

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Bowen Island Food Resilience Society

Published in the Bowen Island Undecurrent, April 3, 2026

Grafton Agricultural Commons is definitely a bit of a mouthful.

In the five years that Bowen Island Food Resilience Society has been managing the garden, we've never quite managed to settle on a name. At different times we've called it Grafton Gardens, Grafton Commons, or simply The Commons.

We figured that this year we should land on one name, and our upcoming AGM motivated us to do it now. So why don't we just call it a community garden? The answer lies both in history and in our ambitions. We chose to include the words 'agriculture' and 'commons' because they hold important meanings for us.

A 'commons' is land shared by a community, not owned by anyone, but by everyone who takes part in it. In history, and in many parts of the world today, particularly in indigenous communities, common lands are variously used for grazing or trapping animals, fishing, collecting firewood, gathering or growing food, and living on. The idea of the commons is rooted in cooperation, shared responsibility and caring for the land. We wanted to capture that sense in the garden's name.

Many of these shared lands disappeared as they were turned into private property. But the idea was never extinguished. Today, communities around the world are rediscovering the power of common spaces. By including 'commons' in the garden's name, we're signaling that it's important to us that it's not just a place where gardeners tend individual boxes, but a shared space where people work together, learn together, and grow food together.

The word 'agricultural' is just as important. Right now, the garden is focused on creating better soil and growing vegetables and fruit. Beds are planted by volunteers working side-by-side, and food is sold and donated locally. But our vision goes further. Our long-term goal is to create a complete organic and regenerative farm — one that includes not only crops, but also some animals. Because, for example, and as many islanders know, chickens can do more than lay eggs; they can help create natural fertilizer.

Our approach is rooted in regenerative agriculture (pun intended), a way of farming that works with nature rather than needing constant artificial inputs. By cultivating biodiversity both above and below the soil and integrating animals, we can create a system that becomes stronger and more productive over time.

Names matter because they shape how we think. A "community garden" suggests a collection of individual plots. An Agricultural Commons suggests something larger. In the end, the name honours an old idea — the commons — while looking ahead to a new kind of small farm built on cooperation, regeneration, and respect for the natural world. In that sense, Grafton Agricultural Commons is a name for what exists today and a statement of intention.



A new sign, funded by a municipal Grant-in-Aid, is set to go up at Grafton Agriculture Commons.