



CONCRETE GARDEN

SUSTAINABLE // URBAN // AGRICULTURE

Fall 2013

LONDON CALLING

urban agriculture
across the pond

DETROIT'S DECAY

what can you grow
from bankruptcy?

STARVING STUDENTS

food fights flare at
B.C. universities

FEEDING FERNWOOD

communal gardens raise
an anarchist plot

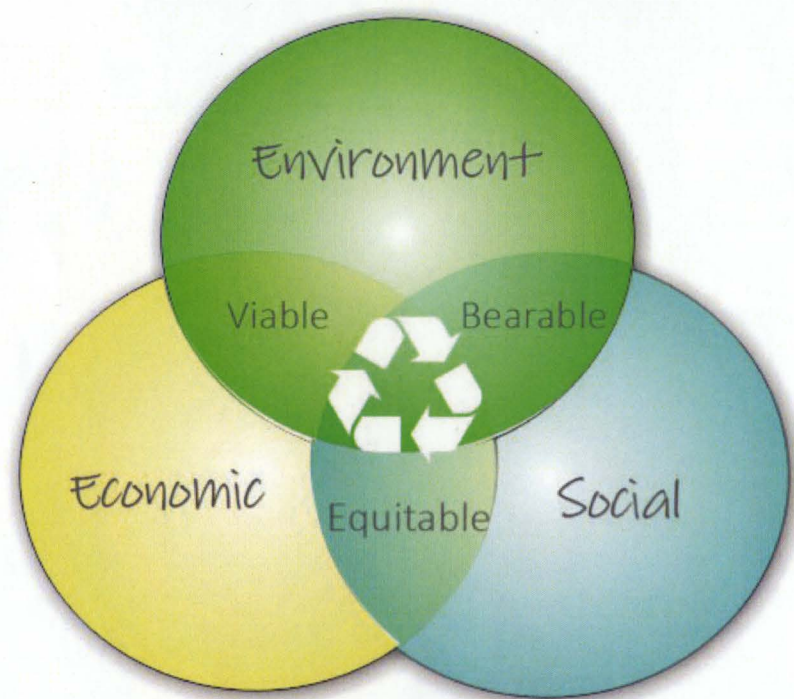
EXPLORING: a food truck | a honey farm | an eco hotel



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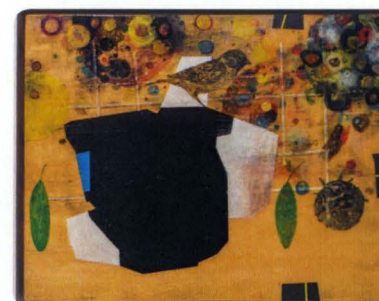
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FROM THE COVER



To Barrie Szekely, the presence of "nature" in cities is fragmented. His art represents "a visual compost of ideas" about the urban mosaic. "[Nature] reveals itself slowly in bits 'n pieces, fragments," he explains.

Szekely's art has been exhibited throughout Canada and the United States. His work can be found in the collections of the Canada Council Art Bank, Prudential Insurance Company of America, New Orleans Museum of Art, and Can West. Currently, Szekely is represented by Bugera Matheson Gallery in Edmonton, Alta., and the Wallace Galleries in Calgary, Alta. His 2013 series, BeautifulHouse-HouseBeautiful, contains a series of eight oil paintings on wood panel. Szekely resides in Victoria, B.C.

NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

IT TOOK ME THREE YEARS TO PROPAGATE a single ripe tomato. The magic finally happened on the illegal rooftop patio of my old apartment in Oak Bay, where I tended a few vegetable plants, poring over them like a fretful parent. To my dismay, I had to slice off half my prize because it had slowly succumbed to blossom-end rot. My reward was miniscule, just a single bite, not fit to pair with cracker and cheese, but the experience stirred my curiosity. How do some farmers consistently grow marvelous organic fruits and vegetables? And is it possible for urbanites to do the same?

This second issue of *Concrete Garden* tells the stories of compelling individuals, businesses, and institutions from around the world that dare to make sustainable agriculture work in urban settings. With major agricultural regions struggling through drought and devastating weather events, and a catastrophic earthquake overdue on the west coast of North America, food shortage is a looming threat.

Growing interest in community gardens and farmers' markets has spurred cities to seek new ways to become food secure. Universities are following suit and leading through ecological innovation. (On page 16, read about UBC's plans to use worms to build the world's most sustainable student union building.) Elsewhere in this issue, *Concrete Garden* will whet your appetite for local cuisine, from a funky food truck to a tasty bistro, and take you inside Canada's greenest hotel. Whether you fancy learning how to plant your own beets, or are interested in the current battle to turn the ruins of Detroit into fertile fields, we hope you discover inspiring new ideas about sustainable urban agriculture within the pages of *Concrete Garden*.

—Kimberley Veness

THE HOME AND AWAY ISSUE

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Editor

Kimberley Veness

Art Director

Kaitlyn Rosenburg

Senior Editor

Quinn MacDonald

Associate Editor

Michael Luis

Publisher

David Leach

Production Coordinator

Daniel Hogg

Photographer

Hugo Wong

Contributing Writers

Meghan Casey
Joseph Leroux
Jory MacKay
Heather Neale
Jennifer Anne Sauter

For information about advertising and sponsorship packages, editorial contributions, story ideas or reprint rights, contact concretewardenuvic@gmail.com

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A Taste of Tradition

An annual conference explores the food culture of Vancouver Island's First Nations

By Quinn MacDonald

JARED WILLIAMS GREW UP IN THE COWICHAN VALLEY, BUT ADMITS he didn't have much knowledge of his people's cooking or food. "We ate mashed potatoes and bologna," recalls Williams, now a kitchen manager, of his childhood diet.

So, in 2010, when he first attended the Traditional Foods Conference to represent the Cowichan Tribes Elder's Kitchen, he felt keen to learn more about how West Coast First Nations have harvested from land and sea for thousands of years. "I remember entering the longhouse kitchen in Nanaimo," he says, "and being blown away. It was just a positive, spiritual, cultural event that I nearly accidentally wandered into with an office manager attitude."

Locals and visitors continue to have their imaginations—and their taste buds—expanded at the annual conference, which shifts location up and down Vancouver Island. On September 27th and 28th, the Cowichan Valley hosts the latest edition. What began in 2008 as a research project about seafood contamination, led by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO), has grown into a gathering of hundreds of people who represent communities across the Island.

"The elders stood up and were like, 'We need more of this, we need to get together around food,'" says Fiona Devereaux, a nutritionist with the Vancouver Island and Coastal Communities Indigenous Food Network (VICCIFN). A funding partnership with DFO eco-toxicologist Dr. Peter Ross gave life to the conference.

Events include discussions on pressing issues, like pollution around traditional foods, workshops exploring community

building, and hands-on demonstrations of salmon pit cooks and other techniques.

"[The conference] allows space for community members to talk about their projects and network with one another," says Erin Rowsell, another VICCIFN nutritionist. "We also mix in the arts with the conference." Attendees have learned to weave berry baskets and carve silk berry spoons.

Jared Williams remembers the "fear factor" when First Nations youth sampled traditional foods like sea urchins and fish eggs. "It was an absolute blast," says the Cowichan conference coordinator. "It opened everybody's eyes that, between the elders on one side of the table and the youth on the other, there had been a huge loss. It became apparent that we had to do something, and we had to do it quickly. From then on, I was hooked."

The conference focuses on five main pillars: nutrition, culture, food safety, community, and sustainability or regeneration. Rowsell and Williams both think the conference draws strength from youth involvement and the translation of traditional knowledge for modern lifestyles.

"I hope it continues to hop around the Island, inspiring the youth," says Williams, "and helping to remind impoverished communities that you don't need money in order to eat. You just have to go outside." *

For more info: www.indigenousfoodsvi.ca

September



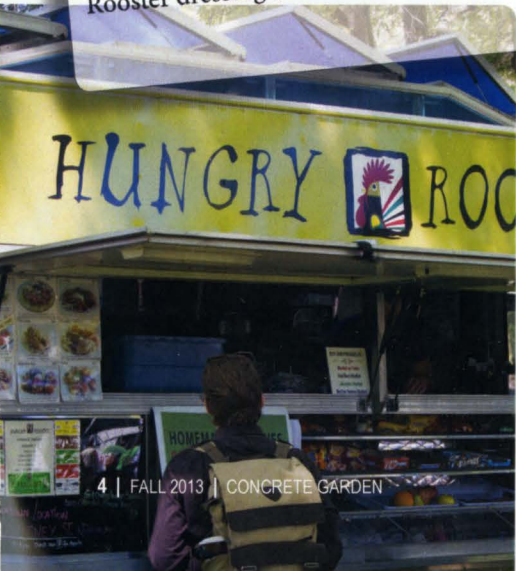
THE HUNGRY ROOSTER FOOD TRUCK

By Kimberley Veness

Mexicanka Perogies: A culinary fusion of cultures

- 6 perogies
- aged cheddar cheese, grated
- Rooster aioli
- fresh salsa / sour cream
- fresh cilantro / lime
- cabbage slaw
- Rooster dressing (shh, it's a secret)

1. Combine a squeeze of fresh lime juice, chipotle to taste and mayonaise for the Rooster aioli.
2. Crisp the perogies in a skillet.
3. Place on a bed of slaw. Top with cheese, aioli, salsa, sour cream, cilantro, and lime.
4. Drizzle with Rooster dressing (if you can get your hands on it).



PAULINA TOKARSKI KNOWS PEROGIES—her special recipe has been passed down through her Polish family for four generations. Paulina and her mother, Janina Tokarski, opened Hungry Rooster in March of last year.

The duo was in business together for over 12 years prior at their Polish delicatessen, Cook N' Pan, located in Cook Street Village. Interested in a change of scenery, the two sold the restaurant and Janina opened a storefront called Hungry Rooster Kitchen in Nanaimo. Paulina took a road trip to Los Angeles to buy the perfect food truck.

So what does a famished fowl have to do with Polish perogies? Paulina says the food truck's name was inspired by the quick, eager way of the rooster. "They're such confident birds, always in charge and ready to face the day."

Paulina lived in Poland until the age of 13. Surrounded by farms and people who loved food, Paulina's upbringing revolved around eating and sharing food grown close to home. She supplies the food truck with lettuce and herbs, like mint and cilantro, from her home garden in Victoria. She shops at farmers' markets in Sidney and Victoria for other produce, or looks for local items at Thrifty Foods. All bread is baked at Pórtofino Bakery in Victoria, and the antibiotic- and hormone-free meat Hungry Rooster serves is sourced from Two Rivers Specialty Meats in Vancouver. All of the truck's food packaging, cutlery, and veggie scraps are compostable.

Of course, Paulina won't reveal her family's secret perogy recipes, but there are many tasty varieties they make that you can choose from. Potato Cottage Dill, Spinach Feta Potato Garlic, and Mushroom Sauerkraut are just some Hungry Rooster signatures. The Tokarskis' perogies sell in the Victoria area at The Market on Yates and The Market on Millstream, Lifestyle Markets, the Red Barn Markets, and Mother Nature's Market and Deli. You can also find them for sale in Duncan, on Salt Spring Island, and in Calgary and Edmonton. *



Nourish Bistro

A FLOURISH OF FLAVOUR HIDDEN IN A SECRET GARDEN

By Meghan Casey



NOURISH CAFÉ AND BISTRO SITS ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF THE HORTICULTURE CENTRE OF the Pacific (HCP), just south of Beaver Lake. A gravel road leads towards a lattice awning nearly swallowed by overgrown vines. The wood-paneled café could be mistaken for a cottage in the middle of nowhere.

Nourish's owner, Hayley Rosenberg, wears rubber boots and smiles with a welcoming glow. She discovered the site while volunteering at the HCP's Glendale Gardens. She bought the building with a dream of bringing people together over good, healthy food in a holistic setting that would satisfy both body and spirit.

When we arrive for lunch, my friend Grace and I are offered any table. A counter divides the kitchen from the empty dining room, filling the open restaurant with the sound of clanging pots and the smell of simmering garlic. I can't help but notice the spindly scrawl on the wall, "Eat with People You Love," and chuckle because we're alone.

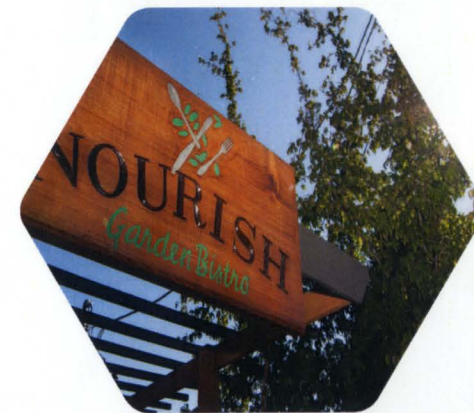
Our two-seater near the window has a cluster of crab apples on a polished oak-slab centrepiece. We scan the menu, and our server suggests the daily juice special, a carrot and beet concoction called The Sparkling Nourishment. I cringe a little—I've always felt at odds with health food—until Grace snaps me out of my hesitation. The In a Curry dish sounds fun, and I hope it pairs well with the beet juice.

Nourish's mandate is to do just that: nourish. Not only does the menu centre on vegetables rather than meat-and-potato staples, but most options are also gluten-free and can be ordered dairy-free. Along with using locally sourced seasonal veggies, Nourish serves fresh-made bread from nearby bakeries.

The restaurant also allows visitors to reconnect with their bodies. The summer season features yoga in Glendale Gardens and trail running in neighbouring parks. Hayley's husband and business partner, Rob Fawcett, runs cycling trips from the building, which range from four-hour tours to a five-day mountain-bike excursion around Vancouver Island. Last July, the couple collaborated on a 100 Mile Ride to a 100 Mile Dinner event that featured pit stops at farms along the Saanich Peninsula followed by a post-ride feast made from locally sourced ingredients.

As more customers trickle in, table talk fills the room. I get ready to plug my nose when my vegetable juice arrives, but relax when a timid sip reveals sweet beet pulp with a lemon-lime tang. My meal appears with diced carrots and parsnips floating in a steaming bowl of yellow coconut curry. The crunchy vegetables and chicken so tender it breaks at the touch of a fork complement the creaminess of the coconut milk. A swish of Sparkling Nourishment cools my palate.

When my plate is clean and it's time to go, our server smiles and waves goodbye. As soon as I leave the bistro, I feel like I could go right back in. *



505 Quayle Road, Victoria BC
(250) 590-6346

Prices: \$5.50 to \$16
NourishInsight.com

10:00am to 8:00pm weekdays
9:00am to 8:00pm weekends

Tugwell Creek Honey Farm & Meadery*

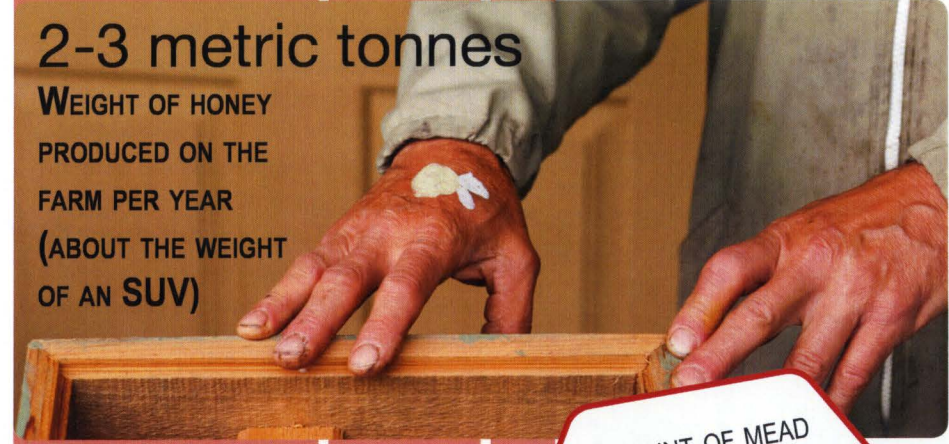
100-150
NUMBER OF BEE
COLONIES KEPT ON
THE FARM

By Kimberley Veness

***DID YOU KNOW MEAD, A FERMENTED MIXTURE OF HONEY, WATER, AND GRAIN, IS THE OLDEST KNOWN ALCOHOL? THE TERM "HONEYMOON" WAS ACTUALLY DERIVED FROM ANCIENT TIMES WHEN GROOMS DRANK MEAD LATE INTO THE NIGHT TO INCREASE THEIR CHANCES OF SIRING A SON.**



Owner Bob Liptrot



2-3 metric tonnes

WEIGHT OF HONEY
PRODUCED ON THE
FARM PER YEAR
(ABOUT THE WEIGHT
OF AN SUV)

AMOUNT OF MEAD
PRODUCED BY THE FARM
8,000-12,000
litres
PER YEAR (ABOUT 150
BATH TUBS)

TUGWELL CREEK HONEY FARM AND MEADERY nestles into a grassy hillside just off West Coast Road in Sooke. In 2003, Bob Liptrot and his partner, Dana LeComte, gained a license as western Canada's first meadery. Liptrot's family has kept bees in the Fraser Valley for generations. He is an entomologist (an insect specialist) and has worked with bees for over 40 years. The Liptrots keep Carniolan bees, a hardy European honeybee adapted to the cool and damp coastal climate of British Columbia.

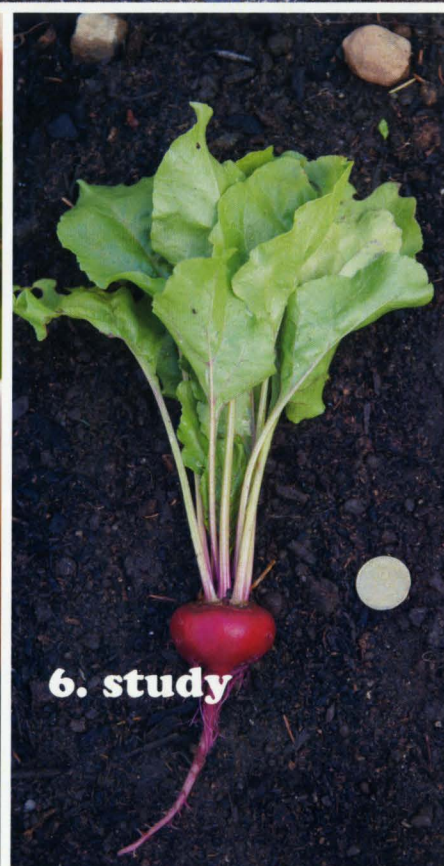
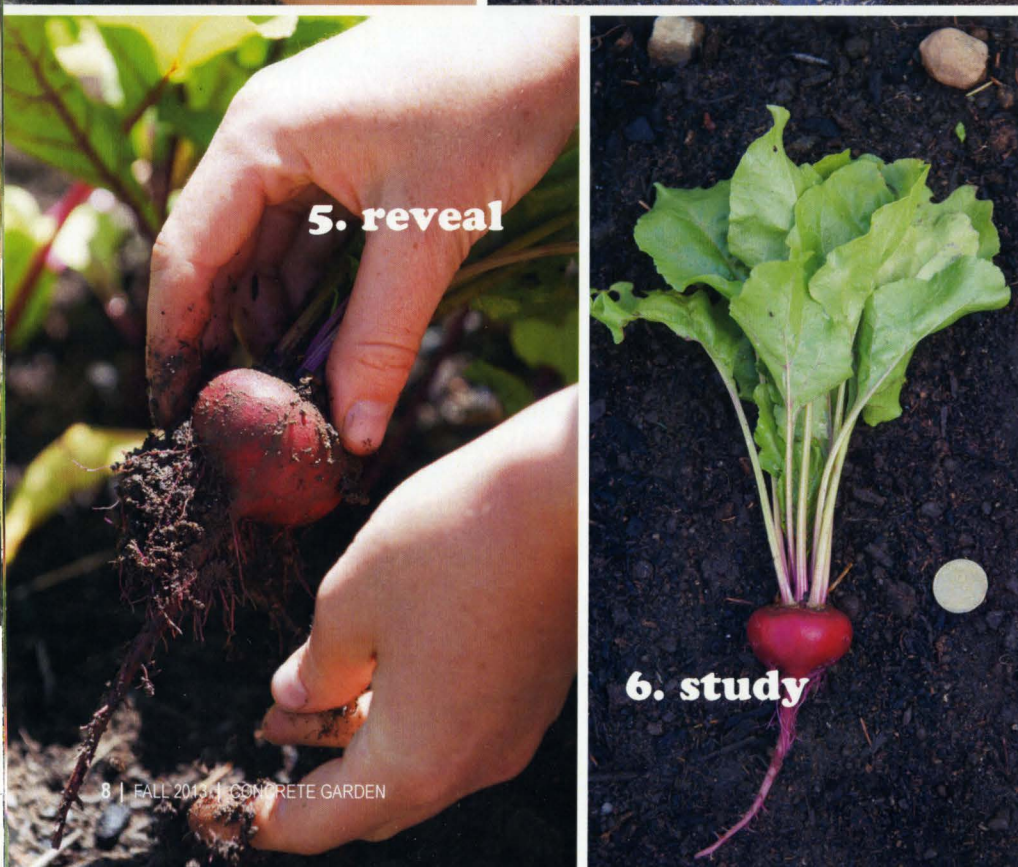
The wooden bar inside the Tasting Room is welcoming. The smooth top is stained a warm yellow, and is well suited for resting elbows. A built-in shelf to the right reaches up to the low ceiling, and is stacked with jars of honey that match the bar's hue. Tugwell Creek crafts two varieties: Fireweed and Field Blossom. Small lights in the shelf make the honey jars glow like little lanterns.

The Fireweed honey tastes sweet and subtle, like catching the scent of summer on your tongue. Liptrot drives 90 beehives to the outskirts of Jordan River, about a half-hour from his farm, so his bees can feast on a field of fireweed. The deep-flavoured Field Blossom is maple-syrup thick. It's made from the pollen of broadleaf maple, blackberry, thistle, and dandelion.

Tugwell Creek is also well-known for its mead (or honey wine). In 2005, the Liptrots won the Northwest Wine Summit Gold medal. They continue to sell quality mead from Tofino to Vancouver. Their mead can be purchased in a number of liquor stores and pubs in Victoria, and through their website.

Besides serving up succulent honey and award-winning meads, Liptrot's bees also serve as an educational tool. Each year, Liptrot gives tours to elementary school children so they can learn about the importance of pollinators. With over 30 stunning bed and breakfast locations around Sooke, tourists find their way to the farm. *

For more info: tugwellcreekfarm.com



Beet Poetry

Confessions of an extremely green thumb

By Heather Neale

IT WAS IN LATE AUGUST LAST YEAR WHEN I dug them up—all three of them: medium sized, fresh and pleasingly plump, a deep purple shade of culinary delight. They were fresh beets, and they were all mine.

I had planted 18 seeds, not three as the packet suggested, and watered daily from May through August, diligently removing prickly sow thistle, daphne, and clover. Only three sprouted, but I was proud. The raised beds in my backyard weren't pretty to look at yet, and when I added up the 30 minutes a day I'd spent weeding and watering, it came to 3,600 hours of labour for three beets, but in this, my second season of food gardening (or, Year Two), I was making progress. And so were the beets.

It was the first time I had grown beets large enough to eat. They were the size of oranges. Okay, mandarin oranges. But I was optimistic that their overwhelming flavour would compensate for their underwhelming girth. Pulling them up, I felt like a six-year-old watching her first magic trick. There was an obvious logic to growing vegetables, but that did not take away from the wonder I felt as the beets' moist skins gleamed in the late-afternoon sunlight.

I TOOK UP GARDENING IN 2011, NEAR THE end of August, when I moved in with my soon-to-be-husband, Jeff. I had never gardened before (unless you count the indoor African violet I killed, or my windowsill cacti), and it was late in the season to begin. But when I looked at Jeff's 600-square-foot backyard, I saw my opportunity. Here

was a chance to ground myself in the earth again after years spent on Vancouver concrete. Growing food in Victoria was going to be easier for me, with more space and more time on my hands.

This spring, I spoke about my paltry early attempts with Carolyn Herriot, the local author of *The Zero Mile Diet* and founder of the Garden Path Nursery north of Victoria. Herriot started growing her first food garden in 1976.

"Eating food that I had grown myself was so rewarding that I have grown a food garden every year ever since," she recalled, "even when it meant digging up a friend's back lawn!" She talked not only about the sense of self-sufficiency attached to the harvest, but also the health benefits of eating local and organic.

It was a claim I'd heard from J.B. MacKinnon and Alisa Smith, the renowned Vancouver journalist couple who co-authored *The 100 Mile Diet*. According to their book, published in 2007, "300,000 Americans are hospitalized each year by the food they eat, while fully one-third of Canadians [suffered] some kind of food related illness [that] year." Eating my own produce sounded a whole lot healthier.

EVERY SUMMER, WHEN I WAS A CHILD, I visited my relatives' farms in Manitoba's Interlake region. I have vivid sense memories of ripe corn on the cob, sweet baby carrots with the dirt still on them, and sugared rhubarb.

As an adult, I wanted to savour those flavours year-round. I wanted to avoid processed, imported goods as much as possible, and grow my own dinner. I wanted to prove I could provide an organic, pesticide-free diet for my husband, my daughter, and myself—miles ahead of my Campbell Soup mom, whose idea of a complete meal was P.B. and J.

Mainly, I wanted my daughter to experience the magic of eating right out of the ground.

During Year One, I cultivated kale, romaine lettuce, spinach and Swiss chard to

get something in the ground before Labour Day. I also planted 49 beets. But as I breezed over the instructions, I thought to myself, "That many inches apart? I'll only grow three beets! That's absurd!" What resulted a couple of months later was, in fact, 49 beets, but most were the size of a pinky tip.

Year Two, I only pulled three beets, but at least they resembled supermarket supply.

So there I was, April 2013, or Year Three of my urban gardening career. My daughter was five-and-a-half months old and eating solid foods, so it was time to make healthier choices on her behalf.

Carolyn Herriot recommends planting what you love, rather than starting with what seems easiest or most prudent. Only then can you maintain a passion for growing your own food.

"At this juncture of time in human history, the most important thing you can do is go back to the garden," she told me. "It may sound simplistic, but never underestimate the life-changing power of growing even one tomato plant and eating the fruits of your labour."

After nurturing, protecting, and caring for a tiny "seed" inside of me for nine months, and being forever changed by the beautiful baby girl it became, I understand that the act of growing something is powerful.

And the best part is that urban growing is catching on. For an entire year, J.B. MacKinnon and Alisa Smith only ate food produced within 100 miles of their Vancouver home and blogged about their challenges for *The Tyee*. According to MacKinnon, their experience acted as a gateway to a local food movement that has seen an increase in farmers' markets, food security awareness, and green innovation.

MacKinnon told me how impressed he has been by local food literacy since the blog became a book, the book became a reality-TV show, and the 100 Mile Diet became a global movement with deep local roots. "[Vancouverites] have tapped into

the sense that we can play with our cities as a community," he explained. "We can take a hands-on approach ... and lobby our city to do things like close off streets and grow fruit trees."

People have begun to understand that "food security"—the goal of ensuring we're not dependent on imported goods for sustenance—is not just about scaling up sustainable farming, or boycotting strawberries flown in from Korea. It's also about me in my backyard with my daughter and my three decent-sized beets.

The authors of *The 100 Mile Diet* and *The Zero Mile Diet* all struggled at first. For Herriot, the initial challenge was a yard full of clay. She treated the soil with a layered composting strategy known as "Lasagna Gardening." It took five years for her yard to blossom into the bountiful garden it is today. MacKinnon and Smith faced the creative challenge of finding enough food and ingredients, like prawns and red spring wheat bread, grown nearby to sate their hunger.

For me, the process has been about steadily learning as I go, and not getting overwhelmed or intimidated by all the complex information out there.

"You could literally mix a whole bunch of seeds in one big bowl," said MacKinnon, "throw them on the ground, and get a garden out of it."

The biggest thing I learned was that trial and error is an essential part of the gardening process. Everyone starts with pinky-sized beets or seedless clay. Eventually, through a process of trying a-little-bit-of-this and a-whole-lot-more-of-that, they find their way to heartier harvests.

I would, too, I vowed.

This year, I'm ready. I've got fresh compost prepped. I've got an array of seeds. And I've got a little helper, who will, as she grows, learn to love getting her hands dirty, watering rainbow-coloured rows of chard, and sampling the organic merchandise. Soon enough, we'll be making borscht for the whole neighbourhood. *

"IT MAY SOUND SIMPLISTIC, BUT NEVER UNDERESTIMATE THE LIFE-CHANGING POWER OF GROWING EVEN ONE TOMATO PLANT AND EATING THE FRUITS OF YOUR LABOUR."

Growing the Green Economy

The City of Vancouver has embraced the new frontier of urban agriculture. Can Victoria's green economy catch up?

By Quinn MacDonald

THIS SPRING, THE CITY OF VANCOUVER launched a comprehensive food strategy after nearly a decade of discussions. One of the document's five main goals is to make food a centrepiece of the region's green economy, by supporting public and pocket markets, upgrading infrastructure, and filling gaps in the supply and processing lines for fresh local produce.

While Victoria has less than 15 per cent of Metro Vancouver's 603,500 residents, the cities share a favourable climate and increasing interest in locally grown food. Chapter 17 of Victoria's new Official Community Plan (OCP)—a 30-year vision of the future—highlights "food systems." But can the Garden City keep up with Vancouver when it comes to generating green jobs from urban agriculture?

In 2004, Victoria city planner Kristina Bouris job-shared as one of Vancouver's first Food System Planners. She agrees that Victoria lags a bit behind its big sibling across the Strait. In 2003, the City of Vancouver passed "a just and sustainable food system" mandate and has since employed at least two full-time staffers responsible for food-system issues. In 2004, the Vancouver Food Policy Council, a 21-member

citizen advisory group, was created. Victoria lacks such an official bridge between its citizens and civic officials on the topic of food.

"[Vancouver's] food strategy is a logical extension of almost 10 years of work now," says Bouris, "and decades of community organization before that."

Food did emerge as an interest in the two-and-a-half years of consultations before Victoria passed its OCP in 2012, but the topic wasn't as emphasized as in Vancouver. Bouris thinks Vancouver's focus on commercial urban agriculture has been the main difference. Nevertheless she is impressed that Victoria devoted a chapter on food systems in its OCP and can only think of three other plans in B.C. with similar sections: Richmond, Langford, and Colwood. Victoria's current OCP only sets policy, however, while Vancouver's new strategy plots specific actions to develop a green economy.

Sharon McGeorge, a member of City Harvest, Victoria's urban agriculture co-op, says it would be great if the municipality developed a more comprehensive food strategy. But for policy to become reality, she says, the city needs to fund pilot projects to help make commercial urban agriculture viable.

"There have been 'strategies' written before," says McGeorge, "but we need to implement the strategy."

Sol Kinnis, a City Harvest vegetable farmer who also raises bees and chickens, thinks Victoria councillors are motivated to change the status quo and agrees with McGeorge about

the need for pilot projects. Municipal governments haven't hindered City Harvest's business so far, she says, but little obstacles, like bylaws and zoning restrictions around compost, fencing, and greenhouses, can complicate commercial urban agriculture.

As a planner, Bouris believes the idea of commercial urban agriculture can inspire Victoria residents to test new ground. She says a municipality's willingness to revise zoning and bylaws reflect its priorities, and cites a 2008 change to the home-occupation bylaw that allows residents to practice commercial urban agriculture—fruits and vegetables only—as an example of progress.

Philippe Lucas, a former city councillor and now chair of the Victoria Downtown Public Market Society, says that municipalities need to encourage urban food production by removing disincentives. He applauds Victoria's lax regulations around urban beekeeping and poultry. He also proposes a 10 per cent reduction in water costs for households that use 10 per cent of their property to grow food.

"It's not just rewarding people that grow food," says Lucas. "It's actually not charging people for using water that doesn't end up in our sewage system."

For more than eight years, Lucas worked to get a year-round public market in Victoria, a vision that will finally be realized in the renovated Hudson building early this fall. He says the city officials helped to host the Eat Here Now local food festival and other fundraisers, but beyond that he

didn't notice much municipal support, especially in finding a suitable space.

"The City is a major landholder in Victoria," he says, "and certainly opening up access to land for a temporary or permanent public market or farmers' market would be one way the City could have been more engaged."

Kinnis says that, as a business, City Harvest doesn't want to rely on government support. However, civic officials could help local farmers negotiate more facilities for growing, processing, and storing food.

five per cent. However, the district doesn't have plans to develop commercial urban agriculture.

Similarly, the Township of Esquimalt adopted a Community Gardens Policy in 2008, established a Community Gardens Task Force in late 2009, and started the township's first community garden at Anderson Park in 2010. Plans for a second are in development.

But according to sustainability coordinator Marlene Lagoa, Esquimalt hasn't hosted a public market in over two years due to low turnout. She claims not to

teaches organic gardening skills; an Urban Agriculture Hotline and urban agriculture workshop series; an Urban Agriculture Resolution that pledges city support; active promotion of public markets; and an easier permit process for new markets.

Lucas sees good intentions on the municipal and regional levels, but little funding or real action to back up the talk and the policy paperwork.

"The community has definitely taken the lead when it comes to food security issues," says Lucas. "This is top of mind for so many individuals in our region. There's

"VANCOUVER HAS A LOT OF LAND, NOT ONLY THEIR PARKS, BUT THEY HAVE WAREHOUSES THEY OWN, THEY HAVE BUILDINGS THEY OWN, THEY HAVE ALL KINDS OF VACANT LOTS THAT BELONG TO THEM. THE CITY OF VICTORIA HARDLY HAS ANYTHING."

"Eventually I would like to be able to provide paid employment to more people and that means allowing more working members who can earn an income," says Kinnis. "But we'll need more yards. We'll need more space."

Bouris says Victoria doesn't have much space to give, however. "This is another key difference between Vancouver and Victoria," she notes. "Vancouver has a lot of land. Not only their parks, but they have warehouses they own, they have buildings they own, they have all kinds of vacant lots that belong to them. The City of Victoria hardly has anything."

VICTORIA'S SURROUNDING MUNICIPALITIES also have yet to push for commercial urban agriculture.

The District of Saanich's strategic plan would increase food production on its boulevards, add 12 community gardens by 2036, increase the number of residents with backyard gardens or poultry from 35 per cent to 66 per cent, and increase commercial farmland by

know of any urban farmers in Esquimalt. While the council welcomes proposals from groups like the Community Gardens Society, Lagoa says there isn't enough demand to make local food a priority.

The District of Oak Bay has 26 allotment plots in their Monteith community garden. It supports local food sales at Oak Bay Night Markets, but these only occur on the third Wednesday of each month from June to September.

Back in Victoria, Bouris says they are working on a more detailed (but still policy-centred) implementation plan for the OCP. She says the city has already taken actions to support urban agriculture, including: two community-orchard and one kitchen-garden pilot projects; an annual operating grant for the non-profit Compost Education Centre, which

a level of capacity and support right now in food security and in local agriculture that is difficult to find in other social justice issues, and I think that creates a great opportunity to act rather than just wish for what [citizens] want to see in the region."

Bouris agrees that local governments need to hear from citizens about which issues to take the lead on.

"There's a lot of energy and momentum right now," says Bouris. "In the way that community gardens or edible landscaping were cutting edge 10 or 15 years ago, I see commercial urban agriculture as the next frontier." *



Finding Space

Matt Franks left advertising for an even greater challenge: selling urban agriculture to Britain's biggest city

By Jory MacKay

"THERE'S MORE THAN 90,000 PEOPLE ON THE WAITLIST FOR ALLOTMENTS in the U.K. because people perceive that if you want to grow something, you need a huge space."

Matt Franks sips on peppermint tea as he explains the fundamental issue ingrained in the British populace that plagues his new business, Connected Roots.

Two years ago, the 29-year-old left his job at a Greater London ad agency to pursue a passion for growing his own food. The son of an avid gardener, Franks grew up in Birmingham, Britain's second largest city. Like many of his neighbours, Franks's family home had enough space for a garden, and he regularly ate food grown in his own backyard. After attending university, however, he moved to London and realized the yard space he was so accustomed to was nowhere to be found.

Beginning with his own windowsill, Franks started planting beans, peas, and garlic. Visiting friends were amazed at what he could grow in such a small space. When he moved into a larger home with a front garden—"the pad of concrete where most people place their garbage bins," he clarifies—Franks experimented with planters and soils, and grew larger vegetables, like cucumber and squash.

At this point, Franks began fielding requests to set up garden spaces, or "grows" as they're known in the U.K., at other people's homes.

"Friends would come by and say, 'Can you do something like that at mine? I have no idea about soils or temperature or how

to grow.' So I would come around, get them set up and get them growing," he explains. "I did that for several friends and then some of their friends would come around and get interested and want to get the same. Connected Roots grew from that network."

The more interest people showed, and the more articles he read, the more Franks thought about quitting his job in the advertising world to focus on growing full time. Yet one major problem quickly became apparent: Aside from a few enlightened friends, most of the U.K. public had a drastically different view of what could be grown in urban centres.

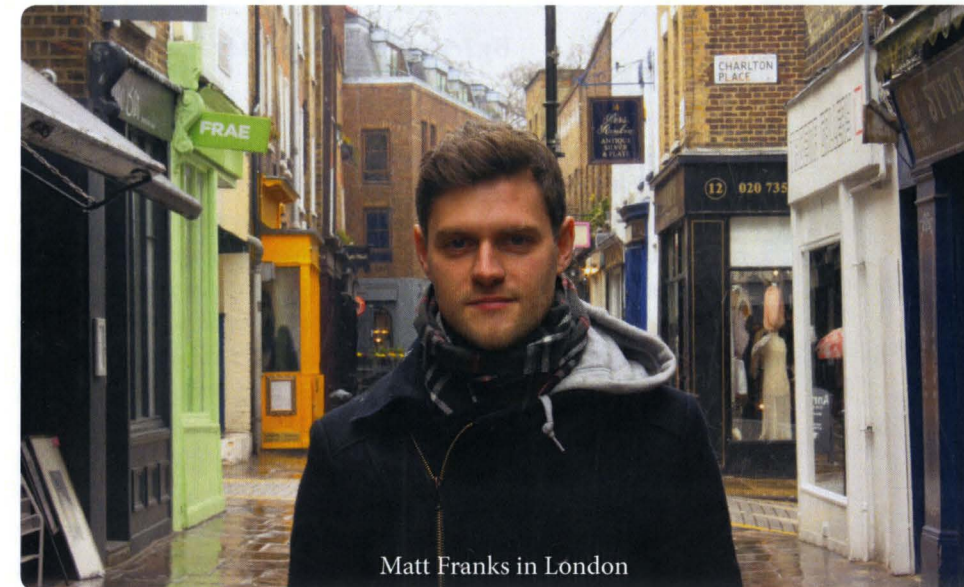
Historical Expectations

After the First World War, the British government amended the Small Holdings and Allotments Act, to ensure a certain amount of land be available for farming in each borough. Service men would then have a sizeable allotment to work on when they returned from the trenches.

Nearly a century later, however, that progressive legislation now poses perceptual and bureaucratic obstacles that frustrate micro-farming in the city.

"The problem is, for most people, that if they can't see a large plot of green, they can't perceive growing anything," explains Franks. "The allotments are a ridiculous amount of space—something like 30 metres by 30 metres—and from the start the government laid down these formulas of what you should grow and when to veg and rotate crops and all that."

"ACCORDING TO THE UN, RURAL AREAS WILL NEED TO INCREASE CROP YIELDS BY SEVEN TIMES TO FEED OUR CITIES, IF URBAN CITIZENS DON'T LEARN TO GROW SOME OF THEIR OWN FOOD. IT SHOULDN'T BE SOMETHING THAT PEOPLE JUST WANT TO DO, BUT SOMETHING THEY NEED TO DO. IT'S A NECESSITY."



Matt Franks in London

photo: Jory MacKay

Franks says this ingrained structure has made British citizens believe they require a proper allotment space before they can start growing food.

While community gardens may be common in North America, dense European cities like London have little leftover space for growing food. Even a progressive borough such as Hackney, with a population of close to 250,000, has only 10 allotment spaces.

Despite policies to constrain London's population growth, the city has expanded every year since 1988, with more than three million people now living in central London. City officials estimate nine million people will call the capital home by 2031.

With that population growth, explains Franks, London loses the equivalent of one-and-a-half Hyde Parks (213 hectares) of green space annually to urban development. He says that people need to learn that they can grow food in spaces smaller than traditional allotments.

Taking a Stand

Through Connected Roots, Franks is bringing his battle for fresh and local produce to the streets. He began with 15 grows his first year, and matched that number in the first few months of 2013. He plans to hit 75 by the end of the year. He has even garnered the attention of major publications after making the shortlist for Britain's Top Real Role Model competition last year.

He created Connected Roots with the goal of helping people live better, reducing food miles, and increasing the consump-

tion of fresh produce. After an initial consultation, Franks sets to work in clients' homes, taking advantage of any space that could be used to grow food, from balconies and windowsills to back gardens and roofs. For those without the time or knowledge, he offers monthly upkeep, a troubleshooting wall planner, and an emergency phone line.

Using planters made from treated jute—a 100 per cent biodegradable vegetable fiber known for its strength and breathability—the structures Franks builds are easily disassembled to fit the transient lifestyle of city dwellers.

In cities of concrete and stone, finding space to grow is one of the biggest hurdles to creating a sustainable food culture. Yet for Matt Franks, finding green space for urban gardeners should not be dismissed as a luxury.

"Half of the people in the world live in cities, and by 2030 that will rise to two-thirds, putting a massive burden on the world's food supplies," he says. "According to the UN, rural areas will need to increase crop yields by seven times to feed our cities, if urban citizens don't learn to grow some of their own food. It shouldn't be something that people just want to do, but something they need to do. It's a necessity." *

For more info: www.connectedroots.co.uk

Uncommon Gardens

Shared food plots can be anything but a tragedy

By Jennifer Anne Sauter

ON A SPRING DAY IN VICTORIA'S FERNWOOD NEIGHBOURHOOD, sitting on a bench among a thicket of shoots and buds, you can marvel at how a gravel-filled bus lot has been transformed into a lush source of organic food. More impressive, the half-acre permaculture garden and food forest, known as Spring Ridge Commons, is open to anyone who wants to walk in and help work or harvest. No sign-up. No waitlist. No bureaucracy. You can get your hands dirty right now.

Site-manager Sean Newton says Spring Ridge represents a unique opportunity for the City of Victoria. "You can come, be in nature, be in a garden, plant a seed, and harvest as you will." Newton admits his volunteer crew has faced setbacks, like vandalism, but with a flourishing landscape and an enthusiastic team of volunteers, Spring Ridge is demonstrating how commons gardens can bring urban communities together.

What is a "Commons Garden"?

A "commons garden" differs from the traditional community gardens that most people know, in which citizens get allotted their own well-defined plots on city-owned property. Instead, Spring Ridge and other commons gardens are throwbacks to the era when tenant farmers in England and elsewhere grazed their livestock on shared estate fields, or "commons."

In general, a "commons" refers to natural or cultural resources available for anyone to use: land, air, water, art, open-source software, ideas. Not everyone agrees, though, that unfettered sharing is universally good. In his famous 1968 essay, "The Tragedy of the Commons," ecologist Garret Hardin explored flaws in the commons system that can lead to resource exploitation (our seafood-depleted oceans are the best example) and social unrest.

Every commons runs on an honour system. In commons gardens, volunteers and the public can forage there, but they are encouraged to leave enough—or plant more—food for others to harvest. As Hardin warned, opportunists who take more than their share will overwhelm the limited resources. So how can a commons garden avoid this tragedy and remain sustainable?

Spring Ridge Commons

Spring Ridge Commons, a combination of food forest and Garry Oak habitat, was founded in 1999. The lot is leased from the City by the Fernwood Neighbourhood Resource Group for one dollar per year, and maintained by volunteer work parties.

"It's all about finding sustainable ways of producing food and creating a community," says site volunteer Linda Chan.

Not far from Fernwood's traditional community gardens and Compost Education Centre, Victoria's oldest and largest public permaculture garden contains meandering pathways, public art, a pollinator garden, a Garry Oak habitat, culinary herbs, and food-bearing plants, such as strawberry bushes and fig trees. It was even highlighted last summer in the *New York Times* Sunday travel section (titled "A Creative Corner of Victoria").

As of 2013, the City of Victoria can boast four commons gardens: Spring Ridge, Banfield Commons, Wark Street Commons, and Fairfield Community Garden.

Garden commons face issues like vandalism and high volunteer turnover. City planners and volunteers have noticed garbage dumping, drug use, homeless camping, and the destruction of young plants.

The more people involved in the garden, says Newton, the less risk there is of careless or destructive behaviour.

"It's been toned down a lot," he says of the vandalism, "just by people being in the garden. People are more respectful when others are around. It's an interesting experiment."

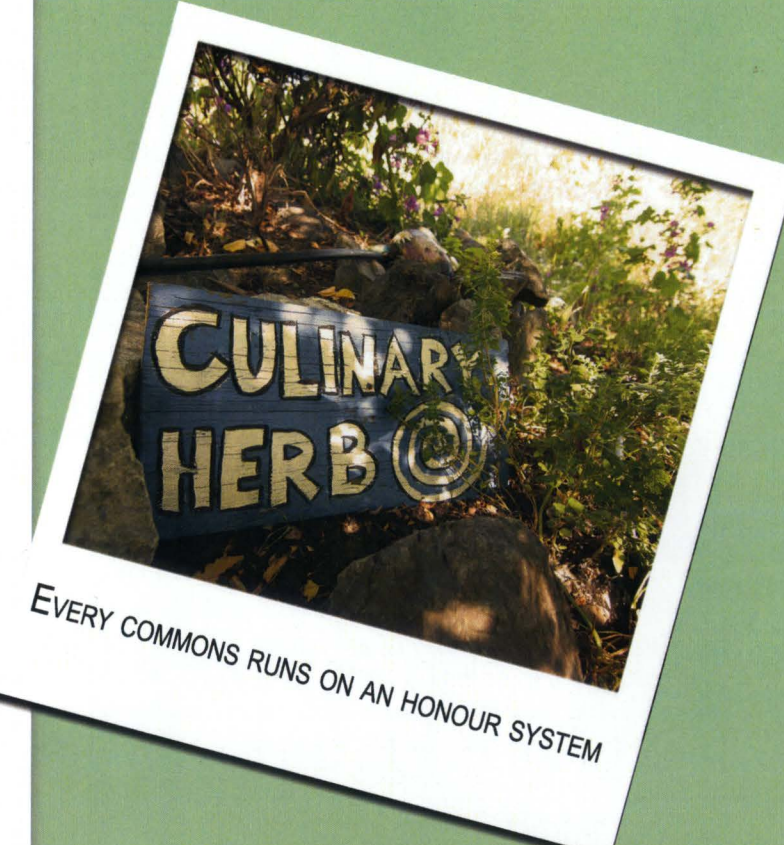
Garden commons produce food, of course, but they also play educational and recreational roles in their neighbourhoods. Spring Ridge's volunteer organizers describe their commons as a "community learning space," and host work parties and expert tours to introduce newbies to urban agriculture.

Brent Howard, a sustainability-focused professional landscaper with a degree in horticulture, ran three parties last year and hopes to lead more. "Through people coming together and sharing from various backgrounds, we can always learn something," says the owner of Garden Roots Landscape. "That's the beauty of Spring Ridge Commons."

A "Commons" Future

The revival of the commons as an ideal of urban agriculture arises from the desires to preserve natural areas in the city, enhance public space, and promote local food production and knowledge. If they can overcome the "tragedy" of selfish plunder, commons gardens can help neighbours forge a new sense of community around food.

All it takes is a stroll through the sprawling brush of Spring Ridge—and maybe some hot tea and a ripe fig from its bounty—to inspire neighbours and visitors to keep the dream of the commons alive and growing in the shared gardens of our cities. *



ON THE BOULEVARD

Often-overlooked sites for potential garden commons are "boulevards," the grassy strips of city-owned land between the sidewalk and the street. Boulevards occupy utility corridors for hydro and gas lines, so municipal workers require year-round access for maintenance. Permanent structures should be avoided, but temporary gardens can be a good option for this space. Aspiring boulevard gardeners should phone BC One Call (1-800-474-6886) to avoid digging into pipes or live wires.

In Victoria, boulevards encompass roughly 300 kilometres of untapped agricultural potential. City officials are reviewing public policy around planting flowers and vegetables on these strips. In the meantime, if homeowners get two-thirds of their block to sign a petition, they can opt out of the Boulevard Maintenance Program—and its "boulevard tax"—and be allowed to maintain their own boulevards.

Last July, boulevard gardening in Victoria made headlines when a midnight guerrilla gardener planted 26 marijuana plants along Admirals Rd. in Saanich. Police removed the plants the next morning.



Food Fight!

Tens of thousands of students go to university in Canada every year, and they're hungry.

By Kimberley Veness

A FEW YEARS AGO, FOOD FOR THOUGHT, A STUDENT union group, asked administrators at the University of Victoria's Food Services to go organic. As an experiment, Heather Seymour, a former chef and the manager of Food Production and Purchasing at UVic, gave the group free rein over purchasing for the residence dining hall, with one day to source enough organic food to feed the 1,400 to 1,800 students who ate in that cafeteria. Food Services would foot the bill.

That bill ended up including \$2,700 worth of organic chicken—that went unsold.

"It's interesting when the students request all-organic," says Seymour, "and then when the cost comes into it, they turn it down."



Artist: Lucas Bell

Attitudes towards food have always reflected the values of post-secondary education. From formal "high table" meals at Oxford and Cambridge, to North American undergrads scarfing Kraft Dinner while cramming for exams. On Canada's West Coast, there is a growing curiosity among students about where their meals come from and what "good food"—local, sustainable, organic—means on campuses that have expanded to the size of small cities.

When Seymour works with groups like Food For Thought, she shows students the complex logistics that go into sourcing enough food to feed a campus. That knowledge helps students understand why the university can't buy enough local—let alone local and organic—food to satisfy everyone.

"If we're going to go all-organic, we're going to have to extend way out to get more food," explains Seymour. "Do we want local and as much organic as we can get? Or do we want exclusively organic, where we give up local?"

UVic's Food Services buys from 24 sources, says Seymour, and 20 are farmers and distributors on Vancouver Island or the Lower Mainland.

"Over 20 years ago, we went from frozen pizzas to local Hothouse pizzas," says Seymour. "We went to Islands West, who attempts to get 40 to 50 per cent of our produce local. It would be more, but I don't see a lot of lemon trees here."

In 1997, a group of environmental studies students founded UVic's Campus Community Garden to grow their own vegetables. The Office of Campus Planning and Sustainability oversees the garden's 90 three-by-four-metre plots, where staff, students, and student groups can raise food for \$30 per year. The garden and UVic campus both reside on the unceded land of the Lekwungen and WSÁNEĆ Coast Salish Territories.

None of the produce grown in the Campus Community Garden, which moved to a new location in 2010, gets eaten in the bistros, pubs, or dining halls on campus. Food Services doesn't source food from the Campus Community Garden be-

cause Food Services doesn't consider that produce safe to eat. In a frustrating paradox, the most locally grown food can't be shared with students.

Every campus farm has unique challenges around food production, says Mark Bomford, but as the Director for the Yale Sustainable Food Project, he doesn't believe "food safety" fears are what stop universities from feeding students out of their own plots.

"When you are giving a fresh, unprocessed product—basically a straight up head of lettuce as opposed to a salad mix—then it's incumbent on the food preparer to wash it," says Bomford, who was Director for the Centre for Sustainable Food Systems at the University of British Columbia (UBC), before joining Yale University in 2011. A small farmer can sell produce direct, explains Bomford, and it doesn't have to go through a certified kitchen unless it is processed. Bomford notes that UBC Food Services and Yale Dining Services haven't had food-safety problems sourcing items directly from campus gardens.

Wanda Martin, a PhD student in UVic's School of Nursing, began her involvement with the Campus Community Garden as an executive member in 2006. She is now a board member and supervises garden staff. Her dissertation examines the effects of food safety policies on food security initiatives.

"I find lots of people use food safety as an excuse," says Martin. "Vegetables don't hold as big of a risk as meat or eggs, so growing fruits and vegetables on campus—particularly if they're grown organically—I don't know of any substance that wouldn't actually kill [them] that would get into the plant system and cause [them] to not be food safe."

The main argument universities might have against producing their own food, she says, is the quantities required to sate campus demand. This is why sourcing from a "solid" supplier is ideal for institutions—and why universities are reluctant to buy from small farms.

So what happens to the food grown in UVic's Campus Community Garden? The garden feeds volunteers, anyone who

rents a plot, and is donated to the campus food bank. Its veggies do find their way to students' plates—just not through official channels.

Some produce gets “exported” off-campus. Student groups such as the Women's Centre and the University of Victoria Sustainability Project turn over their yields to local organizations like PEERS Victoria Resource Society that combat food insecurity—always for free, as the garden's Land Use Agreement restrict selling any produce for profit.

Martin says the Campus Community Garden board members have been talking with the Office of Campus Planning and Sustainability about transforming UVic into an “edible campus,” so famished students could pluck snacks from berry bushes on the trails and fruit trees in the quad.

Last February, the University of Victoria Students' Society (UVSS) organized UVision, an event that polled students on changes that could make the campus sus-

homeowners, and the community.

“If we had enough fruit trees on campus, so that you could have the fresh fruit at the cafeteria or anywhere else around campus for the students to just pick up a piece of fruit, don't tell me they're not going to eat the fruit,” says Martin. “I mean, if you've got a bowl of apples sitting there that are free, people are going to eat them. If you picked it, and it's not off the ground, and it's washed, what's the problem?”

Martin thinks the idea of an edible campus should be approached with care, so the university understands how the pros outweigh the cons. This can happen by educating Food Services and the Office of Campus Planning and Sustainability on how other campuses produce their own food and, at the same time, provide hands-on learning for students.

Research by students has brought the issue of sustainable food production to the campus table. The UVic Food Collaborative and the Campus Urban Agriculture

designated as a future housing reserve in the university's 1997 Land Use Plan, but the students wanted to bring the area back to life—farm style. A decade of conferences, reports, and rallies ensued. Pressure from students, the community, and even David Suzuki caused the university to rewrite its Land Use Plan, and, in 2011, to reassign the status of the South Campus land as “Green Academic.”

The UBC Farm property now covers 24 hectares, half of which is forested. Revenue from the farm's produce, sold largely through local markets and restaurant contracts, is around \$164,000 per year.

“It's always growing—that's the good thing,” says Véronik Campbell, academic coordinator at the UBC Farm.

Each year, around 47,000 students study at the Vancouver campus and more than 15,500 live there. Campbell says that students often graduate with a wealth of knowledge, but little of the hands-on experience and practical skills that employ-

ers look for. “I think there is an interest—I would almost say a craving—for students to get their hands dirty.”

The UBC Farm engages 2,500 to 3,000 students per year from a range of academic backgrounds, says Campbell, with special opportunities for those studying environment, architecture, engineering, journalism, visual arts, and education.

A few years ago, says Campbell, a group of engineering students worked with the Urban Aboriginal Community Kitchen Garden Project, now named the Tu'Wusht Garden Project, to design a smokehouse. A student of indigenous ancestry worked on the smokehouse, explains Campbell. “It was an amazing learning experience for that student.”

Campbell is quick to mention that the farm, and the whole UBC campus, rests on unceded land of the Musqueam First Nation. The farm runs four different indigenous initiatives, including a Musqueam garden.

UBC's aim to become a global leader in food sustainability includes a Sustainable Agriculture Practicum. The popular one-year program teaches sustainable food production, including composting, soil health, crop rotation, and business planning.

“We usually accept 10 to 12 students a year for the practicum, but we probably get double if not triple the demand,” says Campbell. “A lot of young people and city dwellers who didn't grow up in a farming family or with a farming background want to learn how to farm.”

UBC is also constructing the world's most sustainable student union building.

Students continue to analyze what UBC Food Services purchases and what the UBC Farm grows. The farm is certified by FOODSAFE, so harvested produce can be worked into on-campus meals.

FOODSAFE approval is vital, says Bomford, but growing and eating food on campus represents much more than nutrition and safety.

“There are ingredients that are highly visible and don't require lots of volume that you want to focus on with campus dining,” he explains, “so that the food produced by the campus farm doesn't just get swamped and become invisible when the whole purpose is producing visibility in the food chain. It's how can you gain the highest exposure for that food which carries a lot of social value.”

Research by UBC students found that the campus farm could grow enough squash to meet demand. The farm upped its squash plantings and now the university serves its own signature soup every fall.

Other student research initiatives led to campus seafood becoming 100 per cent Ocean Wise certified and a university-wide switch to organic B.C. apples.

“They found that local apples actually cost less than the apples being sourced from Washington, and that led to a procurement switch,” says Liska Richer, the co-manager of the Social, Ecological, Economic, and Development Studies (SEEDS) Program. Throughout the year, students can bite into nine different varieties of B.C.-grown organic apples.

Another project started by a UBC student is “vermicomposting,” or worm composting. The red wigglers convert produce scraps into rich compost in an odour-free process—if done correctly.

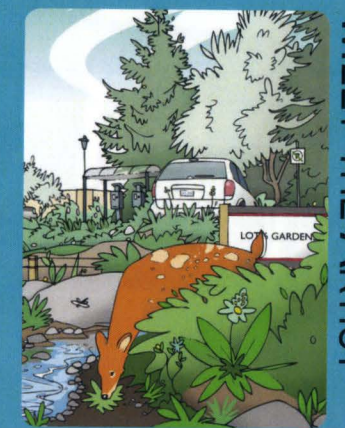
“It started as a small little bucket in a kitchen at one of our food outlets and the staff were willing to test it out,” claims Richer. When the new student union building opens in September 2014, it will take vermicomposting to industrial levels. “They've approved to have these huge—big, big, big!—vessels where they'll be able to capture 100 per cent pre-consumer waste. So that's big news.”

The student who pioneered the project is now working on a pilot for a biodigester that could compost post-consumer waste as well. The worm compost will fertilize the student union building's rooftop garden. At UBC, it seems, not even the sky is the limit when it comes to campus sustainability.

Future of Food on Campus: Building on shared values

The gardens at UVic and UBC were created because students strove to step beyond the walls of their lecture halls and muddy-up their hands while learning about sustainable agriculture. The urge to grow your food where you study is now common—and university administrators are beginning to pay attention. “If you look at movements on campuses across Canada that work towards sustainable food systems,” says Mark Bomford, “many of those are emerging from grassroots.”

Sustainable agriculture projects can flourish into successful student-community relationships only when on-campus partnerships are forged between student groups and academic institutions, says Bomford. “You can get a lot more done a lot quicker if you can identify shared values early on.” *



MEET THE ARTIST

Lucas Bell relates artistic design to problem solving. He applies this approach to the complex problems associated with sustainability, and believes radical changes, like eliminating parking lots from campus property, need to happen.

“My drawing presents the idea of ‘green space’ in the most extreme way possible,” explains Bell. “We can't save the world with reusable mugs alone.”

Bell studied graphic design at the Emily Carr University in Vancouver, and is currently working toward a Bachelor of Fine Arts at the University of Victoria. In his spare time, Bell teaches private painting lessons and dabbles with his own artistic projects in Victoria, B.C.

“IF YOU'VE GOT A BOWL OF FREE APPLES, PEOPLE WILL EAT THEM. IF YOU PICKED IT, AND IT'S WASHED, WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?”

tainable—from a biomass thermal energy facility, to safer bike routes, to a green light for an edible campus plan. A food security working group is now collaborating to ensure that sustainable food procurement is included in UVSS's submission to the board of Campus Planning, which will meet in 2014.

An edible campus may seem like a tasty step in the right direction, but Martin believes the university could take even greater strides.

“If we had fruit trees on campus,” she says, “[it'd be] no different to what LifeCycles does, by having fruit trees in the city and going out and picking the fruit and then giving it out.”

LifeCycles Project Society is a local community organization that makes urban food accessible to those who need it. With its Fruit Tree Project, homeowners register fruit trees whose produce they can't harvest. Volunteer pickers split the bounty between themselves,

Collaborative, both student-run initiatives, each envision UVic as a place where learning can be harmonized with food through environmental studies courses and an interdisciplinary learning centre. Martin says a campus policy to support local food could be a “drawing card” for future students and faculty.

“I'd like to see more educational exchange and for the garden to become a living laboratory, an outdoor classroom,” says Martin. “Eventually, I'd like to see the garden host a national conference on university gardens across Canada and develop that national network on how we most efficiently and effectively produce food.”

University of British Columbia: Farming as food literacy

At UBC-Vancouver, farm-fresh food isn't a problem, it's a solution. In 1999, a group of students began brainstorming how to revive the abandoned agricultural land around campus. The land had been



Garden City?

America's worst urban blight could bloom anew—if the Motor City's community groups and private enterprise can get along

By Joseph Leroux

LONG BEFORE ITS RECENT BANKRUPTCY, DETROIT HAS BEEN KNOWN LESS FOR ITS AUTOMOBILE INGENUITY AND SOUL MUSIC THAN AS A LOST CITY OF VACANT PROPERTIES, BOARDED-UP FACTORIES, AND BROKEN-DOWN HOMES—A RELIC THAT WARNS OF THE DANGERS OF WANTON CAPITALISM AND A FAILED PUBLIC SECTOR. GOOGLE “DETROIT” AND ONE OF THE FIRST IMAGES TO APPEAR IS THE FLAKED INNER HUSK OF A WASTED AMPHITHEATRE. IN THE HAUNTING PORTRAIT BY A PAIR OF PARISIAN ART-PHOTOGRAPHERS, A TRIO OF ORGANS HANG LIKE IRON SHEATHES FROM THE CEILING OF THE UNITED ARTISTS THEATRE, CLOSED SINCE 1974.

THE AUSTERE AESTHETIC OF DETROIT AS A FALLEN EMPIRE IS PALPABLE, AND HAS SPARKED WHAT SOME LOCAL JOURNALISTS LABEL “RUIN PORN”—A ROMANTIC OBSESSION WITH THE CITY’S DECAY THAT HINDERS ITS REBIRTH. BY CONTRAST, A BURGEONING URBAN AGRICULTURE MOVEMENT HOPES TO REJUVENATE THE MOTOR CITY. HOW BEST TO USE THE ACRES OF LEFTOVER LAND, THOUGH, HAS TRIGGERED A DISPUTE BETWEEN RESIDENTS AND PRIVATE COMPANIES.

JOHN HANTZ, A MICHIGAN NATIVE, AS well as president and CEO of the financial holding company Hantz Group, recently secured the largest sale of city land to a private investor in Detroit's history: 170 acres of downtown property, which he now manages as Hantz Farms. The group plans to turn the land into a tree farm called Hantz Woodlands. "Detroit's saving grace," boasts the Hantz Woodlands' website, will transform surrounding neighbourhoods' "blight" into "beauty."

But the tree farm is actually the fallback option of Hantz's dream. The original concept was an urban food farm. The Woodlands site is surrounded by "food deserts" (areas without access to healthy eating choices), so large-scale urban agriculture made good sense. Detroit already has a well-documented urban agriculture movement. (Take a look at the documentary *Grown in Detroit*, on Netflix.) Why only plant trees when Hantz could plant vegetables, too?

The answers depend on whom you ask.

Living in a Food Desert

Finding even basic provisions has become difficult for Detroit's poor. Local public radio station WDET mapped access to affordable healthy eating choices to track the availability of apples, chicken breast, wheat bread, and reduced-fat milk at retailers that accept food stamps. Nearly 90 per cent of low-income shoppers, the project found, would be unable to check all four items off their grocery lists.

In February 2013, Detroit finally legalized urban agriculture, even though Michigan's Right to Farm Act, on the books since 1981, states farmers cannot legally be considered an odour or traffic nuisance, as they provide an essential service. By relaxing zoning laws for urban agriculture and animal husbandry, city council has provided legal protection against nuisance claims.

Of course, Detroit residents didn't wait for their mayor's okay to feed themselves. Many have already found radical ways to recover their land from economic famine, such as urban farming groups like the Eastern Michigan Environmental Action Council, the Detroit Black Community Food Security Network (DBCFSN), Greening of Detroit, and Freedom Growers.

A New Dream or a Land Grab?

So why did Hantz Farms back down from its original vision of civic agriculture? President Mike Score says that neighbours prefer a tree farm to a real farm. "Their dream," he explains, "is that, by purchasing the unmanaged land around their homes and erasing blight from the landscape, their properties will regain value."

You want to believe Score. He speaks directly, and appears in most press releases and photo-ops dressed in heavy-duty overalls and work boots, often next to freshly turned soil or a sapling.

"We shifted away from fruits and more intensely managed horticultural crops because our neighbours did not want them in their neighbourhoods," says Score. "We have a lot of interaction with our neighbours, and we account for their quality of life when we make management decisions."

But his conciliatory claim ignores a canon of opposition from activist groups.

Lottie Spady has been especially vocal in her opposition to the project. Spady joined the Eastern Michigan Environmental Action Council when she organized an environmental film festival called Green Screen.

Now she is spreading awareness about the dangers of Hantz Woodlands.

"A lot of people feel like, 'Well, at least someone is doing something with all the vacant land in Detroit,'" she says in an online video. "Well, there are a number of

reasons to be very concerned about this sale."

Spady's concerns? The sheer size of the sale, a lack of due process and public consultation, and preferential treatment for Hantz Group, which bought the 1,500 lots at 300 dollars a piece.

At a public hearing on December 10, 2012, councillor JoAnn Watson noted the sale price was below market value, while *The Detroit Free Press* reported that "hundreds of residents vented their anger at the project."

"Small farmers, community members that tried to purchase the land that they'd been tending to for years have met with a lot of red tape and resistance," says Spady, in the video. "The fact that someone can come in with a lot of money and resources and is being ushered through the process is very problematic."

Not all community groups oppose the project. The Lower East Side Action Plan (LEAP) has endorsed Hantz Farms for its potential to reuse city land, eliminate blight, and improve property values.

"Detroit cannot afford to hold one-third of its landscape as publicly owned land," says Mike Score, on the website. "Public land has costs, yet it generates no revenue. Detroit has run out of money. The city is bankrupt. A new direction in management of city resources is essential."

Putting the Land in Citizens' Hands

Some activists see the issue as more than just Woodlands or no Woodlands. Since 2006, the Detroit Black Community Food Security Network (DBCFSN) has run gardens, facilitated co-operative land purchases, and lobbied for food and land sovereignty.

In late 2012, executive director Malik Yakini published concerns about the Woodlands in *Food First: Institute for Food and Development Policy*. The document featured a conversation with Hantz that

URBAN AGRICULTURE GROUPS ARGUE THE SALE CONTINUED DETROIT'S "CENTURIES-OLD LEGACY OF INEQUITY."

highlights the conflict over Detroit's rebuilding. Hantz admits he hopes to create scarcity by reducing the abundance of unused land, but he also reveals the idea for Hantz Farms came only after he proposed funding a homesteading office to three city administrations. The office would have enabled residents to buy vacant lots more easily.

"I told him that his original proposal that would put land in the hands of Detroiters is something that I could get behind," said Yakini. "He expressed that he still would be willing to pursue that strategy."

A homesteading office could provide common ground for activists and private industry. Yakini, along with other community-based urban agriculture groups, sent a letter to Hantz stating the sale continued Detroit's "centuries-old legacy of inequity." They asked him to revise the proposal to align with social justice values.

But Mike Score doesn't see the Woodlands project as unjust. "Our team has a strong moral compass that helps us help others achieve their life dreams and build more sustainable communities," says Score, who notes his own work as an agricultural educator at Michigan State University. "Malik Yakini's abstract critique of our work does not resonate with the real-life experiences of our neighbours."

The Woodlands sits next to Indian Village, one of Detroit's most expensive neighbourhoods, where pristine century-old homes and gender-specific gardening clubs form the quintessential Detroit suburb—a sharp contrast to the images of urban decay.

Score wrote to Yakini on behalf of Hantz, and said that while Hantz still wanted to "quietly promote" the homesteading office, the community's desires overrode the possibility of a revised plan.

DBCFSN and other groups drafted a concept for a community land trust—an alternative to Hantz's privatization of public land.

Supporters of the Community Trust Alliance held a rally on December 8, 2012. "We're talking about the people who have held this city down for a very long time," said Myrtle Thompson of Freedom Growers, at the rally. "We're talking about the people who aren't going to jump in, 'oh, this ain't working' and jump out. We're talking about roots—here to stay."

Organizers of the trust hope to fashion derelict properties into meaningful public spaces, which they don't trust Hantz to provide.

More than just raising real estate values, Lottie Spady believes such community-created solutions can aid citizens who suffer most from unemployment, homelessness, and lack of access to decent education and health-care. "I'm thinking this is not the goal of Hantz Woodlands," she says.

The Future of the Farm

Hantz Farms has a three-year contract over the land. Critics are concerned about the company's post-contract plans. Spady says the flip from commercial agriculture to tree farming means Mike Score can't guarantee how his firm will use the land.

When asked about the long-term plans, Score was direct. "Simply to manage the resources as a private sector, for-profit venture. We've been clear on this point since the beginning."

The Hantz Woodlands property rests a mile from Detroit River. The view of downtown from its shore is stunning, with the glistening framework of the buildings showcased by the broad water body.

"With Detroit rapidly gentrifying, and low-income and senior citizens being given eviction notices almost weekly for improvements," says Spady, "the worry is that the rising cost to live in Detroit is going to displace poor and elderly."

The Community Trust Alliance called for a more open public dialogue on the project, and a public hearing took place on

December 10, 2012. A revised "community benefits" agreement requires that Hantz Group offer fair-market value for the purchased land if the company ever resells. The next day, city council approved Hantz Woodlands in a 5-4 vote. "It was disheartening to have some city council members vote in favour of corporate interests as opposed to the people they were elected to serve," says Spady.

The controversy over the greening of Detroit contains lessons for less-damaged cities figuring out how to integrate community and corporate agriculture into urban environments. Fundamentally different ideologies about the responsible use of public land found a coliseum for conflict in Hantz Woodlands. Mike Score and Hantz Farms believe private industry will save Detroit. Lottie Spady says the city is not a blank slate, but rather a home to groups of citizens working against the master narrative of money over community.

"We are starting schools, holding teachers, and developing our own platforms for direct democracy," says Spady. "And we are not giving up." *

THE WOODLANDS SITS NEXT TO INDIAN VILLAGE, ONE OF DETROIT'S MOST EXPENSIVE NEIGHBOURHOODS. PRISTINE CENTURY-OLD HOMES AND GENDER-SPECIFIC GARDENING CLUBS FORM THE QUINTESSENTIAL DETROIT SUBURB, IN CONTRAST TO THE IMAGES OF URBAN DECAY.

Feeding BOLIVIA



How one woman's WWOOFing triggered an urban farming movement

By Meghan Casey

IN JANUARY 2012, MARIA-TERESA NOGALES BEGAN SHAPING HER FAMILY'S PROPERTY ON THE OUTSKIRTS ON SANTA CRUZ, Bolivia, into what is now Manduca farm. The 32-year-old hacked at the overgrown brush with a machete for weeks to clear the track-field-sized farm. With occasional help from local children, friends and family, Nogales was able to transform an unkempt tract of land into an interactive gardening centre.

Farms like Manduca are few and far between in Bolivia, a landlocked country of 10.2 million people, and one of the poorest in Latin America. According to the 2013 World Factbook's statistics, 50 per cent of Bolivians live below the poverty line. For the last 40 years, poverty in rural areas has led to drastic urban migration. Today, 70 per cent of Bolivians inhabit 10 of the country's cities, including Santa Cruz.

Nogales wanted to create a space for Bolivians to learn about sustainable agriculture and urban farming, to grow her own vegetables, and to sell the remainders at the local market.

"Manduca is a way for me to get the message out there and encourage people to get involved with what they eat," says Nogales.

Manduca has given the Bolivian farmer a year of trial and error, but the large plot allows her to experiment with growing techniques. Garlic baskets hanging from the lemon trees and an herb circle sprinkled with fresh sawdust are just a few of the tricks Nogales has picked up over the past year. The soil surrounding this herb garden is raked in a clean circle around the base of an olive tree. Next to the circle is another herb garden: raised rectangular beds fenced in with wood scraps. Plastic bottles are strung above the beds like patio lanterns. When she waters the mint, the drip waters the basil below.

"Given that I've been a city girl my whole life, getting to work outside and really understand nature has been an amazing experience," says Nogales.

Nogales's agricultural ventures began in Bedford, Pennsylvania. In the fall of 2011, she volunteered on the Horn O Plenty farm, after working for ten years in international development and local government. Nogales's research into food security and urban agriculture had made it apparent how distanced she felt from the food she ate. She saw WWOOFing—a worldwide volunteer farming program—as an opportunity to bridge this gap.

On her first day, she sat on her haunches between rows of strawberry plants heavy with plump red berries. Her long hazelnut hair was pulled back out of her face. The autumn chill sank through her brown corduroy button-down shirt. It was a perfect day, in her eyes, and working so close to the ground inspired her to start her own entrepreneurial organic farm when she returned to Bolivia.

The first six months on Manduca proved difficult for Nogales. When the citrus season rolled around in the fall, she was overwhelmed piling crates of fruit. Her routine changed from clearing the land to gathering ripe fruit in a mesh bag. With the help of a few locals, and even her aunt, she boxed and bagged the tangerines, grapefruit, and lemons. She leaned the backseat of her red four-door Kia down and brought her goods to the market, where locals welcomed the fresh produce. Again, in December, plans for clearing more land were cut short when the farm's five varieties of mango trees began to ripen and the fruit plunked down onto the earth.

Aside from digging beds and learning the harvesting schedule, Nogales also learned the ins and outs of finding gardening supplies anywhere she can.

"It's not like in Canada and the U.S. where you can go to Canadian Tire and get the supplies you need. Everything I do, I have to do from scratch."

The Bolivian farmer learned how to make her own compost, mulch, and organic pest-repelling sprays on site. If she needed supplies for beds, she drove around the city looking for lumber and plastic. Getting the word out with the locals made her a main recipient of recycled goods like plastic pop bottles and old wheelbarrows.

Sourcing organic seeds was hard. Seeds imported to Bolivia must pass a certification test that, for the majority, involves a sterilization process to decontaminate the seed coats. When the seeds reach farms, they are covered in a fluorescent pink film. For the seeds to yield organic crops, two or three generations must pass. Truly organic crops are difficult to find—75 per cent of seeds used in Bolivia are imported. To overcome this challenge, Nogales learned to rely on seed and plant swaps with other locals.

Bolivia recently began taking steps towards more organic practices. In October 2012, Bolivian president Evo Morales banned genetically modified seeds under the Mother Earth law, although he is now reconsidering the ban to ensure food security. The Mother Earth law acknowledges the importance of sacred beliefs that indigenous people attach to the land, and underscores the Bolivian peoples' responsibility to protect the ecosystem in which they all live.

ONE IN THREE BOLIVIAN CHILDREN ARE MALNOURISHED. SOYBEANS AND QUINOA HAVE BECOME EXPENSIVE GOODS MOST BOLIVIANS CANNOT AFFORD.

ACCORDING TO RESEARCH BY THE Canadian International Development Agency in 2008, one in three Bolivian children are malnourished. Exports such as soybeans, Bolivia's third-largest export (after minerals and natural gas), and quinoa have

become expensive goods that most Bolivians cannot afford.

These issues spurred Nogales to ask: "Where is our food coming from? Who is producing it? Under what conditions?" Farms like Manduca have the potential to be a resource for the community, she says, for people to reconnect with the food they eat and to enjoy all things that are natural.

Manduca is not the first urban farming project the country has seen. In 2003, with financial support from Belgium, the Bolivian government began a three-year family micro-garden pilot project in El Alto, La Paz. El Alto, meaning "The Heights," is one of the highest cities in the world (at 4,000 metres), and the fastest-growing urban centre in Bolivia. The goal of the project was to make food available for low-income families.

The micro-garden project used recycled goods, such as plastic bottles, to deal with the fluctuating winter temperatures. The bottles were painted black and filled with sand or water. They absorbed the sunlight during the day and released the heat at night. This was a cost-effective and accessible way for families to regulate the temperature of their greenhouses.

The high altitude causes cooler temperatures in El Alto. The city is also known for extended droughts, making field crops an inevitable gamble. The micro-gardens encouraged people to start planting again, and eventually increased homegrown fruit and

vegetable consumption by 85 per cent.

Nogales says most of Bolivia's organic farms, like Manduca, exist outside of city limits. This is a problem she hopes that Alternativas, her new non-profit organization, can solve through collaboration with city governments to improve food policies and "adopt" urban agriculture. Alternativas has already begun work in La Paz. Nogales and her team are working on the city's food policies, as well as gathering funding for community-garden pilot projects in La Paz communities that suffer from the highest rates of food insecurity.

Even though Nogales has put the temporary brakes on opening Manduca's doors to the public, she still feels it has raised awareness with the locals, and those who came from Colombia and elsewhere to learn. Some neighbours have started experimenting in their own backyards. Even her family has tried the hanging pop-bottle herb baskets. No matter what happens, she will still be happy with the role Manduca has played as a major catalyst for change in the way she lives her own life.

"For the first time in my life, I can tell time depending on where the sun is. That's the natural world, the actual world." *

Maria-Teresa Nogales recently chose to move to La Paz in order to focus her attention on Alternativas. Her non-profit organization promotes public policies that allow and encourage urban agriculture, community development, and education. She hopes Alternativas will eventually offer greater opportunities for organic farms like Manduca.

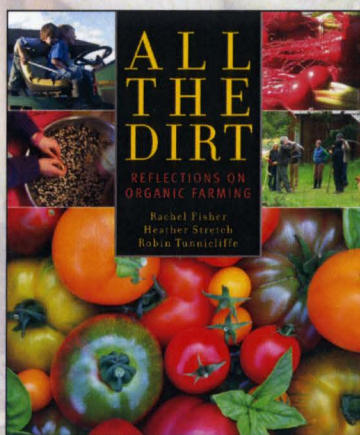
"It's a great opportunity for our cities in Bolivia to play a proactive role in social challenges, not only those related to food security, but also development and the environment as well," says Nogales.

She hopes that Alternativas will encourage the country's capital cities to adopt the necessary policies for urban agriculture. Nogales says that, rather than embrace everything that is processed and industrialized, Bolivians need to go back to their culture.

photo: Javier Zarate Taborga



GROWN LOCALLY



ALL THE DIRT Reflections on Organic Farming

By Rachel Fisher,
Heather Stretch, and
Robin Tunnicliffe

New farmers, experienced growers, budding environmentalists, and fans of natural, organic produce alike are sure to love this how-to book about small-scale organic farming.

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Parkside Victoria Resort and Spa

WHERE: 810 HUMBOLDT ST. VICTORIA, B.C.

By Quinn MacDonald

WHO: THE HULBERT GROUP

YOU MIGHT THINK CANADA'S FIRST LEED (LEADERSHIP IN Energy and Environmental Design) platinum resort would be perched on the Rockies or nestled in a Gulf Island cove. But you can find our country's greenest hotel a few blocks from Victoria's legislature.

The design of the Parkside Victoria Resort and Spa by The Hulbert Group, a Vancouver-based architecture firm, fits a modern building into a historic neighbourhood while balancing luxury with sustainability. The two eight-storey brick towers connect the resort via a three-storey glass atrium. Timeshare owners, resort guests, and local visitors can enjoy a coffee in the lobby and use the free WiFi to catch up on work. Or they can book a walking tour to learn more about Parkside's sustainable features.

Plants rescued from Victoria's Crystal Garden infuse the atrium with exotic scents as a stream trickles under a grey limestone walkway. The stream and connected ponds form part of the building's heat exchange system, in which the atrium acts as a vacuum that draws air through the hotel. Sections of the glass walls open to aid air-flow, while a "living roof" modulates temperatures in winter and summer.

Temperature control is important, as the resort doesn't have air conditioning. UV-tinted glass plates, or louvres, suspended on the sides of the building shield rooms from direct sunlight. In the winter, a natural-gas-powered hot-water heating system warms the resort.

"It's a conscious way of operating," says Daniel Melnyk, Parkside's director of sales. "We keep our guests informed because it's a bit different than what they might be used to in a traditional hotel environment."

Shiny rain rocks on the roof and balconies drain into a 259,000-litre tank. This storm-water collection system provides non-potable water for the rooftop gardens and ground-level plants—mostly native and drought-tolerant. Foraging among Parkside's outdoor gardens, guests can harvest strawberries, blueberries, apples, and herbs.

Parkside also saves water with low-use plumbing fixtures, and

keeps the hot tub and 25-metre pool water sanitary through ozonation, reducing chlorine use by 90 per cent. The buildings avoid ozone-depleting HCFC (chlorofluorocarbon) chemicals in the cooling and refrigeration systems. During construction, developers diverted waste materials from landfills at a rate of 92.3 per cent, well above the LEED platinum requirement of 75 per cent.

Like all the resort's materials, the maple-wood laminate flooring in the guest rooms was sustainably sourced, while the bedroom carpets come from recycled pop bottles. Fireplaces provide heat or ambience, and the appliances all carry Energy Star ratings.

"I like to call it 'conscious luxury,'" says Melnyk. "You're not suffering to be sustainable, you're not suffering to be green, and you reduce the carbon debt."

The underground parking attracts less heat and saves ground-level space for people and plants. Parkside was one of the first hotels in Victoria to install plug-in stations, eight in total, for electric vehicles and is upgrading to the industry-standardized Combined Charging System.

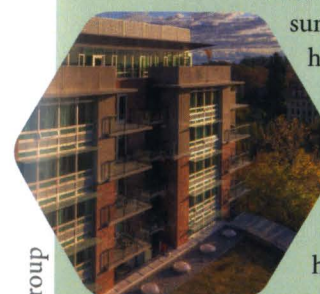
Since opening in 2009, Parkside earned plenty of accolades for its sustainable design, including a perfect five in the Green Key Global Eco-Rating Program; a 2010 Energy and Environment Award from the Hotel Association of Canada; and the Award for Outdoor Environmental Achievement from the Canadian Home Builders Association.

Green design and gold plaques, however, didn't translate into growing profits. Cost overruns on Parkside, plus American tourists scared away by a global financial meltdown and a strong Canadian dollar, all drove previous owner Aviawest Resorts Ltd. into receivership in the fall of 2011.

Last January, the LRG Group, a consortium of Victoria business people, purchased Parkside for \$23 million. Melnyk says the sale frees the hotel to go ahead with major improvements, like a farm-to-table restaurant, that will connect Canada's greenest resort with the surrounding city.

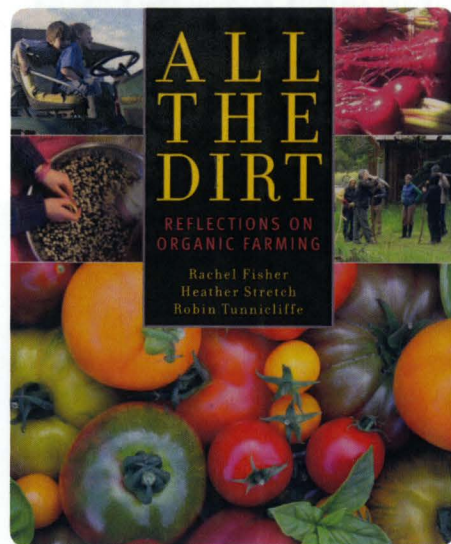
"In our opinion," says Melnyk, "a big part of sustainability is commitment to the community and the local economy." *

To book a tour, call 250-940-1200 ext 0



photos: The Hulbert Group

All the Dirt



authors:
Rachel Fisher
Heather Stretch
Robin Tunnicliffe

FROM THE BEGINNING, RACHEL FISHER, HEATHER STRETCH, AND Robin Tunnicliffe warn readers not to be mistaken: Farming is hard work. But their book, *All the Dirt: Reflections on Organic Farming* (TouchWood Editions), also shows that if you're tough and committed—and maybe a little lucky—farming can also be incredibly rewarding.

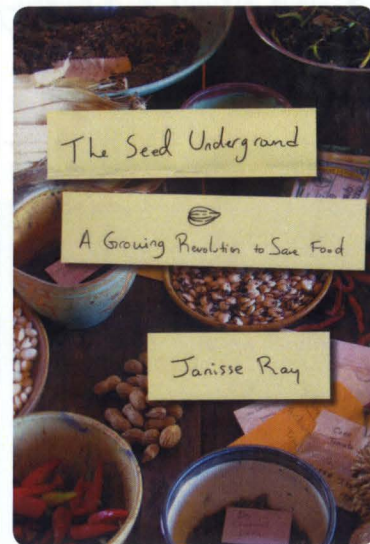
The three friends followed different paths into the field. Now they run their own farms and, since 2002, have run Saanich Organics, to sell farm-fresh produce at markets, to restaurants, and through a box delivery program.

With this book—a finalist for the 2012 City of Victoria Butler Book Prize—they offer up personal triumphs and failures so arm-chair green-thumbs and fellow organic farmers can learn from their experiences. Each has her own methods and agricultural style, and they suggest that aspiring farmers should find what works for them. “We think the best way to learn about farming is to hear farmers’ stories. Each farm is unique, and each story is informative in its own practical context.” But they all stress that in this small-farm community, different strengths will more likely lead to co-operation than competition: “The common thread is that we are all working in solidarity to create an alternative food system that can sustain both our planet and ourselves.”

Whether you're looking to enjoy farm life vicariously or seriously plan to pick up a plough, the insider tips (weed trouble? “Don't despair, and add compost”) and anecdotes (see: Rachel's years living in “the bender”) will engage your imagination. The glossy spreads of organic produce will also look great as coffee-table fodder and may entice you into a garden centre—or at least the nearest farmer's market.

In the dark age of agri-business, these three authors defy the skeptics who say organic farming isn't a viable modern occupation—especially as consumers awake to the health benefits and flavour bonus of eating locally. But for you aspiring agriculturalists out there, don't forget all the work that went into *All the Dirt*. *

The Seed Underground



author:
Janisse Ray

THE WEEK AFTER I FINISHED HER LATEST BOOK, *THE SEED UNDERGROUND: A Growing Revolution to Save Food* (Chelsea Green Publishing), I found myself missing Janisse Ray.

An award-winning American writer and poet from Georgia (her debut was titled *Ecology of a Cracker Childhood*), Ray doesn't hide her anti-chemical, anti-GMO stance on food. Yet she miraculously avoids alienating readers as she blends memoir with history, investigative journalism, how-to advice, and profiles. Ray performs this literary magic with an ever-hopeful voice that speaks with humour, compassion, and sincere interest in her subject matter and subjects. Somewhere along the way, she earns your trust.

So when Ray writes, “We are losing control of our food system,” you believe her. In “the last one hundred years,” she explains, “94 percent of seed varieties available at the turn of the century in America and considered a part of the human commons have been lost.” She chronicles similar genetic devastation across the globe.

Ray blames these declines on the dominance of industrial agriculture, its tendency towards monoculture, and the appropriation of our seed supply by companies like Monsanto, who have patented ancient varieties and genetically designed new ones. She also shows how these methods have damaged the environment and farmers alike.

But Ray doesn't waste time playing the blame game. Instead, most of the book introduces readers to the quiet revolutionaries working to reclaim our food supply as they save and trade seeds. Ray believes this simple act, and the move away from large-scale industrial practices, will bring us back from the brink.

“I want to tell you about the most hopeful thing in the world,” she writes. “It is a seed.”

It might also be this book. *

Reviews by Quinn MacDonald, editor of the Agri-Culture section. For more coverage of books, music and cultural events, visit ConcreteGarden.uvic.ca



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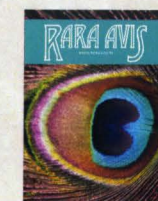
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