

# north shore news

## From the ground up

### North Shore Table Matters Network plants seed for change

[Erin Mcphee](#) / North Shore News

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North Shore Tables Matters steering committee members Alex Kurnicki and Margaret Broughton, two of the North Shore residents working to promote food security and urban agriculture. Photograph by: Mike Wakefield, North Shore News

The yard was full of bees.

Having volunteered for the inaugural BUGblitz (Building Urban Gardens) event on the North Shore in the summer of 2011, Evonne Strohwalder wondered what she'd gotten herself into.

Strohwalder had agreed to help work on some garden beds at the home of a fellow North Vancouver resident. But she was intimidated by the number of resident bees on the property, the result of the homeowner's two hives.

Despite the bees' continued buzzing and whooshing past her ears, Strohwalder, an avid urban agriculture advocate, quickly got over her terror, coming to see the bees in a whole new harmless light. "They totally ignored us... Nobody got stung," she says, ultimately viewing the experience as an important learning opportunity.

Those taking part in the event that day also assisted in the planting of beefriendly wild flowers, and helped build two more bee hives, says Strohwalder, who has continued to volunteer with BUGblitz. Currently she serves as co-ordinator of the initiative, aimed at converting lawns to food gardens, as well as sharing skills, and community building on the North Shore.

Homeowner Stephanie Imhoff - whose garden was the recipient of community efforts that day - also has fond memories of the event. Imhoff was new to North Vancouver at the time.

"On the day, 28 people that I'd never met showed up to help me in my yard. And it was like, 'Wow, if this isn't a welcome to the community than I don't know what is,'" she says.

Imhoff has also continued to volunteer with BUGblitz, and is also a founding member of CLUCK (Canadian Liberated Urban Chicken Klub), a group that promotes the keeping of backyard chickens in North Vancouver. CLUCK has continued to lobby local municipalities and so far it's legal to have a flock of up to eight hens in City of North Vancouver areas zoned for a single-family home.

BUGblitz and CLUCK are two of the approximately 100 community initiatives that are part of the North Shore Table Matters Network. Supported by Vancouver Coastal Health, Table Matters brings together community members and organizations that share a passion for food security and urban agriculture, providing networking, learning opportunities and funding. The network also takes on some of its own projects.

"It comes from a health perspective, trying to prevent food insecurity at the individual level and the household level, and also promote food security at the community level," says Margaret Broughton, a public health dietitian with Vancouver Coastal Health, based at Parkgate Community Health Centre. Broughton is also chairwoman of the North Shore Table Matters Network steering committee.

"Our mandate is to support communities to become more food secure. So we're trying to find ways and partners who are out in the community actually doing a lot of this work to partner with and foster some action through," she says.

BUGblitz and CLUCK, for instance, both started as a result of people attending Table Matters events and meeting other like-minded people, says Broughton.

Vancouver Coastal Health provides about \$40,000 a year to further community food security on the North Shore and support Table Matters.

"We stretch it a long way," says Broughton.

The network's work is guided by a steering committee, comprised of local leaders involved in a variety of food security-focused initiatives, and volunteers at large. Table Matters also has strong support from local government. A staff member from each of the North Shore municipalities sits on the committee. "It's great that our municipal leaders recognize food as a local issue..." says Broughton.

Alex Kurnicki, a streetscape planner in the engineering, parks and environment department of the City of North Vancouver, has been a member of the Table Matters committee since 2011. Over the last five years, the city has emerged as a leader within Metro Vancouver on issues related to food security and urban agriculture, he says.

"Table Matters informs my work on food security and urban agriculture issues by identifying directions the city needs to take new policy as well as being informed on new trends and possible future policy directions, such as food recovery and community kitchens," he says. In addition, serving on the committee with his peers from the districts of North and West Vancouver (Cristina Rucci and Arleta Beckett respectively), provides an opportunity to stay informed on what's going on elsewhere on the North Shore, as well as co-ordinate on policy development.

In addition to the 100 member projects, there are approximately 300 individuals who are members of Table Matters. Table Matters is strongly focused on community engagement and organizes an annual networking and education event, usually in the fall. As well, Table Matters offers an annual community small grants program, thanks to the funding received from Vancouver Coastal Health. Projects focused on serving more vulnerable populations are of particular interest. Eleven groups recently received funding, totalling \$10,000 for 2014/2015. They include the North Shore Disability Resource Centre, which will use the money to offer food preservation classes for residents of five group homes, and the North Shore Community Garden Society, which will put the funds towards the development of the new Garibaldi Community Garden in the District of North Vancouver.

Apart from funding support, "We can help leverage expertise and resources," says Broughton.

The current focus of Table Matters is the creation of the North Shore Food Charter, which the network started work on in 2012. Broughton hopes the document is the first step towards establishing a Food Policy Council for the North Shore, following in the footsteps of other regions across North America.

The North Shore Food Charter is intended as, "a statement of philosophy and values, particularly around food," says Broughton. "It's a set of principles that we're striving to achieve," she adds.

"Our goal was to try and bring all of this together in one document and also really reflect what the community's priorities are around food," she says.

The charter is broken down into five themes: health, access and equity; environmental responsibility; government leadership and collaboration; economic vitality; and food culture and education.

The network conducted an extensive community consultation process and finalized the charter in fall 2013. Members are currently working to get the document endorsed by all three municipalities, to put food security on policymakers' radars. "They're making decisions about land all the time... so when a new condo development goes in, maybe one of the amenity options on the table could be a roof top garden or a community garden for the residents who are going to live there. Or maybe some land should be preserved for just agricultural use (or) for garden use," says Broughton.

So far, the City of North Vancouver and District of North Vancouver have signed off on it. So too has the North Vancouver School District. Table Matters is hoping to get charter endorsements from the District of West Vancouver, West Vancouver School District, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh Nations, and Vancouver Coastal Health.

"Even small amounts of change can make a difference," says Broughton.

Other interested groups, businesses and individuals are also invited to endorse the charter, which is viewable on the Table Matters website.

"Everybody eats. We're all touched by food and we all make choices around food,"

says Broughton.

With spring snowstorms wreaking havoc on the rest of Canada, the North Shore is blessed with a temperate climate, allowing for the growing of crops year-round. That's clearly evident at North Vancouver's Loutet Farm, a program of the Edible Garden Project.

Wednesday morning, during a brief reprieve from the week's rainy weather, a few project representatives gathered in preparation for the upcoming Edible

Garden Project Spring Festival, which happens on April 12, from 10 a.m. to noon. Checking in on the farm's winter crops, it looks like garlic, cabbage, kale and brussels sprouts growing in the field will soon be ready for harvest, along with the arugula and radishes inside the farm's hoop house.

Loutet Farm is just one of many projects undertaken by the Edible Garden Project, a program of North Shore Neighbourhood House. The project's goals are to increase the amount of food being produced on the North Shore, whether it's at an urban farm, like Loutet, or in people's backyards or balconies, and to increase the amount of fresh produce that marginalized people in the community have access to, says Emily Jubenvill, Edible Garden Project manager. In addition to Loutet Farm, other initiatives include GardenSmart workshops, intergenerational gardens, school programs, sharing

gardens (involving the donation of produce to community partners like the Harvest Project and food banks), farm gate sales and ongoing events, like the upcoming family-friendly Spring Festival.

Community participation in the Edible Garden Project is strong. In the last four years, volunteer hours have increased from a couple hundred to more than 4,000 annually. The project had 3,500 participants in their initiatives last year - impressive, considering the

project has the equivalent of only three full-time staff, says Jubenvill.

Like Table Matters, the Edible Garden Project at North Shore Neighbourhood House was founded in the wake of the provincial ministry of health's 2006 core food security public health program, and was started in the same year. Heather Johnstone, then manager of the project, was instrumental in forming Table Matters and organizing its community engagement events, says Broughton. Over the years, the network has continued to provide financial support to the Edible Garden Project.

Jubenvill, who currently sits on the Table Matters steering committee, enjoys the collaboration promoted by the network. She also likes that the network has helped build strong relationships between the local governments, and community groups working in the areas of urban agriculture and food security.

"I think that none of our organizations are large enough to be tackling the big picture things, like what is a sustainable food system for the North Shore. That's epic. By coming together and working together we can start to piece those things together and begin to map what it could look like or what the gaps are or where the next steps are. So I think it really leverages all of our ability to address bigger picture issues," she says.

The next project Table Matters plans to tackle has an environmental focus.

In 2015, Metro Vancouver will have a policy in place banning food scraps from going in the garbage. Instead, organic material will be collected and used for compost, biofuel and animal feed. Metro Vancouver is currently seeking the public's input regarding the change at [metrovancover.org](http://metrovancover.org).

North Shore municipalities have already moved in this direction for residential garbage - by cutting down on the frequency of garbage pickups in the City of North Vancouver and District of West Vancouver - and encouraging residents to put compostable materials in green bins instead.

But the coming change will also affect businesses and institutions. In light of the impact on local grocery stores, Table Matters is hoping to provide an alternative.

"Our project is to try and redirect some of that edible, perfectly acceptable food that's going in the garbage currently to organizations and people in need," says Broughton.

For example, consumers avoid buying apples with small bruises, however they're perfectly consumable products.

"The municipality can play a role in helping pave the way for this process. Business can play a role in helping and then there's the community end - how to use this food. It's fairly complex to actually move food safely from the grocery store and get it out to people," says Broughton.

There are some organizations that are already successfully doing food recovery, including Quest Food Exchange, the Salvation Army and the Harvest Project.

"Our hope is to really scale it up," says Broughton.

[tablematters.ca](http://tablematters.ca)

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