

ECONEWS

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Promoting the Vision of a Sustainable Vancouver Island

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FOOD, GLORIOUS FOOD!

The crunch of fresh buttered sweet corn, the succulent explosion of the first ripe blackberry, the rich, satisfying body of bread from Victoria's Wildfire Bakery – how sad life would be without these things.

We evolved as a species eating a wide variety of fresh, raw, local, organic, unadulterated food – mostly fruits, leaves, seeds, and roots. Think back 20 million years, when our ancestors lived in the forests of Africa. Our cousins, the chimpanzees, share 99% of our genes, and it is almost certain that we ate what they eat today.

Now realize this: the fact that you are alive today means that every ancestor you ever had since life began 3,500 million years ago has successfully passed on his or her genes to *you*.

Along the way, all non-effective genes were discarded: you got the crème-de-la-crème, and with the digestive system they created, self-selected to give us a long, healthy life, with shining white teeth – but only if we eat more-or-less what our ancestors ate: a wide variety of fresh, raw, local, organic, unadulterated food.

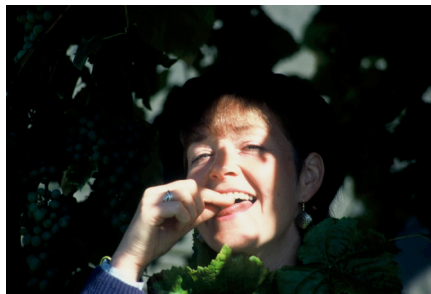
Alas, that's no longer what we eat.

Almost none of our food is fresh – it is picked or killed often weeks before, which for fruit means before it is ripe, so it does not contain the anti-oxidants a plant produces to defend itself against fungus, and passes on to us.

Almost none of it is raw, except the occasional fruit or vegetable.

Almost none of it is local – which is one reason why food contributes so much to global climate change, being shipped and trucked so far, burning fossil fuels all the way. Here on Vancouver Island, we get no more than 5% of our food from the Island. In the event of a big infectious epidemic, when no-one wants to work in a public place such as a ferry or supermarket, we'd be out of food within days.

Almost none of it is organic, except for the small minority who go out of their way to buy organic. Instead, it is grown or raised in fields stripped of their soil nutrients, pumped with fertilizers, and sprayed with pesticides and herbicides. Since the 1950s, foods grown in non-organic soils have lost half of the iron, calcium, sodium, copper, magnesium, and selenium our bodies need. Studies have consistently shown that conventional farmers develop and die of more cancers than the general population.



And almost none of it is unadulterated. To make up for the loss of goodness, food producers add a huge list of things that nature never put there. Did our primate ancestors eat ethoxylated monoglycerides?

What is the result of abandoning the diet our bodies evolved on? A great increase in chronic sickness, including cancer, diabetes, heart disease, food allergies, and obesity, which rob so many of the happiness that comes with good health and poses such a burden on our health care system. As Michael Pollan shows so convincingly in his book *In Defense of Food*, it is the Western Diet itself, aided by an army of nutritionists, which is making us sick.

Think big. Dream big. Challenge our municipal, provincial, and federal leaders, all of whom are soon standing for election, to think big. We've got to pull ourselves out of this dietary rat-hole and get back to fresh, local, organic food as quickly as possible.

We need every school to have access to a working food garden, kitchen, and cooking classes, and a ban on junk food vending machines.

We need local organic food to be served at all public facilities, hospitals, daycare centers, elder care institutions, prisons, meetings, conferences, and in the Legislature itself.

We need every municipality to create an agricultural department and a public committee to guide the development of community gardens.

We need showcase public organic food gardens at the Butchart Gardens, Royal Roads, Glendale Gardens, Camosun College, and proudly on the lawn of the Legislature.

We need investment in farmers markets and pocket markets where growers can sell fresh, organic food.

We need vacant land to be made available on temporary lease for food growing. For how many more *decades* must the 4 acres of the Hydro lands on Haultain St, the city block at View and Vancouver and the vacant lot at View Street Towers sit empty, gathering needles, weeds, garbage, and sadness?

We need total protection of BC's Agricultural Land Reserve.

We need a 3-year tax-break for all farmers who choose to go organic, in reflection of its many public benefits.

We need to pay an extra \$50 annually per household in local taxes to support threatened farmland purchases by The Land Conservancy.

We need to grow more food ourselves, creating new organic Victory Gardens in every backyard, as Carolyn Herriot has been urging and demonstrating, and on some public boulevards, rediscovering the passion and impetus that we had in our last time of crisis, during World War II.

And we need to feast together, celebrating the taste, deliciousness, and goodness of it all. Now, and always.

-Guy Dauncey