



National Circle for  
Indigenous Agriculture and Food  
Case for Support



# Case for support

## Cultivating change for Indigenous agriculture and food



The creation of the National Circle for Indigenous Agriculture and Food (NCIAF) will generate opportunities for proponents of change to have a real and positive impact in supporting Indigenous communities and people in Canada's agriculture and food industry. The NCIAF is intended to help build relationships and networks, find partners and provide access to leading knowledge and opportunities. This document provides an overview of the NCIAF, outlines the purpose and need for the organization, and provides structure and present opportunities for partners, donors and stakeholders to become involved in this new and exciting venture.

### Purpose of the NCIAF:

- To galvanize a community of partners to support Indigenous Peoples and reignite their role in agriculture and food through knowledge sharing and supporting business creation, while honoring Indigenous values, lands, and Mother Earth.
- Advance reconciliation and building of bridges between Indigenous communities and other agriculture and food industry stakeholders to create a shared national vision for Indigenous agriculture.
- Support the development of Indigenous agriculture and food businesses.
- Build Indigenous capacity for agriculture through awareness of opportunities, knowledge exchange, and education and skills development.

### Overview

Farm Credit Canada (FCC), Canada's leading agriculture lender, is helping organize industry stakeholders to found the National Circle for Indigenous Agriculture and Food (NCIAF). The NCIAF will support Indigenous agriculture through programs and services, as well as connect all stakeholders in this common purpose. It will activate a community of partners focused on reigniting the role of Indigenous Peoples in agriculture and food, and it will do this by sharing agriculture practices and business knowledge, and supporting business creation while honouring Indigenous Peoples, their lands and Mother Earth.

There is a significant need among Indigenous communities and businesses for greater food security and sovereignty. Growing the Indigenous agriculture industry will require sustained, long-term support for Indigenous communities and people who want to increase the amount of Indigenous agriculture business on their land and in their territories.

More than half of Indigenous Peoples and communities face very high levels of food insecurity, since traditional hunting and harvesting practices became no longer





viable as a result of colonization. While land was set aside for the use and benefit of First Nations people under Treaties signed more than a century ago, much of the land provided was marginal for agriculture and the vast amount that is suitable is now leased to non-Indigenous farmers. First Nations people have also faced historic barriers that have prevented them from farming their own land. These barriers include the Indian Act, which restricted the sale of agriculture commodities produced on reserve and continues to hinder financing and places restrictions on the use of reserve land today. An indirect, but real impact on Indigenous agriculture also includes the social trauma Indian residential schools had on an entire generation of Indigenous people. It systematically disconnected an entire generation of Indigenous people from their language, culture, spirituality and traditions, including traditional agriculture practices. There is a clear need to overcome or remove these barriers and support growth of Indigenous agriculture businesses, while at the same time recognizing and reconciling past injustices.

### Our shared vision

The NCI AF will be built on a foundation of three strategic pillars that have been validated through national engagement with Indigenous communities and organizations. The three pillars are:

- Advancing reconciliation and building of bridges between Indigenous communities and other agriculture and food industry stakeholders, and creating a national shared vision for Indigenous agriculture;
- Supporting agriculture and food business development;

- Capacity development by building awareness of opportunities, knowledge sharing, education and training, and skills development.

The NCI AF will be an Indigenous-led, non-profit organization. It will deliver programs through its operations and partnerships with government, industry, post-secondary institutions and non-profits. This circle of excellence will bring together all stakeholders to advance reconciliation in the agriculture sector and create a national dialogue for Indigenous agriculture.

NCI AF's primary focus will be to serve as a business accelerator, offering support and advisory services to Indigenous community-owned agriculture businesses and entrepreneurs. To do this, it will support business planning, strengthen management practices, and provide financial assistance and funding options. It will also provide training and education programs for Indigenous communities and support Indigenous leaders in their awareness of opportunities, policies and planning.

In short, the NCI AF will provide programs and services to support the holistic development of Indigenous agriculture capacity and create transformational change. NCI AF will be the place where Indigenous communities, businesses and organizations can connect to the resources they need to succeed.

### The need for the NCI AF

Early engagement with stakeholders has identified a need for the NCI AF to act as a hub for existing supports, such as grants, financing, community programs, and training and development programs. The NCI AF will collaborate with partners to make all programs more accessible to Indigenous people, including the federal and provincial governments, agriculture industry and its representative associations, post-secondary and non-profits groups that work in Canada's agriculture and food industry.

The NCI AF will create space for stakeholders to understand each other, find ways to collaborate and form a shared vision for Indigenous agriculture. It will advance reconciliation in the sector through collaborations, partnerships and knowledge sharing. NCI AF will unlock Indigenous agriculture's full potential through business advisory services and by providing advice and support to accelerate business growth. The NCI AF will support the success of people leading Indigenous agriculture businesses to see opportunities, facilitate their personal development and connect with much-needed resources.

## Challenges and opportunities

In Saskatchewan alone, agriculture is currently practiced on as much as three-to-four million acres of First Nation reserve land and only 20 per cent of that land is farmed by First Nations people, according to early estimates.<sup>1</sup> Yet Indigenous people make up the youngest and fastest-growing segment of the province's population. This imbalance is due to systemic barriers created by the Indian Act, which served to restrict and marginalize First Nation participation in Canada's agriculture and food industry.

The vast majority of reserve land is leased to non-Indigenous farmers through informal "buskshee leases," which are short-term in nature and not legally binding. As a result, sustainability of reserve land has been eroded, since there is no incentive for farmers leasing the land to invest in long-term sustainable practices. Many First Nations have up to 95 per cent of their agricultural land leased to non-Indigenous people who, in turn, maximize production and practice minimal soil conservation.<sup>2</sup> The prevalence of food insecurity is significant in First Nation communities, estimated at 48 per cent and as high as 60 per cent in remote communities.<sup>3</sup>

A House of Commons committee recognized "that limited access to capital, land and high-quality agricultural infrastructure remains a major barrier to the development of agricultural and agri-food businesses in Indigenous communities."<sup>4</sup> While there are federal, provincial and territorial programs to support Indigenous agriculture, the committee found that Indigenous agriculture needs to be better supported with adequate funding tailored to local Indigenous realities. There also needs to be more support for Indigenous food product exports and the facilitation of teaching and sharing of agricultural knowledge. The committee recommended Indigenous financial institutions be provided the resources they need to strengthen Indigenous participation in Canada's agriculture and agri-food industry, as well as a need to make the current funding conditions more flexible to meet the specific circumstances and needs of Indigenous entrepreneurs. There also needs to be a greater awareness among Indigenous entrepreneurs of the support for exports that is available to all Canadian small businesses.

In 2020, the Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council conducted national engagement with Indigenous

agriculture and agri-food operations and subject matter experts. It found that these operations faced significant challenges to growing and remaining sustainable. The challenges include access to capital and financial resources, negative attitudes toward agriculture among Indigenous Peoples due to the legacy of residential schools, barriers to entry, and aggressive non-Indigenous participation. Also, Indigenous-owned land is often not suited for agriculture since it's too small for viable large-scale agriculture production. The Indian Act continues to present barriers for Indigenous participation in agriculture since:

- Real property of First Nations people residing on-reserve cannot be repossessed, which creates challenges for financing and leasing farm equipment;
- Reserve land does not have fee-simple title; therefore, it cannot be used as collateral for loans. While a First Nation council may pass a resolution to allow for liens on equipment, it is not a simple process. It requires time and this creates financing challenges; and
- Indian Act policy solutions that create an enforceable long-term lease, such as designating lands for lease to a third party or issuing Certificates of Possession, are expensive and can take years by the time they receive ministerial approval.

The engagement sessions also found significant challenges for Indigenous labour force participation in agriculture, including a lack of access to employment and training, awareness, access to transportation, ability to participate due to the K-12 system, cultural relevance and lack of internet access. Generally, there are barriers or lack of support for Indigenous people to participate in agriculture across the spectrum of labour, employment and training opportunities.



<sup>1</sup> Arcand et al. Facets Journal. "Sowing a way towards revitalizing Indigenous agriculture: creating meaning from a forum discussion in Saskatchewan, Canada". 2020. P. 619

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council. "Growing Security". 2020: P.4.

<sup>4</sup> The House of Commons, 42nd Parliament, 1st Session. "Support for Indigenous Peoples in the Agriculture and Agri-Food Industry". 2019; P. 11.

## Indigenous engagement – What we heard

Indigenous communities and organizations were engaged nationally from May to August by Bellerose and Associates to gain input into their needs as they relate to the NCI AF. Indigenous leaders from over 40 communities and organizations provided their views.

“Participants of this Indigenous Engagement process expressed **overall support for the establishment of the National Circle of Indigenous Agriculture and Food.**” – What We Heard Report

### These themes emerged through this Indigenous engagement process:

#### **Food Security and Food Sovereignty focus is a priority:**

Increasing local food production and providing access to affordable food is a key priority. Agriculture is viewed as a means to rebuild connection to land, similar to the desire to reclaim culture and language. Community initiatives are seen as an opportunity to get Elders involved in teaching and guiding youth on traditional agricultural practices in order to build interest and create a sense of pride and accomplishment in being involved in agriculture.

**National dialogue:** At the national level, there is a need to bring Indigenous communities together with all stakeholders to create a shared vision and provide leadership to advance reconciliation and results for Indigenous communities. NCI AF will create the space for bringing people together, enhancing communication and collaboration.

**Access to arable land:** With a limited land base, First Nations need to balance multiple and competing land use priorities, as well as heed agricultural impacts and the potential loss of biodiversity.

**Early-stage support for developing opportunities in agriculture and food:** Communities and entrepreneurs need support building baseline knowledge and understanding of the sector, local conditions, feasible opportunities, business models, and potential benefits for economic development that will inform decision-making.

**Support with expanding capacity for later-stage initiatives:** Support is required to expand operations and manage capacity through access to expertise, mentorship, knowledge exchange and hands-on capacity building opportunities.

**Access to capital:** Canadian financial institutions are challenged by serving on-reserve clients due to a lack of understanding of how lending policies deal with Indian Act restrictions, and Indigenous customers (both on and off-reserve) frequently face more demanding application requirements and higher interest rates.

**Labour force development:** There is a lack of awareness of career opportunities in this sector and the potential for Indigenous labour. There is a need for hands-on education and work experience programs for youth around a broad set of opportunities through programs that are Indigenous-led, culturally appropriate and address barriers to access.

**Advice for making services accessible, relevant and impactful:** NCI AF must demonstrate an understanding of the diversity of Indigenous Peoples and tailor its programs accordingly. It must offer a simple and streamlined application and reporting process, as well as personal long-term relationships with Indigenous communities as part of its outreach. Finally, it must offer financing and capacity building programs that support initiatives throughout their journey towards creating successful enterprises.

**NCI AF governance:** NCI AF should ensure representation from First Nations, Métis and Inuit leaders, as well as geographical, intergenerational and industry-wide representation. Governance should include an Indigenous-led decision-making approach involving Chiefs, Elders, Indigenous and non-Indigenous business leaders.



### The strategic pillars of the NCIAF

Three strategic pillars have been identified in the development of the NCIAF and verified through engagement with Indigenous communities and organizations across Canada. The NCIAF strategy will be further refined by the NCIAF Board through ongoing engagement with its members, stakeholders and Indigenous communities.



<b>Reconciliation</b>	
<b>Creating a national vision and circle for Indigenous agriculture</b>	Create a shared understanding of Indigenous agriculture and business opportunities while providing leadership for a national vision and collaboration among Indigenous communities, government, industry, and post-secondary.
<b>Advancing reconciliation</b>	Advance reconciliation in the agriculture industry by facilitating the journey, building relationships, and rebuilding Indigenous Peoples’ role in agriculture and connection to the land while revitalizing traditions and values.

<b>Business development</b>	
<b>Connections and knowledge</b>	Creating connections and sharing knowledge on opportunities, governance, operations, partnerships, and supply chains. Finding synergies between industry, post-secondary institutions, non-profits and government.
<b>Food security</b>	Creating opportunities for local food while growing business capacity and creating interest and pride for agriculture production in the community, focusing on youth.
<b>Food sovereignty</b>	Creating opportunities for food sovereignty through agriculture planning and knowledge for greater community control of food, while revitalizing Indigenous agriculture traditions and connecting agriculture to education, health and wellbeing.
<b>Accelerating business growth</b>	Supporting business development directly providing business models and synergies with economic development. Providing direct business advice through all stages of development from concept to operations. Expanding operational and business management capacity through expert advice for financial and business planning, supply chains, contractors, and pathways to market.

<b>Capacity development</b>	
<b>Ag and food opportunity awareness and leadership</b>	Promote and inspire bold and innovative solutions that will have a lasting impact on the success of Indigenous agriculture and food through proactive communication and engagement with key leaders and organizations supporting Indigenous agriculture.
<b>Knowledge exchange</b>	Knowledge-share and be a resource between Indigenous communities, producers, businesses, service providers, and funders for management and operations and with respect for Indigenous values.
<b>Labour force development</b>	Creating interest in agriculture careers and pathways to inclusive and culturally appropriate training and supports. Connecting businesses and Indigenous people through hands-on learning and development opportunities for capacity development and operational success.

## What NCIAF will do

### Reconciliation

**Create a national dialogue** – We will develop a national dialogue to create a shared vision and to support collaboration to grow Indigenous agriculture among government, industry, post-secondary institutions, and communities. This will be accomplished by bringing regional and sectoral partners together to create a shared vision and collaborations.

**Advance reconciliation** – We will advance reconciliation by engaging directly with communities, bringing people together at the regional and local level, and supporting industry to provide culturally relevant and inclusive programs.

### Business development

NCIAF will support Indigenous business development through programs in the following areas:

**Pathfinding** – There are many siloed pots of programs, funding and resources that are very useful but challenging to find and understand. We will provide individualized support services to connect people to the help they need.

**Web-based knowledge centre** – Canada has numerous supports for all areas of agriculture, but there is a lack of awareness of what they offer and where to find them. We will make it easy for Indigenous people to find the information, knowledge and programs they need in their region and sector.

**Accelerate business growth** – We will provide white-glove wraparound advisory services for accepted projects that have a high positive impact on creating Indigenous agriculture businesses or supporting community-driven growth in agriculture. This includes feasibility studies and business planning for specific businesses, as well as support for Indigenous governments for policy and land use planning, done in ways that integrate Indigenous values, language, and culture and create a connection to the land.

**Community-based production** – There is a huge demand and need for community gardens, greenhouses and farm animals, which inspire youth and provide healthy local food at a reasonable cost. We will establish partnerships and collaborations to develop these projects with communities.



## Capacity

**Opportunity awareness** – Communities that are new to agriculture need to know where the opportunities are. There are many sources of knowledge for agriculture; we will communicate them and make them accessible through pathfinding for programs and partners, and through the web-based knowledge centre.

**Leadership development** – Indigenous agriculture needs leaders who can create and realize their vision. We will create opportunities to provide leaders with the skills and knowledge they need to succeed, whether they're the manager of a band-owned farm, entrepreneur or producer.

**Knowledge exchange** – We will create opportunities to learn from how others have been successful. We will share others' journeys through case studies and road maps. We will provide opportunities for peer support and mentorship.

**Labour force development** – We'll ensure the Indigenous community is aware of and has access to agriculture training programs and work experience programs. Through our pathfinding service and web-based knowledge centre, we'll connect people to the right resources. We will partner with industry and training and education institutions to increase accessibility of their programs for Indigenous people.

## How you can help

Supporting NCI AF will show your commitment to reconciliation with Indigenous people for agriculture and food. You will:

- Be a recognized leader supporting Indigenous communities and people in agriculture, building relationships and networks, finding partners and having access to leading knowledge and opportunities.
- Achieve your Indigenous Environmental, Sustainability and Governance (ESG) goals by contributing to establishing the governance of an organization and its operations that will directly serve Indigenous communities, businesses and people. As a Founding Patron of NCI AF with a significant multi-year contribution, you will:
- Have logo placement on the website landing page as a Founding Patron.
- Have name recognition in news releases, reports and other communications.

As a Partner of NCI AF with a significant commitment to NCI AF, you will:

- Have logo recognition on the website as a partner.
- Have name recognition in reports and communications materials.



## About NCI AF

### Governance

NCI AF is an Indigenous-led and business-focused non-profit corporation. Community engagement showed support for ensuring representation from First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities as well as geographical, intergenerational, and industry-wide representation. Governance will be determined by voting members – a majority of which represent Indigenous communities, organizations and economic development businesses. Classes of membership will be inclusive of Indigenous and non-Indigenous businesses and organizations who support the mission of NCI AF and program delivery.

The governance structure of NCI AF and ways of conducting business will centre around Indigenous protocols, cultural practices and worldviews. The governance will include elder and youth council to provide an intergenerational perspective honouring Indigenous values.

A founding board has been established to steward the organization until its governance is fully established and an AGM can be held to elect a full board based on best practices of the right mix of skills and representation. The founding board includes representatives from industry and the Indigenous community.

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# How can you support the National Circle for Indigenous Agriculture & Food?

The National Circle for Indigenous Agriculture and Food (NCIAF) is an Indigenous-led, non-profit organization dedicated to reigniting the involvement of Indigenous communities and Peoples in agriculture and food to reclaim food sovereignty and grow successful businesses for the generations to come. NCIAF will create and maintain a necessary connection between the agriculture industry, government, post-secondary, and likeminded non-profits to the Indigenous communities and Peoples working to strengthen their food security and sovereignty; and enhance their role in helping to feed the world, while honouring their traditions, lands, and Mother Earth. NCIAF will generate positive change by focusing on business acceleration, increasing access to knowledge, strengthening business planning and management practices, and increasing access to capital. The development of training and education programs for Indigenous communities, Peoples, and leaders will advance awareness of opportunities, policies, and planning. The NCIAF will also support the non-Indigenous agriculture industry to implement reconciliation endeavours within their organizations. The NCIAF will focus on three key pillars: reconciliation, business development, and capacity building.

## Reconciliation

Advancing reconciliation in the agriculture industry by facilitating the journey and building bridges between Indigenous communities and Peoples and other agriculture and food industry stakeholders while revitalizing Indigenous traditions and values.

Community engagement  
National dialogue

## Business Development

Supporting agriculture and food business development by creating opportunities that advance food sovereignty and grow the participation of Indigenous business across the value chain through agriculture planning and knowledge.



















Pathfinding  
Business advisory services

## Capacity Building

Providing proactive communication of learning opportunities, knowledge-sharing, and connecting Indigenous businesses and peoples to hands-on learning and development opportunities for operational success.

Web-based knowledge hub  
Knowledge exchange

By partnering with the NCIAF, you will show your commitment to reconciliation. You will be a recognized leader supporting Indigenous communities and Peoples in agriculture. You will achieve your Indigenous Environmental, Sustainability, and Governance (ESG) goals by contributing to establishing an organization that will directly serve Indigenous communities, Peoples, and businesses. Outlined below are the four opportunities to support:

Benefits based on Annual Investment	Partners			Collaborators
	Maskawâw (Strength) \$1M+	Wâhkôhtowin (Kinship) \$500 - \$999k	Wicítowin (Friend) <\$500k	Mamâwohkamâtowin (Collaboration)* In kind
Consideration of Board membership <sup>1</sup>				
Logo featured on promotional materials, publications & reports				
Logo featured on website				
Feature article in newsletter				
Social media post announcing partnership				
Individual branded event signage				
Reserved event table				

While our Partner level reflects monetary support, the NCIAF welcomes collaborators who wish to support our mission through sharing of knowledge, skills and/or services. Post secondary, other non-profit, or stakeholder organizations can support the NCIAF's mission as a Mamâwohkamâtowin collaborator.

<sup>1</sup> Board membership may be requested, and review of membership will be conducted by the current NCIAF Board.

All Maskawâw partners will receive the NCIAF Annual Report.