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Directed Studies Overview

Previous research (Elliot et al., 2010) suggests a need for third-party involvement in the distribution of food from Gulf Island producers to larger off-island markets. A co-operative distribution center, operated by a cross island growers’ association, could help to build a stronger community for food production in the Gulf Islands, while also improving the economic viability of food production in this area. This directed studies aims to 1) determine whether a co-operative business structure is appropriate in this case and 2) how the sharing of information between producers may be the first step in development of a Gulf Island growers’ association.

To address the feasibility of a co-operative business structure for a central distribution hub for Gulf Island farmers:

* Research the principles of a co-operative business structure – how does it differ from sole proprietorship or a corporation?
* Determine which type of co-operative would be most appropriate – marketing vs. supply.
* Provide examples of distribution co-operatives that have been successful or unsuccessful – what were the key determinants of success and how can this be applied to the Gulf Island context?
* What factors might affect implementation on the Gulf Islands – e.g. Islands Trust

To address the sharing of information among producers:

* Develop a simple relational database that all producers across the Gulf Islands can access
* Access will not depend on production type (vegetable, animal, processed foods, etc.) or methods (organic vs. conventional)
* The database will contain:
  + Farm/business contact information
  + The types of food or commodities produced at each location
  + The size of each farm/business
  + The marketing methods used to sell the various commodities (e.g. transportation method, purchaser of the product, price received)
* The aim of the database is to promote the sharing of information between producers while also providing valuable information regarding the various distribution and marketing methods in place.

Blogging: throughout the term I plan to blog about the direction of the project, the applications to the ‘real world’ and my experiences in completing a directed studies project. This blog can be found at <http://blogs.ubc.ca/bcs3/>.

References:

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