

Understanding Our Food Systems

OUTCOME EVALUATION 2025

PEBBLE BEACH, MARATHON



UNDERSTANDING
OUR FOOD SYSTEMS



Lakehead
UNIVERSITY



Thunder Bay District
Health Unit

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LAKE SUPERIOR SUNRISE

Introduction

BACKGROUND OF THE UOFS PROJECT

Understanding Our Food Systems (UOFS) is a participatory, community engaged and action focused project led by a passionate team of researchers, facilitators and community development professionals that work to build a deeper understanding of food security, Indigenous food sovereignty, and self-determination in Northwestern Ontario. The UOFS project was first established in 2018 through a partnership with the Thunder Bay District Health Unit (TBDHU), the Indigenous Food Circle, Lakehead University's Sustainable Food Systems Lab and numerous organizations and individuals across Northwestern Ontario. The primary purpose of the UOFS project is to take leadership from and provide support to fourteen First Nations within the District of Thunder Bay (Robinson Superior Treaty of 1850 and Treaty 9 areas) to better understand and support reclamation of traditional food systems and establish and implement food sovereignty visions and action plans. The project aims to support Indigenous communities and people to determine their own food systems through community-led initiatives and projects.

The project works with the following 14 First nation communities:

- Animbiigoo Zaagi'igan Anishinaabek
- Aroland First Nation
- Biinjitiwaabik Zaaging Anishinaabek
- Biigtigong Nishaanabeg
- Bingwi Neyaashi Anishinaabek
- Fort William First Nation
- Ginoogaming First Nation
- Long Lake #58 First Nation
- Kiashke Zaaging Anishinaabek
- Namaygoosisagagun First Nation
- Netmizaaggamig Nishnaabeg
- Pawgwasheeng First Nation
- Red Rock Indian Band
- Whitesand First Nation



PROJECT OBJECTIVES

Since 2019, the UOFS project objectives have included:

- Establishing food sovereignty visions for each of the fourteen First Nation communities
- Developing short, medium, and long-term priorities to implement each community's food sovereignty visions
- Supporting community priorities with implementation funds, workshops, trainings, and general assistance on an ongoing basis
- Hosting regular gatherings to bring the fourteen First Nations communities and other partners together to learn, share and plan collaboratively
- Developing resources to support Indigenous food sovereignty in the region
- Building a network of First Nation communities and supporting organizational partners across the region
- Learning among the Thunder Bay District Health Unit and non-Indigenous project team members how to work in partnership and support Indigenous food sovereignty and First Nations to achieve their food systems goals

PURPOSE OF THE PROJECT EVALUATION

This evaluation was conducted in the winter and spring of 2025 and aims to demonstrate advancement of food sovereignty work over time within the 14 participating communities; identify opportunities for continued growth and impacts

on food sovereignty for the First Nations; and inform the UOFS project team of the current state of community partners and how to best support growth and change moving forward.

Approach & Methods/ What We Did

1. TARGET PARTICIPANTS

A multipronged approach was used to gather information from:

- i. First Nation community food champions (those who have directly supported work affiliated with the UOFS project)
- ii. First Nation community members (community members who are involved in community-level food work, or have been instrumental in the past seven years)
- iii. UOFS project team, past and present (people who have been a part of the UOFS project team, or have been instrumental in the past)

2. INDIGENOUS ENGAGEMENT AND DATA GOVERNANCE

This evaluation gathered information about Indigenous communities and project contributions, as the UOFS project is a collaborative initiative between the TBDHU and 14 First Nation communities. To ensure Indigenous perspectives and methodologies were a part of the development and implementation of the evaluation framework, an Indigenous evaluation advisory group was put together. The advisory group was open to any interested community food champions (i.e., key leaders from the First Nation communities). The advisory group was consulted to support the development of the overall evaluation framework, including data collection methods and questions, as well as being invited to participate in writing of this report. Two participants from different First Nations stepped up to support this work. Our goal will be to share this information back with the communities through their community food champions prior to any publication of this work.

All community food champions were given the opportunity to engage in the evaluation process throughout, as they had time and interest.

This could include being an in-community recruiter, sharing their knowledge and insight as a participant, and reviewing analyzed data by the advisory group and the evaluator to contribute to overall findings.

We incorporated OCAP principles* into each step of this work:

Ownership – Specific information shared by members of any community will be given credit and recognition within the broader evaluation work if they request to do so. Ultimately, communities will control the research process and data collected.

Control – All communities, through their food champions, were given an opportunity to participate in the evaluation to the extent they were interested or able. Community food champions could choose to withdraw their data or participation from the evaluation at any time.

Access – During the evaluation process, data was securely held with the TBDHU. Communities can access the information about their specific community at any time.

Possession – The majority of the data will be collected on a community-by-community basis. All focus group and interview recordings and transcriptions, and storytelling recordings will be shared back with each community through their food champion or Chief and Council.

*<https://fnigc.ca/ocap-training/>

3. DATA COLLECTION

Secondary Data collection – Previous reports were reviewed to represent the history of the work that has happened in the past seven years of the project. The evaluator looked at overarching goals and visions of the project and those of the individual communities. A list of the documents reviewed included:

- 2018 community food plans and visions
- 2019 food sovereignty visions
- 2020 report updates
- 2022 food sovereignty assessment community analysis
- 2024 gathering summaries of visions + community planning docs
- Gathering summaries from previous years

The primary form of data collection used for this project was discussions with participants. Focus groups and interviews were conducted primarily on zoom and also in person at the spring gathering event. These were recorded and transcribed for analysis. The discussions included:

- **Focus groups with community food champions**

- » Seven communities were represented in the data. Five focus groups (including staff and volunteers) were held with a total of 19 participants. As well, two individual interviews with food champions from two communities were held.

- **Focus group with key project team members**

- » One focus group was held with 4 past and present members of the UOFS staff team. Two past staff were invited, but unable to attend.

- **Intercommunity focus group**

- » This was held at the spring gathering around the fire with 27 people in attendance.

- **Story telling prompt**

- » This was not picked up by the community food champions as much as we had hoped and only two stories were collected by one of the UOFS staff. These were recorded digitally and shared with the evaluator.



PARTICIPANTS AT THE UOFS SPRING GATHERING 2025 AT SOIL





GREENHOUSE IN BIIGTIGONG

4. RECRUITMENT, COMPENSATION, AND CONSENT

- **Recruitment** - All of the communities were invited to participate in the discussions. An email was sent to the food champions in each community to ask for their support in coordinating a group of community food workers/volunteers to join for a one-hour focus group. Follow up phone calls and one-on-one conversations were held with food champions to organize interviews/focus groups following the initial email.
- **Consent** was requested at the start of the interview. Participants were advised that the interview would be recorded and told that they could withdraw at any time.
- **Compensation** - Food champions were offered \$100 gift card to coordinate and participate in the focus groups. Individuals who participated in a focus group or one-on-one interview were given a \$25 gift card. An Indigenous evaluation advisory group was put together and received honoraria for their time as well.

5. ANALYSIS

Focus group and interview data was analyzed using thematic analysis reviewing each of the transcripts. This approach allowed for identification of and interpretation of patterns within the data, providing a detailed understanding of participants experiences and perspectives. Through this iterative coding process and a review of previous UOFS reports, summaries were developed and are shared in the section titled “Where We Came From”.

6. LIMITATIONS

A major limitation of this research was recruitment of members from the communities to participate in the focus groups. In the end we had representation from only seven of the fourteen communities. We were not able to add an Indigenous researcher to the project and two of the key past staff from the project were not able to share their insights. This original data summary was shared with community food champions primarily through the evaluation advisory team. Their comments have been included in this work. Time constraints for staff and volunteers in the communities had a significant impact on our ability to connect and set up focus groups. We adapted to this for two of the communities by just having one-on-one phone calls with food champions. We also want to recognize that this data was collected and analyzed by people who are not members of the participating First Nations and that this may have impacted the interpretation of the results.

Findings

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

- This **work has grown** and evolved at the community level over the last seven years, which can be seen through increased paid roles, increased community member participation and engagement, increased investment and support by leadership, and a shift in visions from only food security to food sovereignty.
- The **community members** (food champions, leadership, knowledge keepers, interested members) are the greatest assets of community food sovereignty visions and food system work. As well as the land herself!
- The **UOFS** project has been a **supportive partnership** for communities and offers beneficial support, tools, network building, and opportunities.
- **Traditional knowledge is at the heart of this work.** Making space for revitalization at personal and community levels, facilitating sharing (within and between communities), and making the invitation for this learning open and welcoming for all community members, especially young people, is essential to this work.
- **Consistency in staff** roles is crucial to the success of food sovereignty work. This applies to both community partners, as well as the role of UOFS Lead employed by TBDHU.
- **More** infrastructure, human, and financial **resources** are needed to keep the work moving forward. While some specific actions may have surfaced in this evaluation, these three overarching themes of what is needed for the work to continue to grow echo what has been shared in most feedback over the last seven years.



PARTICIPANTS AND STAFF AT THE SPRING 2023 FOOD WORKSHOP GATHERING AT ROOTS COMMUNITY FOOD CENTRE

WHERE WE CAME FROM

This section is intended to provide a snapshot of what food sovereignty work looked like for community partners when the project started in 2018 and how that has shifted over the last seven years, offering a high-level overview of where this work is today.

There has been a shift in how communities are thinking about food as a part of nation building, health, and sovereignty. When the project was established in 2018, there was more of a focus on food security, thus the original community engagement discussions were about food security specifically.

- » Common projects/work/themes shared at this time included things like gardens, greenhouses, food banks/Good Food Boxes, transportation and distribution, cooking programs, community freezers, and community harvesting.
- » There was also more limited investment of resources or staff/community member time into these initiatives, thus other commonalities mentioned were about capacity – the need for increased funding, staff, education and capacity building, planning and strategies.
- When the Indigenous Food Circle* contributed to coordinating the project in 2019, this came with a shift in language and knowledge building to Indigenous food sovereignty, and creating food sovereignty visions in each community.
- Community participants also echoed this shift, sharing that their visions have grown and evolved, like the planting of seedlings that take time to root and sprout. Participants attributed this growth to changing perspectives on health and wellness, an interest in reclaiming traditional knowledge, increased employment opportunities in communities to support food work, and more opportunities for learning, especially for young people.
- Over the last seven years, all the communities who participated in this evaluation have seen shifts in their perspectives of their community food initiatives (some more extensive than others) which includes a greater focus on reclaiming Indigenous knowledge and traditions around gathering, harvesting, preparing, and

sharing foods that are land-based and center the health of individuals, the community, and the land. Food security initiatives still remain a part of most community work in some way, however there has been a notable expansion to focus on food sovereignty.

- The most common types of food sovereignty projects/visions today revolve around:
 - » Food security programs (e.g., Good Food Box, food banks, program hampers, community food market)
 - » Cooking programs/workshops
 - » Harvesting camps
 - » Gardening (e.g., community garden, household raised garden boxes, greenhouses, grow towers)
 - » Food preparation infrastructure (e.g., building, expanding)
 - » Community programming/events featuring food (e.g., seasons festivals, school-based programs, community meals, retreats)
- Community-based food sovereignty projects specific to communities:
 - » Revitalizing traditional food gathering/preparation sites (e.g., Fish shack and dock)
 - » Food forest/orchard
 - » Chickens
 - » Sugar bush collective
 - » Fish egg hatchery
 - » Butcher shop
 - » Bee keeping
 - » Annual Elder and youth land-based retreat
 - » Glyphosate spraying research study
 - » Licensing workshops (e.g., gun)



Indigenous Food Circle Annual Report 2018-2019
<https://foodsystems.lakeheadu.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/IFC-Annual-Report-2018-2019.pdf>

There is no specific baseline data about staff and leadership dedicated towards food system work within partner First Nation communities. However, when initial engagement discussions occurred between staff who began this project and community members involved in food work in 2018, it was revealed that there was a lack of capacity, specifically mentioning the need for paid staff for this work. There is an interesting co-relation between increased staff commitment and paid roles, leadership support and buy-in, and the growth of visions and actions toward food sovereignty.

Many participants speak of how community-funded staff roles provide much of the impetus, momentum, and continuity for community food projects. This is reflected in the composition of evaluation participants:

-

UOFS HELP

Goal setting

Supplies (know)

Information providers website (do page)

more styles

Transformation

MONEY

Education

Income / outgoings

Security of

Knowledge

Feeling anxious

Planning help

Have to attend our sessions!

hospital planning

FB Group for family advice or chat

FB Group for family advice or chat

Financial Planning

Goal setting & Education

Feeling or knowing what is needed to take next

Future

Community planning already happening planning Support (equipment, personnel, and other) to support community

What we need

- business insurance
- supplies & security

how to help

- provide training
- provide supplies & resources

how to help

- we can build the kitchen if we find supplies to build but when do we have kitchen

Goals - before of support

Education/structure/Planning Construction Help

2. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND COMMITMENT

Through this evaluation, participants were asked about impacts that they have seen through their community level food work and one of the biggest impacts shared points towards greater engagement and commitment by community members themselves:

- At the individual/family level, participants reported seeing more people coming out and participating in community food sovereignty programs; families having more interest in and awareness about the importance of healthy eating; and seeing more community members engage with food sovereignty and land-based foods through harvesting, growing, and gathering activities.
- At the community level, participants reported seeing more children and youth participating in food-based programs and learning about traditional food ways.

3. PROJECT TEAM STRUCTURE

The project team structure has seen significant shifts since the beginning of the UOFS in 2018. At that time, the funding was coming in smaller, less regular chunks channelled through the TBDHU whose overall mandate meant that they did not have full time staff capacity to achieve the objectives of the project.



PARTICIPANTS JOINING CHEF CODY AT THE FALL GATHERING 2024.

- From 2018-2020 the bulk of the work was completed by consultants or external groups, while forming a project advisory team that was made up of a TBDHU Public Health Nutritionist, the manager of the TBDHU Healthy Living team, the Director of the Sustainable Food Systems Lab at Lakehead University, and project Elders.
 - » In 2018, the work was done by the consulting group Superior Strategies.
 - » In 2019, the work was commissioned out to the project team of the Indigenous Food Circle, a network of organizations and individuals working towards Indigenous food sovereignty.
- In 2021, the TBDHU received ongoing funding from the Ministry of Health and established a full-time UOFS Lead as a staff position within the TBDHU.
 - » There are advantages and disadvantages to this model. On the one hand, it offers the potential for consistency and sustainability in project support when there is continuity in the role. Conversely, there have been some gaps in staffing this position leading to turnover and challenges in expanding the project model.
 - » The UOFS Lead role has not been held by someone with Indigenous ancestry or someone directly from one of the 14 communities, thus decreasing the Indigenous leadership of the project

4. FUNDING MODEL

The way the project has been funded has shifted since it began in 2018.

- From 2018 - 2020, funding was one-year, grant based that required reapplication and annual detailed reports.
- In 2021, the project received permanent annual funding from the Ontario Ministry of Health directed to the TBDHU.
- This has not only allowed for greater sustainability of the project – the ability to hire a full-time coordinator, community partners knowing they can rely on annual implementation funds, gatherings, and other growth opportunities – but it has also allowed for more flexibility in reporting.

What We're Doing/ Community Food Sovereignty Visions and Work

1. IMPACTS SEEN OVER THE LAST SEVEN YEARS

- The food sovereignty work of the communities is contributing to behaviour shifts at both individual/family levels, and at a community level.
 - » At the individual/family level, participants reported seeing:
 - More people coming out and participating in community food sovereignty programs,
 - Families having more interest in and awareness about the importance of healthy eating.
 - Seeing more community members engage with food sovereignty and land-based foods through harvesting, growing, and gathering.
 - » At the community level, participants reported seeing:
 - Participants reported a shift in the mentality around community events and programs in terms of serving less processed and more land-based foods.
 - There are more children and youth participating in food-based programs and learning about traditional food ways.
 - Less frequently mentioned, but an important impact is that two communities reported more awareness and understanding about the importance of advocating for the health of the land itself – reporting any changes they see while out harvesting or hunting, so that the land is safe for future generations.
- Community member story telling has been an opportunity to share lived experiences of food sovereignty. Through stories, community members highlighted the importance of giving and receiving teachings, learning values and responsibilities, and learning about traditional food.
 - » This giving is very important to do be able to share with the next generation as well to allow traditions and knowledge to pass to the First Nations youth
- UOFS project team members observed increased collaboration within the community and increased knowledge coming back to communities and individuals.
- UOFS project team members also mentioned broader impacts of the UOFS project:
 - » This project and approach as a role model for other health units
 - » Awareness raising opportunity for non-Indigenous people about food sovereignty from a health perspective

“

“Food sovereignty has been a healing journey”

(KZA member)

“

“Food surrounds everything we do here... it's part of our beings”

(RRIB member)



GENE ROASTING A GOOSE AT THE SPRING 2025 GATHERING



MOOSE HANG AT NETMIZAAGAMIG NISHNAABEG HUNT CAMP
OCTOBER 2024

2. STRENGTHS & ASSETS

- The biggest assets/strengths for community food sovereignty work are the community members themselves. This was mentioned in relation to community members:
 - » working together, participating, and being engaged in the work
 - » traditional knowledge sharing among members
 - » dedicated staff (and intergenerational nature of that)
 - » support from leadership for this work (e.g., funding, giving space, flexibility in positions, financing food security initiatives)
 - » team work across staff departments
- A frequently mentioned asset was the increase in land-based learning happening in the community. Participants identified a shift from western to traditional ways, embracing different ways of thinking about food and its importance for health and self-reliance.
- An asset mentioned was the land itself, all the resources that it holds and the significance of the land for food sovereignty overall.
 - » While only a few participants mentioned this, it demonstrates the significance of Indigenous place-based knowledge, culture, and traditions, all of which are at the heart of Indigenous food sovereignty.
- External partnerships were also mentioned as an asset to the work (like UOFS, University of Guelph, glyphosate research).
 - » These partnerships provided opportunities for connection, skill building, research, “unearthing” of traditional knowledge and practices.
 - » The results demonstrate that while the support work of UOFS is fundamentally seen as an asset or resource for community food sovereignty work (as an external partnership), the focus of that support must remain on the communities themselves
 - » Ensuring self-determination drives community visions, as each individual community’s vision is grounded in place-based history, knowing and traditions
 - » Building the capacity of community members in food system work regarding knowledge and understanding, confidence, skills, and networks



“Committed passionate people on the land!”

(BNA Member)

3. CHALLENGES & BARRIERS

The biggest challenges faced in working towards community food sovereignty stemmed from resources – human, financial and infrastructure.

- Lack of financial resources to do the work.
 - » This was mentioned in reference to many different kinds of projects and costs – staffing, building or renovating infrastructure, and materials to keep projects consistently running
 - » Participants spoke about not knowing where to access these funds and not having the time to find out; they rely on external partnerships like UOFS to help them with this research and learning about funding application processes.
 - » Interesting “case study” – Pic Mobert is an example of community generated financial capacity through White Lake Limited, a community owned business that partners with mining and other businesses doing work in the area, which creates revenue that community projects can tap into. This First Nation-owned business has supported community food work in the past.
- Having enough human power to get the work done.
 - » This was mentioned in relation to paid staff, as well as community members in general.
 - » For paid staff, the majority of community participant focus groups and interviews mentioned the need to have more staff positions focused specifically on food work. This would go a long way for starting and evolving new initiatives, having the time needed to fulfill the expectations of the work, as well as allowing for consistency in initiatives staying operational.
- Some participants specifically mentioned the importance of consistency of staff, making sure that people stay long enough to establish a project.
- Some participants mentioned how beneficial it would be to have a whole department or team dedicated to this work; how this could be used as a supportive employment opportunity for community members.
- One community suggested a project manager who could look over all food related projects, someone who could connect the silos, manage funds, and other administrative work.
 - » Community members also mentioned that human power is needed for community food work, as this work is intended to benefit the whole of the community (for the people, by the people).
- Participants spoke of it being challenging to engage and involve community members in this work, getting people to show up and finding the best ways to communicate with community members.
- Participants also spoke about the need to find more of their own community members who know and are willing to share their knowledge with others in the community.
- Some participants suggested this knowledge may no longer be in their community, and that the intercommunity networks and partnerships could be valuable for inviting other community knowledge keepers to come and share.
- The personal wellness of community members was also mentioned a few times as a part of this challenge. The legacy of colonialism, poorer health outcomes, poverty, addictions, eroding of traditional foodways has all impacted people’s overall wellbeing which can make it more difficult to show up wanting to learn and grow.
- Community infrastructure for food programming (e.g., teaching kitchen, processing spaces, gardens and greenhouses, harvesting locations).
 - » The biggest challenges faced with infrastructure were about access. Either spaces are not large or sufficient enough, they are inconveniently located requiring additional transportation, they aren’t available or open all the time, or they do not yet exist.

- The support offered through the UOFS project would be best directed towards serving these challenges and barriers through things like offering workshops and tools on applying for funds (as well as offering direct grant writing support) that would be able to support both increased staffing and infrastructural dollars.
 - » UOFS could also change its implementation fund model and offer a larger grant(s) each year that could be put towards bigger infrastructural projects.
 - » The project could also support food champions in advocating for increased staff positions for this work to their leadership.
 - » Continuing to find ways to bring people together to share knowledge; develop tools and resources; offer workshops and tangible hands-on learning opportunities; connecting with external partners and knowledge sources.
 - » More funds and financial capacity
 - » Accessible, convenient physical space for food programming
 - » More sharing by and with knowledge keepers, hunters, harvesters about community specific land-based knowledge around plants, medicines, using tools, awareness of teachings, etc.
 - In-line with the other challenges and needs, many participant groups mentioned the need for continued momentum and capacity for already started projects, and the need for consistency with staff or those who are leading the project.
 - A few participants also mentioned more support from leadership (in the form of buy-in to the importance of this work and providing tangible supports like staff and funds) and more or expanded external partnerships that can help grow community food system work (e.g., Gaagige Zaagibigaa, Sioux Lookout First Nations Health Authority, Food Action Network-North Western Ontario).
 - Essentially, future growth relies on addressing the overarching challenges and barriers that communities are facing in their food system work. For the UOFS, this means tailoring project supports to fit these gaps as best as possible.
- #### 4. FUTURE GROWTH NEEDS

- What is needed for future growth echoes what participants spoke of in relation to challenges and barriers – more human, infrastructural, and financial resources to keep the work moving forward.
- Specifically, participants frequently mentioned:
 - » More paid staff
 - » More engagement with community members about the work (e.g., feedback, communication, information sharing, participation incentives), specifically children and youth



OUR DAY AT SOIL - COOKING OVER THE FIRE AND RENATA SHARING GARDEN PLANTING TIPS.

UOFS Project Impact

1. STRENGTHS & ASSETS IN SUPPORTING COMMUNITY FOOD SOVEREIGNTY VISIONS

- All communities felt that the project helped them to work towards their food sovereignty visions, and no one reported the project hindering their community's visions or actions towards achieving those visions.
- Positive outcomes, or the features of the UOFS project that have made a difference in supporting community food sovereignty visions, are:
 - » Tangible supports like implementation funds, tools and resources that directly relate to the visions communities are working towards
 - » Offering in-person opportunities to connect and learn from one another (like the gatherings), that helps to foster education, learning, and relationship building
 - Acknowledgment that these opportunities for knowledge sharing also extend to community members in regard to traditional practices, allowing for sharing of this knowledge
 - » The building of a network of community-level food champions that fosters connection, collaboration, and sharing of knowledge between communities that otherwise might not have happened
 - Opens up new possibilities for knowledge sharing across communities
 - Makes space for sharing new ideas, visions, and ways of doing things
 - » Connecting communities to external partners, projects, and learning opportunities (like University of Guelph, Gaagige Zaagibigaa, Roots Community Food Centre, etc.)
 - » Providing a support system for folks doing this work in community, whether through community peers or the project team, so people don't feel alone in the work or in their level of knowledge



USING THE MAGNETIC 13 MOONS CALENDAR ACTIVITY

“ UOFS is a really great support system. They have a lot of good tools and resources to use if you're not familiar with growing or our food systems and navigating them. They help support me, which helps support the community because I'm the one doing [the work]. It's good to have someone to talk to, a group of people.

(UOFS COMMUNITY FOOD CHAMPION)



“The UOFS project is such a good support system to have. When I first started my position, I knew nothing about gardening, it was a learning curve for me to educate myself on it. Thankfully I got connected with UOFS. It was intimidating because I was going into a setting where I thought everyone knew what they were doing, but a lot of people are just learning too I found out. That was nice and comforting to grow and learn together.

(UOFS COMMUNITY FOOD CHAMPION)

“Everything that we are doing here is caring and sharing. I think that is really great because I am learning a lot of new information that helps me with my garden.

(UOFS COMMUNITY FOOD CHAMPION)

- Specific projects or actions that were mentioned as being particularly valuable included:
 - » 13 Moons Tools & Resources (e.g., curriculum, colouring book, poster and interactive game)
 - » Gatherings, as they offer opportunities to highlight community-based work, make intercommunity connections, provide education and training opportunities, support knowledge sharing and translation, and honour Indigenous food sovereignty in its structure
 - » Various reports and research about the project itself (e.g., Food Sovereignty Assessment, 2021-24 program report)
 - » Tailored community projects that highlight self-determination (e.g., glyphosate research project in AZA; butcher shop in RRIB)
 - » Community visits by project team members
 - » Support of senior leadership at TBDHU to work through their own internal institutional barriers in order to support the growth of the project (e.g., understanding and advocating that communities have the right to make decisions for themselves, attempts to address policy change, commitment to problem solving bureaucratic hold-ups)

The project team specifically was asked to reflect on the strategies or practices that they have employed to accomplish the goals of the UOFS project over the last seven years. Their responses demonstrate the importance of a flexible funding model, grounding action in community-based research, relationship building, and institutional growth and flexibility.

- **Flexible funding model**

- » The way the project has been funded has seen a fundamental shift from one-year, grant based funding that required reapplication and annual detailed reports to being fully funded annually by the Ontario Ministry of Health. This has not only allowed for greater sustainability of the project – the ability to hire a full-time coordinator, community partners knowing they can rely on annual implementation funds, gatherings, and other growth opportunities – but it has allowed for more flexibility in reporting. The overarching goals of this project are long term and thus need to be measured and reported in a different way than time-limited grants typically allow for.

- » This can be seen in the 2021-24 program report that captured growth, change, and impacts of the project over a four-year time period, making the findings more impactful and useful.

- **Grounding action in community-based research**

- » Since its inception in 2018, the UOFS project has grounded its direction forward in community-based research. This has helped to ensure that the project's values of being Indigenous-centered, community-led, relational, reciprocal, systemic, and demonstrating long-term commitment to the work could be met.
- » In 2018, the initial consultants conducted community engagement with the fourteen partner First Nation communities that contributed to an initial Community Food Assessment that sought to better understand commonalities and common challenges or barriers in moving forward community food initiatives. This led to the development of individual community assessments and priorities as a baseline for the work as well as a continuing of this work through supporting communities in developing and working towards food sovereignty visions more explicitly and offering intercommunity gatherings to promote knowledge sharing and learning opportunities.

- » In 2021 as the TBDHU hired an Indigenous consulting firm to conduct a Food Sovereignty Assessment. The purpose of this research was to perform a comprehensive community-led food sovereignty assessment to determine recommendations and strategies to strengthen community-based regional food systems and support the design and implementation of the next phase of the work for the UOFS project. Key themes and recommendations for the work came out of this, which underpinned the next four years of the project.
- » In 2024, a review of the project over the last four years was conducted to both highlight and learn from all that has been implemented and accomplished in that time. The report provided a historic overview of the project to date, as well as the outcomes that had been achieved – use of implementation funds, gatherings, developed resources and tools, and community visits.



“ I love that [the UOFS team] are persistent!... Even if I don't answer, they'll check up on me again... haven't heard from you, how are things, how's the garden, let's have a chat or meet. I really value that and appreciate it so much. All the things they've helped me brainstorm and vision for and given me ideas on how to do things better or change things has been so helpful.

(UOFS COMMUNITY FOOD CHAMPION)



LAKE NIPIGON, GOODMAN FAMILY HEADED OUT FISHING.

- **Evolving relationship building**

- » Relationships are essential to the nature of the UOFS project – those within community, with the project team, and between communities both regionally and beyond.
- » Project team members feel that all of these forms of relationship building have evolved over the lifespan of the project. Community participants spoke of greater engagement by community members and leadership; the project team has demonstrated their commitment to supporting community visions in their adaptability to requests and showing up when needed; and cascading relationships have been built with external support partners, like universities and non-profit organizations.
- » Another important characteristic of the evolving nature of relationship building within the project is that it allows for fluidity of who is or “can” be involved at a community level. There are no strict parameters to who can be involved, or how to become a food champion which has meant being able to learn and work from not just specific staff positions, but also volunteers, elders, knowledge keepers, young people, etc., which ultimately has led to program offerings evolving as well.

- **Institutional growth & flexibility**

- » As the project management body for the UOFS project, the TBDHU has both power and responsibility towards the implementation of this work. In reflecting on this position, the project team shared that they feel the TBDHU has been flexible and open to different approaches and ideas to working in partnership with First Nation communities. They also credit the institution with engaging in their own learning around working with Indigenous communities and the importance of self-determination, building mutual respect, and learning to be in good relation which inherently means working through tensions in settler and Indigenous partnership.
- » It must be said that the kind of space that has been established within the institution is not a given; there have been many staff and project team members who have pushed back against established norms and rules to help illuminate the importance of these responses by the institution, and thus contributed significantly to the creation of this more open, flexible, and adaptable institutional space.

2. LIMITATIONS & WEAKNESSES IN ACCOMPLISHING PROJECT GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The project team was specifically asked to reflect on limitations or weaknesses of the UOFS project in regard to achieving goals and positive outcomes, or if there were any ways they felt the project has hindered communities in achieving their visions. As with any good self-reflective practice, there were many areas they felt the project had limitations or weaknesses, while expressing that thinking about the project hindering communities was upsetting and offered the framing of “unintentional harms”. The following themes arose in this conversation:

• Financial limitations

- » While the project has consistent annual funding, this covers many components of managing the project and both project team members and community participants felt there is a limited amount of implementation funding dollars to provide direct fiscal support for community visions.
- » There are also some parameters related to when and how the implementation funds can be spent (e.g., cannot be used on infrastructure) that can impede the funds being effective source of financial support. The project team is also heavily involved in the logistics of spending the money, which can mean slowing down the process if there isn't sufficient staff time or attention to this project component.
- » Current policies within the TBDHU about how to spend money within their institutional accountability framework can sometimes mean less flexibility with how funds can be spent.

• Project team staff turnover and/or absenteeism

- » This is a challenge that the project has faced since the beginning as the support model has shifted and grown. The first phase of the project was conducted by an external consulting group and then was turned over to the Indigenous Food Circle for the next two years, who formed a project team external to the TBDHU (with TBDHU representation). In 2021, the TBDHU received ongoing funding from the Ministry of Health, which meant the project team became officially located within the TBDHU and project team members were now staff of the organization.

- » Turnover in this sense can refer to both the changing hands of project management, from consultant to community group to institution, as well as the people in these actual roles, especially when a permanent coordinator role was established within the TBDHU.
- » Inconsistency of staff/turnover impacts what the overall support model can provide, especially as it relates to relationship building, building tools and resources, offering in-community learning opportunities (e.g., helping to facilitate/plan workshops in community), and expanding intercommunity knowledge exchange opportunities (e.g., gatherings, community-to-community, online discussions, social media page, etc.).
- » This has particularly profound impacts on relationship building. When someone leaves the role, there is a gap in communication and support meaning that community contacts may lose touch with the program or become less invested/involved.
- » It is also interesting to note that no community participants made specific reference to the UOFS Lead or direct project team member support, either as a positive or a negative. There could be many reasons for this, one theory being that this hasn't been a consistent or prominent feature of the support model to date, yet one that would greatly benefit community partners. A more consistent UOFS Lead could bring many of the other project support model ideas to life (see next category) as well as being in-community in-person more often to build relationships, offer trainings, and deepen their sense of understanding of community visions and needs.

• Community readiness, buy-in and commitment

- » Every partner community is unique in their visions and readiness, which lends to the flexible nature of the UOFS project as a blanket approach would not be an effective support model.
- » This also means that every community comes to the project with different levels of readiness when it comes to food sovereignty work, as well as buy-in and commitment.
- » Many communities face staffing challenges whether from burnout, competing priorities or high staff turnover (that can leave projects half started or falling by the wayside without someone to lead them).

- » Project team members also mentioned that currently, the project is not very connected or have relationships with the community leadership of their partner communities. There are reasons for this – it could change relationships at a community level, it could add a bureaucratic layer that slows the work down for community food champions, it would add an element of political negotiation to the work of the project – but there was also acknowledgment that formalizing or having more contact with band leadership could be helpful for their partners in achieving their work at a community level, especially if used in a supportive way with requests of their food champions.
- » A possible way of supporting food champions in their communications with leadership to help bring about awareness and support could be to offer to help do a deputation to Council or have a strategy session at a gathering about how to engage leadership/ types of support they can provide.
- **Collaborating at a regional scale**
 - » External partnerships and broader collaboration have already been cited as a major asset of this project model – both between communities and in connecting them to organizations and universities – but it can also be a challenge!
 - » The more people involved, the more agendas there are to consider and the more moving pieces there are to determining direction, planning events, building tools, etc.
 - » Broader scales of collaboration within UOFS have been conflated with the work of other regional food sovereignty organizations or projects, like Gaagige Zaagibigaa, which can be confusing for community participants.
 - » While this can be a challenge, it also presents an opportunity for the UOFS project to spearhead building a broader organizational network across the region to support this work and the communities.
- **Sharing the learnings from the project more broadly**
 - » While project team members feel they do a good job sharing this work within the circle of project partners, they felt that there was more that could be done to share the big picture of this work beyond project partners, particularly regionally and nationally when it comes to sharing what has been learned and accomplished. This kind of broader sharing may also have positive impacts for policy change opportunities.
- **Better integration of this work and its learnings into the TBDHU**
 - » To the project team, this means better sharing of the learnings, processes, and approaches of the project as a partnership with Indigenous communities throughout the TBDHU.
 - » This could have the benefit of helping other departments to learn to work in better relation with Indigenous communities and to help translate learnings from UOFS across the TBDHU's work.
 - » There was recognition that for this to happen means working to help break down the silos that exist within the TBDHU's work more broadly; it isn't unique to UOFS that learnings are not more integrated across the institution.
- **Emotional heaviness of the work**
 - » The project team acknowledged that for many past and current members, there becomes a personal connection and vested interest in the work and the relationships. The closer one gets to community partners and more deeply understands the realities and history of Indigenous food systems in a colonial context, a lot of different emotions can come up for settler people involved. Experiencing the emotional realities of this work can lead to tensions between staff, difficulties in creating limits, and ultimately may contribute to staff turnover.
 - » The project team expressed that this isn't necessarily a limitation, but a contextual piece to the work and one that can easily become a limitation if it isn't being addressed within the team.

- **Long term visions of food sovereignty aren't solvable in the short term**

- » While the goals and objectives of the work are noble, it was clearly expressed that the work of Indigenous food sovereignty is in its nature long-term work and that it is not something “solvable” by external people. This is the self-determined work of First Nations communities to do for themselves and that we can only be allies in this work.
- » Project team members also acknowledged the various systemic contexts the projects has operated within (e.g., settler colonialism, the COVID-19 pandemic) and the risks that exist of the project reproducing some of the damaging components of these systems by nature of the Indigenous-settler partnership that underpins the work.
- » Team members questioned whether this work can truly have real and lasting impacts towards food sovereignty while existing within the realities of current systems.

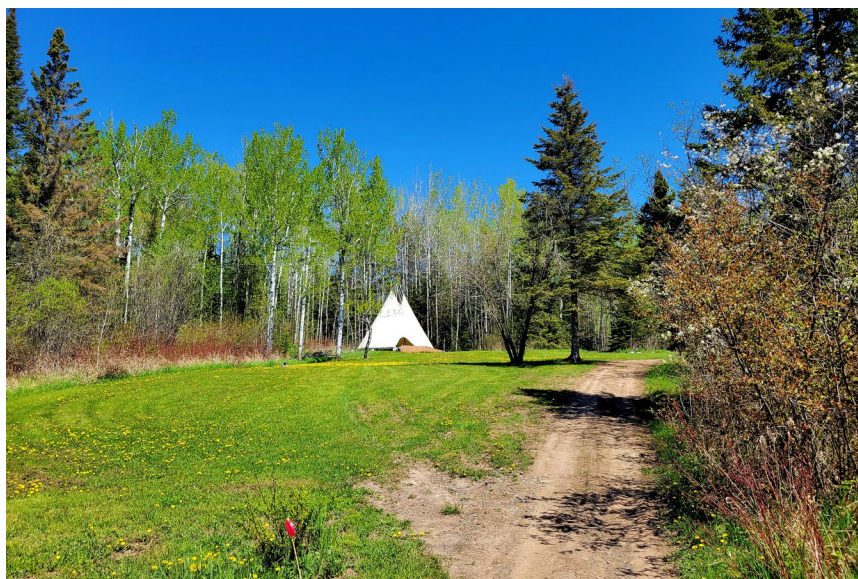
*** It should be noted that no community participants reported any negative impacts of UOFS project support.*

“ One of the impediments I've been hearing as I've been checking in with some of the community folks is that things are getting stopped at Chief and Council... that is something I haven't touched at all since I've been in this project - what are the ways that we can make better connections outside of being in those communities [for informal events]?”... “I think that could help, but I haven't done it yet. I don't know how;

(PROJECT TEAM MEMBER QUOTE)



PROJECT TEAM THAT HOSTED THE SPRING 2025 UOFS GATHERING.



TEEPEE AT THE SCHOOL OF INDIGENOUS LEARNING (SOIL)

STORY TELLING QUOTE:

“ Now teaches his kids, when we’re out on the land and whether you catch a big bull or a small calf, it’s not about the chase. When that animal presents itself to you, it’s a sacrifice of it’s life for you. Believe that animals were put here before us and we learn from them... the food we eat is their medicine from the land that we need; the animals eat the plants and ingest them and then we eat them. Need to value the food on this land that Creator gave us. Very important to teach our children and future generations.

(RESIDENT IN BIIGTIGONG COLLECTED AT COMMUNITY HEALTH FAIR)



3. IDEAS FOR IMPROVING THE PROJECT MODEL

- **By and large, when asked about improvements or additions to the UOFS project model, participants felt that what has been offered to date has been helpful and that the project team is doing a great job.**
- **One of the biggest improvements cited was to just do MORE of everything already on offer – gatherings, workshops, online presentations and meetings, toolkits, videos.**
 - » Some specific topics people were interested to see more of: in-person learning opportunities or videos related to gardening, canning, processing wild game, hunting, harvesting, and land-based teaching.
- **When it comes to gatherings, participants shared wanting them to happen more frequently, finding ways to give everyone who wants to a chance to share about their work, highlighting key community projects as inspiration and modeling for one another.**
- **There was also mention of how there could be clearer communication about implementation funds relayed to community partners – when they can spend, how much, and on what.**

When it comes to additions to UOFS supports, there were lots of creative ideas!

- **Gatherings**
 - » Many people also mentioned how important it is to make space for/invite youth from all community partners to the gatherings as they are the next generation who will continue on with this work, but only if they are given an opportunity to learn about food systems and sovereignty and understand the importance of stewardship roles.
 - » Share recipes
 - » Offer presentations at gatherings virtually as well so that community members who couldn’t attend the gathering in person can still learn and participate

- **Implementation Funds**

- » Provide knowledge, resources and training on how to find and apply for funding (e.g., where to apply, when, how, grant writing support, could be an intermediary for larger grant applications)
- » Offer more implementation funds; consider a model of offering larger “grants” through UOFS itself

- **Workshops/Training**

- » Offer in-person food safety training in community
- » Connect food champions with skilled people outside their community to offer workshops and knowledge sharing on topics of interest
- » Help bring wild game safe food handling presentations or courses to community

- **Knowledge Sharing**

- » Build the model of intercommunity visits to foster relationship building, learning, and idea sharing in more personal ways, as well as allowing for onsite, tangible sharing
- » Have community-based gatherings/circles to promote sharing and learning within communities themselves (e.g., bring in experts, do planning and visioning with community members, share the work/opportunities happening in their own communities)

- **Communication**

- » Establish a central information sharing space/ social media page that all 14 partner First Nation community participants can access (Facebook specifically)
- » Share events on different topics of interest

- **Advisory**

- » Re-evaluate the composition of the project advisory team and expand to include new people (e.g., Indigenous graduate students, elders)

- **If one of the greatest strengths in working towards food sovereignty visions are the community members themselves, then the project needs to find ways to keep supporting community members directly, and expanding who they engage with (e.g., coming to community and offering in person trainings, certificates, workshops; including youth in gatherings and other learning opportunities).**

WHERE WE ARE GOING

- Offer more of current project support model components (e.g., gatherings, resources, tools, workshops, videos).
- Expand the project support model in ways that more concretely benefit a wider range of community members within each partner community (see – Findings, UOFS Project, Ideas for improving the project model).
- Strive for consistency and longer-term commitment within the role of UOFS Lead.
- Integrate learnings and sharing about the project more broadly throughout the TBDHU.
- Share the learnings of the project regionally, provincially and nationally.
- Find ways to better support communities financially in their food sovereignty work, whether that is through revising or increasing implementation funding from the project or supporting communities to apply for external funding.
- Continue to support the community food champions in their food sovereignty visions and implementation.
- Find ways to connect with community leadership to increase engagement and support of food sovereignty work.

Appendix 1 – Question Guide

KEY QUESTIONS

(guiding the evaluation, not to be asked to participants)

1. What steps have First Nation community partners made towards their food sovereignty visions?
2. Have there been any unintended outcomes (positive and negative) of the UOFS project towards community food sovereignty visions? If so what are they? What are the features of the UOFS project that have made a difference?
3. What is helping or hindering First Nation community partners to achieve their objectives? What explains why some initiatives work?
4. What is helping or hindering the UOFS project to achieve its objectives and outcomes? What works best for whom, why and when?
5. What is needed to support future growth and evolution of community food sovereignty visions and actions?
6. How is the UOFS Project contributing to Indigenous food sovereignty in the short, medium, and longer-term?

DEFINITION OF FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

Indigenous Food Sovereignty refers to the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods. This is premised on the inherent right of communities to define their own food systems that include the people, land, water, and all living things that have sustained Indigenous peoples since time immemorial. Core to this idea is that food is sacred and a gift of life, not to be squandered or commodified. (UOFS 2021-2024 Report)

INTRODUCTION & PREAMBLE TO FOCUS GROUPS

- Thank you everyone for taking the time to be here today!
- My name is Courtney Strutt, and I am working with the UOFS project team to develop and implement an outcomes evaluation for UOFS that covers the last seven years of work (2018 – 2024).
 - » I am a non-Indigenous woman of Irish, English and Portuguese descent who grew up in Algonquin territory, but have called the Anishnaabe lands of Thunder Bay home for the last 15 years.
 - » I started working with the UOFS project through the Indigenous Food Circle back in 2018 and am grateful to be back in the circle of this work since last fall!
- The UOFS project works to support 14 First Nation communities in determining and reclaiming traditional food systems and implementing food sovereignty visions, action plans, and community-led initiatives.
- The purpose of the UOFS Project Evaluation is to create and implement a framework to:
 - » Assess the effectiveness and impacts of the project on community food sovereignty for the 14 participating First Nation communities
 - » Identify and direct where the project can go next for continued growth and impacts on food sovereignty for First Nation partners; and
 - » Inform the UOFS project team where each community partner is at and how to best support growth and change moving forward.
- This focus group is an important piece of the data collection for this evaluation, and as such we would like permission to record the remainder of this session.
 - » Do I have your permission to record?

- The information being collected in this evaluation has been developed by the TBDHU UOFS project team alongside an Indigenous Advisory group.
 - » Any information being collected is only being used to serve the purposes of this evaluation for the UOFS project, and possibly to inform the writings of an academic paper to share this work more widely.
 - » All data collected will be securely held with the TBDHU; communities can request access to information specifically about their community at any time and access will be granted.
 - » Any specific information shared by members of a community will be given credit and recognition, with the majority of the findings being anonymized and included into the broader evaluation data.
 - » Communities can choose to withdraw their data or participation from the evaluation at any time.
 - Ask each individual for their consent in participating.
 - Ask individuals if they want to be identified or remain confidential.
 - Any questions about this evaluation before we start the focus group discussion?
3. What specific accomplishments towards your community's food sovereignty vision have been achieved in the last seven years? (Ex. Food infrastructure, knowledge sharing, capacity and skill building, access) (KQ1)
 4. What strengths, assets, strategies, and resources does your community have (or had in the past) that has helped work towards your food sovereignty visions? (KQ3)
 - a. Have there been any strategies or resources that haven't worked or been helpful?
 5. What challenges has the community faced in working towards food sovereignty? (KQ3)
 6. Has being part of the UOFS project helped your community work towards its food sovereignty vision? (KQ2)
 - a. If so, how?
 - b. If not, why? (e.g., parts of the project that prevented your community from working towards their goals or vision in some way)
 7. What impacts in food sovereignty work have you seen or experienced in your community since being a part of the UOFS project? (KQ6)
 8. What is needed to continue seeing growth and action towards your community's food sovereignty vision into the next seven years? (Ex. Resources, supports from inside the First Nation, supports from outside the First Nation, supports from UOFS, knowledge gathering, etc.) (KQ5)
 9. Currently, the UOFS support model consists of strategies and tools such as gatherings, implementation funds, resource and tool development, intercommunity knowledge exchange, and staff support. (KQ5)
 - a. How could any of these supports be improved?
 - b. What additional resources, tools, or overall supports could the UOFS project offer to support future growth and action of food sovereignty work in your community?

COMMUNITY FOCUS GROUPS AND/OR INTERVIEW (VIRTUAL)

1. Introduce yourself and the food work that you do in your community.
 - a. How did you get involved in food sovereignty work? (KQ1)
2. The UOFS project starts from the idea of food sovereignty being about reclaiming traditional knowledge and practices about food to make decisions for your community about what kind of food to eat, how to access it, and how to care for the land while being nourished from it. (KQ1)
 - a. What visions for food sovereignty has your community been working towards over the last seven years?
 - b. How have these visions changed? Why?

COMMUNITY FOOD CHAMPION FOCUS GROUP (@ SPRING GATHERING)

1. Introduce yourself, your community, and the work you do that makes you a food champion for your community.
2. The UOFS project works to support 14 Indigenous First Nation communities in determining and reclaiming traditional food systems and implementing food sovereignty visions, action plans, and community-led initiatives. (KQ4)
 - a. In what ways has the UOFS project accomplished that over the last seven years?
 - b. What has, or can, get in the way of the UOFS project accomplishing its purpose?
3. How has being part of the UOFS project helped the partner First Nation communities work towards their food sovereignty visions? (KQ2)
 - a. Are there any ways being a part of the UOFS project has prevented work happening towards these visions?
4. What impacts in food sovereignty work have you seen or experienced since being a part of the UOFS project? (KQ6)
5. What is needed to continue seeing growth and action towards both community-level and regional-level food sovereignty visions into the next seven years? (KQ5, KQ6)
 - a. Ex. Resources, supports from inside the First Nation, supports from outside the First Nation, supports from UOFS, knowledge gathering, etc.
6. Currently, the UOFS support model consists of strategies and tools such as gatherings, implementation funds, resource and tool development, intercommunity knowledge exchange, and staff support. (KQ5)
 - a. How could any of these supports be improved?
 - b. What additional resources, tools, or overall supports could the UOFS project offer to support future growth and action of food sovereignty work?

UOFS PROJECT TEAM FOCUS GROUP OR INTERVIEW (VIRTUAL OR IN-PERSON)

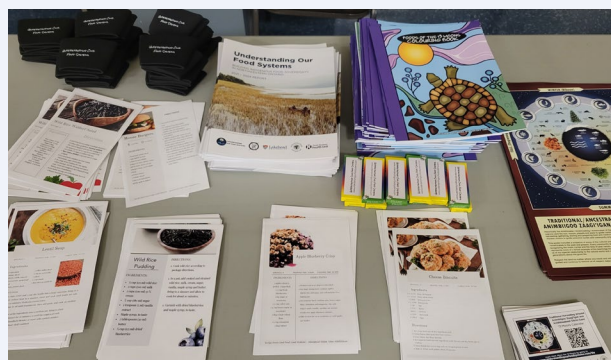
1. Introduce yourself and the role you played on the UOFS team and when.
2. The UOFS project works to support 14 Indigenous First Nation communities in determining and reclaiming traditional food systems and implementing food sovereignty visions, action plans, and community-led initiatives. (KQ4)
 - a. In what ways has the UOFS project accomplished that over the last seven years?
 - b. What projects or actions were you specifically involved in that worked or you think were valuable?
 - c. What have been the limitations, or weaknesses, of the UOFS project?
3. During your time with the UOFS project, how did you see the project helping or supporting the 14 First Nation communities in achieving their food sovereignty visions? (KQ2)
 - a. Were there any ways you felt the project hindered communities in achieving their visions?
4. What impacts in community-level or regional-level food sovereignty work have you seen or experienced since being a part of the UOFS project? (KQ6)
5. What is needed to continue seeing growth and action towards community food sovereignty visions into the next seven years? (KQ5)
6. Currently, the UOFS support model consists of strategies and tools such as gatherings, implementation funds, resource and tool development, intercommunity knowledge exchange, and staff support. (KQ5)
 - a. What elements of the support model are working well in supporting community food sovereignty visions and plans?
 - b. What changes or improvements could be made to the UOFS support model to support future and growth and action of community food sovereignty visions and plans?

STORYTELLING PROMPT (KQ6)

1. Share your name and your community.
2. The idea of food sovereignty is reclaiming traditional knowledge and practices about food to make decisions (for your household or community) about what kind of food to eat, how to access it, and how to care for the land while being nourished from it.
 - a. Share about an experience you have had learning, teaching or taking action about the food you eat.
 - b. What did that experience teach you?
 - c. What are the challenges you face today in accessing traditional foods?



OUR EVALUATOR - COURTNEY OUTSIDE OF A TEEPEE AT THE SCHOOL OF INDIGENOUS LEARNING



UOFS RESOURCES



All of these tools and resources can be found on the Understanding Our Food Systems website under Resources. For hard copies of the poster or colouring book, make a request to the Understanding Our Food Systems Lead at 807-625-5900.

Appendix 2 – Meet the Research Team

Courtney Strutt is a settler woman of Irish, English, and Portuguese descent, born and raised in the unceded territory of the Algonquin (Ottawa), calling Thunder Bay in Anishnaabe-aki home for the last 15 years. She has a master's degree from Lakehead University in Education for Change that focused on interactive methods for deepening action and understanding towards decolonization for settler people. She has been working in the field of community-based research and program development for over 15 years with a focus on education, community development, and food systems work in the contexts of Indigenous resurgence and climate change. Courtney first began working with the UOFS project in 2019 as a project team member of the Indigenous Food Circle, supporting administrative and research initiatives. More recently, Courtney returned to the UOFS project in the role of a consultant to help develop the 2021-24 program report and as the evaluator for this evaluation.

Kim McGibbon is a settler woman of Irish, English descent who was born in Peterborough Ontario and moved to the Northshore of Lake Superior on the lands of the Fort William First Nation more than 25 years ago. She is grateful to be a mother to an amazingly adventurous daughter. Kim became a Registered Dietitian after completing a nutrition degree at the University of Guelph and was later able to do a Master's at the University of Toronto. Most of her career has been spent working in the field of public health but she was honoured to have spent 6 years working at Roots Community Food Centre where she began to learn and work in the area of food sovereignty. Kim loves working with people and building relationships is why she gets up in the morning, an extravert by nature, she knows that food is a great equalizer and a wonderful way to connect with others. Whether it is working in the dirt to grow food, or in a kitchen to prepare and sit down to eat a meal together, she loves how the power of food can be a catalyst for change.

Charles Levkoe is the Canada Research Chair in Equitable and Sustainable Food Systems, a Member of the College of New Scholars, Artists and Scientists of the Royal Society of Canada, and Professor in the Department of Health Sciences at Lakehead University. His community engaged research uses a food systems lens to better understand the importance of, and connections between social justice, ecological regeneration, regional economies and active democratic engagement.

Dorothy Rody worked for Animbiigoo Zaagi'igan Anishinaabek for the last seven years as the Family Well-being Coordinator. She assisted in the development of the School of Indigenous Learning. Dorothy enjoys the outdoors and spending time with family and is currently a member of leadership for her First Nation. She loves practicing the tradition of harvesting and cooking traditional food, for that was the passion she shared with her grandmother. She shared the importance of protecting Mother Earth with many, especially her grandchildren.

Marlene Tsun is a registered member of Alderville FN Ontario and has lived in Gull Bay FN for the past 25 years with her partner. She has two grown daughters and three grandchildren .

She is an Ojibwe women who has followed many traditional practices including food preparation to support her family and community, providing information to those who are also like-minded. She has also learned about medicines provided by our creator in the wild. She got involved with this group because of her interest in helping others learn what she has learned the past 40 years or so and will continue to do.

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OUR FOOD SYSTEMS**

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