



A Decade of Change

How the Region's Food System Evolved

2015 - 2025

While food insecurity, rising costs, and land loss have intensified, a decade of systems-building now positions the region to pursue bold, collaborative solutions.

The story of these ten years is one of paradox: deepening inequities and pressures that strained families and local producers, alongside remarkable growth in community capacity, new infrastructure, renewed Indigenous food sovereignty efforts, and unprecedented collaboration across government, funders, the food and farm sector, and the Good Food Network. Taken together, the data and achievements reveal a system increasingly stretched by affordability and land loss; yet simultaneously strengthened by the collective leadership, innovation, and resilience of people working across the region.

In 2023, **18.7% of residents in the Island Health Region** reported **worried about having enough food**.

The Consumer Price Index for food climbed dramatically across major categories: meat rose more than **80%**, vegetables nearly **73%**, and **overall food costs by more than 55% between 2016 and 2025**. These escalating costs outpaced wages and deepened existing inequities.

Food insecurity rates are dramatically higher among equity-denied groups with roughly **one-third of Indigenous people living off-reserve and nearly one-half living on-reserve experiencing food insecurity**, alongside nearly 40% of Black households, close to **30% of Filipino households**, and almost **half of single-parent families**, compared with roughly 18–25% of the general population in Canada.

Food Insecurity

2012

14% of households in Southern Vancouver Island experienced moderate/severe food insecurity.

2023

21.8% of BC residents are **food insecure**, a 56% increase from **2012**.

1 Million +

British Columbians now struggle to meet basic food needs.

Food Cost

COST OF NUTRITIOUS DIET

Family of 4

2016: \$944/month

2022: \$1,386/month

Increase: +34%

Despite these pressures, **the region’s collective response has grown stronger each year.**

Meal programs, food rescue initiatives, and distribution systems scaled dramatically. About a decade ago, community food agencies served roughly 20,000 meals per week. The purchase and operation of the Food Security & Distribution Centre has had a significant impact on food provisioning. By 2024, the Food Share Network reported more than 81,000 monthly visits across 69 participating agencies, with 350,000 meals served annually by FoodShare partners. **The Mustard Seed has successfully expanded food from roughly 800 pounds a day to over 12,000 pounds a day.**

During the **COVID-19 pandemic**, the network played a key coordination role, ensuring funding, seedlings, meals, and emergency resources reached communities quickly.

Network members met weekly and kept emergency response centers abreast of what we were seeing on the ground. In fact, the CRD highlighted the work of the Good Food Network as a best practice in its evaluation of emergency response after the pandemic.

Efforts were bolstered by the Rapid Relief Fund administered by the **Victoria Foundation**. This fund contributed \$500,000 to support the launch of the **South Island Farmhub**; which connects local farms to community food efforts, as well as the **Growing Together** initiative, supporting people to grow their own food. This evolved into **Get Growing, Victoria! Program**, repurposing municipal greenhouses to grow food for thousands, now a permanent component of the City’s food systems work.

COVID Responses



South Island Farmhub

With crops in the field and worry of looming food crisis - the **South Island Farmhub** was launched and has now distributed over **\$715,000** of locally grown and produced foods to **42 agencies and schools** and put **\$1.7M** into the hands of local food producers.



Get Growing, Victoria!

Growing Together collaborative responded to the need for supporting growing food at home, Working with the City of Victoria, Get Growing was launched and now distributes **100,000 seedlings** and delivers over **700 cubic yards of leaf mulch** through **67 partner organizations**.

At the same time, the region saw **major gains in community food literacy, youth leadership, and culturally grounded programming.**

Alongside emergency response, more food access programs expanded. The Shelbourne Community Kitchen launched in 2015 with its self select Pantry Program that now has grown to providing 70,675 lbs of food, and The Neighbourhood House Network (NHN), led by Fernwood NRG has driven Good Food Box deliveries of affordable, locally sourced produce to thousands of households. Furthermore, through a partnership with **Iyé Creative**, the NHN piloted a Cultural Food Box that improved access to culturally meaningful foods for newcomers and Black communities. These efforts reflect a growing understanding that **food security is not only about quantity and calories, but also dignity, culture, and belonging.**

Community gardens expanded from **30 in 2016 to 40 in 2023**, with Victoria alone increasing its gardens from **18 to 27 over five years**. Newcomer-serving gardens, such as the VIRCS Welcome Gardens, strengthened community ties while making culturally relevant foods accessible to immigrant and refugee families. The Good Food Network launched the **Youth Food Network**, which engaged more than **2,000 youth in leadership development, creative food storytelling, and community food action**.

In our **Good Food Strategy 2025**, our goal was to **double our Food Literacy efforts in 10 years** and while it's hard to measure, we can see considerable advances.

The **Food Literacy Working Group** held annual Roundtables and also produced important resources with a key feature documentary focused on decreasing Food Insecurity. **Feasting For Change**, supported by **Island Health**, implemented literacy campaigns focused on indigenous foods and medicines, sharing messages like *"When the tide is out the table is set"*.

The **Flavour Trails Program** with partnerships from local municipalities and Destination Greater Victoria grew from the North Saanich Festival to a multi-district experience engaging more than **50 farms and thousands of residents each year**. **Seedy Saturday** was revitalized, and the **Victoria Seed Library** re-established, reinforcing community seed sovereignty. Harvest and share was established creating over 2000 square feet of rooftop gardens, and partnering with schools on indoor cultivation.



Compost Education Centre

In 2024 the Compost Education Center delivered **300 workshops to children and 64 through their adult education program**, their highest number of workshops ever.



Community Gardens

2016: 30 community gardens

2023: 40 community gardens

Victoria alone: 18 → 27 gardens (2018–2023)

New gardens such as VIRCS' Welcome Gardens, expanded cultural food access and newcomer supports.

Royal Roads University developed extensive gardens and partnered with cultural leaders to test cultural crops. Research efforts, such as *Closing the Supply Gap*, surveyed more than **100 food and farm businesses** to identify gaps in regional food infrastructure, production capacity, and distribution networks and Kwantlen College recently advanced efforts to conduct a Bioregional Food Systems Study.

Meanwhile, Indigenous-led groups such as the **EMET SW.ISTA KÁL working group** expanded their role in community-rooted food and medicine education, building on the early efforts of the Feasting for Change initiative and culminating in an Indigenous food Gathering in 2025 that celebrate land-based knowledge and cultural food systems.



Youth Food Network Impact

- Over **2,000 youth** engaged in the last decade.
- Youth leadership training, digital storytelling, & food literacy projects.
- Youth Spark Survey (2025): identified 5 key recommendations for youth engagement, including:
 1. Free/low-cost access
 2. Partnerships with equity-denied youth
 3. Cultural food access integration
 4. Hands-on food skills
 5. Stronger social media & in-person outreach

Despite these gains, **youth nutrition data exposes persistent system-level challenges.**

While the percentage of youth consuming cultural foods daily increased from 25% to 29% between 2016 and 2023, daily fruit and vegetable consumption declined from 95% to 87%. These declines mirror the affordability crisis and highlight the need for strong, comprehensive school food systems. Over the decade, the region made major strides in this direction.

The Good Food Shift initiative helped bring school stakeholders together, eventually leading to the creation of Flourish School Food Society, which now provides 1,100 daily meals across 23 schools and supports school garden and farm-to-school programming. Rainbow Kitchen expanded its meal support to an additional five schools. Farm-to-school programming grew from 11 programs in 2016 to more than 30 schools receiving support today. These advances align with growing provincial and federal commitments to national school food programs and reflect the region's leadership in advocating for equitable school meals.

While food literacy efforts expanded, **the region's agricultural capacity faced the opposite trend.**

Between 2016 and 2021, the **number of farms across BC declined by roughly 10%, and farmland decreased by over 752,000 acres; a 12% loss.** These declines reflect consolidation, retiring farmers, development pressure, and the escalating cost of land. Yet, over the same period, the Capital Region made historic advances in land access, Regenerative farming, and food sovereignty. A decade of advocacy led to the establishment of the **CRD Foodlands Access Service**, endowed with a \$1 million annual budget to support farming capacity, land access education, and new farmer incubation. The first pilot farm at Bear Hill launched, symbolizing a shift toward regionally coordinated land access solutions for new farmers.

Community and incubator farms expanded or strengthened their roles, including **Centre for Regenerative Agriculture, Haliburton Farm, Newman Farm, Lohbrunner, Burgoyne/Grandmothers Garden, and Young Agrarians' land access projects.** These initiatives now provide training, tenure solutions, incubation spaces, and regenerative production education for new and diverse farmers. Organizations like the **Sooke Food Chi, Victoria Compost and Education Center, LifeCycles** and **Iyé Creative** led community workshops on growing and harvesting.

Sandown Centre for Regenerative Agriculture - 2025 Highlights

Youth Education: 1,160 student visits, 57 classes, 15 schools engaged through Growing Young Farmers; hands-on learning in soil health, ecology, and food growing.

Community Gardens: Added 123 new in-ground beds for 2026; nearly doubled garden size to 1 acre with 200+ beds.

Sandown Farm: Activated 1 acre of unused land; grew food sold through the **Good Food Box**, **South Island Farm Hub**, and **Flourish**; donated produce to school backpack programs and local food banks; key site for regenerative farming training.

Regenerative Farmer Program: Supports new-entrant farmers with land, mentorship, and infrastructure; 14 farmers running 8 businesses selling at markets, on-site, and via CSA; FarmFolk CityFolk seed hub and KPU dry farming trials hosted on-site.

Key advances occurred in Indigenous food sovereignty.

The last decade saw a resurgence of Indigenous land-based food governance and ecological restoration initiatives. The **W̱SÁNEĆ Land Trust** was established and plans were initiated for **TIKEL** to re-established traditional ecosystems and access for Indigenous harvesters. **The Reef Net Project**; reviving a practice banned in 1916, installed reef nets at Pender Island and the Gulf Islands, supporting the regeneration of traditional fishing systems. **Pauquachin First Nation** advanced **clam garden restoration** and shoreline stewardship, rebuilding ancient mariculture systems that increase biodiversity and food production. These regional efforts look to be amplified in 2023 by the **New Relationship Trust's \$30-million Indigenous Food Security and Sovereignty Program**, catalyzing Indigenous-led harvesting, agroecology, and food production across BC. Together, these initiatives signal a powerful reclamation of Indigenous food systems and governance.

Community and commercial food infrastructure expanded significantly.

Food Hubs were developed in **Victoria** and **Salt Spring Island**, and are in development in **Sooke** and **North Saanich**. The **Direct Farm Marketing Association** continued to produce its annual **Farm Fresh** guide to support local food purchasing. The **South Island Farmers Institute** was born, and continued the legacy of the **Farmer2Farmer** annual conference supporting farm capacity building, network and advocacy efforts. **The South Island FarmHub** now supports over 70 small food and farm businesses with aggregation and distribution services. **Kitchen Connect** evolved into a major processing kitchen supporting **Flourish!** school meals and seasonal processing.

Good Food Shift Collaboration → Flourish!

The Good Food Shift Collaboration undertook the research and capacity building and aligned local, provincial and federal policy advocacy advances to springboard regional school food efforts.

Today Flourish! School Food Society, working along other partners is providing over 3,000 students a day in 30 schools.

1. Kitchen Program

- 23 schools served
- 3000+ students reached

2. Grocery Program - Food Aggregation & Distribution

- 30 schools served
- 5000+ students reached

3. Food Literacy - Garden & Food Learning Support

- 19 school gardens supported
- 4000+ students reached

The regional **Food Security and Distribution Centre** became the backbone of community food provisioning, school meal production, and emergency food distribution. It also put a solid dent in reducing food waste, that was also championed with a number of forums and campaigns led by the City of Victoria. There has also been significant **development of subregional food networks** in the Gulf Islands, Sooke, and more recently emerging on the Westshore.

Despite these gains, some indicators remained stagnant. The number of farmers' markets key ways for local food access saw small gains between 2016 and 2025. Local food in commercial grocers also was fairly limited however with more visibility. This reflects a difficult economic environment for small producers and cost-of-living pressures that limit consumer spending power. But this plateau also reflects broader market constraints beyond local control.

On the **governance and policy** front, the region experienced some of its most **significant advancements**.

Since 2016, local governments have adopted major food system strategies including the **CRD Regional Food and Agriculture Strategy**, the **CRD Land Access Bylaw**, the **City of Victoria's Food Systems Chapter**, **Saanich's Food and Agriculture Strategy**, and **Salt Spring's Food Security Plan**. Six new municipal food-related policies, developed with advocacy efforts from members across the network, were adopted across the region. Dedicated municipal food system staff positions were created, and roles were formalized across multiple municipalities. School District 62, worked with the Village initiative and alongside network members to develop a comprehensive school and community strategy that now sits them as a leader in creating healthier school food environments.



Landmark Achievement: CRD Foodlands Access Service

- Established following years of GFN advocacy.
- \$1 million annual budget for land access and farm training.
- Bear Hill Pilot Farm launched (first farm of new land access program)

The Good Food Network and actors across the region played a critical role in **building the collective infrastructure** needed to advance this work.

Through establishing a Collective Impact framework with long term targets and outcomes called the good Food Strategy, a leadership table guided the work that was facilitated by network Backbone organization CRFAIR that stewarded the development of resources, communication, incubated collaborative initiatives and supported ongoing reporting. This mobilized between **70 and 100 actors**, convening over **2,000 meetings**, and hosting **nine regional Good Food Gatherings**.

Through the Partnership Platform established by CRFAIR, more than **\$2.5 million in funding** flowed directly to **Indigenous- and Black-led organizations**, an unprecedented shift toward equity in regional food systems investment.

Roundtables on equity and food justice, climate and food, community gardens, and farm-to-school collaboration helped align regional practices both intentionally and organically. Through the Equity First Initiative, the network launched an Equity Roundtable and the Backbone was able to hire an Equity Engagement Coordinator, and delivered Cultural Humility training to more than 30 Good Food Network leaders and shifted Network communications to center more diverse narratives through the Culture and Cuisine initiative.



We have also seen a significant shift in regional food systems investment.

Vancity was instrumental in early stage seeding with **Island Health** and the **Victoria Foundation** playing a key leadership role, through shifting funding approaches to more strategic, longer term upstream development and collaborative efforts, including directing funding to indigenous and equity deserving groups through its granting programs.

The **BC United Way Regional Food Hub Initiative** was launched in our region as well as growing linkages to Regenerative Food Systems Investment networks. More recently, **CRFAIR's** work with the **Rising Economy Task Force** of the **South Island Prosperity Partnership** has identified regional food and agriculture sector development as a priority. The launch of the **Vancouver Island Bioregional Study** by **Kwantlen Polytechnic University** aimed at identifying evidence based investment priorities, alongside the work of **Closing the Supply Gap** and commitment by funding partners is creating solid foundations for further advances in regional food system development

Not everything advanced as hoped.

A regional food policy council was not established. A dream of a public market was not successful, and the ambition of creating a community garden or school garden in every neighbourhood remains unmet. These slow or stalled areas reflect the inherent complexity of system change, not a lack of progress. The network also struggled to create a comprehensive evaluation system; however, were able to do annual Progress Reporting and launch Good Food 2025 Evolution; a two-year participatory review designed to inform the next decade of our network collaborative strategy. Our first session to do a Deep Dive into our network governance and leadership showed a need to dig more deeply into shared leadership, resource distribution and how to evolve our model.

The Capital Region now stands with stronger foundations, deeper relationships, and more policy and governance capacity. Current economic and geopolitical environment is renewing a sense of commitment to regional food sovereignty. The work ahead requires transforming this strengthened system into lasting structural change; securing land for future generations, growing regional infrastructure, supporting community fisheries, embedding equity across and into all food system initiative decisions, and ensuring every person in the region has dignified access to healthy, culturally meaningful food. The past decade laid important groundwork. Our ability to continue to tackle these deep seated and structural issues with our food system will require strategic thinking as to where we can focus our efforts and organize ourselves for the deepest impact.

Taken as a whole, the decade reveals a food system simultaneously under stress and rising to meet challenges with creativity, coordination, and care. Affordability worsened.

Farmland was lost. Youth nutritional health indicators declined. And yet, the community responded with more infrastructure, stronger partnerships, innovation, and greater shared commitment.

Conclusion: A Decade of Pressure and Progress

Between 2015 to 2025, the Good Food Strategy set out to advance work in three key impact areas through a collective impact approach.

1. **Local Food Economy:** Strong regional community and commercial food economy supporting sustainable land and water ecosystems
2. **Food Literacy:** Increased food literacy to improve health and sustainability in the CRD
3. **Food Access and Equity** All residents in the Capital Region enjoy food security.

We also set out to strengthen the enabling conditions for change through developing leadership, research policy development, investment and innovation.

The Capital Region's food system experienced both deepening challenges and powerful community-led transformation. Affordability worsened, land capacity declined, climate change risks and impacts became more severe, and inequities widened. Yet at the same time:

- New land access systems were created.
- Indigenous food sovereignty advanced region-wide.
- Food literacy and youth leadership significantly expanded.
- Major infrastructure investments strengthened local food production and distribution.
- School food systems transformed.
- Regional, Provincial and Federal Policy was advanced.
- Equity-centered leadership took root across the network.

The region now stands with stronger partnerships, and more sophisticated coordination than ever. The challenge ahead is continuing to building a system that is embedded in the values of our Regional Food Charter. We must live in place, with cultures and community that remember and center our foodways as the powerful connector to ourselves, to the land and to each other. The next decade holds an opportunity to turn our efforts and advances into lasting change — stewarding land for future generations, ensuring every resident has dignified access to good food, and strengthening resilience against climate and economic instability.

This is the ongoing story of a region under pressure, and a community rising to meet it. Thank you to everyone who made this change possible—honouring those who came before us and strengthening the path for those yet to follow

VIEW REPORT SOURCES



PROVIDE FEEDBACK



FUNDERS & SUPPORTERS

- Vancity
- Victoria Foundation
- United Way
- Island Health
- First West
- Real Estate Foundation
- Vancouver Foundation
- Right to Food
- Destination Greater Victoria
- Municipal, Provincial & Federal Governments
- Horner Foundation

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