

## **UBC Farm: Future imperfect?**

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You might know about the University of B.C. Farm through its Saturday farm market that runs from June to October. Most of the 200-plus varieties of fruits and vegetables for sale are grown right on campus.

Or you might have bought organic eggs from the farm or attended a gourmet food event hosted by volunteers such as Standing In The Field or you might have tickets for the extravaganza Feast of Fields happening on the grounds this Sunday.

You might have had a close-up encounter on a farm tour or, unbeknownst to you, eaten some UBC produce at one of the restaurants it supplies, like Provence Mediterranean Grill. On the other hand, you might be one of the 350 volunteers involved in one of the 100-plus projects, research and otherwise, taking place at the farm.

Fourteen faculties and colleges out of 26 use the farm in some way, says Mark Bomford, director of the UBC Farm. "It spans the sciences to the arts, engaging people in every discipline because all have a growing recognition of how fundamental food issues are, how they're linked together."

That's why supporters of the UBC Farm are biting their nails at the moment. UBC is currently undergoing a review of the farm's place in the university and will be asking for public input this fall. Both uncultivated and cultivated areas of the farm (some 24 hectares in total) are classified as "future housing reserve" in the official community plan: "Obviously that, as well as interest in developing neighbourhood areas, has led to well-placed concerns that housing is what will happen," Bomford says.

Supporters are taking to cooking and petitioning and exhibiting. The principals of Farmstead Wines and Barbara-Jo's Books To Cooks launched an online auction website offering a home-cooked dinner for eight. On Sept. 20, six top-flight Vancouver restaurants (West, Gastropod, Cru, Fuel, Chow, La Quercia) will hold a fundraising dinner to preserve the farm in its current size and location.

Seven artists have installed an outdoor exhibit called Prayer Flags for UBC Farm, evoking the Tibetan tradition of hanging prayer flags to carry prayers to the wind. As well, Friends of the Farm have initiated an online petition to save the farm.

Stephen Owen, vice-president of external, legal and community relations at UBC, assures supporters that there will be a UBC Farm. "No question," he says.

He does say, however, that the farm might change in size and be located elsewhere on the campus.

An independent technical report recommends increasing the current 4.5 hectares of cultivated area to just more than double the size. But about 10 hectares is forest, which farm supporters want to see retained. Owen says any decision on the forest is not imminent for "at least 10 years."

Some of the 100-plus projects at the farm include breeding poultry particularly suited for organic production; improving compost performance; testing mulches for blueberry growers to reduce nitrate leaching from fertilizers; establishing a demonstration truffle (the mushroom kind) grove; growing new and heritage crops; growing native medicinal plants; and establishing the Downtown Eastside Aboriginal Community Kitchen Garden Project to provide fresh produce and a garden for the disadvantaged.

In other projects, volunteers constructed a sustainable "cob" building from sand, clay and straw and set up four honeybee hives for pollination, honey, beeswax and education.

The UBC Farm is part of the faculty of land and food systems, replacing the agriculture faculty of yesteryear.

"It's important to everybody," says Bomford. "It is one of the only remaining connections we have between urbanites and the source of food they depend upon. It's a teaching tool for all ages and provides a valuable research function.

"Food affects everybody. There's a growing body of research concerning the effects of large food systems on global, social, economic levels. It's increasingly important for the urban population to recognize responsibilities."

Climate change, the future and cost of energy, food scarcity and food security are players in our food systems, and since the UBC catchment area includes one in four British Columbians, "we're well-positioned to bring large numbers of people to understand how food is produced, the resources it takes and the environmental impacts associated with that," he says.

"Programs have been growing at such a tremendous rate over the last eight years that what we're doing today is not likely representative of what we'll be doing tomorrow."

The review process will look at how best to use the University Endowment Lands according to its three-fold mission, Owen says. "Those are research, teaching and service. Where the farm fits is in service."

A series of meetings, workshops and open houses will be held from mid- to late October, he says.

(Information will be posted on [www.campusplan.ubc.ca](http://www.campusplan.ubc.ca).)

"The idea is to put out a number of scenarios that the public can respond to. It will probably end in summer 2009, with recommendations to the board of governors," Owen says.

He acknowledges the importance of food issues. "They will be seriously considered.

"A lot of research goes into sustainability issues and UBC is a North American leader and the farm is important to that research.

"Whatever happens in that area, it will conform to the best practices of sustainability, globally. I've been in discussions with Friends of the Farm, graduate students, faculty and community members and it's seen as a terrific resource. We're proud of it."

He thinks it's unfortunate that in an earlier official community plan, the farm area was labelled as "future housing reserve."

"It's unfortunate terminology because it may not be for housing at all," he says.

"There will be a farm although the size may change and it might not be exactly where the cultivated area is right now. If it's slightly changed, it will be because it's more appropriate and the cultivated area will be bigger than it is now.

"The current plans for housing are in other parts of the campus. Right now, it's not on the 24 hectares."

But Bomford still worries. "We have support from senior levels, but nothing in the way of commitment as to what [the farm] would look like, how large and how reconfigured."

mstainsby@vancouver.sun.com

## HEALTHY RECIPES FROM THE UBC FARM MARKET

Students from a food, nutrition and health class from the UBC land and food systems faculty created recipes using seasonal ingredients from the UBC Farm. These were two of their healthy recipes which they offered at the weekly UBC Farm market alongside the ingredients.

### SPAGHETTI WITH CHERRY TOMATOES, CHILI AND BASIL

1 pound dried spaghetti

3 cups UBC Farm cherry tomatoes, cut into quarters

1 clove UBC Farm garlic, thinly sliced

1 hai chili, seeds removed and finely chopped

1/2 cup extra virgin olive oil

1/4 cup chopped fresh UBC Farm basil

1/4 cup grated parmesan

Place cherry tomatoes, garlic, chili and olive oil in a mixing bowl. Cook spaghetti in boiling salted water until al dente. Strain pasta and place in bowl with other ingredients. Toss with parmesan and fresh basil. Serve immediately.

Makes 4 servings.

## RECIPES FROM A RUSTIC FARM FRESH PICNIC

In August, UBC Farm and Provence Mediterranean Grill collaborated on a food event, Farm Fresh Picnic. Provence (4473 West 10th Ave.) provided the picnic baskets of food highlighting UBC Farm-grown ingredients; guests picked up their dinners at the restaurant and proceeded to al fresco dining at the farm.

"It was very rustic and everyone kept saying this is like a real Provencal dinner," said restaurant co-owner Alessandra Quaglia. She and chef Essex Balce work closely with the farm and take regular deliveries from them, she said. "I've taken all my staff there and they get a chance to see what they're cooking with first-hand and tell customers, who love knowing it's from the UBC Farm, less than a kilometre away from the restaurant."

Here is one of the recipes she and Balce created for the event.

## BUFFALO MOZZARELLA WITH CHERRY TOMATO AND HERB CITRONETTE

2 125-gram buffalo mozzarella

20 cherry tomatoes (multi-coloured if available) cut in half

1/2 cup mixed fresh herbs such as dill, oregano, fennel, parsley, savory, sage, mint

Juice of one lemon

1/4 cup extra virgin olive oil

Cracked peppercorns

Fleur de sel

Salt and pepper

4 cups mixed greens

Crema di balsamic (reduced balsamic vinegar), optional

Slice each piece of mozzarella into 8 thin slices. Divide evenly onto 4 plates. In a bowl, mix together herbs, tomatoes, lemon and olive oil. Season with salt and pepper. Spoon tomatoes slightly in front of cheese and drizzle remaining juice around each plate. Season cheese with cracked peppercorns and fleur de sel. Drizzle a little extra virgin olive oil over the greens and serve on the side. For a little added flavour drizzle a little crema di balsamic around the plate.

## ITALIAN BROCCOLI WITH TOMATOES

4 cups UBC Farm broccoli florets

1/2 cup water

2 medium UBC Farm tomatoes, cut into wedges

1/2 teaspoon dried Italian seasoning

1/2 teaspoon dried parsley flakes

1/4 teaspoon salt (optional)

1/8 teaspoon black pepper

1/2 cup shredded part-skim mozzarella cheese

Place broccoli and water in 2-quart microwaveable casserole; cover. Microwave on high, 5 to 8 minutes or until crisp-tender. Drain. Stir in tomatoes, Italian seasoning, parsley, salt and pepper. Microwave, uncovered, on high, 2 to 4 minutes or until tomatoes are hot. Sprinkle with cheese. Microwave 1 minute or until cheese melts.

Makes 6 servings

Credit: Mia Stainsby; Vancouver Sun