



Grow and Connect Interior

November 12 2024

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

GROW AND CONNECT INTERIOR BOLSTERS ACCESS TO LOCAL FOOD ACROSS THE REGION

More local food may be coming to your town. Grow and Connect Interior is a software based tool that will improve access to local food in Interior British Columbia by forming connections between regional stakeholders.

In rural areas, especially within local food systems, organizations often face challenges in gathering and using important data about their supply chain relationships and networks. Traditional methods of collecting supply chain data are usually designed for specific industries, making them complicated and not very user-friendly.

This lack of a single source for gathering supply chain data creates a barrier to effective collaboration and inclusivity among organizations within the food industry. The limited existing data also lacks information on grassroots and small-scale stakeholders, who make up a large portion of food supply chains in rural Canada.

Grow and Connect is an interactive supply chain modeling system that removes these barriers; creating advanced, collaborative decision-making tools for different industries in rural communities across the Interior.

Grow and Connect (foodsupplychain.ca) also serves as a free tool for individual producers to monitor and manage their supply chains, regardless of scale or industry, all within the context of their community. By consolidating real-time, crowdsourced data from members into interactive visualizations, Grow and Connect offers a comprehensive view of the food supply chain that is adaptable to any scale. Watch how it works here: [Demo Video](#).

Kevin McHallam, Founder of Kamloops kombucha company KMK Living, says the "supply chain mapping tool [is] instrumental in revolutionizing how businesses like ours can easily connect with specialty retailers and customers, while identifying new delivery options in underserved

markets in the BC Interior. These tools facilitate connections and support the growth of sustainable, community-focused food systems."

The partners behind Grow and Connect want to see more local food in institutions, stores, and restaurants across the Interior – but a lack of transportation options, combined with high and unpredictable costs associated with the existing options, makes that hard. We can reduce these costs by using Grow and Connect to bring producers together quickly and conveniently to share the cost of transportation, reach new customers, and get more local food into our communities.

Sarah-Patricia Breen, the Regional Innovation Chair in Rural Economic Development at Selkirk College says, "Through our research we have confirmed distribution and aggregation as a common challenge for food and agricultural businesses across the southern interior. While this challenge may not be unique to food and agriculture, it brings with it an additional set of needs, necessitating sector specific investigation and expertise, which makes Grow and Connect a timely and exciting opportunity."

Behind Grow and Connect are five partners: the Kamloops Food Policy Council (KFPC), TruGIS, Selkirk College (Western Kootenay & Boundary Region), Boundary Community Ventures Assn (BCVA), and the Central Kootenay Food Policy Council (CKFPC).

These partners have worked to implement three place-based pilots in addition to the Grow and Connect software. The pilots include an ecommerce platform, distribution and aggregation efforts, and increased storage and distribution capacity for an existing food hub in the region.

This project is funded under the Sustainable Canadian Agricultural Partnership, a federal-provincial-territorial initiative, and is delivered by the Investment Agriculture Foundation of BC.

Grow and Connect Interior has also received funding from the Economic Trust of the Southern Interior, the CN Rail Community Fund, and has drawn on research funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, and the Regional District of Central Kootenay.

Media Contact: Lindsay Harris, Food Policy Implementation Lead, Kamloops Food Policy Council

lindsay@tapestryevaluation.com

250.572.3085

Grow and Connect: <http://foodsupplychain.ca>

Demo Video: <https://youtu.be/cjTVfWZh0n8>

BACKGROUND

Grow and Connect wouldn't exist without the collaboration of many partners across the region who provide expertise on their unique geographic and supply chain needs and have helped implement three place-based pilots, which are outlined below.

PLACE-BASED PILOT 1

KOOTENAY DISTRIBUTION PILOT: ENHANCING LOCAL FOOD LOGISTICS

The Kootenay Distribution Pilot aims to improve food distribution communication and efficiency between producers, carriers, and retailers in the Kootenay-Boundary region. There are numerous examples of missed opportunities for efficiency and collaboration when it comes to moving local food around the region. Grow and Connect is creating accessible and transparent data so that stakeholders involved in cooperative action can take advantage of opportunities to improve food distribution. This pilot will use Grow and Connect to solve logistics problems and support cooperative action.

To create a grassroots and sustainable solution for distribution challenges in the region, the Kootenay Distribution Pilot will test distribution routes, establish key aggregation points, and work with carriers, producers, and retailers to streamline regional food distribution.

Testing distribution routes starts by finding existing routes and working with producers, retailers and carriers to create a functional and user friendly software, Grow and Connect, that automates the process of placing orders, finding carriers and receiving orders. This is an essential first step, as automating existing practices creates a workable software solution. In other words, by basing software development on what's already happening in the real world we will achieve a product that serves all parties well.

Once Grow and Connect is established to automate existing food transportation routes, more complex logistical challenges can be addressed. A critical focus is to establish aggregation points where multiple producers can drop, store and consolidate goods to be picked up by participating carriers. This will be managed through the software to facilitate communication between producers, warehouseers and carriers. Once these aggregation processes are established in different communities, that should translate to more cost-effective options for producers to move their product throughout the region. The software will provide the organizational capacity for this kind of collaboration to occur, which would previously have been left to individuals to manually arrange.

Finally, when we have software that can accommodate aggregation points as well as ordering-shipping-receiving tracking for all parties, the next phase will be encouraging organic

growth of food distribution. At this point, it should be feasible for participants to use the software to come up with new routes and business partnerships based on the information available in the software.

The project aims to have as many participants as possible to create a comprehensive visualization of the food supply chain in the Kootenay-Boundary region.

Learn more and sign up for Grow and Connect [here](#).

Contacts: Rebecca Richards, richards@hedgehogandheron.ca

Damon Chouinard, ed@ckfoodpolicy.ca

Grow and Connect: <https://foodsupplychain.ca/>

PLACE-BASED PILOT 2

KAMLOOPS FOOD POLICY COUNCIL PILOT: E-COMMERCE AGGREGATION SOLUTION ON OPEN FOOD NETWORK

The Kamloops Food Policy Council's (KFPC) place-based pilot focuses on e-commerce aggregation for the Kamloops region. KFPC is utilizing Open Food Network Canada (OFN), a not-for-profit open source e-commerce platform that empowers local producers to sell online independently or through other vendors in their region.

The KFPC has set up a hub, or an account that hosts the products of multiple producers, on the platform. The hub, called The Stir, after the KFPC's physical food hub, sells the products of 17 local producers. These items make up three public order cycles (Stir Saturdays, Meat CSA Boxes, and Holiday Foodie Boxes), and a wholesale cycle. The cycles operate on different aggregation time-frames to accommodate producers.

Stir Saturdays is a monthly order cycle. Producers' products are aggregated at The Stir on a monthly basis, where staff organize the products into their individual orders for customer pick-up at the physical Stir location on the third Saturday of the month.

The Meat CSA Box cycle coordinates the distribution of meat products that are aggregated and packed by Rangeland meats. The Heffley Creek based business is able to access the Kamloops market without risk by selling through this order cycle. The vendor only has to aggregate, produce, pack, and transport the amount of product that has been purchased in advance, and can reach the customers of other local producers who are selling on The Stir's OFN shop.

Holiday Foodie Boxes is a yearly order cycle that aggregates the products of 15 local producers. The KFPC aggregates the products and organizes them into gift boxes that can be purchased

as corporate or personal gifts, with pick-ups happening at The Stir's physical location in December.

Wholesale orders operate on a weekly cycle where product is aggregated at The Stir and delivered to the client by Authentic Indigenous Seafood (AIS) - one of the producers listed on The Stir's OFN shop, and who operates out of the physical food hub location in Kamloops.

Producers, vendors, and consumers benefit from having low-barrier access to multiple local producers in one place through OFN. Digital visibility and network presence on OFN can facilitate producers' access to new markets that address their individual and community needs and opportunities. OFN is a great addition to in-person sales and e-commerce integrations on producers' own websites, as consumers are exposed to more than one local producer when visiting the site, and aren't limited by store or market hours to shop.

Mike McLean, Production and Sales Manager at AIS says, "This program benefits AIS by providing a conduit that places our products in front of local businesses and consumers, which ultimately drives sales and education of our brand and the stories/traditions behind it."

OFN also features transparent pricing breakdowns, so consumers and producers can see what percent of each purchase goes to the hub and the producer.

The Stir OFN Hub also facilitates wholesale, institutional, and business-to-business purchasing through custom private order cycles that can be set up to accommodate the unique needs of each purchaser and producer.

You can create a free OFN account here: <https://about.openfoodnetwork.ca/sell-local/>

Have questions, or need support setting up your account? Reach out to Karla at karla@openfoodnetwork.ca.

View The Stir shop [here](#), and our larger producer network [here](#).

Contacts: James Maine, James@kamloopsfoodpolicycouncil.com
Kent Fawcett, foodhub@kamloopsfoodpolicycouncil.com

Shop: https://openfoodnetwork.ca/thestir/shop#/shop_panel

PLACE-BASED PILOT 3

BOUNDARY FOOD HUB PILOT: INCREASING STORAGE AND DISTRIBUTION CAPACITY

The Boundary Food Hub is a project of the Boundary Community Ventures Assn (BCVA).

The third Grow and Connect place-based pilot focuses on increasing the storage and distribution capacity of the Boundary Food Hub. This effort includes increasing the size of their meat processing facility to provide shelter for reefer trailers. This increased storage capacity will protect the trailers from the elements when not in use, facilitate their cleaning in all seasons, and allow covered loading of product. The trailers are currently rented to producers and processors who otherwise would not have access to product transportation.

The Boundary Food Hub pilot will also add a third reefer trailer to the fleet that will be customized to transport carcasses and improve distribution of meat to butcher shops and restaurants.

Finally, this pilot aims to increase shared freezer capacity that will be available to producers and processors.

These upgrades to the food hub's infrastructure aim to increase the number and capacity of producers and processors supported by the hub; increase capacity for local producers to serve restaurant, retail and institutional markets; and increase the distribution range of local products.

President of Kettle Valley Food Co-op, Lindsay Erlandson, says "The Kettle Valley Food Coop strives to be a bridge between food producers and food buyers in order to create a robust local food community. The Grow and Connect Interior project offers us an exciting opportunity to expand our reach, giving us the ability to more easily and efficiently connect with producers and buyers in our region. Our food producers can sell to a broader market and our food buyers will see an expanded selection of goods, with the benefit of still shopping close to home and supporting the local economy."

Contact: Vicki Gee, vicki@boundarycommunityventures.ca

Website: <https://boundaryfoodhub.ca/>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=61561791305015>