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PROJECT WILL HELP FOOD PRODUCERS AND PROCESSORS REACH NEW OPPORTUNITIES

COURTENAY – Food producers and processors in the Cowichan Valley are about to be engaged in a project to identify new opportunities for value-added food processing across the region. Matching funding support will be provided by the Island Coastal Economic Trust.

As one of the Island’s top food-producing regions, the Cowichan Valley has been proactive in looking into new and innovative strategies to support and grow the agri-food sector, including a 2014 ICET-supported sectoral strategy that yielded recommendations to advance food processing and food security in the region.

The current project will include consultation amongst regional food processors, education and health institutions, beverage-sector producers and others to quantify demand for local food inputs and new production opportunities.

“We know that there is demand in the market for locally-grown and processed foods and beverages, including in the institutional sector,” explained Candice Appleby, with the Small Scale Food Processor Association Executive Director. “This project will put some solid figures beside our general industry knowledge, giving us the detailed demand data we need to move forward.”

The second phase of the project will then outline the infrastructure needed to support increased shared food processing partnerships.

“Developing these needed supports is part of that second-phase work, and that could include things like quality assurance labs or shared processing facilities, which could be implemented with a joint sectoral approach,” Appleby explained.

The project is supported through the Sectoral Strategy funding stream of the Economic Development Readiness Program, designed to support the planning required to address unique sectoral development challenges.

“We are pleased to see that the sectoral study we supported in 2014 has yielded concrete results for the region, including initiatives such as an incubator seed farm, food recovery program and a land match program for emerging producers,” explained ICET Chair Josie Osborne. “This project takes the next steps to support small producers who want to access larger markets like the institutional sector, or large grocery chains, maximizing regional opportunities for food production, processing and distribution.”

The project will launch in late spring, with completion forecast for April 2020.



Building a diverse and sustainable economy.

About the Island Coastal Economic Trust

Created and capitalized by the Province of BC, the Island Coastal Economic Trust (ICET) has been at the forefront of economic diversification, planning and regional revitalization for the past twelve years.

ICET is independently governed by a Board of Directors and two Regional Advisory Committees which include more than 50 locally elected officials, MLAs and appointees from the Island and Coast. This exceptional team of leaders collaborate to set regional priorities and build vital multi-regional networks.

Through a community centered decision-making process, ICET has approved more than \$52 million in funding for over 200 economic infrastructure and economic development readiness projects. These investments have leveraged over \$270 million in new investment into the region creating more than 2500 construction phase jobs and 2650 long term permanent jobs.

A full overview of ICET can be found at www.islandcoastaltrust.ca

For further information:

Line Robert, CEO
Island Coastal Economic Trust
Tel. 250-871-7797 (Ext. 227)
line.robert@islandcoastaltrust.ca

Mayor Josie Osborne, ICET Chair
District of Tofino
Tel. 250-725-3229
osborne@tofino.ca

Candice Appleby | Executive Director
Small Scale Food Processor Association
Tel. 866-547-7372
info@ssfpa.net