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Eat your way through the Cowichan Valley



George Benson, of Cedar Valley Poultry Farm, shows off lettuce grown by him and his wife, Betty. Their farm is one of many Cowichan Valley farms featured on the Buy Fresh, Buy Local map. Story, Page 5.

By [Erin DeCoste - Ladysmith Chronicle](#)

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Clucking chickens, fields of green and the sweet smell of clover greet visitors to Cedar Valley Poultry Farm.

Here, an intrepid foodie can buy huge fresh eggs and crisp veggies still smelling like the dark black earth.

“More people are coming to my farm than I can serve at the market,” Betty Benson said of her Cedar area farm. “I have an appreciation for people willing to drive out to meet the farmer who grew their food.”

George and Betty Benson, along with 70 other farmers and food producers, are part of the new Buy Fresh, Buy Local map.

The map, a Cowichan Green Community project launched in June, connects hungry Islanders with produce, meat, dairy and wine.

The Bensons bring produce and meat to the Duncan, Ladysmith and Cedar farmers’ markets. George manages the Ladysmith and Cedar markets, as well.

“There’s a growing trend of buying locally and understanding where food comes from,” George said as he grabs a fistful of soil, still moist under the hot midday sun.

The map aims to advertise local farmers with consumers, said John Milne, the food security mapping supervisor.

“There’s lots of great food being produced here,” he said. “Lots want to buy local.”

The map is meant for direct marketing — leading people straight to the farmers’ gates or markets in their area.

Chemainus farmers, Christopher and Christine Page of Venner Brook Farm, decided to be part of the map because it was an opportunity.

“It’s a good way to share what we have,” Christopher said.

The Pages raise grass-fed Katahdin lamb — looked after by a temperamental llama.

They said they haven’t seen much difference in the amount of sales yet.

The Bensons, however, said the map has sent more patrons their way.

“It is a good way to connect with our customers,” Betty said. “And we liked that young people are doing [the map] — they have innovative ideas.”

The Cowichan Green Community joined with Service B.C.’s Job Creation Partnership program to hire four unemployed participants to work on the map.

The four have transferred into full-time employment with the skills they’ve learned, Milne said.

“It’s a huge success from that perspective.”

Milne said the map has received support from both farmers and consumers.

“Ten per cent of farmers in the Cowichan Valley participate and that’s huge numbers compared to other municipalities doing something similar,” he said.

The CGC printed 10,000 copies of the map, to be handed out at markets across the valley.

The project runs until the end of September.

“We’ve had wonderful feedback,” he said. “It’s overwhelming.”

Graham Myers, the outgoing president of the Cowichan Agricultural Society, said direct sales are great for farmers.

“They can take a bigger piece of the very small pie of revenue for food production,” he said.

Myers, who owns and operates Maple Groove Farm, is featured on the map. He sells berries and pasture poultry.

“Before this, to find a list of farmers, it was just not available,” he said. “People are definitely using it. They have it

on their front seat of the car and going for a drive.”

The economic aspect of local food is also a boost to area farmers.

“The money you pay for meat, veggies and fruit goes to the community,” Betty said.

Myers said food grown closer is just better.


“Agriculture is more than just pastoral views,” he said. “If we want to keep agricultural land healthy and productive, people have to value it.”

The CGC will be handing out maps at the Cobble Hill Market July 25. Maps are available at farmers’ markets and from farmers on the map.

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