Notice of the Final Oral Examination for the Degree of Master of Arts of

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BA (University of Victoria, 2009)

“Pathways to Resilience: Obstacles and Opportunities for Small-Scale Agriculture and Local Food Systems in British Columbia”

Department of Political Science

Wednesday, October 21, 2015
10:00AM
David Turpin Building
Room A318

Supervisory Committee:
Dr. James Lawson, Department of Political Science, University of Victoria (Supervisor)
Dr. Kimberley Speers, School of Public Administration, UVic (Outside Member)

External Examiner:
Dr. Deborah Curran, Faculty of Law, UVic

Chair of Oral Examination:
Dr. Stuart Snaith, Peter B. Gustavson School of Business, UVic

Dr. David Capson, Dean, Faculty of Graduate Studies
Abstract

Climate change will impact food systems around the world by creating new ecological threats to crops and challenging the massive energy inputs required by modern industrial agriculture. The severity of these threats suggests that British Columbia’s food system is unprepared for the adverse effects of climate change. The province currently produces 48% of its food requirements, much of which is allocated to export markets, and expansion of this system will be difficult as only 1% of provincial land is considered “prime” farmland. One way to prepare a food system for climate threats is to enhance the system’s resilience. A resilient system can quickly adapt to new external problems while maintaining its structure and productivity. A resilient food system is built on three important attributes: internal strength, diversity and flexibility. While there are numerous policy options to enhance resilience, this thesis focuses on role of small-scale agriculture and local food systems. This thesis will argue that provincial and local governments in British Columbia should pursue policies designed to expand small-scale food production and strengthen local food economies, as these scales of agriculture offer the most practical and politically feasible way to create a more resilient food system.

To gather policy options that can achieve this goal, this thesis relies on ideas and insights gathered from sixteen interviews with a diverse group of small-scale farmers throughout B.C. These on-farm perspectives are then evaluated within the complex policy environment that impacts agriculture policy. Agriculture policy in B.C. is influenced by multiple variables, including established policies and financial investments that support large-scale and international agriculture, limited government budgets, challenging relations between provincial and local governments, and bureaucratic challenges with implementing and operating agriculture programs. Despite these challenges, there are numerous policy opportunities and partners that can help policies to support small-scale production succeed. This thesis analyses these obstacles and opportunities, and puts forward a comprehensive list of policy options organized by their political practicality.