

**Title:**

The Farmlands Trust (Greater Victoria) Society: Agricultural stewardship at Newman Farm

*This case study aligns with the Teaching Guide on Food Systems chapters focusing on access to healthy food, and in particular, maintaining farms now and for the future.*

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**Issue:**

The Greater Victoria region on southern Vancouver Island in British Columbia (BC), Canada is comprised of 13 municipalities. According to the 2016 Canadian census, the Greater Victoria region's combined population is 367,770. The Canadian census ranks Greater Victoria as the 15<sup>th</sup> largest metropolitan area in Canada, by population - with a geographic area spanning 268.79 square miles (696.15 kilometers).

Linking farmland, food and community in the Greater Victoria region continue to be issues of importance to farmers, citizens at large, and political decision-makers due to climate change, the decline in local food production, and "farmlessness" from urban encroachment and the high price of farmland. Also, health and socio-economic challenges such as poverty and food insecurity are often concurrent needs that require collaborative-based strategies to aid marginalized populations in the Greater Victoria region (e.g., homeless and vulnerably housed populations with multiple barriers related to mental health, physical health, and employment).

In recognition of the above issues, The Farmlands Trust (Greater Victoria) Society [FLT Society] was established as a charitable not-for-profit organization based in Saanichton, BC, Canada.<sup>1</sup> The organization's mission is to enhance farming capacity in the Greater Victoria area by protecting local farmland, protecting eco-sensitive and culturally special areas, producing food for those in need, providing relevant educational opportunities, promoting the economic viability of farmland, and providing community access and public awareness programs. From 2012 to present, the FLT Society has been gradually returning the 100 year old historic Newman Farm in Saanichton to active agricultural uses.

Overall, the FLT Society supports a holistic approach to sustainable farming. The following are the FLT Society's organizational values:

- *honor heritage*—connect with and respect Greater Victoria farming heritage and wisdom from previous generations;

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<sup>1</sup>Saanichton is one of the neighbourhoods in the District of Central Saanich. Central Saanich is a member municipality in the Greater Victoria region. It is located on the Saanich Peninsula. Often deemed the "breadbasket" of Vancouver Island, the District of Central Saanich's history is rooted in farming (e.g., hobby farms, small working farms, and vineyards) – with 185 active farms in the area. In recent decades, the municipality has seen increases in residential, commercial, and industrial development. Approximately 16,000 people reside in the District of Central Saanich.

- *build relationships*—develop strategic working relationships with farmers, governments, First Nations, business, non-governmental organizations, academia, charitable organizations and the broader community in a manner that fosters mutual respect and embraces diversity of opinions/approaches;
- *harmonize First Nations interests*—engage with local First Nations in a manner that respectfully brings together both First Nations and western approaches to food security in Greater Victoria;
- *grow good food*—support the economic viability of farmlands in a manner that respects the humane treatment of animals, biodiversity of the soil and produces food that promotes good health;
- *embrace stewardship*—protect eco-sensitive areas and habitats surrounding Greater Victoria farms by considering the highest and best uses for both the land and the community; and
- *charity*—provide a venue for persons in need in society to function in a supportive atmosphere of trust and appreciation, while learning new skills.

### Steps Taken:

2008-2012:

The FLT Society was founded as a not-for-profit society under the provincial *Society Act* on March 18, 2008. The FLT Society was originally established to enhance the farming capability of Mt. Newton Valley (in Saanichton, BC, Canada), rehabilitate the stream ecology of Hagan Creek, and create a community trail system.

The FLT Society expanded the geographic and social scope to cover all of the peoples, farmland and adjacent corridors of Greater Victoria with an emphasis on collaboration, farmland management, and outreach to meet the community needs amongst marginalized populations in society.

The FLT Society obtained federal charitable tax status which provided the organization with enhanced funding opportunities to “grow” community-driven initiatives in Greater Victoria.

Spring 2012:

The FLT Society and District of Central Saanich formalized its working relationship through a signing of a Letter of Understanding to serve as stewards of the historic Newman Farm in Central Saanich.

The FLT Society coordinated a farmer/land match between a local farmer (Ian Paul) and land owners (the Lalari family) leading to the creation of Beetnik Farm in Central Saanich.

The FLT Society designated Carol Pickup as the inaugural FLT Society Patron in recognition of her work as a regional champion in sustainable growth and community development. Also, the FLT Society recognized Barbara Souther as the FLT Society Founder acknowledging her pivotal role as the initial “architect” in the creation of the Society.

Summer 2012:

The FLT Society collaborated with the former Local Environmental Action Divas (LEAD) to support the Stop Fruit Drop Program which coordinated land/homeowners with volunteers (from LEAD and the FLT Society) to harvest fruits on properties in and adjacent to the Saanich Peninsula.

- Fall 2012: The FLT Society made a capital improvement to Newman Farm by installing a water line in readiness for the 2013 inaugural growing season.
- Spring 2013: The FLT Society developed a management plan for Newman Farm, honoring the history of Newman Farm while integrating current farming practices on this property.
- The FLT Society commenced the inaugural growing season at Newman Farm which led to the “field to plate” initiative where the FLT Society grows, harvests and shares local vegetables with those in need at Our Place Society<sup>2</sup>.
- Spring 2014: The FLT Society installed deer fencing to protect the Newman Farm vegetable garden plot for the “field to plate” initiative with Our Place Society.
- The FLT Society signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Seaward Farm to operate a small scale sheep farm on a designated portion of Newman Farm. The memorandum was renewed in 2016 for another three years.
- Spring 2015: The FLT Society published the *Resource Guide for Beginning Small Scale Organic Farmers in the Greater Victoria Region*. This Guide (available in hard copy and digital format) is intended for individuals who are interested in building their own small scale organic farm operation.
- Fall 2015: The FLT Society formalized a 10-year (pro bono) license agreement with the District of Central Saanich regarding the agricultural stewardship of Newman Farm.
- The FLT Society planted hedgerow on Newman Farm via Bartlett Tree Services. The purpose of the hedgerow was to provide year-round wildlife habitat along designated areas of Newman Farm<sup>3</sup>.
- In recognition of the important role that trees play in aesthetics, air quality, soil and water conservation and protection of the environment, the FLT Society worked alongside the District of Central Saanich, Central Saanich Lions Club and Tree Canada on Tree Appreciation Day – planting trees and native shrubs at Newman Farm.
- 2016-2017: The FLT Society set up six raised garden beds to expand the customized menu of food options to share with individuals in need within the Greater Victoria area.
- Spring 2017: The FLT Society planted sunflowers, wildflowers, buckwheat and clover to support pollination activity at Newman Farm and the surrounding area. The FLT Society is a member of the Island Pollinator Initiative<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Our Place Society is a drop-in centre for marginalized citizens in the Greater Victoria region – typically, homeless and vulnerably housed populations with multiple barriers related to mental health, physical health and employment. The Society operates a meal service, provides transitional residential accommodation for low income people, provides job and skills development and training to relieve poverty, and educates the public about needs of persons effected by poverty, disabilities and addictions.

<sup>3</sup> Over half of the bird species typically found on a piece of farmland can be attributed to hedgerows, even though the hedges may comprise only a small portion of the available habitat. Other benefits of hedgerows include, but are not limited to, providing habitat for diverse bird populations and beneficial insects (e.g., bumblebees), creating microclimates to improve field productivity, and acting as wind barriers and preventing soil erosion.

<sup>4</sup> The Island Pollinator Initiative facilitates collaboration, event and information sharing, outreach and action to promote the protection of native and managed pollinators on Vancouver Island and the Gulf Islands.

Members of the Pacific Regional Soil Science Society had a field trip to Newman Farm to study the soils at the property.

Dr. Lenore Newman was appointed the new FLT Society Patron. Dr. Newman is a descendant of the Newman family who bequeathed their farm property to the District of Central Saanich. Lenore is a Canada Research Chair in Food Security and Environment at the University of the Fraser Valley, specializing in local food sovereignty and agricultural land use.

In 2018, the FLT Society will be planting fruit trees and shrubs at Newman Farm (courtesy of the Good Food Network) which provides another food source that the organization can grow, maintain and share with Greater Victoria families in need.

### **Measurable Results:**

From 2013 to present, the FLT Society led the “field to plate” initiative at Newman Farm. In 2017, the FLT Society grew, harvested and shared local vegetables with those in need at Our Place Society which totalled 15,830 lbs. (a variety of squash, beets, corn, apples, plums, onions, garlic, carrots, pumpkins, and pears) and equated to \$32,373.75 (CDN). In 2016, the FLT Society gave \$16,005 (CDN) worth of produce to Our Place Society for this initiative (which equates to 7,580 lbs. of produce). In 2015, the FLT Society gave \$4,900 (CDN) worth of produce to Our Place Society for this initiative (which equated to 2,400 lbs. of produce). In 2014, the FLT Society gave \$7,005 (CDN) worth of produce to Our Place Society equating to 3,500 lbs. of produce.

In collaboration with Our Place Society, the FLT Society provides fresh, locally grown produce from Newman Farm to Our Place Society's Food Services Department where they serve approximately 1,500 meals a day to vulnerable adults (mostly homeless and poverty-stricken individuals with multiple barriers) in the Greater Victoria area. To date, the FLT Society via the “field to plate” initiative has shared over 29,280+ lbs. of produce with Our Place Society – linking food production with a local homeless shelter and soup kitchen to aid in relieving poverty and mitigating food insecurity for marginalized populations.

At present, the FLT Society has five volunteer board members, one honorary Patron, one honorary Founder, two volunteer community advisors, one Newman Farm volunteer-at-large, one contracted farm manager, and one contracted webmaster. On average, six to 10 volunteers from the Greater Victoria area assist at each of the scheduled work parties that occur throughout the annual farm season.

### **Lessons Learned:**

**Good governance** is imperative to designing and implementing effective community-based initiatives. The FLT Society is operated by a Board of Directors comprised of Greater Victoria community members who have a diverse array of experience, knowledge, skills and abilities that enrich the planning and implementation of farmland preservation and local food security activities. The FLT Society Board of Directors also receives support from the FLT Society patron, founder and community advisors. In 2016, the FLT Society contracted for farm management services at Newman Farm. The FLT Society Board formally meets six to eight times a year providing strategic direction on the community, financial, operations, and governance dimensions of sustaining the FLT Society as a charitable not-for-profit organization.

Drawing on the FLT Society Board's respective community relationships, skills and expertise, the Society reports on its organizational performance and related deliverables to the District of Central Saanich and funders on an annual basis. These are effective practices for advancing the overall mandate of the FLT Society now and into the future. Transparency, program management, and performance measurement are fundamental building blocks for successful organizational development, particularly for not-for-profit charities in Canada.

The **FLT Society Board annually reviews its strategic plan** and measures its progress in achieving the vision and delivering on the mission and associated goals. When necessary, this working document will be modified to ensure that it remains applicable to serving the needs of the community in a charitable fashion.

**Partnerships and collaborations** are also major pillars sustaining the organization and advancing relevant initiatives in Greater Victoria, particularly in relation to farmland preservation and protection of local food security. In addition to sharing local produce with Our Place Society, the FLT Society continues to work with the Victoria Therapeutic Riding Association, sharing locally grown feeding apples and carrots from Newman Farm to support the young riders in strengthening the therapeutic relationship (as part of the equine therapy) and bonding between the riders and their horses. The FLT Society also participates in various regional ceremonies, festivals and conferences (e.g., Farmer2Farmer Conference, Island Chef Survival, Tsawout First Nation community garden blessing ceremony, Tsawout Seafood Festival, and Seedy Saturday).

Finally, **community engagement and strategic communications** via our email distribution list, mainstream media and social media presence, and annual presentations and guided tours/walkabouts extend awareness and knowledge about the FLT Society and its contributions to preserving farmland, relieving poverty, and protecting local food security in the Greater Victoria area.

**Follow up information:**

For more information, visit the FLT Society website: [www.farmlandtrust.org](http://www.farmlandtrust.org). You can also reach the FLT Society Board of Directors by email at [farmlandtrust@gmail.com](mailto:farmlandtrust@gmail.com).

A copy of the 2007 *Newman Farm master plan study* can be found at [https://www.centrialsaanich.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/documents/newman\\_farm\\_master\\_plan.pdf](https://www.centrialsaanich.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/documents/newman_farm_master_plan.pdf)