

Politics and Pet Rocks: The Evolution of Regional Food Hubs in British Columbia Canada and its Implications for Food Policy

Special Session: Territorialized Food Systems for Inclusion, Innovation, and Sustainability

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Research Team

Sarah Patricia Breen, Selkirk College

Lindsay Harris, UBCO & Kamloops Food Policy Council

Damon Chouinard, Central Kootenay Food Policy Council

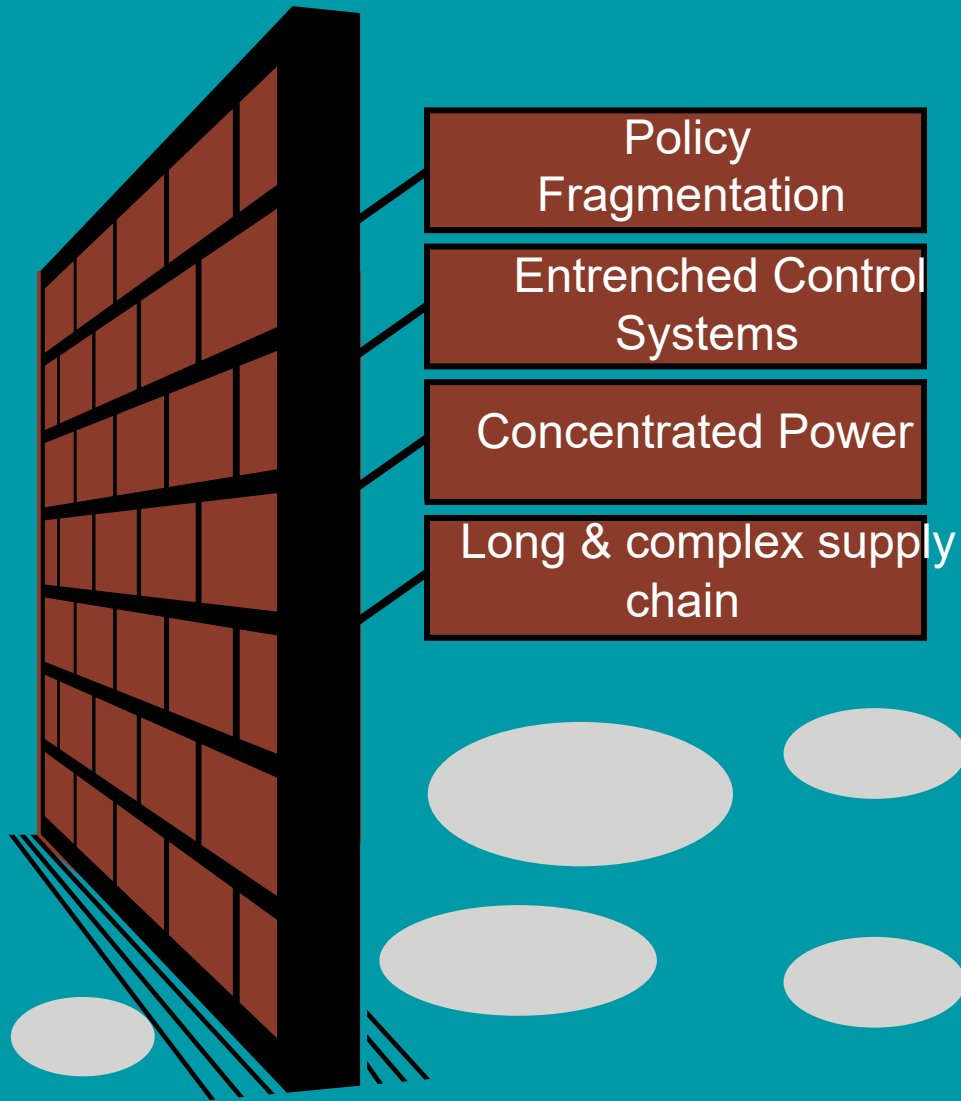
Caitlin Quist, Selkirk College



Overview

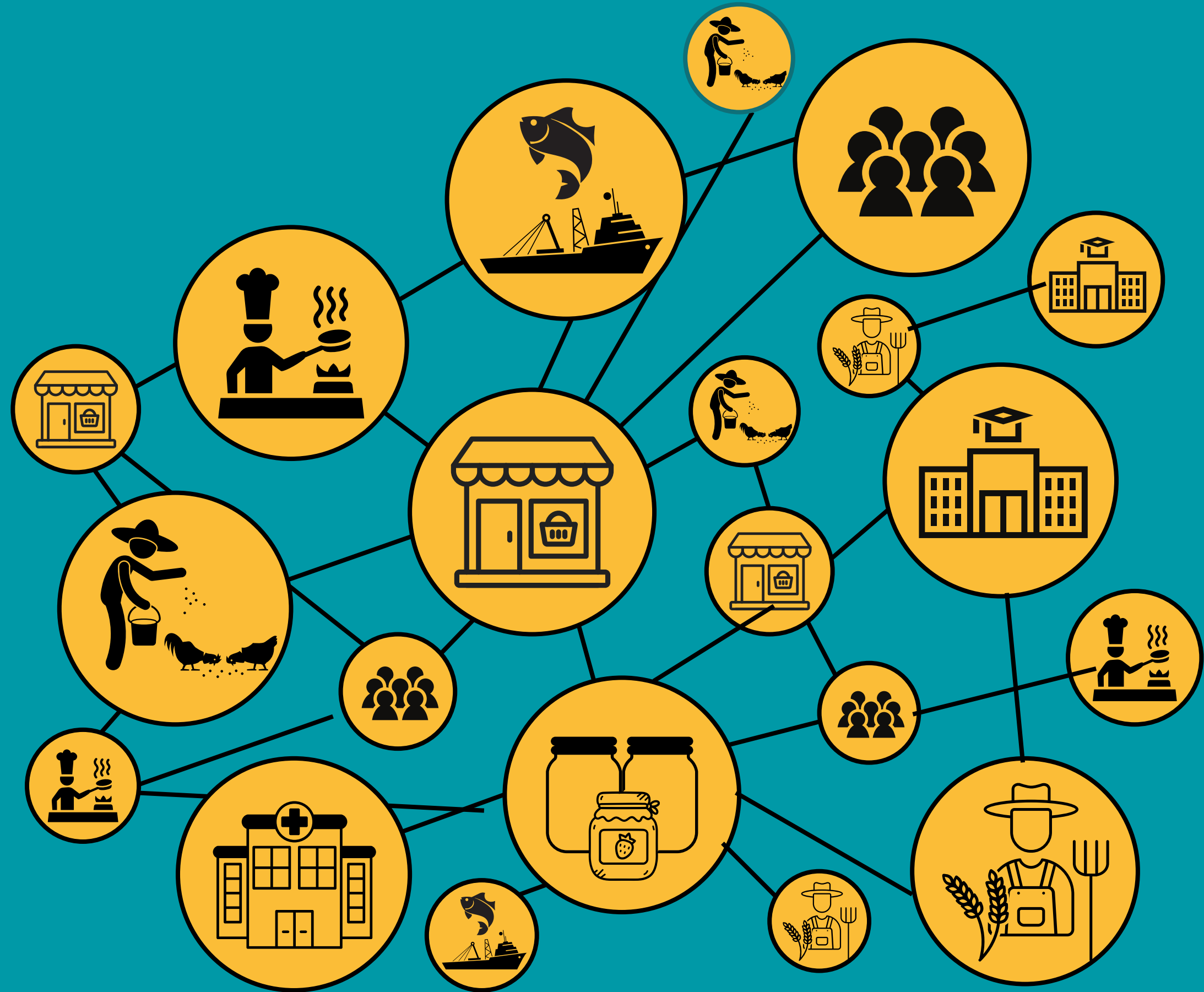
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The Overarching Challenge



Knowledge Gap: Role of Alternative Food Networks?

- Range of initiatives
- Goal to create shorter, relationship-oriented supply chains that link small-scale farmers, fishers, harvesters, and value-added processors directly to consumers communities, and institutional buyers
- **Food Hubs are one example of AFN**



Research Question and Methods

Goal to explore Food Hubs in British Columbia and the roles they play in resilient food systems

Objective 1: Map the evolution of the BC Food Hub Community of Practice

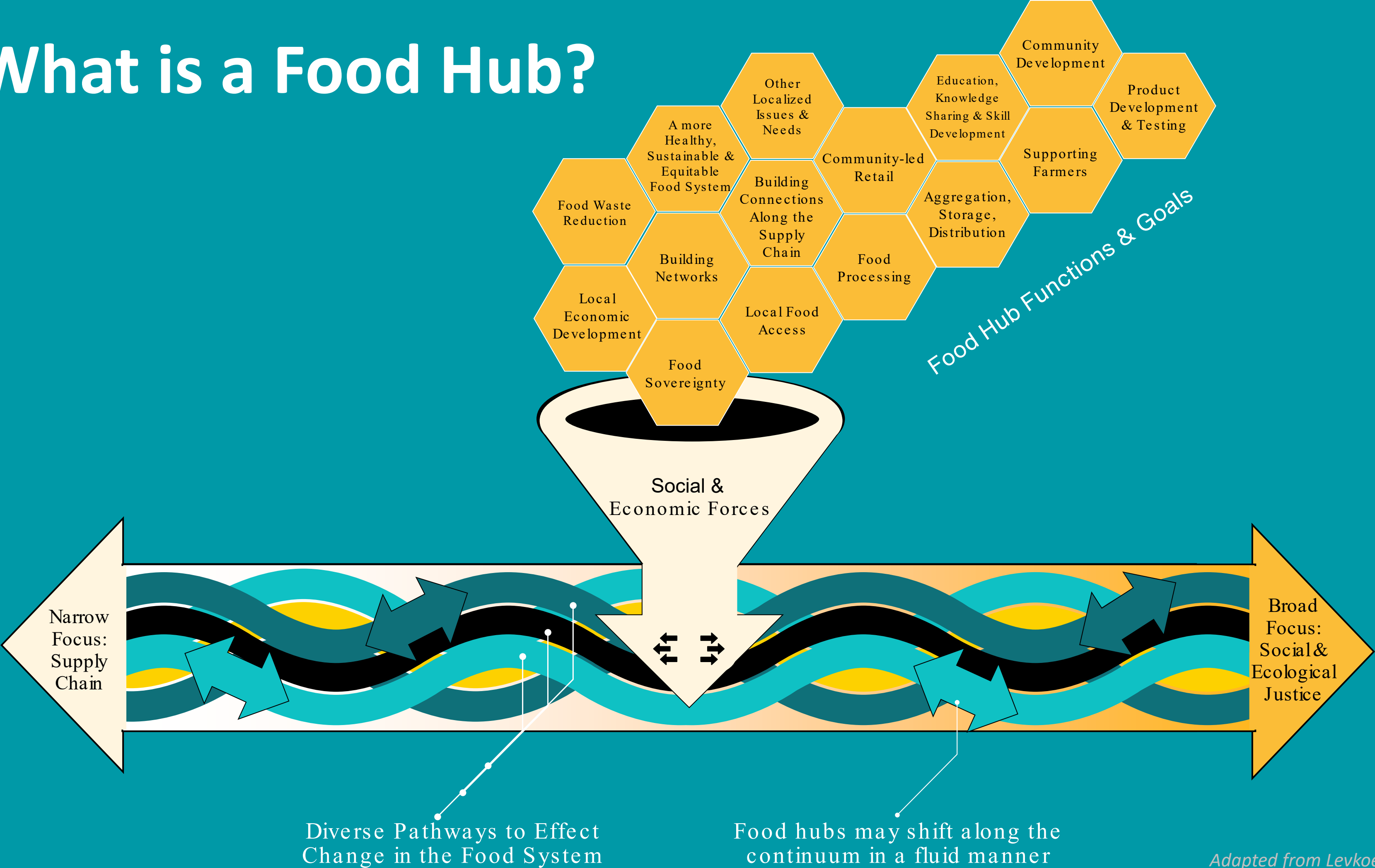
Objective 3: Explore select food hubs and their contribution within their regional food systems

Objective 2: Explore the evolution and resilience of regional food systems

Objective 4: Cross case comparison

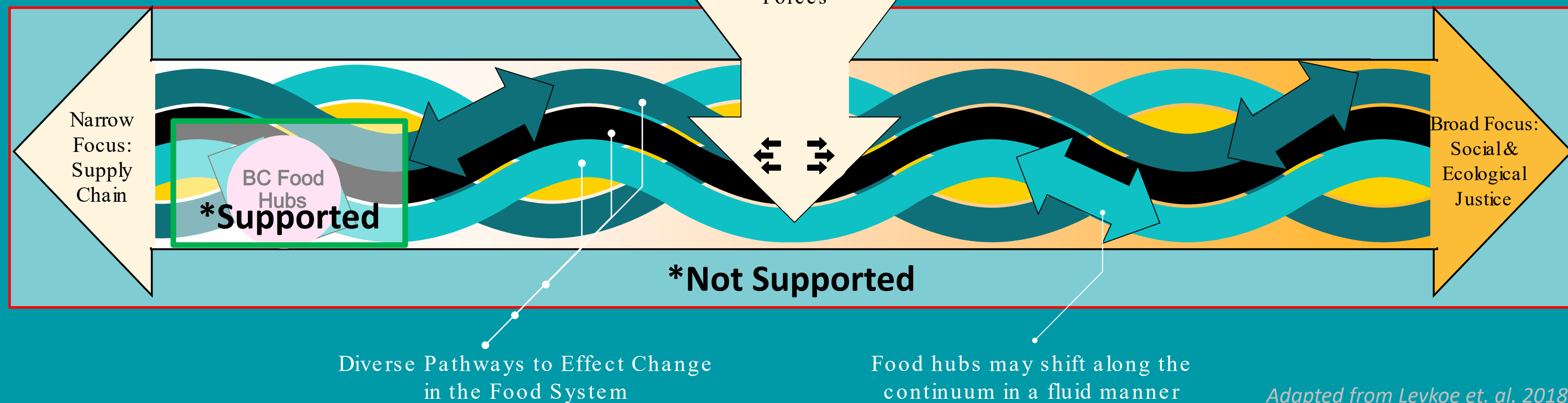


What is a Food Hub?



What is a Food Hub in BC?

“Shared-use food and beverage processing facilities that offer food and agriculture businesses access to **commercial processing space**, equipment, expertise and resources to **support business development and growth.**”* - BC Min of Ag & Food



Food Hubs in BC: Current Roles

The most common two roles are:

Providing shared infrastructure



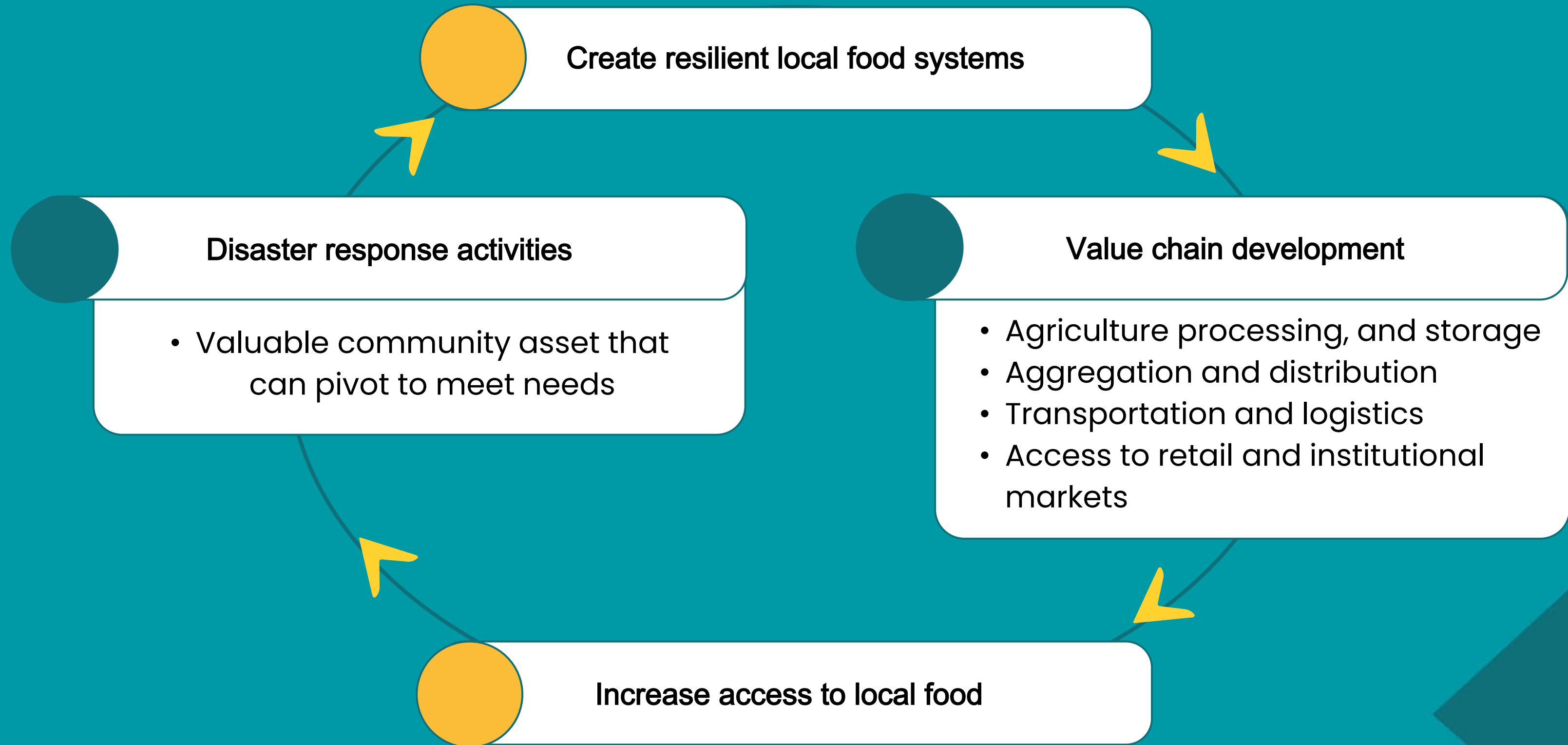
Supporting food businesses



However, many others exist

- Reduced barriers to entry and upfront business startup costs
- Creating economies of scale
- Product testing & research
- Aggregation & distribution
- Retail
- Community development
- Platform for relationship building and collaboration
- Sharing knowledge amongst entrepreneurs
- Increasing access to local foods
- Enabling institutional buying
- Economic stimulus

Food Hubs in BC: Desired Roles



Observed Common Community & Regional Needs

- **Need for value chain development**
 - Supporting primary producers and processors getting product to market through aggregation & distribution, transportation, logistics, and access to retail and institutional markets
- **Need for value-added processing opportunities**
 - Adding value to local primary agricultural products through farmer led or hub led processing
- **Need for waste reduction in the food system**
 - Creating improved circular food systems through food waste recovery and effective use of surplus food
- **Need for community development**
 - Growing community assets, capacity, wellbeing and food security
 - Creating economic growth & employment opportunities
- **Need for infrastructure**
 - Offering commercial kitchen facilities, shared equipment, and food storage space
- **Need for food-sector specific business supports**
 - Providing support navigating existing system of multiple program & service providers
 - Offering early stage supports with low barriers and minimal eligibility restrictions
- **Need for collaboration & coordination**
 - Established mechanisms for collaboration and coordination, used to differing degrees

Observed Hub Actions Matching Needs

Initiating

Few hubs have started work to meet these needs, and those who have are in the early stage



More hubs have started to meet these needs, and those who have are in later stages

Advanced

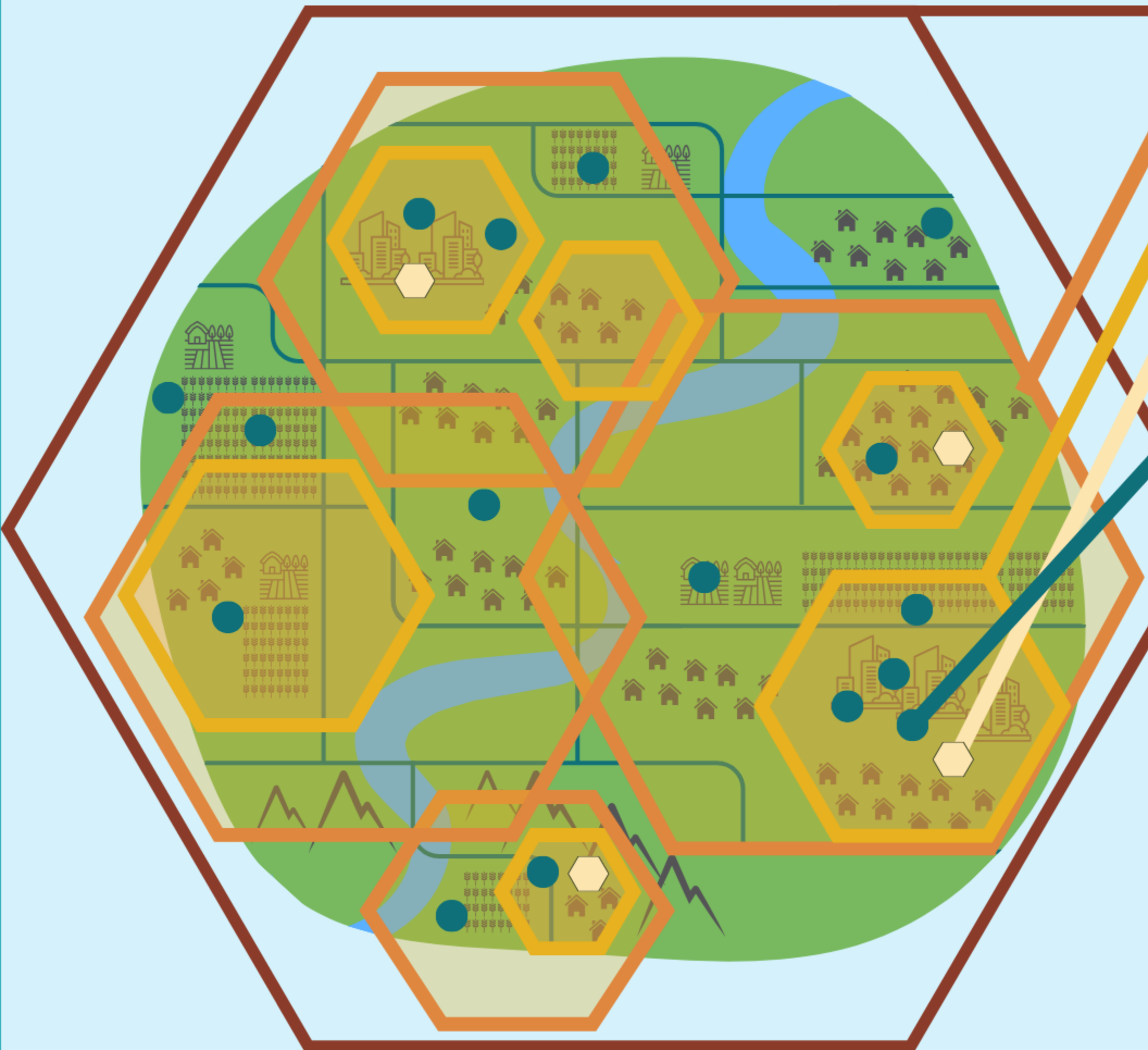
How do Food Hub roles match what is needed?

What prevents Food Hubs from reaching their aspirations?

Challenges		Desires
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Political pressures & expectations• Funder desires & limitations	Vs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Place-based needs• Local priorities
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Costs of operating facilities		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Costs that users can sustain
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Competition		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Collaboration
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lack of appropriate funding• Prioritizing financial sustainability (best business case)• The expectation that food hubs will be financially self-sustaining• Limited operational capacity		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Highly desired but non-revenue generating activities• Investment and stable income
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Traditional economic development		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Community Economic Development & Food Security

Key Finding: narrow focus on commercial processing creates a disconnect with regional needs





Broader Region

Immediate Region

Community

Food Hub

Farms & Businesses

What does this mean for the regional food landscape?

- Overlap in some service delivery
- Gaps in availability and accessibility of other services
- Variable relationships between organizations
- Missed opportunities

Food Hubs remain vulnerable sites of untapped potential

“...the bare bones of it is that it's a shared commercial kitchen. But it's just more expansive than that. It's like an emergent entity that is constantly shifting and evolving to just be positioned to act when we need it to act. To be a resource when we need it to be a resource. To be a community hub, when we need it to be a community hub. It is a complex network of relationships that is a true community resource. It is infrastructure that the community owns. And then it can be whatever we want it to be.”

- Interview participant

Where does this leave us?



Food Hub Practitioners

- Explore diverse pathways to financial sustainability
- Expand potential roles at the right pace
- Prioritize collaboration
- Be based in place



Decisionmaker & Policy Makers

- Make strategic and integrated investments
- Listen to local needs to guide the vision
- Enable collaboration



Researchers

- AFNs often struggle to survive, yet not long after their demise, tend to resurface, likely due to the fact that the needs that bring them into existence are strong and unwavering, yet also at direct odds with the dominant food system.
- Participatory research approaches can support communities with finding pathways through these tensions.



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Thank you!

For more information visit:



Contact Details:

Sarah- sbreen@selkirk.ca

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