

FOOD PRODUCERS FORUM

2023 Annual Report



www.foodproducersforum.com

Where do we go from here?

Over the past year, it has become clear that food is a big concern for everyone in our province. As the cost of food continues to rise, there is a growing sense of crisis. At the same time, we see more and more people returning to home food production.

Because we are committed to doing something real to meet the need for healthy, local food, Food Producers Forum has launched a dozen projects to support community-based food production.

We constantly remind ourselves that to do more than talk about this problem, we need to make sure that the solutions we create are real, sustainable and based on what people want, to make sure we are restoring community control, to counteract the drift toward reliance on government and corporations to solve our basic problems. So we look for ways to engage in dialogue, as we move ahead with our work.



One great example this past year was the conference called *Regeneration: Soil, Food, Community* that we hosted in May of 2022. Starting with a team made up of academics, government representatives, food activists and farmers, we organized three days of intense dialogue about food production, soil, health and food justice. We were joined online by more than 150 participants, who expressed themselves very clearly. From their comments we drew an initial list of more than 50 recommendations. By analyzing this list, to find the most practical and important areas for change, we came up with a list of 20 Action Items that were prioritized by everyone present at the final plenary session. We then formed the NL Food Action Network, to move forward with these actions.

In September 2022, we launched the online *Where's the Food?* Survey, to gather missing information about community food production in our province. Here are the main findings from that survey:

- * In 2022, 750 survey participants produced more than 6 million pounds of local food.
- * They include about 700 gardeners, 650 foragers, 170 who raise animals, 310 hunters & 500 fishers.
- * The survey heard from almost 100 people who grow or gather food that they sell commercially.
- * Home food producers each grew or gathered an average of more than 500 pounds of food.
- * Those who hunted, raised animals or fished each produced an average of 375 pounds of food.

Our survey identified the following needs, challenges and opportunities:

- * Farmers and community gardeners need easier access to available land for agriculture.
- * Community cold storage and root cellars are needed for local food preservation.
- * There is a need for more local, approved abattoirs for meat preparation across our province.
- * There is a general interest in tool sharing and community farming, especially in rural areas.
- * There is widespread desire for workshops, mentorships and online training in food production.

With this information in hand, we are setting out to build a Provincial Food Network, with local community sites right across the province, with a focus on food production, food sharing and food education. We invite you to join us – you can connect with Food Producers Forum by visiting our website or by email.

BOARD MEMBERS



Alison Snow, Secretary



Atanu Sarkar, Faculty Advisor



Rachel Snelgrove,
Board Member



Tim Walsh, Board Member



Solange
Fuekang,
Board
Member



Jeremy Carter, Vice Chair



Dan Rubin, Chairperson

Nathan Gidge, Board Member



Samantha Young,
Executive Director



Heather Rhodes,
Treasurer

WHO WE ARE

Newfoundland and Labrador imports almost 90% of its fresh food. In the past twenty years, according to Statistics Canada, our province has lost more than half of its cultivated farm land. Rising food prices are forcing more and more people, a third of whom are children under twelve, to turn to food banks for their basic needs. Our province has become the least food secure and least healthy in Canada. This is the context in which Food Producers Forum was created, to substantially address the need for healthy food.

Food Producers Forum is a three-year-old non-profit society, based in St. John's, NL. We were created as a non-partisan communications hub, to sustain and expand community food production, in order to rebuild food security and community health in Newfoundland and Labrador. Our board members include immigrants, local farmers and educators, Indigenous members and everything we do is based on discussion and consensus.

The group has developed an inclusive, collaborative model of decision-making and project management, while working directly with rural and Indigenous communities. It has evolved a detailed vision of community sustainability, based on grassroots solutions to endemic problems of local food supply.

FPF has made a series of significant contributions to food security, with a dozen projects to address the need for healthy, local food, produced at the community level.

MAKING DECISIONS IN LIVING COLOUR

Food Producers Forum has become a regional hub for innovation in community engagement, relying on the Talking Circle as its primary mode of group discourse and decision making. This form of dialogue is applied in all meetings of the Board of Directors and in every one of our project teams. Drawing on the experience and insights of everyone in the circle, this model allows everyone in the group to fine-tune each decision, while avoiding deceptive dichotomies, thus consistently "making decisions in living colour." By building project teams based on this process, FPF has been able to launch an impressive series of food projects, while embedding cultural diversity.

The organization emerged out of a consultative process in support of an innovative greenhouse design suitable for community food production in northern communities in 2019. What made this consultation phase remarkable was (a) a commitment by 21 local stakeholders, including the provincial department of agriculture, Indigenous representatives, food activists, farmers and food innovators to ten hours of participation; (b) the use of instantaneous recording, transferred to an overhead screen to confirm each consultant's ideas, and (c) a meeting framework that focused on practical solutions rather than abstract principles.

As a result of this process, the 21 consultants produced an advisory report with 270 recommendations in support of the greenhouse project and provincial food policy! They also identified the need for a non-partisan group to provide connection and communication among provincial food producers

EARTH SHELTERED GREENHOUSE

By combining the essential qualities of the greenhouse and the root cellar, FPF has developed a unique greenhouse design more suitable for northern communities than the standard glass house. With earth insulation on three sides, and a transparent south-facing roof and front wall, it is possible to grow healthy food year-round, even in sub-zero winter conditions. There is already a working model, as proof of concept, currently in its fourth year of operation, in the community of Flatrock, NL. The O'Brien Farm is the site of the FPF demonstration version in St. John's that is almost ready for operation as part of a farm education centre. After working closely on this project for five years, we have turned the work on the building over to the staff of the O'Brien Farm, who will complete the building and internal systems in preparation for the 2023 growing year.

GREENHOUSE OUTREACH PROJECT

Once the construction of the demonstration greenhouse structure was underway, FPF sent word out across our province, seeking rural communities interested in building similar structures for year-round food production. Twenty-six towns and organizations responded with requests for involvement in this project! Out of these, six communities were selected for direct advisement and support. With funding support from the Office of Public Engagement at Memorial University, project team representatives fanned out across the province to meet with local groups, in the Codroy Valley, Norris Point, King's Point, Carbonear, Port Blandford, and Mary's Harbour, Labrador. FPF continues to work on fundraising while three of these sites are currently beginning construction of their greenhouse structures.

GUERRILLA GARLIC GARDENERS

FPF volunteers worked last year, alongside low-income single parents and their children, building raised bed vegetable gardens here in St. John's. This independently funded project relied on local and online donations, and was developed in partnership with the NL Single Parents Association Food Bank. Along the way, the project identified an almost lost strain of NL Tall Garlic and launched a community grow-out program to regenerate and distribute this unique endangered seed stock.

WEBSITE DEVELOPMENT

The FPF website is much more than a promotional site for the group: it is an online resource centre, supplying solid information about farming, gardening, foraging, hunting and fishing. In little more than two-and-a-half years, the website has grown to encompass more than 350 pages of content, with more being added weekly. Along with background information about the group and its projects, the FPF website has become an "online encyclopedia" of resources for food producers in our province. Much of the website content has been contributed by users and supporters. Weekly updates continue as we search for knowledgeable individuals who would like to contribute short articles on a range of subjects

NL GROWN MAP

With support from a team of volunteers and student web developers, FPF developed and launched an online map of local food sources, to provide better access to locally produced, healthy food. The NL Grown Map is now linked through a tab on the FPF Website main page. We will soon be working on a major update of the website created to house this map.

COMMUNITY GARDEN ALLIANCE

After contacting more than 130 community gardens across this province, FPF raised funds to help relaunch the Community Garden Alliance. Following several years of non-activity, after burnout of leaders, this non-profit group has been re-registered, and now has a new board made up of community gardeners.

MAY 2022 PROVINCIAL CONFERENCE: *REGENERATION: SOIL, FOOD COMMUNITY*

A team consisting of food scientists, activists and government representatives, working in collaboration with teaching staff at Memorial University's Faculty of Medicine was organized and hosted an online provincial conference, held in May, 2022.

During three days of online engagement, more than 150 participants and 32 speakers explored multiple aspects of food production, food distribution, food justice and food need in our province. All speakers were pre-recorded, for easier online coordination, and their sessions are still accessible through the FPF website. You can find a link to all the conference sessions on the FPF Website. The main deliverable was a list of 20 action items that were prioritized and voted on by those attending, that are now in the hands of a team made up of ten members of local food groups called the NL Food Action Network.

NL FOOD ACTION NETWORK

Meeting on a bi-weekly basis to bring attention and action to key issues, the membership of this team includes representatives from our provincial Department of Fisheries, Forestry and Agriculture, along with the non-profit groups Fishing For Success, Food First NL, Bridges to Hope food bank, Second Harvest NL, the Social Justice Collective and the NunatuKavut Community Council.

SEEDY SATURDAY 2022

In collaboration with the Memorial University Botanical Garden, Food Producers Forum formed a project team to relaunch the annual Seedy Saturday event here in St. John's NL. The 2022 version was held on Saturday, March 19, 2022 at the Botanical Garden. It featured displays by Food First NL, the St. John's Seed Library, Food Producers Forum, the Mercy Centre for Ecology and Justice, and the Newfoundland Horticultural Society. The event featured workshops on composting, soil fertility, seed saving and hands-on events for kids. It was a real success for the 150 who attended and more than 300 free seed packets were distributed.

FROM THE GROUND UP

Food Producers Forum recognizes the need for public education to support a major shift in how we see our food and where it comes from, so FPF has built a partnership with local CBC, for production of new programming.

The CBC series *From the Ground Up* presented a dozen inspiring, positive stories about local gardeners, harvesters and food innovators. These profiles have included: Kasey Budgell, the fourteen-year-old leading the community garden project in King's Point; a garlic farmer in Ferryland who is water composting seaweed to create a concentrated natural fertilizer; a community composting project in St. John's and the new digital Food Hub distributing food from farmers directly to consumers in Corner Brook. CBC engagement was essential in helping FPF organize and promote the May conference, Regeneration: Soil, Food, Community; CBC staff edited and formatted the 32 presenter videos for the event.

WHERE'S THE FOOD? PROVINCIAL SURVEY

FPF learned that our provincial government, while expressing dedication to food security, has no idea how much or what kinds of food are being grown and gathered at the community level. So, in September of 2022, FPF launched a province-wide survey to identify (for the first time) what is being grown and gathered here. All the work to develop this fully rigorous online survey, approved as human science research by Memorial University, was done by a team of volunteers, with no funding support!

Responses to the survey were received from 750 food producers across Newfoundland and Labrador. Respondents include almost 700 farmers and gardeners, 650 foragers, 170 who raise animals, 300 hunters and 500 who fish. Of these, 85 produce food commercially. The total production of food in 2022 by these survey participants was more than 6.2 million pounds! In addition to identifying what is being grown and gathered and how it is being shared, this research collected comments on the level of training or education in the local food community, what support is needed to expand local production and challenges that food producers are currently facing.

A public forum will be convened in St. John's on March 18, 2023, to share these results and then lead a discussion of how to use this information to improve public policy and regulations affecting local food production. FPF is hopeful that this will help eliminate some of the arbitrary municipal restrictions that are keeping people from producing food in many of our rural communities.

THE ATLANTIC FOOD SYSTEMS SUMMIT

In November of 2022, Chairperson Dan Rubin and FPF Executive Director Samantha Young attended and represented Food Producers Forum at the Atlantic Food Systems Summit, a regional event organized by the Centre for Local Prosperity. This retreat-based conference drew more than 185 presenters from all across our region. Over three days, a series of workshops, panels and discussion groups focused on the challenges facing

everyone in our region, in producing, distributing and accessing healthy, local food. This inspiring event revealed a wide range of initiatives in growing and distributing, as well as processing food. We were particularly inspired by the work of the Station Food Hub, a food processing site in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, and the inclusion of Indigenous partners and perspectives in the conference. We returned home convinced that more effective distribution and processing of local foods will be essential to build a healthy and sustainable food system here in Newfoundland and Labrador.

PROVINCIAL FOOD NETWORK

The next step in a process of rebuilding sustainability in food that has been defined clearly by the conference and the survey will be to build a resilient network connecting food producers at the community level. The mandate for this project was confirmed by our *Where's the Food?* survey results. This network will consist of local community centres for food production, distribution and education, linked by a unique forum-based website currently under development.

FPF is ready to launch the new website, built around a framework of interactive, subject-based forums. Through these forums, community food producers will be able to access reliable information, contact individuals with experience and training, and share effective techniques for local food production. This network will give food producers better access to academic and traditional knowledge.

NORTHERN BERRY PROJECT

A final initiative, waiting on funding from the Weston Family Foundation, is a complex proposal for research into northern berry production. In response to the Foundation's call, issued through their Homegrown Innovation Challenge, to provide ways to produce "marketable berries year-round, at commercial scale," FPF will take a unique approach, based on distributed, community-based berry production, for the harvest of wild and cultivated berries, along with a system of digitally coordinated distribution and marketing, for maximum utilization with value-added products as well as the berries themselves.

Research will be carried out at six sites: one in rural Quebec; an Indigenous community and a commercial farm in Labrador; two commercial farms located on the island of Newfoundland and one hydroponic producer in Mt. Pearl, coordinated by a research team based at the Faculty of Medicine at Memorial University. At each of these sites, key aspects of berry production will be developed and evaluated. This project hopes to define best practice and explore new technologies for berry propagation, production, harvest, distribution and utilization.

The Northern Berry Project will be the most complex and challenging project FPF has undertaken. It will allow FPF to demonstrate a community-based model of food production and distribution that can help our province address the need for healthy, local food, while supporting rural economic renewal along with carbon neutral/sequestration production methods in agriculture.

PARTNERS AND SUPPORTERS

None of this work would have been possible without consistent support from a wide range of groups and funding sources. In the past four years, FPF has raised more than \$170,000 in donations and grants, 90% of which has been distributed to its project sites and partners.

IMPACT OF FOOD PRODUCERS FORUM

The work of Food Producers Forum has transformed the way the public and our local governments think about and approach food production. There is widespread awareness that we have entered a time of food crisis and food emergency, but much of the public discussion to date has focused on these problems and has not generated solutions. Food Producers Forum has been working on the solutions.

FUNDING: To date, FPF has accessed funding and donations from these sources:

- \$45,000 for work terms by five engineering coop students and six coop students in the Faculty of Business;
- \$5,000 for planning of the Earth Sheltered Greenhouse Project, from the MUN Office of Public Engagement (MUN OPE), a project in partnership with MUN Botanical Garden);
- \$10,000 in core funding for the construction of the Earth Sheltered Greenhouse and founding of Food Producers Forum, received from MUN Office of Public Engagement
- \$17,000 for the Earth Sheltered Greenhouse, from the O'Brien Farm Foundation
- \$5,000 in donated materials and discounts for greenhouse construction received from suppliers;
- \$10,000 from MUN OPE for the Greenhouse Outreach Project connecting with rural communities;
- \$5,000 from MUN OPE for the Regeneration Conference project;
- \$1000 from Provincial Department of Industry, Energy and Technology for conference support;
- \$2,000 raised online to support the Guerilla Garlic Gardeners raised bed construction;
- \$19,665 from the Emergency Community Support Fund for greenhouse infrastructure;
- \$17,500 from the federal Investment Readiness Program for communication/outreach;
- \$17,090 from the Community Healthy Living Fund for FPF community outreach projects;
- \$17,000 from Lush Corporation to support core activities and hiring of an executive director.

Along the way, FPF (like many non-profit groups) has found it easy to obtain project-based funding but very challenging to access funds for basic staffing and operation. We continue to wrestle with how to sustain its activities into the future.

PARTNERS

FPF has established strong working relationships with the following groups and organizations:

MUN Faculty of Engineering and Applied Sciences; MUN Faculty of Business; MUN Office of Public Engagement; MUN Faculty of Medicine; MUN Botanical Garden; Provincial Department of Fisheries, Forestry and Agriculture; Provincial Department of Industry, Energy & Technology; NL Federation of Agriculture; Food First NL; Common Ground Community Development Corporation; the Mercy Centre for Ecology and Justice; Western Environmental Centre; NL Autism Society; Single Parents NL; NL Community Garden Alliance; Seeds of Diversity; greeniglu; College of the North Atlantic; NL Community Foundation; Choices for Youth; City of St. John's; The Sha-Ma-Sha Centre; Earth Easy; Firewood Factory; CBC Radio and Television; Backyard Farming and Homesteading NL.

The essential role of FPF is to be a connector and catalyst for change, so these partnerships and links are essential to allow the group to develop and support new programs and projects.

AWARD RECEIVED

The Chairperson of Food Producers Forum, Dan Rubin, received the very first Community Health Champion Award from the Dean of the Faculty of Medicine at Memorial University in June of 2022. This award recognized contributions to community health flowing from the work of Food Producers Forum.

MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS, 2020-2022

- Developed a working model of collaborative, culturally inclusive decision making;
- Defined and advocated for an effective model of community-based food production;
- Has broken through barriers separating and isolating groups and communities In our region;
- Documented more than 6.2 million pounds of undocumented annual local food production;
- Developed and demonstrated new technologies for northern food production;
- Promoted the potential for food security to be based on community capacity and local initiative;
- Identified and developed strategies for meeting needs of vulnerable rural and Indigenous people;
- Connected individuals working on food production through its website, conference and survey;
- Established working partnerships with more than forty other organizations;
- Created new online and media partnership and programs to educate the public;
- Gathered missing data to better inform government policy at municipal and provincial levels.
- Hired an Executive Director, Samantha Young, to assist with project development.

Food Producers Forum is based on the premise that better communication between individuals, groups and communities can create a seedbed for change, so the main metric for its success lies in the degree to which these partners actively engage with this challenge and connect with each other.

While the work of Food Producers Forum is relatively new, and still in progress, there are significant signs that it is already having a major impact on food awareness, food policy and actual food production in this corner of Canada, with major implications for the rest of the country and the world.

In our province Food Producers Forum is a leading agent of change, moving toward a more sustainable, equitable, inclusive and effective way of supplying healthy food. The work of Food Producers Forum challenges each of us to move away from a food system that consumes huge amounts of carbon to produce unhealthy food based on a non-renewable, unsustainable, industrial model that relies on long distance shipping to reach local markets. The work of Food Producers Forum points the way to a very different food system, in which community capacity and better utilization of resources can connect food producers with local markets, in a way that is much more sustainable and ecologically valid.

Food Producers Forum has received national and local recognition for its efforts to realign our thinking and modes of agriculture with methods that are more sustainable, regenerative and affordable, based at the local community level. The work of this group offers an example of what is possible, both here in the north, and around the world. It aligns well with the results of two United Nations studies of world agriculture that determined that to feed the growing population of our planet, we need to support and invest in smaller scale production, at the community level.

Food Producers Forum Annual Financial Report
Submitted by Heather Rhodes, Treasurer
Revised: March 25, 2023

Period Reported: January 1, 2022 - December 31, 2022

Key

IRP	Investment Readiness Program Federal Grant
CHLF	Community Healthy Living Fund Provincial Grant
IET	Provincial Department of Industry, Energy & Technology
LUSH	Lush Corporation
MUN OPE	Memorial University Office of Public Engagement - Greenhouse Outreach Project
MUN BUS	Memorial University Faculty of Business Co-op Student Salaries
BMO	Bank of Montreal

Table 1. Total Income and Expenses - Year over Year

	2021	2022
Income	\$48,610.11	\$27,647.81
Expenses	\$29,243.29	\$22,845.65

Table 2. BMO Account Balance Jan 1 - Dec 31 2022

Opening Balance	\$19,884.05
Closing Balance	\$ 24,686.21

Table 3. Total Income and Expenses by Fund (\$) Jan 1 - Dec 31 2022

	Donations	IRP	CHLF	LUSH	MUN BUSINESS *	IET	Total (\$)
Income	147.82			17,000.00	9499.99	1000.00	27,647.81
Expenses	149.00	9606.21	8090.44	5,000.00			22,845.65
Carry over from 2021		9710.77	11,636.68				
Remainder **				12,000.00			

* Reimbursement for co-op student salaries.

** Excess expenditure from CHLF funds, absorbed by our other funding.

Table 4. Expenses by Category Jan 01, 2022 - Dec 31, 2022

<i>Project</i>	<i>Expense Category</i>	<i>Amount (\$)</i>
Regeneration Conference	Conference Food	\$300.37
	Conference Honoraria	\$2,353.74
	Postage	\$13.61
	Printing - FPF Brochure	\$22.77
	Printing - Annual Report	\$91.08
	Travel	\$50.00
Regeneration Conference Total		\$2,831.57
Atlantic Food Conference	Accommodations, Travel	\$600.00
	Conference Fees	\$280.00
	Printing 2021 Annual Report	\$69.00
Atlantic Food Conference Total		\$949.00
FPF Administration	Advertising Newsletter	\$11.50
	Board Meeting Expense	\$416.28
	Charity Registration Course Fee	\$149.00
	Co-op Salary	\$2,529.61
	Director's Insurance	\$351.90
	Executive Director Salary	\$4,000.00
	FPF Company Registration	\$20.00
	Membership Fees	\$150.00
	Office Expenses	\$60.00
	Office Supplies	\$102.10
Tax Remittances	\$658.99	
FPF Administration Total		\$8,429.38
FPF Web Development	Co-op Salary	\$3,664.77
	Web Developer - Contract Fees	\$2,000.00
	Web Domain Registration	\$216.92
FPF Web Development Total		\$5,881.69

Greenhouse Outreach Project	Consulting fee	\$500.00
	O'Brien Farm Greenhouse Materials	\$415.99
	Printing, Materials	\$51.47
	Transportation	\$517.50
Greenhouse Outreach Total		\$1,484.96
Seedy Saturday	Books	\$120.00
	Printing	\$67.62
Seedy Saturday Total		\$187.62
<i>Where's the Food? Survey</i>	Advertising	\$149.50
	Advertising - Printing Posters	\$56.93
	Samantha Young's Fee	\$2,875.00
Survey Total		\$3,081.43
Grand Total		\$22,845.65