

# Richmond is food insecure

Editor:

In 2006 the Food Security Task Force of the Poverty Response Committee in partnership with other community groups was invited to produce the Richmond Food System Assessment Report, by a Vancouver Coastal Health Smart Fund initiative.

This report indicated that Richmond was food insecure. The urban agriculture plan presented to council in February was a direct result of this report's findings. As the application to remove the Garden City lands from the Agricultural Land Reserve had been rejected in 2006, it appeared that an agricultural vision for the land was needed.

Richmond is food insecure. Most of our crops (cranberries and blueberries) are grown for export. A large proportion of our food comes from the United States which became a net importer of food for the first time in 2006. Clearly we need to become more self-reliant in our food production.

Both the Agricultural Land Commission and B.C. Ministry of Agriculture have determined that the Garden City lands are farmable. The two main issues are soil acidity and drainage. Acidity is a soil condition throughout the Fraser Valley that can be amended effectively and inexpensively with lime. There are a number of methods that can efficiently manage the challenge of drainage in the parts of the site that are affected.

Because traditional rural farming methods are problematic in an urban setting our vision calls for a different

approach where instead of large acreage, heavy machinery, and high chemical applications, we propose a system of smaller lots for intensive small-scale organic farming whose variety of crops would be marketed on site to the local community. A system of trails, community gardens and heritage lands would make the site a destination attraction. (more information is available at [www.richmondfoodbank.org/documents/PRC/PROPOSAL.htm](http://www.richmondfoodbank.org/documents/PRC/PROPOSAL.htm).)

The economic benefits would be manifold:

- A farmers market on site would provide a direct market vehicle for persons who farm on site as well as for other local farmers.

- Richmond's ethnic mix provides great potential for agricultural technology transfer opportunities.

- Small acreage farming methods and security measures can provide a model for other parts of Richmond where traditional methods are proving to be problematic.

The social and health benefits of providing a tangible connection and access to a local food production system is vital. The life expectancy of children is dropping below their parents due to poor food choices, rates of obesity and diabetes are rising due to poor diets, and there are increasing concerns over the safety and nutrition of imported foods.

A recent survey found children able to identify 10 out of 10 corporate logos, but only 1 out of 10 vegetables. We need to educate youth about the food they eat and urban agriculture provides an opportunity to do this.

The opportunity to sell locally grown food on site reduces the environmental

footprint both in transportation cost and in preservation and storage costs, as well as increasing the nutrient value of the produce.

Complicating the issue is the Aboriginal land claim by the Musqueam. Resolving First Nations land claims is long overdue and the Musqueam deserve a fair and equitable settlement. We believe that opportunities exist to resolve this matter without diminishing what remains of our urban farmland.

We have resisted calls to reduce the agricultural plan to a portion of the property. Unless the Agricultural Land Commission rules otherwise, the land must be used for agricultural purposes and our governments cannot consider non-agriculture uses. An intact site bordered by major roads provides the best opportunity for maintaining the site and providing security to the producers.

We have presented our vision to our political representatives at all levels and to the public and we are gratified by the support we have received. It is our hope that the public support for our vision will influence our political leaders to revise their current plans. There is increasing world-wide recognition that there is an urgent need for communities to consider innovative ways to increase their ability to feed their people. Providing food security is a need for our entire community and urban agriculture is a natural for Richmond, a community whose motto not many years ago was, "Garden City."

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