

IMAGINING FOOD IN CANMORE



RESEARCH
REPORT 2020/21



With Thanks

Thank you to all the individuals who agreed to participate in this research project:

Kelsea Alba - Community Volunteer
Jodi Conuel - The Biosphere Institute
Amy Fournier - Town of Canmore
Yuka Ozawa - Yowza! Creative and Catering
Randi Lynn Rinaldi - Primary Care Network
Lori Rissling Wynn - Town of Canmore
Deb Sellers - Canmore Collegiate High School
Avni Soma - The Organic Box
Chantal von Rotz - Valbella Gourmet Foods

We would also like to thank the 18 additional interviewees who wished to remain anonymous as well as the 142 anonymous survey participants from Canmore. Thank you to the following organizations who contributed knowledge to this report: Alpine Edibles, Bow Valley Food Bank, Canmore Food and Friends, Canmore Bee and Pollinator Society, Canmore Pasta Company, Canmore Community Garden, Canmore Young Adult Network, and the Iyarhe Nakoda Food Bank.

Thank you to the Banff Canmore Community Foundation for their financial support for this research and report. This research was also generously supported through the Canada Research Chair program of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) made available by Dr. Marit Rosol and Dr. Annette Desmarais.

Thank you to Megan Imrie and Lu Douce from the Town of Canmore and Deb Grady from the MD Bighorn for their amazing support for this project including as hosts for the Banff Canmore Community Foundation grant. Thank you to Jill Harrison (Town of Banff) for being the initial visionary and providing ongoing and ever-enthusiastic support and insight. Lastly, a big thank you to Cody Alba for all her work transcribing, coding, and editing.

This report was written by Dr. Lauren Kepkiewicz, Postdoctoral Associate, Department of Geography, University of Calgary, 2021.

We recognize that all our food systems in the Bow Valley are based on Indigenous lands and in Indigenous food systems. We respectfully acknowledge and honour the many Indigenous nations who use these lands, including the ȩyā́hé Nakoda, Blackfoot, Tsuut'ina, Ktunaxa, and Secwepemc nations as well as the Region 3 Métis.



RESEARCH BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

What is the aim of this research and how was it conducted?

This research project was designed in partnership with the Bow Valley Food Alliance (BVFA) to identify key food issues and strengths in the community of Canmore. It is part of a broader research project that examines these issues in Banff, the Municipal District of Bighorn, and the Bow Valley more generally. This study is based on a series of interviews conducted from Fall 2019 to Spring 2020 with 26 people who are working to address food issues, create local food cultures, and promote resilient food systems in Canmore. Interviewees include health professionals, volunteers, business owners, hospitality staff, educators, local food producers, and community-based activists. Interviews were transcribed, coded, and analyzed using Nvivo software. Before the final report was sent out, interviewees had the opportunity to review the research and clarify or change quotations from their interviews. The study is also based on an anonymous survey that invited members of the public to respond from June to July 2020. In addition to the interviews, 142 Canmore residents' survey responses are included in the findings of this research. These survey responses are part of a broader survey of the entire Bow Valley, which included 259 respondents from Lake Louise, Banff, Canmore, and the MD Bighorn. Survey participants' responses who do not live in Canmore were not included in the survey results in this research report.

What prompted this research study?

Since the BVFA was established in 2016, the group has discussed a range of food issues in the Bow Valley. While having these discussions, the group discovered that little research existed that records what these issues are and how they affect communities in the Bow Valley. Additionally, many of those engaged in the BVFA expressed concerns that food insecurity in the Bow Valley has yet to be taken seriously by policy-makers as well as the broader community. In response to requests from the BVFA and in partnership with the University of Calgary and the University of Manitoba, this project uses community-based research to help fill these gaps, guiding the work of the BVFA and informing the Canmore community about key food system strengths and issues.

Who funded and conducted this study?

This study was funded through a grant from the Banff Canmore Community Foundation, funding for a postdoctoral position at the University of Calgary, and funding from the University of Manitoba. It was designed and conducted in partnership with the BVFA by Dr. Lauren Kepkiewicz, a postdoctoral researcher specializing in food movements, food sovereignty, and food systems in Canada. Cody Alba also worked as a community-based research assistant on this project, providing support throughout transcription, data analysis, and report writing. Megan Imrie, Lu Douce, and Deb Grady helped connect relevant community members as well as providing input throughout the research process.

SUMMARY OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

Based in conversations with people working and volunteering in food-related positions as well as survey responses, this report outlines key strengths, issues, and recommendations related to food in Canmore.



STRENGTHS

Throughout the research, participants highlighted the many ways that community members are working to address food issues in Canmore. While many food-related strengths and supports were noted, the below are those that came up most frequently throughout the research.

1. **Partnerships**
2. **Canmore Food Recovery Barn**
3. **Community Gardens**
4. **Community Meals**
5. **Food Vendors at Canmore Mountain Market**
6. **Alpine Edible Schoolyards**
7. **Bow Valley Food Alliance (BVFA)**
8. **Good Food Box**
9. **Cultural Food Groups**
10. **TOC Residential Food Waste Collection**

1. Partnerships

While ‘partnerships’ is a broad category, the importance of partnerships between different food-related organizations and businesses was continually noted by research participants. For example, many local businesses donate to Food and Friends while the Bow Valley Food Bank partners with the N.W.M.P. Barracks Museum who grow fresh vegetables that volunteers harvest for Food Bank clients. Local businesses such as Valbella Gourmet Foods and Canmore Pasta Company also donate to a variety of community programs including monthly Canmore Young Adult Network (CYAN) dinners. Additional businesses who donate food and who were noted in the research include JK Bakery, Rocky Mountain Bagel Company, Le Fournil, Good Earth, and Save On Foods. Research participants explained that these partnerships are often mutually beneficial, saving food from the landfill while also supporting the work of local food programs.

2. Canmore Food Recovery Barn

Research participants underlined the ways that the Canmore Food Recovery Barn (CFRB) reduces food waste, educates community members, and provides affordable produce. Several interviewees explained that the CFRB plays an important part in increasing sustainability within food systems, while others noted that it is also important to reduce food waste at the source before it reaches a program like the CFRB. While some interviewees noted that there was less stigma attached to accessing food through the CFRB (i.e. in comparison to the Food Bank), others noted that for certain communities stigma was still attached, particularly for those who are food insecure. Survey respondents ranked the CFRB as the second most used community-based food service in Canmore with 44.53% of respondents saying that they or a member of their family have used the program.

“I think the Food Recovery Barn is fantastic. I’ve been to them a couple of times for my own use for my family and it’s great. The turnout is huge and I think it’s perfect because in my 30 years of being in the kitchen I’ve seen a lot of food go in the garbage and there’s nothing wrong with it”. – Anonymous

“The Food Recovery Barn does amazing work and I’m so happy that they’re here. However, food rescue can only capture a portion of edible food that is going to waste. Efforts to prevent food from going into the waste system in the first place are also important from a climate change perspective.” – Amy Fournier

“ I think that different organizations work well together. As soon as I heard about Canmore Food Rescue, I got together with them to find out what they’re doing and if they’re interested in what I’m doing. I think that there’s different people in the Valley that see the importance of supplying food for everyone and making it accessible for everyone but also keeping food from being wasted. Hopefully these different partnerships keep less food out of the garbage and more in people’s homes and stomachs.”

– Deb Sellers



The community garden has allowed me to access amazing fresh food. I love getting into the garden, harvesting something, and putting it on the table. I think it's so beautiful. There are many opportunities to do all kinds of things with garden produce. For example, I would be very happy to take any leftovers from the garden and create something with them and then distribute to other members."

- Yuka Ozawa

3. Community Meals

In the survey, community meals ranked as the third most used community-based food service in Canmore with 38.69% of survey respondents saying they've attended a community lunch or dinner. Both Food and Friends and CYAN's pasta night were described as spaces that provide social connection and opportunities to build community cohesion. Interviewees also underlined the ways that community dinners provide a healthy meal for those in need without the stigma of a soup kitchen.

"I love that people choose to come together during community meals - both with people they know and don't know. I like that you see a young population at these community meals whereas in other areas it's often middle aged and older adults."

- Anonymous

"The biggest contribution that Food and Friends make is that it's a community and this is a community that is very prone to isolating factors. What would drive people that have been here for 50-60 years to get to know the guy who is running the snowplough or the person serving coffee? Seniors can be very isolated as can new kids in town. If you are not going to socialize in bars, or you are just hanging out with your coworkers, I don't know what else there is aside from these community meals. There isn't a movie theatre or bowling alley. There's a climbing wall and elevation place but these things take money. Where else are you going to meet different people in the community?" - Anonymous

"You look at things like the community dinners at St. Michael's church - that's a pretty powerful community event that serves multiple needs. It's about tackling isolation and loneliness and giving people a warm meal if they're undernourished. There's just so many good things that happen when people share food."

- Anonymous

4. Community Gardens

Although research participants often spoke about the need for more growing spaces, they also highlighted the importance of available garden space in Canmore. Both interview and survey respondents described the Canmore Community Garden as a space to grow food (particularly for those who live in condos and apartment buildings), learn about food, and build community. In this way, research findings suggest that community gardens provide a space for some people to access fresh local produce that can help reduce household food costs and serve as a space to build social cohesion and support mental health. Research findings also suggest that while the Canmore Community Garden is popular, there is demand for additional spaces to grow food (including culturally diverse foods), including greenhouses, rooftop gardens, and vertical farms. 22.6% of survey respondents from Canmore said they had participated in a community garden.

"I wanted to grow vegetables and get my hands in the soil but living in a condo, I wasn't able to. In the community garden I get to do this. I like experimenting, trying different things to see if they work. I also like working with other people and have felt a lot of enthusiasm from being a part of the garden." - Anonymous

"My favourite part of the garden is the people. It's really an enjoyable thing to share common interests with people of all ages who like to learn. A lot of sharing of knowledge happens. You get an 80 year-old and a 2 year-old. The 2 year-old is learning all kinds of stuff like not walking on beds, discerning differences between plants, and so on. The 80 year-old shares her wealth of experience from having a garden for so many years...The community garden also makes people more aware of where their food comes from and what we might do to supply more people with food". - Anonymous

"I think community gardens help people see all the effort that goes into growing food. They also make people feel like they are part of something and can help offset grocery bills. Community gardens would be my first go-to in terms of creating new food spaces." - Anonymous

5. Food Vendors at Canmore Mountain Market

85.4% of survey respondents said they have attended the Canmore Mountain Market in order to access food products, making it the most popular food-related event in town. Research findings suggest that community members see the market as an important space to build community as well as a key space that provides access to local food. Several research respondents also noted the importance of having alternative places to shop such as the farmers' market that exist outside of large-scale grocery store chains. While the market in Canmore currently includes vendors who bring in some of the same products that are available in local grocery stores, there are multiple vendors who provide food sourced from Alberta and British Columbia, which is not accessible through larger grocery chains.

"The farmers market is such a hub - it's such a great community building venue." - Anonymous

"I would like more access to year-round local food, like a weekly farmers market during the winter and summer months. In the winter, it could be far shorter (3h) in a local school gym, for example." - Anonymous

"The Canmore farmers market helps to build a diverse economy and make a more inclusive and liveable community that takes into account diverse social and economic backgrounds. Many of the vendors at the farmers market are locals or employ locals. As a vendor myself, I can attest that farmers' markets provide the opportunity for local artisans, makers, growers and bakers to earn a livelihood in the Bow Valley. Markets add vibrancy to our community and contribute to environmental sustainability by providing people with access to foods and goods that are locally produced, often with a smaller carbon footprint". - Anonymous

6. Alpine Edible Schoolyards

Research findings show that Alpine Edibles is a highly valued program because it provides hands-on learning experiences for teaching kids about food as well as producing local organic food for community members. Several interviewees underlined the great respect the community has for urban farmer, Christian Wright, who has been a key player in increasing food literacy in the community, including facilitating community classes about topics such as seed saving.

"I think Alpine Edibles is a great start: it encourages children to get their hands in the soil and experience how food is grown first-hand. More importantly, it inspires children to think about food systems at an early age." - Kelsea Alba

"Every fall we get food from Christian. A lot of it goes back into our baking, so we put beets and carrots and zucchini into our muffins. I'll put potatoes and dill into salads which I love... For our farm to table module, Christian comes in to give a few different talks. For example, we got fennel from the garden and talked about how to store food throughout the winter. He came in another day and mapped out his garden and we talked about crop rotation and what grows well here and why he chooses certain things." - Deb Sellers



With Alpine Edibles, I've seen the way that students react and how much more engaged they are in the lessons when they're out in the garden. You can see the difference between teaching them in a classroom and teaching them hands-on. Having them work directly with the plants is very effective from an educational point of view."

- Anonymous



7. Bow Valley Food Alliance (BVFA)

Interviewees talked about how the BVFA provides an important space for collaboration in a context where food work in the valley is often done in siloes. Several interviewees explained that the BVFA has worked to connect municipalities and different groups doing food work as well as providing a space where community members can come together to take action regarding food system changes and amplify community voices. Research findings also suggest that community members value BVFA food-related events and workshops as they provide an opportunity to build knowledge and relationships. 18.25% of survey respondents said they had attended a BVFA event.

"I think that people who know the BVFA feel the BVFA gives them faith that things are happening, and that the BVFA provides a place for people to come together and have their voices heard...I found it really valuable to do the Kitchen Table Talks with my groups." - Anonymous

"I love the fact that Canmore has a food box. I remember being a young mom and I didn't have my Canadian citizenship and we were able to participate in the food box program and that was what we could afford so I love that that is in the community. I would love to see that grow and I would love to see businesses partner with them."

- Anonymous

"Besides the BVFA, everyone is kind of working in a silo."

- Randi Lynn Rinaldi

8. Good Food Box

Both survey respondents and interviewees noted that the Good Food Box (GFB) has helped fill a gap in providing affordable food in Canmore. 36.5% of survey respondents noted they have participated in the GFB. By delivering a monthly service that offers food at cost, community members can access reasonably priced fresh produce. Research participants also noted that while they greatly appreciate the GFB and feel the quality has improved as a result of their partnership with The Organic Box, they would love to see an affordable food box that features more local and sustainably-produced fruits and vegetables.

Part of my work is running the Good Food Box which was inspired by the Town of Banff. We partnered with different organizations and now it's Bow Valley wide... There are lots of people who are really grateful for it to finally come to Canmore whether they knew about it happening in Banff or Cochrane or Airdrie and saw that gap. On pick up day we see a range of people, but I would say they are mostly young adults ranging from 25-45. I think the people who access the Good Food Box, often they're not making much money...we see a lot of younger families and people who are excited about the quality, quantity, and price." - Randi Lynn Rinaldi

9. Cultural Food Groups

Throughout the research, various interviewees underlined the important work that cultural food groups contribute to the community. Not only do these groups organize within their own communities to address needs that are often left unmet by other food programs but they also rally to contribute to the food security and food sovereignty of all community-members living in the Bow Valley and beyond.

"It's normal for Filipinos to get together and provide assistance like food packs during difficult situations - for example, there was an earthquake back home in the Philippines and we organized food hampers to send to people in need. It's normal for us. So it was very easy to collect people to get some hampers when COVID-19 happened. Filipino people are shy to ask but there if they see that the community needs something, they will help." - Anonymous

10. TOC Residential Food Waste Collection

Research findings suggest that community members greatly value the Town of Canmore's Residential Food Waste Collection program. While many interviewees reported that they were thrilled with this new program, they also talked about the desire to keep compost in the valley, including requests from community members to use compost produced locally to amend and improve garden soil. Several interviewees also noted that work on a commercial food waste program may happen in the future, filling an important gap in further reducing food waste in Canmore.

"People were just so thrilled with the food waste collection program. There were so many people who wanted to participate that we had to order more bins. We doubled the number of bins that we had available because we distributed them so quickly and then we were still getting requests from people who didn't get one who wanted to participate...the food waste collection program is about climate action but it's also about managing our waste and doing a better job of diverting our waste, making better use of finite resources, and converting it into a usable resource as opposed to landfilling it." - Lori Rissling Wynn

//
The reaction to the Food Waste Collection program has been overwhelmingly positive! Residents have come up to me just to express their gratitude for the work we're doing, which feels a bit strange because as government staff people are more often unhappy with you. I think one of the reasons for the community's enthusiasm is that in most other municipalities that don't have food waste collection program, residents can compost in their backyards, but that isn't an option here due to wildlife. Finally, "I've been wanting to do this forever and have not been able to" has been a pretty common response."

– Amy Fournier



CHALLENGES

While Canmore has many food-related programs, organizations, and actors that strengthen food systems, interviewees also talked about the challenges of living in a mountain town that relies heavily on the tourism industry. Below are ten food system challenges identified by the research.

1. **Affordability**
2. **Lack of local food and support for local food provisioners**
3. **Social injustice and disparities**
4. **Lack of spaces for cooking, preparing, gathering, and growing**
5. **Policies**
6. **Unsustainability of food systems**
7. **Lack of influence over food systems**
8. **Scale**
9. **Municipal Challenges**
10. **Education**





I feel that nobody should go hungry and nobody should face the choice of: do I pay the rent or do I feed myself?"

- Anonymous

1. Affordability

The issue that most often came up during this research was affordability. 98.5% of survey participants ranked the cost of food as a key issue in the Bow Valley while interviewees highlighted the expense of products such as healthy fresh produce, cultural foods, and sustainably-produced products. Research participants linked the cost of food to the cost of living, with emphasis on the high cost of housing. Several interviewees noted that basic needs are particularly hard to cover for those employed in the service industry as many of these jobs pay minimum wage with fluctuating work hours. At the same time, several research respondents explained that the cost of food is not only an issue for those in lower paying jobs but also for those in middle income jobs. While some interviewees and survey respondents suggested that more affordable food programs and lowering the cost of food may help address this issue, others emphasized the need to tackle the prevalence of precarious low-paying jobs and lack of affordable housing.

"My family is struggling but don't want free options as we're not struggling so bad as others. We would just like to afford the food to buy ourselves." - Anonymous

"Of course, we know that to solve food insecurity it is not a matter of food rescue, it's a matter of employment because of the cost of living here." - Anonymous

"I wouldn't necessarily describe myself as poor but I know that the majority of my budget is spent on housing...As much as I'd love to be purchasing local organic foods, which I know would nourish me more, I have to stay within my means."

- Anonymous

"There are a lot of people in this community that I know are food insecure but you wouldn't know who they are because they are working poor, they live in a hostel or in somebody's basement, or they couch surf, living the van life, and then the rest of them are the young service workers." - Anonymous

"We need to address the affordability and the pay structure that's offered within the Valley." - Anonymous

"In our valley we have the highest cost of living of all of the province, the biggest wage gaps, and our biggest industries are generally providing low-income jobs that pay below the Canmore cost of living." - Anonymous

2. Lack of local food and support for local food provisioners

Another key issue identified in the research was accessing local food in the Bow Valley, including barriers to growing food locally and keeping livestock and bees, as well as a lack of support and markets for local food producers. 73.9% of survey respondents noted a lack of locally-produced food as a key issue while 72.5% said that there was a lack of support for local and regional food producers. 67.6% said they believed there was not enough support for local gardeners and other food provisioners. Interviewees linked this lack of local food to increased vulnerability to natural disasters, such as those that cut off transportation routes (such as flooding) and those that create uncertainty around global food supply chains (such as the COVID-19 pandemic). Interviewees also emphasized the connections between supporting local food and building climate resiliency, including the need to increase access to fresh affordable local produce as climate change worsens. Several research participants suggested increasing access to local foods must include support for small food businesses and alternative markets, noting that large grocery chains which often have rules and regulations that make it difficult for small- and medium-sized producers and processors to gain access to grocery store markets. Lastly, many research respondents emphasized that local food should not only be available to those in higher income brackets but to all community members.

"Access to affordable food should not just be the cheaper products, we should be able to access meats and dairy products from quality local producers as they are right on our doorstep". - Anonymous

"It would be great to increase the production of food locally and composting. The closer people are to their food, the better." - Anonymous

"There are so many good things that can come from local food security - what if we had another catastrophe and we were isolated and the highways closed and the railways closed? How much food do we have? Probably not that much." - Anonymous

“
I don't think there's enough
Indigenous involvement,
like actual Indigenous
involvement, in the food
systems in the Bow Valley.”

– Anonymous

3. Social injustice and disparities

Research participants also underlined a variety of social disparities and injustices related to food in Canmore. For example, interviewees underlined the presence of food insecurity in the community as well as stigma that accompanies food insecurity. Certain groups were considered more likely to experience food insecurity such as young families and seniors, as well as those working precarious jobs, often in the hospitality sector, including young adults, temporary foreign workers, and undocumented workers. Additionally, research results suggest that there is a lack of knowledge and meaningful support for Indigenous food systems as well as cultural food systems in Canmore. Lastly, research results demonstrate that while not held by everyone, the following racist, classist, and colonial beliefs are common in Canmore: 1) people from certain cultural backgrounds do not make healthy food choices and therefore need to be educated; 2) people who cannot afford food in Canmore should move elsewhere; and 3) non-Indigenous community members do not need to engage with or have knowledge of Indigenous food systems.

“While there are a few Filipino grocery stores in Bow Valley, their selection is limited – they maybe only have 10-15% of the ingredients people need. Filipino people in the Bow Valley go to Calgary to buy what they need.” – Anonymous

“In Canmore we have a huge gap, some people are millionaires and some barely have money to meet basic needs. But without frontline workers life would change for everyone – it is incredible how some people express hateful opinion towards these workers.” – Anonymous

“There are no cultural foods in the hampers that come from the Food Bank. While our communities will eat whatever is on the table, it's important and fulfilling to eat your own cultural foods.” – Anonymous

“Your salary depends on your colour and your passport...when I first arrived in Canmore and was working at a restaurant I had a local customer tell me not to speak in my own language but to speak English. People sometimes look at us like we're slaves and it's terrifying.” – Anonymous

4. Lack of spaces for cooking, preparing, gathering, and growing

Research results suggest that community members lack access to adequate spaces to grow, prepare, cook, and gather around food. Interviewees identified this as an issue at an individual level related to housing (i.e. housing with no outdoor space for growing food as well as housing that lacks kitchen facilities and/or food storage space, or shared accommodation without adequate kitchen space for all residents), at a community level (i.e. there is no community kitchen available in Canmore), as well as at a business level (i.e. there is a lack of affordable space for growing and preparing food as well as a lack of networking and gathering spaces for small businesses). 78.2% of survey respondents said there is a lack of space to grow food in Canmore. Research findings suggest this lack of food-related spaces is heavily related to the high cost of land and high rental costs in Canmore.

“There are absolutely not enough spaces to gather around food and to cook food. Especially with regards to cooking a meal as a community...If we look at the housing that's affordable, it isn't always that best option. A lot of the basements suites come furnished but your cooking tools are a hot plate or microwave or instapot. That's not to say that you can't nourish yourself with that, it just takes a lot of creative planning...The same goes for share kitchens. We live in a share house so we're constantly battling for fridge space and if our roommates are cooking we often won't cook a full meal because there's too many cooks in the kitchen, literally. Same if you're living hostel style - your fridge space is very limited.” – Anonymous

“I think the biggest challenge in Canmore for food-related businesses is land and location – especially for those who are interested in food production. Because there is no agricultural land here like there is many other places, the options for growing become models like vertical farming. However, the sheer cost of facilities or leases is very prohibitive – especially because with produce, you are often not looking at a high value commodity... We have a number of businesses in the food industry that would love to grow in capacity but cannot find warehousing or shops that would accommodate that growth.” – Anonymous

“As a small business owner I believe Bow Valley entrepreneurs need to grow together but right now we don't really have a way to connect. We don't have a space where we can share resources, talk about common needs, and coordinate things like renting shared cooking and food processing spaces. I don't think anything like that exists right now in Canmore...Canmore has also been missing affordable commercial kitchen facilities.” – Yuka Ozawa

“When we've tried looking into different kinds of food programming for our organization, there are no available spaces. Part of it is there is a lack of these kinds of spaces. Another reason is that the spaces that do exist are all for profit – they are too expensive to rent for community-based programs funded by tax-payer dollars.” – Randi Lynn Rinaldi

5. Policies

75.4% of survey respondents believe that there are insufficient policies to promote sustainable, local, and healthy food systems at municipal, provincial, federal, and international levels. For example, interviewees explained how certain municipal policies constrain, prohibit, and/or discourage growing berry bushes and fruit trees, keeping bees and livestock, and producing backyard compost. At the same time, research findings suggest there are a lack of municipal policies that support ecologically and socially just local food systems. Several interviewees explained that Town of Canmore policies related to what types of plants you are allowed to grow are unclear as well as inconsistently enforced. In addition to municipal policies, interviewees talked about provincial and federal policies that hinder food-related activities such as selling certain products interprovincially, reducing food waste (i.e. due to health and safety regulations that make it difficult or impossible for restaurants to pass along extra food to food rescue operations), using innovative growing techniques (i.e. vertical farming and hydroponics), providing wild game at community functions, and preparing food for community members.

"As far as outdoor food events, it is hard and that's why I've stopped them completely. I have the knowledge - I worked with BanffLife and we hosted a lot of outdoor BBQ's. But that required a tent, a handwashing station, needing this, that, and the other thing. I was only able to provide those because it was a municipally funded event and the food licensing went under the Town of Banff as well. Because we're a stand along not-for-profit, it's really challenging to host an outdoor food event - there are a lot of hoops and hurdles you have to get through, even though the underlying aim is to bring together community to eat. It's hard." - Anonymous

"Now there's legislation in food safety programs. For me to actually sell \$10 packages of my produce to SafeWay I have to spend \$60,000 in our building to make it up to code." - Anonymous

"Food-related businesses often deal with provincial and federal regulations that can be overly restrictive. For example, health and safety regulations sometimes make it difficult for restaurants and grocery stores to donate excess food. Instead that food goes to waste. It would be great to see some flexibility to allow grocery stores and restaurants to do something productive with excess food...Land use bylaws can also limit the businesses interested in growing food using vertical or hydroponic farming techniques. These new methods of growing often need to be in an industrial area because of the sterile environment in which they grow. It's not the same as growing outside and I think our legislation hasn't caught up - municipally, provincially, federally. Traditionally when we look at agriculture it happens outside on a farm but with hydroponic growth you need a sterile, very contained, humid and managed environment. However, legislation doesn't allow this type of production to happen in certain industrial areas." - Anonymous

“

I feel there should be policies developed to allow certain backyard food related activities that are not currently allowed, such as backyard composting and beekeeping. While wildlife issues are a concern, people have been able to grow gardens for food (a known wildlife attractant) without any major issues, and I believe other food production such as composting and beekeeping can be done safely given the right policy framework.”

- Anonymous

6. Unsustainability of food systems

Research results suggest that Canmore community members are concerned with the unsustainability of the dominant food system. While 76.1% of survey respondents ranked food waste as a key issue, the same number of respondents (76.1%) noted a lack of sustainably-produced food. Research participants noted that food waste not only occurs at a household level but also at a commercial level, including in restaurants and grocery stores. In addition to issues of food waste, interviewees explained that industrial food production as well as long transportation chains contribute to climate change and increased GHG emissions. In this context, interviewees highlighted the need for local composting, the reduction of food waste at various scales, and increased access to affordable sustainably-produced foods. Lastly, while interviewees highlighted the importance of ensuring that local food projects keep wildlife safe, they also highlighted the need to understand the impacts the current global food system has on wildlife elsewhere.

*"The food system in Canmore is not sustainable in the long-term - it has an impact on climate change and is wasteful."
- Amy Fournier*

*"It's a problem if we're always sourcing from other regions and those food systems that we're sourcing from are known to have a degrading effect on the environment and are really bad for climate change, which a lot of studies show with industrial models of food production. We're living here in this pristine little mountain town and we're outsourcing our environmental degradation to other regions. So we can think of ourselves here in the Bow Valley as being environmentally friendly but we are deluding ourselves if we're not thinking about the damage we're causing to other regions, including the wildlife that lives there. We need to be creating resilient agro-ecologies locally."
- Anonymous*

"There is still a disconnect between food choices and climate crisis concerns, as certain agricultural practices play a huge part in the latter." - Kelsea Alba

"How do we make sure that our residents have access to good nutritious food that's affordable, that hasn't been delivered thousands of kilometers across an international border? Coming from the perspective of the work that I do, it's amazing work that needs to be done because it meets a number of our goals. It would help with our climate action goals and our waste goals. It could potentially even help us achieve some of the things around coexisting with wildlife." - Lori Rissling Wynn

“

The food system in the Bow Valley impacts sustainability in a very negative way. I feel like the whole system needs to be flipped on its head for us to make food in the Bow Valley more sustainable... I would start by saying that the production of food accounts for 25-30% worldwide GHG emissions so it's a significant portion of the climate crisis and this is everything from food production to transportation, processing, packaging, retail and what goes into your fridge. There are lots of points along the road where we can intercept and reduce waste. For example, wonky carrots getting thrown out at a farm, to people over purchasing at a supermarket and then throwing out food at home. All of these things have significant impacts and each portion of the chain has its own way of contributing to climate change. In relation to the Bow Valley we have to worry about transportation because very little of our food is produced here.”

- Jodi Conuel

7. Scale

Research findings also suggest that the scale of the dominant food system is an issue for community members, charitable food programs, and small local food businesses. For example, large grocery store chains often have centralized policies that can make it challenging for small businesses and local food producers to sell their products to these chains. Research respondents also noted that large grocery stores may give charitable donations of food but in doing so they do not necessarily take into consideration what foods are needed by food insecure community members and instead use charitable food as a way to move product. This kind of behaviour is generally not the fault of local managers but rather an issue of scale with decisions and policies often made in a central office located elsewhere. Several research respondents explained that large scale grocery store models tend to produce a lot of waste and that this kind of behaviour is built into how they operate. In addition to large scale grocery store models, research participants also talked about how the scale of industrial agricultural leads to excessive waste, GHG emissions, and other unsustainable practices. Altogether, research findings suggest that the scale of the dominant food system often causes community members to feel disempowered and confused about how to advocate for food system change.

"How can we convince people to see the ways our current policies are subsidizing monocultures? If we could level the playing field between small agroecological producers and industrial monocultures that would be much better."

- Anonymous

"We are not a small meat processor at this point but we are also not a big meat processor so there is a really huge gap especially in the meat industry in sizes. The little guys and a little deli makes a few sausages and 1-2 kinds of ham and stick to that and then there are the huge guys that make everything else that you buy at a grocery store which we obviously could not compete with and don't want to so we are sort of in the middle and it brings challenges with things such as equipment - a lot of those costs are higher because we need a certain size of equipment or you don't get as good as pricing on your raw materials as a big guy would or you can't get enough of this cut. The meat industry is so volatile and it changes so much. A few months ago, a Tyson feedlot burned down in the USA and it raised all of our prices in beef by a lot. So one thing can happen in a different country and because the big guys have the market, if something goes wrong with their plants or feedlots it affects all of us, down to the rancher in Lethbridge."

- Chantal Von Rotz

**“
Outside of organic,
a bigger component
for me is scale -
meaning that the
scale of agriculture
is not based on large
scale monocrops.
We need to work
towards understanding
economic systems
as being smaller
and to localize our
economies.”**

- Avni Soma



8. Municipal Challenges

Research findings suggest that community members often do not feel that the Town of Canmore is supportive of grassroots food initiatives. For example, several research participants talked about the difficulties they faced when they approached administration and town council; they explained that they felt dismissed, that they were told that the Town of Canmore doesn't deal with food-related projects because food is not part of their strategic plan, and that Town employees refused to meet with them at all. Additionally, both survey and interview responses indicated that research participants felt that the Town of Canmore is not well prepared to deal with food insecurity that often accompanies emergencies, disasters, and pandemics. More generally, 75.4% of survey respondents said there was a lack of understanding regarding local food concerns. (To note: in the spring of 2020 with the start of COVID-19 and after the majority of the interviews were conducted, the Town of Canmore appointed a lead staff person to liaison with food-based groups in the community. Currently this person has been working to address some of the issues noted here.)

"I asked people from bylaw if we could meet casually and talk and they wanted me to say really specifically what we were going to talk about so that they could do their research. I spent a lot of my time trying to articulate it as best as I could and as clearly as I could and they still wrote back and said that I wasn't being clear enough. All I wanted to do was talk to them, get some clarity from their point of view, because their bylaws are written in such vague language that it doesn't make sense. They say that anything that could potentially attract dangerous wildlife can result in a fine for \$10,000. Some of the plants that they have listed as being potentially dangerous wildlife attractants are literally planted in their own landscaping at the Town Civic Center. I think I could just go ahead and plant those things and it would be fine but you're kind of stuck - you want to work with the Town and be responsible but it's been really soul-crushingly difficult to create a productive dialogue." - Anonymous

"Well I gave up trying to influence policies. I tried hard. I went to Town Hall a few times. I talked to people. And no one says no: they say it's exciting, it's great but we don't have time. I phoned people who all say: I'm so busy I won't have time to deal with this for the next ten months. Okay. So basically it's a no. Because if you tell me you don't have a half hour in the next 10 months to discuss it and maybe bring something up, I don't buy it. I have a very tight schedule but I'll make a half hour if I need too." - Anonymous

9. Lack of influence over food systems

Findings from both the interviews and surveys suggest that Canmore community members do not feel like they have the power to make decisions about what their food systems look like. 75.4% of survey respondents indicated that community members perceive they are not able to influence what their food systems look like. Several interviewees explained that people lack influence because they are not able to make the food choices they want due to lack of affordable options (i.e. people noted they wanted to buy local sustainably-produced food but they were not able to afford it), lack of spaces to buy local food (i.e. people noted that they were not able to access local foods through grocery store chains in Canmore), lack of proper labeling (i.e. people were not always able to figure out where products were from, especially in the grocery stores), and lack of access to decision-makers (i.e. both within the Town of Canmore as well as more broadly, for example, within multinational food industries).

"I think people feel very powerless about the big issues of housing, food access, and I think they feel they have no influence." - Anonymous

"Fair Trade Canada wanted to do a campaign where all of the participating cities promoted and spoke about Fair Trade bananas to their local grocery stores. But it was like crickets trying to get a hold of grocery stores at the time - this was a few years ago. How do you influence corporations, whether it's a national or international food chain company, to get them to do something as simple as bring in fair trade bananas? It's incredibly difficult and that's just one item in a store that carries thousands of things. I found that particularly frustrating so I can imagine that other people feel the same way." - Lori Rissling Wynn

10. Education

Lastly, research participants explained that community members sometimes lack education and knowledge regarding food security and food sovereignty as well as regarding how to cook, grow, and preserve healthy foods. 72.5% of survey respondents noted that there is a lack of understanding in the Bow Valley regarding where food comes from. Research findings also note that education is needed not just on an individual level but also for decision-makers and those in positions of power regarding local food needs as well as how to support food security and food sovereignty in the Bow Valley. As many of the other themes outlined above, lack of education is generally intertwined with other issues. For example, education regarding how to cook is not meaningful if people lack the facilities to cook or cannot afford the necessary ingredients.

"I think growing food is an issue...the community garden is fabulous but there is a lack of knowledge and unwillingness to grow food." - Anonymous

“People in the Bow Valley don't really have much power over what their food systems looks like. I think just being Canmore in general because of the cost of everything here, of living here, doing business here, there isn't as much variety in food and what we can buy. It's definitely gotten a lot better in the last 10 years but it is still pretty limited. Nutters has been around forever, but they directly have to compete with some big box stores which is hard. It's hard to say how much we can influence that food system in mountain surrounded expensive tourist towns - I hope that we can.”

- Chantal Von Rotz



RESEARCH RECOMMENDATIONS



1. Increase affordability of food

- Reduce the cost of food, including local sustainably grown food (i.e. through consumer subsidies and subsidies for small and medium-scale food producers and processors)
- Support initiatives that reduce individual household grocery bills, including but not limited to support for community gardens and other food provisioning spaces
- Connect the cost of food with the cost of living (and in particular housing costs), wages, and job stability in policies, strategic plans, and community-based initiatives
- Address the high cost of living and low wages in Canmore
- Conduct further research on the relationship between food insecurity, housing, and affordability in the Bow Valley



2. Increase access to local food

- Work with multiple actors to create more spaces to grow food – both at community and commercial levels
- Adopt creative solutions for growing food on underused spaces (i.e. rooftops, courtyards) as well as developing appropriate growing spaces and/or technologies suitable for mountain communities, such as community greenhouses, vertical agriculture, and other innovative food production systems
- Support small and medium scale food producers and processors (i.e. by supporting: venues geared towards the sale of local food including a year-round farmers' market and a market structure that ensures meaningful vendor participation)
- Establish definitions of local food and use these to guide local food initiatives
- Continue working with provincial wildlife officers to identify spaces that are suitable for gardening, beekeeping, and other food-related activities
- Change bylaws and other policies that restrict food provisioning activities while ensuring the wellbeing of mountain wildlife and ecosystems
- Support and build diverse alternative shopping economies (i.e. food co-operatives, zero waste stores, etc.)
- Collaborate across municipalities to highlight and promote local food producers, processors, and other food provisioners (i.e. increase connections between ranchers located in the MD Bighorn and the Town of Canmore)



3. Support diverse cultural food systems and challenge food system inequities

- Support marginalized groups who are organizing within their communities to meet their food needs
- Ensure that food insecure community members have access to healthy nutritious and culturally appropriate food
- Support food-related businesses that provide access to culturally appropriate food and are run by and for marginalized community members
- Celebrate diverse cultural food systems
- Challenge racism, classism, and colonialism in food systems
- Provide funding specific to cultural food events, programs, and businesses
- Develop strong and trusting relationships with and between groups such as the Bow Valley Food Alliance and community members who are experiencing homelessness and food insecurity as well as undocumented workers and other employees in precarious working situations
- Provide and participate in social justice, equity, and anti-oppression-based training and workshops
- Build connections with and between groups doing food justice and food sovereignty work in the Bow Valley and beyond
- Conduct further research on the relationship between employment status, citizenship, and food insecurity in the Bow Valley



4. Support food-based programs that build relationships with the Stoney Nation

- Ensure treaty obligations regarding Stoney Nation hunting and gathering rights are honoured, supported, and encouraged
- Continue to strengthen dialogue and relationship building between Canmore and the Stoney Nation, understanding that food is often a key part of this
- Understand the different ways that food is part of and can help facilitate reconciliation and support/encourage projects that are doing this type of work
- Educate settler community members about Indigenous food systems as well as the impacts of colonization on Bow Valley food systems



5. Develop and advocate for ecologically regenerative food systems

- Connect climate resiliency with food systems' issues
- Reduce food waste at commercial, industrial, and household levels
- Continue to promote food waste collection programs
- Incorporate geothermal and solar energy into greenhouses and/or other growing initiatives
- Ensure food spaces and programming do not compromise wildlife and wildlife habitat
- Develop an organic waste system that keeps compost in the Bow Valley
- Develop policies and market places that support ecologically regenerative agriculture and other food provisioning activities
- Conduct further research on the relationship between climate change and food systems in the Bow Valley



6. Develop, support, and advocate for policies that create resilient local food systems

- Review policies that discourage and/or prevent food production, composting, beekeeping, and animal husbandry. Change these policies when appropriate.
- Ensure health and safety policies support community food programs and events
- Continue to develop emergency response plans that meaningfully address food insecurity
- Change policies that limit innovative growing techniques such as vertical farming and hydroponics
- Develop food procurement policies focused on access to healthy, sustainable, equitable, and culturally-appropriate foods
- Develop an approach to housing and affordability that meaningfully addresses current inequities and center food sovereignty
- Use the Bow Valley Food Alliance Food Charter as a guideline to rethink and advocate for policy change



7. Foster new and current partnerships:

- Between diverse cultural groups
- Between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities, groups, and individuals
- Between Bow Valley municipalities
- Between producers, consumers, and businesses
- Between community-based groups, businesses, municipalities, and community members



8. Develop welcoming and varied food spaces that meet community members' needs

- Build a food hub with a community kitchen to promote skill and knowledge sharing around food
- Increase the number of spaces to grow food, including community gardens and greenhouses
- Increase the number of spaces to gather, cook, and eat both outside and inside for community members



9. Support small and medium-scale food businesses

- Support the development of affordable commercial kitchens that meet small businesses' needs
- Subsidize/provide land and other food growing spaces for local small-scale food producers
- Increase grants and other funding sources for local food entrepreneurs – particularly for young people and marginalized community members
- Support local businesses with a focus on issues such as: food waste, local and sustainable food production, cultural foods, food system sustainability, education, and creating ecologically and social just food systems
- Increase the number of food businesses owned and managed by marginalized groups
- Organize events/meetings where local food businesses can network and share/demo their products with/for community members
- Increase the number of diverse retail food outlets (i.e. particularly those providing access to local/regional food products)
- Increase support for small businesses to find market spaces and navigate bureaucratic processes (i.e. applying for appropriate permits)



10. Increase support for community food programs

- Increase funding and other supports to community-based food programs created and led by locals, particularly those that foster social justice, cultural diversity, and ecological sustainability
- Fund full and part-time positions that address key food issues in the community
- Support grassroots initiatives by listening and responding to their needs and requests



11. Expand community conversations and education about food

- Grow public conversations about food systems
- Ensure food is prioritized in community conversations and consultations about issues such as housing, development, health, sustainability, and tourism
- Continue providing community classes regarding how to grow, gather, cook, and preserve food
- Increase awareness about where food comes from, how it is grown/harvested, and who grows/harvests it
- Cultivate understandings about food systems Bow Valley residents rely on, including their social, ecological, and economic impacts
- Expand awareness about food waste and food waste reduction
- Increase conversations relating food to social justice, ecological sustainability, and healthy living

Many of these recommendations reinforce and overlap one another. They include big ideas as well as more practical solutions. They are intentionally vague in relation to who might enact them, with the understanding that many different actors will need to come together to make change.



for more information on the Bow Valley Food Alliance and to volunteer in one of our many projects please email:

Bowvalleyfoodalliance@gmail.com

or visit the Bow Valley Food Alliance Website

www.bvfa.ca

