

## **Food Security Policy Scan Hwy 16 from Smithers to Prince George**

### **Introduction**

Policy around food security serves to inform actions by municipal staff, and is an important step to improving community resilience.

The purpose of this policy scan is to determine which policies are in place to support local food security in the communities along Highway 16, from Smithers to Prince George, and to contribute to the information available for future efforts to increase food security policy in this area.

For this survey, “food security” is defined as access to affordable and personally acceptable food. Community food security encompasses production of and access to a supply of food to maximize resilience during emergency situations or extreme natural events. Further, “food insecurity” is defined as an inability to access food due to economic, environmental, or social barriers. The scope of this scan includes household food insecurity, referring to an individual household’s ability or inability to access food, as well as community food availability for general and emergency use. The review includes food- and agriculture-related policies, but excludes those concerning fisheries and water, as these are under the purview of federal rather than regional jurisdiction.

For the past two decades, BC health authorities have described the stages of food security using the Food Security Continuum tool, and this is the method currently used by Northern Health. There are three stages in this continuum: 1) Emergency or short-term relief strategies – food banks, soup kitchens, emergency relief; 2) Capacity building strategies – community gardens, soup kitchens, educational development; and 3) System redesign strategies – policy-level changes, social justice, councils.

Assumptions in this study include that food insecurity exists and must be addressed to increase sustainability and resilience of communities in Northwestern BC.

A significant limitation to this scan is its focus on Official Community Plans (OCP) and narrow geographic area. The primary results are derived entirely from OCPs, giving an overview of a community’s “wish-list” rather than a sense of their “to-do list.” Looking at policy does not directly connect with local activities, since they guide but do not create change. Therefore, impact must be ascertained in another survey. This focus on municipal governmental documents was deemed necessary due to the time constraints as well as the sheer number of non-governmental and not-for-profit organizations in the area, and the added complexities of defining elements such as the “success” of a project implemented by them.

*NB:* There is a distinction between food *security* as defined here, and food *sovereignty*. Food *sovereignty* refers to geographically-rooted food access; that is, the ability to grow, produce, or procure food close to home. This is often grounded in traditional food knowledge and practices, and is particularly relevant for the First Nations of Northwestern BC, given their connection to salmon and longstanding traditions. Food *security* is not necessarily grounded in place, and it is possible to be food secure without having food sovereignty, and vice versa. This

scan does not aim to distinguish between these, and only wishes to acknowledge both of these terms exist and have different implications. For the purpose of this survey, however, the distinction is not overly relevant: food security policy in this context refers to more local production and storage, which is closely intertwined with the concept of food sovereignty.

## Findings

- **Inclusion and Exclusion:** This scan covers policy from municipal governments. It does not explore non-governmental organizations, regional, provincial, or national government policy. (Study in those areas is in progress by a Masters student at SFU.)
- **Search Terms:** Food (food secur\*, food bank\*, food system\*), Community (community garden, community greenhouse), Root cellar, Chicken\* (Backyard chicken\*), Bee\* & apiar\* (backyard bee\* & apiaries), Market (farmer\* market), Farm\* (farm, farmer), Agricultur\* (agriculture, agricultural)
- **Documents Searched & Number of Policies Identified:**
  - Urban: 48
    - Prince George: 41
    - Vanderhoof: 2
    - Burns Lake: 1
    - Houston: 1
    - Smithers: 3
  - Rural: 11
    - Smithers-Telkwa Rural Area: 2
    - Endako-Fraser Lake-Fort Fraser Rural Area: 2
    - Houston-Topley-Granisle Rural Area: 2
    - Vanderhoof Rural Area: 2
    - Burns Lake Rural & Francois Lake (North Shore): 3
- **Themes identified in policies:**

These themes were selected after discussion with my supervisor, as well as a survey of literature on the subject. They are elements which are frequently identified as being either tangible or social indications of food security, as well as its desired outcomes.

  - Health, Environment & Climate Change, Cultural Development/ Education, Collaboration, Food Accessibility, Equity, Resiliency/ Sustainability, Emergency Preparedness, Community Garden, Community Kitchen, Community Greenhouse, Root Cellar, Backyard Farm/ Animal Raising, Farmer's Market, Local Agriculture, Local Economy
- **Rural vs. Urban:**

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Urban Policies</b>	<b>Rural Policies</b>	<b>Total Policies</b>
Health	7	0	7
Environment & Climate Change	9	2	11
Cultural Development/ Education	22	1	23
Collaboration	14	1	15
Food Accessibility	8	0	8
Equity	3	0	3
Resiliency/ Sustainability	14	1	15
Emergency Preparedness	4	0	4
Community Garden	12	0	12
Community Kitchen	3	0	3
Community Greenhouse	1	0	1
Root Cellar	2	0	2
Backyard Farm	9	0	9
Farmer's Market	8	0	8
Local Agriculture	35	11	46
Local Economy	24	3	27

## **Findings**

This policy scan indicates a significant disparity between more rural and more urban policies: while more urban centres, such as Prince George, include elements of community development, education, and equity, the rural areas exhibit more limited support in these areas, but maintain the focus on local economy.

An important finding from this review is that policy is not necessarily reflected in action. While Smithers did not have any explicit directions about private gardens or livestock in town, they did pass a backyard chicken bylaw which has been well-received and largely unproblematic. Prince George, however, recently voted down a similar bylaw despite their policies encouraging household self-reliance. Therefore, it is important to consider the practical and tangible outcomes of community initiatives rather than accepting policy as the end point. An idea or movement can use the OCP to provide support for their recommendations, but should not assume that an OCP policy will translate directly into action.

## Beyond Policy – Implementation

Examples of meaningful steps towards food security can be seen in many communities. Some simple examples include the facilitation of farmer’s markets, community gardens, greenhouses, and kitchens, as well as farm-to-school programs and educational workshops. Much of this is done by local non-profit groups, with the support of the local government, and funding through grant programs such as the IMAGINE grants through Northern Health.

Other steps towards food security can be taken by local governments themselves, as demonstrated in Smithers several years ago when Council passed a bylaw allowing backyard chickens. Prince George refused such an opportunity in February of 2016, when it voted against permitted backyard hens due to concerns regarding noise, smell, and regulation.

Further steps which can be taken by towns and local governments include initiating community composting programs, as well as collaborations with non-profits and non-governmental organizations in the implementation of food security initiatives.

## Additional Resources

Much work has been done recently, and continues to be done, in the field of food security. New toolkits are being made available through governmental and non-governmental agencies, looking not only at food security, but also emergency preparedness, community resilience, and local food production. Listed below are some excellent starting points, which include links to further reading and resources.

- BC Food Security Gateway (<https://bcfoodsecuritygateway.ca/>)
- Healthy Food Guidelines for First Nations Communities (Section 7)
- Northern Health Food Security information page (<https://www.northernhealth.ca/YourHealth/HealthyLivingCommunities/Nutrition/FoodSecurity.aspx>)

## Appendix A – Policy Review Table

Document	Section	Item	Verbatim
Prince George OCP		Objective 5.1.1	Support land use and planning that enhances Prince George as a sustainable, resilient, knowledge based, resource economy which is connected to the world.
		Policy 5.1.13	Protect farmland as an economic generator and increase awareness of the importance of local food for our health and well-being.

		Policy 5.1.15	Protect farmers' access to local and regional markets
		Objective 6.3.4	Adapt to climate change by promoting resiliency to unexpected climate related changes.
		Policy 6.3.2	Developments should be resilient to a wide range of future conditions (such as instances of severe and unusual weather).
		Policy 6.4.11	Integrated land use approaches should be implemented wherever possible to improve opportunities for biodiversity, ecosystem connectivity, recreation, agriculture, and local food production, while reducing conflicts.
		Policy 6.6.4	Examine the feasibility of a curb-side compost pick-up system as well as composting systems for municipal facilities as part of an overall waste management strategy.
		Objective 7.3.4	Encourage a culture of local, healthy food.
		Policy 7.3.1	Support and promote active living and healthy eating.
		Policy 7.3.2	Support the implementation of the Healthy Food and Beverage Policy.
		Policy 7.3.3	Encourage the social and physical environments where children live, learn and play to be more supportive of physical activity and healthy eating.
		Policy 7.3.5	Support increased consumer access to local and healthy food through local food institutions and retail markets throughout the community.
	7.3 B. Food Security	Policy 7.3.7	Support agricultural and food systems planning to improve the current state of food systems and to encourage local food self-reliance.

		Policy 7.3.8	Ensure that food and agricultural spaces are accessible to all people.
		Policy 7.3.9	Ensure existing policies and bylaws help eliminate barriers to sustainable food and agriculture systems.
		Policy 7.3.10	Support improvements to public transportation to make grocery stores and farmer’s markets accessible to all residents.
		Policy 7.3.11	Support food and agricultural opportunities in education and community facilities, parks and open spaces.
		Policy 7.3.12	Support the development of community gardens and community kitchens.
		Policy 7.3.13	Promote attractive agricultural and community gardens in highly visible public or semi-private spaces, ensuring balance with wildlife considerations. [See also Section 6.4 B Caring for our Natural Environment & Forests]
		Policy 7.3.14	Encourage collaboration among industries, such as forestry and agriculture, to foster innovation in local food production.
		Policy 7.3.15	Encourage research and education on local food production and self-reliance.
	7.5 B. Affordable, rental and special needs housing	Policy 7.5.12	Encourage provision of affordable food sources such as on site growing spaces in new affordable housing developments.

	8.2 Urban Form and Structure - Food Systems and Urban Agriculture	Policy 8.2.21	The City should require new multiple residential development applications to consider a sustainable food system approach, for example providing growing space, providing community kitchen amenities and/or allocation of funds toward such community amenities.
		Policy 8.2.22	The City should facilitate community gardens in Growth Priority Areas. The City should consider providing land, working with organizers for community gardens based on community interest and initiative, and designating a staff liaison to facilitate this role. [See also related policy for the Downtown land use designation.]
		Policy 8.2.24	The City should allocate space within City parks, open space, school yards, rights-of-way, City owned facilities, surplus properties, and redevelopment parcels for growing and distributing/selling food. Prioritize vacant, underutilized or derelict sites as identified within the SGOG, Public Works: Civic Improvements section.
		Policy 8.2.25	The City should encourage community greenhouses and gardens and ensure that small-scale food production and storage buildings and structures (e.g., root cellars) are permitted in residential areas.
	8.3 Land Use -8.3B. Downtown	Policy 8.3.21	The City should incorporate and advance food-related Projects and Plans in the Smart Growth on the Ground Downtown Prince George Concept Plan, which include a year-round Farmer’s Market and associated public marketplace, as well as the development of a Food Security/Food Systems plan supported with food banks, community gardens, and community kitchen.

	10 Neighbourhood and Area Plans	Policy 10.1.3	(...) Opportunities for local food production (...)
	11.3 Social Development	Policy 11.3.1	Consider utilizing City-owned land for community gardens.
		Policy 11.3.2	The City should consider acquiring land to support sustainable food systems. This may include but is not limited to acquiring land for: A city farm and farmer resource centre that supports both urban and rural agriculture by providing information and resources to producers as well as in the field demonstration of growing different crops; and, An abattoir to support the regional production, processing, and sales of beef and other livestock.
	13 Integration of Plans, Studies, Policies and s [sic.] - 13.2 Bylaws	Policy 13.2.31	The City should undertake a review of the zoning bylaw to ensure that farmers markets, community gardens, etc., are a permitted use of both public and private realms and that design guidelines support food production.
		Policy 13.2.32	The City should include a comprehensive definition of farmers markets in the zoning bylaw.
		Policy 13.2.34	The City should update the Development Permit Area Guidelines in the zoning bylaw to: (...) incorporate food and agricultural considerations (...)

	<p>13 Integration of Plans, Studies, Policies and s [sic.] - 13.4 New Projects &amp; Studies</p>	<p>Policy 13.4.4</p>	<p>To adapt to climate change, the City should begin to amend the zoning bylaw to consider future impacts. Further study is being conducted to define and examine the impact priorities identified in the Adapting to Climate Change in Prince George report. When the studies are complete, changes to bylaws will be recommended to reflect the outcomes. This includes those related to: (...) wildfire response (...) agriculture (...)</p>
		<p>Policy 13.4.20</p>	<p>To adapt to climate change, projected precipitation and temperature changes should be considered when creating agricultural plans and agricultural land allocations. The City should undertake further study to consider the potential for increased agricultural capacity in the future.</p>
	<p>13 Integration of Plans, Studies, Policies and s [sic.] - 13.5 Education, capacity building</p>	<p>Policy 13.5.14</p>	<p>The City should adopt a community generated food charter that sets out a vision for food and agriculture in Prince George.</p>
		<p>Policy 13.5.15</p>	<p>The City should facilitate private-sector community gardens by developing voluntary siting and design guidelines.</p>
		<p>Policy 13.5.16</p>	<p>The City should develop sustainable food system guidelines for new multiple residential and neighbourhood developments.</p>
		<p>Policy 13.5.17</p>	<p>The City should partner to establish a food and agriculture advisory body that may act as a resource and monitoring body for City Council and/or the Regional Government.</p>

		Policy 13.5.18	The City should assist regional partners to establish a “beef cluster” that will support the beef industry in the region.
		Policy 13.5.19	The City should assist in developing a regional marketing brand for local products and farmers.
<b>Vanderhoof OCP</b>	3.6 Environmental Sustainability Objectives	Objective 3.6.6	To promote the growth and distribution of local agricultural products by supporting the Farmer’s Market and the Community Garden.
	4.6 Community Facilities	Policy 4.6.10 - Food Security	Council is committed to a more environmentally sustainable future and recognizes that initiatives to increase the access to locally grown food products is critical to this future. Policies include: Supporting the development of the community garden; Promoting a local farmers market; and Supporting the McLeod Farm to School program.
<b>Smithers OCP</b>	2.2 Community Vision - Goals	2.2.5 Food and Agriculture	Support sustainable farming and maintain rural values. Smithers values its local agricultural lands and rural setting. We will protect these important features by encouraging appropriate land management practices that maintain their agricultural and rural attributes, and that are supportive of the local community and environment. To achieve greater local self-sufficiency we support and encourage efforts that increase the amount of food grown, processed and consumed locally.

	9.2.2 Support Agriculture	Policy 2	Support and encourage agricultural activities in the Smithers area by encouraging the Regional District to develop an Agricultural Area Plan for the Electoral Area A of the Bulkley Nechako Regional District. This plan may, among other things, address factors that are increasing the cost of farmland, determine how to encourage farming, improve local food security, maintain supporting agricultural infrastructure such as feed companies, auction houses, abattoirs, and cold storage or processing facilities, value-added food production, and address the environmental management of farms.
		Policy 3	Support the diversification of the local agriculture economy as well as efforts to increase local food production that service the Town. This includes participating in regional discussions on issues affecting the local agriculture community (i.e. on-farm housing, agro-tourism, changes to BC's Assessment's farm classification, etc.).
<b>Houston OCP</b>	4.2.2 Economic Diversity Strategies and Actions	4.2.2.4 - Agriculture Priorities	Identify solutions for accessing local markets
<b>Burns Lake OCP</b>	1.3 Enabling Legislation	Burns Lake OCP may include	policies respecting the maintenance and enhancement of farming

<b>Smithers Telkwa Rural OCP</b>	2.1 General Vision Plan	2.1.5. Vision for Sustainability and Climate Change	...Land use and development patterns that work towards more complete and self-reliant communities are supported, including the facilitation of local food production and increased food security. The importance of sustainable development is recognized, especially within the context of environmental impact and climate change. [...] The plan achieves this by [...] facilitation of local food production and consumption
	4.9. Greenhouse Gas Emissions	4.9.6 (a)	... within the Agricultural Designation, the Policies in 3.1.2. support the local production of food, and other agricultural products.
<b>Houston, Topley, Granisle Rural OCP</b>	2.2 General Plan Goals	2.2.3	Protection and preservation of farm land and soil having agricultural capability, and the appropriate utilization of that land for agricultural purposes.
	3 Objectives and Policies	3.1.1 (1)	To protect and Preserve farm land and soil having agricultural capabilities
<b>Endako, Fraser Laker, Fort Fraser Rural OCP</b>	2.2 General Plan Goals	2.2.5	Protection and preservation of farm land and soil having agricultural capability, and the appropriate utilization of that land for agricultural purposes.
	3 Objectives and Policies	3.1.1 (1)	To protect and Preserve farm land and soil having agricultural capabilities
<b>Vanderhoof Rural OCP</b>	2.2 General Plan Goals	2.2.3	Protection and preservation of farm land and soil having agricultural capability, and the appropriate utilization of that land for agricultural purposes.
	3 Objectives and Policies	3.1.1 (1)	To protect and Preserve farm land and soil having agricultural capabilities

<b>Burns Lake Rural and Francois Lake (North Shore OCP)</b>	2.2 General Plan Goals	2.2.6	Protection and preservation of farm land and soil having agricultural capability, and the appropriate utilization of that land for agricultural purposes.
	2.3 Francois Lake (North Shore)	2.3.1 (2) Francois Lake (North Shore) Goals	To protect and preserve agricultural land and encourage agricultural operations that are conducted in accordance with recognized codes of practice and minimize their negative impacts on the natural environment.
	4.9.3 Policies	6(a)	...within the Agricultural Designation, the Policies in Section 3.1 support the local production of food, and other agricultural products