Colihan & Chorney, 2004; Connell et al., 2006; Hinrichs, 2000; Sommer et al., 1980),
- (7) a growing interest in fresh produce by consumers (Colihan & Chorney, 2004; Lockeretz, 1986 as cited in Hinrichs, 2000),
- (8) demand for local products (Colihan & Chorney, 2004; Connell et al., 2006),
- (9) the social atmosphere markets provide (Baber & Frongillo, 2003), and
- (10) the opportunity for urban and rural people to come together (Sommer et al., 1980).

One means of sustaining the local food system is the creation of farmers' markets, as farmers' markets strengthen the connection between local consumers and local producers. They represent a structured organizational form of larger scale than individual roadside stands or U-pick operations. Farmers' markets can range from relatively simple structures with a straightforward purpose, to far larger, complex organizations with a broad public mandate and range of customer, vendors and community stakeholders (Colihan & Chorney, 2004). Lyson et al. (1995, p.109 as cited in Hinrichs et al., 2004) state that "as a social structure linking the formal and informal economies, farmers' markets are organizationally flexible. They accommodate diverse personal motivations, products and organizational strategies. They allow producers to enter and leave easily, while enduring as an organization."

There are a number of common characteristics of farmers' markets. These include:

- (1) high levels of repeat patronage by consumers, patronage by those who live in or near communities with established farmers' markets,
- (2) overwhelming participation by small-scale farmers who report that sales at farmers' markets consist a significant share of agricultural income,
- (3) prices close to or slightly above those found in nearby supermarkets,
- (4) substantial spillovers to local businesses from patrons of farmers' markets, and
- (5) the overwhelming importance noted by patrons on direct social interaction with producers (Brown, 2002 as cited in Lapping, 2004).

### **Vancouver Island**

Vancouver Island is an ideal location to produce food locally. There is available land protected by the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR), moderate climatic conditions year-round, and a good supply and quality of water (Geggie, 2006; Thornton, 2003). The province has a dynamic small farm sector, mild climate, and a community that has an interest in fresh food (Colihan & Chorney, 2004). This study occurred in the Greater Victoria Capital Regional District (GVCRD). The GVCRD agriculture sector has a competitive advantage due to its proximity to a large urban population, which creates a varied market for agricultural crops (Thornton, 2003). There is also a knowledgeable farming community, interest by young people in farming, as well as considerable

training and support programs for new farmers (Geggie, 2006). Currently in Greater Victoria, 13,000 hectares (31,421 acres) of farmland is under cultivation on approximately 750 farms (Downtown Victoria Business Association, 2007).

Despite having a dedicated farming sector, the percentage of food grown and consumed on Vancouver Island has been steadily declining (Geggie, 2006). Whilst fifty years ago, over 90% of the food eaten on the island was produced locally, currently, this figure is at less than 10% (MacNair, 2004). There are several reasons for this decline. These include lack of access to land for farming due to the high price of land, uncertain viability of farming to generate a sufficient income, questionable consumer willingness and ability to pay a price that is reflective of the real costs of local production, seasonality of food and climatic limitations, and limited diversity and supply of locally produced foods in the winter (Geggie, 2006; MacNair, 2004).

A significant limitation in the local production of goods is the decrease in available agricultural land. The Greater Victoria Capital Region is rapidly losing its viable agricultural land. In 1974, the Provincial Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR) was created to preserve high quality agricultural lands from development. The Land Commission Act requires that lands within the ALR be used/ retained for agricultural purposes and that alterations to land use, including the subdivision of land, must be supported by the municipality and approved by the Land Commission (The Corporation of the District of Saanich, 2003). Despite this mandate, nearly 25,000 hectares of agricultural land was removed from the ALR between 1974 and 1999. At this rate, Vancouver Island has had the highest (regional) percentage loss of ALR land in the province of BC (MacNair, 2002). This conversion of valuable farmland on Vancouver Island to non-agricultural uses has incited questions about farm, community, and regional sustainability under such change (McNair, 2004).

Despite these limitations, there is a growing movement towards strengthening the local food network on Vancouver Island. For instance, the Capital Region Food & Agriculture Initiatives Roundtable (MacNair, 2004) states, "The most pressing concern in relation to food security is the need to increase the amount of food being grown locally on Vancouver Island." The popularity of local food among consumers in the Capital Region has also grown substantially- in Greater Victoria, farmers' markets increased from one - Moss Street Market- in 1992 to 10 in 2004 (MacNair, 2004). Farmers' markets provide added value to locally grown in the form of fresh, healthier food in an environment that fosters social interactions, community, and entertainment. These attributes enable farmers' markets to compete with low price food alternatives, manifest in the industrial food system, that currently have a dominant hold on the market.

### **Current Production Practices, Forms of Sales, and Marketing Approaches of Producers**

Producers are currently producing and selling a wide variety of fruit, vegetables, and animal products. The majority of producers prefer to market their products directly to the consumer. Regarding income, the majority of producers make less than 100% of their annual income from sale of their items and several producers have income sources other than that of their product sales.

<b>Items Produced</b>			
<b>Vegetables</b>	<b>Fruit</b>	<b>Animal Products</b>	<b>Other</b>
Sweet corn, lettuce, beans, squash, zucchini, carrots, celery, pumpkins, broccoli, cauliflower, asparagus, heirlooms, potatoes, radishes, leeks, onions, tomatoes, cabbages, kale, collards, chard, herbs, tomatillos, hot peppers, eggplant, arugula, beets.	Blueberries, raspberries, grapes, apples, juneberries, strawberries, blackberries, rhubarb, mulberries, cherries, pears, persimmons.	Chickens, roosters, meat chickens, lay chickens, turkeys, pigs, ostrich.	Christmas trees, seeds, nuts, crafts, flowers
<b>Items That Producers Would Like to Sell at a Market</b>			
<b>Fruit and Vegetables</b>	<b>Animal Products</b>	<b>Other Items</b>	
Blueberries, raspberries, corn, peppers, black potatoes, cabbage stalks, eggplants, tomatoes.	Eggs, honey, pork, chicken	Jams, preserve products, flowers, seeds, crafts	
<b>Specific Items Perceived to Receive Highest Sales Revenue at a Market</b>			
Strawberries, raspberries, blueberries, corn, heirloom tomatoes, salad greens	Eggs, honey	Preserves, plants, flowers	
<b>Specific Items Perceived to be in Greatest Demand by Customers</b>			
Apples, berries, tomatoes, strawberries, pears, corn	Eggs, meat, chicken, honey	Flowers	

### **Attitudes of Producers to Market Characteristics**

The main criteria for the selection of market location are:

- (1) general access to the market for customers,
- (2) public transit access for customers,
- (3) pedestrian access for customers,
- (4) bicycle access for customers,
- (5) aesthetic beauty/ambience of site,
- (6) customer parking,
- (7) market located near traffic or "lines of flow,"
- (8) market located on well-known site,
- (9) market visible to potential customers,
- (10) bathrooms at market,
- (11) wheelchair access for customers,
- (12) adequate space at market,
- (13) market located near large urban community, and
- (14) adequate parking for vendors.

### Strategic Questions

- (1) **Local emphasis.** Having local products at the market is important for many producers, specifically with respect to crafts, produce, and food demonstrations. There is a strong demand by customers in Greater Victoria for local products. However there are many systemic challenges faced by local producers such as a lack of governmental support for local agriculture.
- (2) **Health regulations.** The current lack of education and level of awareness on behalf of both producers and consumers regarding health regulations at farmers' markets leads to unnecessary barriers and fears as well as decreased availability of certain products and lowered sales.
- (3) **Pocket market concept.** The idea of having a pocket market in Royal Oak was suggested by several producers. A pocket market differs from a traditional farmers' market in that it can have fewer vendors and can be operated on a permanent basis (such as daily on weekdays) at a fixed location (Geggie & Fuge, 2006).
- (4) **Organics.** Organics is a prevalent theme throughout the interviews and comments regarding organics span a variety of issues such as:
  - (a) growing demand by customer on Vancouver Island for organics,
  - (b) the desire by producers to incorporate organic practices into their operations,
  - (c) the difficulty of implementing organic certification,
  - (d) pricing for organics,
  - (e) difficulties in understanding organic terminology, and
  - (f) competition of organic with non-organic products.

Organic issues are complicated and are influenced by several factors including government policies, education priorities, and consumer preferences. These issues are beyond the scope of this study. However, the lack of understanding by producers and consumers about organic issues leads to barriers regarding practical implementation of organic practices on the farm, comprehension of organic product labelling by the public, and pricing of organics at farmers' markets.

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