Institute for Sustainable Food Systems

The Township of Langley Food System Study

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Findings from the Township of Langley Farm to Table Study

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Abstract

There is growing interest in the local food movement, and the success of small-scale farmers and direct-to-consumer supply chains have been well documented. In the Township of Langley, there is a general attitude of support for local farming, and food production (HB Lanarc, 2011). However, there is little understanding of the demand for local food, and the potential for alterntive markets to successfully develop in the Township.

The restaurant sector presents an interesting case study to understand local food demand, and explore the barriers to local food procuremnt that impact the type and amount of local food available. The outcomes of this study include recommendations for addressing aspects including; communications, networking, marketing and production considerations.

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The Institute for Sustainable Food Systems (ISFS) is an applied research and extension unit at Kwantlen Polytechinc University that investigates and supports regional food systems as key elements of sustainable communities. We focus predominantly on British Columbia, but also extend our programming to other regions.

Our applied research focuses on the potential of regional food systems in terms of agriculture and food, economics, community health, policy, and environmental stewardship. Our extension programming provides information and support for farmers, communities, businesses, policy makers and other. Community collaboration in central to our approach.

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1. Introduction

The overall success of localized food systems, focused around small-scale producers selling direct to market, has been well documented. With studies suggesting growing interest by consumers with trends like the “100 Mile Diet”, the locavore movement and the increasing popularity of farmer’s markets and agri-tourism. A survey conducted in the Township of Langley (the Township) during preparation of the Agricultural Viability Strategy revealed that local farming was either “very” or “somewhat” important to 95% of all urban respondents and 96% of rural respondents. Fully 100% of urban respondents felt that local food production should be encouraged (HB Lanarc, 2011). These results align with broader trends in local food and are promising for development of local food and agriculture economies in the Township. However, there is little known about the actual demand for locally produced food in the Township. Creating a strong local agriculture sector requires an understanding of how local markets can support local food production in the Township

Given the amount of under-utilized farmable land in the Township of Langley (ISFS, 2018) there is potential for development of a local agriculture sector that can serve markets for local food in the Township. However, small-scale, direct market farmers often experience production, marketing and distributions challenges that are unique from their larger counterparts, operating in the conventional, globalized food system. This has been reported by Township producers, who were surveyed for a food hub feasibility study (Stott, 2015). Small farms find that the lack of suitable processing, storage, and distribution creates a barrier to selling their local products even amid growing demand from local consumers. This lack of infrastructure also impedes their ability to grow their businesses expand sales to new buyers, and increase production on their lands (Stott, 2015).

The local food service industry is just one potential market for local food in the Township (the Township) that could be further explored as a way of developing a vibrant local food economy. This study aims to present information on local food demand in the Township using local restaurants as a case study. Specifically, this project is meant to facilitate better understanding about the role local restaurant businesses can play in the local food supply chain. Additionally, through this project we intended to determine and assess factors that contribute to a successful relationship between restaurants and farmers, while also understanding demand for locally grown food in the Township. We then present innovative solutions and recommendations to improve connections between small-scale farmers and consumers. Both have promise of benefiting farm viability by supporting more direct farm to restaurant and public sales and fostering purposeful relationships between different actors in the food system.

2. Study Objectives

The goal of this study is to better understand what is needed to make direct producer - consumer relationships successful, using the local restaurant sector as a case study. The focus of this research is on the relationship between producers and restaurants, particularly independently owned restaurants and small-scale food producers in the Township. In exploration of the dynamics involved, both the demand and supply of local food was analyzed.

The objectives of the study are to answer the following questions:

1. What do restaurants want to buy from local farmers?
2. What are the business practices of small farms selling directly to restaurants?
3. What are the barriers to farm to restaurant marketing channel, and ways to ensure a long term relationship between producers and buyers?

3. Methods

3.1. Secondary Data Collection

While the research team determined primary research would be our main way of collecting data, some useful information and resources were available to inform our work. The Township of Langley's Agricultural Viability Strategy (AVS) and Food Hub Feasibility Study were explored to inform and orient the study team. The 2016 Statistics Canada Census of Agriculture data provided a comprehensive overview of agriculture in the Township. A customized data package ordered from Statistics Canada provided additional insights.

Lastly, the study team toured the Township's agricultural areas guided by a resident connected to the sector. This provided expanded understanding of the food system landscape and helped connect researchers to actors in the Township's food system. The tour consisted of a motor vehicle survey, and stops at food service establishments and agri-tourism operations.

3.2 Primary Data Collection

The study team conducted interviews with food service business and producers located in the Township and City of Langley (a small urban municipality adjacent to the Township). Brief interviews were conducted across a wide spectrum of the target populations. From those subjects in-depth interviews were selected.

3.2.1. Restaurant Interviews

The study team used the Township's Business License (B/L) Directory hosted on the Township's website, to derive a list of food service businesses to survey. In 2018, there were over 280 restaurants listed on the B/L directory. We excluded all chain, franchise, and fast food restaurants, as it was assumed these type businesses would be less likely to purchase directly from local farmers. This left 190 restaurants which we categorized based on location (neighbourhood) with the rationale that this would ensure proportional representation. Table 1 shows the number of restaurants contacted, and those that responded. Variable response rates meant that certain neighbourhoods were more represented than others in the resulting data set. Table 2 shows the geographical breakdown of restaurants in this study.

We developed a short interview script for restaurants. The goal of short interviews was to understand whether local restaurants are purchasing directly from local growers, what products are purchased (both local and non-local), fluctuations in ordering, and obstacles and opportunities for purchasing locally. We aimed to interview 20% of restaurants by phone. The response rate for phone interviews was low. Alternatively, in person interviews were conducted.

From interviews, the study team identified four restaurants demonstrating good local food sourcing practices. These four restaurants were subject to in-depth interviews, all of which were conducted over the phone. The goal of the in-depth interviews was to ascertain factors and best practices used by restaurants who currently source local food that lead to successful local procurement relationships. The topics of interest for the in-depth interviews included: what products are procured from local growers; how relationships with local growers are established and maintained; are there regulations associated with local procurement; why chefs/restaurateurs have chosen to purchase locally; and the economics of local procurement.

Table 1: Number of restaurants contacted and responded to interviewers

	Number of Restaurants
Number of restarants, after exclusions	190
Number of restaurants contacted	90
Number of restaurants responded	55

Table 2: Breakdown of restaurant interviews by community

Community Name	Number of Restaurants Interviewd
In-person Interviews	43
Brookswood/Fernridge	5
City of Langley	13
Fort Langley	4
Walnut Grove	10
Willowbrook	10
Other	1
Phone Interviews	12
Aldergrove	3
Brookswood/Fernridge	1
Fort Langley	1
Gloucester	3
Murrayville	1
Northwest Langley	1
Willoughby	1
Rural	1
Total	**55**

3.2.1. Producer Interviews

Producer interviews consisted of 20 short (under 10 minutes) and four in-depth interviews (about one hour). As producer information was not always readily available online, part of the objective of the short interviews were to identify candidates for in-depth interviews. The research team focused on reaching out to operations less than four hectares (10 acres) in size in the Township, as well as operations that had a particularly prominent public profile, and operations that engaged in direct marketing of their products. The study team excluded operations that did not produce food and beverage products, such as Christmas trees and horse farms. Potential producer interviewees were identified through several means:

- Recommendations from personal and professional networks
- Township of Langley online B/L directory
- A producer list compiled by ISFS (available upon request)
- Internet searches including BC Farm Fresh, Circle Farm Tour, 248th St Historic Trail, and others

Compilation of the master list was extensive but not exhaustive. When completed, the master list contained 114 producers, the vast majority residing in the Township or in close proximity to it. Table 3 shows the number of producers on the compiled list, the number contacted, and the number who responded. Eight short interviews occurred with producers over four hectares (10 acres) in size or producers that do not market directly to consumers. Seven of the 20 producers interviewed raised some sort of livestock. Table 4 shows the breakdown of producers interviewed by product type. Half of the 20 producers interviewed farmed parcels under four hectares (10 acres), eight farmed parcels above four hectares (10 acres) and two were unsure of parcel size.

Table 3: Number of producers contacted and responded to interviewers

	Number of Producers
Total number of farms	114
Number of producers contacted	51
Number of producers responded	20

Table 4: Breakdown of producers by type of products (some producers reported more than one product).

Type of Product	Number of Producers Interviewd
Vegetable	7
Fruit	6
Beer/Wine/Cider	4
Poultry	3
Livestock (Beef/Pork/Lamb)	3
Eggs	2
Dairy	2
Flowers	1

Nearly every operation on the master list received a phone call from the study team. Cattle/dairy operations were not easy to contact. After one short interview, it was clear they were not a part of our target population because supply management does not allow dairy farmers to sell direct to consumers, or restaurants. Very large greenhouse operations, blueberry farms and other farms that seemed very unlikely to fit our target population were excluded. Additionally, many mushroom farms operate on four hectares (10 acres) or less but were difficult to contact. No mushroom farmers responded to the study team's attempts to contact them.

The four producers that were selected for in-depth interviews were mixed vegetable farmers. They all engaged in direct marketing, including some restaurant sales. Two were certified organic while the others were not but market themselves as natural or otherwise affiliate themselves with organic practices and values conveying such to their customers. One of the main goals of the in-depth interviews was to gain a better understanding of what factors affect the viability and functionality of relationships between chefs and producers, and what makes these relationships successful. Other topics of interest were the financial viability of their enterprise, security of land tenure, preferred markets, and where they make their sales - in terms of markets as well as in terms of geographic location.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Demand for Local Food in Restaurants

4.1.1. Product Sources

Just under one-third of restaurants interviewed reported sourcing at least some products directly from local farmers. Of those restaurants, two-thirds buy specifically from farmers in the Township. Other restaurants sourced from wholesalers (38%), local grocery stores (24%), and large retailers (9%).

The four restaurants chosen for in-depth interviews reported buying products which they consider to be local from farmers in the Fraser Valley and even the Okanagan. They have direct relationships with farmers, but also buy from nearby grocers who stock products from farmers in the Fraser Valley. Our interviews with them revealed that the Township is part of a vibrant food economy in Southwest BC, and that "local" may be better described as "regional" or "provincial".

> "There's a really cool food scene starting to happen. It's a South Surrey-South Langley-Aldergrove-Abbotsford kind of strip. It's almost like a corridor down here, some really neat things happening. For example, Mt Lehman Cheese, they raise their own goats on the property in Abbotsford. I'm getting buffalo cheese and milk through them. The actual farmer is in Langley, raising the water buffalo, but the milk is being processed in Abbotsford. You're going to see a lot of that crossover within this Surrey-Langley-Abbotsford corridor."
>
> - Chef

> "[The local retailer is] good, they bring in organic stuff and have their own farm. Even if not certified organic, they use organic growing practices (no sprays). They also bring in organic goods from other farmers in the area."
>
> -Chef

4.1.2. Products Purchased in Greatest Quantities

When asked what products restaurants buy in the greatest quantities, the majority of responses fell into the fresh vegetables category. Forty-eight out of 55 restaurants responded to this question. The most common types of vegetables mentioned are presented in Table 5, and include salad ingredients (e.g. lettuce, salad greens, tomato, cucumber), onions, carrots, potatoes, and peppers. "Other" is a catch-all category for non-specific responses or any vegetables mentioned only once.

Two of the in-depth interviewees commented on the difficulty of sourcing meat from local producers. One chef wants to source beef locally but usually gets it from a farm that raises their cattle in the interior region of British Columbia. Another chef was frustrated at being able to buy chickens that were raised on a small farm and slaughtered on site, but not being able to sell the product at their restaurant due to regulations.

"I knew exactly how [the chickens] were raised/treated. I knew the process and would have loved to be able to sell them. I feel it's a stacked deck against people with small farms."

- Chef

4.1.3. Products Sold Locally in Greatest Quantities

When asked which of their products are in highest demand, 4 of the 7 vegetable producers interviewed said salad greens and lettuce, and 3 of 7 said carrots. These items match what restaurants said they buy in the greatest volume. However, not all restaurants are willing or able to absorb the higher cost of local greens and carrots.

Table 5: Products purchased in the largest quantities

Type of Product	Number of Responses
Lettuce or salad greens	14
Onions	12
Tomatoes	9
Carrots	8
Potatoes	7
Peppers	7
Broccoli	6
Cucumbers	5
Fruit	5
Eggs	4
Celery	3
Mushroom	3
Cauliflower	2
Pickles	2
Zucchini	2
Other	14

4.1.4. Products Sold to Restaurants

Among the producers who reported selling to at least one restaurant, there was no single type of product that was most commonly sold. One producer sells to many Vancouver restaurants and one local restaurant, and their most popular product is pre-cut salad mix. One greenhouse producer reported selling cucumbers to Greek restaurants. One dairy producer gives chefs discounts for coming into their farm shop. One specialty producer exclusively grows and sells goji berries. A number of alcoholic beverage producers sell to restaurants, and one of them commented on the tight margins. One livestock producer (mostly pork) sells to restaurants through butcher shops outside of the Township. Generally, small-scale livestock producers face regulatory barriers when they wish to sell directly to restaurants.

4.1.5. Seasonality of Local Produce

Restaurants were asked if order quantities changed throughout the year. Of the 20 that responded, 11 said that ordering is seasonal or event-based, and nine said ordering is stable throughout the year.

None of the four local food champions we spoke to sourced 100% of their ingredients locally, especially in the wintertime. They change their ordering and menus to match the local growing season.

"In the beginning of the season, ordering is sporadic. A lot of the crops aren't in. I'm focusing mainly on canned products from last year; asparagus, marinated vegetables, jellies, etc. [My local suppliers] also supply five different types of cheese (cheddar, gouda, blue, triple cream brie, and a rotating option) and charcuterie."

- Chef

4.1.6. Perceived Demand for Local Food

When we asked if locally grown products are in demand, 50 of 55 restaurants and food businesses responded to this question, and 36% of respondents said yes and 48% said no. Three respondents said that sourcing local products is driven more by the values of the business rather than consumer demand for local food. A restaurant's perception of local demand may be connected to whether they buy direct from local farmers or not. Of the 24 restaurants who said there was no demand for local food, three (12%) said they buy direct from local farmers regardless. Of the 18 restaurants who said there was demand for local food, 11 of them (61%) said they buy direct from local farmers.

Table 6: Number of Reponses to the question "Are locally grown products in demand?"

Response	Number of Responses
No	24
Yes	18
No answer	5
Sourcing locally is a business value	3
Don't know	3
Buying locally is a selling point for the business	1
Unclear	1

Restaurants perceived demand from customers for local food is not fully consistent with the "strong support" for local food production reported in the Township's AVS. The AVS survey results showed that 100% of urban residents, 96% of farmers, and 98% of rural non-farmers agreed that local food production should be encouraged.

Interviews suggest that locally focused restaurants do have a specific clientele that, for various reasons, are interested in local food. It is unclear from our interviews, however, whether these customers are from within or outside of the Township.

"Over the years, we had people who are like, "What's gorgonzola?", and they eat it and say, "Wow, that was really good," some adventurous folks. Others don't see value in buying a $14.50 sub when they can get it cheaper at Subway."

- Chef

"Aldergrove is a restricted market, blue collar, and our menu is fine dining. We have a very niche market here."

- Chef

4.2. Business Practices of Small-Scale Farms Selling Directly to Restaurants

Contextually, small-scale farms do not fit well into the modern global food economy as they cannot supply volumes required by most wholesalers and food retailers. In the very large operation of chain grocers and restaurants, small-scale producers face many barriers to participation. Direct consumer sales are a way for these producers to participate in the food economy, albeit in much different ways.

4.2.1. Sales Avenues

Small-scale farms can be successful when they engage in direct to consumer sales because it allows them to capture the whole food dollar. In addition to direct to restaurant sales, examples of direct sales avenues include farm gate sales, community supported agriculture (CSA), and farmer's markets. For some producers, direct to consumer sales are practiced in the most literal sense - by selling products directly to individuals that prepare and eat the food. Other participants sell directly to independently owned, smaller grocers and restaurants with whom they have relationships that do not include an intermediary buying agent or broker. For the purposes of this report, restaurants are considered 'consumers' in and of themselves and qualify as 'direct-to-consumer sales' since they are taking place in an alternative, small-scale and less centrally controlled food economy with a shorter supply chain.

Twelve of 20 producers reported selling to at least one restaurant. However, five of the 12 identified restaurants as their least preferred sales avenue. The amount of effort required to service restaurant needs relative to the volumes sold, difficulty in receiving timely payment, and organizing logistics contributed to this sentiment.

> "Chefs have been hard to work with, and serving them requires a specific setup. [We] have had to badger them to get paid and had some bad experiences in the past."
>
> - Farmer

Conversely, six of 20 interviewees indicated farm gate sales as their preferred sales avenue, some citing the lesser travel, labour and logistical challenges associated it. Data from the 2016 Census of Agriculture shows that 35% of farms in the Township under four hectares (10 acres) participate in farm gate, u-pick and stand/kiosk sales (Statistics Canada, 2018). Agri-tourism can be a helpful tool to draw customers to the farm to make direct-to-consumer sales but needs to be developed to suit individual operations. The drawback that all farmers experience in all direct marketing avenues is that it requires them to have their own systems and infrastructure in place to take food products all the way from field to each individual customer.

4.2.2. Local Food Sales in the Township of Langley

Ten of the 20 (50%) producers interviewed sell less than 30% of their products within the Township. They do sell direct to consumers in Vancouver, Abbotsford, and other nearby municipalities, and still consider this to qualify as participation in the local food economy. This parallels our finding from the restaurant interviews that "local" may actually mean "regional". At the same time, five of the 20 (25%) interviewees sell more than 80% of their products in the Township. Two of which operate on less than four hectares (10 acres). It would be interesting to further explore if there is a relationship between farm size and where food is sole (i.e. whether smaller sized farms sell

Table 7: Number of responses to the question "How much of your produce/products do you sell within the Township?

Response	Number of Responses
Unsure	4
None	1
Very little	4
10%-30%	5
50%	1
80%	1
90% (these are usually farm gate or tasting room sales)	4

at locations closer to their farms). One theme that emerged from the in depth interviews was the perception of limited market opportunities for local sales in the Township, thus requiring farmers to market products elsewhere.

4.2.3. Factors that Facilitate Restaurant Sales

One of the primary factors that keep chefs coming back is a consistently high quality product. Growers pride themselves on being able to offer quality, partly because it is the one thing their competitors in large scale food distribution services cannot compete with. However, consistency of orders, order size variability, and timely payment by chefs are all barriers to making the restaurant sales channel worthwhile for farmers. Strong communication is needed for producers to know exactly what a chefs needs may be. Overall success seems much more likely when the parties involved have underlying values in common or a personal relationship with each other that motivates them to work together and understand each other's businesses.

5. Farm to Table Sales: Barriers and Best Practices

5.1. Barriers to Sourcing Local Food

5.1.1. Communications

Restaurants and farmers are interested in connecting, but there is a lack of information about how to develop these relationships, and what types of products are available and when. Helpful information includes which farms and restaurants would be interested in farm to table direct sourcing, or even simply a list of all the farms in the Township. It would also be helpful to know what products are in demand, what is available, and at what price. On a promising note, fifteen of the restaurants interviewed were willing to have their business name listed as interested in buying from local producers.

"It would even be great just to have a list of restaurants that want to reach out and hear from local farmers. A big barrier is that farmers don't know who needs what and they all don't have the time to promote and connect with each other and find out. This needs to be made easier for everyone."

- Farmer

"I don't know where I can look up all of the farms in the area… If there was a resource for restaurants that I could look up, that would be amazing. Vice versa for farmers – there are restaurants interested in connecting and building relationships with farms. I would totally put my name on a list so people could contact me."

- Chef

"If there was a way to know ahead of time (3 to 4 days in advance) what the restaurants are looking for. Right now… it's a guessing game."

- Farmer

5.1.1. Convenience

Convenience was the most common response when businesses were asked what would make it easier for them to buy from local farmers (Table 8). Thirty nine out of 55 restaurants and food businesses responded to this question. Some restaurants need frequent deliveries or want to buy all they need from one supplier. Ongoing availability is a limiting factor as local products are not available year round and are not always available at retail stores. Purchasing through a single retailer or grocery store (especially if wholesale pricing is available) is a more convenient option than working directly with local farmers.

"If they delivered, [or were] located no more than 10-15 minutes away, [or had] some sort of system that would make it easier to get produce from one thing instead of contacting a bunch of different farms."

- Restaurant Manager

"[Produce] needs to be ready to use. It's convenient to have it delivered. We use Fruiticana or Costco when we are in a rush."

- Cafe Manager

"Delivery and convenience - [we] don't have much storage on site so [we] need deliveries almost every day."

- Cafe Manager

Convenience as a Barrier to Local Food Procurement

Food consumers of all kinds - be they restaurant kitchen managers, small grocery stores, individuals are motivated by convenience afforded by the dominant global food paradigm, and are also constrained by their budget. Megalithic grocery stores and food distribution corporations offer almost anything one might want in any quantity at low, competitive prices, delivered, in some cases, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Small producers simply cannot compete with this level of convenience. Conversely, where local producers fall short on convenience, they can compete by producing a quality, customized, identity preserved product with a real connection to place. If local producers could collectively scale up their efforts and share the substantial costs associated with large scale refrigeration, aggregation, distribution, marketing and organizing of logistics, they could take a step towards offering a level of convenience regional food businesses are used to. These types of collective efforts include farming cooperatives, sales aggregation, and food hubs.

5.1.2. Cost

Competitive pricing was mentioned seven times by restaurants as something that would make it easier for them to buy local products. Even champions of local food must grapple with the price difference, at least for certain products. Two of our in-depth interviewees shared that for high volume vegetables like salad, it is hard for local farmers to compete with the price of imports from California.

"[A local farmer's] salad mix is $55/kg. Just from the food cost, that's $5.50 for 100g. That's not much on a plate! We have to sell it at least $12 a plate."

- Chef

"There are certain things that really don't quite work yet in terms of practicality and cost, e.g. salad. The bagged prewashed mixed green salad - that locally is tough to compete with what's coming from larger suppliers via California or Arizona."

- Chef

"Frequent delivery is required by some and not a practical offering... Setting up the fresh sheet, dealing with lots of small orders, route planning all would take time and we would have to give up something we are currently doing to make it work."

- Farmer

"Overall, restaurants are not advantageous customers to keep, except some who show up and pick up their produce themselves, but even then the volume is very low."

- Farmer

Table 8: Number of responses to the question, "What would make it easier for you to buy from local farmers/growers?"

Response	Number of Responses
Convenience	11
Nothing	9
Competitive price	7
Better availability	6
Require larger volumes	4
Better distribution	4
Food regulations are a barrier	3
Unsure	2
Higher quality	2
Advertising	2
Relationships	1
More options	1
If my business was more successful	1
Unclear	1

The frequency of deliveries and low volumes of restaurant orders can be challenging for farmers, especially for smaller farmers. Restaurant sales require more effort from the producer compared to other direct sales channels like CSA and farm stand sales.

Even among groups that are intimately involved with food, like producers and chefs, we noted a lack of mutual understanding on both sides of the producer-chef business relationship. Ongoing education campaigns on why local produce costs more and the associated but less tangible 'value' associated with supporting local producers is necessary. These campaigns need to target growers, chefs and the public independently with messages designed for each audience, as they all play different roles in the food system. For example, if less immediately tangible benefits like local economic cycling of food dollars, the positive spin offs of small businesses that empower producers (and thus communities) economically were touted and promoted, it may drive some consumers to put more effort into participating in alternatives to the global food paradigm.

5.2. Best Practices for Farm to Table Sales

We conducted in-depth interviews with four Township restaurants that are strong proponents of local sourcing, and four small-scale producers who sell to restaurants as part of their business model, in order to identify promising practices for addressing the barriers above.

Mutual trust and strong communication are critical for restaurants and farmers working directly together. The chefs recognized that farmers deal with uncertainty from weather and pests, and farmers recognized that chefs can have very specific needs in terms of product, post-harvest handling, processing, and frequency of deliveries. Strong communication was brought up as an important factor for sustaining relationships when challenges arise.

“Sometimes chefs are very demanding on what they want and expect and that can be hard on farmers. A lot of times when I work with a farmer they don’t believe what I say when I say, “Tell what you’ve got enough of, and that’s what I’ll take.” Once they believe me, and that relationship is established, then it gets fun! They are more likely to call and say, “I have this, or this person has this, anything you want?”

- Chef

“The best relationships between chefs and farmers are ones where restaurants know who farmers are and how they grow - and vice versa farmers know what the restaurant menu options are. It comes down to knowing what the other side needs and opening good communication.”

- Farmer

Cold-calling can help both chefs and farmers find potential business partners. Three of the chefs advised local farmers to reach out to restaurants directly to showcase their products. One farmer and one chef both suggested having a list of farms/restaurants interested in connecting with each other.

“Don’t be afraid to go out and get the business. Don’t assume people will find you. You have to physically go and show people your product. Take some samples with you. Show them how good and fresh it is. And then when you get the orders, deliver. And I don’t mean drop the stuff off. I mean deliver on what you’re promising. If they order 10 lbs, deliver 10 lbs when you say you’re going to. If you can’t, you have to be honest.”

- Chef

“It would be great for groups of farmers to have open table discussions about expectations with chefs. It would be great to have a list of restaurants with what kinds of things they want and what level of processing they are interested in.”

- Farmer

For chefs, purchasing from local producers is a values-based decision. The four local food champion chefs had different values underlying their decision to support local producers, but the common theme was the importance of supporting local businesses and local agriculture.

Frequent and reliable communication is required for direct sourcing between farmers and restaurants. We did not find a common ordering and delivery system among the restaurants and producers interviewed. Although it is not truly farm-to-restaurant sourcing, chefs can buy local products through local grocers and retailers that carry local products to increase convenience. Two chefs mentioned buying from the same grocer in Surrey that offers produce from the owners’ farm as well as from the Fraser Valley and the Okanagan.

“[I use] phone, email, [and] text. I often phone in orders. The ones with variety to offer will email a product list. I’ll often phone or email back the order.”

- Chef

“Used to have to phone everyone. Spreadsheet put up on website: ordered by restaurants online, or through phone calls, or emails, then collated into pick list and then packaged out to be then delivered usually on Thursdays.”

- Farmer

Farm business model can be adjusted to match the needs of restaurants. Farmers need to prioritize reliable customer service and be sales oriented in addition to growing high quality produce. Restaurants have diverse needs and preferences in terms of communication, deliveries, volume, produce varieties, and produce preparation. For example:

- One chef asks their farmer to grow a particular variety of onion harvested at a specific stage to get the size and flavour he wants.
- One chef adjusts their menu depending on what their farmers have available in large enough volumes.
- One farmer prepares beets to be delivered with 2-inch tops as requested by the restaurant partner.

Some small farmers use sales aggregation and cooperative models to achieve economies of scale that are often challenging because of high upfront costs. Examples include sharing farm equipment, coordinating orders, delivering orders multiple days each week, and shared marketing.

Restaurants can manage their menu to make prices and changing availability work for their business. Chefs may reduce ingredient amounts and portions in order to keep prices in line with customer expectations. They can source local produce at a lower price by buying "seconds" or extra unsold produce from farmers, buying at a bulk discount at local grocery stores, or creating weekly specials to feature bumper crop ingredients. They can highlight their locally focused dishes to customers who are willing to pay more for food with a story or connection to the community. One chef advised taking small steps to integrate local ingredients in order to keep margins manageable.

"I use less of the product on the plate. I want to give a healthy menu price but I can't give customers a big steak and charge [a lot]. In order to meet my margins, [I] blend in some other products that are going to be lower cost items with the higher cost items."

- Chef

"Pricing is definitely a fact, but it gets absorbed and becomes a part of the new norm. You do what you can do at the moment, and then you move to the next step. What are the few things that are really important to you? Then as things go, pick the next thing. Don't do it all at once or you'll die."

- Chef

"At least for us, our clientele are looking for local ingredients, and the story of where this came from and how did you find it. I'm lucky there, they're looking for this as well so I'm able to charge accordingly. They're not always asking for the cheapest thing, so I'm not having to buy the cheapest ingredients."

- Chef

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study found that there were several examples of successful farm to table partnerships in the Township based on shared values of community impact, quality products, and a story of local food, connected to the place we live in. But on a whole, the farm to table marketing channel is relatively small compared to farmers markets or other direct sales avenue. From a producer prospective, sales to restaurants are not for everyone. This marketing channel can sometimes be highly demanding and requires certain systems to be in place. Not all producers will be willing or able to serve this market, and some may prefer other markets and decide they do not have the resources to tend to restaurants. From a restaurant perspective, a conscious choice must be made to procure local food. Many may not feel the need to support local growers because there is no direct benefit to their businesses.

However, farmer-restaurant relationships are important to a vibrant local food system. It creates another viable marketing channel especially for small-scale food producers to diversify their markets. The farmer-restaurant relationship also creates more economic connections within the local food system. Money spent on food by consumers stays within the local economy and goes directly to farmers instead of flowing out of the region to corporate headquarters elsewhere. There are several roles for the Township to create and foster this relationship and support the local food scene.

1. **Build space for relationships to grow, both in person and online.** The Township can also support networking and education events that specifically target key players in the local food economy - chefs, farmers, and local grocery stores - to help develop and share best business practices. This could include educating producers about existing regional distribution outlets, such as VFM Direct, a local sales aggregation food hub operated by the Vancouver Farmers Markets non-profit organization. Online tools can be developed for producers and chefs/ grocers to more easily access local supply/demand data. A local farm product terminal market could be established in the Township, where local producers regularly bring their produce for chefs and others to see and buy.

2. **Help small producers collectively reach economies of scale.** Current regulatory policies can be analyzed to see how they can better support and incentivize small producers and cooperative business models. The Township can explore partnering with local grocers and support them to function as local food hubs and establish best practices. As a longer term strategy, the Township can lead the Lower Mainland to establish a regional-level food hub. They can boost small producers into the emerging local food economy by helping them to collectively achieve economies of scale and more effectively compete with existing food distributors, providing the convenience the public is used to.

3. **Educate key groups and foster local food pride and culture.** Research is needed to investigate gate how to close the gap between consumer attitudes and consumer behaviour in regard to local food. This apparent disconnect between consumer attitudes and behaviour and its potential relationship with access to local food should be better understood so that suitable policy tools can be chosen to close this gap. Enhancing local food pride and culture is another good starting point. Local food presence can be enhanced through 'culinary tourism' efforts similar to the Circle Farm Tour but highlighting locally focused restaurants.

7. Resources

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