

Small Rural Food Banks Join in Innovative Food Procurement Research and Pilot Project
Golden, Revelstoke, Invermere, and Sicamous food banks collaborate to find collective solutions.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Vernon, BC – 11. 29. 2023: Collaborative solutions to procure food more economically are being determined through a food procurement research study in BC's interior. Community Connections (Revelstoke) Society, the Golden Food Bank Society, Columbia Valley Food Bank, and Eagle Valley Community Support Society are working together with the Land to Table Network and the Institute of Sustainable Food Systems at Kwantlen Polytechnic University to determine ways to meet community needs within viable operating costs.

In a time of unprecedented demand for food banks and rising food insecurity across British Columbia, rural food banks are facing declining food and monetary donations. As costs of food increase, these food banks have more people to feed with fewer donations and limited staff time. The four food banks realized that what they may lack in funding, population, and capacity, they make up for in strong community relationships and willingness to work together.

Data from the Revelstoke food bank regarding demand and expenses over the past three years highlights two alarming trends: an increase in the number of households accessing the food bank (from 286 in 2019 to 716 in 2022); and increased food purchasing costs that have nearly doubled over the same period.

With funding from a generous, anonymous donor, the Rural Food Banks Food Procurement Study is an 8-month long project. The four rural food banks will engage in a deep dive into the operations, finances, connections, networks, and possibilities - of their operations. Through in-depth interviews, economic and statistical analysis, and collaborative evaluation, the research team will develop collective pilot opportunities to connect the food banks— capitalizing on their strengths and supporting each other's weaknesses. Through collaborative procurement, cost-sharing, networking, communications and advocacy opportunities, the four food banks are working together to define their own model of food banking, unique to their remote geographic locations and shared challenges of sourcing adequate and affordable food.

The research will also explore differences between the Columbia/Shuswap and East Kootenay regional food banks and their larger counterparts in Calgary, Kelowna and Vancouver - where there are discrepancies, inequities, and opportunities to share across regional boundaries. Aside from an actionable pilot, each food bank will receive recommendations to improve their individual operations and procurement. The hope is that this project will not only support these four food banks, but that the report will act as an advocacy tool and present a model that other small food banks in Canada can replicate or learn from, toward more resilient operations. A final report is expected to be completed by March 2023.

“Food Banks BC believes strongly in the importance of collaboration and its power to incite lasting, positive change. Our hope is that this rural food bank study and subsequent pilot project(s) will not only impact the four local food banks participating but provide Food Banks BC with valuable insights that can be put into practice in other rural and remote food banks as well. Given the present challenges facing thousands of British Columbians and the food banks they’ve come to rely on, we at Food Banks BC are excited to support this grassroots initiative.”

- Nick Johnson (Manager, Member Services, FBBC)

“Having the opportunity to explore our options for increasing access to healthy food by working collectively is a huge bonus for us. Our community and rural area has been as supportive as they can be, but with access to reasonably priced or recovered foods so hit-and-miss, we risk not being able to meet the need in the future.”

- Janet McClean Senft (Eagle Valley Community Support Society)

“An affordability crisis has steadily heightened food insecurity in Golden and surrounding areas over the past few years, deepening the struggles of low income residents and impacting more families, single working-age adults, and people with full time jobs. With over half of the food we distribute being purchased, we are feeling the pinch just as much as the people accessing our services. This research and pilot initiative presents a unique opportunity to work creatively with our resources and connections to ensure nutritious food options are consistently available for those unable to make their budgets stretch any further at the grocery store.”

- Julia Newbury (Executive Director, Golden Food Bank Society)

“As we enter the final quarter of 2023, the number of food bank visits has increased by 24% in the Columbia Valley. In August alone we saw a 46% increase in food bank use since last year. A lack of employment opportunities coupled with inadequate wages to meet the increasing costs of living are stacking up against our community members. When it comes to buying food, bulk purchasing options are often limited by shipping costs to our remote areas, demonstrating the need for regional food banks to work together.”

- Katrina Chapman (Executive Director, Columbia Valley Food Bank)

Contact Information:

For more information or media inquiries, about the project contact: Taha Attiah, City of Revelstoke, Community Economic Development | tattiah@revelstoke.ca | 250-805-2000

About L2T and ISFS

Land to Table (L2T)

Land to Table began as a regionally-based food system network, made up of stakeholders and rightsholders from across our regional food system, in the North Okanagan. This includes: food producers, processors, distributors, retailers, chefs, and consumers, and related groups like businesses, schools, government, other non-profits, and Indigenous communities. Our work extends to neighbouring regions who face similar food system and food security challenges.

We are working to build a thriving, healthy, just, and resilient regional food system in the North Okanagan and beyond, by catalyzing connections and collaboration, to mobilize network participants' ideas, knowledge and energy across the food system. Our work includes building a connected and coordinated food network; undertaking research and projects to strengthen the food system; and building capacity across other non-profits who share in a vision for community resilience.

Institute for Sustainable Food Systems (ISFS)

ISFS is an applied research and extension unit at KPU that investigates and supports regional food systems as key elements of sustainable communities. We engage in multidisciplinary applied research and extension to cultivate sustainable regional food systems that advance the food sovereignty goals of diverse communities.

The ISFS is a multidisciplinary team, with experience in qualitative and quantitative data gathering and analysis, economic assessment and planning, food systems policy research and analysis, community engaged research, working with the agricultural community and local governments.