

From Historical Farm to Urban Farm: An applied initiative to improve northern regional food security, sovereignty and resiliency for all people

Prepared by: The Prince George Urban Farmscape Society

<https://www.letseatlocalpg.com/urban-farmscape>

The **Urban Farmscape Society** (Prince George) seeks your critical support and engagement to facilitate the exciting next step in our long-term commitment to improving our collective regional food security and sovereignty here in North Central BC. The timely availability for purchase of 5 acres of a local historical urban farm close to downtown Prince George has catalyzed a gathering of passionate partners who recognize the unique opportunity to establish a long-needed regional food hub in the very near future. We envision this hub as a lush food garden with, nearby, a commercial kitchen, teaching space, and food distribution/ food processing space, ideally located close to a food insecure neighbourhood (the VLA-Veteran Land Act neighbourhood), offering a critically needed community food literacy educational space to teach food preparation and processing, and a demonstration urban farm.

Food security – how we produce, process and access food, and how much it costs – is front of mind for people in North Central BC. Climate change, supply chain issues, and policy changes developed far from our region have impacted our food supply and costs here in the north. Food security, as defined by the United Nations' Committee on World Food Security, means that all people, at all times, have physical, social, and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food that meets their food preferences and dietary needs for an active and healthy life.

Team **Urban Farmscape** is a diverse coalition with a shared vision of improving regional food security, sovereignty and resiliency for all peoples in our region. This inclusive group came together to champion this vision, and includes a rich diversity of passionate community members from long-term users of the Gilliard Farm community garden (now the Queensway Garden Society) , to representatives of the local college and university, as well as local food security groups in need of an appropriate home to maximize their contributions. This collectively knowledgeable and passionate group incorporated itself as the Urban Farmscape Society in January 2024.

These 5 acres of the Gilliards' farm, critically close to downtown, are a rare, likely unique in Prince George, opportunity of a great location near downtown, easy access to transportation routes, connected by walking/biking trails, with a major highway nearby for easy access for users, processing and markets. A 5 acre urban farm in this location feels like a natural graceful extension to the existing well-established community garden on the Gilliards' Farm.

It is yet to be decided what the best use of these 5 acres would be, but potential examples include:

- A central a food hub/food growing and processing centre
- A food education and workshop centre
- An experimental farm/community/urban farm
- Gardens to provide for food insecure people
- Land for people in rental housing or apartments to grow food

The creation of a Regional Food Hub is a particularly exciting possibility for this land. The 2022 research project *Who's at the Table: A Community-Based Exploration and Mapping of Regional Food Security*

Initiatives and Structures in a Northern Context by Drs. Booth & Healy, School of Planning and Sustainability, UNBC, confirmed community needs and recommendations, with **specific emphasis** on the *requirement* for a physical food hub to serve a critical coordination role for existing food security work as well as actively addressing food security gaps identified by the region's food security experts and food practitioners:

1. People have called for a **physical "hub"** (a food-focused space with necessary facilities such as a commercial grade community kitchen, gathering / classroom area, etc.) and a **virtual "hub"**, in which the needs and desires of all are acknowledged and meaningfully addressed.
2. Sourcing and securing the physical resources that have been consistently recommended to serve this region, i.e., Prince George based infrastructure (buildings, virtual network, etc.) that can address the unique culture and community needs of the region.
3. Funding that will allow sufficient staffing to recognize and support the diversity of demands, i.e., livestock production, agricultural products, as well marketing, education, and communication.
4. All levels of government and organizations recognize the expertise and diversity already existing in the region around food security work, and *build on existing* strengths, activities and initiatives.
5. Sufficient funding for honoraria to meaningfully acknowledge local champions and knowledge holders who can then support and guide the hub staff, through mentoring and specific expertise.

It is more than time for a Prince George Food Hub that would:

- improve access to safe, healthy and culturally relevant food while promoting community development
- improve health outcomes for community members most at risk of food insecurity
- promote environmentally sustainable food systems

Food Hubs are designed to create or foster connections within food systems by enabling organizations to partner with other communities, the private sector, academia and other organizations to collectively strengthen local food systems and address food insecurity in a sustainable manner. Through these connections, community partnerships are able to promote integrated food system solutions that enhance the social, health, and environmental benefits in the area.

Building upon this assessment of identified local requirements, the Urban Farmscape Group shares a vision of a food hub as:

- A Food Systems hub serving the region
- An Education Space
- An Innovation Space
- A Facility offering employment & training opportunities
- Maximizing the work of existing experts, practitioners and champions of regional food security
- A Welcoming, Collaborative and Inclusive space

The following have expressed an interest in using the Urban Farm for programming or articulating their programming with activities at the Urban Farm.

The Everyone At the Table (EAT) collective, the Recycling and Environmental Action Planning society (REAPS), the Eco Living Community Society (ELC), the Aboriginal Business & Community Development Centre, UNDU (United Northern Users UNDUing Stigma society), the Local Food PG Society, District C Farmers' Institute, the Connaught Youth Centre Society (CYC), the Queensway Garden Society, and many interested community members not affiliated to any specific group. The College of New Caledonia's Continuing Education Department is committed to building resilient food security programs and education options to ensure we have a well-supported base of workers and volunteers for these new initiatives.

Researchers at the University of Northern British Columbia will continue to engage with the project through class projects and ongoing research projects.

The project received support letters from:

1. Annie L. Booth PhD, MES, BA, MCIP, RPP, Professor, Environmental and Sustainability Studies, University of Northern British Columbia
2. Chief Dolleen Logan, Lheidli T'enneh
3. Colin Dring, Ph.D., M.Sc., Department of Environment and Sustainability, Royal Roads University
4. Community Futures of FFG, Susan Stearn, General Manager
5. Darleen McIntosh, Elder with the Lheidli T'enneh Nation, UNBC Chancellor.
6. David J. Connell, PhD, Professor, Ecosystem Science and Management, University of Northern British Columbia
7. District C Farmers' Institute, Michelle Miller, President
8. Dr Amelia Merrick, Dean, School of Access and Continuing Education, College of New Caledonia
9. Dr Kathy D. Lewis, Interim Dean, Faculty of Environment, Interim Vice-President, Research and Innovation, UNBC
10. Eco-Living Community Society, Ann Duong, chair & Scott Monroe, Director
11. The Everyone At the Table collective
12. Queensway Garden Society, Pat Ellis, Volunteer Manager,
13. Live Well Prince George Society, Margaret Jackson, President
14. Mary Kranrod, Community member
15. Northern Health Authority, Dr Rachel Kling MD MSc MPH FRPC, Medical Health Officer, Amelia Gallant MPH RP, Regional Lead, Food Security, Jeff Kormos, Population & Public Health
16. Prince George Native Friendship Centre, Barb Ward-Burkitt, m.Ed., O.B.C., Executive Director
17. Public Health Association of BC, Shannon Turner, BA BSc MSc PhD(c), Executive Director.
18. REAPS, Terri McClymont, Executive Director
19. Selina Mitchell, community member living in the neighbourhood
20. Shawn Arnott, Community member
21. UNDU, Katt Cadieux, Executive Director

This initiative is aligned with both the Regional Agricultural Strategy adopted in 2023 by the Regional District of Fraser Fort George and both the OCP of Prince George in regards to food related issues. Its potential impact on local population health is significant.

We thank you for your interest and support.