

## **Thought for Food**

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### **A Brave New Community**

*Gail Southall*

If you've done any reading about what life may look like after peak oil, under continuing climate change, you're likely familiar with the concept of 'new community'. According to today's futurists, in tomorrow's brave new world, cooperation and collaboration will, by necessity, replace individualism and competitiveness in the human heart. Pressures imposed by our planet and past choices will force us to focus our attention locally and work together in unique ways. Everything – housing, food, transportation, commerce, energy development– will require a shift in the mutual benefit direction.

Perhaps because of the essential and fundamental nature of food, this new community is already emerging in the agricultural arena. Revolutionary forces – small farmers moving away from the industrial model, and eaters who care enough about how their food is being grown to support its creation in extraordinary ways – are coming together and designing a sustainable food system that may just keep us and our planet thriving on the bumpy road ahead.

And it's not just in major cities that we see this promising trend. Here's a sample of what's happening in the brave new agricultural community of the Creston Valley:

#### **Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)**

A growing movement in centres around the world, the CSA concept teams farmers with folks willing to pay their money up front for a piece of the harvest action, thereby sharing not only the bounty, but also the risk. In this arrangement the farmer is not alone in bearing the consequences of what Mother Nature delivers, good or bad, and consumers have more choice and control over how their food is produced.

Eaters looking to bump up their '100 Mile Diet' commitment by purchasing local grains initiated the Creston Grain CSA. They approached area farmers who, intrigued by the idea, climbed on board. This summer three farmers are growing four varieties of grain and 200 shareholders will divvy up the spoils. Only in its pilot year, the Grain CSA is fully subscribed and has attracted national media attention. Plans are already underway for next year's planting, as there is tremendous interest on both sides to expand the idea to include other crops.

#### **Orchard Membership**

Concerned about the unpredictability of the international soft fruit market, the folks at Cherrybrook Farms decided to develop a community-focused, u-pick 'membership' operation that runs along the same lines as a traditional CSA. Members rent a tree, so to speak, picking all the cherries from one tree in the orchard. Depending on the season, members can expect to glean from 40 – 100 pounds of cherries for a very reasonable price; again, sharing the risk as well as the reward. No longer reliant on trans-global shipping or fickle foreign tastes, the orchard is being diversified to include other tree fruits and complementary services geared to a local market.

#### **Community Greenhouse**

For several years, the community greenhouse at the College of the Rockies has offered space for people to start flowers and vegetables from seed. For a nominal fee, subscribers get pots, soil, watering services, and space to nurture their tender sprouts. Community greenhouse staff also grow vegetables they later donate to various food programs. Now, in an effort to increase local food security and foster relationships between commercial and backyard growers, the greenhouse is

launching a winter harvest experiment. Basing their efforts on Eliot Coleman's book, *Farming on the Back Side of the Calendar*, participants will learn together how to grow greens in an unheated greenhouse through the winter. No one is sure what the results will be, but all are willing to share the successes and failures for the benefit of knowledge gained.

### **Community Gardens**

Community gardens are not a new idea, providing allotment and communal gardening spaces for those without. But what is new is that increased local interest in growing our own food is boosting the demand for space. The existing downtown community garden is booked solid so the College of the Rockies and public library are designing supplementary gardening spaces, increasing accessibility, so more can benefit.

Necessity is the mother of invention, as they say, and as societies and economies of the brave new community reorganize, Creston is proving innovative ideas are not only for the big players, nor beyond our reach.

*Gail Southall is Coordinator of the Creston Valley Food Action Coalition. For more information visit [www.crestonfarmfresh.ca](http://www.crestonfarmfresh.ca).*