

February 2011

# SITELINES

Landscape Architecture in British Columbia



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Sitelines is published six times per year; February, April, June, August, October, and December by the British Columbia Society of Landscape Architects and is mailed to all BCCLA members, registered landscape architects, associates and affiliates. The editorial deadline is the 8th and advertising is the 16th day of the intervening months. Advertising rate information is available on request. Inquiries regarding editorial, advertising, or other issues should be addressed to the Sitelines Editor, c/o the BCCLA at the above address.

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The purpose of Sitelines is to provide an open forum for the exchange of ideas and information pertaining to the profession of landscape architecture. Individual opinions expressed are those of the writers and not necessarily of those of the BCCLA.

# Death at Courtney Street

By Jonathan Losee, MBCSLA #111

## Farewell my friend.

Your name was *Liriodendron tulipifera* – tulip tree. Your name happily rolled off my tongue. I looked east from my house this morning and saw that you are no longer there in the eastern horizon. Soaring over 80 feet high, you were the tallest thing in our neighbourhood with your chlorophyll laden leaves glowing golden in the fall, filtering the air, cooling the soil below you. Your lofty branches, fractals of life reaching for the sun, home to birds, insects, animals. You will be sorely missed.

Shame to the unimaginative architect unwilling to modify the building to accommodate your roots and lofty branches. Shame to the spineless tree protection bylaw which allowed for your removal without penalty. Shame to the owner who demanded your demise. And shame to the Arborist who's sharp blade pierced your healthy live bark.

A pox upon us all for allowing this unnecessary loss. You were magnificent. **SL**

Images courtesy of Jonathan Losee, MBCSLA #111



Cover Image: Foxglove Farm, Salt Spring Island, BC. Credit: Janine de la Salle, HB Lanarc Consultants Ltd.

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# Artisan Agriculture:

## An Urban Response to Increasing Food Land Potential

*Adapted from: Chapter 8: Artisan Agriculture from de la Salle, Janine, Holland, Mark (2010). Agricultural Urbanism: Handbook for Building Sustainable Food Systems in 21st Century Cities. Green Frigate Books, Halifax Nova Scotia.*

By Janine de la Salle, MA, Food System Planner and Mark Holland, MCIP, LEED® AP, Principal  
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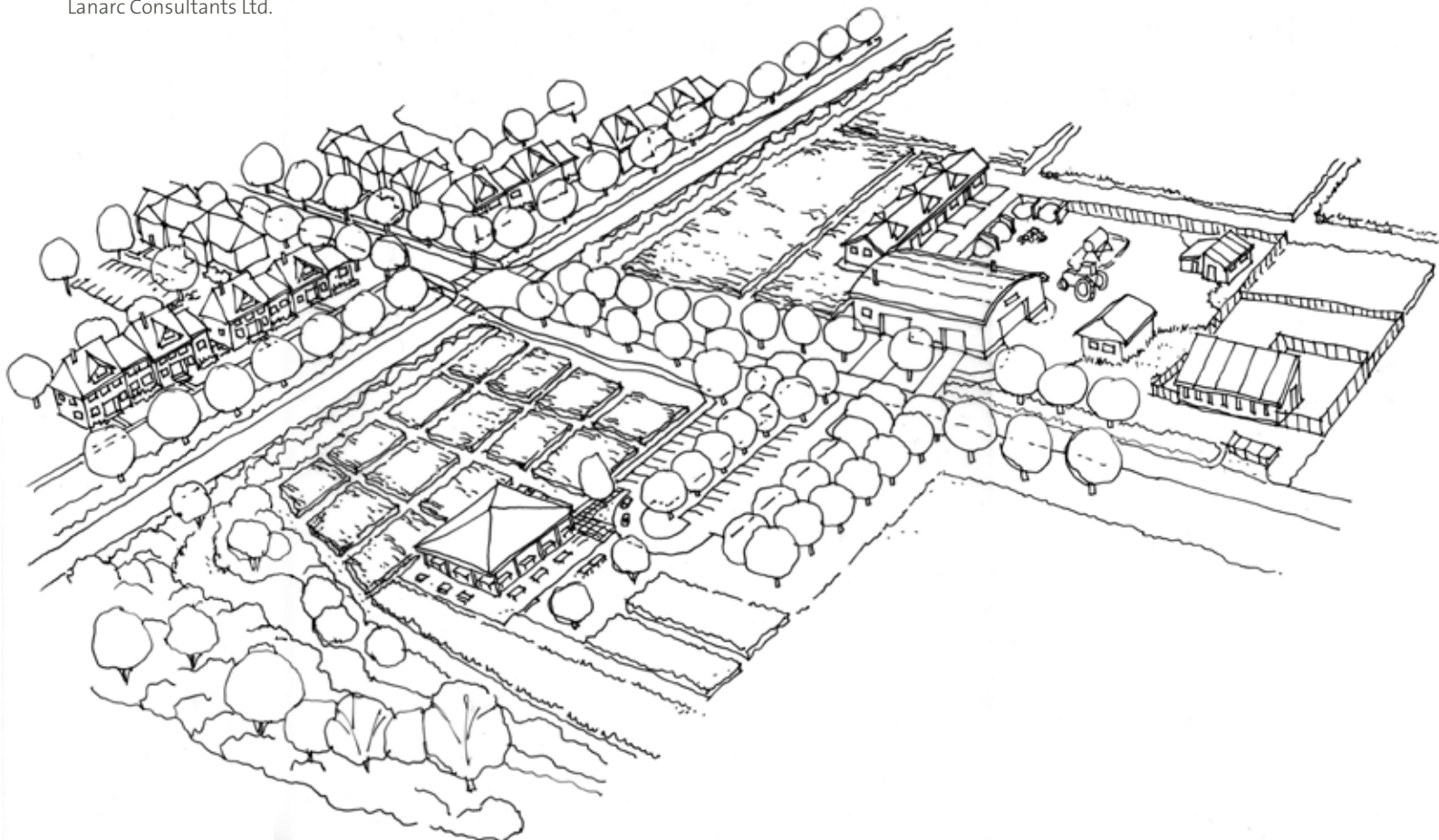
### Foreword

By Donald Crockett, MBCSLA #205:

When I think of the image of the Italian village where high quality and abundant food is forefront in people's daily lives, where central to village life are food celebration and ritual, I can't help thinking that we can do better – live better – than we do in Canada with our increasingly disconnected association with food. The following article will challenge landscape architects on how to better integrate food systems into our daily practice to make our communities great places to live. Mark and Janine have provided a compelling argument and vision for Artisan Agriculture as one component of the Agricultural Urbanism movement. ▶

Artisan agriculture near the residential edge.

Image Credit: Donald Crockett, MBCSLA #205, HB Lanarc Consultants Ltd.





## Artisan Agriculture: An Urban Response to Increasing Food Land Potential

**Easily 75% of the economic value and climate emissions associated with food come after its agricultural production.** The strategies for creating sustainable food systems in a city must take a comprehensive approach and consider the full range of elements of a food system – not just the current favourites of urban agriculture: community gardens and farmers markets. The value in improving the food system moves beyond the production of food into the power of food to be an economic driver, a potent community building agent, and a key opportunity to decrease energy demands. In order to capture these benefits, sustainability in food and agriculture must be approached with a systems perspective, including addressing food processing, packaging, distribution, wholesaling, retailing, restaurants, procurement, education, culture, and food security. It is time for planners and landscape architects to expand their focus on these other aspects of the food system.

Agricultural urbanism refers to movement based on planning cities and neighbourhoods around sustainable food systems. It is an emerging planning, policy, and design framework for integrating a wide range of sustainable food and agriculture system elements into a community at a site-, neighbourhood-, or on a city-wide scale. At its outset, the following principles have been identified for this movement:

1. Address the whole food system – Promote the greatest range possible of the elements of the food system in community planning and design;
2. Foreground the food experience – Make food visible and enhance the experience to the greatest possible range of the food system in the city;
3. Build the local food economy – Build the local and regional food economy through land use planning, education, economic development, and cultural enhancement and celebration;
4. Provide access to food – Provide access to food, including food stores, restaurants, food banks, and others;

5. Promote education on food – Embed education on food in every aspect of urban life – both formally in the school system, and informally wherever people access food;
6. Integrate sustainable food into institutions – Integrate sustainable food systems into all levels of government policy, programs, and institutional mandates;
7. Address food for other species – Incorporate urban habitat into all food production areas wherever possible to maintain a healthy ecosystem;
8. Waste no food – Support and develop the infrastructure and organizations to recover food that might be unnecessarily wasted from wholesalers, retailers, restaurants, and others and channel this food both to the disadvantaged and to composting and nutrient recovery programs;
9. Organize for food – Develop strong partnerships, stewardship groups, collaboration, and overall social capital to support a sustainable urban and regional food system;
10. Develop sustainable infrastructure amongst food systems – Develop innovative energy, water, wastewater, and solid waste management infrastructure and systems integrated with urban food systems.

Agricultural urbanism focuses on making food and agriculture a central part of planning, designing, and living in cities. Conventional agriculture today does not integrate easily into the urban fabric because it requires large areas of farmland, significant industrial-scale barns and machinery, heavy spraying of fertilizers, dust, pesticides, and in some cases, manure. One response to this dilemma has been to create significant buffers between agriculture and human settlement, essentially further separating our cities and the production of the food that sustains them. These buffers, appropriate in many cases, are also being promoted as a partial solution to the ongoing trade-offs between agriculture and habitat. However, conventional buffers tend to sever the physical and psychological connections between people and agriculture.

**In order to capture these benefits, sustainability in food and agriculture must be approached with a systems perspective, including addressing food processing, packaging, distribution, wholesaling, retailing, restaurants, procurement, education, culture, and food security.**

When we begin to pursue the closer integration of farming and cities, we need to envision or articulate an alternative model of farming, termed “artisan agriculture” that will not only survive being in close proximity to homes, but will also actually benefit from that adjacency.

### Artisan Agriculture

Artisan agriculture is a term used here to describe a type of agriculture that is compatible in and around cities. The word “artisan” infers paying close attention to every detail and using advanced skills. In simple terms, the concept of artisan agriculture includes:

- Low-toxicity farming practices. Agro-ecological farming practices with a minimum of toxic pesticides and fertilizers and other sprays are essential for any farming operation adjacent or integrated into neighbourhood areas. This type of farming reduces risk and the need for buffers.
- High-value products. The industrial model of agriculture tends to focus on raw foodstuff as a commodity, with a business model made viable through massive-scale production. The smaller land parcels adjacent to a community require a high-value and/or value-added product focus and the adjacency of an urban market makes this focus feasible.
- Vertically integrated. The focus of artisan agriculture is on finished food products. Many of the value-added steps to transform the raw foodstuff into the final food product occurs on the farm, allowing the farmer to harvest as much of the profit from each step of the food supply chain.



Foxglove Farm, Salt Spring Island, BC.  
Image Credit: Janine de la Salle, HB Lanarc  
Consultants Ltd.

- Land and asset collaboratives. It is common practice for farmers across North America to share ownership of a piece of equipment that they each need but only use once or twice a year. A cluster of urban-edge small, artisan farms can follow this same practice, particularly since the range of equipment and facilities they need for all the steps to create food from agricultural products is quite diverse, and will reduce individual costs and increase financial success.
- Integrated infrastructure. The water, wastewater, energy, and solid-waste management systems of an urban-edge farming operation offer many opportunities to both integrate with urban infrastructure and turn waste into shared resources. Some examples are composting urban food waste for soil amendments, treating urban runoff in ponds and using it for irrigation, and using waste urban heat for greenhouses or buildings.
- Positive community interaction and recreation. Artisan agriculture has a strong business case for connecting urban populations with the sources of their food. In conventional agriculture, there is risk associated with having community members in and around the farm. Artisan agriculture looks to integrate the community into as much of

the farm as possible, because it is through these interactions that the community builds relationships with the farmer. Through these experiences, community members can more readily become the artisan farmer's loyal customers, even though similar food products may be available for less in the supermarket. Farms on the edge of an urban area are part of the visual and experiential open space that is needed to offset the intensity and lack of natural areas that characterize a city. Integrating walking trails and other recreational amenities into urban-edge farms is another way to better connect a community to a farmer. Issues of activity conflicts and legal exposure need to be considered and resolved in some of these situations.

- Farm ecosystem integration. The detailed attention to the design of the multi-faceted artisan farm reflects the conscious integration of habitat into the farm structure, supporting habitat corridors where possible, and paying attention to the needs of birds throughout the year. Not all wildlife is appropriate in a farm, however, and some can cause significant damage. Where possible, wildlife should be integrated carefully.
- A diverse education. The education of a conventional farmer is a hybrid of practices over generations or that of a college or university focused on industrial farming techniques. The education for artisan agriculture covers agro-ecological farming practices and a range of small-business management strategies to support the vertically integrated business opportunities required to succeed. Artisan agricultural approaches may not fit the personality of those farmers who prefer to focus on farming rather than on dealing with the public and on being entrepreneurial with the many spin-offs from their farm.
- Economic diversity. Artisan agriculture mixes agriculture with processing (manufacturing), retail, restaurants, hospitality, agro-tourism, and education. Because of this, artisan agriculture offers significantly greater economic diversity

to a community than does conventional agriculture. While in any individual case, the scale of any given element of these various sectors may be small, with a critical mass of artisan farms, the positive impact on the community could be considerable.

Artisan agriculture has the potential to be a vital part of urban and surrounding areas. It offers benefits to farmers, farmland, local economies, communities, and ecosystems. Some of the advantages of artisan agriculture are:

- Low start-up costs.
- Increased land access for new farmers.
- Farmland protection for farming.
- Improved community interface with agriculture.

## Implementation Strategies

Artisan agriculture may not be appropriate for every farmer, crop, or production. However, it does provide a compelling version of what urban-friendly agriculture might look like. Developing this model of agriculture requires a range of innovation, including:

- Increasing local food-processing, storage, distribution, and marketing capacity.
- Using restrictive and affirmative covenants/easements on the land to protect the land for farming in perpetuity and to ensure appropriate farm practices.
- Developing land-tenure and cooperative ownership agreements so that multiple farmers may operate on a single parcel of land.
- Establishing farm equipment sharing systems to decrease capital investment in farm start-up.
- Integrating artisan agriculture into regional economic development strategies and agricultural plans.
- Re-establishing small-business loan mechanisms within financial institutions.
- Creating incentives, such as ecological goods and services taxes, where the farmer is compensated for protecting and enhancing on-farm habitat. ▶

Implementation of urban-friendly agriculture is also where the design/planning professionals have the largest impact and possibility for innovation. The above strategies can be directly incorporated and considered in the following (high level) ways:

- Site planning that organizes the land use, circulation, etc., as well as the relationship of activities (food processing, packaging, distribution, wholesaling, retailing, restaurants, procurement, education, culture, and food security) to directly support and facilitate artisan agriculture;
- City edge, rural site design, and planning that integrates existing urban edge farming (as opposed to buffer/separation), for example, residential and commercial areas centered, facing, or integrated (open space/trail systems, etc.) with small-scale farm areas and/or related activities;
- Urban site planning that incorporates programming and space requirements for viable small scale farming (available for land lease, etc.) within buildings, rooftops, and/or public open space areas;
- Creating design guidelines that allow for the physical/functional needs and networking of food system elements at the site and building scale, for example, residential guidelines that designate requirements for space/servicing pick up of compost, to facilitate the development of a neighbourhood composting facility nearby;
- Where agriculture is a key component in a community, deliver small scale site design that seeks to celebrate food in general and/or re-introduce agricultural activities as acceptable and necessary practices within our cities and public spaces (design to social shift);

- Small scale site design that seeks to address some of the key challenges/obstacles that have restricted agricultural activities from being integrated into urban/residential areas in the past, for example, waste, noise, odour, etc.

The essence of agricultural urbanism is the integration of the entire food system into cities in a visible and viable manner. Because the dominant model of agriculture in North America at this time uses practices that are incompatible with urban areas, a new model of an urban-edge farm is required. Artisan agriculture is a concept that can offer an alternative to the industrial model of agriculture and can work in many locations to claim the new opportunities that exist around sustainable, urban-edge farming. **SL**



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Gardengate Training Centre, Kamloops, BC.  
Image Credit: Edward Stanford, BCSLA Intern

# RECAPTURING OUR CONNECTION to Local Agriculture

By Dylan Houlihan, Planner, Urban Systems Ltd., Kamloops BC

## **Within the last sixty years, global food infrastructure has developed, matured, and come to dominate the food industry.**

Prior to that time, the majority of food was produced and consumed locally. Backyard gardens were common as was the keeping of chickens and other animals to provide eggs and meats, even within cities. A growing trend towards globalization of the food system as well as increasing regulations on permitted uses on land within cities has led to greater segregation of agricultural activities from more urban land uses. With greater urbanization of populations in the developed world, we have lost our connection to our food supply. Recapturing that connection to our food supply will be challenging. However, due to a confluence of issues such as the fluctuating cost of food, the energy intensity of food systems, the demand for organic food, climate change impacts, and competition for land resources amongst numerous potential uses, the issue of food security is becoming more critical. Instead of letting national and international forces dictate how food is produced and distributed, a growing number of people want to exert greater local control over food systems.

In this context, it is important to recognize some of the potential benefits that localizing food production could have on a community. For instance, the average Canadian household spent approximately \$7300 on food in 2009 (available at: [www.canadiangrocer.com/top-stories/canadians-cut-spending-on-food-during-recession-statscan-2317](http://www.canadiangrocer.com/top-stories/canadians-cut-spending-on-food-during-recession-statscan-2317)). If this was extrapolated to a community of

85,000 people, this would mean spending on food would be over \$230 million, thus representing a substantial market. Localizing a greater portion of the money spent on food could have significant impacts on economic development.

Another benefit accrues in terms of social development and skills diversification. There are numerous examples throughout BC of community groups using local food production activities to promote the social development of people with physical or mental health issues. An example of this is the Gardengate Training Centre in Kamloops (website: [www.theobc.org/leisureservices.htm](http://www.theobc.org/leisureservices.htm)), which provides a range of programs pertaining to the growing and preparing of food and other ancillary skills. This provides skill development for participants in these types of programs while at the same time facilitating the production of food. Skill development need not be limited to those considered disadvantaged, as there are opportunities for people to learn the various skills of small scale agriculture and earn a decent living with proper mentorship.

Promoting local agriculture can lead to a more productive use of land. Many of our communities have vast areas of lawn space in our single family residential neighbourhoods. Often times this is irrigated land that is used almost solely for aesthetic appeal. If we were to consider a 20 acre subdivision, approximately 8 acres of land would be used for outdoor space, a portion of which could be used for agricultural purposes. According

to the SPIN Farming website ([www.spin-farming.com](http://www.spin-farming.com)), using small plot intensive farming techniques can generate revenues of approximately \$50,000 per half acre in urban areas. In the case of a 20 acre subdivision, approximately \$400,000 worth of food could be grown, which is equivalent to the amount spent on food by 54 households. Obviously this scenario assumes maximum utilization and is simplistic, but at the same time it demonstrates the potential if we rethink how we use our land resources.

So how can municipalities encourage the growth of local agriculture? While there are a number of opportunities to facilitate the development of local agriculture, two opportunities worth considering are re-purposing some of the larger public land holdings in communities throughout BC to be used for agricultural purposes; and municipalities developing supportive policies which encourage and promote local food growth.

In most communities in BC, there are two large public landholders - the municipalities themselves who own large portions of land, particularly in the form of parks; and School Districts who also own larger portions of land for schools. In many communities outside of the Lower Mainland, they are facing a similar dilemma - changing demographics, and in particular, an aging population, which is reshaping the demand for parks and schools. In the case of parks, the typical playground equipment and sportsfields, while still necessary for a functioning community, will likely be less in demand in



**...two opportunities worth considering are re-purposing some of the larger public land holdings in communities throughout BC to be used for agricultural purposes; and municipalities developing supportive policies which encourage and promote local food growth.**

the future. School Districts have dealt with the challenge of demographics by closing underutilized schools. Combined, this has left communities with large areas of land that are in need of re-purposing.

The advantage of using parks and closed schools for local agriculture are numerous. First, if market gardening opportunities are to be considered, they offer an economy of scale by being large enough to grow myriad crops while being small enough that large amounts of equipment and labour is not necessary. Second, all schools and many parks have access to community buildings that could be used for programming, education, and value-added services. In the case of closed schools, there may even be kitchens that will enable storage of harvested food and some level of processing as well as gymnasiums and paved outdoor areas that could serve as neighbourhood farmers markets. Third, many of these parks and schools are centrally located. As such they offer great accessibility to potential producers and consumers. Fourth, it offers a positive use of land that is often underutilized and therefore susceptible to nefarious activities. Finally, most schools and parks already have functioning irrigation systems in place which will make watering crops much simpler.

A second way that communities can promote local agriculture is by developing supportive policies. For example, municipalities could encourage developers to include community garden space in their developments, something that the

City of Kamloops mentions in its Sustainable Kamloops Plan (website: [sustainable.kamloops.ca/default.htm](http://sustainable.kamloops.ca/default.htm)). A further opportunity lies in linking the issue of local food to other issues such as water conservation and greenhouse gas emissions reductions. The District of 100 Mile House recently amended its Official Community Plan to include its plan for reducing greenhouse gas emissions. As part of an effort to reduce GHG emissions, the District indicated it would support the development of local agriculture through strategies such as providing community gardens, exploring the feasibility of edible landscaping, etc. Along with OCPs, local food strategies could be woven into bylaws, policies and plans for municipalities such as Subdivision Servicing and Development Bylaws, laneway closure policies, Zoning Bylaws, etc.

Some communities such as Vancouver and Victoria have adopted bylaws permitting keeping backyard chickens, thus allowing an activity that was once fairly common in urban areas. Municipalities can also establish performance based targets around access to community garden space such as the number of plots per capita and/or

ensuring that there are community garden plots within certain distances of existing higher density neighbourhoods.

Reconnecting communities to their food supplies by identifying ways of localizing food systems will be critical to the future long-term liveability of communities. Municipalities can lead this process by leveraging land resources in the community for local food production as well as by supporting local food systems through policy development. By shaping food security as a key component of economic and social development in their communities, municipalities will be in a position to harvest the rewards of strategic investments in local food systems.

*Dylan is a community planner with Urban Systems Ltd. based in Kamloops BC. He has worked on a number of aspects of community sustainability including food security issues. In his spare time, he practices what he preaches by maintaining a garden and raising hens and goats in the rural area of Kamloops. Prior to moving to the "boonies", his family raised chickens in their backyard in the Kamloops core area. SL*

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# How To Plant A Parking Lot: The SOLEfood Urban Farm Raising

By Bryce Gauthier, BCSLA Intern

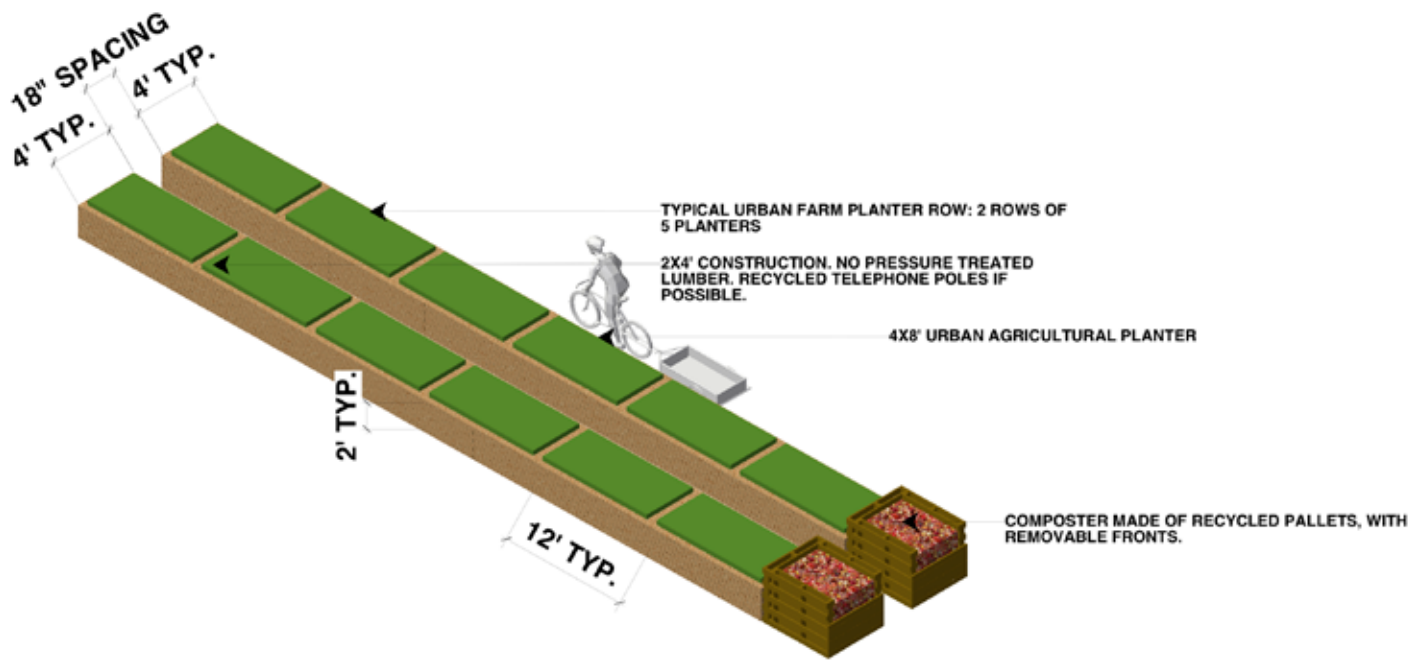


**Last year a dedicated group of volunteers came together to build a very special farm** – on an abandoned parking lot in the Downtown East Side, Vancouver’s so-called “poorest postal code”. Despite the well-documented evidence of blight and neglect, the area is also a dynamic mix of culture, commerce, industry, and history.

SOLEfood is an initiative of United We Can, the acclaimed non-profit, championing economic development opportunities for the area’s poorest residents. The transformation of five empty lots into SOLEfood, proves that there are many positive stories being written about the Downtown East Side. The SOLEfood Urban Farm grew out of a larger vision that green collar job opportunities could bring social, environmental, and economic improvements and offer an alternative to the cycle of welfare and charity dependence that is a fact of life for so many residents. The goal of the farm is to introduce a local source of organic produce to a community that too often sees health and nutrition as a luxury. The farm is being run as a business, providing







## 2 TYPICAL URBAN FARM ROW

part-time jobs for 12 local residents, many of whom have employment barriers, which prevent them from holding a full-time job.

In October of 2009, SOLEfood was just a vision, but a few key events brought the project much closer to reality. A property owner was willing to enter into a five year lease for the farm in exchange for a tax abatement<sup>1</sup>. With a lease in place, Seann Dorry, Sustainability manager for UWC, approached Projects In Place, a volunteer-run, non-profit, composed of architects, planners, landscape architects, and engineers

whose mandate is to help people implement projects that improve communities, with a special emphasis on sustainability, to help with his vision for the farm. By assisting not just in the design, but also the construction process through volunteer build events, Projects In Place helps communities offset costs. In order to meet their grant targets, SOLEfood needed to plant their first crop by the spring of 2010. Meeting this deadline required design, permits, material donations, and construction to be completed prior to the province's tax abatement deadline, which was just three weeks away!

Under tight time constraints, the project team began to whittle away at the many logistical issues and design challenges. The proposed build site, an abandoned parking lot on the corner of East Hastings Street and Hawkes Avenue was entirely paved. Disturbing the pavement would have brought about significant cost and remediation issues, so raised planters were the best option.

Determining the best way to build planter boxes required a balance between available materials, durability, and cost. Compounding these challenges were the realities of any ►



All images courtesy of The Projects in Place Society.

Page 12 Bottom: Pip SOLEfood Urban Farm Perspective.

Page 13 Top: Pip Urban Farm Row.

Page 13 Bottom: Pip SOLEfood Urban Farm Perspective, Looking West.

1. This became a story in itself as the use of tax abatements in exchange for community gardens came under scrutiny in the media. Several stories questioned the benefit to tax payers of removing the properties from the tax base for community gardens. The key difference with SOLEfood is that it is a working farm creating economic opportunity. Unfortunately, several media stories have failed to capture these basic facts.



volunteer build, which necessitated several important compromises. For instance, no power tools were allowed for safety reasons, so construction techniques had to be kept simple. Components had to be easy and quick to assemble, and were often less than preferable materials, because they had been donated. The site plan called for rows of planters (one hundred in all) measuring 4'x14'x2'. The size of the boxes were carefully considered and the final design primarily reflected the most efficient use of lumber and minimal cutting.

Under tight time constraints, the design time whittled away at a range of issues.

- What kind of soil should be used?
- What should the boxes be made of?
- What kind of regulatory testing would be necessary for the food to be sold?
- How much soil can one volunteer move in a day?
- What is the best way to dispose of tons of building material, debris, and several abandoned cars?

A range of people were particularly helpful in addressing these questions. Tom Mckonkie from Eco-Soil Recycling Corporation gave advice on soil; Deborah Foley from BioFert

Manufacturing Inc. provided an invaluable list of contacts in the hydroponic and green house industry; Houston Landscapes donated a work crew; and Micheal Ableman, a renowned practitioner of sustainable agriculture, developed a farm operations plan. David Stoyko, MBCSLA #326, and Randy Sharp, MBCSLA #092, from Sharp & Diamond Landscape Architecture Inc., were invaluable sources of advice and graciously arranged that a portion of my time on the project be donated, allowing me to work on the project during office hours. With an approach that was somewhere between container gardening and traditional farming, our primary challenge was to interpret the advice in a way that suited the project's needs. This process gave way to several issues:

- Building our own soil was preferable, but we didn't have the time. Soil that had been donated lacked the necessary amendments.
- Agriculture experts insisted on a larger soil depth (minimum 600mm) but the cost was prohibitive. Green roof experts suggested drainage barriers and filter fabrics, but those on the agriculture side worried that these materials would become damaged when the soil was turned seasonally.
- The uneven paved surface created ponding and there was discussion about contaminated water leaching up into the planters, so a course of gravel and sand was suggested as a barrier.
- Access issues were addressed by adding a pedestrian access off of East Hastings Street, separate from the vehicular access of the alley.
- Security issues were balanced by retaining the six-foot-high chain link fence, but adding signs, vines, and other elements to welcome the public.

Volunteer builds require time and careful preparation. Being a non-profit with no funding mechanism, Projects In Place depends on young professionals donating their time as Project Coordinators. Kim



Mclymont, a young geography graduate played a vital role in organizing the build event. This experience helped her get a job as a LEED® coordinator with a local engineering firm. This knowledge transfer between the professional realm and the community is a founding principal of Projects In Place, even more important than the actual build itself.

On the day of the first build, volunteers worked in teams to clear and remove debris, assemble planters, build compost bins out of recycled palettes and move soil. Nearly half of the planters were completed, allowing the farm to begin operations and the landlord to qualify for a tax abatement. Work continued in two subsequent builds and by spring the farm was fully operational.

Today SOLEfood continues to grow. The farm just finished its first year, producing more than 10,000 pounds of food, most of which was sold at farmers' markets and local businesses including Au Petit Chavignol, Radha Yoga and Eatery, and the Potluck Café & Catering. Plans have been in the works for some time on a range of other potential sites and every site has had its challenges. Recently, SOLEfood has agreed to lease more



property on East Hastings Street. The catch is that the city owned property will have to be sealed to avoid contamination.

Future challenges include continued expansion of SOLEfood throughout the Downtown East Side, continued staff training, maintaining the productivity of the soil, and continuing to research better urban farming techniques.

One of the more exciting ideas being researched is collecting green waste from local restaurants for compost. Hopefully, everyone involved in SOLEfood will continue to author good news stories from the Downtown East Side.

For more information about SOLEfood, visit [www.projectsinline.org](http://www.projectsinline.org). **SL**

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# Living in a Landscape Designed for Food Sustainability:

## A BCSLA Member Profile

By Andrea Gunner, PAg

Malcom and Wendy at their farm.  
Image Credit: Andrew Cant, High Country Photography

**BCSLA Member Wendy Armstrong-Taylor, #097, had had enough of the hectic city life in 2003**, selling her landscape architecture practice in Vancouver and duplex in Kitsilano and moving with her family to a lovely, rolling 67 acres in the North Okanagan. Wendy and her husband, Malcolm, wanted a more laid back way of life that allowed time for their two young children. Today, Wendy and Malcolm co-manage a thriving certified organic farm that has been producing grain, vegetables, fruit, and cut flowers since 2004. Wendy juggles the high seasonal demands of the farm with a small landscape architecture practice, where she works on a variety of local private and multifamily residential, commercial, and school projects.

### Background

Wendy, originally from Ottawa, was drawn to landscape architecture through a love of art and design tied together with plants and the outdoors. She completed a Diploma in Horticulture and Landscaping from Algonquin College in Ottawa, followed by some time at Emily Carr University of Art + Design and at UBC, registering with the BCSLA in 1981.

Wendy had wanted a farm for many years

and Malcolm, raised on a large sheep station in New Zealand's South Canterbury Plain, was eager to get back to his farming roots. Wendy's love of nature together with her strong interest in health and sustainability have combined well with Malcolm's practical knowledge as they have faced the challenges of renovating their character heritage house and barn, updating and building the necessary outbuildings and infrastructure, and merging sheltered and serene outdoor rooms with practical production utility throughout.

### Evolution

Not only were the farm buildings very run-down when they bought, but the soil had been eroded and depleted and it had an infestation of *Convolvulus arvensis* (European field bindweed), an invasive species which is challenging to control. Wendy and Malcolm made the decision to farm the property organically from the start. This involved learning not only about the vagaries of their mostly light, sandy soil but also about the resident weed population; the effects of summer temperatures on harvest; seasonal precipitation patterns; organic nutrient management through green and animal manures; biological, cultural and

mechanical weed, and organic pest control; and winter hardiness for the perennial flowers Wendy grows.

Wendy's landscape architecture experience has been invaluable in combining art and design with horticulture and soils in planning and growing an ecologically sustainable mix of crops. In addition to the practical production challenges that come from developing a mixed organic farm, Wendy also juggles the seasonal time management challenges of farm production and design deadlines within the family/home office interface. For Wendy, a highly visual person, the height of the bar she has set for herself is often frustrating. Visitors to the farm, however, are enraptured by its beauty and serenity. Wendy's talents have been well employed in enhancing its natural beauty.

Despite the challenges, the Taylors have become quite self-sufficient in a fairly short time. They sell their produce, flowers, and grain through wholesale channels but also direct market through farm gate sales and at local farmers' markets. They produce a good deal of their own food and buy local whenever possible. They have been able to involve their two teenage children every step of the way and especially during the summer,





Hartwood Farm North View.  
Image Credit: Wendy Armstrong-Taylor,  
MBCSLA #097

when both teens help with harvesting and selling at local farmers' markets.

### The Joys Of Working As Both A Landscape Architect And An Organic Farmer

Owning a large piece of land with which to experiment has been a delight. Wendy has developed a practical, hands-on understanding of plants suited to the region which is particularly gratifying and gives her landscape designs a subtle depth and breadth. Okanagan residents are increasingly sensitive to landscape water requirements as a result of years of watering restrictions. Local papers run regular articles for xeriscaping and weekly tips for water conservation. With limits on their own irrigation volume and a fairly light, sandy soil, Wendy's awareness of and need for creative water use has been heightened. As a result, she has developed an in-depth knowledge of drought tolerant plants suitable for the area. The hot, dry summers can take their toll on the aesthetics of a landscape design but embracing the subtle shades and native species brings rewards of beauty with integrity and low maintenance.



### A Current Project Which Ties Both Together

Wendy is working on a local senior's residential project which incorporates a certified organic vegetable/fruit component into the design, ultimately helping to feed the residents. Her knowledge of organic standards will enable her to design a beauti-

ful and practical garden for the residents to enjoy both visually and in the dining room. A perfect match for this 30 year member of the BC Society of Landscape Architects!

You can learn more about Wendy and Malcom's farm by visiting [www.hartwood-northfarm.com](http://www.hartwood-northfarm.com). [SL](#)

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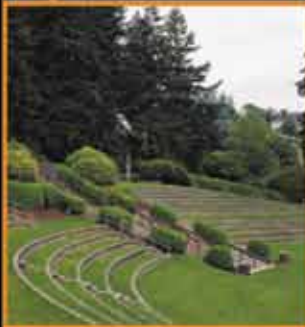
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