



Fields Forward

Growing more together

Fields Forward is a new food and agriculture initiative in Creston and District. Fields Forward envisions a vibrant productive local agri-food system that builds genuine community wealth by supporting and sustaining the community's environmental, indigenous, social, cultural, economic and aesthetic values.

Creston and District is an important British Columbian agricultural region. From Yahk to Yaqaan Nukiy to Riondel - 80% of value of food production for Regional District of Central Kootenay is from Areas A, B & C. Together they generate \$27.5 million of the annual \$34.4 million for the region. And that is on 50% of the available agricultural land. The potential is great.

To actualize the potential, new systems are needed:

- more food and farm activity;
- greater access to value-added opportunities;
- mechanisms to support existing and emerging farmers;
- reliable and context appropriate education, training and extension; and,
- flexible and dependable workforce development and attraction.

Fields Forward is responding with a multi-phased model that is diverse and nimble. It follows on the success of the State of Vermont's Farm to Plate program.


In 1995, Vermont legislated the creation of Sustainable Jobs Fund, designed to accelerate the development of Vermont's Green economy. Strengthening and re-localizing the food system is one of their primary strategies. Vermont began by asking *"If more of what we ate was locally and regionally produced, would this strengthen our local economy, create more jobs and lead to greater food security for all Vermonters?"* In asking this question, Vermont identified an opportunity - to build a food system that is collaborative, innovative, and responsive. It is an example of how to create a resilient and robust economy.

Fields Forward is informed by the knowledge and experience of local producers who say investment in food and agriculture economy builds communities with strong foundations and bold vision.

The goals of Fields Forward:

1. Increase economic development in Creston and District food and farm sector;
2. Create and maintain meaningful, sustainable local jobs in the farm and food economy;
3. Develop locally appropriate food production, processing, storage, distribution and sales;
4. Improve access to healthy local food for all Creston & District residents; &
5. Support an arts and culture community that celebrates food and agriculture.





Fields Forward launched in January 2016 with a two-day forum that included over 80 members of the network. Nine working groups were established. These include Education, Culture, Farmers' Market, Co-Marketing, Infrastructure, Extension and Training, Distribution, Labour Market and Sustainability. In addition, the mobile fruit and vegetable press enterprise is being developed. The working groups expand and contract depending on need.

Some of the Fields Forward highlights for 2016:

Co-Marketing

As part of the mobile fruit and vegetable press project, and in partnership with Left Field Marketing and the Business Advisory Team, Fields Forward is working on a regional co-marketing strategy that builds a cooperative platform to increase market access. Using the mobile press as leverage, the Co-Marketing group is investigating how to connect farmers/food producers and retailers/restaurants in the Yahk - Yaqa Nukiy - Riondel corridor to the broader region, including Vancouver and Calgary.

Infrastructure

Conducted asset mapping to determine existing infrastructure in the region. Consulted with local producers on what is needed to support increase localized production. Currently developing infrastructure to create more value-added production and distribution, as well as associated marketing and market development.

Food Education

On October 4th, 2016 Fields Forward hosted the first annual Press Fest in Creston and District. Each of the 7 regional elementary schools received 75 x 5 litre boxes of apple juice to be used in their meal programs or fundraisers. Over 200 students joined local producers and community members to learn about pressing apples. The 13,000 lb. of apples pressed for the schools were donated by 4 local producers.

Farmers' Market

The Creston Valley Farmers' Market conducted a season-long Rapid Market Assessment to better understand the impact of the weekly market on surrounding businesses. The reporting states that in 4 years (2012 - 2016), growth in sales has increased 40% from \$700,000 to \$1,030,000 in 2016, with a distributed impact on the downtown core of Creston of \$2,168,535.

Labour Market

In identifying the need to support improved interactions and communication between orchardists, orchard workers and community members particularly during cherry season, the Labour Market group established an Orchard Worker Liaison person. Over the 6 week season, the Liaison built relationship, gathered data and clarified the issues surrounding seasonal work in Creston and District. The group is currently refining its goals in partnership with Innoweave through Collective Impact population and production indicators.

Fields Forward is built on a strong foundation

The regional initiative of Fields Forward is built on a partnership between Creston and District Community Directed Fund (Yahk to Yaqa Nukiy to Riondel) and Kootenay Employment Services. Local government and the Lower Kootenay Band established the Opportunity Fund, a mechanism which allows for funding or loans that provide seed money to leverage action. Leadership of Fields Forward is guided by the Impact team, a group of 5 community food and agriculture leaders. The Team structure is designed to enable the work of its members, directing its resources in response to community need. Fields Forward has a commitment of 3 years of funding, with the overall goal of bringing more funds and resources into the agri-food system.