

# **Agricultural update: produce production on Salt Spring Island in 2016**



**Salt Spring Island Agricultural Alliance  
August 2018**

## **Acknowledgements**

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Many thanks to the farmers who took the time to complete the questionnaire and provide important feed back on the future of farming on Salt Spring Island.

The study/ interview team were: Tony Beck, Daria Zovi, Kaleigh Barton, Margie Buchanan-Smith, Jan Steinman, Mary Richardson, and Ellie Langford Parks. The study team was directed by a Steering Committee made up of Anne Macey, Jan Steinman and Tony Beck. Special thanks go to Jan Steinman for maintaining the study database.

## **About the Salt Spring Agricultural Alliance**

The Salt Spring Agricultural Alliance is an independent, non-profit society established in 2008 as one of the recommendations of the Salt Spring Island Area Farm Plan, to carry out its implementation. We also advocate for local agricultural interests to all levels of government, and work to secure funding to support agricultural initiatives on Salt Spring Island.

For more details go to: <http://plantofarm.org>

# **Agricultural update: produce production on Salt Spring Island in 2016**

## **Executive summary**

Across North America, the consequences of producing poor quality food and shipping it long distances are increasingly evident – substantial obesity rates, environmental destruction, and loss of biodiversity. At the same time we know very little about how much food we produce and eat locally and regionally. This is why the Salt Spring Island Agricultural Alliance decided to commission a follow up study to the studies carried out in 2005 and 2010 about agricultural practices and the quantity of local produce on Salt Spring.

The original intention of the study was to continue to track produce production on Salt Spring in the same way as the 2005 and 2010 studies. However because of conflicting data, in particular findings from the 2017 BC Ministry of Agriculture Land Use Inventory and the 2016 Agriculture Census, the study has instead mainly focused on broader issues of importance to the future of agriculture on Salt Spring, while making comparisons to non-quantitative data between 2010 and 2016. Comments on methodology in the current report should not be considered as a critique of the two earlier studies of 2005 and 2010.

Out of a total of 62 potential commercial produce farmers identified, 30 responded to a survey, with the response skewed towards smaller farms. Those farms reporting growing 90,323 kgs of produce on a little under 43 acres. The highest volume crops accounted for 78 per cent of production (sweet corn, 38 per cent; potatoes, 26 per cent; and carrots, 14 per cent). Small and large acreages both had examples of high and low yields and there was no visible trend between different sizes of farm. Further surveys would be necessary to validate these figures.

Sixty per cent of respondents said they had increased production in the last five years. Farmers reported a total of 90 different crops grown; however as noted a small number of crops may predominate.

Several farmers noted lack of profitability in relation to time spent on farming, an issue which troubled some farms which were struggling to make ends meet. Respondents also noted that off farm income and value-added remain key to ensuring farms continue working. There is a strong commonality in the farming methods and they are generally consistent with small-scale, organic and sustainable agriculture, with limited use of chemical pesticides, herbicides or fertilizers. Sixty seven per cent of farms used animal manures, and most of these are generated on the farm. Salt Spring farms wasted very little of produce grown, which suggests effective growing practices. A number of farmers commented that farming on Salt Spring is very labour intensive, and finding agricultural labour can be challenging. Salt Spring suffers from a significant lack of agricultural worker rental accommodation, and a general lack of low cost housing.

Eighty per cent of farms were selling only on Salt Spring using a variety of venues. Roadside stands remain a popular point of sale, as in 2009. Most sales are determined by individual contacts, e.g. between farmers and supermarkets, and there does not appear to be any overall coordination of sales, e.g. to grocery stores. Almost without exception respondents were either satisfied or very satisfied with the market opportunities on-island or in nearby retail outlets such as in Victoria. Farm stands were a particularly effective way of marketing produce in a majority of cases.

The 2017 Salt Spring Foundation Vital Signs survey asked participants to respond to the following question: “I support local farmers by purchasing locally produced food.” Of the 504 respondents, 51 per cent indicated frequently, 40 per cent indicated sometimes, and 8 per cent rarely, with 0.6 per cent indicating never. The same survey estimated significant sums spent by Salt Springers on local produce. These responses suggest that should local produce yield increase there is a local market.

Managing the demographic transition from older farmers to a new generation of farmers is a major challenge. On Salt Spring we have seen younger people enter farming, and one of our challenges is to support these farmers given high land prices and food prices that do not support or encourage small-scale farming.

Looking to the future, respondents emphasized the importance of The Root, the educational, storage and processing facility currently being developed on Salt Spring under the leadership of the SSI Farmland Trust. They also noted the importance of public education about good local food.

### **Potential next steps**

The Agricultural Alliance will continue to track changes in agriculture to support local farms. The focus on local produce may need to be expanded to conceptualise agriculture on Salt Spring within the regional context. We should think beyond how much we are producing locally to considering the regional context and Salt Spring’s place within this.

Linking producers to markets may be a sensible increased area of work for the Agricultural Alliance to support the goal of increased local food production.

Raising awareness among consumers about the importance of supporting local food production (even if higher cost than off-island produce), which will in turn support the local economy, is another potential area of focus.

Supporting younger farmers, both existing and potential, could be another important focus, given the average age of farmers on island. This may mean identifying and investing in more community farming as well as supporting affordable housing initiatives.

The Agricultural Alliance will identify produce-related information not included in the current report and indicate which of these items should have priority for future work.

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## **1. Introduction**

Across North America, the consequences of producing poor quality food and shipping it long distances are increasingly evident – substantial obesity rates (25% in Canada in 2011), environmental destruction, and loss of biodiversity.<sup>1</sup> Food production – specifically large-scale factory farming of livestock and produce – is a significant contributor to greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions – possibly as much as 33 per cent of annual global anthropogenic GHG emissions is attributable to agriculture<sup>2</sup>. On Salt Spring indirect emissions from imported food are estimated to make up about 40 per cent of our community’s emissions inventory.<sup>3</sup> Recent analysis indicates that agri-food alone, within a couple of decades, will emit greenhouse gases equivalent to the entire remaining carbon budget allowable under the UN Paris Climate Change Agreement.<sup>4</sup>

In this context promoting local and regional healthy and organic food is crucial not only for our health, our local environment, but also for our common future.

At the same time we know very little about how much food we produce and eat locally and regionally. A 2016 report by Kwantlen Polytechnic University<sup>5</sup> found that: “in Southwest BC we spend an estimated \$8.6 billion on food annually, but much of this will not stay in the local economy because it is spent on imported food or in non-local food system businesses.... Despite a growing interest in food system localization, there remains little information about how or to what degree it can realistically address our food system sustainability concerns.” The report goes on: “No data are available on how much of the food produced in Southwest BC is consumed within the bioregion and how much is exported.”

This is why the Salt Spring Island Agricultural Alliance decided to commission a follow up study to the studies carried out in 2005 and 2010 which analysed the quantity of local produce availability relative to global food availability in the community. These earlier studies are the first original data collection on local food available for local purchase in the region/province.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For a summary, see Beck, T. (2018): “Bringing it all back home: disruptive supply chains.” In Bromwich, B. et al (eds.) *Oxford University Press Handbook on Food, Society and Water*. Oxford: OUP.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.nature.com/news/one-third-of-our-greenhouse-gas-emissions-come-from-agriculture-1.11708>

<sup>3</sup> Transition Salt Spring (2011) “Climate Action Plan. Version 1”. <https://climateactionsaltspring.org/the-climate-action-plan/>

<sup>4</sup> Benton, T. (2016) “Review Article, The many faces of food security.” *International Affairs*, 92 (6) 1505-15.

<sup>5</sup> KPU (2016) *The Future of Our Food System. Summary of the Southwest BC Bioregion Food System Design Project*. Kwantlen Polytechnic University.

<sup>6</sup> Reichert, P. (2010) Salt Spring Island Produce Study. Mimeo; Reichert, P. (2005) Salt Spring Island Local Produce Study: Final Report. Mimeo.

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We also need to think about what “local” means when we talk about the importance of local food. Food security writers have been increasingly focussing on sustainable regional food systems. Clancy and Ruhf (2010)<sup>7</sup> define a regional food system as one: “in which as much food as possible to meet the population’s food needs is produced, processed, distributed, and purchased at multiple levels and scales within the region, resulting in maximum resilience, minimum importation, and significant economic and social return to all stakeholders in the region. This is known as “self-reliance”—as opposed to “self-sufficiency” wherein everything eaten is supplied within the target area.”

In 2018-2019 the Salt Spring Agricultural Alliance intends to update the Area Farm Plan, which has guided coordinated agricultural development on Salt Spring since 2008.<sup>8</sup> Updating the farm plan needs to take into account the findings of this study concerning the challenges of farming on Salt Spring, as well as upcoming opportunities.

Current farming on Salt Spring should be contextualized in the history of agriculture on the island. Prior to colonization, the region, including Salt Spring was the traditional territory of a number of First Nations, and provided abundant indigenous food through many generations.<sup>9</sup> First Nations activities on Salt Spring date back thousands of years. Foods were harvested, gathered and preserved in quantities that sustained communities and met their spiritual, cultural and social requirements.<sup>10</sup>

From its origins in the 1860s settler farming on Salt Spring appears to have always been a somewhat precarious occupation, and since settlers farming began Salt Spring may never have been self-sufficient in food. Stratton notes that the first farmers needed to import flour, sugar, tea, salt and oatmeal from Victoria. From 1885 to 1914 Salt Spring added commercial to subsistence farming with a focus on fruit and potatoes. In 1899 Mr. S. Conery took 19 tons of potatoes for sale from his two and three-quarter acres, and in the 1890’s some 20,000 boxes of apples (at 40 lbs. a box) were exported for sale annually. By the 1920’s dairy replaced fruit as the island’s main agricultural activity with peak output in 1928 amounting to 140,000 lbs. of butter. By 1950 the creamery had closed and many of the apple orchards went uncultivated.<sup>11</sup>

The recent renaissance in farming on Salt Spring comes from a low point in the 1960’s. Now, as previously, farming is mixed with other activities and many farms need an off-farm income to meet

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<sup>7</sup> Clancy, K. and K. Ruhf (2010) “Is Local Enough? Some Arguments for Regional Food Systems.” *Choices* 25 (1). For further details see Beck (2018) op cit.

<sup>8</sup> <http://plantofarm.org/document-archive/>

<sup>9</sup> See for example [www.fnha.ca/documents/traditional\\_food\\_fact\\_sheets.pdf](http://www.fnha.ca/documents/traditional_food_fact_sheets.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> BC Ministry of Agriculture (2018) *Agricultural Land Use Inventory, Salt Spring Island, Summer 2017*. (Reference No.800.510-69.2017)

<sup>11</sup> Morton, S. (1991) “History of Agriculture on Salt Spring. Farms, Farmers and Farming 1859-1991”. Mimeo.

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their income needs. An account of farming in the early settler days notes: “families used their Land... as a cheap, secure and flexible foundation for a variety of economic endeavours - self-provisioning activities in the rich coastal environment, intermittent waged work on and off the island, and occasional sales of farm produce - better suited to raising a family than accumulating capital.”<sup>12</sup> Another author notes: “Farming on Salt Spring, as we look back, seems to have been farming the hard way. For most island families, farming was too small-scale to really be profitable. It demanded almost endless hard work for meager, precarious financial rewards.”<sup>13</sup>

## **2. About the study**

The original intention of the study was to continue to track produce production on Salt Spring using the methodology of the 2005 and 2010 studies. However because of methodological issues (see below) the study has instead mainly focused on broader issues of importance to the future of agriculture on Salt Spring, while making comparisons to other non-quantitative data between 2010 and 2016. Comments on methodology in the current report should not be considered as a critique of the two earlier studies of 2005 and 2010.

The study was sponsored by the Salt Spring Island Agricultural Alliance. The survey for the study was conducted between February and May 2017.

### **Objectives of the study**

- To document farming methods, including:
  - crop yields;
  - amount of land in produce production;
  - types and sources of inputs;
  - sale destinations;
  - views of farmers on farming conditions and the future of farming
  
- To support updating of the Salt Spring Island Area Farm Plan

### **Definition of Produce**

For the purposes of this study, “produce” is defined as all vegetables, fruits, nuts, pulses and other edible crops sold for human food such as mushrooms, human food grains, culinary herbs and culinary flowers. “Commercially-grown” produce is produce that was



<sup>12</sup> Sandwell, R. (1997) “Reading the Land: Rural Discourse and the Practice of Settlement, Salt Spring Island, British Columbia, 1859-1891”. PhD Thesis, p. 245.

<sup>13</sup> Kahn, C. (1998) *Salt Spring. The Story of an Island*. Harbour Publishing.



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grown by market gardeners mainly for sale.

### **Study Methods**

The study gathered original data from 30 Salt Spring farmers about agricultural practices and produce production in 2016.

The information was collected using a survey based on the previous study in 2010.<sup>14</sup> Interviews were conducted by telephone or in person from February to May 2017, or through respondents' self-completion. The survey was pre-tested on two farms before completion and an induction training was carried out with all interviewers.

The survey covered a range of topics including the area and weight of each type of produce harvested, farming practices, resource inputs including fuel and soil supplements, and information on the point of sale. It also included several qualitative questions related to farming on Salt Spring and the potential future role of the Agricultural Alliance. The study questionnaire is included as Annex 1.

The aim was to survey all the commercial produce farmers on Salt Spring. Repeated efforts were made to contact farmers, by email, by phone and at the market. We identified a total list of 84 potential commercial producer growers. Upon contacting the farms 66 responded. Twenty two of these were not growing commercially in 2016, 14 farms which were growing produce declined to be interviewed, and 18 farms did not respond.

It is estimated that the sample of 30 farms represents 48 per cent of the total number of commercial produce farmers, although the commercial nature of the 18 non-responding farms is not known in all cases. While 30 farms responded to the survey, four farms making up 5.6 acres did not include disaggregated data on crop production, meaning the data of yield below is based on 26 farms.

Two contracted employees and four volunteers conducted the surveys. All interviews were confidential and respondents were informed at the start of the interview that their responses would be aggregated with others and no individual farm data would be released. The data-base was created and managed by Jan Steinman. The report was compiled by Ellie Langford Parks (consultant) and Tony Beck (SSI Agricultural Alliance Board Member).

### **Limitations of survey methodology**

The interviewers found that not all farmers maintain systematic farm records, and sometimes provided contradictory information about crop yields. The method used – recall – may not be the most effective approach for assessing yields, in particular because Salt Spring farmers tend to grow a wide range of individual crops, making estimating their weight for a full growing season challenging.

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<sup>14</sup> Reichert (2010) op cit.

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### **Limitations related to survey response and data discrepancies**

While the survey included 48 per cent of commercial produce farmers, among those farms that did not respond are the larger Salt Spring farms, meaning that the survey is skewed towards smaller farms.

Normally a 48 per cent sample is acceptable for extrapolation to a total population. However, data from the Agricultural Land Use study carried out by the B.C. Ministry of Agriculture in 2017<sup>15</sup>, as well as from the 2016 Agricultural Censuses, threw up some surprises.

- According to the Agricultural Census, in 2016 gross farm receipts were \$13.8 million, an increase from the \$3.8 million in 2011 (and similar figures in 2006 and 2001). We do not have an explanation for this increase as yet.
- Four farms reported annual gross earning of over \$250,000, with one farm reporting sales in excess of \$2,000,000.<sup>16</sup>
- According the BC Ministry of Agriculture Land Use Inventory there were 94 acres under vegetable cultivation, up from 55 acres in the 2010 produce study. There is unlikely to have been an increase of 40 acres in vegetable cultivation between 2010 and 2016.
- In addition, yield per acre for vegetables was 1367 kg in the 2010 produce study, while for this study it was 3642 kg per acre. Yields per acre for fruit were much closer – 1826 kg in 2010 and 1464 kg in 2016.

Given these disparate figures no attempts were made to compare 2009 and 2016 data, further investigation is required to capture actual agricultural production on Salt Spring. So in this report data on yields should be taken as indicative only, and we have focused less on the amount of agricultural produce, which may or may not be representative, and more on areas of use to the Agricultural Alliance and agricultural community for updating the Area Farm Plan.

## **3. Findings on agricultural practices and commercial produce production**

### **3.1 Amount of Commercial Produce Production in 2016**

The total amount of produce grown in 2016 by commercial produce farmers who participated in the survey was 90,323 kg. Table 1 shows how much of this total weight is vegetables, fruit and other produce. Annex 1 sets out which crops are included in which category. Table 1 also shows that this produce was grown on just over 42.7 acres. Vegetables averaged 3,642 kg per cultivated acre, and fruit 1,494 kg per acre.

From aerial photographs of known commercial farms we know that there are at least another 53,655 square metres of mixed vegetables not reported, and additional acreage of known

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<sup>15</sup> BC Ministry of Agriculture (2017).

<sup>16</sup> Personal communication, BC Ministry of Agriculture.

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commercial orchards of 62,100 square metres. So the figures in Table 1 should be taken as indicative only.

**Table 1: Amount of produce grown by 26 Salt Spring commercial growers, in 2016 (figures rounded)**

Crop type	Acres	Kilograms
Vegetables	16.4	59,740
Fruits	19.6	28,704
Grains	5	917
Herbs	1.44	552
Pulses	0.27	400
Nuts	0.005	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>42.71</b>	<b>90,323</b>

The highest volume crops accounted for 78 per cent of production (sweet corn, 38 per cent; potatoes 26 per cent; and carrots, 14 per cent). The survey highlighted that farmers may be concentrating on a few crops, in addition to the three main crops, in particular tomatoes, beets, cabbage, garlic, zucchini and pumpkins. There may be niches that are not being met and gaps in the market, for example crops such asparagus and fennel-bulbs, or crops where there is potential for value added. Low nut production is of interest as SSI was at one time known for its nut trees. Small and large acreages both had high and low yield and there was no visible trend between different sizes of farm. Further surveying would be necessary to validate the comments above and the findings in Table 1.

Sixty per cent of respondents said they had increased production in the last five years, as opposed to 74 per cent survey participants in 2010. Where there had been an increase in production most respondents noted that this was because they had increased land under production or were using improved techniques. Respondents also noted that 2016 was a very good year for fruit production because of seasonal conditions.

The 2016 survey found that the range of crops grown as was relatively large,



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as was the case in 2004 and 2009, with most farms growing many different crops. Farmers reported a total of 90 different crops grown; however as noted a small number of crops may predominate. Annex 2 provides a complete list of crops grown in 2016.

We did not ask questions in the survey about farm income or increases/decreases in profit over time, but several farmers in response to the open ended questions in the survey noted lack of profitability in relation to time spent on farming, as issue which troubled some farms which were struggling to make ends meet. Respondents also noted that off farm income remains key to ensuring farms continue, which according to the 2016 Agricultural Census was also true for all of B.C. According to the 2016 Agricultural Census 64 per cent of Salt Spring farms reported gross farm receipts of less than \$10,000, and per farm average annual net income was approximately \$9, 554. This is slightly higher than the Provincial average (although for 2013) of \$7,994.<sup>17</sup> The BC Ministry of Agriculture Agricultural Land Use Inventory (ALUI) noted that: “While a few farms are doing exceptionally well [see Section 2 below on this], profitability is a concern for the majority of the farms.”<sup>18</sup> At the same time Salt Spring suffers from a significant lack of agricultural worker rental accommodation, and a general lack of low cost housing. Making a profit in farming particularly for small farms depends partly on there being a niche market, for example sales to off-islanders during the summer season in particular at the Saturday market.

### **3.2 Other produce**

Table 2 illustrates other produce; most farms use their own starts, and two-thirds save seeds for their own use. Eggs are the most common other form of produce. There may be an added value niche related to flowers, particularly in the summer months when the Salt Spring Saturday market is active.

**Table 2: Other produce**

Crop	Farms	Percent
Dairy	1	3.3
Eggs	14	46.7
Flowers, Edible	2	6.7
Honey	1	3.3
Meat animals	3	10.0
Medicinal herbs	1	3.3
Seeds, for own use	20	66.7
Seeds, for sale	4	13.3
Starts, for own use	22	73.3

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/tables-tableaux/sum-som/l01/cst01/agri119k-eng.htm>

<sup>18</sup> BC Ministry of Agriculture (2018) *Agricultural Land Use Inventory, Salt Spring Island, Summer 2017*. (Reference No.800.510-69.2017), p. 5.

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Starts, for sale	7	23.3
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### 3.3 Farming methods

Table 3 shows that, as in previous surveys, there is a strong commonality in the farming methods and they are generally consistent with small-scale, organic and sustainable agriculture, with limited use of chemical pesticides, herbicides or fertilizers. For example, farmers tended to use a mix of field row and bed planting, and use of self made compost and mulches were common practice. Most of the farm work was done using hand tools; only a small number of the farms use tractors. In addition Salt Spring farms wasted very little of produce grown, less than 5 per cent on average, which suggests effective growing practices.

A number of farmers commented that farming on Salt Spring is very labour intensive, and finding agricultural labour can be challenging. It involves long laborious hours in the fields; however the focus on sustainable methods suggests that for most farmers farming is a labour of love.

A question for the future of farming on Salt Spring is the sustainability of this largely non-mechanized, small-scale farming in the context of high local land prices, globalization of the food system, and high prices for inputs such as organic manure.

**Table 3: Farming methods**

Farming methods	Farms	Per Cent
Animal power	1	3.3
Bed	19	63.3
Biodynamic	2	6.7
Certified organic	8	26.7
Cold frame/tunnel	11	36.7
Composting	25	83.3
Field row	18	60.0
Heated greenhouse	3	10.0
Heated tables in unheated greenhouse	3	10.0
Integrated pest management	6	20.0
Intensive: Bio or French	2	6.7
Intercropping	9	30.0
Mostly hand labour	28	93.3
No till	6	20.0
Permaculture	7	23.3
Seed saving	12	40.0
Unheated greenhouse	20	66.7
Use chemical fertilizers	2	6.7
Use large hand tools	23	76.7
Use pesticides or	2	6.7

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herbicides		
Use small hand tools	26	86.7

### 3.4 Resource Inputs

In addition to the questions that the survey asked about farming methods, it also asked specifically about resource inputs. The survey findings show that most of the inputs are soil builders and amendments. Given that most of the farms are operating with hand labour and hand tools rather than machines, the direct use of fuels and other energy inputs is very limited.

- Most of the farms indicated that they use animal manures (67 per cent), and most of these are generated on the farm.
- A common amendment was minerals such as lime and dolomite which was used on 63 per cent of farms.



### 3.5 Point of Sale

The survey asked the farmers about where they are marketing their produce. Table 4 shows the most common venues they are using. The majority (80 per cent) are selling only on Salt Spring using a variety of venues. Roadside stands remain a popular point of sale as in 2010. Most sales are determined by individual contacts, e.g. between farmers and supermarkets, and there does not appear to be any overall coordination of sales, e.g. to grocery stores.

**Table 4: Point of sale**

Venue	Farms	Per cent
caterers on SSI	3	10.0
Country Grocer SSI	8	26.7
CSA box program	9	30.0
direct farm marketing	12	40.0
NatureWorks	15	50.0
Other off-island	6	20.0
Other on-island	10	33.3
own roadside stand	17	56.7
restaurants on SSI	9	30.0
Saturday Market	12	40.0
Thrifty's SSI	5	16.7
Tuesday Market	12	40.0

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Almost without exception respondents were either satisfied or very satisfied with the market opportunities on-island or in nearby retail outlets such as in Victoria. Farm stands were a particularly effective way of marketing produce in a majority of cases. When farmers decided not to use the Tuesday or Saturday Farmers' Markets this was either because of time constraints, because their yields were too small, they had other work commitments, or because they were already successfully selling produce through other means.

The 2017 Salt Spring Foundation Vital Signs survey<sup>19</sup> asked participants to respond to the following question: "I support local farmers by purchasing locally produced food." Of the 504 respondents, 51 per cent indicated frequently, 40 per cent indicated sometimes, and 8 per cent rarely, with 0.6 per cent indicating never.

The survey also asked: "Please estimate how much money you spend on locally produced food each month on average." 437 people responded as follows:

\$25 and under .....	63
\$26- \$50 .....	91
\$51-\$100.....	81
\$100-\$200.....	67
\$200 -\$300.....	19
\$300 and up.....	23

The questions include all locally produced food, not only produce, yet these answers are a positive sign that Salt Spring Islanders are purchasing locally produced food, and that should local produce yield increase there is a local market. However the uncoordinated nature of produce sales may mean that additional sales would be dependent on individual contacts. A question for updating the Area Farm Plan is whether farmers and grocery stores want a more coordinated market in place.

### **3.6 Demographics**

The survey asked participants how many family members are working on the farm and how many farm workers they hire or volunteers they bring in, including through WorldWide Opportunities on Organic Farms (Wwoofers).

- 100% of the farms are operated by at least one member of the family.
- The average age of farm owners was 52 and of family members working on the farm 57. There were fewer owners and family members in the 35-54 age groups, with the majority being either below 35 or over 55. Many farms had young family members helping out. So Salt Spring follows the Canadian pattern, with the average age of Canadian farmers being 55.
- Five farms reported a total of 37 volunteers working on their farms.
- Four farms reported a total of eight paid employees.

We know that B.C. farming is in transition. While the average age of farmers across Canada is 55, B.C. demonstrates some important differences to the rest of the country. B.C. has the largest

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<sup>19</sup> <http://ssifoundation.ca/foundation-initiatives/vital-signs/>

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proportion of small farms, nearly 42 per cent, and almost half of B.C.'s small farms sell directly to the public. B.C. also has the highest proportion of female farmers – 37 per cent. Young farmers now comprise 6.9 per cent of total farmers, up from 5.4 per cent in 2011. One report notes: “A major retirement of older generation farmers is already underway. Without policies, training and support to transition new farmers onto the land, agricultural lands will be lost and the chance for local food security—our ability to produce and control our own food supply—will go with them.”<sup>20</sup> On Salt Spring we have also seen younger people enter farming, and one of our challenges is to support these farmers given high land prices and food prices that do not support or encourage small-scale farming.

### **3.7 Farmers’ views on the role of the Salt Spring Island Agricultural Alliance**

Twenty-three respondents answered the survey question: “Are there areas the Agricultural Alliance should be working on to support the farming community?” This question was intended to feed into a consideration of the future of agriculture on Salt Spring. This was an open-ended question so respondents provided ideas without any options being provided by the interviewer.

Two areas were prioritized by respondents. The first was The Root, the storage and processing facility currently being developed on Salt Spring under the leadership of the SSI Farmland Trust. Twelve respondents noted the importance of this facility and were strongly supportive (this does not mean other respondents were not supportive, only that they did not include this as one of their ideas). This chimes with findings from reviews of food hubs which demonstrate their positive contributions to local and regional food systems.<sup>21</sup> Eight respondents noted the importance of public education about good local food. This feedback has proven very useful for the Agricultural Alliance and will be taken on board during updating of the Area Farm Plan.

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<sup>20</sup> <http://bcfarmsandfood.com/who-are-the-21st-century-farmers/>

<sup>21</sup> A 2015 survey of 143 food hubs in the U.S. found that 75 per cent of food hubs were breaking even or better, suggesting food hubs can be financially successful across a range of legal structures and geographic markets. Overall the food hub assessment found the system brought a combination of benefits both in terms of food and health outcomes and positive results for small and medium agricultural operations. Source: Hardy, J., Hamm, M., Pirog, R., Fisk, J., Farbman, J., & Fischer, M. (2016). “Findings of the 2015 National Food Hub Survey.” *Michigan State University Center for Regional Food Systems: East Lansing*.



#### **4. Potential next steps**

The Agricultural Alliance will continue to track changes in agriculture to support local farms. The focus on local produce may need to be expanded to conceptualise agriculture on Salt Spring within the regional context. We should think beyond how much we are producing locally to considering the regional context and Salt Spring's place within this.

Linking producers to markets may be a sensible increased area of work for the Agricultural Alliance to support the goal of increased local food production. For example the Salt Spring store that has recently began focussing on selling locally produced and slaughtered meat may be one approach.

Raising awareness among consumers about the importance of supporting local food production (even if higher cost than off-island produce), which will in turn support the local economy, is another potential area of focus.

Supporting younger farmers, both existing and potential, could be another important focus, given the average age of farmers on island. This may mean identifying and investing in more community farming (such as the Burgoyne Community Farm) as well as supporting affordable housing initiatives.

The Agricultural Alliance will identify produce-related information not included in the current report and indicate which of these items should have priority for future work.

**Agricultural update: produce production on Salt Spring Island in 2016**

**Annex 1: Survey questionnaire**

**Name**

**Name of Farm**

**Address**

**Phone**

**Email**

**Name of interviewer** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date & time of interview** \_\_\_\_\_

This survey is targeted to all Salt Spring Island farmers who are growing and marketing produce as a commercial enterprise.

The purpose is to collect information about the amount of commercial produce production on Salt Spring Island in 2016 and to add to our knowledge of farming issues. The survey is sponsored by the Salt Spring Island Agricultural Alliance and Island Natural Growers, based on the previous produce study conducted in 2004 by Island Natural Growers and in 2010 by the Islands Trust. The information will be used to assess if there has been a change in commercial produce production since the last produce study, which showed that we are growing about 6% of the food that is purchased on the island.

The survey information is important for the whole community as we work together to address our food sustainability needs. The Agricultural Alliance needs the information to help with the work it does to support farming and to increase our shared understanding of the important role of farming in the Salt Spring Island economy. Given that local food production can play a significant role in lowering greenhouse gas emissions the survey results will also be used to assess the emissions associated with food consumption on Salt Spring.

**For the purposes of this study, “produce” means vegetables, herbs, fruits, nuts, grains for human food, pulses, other plant edibles.**

Are you growing produce with the intention of selling it and marketing it? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

**If yes:** Participation in the survey is entirely voluntary. We appreciate your participation. Your responses will be compiled and presented in a manner that does not identify you. All identifying information will be removed when the data is aggregated. No data will be shared publicly that identifies individual farms. You will receive a copy of the study report when it is completed.

**Agricultural update: produce production on Salt Spring Island in 2016**

Are you willing to take part in the survey?

If you have any questions about this survey or how the information will be used in the study please contact Tony Beck at [tonybeckhome@shaw.ca](mailto:tonybeckhome@shaw.ca)

**Survey Number** \_\_\_\_\_

**SECTION 1 PRODUCE PRODUCTION**

1. In 2016 how much land did you farm? \_\_\_\_\_ acres? \_\_\_\_\_ square feet? \_\_\_\_\_ linear feet?
  - a. Is it all your own land? \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. Or does some of it belong to someone else? \_\_\_\_\_ How much?
  - c. If it belongs to someone else, under what arrangement (loan, rental, co-op, community farm, community garden, barter, sharecropping, other)? \_\_\_\_\_
  
2. How much of that land is for produce crops (total area of cultivated, greenhouse, fallow, etc.)? \_\_\_\_\_ acres
  
3. In 2016 how much land did you plant in:
  - a. Annual produce crops \_\_\_\_\_ acres or \_\_\_\_\_ square feet or \_\_\_\_\_ linear feet?
  - b. Perennial produce crops \_\_\_\_\_ acres or \_\_\_\_\_ square feet or \_\_\_\_\_ linear feet?
  - c. Green manures \_\_\_\_\_ acres or \_\_\_\_\_ square feet or \_\_\_\_\_ linear feet?
  
4. Are you looking for more land to farm? \_\_\_\_\_ If yes, how much? \_\_\_\_\_
  
5. In 2016, what produce crops did you grow commercially for human consumption, taking the whole year into account? – see last two pages for crop list.

Name of crop (list individually)	Cultivated area in square feet or acres or linear feet (each crop)	Weight of each crop harvested in 2016 in kg or pounds or pints
<b>Vegetables (including herbs)</b>		

**Agricultural update: produce production on Salt Spring Island in 2016**

<b>Fruits</b>		
<b>Grains, pulses, nuts (for human consumption)</b>		
<b>Other (e.g. mushrooms, spouts, edible flowers -- specify)</b>		

6. In 2016, what percentage of all the produce you grew did you use for your own food on the farm?

\_\_\_\_\_

**Agricultural update: produce production on Salt Spring Island in 2016**

7. In 2016, what percentage of all the produce you grew in 2016 did you give away?
8. In 2016, what percentage of all the produce you grew in 2016 was wasted?  
 a. What percentage of the waste did you compost?
9. Do you think that the amount of produce you are growing on your farm has changed in the past five years?  
 a. Quantity is about the same \_\_\_\_\_  
 b. Quantity has increased \_\_\_\_\_  
 c. Quantity has decreased \_\_\_\_\_  
 [If it has increased or decreased] What are the main reasons for the change?
10. In 2017, do you plan on: [check only one]  
 a. Growing about the same amount of produce as you did in 2016? \_\_\_\_\_  
 b. Increasing the amount of produce you're growing? \_\_\_\_\_ [ If yes,] by how much? \_\_\_\_\_  
 c. Decreasing the amount of produce you're growing? \_\_\_\_\_ [If yes,] by how much? \_\_\_\_\_  
 [ If your plan is to increase or decrease] What are the main reasons for the change?
11. In 2016 did you also produce any of the following for your use on your farm and/or for sale?

<b>Food category</b>	<b>Annual quantity</b>
Dairy (own use only)	
Eggs	dozens
Other (e.g. honey; medicinal plants, edible flowers)	
Edible flowers	\$ worth
Starts for own use (%)	

**Agricultural update: produce production on Salt Spring Island in 2016**

Starts for sale (%)	
Seeds for own use (%)	
Seeds for sale (%)	

**SECTION 2 FARMING PRACTICES**

12. Which of the following farming practices do you use? [check as many as applicable]

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Field row                         | <input type="checkbox"/> Use chemical fertilisers            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bed                               | <input type="checkbox"/> Integrated pest management          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Intensive: Bio or French          | <input type="checkbox"/> Mostly mechanized                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Intercropping                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Mostly hand labour                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Heated greenhouse                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Use small hand tools                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Unheated greenhouse               | <input type="checkbox"/> Use large hand tools                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cold frame/tunnel                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Permaculture                        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hydroponic                        | <input type="checkbox"/> Organic                             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Certified organic                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Composting                          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Biodynamic                        | <input type="checkbox"/> Seed saving. What proportion? _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Certified Demeter Biodynamic      | <input type="checkbox"/> No till                             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Use pesticides/herbicides         | <input type="checkbox"/> Animal power                        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Veganic (no animal/manure inputs) |  |
| Other (describe) _____                                     |  |

13. In 2016, how much of each of the following do you estimate you used specifically in your farming activity?

Inputs			
Energy types	Quantity for the whole year	Notes	
Gasoline a) Regular b) Farm-marked gas			
Hydro electricity			
Solar electricity	[where/how using the solar; # of solar panels, etc]		
Propane			
Biomass (firewood) Diesel			
Other (such as bio-diesel) (specify)			
Soil supplements	Quantity	Sources (location)	
Chemical fertilizer			
Minerals (lime, dolomite, rock phosphate)			

**Salt Spring Island Produce Production Survey, 2017**

etc.)			
<b>Compost</b>			
<b>Animal wastes</b>			
<b>Soil builders or amender: sea soil, blood meal, bone meal, etc.</b>			
<b>Water</b>	<b>Quantity (% from each source)</b>	<b>Sources (e.g. pond, lake, catchment, etc)</b>	
<b>Rock phosphate</b>			
<b>Other</b>			

**13a. For compost, how much was bought and how much was made?**



**SECTION 3 MARKETING**

**14. Where did you market your products in 2016?**

Selling venue in 2016	Yes	Estimated % of sales	Effectiveness rating (e.g. handling & profitability for your farm)			Which of the venues do you plan on using in 2017?
			Very good	Satisfactory	Not satisfactory	
Saturday Market						
Tuesday Market						
Your own farm stand						
A shared or community farm stand						
CSA (box program)						
Direct farm marketing						
Country Grocer (SSI)						
NatureWorks						
Thrifty's (SSI)						
Restaurants – on-island						
Caterers – on-island						
Other on-island (please describe) (e.g. sold to on-island processor)						
Other off-island (please describe)						

**Salt Spring Island Produce Production Survey, 2017**

14a: If you do not participate in the Tuesday market, why not?

14b: If you do not participate in the Saturday market, why not?

15. In 2016, what percentage of your total family income after expenses would you estimate came from your produce sales?

16. a. In 2016, did you process for commercial sale any of the produce that you grew? \_\_\_\_\_  
[If yes] please list the products sold, the processing method, and the quantity and value of each item.

16. b. [If no] are you interested in selling 2<sup>nd</sup> grade produce for processing? \_\_\_\_\_ [If yes] what kinds of 2<sup>nd</sup> grade produce might you have and how much?

17. Do you have a business plan for your farm?

- a. If yes, would you be willing to mentor new farmers in preparing a business farm for their farms?
- b. If you don't have a business plan would you like assistance in preparing one?

18. How important do you think farming and related agricultural activities are for the Salt Spring economy?

Not important Very important  
**1    2    3    4    5    6    7    8    9    10**

**SECTION 4 DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION**

19. In 2016, how many immediate family members worked on your farm? \_\_\_\_\_

- a. How many of them also live on the farm? \_\_\_\_\_
- b. What are their ages?

*Under 20* \_\_\_\_\_

20 – 24 \_\_\_\_\_

25 – 29 \_\_\_\_\_

30 – 34 \_\_\_\_\_

35 – 39 \_\_\_\_\_

40 – 44 \_\_\_\_\_

45 – 49 \_\_\_\_\_

50 – 54 \_\_\_\_\_

55 – 59 \_\_\_\_\_

**Salt Spring Island Produce Production Survey, 2017**

60 – 64 \_\_\_\_\_

75 - 79 \_\_\_\_\_

65 – 69 \_\_\_\_\_

80 and older \_\_\_\_\_

70 – 74 \_\_\_\_\_

19a. Person days of labour spent on produce (7.5 hours = 1 day)

19b. Person days of labour spent on non-produce farming (7.5 hours = 1 day)

20. In 2016, how many volunteers worked regularly on your farm?

21. In 2016, how many hired people worked on you farm?

i. Full-time \_\_\_\_\_ How many also live on the farm? \_\_\_\_\_

ii. Part-time \_\_\_\_\_ How many also live on the farm? \_\_\_\_\_

## **Salt Spring Island Produce Production Survey, 2017**

22. In 2016, did you want to hire more farm workers but couldn't? If yes, why couldn't you? Please provide as much detail as you feel comfortable.

23. Are there things that you think the community at large could do that would help you to increase your produce production in 2017?

24a. What are the main challenges you face in commercial production

24b. What are the enabling factors helping you in commercial production?

25. Are there areas the Agricultural Alliance should be working on to support the farming community?

### **Crop lists for Question 5**

#### **Vegetables**

Asparagus

Basil

Beans pole

Beans bush

Beans green

Beets

Broccoli

Brussels Sprouts

Cabbage

Carrots

Cauliflower

Celery

Chard

Collards

Corn

Cucumbers

Eggplants

## **Salt Spring Island Produce Production Survey, 2017**

Fennel

Garlic

Herbs (mixed)

Kale

Leeks

Onions

Onions – green

Onions - shallots

Parsnips

Peas

Peppers

Potatoes

Radish

Rutabaga/turnips

Salad crops - arugula

Salad crops – salad mix

Salad crops – Asian greens

Salad crops – Bok Choy

Spinach

Squash (winter)

Tomatoes

Zucchini

Mixed

**Fruits**

## **Salt Spring Island Produce Production Survey, 2017**

Apples –regular

Apples - crab

Asian Pears

Blueberries

Boysenberries

Cherries

Currants

Grapes

    Wine grapes

    Eating grapes

Melon

Pears

Plums

Raspberries

Rhubarb

Strawberries

### **Grains & pulses**

Wheat

    Red Spring wheat

    Heritage variety

    Durum wheat

    Winter wheat (to be harvested in 2017)

Oats

**Salt Spring Island Produce Production Survey, 2017**

Barley

Mixed grains

Rye • Fall rye (to be harvested in 2017)

Canola \_\_\_\_\_

Soybeans \_\_\_\_\_

Flaxseed \_\_\_\_\_

Chick peas (including garbanzo beans)

Lentils

Dry white beans (navy and pea beans)

Other dry beans (pinto, kidney, cranberry beans, lima, great northern, etc.)

Hazelnuts

Walnuts

## Salt Spring Island Produce Production Survey, 2017

### Annex 2: Types of produce grown by Salt Spring Island farmers, 2016

#### Vegetables

Asparagus  
Basil  
Beans pole  
Beans bush  
Beans green  
Beets  
Broccoli  
Brussels Sprouts  
Cabbage  
Carrots  
Cauliflower  
Celery  
Chard  
Collards  
Corn  
Cucumbers  
Eggplants  
Fennel  
Garlic  
Herbs (mixed)  
Kale  
Leeks  
Onions  
Onions – green  
Onions - shallots  
Parsnips  
Peas  
Peppers  
Potatoes  
Radish  
Rutabaga/turnips  
Salad crops - arugula  
Salad crops – salad mix  
Salad crops – Asian greens  
Salad crops – Bok Choy  
Spinach  
Squash (winter)  
Tomatoes  
Zucchini  
Mixed

#### Fruits

Apples –regular  
Apples - crab  
Asian Pears  
Blueberries  
Boysenberries  
Cherries  
Currants  
Grapes  
    Wine grapes  
    Eating grapes  
Melon  
Pears  
Plums  
Raspberries  
Rhubarb  
Strawberries

#### Grains & pulses

Wheat  
    Red Spring wheat  
    Heritage variety  
    Durum wheat  
    Winter wheat (to be harvested in 2017)  
Oats  
Barley  
Mixed grains  
Rye •Fall rye (to be harvested in 2017)  
Canola (rapeseed) \_\_\_\_\_  
Soybeans \_\_\_\_\_  
Flaxseed \_\_\_\_\_  
Chick peas (including garbanzo beans)  
Lentils  
Dry white beans (navy and pea beans)  
Other dry beans (pinto, kidney, cranberry beans, lima, great northern, etc.)  
Hazelnuts  
Walnuts