

# Summit 2023: Action Lab Workshops

## Backgrounder | Regional Food Security

Since time immemorial, humans have fed themselves and their families here on the lands, coastlines and waters of the region now called Vancouver Island. Indigenous Elders, in conversations with researcher Nancy Turner, describe the many connections to the natural environment that sustain and nourish communities over generations: When the salal on the land reaches a certain height, for example, you know the kelp off the shores is ready to be harvested.

In the waning days of 2023, it's clearly time to make more connections.

We know this is a time of global volatility and uncertainty, when supply chains linking the food on our tables stretch beyond the horizon and monthly budget lines for groceries seem to as well. Seventy-five years ago, 85 per cent of the food eaten here was grown and produced on the islands. Today, more than 90 per cent of food products are imported, and it is estimated most communities have less than three days of sustenance if worst-case scenarios combine and cascade. When we talk about food security — everyone having safe, culturally acceptable, and nutritional food — we have to remember that about 10 per cent of people here currently do not have the means to access healthy meals.

At this Action Lab, we're going to talk about those challenges and then explore solutions for the interconnected issues of food production, distribution, and accessibility. Leaders and knowledge keepers from a variety of sectors and perspectives will share their expertise and experiences. Attendees will have a role to play as we move together toward identifying actions that the Vancouver Island Economic Alliance can pick up and carry in the coming months. A year from now, we'll gather again to discuss the results and identify next steps.

Here are several questions to think about as you make your way toward this Action Lab: What is working now and how can those success stories be shared and expanded? What are the barriers and obstacles getting in the way of these complex systems working better? And what concrete steps can be taken to improve food security and the economic resilience and health of island communities?