

Food Forum

Growing and Gathering in Cape Breton

April 20, 2023

Funded in part by
Building Vibrant Communities Grant



nscc



Our Roots

How We Started

As often happens in Cape Breton, the Food Forum started because two friends bumped into each other at a local event hosted by Raising the Villages. That quick catch up was followed by a short email, then a zoom call to talk about how Richmond River Roots could achieve the goals set out in their Building Vibrant Communities Grant. Gradually, the Food Forum took shape.

We value the great work already done by others in Cape Breton including the Island Food Network. The interactive map of our rich food landscape can be found here <https://islandfoodnetwork.ca/>. Hosting food forums where people could learn from each other about how to support an enduring food system was one of the recommendations in the Island Food Network Report [IFN SharedFoodVision.pdf \(islandfoodnetwork.ca\)](#). That report presented a powerful shared vision, “We envision a healthful, inclusive and just food system that serves as a lever for transformation and growth.” What an inspiration!

Food Forum Aims

1. Bring people together from across Cape Breton with a shared interest in a strong local food system
2. Share knowledge about growing and gathering foods in Cape Breton.



The Gathering

Who Took Part

Over 80 people from communities, farms and organizations across Cape Breton came to listen to our 'Soundbite Speakers', learn from each other and share ideas about what we might do together.

Where We Met

The Forum was hosted by Nova Scotia Community College, Strait Area Campus. We enjoyed the Soundbite Speakers in Mawiomí Place, took part in table topics nestled in the Margaret Mary Cook Learning Commons and in the expansive cafeteria overlooking the Strait of Canso.



Aerial view of NSCC Strait Campus

Soundbites



Len Vasello
Blue Heron
Farms



Sarah
MacDonald
Farm to Feast

Deep Roots: Stories from our History

Len Vasallo of Blue Heron Farms took us on a journey back through time and overhead via drone in his overview of the past and present of farming in Cape Breton.

<https://www.facebook.com/blueheronfarmer/>

Farm to Feast

Sarah MacDonald of Farm to Feast inspired us with an exciting showcase of social enterprise work happening in the Annapolis Valley.

<https://www.facebook.com/farmcafemiddleton/>

Questions We Asked

After the Soundbites, we met for Table Talks to discuss these topics:

1. Where do we socialize, grow, prepare and share food? How can we expand these welcoming food spaces?
2. How can we share our food stories and knowledge among cultures within Cape Breton?

3. How can people from young to old work together to support food security in Cape Breton?
4. How can we expand the ways we share food resources in our neighborhoods and across Cape Breton?
5. What are traditional and new ways of storing and preserving foods?
6. How can we extend our growing season?
7. What are some examples of Social Entrepreneurs in the Farm to Feast Chain?
8. How can we reduce or divert food waste at home, community and across Cape Breton?
9. What edible landscapes already exist for foraging? Where can we further invest?
10. What do local producers need to thrive?
11. How can volunteers be part of the Farm to Feast chain?

What We Ate

Chef Brooks Hart and the Culinary Skills Class of 2023 created a taste sensation with their menu:



**Roasted beet & carrot with
whipped feta, lemon, dill,
pistachio dukkah**



**Thyme, cracked pepper & sea
salt kettle chips with spicy
ketchup**



Margaree maple butter tart



What We Learned

Working Across Generations

Ideas

- Connect young and old to work together with the community goal of raising/growing their own food
- Create community groups (young and old) to hear about food security in the area
- Invite, listen and hear the many voices, experiences and perspectives
- Provide education in schools
- Share land between older members of the community and younger members (who may have recently moved in) to grow food together, both benefiting
- Pass down knowledge from older to younger generations; exchange knowledges of older and younger generations – each have different areas of expertise
- Avoid reinventing the wheel
- Increase ways for access to land by younger people (sharing of land between young and the old, gov't funds, etc.)
- Connect those willing to let their community use their property to grow food with those who can farm the land
- Build connections between young and the old as many young people are taking leadership roles
- Establish a community food security committee involving both young and old generations (all ages, all backgrounds, all ethnicities)
- Teach younger generations gardening and farming skills to maintain suitability
- Create experimental gardens to generate interest in gardening/farming
- Build on the increasing interest of growing one's own food because of rising food costs
- Help people understand the nutritional values of various foods; the advantages nutritionally of locally grown food
- Community could have a paid position to coordinate and support growing, education - linking various elements
- Camps for kids - need for mentors
- Food banks booming – people don't have access to local foods; patrons often working and in debt
- Many young people haven't learned how to cook
- Quality of life issue - impact on health and food security
- Experiential learning

What potential action items were suggested?

- Buddies' family workshops year-round greenhouses.
- Community gardens
- Learning from elders/ mentors (develop our knowledge)
- Need a paid position to oversee

What people, places and organizations could work together on the actions?

- Community members, farmers
- NSCC (Nova Scotia Community College)
- Schools in the region
- Seniors' clubs
- Seniors subsidized housing
- Community centers
- Cadets/Legions
- Girl Guides/Boy Scouts/4 H Clubs
- Health care facilities
- Municipalities
- Truro Agricultural College
- Post-secondary universities/colleges



What Local Producers Need to Thrive

- Easier access to farmer's markets
- Viable markets for their products
- Access to marketing tools, resources, knowledge and skills
- Land partnerships (and ways to communicate about availability)
- A network of producers (recognizing the differences between farming and market gardening)
- Greater knowledge about the Cape Breton Food Hub
- Help with licencing, regulation requirements
- Information on local resources – storage, processing, etc.
- Information on available grants, subsidies, etc.
- Meetings at times convenient to farmer/gardener work day
- Ways to work with local foodbanks (and decrease food wastage) – e.g., tax credits
- Level playing field with food security social enterprises
- Funding (incentives, low-cost mortgages, tax benefits, etc.) to support new farmers to achieve sustainability

Season extension

- Greenhouse
- High tunnels
- Cold frames
- Growing hardy crops
- Hydroponics
- Value-added products
- Microgreens
- Grow lights
- Find the right spot on your property
- Start seeds indoors
- Heirloom varieties
- Raised beds
- Mulch well

Caveats re season extension

- Roll up or remove plastic from high tunnels for winter
- Find more information about pests in greenhouses
- Use a north south orientation to prevent rebar from catching the wind (might not be the best orientation for growing – know the wind and sun patterns for your area when placing)
- Landscape fabric
- Can use paper pots



Food Preservation

What are traditional and new ways of storing and preserving foods?

- Canning, bottling, jarring
- Freezing
- Salting (salt cod)
- Fermenting
- Dehydrating
- Root cellar
- Barrels as an alternative to root cellars
- Mushrooms on logs
- Jerky marinate-dehydrate-cook
- Jams, jellies, pickles, pesto, etc.
- Cold storage
- Freezing fish baked goods
- Curing (bacon)
- Vacuum sealing
- Home cellar
- Cold room
- Pressure cooking
- Freeze drying

- Hermetic sealing
- Sauerkraut
- Kimchi
- Cheese
- Teas
- Juice
- Deli meats
- Relish
- Hanging to dry – herbs, garlic

Food preserving – ideas

- Food creates memories (bonding)
- Syrups, jams (adaptations to make syrup last, make batches out of frozen berries)
- Home remedies syrup to use when having a tickle in your throat
- Tips for those who want to start preserving
- Know what works (acidity required, etc.)
- Pick the safe ones to experiment with
- Climate factors to consider – temperature, humidity, etc.
- Processing - Cape Breton Food Hub allows people to process in a government approved commercial kitchen
- You can sell on your own property but going off property requires processing in a licenced commercial kitchen/facility



- Many styles, from all cultures, climates Some use electricity, some do not have access to resources, knowledge, kitchen space etc.
- Elements: temperature, dryness, salt, sugar, sanitization, electricity, packaging
- Usages: medicinal, topical, food, by- products (bear grease) nutrition, celebration, ceremony

Food Preserving - What potential action items were suggested?

- Organizing activities - workshop
- Sharing knowledge – formally and informally
- Intercultural exchange
- Sharing tools and equipment
- Mentorship

Food Preserving - What people, place and organizations could work together on the actions?

- Community kitchens
- Colleagues
- Grass roots
- Hobby groups
- Like minded individuals
- Collectives
- Co-ops
- Free schools



Sharing Resources

What were the main points raised by the group for sharing information and food?

- Podcast- in family kitchens
- Make one, take one
- Potluck
- Cookbook
- Big Seasonal Harvest Share (apples) (<https://www.countyleftfarm.ca/harvest-share>)
- Chatting in their community
- How can we Thrive - Narrative project (<https://www.howwethrive.org/our-story>)
- Attack of the Squash People (<https://rpo.library.utoronto.ca/content/attack-squash-people>)
- Community garden gatherings
- Connecting elders + youth
- Connecting established Cape Bretoners with new Cape Bretoners

Where do we socialize, grow, prepare, and share food? How can we expand these welcoming food spaces?

- At home
- Family farms
- Farming in the past was much more popular
- Most families lived on farms providing own food
- Local farms create community
- Going back to growing/raising food/ livestock needs education and equipment
- Sharing information with neighbors, community members
- Social media can have positive impacts to connect to local/interactions and communities
- Send packaged meals to others
- Farmers markets, prep kitchens
- Pop ups for food, potlucks
- Food swaps (community)
- Community support for a bad season natural disaster
- Foraging
- More community networking programs for local producers
- Teach people where food comes from
- Having a second income
- Harvest fest, party, socializes, celebrate, music

How can we expand the ways we share food resources in our neighborhoods and across Cape Breton?

- Many do not know about the tax incentive for donating to food bank. Often foodbanks have to buy perishable items as donations are non-perishables, we need to make this known
- Establish ways to grow year-round, how do we do this in our climate

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- Food bank changed policy to accept more donations, have a box for “take at your own risk” for lack of a better term so locally grown goods can be supplied
 - Supply nursing homes in local food and schools
 - Establish an equipment co-op for farmers
 - School salad bar program could use local produce
 - Food hub drop off location in Inverness County
 - More farmers market locations throughout the island – get one in Port Hawkesbury
 - Improve access to commercial kitchens, comfort centers are now meant to be equipped with commercial kitchens
 - Education – teach children about sustainable food and nutrition and food waste – programs to teach all ages about growing and teach all ages about growing and eating seasonally – schools should have greenhouses (and have someone to maintain it during the summer months) – composting courses; we need to stop over packaging our products
 - Summer programs – growing, foraging, funding for all this
 - Sharing overstocked food – people need to understand the cost to grow/farm locally, what is the cost (financially/ energy) for your chicken breast
 - Food waste from grocery stores needs to go to the community
 - Engaging the next generation in farming – there needs to be succession planning – needs to be more networking between farms for collaboration opportunities
 - Education on price
 - Champions for customers to buy local farmers produce – Food Hub is great but there are barriers (a producer in Richmond can’t go to Port Hawkesbury to drop off a small number of items for sale – gas and personnel costs)

What potential action items were suggested?

- Online format gatherings – zoom breakout room; seed to harvest ideas
- Info + story sharing potlucks

What people, places and organizations could work together on the actions?

- 4H
- Welcome network
- How we thrive
- River Roots Market Gardens
- Farmers markets of NS
- Raising the Villages
- Mi’kmaq communities
- CBICI international community
- Cape Breton Partnership
- CB Food Hub
- Community gardens
- High schools
- Long term care facilities

Reducing food waste

What were the main points raised by the group?

- Learn more about foods that last longer
- Grow things easily frozen/stored
- Restaurants could donate surplus
- Education
- Learning how to cook/prepare
- Education on sanitary/ food/preparation in schools
- Wrap around systems
- Places to store for bulk buying
- Better communication collaboration between those with surplus and those who could use
- Better understanding of how much food is wasted
- Some do not have freezers
- Information on how to use items before they expire
- Sharing costs
- As a grower, I would prefer to have waste to gather for organic matter. Prefer whole food waste accessibility. Awareness
- Education starting at a school level
- Affordability
- Help people make informed choices

What people, places and organizations could work together on the actions?

- United Way
- Food banks
- Women's Place
- Schools
- Volunteers
- Second Harvest
- Feed N.S.

What potential action items were suggested?

- Communal deep freezers
- Collective purchase
- Education
- Teach proper/ efficient composting
- Community kitchens (who's doing it)



Social Enterprise – Farm to Feast example

Ideas/thoughts

- How can we spread the word?
- How can minoritized communities give and get support?
- Diversity is key
- How we break the cycle of poverty/ food bank reliance
- Change a \$12 meal to \$5 meal- how to shop smarter?
- How to market your product

What potential action items were suggested?

- Have NSCC student mentor/ volunteers for cooking/etc.
- Have seasoned gardeners teach newbies
- Grocery literacy education
- Boost awareness through partnering with local media
- Invite farmers to have volunteers

What people, places and organizations could work together on the actions?

- Foodbanks
- Farmer info through Cape Breton Food Hub
- Advertising on local channels (discounts/free for non-profits)
- Summer students to grow with local community centers

- Place boxes in volunteers' yards. Portions go to programming
- Potential community mentorship senior/ youth, etc.
- Culinary students teach basics of cooking to increase food security
- Farm to feast - volunteering to employment pathway assist those with resume gaps/etc.
- Show how to start your own seed germination/planting/etc.; especially basics for those without internet
- Teach how to use herb windowsill/ food balcony gardens
- Help with social media/ advertising / awareness
- Invite farmers to bring volunteers
- Food insecurity pilot project – Social Cause Soup for schools
- Challenge – sources ingredients / in the end inspired food preparation buying then facilities
- Turnover students – strive to achieve continuity – project 1–2-year term

What potential action items were suggested?

- Making those connections/ Sarah's examples sourcing food
- Expanding -vending machine access



Peaches and Pits (Apples and Cores)

Wrap-up food forum

- Know how to find alternatives to big grocery stores
- Create a Facebook for Cape Breton farmers
- No longer a producer but was for jam and jelly; I didn't know how to market myself; there should be a booklet/online source of how to advertise/ market
- Get to know and network people interested in local food security, sovereignty and sustainability – didn't know how many people cared about this topic.
- Learned lots of farmers in Nova Scotia
- Getting families and youth involved - like learning about farming history
- Food market
- Learned history
- Have board "working meetings" planting things
- How do small gardens/ farmers get extra produce to food banks
- Resolve food security so people can pay rent
- Free carton of eggs – register
- Present care programs Leaside – budget plan meals
- Employment options to come back to farm
- Options for communities to work when kids are in school.
- Integrate farming into community housing programs
- Small farm in Judique - difficult to get people to come to the farm to volunteer and learn /learn and benefiting
- Take stigma away from farming, self-sustainable
- Social services – 90% of students live with food security
- Take one, give one cupboard
- Maybe invent a better way to food security than IA cheques
- People and addiction – using money for what their bodies are dependent on can force them to limit their food intake – harm reduction.
- People with a roof over their head would rather starve than go to a food bank
- Losing your job – better options for food and housing security
- Get people giving and receiving
- W G – Food assistance – every organization in bring food into the mix; spread resources then
- Small intensive growing
- Education- generating \$100,000 worth of produce on one acre is possible – young people right out of school don't have enough supports to achieve this
- Increase awareness of the Cape Breton Food Hub
- Emphasize quality of locally produced food
- Raising the Village – we are not going to solve this alone; govt funding required; we're going to work together
- People not able to get to the store – how do they get there
- More volunteers willing to drop of food
- Jr botanicals program in P to 12; need to learn how to plant a seed and start a business

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- People waiting in the hospital for loved ones, could have a food truck for healthier options
 - How do we get the fresh food from the farm into salad for people working in white collar jobs for lunch hospital/ government building



Pulling it together!

- There is significant recognition of, and support for, addressing food security, sustainability and sovereignty in Cape Breton
- Local farmers need more survival options/supports from all levels of government
- Local farmers need more support from communities and community members
- There are numerous community groups and projects underway to further food security for all
- There is much still to be done!
- If we work together to improve our food systems in Cape Breton, we can make a difference!!
- To do that, we need to continue conversations, planning and act!!!

Please join us next fall for a follow-up meeting to create an action plan!



Forum Committee Members

- Dorothy Barnard (Richmond River Roots)
- Norma Jean MacPhee (Richmond River Roots)
- Jim Mustard and Amanda Knight (Raising the Villages)
- Maire Neville (Pan Cape Breton Food Hub)
- Nancy Salmon (NSCC)
- Charlene MacIntyre (NSCC)
- Cortni Boudreau (NSCC)