

# **Haida Gwaii Food Strategy**

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

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## Disclaimer

This report is a product of the UVic Sustainability Scholars Program, a partnership between UVic and various on- and off-campus organizations offering internship opportunities to graduate students working on sustainability-focused research projects that advance sustainability in the region. This project was conducted under the mentorship of Local Foods To School staff.

## Personal Acknowledgements

This work is rooted in the lands, waters, and people of Haida Gwaii, which has been home to the Haida Nation for millennia. I spent large periods of my childhood as a settler on Haida Gwaii and consider it my home.

For this project, I was guided by my relationships with friends, Knowledge Holders, Elders, and youth, both Haida and non-Haida. I worked closely with the amazing Gaad Gas *Raven Ryland*, who led the Haida Gwaii Food Strategy during my time assisting on it. I am deeply motivated by my adoption into a Haida Eagle clan, Skidegate Gidins / Naa 'Yuuwans *XaaydaGa*, in 2021 by the beloved Jiixa *Gladys Vandal* (1938- 2023), a renowned Haida weaver, language mentor, and Elder. I also keep in mind Tuck and Yang's warning of settlers' fantasies about being adopted by Indigenous people to supposedly erase their participation in genocide.<sup>1</sup> An adoption is not a certificate of approval or a one-time event; I understand it to entail lifelong responsibilities of showing up for and supporting the vitality of the clan and the Nation as a whole, within the context of colonialism and white supremacy.

This work was done in the context of ongoing colonial violence affecting our lives and those of our neighbours. It has also been a time of great momentum, discussion, and excitement with the Haida Title Lands agreement, and the emergent futures created by people every day in and around Haida Gwaii. I am so grateful to be connected to this work, community, and movement.

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<sup>1</sup> Tuck, E., & Yang, K. W. (2012). Decolonization is not a metaphor. *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, 1(1), 1-40; Hunt, S. & Holmes, C. (2015). Everyday decolonization: Living a decolonizing queer politics. *Journal of Lesbian Studies*, 19(2): 154-172.

## Introduction

Colonial food systems continue to disrupt many people's relationships with food, land, and each other. Haida Gwaii's food system is heavily dependent on a ferry to import grocery store products, which is vulnerable to shutdowns and delays due to weather, climate crisis-related events, pandemics, and staff shortages. Prices in stores are very high, and processed food is sometimes the most available option for families. But there is incredible energy around building food independence on Haida Gwaii, and in deepening people's capacity to feed themselves. Haida people are leaders in the movement towards food sovereignty, and share wisdom about land cultivation, harvesting, and gathering with their communities. Gardeners and growers of all stripes on Haida Gwaii also form an important part of the Islands' food system.

The Haida Gwaii Food Strategy aims to play a part in better understanding Haida Gwaii's food system, amplifying local knowledge, identifying needs and recommendations, and highlighting pathways for the Islands' communities to move further down the pathway of food self-reliance.

## Background

The Haida Gwaii Food Strategy is a collaboration between multiple organizations, initiatives, and individuals on Haida Gwaii, and spans back to two instructional videos on local food produced in 2020 for the Hlk'yak'ii: To Start a Fire partnership. At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, interest in gardening, harvesting, and processing blossomed on Haida Gwaii. The Council of the Haida Nation hosted a series of webinars on the topic of Food Independence throughout 2020 and 2021. The All-Islands Food Strategy received its first funding in 2021, and a Food Strategist was hired in early 2022. Since then, there have been various community engagements, long-form interviews, public surveys, and research collaborations conducted by the different Food Strategy partners. Local Foods To School and the Skidegate Band Council play key roles in advancing the Food Strategy, as well as Swiilawiid Sustainability Society and the Haida Gwaii Museum. The Haida Foods Committee provides oversight on the work as a whole and is in conversation with project coordinators throughout the process.

The goal in this stage of the Food Strategy is to create a cohesive document that encompasses our community's knowledge gathered through interviews and surveys, and points to tangible ways that individuals and institutions can take action to address areas of need and possibilities in our food system.

## Methodology

Our methodology for this food strategy – the way we engaged with and generated knowledge – is rooted first and foremost in Haida values, laws, and protocols. We have drawn from our existing relationships with lands, waters, and people on Haida Gwaii, and have built new relationships from this grounded basis. Our methods draw from other Indigenous and anti-colonial methodologies. Our research is rooted in an ethic of relationality and relational accountability, which are the tenets of an Indigenous research paradigm<sup>2</sup>. These methodologies also describe the knowledge we are seeking as emergent, shared, value-based, and relational.<sup>3</sup> The stories we tell in this report, and the recommendations we suggest, do not point to one “correct” path forward. Instead, this report contains a multitude of perspectives from our friends, kin, and neighbours. Our goal has been for engagement around local food to put Haida laws in action; to value the means of engagement as much as the ends.

## Data Collection and Analysis

To generate this food strategy, we conducted one-on-one long-form interviews, surveys with community members across Haida Gwaii, and community engagement at public events over the last 4 years. Interviewees were selected for their knowledge of or involvement in local food systems, yet certainly do not represent an exhaustive list of everyone on Haida Gwaii with this knowledge. We also used data from webinars coordinated by the Council of the Haida Nation and the Hlk'yak'ii *To Start A Fire* project, and from complementary research projects on the subject of climate change and marine foods.<sup>4,5</sup> We analyzed this breadth of data using qualitative and quantitative methods. Each interview was a story – a piece of a richly coloured, expanding puzzle. We analyzed interview transcripts by using a coding system to highlight key quotes and ideas, and we identified recurring themes between interviews and other data. Surveys included both quantitative and qualitative questions. We created graphs and charts to analyze the quantitative aspects, and integrated comments and written responses into our findings. Engagement done at public events involved various interactive activities involving reflective questions, post-it notes, maps, trivia, and prizes. The primary goal of these engagements was to open space for

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<sup>2</sup> Wilson, S. (2008). Research is ceremony. Indigenous research methods. Winnipeg: Fernwood

<sup>3</sup> Wilson, S., Breen, A. V., & DuPré, L. (Eds.). (2019). Research and reconciliation. Canadian Scholars.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.haidanation.ca/webinars/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.swiilawiid.org/hlkyakii>

community members to have an access point to the food strategy, and to help collectively shape it.

## Summary

The Haida Gwaii Food Strategy focuses on the following pillars: 1) Growing, Harvesting, and Gathering, 2) Climate Crisis, 3) Education and Resources, 4) Physical Infrastructure, 5) Monitoring and Policies, and 6) Social, Economic, and Cultural Systems. Within these pillars are subsections on a variety of topics such as food procurement, hunting, marine foods, freshwater security, mentorship, food pantries, distribution systems, food waste, working together, youth and elder engagement, and many more.

Based on 28 longform one-on-one interviews and a survey that engaged 151 people across Haida Gwaii, the Food Strategy team completed a draft of a 33-page document that expands on each of the previously-mentioned focus areas. The draft will continue to be worked with and edited throughout the coming months, with additional interviews and engagements to fill in the gaps. The final product will be a living document that can be revisited and updated periodically, plus a digital map that highlights local areas and services related to local food in each community.

The following summaries provide windows into some of the sections of the Food Strategy (food procurement, gardening, climate crisis, and economics):

### ***Food Procurement on Haida Gwaii***

Besides growing, harvesting, and gathering, many community members are currently reliant on grocery stores for their food. Acquiring food is becoming increasingly difficult given consistently rising living costs, stagnating wages, transportation barriers, the cumulative adverse health effects of processed foods, and unpredictable events (eg. weather, pandemics) that cause breakdowns in food distribution systems. Based on the survey conducted as part of the Food Strategy, less than 12% of community members felt that the food supply in their community is reliable. This highlights the urgent need for us to cultivate alternative modes of feeding ourselves and, while building this long-term capacity, addressing more immediate barriers to accessing food and nutrition that many of us face.

### ***Gardening on Haida Gwaii***

Haida Gwaii is home to gardens of many shapes and sizes, as well as several farms. A number of local institutions have gardens and greenhouses that are maintained by staff, volunteers, or program participants, such as the Adult Day Program in Masset, the Local Foods To School pantry in HlGaagilda Skidegate, Agnes L. Mathers Elementary School in K'il Kun Sandspit, and many

more. Farms such as Maude Island Farm, Lavoie Farm, St. Mary's Spring, Baru Farm, and other small-scale growers provide farmer's markets across the islands with fresh produce, proteins, and preserves.

Growing our own food reduces our reliance on ferry-imported foods and fossil fuels, and helps us to connect to land, other beings, and each other. Interviewees noted the incredible mental, physical, and social effects of gardening. Gardening is more than the physical practice of growing food – it opens doors for spiritual communion with other beings, for knowledge-sharing, and for mutual aid among community members.

### ***Climate Crisis***

We understand the climate crisis as inseparable from the interconnected forces of cultural suppression, ecological devastation, and resource-based extraction driven by colonialism and capitalism. Our changing climate is a symptom of a dominant order that is sick and decaying. On Haida Gwaii, we have been feeling the impacts of the climate crisis for several years.

Unpredictable weather events, cold wet springs and freezes, droughts and high temperature events, fluctuating and unstable freshwater sources, and higher ocean temperatures are causing shifts in our food systems.

Community members have already begun to take proactive action in their gardens and harvesting methods to be able to subsist in changing conditions. There has also been collective movement towards increasing our resilience to climate change through donated food distribution, mutual aid among neighbours, the transfer of land-based knowledge between Elders and youth, climate adaptation models, and various community research projects.

### ***Economics***

Food changes hands in various ways on Haida Gwaii – through sharing, gifting, trading, and selling. There is a strong culture on Haida Gwaii of sharing meals, catches, and harvests with our friends, relatives, neighbours, and strangers. We also face the reality of currently living in a money-based economy. As Haida Gwaii continues to move away from resource extraction-based economies, it is important that these major industries are not simply replaced by different types of corporate exploitation. We have the tools and potential to build local economies rooted in place-based relationships, knowledge, and exchange. As food is intertwined with every aspect of our lives – our schools, workplaces, events, culture, connection with others – it is a major part of our Islands' economy.

To support more food-related training, work, production, and services on Haida Gwaii, this type of work must be compensated well. This will, in turn, help bolster the availability of affordable

and nutritious local foods for community members, which will ease the burden of high food prices on people across the Islands.

## References

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