




Discussion Paper on Indigenous Food Sovereignty

October 1, 2023















This discussion paper was commissioned by the B.C. Ministry of Agriculture and Food on behalf of the B.C. Indigenous Advisory Council on Agriculture and Food (IACAF) and prepared by Tea Creek Enterprises. Tea Creek is an Indigenous-led, land-based, culturally-safe Indigenous food sovereignty initiative located in Gitxsan territory near Gitwangak, between the settler communities of Smithers and Terrace, BC.

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Disclaimer

The views expressed in this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the Province of B.C. or the individual perspectives of those represented on the B.C. Indigenous Advisory Council on Agriculture and Food.

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Discussion Paper Graphic Overview

Indigenous Food Sovereignty (IFS) Discussion

Background
Expectations, purpose and scope

History
Loss of First Nation agrarian heritage and food sovereignty

Defining IFS
Defining Indigenous Food Sovereignty

Importance of IFS
Providing narratives and explanations to advocate importance of rebuilding IFS

Current Status
Mapping where IFS stands now and detailing 13 IFS case studies across B.C.

Path Forward
Revitalizing IFS

Executive Summary

This discussion paper summarizes a review of Indigenous Food Sovereignty (IFS) perspectives in British Columbia (BC), with a focus on mapping current initiatives, outlining IFS narratives, and providing case studies. It also highlights several successful IFS initiatives in British Columbia and recommends strategies for various stakeholders to collaborate to scale up IFS across the province.

Supporting IFS benefits everyone by improving environmental, social, and economic outcomes, as well as fulfilling the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (DRIPA) and other provincial and federal government commitments.

Discussion Paper Background

This discussion paper was prepared by Tea Creek, an Indigenous-led, land-based, culturally-safe Indigenous food sovereignty initiative located in Gitxsan territory near Gitwangak, between the settler communities of Smithers and Terrace, BC. It was commissioned by the B.C. Ministry of Agriculture and Food on behalf of the B.C. Indigenous Advisory Council on Agriculture and Food (IACAF) to inform the Provincial Government's understanding of the status of and perspectives on Indigenous food security and food sovereignty from Indigenous people directly involved in related initiatives. The study took place between January and March 2022, with updates and revisions in Spring 2023. The project and resulting discussion paper are intended as a foundational step to guide discussions and planning.

The scope of the paper is limited to the geography of what is now known as British Columbia and is focused on land-based agriculture. Seafood, fish, forests, wildlife, and water are essential to Indigenous food systems and to food security and sovereignty; however, these topics are not the focus of this paper.

> *"Food Sovereignty is the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems."*
> — Food Secure Canada

Where We Came From

Tea Creek often must dispel the myth that Indigenous people were not farmers.

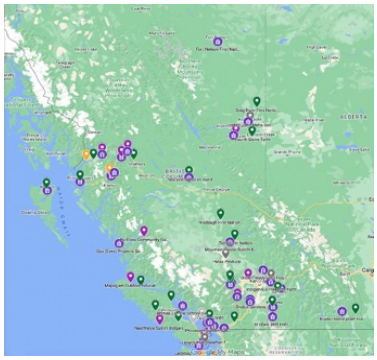
This paper challenges the commonly held belief that Indigenous people were not engaged in agriculture and were not farmers. Prior to colonization, Indigenous peoples were primarily agrarian, living and working within complex agricultural systems across the continent. All Indigenous Nations were food sovereign. After colonization, many Nations adapted and remained successful in agriculture.

As discussed in depth in Section 2.1, throughout this paper, **we intentionally and explicitly used terms like agriculture and agrarian rather than common euphemisms when describing Indigenous peoples' food systems,** as vague terms can create confusion and barriers to policy and implementation.

Indigenous Peoples and Nations in British Columbia have a long and rich history of practicing food sovereignty. Canada's federal government has harmed Indigenous peoples for many generations through genocidal policies and colonial violence. The Indian Act policies have disabled the productivity and competitiveness of Indigenous food producers. These policies, their surviving implementations, and their continuing legacies are described in more detail throughout Section 2.

Where We Are Now

Today, nearly half of all Indigenous people in Canada are food insecure or live in "food deserts," which are neighborhoods with little or no access to fresh, healthy, and affordable foods. [1]



In Section 3, this paper explores definitions and comparisons of food security, food sovereignty, and Indigenous food sovereignty.

Section 4 details why IFS is urgent and provides a communication toolkit for those who champion IFS. The toolkit includes 6 key messages: fighting climate change, reconciliation, promoting sustainable development, offsetting the cumulative impacts of colonization, ensuring regional food security, and fighting agricultural decline in Canada and BC.

To rebuild IFS, current, accurate and reliable data is very important. Limited information, however, is currently available on the extent, focus areas, objectives and status of IFS initiatives in BC. To help address this gap, the authors surveyed Indigenous-led IFS initiatives and gathered an organized list of IFS projects in BC, which did not exist previously. These are examined in detail in Section 5, following a brief note on 'Data Sovereignty' and the need to respect Indigenous Peoples knowledge sharing.

Path Forward

Based on survey results, case studies, and Tea Creek's experience this discussion paper provides reflections on what is required and what is not required to support IFS in BC. Section 6 goes on to identify key ingredients that are required for change in favour of IFS. It also highlights two barriers that hinder IFS, such as more entry-level studies and more bureaucracy. It suggests educating non-Indigenous producers about colonization's impact on IFS, returning land to Indigenous peoples, reducing regulatory barriers around traditional food harvesting and processing, and funding IFS initiatives through a coordinated, sustainable approach involving governments, financial institutions, non-profit funders, and a future Indigenous-led organization.

Finally, this discussion paper suggests that by supporting Indigenous Food Sovereignty initiatives, we can create a more inclusive and sustainable agriculture and food sector for everyone that values and supports Indigenous communities.

KEY INGREDIENTS FOR IFS SUCCESS

- Political Will
- Sense of Urgency
- Funding
- Standards
- Land and Territory
- Indigenous-led
- Trained People
- Reconciliation

[1] "Indigenous Food Sovereignty and COVID-19."

1 Background

1.1 About the BC Indigenous Advisory Council on Agriculture and Food[2]

The Ministry of Agriculture and Food and leaders in the BC First Nations community came together around a shared commitment to advance reconciliation through meaningful change, rooted in the implementation of the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act* and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Calls to Action in the context of the agriculture and food sectors.

In 2021, the inaugural meeting of the BC Indigenous Advisory Council on Agriculture and Food (IACAF) was held following over a year and half of co-development between the Ministry and founding IACAF members. The inaugural membership of IACAF is comprised of individuals nominated and appointed by the Minister reflecting a broad range of leadership, experience and perspectives in the agriculture and food sector from across BC.

The purpose of IACAF is to create a platform for the Ministry and members to work together to enhance the equitable participation of Indigenous peoples in the agriculture and food sectors and support the realization of their economic development objectives.

The Ministry and Council co-developed a three-year Strategic Plan, to guide the work of the Council from its release in 2021 through 2024. The plan includes three priority action areas to advance Indigenous peoples' priorities and address barriers in the agriculture and food sectors. The priorities recognize the ongoing legacies of colonialism and the imminent environmental threats posed by climate change to Indigenous peoples' food systems.

The priority areas of IACAF are to:

1. Advance food security and food sovereignty of Indigenous peoples across the province and contribute to more resilient local, regional and provincial food systems.
2. Increase Indigenous peoples' success and participation in the agriculture and food sector
3. Strengthen and inform the ministry's understanding of Indigenous peoples' inherent rights, interests and perspectives as they relate to the agriculture and food sector through provision of advice on policy and operations to support the implementation of the Declaration Act.

This discussion paper was commissioned by the Council to meet the actions described for the Year 1 objective, for Priority Action 1:

- *Commission a discussion paper on the topic of strengthening Indigenous food security and food sovereignty and building food system resilience that offers recommendations and reflects the unique histories, priorities, innovations, and diversity of Indigenous peoples and offers recommendations.*
- *Review previous and current work related to this priority area in order to identify successful examples and best practices that can be amplified and learned from by others and better define the unique role of IACAF in this area.*

[2] "B.C. Indigenous Advisory Council on Agriculture and Food (IACAF) - Province of British Columbia."

1.2 About Tea Creek

This discussion paper was researched and drafted by Tea Creek. Tea Creek is an Indigenous-led, land-based, culturally safe Indigenous food sovereignty initiative located in Gitxsan territory between the settler communities of Smithers and Terrace, BC.

Tea Creek is operated by Jacob Beaton, an award-winning Indigenous entrepreneur and leader with previous business successes under his belt. Jacob holds the traditional name Dzap'l Gye'a̱ win Skiik, meaning "a busy eagle" or "an eagle who gets things done."

The logo is a "gak" (rabbit) wearing a traditional cedar hat. Tea Creek is located near Gitwangak, which means "people of the place of the rabbits." The lines of various lengths in the circle represent the 4 directions: a long winter followed by spring, summer, and fall.

You can learn more about Tea Creek here: https://www.teacreek.ca

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Drafting was assisted by Tea Creek staff. If you have any questions about the content of this discussion paper, please contact Jacob or Peter.

1.3 Expectations and Scope

This discussion paper was commissioned to inform IACAF's strategic objective to advance Indigenous food security, food sovereignty, and resiliency. The study took four months to complete, from January 2022 to April 2022, and was further revised and added to in 2023. The expectation for the project was to provide an improved understanding of the current status of and perspectives on Indigenous food security and food sovereignty from Indigenous people directly involved in related initiatives. The project and discussion paper are intended as a foundational step to guide continued action.

The scope of the paper is limited to the geography of what is now known as British Columbia and is focused on land-based agriculture. While it is recognized that seafood, fish, and water are essential to Indigenous food systems and to food security and sovereignty, these food systems components are beyond the scope of this paper.

The project had a limited timeframe established by the Ministry of Agriculture and Food and IACAF's 3-year strategic plan and as such the extent of the research and case studies included are not representative of all Indigenous food security and sovereignty initiatives and perspectives across BC.

The findings and recommendations have been presented to the Ministry of Agriculture and Food and IACAF for their consideration. Tea Creek has been commissioned to continue a Phase 2 project building on the findings from this initial project in partnership with IACAF and the Ministry.

2 Historical Context

2.1 The Power of Words

"Agriculture" comes from the Latin word *agricultura*, which means field or land cultivation.[3] **Tea Creek often has to dispel the myth that Indigenous people did not farm and that they were not farmers.**

Due to Eurocentric ideas on food production, Indigenous communities have long been left out of the agriculture narrative. It is evident that Europeans primarily viewed agriculture as cleared fields, domesticated animals, and year-round living on agrarian lands. This caused many settlers to neglect or disregard Indigenous land cultivation methods. [4]

> *"While it is widely accepted that before colonial invasions Indigenous societies in the Pacific Northwest of North America did not develop agriculture per se, Indigenous peoples have managed plant species and enhanced terrestrial landscapes in unique and impactful ways."* [5]

Phrases such as those above can be found throughout literature describing Indigenous cultivation practices. The problem with these descriptions is that they perpetuate the myth that Indigenous people were not agrarian. This stereotype has turned into a stigma that still permeates agricultural and other policies impacting Indigenous peoples.

While it seems efforts are being made to uncover and disseminate the evidence of Indigenous agriculture throughout BC and the rest of Canada, there is a reluctance to use the words "Indigenous" and "agriculture" in the same phrase. Terminology such as "Native Horticulture" or "Domesticated Landscapes" [6] is substituted for terms such as "Farmer" or "Agrarian" when discussing Indigenous food systems. "Novel Ecosystems" and "Forest Gardens" are other creative ways agricultural activities have been described.

The above descriptions may be an attempt to "decolonize" the language used to talk about Indigenous food systems, but they can be confusing when it comes to policy and real-world applications.

The misperception that Indigenous people of BC roamed the lands subsisting off seafood and fish while stumbling across various edible plants has been entirely discredited by research and countless oral histories. Indigenous peoples of the region were responsible for the cultivation of entire landscapes, and resultingly for the production of large quantities of food. [7]

Tea Creek thinks that **"Indigenous agriculture"** is a better term to use when talking about Indigenous food systems because it better describes how Indigenous people have grown food in the past and still do so today.

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[3] Harris and Fuller, "Agriculture: Definition and Overview."

[4] Hall, "Maliseet Cultivation and Climatic Resilience on the Wəlastəkw/St. John River During the Little Ice Age."

[5] Armstrong et al., "Historical Indigenous Land-Use Explains Plant Functional Trait Diversity", 1.

[6] Crawford, "Food Production and Niche Construction in Pre-Contact Southern Ontario", 136.

[7] Armstrong, Dixon, and Turner, "Management and Traditional Production of Beaked Hazelnut (k'áp'xw-Az', Corylus Cornuta; Betulaceae) in British Columbia,"; Joseph and Turner, "'The Old Foods Are the New Foods!': Erosion and Revitalization of Indigenous Food Systems in Northwestern North America."

2.2 Indigenous Peoples were Agrarian

Indigenous peoples of the Western Hemisphere were primarily agrarian. They cultivated food intentionally over many generations.[8] Agriculture was not seen as a separate activity or way of life. Instead, it was tied to language, history, and culture.

Indigenous peoples have greatly contributed to global food security. The #1 produced crop in the world by volume, corn, was domesticated by Indigenous peoples over 10,000 years ago in what is now southern Mexico.[9] Other top crops in the world supplied by thousands of years of Indigenous agriculture include tomatoes, potatoes, squash, beans, and sunflowers.[10] In British Columbia, some Indigenous peoples domesticated camas for its edible tubers and sandbar red willow for baskets, while other groups developed complex aquaculture systems, such as clam gardens.[11]

Numerous studies have shown that Indigenous people across Canada used a variety of farming methods on land, in the forests, and along the waterways before European contact.[12]

It is estimated that by the year 1000 AD, corn had spread over most of the North American continent, including the East Coast and Great Lakes regions. The *Wolastoqiyik* (Maliseet) community, whose ancestral grounds are along the *Wəlastəkw* (the Maliseet name for the St. John River), cultivated maize in this area during the Little Ice Age (1350–1850), prior to European arrival. This was done by carefully planning where to plant the maize based on the quality of the soil and climate conditions. In the middle of the 18th century, maps and studies of the St. John River revealed that both Acadian settlers and the Wolastoqiyik farmed the same intervale land in the region, employing their distinct forms of plot layout. [13]

The well-established and highly regarded "Three Sisters" system of intercropping that local Indigenous communities practiced prior to contact in the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence Lowlands region continues to fascinate the scientific community to this day. This form of agrarian management attributed to Indigenous peoples indicates a long-standing, sophisticated knowledge of cultivation and farming techniques.[14]

Further, there is evidence that people farmed in what is now Manitoba in the 1200s and 1400s, when the weather was warmer and maize could be grown that far north. According to archaeologists, excavation sites have uncovered bison scapulae that were used to manufacture gardening hoes in these settlements. Charred pieces of corn and broken pottery were also found nearby, showing that this area had been settled for 150–200 years.[15]

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[8] Robson, "A Brief History of Indigenous Agriculture - The Manitoba Museum."

[9] Goldsborough, "Manitoba History: Manitoba's First Farmers."

[10] Robson, "A Brief History of Indigenous Agriculture."

[11] Connaughton et al., "Tidal Belongings: First Nations–Driven Archaeology to Preserve a Large Wooden Fish Trap Panel Recovered from the Comox Harbour Intertidal Fish Trap Complex in British Columbia."

[12] Armstrong et al., "Historical Indigenous Land-Use Explains Plant Functional Trait Diversity"; Connaughton et al., "Tidal Belongings: First Nations–Driven Archaeology to Preserve a Large Wooden Fish Trap Panel Recovered from the Comox Harbour Intertidal Fish Trap Complex in British Columbia"; "The Indigenous Origins of Regenerative Agriculture"; Hall, "Maliseet Cultivation and Climatic Resilience on the Wəlastəkw/St. John River During the Little Ice Age"; Flynn et al., "Manitoba History: Manitoba's First Farmers."

[13] Hall, "Maliseet Cultivation and Climatic Resilience on the Wəlastəkw/St. John River During the Little Ice Age."

[14] "The Indigenous Origins of Regenerative Agriculture."

[15] Whetter, "The True History of Farming on the Prairies"; Flynn et al., "Manitoba History: Manitoba's First Farmers."

Food systems on the west coast of British Columbia offer us additional information about the history and complexity of Indigenous farming methods. A huge complex of intertidal fish traps was recently found in Comox Harbour on Vancouver Island. This indicates that between 1300 and 100 years ago, Indigenous people had a huge and highly developed trap fishing industry there.[16] Also, archeological village sites in western and northern British Columbia have been studied for their plant diversity and forest management techniques, which included "long-distance transplanting, controlled burning, weeding, fertilizing, coppicing, and pruning." [17] Both of these examples show long-term cultivation of the land and waterways, indicating how enduring and dynamic Indigenous peoples' agricultural practices were.

Our history books portray Indigenous peoples exclusively as hunters and gatherers, when in reality they were successful farmers who adapted to contemporary practices and led agricultural developments.[18]

In the early days of contact many First Nations adapted European methods of gardening and ranching, which introduced them to new crops like the potato. Traditional Indigenous diets were supplemented in the late 1800s by vegetables and fruits cultivated in European-style gardens. They included potatoes, turnips, onions, carrots, peas, beans, rhubarb, and a variety of berries.[19]

> *"We are indebted to the Indians for a supply of everything in season… at very reasonable rates; They collect great quantities of Berries,… For a back load of Potatoes they charge one shilling; these they cultivate by simply burying the seed under the green turf." (James Bell, early colonist, 1858)*[20]

Eric Tang of the Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre writes, "The success of Aboriginal farmers unfortunately drew the attention of the Federal government, which resulted in the development of policies intended to protect the interests and difficulties that non-Aboriginal farmers were facing." [21]

In our conversations with Indigenous food producers around BC, we were frequently reminded that Indigenous peoples were not "hunter-gatherers" or "subsistence" cultures. This myth was born out of the genocidal colonial practices of the last few centuries that sought to rewrite history books in favour of the colonizers.[22] The fact is that many Indigenous cultures were agrarian and Indigenous peoples across the Western hemisphere and beyond used their lands and traditional territories to develop and sustain complex food systems for thousands of years prior to colonization.

The history of Indigenous people in what is now called British Columbia and Canada is many layered, long and complex. It is important to consider historical facts when examining assumptions about Indigenous food sovereignty and the design of colonial policy frameworks and legal structures impacting Indigenous peoples. These themes are further elaborated upon in Section 3.3.

[16] Connaughton et al., "Tidal Belongings: First Nations-Driven Archaeology to Preserve a Large Wooden Fish Trap Panel Recovered from the Comox Harbour Intertidal Fish Trap Complex in British Columbia."

[17] Armstrong et al., "Historical Indigenous Land-Use Explains Plant Functional Trait Diversity," para 3.

[18] Joseph and Turner, "'The Old Foods Are the New Foods!': Erosion and Revitalization of Indigenous Food Systems in Northwestern North America."

[19] Turner, Lepofsky, and Deur, "Plant Management Systems of British Columbia's First Peoples | BC Studies: The British Columbian Quarterly."

[20] Keddie, "A Lekwungen Herring Fishing Site in Esquimalt Harbour."

[21] Tang and Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre, "The Relationship Between Aboriginal Farmers and Non-Aboriginal Farmers," 5.

[22] Joseph and Turner, "'The Old Foods Are the New Foods!': Erosion and Revitalization of Indigenous Food Systems in Northwestern North America."

2.3 All Indigenous People and Nations were Food Sovereign

> *"We're also going to our Elders to re-learn our history of agriculture that goes back for thousands and thousands of years. We're reclaiming our right to grow these Indigenous foods… We live with them, we co-existed with them on an equal basis; we have agreements made once a long time ago."* [23]

All Indigenous peoples and Nations were food sovereign at the time of colonization and for many generations after. In some places, Indigenous peoples flourished when they combined their cultural and agricultural practices with tools and ideas from Europe and elsewhere. Nations produced a surplus of food, often preserving and trading these surpluses with surrounding Nations that produced complementary products.[24]

A popular processed Indigenous food product is eulachan grease, a dietary fat prepared from smelt-like fish, which is highly prized by north Pacific coast Indigenous cultures and was traded widely over what are now called grease trails. Much like today, where modern products move on highways and rails (which were often built on grease trails), food products were transported by boatload and back between Nations and climatic zones.[25]

According to oral histories, during the Great Depression, many First Nations and Indigenous peoples didn't realize there was a depression because they were food sovereign. Nations not only were food sovereign but also had regular surpluses that were provided to guests through feast systems and also traded with neighbours.[26]

Despite major shocks to Indigenous peoples, many Nations maintained food sovereignty well into the 1900s. Catastrophic population declines began in now-BC in the 1700s, as European diseases caused a "holocaust"[27] and Nations lost over 90% of their populations over the first century of European contact. This loss, coupled with oppressive and genocidal colonization, is what led to the loss of agricultural knowledge and practices. It was not, as presented in our history books, a case of Indigenous people not being agrarian. It was instead a case of people experiencing catastrophic loss after catastrophic loss and then being blamed for their losses and framed as primitive hunter-gatherers.[28]

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[23] Harvey Knight interview quoted in Robin, "Our Hands at Work: Indigenous Food Sovereignty in Western Canada," 91.

[24] Joseph and Turner, "'The Old Foods Are the New Foods!': Erosion and Revitalization of Indigenous Food Systems in Northwestern North America,"; Turner, Lepofsky, and Deur, "Plant Management Systems of British Columbia's First Peoples | BC Studies: The British Columbian Quarterly."

[25] Selkirk, "The Little-Known Hiking Trail That Built Canada,"; Joseph and Turner, "'The Old Foods Are the New Foods!': Erosion and Revitalization of Indigenous Food Systems in Northwestern North America."

[26] See, for example, Cole Harris's 1994 analysis, as well as Nuxalk, Haida, and countless other Nations' oral histories.

[27] Hopper, "Everyone Was Dead: When Europeans First Came to B.C., They Stepped into the Aftermath of a Holocaust."

[28] Joseph and Turner, "'The Old Foods Are the New Foods!': Erosion and Revitalization of Indigenous Food Systems in Northwestern North America."

2.4 Dispossession Of Improved Lands

Indigenous peoples and Nations recovered from massive losses in the 1700s and 1800s and started to rebuild their families and communities. The Indian Act of the late 1800s enabled the seizure of "Indian" lands. In all of what is now British Columbia, developed Indigenous food lands were violently seized and handed over to non-Indigenous settlers. In some cases, Indigenous peoples were forcefully relocated away from their ancestral homelands.[29]

In every part of BC, Indigenous people were dispossessed of their land and forced into residential schools and onto reservations. In most cases, reserve lands were sub-par, too small, and not suitable for food production.[30]

The forced resettlement of First Nations communities onto reserves and restrictions on movement inhibited seasonal harvest activities, and there is evidence throughout the province that with the establishment of reserves, First Nations were often moved off of the most prime food producing lands.[31]

EXAMPLES OF LAND DISPOSSESSION

In the Smithers area, Wet'suwet'en ranch and farmlands were taken and turned over to soldiers returning from the Boer War. In the Lillooet area, Indigenous orchards and potato farms were taken in similar ways and handed over to non-Indigenous people. In the same movement, children were seized and sent sometimes in cattle cars to Indian residential schools (IRS). Indigenous-made irrigation canals were paved over with roads and power line rights-of-way.

In the Chilcotin, Clayton Mack[11] recalled how in the early 1900s, a large, wealthy Indigenous ranch that employed him and many other Indigenous people was suddenly seized, and everyone who lived and worked there scattered. The ranch was then handed over to non-Indigenous people who received a turn-key enterprise stolen from Indigenous people.

[29] "Xwisten Elders Ken and Albert, Part 1."

[30] "Food as a Weapon in the Residential School System."

[31] Tang and Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre, "The Relationship Between Aboriginal Farmers and Non-Aboriginal Farmers."

2.5 Removing the Tools for Food Sovereignty

The federal government of Canada actively passed policies to disable the ability of Indigenous farmers and food producers to be productive and competitive in Canada.[32]

It is important to understand the spectrum of history surrounding Indigenous food sovereignty. The situation we have today is the result of many generations of genocidal policy and colonial violence toward Indigenous Canadians. Indigenous peoples had the tools for agricultural success violently removed from them.

A range of Indian Act policies and systems dispossessed Indigenous peoples of their lands and removed both cultural and physical tools for success. These policies opened up Indigenous land for European settlement and reduced or removed the ability of Indigenous food producers to compete with settlers. As a result, Indigenous food ways and systems have been devastated.[33]

Some of these policies include:

- **Severalty Policy** — Farmland was forcibly subdivided into small acreage. Threatened by large, successful Indigenous farm operations, the Severalty Policy forbade Indigenous producers from working more than 20 acres of land.
- **Peasant Farming Policy** — Indigenous farmers were not allowed to purchase large farm machinery. Indigenous farmers were handicapped by being forced to only use hand tools.
- **The Pass and Permit System** — Created barriers on the flow of goods, people, and services. Indigenous producers needed permits to purchase tools, supplies, and conduct trade which were actively withheld by Indian Agents.
- **Disenfranchisement** — Indigenous people were legally removed as voting citizens and made permanent 'wards' of the state, enabling de-humanizing, infantilizing laws under Indian Act, many of which survive today.
  - As an example, an Indian Band is still not legally allowed to own fee-simple land. As a work-around, Bands and Nations create corporate entities, which can then purchase lands.[34]
  - Another legacy is that it is significantly easier for a non-Indigenous person to obtain a mortgage or financing for housing or activities on Indian Reserve land in Canada, while it is nearly impossible for a Status Indian person to obtain on-reserve financing or mortgages. On most reserves in the Greater Victoria area, the on-reserve population is mostly non-Indigenous people who own their homes on leased land, while many Indigenous people on the same reserves do not own their own homes.

[32] Tang and Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre, "The Relationship Between Aboriginal Farmers and Non-Aboriginal Farmers,"; Arcand et al., "Sowing a Way Towards Revitalizing Indigenous Agriculture: Creating Meaning from a Forum Discussion in Saskatchewan, Canada."

[33] de Leeuw and Hunt, "Unsettling Decolonizing,"; "Indigenous Food Systems Network," Fang, Gabriel, and Feng, "Feasibility Study: Overcoming Policy Barriers to Indigenous Food Sovereignty in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside."

[34] Kirkby, "Reconstituting Canada: The Enfranchisement and Disenfranchisement of 'Indians,' Circa 1837-1900."

Table 1 illustrates the three main agricultural policies constructed by the colonial government that most impacted Indigenous peoples. [35]

Table 1: Agricultural Policies that impacted Indigenous peoples	
1. Severalty Policy	Reserve land was subdivided into small acreage lots that provided little more than subsistence levels of food.
2. Peasant Policy	Indigenous peoples were restricted to only using small simple tools and were not allowed to purchase large farm machinery.
3. Pass and Permit System	Enforced barriers on the flow of people, goods and services between Indigenous and non-Indigenous farmers.

Sources: Bednasek & Godlewska 2009; Tang 2004

[35] Fang, Gabriel, and Feng, "Feasibility Study: Overcoming Policy Barriers to Indigenous Food Sovereignty in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside."

2.6 Stripping Food Knowledge

Despite the impacts mentioned in the previous sections, such as catastrophic population loss and dispossession of lands, many Indigenous Nations continued to prosper and organize for the purpose of making land claims and legal challenges. It was in this context that the federal government instituted mandatory attendance for Indigenous children at Indian Residential Schools. Generations of residential schooling had devastating impacts on IFS. [36]

At residential schools, traditions, culture, and knowledge were stripped away from children, and thousands of children died. As the intergenerational impacts of the Indian Residential School spread, Indigenous family gardens and farms went fallow due to a lack of people and knowledge to farm them. Traplines gradually went dormant, Indigenous food forests were left untended, and family homes and cabins emptied. [37]

The impacts of residential schools cannot be understated. In many cases, entire communities and Nations went from total independence to complete dependence as generations of their children were stolen.

At Tea Creek, for example, it is not an exaggeration to say that 100% of the participants are affected directly or indirectly by Indian Residential School trauma, including the loss of valuable, life-giving knowledge. In a recent wild food walk, no one in the cohort could correctly identify any of the Indigenous trees or plants they encountered. Such an experience likely would have been the opposite 100 years ago, before the deep impacts of Indian residential schools.

[36] Robin et al., "Safe Food, Dangerous Lands? Traditional Foods and Indigenous Peoples in Canada."

[37] Robin et al., "Safe Food, Dangerous Lands? Traditional Foods and Indigenous Peoples in Canada."

2.7 Emerging Themes in Indigenous Food Sovereignty Research

Tea Creek did a review of the literature based on papers from the government, universities, and other organizations. Tea Creek felt it was important to expand on several themes that emerged from the literature reviewed for this paper, particularly the history of Indigenous agriculture in BC, which was previously mentioned.

Theme 1: Early settlers overlooked Indigenous agriculture.

The first theme involves settlers overlooking Indigenous agricultural practices. Early European settlers to British Columbia assumed the region was a huge wilderness where the land and waterways were not being developed or used. Additionally, the common myth held amongst settlers that Indigenous people were purely hunter-gatherers is repeated throughout the literature. This misconception was perpetuated by a lack of understanding of the sophisticated agricultural systems practiced by Indigenous communities, which were often ignored or dismissed as inferior. This in effect erased the Indigenous history of land use and food systems—what one author has called "colonial gaslighting." [38]

Another author describes how, at the time of contact, when the first European farmers were "settling" in Langley (the province's first fur and food trade center), they held the false assumption that the region was filled with vast "wilderness," void of "civilized" society. [39]

Adding to this is the assumption made by researchers, including early anthropologists, who promoted the idea that the First Peoples of BC sustained themselves almost entirely on fish and seafood, with no land use happening.[40] For instance, for over 100 years, archeologists overlooked the intensive root crop cultivation taking place in intertidal regions like Tahsis Inlet, believing it to be fish traps. [41]

> *"By now, many anthropologists are aware that, while Indigenous peoples in northwest North America did not practice a traditional Eurasian style of agriculture (planting large plots of annual grasses and vegetables), they were in fact tending or cultivating entire landscapes for large scale food production"* [42]

The widespread misconception of a wild landscape with few hunter-gatherer groups living there played a significant role in the expulsion of Indigenous peoples from their lands and the subsequent destruction of their food systems, and theme 3 will go into more detail on this subject.

[38] Armstrong et al., "Historical Ecology of Forest Garden Management in Laxyuubm Ts'msyen and beyond,"11.

[39] Settee and Shukla, *Indigenous Food Systems: Concepts, Cases, and Conversations*, 20.

[40] Armstrong et al., "Historical Ecology of Forest Garden Management in Laxyuubm Ts'msyen and beyond."

[41] Armstrong, Dixon, and Turner, "Management and Traditional Production of Beaked Hazelnut (k'áp'xw-Az', Corylus Cornuta; Betulaceae) in British Columbia,"; Joseph and Turner, "'The Old Foods Are the New Foods!'

[42] Armstrong, Dixon, and Turner, "Management and Traditional Production of Beaked Hazelnut (k'áp'xw-Az', Corylus Cornuta; Betulaceae) in British Columbia,"; 552.

Theme 2: Evidence of agriculture — pre-contact to early contact

> *"We're rich! "We're rich in our food!"* [43]
> — Gitga'at matriarch Helen Clifton

The second emerging theme is the evidence of historical Indigenous agricultural practices discovered all through British Columbia. From the camas prairies of Coast Salish territory to the estuarine root gardens of the Nuu-Chah-Nulth and Kwakwaka'wakw Peoples [44] to the orchard gardens of Pacific crabapples in the Skeena region and the hazelnut trees after which the town Hazelton is named,[45] Indigenous-designed agricultural landscapes can be found throughout BC.

One group of researchers looked at the food systems of First Nations along the Pacific coast from central Alaska to the Columbia River and inland to the Rocky Mountains. They found that First Nations in the area consumed about 300 animal species and 150 plant species.[46] Unfortunately, many of these foods are little consumed today.

Agricultural practices are contained within languages themselves. For instance, the estuarine garden sites in Kwakwaka'wakw territory were called təkkillakw, which roughly translates as "place of manufactured soil." [47]

Another feature of the academic literature reviewed for this paper is the repeated references to a type of agriculture that Indigenous societies practiced for generations and termed "forest gardens." Forest gardens are a type of sustainable agriculture that imitates natural ecosystems by combining food crops, medicinal plants, and other ecosystem structures. Charred food remains found in cooking pits in the village of Gitsaex, for instance, show that the Gitselasu People regularly harvested food from their forest gardens. Also, research shows that the Gitsaex forest garden is the result of generations of clearing around the village and encouraging edible plant species by, among other things, transplanting, fertilizing, and burning in a controlled way.[48]

> *"Forest gardens may be a new term in the Pacific Northwest, but it is not a new concept."* [49]

In addition, the articles explore the early years of contact and the ways in which Indigenous communities rapidly embraced some of the new crops, fitting them into their pre-existing food systems and, for a period of time, increasing their food security. For example, as early settlers documented, potatoes, a crop unknown to Coast Salish communities in the late 1700s and thought to have been introduced through trade routes, became well established by the early 1800s and were successfully cultivated and harvested by Coast Salish women in abundance. [50]

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[43] Joseph and Turner, "'The Old Foods Are the New Foods!': Erosion and Revitalization of Indigenous Food Systems in Northwestern North America," 4.

[44] Turner, Lepofsky, and Deur, "Plant Management Systems of British Columbia's First Peoples | BC Studies: The British Columbian Quarterly,"; Coté, *A Drum in One Hand, a Sockeye in the Other.*

[45] Armstrong, Dixon, and Turner, "Management and Traditional Production of Beaked Hazelnut (k'áp'xw-Az', Corylus Cornuta; Betulaceae) in British Columbia,"; Joseph and Turner, "'The Old Foods Are the New Foods!'; Erosion and Revitalization of Indigenous Food Systems in Northwestern North America."

[46] Joseph and Turner, "'The Old Foods Are the New Foods!': Erosion and Revitalization of Indigenous Food Systems in Northwestern North America."

[47] Turner, Lepofsky, and Deur, "Plant Management Systems of British Columbia's First Peoples | BC Studies: The British Columbian Quarterly," 117.

[48] Armstrong et al., "Historical Ecology of Forest Garden Management in Laxyuubm Ts'msyen and beyond,"; Turner, Lepofsky, and Deur, "Plant Management Systems of British Columbia's First Peoples | BC Studies: The British Columbian Quarterly."

[49] Armstrong et al., "Historical Ecology of Forest Garden Management in Laxyuubm Ts'msyen and beyond,"11.

[50] Davis and Twidale, "Indigenous Food Systems on Vancouver Island."

> *"By the late 1800s, many Indigenous people were supplementing their traditional foods with produce that they were growing in European-style gardens: not only potatoes but also turnips, onions, carrots, peas, beans, rhubarb, and various berries (strawberries, currants, gooseberries, and raspberries)"* [51]

Lastly under this theme, literature describes how First Nations in British Columbia, despite not exercising "ownership" of the land from a European perspective, nevertheless developed methods for identifying the "caretakers" of certain agricultural areas and waterways and defining their responsibilities. This was not a system of private property but a system of resource and land management, often exercised through a clan system, where key harvesting sites were passed down much like the European tradition of inheriting family farms.[52] Many resource populations and locations are still "owned" by Indigenous individuals, families, clans, or groups with specific geographical and territorial associations. These associations are found in stories, songs, regalia, and other cultural expressions. Management methods are built on years of observation, experience, practice, and monitoring, and some of them are embedded in age-old stories and ceremonies that embody the beliefs and worldviews of the community. This is what one author describes as "deep management," where traditional wisdom, metaphors, and taboos are passed down through stories, rituals, and the arts.[53] Again, such management systems may be challenging for individuals outside a culture to comprehend or interpret, yet they are effective in informing management practices.

Theme 3: Destruction of lands and food systems

The long and troubling history of the government taking over the food systems of Indigenous people in Canada was another important theme that came out of the readings. Forced migration, land dispossession, climate change, and environmental contamination have all undermined the agricultural knowledge of Indigenous communities. In addition, residential schools, disenfranchisement, and ongoing colonialism have contributed significantly to the eroding of Indigenous agricultural knowledge.[54]

As one researcher highlights, *"Indigenous children lost food preparation and harvesting skills, including the language, songs, ceremonies, and celebrations of their ancestors. Indigenous children were disconnected from the land and for many the cycle of intergenerational learning was broken."* [55]

Additionally, the concept of terra nullius (empty land) used as a tool for the dispossession of lands is often cited in the literature, as is the Indian Act of 1873 and the creation of the reserve system, where the Indian agent oversaw people's ability to come and go for harvesting. Further to this, an amendment in 1884 to the Indian Act would ban potlatches, one of the many traditional feasts that supported food sovereignty for many Nations in BC. [56]

Similarly, for economic reasons, Indigenous people lost access to numerous forested areas, and territories designated as federal or provincial parks were inaccessible to them for harvesting and land management. As the literature reveals this contributed considerably to the disruption and removal of Indigenous peoples' access to their territory, including the loss of agricultural knowledge.

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[51] Turner, Lepofsky, and Deur, "Plant Management Systems of British Columbia's First Peoples | BC Studies: The British Columbian Quarterly."

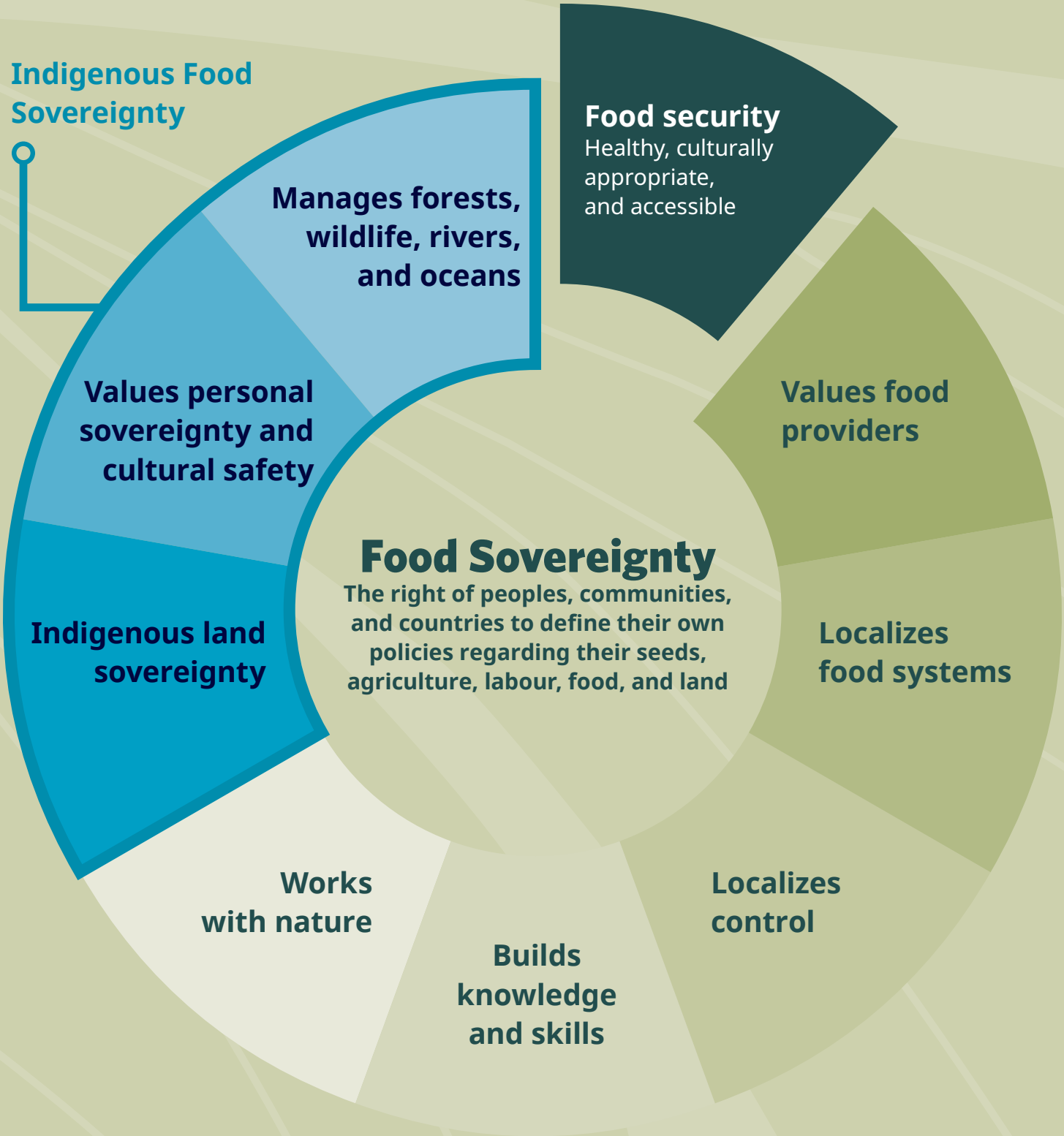
[52] Davis and Twidale, "Indigenous Food Systems on Vancouver Island."

[53] Turner, Lepofsky, and Deur, "Plant Management Systems of British Columbia's First Peoples | BC Studies: The British Columbian Quarterly."

[54] Robin et al., "Safe Food, Dangerous Lands? Traditional Foods and Indigenous Peoples in Canada."

[55] Robin et al., "Safe Food, Dangerous Lands? Traditional Foods and Indigenous Peoples in Canada," 4.

[56] Davis and Twidale, "Indigenous Food Systems on Vancouver Island."


Indigenous Food Sovereignty
Manages forests, wildlife, rivers, and oceans
Values personal sovereignty and cultural safety
Indigenous land sovereignty
Food security
Healthy, culturally appropriate, and accessible
Values food providers
Localizes food systems
Localizes control
Builds knowledge and skills
Works with nature
Food Sovereignty
The right of peoples, communities, and countries to define their own policies regarding their seeds, agriculture, labour, food, and land

3 Defining Food Security, Food Sovereignty, and Indigenous Food Sovereignty

3.1 Food Security

> *"Food security exists when all people, at all times, have access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life."*[57]

People who are never truly hungry and have access to extra food at all times are considered food secure. People who are frequently hungry and don't have access to extra food are food insecure. One measure of food (in)security is the number of days one could go without buying food before they went hungry.[58]

Food security is about people's access to sufficient, safe, nutritious food and how much of that food is available to them.

As a result of systemic exclusion and marginalization from their food sources, there is significantly more food insecurity among Indigenous communities than among non-Indigenous communities. Compared to 9% for non-Indigenous Canadian communities, food insecurity can range from 33% among off-reserve First Nation and Métis Peoples to 70% among some Inuit communities.[59]

During the COVID-19 pandemic, food security issues worsened because those who could afford to stockpile food did so, and those who couldn't afford it were left with empty shelves. [60]

Food security is a core public health program under BC's Guiding Framework for Public Health Goal of Healthy Living and Healthy Communities. The goal of the program is to increase food security for the population of BC. It is a complex and cross-cutting issue across multiple provincial Ministries that needs extensive collaboration to succeed.

Zero Hunger is the second of the 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), of which Canada is a signatory. Support for agriculture is critical to achieving this goal: "The SDGS aim to end all forms of hunger and malnutrition by 2030, making sure all people—especially children—have sufficient and nutritious food all year. This involves promoting sustainable agriculture, supporting small-scale farmers, and ensuring equal access to land, technology, and markets."[61]

STATISTICS ON FOOD INSECURITY IN BC

Overall, food insecurity affects 41% of First Nations households living on reserve in BC: 33% moderately and 8% severely.

Households with children tended to report more insecurity (45%) than households without children (33%). Food insecurity varies from a low of 16% to a high of 47% across ecozone/culture areas.

[57] "Rome Declaration and Plan of Action."
[58] "Hunger."
[59] Philipp, "Indigenous Food Insecurity in Canada - The Borgen Project."
[60] Alabi and Robin, "Food Insecurities and Dependencies: Indigenous Food Responses to COVID-19."
[61] United Nation Sustainable Development Goals, "Goal 2: Zero Hunger."

3.2 Food Sovereignty

Food sovereignty was developed and brought to the public's attention during the World Food Summit in 1996. It was put forth by *La Via Campesina*, a group of land-based peasants, farmers, and Indigenous peoples, to protest the corporate control of global food systems. They define food sovereignty as:

> *"The right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems."*[62]

Food sovereignty has also been defined as a "very broad concept that includes the right to access seeds, the right to produce, trade, and consume one's own foods… It is a concept that is linked to peoples' autonomy and sovereignty." [63] Food sovereignty includes the true right to food and the right to produce food. [64]

In 2007, over 500 farmers and delegates met in Nyéléni Village, Sélingué, Mali, for the Forum for Food Sovereignty. Food Sovereignty's six pillars, commonly called the "Nyéléni Declaration", were developed as a result of these discussions.[65, 66] This declaration has been adopted by the United Nations and other international organizations and forms the basis for food sovereignty definitions globally. The pillars are:

1. **Food for people.** The right to food which is healthy and culturally appropriate is the basic demand underpinning food sovereignty. This first pillar states that everyone has a right to food and food security.
2. **Values food providers.** Food sovereignty asserts food providers' right to live and work in dignity. Farmers and agricultural workers can experience severe exploitation. For Indigenous peoples, the holistic nature of food is often under-valued, treating Indigenous food producers as less than conventional primary producers.
3. **Localizes food systems.** Food must be seen primarily as sustenance for the community and region. Under food sovereignty, local and regional provision and trade takes precedence over supplying distant markets.
4. **Puts control locally.** Food sovereignty places control over territory, land, grazing, water, seeds, livestock, and fish populations under local governance and respects their rights. The local community can use and share them in socially and environmentally sustainable ways that conserve diversity. Privatization of such resources, for example through intellectual property rights regimes or commercial contracts, is explicitly rejected.
5. **Builds knowledge and skills.** Food sovereignty calls for appropriate research systems and resources to support the development of existing agricultural knowledge and supplement it with new skills and appropriate technologies. Technologies that undermine food providers' ability to develop and pass on knowledge and skills needed for localized food systems are not prioritized.
6. **Works with nature (not against nature).** Food sovereignty requires production and distribution systems that protect natural resources and reduce greenhouse gas emissions, avoiding energy-intensive industrial methods that damage the environment and the health of those who inhabit it.

In 2011, a seventh pillar was added by members of the Indigenous Circle during Food Secure Canada's People's Food Policy process:

7. **Food is sacred.** This pillar recognizes that food is a gift of life and is not to be squandered and asserts that food cannot be commodified.

[62] "What Is Food Sovereignty?"
[63] Martens et al., "Understanding Indigenous Food Sovereignty through an Indigenous Research Paradigm."
[64] "What Is Food Sovereignty?"
[65] Global Justice Now, "The Six Pillars of Food Sovereignty - Global Justice Now."
[66] "Declaration of Nyéléni."

3.3 Indigenous Food Sovereignty

> *"Indigenous food sovereignty is a living, breathing way of life found in the past and present and envisioned for future generations."*[67]

Indigenous food sovereignty can be said to incorporate Indigenous peoples' ongoing relationships with the land, woods, oceans, and rivers, as well as the cultural, political, and environmental components of food systems.[68] Community-based expressions of the movement can be found all over Canada, such as community gardens and calls for commercial fishing bans to rebuild fish stocks. Additional examples include providing households with planter boxes, soil, and seeds for the establishment of "Granny Gardens" in order to reduce grocery shopping trips. Others have tried to make their communities less reliant on food from outside sources by coming up with community-based food security plans that fit their needs, traditions, geography, and ability to grow food locally. [69]

The different experiences of the world's Indigenous peoples make it impossible to come up with a single definition of IFS. However, the BC Food Systems Network Working Group on IFS identifies four main principles to guide Indigenous food sovereignty research, action, and policy. These are:

1. **Sacredness and divine sovereignty** — We get our sovereignty directly from our Creator/Great Spirit. It is our responsibility rather than our right, to uphold sacred relationships to one another and the land, plants and animals that provide us with our food.
2. **Participatory** — Indigenous food sovereignty can only be achieved if we are actively participating in Indigenous food related activities (hunting, fishing, gathering and sustainable farming) on a day-to day-basis.
3. **Self–determination** — To be free from the corporate control and oppressive land, water and social policies and practices.
4. **Policy** — Indigenous food sovereignty is ultimately "grounded in practice" but is negatively impacted by oppressive colonial policies and requires a balanced approach to forming and influencing policy.[70]

THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN FOOD SECURITY AND FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

Food sovereignty includes food security as the first pillar. Due to its holistic nature, food sovereignty differs from food security. Food security is a goal, an outcome. Food sovereignty is a mission, or way, to accomplish food security. Food security is unconcerned with where or how food is produced; rather, its main concern is to protect existing food systems, whether through subsidies or policies, regardless of their exploitative practices. [1]

You can say that food security is a key component of food sovereignty; however, food security does not include or cover food sovereignty.

Additionally, the term "food security" cannot be simply exchanged for "food sovereignty." They are substantially different in their definitions and prioritizations.

[67] Robin, "Our Hands at Work: Indigenous Food Sovereignty in Western Canada," 91
[68] Morrison, "Indigenous Food Sovereignty: A Model for Social Learning."
[69] "Indigenous Food Sovereignty and COVID-19."
[70] Morrison, "Cross Cultural Interface Where Indigenous and Sustainable Agri-Food Systems Intra-Act."

At Tea Creek, after discussions with other Indigenous food producers, we recommend adding to or expanding the definition of IFS to include:

1. **Indigenous land sovereignty** — Returning Indigenous control over lands and natural resources is essential to the success of IFS.
2. **Management of forests, wildlife, rivers, and oceans** — IFS extends beyond Eurocentric definitions of agriculture that are overwhelmingly employed in legal, political and policy structures in BC and beyond to include all food and medicine sources, and the environments and habitats that support them.
3. **Personal sovereignty and cultural safety** — Supporting the rights of Indigenous people to self-determine, and to be safe to be themselves within their own culture on their own lands.

A recommended next step is to convene Indigenous producers to decide what can be added or modified for a BC definition of IFS.

Indigenous Foodways vs. Colonial Foodways

To address Indigenous food security and sovereignty, it is essential to understand Indigenous worldviews and foodways. For many Indigenous people, land is more than just property. It is tied to culture, identity, relationships, ecosystems, social systems, spirituality, law, and more. Indigenous peoples commonly have spiritual and ecological connections with the plants and animals that provide their food. Agricultural cultivation techniques and the related knowledge and customs are often handed down from generation to generation in conjunction with rituals, songs, and ceremonies honouring the co-creation of non-human beings. **Food is seen as a "gift from the Creator" with deep spiritual and cultural significance, rather than as a "product", "resource" or "commodity" to be exploited.**[71]

Indigenous foodways have been displaced, threatened, or destroyed as a result of colonization and the imposition of non-Indigenous foodways through settlement in Canada (and elsewhere in the world). IFS aims to contribute to the process of decolonization and revitalization of Indigenous foodways, which, aligns with major, immerging objectives within the agriculture sector at large to transition to regenerative, sustainable, and climate-mitigating practices.

[71] Fang, Gabriel, and Feng, "Feasibility Study: Overcoming Policy Barriers to Indigenous Food Sovereignty in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside," 3.

Six Reasons to Support Indigenous Food Sovereignty



4 Why is Indigenous Food Sovereignty Urgent?

> *"You needed to start growing vegetables yesterday, you know. Today is a good time to start, but yesterday was better."*
> — Sam Gosnell, Tea Creek graduate[72]

The ever-worsening impacts of climate change are threatening food security on a global scale. Coupled with supply-chain vulnerabilities revealed by the COVID-19 pandemic, these impacts highlight the urgency of IFS. In BC, global conditions have caused food prices to skyrocket, and those with low incomes are the hardest hit. A disproportionate number of low-income people are Indigenous.[73]

Food shortages, environmental damage, species extinctions, and climate disasters are threatening the world's population at a time when reconciliation with Indigenous peoples is not only urgently required but has been made a provincial and national commitment through the Province of BC's *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act* and the Government of Canada's *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act*. Yet, Indigenous people continue to experience reconciliation as "all talk and no action."

Specific actions directed toward IFS could address these concerns. The aim of this discussion paper is to demonstrate how and to offer tangible recommendations and strategies for the Provincial government, for Indigenous communities, and for other agencies involved in Indigenous food and agriculture projects.

Returning lands to Indigenous people and investing in IFS will contribute to a diversity of key Provincial and Federal government priorities, including:

- Fighting climate change
- Enhancing food security
- Fostering economic resilience across BC's regions
- Tackling 13 of the United Nations' *Sustainable Development Goals*
- Rejuvenating the province's agricultural sector
- Supporting reconciliation, the implementation of the *Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act*, and offsetting cumulative impacts of colonization

While the numbers of farms and farmers in Canada are in steady decline, farmers' average age is increasing. In contrast, the Indigenous population is the youngest and fastest-growing in Canada.[74] Moreover, rural areas with food-producing capacity are populated by Indigenous people. This means that Indigenous communities in rural areas are well positioned to step into food production. Many Indigenous communities are already doing so, as the case studies in this paper document.

Now is the time to work together to implement IFS-based solutions on a large scale. Indigenous Nations and people are ready to move on IFS. A comprehensive and adequately resourced IFS plan will equip us to make positive changes that benefit everyone.

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[72] Jacob Beaton, "Sam - Nisga'as Naturally Want to Help Other Nisga'as," 2:24.

[73] "Indigenous Food Sovereignty and Food Security in a Changing Climate."

[74] "The Daily — Indigenous Population Continues to Grow and Is Much Younger than the Non-Indigenous Population, Although the Pace of Growth Has Slowed."

4.1 Communication Toolkit Championing IFS: 6 Narratives

In meetings with IACAF leadership and members, it became clear that several different narratives support Indigenous food sovereignty as a high priority. This section summarizes some of the most important, prominent narratives and is designed to be used as speaking notes when talking about IFS. Key messages center on:

- Fighting climate change
- Reconciliation
- Sustainable development
- Offsetting cumulative impacts of colonization
- Regional food security
- Fighting agricultural decline in Canada and BC

These narratives are listed in random order, not by priority or urgency, and the list is by no means comprehensive. It is a starting point for discussion on IFS. Please feel free to mix and match the narratives to suit your community's IFS agenda.

4.1.1 Fighting Climate Change

Target audience:

Those who see fighting climate change, global warming, and climate disasters as a top priority.

Problems to solve:

- Climate disasters and global warming
- High carbon footprint of getting food from the producer to the consumer
- Shrinking biodiversity

Narrative:

By supporting IFS, we are directly fighting climate change. Imported, industrially produced foods tend to have a higher carbon footprint depending on how far the food comes to the consumer and how much processing is needed. A general assumption is that for every calorie it takes to produce food on a farm, it takes 10 or more calories to get it to the customer.

Food imported from places like California and Mexico are prime examples of imports with an outsized carbon footprint that is not sustainable. When we localize our food systems – from growing to processing to distribution — through IFS, the carbon cost of food is reduced, making a large positive contribution toward reducing greenhouse emissions and increasing local food security at the same time.

It is important to note that not all local food systems reduce carbon costs. Generally, soil-based systems trap carbon and are low in cost. Indoor growing can actually increase the energy cost of local food. [75]

The world's natural world is in sharp decline, with two-thirds of the world's wildlife wiped out since 1970. [76] Additionally, 80% of the world's remaining biodiversity rests on lands managed by Indigenous peoples. [77] This is why returning lands to Indigenous peoples is considered a pillar in the fight against climate change and climate disaster.

Short video on this subject produced by Tea Creek: https://www.facebook.com/jwbeaton/videos/10158444016921043/

[75] "Indoor Farming Delivers Super-Fresh Produce to Cities, but Its Energy Use Creates a 'Conundrum.'"
[76] Woodyatt, "Human Activity Has Wiped out Two-Thirds of World's Wildlife since 1970, Landmark Report Says."
[77] Raygorodetsky, "Indigenous Peoples Defend Earth's Biodiversity—but They're in Danger."

4.1.2 Reconciliation

Target audience:

Primarily non-Indigenous people and initiatives that are making acts of reconciliation with Indigenous people a priority.

Problems to solve:

- There are many historical injustices to redress, including dispossession of lands and removal of IFS tools, among others.
- Indigenous people are becoming frustrated that reconciliation is all talk and no action.
- Reconciliation can be daunting when the impacts of genocidal colonialism are so broad and deep.

Narrative:

Actively supporting IFS is a reconciliatory act that can advance a number of possible repairs. Supporting IFS:

- Returns historically Indigenous food-producing lands to Indigenous owners.
- Provides a pathway to restoring food knowledge that was stripped away through residential schools and other genocidal tactics.
- Offers many opportunities to repair local and regional Indigenous economies that were desiccated by centuries of federal and provincial policies designed to destroy the Indigenous food economy.
- Provides space for land-based, culturally safe healing.
- Provides opportunity for settler-descended Canadians to learn about our history and be a part of positive reconciliation.

Many Indigenous cultures and languages do not differentiate between land and people. Removing Indigenous people from their lands was a profound act of violence. Returning valuable food-producing lands to Indigenous ownership and management is a powerful act of repair and reconciliation.

In Coast Salish languages, for example, the word for land and the word for people share the same root. When asked why, it was explained that the root word means “center of your being” and also “we are the land, and the land is us.”

An article with more information on Coast Salish phrases and traditional worldview can be found here: https://www.capitaldaily.ca/news/salish-language-word-of-the-week-first-nations-cowichan-indigenous

[78] “THE 17 GOALS | Sustainable Development.”

4.1.3 Sustainable Development

Target audience:

Those who want to see pathways for more resilient, sustainable local economies.

Problems to solve:

- The developed world, which hosts a minority of the world's population, consumes an outsized share of the world's resources.
- The developing world, which many argue includes some Indigenous Nations and Peoples in Canada, deserves a fair living standard and share of resources.
- The world cannot afford for everyone to consume an outsized amount of resources.

Narrative:

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by all United Nations member states in 2015, provides a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future. At its heart are 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are an urgent call for action by all countries, both developed and developing, in a global partnership. The SDGs recognize that ending poverty and other deprivations must go hand in hand with strategies that improve health and education, reduce inequality, and spur economic growth — all while tackling climate change and working to preserve our oceans and forests. [78]

Making IFS a cornerstone of sustainable development is wise, as it checks off a number of the 17 goals. Some of the top priorities covered are:

- No poverty (#1) — IFS provides a route to food security, but also other poverty reduction such as housing and clothing.
- Zero hunger (#2) — IFS focuses on providing food to those who need it.
- Good health and wellbeing (#3) — IFS provides many physical and mental health benefits stemming from working with soil, often outdoors, and in a physically active way.
- Quality education (#4) — Many Indigenous people respond very well to learning in a land-based, culturally safe environment provided by IFS initiatives.
- Gender equality (#5) — Food production work in many Indigenous cultures is gender neutral, and Tea Creek is bucking trends in trades participation by enrolling equal numbers of males and females.[79]
- Sustainable cities and communities (#11) — Localizing food production and supporting local industries through IFS goes a long way toward this goal.
- Climate action (#13) — As mentioned, localizing food systems through IFS is a key to fighting climate change by greatly reducing the carbon footprint of food production.

[78] "THE 17 GOALS | Sustainable Development."

[79] "Impact 2022; Tea Creek Training and Employment."

4.1.4 Offsetting Cumulative Impacts of Colonization

Target audience:

Indigenous and non-Indigenous policy makers and leaders in BC, Canada, and beyond.

Problems to solve:

- Indigenous people have been negatively impacted by a wide spectrum of government policy and actions. These negative impacts add up and are felt acutely by Indigenous peoples.
- As one example, logging, mining, oil and gas, energy, fishing and "conservation" policies and activities have disrupted or destroyed traditional food sources such as salmon, shellfish, berries, and wild game.
- The loss of these traditional foods disproportionately affects Indigenous people, whose median incomes have not risen significantly in BC.

Narrative:

After Indigenous people were confined to reserves, they were often able to supplement their low incomes by harvesting wild food. Families in the Northwest, for example, were able to store dozens of cases of salmon and stock their freezers with wild meat. However, cumulative impacts have reduced wildlife, including in rivers and oceans, and the availability of these food sources has been in sharp decline.

Indigenous people are more likely to be rural and live on reserve, where Indigenous median incomes are well below poverty levels. In the past, it was possible to live a healthy lifestyle on a low income, but with sharp declines in wild food, Indigenous people, especially children, often live in dire straits. In the Kitwanga valley, for example, the median income on reserve is less than $20,000 per year [80] and the average number of people per household is three to four times higher than in the nearby cities of Smithers and Terrace. These numbers are not unusual for rural and remote First Nations in BC. On these income levels, it is nearly impossible for people to feed their families. Many households lack things most readers of this document take for granted: an insured vehicle with gas in the tank, adequate clothing, and enough food in the kitchen.

IFS offers a path for offsetting cumulative impacts. As calories have been removed from Indigenous territories through industrial activities, these calories can be directly replaced through the support of IFS projects that produce healthy, local food. The costs to start up and sustain IFS projects are miniscule compared to the revenue generated from resources extracted from Indigenous lands in BC.

[80] "Aboriginal Community Data Initiative Portrait, 2016 Census – Gitwangak (First Nation/Indian Band or Tribal Council Area)."

4.1.5 Regional Food Security and Economic Development

Target audience:

Local communities, mostly in rural areas, that are concerned about food security and food shortages in the future.

Problem to solve:

- Climate change, market and supply chain volatilities and other global conditions mean that food in remote and rural areas is becoming increasingly vulnerable, scarce and prohibitively expensive.

Narrative:

Regional food security is threatened by a number of factors, including supply chain issues, rising costs of inputs, and climate disasters. By supporting comprehensive IFS projects, we can provide regional food security and buffer local economies and regions against future food shortages and shocks.

It is important to understand that IFS goes beyond food production to include control and care of forests, rivers, and oceans. With Indigenous people in control of lands, both biodiversity and the available water-holding capacity of lands increase, adding an additional layer of regional resilience beyond primary food production.

IFS also includes supporting industries such as primary trades and businesses that create and provide inputs required by food producers. A robust IFS economy would produce a surplus of product and goods that could then support surrounding regions.

4.1.6 Fighting Agricultural Decline in BC and Canada

Target audience:

Farmers, primary food producers, policymakers, and the general population.

Problems to solve:

- The number of farmers continues to decrease in Canada, and the average farmer continues to get older.
- Indigenous farmers represent only 1% of farmers, despite making up around 5% of the Canadian population.[81]
- Canada continues to decline in farming activity and active farmland. The number of active farms in BC declined by over 9%, according to the latest census data.

Narrative:

There are fewer farmers in Canada, and the remaining farmers are getting older. [82] Indigenous people make up only 1% of farmers, while making up 5% of the population. Indigenous people are Canada's fastest-growing population and have a youthful average age, with over half being under the age of 25. [83] An opportunity exists for BC and Canada to achieve multiple goals and solve many issues by actively and meaningfully supporting IFS projects.

In 2021 alone, Tea Creek introduced hundreds of Indigenous people to IFS through over 1,200 site visits. SkillsTrade BC, and a postsecondary agricultural advisor say that Tea Creek's "Introduction to Agriculture" program has trained more Indigenous people in agriculture than any other program in BC. Supporting similar initiatives, paired with real support for IFS projects, could have an enormous positive impact on the overall agricultural sector.

Even if just 5% of the Indigenous population in BC [84] became active in food sovereignty, it would add more than 11,000 people to the province's food economy.

[81] "Aboriginal Peoples and Agriculture in 2016: A Portrait."

[82] "The Daily — Canada's 2021 Census of Agriculture: A Story about the Transformation of the Agriculture Industry and Adaptiveness of Canadian Farmers."

[83] "Indigenous Identity by Registered or Treaty Indian Status: Canada, Provinces and Territories, Census Metropolitan Areas and Census Agglomerations with Parts."

[84] "Focus on Geography Series, 2016 Census - Province of British Columbia."

A Brief Note About Data Sovereignty

Agricultural knowledge is often based on ancestral and collective ways of knowing and is imparted through various methods, such as oral traditions and ceremonies. It is important to understand that the early exchange of Indigenous knowledge with settlers flowed freely, yet over time that knowledge became a tool for settlers and colonial governments to remove Indigenous people from the food systems that had sustained them for thousands of years.

Many of the colonial inequities that Indigenous communities still endure today were ultimately caused by openly sharing knowledge of the land with newcomers, who designed policies that took away Indigenous peoples' food sovereignty.

You see this colonial legacy addressed in Article 31 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), which was established as the Province of B.C.'s framework for reconciliation with the passing of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act in 2019. Article 31 reads:

> Indigenous peoples have the right to maintain, control, protect and develop their cultural heritage, traditional knowledge, and traditional cultural expressions, as well as the manifestations of their sciences, technologies, and cultures, including human and genetic resources, seeds, medicines, knowledge of the properties of fauna and flora...They also have the right to maintain, control, protect and develop their intellectual property over such cultural heritage, traditional knowledge, and traditional cultural expressions.[85]

The importance of Indigenous "ownership" and control of data has repeatedly come up during Tea Creek's mapping project. There were significant concerns raised with Indigenous food producers and subsequently in our phone calls with other Indigenous people. There is a very high level of discomfort around sharing important or sensitive details and then having that information held by any non-Indigenous entity.

Additionally, while seeking survey input to collect data for an IFS mapping project, multiple concerns were raised over how this data would be used. There is concern that information collected could be used to target Indigenous communities in a negative or exploitative way for instance, by companies, groups or organizations who want to quickly narrow in on First Nations and try to sell them things they may not need or want.

Finally, a sense of hesitation exists from communities that feel they are often "over-surveyed" and "under-served".

As an Indigenous-led organization, we appreciate the depth and complexity of these concerns and have taken steps to ensure data shared with us during this project is kept securely. We are committed to ensuring the data is only used in ways that support and not harm Indigenous peoples.

See Appendix E for 'Data Sovereignty Survey Disclaimer'.

[85] "United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act."

5 Survey Results, IFS Mapping & Case Studies

Overview

A survey was sent out to participants across British Columbia, who are actively working on planning, developing, or implementing Indigenous-led food security or sovereignty initiatives in their communities. The survey reached about 500 people and yielded approximately 50 returned surveys, representing a 10% response rate. This is double the industry average of a 5% response rate to surveys.

The survey data pool was relatively small, and conducting a more extensive return will require additional time and resources. However, we were able to gather important data based on direct responses to some of the questions.

A link to the survey itself can be found here: https://teacreek.wufoo.com/forms/mi1bg30mi64qb/



Of the surveyed projects, 53% have startup costs under $500,000, while the remaining 47% have startup costs between $500,000 and $2,000,000. Of the 52 total responses, seven (7) reported being in operation.

In response to the question, *"What is most important and needed to support Indigenous food sovereignty and security in your Nation or community?"* participants were given a host of responses that they could rate from 'not important at all' to 'most important.'

The following options were given:

- Connection to customers
- Access to land
- Capital funding
- Operational funding
- Reconciliation actions from government
- Training/access to workers
- Food sovereignty planning
- Nation to Nation collaboration
- Policy changes to support IFS

The top three responses in order of priority were:

1. Operational funding
2. Capital funding
3. Training/access to workers

In response to the question, *"What are the impacts of climate change on your community or nation?"* Participants responded most strongly to the following three impacts:

1. Our fish, game, or other wild foods are in decline
2. We have been impacted by fires or record heat
3. Our supply chain was interrupted

The highest reported barriers to projects or initiatives across survey participants in order of response were:

1. Lack of capacity (trained people)
2. Lack of funding
3. Lack of effective education or training

Please find further summaries of the survey in Appendix C.

Findings and Observations

It should be noted again that while the survey results were not representative, we can harvest the themes from the content shared and compare them alongside the literature review, case studies, and experience working in the field to draw comparisons and conclusions.

The main conclusions and themes we can draw from the survey results are as follows:

- There is a need for community-led initiatives that are Nation-directed. Self-determination is critical.
- Ongoing operational funding is key to sustainable development of programs and initiatives.
- Easier access to funding is critical to help Nations with low capacity develop successful projects.
- Unsustainable land management practices that have a colonial bias, including resource extraction and exploitation, are impacting Indigenous community access to wild foods, and in so doing impacting their food sovereignty and food security at nation, community and household levels.
- Training and capacity building are identified as necessary to the long-term success of projects or initiatives.
- Access to land and capital funding are critical to success and getting operations off the ground. Many initiatives fail or falter due to unsustainable funding and capacity once in operation mode.

5.1 Mapping IFS Projects In BC

A contact list is the first step in deploying a survey and gathering information. Tea Creek learned that an organized list of IFS projects in BC does not currently exist. There are no centralized IFS resources or initiatives available or anybody that brings them together. This issue was raised early on in this project, and Tea Creek endeavored to start with gathering IFS information and centralizing it on Tea Creek servers.

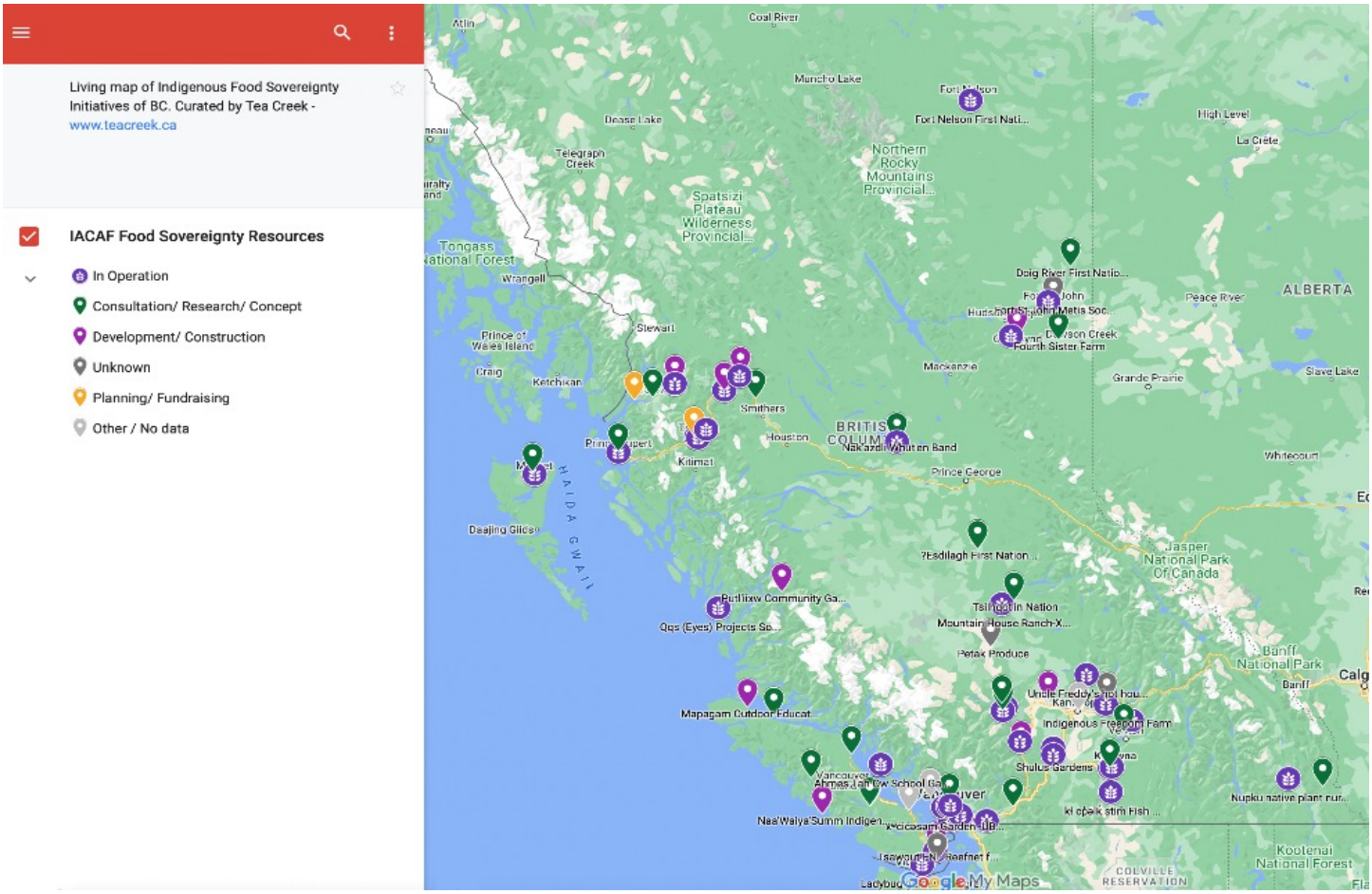
Additionally, we reached out to other resources who have recently conducted surveying or engagement around IFS, but either we did not hear back or we were refused assistance.

If adequately funded, an extensive and authoritative resource map could be created that could serve Nations across BC by conglomerating initiatives, resources, trade networks, and funding sources.

Such a map would benefit Indigenous Nations by increasing their ability to network easily and effectively, access resources and funding, and develop trade networks.

A helpful resource map for comparison has already been undertaken by the Young Agrarians. Funding was sourced from the Ministry of Agriculture and Food to create a BC wide map for farmers to easily access resources, land availability, education, other farmers and jobs available. Please see their website for preview: https://maps.youngagrarians.org/

Initial Mapping



5.2 Case Studies

Tea Creek conducted 13 case studies with a broad range of Indigenous food sovereignty and security projects, initiatives, and persons across many Nations in BC.

Case studies were conducted in the Northwest, Northeast, Central, South, and Interior regions of BC between February 24 and March 31, 2022.

- kɬ cp̓əlk̓ stiḿ Fish Hatchery
- Neskonlith Indigenous Freedom Farm
- Shulus Gardens
- Harold Aljam — First Nations Agriculture Association (FNAA), Coldwater Indian Band
- Splitrock Environmental
- Ucwalmicw Community Gardens
- Erin Durrell — Narcosli Consulting
- Sik-e-dakh Farm School
- Mapagam Outdoor Education Society
- Akisq’nuk, Band of the Ktunaxa First Nation
- Tea Creek: Food Sovereignty Training
- Amisk Farm
- Fourth Sister Farm

5.2.1
kɬ cp̓əlk̓ stiḿ Fish Hatchery

16 Green Mountain Road, Penticton, BC V2A 8X1
Nation and Community: Syilx, Okanagan Nation Alliance (Okanagan Indian Band, Upper Nicola Band, Westbank First Nation, Penticton Indian Band, Osoyoos Indian Band, Lower and Upper Similkameen Indian Bands, Colville Confederated Tribes)

https://www.syilx.org/fisheries/our-projects/

Interviewee: Herb Alex, Site Manager







Overview

The kɬ cp̓əlk̓ stiḿ Hatchery is an integral part of the maintenance and survival of the Okanagan and Columbia sockeye runs. Due to the "New Deal" in the 1940s, the creation of dams along the Columbia River and Okanagan River slowed and eventually impeded the sockeye (and other salmonids) from returning to their natural spawning grounds. This fish hatchery aims to rehabilitate sockeye runs in the Okanagan Valley and Columbia River Basin.

The damming of the Columbia prevented fish from making it up to the rest of the Columbia (i.e., Castlegar and Revelstoke). Similarly, the McIntyre Dam near Oliver prevented the fish from going onto the Skaha and Okanagan Lakes.

The Okanagan Nation (Syilx peoples) once relied on salmon, most of which was dried and smoked, for 80% of their annual food intake.

This initiative is eight years old and is funded by public utility districts (PUDs) in the US that fund environmental projects to do with the impacts of river damming. The Okanagan Nation Alliance also has a habitat restoration team that works to restore fish habitats along the rivers and lakes of the Okanagan.

The initiative

kɬ cp̓əlk̓ stiḿ Hatchery opened in 2014 as a project to rehabilitate sockeye in the Okanagan basin after the devastation of salmon runs due to the Columbia River damming. Prior to 2014, the number of fish arriving in the Okanagan was around 15,000-30,000 per year. The highest run recorded since the opening of the hatchery was 150,000 fish.

Salmon begin their run through the valley starting in July and end up depositing their eggs around September or October. At this time, salmon are harvested and brought to the hatchery to "ripen." Once the eggs are ready, they are harvested from the salmon, incubated in the facility, and transferred to larger boxes once they reach a certain size.

The fry stay in the hatchery until May or June of the following year and are released into Shingle Creek, which runs into the Penticton Channel. Fish then enter Skaha Lake (their incubator lake), where they remain for one year, after which they swim down through the Columbia Basin out to sea for feeding, usually up to Alaska and the northern BC coast.

The survival rate of returning wild salmon in the Okanagan is only 0.5%, while the survival rate for hatchery fish is 30%. This is because eggs and fry are protected from environmental impacts and prey during their stay in the hatchery.

Each year, the hatchery has the capacity to harvest and incubate 8 million eggs. Due to a low number of returning salmon, they release about 400,000 sockeye fry each year into lakes in the interior. Some are shipped by container to spots in Okanagan Lake, and some are deposited as far east as the Kootenays in the Columbia river and lake systems. With higher salmon returns, more eggs could be harvested, and the hatchery could operate at a fuller capacity.

A hatchery is necessary at the moment in the Okanagan to sustain the sockeye and chinook populations in light of many devastating environmental impacts, including climate change, overfishing, and resource extraction.

Other projects

In addition to its hatchery program, the Okanagan Nation has other projects that help salmon spawn and return to the area. These include:

- River and creek 're-meandering and reconnection,' restoring the natural curves that encourage fish spawning habitats and feeding grounds and reconnecting streams and creeks that have been blocked off or redirected
- River and creek gravel bed restoration to encourage spawning grounds
- Monitoring and mitigating invasive species impact

Impacts and challenges to the traditional salmon runs in the Okanagan

- Climate change, rising river and lake temperatures
- Competing fish harvesting interests along the riverways, Nations downstream from the hatchery (in the US) harvest for food along the way. Without inter-nation agreements on harvest numbers, most viable food fish and hatchery eggs may be used already
- Invasive species (like carp) eat eggs and fry of sockeye salmon
- Urbanization and irrigation canals in the Okanagan degenerate salmon spawning grounds
- Hyper-oxygenation of the water from dam turbines can kill off large amounts of young fish along their first migration back to the ocean
- Commercial overfishing in BC/Alaska
- Overlogging, clearcutting, urbanization, agriculture, and mining destroy fish habitat and spawning grounds

Impacts of reduced salmon runs on the Okanagan Nation:

- Reduced food security
- Limited access to cultural practices related to fishing and preserving
- Health-related issues due to limited access to traditional foods

Families of the Okanagan cannot access enough fish for drying or smoking for their annual diet. In 2021, the fish harvest was significantly reduced due to warming and low rivers. The amount of fish released in 2022 will also be significantly reduced due to low fish numbers and reduced egg collection.

Future projects

The Okanagan Nation Alliance (ONA) is working on restoring salmon to once-teeming streams, rivers, and lakes within Syilx territories. These initiatives inevitably benefit neighboring communities connected within the same watershed, including the Secwepemc, Ktunaxa, and southern neighboring communities in northwestern Washington, such as the Colville Confederated Tribes.

Based on the size and scope of the kɬ cp̓əlk̓ stiḿ hatchery, 300,000 to half a million salmon could return to the Okanagan Basin each year. This number could effectively meet the food security and sovereignty needs of the local Indigenous communities.

To see this happen, the ONA would need further assistance in the following areas:

- Cooperation from local municipalities, local regional districts, and landowners to create and encourage salmon habitats and reduce invasive species and barriers
- Measures to address commercial overfishing across borders that impacts returning salmon runs in Okanagan and Columbia Basins
- Funding to expand rehabilitation projects
- Steps to facilitate or encourage inter-Nation collaboration around salmon reintroduction

Currently the ONA is proposing a salmon reintroduction project into the northern Columbia Basin, which spans the southeastern territories of BC. This could potentially be the largest salmon reintroduction project in BC and Canada.

To initiate this project, a multi-nation and multi-party agreement between the Secwepmec, Syilx, and Ktanaxa, the DFO, and the Province of British Columbia must be established. Currently salmon fry from the kɬ cp̓əlk̓ stim̓ Hatchery are shipped via containers and spread to incubator lakes in the Upper Columbia Basin. Capacity is much reduced due to travel and shipping restraints. The goal would be to develop a new hatchery site alongside a major incubator lake in the Kootenay watershed. A separate hatchery site would ensure that the salmon from that specific area and climate would be harvested for their eggs so that the genetics of the fish would stay within the specific watershed, increasing their chances of survival.

This project is of crucial importance for all Nations along the Columbia Basin. Rising river and lake temperatures are increasing the likelihood of salmon extinction. The Columbia Basin is home to a number of cold water lakes that could serve in the future as incubator lakes that host salmon fry for the first year of growth before they head downstream to the ocean to feed. Given the changing climate, these lakes are crucial to salmon survival and provide a generous environment for strong runs in the future and reintroduction of salmon back into the diet of the Okanagan and neighboring Nations.

5.2.2
Neskonlith Indigenous Freedom Farm

Neskonlith Indian Band
Nation and community: Secwepemc, Neskonlith

https://www.indigenousfoodsystems.org/

Interviewees: Dawn Morrison and Janice Billy



Overview

Tea Creek met with Dawn Morrison and Janice Billy to discuss their projects in their community and wider-scope projects and initiatives working in Indigenous food systems in BC.

The discussion centered around wider policy and the broad impacts of colonization on Indigenous peoples across Nations in BC, as well as the implications of outside governmental bodies imposing on Indigenous lands and land rights.

The Indigenous Freedom Farm is a grassroots initiative founded on Neskonlith territory to support the local community through food growing and land-based healing.

Core issues

Most of the discussion centered on issues around land access, water rights, and the abuse of Indigenous sovereignty by colonial systems.

Multiple barriers exist for Indigenous communities in the local area, including:

- Access to land — there is not enough land and not enough funding; existing land is farmable though capacity to use it is low.
- Increase of large-scale, non-Indigenous agriculture projects in the area impacts water usage. These projects claim resources without reparation.
- Heavy forestry and agriculture in the area degrades land, water, and water infrastructure.
- Water use is not managed or monitored, water infrastructure (dam in Neskonlith) is not maintained, and local non-Indigenous agriculture producers are not held accountable for water usage.
- Capacity to run and maintain projects is currently low due to funding issues and systemic barriers.
- Too much time chasing funding and lobbying government; government must realize that capacity is currently low in many Nations due to the impacts of colonization and that it has a responsibility to use its resources to support projects.
- Band system is a flawed, imposed structure that doesn't work in the interest of many Nations.

Needs

- Long-term core funding that allows Nations to dictate and implement their own projects with limited strings attached and a minimum of bureaucratic barriers.
- A funding approach that respects and enters into dialogue on specific Nation needs. The government has a fragmented, siloed approach to interactions with particular Indigenous food systems that are complex and intersectional. An inter-ministerial approach is needed to take the burden off Nations to fix a system that doesn't apply to them.
- Funding to support infrastructure development: irrigation, buildings (cold storage, housing), staff and wages, participant wages, transportation (non fossil fuel). Government must work to 'balance the burden of the work' by addressing Nations' technical needs and providing training, mentorship, and long-term funding.
- Funding for Nation-to-Nation research (Indigenous led) to understand the specific food and water needs of each Nation, as well as funding for initiatives that help Nations get there (i.e., understand how much it will take and what it will take in terms of infrastructure and capacity).
- More incentives for youth: wages, mentorship specific to Indigenous food systems.

Neskonlith Indigenous Freedom Farm would like to see agriculture reframed as regenerative food systems. They note that funders need to adapt to Indigenous groups and take their cues from them rather than the other way around.

5.2.3
Shulus Gardens

Lower Nicola Indian Band (Shulus: 'People of the Creek')
2124 Nawishaskin Lane, Merrit, BC
Nation and Community: Secwepemc, Lower Nicola

https://www.lnib.net/shulus-community-and-medicine-garden/

Interviewee: Lorna Shuter, Project Manager
One full-time manager and two full-time seasonal workers are employed; a summer student program is offered.







Overview

Shulus Gardens was founded in 1997 and originally funded by the Lower Nicola Band, a community of approximately 1600 people. The initiative sprang up from the band's Sustainable Food Security Initiative and was designed to encourage food-growing projects in its community.

Shulus Gardens grows mixed food crops, including potatoes, squash, swiss chard, lettuce, onions, carrots, and beets, on about one acre of farmland.

There are multiple beehives on site, a small orchard, and a medicine garden. Infrastructure on site includes a harvest station, indoor storage and office space, a bathroom, a cool room for vegetable storage, and some storage sheds.

The food grown on site is sold to the local community and the local Nicola Valley Institute of Technology (NVIT) cooking and chef program. Community members can receive food vouchers and have access to fresh produce throughout the year. Food is also sold to local soup kitchens, school kitchens, and elders in the community.

Regular workshops are hosted on site around food growing, composting, and orchard management. Participants range from school groups to the elderly. Shulus Gardens employs and trains community members in all aspects of farming and food growing, including data recording, selling, packaging, and bookkeeping. Education is an essential part of their programming, and community members are encouraged to grow their own food in the community.

Shulus Gardens is core-funded by the Lower Nicola Band and accesses food and farming grants for infrastructure improvement and expansion. Seedlings are grown at the NVIT greenhouse in Merritt through a partnership agreement.

The farm operation is on what used to be a beef cattle pasture once known as the Shulus Cattle Farm. The band found that small beef operations were a money drain and switched the site's use for vegetable production and training.

Needs

- Leadership in the community and community mentorship
- Further training for food growing and associated skills
- Capacity to expand projects into community and develop inter-Nation collaborations

Future projects:

The Lower Nicola band hopes to expand the Shulus Gardens model further into the community but lacks someone to "pass the project on to." This part of the project would include:

- Helping households to turn their property into food-growing sites
- Expanding traditional foods workshops in cooperation with the local cultural center
- Hosting more food growing workshops
- Expanding the Shulus garden site
- Bringing in mentors and elders for knowledge sharing

5.2.4
Harold Aljam, Coldwater Indian Band

President of the First Nations Agriculture Association (FNAA),
Economic Development Coordinator for Coldwater Indian Band

301- 230th Street, Coldwater Reserve #1, PO Box 4600
Merritt BC V1K 1B8
Nation and community: Secwepemc, Coldwater Indian Band

Interviewee: Harold Aljam



Overview

Tea Creek discussed a variety of topics with Harold, including local ranching, agriculture projects within his community, and the impacts of climate change on the area.

Harold wears many hats. He is a rancher, working 35 cattle on a ranch passed down from his father. He also works on economic development with the Coldwater Band and is the president of the First Nations Agriculture Association (FNAA).

Impacts of climate change on the area

In 2021, the impacts of climate change will have devastating consequences for the Merritt area ranching and farming community.

- Water shortages meant farmers could not irrigate their hay fields. This led to lower yields with most farmers getting just one cut of hay (compared to the typical 2 or 3 cuts/year).
- Massive fires in the area meant farmers had to either evacuate their cattle or leave them behind. Many farmers lost their summer range (natural grazing range for cattle in the summer) due to fires. Many cattle had to stay or be brought back to pasture earlier than usual, which led to hay shortages as cattle started eating the winter hay supply earlier.
- Floods hit in later autumn which flooded out the lower plains in the area, destroying hay fields and rotting the hay.

Ranching and agriculture in Coldwater

The Coldwater Indian Band was once home to eight ranches within their reserve land. Today, that number is reduced to three. The average age of ranchers in the area is 67–68. Many of the older ranchers had no one to pass their knowledge to. When younger band members left the community for short-term jobs, they would come back to ranches that had been closed down.

Today, even though there is interest in getting ranching initiatives going again, younger generations don't have the knowledge, experience, or capital required to restart them.

Harold shared that there used to be thousands of pounds of potatoes farmed on reserve land in the area. A local story tells that at one time, up to 50,000 pounds of potatoes were grown and shipped to the Lower Mainland.

Ranching has been in decline over the last few decades. Competition with US markets puts a strain on local prices, and non-local dairy farmers are buying up local ranches and turning them into feedlots. This is detrimental to the local environment as effluent from oversaturated soils runs off into rivers.

Challenges/barriers

- There is a gap in knowledge and skills transfer for ranching and agriculture. Younger community members don't have training or mentorship to become farmers, business owners or developers. The Coldwater band struggles with finding ways to get youth engaged.
- Capital funds are not available to kickstart farms; major funding is needed for infrastructure and equipment and to breed stock for ranching.
- Climate change, logging, mining, and highways development have led to increased drought, fires and floods in the area. All have had a major impact on agriculture.
- Local abattoirs face too many regulations and rules, limiting the amount of accessible slaughtering facilities in the area. This in turn reduces the amount of cattle that local farmers can ranch successfully.
- Excessive regulations on food production keep local and small producers and systems from thriving.
- Inter-Nation collaboration is low in the area.
- Local recreation and development impede Indigenous food production.
- Non-Indigenous peoples overharvest fish and berries.

Future goals and plans

- A community garden that trains and mentors youth in agriculture skills, marketing, and business and entrepreneurship.
- Large-scale animal farm development (pigs, turkey, chickens) on reserve to supply community needs for the year.
- Development of fish farms on land for local fish harvest.
- Industrial kitchen on band land for processing and preserving community food (berries, fish).
- Accessible loans for Indigenous farmers.

5.2.5
Splitrock Environmental

South 1119, BC-99, Lillooet, BC V0K 1V0
(250) 256-0002
Nation and community: St'at'imc, Sekw'el'was

splitrockenvironmental.ca

Interviewees: Courtney Andrews, Nursery Coordinator; Odin Scholz, Senior Biologist







Overview

Splitrock Environmental was founded by the Sekw'el'was band in 2008 to deliver environmental restoration consulting and projects. It was conceived initially as a response to the major impacts of BC Hydro and railway development.

Splitrock has since been involved in a number of projects in the area, collaborating with local First Nations to deliver rehabilitation projects ranging from salmon habitat restoration to the reintroduction of wild food systems.

Splitrock operates a large nursery, collecting wild seed and cultivating nursery stock for resale and large-scale rehabilitation projects. Traditional foods are an important part of the nursery stock.

The local rivers and the watershed are controlled by Seton Dam, which sits between Seton Lake and the Fraser River; many of the projects are funded by BC Hydro.

The St'at'imc-governed area was traditionally known as a place of abundant wild foods, and other Nations often traveled to the area to trade and harvest.

Nursery

Many types of local traditional plants and trees are cultivated at the nursery, including white bark pine (pine nuts), huckleberry, Oregon grape, soapberry, Indian parsley, sage, wild raspberry, wild strawberry, chokecherry, gooseberry, saskatoon berry, mock orange, columbine, nodding onion, giant wild rye, and balsamroot.

These plants would have been harvested seasonally for a wide variety of nutrients and medicinal purposes.

Seed for cultivation is harvested in the wild by Splitrock staff and community members using sustainable methods. Seeds are planted and cultivated. Customers of Splitrock nursery stock include forestry companies, BC Hydro, local schools (for traditional gardens/medicine wheels), and local First Nation communities.

Restoration/rehabilitation projects

Splitrock currently works on a number of projects that rehabilitate land that has been impacted by hydroelectric projects, forestry, and recreational overuse.

Splitrock is currently working in the area to rehabilitate white bark pine, once a staple wild food for the St'at'imc Nation, grizzly bears, and squirrels. The seeds of this pine can provide up to 50% of a person's daily fat and carbohydrate needs, providing immense caloric value.

White-bark pine, which grows at high altitudes, is being encroached upon by invasive tree species.

Splitrock plans to work with the St'at'imc Nation to encourage a strong stand of white bark pines in the area using traditional burning techniques, seed collection, and replanting.

Splitrock also constructed and currently monitors salmon-spawning channels on its grounds. The spawning grounds are home to pink salmon that run through the area. Annual salmon counts and fish health monitoring occur at Splitrock, as well as water quality, flow, and temperature monitoring. Splitrock is currently working to diversify the spawning grounds with more natural shade cover to provide cooler and less exposed spawning areas; however, they are currently in negotiations with the local beaver population to see this effort through.

Challenges/barriers

- A lack of local, intentional burning puts certain wild foods at risk from invasive species. Traditional burning used to regenerate food forests and lands and allowed wild crops to return and regenerate.
- Currently the Nation's salmon needs are not met because salmon numbers are in serious decline.
- Non-Indigenous community members over harvest wild foods.
- Local bands are stretched too thin having to balance too many issues with limited resources to address bigger IFS needs.
- Projects are constantly met with funding restrictions and budget expectations that inhibit collaboration and a holistic approach.
- The imposed band council system with its segregated approach to people and land doesn't allow for good collaboration. There are seven different communities within the St'at'imc Nation, each is governed by a different band council.
- Hydro projects have created irreversible long-term damage to salmon-spawning grounds.

Needs

- Outreach and education in local communities and schools on local foods and ethical harvesting practices that teach sustainability and cooperation.
- Salmon rehabilitation projects that are inter-Nation (i.e., that follow the route of the salmon all the way to the coast).
- Governmental regulatory cooperation and funding that takes a 'build from within' approach and works with Nations to generate projects and initiatives.
- A traditional burning program to mitigate wildfires and regenerate food habitats.

5.2.6
Ucwalmicw Community Gardens

10 Paul St, Lillooet, BC, Canada, British Columbia
Nation and community: St'at'imc, T'it'q'et

https://www.facebook.com/ucwalmicworganic/

Interviewee: Kevin Whitney, Operations Maintenance Manager, T'it'q'et Band







Overview

Ucwalmicw Community Gardens is a nonprofit food-growing initiative started by members of the T'it'q'et band in Lillooet, BC. Ucwalmicw means "people of the land" in St'at'imc.

The gardens sit on seven acres in the center of the community and are surrounded by homes, the community center, and the main offices of the T'it'q'et band. The surrounding areas were farmed by Indigenous peoples for generations. More recently, vegetable and fruit cultivation was added to the diets of the local peoples.

The site hosts a large orchard of mixed fruits and large garden spaces for vegetable cultivation. There is a small greenhouse on the land, a root cellar, and a stone oven. Vegetables are packed and sold in the nearby Ucwalmicw Center Society building.

Future

The Ucwalmicw Community Gardens is run on grants that provide funds for its different projects and initiatives. Currently, the Ucwalmicw Center Society is not core-funded and receives just enough money to keep operations running. The gardens are largely run by volunteers from the community.

Future plans for the Ucwalmicw Community Gardens include the addition of a new greenhouse, the expansion of the gardens into new areas of land, and the addition of a separate wash/pack facility and storefront to sell their products.

The Ucwalmicw Community Gardens also plans to expand their operation through the addition of livestock and chickens for meat and egg production to meet the community's food security needs.

Kevin also expressed the need for inter-Nation trading and hopes that agreements and relationships can be established between neighboring Nations to trade fruit, vegetables, and fish.

Needs

- Access to water and funding to maintain old irrigation systems, funding to upgrade irrigation systems
- Community engagement
- Wage subsidies for workers/participants
- Core funding for general programs
- Funds to engage and train community in all aspects of agriculture and food production
- Funds to create large community kitchen for processing and community distribution
- Foods education (growing, cooking, preserving) and integration of food knowledge back into the community

5.2.7
Erin Durrell, Narcosli Consulting
Also working with ?Esdilagh First Nation

Quesnel, BC
Nation and community: ?Esdilagh, Tsilhqot'in First Nation (TNG)

https://www.esdilagh.com/

Interviewee: Erin Durrell



Erin is an experienced business development consultant with a focus on food security and agriculture. She has demonstrated extensive experience in relationship building, negotiation, agriculture policy and practices, food security, land stewardship, environmental awareness, report and grant writing, community engagement, and policy analysis.

Erin is of mixed Indigenous and non-Indigenous heritage and is a member of the Esk'etemc First Nation.

Overview

Tea Creek met with Erin to discuss IFS projects she is consulting with in her area. She is currently working on a project with the ?Esdilagh First Nation to construct an abattoir that will be First Nations owned and operated. The abattoir will provide butchering and cutting services to local businesses and individuals while also supporting food security within the TNG with the addition of a smokehouse and traditional cutting area. The project is currently on hold due to COVID and funding barriers.

Erin believes food security is a critical issue that must come first for Indigenous communities and suggests that agriculture is one way to get there. Traditional food systems must be encouraged simultaneously.

Erin stated that much of the region's traditional and recent agricultural knowledge has been lost. Programs that support knowledge transfer and mentorship have been scarce.

The historical governmental approach has created a system of dependency that doesn't allow for sovereignty. Funding has been directed towards housing and social issues while failing to address the systemic issues such as social isolation and lack of community engagement.

Challenges/Barriers

- There is a shortage of local abattoirs and trained butchers. Regulations make it difficult for small-scale abattoirs to function.
- Discrepancies between provincial and federal regulations in regards to on-reserve projects create barriers.
- Capacity for bands to create their own IFS initiatives is low; projects need leaders and champions to help them be successful.
- Funders often require matching funds from within organizations, this requirement is often difficult to meet.
- Funding tends to be project specific which often means it is too specified for community needs and doesn't support knowledge transfer or mentorship.
- People on reserve have multiple barriers to accessing funding and capital support (e.g., no one wants to fund land-based projects because the land is technically owned by the federal government).
- Band leadership changes frequently; project continuity is stifled by imposition of band council system and staff turnover.
- Funding applications and reporting are overwhelming for bands with limited capacity.

Needs

- Focus on food security first, food sovereignty second
- Agriculture and associated skills training hub in the region
- Funding that does not require 'matching'; low-barriered funding that funds skills transfer and mentorship
- Support band leadership training, leadership support (financial, training, extra staff) for those starting projects and initiatives
- Food and agriculture education in community
- Community-led models
- Reduce red tape and reporting requirements on basic funding
- Funds required to support success, not dependency

5.2.8
Sik-e-dakh Farm School

7900 Sik-E-Dakh Road, Sik-E-Dakh, BC, V0J 1Y3
Nation and community: Gitxsan, Sik-E-Dakh

http://sik-e-dakh.com/wordpress/index.php/about/
https://www.kpu.ca/farmschools

Interviewee: Amanda Scott (farm school manager) and farm school class







Overview

The Sik-e-dakh Farm School was established in 2020 as a partnership between the Sik–dakh band and Kwantlen Polytechnic University (KPU).

The farm school cultivates plots on Sik-e-dakh community lands, producing nutritious vegetables for its community members at no cost. The farm school hosts a greenhouse, a small orchard, animal grazing land, and different food-growing plots throughout Sik-e-dakh.

In 2021, the farm school grew 10,000 lbs of potatoes for their community alongside other mixed vegetables. Students assembled a weekly food box for elders in the community with vegetables grown in the gardens.

Summer employment opportunities are available through the farm school beginning in June and running through the end of the growing season in October.

Through the winter, the program continues and students attend weekly Zoom meetings with KPU Farm School around food growing, marketing, and associated Indigenous-based agriculture training. Winter programs also include food preservation classes and education around food storage.

Sik-e-dakh has a long history of community gardening. Many of the students who attend the program have childhood memories of working the land with their families. When asked what is most important to them in regards to this project, many replied that engaging and providing food for their community was the most important consideration.

The goal of the Sik-e-dakh Farm School is to work within the community to develop regenerative agriculture practices and economic development opportunities while prioritizing the interest of food sovereignty and dignity for First Nations.

> *"We address the need for good work, education, healthy food access, and community resilience."*
> —Amanda Cook, Sik-e-dakh Farm School Coordinator

Challenges/Barriers

- Leadership and knowledge gaps
- Engaging community members who may not have experience with fresh, garden-grown foods

Future

Sik-e-dakh Farm School hopes to expand its programming and community impact over the next few years, broadening their scope to include traditional food harvesting, hemp production, and implementing cooperative models of economic development in the community. There are plans to build a wash station for vegetable preparation and packaging and establish a fish-processing facility for community members to process their salmon.

There are also plans to expand their livestock and meat production and have a partnership with Skeena Valley Farms to expand their broiler chicken project for whole chicken sales.

The farm school is currently negotiating access to larger plots of land to expand in their community, with some plots up to 6 acres in size.

Needs

- Funding and training to establish a local abattoir
- Hands-on skills training around food growing and related trades
- More localized, community-specific food systems
- Reliable and sustainable funding to develop innovative local food systems

5.2.9
Mapagam Outdoor Education Society

PO Box 1843, Port Hardy, BC, VoN 2Po
Nation and community: Gwa'sala Nakwaxda'xw

Interviewee: Wade Charlie, Owner/Operator



Overview

Mapagam Outdoor Education Society is a new initiative led by Wade Charlie, a member of the Gwa'sala Nakwaxda'xw Nation. Wade is a local hereditary chief who grew up on his traditional territories. He learned land-based skills at a young age and has vast experience in hunting, fishing, harvesting berries, and gardening.

This program involves taking school groups, youth, and adults out on watercraft to orient them to the local traditional skills and food harvesting both on land and in the water.

Participants are educated in local food systems and exposed to a wide range of activities, including eel and deer hunting, crab harvesting, fishing and processing, clam digging, and gardening.

The intention of this project is to engage youth in traditional activities as a way to pass on knowledge and keep cultural values alive and healthy in the local community.

Future plans/expansion

- Help rebuild grease trail, encourage inter-Nation trading networks
- Expand the nonprofit and build an administrative team
- Set up gardens and cabins on traditional territories for overnight use

Needs

- Inter-Nation agreements, collaboration between bands
- Local capacity to develop administrative staff, training and knowledge sharing around administrative systems
- Overhead and capital to fund infrastructure and equipment
- Access to easy, non-barriered funding

5.2.10
Akisq’nuk First Nation Learning Garden

3046 Highway 93/95 Windermere, BC V0B 2L2
Nation and community: Ktunaxa, Akisq’nuk

Interviewee: Kayla Ferguson, Aboriginal Head Start Coordinator



Overview

The Akisq’nuk First Nation Learning Garden was established in 2021. The original funding came through a grant, and garden beds were constructed in 2021. 2022 will be the first growing season. The Akisq’nuk Nation provided land access for the garden space.

The goal of establishing the garden was to teach children and the community about gardening and where food comes from. It also provides a gathering space for community members.

The garden is predominantly volunteer-run. It is primarily staffed by one paid employee. As this is the first growing year, staffing requirements to run the garden are unclear; however, these will be assessed throughout the season.

One of the hopeful outcomes for the learning garden is to contribute to the greater community of Akisq’nuk First Nation. The vision is to grow vegetables, medicines, and traditional foods to bring into the community, eventually bringing Elders in for gatherings to work and teach alongside younger members. Currently, children from the community daycare help plant, care for, and harvest the gardens.

The main goal of this project is to grow vegetables while also cultivating traditional foods and medicines (tobacco, berries, etc.). This growing and medicinal knowledge is passed along from Elders to the youth. With the generations teaching and learning together, the project can be used as a tool for healthy, clean eating and knowledge transfer between community members.

Challenges/Barriers

- Learning ways to safely and humanely deter groundhogs/gophers
- The Band office is very short staffed. Getting approvals is on the back burner. The Chief is new (recent elections) and capacity is at an all-time low
- Organizer is not Ktunaxa, so it is difficult to work with some community members
- COVID has made it very difficult for gathering when trying to meet, choose the garden name and plan, etc.
- Coordinating and sourcing volunteers (community daycare is tasked with this)
- Limitations on gardening knowledge and grant writing (knowledge, capacity)

Successes

- Getting the grant to actually build the garden, could not have done it without the funding
- Connecting with Tiffany of Fourth Sister Farm for mentorship
- Connections with Elders — another mentorship/knowledge-share opportunity

Future Plans

- Place-based knowledge transfer
- Education, training and mentorship is going to be key
- Expanding staff and volunteer base

5.2.11
Tea Creek: Indigenous Food Sovereignty Training

784 Highway 37, Kitwanga, BC
Affiliated Nations: Works mostly with Gitxsan, Wet'suwet'en and Nisga'a Nations (Gitwangak, Gitanyow, Witset, Gitlaxt'aamiks)

www.teacreek.ca

Interviewees: Jacob Beaton and Jessica Ouellette, Owner/Operators
info@teacreek.ca







Overview

Tea Creek is an Indigenous-led, land-based, culturally safe IFS training initiative in Northwest BC, located in Gitxsan territory between Smithers and Terrace.

Tea Creek catalyzes new land-based projects and livelihoods, restoring the ability of Indigenous Nations to grow fresh, healthy food and medicine in an interdependent economy.

Tea Creek's mission is to revitalize the culture of food sovereignty that was a central part of life for Indigenous peoples throughout North America.

Tea Creek's Indigenous-led program works in partnership with First Nations proponents to build a sustainable economy and long-term food sovereignty. Tea Creek offers trades training and agriculture training and partners with the communities of Witset, Gitwangak, and other Nations to help plan and develop their own food sovereignty initiatives.

Training focuses on four specific "Tea Creek" quadrants:
- Nutrition/hosting: cooking, site preparation, maintenance
- Builders: carpentry, mechanics, plumbing, machine operations
- Growers: seeding/nursery, soil prep/health, harvesting and packaging, marketing
- Administration: bookkeeping, planning, business systems, project management, supervision

Within each quadrant, specific training is available to meet participants' needs and interests.

Tea Creek's goal is to address food sovereignty using a community-led approach that respects the sovereignty of Nations to determine their own path to food security and sovereignty. Training at Tea Creek is culturally safe. Staff is around 80–90% Indigenous and participants have access to cultural mentors during their time on site.

Tea Creek understands that there are multiple barriers to wellness in Indigenous communities, and its programming is structured to address these barriers with wrap-around support. Participants are provided with mental health support, PPE and clothing, bridging to employment, and transportation.

Tea Creek also grows an abundance of fresh, nutritious produce on 3 acres of field blocks. Tea Creek has 139 acres of land in total, all within the northern Agricultural Land Reserve. All food is generated using farming methods that are as sustainable as possible. All the food produced is distributed to community members, participants, and staff at no cost. In 2021, Tea Creek produced 20,000 lbs of fresh food for the local community.

Future Plans/Goals:

Tea Creek plans to expand its operations and reach in the following ways:

- Expand partnerships with more Nations across BC and Canada to establish community farms and food sovereignty projects in Indigenous communities
- Expand infrastructure on site:
  - Longhouse Food Hub
  - Large workshop for mechanical repair and teaching
  - Overnight cabins
  - Upgraded hydro and water
- Continue expanding 'equipment library' — a collection of machines and implements that can be loaned to communities for food growing and site preparation
- Establish a central warehouse that will centralize agriculture supplies and materials in the Northwest
- Build core curriculum and manifesto for the 'Tea Creek Model'
- Expand range of activities and types of trainings on site
- Establish a charitable foundation

Successes

In just three years, Tea Creek has managed to build a successful business model that hosts 10 core staff and operates with the continued support of local Nations. Highlights from last year (2021) include:

- Over 1,200 Indigenous visits
- 6,000+ meals served on site
- 150 Indigenous people enrolled
- 33 graduated from training programs
- Over 15,000 work hours paid to Indigenous people
- 20,000 lbs of veggies grown and donated
- Over 450 'Introduction to Trades' delivered
- More details online: https://www.teacreek.ca/impact-2021

Tea Creek has support from the Witset, Gitwangak, and Gitanyow band councils.

Tea Creek has also made waves in the local community as a social enterprise. Participants report higher confidence, enthusiasm, and positive mental health outcomes as a result of Tea Creek programming.

Tea Creek has had to work hard to secure funding for regular programming, often dedicating large amounts of staff resources to proposal and report writing. These efforts have resulted in successful funding for 2022, but not beyond it.

Challenges/Barriers

- Lack of multi-year or core funding for site operation and staff. Tea Creek struggles to survive past each training season. This year staff spent 8 months fundraising in order to operate for 4-6 months.
- Lack of wage subsidies and financial support needed for participants involved in training and apprenticeship on site.
- Climate change creates water-access challenges and growing challenges.
- Funders have high or unrealistic expectations of outcomes for participants or organizations. These expectations don't meet the day-to-day reality.
- Valuable time and resources are taken up by grant writing and reporting that could be allocated to Tea Creek programming and curriculum development.

5.2.12
Amisk Farm

Box 177 Moberly Lake, BC V0C 1X0
Nation and Community: Saulteau First Nation

Interviewee: Julian Napoleon, Owner/Operator
sales@twinsistersnursery.com



Overview

- Amisk Farm was used for about 2 years to grow food. Planted first community-scale crop in Oct 2021 (garlic)
- The farm provides food for the folks in the greater community and provides access to food and food programming on the reserve
- Helped in part by Twin Sisters Nursery (in-kind labor and greenhouse space for seedlings)
- Project is funded by the Indigenous Priorities Granting Program through the Vancouver Foundation ($55,000 for 1 year)
- Temporary workers and 10 community members help out on the farm at different times
- An application was submitted for 1 full time staff member from a government source of funding (for the growing season)
- Employs 6 summer students 1-2 days/week
- Serves on-reserve residents of Saulteau First Nation, impacts also to off-reserve folks and local surrounding area
- The farm and farm house are completely off-grid
- The project was developed with the intention to integrate land-based practices and host a larger IFS and self determination framework
- Current achievements — Creation of the farmhouse, community collaboration, able to employ multiple youth in the community to teach skills and provide assistance in building the house
- Building strong community partnerships — Twin Sisters nursery is donating growing space and labor

Barriers

- Funding restrictions are all too common. Funding and grants that claim to be non-restrictive have barriers attached to them
- Systemic racism: the owner lives on-reserve and faces systemic racism. He is not able to acquire loans/mortgage to purchase or lease off reserve to expand farming operations
- Access to on-reserve/off-reserve land for farming
- Long-term multi year funding
- No local training for website creation, marketing
- Barrier-free infrastructure funding
- Equipment loans and grants

Future goals and needs

- 5 pigs and 20 chickens this season (pasture restoration project) and housing for them
- Installation of more ungulate fencing
- Building water infrastructure, and irrigation equipment, potable water for leafy greens
- Staff/trainee housing (cabins) to be able to host employees on-farm
- Community training facilities (open covered space with picnic table) for workshops, training, gatherings and ceremonies
- Workshop — For tractor, tools, etc. for farm projects
- Fruit tree project — Cold hardy rootstock for grafting, need a small-scale orchard
- Farm truck for moving materials on the farm
- 10 ac rural lot expansion (multi-year project) — Needs to be fenced with livestock fencing, make a dugout (historic use from horses and cattle, fence is in disrepair)

5.2.13
Fourth Sister Farm

Land-Based Learning and Indigenous Stewardship & Research Progress, BC V0C 2E0
Nation: Secwépemc

Interviewee: Tiffany Traverse, Indigenous Farmer, Land & Seed Steward







Overview

Tiffany purchased the farm in 2015 to engage in more direct research and stewardship work in the area. The plan is to eventually have more land-based teachings on-farm, but for now the focus is mainly on Indigenous seed collection, stewardship, rematriation, seed adaptation, and Indigenous plant breeding.

This project is a partnership with Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC) on the Soils Health Research Project. AAFC funds this project to the tune of $55,000 over 2 years (2022–2023). All other funds are provided by Tiffany through her work off-farm as well as her "in-kind" labor on the farm.

Tiffany works solo on the farm, and the only "income" is from consultation and the small grant funding from AAFC (which covers supplies and sampling and seeding costs).

Currently, the seed-growing work impacts specific communities and groups (ex: the Métis Nation via seed-growing done under the mentorship of Métis seedkeeper Caroline Chartrand).[86]

Tiffany has been focusing on work around Indigenous foodways and reconnecting to plant foods and medicines that are culturally relevant to her Secwépemc roots and to local Treaty 8 Nations. The success of Tiffany's work is driven by her passion for the importance of this work in reconnecting to her own personal foodways and for helping others research and actualize these connections.

Challenges/barriers

Being an individual with no nonprofit or foundation status, grant funding is almost nonexistent. Any funding secured has to be in partnership with another group or entity.

Future goals/plans

There is a definite need for sustainable funding to continue the amount and scope of Indigenous research and plant breeding that Tiffany wants to continue doing. With an overlapping climate crisis happening around us, seed adaptation work is vital now more than ever.

[86] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=neOCPH-rnBM

5.3 Case Studies Review

While each nation will have their own unique food sovereignty plan, there are many threads that link the basic needs, as shown from the studies we conducted across different Nations in BC.

The most commonly identified successes or conditions incumbent to success were:

- Volunteer and community member contributions are key to ensuring sustainable operations of projects
- Mentorship and knowledge sharing/transfer from community members, hired professionals, and Elders are necessary
- In cases where there was inter-Nation collaboration on projects, this was cited as important for the success of the project
- Projects that received enthusiastic support from the local band council office tended to be less strained capacity wise and more supported from within the local community
- Allyship from non-Indigenous organizations helped support Indigenous projects through the following means: financial, knowledge sharing, sharing infrastructure and tools, education and outreach

The most commonly identified barriers are:

- Lack of training and knowledge transfer for community members, knowledge has been lost and there is a huge gap in learning (in both colonial agriculture and traditional Indigenous food systems)
- Climate change: immediate and long term impacts on agriculture and wild foods
- Lack of capital for equipment and infrastructure
- Funding has too many barriers, red tape and attachment to narrow outcomes
- Inter-Nation collaboration is a struggle, internal disputes and 'job protection' keep some Nations from cooperating together
- Development and non-Indigenous groups/individuals impacting local wild food supply (logging, mining, over harvesting)
- Challenges arising from regulatory bodies. Reserves being on federal lands within Provincial bodies creates barriers for Indigenous producers, farmers and business owners
- Systemic colonial assumptions and perspectives encroach on nation health and wellness. Systems of dependency for so long have instilled dependent thinking. Programs and initiatives must take a Nation based approach and be regenerative instead of charitable.
- Limited capacity among Nations and bands, stretched too thin and the issues are too large to effectively address everything
- Government imposition of band council affects community collaboration and Indigenous-led approaches to wellness. Funding is often required to flow through band offices and sometimes capacity or knowledge is limited to best serve the community needs.

The most common suggestions, improvements among interviewees are:

- Encourage inter-Nation collaboration, trading and exchange networks
- Funding for capital expenses and infrastructure that doesn't have impositions or narrowed results attached to it
- Dialogue, on the ground, with different Nations. Collaborate with other Nations and initiatives. Essentially, different communities have different needs and there are major gaps in knowledge.
- Shifting communities back into food security/sovereignty by offering sustained funding, training and assistance to support Nation-based approaches. The current ministry approach is colonial and is not land based but driven by concepts and values that do not line up with every Nation.
- Training initiatives: agricultural (and supporting trades), business, entrepreneurship, knowledge transfer
- Fund agriculture training hubs that feed skills back into communities
- Develop land trusts that are Nation-led to develop and put lands back in Nations hands

5.4 Updated 2023 Survey Summary and Map

The initial Indigenous Food Sovereignty survey was conducted in 2022 to inform the IFS discussion paper. This survey form was edited and updated with feedback from the Ministry and the Tea Creek Team.

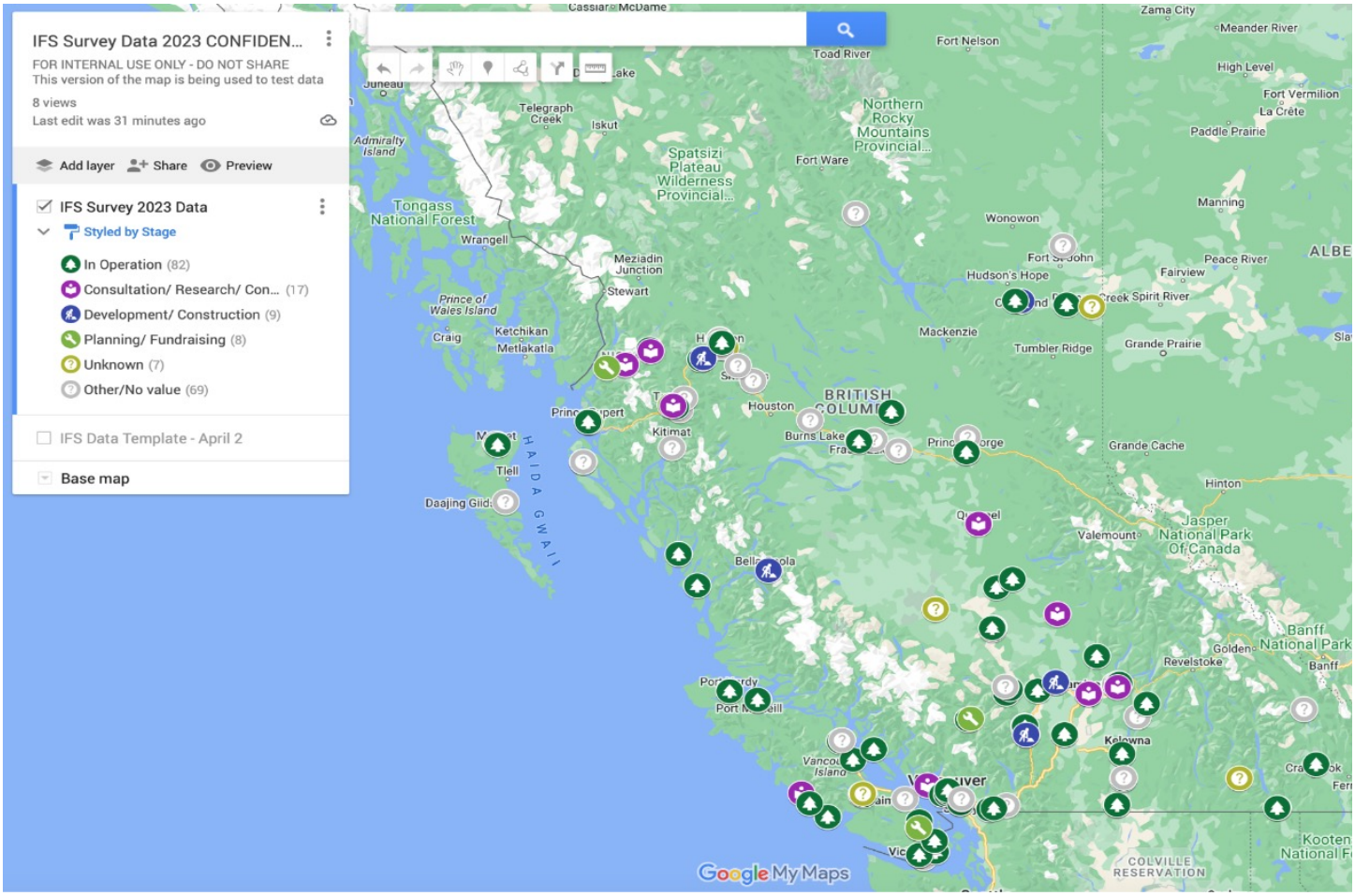
The updated survey was then re-administered in spring 2023 to all past participants, and in addition, the researchers contacted IFS projects yet to be surveyed and invited them to participate either over the phone or online. We revised the survey privacy statement to let participants know that some data would be shared with the Ministry. This respected Indigenous ownership and control of Indigenous data and made the participants feel more comfortable.
See Appendix E for the 'Data Sovereignty Survey Disclaimer'.

Summary

The results of our 2023 Indigenous Food Sovereignty Survey confirm that Indigenous food projects are small-scale, geographically diverse, and challenged by access to funding and trained human resources. The survey also confirms that reviving Indigenous food sovereignty is a high priority for most Nations in BC.

- 69% of projects surveyed are in operation; the remaining are in a variety of stages, from planning to fundraising to post-operation shutdown.
- 78% of IFS projects have a start-up cost of under $500,000.
- 75% produce under 10,000lb of food per year.
- 73% are seeking more than $50,000 to expand their current operations.
- 92% are experiencing adverse effects of climate change, with the biggest impact cited being declining wild food production. Other impacts cited include fires, interrupted supply chains, water shortages, and flooding.

2023 Updated map



Learning Experiences and Suggested Remedies

In conducting our 2023 survey and meeting with Indigenous peoples working in food production and food sovereignty, we encountered some challenging stories. We chose to summarize these stories in a formal manner to protect the privacy of those sharing them, while also effectively communicating with the Ministry and others the valuable lessons they offer in terms of their scope and significance. The hope for Nations is that effective controls and practices can be implemented to safeguard other Nations from experiencing these adverse outcomes.

Below, we have summarized some of the challenging experiences, along with some suggested remedies.

Learning Experience	Remedy
Nation spent millions of dollars on solutions that were not delivered or constructed	• Indigenous Certified Supplier List • Association Support
Nations quoted significantly higher than MSRP for agricultural supplies, equipment, and services	• Non-Indigenous ally requests quotes • Indigenous Certified Supplier List • Association Support
Fundraisers apply for grants and funds for Indigenous projects but direct the funds toward self-interest or non-best use	• Indigenous-led standard required • Indigenous Certified Consultant List • Conflict-of-interest rules with funding • Culturally-appropriate training
Non-indigenous leadership or management of Indigenous projects leads to financial losses and projects that move away from the Nation vision	• Indigenous-led standard required • Culturally-appropriate training
Structures are purchased and built but are non-operational, derelict, or have failed completely	• Culturally-appropriate training and capacity building • Indigenous Certified Supplier List • Association Support
Indigenous funds go toward projects that largely benefit non-Indigenous people and businesses	• Indigenous-led standard required

Please find further summaries of the survey in Appendix B.

Keys to Indigenous Food Sovereignty



Political Will
Needed by both provincial and Indigenous governments to drive policy and resource allocation



Sense of Urgency
Necessary to get the sustained attention and resources for projects to succeed and not die on the vine



Funding
Required in all project phases for them to take root and flourish



Standards
Definitions are needed to assess projects and ensure resources are allocated to the right places



Land and Territory
Indigenous people need and must control their own food-producing spaces



Indigenous Led
Indigenous people must lead at every level, from policy to on-the-ground implementation



Trained People
Managers and trades people are needed to build and maintain operations



Reconciliation
Reconciliatory acts around food policies, land access, and funding

6 Path Forward

6.1 Keys to Realizing Indigenous Food Sovereignty

Based on survey results and case studies, coupled with Tea Creek's experience, the following key ingredients are required for change in favour of IFS:

Key	Why
Political Will	Political will is needed on both the settler government and Indigenous government sides. Political will drives policy and resource allocation and is key for success.
Sense of Urgency	Without a sense of urgency, the necessary human and financial resources will be lacking, and projects will die on the vine. IFS projects need substantial, sustained attention and resources to succeed.
Funding	Adequate funding at all phases of IFS projects is required for IFS to take root and flourish. Unlocking appropriate funding for Indigenous people and Nations across food-producing and related sectors is essential.
Standards	Agreeing on what IFS is and how it is defined is key to assessing projects and ensuring that time and resources are allocated to the right places. If IFS is not resourced properly, those resources may end up in the wrong places without standards.
Land, Territory	Primary food production requires adequate land, territory, and spaces. Indigenous peoples must have the rights to control their own food-producing spaces for IFS to be possible. Lack of land (ownership and rights for access and use of land and resources) is a main barrier to reviving IFS.
Indigenous-Led	It is essential that Indigenous people lead the implementation of IFS at every level, from policy to on-the-ground implementation. Non-Indigenous parties should be clear that their role is as allies and defer to Indigenous people on final decisions.
Trained People	Any IFS project will need trained, experienced managers and workers. In addition, tradespeople are needed to build and maintain IFS operations. All regions of BC will need enough trained people and a long-range plan.
Reconciliation	Reconciliatory acts, especially around food policies, land access, and funding, are key to IFS success.

A detailed discussion on the conditions that are incumbent for the success of IFS initiatives is provided in Appendix F.

6.2 What is Not Key to Success and Why

In considering what is required to support the success of IFS initiatives and create conditions in which Indigenous peoples' self-identified priorities and goals for IFS can be realized, it is equally important to reflect on what is not required and what may hinder, rather than advance, these goals. Specifically, more entry-level studies and more bureaucracy were cited by survey participants as hindering meaningful action and, thereby, undermining IFS.

- **More entry-level studies:** Indigenous food producers expressed exhaustion and frustration around perceived over-studying of Indigenous people. We also heard frustration about a lack of action and resources for IFS.
- **More bureaucracy:** Indigenous people are over-laden with bureaucracy that is often discriminatory in nature. Indigenous people agree that more burdensome, resource intensive and paternalistic oversight is not wanted.

> *"We don't need more studies, commissions, or councils where people sit around and talk about the issues or barriers facing Indigenous peoples' access to land and food. What I think we need are sustainable financial resources, such as grants for Indigenous people who want to start food businesses. We need access to land and housing at a reasonable cost. We need insurance. We need ALR [Agricultural Land Reserve] regulations that favour community over private land ownership. Indigenous people who do not live on reserve or are displaced from their own community also need support, as most funding goes to band councils."*
> — Survey Participant

> *"The top-down bureaucracy creates barriers. The application and reporting requirements are unnecessarily complicated. There is no trust, continuity, or flexibility to the grantmaking. We are experienced fundraisers with a long, successful track record and still found Ministry of Agriculture funding to be barbaric."*
> — Survey Participant

> *"Yes, [the programs and policies of the Ministry of Agriculture] have been obstructive. The primary issue I have found is that most programs require that the farm has been operational and produced income. I have been in the start-up phase, including building a home, clearing market garden fields, building water infrastructure, purchasing BCS tractor, tools, sawmill, etc... Obviously the start-up phase has the highest associated costs and I have had to continue to work full-time in order to reinvest all of my income into starting a farm. Infrastructure development in particular presents substantial barriers to development."*
> — Survey Participant

6.3 Priorities and Recommendations to Advance IFS

Recommendations and Priorities	Who
Relationship and partnership building: Education, engagement, allyship	
Educate non-Indigenous agriculture and food producers about our collective history. Work on “myth busting” and sharing facts about the impact of colonization on IFS.	The Ministry of Agriculture and Food, other ministries and government organizations, the private sector, including industry associations, and Indigenous partners.
Engage communities "on the ground" through respectful relationships and appropriate cultural practices.	All Government. Encourage more site visits and on-the-ground processes to engage and work with Indigenous people, initiatives, and Nations.
Allyship and bridgebuilding encourages non-Indigenous organizations and businesses to actively support and cooperate with Indigenous communities	Sector non-profits and private business.
Land: Return land and amend policy for First Nations owned/operated Agriculture Land Reserves (ALR)	
Public reconciliation: return land to Indigenous people: The vast majority of land in BC is “Crown” land.	Government Ministries and Agents responsible for Indigenous consultation, accommodation, Treaty settlements, service provision and reconciliation.
Commercial reconciliation: Return Land to Indigenous people: First Nations (Bands) cannot directly hold land, so need to own land through corporate entities. These entities often need financing.	Governments, Farm Credit Canada (FCC), Financial Institutions (RBC, BMO, CIBC, Scotia Bank, etc.), Aboriginal Financial Institutions (AFIs), Related entities.
Private reconciliation: Return land to Indigenous people:	Future or existing Indigenous Land Trust/ Fund entity that can facilitate and support transferring fee simple lands to Indigenous people and Nations. Provincial purchasing of select private lands to return to First Nations through treaty agreements.
Revise ALR rules to allow for Indigenous uses of ALR land. In general, these uses are more holistic and include housing, food, culture, and commercial. We highly recommend the Indigenous-led model be a part of an Indigenous exemption to ALR uses.	Government and all relevant stakeholders.

Address regulatory barriers adopt regulatory protections	
Reduce regulatory barriers around traditional foods harvesting and processing	Provincial and Federal governments.
Advocate for protection of Indigenous Intellectual Property in the agriculture and food sector	Ministry of Agriculture and Food, other government Ministries and organizations
Fund Indigenous Food Sovereignty initiatives through a coordinated, sustainable approach	
Fund IFS at appropriate levels and timeframes. Most IFS projects have start-up costs under $500,000.	Governments, Financial institutions, such as Farm Credit Canada (FCC), Non-profit funders, Future Indigenous-led Organization

Please see Appendix G for a 'Community IFS Planning Checklist and Scoresheet'.

Appendices

Appendix A. Glossary/Definitions

AGRICULTURE — The science, art, or practice of cultivating the soil, producing crops. [87]

AGRARIAN — Relating to the land, especially the use of land for farming. [88]

CULTIVATION — To prepare land and grow crops on it; or to grow a particular crop. [89]

FOOD SOVEREIGNTY — The right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define and control their own food and agriculture systems. [90]

HUNTER-GATHERER — A member of a culture in which food is obtained by hunting, fishing, and foraging rather than agriculture, animal husbandry and other practices that intentionally manage plants, animals and ecosystems for sustained, enhanced food production. [91]

INDIGENOUS DATA SOVEREIGNTY — Indigenous data sovereignty means that Indigenous peoples have the right to own, control, access, and steward data about their communities, lands, and culture. [92]

INDIGENOUS FOOD SOVEREIGNTY — See Section 3.3 for a working definition,

INDIGENOUS GIFT ECONOMY — In an Indigenous gift economy, abundance is shared. Status comes from giving, not accumulating. Gift economies are based on gratitude, interdependence, and reciprocity. Since all thriving is mutual, a gift economy fosters community relationships and mutual well-being. [93]

[87] *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, s.v. "agriculture," accessed February 28, 2023, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/agriculture.

[88] *Cambridge Dictionary*, sv. "Agrarian", accessed March 2, 2023, https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/agrarian.

[89] *Cambridge Dictionary*, s.v. "cultivate", accessed March 2, 2023, https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/cultivate.

[90] "What Is Food Sovereignty?"

[91] *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary,* s.v. "hunter-gatherer," accessed February 28, 2023, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/hunter-gatherer.

[92] "Indigenous Data Sovereignty | SFU Library."

[93] "The Serviceberry: An Economy of Abundance – Robin Wall Kimmerer."

Appendix B. Updated 2023 IFS Survey, Summary, and Map

Method

The initial Indigenous Food Sovereignty (IFS) survey was conducted in 2022 to inform the IFS discussion paper. This survey form was edited and updated with feedback from the Ministry and the Tea Creek Team.

The updated survey was then re-administered to all past participants in Spring 2023, and in addition, the researchers contacted IFS projects yet to be surveyed and invited them to participate either over the phone or online.

The data was cleaned multiple times over the course of the survey to remove duplicates as well as any non-authentic entries.

The data was then converted into a format that Google Maps can accept, rendered multiple times using Google Maps, and scrutinized. This was done four times as part of the data-cleaning process.

Issues and Adjustments

As part of the survey expansion and refinement, we also revised the privacy statement to reflect the current situation and inform the participants that some of their data would be shared with the Ministry as a partner in this project. However, we encountered a reluctance from the respondents to participate in the survey when they learned that the Ministry would have access to their data. Our research team discovered that the respondents felt more comfortable sharing their information with us, as we are Indigenous researchers.

Following recommendations from our subject matter experts and after consultation with Ministry staff, it was decided that data would be held by Tea Creek and then eventually by the Indigenous Food Sovereignty Association (IFSA). This would ensure that the Indigenous data would remain in Indigenous hands and that summaries would be provided to the Ministry, as well as any queries answered to the best of our abilities.

The shift towards Indigenous ownership and control of Indigenous data was well-received by Indigenous survey participants.

Early in our surveying, our research team began to hear a number of accounts of disappointing experiences that Indigenous nations, peoples, and groups have had in the agricultural and food industries. Many of these stories were startling. In consultation with experts and the Ministry, it was decided to shift our focus from positive case studies to “lessons learned.”

Our team attempted multiple times to gather verbal disclosures from Nations and individuals who have had discouraging experiences and document them as case studies. However, individuals refrained from sharing these stories in writing due to fears of potential repercussions. We were however, given permission to present a few stories in summary form without revealing any identifying details.

Summary

The results of our 2023 Indigenous Food Sovereignty Survey confirm that Indigenous food projects are small-scale, geographically diverse, and challenged by access to funding and trained human resources. The survey also confirms that reviving Indigenous food sovereignty is a high priority for most Nations in BC.

Sixty-nine percent of projects surveyed are in operation; the remaining are in a variety of stages, from planning to fundraising to post-operation shutdown. A majority of initiatives are legally structured as non-profit societies. Seventy-eight percent of IFS projects have a start-up cost of under $500,000. In line with this start-up cost, 75% produce under 10,000lb of food per year. Seventy-three percent are seeking more than $50,000 to expand their current operations.

Ninety-two percent are experiencing adverse effects of climate change, with the biggest impact cited being declining wild food production. Often, declining wild food production is what is driving nations toward food sovereignty projects. Other impacts cited include fires, interrupted supply chains, water shortages, and flooding.

Lessons Learned

In conducting our 2023 survey and meeting with Indigenous peoples working in food production and food sovereignty, we encountered some challenging stories. We chose to summarize these stories in a formal manner to protect the privacy of those sharing them, while also effectively communicating with the Ministry and others the valuable lessons they offer in terms of their scope and significance. The hope for Nations is that effective controls and practices can be implemented to safeguard other Nations from experiencing these adverse outcomes.

Below, we have summarized some of the challenging experiences, along with some suggested remedies.

Learning Experience	Remedy
Nation spent millions of dollars on solutions that were not delivered or constructed	• Indigenous Certified Supplier List • Association Support
Nations quoted significantly higher than MSRP for agricultural supplies, equipment, and services	• Non-Indigenous ally requests quotes • Indigenous Certified Supplier List • Association Support
Fundraisers apply for grants and funds for Indigenous projects but direct the funds toward self-interest or non-best use	• Indigenous-led standard required • Indigenous Certified Consultant List • Conflict-of-interest rules with funding • Culturally-appropriate training
Non-indigenous leadership or management of Indigenous projects leads to financial losses and projects that move away from the Nation vision	• Indigenous-led standard required • Culturally-appropriate training
Structures are purchased and built but are non-operational, derelict, or have failed completely	• Culturally-appropriate training and capacity building • Indigenous Certified Supplier List • Association Support
Indigenous funds go toward projects that largely benefit non-Indigenous people and businesses	• Indigenous-led standard required

Suggested Remedies

Association Support (Indigenous Extension Support)

In many cases, having an Indigenous-led association for Indigenous peoples and nations to contact and interact with would save money and avoid pitfalls. In our experience, Indigenous people trust other Indigenous peoples, and having an authentic association would be trusted and a conduit to sharing information and support.

Indigenous-led Standard

In conversations with funders, deciding which IFS project is authentic and deserving of support can cause hand-wringing. In a meeting with IFS champions, it was agreed that Indigenous people are the only ones who should decide who is Indigenous or what initiatives are authentic Indigenous projects.

Having an Indigenous-led standard developed and maintained by Indigenous peoples would go a long way toward remedying a number of challenges. It removes the liability of non-Indigenous people as arbiters of Indigenous projects. With funds, support, and resources going toward Indigenous-led projects, it increases the likelihood that those projects will benefit Indigenous peoples and nations.

Indigenous Certified Suppliers List

Similar to the PAR certification established by the Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business, the idea is that suppliers can apply for and go through a certification process to be on a Certified Suppliers list. Conversely, suppliers could be removed from the list for breaches. The supplier list is something that would be trusted by Nations looking to get into food production and something sought after by suppliers.

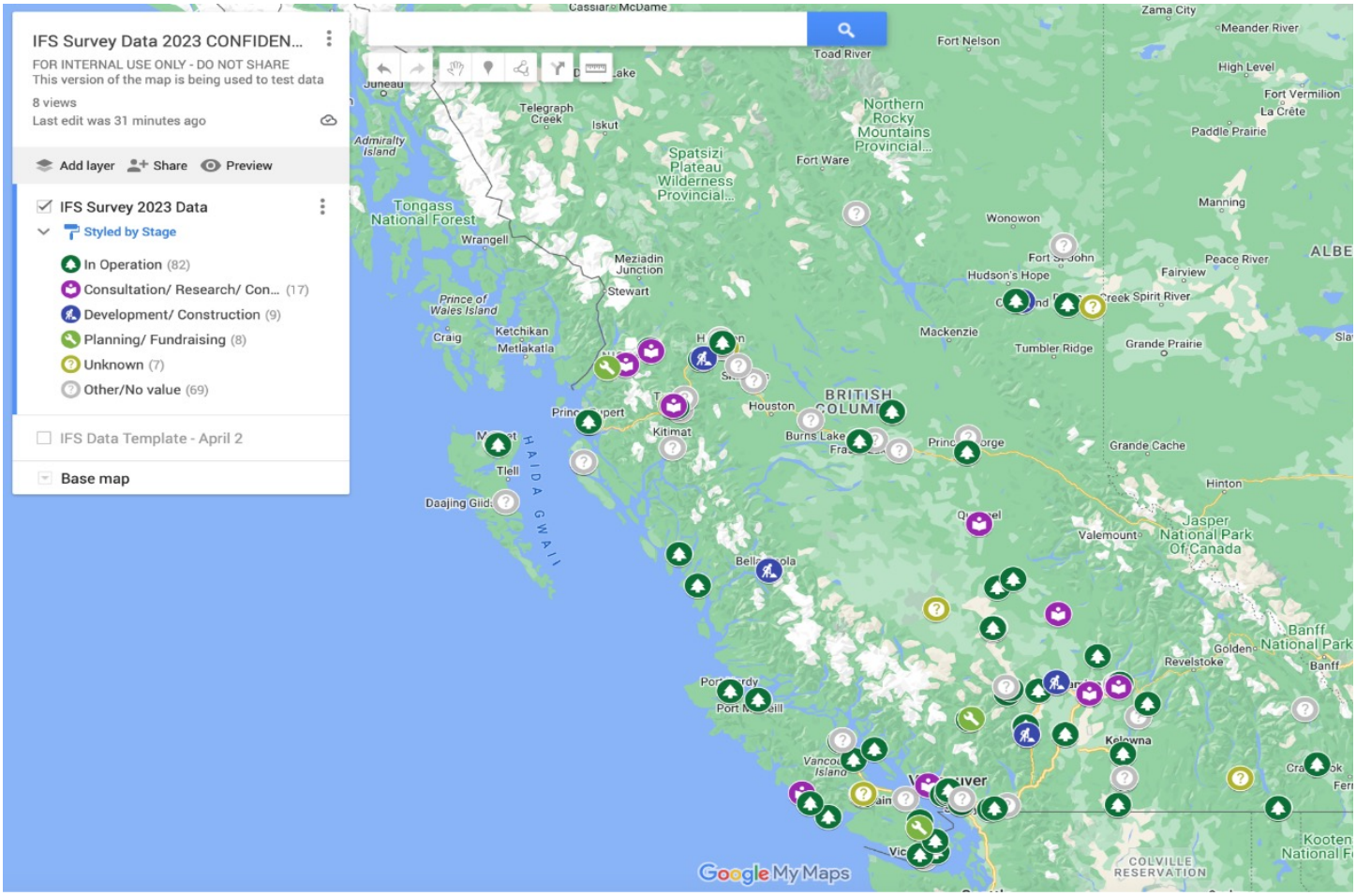
We already have such a list at Tea Creek; it is one of the top requests from Nations and Indigenous Agriculture trainees. We have a spreadsheet of suppliers we've used and recommended. It would be good to have a formal list and process.

Culturally-Appropriate Training

Lack of capacity and lack of appropriate training are both listed as top barriers in the survey, and the results of poor training and capacity are at the root of a number of learning experiences. We heard that it is not enough to have mainstream agricultural training; the training also needs to be culturally relevant and appropriate to be effective.

Map of IFS Projects in BC

Please take note that individuals, rather than organizations or Nations, complete the “other/no value” surveys.



IFS Survey 2023 Data
Styled by Stage
In Operation (82)
Consultation/ Research/ Con... (17)
Development/ Construction (9)
Planning/ Fundraising (8)
Unknown (7)
Other/No value (69)

Survey Results

Respondent Profile

Sample size: 183

- 63% Identify as Indigenous
- 28% work for a Nation
- 26% are in a leadership position
- 21% work in primary food production

State of Operations

Sample size: 121

- 69% in operation
- 12% in consultation or research
- 7% in development and construction
- 7% in fundraising
- Remaining unknown
- Half are land-based food producers
- One quarter are forest-based producers, and one quarter are water-based food producers

Legal Structure

Sample size: 106

- 61% are non-profits
- 31% are hybrids (non-profit and for-profit)
- 8% are for-profit

Startup Cost

Sample size: 97

- 78% have a start-up cost under $500,000
- 21% have a start-up cost between $500,000 and $2,000,000
- 1% have a stat-up cost over $5,000,000

Expansion Cost

Sample size: 100

- 18% require more than $750,000
- 4% require $250,000–$750,000
- 55% require $50,000–$250,000
- 23% require under $50,000

Annual Production

Sample Size: 61

- 2% produce over 100,000 lb
- 23% produce 10,000 lb
- 75% produce under 10,000lb

92% are experiencing adverse impacts from climate change

Impacts are:

1. Declining wild food production
2. Impacted by heat and/or fires
3. Supply chain interruptions
4. Water shortages
5. Flooding

Importance of IFS

Sample size: 128

- 82% said IFS is “very important” or “most important” compared to other Nation priorities.

Top Barriers

1. Lack of funding and lack of capacity (trained people) were tied for #1
2. Lack of IFS planning and lack of training were tied for #2
3. Lack of inputs
4. Lack of farmland

Indigenous-led measures

1. Majority staffed
2. Majority managed
3. Majority owned
4. Majority governed

Indigenous language group representation

1. Salishan
2. Sm’álgyax/ Tsimshianic
3. Dene/ Athapaskan
4. Kwakwalaa/ Wakashan
5. Haida
6. Ktunaxa

Appendix C. Survey Highlights and Comments

(See Section 5)

Sample responses to the open-ended question, *"Have you found the policies and programs of the Ministry of Agriculture Food and Fisheries to be helpful or obstructive?"* are provided below.

> *"Obstructive: Overly paternalistic in how we can only engage a consultant on their database and not seek our own. Inadequate Financial Support: Money being provided for studies and business plans is way too low."*
>
> *"Through submitting a grant application, we accessed the BC Indigenous Agriculture Development Program, Stream 1. We completed an Agricultural Opportunities Assessment that focused on examining community food security and identifying priority projects to address Food Sovereignty and Food Security. I found the process to be a positive experience. The consultant we were assigned through the above program was open and responsive to our needs. However, I am not aware of any other Indigenous-focused programs connected to agriculture and food systems/ food sovereignty."*
>
> *"I find them to be insufficient, not up to the urgency of the challenges of bringing forth sustainable food systems, including Indigenous food security sovereignty."*
>
> *"Indigenous food sovereignty is severely limited by all forms of colonial governance and in particular destructive resource extraction e.g. clearcut looking and herbicide poisoning, fish farms, oil and gas. UNDRIP is not honoured and access to land can be limiting. Ecosystem collapse is putting a severe strain on traditional food access. Regulations around wild meat processing have created barriers to urban access. Since we have not yet directly worked with this Ministry or done any provincial advocacy around food systems ourselves, it is hard to comment further."*
>
> *"Fish farms are destroying wild stocks but MAFF [Ministry of Agriculture and Food, formerly the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries] is ignoring the obvious."*

Sample responses to the open-ended question, *"What does Indigenous food sovereignty mean to you, your Nation, or community?"*

> *"Indigenous food sovereignty to me means that each of our respective communities and Nations are able to be autonomous in our foodways, without obstruction from the land base. We live in a capitalistic system, so funding is still very much a vital role in helping us realize these re-connections to land, place, language, foods, medicines, and the ability to pass knowledge along to the next generations."*
>
> *"Food from our land and being able to provide for our community to be able to survive."*

"We are a rural Island separated by hecate strait. Very dependent on BC ferries and the trucks loaded with food freight for our grocery stores. Deer populations affect our biodiversity in the understory of all forests on Haida Gwaii. In the spirit of reconciliation and remediation of the effects of colonialism, funding of a commercial venison project would be instrumental in helping our forests become the thriving ecosystems to provide food and medicinal plants. Also, getting the deer population in check will promote the growth of our berry species. Our berries are another food source we would like to tap into."

"Gold River has been without a local grocery store for about 5 years now and we travel to Campbell River to do our grocery shopping. The local Deli, gas station, and Fields stores have been providing what they can. It is so good to have fresh vegetables that we grow in our own garden and we also do food preservation, tomatoes, fruits, pickles, we have smoked and jarred fish and are hoping to have an elk and maybe deer to preserve as well. This would surely save on costs for our nation members."

"Our community has articulated a vision for a localized food economy that includes more locally produced food, more access to ancestral foods, a localized food economy (i.e. more trade amongst communities in the region for locally produced food), and increased literacy and skillbuilding to support the resilience of our community at a household and Nation level - all intended to align with our ancestral values around reciprocity, sustainability, and community care. This is the concept of food sovereignty we are working to realize."

"The right to self-determination and land and water management decision making authority across our territory. Continual access to fresh, healthy, safe, culturally relevant food gathered without oppression, harassment, false colonial authority, or industrial degradation for all generations to come."

"Provide an awareness of healthier eating and cooking habits, employment opportunities, food preparation and self-care skills, gardening skills, food security and sustainability."

"Food sovereignty to me means holding on to traditional approaches to diets, working with the land, and keeping a sustainable relationship with our resources."

"Indigenous Food Sovereignty means a true connection with the land and traditional food systems that were once prevalent throughout our province. Having the autonomy to use traditional lands and practices. Ensuring all Indigenous have access to affordable, nutritious foods including wild foods without oppression from the colonial governments policies."

"Indigenous food sovereignty means having not only policy but also community-will to retake control over their food systems. So that they have access to healthy, sustainable, and culturally appropriate food and food systems including agriculture, production, harvest, marketing, trading, culture, forage, preserving, etc."

Appendix D. Survey Questionnaire

(See Section 5)

IACAF Indigenous Food Sovereignty Survey

Help Shape Indigenous Food Security and Food Sovereignty (IFS) discussions in BC!

We know you are busy, and maybe have been over-surveyed! We expect this survey to take 5-10 minutes to complete. We are offering $250 honourariums for anyone willing to participate in a Case Study. If you are interested, please opt-in below.

This survey is being conducted by Tea Creek on behalf of the Indigenous Advisory Council on Agriculture and Food to research a diverse sample of food sovereignty/security initiatives in different nations across BC. The findings of this survey will be included in a report which will be delivered to the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries (MAFF) in the spring of 2022.

Tea Creek is an Indigenous-led food sovereignty initiative operating on Gitxsan territory in Kitwanga, BC. We offer agricultural training, employment skills training and work with our Indigenous community partners to develop food sovereignty initiatives in the north.

Please see our website for more info on who we are what we do: www.teacreek.ca

We did our draw for the main prize, it was won by Herb Alex of the Penticton Hatchery. Congrats Herb! You are still welcome to fill in the survey and help inform the IACAF, thank you!

---

* Your First and Last Name

* Your Email

Your Phone Number

Please choose all that apply to you:

- ☐ I am Indigenous
- ☐ I am in a Leadership Position
- ☐ I work for a Nation
- ☐ I work in Food Production

* Are you telling us about:

- ☐ An Indigenous Community or Nation
- ☐ A Business or Initiative

Street Address of Nation or Initiative:

Please provide the name of the Community or Nation that you are representing or work for:

Please provide the name of your Project or Initiative:

Street Address of Nation or Initiative:

PO Box/ Mailing Address:

Town, Province, and Postal Code:

Most relevant website:

What stage would you describe the project or initiative is in?

--

What is/ was/ or will be the total startup cost for your business or initiative?

--

Is your First Nation, business or organization:

- [ ] Rural (In the country)
- [ ] Semi-Rural
- [ ] Urban (In a city)

Can we include you in our prize draw?

Yes, include me in the draw

Are you willing to participate in a brief Case Study? We offer $250 honorariums for each Case Study participant. The case study will add a few details and narrative to this survey. Thank you!

Yes, please include me in a Case Study

How much food is currently produced locally?

--

Is climate change impacting your community's food security?

- Yes
- No

What are the impacts of climate change on your community or nation?

- We have Water Shortages
- We have been Impacted by Fires or Record Heat
- We have been Impacted by Floods
- Our Supply Chain was Interrupted
- Our Fish, Game or other Wild Foods in Decline
- Other

How important is Food Sovereignty compared to other initiatives in your Nation?

--

What barriers to Food Sovereignty have you experienced? Select all that apply:

- Lack of Farmland
- Lack of Funding
- Provincial Laws or Regulations
- Lack of Food Security/ Sovereignty Planning
- Lack of Capacity (trained people)
- Hostile Climate or Environment
- Lack of Inputs (compost, feed, supplies)
- Lack of effective Education or Training
- Not enough People (population)
- Other

What is going well in your Nation or community around food security or food sovereignty?

- [ ] We have Skilled People
- [ ] We have Political Will
- [ ] We have Funding
- [ ] We have a Plan
- [ ] We have Land
- [ ] We have a Strong Economy

How does your Initiative best tie into Indigenous Food Sovereignty?

- [ ] Food for People (Food Security)
- [ ] Supporting Food Providers/ Production
- [ ] Localizing Food Systems
- [ ] Local Food/ Land Control
- [ ] Building Food Knowledge, Skills, and Education
- [ ] Other

If other, please list:

What was accessed or used to initiate this project?

- [ ] Land Purchase or Leasing
- [ ] Inter-Government Agreements
- [ ] Government Funding
- [ ] Private Funding or Support
- [ ] Own-source Funding
- [ ] Internal Community Support and Volunteering
- [ ] Other

Did you access funding or support from the Ministry of Agriculture, Food, Fisheries?

Yes

Have you found the policies and programs of the Ministry of Agriculture Food and Fisheries to be helpful or obstructive? Can you tell us more?

Maximum of 100 words. 0

What barriers have already been overcome to start or sustain this project?

Maximum of 100 words. 0

What is most important and needed to support Indigenous Food Sovereignty/Security in your Nation or Community?

	Not important at all	Not very important	Important	Most important
Connection to Customers	1	2	3	4
Access to Land	1	2	3	4
Capital Funding	1	2	3	4
Operational Funding	1	2	3	4
Reconciliation Actions from Government	1	2	3	4
Training/Access to Workers	1	2	3	4
Food Sovereignty Planning	1	2	3	4
Nation to Nation Collaboration	1	2	3	4
Policy changes to support IFS	1	2	3	4

What does Indigenous Food Sovereignty mean to you, your Nation, or Community?

Maximum of 100 words. 0

Is there anything else you would like to add or share? Anything you would like to add?

Maximum of 100 words. 0

Do you have a relevant report or file to share? Please attach it here or email us, info@teacreek.ca

Choose a file

File limit 10MB

Can we quote you by name in our report to MAFF?

Yes, use my name

Submit

Appendix E. Data Sovereignty Survey Disclaimer

(See Section 5)

How the information you provide will be used

This sheet relates to the Indigenous Food Sovereignty mapping project we're working on, and specifically is about the data gathered in the survey at www.ifsovereignty.ca

Project Intent: The intent of this project is to map out Indigenous Food Sovereignty (IFS) projects so future support, policy, and programs can be designed to better support IFS.

There are three ways that your data will be managed once it is submitted:

1) All data will be held securely by Tea Creek and the Indigenous Food Sovereignty Association (IFSA), both are Indigenous-led organizations.
2) Some data will be summarized and shared with the BC Ministry of Agriculture and Food (MAF).
3) Some data will be shared publicly as part of a map. Any information that is already public, such as your website, address, and content available there, may or may not be shared publicly.
4) Some data and opinions will be shared publicly, but only if you consent to it being shared.

We created a basic map out of the survey we completed last year. You can view it here: https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/0/edit?mid=1TD4AmSztU7hUteib5bEYrggNYyOzFm3J&usp=sharing

If you wish to complete the survey but not have any information shared, please contact us at Tea Creek: www.teacreek.ca

Your provided data will be handled the following way: Please keep in mind that a lot of this data is not required; it is voluntary. The more information we have, the stronger our recommendations and network will be.

Your Data	How it will be stored	Will it be shared publicly?	Will MAF have access to it?
Name	Securely	With consent only	No
Email and Phone	Securely	No	No
Physical Address	Securely	Maybe, as a map pin	Yes
Personal profile information	Securely	Only in summary. Data won't be attached to you.	No
Initiative/ Nation name	Securely	Maybe, on the map	Yes
Initiative Stage of Development	Securely	Maybe, on the map	Yes
Money needs of Initiative	Securely	No	Yes
Food production level	Securely	No	In summary
Impacts, barriers	Securely	No	In summary
Tie-in to Indigenous Food Sovereignty	Securely	Maybe, on the map	Yes
Access to MAF programs	Securely	No	In summary
Needed supports	Securely	No	Yes
Indigenous-led	Securely	No	In summary
Your comments	Securely	No	Only with consent

Appendix F. Conditions Incumbent for IFS Success

There is obvious proof of innovation, adaptation, and resilience in Indigenous communities stemming from thousands of years of pre-contact sustainable foodland management practices. In many ways, these practices are still supported and practiced in Indigenous communities across British Columbia.

In order for funding support to be directed effectively, it must meet and honour the initiatives that exist in communities. This calls for a strategy that:

> *1) "promotes the re-establishment of local community-based food economies, that combine traditional harvesting with ecologically and culturally sustainable agriculture practices, and*
>
> *2) builds on the food related activities already taking place in AboriginalCommunities."* [94]

In order to build secure food systems in Indigenous communities, action must be taken to not only fund new initiatives and projects but also flow funding to existing initiatives and projects to encourage the expansion or sustainability of those initiatives.

In regard to promoting and ensuring the success of Indigenous agricultural initiatives three main areas are imperative to success: (1) Indigenous trade networks; (2) business training; and (3) government-nonprofit partnerships. [95]

Indigenous Trade Networks

More than half of the farmers and entrepreneurs surveyed in the situation assessment noted the existence of an Indigenous trade network "t*hat greatly helps Indigenous businesses to succeed*." The report goes on to say:

> *"There is also a desire to see more Indigenous trade; it was noted that the Kweseltken Artisan and Farmers Market is a great place to share from community to community. There is a desire to see more coordination between communities for trading of produce prior to the season start. Informal mentorship (specifically by those who are in the field) and accessing networks (through conferences, associations and events) was noted as being very helpful for operators to get started."* [96]

Business Training

The situation assessment found that:

> *"business programs, or other programs that have a business component are an important factor in food operation startup ups. Financial support from Band offices for members pursuing educational opportunities was key in several instances. The business programs specifically mentioned in the interviews as being helpful were:*
>
> *• Investment Business Equity Fund and forgivable loans*
>
> *• TRU Horticulture Program (there are sections of this program on business management)*
>
> *• Aboriginal Business Entrepreneur and Skills Training (BEST) program*
>
> *• Community Futures self-employment training"* [97]

[94] Morrison, "B.C. Food Systems Network Working Group on Indigenous Food Sovereignty."
[95] Tapestry Evaluation & Strategy, "Indigenous Agriculture Situation Assessment."
[96] Tapestry Evaluation & Strategy, "Indigenous Agriculture Situation Assessment."
[97] Tapestry Evaluation & Strategy, "Indigenous Agriculture Situation Assessment."

Government and Nonprofit Partnerships

According to the situation assessment,

> *Partnerships [are] an important part of community-based and enterprise-based farming and food initiatives. Having a broad base of organizations from multiple sectors and levels of government, as well as a committee that represents different community interests, was noted as an important contributor to the success of several community-based projects. A trusting relationship with the Band office (or further, a Band office that is willing to supply materials such as wood chips, tilling, etc.) was noted as an asset for both community-based and enterprise farms. Partnerships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous rural communities are an opportunity to assist growers make the most of small rural markets."* [98]

Lastly, a review of Indigenous food sovereignty in Western Canada notes that

> *"nurturing relationships also helps to build support for community-based food projects. Many of the food projects highlighted depend on the support of volunteer community members. The importance of support for and from the community is critical to these undertakings."* [99]

[98] Tapestry Evaluation & Strategy, "Indigenous Agriculture Situation Assessment."

[99] Robin, "Our Hands at Work: Indigenous Food Sovereignty in Western Canada."

Appendix G. Community IFS Planning Checklist/ Score Sheet

The following checklist can be used to determine how ready a Nation is to undertake IFS projects.

Checklist Item	Rate Your Nation
Political Will and Community Buy-In Political will drives policy and resource allocation and is key for success. For Nations, political will includes having BCRs in place, and support of hereditary (if applicable) and elected leaders, as well as the community.	/10
Urgency IFS projects need substantial, sustained attention and resources to succeed. IFS will need to be urgent enough to sustain staff time and resources.	/10
Funding Adequate funding at all phases of IFS projects is required for IFS to take root and flourish. Unlocking appropriate funding for Indigenous people and Nations across food-producing and related sectors is essential.	/10
IFS Standards Implementation Ratify IFS standards to ensure that resources are allocated towards IFS projects and not misdirected.	/10
Land, Territory and Access to Food Producing Land Food production requires adequate land, territory, and spaces. This land must be free of conflict and available for IFS work.	/10
Indigenous Led It is key that Indigenous people lead the implementation of IFS at every level, from policy to on-the-ground implementation. Non-Indigenous parties should be clear that their role is as allies and defer to Indigenous people on final decisions.	/10
Trained People Any IFS operation will need trained, experienced managers and workers. In addition, tradespeople are needed to build and maintain IFS operations.	/10
Key Infrastructure Food production requires, at a minimum, power, water, and sewer infrastructure in place. Other considerations include buildings and roads. If these are not available, they need to be factored into any budgeting and planning.	/10
Total Readiness Score:	**/80**

Appendix H. Bibliography

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