

MNBC Ministry of Environmental Protection and Métis Rights Report on Home Garden Pilot Project 2021

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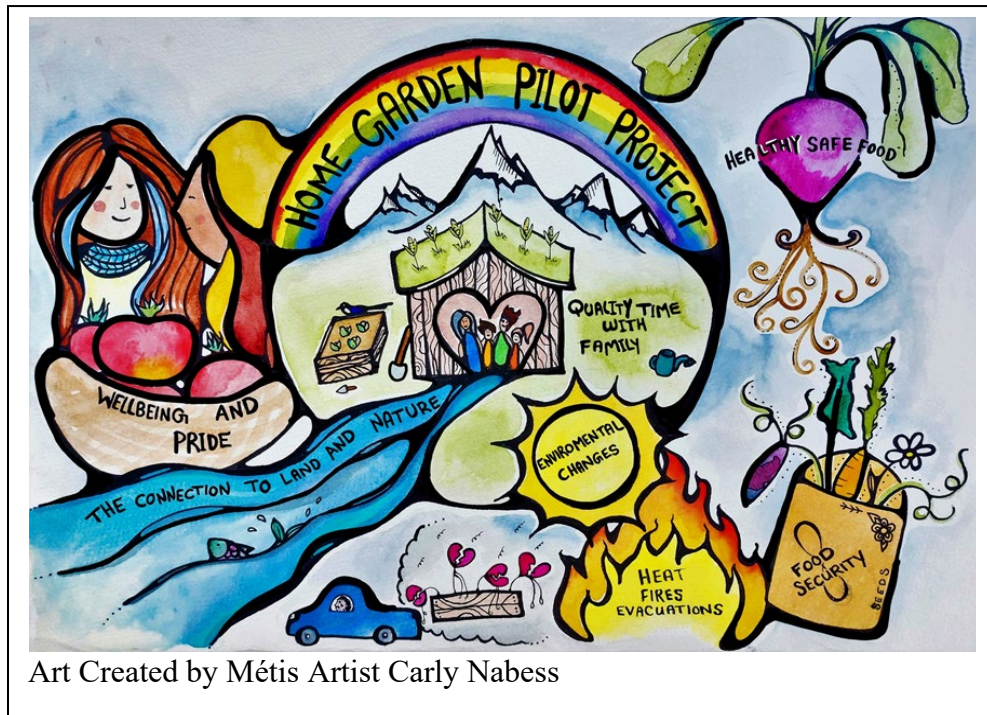


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Abstract

Food insecurity has been increasing in recent years and has been further exacerbated in 2020/2021 by COVID-19. Climate change and other factors will influence this in the upcoming years as well. The MNBC Cabinet and community members have identified food security as a key priority to focus future initiatives. The home garden pilot project (HGPP hereafter) was developed and launched by The Ministry of Environmental Protection and Métis Rights in response to requests for Métis people to be more self-sufficient in food security. The project was supported through the ISC COVID-19 needs-based funding and included 100 Métis households throughout the province.

The HGPP was launched in Spring 2021. In August 2021, the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Métis Rights conducted a survey to determine the success of the project. This report summarizes the project, details the results of the survey, concludes the success of the project and makes recommendations for improvements to the project to develop into a larger program.

Acknowledgements

Maarsii to the many people who made this pilot program possible and a huge success.

We are grateful to have received the funding from Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) through the COVID needs-based programming. Thank you for supporting this initiative and enabling us to provide this valuable opportunity to our community members.

Thank you to Geneviève Gratton for jumping right in and taking this project on in the early stages. Your dedication and ability to organize this quickly is greatly appreciated.

Thank you to Carly Nabess for capturing the essence of this project in her painting featured on the front page of this report.

Thank you to all the pilot project participants for sharing your knowledge, thoughts, and photos with us throughout the program. Because of your commitment and passion, we can conclude that it was a success, and your feedback will help us develop more meaningful programs in the future.

Maarsii.

Background

Food insecurity has been increasing in recent years and has been further exacerbated in 2020/2021 by COVID-19. Other factors will influence this in the upcoming years, such as climate change, which threatens to decimate traditional food systems, risking further serious consequences for livelihoods and health. Food insecurity and climate change are, more than ever, the two major global challenges humanity is facing, and climate change is increasingly perceived as one of the greatest challenges for food security¹.

The MNBC Cabinet and Community members have identified food security as a key priority to focus future initiatives on. Food security, as defined by the United Nations' Committee on World Food Security², exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life. The four pillars of food security are: food availability, access to food, utilization and stability.

According to Food Secure Canada³, when it comes to food security the goals are: zero hunger, healthy and safe food, and sustainable food systems. This is achieved by advancing food security and food sovereignty. Food security can be defined as: the state of having reliable access to a sufficient quantity of affordable, nutritious food.

There are many considerations when discussing food insecurity, as just gaining access to food is not always enough. It is a complex problem that requires interdisciplinary research and collaborative solutions. For example:

- Simply having a job and stable income is not enough; low-waged jobs and temporary work means people in the workforce often do not have enough income to be food-secure.
- Food insecurity rates are highest for single mother households and households with incomes below poverty line.
- Food insecurity may be long term or temporary. It may be influenced by a number of factors including income, employment, race/ethnicity, and disability.
- A number of factors can affect food security including population growth; climate change; urbanization and industrialization; land use shifts and water scarcity; income growth and nutritional trends; and trends in global energy supply and food trade.
- The impact of food insecurity on health extends beyond diet and nutrition.
- Food insecurity leaves a lasting mark on children's wellbeing. Experiencing food insecurity at an early age is associated with childhood mental health problems, such as hyperactivity and inattention. Experiences of hunger in childhood increase the risk of developing asthma, depression, and suicidal ideation in adolescence and early adulthood.

¹ HLPE, 2012. Food security and climate change. A report by the High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition of the Committee on World Food Security, Rome 2012.

² [Committee on World Food Security - United Nations Special Rapporteur \(hilalelver.org\)](http://www.hilalelver.org)

³ [Food Secure Canada](http://www.foodsecurecanada.ca)

- Adults living in food-insecure households report poorer physical health and are more vulnerable to a wide range of chronic conditions, such as diabetes, heart disease, hypertension, arthritis, and back problems. They are also more likely to be diagnosed with multiple chronic conditions. Additionally, adults with mobility impairments appear to be disproportionately affected by food insecurity.
- There is a particularly strong relationship between food insecurity and poor mental health. The risk of experiencing depression, anxiety disorder, mood disorders, or suicidal thoughts increases with the severity of food insecurity.
- In addition to income, housing tenure is an economic risk factor for food insecurity. Studies have repeatedly found that households owning their home have a decreased vulnerability to food insecurity compared to renters.

There are cultural considerations to be mindful of when discussing food and access to food. When trying to understand the reasons why harvesting, and access to traditional foods, is essential to Métis, it is important to look at the matter in terms of the Métis conceptualization of health and wellness. The Métis understanding of health is different from biomedical models, which often describe health as an absence of disease. For Métis people, the idea of health and wellness is derived from the Cree *miyopimatisiwin*, which means living well, or being alive well. *Miyopimatisiwin* is a way of life; in fact, it is *the* Métis way of life. The Métis harvest their own food because they need the sustenance that the food provides, and harvesting their own food is less expensive than buying it.

Métis report a higher rate of obesity, heart disease and diabetes than the general population. Harvesting their own food helps cut down on the intake of food that is high in calories, and low on nutrients and contains a lot of fat and sugar. Métis also appreciate the natural quality of harvested foods. This is closely related to health, but also captures ideas about tradition, purity or organic virtues, and nutritional value, and warrants a separate acknowledgement. Métis also like the taste of harvested food compared to the taste of food bought in stores. The activities surrounding the harvesting of food, including scouting, searching, and tracking, is also something that Métis enjoy that they would not get by simply buying food in a store.

Indigenous households (including Métis) in Canada are more likely than non-Indigenous households to experience the sociodemographic risk factors associated with household food insecurity (poverty, single parenthood, living in a rental accommodation, and reliance on social assistance).

It is because of these interconnected considerations that it is important to go beyond food security and aim to enact food sovereignty, including Indigenous food sovereignty and Métis food sovereignty.

Food Sovereignty

Food sovereignty is defined by the International Panel for Food Sovereignty (IPC), as: “the right of peoples, communities and countries to define their own agricultural, labor, fishing, food and land policies, which are ecologically, socially, economically and culturally appropriate to their

unique circumstances. It includes the true right to food and to produce food, which means that all people have the right to safe, nutritious and culturally appropriate food and to food producing resources and the ability to sustain themselves and their societies”⁴. The concept was developed by an organization called La Via Campesina in 1996, out of recognition that the concept of food security lacked to address the asymmetry of power in the food chain. Food sovereignty as a policy seeks to balance the inequalities of the food system and to consider food beyond a commodity. Six pillars of food sovereignty were developed at Nyéléni 2007, the World Forum for Food Sovereignty.⁵ The pillars are:

1. A focus on food for the people by placing their needs at the center of policies and acknowledging food is more than commodity
2. Values the people who provide the food
3. Focuses on local food systems by supporting shorter food chains, rejecting inappropriate food aid, and creating independence from remote and unaccountable food corporations
4. Puts power in the hands of the local producers by rejecting the privatization of natural resources
5. Promotes knowledge and skills by starting with traditional knowledge, using research to pass on this information, and rejecting technologies that undermine local food systems
6. Works *with* nature by maintaining healthy ecosystems, improving resilience and rejecting destructive food production methods
7. A seventh pillar of food sovereignty was added by members of the Indigenous Circle during a following world forum: food is sacred – food is a gift and must not be squandered or commodified

Indigenous Food Sovereignty

In 2006, a Working Group on Indigenous Food Sovereignty was created to address the underlying factors that cause food insecurity and to ensure that Indigenous voices, perspectives, and knowledge were included in the discussions. Dawn Morrison, the founder of the working group, lists the four principles of Indigenous food sovereignty as:

1. Food is sacred, not a commodity;
2. Participation – current and future generations need to continue cultural harvesting practices;
3. Self-determination – the freedom for Indigenous peoples to make their own choices about their food;
4. Legislation and policy that attempts to reconcile Indigenous food and cultural values with colonial food systems through a restorative framework.⁶

⁴ International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty. IPC Handbook. International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty; 2020. Available from: [IPC Handbook - International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty \(IPC\)](#)

⁵ Food Secure Canada. What Is Food Sovereignty. Available from [What is Food Sovereignty | Food Secure Canada](#)

⁶ Morrison D. BC Food Systems Network – Working Group on Indigenous Food Sovereignty: final activity report. Nelson, BC: BC Food Systems Network; 2008 Mar. Available from: [WGIFS Final Report March 08.pdf \(indigenousfoodsystems.org\)](#)

Generally, Indigenous food sovereignty is defined as “the right to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods...[as well as] the right [for Indigenous peoples] to define and control [their] own food and agricultural systems, including markets, production modes, food cultures and environments.”⁷ It is a framework to enable Indigenous peoples to develop highly sustainable, resilient and adaptable harvesting strategies.⁸



⁷ First Nations Health Authority. Planning for food security: a toolkit for the COVID-19 pandemic. North Vancouver, BC: First Nations Health Authority; 2020. Available from: <https://www.fnha.ca/WellnessSite/WellnessDocuments/FNHA-Planning-for-Food-Security-A-Toolkit-for-the-COVID-19-Pandemic.pdf>.

⁸ Morrison D. BC Food Systems Network – Working Group on Indigenous Food Sovereignty: final activity report. Nelson, BC: BC Food Systems Network; 2008 Mar. Available from: [WGIFS_Final_Report_March_08.pdf](http://indigenousfoodsystems.org/WGIFS_Final_Report_March_08.pdf) (indigenousfoodsystems.org)

Example of an Initiative Supporting Indigenous Food Sovereignty

As stated by Yukon Hospitals, “healthcare facilities that serve Indigenous populations have an obligation to remove barriers to health, healing and culture.” Out of the recognition that traditional food is an important part of First Nations culture, they developed the Traditional Foods Program, which is part of their larger First Nations Health Programs. Resident licensed hunters and First Nations hunters donate wild game to the program. The hunters, along with the Food Services Team who prepare the food, follow Traditional Foods Program Protocols and Procedures to ensure the safe and quality delivery of traditional meals to Indigenous patients. First Nations Liaison staff visit Indigenous patients to help them access traditional foods and support their cultural needs and healing. Foods served include moose, Bannock, cranberries and caribou.

The Haida Gwaii Hospital and Health Center also launched a project in 2018 to bring traditional meals to Indigenous patients.

To read more about these initiatives: [Traditional Food Program | Yukon Hospital Corporation \(yukonhospitals.ca\)](https://www.yukonhospitals.ca/traditional-food-program)

[Why bringing traditional food into Haida Gwaii hospitals and schools matters | Canada's National Observer: News & Analysis](https://www.canadapress.ca/story/indigenous/2018/06/why-bringing-traditional-food-into-haida-gwaii-hospitals-and-schools-matters)

Métis Food Sovereignty

Currently there is no agreed upon definition of Métis food sovereignty, however, Devonn Drossel, who hosts the podcast *Our Foods: Chatting about Métis Food Sovereignty* produced by The Rupertsland Centre for Métis Research, notes that it likely depends on where you are and the traditions of that place. They describe Métis food sovereignty as the interconnectedness of food and culture; how participating in Métis food practices helps them to understand what it means to be Métis; as not being reliant on the capitalist structures to access food; as not having to worry about contaminants in harvested or hunted food or experiencing violence when accessing food rights or land; as having the ability to define Métis food systems; and finally, that Métis peoples’ right to food “comes with a very distinct set of responsibilities that [Métis] have to uphold to”. Enacting Métis food sovereignty would mean “[seeking] to address the underlying issues that continue to contribute to disproportionate negative health outcomes, food insecurity and lack of access to cultural food and practices”.⁹

There is currently a lack of information on current Métis food practices, especially those relating to berry harvesting, farming, and fishing. There is also a lack of gender studies in Métis food practices.¹⁰

Over the coming decades, a changing climate, growing global population, rising food prices, and environmental stressors will have significant yet uncertain impacts on food security. Adaptation strategies and policy responses to global change, including options for handling water

⁹ Devonn Breanna Flora Drossel (Host). What is Métis Food Sovereignty? (No. 1) [Audio podcast episode]. In *Our Food: Chatting about Métis food sovereignty*. Rupertsland Centre for Métis Research. [Podcasts | Faculty of Native Studies \(ualberta.ca\)](https://www.rupertsland.ca/podcasts)

¹⁰ For more information see Chapter 5: Women’s Environmental Knowledge and the Recognition of Métis Rights, and Chapter 6: Community-based Research and Métis Women’s Knowledge in Northern Saskatchewan, in *Living*

allocation, land use patterns, food trade, postharvest food processing, and food prices and safety are urgently needed. It is crucial that governments do not wait until widespread food shortages emerge but act now in anticipation of challenges ahead rather than waiting until these threats materialize, and then being compelled to react in an emergency atmosphere.

MNBC has historically not had an Emergency Response or Management plan. We were very reactive to the pandemic but have been able to begin to work on an Emergency Management plan. This will enable us to be more proactive in the future, this includes food security (beyond COVID).

Home Garden Pilot Project Launch

The project was initially open to 50 participants, but due to the interest in the project (50 applicants in 45 minutes), the project was extended to 100 participants.

There were two separate aspects to the project:

1. distribution of a seed starter pack of 11 varieties of plants, and
2. a grant of \$200 for each participant to procure soil and gardening tools locally.

The total budget for the seed starter packs was \$2,400, the total budget for the grant was \$20,000, and the total budget for seed starter pack distribution was \$1,823, for a total project budget of \$24,223.

Budget for Seed Purchase

Seed Type	Crop Type	Pack Size	Price
Bean, Bush, Dry	Kidney CO	500g	\$22.50
Bean, Pole, Fresh	Emerite	500g	\$26.25
Chard	Rhubarb CO	100g	\$12.60
Corn	Candy Mountain CO	200g +2 packets	\$36.80
Cucumber	Pickling CO	20g	\$24.00

A Barrier to Indigenous Food Sovereignty

In an interview with CBC, Jared Qwustenuxum Williams, an Indigenous food sovereignty advocate and chef, describes how BC food policy and regulations impedes access to traditional foods. He says that if traditional ingredients cannot be used, Indigenous cuisine cannot be highlighted. Qwustenuxum prepares meals for 100 Quw'utsun' Elders daily. Some of their traditional foods include raw herring eggs, lingcod eggs and salmon head, which aren't commercially available. Since Qwustenuxum and all his staff must have their FOODSAFE certificate to work in the kitchen, and this certificate prescribes that all food comes from an approved source that is in accordance with BC Food Premises Regulations, they are not able to serve these traditional foods. Qwustenuxum notes how challenging that makes it for Indigenous Peoples to reconnect with their traditional foods and culture if they're not allowed to share, showcase or access it.

To read the article:

['Our culture is in everything': This Indigenous chef is on a crusade for food sovereignty | CBC Radio](#)

Kale	Nash's Green CO	100g	\$24.00
Lettuce	Rouge D'hiver CO	2 packets	\$8.00
Mustard	Mizuna CO	20g	\$8.40
Squash, Summer	Dark Star Zucchini	50g	\$37.50
Squash, Winter	Delicata CO	50g	\$41.25
Flower	Phacelia CO	10g	\$9.00
Shipping			\$12.00
Taxes			\$13.12
Total			\$275.42

Budget for Seed Distribution

Expenditure	Qty	Cost each	Total
Bubble mailer package - 5/pack	10	\$6.49	\$72.69
Xpresspost shipping estimate	50	\$14.25	\$748.13
Small seed packing envelope - 250/pack	3	\$26.99	\$90.69
Total			\$911.50

Application Process

The program was advertised on the MNBC website and social media. Families interested in applying for the HGPP filled in an online application form that collected their contact information, mailing address, and details about their gardening plans. Pictures and information from the progress of their gardens were encouraged to be shared with the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Métis Rights to assist in the assessment of the pilot project.

For participants to be eligible for the project, they had to be a Métis citizen or self-identifying as Métis (with priority given to MNBC citizens), and no more than one applicant per household.

Applicants were asked to provide their mailing address (to send the seed kits) as well as a copy of a void cheque to have the \$200 grant for soil and tools deposited into their account. Applicants were also asked to provide their contact information (email and phone number) so that the Ministry could check in with them throughout the summer to gauge the success of the pilot program. Applicants were to declare that the funds they received would be used for the purpose of gardening.

Each seed pack contained 11 varieties of seeds. The table below list the varieties and quantity of seeds of each. The seeds were purchased from BC Eco Seed Coop. The seeds were bought in bulk and then divided up into envelopes for each applicant.

Number of Seeds	Plant Type
20	Kidney Beans
20	Fresh Green Beans
30	Rhubarb Chard
20	Candy Mountain Corn
10	Pickling Cucumber
30	Green Kale
30	Rouge D’hiver Lettuce
30	Mizuna Mustard Green
10	Zucchini Squash
10	Delicata Winter Squash
20	Phacelia Flower (to attract pollinators)

Ministry Feedback

From the perspective of The Ministry of Environmental Protection and Métis Rights, the project was a success. Some logistical challenges mentioned were as follows:

- Dividing seeds up into individual packages was time quite consuming
- It was challenging reaching individuals in Chartered Communities who may not have regular internet access (or any at all)
- Because the funding was received late in the start of the growing season, seed suppliers were sold out of a lot of varieties, and gardeners did not have the head start on planting that may have yielded higher success

HGPP Survey

The Ministry of Environmental Protection and Métis Rights conducted a survey (using the Survey Monkey platform) to determine the success of the pilot project. All participants of the project were asked to complete the 17-question survey, between August 26th and September 10th, 2021. Generally, the survey sought to determine who the project served (number of people in household, who in household participated, new gardeners/experienced gardeners), how the project contributed to food security, and how the participants received the project (level of satisfaction and ideas for improvements). Seventy participants completed the survey (70% of participants).



Art created by Métis Artist Carly Nabess

Summary



A summary of the results is as follows:

- The number of people in respondents' households ranged from 1 to 6 and averaged 3.2 people.
- 77% of respondents lived in houses, 7% lived in apartments/condos, and 16% lived in another type of housing (e.g. townhomes, basement suites, etc.)
- 80% of respondents had gardened before
- 86% of respondents had parents or grandparents who gardened
- 98% of respondents were able to find and/or access good tools and soil for their gardens
- 82% of respondents felt that their garden contributed to food security in their household
- 77% of respondents felt a 'gardening handbook' would be helpful

Some of the plants that respondents listed their parents and/or grandparents had grown included a variety of flowers, fruits, vegetables, herbs and "everything to survive".

Participants

When asked who in their household participated in the gardening:

- 32 % of respondents gardened alone
- 27 % of respondents gardened with their partner
- 8 % of respondents gardened with a parent
- 31% of respondents gardened with their kids
- 22 % of respondents gardened with the entire household or family
- 7 % of respondents gardened with family or friends living in another household
- 3 % of respondents gardened with a sibling
- 7 % of respondents with their grandparent(s)/grandchild(ren)



Seed Selection

When asked if they were happy with the seed selection, 88% of respondents were satisfied, while 12% were dissatisfied with the seed selection. The most (> 10 times) requested seeds to include in a future program were: tomatoes, carrots, peas and beets.

Other seeds that were notably mentioned (between 9 and 3 times) were: lettuce/greens (more variety or different variety), herbs, potatoes, berries, flowers/pollinator plants, onions, squash, more root vegetables, more region-specific seeds, pumpkin, cucumbers, tobacco, and Indigenous/traditional herbs. Nine respondents were content with the seed selection.

Harvest

When asked if they were able to harvest a satisfiable amount of produce from their garden:

- 69 % of respondents were satisfied with the amount of produce harvested
- 17 % of respondents were dissatisfied with the outcome of their gardens
- 14 % of respondents thought it was a good start, but didn't harvest as much produce as they'd hoped for (either due to fire evacuations, extreme heat, pests, or other factors)



Project Benefits

When asked to list a few benefits that they received through their gardens, some of the themes that came up in the respondents' answers were:

- Quality time spent together (family, siblings, partners)
- Daily access to fresh, healthy, safe produce
- Teaching kids to garden/what it takes to produce food
- Well-being (stress relief, sense of accomplishment, pride, benefits to mental health)
- Responsibility
- Connecting to land and nature
- Storing food for winter
- Increased appreciation for food
- Less food waste
- Less money spent on produce
- Sharing food with family and friends
- Learning culture
- Skills building and confidence building



Some especially heartwarming responses included:

- “we were able to cut down on buying produce from the grocery store saving us money and we were able to share produce with other family members so that was rewarding to be able to help them out too”
- “Connection to land, connection to family (family project), increased appreciation for food, less waste, help with income.”
- “Fresh organic produce right outside the kitchen door, usually picked moments before I cooked it- highly nutritious! As a mother this made me feel very good! Knowing there was no pesticides sprayed on our food. Teaching children the value of a seed and allowing them to watch the life cycles of insects that fed and pollinated in our garden. Then in turn watching the birds come in the yard to feed off the insects. Aside from the benefit of learning to grow and access our own food, it brought nature's classroom into the yard for the children to learn, while also providing us with exercise in the fresh air. The kids were more likely to try a new food when I explained that they helped to grow it themselves. I also had an opportunity and reason to investigate different practices (canning, freezing, drying) for preserving the harvests that we did not eat fresh. Lastly, it gave me an opportunity to model to the children our family values. When we have excess, we share. The children were included in sharing parts of the harvest with my next-door neighbours and my family, which allowed them to practice showing that we care by sharing.”
- “Creates a sense of purpose for the family and was able to provide excess to elders”
- “Food, connecting, harvesting together, learning culture”



- “Food for the winter months. Pickles from the cucumbers. Beans frozen in the freezer. Fresh lettuce for several months which I did not have to buy. There are many benefits for my family from having this garden for which I am so grateful for this program. Thanks to MNBC I have so much for winter for the family that I do not have to buy. The protein count from all of the winter food will benefit our health. Sincerely thank you for this garden.”
- “Family time, Mental wellness, Healthy snacking, Pride, Education, Responsibility”

Participant Recommended Improvements

When asked to share any thoughts or ideas on how to improve the program in the future, 49 respondents shared their ideas:

- Gardening information (dealing with pests, how to plant, weed suppression, improve soil, etc.)
- Send seeds earlier in the year
- Include Indigenous herbs/plants and information on storage and use
- Include recipes (some plants were unfamiliar)
- Information on seed saving techniques
- Information on preserving/storing vegetables
- Information on regional growing conditions
- More seeds/more variety of seeds
- Gardening workshop for beginners
- Group membership or discounts for gardening centers
- Platform for gardeners to connect (share tips, photos, ask questions)

In addition, 88% of survey respondents said they thought a ‘gardener support’ would be beneficial to the program in the future. The ‘gardener support’ would provide guidance and support in gardening, as well as troubleshooting for issues like pests and pool soil.

Finally, when asked if they would be interested in joining a workshop to discuss the project and share feedback with community members, 54% of respondents said yes, and 46% of respondents said no.

Email Correspondence from Participants

As part of the HGPP, participants were asked to send updates (and photos of their gardens if they liked). Below are some of the comments and photos that came in.

- “I am sending you a picture of the zucchini that I am grating for the freezer. Then I will make muffins with the frozen zucchini in the winter months.” – P. W.
- “[I] just wanted to say thank you so much to MNBC for the Home Garden Kit, every little bit helps in these times and my family and I are extremely grateful for the gift.” – S.S.



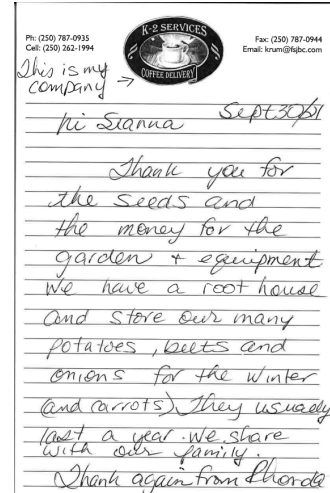
- “I would like to thank you for providing the opportunity to start my garden during this pandemic year. It may be a small start but as you can see there is a lot of activity within the deer fence. The deer also approve of all the plants which burst through the confines of the fence! Please continue this program so others may discover the joy of providing food for their family.” – B. R.

- “This was an amazing program to be a part of and I will never forget this opportunity.” – C. J-P.

- “We loved the program and it provided so much for our family.” – N. B.
- “Thank you all for having such a great project, this has really helped. I have harvested some amazing vegetables and have been having real nutritional meals. My freezer even has some for winter.” – C. K.



- “I would like to say that my garden didn't quite turn out like I wished it would have, between the extreme heat this summer and my neighbor having 2 female cats who both gave birth to a litter of kittens each producing about dozen kittens between the two and they decided using my garden plot for their bathroom was their right, so like I was saying my garden was more of a flop then a crop, lol” – B. L.



Program Development

Based on the feedback from participants and the staff at MNBC responsible for launching the program, the following items would be priorities to improve the program if it were to run again:

1. Send seed packs out earlier in the year

In order to give the Ministry more time to procure, organize and distribute the seed packs in time for participants to start their gardens in early spring (or start some seeds indoors), the program should aim to launch well before gardening season starts. Based on the feedback from the pilot project and from research conducted by the Food Security Coordinator, the Ministry now has all the information needed to launch the program a second time. All that is required for the program to run again is funding.

2. Provide more information in the home garden kits

Many participants, either through the survey or email correspondence, mentioned that it would be helpful in the future to have more gardening-related information. For example: how and when to start seeds, how to improve poor soil, growing tips for specific regions, and how to preserve vegetables. To address this, we recommend future home garden kit programs include a gardening booklet that includes such information, along with recipes and other gardening-related resources.

3. Provide more regional seed packs

Another suggestion is having regionally-relevant seed packs, or the option for participants to choose their seeds. B.C. is such a large and diverse province. For example, Region 7 has vastly different growing conditions than Region 2. Several participants had a couple failed crops due to their limited growing seasons. While we feel allowing participants to choose the seeds they desire would be complicated and cumbersome, we suggest providing two or three different seed packs that reflect the different growing conditions of the province. In order for this improvement to be carried out effectively in future programs, applications would need to be received prior to ordering seeds.

4. More seeds

Several participants requested more seeds for future programs. One way to provide more seeds, while at the same time reducing the labor associated with preparing and mailing seeds, would be to send whole seed packs to participants (rather than dividing up packs received from the supplier into multiple envelopes). Further labor and mailing costs could be reduced by having the suppliers send the seeds directly to the participants.

In addition to the seed kits and grants, other initiatives and improvements that could further support the Home Garden Program may include:

- Connect with seed co-ops and West Coast Seed's Seed Donation Program to reduce costs of seeds (and therefore the cost of running program)
- Build a 'gardening and food preserving group' (email list) with monthly updates sharing resources, tips, events, workshops, etc.
- Support Chartered Communities in developing community gardens for people who may not have access to a home garden (for example apartment dwellers)
 - Support could include funding procurement, a community garden handbook, and advising
- Host workshops that complement the program, for example:
 - canning and preserving
 - preparing traditional medicines from plants
 - beginners guide to gardening
 - seed saving
- Connect with gardening centres in each Chartered Community to obtain membership discounts/deals for MNBC citizens

Conclusion

Métis in B.C., along with MNBC's Cabinet, have addressed food security as a focus to prioritize for future initiatives. Food insecurity is not a new issue facing Métis, however, COVID-19 and escalating climate change impacts have exacerbated the issue. The Home Garden Pilot Project was developed in response to requests for Métis in B.C. to be more self-sufficient in food security. Considering that 82% of survey respondents (70% of participants completed the survey) felt that the project contributed to food security in their households, along with the numerous comments and emails describing how participants' gardens helped their families out in such challenging times, we can happily conclude that the project was a success. It is our hope and recommendation that the program run again in the future.