



*PHOTO: Dianne Villessèche
inside the Prince Rupert high
school greenhouse.*

NORTH COAST FOOD HUB

Strengthening Local Food
Systems in Prince Rupert, BC

Start Date | June 2025

Projected Length of Project | 5 years

Project Leads

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Community Partners to Date

School District 52, City of Prince Rupert,
Gitmaxmak'ay Nisga'a Society,
Public Health Association of BC (PHABC),
and a growing network of local educators, growers,
harvesters, and cultural knowledge holders.

Introduction

The North Coast Food Hub is a community-driven initiative that strengthens local food systems and economic capacity in Prince Rupert and collaborates with surrounding Indigenous communities. Although Prince Rupert is a key coastal port and economic gateway on Kaien Island in Ts'msyen Territory, it experiences the highest urban child poverty rates in British Columbia (25.9%, compared to the provincial average of 16.7%), widespread food insecurity, and limited access to culturally appropriate seafood and produce.

These challenges stem from limited local economic control, fragile supply chains, and

a lack of community-owned infrastructure. The North Coast Food Hub addresses these issues by developing practical, place-based social and economic infrastructure in schools and community spaces. This supports local production, skills development, and sustainable livelihoods. Given Prince Rupert's climate and geography, school-based greenhouses and community growing spaces are essential.

This collaborative project unites schools, community organizations, Indigenous partners, and local government to develop a food system rooted in the values, needs, and strengths of BC's North Coast.



Project Summary

The Food Systems program grew out of years of research and community engagement through the North Coast Innovation Lab (2017-2020), a place-based initiative that partnered with social change organizations, where we identified critical gaps in local supply chains and an urgent need for fresh, reliable, local food.

Since then, our research and community partnerships have continued to evolve — through urban farming and regenerative mariculture projects, we have built strong relationships, practical business models, and deep local expertise, all of which work toward a more resilient food economy on BC's North Coast and beyond.

Phase 1 of the Food Hub focuses on constructing greenhouse infrastructure on school grounds and equipping a fish processing kitchen for School District 52, laying the groundwork for farm-to-school initiatives, expanded meal programs, and community markets.

Ongoing community engagement ensures

development aligns with local priorities, knowledge, and culture.

Phase 2 will expand greenhouse and outdoor growing spaces beyond schools, establish a downtown food hub with a public greenhouse and pavilion market, and create a composting and soil-making operation using local organic waste.

Ecotrust Canada also advocates for fisheries policies that improve community access to locally harvested seafood, aligning policy with infrastructure and local food economies. Together, these efforts centre Indigenous food sovereignty, address community-identified needs, and establish a scalable, place-based model for resilient and inclusive food systems in northern coastal communities.

Funding will support infrastructure, programming, and staffing, advancing local food production, employment, and economic opportunities — ensuring equitable access to nutritious, affordable, and culturally meaningful food.

Strategic Objectives (2025–2030)

Phase 1: Building the Foundation (2025 – 2027)

Focus: School-based Food Production and Core Infrastructure

Phase 1 establishes the physical and operational foundation of the North Coast Food Hub by developing school-centred and community-focused food production, processing, and distribution infrastructure. Schools serve as anchor institutions, aligning infrastructure, procurement, and learning for the benefit of the wider community. This phase prioritizes immediate access to food for students and families while strengthening long-term community food resilience.

Key activities include:

- Construct and operate school greenhouses and outdoor growing spaces across School District 52 (Prince Rupert, Port Edward, Hartley Bay).
- Develop larger greenhouse infrastructure at Westview School (an inactive school site) to support school meal programs, local service organizations, and affordable community access to fresh, locally grown food.
- Create food forests and outdoor learning spaces at participating schools, incorporating Sm'alg yax language and cultural knowledge into hands-on, land-based learning.



PHOTO: New raised garden beds at the Prince Rupert Middle School.

- Purchase equipment for the School District's fish processing kitchen and develop a shared-use community space
- Integrate school- and community-grown produce into school meal and food programs
- Provide hands-on, land-based learning opportunities for students, supported by educators and community knowledge holders, including youth employment, mentorship, and intergenerational learning
- Offer seasonal community programming focused on gardening, composting, food processing, and knowledge sharing
- Develop a weekly community market
- Establish a North Coast Food Hub Advisory Committee with elected members to provide community-led guidance on project strategy, decision-making, and engagement

This phase is underway, with partial funding secured. Additional investment is required to complete infrastructure, staffing, and programming.

Early progress includes new 25' x 26' greenhouses at two elementary schools and 35 raised garden beds across three schools. In 2025, over 1,050 lbs of produce were grown, with 80% donated to seven community organizations. Using existing infrastructure, over 400 lbs were harvested for the school meal program.

Construction is underway for a 25' x 100' community greenhouse at Westview to expand food production. We strengthened food systems by acquiring a refrigerated van for school food delivery and equipment for the fish processing kitchen.

We have strengthened core food systems infrastructure by acquiring a refrigerated van for hot and cold school food delivery and equipment for the School District's fish processing kitchen.



PHOTO: To the right of Roosevelt School, an urban garden next to the food forest.

Phase 2: Expanding Community Food Infrastructure (2027-2030)

Focus: Regional Food Access, Processing & Economic Opportunities

With core infrastructure and school-based programming established in Phase 1, Phase 2 will expand the North Coast Food Hub to serve the broader community and region. This phase will strengthen the local food economy by extending infrastructure, markets, and governance beyond schools to community and regional systems.

Planned activities include:

- Expand greenhouse and outdoor growing spaces beyond schools to serve seniors' and assisted living complexes, community garden plots, and home growers
- Develop a downtown food hub featuring an interactive public greenhouse, a pavilion market space for local growers and community food sales, and ongoing public programming

- Establish a composting and soil-making operation using locally sourced organic waste, including fish offal, grain waste, kelp, wood chips, and log findings diverted from the landfill
- Collaborate with School District 52 to establish regular, school-led programming and curriculum that integrates hands-on food skills, land-based learning, local food systems education, and the Sm'algayax language
- Support small-scale food enterprises and local economic opportunities linked to greenhouse production, processing, community markets, and compost and soil operations
- Promote climate-resilient growing practices, food forests, and four-season greenhouse systems
- Support Indigenous-led food initiatives where invited, grounded in traditional knowledge, governance, and language
- Explore ways to increase access to local fish and seafood through policy

Project Impact Summary (2025 – 2030)

The North Coast Food Hub supports community-led food production, access and economic resilience by building local capacity, infrastructure, and collaboration with schools and community partners in both project phases.

The North Coast Food Hub will expand access to fresh, locally grown food for students, families, youth, seniors, and community members in Prince Rupert, and will support surrounding Indigenous communities where invited. By developing greenhouses, hands-

on learning, culturally relevant programming, and local economic opportunities, the project strengthens food literacy, advances food sovereignty, and builds long-term community resilience.

Phase 1 focuses on establishing essential school-based infrastructure and programming. Phase 2 expands community access, regional food infrastructure, and economic and educational opportunities across the North Coast.

Who Benefits

The North Coast Food Hub engages community members as active participants in shared systems. It serves people across Ts'msyen Territory, Prince Rupert, and the North Coast of BC, including:

- Indigenous community members, youth and Elders, and surrounding Indigenous communities
- School District 52 students (64% of whom identify as Indigenous)
- Low-income households facing food insecurity
- Seniors and older adults
- Community members participating in school- and community-based programs, including newcomers and culturally diverse populations
- Local food entrepreneurs
- Community members who would like to purchase local food



PHOTO: A Conrad Elementary student plucks a radish from a school garden bed.

Funding Needs & Investment Opportunities



We seek support to advance the strategic priorities in the *Prince Rupert Community Food Action Plan*. Key investment areas include:

- Dedicated staffing and coordination to ensure effective implementation and long-term impact
- Expansion of school- and community-based greenhouse infrastructure and gardens
- Development of the North Coast Food Hub (Phase 2), including community-facing infrastructure, public market space, and programming
- Establishment of a composting and soil-making operation (Phase 2) to support regenerative practices and sustainable local food production

Why Now?

Prince Rupert faces rising food costs, increasing child poverty, climate-related supply disruptions, trade and policy uncertainties, and limited access to local food, all of which strain families, schools, and community services. The North Coast Food Hub is being implemented with infrastructure under construction, strong partnerships, and established community trust.

Strategic investment at this stage will accelerate progress by completing infrastructure, stabilizing staffing, providing community economic development opportunities, and expanding programs that improve food access for students and families. Early action will build lasting local capacity and long-term community benefits, positioning Prince Rupert and the North Coast as leaders in resilient, community-led food systems.



PHOTO: Students get their hands dirty harvesting potatoes.



PHOTO: The refrigerated van purchased in 2025 to deliver food to students in the school district.

▶ Join Us!

We are developing a self-sustaining model through local food and compost sales, community-driven programming, and strong institutional and community partnerships.

This community-led initiative is grounded

in the strength, knowledge, and resilience of the people of Prince Rupert and the North Coast of BC.

With your support, we can advance a more resilient, equitable, and culturally grounded food future for the North Coast.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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For over thirty years, Ecotrust Canada has demonstrated that it is possible to build an economy that provides for life. Through strategic partnerships and on-the-ground initiatives in rural, remote, and Indigenous communities, Ecotrust Canada works to create thriving, just, and sustainable futures for people and the environment.

Learn more at ecotrust.ca