



Native Women's  
Association of Canada

L'Association des  
femmes autochtones  
du Canada

## The AgriDiversity Pilot Project

# Key Findings Related to Best Practices & Investment Opportunities for Indigenous Women

### About the project

In this project, the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) undertook:

- a pilot project on participation in the agricultural and agri-food sector by Indigenous women, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse people;
- a national survey to help identify their involvement in the sector and to highlight best practices; and
- a series of community engagement sessions on agricultural practice and Indigenous women's knowledge.

... With the intention to inspire, motivate, and encourage broader participation in agricultural practice using Indigenous knowledge

The goal of the project was to identify the major sub-groups of Indigenous food systems and to reveal:

- more specific needs of women depending on which Indigenous food system they participate in;
- how communities are combining, adopting, or preserving traditional food production and distribution methods (e.g., hunting, sharing, trading); and,
- newer agri-food methods (e.g., industrial farming, greenhouses, export markets, grocery stores).

The project was funded by Agriculture and Agri-food Canada.

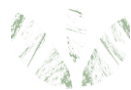
### National Survey

NWAC created and rolled out a national survey to help identify major geographic zones where Indigenous people are living off the land in similar ways (for example, coastal fishing, inland hunting and trapping, southern crop harvesting).

NWAC released the survey on March 19, 2020 and had received 451 submissions by March 31, 2020—indicating a highly successful campaign since we had pegged to receive 150 responses.

First Nations women and gender-diverse people comprised the largest percentage of respondents:

- 66% are living off reserve
- 45% are between the ages of 50 and 64 years



## Survey results revealed that:

- Over 60% engage in gathering foods (berries/medicines), fishing, hunting, and growing plants.
- Half of the respondents indicate they barter and/or trade for goods. The majority of respondents share their harvest with members of their community.
- Almost every respondent (98%) wants to eat more food from the land. A few indicated having received a federal grant for ethnobotany training.
- There is an appetite in Indigenous communities to sell or trade more food from the land, with 60% expressing an interest.
- Participants expressed a desire to learn how to grow and harvest food and medicines, traditional harvesting, and want access to the teachings of Elders and Knowledge Holders.
- Less than one fifth were engaged in a food-related business (e.g., farming, grocery store)
- Major impediments to engage in activities leading to eat more food from the land were lack of resources (land, money, transportation), time, and insufficient knowledge on how to begin. Restrictions on hunting and fishing, land contamination, and land availability were cited as barriers for many respondents.

They also underscore the important role that Indigenous women have played, and continue to play in food gathering, harvesting, and preserving. Responses include:

- *“keepers of medicine and knowing when and where to harvest”*
- *“help harvest game [and] teach our children on how to harvest, what plants are good to eat, and what plants can be used as medicines”*
- *“play a critical role encouraging the people and our children to live off the land”*

The information gleaned from the survey proved very useful to roll out local engagement sessions.

## Engagement Sessions

Beginning in May 2020, NWAC held engagement sessions and workshops with 25 First Nations communities from across Turtle Island who are interested in or currently engaged in Indigenous food sovereignty and seed sharing practices. Over 150 participants took part in the online sessions.

The engagement sessions discussed several topics, which included:

- Urban Gardener
- Beginner Gardener
- Cedar Harvesting (Mashkikiwaboo—YouTube)
- Composting
- Glyphosate and Soils
- Companion Planting
- Be the Medicine (Mashkikimin—YouTube)
- Two Worldviews
- Transplanting Indigenous Squash (Gete Okosomin—YouTube)

## Best practices learned from each session include the following:

### URBAN BACKYARD GARDENER

- Build up soil using compost made from manure and a seafood compost mixture (don't use dog, cat, or human manure)
- Ground up eggshells and put in the soil to feed the plants, along with liquid fish fertilizer every 2 weeks

### BEGINNERS GUIDE TO GARDENING

- Know your area's hardiness zone and keep a garden calendar to record frost dates
- Don't put broccoli, tomatoes, or cucumbers in same spot every year as these need more nutrients
- Raised garden beds can accommodate plants closer together

### PREPARATION OF CEDAR

- Keep only the green part
- Boil for 12 minutes to give you a tea of a nice golden colour

### COMPOSTING

- Alter brown and green layers to help materials break down (25 parts brown to 1 part green)
- Let manure age in the compost heap until next year

### MULCHING

- Makes a big difference for aeration, encouraging worms to populate the soil
- Suppresses weeds, keeps roots cool, helps prevent rot on long-growing vegetables
- Work organic mulch into the soil at the beginning of the new growing season to enrich the bed
- Extend the growing season by covering your beds with plastic

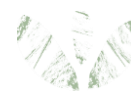
### HOW DOES YOUR GARDEN GROW?

- Water carrots, beets, corn, and potato plants frequently
- Use a "tea" to nurture tomato plants: soak banana peels in water for 3 days outside and then pour on tomatoes

## Conclusion: Overall Findings

Specific achievements that have come out of this pilot project include:

- new partnerships across Canada (for example, NWAC—Clearwater Farm)
- a new Indigenous organization that is helping community gardeners engaged in growing food for the community—thus, promoting food sovereignty



## Through the project, NWAC has:

- helped to launch an Indigenous organization assisting community gardeners engaged in growing food for the community.
- promoted partnerships (Clearwater Farm and Ontario Water Corporation) to plant and harvest Indigenous squash seeds.
- helped to create a new branch of jobs, known as agripreneurs, who learn about Indigenous plants as foods, and how to garden to achieve positive results while being employed

### A QUOTE FROM ONE OF THE AGRIPRENEURS WHO ALSO LEARNED HOW TO BUILD A PERMACULTURE GARDEN:

*“Last season was my first time ever growing squash so it was an honour and intimidating to be growing such valuable seeds without the know-how ... The project greatly enhanced my knowledge of growing squash! But what has struck me most is the feeling of deepening connection to the land, the importance of food sovereignty and of saving your own seeds.”*

## In addition, this pilot project has contributed to the:

- creation of a national network of gardeners and agricultural resources
- engagement of Elders and Knowledge Holders in giving teachings on the land
- engagement of horticulture experts and intergenerational families in sharing their agricultural practices

The work we have been doing is a good beginning in promoting awareness of agriculture and its role in the economy while building networks and access to information for Indigenous women, families, and communities.

A significant way in which this project will be assisting Indigenous women to participate in the agricultural sector is by learning their barriers to traditional and non-traditional food production and raising public awareness of the value of traditional Indigenous food systems so that it can be incorporated into Canada's understanding of its agriculture industry.

Supporting Indigenous women in their knowledge-keeping roles will be crucial to revitalizing traditional Indigenous food systems. Indigenous women are also often responsible for harvesting medicines and processing animals after the hunt. To include Indigenous women in the agriculture system will require including medicines and animal by-products. Indigenous women see all these products as part of living off the land.

Some communities are eager to establish personal or community-owned businesses to help bring money to the community or are excited to have established one. But given colonization, the lack of access to land, capital for investments, transportation infrastructure, and so on severely limits their ability to establish industrial or export facilities.



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