



Revelstoke Co-op Feasibility Study

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Community Connections (Revelstoke) Society

Revelstoke, BC

Prepared by C. Routheir & J. Morris

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Executive Summary

The issue of food security has become an important topic to the community of Revelstoke. As Revelstoke is a fairly isolated community, issues associated with food production should be addressed to minimize food cost and create access to local food sources by establishing local producers, processors and suppliers. Recently a food co-op has been identified by the Food Security Strategy as one potential way that Revelstoke could become more food secure and this feasibility study explores the viability of a food co-op in the community of Revelstoke. This study aims to address the feasibility, challenges, and explore alternatives that may help Revelstoke become more food secure.

Historically Revelstoke had a food co-op in operation from 1921-1985. Recent construction of three hydroelectric dams flooded most of the areas agricultural land, greatly reducing the amount of producers within the community. Since then Revelstoke has become more dependent on large suppliers, relying on both specialty and larger food stores for their food supply.

Interviews with local businesses expressed concern for the development of a food co-op. Identifying the lack of producers in the area and concern for creating competition for their products were negative factors for local businesses. Additional challenges surrounding financial, land access and education and awareness were identified and addressed and seen to be factors which would limit the feasibility of a food co-op.

Many alternative recommendations were found that may better address the needs of food security in Revelstoke than a creation of a food co-op. In this study community supported agriculture, farmers markets, young agrarians, community kitchens, food distributions, online markets and buying clubs were all seen as viable options for increasing Revelstoke's food security. As gaps between growers and producers were identified while conducting this study, it is recommended that boosting the supply of local food and new producers should be a focus before a food co-op could be beneficial.

Introduction

1.1 Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to look at the possibility of a food co-op in the community of Revelstoke. This feasibility study explores the viability of a co-op business model in order to develop services and infrastructure to streamline transactions between growers and consumers, putting energy and determination towards agricultural production and economic activity in the region. This report is not finalized as the local food system is constantly changing.

A number of factors have contributed to the suggestion of a food co-op in Revelstoke. Food security is an important issue for the community, as our access to food is currently reliant on mostly imported suppliers. There are a number of challenges identified for the success of a food co-op in Revelstoke, mainly the lack of producers in the area that will be able to meet the supply and demand of a co-op business. Expanding the local area to include nearby producers and processors has been seen as an option but brings with it the challenges associated with transportation costs. Financial assistance, land access and education and awareness have also been identified as challenges for the creation of a food co-op.

Concern has been expressed by local businesses who currently achieve this market by selling local products that a co-op will create competition with their business. It should be noted that strengthening the local food system is part of the co-ops mandate and local growers and producers should receive preferred treatment.

1.2 Purpose of a Food Co-op

A food co-op has been identified as one opportunity which could allow the Revelstoke Food Security Strategy to achieve its vision for food security in Revelstoke. It would contribute to the FSS goals by providing access to food, increasing access to local and regional food which has been ethically produced, promoting food culture, providing economic sustainability and increasing knowledge of local food security and local food systems.

A recommendation in the FSS report was to promote the consumption of local food and to establish a food co-op which purchases food from local suppliers, as well as other products such as bulk goods to provide access to affordable, good quality foods (Selkirk Planning and Design (SPD) & Ross, H. 2014).

Creation of a food co-op could benefit the community in a number of ways. By providing another market for locally produced foods, a food co-op would increase access to local and regional food which is sustainable and ethically produced and helps develop partnerships that increase local food production and helps ensure economic sustainability. This method also

encourages economic development opportunities related to local food production alongside a diversity of small, locally-owned business opportunities

1.3 Food Security

Beginning in 1965, three hydroelectric dams were built on the Columbia River which created large reservoirs in the area resulting in the flooding of agricultural lands. Before this event, the agriculture in Revelstoke was considerable, with over 200 farms within a 50 miles radius (Revelstoke Museum and Archives). The town was also the host of two of the largest dairy farms in the area. Nowadays, there are only a handful of small scale farms thriving in the community.

Food security is becoming a concern and a priority as we observe a shift in both our global economy and the sustainability of our environment. According to University of Guelph's Food Institute (Food Institute of the University of Guelph, 2015), consumers should expect an additional annual increase on food of about \$345 per household in 2016. Since most vegetables and fruit consumed in Canada are imported, they are highly vulnerable to currency fluctuations. The Food Institute of the University of Guelph also expected food inflation to be between 2.0% to 4.0% in 2016. Already, the average Canadian household spent \$325.00 more in 2015 than in 2014 and may increase to \$345.00 in 2016 (Food Institute of the University of Guelph, 2015).

In 2015, the provincial Health Authority released their findings regarding food fluctuations and stated their concerns about food security. They found that in British Columbia the average monthly cost for a nutritious food basket for a family of 4 in 2015 was \$974.00 and showed an increase of \$60.00 per month between 2013 and 2015 (Provincial Health Services Authority, 2016).

Recently, food security has become an important issue for the residents of Revelstoke. In 2013 a Food Charter was created by a steering committee, made up of local residents and specialists in food security, and together the Revelstoke Food Security Strategy was created. This strategy aims to help Revelstoke become more food secure. The Revelstoke Food Security Strategy (FSS) is a document prepared by Selkirk Planning & Design and Hailey Ross and outlines tasks, goals, and vision, which was adopted from the food charter. The FSS also outlines Revelstoke's current local food shed and looks at organizations involved with food security programs and address challenges faced by food security in Revelstoke. Recommendations were developed by conducting group interviews with local food experts and 7 "very high" recommendations were outlined as a strong start to achieving stronger food security within Revelstoke.

1.3.1 FSS Committee

In the light of those facts, the Food Security Strategy Committee is working intensively towards assuring sufficient, safe, and nutritious food for the health and well-being of the Revelstoke population. The committee was composed of 9 members:

Linda Boyle: Community Nutritionist, BC Interior Health
Melissa Hemphill (Committee Chair): Holistic Nutritionist
Chris Johnston: City Councillor, Lawyer
Patti Larson: Community Outreach and Development Community Connections
Alan Mason: Director of Community Economic Development, City of Revelstoke
Linda Nixon: City Councillor, City of Revelstoke
Penny Page-Brittin: Environmental Sustainability Coordinator, City of Revelstoke
Terra Park: Organic Farmer, Terra Firma Farms
Nian Zhu: Healthy Schools Coordinator, School District 19

The consultants are Hailey Ross of the North Columbia Environmental Society (NCES) and Fraser Blyth of Selkirk Planning and Design.

Many members of this committee have continued on to work on the Food Security Advisory committee, which guides the work of the Food Security Coordinator and is under one of the many programs that the Community Connections Revelstoke Society offers.

1.4 Location

Located on the Columbia River, Revelstoke is a beautiful mountain town located between the Selkirk and Monashee mountain ranges. Slowly booming in the tourism industry, this community of about 7,000 inhabitants is rich in natural environmental beauty and offers many opportunities for new and expanding businesses. Revelstoke is situated 641 km east of Vancouver, British Columbia and 415 km west of Calgary, Alberta, making it relatively isolated when compared to other communities in southern British Columbia. The transportation corridors include the Trans-Canada Highway 1 east-west and the Columbia Valley as a north-south axis with Highway 23. There is also the mainline of Canadian Pacific Rail, which has a station in Revelstoke.

The Revelstoke area is generally considered to include the Rogers Pass and Glacier National Park to the east; Mica Creek and Kinbasket Lake to the north; Three Valley Gap to the west; and the northern part of Arrow Lakes including the Beaton-Trout Lake area, to the south (City of Revelstoke, 2012)

1.5 Challenges

There are many challenges for future farmers in the Revelstoke region. Some of which include scarcity and price of land, lack of a formal distribution system for local products, lack of business training focusing specifically on farming and food production, lack of storage and processing facilities, competition in price and volume from imported foods, challenging market conditions and regulations and international agreements. It has been suggested that a creation of a food co-op may be a way to address some, if not all, of these issues related to food security.

2.0 Goals and Objectives

The goal of this research is to evaluate the viability of a food co-op in the community of Revelstoke. The vision of a food co-op for Revelstoke is to increase the income of farmers and provide a steady local food supply for restaurants and stores, as well as, promote popular understanding and support for local agriculture and potentially increase the food production and sustainability of the region.

The objectives of this study aims to explore the opportunities of a food co-op for the community and evaluate the supply and demand of local food. This study looks at factors that make a co-op a viable option including history, supply/demand, economics of Revelstoke, and other factors.

2.1 Study Methodology

The study methodology was used to address the challenges and steps needed in order to create a food co-op in Revelstoke. Throughout the study the following steps were followed in order to ensure that all questions regarding the viability of a food co-op were answered. The methodology was as follows:

1. Analysis of the past Revelstoke Co-op
2. Analysis of historical, current and future of the local food supply and demand
3. Local market analysis
4. Evaluation of a co-op as meeting market needs
5. Exploration of alternative options that address goals of providing access to local food and/or increase local food production

3.0 Background

In 2013-2014, after conducting surveys and research, the Food Security Strategy researchers identified gaps in availability of local food in the area. In acting on a recommendation from the Revelstoke Food Security Strategy, this study is exploring the market viability and local capacity to develop a food co-operative. The idea behind this is to strengthen transactions between growers and customers, in an effort to fuel agricultural production and economic activity in the region.

3.1 Description of a food co-op

Although there is no universally accepted definition of a co-op, most co-ops operate under the philosophy created by The Rochdale Society of Equitable Pioneers (Rochdale Pioneers Museum, 2016), whose principals have been adopted to operate a democratic business. There are many different kinds of co-ops including financial, marketing, multi-stakeholder, worker and producer. You might be familiar with some co-op's such as Mountain Equipment Co-op and Revelstoke Community Credit Union, as well as producer co-op's such as the Kootenay Co-op in Nelson, BC.

Food co-ops are owned and governed by their members, providing a structure for ensuring that members and customer's needs are met through democratic participation in the decision-making of the enterprise. They value self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity and solidarity. The members own the business, set its policies, and, in many cases, share in the profits. Food co-ops focus on the collaboration of producers in the aggregation, marketing and distribution of local food together with purchasers, educators, government partners, feed & seed stores, and various stakeholders involved in local food security and sustainability efforts.

The co-op model provides a structure for ensuring that needs are met through democratic governance. Members have equal opportunity to direct the way the business is run and to offer input on decisions affecting their everyday work lives. A co-op food store could boost the development of a vibrant local sustainable agricultural economy.

The co-op system allows for the money to be spent locally and recirculates. For example, the co-op purchases from local farmers who, in turn, buy supplies from local sources, hire local technicians to repair equipment, and purchase goods and services from local retailers. To some extent, conventional grocers can do this. According to Stronger Together Co-op (2016), for every \$1,000 a shopper spends at their local food co-op, \$1,604 in economic activity is generated in their local economy—\$239.00 more than if they had spent that same \$1,000 at a conventional grocer. The co-op could then promote and facilitate community self-sufficiency and local food security. But is this model suited for Revelstoke?

3.2 History of Revelstoke Co-op Society

A Co-op business existed in Revelstoke from 1921 until 1985. Information gathered from the Revelstoke Museum and Archives showed that it had a conventional cooperative structure and it followed the guidelines from the by-laws of the Co-operative Society of Rochdale, England. It was created in majority by railroad employees and it had 4 directors on its board. It was closely connected with the co-ops in the Shuswap and further down the valley. This federated Revelstoke Cooperative Society had over 100 share-holders and was established to try to bring costs of goods down. It was in fact composed of multiple stores that offered various goods, not only food. They had amongst other stores a gas station (Federated Co-op in Saskatchewan), a food store, a hardware store, and ladies wear. They also had a store branch at Mica Village when it was buzz of activity during the construction of the Mica dam.

Historical records show that throughout its operation the co-op was running well, with some situational fluctuations due to the war and other major events. In 1985, they faced bankruptcy as a result of an expansion plan. The purchase of a 14 acre property with big interest rates during the period of high market values, the debt servicing costs related to the purchase of the property, the cash flow deficiencies, and the high inventory level and obsolete stock were to blame (Adshead, 1985). The store closed in the winter of 1985.

Since then a number of food stores have opened in the Revelstoke area. Save On Foods (formerly Cooper's Foods), which is part of the Overwaitea Food Group was established in 1956, and Southside Market, a part of AG Foods, are the largest grocery providers in the area. Other smaller and specialty stores include Mountain Goodness Natural Foods, Le Marche, Ray's Butcher Shop and others.

3.3 Co-op Examples in Region

There are a number of examples of established and thriving co-ops within our region. Incorporated in 1975, the Kootenay Co-op, located in Nelson, BC is one of British Columbia most successful independent natural food retailers. The Kootenay Co-op has over 13, 000 members and is supplied by over 100 growers and producers from the area (Kootenay Co-op, 2016). In 2012 the co-op reached \$10 million in sales and \$1990 sales/square feet, which was more than double the industry average (Kootenay Co-op, 2016).

Other examples in the area include the Cariboo Growers Farmers Co-op located in Williams Lake, BC. The Cariboo Growers have been in operation since 2009 and have over 40 local producers that are member of the co-op. Also nearby is the Monashee Community Co-op, located in Lumby, BC which is supplied by 25 growers and producers.

4.0 Economic Trends

In order to assess the feasibility of a food co-op in Revelstoke and to potentially increase access to local products, we looked at the economic trends of the area to determine if a food co-op would benefit the community and assist the growing population.

4.1 Population of Revelstoke

The Population of Revelstoke has remained somewhat consistent since 2005. Information gathered from BC Stats (Government of BC, 2015) show Revelstoke's population to be 7,192 in 2015. This includes the residents in the City of Revelstoke, as well as, south of the airport and those located on the Begbie bench (Revelstoke Mountaineer, 2016). The last census by Statistics Canada was conducted in 2011 and found the population to be 7,139, which was down 1.6% from the last census conducted in 2006 (Statistic Canada, 2012).

4.2 Supply/Demand

While the year round population of Revelstoke stays consistent, seasonal influxes of visitors, seasonal workers and temporary workers increases substantially during the tourism season which creates additional demand for food and other resources. A study conducted by Integrated Community Sustainability Plan (ICSP) showed that on the busiest days of the tourism season visitor's account for 5000-6000 additional residents, increasing the estimated amount of people in Revelstoke to 12,700-13,700 on peak days (Orlando, A. 2013).

With such an influx of people, predicting supply and demand can be challenging for the growers and producers which supply the City of Revelstoke. The FSS has identified local commercial food producers, processors and suppliers and outlined their community profile in their report.

4.2.1 Producers

Producers in Revelstoke have been identified as businesses that devote land and space to growing or raising food (SPD & Ross, H. 2014). This description does not include individuals who grow their own food through backyard gardens. Identified food producers are as follows:

1. Terra Firma
2. Nadja Luckau
3. Bird Bee Tree Urban Farms
4. Greenslide Cattle Co
5. Wildflight Farm
6. D-Dutchman Dairy

7. Other back yard gardeners who may be or soon will be selling produce to retailers

4.2.2 Processors

Processors have been identified as businesses that take raw materials and create food products. Only businesses that were creating food for consumption at home were listed. Identified food processors are as follows:

1. The Modern Bakeshop & Café
2. La Baguette
3. Revy Mountain Meals
4. BA Sausages
5. Kurt's Sausages
6. Ray's Butcher Shop
7. Wild Game Processors
8. Stoke Roasted Coffee Company
9. Clayoquot Botanicals
10. Mt Begbie Brewery
11. Revelstoke Farmers Market Vendors (specifically those selling fruit, vegetables, preserves and baked goods)

4.2.3 Food Suppliers

Food suppliers in Revelstoke have been identified as the organizations and businesses that bring food to Revelstoke. These have a high volume of food and supply the majority of Revelstoke.

1. Southside Market
2. Save On Foods (formerly Cooper's Foods)
3. Big Eddy Market
4. Mountain Goodness Natural Food Store
5. Le Marche Gourmet
6. Revelstoke Farmers Market (summer)
7. Revelstoke Winter's Market
8. Dolan Home Delivery

These lists were our attempt at best capturing the processors, producers, and supplies of Revelstoke but are not a complete representation. Additional businesses are continuing to support the local economy and new food related business are being developed each year.

4.3 Statistics on food consumption

Information on local food consumption for Revelstoke was not easily accessible. Researching for information on food consumption by the FSS began with a report by the government of BC; Ministry of Agriculture called “B.C.’s Food Self Reliance-Can B.C’s Farmer’s feed our growing population?” Calculations were then determined based on the study’s findings and recommendations in Canada’s Food Guide to determine the amount of consumption that a person needs daily. A chart listed below shows the recommended number of food guide servings for each food group (Health Canada, 2005). From this one can determine what percentage of a person’s diet is made of local food.

Recommended Number of Food Guide Servings per Day

	Children			Teens		Adults			
	2-3	4-8	9-13	14-18 Years		19-50 Years		51+ Years	
	Girls and Boys			Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
Vegetables and Fruit	4	5	6	7	8	7-8	8-10	7	7
Grain Products	3	4	6	6	7	6-7	8	6	7
Milk and Alternatives	2	2	3-4	3-4	3-4	2	2	3	3
Meat and Alternatives	1	1	1-2	2	3	2	3	2	3

Information gathered from local food stores shows that while most stores try to supply customers with local or BC products a large number of their products are imported, either from other provinces or internationally. Information gathered by the FSS states that both large suppliers (Save On Foods and Southside Market) sell less than 1% of food that would fit into our regional food shed (SPD & Ross, H. 2014). It is suggested that additional information could be gathered from the chamber of Commerce in Revelstoke to determine the percentage of food bought locally vs out of town shopping.

4.4 Food consumption predictions

With the population of Revelstoke and the influx of seasonal residents and visitors, consumption of local food can be hard to predict. Without knowing essential statistics regarding Revelstoke food consumption it is hard to make predictions on future consumption needs.

4.5 Input from local providers

Comparing Revelstoke with other BC communities that have food co-ops, we can observe a significant difference in the amount of local grower-producers. For the purpose of this study, a few food suppliers and producers from Revelstoke were contacted and interviewed on their

views of current market conditions. These interviews are the opinions of local business owners and need to be conscious that they do filter self-interest.

The questions discussed involved opinions on the business's success, any obstacles they encountered, the offer/demand situation, their view on eating local and current economic situation, the idea of a co-op, food waste occurred by the business and any alternative projects. The following is a summary of interviews conducted.

4.5.1 Terra Firma Farms (Routhier, C. personal communication. March 10, 2016)

In operation since 2010, *Terra Firma Farms* is Revelstoke's main local organic producer-provider of fresh produce for at least 6 months of the year. Owned and operated by Terra Park and Robert Jay, the farm plays a major role in our local food economy. They are passionate about growing and distributing their healthy and fresh produce to anyone interested in local, sustainably grown foods. They are making their products as accessible as possible, distributing produce at Revelstoke's Farmer's Market, *Le Marche Gourmet*, the health food store, delivering to local restaurants and caterers and providing community supported agriculture by providing a pre-ordered vegetable box for residents. Located on Mt Begbie road, their production rate has increased in the last few years and they will most likely be able to double their production with an expansion of their farm for 2016 to a 31 acre property on Highway 23 South.

A big obstacle that they face is the policy limitations when selling to big corporations like Coopers' Foods, which has a national food safety standard program designed to help implement effective food safety procedures within fresh produce operations. In order to sell to large grocers Terra Firma would have to put significant efforts, time and money towards obtaining the *GAP* program certification. Terra Firma might consider that option in the future but it is not a priority at this time. For the moment, their production output meets their sales income and they generate zero waste.

In terms of a potential food co-op, they felt like the business model limited their personal potential profit. They couldn't sell more than 25% of their products through a co-op due to the minimal profit they would generate from this model. They don't see a need in the community for an additional food store as they feel the current situation of supply and demand is fairly balanced and also wish to avoid unnecessary competition in the food sector.

4.5.2 Mountain Goodness Natural Foods (Routhier, C. personal communication. March 9, 2016)

This health food store can be reached leaving Highway 1, following directions to Revelstoke's downtown, on Victoria Street. It is a private business and has been established for just over 10 years. One of the owner's goals is to provide excellent service along with products that the community of Revelstoke is looking for. Customers can request specific products and often find satisfaction at this store as they aim to accommodate customer's needs by offering bulk

purchases at a discounted price. Dealing with customers individually creates strong owner-buyer relationship, which is a precious service in a small town.

This mainly organic food store offers a variety of organic products and currently 15% of her products are from BC. Products supplied are from local and regional producers and include teas, organic grass-fed beef, free-run chicken, eggs, organic turkey, organic milk, goat cheese and yogurt. Fresh produce is provided by Wild Flight Farms (located in Mara) year-round. The store is proud to generate zero waste and the employees work hard to ensure that everything coming in the store is sold before the best before date.

The owner had made several attempts to bring in products from the Kootenay's, but transportation costs and time issues have proven difficult to overcome.

4.5.3 Le Marche Gourmet (Routhier,C. personal communication. March 7, 2016)

Located on Victoria Street, Le Marché Gourmet is a speciality market owned by Olivier Dutil and Sonia Ratte since 2015. Preaching “quality” and “local”, they source fruits and vegetables as locally as possible. Offering premium products, the aisles are stocked with pasta, sauces, spices, vinegars and fresh produce, amongst other items. This enterprise quotes its’ success based on their ability to fulfill the needs of their customers. Le Marche is in addition to the small market which is operated in their café outlets. The owner states that direct contact with clientele as well as caring for their satisfaction helps accomplish this mission.

Their vision is to run a healthy business that provides high end, local and organic products as much as possible, while encouraging producers to strive towards sustainable practices.

Olivier states that he strives to provide high quality local products at affordable prices and feels that his store is drawing customers to the store to the point that other food providers are seeing a decline of sales in certain areas.

Le Marche Gourmet’s owner Olivier doesn’t see a need for a food co-op in Revelstoke as he feels his business is filling any gaps in local food selection that existed prior to his opening of the store. His previous experience with several co-ops in Quebec leads him to believe that the co-op model is very challenging to create.

These interviews are just a sample of local businesses perspective in the food production industry in Revelstoke and each express their own opinions and concerns related to the feasibility of a food co-op in Revelstoke. It should be noted that these businesses, and others in the area, are achieving some of the desired goals in which a creation of a food co-op would achieve. Their concerns regarding creating strong competition in their related market would likely have detrimental effects on their business.

4.5.4 Wild Flight Farm (Hemphill, M. personal communication. May 28, 2016)

Wild Flight Farm is located in Mara, BC and is operated by Hermann and Louise Bruns. Wild Flight Farm is an important vendor at the Revelstoke Farmer and Craft Market (RFCM), where Hermann not only sells the farms produce but also is the chair of the RFCM. Wild Flight Farm is also a vendor at the Winter Market and one of the only vendors that sells produce during this time.

Currently, the farm is not interested in producing more than their current production and identified that there may be a larger market out there but that they are limited by travel time, truck capacity and staff. When asked if a food co-op would be a good option for Revelstoke, they feel that a food co-op would decrease profits, as they would no longer be selling directly to the consumers. They stated that they are interested in shifting away from the farmers market, as they find it labour intensive and tiring, especially with the current policy that the farmer must be present at the market.

Hermann feels that are other options, such as online markets, but notes that these methods may come with their own challenges such as it may be difficult for retailers to source products. Hermann felt that anchor tenancy is worth exploring as if he, or someone else, were to manage the produce department of the food co-op then there would be enough of a demand to sell their products and would be able to plan farming accordingly. Currently he feels that Revelstoke food retailers cannot sell enough of his products during the summer to make it worthwhile.

It should be noted that the goals of a creation of a co-op is not to out compete local businesses already providing this service, but to increase the amount and access to food produced locally, hopefully, creating more producers to support businesses. An example can be the Kootenay Co-op, which saw both a growth in number of producers and the co-op itself.

4.6 Comparison with other Co-op's in Region

This research also looked at other communities in British Columbia where food co-ops were in operation. A summary of the researched co-ops is listed below.

Location	Store	Population	Grower- Producers
Williams Lake	Cariboo Growers (Co-op)	10, 800	40
Nelson	Kootenay Co-op	10,000	122
Lumby	Monashee Community Co-op	1, 700	25
Revelstoke	Future Co-op?	7,000 (12,000+ seasonally)	6

As outlined, both larger and smaller communities compared to Revelstoke operate a food co-op. Revelstoke's population has a seasonal fluctuation during the summer and winter months due to visitors and seasonal workers. Although the communities researched have similar population sizes, one of the main differences is the lack of community grower-producers located in Revelstoke.

Although interviewed producers and retailers seem to thrive with their supply and meet the demands, growth in the Kootenay Co-op suggest that the development of a local co-op will support the growth of new local producers and increase the amount of local producers and processors, reducing our reliance on imported goods.

Using the Kootenay Co-op as an example we can see how the growth of the co-op and the community contributed to the co-ops success. Developing slowly, the Kootenay co-op started in 1975 as a buying club and was run completely by volunteers. In 1981 it started a small retail operation in South Slocan and in 1986 moved to Baker Street in downtown nelson. During this time gross sales increased from \$150,000/year to \$273,500/year (Kootenay Co-op, 2016). Expansion and growth continued until 2012, when again the co-op moved to accommodate its growing business. Reaching \$10 million in sales, the co-op supports over 100 local businesses and continues to promote through their "True Local" brand. The Kootenay Co-op is continuing to grow with acquiring new members every year and expanding the co-op model into other areas, including car sharing, and housing.

5.0 Challenges

5.1 Financial

Financial issues have been identified as one of the biggest challenges faced by small businesses. For the grower and producer, start-up costs often out-weigh potential income. Finding financial options to help support local businesses is a high priority when creating a successful food co-op. If a co-op business is seen as a feasible option then the next step in the process would be to develop a business plan.

Many organizations offer assistance in developing business plans. The federal governments Canada's Business website (www.canadabusiness.ca/eng/page/2856) offers useful information to help develop business plan. Developing a financial plan will address costs and illustrate how to bring in revenue. The British Columbia Co-op Association has put together a guide on how to start a co-op titled Cultivating Co-op's (2013) and outlines in detail the steps needed to create and run a successful co-op.

Locally, Community Futures offers support and guidance for those wishing to develop local businesses and can assist in the creation of business plans for social enterprises. The Upper Columbia Co-operative Council (2014) has put together a great feasibility study for the Kootenay & Boundary Area and contains valuable information on assessments, markets, operation and recommendations and could be a valuable resource for further co-op development.

5.2 Land access

Access to land has been identified as a challenge, both for growers and producers, as well as space for a co-op. The FSS has identified that there is 153.4 hectares of vacant land within Revelstoke that has potential for food production (SPD & Ross, H. 2014). The FSS has made recommendations regarding land access and the creation of more local food production. With more growers and producers in Revelstoke food security would be improved and a food co-op could potentially be more successful.

5.2.1 Availability of agricultural land

With most of the agricultural lands lost due to the damming of the Columbia River, there are few spaces available that would support food production within Revelstoke. Agricultural land is defined as the land resource upon which agriculture takes place due to its ability to grow food products (ALC, 2014). The FSS has identified 43.7 hectares within city limits that could be used for food production (SPD & Ross, H. 2014). The availability of agricultural land can be identified through the Provincial Agricultural Land Commission website (www.alc.gov.bc.ca/alc/content/home) and can help determine potential agricultural areas within Revelstoke.

With restriction to land use within city limits, a number of smaller scale ideas have been developed to help increase local food production with available space. Small plot intensive farming (or SPIN) has been developed to maximize productivity and enhance profitability of sub-acre areas. The SPIN model uses a combination of backyards, city lands and boulevards to produce food within the city. SPIN farming has been identified as a great model for start-up farmers since it requires minimal investment in equipment and machinery, and utilizes land that does not need to be purchased to be used (Pedal to Petal, 2016). Land sharing is an agreement between land owners and local gardeners/producers to access privately owned land in order to grow food. This is an opportunity to maximize underutilized agricultural areas within Revelstoke and could build on educational opportunities for individuals to help build their own individual backyard gardens.

5.2.2. Permits

Land access seems limited by the City of Revelstoke by-laws. The FSS cites: “(There is) By-law and policy limitations with regards to a growing urban farming sector (and) limited existing regulatory support for food production throughout the city. No current lease agreements in place for food production on city-owned land.” (SPD and Ross, H. 2014, p.48). A recommendation by Ministry of Community, Sport and Cultural Development (CSDC) was to work with local government to amend local zoning bylaws and review and revise any regulations that can be potentially harmful to farming activities. They offer an address for consultation available through the Ministry of Agriculture (AGF) which can be used to pursue proactive partnerships and protect against land use conflicts. Additional information can be found at www.agf.gov.bc.ca/remgmt/publist/800series/840000-1.pdf

5.3 Education/Awareness

Education and support is available to those wishing to start up or develop a co-op. The BC Co-op Association (BCCA) is an organization that works on behalf of co-ops and credit unions in British Columbia. They offer guides on how to start a co-op in your community and offer free assessments for members or emerging co-ops on the co-op development path (BCCA, 2016). Locally, the Upper Columbia Cooperative Council (UCCC) is based in Nelson, BC and works closely with the BCCA. This council offers informational programs for the public about co-ops and co-op 101 sessions (UCCC, 2016). As part of the nature of a co-op a statement taken from the UCCC’s website states that co-ops are mandated to help develop other co-ops (UCCC, 2016).

In order to incorporate local food production education and support are needed. By establishing or joining an existing agriculture organization and connecting people interested in learning agriculture skills with growers and producers, it brings incentives and opportunities to develop a stronger farming industry. Currently, Revelstoke has limited opportunities that provide mentoring and support to those looking to get into agriculture or enhancing their products.

6.0 Alternatives

As stated previously, the goals of a food co-op is to provide the community with access to a steady local food supply and potentially increase food production and sustainability within the community. This method sees co-op members working together with local farmers to conduct business. Though this report may serve as a starting point or decision-making tool for those interested in starting a food co-op in Revelstoke, many personal factors come into play such as

finances, experiences, relationships and risk-tolerance. Here we present some alternative options that may help Revelstoke reach its goals of becoming more food secure and increasing the amount of local producers and suppliers.

6.1 Community supported agriculture (CSA)

Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) programs are a relatively recent phenomenon in the United States and Canada. The goal of this system is to allow residents to have direct access to high quality, fresh produce grown locally by regional farmers. CSA is a direct relationship between a local farm and its community and creates strong customer-producer relationships. Customers share the risks and benefits with the farmer by purchasing shares in advance of the growing season and receive dividends in the form of produce throughout the harvest. By pre-purchasing products prior to the growing season, customers are helping to support the local farmer through the initial growing season by assisting with start-up costs. CSA's are cooperative structures and Farmfolk, CityFolk (2016) offers an online directory of CSA programs. Locally Terra Firma Farms operates this service by offering the advance purchase of food boxes prior to the growing season. Those who subscribe are then supplied weekly with fresh produce from June-October.

6.2 Farmers Markets

Revelstoke has two Farmers Markets that operate year round. The Revelstoke Farmers and Craft Market operate weekly in the summer and the Revelstoke Winters Market operates bi-weekly throughout the winter. There, one can find fresh local fruits and vegetables, local honey, baking, preserves, fresh flowers, and locally made crafts. The Revelstoke Farmers and Crafter Market operates by a motto that items must be “made, baked or grown” in order to be available for sale at the market. An amendment to the local by-law has been added to allow imports during the first 8 weeks of the market. This amendment was added because so few locally grown crops are available during this time. This amendment is open to all vendors participating in the market.

The summer Revelstoke Farm and Craft Market is part of the BC Association of Farmer's Markets and on average has 20 vendors in the summer. This event is very popular with locals and tourist alike, and is continuing to grow and attract new vendors. Opportunities to expand are available and are observed through the lack of value added products, which are products that changes the physical state or form of a product into something else, such as milling wheat to flour. This sector has been identified as an area which could be increased and offer opportunities for local business to promote their products such as homemade chocolate, crackers, teas etc. Visitor counts could be conducted to observed trends and help determine growth and promotion of the Revelstoke Farmers Market. This information could be valuable to potential vendors and

can be used to promote Revelstoke Farmers Market to nearby businesses and at other Farmers Markets that may operate in the surrounding area.

6.3 Young Agrarians (2016)

The Young Agrarians (YA) are a group which aims to help link young people wishing to get in to the agriculture sector with training and education opportunities that provide skills to inspire the next generation of farmers. They create programs linking land seekers to land owners and create educational workshops for those interested in agriculture. Young Agrarians could be great support and influence on the future of our local agriculture. They are BC focused, with the hopes to develop regional partnerships with organizations and young agrarians across Canada and beyond. Brief communication with one of the members suggested interest in developing a YA program here in Revelstoke. The opportunity to link current local producers to those interested in agriculture could produce mentorship programs and facilitate the exchange of knowledge needed to develop an agricultural business and allow the growth of future Revelstoke producers.

6.4 Community Kitchens

Community Kitchen programs contribute to a food co-op idea by fostering a co-operative between local producers and community members with the goal to provide the community with local food and education. Community kitchens practice a co-operative environment where everyone participates in the recipe selection, shopping, cooking and clean up. As they are participant driven, each group decides how to operate their kitchen.

There are many examples of this kind of service throughout the province. Based in Kamloops, BC Interior Services (2016) has a well-organized program run by a Coordinator who teaches techniques for nutritious and affordable cooking skills. Community kitchens can be designed to fit needs and fill gaps. Nanaimo Community Kitchens Society (2016) also offers multiple programs hosted in various locations in the city, targeting all kinds of groups in the community.

Community Kitchens can also be a commercially licensed, well-equipped space available to commercial groups and individuals at a low cost. These spaces can be used for social and educational purposes, but also can be an “incubator kitchen” for small enterprises providing a space to help grow and promote small manufactures and start-up companies. These incubator kitchens help local businesses and entrepreneurs bring their passion to the community. Community kitchens could also be a way to add value market products for those wishing to participate in local farmers markets, but lack production space.

In the past, Revelstoke had a community kitchen through Community Connections Society but has changed to a “Food Skills for Families program”. Through the Revelstoke Food Bank, the “Nutrition and skill building workshops” is another program offered for people in need. During the winter, the Revelstoke United Church runs a program called “Soup ‘n’ smile” where once a week, everyone is welcome to go in and enjoy a hearty meal made by volunteers. There is potential for more of these types of programs in Revelstoke, providing community interest and access to locations.

6.5 Food Distribution

The concept of a food distribution Co-op was discovered during the research phase of this study. A food distribution co-op is looking to re-create the middle ground in the local food distribution system. These co-ops work with farmers, producers and retailers to help undertake crop planning, delivery and storage and help distribute local food to the community through buying groups.

An example from Quebec is Distribution Coop Alentour (2016), which is a distributor of natural and organic foods delivering to natural food outlets, specialized boutiques and supermarkets throughout Quebec. It specialises in the distribution of dry and frozen natural and organic foods. Even though the natural and specialised food boutiques represent the initial and priority markets of the Coop, it has responded to other markets to be able to service supermarket chains and the institutional sector for specific products.

Nanaimo has a distributor’s co-op called FoodRoots (2016). This not-for-profit co-op is a distributor of local naturally grown produce and foods processed in their region. FoodRoots is re-creating an important link in their food distribution system by having a local food storage and distribution facility bringing local food closer to the table. Working with farmers, processors and retail members, the co-op undertakes crop planning with farmers, provides delivery and storage facilities and works to maximize the local food production by distributing local foods to communities through their buying group. They are also working towards a Year Round Market in Victoria and providing produce for small scale food processors.

With Revelstoke being small and somewhat secluded, this system could be recreated here with the collaboration of regional growers/suppliers from the Shuswap, Okanagan and Kootenay’s. This could be a great solution for consistently providing towns in these areas with local products. With a food distribution co-op, the offer vs the demand could be met in more efficient and sustainable ways.

6.6 Online Farmers Market

An online market which creates a platform where various producers can list weekly offerings such as Farmers Market Online (2016) could be a way to reach farmers outside of the weekly or bi-weekly schedules of local farmers markets and could result in a more accessible way to obtain local farmer's products and meet the needs of people with busy agendas. This additional resource could offer a positive difference in the health of our community by creating awareness of wholesome and healthy alternatives as opposed to mainstream processed foods. It could build an extra support to our local farmers and local producers and would create another environment for farmers to sell to customers, and customers to buy from the farmers.

6.7 Buying Clubs

Buying clubs are a group of individuals or families who get together and buy directly from wholesalers. Buying clubs offer wholesale prices by saving money through buying in bulk. It is a good opportunity for groups to access products that may not be available through farming and can be flexible depending on the group's needs. There are many different buying club models as outlined on the website startabuyingclub.com (2016). These include owner run, member only, worker-co-op, and farm owned. Through these groups members can get products through national, local or direct from farm producers. Each has their own pros and cons including prices, availability of products, delivery methods and opportunity to build relationships and is dependent of the group's needs. Owner run buying clubs can be operated as a business and can have markup costs which can help benefit the owner. UBC sprouts and Kaslo Food Hub Bulk Buying Club are examples of buying clubs in BC.

7.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

Upon conclusion of this feasibility study it appears that there is not a sufficient market opportunity for a co-op, as there are too few producers in the area. Since 2013, other food businesses emerged in the community and that has had a substantial impact on our local food situation, as well as, with larger food suppliers (Save On Foods) bringing in more BC products to the store. With the opening of smaller specialty food stores, access to local products has improved, even though local food production has yet to increase. It has been addressed by local businesses that the creation of a food co-op would create competition and could potentially affect their business sales. Additionally, there is little market incentive for new businesses wishing to develop in this field, as stated by other local businesses, that supply and demand for products are currently being met.

Under these circumstances, the city is not as much in a need for such a service as it was a few years ago. Our few farmers and small producers do not feel challenged by the lack of distribution or processing infrastructure. They feel that they don't need wider access to retail, institutional or commercial foodservice markets. Although the interest for local and regional food continues to rise in Revelstoke, most of our current food suppliers are making great efforts to fulfill that demand.

This study identified a gap in producers and suppliers. Local food is somewhat accessible through various ways through grocery stores, specialty food stores, farmer's markets and food box systems. Expanding our "local" food suppliers into our neighbouring areas and creating partnerships with these businesses will increase the access to local food providers. With few growers in the area it is hard to boost the supply of local food and the creation of new growers and producers should be a focus before a food co-op could be beneficial.

A recommendation from the FSS (SPD & Ross, H. 2014) was to develop a feasibility study to attract new farming businesses to Revelstoke with a specific focus on expanding animal husbandry. Currently there are no sources of local duck, lamb, pork, goat, or dairy. Additional mentorship and educational support for new food production businesses will be beneficial for the community and boosting the production of local food sources.

Overall, it appears that more recommendations regarding the creation of local food have been identified and should be addressed for a food co-op in Revelstoke to be successful. While researching for this study, it seems that creating new growers through training and mentorship programs is needed. Financial constraints and access to land have been identified as large challenges facing new farmers and partnerships between financial sectors and businesses addressing agriculture needs should be developed in order to support new agricultural businesses.

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