



Principle Researcher(s) & Affiliations

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Research Field

Food Systems
 Geospatial Mapping
 Rural Development

Partners & Collaborators

The RDI is working closely with the Selkirk Geospatial Research Centre (SGRC) and are forming a multi-stakeholder advisory committee for this project. It is anticipated that advisory committee members will provide suggestions and technical advice in identifying and developing research plans into specific opportunities for increasing food production and improving food security. Additional technical advisors will likely be consulted for support, information and advice on identified opportunities.

Funding Sources

BC Real Estate Foundation
 Columbia Basin Trust (RDI Funder)



Project Period

From: October, 2014
 To: December, 2015

Funder Contribution: \$50,000
 RDI Contribution: \$50,000
 Partner In-Kind: \$31,000
 Total: \$131,000

Columbia Basin- Boundary Food System

October 2014

Identifying Opportunities to Increase Food Production and Improve Food Security

Introduction

The Food System project will identify opportunities to increase food production and improve food security in the Columbia Basin-Boundary region. The research will focus primarily on identifying areas where the RDI can provide information to food system actors to help improve the food production, processing, distribution and retail sectors. As it is generally recognized that many problems within our food system could be overcome if farming became more economically viable, this project will focus on economic development opportunities. Specific opportunities will be identified based primarily on the three recently completed Agriculture Plans in our region, and on advisory committee consultations. The most promising options will be investigated in greater depth, and research findings will be presented to specified user groups - producers, processors, distributors and retailers.

The mapping portion of the project will consist of an inventory of both actively farmed agriculture land, and agricultural land not currently being farmed. The underutilized areas will be cross-referenced with both climate and land values to identify the most promising land for new farmers and investors to expand agricultural production.

A supply chain analysis will highlight areas of opportunity on several important food products. This analysis will identify the strengths of successful products and identify where improvements in the supply chain of products with potential for expansion could be implemented.

Research Rationale & Target User Groups

There is a growing interest in agriculture and food security in the region, with the RDKB, RDCK and RDEK all recently completing Agriculture Plans. There is also considerable recent research both within our region and elsewhere on agriculture issues, which tend to either focus on challenges or provide general options for opportunities, however none cover the Columbia Basin-Boundary on a regional scale. This project will help build the capacity of key stakeholders and decision-makers from across the region to make informed decisions related to regional food systems and related land use planning.

Primary Research Questions

1. What assets and gaps exist in the regions' food systems landscape?
2. What are the opportunities to better utilize agricultural lands?
3. What specific opportunities exist to improve the regions' food system?

Methods

This project will take a systems approach to identify opportunities to increase the amount of local food produced, processed and consumed in the region. In the fall of 2014, we will identify common themes in the RDKB, RDCK and RDEK agriculture plans, and review all research already conducted within our region. We will identify a suite of research gaps, potential solutions, actions and opportunities to strengthen our regional food system for consideration by the advisory group. Based on feedback from the advisory group, we will analyze research and best practices from outside our region that focus on the identified opportunities for food system enhancement.

Beginning in October 2014, the Selkirk Geospatial Research Centre (SGRC) will use a combination of remote sensing and currently available data to develop a spatial layer of current and potential or underutilized agricultural lands. The underutilized lands will be cross-referenced with climate and soils data, as well as land values to identify opportunities where new farmers and investors could expand agricultural production. Additional geospatial analysis in 2015 will depend on opportunities identified in the consultation process. Possible analyses include transportation systems, agricultural production and processing clusters, climate data, climate change projections, soils, zoning, productivity, etc.

Starting in January 2015, the production, processing and distribution question will be addressed via a supply chain analysis of up to five key products, chosen based on consultations with the advisory group and RDI research. Supply chain characteristics of successful products will be compared to the supply chains of products with the greatest potential for improvement to identify how these can be further developed.

Key Activities

The advisory group will be formed in October 2014. Members will be drawn from food system actors across the Columbia Basin-Boundary region, including food producers, processors, distributors, retailers, government representatives, food systems researchers, food activists and organizers. The first meeting will be scheduled in November 2014, where the initial suite of opportunities identified in the literature review and earlier consultations will be presented to the advisory group for comments and refinements. Ideas for additional opportunities (such as improving access to land, education, storage facilities, transportation and distribution systems, markets, or particular value added products, etc.) will be solicited.

Subsequent meetings are planned for April or May 2015, and a final meeting in October 2015. It is anticipated that individual members of the advisory group with particular interest and expertise in a specific opportunity (and have time to provide advice) will be involved on a more regular basis.

Knowledge Mobilization and Products

By project completion in December 2015, up to five new food system indicators will be added to the Digital Basin (<http://www.cbrdi.ca/state-of-the-basin/digital-basin-portal/>), and a project report 'Opportunities for Strengthening our Regional Food System' will be complete. The new indicators and report will fill the information gaps identified in the three agriculture plans and prioritized by the advisory group. We will present results to Regional Districts, hold up to three workshops or webinars and release at least one project video highlighting findings and Digital Basin outputs.

Knowledge mobilization activities will include press releases (launch, key milestones and conclusion of project), project updates in the RDI e-newsletter, promotion by advisory group members, participation at community and regional level food security-related events, and project overview and progress updates on the RDI website. The project will also be promoted through Selkirk College and Columbia Basin Trust communication channels and updates will be shared during ongoing presentations with key stakeholder groups from across the region, including local government, First Nations government, the Kootenay Real Estate Board, and agricultural groups.