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SMALL SCALE
FOOD PROCESSOR
Association (SSFPA)

Sound Bites

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Holly Korstad UVic Practicum Report

My name is Holly Korstad and I am writing this as a practicum student in the School of Social Work at UVic, with the participating organization, the Small Scale Food Processor Association (SSFPA). Through the practicum I was introduced to two segments of the Vancouver food system: food production/farming and food value-adding/processing. I began by completing an internship at the UBC farm and then began interviewing small-scale agri-entrepreneurs and micro-processors in the Lower Mainland. I will give a short summary of some of the amazing work that is being done by these people, and present some of the challenges and barriers they are faced with.

Food Production/Growing

UBC Farm, Vancouver BC

This segment is a result of a one-month organic farming internship that I completed at the University of British Columbia farm. Through talking to various people at the farm, I learned about some of the barriers facing food producers/farmers in the Lower Mainland.

The UBC farm is a 40 hectare student-run farm, which includes a community garden for the Musqueam First Nation, a Mayan demonstration garden, a market garden (which supplies the UBC Farm Market) and a demonstration garden for local elementary/high school students. The UBC farm offers training in exchange for volunteer hours, including drop-in urban farming sessions and internships. I participated in a one-month internship this summer, where I had a hands-on introduction to the food production/growing process. Though I had many tired muscles, I also had many "community building" experiences, working co-operatively with other volunteers, and developed a new appreciation for the food products at my local market.

Some food production/growing barriers:

1. *Lack of training opportunities for organic farming/horticulture in BC.* One of the gaps in our local food system is a lack of provincially recognized training programs for organic farming/horticulture in BC. Aspiring farmers are relying on the good-will of experienced farmers to learn the trade, which can also be a burden on the established farmers, especially if they constantly

have to train new people. As I discovered, farming requires many skills that may take an urban-raised individual longer than anticipated to acquire!

2. *Urban encroachment of farmland:* In 2012, the UBC farmland is scheduled for re-development to a housing community. There is a fear that the farm may be paved over to create space for low or medium density housing. People from the UBC farm have been strategizing with sustainability planners, ecologists, professors, students and interested members of the community to create a sustainable land use plan for the area. Their intent is keep the farm operational, and to combine the farm with high density housing, centralized parking, community space and an emphasis on alternative energy. If approved, this housing development could be a model for other universities across Canada. For more information, see the UBC farm website at www.agsci.ubc.ca/ubcfarm or contact Mark Bomford at (604) 822-5092.



One of the highlights of the internship was learning about the process of building houses out of earth. Since cob-building does not require a lot of skill or expensive tools, everyone can be involved.

Food Processing – Lower Mainland Small Scale Agri-Entrepreneurs growing and processing food

I met Randy Thompson at his farm in Langley, where we had a great discussion about his motivation and philosophy for farming. When Randy started out, he was a chef and a member of the BC Chefs' Association, who became introduced to garlic through a friend. Soon he began playing around with recipes, trying to find something exciting and unique. He believes that there is a lot of "garbage" food out there and that it is important to produce products that both taste good and have quality ingredients. As Randy states, he is "trying to produce products with



Randy Thompson - Owner
Oddball Organics
Langley BC
(604) 514-9277
www.oddballorganics.com

integrity." In his case, that means that all of his ingredients are 100% certified organic and he is taking stewardship of his land through organic farming methods. Randy is a member of the Native American plant co-op, which is collecting seeds that were traditionally used by First Nations people, as well as part of a seed-savers exchange. He is also interested in tracing the cultural and genetic history of plants, especially garlic, which some people say has over 500 varieties. He believes strongly in taking stewardship of the

land through his farming methods and outside affiliations. Randy produces three kinds of garlic nectar at his certified commercial kitchen, with varying degrees of "heat". These include the original Garlic Nectar, "Nasty Nectar" and "Nuclear Nectar". As stated in his pamphlet, "Garlic nectar is a blend of honey, garlic, lemon juice, apple cider vinegar and a hint of cayenne pepper. It is a multi-use product that is limited only by your imagination." All of the ingredients are 100% organic and the nectars are available at Otter Co-op, Capers, Heritage Meats, West Coast Seeds, and other stores.

JD Farms Specialty Turkey

Debbie and Jack Froese both grew up on farms and purchased their beautiful Langley farm in 1979. They are in a niche market, selling turkeys raised without medication or antibiotics. As stated in the JD farms pamphlet, "Turkeys on JD Farms are fed a natural diet of grain, vitamins and minerals without any medications or animal by-products. The turkeys are raised in spacious, well-ventilated barns with free access to fresh water and a constant supply of fresh feed." The products that Debbie and Jack carry include whole or cut turkeys and a large variety of processed products, such as sausages, soup, and lasagna.

While talking to Debbie, I was struck by how active she is both in her local community and with other farmers in BC. In her local community, she is very connected with neighbors, who send their kids over to do chores on the farm and to learn about farm life. Debbie believes that the farm environment is great for kids, teaching them about physical labor, completing jobs and understanding their food. Debbie is also active outside of her farm, as a member of the BC Farm Women's Network. Their activities have included advocating for the right to have "non-GM" written on food labels, grass roots organizing for women who are abused and educational workshops, such as First

Debbie Froese
JD Farms specialty Turkey
Langley BC
604-856-2431
www.jdfarms.net



Aid and First Nations healing methods. Debbie believes that food products should be well labeled and that food "sellers" should be more educated about the products they carry. JD Farms turkeys and turkey products are available at Choices, Capers, Heritage Meats and at the on-site farm store.

Goldwing Ostrich Products

When I arrived at the Goldwing Ostrich farm, I walked past the spacious, fenced off areas where the ostriches were living. They are apparently quite curious about strangers and they all came over to the fence and watched me walk by. It was a bit unnerving for a city girl like me, but definitely an experience worth having! I was led into a small, health inspected store where co-owner Bonnie Curtis stores products such as ostrich meat, jerky, eggs, feathers, Ostrich Oil products and free range non-medicated beef. All of

the birds are raised without the use of antibiotics or medications. Bonnie also has a number of tanned products, including wallets, and home-made soaps and lip balms. From her experience, adding value through processing her ostrich and soap products is necessary for the survival of her business; selling meat only covers the cost. Goldwing Ostrich farm was started in 1993 at what Bonnie described as the height of ostrich popularity. Although her husband, Ed, grew up on a farm, Bonnie was raised in an urban environment and

had a lot to learn about rural life. Nevertheless, she enjoyed the lifestyle and considered it to be a good atmosphere for raising children. Goldwing Ostrich products can be purchased at their farm in Aldergrove, by phone at (604) 856-2888 and in the Vancouver farmers markets.

Bonnie Curtis
Goldwing
Ostrich Products
Aldergrove, BC
604-856-2888



Bad Girl Chocolates—a micro-processor buying ingredients “off the shelf”

When I met Kelly Boyd at her Vancouver home, I was struck by how much work it requires to be successful as a micro-processor. In the busy season, she can work 10 to 12 hours a day, everyday, making chocolates for the local farmers markets. This is a large commitment, but Kelly seems to love what she is doing.

Kelly talked about the community that she has experienced at the markets.

She says that vendors often mentor one another, sharing skills and joining committees to improve the market



*Bad Girl Chocolates
Kelly Boyd, owner
Vancouver, BC
(604) 291-9698
www.badgirlchocolates.com*

market every week.

Kelly produces a wide variety of dairy free chocolates. As stated on her website,

conditions. She also enjoys seeing customers come back week after week to buy her products or to chat. She especially enjoys the children that come to the markets, and states that “Its great seeing these kids recognize me and remember me.” She says that people look forward to seeing her at the

“All products are produced in small batches using only the finest and freshest ingredients. All fruits are local and organic if possible. Only pure bittersweet Belgian couverture chocolate is used in the making of our chocolates and truffles.” (www.badgirlchocolates.com) These products include beautifully designed truffles (as pictured below), yummy chocolate-dipped strawberries, caramels, and sugar free chocolates. Bad Girl Chocolates are available at the Vancouver farmers markets or by contacting Kelly.



Barriers for small-scale agri-entrepreneurs and micro-processors

The information below was obtained through phone calls and interviews with small-scale agri-entrepreneurs and micro-processors in the Lower Mainland. The following are some of the challenges and barriers that they have identified through their experiences in the Lower Mainland food system.

1. Marketing

- Competing with large corporations, who have entire divisions devoted to marketing and research.
- Many small processors do not have the financial resources to pay for advertising.
- People advertising as specialty products when they are not hurts people who are actually in niche markets.

3. Packaging

- Labels, jars, etc. can be expensive, especially if you are purchasing this alone (not bulk-buying with others).
- Labels require testing for nutritional content, etc., and this can be expensive.
- The labeling industry is not designed for small-scale. One processor stated her experience that many companies require a minimum purchase of 10,000 labels.

5. Emotional effects of working alone

- Many of the people I spoke to worked alone, or with just one other person.
- Many were not closely connected with their community
- It can be lonely and isolating to have to work alone everyday, coping with these issues without support of other processors.

7. Inspection of home processing facilities in Vancouver not permitted

- Only inspected if you are within “commercial” zoning.
- Small processors, and others, would like the city to re-consider the health risks of producing food in small quantities at home as compared to a large and difficult to monitor factory. (Lower Mainland Food Council Policy Recommendations to City of Vancouver, August 2003)
- Home processors are forced to restrict themselves to selling at farmers markets, which allow for low-risk, at home processing.
- These markets are seasonal and processors may find themselves without a consistent place to sell their products for much of the year.

2. Commercial Kitchens

- In Vancouver, rental cost is approximately \$25-30 per hour, which is not feasible for some small processors – all of their profits would go towards the kitchen.
- It is expensive to start up your own commercial kitchen – you need the initial money to start up, and the expertise.
- There are limits as to who can share the kitchen space (I.e. someone who is producing chocolates would find it difficult to share with a baker)
- It can be difficult to share with people (I.e. coordinating schedules, differing ideas about cleanliness, sharing freezer space, etc.)

4. Restrictions on exporting products, which depend on kitchen inspections

- Regional health inspection allows regional sales, and it is expensive to have a provincial level kitchen.
- Some products are only provincially inspected, so they can't leave the province, which limits sales.
- Federal inspection is very expensive – you may need to pay for a federal health inspector to be there everyday.

6. Getting Products into large supermarkets

- Sometimes you can't just speak to individual stores directly to have them carry your products, you have to get product listed on the corporate database.
- Individual stores will choose whether or not to stock your product, possibly without having tried your products.