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Time to start growing more produce locally?

Jillian Trainor jillian@peicanada.com

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Most food in Newfoundland and Labrador is shipped in by truck, plane or boat, so when Snowmageddon hit Newfoundland in 2020, access to fresh produce in the province was effectively cut off for days. With that, came the realization that something needed to ensure residents of the province had access to healthy, nutritious food

year-round.

This is where the Food Producers Forum Inc. comes into play. The organization is a provincially registered non-profit society created as part of the Earth Sheltered Greenhouse Project in 2019, and is a public information hub that promotes information and services to help food producers at all levels in the province move toward food security by producing more of what residents eat and use at a more local level.

The group has nine projects on the go right now, one of which is something called an earth sheltered greenhouse, a building that's a combination between a root cellar and a greenhouse. The back wall of the greenhouse is built into a hillside, with a concrete wall to collect solar energy, using earth for insulation and as a direct source of warmth in winter and cooling in summer. Food can be grown year-round by making the maximum use of solar energy. A working model was actually used by a member of the group during Snowmageddon, which only cost him roughly five dollars a month to heat the greenhouse.

These greenhouses don't necessarily have to be on private property. They can also be used to grow food for people who might want to build one, but don't necessarily have the space or means to actually do it. This leads to the next project the organization is working on, the Greenhouse Outreach Project, which is the latest phase of five years of collaboration with Memorial University and the O'Brien Farm Foundation, with support from a local heritage seed company. The goal of that project is to work collaboratively with each community involved to develop a unique version of the greenhouse design, one that's tuned to local needs and growing conditions, to maximize community involvement.

Not only do these projects help teach people where their food comes from, it helps battle the rising cost of food. We all know fresh produce is infinitely better for us than food that's been processed and is sitting on a shelf, or in a freezer for who knows how long, but as we begin to really see and feel the effects of climate change, access to that food, along with the ability to grow it, becomes more difficult.

PEI is in a somewhat similar position Newfoundland. Yes, we do have access to the mainland thanks to ferry services and the Confederation Bridge, but what if something similar happens here? What if we lost that access to fresh food for whatever reason?

This isn't meant to drag local food producers, far from it. The fact is, a lot producers on the Island grow potatoes, it's literally what we're known for, and while they apparently do provide a lot of the nutrition the body needs (with the exceptions of vitamins A, B12 and E, and calcium and selenium), we can't live off potatoes alone.

Maybe it's time PEI takes a closer look at something like this.
