



A Southern Gulf Island Food Producers Priorities Report 2024

Southern Gulf Island Community Resource Centre



Food Resilience Alliance

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SGI FOOD PRODUCERS' PRIORITIES REPORT

An Overview of Food Producer Priorities and Recommendations for the Islands of Galiano, Mayne, Pender and Saturna.

Background

The Food Resilience Alliance (FRA) is a working group of the Southern Gulf Island Community Economic Sustainability Commission (CESC) of the Capital Regional District (CRD), dedicated to strengthening the local food economy. The FRA is comprised of food security-focused member groups in the Southern Gulf Islands (SGI) including the Southern Gulf Island Community Resource Centre (SGICRC), the Gulf Islands Food Co-op (GIFC), the Galiano Community Food Program (GCFP), the Mayne Island Food Bank (MIFB), the Pender Island Recreational and Agricultural Hall Association (PIRAHA), the Galiano and Pender Island Farmers' Institutes (GIFI and PIFI), and the Mayne Island Agricultural Society (MIAS).

The FRA came together in 2021 to collaborate on a project to create a Local Area Food and Agriculture Plan (LAFAP), which functions as an update to 2017's SGI Food and Agriculture Strategy. The LAFAP identified several priorities to strengthen the local food system in actionable ways. Recently, the FRA has reconvened to consider which priorities are most viable to address in 2024.

In March 2024, the member groups met and identified a handful of possible priority actions for the FRA to bring forward to the CESC in hopes that funding will be allotted for related projects that will address the following priorities.

Food Processing

The development and ongoing coordination of Livestock Processing methods in the SGI as well as the research and community engagement in development of a centralized food hub on each Island.

Digital Tools

Research, implement and maintain digital tools to enhance visibility and marketing for local food producers and the farmstand culture of the SGI.

Networking

The planning and ongoing coordination of Southern Gulf Islands Meet Your Maker and Grower to Grower events to foster community bonds and enhance the SGI grower network.

By implementing these solutions as part of a regional project the Southern Gulf Islands can strengthen its community food chain, create new opportunities for local farmers, and enhance the resilience of their agricultural sector. Through ongoing research, community engagement, and collaborative efforts, the region can build a more sustainable and vibrant food system that benefits both producers and consumers alike.

GROWER HIGHLIGHTS

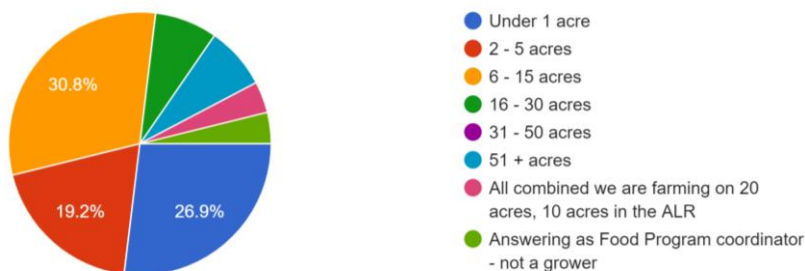
The 2024 SGI Food Producers' Priorities Poll

An anonymous online poll was constructed to better understand the SGI growers participating. Questions such as location, size of property and if the property used to grow food on was zoned ALR, were asked. Inquiries as to type of food produced and how the participants choose to market their grown and value added products was also asked. To gauge support for potential FRA supported initiatives, a scaled response option was provided -1 being the least and 5 being the highest priority action.

The Responses

This poll saw growers from Galiano (8), Mayne (3), Pender (14) and Saturna (1) participate. Prohibitive to the digital data collection efforts were the short timeline and engagement during the busy growing season, limiting grower availability to participate in the poll. This collection of information gathered still provides us with valuable insights into the priorities and challenges faced by food producers.

It should be noted that over 60% of our grower respondents produce food on land not designated Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR), 31% on ALR and 8% being unsure of their land zoning. When asked to share the size of the property on which they produced food, 7 of our grower respondents were on an acre or less. The most selected acreage category was between 6 - 15 acres.



When asked to indicate what they grow or produce for household and family use*, the top response categories were vegetables (96%), tree fruit (85%), berries (70%), and eggs (38%). Honey (11%), lamb (24%) and poultry (12%) were also chosen by participants.

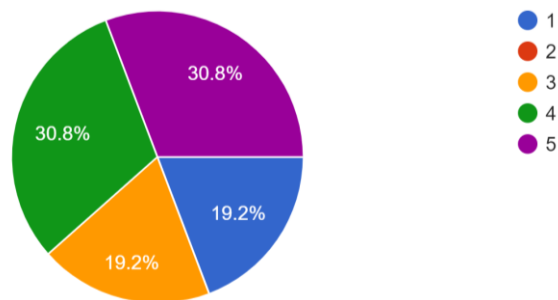
When asked to indicate what they grow or produce for sale to the local community and or Island visitors* the top response categories were vegetables (58%), tree fruit (42%), eggs (31%) and berries (15%). Lamb (15%) and poultry (8%) were the only meat products indicated as being sold to local consumers. Almost 30% of respondents indicated that they don't sell their grown or value added food products.

Of the grower respondents who participated, 42% indicated that they market their grown products on their home farmstand while the remaining respondents used a combination of Farmer's Market tables and website or online media to sell their grown or value added food products.

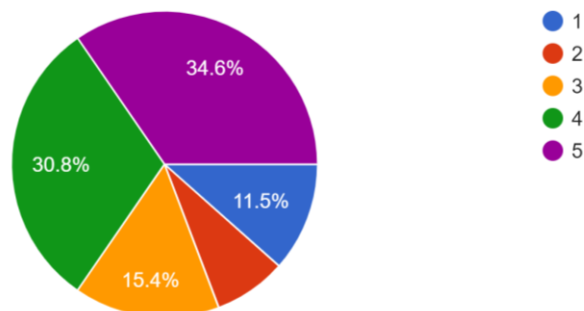
*Participants were asked to select all categories that applied to their scenario.

When questioned *“as a food producer in the region, what do you feel would be an important community initiative for the growers and food producers in your community”* participants had the following several actions to prioritize. A scaled response was required - 1 being the least priority and 5 being the highest priority action.

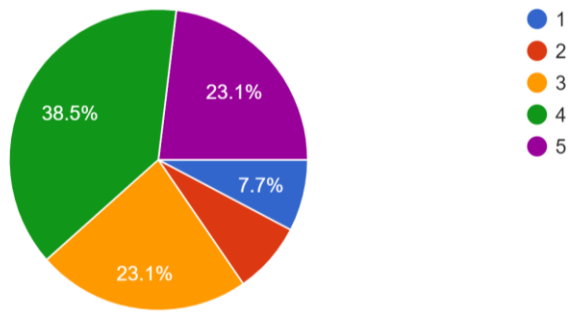
Question 1: A centralized Food Hub for food processing - a physical location which meets the health and safety standards necessary for the resale of value added food products (i.e. sauces, jams and jellies, cheese, jerky, etc.) This space would be available for rent (hourly/day) at a minimal rate. Over 60% of grower respondents chose 4 and 5 on our priority scale.



Question 2: An SGI mobile abattoir service for meat processing - an FRA coordinated initiative which could allow for seasonal on Island livestock processing (beef, chicken, lamb, pork) Undertaking a collaboration partnership with the Small Scale Meat Producers Association's membership could make this possible. Over 65% of grower respondents chose 4 and 5 on our priority scale.

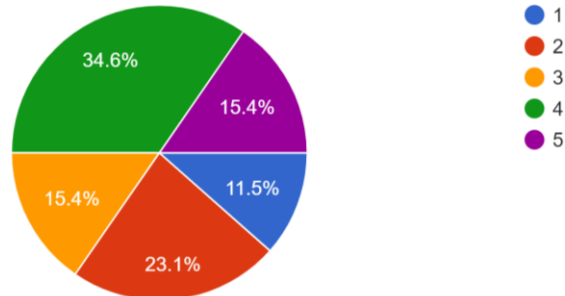


Question 3: Website and/or Online Mapping for local food producers - Inspired by the major growth that Salt Spring Island has seen in their local farmstand culture through the creation of a website called SSIfarmstands.com. FRA is considering a similar online farmstand map for the SGI. This farmstand map would be embedded in a website that could also feature information about local grower participants. All food producers and processors with a roadside stand could also link the map to their own social media/online platforms. Over 60% of grower respondents chose 4 and 5 on our priority scale.



Question 4: Further applied technology - an app designed for mobile users (growers, producers, local consumers and visitors) to find farm stands and value added food products available in the SGI. Only 35% of grower respondents chose 4 and 5 on our priority scale but over 38% of respondents chose 3. An assumption can be made from this data that although the importance of technology and mapping is significant to our local growers, the form and function of an app may be of unknown benefit to them.

Question 5: Application Support for food producers' licensing - an FRA coordinated initiative to guide interested food producers through the Farmgate and/or Farmgate Plus application process and associated Island Health and/or other regulatory permits. Over 50% of grower respondents chose 4 and 5 on our priority scale.

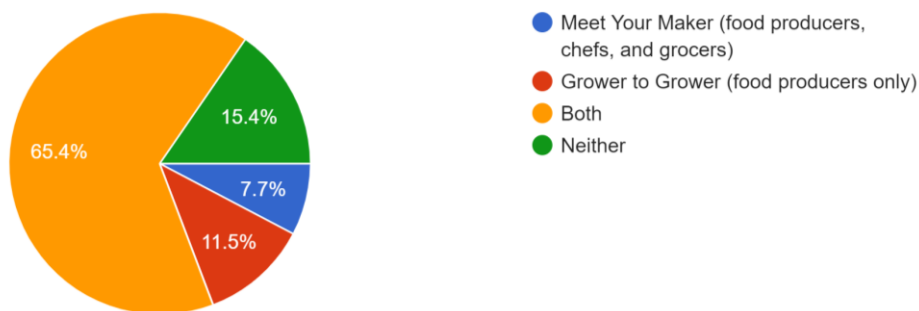


Question 6: Grown Local Advertising Strategy for interested SGI food producers and vendors. Inspired by the Galiano Community Food Program Initiative, *Galiano Grown*, which provides labels and signage to growers, restaurants and grocers to signal to consumers which foods are produced on Galiano, the FRA has considered creating a similar marketing strategy for Pender, Mayne and Saturna. Just over 40% of grower respondents chose 4 and 5 on our priority scale while almost 35% of respondents chose 3. With this moderate amount of interest by grower respondents the SGI Grown Local strategy could be implemented at a secondary stage in the project.

Question 8: Would you be interested in participating in an annual Southern Gulf Islands Food Summit? Because the connection between local growers and consumers is the heart of the local food economy, FRA is considering creating an online two-day "conference" bringing these important groups together to discuss a variety of topics within the local food

system. The event would feature panels of participants with expertise in their areas, workshops, and general conversations. 50% of the grower respondents chose yes while over 40% were undecided.

Question 9: Would you be interested in participating in future Southern Gulf Islands Meet Your Maker and/or Grower to Grower events? Inspired by the Galiano Community Food Program and the Gulf Islands Food Co-op's successful projects, FRA could create similar events which are designed to build community bonds within the local food system, between food producers, chefs and grocers, and even simply between the growers themselves in the SGI. Over 65% of grower respondents indicated they would be interested in attending both events. Only 8% of respondents indicated they would be interested in neither.



Based on this entire collection of responses, the remainder of this document will provide an overview of the preliminary research conducted by the FRA project team to help determine potential next steps of the project.

- **Community Food Hubs**
- **Livestock Processing**
- **Grower Networks**
- **Digital Tools**



FOOD PROCESSING

Community Food Hubs

A community food hub is a centralized and licensed location where local food is collected, stored, processed, distributed, and sometimes consumed. Its purpose is to connect local gardeners, farmers, cooks, bakers, and others - to support local food security and sovereignty. Food Hubs work towards building and sustaining a healthy and prosperous local farming and food sector: production, preservation, distribution, consumption, and resource recovery.

One achievable example being seen utilized in a neighbouring coastal community is the [Texada Food Hub](#) , an initiative of the [Texada Agriculture Group](#) (TAG). Strategic funding awarded by Island Coastal Economic Trust in 2018, allowed for a 400 sq. ft. wheelchair accessible commercial kitchen to be built on location at the Texada Elementary School. The Texada Food Hub *“holds an impressive array of equipment and tools that can dehydrate, freeze, can, ferment, bake, or do just about any other food processing and producing task imaginable. The space set-up is also conducive to workshops - from Food Safe certification to textile and dye-making to fermentation”* ([Island Coastal Trust, Stories](#))

Another, the [One Straw Society](#) established in 1995, is a newly registered charity on the Sunshine Coast which focuses on collaboration and resiliency thru workshops, online speaker series, community gardens, tool libraries, farm to table dinners, subsidized food programs and seed saving initiatives. With a membership of around 700 (2023), this grass roots initiative is the host of numerous year-round hands-on events that benefit a diverse range of community members.

An example closer to home, [The Root](#); a [Salt Spring Island Farmland Trust](#) project, is a robust 3,000 sq. ft. food hub which opened its doors in 2023. Intended to create support for small-scale farmers and to aid in the creation of a local wholesale, processing and distribution alternative to serve larger on-island food purchasers - increasing demand for locally grown value-added products. The Root has:

- an accessible commercial kitchen facility
- indoor temperature-controlled storage
- walk in fridge and freezer units with shelves
- a seed bank in association with Salt Spring Seed Sanctuary
- a barn for hosting workshops and events
- permaculture demonstration restoration garden
- tool and equipment rentals
- a washing and processing station for produce
- on-site gardens and food forest
- a composting unit for food waste
- a residential rental suite
- farming and food-related education ([SSIFLT Website](#))

By fostering collaboration through physical space, knowledge sharing, and grower networks, we can create a supportive and innovative agricultural community. This approach not only enhances productivity and sustainability but also strengthens the social fabric of the agricultural sector.

Livestock Processing Services

In the Southern Gulf Islands, small-scale livestock producers face numerous challenges in processing their products for local and retail sale. Overcoming these hurdles requires a comprehensive understanding of the steps involved in livestock processing and navigating regulatory requirements.

The [2024 Southern Gulf Island Livestock Processing Report - a Summary Guide](#) provides an overview of the provincial requirements governing the health and safety standards of meat processing. The report outlines three key aspects of livestock processing: Farmgate License, Farmgate Plus License, and Mobile Abattoir Processing Services. Each component is essential in ensuring compliance with regulations while promoting sustainable and safe practices in the livestock industry.

Steps to Small-Scale Livestock Processing

- **Regulatory Compliance:** Producers must familiarize themselves with local, provincial, and federal regulations governing meat processing, including licensing, inspection, and labeling requirements.
- **Processing Facilities:** Identifying and securing access to suitable processing facilities is crucial. This may involve partnering with existing facilities or investing in on-farm processing infrastructure.
- **Quality Assurance:** Implementing rigorous quality control measures to ensure the safety and quality of the final products is essential. This includes proper sanitation, handling, and storage practices.
- **Market Development:** Building relationships with local retailers, restaurants, and consumers is vital for creating a market for the products. Direct marketing through farmers' markets, online platforms, and community events can also be effective.
- **Continuous Improvement:** Producers should continuously seek opportunities to enhance their operations, whether through process optimization, product diversification, or value-added processing.

Challenges Faced by SGI Producers

- **Limited Access to Processing Facilities:** Small-scale producers often struggle to find nearby processing facilities equipped to handle their livestock. BC Ferries' transportation difficulties can significantly impact the movement of livestock and agricultural products to markets or processing facilities.
- **Regulatory Compliance:** Meeting stringent regulations for food safety and processing standards can be daunting and costly for small operations.
- **Market Access:** Establishing connections with local markets and retailers can be challenging, especially for newcomers to the industry.

- Financial Constraints: Investing in processing equipment and facilities requires significant capital, which may not be readily available to small-scale producers.

Community Support and Collaboration

- Collaborating with other producers, industry associations, and local government agencies can provide valuable support and resources for navigating regulatory challenges and accessing markets.
- Community initiatives aimed at promoting local food systems and supporting small-scale producers can help raise awareness and demand for locally produced meats.

Resource Assistance

- Producers can seek assistance from government agencies, industry associations, and educational institutions offering resources, training, and funding opportunities tailored to small-scale livestock processing ventures.



Small Scale Meat Producers Association

The Small-Scale Meat Producers Association (SSMPA) is a registered non-profit and is a representative of British Columbia's primary producers, as well as supportive individuals and organizations, who are raising meat outside of the conventional, industrial system that currently exists.

SSMPA's objective is:

- To ensure a voice for small-scale meat producers.
- To help grow the market and support systems for small-scale meat producers
- To provide resources and foster research to support the small-scale meat-producing industry.
- To encourage the adoption of best practices by the small-scale meat-producing industry.
- To grow a network of small-scale meat producers.
- Developing a community of like-minded producers, consumers, abattoirs, and butchers all working together with the support of all levels of government
- Removing systemic barriers that impede small-scale meat producers from competing fairly in the marketplace
- Developing a regulatory framework that acknowledges the unique needs of small-scale meat producers
- Enabling BC consumers to make purchasing decisions that allow for the production of high-quality meat at family farms with consideration for the environment, and animal welfare.

[\(SSMPA Website\)](#)

Collaborating with relevant agencies and food groups, such as the Gulf Island Food Co-op, the Galiano Food Program and the Small Scale Meat Producer's Association, can provide valuable resources, networking opportunities, and support for producers. Strengthening these partnerships and advocating for policies that benefit small-scale producers could enhance the resilience of the local food system.

Grower Network

Focusing on fostering collaboration and knowledge-sharing among growers to promote sustainable agricultural practices and enhance the resilience of local food systems. Through various components such as Peer-to-Peer connections, Meet Your Maker events, and Knowledge Sharing Workshops, an SGI Grower Network can assist in the creation of a supportive community where local growers can learn from one another, exchange ideas, and access valuable resources.

Peer-to-Peer Connections:

Peer-to-Peer connections form the backbone of the Grower Network, providing farmers with opportunities to connect with fellow growers in their region or within similar agricultural sectors. *As one Galiano respondent shared, "It would be wonderful if the events could be in-person, as this adds so much to the connection between islands, it really is the glue and cannot be replicated by an online event ... maybe hybrid for those who cannot travel and would prefer to attend online".* These connections facilitate the exchange of insights, challenges, and best practices, allowing farmers to learn from each other's experiences and build meaningful relationships within the agricultural community. Whether through informal gatherings, online forums, or structured mentorship programs, Peer-to-Peer connections empower farmers to support one another and navigate the complexities of farming together.



Meet Your Maker Events:

Meet Your Maker events offer farmers and consumers alike the chance to connect directly and discover the journey of their food from farm to table. These events typically feature farm tours, tastings, and interactive demonstrations, providing attendees with a deeper understanding of the agricultural practices and values that shape their food choices. By fostering transparency and building trust between growers and

consumers, Meet Your Maker events help strengthen local food systems, positively impact agricultural economics and promote sustainable farming practices.

Knowledge Sharing Workshops:

Knowledge Sharing Workshops provide farmers with access to specialized training, resources, and expertise to support their professional development and enhance the productivity and sustainability of their operations. These workshops cover a wide range of topics, including soil health, crop management, livestock husbandry, and marketing strategies. By bringing together industry experts, researchers, and experienced farmers, Knowledge Sharing Workshops create opportunities for collaborative learning and skill-building, equipping growers with the tools and knowledge they need to thrive in today's agricultural landscape.

One topic that was brought up by several of the grower participants was the need for climate change adaptation initiatives such as rainwater catchment solutions and revised planting method education. As one grower shared *"Somehow we need to acknowledge that climate change is real, and growers need to adapt."* The facilitating of educational opportunities and supporting regional programming can assist SGI growers in mitigating impending environmental changes to their grower landscapes.



The SGI Grower Network Initiative can serve as a catalyst for building resilient and vibrant farming communities by fostering collaboration, innovation, and knowledge-sharing among growers. Through the SGI Grower Network farmers and food producers can connect with their peers, engage with consumers (both local and visitors), and access valuable resources to support their journey towards sustainable agriculture. By working together, SGI growers and food producers can overcome challenges, seize opportunities, and contribute to the vitality of our local food systems for generations to come.

TECHNOLOGY

Staying Connected

In the Southern Gulf and Salt Spring Islands, agricultural practices are evolving to engage more effectively with local consumers using digital tools. Websites, digital directories and apps help consumers locate and connect with local food sources. These tools often include maps, producer profiles, and information on product availability. By adopting a regional approach in content and design, farmers and value-added food producers can foster stronger connections with their local markets; leveraging the unique characteristics of our Island communities to enhance local food systems and sustainability.



MAP VS. APP

To meet the diverse needs and preferences of farmers, consumers, and various types of visitors, it's essential to create a well-structured, user-friendly, and informative digital tool for the growers, producers and consumers in the SGI.

Ease of Application for Farmers

- Simple Input Form: Create an easy-to-use digital form for farmers to fill out their details, including name, address, products, payment options, contact info, and upload up to 10 photos.
- Mobile-Friendly: Ensure the form is mobile-friendly, so farmers can contribute their information directly from their phones.
- Guidelines: Provide clear guidelines and examples on how to complete the form effectively.

Accessible for Consumers

- Interactive Map: Develop an interactive, easy-to-navigate map accessible via both desktop and mobile devices.
- Search Functionality: Include a robust search feature allowing consumers to find farmstands by product, location, or other criteria.
- Filter Options: Allow users to filter by product type, payment options, or other relevant categories.

Marketing

- QR Codes: Generate unique QR codes that link directly to online mapping and potentially, specific farmstand listings on the map. Signage could be provided to growers to display at their stands.

- **Consistent Signage:** Design uniform signage that could be provided to growers to improve visibility and branding.
- **Social Media Integration:** Allow users to share farmstand listings on social media directly from the map.

Maintenance

- **Admin Dashboard:** Develop an admin dashboard for easy management and updating of farmstand information.
- **Scheduled Check-ins:** Schedule regular check-ins for a designated person to review and update the map as needed.
- **User Feedback:** Implement a feedback system where users can report outdated information or suggest improvements.

One such example of digital tools being used in our local agricultural community is the [Salt Spring Island Farm Stands](#) website. Designed to enhance the accessibility and visibility of over 200 farm stands on Salt Spring Island. The project aims to provide a user-friendly online map that helps both locals and visitors discover and navigate to these farm stands efficiently. The website's current version is functional, but there are plans to expand its capabilities, improve search functionality, and enhance the overall user experience through strategic marketing and community engagement.

Current Features

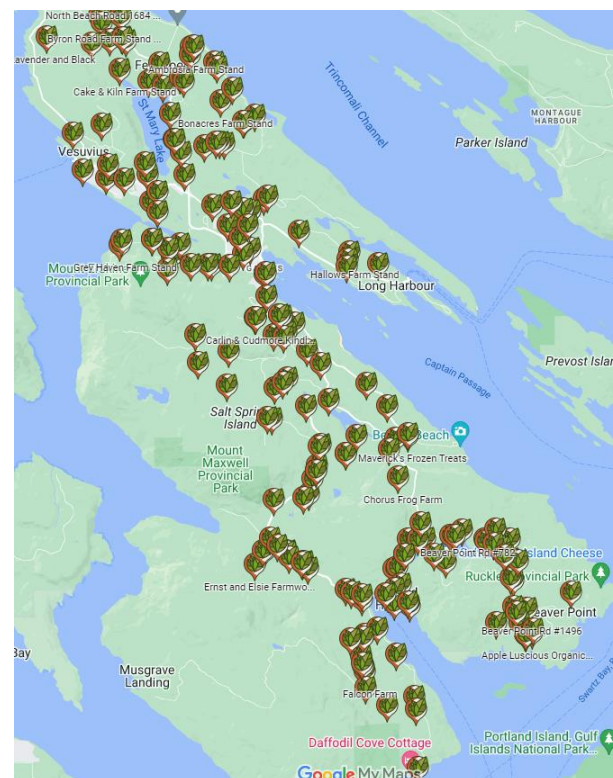
Digital Map Integration: The website features an integrated digital map that displays the locations of over 200 farm stands, making it easy for users to find and visit them. In addition to the digital map, physical maps are available to cater to users who prefer traditional navigation tools.

Target Audiences

Locals: Encouraging residents of Salt Spring Island to use the digital map for discovering and supporting local farm stands.

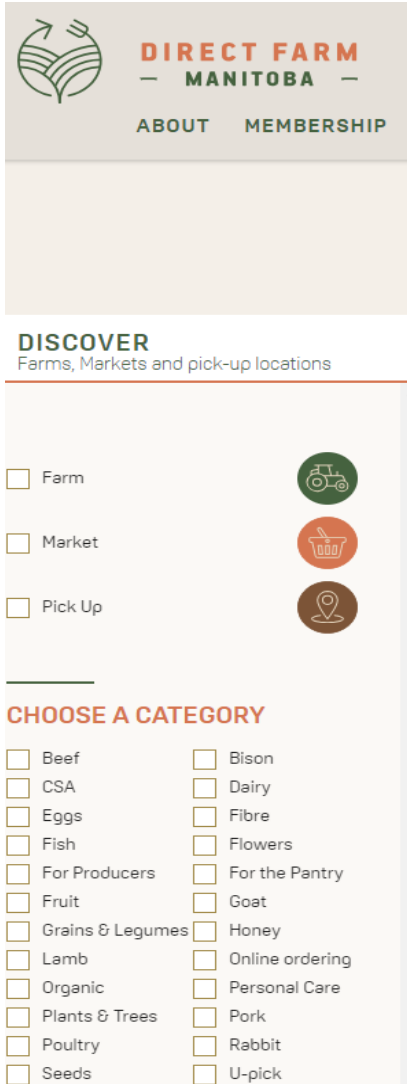
Visitors with Local Hosts: Making it easier for visitors staying with local hosts to find farm stands and other local attractions.

Tourists: Providing tourists with an easy-to-use tool to explore the agricultural offerings of the island.



By implementing these strategies and improvements, the Salt Spring Island Farm Stands' website aims to become a central hub for discovering and supporting local agriculture on the island. The combination of digital and physical maps, coupled with effective marketing and community engagement, will ensure the project's ongoing success and relevance.

Another website and map directory of note belongs to [Direct Farm Manitoba](#). A member owned cooperative of direct marketing farmers and Farmer's Markets with over 120 farms and 41 markets in their listings.



DIRECT FARM
— MANITOBA —
ABOUT MEMBERSHIP

DISCOVER
Farms, Markets and pick-up locations

☐ Farm 

☐ Market 

☐ Pick Up 

CHOOSE A CATEGORY

☐ Beef	☐ Bison
☐ CSA	☐ Dairy
☐ Eggs	☐ Fibre
☐ Fish	☐ Flowers
☐ For Producers	☐ For the Pantry
☐ Fruit	☐ Goat
☐ Grains & Legumes	☐ Honey
☐ Lamb	☐ Online ordering
☐ Organic	☐ Personal Care
☐ Plants & Trees	☐ Pork
☐ Poultry	☐ Rabbit
☐ Seeds	☐ U-pick

Direct Farm Manitoba has brought together three organizations that have been the primary supporters of the small-scale farm sector in the province.

The former Farmers' Market Association of Manitoba (FMAM), incorporated in 2007, forms the base that continues today with the farmers' market members of Direct Farm Manitoba. In 2013 a Small Farm Working Group led by Dr. Wayne Lees was set up by the province to study support for the sector. The study recommended an organization be created to support small scale farmers. In March 2016 Direct Farm Manitoba was formed by extending the existing FMAM cooperative with the addition of Individual farm members. (DFM website)

Current initiatives of Direct Farm Manitoba include the **Spark: Farm and Food Accelerator**; providing showcase opportunities for new farm or food vendors, and the **Manitoba Community Food Currency Program**, assisting community members who experience barriers to accessing fresh food and value-added products due to economic circumstance.

Direct Farm Manitoba is also a founding member of [Canadian Farmers' Markets](#), a coalition of farmers' market associations building and strengthening local food systems across the country. They are also a proud member of [Farmers for Climate Solutions](#) (FCS), a national farmer-led coalition representing more than 20,000 farmers.

These are just a few examples of local grower initiatives that, through innovative solutions and community-driven efforts can build a food system that not only meets the needs of today but also secures the prosperity of future generations.

LOOKING AHEAD: BUILDING A RESILIENT FOOD SUPPLY

In conclusion, building a resilient food supply for the Southern Gulf Islands requires a multifaceted approach that leverages both innovation and community collaboration. By focusing on creating opportunities and strengthening the existing community food chain, we can ensure a sustainable and prosperous future for local food producers.

Regional Pilot Project Coordination

To achieve this, we recommend initiating a Regional Pilot with dedicated Project Coordination to spearhead several key initiatives:

1. Mobile Abattoir Booking Service and Farm Gate Plus License Awareness

- Continuation of research and development for a Southern Gulf Island Mobile Abattoir Booking Service to support local livestock producers.
- Implementation of a Farm Gate Plus license community awareness program to encourage adherence to BC food safety protocols.
- Providing support to community members interested in obtaining licenses, maintaining a database of licensed individuals, and promoting regional marketing efforts to boost agricultural economic health.

2. Southern Gulf Island Food Hub Initiative

- Further research and development of a regional Food Hub Initiative to support existing local grower and food producer programs.
- Identification of additional ways to support and enhance these programs, fostering a collaborative and resilient food network.

3. Online and In-Person Engagement Strategy

- Continuation of research and development into engagement strategies, including hosting regional and local events such as Grower to Grower and Meet Your Maker.
- Coordination of an annual SGI Food Producers' Priorities Poll to gather input and address the evolving needs of the community.

4. Collaborative Funding Opportunities

- Research and implementation of opportunities for collaborative funding to support these initiatives and overcome financial barriers.

By understanding regulatory requirements, accessing processing facilities, developing markets, and fostering community support, the Food Resilience Alliance can help small-scale producers navigate the challenges they face. With perseverance and strategic planning, local growers and food producers can successfully bring their products to both local and retail markets, ensuring a resilient and vibrant food supply for the Southern Gulf Islands.