



Shape Your Future Victoria

Urban Food System

A full report on food systems is available on the City of Victoria's website for the *Official Community Plan* review at:

www.ShapeYourFutureVictoria.ca

Definition and Description

The **urban food system** refers to the series of interconnected activities that shape how food is produced, processed, distributed, consumed and recycled within the city. The urban food system is tightly linked to the regional food system. **Food security** exists when all citizens obtain a safe, personally acceptable, nutritious diet from non-emergency sources.

Why Is This Topic Important?

Within cities, the food system shapes many aspects of daily life and the built environment. The availability of nutritious, affordable food enhances the health and well-being of residents. Markets and cafes animate neighbourhoods and bring people together. Food-producing gardens and trees increase green spaces and re-use organic waste in the form of compost. Daily travel patterns are shaped by trips to grocery stores, food banks and eateries. Food-related businesses provide employment and economic benefits.

Did You Know?

Victoria's **urban food system** includes gardeners, bakers, coffee roasters, wholesalers, food shop keepers, nutritionists, chefs, compost collectors, over 100 community groups, and – perhaps most importantly – eaters.

Within Victoria, many people grow a portion of their own food in backyard, balcony, community and rooftop gardens and on fruit trees. Approximately 50 homes have backyard chickens.

Victoria has five **community allotment gardens**, including two in Fernwood, two in James Bay and one in Victoria West. Three community commons gardens also demonstrate food gardening.

Vancouver Island imports approximately **90 per cent** of its food; if ferry access were cut off, it is estimated that Victoria would have a three-day supply of food.

In Greater Victoria, 39 agencies provide over **28,000** free or low-cost meals, snacks and other food services each week. Approximately 50 per cent of this food is donated, mainly by corporations¹.

The region's traditional agriculture sector is declining. Between 1996 and 2006, the CRD lost 14 percent of its poultry farms and 81 per cent of its dairy farms. 67 per cent of farms in the CRD earn less than \$10,000 per year, and the average farmer is 54 years old.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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Issues and Trends

Access to Healthy, Affordable Food:

- Local emergency food services report an increase in use among families, children, new Canadians, older adults, and people who are homeless and unstably-housed.
- Charitable food programs in Victoria depend on food donations. The proportion of dairy products and produce served is low, which raises questions about the healthfulness of foods currently fed to homeless and low-income people in the city¹.
- Victoria needs to anticipate its food needs in case of an emergency including how local retailers, wholesalers, farmers and home gardeners might support emergency planning.

Increased Urban Food Production:

- Backyard garden space is often limited for people who are renting and/or living in multi-unit housing such as apartments and townhouses. Residents wishing to grow food may need to look for sites beyond their backyards.
- Victoria's five community allotment gardens have waitlists, and starting a new garden is a complex process that requires a suitable site and the support of neighbours due to potential conflicts about use.
- Not all people in Victoria have the interest, skills, time or resources necessary for growing food.
- Residents have different perceptions about whether activities such as community gardens and fruit trees are appropriate activities for parks and other public lands.
- Urban farming in private backyards presents an opportunity for more food to be grown and sold in the city.

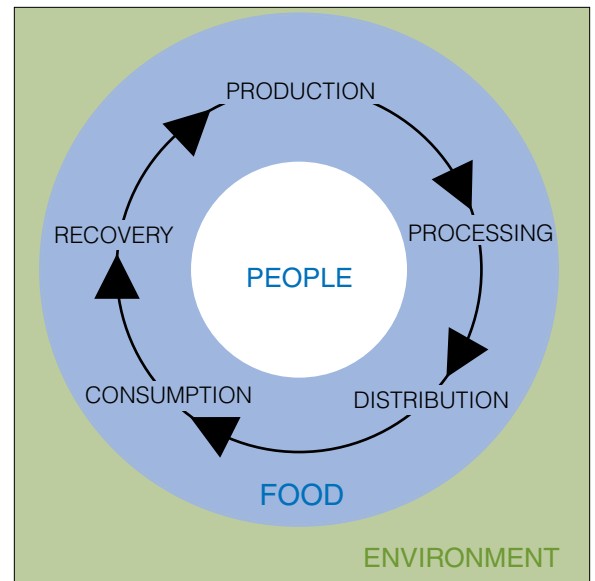
Challenges to Regional Agriculture:

- Regional farms, particularly those on the Saanich Peninsula, produce a wide variety of products throughout the year.
- The region's capacity to produce more food is limited by the declining economic viability of traditional agriculture, development pressure on farmland, aging farmers and a loss of food infrastructure within the CRD (e.g. meat processing facilities).

The City in Action: What We Do Now

The sustainability of the urban food system is affected by many forces outside Victoria, such as global trade, climate change and provincial regulations. Municipalities have the capacity to strengthen the urban food system through policies that encourage more urban food production, improve physical access to healthy food, retain local food businesses, promote organic waste recycling and build partnerships.

Individual City departments support a variety of food-related activities, such as supporting community gardens and markets, funding community food projects, and licensing commercial urban agriculture and street food vending.



THE FIVE STAGES OF A SUSTAINABLE URBAN FOOD SYSTEM

Share your thoughts and ideas:

City of Victoria policies and programs can help to shape Victoria's urban food system, and enhance the ecological, economic and social well-being – including the nutritional health of the entire community.

- Is it important to you that more food be produced within Victoria? Why or why not?
- Where do you get your food on a weekly basis (stores, markets, food banks, restaurants)? What is important to you about where you go and what you eat?
- What are the obstacles to creating a more sustainable, urban food system in Victoria?

1. Bocskei, E. and A. Ostry. 2010. Charitable Food Programs in Victoria, BC. Canadian Journal of Dietetic Practice and Research, 71(1).

WANT TO LEARN MORE?

- Additional topic sheets are available online at www.shapeyourfuturevictoria.ca/research-facts