

# Richmond Food System Assessment

Environmental Scan & Action  
Plan

Executive Summary



Surya Govender, Researcher  
Lucky Herath, Research Assistant  
Juan Solorzano, GIS Mapping  
Kathy Coyne, Principal

Coyne and Associates, Ltd.  
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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Known as The Garden City, Richmond is a growing urban centre with strong rural traditions. With plentiful opportunities for producing and distributing healthy food locally, Richmond has the potential to provide all its citizens with nutritious, affordable, culturally-appropriate food choices. Currently, however, there are gaps in Richmond's food system, particularly for vulnerable populations such as children, people with disabilities and those on low income. Access to food in Richmond is limited, not by the supply, but by a number of other significant factors, including the cost of groceries, limited public transportation to services, the stigma attached to traditional charity services, and a lack of information about alternative food production and access models.

The purpose of this report is to assess the current food system in Richmond, identify available resources, and highlight where services or systems are not working well for local residents, with a focus on vulnerable populations.

### Overview of Method

A number of methods were used to conduct an environmental scan and engage community participation and knowledge, as follow:

- Internet-based survey of local agencies and organizations;
- Community mapping sessions at a variety of locations;
- Review of existing literature including statistic and policy documents;
- GIS mapping of existing resources, services and food access points;
- Key stakeholder interviews; and
- Action Plan development workshop with Advisory Group, using the Splash and Ripple® Model.

A comprehensive list of indicators was developed by the consultant, drawing from those used in several existing food system assessments in Canada and the U.S. <sup>1</sup>

### Summary of Findings

This report is organized by key themes related to a healthy food system: *health and nutrition, production; access, distribution, emergency planning, and waste management*. Using identified indicators within each of these themes, the following summary provides highlights of Richmond's particular successes and challenges.

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<sup>1</sup> Including: Forum of Research Connections (FORC) (2005). *Vancouver Food System Assessment* (2005); Community Nutritionists Council of BC (2004, June). *Making the Connection – Food Security and Public Health*;

### **Health and Nutrition (p. 22-24)**

The health and nutrition indicators examined include:

- Rate of diet-related health problems, including obesity and diabetes;
- Existence of and support for public health and nutrition education efforts; and
- Availability and affordability of organic and non-GMO food.

Richmond residents have the lowest smoking and obesity rates in the country and live almost three years longer than the national average. Nutritional information is available to the public in a number of different ways, through existing community agencies and services. However, there is a lack of language-specific services and integration of nutritional education within the Richmond school system.

BC rates high for organic production nationally. The number of organic farmers in Richmond is not known. In national studies, costs for organic vs non-organic produce compared favourably. However, a comparison of organic prices in four major Canadian cities showed Vancouver-area rates as consistently higher (see Appendix A).

### **Local Food Production (p. 25-34)**

Indicators that local food is being produced include:

- Support for and preservation of local agricultural land;
- Extent to which available agricultural land is utilized for growing food;
- Viability of local and regional agricultural sector;
- Viability of local fishing industry;
- Extent to which food is processed locally; and
- Availability and accessibility of Community Gardens to all residents, particularly those on low income.

Approximately 4,900 ha of Richmond's land base are within the Agricultural Land Reserve, amounting to 34% of the City's lands. There continues to be a push for exemptions to develop ALR lands, and the municipality takes these requests into consideration. Agricultural land use in Richmond accounts for just over 3,000 ha while remaining ALR land in the municipality is either vacant or dedicated to non-farm uses (roads, institutions, golf courses)

The number of farms in Richmond is decreasing (from 247 in 1996 to 182 in 2001). However, some crops are particularly successful here. For example, in 2001, cranberry production in Richmond covered more than 1/4 of the land for cranberries in Canada and approximately 47%

of BC's cranberry acreage. Richmond has developed an Agricultural Viability Strategy. However, progress on the strategy is not readily apparent to the general community.

Fishing, including processing and distribution, is a significant industry. Local fish and seafood is also readily available to local residents. There are many local processors and distributors located in Richmond, especially for fish and seafood (See Appendix C). The majority of local cranberries, one of Richmond's largest crops, are processed in the United States.

Of the four public community garden sites in Richmond, only one is accessible by public transit. There is a need to provide more outreach to the low income community to encourage their access and participation. There is currently no formal process for identifying new community garden sites across Richmond. While there are a number of private rooftop gardens and green roofs in Richmond, none are known to be food producing.

#### **Access and Distribution (p. 35-49)**

The project also looked at whether food is accessed and distributed efficiently and effectively from local sources, through the charitable sector, and through schools and institutions. Indicators that food is being effectively accessed and distributed from local sources include:

- Availability and accessibility of healthy food choices ;
- Affordability of healthy food choices;
- Availability and accessibility of locally produced food; and
- Availability and accessibility of culturally-appropriate food.

For the most part, food stores in Richmond appear fairly well distributed and cover a wide range of consumer choices. One exception is East Richmond, where there are few choices for shops selling food and produce.

This study did not do a survey of food costs in Richmond. However, an annual study (using regionally-based data) on the cost of eating in British Columbia indicates that an average Canadian family can expect to spend approximately 15% of their income on food, while a family living on income assistance in BC can expect to spend 31-44% of their income on food.

Richmond is well known for its farm stands and u-picks, selling seasonal produce along main roads throughout the agricultural areas of the city. This research found no Richmond-based social enterprises or farmer's markets promoting local food consumption and no known restaurants or caterers focusing on local food.

For immigrant groups in Richmond, culturally-appropriate food sources are largely dependent on the size of the specific population. Smaller immigrant groups have trouble accessing culturally-appropriate food and food support.

Access and distribution indicators with respect to charitable sector (p. 37-40) include:

- Availability and accessibility of charitable food relief to those in need;
- Extent to which charitable food relief is provided for those with specific health needs;
- Extent to which charitable food relief is nutritionally adequate and culturally-appropriate; and
- Extent to which charitable food relief emphasizes capacity building and increased self-reliance.

The Richmond Food Bank has two locations that provide three weekly distribution sites for those in need. St. Albans Church, Nanak Sar Gursikh Temple and the Salvation Army offer free meals on a weekly basis. However, access to the food bank by public transportation is a notable concern.

The Richmond Food Bank provides extra resources for people with diabetes or HIV/AIDS. The overall perception is that these resources are becoming healthier and more varied. However, the Richmond Food Bank does not provide culturally-specific food and this may deter some potential clients from accessing support. In general, the charitable food sector does not provide capacity development opportunities for low-income “clients”.

The last measure of access and distribution is whether food is accessed and distributed through schools and institutions (p. 41-43). Indicators used in this category include:

- Extent to which nutrition education is part of standard curriculum;
- Extent to which school system promotes healthy eating;
- Existence of and support for food-related Social Enterprises; and
- Extent to which food transportation is managed for risk.

There is no standard curriculum for nutritional education in Richmond schools. A few schools access a greenhouse or garden for student instruction and two schools have elective teaching cafeterias. Cafeterias in Richmond schools are privately contracted and there is no district-wide policy regarding the nutritional value of the food provided. Policies on vending machines and food provision are currently under review.

There is no district-wide policy regarding food resources or nutritional support for students living in poverty or otherwise experiencing food insecurity. These needs are currently met on an ad hoc basis by school administrators and teachers.

There are no known food-related social enterprises based in Richmond. There is interest, in the community service sector, in the development of social enterprises for Richmond (i.e. good food boxes etc.)

### **Transportation (p. 50)**

A survey of food transportation systems for Richmond was beyond the scope of this project. However, the global trend is towards an increasing number of miles that food travels from the point of production to the plate. Given its geographical circumstances, the environmental impacts of food transportation, and the health consequences of food preservation, the current dependence on food imports presents a significant risk for food security in Richmond.

### **Emergency Planning and Risk Management (p. 51)**

This theme had only one indicator which was:

- Extent to which provision is made for supplying safe food and water in case of an emergency or natural disaster.

Policies for emergency planning exist at a federal, provincial and municipal level. A focus on consumption of local goods can significantly minimize the risk of food shortages in case of an emergency or natural disaster.

### **Waste Management (p. 52-53)**

Indicators considered with respect to this theme were:

- Extent to which excess food is shared with those in need;
- Extent to which food waste is composted;
- Extent to which food-related waste is recycled; and
- Existence of and support for innovative initiatives for managing waste.

Many community agencies and some local businesses donate excess food to the Richmond Food Bank.

The City runs a compost demonstration garden and offers composting workshops. However, there is no city-wide composting program in Richmond. The City of Richmond first began offering recycling services in 1990. In 2000, the total estimated residential waste was 54,532 tonnes with an estimated 49.8% being recycled.

The GVRD runs a number of innovative projects to manage and reduce waste for the region, including a Waste-to-Energy Facility and a bio-solids processing project.

## Issues and Gaps

The findings of this research suggest that overall, Richmond is producing food locally and residents generally have access to a wide variety of food choices, including charitable food relief. There are, however, some important issues and gaps that must be addressed if Richmond is to provide safe, affordable and appropriate food for all its residents, including those who face systemic or health barriers to access and participation. In summary, these gaps and issues are:

- A lack of information on organic farming and the use of genetically modified food products and ingredients. In addition, institutions that compile information on community and individual health do not regularly do so within a framework of food security.
- Agricultural Land Reserve and agricultural land in general is continually challenged by new development and the tension between rural and urban land use is a defining feature of Richmond's political, social and geographic landscape.
- A lack of cohesive effort on the part of stakeholders (City Council, developers, farmers) to address the viability of local food production. In particular, local farmers lack a unified voice.
- A lack of understanding and communication between farmers and Richmond's urban residents.
- The inability of existing community gardens to meet current demand and be accessible by public transit. Also, no known food-producing green roofs in Richmond.
- Lack of a formal process for establishing new garden sites or for the evaluation of how or by whom gardens are being used. Specifically, access by low-income families or other vulnerable communities is neither facilitated nor monitored.
- Although the trend may be shifting, East Richmond, an area where many new immigrants settle, has been chronically underserved by retail food outlets.
- Culturally-specific food resources are limited for Filipino, Somali, Afgan, Japanese and other minority immigrants,. For example, there are few sources for halal meat in Richmond and

many Richmond residents shop in Vancouver or Surrey for culturally-specific items.

- No known restaurants or caterers in Richmond that are exclusively or explicitly serving locally-grown food.
- No known food-related social enterprises (ie. farmer's markets, good food boxes, buying clubs or community shared agriculture (CSA) agreements) or community economic developments initiatives currently located in Richmond.
- Approximately half of people living with disabilities in Richmond are estimated by service providers to experience food insecurity.
- Larger influxes of refugees arriving in Richmond with high needs and few resources. Newcomers often have financial restrictions and with the high cost of housing, other aspects of settlement, especially food provisions, are suffering.
- Needs of Richmond's Aboriginal population not being served comprehensively and difficulty in assessing their relative food security in the municipality.
- Locations of the Food Bank distribution sites are not readily accessible by public transportation and are not providing explicitly culturally-specific food on a regular basis.
- Many Richmond churches and temples occupy ALR land but few are using that land to grow food for community access or to develop community self-sufficiency.
- While Richmond schools may be meeting the needs of their students on an ad hoc basis, there is no formal district-wide policy to address the nutritional needs of at-risk students.
- No current district-wide regulation or guideline regarding the nutritional content of food services within the school setting.
- While the scope of this study did not allow for an assessment of the food transportation system, global trends indicate an increasing reliance on imported food and food products.
- Richmond's transportation infrastructure is vulnerable to natural disaster, putting food exports and economic relationships at risk.
- While recycling is happening with more regularity, there continue to be barriers to both composting and recycling, specifically: a lack of information and understanding about waste reduction and a lack of resources available to increase services.

## **Key Recommendations**

As part of the work of this report, an action plan was developed by the Food Security Task Force with the long term goal that:

*In Richmond, people are making healthy choices supported by a sustainable, affordable and equitable food system that maximizes community self-reliance and cultural inclusion.*

The action plan is detailed in an outcome measurement framework (OMF) provided on Page 61. The plan includes the follow actions:

### **Consultation and Mobilization**

Develop plan summary and consult with residents, businesses, churches, schools, government agencies, service agencies and clubs and other community organizations on the draft action plan and mobilize community support for the action plan through festivals and events.

### **Collaboration and Partnership Building**

Expand food security committee and build committed partnerships to implement the action plan.

### **Fundraising**

Seek funding and in-kind contributions to implement the action plan.

### **Multigenerational Food Security Projects**

Identify best practices and promote multigenerational food security projects across programs.

### **Food Programs with a Focus on Vulnerable Populations**

Design, implement and promote food related social enterprise initiatives and develop public education workshops (speaker series, community inventory etc.) with a particular focus on low-income people and people with disabilities and chronic health issues.

### **Information on Food and Food Resources**

Develop a guide to food and list of food security materials in Richmond building on environmental scan and distribute it through Tourism Richmond, Chamber of Commerce, the Library and other partners.

### **Mentoring**

Recruit and support low income participants to be involved in leadership roles.

### **Monitoring and Sustainability Plan**

Develop monitoring tools and develop a plan to sustain food security in Richmond.