



# GROWING GREEN: for SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEMS

A Law Reform Project

[www.ffcf.bc.ca/GrowingGreen.html](http://www.ffcf.bc.ca/GrowingGreen.html)

## Growing Green: Project Description

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### Overview

Launched in April of 2002, *Growing Green* is a two-year law and policy reform project designed to:

- develop concrete, practical law and policy reform proposals to make growing and distributing food in BC more sustainable, and
- strengthen the capacity of voluntary organizations to contribute to federal, provincial, and local law/policy making.

Funded in part by the federal Voluntary Sector Initiative, *Growing Green* is a project of West Coast Environmental Law (WCEL), FarmFolk/CityFolk (FF/CF), and the Liu Institute for Global Issues. All three organizations are working collaboratively with (and sharing the project benefits among) dozens of farming, food, and voluntary sector organizations. *Growing Green's* focus is on federal, provincial and local law and policy as it applies to growing food in and around BC's urban areas. To acknowledge and build upon innovative ideas generated across the country, *Growing Green* is working with and seeking advice from exemplary national organizations like the Toronto Food Policy Council.

*Growing Green* is based on the premise that participants in the food system already provide environmental services, but the system must produce more in order to be truly sustainable. Through a continuous and iterative collaboration process with farm, food and voluntary organizations, *Growing Green* identified several dozen of the issues that deserve attention. With the help of a project Reference Group of community leaders, *Growing Green* has determined the law and policy reform priorities set out below—which *Growing Green* believes offer a chance to make concrete and meaningful economic, social and ecological change.

### Making Sustainable Food Systems Work

From agriculture, health, environment, labour, community development and other sectors stream innovative ideas for improving our food systems (such as Environmental Farm Plans, school meal programs, chef-farmer partnerships, immigrant farm worker training and hundreds more). Though food is the common thread, there are no forums for intersectoral discussion and problem solving. Nor is food on government planning agendas. *Growing Green* will explore the potential for food councils (provincially and regionally/locally) to host such discussions, develop collaborative solutions for food system problems, and influence legislation and planning.

This section's priorities are:

- **Making the case for community-based food councils.** Work primarily in the Capital Regional District and Greater Vancouver Regional District, with reference to other food coalitions operating around BC and across Canada. Food councils can help bring about changes in food systems that increase community economic activity, decrease environmental impacts, and strengthen community relationships.
- **Showcasing model Official Community Plans and bylaws for agriculture/food.** Review "best in class" examples of regulations re: food, in collaboration with WCEL, Smart Growth BC, CitiesPlus, the GVRD and others.
- **Contributing to provincial public health legislation.** Collaborate with the Community Nutritionists' Council of BC and other groups to offer advice re: community food security in relation to public health. For the proposed *BC Public Health Act*, the BC government is actively considering food security as a key factor in public health.

- **Attracting small-scale food processors.** Work with the Small Scale Food Processor Association and others to identify regulatory incentives and barriers to strengthening small-scale food processing businesses in BC. Processing is one of the most promising components of BC food systems for increasing community economic activity and providing new markets for farmers.

## **Making Sustainable Food Systems Pay**

The food system would provide more ecological services if there were a better economic case for doing so. *Growing Green* is investigating the following ideas as ways to make more sustainable food practices pay:

- **Promoting sustainable farming by reducing unnecessary regulatory barriers.** Promote the most ecologically responsible farm practices by identifying producers already employing these practices, and help to reduce unnecessary regulatory barriers. Examples are related to attracting new family investment on the land (e.g. 'smart' accommodation), and planning for succeeding generations (without subdividing).
- **Bringing UK National Trust and other 'working farm' trust models to BC.** Investigate ways to attract trust organizations and estates to invest in working sustainable farms. The leading example is the National Trust in the United Kingdom, which owns over 1200 working farms, and has the authority to place ecological restrictions on long-term leases. There are also other models in BC. The result would be considerable long-term investment in working farms, higher incomes for farmers, and more sustainable farming.
- **Restoring farmers' right to conservation covenants on ALR land.** Investigate concerns of trust organizations and farmers who perceive a BC regulatory barrier when they want to secure sustainable farming practices on their property for future generations in the form of a conservation covenant.
- **Obtaining affordable access to supply management schemes for family and integrated farms.** Design and implement models within which small and integrated sustainable farmers can obtain quota from supply management schemes to use collectively.
- **Rewarding farmers for providing ecological services.** Using an award-winning freshwater project as a case study, design mechanisms for both identifying farms that provide ecological services and for rewarding farmers who provide those services. With healthy streams on their properties, farmers provide a number of obvious ecological services to the community (habitat, green space, etc.). One less obvious but essential service is water storage, which is particularly valuable as long-term storm water management (e.g. 100 or 200 year floodplain) and as a hydroelectric power reserve (instead of holding the water downstream in a large dam). Money to compensate a farmer for providing this crop ('water farm') could come from cost savings to the community—reduced storm water liability, or deferred infrastructure. Private investment could be attracted by adding certification for a 'LEED Farm' to the highly successful LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) program for green buildings.

## **Strengthening Voluntary Sector Participation in Policy Development**

Pursuing its goal of developing capacity in the voluntary sector, *Growing Green* has engaged in dialogue with as many voluntary sector farm, food and related organizations as possible. It has set aside budget resources to help facilitate policy dialogues. In the first year, it sponsored dialogues with the BC Food Systems Network, Certified Organic Associations of BC, and the POLIS Project on Ecological Governance (among others). *Growing Green* will sponsor more policy dialogues in its second year and will produce tailored resources to assist voluntary sector groups to continue and expand their participation in policy development in the future.

For years, project partners have been developing collaborative planning models. *Growing Green* will develop these models further (both theory and practice), and share them with other voluntary sector organizations in order to obtain feedback and constructive criticism.