

# 2023-2024 ANNUAL REPORT



**FOOD MATTERS**  
MANITOBA



*A STRONG FOCUS ON **TRUST-BASED PARTNERSHIPS**  
IS HOW WE APPROACH OUR WORK,  
**TOGETHER** WITH THOSE WHO ARE IMPACTED  
AND THOSE WHO FIGHT **FOR CHANGE.***

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## FOOD MATTERS MANITOBA

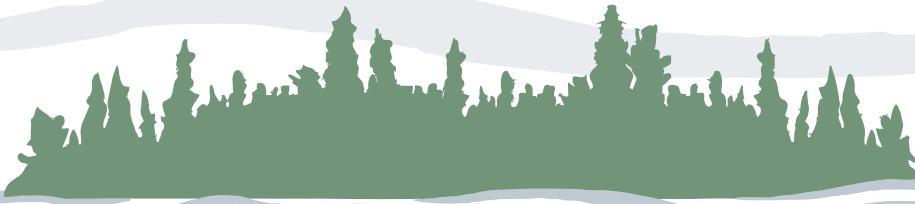
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## A LETTER FROM OUR **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

*Demian Lawrenchuk*

Our Executive Director is a traditional community harvester from Fox Lake Cree Nation who is driven by the Inninwuk (Swampy Cree) teachings.

Learning all he can from the land and the Elders, Demian spent much of his adult-life harvesting from the land, as dictated by the seasons. This developed in him a strong will, and commitment to pass on the invaluable lessons and skills he learned to the next generation.

With Food Matters Manitoba, Demian has inspired the organization to help support other communities in sharing their knowledge with their youth toward food security and community empowerment.



As I reflect on Food Matters Manitoba's journey through another year, I find myself deeply inspired. I find myself humbled, excited, proud and hungry for the road that lay ahead. As someone from a northern Indigenous community here in Manitoba, I am familiar with life in the North. I am familiar with the infamous challenges that first come to mind when we think of the region - the issues that dominate the news and thus the common perception.

Yet, I am just as familiar with the spirit of the north - the beauty and depth of culture whose origins trace back to time immemorial. These are cultures that were born through a union of people and the natural world, through endless evolution as the natural cycles of life harmonized together. These are cultures that year after year, endured the unrelenting intensity of the long annual freeze, celebrated the explosion of life welcomed by the annual thaw, found meaning in the smallest details such as the way a particular leaf would hang on a certain species of tree at a precise time of year, while understanding the unbroken connection of all of creation tied together in all directions of time and space.

These are the cultures that could not be extinguished, the people that could not be stopped. This is the power of the north that I know. Like the seasonal cycles, our people have endured a dark and cold winter of hardship, but now, as a people, we celebrate the explosion of life as we reclaim our identities - wearing our beauty and power with pride.

The journey of our organization is one of learning, adaptation, relationships, commitment and celebration. It is dedication to the long road of systemic change and an investment into long-term solutions that deliver short-term benefits every step along the way.

Throughout this past year, we have continued to harness the powerful spirit of the people of the north along this journey of wellbeing and empowerment. This past year, we have continued building relationships, hiring people in their communities, supporting the production of local healthy food, mentoring youth, empowering elders to share their knowledge, and so much more.

Building upon the foundation of traditional harvesting and Indigenous knowledge, we expand and evolve food systems, as the communities in our network share practices together- enhancing and diversifying them with various forms of agriculture, looking forward to new, exciting, and sustainable economic opportunities.

The journey to a prosperous, healthy and food secure future for all Manitobans bears a role for each of us to play. So, I invite you, once again to join us along this journey as we work together to unlock the human potential of northern Manitoba, to empower change from within.

*Ekwa pimohtetan - now let's walk together.*

*Demian Lawrenchuk*







**Demian Lawrenchuk**  
Executive Director



**Myles King**  
Northern Programs Manager



**Morgan McCurdy**  
Northern Programs Coordinator



**Debby Lute-Storey**  
Office Manager



**Chantal Schromeda**  
Communications Coordinator



**Barry Little**  
Agriculture and Logistics Specialist



**Gordon Walker**  
Traditional Harvester, Elder & Mentor  
Norway House



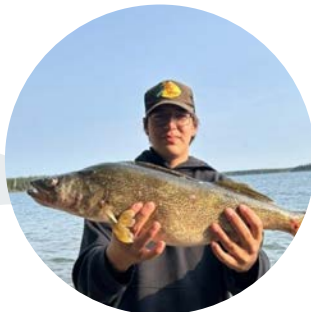
**Lester Balfour**  
Traditional Harvester & Mentor  
Norway House



**Scotty Saunders**  
Traditional Harvester  
York Landing



**Lawrence Saunders**  
Community Project Coordinator  
Fox Lake/Gillam



**Cameron Saunders**  
Youth Harvester  
Fox Lake/Gillam



**Jaden Lavallee**  
Youth Harvester  
Fox Lake/Gillam



**Myron Cook**  
Community Project Coordinator  
Brochet



**William Cook**  
Youth Harvester  
Sherridon



**Sidney Castel**  
Youth Harvester  
Sherridon



**John Halkett** (Incoming 2024)  
Northern Community Facilitator  
Brochet



**Shante Gambling**  
Youth Harvester  
Norway House

## OUR 2023-2024 TEAM OF STAFF PARTNERS & HARVESTERS

## A LETTER FROM OUR BOARD CHAIR

The 2023 year was a year of tremendous growth at Food Matters Manitoba, and it was a time I spent reflecting on the integral link between food and community. It is at both the special times in our lives, and for simple family meals, that we gather together with those we care about and feast together.

While many of us have the privilege of walking down to the grocery store and buying what we need and preparing that food for our family and friends, for others that is too often out of reach. Whether because the food is unaffordable, unavailable, culturally inappropriate, or inaccessible, our food systems are simply not adequate for everyone. And when food is not available, people can miss opportunities to grow and nurture their relationships.

The 2023 year at FMM, we were constantly striving for robust food systems – but we were also seeing in real time how food security goes hand in hand with healthy communities and families. I think our shift over the past couple of years to focus on the north has provided our team with opportunities to ask people, not just ‘what will transform your food systems,’ but ‘what will enhance your relationships and health – with each other and with the land.’ It has been a joy to be reminded that the work of Food Matters Manitoba could also be called ‘community matters.’

Our own board and staff community are integral to the work of FMM. I offer sincere thanks to our current board members Cynthia Neudoerffer (incoming chair), Alison McCullough-Butchart (vice chair), Thea Green (secretary), Chris Maxfield (treasurer), Mya Kidson, Mackenzie Kreitz, and Kaylee Michnick for their time and expertise. I would also like to thank our out-going board members Erin Crymble, Michelle Finley, Sharissa Nault, and Ramogi Nyonje.

And of course, to our staff who provide the strong foundation of our FMM community, thanks go out to our 2023 staff team of Demian, Myles, Morgan, and Debby, and welcome to our new staff in 2024, with Chantal, John, and Myron – not to mention our many community and youth harvesters for their tireless work.

**Kirsten McCorrister**, 2023 Chair (Outgoing)



*“As I move on from my time at Food Matters Manitoba this fall 2024, I know that the organization will continue to offer strong leadership, creative food security solutions, and a fire around which people cook amazing food and grow healthy and kind relationships.”*





## OUR 2023-2024 BOARD OF DIRECTORS



**Cynthia Neudoerffer**  
2023 Board Member  
Incoming 2024 Chair



**Alison McCullough-Butchart**  
2023-2024 Vice Chair



**Michelle Finley**  
2023 Secretary  
(Outgoing)



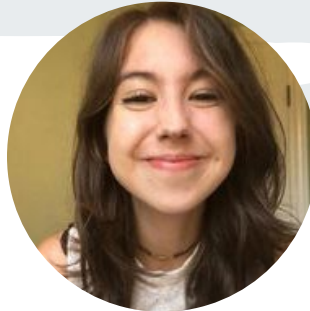
**Thea Green**  
2023 Board Member  
Incoming 2024 Secretary



**Erin Crymble**  
2023 Treasurer  
(Outgoing)



**Chris Maxfield**  
Incoming 2024 Treasurer



**Mya Kidson**  
2023-2024 Board Member



**Kaylee Michnik**  
2023-2024 Board Member



**Mackenzie Krietz**  
2023-2024 Board Member



**Ramogi Nyonje**  
2023 Board Member  
(Outgoing)



**Sharissa Neault**  
2023 Board Member  
(Outgoing)



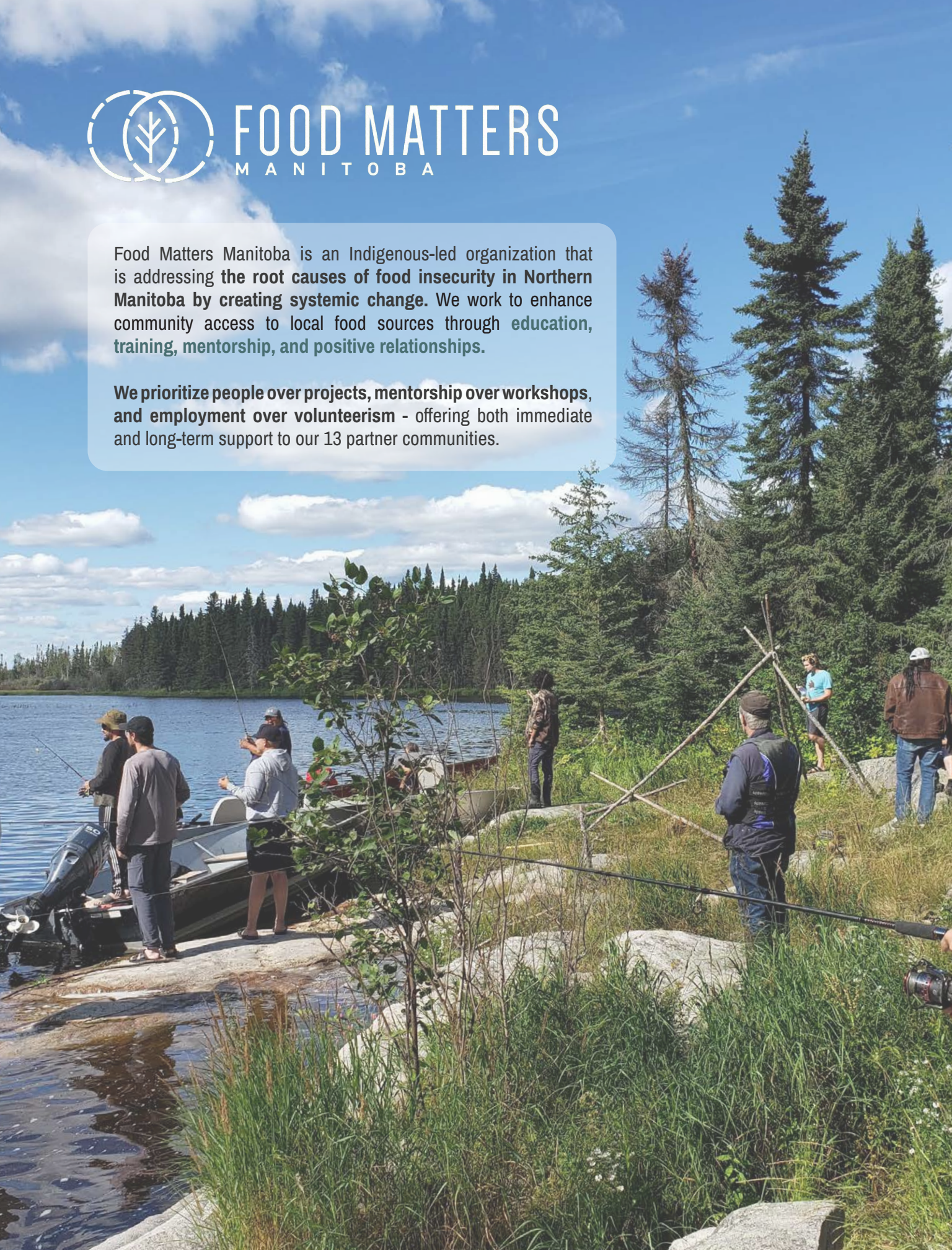


# FOOD MATTERS

MANITOBA

Food Matters Manitoba is an Indigenous-led organization that is addressing **the root causes of food insecurity in Northern Manitoba by creating systemic change**. We work to enhance community access to local food sources through **education, training, mentorship, and positive relationships**.

**We prioritize people over projects, mentorship over workshops, and employment over volunteerism** - offering both immediate and long-term support to our 13 partner communities.







*For Indigenous communities, life always centred the pursuit of food from the land.*

*The word for life, “pimatisiwin” translates to, “following that which has been given to us from the Creator.”*

## WHAT GUIDES US

### → Relationships

are at the forefront. Understanding the complexity required to establish healthy, thriving communities drives us to build local teams and foster a thriving community throughout the region.

### → Food Production

is viewed through the lens of the seasonal cycles as a sustainable holistic system for life, wellbeing, and community engagement.

### → Language and Ceremonies

are valued and understood for their impacts of creating strong, stable, and committed individuals and communities.

### → Indigenous Culture and Knowledge

are leveraged to utilize existing strengths to build from and create powerful, resilient momentum.





# FOOD MATTERS

MANITOBA



IN 2023, FOOD MATTERS MANITOBA HIRED **2 FULL-TIME HARVESTERS** AND **8 YOUTH HARVESTERS** IN **5 PARTNERING COMMUNITIES**, LEADING TO THE FORMATION OF **3 DEDICATED LOCAL TEAMS**.

## HOW WE DO WHAT WE DO

By partnering with 13 Indigenous communities in Northern Manitoba, Food Matters Manitoba supports **capacity building initiatives towards the development of enhanced community food systems** - tackling food insecurity in the north through community driven change.

Traditional and healthy foods are a powerful and sustainable means to reduce food insecurity in our partner communities.

These partnerships are centred around **trust and respect** - drawing on the strength, experience, knowledge, and traditions of Indigenous Peoples. We look to each community's strengths that can be supported, while providing new opportunities communities are looking to add.



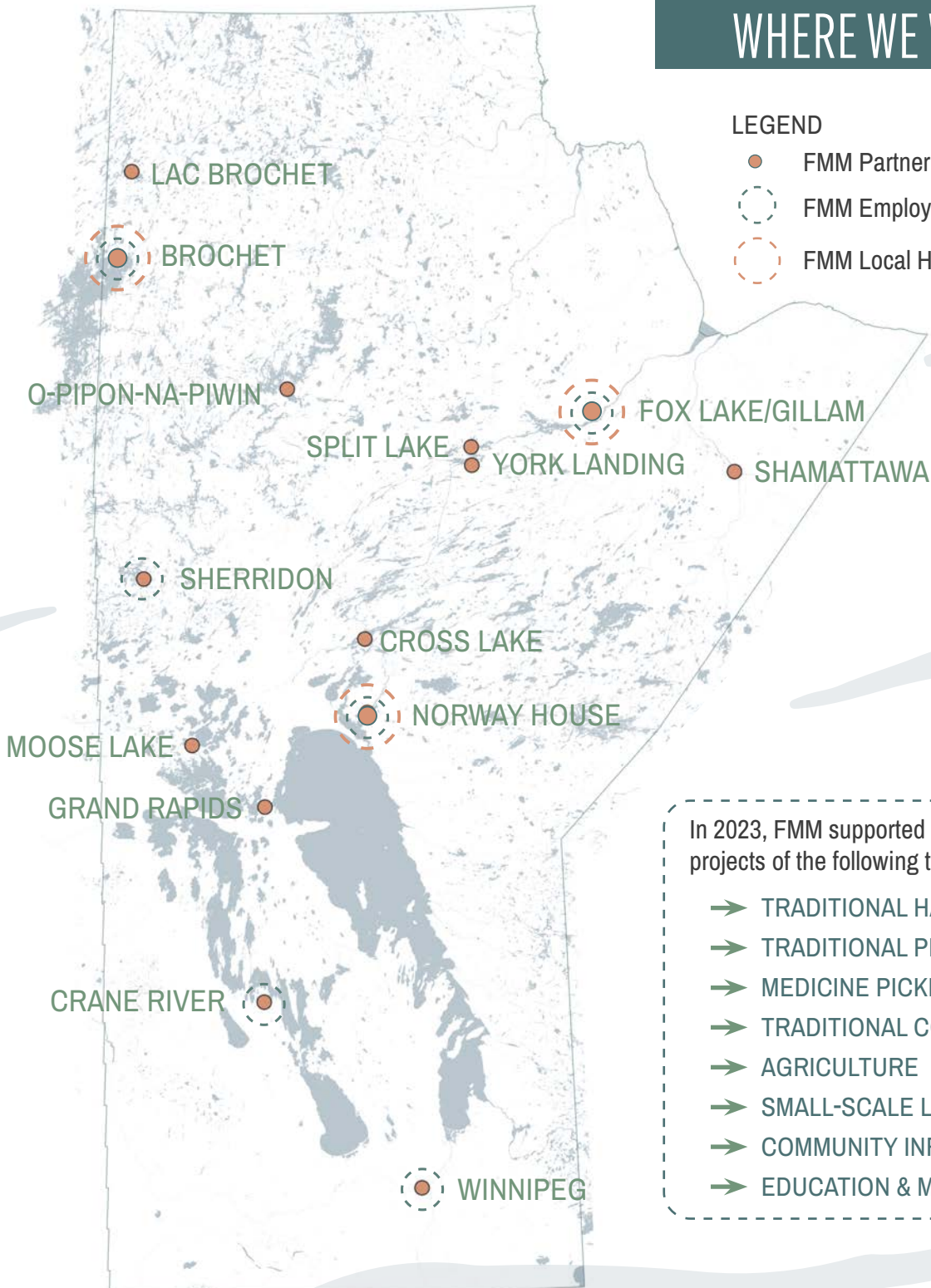
Our support varies from agricultural support to livestock, harvesting resources, medicine and ceremony support, infrastructure support, our harvester program, and youth harvester program.

By addressing communities' unique and individual needs, we work together to **build local food systems and support long-term community-led initiatives to reduce food insecurity**.

## WHERE WE WORK

### LEGEND

- FMM Partner Communities
- FMM Employed Harvesters
- FMM Local Harvester Teams

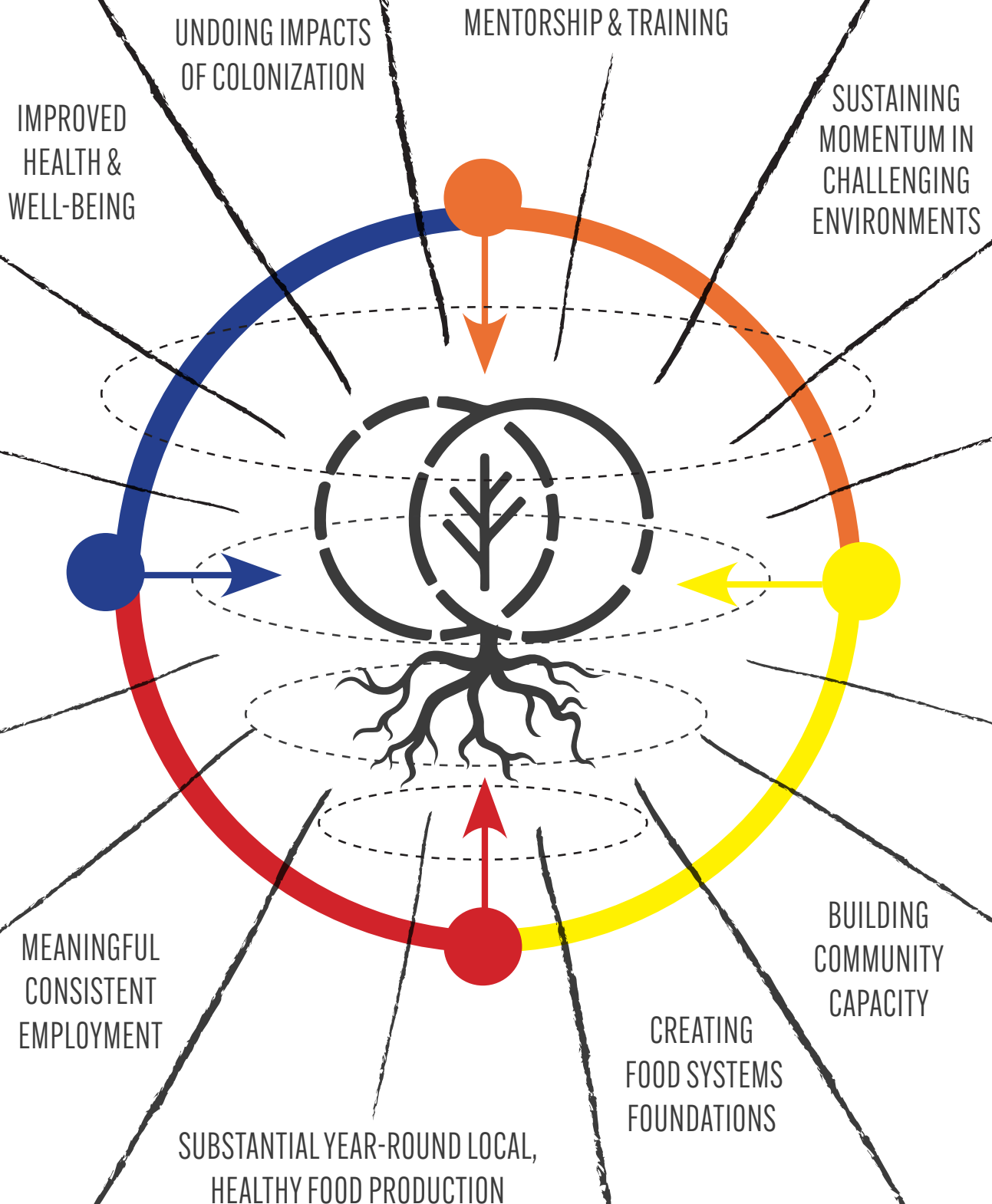


In 2023, FMM supported community-led projects of the following types:

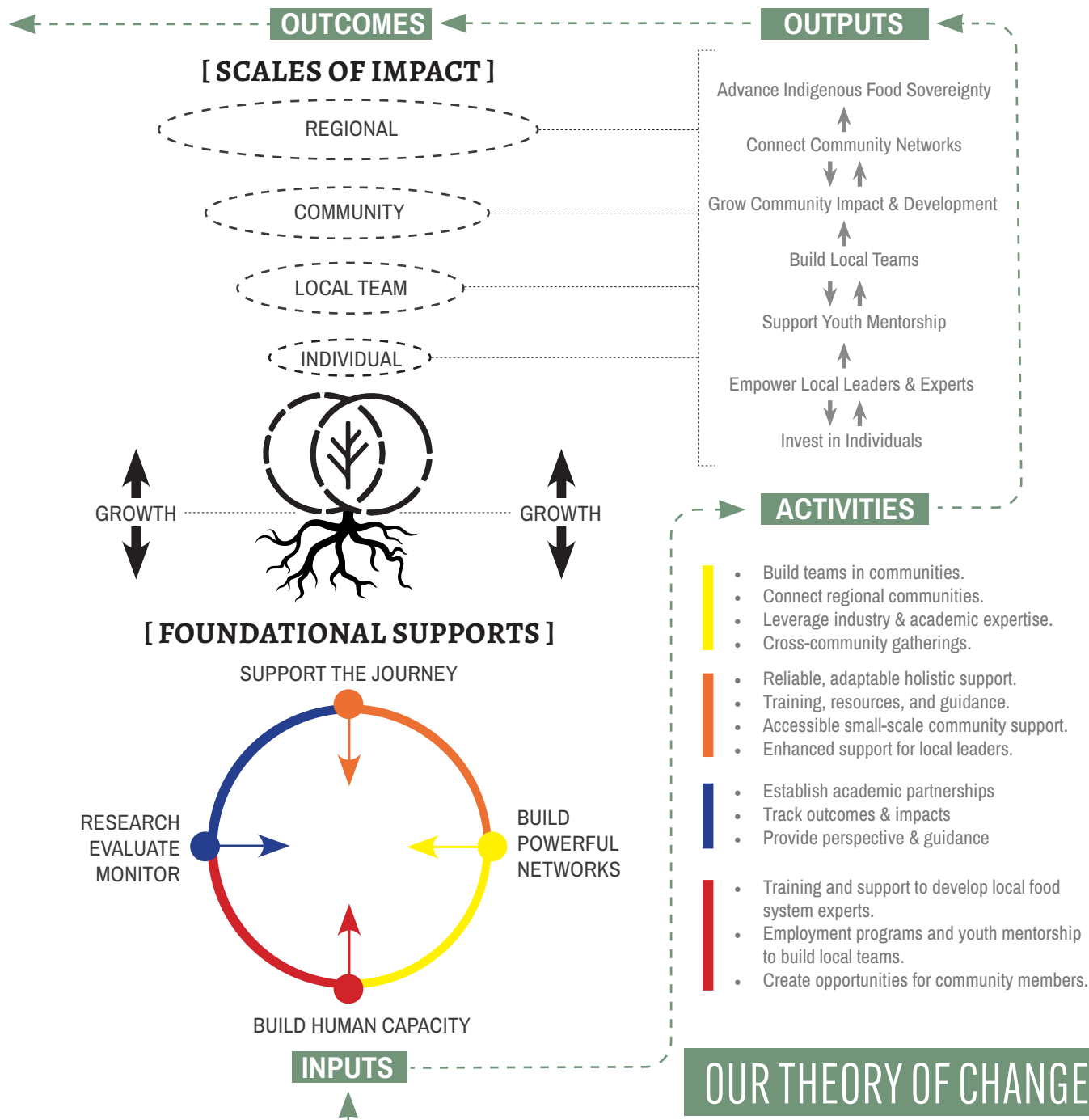
- ➔ TRADITIONAL HARVESTING
- ➔ TRADITIONAL PLANTING
- ➔ MEDICINE PICKING
- ➔ TRADITIONAL COOKING
- ➔ AGRICULTURE
- ➔ SMALL-SCALE LIVESTOCK
- ➔ COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE
- ➔ EDUCATION & MENTORSHIP

OUTCOMES OF FOOD MATTERS MANITOBA

# INCUBATORS FOR CHANGE





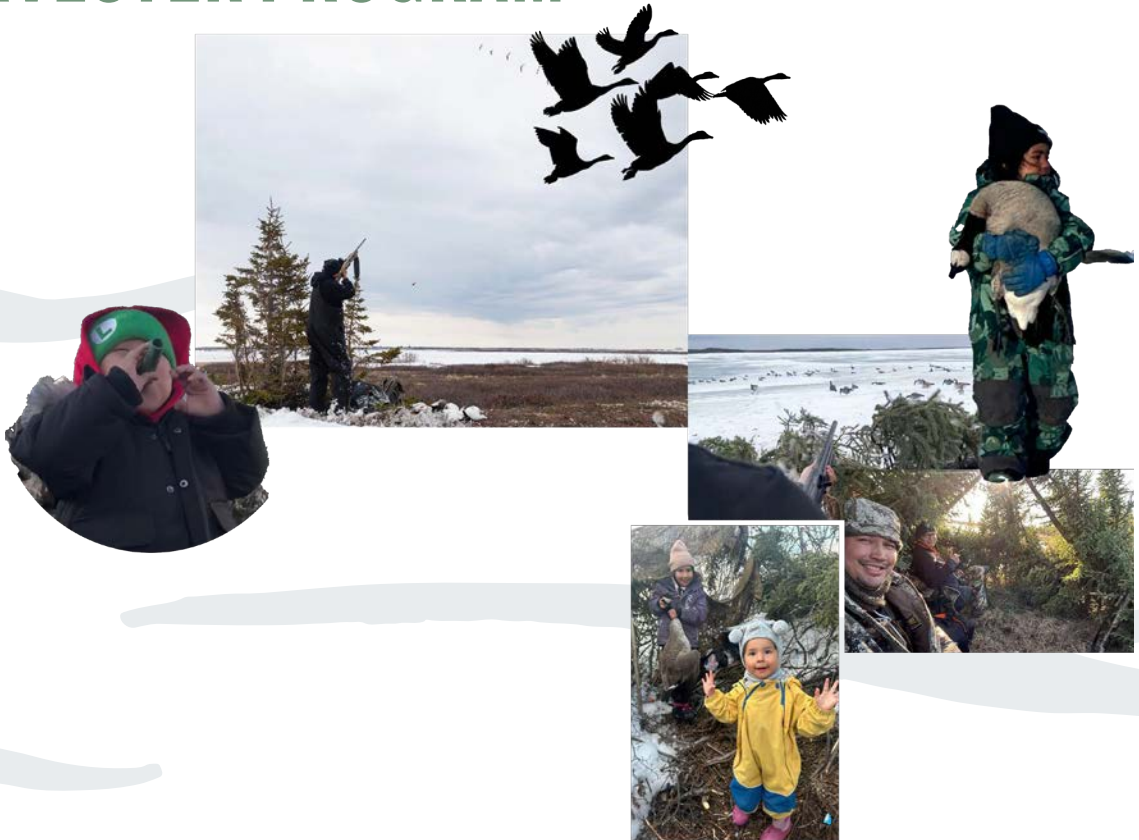


Our support system is a **process** that works to create **incubators for change**: an active and layered support structure of employment, materials, equipment, and education, enabling community members to harvest, innovate, and navigate challenges within their communities, while building up the foundation for an **Indigenous community food system**.

This approach is **strengths-based** and focuses on **empowering and building-up individuals and local teams, engaging communities to unite the region**. We have established deep roots in communities as a result and are successfully creating impacts within the challenging environments of Northern Manitoba reserves.

## 2023 HIGHLIGHTS

# HARVESTER PROGRAM



The Harvester Program is a solution co-developed through our Northern partnerships. Harvesters **collect local and traditional food sources** through **hunting, fishing, trapping, and gathering**. Food Matters Manitoba provides both immediate and long-term support to traditional and local harvesters in our participating communities.

**Immediate support** is provided through honoraria, equipment, travel and supplies.

**Long-term support** is offered to dedicated traditional harvesters who are interested in creating a measurable impact in their communities through full-time employment. **Traditional harvesters are elders, community members, and youth - preserving key Indigenous traditions and passing down knowledge to the next generation.**

At Food Matters Manitoba, **we work to bypass barriers and challenges in current food insecurity interventions**. We strongly believe in employing individuals who are working towards important food initiatives, community wellbeing and fostering self-determinative environments.

The Harvester Program is aligned with the principles of **Indigenous food sovereignty, self-determination, and environmental and fiscal sustainability**. The goal is to provide traditional food that is healthy, local, and readily available year-round to the community - particularly to elders and families needing extra support.

In 2023, the Harvester Program ran in **Norway House, Brochet, Fox Lake/Gillam, Crane River, York Landing, and Sherridon**.



## COMMUNITY HIGHLIGHT BROCHET

DURING THE 2023 FISCAL YEAR, FMM SENT BROCHET:

- ➔ **RABBIT SNARES** FOR YOUTH HARVESTERS
- ➔ **330 CONIBEAR TRAPS** FOR BEAVER HARVESTING
- ➔ **JIGGERS** FOR ICE FISHING
- ➔ **CANNING EQUIPMENT** TO PRESERVE FOOD
- ➔ **80 MESH NETS + DRESSING KNIVES** FOR FISHING



**Myron Cook** is a traditional harvester, youth mentor, and FMM's Community Project Coordinator in Brochet. He explains how FMM is making a real and tangible difference in his community through the Harvester Program.

“ We help the less fortunate.  
We hunt for them, we fish for them,  
*our traditional way.*”





# YOUTH HARVESTER PROGRAM

“*I found the outdoors **so peaceful**,  
and many have to be fed  
– especially our elders.*

*Teaching **our way of life** to  
the young ones **is important.**”*

- **Lester Balfour**, 2023, Norway House  
FMM Northern Partner and Traditional Harvester



Youth play an integral role in ensuring local food systems thrive in the north.

The Youth Harvester Program provides opportunities for youth to safely go out onto the land with one of our experienced harvesters to learn from them - enabling traditional knowledge to be passed down through hands-on learning and connection.



The Youth Harvester Program emphasizes the positive impact being out on the land has on individuals. It promotes **physical health**, **emotional and spiritual well-being**, **building good relationships**, and **respect toward the land and others**.

It inspires a sense of **responsibility** for the knowledge shared, all while getting back to **traditional roots**, **providing for the community**, and **eating healthy and traditional foods**.



## YOUTH EXPERIENCE HIGHLIGHT

## SIDNEY CASTEL

2023, Sherridon, FMM Youth Harvester

“

Food Matters Manitoba was looking for several youth to become full-time community youth harvesters. ***I decided to join the community food initiative, which meant I would get to hunt and gather in the Ancestral/Traditional Territory of the Kiciwapa Cree Nation.*** In the last year, I travelled to many different locations.

***Floyd North, my grandpa was my guide and teacher. His extensive knowledge of the history, culture, language & practices of the land were great life learning experiences.***”



“

***I love passing on my knowledge of the land to the youth of my community.***

***I try to help them see that there's more than just sitting inside on a video game or watching TV.***”



## 2023 HIGHLIGHTS

# COMMUNITY-DRIVEN NORTHERN FOOD SYSTEMS



## SCHOOL GARDEN IN SPLIT LAKE

**Vivian Lin**, teacher and dedicated community member champions the school garden project at Split Lake school. She expresses,

“We’re trying to give them some ideas, *to inspire them* – that’s the thing, to inspire them from an early age, and *hope to bring some good changes into their lives.*”

In 2023, Food Matters Manitoba sent **seeds, grow lights, and other equipment** needed for gardening to support Lin and the school. The garden has produced **lettuce, cucumbers, strawberries, green onions, tomatoes, etc.**

Vivian hopes to inspire the children to get back to the land, incorporating land-based learning – teaching the children who may not have access to fresh produce **how to grow their own foods** and make healthy choices.



“ Within each community there are amazing human beings that are **committed to improving the lives of their people** – **leaders within the community, expert harvesters; individuals who are grounded, reliable, and skilled.**

***Those are the people that we began to support.”***

- **Demian Lawrenchuk** 2024,  
FMM Executive Director

## CHICKENS IN NORWAY HOUSE

In 2023, Food Matters Manitoba provided Northern partner and traditional harvester, **Lester Balfour**, with chickens and materials to establish and maintain the coop for daily egg production.



## 2023 HIGHLIGHTS

# COMMUNITY-DRIVEN NORTHERN FOOD SYSTEMS



## MOOSE HUNT IN LAC BROCHET

In 2023, Food Matters Manitoba helped fund the **annual moose and caribou hunt in Lac Brochet** involving youth and traditional harvesting mentors harvesting traditional food for their community.







## GARDEN BEDS IN FOX LAKE/GILLAM

Spearheaded by FMM's Community Project Coordinator, **Lawrence Saunders Jr.**

In 2023, Food Matters Manitoba sent seeds to our Northern partners in Fox Lake/Gillam for **raised garden beds for elders.**

The garden produced a variety of **fresh and healthy produce** that were distributed to the elders and community members including onions, potatoes, and tomatoes



IN 2023, OUR PARTNER COMMUNITIES IN THE NORTH RECEIVED ROUGHLY  
**1000 SEED PACKS** AND ABOUT **50 GARDEN BEDS** WERE BUILT.



## 2023 HIGHLIGHTS

# CROSS-COMMUNITY HARVESTS



## CHURCHILL GOOSE HUNT



In May, Community Project Coordinator **Lawrence Saunders Jr.** brought several youth from Fox Lake/ Gillam and York Landing to Churchill for Food Matters Manitoba's Annual Goose Hunt.

Goose hunting is one of the most important components of Cree culture - it's a **tradition that signifies the Cree New Year, a celebration of life as the earth wakes after its long winter sleep.**

Experienced hunters such as Saunders accompany and mentor the youth throughout the week - **facilitating learning as they harvest and process the food to bring back to their communities.**

Hunters and youth are provided with accommodation, supplies, and equipment needed.



*“I hope to continue these hunts for years to come because it really is therapeutic being out there on the land and would love to see more people wanting to have that connection, as our culture is dying out.”*

*- Lawrence Saunder Jr., 2023, Fox Lake/Gillam, Community Project Coordinator*

IN 2023, ABOUT **80 GEESE** WERE HARVESTED & BROUGHT BACK TO COMMUNITIES.



## NORWAY HOUSE ICE FISHING HARVEST

In March, Traditional Harvester, **Lester Balfour**, and Community Project Coordinator, **Lawrence Saunders Jr.** organized a cross-community harvest in Norway House, with support from **Elder Gordon Walker**.

Youth from Fox Lake and Norway House enjoyed a two-day ice fishing trip, **setting nets for walleye and fishing for trout**. The event included shore lunches, Cree language teachings, and ended with a community feast featuring the harvested fish, fostering engagement with the land, culture, and one another.





“ The Grow North Gathering embodies the concept that **food security** is about, at least in part, **living the experience of food as culture.**

Over the three days together we got to experience how the **traditional food system is embedded** in the **rhythm of the land and the culture of the people that grow, process, and share food together.”**

- Dr. Cynthia Neudoerffer, 2023, Board Member

## 2023 HIGHLIGHTS

# GROW NORTH ANNUAL GATHERING IN NORWAY HOUSE



In 2023, Food Matters Manitoba staff, Northern partners, workshop facilitators, and guests attended the Annual Gathering in Norway House - **hosted by Northern Partners, traditional harvesters and Elders Gordon and Madeline Walker** at the Kinosao Sipi Cultural Camp.

This year, attendees participated in a variety of workshops and activities including **snowshoe making, ribbon crafts, bannock making, beekeeping, fishing, traditional planting, medicine picking, and in preparations for a traditional feast.**

It was a wonderful three days **full of delicious traditional food, knowledge sharing, youth involvement, and community.**

We look forward to next year's gathering!









A snowmobile is parked on a vast, snow-covered frozen lake. A long line of fish, likely walleye, is laid out on the ice, stretching from the snowmobile towards the right side of the frame. The background shows a dense forest of evergreen trees under a clear sky.

## A MESSAGE TO OUR FUNDERS,

### *Ekosani (Thank you)*

Your generous support has equipped us for another year of strengthening local capacity, expertise, and experience with our community partners.

With a growing foundation of support, Food Matters Manitoba and our community partners are ready to increase the impact of our work through joint initiatives at the intersection of Indigenous food sovereignty and community economic development.

Please join us on the exciting year ahead!



FOOD MATTERS  
MANITOBA





## FEDERAL FUNDERS:

- Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC)
- First Nations and Inuit Youth Employment Strategy (FNIYES)
- Department of Families
- The Youth Employment and Skills Program (YESP)

## PROVINCIAL FUNDERS:

- Department of Families
- Department of Indigenous Reconciliation and Northern Relations
- Manitoba Health and Community Wellness

## INDEPENDENT FUNDERS:

- The Clean Foundation
  - Catherine Donnelly Foundation
  - Canadian Agricultural Resource Council (CAHRC)
  - MakeWay Foundation
  - Lawson Foundation
  - Lulu Lemon
  - Food & Beverage Manitoba
  - Canadian Red Cross
  - Healthy Horizons Foundation (North West Company)
- 



Together we can make a difference toward Indigenous food sovereignty and drive forth positive change

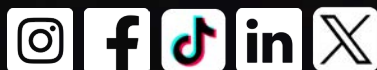
Visit our website to explore our programs, or reach out via email or phone!

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