

## Emergency Agriculture Response and Recovery Plan Wrap up Report August 2020

### Background

The Salt Spring Island Agricultural Alliance is a network of organizations promoting local healthy food. In March, the SSIAA, with member organizations and concerned groups, developed a Recovery and Response Plan to address challenges presented by COVID-19. More information can be found at <http://plantofarm.org/covid-19/>.

Fourteen groups came together to contribute to the plan including the Salt Spring Island Agricultural Alliance, The Salt Spring Island Farmland Trust, Salt Spring Island Farmers' Institute, The Community Market Society, Tour Salt Spring, Country Grocer, Salt Spring Chamber of Commerce, Transition Salt Spring, Transition Salt Spring Enterprise Cooperative, Community Economic Development Corporation, Island Natural Growers, the Poultry Club, Island Trustees, and Capital Regional District Local Area Representative.

Plan implementation was financially supported by the Salt Spring Foundation, the Capital Regional District, and the Community Evolution Foundation.

Coordination effectively reduced barriers for farmers, increased communication amongst organizations, and resulted in a stronger agricultural sector despite COVID-19, over the spring and summer of 2020. Interventions supported access to safe food for island residents, support for at-risk food producers and small-scale farmers, and resources to make viable essential food infrastructure for processing, storage, and distribution.

The present report highlights Transition Salt Spring Enterprising Cooperative successes of the Emergency Agriculture Response and Recovery Plan working group, discusses challenges, and highlights gaps remaining and next steps required. While work on the Response and Recovery Plan wraps up, the Area Farm Plan Renewal is being finalized and work will begin to determine timelines and develop an implementation plan for that plan, incorporating next steps and gaps highlighted in this document.



## Acronyms

CEDC	Community Economic Development Corporation
CRD	Capital Regional District
ING	Island Natural Growers
SSI	Salt Spring Island
SSIAA	Salt Spring Island Agricultural Alliance
TSSEC	Transition Salt Spring Enterprise Cooperative

## Key Successes

*A major benefit of the response and recovery work has been to ‘better understand what everyone is doing and what their needs are so we can see if there is something collectively we can do to move things forward. Some new avenues opened up by having these conversations. Coming together resulted in more positive outcomes.’*

*– Anne Macey, Abattoir Society*

Overcoming the challenges of physical distancing and limits on numbers enabled the Tuesday market to go ahead. Efforts resulted in 6 additional Farmers’ Markets, in the early season, from April to June 2020 as well as an online platform for sale and purchase of local produce. Partnership with Driftwood presented farmer profiles informing the community about access to local produce amidst the global pandemic.

Vegetable box program subscriptions showed a 157% increase in 2020 over 2019. Based on data collected by Island Natural Growers, 603 households participated in a weekly vegetable box subscription program, or similar, in 2020 compared to 235 households in 2019. Some new kitchen equipment has been purchased for the ROOT and the SSI Farmland Trust is concentrating energy on getting the facility operational this season.

In addition, research was completed around the feasibility of a land matching program and how to support new farmers.

## Status of Plan Components

The final status of each component of the Recovery and Response Plan is outlined below. Gaps are highlighted in the discussion following.

### 1. Immediate response

<b>1.1 Run a community on-line marketing service for food producers</b>		
<b>Activity</b>	<b>Lead</b>	<b>Final Status</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Set up and maintain localline.ca page for on-line sales from individual farms. This will be open to all farms on island for fresh and processed food. This will reduce human interaction and virus transmission.</li> </ul>	Tuesday Market Society	Set up. <a href="https://www.localline.ca/salt-spring-community-market">https://www.localline.ca/salt-spring-community-market</a> . As of June 2020, 30 suppliers including 8 farmers were participating. The public can order food products for pick up at Tuesday market.
<b>1.2 Run a distribution service for pick up and delivery</b>		
<b>Activity</b>	<b>Lead</b>	<b>Final Status</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The distribution service can pick up from farms and drop off at customers, limiting travel time and costs for all, and reducing transmission risk</li> <li>Set up online booking service</li> <li>This will reduce human interaction and virus transmission.</li> </ul>	Tour Salt Spring  SSI Agricultural Alliance/Tour Salt Spring	Delivery service offered to farmers. Responses were slow however feedback from farmers using the service was very positive. 58 deliveries were made in May, 68 in June, and 90 in July.  It was determined that an online booking service was not needed at this time due to current demand for the service.
<b>1.3 Provide streamlined no or low interest loans to farmers and food processors</b>		
<b>Activity</b>	<b>Lead</b>	<b>Final status</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>TSSEC has considerable experience in providing loans to green businesses</li> </ul>	TSSEC	1 loan to Abattoir during COVID-19.

		<p>Working on the Climate Action Plan goals. Still have capacity to help with agriculture related grants if needed though there has been little demand.</p> <p>Some regulation classifications changed recently so TSSEC is now eligible to fit in the coop category and members can donate up to \$10,000 rather than the \$5000 limit previously.</p>
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<b>1.4 Prevent virus transmission</b>		
<b>Activity</b>	<b>Lead</b>	<b>Final status</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure safety protocols communicated to all farms, food production facilities and market on an ongoing basis</li> <li>Create a 1 page tip sheet for farms</li> </ul>	<p>SSIAA</p> <p>SSIAA</p>	<p>Circulated &amp; posted on plantofarm.org COVID page</p> <p>Completed</p>

<b>1.5 Run help desk for individual farms</b>		
<b>Activity</b>	<b>Lead</b>	<b>Final status</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support individual farms in making applications for grants and loans and government subsidies by providing up to date information through a help desk (phone and email)</li> </ul>	<p>Upland Consulting</p>	<p>Information re funding posted on website</p> <p>1 request for help with BC grant for on-line marketing. Challenges given the quick turn-around time for many grants and timing with the harvest season underway.</p>

## 2. Increase food production

<b>2.1 Expediate opening of the Root</b>		
<b>Activity</b>	<b>Lead</b>	<b>Final status</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Facilitate hook up to municipal water source</li> </ul>	<p>CRD/Water District</p>	<p>Maybe still applicable; In the meantime the Farmland Trust pursued alternative water options.</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Source funds for purchasing and installing specific kitchen equipment, coolers and freezers to operationalize capacity to process and store year-round supply</li> </ul>	All	<p>Farmland Trust worked with volunteers to source grant funds. Four applications submitted for staff positions, equipment, and programing needs.</p> <p>Received funds from the SSI Foundation for an oven. Received Federal Government funds for 'Community Eats' program.</p>
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<b>2.2 Maintain operations at the abattoir</b>		
<b>Activity</b>	<b>Lead</b>	<b>Final status</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establish a "back up" work force for staff shortages and high demand times.</li> <li>Investigate feasibility of increasing capacity with "personal use" only days for poultry bookings with no inspection</li> </ul>	Abattoir Society	<p>Backup for April/May for red meat team.</p> <p>Summer student successfully hired to support at the abattoir.</p> <p>Not possible in a licensed abattoir. Added additional poultry days &amp; processed 900 more birds compared with same period last year.</p>

<b>2.3 Increase capacity and farmed land</b>		
<b>Activity</b>	<b>Lead</b>	<b>Final status</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Connect landowners with underused land and potential farmers, and develop incubator farm</li> <li>Recruit retired farmers to assist with mentoring new farmers</li> </ul>	<p>SSI Farmland Trust &amp; Island Natural Growers</p> <p>Island Natural Growers</p>	<p>Farm incubator and land matching research was completed. A proposal/action plan identifies concrete actions that can be taken to further action in this area.</p> <p>6 farm mentors recruited for specific commercial farm needs including specialist knowledge of seed production, post-harvest produce handling, and organic certification.</p>

<b>2.4 Increase home production (includes Community Gardens)</b>		
<b>Activity</b>	<b>Lead</b>	<b>Final status</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promote increased production through newsletter</li> <li>Set up Facebook page for home gardeners</li> </ul>	Garden Club & Mentor Gardeners	<p>Free gardening advice provided.</p> <p><a href="http://www.lindagilkeson.ca/index.html">http://www.lindagilkeson.ca/index.html</a></p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increase produce donations to the food bank</li> </ul>	<p>Transition Garden Club</p>	<p>A number of Gardener Help Resources were also aggregated and shared. E.g. <a href="https://www.growingfood-together.com/">https://www.growingfood-together.com/</a></p> <p>Mentor Gardener program established. At final count, the program had 26 mentors connected to 38 mentees (new/beginning gardeners). Glowing reports were received. There is hope that the project will continue in future years because it appears to be making a real difference in beginning gardeners' successes and confidence.</p> <p>POD neighbourhood community garden initiative. 17 families growing food together. Individual and communal garden space. <a href="https://echovalley.ca">https://echovalley.ca</a></p> <p>Estimated 35% increase in produce donations to the Food Bank. 4 growers consistently give large amounts of food, many dedicated gardeners dropped off weekly donations</p>
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<b>2.5 Increase poultry levels</b>		
<b>Activity</b>	<b>Lead</b>	<b>Final status</b>
<p>Promote hatching capacity on island</p>	<p>Poultry Club</p>	<p>Increased interest in hatching. Early this year there was a spate of incubator purchases, followed by a spike in hatching. Over 2000 chicks were hatched on Salt Spring Island, that would otherwise have had to be mailed or flown here, or picked up off island. More people are growing more eggs and meat locally.</p>

### 3. Increase the amount of local food in outlets

<b>3.1 Set up and run Tuesday and Saturday Farmers' Markets</b>		
<b>Activity</b>	<b>Lead</b>	<b>Final status</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Obtain permissions to operate restricted</li> </ul>	<p>Tuesday Market</p>	<p>Saturday market on hold. Tuesday Market opened April 21 with</p>

<p>market</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure safety protocols met at markets</li> </ul>	<p>Society</p>	<p>safety protocols in place to provide a market for farmers.</p> <p>Room for ½ the vendors as usually due to space restrictions for COVID. Tuesday market getting close to normal though from a vending perspectives.</p> <p>Saturday market was reframed to promote local. Communication to ensure that this market works for farmers and provides a second sales opportunity each week. The Saturday market is set to open in July.</p>
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<b>3.2 Increase local food in retail outlets</b>		
<b>Activity</b>	<b>Lead</b>	<b>Final status</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Liaise with Country Grocer, Thrifty Foods, NatureWorks and other outlets about seasonal requirements, potentially as part of regional initiative</li> <li>• Link outlets and farmers</li> </ul>	<p>SSIAA In collaboration with regional initiative Closing the Supply Gap SSIAA</p>	<p>Country Grocer is open to more produce if they can get it in suitable quantity and at their bulk price point. Farmers are invited to reach out to the produce manager directly to let them know what produce they have available to sell. Facilitated meeting of producers with South Island Farm Hub initiative . More work needed to coordinate sales &amp; distribution &amp; facilitate access to larger markets.</p>

<b>3.3 Advertise produce in farms and on farm stands</b>		
<b>Activity</b>	<b>Lead</b>	<b>Final status</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide regularly updated information on produce available from farms and on farm stands</li> <li>• Disseminate information about produce availability via website links and using social media</li> </ul>	<p>Farmers' Institute</p> <p>All</p>	<p>Many links and web platforms connected farmers with the community.</p> <p>Salt Spring Island Farmers' Institute farm directory - <a href="http://ssifi.org/farm-directory">http://ssifi.org/farm-directory</a></p> <p>Salt Spring Meats -</p>

		<a href="http://www.saltspringmeats.com/">http://www.saltspringmeats.com/</a> Farm Stands, Farmers and Foodies of Salt Spring Island Facebook page - <a href="https://www.facebook.com/groups/567788823943998/">https://www.facebook.com/groups/567788823943998/</a> Salt Spring Farm Stands 2020 location map - <a href="http://bitly.ws/9dJe">http://bitly.ws/9dJe</a>
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#### 4. Increase processing and storage

4.1 Increase processing/freezing capacity for larger harvests		
Activity	Lead	Final status
Operationalize The Root	Farmland Trust and SSIAA	Three grants have been submitted to cover the \$200,000 capital shortfall. Funding was successfully obtained to purchase some kitchen equipment.

4.2 Teach food processing skills for 2020 harvest season		
Activity	Lead	Final status
Set up webinars from local chefs and virtual workshops on processing	CEDC/Island Natural Growers with Farmland Trust once Root operational	Waiting for harvest season. Funding is in place for the Farmland trust to offer educational programs as soon as the Root is operational.

#### 5. Ensure supply of labor and key inputs

5.1 Organize bulk buying and storage		
Activity	Lead	Final status
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Liaise with farmers concerning requirements</li> <li>Coordinate bulk buying</li> <li>Identify potential sites for temporary storage of supplies and get agreement</li> </ul>	Rob Pingle	<p>This piece was put aside since many farmers had already done their ordering for the year and there were more immediate concerns around ensure markets for sale of produce.</p> <p>Bulk buying potential needs to be explored in Jan/Feb 2021 for</p>



<p>from owner (e.g. Slegg, Moonstruck, Root Barn)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Manage storage and distribution for soil, feed, compost etc</li> <li>• Facilitate production of locally produced compost</li> </ul>	Islands Trust	<p>potential group purchasing of inputs for the 2021 season.</p> <p>Compost continues to be an area of concern. Many conversations have been had about potential options. Concerns around zoning leave the project at a standstill at present.</p>
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<b>5.2 Assess labor needs and respond to shortages</b>		
<b>Activity</b>	<b>Lead</b>	<b>Final status</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Survey farmers to determine short and longer term labor needs</li> <li>• Based on survey, train potential farmworkers, taking into account any liability issues</li> <li>• Connect farmworkers to farmers</li> </ul>	<p>SSIAA</p> <p>ING</p> <p>ING</p>	<p>Survey sent out in May. Only about 5 responses were gathered. Discussion was had in June. It was determined that it was too late. Farmers adjusted with what they had. Consider this again in future years. Continue to develop mentorship programs to increase skilled labour on Salt Spring Island and mitigate labour shortages.</p>

## 6. Ensure food supplies for vulnerable groups

<b>6.1 Support provision of healthy food to underserved populations</b>		
<b>Activity</b>	<b>Lead</b>	<b>Final status</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase coupon program and enable pick up of local produce/meat via markets and/or other distribution points</li> <li>• Stronger cooperation and partnership with the Seed Sanctuary</li> <li>• Increase dry storage capacity including at the Root</li> <li>• Increase of budget to buy local bulk from farmers for the food bank</li> </ul>	Community Services	<p>SSICS successfully raised \$60,000 for the coupon program. This allows the program to support 135 families this year.</p> <p>Grant applications have been submitted to complete the Root so that storage capacity is available.</p> <p>Commitment of \$10,000 matching funds through South</p>

		Island Farm Hub “Farm Bucks” were secured to purchase local food for Gulf Island schools. Gulf Islands Secondary School cafeteria will match the \$10,000. This means that a total of at least \$20,000 will be spent by SD64 on local foods produced in the gulf islands this school year. A person is in place to coordinate the farmers and schools on Salt Spring Island.
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**7. Ensure funding, effective administration, liaison, communication to public and coordinated response, tied in to overall Island planning**

<b>7.1 Identify and apply for community funding</b>		
<b>Activity</b>	<b>Lead</b>	<b>Final status</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify and apply for community funding to execute activities identified above and for overall management of response and recovery plan</li> </ul>	Upland Consulting/ CEDC	<p>\$11,000 was received from community organizations to support implementation of the Recovery and Response Plan from May to August 2020.</p> <p>\$3000 received from CRD            \$5000 received from Evolution Foundation            \$3000 via ING from SSI Foundation</p>

<b>7.2 Farmers and the public receive ongoing information about the response to COVID-19</b>		
<b>Activity</b>	<b>Lead</b>	<b>Final status</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop one page communication strategy</li> <li>Ensure regular (at least twice a week), consistent and clear communications through Alliance website, Facebook page, email list, press releases etc.</li> </ul>	CEDC	<p>Done: Developed in conjunction with Task Force. A series of 9 farmer profiles were published in Driftwood. Information was distributed including impact of COVID on the farm, what produce they grow, and where/how to purchase it</p> <p>SSIAA Mail chimp newsletter sent out to 267 contacts</p>

**7.3 Logistics**

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Lead</b>	<b>Final status</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maintain effective administration functions, including website</li> </ul>	Transition/SSI AA  Coreen Boucher (website)	Administration functions and regular website updates were regular and ongoing from April 2020 to August 2020.  COVID response activities can be clearly located on the Plan to Farm website.

<b>7.4 Overall coordination and liaison</b>		
<b>Activity</b>	<b>Lead</b>	<b>Final status</b>
Liaise and coordinate with key groups – Alliance Member Organisations, other food organisations/ outlets, CRD, CEDC, Community Services, CAG etc	Anne Macey/Tony Beck	Regular working group meetings took place weekly through March and April and bi-weekly from May through July. Overall, 11 coordination meetings were held with an average of 10 people, representing numerous organizations, in attendance at each one.  Given available funding, a part time coordinator was hired for May-August to support this work.

**Gaps, Next Steps and Priorities**

While Agricultural Response and Recovery Plan work wraps up, it creates a solid foundation for Area Farm Plan Renewal work on implementation priorities and timelines which will take place over the coming year to further strengthen agriculture and food security on Salt Spring Island.

Over the course of the Response and Recovery Plan work we have learned that coordination of services is beneficial for scaling impact. Having a paid coordinator has effectively helped connect with community partners; discover within the region where synergies and connections exist; help maintain existing partnerships and start to build new ones. At the same time, this pandemic highlighted gaps and showed where priorities need to be placed.

The short duration of the project has been somewhat of a challenge as it required the coordinator to spend significant time making further proposals to seek funding for ongoing assistance beyond the life of this project. Ongoing funding would be greatly beneficial for ensuring continuity and maximizing the efficiency of efforts. Ultimately, stable, long-term funding needs to be sourced to hire people to help implement projects that have potential for significant positive impact on farming and food production on Salt Spring Island.

The Agricultural Response and Recovery work wraps up with a couple of key items requiring attention and also uncovered additional gaps in agriculture on Salt Spring Island which deserve future work.

In the short term, the priority is to complete the Root so that it is operational and can serve as a foundation to support future work. Beyond that, next priorities, which will be made clear in the Area Farm Plan Renewal, include:

- Industrial scale composting on Salt Spring Island
- Linking gaps in food availability, ability to process, and demand for the product (e.g. freezer capacity where lamb can be stored between slaughter and sale).
- Connecting mid-size producers who may benefit from support with marketing or bulk purchasing or may have surplus produce which could be put to use.
- Initiate a land matching program to provide more opportunity for farming and food production on existing farmland.

### **Closing**

In closing, the Agriculture Response and Recovery Plan work has contributed significantly to agriculture on Salt Spring Island. The concentration of effort has been unprecedented and the results in terms of awareness of local agriculture, local production, and local consumption are certainly clear. The work has been extremely effective at bringing community partners together in collaboration to share resources and problem solve together. This collective action strengthens the agriculture sector and sets a solid footing for the Area Farm Plan Renewal implementation work.