Celebrating 20 Years of
THE UBC FARM
ANNIVERSARY REPORT
2001-2021
The Centre for Sustainable Food Systems at UBC Farm is a teaching and research centre and local-to-global food hub working towards a more sustainable, food secure future. Located on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory of the hən̓q̓əmin̓əm̓-speaking xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam) people, the UBC Farm continues the long xʷməθkʷəy̓əm tradition of learning and harvesting on these lands. UBC students started growing food here in the late 1990s – with the Tal A’xin: Maya in Exile Garden established in 2000 – while it was in 2001 that students first started selling produce at the newly dubbed UBC Farm. Housed under the Faculty of Land and Food Systems, the UBC Farm has thrived for 20 years thanks to the UBC students, faculty and staff who launched the petition and gathered for the Great Farm Trek in 2009 to demonstrate the need for a dedicated site for food systems learning, research, and food cultivation at UBC.
The Centre for Sustainable Food Systems was established 10 years ago to further this aim, with a vision to spur innovation from field to fork to achieve resilient, thriving, and socially just food systems for all. The CSFS supports collaborative research, teaching and learning opportunities for UBC students, faculty, and staff as well as local and international academic and community partners. CSFS members work on the development of innovations in agroecosystem management for food security and ecosystem services, while honouring, respecting, and protecting diverse ecosystems and knowledge pathways within Indigenous and agrarian food systems.

Situated within a 90-year-old coastal hemlock forest, the 24-hectare UBC Farm has grown to become a key part of UBC’s agroecology research and education as well as an important Vancouver food hub. A place of learning for students, researchers, and the neighbouring community, the UBC Farm features cultivated annual crop fields, perennial hedgerows and orchards, pasture, Indigenous-led gardens, and forest stands – cultivating over 200 varieties of fruits, vegetables, and herbs, as well as honey beehives and egg-laying, pasture-raised hens.

We wish to thank our dedicated faculty and community members, staff, students, and volunteers, as well as our donors and research funders, for their passion and hard work. And we express special appreciation to those who were there from the very beginning: It’s thanks to you that we are here 20 years later.
Message from the DEAN & ACADEMIC DIRECTOR

The UBC Farm is a jewel for the university community and the community at large. I’m proud to serve as interim academic director during the UBC Farm’s 20th anniversary year and the 10th anniversary of its academic unit, the Centre for Sustainable Food Systems (CSFS).

A unique learning space, the UBC Farm and CSFS bring together leading agroecological researchers, citizen scientists, food systems entrepreneurs, students, and youth in the community. The innovations taking place, and the learnings shared, benefit not only those involved today but also future generations.

The UBC Farm started in 2001 thanks to the will of students who demanded the university create space for agricultural initiatives as many campus-based agricultural programs had been wound down during the 1990s. In 2001, the first UBC Farm produce was sold, and since that time, the site has grown to become an important hub.

The UBC Farm pushes the boundary of agroecological science, farm management, and food resiliency. Global research linkages are taking place through the CSFS research associates in their individual research projects, as well as through the UBC Research Excellence Cluster for Diversified Agroecosystems. Locally, research collaborations take place through important partnerships with farm producers.

Place is important and the 24-hectare UBC Farm is located on the unceded ancestral territory of the Musqueam people. Three Indigenous initiatives at the Farm honour land-based traditions, foster a sense of community, and teach Indigenous culture, including the interdependencies of land, water, medicine and food.

A place for learning, students are provided an opportunity to get involved in the food system by volunteering, conducting research and taking courses on-site. Through its community programming, the UBC Farm fosters food literacy and supports the local network of food systems entrepreneurs.

This last year with COVID-19 has been challenging and we put hundreds of programs on hold in 2020. We are looking forward to welcoming people in person as we begin re-activating events in the coming years.

At the Faculty of Land and Food Systems, the UBC Farm and the CSFS play an important role in helping achieve our vision of balancing our food system and planetary health to create a better world. In the next 20 years, I’m excited to see the UBC Farm share and seed innovations with its collaborators, and find ways to achieve a resilient, thriving and socially just food system.

Rickey Yada
Interim Academic Director, CSFS and UBC Farm
Dean and Professor, Faculty of Land and Food Systems
Welcome to our big anniversary year! I feel very privileged to be guiding operations at the UBC Farm and the CSFS as we mark these important milestones: reflecting on the past, appreciating our present, and planning (as best we can) for a future in which sustainable food solutions will be critical.

Last year was a challenging time for all of us with the realities of COVID-19. As a space of experiential learning, it was difficult for the UBC Farm to safely bring students and community together as we have for over 20 years: while we were able to continue cultivating and distributing food as an essential service, the UBC Farm was closed to the public, events were cancelled and in-person teaching stopped. Our flagship training program for emergent farmers, the Practicum in Sustainable Agriculture, would have marked its 12th season: instead, the program was cancelled as we could not risk the health and safety of our students and staff.

The pandemic’s silver lining highlighted the resilience of the CSFS and UBC Farm, where staff and faculty quickly pivoted to move programs, classes and events online, including the launch of a successful webinar series, food skills workshops and the Feeding Growth workshop series. Children and youth programs went ahead in partnership with UBC Recreation, with clear yet creative safety protocols: pool-noodles doubled as physical distancing tools!

Critically, the CSFS team ensured safe continuation of research projects, with multiple researchers taking advantage of our COVID-safe outdoor “lab”. Indigenous community access was supported, with the Musqueam garden seeing a robust revival, while we supported a thriving growing and market season with the continuation of the UBC Farm Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) and Farmers’ Markets.

As we move past the worst of the pandemic, I know that we could not have accomplished all that we did without the resiliency, flexibility and dedication of our team of staff, faculty, students, volunteers, donors and community supporters – many of whom worked and engaged exclusively from home – thank you!

While COVID has us all longing to go back to “normal”, my hope is we approach this global pause as an opportunity to tackle systemic crises such as inequity, injustice, racism and climate change. As we envision a better future, we are engaging more deeply with the Musqueam community on whose unceded traditional territory the UBC Farm is situated, by exploring and learning the intersections of our shared values and principles. We are working with LFS to apply a decolonized equity, inclusion and justice lens to our programs and activities. We are also increasing access by developing online versions of our Practicum in Sustainable Agriculture; planning flexible work and teaching arrangements to reduce fossil-fuel based commuting; and sharing our research and learnings through collaborative open-source platforms.

In the past two decades, the UBC Farm and CSFS have brought researchers, students and members of the community together to work on food systems’ sustainability initiatives – COVID did not stop that from happening – and we continue to steward a key place of interdisciplinary research, experiential learning and exemplary community engagement. We look forward to the challenges and opportunities in the next 20 years and beyond.

Clare Cullen
Operations Director, CSFS and UBC Farm
Celebrating 20 YEARS OF THE UBC FARM

2001
First crops grown and sold by student volunteers in response to a resurgent interest in food systems after closures of agricultural research in the 1990s.

2002
First FarmAde as a fundraiser and awareness-building event.

2005
Urban Aboriginal Community Kitchen Garden Project begins (later re-named Tu’wusht). Friends of the Farm formed to help save farmland from housing development; UBC President given 16,000+ signature petition to save the UBC Farm.

2009
Great Farm Trek 2.0: thousands of students, faculty, staff, and community protest against proposed development. University commits to retain the integrated farm system as a land-based academic facility. Cultivating Place published as a strategic direction for the UBC Farm.

2011
The Centre for Sustainable Food Systems (CSFS) created to encourage research with a global reach. UBC Farm land designated ‘Green Academic’. Culturally Relevant Urban Wellness (CRUW) programs begin in partnership with Vancouver Aboriginal Child and Family Services Society.

2014
BC Eco Seed Co-op launches.

2016
The CSFS five-year strategic plan published. Indigenous Health Research and Education Garden gifted the name xʷčitasam (place of growing) by xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam) Elder Larry Grant. The UBC Farm receives organic certification. Relaunch of LFS 496 as Food Systems Career Development placements. Feeding Growth comes to the CSFS.

$18K SALES IN 2002
OVER $400K TODAY
2017 UBC Future of Food Global Dialogue Series begins. Think&EatGreen@School relaunches. UBC Food Services publishes Food Vision and Values Commitment, in partnership with CSFS.

2018 The CSFS designated a formal UBC research centre through the Office of the Vice-President, Research and Innovation (VPRI). The BC Food Web launches. The Diversified Agroecosystem Research Cluster hosted at CSFS is awarded a UBC emerging cluster. The UBC Sustainable Food Systems Minor launches. The Alma Mater Society referendum provides students a 20% discount on UBC Farm produce.

2019 CSFS Dataverse portal is created to make UBC Farm research data openly available. LiteFarm app for farmers launches. Long-term research projects at UBC Farm begin on biodiversity monitoring and water monitoring. UBC Farm Forest Strategy Committee comes together. CSFS grows to 35 formal Academic Associates. The Diversified Agroecosystem Research Cluster awarded a UBC established cluster.

2020 COVID-19 resilience: programs and events pivot to online, UBC Farm closed to public, team ensures safe continuation of research projects, Indigenous community access and a strong growing, harvest and market season.

2021 The CSFS and UBC Farm continue to build collaborations with local and global communities, striving for a sustainable, food-secure future.
The CSFS at UBC Farm serves as a key place of experiential teaching and learning, bringing together learners from across UBC and the broader community. Our Practicum in Sustainable Agriculture develops the next generation of farmers and educators, Feeding Growth fosters progressive food entrepreneurs, children and youth camps and school field trips provide hands-on educational experiences in nature, instructors from across UBC bring their classes to learn at the UBC Farm, while the creation of the Minor in Sustainable Food Systems allows students to deepen their understanding of food and sustainability. We bring people together, from cooking a meal at our Community Kitchens, to teaching food skills and sustainability with Community Workshops, while our Future of Food webinar and seminar series brings together experts from around the globe to create dialogue and solutions to food systems issues.
Four Indigenous initiatives run autonomously at the UBC Farm: the Culturally Relevant Urban Wellness Program (CRUW), developed in 2011 by Vancouver Aboriginal Child and Family Services Society, the newly revitalized Musqueam Garden, Tal A’xin: Maya in Exile Garden, established in 2000 as one of the longest-running community-based projects at the UBC Farm, and x̱w̱č̣ə̨̓səm: Indigenous Health Research & Education Garden, part of LFS Indigenous Research Partnerships. The Tu’wusht Garden project, from the Vancouver Native Health Society, grew and prepared food at the UBC Farm from 2005 to 2019.

In 2020, some programs, including the Practicum, were cancelled but others quickly pivoted to online, transitioning workshops, seminars and tours to the virtual space and launching a new webinar series on building resilient food systems in response to COVID-19.

CSFS and UBC Farm Anniversary Report 2021
We aim to inform and transform the whole seed to plate continuum – from the farm field to your dinner table.

The UBC Farm has supported innovation in achieving sustainable food systems since its inception in 2001. The Farm acts as a unique space where new social, economic, and environmental practices can be designed, tested, and monitored long-term within a fully operating organic farm.

The creation of the Centre for Sustainable Food Systems (CSFS) 10 years ago formalized this focus, bringing together researchers to investigate real world solutions. The CSFS is an interdisciplinary and collaborative hub where researchers from faculties and departments across UBC create innovative solutions in collaboration with international partners. Our research explores and tests novel approaches that consider agroecological, environmental, and social dimensions to pursue a sustainable future – from improving soil and water quality, protecting biodiversity, to supporting climate resilience and food sovereignty.
Food is foundational to all we do. The cultivation and sharing of food at the UBC Farm is what makes grounded, applied research and experiential learning possible. The UBC Farm models a small-scale, diversified, organic farm, cultivating over 200 varieties of fruits, vegetables and herbs, and also features honey beehives, seed production, flowers, and egg-laying, pasture-raised hens. This living agroecological system provides a broad range of opportunities for collaborative research, teaching and experiential learning for UBC students, future farmers, and the urban community. We are committed to sharing our knowledge gathering and research, as well as demonstrating transparency in our production practices, including our organic certification process, harvesting, crop rotation and seed saving.
The UBC Farm does a lot with a little.

With your support we can have an even greater impact as we grow over the next 20 years.

To learn more about making a gift to support the UBC Farm, please contact:

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