

HEALTHY EATING AND FOOD SECURITY

Promising Strategies for BC



A Discussion Paper

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this discussion paper is *to highlight key strategies and actions that will support more British Columbians to be food secure and to make healthy food choices*. The key audience is individuals, communities and organizations who are working or have an interest in the areas of healthy eating and food security. Others, including decision makers at all government levels, may find the information helpful. This paper is not meant to be directive to any level of government. The strategies and potential actions (Appendix 1) are drawn from recent reports and documents from BC, Canada and elsewhere. Initiatives in BC that illustrate some of the strategies and actions are highlighted.

The paper outlines best and promising practices that can inform community action in the areas of food security and healthy eating in BC. What is clear in the literature is that meaningful progress requires the engagement of stakeholders from different sectors, working together at many levels and employing a variety of strategies – advocacy, policy, legislation, communications, program development – to create environments to support more British Columbians to be food secure and to make healthy food choices.

Healthy eating and food security are dependent on the availability and access to healthy food, which in turn is dependent on a healthy food system. Increasingly, food is being seen as a vehicle to forward many objectives – to promote health, build strong and diverse communities, protect the environment and strengthen the economy (1).

“Food security is defined by a situation in which all community residents can obtain a safe, culturally acceptable, nutritionally adequate diet through a sustainable food system that maximizes self-reliance and social justice.” (2)

There has been significant activity in recent years to promote healthy eating and build food security. This includes government, community and private sector initiatives, often working in partnership. The desire amongst stakeholders to maintain the momentum and build on gains made is strong and provided the impetus to develop this paper. The content was guided by a working group over a short period of time with input from a number of individuals across the province engaged in healthy eating and food security work. It was also coordinated with the work of other relevant planning initiatives underway at the same time. Representatives from each of the initiatives met and agreed to ways to complement and further each others’ work. For more information see Appendix 2.

It is the hope that this document will continue to evolve to support and serve those engaged in healthy eating and food security work throughout the province.



GOAL

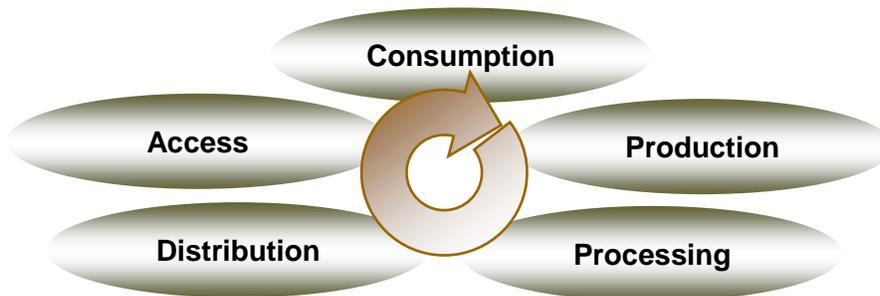
Everyone has access at all times to sufficient, safe, personally acceptable, nutritious foods produced in a manner that promotes health, protects the environment and adds economic and social value to communities.

(Adapted from World Health Organization and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation)

FRAMEWORK

A food systems framework¹ was chosen to organize the strategies and actions, primarily because it emphasizes the connectivity between food, health, the environment and community (1). Promising strategies to move food security and healthy eating forward are organized around the following sectors of the food system (3) and corresponding key directions:

- Food Production – Key Direction: Produce more local food
- Food Processing – Key Direction: Develop and promote healthier products
- Food Distribution – Key Direction: Improve availability of healthy foods for everyone
- Food Access – Key Direction: Improve access to healthy foods for everyone
- Food Consumption – Key Direction: Strengthen food-related knowledge, skills and behaviours



Adapted from American Dietetic Association Sustainable Food System Task Force (3)

¹ Absent in the framework is food system waste. Actions taken by communities would ideally consider the issue of waste, or more broadly how the actions enhance the health, environmental, social and economic value of communities.



KEY DIRECTIONS AND STRATEGIES

This section provides both an overview of why each key direction and strategy is important to healthy eating and food security and some illustrative examples. For a listing of potential actions see Appendix 1.

1. Food Production

Key Direction: Produce more local food

“All British Columbians should have access to safe, locally produced food.” (4)

Growing, producing and processing more local, healthy, safe food can contribute to a more food secure province by reducing BC’s dependence on imported food and improving access to healthy foods in those communities and neighbourhoods in which it may be limited. Producing more local foods can also reduce the “...environmental and carbon footprint, thereby promoting the economic viability of the BC agriculture and food sector.” (4)

The following six strategies are specific to promoting healthy eating and building food security. It must be noted however, that these are but a few of those required to support the thriving agriculture and food production sector necessary for producing more local food. *The British Columbia Agriculture Plan. Growing a Healthy Future for B.C. Families* outlines 23 strategies “...that create a roadmap to sustain and facilitate the growth and diversification of the industry while increasing public awareness, understanding and support for the people that produce our food.” (4)

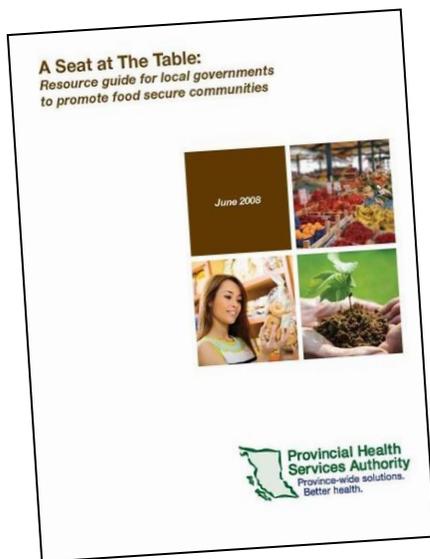
Strategy 1.1: Develop food policy

Creating food policy creates an opportunity to integrate all the key directions and strategies in this paper, as well as other issues relevant to the food system. It defines what is important and guides decisions about the many issues related to how food is produced, processed, distributed, purchased, protected or disposed (5).

Food policy at all levels of government – municipal, regional, provincial, First Nations and federal – plays a key role in improving food systems, building food security and promoting healthy eating. Policy development must include a wide range of stakeholders from many sectors and the process needs to be supported with resources and tools, for example, municipalities supporting food policy councils.

The Kamloops Food Policy Council (KFPC) thrives as a grass roots organization incorporated under the Society Act in June 1996. It is one of the longest standing food policy councils in Canada and a leader in local food security. In 2002, the City amended the Kamloops Social Plan to include food policy goals and objectives. In 2006, the Interior Health Authority, City of Kamloops and KFPC partnered to undertake a Community Food Action Initiative project to engage stakeholders in efforts to strengthen and support food planning, policy and practices. This resulted in the Kamloops Food Action Plan. In 2007, the KFPC completed a report on best practices in urban agriculture for the City of Kamloops. Recommendations from both reports are being implemented. Food security is embedded in the [Kamloops Social Plan \(2009\)](#) and this year the City is supporting the expansion of the community garden program with \$30,000 in funding.





Food security is one of 21 core public health programs in B.C. with a goal to increase food security for all British Columbians, in part by creating healthy food policy.

The Community Food Action Initiative (CFAI) is a health promotion initiative aimed at increasing food security particularly for those British Columbians living with limited incomes. CFAI is a collaborative effort of the Provincial Health Services Authority, five regional health authorities and the Ministry of Healthy Living and Sport. It was the first provincial initiative to recognize and financially support community-led solutions to increase food security. These include community gardens, farmers' markets, community planning, healthy food for public buildings, creating community capacity, community food assessments, and developing local food charters and policies. *A Seat at the Table: Resource Guide for local governments to promote food secure communities* is available at [PHABC - BC Food Security Gateway](#).

*Strategy 1.2: Ensure **land** is available and used for food production*

Local food production relies on land suitable for agriculture, which must be both available and be put into production. BC's Agricultural Land Reserve serves to protect agricultural land, however not all of it is in active production for a variety of reasons (6). Putting that land into production must be more attractive than allowing it to sit idle.

To become more self-reliant, more suitable land with access to irrigation will be required. According to *B.C.'s Food Self-Reliance: Can B.C.'s Farmers Feed Our Growing Population?* the amount of farmland with access to irrigation will need to increase by almost 50% over 2005 levels in order to produce a healthy diet for British Columbians in 2025 (7). Land that has access to irrigation is typically near urban centers; land which is subject to numerous pressures. The vast majority of land farmed or suitable for farming in BC is closest to the most densely populated and fastest growing regions of the province, i.e. the Lower Mainland, Okanagan and southern Vancouver Island. Raising awareness amongst British Columbians about the importance of local production to food security is critical to continuing to preserve and protect land suitable for agriculture. Bridging the urban/agriculture divide is a theme in the BC agriculture plan.



It has been an amazing journey to work together to form the Barrowtown Agriculture Development Society to support and develop new farmers and agriculture in Abbotsford. This began by connecting three farmers to one another and connecting them with land which we learned about through our connection with a city planner. Fourteen acres of unused agricultural land, owned by the City of Abbotsford, was available for an affordable lease and **Skeeter Farm** was born. It has gone on to become a tremendous advocate for small farms in Abbotsford, and has connected with hundreds of people through presentations, blogging and other social media. The farm has two main marketing channels – community supported agriculture in which participants receive a specified amount of product in exchange for buying a share, and a booth at the Abbotsford Farm and Country Market. Both methods directly link the producer and consumer and reduce “farm-to-fork” distance.

Through a database of new farmers and available farmland, several new farmers have been matched with land or other farmers. There will be a number of other new farms in Abbotsford beginning in the next season or two as a result.

*Kevin Koopmans, Abbotsford Food and Agriculture Connection Table (AFACT)
Community Futures South Fraser - www.southfraser.com*



Strategy 1.3: Increase *urban food production*

Urban food production can take many forms such as backyard, community, school, restaurant kitchen and rooftop gardens; the keeping of backyard chickens and bees; greenhouses; and city farms. These activities, many of which are dependent on supportive municipal policy, bring economic, environmental, health and social benefits to communities (8). They can serve to move healthy eating and food security forward in many ways, including:

- making healthy food more available and affordable in underserved communities and neighbourhoods
- providing opportunities to connect people, especially young people, with food and agriculture
- increasing a community's food self-reliance
- providing a source of healthy food in times of emergency or economic crisis.

Strategy 1.4: Build a *strong market for BC foods*

Producers need a market that pays them a fair price if they are going to continue to produce food and to encourage future generations to follow in their footsteps. Policy can encourage individuals, businesses and industry to favour local, regional and seasonal products. Incentives can assist retailers and restaurants to carry and use local products. Consumers can assist by requesting local products, shopping at retailers that carry local products, and choosing restaurants committed to local foods when eating away from home – essentially using their purchasing power to buy BC-produced foods whenever possible (6).



Metro Vancouver develops policies and initiatives to address region-wide agricultural issues. In 2008, the Metro Vancouver Sustainability Framework, approved by the Board, set a target to complete a **Regional Food System Strategy** in 2010. The strategy will be developed in collaboration with the food sectors, other government agencies, organizations and community groups. Several events have been held to seek input on priority strategies and actions that will help build a resilient and sustainable food system for this region.

www.metrovancouver.org/planning/development/agriculture/Pages/default.aspx

District Wide Farm to School Program Within Reach

Appreciation of the connections between farms, food, and health is deeply rooted in the people of the South Okanagan, where the Public Health Association of BC (PHABC) funded five schools to establish Farm to School programs. The food supplier for all the schools was a cooperative of 20 farms. In short order it became clear that what enthusiasts really wanted was a program in every school in the district. Teacher Marji Basso set forth to make that happen, first by organizing a group of stakeholders to attend PHABC's *Farm to School Growing the Next Generation Conference*. Inspired, the school board trustee, teachers, principal, community nutritionist, and farmer returned to Oliver and crafted a proposal to fund four additional programs. CFAI funds were secured from Interior Health for this purpose. Today those funds support the wages of a district Farm to School Consultant, the purchase of salad bar equipment, the establishment of targets for local food sources through closer collaboration with farmers and caterers, and the development of a school district food security policy, bringing the dream of a district wide Farm to School program within reach.

Farm to School Salad Bar initiative was established to improve the health of school children by increasing access to locally grown, nutritious, safe, and culturally appropriate foods in at least 12 schools within the northern and interior health regions. This initiative was based on a successful pilot program supported by Northern Health.



Strategy 1.5: Increase awareness and interest in food production

Building awareness, interest and understanding of food production is important to assist consumers in making choices that will strengthen the food system and assist in bridging the agriculture/urban divide. Initiatives that involve youth can increase interest in careers in food production, necessary for ensuring local production for future generations.



In 1999, a small group of Vancouver Island chefs, concerned about the future of independent farmers, came together to form the **Island Chefs' Collaborative (ICC)**. Their vision was a sustainable food and agricultural system and their mission was to support local farmers in achieving it. One of the ICC initiatives was the Bastion Square Farmers Market, located in Victoria. On property donated by the Maritime Museum and with a start-up grant from Farm Folk/City Folk the market was born. Instead of farmers leasing the space, the ICC buys the produce and staffs the market with chef volunteers. This gives farmers more time in the field, a guarantee they will sell everything harvested that morning, and another avenue to make their business viable. It gives chefs an opportunity to connect with consumers and educate the public about the benefits of buying local.

It gives consumers a downtown venue to purchase quality, healthy local produce. The ICC also raises money for its Farmers' Grant Program through an annual *Defending Our Backyard Local Food Festival and Fundraiser*. Each year, two farms are granted money to help develop and improve operations.

2. Food Processing

Key Direction: Develop and promote healthier products

Whole foods are generally healthier foods. The consumption of food harvested at peak ripeness and minimally processed at source or in community or regionally based processing facilities has health, economic, environmental and social benefits.

Strategy 2.1: Develop local food processing capacity

Food processing is anything that changes or adds to a product or service. It can range from sorting product to creating a value-added product, described as changes to a product or a practice that lead to a higher portion of the consumer's food dollar going to the producer (9). Activities that shorten the distance between the consumer and the producer, e.g. direct selling or on-site processing, are also cited as a means to add value to an operation (9).

Increasing producers' profits while at the same time appealing to consumers helps to build resiliency in the food system. Developing and supporting local food processing or value-adding activities will help make food producing a viable form of employment, create more jobs and strengthen the economy, which in turn help to build more food secure and healthier communities (6). It can also help ensure a safer food supply, as food can be traced back to source more easily.



*Strategy 2.2: Encourage and support the **development of healthier food products***

Promoting the consumption of well grown, in season and as local as possible food is primary to both food security and healthy eating. While consumers may choose to eat a variety of processed foods, improvements to these foods will make healthier choices easier for consumers, for example by regulating the sodium content of some foods. Policy can assist by setting nutrition standards or criteria that encourage producers to reformulate products, as seen with the *Guidelines for Food and Beverage Sales in BC Schools*.



I'm very impressed with the efforts industry is making to learn about the *Guidelines* and make healthier products that taste good and that students will eat. We're continually adding reformulated products to www.brandnamefoodlist.ca that previously could not be sold to students because they were too low in nutrients and too high in calories, fat, sugar and/or salt. The food industry is reducing the portion size of products, cutting back on salt, sugar and fat, switching to whole grains and adding fruit and vegetables to make products healthier.

Karen Birkenhead, Food Guidelines Dietitian, HealthLinkBC

*Strategy 2.3: Improve **identification** of healthy foods*

Healthy foods are whole or minimally processed and it is these foods that should be strongly promoted. Accurate, standardized and understandable nutrition information on packaged foods, such as national standardized front of package labelling and menu item labelling would assist consumers in making healthier choices.

*Strategy 2.4: Limit **advertising** of unhealthy foods and beverages to children*

A recently released Dietitians of Canada discussion paper provides a thorough review of the issue of advertising (all promotional marketing) of foods and beverages to children. It notes "...current advertising practices play an important role in shaping children's food and beverage choices, preferences, dietary patterns, food-related attitudes, beliefs, values, behaviours and health. There is sufficient evidence to support the need for an integrated, multi-sectoral approach to reduce the negative impact of food and beverage advertising on children as one factor influencing the healthy growth and development of our children and as a component of children's rights to adequate, safe and nutritious foods." (10)

Regulations to limit the advertising of unhealthy foods and beverages to children in a variety of media should be developed, while at the same time promoting healthy foods and beverages. Other measures to limit the promotion of unhealthy foods such as refusing offers from food and beverage companies to sponsor equipment and programs in schools are also important.





3. Food Distribution

Key Direction: Improve availability of healthy foods for everyone

Food distribution is about moving food from the producer – the farmer, fisher, processor – to the consumer. According to the Directory of British Columbia Food Service Distributors, there are three distinct sectors within the BC food distribution industry, specifically distribution between producers and 1) the retail sector, 2) the restaurant/hotel sector, and 3) the institutional sector (hospitals, schools, prisons, rehabilitation centres) (11). Enhancing the ability to connect local producers, especially the small producer, with each of those three sectors and with the consumer directly builds food security. It will help producers get their product to market, which in turn helps build demand, and supports consumers by making product more available. This is especially important for consumers living in places where the supply of healthy food is limited, and in communities with populations at greatest risk for food insecurity and poor health.

Pilot project Take a Bite of BC is an example of getting local food to market, in this case schools. BC Agriculture in the Classroom Foundation worked with 14 secondary schools in the Lower Mainland to bring fresh BC products to their teaching kitchens from September to December 2009.

Take a Bite of BC!
Choose Close to Home and Make a Difference

BC PRODUCTS FEATURED - FALL 2009				
September	Blueberries	Rutabaga, Turnip Mix	Turkey	Greenhouse Vegetable Mix
October	Chicken	Cranberries	Carrots	Cole Crops
November	Pork	Milk & Cheese	Eggs	Potato Mix
December	Cabbage Mix	Frozen Vegetable Mix	Beef	Mushrooms

Strategy 3.1: Ensure **healthy food is available** in every community and neighbourhood

In geographically isolated communities, many of which are First Nations, a limited supply of healthy foods is a significant barrier to food security and healthy eating. What is available is often more expensive and of poor quality, in part due to the high cost of distribution and length of time to deliver to remote areas. In other areas, some low-income neighbourhoods experience a shortage of grocery stores which makes access to healthy food more difficult (12).

Supporting those communities and neighbourhoods to become more food secure can include strengthening local food production in addition to linking producers with consumers through a variety of venues such as farmers’ markets, community gardens, food cooperatives, and community supported agriculture. Strengthening local and regional distribution systems as well as incentives to transport healthy foods to remote communities are further forms of support. The ability of communities, especially remote communities, to safely store adequate quantities of food for emergencies is also critical to food security.

Produce Availability in Remote Communities Initiative is a one-year initiative aimed at improving the year round availability of produce for British Columbians in remote communities. The goal is to improve health, quality of life and community resilience through grants for community gardens in remote First Nations communities and by making the purchasing and transporting of produce more efficient. The initiative will bring people together to come up with and try new ideas to improve the availability of produce in their own communities.



4. Food Access

Key Direction: Improve access to healthy foods for everyone

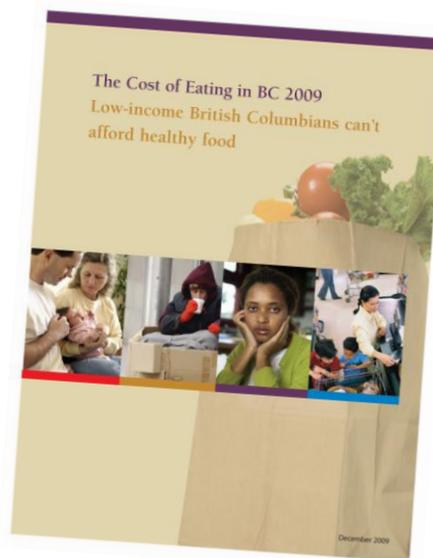
“Improving food access for everyone demands multiple approaches to meet the different needs of diverse communities.” (13)

People who have easy access to healthy foods are more likely to eat well. Barriers to food security and healthy eating include limited access to healthy foods because of inadequate income or limited availability. First Nations communities may face barriers to accessing the variety and quantity of traditional foods desired. The places people frequent such as school and work may not offer healthy foods.

Strategy 4.1: Ensure individuals and families can afford to buy enough healthy food

The most significant barrier to healthy eating is inadequate income (14). Government and community food initiatives and programs can assist in making healthy foods more accessible to low-income populations, but in order to truly improve the situation the underlying cause of household food insecurity – poverty – must be addressed (6).

Monitoring the cost of healthy eating relative to median income is an important indicator of food security. Providing vulnerable populations with financial assistance and supporting food action initiatives that improve access to healthy foods for those populations will reduce food insecurity.



Each spring dietitians working throughout BC collect prices for a standard basket of food called the *National Nutritious Food Basket*. The prices are pooled to obtain an average cost for the basket and can be used to monitor changes in the cost of a healthy diet.

Since 2000, Dietitians of Canada, BC Region and the Community Nutritionists Council of BC have jointly published a report called **The Cost of Eating in BC**, in which the cost of the food basket is compared to various income levels. It demonstrates that low-income individuals and families do not have enough money to purchase healthy food and is used as tool to advocate for actions to reduce poverty.

The Farmers' Market Nutrition and Coupon Project was a provincial food security initiative of the BC Association of Farmers' Markets (BCAFM) that linked local farmers and low-income families. The project – the first of its kind in Canada – provided \$15 per week in coupons to low-income families that could be used to purchase fresh fruit, vegetables, meats, eggs, dairy or fresh cut herbs at participating farmers' markets. Families also participated in a cooking and skill building program to gain knowledge and skills in the preparation of healthy, nutritious meals. The coupons allowed them to put into action what they were learning. It brought dollars to farmers and markets and supported close to 3000 low-income families in accessing local, healthy food since its inception in 2007. This successful project was cancelled for 2010 due to lack of funding.



Strategy 4.2: Increase **healthy foods in places** people live, work, learn and play

Information and education are not enough to change eating behaviours. Making healthy food more available in the settings people frequent – home, work, school, community – is necessary. Healthy choices cannot be made if healthy choices are not available, and healthy choices are less likely to be made if they appear to be less attractive, for example by costing more money.



Kuper Island: Planting Food for Lives

This community is developing food action plans based around community gardening and expanding healthy eating and active living programs offered through the health centre and the school. The garden can help save the expense of travelling by ferry to the nearest grocery store, revitalize traditional knowledge about foods and plants, and bring the community together.

The garden has been used to support a number of programs and has provided many opportunities for people to demonstrate their understanding of the principle of *uq'wital*, a word that means H'ulqu'minum Mustimuxh people connected by love and care.

When it started, few members of the community had gardening skills. Community members have felt valued and supported by the efforts people have made to share their knowledge and passion.

In a joint plan between the Kamloops Food Bank (KFB), Salvation Army, Men's New Life Mission, Interior Health and City of Kamloops, "**Food Share**" was created to recover food from Overwaitea Food Group. KFB has integrated the collection and distribution system of thousands of pounds of perishable and non-perishable food to over 30 community organizations, in the process diverting food from the landfill and reducing its contribution to greenhouse gas emissions. For one recipient organization, PIT (People in Transition) Stop, it has complemented the food available to the 100-140 clients that attend the once a week community meal.



Before Food Share, the \$1 per person available to provide a meal made it challenging to make it healthy. Now, the additional fruit, vegetables and breads allow us to prepare a meal that is attractive, nourishing and healthy.

Rose Soneff, PIT Stop Leader



Establishing and implementing policy assists in creating healthier environments so people have better access to healthy food. The provincial government's *Guidelines for Food and Beverage Sales in BC Schools* and *Healthier Choices for Vending Machines in BC Public Buildings* are good examples of supportive food policy. These policies serve to restrict the sale of unhealthy foods and beverages and promote the sale of healthy foods and beverages. They have also influenced vendors to reformulate products to meet the guidelines.



Resources and tools assist with policy implementation. The *Brand Name Food List* online tool supports schools, recreation facilities, and government buildings to find foods and beverages that meet the provincial government guidelines.

Prices influence consumption (15). Fiscal policies such as pricing strategies that decrease the price of healthy foods and increase the price of unhealthy foods can make the healthier choice more attractive.

Municipal and regional governments play an important role in determining what foods will be available in neighbourhoods and communities (5). Planning, regulations and bylaws can all support or limit access to healthy foods. Venues that link producers with consumers such as community and school gardens, farmers' markets, food cooperatives and direct farm sales are all dependent to a degree on supportive policy and in some cases incentives, for example encouraging grocery stores to locate in low-income neighbourhoods. Bylaws can also serve to limit or prohibit fast food restaurants near schools and youth facilities.



5. Food Consumption

Key Direction: Strengthen food-related knowledge, skills and behaviours

“Food security [includes] people [knowing] how to make healthy choices and nutritious meals for their families and themselves... They may also grow their own fruits and vegetables in home or community gardens.” (16)

Activities that involve food preparation and eating together can contribute to healthy eating and food security by introducing people to new foods, building skills for choosing and preparing healthy foods, influencing eating behaviour and enhancing social connections.



BetterTogether

Better Together

The impact of more families eating more meals together is fundamental to creating changes in societal behaviours – from eating more healthfully, to better academic performance, to reduced substance abuse and improved social adjustment. Eating together more often may even play a role in reducing obesity. The [Better Together](#) website houses tools for children, families, educators and health professionals to help families take the first step towards eating together more often.

Strategy 5.1: Support the development of **healthy eating practices** over the lifespan

Good nutrition plays a key role in the optimal growth, development, health and well-being of individuals in all stages of life. Healthy eating can also reduce the risk of some chronic diseases, such as heart disease, stroke, diabetes and some types of cancer.

Especially during pregnancy, lactation, infancy and in the senior years, individuals need specific nutritional advice (6). Healthy eating for mothers during pregnancy and lactation is important for the optimal growth and development of infants. There is much evidence to support exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of age, and breastfeeding up to two years and beyond, for health benefits to both infant and mother. For young children, eating habits developed early in life may be maintained throughout adulthood (17). Seniors have increased nutrient needs in the face of many potential barriers to healthy eating:- a decline in income, appetite, interest, and/or ability to grocery shop and prepare food can all negatively influence eating behaviours (6).

Initiatives that support people, especially at-risk or vulnerable populations, to meet their nutritional needs at these stages of life can improve healthy eating, food security and reduce health inequities.



Strategy 5.2: Develop **comprehensive initiatives that are multi-component** and supportive of knowledge and skill development

Initiatives that support similar goals, use consistent messaging and reach people in the settings they frequent are more likely to be successful.



Action Schools! BC is a best practices model designed to assist schools in creating individualized action plans to promote healthy living. The initiative's framework for action, support materials, teaching resources, and workshop models have been developed to invest in teachers while building new and enhancing existing capacity throughout the school community. The Action Schools! BC – Healthy Eating component was developed to increase awareness and consumption of vegetables and fruit through Tracking, Tasting, Snacking and Learning Activities.

Schools exert tremendous influence over children's eating habits and have been described as "...the ideal settings to establish and promote healthy eating practices in children and adolescents." (18) The curriculum is important to give students the knowledge and skills they need to make healthy choices. The school food environment – the kinds of foods served, how food is used, role modeling – supports classroom learning by providing opportunities to practice healthy eating and promote the consumption of healthy food. Effective school based interventions are comprehensive, high intensity and multi-component, including for example curriculum, policy, role modeling and parental/family involvement (19).



Children, parents and teachers are becoming more aware of the sugar content of their drinks with **Sip Smart! BC**.

Teachers are reporting: "Children are comparing drinks in their lunches...especially trying to figure out if their juice box is real juice or blends."

Parents are reporting: "I learned about sugar in drinks."

Students are reporting: "I watched my dad drink a bottle of pop and then told him that there were 17 sugar cubes in it. He stopped drinking it."





Similar to schools, workplace programs that are multi-component and involve workers in planning and implementation, provide healthy foods and beverages in workplace facilities, involve a family component and individual behaviour change strategies are more effective (19).

Food brings people together. Community activities and initiatives centred around food – food celebrations, community kitchens, community gardens – are an opportunity to develop food related skills and knowledge, increase access to healthy foods, build social connections and address community issues.

The *Neighbourhood Learning Centres* concept is one mechanism to assist schools and community organizations to come together to support both school and community services, which could include nutrition education and skill building initiatives.



Feasting for Change is a project inspired by the traditional food practices of First Nations. Its aim is to enhance food sovereignty amongst Aboriginal communities on South Vancouver Island.

“Feasting” serves as a platform for discussion of community issues and the sharing of knowledge between Elders and youth. It offers rural and urban communities the chance to experience a meal created in a time-honoured fashion, and assists in bringing communities “back to basics.” In other words, the Feasts are a way for community members to share traditional food and knowledge, while exploring ideas about the community and health.

Food Skills for Families (FSFF) is a food skills program geared to Aboriginal, South Asian, new immigrant and low-income families to build skills necessary for choosing and preparing healthy foods.

Community members in a rural and remote community initially dismissed the idea of the FSFF program because they felt that the food for the recipes was not available or affordable.

- Elders became involved and translated aspects of the program to make them more relevant to the traditional ways of the community.
- FSFF became a catalyst to look at the bigger picture of food security and the act of cooking together strengthened community capacity.
- The five alumni who completed the course helped to establish a large community garden with amazing tomatoes and another garden is being planned at the school.
- Nutritional information was woven into other health programs, e.g. youth took the Sip Smart! BC poster used in FSFF to all the classes in their school to discuss sugar sweetened beverages.



CALL TO ACTION

British Columbia is home to many innovative initiatives aimed at building food security and promoting healthy eating. A collaborative and integrated approach engaging stakeholders across many sectors using a variety of strategies is critical to continuing to move forward and create environments supportive of healthy eating and food security.

Some suggestions for next steps include:

- **Bring together interested partners to review the strategies in this paper and identify actions that can be worked on together**
- **Participate in healthy eating and food security initiatives**
- **Start an online networking approach to keep the healthy eating and food security community linked in local areas**
- **Determine how best to frame strategies to capture the attention of stakeholders, especially decision makers**
- **Meet with decision makers to showcase food policy and program initiatives that are making a difference**
- **Advocate for resources from multiple sources to implement and sustain initiatives and programs based on best practices**
- **Develop policy and program initiatives with criteria to promote strategies that strengthen environmental, economic, health and social value in communities**
- **Build evidence of success for policy and program initiatives through surveillance, monitoring and evaluation.**



The Power of Networks

Long Term Inmates Now in the Community's (L.I.N.C.) participation with Mission Food Access Network (MFAN) has enabled us to develop a wider network and we have learnt just how powerful networking can be. Other MFAN participants have been a source of advice, helped us secure community support, introduced us to groups to collaborate with, raised community awareness of L.I.N.C. and helped change community attitudes towards former inmates. I have learnt a lot about food security and have deeply appreciated the depth of knowledge and commitment to food security issues shown by fellow members.

Being a part of MFAN has affirmed that what we are doing is useful and appreciated. I find that very motivating and it really helps me keep our projects moving and connected to others. Our participation has helped us develop our plan for a food exchange store through the new contacts we have made, who have helped us find financial and in-kind resources in the community and gather letters of support for the idea. MFAN also served as a lever for our successful proposal to operate an organic community garden in Mission.

The benefits we get from our association with MFAN are so great that we have decided to include a line item in all budget proposals that commits funds to MFAN so that we can contribute to keeping the network active.

Sherry Edmunds-Flett, Executive Director of L.I.N.C.



APPENDICES



APPENDIX 1: GUIDING PRINCIPLES, KEY DIRECTIONS, STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS

Guiding Principles for the Inclusion of Actions

- Promote best and promising practices – there is evidence in the literature or strong experiential knowledge to support them.
- Use partnerships and collaborative approaches – moving healthy eating and food security forward involves stakeholders from many sectors working together on many fronts utilizing multiple, interrelated strategies.
- Take a systems approach – recognize the many determinants of healthy eating and food security, consider the whole context and try to understand the connections between the parts (20).
- Focus on strengthening community capacity – communities are able to identify and prioritize their own issues and can work toward developing the solutions that work for them.
- Reduce inequities – people from more advantaged socioeconomic groups generally have a longer life expectancy and enjoy better health than those from less advantaged groups (21). Narrowing the equity gap should be a priority.

Key Directions, Strategies and Actions

Food Production	
Key Direction 1: Produce more local food	
Strategy 1.1: Develop food policy	<p>Potential Actions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raise awareness about the role of food policy (5,6,16,23,40) • Develop strong partnerships that include a wide range of stakeholders to develop food policy at all levels of government (5,6,15,22,39,40,42) • Support food policy development with tools and resources, e.g. municipalities supporting community food policy councils with meeting space, staff support at meetings and for council initiatives (5,6,23,39) <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Continued...</i></p>



Food Production

Key Direction 1: Produce more local food

<p>Strategy 1.2: Ensure land is available and used for food production</p>	<p>Potential Actions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raise awareness of the benefits of preserving resources for food production (6,7) • Encourage municipal, regional, First Nations and provincial governments to preserve BC's agricultural land base and develop incentives to farm idle land/disincentives to leave agricultural land out of production (4,5,6,24,36,37) • Develop partnerships to access unused agricultural land for food growing, e.g. leasing, land sharing (6,23) • Recognize First Nations interests with respect to stewardship and access to lands and waters from which traditional diets are sustained; increase access to land for the purpose of agriculture and traditional food harvesting (4,24,32) • Develop initiatives to attract and assist new farmers (1,4,6)
<p>Strategy 1.3: Increase urban food production</p>	<p>Potential Actions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support community, school, backyard and rooftop gardening, especially for vulnerable populations (4,5,6,8,13,17,24,28,34,37,39,40,42) • Support paid coordinator positions for community and school gardens (36) • Develop partnerships to access unused land for food growing (5,6,8,36) • Develop and support municipal and regional policies/bylaws that allow for urban food production (5,8,17,23) • Link urban agriculture activities to health, economic, social and environmental strategies, e.g. in municipal planning (1,5,8,37,38)
<p>Strategy 1.4 : Build a strong market for B.C foods</p>	<p>Potential Actions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop policy to encourage businesses and organizations to buy local, regional and seasonally produced foods, e.g. <u>School Fruit and Vegetable Snack program</u>, farm-to-hospital, <u>Farm to School</u> (1,5,15,17,36,42) • Offer incentives to retailers to carry locally produced foods (6) • Promote local products through branding programs, agritourism initiatives, food festivals and celebrations (4,6,8,17,36,40) • Support retailers and restaurants committed to local foods by promoting them and encouraging consumers to purchase from them (4,6,8)
<p>Strategy 1.5: Increase awareness and interest in food production</p>	<p>Potential Actions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raise awareness about the importance of local food production to food security, e.g. through food forums (16,17,21,40) • Support initiatives that involve youth in the classroom, e.g. <u>Agriculture in the Classroom Foundation</u> school gardens, tasting programs, and in the community, e.g. 4-H (4,35) • Support strategies to minimize conflict between urban interests and development and agricultural activities (4,6,7,8) • Increase the capacity of First Nations people to participate in food production (4,24)



Food Processing

Key Direction 2: Develop and promote healthier food products

<p>Strategy 2.1: Develop local food processing capacity</p>	<p>Potential Actions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide resources and support (e.g. financial, education, training) for the processing and distribution of local and regionally produced foods, e.g. <u>Investment Agriculture Foundation of B.C.</u>; <u>Industry Development Trust Funds</u>; <u>Island Chefs' Collaborative farm grant program</u> (6,8,24,36,37) • Link producers to existing food processing facilities (6,36) • Provide education and support to food processors to develop food safety plans, e.g. <u>Small Scale Food Processors Association</u> (6)
<p>Strategy 2.2: Encourage and support the development of healthier food products</p>	<p>Potential Actions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop measures to support healthier foods, e.g. regulate sodium, trans fat, saturated fat, and sugar content of selected foods (6,15,19,26,33) • Partner with food producers and industry to create healthier products (15,33) • Investigate the use of disincentives/incentives (e.g. tax on unhealthy foods) to encourage industry to produce healthier foods (15,17,26,27, 28,33,41)
<p>Strategy 2.3: Improve identification of healthy foods</p>	<p>Potential Actions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investigate guidelines to define the terms “healthy” and “unhealthy” to support food policy, food labelling and point of purchase prompts to support consumers, e.g. a national brand or logo (19,43) • Introduce national standardized front-of-pack nutrition labelling (17,26,27,33,35) • Institute nutrition labelling of foods sold in restaurants (17,26,27,28,33,34) • Use pricing strategies and point-of-purchase prompts in retail outlets, restaurants and vending machines to promote healthier choices (15,19,27,41)
<p>Strategy 2.4: Limit advertising of unhealthy foods and beverages to children</p>	<p>Potential Actions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ban television advertising of unhealthy foods and beverages during programming viewed by children (6,10,15,17,26,27,29,33) • Reduce or remove advertising and other “under the radar” techniques such as advergames, product placement, celebrity endorsements, etc in other media such as print, internet, radio, in-store and via mobile phone (6,10,15,26,29) • Apply advertising restrictions to all settings in which children gather (10) • Encourage promotion of healthy foods and beverages (6,10,15, 29,31)



Food Distribution

Key Direction 3: Improve availability of healthy foods for everyone

Strategy 3.1:
Ensure healthy food is available in every community and neighbourhood

Potential Actions

- Strengthen local and regional distribution systems and develop ways to connect small and medium producers to distributors and consumers, e.g. 2005 Directory of British Columbia Food Service Distributors (1,5,23,32,40)
- Provide outreach services to people with limited access, e.g. delivery services, satellite depots (23)
- Provide incentives for transport of healthy foods to rural and remote communities (24,26,32)
- Develop partnerships to link producers with consumers (24)
- Embed food system thinking in municipal and regional planning (1)

Food Access

Key Direction 4: Improve access to healthy foods for everyone

Strategy 4.1:
Ensure individuals and families can afford to buy enough healthy food

Potential Actions

- Develop policies that address poverty by increasing the proportion of people with adequate income and making improvements to the social safety net, e.g. living wages, affordable child care and housing, favourable taxation for low-income individuals and families, adequate income assistance (1, 6,14,17,24,30,32,36,42)
- Monitor the cost of healthy eating as a proportion of median income as an indicator of food security; also monitor income supports and advocate for adequate income to purchase healthy food (6,17,30,43)
- Support food action initiatives that improve access to healthy foods for low-income populations e.g., the Farmers' Market Nutrition Coupon pilot program (4,6,13,24,26,28,33)

Continued...



Food Access

Key Direction 4: Improve access to healthy foods for everyone

Strategy 4.2: Increase healthy foods in places people live, work, learn and play

Potential Actions

- Encourage organizations and businesses to adopt healthy eating policies, including promoting local foods (1,23,40)
- Promote the availability of healthy foods and restrict the availability of unhealthy foods through guidelines and policies in public institutions, especially schools and other child and youth facilities e.g., *Guidelines for Food and Beverage Sales in BC Schools* and provide support to implement www.healthyeatingatschool.ca (15,17, 26,27,28,33,34,35,39,40,42,43)
- Implement strong nutrition standards for school meal programs, child care settings, residential facilities (28,33,34,35)
- Develop fiscal policies (e.g. pricing strategies, taxation) and partnerships to support schools to provide healthy foods (17,33)
- Enhance school meal program funding, fund healthy food and snack programs in early childhood and after school programs e.g. *CommunityLINK* (Learning Includes Nutrition and Knowledge) (1,26,28,31,43)
- Develop fiscal policies to encourage the purchase of healthy foods and discourage the purchase of unhealthy foods in public institutions (15,33)
- Develop policies that support food access (e.g. community gardens, farmers' markets, bake ovens) on public lands (1,4,5,8,26)
- Investigate the use of municipal bylaws that prohibit the establishment of fast food restaurants near schools and youth facilities (33,36)
- Support and promote efforts (e.g., grants, incentives) to provide access to healthy foods in a variety of settings, neighbourhoods and communities by linking producers to consumers, e.g. through direct sales at farm gate, fish docks, farmers' markets, farm trucks, Community Supported Agriculture, community gardens; food cooperatives; good food boxes (1,13,17,25,28,32,33,34,36,37,39)
- Create food directories for consumers to access local foods (5)
- Improve existing community/neighbourhood food stores, build partnerships with small retailers, offer incentives/training to stock healthier foods, increase customer spending power e.g., through coupon programs (13,28,33,34)
- Consider incentives to attract grocery stores, supermarkets, food cooperatives and farmers markets that sell healthy foods to underserved communities/neighbourhoods (8,13,28,33,34,41)
- Reduce barriers that limit First Nations access to indigenous foods (24,32,41)
- Ensure access to quality drinking water for communities throughout the province (6,24,28,32, 33)
- Adopt building codes to require access to and maintenance of fresh drinking water fountains (28,33)
- Use community mapping to identify priority neighbourhoods and communities in which to improve food availability and access; conduct an inventory of food-related assets and infrastructure (stores, buildings, land, kitchens) to maximize the use of existing facilities (1,5,36,43)
- Support emergency food programs/food banks to provide healthy foods, e.g. through gleaning of farms, food share, food recovery (1,39,42)
- Develop community emergency food plans (6)



Food Consumption

Key Direction 5: Strengthen food-related knowledge, skills and behaviours

Strategy 5.1: Support the development of healthy eating practices over the lifespan

Potential Actions

- Develop culturally appropriate healthy eating programs to support at-risk pregnant women (6,15,19,26,27,32,35,40,42,43)
- Adopt Baby-friendly Initiative in health care settings (6,17,28,43)
- Strengthen breastfeeding education, promotion and support (6,12,15,17,26,27,28,32,35,41,43)
- Encourage Baby-friendly policy development in communities (6,17,28,43)
- Support early learning practitioners with resources and tools to provide healthy foods and create environments for children that support healthy eating and healthy relationships with food, e.g. resources to support cooking meals on site, Food Flair Early Learning Practitioners Resource (17,31,41,43)
- Promote resources that support young families to practice healthy eating, e.g. LEAP BC family resources, Better Together (17,41)
- Develop media campaigns, utilizing multiple channels (print, radio, internet, television, social networking and other promotional materials) to promote healthy eating practices using consistent, clear and simple messages (15,17,19,26,35,40,43)
- Provide reliable, accessible information about food, food system, nutrition and health e.g., supermarket tours, on-site educational programs to support the purchase of healthier foods, agritourism, food forums, Dietitian Services at HealthLinkBC (19,35,42)
- Develop initiatives and promote resources to support older adults to practice healthy eating e.g., opportunities to eat together frequently, interventions addressing the needs of home bound seniors (6,15,19,41)

Continued...



Food Consumption

Key Direction 5: Strengthen food-related knowledge, skills and behaviours

**Strategy 5.2:
Develop
comprehensive
initiatives that are
multi-component and
supportive of
knowledge and skill
development**

Potential Actions

School

- Develop school curricula for all ages that includes nutrition education, food literacy, food skills and food security and expand food oriented opportunities in non-classroom learning environments, e.g. farm visits (1,17,19,31,36,37,40,41,43)
- Develop policy to create school environments that support healthy eating and food security (6,19,31,39,41,43)
- Develop parental/family component to encourage healthy role modeling, e.g., Food Skills for Families ,newsletters, food forums (17,19,31,39,40,41)
- Expand the School Fruit and Vegetable Snack program (4,6,17,31)
- Expand food festivals and celebrations with healthy foods and beverages (1,42)
- Support school staff wellness and training to encourage healthy role modeling (31)

Work

- Develop multi-component programs promoting healthy eating that include healthy foods and beverages in facilities, involve workers in planning and implementation, include a family component and individual behaviour change strategies (15,19,26,27,40)
- Develop policies supportive of breastfeeding mothers (6,17,28)

Community

- Include healthy eating and food security messaging in community development campaigns or social marketing campaigns (15,19,28,40)
- Develop partnerships with municipal leaders, community champions and businesses to initiate and sustain community-wide strategies that focus on food
- Sponsor community events that celebrate food e.g., Apple Festival (1)
- Promote urban agriculture activities as centres of learning (37)
- Promote food skills in a wide range of community contexts such as family, seniors, newcomer settlement and homeless services (1,16,17,19,32,35,36,39)
- Provide nutrition education programs that target high risk groups (19,26)
- Expand the supply and support training of relevant health workers to support population and community based initiatives (26)



APPENDIX 2: COMMUNIQUE FOR PROVINCIAL HEALTHY EATING AND FOOD SECURITY STAKEHOLDERS



Moving Healthy Eating and Food Security in BC Forward

Have you heard about a process that is underway to help move healthy eating and food security in BC forward? If you are not sure who is involved, how it is linked to other provincial processes or what it is all about, the following overview should help. Note this is an evolutionary process and all input is welcome.

Background - There has been a growing flurry of healthy eating and food security activity over the past few years and especially in preparation for the 2010 Olympics (e.g. BC Healthy Living Alliance (BCHLA) Healthy Eating Strategy and its five initiatives, other ActNow BC strategies, the Community Food Action Initiative, etc.). These have played a significant part in bringing greater attention to the role of healthy eating in chronic disease prevention. In addition, those working to support healthy eating and food security in their communities were collaborating more and seeing the positive effects of their labour.

Given that the future of healthy eating programming and support beyond the Olympic Games and the economic crisis was unknown, individuals who were leading or working within the initiatives became concerned. In a desire to keep the momentum going and with the aim of sustaining and building on the gains made, a number of stakeholders formed an Ad Hoc Planning Group to brainstorm how best to move forward together. A first step was to organize a forum for a wider group of individuals and representatives of organizations involved in 'on the ground' healthy eating and food security work across the province.

The healthy eating food security forum - On October 27, 2009, with funding support from the BCHLA Community Capacity Building Strategy, led by the Canadian Cancer Society, a forum was convened in Vancouver. This forum focused on developing new opportunities for partnerships and collaboration in communities and regions throughout the province in a climate of significant economic restraint and an unknown future. Thirty-five individuals from not-for-profit organizations, the private sector and government attended a full day session. Community nutritionists, food security coordinators, representatives from the BCHLA Healthy Eating Initiatives, leaders from groups including Dietitians of Canada, BC Food Systems Network, Ministry of Healthy Living and Sport, BC Dairy Foundation, Action Schools! BC and the Community Food Action Initiative were in attendance. The forum identified a number of short-term goals, including the need to: keep a broad group of stakeholders engaged in discussions, identify priorities and develop a strategy to sustain the collaboration, and build on the successes achieved within the healthy eating and food security community.

Working groups at the forum discussed key topics such as: program delivery, food production, advocacy and policy, food systems change and school policy. Two working groups evolved around two main themes:

- A Healthy Eating at Schools group – which is co-hosted by the BCHLA School Guidelines Support Initiative, the BC Dairy Foundation and the community nutritionists, School-aged Committee
- A Healthy Eating in BC Communities group, currently led by the BCHLA Healthy Eating Strategy Collaborative



Steps since the fall forum – These groups have continued to meet by teleconference, with leadership from the Ad Hoc Planning Group, to build on the discussions at the October forum. From these discussions, a need was identified for a plan to help integrate the healthy eating and food security work that has been accomplished and provide direction for the future. With this need acknowledged by the working groups, Dietitians of Canada, BC Region applied and received funding from the Public Health Agency of Canada for the development of a draft healthy eating and food security plan. The draft plan is due March 31, 2010. The Ad Hoc Planning Group will act as an Advisory Committee to the project.

How will the process unfold? The overall intent of the draft plan is to support and guide those working in communities by identifying priority strategies that will foster healthy environments to support more British Columbians to be food secure and to make healthy food choices.

A framework will be developed considering other provincial, national and international healthy eating/food system strategies/plans. These plans and a review of literature of promising or best practices, along with input from stakeholders on priorities that would support their work at the community level, will form the basis of the recommended policy and program actions for moving forward. Input will be solicited from the school and community working groups, key planning processes underway (e.g. Obesity Reduction Strategy for BC Working Group on Food) and other interested parties.

Given the short time frame for preparing the draft plan, the consultation process will be primarily by e-mail and through teleconference meetings. Further consultation may take place post March 31, 2010 depending on funding support and interest in pursuing further input.

How does this process align with other plans underway in BC? Communication and collaboration has taken place to ensure this planning process is coordinated with and supports or builds on the other key provincial planning initiatives, including the BC Obesity Reduction Strategy and the Provincial Health Services Authority's Provincial Planning Committee on Food Security. Leads and/or contributors to these planning initiatives have met and agreed to the best ways to complement and further each others' work. Key stakeholders overlap on each of the planning groups to further enhance coordination.

The framework and synthesis of best practices from this project will be shared with the Obesity Reduction Strategy for BC's Working Group on Food. The Working Group will map current BC healthy eating and food security programs and policies against the best practice evidence in order to identify policy and program gaps.

How can you become involved in moving healthy eating and food security forward in BC? If you have questions, comments, concerns or wish to share your thoughts on priorities for healthy eating and food security programs and policies in BC, please consider joining the school and/or community working groups' teleconferences, or contact any of the members of the Advisory Committee. Input for this initial process will be received up to March 15:

- Janice Macdonald, Dietitians of Canada, BC Region; jmacdonald@dietitians.ca
- Sydney Massey, BC Dairy Foundation; smassey@bcdf.ca
- Susan Ross/Zena Simces, BCHLA Healthy Eating Strategy Collaborative; sueross@interchange.ubc.ca, zenasimces@shaw.ca
- Rose Soneff, BCHLA Community Capacity Building Strategy; rsoneff@bc.cancer.ca
- Margaret Yandel, Healthy Eating Project Manager, Ministry of Healthy Living and Sport; Margaret.Yandel@gov.bc.ca

Prepared by the Advisory Committee – February 15, 2010



APPENDIX 3: LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Thank-you to the many individuals who participated in the development and review of this paper including community nutritionists, food security coordinators, prevention managers, leaders and coordinators of healthy eating and food security programs, and representatives of government and non-government organizations. If you were involved and your name is not listed we apologize for the oversight.

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