

## Executive Summary

# Groundwork: Toward a Resilient Food System for Bowen Island

*[These] are two of the best reports I have seen from agrologists anywhere, because they cover the wide spread of everything you could think about to resolve this problem.*

—Harold Steves,  
4<sup>th</sup> generation farmer, Richmond City Councillor, Metro Vancouver Councillor

Members of Bowen Island Food Sovereignty are deeply concerned about the global climate emergency and believe that agricultural practices that take care of the land and soil are a valuable and overlooked tool for mitigating the damage. We believe that these same practices can be implemented to ensure greater food security in a world where agriculture is threatened by a changing climate.

In the spring of 2019, we started work on an initiative we call *Toward a Resilient Food System for Bowen Island*. By October, we had published the *Communication and Engagement Groundwork Report*, a study that explores Bowen Islanders' experiences and attitudes about food, farming, and climate. We also published the *Agrarian Analysis*, a compendium of data documenting the island's biophysical characteristics, land use, and potential for agricultural activity.

Our initiative supports local, place-based agriculture and food systems as a means for both building community resilience and mitigating climate change. Some benefits of a local food system, based on regenerative agricultural principles, include carbon sequestration in the soil, reduction of greenhouse gas emissions associated with organic waste management and food importation and delivery, accessibility of fresh and nutritious food for all, and the development of healthy community connections.

*The main way that most people will experience climate change is through the impact on food: the food they eat, the price they pay for it, and the availability and choice that they have.* —Tim Gore, Head of Policy, Food Justice for Oxfam

## **Communication and Engagement Groundwork Report**

From March through September 2019, our outreach engaged hundreds of people through an online survey, a facilitated stakeholder workshop, tabling at the Farmers' Market, more than a dozen newspaper articles, educational presentations, and one-on-one interviews. We sought the participation of the community at large to generate ideas and cultivate a shared sense of purpose. Much of the information we collected, in particular that which was gathered during the interviews, relied upon individuals already invested in agricultural activities on the island.

We organized the information we gathered into a number of categories:

- Food production, distribution and marketing
- The challenges of farming on Bowen
- Economics and motivations for farming on Bowen
- Natural resources and climate change
- History of farming on Bowen
- Opportunities and next steps

We learned that while there is a wide variety of foods being produced on Bowen, over time the production of local foods has gotten tougher. Challenges that were identified include economic barriers, regulations, poor soil, invasive species, and climate change leading to water scarcity. Those islanders who consider themselves “farmers” rely on other sources of income but are driven to produce food out of a desire to act as stewards of the land and because it aligns with their values and lifestyles.

*The Communication and Engagement Groundwork Report* concluded with a list of actions that can be taken by groups or individuals to support a resilient food system on Bowen Island. Some of these actions are already noted in municipal policy, such as objective #88 in Bowen Island’s Official Community Plan (OCP), which expresses the intention “to encourage Metro Vancouver Parks to plan and implement active farming uses for ALR lands in Crippen Regional Park, subject to the environmental policies of this OCP, as demonstration farming, allotments or recreational gardening if compatible with park values.”

Other opportunities for actions the report identified include:

- Investigate bylaw changes that would enable food producers to sell their produce regardless of the zoning of their property
- Offer assistance to on-island meat producers, a possible mobile abattoir, and education about regenerative livestock grazing
- Encourage rainwater harvesting and water conservation
- Develop bylaws to support Policy 42 in the OCP: “Any subdivision or development should be designed to maintain a maximum amount of undisturbed forestland. Wherever possible, the retained forests should connect with adjacent forestlands.”
- Implement municipal restrictions on pesticide use
- Support compost education and facilities on the island

## **Agrarian Analysis**

The research for our second publication, the *Agrarian Analysis*, was led by Julie P. Sage, M.Sc., P.Ag. Starting with a history of the island’s identity as a farming community, the *Agrarian Analysis* presents the biophysical characteristics of Bowen Island and lays the groundwork for policy development and community action to support the protection and expansion of agricultural activity on the island.

Research for the analysis spanned seven months and included reviewing information about agricultural and food systems from strategic plans, frameworks, action plans, community plans, academic studies, non-governmental organizations, and news

outlets. Some of the technical data was accessed through communications with representatives at various levels of government and ministries as well.

The analysis explains how economic pressure to develop agricultural land for purposes other than farming threatens local production and adds to our dependency on imports. The purview of the Agricultural Land Commission and its stewardship role is outlined along with recent legislative efforts to curb non-agricultural development.

Climate projections are referenced throughout the report to illustrate ecosystem sensitivities. The projected impacts of our changing climate underscore the need to safeguard and strengthen local food production.

The *Agrarian Analysis* has an extensive glossary and references, making it a useful resource for planning and policy action related to land use, biodiversity, and natural resources. The report also offers a set of “food-system resilience indicators” specific to Bowen Island, as well as recommendations for addressing each of them.

A broad range of recommendations is listed at the conclusion of the report. To facilitate implementation, they were formulated using the Regional Food System Action Plan framework developed by Metro Vancouver in 2016. The full text of the recommendations includes corresponding objectives and policies excerpted from Bowen Island’s Official Community Plan.

The recommendations detail actions to:

- Increase capacity to produce food close to home
- Protect and revitalize agricultural land for food production
- Enable expansion of agricultural production
- Invest in a new generation of food producers
- Improve the financial viability of the food sector
- Increase capacity to process, warehouse and distribute local foods
- Include local foods in the purchasing policies of institutions and businesses
- Increase direct marketing opportunities for locally produced food
- Further develop value chains within the food sector
- Review government policies and programs to ensure they enable the expansion of the local food sector
- Support a food system consistent with ecological health
- Protect and enhance ecosystem goods and services
- Reduce waste in the food system
- Facilitate adoption of environmentally sustainable practices
- Prepare for the impact of climate change

## **Final Recommendations**

The *Agrarian Analysis* concludes by acknowledging the urgency of planning for the inevitable disruptions and opportunities presented by climate change. We propose that to seriously answer the existential threat that confronts us will require dedicated funding and staff.

This commitment, we firmly believe, is supported by our comprehensive evaluation of Bowen Island's need for consistent, proactive and focused attention to climate change mitigation, adaptation and resilience, the three pillars of response outlined by the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

Most conversations about the climate emergency are framed in terms of disaster preparedness, mitigation, and adaptation. Climate action plans tend to prioritize infrastructure and transportation measures for meeting mitigation and adaptation goals. But, by focusing on the resilience of our food system, we can address the climate emergency while stimulating a healthier local food economy and re-envisioning our relationships with the natural world and each other. You are invited to become part of this initiative, to help move us *Toward a Resilient Food System for Bowen Island*.



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The *Communication and Engagement Groundwork Report* and *Toward a Resilient Food System for Bowen Island: Agrarian Analysis* were published by Bowen Island Food Sovereignty. Members: Jackie Bradley, Elaine Cameron, Meribeth Deen, Phil Gregory, Shasta Martinuk, Julie Sage, Susan Swift, and Rabia Wilcox. Bowen Island, British Columbia, Canada October 2019.