



PREPARED: FEBRUARY 2023

ASSET MAPPING REPORT

FOOD ECOSYSTEMS PROJECT

NORTH CENTRAL REGION

HOSTED IN THOMPSON

BY FOOD AND BEVERAGE MANITOBA &
COMMUNITY FUTURES MANITOBA

Contents

Background	2
List of Participants	3
Workshop Method of Delivery	4
ASSETS Identified	4
Highlights Identified	5
Steps Forward	7
Resources & Supports	11
Research & Development	12
Appendix A	13

Background

The Food Ecosystems Project is a partnership between Food and Beverage Manitoba and Community Futures Manitoba.

This Project investigates how Manitoba's food and agriculture industry — from entrepreneurs such as growers and processors, to retailers and end-users — can contribute to a more resilient economy and strengthen our capacity to weather future crises. By engaging an array of stakeholders through workshops and interviews, we identify opportunities, gaps and initiate strategic investments (infrastructure and services) to grow this vital sector.

The Project takes a community-driven, partnership centered approach to mobilize existing assets, avoid duplication and enhance the resiliency and capacity of Manitoba's food ecosystem.

Expected Project outcomes:

- Inform future investments in funding, infrastructure and services, directly through partner organizations as well as in providing recommendations to the Province of [Manitoba's Next Policy Framework](#);
- Create connections between regions and communities;
- Support post-COVID recovery;
- Encourage collaboration, diversity and sustainability;
- Create new pathways for entrepreneurs and business owners to sustain and grow their business by connecting them to services, equipment, expertise and capital.

List of Participants

Invitations were sent out to 25+ economic development agencies, tribal councils, community organizations, farmers, service delivery providers, and entrepreneurs/small-mid sized enterprises (SMEs) located in the North Central region. The invitation list was compiled based on recommendations from Food and Beverage Manitoba and Community Futures North Central Development. Invitees were encouraged to invite other participants located in the North Central region and working in the food and agriculture industry.

Name	Organization
Eugene Larocque	Arctic Gold Honey / Arctic Bison
Steven Larocque	Arctic Gold Honey
Liz Sousa	Community Futures NCD
Tim Johnson	Community Futures NCD
Ken Slobodian	Community Economic Development Fund
Chris Thevenot	Community Economic Development Fund
June Chu	Northern Association of Community Councils – Northern Vice Chair
Melissa Branconnier	Prairies Can
Emily Pruder	Thompson Crisis Centre
Connie Krahenbil	Thompson Community Development Corp.
Caroline Sanoffsky	Bayline Regional Roundtable
<i>Marlene Coltran</i>	<i>Regrets</i>
<i>Tom Scotg</i>	<i>Cross Lake – regrets</i>
<i>Freda Lepine</i>	<i>Regrets</i>
<i>Shyanna Lynxleg</i>	<i>Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak - regrets</i>
<i>Marilyn Linklater</i>	<i>Nelson House Medicine Lodge - regrets</i>
<i>Charles Simard</i>	<i>C&M Farms - regrets</i>

Workshop Method of Delivery

There was one, 3.5-hour asset mapping workshop with lunch in Thompson at the Ma-Mo-We-Tak Friendship Centre on February 2, 2023. The workshop prioritized [community economic development principles](#) and used the “Whole Assets” approach. The Whole Assets approach allows community members to value social, economic, and physical aspects of their region. This is a broad approach to asset mapping in that it identifies assets across a whole spectrum of possibilities including built, economic, social, natural and service-oriented assets.

The workshop was advertised through various means including direct email invitations to membership networks, social media channels, local food security and community groups, newsletters, as well as recommendations from the local Community Futures offices. Any community members involved in the food and agriculture industry, including service delivery providers, were invited and welcome to participate in the workshop.

The participants engaged in open discussion about the inventory of all good things in their region connected to food and agriculture, ranked the most valued aspects using a dot democracy exercise (more dots indicate high importance), and discussed how to preserve these assets. Once the assets were identified and valued, the next stage was to strategize about how to build on the assets in order to sustain and enhance them for the future. This process of asset mapping provides a critical element of community development, which is the engagement of people in the shaping of their community.

Lastly, the workshop included a discussion about assets that the participants felt were missing in their communities and could help enhance or compliment the previously identified assets.

ASSETS Identified

Assets were identified by participants in the following five categories: built, economic, social, natural and service. Assets were then ranked using a dot democracy exercise (more dots indicate high importance). A full list of the assets identified in the workshops can be found below in [Appendix A](#).

Highlights Identified

- The region has **an abundance of traditional knowledge, traditional medicines, foraged products such as mushrooms and berries, fishing, and other culturally significant products** that are highly valued and provide opportunities for additional community-based jobs, revenue, and food security.
- **The biggest challenge identified in initiating or scaling an agri-food business was government regulations**, that either were not developed with the uniqueness of the Northern context in mind (such as access to economies of scale and/or specific infrastructure) or that involve multiple disconnected levels of government (ex. in navigating crown land restrictions). There is a lot of local desire to scale up land-based production from being hobby focused into a more sustainable industry.
- **Preserving the cleanliness of the lakes and fish populations was noted as a top priority, along with the boreal forest** and natural products from this ecosystem as noted above. Hydro dams, regulations around crown land use, and the disconnect between decision-makers in the north and south negatively impact the ability of community members to earn a living from these resources.
- **Informal mentorship and networking opportunities** were cited numerous times as invaluable to the community, and in particular, to those launching new enterprises. These informal networks allow for increased collaboration and industry knowledge regarding grant or loan opportunities through to technical advice and services. This is especially helpful for new farmers or entrepreneurs with less experience attempting to enter the sector. There was also a desire to expand networks and connections to markets in southern cities such as Winnipeg or Brandon.
- **Traditional knowledge from elders and others with lived experience on the land is valuable to the community.** However, lived experience and traditional knowledge (typically passed down in informal networks and/or orally) is not always acknowledged or accepted in comparison to “formal education”. There is a disconnect between modern education and modern life versus the land-based skills and knowledge kept by previous generations. **There is an opportunity to preserve this knowledge and connect elders with younger generations before this knowledge is lost.** Programs like culture camp and the Boreal Discovery Centre are extremely important in achieving this goal

and need support to continue. **University College of the North (UCN) is identified as an important resource; however, it was acknowledged that it is underutilized and there is more potential there.**

- **Formalized blueprints or manuals specific to the North do not exist for many projects** (ex. beekeeping) and could be helpful for expanding or replicating projects in the community, or other neighbouring communities. One area for potential replication that is becoming more popular, and has seen success in communities such as Churchill, Norway House Cree Nation and others, is self-contained vegetable growing operations.
- **Food security in the North is a major and ongoing issue, which could be restored by allowing greater distribution of foraged, trapped, or hunted wild foods.** Without a wild meat inspection site, or more lenient health guidelines which would enable the donation of wild foods, it is not possible to distribute this important resource among community members. Wild meat and local dishes are noted as a strong source of pride.
- There is **limited to no access to commercial kitchens in the region.** This makes it challenging to develop, produce and sell food products that adhere to regulations. While some kitchens are certified, few are publicly available or accessible to SMEs due to a lack of human and administrative capacity. Others could be certified, but again lack the human and administrative capacity to coordinate the process(es).
- **It is very difficult to grow beyond small-scale local farm gate sales for primary producers and processors.** Production of valuable crops and products (ex. Haskap berries and honey) is possible, but **the storage, processing, and distribution of these products is very difficult to develop from scratch for SMEs.** The process of securing retail placement is resource intensive and difficult to navigate. Lack of processing and storage infrastructure was noted repeatedly as a barrier.
- Funders and loan-providers such as Community Futures, Prairies Can and CEDF are identified as assets. **However, provincial, or federal grants and the conditions that are required to obtain them are unattainable for most SMEs** and are seen as more targeted and relevant for larger scale operations. Larger companies have access to more labour, knowledge, experience, resource, and infrastructure capacity to write the grants and meet the conditions. More **pathfinding supports** would be welcomed to ensure that SMEs are better able to source funding information and are better able to navigate grant writing processes.

Steps Forward

- **Support the development of a northern Manitoba brand in the small-scale food sector** recognizing that previous recommendations have noted that “government and the food industry should continue to **act together to highlight local foods.**”¹ Additionally, “**collaborative marketing models**”² should continue to be funded and if possible, increase funding, of critical industry support organizations such as Food and Beverage Manitoba, Uptown Emporium, Community Futures North Central, and other local organizations (such as Community Economic Development Fund (CEDF)/Look North). Travel Manitoba could also play an important role in supporting the marketing and promotions of local food-based businesses, including the development of a northern Manitoba brand that these businesses can access.
- In 2017, a report and action plan authored by Look North recommended: “There is a clear need to develop enterprise culture and to help business start-ups and small and medium enterprise (small business) to succeed in local communities... **Government has a clear role to play in facilitating growth through regulatory enablement**, e.g. regulation and policy reform to better enable growth.”³ This recommendation is relevant for the agri-food industry in general, which should be supported to “develop an **ongoing consultative opportunity** between government and the small-scale food processing sector, **to problem solve early in the policy and regulation-making process.**”⁴
- **Recognizing the differences in barriers between northern and southern Manitoba**, or remote and central communities, is another critical consideration for facilitating the growth and success of northern SMEs. Due to issues around economies of scale, as well as infrastructure limitations in northern Manitoba, **alternative business models such as social enterprises, co-operatives or collaborative non-profit initiatives should be encouraged for growing northern Manitoba’s agri-food sector**, especially for small-mid sized primary producers and Indigenous communities. Divestments in business support or mentors for this kind of incorporation has had negative consequences and hindered rural and northern economic development. Some people approaching provincial

¹ Page 13, <https://www.gov.mb.ca/agriculture/food-and-ag-processing/pubs/small-scale-food-report.pdf>.

² Ibid.

³ Page 9, https://www.gov.mb.ca/asset_library/en/looknorth/look-north-report.pdf.

⁴ Page 12, <https://www.gov.mb.ca/agriculture/food-and-ag-processing/pubs/small-scale-food-report.pdf>.

advisors are actively discouraged from starting cooperatives, despite decades of success on the Prairies. Increased support for Manitoba Co-operative Association, and focused practitioner training for socially driven business development, must be considered.

- Communities that house significant hydro electric infrastructure may be impacted in negative ways, as one report noted that, “whitefish populations in northern Manitoba also collapsed with impoundment, resulting in substantial declines in income for communities that were once prosperous.”⁵ This study recommended that action is taken to increase opportunities and capacity for “Indigenous communities to shape decision-making regarding this and other related development” that impacts Manitoba’s traditional agri-food economies. New funding opportunities should be made available for **First Nations communities to establish “guardian and monitoring programs to make well-informed decisions to protect [Lakes, Rivers] and our traditional livelihood [in northern Manitoba].** These programs fill gaps in scientific understanding by centering Indigenous knowledge and relying on people living on the land.”⁶
- With funding support, SMEs in the food and agriculture industry would find **value in more networking and mentorship opportunities throughout northern Manitoba.** These could be supported by local Community Futures offices, Food and Beverage Manitoba, or others, and include partnerships with band offices, chambers of commerce, or local councils. Events are best attended when they are well-funded, with some structure as well as food and beverages to encourage gathering. Such events and mentorship programs would be catalysts for collaborative partnerships and innovations.⁷
- “Collectively, **Indigenous Peoples contain knowledge of a wealth of cultural diversity in the ingenuity of food systems that are adaptive to the world's diverse ecosystems and climate change.** Realizing this goal begins with encouraging and enabling Indigenous communities to fully access and appreciate their local cultural heritage and identity... Continuity of traditional practices is essential and includes encouraging new ideas and expressions of culture with food, including indigenous cuisines with biodiverse species and preparation techniques. These **initiatives require legislation that enables and protects natural resources and their use, and ensures time, funds, and equipment for**

⁵ Further, “Per capita incomes in SIL dropped from levels that were 5X the average of northern communities in 1967 to ones where the majority of fishers are now on Social Assistance (Kamal et al. 2014, Dysart pers. comm.)”. Page 9, https://hydroimpacted.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/WaNiSkaTan_SSHRC_PG_Application-Compressed-copy.pdf.

⁶ <https://www.lwic.org/call-to-action-2>.

⁷ Page 40, <https://www.gov.mb.ca/agriculture/food-and-ag-processing/pubs/small-scale-food-report.pdf>.

Indigenous Peoples to reinforce cultural food system access and identity.⁸ These goals and similar initiatives are echoed in the province’s small-scale food sector report from 2015, which noted that “preserving heritage breeds of animals and traditional seeds was important... this genetic bank might be lost or severely diminished without small scale agriculture”.⁹ It is strongly suggested that the province of Manitoba **learn from, and co-create mutually acceptable health guidelines alongside Indigenous food makers, knowledge keepers, and experts** in order to support an increase in the number of Indigenous and traditional cuisines based upon biodiverse species and preparation techniques (as noted above). Food Matters Manitoba may be able to support this process, with their direct experience in the area of Indigenous Food Sovereignty.

- Create a **business mentorship program** for SMEs in the food and agriculture industry through Food and Beverage Manitoba. This could include **the creation of relevant playbooks and manuals to be shared across Manitoba’s agri-food industry**, as well as taking “**a collaborative industry-government navigator approach** to assist small entrepreneurs; create a 1-800 mindset.”¹⁰ Such a program would assist entrepreneurs when navigating existing resources and provide direction to relevant models, services and resources such as the Province of Manitoba’s Agriculture and Health departments, Prairie Research Kitchen, Bioscience Association of Manitoba, the Richardson Centre for Food Technology at the University of Manitoba, amongst others. The business mentorship program should support training focused on scale-up and commercialization as well as selling online, wholesale, and direct to retail and could be supported in partnership with UCN.
- Expand funding support for **food security projects that prioritize local food access and waste reduction**. Current regulations must also be changed to **allow for wild meat to be shared with non-profits and community organizations**, using different precedents. As one example, regulations in the Northwest Territories, indicate that “there is nothing that prevents Indigenous Peoples from sharing their traditional/country food. However, there are still policies that apply to the sharing of wild food in an urban center. For example, under Section 13 of the Wildlife General Regulations, if a gift of more than 5 kg of lawfully harvested game meat is to be given, it must have the following information with it: name of harvester, license number or name of Indigenous organization to which

⁸ “Why and How to Strengthen Indigenous Peoples' Food Systems With Examples From Two Unique Indigenous Communities”, Harriet V. Kuhnlein and Sinee Chotiboriboon, <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fsufs.2022.808670/full>.

⁹ Page 21, <https://www.gov.mb.ca/agriculture/food-and-ag-processing/pubs/small-scale-food-report.pdf>.

¹⁰ Page 31, <https://www.gov.mb.ca/agriculture/food-and-ag-processing/pubs/small-scale-food-report.pdf>.

the person is donating, the date of the transaction, the species, and the exact weight of meat.”¹¹

- **Adopt a home food processing regulation like that in Saskatchewan which supports an increase in permitted cottage food production and direct sales to the public for “low risk” foods.**¹² Additionally, identify and invest in local leaders and organizations, such as CF North Central, CEDF/Look North, UCN, and/or Uptown Emporium, to **mobilize one of the existing commercial kitchens to make it publicly available for food entrepreneurs.** Without such supports, the food and agriculture industry in northern Manitoba will continue to be disadvantaged.
- Investment is needed in more **shared storage and distribution infrastructure** for local food producers (fishers, processors, etc.). This will grow the food and agriculture sector by encouraging SMEs to scale their business without taking on more debt than is financially viable. Funding can assist in scale-up, increasing rural and northern access to urban market opportunities, as well as promoting strategic rural-urban partnerships and collaborations. With funding support, Food and Beverage Manitoba or CEDF/Look North are potential options to activate and oversee this investment.¹³
- **Create relevant, accessible, well-advertised funding opportunities for SMEs** by supporting a third-party funding delivery agent that represents their interests such as Food and Beverage Manitoba or CEDF/Look North. Include funding streams for small equipment purchases, shared infrastructure investments and collaborative distribution projects that allow northern communities to address challenges such as rising fuel costs. A local task force would also be helpful to support SMEs and local organizations in navigating regulations and funding, and alerts to potential opportunities.

¹¹ Page 9, <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fcomm.2022.780391/full>.

¹² <https://www.saskatchewan.ca/residents/environment-public-health-and-safety/food-safety#home-food-processing>.

¹³ Ibid, Page 37.

Resources & Supports

Food and Beverage Manitoba

Phone: 204-982-6372

E-mail: info@foodbeveragemb.ca

Website: <https://foodbeveragemb.ca/>

Community Futures North Central Development

Phone: (204) 677-1490

Email: ncd@northcentraldevelopment.ca

Website: www.cfmanitoba.ca

Manitoba Agriculture

Phone: 1-844-769-6224

E-mail: mbagrifood@gov.mb.ca

Website: <https://www.gov.mb.ca/agriculture/index.html>

Communities Economic Development Fund (CEDF)

Phone: 1.204.778.4138

Website: <http://cedf.mb.ca/>

Northern Manitoba Food, Culture and Community Collaborative

Website: <http://www.nmfccc.ca/contact.html>

Manitoba Public Health Inspector

Website: <https://forms.gov.mb.ca/cmphi/>

Commercial Kitchens for Rent

Website: <https://www.gov.mb.ca/agriculture/food-and-ag-processing/starting-a-food-business/community-kitchens.html>

The Food Development Centre

Website: [Province of Manitoba | agriculture - Food Development Centre](#)

Bioscience Association of Manitoba

Website: [Home Page | Bioscience Association Manitoba \(biomb.ca\)](#)

Manitoba Industry-Academia Partnerships

Website: [Manitoba Industry-Academia Partnership](#)

Social Enterprise Manitoba

Phone: 204-943-0547

Email: m.barkman@ccednet-rcdec.ca

Website: <https://socialenterprisemanitoba.ca/>

Entrepreneurship Manitoba

Phone: 204-945-8200

Toll free: 1-855-836-7250

E-mail: EMBinfo@gov.mb.ca

Website: <http://www.entrepreneurshipmanitoba.ca>

Futurpreneur Manitoba

Phone: 204-296-2694

E-mail: clientsupport@futurpreneur.ca

Website: <https://www.futurpreneur.ca/>

Manitoba Cooperative Association

Phone: (204) 989-5930

E-mail: info@manitoba.coop

Website: www.manitoba.coop

Fireweed Food Co-op

Website: [HOME | Fireweed Food Coop](#)

Direct Farm Manitoba

Website: [Direct Farm Manitoba](#)

Manitoba Women in Agriculture & Food

Website: <https://mwaf.ca/>

Fresh Option Organic Delivery

Website: [Fresh Option Organic Delivery | Winnipeg Manitoba Canada](#)

World Trade Centre, Winnipeg

Website: <https://www.wtcwinnipeg.com/>

Research & Development

Prairie Research Kitchen

Website: [Red River College Polytechnic: Prairie Research Kitchen \(rrc.ca\)](#)

Richardson Centre for Food Research & Technology, UMB

Website: [Richardson Centre for Food Technology and Research | University of Manitoba \(umanitoba.ca\)](#)

Appendix A

SOCIAL

1. *Connection to food and knowledge keepers (4 dots)*
2. *RD Parker Land Based Training (4 dots)*
3. *Waponok School Raised Gardens (4 dots)*

Other

- Interconnected networks of people; everyone knows each other and the projects that are occurring (2 dots)
- Supportive community attitudes (1 dot)
- Scouts Group summer camp (1 dot)
- Relationship with elders and traditional knowledge
- Relationships and connection to funding partners

SERVICE

1. *Local skills and knowledge, with a commitment to transfer to youth (land-based education, community schools, supportive school divisions and universities) (6 dots)*
2. *Skills MB In-School Environment Program (2 dots)*
3. *Culture camp (2 dots)*

Other

- Business start-up support from organizations like CEDF, Community Futures, etc. (2 dots)
- Service hub of the north with healthcare, banking, etc. (1 dot)
- Free advertising opportunities through networking and community organizations (1 dot)
- Northern Gardening and food knowledge around cold climate food production and willingness to share knowledge (Arctic Gold Honey, Berry Little, Frontier School Division)
- Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak (MKO) food bank
- Northern Manitoba Food Culture & Community Collaborative (NMFCCC)

NATURAL

1. *Traditional medicines (5 dots)*
2. *Wild blueberries and berry picking x3 (5 dots)*
3. *Honeybees and pollinators (3 dots)*

Other

- Non-timber forest products, wild foods, etc. for niche markets (2 dots)
- Hunting and wild meats (wild chickens, elk, moose, etc.) (2 dots)
- Abundant lakes and rivers (water) x2
- Indigenous land
- Crown land
- Fish
- Natural fur
- Sturgeon project
- Birch syrup
- Pembina Plum trees
- Farming and honey processing equipment

ECONOMIC

1. *Community futures loans and services (4 dots)*
2. *CEDF loans, co-located services, community representatives x2 (4 dots)*
3. *Access to the land and unique partnerships (4 dots)*

Other

- Thompson fur tables (3 dots)
- Agriculture Canada funding (2 dots)
- Wabowden Garden Centre (2 dots)
- Traditional Indigenous economies and related skills (fishers, trappers, hunters) (2 dots)
- People looking for work (1 dot)
- Carbon offset program for fish waste (1 dot)
- Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak
- Keewatin Tribal Council
- Manitoba Metis Federation supporting economic development

BUILT

1. *University College of the North x3 (7 dots)*
2. *Boreal Discovery Centre with sturgeon and gardens x2 (3 dots)*
3. *Norway House Historical Data on Farming (3 dots)*

Other

- Hydro
- Highways
- Processing equipment and technology