

Growing Green: Project Priorities
Interim Backgrounder March 31 2003

Attracting small-scale food processors

Processors are a key link in local food systems (for instance, when Vancouver Island lost its largest chicken processor, in the next 3 years it lost half its commercial chicken producers). Stronger community-based processors mean more local ownership, identity and diversity, increased jobs and dollars circulating locally, and reduced “food miles.”

There is growing consumer interest in healthy, tasty, local foods that lend themselves well to niche markets that can be supported by local processors. Small-scale (less than 25 employees) processors in BC have identified a strong interest and need to work together: a BC Small Scale Food Processor Association incorporated as a federal non-profit in 2002 and is running workshops and developing regional strategic plans for the sector. At the same time, planning is under way for a BC Food and Beverage Processors Association.

Commercial community kitchens are facilities that can link commercial processing ventures and community-based projects like the Tree Fruit Project or Good Food Box - there is a project under way to develop a provincial network of 7-8 community commercial kitchens. Also, one regional food “brand” has been developed in BC (the Island Farmers’ Alliance rooster), and others have been proposed, for food produced in a specific bioregion or “foodshed.”

The *Growing Green project* provides an opportunity to interact with all these initiatives and strategize how best to support processors in community-based food “value chains.”

Goals

- Provide strategic input and policy recommendations regarding efforts currently under way in BC to link and organize food processors, with particular focus on:
 - keeping processors in communities
 - ensuring small-scale operations play key roles.
- Research and promote flexible manufacturing/distribution networks using examples like the Emilia Romagna area in Italy.
- Ensure that commercial processing links with community-based projects like community kitchens, Good Food Box programs and more.

Results

By the time *Growing Green* ends in 2004 we want to see:

- A viable BC Food and Beverage Processors Association that provides appropriate services to small-scale operations.
- One pilot regional manufacturing/distribution network (possibly a co-op) established that pools product from various small local processors and does processing, labelling, packaging and distribution – partly supported by loans from credit union(s) that

believe in keeping local food dollars circulating, and sponsored by a community-based food council.

- Parallel development of regional “brands” for a category of food to be known as local or “Residents’ Choice,” defined as produced and/or processed within, say, 200 km of the purchase location (within the local foodshed).