

A Few Words on Food Security

Whether it's a generalization or not, there are a few things that set Canadians apart from residents of other nations. (No, I'm not talking about hockey fever, although there's that too!)

We seem to be fascinated with weather. We talk about it, forecast it, grumble about it, and marvel at it. Take note of how often talk of weather comes up -- even in casual conversations with folks you don't know too well.

Living in Trout Creek, we walk our dog twice a day along the creek, either towards Okanagan Lake or, on the west side of Highway 97 away from the lake. In the last two weeks, one cannot help but notice how the Creek has changed from a 'bubbling brook' to a 'rushing river'.

Even before the spring runoff began locally, however, I had a brief conversation with a fellow dog walker. Of course, talk of the weather came up -- at that time a brief discussion on the struggle Manitobans and Midwest Americans were facing as they dealt with record flooding. A casual statement near the end of our meeting has me thinking: "Even though I feel for these people, I'm glad we live in the Okanagan and are not really affected by what's happening elsewhere. "

No? I beg to differ.

If prime agricultural areas in North America are under water, how does this affect our food availability? Anyone who has wheat or corn gluten sensitivities knows how pervasive wheat and corn are in the products we buy, especially processed ones.

Daily we hear and share comments on how cool and rainy the spring has been. Not just in the Okanagan, but provincially and nationally as well. If farmers, large and small, are not able to sow crops or harvest them in time to avoid frost, what happens then?

The farmers bear the brunt of the hardship but the weather affects those of us who depend on them for not only a steady food supply, but a steady diet of 'cheap' (read 'undervalued') products.

Combine the weather with rising fuel costs and increased food production costs and I'm pretty sure you'll get the picture. It's worth talking about and much, much more detailed than what can be written in even a series of columns.

It's not just doom and gloom though. There are things we can do. The trend toward high intensity gardening such as square foot gardening and containerized gardening gives everyone the opportunity to grow at least a portion of their own vegetables, fruits and herbs.

SPIN gardening, community gardens and food cooperatives help create community as well as provide fresh, 'cide-free produce to many.

We can patronize farmers' markets or remove lawn and install a vegetable garden or permascape (ornamentals and edibles). Purchase fresh, local produce from established or roadside produce stands. Try a 'pick your own' experience this summer.

Too much harvest at one time? Share with your neighbours or check with your local food bank. SADI (Summerland Asset Development Initiative) has volunteers pick surplus fruit that would otherwise go to waste. The fruit is shared between the volunteers, tree owners and charitable organizations.

Try preserving surplus harvest by canning, freezing, dehydrating, or juicing it. Some products do well in a root cellar or cold storage space, others will overwinter in the ground. If you don't have the skills or knowledge to preserve food, learn how. Or maybe there are others that will do it for you.

Chat with your friends and neighbours about food security. What are you waiting for... a change in the weather?

Toni Boot is the founder and owner of Grasslands Nursery in Summerland, a nursery specializing in sustainable gardening. Comments and suggestions for future Water Wisdom columns may be directed to her at grassnursery@telus.net. Visit www.grasslandsnursery.ca to join our blog discussion.