



Squamish CAN
Climate Action Network



SQUAMISH
FOOD POLICY COUNCIL

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Good Food Program:

SQUAMISH TO LILLOOET REGIONAL FARM HUB

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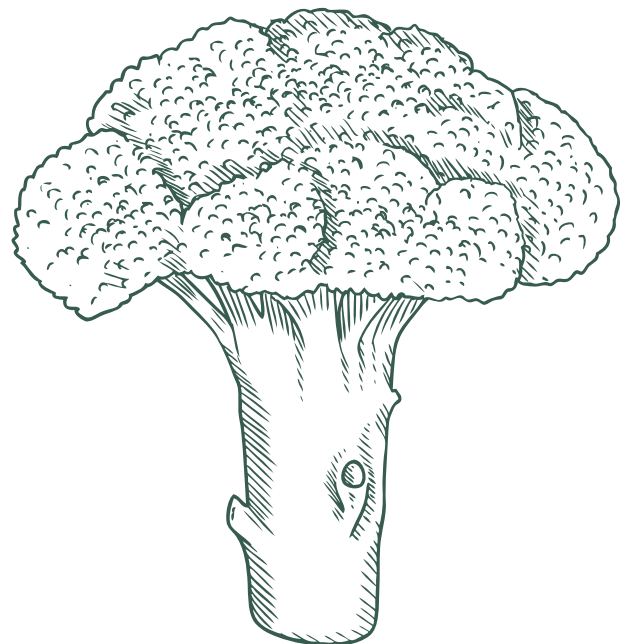


TABLE OF CONTENTS

Background

Who is the Squamish Food Policy Council?.....	1
Who is Squamish CAN?.....	1
What issues are we trying to address?.....	1
How did we get here?.....	2
What is the systemic change?.....	3
What is the Good Food Program?.....	3

Good Food Program: Squamish to Lillooet Regional Farm Hub

What is a Farm Hub?.....	5
What issues can it solve?.....	5
What are the goals of this project?.....	5
Where has this been done? Is it working?.....	5
What do farmers have to do to participate?.....	5
What are the benefits to a farmer's business if they participate?.....	6
Does it matter how big or small a farm is?.....	6
What is the financial feasibility of such a project?.....	6
What is the cost to farmers?.....	7
How are producer price agreements arranged?.....	7
What does distribution look like?.....	7
Who are the key stakeholders?.....	7
How will the success of this program be measured?.....	8
What are some expected challenges?.....	8
What would the Farm Hub actually look like?.....	9

BACKGROUND

WHO IS THE SQUAMISH FOOD POLICY COUNCIL?

The Squamish Food Policy Council (SFPC) was formed in 2015 to further sustainable food systems work in Squamish and the Sea-to-Sky region. Our mission is that ALL members of Squamish have access to enough nutritious, safe, ecologically sustainable, and culturally appropriate food at all times. Squamish Valley food and agricultural lands are protected and productive, and producers, processors, growers, foragers, and knowledge holders are valued and supported.

WHO IS SQUAMISH CAN?

Squamish CAN (Climate Action Network) is the backbone organization for the SFPC that strives to educate, support, and empower the community of Squamish by developing, promoting, and implementing sustainable strategies to mitigate climate change. Formed in 2009, Squamish CAN is a registered non-profit that is highly regarded in Squamish for often being the centre point for many initiatives involving community partners to achieve a common goal. They have been working with municipal and regional governments, public educators, other non-profits, and local businesses to see change happen in the community. Squamish CAN also aims to increase civic engagement in food systems through community gardens, food literacy workshops, and educational programs and events, whilst cultivating partnerships at the local and regional level to influence policy.

WHAT ISSUES ARE WE TRYING TO ADDRESS?

Our organization is trying to address the issue of climate change through a regional, values based food systems lens. It is estimated that globally, our industrialized food system contributes as much as half of all human-produced greenhouse gas emissions (Hawken, P. (2017, Drawdown). 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.

The expansion of industrial food systems around the world has come at a high cost for biodiversity, land conversion, nitrification of waterways, and increased greenhouse gas emissions while at the same time exploiting workers, mistreating animals, and making us sick through poor diets and polluted environments. Most of the food we eat comes from vast, industrialized, heavily polluting operations devoted to growing a single product, which is referred to as a monoculture.

The industrialized food system was developed in the 21st century and is dominated by large private enterprises and based on streamlining processes and maximizing profits. It has been convenient for farmers who use machines to plant, fertilize, cultivate, and then harvest thousands of acres with one crop. Farmers' production plans fill predetermined quotas, and harvests are sold in bulk to third parties for further processing and distribution down the food supply chain, eventually landing on our dinner plates.

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.

For example, a carrot grower in Pemberton may be growing enough crops to supply a local grocery store, but their carrots don't fit the uniform size desired by the store, and so shoppers find 'perfect' imported California carrots on the shelves instead. Or we have the case of a farmer in Squamish who specializes in salad greens, which a chef at a local restaurant loves. However, vulnerable to the weather and seasons, the farmer can't guarantee to fill the order each week and so the chef chooses to stay with a traditional supplier, which provides a lower quality but consistent delivery.

HOW DID WE GET HERE?

Our food systems work scaled up in 2015 with the endorsement of a document we wrote called the Squamish Food Charter. Later that year we established the Squamish Food Policy Council to push forward on implementing the Charter's principles, which are: Community Economic Development, Ecological and Human Health, Social Justice, Collaboration and Participation, and Celebration. This document addresses forwarding ideas such as local food procurement by institutions, fair pay for farmers, and exploring different sales channels to better connect consumers to farmers. It guides our organizations and municipalities' food activities.

Further community outreach was initiated in 2016 when, in partnership with the District of Squamish, we co hosted two deep dive sessions to gather community knowledge and feedback about our food system for integration into the new Official Community Plan (OCP). This two year process culminated in a dedicated seven page Food Systems section in the Squamish 2040 OCP, endorsed in 2018. This lay out at the municipal level objectives such as: Increase local food security and self-sufficiency; Increase the value of the local agri-food economy; Integrate food access, infrastructure, food rescue and redistribution services and programs within physical and virtual community food hubs in the community; support regional food security initiatives to enhance the Squamish 'Foodshed'.

Our work has been further guided by the Squamish-Lillooet Regional Food Task Force. This collaborative approach to regional food security identified action items, one of which we took on: the project of developing a Regional Food Procurement Policy.

This became what we are now calling the Good Food Pledge. It has been endorsed by the Squamish Lillooet Regional District, and the Districts of Squamish and Pemberton. While having local government endorsement of the Good Food Pledge is monumental, it is not enough. We know there is huge potential held within local and sustainable food procurement, but we now need to take a step back and figure out what is next. With the Develop grant that we received of \$20,000 from the Vancouver Foundation to do this work, we hope to explore the "What Next". We have a vision of the changes the Good Food Pledge could achieve, but need to evaluate interest first and foremost.

We believe these can best be forwarded through the development of a Good Food Program, and we are exploring creating a Regional Farm Hub to centralize aggregation and distribution of local food for sale to individuals and wholesale markets.

WHAT IS THE SYSTEMIC CHANGE?

While there are many clear benefits of a local food system that values the health and well-being of the environment, it's workforce, local economies, animals, and communities, the lack of distribution channels and support available for smaller farms makes it challenging to be competitive in the current market.

Why is further exploration & inquiry into this issue important? Who in the community do you see as being able to challenge or disrupt the ways things are now?

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 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.

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.

Collaboration efforts through the Regional Food Task Force, convened in 2017 by the Whistler Centre for Sustainability, alongside years of ongoing work within each community, has laid a strong foundation for next steps in developing the Sea-to-Sky's food system. We are now at a point where the right targeted actions will make significant and disruptive change. We need to invest in a focused inquiry and community engagement to understand what exactly this values-based approach to a sustainable food system will look like.

WHAT IS THE GOOD FOOD PROGRAM?

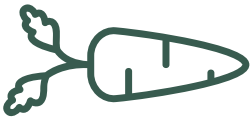
The Good Food Program is an initiative of the Squamish Lillooet Regional Food Task Force, established in 2018, which is composed of regional food stakeholders and local governments. Task Force members collaboratively identified actions to help advance the sustainability of the regional food system, one of which is the development of a Regional Procurement Policy and Pledge for broad endorsement and action, led by the SFPC. The proposed Pledge and Policy aims to support local food producers and processors through implementing food procurement practices aligned with "good food" values that serve as guiding principles to the pledge: Local Economies and Communities, Environmental Sustainability and Stewardship of Natural Resources, Nutrition, Valued Workforce, and Animal Welfare. A pledge and policy is intended to increase the percentage of local and sustainable food purchased by the District, and other future adoptees (member municipalities, institutions, academic, schools, hospitals, businesses, etc.), in turn, increasing the support of and demand for local agriculture.



LOCAL ECONOMIES AND COMMUNITIES



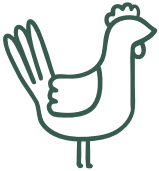
ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY AND STEWARDSHIP OF NATURAL RESOURCES



NUTRITION



VALUED WORKFORCE



ANIMAL WELFARE

GOOD FOOD PROGRAM: SQUAMISH TO LILLOOET REGIONAL FARM HUB

WHAT IS A FARM HUB?

A Farm Hub 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 Pledge values to strengthen food equity and access along the Sea to Sky while increasing sales for farmers.

WHAT ISSUES CAN IT SOLVE?

Food self-reliance has been identified as a key climate change strategy in BC. 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 regional farm hub would strengthen the region's food security by building self-reliance. 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.

WHAT ARE THE GOALS OF THIS PROJECT?

The ultimate goal of the regional Farm Hub is to create a local, resilient, and accessible food economy in the Sea to Sky region. In addition to increasing a community's health and wellbeing, a strong local food system is vital in meeting the challenges of climate change on a local scale. Ensuring that farmers and food producers earn a living wage while increasing equitable community access to local food is the aim of the Farm Hub project.

WHERE HAS THIS BEEN DONE? IS IT WORKING?

The South Island (SI) Farm Hub was established in Victoria, BC in 2020 as a response to a market loss for local farms due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The SI Food Hub's goal was to provide fresh local food to participants while ensuring a steady revenue for farmers. Farmers were paid a fair price for their products and fresh produce was able to reach populations that experience barriers to healthy food (SI Farm Hub, 2021). Farmers were trained to operate the Local Food Marketplace platform, where produce availability can easily be uploaded that purchasers can order from. The project was supported by grants and profitability was achieved for farmers in the first year of the program.

WHAT DO FARMERS HAVE TO DO TO PARTICIPATE?

As a member of the Farm Hub, farmers will have access to an online platform where they can upload what produce they have available on a weekly basis. Farmers will be trained on how to use the Local Food Marketplace platform efficiently (Local Food Marketplace, 2021). Farmers will be asked to take responsibility over maintaining their online presence in the virtual Farm Hub with support from Squamish CAN and other organizations.

GOOD FOOD PROGRAM: SQUAMISH TO LILLOOET REGIONAL FARM HUB

Produce needs to arrive at aggregation, market ready to market standards (in boxes/bags labelled, safely and neatly packaged) which requires one to invest in packing materials and keep a high quality standard.

In general, we would ask farmers to follow our aggregation/drop off schedule and posting schedule so there are some logistics that farmers would need to meet to participate.. Furthermore, farmers would be responsible for their product photos, product descriptions, profile completion and crop planning with the team if necessary. Our team would be able to support photos and descriptions to farmers that are not on their computers much and need the time to harvest.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS TO A FARMER'S BUSINESS IF THEY PARTICIPATE?

Participation in the Farm Hub would provide a basis for guaranteed and consistent sales for farmers along the Sea to Sky corridor. A digital platform for selling produce will allow for producers to directly sell food to consumers, charities, schools, wholesale, and delivery. By building a clear relationship between producers, sellers, consumers, and organizations, a local supply and demand chain is strengthened. Farmers have the potential to see strong weekly sales and sold out products (SI Farm Hub, 2021). Ultimately, the Farm Hub will allow farmers to focus on growing while aggregation and distribution will be covered by the Farm Hub platform.

If farmers have existing strong relationships with buyers, it should be noted that the Farm Hub aims to complement these relationships rather than substitute them. The Farm Hub is not meant to compete with the current market nor existing relationships with restaurants, but rather to expand and broaden access to the local food network.

DOES IT MATTER HOW BIG OR SMALL A FARM IS?

The Farm Hub has the ability to support different scales of farmers, though farm size and output should be taken into consideration. The SI Farm Hub found that farms with larger inventories and more variety that made use of marketing of the online program had greatest success in sales (SI Farm Hub, 2021). These farms posted available products online just prior to the store opening each week, thus reaching more people online. From smaller farms, a specified weekly pre-order was found to be beneficial. This secured a basis for guaranteed sales in a given week. Overall, both small and large farms have great potential to benefit from participating in an online farm hub, especially if online marketing and updating produce availability is consistent week-to-week. Squamish Food Policy Council and the Local Food Marketplace will work with the farm community to determine price agreements, as well as identify what services they would like to expand, such as CSAs and value-added farm products.

WHAT IS THE FINANCIAL FEASIBILITY OF SUCH A PROJECT?

Looking at local examples of a Farm Hub's feasibility, the SI Food Hub has seen dramatic increases in sales on a weekly basis since the program's inception in May 2020. Three revenue streams have been launched: selling to charities and schools, selling to restaurants, and providing home deliveries.

GOOD FOOD PROGRAM: SQUAMISH TO LILLOOET REGIONAL FARM HUB

The SI Farm Hub received grants to help with startup costs. In addition to the Farm Hub platform, the SI Farm Hub utilized the 'Farmbucks' program, which was a key part of the project's profitability. This allowed charities to purchase products from farmers at a subsidized price.

If the Squamish to Lillooet Regional Farm Hub were a non-profit model, we would apply for grants to cover the capital costs (development and launch) of this program. Farmers will not have to pay any start-up fees, as the program would ultimately be funded and hopefully sustained through sales. Additionally, a program similar to Farmbucks that supports charities' purchasing from farmers would be a valuable part of the business model; the feasibility of this along the Sea to Sky will be assessed should there be support for the advancement of this program.

WHAT IS THE COST TO FARMERS?

While costs have not been determined yet, we will strongly consider best practices from other successful farm hub models, such as the South Island (SI) Farm Hub. At the SI Farm Hub, the farmer determines their wholesale pricing; in other words they determine what they charge SI Farm Hub for each unit. It is common practice for wholesale pricing to be 20-40% below market or retail pricing. Whatever the farmers choose as their price, the SI Farm Hub adds 20% and 30% to their different customer tiers. The final price to consumers would be 1.2 or 1.3 times the farmer price.

HOW ARE PRODUCER PRICE AGREEMENTS ARRANGED?

While this has not been determined yet, we look to the SI Farm Hub's example. The SI Farm Hub created their own pricing guide. They relied heavily on the work that local farmers and the local food economy already had in place (farmers' markets pricing, existing local wholesale pricing, other CSAs) and also took into consideration wholesalers and the Certified Organic Associations of BC (COABC) online pricing guide. This is an important piece farmers agreed to in the project's terms of agreement to reduce competitiveness and give every farmer an opportunity to sell their product at a fair price.

WHAT DOES DISTRIBUTION LOOK LIKE?

This has not been determined yet, but we look forward to hearing farmers' input before we start to advance this project. Our hope is that distribution is streamlined with your existing operations and would not incur any extra costs on the farmer.

WHO ARE THE KEY STAKEHOLDERS?

The key stakeholders for the Sea to Sky Farm Hub would be any business or organization that procures food as well as residents. For example:

- Farmers and food producers in the Sea to Sky Corridor
- Schools, local governments, hospitals, non-profit community organizations and local Indigenous groups purchasing food for day-to-day operations
- Restaurants including larger institutions like Whistler/Blackcomb

GOOD FOOD PROGRAM: SQUAMISH TO LILLOOET REGIONAL FARM HUB

HOW WILL THE SUCCESS OF THIS PROGRAM BE MEASURED?

Measures of success of the Sea to Sky Farm Hub will include both qualitative and quantitative assessments. These evaluations will be conducted twice a year, possibly quarterly at the launch of the project to gain initial feedback.

Quantitative indicators may include:

- Number of farms who indicate the Farm Hub is contributing to farm's development and/or success
- Revenue obtained by local farmers related to the farm hub
- Number of consumers registered to receive produce from local farmers
- Number of charities able to obtain and offer fresh food options to clients
- The inception of 'Farmbucks' or a similar subsidized credit program
- Amount of fresh food provided through credit program

Qualitative indicators may include:

- Charities and other organizations reporting that they are benefiting from the program
- Organizations and institutions providing story of impact related to fresh food availability for the community they serve
- Farms indicate that the Farm Hub is valuable to their operations and viability
- Farms provide constructive feedback and suggestions for further improvement of Farm Hub

This list of indicators will be constantly developed and improved upon to reflect the needs and evolving goals of the program.

WHAT ARE SOME EXPECTED CHALLENGES?

Since the Farm Hub is a relatively new local food economy model, challenges will inevitably arise as the program becomes established in the Sea to Sky. We will do our best to foresee possible limitations and work to account for them in the planning process. Firstly, a possible challenge to the Farm Hub project is **winter sales**. More food will be available in the growing season and product availability will inevitably fluctuate with the seasons. To ensure sales in the winter months, the Farm Hub team can focus on marketing based on shifting availability. This can include frozen meat and fish and berries for the winter months, marketing 'Christmas boxes', and hosting webinars and information sessions around seasonal cooking. Planning produce that can be frozen for winter months during summer months will be essential to ensuring a steady supply in the bridging seasons.

Another possible challenge is **administration time**; farmers may feel hesitant about maintaining an online store on a weekly basis in addition to their existing responsibilities. To counter this, it is important that farmers are offered adequate training and information on operational logistics ahead of the growing season. Technological support by the Local Food Marketplace and Squamish Food Policy Council staff will be offered wherever necessary. A thorough understanding of the online platform and constant communication to assess progress and considerations will provide ease for

GOOD FOOD PROGRAM: SQUAMISH TO LILLOOET REGIONAL FARM HUB

farmers in their duties.

Further, another possible challenge is **external funding** to maintain or grow the program. Squamish Food Policy Council is currently working towards a proposal for a Vancouver Foundation grant of \$300,000 to create and run the Farm Hub program over the span of three years. Given the success of the SI Farm Hub's 'Farmbucks' program, additional funding for a subsidized charity credit program will be beneficial, though the feasibility of this is unknown at this time of the planning process. In addition to funding, the robustness of the program will be determined by product sales and stakeholder engagement.

Moreover, another concern farmers may have is about losing their **branding**. In order to meet this concern, the Squamish Food Policy Council is committed to maintaining consistent communication with farmers about their marketing strategies. Farmers are encouraged to incorporate their unique branding into the Farm Hub online platform.

Overall, the establishment of a Sea to Sky Farm Hub has the potential to revitalize the local food economy, however since it is the first project of its kind in the region, logistical hurdles will need to be met, overcome, and learned from as they materialize throughout the process.

WHAT WOULD THE FARM HUB ACTUALLY LOOK LIKE?

If the project goes ahead, the Squamish to Lillooet Regional Food Hub would utilize the Local Food Marketplace (LFM) platform. The LFM platform is an online software originally developed in Oregon. The organization's goal is to help small farms get more local food to their communities through building an easy-to-use technological platform for farms, markets, and food hubs to sell their products through (Local Food Marketplace, 2021). Many regions whose food markets were impacted by COVID-19, such as Vancouver Island's South Island Farm Hub, have partnered with LFM to establish an efficient online farm hub to the community.

The LFM will work with farmers to build a custom website for each farm, where products, amounts, and prices can be listed. Here, farmers will be able to easily update product availability at any time. The platform automates various aspects of the online ordering chain, such as harvest lists, pick lists, recurring orders, packing, distribution, and delivery plans (cite). Farmers can also choose to set up CSA shares and subscriptions. Administration support would be offered by the Squamish Food Policy Council and technological support by LFM.

SQUAMISH TO LILLOOET REGIONAL FARM HUB

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Learn more about the benefits of an online Farm Hub platform here:

<https://home.localfoodmarketplace.com/solutions-farmers/>.

Squamish Food Policy Council: <http://www.squamishfoodpolicycouncil.com/about-us.html>

Squamish CAN: <https://www.squamishcan.net/>

South Island Farm Hub: <https://www.sifarmhub.ca/>

Squamish Food Charter:

[http://www.squamishfoodpolicycouncil.com/uploads/5/5/0/7/55070061/squamish food charter-rationale-history_2016.pdf](http://www.squamishfoodpolicycouncil.com/uploads/5/5/0/7/55070061/squamish_food_charter-rationale-history_2016.pdf)

District of Squamish Official Community Plan:

<https://squamish.ca/yourgovernment/official-community-plan/>

Squamish-Lillooet Regional Food Task Force:

http://www.whistlercentre.ca/sumiredesign/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/SLRD-Regional-Food-Task-Force-Implementation-Plan_Nov5.pdf

Good Food Pledge:

<http://www.squamishfoodpolicycouncil.com/good-food-procurement-program.html>

Do you have any questions, comments, or concerns? Please email Krystle at squamishfoodpolicycouncil@gmail.com.

