



Growing Forward

Canada/Northwest Territories
Growing Forward Agreement

Small Scale Foods Program

Community Garden Initiative

2011 Annual Report



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Introduction

Since 2006, the Department of Industry, Tourism and Investment (ITI) has operated a local, community-based food production program in some communities throughout the Northwest Territories (NWT). Program resources were provided primarily from the Canada/NWT Agriculture Policy Framework Agreement.

The program was expanded through the Canada/NWT Growing Forward Initiative, signed by the Government of Canada through Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, and the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) through the Department of ITI. Since the program onset, it has experienced exponential growth in participation and interest throughout the NWT. All but three communities are now actively involved in local food production initiatives, and many garden sites have been established or expanded this past year. Although ITI has provided assistance and direction, communities have been actively engaged in providing direction, which fosters an environment of leadership amongst community members involved.

The Small Scale Foods Program (SSFP) focuses on small, community-based garden production of vegetables and fruits, as well as identifying local wild edibles. The primary mandate of the SSFP is to create an environment within communities that encourages residents to work together to

gain and share knowledge in growing food of their preference for community consumption. The SSFP provides seed, small tools and equipment. Program staff also assist in the selection and development of community garden sites, in conjunction with resident community groups, band councils and/or local governments. Projects are developed entirely according to the community's criteria, with assistance provided to meet community expectations.

Most projects are small in the beginning. However, as interest and success grows, the size and expectations for projects generally increases. Schools are encouraged to incorporate production of bedding plants into their curriculum, which allows students to gain interest and participate in projects.

As communities gain confidence and expertise requests are accommodated to place small greenhouses and expand the types of plants grown to include flowers, herbs, and fruit trees where deemed practical. Ultimately, it is the goal of the SSFP to include provision for storage and further processing (preserves) and see small self-sufficient units in all communities, as well as individual gardens. Provisions have also been made to allow for placement of small poultry and egg production.





Background

Historical perspective

Local food production of vegetables, poultry, meat and milk has occurred since early settlement of communities in the NWT. Early European Settlers grew gardens and kept livestock operations to feed their families and supplement local foods. The Hudson Bay Company and early Catholic and Anglican missions produced a wide variety of food for their own use and for distribution and sale.

As transportation systems evolved and became more reliable and widespread, local production of food gradually declined as imported foods became more available. The emergence of a cash economy moved many communities away from local food production and traditional harvesting as principle sources of sustenance, putting a greater reliance on wage economies and imported food. Since the late 1960s/early 1970s very few families have grown or produced their own food other than traditional wildlife harvesting. Instead there has been an increasing reliance on store bought food products and accompanying high calorie, lower nutrition packaged foods. Many of the elders continue to speak of earlier years when mission gardens were common; however, much of this knowledge has been lost.

Program justification

The SSFP was designed to encourage interest and participation in food production on a local basis. It is also intended to reinstate the lost knowledge of local food production and improve perception of agri-foods. The program provides

support, training and basic infrastructure for local food production in communities and works with residents of these communities to design, establish and expand local food production systems for their benefit.

Stakeholders and partners

The largest proponents of the SSFP in many Northern communities have been a strong core of community volunteers supported by local community governments. Despite having many projects and responsibilities on the go, these tireless individuals have championed community gardens as agents of community development, an economic alternative that utilizes available resources, a way to 'grow local', and even as a way of offsetting carbon production and encouraging the use of alternative energies. Several community garden projects are incorporating solar power to run gardening infrastructure such as water pumps.

It is clear that targeting youth through the school system increases participation from the entire community. By bringing workshops into the schools, and having classes come out in the spring to help with planting or in the fall to help with harvest, a community garden provides ample opportunity to integrate biology, physical fitness, and local economics to students in a practical setting. This is great promotion for the program as it allows parents and teachers to become involved in the community garden along with their children and students.





Background

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

Projects to date

ITI is working towards having the SSFP available in all regions in the NWT. The program is administered from Hay River and is under the direction of ITI's Agriculture and Agri-foods Consultant, along with a small team of summer students. Technical support is provided to identify sites and to clear and develop land. Program support provides seeds and small tools for planting and garden maintenance. Assistance is also provided to community organizers and volunteers through workshops and hands on training on a regular basis throughout the growing season.

The program began slowly in 2006 establishing sites in communities primarily along the south MacKenzie road system. By 2009, the program had contacted 27 communities of which 15 had active community garden sites supported by the

program. The summer of 2011 saw all but three communities in the NWT involved in some form of local food production system, with some moving on to larger established sites and incorporating greenhouses. Only the three most northernmost communities have yet to have some form of community garden. Discussions regarding program options will take place with these communities in the coming year. The three major centers, Yellowknife, Hay River, and Fort Smith operate independently and the SSFP participates on a limited basis.

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





Regional Involvement

The following table summarizes communities currently involved in the SSFP by region.

Community	Type of Project	Project involvement to date	Future involvement planned
Inuvik Region			
Aklavik	Community garden, container system	Site has been identified for planting in 2012.	Workshops set for spring 2012.
Fort McPherson	Community garden	Small site developed in 2010. Site expanded 2011.	Site to be expanded 2012. Container system to be established 2012.
Inuvik	Community greenhouse	Established independently in 1999, two components consisting of 74 individual plots and a 4,000 sq. ft. commercial greenhouse.	Increased involvement with the Inuvik project. Project had considerable success in 2011. A new manager was hired and the commercial as well as the community components did very well.
Tsiigehtchic	Multiple site development	SSFP aided in identifying two sites and gave assistance on site development.	Site identified and developed, but site deemed to be inoperative. The community will work to identify an alternate site.
Tuktoyuktuk	Raised beds greenhouse site development	Site identified 2010. Sponsor group identified. Construction and planting of 24'x30' grow dome in 2011	Increased bed and container construction planned for 2012. Materials to be brought in via winter road.
Sahtu Region			
Colville Lake	container system	Small container system established in 2011 in conjunction with school. Additional materials brought in on winter road.	Site to be developed and planted spring of 2012 with involvement of the school.
Deline	Community garden greenhouse	Garden site expanded and a 24'x32' greenhouse placed.	Work with group on increased technical requirements of a greenhouse. Community is also interested in incorporating a small poultry operation.
Fort Good Hope	Private gardens	Several private gardens established with SSFP. A new community garden site has been identified for development. Old mission site is being reconsidered.	Increased involvement with private gardens and reestablishment of central garden.
Norman Wells	Community garden	Garden site developed and planted spring of 2009. Small greenhouse placed 2010.	Community interested in expanding to other sites. Due to hard rocky ground a container system is to be incorporated.
Tulita	Community garden	Community garden since 2006. Community has requested container system for 2012. Interested in using tires.	Continued instruction sessions planned prior to spring. Materials dropped off for 2012.



Regional Involvement

Community	Type of Project	Project involvement to date	Future plans
Dehcho Region			
Fort Liard	Community garden	Community decided to stay with backyard gardens as these are well established.	Provide ongoing support.
Fort Simpson	Community garden	Established 2008. Two expansions of garden have taken place since that time, with further expansion planned.	New site developed 2011 at Papal site along river. Primary direction through ITI regional office.
Jean Marie River	Site development	Initially established 2006, with a suspension of gardening activities in 2009 due to the garden site being used for housing.	New site developed and planted spring of 2011. Expansion for 2012 requested.
Nahanni Butte	Community garden	Established 2006, new site established in 2008. Site expanded 2009.	Electric fencing delivered to site. Additional expansion for 2012.
Trout Lake	Community garden	SSFP assisted in expanding existing site and increasing production. A small greenhouse was placed in 2010.	Continued support requested by community. Community has expressed interest in additional workshops on production. Interest in small poultry.
Wrigley	Community garden	Established 2008. Expansion of site occurred in 2009, with additional expansion planned.	Increased involvement by school and students is generating additional interest. Container system to be placed closer to school.





Regional Involvement

Community	Type of Project	Project involvement to date	Future plans
North Slave Region			
Behchokò	Site development	Two sites planted using containers at elders facility and friendship center.	Site to be expanded 2012. Additional community involvement anticipated.
Dettah	School based program	Container system placed in 2011 with 5 large beds. Workshops conducted.	Supplying a small hydroponic unit to be used in conjunction with school curriculum
N'dilo	Container-based community garden	Six 4'x16' containers established in center of community. All planted and production disbursed throughout community.	Expansion of site with additional planters in 2012.
Gameti	Community garden	Established 2007. Active interest by school and students.	Individual community members have expressed interest in developing their own gardens.
Whati	Community garden, allotments	Established 2006 as one of first participants of project. Expanded and fenced.	Instruction sessions planned.
Yellowknife	Community garden (multiple sites), allotments	Community is highly independent with three garden sites developed with minimal support from SSFP.	New site to be developed 2012. Assist as requested.
Wekweeti	New site 2011	New site established in summer 2011.	Materials transported on winter road for expansion. Workshops in conjunction.
Lutsel 'ke	Community garden	Established 2008. 24'x32' hoop greenhouse placed summer 2010 and immediately placed in production.	Continued support with increased workshops with schools.





Regional Involvement

Programming for communities in the South Slave Region differs slightly in that the SSFP is administered through ITI's South Slave Regional Office. Below is an overview of community garden projects and initiatives in the Region.

South Slave Region						
	Fort Smith	Hay River	Enterprise	Ft Providence	Ft Resolution	Kakisa
Community Gardens						
Status	Established	Established	Expanding	Establishing	Expanding	Expanding
Coordination	ITI Region / local group	ITI Region / TFA	ITI Region / TFA	ITI Region/ TFA	ITI Region/TFA	ITI Region/TFA
Land tenure	NWT Park	ITI land	Community land	Community land	Community land	Community land
Workshops ¹						
Gardening	June 2012	May 7, 14, 21	May 5			May 15
Processing/ storage	Sept 2012	Sept 2012				
Notes						
Community gardens	Land was prepared and plots assigned by ITI	Plots were assigned by TFA	Boxes were created.		New garden area planned for next year.	

¹ The Territorial Farmers Association (TFA) coordinated these workshops, which were funded through a contribution from ITI's Support for Entrepreneurs and Economic Development (SEED) Policy.



Future Directions

For the Small Scale Foods Program

The summer of 2011 was the fifth year of the SSFP. To date, the program has concentrated on establishment of community gardens and has evolved to providing assistance with backyard gardens. While most communities have sufficient arable land to allow for land based systems, some such as N'dilo and Behchokò have utilized container based systems using rough lumber and supplied soil. Other communities have used available materials from the local dump as containers for growing. These have included old boats, bathtubs and tires.

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

The SSFP will continue to offer workshops on topics such as basic gardening and the storage and preparation of produce. There have also been requests from communities to have workshops on subjects such as family nutritional needs and composting. Program staff continue to plan winter workshops based on the requests and interest level of individual communities.

As a community progresses in its gardening knowledge, it often asks for more advanced gardening infrastructure. These requests are honoured by program staff if appropriate. Communities further advanced in their gardening projects are more likely to take the lead in using program equipment for individual garden cultivation and greenhouse production. This is encouraged as individual production in association with community garden production is co-beneficial, especially in the smaller communities. Ultimately, one degree of success of the program would be the establishment of a commercial or semi-commercial component of food production in a community.

Interest in the SSFP has grown exponentially since its origins. During the early years of the programming, staff actively sought out community and third party interest. In recent years, there has been a deluge of requests from media, independent persons, and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) for information. The intent of the program has always been to work *with* communities to establish independent local food production systems. Support offered was and continues to be peripheral aimed at imparting knowledge and confidence. While there are any number of growth enhancement technologies and materials available the program has always been careful to provide these technologies on a step basis. Many communities have gained sufficient levels of knowledge and confidence and moved to methods such as crop covers, mulching, and the use of greenhouses to enhance production and growth.

Over the next few years, it is envisioned that many communities will operate on an increasingly independent basis and act as an information source for other communities. Social networking sites such as Facebook have already provided forums for discussion between communities and encouraged input from outside sources. NGO's are also becoming more involved in projects at varying levels, through provision of school sessions. As this involvement increases, the SSFP will continue to offer assistance as requested and will focus more on communities which have less resources or higher challenges.

The highest level of success to be achieved is to be told you are no longer needed.



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

Inuvik 1-867-777-7286
Sahtu 1-867-587-7170
North Slave 1-867-920-8967
South Slave 1-867-872-6430
Dehcho 1-867-695-7510
or contact the Agricultural Hotline 1-877-821-8256