



FOOD MATTERS MANITOBA

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2025

THE NORTHERN SUN



**“THE WINTER ROAD IS OUR
LIFELINE”**







THE NORTHERN SUN

ISSUE 5
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The Northern Sun is a quarterly publication designed to inform and educate readers about Food Matters Manitoba's efforts in Indigenous food sovereignty. Articles reinforce these values, efforts, and highlight our Northern partners' work in their communities.

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FEATURE

NORTHERN LIFELINE DELAYS

With unpredictable winter road access amid climate change, remote Indigenous communities are anxious for solutions.

BY CHANTAL MARIE SCHROMEDA

PHOTOGRAPHY BY MYRON COOK

The isolated community of Kisipakamak (Brochet) is roughly 1000 km north of Winnipeg on the northern shore of Reindeer Lake, nestled next to the Saskatchewan border.

It's one of over 20 communities in the north depending on the province's 2,375km long winter road system to access vital goods, according to the province.

“The winter road is our lifeline for fuel, lumber, bulk shipments, equipment, dried goods, and housing supplies,” says traditional Indigenous harvester, Myron Cook, living in Kisipakamak.

But as the winter seasons grow shorter amid unpredictable climate changes, communities dependent on winter road access in remote regions are anxious for solutions.

Indigenous non profit working towards food sovereignty, Food Matters Manitoba (FMM), routinely sends goods to remote communities in the north depending on winter road access to support the growth of local food systems. Community members living in the north, like Cook, believe fortifying strong and dependable food systems can play a role in being part of the solution, alleviating some of the stress of the unpredictable winter road system for isolated Indigenous communities.



Every year, FMM sends supplies on the winter roads to Bunibonibee (Oxford House), Kisematawaw (Shamattawa), Dahlu T'ua (Lac Brochet), Kisipakamak, and Kiscewaskahikan (York Landing). The supplies sent to communities depend on communities' wants and needs, regarding infrastructure and harvesting.

"We routinely send up soil for those looking to start small gardens, along with lumber to build raised beds," says FMM Northern Programs Manager, Myles King. "We have sent up gardening and indoor grow supplies to schools and health departments, fishing and netting equipment, as well as hunting supplies."

In Kisipakamak, the Health Centre and community partners receive seeds shipped from FMM to hand out to community members interested in planting. The Health Centre hosts a large seasonal garden where community members can gather to plant their own crops.

The school in Kisipakamak also uses shipped seeds to build raised garden beds.

Fishing and netting equipment, along with hunting supplies, ensure harvesters like Cook, who is also FMM's Community Project Coordinator, and youth of the community, have the necessary supplies to go out onto the land - harvesting traditional foods intended for the elders and greater community.

"Having less reliance on imports in remote communities provides more reliability accessing the food they need," says King.

According to the province, the winter road system serves over 30,000 people living in the north, carrying over 2,500 shipments of goods each year.

While the winter roads typically have a designated opening for mid-January depending on the weather, the majority of the roads did not open this year until mid-February, with some designated road sections not scheduled to be open until the end of February.

With warmer winters comes a shortened winter road season, creating smaller windows of opportunity for FMM to get communities the goods they need, explains FMM Northern Coordinator, Morgan McCurdy.

"Last season in 2024, we had begun to think that the roads might not open due to the warm weather," she says. "This has us looking at other options like flying in the supplies to each community, which would almost triple the cost of the project."

Cook wants to see more solution-based approaches to resolving communities' dependency on the winter roads. While alternative methods of transportation do exist, they are incredibly inconvenient or wildly expensive.

"The only alternatives to travel in and out of the community is either by plane, which is outrageously expensive or by boat to cross the lake to Saskatchewan," he says.

By building local food systems, Cook believes there would be less reliance on getting goods shipped in from the south, so Indigenous communities could be self-sufficient as they were prior to colonization.

“Building strong, local food systems like gardening and local harvesting is a very good part of the solution, as we only have one grocery store with high food prices and one airline with high costs of freight,” he says. “It (local food systems) would decrease our dependence on store bought goods, and it would really benefit people and families financially, while providing a healthier diet.”

Cook is heavily immersed in his community and has been from a young age, harvesting off the land for the elders and greater community. Through his ongoing work with FMM, Cook brings the youth of the community onto the land to pass down the same skills he was once taught by his family.

He sees first-hand how FMM’s support has had a positive impact on his community, as local food systems foster healthy people and deep, community support networks, he explains.

And while building local food systems is a strong starting point, Cook wants to see a myriad of solutions implemented to tackle the systemic issue for Indigenous communities in the north.

“We need lower food prices, local greenhouses and gardens, different methods of bulk shipments, and the best most advanced equipment possible to construct the winter roads,” he says. “Also, more research needs to be done with the consideration of climate change to prove that the winter seasons are actually getting shorter.”

As temperatures continue to fluctuate, so do road conditions, making it increasingly difficult to reach communities.

“Blockades and poor driving conditions are making the journey more difficult,” adds King.

Tally varying road conditions and a shorter winter season together, and FMM’s truck driver transporting goods to communities needs to be ready to head out onto the winter roads with short notice, explains King.

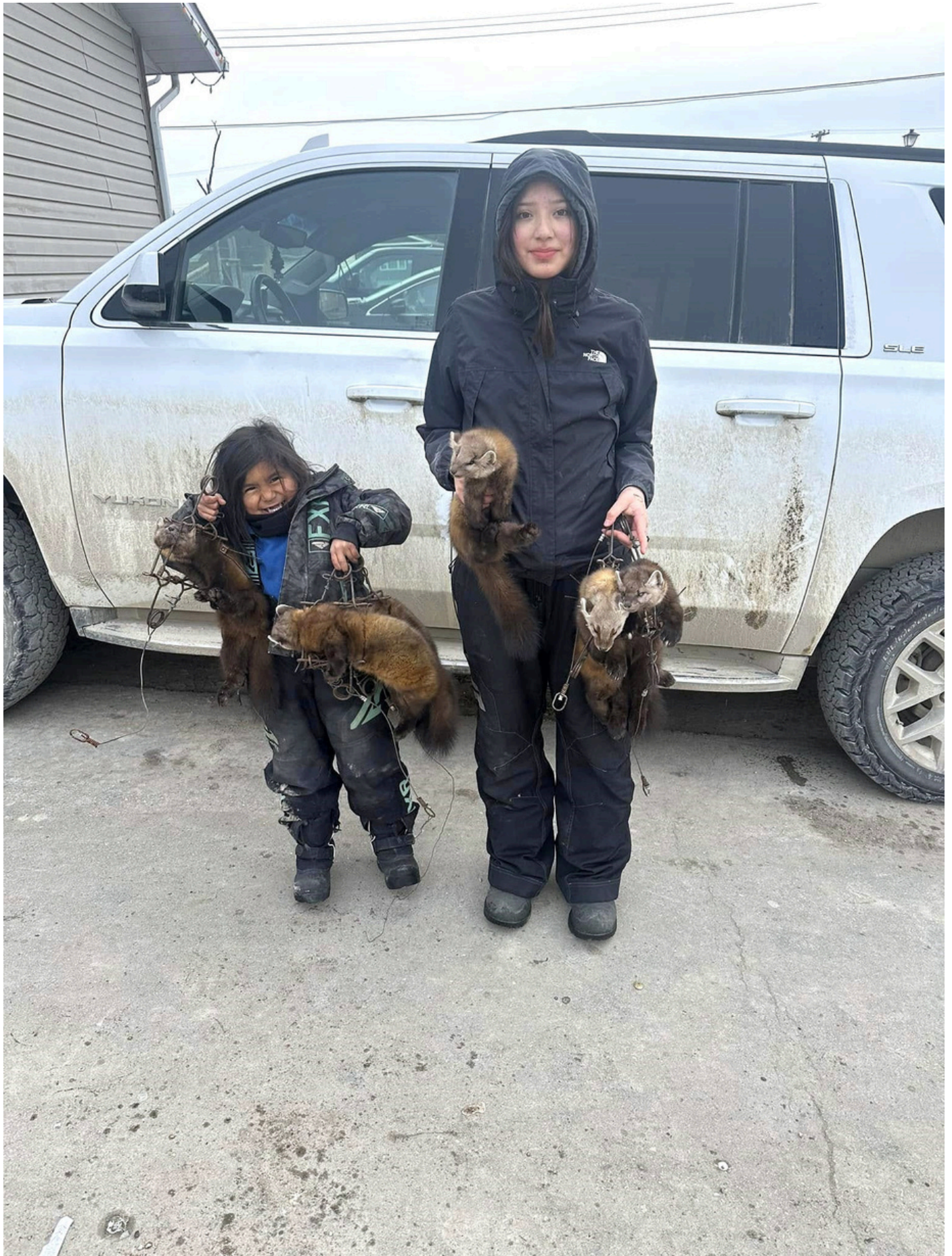
If unable to deliver by driving, rations start or prices to cover flying in the fuel jump.

“This leads to less access to the land and households dependent on generators to take more out of their budget,” he adds.

The lack of stability with the province’s winter road system is a serious issue. And with remote Indigenous communities being at the mercy of the weather, community members like Cook want solutions to be a priority.

For decades Indigenous communities have been displaced and disregarded by the Canadian government, states McCurdy.

“By strengthening community food systems, we are helping communities we work with to create a healthier environment for their community members,” she says. “By helping them regain access to the land, we also help build healthy bodies, minds, and souls through land-based practices.”



COMMUNITY

TRAPS AND TRAIL

Traditional harvester Lawrence Saunders Jr.'s on the ongoing trapping season this winter in Makeso Sakahikan (Fox Lake/Gillam).

BY LAWRENCE SAUNDERS JR.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY LAWRENCE SAUNDERS JR.

In November, we were busy checking traps every two days and there are always challenges along the way.

We always have to worry about ice thickness, swamps being frozen, and if we're prepared for a whole day out there if machines break down on us. But also, it's a whole learning experience for the youth to see the hard work that goes into it.

From getting traps ready, to breaking trail and setting 300 traps, we're always testing the ice in the first few weeks into trapping to be sure it's safe enough for travel. It's important to follow that gut feeling when it's time to turn around and call it good enough for that days' worth of work.

Right now we've caught two lynx, two arctic foxes, one wolverine, 115 marten, and one wolf.



I am going to teach the kids it's not just about money, but to see what the furs can provide for us. I'll also be getting gauntlets and hats made for every kid that comes out to trap with me this winter. I'll also be getting a dozen marten mounts made for gifts.

In January, we set beaver traps and did the whole process; from chiseling the ice, setting, and checking traps, to boarding and shipping off furs to the tannery in March.

We're also always on the lookout for native medicines on the trails so we can come back to those places when it's time to harvest medicine.

We're always monitoring big game animals such as moose, caribou, and wolves - making sure the numbers are staying healthy for future generations. Little do we know, this is all a lifestyle that our ancestors did for thousands of years.

I hope that the kids get the drive I have for trapping and harvesting, and that they can carry on this lifestyle and share the knowledge that I have passed onto them.



COMMUNITY

WINTER WORKSHOPS

The Pas' Helping Hands 4-H Club participated in a series of food and harvesting workshops over the winter.

BY CHERYL ANTONIO

PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHERYL ANTONIO

The Pas Helping Hands have been busy learning about wintering foods in the local area of their community.

The group participated in a food processing and canning workshop in which they learned how to make several varieties of pickles, jams, jellies, fruits, and salsa.

There are a lot of safety things to learn about when you are processing food to last the winter. There are also many techniques that have changed over the years. Jars don't have the rings anymore. Some people use the oven to process their jars instead of a water bath.

They also learned about freezing vegetables from their garden so they will last a few months in the freezer. Blanching and freezing seems easier, but it doesn't always last as long as canning. However, jars have become very expensive, so it is cheaper to freeze your food.

The Club members also pitched in together and bought a pig from Round the Bend Farm. Shawn, our loyal and consistent mentor, shared his knowledge with the group about what to expect when killing the pig. His gentle teachings prepared everyone in a good way.

A beautiful pig offered himself, standing before the group, while all the other pigs went to the other side of the pen for food. It was a good kill and we gave thanks.

After demonstrating how to take the hair off, everyone had a chance to try it for themselves. Once the animal was opened up, there were lots of good conversations about the organs. One member took the heart as her grade five class is learning about it. Her teacher had asked ahead of time if the class could have it to learn from it.

The pig was left hanging for the night and everyone enjoyed bison smokies over the fire before going home.

On day 2, it was time to butcher and to teach the kids many skills. The tables and grinder were set up in a cozy, wood heated trapper's tent.

All hands were kept busy with cutting, with grinding, with wrapping, and with labeling. It was good work with lots of visiting happening at the same time.

Lunch break was again around the fire, this time though, it was bison chili with fresh baked bannock.

The younger children enjoyed playing in the deep snow and on the hills of pushed snow around the yard. In just a few hours, the meat was all packed up and divided up for each family.

Upon getting home, the work wasn't done, the fat was rendered down into a beautiful liquid. After straining twice, it was put into jars, cooled off, and turned into a pure and delicious lard.

Larger pieces of meat were placed in a curing liquid to soak for days and turned into hams. Bacon will be smoked and ready for the pan in a couple weeks. So much goodness!

We are very fortunate to have local farms in which families and groups can have these experiences all year long.







COMMUNITY

SUCCESS IN SEEDS

Teacher Vivian Lin, in Tataskweyak (Split Lake), reflects on the school garden program's success this school year.

BY VIVIAN LIN

PHOTOGRAPHY BY VIVIAN LIN

Regarding our gardening program, I believe we are doing much better than last year. We are running a very good breakfast program this semester, and we are providing lettuce and greens for salads to go with hot breakfast twice a week. We will keep supporting the breakfast program with the veggies we are growing.

Now, I feel we need to plant more in order to catch up with the speed the veggies are growing at.

The kids are interested in the garden as well. I see more kids snacking on lettuce, kale and of course, tomatoes.

I moved an aerogarden with two tomato plants in the hallway and some strawberry plants outside. The kids are disappointed that there are still no strawberries but they are looking for cherry tomatoes. It's a learning curve for them because they are learning to pick red, ripe tomatoes as opposed to the green, sour ones.

We also have peppers, some were used for the breakfast program. They are small, just half the size of the store bought ones. The kids were surprised to see a real red pepper in front of them. Now, they are waiting for jalapeños. Some kids have asked when they can try some.

We also established three trays of green onions. The home economics teacher used them with some greens, basil, and cilantro to make soup and stew. She told me the kids liked it. Staff members and community members also ask for green onions when they are ready.

This month we are going to set up a grow tower for strawberries only. I have successfully started them from seeds. Some mature strawberry plants have runners. I'm hoping the kids will at least be able to see some flowers.

The industrial arts teacher will work with her students to start an outdoor garden when spring comes. We ordered some gardening tools and from there, the plan was to build a fence, set up some chairs or benches, and plant some flowers. There will also be a spot for the veggies we have to remove once the school is closed for the summer. Strawberries will be in the garden and we will move them back inside when school resumes in the fall.

We do have some setbacks, we are facing thrips on our second grow tower now. It's not as bad as last year but we are monitoring the situation. We set up fans to increase air flow and I washed the plants I could wash once a week, so fingers crossed.

Students are still learning how to pick veggies by not grabbing or breaking the whole plant. Again, it's a learning curve. They will do better once they learn how to handle plants properly.

The plan for next school year is to maintain what we are doing now, working with the breakfast program and maintaining the grow towers we have. The land base cabin already has power hooked up and I was told the temperature is fine at night. A teacher working in the land base cabin is talking about what can be grown there. I'm hoping I can get them either an aero garden or something like a grow tower.

I want to plant more flowers in the school to make the school pretty. I'm hoping more classroom teachers would like to set up a green corner in their rooms.

In the future, I want to group some students and start trying to use the Kratky method. I saw some Facebook videos of growing greens in mason jars and I feel it could be more accessible for most people in the community.







COMMUNITY

RABBIT SNARING

Northern Community Facilitator, John Halkett, reflects on the youth rabbit snaring club in Kisipakamak (Brochet).

BY JOHN HALKETT

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOHN HALKETT

The rabbit snaring club, hosted by Myron Cook, took place in the outskirts of Kisipakamak (Brochet) from January 6th to January 15th. Students from the Kisipakamak school attended the club.

During the first session, the students were able to tell rabbit tracks apart from other animal tracks in the snow. The instructors started off by showing the students what to do and the students followed the steps that were shown. The students did a great job setting snares on their own.



On day 2 of the rabbit snaring club, we all went to check the snares and the students were shown how to properly store the harvest. The rest of the sessions were all based on checking snares with the students.

The students were taught to set rabbit snares, identifying rabbit tracks and trails.

It was a good experience for the students, they showed much interest in learning how to snare rabbits.

When the final session came along, it was a day of checking and removing all snares.

The rabbits that were harvested had been given away to a few elders who live in the community.

I learned how to snare rabbits just over a year ago. For me, it feels great knowing that the kids get to learn this skill at a younger age. Knowing how to trap and hunt where we live is essential to everyone who lives in the north. I enjoyed helping with teaching and I enjoyed the work.



FIRST PERSON

COLD SNAP HARVESTS

Youth harvester Paul Nice's personal update on his harvesting over the cold winter months.

BY PAUL NICE

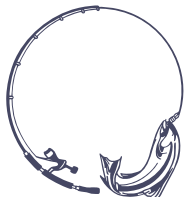
PHOTOGRAPHY BY PAUL NICE

Throughout January, I've been sticking in my nice little rhythm throughout this cold month, doing rabbit snaring with some hunting and fishing.

The rabbits are pretty hard to track down this winter. There aren't too many moving around in my area, though I still manage to find good trails to set my snares on.

Once all the snare checking is done, I usually head out on the lake to do some fishing.

I recently got myself a nice hand auger and I'm in love with how portable it is.



I'm out fishing as much as I can be. There's something awesome about being out in the wilderness and sharing this cold landscape with all the other animals trying to survive these frozen months.

The ptarmigans don't let the cold phase them and I won't let it phase me either.

I'm making the most out of the days even when it gets to -40 C. I can't wait to see what's in store for me in the future. You never know what you may come across when you're out in the woods or on the ice.

As the days keep passing, slowly going through the month of February, I've been keeping my schedule going with hunting and fishing whenever I can.

The cold snaps are pretty gnarly this time of year. The one thing it's done is teach me how much I need to bundle up.

This month so far has been pretty nice with fishing and hunting. I can't wait to see how the rest of the month turns out for me. It's always a treat to see what you stumble across in the wilderness. There's always something moving about, even in this bitter cold.



ART

BEAR CLAN

BY SIDNEY CASTEL

This piece is named “bear clan” in honour of my grandmother, as that is her spirit animal.





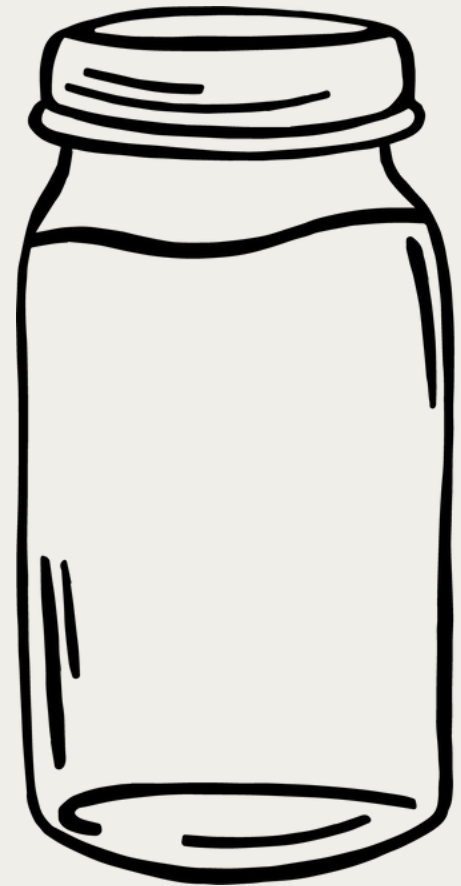
FOOD**RENDERING FAT- HOW TO!****RECIPE BY HELPING HANDS 4-H CLUB**

You can make lard from pork, tallow from beef or lamb, and schmaltz from fowl.

We couldn't find if there were any names for moose, deer, elk, caribou, or any other traditionally Indigenous hunted animals. But, whatever the name, it is an easy process and well worth it to have on hand!

Instructions

1. Take any amount of fat from your hunt/kill. Try to clean off as much meat as you can.
2. Cut, chop, or grind it into small pieces.
3. Place it into a pot, but don't go over. You can do this in several batches if you have to. Add about an inch of water to the pot so the fat doesn't burn.
4. Bring the contents to a boil over medium high heat and then lower to a simmer. Let it simmer for an hour.
5. Stir occasionally, to break up any large pieces that may have stuck together.
6. After the hour, let it cool for 30 minutes.
7. Strain with a fine colander and cheesecloth (if you don't have cheesecloth, use a clean tea towel). Straining it twice is a good idea.
8. Pour it into jars and place in the refrigerator to set overnight, or for a few hours.



It is then ready to use!

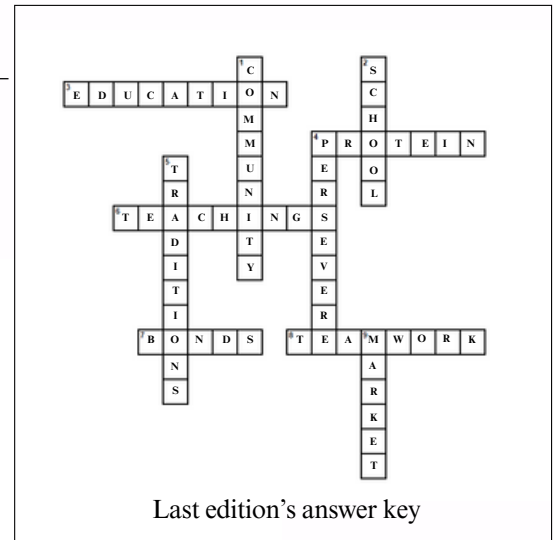
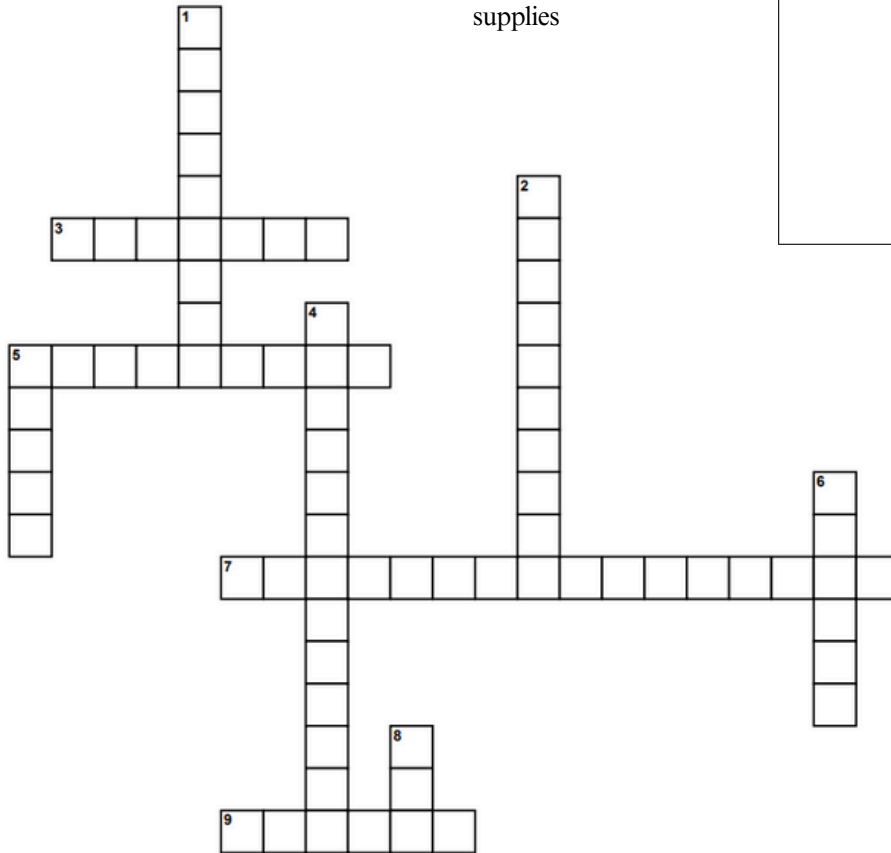
GAMES

**THE NORTHERN SUN
CROSSWORD**

PRESENTED BY **FOOD MATTERS MANITOBA**

ACROSS

- 3. Learning to make pickles, jams, fruits, salsa
- 5. The ancestors lived this _____ for thousands of years
- 7. Fresh veggies from the garden
- 9. Over _____ communities depend on the winter roads for goods and supplies



Last edition's answer key

DOWN

- 1. Ice _____ is important to consider when harvesting in the winter
- 2. Providing lettuce for the school
- 4. _____ is contributing to an unreliable winter road system
- 5. _____ food systems can help alleviate some stress for communities relying on winter roads
- 6. Students setting _____ for their community
- 8. When harvesting, always follow your _____

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