



THE GWAII VISION

PROMOTING ISLANDS SUCCESS

October 2010

A GROWING NEED FOR A LOCAL FOOD ECONOMY



Grown or gathered, there is an abundance of food on Haida Gwaii. But a new wave of interest in food security offers opportunities for increased community vitality and viability.

Islanders have always taken an interest in food and the Graham Island East Coast Farmers' Institute (incorporated in 1913) can attest to that. A Farmer's Institute can make group purchases for the benefit of members, says Bill Mackay. Thanks to the institute, an egg incubator, plucker and stock trailer are available for members to use, plus the group holds the lease on the Fall Fair grounds, a 28 year-old island event.

Islands Foods', another food-focused group, started in November 2008 and can already boast 170 people on their email list. The group, which encourages, promotes and facilitates islanders' efforts to sustain themselves with local food has offered garden tours, wild plant identification trips, a free local foods exhibition, weekly recipes in the newspaper and more. One local family estimates they get 80 per cent of their nourishment from raising pigs, goats, ducks and harvesting their huge garden, says Sara Eaton, a founding member of the group.

But a local food economy needs more than backyard gardens, says Lynda Dixon of Maude Island Farm. She was taken aback after touring the islands' farms this summer when she realized how little farming is actually happening here.

"I already knew that, but after I saw how little production is coming out of even the people who are producing, it made me realize that we need to address local food security," she says.

According to Statistics Canada, the average household spends about \$7,000 a year on food. If most of that food is being imported, then islanders are consuming rather than producing a key part of the economy. Dixon hopes more of that money can stay on the islands. In her mind an agricultural strategy is essential — one that addresses food and energy needs and provides sustainable employment at a fair wage. She hopes the communities can create a vision to help islanders proceed into a new era — one with the challenge of increased transportation costs and decreased fossil fuels.

One of the biggest challenges recently faced by farmers was new provincial legislation that made it illegal for meat producers to slaughter livestock on their farms. Isolated rural farmers were told they had to take their animals to licensed facilities, which in our case was a ferry ride and hundreds of kilometres away. To top it off, Community Futures looked into the possibility of building a local slaughter plant and found it wasn't feasible given the remoteness and the size of the community.

In the end, lobbying by members of the Farmers' Institute helped to change the province's tack on the issue. "The government recognized it was bad to put so

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GWAI VISION'S ENTREPRENEUR FILES...



Who: **Brock Storry** (on left in picture) and **Jim Roberts**

What: **Island Meat and Sausage Co.**

Where: **Crafted in Port Clements and sold in local stores. (250) 557-8596**

A new island-made product has been sizzling on barbeques this summer — a variety of sausages and pork products made by two men in Port Clements. Jim Roberts and Brock Storry started by selling at the Queen Charlotte Farmer's market and are now expanding into retail outlets across the Islands. Gwaii Vision asked them how this little idea got to market.

Gwaii Vision: How did you get started?

Jim Roberts: We wanted to start a home-based business on the islands and we wanted to sell sausage. I worked in two sausage places — a big corporate giant and a small independent place. The big place, I didn't like very much, but at the small place, the quality was better. They made good products and that was our model.

GV: What have been your main challenges?

JR: When we started, it was writing a business plan. It took six months to write it in the first place and later when I went to Community Futures for a small business loan they said re-do it. But you know what? We refer back to that business plan all the time. To run this business and to make sure we can buy supplies and get paid, we have to produce so many pounds a week. But we were only at a quarter of that, so it wasn't really working. Now we're over the half way mark and making three quarters of the volume we need to make the plan work, so that's pretty good.

Brock Storry: Learning how to market has been one of our main challenges. Neither one of us is a marketer, but we are getting better

GV: What about your successes?

JR: The business is actually growing every week now. We're now selling to Atwell Foods, Green Gaia Groceries and the Island Sunrise Cafe in Masset; Anne's Barn of Plenty in Tlell and to one of the fishing lodges. Apparently it takes three years to get a business going and this is our second year.

GV: What's in the future for Island Meat and Sausage?

JR: We would like to get our stuff into the big Co-op (Delmas in Masset and Gwaii in Skidegate), and possibly have our products sold on the mainland. But the future is always to keep Island Meat and Sausage Co. a small, independent meat processor with a quality product.

BS: We want to get a reefer unit so we have a place to hang deer and can do cutting and wrapping of not only wild game, but locally grown livestock, as well. People ask us about that all the time so certainly there is a market for it.

The Gwaii Vision asked two local entrepreneurs why they do what they do.

An entrepreneur is a person who owns an enterprise, or venture, and assumes significant accountability for the inherent risks and benefits.



Who: **Roberta Olson**

What: **Keenawii's Kitchen**

Where: **237 Highway 16, Skidegate. (250) 559-8347**

For many visitors and locals alike, Roberta Olson's unique business Keenawii's Kitchen offers an authentic taste of Haida cuisine. She not only serves lunches and dinners rife with salmon, halibut, and other flavours of the islands to groups around her large dining room table, but she gathers many of the seasonal ingredients herself. Gwaii Vision asked what led her to the kitchen.

GV: When did you get started in your business?

Roberta Olson: Nineteen years ago I was invited by a tour operator for lunch and they talked me into doing what I do now, which is invite people into my home to eat. We called it Keenawii's Kitchen — my Haida name. Since then it's been an ongoing exploration of what people want to eat and experience.

GV: How is Keenawii's Kitchen a uniquely Haida dining experience?

RO: It's all about gathering and preparing things like seaweed, nettles, berries, salmon and more. We start gathering early in April and it pretty much goes right through to September/October. For me

it isn't unique. I do it anyway and I've always done it. This way it gives other people, like tourists, the experience.

GV: How many people work with you?

RO: I always have a lot of workers. I get the younger kids to serve, sing and tell stories. I have to start a few days in advance of each big meal so I get a few steady workers for that and on the day of the event there are as many as eight working.

GV: How important is this opportunity to your young workers?

RO: They all enjoy it. I've gone through so many workers in here because they all grow up and move away or carry on with something else. It started with my granddaughters working for me and they are all in the restaurant business now. It is good experience for the young ones because they are braver especially since we're getting them all up to dance more. Also I'm always taking someone with me to gather. Right now one of my young workers wants to hang out with me to learn how to pepper smoke fish.

It would be good to get the school to send a class down to watch the preparing. I used to do that at Copper Bay when my parents were here. A school bus would come and I would spend the day talking and cooking fish.

GV: What are your challenges?

RO: Because I'm doing it out of my private home, my only challenge is the roof leaking, the floors wearing out and the deck getting wobbly. This winter I have to stay home and get a lot of repairs done.





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many farmers out of business," said Mackay. Now farmers can slaughter and sell to neighbours like they used to, although there is a lot more red tape to cut through.

Nevertheless, Mackay sees a lot of potential on the islands. At one time most meat consumed here was raised here, he says, and there was a dairy in Sandspit until the 1960s. Now a farmer's market takes place in Queen Charlotte and local beef is available from Richardson Ranch in Tlell, but with awareness around eating locally on the rise, there is room for more small businesses to crop up. "The fact is we have the capability of easily producing all the food we need to eat here," he says.

Meanwhile, the folks at Islands' Foods don't want people to forget about gathering. The Grow and Gather event held at the Haida Heritage Centre

in Skidegate last spring was an attempt to weave together the food sustainability efforts of both the Haida and non-Haida communities.

Dolly Garza, one of the exhibitors, says her focus is on gathering. "Summer is such a busy time of year, I don't know how anyone finds time to garden." She won't go out for a hike unless it's to gather food like beach asparagus or berries. In Garza's opinion, seaweed is the most underutilized resource on the islands — with the exception of the prized black seaweed (porphyra) or sgyuu.

"We're walking over all the other seaweeds to get to it and they are all edible, delicious and nutritious with phenomenal vitamin content," she says. Things like bull kelp and popweed can be harvested at any time of the year and are perfect for stir fry, pickles or soups.

Garza thinks young people especially should learn more about what's available to eat on the islands. "So many kids are outdoors all the time and have potential to get lost. It's good to know two or three foods you can eat any time of the year, not just the abundant berries in August." Plants like licorice fern, fireweed and labrador tea, could save a person's life, she says.

"So much has been put aside," says Garza, in reference to people's knowledge and comfort with gathering and eating things like seaweed and wild plants.

Self-sustainability will be a challenge for islanders, whether people decide to grow, gather or do a little of both. But we have natural gifts on these islands, says Eaton, and seaweed (which makes great mulch and compost for gardens) along with abundant rain, are but two of them.

MESSAGE FROM ART LEW

The Keys to Community Success



Our world is experiencing huge changes - economic foundations are shifting, the nature of work is transforming and the climate is reconfiguring. Haida Gwaii is seeing its fair share of local change with the forestry and fishing industries a small remnant of what they once were; gaps in needed public infrastructure and a declining population.

There are many stories of communities being buffeted by change. Revelstoke is a town that ran out of economic steam in the mid 1980's. Available timber was substantially reduced when areas were flooded for new dams, then local economic stimulus

from dam construction projects dried up and a large sawmill closed resulting in only 4% of harvested timber being processed in the community.

The local government along with many community groups and individuals came together to demand the province take action. First they required that timber harvested locally be processed locally. This resulted in the saw mill reopening. Next, when the license holders tried to sell their interests, the community said this was not in their best interest and the transfer wasn't approved. Finally the door was opened for Revelstoke to buy the licenses and they were turned over to a community forest corporation. This leveraged more saw mill capacity and the start up of new secondary and tertiary businesses.

Why was Revelstoke successful? The community came together in large numbers to demand change. Resilient communities proactively implement solutions and adapt within their social, economic and environmental spheres and they do so in ways that strengthen the capacity of citizens, enterprises and organizations.

What are key elements of a resilient community?

1. Local government and non-profit leadership reflect the diversity of residents' backgrounds and interests.
2. Leaders are visionary, facilitate a broad range of participation in decision processes, build consensus, share power and coordinate action.
3. The community is self-reliant and looks to itself and its own resources to address major challenges and build new economic opportunities.
4. Residents are proud of and optimistic about their community and reflect their attachment by participating in community affairs.
5. People strongly believe in, encourage and support education, local educational institutions and life long learning.
6. The economy is diversified offering employment in a broad range of businesses that to a significant degree are locally owned.
7. A community development plan is in place that was created and implemented with local citizen involvement.