

ᐃᐁᐃᓃᓃ ᐅᓃᓃᓃᓃᓃᓃᓃ
Inuit Tuttarvingat



Profiles of Food Security Activities in Inuit Communities
June 2012

Prepared by: Catherine Carry and Laura Carfagnini



National Aboriginal Health Organization (NAHO)
Organisation nationale de la santé autochtone (ONSA)
ᐃᓃᓃᓃ ᐃᓃᓃᓃᓃᓃᓃᓃᓃ ᐃᓃᓃᓃᓃᓃᓃᓃᓃᓃᓃᓃᓃ ᐃᓃᓃᓃᓃᓃᓃᓃᓃᓃ

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION 3

PROFILES 6

PROFILE 1: TAKE A KID TRAPPING AND HARVESTING 6

PROFILE 2: KUGLUKTUK HIGH SCHOOL, SCHOOL COOKING CLUB 8

PROFILE 3: HUNTERS AND TRAPPERS ORGANIZATION (HTO) 10

PROFILE 4: PROJECT NUNAVUT AND THE COUNTRY FOOD MARKET 12

PROFILE 5: KUUIJUAQ GREENHOUSE PROJECT..... 14

PROFILE 6: PERSONAL GARDENING..... 16

Introduction

The food security knowledge-sharing project of the Inuit Tuttarvingat of the National Aboriginal Health Organization (NAHO) aims to share information and practices from programs that contribute to food security in Inuit communities. Our definition of food security includes access to safe, reliable sources of nutritious foods that are culturally and personally acceptable.

Food security is a “*situation that exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.*”

- *The State of Food Insecurity*, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), 2001

Sharing knowledge: Enhancing food security has become an overarching health priority for Inuit in northern remote communities in Canada. Food insecurity rates in Canada are highest in these communities. Much work by all levels of government and non-governmental agencies, community organizations, and stakeholders has been put into improving food access and availability, as well as reducing barriers for future generations to eat country foods.

Inuit Tuttarvingat has prepared the community food security activity/program profiles because knowledge of well-run programs can contribute to community solutions. The following activities/programs collected through telephone interviews conducted in February and March 2012 represent a sampling of “promising practices” that could be replicated in other Inuit communities.

Program/activity selection: Our project was limited to profiling six community programs or activities that contribute to food security. We used the northern program database of Food Secure Canada, media information, and advice from contacts to identify the programs to include. We wanted to provide one example from every Inuit region: Inuvialuit Settlement Region (Northwest Territories), Nunavut (one for each of the three sub-regions), Nunavik (Northern Quebec) and Nunatsiavut (Labrador). While our project did not use scientific rigour to determine the final selection, we did apply a number of criteria. See Table 1 below for details on the selection criteria. We also developed an alternate list, in the event that one or more of the projects was not available for whatever reason. We then requested input from Inuit Tuttarvingat-NAHO’s food security partners before determining our final list of six.

Country food: Country foods are harvested from the land, air, and sea around Inuit communities. Our project has a strong focus on country foods. Country foods continue to be very important to a healthy Inuit diet. However, many barriers exist for Inuit to have adequate amounts of country food. The food programs profiled in this document address some of those barriers.

Inuit communities are eating less country food than generations before for a variety of reasons, such as:

- Fewer skilled hunters.
- Fewer younger people have been taught to harvest or prepare traditional foods.
- People have come to rely more heavily on easy-to-prepare store foods.
- More people are seeking waged jobs, leaving less time available for subsistence hunting.
- Sharing traditions are under stress and are changing.
- Costs associated with harvesting, such as equipment, fuel, and repairs, continually rise.

Growing food: An additional focus of our project involves the growing of food. This does not replace country foods, but it is complementary. Many communities rely on weekly food shipments by air to deliver fresh produce; bad weather, delayed deliveries, and improper food handling reduce the quality and freshness of the produce. Foods grown locally are fresh, nutritious, and often more affordable than similar store-bought produce. Growing food is not typically a part of Inuit culture, and is not yet wide spread. Gardening outdoors and under greenhouse protection is viewed as an alternative or supplement to store-bought vegetables.

Next steps: Due to federal funding cuts, NAHO is closing June 30, 2012. Dr. James Ford and his team at McGill University have agreed to take over and complete the project. The team is proceeding to identify Inuit youth in the program communities to gather footage from the six profiled projects. Resulting short videos are expected in 2013. Preparation of an additional six videos on food security research projects in Inuit communities is also underway through the team. Funding to date has been provided by the Canadian Institutes for Health Research — Knowledge Translation Program.

Table 1: Selection criteria for promising practices in food security

1.	Potential for replicability	It is desirable to highlight activities that can benefit other communities.
2.	Examples already exist in all Inuit regions	We preferred discussing ideas that may not already be available in all Inuit Nunangat regions.
3.	Supports cultural values and cultural food choices	Programs that promote traditional foods and the traditional food system of hunting, fishing, and sharing were viewed favorably.
4.	Builds system capacity	System capacity was interpreted as <i>self-reliance</i> , but also networks, or community groups that can strengthen the community and help lower food insecurity.
5.	Builds Inuit capacity	We wanted to identify and share programs that taught traditional Inuit skills like harvesting or other skills like cooking with country food in combination with other foods.
6.	Creates community infrastructure	Community infrastructure implies buildings or places to store foods or get foods within communities.
7.	Preserves/ transfers cultural knowledge	It is important for the next generation to gain cultural knowledge. This criterion differs from number 3 (above), for example: sharing or selling country foods supports cultural food choices, but does not transfer the knowledge to others. Whereas a community harvest program shares knowledge so that other people can become hunters, or can learn to get around on the land.
8.	Public popularity	Although difficult to gauge, some initiatives were able to promote how well they grew from one year to the next. The potential for growth and community acceptance were considered when according a point to this category.
9.	Youth engagement	We identified the programs that had a strong focus on youth. It was considered a strength for the program to involve the community youth.

Reference:

Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations. (2001). The state of food insecurity in the world. Retrieved from: <http://www.fao.org/docrep/003/y1500e/y1500e00.htm>

Resources:

Haiyin Wong, H. (2011). Inventory of Food Security & Food Sovereignty Organizations, Initiatives and Resources in Northern Canada. Local Food Connections Project for Remote and Northern Communities (Canada). Final Report — Rev.1. Ottawa: Food Secure Canada.

Carry, C. (2011). Inuit Food Security — On-line Learning Tool: Content Advisory Committee. Planning Meeting Report. Ottawa: Inuit Tuttarvingat, National Aboriginal Health Organization.

Profiles

The profiles presented below are listed geographically from west to east, beginning with the Inuvialuit Settlement Region in the Western Arctic (NWT) and concluding with the Inuit region of Nunatsiavut (Labrador).

Profile 1

Organization & initiative:	Take a Kid Trapping & Harvesting
Location:	Northwest Territories (including Inuvialuit Settlement Region)
Website:	ITI Take A Kid Trapping (website)
Start date:	2002/2003
Funding:	Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) through Department of Industry, Tourism and Investment (ITI) and Department of Municipal and Community Affairs (MACA); Government of Canada through the Growing Forward Program
Partnerships:	Federal and territorial governments through Growing Forward, ITI, MACA, Environment and Natural Resources (ENR), and Agriculture Canada. Schools and Aboriginal organizations throughout the Northwest Territories, local Hunter and Trapper Associations, and elders.

Description:

The Growing Forward program, which includes the Take a Kid Trapping & Harvesting program, is cost-shared by the federal and NWT governments. The Take a Kid Trapping & Harvesting program has been included in the Growing Forward program since 2009, reflecting a need that communities have to renew interest in the local economy and promote traditional harvesting as an important food source.

The Take a Kid Trapping & Harvesting program is available in all regions of the Northwest Territories. The GNWT provides funding to schools that organize youth on-the-land skills training. When the program started in 2002, 386 youth participated. With ongoing expansion, 2274 youth were involved from 49 different school groups in 2011. The Inuvik Region held eight projects that included 78 youth. Each group takes kids out on the land for up to two weeks. Activities vary and can include: setting and pulling fishing nets, setting snares and traps, harvesting berries, or tracking and hunting caribou and other animals. In Aklavik, for example, activities can involve muskrat, lynx, mink, and cross fox; and in Inuvik, rabbits and marten. The groups often teach traditional food preparation and important lessons about proper preparedness for on-the-land excursions.

How did the program start?

In 2002, it was noted that the average age of a trapper was about 60. “[Skills] that have been passed down from generation [to generation] in the past ... are not being

“[The program] has obviously blossomed significantly, to the point that the demand is outstripping supply.”

passed along as they used to [be]...¹ The Take a Kid Trapping & Harvesting program started in an effort to prevent the invaluable trapping and harvesting skills from being lost to the next generation. To achieve this, program organizers targeted school-aged youth and introduced them to traditional life skills while rebuilding interest for obtaining food from the land.

Who gets involved?

The program encourages youth of all ages to be involved. *"We love taking little kids out – they're great fun."* Schools create the ideal environment and organize the youth activities. Youth are encouraged to take part in several Take a Kid Trapping & Harvesting activities in different years and at different ages. Teachers who participate volunteer additional time beyond their regular work hours. The activity time, type, and duration are entirely up to the community, and the communities always involve an elder in the on-the-land youth training.

Feedback and response:

The GNWT's Department of Industry, Tourism and Investment collects an activity report from each school or community that participates. Some of the outcomes and outputs are monitored this way. Members of the Legislative Assembly also report proudly on the activities that youth are involved with in their communities. Trapping activities link to the Genuine Mackenzie Valley Fur (GMVF) Program; and, those results are reported and monitored. The GMVF Program provides trappers with the opportunity to sell their fur to the international fur market, and offers a marketing service to assist trappers in doing this. Since the program started in 2002, more youth have been involved in the trapping sector.

Benefits:

The benefits of participating in the program are broad: monetary, traditional skill-building, and benefits to diet through traditional foods. Through trapping activities, youth have an opportunity to improve their financial security by earning money in return for pelts sold to auction. Colford mentioned that income opportunities often motivate young people to get involved. Youth also benefit from skills learned on the land, which include snowmobile repairs, tracking, respect for the environment, and animal preparation after trapping or harvesting. In addition, trapping and harvesting nutritious country food increases the nutritional adequacy of local diets and can decrease dependency on store-bought foods. Small game like beaver, muskrat, marten, and rabbits supplement caribou, the most common source of country meat.

Challenges:

The program has had a few challenges, most notably in *"keeping up with demand."* Since the number of schools applying to fund the on-the-land activities has increased every year since the program's start, the budget has had to increase as well. The support of the federal government since 2009 through the Growing Forward program has helped to manage the demand issues. High food costs and the lack of wage opportunities are compounding challenges that reflect the hardship of living in northern remote communities. If the traditional economy that includes harvesting natural resources is lost, there will be devastating consequences for communities and cultures.

Information sharing:

Through word of mouth and meeting presentations, the Take a Kid Trapping & Harvesting activities have been promoted in every province and territory.

¹ Quotes from John Colford

Future plans:

"We need to focus on our efforts on reducing our dependence on southern food sources, although I am not being critical of them." Colford suggests including traditional harvesting and new technologies involving growing food. If growing food in remote areas is possible on a community-wide scale, then the goal according to Colford would be to "grow it in a way that is efficient and cost effective." The Take a Kid Trapping & Harvesting program is one of the ways that the Northwest Territories is working on transferring skills and traditional knowledge, resulting in improved food security.

Who to reach:

John Colford
Phone: (867)873-7383
Email: john_colford@gov.nt.ca

You may also be interested in:

[2009/2010 Take a Kid Trapping & Harvesting Annual Report](#)

Profile 2

Organization & initiative:	Kugluktuk High School, School Cooking Club
Location:	Kugluktuk, Nunavut
Start date:	Roughly 2007; runs August to May
Funding:	Breakfast for Learning, Brighter Futures, Aboriginal Diabetes Initiative, BHP Mining
Partnerships:	Grizzlies' Athletic Association, Kugluktuk High School Staff and Students, the community nutritionist

Description:

The need for food prompted the teachers and staff at Kugluktuk High School to come together and develop what is now being called the "School Cooking Club." The students are involved in shopping for food, fishing, and harvesting, and in preparing, cooking, and serving meals. The program starts every morning around 7:00 a.m. with volunteer students and staff. The kitchen is set up with three work stations that accommodate three students per station. A healthy breakfast is made every morning for 70-80 students. It is served informally in the library before classes begin. The cooking club also meets daily to make the food for lunch or for the following day's lunch served at school. Students and volunteer staff may stay as late as 5:00 or 6:00 p.m. Almost all of the students get involved at some point throughout their six-year high school experience. Food safety and food preparation courses are taught in the cooking club as well as in health classes. Without the contribution of the students' time, the program could not run on its current funding. Students are 11-18 years of age, and, on average, about twelve students are part of the activities throughout the day.

How did the program start?

"It started from need. ... I couldn't see you starting out with doing what we are doing now all at once. It is something that has evolved."² Adequate nutrition for students was the driving factor. Other

² Quotes from project person interviewed

aspects of food security — such as culturally important foods, access to traditional food sources, finding available country foods on a year-round basis, and involving different sponsors and governing agencies — simply developed over time. The program now has integrated land skills, food safety, and nutrition lessons into the cooking experience.

At the beginning, we started a daily healthy breakfast program with a lunch pilot every Friday. BHP, a mining company, makes a donation to the school to enhance cultural activities. Some of this money funds hunting and fishing experiences. We also receive funding from government which targets nutrition and healthy lifestyles. From these initiatives, the cooking program developed. When the mining company visits the community for information sessions, the Hamlet of Kugluktuk contracts the school cooking club to cater a meal for community members who attend. Often, the students receive recognition and praise for their work. These occasions give students opportunities to plan menus, budget, purchase, prepare, and serve food. Monies earned are used to enhance the kitchen and the program.

Community outreach:

As the cooking club developed, it found ways to reach out into the community for mutually beneficial relationships. For instance, the high school also hosts the Mentor Program that runs after school and is administered by the Kugluktuk Grizzlies. This program gives children a safe place to be while being led in activities by high school students. Also, a “Nearest and Dearest” play group for preschoolers and their parents is held at the school on Saturdays. The fact that the groups get together at the school created an opportunity for the cooking club to be involved in preparing healthier snacks and meals. *“We weren’t as involved in the beginning as we are now, because obviously funds determine how much [we] can offer.”*

Who helps?

The breakfast preparation is supervised every morning by one school staff person who volunteers (rotates one week of service every 10 weeks). A coordinator puts in time on a more regular basis. The students offer their time for food preparation, cooking, and distributing the food. It is not always the same group of student volunteers because there is a lot of interest among the student body. The school’s support staff also plays a role. Anyone can get involved if they have time to give and respect for everyone there. One staff member helps every time there is fish preparation and when fish meals are being served. Another elder is involved in bringing the kids out to set nets for fishing.

Benefits:

Important benefits for Kugluktuk High School are many. The youth are better able to focus while in class. At the high school, the value of respect provides a firm foundation for social interaction. In the spirit of respect, students cooperate and come together to work on the food preparation. The students who volunteer reap benefits from a free snack, a lesson in nutrition or safe food handling, a new skill, or the satisfaction of being involved.

Challenges:

Weather, finances, and sustainability cause challenges for the cooking club. We are learning to develop solutions for each obstacle. For example, the cost of food changed when the familiar northern Food Mail Program was replaced. Also, animal migration patterns present challenges for accessing caribou. Since we were unsuccessful in harvesting any caribou in the fall, we will make attempts again in the spring.

Future plans:

The message for other communities is that this program is working well, but it did not begin by offering everything that is available now. *“It’s difficult to give ... a framework [for] what goes on here and a pattern for other schools,”* but the essential components of success are to:

- Hold *“the belief that [it] is worth [the] time [spent].”*
- Have *“the energy to fulfill it [the demand].”*
- Make *“the commitment to sustain it.”*

“Those are challenges. I think any school can get to where we are by starting small and building.” In Kugluktuk, a next step for food security would be to reach the teenagers who are not in school. This generation is starting out and can experience challenges in food security because of the high costs associated with harvesting and fishing or of buying healthy foods in the store. Ideally, the experience at school will allow the next generation to be informed about their food options. They will be more familiar with produce and resources, and they will have the skills to make healthy food choices.

Who to reach:

Kugluktuk High School, Kugluktuk, Nunavut

Phone: (867)982-4406 (extension 7702 for the principal’s office)

Other Links:

[Kugluktuk Grizzlies](#)

[Breakfast for Learning — Nunavut](#)

[Funding Opportunities — Nunavut](#)

You may also be interested in: [Food First Foundation NWT](#)

Profile 3³

Organization & initiative:

Hunters and Trappers Organization (HTO):
Harvester Support Program

Location:

Repulse Bay, Nunavut

Website:

[Nunavut Tunngavik Inc.](#)

Start date:

Harvester support began in 1995 and has evolved since 1999, when the government changed from the Northwest Territories to Nunavut. The program is open to each HTO through an application process. The community harvest program has been occurring annually in Repulse Bay for over eight years.

Funding:

Nunavut Tunngavik Inc. (NTI)

Partnerships:

Government of Nunavut (GN), NTI, HTO, community hall, and/or school for in-kind donation of space and hunters, elders, and community members.

³ This interview was conducted in the Inuktitut dialect of the Inuit language and interpreted into English.

Description (Repulse Bay community harvest):

For at least eight years, the HTO of Repulse Bay has accessed funding to put together a community hunt and feast for elders and community members. The funds are static at a maximum of \$3,000, which covers the costs of fuel to harvest country foods and additional store-bought foods to complement the menu for the feast. The HTO posts a sign-up sheet for hunters and announces the event on the radio and by word-of-mouth. Gradually, hunters sign up and the HTO board of directors selects hunters from the list. Most of the cooking happens in the volunteers' kitchens; the prepared food is then brought to the large community hall or to the school's gym.

The feast is usually held shortly after the Christmas holidays because people with low incomes and those who are food insecure find January to be a particularly difficult month. The celebration brings the community together.

How did the program start?

In recognition that harvesting is essential to maintaining Inuit traditions and culture, the territorial government began providing specific funds through the Nunavut Harvester Support Program (NHSP) for activities that hunter and trapper organizations could deliver within communities. Every year, NTI administers the funding for the Harvester Support Program, distributing it to the communities.

Who gets involved?

The community hunt provides an opportunity for bringing youth and less experienced hunters on the land, sometimes for the first time. Youth learn from experienced hunters. When the community plans to bring youth on the land, some training takes place before the excursion. Elders are always invited to the feast, which promotes togetherness in the community. All of the work by the hunters and the women who cook is done on a volunteer basis.

Benefits:

The community harvest is an annual event that teaches Inuit youth traditional skills and harvesting knowledge through observation and participation with experienced hunters. Hunters benefit from going out on the land together because they help each other and maintain their skills. The community benefits from the financial support enabling them to gather foods important to their culture. Further, the activity brings people together.

Challenges:

For Michel Akkuardjuak, the HTO chairperson, "*there are no hardships*" associated with the community harvest. The HTO manages the budget received from NTI, and people come together to make the event happen. People realize that the magnitude of the hunt and the feast would not be possible without the core funding, and are grateful to be able to collaborate on this project that directly benefits the community.

What is harvested?

Location and season determine what animal species can be hunted. In Repulse Bay, the community harvest often brings caribou and fish. At times, they can also harvest beluga whale. To complete the feast, other foods are purchased and prepared.

Future plans:

The community has limited solutions internally. Food security is improved when money comes through projects like the Harvester Support Program. It takes renewed commitment from Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated to believe in the program and support it on a continued basis. Food security in Inuit communities requires that culturally acceptable foods be made available; the community harvest does just that for Repulse Bay.

“The purpose of the Nunavut Harvester Support Program is to provide support for lower income harvesters in order to ensure that traditional harvesting and its associated cultural values and knowledge remain a strong and vibrant element of Inuit life.”

– Review of Harvester Support Program, 2008 (p. 18)

Who to reach:

Michel Akkuardjuak, Chairperson, HTO Repulse Bay
 Phone: (867)462-4334
 Email: repulsebayhto@qiniq.com

You may also be interested in:

[2008 — Consultants’ review of Harvester Support Program](#)

Profile 4

Organization & initiative:

Project Nunavut and the Country Food Market

Location:

Iqaluit, Nunavut

Website:

www.projectnunavut.com

Start date:

November 2010

Funding:

Federal/Territorial Growing Forward Program, Agriculture Canada, Government of Nunavut’s Department of Economic Development and Transportation, one-time initial contribution from the Government of Nunavut’s Department of Environment

Partnerships:

City of Iqaluit does not charge for the space in the park that is used for the Country Food Market.

Description:

Food security was at the forefront of William Hyndman’s plan when he proposed and developed Nunavut’s first Country Food Market. *“Food security was definitely one of the drivers of doing this project, because it allows one group who faces food insecurity, who are hunters, to access another group who also don’t have a high level of food security, who are households that can’t get country foods. By connecting them, they can help each other overcome that.”*⁴ In this case, the person

⁴ Quotes from William Hyndman

organizing the market acts as an agent to bring country foods to families who would otherwise not have it. The variety and quantity of country foods available to the community has increased. The nutritional benefits of country foods are well acknowledged; elders, who crave country foods but could not find it on their own, appreciate the market — they show up and support it. Hunters can now count on the monthly market as a place to sell the products of their hunt and earn cash to recoup the costs of fuel, snowmobile, and other equipment needed for maintaining their livelihoods. *“The main focus is to provide hunters access to a cash economy, and to provide households greater access to country foods.”*

How did the program start?

There has been informal talk about the feasibility of a country food market for a few years in Iqaluit. *Iqalummiut* had heard that every community in Greenland had a country food market, which sparked interest in starting one in Iqaluit. November 2010 marked the first Country Food Market for Project Nunavut. It was announced through the local media, TV, radio, and newspapers. Since its start, the Market has been the topic for at least four radio interviews. Its success is measured by: the number of clients who show up, which has been as much as 300; the number of hunters who show up; the affordability of the prices for the food; and, the overwhelming acceptance from the community, including the elders. Now, hunters and supporters alike can count on a country food market every second Saturday of each month.

Who helps?

The setup requires a few hands: the organizer can usually count on about six young adults to set up three large tents and tables to lay out the food. The event is held outdoors in a community park space; hunters can drive up in their snowmobiles. Non-hunters get involved too; some elders come with bannock for sale. Usually the line-ups start before the market is open, and the food sells out before the market is scheduled to close.

Benefits:

Increased access to country foods is the biggest benefit to the community. While there is a transition to a cash economy, and having a salaried job is often inconsistent with having time to hunt, the country food market is a place where hunters can earn some cash for the purpose of continuing to hunt. For those involved, hunting not only provides country foods for the hunters' families and their close sharing networks, it also supports country food access for the rest of the community, which is especially important for families living without a hunter.

Challenges:

In the beginning, the Hunters and Trappers Organization (HTO) passed a resolution stating that they accepted the market as an outlet to sell country foods. Although resistance was expected; everyone who doubted that the market would be accepted amidst a traditional backdrop of sharing practices was surprised by the overwhelming degree of acceptance: the government accepted it, the HTO accepted it, the hunters showed up, the elders showed up, and many others showed up to buy country foods. It was as if the resistance was coming from *“the other guy,”* but in reality hardly any resistance was found. Despite the warm welcome from the community, the Country Food Market depends on annual government funding to support it and with that comes uncertainty for sustainability over the long term.

Future plans:

This culturally fulfilling initiative helps to sustain hunter activity, so that people may continue to hunt and gather, and provide fresh food to their communities. Hyndman says the success is tied to the hunters themselves, more than to his own work. Eventually, he would like it to become a tradition in Iqaluit, so that no special announcements need to be made, everyone will just know to show up. Increasing the sustainability with less active management is a medium- to long-term goal. Since the market in Iqaluit is running well, Rankin Inlet is considering starting one with the help of William Hyndman. Hyndman is happy to help other communities and answer questions they might have for starting up a similar country food market. He can be reached at the contact information below.

Who to reach:

William Hyndman, Iqaluit, Nunavut
Phone: (867)979-8808
Email: info@projectnunavut.com
Website: www.projectnunavut.com

Other links:

[Photos from Nunavut photographer Ron Wassink](#)
[Nunatsiaq News](#) before the market started
[Nunatsiaq News](#) after the market started

Profile 5

Organization & initiative:	Kuujjuaq Greenhouse Project
Location:	Kuujjuaq, Nunavik, Québec
Start date:	About 20 years ago, has expanded in scope since 2009, and runs from mid-May to early October
Funding:	The Northern Village of Kuujjuaq owns the building, supplies water and electricity, and funds repairs. Kativik Regional Government's Department of Regional and Local Development currently funds research. Funding expected under Québec's Plan Nord agreement.
Partnerships:	Northern Village of Kuujjuaq; Kativik Regional Government's Department of Regional Local Development; Laval University.

Description:

The "Greenhouse Project" is very much in the development stage. The original structure from the 1990s is a metal frame greenhouse covered by plastic. For many years the heating system has remained broken, which shortens the growing season by about two months; however, the greenhouse is still a very productive space. Planting in the greenhouse starts in May, while crops are harvested into September and sometimes until early October. The vegetables grown in a greenhouse include leafy greens like lettuce, herbs (parsley), zucchini, and root vegetables (radishes, potatoes).

How did the program start?

The greenhouse structure was built by the Northern Village of Kuujjuaq, in conjunction with Laval University in the 1990s, for a municipal 'revegetation' project. Plants were started and then transplanted to the outdoor environment, usually to repair soil erosion. For over 20 years, the Northern Village of Kuujjuaq has owned and been responsible for maintaining the building. Community members have access to 21 garden plots, producing a wide variety of vegetables for personal use.

How is the program expanding?

In 2009, a Masters student from Laval University was sponsored to assess interest in the community for a 'Greenhouse Project.' This project sought to expand the greenhouse operation into multiple projects to fit in a community social development program. From that point forward, many ideas surfaced from the community and local government.

Eight spin-off projects may eventually develop out of the greenhouse project, "*five are actively happening and three are in the process of emerging.*"⁵ The projects are diverse, from involving a group home that would provide gardening as horticultural therapy (to promote a feeling of wellness), to starting a composting project with the local grocery store and chain supermarket for soil production, as well as plans to involve youth in community gardening initiatives. Also on the horizon, is a project to expand the production space to include a new greenhouse, which may allow more people to be involved.

Who helps?

The community members, who have an interest in growing their own vegetables, plant and tend their own plots. A volunteer spends a lot of time in the greenhouse as he has experience with organic agriculture on a commercial scale and is able to share his knowledge. The student, who started in 2009, has continued to work on the community social development program as a PhD candidate at Laval University; she is involved in promoting the program and in networking with the community and different organizations to develop long-term plans.

Gardening in Nunavik:

Beyond the greenhouse structure, at least 25 other forms of protected gardens, such as small private greenhouses and cold frames, were found in Kuujjuaq in 2009. The interest is coming from local Inuit and non-Inuit alike. Since it has been proven that growing some of their own vegetables is possible, community members view it as a good alternative to relying on store-bought vegetables that are very costly. "*Greenhouses are a form of agriculture, [and they are a practice that is] very connected to the land. ... [T]here are a lot of parallels between harvesting traditional foods and agriculture.*"

Benefits:

Supporters feel that the greenhouse and related projects will foster community development and capacity building, so that more food can be produced locally, while community members gain experience and skills. In a low-tech environment, the cost of food production is affordable and may be part of the solution for some of the food security challenges in the community. The greenhouse and its spin-off projects benefit community members of the Northern Village of Kuujjuaq.

⁵ Quoted from Ellen Avard.

Challenges:

“There was never an official community garden committee or structure in place — it was very informal.” Therefore, problems arose that included conflicts when people wanted to garden but could not get a new plot. The project team is looking into solutions for increasing space and allowing more people to get involved. Another challenge is lack of time for coordinating the activities. Inuit are welcomed to be involved in this project — even though agriculture has not been a part of Inuit food systems in the past. The hope is that the project will provide safe and nutritious food at a reasonable cost in the future.

Purpose of a greenhouse in bettering food security:

Grocery stores stock fresh fruits and vegetables and some items run out before the next shipment arrives. With a greenhouse, fresh food can be available in the community on a constant basis during the growing season. The food can help meet the demand of people who like fresh vegetables and herbs, possibly at a lower cost, and definitely of fresher quality and with less environmental impact. Up to 80 per cent of the average diet in Nunavik is based on store food, and with a growing population, the traditional food system cannot meet the demand of feeding everyone all the time. Given these factors, it is important to find acceptable solutions for the community.

Future plans:

If the funding is secured and community support is strong enough, the vision is to have a commercial greenhouse supplying vegetable produce to Kuujjuaq, possibly at a lower cost and fresher quality than foods flown in. Also, since the gardening activities have sparked the interest of several groups in Kuujjuaq, organizers hope to bring gardening to elders, youth, and people of all ages.

Who to reach:

Ellen Avard

Email: Ellen.Avard.1@ulaval.ca

You may also be interested in:

[Nunatsiaq News](#)

[Union des Producteurs Agricoles](#)

[Alaska Dispatch – Greenhouses in Canada’s North](#)

Profile 6

Organization & initiative:	Personal Gardening
Location:	Nain, Nunatsiavut, Labrador
Start date:	15-20 years ago; May or early June to mid-August or September
Funding:	Supported by personal funds

Description:

Behind their home in Nain, Brian and Fran Williams, who have lived there for over 30 years, have had a garden for almost as long. The space where they garden is technically a greenhouse since it is all covered to protect against the elements. The greenhouse is about 12 x 12 feet; they have another plot on the side of their home that is almost as long and three feet wide. A third plot grows chives

and rhubarb; it measures 4 x 4 feet. Brian tends to the garden for about an hour a day during the growing season from May to September. From his efforts, he is able to grow leaf greens such as lettuce, spinach, and herbs, as well as beans and radishes. The vegetables that grow well in the soil conditions in Nain are salads; potatoes may also grow well, but they have not tried to grow them yet.

How did the program start?

“There are a variety of things you can find in the store now. I think that was one of the reasons why I started a garden [25 years ago] ... because we didn’t get fresh fruits and vegetables [at that time]. So maybe that was why I started in the first place.”⁶

Materials used:

Recycled materials can work well for a personal greenhouse space. The Williams use lumber and clear polymer roofing for their greenhouse, while the area to the side of their home is covered with old shower partitions made of glass. Plastic sheathing also works well to create a barrier from the wind and weather, while locking in some heat. The Multi-Materials Stewardship Board of the Newfoundland and Labrador government promotes and provides large compost bins free of charge. Composting was possible before, but easier now with the black bins.

Benefits:

The reward of growing your own food is being able to collect the crop. Brian feels that the foods that he grows are *“far superior”* to store-bought foods. The plants are mature for picking around August to September, which means that for two months in the summer their grocery bills can be less expensive, and the vegetables that they eat are fresher. Their garden produces enough to give some vegetables to a few family members.

Challenges:

The climate in Nain can affect how well crops grow; the temperature can drop to create a frost in the summer growing months. For those reasons and others, the Williams have had a couple of seasons where they did not plant or harvest from their garden. *“I just got frustrated; the summers were really bad at that time.”* Instead of resorting to chemical pesticides, they have done trial and error experiments around composting. *“It is expensive to get fertilizers up here – that is where composting plays a large role.”* All of the space used for gardening is kept off the ground in ‘raised beds,’ which help to control the temperature and prevent frost on the plants.

Advice:

From Brian’s perspective, the summers with bad weather can be discouraging to someone starting a garden, but on the other hand once started, the garden is easier to keep up. *“Initially it was hard work getting the whole thing started because good soil is in short supply.”* That shouldn’t discourage someone from trying. *“I had to go around scraping soil, then filling a wheelbarrow and mixing it with compost.”* The Williams have found it useful to start the seeds inside the house in May with earth that has been sterilized by heating in an old frying pan in the oven at 400°F for one hour (covered), and then using seed starting pots. If the weather is not too cold, they transfer the plants outdoors in July. Sometimes Brian starts the growing process in the greenhouse with a portable heater at night to make sure the crops survive.

⁶ Quotes from Brian and Fran Williams.

His wife Fran, who is from Hopedale, says that it is possible for Inuit to get involved in making their own garden, and it is something that future generations should consider in the face of “*looming climate change.*” Their garden took a number of years to evolve, and people starting out should not get too frustrated by the challenges because “*the food source[s][are] going to be impacted. We’re going to have to look at other ways; we’re going to have to grow our own stuff.*”

History of gardening in Northern Labrador:

Inuit and locals recall the Moravian missionaries who came in the 18th century to Nain, Makkovik, Hebron, Okak, and other former communities along the coast of northern Labrador. The missionaries set up greenhouses and raised beds for gardening. At least one was still present in Nain 30 years ago when Brian Williams came to live there. He recalls they used seaweed and seashells for fertilizing the earth and that they grew potatoes and rhubarb. Now, both of those plants are well accepted in the Inuit diet, and rhubarb grows wild in many places. Some Inuit have actually planted it by their homes. Missionaries also grew root vegetables.

Information sharing:

The Williams are not the only family gardening in Nain; however their continuous efforts over the years have been highlighted for sharing with other communities. Their experience with gardening for decades in the northern climate makes them a model for others. In April 2010, the Food Security Network of Newfoundland and Labrador held a Gardening Workshop in Hopedale. The Williams were invited to present on their gardening successes and provide recommendations for others. For strongly motivated and interested community members, Brian would consider showing them around his garden.

Future plans:

Although fresh produce is now available in grocery stores in Nain, the Williams plan to continue to grow food in their garden. Produce grown at home is fresher and it is expected that the cost of store-bought foods will continue to increase with rising fuel costs. “*Anything that can be done to reduce the cost of transportation or the distance from production to market is going to become very important in the future.*”

Who to reach:

Brian Williams
Phone: (709)922-2110
Email: bw.nanut@nf.sympatico.ca

You may also be interested in:

[The Multi-Materials Stewardship Board, winter composting](#)
[The Food Security Network of Newfoundland and Labrador](#)
[Food Security Network of Newfoundland and Labrador: Best practices toolkit for community gardens](#)

Prepared by:

Catherine Carry, Senior Program Officer
Inuit Tuttarvingat, National Aboriginal Health Organization
220 Laurier Avenue West, Suite 1200
Ottawa, ON K1P 5Z9 Canada
Tel.: (613)760-3515 / E-mail: CCarry@naho.ca

We gratefully acknowledge the assistance of Laura Carfagnini, Master of Public Health Candidate at the University of Waterloo, in preparing the profiles, and all those who participated.