

THE NORTHERN SUN



**“AS NATIVE PEOPLE,
WE OVERCOME AND
ADAPT TO ANY
CHALLENGES”**







THE NORTHERN SUN

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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

ADAPTING TO CLIMATE CHANGE

*Indigenous harvesters and Manitoba Non-Profit Food Matters
Manitoba adapt to the ongoing effects of climate change in the
north.*

BY CHANTAL MARIE SCHROMEDA

PHOTOGRAPHY BY DEMIAN LAWRENCHUK

Traditional Indigenous harvester Myron Cook, in Kisipakamak (Brochet), depends on the biodiversity in the north for healthy and traditional foods that are distributed amongst the elders, the community, and his family.

But ongoing wildfires, low water levels, and health hazards brought on by climate change are posing a serious threat to habitats in the north and the traditional ways of living.

“Everything has changed due to climate change,” says Cook.

Climate change has damaged the land, the water, and life - affecting traditional practices in Indigenous communities, leading to distress, states a 2020 study published in Environmental Health.

Indigenous territories in the north are impacted the hardest in Canada by the effects of climate change, according to a 2021 Indigenous Climate Action report. According to Canada’s Changing Climate Report in 2019, the north will warm at three times the global rate in comparison to the rest of the country warming at twice the global rate.





With the effects of climate change felt across the north, traditional harvesters in Manitoba, their communities, and Manitoba Indigenous non profit, Food Matters Manitoba (FMM), are working to adapt to climate change's effects in order to continue building local and prosperous food systems.

Indigenous food systems have thrived for thousands of years because of the depth of the relationship with the land, explains FMM's Executive Director, Demian Lawrenchuk.

"The people travelled between key locations at precise times throughout the year to ensure they had access to the necessary resources and food," says Lawrenchuk.

"This relationship and the associated patterns of life, remain relevant and necessary for the wellbeing of so many people that call this region home today," he adds.

In the north, life has historically been understood as tough and uncertain - communities have a fragile connection to the global supply and food production network stemming from the dependency colonization has created, explains Lawrenchuk.

Now, with the current climate crisis, there is instability to the ecosystem's predictable ancient cycle, and harvesters in the north are faced with immense new challenges, he states.

Heading out onto the land to travel his and his ancestors' traditional hunting routes, Cook remembers having a plethora of traditional foods and medicines to harvest and pick for the community.

But those traditional routes are no longer what they once were.

"With the warmer climate it's harder, everything is burning," says Cook, FMM's Community Project Coordinator. "The caribou don't walk in the same places anymore - that's one of the big challenges we face as harvesters."

Caribou are nomadic beings and their migration routes during winter have drastically changed as a result of climate change, explains FMM's Northern Programs Manager, Myles King.

"As access to their seasonal foods remain longer in the farther north, the need to come farther south is no longer there - making communities travel farther to harvest," says King.

The caribou have been essential historically for survival in the isolated community of Kisipakamak - providing clothing, moccasins, tools, and food, explains Cook.

"Us, our people, we really depend on the caribou - we really depend on it," he adds. "If it wasn't for the caribou, our people of the Barren Lands would not be here today."

According to Manitoba Wildfire Service (MWS), as of August 6th there have been 216 wildfires in 2024.

While 77 of those wildfires have been human caused, the majority are caused by the ongoing lightning activity across the province. MWS is anticipating several new fires will be appearing daily as a result of lightning.

"The increase in temperature and decrease in humidity means more forest fires from thunderstorms, which changes the habitat for many animals and the migratory routes of the nomadic mammals," says Cook.

The ongoing forest fires have a direct effect on the loss of plant and animal life, and evacuations lead to many harvesting challenges, states FMM's Northern Coordinator, Morgan McCurdy.

As the thick smoke billows out from the forest, Cook says the fires pose ongoing health concerns for him and fellow harvesters.

“The forest fires with heavy smoke really is a challenge with visibility for travel and for health,” he says. “We have to time any plans we have on the land for safety reasons.”

High temperatures also increase the risk for heat related illness.

“Higher temperature and dryer weather make it harder on the body as well - increasing the chance for heat exhaustion and heat stroke, which is very dangerous for hunters and fishermen,” states Cook.

Adapting to the ongoing climate crisis is no small feat, but Indigenous populations have been adapting to the ecosystem for centuries, states the 2020 Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) report.

FM M’s goal is to get to the root of the issue by building long-term change, so communities can adapt to climate change in a way that best suits them.

“We are methodically and consistently building capacity within communities through long-term employment and training,” says Lawrenchuk. “This approach empowers communities to respond to and overcome the challenges of climate change, food insecurity, and colonization in a way that is most meaningful to them.”

FMM also sources and ships materials to communities from Winnipeg, finds and provides guidance for northern employees, and secures funding for increased operations cost.

It’s important to be prepared, and FMM is adapting to react quickly to the erratic seasonal shifts, explains King.

“This includes our work sending materials up on the winter roads and our support for seasonal harvests,” he says. “We also have to be mindful about providing the resources to keep the harvests without spoilage.”

While the traditions and food systems of Indigenous communities have survived colonization, displacement, and varying climates, according to the FAO report, that does not negate that climate change is a huge challenge - one that Cook explains he’s experienced all over North America.



As the seasonal patterns become increasingly irregular, there is no longer a steady cycle for harvesters to anticipate.

Traditional harvester in Makeso Sakahikan (Fox Lake/Gillam), Lawrence Saunders, explains that every year is now different.

“There is never a steady cycle,” he says.

Saunders often works with the youth in his community as a mentor - bringing his children and other youth onto the land to show them how to harvest traditional foods and pick medicines.

This year, the uptick in bugs has been out of control.



“While trying to pick medicines you have to make sure you have bug spray or bug jackets, or they’ll drive you crazy,” he says.

In Kinosao Sipi (Norway House), traditional harvester Lester Balfour frequently brings the youth out onto the water to show them how to set nets and harvest fish for the elders and their community, but the water levels often fluctuate - affecting the fish, states Balfour.

Varying water levels and unpredictable storms brought on by climate change causes damage to equipment - affecting traditional harvesters ability to provide food for their communities, explains Lawrenchuk.

“Hazardous and low water conditions cause more frequent damage to boats, propellers, and nets, harvests become harder to process before spoiling, and the cost or even ability to repair and replace equipment is not always possible,” he says.

Low water levels also create hazardous or unnavigable conditions on the waterways and cause stress on fish populations - harming spawning activities, adds Lawrenchuk.

Cook explains the fish’s spawning activities have been affected by the rising water temperatures over the years.

“The increase in water temperature changes all the fish’s behaviour and spawning patterns - with the drought and less rain, the water levels dropped significantly which prevents us from accessing many hunting and fishing spots or makes it harder,” says Cook. “Also, for the change in water temperatures, we had to take into consideration the change in fish behaviours with the quicker melting of the ice changing their spawning times.”

These behavioural changes mean harvesters must reroute their travelling routes to certain harvesting locations, explains Cook

All of these challenges of instability in the natural world lead to an inability to secure necessary food for families and households, adds Lawrenchuk.

Adjusting to these new routines brought on by climate change can be difficult.

“Goose season comes quicker, berry season is shorter, and polar bears and seals come farther inland,” says McCurdy. “Having to learn these new routines and adjust to these changes is quite a challenge.”

But the mutually respectful relationship between Indigenous Peoples and the land is a way of life, and the continuation of traditional harvesting is vital for Northern communities, states Balfour, who is FMM’s Northern partner.

“Indigenous landbase is who we are, it’s a way of life,” he says.

Though ongoing environmental degradation continues to pose a threat to communities in the north, Cook stands firm in his belief that traditional harvesters will continue to adapt and overcome the challenges climate change presents to them.

“As Native people we overcome and adapt to any challenges, and any changes to the land and environment brought forth to us,” he says.



COMMUNITY

FOX LAKE CREE NATION'S WEIR TRIP

Harvesters in Makeso Sakahikan (Fox Lake/Gillam) travel their ancestors' traditional routes on a paddling trip.

BY LAWRENCE SAUNDERS JR.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY LAWRENCE SAUNDERS JR.



During the end of August we did 130 kms - 30 hours of paddling from Weir River to Deer Island. What an experience.

Through all the challenges we faced we pulled through as a group. Hats off to the women and young guns that accomplished this paddle.

These routes were once our ancestors' highways, the routes they used to feed themselves and others around them. To know that they were up above keeping us safe was comforting.

There was a huge polar bear that walked at least 40 kms along the river.

Not knowing if he was still around was keeping me on edge and extra cautious - got to keep in mind that this is their area as well, got to learn to live with them.

We're planning on making this an annual trip now that we have an idea of how long it takes and what to expect.



COMMUNITY



HELPING HANDS 4-H CLUB BEEKEEPING

The Helping Hands 4-H Club in the Pas tackle beekeeping.

BY CHERYL ANTONIO

PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHERYL ANTONIO

The Pas Helping Hands 4-H Club has been learning about beekeeping for going on three years. A grant was obtained through the Bee Cause project in which the Club was able to purchase hives, a smoker, suits, and other accessories.

As part of the grant, an adult had to take part in several beekeeping webinars, and the Club had to obtain a mentor who would be able to teach all aspects of beekeeping. Shawn Sexsmith of Round the Bend Farm in The Pas agreed to not just be the Club mentor, but, to provide a home for the hives at his farm!

Club Members visit the hives on several occasions throughout the season. They learned about smoking the bees to calm them and have also learned a variety of bee behaviors to watch out for. Did you know bees can become aggressive when there is bad weather? On a nice day, the bees are quite docile after a bit of smoke and if properly dressed, the youth can confidently work around the hives.

In the fall, the honey is extracted with the help of many hands.

The wax is scraped off the top and then the frames are put in the honey extractor machine. It spins very fast, and the honey falls to the bottom of the tub then is drained through a tap. The honey is then strained to get the last of the particles out. Finally, it is put into containers for human use.

Before freeze-up, the hives must be covered with an insulated wrap. There are a couple small spaces for the bees to come out, as they don't use the bathroom in their hive!

In the north, it is not easy for the bees to last a hard winter. A special sugar solution must be made and put in the hive for them to eat. If it is a long winter, it may run out. We were very happy to see some early movement outside the hives in April this year. We hope our bees have survived!



FIRST PERSON

A YOUTH HARVESTER'S SUMMER

Youth harvester Sidney Castel reflects on new harvesting accomplishments and skills over the summer months.

BY SIDNEY CASTEL

PHOTOGRAPHY BY SIDNEY CASTEL



I learned about a few new medicines such as stitching medicine that works as nature's own band aid or bandage. I also learned how to clean and boil traps for wild animals, and I learnt what the drying process is like for the medicine that I harvest.

I took two youth community members out and showed them how to harvest wild game, also, how to clean and cook it.

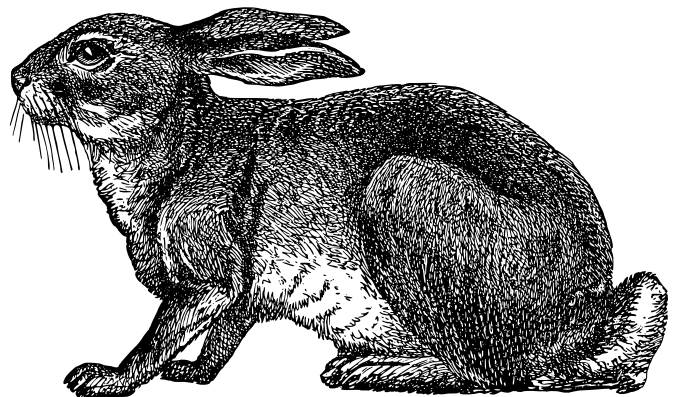


I took both the youth out to call moose and showed them how to make a homemade moose caller out of birchbark. I also showed them how to do different moose calls such as a cow call and bull moose grunting.

I also showed another youth how to shoot her very first rabbit. It was a blast - being able to teach her how to shoot and handle guns in a safe manner is awesome. Seeing her excited after shooting her first rabbit made me happy.

And I busted trail into a lake I've never been before.

I took a youth with me and showed him it is important to mark your trail with highlighted ribbons and to always be aware of your surroundings so you don't get lost.



I love passing on my knowledge of the land to the youths of my community. I try to help them see that there's more than just sitting inside on a video game or watching television.

I also taught the youth how to clean and fix a rabbit properly, and to try to not waste any meat as our ancestors practiced long before us.

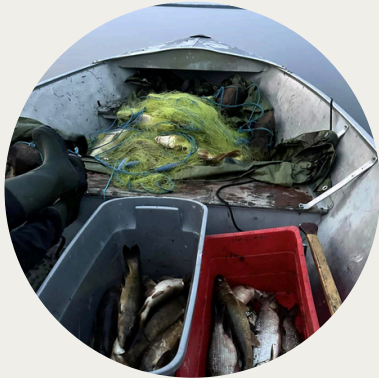
Over the summer, I also got to take out my brand new boat my grandfather purchased for me.

I also took matters into my own hands to take care of the beaver damming up the creeks, and I made a demonstration video on how to set a 330 conibear the easy way with a side line.





FOOD



LAKE TO PLATE

Harvested nameesteek/smoked fish from red suckers given to elders and other community members in Kisipakamak (Brochet).

BY MYRON COOK



FOOD

CHERRY CHEESECAKE TARTS

RECIPE BY HELPING HANDS 4-H CLUB



There are many, many amazing cherry trees around OCN/The Pas. Our 4-H Club has been picking for many years and learning to make wonderful foods from them!

One of our favorite recipes is for sour cherry cream cheese tarts!!

You can make your own crust for these, but we prefer to buy the commercial made ones as it is quite often cheaper.

To make these you need to first make your filling:

Ingredients

- 4 cups pitted sour cherries fresh, then frozen and drained
- 2 cups cherry juice (I got more than 2 cups when my frozen cherries thawed)
- 1/3 cup cornstarch
- 1/3 cup brown sugar
- 1/3 cup white sugar
- 1 teaspoon almond extract
- 2 teaspoons vanilla

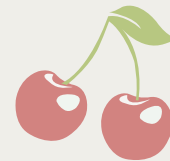
Instructions

1. Thaw cherries and hang in sieve over a bowl for a couple hours to separate cherries from juice
2. Blend cornstarch with both sugars; place juice in a medium saucepan and whisk in dry ingredients as you sprinkle them over the juice via a sieve
3. At medium-low heat, stir until thickened and clear; mixture will be very thick
4. Add strained cherries, stirring constantly to bring mixture back to a boil: 1-2 minutes (it won't really boil, but will just plop-plop for a minute or two as you continue to stir constantly)
5. Remove from heat immediately as cherries are tender and should not be overcooked
6. Stir in almond and vanilla; pour into canning jar
7. Cool to room temperature

Then comes the fun part of assembling your tarts!!

Instructions:

- 3 ounces cream cheese softened
- 1/4 cup confectioner's sugar
- 1/8 to 1/4 teaspoon almond or vanilla extract
- 2 individual graham cracker shells
- 1/4 cup cherry pie filling



8. In a small bowl, beat the cream cheese, sugar, and extract until smooth. Spoon into shells. Top with pie filling. Refrigerate until serving.

ART

HERBIE

Veggie creature sculpture made of reclaimed materials.

BY ARTIST MICHELLE MOULSON



I grew up on a farm, and growing food and cooking was and is, a huge part of my life. Herbie is a great example of that. I initially made him for an art prompt from Manitoba Craft.

The theme was “taste” and Herbie’s tongue is meant to indicate the types of taste buds.

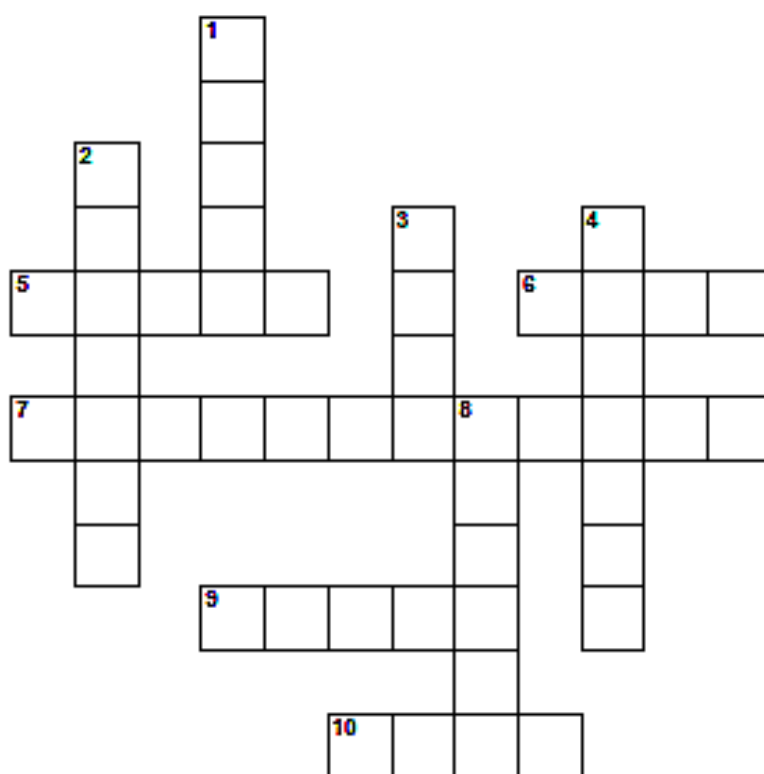
The vegetables on the tongue correspond to them - sweet, salty, bitter, etc.



GAMES

THE NORTNERN SUN CROSSWORD

PRESENTED BY **FOOD MATTERS MANITOBA**



ACROSS

5. A sweet topping
6. What season is honey extracted?
7. Indigenous territories have the highest percentage of ____ on the planet
9. Indigenous Peoples ____ to their environment
10. Don't forget to mark your trail

DOWN

1. The North warms ____ times faster than the rest of the country
2. Method for bee calming
3. Lightning strikes
4. These mammals' migration routes are changing
8. The ancestors' highways

Answer key in next edition.

