

In 20 years we have no idea what we will see. It could be OK for food here, it could be awful. It's up to us.

Community Perspectives on Food Security on Hornby Island in the Climate Emergency

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I respectfully acknowledge that I live and write on the unceded territory of the K'omoks Nation. Their millenia-long stewardship of their traditional territories has maintained and enhanced the food abundance of the ocean and the land.

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Background

On April 11, 2021, more than a year into the pandemic, a facilitated Hornby Island Community COVID Conversation was held on Zoom (hirra.ca/reports/2021-reports/). The community conversation was attended by about 70 people and used a small group break-out format where participants shared experiences of the pandemic, reflected on the stories we heard, identified themes, and then generated ideas for moving forward. Some of the themes identified were Food Security, Affordable Housing, Water Sustainability, and Climate Change.

The April Community COVID Conversation was followed by a difficult summer. The Heat Dome at the end of June 2021, and the long and severe drought meant that the impact of the climate emergency on Hornby Island that had already been identified as a major concern took on heightened significance.

HIRRA President Daniel Siegel brought a proposed to the September 2021 HIRRA meeting for the formation of working groups to examine and take action on “The Future of Hornby in the Climate Emergency”. His list of possible working groups included housing, visitor capacity, health care, water, food, local businesses and economy and (re)discovering our shared values. The framing questions were: What kind of community are we now? What do we want to become? Daniel called for volunteers to join working groups.

I, Nym Hughes, emailed HIRRA to say I wanted to join the food security working group and heard back that there actually wasn't yet a food security group except for me but I would be very welcome to take on the project. So that was where and how I entered this narrative.

I did not think I could be a working group by myself but it did seem to me that I could try to gather answers to how people were seeing food security on Hornby in the climate emergency. I could interview people and report their comments, stories and suggestions back to HIRRA.

I designed my interviewing, summarizing and reporting-back as a qualitative research process informed by community-engaged research practices. I used a “snowball” approach to find people to interview. I started with a couple of people I already knew who I knew had things to say about food security, interviewed them, asked them who else I should interview, got more names,

approached the recommended people, interviewed them, got more names and so on and so on...

I was fortunate to be able to talk to home gardeners, community gardeners, market gardeners, farmers, people who used community food security programs and people who worked in community food security programs, retailers, roadside stand operators and customers of roadside stands, Market vendors, full-time residents, part-time residents, cooks, fishers and foragers. Everybody, of course, was part of several or many of these categories. All participants were promised anonymity, that I would not link comments or suggestions to individuals.

If you want to know more about my research process, there is a more detailed description as Appendix 1.

I started interviewing in October, and in November, extreme rainfall, flooding, mudslides, loss of life, and highway closures happened in the Fraser Valley and the BC Interior. Impacts of weather extremes linked to the climate emergency were front and centre in people's minds and, as many people commented, it was a good time to be talking about food security. This report summarizes what I heard.

What we understand as the meaning of food security here

The most common understanding of what food security meant to the people I interviewed was that food security was synonymous with local food production and consumption. To be food secure on Hornby would mean that we would be able to feed ourselves with what we grew, raised, processed, foraged, hunted, fished, gathered, stored, sold and shared here on Hornby.

- *We would be feeding everyone on Hornby as much as possible with locally produced food.*

The meaning of food security on Hornby was also frequently linked to what would happen to food availability in case of disaster.

- *Food security is about emergency preparedness.*
- *We would be able to feed people for a time in an emergency situation.*

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations writes, “Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.” No one I talked with thought that all people on Hornby at all times had adequate access to food.

Food Insecurity

- *I know that many elders eat a substandard, processed diet for most of their meals*
- *The shortcomings are for those with low income, or disabilities that prevent them going out or cooking.*
- *People in financial need, people receiving home care not food secure.*

These comments describing who does, and who does not, have access to adequate food are describing food insecurity. There were many comments that suggested that food security on Hornby meant the elimination, or at least the substantial minimizing of food insecurity.

- *Need a “whole island” food program for people needing food.*
- *Develop a multi-pronged approach, address stigma associated with food bank, hot lunch programs.*
- *Increase access to food through enhancing distribution system.*
- *A grocery delivery system to make sure everyone is getting good food to eat, year-round.*
- *Real food security for the Hornby community would mean CSA-type food boxes for everyone who doesn’t grow their own food.*
- *Space for cooks to prepare meals for those who cannot cook*

Another related food security meaning was that food security meant being able to raise at least some of one's own food.

- *Having a piece of ground is the most important thing.*
- *Need access to land/finances/equipment.*
- *Food security would mean more food growers with access to fertile land for growing.*

Food Justice

While some initiatives to address food insecurity come from a place of helping others, some can best be described as part of an approach to achieving food security called food justice. Based on a belief that food is a human right, food justice looks at the reasons underlying food insecurity, with a particular focus on how access to food for individuals and communities differs based on structures of social inequity. Food insecurity in Canada and the United States is linked to marginalization, poverty and institutionalized racism. So, for example, a food justice perspective, in addition to creating and supporting initiatives that provide food to food insecure people, would not only notice that poverty and food insecurity on Hornby Island were linked, it might advocate for affordable housing, access to land for gardening, the availability of living wage work, adequate income assistance and disability rates, a basic guaranteed income and other changes that would address poverty and therefore lessen food insecurity caused by poverty.

- *OK if you have money, mobility and good housing: poverty, aging, isolation, inadequate housing with minimal kitchens all mean food insecurity.*

Food Sovereignty

The other social justice movement linked to food security is food sovereignty. Food sovereignty tends to look at food systems from local to global and analyze who has the power to shape those food systems. "The language of food sovereignty, as distinct from food security, is explicit about food citizenship: it emphasizes that people must have a say in how their food is produced and where it comes from. The core of food sovereignty is reclaiming public decision making power in the food system." (Growing Resilience and Equity, Food Secure Canada, p.9).

In Canada food sovereignty organizations tend to focus on influencing agriculture and food policies. Food sovereignty in BC and Canada is very linked to Indigenous sovereignty and is being led by Indigenous peoples. "The food sovereignty movement is building around the world and while there is no universal definition, it can be described as the newest and most innovative approach to achieving the end goal of long term food security. Indigenous food sovereignty is a specific policy approach to addressing the underlying issues impacting Indigenous peoples and our ability to respond to our own needs for healthy, culturally adapted Indigenous foods. Community mobilization and the maintenance of multi-millennial cultural harvesting strategies

and practices provide a basis for forming and influencing "policy driven by practice". (Indigenous Food Systems Network <http://www.indigenousfoodsystems.org/food-sovereignty>)

In the conversations I had, there were a number of comments that identified problems, disparities and sometimes injustices in our local, national and global food systems.

- *We need to help people understand what is involved in the highly technologized, cheap labour global food industry.*
- *Food prices in stores do not fully reflect the cost of growing with chemicals, fuel, transport, processing, etc.*
- *Growers need to make a living – high- calorie crops that contribute to food security like potatoes, beets, carrots- we can't sell them for enough money. Salad greens sell for the most money, but have few calories.*
- *Large farmers get subsidies, small farmers get nothing.*
- *Unhealthy food is much cheaper than good healthy food because it is grown and processed by slave labour.*

Food Systems

All these different understandings of the meaning of food security on Hornby seem to me to be integrated in the language of local or community-based and sustainable food systems.

“Local food systems build vibrant and healthy food systems, environments, and communities. By supporting local farmers and fishers, and ensuring that the infrastructure and markets that surround them are supportive, we ensure that all Canadians everywhere can benefit from a thriving local food economy.” (Food Secure Canada. Local Sustainable Food Systems Network)

“A sustainable food system is one that contributes to food security and nutrition for all in such a way that the economic, social, cultural, and environmental bases to generate food security and nutrition for future generations are safeguarded. (Growing Resilience Across Canada, Food Secure Canada)”

Strengthening local food systems is also one of the most effective strategies for surviving in the climate emergency. “Build resilient, ecological local food systems that shorten and diversify food chains, revitalize communities, ensure greater access to healthy and fresh foods, support lower-emissions food systems, build greater resiliency to shocks and reduce food loss and waste” (Growing Resilience Across Canada, Food Secure Canada)

But my personal favourite is this unsourced quote, brought by one of the people I interviewed.

- *“Sustainable food systems? What do they look like? They steward and enhance ecosystems, and respect the need of other species in those ecosystems. They support equitable and just access to food for all people in a way that is empowering, inclusive, dignifying and respectful. Growing food, growing community.”*

Assessment of Current Food Security on Hornby

Opinions varied from not so great to pretty good.



Bleak

- *Very fragile*
- *Weak*
- *Terrible*

There were a variety of reasons for this assessment and a strong sense that total food security on Hornby, under the definition of food security meaning using only local food, was not possible.

Food security on Hornby is extremely unlikely.

- *Regulatory policies hinder local food production.*
- *No commercial production of grains, oils, dairy and only a little meat.*
- *Very little willingness, experience and tools to do the hard, dirty, physical labour to grow a year's food crops, make hay, butcher livestock, preserve food, saw firewood, etc.*
- *No one on Hornby with a commercial fishing license anymore.*
- *Food basics from elsewhere, animal feed, machinery and fuel, seed, gardening supplies.*
- *A large percentage of residents are 75 years of age or older.*
- *Much farmland not used for growing food.*
- *Aging population, not enough new farmers or fishers.*
- *Fishing licenses very expensive and it is a hard life. Needs extreme skills and knowledge.*
- *No on-island production of grain, and no grain processing for humans or livestock.*
- *No on-island production of fats / oils.*
- *There are very few adult residents with experience in food-raising beyond a home garden.*
- *Growers retiring, land not sold for farming.*
- *Accessing local fruits and vegetables easy. Eggs relatively easy. Staples – grain and dairy and meat – not easy.*
- *Uncertain summer water.*

However, there was a general consensus that Hornby had many strengths and could vastly increase our use of local food.

There is massive potential for improvement.

- *If we could buy only local, we would.*
- *Better than some places and better than it used to be.*
- *Climate is good for growing.*
- *Good strides in the past 30 years.*
- *Lots of movement towards localized sources.*
- *No point in buying stuff shipped in if there is a local label.*
- *We have a gardening and food processing culture on Hornby.*
- *People buy local food wherever it is sold and still lots of room to expand market.*
- *Lots of backyard gardens, fruit trees.*
- *Strong interest in organic agriculture.*
- *Fair amount of farmland.*
- *We always buy Hornby first.*
- *Not sure it is an accurate perception that buying local costs more when you count in ferry fares, time, etc.*
- *Increasing community awareness of the importance of local food.*
- *Small local “pop-up” food businesses emerging and being well-supported by Co-op and buyers but still room for more.*
- *We have 5 species of salmon and 20 species of cod, clams, oysters, oolichans, gooeyducks, prawns, shrimps, scallops and herring in our area. Enough to sustain 1000 people if we did it smart.*
- *There is a long-time and solid commitment to local agriculture in the Official Community Plan and in the 2020 Visioning Update.*
- *We have a well educated population with a broad range of experience, an attitude of volunteerism and a history of “getting things done”. On Hornby we see the problem then go to action to solve it.*

Other respondents saw food security on Hornby as already quite strong, especially if the definition of food security included food produced regionally or further away.

Food security on Hornby is pretty good.

- *Several large market gardens with strong customer base*
- *Excellent Co-op support for local food.*
- *Strong culture of food growing and processing.*
- *Local fruit, veggies, nuts easy to buy.*
- *There are passionate farmers and market gardeners.*
- *Co-op and Ford Cove Store support local food production and food access.*
- *The Farmlands Trust, the Community Garden, the Gleaning Project, CSAs, Roadside Stands, The Kitchen, Meals from the Heart are all great contributors to food security.*
- *More than 30 people are partially growing their own food at the Community Gardens on decent land with good sunshine.*
- *There is still an abundance for fishing and foraging – fish, seafood, berries, nettles, mushrooms.*
- *Both Co-op and Ford Cove Store will do bulk orders. Cheaper and several households could share.*
- *Local eggs.*
- *No bears, squirrels, rabbits.*
- *Wineries/cideries are doing well.*
- *We need to explore and strengthen connections with our Foodshed – Hornby, Denman, Comox Valley, Vancouver Island. In case of the climate emergency creating a dire access to food situation, we can draw on our foodshed.*
- *Growing food is a gift to the community. There is nothing I would rather be doing.*
- *The Kitchen Meals and the Food Bank are great.*
- *The Co-op is part of Federated Co-ops. In case of emergency we have their back-up and can draw on FCL storehouses. We are not alone.*
- *If you have a decent income, and are comfortable going out, and have basic cooking skills, you are pretty food secure here.*

The climate emergency and food security

Most comments about the impacts of the climate emergency on food security on Hornby were focused on problems already experienced or seen as possible or likely in the future.

- *If the ferries go out we are hooped.*
- *Farmers always have to be adaptable and flexible, but now you have to be so much more adaptable – the weather is completely unpredictable – can't plan, just react to drought, just react to water pooling in the fields...*
- *This year was very bad. Lost pastures. Feeding hay 2 months earlier than usual.*
- *It was too wet to plant the garlic this fall. The rains came so early – we couldn't get on the fields.*
- *Hornby can survive better than industrialized urban areas, but we are still very vulnerable.*
- *We had a whole crop of greens we had to just turn in - we didn't have enough water.*
- *More pests and diseases. Fewer pollinators.*
- *We were almost out of water for the first time in 30 years.*
- *We are very dependent on outside inputs.*
- *All marine species already affected – some may be wiped out.*
- *Supply chains disrupted. Food prices increasing.*
- *I saw bugs I had never seen before.*
- *Dependence on long supply chains that are completely dependent on the fossil fuel economy.*
- *Impossible to feed everyone in an emergency for very long.*
- *Most food in stores and restaurants arrives by truck and ferry, and is stored using electricity. All very subject to petroleum shortages, electricity failures, ferry breakdowns, and breakdowns in world shipping.*
- *Likelihood of increasing severe weather events - heavier winter rains, soil erosion, flooding then drought, heat, fires.*
- *Potential global economic and political collapse.*

There were also quite a few comments expressing a belief that Hornby could take steps now to lessen the negative impacts of the climate emergency and we would do OK.

- *More use of regenerative food production practices like agro-forestry, no till, permaculture that are more resistant to the negative impacts of climate change.*
- *Climate emergency supply chain disruption means local food is starting to make sense to the mainstream. It is better environmentally, it is low-input, organic or pesticide-free and buffered somewhat from rising prices.*
- *Community awareness of the importance of local food is increasing.*
- *Maybe we can grow more hot weather crops like citrus and olives.*
- *Hornby is a great place to survive climate change.*

There was one perspective that was expressed both as one of the climate emergency negatives and as one of the potential positives.

- *More people are moving here to get out of the city.*

Ideas to strengthen food security on Hornby in the climate emergency

There were many many many ideas on how to strengthen food security on Hornby. I have tried to organize the ideas into categories.

More local food:

Share knowledge and skills for sustainable and ethical foraging.

- *Acknowledge and learn from First Nations expertise and stewardship.*

More commercial-scale food production:

Use more existing fallow farmland to grow food

- *More land in Farmlands Trust.*
- *Support both landowners and new farmers to negotiate lease agreements.*
- *Offer new farmers resources and skills training re administrative skills, business planning, what money is available.*
- *Start-up capital for tools, equipment, seeds, fencing, etc.*
- *Five acre plots for a young farm family to grow food for themselves and neighbours.*
- *Advocate for government financial support for small farms.*
- *Create community financial support for small farm start-up costs.*
- *Provide resources, education, mentoring on agro-ecological, regenerative growing practices.*
- *Long time growers as mentors with young enthusiastic growers.*
- *Grower/producer co-ops - e.g. a potato co-op.*
- *Farmstands shared between several growers – you could just take your produce there, you wouldn't have to run the stand.*

Increase meat, poultry, dairy production.

- *Advocate for small-scale slaughter regulations specifically for rural and remote communities.*
- *Small local abattoir.*
- *Pressure BC ferries to go back to policy of allowing commercial farm vehicles transporting live animals or birds to slaughter to have priority. In the heat even one hour wait can mean suffering and death.*

Grow more food in backyard/community gardens:

- *Encourage everybody to try to produce some food.*
- *Access to garden space.*
- *More community garden(s)*

- *Share information on what to do if you have a piece of ground, big picture planning, what are the 10 most important things? Offer mentoring, soil testing, encouragement.*
- *Elders with underutilized garden plots lease to neighbours without garden space and split produce.*
- *Provide seasonal resources and skills training for new gardeners.*
- *Provide resources and skills training for all gardeners on how to grow successfully in drought, etc.*
- *Provide resources and skills on growing nutrient-dense and protein crops best for food security.*

Community Greenhouse

- *Provide gardeners better opportunity to start their own plants*

Enhance small scale nut production.

Increase availability of fish and seafood

- *Advocate with DFO for community fishing licenses.*
- *Encourage more fishers to sell their catch here.*

Availability of better storage facilities for food of all types local and from off-Island and facilities for post-harvest processing and the creation of value-added products were seen as critical.

Storage

- *Individual households store month's worth of staples.*
- *Bigger Co-op warehouse for back-up of off- island food essentials e.g. grains, nuts, legumes, oils, sugars, spices, etc.*
- *Clean, cold and rodent-proof community storage.*
 - *Local fruits and root crops could store over the winter and be sold locally.*
 - *Perishables for community food security programs and emergencies.*
 - *Individual household perishable storage.*

Commercial kitchen facilities

- *Commercial level value-added products.*
- *Production of "ready-to-eat" meals made with local ingredients – fresh and frozen.*
- *Processing local food crops for household use.*
- *Community food security program use.*
- *Building skills in food preservation.*

Finding ways to involve more community members in our local food system inspired much creativity and many ideas.

Build food security awareness, knowledge and community through promotion, celebration, connection and communication

Honour and celebrate local food producers, distributors, sellers, sharers:

- *Community feasts with local food.*
- *Have a Local Harvest Feast with Fall Fair – could use prizewinning produce.*
- *Feasts as fundraisers for Food Security organizations.*
- *Chef competitions using local food.*
- *Feasts where chefs cook for growers/producers/distributors, sharers.*
- *Potlucks where local food fans eat and learn.*

Promote importance of food security and the role of local production.

- *Campaign re buy local/cook/local for households and restaurants.*
- *Promote local food through labeling, messaging, print and social media.*
- *Farm tours/food garden tours especially water-wise/regenerative examples.*
- *Create internet-based resource for information- sharing.*
- *Education and resources re environmental and food justice costs for global food system, local food systems.*
- *Conversations about individual food choices and impact on climate emergency.*
- *Create opportunities for conversations about what kind of food system we want here.*

Support equitable access to local food/decrease food insecurity

- *Support community food access and security organizations.*
- *Increase fresh local produce donations to food access and security programs.*
- *Create voucher system for people with low incomes to access local food e.g. Farmers' Market Nutrition Coupon Program.*
- *Promote cultural/attitudinal change: food security not charity; critical to everyone in this time of climate emergency.*
- *Keep food that must come from off-Island affordable e.g bulk ordering.*
- *We need not to be consumers; we need to be citizen eaters.*
- *Connect across region with other food security groups.*

Enhance communication and co-operation among Hornby groups/individuals involved with food production, selling, storing, distributing, sharing:

- *Networking. Get together once or twice a year.*
- *Share information. Celebrate successes.*
- *Honour individuals, projects, businesses who have made contributions to Food Security on Hornby*

Conclusions and Next Steps

Intersections

One very clear theme that emerged through the conversations I had was how strongly food security is intertwined with almost all other Hornby issues.

- *In the climate emergency we are in a domino situation. What you do on your property affects your neighbours. Water/food/housing/tourism/ - if we screw up one part, we screw up the whole thing.*

Water: water is essential for growing most food.

Housing and land access: housing is essential for seasonal farm workers, young working families, land for growing.

Energy and transportation: food supply is very dependent on trucking, off-island inputs, gas and electric machines.

Emergency preparedness: food is essential for disaster survival. “The Islands Trust suggests that, “Should supply lines be severed, most of our communities have enough food to last for three days.” (2020 Gabriola Health Report, p.80). BC Emergency Preparedness now recommends you have 3 to 7 days food and water supply.

(<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/safety/emergency-management/preparedbc>)

Messaging: promoting local, educating re emergency food supply.

Economics: food producers compete with producers around the world and with other economic sectors on the island.

Environment: food production and harvesting can harm OR benefit the larger environment and is also impacted by damage to environment.

Comments related to these other issues and topics will be compiled from the interviews and forwarded to the relevant HIRRA working group, committee or community group.

Interview Summary

People I talked with understood the meaning of the term food security in several different ways. The most common was eating exclusively or predominantly locally harvested food, with other definitions involving emergency preparedness, access to adequate food for every individual on Hornby and access to land to grow adequate food. Additional meanings linked to the need to address underlying reasons for food insecurity as well as disparities and injustices in local, regional, national and global food systems.

There were a range of opinions on Hornby about how robust our current food security is ranging from “bleak” to “pretty good”. However there is a general consensus that while total local-produced-only food security on Hornby is “extremely unlikely”, there is a great deal that we can do to make our food security better.

Everyone I talked with was very aware of the climate emergency and people identified impacts they were experiencing, particularly farmers, market gardeners, home gardeners and fishers. There was, again, a range of opinions on how bad things might get here from “possible complete global political and economic collapse” to “Hornby is a great place to survive the climate emergency”. And again, most opinions clustered in the middle with the two ends of the assessment spectrum also agreeing that there was much we could do to adapt our farming, growing and fishing to the changing climate.

People are confident we can make substantial improvements to food security on Hornby by using strategies that encourage and support young farmers and fishers. Ideas included utilizing fallow farmland, promoting regenerative farming approaches, encouraging everyone to produce some food and pressuring DFO to create community fishing licenses. Another critical area was advocating for regulatory changes that take into account the realities of rural and remote communities to allow for more production of meat and dairy, as well as adequate storage and multi-purpose post harvest processing facilities and the production of value-added products.

Promotion of local food and education for virtually everybody about food, food production and, food systems were seen as key components, everything from workshops for home gardeners to demonstration plots for high-protein and nutrient-dense crops. Strengthening our local community food security programs was seen as important as well as promoting connection between all food-related groups and organizations, to share information and celebrate our vibrant Hornby food culture and economy. And most important of all – lots and lots of community local food feasts.

It was very evident that there is an incredible amount of knowledge, skills and creativity here – and a lot of ideas and energy for how to make food security stronger.

Action Steps

At the December 8, 2021 HIRRA Meeting I presented a short PowerPoint overview of the suggestions for action that came out of the interviews. A Food Security Working Group has formed consisting at this time of Barbara Baird, Chelka, Nym Hughes, Reina LeBaron, Phoebe Long, Ryan May and Angela McIntyre. This Food Security Working Group will have its first meeting in January and will report-back regularly to HIRRA .

It is notable that even though every single farmer and grower interviewed said loudly and clearly that it had to be non-growers who took on the work of promoting food security on Hornby because growers and producers were “too busy and too tired from growing”, a majority of Working Group members are growers. Wish us luck and get in touch if you have questions or suggestions.

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Appendix 1: Research Design

When I volunteered to gather information on community perspectives on food security on Hornby Island in the climate emergency, I knew very little about food security on Hornby, food security generally or even Hornby generally. My partner and I moved to Hornby only a short time ago – in 2017. I thought, however, that I probably had enough knowledge and skill in research to interview people in an ethical and useful way and to write up what I learned to share with my neighbours.

Research as a word and as a practice is usually associated with universities and academics and certainly I learned my formal research skills through a university although I am not much of an academic. I had a varied paid work life, but spent decades in the BC College and Institute System. By the late 1990s academic credentials were becoming increasingly important, even mandatory, in order to continue to teach in the BC College and Institute System, so I obtained both a Master's in Education and a Doctorate in Education from SFU. I like clarity and structure in anything I do, and my research education and experiences offered me a process, a structure, ethical principles and a "role" that I understood in order to explore food security on Hornby. I decided that what I was doing was community-engaged research using a fairly standard qualitative research design.

Community-engaged research is generally understood to be based in communities using a model of collaboration between university-based researchers and members of the community. "Fundamentally, CER is about the collection of information to answer a specific question that is of interest to a community." (SFU Community-Engaged Research Institute, 2021).

I was trying to answer a question that was of interest to the Hornby Island community, or at least the Hornby Island community as represented through HIRRA, but I was not a university-affiliated researcher, indeed I was a member of the community within which I was researching. However, the goals and values of community-engaged research (CER) resonate strongly with my own research preferences and values:

"Many of the frameworks associated with CER trace back to the popular education movement and the development of 'participatory action research' which sought to address power relations and challenge the gap between theory and practice. These foundational ideas viewed people as the experts about their own lives and sought to align research with the real needs of communities. Emerging from this came an approach to research that seeks to understand the world by reflecting what is of vital concern to people and developing knowledge and action to change it" (SFU Community-Engaged Research Institute, 2021).

Since my goal was to reflect back to my community a picture, a story, a map, of food security on Hornby in the climate emergency and what could be done to make things better, I decided to embrace community-engaged research goals and just ignore the university-affiliation part.

I used a standard and simple qualitative research design. “The goal of qualitative research is to understand participants’ own perspectives as embedded in their social context... often used for exploratory questions, such as How? or Why? Questions. Researchers are themselves instruments for data collection, via methods such as in-depth interviewing or participant observation. Data are thus mediated through a human instrument and usually collected from small non-random samples (e.g. purposive samples, convenience samples, snow-balled samples). Data analysis often relies on the categorization of data (words, phrases, concepts) into patterns, sometimes this data will then be embedded in larger cultural or social observations and analyses. Often complexity and a plurality of voices is sought.” (Qualitative or Quantitative Research? McGill Qualitative Health Research Group)

I wanted to understand how people on Hornby understood food security in this place, in this climate emergency time. I gathered “data” by interviewing people, asking them questions, taking notes on what they told me if possible. Sometimes people showed me around their places, which was wonderful but made it a challenge to take lots of notes. I found people to interview using a “snowball” participant recruitment strategy, meaning I started with a couple of people who I already knew, and who I knew had opinions about food security on Hornby. At the end of our conversation, I asked who else they thought I should talk to and approached the people they suggested as best as I could. Every interview generated more names and the “snowball” grew.

As far as I know, the snowball could have grown until I had talked to everyone on Hornby, but like many research projects, deadlines intervened. Another challenge was that my interviews generated names but not necessarily contact information so there were people I was not able to connect with. I talked to many people and think I covered farming and growing pretty well but I would have really liked to talk with more retailers, more roadside stand operators, more restaurant people, and more fishers, hunters and foragers.

I transcribed my notes from each interview and organized my transcribed notes into theme categories. This study was almost entirely descriptive – I did almost no analysis. However, as the qualitative research definition says “data is mediated through a human instrument”, in this case, me. Qualitative research is always shaped and inevitably influenced by the researcher’s preexisting lenses, their life experiences, perspectives, biases. I did minimal interpreting of the data, primarily summarizing the perspectives I heard, but I inevitably shaped what I asked, what I heard, what I emphasized.

For example, I wanted to join the food security working group because I had/have a longtime interest in the year-round growing and processing of food. In my 20’s, like many others, I wanted

to farm, to be ‘self-sufficient’, to eat only what I grew or raised. And like many others, I tried very hard for several years but did not succeed in my goal of being a farmer. So it is unsurprising that I started this research process by interviewing farmers and growers. It did not even cross my mind to seek out fishers or seafood harvesters or hunters or foragers until quite a long ways into the interviewing process and then only because the people I was interviewing were telling me how the ocean and the forest had provided food for them and their families for generations. The blinkers acquired on my own life path limited my understanding of what “food” on Hornby even was.

I promised the people I talked with that I would publicly acknowledge their participation by name with much gratitude but that I would not attribute any quotes, paraphrases, ideas or suggestions to individuals. Some people were happy to be identified and would have preferred that their words were quoted accurately rather than paraphrased or summarized and to those people I offered, and continue to offer, my regrets. I lacked the time, the technology and the willingness to record interviews, transcribe them word for word, and use only approved quotes. As part of confidentiality, I have destroyed my original interview notes and have worked from one collective typed list of transcribed interview notes with no identifications attached.

Qualitative research builds understanding, not statistics. I understand a lot more about how people on Hornby see food security and what they thought could and should be done to strengthen food security through listening to their experiences and ideas. And I hope that this report will allow others to gain a similar understanding. But what is missing is the quantitative data, the numbers, the percentages, the statistics. Many people wanted concrete numerical data.

- *How many people are food insecure? How many seniors? How many families with young children? How many people living alone?*
- *What kind of emergency food stores do we have now? How much do we need? How long could we survive in an environmental catastrophe?*
- *What percentage of people on Hornby are primarily eating locally-sourced food?*

I would strongly recommend that answers to those kind of questions be sought. One of our neighbouring islands has produced a fascinating and comprehensive report called 2020 Gabriola Health Report: Taking the pulse of our island. I strongly recommend having a look at it to see what kind of extremely useful numerical information it is possible to gather to aid in our community decision-making.

Sources/Resources

Hornby reports that provided me with a foundation through excellent previous work done here:

Hornby Island Community COVID Conversation Report <https://hirra.ca/reports/2021-reports/>

A comprehensive account of the process and content of the April facilitated Zoom conversation organized by HIRRA, HICEEC, Hornby-Denman Healthcare, HIES, the Hornby Island Co-op CO-OP with input from the Resilience Initiative and the Heron Rocks Friendship Centre Society. Facilitated by Jenn Meilleur and Erica Crawford, NewStories, this is the most visually stunning report I have ever seen. Lovely formatting and Rae Mate's exquisite pandemic art. The content is pretty great, too.

Hornby Island Community Visions Review Report 2020 <https://hiceec.org/about>

Between 2001 and 2003 the Hornby community engaged in a lengthy and comprehensive visioning process, initiated by HICEEC, that created 20 year vision statements for the agricultural, arts, cooperative enterprises and community infrastructure, economy, environment, governance, housing, social services and support, and tourism sectors on Hornby.

At the 20 year mark, consultant Darlene Gage, who had worked on the original project, was hired to bring together community leaders in each of those sectors to assess progress and weigh in on whether a similar visioning process should be undertaken now, and if so, how. I found the report fascinating, especially reading the original vision statements from 20 years ago, and Darlene's expert comparisons of the differences and similarities in perspectives over 20 years.

I was particularly interested in the agriculture section, but also the recommendation that once key issues had been identified there could be a "call for volunteers or organizations to lead working groups on the main issues. These groups would undertake research about their specific issue to understand it in more depth. They would also identify the challenges impacting the specific situation on Hornby, and then the possible solutions or action plans..." which sounded exactly like the process this report describes. My thanks to Rudy Rogalsky who retrieved the report from the HICEEC website after I had failed dismally to find it.

Other Islands:

2020 Gabriola Health Report – taking the pulse of our island.

<https://www.phcgabriola.org/post/2020-gabriola-health-report>

“The Gabriola Health and Wellness Collaborative (GHWC) has produced the Gabriola Health Report to provide all Gabriolans access to data that reflects the health of our island community. ...This report takes a “social determinants of health” approach. As such, we have not only included data on issues like disease prevalence and health care availability, but also data that reflects on the broader social and economic conditions that can and do have real impacts on people’s health – including income levels, housing affordability and quality, attachment to the workforce, education levels, environmental quality, food security, social inclusion, and engagement in civic and community life.” This would be riveting reading for people on Gabriola and I include it here as an example of what could be done on Hornby that would be so useful.

The Galiano Food Program.

<https://galianoclub.org/food-program/>

“The Galiano Community Food Program strives to ensure that Galiano Island is a thriving, livable, food-secure community, where every resident feels included, welcome and empowered to build a deeper connection with their food system. In so doing, the Program improves Galiano’s ecological sustainability and community resilience in the face of climate change and uncertainty.” Another gulf island with a very interesting and wide-ranging set of food security initiatives including a community greenhouse, a cheese club, a garlic co-op and a nettlefest.

Saltspring Island Climate Action Plan. Transition Saltspring.

<https://transitionsaltspring.com/responding-to-climate-change/>

An amazing document outlining 250 recommendations to address climate change impacts – current and future – on Saltspring covering transportation, built infrastructure, food and agriculture, forests, freshwater ecosystems, land use and settlement patterns. I think what I found most amazing was the description of the process that created the Plan: “This Plan was a community-led effort led by twenty-three Salt Spring volunteers, with the input of dozens of experts and input from more than two thousand islanders over more than a year”. Although Saltspring is bigger and has more people than Hornby, the analysis and the suggestions for solutions are often quite applicable for us. If you want to know how a Salish Sea island plans to deal effectively with the climate emergency, read it.

Helpful in clarifying different definitions of food security:

Ackerman-Leist, Philip. **Rebuilding the foodshed: How to create local, sustainable and secure food systems.** (2013) A community resilience guide published by the Post-Carbon Institute and Chelsea Green Publishing. Available through Vancouver Island Regional Library and thanks a lot, Paula, for recommending it.

Food Secure Canada. <https://foodsecurecanada.org/>

A Canadian organization working towards food security primarily through supporting grassroots organizations, research, conferences, and influencing federal, provincial and local food policy. Has published some really interesting reports that can be easily found on their website and that helped me understand what food justice, food sovereignty and local food systems were in the Canadian context. One particularly helpful one was Growing Resilience and Equity Across Canada (2020).

BC Food Systems Network <https://bcfsn.org/>

“works to create healthy, just and sustainable food systems in British Columbia by strengthening connections, nurturing capacity, and supporting joined-up food policy at all levels. “

BC Food Security Gateway <https://bcfoodsecuritygateway.ca/>

"The Gateway supports knowledge exchange and collaboration to address food security in BC"

Indigenous Food Systems Network <http://www.indigenousfoodsystems.org/>

If you want to immerse yourself in learning about or learning more about Indigenous Food Sovereignty, this is a great place to start. Illuminating.

“Since the time of colonization, Indigenous communities have witnessed a drastic decline in the health and integrity of Indigenous cultures, ecosystems, social structures and knowledge systems which are integral to our ability to respond to our own needs for adequate amounts of healthy Indigenous foods. Indigenous food sovereignty provides a restorative framework for health and community development and reconciling past social and environmental injustices...”

Food And Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

<https://www.fao.org/publications/sofi/2021/en/>

If you want the latest global information, this is where to go. This website offers The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World (2021) through videos, interactive stories and maps, and digital publications.

Research information:

Qualitative or Quantitative Research? McGill Qualitative Health Research Group)
<https://www.mcgill.ca/mqhrg/resources/what-difference-between-qualitative-and-quantitative-research>

Community-Engaged Research Initiative.
SFU.<https://www.sfu.ca/cei.html>

Food Systems Lab. SFU.
<https://foodsystemslab.ca/>