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Press Release

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2009 Community Food Matters Gathering

NELSON, British Columbia – On March 24, 2009, the Nelson group Community Food Matters (CFM) hosted what will likely become the first of an annual gathering of businesses, organizations and individuals involved in the area’s food system.

A few months ago, CFM recognized that there was a rapidly growing number of businesses, organizations, institutions, farmers and individuals involved in and/or interested in working towards the creation and enhancement of our regional food system. It was determined that an annual networking meeting that could bring all of these groups together was crucial to ensure that the many initiatives that are either underway and/or proposed are carried out with the greatest efficiency and positive impact.

What resulted was a grant from the Community Food Action Initiative in partnership with Interior Health to enable CFM to host a full-day, invitation-only meeting where over 70 people involved in the food system gathered to learn, network and collaborate.

Since the CFM Gathering took place a number of positive outcomes have transpired.

Ryan Martin of the Hume & Best Western Hotels has since diverted the properties’ compostable waste to a local farm operated by the Preserved Seed Café. Martin now avoids the cost of hiring a waste disposal company to truck away the nutrient-rich garbage. Some of the food grown with that compost will now be returned to the community through the food served at the Café – a truly sustainable system.

Another positive outcome landed in the lap of the Nelson Urban Acres project who has since found some more backyard space in Nelson on which to grow food for their newly launched urban agriculture business (*more on NUA below*).

The bulk of the day was devoted to 36 presentations delivered by many different interests. Each presenter had only five minutes to communicate who they were, what they had achieved, and what future plans they had in store. The event was recorded in audio by Kootenay Co-op Radio’s Deconstructing Dinner and is available for download on the show’s web site (www.deconstructingdinner.ca).

What separated this meeting from past food system oriented events was the concerted effort to invite as many Nelson food-based businesses as possible. CFM recognizes the pivotal role businesses can play in helping drive a regional food economy and in attendance were Oso Negro Coffee, All Seasons Café, BiBO, The Preserved Seed Café, Kootenay Country Store Co-operative, Ellison’s Market, Au Soleil Levant, Hume Hotel/Best Western, Fisherman’s Market, and the Vienna Café.

Also in attendance were political figures including Nelson city councillor Kim Charlesworth and NDP provincial candidate Michelle Mungall. Columbia Basin Trust and the Osprey Foundation were also there to learn about local food-based initiatives.

The following is a snapshot of the exciting groups/projects already underway and/or proposed (*a more detailed account can be found within the .pdf attachment or through the Deconstructing Dinner web site*).

Kootenay Local Agricultural Society (KLAS)

A newly-formed society made up of 70 members throughout the RDCK. Area residents can expect to see more of the Society's marketing label "Kootenay Mountain Grown" on food sold in local stores. The label communicates that the food was grown locally and has met standards developed by the Society, which are similar to organic standards. KLAS has become active in hosting hands-on workshops on composting and bee-keeping.

www.klasociety.org

Kaslo Food Security Project

In February the KFSP hosted a well-attended event in Nelson designed to link farmers up with available land. The event introduced innovative models through which unused land could be leased by people in the region who are interested in growing food. The event has since generated a number of new farmer/landowner relationships. One of those relationships was spearheaded by John Alton who also shared his work-to-date at the Gathering.

www.nklcss.org/food.php

West Kootenay Eco Society (WKES)

John Alton shared the latest developments from the WKES including their interest to launch a Farmers' Market that would only sell food and would be more visible to the community. An idea for an on-line virtual farmers' market was also introduced.

www.eco.kics.bc.ca

Soil Matters Farm CSA (Community Supported Agriculture)

One of the only vegetable CSAs operating in the Kootenays is moving into its third season with up to thirty members on board. Members make a financial commitment at the beginning of the season and Soil Matters provides a box of fresh veggies for thirty weeks throughout the year. This year the CSA will require members to commit to lending a hand on the farm.

www.soilmatters.wordpress.com

Kootenay Lake Sailing Association

In October 2008, the KLSA became involved in the local food system when four boats transported to Nelson 5,000lbs of grain grown in Creston as part of the Kootenay Grain CSA. Sailors David Oosthuizen and Jay Blackmore encouraged farmers at the gathering to approach them if they knew of anyone interested in having food transported up and down the lake this year. They were also optimistic that the fleet of boats will triple in size to accommodate the larger quantities of grain being grown as part of the CSA this year.

www.klsa.kics.bc.ca

Sharing Backyards

Paul Craig would like to see Nelson residents become more involved in sharing tools, resources and knowledge on how to grow food within city limits. He can be contacted at yogadancin@hotmail.com. Paul is also encouraging residents to use the Nelson portal of the Sharing Backyards web site whereby people with available garden space can link up with people looking for space on which to grow food this year.

www.sharingbackyards.com

Nelson Food Cupboard Society

Now in its 10th year, the Food Cupboard is much more than just an important place for members of the community who are in need of accessing food. The Food Cupboard seeks to support the local economy by investing in local farmers. They are currently seeking to develop a program to offer more protein sources by offering local farm-fresh eggs.

www.foodcupboard.org

Oso Negro Coffee / Café

The Café is a strong supporter of local suppliers and will continue with the second year of its rooftop herb garden. They will also install a solar food dryer to prepare foods for use in their kitchen.

www.osonegrocoffee.com

Nelson Urban Acres

Paul Hoepfner-Homme and Christoph Martens are launching a farm... in the city! The duo is using the SPIN model, which was in part created by Saskatoon's Wally Satzewich. The model provides a framework for how an urban agriculture business can be profitable on less than an acre of land. They're looking for any space in or near Nelson, which they can cultivate. Look out for their VERY local food at the markets!

www.nelsonurbanacres.ca

Cannery

Jesse Phillips is keen to see Nelson become home to a cannery where locals can share recipes and techniques and preserve the bounty of food produced in the region for winter consumption. Phillips has experience canning but is unsure how to get such a project off the ground. He's looking for support on how to go about it.

Interior Health

Community Nutritionist Tara Stark described the health authority's role in fostering more food secure communities. According to Stark, IH now identifies food security as one of 21 core programs in public health and offers small grants to communities through the provincial Community Food Action Initiative.

www.interiorhealth.ca

Nelson CARES Society (Eco Store and Supported Employment)

Both Billy Jones and Florence Christophers communicated how their work can support a more food secure Nelson. Jones is preparing for a summer launch of an Eco Store, which will seek to provide products to assist in more sustainable living. The store will maintain an on-line presence and move into a physical location once an ideal space is found.

Christophers, who seeks to provide employment to over 40 clients with developmental disabilities, proposed an idea to link her clients up with regional farmers seeking casual labour.

www.nelsoncares.ca

Kootenay Country Store Co-operative

With over 8,000 members, the Kootenay Co-op is likely the most successful co-operative grocery store in Canada. Now in its 33rd year, the Co-op continues to place priority on local producers. The Co-op will be celebrating Earth Day throughout April by promoting the more environmentally responsible usage of the store's bulk sections.

www.kootenay.coop

Kootenay Grain CSA (Community Supported Agriculture)

CSA co-founder Matt Lowe announced that the project will be expanding more than threefold in the coming year and will be offering two new varieties of crops (Winter Wheat and Lentils).

www.cjly.net/deconstructingdinner/thelocalgrainrevolution.htm

Growing Through the Seasons – Gardening Course

If you haven't heard about this Kootenay-centric gardening course, it's likely because the interest is overwhelming and no publicity is required. Frank and Libby Ruljancich offer the course on their homestead in Deer Park. Now into their second season of offering the course, it has already commenced and enrollment is full.

Backyard Chickens

Nelson resident Valerie Sanderson would like to raise chickens in her backyard but a municipal bylaw prohibits her from doing so. She has already begun consultations with councillors on how to get the bylaw changed.

www.nelsonchickens.com

Community Futures

CF has assisted over 70 food-based businesses in the Central Kootenay region. At their January visioning session, everyone in attendance agreed that support for community-based agriculture and food projects was critical to ensure a sustainable regional economy.

www.futures.bc.ca

Upper Columbia Co-operative Council

Incorporated in the fall of 2008, the UCCC has been formed to promote the principles of cooperation through the co-operative model of operating a business and or service oriented organization. Board member Robert Agnew suggested that the co-operative model is an ideal one to protect communities from the irresponsible models that have wreaked havoc on the global economy. There are over 80 incorporated co-operatives in the Kootenays.

www.uccc.coop

Central School Garden

Jennie Barron is a parent/volunteer for students enrolled in the Wildflower program at Central School. Last year marked the first year in the students' new garden space, which, only the year prior, was asphalt. The students took part in digging up the asphalt and constructing and planting a number of raised beds in which they grew many crops. The season ended with the baking of pumpkin pie!

Deconstructing Dinner – Kootenay Co-op Radio CJLY

Jon Steinman's weekly one-hour radio show was launched with the hope of sharing exciting food-based projects happening in the Nelson area and abroad. The show has acted as key resource helping to drive the increasing interest in the community to see Nelson become more food secure. The show has produced over 130 shows to date and airs on radio stations around the world.

www.deconstructingdinner.ca

G.E. Free Kootenays

Launched in July 2008 with guest speaker and Saskatchewan farmer Percy Schmeiser, G.E. Free Kootenays hopes the region will become and remain free of genetically engineered plants and trees. GEFK has been introducing a G.E. Free resolution to municipalities throughout the region hoping political leaders will adopt a policy to protect the region from the known and unknown threats of these experimental food technologies. The City of Nelson became G.E. Free in November 2008 and the Village of Kaslo in January 2009. GEFK is awaiting a response from the City of Castlegar following their presentation to city council in late 2008. They will be in Rossland on April 27 and will host Percy Schmeiser in the Kootenays once again but this time in Creston and hopefully Grand Forks in September.

www.kootenayfood.ca/gefreekootenays

The Community Food Matters Gathering also hosted a workshop to guide delegates on how to use the networking tools provided on the Kootenay Food Strategy Society's new interactive web site www.kootenayfood.ca. The site acts as a portal into many of the groups and projects operating in the region. CFM hopes the site will become a hub for more dialogue, information sharing and collaboration on regional food issues.

You can catch Community Food Matters' Jon Steinman speaking about the 2009 Community Food Matters Gathering as part of the April 25 Earth Day celebrations. Jon will speak at 12pm at 602 Kootenay Street www.kootenayearthday.ca. Jon will also use the Gathering as a conversation starter on May 21st as part of the CIEL Hundred-Mile Ideas Diet speaker series hosted at Oso Negro Café.

If you would like contact information for any of the groups above, we'd be happy to provide that information to you.

Also attached is a summary of responses from participants that can be used as part of your article.

Contact information:

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