

Preface

People care most about what is closest to them. *Nothing* is closer to people than the food they put into their mouths every day. *Nowhere* is closer to people than their own backyard or schoolyard or front boulevard. The growing gap between our immediate world and the distant worlds that feed us is starting to gnaw at people. They see pieces of their lives fraying, and they see how much of that disintegration is related to the food they eat — or don't eat. They see the most primal element of personal survival put into the hands of underpaid foreign workers, a few large corporations, and distant mega-farms and processors dependent on diminishing supplies of cheap oil and water.

North Americans' health care costs, their children's obesity, their own health, their insecurities about the future of oil, water and soil, their uncertainties about climate change, and their anxieties over the loss of agricultural land are all related to accessing quality, affordable, nutritious food from reliable sources. The low-nutrient, low-quality “junk” food so many of us depend on is, literally, killing us. While the threats to our food supply in North America are trivial compared to the billion people elsewhere who go to sleep hungry every night, they're our issues and we must care about them.

The full story on urban food systems can't be told without looking at the corporate farmers and big global flows of food from one continent to the other that are laced with subsidies, floating in oil, and driving smaller farmers into bankruptcy. International treaties, national policies, commodity traders, and the price of tractors will always determine a lot of what we eat and how much we pay for it. This book will touch on that,

but it will look more at what can be done at the local level, ramping up urban and near-urban local food production and distributing it more effectively. That's where the passion is. That's where we feel the wonder and simplicity of growing: "*I just planted this seed in a pot on my balcony and in three months I grew all these tomatoes!*"

What many are calling the "food revolution" is a groundswell of different actions that aims to take more control over the food that we eat. Bringing food production back into our cities and near-urban areas is part of a larger, more widespread urge — sometimes unspoken — to take back more control of our lives. It's a craving identified more than 50 years ago by the architect Frank Lloyd Wright:

"Of all the underlying forces working toward emancipation of the city dweller, the most important is the gradual reawakening of the primitive instincts of the agrarian."¹

And, as Matthew Crawford put it in his recent book, *Shop Class as Soulcraft*: "[The] struggle for individual agency... I find to be at the very center of modern life... Both as workers and as consumers, we feel we move in channels that have been projected from afar by vast impersonal forces. We worry that we are becoming stupider, and begin to wonder if getting an adequate grasp on the world, intellectually, depends on getting a handle on it in some literal and active sense. Some people respond by learning to grow their own vegetables."² Writ large, this is the backbone of the worldwide "food sovereignty" movement, an international campaign to ensure people can exercise their democratic right to control their own food.

As Polyface Farm owner/author Joel Salatin says: "I can't wrap my head around global warming, but I can wrap my head around what I'm going to eat tomorrow."³

This book will look at people like Joel Salatin who are going "past forward" "back to the future" and celebrating messy organic things again. It will show how to pick up what we dropped beside the road to globalization, and how to take it down another road that combines the best of ancient farming wisdom with modern technology and the benefits of international trade.

I am not a farmer or even someone who grew up on a farm, although, like so many other people, some of my forebears were farmers. In my case, it was my great grandfather on my father's side, one of the first European settlers in Ladner, B.C., just south of Vancouver. The town was named after him and his brother. They farmed, and they also started a salmon cannery. I remember my maternal grandmother proudly showing me around her greenhouse in one of the tonier residential areas of Vancouver many years ago — and my mother's story of milking the family cow in that same backyard.

My interest in food systems comes out of a wider interest in changing the ways we live to ensure our children and grandchildren can live healthy and prosperous lives. It's what got me into municipal and regional politics after a career in publishing and journalism.

I've been a gardener all my life, having most recently converted the front lawn of a small lot I bought in Vancouver's Kitsilano neighborhood into a mix of berry bushes, fruit trees, and vegetable plots.

As a city councilor, I was the liaison to the Vancouver Food Policy Council as it struggled to get food issues onto the city's agenda — and into the budget. The city now has a food charter and succeeded in adding 2,010 food-producing community garden plots as a legacy to the 2010 Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games hosted in Vancouver.

As a member of the Metro Vancouver regional board of all the municipalities in our region, I couldn't help thinking that Metro Vancouver had all the ingredients for local food security — protected fertile farmland close to the city, great soils, a mild (for Canada) climate, plenty of water, and a large number of small family farms. It is said to be the most productive intensive agriculture area in Canada. Metro Vancouver now has a food strategy, for the first time. This book came out of my desire to push that agenda, as well as to promote what we and other jurisdictions in North America are doing to deal with the impending world food crisis.

For politicians, there are few decisions that don't have a downside — some group always seems to lose out. Food policy is one of those rarities. Bringing more fresh food production closer to home is an unparalleled win-win-win move. When urban agriculture flourishes, our children

are healthier and smarter about what they eat, fewer people are hungry, more local jobs are created, local economies are stronger, our neighborhoods are greener and safer, and our communities are more inclusive. Everyone ends up smiling.

There are a lot of books written by people who know a lot more than I do about the world food situation, the health impacts of eating the wrong foods, water and fossil fuel shortages, and other mega-trends. There are also a lot of books being written about how to grow your own vegetables, fruit, chickens or bees in myriad small spaces. And there are even more celebrating local cuisine and recipes. What this book hopes to provide is advice to legislators, policy-makers, school officials, community organizers, developers, planners and health advocates about *what they can do to improve access to healthy food for all the people they represent*. What land use policies enable local food production? How do we zone cities to avoid food deserts? How can we make agri-culture part of mainstream culture? Who's getting it right? Eating more locally sourced food definitely feels good, but how do we ground public policy in economic, social and political sense, not just in emotion?

In the locavore spirit, I'll be talking a lot about my own city (Vancouver), my own region (Metro Vancouver), and my own country (Canada). But I'll also draw on my travels and research in other parts of North America and Europe.

Although a lot of the book is about planning cities, planning isn't just for professional planners. We all contribute to city planning by the choices we make every day: how we get to work, where we live, what we are willing to pay for water, and of course, what food we choose to eat or grow. Politicians, citizens, community groups, businesses and developers also shape the cities where most of us now live. If we can all get this right, we will transform our cities and our lives and give new hope to our children and grandchildren.

And when the talk is done, we have to do the dirty work. Let the farmers remind us:

“No amount of policy initiatives and foundation reports will successfully encourage food production in Canada until more people are willing to do the grunt work of farming. Farming these

days is variously dirty, hot, sweaty, boring, menial, messy, wet, cold, frustrating and dirtier still. And that's when things are going well. Policy-makers would be more helpful to farmers if they got out from behind their desks, rolled up their sleeves, and helped with the work. The notion of delegating the workload, be it with chemicals, fancy machinery or migrant workers, is a tired initiative of the 20th century. A new generation of farmers, whether they're 18 or 80, knows that the future of successful food-growing is in the soil.⁴