REVITALIZING FOOD SOVEREIGNTY IN TREATY #3

PRE-FEASIBILITY STUDY FINAL REPORT

TREATY #3 INVESTMENT GROUP

GRAND COUNCIL TREATY #3

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Between June 2024 and July 2025, Grand Council Treaty #3, in partnership with Narratives Inc., led a pre-feasibility study to explore the future of food sovereignty in Treaty #3 territory.

Through community surveys, six engagement sessions, and interviews, and guided by Grand Council Treaty #3's four directional governance model, members from across the territory shared their visions for food sovereignty including how to reclaim local food systems and the barriers they face in accessing healthy foods.

Community members spoke candidly about the challenges they face including food affordability and quality, policy or legislation that prevents access to historical and cultural food gathering practices, pressures from industrial development, systematic problems such as mental or physical health, struggles with community capacity, lack of infrastructure, environmental pollution affecting the health of the land, and ongoing impacts of colonization. Yet, despite these challenges, many community members spoke to the food practices they are already enacting in their own ways, gardening, fishing, hunting, gathering – and identified opportunities to expand these practices through education, research, and strengthened local food distribution.

One of the key strategies identified through this work is the development of regional food hubs. Four initial food hub locations were identified based on community guidance and the feasibility criteria outlined in this study:

- Wauzhusk Onigum (North)
- Naotkamegwanning (West)
- Rainy River First Nation (South)
- Wabigoon Lake Ojibway Nation (East)

These potential hubs are envisioned as multipurpose spaces to support food storage, processing, education, land-based learning, and cultural resurgence. Their development is guided by a food hub rubric and supported by community priorities shared throughout this study.

However, food hubs alone cannot achieve food sovereignty. This study outlines a holistic, systems-based approach, one that includes dedicated teaching networks of Knowledge Keepers and land-based practitioners, investment in physical food education spaces, and a comprehensive policy framework grounded in Anishinaabe values. These recommendations span key areas such as land access, traditional harvesting, health and nutrition, infrastructure, and environmental protection.

The report concludes with a detailed path forward, including seven recommended next steps:

1. Confirm and Develop Regional Food Hub Sites
2. Support Community Teaching Networks
3. Invest in Land-Based Learning and Physical Spaces
4. Advance Policy Development Across Key Areas
5. Create a Treaty #3 Food Sovereignty Action Plan
6. Establish a Cross-Community Governance Body
7. Secure Sustainable, Multi-Year Funding

Taken together, these findings, food hub development steps, and recommendations can lead to holistic Treaty#3 food systems that work with local communities and ecosystems to revitalize food sovereignty.

PROJECT BACKGROUND

In June 2024, Grand Council Treaty #3 launched a food sovereignty pre-feasibility study to better understand and address food access challenges across Treaty #3 communities. This work aimed to identify barriers, surface opportunities, and outline a clear path forward toward food sovereignty that is grounded in the voices, visions, and leadership of Treaty #3 Nations.

Guided by the Four Directional Governance Model, Treaty #3 leadership hosted six regional engagement sessions across the four directions - North, South, East, and West - and invited ongoing community input throughout the process.

The following report shares the knowledge gathered with and for Treaty #3 community members, leaders, and experts, alongside background research outlining barriers to food access across the territory. The report presents the barriers faced by local food producers, highlights community strengths and opportunities in reclaiming food sovereignty, and provides recommendations to support next steps. It explores the potential of food hubs to meet community food security needs, and presents considerations for implementation, education, and long-term planning.

FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

Food sovereignty - or the right for a community to define, operate, and control its own food system - is a global movement that seeks to recenter communities in ensuring access to healthy, culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods. It emphasizes local food economies, sustainable food production, and centers culturally appropriate foods and practices (Wittman et al., 2010). La Via Campesina, an international group of peasant and small-scale farmers, first popularized the term food sovereignty in 1996 seeking to defend their land rights, ways of life, and articulate a common response to the neoliberal food market. Their Declaration of Nyéléni from the 2007 Forum for Food Sovereignty, defined 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. It puts those who produce, distribute and consume food at the heart of food systems and policies rather than the demands of markets and corporations. It defends the interests and inclusion of the next generation."
>
> (NYÉLÉNI INTERNATIONAL STEERING COMMITTEE, 2007)

Food sovereignty thus aspires to autonomy, social justice, and balance with the rest of nature, while offering a pathway to recenter food systems with intergenerational consciousness and action (Gliessman et al., 2019; Friedmann, 2016). By embracing frameworks rooted in food sovereignty, communities are finding ways to affirm their own local, place-based, and cultural knowledge and to move away from the effects of colonized foodways and modern-industrial agriculture.

Food sovereignty emerged in response to food security efforts, which aim to ensure the "availability at all times of adequate world supplies of basic food-stuffs…and to offset fluctuations in production and prices" (Jarosz, 2014, p. 170). Conventional large-scale agriculture has embraced food security models, making them more interested in global price stabilization than justice or equity in food production. Consequently, food security has encouraged the dumping of large-scale monoculture commodities at below-market prices that disadvantage local and small-scale producers while often flooding communities with shelf-stable and less-nutritious foods. In response, food sovereignty frameworks shift the focus from the right to access food to the right to produce it (Mihesuah and Hoover (eds.), 2019; Menser, 2014; Wittman et al., 2010). Food sovereignty calls for equitable access to resources and the right to obtain healthy, culturally appropriate, and ecologically sustainable food for all and thus offers an alternative to the food security's neoliberal agriculture model built on global trade policies (Jarosz, 2014).

By "address[ing] intersecting issues of hunger, environmentally unsustainable production, economic inequality, and social justice on a political level," (Mihesuah and Hoover (eds.), 2019, p. 8-9) food sovereignty projects are engaging community-held, place-based ecological knowledge to empower communities in regaining their foodways and in the process center Indigenous frameworks as a viable way to reduce fossil fuel consumption and dependence on imported conventional food.

INDIGENOUS FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

For Anishinaabe communities, the interconnectedness between people and their environments means food sovereignty is not a new concept. Rather, it is a new term for historical food practices throughout Treaty #3 which were intertwined with place, built on deep observational knowledge transmitted across generations, and shared, gifted and traded locally and afar. Because of this, Anishinaabe food sovereignty initiatives are **led** by Anishinaabe communities **for** Anishinaabe communities and incorporate localized, cultural knowledge, processes, foods, and intergenerational transfer into contemporary communities, food systems, and local food economies (Wittman, 2011; Dower and Gaddis, 2021).

Given the strategic suppression of Anishinaabe food systems during colonization, Indigenous food sovereignty is a way to recenter local communities while reclaiming food systems and associated economies. It's not about returning to a historic way of life but integrating Indigenous knowledge systems, ways of being, needs, and relations to the land into contemporary foodways. Whereas protecting local and cultural foodways is of upmost importance, so too is creating and expanding economic ventures pertaining to foodways so that communities can produce and access culturally significant as well as locally sourced and produced foods. As stated by Robin, Rotz, and Xavier in a 2023 Yellowhead Institute Report on Indigenous Food Sovereignty in Ontario,

> "Food, and food sovereignty, represents a pathway for Indigenous futures, one of working in good relation to the land and where we feed ourselves and our communities well."
>
> (PAGE 6)

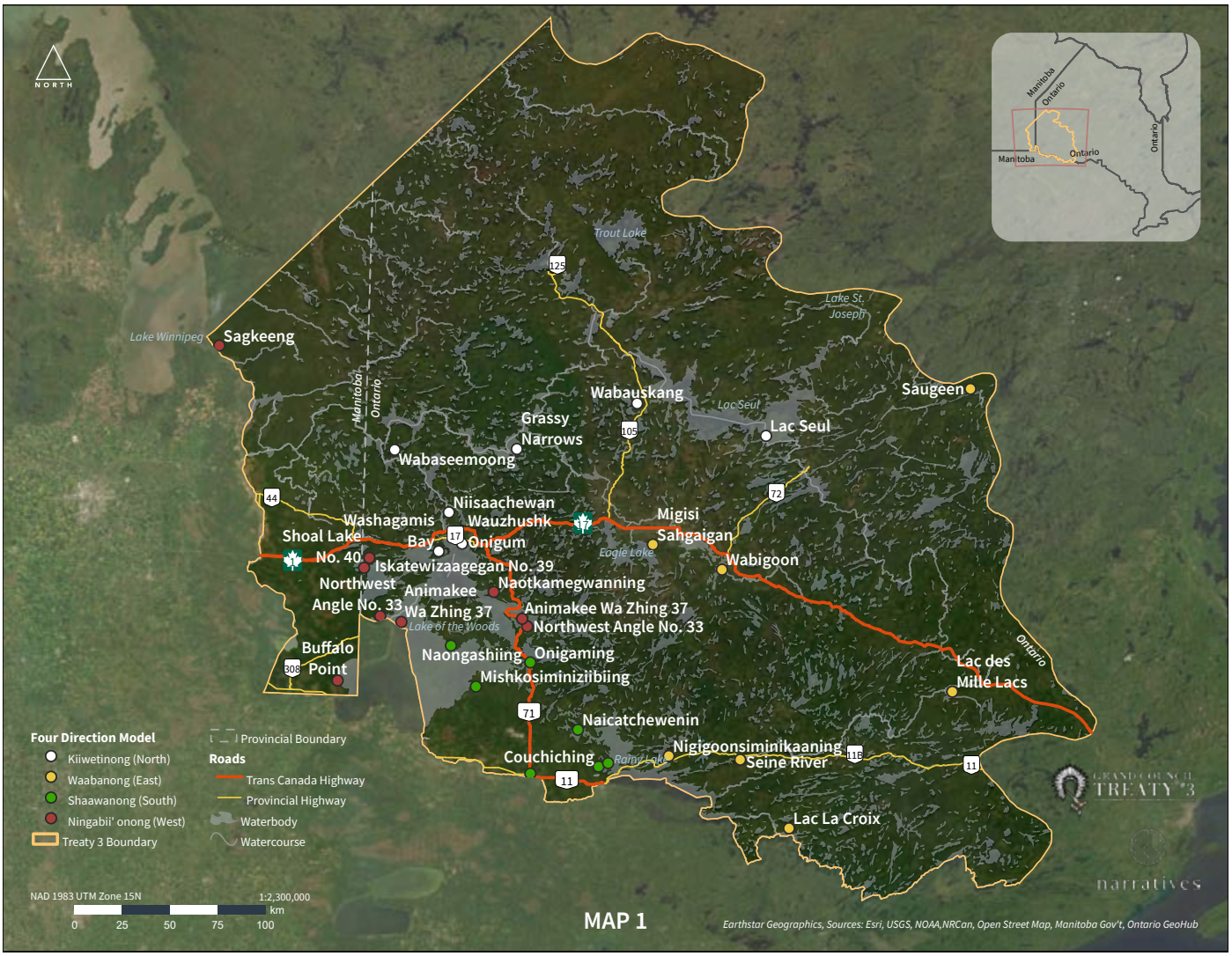
TREATY #3 AND ITS COMMUNITIES

This food sovereignty pre-feasibility study led by Grand Council Treaty #3, and informed by the 28 Anishinaabe Nations it represents, reflects a Treaty-specific approach to Indigenous food sovereignty that connect to the cultural, economic, environmental, and social aspects of Treaty #3 food systems. It centers community voices in identifying barriers to food access, exploring pathways to reclaim food systems, and building a vision for the future grounded in Treaty #3 governance, values, and knowledge.

A key part of this work is the exploration of regional food hubs - community-rooted sites for food processing, education, storage and distribution across the territory. These hubs could serve both practical and cultural roles by reconnecting foodways to land, tradition, and community well-being. This report incorporates community guidance on potential food hub locations and the types of activities they could support.

To begin this process, understanding the physical and cultural landscape of Treaty #3 and its historical and ongoing relationship to food is essential for building food systems that are rooted, resilient and reciprocal.

Living Landscapes



TREATY #3 LAND AND COMMUNITIES

Treaty #3 territory spans a diverse ecological landscape shaped by its position at the convergence of the boreal forest, prairie transition, and Great Lakes–St. Lawrence ecosystems. This includes the Lake Wabigoon, Agassiz Clay Plain, Lake St. Joseph, and Pigeon River ecoregions. The land is characterized by a mosaic of bedrock uplands, peatlands, mixed forests, clay plains, and extensive lakes and rivers, each contributing to a rich network of Indigenous food systems.

The climate is cool and moderately dry, with growing seasons between 162 and 190 days, supporting a wide range of northern, southern, and prairie-edge species. Soils vary from thin granitic till on exposed Shield to calcareous clays and peaty organics in lowlands - each shaping what foods grow and thrive. Fire cycles, glacial history, and hydrology all contribute to the distribution of vegetation and animal habitats.

These conditions create a dynamic, seasonal food system grounded in the land. Plant, animal, and aquatic foods have long sustained Treaty #3 communities, providing nourishment, medicine, and cultural continuity rooted in the land. **Noopiming** (forests) and glades offer a wide variety of plant foods and medicines, including **miinan** (blueberries), **miskomin** (raspberries), **aniibimin** (cranberries), and bearberries; edible greens like **ozhaashijibik** (fireweed), lamb's quarters, and wood sorrel; and medicinal plants such as **wiingashk** (sweetgrass), **maskiigobag** (Labrador tea), and **namewashk** (wild mint). Bulbs and roots like wild lily, wild licorice, and nodding onion are also harvested. Wetlands and shorelines support culturally significant species like **manoomin** (wild rice), **wiikenh** (sweetflag), and **apakweshkway** (cattail), while prairie openings and rocky barrens provide big bluestem, buffaloberry, and prairie turnip – many of which hold ceremonial or spiritual importance.

Game and foraged animals remain vital to Treaty #3 food systems. Large game such as **mooz** (moose), **waawaashkeshi** (white-tailed deer), and **makwa** (black bear) provide meat, hides, fat, and materials for tools. Small game and birds – including **amik** (beaver), **waabooz** (snowshoe hare), **aagask** (sharp-tailed grouse), **zhiishiib** (ducks), and **nika** (geese) – are harvested seasonally. Species like Franklin's ground squirrel, jackrabbit, and various waterfowl reflect the region's unique blend of prairie and boreal ecosystems. Aquatic species also play a critical role. The Nelson River watershed and surrounding lakes sustain **namegos** (lake trout), **ginoozhe** (northern pike), **ogaa** (walleye), **muskie, adikameg** (lake whitefish), **asaawe** (perch), **namebin** (sucker), and **gidagagwadaashi** (crappie) – key food sources throughout the year. Rivers and wetlands support frogs, turtles, and additional waterfowl, which have been harvested for both food and ceremonial use across generations. Together, these landscapes have sustained complex and adaptive Indigenous food systems over generations. From clay plains suited to cultivation and pasture, to peatlands and forest understories rich in forage and game, the region holds immense ecological and cultural knowledge. Today, this biodiversity underpins efforts to revitalize Anishinaabe food sovereignty – not only as a response to climate and food insecurity, but as a commitment to cultural continuity, health, and respectful stewardship of ecosystems.

Relational Foodways

The food systems of Treaty #3 are grounded in longstanding Anishinaabe relationships with the land, developed through generations of cultivation, harvesting, and ceremonial practice.

Seasonal Food Systems and Land-Based Practices

Prior to the signing of Treaty #3 in 1873, Anishinaabe communities managed complex and seasonal systems that included large-scale gitigaanan (gardening), manoomin harvesting, and land-based hunting and fishing. Walleye, whitefish, and sturgeon were some of the most valued fish that were gathered with cultural techniques such as spear fishing and using large community made nets (PBS Wisconsin Education, 2020). In the summer when fresh food is the most abundant, communities gathered many species of berries, notably wild blueberries and strawberries as well as wild onion, mushrooms, butternuts, and hazelnuts among many others (Treuer, 2012). In spring, as tree sap makes its way from roots and to branch tips, Anishinaabe sugar bush camps harvested sap to be transformed into syrup, or more commonly, sugar. Hunting camps and trap lines helped ensure communities had access to deer, moose, rabbit and other small game that could be cooked fresh or dried for long term storage.

Anishinaabe Gardens and Seed Stewardship

Through the intergenerational transfer of knowledge and seed-keeping practices, the Anishinaabe sustained distinct gardening systems that provided communities with corn, squash, beans, and potatoes. On the Lake of the Woods alone, more than 200 acres were collectively maintained, stewarded and planted with seeds transferred across generations by community seed keepers who stewarded and made sure seed relatives continued to adapt to place and the local growing conditions (Grand Council Treaty #3, n.d.). Gardens thrived as diverse food landscapes hosted many plant, animal, and insect species. Anishinaabe gardening practices - such as Three Sisters cultivation and consensus-based governance, where decisions prioritized the well-being of the whole community over individual interests - offer an example of a sustainable system grounded in collective responsibility, interdependence, and care for the land. This stands in contrast to today's chemical-intensive, profit-driven monocrop agriculture that shapes most mainstream food systems. (GCT#3, n.d.).

Gathering, Sharing, and Preserving Food

Whether by hunting, fishing, gathering, or gardening, maintaining foodways was a community endeavor. Food was gathered and processed using cooperative methods that involved many members of the community. Different skills were needed for accessing, processing, and sharing community food. In Anishinaabe food practices, berries, wild foods, and cultivated plants that were not consumed immediately were often dried - honouring the gifts of the land and ensuring nothing was wasted. In contrast, mainstream food systems in Canada are responsible for approximately 46% of all food produced being lost or wasted (Second Harvest, 2024). Drying and smoking extended shelf life but also played a key role in transporting, trading, gifting, and sharing food as the preservation method makes products much lighter, smaller, and overall easy to pack. Anishinaabe people value food not merely as sustenance, but as a sacred gift from the land—something that sustains life and nourishes both individuals and communities. Traditionally, all food was regarded as medicine; what was consumed was inherently good for the body and spirit. This stands in sharp contrast to modern food systems, where the production and consumption of food often lack this holistic relationship and can even be harmful tocommunities. Traditionally, all food was regarded as medicine; what was consumed was inherently good for the body and spirit. This stands in sharp contrast to modern food systems, where the production and consumption of food often lack this holistic relationship and can even be harmful to health.

Food as Governance and Ceremony

These practices were not merely about survival but were expressions of governance, responsibility, and kinship with the land. Community feasts, offerings, and seasonal gatherings served to honour these relationships and pass knowledge across generations. Anishinaabe communities value food not merely as sustenance, but as a sacred gift from the land—something that sustains life and nourishes both individuals and communities. Traditionally, all food was regarded as medicine; what was consumed was inherently good for the body and spirit. This stands in sharp contrast to modern food systems, where the production and consumption of food often lack this holistic relationship and can even be harmful to health. However, colonialization soon began to unravel this balance. Although Treaty #3 guaranteed protections for cultivated lands, wild rice beds, and promised agricultural support, these commitments were largely unfulfilled. Federal policies restricted Anishinaabe farmers from selling produce without permission, flooded traditional harvesting sites through dam construction, and imposed restrictive hunting, fishing, and land use laws. These interventions not only limited access to food, but also severed relationships to place, intergenerational knowledge, and land-based identity - functioning as part of a broader, intentional system of colonial control and cultural erasure.

Colonial Disruption and Systemic Barriers

Over time, the decline of traditional food systems was further intensified by structural barriers such as inadequate infrastructure, market exclusion, and the impacts of environmental degradation. Climate change adds a new layer of complexity. Erratic seasonal patterns, warming temperatures, and industrial pollution are threatening remaining food sources like moose, fish, wild rice, and cedar. These changes affect not only what can be harvested, but when, where, and how – disrupting the seasonal cycles that have always guided Anishinaabe food systems. In remote communities, the loss of traditional food sources often forces reliance on expensive store-bought alternatives that are high in sugar, salt, and saturated fats, compounding health inequities. Although only 7% of on-reserve households in Treaty #3 currently maintain gardens, 78% express a desire to eat more traditional foods. This gap is not a reflection of disinterest, but rather the legacy of systemic displacement and ongoing climate disruption.

Resilience, Revitalization, and Food Futures

Despite this, Treaty #3 communities continue to assert food sovereignty through resistance, revitalization, and adaptation. The return of community gardens, seed saving, youth education, and cooperative harvesting efforts are grounded in Anishinaabe law and knowledge systems, not only to feed people but to reestablish autonomy, cultural strength, and environmental stewardship. These practices reflect a deeper commitment that food sovereignty is not just about what is eaten, but about how people relate to land, community, and future generations. In the face of climate change and colonial disruption, the restoration of Anishinaabe food systems represents both a necessity and a vision of resurgence.

In all, historic Anishinaabe foodways were guided by cultural practices that depended on community cooperation, participation, and land-based learning. Food was widely shared, gifted, and traded, as were the tools, material culture, and intergenerational knowledge that aided in food gathering and processing. Indigenous food economies involved the cultural food knowledge and technologies that fed communities across seasons within diverse landscapes. At the same time, Indigenous economies were built on relationality, living in balance with the local ecosystem, and encouraging biodiversity. While these foods, traditions, cultural knowledge, and processes are alive in contemporary Anishinaabe communities, colonization and introduced food systems severely impacted community foodways. Indigenous food sovereignty may provide a common language and framework to help communities reclaim control of their local foodways and associated economies.

PREPARING THE GROUND: METHODS

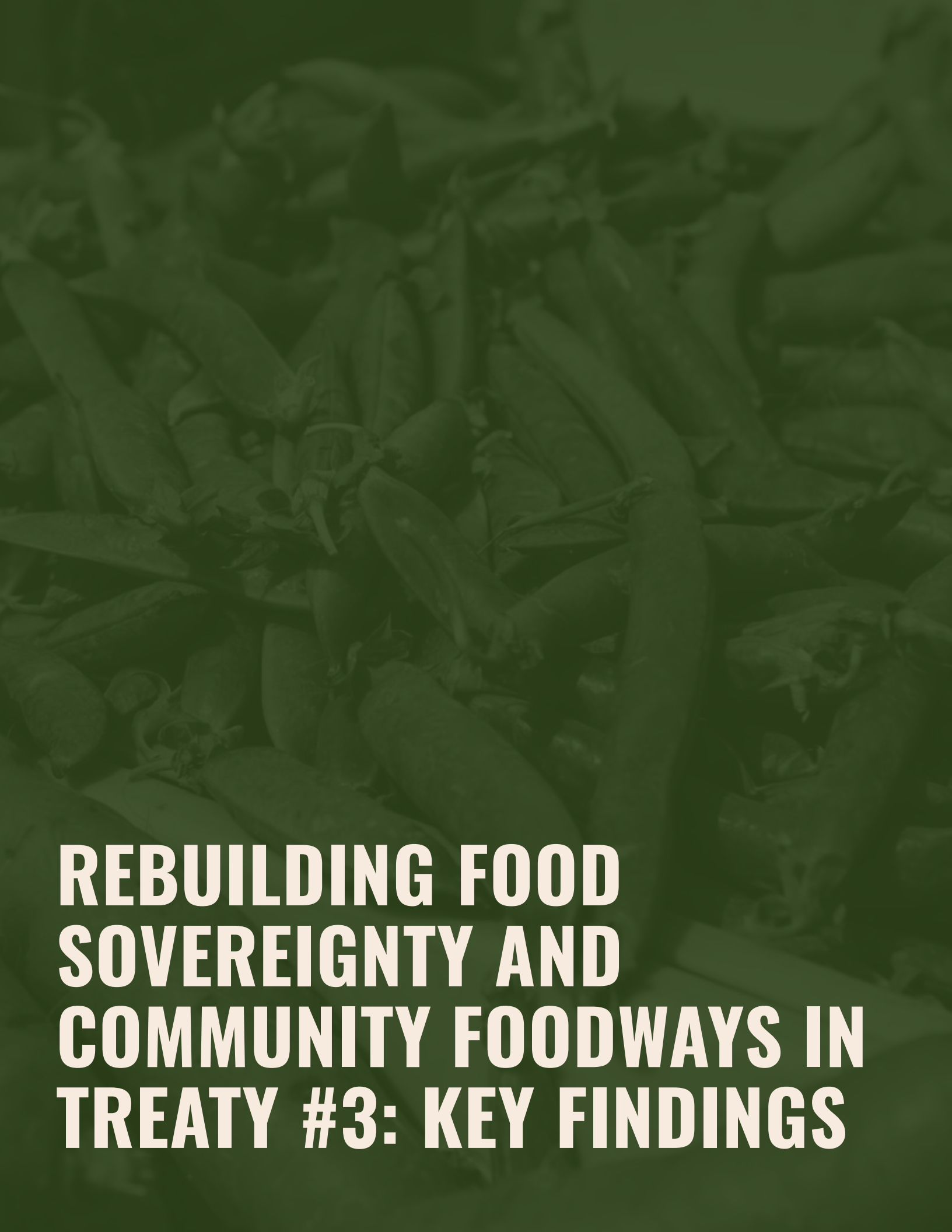
To conduct this pre-feasibility study, the project team first invited representatives of each Treaty #3 governing council to inform them of the upcoming work. Council representatives were able to share their thoughts regarding reclaiming food sovereignty in the region and their specific knowledge around the topic as it relates to their own communities.

A literature review was then conducted to provide background for Treaty #3 leadership and community members, grounding the study in theory, precedent, and existing knowledge. With this foundation in place, the project team hosted a series of food sovereignty engagement sessions across the four directions of Treaty #3. A total of six engagement sessions were held in Rainy River, Couchiching, Lac Seul, Shoal Lake 40, Eagle Lake, and Niisaachewan. Community members were invited openly via flyers and Facebook posts with turnout ranging between 6 to over 30 community members depending on location. Several sessions also offered the option to attend virtually.

In addition to contributing during the engagement sessions, participants were given the opportunity to complete an online survey. In total, 40 surveys were collected. A second survey was distributed to Band leadership across Treaty #3, focused on year-round access to grocery stores and fresh, healthy foods.

To deepen the qualitative insights, five focus groups were conducted with a total of ten participants. Interviewees were selected on their expertise, lived experience, and leadership in food sovereignty and Treaty #3 food systems.

The meeting notes, interview transcripts and survey results were collected, reviewed and analyzed to identify common themes, stories and relationships regarding food sovereignty, community foodways and food hubs. These findings are presented in the following section, with direct quotes from participants. In general, community members shared their understanding of food sovereignty, the barriers and challenges they face, and their visions for promoting local food independence and wellness in Treaty #3.



REBUILDING FOOD SOVEREIGNTY AND COMMUNITY FOODWAYS IN TREATY #3: KEY FINDINGS

Through interviews, engagement sessions, and surveys, community members shared rich insights into their visions for reclaiming food sovereignty in Treaty #3. These key findings reflect a spectrum of experiences, values, and goals ranging from current practices to structural barriers and aspirations for community led food systems.

This section highlights key findings on these topics gleaned from community members including:

- How Treaty #3 community members understand food sovereignty
- Barriers Treaty #3 community members face in food access and food sovereignty
- Opportunities for Treaty #3 food sovereignty including revitalized food economies

HOW TREATY #3 COMMUNITY MEMBERS UNDERSTAND FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

Across all sessions, participants spoke passionately about what food sovereignty means to them. For many, it involved ownership, control, and community autonomy over all parts of food systems from growing and harvesting to sharing and selling...

> "To me, food sovereignty means being part of every part of the distribution of food. So going from the beginning, whether that's growing, raising, selling food, and then being able to properly distribute it. So, looking at different ways that we can work towards creating distribution centers, making sure food's going to different communities, and then also being able to - have, I don't know if this is the right word, but ownership over the way that the funds come back."
>
> (TREATY #3 FOOD SOVEREIGNTY INTERVIEW, FEB 12, 2025)

This description includes ownership over food production and distribution, as well as any revenues generated from products within Treaty #3. This represents food sovereignty at a community or territorial level and is also noted in this description:

> "Basically, the whole system of food sovereignty, when you're looking at raw materials. Right to distribution, to the sales, and transportation, and then also even, you know, being part of the nutritional factors within an educational component within that with communities, and then also relating that back to the communities that we serve. And understanding that our job is really focused on building those partnerships, whether it's First Nation to First Nations or First Nations to our organizations, then also to municipalities, and then also to business."
>
> (TREATY #3 FOOD SOVEREIGNTY INTERVIEW, FEB 12, 2025)

This member emphasized the importance of building intentional and interconnected networks around food pathways – incorporating nutritional knowledge and education, while also fostering relationships and partnerships both among First Nations and with non-First Nation entities. Others spoke about individual rights and the ability to have control over one's access and choices regarding food.

> "Food sovereignty is being able to control anything to do with our right to be able to grow and harvest culturally appropriate and healthy foods in the manner that we want."
>
> (TREATY #3 FOOD SOVEREIGNTY INTERVIEW, JAN 8, 2025)

This echoed many of the survey responses that spoke to the ownership of food, both in possessing and the ability to share food. For example, one survey response indicated that food sovereignty is "the ability to provide for ourselves and have autonomy over what goes in our food also being able to protect traditional food sources" (Respondent, Sagkeeng). Another indicated that it "means the right of Indigenous communities to control their own food systems in ways that honour their cultural traditions, ancestral knowledge and relationship with the land" (Respondent, Naicatchewenin).

These definitions reiterate the connection between food, knowledge, and relationships that connect community to land. For example, a younger generation depends on a relationship with an older generation to learn how to smoke suckers. This intergenerational connection is not only where knowledge is transferred, but also where a sense of community and meaningful interaction is rooted. It serves as a catalyst – igniting a chain reaction in which the youth, now equipped with that knowledge, can share it with others, pass it forward, and contribute to the ongoing formation of community and cultural practice. All of this unfolds through a single food source and the cultural practice tied to it, demonstrating how one act can carry layers of cultural, social, and educational significance. Carol Ann Hilton speaks about knowledge as being valueless unless it is shared or passed down and also talks about the assignment of value to relationships rather than capital in Indigenous economies (Hilton, 2021).

Food sovereignty is more than just having food to eat; it is about relationships with land and each other. Hence, many Treaty #3 members also spoke about decolonization, or Indigenizing food pathways, as a key aspect of food sovereignty.

> "It connects me to my roots, it brings me back to a lot of the work that we do with our with Grand Council Treaty #3 is around finding alternatives, coming back to identity, culture, language and to me food is as such a big part of that. It brings me into the land-based living and living in a good way."
>
> (TREATY #3 FOOD SOVEREIGNTY INTERVIEW, MARCH 3, 2025).

Survey respondents shared that to them, food sovereignty means having access to food year-round and learning to gather medicines. Others spoke to the importance of the ancestral ability to move across the land seasonally to access food sources as a Nation, sharing locations and access to food sources together (Treaty #3 Food Sovereignty Interview, Dec 5, 2024).

Other key themes included consistent and sustainable (affordable and grown in an ecofriendly way) access to healthy foods, as well as more stable access to locally produced foods.

> "Food sovereignty to me means having access to and being able to produce and grow our own food because that's what we used to do back in the day."
>
> (TREATY #3 FOOD SOVEREIGNTY INTERVIEW, NOV 29, 2024)

Relatedly, some respondents noted that greater access to locally produced food also reduces reliance on external (to Treaty #3) food systems, such as large grocery store chains (i.e., Safeway, Walmart, Extra Foods).

> "Not going to Fort Frances or Safeway and actually knowing what to get from the land, trees and the plants and all the rest of it. Being able to not depend on others for food. I am nowhere near that and never have been. I've always gone to colonial stores and bought off the shelves and catch the occasional fish and harvest the occasional meal and that, but nothing to the point where I would be able to live as my ancestors did."
>
> (TREATY #3 FOOD SOVEREIGNTY INTERVIEW, DEC 5, 2024)

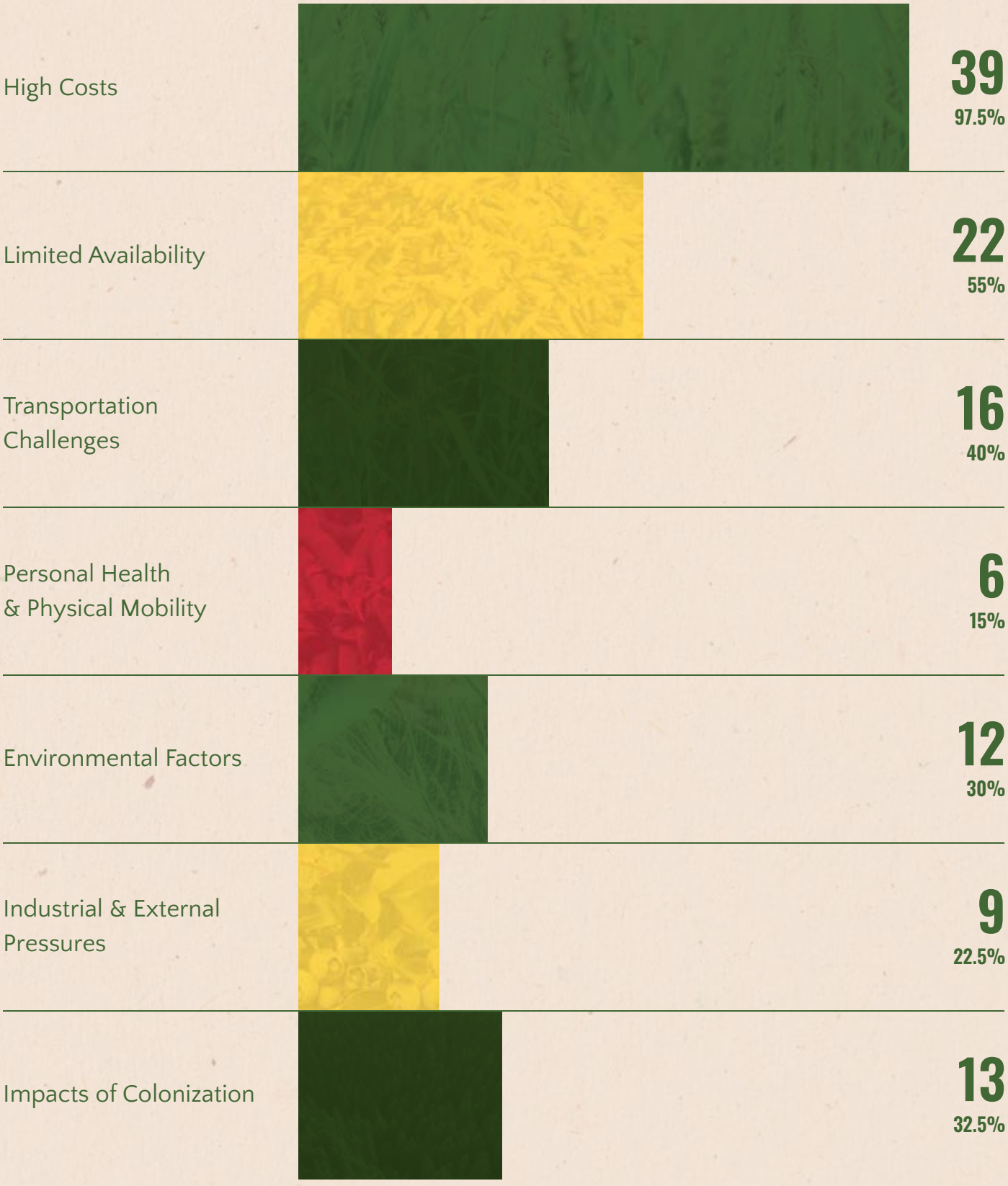
Many members emphasized the need for education that reduces dependence on large chain stores and to strengthen both collective and individual knowledge of healthy eating that reflects each person's unique needs (Treaty #3 Food Sovereignty Interview, March 3, 2025). This brings community definitions of food sovereignty full circle where building food pathways and knowledge within Treaty #3 people can also facilitate overall ownership and connection to all the aspects of food.

TREATY #3 BARRIERS TO FOOD ACCESS AND FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

FIGURE 1: WHAT BARRIERS DO YOU EXPERIENCE FROM SURVEY RESPONDENTS

Participants discussed the challenges and barriers that Treaty #3 people face to access food alongside the visions of food sovereignty. People spoke about issues regarding food affordability and quality, policy or legislation that prevents access to historical and cultural food gathering practices, pressures from industrial development, systematic problems such as mental or physical health, struggles with community capacity, lack of infrastructure, environmental pollution affecting the health of the land, and ongoing impacts of colonization.

WHAT BARRIERS DO YOU EXPERIENCE WHEN TRYING TO ACCESS FOOD?



As seen in Figure 1, food affordability was the top cited challenge (97.5%) community members face in accessing food. This was also true in community interviews and surveys where participants spoke to the affordability of food as well as the high cost of equipment or resources needed to engage in land-based food practices, such as hunting.

> "And then access to healthy things is a little bit... It is a challenge, especially when they tell you that food prices are going up 3 to 5% next year again and that food banks are like, you know, being needed by more and more people. it's crazy how many people are going without food."
>
> (TREATY #3 FOOD SOVEREIGNTY INTERVIEW, DEC 5, 2024)

> "We'd rather go out hunting our own food than to go into some of these places in the north and pay the astronomical amount of money. You know that. So again, I don't want to get carried away, but you want to talk about obstacles. Oh, there's a lot of barriers. [Laughs]."
>
> (TREATY #3 FOOD SOVEREIGNTY INTERVIEW, MARCH 3, 2025).

In survey responses seen in Figure 1, 55% of participants listed limited availability as a barrier to accessing fresh food in their communities. This sentiment was echoed in interviews, where people spoke about the lack of quality food in local stores and the high cost of what was available. As a result, some expressed a preference for hunting and sourcing their own food – though accessing the tools and resources needed to hunt is often financially out of reach.

> "One hurdle is that some of our people find it impossible to hunt for themselves because firearms are expensive so if you're on any form of social assistance or are the working poor, purchasing a firearm is might not be possible. And to purchase a firearm and use it while hunting, you need a PAL, which requires you to pass a gun safety course. You also need to have a vehicle that can go down rough roads as game usually isn't near the community – you have to go farther. These factors do limit the traditional practice of hunting game that will feed your family, but they also impact your treaty right to hunt."
>
> (TREATY #3 FOOD SOVEREIGNTY INTERVIEW, JAN 8, 2025)

The costs for buying and licensing a firearm to be able to hunt, along with learning the many skills and other equipment needed for hunting, including processing and safely storing meat, creates multiple overlapping barriers for Treaty #3 people. Furthermore, people often need to travel a far distance to access hunting areas, often requiring a vehicle that can handle rural roads.

This leads to a related set of concerns regarding legislation and regulations that both cut off people's ability to sell their products historically, and currently, leading to the loss of knowledge about hunting, fishing, and gardening.

"Him [another member in the interview] and his mom used to go fishing all the time and they would come back onto the harbour front in Kenora to sell the fish and that's where they would make their money. And now, he said that the MNR (Ministry of Natural Resources), they came and they told them that they can't do that anymore because of they don't have fishing licenses and they didn't have that commercial fishing license to be able to sell. So that history of food sovereignty in Treaty #3 is so important to really understand where we are now and why those systems have been put in place that have taken conventional or historical, traditional ways of being able to produce and sell and create that distribution within the communities too. I think that's a really important aspect."

(TREATY #3 FOOD SOVEREIGNTY INTERVIEW, FEB 12, 2025)

"We used to grow our own food. We used to have islands in [Treaty] 3 where our people grew food on these islands and then sold it to the market. People didn't realize that back in the early 1900s we had gardens that are situated on the island throughout Treaty #3. And then we sold it to the markets in Kenora, Fort Frances, but it was outlawed because our people were doing so well with it that they were buying their food instead of farmers. So, Canada basically instituted an act that didn't allow them to buy produce from First Nations. And it was basically outlawed. So that's what entailed. And then we have to go back and... Well, how do we fix that?"

(TREATY #3 FOOD SOVEREIGNTY INTERVIEW, FEB 12, 2025)

People also raised concerns about the management of animals, such as moose and various fish species, noting that these decisions are made by external bodies rather than being grounded in the land-based knowledge of Treaty #3 communities. The lack of firsthand information and control over how species are counted and managed creates barriers for Treaty #3 hunters seeking the knowledge and authority to care for and steward these populations. (Treaty #3 Food Sovereignty Interview, Jan 8, 2025). This is related to historic impacts of colonization, particularly the ongoing effects of the Indian Act and residential school experiences as noted in this member's observations:

"But is it a collective, are we a collective? So sometimes I think the greatest barrier is nationhood. Are we seriously a nation as it was in 1873 when the treaty was being signed? And if we are thinking as a nation, a collective, are we taking care of all of the people throughout the whole territory, remembering our relationships from one community to another all across the land, the waters? Or, has colonial thought process affected us so much that we act as independent communities of a couple of hundred? Because we're... None of us are very big and just taking what we can. And we've learned the lessons of colonialism really well. So, Duncan Scott and John A. McDonald, all those guys are getting their way, know taking the Indian out of the child. Today, English is the first language of many, few hunt and fish, food sovereignty is having a paying job in order to buy groceries for the most part."

(TREATY #3 FOOD SOVEREIGNTY INTERVIEW, DEC 5, 2024).

The effects of colonization continue to impact Nations' ability to connect to their lands, connect to their cultural practices, and to have decision-making authority over the management of the lands and waters.

Several people also expressed concern over the declining health of the land, citing environmental degradation, pollution, and habitat destruction caused by both historical and ongoing development:

"And they, the provincial and federal governments have changed things too. I was told that they've removed the Exits Clause with new Impact Benefit Agreements. Premier Ford has removed the exit clause so that companies proposing or entering new environmental projects are no longer required to plan or finance how the land will be put back together at the end of the project. There will be no need to plan or pay for the repair of the land and waters in any way. Current projects, like New Gold, must abide by their Exist plans, The impact benefit agreement with New Gold includes environmental monitoring and at the end of the project, New Gold is to repair the land with funds set aside from the beginning of the project. When New Gold was constructing the mine, they took great care in moving fish from ponds to another place, then returned the fish etc., when roads were built. The land has been greatly disturbed over the past 10 years, I'm not sure the few dollars set aside will repair much. And this Ford government has been doing other things, changing things, disregarding the health of the land that we all depend on, removing Exit Plans that at least did a little to heal the wounds at the end of a mines usefulness.

And so, while we study Food Sovereignty solutions, we must also pay attention to what the larger society, local, provincial and federal governments are doing. I think, at some level, our sovereignty is contingent on how much they actually allow us to do. We must remember how to depend on one another, work with the lands and water, conduct our ceremonies, speak our language, walk with kindness and in balance. Reclaiming food sovereignty is a step towards our collective health."

(TREATY #3 FOOD SOVEREIGNTY INTERVIEW, DEC 5, 2024)

This highlights broader challenges to achieving food sovereignty, as contamination of land and water renders both fish and animals unsuitable to eat, disrupting traditional food sources and pathways.

> "If the lands were still providing the quantity that we need for the growing population, our health would be better. However, the forests are not the healthy ones that they were in days gone by. The animal numbers are depleted, the waters are dirty, and the fish are also not as healthy. And returning to traditional food would take an awful lot of effort so that it was consumable in a positive way for us today and at the number that we are."
>
> (TREATY #3 FOOD SOVEREIGNTY INTERVIEW, DEC 5, 2024)

Even with the learning and revitalization of traditional practices such as trapping, hunting, or fishing, the health and quality of wildlife, food systems may be compromised – a consequence of insufficient regulation and oversight in development activities.

People also spoke with grief about the struggles communities and families face with mental and physical health issues, which stem from a lack of access to healthy and culturally grounded practices and food products.

> "So I mean, I really believe that simplifying things that sometimes, and I'm not going to say whether I don't want to get into the political side of how I feel that we got to where we're at, but we need that knowledge to come back. We need that. All of those barriers are there, whether they've been placed there purposely or not. It's time to wake up and to say, okay, well, we need to take back our health, we need to take back our youth. We need to take back all of these, "empower our people" and go back to simplifying things. And it all starts with what we're fueling. It all starts with what we're putting in our body. And how can we expect that to happen when they don't have access to do this food?"
>
> (TREATY #3 FOOD SOVEREIGNTY INTERVIEW, MARCH 3, 2025)

In Treaty #3, knowledge and education relating to cultural practices of wellbeing are inextricably tied the symbiotic relationship between land and food sources. This is why knowledge and education around cultural practices of wellbeing for Treaty #3 people are so tied to being on the land and connection to food sources.

Many also spoke about human resource and financial capacity challenges within Treaty #3 Nations to implement and sustain food sovereignty work.

> "With our greenhouse, one of the barriers that we're facing right now is having someone to operate it. And we know it can't be a volunteer thing; it needs to be paid. We have been trying to look for funding for a paid position so that we can get it started and hopefully we can go from there."
>
> (TREATY #3 FOOD SOVEREIGNTY INTERVIEW, NOV 29, 2024)

Often it is a full-time job just looking for funding to support local initiatives:

"We do a lot of the front end proposal writing for communities because we've noticed that as we've been working with them again, capacity is an obstacle for a lot of them or and so if we're already working towards these projects within our own project, we've extended our services to be able to help support them to create these programs inside their community as well."

(TREATY #3 FOOD SOVEREIGNTY INTERVIEW, MARCH 3, 2025).

Initiatives, such as community greenhouses or gardens, can stall as energy for sustaining work declines, especially when so much of the work is expected to be done on a voluntary basis. Furthermore, there are physical and infrastructural barriers to be able to create larger facilities, such as energy supply.

"Yeah, there might be one barrier too that they may come up and that's actually the electrification of the power lines. Because a lot of communities don't have three phase power. And so that limits the capacity in the community to build large scale operations, even just commercially. And like the abattoir that we visited [...] was self-contained, basically it could operate on its own just with its batteries and what's available there. But it requires three phase power. And it had smokers and everything they're using in there [is] just to value added to their food. And so that's something that we have to consider in our discussions at least with the Ministry of Energy to ensure that all communities in Treaty #3 have that availability of those resources to be able to do large scale operations. And you don't know what the capacity of a large refrigerator requires. So, we have to consider those things."

(TREATY #3 FOOD SOVEREIGNTY INTERVIEW, FEB 12, 2025)

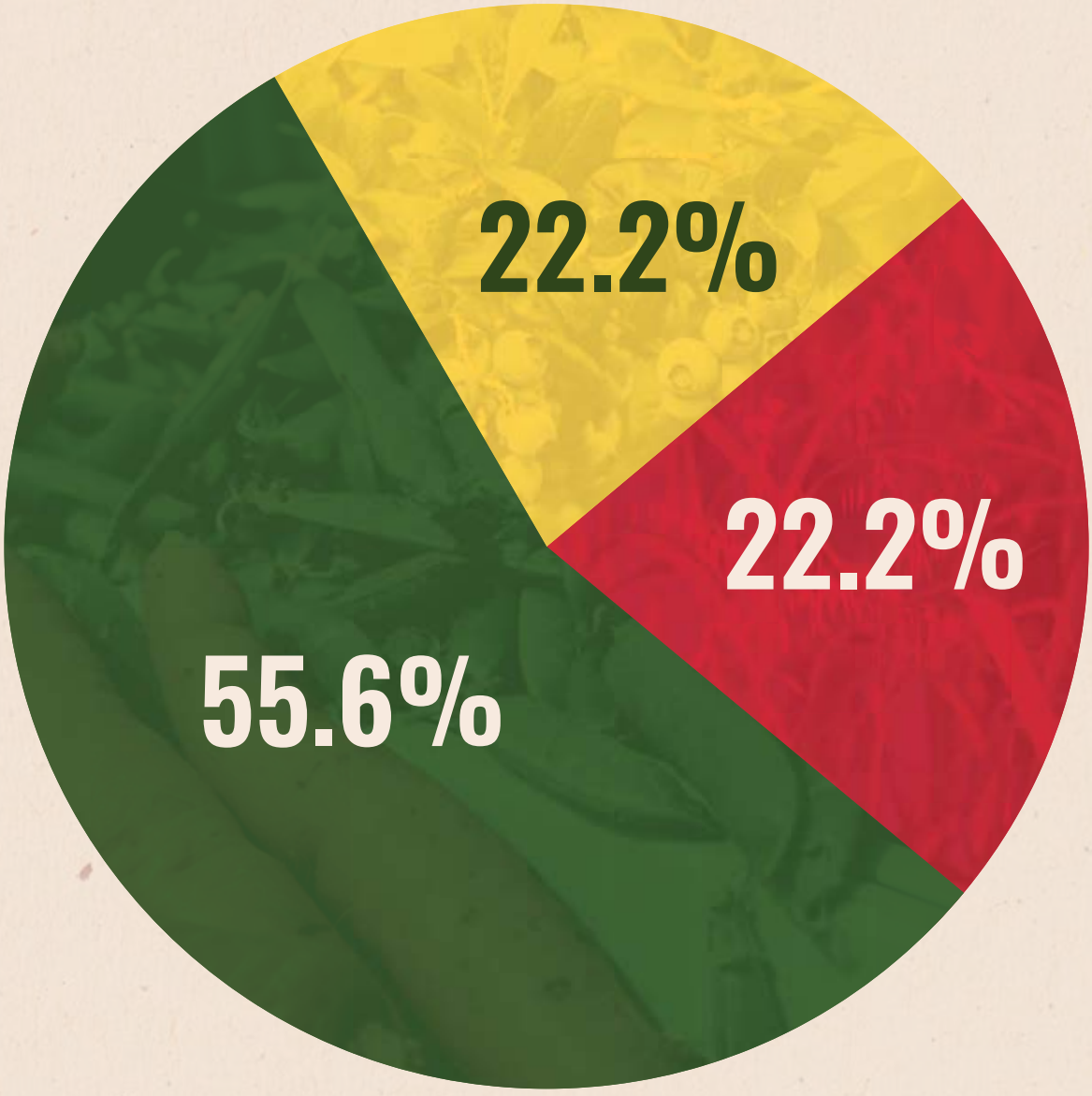
People also highlighted the lack of docks for boat access, as well as limited availability of quality land - both for growing larger quantities of crops and for supporting animal operations. Additionally, shifting climate change bring increasingly volatile conditions such as drought and flooding - two extremes that sit at opposite ends of the spectrum - making it challenging for Nations and communities to develop effective and adaptable mitigation plans (Treaty #3 Food Sovereignty Interview, Nov 29, 2024). However, the interconnected nature of these issues also creates opportunities for collaboration across communities, where addressing one challenge can lead to broader, far-reaching positive impacts.

Access to Grocery Stores

From the survey sent to Band leadership regarding food access via grocery stores that stock fresh, healthy food year-round, major gaps were identified regarding food access experienced by community members. Of the respondents, more than half (56%) reported there are no stores in their community to buy fresh produce, meats and dairy year-round. Further, two-thirds of respondents (66%) noted there are community stores in which they can only access non-perishable but not fresh foods in their community year-round. In total only 11% of survey participants said the stores in their community are able to meet the nutritional and cultural needs of community members with 100% saying it is common for community members to leave the community to access food.

FIGURE 2: HOW COULD GROCERY STORE ACCESS BECOME EASIER FOR COMMUNITY MEMBERS? SURVEY

HOW COULD GROCERY STORE ACCESS BECOME EASIER FOR COMMUNITY MEMBERS?



- Introducing a Shuttle/Bus Service
- A Grocery Store in the Community
- A Food Hub in the Community Which Would Provide Locally Produced Foods

WHAT IMPROVEMENTS WOULD YOU RECOMMEND FOR ACCESSING GROCERY STORES IN YOUR COMMUNITY?

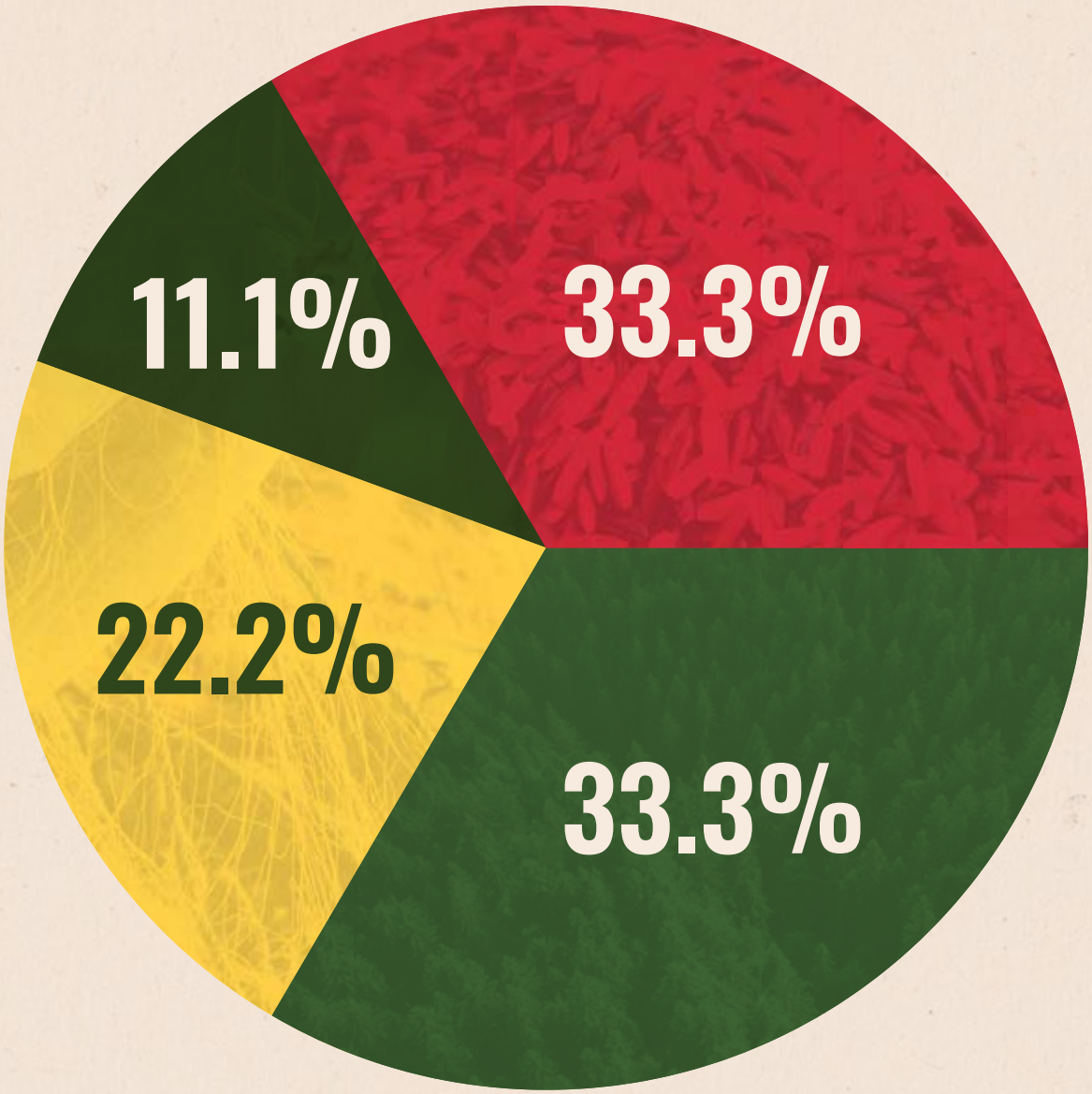


FIGURE 3: WHAT IMPROVEMENTS WOULD YOU RECOMMEND FOR ACCESSING GROCERY STORES IN YOUR COMMUNITY?

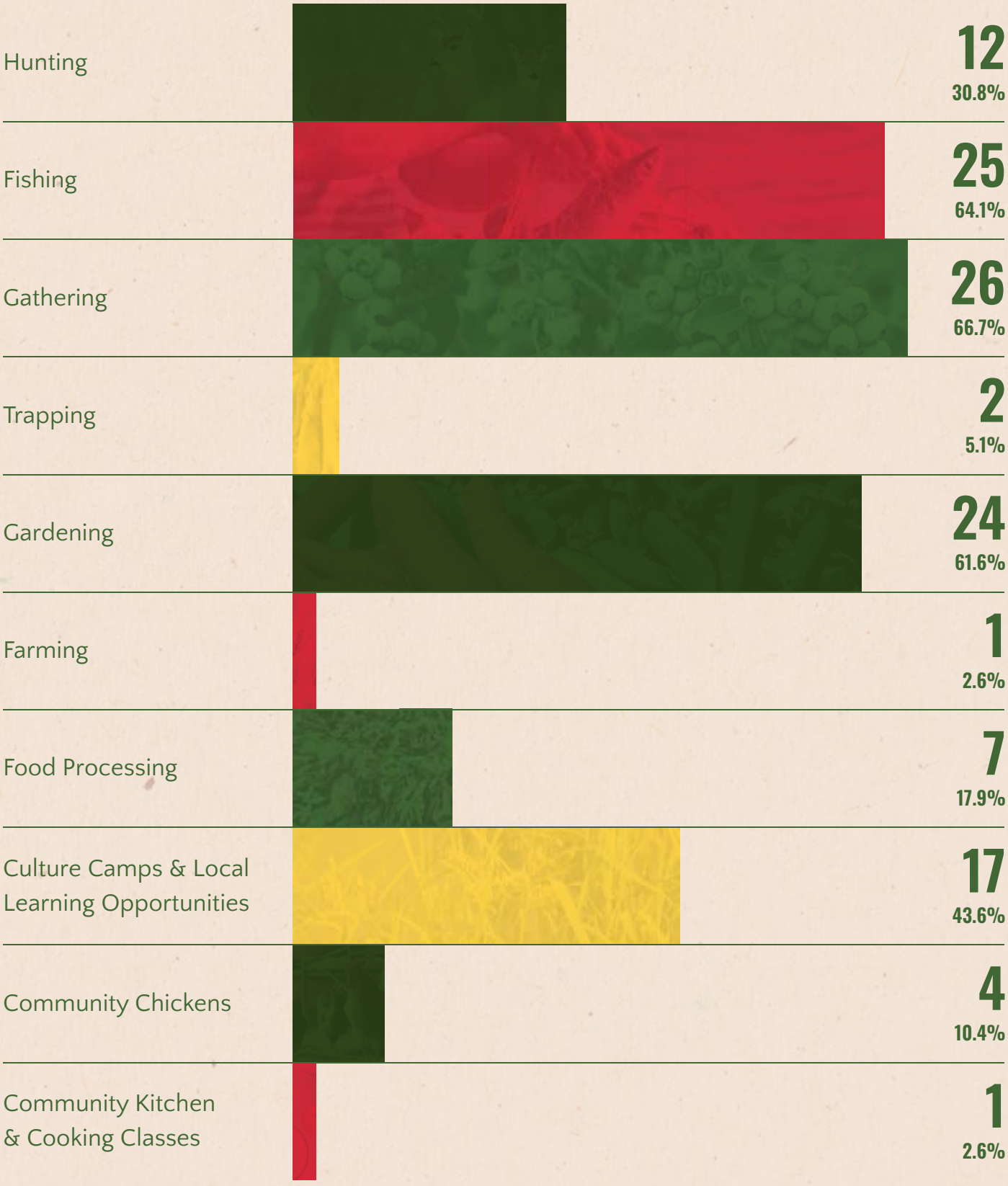
Band leadership respondents noted that having a grocery store in the community (55%) would aid in community food access, followed by 22% that noted food hubs could also aid the process. Survey responses noted a number of community-based solutions including organizing community transportation options such as shuttles, keeping an updated list of food access points, developing community bulk buying plans, increasing community food production and selling, and enhancing opportunities for traditional food access and education. These results can be seen in Figures 2 and 3.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR FOOD SOVEREIGNTY IN TREATY #3 COMMUNITIES

FIGURE 4: WHAT FOODWAY ACTIVITIES ARE COMMUNITY MEMBERS ALREADY ENGAGED IN

Barriers aside, there were many discussions around work already occurring through existing initiatives and programs, which will be discussed first. There were also many visions for building upon current work, including suggestions for large- and small-scale projects. Treaty #3 people recognize the challenges and multi-layered barriers but continue to build and create food ways to sustain healthy bodies, minds, and communities.

DO YOU ENGAGE IN ANY OF THE FOLLOWING FOOD ACTIVITIES?



Existing Foodway Activities, Initiatives, Programs and Facilities

Many community members are engaging in foodway activities as represented in Figure 4. The most commonly cited foodway activities were gathering, fishing, and gardening. In interviews and engagements, smaller scale agricultural projects, including greenhouses and gardens, were the most cited community food sovereignty initiatives.

Greenhouses take funding and capacity to run properly and sustainably but they provide large amounts of opportunities for food, and plant starters.

"What excites me is that we built our greenhouse several years ago. We can do starter plants earlier and grow plants immediately after the frost leaves so we can get larger plants in the outdoor garden earlier. And we also have a longer growing season which is good for squashes and melons. We can also provide starter plants for our home gardeners. At harvest time, give the vegetables to the members of the community. If you've never had a tomato fresh out of the garden, you haven't experience how delicious a tomato can be. And the vegetables are nutritional so we help promote healthier eating."

(TREATY #3 FOOD SOVEREIGNTY INTERVIEW, JAN 8, 2025)

Supporting small-scale agriculture, as well as having year-round ability to potentially grow food for the community is part of broader learning initiatives. Many members spoke about greenhouses being connected to schools and school programs, as well as looking into historical practices of cultivating medicines.

"This coming year we're looking at a greenhouse, we're looking at different ways of producing our own food. And then, you know, we really are getting into the traditional ways of growing too, like growing our own tobacco, our own medicines, you know, and this is again going back to a community approach. These programs will be there to assist with alternative programs. But the idea is to create a model that then will ripple into our surrounding communities. A model that can be tailored and that can be... In my 17-year career with the government, we always talked about exit strategies. There's some massive gaps in our systems, in every single system that we have. And a big part of that sometimes is that knowledge, like all these things that we've been talking about around food, whether it's connection, empowerment, it all comes back to the knowledge base and mentorship and being shown and experiencing. So Gamikaan Bimaadiziwin is the birthplace of the roots of all of these things."

(TREATY #3 FOOD SOVEREIGNTY INTERVIEW, MARCH 3, 2025)

Many members also spoke passionately about ways their communities are revitalizing and encouraging historical and cultural food practices, for personal reasons but also as components of broader healing and cultural resurgence. Integrating food learning into youth education, community cooking classes, and education around diabetes are a few examples of food revitalization initiatives. Several communities also have food distribution mechanisms already in place, and one community has chickens for members to access fresh eggs. Learning from mentors across Treaty #3 to help navigate barriers around knowledge and equipment is needed to be successful, as this person mentions:

"Yeah, traditional foods. We do have a lot of hunters, and we do have a local person that does wild rice pickings and sells them in the area. We also do have a lot of community gardeners. And there's a lot to learn from everyone in the reserve. It's just the fact of connecting and figuring out what works for us to be able to provide for everyone."

(TREATY #3 FOOD SOVEREIGNTY INTERVIEW, NOV 29, 2024)

One survey respondent mentioned an annual moose hunting camp and community gathering for fish harvesting in the fall (Survey, Migisi Sahgaigan). Another mentioned a community Fall Harvest as an opportunity for sharing resources (Survey, Naicatchewenin).

Community members spoke to educational opportunities, that building skills for growing (e.g., gardens, hydroponics) and cooking food also contribute to the revitalization of food pathways. Others talked about cooking classes and educational resources for those living with diabetes. One member spoke about finding a funding grant for sustainability and was able to connect a community garden initiative that was struggling:

> "I seen this ad on Facebook for this grant program that also did mentorship for 18 months on a sustainability project, we applied, and we got accepted. I reached out to her, that's how we met, because she was working on the community gardens. I figured it was a perfect opportunity to get the mentorship to understand the business side of things so that we could make a business plan and do everything properly. What we recognize from the failure of the community gardens is that we need like it to be a community initiative."
>
> (TREATY #3 FOOD SOVEREIGNTY INTERVIEW, NOV 29, 2024).

Effort to build on community interest and seize opportunities serves as a strong example of how relationships and connections can support the development of more sustainable foodways.

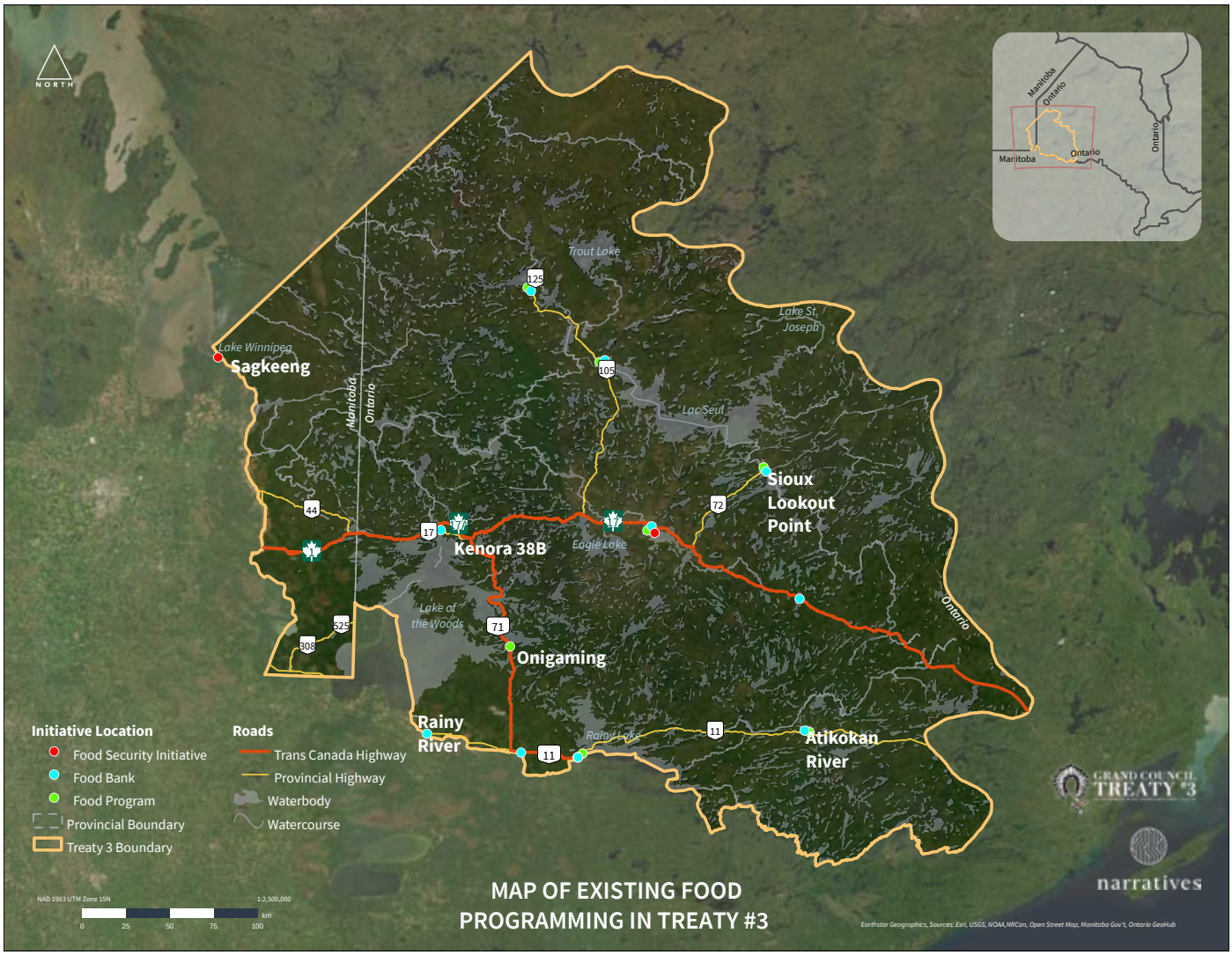
Looking toward future opportunities, one member emphasized the value of research and data collection – both to assess community needs and to lay the groundwork for a growing database that can guide food cultivation and distribution moving forward.

"...We did a survey with the students, to see what they eat the most, and to see what they wanted to grow. We based our seed purchases from that and kind of created our model from that. We also have a Starter Guide that we've been creating, basically a toolkit with all the seeds that we bought for the students and the staff. And then we'll just build off that. Our mentor that owns the greenhouses nearby that we've been learning everything from, he keeps the data of the way he feeds his plants, what time he starts them each year, etc. He's been doing this since he was young. So, he's got spreadsheets of his own data collection. Eventually we would like to get there. I think that's a huge responsibility for youth, but maybe grade 12, they can learn about that. And then again, you don't know what data collection is and what policy and things like that are. Through this, we bring in energy, we bring in data collection, we bring in those conversation pieces to influence what's out there. Because that's a really big thing right now. Policy, data collection and research, that's where everyone's at and that's where reconciliation in Canada is at, is the research stages and a lot of NGOs are in those stages right now. Right. And then we're kind of like, we're seeing Canada in those planning stages, in those consulting stages, in those research stages."

(TREATY #3 FOOD SOVEREIGNTY INTERVIEW, NOV 29, 2024).

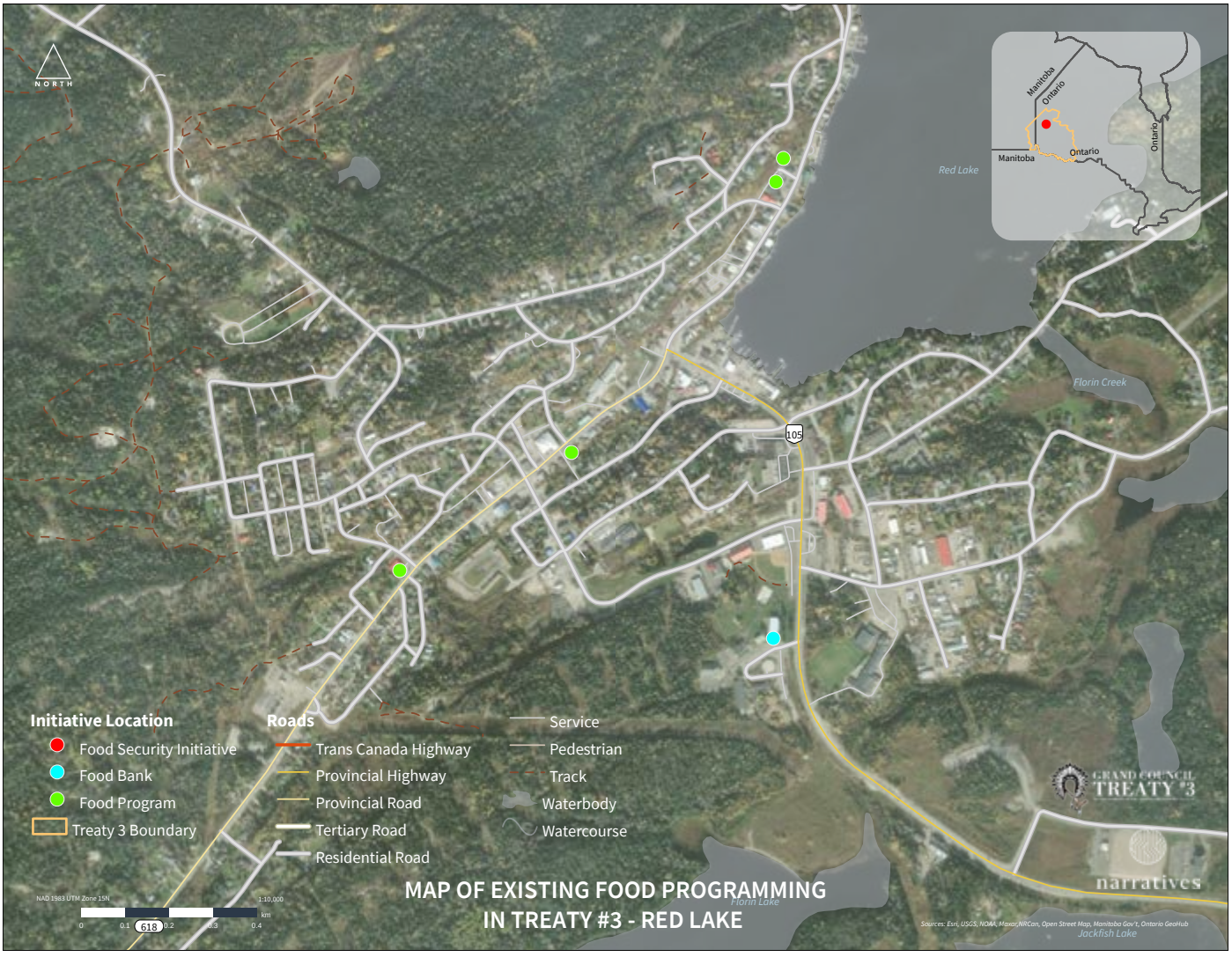
This example shares a model for developing distinct seed packages based on community needs. The following examples illustrate small or large-scale agricultural models that draw from data research on plants and production.

Map of Existing Food Programming in Treaty #3



EXISTING FOOD PROGRAMMING IN TREATY #3

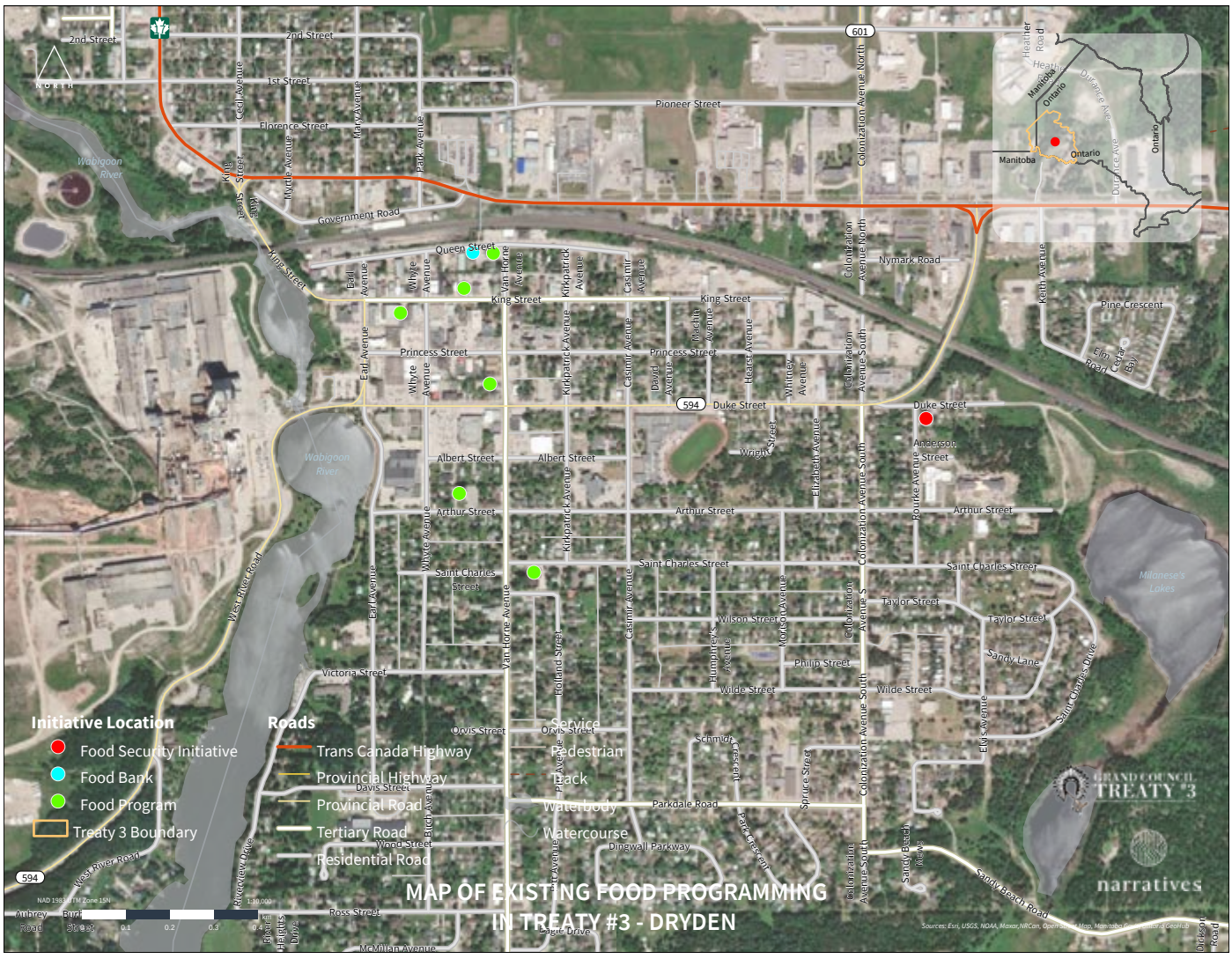
This map illustrates the spectrum of food-security supports currently operating across Treaty #3. Eleven food banks, typically housed in resource centers, churches, or health clinics form the formal safety-net infrastructure. Layered on top are twenty community food programs whose purposes range from school-based breakfast and lunch initiatives to Meals-on-Wheels deliveries, monthly food-box co-ops, and communal table nights. The food banks and programs reach are uneven. These are centered on major municipalities in the region, Nations that are not located near a town, major highway corridor, or on the outskirts of the territory are without access to these programs as they are often hours away by car, and sometimes inaccessible depending on the season. Nations that experience geographic isolation and lack of access to basic needs not only deepen existing inequities but also perpetuate cycles of intergenerational trauma - repeating patterns of disconnection, displacement, and chronic stress that stem from colonial disruption and are continually reinforced by ongoing systemic neglect.



EXISTING FOOD PROGRAMMING IN TREATY #3 - RED LAKE

EXISTING FOOD PROGRAMMING IN TREATY #3 - FORT FRANCES

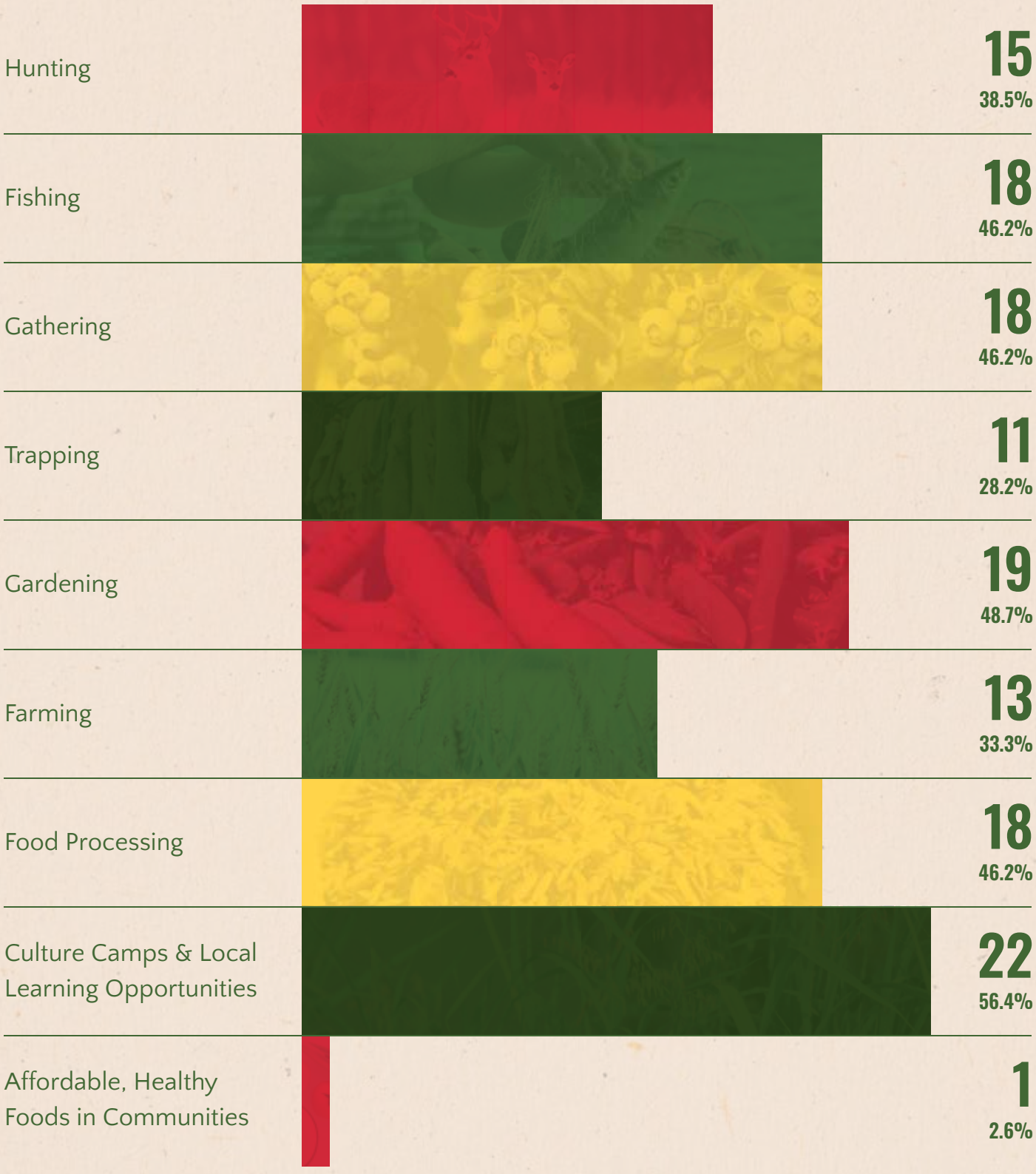
EXISTING FOOD PROGRAMMING IN TREATY #3 - SIOUX LOOKOUT



EXISTING FOOD PROGRAMMING IN TREATY #3 - DRYDEN

There are four food related initiatives that operate within the region, but only two as points on the map. Agri-Tech North's hydroponic operation in Dryden seeks to reduce food insecurity in the northernmost communities by decreasing fresh produce costs through providing year-round fresh crops. Sagkeeng Youth is a community-specific food sovereignty program located in one of the more geographically isolated communities in the territory, where distance contributes to both logistical challenges and disconnection from other Treaty 3 communities.

WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING FOOD ACTIVITIES WOULD YOU LIKE TO BE MORE INVOLVED IN?



Current and Future Opportunities

FIGURE 5: WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO BE MORE INVOLVED IN

Survey participants responded to what foodway activities they would like to be more involved in along with what activities they are already doing. As seen in Figure 5 members cited cultural camps and local learning opportunities, gardening, food processing, gathering, and fishing as top interests.

From engagements and interviews, many aspects of small- and large-scale agriculture, marking and business development, foodhubs for processing and distribution, education and equipment for hunting, trapping, wild foods harvesting and fishing, as well as ongoing knowledge mobilization were discussed in the visions for Treaty #3 food sovereignty initiatives. Greenhouses and gardening, or small-scale agricultural models were the most discussed components Treaty #3 members wanted to both build on but also create new opportunities. This speaks about the historical and cultural foodways of gardening and small-scale agricultural practices that people want to reconnect with but need education and tools, and infrastructure to make use of current technology such as greenhouses to extend growing seasons. There are also opportunities mentioned that build on cross cultural partnerships, such as the mentorship and potential hope to acquire a greenhouse business from a settler couple who have been passing on learning about greenhouse management.

"Buying land and existing businesses, that's where you know the potential to expand and buy property is and continue the good work. All this agriculture land nearby in neighboring municipalities could be Sagkeeng's, it could be Treaty 3's. And that's kind of a vision that I would like to see for the future of indigenous-led agriculture. Buying our land back and utilizing it."

(TREATY #3 FOOD SOVEREIGNTY INTERVIEW, NOV 29, 2024)

This desire to grow small-scale agriculture ventures is echoed in many of the survey respondents:

> "To use our traditional territory, to have gardens and green houses built, to have the equipment example rototillers, water for the growing of food, seeds and plants to grow, and people to maintain the gardens and greenhouses."
>
> (SURVEY, NIISAACHEWAN)

Some also noted the need for other infrastructure to build out capabilities to process and distribute food well:

"Infrastructure such as greenhouses, processing facilities, community gardens and infrastructure for food processing, funding [i.e.] healthy food boxes."

(SURVEY, MIHISI SAHGAIGAN)

These visions tie back into goals for food sovereignty for ways to build food pathways where Treaty #3 people build relationships and networks of infrastructure to support and promote growing and distributing local foods.

In tandem with greenhouse, gardens and processing facilities there was also the revitalization of cultural food knowledge and practices as underlying components in food sovereignty going forward. This includes continuing to build on ceremonial practices, language learning and intergenerational knowledge transfer through inclusion of Elders and knowledge keepers in food pathway practices. Some of these pieces again include building infrastructure to support historical and current cultural practices of food preservation and processing:

"We were thinking about maybe creating a smokehouse next. Community smokehouse, where the hunters and the fishers can come and dry and smoke their meat and fish and preserve and smoke hides."

(TREATY #3 FOOD SOVEREIGNTY INTERVIEW, NOV 29, 2024).

One member spoke to the need to rekindle the knowledge and love with the land through education:

"We really, we really got to reclaim our Indigenous minds. Whatever anybody can do to help us remember that we have our own way of thinking, our own way of doing, our own ceremonies, our prayers, our work that can remind the land how much we love her and to help us claim space again. And once we open up our Indigenous minds again to what it is we could do, then every individual is just going to be so excited."

(TREATY #3 FOOD SOVEREIGNTY INTERVIEW, DEC 5, 2024)

Another spoke to the community relationships and caretaking of each other noting that when Anishinaabe used to go hunting for deer, meat would be shared with those that couldn't hunt- particularly elders and those who did not have capacity to secure their own meat. This was done in ceremony and with a spiritual element that took care of all community members (Treaty #3 Food Sovereignty Interview, Jan 8, 2025).

Ideas for seasonal camps, where members can come and learn together practices such as wild food harvesting, hunting and trapping, fishing and recipes for using these foods came up in discussion as well as the survey.

There was also talk about building programing in schools where Elders could connect with youth in growing, preserving and eating good food together. Elders remember times of food security, for themselves or their ancestors, where small scale agricultural practices took place, with locations mentioned such as Garden Island where the community grew food to share (Treaty #3 Food Sovereignty Interview, Feb 12, 2025).

Helping to reconnect and fill in gaps in knowledge around personal and communal food pathways was spoken about in the intergenerational transfers of knowledge that need to happen going forward.

Revitalizing Local Food Economies

Many members see the connection between food sovereignty and broader goals like job creation and entrepreneurship - sometimes referred to as economic sovereignty - as a key driver for real momentum and network building. Several emphasized the importance of linking knowledge-building efforts with career paths and economic development opportunities for people in Treaty #3.

> "That's kind of why we approached the school. It's kind of like long term sustainability of the project and like also just influencing youth at a young age to gauge their interest. And beforehand, our school does a lot of great things, but I will say there's not enough career planning. A lot of times people don't even know what they want to do by the time they're in high school, and some of these careers you should start planning at grade nine already. You want to have your grades, you want to have your math's, you want to have your science. And so that's like a big thing. And that's like one of the things that influencing agriculture, influencing food security at the high school level so that they can start knowing what there is out there or what kind of careers they could make out of that. And influencing like a green thumb or it being a hobby too. It doesn't need to just be large scale. It could just be like a hobby at home, you know, supplementing their food income."
>
> (TREATY #3 FOOD SOVEREIGNTY INTERVIEW, NOV 29, 2024)

> "So economic development is employment, and we need employment opportunities. And with our young people struggling as much as they are, I think anything connected with food sovereignty, land-based job opportunities would help."
>
> (TREATY #3 FOOD SOVEREIGNTY INTERVIEW, DEC 5, 2024)

This strongly ties back to the broader goal of establishing long-term, sustainable food security by reclaiming food sovereignty - understood as having ownership and control over all aspects of the food system, as reflected in this member's vision.

> "Basically, the whole system of food sovereignty, when you're looking at raw materials. Right to distribution, to the sales, and transportation, and then also even, you know, being part of the nutritional factors within an educational component within that with communities, and then also relating that back to the communities that we serve. Right. And understanding that our job is really focused on building those partnerships, whether it's First Nation to First Nations or First Nations to our organizations, then also to municipalities, and then also to business."
>
> (TREATY #3 FOOD SOVEREIGNTY INTERVIEW, FEB 12, 2025)

Building Indigenous business models that integrate cultural knowledge, community healing, and reconnecting to the land, gives hope for food sovereignty within Treaty #3 but also across Turtle Island where Nations and communities can thrive.

Many shared the importance of distributing and selling food products within Treaty #3. One person noted:

> "That's another thing too, that we hear all the time, like in the investment group working, that sometimes, the food sovereignty is a social issue, but we don't think of it as an economic issue as well."
>
> (TREATY #3 FOOD SOVEREIGNTY INTERVIEW, FEB 12, 2025)

In understanding the interrelationships between food sovereignty and economies, members are envisioning revitalized food economies that are built to the interests and needs of local communities. In this process, respondents spoke to food future that are sustainable and offer employment opportunities to members, particularly young people, that are connected to local knowledge systems and serve the wider community to build entire networks and systems in and for Treaty #3.

STEWARDING THE PROCESS

By grounding this study in the realities, opportunities, and aspirations shared by community members, Treaty #3 can begin to localize food systems and economies in a way that honors community strengths and priorities.

Developing food hubs have been identified as a viable strategy by Treaty #3 leadership as they can serve as distribution sites as well as common sites for food education, resources, and processing space all cited as needs in communities. This section will outline what food hubs are and potential services they may provide in the context of Treaty #3. A food hub rubric is provided to aid in the process of selecting communities that may host a food hub. Additionally, the food hub rubric was used to offer a potentially fit site for a food hub in each direction of Treaty #3 in accordance with the Four Directional Governance Model.

FOOD HUBS

FIGURE 6: WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE IN A FOOD HUB

Food hubs are centers that serve a region by collecting and distributing local food, facilitating connections between local food producers and the wider community. At the same time, food hubs can fill several social roles and services not typically provided by wholesale food companies. The programming supported at these sites is best when it is driven by community needs and capacity and may include food distribution, community kitchen space, processing equipment for harvested and hunted foods, educational programming, and other infrastructural needs such as freeze space or dehydrators.

WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE IN A FOOD HUB?

Survey participants and interviewees identified food hubs as an essential strategy to support processing, infrastructure, education, and food system integration. When asked about priorities for food hubs:

- **102.5%** identified access to local food as a top priority
- **75%** prioritized educational programming and resources, and
- **77.5%** identified processing facilities

Others desired elements include gathering spaces, community kitchens, and access to healthcare specialists. Notably, 70% selected "all of the above," indicating widespread support for a comprehensive, multi-purpose food hub that supports food access, cultural knowledge, and community health.

There was also talk of locations for community food distribution, often for food hampers, or food packages for those in need. These locations operate as potential locations for education and other types of food hub connections. One member spoke of a food processing facility:

> "Rainy River Meats, in Emo, process buffalo and rabbits and all kinds of stuff. So, you can buy more traditional meats that have gone through the food safety line to ensure that everything meets the food safety standards. The animals are farmed, not raised wild on the land so really not traditional at all."
>
> (TREATY #3 FOOD SOVEREIGNTY INTERVIEW, DEC 5, 2024)

The processing plant has been recognized as a food hub with potential for broader regional impact and could serve as a model for similar initiatives throughout Treaty #3.

Discussions around branding Treaty #3 products were centered around bringing more visibility to Treaty #3 as food producers and distributors. Some envisioned food hubs that included processing spaces such as butcher shops that also sold other Treaty #3 products (Treaty #3 Food Sovereignty Interview, March 3, 2025). These ideas also linked to economic development and food education – supporting community members in how food hubs can contribute to local business models and food sovereignty.

One participant involved with a local beef farm noted that learning business models has been a lot of trial and error. And in the context of Treaty #3 they are trying to fully understand and respond to the needs of the local community in accessing fresh and local meat. This depends on educating the community in regard to investing in the local food systems rather than commercial grocery store suppliers such as Safeway which in the long run supports local businesses to help keep dollars in the community while building up local and more affordable food systems (Treaty #3 Food Sovereignty Interview, Feb 12, 2025).

Infrastructure to support trade and food distribution was discussed in practical terms - such as the need for storage space, refrigeration, and transportation. Many emphasized the importance of strengthening existing infrastructure within Nations and building networks through those established connections.

"There's some stores and communities that could be used that may already have this infrastructure. There are different partners we could be working with. [...] it kind of seems like the system for food stock, for food systems, for food sovereignty is broken. So, for me, it's kind of ground up. I mean, I don't know. Like, I think the best bet right now would be to be working with the communities who do have stores already because that's just a natural place where we could distribute."

(TREATY #3 FOOD SOVEREIGNTY INTERVIEW, FEB 12, 2025)

Some places were mentioned such as Rainy River and Sagkeeng, building upon existing smaller infrastructure.

"I think Sagkeeng would be a good food hub source, I feel like when I think of it in the area, I don't know of any local food hubs. I mean once in a while you do see the occasional farmers stand in town, but it's just a small stand. It's nothing like a farmers' market like what S... talks about. And so that's why we really want to push that in our community."

(TREATY #3 FOOD SOVEREIGNTY INTERVIEW, NOV 29, 2024)

Participants emphasized the importance of allowing each Nation to shape their own unique approach to food sovereignty. While collaboration across Treaty #3 is vital, there was strong agreement that a one-size-fits-all model would not serve the diverse needs and realities of communities. Instead, supporting communities to lead in ways that align with their values, capacity, and aspirations was seen as essential. (Treaty #3 Food Sovereignty Interview, Feb 12, 2025).

FOOD HUB SELECTION RUBRIC

To support the development of a food hub in each of the four directions of Treaty #3, the project team created a Food Hub Rubric. This tool is intended to guide site selection by assessing infrastructure, accessibility, sustainability, and community relevance. The rubric allows for comparative scoring and identifies potential hubs aligned with Treaty #3's Four Directional Governance Model.

CATEGORY	IDEAL SITE (4)	GOOD SITE (3)	MODERATE SITE (2)	CHALLENGING SITE (1)
PROXIMITY TO COMMUNITIES	Centrally located with easy access to multiple First Nations communities, ensuring equitable food distribution.	Located within a reasonable distance of key communities but may require some transportation planning.	Somewhat remote, requiring significant travel for key populations.	Very remote or difficult to access, creating major barriers to distribution.
LAND SUITABILITY AND INFRASTRUCTURE POTENTIAL	Land is well-suited for development, with space for storage, processing, and potential expansion. Ground conditions allow for stable construction and soils are fertile for potential agricultural development.	Land is suitable but may require some modifications (e.g., clearing, leveling).	Some challenges with land use, requiring extensive modifications before construction.	Unsuitable for development due to environmental or legal restrictions.
DISTRIBUTION	Site is well-positioned near existing beef suppliers, processing facilities, and distribution routes, minimizing costs and logistical challenges.	Reasonable access to beef suppliers but may require additional transportation planning.	Some supply chain gaps exist, requiring significant logistical investments.	Poor access to suppliers, making distribution highly impractical.
EDUCATION AND TRAINING POTENTIAL	Site allows for on-site educational programs, workshops, and skill-building in traditional and modern food systems. Space for intergenerational learning is available.	Some space for educational programming, though additional investment may be required.	Limited capacity for educational activities, requiring off-site alternatives.	No feasible space for education and training.
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND CULTURAL RELEVANCE	Located in a culturally significant area with strong community ties; easily accessible for traditional harvesting and land-based education.	Moderately relevant to traditional foodways but not fully integrated with cultural food practices.	Some connection to Indigenous food systems, but lacks accessibility for cultural use.	No cultural relevance or connection to traditional food practices.

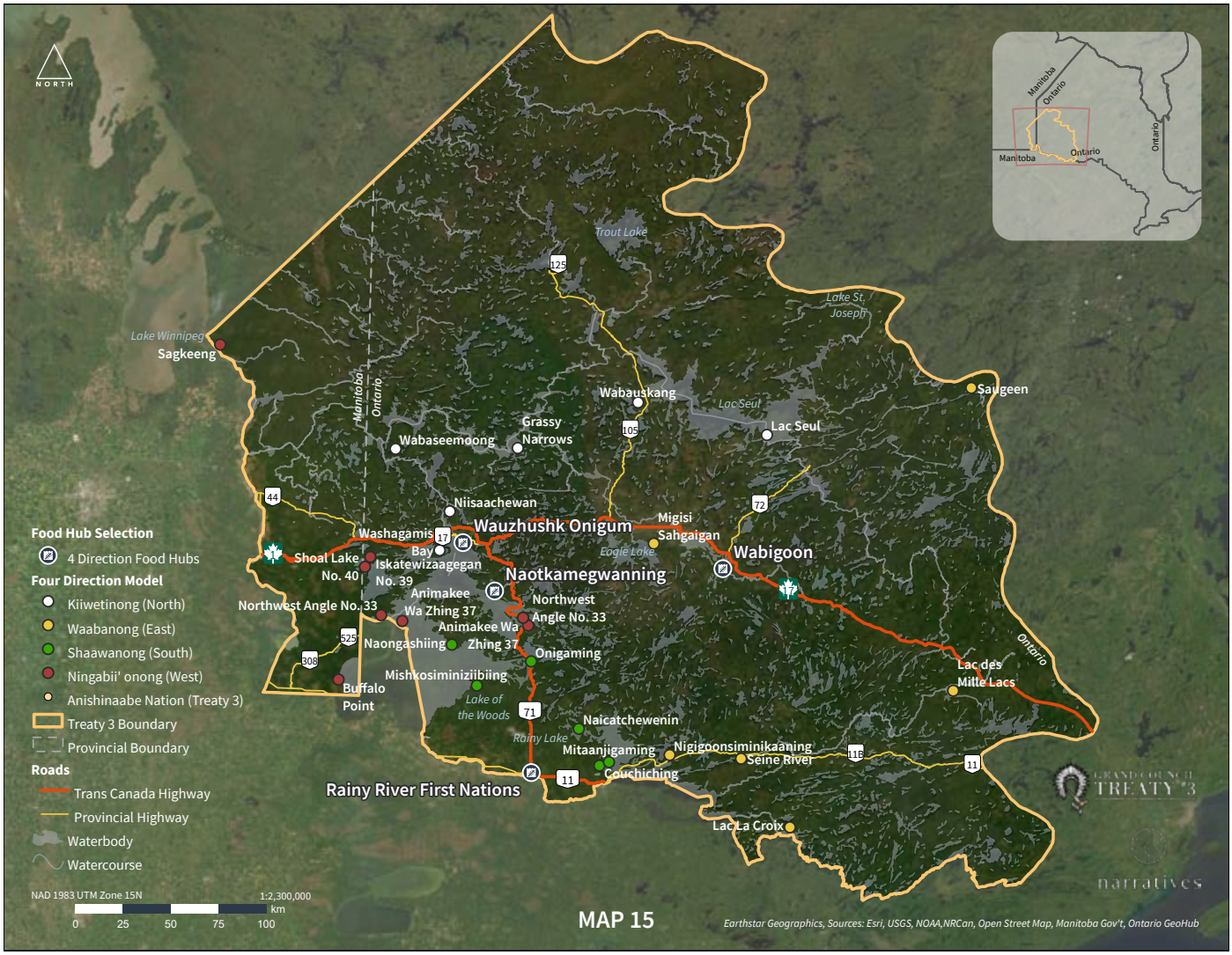
CATEGORY	IDEAL SITE (4)	GOOD SITE (3)	MODERATE SITE (2)	CHALLENGING SITE (1)
ECONOMIC VIABILITY AND SUSTAINABILITY	Strong potential for year-round funding and revenue generation, including partnerships, government grants, and business opportunities such as ecotourism and local food sales.	Moderate funding and revenue potential, though off-season funding challenges exist.	Some economic potential, but long-term financial sustainability is uncertain.	Not financially viable; lacks funding and revenue streams.
EMPLOYMENT AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT	Site can support stable jobs and training opportunities for local First Nations workers, including youth and elders, with pathways for leadership, and potential for small food-based businesses.	Some employment potential but requires additional development to create sustainable jobs.	Limited employment opportunities, with only part-time or seasonal potential.	No clear employment opportunities tied to the site.
LOGISTICS AND TRANSPORTATION	Easily accessible by road, with existing infrastructure to support food transportation and distribution.	Reasonably accessible, though road improvements or additional logistics planning may be needed.	Remote location with difficult access, limiting ability to serve communities in the region without significant investment.	Extremely difficult to access, making reliable distribution unfeasible.
ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP	Site supports sustainable development, with potential for renewable energy use, waste reduction, and protection of traditional food sources.	Some environmental benefits but may require mitigation efforts for sustainability.	Environmental risks present, requiring significant interventions.	High environmental risks, no environmental initiatives or infrastructure in place to reduce carbon footprint.
PARTNERSHIPS AND COLLABORATIONS	Strong potential for partnerships with local food producers, First Nations organizations, and regional distribution networks.	Some partnership opportunities exist but require further development.	Limited local partnerships, requiring outreach and additional investment.	No existing partnerships or collaboration potential.
FOOD SECURITY AND ACCESSIBILITY	Site will significantly improve food security, offering affordable and consistent access to culturally relevant, and nutritious food.	Facilitates some improvements to food access, though barriers like cost or transportation exist.	Limited impact on food security, requiring additional strategies to reach underserved communities.	Little to no impact on food security due to location, accessibility, or distribution challenges.
ADAPTABILITY AND CLIMATE RESILIENCE	Location is well-suited to withstand climate-related challenges, with strategies for water management, diverse food production, and resilience planning.	Some climate adaptation strategies may be needed, but risks are manageable.	Site faces notable climate risks that require extensive adaptation.	Site is highly vulnerable to climate change, making long-term sustainability unlikely.

Rubric Scoring Guide

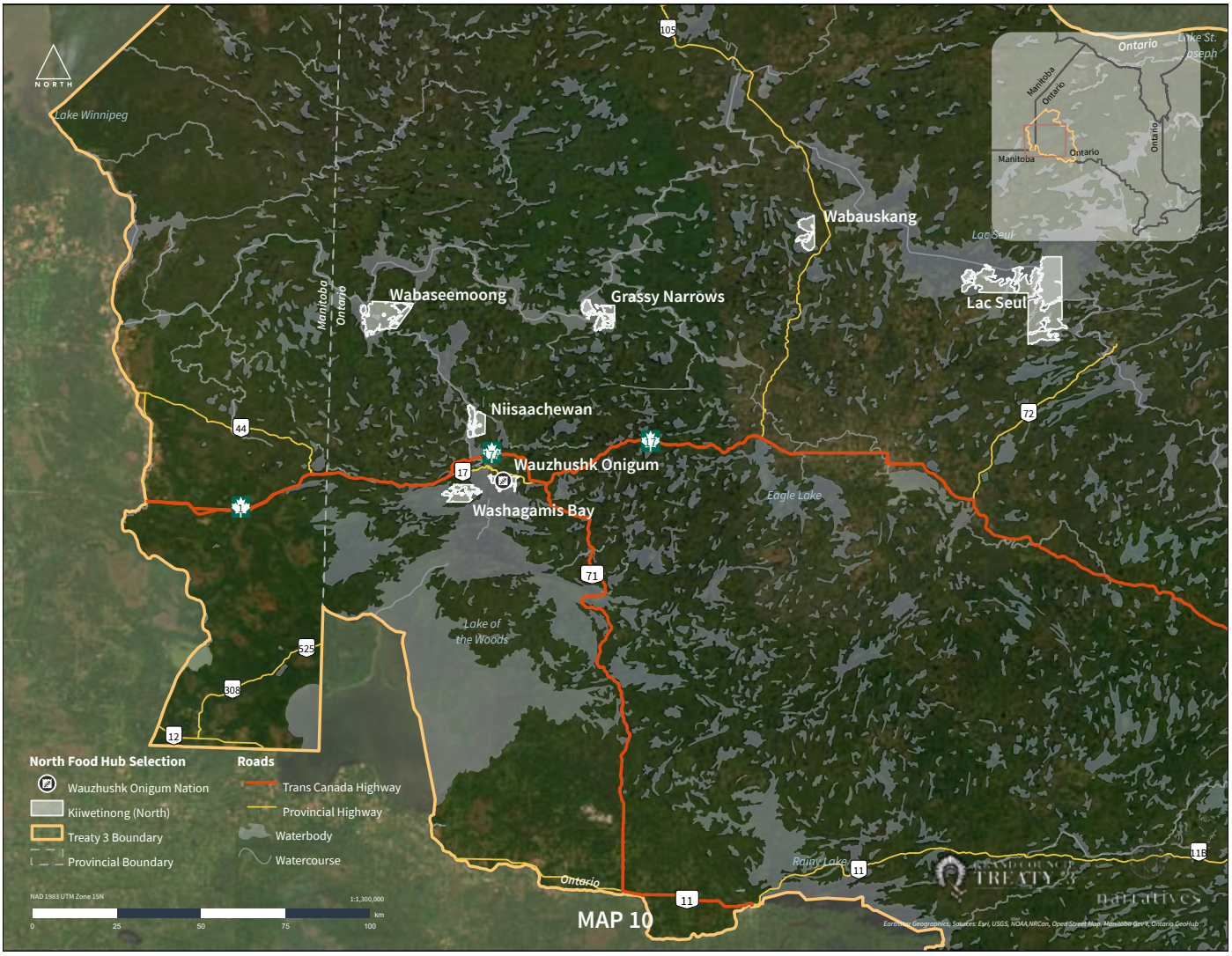
40-48 IDEAL SITE
The site is highly suitable for a food hub. Preferred option for a functional, sustainable, and effective site for serving the needs of First Nation communities in Treaty #3 territory.
30-39 GOOD SITE
The prospective food hub has strong potential but requires some investment and planning to address logistical or infrastructure challenges.
20-29 MODERATE SITE
The prospective food hub presents some challenges that will require significant investment and development in order to best serve surrounding communities.
BELOW 20 CHALLENGING SITE
The prospective food hub is not viable in its current state and needs extensive modifications or alternative solutions to serve as a successful food hub for Treaty #3 communities.

TREATY #3 PROSPECTIVE FOOD HUB SITES

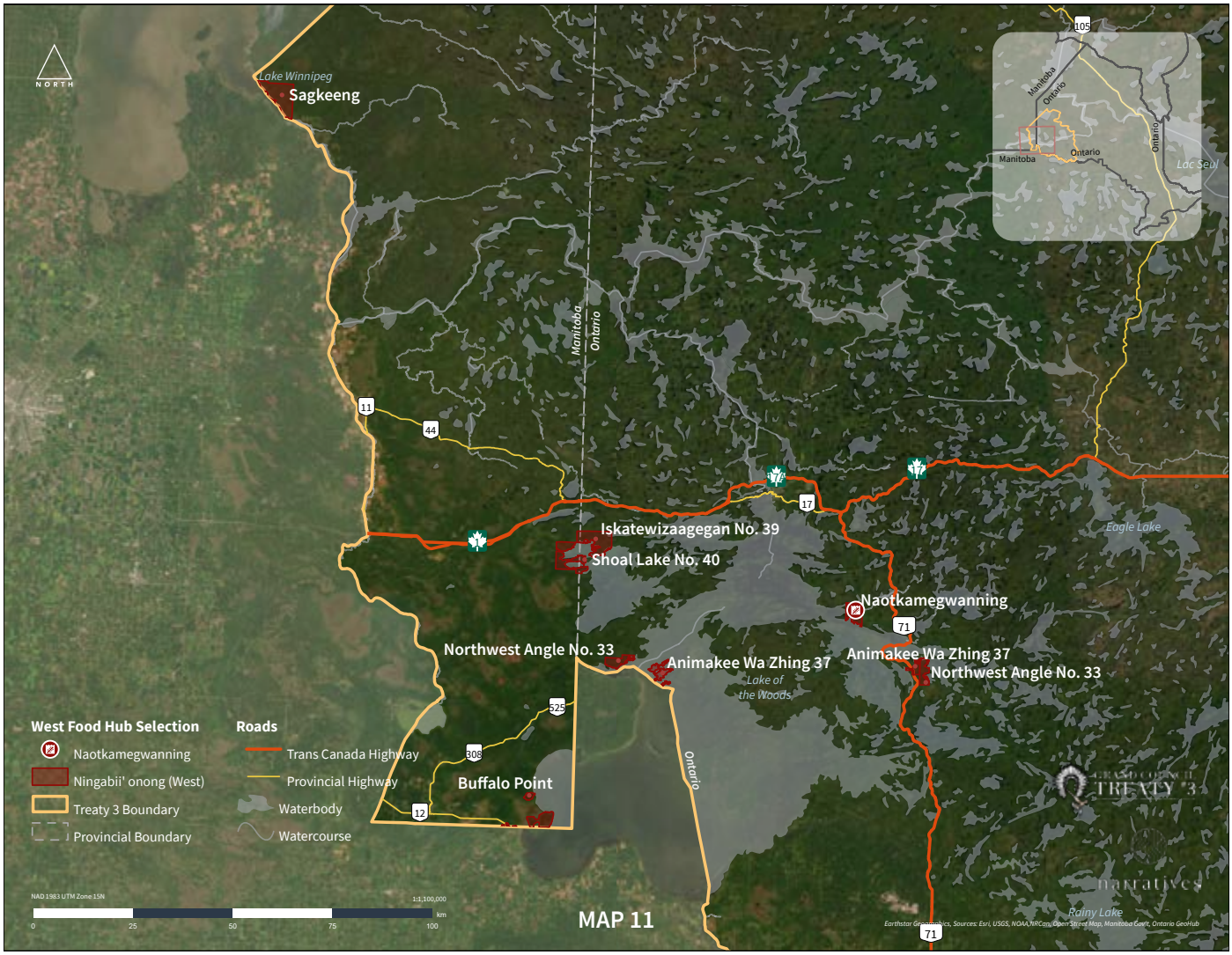
The following map series showcases prospective food hub locations across Treaty #3 and zooms into each distinct region: north, south, west, and east in accordance with the Four Directional Governance Model. Together, these directional food hubs can serve community driven needs while serving as distribution centers for neighboring communities.



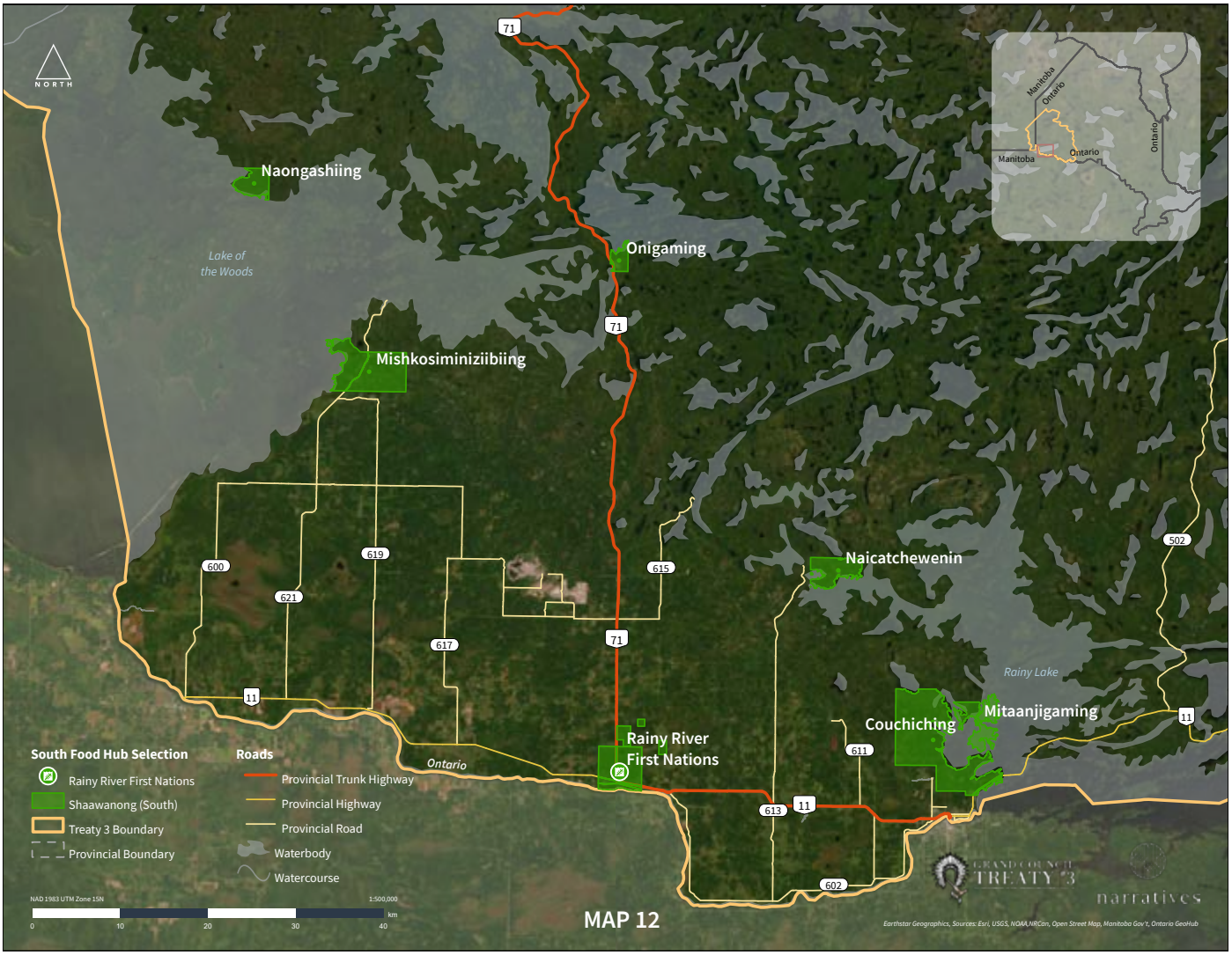
FOOD HUB LOCATIONS ACROSS TREATY #3



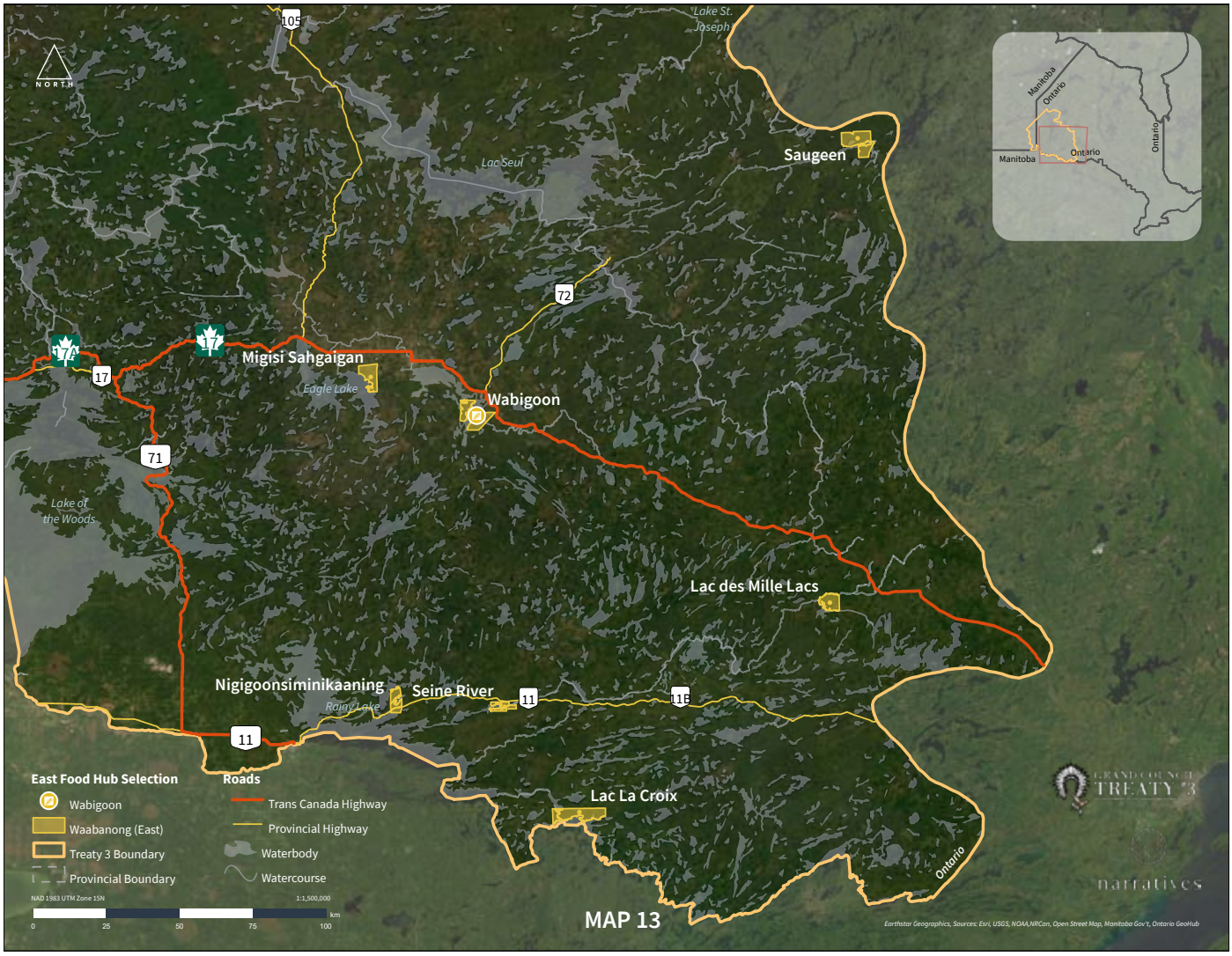
NORTHERN REGION FOOD HUB LOCATION



WESTERN REGION FOOD HUB LOCATION



SOUTHERN REGION FOOD HUB LOCATION



EASTERN REGION FOOD HUB LOCATION

After applying the 12-factor food hub rubric, the highest scoring sites in each direction are Wauzhushk Onigum (North), Naotkamegwanning (West), Rainy River First Nation (South) and Wabigoon Lake Ojibway Nation (East). Both Wauzhushk Onigum and Wabigoon are located on the primary highway in the region, are near their region's largest municipality, and have the capacity for the infrastructure required for a Food Hub. Naotkamegwanning is the largest nation on the stretch of land and highway (11) that services the vast majority of the population within the western region. While the western most nations within the western region are a distance away from Naotkamegwanning they are much more easily serviced by Wauzhushk Onigum in the northern region.

Of largest contention is the southern region, who by score is decidedly Rainy River First Nation (RRFN). RRFN is the most centrally located in the south, able to reach the furthest by highway nation – Big Grassy and are ideally located within the center of the agricultural south to have access to beef distribution and production. Community feedback however suggests that Couchiching First Nation is also a viable southern selection as its proximity to Fort Francis, as well as its ability to service nations in the Eastern region cut off from Wabigoon much more easily than RRFN.

HARVESTING AND SHARING - NEXT STEPS

Going forward, exact food hub sites will need to be agreed on by Treaty #3, to begin to develop these spaces in way that account for needs, capacity, and geography while housing infrastructural needs such as processing equipment or cold storage space. Feasibility considerations must include the capacity to support and maintain food hub managers and programming directors, as well as conducting a risk assessment that accounts for capital and major purchases.

But food hubs alone cannot rebuild Treaty #3 food systems. Instead, there needs to be a wholistic systems approach that can hold the complexities of relational food systems, challenges members face and their adaptive mitigative strategies. To hold these threads together, Figure 7 examines a number of barriers faced by Treaty #3 in revitalizing foodways alongside their impacts, adaptive strategies, and examples of specific adaptive measures that could be taken.

FIGURE 7: BARRIERS, IMPACTS, AND ADAPTIVE STRATEGIES

BARRIERS	IMPACTS	ADAPTIVE STRATEGIES	EXAMPLES / IDEAS
CLIMATE CHANGE	Unpredictable seasons.	Seasonal planning and flexible crop cycles.	Gardening education and nation specific crop cycle planning. Territory wide greenhouse implementation.
	Loss of species.	Ecosystem restoration through species reintroduction and stewardship.	Nation led seed bank program.
	Shifting migration patterns.	Create adaptive harvesting education plan through species monitoring programs.	Use Map Aki and a mobile tool/knowledge co-op to track species locations.
DAM & WATER MANAGEMENT	Inconsistent wild rice growth.	Dam water level management needs to be coordinated with First Nations and Grand Treaty Territory #3 to ensure rice revitalization, habitat restoration, flow timing, and local agriculture needs are met.	Wild rice revitalization zone with water barrier walls if Dam control co-operation is unlikely.
	Fish spawning areas disrupted.		Map and protect spawning zones; support the regional fish hatchery to offset losses.
	Low-lying agricultural lands flooded.		

BARRIERS	IMPACTS	ADAPTIVE STRATEGIES	EXAMPLES / IDEAS
ENVIRONMENTAL CONTAMINATION	Medicine and food gathering affected from forestry pesticide practices.	Identify and protect clean harvest zones.	Coordinate with provincial forestry authority to develop no spray zones.
GROWING CAPACITY	Northern soil quality limited.	Greenhouse expansion programming, Training, Funding throughout the northern regions without adequate soils.	
GEOGRAPHICAL BARRIERS	Lack of local markets leads to higher food costs driven to community.	Strengthen and create new local retailers. Utilize food hubs as central trade / distribution centers for local retailers. Creation and management of local food forests. Transportation support for those without vehicle access, grocery shopping gas subsidies.	Push for government subsidization of local vendor starter programs. Transition local vendors into community or cooperative owned grocery stores.
	Long distance to grocery stores adds costs to grocery shop trips.		Expand and embed community grocery stores through treaty wide trade network.
	Remote communities reliance on air services.		Food Hubs expanded to mobile model, meeting under serviced remote communities.
GOVERNMENTAL BARRIERS	Funding cuts and inconsistent support to food initiatives.		
	Grocery monopolies reducing local options.	Community-run stores and treaty trading program.	Scale the locally owned grocery and formalize inter-community barter exchanges.
	Regulatory barriers prevent communities from selling locally harvested or processed foods.	Treaty 3 certification and policy advocacy.	Create a Treaty 3 traditional foods certification to meet regulations and open markets.

BARRIERS	IMPACTS	ADAPTIVE STRATEGIES	EXAMPLES / IDEAS
KNOWLEDGE BARRIERS	Loss of traditional knowledge due to generational gaps and colonization.	Regular Elder's council mentorship guidance for food and land-based education.	Establish Treaty-wide council of growers, fishers & processors to guide transfer of knowledge.
	Lack of educational programs to teach youth hunting, gathering, and food preparation skills.	Seasonal camps and school curriculum.	Run family food camps and integrate foodways modules into school programs.
	Confusion around legal permissions and resource use.	Open-access Map Aki and workshops.	Public layer of Map Aki plus workshops clarify where and how resources can be harvested.
HEALTH AND MOBILITY	Physical mobility challenges prevent some community members from accessing traditional harvesting.	Home-delivery garden kits and community shuttles.	Provide delivered garden packages and organize harvest trips with community vans.
	Health concerns such as blastomycosis discourage gardening in certain areas.	Indoor container growing.	Promote indoor kits and offer training on safe soil handling via in person or virtual classes.
TRANSPORTATION AND LOGISTICS	Limited or no public transportation in many regions.	Mobile tool/food vans and shared logistics.	Deploy the Mobile Tool & Knowledge Co-op trailer to bring tools and food to each community.
	Community shuttle programs exist but with strict limitations (e.g. one person per family).	Expand shuttle capacity and treaty wide trip coordination.	Work and established expand programs similar to the Family Preservation Program to schedule multiple-family grocery runs.
	Winter access is especially difficult; stores often have empty shelves.	Local cold storage and year-round greenhouses.	Build regional cold-storage facilities in food hubs and maximize greenhouse production in winter.

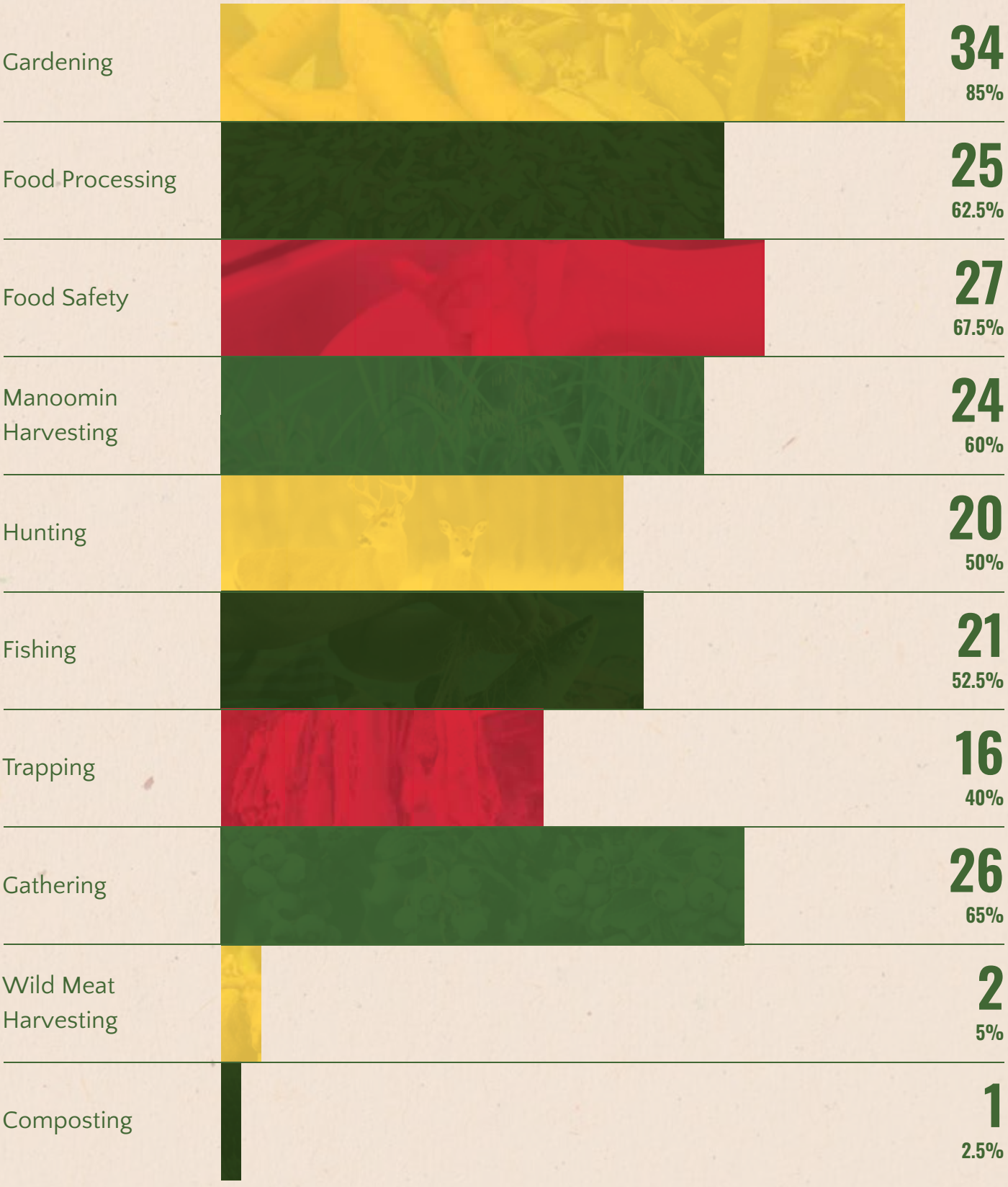
COMMUNITY EDUCATION AND IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

FIGURE 8: WHAT KINDS OF EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMING MEMBERS ARE INTERESTED IN

Throughout the engagement process, members voiced a deep and consistent desire for more education and opportunities related to local food systems.

Many communities shared that they currently lack the dedicated resources, coordination, and physical space needed to support consistent knowledge sharing around food systems. In particular, youth and other community members who are eager to learn about traditional practices such as harvesting, growing, foraging, hunting, fishing, food preparation, and processing often do not know where to go or who to turn to for guidance. This absence of structured mentorship and access to knowledge transfer presents a major barrier to cultural continuity and food sovereignty.

WHAT KIND OF TRAINING WOULD YOU BE INTERESTED IN?



To move forward, Treaty #3 can consider the following core strategies:

Establish Dedicated Teaching Networks of Knowledge Keepers and Land-Based Practitioners

Many participants recommended forming groups of Knowledge Keepers and land-based practitioners who are willing and able to teach traditional skills, such as harvesting, growing, fishing, processing and preparing foods, to younger generations and other interested community members.

There are several options for how these teaching groups could be structured - whether each community supports their own dedicated team, or a few regional groups are created to serve multiple communities across Treaty #3, or a mobile/traveling group of teachers rotates through communities and food hub locations. These models can be further explored based on capacity, interest, and funding.

Invest in Physical Spaces for Food Education

Food hub buildings or shared community food spaces could play a critical role by offering a central location where these teachings can take place. These hubs could host seasonal workshops, scheduled classes, and informal drop-in sessions where people of all ages can learn and practice skills in a safe and welcoming environment. Importantly, these teachings should include both traditional knowledge and practical gardening education.

Prioritize Both Traditional Teachings and Practical Gardening Education

Many community members emphasized that access to gardening knowledge and support is especially lacking for those who did not grow up with opportunities to learn these skills. Without clear, accessible, and culturally relevant education on how to grow food, individuals are less likely to begin gardening on their own - and even less likely to pass those skills on to their children or grandchildren. Addressing this generational gap in food knowledge is critical to strengthening long-term food security, self-reliance, and cultural resurgence.

POLICY CONSIDERATION

To support the goals and values of Treaty #3 food sovereignty and the future development of food hubs, new or revised policies may be needed. These policies should prioritize community control over food access, quality, and production – helping to sustain a closed-loop system that centers Treaty #3 communities while also creating opportunities for economic participation by non-Indigenous populations.

Food Quality, Quantity, and Access

Goal: Guarantee access to healthy, high-quality, culturally appropriate food for all.

Food quality standards could include guidelines that promote natural food production methods, such as limiting the use of fertilizers and hormones, reducing irrigation, and encouraging growth practices that align with the principles of the Nibi Declaration. To ensure equitable access, policies must also address food quantity and distribution - guaranteeing that all community members can access local, high-quality foods regardless of income or contribution, which may require thoughtful checks and balances.

Traditional Harvesting and Processing Practices

Goal: Protect and elevate Anishinaabe Foodways.

Policies that guide how, when, and where food is harvested and processed should incorporate and uphold traditional Anishinaabe practices. These measures are not intended to impose control, but rather to protect and promote Indigenous food ways that have always emphasized reciprocity, sustainability, and respect for the land. In doing so, such policies not only strengthen cultural continuity but also contribute to the health of the environment. To truly advance the goals of food sovereignty in Treaty #3 territory and to ensure the long-term success of food hubs, a comprehensive policy framework will be necessary - one that reflects Anishinaabe values and local priorities, while addressing systemic gaps in food access, governance, and land stewardship.

Land Access and Use

Goal: Secure land for food production, harvesting and education.

Beyond policies focused on food quality, quantity, and traditional practice, communities may benefit from additional policy areas that holistically support the entire food system. For instance, land access and land use policies are critical. These can ensure that community members have protected and long-term access to traditional harvesting areas, gardens, farmlands, and gathering spaces. Such policies might include the designation of cultural food zones or zoning allowances for food production and land-based education. Protection from industrial development, contamination, or extractive industries will also be key to ensuring these lands remain viable for future generations.

Food Governance Structures

Goal: Establish community-led bodies to oversee food sovereignty efforts.

Food governance is another vital policy area. Treaty #3 communities could develop frameworks that formally recognize and support local food councils or community-led bodies responsible for overseeing food hub activities, land access, distribution systems, and knowledge transmission. These councils should include Elders, Knowledge Keepers, youth, and harvesters to ensure a broad base of knowledge and community representation. In tandem, a Treaty-wide food labelling or certification system - such as "Treaty-Grown" or "Anishinaabe Approved" - could help elevate local food products, build trust, and support ethical trade, while ensuring cultural integrity and environmental standards are upheld.

Inter-Community Trade and Distribution

Goal: Strength internal food sharing networks before export.

Trade and distribution policies can also reinforce Treaty #3's food sovereignty objectives by facilitating inter-community exchange of seeds, traditional food products, and processing tools. These policies could formalize community-to-community trade, prioritize internal food distribution before exporting surplus, and promote local markets or trading posts that prioritize Indigenous-grown or harvested food. Regional coordination may be particularly beneficial here, especially for smaller or more remote communities that face significant barriers in food transportation and infrastructure.

Education and Knowledge Transfer

Goal: Embed food teachings into everyday life and systems.

Knowledge transfer and education are equally critical. Policy development in this area could include mandating land-based learning in local schools, funding seasonal culture camps, and establishing apprenticeships with Knowledge Keepers. Formal recognition of Knowledge Keepers and harvesters as educators - on par with Western-trained instructors - would not only support the integrity of Indigenous education systems, but also help restore intergenerational knowledge transmission. Food hubs themselves can serve as important physical spaces where such learning occurs, but policies will need to ensure consistent support, funding, and governance structures for these programs to flourish.

Infrastructure and Technology

Goal: Support shared tools and sustainable innovation.

Infrastructure and technology policies must also be developed to support the practical and logistical needs of food production and sharing. This includes guidance on how communities can share equipment (gardening tools, food processing, cold storage), and support for mobile infrastructure like traveling greenhouses or processing trailers that can serve multiple communities. As Treaty #3 moves toward greater sustainability, policies that incorporate insulated root cellars, and clean water systems - should also be considered. These technologies align with the values set out in the Nibi Declaration, particularly regarding the respectful and minimal use of water and land-based resources.

Health, Safety, and Nutrition

Goal: Align safety protocols with Indigenous food knowledge.

Policies around health, safety, and nutrition are also crucial. While many Western health standards conflict with traditional processing methods (smoking, drying, or fermenting), Treaty #3 communities could develop culturally appropriate health policies that legitimize and support traditional foodways while maintaining safety. Policies could also address food security from a wellness perspective – for example, ensuring traditional foods are served in schools, elder care facilities, and healing lodges. Nutrition guidelines might incorporate wild foods, medicines, and seasonal eating patterns that promote holistic health.

Environmental Stewardship

Goal: Protect ecosystems that sustain Indigenous foodways.

Finally, environmental stewardship policies must form the foundation of any food sovereignty strategy. These could include protections for wild rice beds, fish spawning areas, berry patches, and medicinal plant zones. Climate change, shifting migration patterns, and water mismanagement already threaten many of these ecosystems. Policies that enforce sustainable harvesting practices, implement rotational foraging, or require boat wash stations to prevent invasive species spread will help maintain ecological integrity.

Some examples of sustainable harvesting practices:

1. **Take only what you need:** Harvest in quantities that meet immediate needs, not for excess or profit. Avoid overharvesting to allow populations to regenerate naturally.
2. **Leave enough for regrowth and reproduction:** leave part of the plant (roots, seeds, or stems) to ensure regrowth. For animals, avoid taking females with young, or harvesting during breeding/spawning seasons.
3. **Follow seasonal patterns:** Harvest during times of abundance, following natural life cycles. Use rotational gathering areas to allow ecosystems time to recover.
4. **Respect and minimal impact:** Avoid damaging surrounding ecosystems or habitats during harvest. Use traditional, low-impact tools (hand harvesting, not heavy machinery).
5. **Observe and adapt:** Monitor changes in plant or animal populations and environmental conditions. Adjust practices based on signs from the land – if a species is declining, stop or reduce harvesting.

The implementation of these policies will require collaboration across communities, the inclusion and sustained support from leadership and funding partners. But if developed and enacted with care, they offer a powerful foundation for self-determination, cultural resurgence, and long-term food sovereignty in Treaty #3.

CONCLUSION: PATH FORWARD

This pre-feasibility study represents an early but essential step toward reclaiming food sovereignty across Treaty #3 territory. It has surfaced clear themes, community priorities, and concrete opportunities for restoring Indigenous food systems grounded in Anishinaabe knowledge, values, and leadership.

What emerged most consistently is that this work cannot wait. The urgency of climate change, food insecurity, and cultural disruption is already being felt. Yet at the same time, there is powerful momentum in the knowledge held by Elders and harvesters, in the strength of youth voices, and in the deep desire for change shared across communities.

Moving forward, the following actions are recommended to build on the momentum of this study:

Confirm and Develop Regional Food Hub Sites

Begin coordinated discussions to identify and confirm the geographic location of food hubs across Treaty #3 territory per this study. Development should consider:

- Proximity to harvesting/gathering areas and community needs;
- Infrastructure requirements (e.g., processing equipment, cold storage, kitchens);
- Staffing plans for food hub managers and programming leads;
- Capital planning and risk assessments for major purchases.

Support Community Teaching Networks

Create formal teaching networks of Knowledge Keepers and land-based practitioners to offer hands-on instruction in harvesting, growing, foraging, processing, and preparing traditional foods. These networks may be:

- Community-specific;
- Regionally shared;
- Mobile teams traveling across food hubs.

Invest in Land-Based Learning and Physical Spaces

Prioritize the development or renovation of shared food education spaces such as food hubs, community gardens, greenhouses, or outdoor teaching grounds- that can host workshops, cultural camps, and intergenerational teachings.

Advance Policy Development Across Key Areas

Use the policy framework identified in this study to begin:

- Drafting and adapting food quality and access policies;
- Protecting land and harvesting zones;
- Establishing local food governance structures (e.g., food councils);
- Supporting inter-community trade and Treaty-wide labelling systems;
- Recognizing Knowledge Keepers as educators;
- Integrating health, safety, and nutrition standards aligned with traditional practices;
- Safeguarding ecosystems and enforcing sustainable harvesting.

Create a Treaty #3 Food Sovereignty Action Plan

Using the insights from this study including barriers, impacts, and adaptive strategies (Figure 7) to develop a living Action Plan that:

- Aligns with community priorities and regional strengths;
- Highlights community-specific needs and actions;
- Includes short-, medium-, and long-term strategies;
- Identifies funding sources, partners, and timelines;
- Is updated annually based on community feedback and outcomes.

Establish a Cross-Community Governance Body

Convene a Treaty #3-wide working group or council to coordinate the implementation of the Food Sovereignty Action Plan, support regional collaboration, and oversee education, infrastructure, and policy work. This body should be representative of Elders, youth, harvesters, community leaders, and Knowledge Keepers.

Secure Sustainable, Multi-Year Funding

Develop a coordinated strategy to pursue sustained investment in food sovereignty work across the territory, with a focus on:

- Multi-year funding agreements;
- Capacity-building grants;
- Infrastructure and staffing support;
- Community-based research and monitoring.

THIS WORK IS NOT JUST ABOUT GROWING FOOD; IT IS ABOUT GROWING FUTURES.

By building on the relational foodways, political sovereignty, and cultural teachings that have sustained Treaty #3 for generations, this path forward becomes a reclamation of identity, wellness, and autonomy.

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Treaty #3 Food Sovereignty Interview. (February 12, 2025). Gary Allen, Hailey Krolyk, and Amanda Belanger. TRNSPT _20250212_ T31026_ GaryAllen,HaileyKrolyk&AmandaBelanger

Treaty #3 Food Sovereignty Interview. (March 3, 2025). Lauren Gorjanc, Selena Belanger, Traci Belanger, and Maria Montoya. TRNSPT _20250303_T31026_ LaurenGorjanc,SelenaBelanger,TraciBelanger&MaferMontoya

APPENDIXES

OPEN GRANTS (JUNE 2025)

STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS INITIATIVE

https://www.sac-isc.gc.ca/eng/1330016561558/1594122175203

Timeline: Open - ongoing

Purpose of Fund: Indigenous communities participate in complex economic opportunities:

- Economic readiness
- Economic infrastructure
- Expanding viable businesses
- Pre-feasibility and feasibility studies
- Environmental diagnostics and evaluations
- Community economic development planning
- Skills development and training

Eligible Applicants: Indigenous businesses, organizations, partnerships and joint ventures. Indigenous communities and local governments, academic institutions,provinces and territories.

Amount, Project Timeline: Not listed

Types of Projects, Activities: Economic readiness, economic infrastructure, expanding viable business, pre-feasibility and feasibility study, envrionmental diagnostics and evaluation, community economic development planning, skills development and training.

Application Process: Eligible recipients do not apply directly for funding. Federal partners work with Indigenous communities to identify opportunities to bring to SPI's interdepartmental investment committee for consideration. The committee vets and then supports the co-development of chosen initiatives. Send an email to the SPI Secretariat: IPS-SPI@canada.ca.

Additional Notes / Project Ideas: Conduct the next phase of this project: a feasibility study for food hubs in each of the four directions.

CLIMATE CHANGE + HEALTH ADAPTATION PROGRAM

https://www.sac-isc.gc.ca/eng/1536238477403/1536780059794

T**imeline:** Open, due September 12, 2025

Purpose of Fund: Funds the efforts of First Nations and Inuit communities to identify, assess and respond to the health impacts of climate change.

Eligible Applicants: First Nations communities, organization including band councils, tribal councils and FN associations

Amount, Project Timeline: $125,000 per project up to 2 years to complete

Types of Projects, Activities: Develop and implement health-related adaptation or action plans. Identify vulnerabilities in the health system and develop plans to address them. Develop and share knowledge-building and communication materials. Support adaptation decision-making at the local, regional and national levels. Eligible expenses include garden supplies and equipment.

Application Process: Contact cchap-pccas@sac-isc.gc.ca for a proposal template.

Additional Notes / Project Ideas:

1. Launch a seasonal "action lab" program for youth in Treaty 3 that explores the relationship between

climate change and food systems. Each lab would include land-based learning (e.g., fishing, harvesting, seed saving), health workshops (nutrition, water safety, food prep), and creative projects like podcasting, digital storytelling, and climate mapping.

2. Co-create climate-resilient healing and food gardens in several Treaty 3 communities, designed to address both mental and physical health impacts of climate change (trauma, stress, food insecurity). Adapt plant selection and garden designs to local climate stressors (drought, flooding, pests) and include climate health education for all ages.

NORTHERN CAPACITY FUND

https://foodbankscanada.smapply.ca/prog/2025_northern_capacity_fund_/
Timeline: Open - Due June 30, 2025
Purpose of Fund: Build sustainable capacity and infrastructure to address food insecurity in Northern regions.
Eligible Applicants: Food banks and food security organizations in Canada's Northern Regions.
Amount, Project Timeline: Not listed
Types of Projects, Activities: Infrastructure, transport, food handling equipment, emergency generators, staff time but will not fund full-time staff positions
Application Process: Submit an application online through Food Banks Canada online portal.
Additional Notes / Project Ideas: Connect with food banks in Treaty 3 to support food infrastructure such as storage and refrigeration.

INDIGENOUS SERVICES CANADA - ABORIGINAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP PROGRAM: ACCESS TO CAPITAL

https://www.sac-isc.gc.ca/eng/1375201178602/1610797286236
Timeline: Open - ongoing intake
Purpose of Fund: This program promotes entrepreneurship and seeks to increase the number of viable Indigenous-owned businesses. The program has 2 streams: access to capital and business opportunities.
Eligible Applicants: Indigenous individuals, including businesses owned and controlled by Indigenous Peoples
Indigenous organizations and associations, except those with charitable or religious purposes
Funding can be accessed through Indigenous Financial Institutions and Métis Capital Corporations across Canada. Eligibility varies between IFIs and MCCs. Consult with your local IFI or MCCs to see if you are eligible.
Amount, Project Timeline: Up to $99,000 for Indigenous entrepreneurs, Indigenous businesses up to $250,000
Types of Projects, Activities: Equity contribution and businesses services to start, expand or acquire a business.
Application Process: To apply for funding, please contact your local Indigenous Financial Institution or Metis Capital Corporation directly. For any inquiry, please contact NACCA or your local MCC:
National Aboriginal Capital Corporations Association
Apeetogosan (Métis) Development Inc.
Métis Financial Corporation of BC
Louis Riel Capital Corporation
Métis Voyageur Development Fund Inc.
SaskMétis Economic Development Corporation
Additional Notes / Project Ideas: Connect with Indigenous food-related businesses in Treaty 3 to support the expansion of their food businesses.

GRASSROOTS GROWTH PROGRAM

https://www.ontario.ca/page/grassroots-growth-program

Timeline: Open - Rolling Deadline

Purpose of Fund: Funding for initiatives that create broader opportunities and greater benefits for the agri-food sector and rural communities in Ontario.

Eligible Applicants: Corporation, partnership, sole proprietor, or unincorporated association, including an Indigenous community or band council.

Amount, Project Timeline: Cost-share funding is strongly encouraged for all projects. For Targeted, cost-shared local marketing projects funding is up to 50% of eligible project costs for projects up to $100,000 in cost-share funding.

Types of Projects, Activities: Public engagement, youth leadership, enhancing safety, strengthening public trust, encouraging agri-food and rural development options.

Application Process: Email ag.info.omafra@ontario.ca for instructions on how to apply. Applications must provide specific details including detailed project design, rationale for why the project should be undertaken, anticipated benefits, organizational capacity to deliver the project, work plan, detailed activity-based budget, financial capacity.

Additional Notes / Project Ideas: Public engagement and youth leadership in the feasibility study for the food hubs in each of the four directions.

"2 BILLION TREES PROGRAM"

https://www.canada.ca/en/campaign/2-billion-trees/2-billion-trees-program.html

Timeline: Open, due September 18, 2025

Purpose of Fund: Motivate and support new tree planting projects of 50,000 trees or over with the larger goal of planting a total of Two Billion Trees.

Eligible Applicants: Indigenous governments, communities and organizations are eligible to apply.

Amount, Project Timeline: Up to $250,000 for the prepare to plant funding stream to prepare for a small-scale planting of 50,000 trees or more.

Types of Projects, Activities: Site assessment, seed management, training and capacity building, site preparation work, monitoring and management tools.

Application Process: Submit a proposal using the online portal using GCKey.

Additional Notes / Project Ideas: Planting fruit trees in Treaty#3 territory around the food hubs for shade and fruits.

INDIGENOUS AGRICULTURE AND RELATIONSHIP DEVELOPMENT

https://www.gov.mb.ca/asset_library/en/scap/documents/scap-iard-guide.pdf

Timeline: Open until June 26, 2025

Purpose of Fund: Supports actions and activities related to engagement and enhancing relationships between Industry and Indigenous Peoples.

Eligible Applicants: Indigenous businesses and organizations are eligible.

Amount, Project Timeline: Max of $5,000 per engagement up to $25,000

Types of Projects, Activities: Actions and activities related to engagement and enhancing relationships between industry, academia, and Indigenous Peoples such as planning and development in food systems.

Application Process: Submit an application worksheet.
Additional Notes / Project Ideas: Engagement activities relating to food hub feasibility with Treaty#3 located in Manitoba.

FIRST NATION ADAPT PROGRAM

https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1481305681144/1594738692193
Timeline: Open, ongoing
Purpose of Fund: Funds First Nation-led climate change adaptation projects across Canada.
Eligible Applicants: First Nation communities and organizations.
Amount, Project Timeline: Varying amounts depending on scale, $1,000,000 +; up to $250,000 for small-scale adaptive actions.
Types of Projects, Activities: Risk assessment, adaptation planning, small scale adaptive action implementation, development of tools to support adaptation planning.
Application Process: Submit an application by email which includes proposal form, budget, workplan, and BCR. Contact adaptation@rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca to obtain a budget spreadsheet (MS Excel) and complete a project proposal as described in the guidelines.
Additional Notes / Project Ideas: Conduct a climate risk assessment and develop a climate change adaptation plan for all Treaty#3 Nations, including understanding the impacts of climate change to traditional food access and opportunities to build resilience through local food production.

LOCAL FOOD INFRASTRUCTURE FUND

https://agriculture.canada.ca/en/programs/local-food-infrastructure-fund-small
Timeline: Currently closed, next intake will be open Fall 2025
Purpose of Fund: Supports projects that strengthen community food security and increase the availability and accessibility of local, nutritious, and culturally appropriate food through food production-focused activities for equity-deserving groups, particularly Indigenous and Black communities.
Eligible Applicants: First Nation, Inuit or Métis community and/or governments, First Nation, Inuit or Métis not-for-profit associations, First Nation, Inuit or Métis not-for-profit organizations
Amount, Project Timeline: Small Scale: $25,000 - $100,000, Large Scale: $150,000 - $500,000
Types of Projects, Activities:

1. Beekeeping equipment
2. Community Gardens
3. Food Forests
4. Garden boxes/beds/tools
5. Greenhouses
6. Irrigation systems, wells, solar panels, composting systems
7. Seeds, soil, compost (initial year only)
8. Tractors + other heavy farm equipment
9. Vertical and/or hydroponic gardens
10. Hunting, fishing equipment

Application Process: Create account with Agriculture and Agri-Food Online Services and submit application through the portal.

Additional Notes / Project Ideas:

1. Develop demonstration plots and larger agricultural spaces that grow drought-tolerant, native food crops (e.g., prairie turnip, wild onion, sunchoke, corn varieties, beans). Install soil moisture sensors, weather stations, and composting systems to collect data on environmental conditions, yields, and soil health over time. Use this data for both academic research and traditional knowledge integration, shared through workshops with students and community.
2. Create a dedicated teaching and processing space (or retrofit an existing one) where Elders, harvesters, and land-based educators can teach youth and community members about traditional harvesting, growing, seed saving, processing, and preservation (drying, smoking, fermenting), and technologies/tools. Programming can rotate seasonally, with school participation built into the curriculum.
3. Designate parcels of land as protected or semi-managed zones for harvesting wild food (berries, medicines, game, fish).
4. Establish community trade centre program where community members can trade, sell, and purchase locally harvested or cultivated foods (including wild foods, traditional medicines, or farmed goods).
5. Create a seed bank focused on native and traditionally grown crops. Include a lab/research space for cataloging varietal differences, germination rates, and environmental suitability. Partner with schools, farmers, and Elders to preserve seed lineages and ensure community control of genetic resources

ENVIRONMENT & CLIMATE CHANGE CANADA - ABORIGINAL FUND FOR SPECIES AT RISK

https://www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/services/environmental-funding/ipsar-how-to-apply.html

T**imeline:** Closed, opens November 15th of 2025

Purpose of Fund: Provides grants to projects seeking to support and promote the conservation, protection and recovery of target species and their habitats on Indigenous lands or lands where traditional food, social, and ceremonial activities are carried out by Indigenous peoples. Species at risk are listed here: https://laws.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/s-15.3/page-10.html

Eligible Applicants: Indigenous Nations, groups, not-for-profit and for profit organizations.

Amount, Project Timeline: Usually from $10,000-$50,000 per year, for 1-3 years for new projects.

Types of Projects, Activities: Habitat protection and procurement; habitat improvements; species management; conservation planning; surveys, inventories and monitoring; project or program results evaluations; Indigenous knowledge gathering or use; outreach and communications; education and training.

Application Process: Apply online through Grants and Contributions Management System. Contact your regional Indigenous Protected Species At Risk coordinator to obtain an Expression of Interest form. https://www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/services/environmental-funding/ipsar-how-to-apply.html#ContactUs

Additional Notes / Project Ideas: Develop a habitat protection and land-based monitoring plan for moose and caribou. Monitoring of at-risk fish species.

INDIGENOUS YOUTH ROOTS

https://indigenousyouthroots.ca/grant/land-and-food-sovereignty-stream

T**imeline:** Closed, will open Fall 2025

Purpose of Fund: Aims to increase opportunities to participate in land-based programming, learn about food and medicines and engage with knowledge keepers.

Eligible Applicants: Grassroots Indigenous youth groups of at least 2 people.

Amount, Project Timeline: $20,000

Types of Projects, Activities: Community Gardens, Digital Land Connections, Land-based camps and Programming

Application Process: IYR encourages applicants to reach out if they have any questions. Please email **gwen@indigenousyouthroots.ca** to speak to a member of the team.

Additional Notes / Project Ideas: Connect with Grand Council Treaty#3 Youth Council and Sagkeeng Youth Greenhouse to support their community garden and land-based learning.

GRANTS

INDIGENOUS FOOD SYSTEMS AND AGRICULTURE: PROVINCE OF MANITOBA

https://www.gov.mb.ca/scap/indigenousagri/indigenous-food-systems.html

Timeline: Closed January 30th, 2025, stay tuned for future intakes

Purpose of Fund: Enhance food security and sovereignty, revitalize traditional food systems, build skills and resources, adapt to climate change, increase indigenous involvement in Manitoba's agriculture

Eligible Applicants: All Indigenous groups including business and organizations, communities, government, primary producers, other Indigenous led groups undertaking agricultural initiatives.

Amount, Project Timeline:

- Enhancing Indigenous Food Systems: 100% reimbursement max $200,000. Projects have up to 22 months to complete
- Planning + Consulting: 100% government funding to a maximum contribution of $80,000
- Training and Resource Development: 100% government funding to a maximum contribution of $10,000
- Capital Equipment + Software: 50 per cent government and 50 per cent applicant to a maximum contribution of $50,000 per project.

Types of Projects, Activities: Enhancing Indigenous food systems, planning + consulting, training and resource development, capital equipment and software.

Application Process: Program intakes are typically open for four (4) to six (6) calendar weeks.
The application process typically requires two forms: an Applicant Information Form, and an Application Worksheet.

Additional Notes / Project Ideas:

1. Develop demonstration plots and larger agricultural spaces that grow drought-tolerant, native food crops (e.g., prairie turnip, wild onion, sunchoke, corn varieties, beans). Install soil moisture sensors, weather stations, and composting systems to collect data on environmental conditions, yields, and soil health over time. Use this data for both academic research and traditional knowledge integration, shared through workshops with students and community.
2. Create a dedicated teaching and processing space (or retrofit an existing one) where Elders, harvesters, and land-based educators can teach youth and community members about traditional harvesting, growing, seed saving, processing, and preservation (drying, smoking, fermenting), and technologies/tools. Programming can rotate seasonally, with school participation built into the curriculum.
3. Designate parcels of land as protected or semi-managed zones for harvesting wild food (berries, medicines, game, fish).
4. Establish community trade centre program where community members can trade, sell, and purchase locally harvested or cultivated foods (including wild foods, traditional medicines, or farmed goods).
5. Create a seed bank focused on native and traditionally grown crops. Include a lab/research space for cataloging varietal differences, germination rates, and environmental suitability. Partner with schools, farmers, and Elders to preserve seed lineages and ensure community control of genetic resources.

Notes: Program Guide: https://www.gov.mb.ca/asset_library/en/scap/documents/iard-program-guide-food-systems-v02.0.pdf

ONTARIO AGRI-FOOD RESEARCH INITIATIVE - APPLIED RESEARCH

https://www.ontario.ca/page/ontario-agri-food-research-initiative

Timeline: Currently closed

Purpose of Fund: Provides funding for agri-food research and innovation projects in Ontario, which is a key pillar of the Grow Ontario Strategy.

Eligible Applicants: Municipal or Indigenous government or government agency are eligible.

Amount, Project Timeline:

1. Applied research: max $150,000
2. Pilot and demonstration: max $150,000
3. Knowledge translation and transfer: $50,000
4. Commercialization: not disclosed

Types of Projects, Activities: Applied research, pilot and demonstration, knowledge translation and transfer, commercialization.

Application Process: Apply through the research management system.

Additional Notes / Project Ideas:

1. Partner with Elders, harvesters, and researchers to revitalize traditional manoomin (wild rice) harvesting and processing techniques, while exploring new low-impact, small-scale technologies for de-hulling and packaging. The project could include research into best cultivation conditions in local lakes, ecological monitoring, and testing market potential for packaged, Nation-branded wild rice products.
2. Community-based greenhouse equipped with monitoring tools to test different growing systems (e.g., hydroponics, aquaponics, passive solar heating) and identify resilient, nutrient-dense crops suited to the Treaty 3 climate. Youth and community members could participate in growing, recording, and analyzing data, linking science with local needs.

Notes: OAFRI is jointly funded by the Governments of Canada and Ontario under the Sustainable Canadian Agricultural Partnership (Sustainable CAP), a five-year federal-provincial-territorial initiative

MANITOBA CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENT: AGROFORESTRY

https://www.manitoba.ca/scap/climatechange/carbonsequestration/agroforestry.html

Timeline: Currently closed

Purpose of Fund: Promote the establishment of shelterbelts and tree plantings.

Eligible Applicants: Indigenous primary producers and communities, including First Nations, Metis, and Inuit Primary producers. All projects must be on agricultural land, and participating farmers must have a valid Environmental Farm Plan Statement of Completion.

Amount, Project Timeline: Eligible applicants can be reimbursed for up to 75 per cent of total approved eligible costs, to a maximum of $15,000 per project.

Types of Projects, Activities:

1. Establishment of shelterbelts or tree buffers for farmyard, livestock facilities and fields
2. Planting of trees/shrubs on marginal or high-risk cropland
3. Silvopasture (the deliberate integration of trees and grazing livestock on the same land)"

Application Process: Complete Applicant Form and Worksheet

Additional Notes / Project Ideas:

1. Develop block tree and shrub plantings along key drainage routes and seasonal creeks within or near agricultural areas to filter runoff, reduce erosion, and retain water on the land. Engage youth in GIS mapping and site monitoring to track impacts on sediment reduction, nutrient loading, and biodiversity return over time
2. Design and implement shelterbelts using native trees and shrubs that hold cultural and medicinal significance (e.g., birch, cedar, poplar, highbush cranberry)

Notes: OAFRI is jointly funded by the Governments of Canada and Ontario under the Sustainable Canadian Agricultural Partnership (Sustainable CAP), a five-year federal-provincial-territorial initiative

MANITOBA CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENT: GRASSLANDS AND GRAZING MANAGEMENT

https://www.manitoba.ca/scap/climatechange/carbonsequestration/grasslands-and-grazing-management.html

Timeline: Currently closed

Purpose of Fund: Implement grasslands and grazing management.

Eligible Applicants: Indigenous primary producers and communities, including FN, Metis, and Inuit.

Amount, Project Timeline: Eligible applicants can be reimbursed for up to 75 per cent of total approved eligible costs, to a maximum of $15,000 per project.

Types of Projects, Activities:

1. Input from a knowledgeable professional create a grazing management plan
2. Rotational grazing infrastructure
3. Conversion of marginal and high risk annual cropland to permanent grasslands
4. Increase in the composition of alfalfa or other locally adapted and persistent nitrogen fixing perennial legumes in pasture and hay to at least 30 per cent of the forage

Application Process: Applicant form and worksheet

Additional Notes / Project Ideas:

1. Pilot a rotational grazing system that incorporates strategically fenced-off riparian buffer zones along waterways, allowing degraded streambanks to recover and native species to reestablish. Grazing is timed and rotated to improve soil health and plant regrowth
2. Establish a network of traditional and modern demonstration gardens that explore the use of composting, biochar, and natural mulching to improve nutrient and water retention. Use this as a site for testing soil quality, experimenting with Indigenous and non-Indigenous crops, and offering workshops for community members

FIRST NATIONS AGRICULTURE AND FINACE ONTARIO - BEGINNER FARMER PROGRAM

https://www.firstnationsag.ca/beginning-farmers-program/

Timeline: Closed, last intake appears to be 2023

Purpose of Fund: Support new beginning First Nations farmers between the ages of 16 and 40 through all stage of farm business startup. BFP supports the creation, development and investment in the new farm businesses. The program has two distinct areas of focus: 1. Workshops and Training;, 2. Start-Up Financing.

Eligible Applicants: Be First Nations with Registered Status, be between the age of 16 and 40 years old and reside in Ontario; not have owned or operated a significant farm business previously.

Amount, Project Timeline: On approved projects, financing of up to $50,000 is available with Grants – 30% up to a maximum of $15,000.
Types of Projects, Activities: Financing for their new farm business. Eligible costs include livestock, equipment, machinery, materials, inputs, building costs, storage, etc.
Application Process: Complete the contact form.
Additional Notes / Project Ideas: Share this opportunity with new First Nation farmers in Treaty#3.

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES RESILIENCE FUND

https://www.iprfund.ca/
Timeline: Last intake closed on March 28, 2025
Purpose of Fund: Indigenous Peoples Resilience Fund (IPRF) supports projects that foster and support long-term, holistic approaches to community wellness and resilience.
Eligible Applicants: Indigenous-led and serving organizations
Amount, Project Timeline: $100,000
Types of Projects, Activities:

- Transferring traditional knowledge through land-based learning;
- Strengthening community connectivity;
- Supporting mental health and spiritual wellness through ceremony;
- Fostering cultural programming;
- Reclaiming food sovereignty, and;
- Stewarding the land and water for future generations.

Application Process: Apply through the online application form.
Additional Notes / Project Ideas: Cultural programming and land-based learning at the food hubs in each of the four directions.

GOVERNMENT OF MANITOBA AGRICULTURE GRANTS

https://www.gov.mb.ca/scap/intake-information.html
Timeline: Various dates

LOANS AND OTHER SUPPORTS

BEEF FARMERS OF ONTARIO - ONTARIO BEEF BREEDER CO-OPERATIVE PROGRAM

https://ontariobusinessgrants.com/loans/beef-farmers-of-ontario-bfo-ontario-beef-breeder-co-operative-program/

Timeline: Ongoing, rolling deadline

Purpose of Fund: Eight co-ops have been formed in various regions of the province to provide members with loans to purchase beef breeding females.

Eligible Applicants:

- Applicants must be individuals who are least 18 years of age and who are landowners or who rent land, or are voting shareholders in partnerships or corporations owning land in Ontario.
- Be members of the right co-ops providing funding
- Have a purchase order for beef breeding females.

Amount, Project Timeline: After becoming a member, producer applies for a purchase order for the amount of anticipated breeding livestock purchase, loan of $75,000+ depending on the co-operative. Most loans payable over 5 years.

Types of Projects, Activities: Purchasing beef breeding females.

Application Process: 1. Apply to the co-ops, 2. Apply for a purchase order for the amount of anticipated breeding female purchase

Additional Notes / Project Ideas: Share with beef farms in Treaty 3 who may be interested.

FARM CREDIT CANADA - INDIGENOUS AGRICULTURE AND FOOD

https://ontariobusinessgrants.com/loans/farm-credit-canada-fcc-indigenous-agriculture-and-food/

Timeline: Ongoing, rolling deadline

Purpose of Fund: On and off-reserve financing and resources to Indigenous entrepreneurs, economic development corporations and First Nations communities. In addition to agriculture activities, FCC has also expanded their eligibility to include traditional Indigenous harvesting from natural sources.

Eligible Applicants: Indigenous entrepreneurs, economic development corporations and First Nations communities on and off-reserve; performing agriculture activities, including traditional Indigenous harvesting from natural sources.

Amount, Project Timeline: Loan of no fixed amount. The applicant will pay interest and other fees, if applicable.

Types of Projects, Activities: Agriculture activtiies, traditional harvesting activities.

Application Process: Applicants must contact FCC representative for details: https://www.fcc-fac.ca/en/about-fcc/contact

Additional Notes / Project Ideas: Share with beef farms in Treaty 3 who may be interested.

ONTARIO GROW ACCELERATOR HUB VIA ONTARIO AGRI-FOOD INITATIVE

https://bioenterprise.ca/innovators/grow-ontario-accelerator-hub-goah/

Timeline: Open as of February 2025: Continuous intake until reach capacity

Purpose of Fund: Provides agri-food business supports that enable more solutions and technologies to be brought to market by providing:

- Mentoring and advisory services
- Growth planning
- Investment readiness.

Eligible Applicants: Municipal or indigenous government or government agencies. Be operating in the agriculture, agri-food, and agri-based products sectors.

Amount, Project Timeline: Does not provide direct funding but provides supports for mentorship.

Types of Projects, Activities:

1. Food Safety
2. Animal Health & Welfare
3. Plant Health + Protection
4. Soil Health
5. Water Quality + Quantity
6. Sustainable Production Systems
7. Productive Land Capacity
8. Competitive Production Systems
9. Innovative Products and Product Improvement
10. Trade Market + Targeted Sector Growth Opportunities

Application Process:

1. Sign into the Bioenterprise website: Companies that have existing accounts with Bioenterprise must sign into the Bioenterprise website
2. Apply for the initiative through the portal."

Additional Notes / Project Ideas: Identify locally developed traditional or modern technology within Nations. Connect with mentors to harness those technologies.

Summary of North Region Engagement

Food Sovereignty Project – Grand Council Treaty #3

Introduction

Grand Council Treaty #3 is conducting a pre-feasibility study to assess barriers to food access and to create an action plan for food sovereignty. We are working with communities to identify a path towards food futures that connects to the cultural, economic, environmental, and social aspects of food systems.

For Treaty #3 territory, food sovereignty development will aid communities in increasing access to fresh and cultural foods and reduce reliance on medical and emergency food systems experienced by Indigenous communities in the region. At the same time, this project will inform the process of rebuilding Anishinaabe foodways on the seasonal round, with food economies built on regional cooperation and trade. In the pre-feasibility study, a literature review will be conducted, and barriers that Treaty #3 communities are facing in reclaiming food sovereignty will be identified in collaboration with the five Councils. This research will direct us in carrying out community engagements and key interviews in each of the Four Directions of Treaty #3. A Food Sovereignty Action Plan report will be delivered, which will include all collected materials, community-driven next steps and analysis, and resources for the next phases of the food sovereignty revitalization strategy.

The project's approach is shaped by key questions, guiding values, and main deliverables, detailed below:

Key questions

- Which communities are strategically positioned for facilitating access to food resources for neighboring communities?
- Which communities face the greatest challenges in accessing food resources?

Key guiding values

- Four Directional Governance Model
- Community leadership
- Data sovereignty

Main project deliverables

- Research: literature review, framework development
- Engagements with each of the Councils: Youth, Elders, Men, Women, LGBTQ2S

- Engagements with each of the four directions: North, South, East, West
- Interviews
- Regional maps that include current food access and opportunities
- Food sovereignty Action Plan

Engagement Summary

This engagement took place on February 20th, 2025, at the Centre of Excellence in Niisaachewan Anishinaabe Nation and included Elders and local community members from Niisaachewan and neighboring communities. This engagement represented the North Region and was the last of four engagements in each of the four cardinal directions, following GCT#3's Four Directional Governance model. The engagement saw approximately fifteen (15) people in attendance, including GCT3 staff, members of Council, and drummers.

The engagement focused on a series of questions that aimed to identify community strengths in the North Region, as well as the largest hurdles to overcome. The major questions asked were:

- What does food sovereignty mean to you?
- What does traditional food mean to you?
- What barriers are there to accessing food in your community?
- What opportunities are available for accessing food in your community?
- What is the route and distance you need to travel to obtain food? (Mapping exercise)

What does Food Sovereignty mean to you?

Food sovereignty is deeply tied to the understanding that food is a way of life, intrinsically connected to water, memory, and tradition, where bodies inherently recognize what should be eaten. It involves increasing local food production capacity, such as expanding greenhouse infrastructure **and building raised planting beds, although these require ongoing maintenance.** Having the skills to cook and utilize local foods is essential to fully realizing food sovereignty. Traditional knowledge plays a crucial role in this process, with practices like using tobacco to communicate with the land about necessary medicines.

Food sovereignty also intersects with international politics, where tariffs and trade policies can hinder local food systems, making it imperative to strengthen local capacity and resilience. Laws protecting traditional medicines and species are critical, particularly for plants and seeds cultivated by Indigenous communities, such as manoomin (wild rice), which has been subject to commercialization by external entities. Medicines are not limited to plants but encompass all living things, reinforcing the need for sustainable harvesting limits and land management practices, including regulated trapping cycles.

The cost of living directly impacts food security, making access to nutritious, locally sourced food — such as blueberries and other traditional staples — a priority. A blueberry farm was mentioned in direct relation to this notion. Equitable food distribution is fundamental, ensuring that food is shared within the community rather than pursued through an individualistic approach. Balanced food allocation requires a strategic process, and the potential role of food hubs in facilitating fair distribution must be explored to maintain community-centered food systems.

What does traditional food mean to you?

The dialogue on traditional foods focused on several pre-colonial practices, highlighting the importance of harvested, wild, and natural foods. The interrelationship between the land and non-processed foods and medicines is central to the health and well-being of the Anishinaabe peoples of Treaty #3 land.

The consumption of foods before colonization was both physically and spiritually nourishing, carrying cultural significance tied to family practices and generational sharing that evokes deep memories among those who continue these practices. Traditional practices of food and medicine gathering also centered sustainability and respect for nature and wildlife, with nothing wasted in the process.

Many foods were listed as traditional, including a variety of naturally occurring and locally harvested foods that have nourished communities for centuries, such as blueberries, cranberries, saskatoons, and chokecherries, which provide essential nutrients and hold cultural significance. Manoomin, or wild rice, is a staple food with spiritual and ecological importance, requiring careful stewardship to ensure its sustainability. Protein sources like rabbit, moose, and fish — including trout, whitefish, and walleye — are vital to traditional diets,

reflecting a respectful relationship with the land and water. Nuts such as hazelnuts further enrich this diet, offering essential fats and energy.

Traditional food is more than sustenance; it is a way of life that embodies reciprocity, balance, and a deep respect for the natural world, reinforcing the importance of protecting and maintaining access to these foods for future generations.

What barriers are there for accessing food in your community?

Accessing food in the community is challenged by both environmental and systemic barriers, making traditional food cultivation and harvesting difficult. Soil fertility and depth are significant concerns, as much of the land consists of rock and granite, limiting areas suitable for growing food. Historically, gardens thrived in low-lying areas where soil conditions were ideal, but dam construction led to widespread flooding, destroying these fertile lands and leaving little viable space for reestablishing gardens.

Concerns about blastomycosis, a disease caused by a fungus found in the soil of the Lake of the Woods region, further discourage food production. Invasive species, particularly aquatic ones like zebra mussels and foreign bait species, threaten local ecosystems, yet there are no boat washdown stations to mitigate their spread.

Transportation barriers and high food prices make it difficult for many to access nutritious food, exacerbating food insecurity. The issue extends beyond sustenance to health and well-being, as food connects to medicine and traditional healing practices, which often contrast with Western medicine's approach to health.

The broader conversation around food security requires a holistic view, yet limited capacity and resources make it overwhelming to address long-term solutions. Federal funding cuts and inconsistent financial support make it nearly impossible to develop sustainable food initiatives, as feasibility cannot be properly assessed within short funding cycles. Additionally, industrial forestry operations continue to destroy critical habitats for wildlife and traditional medicines, further disrupting the balance necessary for food sovereignty and ecosystem health.

What opportunities are available for accessing food in your community?

There are numerous opportunities to improve food access in the community by strengthening local food systems, economic development, education, and sustainable resource management. Establishing relationships with local grocers could help provide both market access for locally produced food and a way to redistribute food that would otherwise be discarded.

Sourcing food locally reduces costs and ensures that money stays within the community, though strategies must be developed to ensure equitable distribution. Economic initiatives such as cannabis production and seed banks present opportunities for self-sufficiency and revenue generation, while the protection of natural water sources, like springs, is essential for long-term food security.

Traditional foods could be sold in restaurants and hotels, increasing visibility and economic viability, while a dedicated composting area could support local food production. Mandatory boat wash stations would help prevent the spread of invasive species, protecting aquatic food sources.

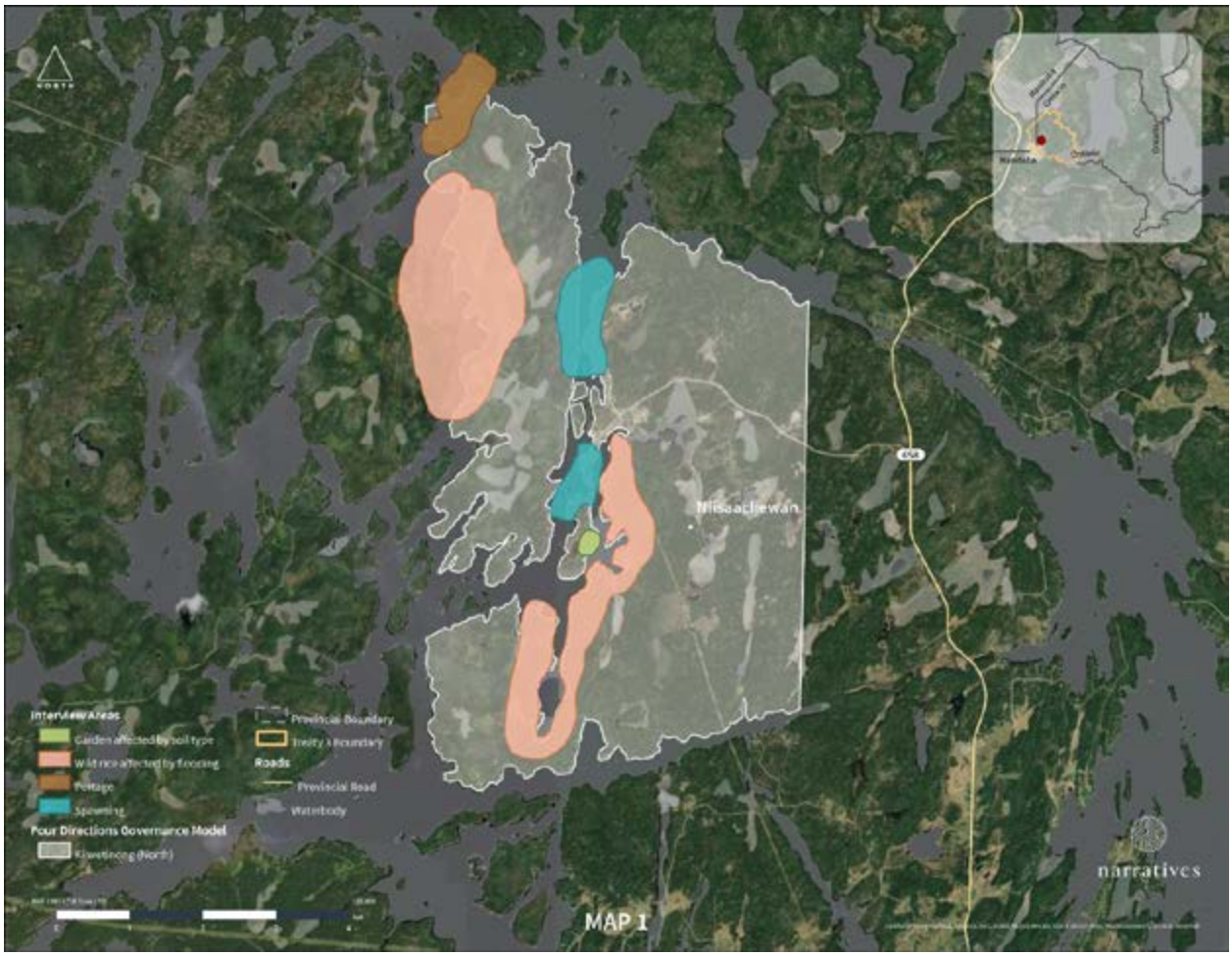
Addressing transportation barriers through shuttle services to grocery stores or establishing a small community store with essential goods would improve food accessibility. Kenora currently acts as a hub for surrounding communities, but a long-term solution could involve a dedicated local food center, possibly at the firehall or band office.

Education and skill-building in farming, food production, and processing, including packaging and smoking facilities, would enhance local food sovereignty. Fishing could be integrated into a rotational harvesting system among communities to allow land and water sources to rest and regenerate.

Expanding trade beyond monetary transactions, strengthening food banks through different funding sources, and passing down traditional food knowledge through hands-on experience are all vital steps toward a resilient food system. Programs that teach youth about seasonal harvesting, food preservation, and the use of traditional medicines like sage could be incorporated into schools and camps, similar to existing initiatives in Kenora and Lac Seul.

Learning from other agricultural models, such as the Hutterites and Middle Lake Farm, could provide valuable insights into sustainable food production. Community-wide seasonal feasts would reinforce food as a means of gathering and strengthening relationships, while youth-focused initiatives could create long-term cultural and health benefits. The return of the moose population, potentially linked to forest fire activity, also presents an opportunity to monitor and manage traditional food sources. Seasonal donation programs, such as Christmas hampers through KCA and other networks, further highlight the importance of collaboration in addressing food security.

Mapping Exercise



The Narratives team met with a community member who shared insights on current fish spawning areas, as well as former wild rice beds and garden sites. He emphasized that the wild rice beds are no longer sustainable in the long term — despite initial growth, they are eventually drowned out by rising water levels or disrupted by boat wakes.

He also described how gardens once maintained along a specific shoreline have now become islands due to rising water levels caused by dam construction. Additionally, he noted that the dams flooded low-lying areas that were once ideal for gardening. The community member further suggested a possible connection between Jackfish (pike) spawning areas and the locations of wild rice beds.

Key Takeaways

Food Sovereignty

- Deeply tied to land, water, memory, and tradition.
- Requires increasing local food production capacity (e.g., greenhouses, traditional food growing and farms).
- Emphasizes traditional knowledge, including using tobacco for land communication.

- Impacted by trade policies and the commercialization of Indigenous foods (e.g., wild rice).
- Calls for stronger laws protecting traditional medicines and sustainable harvesting.
- Highlights the need for equitable food distribution and community-centered food hubs.

Traditional Foods

- Pre-colonial diets emphasized sustainability and non-processed, locally harvested foods.
- Key foods include blueberries, cranberries, saskatoons, chokecherries, wild rice, fish (trout, walleye, whitefish), moose, rabbit, and hazelnuts.
- Food is more than sustenance — it embodies reciprocity, balance, and respect for nature.

Barriers to Food Access

- Poor soil quality and loss of fertile land due to flooding from dam construction.
- Invasive species (e.g., zebra mussels) threaten local ecosystems.
- High food prices and transportation challenges limit access to nutritious food.
- Lack of funding and inconsistent financial support hinder sustainable food initiatives.
- Industrial forestry disrupts wildlife habitats and traditional medicine sources.

Opportunities for Improvement

- Strengthening relationships with local grocers to reduce waste and support local markets.
- Expanding economic initiatives (e.g., seed banks, cannabis production).
- Establishing a community food hub, possibly at the firehall or band office.
- Implementing mandatory boat wash stations to protect aquatic food sources.
- Enhancing education on farming, food preservation, and traditional food practices.
- Developing rotational harvesting systems and sustainable wildlife management.
- Increasing youth engagement through seasonal harvesting programs and school initiatives.
- Learning from other agricultural models (e.g., Hutterites, Middle Lake Farm).

Conclusion

This engagement highlights the importance of community-driven solutions to food sovereignty, with an emphasis on strengthening local food systems, protecting the environment, and ensuring equitable access to traditional foods. The insights gathered will inform the next steps in revitalizing food sovereignty in Treaty #3 communities.

Summary of East Region Engagement

Food Sovereignty Project – Grand Council Treaty #3

Introduction

Grand Council Treaty #3 is conducting a pre-feasibility study to assess barriers to food access and to create an action plan for food sovereignty. We are working with communities to identify a path towards food futures that connects to the cultural, economic, environmental, and social aspects of food systems. For Treaty #3 territory, food sovereignty development will aid communities in increasing access to fresh and cultural foods and reduce reliance on medical and emergency food systems experienced by Indigenous communities in the region. At the same time, this project will inform the process of rebuilding Anishinaabe foodways on the seasonal round, with food economies built on regional cooperation and trade. In the pre-feasibility study, a literature review will be conducted and barriers that Treaty #3 communities are facing in reclaiming food sovereignty will be identified in collaboration with the five Councils. This research will direct us in carrying out community engagements and key interviews in each of the Four Directions of Treaty #3. A Food Sovereignty Action Plan report will be delivered, which will include all collected materials, community-driven next steps and analysis, and resources for the next phases of the food sovereignty revitalization strategy.

The project is guided by key questions, core values, and deliverables, detailed below:

Key questions

- Which communities are strategically positioned for facilitating access to food resources for neighboring communities?
- Which communities face the greatest challenges in accessing food resources?

Key guiding values

- Four Directional Governance Model
- Community leadership
- Data sovereignty

Main project deliverables

- Research: literature review, framework development
- Engagements with each of the Councils: Youth, Elders, Men, Women, LGBTQ2S

- Engagements with each of the four directions: North, South, East, West
- Interviews
- Regional maps that include current food access and opportunities
- Food sovereignty Action Plan

Engagement Summary

This engagement took place on September 19th, 2024 and included Elders and local community members from Eagle Lake as well as those from other eastern region nations and nearby communities, along with local stakeholders. This engagement represented the East Region and was the first of four engagements in each of the four cardinal directions, following Treaty #3's Four Directional Governance Model. The engagement saw approximately 20-25 people in attendance including Treaty #3 staff, Eagle Lake Chief Bernadette Wabange, members of Council, drummers, a member of a local food sovereignty organization, and members of local provincial government operating out of nearby Dryden.

The engagement focused on a series of questions that looked to answer where communities and eastern regions strengths lay, as well as what the largest hurdles to overcome are. Major questions asked where the following:

- What does food sovereignty mean to you?
- What does traditional food mean to you?
- What barriers are there to accessing food in your community?
- What opportunities are available for accessing food in your community?
- What is the route and distance you need to travel to obtain food? (mapping exercise)

What does food sovereignty mean to you?

The term "food sovereignty" was new for some participants but represented a concept many deeply understood from lived experience. Participants emphasized that reclaiming control over traditional lands is essential for achieving the freedom to determine and manage their own food systems. Another theme was the decolonization of food systems through the return to traditional food knowledge, crops, and methods, while integrating sustainability and reciprocity in food practices.

Participants discussed the protection of resources, ensuring food security through equitable access and distribution, and the importance of strong community management that emphasizes mentorship and passing on food traditions to future generations.

What does traditional food mean to you?

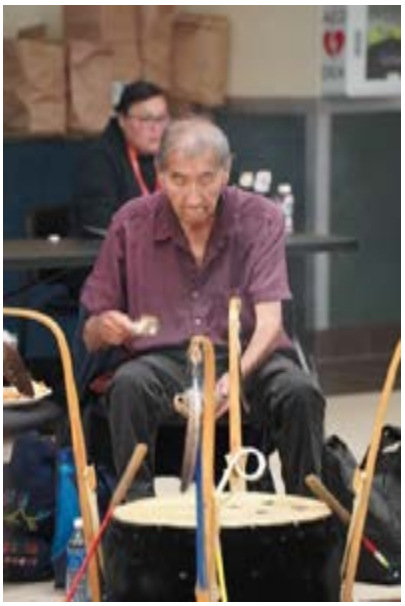
The dialogue on traditional foods focused on several pre-colonial practices, highlighting the importance of harvested, wild, and natural foods. The interrelationship between the land and non-processed foods and medicines is central to the health and well-being of the Anishinaabe peoples of Treaty #3 land. The consumption of foods before colonization was both physically and spiritually nourishing, carrying cultural significance tied to family practices and generational sharing that evokes deep memories among those who continue these practices. Traditional practices of food and medicine gathering also centered sustainability and respect for nature and wildlife, with nothing wasted in the process. Many foods were listed as traditional, including wild game (moose, beaver, deer), fish, wild rice, berries, and mushrooms.

What barriers are there for accessing food in your community?

The barriers to accessing food for community members fall under seven major interrelated categories:

1. High Costs – Food prices are rising, partially due to increased transportation costs and the rising costs of agricultural inputs.
2. Limited Food Availability – Many grocery stores have bare shelves, especially in winter, and there are limited local food options due to a scarcity of grocery stores.
3. Transportation Challenges – Long distances, lack of transportation options, high fuel costs, and poor road and trail conditions make accessing food difficult.
4. Personal Health and Physical Mobility – Traditional food sources also pose barriers to many community members due to health or mobility limitations.
5. Environmental Factors – Changing seasons, unpredictable weather, and the disappearance or migration of species (wild game, berries) create challenges for hunting, foraging, and accessing traditional foods.

6. Industrial and External Pressures – Control over one's own lands is a major barrier, impacted by non-Indigenous industries, forestry practices, and heavy pesticide use, which damage the environment and force communities to rely on outside food sources.
7. Labor and Funding Issues – Limited staff, labour constraints, and challenges in managing grants or securing funding make it difficult to maintain and expand local food systems.


What opportunities are available for accessing food in your community?

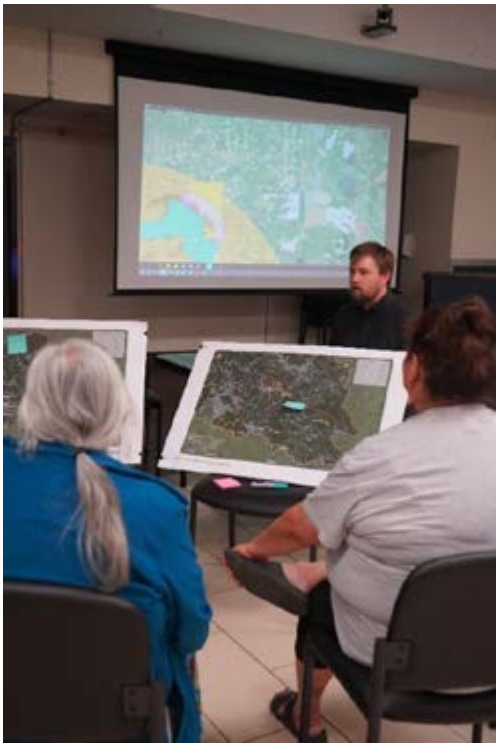
Many opportunities for improving food access in Treaty #3 communities were shared at the engagement. Participants suggested that education through community workshops, school programs, and nutrition knowledge sharing could help rebuild community foodways and provide opportunities to learn skills in healthy food and land-based practices. These activities also have potential to build community capacity and connect generations, reintegrating traditional foods and land-based practices into daily life.

Developing community infrastructure—including gardens, root cellars, chicken coops, hoop houses, communal food processing sites, and commercial kitchens—is of interest and requires further research. These projects could be funded through diverse funding streams and by integrating food infrastructure into other community plans and grant proposals to support long-term food sovereignty efforts.

Participants emphasized leveraging communal resources such as trap lines, surplus land, and specialized community skills to improve food access through trade and inter-community collaboration. They also discussed integrating clean energy technologies into agricultural practices as a way to adopt future innovations rather than reject them entirely. These methods were viewed as opportunities to enhance resource sharing and food production while adapting to a changing climate and supporting self-determination and food sovereignty in Treaty #3.

Mapping exercise

The mapping exercise station was primarily used to identify routes to both traditional and colonial food sources, helping to visualize the geographic barriers to food access. During this exercise, participants shared additional insights and themes. A primary concern was that colonial land use practices are creating tensions around traditional food gathering and processing. Dam operations at Eagle River and Rainy River significantly affect wild rice and manoomin production, as communities have no control over water flows and face major impacts. Pesticide spraying in commercial forestry, the spread of invasive species, and climate change all pose significant ecological challenges. Another barrier identified was the distance to current food hubs and associated costs, as reliance on air transportation for communities inaccessible by road during certain seasons significantly drives up food prices.



Key Takeaways

1. Barriers to food sovereignty in the East Region include three major themes: high costs and a lack of economic power to overcome these costs; limited sovereignty and external control over traditional lands; and environmental changes affecting traditional food systems.

2. Elders and community members already have a clear understanding of the steps needed to regain food sovereignty in Treaty #3, but a lack of sustainable capital and jurisdictional power is preventing these changes from being realized.

3. Participants called for government support through funding, jurisdictional changes, and increased sovereignty over their lands as solutions to barriers that communities cannot overcome solely through internal strength.

Conclusion

The engagement highlighted the barriers community members face today as well as the strengths that traditional food systems can offer. Community members and local stakeholders stressed the importance of preserving and carrying forward traditional knowledge through non-colonial food systems, especially in the face of rising costs and environmental impacts. Next steps for the project include:

- Conducting three more engagements across the other regions in Treaty #3 territory: North, West, and South
- Organizing virtual sessions with Grand Council Treaty #3's five councils: Men's, Women's, Youth, Elder, and LGBTQ2S respectively
- Conducting follow-up virtual interviews with councils
- Finalizing the literature review
- Completing the Food Sovereignty Action Plan as a final deliverable

Lac Seul Engagement

Food Sovereignty Project – Grand Council Treaty #3

1.1 Introduction

Grand Council Treaty #3 is conducting a pre-feasibility study to assess barriers to food access and to create an action plan for food sovereignty. We are working with communities to identify a path towards food futures that connects to the cultural, economic, environmental, and social aspects of food systems.

1.2 Engagement

The sixth and final engagement session took place in Lac Seul on April 22nd, 2025. Thirteen participants attended. This engagement session aimed to gather knowledge from community members and producers to better understand barriers and opportunities for food sovereignty in Treaty #3 territory. Participants were invited to share:

- What does food sovereignty mean to you?
- What does traditional food mean to you?
- What barriers are there to accessing food in your community?
- What opportunities are available for accessing food in your community?

1.3 Key Takeaways

Barriers

Transportation challenges: Participants from Lac Seul highlighted several structural and systemic challenges to achieving food sovereignty. Transportation remains a major barrier, as community members without access to vehicles face high travel costs, with cab fares to nearby towns like Sioux Lookout reaching up to $90–$100 each way. The lack of consistent, reliable transportation services means some residents resort to hitchhiking, regardless of weather or safety concerns. These issues are tied to broader problems around underfunded transportation infrastructure, including the need for drivers, insurance, and policy support.

Limited local food options: While two community stores operate under the “Fresh Market” brand, they often prioritize non-Indigenous consumers and tourism over meeting the food needs of community members.

Loss of traditional harvesting areas: Access to traditional harvesting areas has been disrupted by infrastructure like the Ear Falls dam, which has changed fishing access and availability.

Legal and regulatory restrictions: Additionally, legal restrictions prevent local butchers from selling red meat, undermining opportunities for community-based food economies.

Opportunities

Reclaiming traditional foodways: Community members emphasized the importance of reclaiming traditional foodways as central to food sovereignty, prioritizing healthy and culturally grounded foods over processed alternatives.

Community-led enterprises: There is growing momentum for community-led initiatives, including a local culinary graduate’s efforts to launch a cooperative business from home that reflects Indigenous values and food traditions.

Local food production infrastructure: Participants expressed interest in reviving opportunities for local food production, such as building greenhouses, an initiative previously stalled due to energy limitations.

Education and skills development: Integrating food sovereignty into education was also seen as key. Ideas included high school programming to teach gardening, tool-making, and traditional processing skills like moose butchering for food and hides.

Food Hubs

The role of food hubs in improving access and affordability was recognized, though concerns were raised that oversight is currently centralized, with only one person managing all Treaty #3 food hubs. Participants underscored the need for locally responsive food systems,

supported by regional infrastructure but rooted in each community's specific needs. With appropriate investments and local leadership, food hubs were seen as vehicles to reduce prices, increase food security, and support culturally relevant food practices across Treaty #3.

1.4 Conclusion

This engagement offered critical insights into the challenges and aspirations shaping food sovereignty in Lac Seul. Community members clearly articulated the need for improved infrastructure, policy reform, and stronger local control over food systems. Their ideas emphasized self-determination through education, traditional practices, and community-led enterprise. These contributions will be instrumental in guiding the development of a Treaty #3-wide food sovereignty strategy grounded in equity, cultural revitalization, and regional collaboration through food hubs.

Couchiching Engagement

Food Sovereignty Project – Grand Council Treaty #3

1.1 Introduction

Grand Council Treaty #3 is conducting a pre-feasibility study to assess barriers to food access and to create an action plan for food sovereignty. We are working with communities to identify a path towards food futures that connects to the cultural, economic, environmental, and social aspects of food systems.

1.2 Engagement

The sixth and final engagement session took place in Couchiching on May 21st, 2025. Eight participants attended the session. This engagement session aimed to gather knowledge from community members and producers to better understand barriers and opportunities for food sovereignty in Treaty #3 territory. Participants were invited to share:

- What does food sovereignty mean to you?
- What does traditional food mean to you?
- What barriers are there to accessing food in your community?
- What opportunities are available for accessing food in your community?

1.3 Key Takeaways

Barriers

Environmental and regulatory impacts: Community members identified several interconnected barriers to food sovereignty. Historical flooding and damming, combined with restrictive regulations and permit processes under Treaty #3 and the Indian Act, have significantly limited traditional agricultural practices. The community noted the loss of once-prominent gardens and food lands, as well as the destruction of Treaty #3 farmland (such as the LOTW Treaty Farm) due to water level allowances.

Transportation challenges: Access to traditional food is further hindered by transportation issues; residents often face a one-hour walk to the grocery store without a safe pathway, and high prices at community-run stores create additional challenges.

Loss of traditional knowledge: A major barrier is the inconsistent and inaccessible transfer of traditional knowledge. Many community members lack basic knowledge of how to hunt, harvest, process, or preserve food, and don't know where to turn for support. The loss of intergenerational transmission has led to gaps in food-related skills, especially among youth.

Resource limitations: This is compounded by limited access to equipment and tools for food harvesting and processing.

Systemic barriers: The broader systemic issue remains — colonial systems continue to deter Indigenous self-determination in food and land matters.

Opportunities

Knowledge networks and education: Community members proposed practical and cultural solutions rooted in both tradition and innovation. There was strong support for creating a Treaty-wide food knowledge network, distinct from existing Elder or youth councils, composed of individuals who hold knowledge in gardening, plant and animal care, food processing, and harvesting. Participants emphasized the need for localized education and seasonal workshops on food skills, along with curriculum development for youth that includes foodways like maple syrup harvesting, wild rice processing, and traditional hunting.

Infrastructure and tools: Several tangible ideas were recommended, including seedbanks with Indigenous seeds, community root cellars, and a shared mobile tool and knowledge co-op — a trailer equipped with gardening and processing tools that would travel between communities.

Technology and mapping: An expansion of the Map Aki tool was also suggested, creating a community-facing, interactive map that includes food and medicine locations, oral histories, teachings, and multimedia uploads from youth and Elders.

Community programming and cultural revitalization: Members also supported ideas like daycare-based gardening programs, community gardens shaped like animals (e.g., eagles or turtles), and the revival of practices such as syrup tapping and sucker smoking.

Economic initiatives: Economic models such as community shareholders in food enterprises and a formalized trade network between communities were viewed as ways to revitalize food-based economies while aligning with traditional values.

Food Hubs

Participants viewed food hubs as crucial infrastructure to anchor regional food sovereignty efforts. Couchiching, due to its accessibility and connection to Fort Frances and the U.S. border, was identified as a strong candidate for a southern food hub. Food hubs were envisioned not only as logistical and distribution centers but also as educational and processing spaces, equipped for wild rice processing, fish smoking, syrup production, and cold storage.

Communities could specialize in specific foods, with a designated “trader” responsible for transporting their contributions to hubs and returning with goods from other communities. These food hubs could support a barter-based economy, foster ethical trade, and promote sovereignty through collective ownership. Certification programs were proposed (e.g. a Treaty #3 label for syrup or fish) to support ethical commerce rooted in cultural values.

Food hubs could also act as eco-cultural learning sites, hosting seasonal family camps, interpretive trails, and signage with teachings. These approaches reflect a strong desire to balance economic independence with cultural integrity and to ensure food sovereignty is guided by passionate, knowledgeable community members across Treaty #3.

1.4 Conclusion

This engagement provided valuable insight into food sovereignty priorities and challenges in Couchiching that will inform the pre-feasibility study for a Treaty #3-wide food hub network. Participants identified systemic and local barriers, such as loss of traditional food lands, limited knowledge transfer, and infrastructure gaps, that limit community self-reliance. They offered a range of solutions focused on restoring intergenerational knowledge, supporting localized food production, and strengthening trade between communities. These perspectives will guide the design of culturally grounded, community-led food systems across the territory.

West Engagement

Food Sovereignty Project – Grand Council Treaty #3

1.1 Introduction

Grand Council Treaty #3 is conducting a pre-feasibility study to assess barriers to food access and to create an action plan for food sovereignty. We are working with communities to identify a path towards food futures that connects to the cultural, economic, environmental, and social aspects of food systems.

1.2 West Engagement

The engagement session for the West Region took place in Shoal Lake 40 on January 30th, 2025. Twelve participants attended the session, primarily staff and community members from Shoal Lake 39 and 40. Chief Kevin Redsky greeted facilitators upon arrival, and Councillor Brenda Freel, who holds the Health and Social portfolio, participated in the session. This engagement session aimed to gather knowledge from community members and producers to better understand barriers and opportunities for food sovereignty in Treaty #3 territory. Participants were invited to share:

- What does food sovereignty mean to you?
- What does traditional food mean to you?
- What barriers are there to accessing food in your community?
- What opportunities are available for accessing food in your community?
- What is the route and distance you need to travel to obtain food? (Mapping Exercise)

1.3 Key Takeaways

Barriers

Colonial impacts on traditional food systems: Participants highlighted several barriers to food sovereignty, with the recurring theme being the failures of the colonial food system to meet needs that were previously met through traditional food practices.

Water management and wild rice: A major concern was the inability to consistently grow wild rice due to fluctuating water levels controlled by the Lake of the Woods Control Board, a joint federal-provincial body with little to no engagement with local communities regarding their needs.

Fisheries closures: Participants also noted the closure of local commercial fisheries by the government in the 1980s due to differing views on responsibility for the decline of whitefish populations.

Geographic isolation and transportation: Geographic isolation and transportation barriers were frequently raised, as community members rely heavily on transportation and face challenges with transportation equity, rising food costs, limited choices for nutritious food, and a local grocery store that is only open half the year.

Knowledge gaps: A lack of knowledge about food and nutrition, both from Western and traditional perspectives, was cited as another significant barrier, affecting household food preparation, local food processing, and agricultural production.

Broader systemic challenges: Compounding these issues are broader challenges, including environmental degradation, overhunting and overharvesting, mental health and addiction struggles, and government red tape.

Access to grocery stores: While the Nation has a small store on reserve, it only offers frozen and processed foods. Community members must travel to Kenora or Steinbach to access groceries, which is over an hour away by car. Although there is a community shuttle bus, only one family member per household is permitted to use it. The Falcon grocery store, approximately 30 km away and about a 30-minute drive, operates only during the summer months.

Opportunities

Community kitchen and garden initiatives: Community members discussed several promising opportunities for improving food sovereignty. The community kitchen and community garden were highlighted as important resources that provide food education, support meal preparation, and help reduce waste through seed-saving initiatives.

Entrepreneurship and economic development: Entrepreneurship and economic development were also areas of interest, as the community kitchen is seen as a potential hub for helping members launch food-based businesses and for developing a food bank centered around redistributing surplus or leftover food.

Knowledge exchange programs: Knowledge exchange programs were strongly emphasized, with participants advocating for systems that promote the sharing of information and skills between generations, between different nations, and between policymakers and community members.

Addressing geographical barriers: Addressing geographical barriers was another key topic, focusing on transporting those with the greatest need directly to sources of food. In this context, the local Hadishville strawberry farm plays an important role, offering opportunities to organize group outings for berry picking. Additionally, the grocery shuttle program helps community members travel to Kenora for groceries.

Food Hubs

Participants saw potential in developing food hubs as a way to harness and reduce food waste, particularly through methods like dehydration and other preservation techniques. The food hub could also function as a marketplace connected to local community gardens and go beyond traditional market roles by incorporating educational and workshop opportunities.

1.4 Conclusion

This engagement provided valuable insight into food sovereignty in Treaty #3 territory that will inform the development of a Food Sovereignty Action Plan. The group identified several systemic and environmental barriers limiting self-sufficiency and local food access, and shared solutions to strengthen traditional food practices, enhance community-led initiatives, and support sustainable food systems for future generations.

South Engagement

Food Sovereignty Project – Grand Council Treaty #3

1.1 Introduction

Grand Council Treaty #3 is conducting a pre-feasibility study to assess barriers to food access and to create an action plan for food sovereignty. We are working with communities to identify a path towards food futures that connects to the cultural, economic, environmental, and social aspects of food systems.

1.2 South Engagement

The engagement session for the South Region took place in Rainy River on November 7th, 2024. Twelve participants attended the session, including representatives from the Northwest Metis Council, Agritech North, Nigigoonsiminikaaning First Nation, Naicatchewenin First Nation, Couchiching First Nation, Big Grassy First Nation, and Rainy River First Nation. This engagement session aimed to gather knowledge from community members and producers to better understand barriers and opportunities for food sovereignty in Treaty #3 territory. Participants were invited to share:

- What does food sovereignty mean to you?
- What does traditional food mean to you?
- What barriers are there for accessing food in your community?
- What opportunities are available for accessing food in your community?
- What is the route and distance needed to travel for you to obtain food? (Mapping Exercise)

1.3 Key Takeaways

Barriers

Disconnection from traditional food systems: Participants highlighted several barriers to food sovereignty, noting the disconnect between traditional food practices and the capitalist food system.

Market and processing limitations: Members mentioned the closure of private distribution companies, the outsourcing of wild rice processing, and the monopolization of regional butcher shops by Safeway, which limits access to local food.

Land use restrictions: Members of Couchiching First Nation stated that permit restrictions have prevented the Nation from reclaiming traditional farmland.

Decline of community resources: Others noted that the decline of community-owned food resources, such as community gardens, has further weakened local food security.

Planning and governance challenges: Resource planning in Treaty #3 territory is complicated by the lack of population data, while government programs and engagement are inadequate, as they fail to address the unique needs of individual communities.

Opportunities

Ecotourism and economic initiatives: In exploring solutions for food sovereignty, community members discussed initiatives such as wild rice ecotourism, which offer economic opportunities while also supporting cultural revitalization and ecological stewardship.

Ending exploitative systems: There was also a strong emphasis on ending predatory relationships with food businesses to regain control over local food systems.

Knowledge and youth education: Participants emphasized the importance of fostering knowledge of cultural foodways and suggested creating educational programs to engage children in learning about cultural foods and traditional practices that incorporate food (e.g., hunting, gathering).

Agricultural support programs: The Ontario program for fodder production was identified as a potential resource to support sustainable agriculture.

Balancing economic and cultural priorities: However, an important ethical discussion emerged around whether food sovereignty efforts should align with traditional, pre-colonial models of communal sharing or whether generating revenue through these initiatives is a necessary step toward self-sufficiency. These conversations highlight the tension between economic independence and cultural values, underscoring the need for community-driven approaches that balance both priorities.

Food Hubs

Participants saw opportunities for food hubs to serve the region by acting as education centres, wild rice processing facilities, distribution centres, regional game abattoirs, apiaries, and storage facilities. Members provided a list of foods grown in the region, both historically and currently, that could be cultivated for sustenance through food hubs. Agritech North participants offered insights into which crops thrive in specific climates.

1.4 Conclusion

This engagement provided valuable insight into food sovereignty in Treaty #3 territory that will inform the development of a Food Sovereignty Action Plan. The group identified a number of systemic barriers limiting self-sufficiency and local economic control, and suggested solutions to reconnect communities with traditional food practices and sustain them for future generations.

GRAND COUNCIL
TREATY #3
The GOVERNMENT of THE ANISHINAABE NATION in TREATY #3