



I·SPARC
**FOOD
SYSTEMS
PROGRAM**



ISPARC
Indigenous Sport,
Physical Activity & Recreation Council

**A Journey Toward Indigenous
Food Security & Food Sovereignty**



Food Systems Program: A Journey Toward Indigenous Food Security & Food Sovereignty

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First Nations Health Authority
Health through wellness

Thank you and acknowledgement to the
First Nations Health Authority
for valued partnership.



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FOREWORD

To guide future decision-making and evolution of the Food Systems Program, the following Vision statement was prepared by the Food Systems Program participants who contributed to strategic planning for the Food Systems Program in 2021:

Elders, families, and young people connect with gardens, water, and forests to activate and sustain the holistic healing of individuals, communities, and the earth, and to embody our inherent right to self-determination, food sovereignty, and intergenerational sustainability.

Colonial interferences such as the Indian Act, Reservation system, and the implementation of colonial elected Chief and Council systems in place of Indigenous governance systems continue to have implications today with regard to inequitable distribution of resources, infringement on inherent hunting and fishing rights and disrupted access and limited stewardship of traditional lands. One of the many legacies of Residential schools was the significant loss of Indigenous Knowledge when children were removed from their families and culture. These long-term systemic disconnections to Indigenous food relations continue to impact Indigenous communities' overall health and well-being.

As we continue to experience climatic stressors and disasters, soaring food costs, supply-chain disruptions, and ongoing complications in relation to COVID-19, actions taken toward achieving food security and food sovereignty is practical and necessary for all communities. It is also a sovereign right as articulated in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act in British Columbia. Restoring

communities' capacity for self-determined planning toward sustainable food security and food sovereignty is a legislated component of the journey toward Reconciliation.

Food security, as defined by the United Nations' Committee on World Food Security, means that all people, at all times have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food that meets their food preferences and dietary needs for an active and healthy life.

"Indigenous Peoples have lived the reality of Indigenous food sovereignty for thousands of years and have made major contributions to the food security of all Peoples. The Working Group on Indigenous Food Sovereignty (WGIFS) has identified four key principles that guide how Indigenous food sovereignty is expressed:

- 1. The sacred responsibility to uphold the relationships to the land, water, people, plants, and animals that provide us with our food. Our right to adequate amounts of culturally appropriate foods is based on natural law and should not be constrained by colonial laws and policies. We eat food, it becomes us. Food comes from the land, so we are a part of the land.*
- 2. We must participate in Indigenous food related activities on a day-to-day basis to achieve food sovereignty and uphold our sacred responsibilities. This includes hunting, fishing, farming, gathering, preserving, preparing, sharing, and trading foods in a cooperative subsistence economy.*
- 3. Self-determination and freedom from corporate control of the land and food systems.*
- 4. Decolonizing policy, planning, and governance. Indigenous food sovereignty cannot be achieved within the same institutional frameworks that were designed to dispossess us."¹*



PROGRAM HISTORY

The First Nations Food Systems program (FNFS) grew from BC's Access to Produce in Rural and Remote Communities initiative, previously funded by the Ministry of Health and supported by the Ministry of Agriculture. From 2009 to 2022, the Heart & Stroke Foundation implemented the FNFS; first in collaboration with the Ministry of Health, and then with the First Nations Health Authority since 2014. Core components of the FNFS has included:

- **\$5,000 grants for infrastructure, tools and materials and/or wages for a garden coordinator**
- **Technical field and educational supports**
- **Regional and provincial gatherings for networking and knowledge exchange**
- **Advisory representatives with relevant expertise**

The FNFS initially focused on partnering with BC First Nations communities by offering \$5,000 grants and technical support to start,

expand and/or improve small-scale community gardens to enhance access to fresh produce. Since 2018, the program began to evolve in response to community's ongoing expressed desire to recognize a far more complex relationship to food. This shift would include centering Indigenous perspectives and prioritizing the unique cultural relationship each Nation has with food. This has come to include (but not limited to) Indigenous food related activities such as ceremony, medicinal gardens, foraging, fish & game hunting and preserving—all factored into overall health and wellbeing on a community's pathway toward food sovereignty and food security.

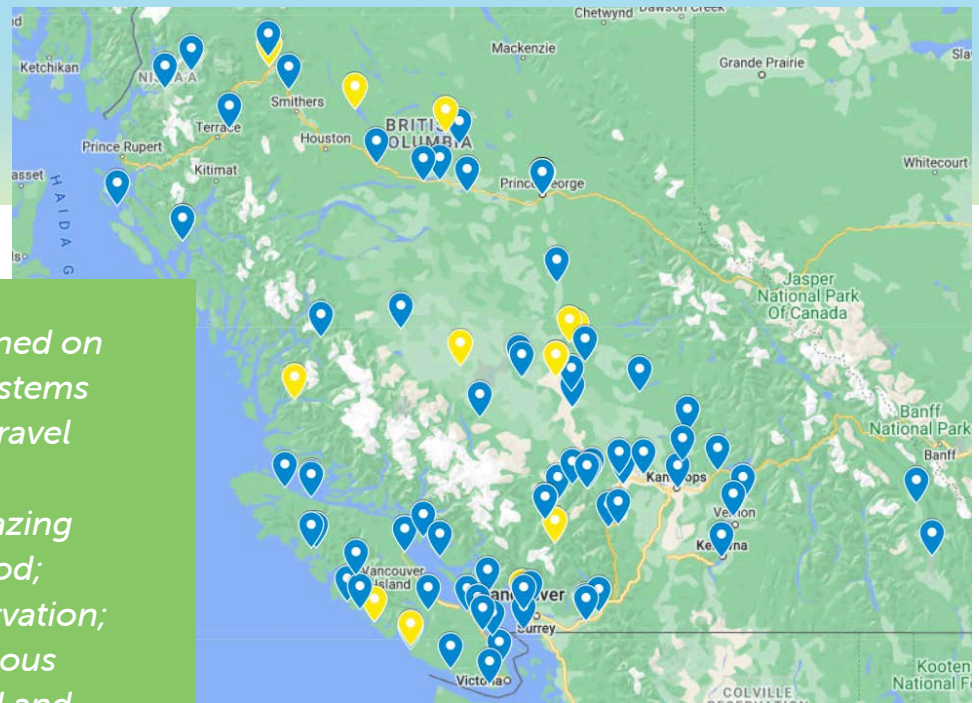
The Indigenous Sport, Physical Activity & Recreation Council (I-SPARC) was identified by the First Nations Health Authority (FNHA) as a new implementing partner that could help steward the Program from an Indigenous, community-led perspective. This builds on nearly fifteen years of trusted partnership. FNHA is one of I-SPARC's founding partners and ongoing Partner Agency for health and wellness programming. On April 1, 2022 I-SPARC began delivering the FNFS under a modified name, 'Food Systems Program'.

"We are pleased to continue building on our valued relationship with the First Nations Health Authority, now to include the Food Systems Program. This is an exciting new area of programming for I-SPARC, which aligns with the broad range of innovative community-based activities being carried out through our Healthy Living programs. During this transition year, we have had the opportunity to learn more about what is important for communities in relation to food security and food sovereignty."

- Rick Brant, I-SPARC CEO, April 2022.

"I will always be grateful for everything I have learned on my food journey during my time with the Food Systems Program. It provided me with the opportunity to travel throughout BC, to visit different communities and meet a variety of unique, knowledgeable, and amazing people. I learned about growing and gathering food; also fishing, hunting, food preparation, and preservation; and most importantly I have learned from Indigenous communities and Peoples how to truly enjoy food and celebrate achievements. It taught me that food is so much more than just something we put in our bodies. It is bringing people together. It is ceremony. It is medicine for our physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual well-being. Food is about relationships and through this program I formed a lot of healthy relationships – to food in all its shapes and forms, to the land and the waters, and most importantly to the people involved in this program. I truly believe in the value of this Program and the importance of food security and sovereignty, with Indigenous Peoples leading the way. All My Relations."

~ Sonja Grosse-Broemer, Food Systems staff 2013-2022



Participating communities plotted Google MyMaps: Sohee Jung, Toa Consulting

The Program began with seven participating communities, and in just over ten years has grown to include 75 across the province, with many more expressing interests.

INTRODUCTION

Through the fall of 2022, I-SPARC's Food Systems Program team reached out to participating communities through in-person visits and video calls. The aim was to support the development of this Story in order to better understand what stage communities are at on their food security and food sovereignty journeys. The information collected builds on past consultation work dating back to 2017 and is intended to help inform an evolved, self-determined program design moving forward 'in a good way'.

Communities were asked about their top challenges, what they would like to see for supports, what their learning and community gathering priorities are, the level of project participation in their communities, and the nature of their project successes. The

unique contexts experienced in each community has revealed a very diverse range of project types and how those projects are carried out. Though each is unique, there are many common themes that emerged that the Food Systems Program can continue to learn and grow from through sharing and listening.

Past evaluation conducted has shown how the Food Systems Program is positively impacting the health and wellbeing of participating community members. Many reported that through their community-led projects, they have experienced:

- **Increased access to nutritious, affordable foods and more awareness of how chronic diseases relate to the foods we eat;**
- **Reduced barriers to food security and the ability to widely distribute fresh and preserved foods to community members through luncheons, feasts and food baskets;**
- **Social and therapeutic benefits with access to safe neutral spaces to gather; and**
- **Cultivation and reclaiming of Indigenous food relations.**



PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS



Food Champions were provided with a list of participant types that commonly engage with the food system projects in their communities. The percentages in the graphic illustrate how many times each participant type was selected out of the number of communities engaged during the visits and calls in the fall of 2022.

Project Demographics



LISTENING TO COMMUNITY

2022-23 COMMUNITY VISIONS

To ensure continued program momentum during the 2022/23 transition year, existing participating communities were invited to apply for a grant through a one-time expedited assessment process. Of the 75 active communities from

the prior year, 66 submitted applications and 100% were funded.

Though gardens and access to fresh healthy food remains a top priority for community, the project themes are becoming more diverse and a focus on revitalizing Indigenous food related activities are increasing.

The top project themes that communities are carrying out this year include:

- 77% of the applicants include in ground gardening/garden boxes or greenhouse related activities
 - Of those, 12% are improving or installing irrigation systems
- 50% include a focus on Indigenous foods and food sovereignty-related activities

- 12% of those highlighted ceremony, gathering and Potlatches
- 25% are focusing on canning, preservation, dehydration
- 18% requested support for animal and fish related projects such as:
 - Smokehouse / smoking / tanning / canning
 - Chickens and coop, sharing eggs
 - Home grown beef, lamb, pork
 - Preserving/monitoring sites for clams and other seafood

Some unique projects being carried out this year:



- Launch of a food truck (Auntie's Kitchen) using produce from the local garden
- The re-launch of a Farmers /Crafts Flea market
- A garden tool lending library
- An Indigenous food cookbook
- Aqua-ponics



Photo: Beangka Elliott



RECIPES FOR SUCCESS

Photo: Julia Flinton



Connecting with communities individually through the fall of 2022 has allowed Food Champions and Food Systems staff to get acquainted and share a deeper delve into understanding community priorities. Though each community is in a unique position on their journey to food security and food sovereignty, some valuable lessons have been shared that all can learn from.

The most common themes are summarized here:

- Align with other programs
- Engage youth, Elders and Knowledge Holders
- Get buy-in and support from Chief & Council
- Diversify funding sources
- Provide neutral safe space for gathering and sharing



**Carrier Sekani
Family Services (CSFS)
Northwest**



When Kayla assumed responsibility for the CSFS garden, “Akhadineenle”, she was eager to get it growing! She revitalized the space by integrating garden activities with existing youth programs and services. Youth & Elders came together and enjoyed planting seeds, watering, weeding, and harvesting. Located in a downtown urban setting, some people warned about theft and vandalism, but Kayla has found the opposite - the garden is respected and appreciated. It brings joy to youth and the community.

“We hosted a traditional Potlatch this summer, and our chef prepared the meal using some of our garden produce and locally sourced salmon! We had 80 attendees, including youth, their families, elders, and CSFS leaders. We honored the youth at the event and thanked them for contributing to the meal through their garden work; seeing their pride and confidence at the event was very rewarding.”

~ Kayla Brownscombe, CSFS

Many Elders spend a lot of time alone and appreciate the opportunity to get involved in a project. Integrated elder and youth activities promote intergenerational healing and support holistic wellness for all participants.

Elders typically have flexible schedules, and they are enthusiastic partners. Elders have the knowledge to share, and it is essential to include them in project planning and implementation.

New project coordinators should seek out the Knowledge Holders in their community and invite them to participate. The community is inspired to get involved when Knowledge Holders are invested in a project!

These two communities have found great success by partnering with Chief & Council in planning, as well as integrating food projects with school and daycare programming.

The \$5,000 FSP grant is one of many funding sources going into the building of the Skeetchestn Stables, now well underway. In support of the community's robust food security plan, Principal, **Bryce Ross** has managed to help mobilize multiple funders to help make the animal husbandry program come to fruition. He also wrote proposals to build a Language/Culture camp, pit house, smoke house and tanning shack.


Other members of the community have secured partners to procure an industrial freezer, greenhouse, food forest, underground root cellar and water harvest cisterns.



Skeetchestn Community School Interior



Saik'uz Northwest



With the support of the Saik'uz Nation, in just a few short years, Food Champions Linda MacDonald and Gilbert Vickers have gone from the development of a small garden plot beside the Nation office, to one acre of fruit trees, in-ground garden space and garden boxes. The children at the daycare love to garden and are a source of pride and inspiration for the community.

This year they were approved for funding to build a 60-foot greenhouse dome.

"If we are successful with the dome, we may be eligible for a commercial greenhouse and be able to employ people. This next year is going to be epic."



"I am a clinical therapist and I do some therapy in the garden. The garden is a great place to do trauma therapy. With one child, we were able to work through some early trauma. While pulling weeds we uprooted some ants and the ants home ... which helped this child reflect on his own life's parallels of being uprooted and displaced from his home. We were able to dive deep into some tough topics while in the safety of the garden space. It can be very therapeutic."

~ Ted Campbell, Youth Clinician and Food Champion, Nuxalk



**Okanagan
Indian Band (OKIB)**
Interior

"We were recently approved to start a ranch on a piece of OKIB land. Not only do we want to focus on food security, but also healing. This land will have space for sweat lodges and other practices for healing. We are now beginning to plan a path for true food sovereignty."

~ Nikki Lorentz, Garden Coordinator, OKIB



"Food sovereignty is about more than just food—it is everything. It's in our history, it's in our stories, water, land, air and supernatural."

~ Ross E Hunt Jr, Kwakwaka'wakw

Kwakwaka'wakw First Nation has found that community engagement tends to increase when there are special events to look forward to, like the annual pitcook at harvest time, utilizing food from the gardens and the sea.

This method of cooking, and ceremony around it, has existed for millennia until it was suppressed during colonialism. In recent years, communities have been bringing it back. Elders and Knowledge Holders are passing on knowledge and techniques to the next generations who want to restore this practice.



Kwakwaka'wakw
North Island



Photo: Westbank First Nation



"My grandmother used to put a seed in her mouth before planting it. She said it would tell the earth what she needs."

~ Jamie Hunt, 'Namgis

TRADITIONAL WAYS

There is a strong desire to revitalize Indigenous ways of foraging, hunting, processing, preserving, ceremony, and medicines. Some participants have spoken about how community-led food initiatives are reawakening the spirits and how their projects contribute to reviving Indigenous food relations and language through gatherings led by local Knowledge Holders.



"There are foods that I have not eaten in 40 years. I have been craving duck soup and I can't even remember what it tastes like. My son craves crab, but they cost \$30! The way we used to eat feels impossible. I would much rather live off of seafood than Shake n Bake. There should be more support for communities wanting to access our traditional foods."

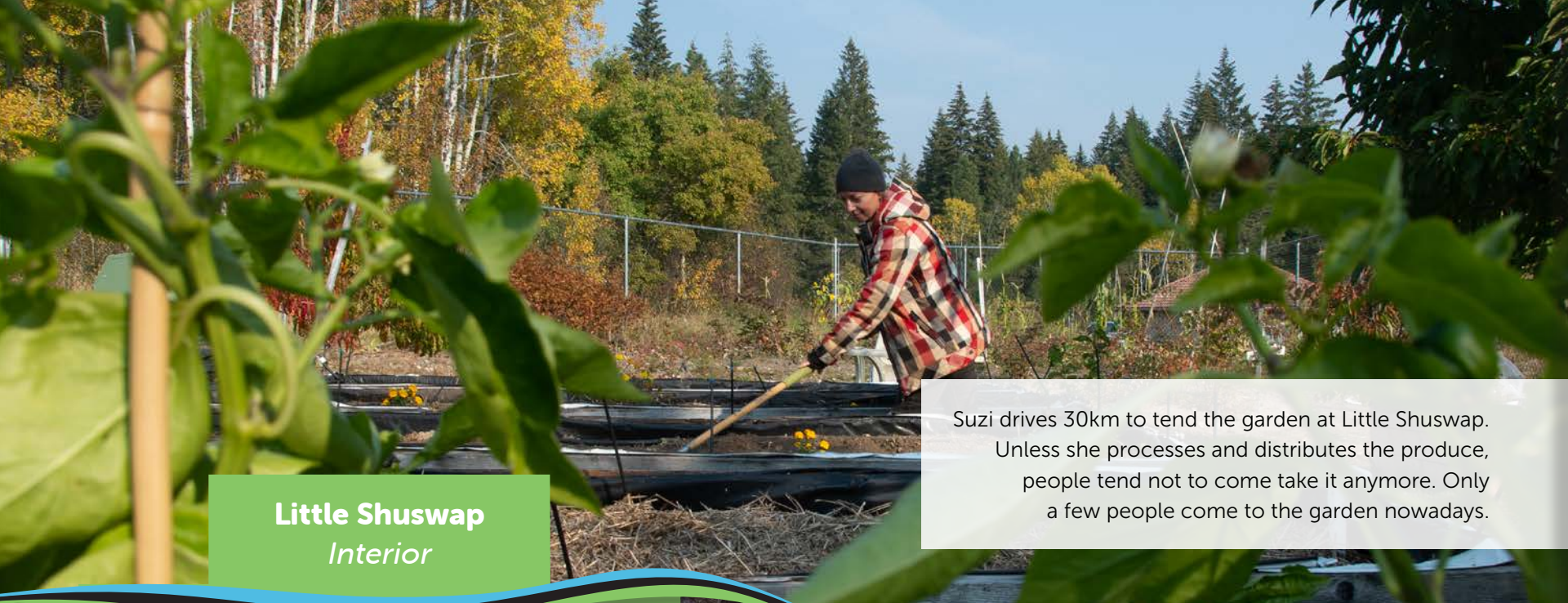
~ April Lucas, Ehattesaht

"So many have lost hunting and gathering skills...sadly today we hunt at Save On Foods. Our Elders still share the stories and talk about the good old days of the past. There is a strong desire here to bring that back and really encourage youth to understand our traditional relationship to foods and medicines."

~ Christine Baker (TlatlaKwot), Squamish



Photo: Beangka Elliott



Little Shuswap Interior

Suzi drives 30km to tend the garden at Little Shuswap. Unless she processes and distributes the produce, people tend not to come take it anymore. Only a few people come to the garden nowadays.



"The \$5,000 grant pays our gardener wages and our Health Centre tops it up. It took a long time to recruit a part-time seasonal gardener this year, and we were worried we wouldn't have one. No one from community applied for the job."

~ Kristina John, Little Shuswap

TOP CHALLENGES

Achieving success often comes with overcoming challenges along the way. Food Champions have shared the types of challenges their projects are most pressed by. Despite the diversity of project

types, geographical contexts, and vulnerabilities, common themes have emerged, providing Food Systems staff with the top priority areas to focus future supports on. Since COVID-19, attracting engagement and retaining labour to run projects, even paid labour, has been noted by 73% as a top challenge. These are the most noted:

- Attracting and retaining labour
- Grant timing vs season
- Not enough funding
- Historical interference
- Loss of Knowledge
- Remoteness/access
- Pest control
- Climate and disasters



Yekooche Northwest

Yekooche's food security is under pressure due to its remoteness. The closest grocery store is 75 minutes away by gravel road and very few in the community have a driver's licence. In years past, fresh produce was delivered to everyone from the spacious garden, and a fire-pit area provided a valuable social gathering space.

"I have heard about how successful the garden was here in the past, with the potential to feed the entire community. I learned that one of the gardeners recently passed away, so I am assuming this may be why the garden and greenhouse have been put to rest out of respect. With healing and time, I am hopeful it can eventually be revitalized for the community."

~ New FSP Champion, Krista Janssen, Yekooche

Of the few funding opportunities that do exist for food related projects in BC, none of them provide core operational funds, and many are only one-time funds, making planning and staffing for sustainable projects incredibly difficult. Fiscal year restrictions often mean grants come too late in the season to align with time sensitive project needs. To add even more pressure, with supply-chain issues and rising costs, supplies are harder to get and the cost of living is higher than ever, especially in remote communities.

In recent years a sense of loss has rippled through many once-thriving community projects. The isolation of COVID-19 has been tough to come back from. Some people still hesitate to gather, some are grieving loved ones, and many are simply fatigued and too burned out to volunteer. From an historical context, colonial legacy amplifies the loss of Indigenous Knowledge and ways of being.

A number of Food Champions reflected how colonial legacy continues to impact internal and local politics. In some cases, there are multiple communities spread out geographically under one Nation. Resource distribution, like grants, is not or cannot always be equitable. Others quietly navigate historical grievances impacting everything from hunting and fishing rights to the willingness to participate in projects and programs. It is even further complicated for communities like Westbank, where Reservation lands intersect or overlap with Crown or private lands, greatly limiting the Nation's agricultural and traditionally stewarded spaces.



Skeetchestn
Interior

"Our whole community was in hotels in Kamloops for a month and a half last year due to fires. We are so vulnerable to drought, fire or floods. For every project proposal we put forward we do a SWAT analysis highlighting flooding and fires as serious risks. Overall, there has been a real shift in thinking here... going back to traditional ways of knowing and doing in relation to food security, and here at the school, we want to support that for the benefit of everyone in the community."

~ Bryce Ross, Principal of Skeetchestn School



Westbank
Interior

Every year there are new challenges that come up to prepare for or respond to. Whether it is better fences to keep out wildlife or the neighbourhood cat digging up the garden. Some communities have struggled with vandalism and theft.

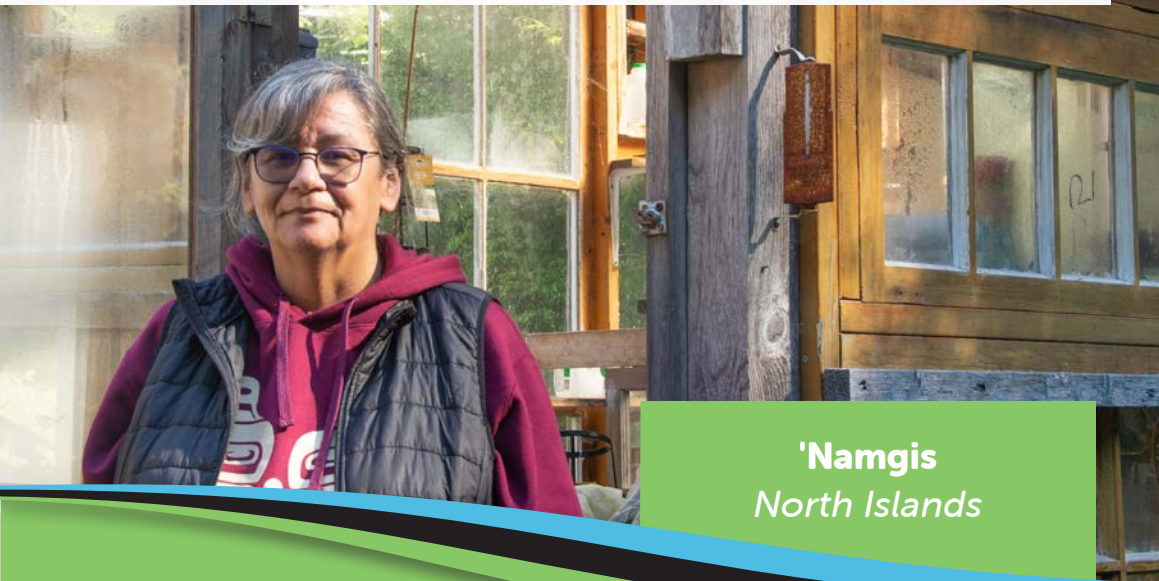
Climate factors may also give rise to invasive species, like quack-grass, grasshoppers, snails, aphids or even hungry wasps. For the first time in current memory, Squamish First Nation was confronted by a grizzly bear this year!

Disasters like fires, floods, heat domes and health pandemics are nearly impossible to plan for. More and more communities are wanting to take steps to be more food secure and self-reliant. Support with building capacity for planning and implementation is needed.

"Being able to share so much food with community and provide a neutral, safe space to gather for children and our wellness program really fills my cup. But this quack-grass is everywhere, we have tried everything to control it!"

~ Megan Stewart, Westbank

Both Food Champions note they do this work off the side of their desks in addition to their full-time jobs. Both are near retirement with limited technical skills and hope a new Food Champion will be inspired to take their place.



'Namgis
North Islands

The community garden was initiated by nurses funded through Health Canada. They were responding to broader health issues by planting nutritious foods. The community wasn't familiar with some of foods, like kale, but have benefited from produce and preserves. When the nurses left, it has been tough to keep up the garden. Jaimie has been keeping the project going because she sees the value, but she struggles as she does not have the technical knowledge and it is hard to find volunteers. "We would benefit with some help getting our youth engaged by learning more about healthy food production and getting them involved in the revival of our traditional foods."

~ Jaimie Hunt, 'Namgis

There are 30 garden boxes at member's homes, and 30 more at shared spots such as daycares, Health Centre and Nation Offices. Some boxes are getting old and need repair. Members are using boxes for different desires such as flowers, medicinal plants and vegetables.

"I am not a gardener, but I have always applied for the FSP grant and purchased seedlings and delivered dirt for our community over a 15 mile area. In the old days, before the Squamish town got built up, we used to have shared farmland, fruit trees and cattle. I'm retiring next year so we need a new Food Champion to take over and to continue supporting our Generational plan to help restore our traditional relationships to food and medicine."

~ Christine Baker (TlatlaKwot), Squamish



Squamish
Coastal Fraser

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

I-SPARC is committed to supporting the inclusion of First Nations, Métis, Inuit and Indigenous populations away from home and in urban settings. This will expand the Program and its number of participants, and will enrich and diversify our knowledge sharing, networking and funding partnership opportunities. Going forward, the Food Systems Program will continue to offer core components from the past with some modifications based on feedback from community and Advisory members.



COMMUNITY GRANTS

Efforts will continue to be made to keep barriers low with regard to grant eligibility requirements, application and reporting processes. However, with growth on the horizon, there will be more emphasis placed on automizing some components. This will assist with developing more effective and efficient processes for releasing grants quickly and for storing historical information, so knowledge is not lost when there is staff turnover either in the community or at I-SPARC.

85% of communities consulted in fall 2022 indicated they were interested in the possibility of tiered funding streams. I-SPARC is hoping to pilot tiered funding options in the future, offering smaller and larger grant amounts. Tiered funding would allow communities to apply for funds based on their unique needs and capacities. Stand by!



TECHNICAL SUPPORTS

Dating back to the beginning of the program when it was designed solely as a garden program, the FNFS offered regional field technicians to support communities. Some participants have noted they greatly valued that support for technical advice and help with carrying out gardening-related activities, however, not all communities benefited or were aware the support was available to them.²

During the 2022/23 transition year, existing participating communities were invited to request a technician, if needed for specific support, and I-SPARC considered those requests on a case-by-case basis. Out of all the 2022/23 granting Vision plans that were submitted, 8% indicated they would like to see the support of a regional field technician, which may be indicative of how projects and priorities are evolving since the program's inception. I-SPARC has opted to re-evaluate this component of the program.

Past recommendations from community suggested that the Program *ensure that the founding principles* [of the program] *are based on community-based and strengths-based approaches where communities are valued for their knowledge and culture.* There have also been suggestions from communities over time to change the message of the Program from *helping* communities to **empowering** communities.³ In response to this, I-SPARC is working toward a model of technical supports that will assist communities with developing the capacity for self-determined planning for long-term self-sustainability; to ensure there is expertise/Knowledge Holders available for food related topics beyond gardening; and to warrant that access to technical support is equitable.

GATHERINGS

58% of the communities consulted in the fall of 2022 expressed how much they preferred regional gatherings. 12% discussed the virtues that provincial level gatherings offer and 30% had no preference for either one, though it should be noted that 100% of those asked prefer them in person. I-SPARC plans to re-introduce regional gatherings in 2023/24 in partnership with communities.



WORDS MATTER

The naming of the Program has come up in conversation with communities in recent years, and whether or not 'Food Systems' fully describes what the Program is about and means to communities. During discussions in fall 2022, Food Champions were asked what they thought of the Program name; what words are used in their community to describe their projects; and what kind of words do

they suggest to best describe activities occurring within the Program. Many great new conversations unfolded! This word cloud visualization was created by an AI program from the discussion notes. The bigger and bolder the words appear, the more often the words were mentioned.

This illustration will help guide further discussions for the most suitable program name





METHODOLOGY

From September 1, 2022 – November 17, 2022, fifteen (15) communities welcomed a visit in person with I-SPARC staff and Toa Consulting. These communities were identified to ensure that a broad spectrum of project age, size, type of project, and geographical area were represented. The remainder of this year's participating communities were each invited to meet by phone or video call. 40% of communities generously signed up and participated in informative conversations. External expert Advisory was consulted to review and provide input on this document.

An analysis was conducted of existing data from community including:

- Historical final project reports from participating communities 2019-2021
- The 2022/23 Community Vision Plans

An analysis of prior assessments:

- First Nations Food Systems Evaluation, Reciprocal Consulting, 2017
- First Nations Food Systems Strategic Plan Recommendations, Reciprocal Consulting, 2022

Endnotes:

¹ Dawn Morrison (Secwepemc), founder WGIFS, 1983. The WGIFS and Morrison are internationally recognized for creating a critical pathway of consciousness where Indigenous food sovereignty meets social justice, climate change, and regenerative food systems research, action and policy, and planning and governance.

² The 2017/18 evaluation conducted by Reciprocal Consulting at the program's height, indicated 30% of participating communities reported they did not know there were field technicians available for support.

³ Page 9, FNFS Evaluation_Reciprocal Consulting, 2017



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