

# Interior Region Indigenous Food Forum: Summary Report

September 25-26, 2023

Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc | Kamloops



Figure 1: The Tk'emlúps Arbour in Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc



## Acknowledgements

It is with great respect and gratitude that the Steering Committee acknowledges the Secwépemc Nation and the traditional territory on which we gathered for the Food Forum event. We want to acknowledge the Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc and thank Kukpi7 Rosanne Casimir for welcoming us to the community.

Thank you to the community-led Advisory Committee, the First Nations Health Authority (FNHA), and Interior Health (IH) for the collaborative effort and partnerships, which contributed to the success of the event. The Food Forum is supported by Interior Health's Community Food Action Initiative funding program.

We are profoundly grateful to the keynote speaker, presenters, workshop facilitators, and event supporters, for providing their time, knowledge, expertise, and thoughts on a variety of topics. The wisdom shared during the event was outstanding, contributing immensely to the enrichment of our knowledge and perspectives.

We sincerely appreciate [Shelanne Justice Photography](#) for the visual storytelling captured in the stunning photographs featured in this report. Shelanne possesses a keen eye and ability to convey narratives through the lens. We are honored to showcase her work.

## Overview

From canning and preservation, to learning about medicinal tea, and the importance of climate change, participants from Indigenous communities came together with event organizers, IH and FNHA, for important conversations at this year's Interior Region Indigenous Food Forum at the Arbour in Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc on September 25-26, 2023.

The successful event saw 96 people in attendance over a day and a half. On the rainy evening of the September 25, Kúkpi7 Rosanne Casimir opened the event and welcomed everyone to Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc, followed by a traditional opening from Elder Hank Gott. The attendees feasted on an incredible buffet dinner from chef, Steven Teed. During dinner, storyteller Kenthen Thomas shared a drum story about Coyote.

The event emcee, Gord Cuthbert, had the group laughing throughout the event and guided attendees through both days with ease.

Elected Tkwenem7iple7 (councillor), Nikki Fraser, opened September 26 with a thought-provoking and family-centred keynote on Indigenous Food Sovereignty. The attendees then moved into breakout conversations on Climate Change, and its affects on food security in communities.

After lunch, attendees split up into four workshops:

- **Workshop #1:** Preserving the season, canning & dehydrating apples (DeeAnna and Herb Charlie)
- **Workshop #2:** Climate Change, Health and Well-Being Discussion - featuring Xení G'wetin Food Security & Climate Action Story (Sam Green, Kady Hunter and Maery Kaplan-Hallam)
- **Workshop #3:** Making Tea with Traditional Plants, Berries and Stories (LaVerna and Louie Stevens)
- **Workshop #4:** New Relationship Trust Funding - grant information & discussion on needs for success (Erica Nitchie and Kristy Palmantier; Ministry of Agriculture)

The day ended the with so much gratitude for the speakers, workshop facilitators, and guests, excited to move forward with new connections and a plan to meet again in 2024.

*Figure 2: Participants listen to a Secwépemc story by Kenthen Thomas*



## Attendance: Who Participated

Attendees travelled from Indigenous communities throughout the Interior region. This included individuals working in health and wellness, food security, gardening and agriculture, and food sovereignty within their respective communities. We were fortunate to be able to come together with members from Syilx, Nlaka'pamux, Secwépemc, St'át'imc, Ktunaxa, Tsilhqot'in, and Dākelh Dené Nations. Additionally, participants represented Gitxsan, wet'suwet'en, Cree, Blackfoot, Walpole, and Métis Nations.

Non-Indigenous government partners and organizations were welcomed to attend in a 'listening' capacity. Organizations with representatives in attendance included Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, Ministry of Agriculture, BC Centre for Disease Control, First Nations Health Authority, Interior Health, Okanagan College, School District 6, Thompson Rivers University Food Sovereignty program, and United Way BC.

## Speakers and Presentations: What Was Shared

### Opening

The event was opened on Monday evening by Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc Kukpi7 Rosanne Casimir. She spoke to the importance of sourcing out local and traditional foods.

"We've definitely seen a huge rise in the importance of being able to pass on that knowledge since COVID," said Kukpi7 Casimir. "During COVID, we've seen a lot of the impacts in food shortages, but it was also looking at opportunities to get back to the land - growing more of the produce, more of the vegetables locally."

Kukpi7 Casimir says it can be the source of essential vitamins and nutrients we all need.

Figure 3: Kukpi7 Rosanne Casimir



## Keynote Speaker

For the keynote presentation at this year's food forum, Nikki Fraser, shared her story about food and relationships. Nikki is currently serving her first term as elected Tkwenem7iple7 (councillor) for Tk'emlúps te Secwepemc.

Nikki captivated the audience with her story, how she moved back to Tk'emlúps te Secwepemc from the city as a young girl, and how food became the center of connection and relationships. Each season brought new foods to harvest and strengthened relationships among the matriarchs in Nikki's family. When Nikki first learned of what food sovereignty and food security meant, she realized that these were already a part of her family's lives and her mother had been passing down knowledge and skills.

Building from her own personal experiences, Nikki started working as the Food Sovereignty Coordinator with Tk'emlúps te Secwepemc and coordinated a number of community projects to support their community food systems. The most recent exciting project to come to realization is the brand new grocery store, Sweláps Market, owned and operated by the Tk'emlúps te Secwepemc community.

*Figure 4: Nikki Fraser, kwenem7iple7 for Tk'emlúps te Secwepemc.*



## Connections and Conversations

After the keynote presentation, food forum participants divided into 4 groups around the Arbor to allow for discussion, sharing, and learning on climate change and its impacts on food systems. While the discussions included problems connected to climate change, there was also a lot of focus on solutions that are currently happening in community, and potential future actions to respond to and mitigate climate change.

The problems shared included:

- less salmon due to drought and low water levels
- pests are changing, more invasive species
- wild fires are displacing animals, affecting berry growth
- flooding
- harvest seasons/traditional seasonal calendars are changing
- constant feelings of being: scared, frustrated, urgency, exhausted, fight/flight mode

Solutions to adapting to and mitigating climate change:

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Traditional burning practices and fuel mitigation</li> <li>• Center and action Elder knowledge</li> <li>• Look to natural law</li> <li>• Climate zone mapping, land use planning, develop strategies</li> <li>• Guardianship programs</li> <li>• Forestry agreements</li> <li>• Water conservation</li> <li>• More educational programming (TRU, NVIT)</li> <li>• Consistent open spaces to share</li> <li>• Learning new ways to grow food</li> <li>• Cultivation of traditional plants</li> <li>• Holistic approached, everything is connected</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seed security</li> <li>• More trading</li> <li>• More Youth involvement</li> <li>• Taking inventory of plants and medicine</li> </ul> |
|--|--|

Figure 5: Discussion circles



Figure 6: Discussion circles



## Workshops

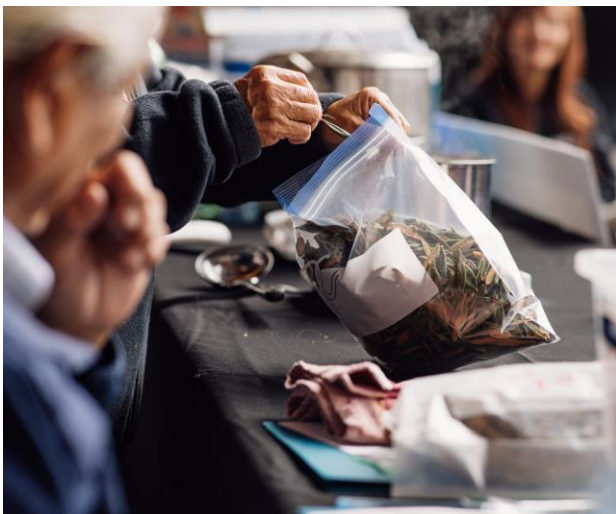
### Making Tea with Traditional Plants, Berries and Stories

LaVerna and Louie Stevens guided participants through the process of crafting tea using traditional plants, roots, and berries.

Participants had the opportunity to try willow, Labrador, mint, sweetgrass, bear root, and bitterroot teas along with soapberries and Saskatoon berries. Throughout the workshop, LaVerna and Louie weaved teachings and stories as they made and shared the plants and berries with participants.

Participants thoroughly enjoyed this session, evidenced by the note taking, full participation, and delighted expressions, as they tasted the tea and berries. The group gave a heartfelt thank you to LaVerna and Louie.

*Figure 8: Dried plants for crafting tea*



*Figure 7: LaVerna and Louie Stevens*



*Figure 9: Making Tea with Traditional Plants, Berries and Stories*



## Food Preservation

*Figure 10: DeeAnna and Herb Charlie*



Hosts, DeeAnna and Herb Charlie from Secwépemc Nation, brought their gifts of food preservation skills and knowledge, sharing generously with participants from across the Interior Health region.

Participants in the food preservation workshop had hands-on experience peeling, coring, cutting, and cooking apples. Some apples were dehydrated into apple chips; while other apples were spiced and cooked down into apple butter.

There was plenty of time for discussion and laughter as participants prepped the apples. As jars of apple butter were placed in a hot water bath for canning, DeeAnna shared the ease of transferring the workshop skills of canning and dehydrating to other food sources including berries and other fruit. Each participant took home bags of apple chips and jars of canned apple butter. Extra canning and apples were shared with the larger community forum.

*Figure 11: Attendees peeling apples*



*Figure 12: Apple butter*





## Grant Writing

The Ministry of Agriculture and Food, in partnership with New Relationship Trust (NRT), have launched the new [Indigenous Food Sovereignty Funding Program](#). Lisa Paull from NRT shared the background of the funding, who can apply, the eligible costs, how to apply, and the intake frequency. View the [NRT Food Security & Sovereignty recording](#).

More information that Lisa shared during the question period included that NRT is flexible with project timelines and the report requirements are not demanding. The first intake is now closed, and the next intake opens up in May 2024.

Erica Nitchie and Kristy Palmantier from the Ministry of Agriculture and Food shared another funding opportunity from Investment Agriculture - [The Food Security Emergency Planning & Preparedness Fund](#).

The group then sat in circle to share experiences with granting and what is needed to be successful when applying for funding opportunities. Participants shared that to be successful, it is the funders that need to change, including reducing reporting requirement, providing more sustainable funding and ensuring grant criteria is flexible. They also shared that more support is needed for grant writing, plain language be used in communications, and that relationships building should be a part of the grant process. In addition, to be successful there is a need to assess food security and food sovereignty in communities.

*Figure 13: The Grant Writing workshop group*



Figure 14: Climate Change & Health workshop group



## Climate Change & Health

At the Climate Change, Health and Well-Being Workshop, Sam Green shared the food and climate story of Xeni Gwet'in. Sam had started in an Emergency Coordination role, but after listening to Elders about climate change impacts, the role shifted to food security as this was a focus in the stories heard. The question that guided their initial work was 'how can we strengthen our food system at the same time as building community resiliency when thinking about climate'. The community started to map how heat

and precipitation will change and impact culturally significant plants and animals. Building on the map project, next steps are forest stewardship, land use planning, and food systems planning. This will include short season crops planning, and determining the needed infrastructure such as root cellars, geodomes, and fences.

Maery Hallam-Kaplan, from FNHA, shared the funding program that she oversees – Indigenous Climate Health Action Program. Although this program is broad and can support any climate health action, many communities focus on food security and food sovereignty. There is also a desire for communities to map how the land is changing and what plants and animals are being affected by climate change, similar to what Xeni Gwet'in has done!

Some other key points raised during the conversation:

- FNHA and IH have shifted their funding programs to better support communities including flexible timelines and reduce reporting requirements
- Cultural and traditional activities is climate action
- Even when communities have funding, hiring people for the work is challenging
- There is a need to for a trade network to support communities impacted by climate events
  - An in-person gathering, a mapping system with Digital Democracy, UWBC Food Link app
- Power imbalances in granting programs can deter people from applying
  - Granter need to be accountable to funding recipients

Figure 15: Climate Change & Health workshop group



## The Feast

Chef Steven Teed, a member of the Adams Lake Indian Band community, prepared an incredible buffet dinner for attendees.

The menu consisted of BBQ local Secwépemc salmon, braised duck with mushrooms medley jus, fresh local vegetables (Burkholder corn, Desert Hills squash, beans, and carrots), roasted BC potatoes, summer salad. Dessert featured an Okanagan apple crisp. A delicious sparkling lavender and rosehip mocktail was served.

Figure 16: Chef Steven Teed



Figure 17: The Feast



## Elder and Wellness Support: How We Stayed Well

The Steering Committee and Advisory Committee saw importance in ensuring wellness supports (e.g. smudging, brushing off and a safe space to debrief with an Elder) and traditional practices and protocols (e.g. prayer before meals) were available throughout the Food Forum.

Wellness supports were provided by Secwépemc Knowledge Keepers and Traditional Healers, Rhona Bowe and Rod Tomma.



Elder Hank Gott also provided wellness support, offering event opening and closing prayers, and prayers before meals.

## Advisory Committee

- Dawn Morrison, Secwépemc
- Fred Fortier, Secwépemc
- Chief Byron Louis, Syilx
- Pamela Barnes, Syilx
- Dave Mutch, Ktunaxa
- George Casimir, Secwépemc
- Michael Wesley, Gitxsan

*Figure 18: Attendees having lunch*



## Sponsorship

Thank you to Telus, Sodexo and Health Canada for their generous contribution to support the Food Forum.

## Steering Committee

- Kris Murray, Interior Health – Corporate Director, Aboriginal Health & Wellness
- Nicole Taylor-Sterritt, Interior Health – Lead, Aboriginal Partnerships
- Jill Worboys, Interior Health – Public Health Dietitian
- Alexis Blueschke, Interior Health – Public Health Dietitian
- Seamus Damstrom, Interior Health – Public Health Dietitian
- Kristi Christian, Interior Health – Lead, Aboriginal Food Security
- Amanda Atkin, Interior Health – Coordinator, Aboriginal Partnerships
- Ashley Cruickshank, Interior Health – Administrative Assistant
- Carnation Zhuwaki, Interior Health – Knowledge Facilitator
- Casey Neathway, FNHA – Director, HEM & EPHS
- Kathleen Yung, FNHA – Food Security and Healthy Eating Specialist

*Figure 19: The Steering Committee*



## References

Stories @ IH: Interior Indigenous Food Forum allows for important conversations  
<https://www.interiorhealth.ca/stories/interior-indigenous-food-forum-allows-important-conversations>

YouTube: Interior Indigenous Food Forum Talks Climate Change & Food Systems  
[https://youtu.be/XFba6hci\\_Tk](https://youtu.be/XFba6hci_Tk)