

NEWS

Group attempts to identify food security priorities

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A healthy diet is about more than just following the food guide, says a local group.

Providing everyone with food that is not only nutritious, but has also been produced in an environmentally friendly and socially just way, is the focus of Food Security in the South Okanagan Similkameen, a committee of residents hoping to address the "many imbalances in our food system."

"We are living in a very agriculturally rich, food secure place," said Christine Schwarz, the community developer for the Food Security SOS, which is being funded by the Canadian Diabetes Association and hosted by the Pentiction and District Community Resources Society.

Despite our access to locally grown food, many people buy fruit and vegetables that have

been shipped from overseas "using up vast amounts of fossil fuels, while our own apples are left to rot on trees."

While some people cannot afford to purchase fresh fruit and vegetables, too often those that can opt to eat out or buy food grown elsewhere.

Schwarz and Food Security SOS is looking to change that. What form the change will come in is something Schwarz is hoping residents of the valley can help to determine.

"At this point we are collecting information from the people in our communities," she said. Schwarz and other volunteers will be going travelling across the valley, starting yesterday

at Pentiction Farmer's Market, with a survey that will have participants rank their priorities regarding food security.

The information will then be compiled to create a Community Food Plan, which is expected to be complete by February 2008. The plan may include programs and projects that can be implemented by local governments, school boards and organizations.

"The exciting thing about the movement is that it can range from lobbying the federal government to growing my own tomatoes in a pot on my balcony. It really ranges vastly," she said.

Schools, for example, could create vegetable gardens that teach children how to see and grow their own vegetables for eating or encouraging schools to hand out locally grown healthy snacks. The plan would also look at supporting existing programs like the Summerland Fruit Tree Project, Healthy Harvest Box, The Gleaners, Community Gardens, food banks and farmers markets, among others.

The great thing about the food security system, Schwarz said is that everyone is already part of it. People just need to start thinking about food differently. Rather than running out to a grocery store people need to think about the bigger impact of their food choices. The food security system focuses on things like sustainability and environmental impacts from where food comes from to how its grown and utilized.

To be part of the project or to fill out a survey e-mail <sosfood4all@gmail.com>.

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