

Farmer shows how to maximize Langley land use

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In 2012, Kelowna farmer Curtis Stone grew more than 22,700 kilograms of food - without owning a single acre of land.

The founder of Green City Acres, a successful urban organic farm, was one of several speakers at a workshop on smalllot agriculture in Langley Saturday. Four hundred people turned out for the event, which was organized by the Langley Sustainable Agriculture Foundation, a non-profit group working to put idle Langley farmland to use.

Langley Township is unique among the Metro Vancouver communities: It has the most farmland of any of the Metro cities, with 75 per cent of its area in the Agricultural

Land Reserve. But unlike ag-giants Abbotsford and Chilliwack, 73 per cent of Langley's land is in parcels smaller than 10 acres. Only 55 per cent of the city's ALR land is farmed.

At the workshop, Stone challenged the idea that farms need to be big in order to be successful. Four years ago, fed up with the way the planet is being "plundered," Stone saw no choice but to live by his convictions and grow his own food.

He began to rent yards from Kelowna homeowners, giving them a weekly basket of produce in return for the use of their land. He uses a method called "spin farming" and grows high-value crops in densely planted beds. From a 6,000 sq. ft yard, he generates about \$60,000 over an eightmonth growing season.

The response has been phenomenal: On one backyard farm, near the Kelowna hospital, Stone has a hard time getting work done as passersby stop to ask questions. Many sign up for the farm's CSA box program.

"There's something about farming and growing things and food that people just love," he said. "We're very disconnected from agriculture in our modern world. This lets people see and experience it for themselves."

Stone has perfected his system over the years, capitalizing on the growing interest in local, organic food. He tells wouldbe farmers to start small and make sure there's a market for their food.

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Illustration:

• Jenelle Schneider, PNG / Kelowna farmer Curtis Stone speaks at the workshop on small-lot agriculture in Langley. Jenelle Schneider-PNG Jenelle Schneider-PNG

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