

STEWARDING FOOD SYSTEM PROJECTS

A DECISION-MAKING GUIDE FOR INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES



Funded in part by the governments of Canada and British Columbia under the Sustainable Canadian Agricultural Partnership, a federal-provincial-territorial initiative.

HOW THE FIVE TOOLKIT PATHWAYS WORK TOGETHER



This guide is made up of **five (5) toolkit pathways**, and has been developed for Indigenous leaders (decision-makers and senior staff) and community members who want to start, or scale up, a food-related enterprise.

The guide can be followed from start to finish, exploring all five individual pathways, or they can be used independently. They are summarized as follows:

1) Community Alignment for Food Initiatives: this is intended to support Indigenous Leadership in determining if the project is a good fit for their community.

2) Determining Readiness: this is a decision-matrix tool intended to be completed by food entrepreneurs and project champions to ensure that their initiative is implementation-ready.

3) Gathering Support: this is a toolkit intended to support food entrepreneurs and project champions in developing a case for support for their project.

4) Food Project Presentation Checklist: this is a detailed checklist intended for food entrepreneurs and project champions who are preparing to present to potential funders and/or to Indigenous Leadership.

5) Restarting Stalled Food Projects: this toolkit can help community leaders work through questions to determine if an existing stalled project should be revived.

HOW THIS GUIDE WAS CREATED



Stewarding Food System Projects: A Decision-Making Guide for Indigenous Communities is grounded in years of Indigenous leadership, partnership, and collective learning across British Columbia. Indigenous Nations and organizations have consistently affirmed that food systems are inseparable from Indigenous laws, cultures, economies, and responsibilities to land and water. Food is not simply a sector or service, it is a living system that sustains community well-being, governance, and self-determination.

This understanding has been reinforced through extensive engagement and analysis, including the [Discussion Paper on Indigenous Food Sovereignty in British Columbia](#), which documented Indigenous-led food initiatives, shared narratives, and successful case studies across the province. The paper, supported by the B.C. Indigenous Advisory Council on Agriculture and Food (IACAF), highlighted both the strength and diversity of Indigenous food systems and the need for tools that support community-driven decision-making, long-term stewardship, and locally defined success.

These themes were echoed and deepened through [The Gathering of Indigenous Organizations](#), which brought together Indigenous food, agriculture, and fisheries organizations to share experiences, identify barriers, and articulate collective priorities. The Gathering, which was supported by IACAF, underscored the need for stronger coordination, clearer pathways through funding and policy systems, and practical tools that support Indigenous communities to make informed, values-based decisions as they steward food system projects.

At the same time, Indigenous partners have identified ongoing challenges navigating funding, policy, and program environments that are often misaligned with Indigenous priorities, timelines, and governance structures. The [Gap Analysis of Funding for Indigenous Agriculture and Food](#), guided by IACAF, confirmed these systemic barriers and underscored the need for clearer, more accessible decision-making supports for communities leading food system projects.

This toolkit responds directly to that need. It is designed to support Indigenous communities and entrepreneurs as they steward food system projects, from early visioning through implementation and sustainability, by centering Indigenous values, rights, and responsibilities. Rather than prescribing solutions, the guide is intended to provide practical frameworks and reflective questions to help communities assess opportunities on their own terms, navigate partnerships and funding, and make informed decisions that align with their own laws, priorities, and long-term food sovereignty goals.

The toolkit project team (Ispahcâw Consulting and Upland Agricultural Consulting) would like to express our deepest gratitude to all those who shared their stories and feedback with us during the development of the toolkit.

GLOSSARY

Business and governance language can sometimes feel unfamiliar or overly technical. When presenting projects to leadership, partners, or funders, using clear and simple explanations can help build shared understanding and trust. When in doubt, plain language is often the most effective way to communicate complex ideas. The following terms are occasionally used throughout the this toolkit:

Asset

Physical infrastructure, equipment, or something of value owned by a business or organization. This could include land, buildings, vehicles, livestock, or intellectual property.

Band Council Resolution (BCR)

A formal motion passed by Chief and Council that authorizes a specific action or decision.

Business

An initiative with the goal to earn income or profits.

Co-operative (Co-op)

A member-owned organization where profits and decision-making are shared among members.

Corporation

A legally registered business entity that exists separately from the people who own it. Corporations can own assets, sign contracts, and carry liabilities.

Cost of Goods Sold (COGS)

The direct cost required to produce a product. For food projects, this may include seeds, feed, ingredients, packaging, and labour involved in producing the item.

Demographics

Characteristics of a group of people such as age, income, household size, or lifestyle. These details can help identify potential customers.

Direct-to-Consumer (DTC)

Selling products directly to the customer without intermediaries. Examples include farm stands, farmers' markets, or community food box programs.

Distribution Channel

The pathway a product takes to reach customers. For example, direct-to-consumer (farmers' markets, farm gate sales, online sales), or delivery to grocery stores or food wholesalers.

Enterprise

A project or initiative that requires effort, often in the form of a business to generate profit.

Entrepreneur

Someone who has a business idea, whether or not they have previous experience in business.

Equity

Ownership in a business or project. For example, someone who owns 50% equity owns half of the business.

Equity Investment

Money invested in a business in exchange for ownership shares.

Grant

Funding provided by governments, foundations, or organizations that does not need to be repaid if the project meets the agreed conditions.

GLOSSARY

Infrastructure

The physical systems needed to operate a project, such as buildings, irrigation systems, power supply, roads, or equipment.

Letter of Intent (LOI)

A written statement from a potential buyer indicating interest in purchasing a product. It is not a contract but shows potential demand.

Liability

A responsibility or obligation, often financial. Liabilities can include debts, loans, or legal responsibilities such as insurance coverage.

Loan

Money borrowed that must be repaid over time, usually with interest.

Margin

The difference between the cost of producing a product and the price it sells for. Margin helps determine whether a product is profitable.

Market Validation

Evidence that customers exist for a product. This could include conversations with buyers, letters of intent, or market research.

Net Profit

The money remaining after all business expenses are subtracted from total sales (revenue). It shows whether a business is actually making money.

Net 30 / Net 60

Number of days that it may take to receive payment timeline after an invoice has been submitted.

Operator / Project Lead

The person responsible for the day-to-day management of a project or business.

Partnership

A business arrangement where two or more people or organizations share responsibility, decision-making, profits, and risks.

Revenue

Money earned from a product. Does not account for expenses to make the product.

Scaling

Expanding the size or production level of a business.

Supply Chain

The network of steps involved in producing and delivering a product, from raw materials to the final customer.

Wholesale

Selling products in larger quantities at a lower price to retailers, distributors, or other businesses who will then sell the product to consumers.

Working Capital

Money needed to operate the business before revenue is received. This can include paying staff, buying supplies, and covering operating costs.

Acknowledgments

This toolkit was developed by Ispahcâw Consulting and Upland Agricultural Consulting. All information is current to 2026.

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Examples used through this toolkit have been gathered with permission or from public-facing documents and websites.

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