



College of
New Caledonia



**Division of Community
Engagement and Food Systems**

Understanding Local Food Culture in the Prince George, BC Area



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Abstract

Access to food and local food resources are at the forefront of issues facing British Columbians. During uncertain times where residents are faced with the rising costs associated with inflation and the uncertainty of food supply from historical disasters such as the Covid-19 pandemic, flooding, and forest fires, the need to understand local food systems has become increasingly important. This study sought to further understand the gaps in local food access and education.

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Acknowledgements

The College of New Caledonia and the Public Health Association of BC are honoured to work with Indigenous communities of this region, inclusive of the First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples. We acknowledge the graciousness of the First Nations peoples in welcoming those who are seeking knowledge to their traditional territories:

- ʔEsdilagh (Alexandria) First Nation
- Binche Whut'en First Nation
- Burns Lake Band (Ts'il Kaz Koh)
- Cheslatta Carrier Nation
- Kwadacha Nation
- Lake Babine Nation
- Lhtako Dene First Nation
- Lheidli T'enneh First Nation
- Lhoosk'uz Dene Nation
- McLeod Lake Indian Band (Tse'Khene Nation)
- Nadleh Whut'en
- Nak'azdli Whut'en
- Nazko First Nation
- Nee Tahi Buhn Band
- Saik'uz First Nation
- Skin Tyee Nation
- Stelat'en First Nation
- Takla Nation
- Tl'azt'en First Nation
- Tsay Keh Dene Nation
- Wet'suwet'en First Nation
- Yekooche First Nation



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Introduction

Access to food and local food resources are at the forefront of issues facing British Columbians. During uncertain times where residents are faced with the rising costs associated with inflation and the uncertainty of food supply from historical disasters such as the Covid 19 Pandemic, flooding, and forest fires, the need to understand local food systems has become increasingly important.

The BC Centre for Disease Control 2023 report *“Priority Health Equity Indicators for British Columbia: Household Food Insecurity Update Report”* describes food security as a benchmark where “everyone has equitable access to food that is affordable, culturally preferable, nutritious and safe; everyone has the agency to participate in, and influence food systems; and that food systems are resilient, ecologically sustainable, socially just, and honor Indigenous food sovereignty”.

These challenges presented the questions:

1. How do community members access local food, if at all?
2. What educational opportunities would they be interested in regarding personal sustainable food practices?



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Project Description Overview

The College of New Caledonia (CNC) recognizes the challenges around accessing local food. In partnership with the Public Health Association of BC (PHABC), the Applied Research and Innovation department at CNC aimed to research potential solutions to local food access and education. This project idea is an extension of CNC's successful 2023 Feed BC Grant project "It Takes a Community to Feed a Student" which sought to understand student food security within their perspective campuses, and specifically if there was access to local foods within CNC and the University of Northern British Columbia.

Being sustainable with the ability to grow food in a northern climate is becoming exceedingly important, "in 2017-2018, 1 in 8 (12.5%) people 12 years of age and over in British Columbia lived in households that experienced some level of household food insecurity during the previous 12 months" these rates are even higher in Northern British Columbia with "16.6% [of households] in the Northern Health Region" facing food insecurity (BC Centre for Disease Control, 2023). Sourcing and growing local food could be vital in dealing with climate change, natural disasters, and challenges such as increasing inflation.

With a 2024 grant from the Feed BC Post Secondary Institution Partner Capacity Funding, CNC distributed a survey to understand local food access and limitations on a community scale. The survey also sought to understand types of educational opportunities around local food those surveyed would be interested in; using the Feed BC Funding, CNC then hosted a free, half day workshop on a topic that community members expressed most interest in.



Survey Creation

This survey was created with the goal of surveying at least 200 participants on their perceptions and experience around local food access using a digital platform (i.e., Microsoft Forms) to maximize accessibility and reach. A simple survey, of 14 questions with the opportunity to provide written feedback, was created with the goals that it:

1. collected enough information to be useful to CNC and the PHABC;
2. and took no longer than 10 minutes.

It was important that the survey be concise and accessible as to encourage survey completion. Simple and open-ended questions presented opportunities for participants to expand their answers if desired.

The survey consisted of the following questions:

1. How do you define "local foods"?
2. Please enter your place of residence (e.g., the name of your town, city, village):
3. Is eating local foods a priority for you?
4. Do you purposefully select local foods while shopping?
5. If you said "yes" to question 4 please select your top 3 reasons for seeking locally produced food:
 - Quality and freshness
 - Taste and nutrition
 - Supporting the local economy
 - Reduced transportation and handling
 - Reduced environmental impact
 - The treatment of local farm animals versus that of industrial farms
 - Other



6. What are some barriers to selecting local foods? Select all that apply:
- Ability to find local foods at chain grocery stores
 - Ability to get to local farmers markets
 - Cost is more than the same product produced elsewhere
 - There is not enough variety or selection to meet my needs
 - No barriers
 - Other
7. How often do you eat local produce?
8. How often do you eat locally raised meat?
9. Do you grow, raise or harvest your own food at home? Please select all that apply:
- Grow garden produce
 - Raise meat animals
 - Harvest wild game meat
 - Gather wild plants and berries
 - I do not grow, harvest or raise a food source
 - Raise laying hens for eggs
 - Other
10. What concerns do you have, if any, about our local food supply and food security?
Please select all that apply.
- No concerns
 - Industrial and retail food waste
 - The amount of transport required to get food items to Northern BC
 - The sustainability of industrial food production
 - Uncertainty about quality of food
 - Uncertainty about industrial food manufacturing processes
11. When shopping, do you select foods based on the following factors? Please select all that apply.
- Grown or produced in BC
 - Grown or produced in Canada
 - Grown or produced in North America
 - The most affordable option no matter the product origin
 - Certified organic
 - Free range and/or range fed
 - Fair trade



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12. Would you be interested in attending a local, one day, in person workshop regarding growing your own food?
13. What type of workshop would you be most interested in attending? Please select ONE.
 - Starting plants indoors to extend the growing season
 - Direct sowing plants that will be successful in a short season
 - Food Preservation
 - Greenhouse cultivation for the Prince George area
 - Hydroponic growing
 - Other
14. If you have any additional comments about local food, local food programs and courses you'd like to see available, or this survey please add them below.

The PHABC assisted with creation of the survey, editing and provided insight into the creation of the questions.



Distribution and Media

There are limitations with digital surveys. First, it is difficult to encourage participants to take time out of their busy schedules to complete a voluntary survey; as such, the goal of 200 survey responses was set with this in mind.

There were two main approaches taken to achieve the desired number of survey responses:

1. distribute the survey digitally among different community groups;
2. and those who completed the survey had the option to be entered into a random draw for a gift card to a Prince George eatery specializing in local food.

Distribution

The advantage to having a digital survey was the ease of sharing it. As this project focused on the community surrounding Prince George, BC, the survey was shared via email to groups in the area who might be interested in secure food systems including: community gardens, school programs, First Nations organizations, local educators, public interest groups, community organizations and local news outlets.

Media

Sharing the survey on media sources was very successful due to the dedication of the CNC Communications department. The original story featured an interview with Dr. Theresa Healy, President of Public Health Association of British Columbia, CNC Vice President of Academic Chad Thompson and CNC Research Associate Shelby Roberts as well as B.C. Minister of Agriculture and Food, Pam Alexis and contained link to the survey.

This story was shared on CNC's [website](#) as well as CNC's Facebook page. From there the Communications department was contacted by several local news stations that then shared the story and survey on their platforms including [CKPG](#), [My PG Now](#), [Frequency News](#) and the [Prince George Citizen](#).



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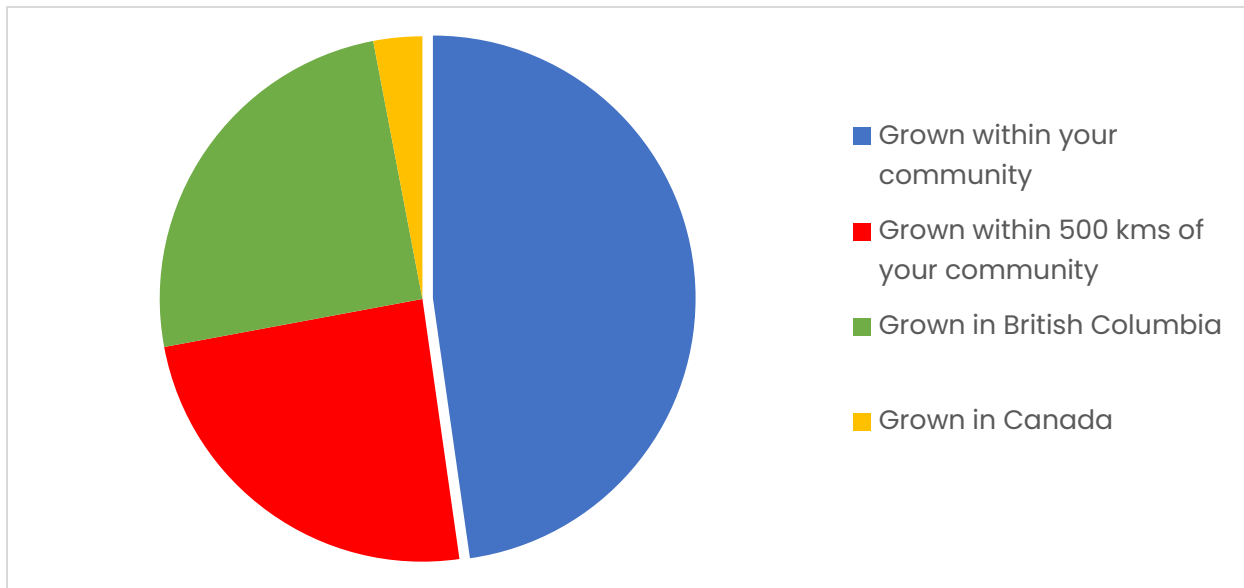
Survey Responses

The survey was active from January 30, 2024 to March 1, 2024, and had a total of 333 responses, with an average time of 08:27 to complete the questions. The team is pleased to have this response on a voluntary survey that was active for only four weeks. Responses to the survey and the questions were enthusiastic and thoughtful.

The knowledge gained from the responses gives further understanding to challenges that the community is facing accessing local food and will help CNC create further educational opportunities regarding sustainable food education.

Survey Results

Question 1: How do you define “local foods”?



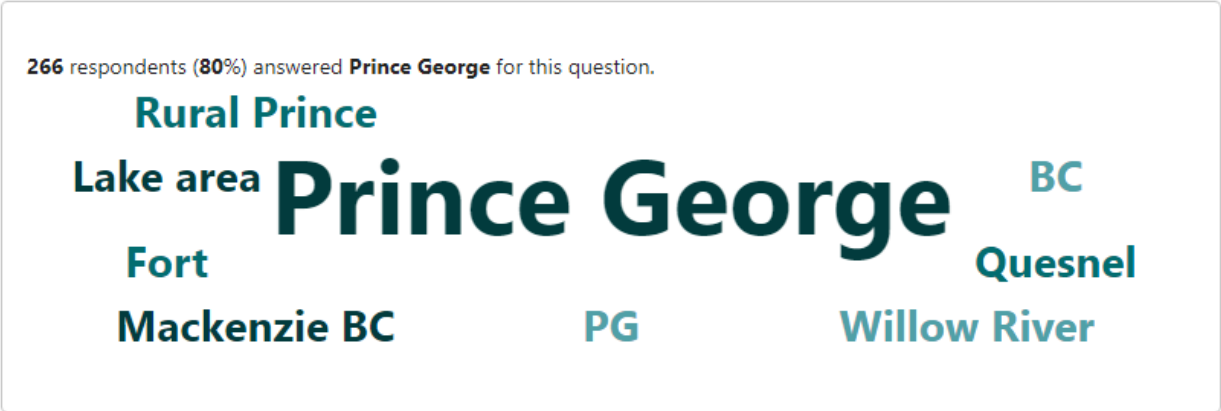
How do you define "local foods"?	Percent of Responses
Grown within your community	48%
Grown within 500 kms of your community	24%
Grown in British Columbia	25%
Grown in Canada	3%

As seen above, the definition of “local food” varies widely. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency recognizes local food as that which is grown within your province or territory, or across provincial/territorial borders within 50 kilometers of the originating province or territory.

The survey data suggests that those looking to support shopping for local foods are looking within their communities to do so. This can be especially challenging in northern regions of British Columbia where sourcing community grown produce is often limited by seasonal availability. Prince George is fortunate to have a farmers’ market that operates year-round with sellers that have product at the indoor winter market and a much larger expanded summer market.



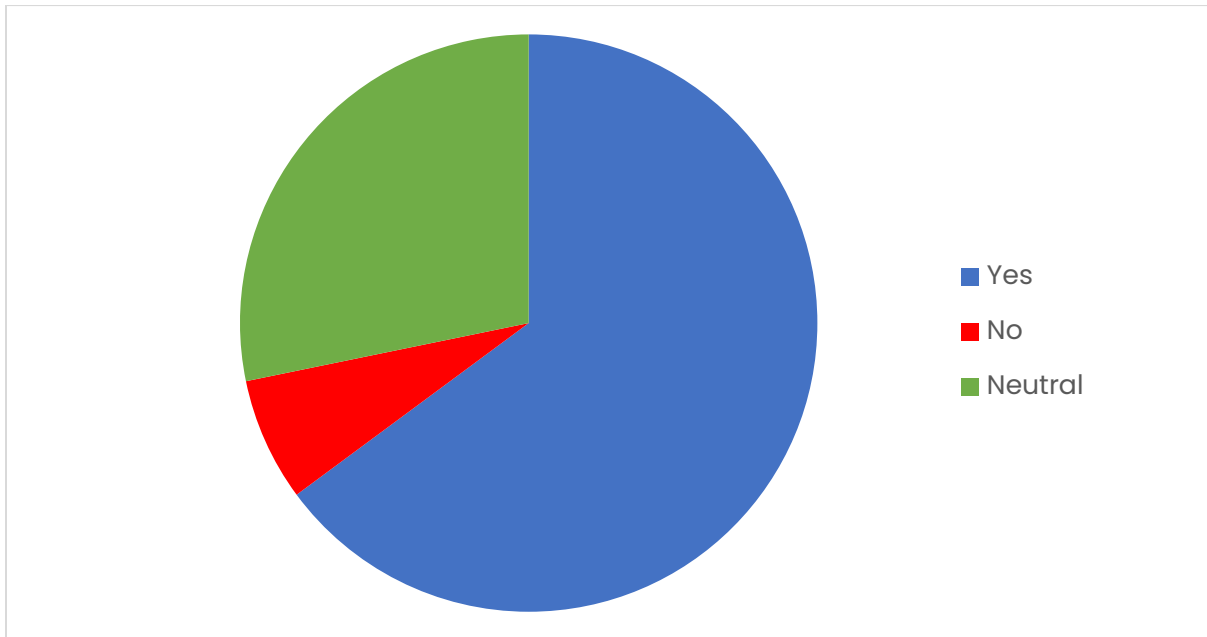
Question 2: Please enter your place of residence (e.g., the name of your town, city, village):



The goal of the survey was to connect with residents of Prince George. This was successful while also gathering information from surrounding communities such as Mackenzie, Quesnel, Fort St James, and Vanderhoof.



Questions 3: Is eating local foods a priority for you?

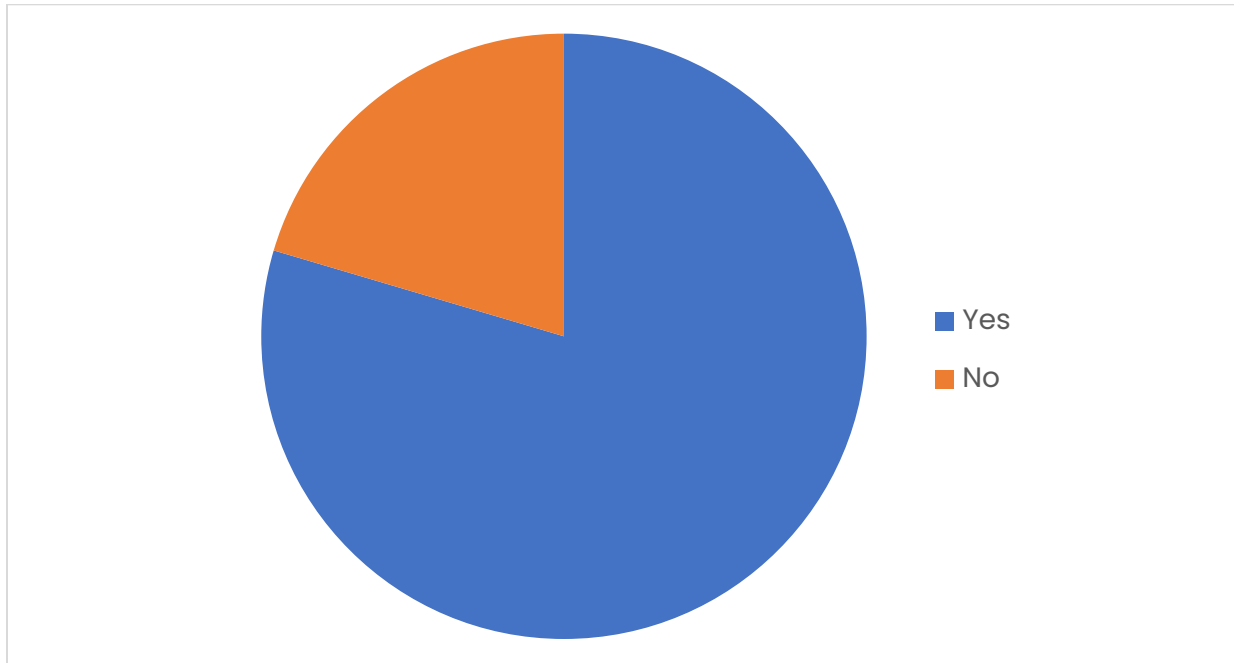


Is eating local foods a priority for you?	Percent of Responses
Yes	65%
No	7%
Neutral	28%

Of those surveyed 65% of responses indicated that eating local food was a priority to them.

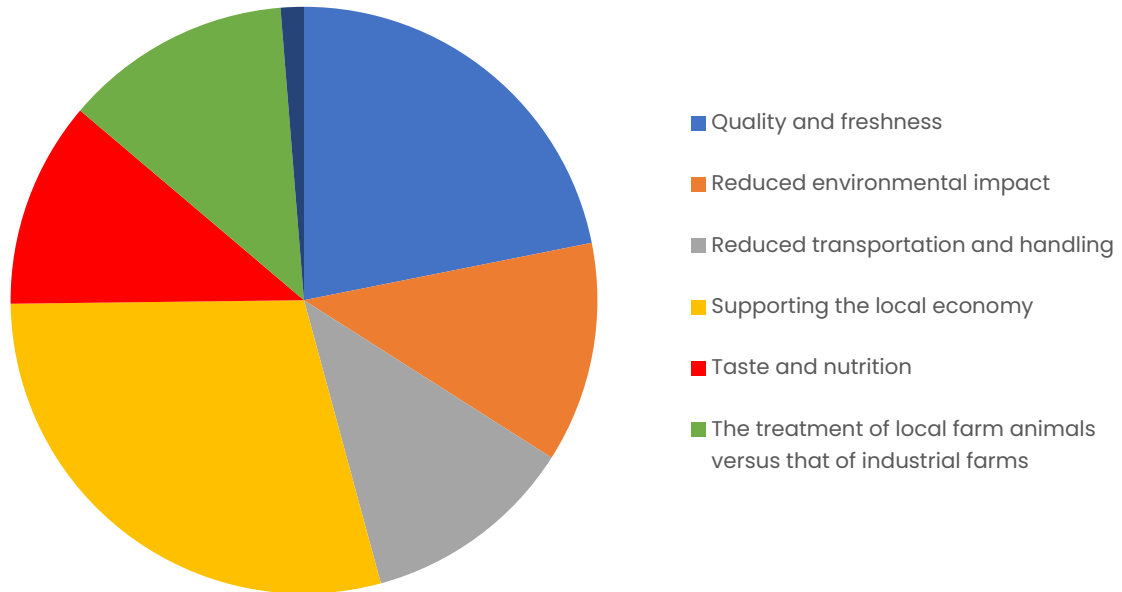


Question 4 and 5: Do you purposefully select local foods while shopping and if you said "yes" to question 4 please select your top 3 reasons for seeking locally produced food:



Do you purposefully select local foods while shopping?	Percent of Responses
Yes	80%
No	20%

If you said "yes" to question 4 please select your top 3 reasons for seeking locally produced food:



If you said "yes" to question 4 please select your top 3 reasons for seeking locally produced food:	Percent of Responses
Quality and freshness	22%
Reduced environmental impact	12%
Reduced transportation and handling	12%
Supporting the local economy	29%
Taste and nutrition	11%
The treatment of local farm animals versus that of industrial farms	13%
Other	1%

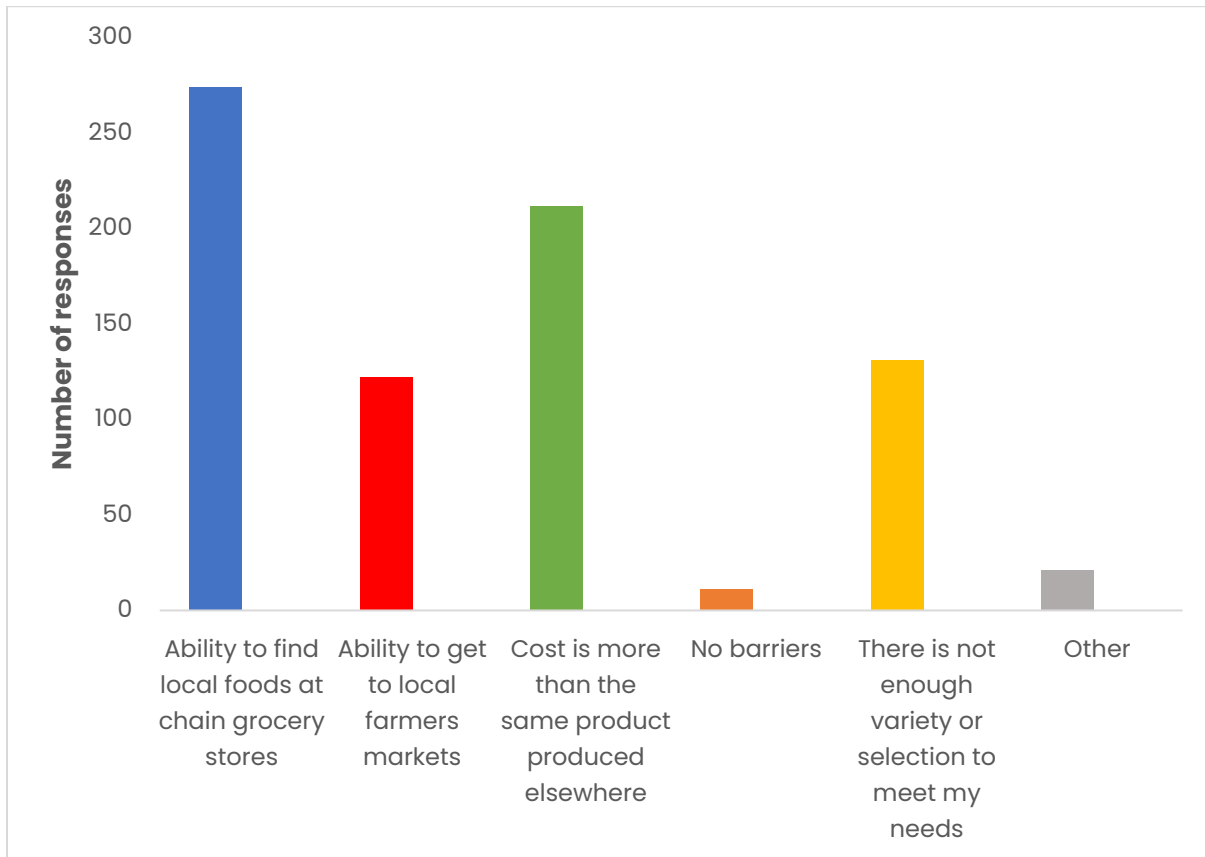
Survey results suggest that those within Prince George and the surrounding areas place a high value on local foods with 80% of those surveyed stating they purposefully select local foods while shopping.

The primary reasons for selecting locally produced food were:

- 1) supporting the local economy (29%);
- 2) and quality and freshness (22%).



Question 6: What are some barriers to selecting local foods? Select all that apply:



What are some barriers to selecting local foods? Select all that apply:	Percent of Responses
Ability to find local foods at chain grocery stores	36%
Ability to get to local farmers markets	16%
Cost is more than the same product produced elsewhere	27%
No barriers	1%
There is not enough variety or selection to meet my needs	17%
Other	3%

The largest barriers to selecting local foods are the ability to find local foods at the grocery store (36%) and the increased cost associated with those products (27%). “Research consistently demonstrates that household food insecurity is primarily an income-based



issue” and with local foods often being more expensive than products produced elsewhere, this greatly limits people’s ability to select local options (BC Centre for Disease Control, 2023). However, there are publicly funded programs like the Farmer’s Market Nutrition Coupon Program (FMNCP) that aim to connect lower-income seniors, families, and pregnant individuals to local food by working with community partners to distribute up to \$27/week in farmer’s market coupons. The FMNCP operates in around 85 communities across BC, including 11 locations within Northern BC, and runs for 16 weeks.

The “other” (3% of responses) category included comments on the following:

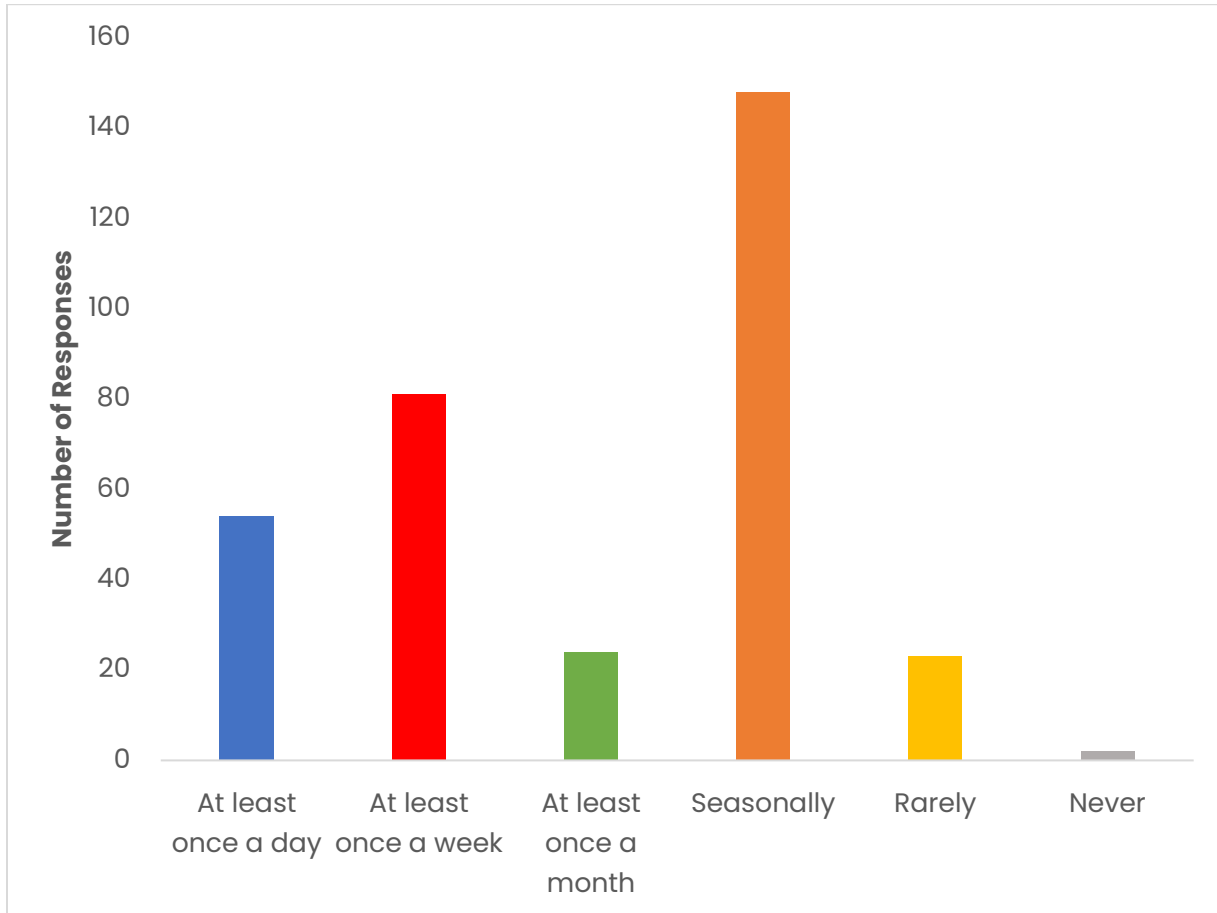
- Fresh produce not available year-round
- Many things are just not grown locally (and similar comments noting produce like lemons, bananas and foods from foreign cultures not being able to grow locally)
- Lack of community garden spots to grow one’s own food in the city

Better advertising and access to community gardens could help encourage those who do not have space to grow their own produce when seasonally able. BC Centre for Disease Control (2023) notes that community gardens can also have “positive social outcomes such as social connectedness and sense of belonging, as well as some positive impacts on community food security”.

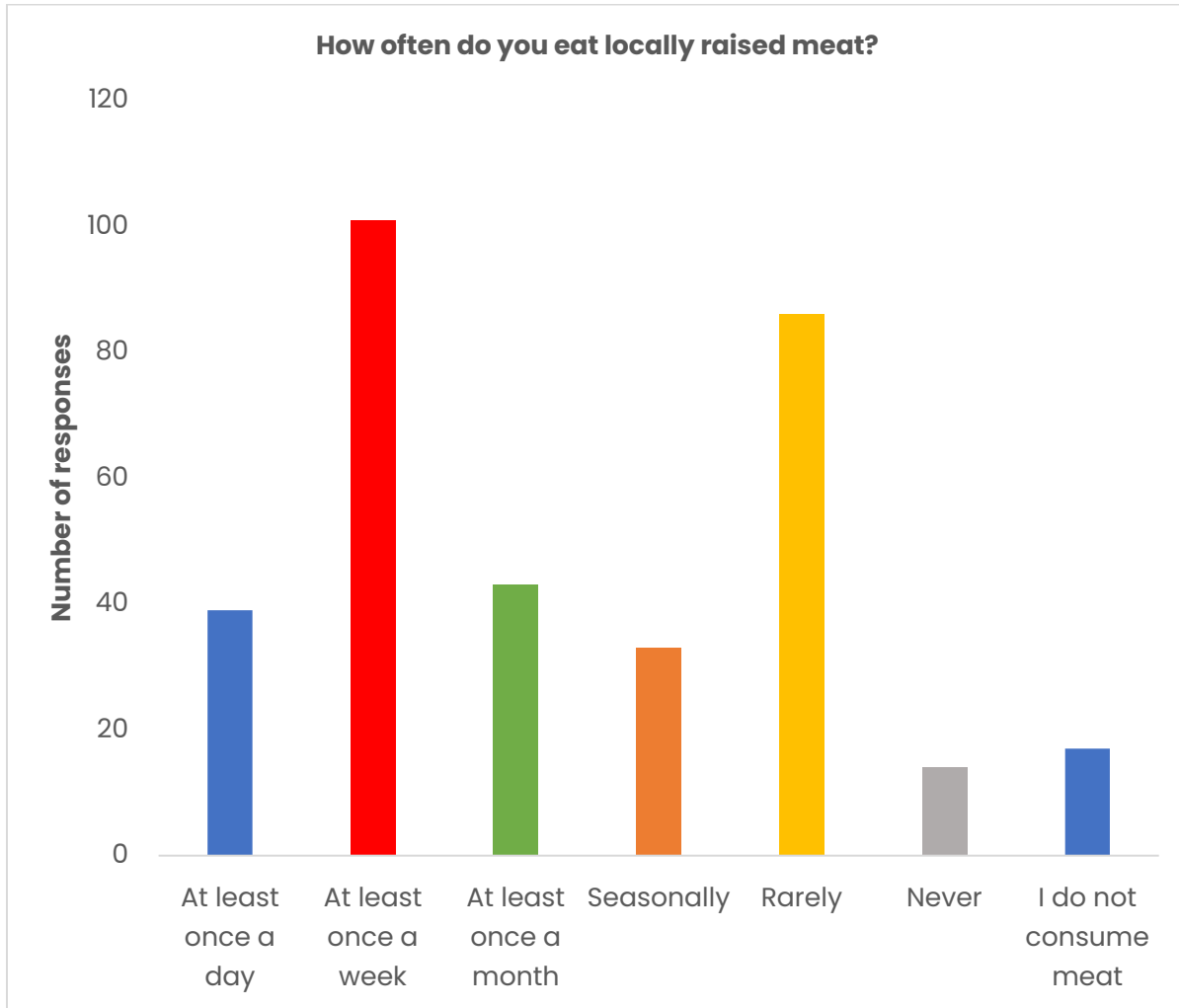
Getting people together to grow food encourages food sovereignty and a sense of community for those seeking connection. For example, Everyone at the Table Prince George (EAT) is a community group in Prince George dedicated to linking local food sources to the people who need them. The EAT website has an extensive collection of resources including contact information for the local [community gardens](#).



Question 7 and 8: How often do you eat local produce? How often do you eat locally raised meat?



How often do you eat local produce?	Percent of Responses
At least once a day	16%
At least once a week	24%
At least once a month	7%
Seasonally	45%
Rarely	7%
Never	1%



How often do you eat locally raised meat?	Percent of Responses
At least once a day	12%
At least once a week	30%
At least once a month	13%
Seasonally	10%
Rarely	26%
Never	4%
I do not consume meat	5%

With access to local produce in the Prince George community being heavily dependent on grocery stores, it is not surprising that the majority of those surveyed (45%) eat local produce seasonally when it is easier to purchase and in general less expensive. The growing season in



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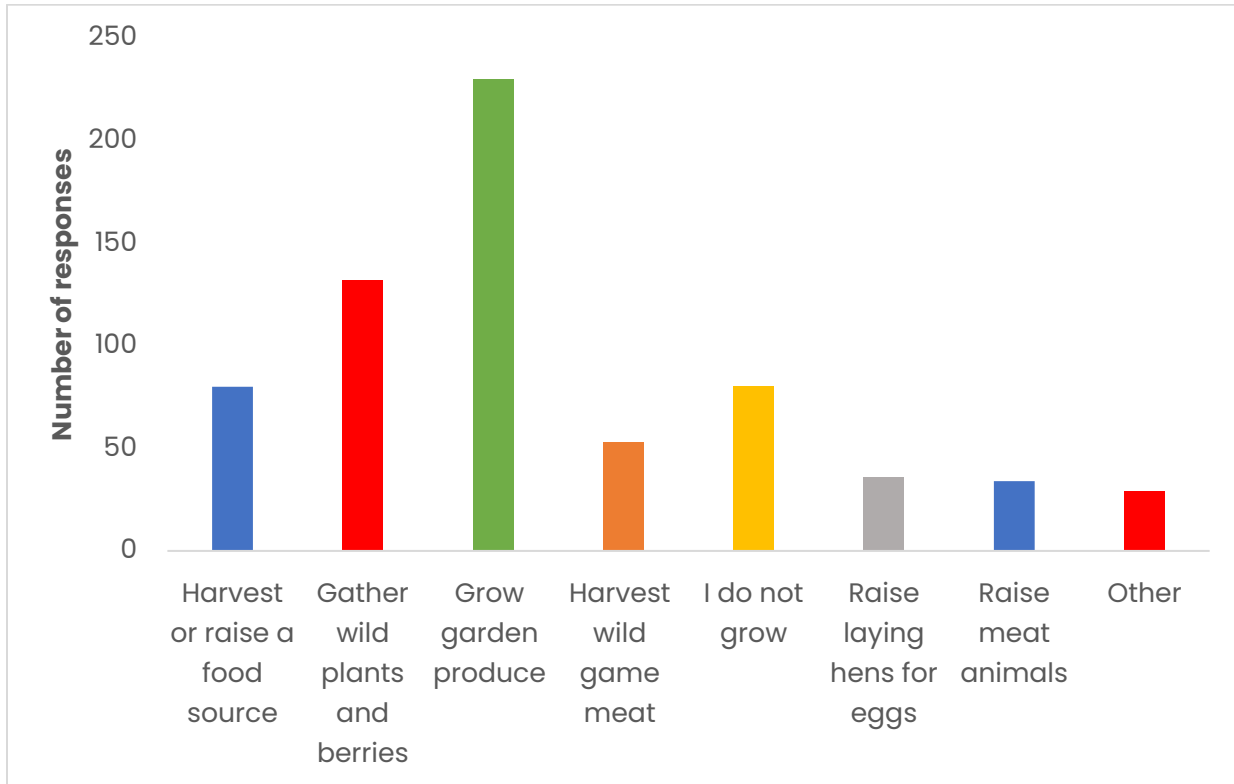
Prince George is limited to 101 days as per the West Coast Seeds "[Northern Vegetable Planting Guide](#)" which greatly reduces the types of produce that can be grown and accessed.

Access to local meat in Prince George is simpler than produce. The indoor Farmers Market features several meat producers; there are also local producers, such as Garrendenny Farms and Hunny Do Ranch, who will prepare and deliver individual meat packages right to the customer's doorstep. Bar K ranch (owned by Carrier Lumber) is also a large producer in the area operating on 8600 acres and supporting around 3200 cattle, Bar K is a grocery supplier including for Save On Foods.



Question 9: Do you grow, raise or harvest your own food at home?

Please select all that apply:



Do you grow, raise, or harvest your own food at home? Please select all that apply:	Percent of Responses
Harvest or raise a food source	12%
Gather wild plants and berries	20%
Grow garden produce	34%
Harvest wild game meat	8%
I do not grow	12%
Raise laying hens for eggs	5%
Raise meat animals	5%
Other	4%



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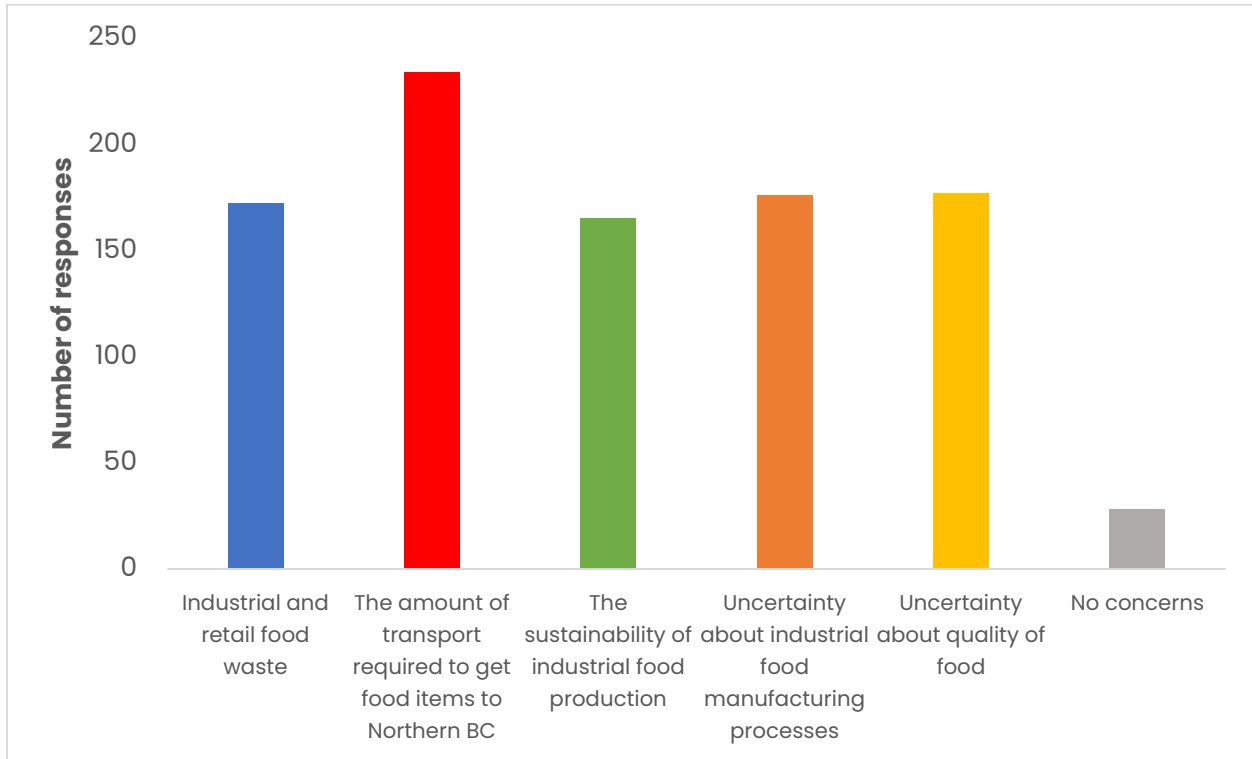


Of the responses 4% selected “other” for this question; some of those responses included: having dairy goats to produce their own milk, yoghurt and cheese at home, only having enough space for a herb garden, having bees for honey and one respondent having a deep winter greenhouse.

Another rising theme with the “other” responses was the desire to have backyard chickens: “I want egg-hens but am not allowed according to bylaw”, “Would LOVE to be permitted chickens in back yard” and “Would like to once we have a garden space and room for chickens”; at this time it is against Prince George city bylaw to have chickens in residential areas. There are other municipalities within British Columbia that permit backyard chickens, for example the [City of Victoria](#) allows up to 15 female chickens within city limits as long as they are set back from the property line.



Question 10: What concerns do you have, if any, about our local food supply and food security. Please select all that apply.

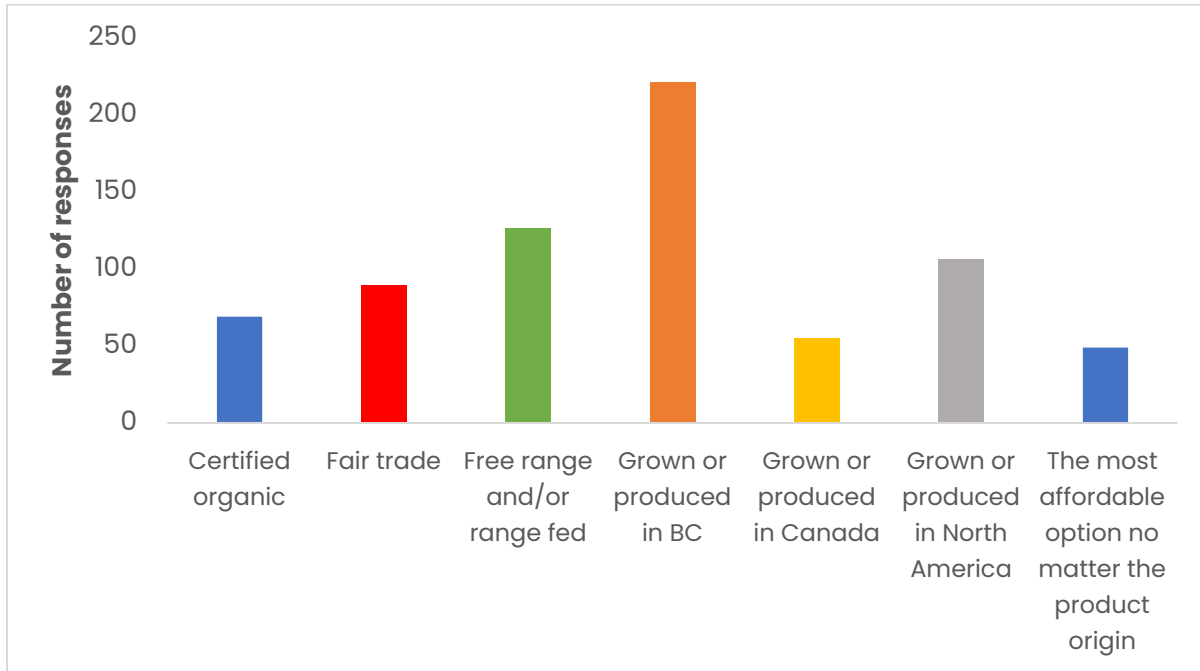


What concerns do you have, if any, about our local food supply and food security. Please select all that apply.	Percent of Responses
Industrial and retail food waste	18%
The amount of transport required to get food items to Northern BC	25%
The sustainability of industrial food production	17%
Uncertainty about industrial food manufacturing processes	18%
Uncertainty about quality of food	19%
No concerns	3%

The amount of transport required to get food to Northern BC is a concern to 25% of those surveyed. During supply chain issues at the height of the 2020 Covid Pandemic, followed by the 2021 Pacific Northwest flooding and ongoing years of forest fires, access to food in Northern BC was severely impacted. Transportation of food to Northern BC is heavily dependent on the lower mainland and having clear highway access across the province for the transportation of food goods.



Question 11: When shopping, do you select foods based on the following factors (please select all that apply):

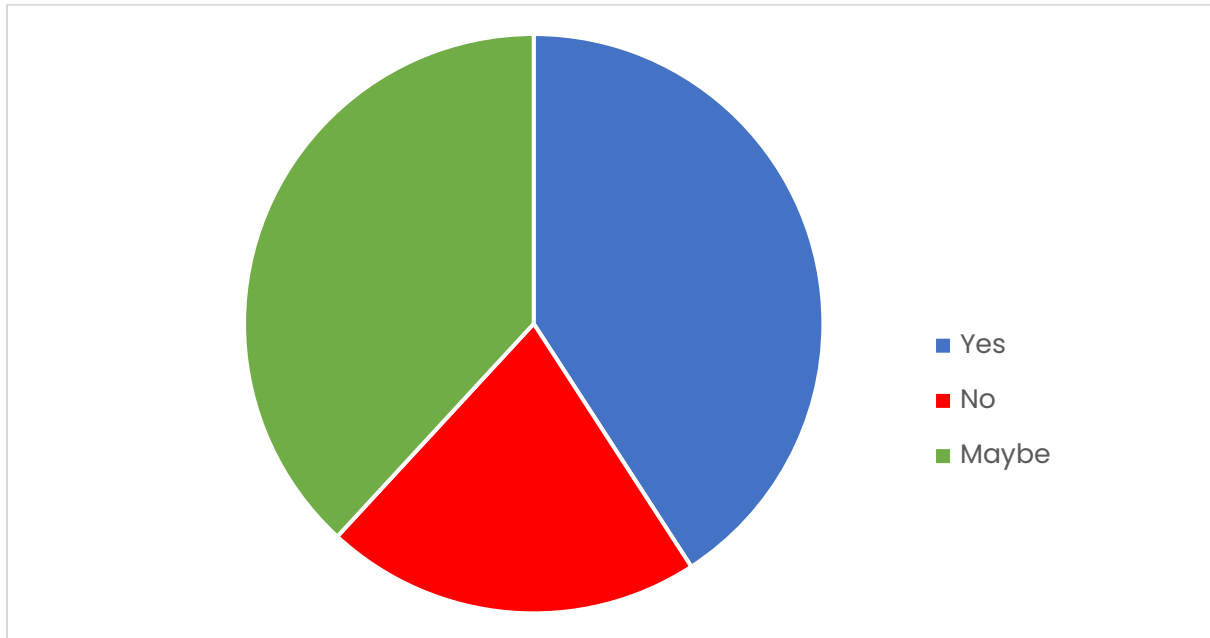


When shopping do you select foods based on the following factors (please select all that apply):	Percent of Responses
Certified organic	9%
Fair trade	12%
Free range and/or range fed	18%
Grown or produced in BC	31%
Grown or produced in Canada	8%
Grown or produced in North America	15%
The most affordable option no matter the product origin	7%

Those surveyed appear conscientious of where the foods they are selecting are coming from. Save On Foods is the primary grocery store in Prince George with four locations across the city and a [commitment to local foods](#); “Save-On-Foods supports Western Canadian food producers by carrying more than 2,500 locally made products from more than 2,000 local growers and producers”. Being able to access local products at the grocery store allows communities to easily support local producers, though cost may still be a prohibiting factor.



Question 12: Would you be interested in attending a local, one day, in person workshop regarding growing your own food?



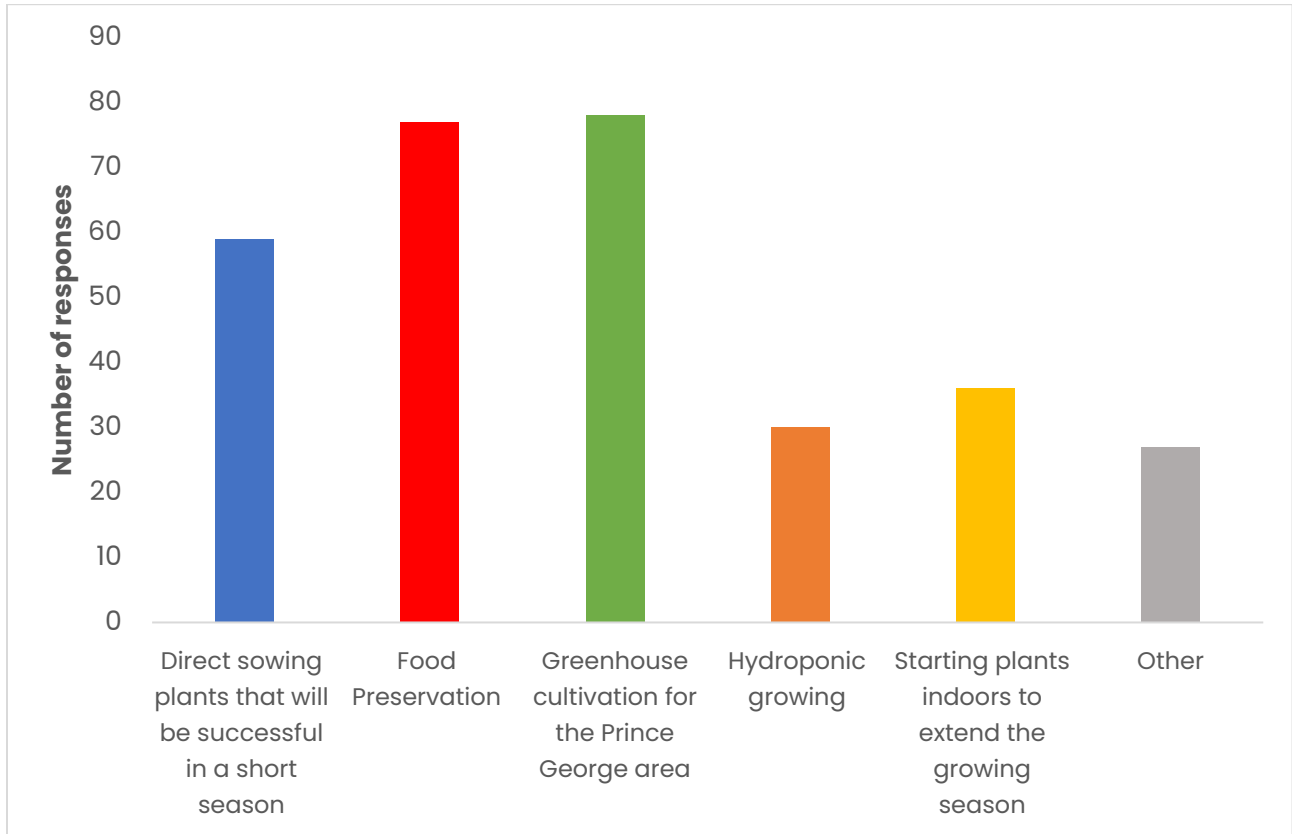
Would you be interested in attending a local, one day, in person workshop regarding growing your own food?	Percent of Responses
Yes	41%
No	21%
Maybe	38%

A key aspect of this survey was to garner interest in having food-based educational opportunities at CNC. Of the 333 people surveyed 41% selected they would be interested in a food growing workshop, while 38% selected “maybe” and 21% of respondents selected “no”.

Having educational opportunities is a step towards food sovereignty. Giving people the confidence and knowledge to grow their own food allows communities to increase their food security.



Question 13: What type of workshop would you be most interested in attending? Please select ONE:



What type of workshop would you be most interested in attending? Please select ONE:	Percent of Responses
Direct sowing plants that will be successful in a short season	19%
Food Preservation	25%
Greenhouse cultivation for the Prince George area	25%
Hydroponic growing	10%
Starting plants indoors to extend the growing season	12%
Other	9%



Greenhouse cultivation narrowly surpassed food preservation (with greenhouse cultivation receiving 78 responses and food preservation 77 responses) as the type of workshop with the most interest.

Some of the “other” suggestions included:

- “Apartment growing”
- “basic knowledge about local regulations and appropriate foods for my yard space”
- “Container growing, vertical growing”
- “Electrically heated backyard greenhouses. Cheap Hydro for growing.”
- “Gardening with limited space eg small beds, balconies, community gardens”
- “I would be interested in all, but particularly for people who live in apartment and do not have ideal light conditions and limited outdoor space”
- “Meat cutting (for cow, moose, etc.)”
- “My first option was going to be “starting plants indoors” but then I thought, CNC could really benefit from turning this into a program, more than one day, combine all these ideas, maybe a certificate program? Over the course of 3-6 months? I think many people would be interested in this. (I would definitely pay tuition for something like this although I'm not sure how it would benefit career wise, but it would still be good for personal benefits)”
- “Permaculture”
- “Promoting coming to u pick farms”
- “Starting a 'Club' so people living in apartments etc can access 'land' to grow and share, also creating 'jobs' to CNC students”
- “Virtual options since can't attend in person.”
- “Which fruit trees are most successful here”



Question 14: If you have any additional comments about local food, local food programs and courses you'd like to see available, or this survey please add them below.

This question allowed the opportunity for participants to be heard, and the responses were extremely varied; there were 124 responses to this question, from comments on courses that people would support at CNC, to opinions on government policies and knowledge from those who have been growing food in Prince George for 50 years. A few of the comments are noted below, with a complete table in Appendix I.

- “Courses on small farm animal (pigs, goats, sheep, poultry, rabbits) raising for personal consumption from purchasing a weaned animal through butchering and food storage/curing. Not just the raising process but also the financial commitment and cost of raising an animal to point of slaughter. A break down of cost to raise vs cost to purchase including initial investment in equipment cost.”
- “How to pressure local governments to make funding [a]nd space for community gardens easier to access. How to pressure local governments to pass a by law allowing backyard hens.”
- “We need to get backyard chickens allow[ed] in PG! We also need to get the Bear Aware folks to communicate strategies on HOW to grow food and protect bears, currently they just yell at everyone to not grow food (a simple electric fence will keep the bears away)”
- “We have been growing our own fruits and vegetables since 1973 when we came to Prince George and couldn't find locally grown food in the supermarket.”
- “I'd love a more accessible farm to door delivery. I know we have one option for a biweekly pickup but I can't ever get there during pickup and I'd love something weekly.”
- “Affordability affects most of my food purchasing decisions. I find the local farmers market very very pricey. I buy mostly local farm meat except chicken. Haven't found a supplier of chicken meat yet. Only local farm eggs. US weather issues affecting produce availability here I believe. I see lots from South Africa”
- “We need a milk processing plant in the northern part of the province so we still have access to milk during highway closures without having to rely on dairy products being shipped here from lower mainland.”



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- “I believe we should be allowed to raise small animals, for food, if space allows. I live on 1acre, yet am not allowed according to the current bylaws”
- “We are small local growers and find it frustrating that grants and programs are often focused on bigger farms.”
- “I’d like to see the amazing greenhouse set up at CNC used to its full capacity and have info sessions for residents based on the operation of that greenhouse. It’s an amazing opportunity that has been sorely neglected.”



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