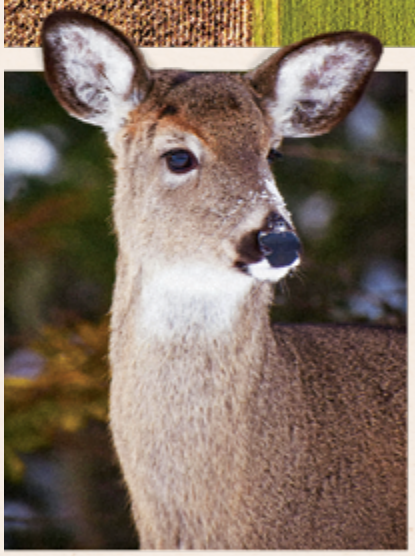




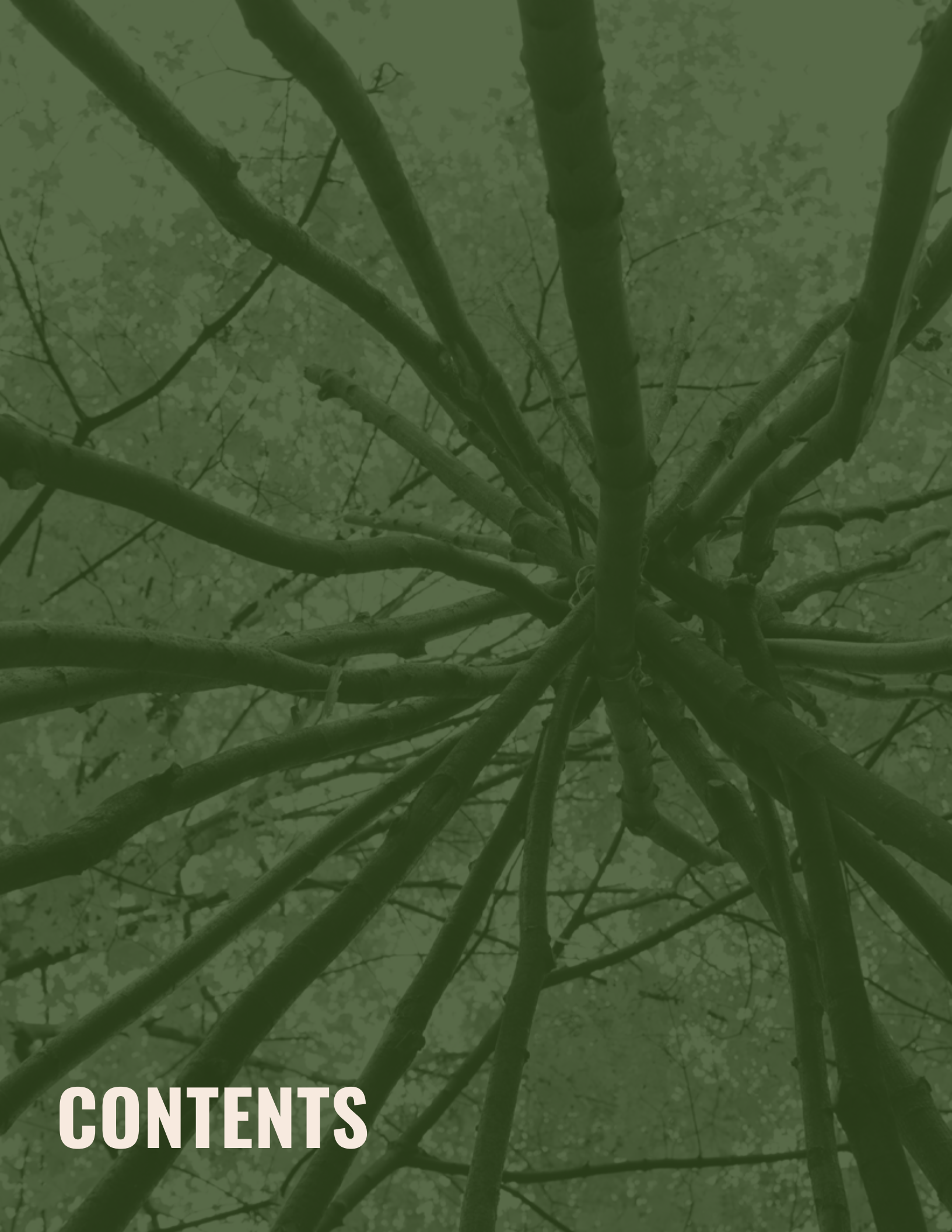



AGRI-FOOD ECONOMIC BLUEPRINT

GRAND COUNCIL TREATY #3

TREATY #3 INVESTMENT GROUP

GRAND COUNCIL TREATY #3



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In January 2026, Grand Council Treaty #3 initiated the development of a comprehensive Agri-Food Economic Blueprint to address gaps in youth education, training pathways, and development across the territory.

Building upon the 2025 Food Sovereignty Pre-Feasibility Study, this work was informed by direct community input gathered through background research, a community survey of 35 participants, and a focus group session held on February 17, 2026. Guided by the four-directional governance model of Treaty #3, the blueprint identifies how to bolster food security, enhance food production opportunities, and link food systems to cultural lifeways and local resources.

Community members spoke candidly about the challenges they face, including high food costs—cited by 97% of survey respondents—and a heavy reliance on commercial grocery stores that do not support local economic development. Participants identified significant barriers such as the loss of traditional practices (53%), high costs for harvesting equipment (47%), and a lack of cold or dry storage (29%). Systemic issues were also highlighted, including the impacts of colonization on health baselines, restrictive colonial policies, and environmental concerns regarding water contamination from mining and industry. Furthermore, while 80% of respondents are interested in agri-food positions, a "workforce portion" struggle exists due to a lack of technical training and applicant confidence.

Despite these hurdles, many community members identified opportunities to expand existing practices through climate-adaptive infrastructure and intergenerational knowledge sharing. Key priorities for expansion include:

- **Food Preservation and Processing:** 88% of participants want to expand canning, drying, and smoking, potentially through community-based processing hubs for butchery and roasting
- **Growing Infrastructure:** 79% support the use of greenhouses to mitigate climate change risks and extend short growing seasons, while others suggested hydroponics for year-round fresh food.
- **Cultural Foodways:** There is strong interest in revitalizing wild rice (manoomin) initiatives (74%), Indigenous seed saving (68%), and traditional hunting and fishing.

A central strategy identified in this work is the development of robust food distribution and governance models. Community members envisioned:

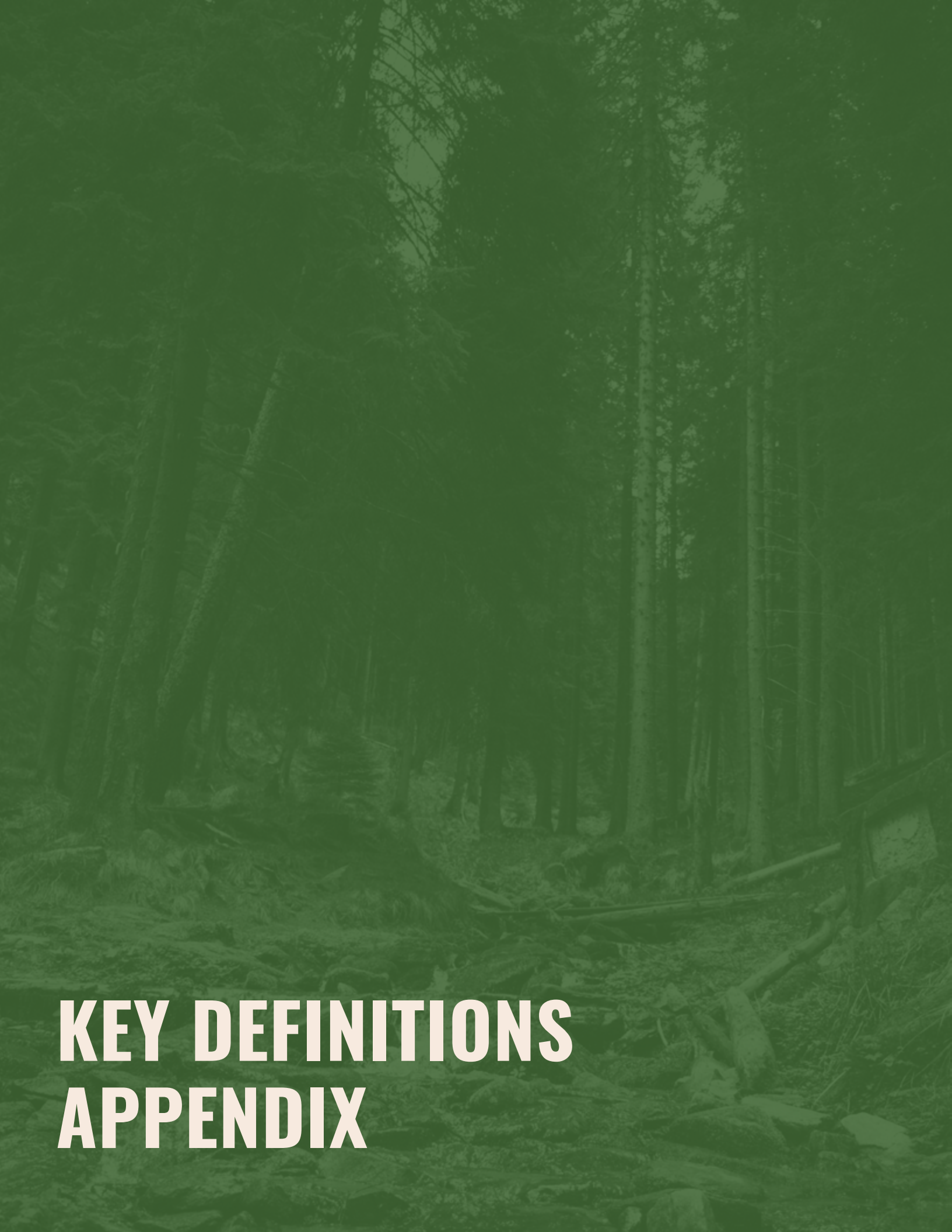
- **Trade and Distribution:** Establishing trade hubs and utilizing refrigerated transportation, such as "refrigerator vans," to move food between Treaty #3 Nations.
- **Community-Led Governance:** 83% of respondents believe development should be governed by community-led initiatives, with 49% supporting a cooperative (co-op) model to keep profits within the community.
- **Youth and Education:** 94% cited youth as a critical piece of the sector, suggesting the integration of gardening into elementary schools and the creation of high school learning opportunities.

The report concludes with a detailed strategic plan featuring four recommended next steps:

1. **Reclaim Food Sovereignty and Cultural Foodways:** Expand traditional harvesting and establish Indigenous seed banks to preserve heirloom varieties.
2. **Build Local Infrastructure and Processing Capacity:** Construct greenhouses and develop community processing hubs for value-added products.
3. **Foster Agri-Food Human Capacity and Youth Engagement:** Integrate agri-food into school curriculums and establish Elder-led mentorship programs.
4. **Establish Sustainable Governance and Economic Models:** Develop cooperative business structures and revitalize historical trade routes, including those protected under the Jay Treaty.

Taken together, these findings and strategic goals provide a roadmap for Treaty #3 to transition from market dependency to a self-sufficient, culturally vibrant agri-food economy.





KEY DEFINITIONS APPENDIX

AGRI-FOOD DEVELOPMENT	The process of improving the efficiency, sustainability, and economic value of the entire food supply chain—from primary production (farming/fishing) to processing, distribution, and consumption. It aims to boost food security, enhance rural livelihoods, and drive innovation.
COMMUNITY FOODWAYS	Refers to the shared practices, traditions, and beliefs surrounding how a group produces, prepares, distributes, and consumes food. These systems link food to cultural identity and social bonds, emphasizing local resources, sustainability, and collective action to foster community health and preserve traditions.
COOPERATIVES	Initiatives, projects, or organizations owned and democratically governed by members of the local community to meet shared needs and goals. Unlike traditional businesses focused on maximizing profit for distant shareholders, these cooperatives are community-focused and can center around increasing local food production and access in the territory.
FOOD SOVEREIGNTY	The right of peoples to healthy, culturally appropriate food produced through sustainable methods, and the right to define their own agricultural and food systems. It prioritizes local, democratic control over food production and distribution, putting producers and consumers rather than corporate markets at the center of decision-making.
TRADITIONAL FOOD	Refers to dishes, ingredients, and culinary methods passed down through generations, often deeply rooted in a specific culture, region, or community. These are typically nutrient-dense, locally sourced, whole foods—such as berries, wild game, wild rice, fish, and other harvested, gathered, and hunted foods—prepared using traditional, processing and cooking techniques.

PROJECT BACKGROUND

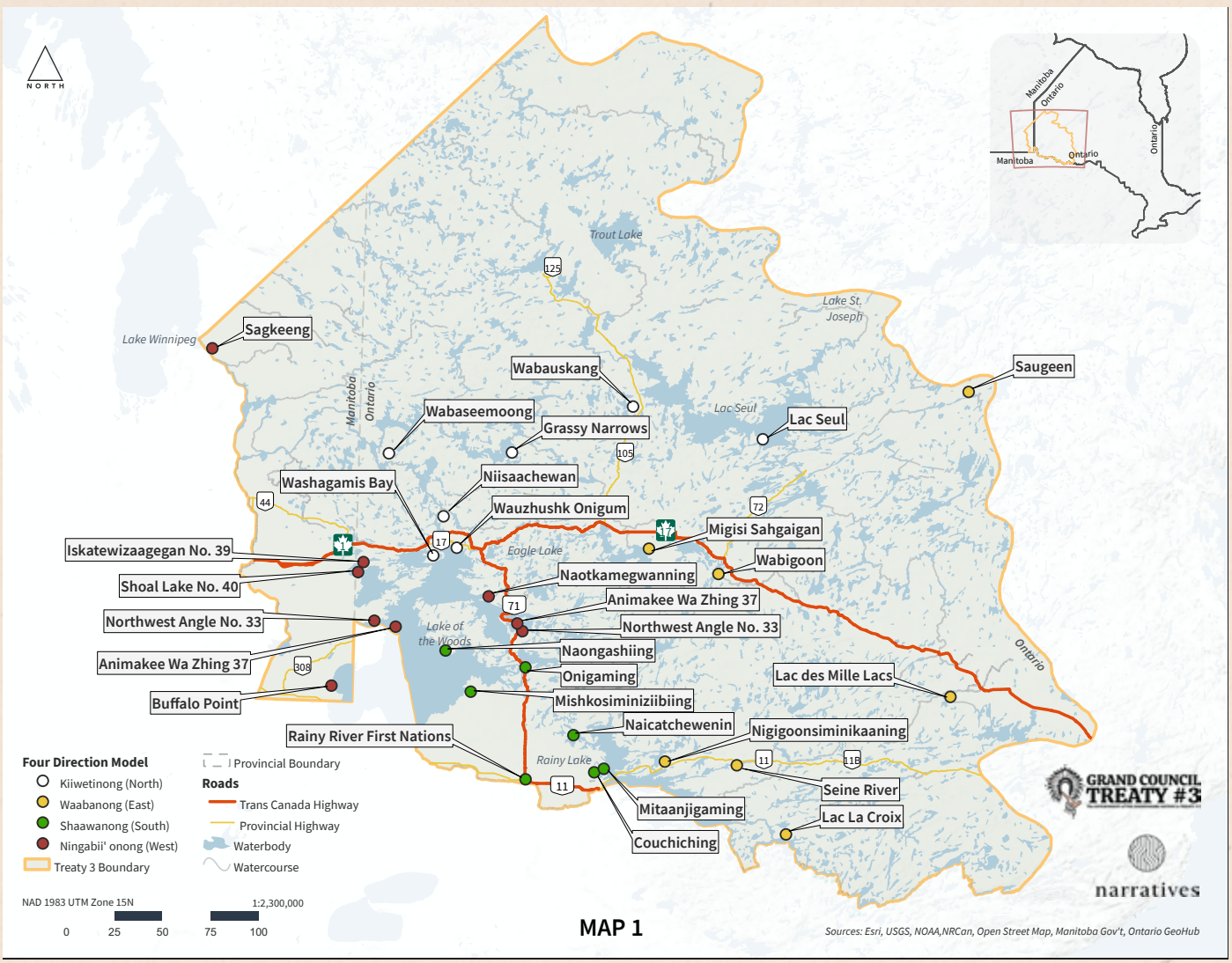
The agri-food economic blueprint, initiated by Grand Council Treaty #3 (GCT#3), seeks to create a food sovereignty pathway through community input and priorities. This initiative is designed to address existing gaps in agri-food opportunities, youth education, and training pathways across the territory by grounding strategic development in community-led priorities and insights. The blueprint serves as a roadmap to foster a self-sustaining agri-food ecosystem within Treaty #3.

Key objectives include:

- Identifying Training Pathways and professional development opportunities for Treaty #3 communities and individuals.
- Inspiring Anishinaabe youth to explore careers in the agri-food sector through targeted awareness and skill-building strategies.
- Centre Community Growth and ensure the blueprint reflects the authentic needs and interests of Treaty #3 Nations.

This work is not an isolated effort; it is a vital extension of GCT#3's ongoing mission to strengthen food sovereignty throughout the territory, guided by GCT#3's four directional governance model.

THE 28 NATIONS THAT ENCOMPASS TREATY 3#, ARE SHOWN IN THE MAP BELOW.



MAP 1

This blueprint builds upon the Food Sovereignty Pre-Feasibility Study conducted from June 2024 to July 2025. The Feasibility study highlighted significant challenges regarding access to healthy, culturally grounded foods while recognizing the strength of existing local food practices. Previous recommendations, such as the establishment of regional food hubs, Knowledge Keeper networks, and land-based learning, provided the context for the current economic and educational strategies being developed.

By integrating the findings of the pre-feasibility report, the Agri-Food Economic Blueprint will transition these insights into actionable recommendations, including funding needs, potential sector partnerships, and clear benchmarks for success.



METHODS

The development of the Agri-Food Economic Blueprint follows a community-driven and participatory research framework designed to ensure that the resulting strategy is grounded in the lived experiences and priorities of the Anishinaabe of Treaty #3.

To maintain alignment with the vision of GCT#3, the project team held bi-weekly meetings with leadership to ensure all work was completed in a timely manner and remained responsive to community direction.

The core of the methodology was a community engagement strategy comprised of focus groups interviews, and a community survey. These activities provide essential opportunities for participants to share ideas regarding the expansion of agri-food economic and educational activities. Survey and interview questions built upon successes, challenges, and opportunities identified in the Pre-Feasibility Study. Interviews were conducted with key stakeholders and individuals currently active in the sector to capture high-level perspectives on regional strategic opportunities and necessary infrastructure such as funding and finance needs. Simultaneously, an online survey was distributed to any Treaty #3 members, specifically targeting those already working in the agri-food sector and individuals interested in participating more deeply in local foodways. These engagement tools utilize open-ended questions to invite participants to express their opinions on education and training opportunities, particularly for youth, and to identify the specific types of agri-food activities that members are most interested in pursuing.

The online survey was completed by 35 participants, from the demographic breakdown shown in Figure 1, showing broad participation across ages and backgrounds.

Following surveys and focus group interviews, data was systematically organized and coded using MAXQDA software to facilitate a thorough thematic analysis. This approach allowed the project team to identify recurring priorities, cultural insights, and specific training needs shared by community members across different regions. The resulting analysis is incorporated throughout the final Agri-Food Economic Blueprint, ensuring that all recommendation are directly informed by the input and priorities of the Treaty #3 community.

WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING BEST DESCRIBE YOUR INVOLVEMENT IN YOUR COMMUNITY AND FOOD SYSTEMS?

3	8
Youth (Under 30)	Elder
7	9
Knowledge Keeper	Harvester
6	4
Food Producer	Entrepreneur / Business Owner
2	18
Leadership / Council Member	Community Member Interested In Food Systems

FIGURE 1: SURVEY PARTICIPANTS



AGRI-FOOD OVERVIEW

In the context of Treaty #3, Agri-food development focuses on improving the efficiency, sustainability, and economic value of the entire food supply chain, from primary production such as farming and fishing to processing, distribution, and consumption.

Its primary aims are to boost food security, enhance livelihoods, and drive innovation through culturally grounded systems. This development represents a strategic pathway toward economic sovereignty, where Nations reclaim control over pieces of the agri-food system.

The food systems of Treaty #3 are rooted in deep, ancestral relationships with a diverse ecological landscape that includes boreal forests, prairies, and extensive aquatic networks. Historically, Anishinaabe communities managed complex, seasonal systems of land-based hunting, fishing, and large-scale gardening. This included harvesting culturally significant species like manoomin (wild rice), sturgeon, and a wide variety of medicines.

Despite the legacy of colonial disruptions, such as restrictive policies that historically outlawed the sale of produce from First Nations and severed intergenerational knowledge transfer, these relational foodways remain a cornerstone of Anishinaabe identity. Today, revitalizing these systems is seen as a way to harmonize traditional knowledge with contemporary economic models to ensure health and respectful stewardship of the land.

Many members remain active in traditional practices, community gardens, and other initiatives. Additionally, 11 food banks and 20 community food programs, including school breakfast initiatives and monthly food-box co-ops, operate within the region, though geographic isolation remains a significant barrier for more remote Nations.

Current food access data highlights a critical reliance on external, colonial food systems. This reliance on external grocery chains represents a significant outflow of local dollars. There is a clear opportunity to recapture this economic value by developing Treaty #3 agri-food business models.

BUILDING AGRI-FOOD OPPORTUNITIES AND STRATEGIES IN TREATY #3: KEY FINDINGS

Through an engagement session focus group and survey, community members shared rich insights into their visions for agri-food development 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 based agri-food development.

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

- Current gaps and barriers in food access and production for Treaty #3 members
- Opportunities for Treaty #3 agri-food development and revitalized food economies including training and programming
- Strategies to implement learnings and opportunities to bring more community members into the agri-food sector locally

CURRENT GAPS AND BARRIERS IN LOCAL AGRI-FOOD DEVELOPMENT

Currently, Treaty #3 members experience challenges in accessing food related to cost, procurement access, lack of training, climate and environmental change, contamination, and restrictive or colonial policy restrictions. Additionally, those already working in food procurement and processing struggle to staff open positions. These barriers should be considered when strategizing agri-food development options so that opportunities may help fill gaps in access and participation in local food systems.

Food Access

Participants discussed the challenges and barriers that Treaty #3 people face to access food alongside their visions for agri-food development and participations opportunities. As with the 2025 Grand Council Treaty #3 Food Sovereignty Study, people spoke about issues regarding food affordability and issues regarding food affordability and accessibility that limit and create challenges in community member's access to fresh and historical or cultural food gathering practices including the ongoing impacts of colonization.

WHAT ARE THE BIGGEST CHALLENGES TO ACCESSING HEALTHY, AFFORDABLE, AND CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE FOOD IN TREATY #3?

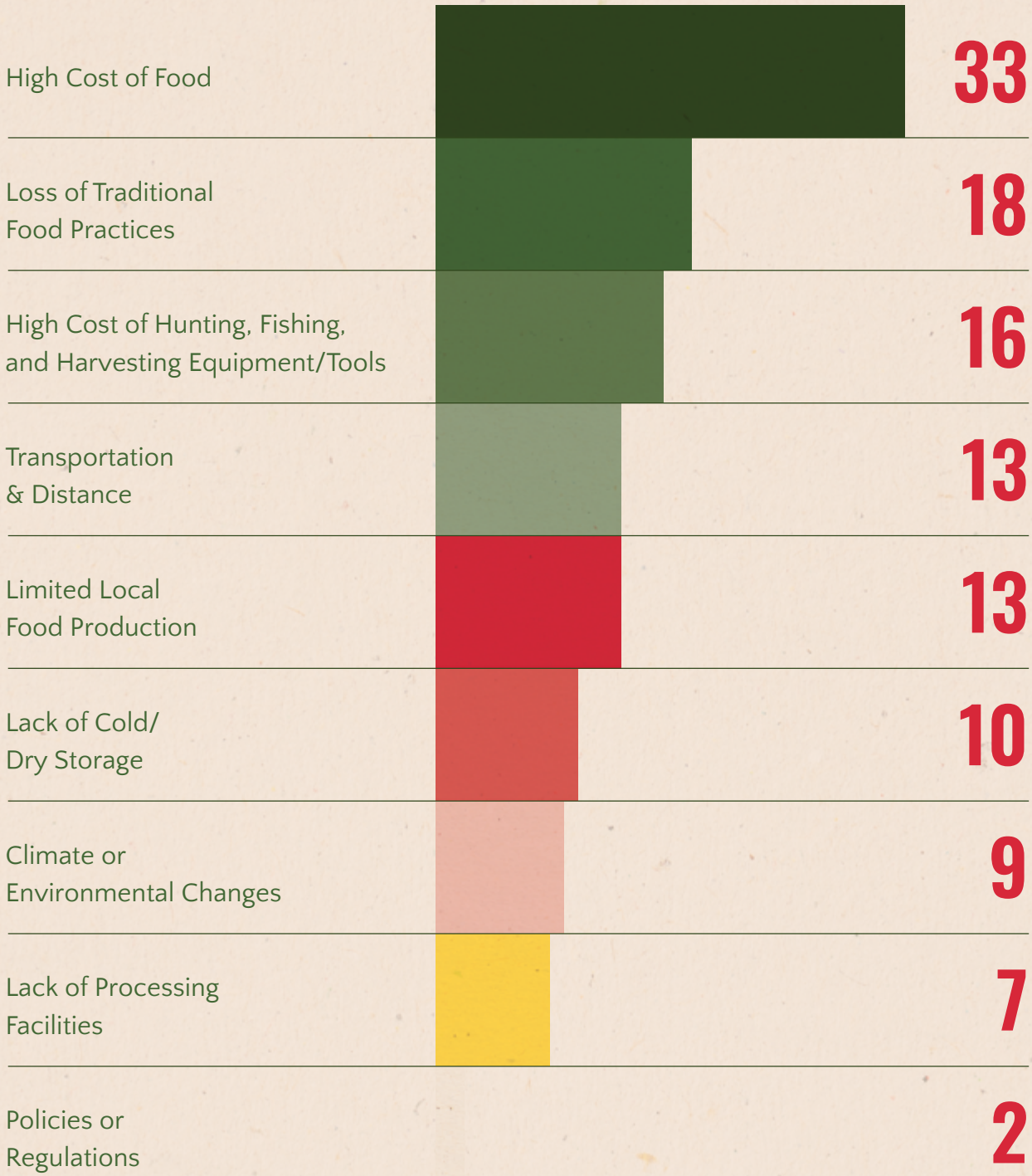


FIGURE2: CHALLENGES IN ACCESSING AFFORDABLE, FRESH, AND CULTURAL FOODS IN TREATY #3

As seen in Figure 2, among the 35 survey participants, almost all (97%) cited high cost of food as a problem. Additionally, 18 (53%) of respondents cited loss of traditional food practices and 16 (47%) said that the high cost of hunting, fishing, and gathering equipment as issues in acquiring food. Further a third of survey participants cited transportation and distance (38%), limited local food production (38%), and lack of cold/dry storage (29%) as challenges in engaging the local food system.

Through information collected through the survey and previous food sovereignty research in Treaty #3, we know that the vast majority of community members rely on grocery stores for food access. In some households, grocery store food is supplemented with locally available and harvested food stuff provided by community gardens, hunting, fishing, gathering, community-based food programs, and trade between families. These results can be seen in Figure 3.

The reliance on grocery stores remains an issue as Treaty #3 consumers are subject to market fluctuations and inflation of commercial foodways that do not reflect the local and cultural foods of the territory. Additionally, the revenues of the grocery stores for the most part do not support local Treaty #3 economic development. While this remains a barrier, it also presents a large opportunity to build food access around local producers, foodways and economies to connect consumers to local markets and lessen the reliance on commercial grocery stores which will be discussed in later sections.

HOW DO YOU CURRENTLY ACCESS FOOD?

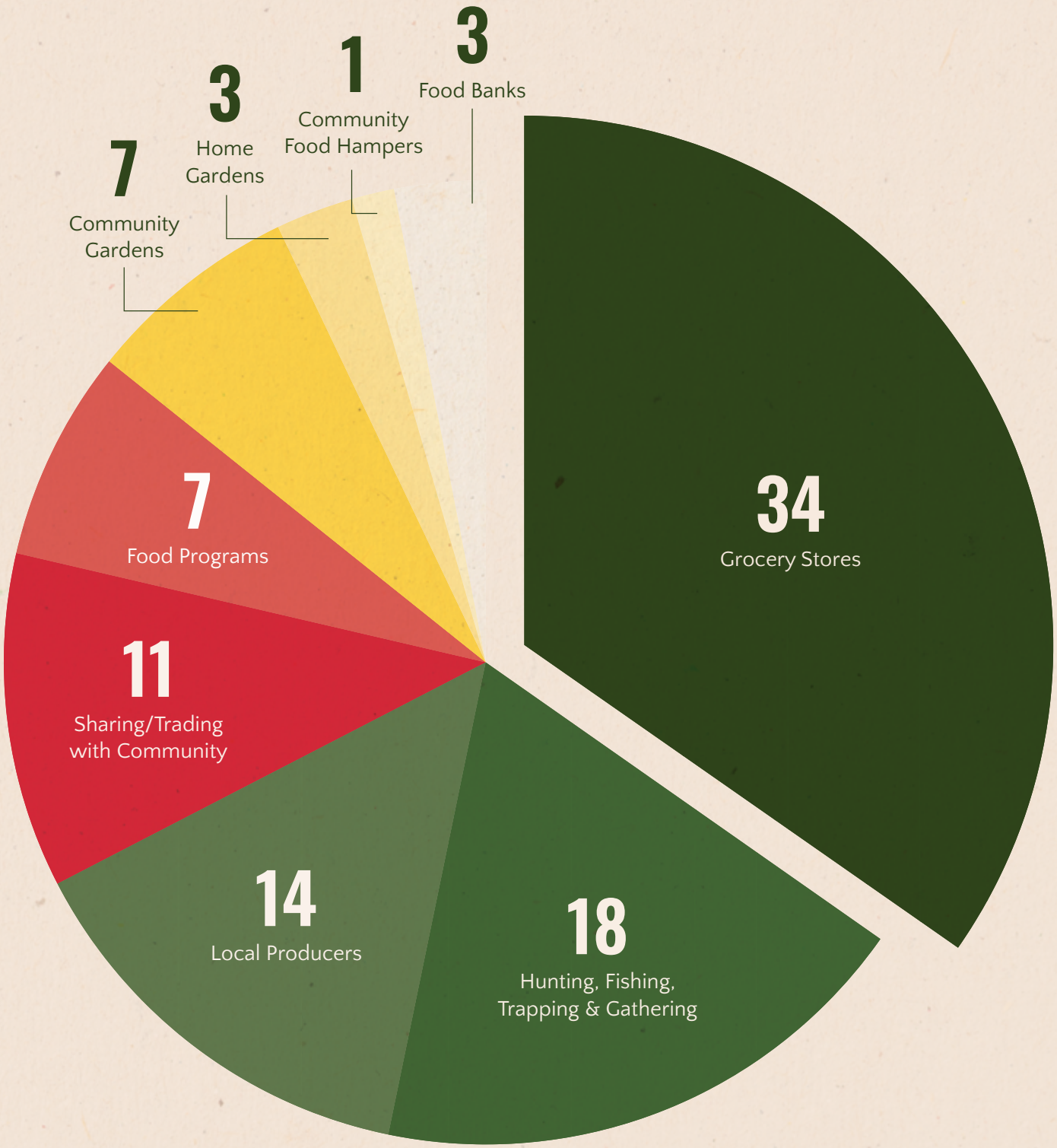


FIGURE 3: CURRENT FOOD ACCESS

Resource, Climate Change, and Systemic Challenges

From the focus group, more challenges experienced by community members were gleaned particularly in terms of resources and industry challenges in the territory.

> "One of the big concerns for the community is a lack of usable land space... the main community is a really small place that's nearly tapped out for... development or expanding food sovereignty initiatives. We have to either look to the old reserve lands, which aren't really accessible for most community members, or we have to look to an urban hub, which again, transportation presents a barrier for the community. And then in addition to that, it's having healthy land. And so right now the current or existing community garden is close to...a temporary waste transfer site in the community."
>
> FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT, FEB. 17, 2026

Through previous food sovereignty studies by Grand Council Treaty #3 and background research, we know that the decline of traditional food systems was intensified by structural barriers and industry such as inadequate infrastructure, market exclusion, and the impacts of environmental degradation with climate change adding a new layer of complexity. From the survey, 9 (27%) of respondents were concerned climate and environmental change with 2 (6%) of participants also concerned about policies and regulations that are restrictive. This was also discussed in the focus group as members said:

> "There's also all this pressure from a number of mineral exploration companies who've said we've got different permits that are open because we're looking at doing exploration. And it's, you know, all around the community. And so then there's concerns about if we are trying to build food sovereignty and be more self reliant on our own systems. How do we actually do that when we don't know the true impact of existing mining operations or existing industry on the health of the animals or the health of the water? Because our industry partners have told us we don't know exactly what the impact of our tailings pond is to the animals because we don't have a lot of people that are voluntarily submitting surveys on the animals."
>
> FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT, FEB. 17, 2026

Further, one participant spoke to revitalizing wild rice programs in the territory and the ways industry has presented additional concerns with water contamination. This contamination creates issues for the health of wild rice sloughs and consumers alike and the burden of research and water monitoring often falls back on initiatives and programs themselves as they attempt to produce traditional community food sources.

> "I think over time we're going to be working on a wild rice revitalization program. And one of the ways...we're starting that program is through Lands and Resources. And so Lands and Resources is attempting to...monitor water levels and water contamination...We can't necessarily go back in time and look back in time at what things were when it was in a good space."
>
> FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT, FEB. 17, 2026

One focus group participant spoke to the systemic level effects of colonization on Indigenous bodies as it relates to health. As most health research is built on non-Indigenous bodies, this presents challenges as community members attempt to reclaim their health in the face of non-Indigenous health systems and baselines.

> "Not only did colonization change the way we lived and then like how our bodies are functioning in society. But I think our bodies functioned different from the colonization way to begin with. So in the present day we're expected to have like the lower cholesterol like the average person would have. But I think naturally we're supposed to have higher cholesterol. So then we're put on medication to lower cholesterol and then it deteriorates our tissues because our tissues are a little bit different...So I think even in the health field, we're being told something that our bodies aren't necessarily adapted to."
>
> FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT, FEB. 17, 2026

Staffing and Human Capacity Challenges

Among survey respondents, the vast majority (80%) are interested in increasing agri-food positions and opportunities in the territory. However, focus group participants cited troubles in filling open positions even when they were available including by saying, "the ideas are starting to come together. It's just the workforce portion that we're kind of struggling with" (Focus Group Participant, Feb. 17, 2026).

The gap between community interest and the struggle to actually fill positions was commented on by focus group participants that noted this is most likely due to the lack of training opportunities and applicant confidence they have the skills necessary to fit these roles.

> "I think if we could get people just trained...because I've had the garden posting up [and] last year we only ended up with one applicant...it's so hard to find people who have that educational background. So my next line of defense is to request the training from Seven Gens and see if people are willing to be educated. And then hopefully we could hire a community member that's been educated and just be like, here's a job posting [and] you're welcome to apply."
>
> FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT, FEB. 17, 2026

This aligns with further comments by focus group participants that community members feel like "we still need some expertise in the processing part" and "making people feel confident they even have the skills to apply for the job." One participant noted the ways they are trying to build capacity and foster skill development and confidence in saying:

> "I'm trying to work with our summer students who are graduating high school this year with no intention of college or university and just saying, hey, this is an opportunity that you have."
>
> FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT, FEB. 17, 2026

In all the challenges of food access, industry, environmental change, and human capacity within Treaty #3 present opportunities to creatively fill gaps and research needs based on Treaty #3 community input and value systems.

AGRI-FOOD EXPANSION OPPORTUNITIES

Despite the barriers and challenges community members face in accessing and producing food in Treaty #3, there are many opportunities to create or expand upon existing food work and initiatives to increase not only local food access, but job and economic activities as well. This section will overview focus group discussion and survey results surrounding community member's visions for agri-food expansion including the types of activities they would like to see as well as training and job opportunities that may improve local food production and distribution.



WHICH AGRI-FOOD ACTIVITIES WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE CREATED OR EXPANDED IN TREATY #3?



FIGURE 4: AGRI-FOOD ACTIVITIES TO CREATE OR EXPAND

Among survey respondents, 80% are interested in increasing agri-food opportunities in Treaty #3. When asked what activities they would like to see expanded or created, 30 (88%) participants cited food preservation i.e. canning, drying, and smoking. Other top responses included having community gardens (85%), growing traditional foods (82%), and having greenhouses (79%) as top activities to create and expand. Cultural food activities such as wild rice initiatives (74%), Indigenous seed growing and saving (68%), fishing (53%), and hunting (68%) were also listed as high priorities for agri-food developments in Treaty #3.

Many of the agri-food expansion opportunities identified in the survey were discussed at more length with focus group participants, one of which noting they would like to "start with our own cultural sovereignty because it's amazing the beauty and magic in our food and how it can help sustain us as well" (Focus Group Participant, Feb. 17, 2026).

Food Processing

Like survey participants, the focus group discussed opportunities related to food processing, particularly in relation to traditional and locally gathered foods. Many participants noted the ways communities are engaging historic preservation methods as a learning tool and way to increase food access affordably.

> "There's there's a rise in families...doing the butchering themselves of either the deer or moose. So instead of bringing it to a butcher, which is like another couple or a few hundred dollars to get that done, they are getting the tools to do that work at home instead of bringing it elsewhere. So having even a place in community for folks to come together and have a place to do that and share knowledge on how to do the butchery, I think would be really cool and beneficial for families that do have hunters and to just help people feed themselves."
>
> FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT, FEB. 17, 2026

"One of the events...we do [is] a fall gathering and we had someone do a moose and fish smoking demo. So he had samples ready to go, but it was very do-it-yourself...and we just had moose meat and white fish smoking all day over a fire...teaching folks that you don't need a $800 smoker to smoke your meats and that there are ways to do it that are a lot more accessible and that can extend the shelf life of these foods that can be harvested."

FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT, FEB. 17, 2026

Revitalizing historic preservation methods will be an ongoing learning. As one participant noted, the ways of the past which they have not seen in some years noting a need for active learning and resource sharing to reclaim these ways and add them to the spectrum of food processing opportunities.

"I think we still need some expertise in the processing part. You know, I've seen back in the 80s, they had this kind of like...like an oil drum, but they converted into some kind of a roasting drum. But I haven't seen one lately,"

FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT, FEB. 17, 2026

In all, food processing will be of utmost importance to agri-food development across Treaty #3. These activities are informed by historic processes and fit to the contemporary communities across the region. These food processing activities will allow for extended shelf life, preservation, and market opportunities for food grown, harvested, and gathered in the territory to build the spectrum of agri-food participation and opportunities.

Garden and Growing Infrastructure Opportunities

Across the survey and focus group session, greenhouses were mentioned and discussed in regard to their ability to increase local food availability as well as providing an adaptive strategy to producing food in changing environmental conditions.

"I think it'd be great to have more greenhouses in each community just because our seasons are changing and the beginning of the season can be rough on plants, especially because if we get warm weather and then we get a frost overnight late in the season, then it can completely eradicate all of the work that we've done. I think that greenhouses are a fantastic way to offset that risk of losing the plants. And then even into the fall season it'll extend our growing season because we have a short season for growing regardless. I think greenhouses are a great first move."

FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT, FEB. 17, 2026

"And with climate change...sowing time, harvest time, everything is changing. With a greenhouse you can regulate the temperature and...it's helpful to protect the plants from like as sad as is it as it is to say it's helpful to protect the plants from just like rainfall. I did see a post yesterday saying that there's increased pollution in the air due to snow melting. I think it's really good to protect the plants from like the snow and the rain as well."

FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT, FEB. 17, 2026

Alongside greenhouses, one participant spoke to hydroponics, a soilless cultivation method involves growing plants in water-based, nutrient-rich solutions, to increase local food production. As the participant noted, innovative infrastructure like hydroponics, can support holistic food systems by contributing fresh food to community members year-round and act as a foundation to build additional skills and capacity.

"It would be great to expand hydroponics within the community as well as the connection from farm to the table for community members. One of the initiatives we're working on is being able to support community members with access to kitchens and recipes to be able to prepare the food they've grown."

FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT, FEB. 17, 2026

Increasing local food production and agri-food opportunities with infrastructure to extend growing seasons and access to fresh food year-round remains a priority among both consumers and producers. What community members and initiatives decide to grow in gardens, greenhouses, and emerging infrastructure endeavors can supplement Treaty #3 food systems with diverse products that include conventional produce and cultural, Anishinaabe produce alike.

Cultural Foodways

Survey and focus group participants both expressed interest and desire to increase cultural foodway production and practices in a revitalized Treaty #3 food system and agri-food economy. A majority of survey respondents would like to see more Indigenous crops in the garden spaces along with seed saving of cultural and heirloom varieties.

The focus group participants discussed this further noting the importance of traditional seeds for cultural foodway revitalization, food sovereignty, and community health, connecting these elements to more diversified seed stocks and crop varieties.

"I'm not talking yellow corn, I'm talking about multiple corns. I'm talking about not just the sweet squash, I'm talking multiple squash as well. These are things we grew. There's different plants that we are meant to bring back that will bring our people back to its original forms."

FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT, FEB. 17, 2026

Finding historic, cultural, and heirloom seed varieties can require time, patience, and connection across communities and the larger Anishinaabe territory. One participant spoke to the ways connections can help diversify seed stocks with traditional varieties that are non-GMO, environmentally suited, and not dependent on harmful additives.

> "I have looked for more like traditional corns and I am in contact with two reservations in Minnesota that have seed banks that they're willing to share with us. I think for the most part we're going to try and keep our gardens as organic and GMO free as possible. So that's the goal, trying to bring back the traditions but also introduce new traditions in the way that we are. We're returning to taking care of our food."
>
> FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT, FEB. 17, 2026

The sentiment of connection with near and distant Anishinaabe Nations was further echoed in a participants noting it would be good to have events that connect seed and knowledge keepers,

"To share knowledge on seed saving so people aren't having to go like buy new seeds each and every year and then knowledge around that. Then you can pick the seeds from certain plants on how well they're doing and develop your own [place-based] plants that are suitable for your zone area."

FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT, FEB. 17, 2026

Continuing to build agri-food opportunities that also revitalize Anishinaabe food systems fit to local environment was also referenced in regard to wild rice initiatives, hunting, and fishing. These activities were talked about generally in regard to rebuilding food systems and revitalizing foodways and economies.

"If I know someone's going out, I'm like, hey, pay me a goose breast and I'll be there, like, contribute back to my table a little bit and I'll contribute to yours…It's gotten to the point where I have one friend specifically who will do a goose hunt every year and he knows that I like just like teaching my kids how to clean them. So a lot of the times I'll get home and there'll just be like a goose on my step."

FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT, FEB. 17, 2026

"It would be really great to not just have a policy that says you get a week of community leave in the fall to go harvesting, but for us to actually as a community…go out on a hunt or to go out on a wild rice harvest. And for people to not feel like they have to choose between showing up to work or actually doing something that's good for themselves, their family, their community ."

FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT, FEB. 17, 2026

"And we do have…historical food that was eaten in the past before grocery stores. There's probably a long list, but the main ones here are the fish and the wild rice. We also have acorns…they're everywhere here and nobody's eating them except for, you know, the squirrels and the bears…we have opportunity with those."

FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT, FEB. 17, 2026

Community members expressed a strong interest to incorporate traditional Anishinaabe foodways and activities in agri-food opportunities alongside revitalized processing abilities to extend shelf life and market opportunities. In addition to traditional activities there is also a strong interest in acquiring and building contemporary systems to better fit changing environments and the communities of today to fill gaps in food access and relocalize Treaty #3 food systems and food economies.

AGRI-FOOD SKILL DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING

Actually fostering agri-food opportunities in Treaty #3 will depend on relevant training and skills development to build capacity in the agri-food sector across interaction with the local food system. Through the survey and focus group, community members shared what learning opportunities they would be interested in as well as ones they thought were most needed in agri-food development across the territory. Related to skills development, community members also shared the ways youth opportunities and inextricably linked to local youth and intergenerational sharing opportunities.

In survey results, community members expressed a strong interest for training and learning opportunities related to traditional food harvesting and preparation (80%), followed by gardening skills (71%), and food safety and processing (66%). Additionally, survey participants expressed interest in nutrition and diet learnings (57%), and agri-food administration and financial management (40%). These results can be seen in Figure 5.

WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO LEARN IN REGARD TO PARTICIPATING IN THE LOCAL FOOD SYSTEM?



Gardening Skills



Traditional Food Harvesting and Preparation



Food Safety and Processing



Nutrition and Diet



Agri-Food Admin and Financial Management

FIGURE 5: LEARNING OPPORTUNITY INTEREST

In the focus group, skill development and training opportunities were discussed alongside the need to develop specific job skills related to gardening as seen here

> "I would like to get more [training] in just basic horticulture so that people are understanding...what the plants need just in general. And once they understand what the plants need, it's a lot easier for them to just get in there and get their hands dirty because every plant is so different and every plant needs a different type of love. I think we could get people just trained on that."
>
> FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT, FEB. 17, 2026

Additionally, community members noted the need to incorporate traditional teaching in training as cultural continuity and as a measure of increasing nutrient intake and overall health of foods.

"Elders have said that when we...eat meat [hunted] during mating season it doesn't give the right nutrients for elders and for our children...They actually speak about animals when they're in that form, their brain ain't producing the right nutrients for us to consume."

FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT, FEB. 17, 2026"

Speaking of maximum nutrients, some cooking classes that can happen in person and online [can] share how cooking different foods can mix the nutrient intake and which are better to eat raw for max nutrient intake."

FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT, FEB. 17, 2026

Many participants noted the importance of including and building training around youth with 94% of survey participants noting youth as a critical piece to building agri-food opportunities. Focus group members echoed this sentiment of starting with the youth to foster agri-food and foodway skills from a young age.

"What about education in elementary schools in terms of gardening? Getting kids interested in growing their own food at a young age. I do workshops here in Winnipeg around growing tobacco with young people and the kids are really interested and I show them the seeds and share some of the teachings. And then we plant, whether it's tobacco or vegetables in the schoolyard, and then we kind of check in with them. And I think that really, you know, gets the younger generation realizing that it's not that difficult to grow something."

FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT, FEB. 17, 2026

"And I think that, you know, young people are really interested in the stories around food. So I grow a type of squash that our ancestors grew for thousands of years...Kids knowing those stories and the stories around our foods, I think is really important."

FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT, FEB. 17, 2026

Many participants shared the importance of just being out on the land and mentorship in cultural knowledge sharing related to food. Community members shared experiences including:

> "[We] went out on the land [with youth] and we gathered the sumac berries and made a traditional form of lemonade...it's delicious and it's very healthy and it has natural sugars. So, you know, if youth could be taken out on the land and shown like the berries are so prevalent in the Kenora area, and you can make some really delicious things out of them. And they're also medicinal. Taking kids out to learn about things like that is great."
>
> FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT, FEB. 17, 2026

"This year our community put together a youth like filleting like fish activity. And we had so many kids show up and so we ended up having a lot of pictures taken because there were so many kids and like the way they're like faces light up."

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"[Having youth learn fishing skills] from like the older generation and having that tradition passed on was really cool. And it really didn't take much. There was just like a lot of fillet knives and a lot of cutting boards and then they just put up like popup tents."

FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT, FEB. 17, 2026

Including youth in agri-food development across Treaty #3 can build their confidence and knowledge of local food jobs and opportunities. By taking youth onto the land for active learning and mentorship opportunities they can also connect to cultural components, stories, and teachings of their communities.

HOW DO YOU FEEL FOOD AND LAND-BASED KNOWLEDGE SHOULD BE SHARED?

34	25
On the Land Learning	Workshops
27	30
School-Based Programs	Community Gatherings
19	17
Online Resources	Apprenticeships / Mentorships
Elders and Knowledge Keeper Led Teachings	30

FIGURE 6: SHARING LAND-BASED KNOWLEDGE ACROSS COMMUNITY

When asked how land-based knowledge should be shared across the community, youth again were important to process. As seen in Figure 6, being on the land and Elder and knowledge holders teaching were reported as key education pathways for community-based learning. Community gatherings, school-based programs, and workshops were also reported to be important to sharing knowledge and building agri-food capacity in the community. These trends represent a community-built agri-food network reliant on the community connections between generations and the local landscape.

Along with how knowledge should be shared, community members offered their ideas on what training was most needed for agri-food development in Treaty #3. Survey results seen in Figure 7 indicate that the most needed training opportunities are traditional food harvesting and processing (86%), mentorship with knowledge holders (80%), gardening and farming skills (77%), seed saving and stewardship (71%), youth land-based learning (69%), greenhouse operations (66%), and food safety and processing (63%). These results align with community members desire to build gardening programming with greenhouse infrastructure and a local seed bank as well as revitalizing traditional food harvesting and processing with intergenerational land-based learning.

Together, these training opportunities have the potential to support agri-food development in Treaty #3 by ensuring community members have access to critical skills and leaning that will enable them to feel confident and ready to navigate agri-food as a potential job opportunity or to support their own and their family's food security.

WHAT TYPES OF TRAINING OR LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES ARE MOST NEEDED?



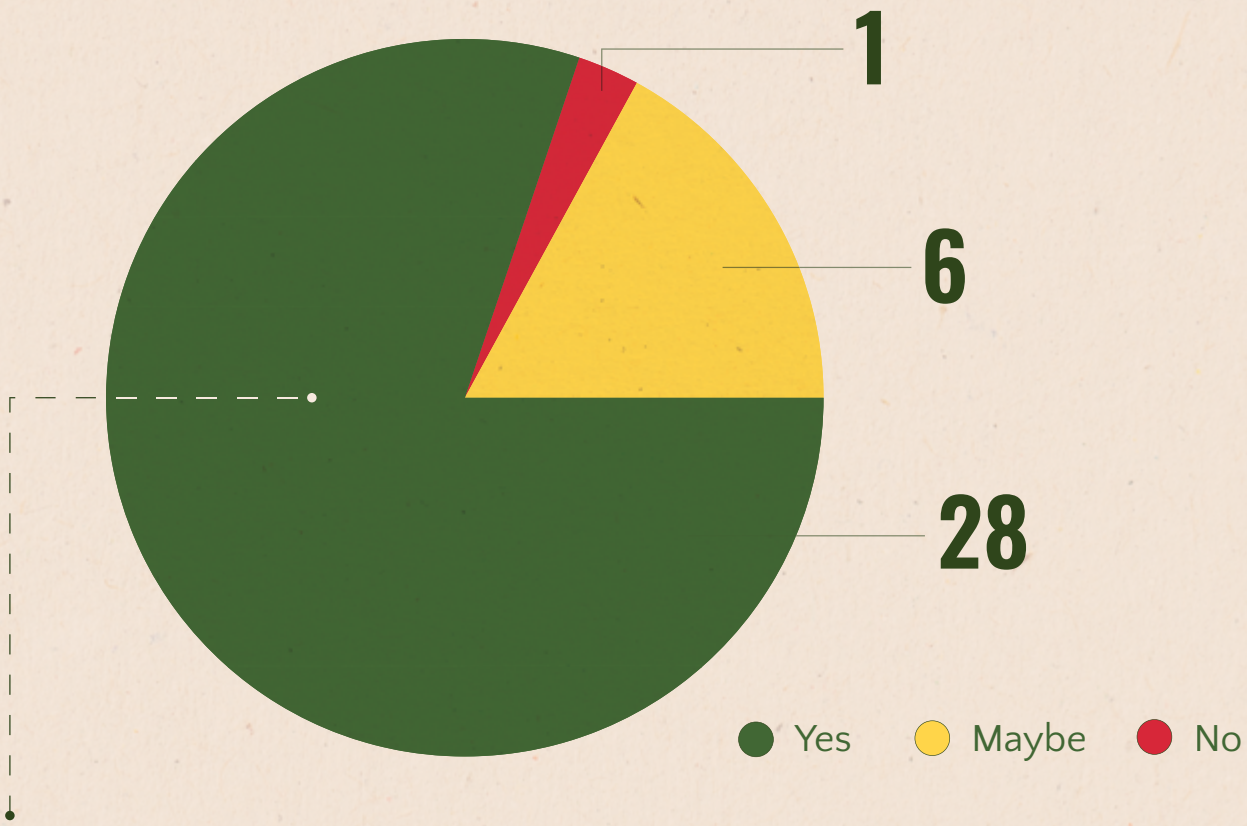
FIGURE 7: NEEDED TRAINING AND LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

JOBS AND ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES

From community input with the survey and focus group, it is clear that Treaty #3 members are interested in increasing job and economic opportunities related to the local food system. Survey results reflected a balance in the type of economic opportunities community members would like to see. Traditional foods, gardening, greenhouses, food preparation and processing, and business were the top economic considerations for respondents. These results can be seen in Figure 8.

In addition to their general interest in Treaty #3 foodway economic development, survey participants reported the types of job and economic opportunities agri-food initiatives should support. As seen in Figure 9, 29 (83%) believe that agri-food development needs to happen across needed roles and activities related to local food production and distribution. Training and mentorship, production and processing, and administration to logistics are all considered as needed roles that Treaty #3 agri-food development should include.

WOULD YOU BE INTERESTED IN INCREASING JOB OPPORTUNITIES IN TREATY #3 LOCAL FOOD SYSTEMS?



WHAT POSITIONS DO YOU IMAGINE?

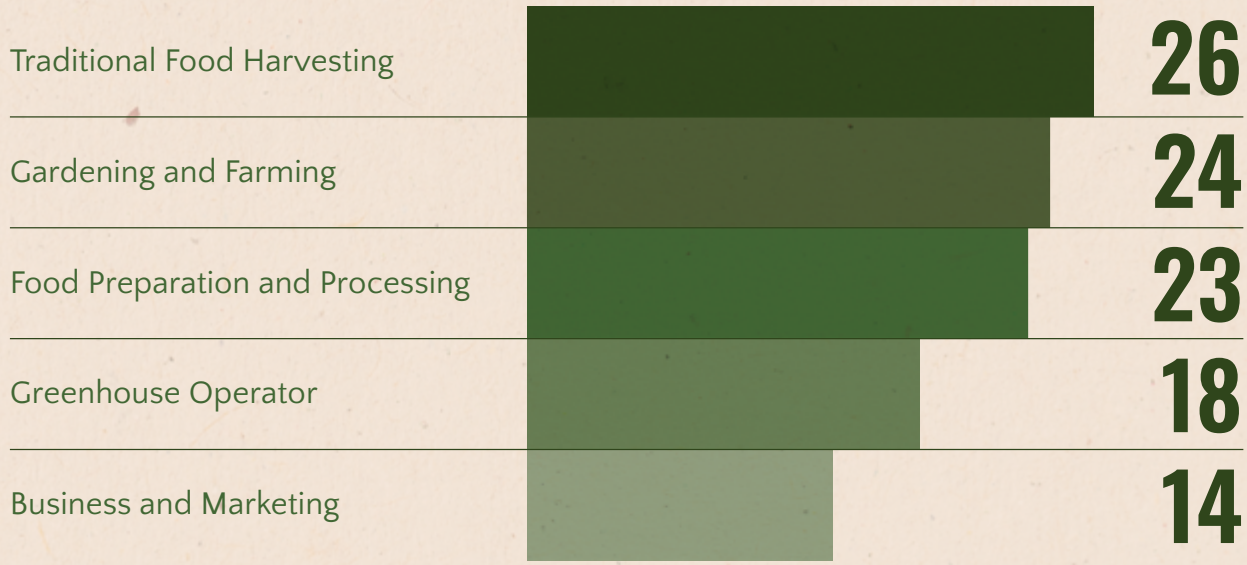


FIGURE 8: JOB OPPORTUNITY CREATION INTEREST

WHAT TYPES OF JOBS OR ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES SHOULD AGRI-FOOD INITIATIVES SUPPORT?

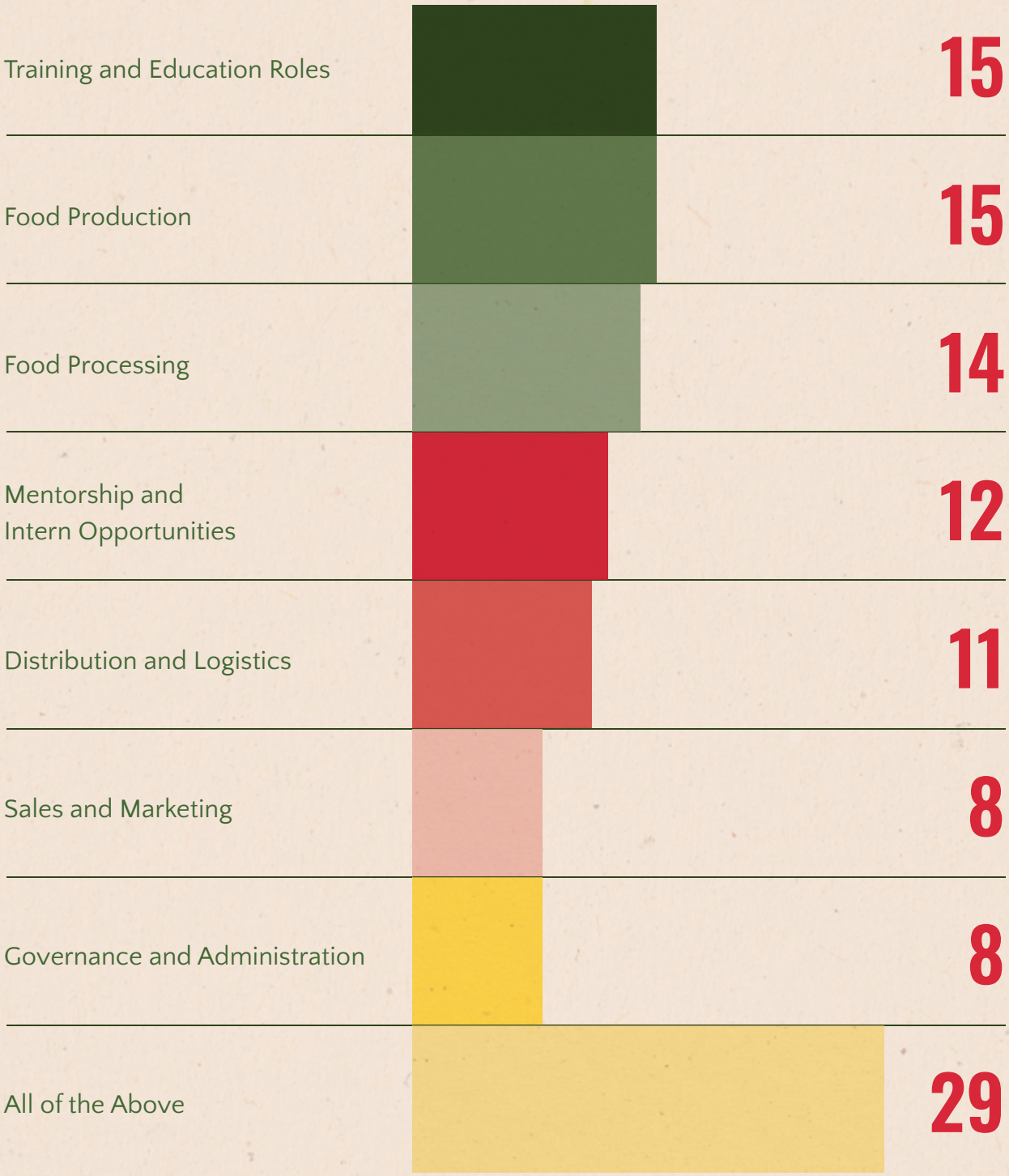


FIGURE 9: AGRI-FOOD JOBS AND ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES



IMPROVING FOOD DISTRIBUTION

In addition to an interest in increasing job opportunities related to Treaty #3 foodways, members are reported an interest in purchasing from local suppliers. As seen in Figure 10, the willingness to spend their dollars locally, indicates a ready-to-purchase market that can support and sustain local agri-food jobs. Survey respondents also indicated the types of foods they would be interested in buying locally from Treaty #3 producers. These foods include wild rice, fish, wild meat, and locally grown vegetables. Full results to what types of foods folks would like to have purchasing access to in Treaty #3 can be seen in Figure 11.

WOULD YOU SEEK OUT TREATY #3 FOOD PRODUCTS IF THEY WERE AVAILABLE TO BUY LOCALLY?

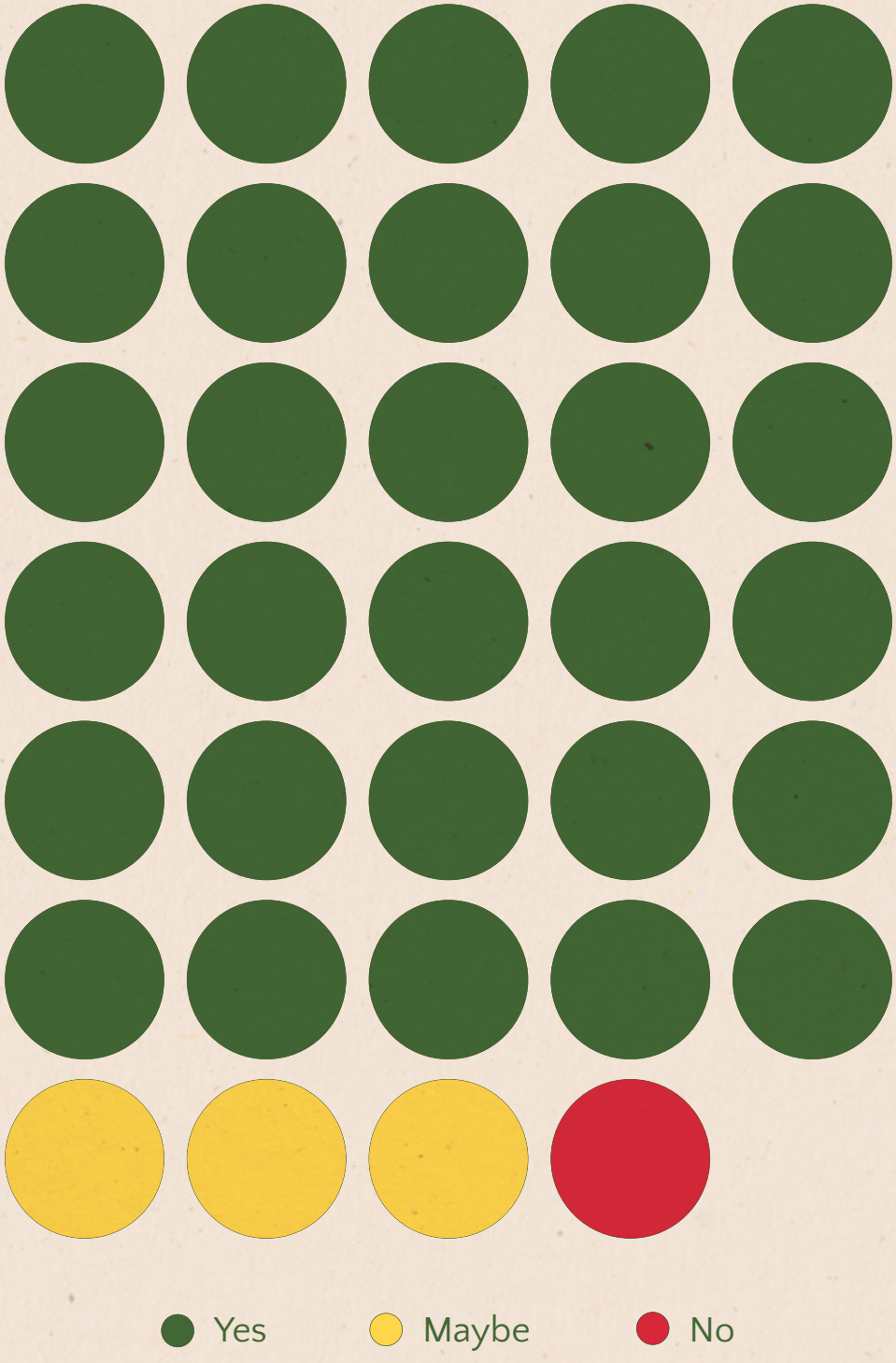


FIGURE 10: WOULD YOU SEEK OUT LOCAL FOODS

WHAT KIND OF FOODS WOULD YOU BE MOST INTERESTED IN ACQUIRING FROM LOCAL PRODUCERS?

















FIGURE 11: LOCAL FOOD PRODUCTION INTEREST

While training opportunities and supportive agri-food businesses opportunities can improve food access, getting foods to communities and local markets will depend on holistic food systems and understandings of supply chains. In previous food sovereignty reports by Treaty #3, the potential of trade hubs was explored and recommendations were provided by community members as to potential trade hub locations and services offered. In survey results, food hubs were again identified by 25 (71%) participants as a method of improving local food distribution across the territory. Additional food distribution opportunities included were trade with other Nations, processing facilities, distribution centers, and community freezers and can be seen in Figure 12.

Focus group participants also spoke to opportunities in distributing Treaty #3 to local consumers as it relates to agri-food development. Participants discussed several logistics and infrastructure needs for food distribution, emphasizing the importance of getting food to community members in a way that is both affordable and accessible. Like survey participants, focus group members spoke to trading across Nations and communities to distribute local foods throughout Treaty #3.

WHAT WOULD IMPROVE FOOD DISTRIBUTION AND ACCESS ACROSS TREATY #3?



FIGURE 12: IMPROVING FOOD DISTRIBUTION AND ACCESS

> "Cross collaboration [could improve food distribution between] communities in Treaty #3. Say if one community has a really successful growing season and then another one doesn't. [Or a community has a] bunch of moose or something. [There could be] trading and sharing, not just within community, but across the various communities."
>
> FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT, FEB. 17, 2026

This sort of cross collaboration across communities and Nations could also enable producers to connect to further markets helping to increase local food availability and agri-food economic development across the entire territory. On widening distribution markets across multiple communities, one participant feels "it is really important for us to do that because the population down south is much more than what we have here, which gives us a huge market to tap into" (Focus Group Participant, Feb. 17, 2026).

Transportation through community trucks and mobile refrigeration was also discussed as a distribution need.

> "I have heard like people speak on like possibly a van, like a refrigerator van to transport and maybe have like partnerships with just other First Nations, just in general, where we would be like, hey, we'll transport on this day in this direction, and then on this day in this direction."
>
> FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT, FEB. 17, 2026

> "Routes to harvest has a refrigerator truck that shuttles vegetables to the First Nation communities. We need our own."
>
> FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT, FEB. 17, 2026

Given Anishinaabe foodways and communities span the Canada–U.S. border, some community members are wanting to learn more about exercising their rights through the Jay Treaty.

> "I'm currently working on this understanding more about the Jay Treaty so that we can work internationally under our rights so that we can continue to work with our Minnesota [relatives] and then possibly even beyond. I think it's really important that we start accessing more of our rights through the Jay Treaty..."
>
> FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT, FEB. 17, 2026

GOVERNANCE MODELS AND AGRI-FOOD DEVELOPMENT

Community members offered insights into the governance and structure they would like to see in agri-food development in Treaty #3. Community-lead initiative, Nation led business, cooperatives, cross Nation partnerships and support from Grand Council Treaty #3 were all discussed as governance options.

Community-led Initiatives and Business

In survey results, the majority of respondents believe that agri-food development should be governed and built through community-led initiatives (83%) and business opportunities (51%). Focus group participants echoed this sentiment in saying:

> "It's really important to emphasize the work at the community level because there are a number of things that I see happen at the Nation level that don't make it down to the community members who are most in need."
>
> FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT, FEB. 17, 2026

> "The way I see it, I think it should be a progressive business model where it starts as community led and if it gets to the point where it's profitable then it could like have like a tier system."
>
> FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT, FEB. 17, 2026

These discussions made it clear that connecting directly with community members and building initiatives with and for the local community will be of upmost importance for long terms sustainability and community uptake of agri-food development.

Cooperatives

Cooperatives were discussed as a governance model that could support community-led development and participation in the local food system. Among survey respondents, 49% agreed that cooperatives could function as a governance model. On cooperative development, focus group participants noted they " think that a co-op would be really fantastic for our area" and that "a cooperative model where we are able to kind of go back to some of that trading and being able to help our other community communities in the nation is really great" (Focus Group Participant, Feb. 17, 2026).

Further, participants spoke to the operations and technicalities of a local cooperative including the types of services they could provide saying:

> "Our end goal is to have a co-op essentially, so we have somewhere where people can contribute by saying, hey, we'd like to be a member. So a small fee to be a member and then they get the discounted rate on the food. And ideally we would like to have our garden right next to the co-op and then have a processing plant in the back of the co-op as well."
>
> FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT, FEB. 17, 2026

> "The way I would see it would be community led co-op and then corporation, depending on how profitable you can make it. I think it would make the most sense that if it was eventually corporation owned that the money would go back to the community."
>
> FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT, FEB. 17, 2026

Be it through community-based initiatives or cooperative development, community members are interested in increasing cross-Nation trading to increase knowledge transfer and agri-food development in the region. In survey results, 54% of respondents are interested in partnerships with other Nations. In the focus group, participants spoke directly to this in saying

> "You know, we're revitalizing some of those historical ways of trading and being able to support other parts of the community. I know down in the south there are some agricultural opportunities that maybe aren't going to exist the same way in some of the other Nations. And we all have something that we're able to bring to the table. And I think in time, a cooperative model where we are able to kind of go back to some of that trading and being able to help our other community communities in the Nation is really great."
>
> FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT, FEB. 17, 2026

In all, cooperations could serve as a governance model able to respond to local needs while providing local food access and inclusion. These types of models can be part of larger endeavors, corporations, and build collaboration and trade across Nations in Treaty #3 territory.

Grand Council Treaty #3's Role

As for what role Grand Council Treaty #3 should play in agri-food development, community members are clear the Council should have a part. Survey responses indicate the most needed roles by Grand Council Treaty #3 are through supporting funding applications and financing opportunities (88%), facilitating training, education, and capacity building (88%), supporting youth engagement and employment opportunities (74%), and knowledge sharing and networking between communities (77%). These findings related to focus group sharing about Grand Council Treaty #3's role reflected in asking if "[Grand Council] Treaty #3 [could] get people more interested, more involved or give them more access to these programs?" (Focus Group Participant, Feb. 17, 2026).



CONCULSION AND NEXT STEPS

The development of a comprehensive Agri-Food Economic Blueprint for Grand Council Treaty #3 represents a vital step toward reclaiming food sovereignty and fostering long-term agri-food development opportunities. While significant barriers such as high food costs, environmental degradation, and systemic capacity gaps persist, the insights gathered from Treaty #3 members reveal a powerful vision for a revitalized, local food economy.

By prioritizing intergenerational knowledge sharing, investing in climate-adaptive infrastructure like greenhouses, and establishing community-led governance models such as cooperatives, the territory can reduce its reliance on commercial grocery stores and better support local livelihoods. Ultimately, this blueprint aims to ensure that communities of Treaty #3 are supported by active harvesting networks and robust local food systems that allow members to thrive physically, culturally, and economically without having to choose between their modern responsibilities and their traditional foodways.

STRATEGIC PLANNING

In developing agri-food opportunities in Treaty #3, this work has identified key goals, opportunities, and potential outcomes and measures for each. Moving forward, the following actions are recommended to build on the momentum of this agri-food blueprint:

1. Reclaim Food Sovereignty and Cultural Foodways
Revitalizing traditional practices and reducing dependency on commercial grocery systems.

OPPORTUNITIES	OUTCOMES	MEASURES
Expand wild rice (manoomin) revitalization programs and traditional harvesting (hunting/fishing). Establish Indigenous seed banks to preserve heirloom varieties (corn, squash) and ensure organic, non-GMO food sources. Implement "community leave" policies to allow members to participate in seasonal harvests without career or educational penalties.	Increased access to nutrient-dense, culturally appropriate foods and strengthened connection to the land.	Number of active community members participating in traditional harvesting networks. Quantity of traditional seeds saved and redistributed within the Nation.

2. Build Local Infrastructure and Processing Capacity
Extending the growing season and adding value to local harvests through processing.

OPPORTUNITIES	OUTCOMES	MEASURES
Construct greenhouses and hydroponic systems to mitigate climate change risks and provide year-round fresh produce. Develop community-based processing hubs for butchery, smoking, and canning to extend shelf life and create market-ready products. Acquire refrigerated transportation (vans/trucks) to facilitate food distribution between Treaty #3 communities.	Reduced food waste, improved local food availability during off-seasons, and established foundations for local markets.	Total square footage of climate-controlled growing space (greenhouses/hydroponics). Number of local food products processed and stored in community facilities.

3. Foster Agri-Food Human Capacity and Youth Engagement
Addressing staffing shortages by building confidence and technical skills.

OPPORTUNITIES	OUTCOMES	MEASURES
Integrate agri-food education into elementary and high school curriculums, including CO-OP placements and school gardens. Establish mentorship programs where Elders and knowledge holders teach land-based skills (filleting, harvesting, preserving). Provide certified training in horticulture, food safety, and agri-food administration.	A skilled local workforce ready to fill agri-food positions and a younger generation inspired to pursue food-related careers.	Percentage of agri-food job postings filled by trained community members. Number of youth participating in land-based learning workshops.

4. Establish Sustainable Governance and Economic Models
Creating community-led business structures that keep wealth within the territory.

OPPORTUNITIES	OUTCOMES	MEASURES
Develop a cooperative (Co-op) model for grocery stores and processing plants to ensure profits benefit the community. Revitalize historical trade routes and partnerships across Nations (including cross-border trade via the Jay Treaty). Utilize Grand Council Treaty #3 to facilitate funding, networking, and large-scale capacity building.	A "ready-to-purchase" local market that supports Treaty #3 entrepreneurs and reduces economic leakage.	Establishment and membership growth of community-led food cooperatives. Volume of trade (food and resources) occurring between Treaty #3 partner Nations.

The proposed strategic goals for the Treaty #3 Agri-Food Economic Blueprint are designed to transition the region from a state of market dependency to one of self-sufficiency and cultural pride. By integrating traditional Anishinaabe foodways with modern infrastructure—such as greenhouses and local processing hubs—these initiatives aim to stabilize food access while lowering household costs through bulk buying and local trade. Central to this success is a community-led governance model that prioritizes intergenerational knowledge sharing, ensuring youth are equipped with the skills and confidence to lead a sustainable local food economy. Ultimately, this strategic approach seeks to improve holistic community health, reducing diet-related illnesses and fostering a robust network of hunters, fishers, and producers who no longer have to choose between their livelihoods and their traditions.

TREATY #3 INVESTMENT GROUP

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