



Growing Forward

Canada/Northwest Territories

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Small Scale Foods Program
Community Garden Initiative

2009/10 Annual Report





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Introduction

The Small Scale Foods Program (SSFP) was established in the mid-1990s. The aim of the Program was to provide assistance and support towards establishing food production systems in communities in the Northwest Territories (NWT). When it first began, the Program was very limited in its orientation and uptake.

In 2006, the Program was re-introduced with resources largely provided from the Canada-NWT Agriculture Policy Framework Agreement and expanded through the Canada-NWT Growing Forward Program. The Government of Canada and the Government of the Northwest Territories, through the Department of Industry, Tourism and Investment (ITI), recently signed this Agreement.



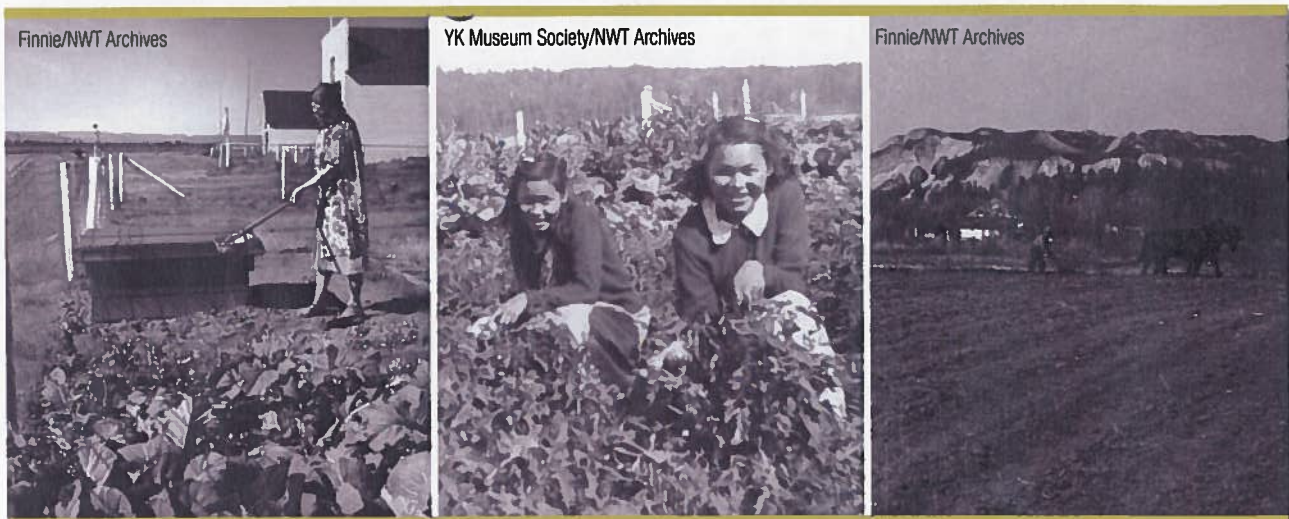
Background

Historical Perspective

Organized production of food for local consumption, conventionally referred to as agriculture, has had a place in communities in the NWT since European settlers began arriving over 400 years ago. Settlers kept private gardens and established small agri-food operations to feed their families according to accustomed dietary needs. As far North as Aklavik, employees of the Hudson Bay Company and early Catholic and Anglican missions produced a wide variety of food for their own use and for distribution and sale. These employees also contributed expertise and effort in determining suitable varieties of fruits, vegetables and grains for local production.

As transportation systems evolved and became more reliable and widespread, local production of food crops gradually declined as imported foods became more available. Coinciding with this availability was the emerging cash economy. This cash economy moved

many communities away from agri-food production and traditional harvesting as principle sources of sustenance, putting a great reliance on the wage economies and imported food. Since the late 1960s and early 1970s, very few families in any of the NWT communities have kept private gardens. Instead, there has been an increasing reliance on store bought meat and produce. Elders in communities often refer to earlier days when they worked planting and hilling potatoes in mission gardens and helped raise beef and dairy cattle. However, much of this knowledge has been lost.





Background

Program Justification

Local food production in the NWT has declined considerably over the last several decades. Current dietary trends, combined with economic necessity for many residents in the NWT, have resulted in increased consumption of and reliance on processed and frozen foods. These foods tend to have a longer shelf life than fresh produce. But there is a “non-cash” expense associated with these foods. They are simply not as nutritious as locally produced food.

Today, the availability of fresh vegetables in most small NWT communities is limited to the summer months when these foods are in abundance in the southern wholesale food markets. Even during these periods, the cost of fresh vegetables in many small communities is well in excess of prices found in southern Canada. For example, prices paid for potatoes in the Sahtu Region range between \$2 and \$3 per pound.

Transportation costs are the main culprit. In many instances the cost of transportation adds 300 to 400 percent to the wholesale price of the product, making it financially out of reach for many families. As a result, stores, especially in smaller communities, tend to bring in very limited quantities of fresh produce. The main reasons are that it is costly to buy and has a limited shelf life compared to frozen vegetables.

The SSFP is designed to reverse this trend. It provides support, training and basic infrastructure for local food production in communities and works with residents of NWT communities to design, establish and expand gardens for their benefit.





Background

Stakeholders and Partners

Over the summer months and into the early fall of 2009, discussions and interviews were held with community representatives. It was determined that the majority of communities in the NWT were interested in re-establishing local food production systems. Most communities wanted access to locally grown produce. However, it was also pointed out that many of the skills necessary to create and sustain systems for production had been lost over time.

The largest proponents of the Program in many NWT communities have been local community governments and a strong core of community volunteers. Despite having many projects and responsibilities on the go, tireless individuals have championed community gardens as agents of community development. This economic alternative utilizes available resources as a way to 'grow local' and even as a way of off-setting carbon production and encouraging the use of alternative energies. Several community garden projects, most notably in Łutselk'e, have examined using solar power to run gardening infrastructure such as water pumps.

We have also found that targeting youth through the school system increases participation from the entire

community. By bringing workshops into the schools and having classes come out in the spring to help with planting or in the fall to help with harvest, a community garden provides ample opportunity to integrate biology, physical fitness, and local economics to students in a practical setting. For example, the 2009 harvest from Deline's community garden was given to the local schools. The carrots from the harvest became healthy snacks at snack time and other vegetables were given to the home economics class for cooking. This is great promotion for the Program, as it allows parents and teachers to become involved in the community garden along with their children and students.

The Department of Health and Social Services (HSS) is in a position to be a strong proponent of the Program. Its promotion of community wellness is directly aligned with the physical and nutritional components of gardening and harvesting. SSFP staff have worked with HSS on this concept, most notably in Fort Providence, Fort Simpson and Tsiigehtchic. It is hoped that this inter-departmental cooperation will continue and expand in the future. Experience has shown that community gardens located more centrally and those within a compound (like a health centre) tend to garner more community participation and are looked after better.





Background

Projects to Date

The SSFP is being implemented in all regions of the NWT by ITI. The Program is administered from Hay River and is under the direction of ITI's Agriculture and Agri-foods Consultant, along with a small team of summer students. Support is provided to identify sites, clear and develop land, and provide seeds and basic tools for planting and garden maintenance. Assistance is also provided to community organizers and volunteers on a regular basis throughout the growing season.

In 2006, the first year of the Program, six communities took part, including Fort Resolution, Fort Simpson, Jean Marie River, Kakisa, Nahanni Butte and Tulita. In 2007, eight communities took part in the Program and all six of the community garden groups continuing from the previous year requested that their garden site be expanded.

By 2009, the Program had contacted 27 communities, of which 15 had active community garden sites.

SSFP staff visited eight more communities that were interested in developing sites and have developed implementation plans for the spring of 2010. Three more communities have independent operations that have been supported by the Program in the past. Program staff continue to support these operations when requested.

All the sites that have been planted to date have achieved fair to excellent yields. Commonly grown produce at all sites includes beets, broccoli, brussels sprouts, cabbage, carrots, cauliflower, peas, potatoes, tomatoes, lettuce and turnips. Community organizers decide how to distribute the produce that is grown. Typically the produce is distributed among community garden members and volunteers that helped with the harvest. In some cases the produce is also used for a community feast.





Background

Projects to Date

The following table summarizes communities currently involved in the Program by region. Regions are identified based on the Government of the Northwest Territories regional divisions.

Community	Type of Project	Project involvement to date	Future involvement planned
Inuvik Region			
Aklavik	Site development	SSFP aided in identifying site and gave direction on proceeding with development.	Instruction sessions planned prior to spring, site to be planted spring of 2010.
Fort McPherson	Site development	Contact made with potential sites identified during a tour with elders.	Site to be developed and planted spring of 2010.
Inuvik	Community greenhouse	Established independently with support from SSFP.	
Tsiigehtchic	Multiple site development	SSFP aided in identifying two sites and gave direction on proceeding with development.	Instruction sessions planned prior to spring, site to be planted spring of 2010.
Sahtu Region			
Colville Lake	Site development	Contact made and potential sites identified by community.	Site to be developed and planted spring of 2010.
Délne	Community garden	Garden site expanded in 2009. SSFP contributed a smaller greenhouse, which is now an established part of garden.	Further expansion of site planned, as well as a larger greenhouse for spring of 2010.
Fort Good Hope	Private gardens	Garden site from previous years no longer used, but several private gardens established with SSFP. A new community garden site has been identified for development.	Development and planting of community garden and requested private gardens in spring of 2010.
Norman Wells	Community garden	Garden site developed and planted spring of 2009.	Community interested in expanding to other sites and acquiring a greenhouse for spring of 2010.
Tulita	Community garden	Has had a community garden since 2006. Community has requested an additional site for spring of 2010.	Instruction sessions planned prior to spring. Development and planting of additional site in spring of 2010.
Dehcho Region			
Fort Liard	Site development	Contact made and potential sites identified.	Site to be developed and planted spring of 2010.
Fort Simpson	Community garden	Has had a community garden since 2008. Two expansions of garden have taken place since that time, with further expansion planned.	Current garden to be expanded and greenhouse to be used spring of 2010.
Jean Marie River	Site development	Has had a community garden since 2006, with a suspension of gardening activities in 2009 due to the garden site being used for housing.	New site to be developed and planted spring of 2010.



Background

Projects to Date

Nahanni Butte	Community garden	Has had a community garden since 2006, with a suspension of gardening activities in 2007 as bison had destroyed the garden. A new site was located and secured against bison in 2008.	Electric fencing is required as a more permanent solution to exclude bison.
Trout Lake	Community garden	Has had a community garden since project initiation.	Instruction sessions planned prior to spring.
Wrigley	Community garden	Has had a community garden since 2008. Expansion of site occurred in 2009, with additional expansion planned.	Site size to be substantially increased in spring of 2010.
North Slave Region			
Behchokq	Site development	Contact made with potential sites identified.	Site to be developed and planted spring of 2010.
Gameti	Community garden	Has had a community garden since 2007.	Individual community members have expressed interest in developing their own gardens.
Whati	Community garden, allotments	Has had a community garden since 2006. The community has since created a drainage ditch and fencing system.	Instruction sessions planned prior to spring.
Yellowknife	Community garden (multiple sites), allotments	Community is highly independent, with three garden sites developed with minimal support from SSFP.	
South Slave Region			
Enterprise	Community garden, allotments	Has had a community garden since 2007. A permanent greenhouse contributed in 2009.	Instruction sessions planned prior to spring.
Fort Providence	Community garden Additional interest to be followed up on.	Garden site developed and planted spring of 2009.	
Fort Resolution	Community garden	Has had a community garden since 2006.	
Fort Smith	Community garden, allotments	Community is highly independent with two garden sites developed within heritage compound. Interest expressed in acquiring SSFP support for development of third site.	
Hay River	Site development	Identified site cleared and prepared for planting.	Site to be developed and planted spring of 2010.
Hay River Reserve	Site development	Identified site developed in fall of 2009 and spring of 2010.	
Kakisa	Community garden	Has had a community garden since 2006.	Community requires close support.
Łutselk'e	Community garden	Has had a community garden since 2008. SSFP contributed a smaller greenhouse in 2009.	Current site to have soil enriched. A larger greenhouse is planned for spring of 2010.



Future Direction for the Small Scale Foods Program

The SSFP staff held end of season interviews and discussions with participating communities in 2009 to examine the impact of the Program. Communities that provided feedback indicated that residents enjoyed having the garden and liked having fresh produce. These communities also felt that there was sufficient contact with the Program coordinators, but that more education would be beneficial prior to planting in the spring.

One way this education can be delivered by staff is through winter workshops on topics such as basic gardening and the storage and preparation of produce. There have also been requests from communities to have workshops on subjects such as family nutritional needs and composting. SSFP staff continue to plan winter workshops based on the requests and interest level of individual communities. During the winter of 2009/10, workshops were provided to each community on storage and use of produce.

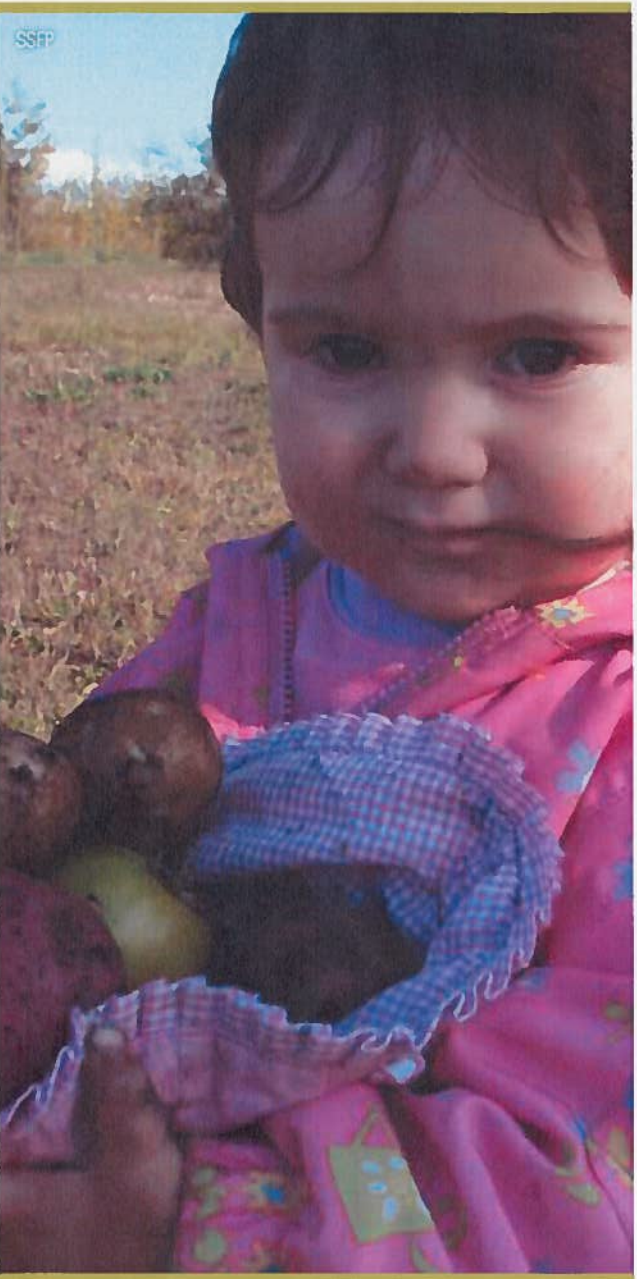
The SSFP continues to provide equipment such as tillers, small tools, seeders, water pumps, hoses and fittings, and fencing materials to communities according to their current infrastructure, interest level and knowledge base. Communities with a more advanced gardening infrastructure and knowledge base will have greenhouses provided by the Program for extending the gardening season and to grow less hardy crops such as tomatoes and cucumbers.

The SSFP will continue to provide seeds, bedding plants and technical assistance to all communities. The Program will benefit considerably from the placement of additional summer staff resources in the South Slave and Sahtu regions. The SSFP staff monitor the vegetable preferences and performances in each community every year and continually adjust the types of produce that best suit the local climate based on the community's preference and the level of community involvement. In 2010, each community garden site is expected to have a planted area of a minimum of one quarter of an acre. Particular attention will be paid to those communities that expressed a strong interest to start a garden in the 2009, including Aklavik, Tsiigehtchic, Colville Lake, Fort Good Hope, Fort Liard, Jean Marie River, Behchokò and Hay River.

As a community progresses in its gardening knowledge, it often asks for more advanced gardening infrastructure. More advanced communities are more likely to take the lead in using equipment for individual garden cultivation and greenhouse production. This is encouraged as individual production in association with community garden production is co-beneficial, especially in the smaller communities. For example, under the allotment garden model in Fort Smith, many community garden members have personal gardens and supplementary allotment plots where they can grow more produce. The community garden benefits by having experienced gardeners involved year after year. Individual gardeners benefit by being able to increase their production.



Future Direction for the Small Scale Foods Program



For information on Growing Forward,
please contact your regional office of
Industry, Tourism and Investment at:

Inuvik 1-867-777-7286

Sahtu 1-867-587-7170

North Slave 1-867-920-3230

South Slave 1-867-872-6430

Dehcho 1-867-695-7510

or contact the
Agricultural Hotline 1-877-821-8256

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