

Full Report | Spring 2022



NFDN EVALUATING SUCCESS, PLANNING THE FUTURE



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Photo: from NFDN Air Creebec Tour 2018

Cover Credit: Ministry of Natural Resources, Far North Branch, 2014

THANK YOU

This research could not have been completed without the openness and sharing of people across Northern Ontario who shared their knowledge and time to support this research. Chi Miigwetch to all the leaders and participants of the Understanding Our Food System project, who have demonstrated new ways of forging plans towards food sovereignty, community building between Indigenous and settler people, and changing the way funding works to adapt to the needs of the people. Merci beaucoup to Professor Charles Levkoe for your substantial research contributions to Canada's academic world of food system development. Your research demonstrates the opportunities for change to a broader audience. And a final thank you to Jen Esposito Springett and Kelleigh Wright for your incredible work on value chain coordination, shaping the future of the work within the Northern Food Distribution Network (NFDN) and beyond.

DISCLOSURE

To be fully transparent, the researcher who undertook this report has a prior history with the Northern Food Distribution Network (NFDN), the Local Food and Farm Co-ops (LFFC), and the agri-food sector. Having previously been contracted by the LFFC, Peggy Baillie was an initial founding member of the NFDN and was later hired to be the first coordinator of the NFDN. Furthermore, Peggy is an agri-food producer engaged in producing and distributing primary foods for direct consumption. The researcher's experiences have influenced their ability to conduct this research successfully. Great care has been taken to ensure that pre-disposed judgments and assumptions be carefully examined and quantified before being included in the study with also objectively looking at the goals set out in this work from outside of prior assumptions to be open to new findings and outcomes.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Northern Food Distribution Network is a multi-sectoral unincorporated organization that has set out to accomplish the monumental task of improving efficiency, resilience, and accessibility of Northern Ontario food value chains. Through the work of numerous stakeholders and meetings, core objectives and strategies were identified to address the challenges within the food value chain to meet this goal. Over the last five years, steps have been taken to work on these challenges. Obstacles such as staff turnover and the COVID 19 pandemic limited the capacity of the network to advance objectives in 2020 and, to some degree, 2021.

Acknowledging that the network was challenged with a large mandate and faced structural obstacles, this research was undertaken to identify the most successful activities of the NFDN and propose actions for the next five years to advance the mission of the network to address food value chain challenges.

To gain conclusions on the successful activities and most impactful next steps, interviews with 25 food system leaders, distributors, and food producers were completed to collect valuable data on the impact of the NFDN, challenges they currently face in their work, and recommendations on how to address said challenges. Supplemental research was undertaken to substantiate the findings from the interviews, and recommendations were composed.

The food distribution system in Northern Ontario is complex. The vast geographic area, dispersed population, climatic considerations, and agricultural capacity play into a functioning but inefficient food system. While there are many food distribution mechanisms, each comes with its challenges. Factors such as the corporate global food economy, lack of food system infrastructure, oppression of Indigenous foodways, and minimal food production capacity contribute to people across Northern Ontario having limited access to the foods they self-determine to be valuable and essential for their sustainability.

Addressing these challenges cannot be done in isolation or by one organization. Bringing together the numerous food system actors and organizations to create a shared plan to classify the work, divide activities to appropriate people and organizations, and collectively learn from each other as the work advances - these are the goals that the NFDN has identified and acted upon to address this complex problem.

The interviews identified that the need for a network such as the NFDN is apparent, as the work needed to address the food value chain problems in Northern Ontario are complex and cannot be done in isolation. Furthermore, through the interviews, the unsolicited recommendation that the network engages in successful networking, education, research, and infrastructure development validated the previously constructed Logic Model. This demonstrated that the proposed activities of the NFDN continued to be relevant.

Building on the collective results of the research, a revised action plan and recommended next steps are outlined to advance the objectives of the NFDN. The proposed action plan builds on existing knowledge. It encourages the development of a sector-wide vision statement of the food system to be constructed and solicitation of new information on the gaps in the food value chain, which can drive future activities, partnership developments, and funding applications.



Air Creebec Plane @ 2018 NFDN facility tour

PROPOSED NFDN ACTION PLAN

Project	Objectives	Outcomes	Results
Pilot Project Oversight	To provide collective oversight of the pilot to assess the project's sustainability.	Participate in 1-3 pilot projects from a co-operative oversight and knowledge transfer	Assess with project oversight through diverse expertise participation.
Value Chain Training	Offer training to support food system actors with the tools to activate change in various ways.	Deliver training at networking events and through online platforms	Have more knowledgeable food system actors
Northern Food Distribution Network Visioning session	To bring together food system actors to create a shared vision of a food system to work towards	Host 1 NFDN facilitated meeting.	Create a clear shared vision of the intent of the work
Networking + Member recruitment	To learn about what work is being done across the North where the gaps are. Build stronger partnerships with other organizations across the North	Host 2- 4 meetings to bring together food system actors to share and collaborate + gain more active members of the network.	Build a more robust network of collaboration and increase knowledge transfer
Database Development	Create a shared database that hosts existing research, data, and information in one easy-to-access location.	Build a website (also in communications plan), and begin aggregating research and data to populate	Have a comprehensive source of data
Gaps Analysis	What are the gaps that need to be addressed based on the vision? How can the NFDN collectively address these gaps?	Gather data from networking meetings to identify gaps in access, data, and infrastructure in Northern Ontario	Identify priority areas of work, projects, and research for future funding.
Communications	Share stories about what is being done in the North to advance food security and sovereignty	Build a more substantial audience and engagement in NFDN	Increase awareness across the food value chain of
Funding	Identify funding priorities based on gaps analysis and networking events. Identify which organizations are best positioned to take on various aspects of the work.	Apply for 2-3 sources of funding to secure funding for 2023-2025	Secure future funding to support the work of the NFDN
NFDN Governance Review	Review core documents to ensure they meet the needs of the NFDN	Review and approve Terms of Reference	Have core governance document

Deeper reflection on the network structure and governance identified core challenges around a lack of clarity around roles, mandate, and how to engage in the work. Interviewees validated these challenges and articulated a lack of capacity to complete all the work needed for the NFDN governance and action plan. These findings resulted in recommendations to build the strength of the network by fostering a more robust environment of collaboration, working to break down silos within the membership, providing fundamental education on value chain coordination, and supporting leaders with the skills and knowledge to keep members engaged and supported as they work together. These recommendations are outlined in conjunction with revised terms of references that address governance challenges around membership and mandate.

Addressing the articulated lack of capacity at the NFDN member level to complete all the tasks of the NFDN, an evaluation of the roles of coordinators and, more specifically, value chain coordinators was undertaken. Based on all the research, it is fully validated that for the NFDN to continue to address the food system challenges, administrative and coordinator capacity is required to support the NFDN members directly while also executing aspects of the action plan. It is unrealistic to expect this work to be completed by members who have already expressed a lack of capacity. To address this, recommendations on building stronger partnerships with organizations across the North and supporting organizations to put the value of the work of the NFDN into work plans of members, therefore increasing their availability and capacity to participate.

To accomplish all this work, the NFDN requires solid visionary leadership, willing to traverse uncharted territory to develop a truly inclusive and collaborative network while breaking down barriers to participation and engagement. There are currently many talented people participating within the NFDN regularly. Supporting these and newly recruited members with the ability to lead well is imperative to the NFDN's success.

The NFDN is the only pan-Northern Ontario network with a mandate specifically on food value chains. It is also uniquely structured to achieve this work through collaboration with other organizations and businesses working in food systems across the region. This mandate and structure position the NFDN to complete strategic activities to address the complex challenges of the food system. This work will not be easy, so celebrating successes as they emerge is essential to keep the perspective of the work moving forward.

This report serves as a guiding document for the NFDN moving forward. Acceptance of the recommendations is at the discretion of the NFDN, but it is hoped that value is found in the research and subsequent outcomes.

CORE HIGHLIGHTS

Networking, Education, Research and Infrastructure Development, Alternative Value Chain Model maintain to be the top priorities of the NFDN

Creating a food system vision with other food system organizations and participants can create more clarity in direction, while providing a greater understanding of the work that needs to be done to achieve the vision

Partnership development is required to increase the capacity of the network and there are several organizations well positioned to partner with the NFDN

NFDN has a responsibility to ensure that Indigenous communities of Northern Ontario are engaged in the design and decision making processes

Supporting NFDN members with value chain training is important to increasing engagement

Executing a communications strategy will foster engagement, while highlighting the successful achievements across the North to build a stronger food system

Acknowledging the limited capacity of members to execute work, the NFDN requires coordination and administrative support to execute its activities

Membership recruitment, along with approving governance documents will strengthen the NFDN capacity

NFDN leadership needs to be courageous in forging a path through uncharted territory of food system development, and foster an environment of collaboration to break down silos while encouraging engagement

BACKGROUND

The idea of the Northern Food Distribution Network (NFDN) began to percolate in 2016, out of the vision of Franco Naccarato of the Greenbelt Fund, to bring together the diverse voices and perspectives of Northern Ontario to address the complex challenges with distributing food across the geographically vast and culturally diverse region. While the early conversations were exploratory, an in-person meeting in October of 2017 spurred momentum and participation to bring the Network to fruition. Since that time, significant work has been done to formulate a structure, governance and overarching documents to guide the activities of the emerging network.

Throughout 2017-2019, food system actors from across Ontario gathered to develop the NFDN, an unincorporated network of food system stakeholders. A terms of reference was designed to structure members into two main groups; a Collaborative Committee focused on leadership and governance and Advisors who were members to share their food system knowledge and experiences to build collaborative solutions to the challenges in the food value chain.

After two in-person meetings in 2018 that brought people from across the North to identify the most pressing challenges and possible solutions to the food system they work and lived in, a logic model and subsequent action plan were created to provide direction to the actions of the NFDN. The network negotiated a partnership agreement with the LFFC to host the network, and funding was secured to conduct the activities of the NFDN.

Unfortunately, significant staff turnover at the LFFC, combined with the onset of COVID 19 and new members of the NFDN, resulted in a lack of direction and clarity exasperated by the uncertainty and crisis arising from COVID 19. Therefore, 2020 was spent trying to find direction while exploring how to respond to the pandemic's food crises. Thankfully in 2021, more momentum was found as environments calmed and members were able to gain and provide perspective. Ten educational events were hosted with 529 participants, which raised awareness around food system challenges and opportunities.

In the fall of 2021, Peggy Baillie, the researcher for this report, was contracted to complete this research report to summarize the successes in food distribution around the NFDN environment since its inception and determine the best next steps to use the knowledge of the NFDN to advance food distribution for the next five years. The subsequent research resulted in 25 interviews with food system leaders, distributors and food producers from across the region, combined with secondary research to validate and substantiate the finding of the interviews.

CONTEXT ON NORTHERN FOOD DISTRIBUTION IN NORTHERN ONTARIO

This report intends to determine the best activities of the NFDN, those in the best position to advance food distribution efforts and create an action plan to direct activities moving forward. Based on the outcomes of the interviews, it was identified that further context on specific aspects of the NFDN was required. Therefore, context sections provide a blend of additional research and data from the interviews to provide a rationale for the suggested next steps. This section intends to balance broadening understanding of the factors contributing to the NFDN's activities, identifying areas of focus the network is best positioned to address, and recommendations on the best activities for the NFDN to engage in.

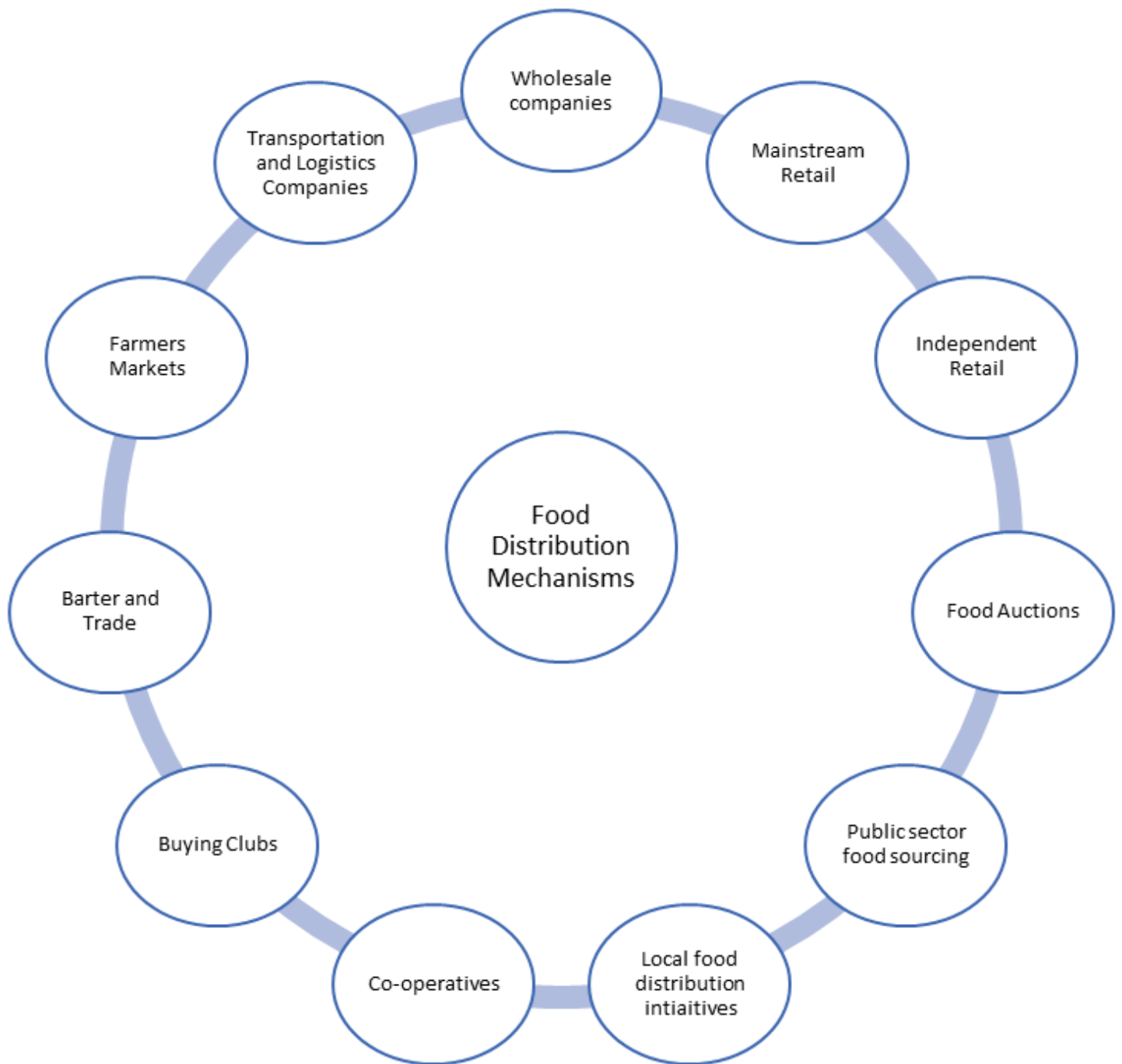
REGIONAL FOOD

In Northern Ontario, a vast array of agricultural, harvesting and fishing operations sell foods to local and out-of-region markets. The most recent data shows that there are 1985 farming operations in Northern Ontario (Ministry of Food and Agriculture 2016). The size of the operation varies from under 10 to over 3250 acres. This is an important statistic, as the agricultural sector is vastly diversified, from cash crops, livestock, horticulture, and greenhouse/ nursery operations. It should also be mentioned that the intent to farm can vary from operator to operator, some with moralistic ideals such as hobbies or homesteading, to more business-focused operations. It is important to note this as not all farms operate as a traditional profit-focused enterprise but may be more intent on lifestyle choices. Understanding that the agricultural industry is so varied is crucial as not all farms can be compared equally when it comes to addressing regional food demands, and with the intent to have operations that can both grow food for human consumption while also being sustainable from a financial standpoint due to scale, crop, size and intent.

The aquaculture and commercial fisheries industry is also an important sector in Northern Ontario. The Ontario Aquaculture Association lists 14 members in Northern Ontario, most located in the Manitoulin Island region. Commercial fishing data is not readily available for Northern Ontario, with the only available data listing 600 commercial fishing licenses currently active across the whole province (Ontario 2022).

While limited data should or does quantify the efforts of Indigenous Peoples of Northern Ontario to participate in traditional foodways, projects like Understanding Our Food Systems, a project of fourteen First Nations in Northwestern Ontario, to rebuild their food systems, demonstrated that Indigenous communities across the North are actively engaged in efforts to revitalize their traditional foodways of hunting, fishing, gathering and cultivation.

Regarding food distribution mechanisms, Northern Ontario is host to various markets driven from the traditional supply chain and from context / demand based on local circumstances. When considering the work of the NFDN in advancing food value chains, understanding these mechanisms is essential. Each method of distribution comes with its context, benefits and challenges.



Mainstream Retail

Conventional grocery stores, with a supply contract through one of the two major grocery distributor companies, either Loblaw's or Sobeys. These contracts bind them to supply contracts, purchasing agreements, and restrictions on carrying products. It can include but is not limited to Independent Grocers, Value Mart, Foodland, No Frills, Superstores etc.

Opportunities

Substantial purchasing power through sourcing contracts, steady supply through automated inventory management, higher margins through trade practices.

Challenges

Bound by contract agreements which restricts local sourcing to limited quantities

Independent Grocery

Independently owned niche retail operations with no large distribution contracts, sourcing supplies from smaller wholesale companies. They can guide their own sourcing decisions but do not have the purchasing power and price breaks with larger supply contracts. Examples include George's Market, Seasons Pharmacy and Culinaria, Trussler's Pantry.

Opportunities

Able to source products based on internal decision making, flexible

Challenges

Narrow margins, lack of purchasing power, can have fluctuations in supply dependent on sourcing

Food Auction(s)

There is currently one food auction in Northern Ontario, the Algoma Produce Auction. On set days, produce farmers can bring their produce to the auction to be sold to the highest bidder. The sale price of the goods is guided by supply, demand and quality. Suppliers cannot drive the end price of the goods.

Opportunities

Flexible to what is currently available on the market, accessible point of entry for producers, opportunities to sell large volumes of goods.

Challenges

Fluctuating prices increase varied profitability for producers, not consistent supply

Public Sector Food Sourcing

Institutions funded through public dollars that source food for clients and patients. Includes but is not limited to: retirement homes, hospitals, schools, sports facilities.

Opportunities

Small to large-scale purchasing capacity purchasing can be influenced through policy and procurement.

Challenges

Constraints based on facility storage and equipment, constraints based on staff cooking skills, bound buy purchasing regulations guided by the governing body

Local Distribution Initiatives

Independent owned or co-operatively managed initiatives that source food from local suppliers to distribute to local consumers as either source ingredients or value-added (i.e. Prepared meals). Examples include Click Fork, Superior Seasons, 807 Co-op, Truly Northern.

Opportunities

Small to medium scale purchasing capacity, able to source from a variety of sources and producers, able to meet direct to consumer needs

Challenges

Access to labour, limitations in distribution based on capacity or access to external distributors, limited volume, narrow margins reduce the ability to sell wholesale to other businesses.

Co-operatives

member-owned businesses collectively pool resources to either sell or source products. Examples include Co-op Regionale Northern Beef.

Opportunities

Depending on scale, additional resources may be available to increase the volume of product sales or access, resources through labour and infrastructure to coordinate purpose of co-op, open membership

Challenges

Limited by business policies and objectives

Buying Clubs

There are several buying clubs, formal or informal, across the North. The goal of these clubs is to reduce food prices or increase access to certain foods that are otherwise hard to source. These can include remote community buying clubs that collectively shop to reduce shipping costs or natural food buying clubs that source from a wholesale supplier as one buyer.

Opportunities

Able to meet unique needs of a select group of people, flexibility on which items to source, collective teamwork to address local challenges

Challenges

Limited capacity to organize larger volumes, commonly lacking transportation, receiving and storage infrastructure.

Barter and Trade

It is traditional practice to barter and trade goods, particularly in Indigenous communities. Goods are exchanged based on a mutually agreed-upon value of the goods.

Opportunities

Outside the colonial market-based system, non-monetary-based, able to exchange goods that value people's skills over the market prices of goods.

Challenges

Difficult to scale, commonly limited to direct relationships

Farmers Markets

Commonly a group of food producers and other artisan vendors who sell at a specific location and day of the week, seasonally dependent. It can also include more bricks and mortar markets such as Goods and Co, Thunder Bay. Examples include Mill Street Market, North Bay Farmers Market.

Opportunities

Autonomy of businesses to operate under their unique needs, reach new audiences for regionally produced foods

Challenges

Limited hours of operation and location, constrained by customer numbers and organizational capacity, high demand of time by producers to participate

Transportation & Logistics Companies

These businesses commonly distribute food to remote and rural communities with limited access to supplies. These companies receive requests from clients, then source the products and ship them to the client for a cost. Commonly in Northern Ontario, this service is offered by airlines and outfitters. Examples include Clark's Outfitting, Wasaya Airlines

Opportunities

Able to access clients in rural and remote areas, can be agile to meet unique demands and pivot when needed, typical to have regular schedules and drop points.

Challenges

Limited storage capacity at some locations can be weather dependent; having a cornered market can lead to higher prices for services,

Wholesale Companies

Traditionally a business-to-business enterprise that supplies other businesses with food and supplies for their operations. Many independent wholesalers in Northern Ontario work with smaller independent retail operations, restaurants and public service institutions. Examples include Loudon's, Massey Wholesale.

Opportunities

Able to move high volumes of foods effectively and efficiently, access to a consistent supply of goods (imported),

Challenges

Limited storage capacity at some locations, can be weather dependent, having a cornered market can lead to higher prices for services, require food auditing compliance to carry products (i.e. Canada Gap)

While there is a wide range of opportunities for food to be distributed throughout the North, producers directly engaged with producing, harvesting or gathering foods are using varied mechanisms to sell their goods; therefore, each mechanism should be valued for its participation in the food value chain.

SECTOR SPECIFIC RESEARCH

Production

Acknowledging the various mechanisms within the food distribution sector, primary producers in Northern Ontario were interviewed to discuss their production capacity, challenges and distribution mechanisms. Those interviewed noted specific challenges associated with expanding their production. These can be categorized under Demand, Labour, Infrastructure, Limited Agricultural Sector.

Every producer that was interviewed said that all their production was explicitly driven by known demand. In an industry with extreme risk and low margins, farmers are unwilling to produce an excess product unless demand is demonstrated. Therefore producers only grow for a known market, based on market research, contracts or forward purchasing.

In those that have attempted to break into new markets based on increased production capacity, many express disappointments on the volume of purchasing through restaurants or grocery stores. It was noted multiple times that restaurants have high needs regarding time and specifics with products but are unwilling to pay for higher quality products. Many were surprised at the low volumes purchased even when purchasers expressed a keen interest in local foods when working with grocery stores. While major grocery chains have budgets specifically to spend on locally purchased goods, trade practices (see note) and other policies can limit the capacity of the local producer to penetrate and sell increased volumes.

Trade Practices within the Grocery Industry

There are a number of commonly used trade practices within the grocery industry that stores use to increase margins. They are not openly discussed but commonly used. This can include:

- **Over and Above:** a % of manufacturers sales given back to a retailer in order to obtain listings
- **Listing Fees:** national chains can request between \$500-\$100,000 as a listing fee for an item.
- **National Agreements:** national chains develop core agreements with sales targets of vendors, where if sales exceed the given target a % is given back to the retailer.
- **Late Delivery Fees:** fees between \$500-\$1000 can be applied to a supplier for orders delivered later than the PO request.
- **Price Freeze Periods:** where a retailer will enforce a price increase freeze to keep prices stable from September to January, limiting suppliers to increase prices even when input prices increase.
- **When large manufacturers are contractually committed and constrained by national agreements, the opportunities for smaller scale to penetrate the market is limited. (Dessureault, 2016)**

The Ontario definition of “local” impedes on regional food purchasing due to supply chain integrated corporations of southern Ontario. Grocery stores can prioritize volume purchasing from greenhouses and indoor facilities in the south over regional produce while still meeting the objectives of their corporate buy local initiatives (retail-insight-network.com 2018).

Larger companies use alternative “local” definitions of legitimizing their purchasing. For example, as stated in their Annual Information Form 2019, Loblaws takes pride in working with “local farmers, fishermen and producers.” More than 30% of the Company’s annual produce purchases are from Canadian growers. During the peak growing season, approximately 50% of the Company’s produce is Canadian grown. The Company’s PC Free From poultry and pork is sourced exclusively from Canadian farmers. While it is essential to value purchasing from Canadian producers, the metrics used to measure food purchasing do not account for provincial or regional purchasing.

As is currently being seen across Canada, labour shortages are a significant issue. In September 2021, the National Farmers Union (NFU) estimated 500,000 job vacancies in the food and drink industry, including agriculture (nfonline.com, Sept 2021). Producers interviewed confirmed that access to labour was a significant limitation for their operations. One producer also noted that chronic staff shortages are attributed to by agriculture not being viewed as a viable career for new entrants to the workforce. This was further validated by the NFU’s report, “Reframing the Farm Labour Crisis in Ontario”, where it was shown that farm labour is devalued in the public perception compounded by low food prices and wages. The labour shortage and cause were further validated by all producers interviewed.

When exploring opportunities to expand, access to infrastructure was a significant limitation. The abattoir crisis is fracturing our food system across Ontario, as the number of provincially licensed abattoirs has dwindled from 229 in 1999 to 115 in 2020, according to OMAFRA. This leaves producers with no access to processing, forcing them to sell to feedlots rather than direct market. In Northern Ontario specifically, there is limited publicly accessible food processing infrastructure found in other places in the province. Shared processing facilities, like the Ontario Food Venture-Center in Colborne, offer opportunities for producers and entrepreneurs to use scalable food processing facilities to add value to their products while meeting food safety standards. No such facility exists in Northern Ontario. While producers like Leisure Farms have taken it upon themselves to build their own facilities, it was indicated through the interviews that publicly accessible infrastructure like canneries, processing spaces, and egg grading stations would elevate producers’ capacity to expand to meet new markets.

The infrastructure limitation may be directly impacted by limited agri-food producers operating in Northern Ontario. A 2016 study on the carrying capacity of agricultural land, it takes between 0.5 to 3 acres of land to feed a person (Peters. 2016). Currently, there are 633,457 acres of land under production (OMAFRA 2016). If all agricultural land under current production were to be used for food for human consumption, it would assume that there would be .8 acres per person, based on 2016 population data of 780140 people living in Northern Ontario. However, this is an over-simplistic perspective, as Northern Ontario cannot produce all foods consumed by the inhabitants based on the climate and soil conditions. Reviewing our agricultural capacity to feed the population of the North would require extensive further study.

The current NFDN objectives outlined in the logic model contribute to the obstacles of demand, labour, infrastructure, limited agricultural sector. Through the education around agricultural policy, research, advisor services, infrastructure development, alternative distribution model, and broader sector education, these activities can each work to address some of the challenges this research outlines. Policy can drive demand which increases agricultural capacity and influences the labour sector; research can assess production gaps, labour issues and infrastructure needs, advisors can assist in all aspects of the food value chain, infrastructure development can address production issues and drive demand by access to processing and storage, alternative distribution models can influence demand, therefore, increasing production capacity influencing infrastructure development, and education can raise awareness of all these issues to assist food system actors in making the change through their work and lives.

Distribution

As the demand for more local and source-identified foods has increased in the past ten years, distributors have been working to find solutions to offer local and regional products to their clients. Unfortunately, in Northern Ontario, that has been a challenge for all those interviewed. For this report, independent distributors directly involved in food distribution were interviewed. These interviews categorized common findings as Limited Agricultural Sector and Food Safety Requirements.

Distributors pride themselves on quality, consistency and timely delivery. Their businesses have been built by developing larger supply chains that manage the global food chain to create the conventional food system as we see it today. The availability of produce of any kind year-round has been 50 years in the making as large multinationals invested in corporate farming around the globe to replace seasonality with consistent supply. As this global food chain has become predominant, consumer demands have also changed to include expectations of having products like romaine or tomatoes whenever they like.

As a result of the current global food system that distributors are working in, there is a high expectation that the products they carry have to meet their standards in quality and availability. All distributors interviewed expressed the challenge of finding any producer that could meet those specifications. While producers have made attempts to have consistent supply, in most cases, the quality has not met the customers' demands, as explained by some distributors interviewed.

One interviewee clearly articulated that proteins in Northern Ontario have the most significant potential to be integrated into the distribution supply chain. That said, the existing challenges with abattoirs, as previously stated, pose a challenge for producers to meet this opportunity. This is why businesses like Penokean Hills were forced to purchase their own abattoir to have consistent processing facilities. Not all producers can buy, own and operate their own processing facilities, so this is not a solution applicable to the broader industry. The support of existing and development of new publicly-accessible abattoirs and processing facilities would begin to address this challenge.

The second main challenge identified by distributors was the external auditing requirements for their food safety and traceability programs. For products to be added as an SKU, they need to meet the distributor's needs, which are not uniform across the industry. Auditing systems like Canada Gap and HACCP are two certifications that can be achieved to support listing products. Still, most producers do not have the volume to justify the investment in these processes. Only one distributor said that they had developed their own internal auditing system that would allow products to be added without these other certifications. Still, again they said that supply was the main issue.

Producers interviewed, when questioned about their potential in working with distributors, those with increased production capacity have developed alternative market mechanisms to distribute their foods. These include initiatives like Click Fork, which aggregates products to be distributed directly to consumers; Co-op Regionale is a co-operative with many divisions, including agriculture, that receives, dries and ships commodities such as oats to larger processors like Quaker Oats and Northern Beef which has a common brand and production practice that aggregates beef to be distributed directly to consumers and other businesses.

As the agri-food sector grows and develops through all the actions of the NFDN and partners, the main factor around the limited agricultural industry, which influences the lack of ability to take on food safety requirements, can be addressed as the industry grows through increased demand, infrastructure, awareness and sector growth. Additional research could be undertaken to assess how working with distributors directly could be addressed, identifying inefficiency gaps in the distribution chain to find ways to increase collaboration and supply efficiency can be used as a tool to build more robust collaborative supply chains. It is recommended for the short term that the NFDN continue to focus on working with alternative distribution models based on the current scale of the ag sector in Northern Ontario, current levels of knowledge and current human resources capacity. A complete summary of this recommendation is included in Next Steps.

Policy

There are examples across Canada where policy could directly influence the development of more sustainable food systems that meet the people's needs. Socioeconomic, cultural and regional factors all play into how people can engage in food, but through inclusive policy, change can happen.

A 2020 study (Wet al. et al.) demonstrated and proposed examples of how policy can shape Indigenous food systems. The Harvester Support Programs (HSP) subsidizes harvesting equipment, tools, and wild game purchases directly from harvesters. The Northern Integrated Commercial Fisheries Initiative prioritizes small-scale Indigenous commercial fisheries. The report goes further to make recommendations of policies that could shape the future of food, such as the development of a Wild Foods Inspection Act “develop specific food safety regulations that enable the sale of traditional/country foods within the North, particularly at public institutions such as schools and hospitals.”

Northern Ontario is fortunate that one of the national leaders in food policy lives in Thunder Bay. Dan Munshaw, Procurement Manager at the City of Thunder Bay, has been forging a new path toward sustainable food systems in his city. Through his role in procurement, and as a person who appreciates the value of a local food system, Dan has been able to use policy to shape the decision-making processes at the city to include regionally produced food, therefore impacting the regional food system. In a recent webinar hosted by the NFDN (Balancing Values and Sustainability Nov 2021), Dan clearly articulated how, through the development of procurement policy at the City of Thunder Bay, they have been able to influence municipal spending on local foods. This is done through contractual agreements and forward contracting. This process involved the creation of agreements to purchase between the producer and the buyer, in this case, the city. This process has allowed local producers to have secured markets for their goods, plan with their buyer for increased production in coming years, build more robust sustainability for their operations while getting more local and nutritious foods to area residents.

At the federal level, food and agricultural policy are influenced by the Agricultural Policy Framework (APF), which defines priority areas for federal and provincial governments. This includes funding recommendations and program development. The Canadian Agricultural Partnership is one program developed out of the APF. While the framework has many strengths, there is ample room for improvement, including developing an inclusive framework that respects food sovereignty and Indigenous rights.

At the provincial level, there are policies that influence local food systems. In Ontario, the Local Food Act 2013 aims to foster successful and resilient local food economies, increase awareness of local food, and develop new markets. The act's goals are to improve food literacy, encourage increased use of local food by the public sector, and increase access to local food. The act is the responsibility of the Minister of Agriculture to create programming to drive the purpose and goals of the act. As the minister is responsible for the programming development, their knowledge of how to enact this work comes through education and advocacy about the current condition in Ontario, so it is the responsibility of constituents and sector organizations to work with the minister to develop and adapt programming to best suit the needs of the whole province.

Multiple participants of the research noted that little change could occur without policy. Recommendations by participants were around advocating for change to the Nutrition North Canada subsidy program to expand the availability of subsidy recipients, community eligibility, reporting and food item eligibility. Additionally, supporting organizations with the tools needed to develop policies to influence purchasing decisions, goals, and metrics could help change purchasing priorities, further strengthening the food system.

As NFDN is not directly involved in advocacy, education is a pillar of the logic model. The NFDN can educate on food policy to shape or influence policymakers. Educating network members on how the Nutrition North Subsidy works would broaden the understanding of the obstacles faced by the program and envision how a different program could look. Sharing examples of how food policy has shaped food systems in other regions could influence policymakers to assess policies that could be developed for their municipality or community to advance food system goals. Furthermore, by collecting data and sharing knowledge about current conditions and recommended solutions with policymakers, these influencers are better positioned to develop policies and programming suited to meet the population's needs.

Food Sovereignty

Due to the devastating actions of the Canadian Government to oppress Indigenous Peoples while actively working to destroy their culture and traditions, most people in Northern Ontario have grown up in a colonial food system guided by corporate interests rather than prioritizing the rights and needs of people. This has resulted in a magnitude of destruction on the livelihoods of Indigenous communities in Northern Ontario and Canada. Confining people to the reservation lands systemically restricted their access to traditional hunting, gathering and fishing, which ensured their food security, forcing them to incorporate a western diet, leading to numerous adverse health outcomes. Furthermore, the abuse and attempted assimilation of Indigenous Peoples through the residential schools system stripped people of their sense of self, culture and community. These have contributed to a wholly fractured food system in Indigenous communities across Northern Ontario and Canada, leading to poor food security and a lack of food sovereignty.

The concept of food security is not a reality with every home. The Voluntary Guidelines to Support Progressive Realization of the Right to Adequate Food states, “Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life. The four pillars of food security are availability, stability of supply, access and utilization.” The most recent data from May 2020 shows that 14.6% of households self-reported food insecurity. But the case is drastically different in Indigenous communities 1 in every two households experiencing food insecurity (Levi, Robin 2020)

The distinction between food security and food sovereignty is important for people across the globe. La Via Campesina, an international peasant movement, defines food sovereignty as a “process of building social movements and empowering peoples to organize their societies in ways that transcend the neoliberal vision of a world of commodities, markets and selfish economic actors...Food Sovereignty is a process that adapts to the people and places where it is put into practice”(viacampesina.org). When we look at the fracture food system, combined with the devastation of Indigenous culture and communities, a focus on food sovereignty is more important for many communities as they work to reclaim their identity and culture. The ability to self-determine how people can engage with, access, and be in relation to the food they eat is a crucial next step towards reconciliation.

COVID-19 has exasperated an already inadequate food system in most Indigenous communities and demonstrated to the world the need to address long-standing deficiencies in the food system. Thankfully, due to the courageous work of many people of the North, work is being done to reclaim the food and build food sovereignty. In the face of the crisis of COVID-19, communities have not only had to address short-term needs. They have also pushed themselves to begin the process of envisioning a long-term solution to the food challenges they face, determining what kind of food system they want to create in their communities.

In interviews with food system leaders for this research, flexible funding and place-based staff shaped their ability to support Indigenous food sovereignty. When the Understanding Our Food System negotiated funding, it was designed to be flexible to the identified needs of the communities, rather than pre-defined metrics set out at the time of the funding application. The funding was used to address self-identified needs within the communities by having flexible spending outcomes, further advancing their self-determination. Additionally, having staff able to be in the communities and meet face to face with those involved in shaping decisions fostered a better trust and responsiveness to the community's needs. Building this trust allowed the conversations to continue and the projects to advance as they are today.

As communities advance their visions for a more food sovereign system, the settler people need to change perspective and ways of understanding and engaging. “For example, the Indigenous ways of being and working are often rooted in their culture and traditions, which are different than that of the priorities of settlers. It has also been identified that Indigenous Peoples may often face different emotional impacts when not working in an environment that is consistent with their beliefs. Facing this reality poses a range of mental and physical health impacts on Indigenous Peoples and the land.” (Levkoe, McLaughlin, Strutt, Ng 2019)

The work of the Understanding Our Food System is transforming the way we can support and encourage collaboration in building food sovereignty on all the land in the North. The Thirteen Moons Poster can be used as a tool to begin to scrape the surface of what food sovereignty can be for the people. It can also be a tool to change how we look at engaging in dialogue around what food is, how to interact with it, and what it means to us.

Harvesting by the moon cycle,
Indigenous Food Circle
(Understandingourfoodsystem.com)



Going beyond the ways to foster spaces and understanding to build food sovereignty, it is essential to recognize the fundamental rights of Indigenous Peoples as we begin to transform our ways of collaboration and community building. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) is an international declaration that “..establishes a universal framework of minimum standards for the survival, dignity and well-being of the Indigenous Peoples of the world and it elaborates on existing human rights standards and fundamental freedoms as they apply to the specific situation of Indigenous Peoples” (United Nations, n.d.). This document is valued deeply in many communities across Northern Ontario as a pillar of hope and justice for a future to come. While the UNDRIP is a comprehensive document, for the purposes of this report, the following sections are noted as they directly relate to the rights of the people of the land and should guide how self-determination, collaboration, and decisions can be fostered within the NFDN.

From The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act:

Article 11

- Indigenous Peoples have the right to practice and revitalize their cultural traditions and customs. This includes the right to maintain, protect and develop the past, present and future manifestations of their cultures, such as archaeological and historical sites, artifacts, designs, ceremonies, technologies and visual and performing arts and literature.

Article 18

- Indigenous Peoples have the right to participate in decision-making in matters which would affect their rights, through representatives chosen by themselves in accordance with their own procedures, as well as to maintain and develop their own Indigenous decision-making institutions.

Article 23

- Indigenous Peoples have the right to determine and develop priorities and strategies for exercising their right to development. In particular, Indigenous Peoples have the right to be actively involved in developing and determining health, housing and other economic and social programs affecting them and, as far as possible, to administer such programs through their own institutions.

Article 29

- Indigenous Peoples have the right to the conservation and protection of the environment and the productive capacity of their lands or territories and resources. States shall establish and implement assistance programs for Indigenous Peoples for such conservation and protection, without discrimination.

Article 31

- Indigenous Peoples have the right to maintain, control, protect and develop their cultural heritage, traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions, as well as the manifestations of their sciences, technologies and cultures, including human and genetic resources, seeds, medicines, knowledge of the properties of fauna and flora, oral traditions, literatures, designs, sports and traditional games and visual and performing arts. They also have the right to maintain, control, protect and develop their intellectual property over such cultural heritage, traditional knowledge, and traditional cultural expressions.

Article 32

- Indigenous Peoples have the right to determine and develop priorities and strategies for the development or use of their lands or territories and other resources.

CONTEXT ON MULTI-DISCIPLINARY NETWORKS

Multidisciplinary networks are professional networks organized by professional services to offer clients new multidisciplinary approaches to solving complex problems (Wikipedia). The significant work done by Nourishing Communities, an academic research collaborative, has shown that community initiatives and networks “ build social capital, encourage co-operation over competition, stimulate social and environmental innovation, offer spaces for business mentorship and knowledge sharing, and contribute to community well-being” (Knezevic 2021) It is through the bring together expertise of varying disciplines, that a wide variety of perspectives and knowledge can collectively approach complex problems. “Community-embedded food initiatives exist in market economies, but make more-than market contributions. They challenge the dominant, industrialized food system, while generating non-monetary benefits in their communities.” (Knezevic 2021) "These.... organizations are key to food system change because they consider the integrated relationships between different discourses, approaches, mobilizing structures and the perceived opportunities of adopting more comprehensive and diversified approaches. (Levkoe 2015) .

As will be outlined below, the complexity of these networks offers unique opportunities and faces specific challenges that need to be addressed to accomplish its goals and sustainability. First, it is important to look at successful examples of multidisciplinary networks in Northern Ontario and Canada that have had a meaningful contribution to the food system.

The Indigenous Food Circle (IFC) is a collaborative network of Indigenous-led and Indigenous-serving organizations that work together to support Indigenous Peoples to address food system challenges and opportunities collaboratively. The network’s goals are to reduce Indigenous food insecurity, increase food self-determination, and create positive relationships with settler people through food.

The IFC was in an excellent position to support First Nation communities when the COVID 19 pandemic hit the North due to the trust and collaboration fostered within the network. In response to COVID 19, the IFC was able to support communities in a multitude of ways, including providing logistic support and value chain coordination to connect communities with distributors for bulk ordering, access for funding for short-term and long term food security and sovereignty needs, and directly connecting communities with existing programmings such as the Northern Fruit and Vegetable Program to increase fresh foods in the communities. (Levkoe et al. 2021) Their broad network, with specific goals, allowed them to directly support those in need during a tumultuous time in our food system.

During the research interviews, why and how the Indigenous Food Circle has had such an impact was raised. The answers pointed towards the “real money” behind the work that could be spent where it was most needed, plus having ongoing resources and people in the places where they were needed made the most significant impact.

In between 2009- 2013, Professor Charles Levkoe, Canada Research Chair in Equitable and Sustainable Food Systems, studied three provincial networks across Canada: British Columbia Food Security Network, Food Matters Manitoba, and Sustain Ontario. Levkoe's research identifies the strategies that sustained these networks while allowing them to be effective makers of change through collaboration and networking: coordinating physical networking spaces where organized or incidental collaboration can occur, using virtual networking spaces such as listservs and digital newsletters to maintain connections and foster collaboration, and using networking mechanisms to organize and impact provincial food policy. Through this work, these three core strategies identified allowed the networks to pull together unlikely allies, foster collaboration, and empower organizations to take action within their own work to advance food system goals. All three networks, through these strategies, have had a notable impact on the food systems in their province, advancing food programming, changing policy and fostering collaboration. (Levkoe 2014)

Through multi-sectoral networks that bring together diverse actors from multiple disciplines, actual change can occur through sharing knowledge, building understanding, and finding ways to work towards common goals (Levkoe 2017). Both the Indigenous Food Circle and Professor Levkoe's evaluation of provincial food networks demonstrate that networks can effectively impact food systems through relationships, communication, and collaboration.

Many networks intentionally decide to remain unincorporated and ad hoc based on the complex issues they are facing. This allows the network to be more nimble but also the network will face other challenges like access to funds, staffing and administrative oversight. Put simply, an immense amount of energy is required to sustain network coherence and function. Still, it needs to be exerted in a way that recognizes and works with the actors' diverse perspectives and the network's decentralized structure (Levkoe 2015). Those interviewed validated this, explaining that they are unsure of the network's mandate and unclear about their roles. This lack of clarity can be sourced back to the infancy of the network and its member's participation and a lack of clear direction. Additionally, many participants echoed their lack of capacity to engage in the work of the NFDN based on an already overwhelming workload in their occupations or livelihoods.

As networks strive to bring together diverse voices to share and learn from each other while working towards a common goal. This requires fostering spaces that allow everyone to be engaged. Commonly, networks and large organizations suffer “silos,” which are defined “as psychological boundaries creating compartmentalization, segregation, and differentiation” (Waal et al., 2019). Organizations that suffer from a silo mentality can stifle collaboration, knowledge exchange and overall organizational impact. In the research, many interviewees responded that they were unclear what their role was and how they were meant to contribute. This has led to a lack of participation and a sense of confusion at some of the NFDN meetings.

For this reason, it is prudent to explore the ways to avoid and break down silos as described in “Silo-Busting: Overcoming the Greatest Threat to Organizational Performance.” The following is a table that summarizes strategies to create an inclusive, engaged organization:

Structure	Method
<p>Values: to promote collaboration as a common value</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create values to support collaboration • Create a shared identity with a common goal that brings
<p>Collaborative Operating Model: how to make collaboration easier</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create clarity of roles, responsibilities and outcomes • Create processes that foster collaboration • Create projects that stimulate collaboration • Create space to discuss and resolve conflicts and build trust • Develop indicators to measure collaboration
<p>Collaborative Environment: Creating a collaborative mindset, behaviour and culture</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure equity and justice for all involved • Create methods for clear communication and knowledge sharing across the organization • Create spaces, informal and physical, where members can interact, bond and get to know each other
<p>Leadership: demonstrating and promoting collaboration</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support the development of interpersonal skills with leaders to enable them to collaborate • Leadership demonstrates a collaborative behaviour
<p>People Reward and Development: rewarding people for their collaborative behaviour</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruit people with the collaborative mindset and networking skills • Provide training to build collaborative skills • Visibly recognize and reward people who collaborate

Source: Silo-Busting: Overcoming the Greatest Threat to Organizational Performance 2019

NFDN MOVING FORWARD

The structure of the NFDN offers ample flexibility for the network to serve the needs of Northern Ontario in several ways, provided that it can support its members through visionary leadership, education and support. The NFDN is forging a new path into uncharted territory, working to address the monumental needs of a broken foods system while fostering collaboration between settler and indigenous Peoples to develop a future that addresses the needs of all. No one knows the best way to do this, but it is through listening, understanding and responding in a way that has all the people's needs and challenges at heart that the best attempts at change can happen.

By being a diverse network of skilled and knowledgeable people, these human resources can address unique challenges as they arise. If the NFDN can build collaboration and build recognition for its diverse expertise, advisors could respond to specific project needs as they arise. Respondents of the interviews explicitly said that access to mentorship and guidance to address core challenges was a significant weakness in advancing projects. If the members of the NFDN can provide direct knowledge exchange with emerging projects, such as new abattoirs, or distribution initiatives, the hope is that further success will be achieved.

Almost every respondent valued the opportunity to bring people together to learn from each other and cooperate to explore solutions to complex problems. This builds on the previously stated evidence on the impact of collaboration. The value of facilitated networking sessions, bringing people together from across the food value chain, offers a space to reduce isolation and fuel momentum to keep doing the hard work that each actor is doing to build a more robust food system. It is difficult to quantify the impact of these meetings, as there may not always be direct outcomes, but as we look to change how we foster new ways of being, building a community of collaboration is an evidence-based approach to strengthening impact.

The NFDN has a clear problem statement and goal but lacks a vision of what it is working to create. Having a vision supports those engaged in the work with a place to work towards while creating a sense of purpose by having some higher vision of what the effort is worth. Many respondents noted that the lack of clarity around the mandate of the NFDN was a barrier to participation. Various ways to address this lack of clarity are noted throughout this document. Included in this should be the development of a collaboratively created vision of the future food system for Northern Ontario that can be fostered through the efforts of multiple communities, organizations and regions.

It should also be noted that if there is higher clarity around the mandate and the vision, more time can be dedicated towards direct action rather than figuring out what is to be done. Only a small portion of time should be required to address governance needs, while most of the time should be dedicated to direct activities that drive the NFDN towards the goal and vision. That said, priority should be put toward recruiting members to build the network and choosing leadership for the collaborative committee, which has the visionary leadership to drive the network forward.

CONTEXT ON VALUE CHAIN COORDINATION

Value Chain Coordination is defined by building collaboration between various businesses, actors and communities across the food value chain, with the overarching goal of improving the conditions within the food value chain. This work is built mainly on soft skills such as relationship building, matchmaking and communication. Through this work, broader food system actors can create, use, and sustain infrastructure within their communities to meet food goals.

It should be understood that this work has been done for centuries, unknowingly by those engaged in the work. From farmers connecting farmers to trade seed, to Indigenous Peoples sharing land knowledge as they travelled and met with other communities, to public health nutritionists working with local retailers to carry fresh fruits and vegetables. All these are acts of value chain coordination. There has been a concerted effort to improve the regional and local food systems away from a corporate, industrialized food system in more recent years. A new language was developed to promote this work and encourage more active participation in food value chain change.

The Wallace Center at Winrock brings together diverse people and ideas to co-create solutions that build healthy farms, equitable economies, and resilient food systems. The Wallace Center popularized the concept of food Value Chain Coordination. To this day, The Wallace Center is continuing to advance this work through several programs offered, including their Community Food Systems Mentorship Program and Systems Leaders Retreats. These programs bring together food system actors to advance their skills in value chain coordination through mentorship and direct learning opportunities from experts in the field.

The most recent work, *Bridges and Barriers in Northern Ontario Exploring Food Value Chain Coordination* by Jen Esposito Springett and Kelleigh Wright released in 2021, provides a detailed description of the landscape in Northern Ontario and the role that value chain coordination can play in impacting the food value chain. This groundbreaking work for Northern Ontario outlines the North's challenges and the opportunities to advance this work.

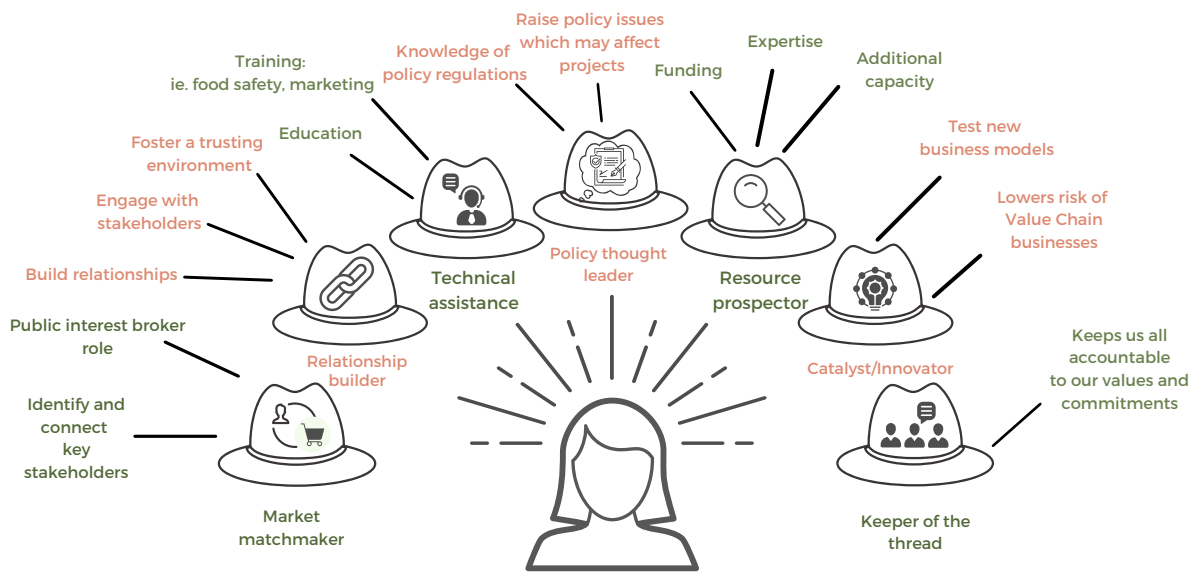


Image Credit: (LFFC) Redekop, Adapted from Wallace Centre Roles

The report outlines key recommendations to advance food value chains: Increased Capacity, Training and Leadership Development, Collaboration, Place-Based Learning. Increased capacity refers to the current lack of capacity within organizations to include value chain work as a priority in their work plans. Amplifying the value of this work into funding agreements and work plans can elevate the potential for actors to take on these roles. Training and Leadership Development acknowledges that all leaders do not have all the knowledge and that continued learning is required to support all the people they are working with. Fostering more opportunities to learn from each other on the successes and challenges while discussing complex issues can help leaders advance food system goals holistically. Collaboration recognizes that this work cannot be done in isolation. Fostering space and ways for collaboration will bring more knowledge and expertise together to address the complex issues of the food system. Place-based learning refers to developing a comprehensive training program that is accessible while offering value chain coordination principles, best practices, and fundamental food system knowledge.

Further research points to key mechanisms that facilitate the development of relationships between diverse activists, including mediation by a third party broker, meetings and events that serve as important contact points, and communication technologies that support ongoing contact between distant allies (Levkoe 2015).

While there has been an advance in the language and importance around value chain coordination, a next step is needed to decolonize our approaches as we build a more just and equitable food system, including all people and cultures into the work. Approaches to this are discussed in Next Steps.

ROLE OF NFDN COORDINATOR

The NFDN is a complex network of various actors and members, all contributing in unique and special ways. For this report, particularly in improving the value and outcomes of the NFDN, the recommendations on Value Chain Coordinators will be divided into two segments: NFDN Members and paid NFDN Coordinators.

Understanding that all people are coming to the NFDN to contribute their knowledge from various capacities requires respect for where people are coming from. That said, participants need to have clarity around their role, participation, and the benefits they receive from being engaged. As was demonstrated earlier, the role of leadership is in breaking down silos, fostering an environment of co-operation, bringing value and recognition of the work and clarifying roles.

Resources should be put towards ensuring that network members have a fundamental understanding of the role of Value Chain Coordination, that each person does not need to wear all hats, but through collaboration, a variety of skills and knowledge can be used to address an obstacle or challenge. Additionally, fostering the collaborative space to break down silos will increase the group's productivity.

Throughout this research, it has become apparent that active members (Collaborative or Advisors) have limited capacity to do all the work required by the NFDN. Beyond attending meetings and doing specific tasks, it cannot be expected to have volunteers take on the bulk of the work. Therefore it is recommended that the NFDN continues to have compensated coordinator(s) to advance the work.

A core coordinator or project manager could be a “keeper of the thread.” A person aware of all the various moving parts of the work of the NFDN, with a particular focus on supporting those participating in the network to advance the goals of the NFDN through their work. This person can complete activities of the action plan but also work to identify who else could participate in the activities and take on various tasks. As the NFDN is a collaborative network, it should not be the intent that the coordinator is responsible for completing all the tasks but building the collective capacity to work toward the shared vision.

RECOMMENDED NEXT STEPS

Considering the research results outlined previously, the following summarizes the recommended next steps of the NFDN. This summarizes the most important and influential actions of the NFDN.

NETWORKING

The value of the networking opportunities was identified as one of the most impactful activities of the NFDN. While hard to quantify all the outcomes from such events, the respondents acknowledged that the chance to create new relationships, build collaboration, and share knowledge was impactful to their ability to do their job and advance food system goals.

The impact of networking events was further outlined by the effects of multi-sectoral networks, demonstrating that through these events, people can break down isolation, build better working relationships, and foster collaboration in ways that are more challenging when working alone.

The NFDN should continue to value the opportunities to have networking and collaborative working sessions to share knowledge, gain perspectives on challenges across the food value chain, and design innovative solutions that can be collaboratively worked. It is recommended that these meetings be facilitated to increase participation while also valuing the participants' time.

EDUCATION

Education efforts of the NFDN should be focused on providing knowledge to the target audience (See NFDN Governance Structure) to bring broader food value chain knowledge that will allow a wide variety of actors within the food system to assist with change, directly with the NFDN and indirectly through their own work.

Educational opportunities could be developed through, but not limited to, sharing the following: research data, the value of local and regional food systems, system challenges and opportunities identified, innovative models to address food system challenges (including food branding, community projects and collaborative efforts), how policy changes food system outcomes, food sovereignty and land-based approaches for food systems.

RESEARCH & INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT

One of the initial objectives of the NFDN action plan was to do a feasibility assessment of a food hub in Northern Ontario. Before embarking on a complete feasibility study, members of the NFDN conducted initial research with distributors to assess the potential and need for a food hub in any district of Northern Ontario. This research showed that it was recommended not to proceed with the feasibility study at the time of the study but to invest resources in education to drive consumer demand and develop a platform to utilize the existing transportation network to increase the distribution of regional foods.

While this was just a preliminary study, assessments and research such as this can influence projects advancing to meet the needs of Northern Ontario food security and sovereignty. As infrastructure was identified as the main barrier for increased production, the NFDN can play a role in conducting valuable research to assess the feasibility of infrastructure models across the north to scale up regional production.

One of the noted data weaknesses in all the research was the lack of information on where food is moving, what trucks are on which routes, inefficient loads, and what is currently being produced in Northern Ontario. Thankfully the Northern Ontario Farm Innovation Alliance is completing a food production assessment for the North. This work can be built on by conducting further research to gain a complete picture of the food value chain in Northern Ontario. A suggestion from interviewees was for the NFDN to assess the capacity to create digital infrastructure to use the existing transportation network to move products more efficiently around the North. Whether this is possible requires further investigation, but evaluating how this missing data gap can be addressed is worth consideration.

Beyond research, there are other ways for the NFDN to partner in infrastructure development. Current or emerging initiatives offer opportunities to change the Northern Ontario food value chain. Current projects, like the Dryden Airport with Loomex group and 807 co-op, could help to shape the future of food distribution into multiple communities in the Northwest and the Far North. The NFDN can partner with supporting the assessed potential of this infrastructure development. Additionally, in 2021 the Liberal government pledged \$1 billion over five years to develop school food programs. While this will take time, it was identified through the research that the distribution networks created through government-funded programs could assist in leveraging new distribution opportunities to currently underserved communities (Northern Fruit and Vegetable Program). If and when the school food programs are advanced, the NFDN can partner with coordinating bodies to assess ways to leverage the program's food distribution to advance further food goals across the North.

These suggestions for NFDN participation in research and infrastructure development are mere examples of how to engage. The key point is that there is a need for this work to be done, and respondents point to the NFDN as the network that should lead and be involved in this work.

ALTERNATIVE VALUE CHAIN MODELS

With raising awareness around the food crises in remote communities, there has been a significant increase in private enterprises courting communities and food systems leaders to find new business servicing the North. Seen as an opportunity to increase sales rather than find solutions, many research respondents were skeptical of southern food distributors and food systems solutions businesses.

The value of the existing conventional distribution system that feeds us every day should not be dismissed. Under the current political and market conditions, privately owned businesses have no market-based incentive to reduce distribution costs. Companies would decide to lower pricing or collaborate with local initiatives to improve the food value chain through moral or altruistic reasons. In a ten-year study of 50 supply chains, Narayanan and Raman found that “Every firm behaves in ways that maximize its own interests, but companies assume, wrongly, that when they do so, they also maximize the supply chain’s interests... We found, in more than 50 supply chains we studied, that companies often didn’t act in ways that maximized the network’s profits; consequently, the supply chains performed poorly.” (Narayanan, Raman 2004). The key finding from this research showed that when companies work with their best interests first, rather than respecting the whole supply chain, there are bound to be failures as each factor is not working on collaboration with the other, but instead just serving its own needs. When we look at building a more robust food value chain, addressing how we build stronger collaboration throughout the value chain can have many outcomes, from reduced cost to higher efficiency to reduced environmental impacts from inefficient systems.

Suppose it is true that distributors are not incentivized to reduce costs. Should that be an objective of the NFDN, then to look at how alternative distribution models can leverage the network’s goal of improving the efficiency, resilience and accessibility of Northern Ontario food value chains would be prudent. Alternative distribution models can act as inspiration or as opportunities like Arctic Coops offer offset solutions to reduce food costs by diversified member-owned services that have higher margins to reduce food costs. Or the current 807 Pilot Project working with Clark’s to distribute foods to the North, increasing product offering and lowering costs.

Alternative models can also work in conjunction or partnership with a conventional distributor or retail chains; as Narayanan and Raman point out, to truly improve a supply chain, all partners need to agree on shared incentives to optimize the supply chain, while all are benefiting from its efficiency (Narayanan, Raman 2004). An example of this type of shared value model could be identifying a method whereby food can be backhauled on an empty load to a location, but the client incurs reduced shipping fees due to the understanding that this improves the profitability and efficiency of the distributor, while also meeting the needs of the client or community. The work to negotiate shared value between the conventional distributor and client could be the role of a value chain coordinator, acting as a mediator to find a shared solution.

Further research could be undertaken to assess the gaps and inefficiencies with the current food distribution system. By mapping existing supply chains, pending the cooperation of distributors, opportunities to change the effectiveness to move products throughout the North could be identified. This research, however, would require the investment of resources in the form of funding and appropriate partnerships with supply chain actors and research facilities. This could be a future activity of the NFDN should it be identified as a priority.

Case Study: Northern Fruit and Vegetable Snack Program (NFVP)

Operated through the Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association and funded through the Ministry of Health and Long Term Care, the NFVP provides over 3 million servings of fresh fruit and vegetables over 20 weeks from January to June with over 50% of the product being grown in Ontario.

While the program suffered supply challenges as a result of COVID 19, it was through partnerships that the program has improved distribution chains in the North. By consolidating programs, such as the school milk program with the NFVP they were able to become much more efficient at getting fresh foods to the school. Also by funding distributors to deliver to more remote areas, these businesses were furthermore able to distribute more foods to previously underserved clients in the areas.





VALUE CHAIN COORDINATION

Case Study: 807 Co-op partnership with Clark's.

Clarks is an outfitter operating over 30 hunting and fishing outposts across Northern Ontario. Over the years they have developed strong relationships with 12 communities as they would transport members to their hunting grounds, and provide supplies on their float plane service.

When COVID 19 happened, major supply disruptions occurred for most remote communities. Members reached out to ask Clarks to send additional items such as food to the communities, which they happily started doing, with compassion and transparency.

As this distribution partnership continued, Clark's started working with 807 Co-op and Northern Beef, to distribute northern produced foods to the communities.

This partnership has allowed remote community members to have access to nutrient dense foods, at comparable prices to previously sourced foods.

Breaking down the perceived barriers for participation within the NFDN, in conjunction with contracted human resources to advance the activities, are crucial elements required to see success with the NFDN.

Supporting members with the fundamental education of Value Chain Coordination is recommended to allow members to recognize that they do not need to have answers to all the problems and that the knowledge they hold is valuable in its own right, but through collaboration that the diverse expertise can address the complex challenges with the food system. As stated throughout this report, leadership at the NFDN is responsible for supporting the membership with the appropriate tools to foster collaboration and engagement.

The articulated lack of capacity by members to execute the activities of the NFDN signals the need for direct staff support. Having a coordinator for the NFDN will allow core administrative activities to be accomplished while also specific project-related work is required to advance the action plan. If conditions support, having value chain coordinators throughout the North would allow a truly inclusive network for place-based coordination and relationship development.

Acknowledging that we live in a colonial food system that does not address the people's cultural, environmental, or health needs is core to moving towards a different future. As demonstrated in this research, changing the ways we engage, create space and foster self-determination as stepping stones towards reconciliation and building a stronger future.

Understanding our Food System has shown us that supporting people to decide what they feel is best for them can be the first step towards creating change that will last. If people are included in the decision-making process, they are more likely to participate willingly. Moving beyond adapting or modifying our existing food distribution system and opening up to the possibilities of different ways of being allows more place-based solutions to occur. Accepting practices such as barter and trade, in conjunction with self-determined new initiatives as opportunities to strengthen the food system, should be considered.

As Article 18 of the UNDRIP articulates the rights of people to participate in decision making, it is fundamental that the NFDN be inclusive in ensuring that decisions being made towards future actions be made in conjunction with the Indigenous Peoples they impact. Additionally, Indigenous Peoples' open participation at the NFDN should be fostered and welcomed. Significant efforts may be required to be a fully inclusive and just network, but fundamentally there is no other choice if the outcomes of the NFDN will address the needs of all people of Northern Ontario.

FOSTERING COLLABORATION

The NFDN was created as a network specifically to allow people and organizations across Northern Ontario to work together to advance the actions of the NFDN. That said, more needs to be done to foster direct collaboration with partners and fellow people working on shared goals.

A concerted effort should be made to create more direct partnerships with organizations and communities across the North. This report outlines other potential partnerships, but the list is not exclusive. Creating more direct partnerships, recognizing the work's shared value, and allocating resources will advance the activities.

Fostering collaboration can also increase cooperation with Indigenous communities and members. Creating a space of open dialogue and participation, providing ample time to explore stories, challenges and solutions, and being open to changing the colonial/ settler ways will offer more opportunities for collaboration with Indigenous communities.

Finally, the NFDN needs to demonstrate the behaviour they wish to see and work to create space for collaboration through breaking down silos. With the support from coordinators, a thriving network can be developed in time if the leadership puts intent towards these pursuits.

NFDN GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

In reviewing all the aspects of the NFDN, a review of the NFDN governance structure was conducted to assess opportunities for improvement that tie back the research. The following is a summary of the governance structure and activities with recommendations.

The NFDN is an unincorporated network composed of food system leaders and stakeholders from across Northern Ontario. The terms of reference outline the roles and responsibilities of an Advisory Committee and a Collaborative Committee. The Advisory Committee is responsible for working with project partners on shared goals, providing recommendations for actions to meet the objectives of the NFDN, and sharing knowledge that will broaden network members' understanding of the complex Northern Ontario food system. The Collaborative Committee is a smaller group focused on network governance, monitoring and evaluation.

When the Terms of Reference were developed in 2019, there was gaining momentum to advance the participation in the Network through events planned in the fall of 2019. Unfortunately, those events were unable to be held due to health challenges experienced by the facilitator and were postponed till the spring of 2020. Further challenges were met with the advancement of COVID 19 and contractor turnover at the LFFC. The lack of ability to host in-person events has dramatically impacted the ability of the NFDN to increase member participation due to the fractured nature of the crisis and food system as a result of COVID 19.

Turnover at the LFFC resulted in a lengthy onboarding process as the contractors were tasked with familiarizing themselves with the NFDN. This was a challenge due to the infancy of the network, lack of engagement and new governance structure. As most people at the table were new, a lack of clarity continued to percolate through the membership as to the direction of the NFDN, which led to further delays.

Thankfully, before the March 2020 COVID 19 initial lockdown, funding was being sourced to execute the NFDN action plan through the lead organization, LFFC. As the NFDN decided early on not to directly engage in completing work directly, the decision was made to work with partner agencies across the North as a priority to build stronger collaborations and balance the work through a variety of perspectives, voices and people. Since early 2020, the LFFC has continued to advance the goals of the NFDN through the work of contractors hired across Northern Ontario to support the objectives and action plan. See the Action Plan summary below.

NFDN TARGET AUDIENCE

It is crucial to provide clarity about who the NFDN's audience is to focus on the outcomes and direction of the work. Fundamentally, the NFDN should be focusing on directing the work towards those sector audience actors who can use the information from the NFDN to influence programming, policy and projects. The following is a chart of the target audience and why.

Sector	Outcomes of participation
Logistics and Transportation (e.g. freight, airlines, trucking, shipping)	Build relationships with potential clients, guide how to improve transportation of goods, data access to assess and assist with new opportunities and programming
Distribution	Assist in finding solutions to distribute foods, access to data to assess and assist with new opportunities and programming
Agriculture and Primary Production	Find ways to develop new markets for local foods and have data to assess new agricultural production and marketing opportunities
Community Organizations with a mandate around food and/or agriculture	Create connections with other value chain participants, learn more about the food value chain, have access to data to support programming decisions
Food Processing	Find ways to develop new markets for local foods have data to assess new opportunities for production and marketing
Food Retail	Find ways to develop new markets for local foods, have data to assess new opportunities and assist with further retailing of foods

Sector	Outcomes of participation
Food Access Programs (food banks, pantry programs etc.)	Create connections with other value chain participants, access to information to improve supply chains
Economic Development	Participate in developing economic development policy, funding and solutions in food, agriculture and distribution
Funding Agencies	Participate in developing economic development policy, funding and solutions in food, agriculture and distribution
Provincial and Federal Government	Identify opportunities and gaps in policy or infrastructure to improve Northern Ontario food value chains
Public Health	Develop relationships and connections to deliver more robust public health programming
Education	Learn about gaps in knowledge within the food value chain, and develop new learning opportunities for Northern residents
Local government	Develop relationships with individuals and organizations that can assist in advancing local municipal goals and identify new opportunities

ADVANCING NFDN

While the NFDN development has been slow, evidence shows that the current conditions support substantial momentum being gained in 2022 and beyond. Fundamental changes include the development of the understanding of Value Chain Coordination and the role that NFDN members can play in this work, the new 807/Dryden Airport Pilot Project, and current funding and human resources capacity. In conjunction with the substantial governance development work already completed, these advancements put NFDN in an excellent position to proceed.

That said, it is imperative that current and new members of the NFDN understand why they are there, what their role is and how they are meant to engage. This means that both leadership and staff are responsible for sharing core documents such as the terms of reference, logic model, and value chain explanation. In addition, setting the stage at meetings to ensure that people understand the purpose of their participation would increase valuable participation.

Furthermore, based on the evidence from multi-sectoral networks and the interview findings, the overall effectiveness of the NFDN can be tied back to capacity, both in the forms of human resources and funding. As many interviewees stated that they are currently overstretched and doing this work “off the side of their desks,” coordination and administration capacity is required to facilitate the work of the NFDN. Further in the report, details on coordinator roles are explained. The ability to have human resources is directly tied to funding. Both staffing and activities funding are needed to complete the network's objectives. Without said funding, there would be severely limited capacity to continue the work of the NFDN.

The NFDN was explicitly designed not to be an incorporated body but to act as a convener of existing organizations to support the work happening across the North. To advance this objective, it is recommended that the NFDN create more semi-formal partnerships with communities and organizations across the North to leverage participation, support mutual goals, and work together to advance the work. Some partnerships that could be created with organizations that are doing mutually beneficial work are

This list is not exclusive but rather a starting point of identified organizations currently working in food system development in Northern Ontario.

- Indigenous Food Circle
- Northern Ontario Farm Innovation Alliance
- Northern Ontario Indigenous Food Sovereignty Collaborative (NOIFSC)
- Northern Ontario Transportation Task Force
- Nourish Collaborative: Northern Ontario School of Medicine and NOIFSC
- Rural-Agri Innovation Network
- Thunder Bay Food Strategy
- Understanding our Food System

As a part of this research, a review of the draft terms of reference was undertaken. The appendices include a revised version of the terms of reference, including previously drafted amendments and new additions. It is recommended that the NFDN take the time to approve this document to have a foundational document to outline the organization's governance.

To build on the structure of the NFDN as built into the terms of reference, it is recommended that a formal structure of Collaborative Committee Meetings be accepted to minimize duplication of time and efforts around governance. The Collaborative Committee is recommended to meet quarterly, with specific meetings to review: Annual Action Plan, Governance and Membership Review, Partnership Review, Metrics and Measurements Review. By organizing and dividing these tasks, Collaborative Committee Members can focus their participation in the NFDN in concrete, task-oriented ways and provide calculated results. A sample schedule of meetings is included in the appendix.

Revising the action plan should be a process that is done annually to ensure that clear, concrete actions are being completed to advance the goals of the NFDN. This can be a living document adapted and changed as conditions change but should be used as a guide to direct the work and measure outcomes of the valuable time and resources put into the NFDN. A draft 2022 action plan has been included below based on the priorities identified in this research.

Finally, for the NFDN to be an effective tool of change in the food system in Northern Ontario, the leadership at the Collaborative Committee needs to take the responsibility of leadership by exhibiting the qualities that will support the participants in the network to make change. This may require recruiting specific people with the skills to be the leaders of the NFDN. Some of these qualities that directly affect the ability of an organization to make change are:

- **Champion** – a person willing to ensure that the progress does not die due to a lack of attention, advocates for the end goal, and supports others to move with them to promote change
- **Role Model** – a person modelling the behaviour and attitude that you wish to see in all those participating with you
- **Decision Maker** – a person willing to make decisions based on assessing the best options available. Be able to set priorities and actions
- **Communicate** – a person who is the voice of the change. Offer consistent messaging about where you are going and what is the change you want to see
- **Engage** - a person willing to participate in the work, supporting those around them, acknowledging the challenges and difficulties, and motivate people to work together
- **Hold Accountable** – a person who is accountable to the change you want to see, and ensure that others do the same

NFDN ACTIVITIES

- 2016
 - Initial meetings hosted by Franco Naccarato (Greenbelt Fund) with Kendal Donahue (OMAFRA) & Peggy Baillie (LFFC)
- 2017
 - First advisory meeting in February
 - First in person meeting- October in Thunder Bay - Facilitated by Amanda Sheedy
- 2018
 - Two in-person network meetings held (Thunder Bay and Timmins) Facilitated by Peggy Baillie -38 People attended
 - Logic Model created from outcomes of meetings
- 2019
 - Terms of Reference Created
 - Action Plan Finalized
 - Funding Applied For to support action plan
 - Food Terminal Feasibility Completed
 - Pilot projects launched
 - Two in-person meetings planned by cancelled due to faciliator illness
- 2020
 - COVID 19 hits
 - Staff Turnover at LFFC
 - 5 steering committee meetings held
- 2021
 - 3 steering committee meetings held
 - Value Chain Coordination research and report completed
 - 10 Education and Training sessions held - 529 participants

In 2019, an action plan was developed for the NFDN to outline the priorities and actions for the network. When funding was applied for through the LFFC, the Action Plan was integrated into the Health Food Distribution Project, which supports contractors hired to execute the actions of the NFDN action plan. The following is a status update on the project's progress.

PROGRESS UPDATE: 2019 ACTION PLAN

Project	Project Lead	Status	Results
Governance Development of Northern Food Distribution Network	NFDN	In Progress	Terms of reference development and amendment + NFDN research report 2022
Feasibility of Food Terminals/ Hubs in the North	RAIN	1 Completed	Feasibility of food hubs identified as not feasible at the time of completion
Branding of Northern Ontario Foods	Tourism Northern Ontario (TBD)	Postponed	*See note
Annual networking events to bring together distributors, producers and buyers across the North	LFFC	Ten webinars completed	Networking events have been a challenge in COVID, but more trainings have been offered.
Parallel project delivery in three communities fly-in, rural, urban)	NFDN	One project in development	One project in progress
Funders Forum	NFDN	Complete	

Note: In regards to Branding of Northern Ontario Foods:

"The Common Culinary Tourism Branding deliverable is on indefinite deferral for a few reasons. The pandemic has taken a wide and large toll on many food operations in Northern Ontario over the last two years. It is still unknown when the final wave of Covid will arrive or leave and whom will be left standing in its wake. Secondly, the strongest tourism sector in the North is Temiskaming, where this deliverable could have focused its efforts and sadly, they lost a great leader Nicole Guertin to cancer earlier this year. This has left a void. Thirdly, the budget for such a project is grossly inadequate, and further fundraising efforts are required before any further work can be undertaken." LFFC

Reports Completed to Date

- Northern Ontario Food Distribution Workshop Report 2017 – Amanda Sheedy
- Summary of Northern Distribution Meetings 2018 – Peggy Baillie, Kendal Donahue & Arik Theijsmeijer
- Northern Distribution Logic Model 2018 – Emmett Ferguson, Arik Theijsmeijer & Peggy Baillie
- Northern Food Distribution Network Draft Action Plan 2019– Peggy Baillie
- NFDN Food Hub/ Termina Summary Report 2019 – David Thompson & Emmett Ferguson
- Barriers & Bridges in Northern Ontario 2021 – Jen Esposito Springett & Kelleigh Wright

Throughout the interviews conducted as part of this research, the original objectives, as outlined in the logic model, continually were demonstrated as the highest value activities that the NFDN could engage in. This was a welcome discovery to identify that the path laid out in 2019 remains relevant today. Additionally, throughout this research, other priorities were identified. As a result, a revised 2022 Action Plan has been developed as a starting point to advance the goals of the NFDN for the current year. This plan has been reviewed against the current funding through the LFFC.

REVISED 2022 ACTION PLAN

Project	Objectives	Outcomes	Results
Pilot Project Oversight	To provide collective oversight of the pilot to assess the project's sustainability.	Participate in 1-3 pilot projects from a co-operative oversight and knowledge transfer	Assess with project oversight through diverse expertise participation.
Value Chain Training	Offer training to support food system actors with the tools to activate change in various ways.	Deliver training at networking events and through online platforms	Have more knowledgeable food system actors
Northern Food Distribution Network Visioning session	To bring together food system actors to create a shared vision of a food system to work towards	Host 1 NFDN facilitated meeting.	Create a clear shared vision of the intent of the work
Networking + Member recruitment	To learn about what work is being done across the North where the gaps are. Build stronger partnerships with other organizations across the North	Host 2- 4 meetings to bring together food system actors to share and collaborate + gain more active members of the network.	Build a more robust network of collaboration and increase knowledge transfer
Database Development	Create a shared database that hosts existing research, data and information in one easy-to-access location.	Build a website (also in communications plan), and begin aggregating research and data to populate	Have a comprehensive source of data
Gaps Analysis	What are the gaps that need to be addressed based on the vision? How can the NFDN collectively address these gaps?	Gather data from networking meetings to identify gaps in access, data and infrastructure in Northern Ontario	Identify priority areas of work, projects and research for future funding.
Communications	Share stories about what is being done in the North to advance food security and sovereignty	Build a more substantial audience and engagement in NFDN	Increase awareness across the food value chain of
Funding	Identify funding priorities based on gaps analysis and networking events. Identify which organizations are best positioned to take on various aspects of the work.	Apply for 2-3 sources of funding to secure funding for 2023-2025	Secure future funding to support the work of the NFDN
NFDN Governance Review	Review core documents to ensure they meet the needs of the NFDN	Review and approve Terms of Reference	Have core governance document

NFDN COORDINATOR ROLE

The decision by the NFDN to be unincorporated and to work with partner organizations like LFFC to advance priorities is a unique arrangement. For these types of partnerships to be successful, as was outlined about distributor supply chain partnerships, shared values need to be identified for the partnership to be efficient and effective.

When the LFFC applied for funding on behalf of the NFDN, a partnership agreement was developed. A funding plan outlining the Health Food Distribution North Project, which incorporated the activities of the 2019 action plan, was shared between the partners. This funding agreement and the action plan continue to determine the work plan of the coordinator.

In the previous section, a draft 2022 action plan was proposed to advance the work of the NFDN. It is suggested that the NFDN Coordinator and additional staff would support these activities, within the confines of their capacity (time and knowledge), and would work specifically to identify how to collaborate with others across the North to advance these activities as it is not the role of the coordinator to complete the work exclusively, but rather to work in co-operation and foster collaboration across the North to build a stronger and more resilient food system.

One action item previously undiscussed in this report is Communications. The staff at the LFFC drafted a 2021 Communication Plan to increase awareness and participation in the NFDN. It is recommended that the Coordinator works with support staff to advance a communication plan to bring further engagement and public awareness of the work of the NFDN. The Communication Plan is included in the appendices and should be reviewed by the NFDN Collaborative Committee.

Beyond the action plan, the coordinator is also responsible for supporting the NFDN with administrative tasks such as taking minutes, circulating documents and preparing for meetings.

FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

The current funding agreement at the LFFC to conduct the activities of the NFDN will expire in the Spring of 2022. In the prudence of openness and transparency, the NFDN should review the partnership agreement with the LFFC and review the effectiveness of the partnership to advance the goals of the NFDN. This is important to check in on how well the partnership is working and areas for improvement.

For transparency, it is not assumed that the host organization will continue to be the LFFC. This is not a reflection of the work of the LFFC but rather due to a lack of communication and evaluation between the LFFC and the NFDN. There was support within the research for the LFFC to continue this work, but also some concerns were raised over the lack of dialogue and evaluation between the two organizations.

If after review of the partnership is completed and the host organization determined, LFFC or other, a revised action plan should be created to determine the next steps to advance the goals of the NFDN. The information to feed the revised action plan should be sourced from the visioning session, networking events, and gaps analysis with guidance from the NFDN advisors.

Once the action plan is completed, an evaluation of available funding that would support the advancement of the NFDN objectives and strategy should be identified, and subsequent funding applications submitted.

Learning from successful examples of supporting food sovereignty through the Indigenous Food Circle and the Northwestern Ontario Indigenous Food Sovereignty Collaborative, funding to support self-determination and food sovereignty should remain flexible in responding to the emerging needs and identified visions of the people who the funding means to serve.

It should be explicitly stated that there is identified value for coordinator capacity for the NFDN. This should be included in the funding agreement and an overhead administrative cost towards the host organization to offset operating costs to host the network.

Next Steps:

1. Host a Collaborative Networking and Visioning Session to create a shared vision of future food system in Northern Ontario
2. Conduct Gaps Analysis to achieve shared vision.
3. Revise Action Plan
4. Review Partnership Agreement between LFFC and NFDN.
5. Develop New Partnership Agreement with Host Organization
6. Identify funding sources
7. Apply for funding

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APPENDICES

EXAMPLE MEETING SCHEDULE OF THE YEAR

First Quarter

Collaborative Committee Meeting – Review Action Plan for Year

Advisor Committee Networking Meeting – update network on projects, and to gather input on project execution and other food system programming underway throughout Northern Ontario

Second Quarter

Collaborative Committee Meeting – Review Governance and Membership

Advisor Committee Networking Meeting – update network on projects, and to gather input on project execution and other food system programming underway throughout Northern Ontario

Third Quarter

Collaborative Committee – Review Partnership Agreements with partner organizations

Advisor Committee Networking Meeting – update network on projects, and to gather input on project execution and other food system programming underway throughout Northern Ontario

Fourth Quarter

Collaborative Committee – Review metrics, measurements and data to evaluate success of network

Advisor Committee Networking Meeting – update network on projects, and to gather input on project execution and other food system programming underway throughout Northern Ontario

Note:

a) additional meetings could be held by subcommittees focused on specific projects or activities of the NFDN. It would be recommended that these subcommittees report back at these quarterly meetings.

b) The recommended content of the collaborative committee meetings would not be exclusive to the topics listed, but rather as calendar markers of when key administrative tasks be addressed.

DRAFT COMMUNICATIONS PLAN AUGUST 2021

Platform	Website	Website blog	E-newsletter	Facebook	Instagram
Goals	Decide on website (with paid domain and maintenance with succession plan or webpage with enhanced SEO)	Regular updates, media news about NFDN/our partners/the North, job postings	Set a regular schedule for updates: ie. quarterly	Decide if NFDN needs separate social media accounts and if so, which ones and who will manage this content?	IG recommended if there will be regularly updated visual content
	Keep up to date as landing info pages for NFDN, share news via blog		Decide who will write this content, who sends this and where's the contact list? (ie. look at Blogspot)	FB recommended as starting basis to increase outreach since so many of our partners/steering committee is on FB	
Target Audience	Members, partners, farmers	All: especially those who don't already know about us	All	Those interested in NFDN, as well as closer inner circle partners (ie. sharing material)	All
Tactics	Original Content: Toolkits, Articles on what is happening in the sector, videos/webinars, events, summaries of activities	Regular content blogs: campaigns, articles of interest, infographics, general Northern ON content, food justice content	Updates, upcoming events/webinars, sharing partner/stakeholder events and promo, funding news	Post ideally at least 2x/wk	Post ideally at least 2x/wk

Interested in the NFDN

What is the NFDN?

The Northern Food Distribution Network is a multi-sectoral unincorporated organization that has set out to accomplish the monumental task of improving efficiency, resilience, and accessibility of Northern Ontario food value chains. The NFDN brings together people from across Northern Ontario to share knowledge, expertise, and discuss challenges to come to collective solutions to complex food system issues.

Why the NFDN wants your participation

To address the complex issues with the Northern Ontario food system, it requires diverse perspectives and knowledge. Changing the system so that it meets the needs of all people requires insight from different sectors and communities. By participating in the NFDN, you can share your perspective, knowledge and expertise to shape the future food system in Northern Ontario.

How can you participate?

The NFDN is composed of two types of committees:

The Advisory Committee is responsible for working with project partners on shared goals, providing recommendations for actions to meet the objectives of the NFDN, and sharing knowledge that will broaden network members' understanding of the complex Northern Ontario food system.

The Collaborative Committee is a smaller group focused on network governance, monitoring and evaluation

Current Projects: INSERT CURRENT ACTION PLAN

DRAFT ONBOARDING PACKAGE FOR NEW MEMBERS

How new members are added

At the quarterly collaborative committee meetings, a list of new members is reviewed and approved. NFDN strives to be an inclusive organization and welcomes participation by all people. If conflicts are identified, interested members will be contacted in writing outlining the potential conflicts, which will need to be discussed and resolved before participation is granted.

When are meetings?

Each committee is committed to meeting quarterly for key meetings. Additional meetings can be held for project specific needs. Your participation at meetings will be gaged based on your participation in various side projects.

Ready to join?

Please complete the attached form, and send to : INSERT EMAIL

Recommended Reading: (INSERT LINKS TO EACH FILE)

Organized by priority

- NFDN Terms of Reference
- NFDN Logic Model
- Barriers & Bridges : Exploring Value Chain Coordination Winter 2022
 - Executive Summary
 - Full Length Report
- NFDN Evaluating Success & Planning Future Report Spring 2022
 - Executive Summary
 - Full Length Report

NFDN MEMBERSHIP FORM

Name	
Community	
Organization (if applicable)	
Email	
Phone	

Which sector perspectives can you bring to the NFDN? Check all that apply

	Shipping and Logistics		Food Access Programs
	Wholesale/Distribution		Economic Development
	Community organization with a food mandate		Funding agencies
	Public Health		Government
	First Nations		Remote Communities
	Food processing		Education
	Food Retail		Agriculture
	Urban		Rural
	Other : please describe		

NFDN MEMBERSHIP FORM

Why are you interested in being an NFDN Member?

Are you interested in being an advisor or a collaborative committee member?

Please send completed form to : INSERT EMAIL