

Carlo & Laura Brizzi  
6159 Lakes Road  
Duncan B.C V9L4J6

**Italian Kitchen and Deli Grove Hall Farm**

To Our Local Community Members and Representatives,

We are writing to you to express our aspirations and intentions with our current business; Italian Kitchen and Deli at Grove Hall Farm. However before going into specifics, it's important to know our family history and passions that are unified with our community, farm, and food. Coming from a long line of farmers both Canadian and Italian we searched to find our own piece of land to continue on our family heritage and keep the old school methods alive. Living in Burnaby for 30 years raising our family, while owning a lake house on Lake Cowichan, where we spent our summers for over 30 years, our dream was to one day move to the Island and live the life we needed; connected to the land. We spent years looking for the right property and finally in 2015 we found our current home.

Purchasing this property had opened up opportunities for us to teach our children our farming heritage and love for the land. As we immediately began to farm the 18 acres of property, we began with 1 acre of land devoted to only our Mediterranean diet vegetables such as tomatoes, garlic, eggplant, zucchinis, and more, with 6 acres for our sheep and chickens. As a family we were all eager and devoted together to become stewards of our land and wanted to see how much we could yield and what plants would flourish the best. We have spent countless hours with our children teaching them how to take care of a garden, harvest the fruit, and turn it into a product which can be stored for a later date. As time went on our son Matthew who studied culinary in Florence, wanted to share the farm produce that we were yielding with the community as they do in Italy where he studied. Living and studying in Italy he was exposed to farming culture, fresh seasonal food, and animal husbandry. He spent an additional 6 months in Thiene with his Zio Marco learning how to become a steward of the land, harvest, and maintain the land with pastural farming methods. Not only did he learn the skills, he began to understand that he could connect with the community through nourishing food, and also help with food security as his Zio Marco, who fed many families in his community with his harvest; Matthew wanted to do the same. We spent many hours walking our beautiful property and with thoughtful planning, we found the perfect location to construct our farm stand, "THE ITALIAN KITCHEN & DELI", without compromising any of the very mature trees. Working alongside the city, local designers and craftsmen, who shared the same excitement as we did, we drew up the plans, were granted a permit, and attained final occupancy.

The business finally opened July 21, 2018 and we had a tremendous response. The amount of support we received from our local community overwhelmed our hearts. We saw how

they supported our passion for locally produced food, and access to farm fresh products. As time went on, we developed deep connections with other farmers, and our local community members and our business became a regular spot for people to gather, create memories, and most importantly have access to local healthy food. We've watched young couples become families, young kids become adults, and our elderly community share good food amongst their longtime friends. We became fully aware that we not only were providing food security for the Valley but a place where people feel proud and safe to bring their loved ones to enjoy the experience and atmosphere of our business. With the success and support that has been given to us by our community we also understood that we must support our fellow entrepreneurs. We have donated to schools, many local organizations, and have partaken in many events such as MS Bike Tour, Cowichan Valley Car Show, and more.

One of the main hurdles and realization for food security that has come through our business journey was the beginning of COVID-19 pandemic. As our community was ordered to shut down other than essential services, and everyone began to feel the effects of how different our lives were about to become. Many shelves at the local grocery stores were empty, families who relied on food for their children through school programs did not have access to food, and our elderly community was highly compromised as families were advised not to gather. This made us realize that duty as farmers and local food suppliers was more imperative than ever. With new safety protocols in place, we continued with business in a very different way. We created a take-out window as there was no option to allow customers to come into the store. We quickly worked on developing an online market as an alternative method for customers to access food products. It was definitely a challenge, since we were a new business and had no history, we did not qualify for any COVID assistance during these times as well. We operated with a staff of only family members and offered specials, and advertised extensively. Seeing the effects of COVID on availability of food we decided to use this time to expand our farm. We began to expand our pastures to allow space for pigs, more meat hens, 1000 blueberry plants, different types of garlic and much more. In January 2022, we purchased a small acreage with our son Matthew, where he farms as well. This property has laying hens, Icelandic sheep, pigs, and future plans to produce fresh vegetables and perhaps grapes. As you can see our family is dedicated to this passion and our teachings, and family heritage lives through our children.

With our increased production of our farm products, we have been faced with the problem of no place to store our fresh and preserved products. We realized we needed an accessory building that would give us a large walk-in fridges, freezers and space for dry goods. We needed to eliminate the amount of our fresh produce and preserved products that were going to waste. We worked very hard to avoid this, but with no place to store fresh produce while we were processing and also the lack of staff we were losing a lot. Then when the major storm in 2021 caused power outages across the Island, with the lack of storage space and commercial grade refrigeration our business had a large loss of meats, fresh and frozen produce. As a family we worked countless hours, first ensuring our generators were running, then started to sort through thousands of dollars' worth of products to see what we could salvage for our community and customers; this experience to say the least was saddening and disheartening. This event

made us realize that, we needed to further invest in more commercial refrigeration that would help to avoid any future loses of this magnitude when the next major event happens.

We read through our zoning and understood that we would be able to construct the accessory building with no issues, as it would only be us and farmhands using the building; this addition would immediately accommodate our crops and livestock processing by having a backup generator connected to all of the fridges and freezers that hold our products. Unfortunately, we were wrong in our understanding of the bylaws and we were given a stop work order on our project. For this error in judgment we apologize, as we were not trying to cause any problems. We simply thought we could build the accessory building to accommodate our farm products; we did not want to go through such a loss again. We went through the exact same steps as we did for our current business by having our plans drawn up, hiring a certified engineer, and had professionals start the job.

We are hoping to move forward with our addition so that we can continue to produce, process, and offer a place for people to come and purchase local healthy house made products and also offer them a little taste of Italy with some of our other products we bring in for them. Many customers are excited and thrilled to see that if our project moves forward, that we will have the opportunity to produce more of their favorite products that have become a staple in their household and at family gatherings. This project not only has given us courage to take a big step to commit to the Cowichan Valley food security but has also given other small niche farmers around us, a place that they too could contribute to their community and partner with us and sell their products. Our dream is to continue to be contributing farmers to the Cowichan Valley and to give our community access to farm fresh healthy food.

The Brizzi Family