

# Vancouver, Canada

## Targeting NEXUS food security: Vancouver's Regional Food System Strategy

The Regional Food System Strategy aims to ensure the long-term sustainability of the food system in the Greater Vancouver Regional District, now named Metro Vancouver. Through uniting rural and urban municipalities with multiple private stakeholders, synergies have been achieved to bring about increased local, equitable and sustainable food practices.

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#### Urban NEXUS Case Study

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### Abstract

The globalization of food systems has made agri-food systems less sustainable. In response, the Vancouver Regional Food System Strategy seeks to address the challenges of contemporary global food systems, through a multi-pronged strategy. The strategy is focused on actions at the regional level which will lead to a more localized, sustainable, resilient and healthy food system while continuing to be embedded in the larger food system at the national and global scales. Given the multi-sectoral nature of food systems, a process was developed to involve a wide range of stakeholders: farmers, food processors, distributors and retailers, public health authorities, municipalities, provincial and federal government and their agencies as well as NGOs, community groups and academia. The unique platform provided by Metro Vancouver helped to mobilize this approach, which would have otherwise been beyond the scope and capacity of some smaller municipal members to achieve.

### The globalized food system: resource pressures and the depletion of local markets

The globalized food system has brought diverse cuisines into our homes. This has come at the cost of increased food waste, a larger carbon footprint of the agricultural sector and a depleted market for local produce—trends that exacerbate food security and energy efficiency. A study of the global agri-food systems estimates that 7.3 units of energy are used to produce one unit of food. In addition, a report of the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) and World Resources Institute (WRI) in 2013 revealed that one third of all food produced worldwide gets lost or wasted in food production and consumption systems, with the characteristically long supply chains of global food systems being a major cause of wastage. This results in massive inefficiencies of food and energy consumption demands, which are set to further increase in the future.

Aware of the importance of fostering local and regional food security, the Vancouver Regional Food System Strategy seeks to address the challenges of contemporary global food systems, through a multi-pronged strategy that involves various levels of the metropolitan administration and a variety of private stakeholders.



Date	2011-present
Urban NEXUS Sectors	Water-Food-Land Use
Urban NEXUS Innovations	Institutions; Communications + User behavior
Scale	Regional
Budget	n/a

## Urban NEXUS Definition

The Urban NEXUS is an approach to the design of sustainable urban development solutions. The approach guides stakeholders to identify and pursue possible synergies between sectors, jurisdictions, and technical domains, so as to increase institutional performance, optimize resource management, and service quality.

It counters traditional sectoral thinking, trade-offs, and divided responsibilities that often result in poorly coordinated investments, increased costs, and underutilized infrastructures and facilities. The ultimate goal of the Urban NEXUS approach is to accelerate access to services, and to increase service quality and the quality of life within our planetary boundaries.

ICLEI / GIZ 2014

# Urban NEXUS Case Study

## The metropolitan region of Vancouver: at the forefront of regional and urban sustainability

The Greater Vancouver Regional District, with the coastal seaport city of Vancouver as its major urban center, is the third largest metropolitan area of Canada, situated in the southwest corner of the province of British Columbia. It is the most densely populated region in the province with 2,313,328 inhabitants (Canada Census, 2011), and is administered by the Greater Vancouver Regional District, better known as Metro Vancouver. Metro Vancouver acts as a political body and corporate entity operating under provincial legislation delivering regional services, planning and political leadership on behalf of its 23 members. The multi-sectoral and sustainability-oriented approach of Metro Vancouver is institutionalized by the Board Strategic Plan, adopted in early 2014, which lays out the priorities and long-term goals of the Metro Vancouver Board with regard to the regional management plans.

Sustainability is a key concept in the governance of Metro Vancouver and the city of Vancouver. The city recently won the 2013 World Green Building Council (WGBC) Government Leadership Award for Best Green Building Policy for its Greenest City 2020 Action Plan, has long been a global hub for sustainable initiatives.

The Sustainable Region Initiative (SRI) of Metro Vancouver is an important force in the developmental activities in the region, and the Regional Food System Strategy is designed to support the existing British Columbia Agriculture Plan 2008, with its focus on local food and urban-rural interdependencies.

In 2002, Metro Vancouver formally positioned the concept of sustainability at the center of its operating and planning philosophy, a comprehensive plan known as the Sustainable Region Initiative (SRI). This resulted in the adoption of a Sustainability Framework in 2008, which provides the imperatives and principles to implement and operationalize sustainability as the central tenet of Metro Vancouver. The metropolis redesigned its regional management plans related to drinking water, solid waste, liquid waste, air quality and greenhouse gases, regional growth, and regional parks, adopted in 2011. In addition, the need for action to contain urban growth and protect farmland in a region with a fast-growing population gave rise to Vancouver's Food System Strategy.

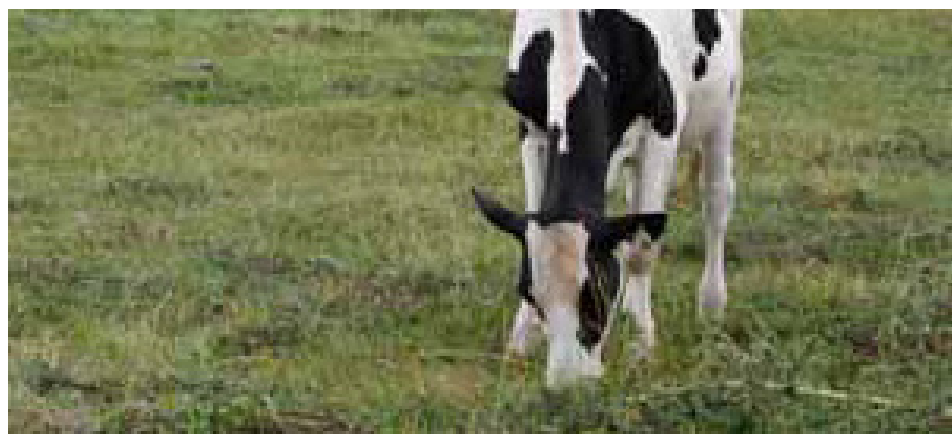
## Metro Vancouver

Metro Vancouver is a political body operating as a regional district, an administrative level of government, dating back to the 1960s, that is unique to the province of British Columbia in an effort to oversee the rapid expansion and resource extraction within the province, as well as to address urban fringe issues and those of rural areas which were increasingly becoming urban, with no municipalities of their own.

Metro Vancouver is also the regional district responsible for the governing of the metropolitan area of the City of Vancouver. In total the district comprises 23 members: 21 municipalities including the City of Vancouver, one treaty First nation and one electoral area. It represents the residents of its region under four

separate legal entities: Greater Vancouver Regional District (GVRD), Greater Vancouver Water District (GVWD), Greater Vancouver Sewerage and Drainage District (GVS&DD), and the Metro Vancouver Housing Corporation (MVHC). The GVRD, GVWD, GVS&DD and MVHC are each governed by a separate Board of Directors composed of elected representatives from the respective members who have chosen to participate in the provision of the service.

In collaboration with its members, Metro Vancouver has three broad roles- to provide core utility services (water, sewerage and drainage, solid waste management) to its members, to carry out planning and regulatory responsibilities related to the three utilities, as well as to develop and implement strategies related to issues of regional interest, and to serve as the main political forum for the discussion of significant community issues at the regional level.



## The Urban NEXUS: A multi-stakeholder approach ensures suitable initiatives and actions

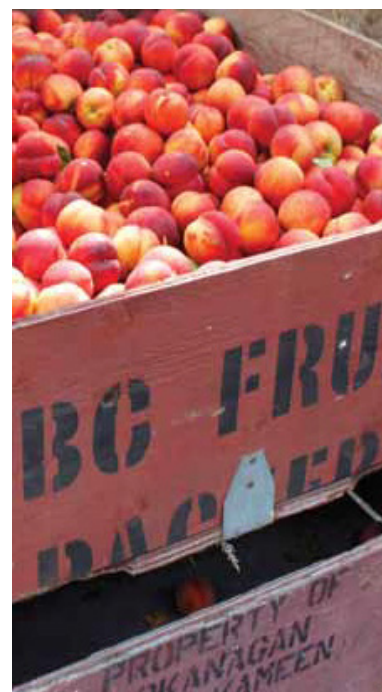
The region of Metro Vancouver is endowed with ample agricultural lands, a biologically rich coastline and a multitude of freshwater resources. The coexistence of dense urban areas and fertile rural lands within the region, and the platform given through the regional jurisdiction of Metro Vancouver, gave rise to the opportunity for a regional food and agriculture strategy. The developed strategic plan aims towards creating a healthy and sustainable food system, by utilizing interdependent synergies at the regional level.

The Vancouver Regional Food System Strategy (RFSS) is focused on actions at the regional level which will lead to a more localized, sustainable, resilient and healthy food system which continues to be embedded in the larger food system at the national and global scales. Given the multi-sectoral nature of food systems, a process was developed to involve a wide range of stakeholders: farmers, food processors, distributors and retailers, public health authorities, municipalities, provincial and federal governments and their agencies as well as NGOs, community groups and academia. The unique platform provided by Metro Vancouver led to the mobilization of this approach, which would have otherwise been beyond the scope and capacity of some smaller municipal members to achieve.

### Metro Vancouver about its Regional Food System Strategy:

*"Recognizing that a sustainable, resilient and healthy food system meets the needs of the present generation and protects the ability of future residents to meet their needs, Metro Vancouver is committed to working with others to support and enhance the regional food system - to ensure economic prosperity and preserve our ecological legacy. This will require protecting and conserving the region's rich farmland, supporting the local food sector, promoting healthier eating habits, reducing food waste and addressing inequities in food access."*

*(Metro Vancouver, Sustainable Region Initiative 2002–2011: A Roadmap to Sustainability)*

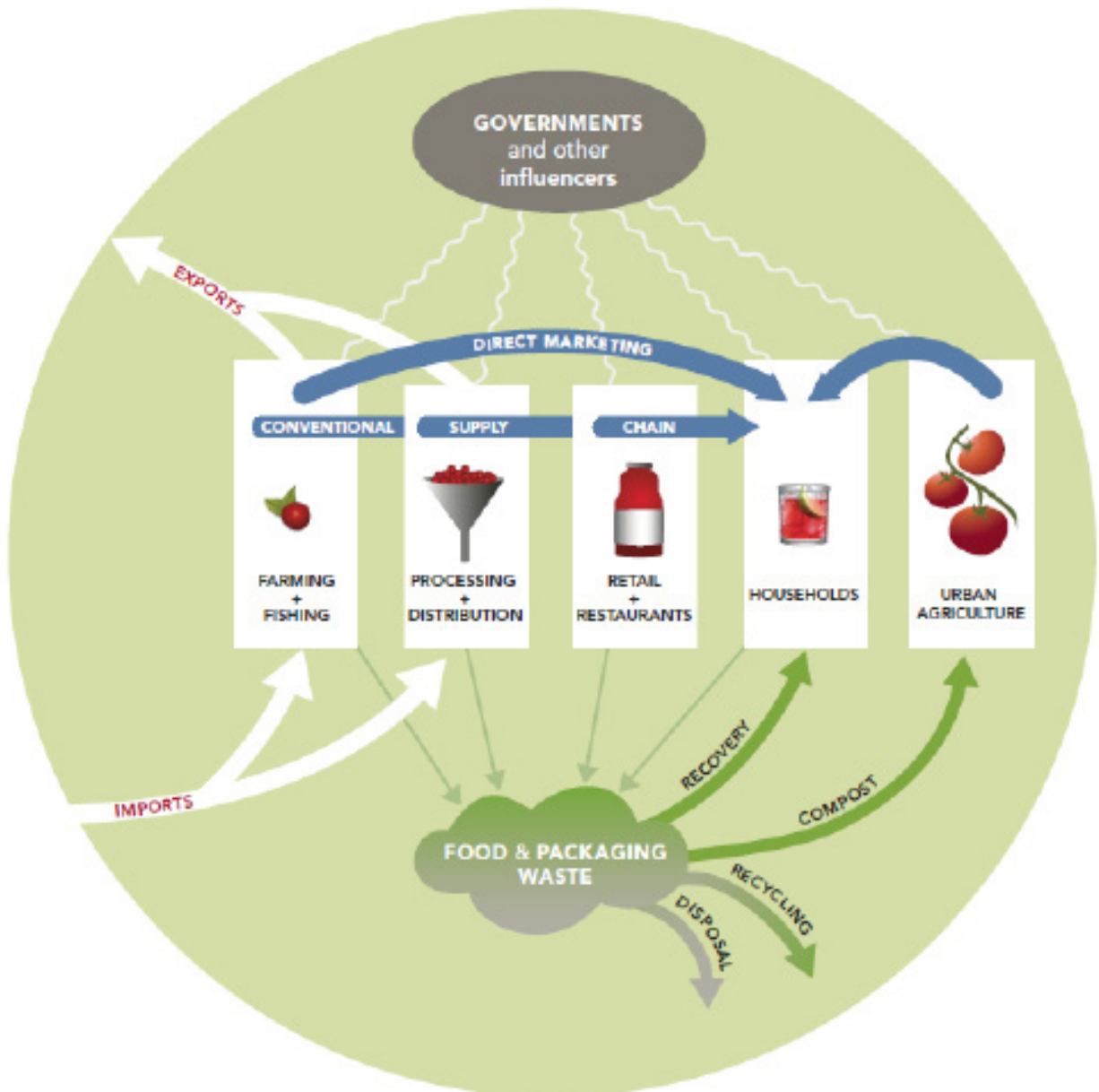


©Metro Vancouver, 2011

Metro Vancouver's Regional Food System Strategy is an adaptive program, designed to align with existing initiatives while implementing new activities. The Strategy lists various initiatives to be undertaken by distinct stakeholders, ranging from the local, regional and federal government. The institutional Nexus between public and private stakeholders enabled the Metro Vancouver Board to put together a tailored strategy, the primary goals of which are to:

- increase the capacity to produce more local food,
- improve financial viability of local farmers and food processors,
- encourage people to adopt healthier diets,
- ensure a more equitable access to nutritious food
- reduce waste in the food system,
- and to protect the ecological health of the region and surrounding waters.

#### Regional Food System Strategy



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Dairy Classroom: raising awareness about food production amongst the youngest members of society

The Regional Food System Strategy is under the management of the Regional Planning and Agriculture Committee of Metro Vancouver. The next step for the RFSS, currently a detailed strategic plan, is to operationalize it via an Action Plan that focuses on the role of local governments in the implementation phase.

The several member municipalities of Metro Vancouver have been active in their participation in the RFSS. The City of Vancouver developed a Local Food System Strategy that identifies priorities and serves as framework strategy (see Box 2). Other municipalities, where agriculture is still an important economic and cultural sector (Surrey, Richmond, Delta, Township of Langley, Pitt Meadows and Maple Ridge), have developed agriculture plans setting individual focus areas. Metro Vancouver also reached out to involve the provincial and federal governments to more effectively realize the objectives of the RFSS. Additionally, the intensive participation of the private sector and community groups during the formulation process of the RFSS has ensured their commitment to the plan.

Each of the stated goals of the RFSS are coupled with sample actions and clearly-defined performance measures to evaluate the success of each strategy. For instance, actions planned by the RFSS to achieve its goal of increasing the capacity of local food production includes, among others, the support of hatcheries to augment the low salmon count in the region and the establishment of incubator farms on Metro Vancouver land to provide new farmers with a site to start their business. In addition, Metro Vancouver sent a request to municipalities to develop zoning bylaws and guidelines for commercial urban agriculture while the metropolis collaborates with the Agricultural Land Commission to protect the existing agricultural land base. The performance measures for this goal include the total hectares of land in the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR), the land categorized as farm property and the proportion which is actively farmed, as well as demographics such as the average age of farmers in British Columbia.

## Integration within the sustainability framework

The Regional Food System Strategy is one among a suite of interconnected regional management plans developed around Metro Vancouver's Sustainability Framework. Other regional management plans which intersect with the RFSS include the Integrated Solid Waste and Resource Management Plan, Integrated Liquid Waste and Resource Management Plan, Affordable Housing Strategy, Drinking Water Management Plan, Air Quality Management Plan, and the Parks and Greenways Plan. The different regional plans are consciously integrated with one another at the administrative level to break down artificial silos of management and create greater efficacy and efficiency through integrated action.

For instance, the Metro Vancouver Drinking Water Management Plan feeding into the Regional Food System Strategy results in support for the adoption of environmentally sustainable irrigation practices and technologies which will minimize the agricultural demand for water. In a similar manner, the promotion of waste reduction, reuse and recycling as part of the Integrated Solid Waste and Resource Management Plan results not only in less wasted food and reduced waste from food packaging, but also fosters gleanings and food recovery activities to cut down waste at the production level as part of the RFSS.



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### Urban Nexus: coordinated regional planning

The Regional Food System Strategy is embedded in the larger regional management strategy of Metro Vancouver. Coordination is required especially with the Regional Growth Strategy and the Integrated Solid Waste and Resource Management Plan, which include land use policies concerning the region's agricultural land base as well as activities to improve the economic viability of farming.

## Results

### **Early implementation of the various regional management plans has begun.**

With regard to the RFSS, efforts have commenced towards measures such as containing growth and protecting agricultural lands, as well as advocating for a strong role and sufficient budget for the provincial Agricultural Land Commission and provincial support for local food.

**Current initiatives at the municipal level are supported and taken into consideration for the proposal of further action towards achieving the objectives of the RFSS.** For instance, the City of Vancouver facilitated the operation of farmers' markets throughout the city through bylaws, reduced permit fees and streamlined application processes.

**The Ministry of Community and Rural Development reviewed farm tax policy to ensure a fair and equitable assessment system.** Both actions work towards promoting financial viability of local farmers at different jurisdictional levels, and were incorporated in the RFSS by the mediating platform of Metro Vancouver which then proposed the use of the tax system to encourage agricultural production on land in the ALR.

## Lessons learned

The importance of strong, regional institutions to connect municipalities and for the oversight of actions: The regional districts of British Columbia highlight the importance of appropriate institutions and administrative units. Metro Vancouver, with its regional-level jurisdiction, was able to envision greater synergies in the food system by linking urban and rural municipalities, which could not have been achieved by an individual municipality or local government.

**Effective action through an applied inter-sectoral Nexus:** The Metro Vancouver Regional Growth Strategy, of which the Regional Food System Strategy is a part, institutionalizes a cross-sectoral approach to sustainable development by consciously integrating the sustainable management plans for sectors which are normally dealt with independently, such as waste management, water and air management or food system management.

**Efficient planning requires flexibility:** The RFSS document makes use of existing resources, institutions and legislation but is also designed to continually adapt to changing circumstances by deploying new strategies and initiatives.

**A well-integrated administrative setup overseeing the regional management plans and clearly defined performance measures are key for effective progress.** The Regional Food System Strategy aligns to a continued commitment to sustainable regional growth which appears to be strong indicators for the effective implementation of the RFSS.

## Replication

Through its proposed initiatives at different administrative levels, the Regional Food System Strategy provides a blueprint for the governing institutions of other regions and provinces in Canada and other countries to follow.

### **City of Vancouver Food Strategy**

Adopted in January 2013, the Vancouver Food Strategy is a municipal-level strategic plan to create a just and sustainable food system for the city of Vancouver. Building on years of food systems initiatives by institutions such as the Vancouver Food Policy Council as well as grassroots community development groups, the strategy considers all aspects of the food system, from seed to table to compost heap and back.

In comparison to the Vancouver Regional Food System Strategy, the goals of the City of Vancouver's Food Strategy are more conducive to the food system of a highly-urbanized, metropolitan area. These include the provision of access at the neighborhood level to healthy foods and sustainable food waste disposal; the creation of opportunities that support green food sectors, technologies and social enterprise models such as measures toward urban farming; the advocacy for food issues of equity and sustainability, and the involvement and empowerment of residents through community-based programs.

The performance of the Vancouver Food Strategy is based on an evaluation of the existing target in the City of Vancouver's Greenest City Action Plan - to increase city and neighborhood food assets by 50 per cent over 2010 levels by the year 2020.

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ICLEI, as implementing partner of the Urban NEXUS project, is responsible for the content of this Case Study.

## Budget and finances

As a strategic plan, the Regional Food System Strategy had no allotted budget for the period between 2011 (when it was adopted) and 2014. With the operationalization of the Action Plan, the RFSS will have an as-yet unspecified budget.

## Acknowledgements

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## Sources

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## Further Reading

- GIZ and ICLEI, 2014, Operationalizing the Urban NEXUS: towards resource efficient and integrated cities and metropolitan regions. Available at: [www.iclei.org/urbanexus](http://www.iclei.org/urbanexus)



On behalf of:



This Case Study was elaborated for the Urban NEXUS project 2013-2014.

The ICLEI Case Study series is available at [www.iclei.org/casestudies](http://www.iclei.org/casestudies), and focuses on various types of urban sustainability activities of ICLEI Members and local governments that are part of ICLEI projects across the globe.

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