

# Food farming interest enjoying rebirth

by Sabine Eiche

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There's a renaissance happening in Richmond. Not the renaissance of Leonardo and Michelangelo and the rebirth of interest in ancient art. No, what's happening here, right now, is another kind of renaissance – the rebirth of interest in food farming.

This spring the Richmond Food Security Society compiled a report about our foodland asset, providing some thought-provoking data. It turns out that less than 5% of the total land in the province of BC is suitable for food production. The City of Richmond, however, is in a privileged position, with 39% of its land base within the Agricultural Land Reserve. Stated in acres, the figure is around 12,338, which rises to 13,746 if agricultural land outside the Reserve is included. More than half of that land – around 7,591 acres – is actively worked by 211 farms.

But a while back the situation was looking dire. More and more family farms were closing, often because the owners were getting too old and younger family members didn't want to continue. In 2012, Arzeena Hamir, the former co-ordinator of the Richmond Food Security Society, wrote that we'd been "losing one or two family farms every year since 2009." Many Richmondites heard an especially loud alarm bell July 19, 2010, when Tai On farm on No. 5 Road suddenly shut down, after 40 years in business.

It seems, however, that a shift in the other direction is underway. Not only is the Richmond Sharing Farm at Terra Nova thriving, but the Institute for Sustainable Horticulture at Kwantlen Polytechnic University, in cooperation with

the Sharing Farm Society, Richmond Food Security Society, City of Richmond and VanCity has established the Richmond Farm School program. And recently, six young people have decided to turn their hand to farming – five with half an acre each of incubator farmland, at the south end of Gilbert Road, and one, Allan Surette, with a two-acre farm, Urban Edibles, on Steveston Highway, just east of the intersection with Gilbert Road.

Surette uses organic methods on his farm. During late spring, he sells mainly flowering plants and vegetable seedlings, but as the summer progresses there'll be more and more fresh bounty from his fields.

You can check how the vegetables are growing because the fields and raised garden beds are all visible behind and around the farmgate stand. Seeing which vegetables are still in the ground and which have already been harvested gives you a sense of Nature's timing, something that's been eradicated by supermarkets, where anything and everything can be had at any time of the year.

Surette also sells freshly-collected eggs, laid by hens that are pasture raised, with non-gmo feed, in the apple orchard of Cherry Lane farm, a few kilometres to the north. For everyone who used to get their eggs at New Moon Acres farm on No. 2 Road, which closed about the same time as Tai On, this is good news – and another instance of Richmond's renaissance.