

Thanks to generous funding from BC Healthy Living Alliance, I was able to travel to Chehalis at the end of September to participate in the tenth annual conference of the BC Food Systems Network whose theme this year was Bioregionalism: Healthy Associations between People, Plants, Animals and Nature. For anyone who may not be familiar with this organization, I highly recommend a walk through their website www.fooddemocracy.org if you haven't already accessed it for good information and resources on food policy, security and agricultural resources. I'd like to strongly recommend that either NVFN or NHCA obtain a membership from BC Food Systems Network. One of the perks of membership, is that we would be eligible to borrow a video camera kit (value of \$1500) from the network for up to three months in order to document some of the activities of our local initiatives.

I'd like to share a few highlights of various workshops that I attended. Academic Eleanor Boyle presented on *Meat: Problems and Solutions for Environmental Health* and although her solution to the over consumption of meat particularly in western industrialized countries was to eat less – I did find some of the statistics that she shared to be startling. There is 24 billion livestock (pigs, cows, poultry) in the world. Seventy percent of agricultural land globally is dedicated to sustaining livestock. And on average people in industrialized countries eat an equivalent of two burgers per day. The world's average consumption of meat is 100 grams per day, 10 grams more than what is sustainable from a planetary perspective. Canadians on average eat 250 grams (just over half a pound) of meat per day. Adding in the challenges of storing or converting livestock waste in an environmentally sound manner, Boyle strongly advocated for reducing our meat consumption.

Sina Tallio led a discussion on *Development of Traditional Foods for a Local Market* and strongly encouraged participants to consider establishing commercial production of indigenous plants such as fireweed, soapberry, camassia quamash and others. Many participants were concerned that species of indigenous plants have been harvested to extinction or endangered due to poor harvesting practices. Cultivating these wild species results in hardier and larger plants, which could easily support commercial uses. I was particularly taken aback to discover that when indigenous peoples harvest wild plants on reserve lands that they are not allowed to sell (in their wild state or as a processed food) what they have harvested off reserve. A legacy of the Indian Act, this regulation seemed to be a significant barrier to economic development and independence for on reserve peoples.

Just through the abundant networking that was available during the conference I was introduced to a variety of versions of food share or food rescue programs. Perhaps the most known food share program is Quest located in Vancouver, who in 2006 received \$1 million dollars from VanCity Foundation to further support their efforts. Quest rescues 5.77 million pounds of food per year, which represents 1% of all the food that is wasted in BC annually. A food rescue program that exists in Terrace, distributes 5000 pounds of food each month to various non-profits that ensures this food reaches hungry children and families. The CEO of Save-on-Foods has issued a statement to all stores, that they are in support of participating in food share programs.

Since my return from the conference, I have been in contact with allies in Fort St James and Nakazdli and it is our hope to establish a much needed food share program in these communities. Currently food waste from Overwaitea in that community is doused in bleach before it is put in dumpsters. The impact on our environment in terms of this bleached food biodegrading in landfills, not to mention the shame of not having perfectly good food reach those most in need, is ample motivation to get this project going. In order to distribute “high risk” foods (dairy and meats), we will need use of a refrigerated van or trailer, and if anyone has any leads on funding or the actual equipment, which would help make that a reality, I would appreciate hearing from you. Also, if you know of anyone who would be interested in volunteering on that project from the Fort St James area, please have them contact me at sarmstrong@nvcss.ca or 250-567-9205.

~ submitted by Susan Armstrong