



Squamish CAN
Climate Action Network



SQUAMISH
FOOD POLICY COUNCIL

Good Food Program:

December 2021

SQUAMISH TO LILLOOET REGIONAL FARM HUB

Survey Report

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A Farm Hub provides a network of food and farm infrastructure within a region to strengthen the area's local food economy. It involves the collaboration of farmers, organizations, and consumers to aggregate and distribute resources to make food available in a given area. A Farm Hub aims to address the issue of climate change through a regional, values-based food systems lens and through deliberate procurement practices that aligns with the following Good Food Values:

- Local Economies and Communities
- Environmental Sustainability and Stewardship of Natural Resources
- Nutrition
- Valued Workforce
- Animal Welfare

The Squamish Food Policy Council (SFPC) received \$20,000 of funding from Vancouver Foundation to conduct a region-wide survey to understand our community's readiness and support for a Farm Hub, particularly from consumers, purchasers, and farmers of food in the region. This report reviews the survey findings conducted as an important step in determining our communities readiness for a Farm Hub.

Survey Highlights:

- 73% of survey respondents are supportive of the development of a Squamish to Lillooet online Farm Hub.
- 'Decreasing reliance on imported products', 'strengthening the direct relationship between producer and consumer', and 'improving the convenience of sourcing local fresh foods' were identified as the most important changes to the food system that the Squamish to Lillooet community would like to see.
- Affordability and convenience were identified as the two most important concerns from farmers, purchasers, and residents alike, and should be focused on in the future feasibility study of a Squamish to Lillooet online Farm Hub.
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In conclusion, the survey conducted has highlighted that our community is showing a high degree of readiness and support of a Farm Hub, but a closer examination that addresses the challenges and concerns voiced by residents is required. The next step is to conduct a feasibility study of running a Farm Hub in the Sea to Sky region, examining the

operational and financial feasibility of this project. SFPC has received a quote and project proposal from Upland Consulting to undertake this project. Funding is being sought to cover costs for the next steps.

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PROJECT OVERVIEW

Squamish CAN (Climate Action Network) acts as the backbone organization for the Squamish Food Policy Council (SFPC) and is working to address the issue of climate change through a regional, values based food systems lens. It is estimated that globally, about 21–37% of total greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions are attributable to the food system. These are from agriculture and land use, storage, transport, packaging, processing, retail, and consumption. What we eat, where it comes from, how it is produced, processed, packaged, marketed, and then eventually disposed of, are all threads of the interconnected food systems web; strengthening our local food system is an essential part of tackling climate change.

We have seen that the shape of a food system impacts a community's climate footprint as well as it's overall health and wellbeing. Food self-reliance has been identified as a key climate change strategy in BC. The Sea-to-Sky region, from Britannia Beach to Lillooet, is largely dependent on imported foods. A Market Analysis conducted for the Squamish Valley Agriculture Plan found that the District of Squamish residents spend a collective \$8 million on food per month. This indicates that there is a significant amount of capital being spent on agriculture and agri-food businesses outside the community and opportunity to shift some of that spending to our local food economy.

The area is also facing population growth, development pressure on agricultural land, and increased risks of flooding, wildfire, and drought due to climate change. The region has a well established small and medium-scale agricultural community in Pemberton and Lillooet, a growing number of farms in Squamish, and great potential for more. One of the main constraints identified to the entry and expansion of local foods is the lack of aggregation and distribution systems in the region. SFPC is exploring the development of a regional virtual Farm Hub to strengthen the region's food security by building self-reliance and a thriving local market. By increasing the region's food self-reliance, we can increase the region's overall resilience and preparedness to the inevitable impacts of climate change while simultaneously strengthening the local economy.

While the evidence is that a globalized, industrial food system is degrading the health of our environment, communities, and economies, our society seems to be stuck in place. We believe this is because of an uneven power structure that favours the status quo. Farming is a difficult career with tight profit margins at any scale, but small and medium sized producers are at a disadvantage for several reasons. Aggregation, distribution, and sales channels, as well as subsidies, all cater to industrial scale farms. There is huge potential to increase the

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amount spent locally and influence local economies, health, and food systems. There is a gap in distribution services for small and medium-scale producers who are interested in selling products beyond the farm gate or the farmers' market, but do not have the capacity or resources to distribute goods to diverse markets. Experiences in other regions in BC, Canada and North American have shown that various options exist for small-scale distribution of regional products, such as Farm Hubs.

GOOD FOOD PROGRAM: SQUAMISH TO LILLOOET REGIONAL FARM HUB

With guidance from the Squamish-Lillooet Regional Food Task Force and the Squamish Valley Agriculture Plan (SVAP), SFPC is leading the development and implementation of a Regional Food Procurement Project which is titled the Good Food Program. This project aims to create solutions for small-scale distribution of regional products and have an impact on the local food chain by increasing the amount of local food being purchased through three main initiatives: 1) Pledging and Policy; 2) a standardized Good Food Program; 3) Farm Hub. The goal of this project is to address the issue of climate change through a regional, values based food systems lense and through a three pronged approach addressing various levels of decision makers along the supply chain such as consumers, farmers, and retail purchasers, as well as institutions like government, health, and education. The project objectives are to directly influence the purchasing power across the region through widespread pledging, policy uptake, and opportunities to purchase locally-grown food and support small-scale farm jobs.

The Good Food Program was determined to be a priority project in the SVAP under Goal 2: "Improve Sector Growth and Market Viability", and specifically action 2.4 to "support local food procurement initiatives" (SVAP). The first phase of the project was supported by the Squamish Lillooet Food Task Force and funded by the Whistler Centre of Sustainability.

Project Title: Good Food Program

SVAP Goal 2: Improve Sector Growth and Market Viability

Objective: Enhance agricultural market viability of the Squamish Valley through strengthened value chains, labour market, and relationships.

SVAP Action 2.4: Support local food procurement initiatives

Partners: Squamish Lillooet Regional District, District of Squamish, Resort Municipality of Whistler, Village of Pemberton, Village of Lillooet, Chambers of Commerce, Whistler Restaurants Association, Whistler Centre for Sustainability, Vancouver Foundation, Tourism and Educational organizations and more.

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The first phase of the project has seen momentous uptake; we have received government endorsement from across the Squamish Lillooet Regional District to pledge and develop policy supporting the Good Food Values. By integrating Good Food values into a regional food distribution program that connects Sea-to-Sky grown food to consumers, we aim to shorten our food supply chain, minimize our climate impact, and support healthier local economies and people. As next steps in the Good Food Program, we are working to develop a Farm Hub serving the Sea to Sky corridor. A Farm Hub aims to address the issue of climate change through a regional, values-based food systems lens and through deliberate procurement practices that aligns with the following Good Food values.

How can an online Farm Hub address climate change?

We have seen that the shape of a food system impacts a community's climate footprint as well as its overall health and wellbeing. Agriculture and the food system are key to global climate change responses. Combining supply-side actions such as efficient production, transport, and processing with demand-side interventions such as modification of food choices, and reduction of food loss and waste, reduces GHG emissions and enhances food system resilience. Local food systems are characterized by increased food self-reliance, which is defined as the ability to satisfy food needs with food grown locally. In British Columbia (BC), Canada, food security experts have identified increasing food self-reliance as a key climate change adaptation strategy (BC Food Systems Network 2012) The Sea to Sky region, from Squamish to Lillooet, is largely dependent on imported foods. The area is also facing population growth, development pressure on agricultural land, and increased risks of flooding, wildfire, and drought due to climate change.

A Farm Hub centralizes regional aggregation and distribution of local food for sale to individuals and wholesale markets. It is a network of food and farm infrastructure within a region to strengthen the area's local food economy. It involves the collaboration of farmers, organizations, and consumers to aggregate and distribute resources to make food available in a given area. A Farm Hub along the Sea to Sky corridor, from Squamish to Lillooet, would be guided by the Good Food Values to strengthen food equity and access along the Sea to Sky while increasing sales for farmers. By integrating these values into a regional food distribution program that connects Sea to Sky grown food to consumers, we can shorten our food supply chain, minimize our climate impact, strengthen food self-reliance, and support healthier local economies and people. We are using community input to guide our work.

Squamish to Lillooet Farm Hub Survey

The goal of this research was to determine whether or not an online Farm Hub is a viable option for the Squamish to Lillooet region. The first step to determine viability was to gather data on the community's enthusiasm and support for this potential project, particularly from consumers, purchasers, and farmers of food in the region. It was critical to identify community needs and barriers to such a community-centred project before moving forward with its implementation.

Research Methods

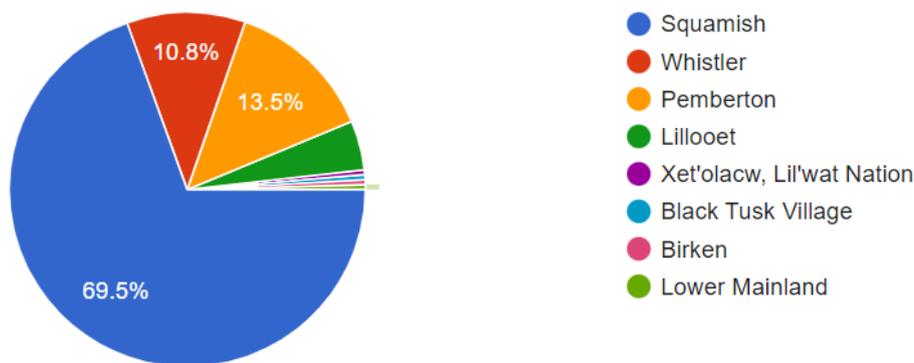
Throughout August and September 2021, SFPC released a survey to gauge community interest in a Squamish to Lillooet regional online Farm Hub. We designed three surveys - for residents, food purchasers, and farmers, respectively - that included a series of questions aiming to provide insight about the current status of the local food economy and what changes are most desirable by the community. Receiving these responses provides us with quality insights that will influence whether or not the concept of a Squamish to Lillooet regional online Farm Hub will move forward into the development phase.

A variety of communication methods were used to distribute the survey, such as emailing all farmers, local businesses, and organizations in the region; phone interviews with local restaurants; social media posts; newspaper and radio interviews; in-person community outreach at the Squamish Farmers' Market and the Pemberton Farmers' Market; word of mouth; and more. A raffle for a \$50 gift certificate was used as an incentive to gather survey responses. We gathered a total of 279 responses, 225 of which were residents, 31 farmers, and 23 food purchasers. We thank all those who participated in the survey, as their feedback is incredibly valuable and will continue to be used in the next phases. The following report summarizes the key findings from each of the three surveys.

KEY FINDINGS

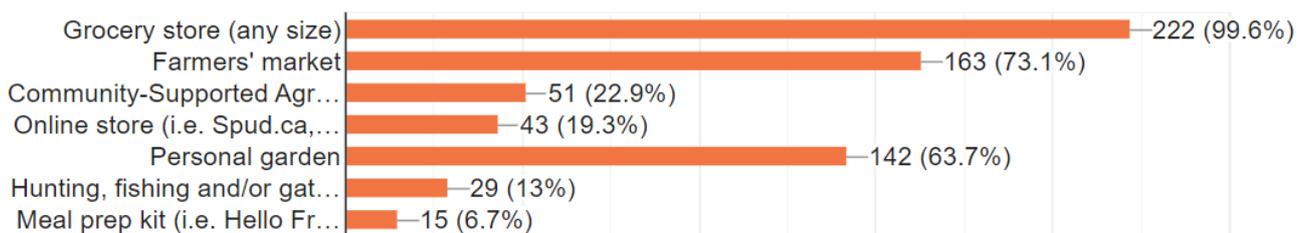
Residents

A total of 225 responses from Squamish to Lillooet residents were received, 69.5% of which from Squamish, 13.5% Pemberton, 10.8% Whistler, and 4.5% Lillooet. The overwhelming majority of Squamish responses may be due to the fact that Squamish residents are more familiar with the work of the Squamish Food Policy Council and Squamish CAN, thus being more likely to come across media relating to the organization.



Current Avenues of Food Procurement

Residents were asked, “How do you currently obtain food?”. The survey responses are as follows:



Nearly all (99.6%) of residents mainly obtain food from grocery stores. 73% obtain food from the farmers’ market, 64% from a personal garden, 23% from Community-Supported Agriculture (CSA), 19% from an online store (such as Spud.ca), 13% from hunting and gathering, and 6.7% from ordered meal kits. A variety of other ways of procuring food were also noted (roughly 1%), such as farm stands, neighbourhood food sharing groups, local restaurants, and food banks.

Current Local Food Support

Residents were asked, “Approximately what percentage of the food you consume is produced within the Squamish to Lillooet region?”. Responses ranged widely from 0% to

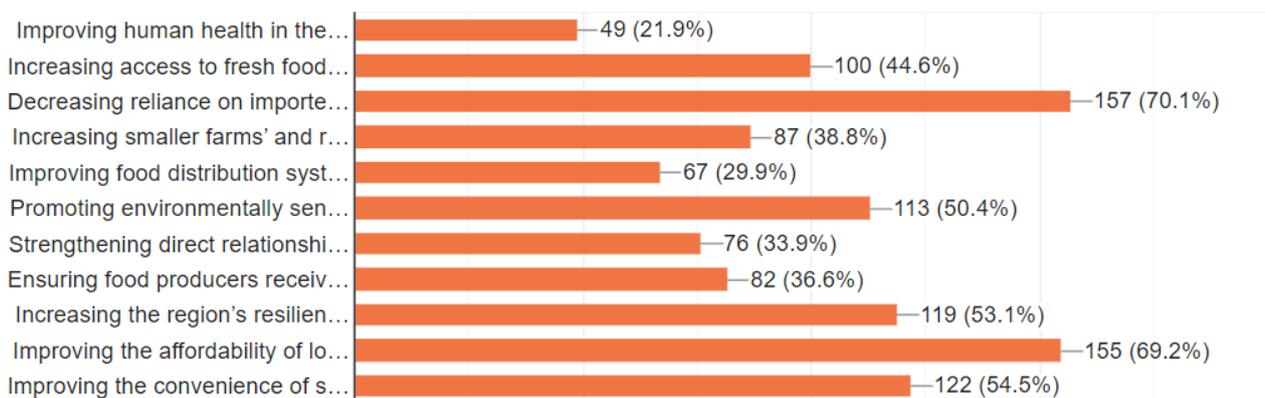
KEY FINDINGS

100%. Many residents expressed that their percentage increases in the summertime, with easier access to fresh seasonal produce.

The next question asked, “Are you interested in increasing your percentage and supporting more regionally-grown food along the Sea to Sky corridor?”. Nearly all residents (95.5%) responded ‘yes’. 4.5% of residents responded with ‘maybe’, elaborating that they require more information. Overall, an overwhelming majority of residents are interested in supporting the local food economy.

Changes to Local Food Procurement

Residents were asked to rank the top five changes to the local food system that would be most important to them. The following graph outlines the results:

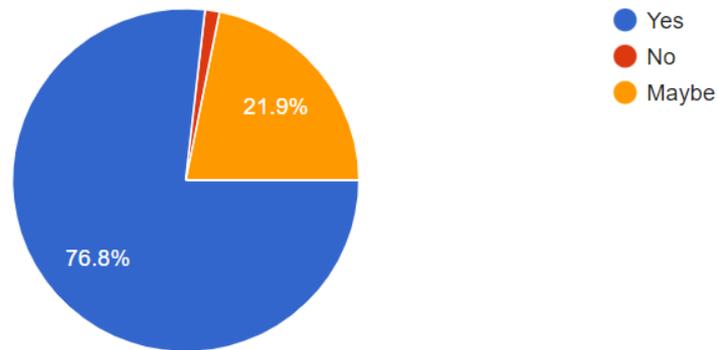


Most residents (70%) found that decreasing reliance on imported products was the most important change to the food system that they would like to see. This was followed by improving the affordability of local food (69%), improving the convenience of sourcing locally grown food (54.5%), increasing the region’s resilience to the effects of climate change (53%), and promoting environmentally sensitive production practices (50%).

Farm Hub Participation

When asked if residents are interested in participating in a potential Farm Hub as a consumer of food, most residents (77%) said ‘yes’, 22% said ‘maybe’, and 1% said ‘no’. Most respondents are interested in ordering vegetables (95%), followed by fruits (87%), eggs (76%), frozen products (65%), meats (64%) and artisanal products (58%). Other responses included mushrooms, teas, herbs, spices and dairy-free specialty products.

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Residents were asked to expand on their answer to whether or not they would support an online Farm Hub. Most responses were positive and reflected the notion that consumers want to support regionally-grown local food. However, the key takeaway is that residents are supportive of a Farm Hub depending on the affordability and convenience of the service.

Residents that answered 'yes' to participating in a Farm Hub expressed interest in supporting local food in off-seasons when farmers' markets end, expanding on their already-existing CSA boxes, and decreasing their reliance on imported produce from grocery stores. Many are interested in using the Farm Hub to complement their existing CSA subscriptions with local fruits, frozen products, bread, and meats. Residents that answered 'maybe' to supporting the local Farm Hub generally stated that they require more information on cost, location, expected commitment, and convenience to be supportive of the project. When asked how frequently residents would be interested in ordering from a Farm Hub, 42% of residents are interested in ordering weekly, 37% every other week, and 11% monthly. Other answers included 'as needed' and 'sporadically'.

Key Comments and Concerns from Residents

The responses were generally positive and excited about supporting local farmers. Some general themes included:

- "This is great, can't wait"
- "I think it is extremely important to support our local farmers and that folks learn about where their food actually comes from. I do my best to support our local farms during the harvest months and would love an option to do so in the winter months too."
- "Please make available at Squamish farmers' market and possible recipe/meal suggestions with in-season food"
- "Offer smaller quantities to folks who live alone"
- Consider how this intersects with reconciliation with Indigenous communities and land. In

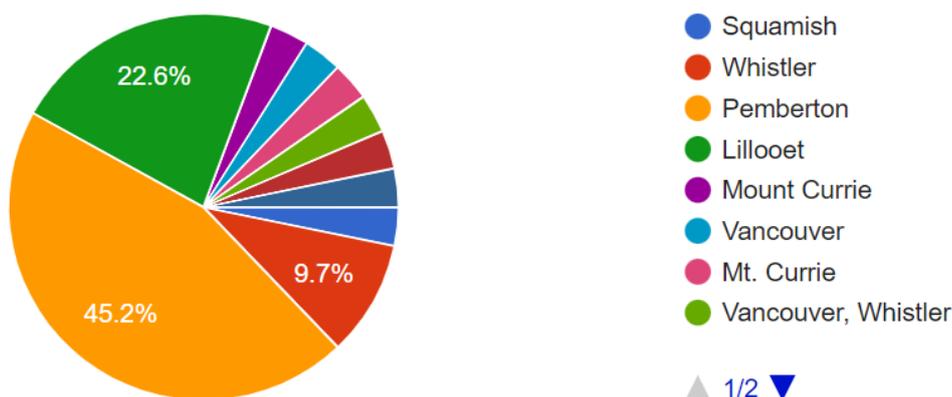
KEY FINDINGS

the past, local food movement is often most welcoming to those with privilege

- “Please don’t let this be another profit-driven greenwashing action that the new wave of bourgeoisie residents seem to vibe with”
- Excited to support if this benefits farmers
- Maybe offer meal kits
- Need a more holistic approach to foodhub, including incubator/accelerator functions to add value (e.g. a pilot plant for product development), along with well-managed, eco-friendly, physical storage facilities (ambient/refrigerated/frozen) and distribution network. I am concerned about use of non-environmentally sound transportation for distribution (e.g. lots of poorly maintained, polluting vehicles)
- Can this service be subsidized?
- “I also wonder how this farm hub could help support local Indigenous groups (either in exercising their rights to traditional harvesting/hunting/fishing etc, or by featuring local Indigenous artisans/farmers.etc). May be worthwhile to connect with First Nations Food Systems Project (I think there were some folks in Lillooet who were working on community gardens/farms that may want to be involved?). And to connect with Lillooet Agriculture and Food Society (LAFS) and Lillooet Community Connect Hub if they haven’t been connected with already if the hub goes all the way to Lillooet. Also interested in how this could help connect schools to ordering more local food and would love to help support that as the hub progresses

Farmers

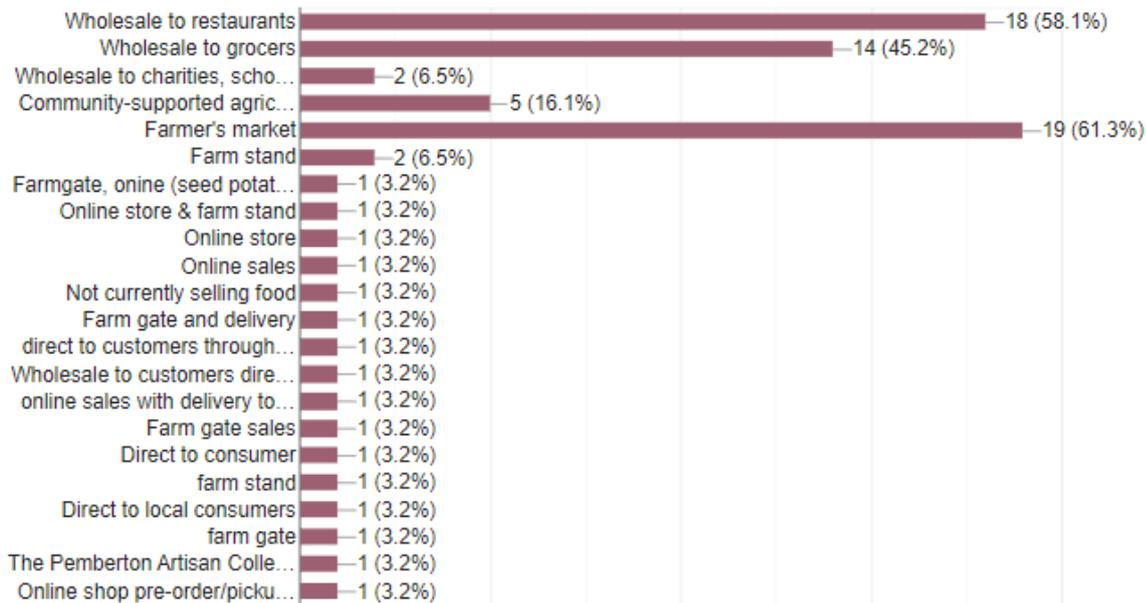
A total of 31 farmers responded to the survey, providing valuable feedback on how farmers along the Sea to Sky view a potential online Farm Hub. Most farmers surveyed (45%) reside in Pemberton, 23% in Lillooet, and 10% in Whistler. Other areas included Squamish, Mount Currie, Birken, and D’Arcy.



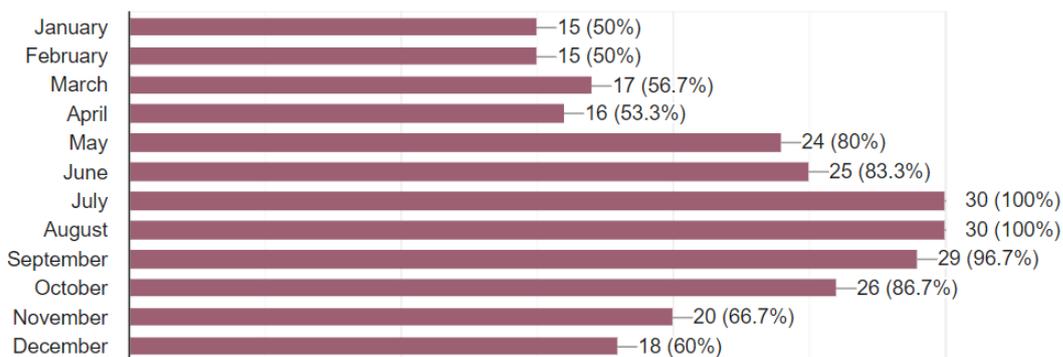
KEY FINDINGS

Current Farmers' Revenue Streams

When farmers were asked how they currently sell food, most responded (61%) that they sell their produce and other goods at farmers' markets and wholesale to grocers (58%). 45% sell wholesale to grocers, 16% through Community-Supported Agriculture (CSA), and 6.5% sell wholesale to charities and schools. Other selling avenues include online stores, farm gate, farm stands, and the Pemberton Artisan Collective.



Farmers were asked during which months their farm aggregates and distributes food. According to the survey, all farmers aggregate and distribute food in the summer months (July, August and September). Only about half of farmers aggregate and distribute food in the spring and winter months (December, January, February, March, April). This makes sense, as most farms' profits align with the natural growing season.

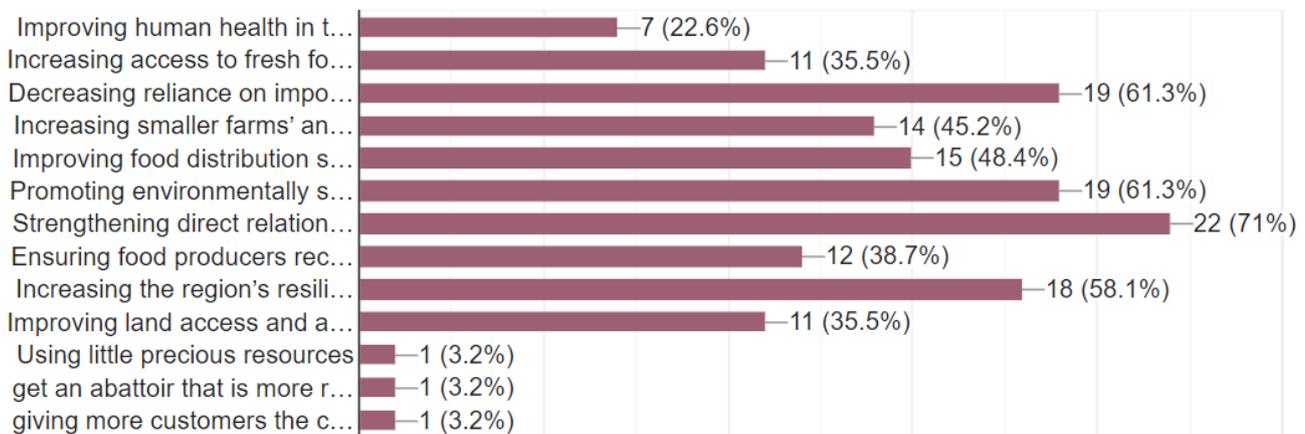


KEY FINDINGS

Farmers were also asked what kind of online presence, if any, their farm currently maintains. 81% of farmers have a Facebook presence, 71% use Instagram, 64.5% use a website, and 13% have no online presence. This provides us with the insight that many farmers are already present in the online space and would likely be more familiar with an online platform such as a virtual Farm Hub.

Changes to the Local Food System

Farmers were asked to rank the top five changes to the local food system that would be most important to them. The following graph outlines the results:

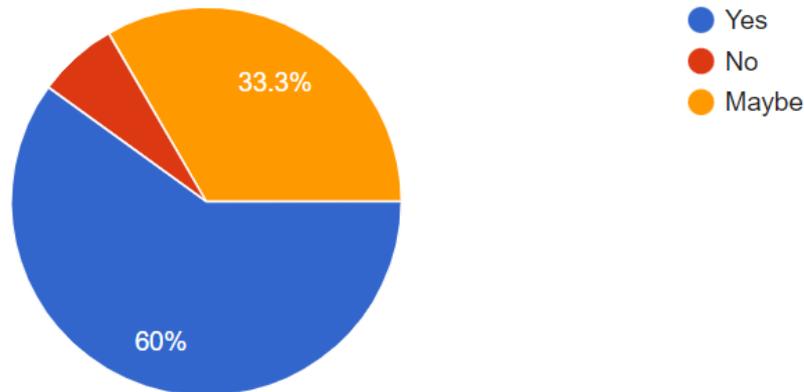


Most farmers (71%) found that strengthening the direct relationship between producer and consumer was the most important change to the food system that they would like to see. This was followed by decreasing reliance on imported products and increasing food self-reliance along the Sea to Sky corridor (61%) and promoting environmentally sensitive production practices (61%), increasing the region's resilience to the effects of climate change (58%), and improving the food distribution system along the Sea to Sky corridor (48%).

Farm Hub Participation

Farmers were asked if they would be interested in participating in a Farm Hub with their farm. 60% of farmers responded that they are interested, 33% are maybe interested, and 7% are not interested in participating in a Farm Hub.

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Those that responded ‘yes’ expressed that the Farm Hub would be a unified way to get people knowing about local products, reaching consumers online, and cutting down on food delivery costs and emissions. Many farmers were interested in using the Farm Hub as another stream of sales and as a tool for organizing online orders, home deliveries, and distribution. The farmers that responded ‘maybe’ expressed that they would be supportive of a Farm Hub depending on the model, commitment, logistics, price received, and quantities needed. Some farmers noted that they would participate if frozen products were accommodated, aggregation was straightforward, and the cost to participate was reasonable. Farmers that responded ‘no’ expressed that they are content with the revenue streams they already have, they do not require a ‘middle man’, and/or that they are not willing to participate with or maintain an online platform.

Key Comments and Concerns from Farmers

The last question of the survey called for any comments, concerns, and suggestions for the possible implementation of a Squamish to Lillooet Farm Hub. Some key takeaways are summarized here:

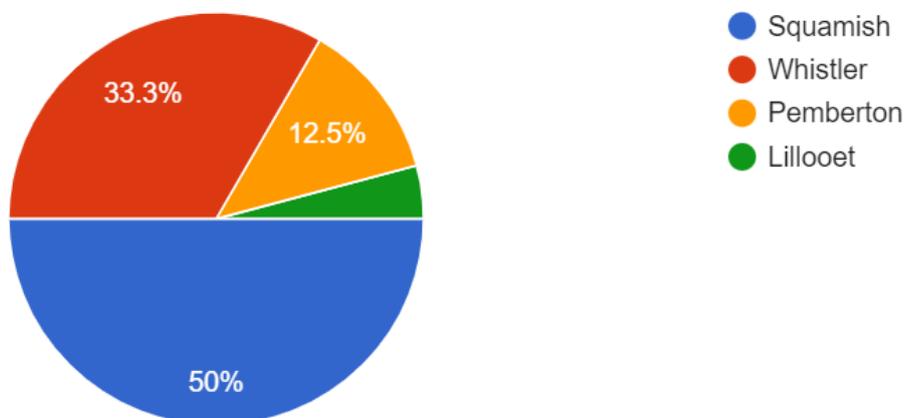
- “Need to include BIPOC farmers”
- Consider how to support farms that support chicks and ducklings where people could obtain animals and then grow them themselves, as well as hay farmers who help support people with livestock. These are all part of the food system, not just fruits and vegetables”
- “Need to know what the cost to farmers would be”
- “Include different categories, such as Herbal Medicine category”
- “Lillooet trialled a Food Hub in 2015 and producers were unwilling to put in effort or pay a percentage of sales in order to move the model forward. Around that time, the Lillooet Agriculture and Food Society accomplished a Food Hub Feasibility Plan that should be reviewed by this group”

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- “Aggregating our community resources sounds like a phenomenal idea. I am most curious and interested in the sustainability and in turn resiliency of our region. We have such high carbon emissions locally due to transportation.. we ship our food out and ship food in, but we have so much production in our region that could just stay here if we had some storage facilities. I am a market farmer, I provide 14 families with food in a CSA format, I am looking to increase the number of families I work with to provide them a relationship with their food so I'm not sure I could do much providing for this, but I know all the families I work with would buy year round from a local source if they could”
- “I think old time tested and true farmers methods should be promoted and not lost to the internet, whether it be permaculture, co-ops, farm stands, markets, fairs”

Purchasers

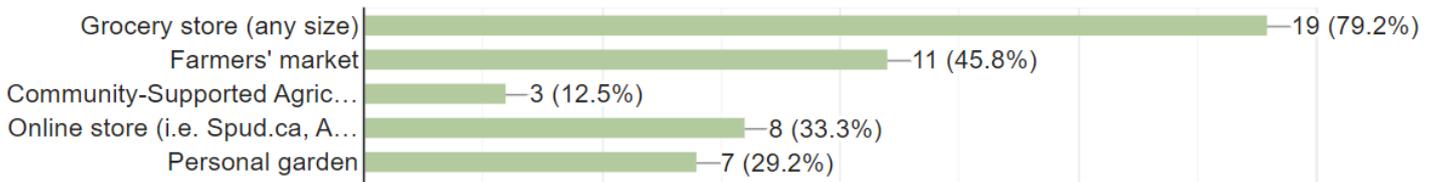
A total of 23 food purchasers responded to the survey, providing valuable feedback on how restaurants and other establishments along the Sea to Sky view a potential online Farm Hub. Most purchasers surveyed (52%) reside in Squamish, 30% in Whistler, 13% in Pemberton, and 4% in Lillooet.



Current Local Food Procurement

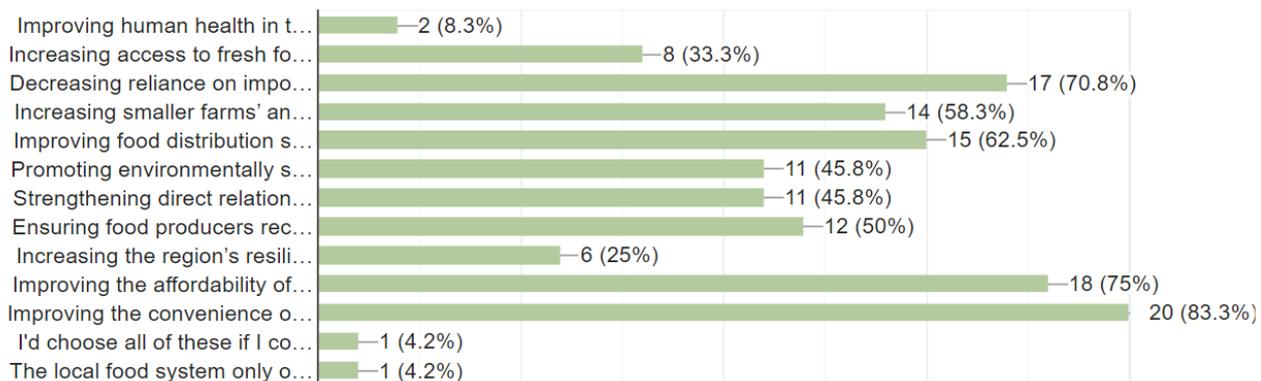
Purchasers were asked about the current ways they currently obtain food. 78% of purchasers obtain food from grocery stores, 48% from local farmers' markets, 35% from online stores, 30% from personal gardens, and 13% from CSA. Other responses included hunting and gathering, Freshpoint, Sysco, Yen Bros, as well as a variety of other distributors and commercial suppliers. Purchasers were asked to estimate the percentage of local food in the total food that they purchase. Responses were generally low, in the 0-10% range; some restaurants responded with higher percentages, between 40-70%. When asked if purchasers are interested in increasing their percentage of local food, 91% said 'yes', and 9% said 'maybe'.

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Changes to the Local Food System

Purchasers were asked to rank the top five changes to the local food system that would be most important to them. The following graph outlines the results:

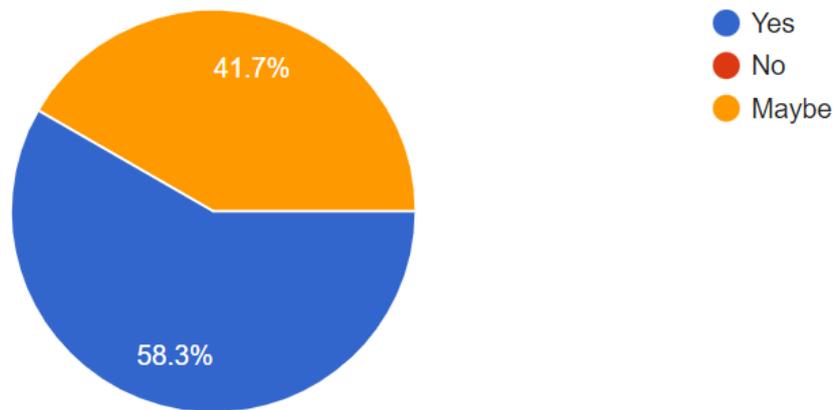


Most purchasers (87%) found that improving the convenience of sourcing local fresh foods was the most important change to the food system that they would like to see. This was followed by improving the affordability of locally-grown high-quality food (74%), decreasing reliance on imported products and increasing food self-reliance along the Sea to Sky corridor (70%), increasing smaller farms' and ranches' access to markets (61%), improving the food distribution system along the Sea to Sky corridor (61%), and promoting environmentally sensitive production practices, strengthening the direct relationship between producer and consumer, as well as ensuring food producers receive fair and consistent sales year-round (48%).

Farm Hub Participation

Purchasers were asked if they would be interested in participating in a potential Farm Hub. 61% of purchasers responded that they are interested and 39% responded 'maybe'.

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Those that responded ‘yes’ expressed that they want to support more locally-produced food and that ‘one-stop shopping’ can cut down on purchasing time. Some purchasers wrote that they would enthusiastically support the Farm Hub as a tool for diverting waste through large grocery partners. Others were interested in using the Farm Hub to order local teas, wine jellies, beer, and liquor. Survey participants that responded ‘maybe’ wrote that they would support the initiative if costs of the products are comparable to existing distributors, such as Freshpoint and Sysco. Multiple purchasers outlined the challenge of volume; purchasers want to make sure that the item that they need is in stock and available to purchase frequently, which can be a challenge for smaller farms that can have low stock. Another potential barrier is the ordering process, as large distributors have a fairly simple one. Further, some purchasers noted that they have pre-existing relationships with farmers that produce specific products just for them and would want to maintain that relationship if a Farm Hub were to materialize.

Producers were asked what food products they would be most interested in purchasing that are grown or produced within the Squamish to Lillooet region. Purchasers were most interested (96%) in sourcing vegetables from a Farm Hub, 91% fruits, 83% eggs, 65% dairy, frozen products, and artisanal products, and 57% seafood. In terms of ordering frequency, 55% of purchasers said they would order weekly, 14% every other week, 4.5% monthly, and 4.5% daily. Many purchasers expressed concern about ordering frequency, as supply needs vary widely with busy seasons, seasonal produce, and fridge space. Overall, purchasers want more information on the process, pricing, and logistics of a Farm Hub.

Key Comments and Concerns from Food Purchasers

- Mariana (manager of Food Bank) is keen to help, partner, support or boost this program in any way
- “Transportation is a key piece. There is no freight company that drives from Lillooet to

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Squamish. All shipping goes through Kamloops to Vancouver. Adding a freight option that serves the Lillooet to Squamish corridor that is able to get products from farmers to purchasers would be key to making any progress”

- “The local food system only operates for about three months of the year. In some cases less. At the start of the season, the offerings of the local farmers are small and we source a lot through GFS. Food security has to come through extending the season, encouraging growers to use grow tunnels or green houses, etc. Some farmers are not super interested in selling locally as the locals do not have the means to pay the premium prices for local organic food. These farmers choose to go to Vancouver to sell their products at FM at much higher prices than in the area. You can't stop that. Farmers need to be able to make money as well.”

Survey Summary

Overall, most survey respondents (73%) are supportive of the development of a Squamish to Lillooet online Farm Hub. ‘Decreasing reliance on imported products’, ‘strengthening the direct relationship between producer and consumer’, and ‘improving the convenience of sourcing local fresh foods’ were identified as the most important changes to the food system that the Squamish to Lillooet community would like to see. Affordability and convenience were identified as the two most important concerns from farmers, purchasers, and residents alike, and should be focused on in future feasibility studies of a Squamish to Lillooet online Farm Hub.

