

Okanagan Bioregion Food System Design, Study and Plan

Fact Sheet for Policymakers

What is the proposed project?

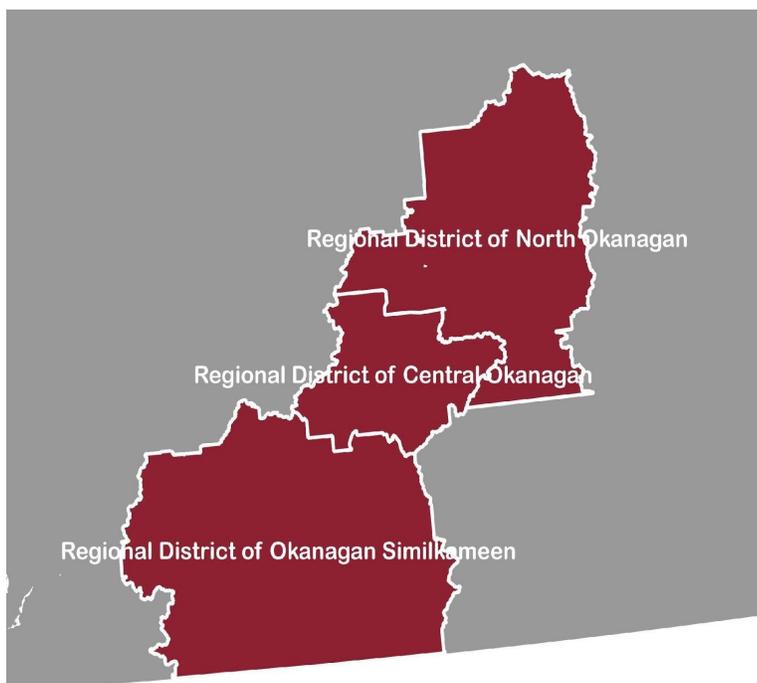
The Okanagan Bioregion Food System Design and Study project is a research project to provide information about:

- the potential to increase food production and processing for local markets in the Okanagan and Similkameen regions;
- whether and to what extent increasing local food production could improve food self-reliance, benefit the economy, and create jobs;
- the potential to reduce some detrimental environmental impacts from food production in the Okanagan and Similkameen regions; and
- the current policy gaps that hinder such a food system, and proposed policy changes to address these gaps.

The project models a number of future food system scenarios that are applied to baseline data garnered from fieldwork, Census for Agriculture, and the Okanagan Basin Water Board. The scenarios represent possible outcomes of choices we make, and evaluate a range of food production, ecological, and economic indicators including: food self-reliance and imports, greenhouse gas emissions, nutrient balances, wildlife habitat impacts, employment, GDP, tax revenue, etc. When compared to our current situation, these outcomes can be used to help understand the impacts of decisions we might make, and how they impact the outcomes we could seek to achieve. The project then outlines the necessary policy changes to achieve these outcomes.

The objective of the study is to bring forth data driven information regarding the food production, resource utilization, environmental stewardship, and economic potentials of a more regionally focused food system that will operate in conjunction with and complement export market focused agriculture.

What regions does the Okanagan Bioregion include?



For the purposes of this study, the Okanagan bioregion includes lands within the three regional districts (Okanagan-Similkameen, Central Okanagan, and North Okanagan), and the Okanagan Nation Alliance boundaries, and some of the Splotsin Band lands.



Institute for Sustainable Food Systems

Why should local and regional governments support this work?

Our current Okanagan food system is challenged by issues including climate change and water issues, disruptions in food supply, global economic instability, population growth, resource depletion, and loss of arable land. At the same time, agriculture is struggling economically, farmers are aging and young people are not choosing farming as a career because it is difficult to make a living wage. Re-localizing our food system could address many of these challenges, increase our future food self-reliance, sustainability, and benefit our local economy and community health and well-being.

- The study provides **accurate data regarding costs and benefits** of food system change, and **policy analysis and recommended actions** in support of sustainable local food systems.
- The study provides information that can **increase the self-sufficiency of our local food system in the face of issues like climate change**.
- The Okanagan has some of the best farmland in BC, and this study will illustrate **why it needs to be farmed, and how it can best be used**.
- An increasing number of **community groups are advocating for sustainable local food systems** and the information that is produced by this study. Organizations include the Central Okanagan Food Policy Council, Okanagan Basin Water Board, South Okanagan Similkameen Conservation Partnership, Similkameen Okanagan Organic Producers Association, among others.
- **Other regional governments, local MLAs in the region, and BC's Ministry of Agriculture are likely to support this study** as it advances provincial priorities for agriculture.

How does this project build on pre-existing agricultural planning work?

The Bioregion Food System Design and Study will consider and build upon existing food system planning and other related work to support local and sustainable agriculture being done in the region. This includes agriculture plans, Regional Growth Strategies, Official Community Plans, Food Strategies and related work.

Who does the work?

The project is led by Kwantlen Polytechnic University's Institute for Sustainable Food Systems (ISFS), with support from Okanagan College and UBC researchers. ISFS is an applied research and extension unit at KPU that investigates and supports regional food systems as key elements of sustainable communities. Although located in the Lower Mainland, a local KPU coordinator would manage the project on the ground in the Okanagan region, and ISFS researchers would travel to the region for focus groups, meetings and workshops throughout the project. Local data collection, linkages to

existing Okanagan work (for example, water demand modeling data, existing agricultural plans and studies) and local fieldwork are central to the project.

This will be the second project of its kind; ISFS recently completed the ground-breaking, 5-year *Southwest BC Bioregional Food System Design Project*. Project results and reports are available online at www.kpu.ca/isfs/swbcproject

What's the timeline and what would it involve?

The project will begin in late spring 2018 and will span **two years**. It will include establishing food system parameters and indicators with key stakeholder groups, data gathering, configuration and input, scenario generation and output analysis, policy analysis and recommendations, and the preparation of reports and presentations to local governments and stakeholders. Local partners are engaged throughout the process.

Who are the confirmed partners?

Funders:

Real Estate Foundation of BC
Regional District of Okanagan-Similkameen (RDOS)
Regional District of North Okanagan (RDNO)
Ministry of Agriculture

Other Partners:

Regional District of Central Okanagan (RDCO)
Okanagan Nation Alliance (ONA) & local First Nations
Okanagan Basin Water Board (OBWB)
Interior Health
UBC-Okanagan & Vancouver
Okanagan College
Local Governments (11 of 16)
Central Okanagan Food Policy Council and other Grassroots & Community Groups

What are the next steps? How can I support this?

- Discuss the benefits of an Okanagan bioregional food system with your fellow elected officials, community groups, constituents, and staff.
- Advocate for the project in discussions and decisions around the subject.
- Ensure your organization has endorsed the project and stay involved!

Who can I contact if I have questions or want more information?

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April 23, 2018

