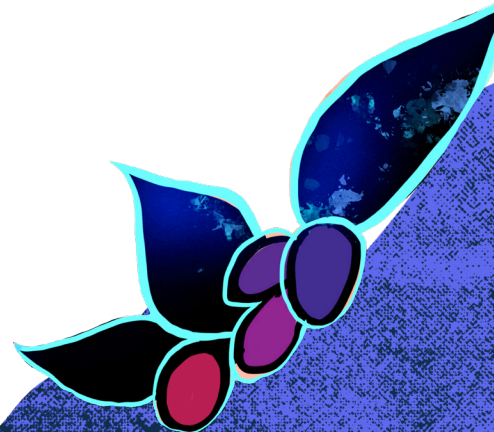





Indigenous Food Sovereignty and Food Security in a Changing Climate

What was heard from Indigenous Engagements

Prepared by Alderhill Planning Inc. for the Climate Action Secretariat and the Cross-Government Food Security Steering Committee | Fall 2022





The purpose of this report is to reflect what was heard during various engagements focused on Indigenous food sovereignty and food security in a changing climate. The findings in this report do not necessarily reflect the views of the Province of British Columbia.

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Introduction

Indigenous Peoples' relationship with the Land and diverse food systems have been cultivated over millennia, strengthening collective food security and synergistic stewardship practices that in turn, acknowledge food sovereignty as an inherent right and a sacred responsibility. Faced with new climatic changes, this knowledge and expertise, complemented with innovative solutions and collaborations, will be essential in building climate resilience in Indigenous communities across the territories of what is now known as the province of British Columbia (BC).

The Provincial government is developing a province-wide food security framework to respond to food security challenges in BC. This framework seeks to uphold Indigenous food systems and food sovereignty and will consider how to respond to the imminent consequences of climate change. It is also meant to support groups who are at a higher risk of food insecurity and respond to their needs with agility to meet people where they are at. To lead the development of this framework and support food security planning and action in BC, a Cross Government Food Security Steering Committee was established in 2020 with representatives from twelve different ministries. The committee is co-chaired by the Ministries of Health (HLTH); Social Development and Poverty Reduction (SDPR); and Agriculture and Food (AF).

Development of the framework has been informed by engagement with Indigenous Nations, organizations and external partners to better understand their needs and perspectives to advance food security and food sovereignty in BC. This report provides an overview of data gathered as part of the Indigenous engagement stream and was supported by funding from the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy through BC's Climate Preparedness and Adaptation Strategy.

The Province has reaffirmed its commitments to Indigenous Peoples through the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act Action Plan (Action Plan), which prioritizes the maintenance of traditional foods and systems over the next five years. The Action Plan highlights the following food security related outcomes the Province is striving towards:

- Indigenous food systems are recognized and supported in their foundational and interconnected role in providing cultural, social, environmental and economic well-being; and,
- Indigenous Peoples have meaningful and sufficient access to abundant and healthy traditional foods and have peaceful enjoyment of their harvesting rights.

As Indigenous Peoples and the Provincial government move forward on these identified outcomes, it will be important to hold leadership accountable for the actions supporting the resilience and health of First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities in BC through improved food sovereignty and food security.

In mid-2021, the Climate Action Secretariat of British Columbia (CAS) partnered with Alderhill Planning Inc. (Alderhill), an Indigenous-owned planning firm based out of BC to learn more about Indigenous perspectives and priorities regarding climate adaptation and resilience within the province. Food sovereignty and food security are deeply impacted by climatic changes, and it is for this reason that Alderhill has highlighted them as topics throughout the engagements, supplementing the research and good work already underway.

ENGAGEMENTS AND RESEARCH

Climate Action Secretariat Public

Engagements:



Other:



Indigenous Food Sovereignty and Food Security
in a Changing Climate Report

Alderhill's approach for data (stories, perspectives, observations) collection and research included a three-day Indigenous Climate Resilience Forum (Forum), a Métis Climate Resilience Gathering (Gathering), the Indigenous Climate Resilience Futures Zine (Zine), one-on-one interviews (with members of the public and with a Unified Aboriginal Youth Collective member), and additional research through attending webinars focusing on Indigenous climate resilience and related topics. Alderhill also engaged the Indigenous Climate Adaptation Working Group (ICAWG) in a focus group dedicated to food sovereignty and food security and interviewed Jacob Beaton from Tea Creek for a Community Climate Resilience Story.

While the primary objective of these engagements was to contribute to the development of the Provincial food security framework, the data collected also contributed to several companion documents and resources. These include Going Barefoot: Climate Resilience and Adaptation in British Columbia; Indigenous Climate Resilience Forum Summary Report, the Métis Climate Resilience Gathering Summary Report, the Indigenous Climate Resilience Futures Zine, and the Indigenous Community Climate Resilience Stories.

This report raises Indigenous perspectives and knowledges relating to Indigenous food sovereignty and food security, particularly at the intersection of climate change, through the exploration of ongoing challenges, project profiles and recommendations for building climate resilience. These viewpoints were shared through the various engagement methods mentioned above.

Executive Summary

“We know food is our identity, our sovereignty, our right, our health, our lives, and our future. Food justice means we have to assert our ways, our knowledge and our decision-making on our Lands.”

– Keynote Speaker, Forum

The cumulative impacts of climate change (including heat waves, droughts, flooding, forest fires, and storms) paired with the COVID-19 pandemic and related supply chain issues, rising food prices, impacts of industrial activities, and the encroachment/mismanagement of traditional Lands (by both government and industry) has collectively resulted in a significant increase in food insecurity and reduction in food sovereignty for Indigenous Peoples across BC. These catastrophic events have shown us the vulnerability of our interconnected food systems, particularly for rural and remote communities, and highlight the need for a coordinated and integrated approach to food sovereignty and food security across communities, levels of government and leadership.

From a series of Indigenous climate resilience engagements held from February to July 2022 (see Introduction for details), this report culminates participants’ perspectives, knowledges, and projects relating to the intersection of Indigenous food sovereignty and food security.

This report contains three main sections along with an appendix that highlights three stories of Indigenous climate resilience and food sovereignty currently happening in First Nations communities across BC. The three main sections are:

1. **Describing Food Security and Indigenous Food Sovereignty** provides the reader with general descriptions to support a shared understanding.
2. **Ongoing Challenges** looks at climatic impacts, environmental degradation and industrial activity, effects of colonization, COVID-19 and compounding crises, inflation and high food prices, honouring Métis-specific challenges and honouring challenges for people living in urban centres or otherwise away from home.
3. **Recommendations for Building Climate Resilience** offers lessons for the future success of culturally centred and community-led climate solutions from both Provincial and community-based lenses.

In summary, Indigenous food sovereignty and food security are intrinsically connected to self-determination and access to land. Having agency in the restoration and the cultivation of reciprocal relationships within food systems and the lands and waters they are a part of results in increased access to culture, health, identity, wellbeing and healthy, thriving ecosystems.

Describing Food Security & Indigenous Food Sovereignty

“Food is a gift and that gift is a connection. It’s who we are. It’s how we are Syilx People. It has nothing to do with the Indian Act or any other colonial definition.”

–Keynote Speaker, Forum

For this work, food security and food sovereignty have been described broadly, with the acknowledgement that food is culture and that the terms food sovereignty and food security have different meanings to different people, communities, and Nations.

The BC Centre of Disease Control has published some definitions that help frame these concepts within this report:

Food security means that:

- Everyone has equitable access to food that is affordable, culturally preferable, nutritious, and safe
- Everyone has the agency to participate in and influence food systems
- Food systems are resilient, ecologically sustainable, socially just, and honour Indigenous food sovereignty

Food insecurity, in contrast, exists when factors outside an individual’s control negatively impact their access to enough foods that promote well-being.

- Economic, social, environmental, and geographical factors influence this access.
- Food insecurity is most acutely felt by those who experience the negative impacts of structural inequities, such as discrimination and ongoing colonial practices.¹

¹ BC Centre for Disease Control. (2022). Defining food security and food insecurity. Vancouver, BC. BCCDC, Population Public Health <http://www.bccdc.ca/our-services/programs/food-security#Reports--&--resources>.

The BCCDC acknowledges that Indigenous food sovereignty is difficult to define and that some people argue that a definition cannot adequately capture the nuances of Indigenous food sovereignty. The former chief of Bonaparte Indian Band, Ryan Day, shared some words that help capture the concept:

“Our laws of how to exist as Indigenous Peoples come from our Land, our teachings of how to exist in the world are given by the interconnected web of living organisms from our stories passed down, and through our observation of their patterns and behaviours in the seasonal round and their cycle of life. To be told of these things is considered knowledge in the western tradition, but Indigenous Knowledge is only truly known when it is practiced, and in this way, it becomes a part of who we are: Indigenous food sovereignty is Indigenous Sovereignty. Without wild foods, and the practice of learning and interacting with them, we cease to be Indigenous, it is a fundamental part of our existence in this world. I would argue the entire fight for “Title and Rights” by generations past and present is based on this premise. We need to be very careful not to water down colonial resistance by changing the language to food sovereignty and food security, it always has and always will be about our existence as Indigenous Peoples in this world being entirely dependent on our relationship to our Lands. Indigenous Food Sovereignty is a knowledge trust that must be protected, for it is what informs the path forward to finding balance in a world that is in crisis.”

–Ryan Day, Bonaparte Indian Band

The BCCDC report concludes that Indigenous Food Sovereignty must be discussed in the context of actions and systems change; “Colonial systems need to be restructured to better support Indigenous food sovereignty and ensure that policy is grounded in practice. This work is the responsibility of non-Indigenous people—an ongoing process of unlearning current ways of thinking and re-learning based on the values and practices that guide Indigenous Peoples’ relationships to the Land and each other.”²

² BC Centre for Disease Control. (2022). Defining food security and food insecurity. Vancouver, BC. BCCDC, Population Public Health. <http://www.bccdc.ca/our-services/programs/food-security#Reports--&--resources>



Ongoing Challenges

This section thematically highlights challenges shared by participants/community members that Indigenous communities face in maintaining and achieving food security and food sovereignty. The common thread woven throughout is that they are all being exacerbated by climate change and require collective and cross-government action to be addressed.

Effects of Colonization

“It is important for us to return as our community was subject to a forced removal. Early colonizers recognized the abundance here and removed us.”

–Participant, Forum

The intergenerational effects of colonization on Indigenous Peoples, the land, and the relationships between the two, continue to hinder Indigenous Peoples’ ability to reclaim food sovereignty. Access to traditional territories, and therefore food systems, is fettered by ongoing dislocation, intergenerational trauma, racism, lack of oversight of industries, weak provincial lands and stewardship regulations, poverty, the privatization of unceded land, and more.

As was previously mentioned, the interconnectedness and synergistic relationships that Indigenous Peoples have to their traditional territories and food systems provided sustained food sovereignty and food security for millennia. Forced systems of colonization sought to dislocate Indigenous Peoples from their families, territories, and cultural connection to the Land. For many years, the reserve systems prohibited First Nations Peoples from leaving the small parcel of land they were allocated, therefore cutting them off from traditional food sources. Instead, they were provided rations of tea, flour, and sugar. In residential schools, children were fed inadequately and were often malnourished. In many reserve communities across the province, poverty affects one’s ability to purchase foods of higher quality, and sometimes there is access to only low-quality foods that are high in sugar, salt and fat. Many Indigenous Peoples have adapted to the flavours of these often low-quality and less nutritious foods and no longer have a taste for traditional foods. These realities, among other colonial impacts, resulted in a magnitude of effects on the mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical health of Indigenous Peoples.

Consequently, access to traditional foods, and therefore Indigenous food sovereignty, is greatly impacted by these health impacts. Being out on the land requires physical fitness, as well as emotional, mental, and spiritual fortitude. And yet, being out on the land, interacting with traditional food sources, combined with the nutritional values of these foods, is noted to be the greatest benefit to the holistic health and well-being of Indigenous Peoples.

In some instances, prejudice and racism towards Indigenous Peoples remain issues that interfere with hunting and harvesting practices. In one case, Fort Nelson First Nation community members returned to a lake to fish for the first time in 60 years. Once word got out to the broader community, a member of the Nation received phone calls from non-Indigenous people accusing them of over-fishing, completely overlooking the 60-year hiatus. Another example that one participant pointed out is that the disproportionate cases of violence against Indigenous women and 2SLGBTQQIAA+ people mean it is sometimes dangerous for these demographics of Indigenous Peoples to go out on the land.

Whereas colonization has resulted in numerous inequities between non-Indigenous and Indigenous Peoples living in BC, it has also created disparities between Nations. For example, one participant pointed out that reserves in the interior are larger because First Nations used cattle-ranching as leverage for negotiating land size (more land is needed for cattle-ranching). Therefore, some Nations have more land which often translates to greater food sovereignty and food security. As another example, interior Nations moved about the land in seasonal rounds, going to specific places to monitor and enhance the land in various ways to maximize the probability of abundance (security). Colonial impediments have significantly obstructed the ability of many First Nations communities to move freely in pursuit of food sovereignty and food security within their territories.

Throughout the engagements, several Elder participants shared that they were forced to garden in residential schools and for this reason, it is very hard for some community members to participate in and feel safe around gardening initiatives.

“It is so important that we create space and we take the time to be trauma-informed. Sometimes we don’t think about it when we are doing a garden project or a solar project, but the reality is that for us, it’s always deeper.”

– Participant

Climatic Impacts

“The heat impacts we went through last year had significant impacts. When we had 46 degrees, this was in Shuswap, the only thing I could do was just lay in the shade... And it caused problems in the greenhouse. Once the bugs get in there– they come with the heat– they destroy your garden in just a couple of days. We have to change the ways that we grow food.”

– Participant, Forum

Given the complex and diverse biogeoclimatic zones within the territories collectively known as British Columbia (BC), there is a high degree of variability between regions in regards to the climatic changes Indigenous communities are beginning to experience. More extreme temperatures, variations in precipitation, extreme weather events, and nutrient leaching will all vary considerably across the province.

Climate change is a driving disruptor to Indigenous food systems and the interconnected food web, resulting in disorientation for many species. For example, participants noted that some species that have historically served as vectors, carrying seeds to new sprouting locations, are no longer doing so, compounding the decline of food crops that their communities rely on. In other instances, participants noticed that birds are not returning to their usual areas, and new birds that have never been seen before are now appearing. Both food and medicines are becoming disturbed as new plant communities move in, and there are even hunters reporting that elk, moose, wolves, and cougars are pushing their previous boundaries of habitat range, which is impacting other species in the area. This is changing the whole kin system, which will have unknown, long-term impacts.

“Harvesters are noticing that Saskatoon berries aren’t producing despite prolific bloom - the pollinators are struggling.”

–Keynote Speaker, Forum

“I tend to think just macro, but I think the microclimate that we have is being changed. I have an acre—even within that acre I am having to plant in different zones.”

–Participant, Forum

Environmental Degradation and Industrial Activity

“Industry is pushing our main source of protein, which is moose, away from the territory and it gets harder and harder to hunt what we need.”

–Indigenous Climate Adaptation Working Group Member

Another critical factor compounding climatic impacts on food sovereignty and food security for Indigenous Peoples is the rampant environmental degradation from human activity and industrial resource extraction. An ongoing issue that has remained largely unaddressed for many years is the concern over the lack of accountability within resource extraction industries that irreparably damage the environment and destabilize Indigenous food systems. There was a strong desire for increased monitoring of industry; participants shared that they do not trust industrial self-monitoring or their environmental reclamation processes. Participants also advocated for Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) to be referred to (but not appropriated) in determining industrial standards.

“Industry is threatening our ecosystems. The kelp forests are so important for the protection of herring and salmon fry—it is all relative. Commercial aspects as well—we have a lot of things like mid-water draggers and trawlers who fish off our coast, but there are billions of dollars [in the fishing] industry—it is hard for the government to regulate [fishing practices], and shipping, too. The government gets so much money from these [practices], but the protection of these areas is so important. We spent millions of dollars cleaning the BC coast—and one incident has repopulated it with marine debris.”

–Indigenous Climate Adaptation Working Group Member

Many participants expressed concerns about moose populations in BC, with a participant in the south reporting a lack of moose due to forestry practices. Another participant noted that this decline has also affected moose populations in the north due to the increase in hunters resulting from the decreased populations in the south. Some First Nations have stopped moose hunting to allow populations to regenerate, but participants pleaded for more Nations and governments to become increasingly involved. Moose are integral to many Indigenous communities' food sovereignty and food security and it is important to protect their natural habitats because moose cannot be farmed to sustain their populations due to the diverse foods they require to survive; “once their habitat range is substantially restricted, they will starve to death” (Participant, Forum).

Another participant found that competition from commercial berry picking camps also created stress on the environment because they would come in and harvest too much at one time, impacting the birds and bears who also rely on berries in that area.

COVID and Compounding Crises

The food security of Indigenous communities was immensely impacted during the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly in remote communities. As one participant noted, “[w]hat happened in the pandemic is people who were relatively well-off, privileged, had money, could afford to [be] food secure. They can go and buy food off the shelves at the drop of a hat, and those of our people, the majority of whom can’t do that—they don’t have the means... so the food security situation became much worse.”

Inflation and High Food Prices

“Our truck comes in once a week and the prices are crazy. Half the time the bread is already expired or we get old and mouldy vegetables.”

—Indigenous Climate Adaptation Working Group Member living in a remote community



Between August 2021 and August 2022, food prices rose by 9.1%³. For remote communities where prices are already staggering, this rise will exacerbate food insecurity for many. As one participant explained, local wild food sources help to secure food for families who cannot afford to depend solely on grocery stores; “The grocery truck here has the furthest to travel, we are the last stop in BC. food prices here are VERY high. [We] don’t have a Walmart here... [so] It helps financially, the fish.”

You have to have money to buy food. So many people are in situations where there’s just not enough. Or they can walk to the convenience store, but not the bigger stores. Poverty is an issue—and a big one. Especially folks who have to depend on the welfare system... I was a teacher for many years, and I learned I had to bring extra snacks to class because kids were hungry. So many people can’t afford either food security or rent. I’m appreciating the fact that Indigenous Peoples are starting to have more say over the social services.”

—Participant, Métis Climate Resilience Gathering

³ Consumer Price Index. BC Stats, October 2022 https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/data/statistics/economy/cpi/cpi_highlights.pdf

Honouring Métis-Specific Challenges

Métis People in BC experience specific challenges related to food sovereignty and food security. Many participants in the Métis Climate Resilience Gathering commented that lack of access to land greatly impacts their food sovereignty and food security. Other participants commented that the lack of resources such as time and awareness of programs as well as gardening knowledge impacts their ability to be food secure and/or sovereign. Participants also commented on how the geographically dispersed populations of Métis People impact communal food sovereignty and food security projects.

“For Métis as well, given that we are so dispersed it can be difficult to share knowledge and resources within our communities. So linking communities is key. I think that access to land is really important. Not only access to resources to get started; but access to time. And access to knowledge. If you didn’t grow up in a house that valued that, then you didn’t know where to start. Linking communities is key. But up here we are so geographically located it’s hard to be connected.”

–Participant, Métis Climate Resilience Gathering

Honouring Urban and Away from Home Challenges

Urban and Indigenous Peoples living away from their home territories face particular challenges; it can be challenging for them to access community programs or support systems that promote food security and/or food sovereignty, nor can they readily access their traditional hunting and harvesting territories.

Other Challenges

- Tourism is very popular in places like Haida Gwaii, especially for tourists who enjoy hunting. One participant commented that hunters are drastically impacting local food sources for people in their community.
- Another participant commented on the immediate gratification that stems from western culture. People are used to having mangoes when it’s not mango season in Mexico, and so they are shipped in from further countries, contributing to greater amounts of CO₂ in the atmosphere. This participant advocated for eating within local, seasonal rounds and becoming adjusted to different diets.
- Participants noted the critical importance of clean water in food chains and food production. Food sovereignty and food security efforts will go to waste without strong water protection acts that heavily penalize industries.



*Illustration by Michelle
Buchholz*



Recommendations for Building Food Security and/or Sovereignty in a Changing Climate

Implementing solutions to strengthen food sovereignty and food security will require a multifaceted approach supported by all levels of government and sectors, as well as equitable collaboration with Indigenous communities across the province. The following recommendations were synthesized from the feedback gained across all engagements and follow-up conversations. They are divided into two sections, acknowledging that some aspects of food sovereignty and food security require provincial involvement while others will be most impactful when led by communities. Provincial recommendations are subdivided into the following themes: Funding & Subsidies; Policy; Environmental Management; Curriculum/Education; Engagement, Networking and Knowledge-Sharing; and Data Collection. Community-led roles include: Restoring Indigenous Food Systems, Stewardship Practices, and Cultural Teachings; Community-Led Planning Processes; and Strengthening Community Connections and Well-being.

When considering the recommendations below it is important to remember that climate adaptation projects that work well in one part of the province may not be a good fit elsewhere. As an example, one participant explained that many hothouses available on the market are not ideal for communities north of Williams Lake, so their community partnered with a local university to engineer subterranean hothouses. Therefore, solutions should consider Land-based knowledge, be bio-regionally appropriate, and work within the means and capacity of each particular community.

Building Indigenous Food Security and Food Sovereignty from a Provincial level

The following recommendations from what was heard through these engagements have been compiled for the Provincial government to consider in the development of the Provincial food security framework.

Funding & Subsidies

- Create non-prescriptive grants that support self-determination in terms of Indigenous food sovereignty and food security as well as a specific stream for pilot projects.
- Ensure that the grants include full-time employment of teams, dedicated contracts, education, and meaningful community engagement and planning efforts.
- Fund summer student employment programs to increase youth leadership and keep youth involved in food sovereignty and food security projects.
- Provide funding for regional food coordinators and mentorship programs to help connect communities that want to learn from one another's food sovereignty initiatives.
- Provide seasonal grants for community programs that increase access to traditional foods such as providing communities with funds to go harvest roe on kelp, hunt deer or catch salmon.
- Provide funds that community members living outside of their traditional territory can apply for to access their traditional Lands for food harvesting/hunting.
- Fund food projects/programming for Indigenous Peoples living off-reserve including urban Indigenous Peoples.

- Fund guardians programs to protect water (i.e. Guarding a section of the ocean from ships/fishing so that coral can start growing again, leading to greater fish populations).
- Fund apprenticeships and training programs for youth to be involved in the development of local infrastructure, stewardship, and food system projects.
- Invest in innovative, nature-based and/or Indigenous solutions/practices like aquaponics.
- Fund access to land for Indigenous communities; costs for fuel, outdoor gear, vehicles and additional paid time off from work.
- Provide funding for Indigenous cooking classes in communities to help teach traditional and innovative ways to prepare wild foods (as much of this knowledge has been lost through colonization).
- Subsidize food costs, particularly for Indigenous Peoples who are:
 - a) without access to traditional hunting/gathering territories,
 - b) living remotely where food prices are very high,
 - c) struggling to afford food, and
 - d) living in urban areas where the cost of living is very high.
- Subsidize gear and gas costs for hunting/fishing/harvesting.
- Subsidize local food production through tax breaks for small-scale food producers and accessible small business grants.
- Subsidize taxes on local food items purchased by grocery stores.

Policy

- Ban the use of glyphosate and other harmful pesticides/herbicides (in forestry practices, utility services, agriculture, aquatic environments, and home usage).
- Create stronger policies in the forestry industry that limit clear-cut acreage and support mixed-wood forests to
 - a) promote wildlife habitat for hunting areas,
 - b) limit flooding during atmospheric rivers, and
 - c) limit the impact of forest fires.
- Increase provincial monitoring of industry and agricultural practices and their environmental impacts.

“Too often we rely on industry monitoring their own impacts—understanding the impacts on our food systems, and where we need further action to protect them would go a long way.”

—Participant, Forum

- Strengthen water protection acts.
- Refer to traditional ecological knowledge when creating policies for industrial standards.
- Create policies that support moose populations to regenerate.
- Look to nature-based solutions and Indigenous Knowledges for solutions/innovations in agricultural and forestry practices.
- Avoid solutions that depend on genetic modification, chemical additives, or interference with natural systems.
- Continue funding the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and 2SLGBTQQIAA+ Peoples Action Plan so that Land-based practices that support food sovereignty and food security feel safe and accessible to more demographics.
- Invest, at a Provincial and Federal level, in localized food sources and decrease reliance on imported food sources.

“It would be good to know where our food comes from, how we can make it more efficient, and how we can change consumer habits –we are probably importing a lot of our food in all of BC, and are exporting foods from BC. It doesn’t make sense. We need to build those efficiencies and study the food brought into our communities.”

–Indigenous Climate Adaptation Working Group Member

Emergency Management

- Co-develop or support communities in developing emergency plans, inclusive of food reserves and rations for communities most likely to be impacted by supply chain issues, climate disasters, etc.

Curriculum/Education

- Include Indigenous history and colonial impacts on Indigenous food systems into the provincial curriculum.
- Promote mental health benefits of gardening and being outside on the land into the curricula of schools with high populations of Indigenous students.
- Include garden programs into the provincial curriculum, inclusive of Indigenous gardens, Land-based Knowledges and culturally relevant teachings. For example, in Okanagan schools, students could learn about the four food chiefs (a Syilx creation story).

Engagement, Networking, and Knowledge-Sharing

- Create networks that support Indigenous communities to share best practices, relationship-building, and data.
- Maintain an open dialogue and sustained relationships between the Province and Indigenous communities through accessible engagement, dedicated public servants, and open communications (such as an open portal for communities to express needs, observations, issues, etc.).
- Continue Indigenous advisory committees related to climate change, food sovereignty and food security.
- Increase awareness of residential school impacts and support intergenerational healing initiatives in communities.

Data Collection

- Invest in sustained, thorough, and open-access data collection regarding climate change impacts on Indigenous food systems.

“Our kelp is disintegrating. We are hearing about how we are threatened by salmon farming –they continue to threaten fish stocks today. We are hoping that more studies come out of this.”

–Indigenous Climate Adaptation Working Group Member

- Invest in Indigenous-led data collection for identifying traditional gathering areas and how climate changes might affect them to allow communities to act preemptively to protect areas or transplant important species.

“If there was a better understanding at the local level about what our bioregional needs are, then communities could determine how to get the appropriate resources to build food production, harvesting, processing, and distribution capacity to meet the needs of the community.”

–Participant, Forum



Building Indigenous Food Sovereignty and Food Security from a Community-based Level

Indigenous Peoples have continuously been at the forefront of environmental protection, stewardship and activism. The following recommendations were shared by participants in support of community-led initiatives and practices to collectively educate, empower, and mobilize communities to continue to restore their inherent rights as Indigenous Peoples and citizens.

“We need to come together as a community and start making our own bread and growing our own fresh vegetables to have a chance of survival in a healthy manner.”

–Indigenous Climate Adaptation Working Group Member

Restoring Indigenous Food Systems, Stewardship Practices, and Cultural Teachings

- Communities must understand that the restoration of Indigenous food systems, stewardship practices, and cultural teachings are paramount to strengthening Indigenous food sovereignty and therefore self-determination.
- Teachings of the interconnectedness of food, culture, and the land (including deep knowledge of food systems and synergistic stewardship practices) need to be passed on to the next generations.
- Getting kids and youth in the gardens might encourage participation from Elders, helping to heal and restore relationships with food cultivation.

“Food is culture; we need to practice cultural teachings to restore symbiotic food systems.”

–Participant, Forum

Community-led Planning Process

- Bring community members together to create a plan to gain community buy-in and ensure projects and ideas are headed in a direction that's appropriate for the community. The community planning process should be sure to include meaningful dialogue with community members of diverse demographics to best understand and accomplish collective community priorities. Resources for Comprehensive Community Planning are available through Indigenous Services Canada.
- Conduct feasibility studies and make them publicly available to support other communities who might be considering similar projects.

- Start small and build capacity over time; focus on the core priorities before expanding into other complimentary services and programs.
- Acquire resources to ensure full-time employment of teams, dedicated contracts, and education opportunities to ensure the continuity of effective plans and programming.
- Promote and replicate successful programs already occurring in BC, such as solar greenhouses, composting programs and community gardens, to limit many risks involved in starting something new in a community.
- Caution specialization in certain foods and areas as it may lead to monoculture, bringing communities back to square one, unless communities decide to trade crops with each other.

“Accessibility I think, having an abundance of ways to readily participate and learn about how foods are grown, and how to develop that relationship to Land. So many of us are urban Indigenous and/or don’t have access to growing space.”

–Participant

Strengthening Community Connections and Wellbeing

- Strengthen community and family ties to increase the success of programs and projects within communities: Participants voiced the positive impacts of spending time together while learning how to grow food and listening to traditional stories.
- Share and learn beyond the community: Participants expressed the benefits of sharing and learning across a broad network of communities as well as local businesses.
- Create food programs that build traditional knowledge and connect youth to Elders to strengthen community connection and build youth knowledge and resilience.
- Increase awareness of the intergenerational impacts of residential schools on community members to support healing and community-building.
- Invest in wellness: Many participants commented that gardening, harvesting, hunting, fishing, and being on the Land are all hugely beneficial to physical, mental, emotional and spiritual wellness.

Conclusion

Indigenous Peoples remain intimately connected to their traditional territories and food systems. As the province continues to develop its food security framework, there is a resounding acknowledgement that the leadership, expertise, and perspectives of Indigenous Peoples are vital to advancing this work and ultimately, reclaiming Indigenous food sovereignty and food security.

This report raises the voices of Indigenous participants from across what is known as British Columbia, speaking to climate-related impacts threatening food sovereignty and food security. Participant feedback illuminates the interconnected challenges that culturally and geographically diverse communities and Nations face, inclusive of changing weather patterns, environmental degradation and industrial activity, effects of colonization, COVID-19, inflation and high food prices, and Métis-specific, as well as urban-and-away-from-home- specific challenges. Recommendations for building food sovereignty and food security were highlighted in terms of Provincial and community roles. The three project profiles in the Appendix provide a snapshot of the incredible and innovative community-based initiatives currently underway in the province.

Appendix

Project Profiles

There are many food sovereignty and food security projects and initiatives underway across British Columbia as communities shift and adapt to climate change realities. Gardening, agriculture, traditional harvesting, fishing, and aquaculture activities and programs were highlighted by many participants as a cornerstone of reclaiming and decolonizing food sovereignty and food security. While some projects may experience a gradual start as the community becomes familiar with its implementation and goals, several tools (such as putting gardens in central locations, and serving participants with varying levels of experience) have proven to be successful methods when engaging communities on food sovereignty and food security initiatives.

Before going into depth on the three projects highlighted below, it should be noted that many other initiatives were mentioned throughout the engagements and research. These include, but are not limited to:

- Traditional berry walks
- Greenhouse projects
- Food forests
- Community-run ranches
- Community gardens
- Vertical gardens
- Youth camps where kids interact with ancestral foods and medicines
- Seed saving and sowing
- Pickling and preserving
- School trips to gardens
- Fruit tree planting
- Regenerative farming practices
- Local food box deliveries
- Harvesters programs (dispersal of hunted or gathered foods to community members)

Below are three examples of projects that are lifting people up and helping to address food security and food sovereignty within communities.

Granny Gardens & other initiatives by Qqs (Heiltsuk)

“In a moment where people were looking for something to engage them and something bigger to be connected to, something that made them feel linked to people around them even when they couldn’t physically be together: gardening worked at that moment.”

–Indigenous Community Climate Resilience Story

Qqs responded to COVID-19 related isolation and food insecurity through a new delivery model of their Granny Gardens gardening program. Instead of gathering people together in the garden, Qqs distributed planters, seeds, and soil to community members to enable gardening at home. When the new delivery model was introduced, peer support and community connections were created and maintained through a new online Facebook community. The name “Granny Gardens” was chosen as a way of acknowledging the ancestors, particularly women, who have held knowledge of the plant systems that have supported the Heiltsuk to thrive and survive every adversity that they have experienced since creation.

Within several months, Granny Gardens grew from supporting a few dozen families to over 150, with up to half of the community showing interest in future participation. After pandemic restrictions were lifted, many workshops resumed and Qqs began including other resilience-based skills, such as sewing, seed saving, and pickling. In addition, Qqs began sending families home with care packages of food and plants.

Qqs then undertook a Community Food Security Assessment to collect data on how the community viewed and understood food systems. Ultimately, 92 households volunteered to participate in the survey, providing feedback that resulted in 25 recommendations to increase food security. In response to the recommendations, Qqs created Granny’s Kitchen, a “zero-barrier” food bank, supported through both financial and in-kind contributions from a coalition of health organizations. Granny’s Kitchen provides regular hampers of fresh groceries, personal hygiene products, and non-perishables to over 200 local households in the community.

Additionally, Qqs launched a harvester program where they have created and hired a roster of commercial harvesters whose income was impacted by the pandemic. These harvesters went out and gathered ancestral foods which are then put into hampers and distributed to Elders in the community. To facilitate sharing and preserving traditional knowledge, many harvesters have been paired with local youth to support identifying and harvesting ancestral foods for the community.

Each of these Qqs initiatives ensures that community members are regularly provided with meals focused on ancestral foods, and access to skills-based training, all while preserving Land- and community-based food traditions and knowledge, thus upholding the principles of food sovereignty and security.



Tea Creek in Gitxsan territory by Dzapł Gygyaawn Sgyiik (Jacob Beaton - Tsimshian)

“Most of what we do is actually building self-esteem. After getting through the year, food is a great outcome, but the real story is how many people we’ve empowered and helped along the way.”

–Indigenous Community Climate Resilience Story

Launched in 2021, Tea Creek is an Indigenous-led, outdoors-based, culturally safe, hands-on organization that delivers introductory trades and food sovereignty training. The vision statement for this initiative is to create resilient, healthy, local Indigenous communities through land-based programs and abundant local food. Tea Creek is based on a unique land-based model that combines skills, knowledge and tools surrounding food, mental health and wellness, and trades training together into programs and initiatives. Tea Creek is not owned by any single First Nation, which poses an advantage due to its apolitical nature, creating a safe space and resource for people from different nations to access, increasing participation from community members.

Tea Creek began in 2019 when gardeners started homesteading on a farm that was located on a very important piece of Gitxsan territory, a crossroads of trails and a traditional meeting place. Tea Creek is also located in three overlapping climate zones: coastal, arctic, and boreal interior. This geographical diversity provides a great teaching tool as Tea Creek sustains vegetation in all three of the climate zones.

Due to pressures and food scarcity related to climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic, many First Nations in the area were seeking reliable food sources, knowledge, and tools surrounding food production. The food scarcity during this time highlighted the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 and climate realities on low-income families who could not afford to stock up on items when food shortages were anticipated. In response, Tea Creek built greenhouses, and bought seeds and agricultural equipment to focus on local food security (avoiding dependence on supply chains) while also securing youth employment funding to hire Indigenous youth to help build the greenhouses.

In 2021, Tea Creek produced a surplus of over 20,000 pounds of food on 1.8 acres of active field blocks. All of the food was gifted and distributed to over 1000 guests who came to the farm.

In addition to growing food for the community, Tea Creek emphasizes training programs and saw 33 graduates from their various programs in 2021. Working with three different First Nations partner communities, Tea Creek continues to work to better understand different community visions and opportunities for new training offerings, such as machine operation, medical cannabis growing, indigenous agriculture and professional cooking. Ultimately, Tea Creek is envisioning a future of low- to no-barrier programs that continue to promote culturally-grounded, Indigenous-led food sovereignty and food security in the community.



Kanaka Bar (Nlaka'pamux)

“What we did is we reversed the effects of colonization, and we didn’t do it alone, we did it together.”

–Keynote Speaker, Forum

Kanaka Bar produced a land use plan that summarized all of the impacts on the Land between 1888 and 2015, to determine the availability of land and resources for housing, economic development, and traditional use activities. In 2021, the community decided to replace the land use plan with a community resiliency plan to promote 100 years of resiliency and stability focused on:

- Air and water;
- Food and shelter;
- Capacity development;
- Knowledge gathering, storage, and transfer; and,
- Energy, transportation, and waste management.

Kanaka Bar has used its Community Resiliency Plan to guide its initiatives, programming, and projects. A key area Kanaka Bar invested in is water supply, which they have effectively doubled by investing in infrastructure to capture and store water. As the foundation for the health of communities and the Land alike, investing in water ensures food security for the community as without water, there is no food, no life.

Kanaka Bar is also investigating best practices for harvesting fruits, vegetables, and rabbits. Investing in nature-based solutions, they have implemented irrigation systems to support natural ecosystems that are affected by climate change. By irrigating traditional food systems, Kanaka Bar ensures abundance whereas these foods might otherwise be endangered due to increased temperatures and drought. Kanaka Bar has also invested in Controlled Environment Agriculture (CEA), using shipping containers and grow lights, allowing them to control the heat, humidity and lighting so that fruits and vegetables can be grown year-round and processed for storage. Archeological records indicate that Kanaka Bar has been practicing traditional forms of agriculture for over 7000 years, and these modern approaches ensure that they can continue to uphold their food sovereignty. Kanaka Bar makes it clear that through reconnecting with the Land, they have rekindled their self-identity and the responsibility to manage their Land and resources.