

IMAGINING FOOD

IN THE MUNICIPAL DISTRICT OF BIGHORN



RESEARCH
REPORT 2020/21



With Thanks

A big thank you to the 20 interviewees who were so generous with their time and knowledge. Thank you also to the survey participants. Without you, this report would not be possible.

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This report was written by Dr. Lauren Kepkiewicz, Postdoctoral Associate, Department of Geography, University of Calgary. 2021.

We recognize that all our food systems in the Bow Valley are based on Indigenous lands and in Indigenous food systems. We respectfully acknowledge and honour the many Indigenous nations who use these lands, including the ȩyāñé Nakoda, Blackfoot, Tsuut'ina, Ktunaxa, and Secwepemc nations as well as the Region 3 Métis.



RESEARCH BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

What is the aim of this research and how was it conducted?

This research project was designed in partnership with the Bow Valley Food Alliance (BVFA) to identify key food issues and strengths in the Municipal District of Bighorn. It is part of a broader research project that examines these issues in Banff, Canmore, and the Bow Valley more generally. This study is based on 20 interviews conducted from Fall 2019 to Spring 2020 with a range of individuals whose professional and/or volunteer work is related to food systems in the MD. Interviewees ranged from local food producers to educators to business owners to those involved in food-based community initiatives. Interviews were transcribed, coded, and analyzed using Nvivo software. Before the final report was sent out, interviewees had the opportunity to review the research, give feedback, and suggest changes. The study is also based on an anonymous survey that invited members of the public to respond from June to July 2020. These survey responses are part of a broader survey of the entire Bow Valley, which included 259 respondents from Lake Louise, Banff, Canmore and the MD Bighorn. Only responses from survey participants who live in the MD Bighorn were included in the results of this research report (to note only 12 people responded from the MD Bighorn, so survey responses are neither a central focus nor have survey percentages been reported in the following report due to the small sample size; however anonymous comments have been included and survey responses have been used to inform the research findings).

What prompted this research study?

Since the BVFA was established in 2016, the group has discussed a range of food issues in the Bow Valley. While having these discussions, the group discovered that little research existed that records what these issues are and how they affect different communities. Many of those engaged in the BVFA expressed concerns that food issues in the Bow Valley have yet to be taken seriously by policy makers as well as the broader community. In response to requests from the BVFA and in partnership with the University of Calgary and the University of Manitoba, this project uses community-based research to help fill these gaps, guiding the work of the BVFA and informing policy makers and residents about key food system issues and strengths.

Who funded and conducted this study?

This study was funded through a grant from the Banff Canmore Community Foundation supported by the MD Bighorn and the Town of Canmore, a postdoctoral position at the University of Calgary supervised by Dr. Marit Rosol, and a research grant at the University of Manitoba led by Dr. Annette Desmarais. It was designed and conducted in partnership with the BVFA by Dr. Lauren Kepkiewicz who is a community-based researcher specializing in food movements, food sovereignty, and food systems in Canada. Cody Alba worked as a community-based research assistant on this project, providing transcription, data analysis, and report writing supports. Deb Grady and Megan Imrie helped connect relevant community members as well as providing input throughout the research process.



FOOD SYSTEMS STRENGTHS



1. Community Food-based Connections and Resilience
2. Local Ranchers and Gardeners
3. School Food Programs
4. MD Bighorn Council and Administration
5. Good Food Box
6. Community Gardens/Greenhouses
7. Exshaw Community Kitchen
8. Bow Valley Food Alliance
9. Collaboration and Partnerships

1. Community food-based connections and resilience

The findings of this research underline the many ways that MD communities connect around food as well as the important role food plays in creating and strengthening community resilience. For example, interviewees talked about the central role community meals played in gathering MD community members during the 2013 flood. Interviewees also talked about the richness of informal events that gather community members around food such as neighbourhood potlucks as well as community-based initiatives such as the meals hosted by the Exshaw Food Crew.

"I know there are families that get together once a month and cook something and talk about it and of course almost any family event, celebration, or party centres around food. Food is a big part of our lives."

"Most events that the community has are around food...We get together with a bunch of the neighbours and that's what we do: get together and eat and celebrate. Happiness always revolves around food and brings people together."

"During the 2013 flood, food was a really good way to connect people. Everyone ate supper together every day. We kept feeding people for 3.5 weeks so that they could go into their houses and clean out all the silt and stuff. Gas lines had to be flushed, water lines had to be flushed, power had to be put back, houses had to be inspected so there wasn't anywhere safe for people to prepare or clean or eat food, so we just kept feeding people at the school. There were restaurants that donated meals and there were people that would make sandwiches or pizza and send them out to feed people. It was a way that people connected. Often, it was the high point of peoples' day when they got to get together and visit with one another, relax a bit, and eat. That time spent together would also be when we had our updates. We were taking lists of who needs what and trying to match volunteers up with them so there was lots of ways for people to interact - interactions around food were a really positive thing and it really brought people together and made them feel like a community. I know in Benchlands there happened to be some forest fire type guys that were coming through that had a bunch of tools and they helped to clean up a lot of the trees that were down. They needed to be fed and everybody just pitched in and they had a big potluck every day and that's how people out in the country do things, they all pitch in. So I think in some ways it really helped MD residents see how resilient they were and what we could come up with just on the fly and how we could be flexible and those sorts of things. It also brought home to people that they need to think about being prepared. "

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People often get together around food. In Harvie Heights they do a potluck every couple of months in the community hall and then in the summer they spread out onto the deck for a BBQ. Most of the MD community associations have a BBQ or some kind of meal attached to their AGMs. For other community events like Exshaw sports day, there's always food connected.”**

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We have some of the most respected ranchers in the province if not in the industry. Many of our ranchers have been part of provincial and national organizations focused on the industry. They don’t just do their own work, they get involved.”

2. Local ranchers and gardeners

Throughout the research, participants underlined the vital role that ranchers play in the MD, including the different ways that ranchers connect with the landscapes on which they work. Multiple interviewees underlined the hard work and strong reputation of MD ranchers. Several also spoke about the vibrant history of gardening in the MD including the depth of knowledge particular residents have in relation to vegetable and fruit production. Interviewees noted the important role that educational programs such as Gardening in the Ghost play in sharing and growing knowledge around food production.

“I would say most of the producers in the MD understand that taking care of the land is in their best interest from a business standpoint as well as an environmental perspective. They take a lot of pride in it.”

“I don’t see myself as a tree hugger or for or against any of the current conversations around climate change. I am aware of these conversations and I’m interested but I feel like there are parts of both that are really relevant today. When I started a family, and I had a little girl, I wanted to have as good as quality of food as possible on the table and if that meant it was good for us it also meant it was good for others. I also felt strongly about preserving the little bit of landscape that we could. I can only manage what’s in my backyard so it was really important to me to live off this landscape with some kind of harmony as best we could and demonstrate that it could be done. There weren’t a lot of people producing beef like we were back in the late 90s and early 2000s. A real conscious view to work on the landscape and not obliterate, let Mother Nature tell us what to do and work with that.”

“In Exshaw there is a part south of the tracks called Little Italy. We had a lot of Italians come to work in the cement company and they are wicked gardeners. It took time, and they built up their soil, but they have beautiful gardens.”

“Everybody says you can’t grow anything here. When we moved here, we had people stop to say: ‘You’re wasting your time. You’re never going to do this.’ Now they’re saying: ‘You have the best cider we’ve ever tasted.’ Or ‘I can’t believe you’ve got all those cherries,’ because we’ve been able to give away lot.”

“We’ve run a workshop called Gardening in the Ghost to introduce people to fruit trees that work in our area. We do a spring course because it corresponds nicely with everybody’s spring fever. Then they can come back and look at things that are flowering, look at fruit when it’s ripe, how big it is, how much there is, what the full size of the tree is, what the mature size of the tree is going to be like. We do a lot of design work too.”



3. School food programs

Research participants also talked about the importance of food-related programs at the Exshaw School. Several interviewees highlighted the necessity of ensuring all children have enough to eat, noting the role school food programs can and do play in meeting this need. Interviewees also pointed out how Indigenous foods are incorporated in cultural curriculum and the positive effect these have had on student attendance, wellbeing, and confidence. In addition to these programs, several research participants highlighted CRPS' partnership with Alpine Edibles, noting that this partnership has helped to increase food literacy by providing hands-on learning experiences as well as providing healthy produce for the school's food programs.

"CRPS has a great partnership with Christian. He has developed curriculum for specific grades and he has been here for the past two years doing the programming in conjunction with the teacher and the classroom and really making use of the greenhouse."

"We do feasts during parent-teacher interviews and there's always food provided because that's part of acknowledging our demographic and working together and valuing the culture. It's important to know Indigenous ways of knowing and living and tradition and in households there's food on the table, there's food in the fridge, and everyone comes and eats together or helps themselves and it's not a western way of here's your portion, here's your portion, here's your portion."

"Exshaw School also has programming in the classroom that brings in community elders to do nature walks and different types of traditional food access, including hunting and gathering. We've also done hide scrapping and meat drying. So there's a trajectory of programming having to do with traditional aspects of food."

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Learning needs to be meaningful, you have to have a buy in, or kids aren't going to stick with it. Food-based programs can affect attendance too. If a kid knows it's their greenhouse day or their watering day, it affects attendance and they're going to come to school more.”**

4. MD Bighorn Council and Administration

Several research participants underlined the multiple ways in which the MD council and administration support local food producers, including hosting workshops on topics such as gardening, chickens, and soil conservation. Several interviewees highlighted the work of MD agricultural technicians and the multiple ways they support local ranchers, including connecting them to different funding opportunities as well as supporting ranchers to develop environmental farms plans. Multiple interviewees also highlighted the key role that MD Community Services Coordinator Deb Grady has played in supporting school food programs, facilitating programs like the Good Food Box, connecting with Iyarhe Nakoda elders over food and food-based programming, and acting as a resource for community gardens in Exshaw and Dead Man's Flats.

"The MD provides staff that assist rural residences with beneficial management practices for their operations. This includes everything from developing an environmental farm plan in order to keep cows out of the stream and letting people know if there are any funding opportunities, who qualifies for grants, and who they need to contact. We are like a little resource centre and have our fingers in a lot of different areas that can help producers access information. There's a ton of information out there through municipalities and the province so we help MD ranchers maneuver them and make some recommendations. Whether it's a quick conversation over the phone or an actual site visit to their operation or having them attend one of the workshops we host. We also host different workshops and events. As an example, last year we did a small chicken flock workshop geared toward those who might want to have a few chickens in the rural area but may have never done that before. So we organize different workshops based on the need and desire in the area....we are also a resource for people who have questions like: "I saw that this producer uses hormones, what's that about?" We try to stay in the know with current agricultural practices and what's happening in the industry."

"With the MD we've been working a lot with Deb. On Tuesday, we had an elders and seniors tea and I worked with Deb that day - I provided some of the food, she provided some of the food, and we held the function here at the school where it was very community blending between the Nation and the Town and the MD coming and helping to facilitate the event. That was nice to see."

"Deb has been really great at slowly and intentionally developing relationships in lots of different circles on the Nation through many different projects including the nature walk on the South Exshaw Trail and the mural projects."

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There's tons of support within the MD administration for agriculture, whether its beneficial management practices or encouraging us to create new events and try new things. We get a ton of support and freedom so that's really nice...We put on events for the rural communities and for the hamlets. We had a Gardening in the Mountains workshop. While most people in the rural areas already garden, it was very well-received by people in Exshaw and Dead Man's Flats. We also had people come in from Canmore.

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As a volunteer for the Good Food box, I’ve noticed an increase in orders. I really think this program has benefited our community. Produce cost is more realistic.”**

5. Good Food Box

By delivering a monthly service that offers food at cost, research suggests that the Good Food Box (GFB) has helped MD residents access affordable fresh produce. While some interviewees noted that the GFB sometimes left people with produce they weren’t sure how to use or didn’t want, others noted that it was particularly well suited for families and provided different types of produce that encouraged people to try new recipes.

“We did a price comparison with the Good Food Box. You get 20-25 lbs for \$25 but in Canmore and Banff grocery stores the same was \$53 in change. It was not as fresh. It was not as good quality...The subsidized boxes seem to provide a support for people that are just above the cut-off lines of some of the affordability programs – so they don’t have access to a lot of supports which means the Good Food Box makes a big difference.”

“I’ve been communicating with Deb in order to create an option for the Nation to access the Good Food Box. I was upfront at the beginning about really wanting to participate and offer it as an option but knew it would be a slow uptake because it’s not really set up in a way that’s accessible because it works on timelines – you have to have your money in at a certain time and then the pickup is later on so there’s lots of scheduling and it doesn’t really work with rhythms that the community runs by so it hasn’t been accessed but it’s there, and it’s there to be accessed.”

“The Good Food Box is starting to gain momentum out here and there are a few people in Dead Mans that get it. While I don’t personally get it, because it’s too much stuff, there are lots of families with kids that it’s perfect for. People I know that have gotten those boxes, they think it’s great and they say it gives them opportunities to try different things because they don’t know what’s coming.”

6. Community Gardens/Greenhouses

Multiple research participants underlined the importance of having a variety of different spaces to grow vegetables including community gardens in Exshaw and Dead Man’s Flats (including the Exshaw Greenhouse, which is part of the Exshaw School Food programming). Although many underlined the need for more spaces to grow food, they also noted that those that currently exist provide space not only to grow fresh produce but also to help people learn about how to grow things and where food comes from.

“We’ve worked with the Exshaw community association for a bunch of years to get a community garden up and running. That got running in 2012 just in time for the flood to come and all the silt to go around everything but they cleaned everything out and the next year people used it again.”

“The greenhouse in Exshaw is good! Last week we had potato leek soup and before we had tons of carrots, zucchini, and tomatoes – all different heirlooms and colours and we made a bruschetta and zucchini muffins, zucchini everything. It’s great! It provides an important connection because the kids are actually working and doing a lot of the work. The grade 4’s that planted in the spring and then the grade 5’s in the fall so they can harvest and cook with it. They’ve done the whole cycle which is pretty impressive.”

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Little kids love eating stuff out of the garden, if you can pull a carrot or peas out of the garden, that’s way more exciting than if it came from the store. It’s good for them to see where it comes from and where it grows.”**

7. Exshaw Community Kitchen

Several interviewees underlined that the Exshaw Community Kitchen provides an important space for community members to connect as well as providing space for Exshaw school students to prepare food (i.e. for the Grade 7/8 food course). They also noted that one of the lessons from the emergency response from the 2013 flood was the vital role that community kitchens play in providing food for community members.

"In my role in the Exshaw community association, when we were rebuilding the community hall after the 2013 flood, I really pushed to have a better commercial kitchen put in because in the 2013 flood we really found out that we don't have enough space to prepare food."

"One of the options is a foods course for the Grade 7's and 8's. It's a partnership - we don't have a kitchen for the kiddos to access because food is already being prepared in the Exshaw School kitchen and it's busy in there already. So the kids use the community center kitchen - they walk over every Monday morning to use it. So that's a partnership that they've made with Deb too."

8. Bow Valley Food Alliance

Several research participants also highlighted the role that the Bow Valley Food Alliance has played in working across municipalities as well as connecting a variety of food-related groups, initiatives, and community members throughout the Bow Valley. Interviewees also mentioned that the BVFA provides learning opportunities regarding local food as well as building relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities in the Bow Valley.

"The BVFA meeting drove home in my mind the issue of food security in this area and sparked some interest...The BVFA has also helped make connections between different groups, families, communities, and local food producers. I will keep an eye out for future events - I would like to talk with more gardeners in the Bow Valley. Growing produce in an extreme climate is interesting to me so those kinds of exchanges would be really helpful."

"I was really interested in the Food Alliance right from the get go so I've been following behind the scenes. I haven't been able to participate but I'm aware of what conversations have been happening and I'm really glad that the Nation has sometimes been involved. It's somewhere to start. Planting some seeds and seeing what can grow and who can tend them and taking a collaborative approach of tending what's growing."

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I think bringing some of the ranchers into the Bow Valley Food Alliance is a good way to start strengthening connections in the Bow Valley. Also, having businesses like Valbella Meats involved is good too. I think the more people you can connect around food, the better. Food gathers people and provides a space to learn more about local foods.”**

9. Collaboration and Partnerships

As suggested in many of the categories mentioned above, a key strength that research participants highlighted was the diverse number of partnerships based on and around food in and beyond the MD. Partnerships included those centered around ranching between different municipalities as well as relationships between the Exshaw School and the MD and the Exshaw School and Iyarhe Nakoda Nation.

"I can't speak from the perspective of the municipalities, but I can speak from my own personal perspective and the way we've gone about developing relationships is intentionally and with a humble heart. Slowly developing relationships and trust with services on the Nation, in consultation with elders, and in consultation with community members, as well as figuring out what the needs are and everyone coming together so that everyone is at the table. It's important to have a recognition of how the hoop can be balanced in all ways and not just from the settler mindset and how everyone comes together and honouring that this is a process and this is a partnership. Here we have a really good relationship with the Health Center. Since I've been here I've been really intentional about developing relationships with the Health Center and Turning Points and the Food Bank and with the dietician at the Health Center and at NES and MCS. How all of the needs are there, what the services are there, what we're seeing here and there's ongoing communication. But it can't be "Oh, I have the idea and the answer, let me impose all of my decisions and what I think is right for the community." That is not going to work and not going to fly."

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We partner with different municipalities including neighbouring Rocky View, Mountain View, Clearwater. I'm on a couple committees that plan annual events. One's called 'Lady Livestock Lessons' which connects women in agriculture and in ranching in particular. Another one is called 'Ranching Opportunities' which is kind of our big one. Every other year we do a water conference, which talks about water usage as well as some of the misconceptions about how water is used in agriculture and ranching."





FOOD SYSTEMS CHALLENGES



1. Affordability
2. Ecological sustainability
3. Accessibility to locally produced food
4. Supports for local food provisioners
5. Policies
6. Knowledge and skills
7. Local food capacity and supply chains
8. Food-related Policies





I really believe it is important to manage your grasslands, your ranch land. The cattle can kind of take care of themselves, as long as they have their feed. But a key thing as a rancher is managing the grasslands - ensuring there isn't overgrazing, over harvesting and so on. We need to manage from the ground up. There are several organizations that have been good at providing ranchers with this kind of support. The municipal districts are good at that: weed control, fertilizing vs not, natural and native pastures and why they are distinct."

1. Affordability

Research participants highlighted affordability as a key food issue in the MD Bighorn. Cost of food was continually emphasized, with research participants noting that food costs are "outrageous" and "ludacris." In particular, several participants highlighted the high cost of healthy produce as well as local organic produce. Interviewees also noted that due to cost of food in the Bow Valley, many MD residents drive to Cochrane or Calgary in order to purchase cheaper groceries. Several interviewees asked why groceries are more expensive in the Bow Valley (as compared with Cochrane and Calgary), noting that the Bow Valley is on the main transportation route that products pass through from East to West and vice versa. Lastly, several research participants explained that low wages in the Bow Valley often prevent people from buying the food products they would like.

"Why do things cost more here? It's a bit of a disconnect for me that food costs more here. Why do I pay \$2 more for a block of cheese than in Calgary when it's 45 mins away? Is the transportation that much of a mark-up when it's going west anyway?"

"I make \$15 an hour so I can't afford a lot of food...The difference I've found between Edmonton and here is I'd pay \$30 for three bags of groceries. Here it's over \$100."

"The people who grow locally, like Farmbox and whoever else in Canmore who's doing it, are expensive. I'm not paying \$9 for an eggplant."

"In the MD, many go to Canmore to get food. People here also buy their food in Calgary because it's cheaper. Some people grow their own. We also have ranchers and hunters who provide their own meat."

"I've been a poor student for quite awhile so my thing is price point. If I can get groceries reasonably, I can cook almost anything. But it all comes down to what is the cheapest thing in the grocery store."

2. Ecological sustainability

While there was a consensus among research participants that environmental degradation is a food system issue for MD residents, there was not always agreement regarding what factors result in unsustainable food systems. Many participants noted a lack of access to produce grown with sustainable production practices but not everyone had the same understanding regarding what these practices look like on the ground. For example, some research participants noted that organic practices were important, while others did not believe this to be the case. However, there was agreement that food waste and water pollution related to food production are key sustainability issues that need to be addressed in order to promote ecologically healthy food systems. While research participants highlighted sustainable MD ranching practices (i.e. that contribute to soil health), they also noted that some ranching practices in the MD could be supported, encouraged, and improved. Additionally, research participants did not always agree with what constitutes sustainable ranching practices, with many explaining that beef producers feel they have been unfairly represented in relation to climate change and greenhouse gas emissions.

"Trying to keep cattle out of rivers is constantly a challenge for producers but also a challenge for those doing outreach. Cattle need food and water - depending on your land and how your operation is set up, providing those things can look very different. It's important to recognize that these things are not black and white. For example, it doesn't mean cattle can't go into the river, but it also doesn't mean they should all the time. So what are ways we can mitigate this?"

"We have to think restorative. Especially soils...we say why can't we grow anything? Well, your soils are dead. We need to take care of our soils."

"In terms of environmental stuff, there are things I do that I know I won't get paid for but I'm happy to do. I guess that could become a reason for some people to buy my product! I will do or not do darn near anything you'll pay me for. I still have to make a living and I have to compete with other products and other countries that can produce beef cheaply and may or may not have the same environmental or sanitary standards. I'm not saying ours are too high or their's are necessarily too low, but it's a different mindset."

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I think a big challenge is connecting the people that are in the Bow Valley with people who are producing local food. People don't know where to buy local products.”

3. Accessibility to locally produced food

Overall, research participants talked about a lack of connection between Bow Valley consumers and their food and that Bow Valley consumers are not always able to access locally produced foods. A variety of reasons was given for this lack of access and connection, including a lack of knowledge regarding where to buy local food, a lack of connection between Bow Valley communities in the Bow Valley corridor and the MD rural areas outside of the corridor, as well as a lack of marketplaces selling affordable local produce.

“I think the divide between the consumer and the producer is widening and widening.”

“I think a big challenge is connecting the people that are in the Bow Valley with people who are producing local food. People don't know where to buy local products.”

“Farmers markets are good but a lot of time you get people coming from B.C to sell their produce. That's fine - I like B.C. fruit. But let's look at it locally. Who's growing local fruit? I would buy local fruit if I could find it. Sometimes farmers aren't the best at marketing their own crops or celebrating their own successes. So they're labouring away and it's almost a secret...if people don't know about these local producers, these producers are probably struggling. It's hard to make a living as a farmer or as a producer, especially a small-scale producer.”

4. Supports for local food provisioners

As mentioned above, several research participants noted insufficient marketplaces for local food producers to sell their produce as well as a lack of marketing supports for local food producers. For example, several interviewees explained that MD food producers do not always have the time and resources to 'tell the story' of their products in a way that appeals to consumers nor do they necessarily have the logistical means to sell directly to consumers. Additionally, research participants underlined that although there is a long history and continuing practice of food production in the MD, that some residents (and particularly those living in the Bow Valley corridor) lack knowledge of how and what to grow in personal gardens. Several participants also noted that there is a lack of garden space for some MD residents living in the corridor. Lastly, there were differing opinions regarding the feasibility of growing food commercially in the MD. While some concluded that land, labour and energy costs were too high, others explained that with increased knowledge and institutional supports certain types of local food production would be commercially possible on a small-scale.

“I feel like for producers it's hard to meet the demands of this newer sustainable agriculture movement. All of a sudden producers are expected to start telling their story even though they've been doing the same thing for 40 years. I think a lot of them are wondering: “Now we have to tell you my story?”

“There are people who often come to me and say they would like to buy a bit of beef, but I do very little of that. It's a complicated thing. You need the kind of cow that people want to buy. They want grass-fed but they need to be fat enough to be a good eating experience. That's hard to hit in a short growing season. You need to be growing green grass for a long enough time period. Being a small operator the costs per animal are way higher. Either your customer has to come pick it up or you have to deliver it to them. A lot of people don't have a deep freeze anymore and they can't take a lot of meat so they can take 10lbs of meat well I'm not interested in selling 10lbs of beef every 3rd day to somebody - as much as I like visiting my neighbour! But if the people who are willing to pay for that kind of beef increase, the people producing it will also increase.”

“I think growing food is an issue. I would love to see more people growing more food. I know whoever has gardens do some incredible stuff.”

5. Knowledge and skills

As mentioned previously, many research participants noted that within the Bow Valley there is a lack of understanding regarding how and where to purchase local food as well as how to grow food in the Rocky Mountain climate. Additionally, several participants explained that there is a lack of understanding regarding the impact of food production on the environment, and particularly regarding the impact of meat production on land, water, and air. Lastly, multiple participants underlined a lack of knowledge related to cooking and preparing healthy foods. While participants talked about a lack of skill and knowledge related to food, they also underlined that this was not necessarily a result of individual choice or lack of education but of social and political factors that left people without the time and money to invest in cooking healthy meals, gardening, and/or learning about local food systems.

"If consumers were aware of what they buy and consume, then there would be a more collective effort to look into less concentrated food production practices. They would also better understand the importance of using all parts of a cow. Don't just buy t-bones and ribs, use the whole animal and understand why those are a good meal and good for your footprint. Even just vegetables, there are so many creative ways that you can prepare these."

"People don't know how to break down a chicken and how to cut up a chicken breast, legs, thighs. They don't know to get four meals out of a chicken - including ending up with all the scraps as chicken soup. Skill is lacking."

"People often don't understand the nutrition aspect of food. They don't realize: 'Oh I need this food to feel good, to function properly. They think: 'I'll just eat pizza.'"

Please don't try to convince me that when you have a monoculture in a farm landscape that you aren't displacing or ultimately hurting animal life of some form. Just because people don't see the harm that monocultures cause doesn't mean it doesn't happen. In contrast, people get upset about slaughtering animals for meat without understanding there are different practices related to raising beef. I think people need to have a clearer view regarding what it means to put good quality food on your table and not just focus on a single practice like murdering a cow and saying that's bad."

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I think there's people that try to grow their own food but I think that's still a minority. I think that most people have already convinced themselves that it's impossible... You have to first understand what grows here and secondly understand that you won't get a crop every year... you also need to understand chinooks and ground cover. A lot of people when they think about gardening, they think about it in the summer but you need to think and observe throughout the season."

6. Local food capacity and supply chains

While research participants highlighted the many ways that MD community members are resilient and creative when it comes to accessing food, several participants underlined the high level of dependence that the MD has on long food supply chains from elsewhere. While this kind of dependence is not unusual for many Canadian communities, research participants underlined the challenge of the MD's geographic location and the ease with which MD communities can be cut off from their food supply chains (i.e. particularly for communities like Exshaw in the corridor). Multiple interviewees talked about the impact the 2013 flood had on MD residents and expressed concerns regarding whether or not residents and the MD are adequately prepared for a lengthier emergency situation.

"Exshaw was cut off during the 2013 flood. We had food coming in by helicopter for the first couple of days and then we were able to get a truck through to BRING in food. We were preparing and feeding people, the whole community, out of the school and some BBQ-ing in the MD garage because the Exshaw community centre was flooded so it really brought home our reliance on other places for food. People were like: "We can be really cut off."

"The more community connections you have, the better you do in a crisis, people need that for resiliency. Doing it around food also helps people learn about other cultures, try other foods and it's a good way for people to share."

"Well it's all about being self-sufficient. We shouldn't be so dependent - that's my view... I haven't read all the MD's disaster planning but what is the answer for food supplies?"

"I wish we could deinstitutionalize and decommodify and decommercialize food."

"I realize the importance of having a strong local supply of produce rather than relying on imported food or sending the food we produce in Canada to other countries to process."

7. Food-related Policies

There was some disagreement about whether MD residents living in the hamlets in the Bow Valley corridor (Harvie Heights, Dead Man's Flats, Lac des Arcs, and Exshaw) should be able to keep chickens and bees. For example, some research participants strongly believed that any kind of livestock was not appropriate for hamlets in the Bow Valley corridor due to issues with wildlife, smell, disease, lack of knowledge, and animal welfare. However, other research participants talked about the long history of raising livestock for personal use in the corridor and felt that if these practices were provided with enough support, that they would help increase community members' access to local food as well as food security. More generally, when asked about policies, research participants responded that they were either unaware of food-related policies or stated that there was a lack of municipal policies that explicitly support sustainable, local, and healthy food systems.

"In the MD we get questions sometimes about vegetation, like "I'm in Deadman's and I'm landscaping my yard - what vegetation can I use?" or "Does the MD have any bylaws against certain vegetation?" We don't condone fruit bearing or berry producing vegetation and I believe there is a statement in our land use bylaw that states vegetation should not attract wildlife. Bears don't know where the boundaries are between municipalities. They don't know that the rules are different here, in Exshaw, then in Canmore."



RESEARCH RECOMMENDATIONS



1. Increase availability of and access to local food

- a. Encourage food production on underused land/spaces
- b. Increase the amount of appropriate growing spaces
- c. Support the development of sustainable food production technologies
- d. Strengthen connections between those living in the MD corridor and those living outside the corridor
- e. Work with other municipalities to increase knowledge about local MD food producers (i.e. develop an “Eat local” campaign in partnership with surrounding Bow Valley municipalities)
- f. Work with other municipalities to develop food-focused marketplaces (i.e. a year-round farmers market) that support local food producers, processors, and other food-related small businesses (particularly those located in the MD)
- g. Establish definitions of local food and use these to guide local food initiatives



2. Expand support for local food growers, producers, and businesses

- a. Promote MD food producers within the MD and beyond
- b. Connect people intergenerationally who are interested in growing food
- c. Build on the history of growing food in the MD
- d. Encourage and support local groups and businesses who are working to increase the amount of locally grown food both commercially and in individual households
- e. Create more events/avenues to celebrate local ranchers, food producers, food-based businesses, and community-based groups (i.e. harvest events/celebrations)



3. Support food-based programs that build relationships with the Stoney Nation

- a. Support and strengthen cultural food programs in the MD, especially at the Exshaw School
- b. Work with the Stoney Nation to ensure Stoney community members have access to hunting and gathering grounds in the MD
- c. Ensure treaty obligations regarding Stoney Nation hunting and gathering rights are honoured, supported, and encouraged
- d. Continue to strengthen dialogue and relationship building between the MD and the Stoney Nation, understanding that food is often a key part of this
- e. Understand the different ways that food is part of and can help facilitate reconciliation and support/encourage projects that are doing this type of work
- f. Educate settler community members about Indigenous food systems as well as the impacts of colonization on Bow Valley food systems



4. Develop and advocate for sustainable and ecologically regenerative food systems

- a. Connect climate change resiliency with local food systems
- b. Support community discussions about key sustainability issues related to food (i.e. the relationship between climate change and food)
- c. Reduce food waste at commercial and household levels
- d. Develop an organic waste system that keeps compost in the Bow Valley
- e. Continue supporting MD participation in programs that facilitate sustainable ranching practices
- f. Increase support and funding for MD ranchers to adopt sustainable ranching practices
- g. Incorporate geothermal and solar energy into greenhouses and/or other growing initiatives
- h. Ensure food spaces and programming do not compromise wildlife and wildlife habitat



5. Increase affordability of food

- a. Work with other Bow Valley municipalities to address cost of food through innovative and creative solutions
- b. Continue with programs such as the Good Food Box to provide affordable produce to MD residents



6. Expand community conversations and education about food

- a. Support food-based programs and curriculum at the Exshaw School, particularly those that strengthen Indigenous food systems and facilitate knowledge about and access to culturally appropriate foods
- b. Continue and expand cooking and gardening workshops and classes offered in the MD
- c. Draw on and support community-based knowledge about ranching, gardening, and other food production practices in the MD
- d. Prioritize food in community conversations and consultations
- e. Cultivate understandings about food systems that Bow Valley residents rely on, including their social, ecological, and economic impacts
- f. Increase conversations relating food to social justice and ecological sustainability



7. Foster new and current partnerships between:

- a. MD Community members
- b. The MD and the Stoney Nation
- c. The MD and surrounding municipalities
- d. Local producers, consumers, businesses, and community-based groups
- e. Regional, provincial and municipal groups and institutions (i.e. high schools and Universities focused on food-related programing)



8. Develop, support, and advocate for policies that create ecologically and socially just food systems

- a. Identify areas where it is appropriate for community members to practice animal husbandry, compost, and grow food and change policies that discourage and/or prevent these activities
- b. Review policies that discourage and/or prevent food production, composting, beekeeping, and animal husbandry. Change these policies when appropriate.
- c. Continue to develop emergency response plans that meaningfully address vulnerabilities related to food
- d. Develop institutional food procurement policies focused on access to healthy, sustainable, equitable, and culturally appropriate foods
- e. Use the Bow Valley Food Alliance Food Charter as a guideline to rethink and advocate for policy change



9. Encourage and support food programs and food spaces within the community

- a. Develop more spaces to grow food, including community gardens and greenhouses
- b. Support and develop innovative projects like community food storage spaces and communal food processing and kitchen equipment rentals/sharing
- c. Continue support for the Exshaw Community Kitchen



10. Challenge food systems inequities

- a. Support marginalized groups who are organizing to meet their food needs
- b. Ensure that food insecure community members have access to healthy nutritious and culturally appropriate food
- c. Celebrate diverse cultural food systems
- d. Provide funding specific to cultural food events, programs, and businesses
- e. Challenge racism, classism, and colonialism in food systems

Many of these recommendations reinforce and overlap one another. They include big ideas as well as more practical solutions. They are intentionally vague in relation to who might enact them, with the understanding that many different actors will need to come together to make change.

for more information on the Bow
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