

From: Benjamin McConchie
Sent: Tuesday, July 6, 2021 9:38 PM
To: Islands2050
Subject: Fw: Policy Statement feedback from Twin Island Cider

From: Twin Island Cider <info@twinislandcider.com>
Sent: July 6, 2021 4:13 PM
To: Benjamin McConchie
Subject: Policy Statement feedback from Twin Island Cider

Hey Ben, here's a better iteration of our feedback--are you able to forward this to the council/whoever is applicable? Thanks Ben!

From Katie Selbee, operator/part-owner of Twin Island Cider

As one of relatively few young farmers/owners of a land-based business on the Gulf Islands, I'm submitting this feedback for the agricultural section of the new Islands Trust Policy Statement with the expectation that, as an agricultural professional with a decade of farming behind me and at least 30 more years ahead of me living and working on SDAY,ES, my recommendations will be reflected in the final policy statement.

The proposed agricultural section of the draft statement totally misses the many opportunities that exist to create connections between settler food growers/farmers, actively increasing (not just preserving) native biodiversity, and supporting First Nations traditional food sovereignty initiatives on the Gulf Islands. A "precautionary" approach to agriculture is a lame understanding of the land, food, and how local ecosystems do inevitably include human animals who eat a considerable amount of food every day, and it also ignores the fact that with climate change diminishing food-growing abilities in sub-tropic regions, food growing in our region is going to become unavoidably important in the coming decades whether we welcome it or not. It also negates the fact that traditionally, First Nations were actively propagating, pruning, and stewarding foodlands until colonizer-settlers severed much of these cultivation networks. It is evidenced through extensive research by ethnobotanist Nancy Turner and First Nations oral history that native fruit trees like Pacific crabapple, oso berry and black hawthorn as well as great camas and others once flourished here because of active First Nations plant cultivation--not because the environment was left uncultivated/undisturbed. So diverse native plant species like this have diminished not just because of settler development but because First Nations communities were physically denied access to tend traditional foodlands. By current settlers valuing these species, propagating and cultivating them more widely and prioritizing First Nations land access, collaborative relationships could be formed in future years and "farmland" understood as valuable foodlands that also help foster beneficial native biodiversity.

Seeing the compounding troubles of farmers in California and elsewhere, few people can be as concerned about climate change, sustainable water use, biodiversity and ecosystem health as small-scale farmers for whom this is our chosen livelihood—often for environmental and social justice reasons. While I don't advocate for retaining the IT's previous policy statement "Trust Council recognizes that agriculture is a traditional and valuable activity in the Trust Area"—I advocate for the new policy to recognize and identify that small-scale, sustainable, regenerative agriculture is actually KEY to community goals of preserving and increasing biodiversity and being active allies in Indigenous traditional food revitalizing. Bylaws, research and funding should be centred around this understanding and centred on aiding and enabling those of us working towards these goals (all of the young Gulf Islands farmers I personally know are of this mindset), rather than creating layers of bylaws, policies and costly research to attempt to limit the few "bad apple" farmers who do not. My concern is that the IT's focus on (mostly unsuccessfully) attempting to limit the negative "few" may complicate and take resources away from the positive, on-the-land work many young farmers like us are undertaking of our own volition to increase native biodiversity, without any government funding or support.

"Precautionary" suggests an overarching goal that farmers/would-be farmers be subject to an increase in costly, time-consuming regulation of their activities. This needs to be replaced by more proactive language about creating policy that actually enables the increase of biodiversity on farmland in the Gulf Islands (rather than just "preserves"), and enabling "private" farmland and crown land to be available for collaborative use for First Nations foodlands initiatives/native biodiversity projects. I know of quite a few W̱SÁNEĆ initiatives centred on reviving traditional foodways and plants, one of which my partner and I are currently in conversation about aiding in a land-based way.

The Trust Council needs to recognize that their/our presence here on the Gulf Islands as "landholders" is enabled by a larger, exploitive colonial food system that is causing environmental and social problems elsewhere in BC and in the US. The food trucked to our grocery stores here would not exist without the underpaid and underprotected bodies of migrant workers who face increasing physical harm in their farm work, as seen last year when migrant farm workers were forced to work outside in forest fire smoke events, workers dying from Covid due to farm housing that did not allow for physical distancing, and from farms in the Okanagan making workers work outside in the recent heat wave and/or living in cramped quarters with no fans.

For the IT to increase barriers and regulation of farming in the Gulf Islands and to remove "valuing" the potential for a resilient farming economy here on the Gulf Islands is to ignore the realities of the oppressive, fossil-fuel transport-driven food system that enables us to buy food/wine (for the time being) from grocery stores and live comfortably on our "preserved and protected" islands. That is the most privileged, oppressive, unjust mindset I can imagine.

So, in this policy statement I'd like to see an acknowledgement of this reality of the larger food system/climate crisis, and some commitment to work to help enable small, sustainable, regenerative farms in order to help foster healthy, on-island food systems in which agricultural land and practices actually help increase native plant diversity and create a collaborative food growing network in which First Nations harvesting sites are collaboratively maintained AND accessed, and new ones are actively established. The many basic facets that go into maintaining a sustainable/feasible small farm need to be prioritized: permanent, private on-farm housing for year-round local workers (we personally had/have three of our main Pender resident workers face rental housing evictions this year), agro-tourism (no matter your view of "farm tourism", we could not exist with only local on-island support because the importance of local agriculture is so incredibly lacking here), and water storage (creation of irrigation ponds, storage sites, etc).

The few "bad apple" farmers causing issues that one IT trustee apparently termed "polluters" (without acknowledging that they eat 3 meals a day thanks to "polluters" farming elsewhere), will very likely no longer be farming in 10-20 years. Meanwhile, a new generation of agrarians is trying to take root here with FAR more educational tools and information available to them than previous farming generations, climate change challenges and an honest understanding that they are settlers on unceded First Nations land. The Island Trust council needs to re-frame this policy statement with these young farm folks top of mind.

My partner and I would be more than happy to give more specific feedback and recommendations as-needed through this policy change process.

Thank you for reading,

Katie Selbee