

GULF ISLANDS Co-op Proposal
1st Co-op Presentations & Discussion
Saturday, October 14, 2017 (12:00 Noon to 2:30 pm)
Pender Island Community Hall

PRESENT (25):

Zorah Staar Project Coordinator, GULF ISLANDS Co-op Proposal
Colleen Doty Food Producer Outreach Coordinator (plus Daisy Hill Farm, Galiano)
Elvy Del Bianco Vancity Program Manager, Co-operative Partnerships
Derek Masselink BC Ministry of Agriculture Regional Agrologist for Vancouver Island South

Food Producers: Barbara Johnstone Grimmer (Fir Hill Farm, Pender Farmers Institute President)
Richard Piskor (Hope Bay Hop Farm, Pender Farmers Institute Executive)
Matilde Te Hennepe (Raven Rock Farm & Pender Farmland Acquisition Project)
Katie Selbee & Matthew Vasilev (Twin Island Cider & Farm)
Martha McMahon (Inis Eile Pender Island Farm)
Cheryl Grunbock (Avondale Blueberry Farm)
Jodi Schamberger (Avondale Sheep Farm)
Mark Benson (present initially)
Mae Moore (also E.D. of Heartwood Folk School)

Supporters: Deb Foote (Mayne), Everest Lapp, Kathy Cronk, John Heinonen, John and Mary Anne Pare, Charlene Thompson, Paul Wintershoven, Derek Wolff, Lisa Fleming, and 2 others

- 1. INTRODUCTIONS & OPENING COMMENTS:** People briefly introduced themselves (see above), and why they were interested to hear more about a potential GULF ISLANDS CO-OP.
- 2. GULF ISLANDS Co-op Proposal:** see pdf of **Co-op Presentation** by Project Coordinator Zorah Staar (online HERE). A Community Works grant has been received, which creates a marvelous opportunity for interested food producers, other producers, and Southern Gulf Islanders to explore potential creation of a **GULF ISLANDS CO-OP (for Food Producers and Island Sustainability)**.

This Co-op could prioritize the Southern Gulf Islands of **Pender, Galiano, Mayne and Saturna**; the mutual economic benefit of its members; and also community and environmental sustainability.

The CO-OP could also serve as the **inter-island collaborative organization** recommended by both the 2017 Southern Gulf Islands Food & Agriculture Strategy, and the broader SGI 2020 Strategic Plan.

Regional Agrologist Derek Masselink, farmer and co-author on the above Ag Strategy, was present. He also expressed support for exploring how a Co-op serving island food producers could be a helpful follow-up to the Strategy (see links to it & more at <http://heartwoodfolkschool.ca/gulfislandsco-op>)

- 3. CO-OP MODEL Aspects & Potentials: Presentation by Elvy Del Bianco**, Vancity Program Manager for Co-operative Partnerships (slides online HERE). Elvy gave a fascinating, informative, and inspiring talk – about the history, core principles, economic and community-building strengths of Co-ops, and also the challenges to meet in creating one. Co-ops are generally for-profit but are democratically controlled by their members, for their benefit and to serve common goals. Co-ops have a higher rate of success than regular businesses, and an estimated billion people in the world belong to one.

Elvy Del Bianco also identified keys aspects of what co-ops do that line up well with the Food Producer needs identified in the SGI Food & Agriculture Strategy. One challenge with CO-OPs is deciding both the purpose, and also who the Members will be (e.g. how broad to go with Producer Members, and also

whether to have Consumer Members who vote, or simply consumer supporters who benefit from the co-op). Elvy answered group questions, about different approaches that an island co-op could take.

4. **FOLLOW-UP DISCUSSION** – See list of Pender meeting attendees above. Key Pender food producers and food group reps were present (others tied up today but keen to hear more). There were also some artistic and other producers present, and other supporters of the proposed island co-op.

A lot of Pender interest in the Co-op Proposal was expressed, especially in the context of how challenging it is to be an island food producer. Hope was expressed that with co-operative support, more food could be grown in an economically viable way, and more farmers created and sustained.

Food Producer Outreach Coordinator Colleen Doty was present (also a **Galiano farmer**). She has spent the last 6 weeks speaking with farmers and food producers from Galiano, Mayne and Saturna. A number of them have also expressed interest in the proposed Co-op, and identified a lot of the **same needs as the Pender meeting folks** (see below). **Deb Foote of Mayne** was also present, confirming that Mayne growers faced the same challenges, and talking about her significant co-op experience.

Detailed notes were taken of particular needs and suggestions made at this Pender meeting. These needs included the following (in brief):

- Food Producer capacity building, to be able to grow more food to meet the great on-island demand for the amazing food created by our island farmers, growers, and value-added producers!
- Increased access to agricultural land, storage, and equipment (e.g. certified kitchens);
- Advocacy on behalf of Food Producers, e.g. to address restrictions, problems, opportunities;
- Education about food growing challenges, costs, pricing, and the importance of healthy food;
- Joint bulk purchasing for inputs (e.g. seed, materials), and sharing of resources (e.g. equipment);
- Joint marketing and sales opportunities, for when there is surplus food created (e.g. online co-ops);
- Growing source crops to supply off-island value-added products, for economic viability;
- Co-operatively exploring new on-island value-added production (e.g. a Gulf Islands brewery)
- Other Producers needs for joint marketing and sales, scrambling to make an island living as well; Local creators of art, craft, natural health products etc. have traditionally co-operated with food growers at Saturday island markets, and have expressed interest in Gulf Islands Co-op Proposal;
- Co-op supporters needs: those present discussed their need for healthy local food, their positive experiences with other co-ops as consumers, and their desire to support island food growers.

Zorah Staar noted that **prioritizing Southern Gulf Islands Food Producers** was the basis for the Community Works funding, and also exploring whether to add more producers, for greater mutual benefit. Today (an exciting start!) was just the beginning exploration. Ultimately, the producers and supporters who were the most interested in this **GULF ISLANDS Co-op Proposal** would democratically decide its direction.

5. **WHAT'S NEXT?** October 29: Co-op Presentation & Discussion on Galiano (Co-op Expert Marty Frost); November 16 to 19: three island representatives to attend Vancity Co-op Boot Camp in Vancouver; January/February, 2018: Mayne & Saturna Co-op Meetings, and then more meetings on each island.

* see <http://heartwoodfolkschool.ca/gulfislandsco-op> for more info, and **REGISTER** to receive updates!