



Report: 2011 BC Association of Farmers' Market Annual Conference

Date: March 22, 2011

From: Jen Comer, Farmers' Market Manager

On March 11-13th the BC Association of Farmers' Markets held their annual conference and AGM in Richmond B.C., bringing together hundreds of people involved in local food. It was an opportunity to celebrate, to build relationships, and to learn from each other about enhancing our own community's local food security. Thanks to support from the Chamber of Commerce, RDCK and COTR, the Creston Valley Farmers' Market Manager, Jen Comer, and long-time Farmers' Market vendor Jean Syroteuk represented our community at the conference.

Farmers' Markets are quickly becoming a backbone of BC communities. They foster sustainable local economic development through small-scale business opportunities, which is of paramount importance in towns with few skilled labour opportunities and high unemployment rates. Agri-tourism is one of the fastest growing sectors in the tourism industry, and vacationers are specifically targeting local Farmers' Markets as key places to visit on their holidays. Farmers' Markets feed our communities through providing affordable, nutritious, and delicious ingredients for meals. They engage all members of our community as either producers or consumers and as social gathering places with "edu-tainment."

Local governments all around B.C. are actively including Farmers' Markets into their community's strategic priorities, social planning, and economic development strategies. Many farmers' markets have been invited to participate in their communities Official Community Planning, among other visioning and planning sessions. The cities of Vancouver, Prince George, Kelowna, and the regional district of the Comox Valley are establishing permanent homes for their farmers' markets. Some communities are taking it to the next step by establishing 'Food Hubs' which are places for producers to test and develop new products in an approved commercial facility. Vancouver's Food Hub and Farmers' Market is central to the city's green economic development strategy.

The cities of Fort St. James, Richmond and New Westminster have run successful “Nutritional Coupon” programs, whereby low-income mothers learn to collectively cook meals from scratch using ingredients found at the local farmers’ markets. These individuals are then provided with weekly farmers’ market gift certificates to purchase fresh produce for home cooking. The redemption rate for these programs is often above 90%, truly making an impact on low-income families' livelihoods. Additionally they build an individual’s confidence, develop math and other life skills, learn how to cook on a budget, and develop lasting relationships with other participants and instructors.

These projects are similar to what the Creston campus of the College of the Rockies is hoping to develop with their “Agricultural Innovation and Marketing Hub.” The goal for this initiative is to build a commercial community kitchen, a testing laboratory, and permanent home for the Farmers’ Market. As outlined by project coordinators from other cities, the keys to success for these projects include: collaborative partnerships between stakeholders (non-profits, institutions, governments, and the public), developing a shared vision, and finding sustainable funding sources.

The Creston Valley is poised to become one of the most vibrant, diverse and important food markets in the Kootenays and British Columbia. Help us make it happen!

The Creston Valley Farmers’ Market starts Saturday, May 7th at Millennium Park. The Food Action Coalition will be cooking up a hot local breakfast, and vendors will be selling everything from early produce, meat, bedding plants, baking, and artisanal products!

2011 Market Dates & Locations

May – September	Saturday 8am – Noon	Millennium Park
July – September	Wednesday 3:30 – 6:30	Spirit Square (11 th Ave & Canyon St)
October – December	Saturday 10am – 2pm	Morris Flowers & Garden Centre