



**Galiano Community Food Program
Event Report for *Meet Your Maker*
held Saturday January 30 2021, over Zoom**

Purpose

To address a need that was identified via the Covid Impact surveys that the Food Program and the Galiano Island Farmers Institute conducted with Galiano Food producers, grocers and restaurants in June of 2020. In the survey, growers identified that they were interested in accessing help marketing products cooperatively with other farmers on Galiano or in the region, to Galiano grocery stores and other markets; as well as obtaining more information from Galiano's vendors about the types of products they are interested in buying.

Attendees

15 growers, 3 grocers, 3 farmers' market reps and 9 restaurateurs

Event Outline

- Introduction
- 4 breakout sessions with each small group of growers meeting with
 - Grocers
 - Markets
 - Restaurants with seasonal menus
 - Restaurants with year-round menus
- Whole group discussion

Before the event, participants submitted information about their operations, and the answers were circulated to all the attendees ahead of time. These profiles helped jumpstart the conversation on the day of the event.

Overview and takeaways

Even though the event was held over Zoom, the event provided an opportunity for connection at a time when such opportunities are limited because of the pandemic. There were a lot of comments both during and after the event about how great it was to actually see and connect with other members of our community.

During the event itself (see detailed notes below) there were lots of discoveries of possible new partnerships. e.g. *'We'd like to try your melons this season', 'I'll take your compost!'*. There were discoveries of what each side needs from the other—growers and vendors came away with a much clearer understanding of the limitations and requirements for potential partners. Grocers shared info about products that sell, growers shared what they grow and what they could grow. There was also collaboration between growers—they shared things that work for them that might help address other growers' challenges (i.e. "This has worked well for us, might work for

you.”) Participants also identified challenges they see in improving food security on the island. There was a shared desire all around to increase partnership and availability of local food.

One basic assumption of the event was that there were untapped opportunities for growers to serve the markets of the restaurants and grocery stores. It was apparent from the event that in fact, Galiano doesn't have anywhere near enough growers/land in production to meet the needs of those markets. The growers who are here are able to find markets for all their food, (though often not at a viable price). The restaurants and grocery stores need far greater volume than our growers can provide, across a very long season, and in many cases, it just doesn't make sense or isn't possible for the growers to try to serve this market. There were exceptions, and it will be interesting to see if these new partnerships are sustainable. There also does seem to be an opportunity for farmers to provide value-added products, especially if they are shelf stable, to some vendors. Some examples that seemed promising were tea blends and flavoured honey.

Perhaps the most important theme of the event was the desire for ***improved cooperation and communication***. Growers are wanting an online platform and more opportunities to connect, in order to collaborate with one another, to share knowledge and resources, to coordinate so as not to duplicate offerings, and to better meet the demands on the island. They'd also like to better collaborate on setting more consistent pricing. There was talk of a more cooperative approach, so farmers could collaborate to try to fill one order, and there would be less communication overhead for both sides.

Another need (possibly served by the same platform) is for a way for the growers to better communicate with the grocery stores, restaurants and market shoppers about what they have available for sale, generally and when there is a surplus, and at what price. In addition, restaurants and grocery stores could share what they're looking for, so growers could try to meet the need.

Next Steps

It was clear that this event served a need and was a valuable exercise for the participants. The Food Program intends to coordinate a second annual *Meet Your Maker* in the winter of 2021.

The need for communication tools is a clear area where action is needed to support Galiano's food producers and vendors. At this time it is unclear who might have the capacity to coordinate this. Over the next few months, the Food Program will explore possible solutions, including what has worked well for other communities, and see what might fit within the capacity of the organization, possibly in collaboration with other local organizations.

The Food Program will also look into offering a micro greens workshop that might provide a stepping stone for one or more local growers to launch an operation that would serve the local market.

Select Event Feedback Survey Comments

Farmers

What was your favourite part?

- *Access to restaurants and other growers I will now contact*
- *Talking to the growers*
- *Being able to talk directly with everyone - the growers, and to restaurants to learn what they need.*
- *Seeing other peoples faces! and learning about their needs and roadblocks to success.*

Other comments from the Farmers:

- *I recognize the forum was the first step in meeting a challenging need... as far as I'm concerned, it was a very successful first step. It highlighted for me that many of us are in the same boat... and gave me ideas about cooperation that would help all of us. Thanks for this... I look forward to taking advantage of the contacts and doing what I can to make things better.*
- *Thank you for organizing! I think it is valuable to see each other and hear a bit about their situations and to get people to think about other possibilities because it is easy to just do what is already (sort of?) working.*
- *I thought it was a great learning experience. I wish we were able to do meat sales by piece*
- *It was great and hope to do it again!*

Vendors:

What was your favourite part?

- *The welcome package was brilliant. It was good to know that there is hope of figuring out a system that works for everyone. Great to get to meet the newcomers to the island too.*
- *As a vendor, I enjoyed hearing the different needs of the growers, trying to figure out how I can be helpful*
- *Learning the varied experiences of how folks are taking on small farming practices.*
- *Restaurants owners and growers were able to meet and discuss the needs and availability*
- *Getting to connect with so many people*

Other comments from the Vendors:

- *Well thought-out. Info sent out ahead of time was useful. Seemed to me people walked away from this with some clarity, new ideas and connections. Thank you.*
- *Very grateful for the opportunity to get this discussion going. I think this will greatly benefit producers and consumers alike*
- *Great event, learned a lot, very glad to have taken part*

Discussion Notes (thanks to the volunteer notetakers at the event!)

General Challenges

- *Growers have no trouble selling most of their food (plus or minus zucchinis / garlic at the height of the season). The issue is making it economical.*

- Timing - very important for grocers and restaurants, but hard for growers to predict, because it's so dependent on the weather
- Pricing. Growers need to get a fair price. Hard to figure out how to price things. Prices come from the source of planting resourcing. Buyers want to know the price ahead of time. Growers can't say specifically how much it is before the season, but they can give a range and it shouldn't change too much over the season. Easier for more experienced farmers.
- Commercial kitchen - hall kitchen cleaning fee is too high during covid

General Discoveries

- Not everyone knows about Galiano Grown. Has tourism value.
- Microgreens, gourmet greens, tender greens, herbs, edible flowers - all better to buy local because of price and quality. There isn't much in the way of microgreens production on the island. The Galiano Conservancy does grow pea shoots, edible flowers and herbs.

Grocery Notes

- Marina shoppers are high-end. First stop across the border. Attractive packaging is a big deal for Marina shoppers
- Grocers could buy the animal on the hoof and specify the cuts/grind they want
- Marina location has high overhead so everything we sell needs to be profitable
- Thursday is the day Daystar wants to receive orders, to make sure the right staff are there to receive it.
- The larder boxes are wonderful for smaller farms, they are a great idea, they work for the restaurants, but they work even better for families.
- Packaging size - Marina needs small units, esp for meat
- Storage/shelf life is tricky, especially in shoulder season.
- Daystar will take very small orders, doesn't need to be pre-sorted or pre-sized.
- Grocers are really open to local producers, but tend to just default to more traditional sourcing because it can supply the volume consistently and it takes a lot less work.

Restaurant notes

- It's intimidating for newer growers to try to commit to a whole season for a restaurant.
- Some restaurants like to be able to haggle for the price
- Restaurants need such a high volume of product, it's challenging for local producers to meet the need and ensure the consistency.
- In general, price is not the problem for restaurants because they can charge it to the customers.

Meat and eggs

- There is meat produced on island that is processed at a licensed abattoir
- Local meat products can even be better priced than products from Vancouver Island.
- Timing is tricky - meat is usually ready in the fall, after the rush
- Meat and egg demand is very high and there is limited supply.

- Restaurants can't always use the whole animal.
- Storage space is also an issue with meat.
- Livestock producers demand for their product overwhelms their supply, so currently, quantities of meat currently being produced on the island are still not nearly enough to supply even one restaurant;
- Grocers don't have a butcher on staff, or the facilities or the equipment
- More people and businesses are interested in buying meat sold "off the hoof" (ie without middle-persons, selling quantity versus cuts)
- Some restaurant can purchase a whole chicken if they have time to cut it and aren't in a rush, but restaurants in a rush can't deal with a whole chicken
- Galiano needs a butcher shop
- Some growers don't want to increase their production
- Growers would like to know what other growers are pricing things at.
- Growers need a way to coordinate orders, deliveries, pickups with grocers, restaurants.
- Consistency is so important for restaurants with a fixed menu, and 1-2 wks' notice
- Reliability - summer is so hectic, can't deal with producers backing out part way through the season or changing their prices half way through the season.
- Restaurants need early communication and consistency, or they will lose interest in supporting island businesses
- It is easier for big farms to provide consistency, harder for small farms.
- One barrier is that everything from the farmers is ready July, August, and September. It is ready all at once. Storage can be difficult both for growers and restaurants. The only solution to providing produce year-round would be a greenhouse, but that is expensive.
- Produce is picked in the morning so it's not fresh for the evening north end market
- Small scale growing of crops to sell at market is time-consuming and physically gruelling, although worthwhile because of the "guarantee" to sell out. Adding diversity to crop selection complicates the process of growing enough that it may not prove to be worthwhile
- It's "such a monumental task" to get ready for market (picking, prep, transport, etc.) that it is so much simpler to just stick to what works - barrier to growing different varieties
- Early start of the Saturday Market means a big hustle in the morning

Market notes:

- Eggs are allowed for sale at markets now
- Producers need to talk together about how to handle margins related to the best abattoir, because you can only mark things up so much.
- Chickens and eggs are easy to sell via word of mouth, but markets could be useful pick up points
- Some growers would like to see the Saturday market start in April instead of May, for early greens and plant starts
- Childcare at the market may be helpful
- Maybe shortening the hours of the market would be better for the vendors as the last hour is usually not very profitable

- Consistent, weekly meat purchasing at the Saturday Market may not be realistic but there may be room for the Saturday Market to help connect consumers with meat producers via preordered pickups and a shared freezer for small amounts of meat. Meat sellers can also take pre-orders at the market, which is less risky than bringing the product in the hopes it may sell.
- GIFC Co-op Table could be helpful to small scale growers
- Market will be using the bigger field this year may allow for expanded opportunities (ie—trunk sales)
- Is alcohol allowed for sale at market?
- Without enough inventory, not worth having a market table; if \$100 profit could be made at the North Hall Market, it would be worth coming for the exposure;
- The Saturday Market is a viable sales venue for small scale growers.
- The North Hall Market could be a viable sales venue if enough vendors participated to create a lively atmosphere.
- Very large scale growers have an understanding of the scale necessary to supply restaurants, grocers and a demanding public, so there is little need for a market as a sales venue.
- When attempting to scale up crop and livestock production, small scale growers may not consider the market as viable a sales option as supplying a restaurant or grocer, as consistency in sales is vital to success.
- Some value-added food items may not sell as successfully as produce at all markets, so strategic participation is important. However, even a slow sales day on these items may prove worthwhile in terms of long-term marketing.

Cooperation and communication

- Henny's weekly list is really helpful and can serve as a model for other growers.
- Most growers aren't getting the word out about what they have.
- Discussing orders earlier in the season would be a big help.
- Should have meetings like this to connect again later in the season when farmers have a better idea of timing and what they are producing
- A list of the products restaurants are using, and a list of the products farmers have would be really useful to match people up
- An online platform on which growers can let restaurants know how much they will have, and restaurants can make a list too showing what they need. The online platform can act as the mediator between the growers and the restaurants. Going to each grower individually takes a lot of time, this platform would save a lot of time.
- Having a list from restaurants ahead of time about what they need and in what quantities would be really helpful to growers. It would allow growers to plan out each crop accordingly.
- Most farmers have such a small place, they were thinking of reducing variety and having larger quantities of fewer crops. Instead of everyone having small amounts of lots of things, it could be useful to coordinate and have each farmer grow fewer things in larger quantities. Farmers want to coordinate so everyone is growing different things and meeting the demand of restaurants.

- It would really help restaurants if farmers were willing to get a cooperative going.
- If the restaurants owners want to stick local, it would be useful for multiple different farmers to produce one product, so that together they can meet consistency and share in providing that one product.
- Some farmers are producing small quantities of a lot of things to sell at markets, they would be open to modifying production as an experiment if they knew what restaurants needed grown.
- Billboard at south hall to communicate what is needed and what is available
- Could hall be a rendezvous point for pick up?
- If farms could consistently share lists (like Henny does) with restaurants before the restaurants order from their larger suppliers, more food from Galiano could be used as ingredients, but this effort needs co-ordination (by whom?);
- if a grower has a surplus, they may be able to reach out to the restaurants, who could then run a special featuring the ingredient
- Platform would also allow farmers to collaborate on eg medications, bulk buys
- Helpful for farmers to know what restaurant are paying their vendors for products, a monthly forecast is helpful, it can help farmers plan their business
- Important for early communication on (1) the needs of the restaurants so growers can plan, and (2) what the growers can produce so the restaurants can plan. It is too time consuming to do individual one on one reach out, there should be a list for restaurants and a list for producers that is shared.
- Is there a 3rd party who can coordinate this, maybe an online platform?