

Strait Talk, September, 2009

Have you ever noticed trends in food fashion? Growing up in Montreal I never saw, much less tasted, an avocado until university! They were just not available. Now we think nothing of eating exotic foods imported from around the world, foods unknown to our parents! But as we pay greater attention to our carbon footprint, food fashion has turned to local eating. This is a trend I feel really good about. For me, local food tastes better, supports our local economy, uses less fossil fuel and is fun. Farmers' markets are springing up everywhere, more people are trying out growing their own food, restaurants are creating innovative menus using local ingredients and people are paying more attention to what they eat.

A number of Sunshine Coast initiatives are underway to promote local agriculture and address the issue of food security. The Food Security Network states: food security is not just a poverty issue; it is a much larger issue involving the whole food system and affecting all of us in some way. Community food security exists when all citizens obtain a safe, personally acceptable, nutritious diet through a sustainable food system that maximizes healthy choices, community self-reliance and equal access for everyone.

Earlier this year, the SCRD, partnering with other local governments, established an Agricultural Advisory Committee (AAC.) The volunteers on the AAC share a wide range of skills and knowledge about growing food. Their task is broad, from advising local government on issues around the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR) including development applications, to raising awareness of agricultural issues within the community, to identifying ways that local governments can nurture and support agriculture.

There are a number of non-profit groups working in the area of food security. We now have 4 weekly farmers' markets in Gibsons, Sechelt, Roberts Creek and Pender Harbour. (www.coastfoodaction.org/sunshine_coast). The Fruit Tree Project is dedicated to utilizing local fruit that would otherwise be wasted. This summer over 1000lbs of fruit have been given to the Food Bank, all donated by tree owners and picked by volunteers! (fruittree@live.ca) Seedy Saturday is an annual Spring-time event put on by One Straw, the umbrella group that knits all the Sunshine Coast food security initiatives together. At Seedy Saturday, growers exchange seeds and information and help raise awareness of local sustainable food production. (www.onestraw.ca)

The local food growing community is expanding. In addition, we have restaurants supplied by their own gardens, a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) Project in Gibsons, several community garden locations, and folks teaching permaculture, edible landscaping, and food processing.

This is just a taste of what is happening! Support local growers by shopping at the farmers' markets, encourage your favourite grocery store to carry local produce and try growing a few veggies next summer.

Donna Shugar
donna_shugar@hotmail.com

The opinions expressed in this column are the author's and do not necessarily reflect those of all members of the SCRD Board.