



CANADIAN AGRICULTURAL
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RESSOURCES HUMAINES EN AGRICULTURE
CAHRC-CCRHA

Growing Security

Summary of Indigenous Agriculture and
Agri-Foods Zoom Webinar Discussions
May 19-22, 2020

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Canadian Agricultural Human Resources Council

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Growing Security

Indigenous Agriculture and Agri-Foods

Zoom Session Key Points

May 19 to 22, 2020

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Indigenous Agriculture and Agri-Foods

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First Nations and Indigenous people history in agriculture and agri-foods today has existed long before Canada confederated. There has always been a relationship between Indigenous people and the land. Indigenous people harvested plants, ranched livestock, and cultivated plants to create medicines and design companion planting systems like the Three Sisters¹. Canada's agriculture and agri-foods industry is critical to the sustainability and independence of the country, and of growing importance to Indigenous communities nationwide.

The Context

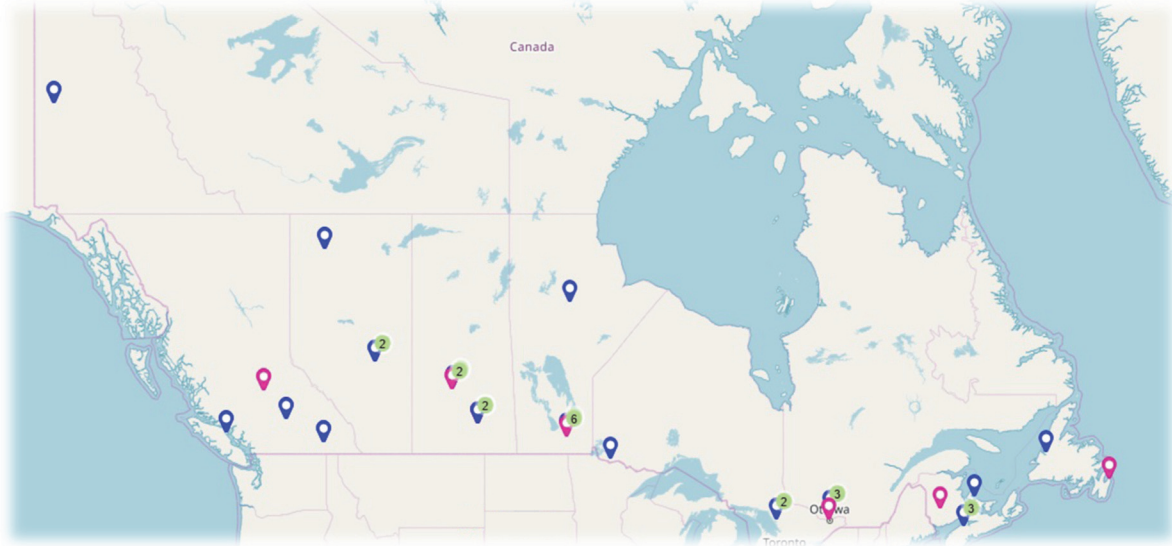
Prior to the Covid-19 Pandemic unfolding in March 2020, the Canadian Agricultural Human Resources Council (CAHRC)² initiated a project to explore with the Indigenous community ways to increase Indigenous participation in the agriculture population as operators and through employment. A one-day session of Indigenous operators scheduled for mid-March 2020 was restructured to four Zoom facilitated webinars. These sessions were split by geographic region and held:

- May 19 – West – BC, Alberta, Yukon, Northwest Territories
- May 20 – Prairies – Saskatchewan, Manitoba
- May 21 – Central – Ontario, Quebec
- May 22 – Atlantic – Newfoundland / Labrador, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Nunavut

These sessions had 32 Indigenous participants from a wide range of agriculture and agri-foods operations and agencies including agriculture students. Joining the sessions were 15 Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) from federal and provincial government agencies, program, and educational / post-secondary institutions. The map below illustrates the location of the participants. (See **Appendix A: Participant list**)

¹ Three Sisters companion planting – is a companion planting system where beans, corn and squash are planted together – each helps the other to survive. <https://www.nativeseeds.org/blogs/blog-news/how-to-grow-a-three-sisters-garden>

² The Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council (CAHRC) is a national, non-profit organization focused on addressing human resource issues facing agricultural businesses across Canada (<https://cahrc-ccrha.ca>). It offers supports to agriculture and agri-foods operators throughout Canada to address labour needs, worker requirements, emerging labour issues, position requirements, and competitiveness. Collaboration is fundamental to CAHRC operations. It partners with industry associations, educational institutions, and government departments to deliver practical staff management tools and training programs.



**Tags indicate the participant location: Blue = Indigenous, Pink = Subject Matter Expert*

In preparation for the March 2020 national session, a pre-session survey completed by invitees identified primary areas of interest to the Indigenous community. The Indigenous community felt the agriculture and agri-foods industry can create jobs in Indigenous communities, engage youth, and strengthen economic development. Respondents were greatly interested in learning of opportunities and felt that to increase involvement, more finance and capital is needed, technical and business training, information on opportunities, and access to land.

This document summarizes the discussions with an overview of the agriculture and agri-foods industry in Canada and Indigenous participation as operators and workers.

Canada and the Indigenous Agriculture Industry

In 2016 in Canada, the agriculture and agri-food system (AAFS) accounted for 6.7% of Canada's GDP or \$111.9 billion and employed approximately 2.3 million people³. Of those employed in the industry, the agricultural (farm) population was 592,575 people of which 15,765 individuals (2.7%) self-identified as Aboriginal.⁴ The agricultural (farm) population is farm operators (individuals involved in the day-to-day management decisions in operating a census farm) as well as the individuals in their households.

From 1971 to 2016, the farm population declined by 62.7% with the average size of the farm household shrinking by 35.5% to 2.8 persons.⁵ The average age of the agricultural population increased to 55 years with a mere 1 in 12 having a formal succession plan to transfer the farm to the next generation of farmers. During this period, women also accounted for a larger share of farm operators.⁶ A shift in the residency of farm household also occurred. More

³ An Overview of the Canadian Agriculture and Agri-Food System, 2017. AAFC. <http://www.agr.gc.ca/eng/canadian-agri-food-sector/an-overview-of-the-canadian-agriculture-and-agri-food-system-2017/?id=1510326669269>

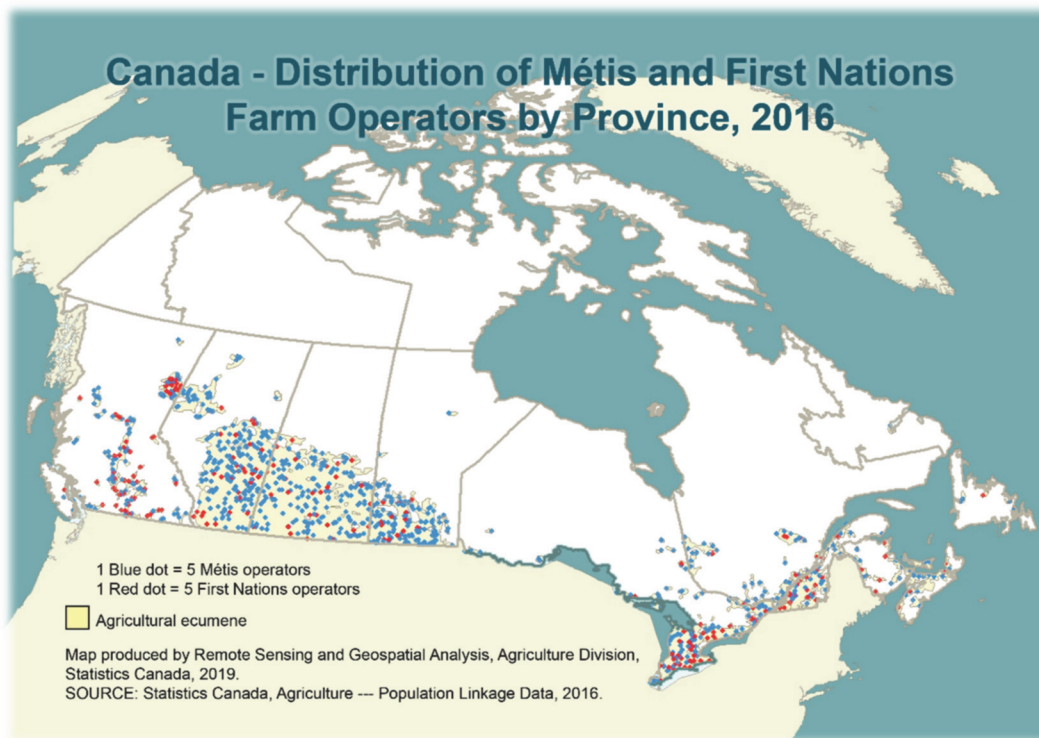
⁴ Aboriginal Peoples in Agriculture 2016 – Stats Canada - <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/96-325-x/2019001/article/00001-eng.htm>

⁵ Agriculture Population Linkage Data, November 27, 2018 – <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/95-633-x/95-633-x2017000-eng.htm>

⁶ 2016 Census of Agriculture – <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/170510/dq170510a-eng.htm>

of the farm population is residing in urban areas, which reflects a rise to 16.1% of the population in 2016 from 7.9% in 1971.⁷

While the Canadian farm population has been declining, the share of Indigenous people in the agricultural population grew. In 2016 it was 21.4% higher than 1996; comparatively the total agricultural population dropped 39.3%. The number of Indigenous agricultural operators represented 5,160 (1.9%) of the 270,720 agricultural operators in Canada, representing an increase of 51.6% of Indigenous operators from 1996 to 2016.⁸ Métis people are over 76% (3,940) of the Indigenous operators. These operators are primarily situated in Alberta and Saskatchewan, while the First Nation agricultural operators were mostly located in British Columbia (285), followed by Ontario (215) and Alberta (150) (see map below).



Source: <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/96-325-x/2019001/article/00001-eng.htm>

The reasons for the increase of the Indigenous population in agriculture in 2016 is unknown, though it can be speculated this may be attributed to a greater numbers of Indigenous people choosing agricultural careers, and a higher number of people self-identifying as Indigenous, or other factors, such as an increase in Indigenous economic and business programming. It is unknown if this increase of Indigenous participation will continue.

While there have been natural downward shifts in the mainstream Canadian agricultural and agri-foods industry through an aging Canadian population and general declines in agriculture participation, the COVID-19 Pandemic has impacted all aspects of this industry and society. The level of impact is unknown as Canada and globally, countries battle to contain the pandemic and get their economies back on track. Canada typically has a well-balanced and

⁷ IBID

⁸ <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/96-325-x/2019001/article/00001-eng.htm>

stable food supply chain consisting of domestic and imported goods; however, the Pandemic has had a considerable impact on Canada's food security. Incidents of significance were first the strain on the food shipping and transportation networks, restaurants shutting down, followed by the temporary closure of several major meat processing plants when the Covid-19 spread amongst workers. Adding to the problem, many farmers depend on foreign workers to plant and harvest crops, however these workers upon face additional barriers to entering the country during the Covid-19 Pandemic .

Indigenous Goals and Challenges

Despite the Covid-19 interruption to the agriculture and agri-foods industry, there appears to be an increase of entrants by Indigenous communities and people into the field. It seems the Indigenous operators are pursuing activities related to traditional practices like harvesting of berries, herbs, rice and plants and other non-timber forest products; tapping trees for maple syrup production; and combining plants into traditional medicine, as well as fishing, hunting, and trapping. Ranching and farming are more recent history constructs which has expanded from cattle ranching to bison (including hormone free ranching) and beekeeping (apiary). Operators are also fusing agriculture and agri-foods with tourism through farm-to-table businesses (e.g., Chef Ray Bear, Kisik Ridge Estate, NS and Chef Cezin Nottaway, QC) and setting up farm education attractions with interpretive sites and restaurants (e.g., Métis Crossing, AB) to 'tell the story through food'. They are also into food production and packaging of products such as gourmet maple syrups and wild rice. These products are sold commercially with the internet being a key sales channels (especially during this Covid-19 Pandemic), along with farmers markets and retail outlets.

Canada has always been a major food trading partner – being the 5th largest food exporter in the world, and the 6th largest importer. The Canadian Agri-food Trade Alliance reports that “We [Canada] export half of our beef/cattle, 70% of our soybeans, 70% of our pork, 75% of our wheat, 90% of our canola and 95% of our pulses.”⁹ While agri-food exports contribute to Canada's economy, food security has been of utmost concern to many Indigenous communities for some time. Indigenous communities in the north also have food security concerns. These are exasperated by high food costs and inconsistent food supply. Remote and isolated communities have the same trepidations, especially those that are only accessible by plane or boat; they will often have food shortages during inclement weather or other natural disasters (i.e., forest fires, flooding).

The national Assembly of First Nations partnered with the University of Ottawa and Université de Montréal on a comprehensive technical study on Indigenous food quality for eight Assembly of First Nation regions. This community-based study defined the food safety and quality for Indigenous peoples across Canada. The research found “The prevalence of food insecurity is very high in First Nations communities (48%). The highest rates of food insecurity were found in Alberta (60%) and in remote communities.”¹⁰ The study also found the diet of First Nations adults across Canada did not meet nutrition recommendations, except on days when traditional food was present.

⁹ Canadian Agri-food Trade Alliance - <http://cafta.org/agri-food-exports/>

¹⁰ FNFNES Final Report for Eight Assembly of First Nations - AFN, University of Ottawa, Université de Montréal. November 2019, page 6.

Goals for Indigenous Participation

Indigenous participants in the webinar sessions identified goals of Indigenous nations and people in a wide array of agriculture and agri-foods industry sectors:

- Have food security
- Be self-sufficient
- Reconnect with the land, especially youth, and return to applying cultural values and principles our stewardship of the land
- Promote environmental sustainability and preserve cultural values
- Add value – monetize lands
- Secure employment in management and all levels of operations
- Improve awareness of agriculture and industry sector – the values and benefits
- Promote health work ethics
- Promote opportunities
- Engage youth in the industry
- Encourage buying local

Challenges

While Indigenous people have a long-standing inherent and cultural relationship with the land that existed long before colonialism in Canada, Indian Residential schools taught agricultural skills and government policy encouraged Indian participation in the agricultural economy. The implementation of the Peasant Farm Policy¹¹ in 1889 and changes to the *Indian Act*¹² which restricted Indian farmers ability to barter and trade effectively reduced Indian farm earnings and destroyed any advances they made. “Indigenous farmers were to reduce their acreages dramatically and to grow root crops, not wheat. They were to use the most rudimentary implements: to broadcast seed by hand, harvest with scythes, bind by hand with straw, thresh with flails, and grind their grain with hand mills. They were to manufacture at home any items they required.”¹³

In addition to the challenges the agriculture and agri-foods industry typically experiences, and the unforeseen circumstances caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, Indigenous communities experience their unique set of obstacles. These are typically associated with natural and geographic factors as well as barriers related to the *Indian Act* and other regulatory regimes.



Land and Resources

- Access to land and natural resources – reserve land may not be usable for agriculture due to small size and or soil conditions, and the water quality and supply may not be available
- Geographic barriers – inadequate infrastructure, and agricultural services
- Land use restrictions – arable reserve land may be locked into long-term leases to non-Indigenous farmers; the *Indian Act* process for land use planning is cumbersome and creates barriers to access financing
- Effects of climate change on the natural environment

¹¹ <https://www.historymuseum.ca/cmhc/exhibitions/aborig/fp/fpz4e02e.html>

¹² Indian Act - Sale or barter of produce – Sec. 32 (1) A transaction of any kind whereby a band or a member thereof purports to sell, barter, exchange, give or otherwise dispose of cattle or other animals, grain or hay, whether wild or cultivated, or root crops or plants or their products from a reserve in Manitoba, Saskatchewan or Alberta, to a person other than a member of that band, is void unless the superintendent approves the transaction in writing. <https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/i-5/section-32-20021231.html>

¹³ University of Saskatchewan: Indigenous Reserve Agriculture to 1900 – https://teaching.usask.ca/indigenoussk/import/indigenous_reserve_agriculture_to_1900.php



Capital and Financial Resources

- Inaccessible to Indigenous communities and people
- Lack of awareness of funding and resources availability
- No business infrastructure for local, regional, and international markets; unable to access markets



Perception of the Agriculture Industry

- It is a difficult and demanding occupation / industry
- Negative association with the Indian Residential Schools
- Low pay
- Lack of awareness of what it is, along with the values and benefits
- Unable to compete with mainstream competitors



Labour, Employment and Training

- Access to training and education is impeded by lack of availability of education and training funds
- Education and training – specialized and technical – long distance to travel to access training
- Lack of access to specialized and technical training through absence of training funds for school and workshops
- Lack of availability or awareness of employer funds for on-the-job training
- Lack of availability of transportation – no driver's license, no transportation
- Access to childcare available for mothers and single parents
- Labour shortages at harvest – hard to get workers if not a family owned farm, youth return to school before harvest
- Training does not have cultural relevance – is missing cultural relevance including principles and delivery / teaching style
- Lack of or reliable internet access – creates barriers to online training, education, and other industry information

Improving Indigenous Participation – What is Needed

Session participants recommended several methods to increase Indigenous involvement in the agriculture and agri-foods industry. This could be done through increasing involvement in the agricultural population¹⁴ and operators (businesses, producers, harvesters). It is important to understand that the Indigenous community is comprised of First Nations, Indigenous people (status and non-status)¹⁵, Métis and Inuit people. They may reside in rural, remote, urban, or isolated settings, be subject to the *Indian Act* regulations if situated on-reserve. There are programs designed to support Indigenous people to start, expand and, recently, specialized Covid-19 business sustainability

¹⁴ The **agricultural population** is individuals dependent on agriculture, hunting, fishing, and forestry for their livelihood.

¹⁵ A 'status' Indian is a person who is registered as an Indian under the *Indian Act* of Canada. A non-status Indian is a person of North American Native ancestry but does not satisfy the *Indian Act* definition of 'Indian'.

programs. Increasing Indigenous participation in the agriculture population and as operators require a variety of approaches and specialized services.

The Zoom webinar Indigenous participants were family and Band operators, Indigenous organizations, programs, technical experts, and resources. They emphasized that family operations may not experience similar labour challenges shortages as commercial or Band driven ventures may have difficulty finding and sustaining labour. Family businesses know their livelihood is subject to the farm's success. Band owned ventures also differ from non-Indigenous commercial enterprises – Band operations are owned by the community (may be one of several ventures of the Band) and may be able to benefit from other Band initiatives such as training, youth summer employment programs, and incorporate social development and cultural elements, making the venture more than a business, it is a social enterprise. If the Band owns more than one business, it too could economize its agriculture operations by sharing business operating costs with other ventures.

The Indigenous agricultural and agri-foods system is shaped by ownership, purpose, and access to markets. Family or privately owned ventures have less access to government programs and training resources, while Band owned or driven operations may be able to sustain their operations through innovative practices like operating as a training centre or school, community garden, tourism attraction or cultural centre. Band owned ventures tend to be – gardens, greenhouses (vegetable and aquaponics), cattle and bison ranches, farm schools, aquaculture ventures, beekeeping / apiary, native plant, and cannabis. The outputs of these ventures may be for self-use, greenhouse and community garden produce are commonly distributed to community members like Elders, new mothers, and families, or sold through local farmers markets or commercial ventures. Band ventures may also coordinate community cultural activities like harvesting and herb and food preparation workshops.

Supports needed to realize the goals and increase the Indigenous agriculture population relate to operations, or the establishment and success of agricultural enterprises, training, information workshops, skills, and technical education.

Indigenous Operators and Enterprises

Indigenous operators need to have sustainable enterprises that can anticipate and adjust to changing environments – whether they are Band or individual / family owned. Operators that were able to rapidly innovate in response to the Covid-19 pandemic were ones that shifted production, offered new products, and focused distribution on local markets and / or online sales channels. Essential to sustainability are internet connectivity, technical skills, and business acumen along with market knowledge and ability to anticipate opportunities. One participant reported they responded to local market demands by selling farm inputs, such as soil and fertilizer, for local people who were starting their own gardens.

Employers require employees who have soft skills, like leadership, teamwork, communications, problem-solving, work ethics, flexibility / adaptability, and interpersonal skills. Indigenous employment organizations often refer to these as Essential Skills¹⁶ and can test individuals to determine the readiness of a person for a specific job. Indigenous Skills Employment Training agencies (ISETs) can also support individuals with developing their skills, acquiring certification and formal education.

¹⁶ Essential skills are skills needed for life, are the foundation to learning all other skills, and help people adapt to workplace changes. There are 9 essential skills - reading, writing, document use, numeracy, thinking skills, oral communication, computer use/digital skills, working with others, and continuous learning. There are nationally developed Essential Skills assessment tools available to determine a person's readiness for a job. <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/essential-skills/definitions.html>

Indigenous operator supports needed are:

General Information & Services

- Information on opportunities, especially emerging products, and technical information
- Advisory services
- Labour management and sourcing

Training & Education

- Funding to train unskilled workers while on the job
- Farm Business planning and training on human resources management, marketing, accounting / bookkeeping, operations, computers, and internet marketing
- Specialized information – environmental, culture, emergency preparedness, climate change

Existing Indigenous Business Supports – There is an Indigenous business support network that provides business planning and technical workshops, and loans; however, these are on the standard business plan format, and typically do not provide specialized or technical knowledge. The ISETs also administer programs for employers such as wage subsidy, job posting, and candidate screening and referral. The ISETs may also partner with other institutions, especially provincial apprenticeable trades and education institutions, to design and / or host courses.

Operators identified specific technical training needed:

- How to grow food, soil, conditions, grow lights, organic and fertilizer
- Gardens, vegetable crops, different gardens
- Food safety¹⁷
- Food production –growing food crop, soil sciences, plant anatomy, pests, and diseases
- Harvesting and storage, storage techniques for individual crops – greenhouse production, and for various climates
- Animal husbandry, hatchery
- Apiary / Beekeeping
- Pasture and soil fertility management – for different product sectors
- Culinary School¹⁸

Training Content and Delivery

Indigenous programs, workshops and courses have refined their design and delivery to better reflect the needs of the Indigenous learner. Training and education programs that incorporate cultural components like activities (in-class and tours), principles, lessons, and practices, that also include supports like childcare, transportation, and onsite addictions and mental health supports – have realized great success. The cultural content and principles that are deemed essential to successful Indigenous educational programs must be delivered by Indigenous experts, such

¹⁷ ISETs commonly offer Food Safety certification courses to their program participants.

¹⁸ Professional Cook training is a Red Seal apprenticeable trade – in British Columbia, the Industry Training Authority (ITA) partnered with the Nicola Valley Institute of Technology and Okanagan College to enhance an existing Professional Cook training program with Indigenous cultural elements.

as cultural or ‘bush’ knowledge keepers. They can be instructors, guest speakers or on-site liaisons. Some high schools have on-site Elders in Residence programs.

ISETs and Indigenous training programs also typically offer job placement and employment counseling services with job coach supports. Job coaches provide regular care to students and employees who are liaisons between the instructor / employer and the student / employee. Coaches guide the individual with establishing structure for the student or work life. Job coaches and other trainee and employers supports are typically provided through ISETs.

During the Covid-19 Pandemic many institutions have switched to online and internet-based training; however, it is important to recognize that this cannot be the sole mode for teaching. In community and face-to-face learning is still required. Not all communities have reliable internet access, nor may participants have the right computers or have internet knowledge. Successful Indigenous training programs too are hands-on and include tours and interactive activities – these are elements that cannot be effectively delivered on-line or through distance learning. In-person program delivery also fosters trust in the learning environment and enables the instructor and the subject matter experts to better assess and understand the situation, context, and participant.

Career Paths and Promotions

- 1) **Career Path Information** – Sharing information on career paths in the agriculture and agri-foods fields can inspire Indigenous people to explore careers in all fields of the agriculture and agri-foods industry. This information would illustrate options at each stage and promote management careers.
- 2) **Ag101 Course** – Promotional information may be supported with an introductory program, such as Ag101 which introduces Indigenous people of various demographic groups to career and business opportunities in agriculture and agri-foods and include a work practicum placement. The activities and opportunities would vary by age group and geographic interest, and incorporate Indigenous cultural teachings, principles, and practices.
- 3) **Youth Program** – For older youth / young adults, there is an initiative designed to increase their interest in agriculture and agri-foods careers. This national Indigenous youth program was sponsored by Agriculture and Agri-foods Canada and headed by Indigenous agriculture leaders¹⁹. This project introduced over 100 Indigenous youth throughout Canada to science and agriculture careers. Key to the program’s success was that it was Indigenous led, incorporated Indigenous cultural teachings, and the program was delivered in the communities where the youth live so they were amongst their peers and familiar surroundings.
- 4) **Indigenous Children** – Children should be introduced at early ages to all aspects of the industry which includes Indigenous cultural practices in harvesting and modern agricultural practices to emerging fields. The activities could be tours of farms (animal and fish), outings with Bush Knowledge Keepers with emphasis on tailoring the activity to the youth’s age group, starting with safe animals for young children. Agriculture and agri-foods education and activities would be incorporated through all stages of schooling with extra-curricular activities outside of school, such as an Indigenous 4-H program.

¹⁹ Indigenous leader Darren Cook delivered the National Youth Initiative funded by Agriculture and Agri-foods Canada.

Other Initiatives

In addition to supporting Indigenous operators and individuals in understanding, entering, and developing, there are other initiatives that are needed to safeguard and strengthen Indigenous agriculture and agri-foods, and maintain the integrity of this sector.

- 1) **Cultural Intellectual Knowledge and Protection** – There is specialized knowledge and practices that distinguish Indigenous operators and experts. This requires legal protection, and the knowledge of the practitioners – Cultural Knowledge Keepers / Bush Knowledge Keepers – recognized and values as teachers, and incorporated into the training, operations from the agriculture and business operations perspectives.
- 2) **Partnerships** – Relationship with other institutes and organizations can advance activities through specialized knowledge and connections, generate credibility, and provide access to resources that may otherwise be available. There are a few key entities.
 - a. **Agriculture and Agri-food agencies** – such as CAHRC which has specialized skills and industry resources, as well as federal and provincial / territorial government, and industry sectors (e.g., Aboriginal Aquaculture Association, First Nations Forestry, Bee Canada, cannabis, etc.).
 - b. **Indigenous Agencies** – ISETs, Aboriginal Funding Initiatives / Capital Corporations (AFIs, ACCs), and Indigenous tourism. Each ISET identifies its own priorities and develops its own strategies and work plans; they can provide many training and employer supports, and partner with education and training institutes and trades regulatory agencies.
 - c. **Colleges and Universities** – partnerships with these institutes would focus on training and research and open opportunities to access research grants not typically available without educational institute partners.
 - d. **Employer Internships** – can be paired with Indigenous employment agencies (ISETs, AMIK), and high school and post-secondary. The focus could be summer employment, job shadowing or mentorship.
- 3) **National Indigenous Product Brand** – would distinguish Indigenous products and promote the Indigenous cultural values and principles. It may also open new consumer markets that are seeking different and wholesome products.

National Indigenous Network

A national network with regional chapters of Indigenous operators was considered essential to support operators and increase interest and participation.

- 1) **Think Tank** – The Indigenous network would serve as a think tank and sharing of ideas and smart practices.
- 2) **Technical Knowledge & Training** – The Indigenous network would coordinate and promote in-person and on-line information and training sessions, such as webinars. These would include technical experts sharing information on topics such as soil and crop management, pasture days, fencing and over grazing, and agency representatives who would relay information on programs and resources. This could include facilitation with partners in specialty training in seed, mushroom, chickens, beekeeping / apiary, cannabis, native plants, and information on career options and ladder.

- 3) **Marketing, Social Media & Internet Presence** – Internet presence through a website and social communications would support the network where members would post initiatives and answer questions on sector problems.
- 4) **Advisory Services** – A national network may also coordinate advisory services, such as human resources management and labour support.
- 5) **Research** – It may also lead research projects and coordinate project partners and funders.
- 6) **National Indigenous Food Brand** – The network could house a national Indigenous brand for Indigenous products and marketing and sales channels and host the development of the Ag101 program.

Appendix A: Session Participants

Indigenous Participants

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