



## PENDER COMMUNITY TRANSITION (PCT)

*\* a cooperative alliance for a brighter future \**

(website: [www.pendercommunitytransition.ca](http://www.pendercommunitytransition.ca))

### ***LET'S GROW MORE FOOD ON PENDER!***

**Saturday, March 5, 2011 Community Discussions**

**(1:00 to 4:00 pm, Pender Community Hall)**

**Note:** Approximately 50 Penderites came out to view information displays and handouts on various food growing topics, and then 40 stayed to engage in six different community brainstorming and planning groups (as summarized below). Topics 1, 2 and 3 were discussed in the first hour, and then topics 4, 5 and 6 were discussed in the second hour.

#### **1. SUSTAINING PENDER FARMERS & FOOD GROWERS (*with more local buying, Community Supported Agriculture, and in other ways*):**

This group involved about 15 Pender farmers, growers, other community members, and local government reps. Sue Bailey initiated discussion, with a definition of “sustainable agriculture” that included being healthy, not harmful to the environment, humane, providing a fair wage to the farmer, and supporting communities. Peoples` comments included the following:

- not enough sustainable agriculture was happening on Pender, if any (based on the above definition including a fair wage to the farmer);
- we needed to increase the economic viability of farming here;
- one challenge was that agricultural land was expensive;
- community owned farmland was suggested, including acquiring it by selling public land (such as the property up behind the Pender airport) to exchange it for arable land (CRD Director Ken Hancock said he would check further on this idea);
- Community Supported Agriculture was a newer way for consumers to buy local seasonable food directly from a farmer (e.g. through a prepaid weekly box of produce, but only one farmer on Pender was doing this CSA model at the moment);
- suggested by another farmer that CSA's involved a lot of extra work, in addition to the hard work spent growing the food and farming;
- consumers had grown accustomed to cheap mass-produced food (50 years ago spending about half their income on food, but today spending only 10 or 15 percent, even though non-local food now often traveled an average of 2,400 km to reach us;
- this was damaging to local economies, ourselves, and our environment (e.g. CO2 emissions), whereas locally-grown food could be fresher, healthier (e.g. no pesticides, non-GMO), involve less packaging and food miles, and greater local food security;
- question: with current Pender demographics (e.g. retired population), who are our future farmers, and where will be the agriculture land that we need? (e.g. if it's been given over for non-food uses, even though zoned agricultural);
- other suggestions for supporting Pender farmers and growers: buy from local Farmers Market; buy from local farm stands; ask retailers to sell local produce; explore new shopping and eating habits; support Pender Community Farmland Acquisition Project;

- there was a need for public education, for consumers to understand more about food realities and how much labour and other work it actually takes each day for our local farmers to grow food for us, and to sustain their farms and themselves as well;
- many regulations (federal, BC and CRD) now affected growing and selling food and made it more difficult (for example health regulations that had essentially eliminated local meat processing here on Pender, but meanwhile transporting animals for off-island meat processing generally eliminated any profit at all);
- support was expressed for mobile abattoirs, and for “local food law” that distinguished between big and local producers (in terms of applying regulations);
- Saltspring Island and Saanich had local abattoirs (for poultry, lamb, pigs, goats), with various inspection, licensing, and time-booking requirements, and also expense;
- one problem was availability, both of things farmers needed (like abattoirs, water, land), and also availability of future farmers (especially when young people couldn’t currently make a living from farming or from spending a lot of time growing food);
- smaller growers and gardens needed to be encouraged as well;
- we also needed more Community Supported Agriculture arrangements, Community Farmland Acquisition, and other ways for local people to be paid a fair wage to grow food and manage food growing for our community;
- support was expressed for the development of a Local Area Farm Plan, including the development of local farming capacity (this was something that could be supported by the provincial Ministry of Agriculture, CRD, and Islands Trust, in various ways);
- final suggestion (before 1-hour discussion time ran out): instead of new subdivisions requiring a 5% parkland dedication, perhaps a dedication of food growing land could be required, and there could be recognition of such land as a community amenity
- note: the “Let’s grow more food on Pender!” event also included a display by Barbara Johnstone Grimmer about “Raising Chickens on Pender” (in a small-scale, doable way).

## **2. COMMUNITY NUT & FRUIT TREE PLANTING** *(for example, how might we cooperate on a project for buying, planting, care & harvesting?)*

Matilda Te Hennepe initiated this discussion, which was inspired in part by the successful community nut tree planting program started by Transition Saltspring (and other transition communities, e.g. in the UK). These nut tree initiatives were based on the need to increase local food self-sufficiency and security, and the fact that in northern temperate climates, nut trees had a much higher average yield per acre (of carbohydrates and protein) than wheat. [Note: On Saltspring, the trees being planted on public and private property included almonds, butternut, heartnut, hazelnut, pine nut, various walnuts, and sweet chestnut, mostly paid for by carbon offsets from Salt Spring Air – see [www.pendercommunitytransition.ca](http://www.pendercommunitytransition.ca) for more info.] People’s comments in this Pender group included the following:

- people discussed their current experience growing nut trees, and wondered what methods could be used to improve yields (especially on older trees);
- hazelnuts were already grown here, and people expressed interest in growing more;
- advice was needed about the best other nut trees to try here, where to source them, and proper pruning and care (Master Gardeners on Pender who could likely help);
- Farmland Project people had talked about including some nut tree planting, and setting up a system for carbon offsets (e.g. from airflights) to be used for funding;

- suggested that people buy small trees to raise in pots, until land was acquired;
- also suggested to develop a resource list, of current nut or fruit trees on the island;
- it was believed that hazelnut trees took approximately 7 or 8 years to create the first nuts for harvest, and that these trees did particularly well in our climate;
- walnut trees apparently took a longer time to reach harvest (e.g. 10 to 20 years);
- suggested that new hazelnut trees be planted between November and March, in a mixture of 30% sand, 30% soil, and 30% compost;
- there was a Ministry of Agriculture site with further information about nut tree planting;
- one person said that some community nut trees could be potentially be planted on their property, although it was not currently fenced (so deer would be an issue);
- noted that some apricots could also be grown on Pender;
- further re: community fruit tree planting, one issue on Pender was the number of fruit trees which were not currently being actively cared for or harvested, which the Farmland Project was working on with their cooperative picking and juicing project;
- final suggestion: that people remember to thin or cull excess fruit from their trees when they were loonier size, which would enable the remaining fruit to grow larger.
- **Note:** Although Pender might not seem to need more fruit trees at present, this situation could change rapidly as globalized trade (e.g. apples from New Zealand) stopped being facilitated by cheap oil. This was a good beginning discussion about community nut and fruit planting on Pender, and now we invited anyone interested in participating or helping with such a project to email [info@pendercommunitytransition.ca](mailto:info@pendercommunitytransition.ca) (especially a coordinator), and to see [www.pendercommunitytransition.ca](http://www.pendercommunitytransition.ca) for more info.

### **3. SHARING BACKYARDS / GARDENS / COMPOST** *(for people who either have gardening space or compost to spare, or need some)*

Zorah Staar began by describing an existing website called Sharing Backyards, which involved matching people who had gardening space that they weren't using, with people who were keen to grow food but didn't have the space (and then the labour and food could be shared as agreed). People could list their first name, general location, and what they were offering or requesting, and then they could confidentially initiate discussions with potential garden sharing partners, without their full name or exact location being known until they had built trust with the other person and decided to go further. The process was described as being a bit like choosing a roommate, and was facilitated by the website linking and mapping system. One requirement for Pender to take advantage of this particular Sharing Backyards website was that a local group would have to agree to sponsor the local branch of it, and to allow advertising on the webpage. However, maybe Pender could set up a similar program on its own.

In addition to Pender people who had or needed gardening space to share, there also seemed to be those who either needed compost material (to build soil on Pender rock) or who had maple leaves, manure, or other compost material to spare (e.g. good kitchen scraps just going to waste). Ideally, a Pender garden sharing program could also include compost sharing as well. People commented as follows:

- garden sharing would be a great way to help people grow more food on Pender!

- there seemed to be a lot of retired people who could no longer garden, and younger people who were interested in growing food but didn't have access to land, or even people who had land but it was shaded by trees and not ideal for growing;
- some people in the group said that they wanted to keep growing food on their land, but needed some help (i.e. they couldn't do it all themselves, or weren't here all the time);
- these people said they wanted to maintain the ability to grow food on their land, both for personal food security into the future, and also because it generally tasted better;
- Pender Organic Community Garden was great for some, but too far to travel for others;
- mentioned that the Sharing Backyards in Victoria program had been going on for a while (sponsored by Lifecycles) and appeared to be working really well;
- further re: compost, some Penderites without trucks used to cooperate with those who had trucks, to go down to the beach and fill up with kelp, and then share it among the gardens;
- someone else knew of some great Lower Mainland places that had manure and other compost available for free or cheap, if we could cooperate to bring truckloads of it back;
- Zorah Staar described the new **PENDER VHS (Voluntary Helping System)** which had just been set up on the new Pender Community Transition website, and which could provide a way for people to offer or request both various kinds of cooperation and exchange (see item 4 below), and also to facilitate sharing garden space (Note: [www.pendercommunitytransition.ca/garden-or-compost-sharing](http://www.pendercommunitytransition.ca/garden-or-compost-sharing) now ready to go for this!)
- in addition to the above kind of helping system that people could search on the new Pender Community Transition website, it was also suggested to build in a Twitter/Facebook/RSS feed capability so that people could sign up to get notified when a certain kind of possibility came up (e.g. an alert that a certain beach was packed with seaweed);
- besides the above, there were people on Pender who sold good animal manure compost, so this was another useful thing for beginning gardeners to know about;
- going back to food growing, various people said that their gardens were now being shaded out by growing forest, but fallers were expensive, so perhaps neighbours could cooperate to get a tree faller to come take down a bunch of trees at once;
- acknowledged that growing more food here would likely mean taking down more trees;
- also suggested that garden sharing could facilitate great mentoring (e.g. when people were working together on the same property, and one of them had more experience);
- a South Pender person talked about sharing equipment too, saying that he had a truck which he considered to be like a community truck, made available to others (note: the Pender VHS at [www.pendercommunitytransition.ca](http://www.pendercommunitytransition.ca) includes sharing equipment);
- another thing that growing more food on Pender would likely require was more fencing (e.g. what about cooperation on buying fencing in bulk and then putting it up);
- noted that Community Farmland Acquisition Project already had a great program for cooperative harvesting and juicing of fruit trees (for people who needed help with this);
- final notes on compost - Recycling Society AGM was on April 29, with a guest speaker on composting, and someone suggested using low-temperature charcoal in combination with manure as a soil builder, as in the past (google terra preta for more).

#### **4. LOCAL EXCHANGE / VOLUNTARY HELPING SYSTEM: *(systems for someone to offer services/stuff you need or someone else to request what you can offer)***

Following up on the above discussion about people cooperating on food growing activities, Zorah Staar initiated a discussion about two kinds of local systems to facilitate this further.

One was the **PENDER VHS (Voluntary Helping System)** which had been set up on the new website at [www.pendercommunitytransition.ca](http://www.pendercommunitytransition.ca). The other was a more formal system used in a number of communities worldwide, called a **Local Exchange Trading System or LETS**.

In brief, a LETS was a non-profit community enterprise which shared information about available goods and services, and recorded transactions of community members who exchanged them, using the currency of locally created LETS Credits. A person got credits for goods or services provided to others, and was debited for goods or services received from the same or other members. It was a barter exchange which got around the problem of the person you were providing something to not necessarily having anything you wanted. The apparent reason LETS had not taken off as much in Canada was because our government required all barter exchanges to be comprehensively registered, so that income tax could be charged wherever people used the LETS to sell something they normally sold for money, or in a regular pattern that was akin to earning income. There were also potential sales tax implications. The other main difficulties with LETS were burnout of the volunteer coordinators, and difficulties determining equivalencies between various goods and services.

At the same time, LETS could be an amazing tool for building community, creating connections and cooperation between community members, starting to relocalize a community's economy, and helping people get needs met without a lot of cash. This could include local food and food growing services being exchanged through a LETS. The people in this discussion group made comments as follows:

- a LETS or Local Exchange Trading System could potentially be good for Pender;
- right now, Pender people could get a lot of needs met by taking ferries to buy relatively cheap food and goods in town, or through globalized trade that supplied our retailers;
- however, as peak oil, climate change, and other worldwide resource and financial impacts started affecting the above, along with reducing some people's disposable income, then it would become increasingly important to be able to get more needs met locally, including through barter or other non-cash forms of exchange;
- in some ways a LETS was like a more formalized version of how things used to work here, when people helped each other on the basis of community and trust, knowing that the help would be coming back to them when they needed it (if not from the same community member they had helped, then from other community members);
- this worked pretty well when the Pender community was small enough that people knew what others had to offer and whether to trust them, but the community was much larger now, so perhaps some kind of linking system could help people get needs met;
- someone who had previously been part of an international barter exchange expressed concern about the LETS members who offered something of greatest value getting "cleaned out" at the front end, and not receiving back in proportion to what they'd given (e.g. if very little of what was being offered on the system appealed to them);
- going back to the benefits of LETS, suggested that it could be used to promote volunteering, if people were given LETS credits for providing volunteer services to local non-profit groups (but unclear how this would balance out in the end, perhaps by groups then getting LETS credits for the services they were providing back to the community?);
- another option besides LETS credits was the PENDER VHS (Voluntary Helping System) which had just been set up at [www.pendercommunitytransition.ca](http://www.pendercommunitytransition.ca), which was described as a community-building classified ads system, for Pender people or organizations to



- offer or request goods, equipment, services, or some other form of cooperation, FOR FREE, NO CHARGE, or on similar terms discussed OFFLINE [this was the SAME system where categories were added after March 5 for garden or compost sharing];
- key was that the PENDER VHS simply connected people offering something with people who might need it, and then the terms (e.g. you can have this greenhouse for free if you come take it apart and pick it up), would not be part of the online system, and neither would the system keep track of any credits or debits (like a LETS);
  - there was also some discussion of a hybrid system, e.g. having the online PENDER VHS with all terms arranged offline, but with some oversight in the form of a phone line that people could call in to report either great generosity, or on the other hand abuses of the system (like people taking a lot but not giving in proportion);
  - in any event, the PENDER VHS (Voluntary Helping System) would not involve any credits or legal right to receive anything, so there would be no income or sale to be taxed;
  - the goal of any of the above was not to avoid payment of any legitimate income or sales tax, but rather to help Penderites better meet their needs locally;
  - if this was by a Local Exchange Trading System (LETS) keeping track of credits and debits, then it would have to be registered with the Canada Revenue Agency and submitted to potential income tax, sales tax, and other regulation;
  - it was suggested to try having a LETS or barter booth at the weekly Farmers Market, and one person said they would be willing to help coordinate a Pender LETS;
  - in summary, there was support expressed for Pender VHS, for encouraging people to start using it, and then possibly working towards a more formal LETS in future (if enough people volunteered to set it up, register it with the government, and coordinate it);
  - note: you can go to [www.pendercommunitytransition.ca](http://www.pendercommunitytransition.ca) and click the PENDER VHS search button at the bottom of the menu to the right, to find out more and place an ad!

## 5. COMMUNITY SEED BANK *(would you grow, save, and share a particular seed, to help your community?)*

**Note:** This discussion was initiated based on a recent article from Dan Jason of Salt Spring Seeds, about the importance of Community Seed Banks for local food security and resilience. This was especially so at a time when genetically modified seeds and corporate gene-patenting of these and other seeds was increasing, multi-national trade agreements (like CETA) were seeking greater control over seeds, and local food security and sovereignty was expected to be affected by climate change, peak oil, and other worldwide impacts (see [www.pendercommunitytransition.ca/pender-community-seed-bank](http://www.pendercommunitytransition.ca/pender-community-seed-bank) for more information).

A Pender Community Seed Bank could start with a couple of dozen community members each volunteering to grow out and save one kind of heritage food seed (i.e. not genetically modified or gene-patented). There would need to be some planning about a good range of seeds to grow and save, and also some help to teach people about the best ways to grow, save, and store seeds. Then central storage locations would need to be created. What would really help is to have a couple of volunteer coordinators take this project on.

On March 5, Nori Pope initiated the group discussion by talking about the need for more education about seeds and seed saving. Then there were comments including the following:

- GMO's were genetically modified organisms, which involved adding a chromosome to an existing variety of a different genus (e.g. adding fish DNA to tomato plants, resulting in GM plants and GM seeds);
- this was not necessarily bad in every case, but we didn't know the consequences in most cases [and there had definitely been some examples of negative impacts];
- hybrid seeds were created by crossing two distant lines of the same species, resulting in initially vigorous plants and first generation seeds, but then after that the seeds often failed to breed true or could be sterile (hence the need to keep buying hybrid seed);
- on the other hand, open-pollinated seeds were the traditional varieties which had been grown and selected for desirable traits for millennia (and which commercial breeders had little incentive to sell because then people could just save seed instead of buying more);
- when attempting to save seed, it was important to know where the seed came from, and to make sure that it was open-pollinated and not hybrid;
- seeds needed to be collected at the appropriate time and in appropriate ways (different for various plants), and seeds also had different longevities;
- there were various techniques for storing seed to maintain maximum fertility, with refrigeration being common, and also storage in a mixture of sand and peat moss (and some seeds need specialized treatment, like fermenting before saving).
- there was support expressed for starting a Pender Community Seed Bank, but this would require some volunteer recruiting, education, and coordinating (go to [www.pendercommunitytransition.ca/pender-community-seed-bank](http://www.pendercommunitytransition.ca/pender-community-seed-bank) to be involved!)

## 6. OTHER WAYS TO INCREASE LOCAL FOOD SECURITY & FOOD SOVEREIGNTY (*while reducing carbon emissions, handling peak oil, and transitioning into a more resilient, brighter future*)

Some simple proposed definitions: **local food security** means Pender having enough food for all, despite peak oil, climate change, and other worldwide resource and financial impacts, whereas **local food sovereignty** (even better) means the right of our Pender community to define our food and agriculture systems, and the capacity to offer Penderites nutritious food, with resilience and self-sufficiency.

Anna Lundeen initiated and took notes for this discussion on other ways to increase local food security (and food sovereignty), which was intended to create a space to talk about potential food growing initiatives in addition to the ones already being discussed today. The community members present made comments including the following:

- we could talk in generalities about the great importance of local food security, but the key was to get useful projects going (e.g. on good land that was not being fully utilized, like some of the growing space near the current Pender Organic Community Garden);
- one challenge was that some of the younger people interested in growing more food had little time to do so, whereas retired people had more time, but may or may not want to spend it growing food (as opposed to having other fun);
- Community Supported Agriculture (CSA's) were supported as a good idea, with a suggestion that perhaps different Pender producers could cooperate on a given CSA box arrangement (where consumers receive a box of fresh produce each week);

- Sandor Csepregi talked about his upcoming Southern Gulf Islands-a-thon (a swimming, running, and kayaking event, to raise awareness about local food security and sustainability, and to raise money for island food banks and other community food initiatives (see [www.members.shaw.ca/gulfislandsathon/index.htm](http://www.members.shaw.ca/gulfislandsathon/index.htm) for more info);
- note: Sandor later sent in a comment about two American companies operating out of Puget Sound, called [Farm Boat \(Local Produce at the Dock\)](#) and the [Salish Sea Trading Cooperative](#) (i.e. ways to increase inter-island trade of local food and goods];
- some people commented on how difficult it was to grow food or organize a community to grow more food for itself, but not compared to our likely difficulties if we don't do so;
- suggested that Pender needed to develop a Local Area Farm Plan (like Saltspring and other areas had), to identify current local challenges to farming, achievable local goals, and also practical projects to get the farming and growing momentum going;
- Pender Community Farmland Acquisition Project was supported as an important step;
- with these initiatives, we were shifting our consciousness and our language;
- suggested that Tru Value be lobbied for more specific labelling (e.g. of GMO foods);
- food security also needed to be looked at from an environmental perspective, from the point of view of the interconnectedness of our food supply with our environment;
- there was support for more sharing of local food growing work and food crops;
- new food store on Mayne Island was a great example of local farmers and food growers being supported to share their food crops with community members;
- also suggested to create a local market for Pender venison and geese, which could be shot in legal, responsible ways (education required), and then be a good food source;
- Sidney Island had a program (in cooperation with local First Nations) for appropriate, necessary culling of deer, to provide meat to food banks and for sale;
- Pender would need an abattoir to do this (mobile or permanent);
- Pender farmers currently had to process livestock off-island, which was expensive;
- discussion about the importance of communities finding ways to resolve disputes, to get community members on the same page sooner;
- professional or other skilled dispute resolution people could help our community in this way, and we needed to pay attention to situations where this could really be useful;
- Pender Farmland Acquisition Project was intended to involve a community orchard, community potato plot, and other projects for sharing food work and crops in fair ways (rules would need to be worked out at the beginning, e.g. perhaps a cooperative capitalist model, where people benefitted from the value added through their work?);
- in early times, a small farm might do everything, but then regulations came in that shut down a lot of activities (e.g. milk system moving from milk cans to tanker trucks);
- current regulations made it really hard for smaller local farmers in many ways (e.g. suddenly eliminating any profit from small-scale livestock farming);
- community change often happened slowly, and there was a need for educational campaigns (about things like buying and growing more local food);
- suggested that retailers be provided with signs or stickers to identify locally grown food;
- our local Tru Value was supportive and in the process of adapting (e.g. for the past few years, almost all of their arugula was from local growers).

**Note:** There was a brief full-group circle, with thanks to the 40 people who'd offered many great ideas, and confirmation that notes from today's "Let's grow more FOOD on Pender!" event would be prepared by Pender Community Transition and shared in the near future.