

# The Wâwiyiyaw

National Circle Newsletter For Indigenous Agriculture & Food  
February 2026

NEWS

UPDATE 

## Honouring Black History Month: Food, Land, and Shared Pathways of Resilience

February marks Black History Month in Canada—a time to celebrate the histories, contributions, and leadership of Black communities, while also reflecting on ongoing struggles for equity, food security, and land justice.

At the NCI AF, we recognize that food systems are deeply connected to culture, land, and self-determination. This month offers an important opportunity to reflect on the shared and intersecting experiences of Black and Indigenous Peoples within agriculture and food systems.

For generations, Black farmers, growers, and food entrepreneurs have shaped Canada's agricultural landscape. Despite systemic barriers such as land dispossession, limited access to capital, and discriminatory policies, Black communities have preserved resilient food traditions rooted in innovation, care for the land, and community well-being. From small-scale farms and community gardens to food cooperatives and cultural food hubs, Black-led initiatives continue to advance food sovereignty—echoing Indigenous approaches grounded in land-based knowledge, intergenerational learning, and sustainability.

While Indigenous and Black histories are distinct, both communities have navigated the impacts of colonialism, displacement, and exclusion from agricultural decision-making. At the NCI AF, we believe advancing Indigenous agriculture also means building respectful relationships and solidarity across all communities. Learning from Black food leaders strengthens conversations around equitable land access, climate resilience, and culturally appropriate food systems.

Black History Month is also a time to uplift Black excellence. Across Canada, Black chefs, farmers, researchers, and food advocates are redefining inclusive and sustainable food systems by centering culture, health, and justice. We encourage our network to support Black-owned food businesses, learn about Black agricultural histories, engage with Black-led food justice initiatives, and reflect on opportunities for collaboration.

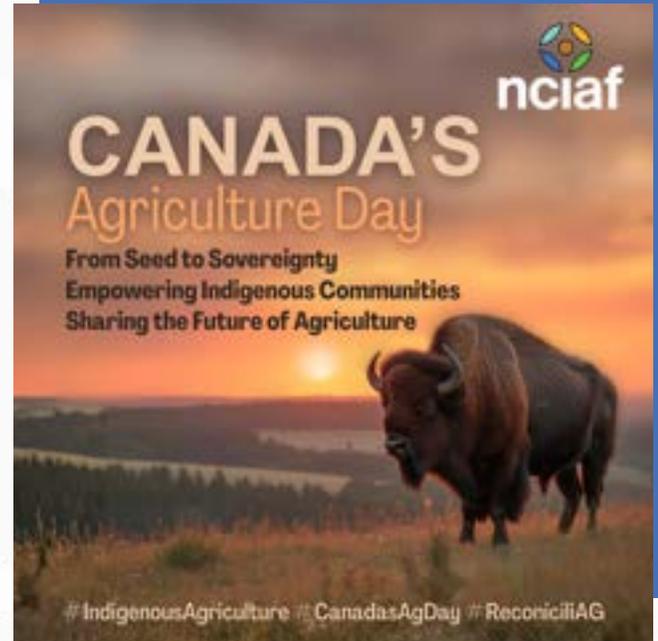
As an Indigenous-led organization, the NCI AF remains committed to food systems that are people-centered, land-based, and community-driven. Honouring Black History Month aligns with our values of respect, reciprocity, and relationship-building—strengthening collective efforts toward food sovereignty, sustainability, and justice throughout the year.

# Celebrating Canada's Ag Day: Indigenous Leadership in Agriculture

Canada's Agriculture Day is an opportunity to recognize the people, knowledge, and relationships that sustain our food systems. At the NCIAF, we celebrate Indigenous leadership in agriculture and food as essential to building resilient, sustainable, and community-centered food systems.

Indigenous agriculture is rooted in respect for the land, intergenerational knowledge, and reciprocity—values that continue to guide food production, stewardship, and innovation today. Across the country, Indigenous farmers, harvesters, and food entrepreneurs are strengthening local economies, revitalizing traditional foodways, and advancing food sovereignty.

On Canada's Ag Day, we honour those working to nourish communities while caring for the land. We also reaffirm our commitment to supporting Indigenous-led agriculture, partnerships, and pathways that centre culture, sustainability, and self-determination—today and into the future.



## At the Table of the Future: Indigenous Voices Shaping Canada's Food Systems

At the Future of Food Conference 2026, discussions moved beyond trends to explore what truly drives a resilient and equitable food system. In a thought-provoking session, JP Gervais, EVP, Strategy and Impact and Chief Economist at Farm Credit Canada, invited participants to consider where they would invest \$1B in Canadian agriculture and food. From an Indigenous agriculture perspective, these conversations underscored that investment

is not just about capital, but about relationships, community-defined priorities, and long-term benefits rooted in land, culture, and self-determination.

The conference also featured an inspiring presentation from Métis chef and entrepreneur Jenna White, owner of Jenna's Nut-Free Dessertery Inc. Jenna shared her journey of overcoming personal challenges to build a thriving Indigenous-owned business that weaves Métis knowledge with innovative and inclusive food practices, which highlights the power of Indigenous-led approaches in advancing food sovereignty, sustainability, and community well-being.



*Photo: Jenna White (left) and Ashley Nicholls (right) during panel discussion.*

# Where Land and Food Meet: Reflections from the Indigenous Lands Symposium 2026

The Indigenous Lands Symposium 2026, hosted in Sudbury, ON, by Wahkohtowin Development at Science North. From the moment participants arrived, it was clear this was not simply a conference about forestry policy, but a space rooted in relationship—to Land, to one another, and to future generations.

The symposium opened with teachings from Dr. Kathy Absolon, who reminded us that Creation existed long before humans, and that our responsibilities are grounded not in ownership, but in kinship. Land is not a resource to manage; it is a relative to care for. Throughout the week, Nations shared how they are moving beyond colonial consultation models and into the full expression of inherent jurisdiction—designing conservation plans, Guardian programs, and stewardship strategies on their own terms. The conversations were practical and grounded, but always returned to responsibility.

For the NCIAF, that responsibility includes food. On the second day, Emily Nanne, NCIAF Program Consultant in Northern Ontario, moderated a panel on Indigenous Food Sovereignty that reinforced what many already knew: food systems are not separate from land governance; they are a direct outcome of it. Panellists Kara Tremblay, Jordan Assinewe, Gigi Veeraraghavan, and Elder Isabell Souliere shared lived experiences of reclaiming harvesting practices, strengthening community gardens, protecting hunting territories, and carrying traditional knowledge forward. Together, the panel made clear that when Nations assert jurisdiction over land, they also strengthen jurisdiction over food, improved health, resilience, and cultural continuity.



*Photo: Lorraine Pitawanakwat (left) and Emily Nanne (right), staffing the CareersNOW! and NCIAF booths, respectively.*



*Photo: Kallie Wood (right) with attendees in the Teaching Lodge.*

The NCIAF also hosted a Teaching Lodge alongside partners and leadership, where conversations flowed easily between Lands and Resources teams, youth advocates, and food system practitioners. Discussions on land camps, Indigenous entrepreneurship, Guardian programs, and community gardens reinforced a shared understanding: decisions about forestry and water are inseparable from decisions about nourishment and wellbeing.

The symposium closed with global Indigenous voices sharing perspectives from beyond the boreal forest—different territories, shared challenges, and shared determination. We left Sudbury reminded that food sovereignty does not begin in a kitchen or a greenhouse; it begins on the Land. As Indigenous Nations across Northern Ontario continue to assert leadership over their territories, they are also shaping food systems that are self-determined, innovative, and deeply rooted in culture.

# Learning Together: Introducing Our Riipen Student Cohort

In January, the NCIAF welcomed a cohort through [Riipen](#), a project-based learning platform that connects educators, organizations, and learners to collaborate on real-world industry projects, helping bridge the gap between education and employment. The two students participating in this cohort were Khushi Desai and Fatima Chaudhary, and we invited them to answer a few questions as part of our spotlight feature.

## ***KHUSHI DESAI***

### ***Tell us a little about yourself and your schooling, hobbies, passions, and/or career goals.***

I'm currently studying Graphic Design at Durham College, and I've always been drawn to creative work that feels meaningful. I really value storytelling and intention — I don't just want to make things look good, I want them to mean something. Long-term, I hope to travel and experience new cultures because I think that's where so much inspiration comes from. Outside of school I love painting. It's one of the only things that truly quiets my mind.

### ***What inspired you to apply for this project with the NCIAF?***

I was inspired because of its focus on community, cultural storytelling, and meaningful representation. As someone who deeply values the role of design in shaping narratives, I was drawn to the opportunity to contribute to work that feels impactful beyond aesthetics.

### ***What have you enjoyed most about working with the NCIAF so far?***

Honestly, working with Michelle and Kate has been such a positive experience. They've created such a welcoming and supportive environment. I've also really appreciated the creative freedom I was given in my projects. It allowed me to experiment and grow as a designer. On top of that, learning more about Indigenous culture and wild rice has been such a meaningful part of this experience. It's not just design work — it feels like I'm actually learning and expanding my perspective too.



*Photo: Khushi Desai.*



*Photo: Fatima Chaudhary.*

## ***FATIMA CHAUDHARY***

### ***Tell us a little about yourself and your schooling, hobbies, passions, and/or career goals.***

I'm someone who really values creativity and community. Outside of school, I enjoy baking, reading, and graphic design, all of which allow me to slow down and express myself in different ways. Long term, I hope to build a career that blends creativity with meaningful community impact.

### ***What inspired you to apply for this project with the NCIAF?***

I was motivated by a desire to give back to the broader community in meaningful ways. I've always understood the importance of acknowledging and working alongside Indigenous organizations, and this felt like an opportunity to do so in a professional setting. I saw it as both a chance to contribute and to learn.

### ***What have you enjoyed most about working with the NCIAF so far?***

I've really appreciated the kindness everyone has shown. The environment feels collaborative and supportive, which has made it easy to grow and share ideas. It's been rewarding to be part of a team that genuinely values connection and purpose.

# Indigenous Prairie Bison Initiative: Supporting Bison Stewardship Across the Prairies

The NCIAF President & CEO, Kallie Wood, Senior Vice President of Business Development, Chris McKee, ReconciliAG Specialist, Monique Desjarlais, and Indigenous Prairie Bison Initiative (IPBI) Manager, Colin Art, attended the No Borders Show, Sale & Convention, held in collaboration with the Canadian, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba Bison Associations. The event brought together producers, industry leaders, and community members from across the Prairies and beyond.



*Photo: SVP Business Development, Chris McKee, shares the IPBI Program details with No Borders Convention attendees.*

Panels and speakers shared insights on the future of the bison sector, with consistent themes of collaboration, mentorship, strong networks, and the importance of centering meaningful stories around bison. These priorities closely align with the NCIAF's relationship-based approach, rooted in respect, reciprocity, and shared learning.

Chris presented about the newly launched IPBI, which will strengthen Prairie Indigenous communities' participation in bison ranching by expanding access to land-based learning, business planning support, herd management training, and opportunities to connect with experts, lenders, and other Indigenous producers.

At its core, IPBI advances Indigenous food sovereignty and self-determination by supporting communities to reclaim their roles as bison stewards, guided by community priorities and traditional knowledge.

While presentations highlighted a shortage of bison to meet market demand, many attendees expressed interest in supporting IPBI. There was shared recognition that strengthening Indigenous stewardship will benefit the entire sector. Colin reflected on the openness of producers to share successes and challenges, as well as the strong emphasis on collaboration over competition.

The NCIAF continues to bridge relationships between prairie bison associations and Indigenous communities working to begin or strengthen their bison journeys.

## Upcoming Bison Events

Manitoba Bison Gathering  
May 4 & 5, 2026  
Winnipeg, MB

Buffalo Engagement Workshop  
May 21, 2026  
Wanuskewin, SK

Keystone Connections 2026:  
Connecting Buffalo Guardians  
June 3 & 4, 2026  
near Calgary, AB

**[Click here](#)** if you or your community would like to know more about IPBI, or email us at **[IPBI@nciaf.ca](mailto:IPBI@nciaf.ca)**



## Events We're Attending

Stay connected with us at events we are attending! We're excited to engage with communities and support Indigenous agriculture.

### Food, Fuel, Fertilizer Global Summit - April 8-9, 2026

Location: Regina, SK

### Aggie Days - April 15-17, 2026

Location: Calgary, AB

## Events We're Sharing

While we won't be attending these events, we encourage you to explore opportunities to learn and network.

### Forward Summit West - May 14-15, 2026

Location: Calgary, AB

## Featured Quote

Here is our featured quote of the month:



The Indigenous Agriculture and Food Systems project is about more than innovating programs. It is about reshaping systems to better reflect Indigenous values and realities. When financial institutions listen meaningfully and respond with the right tools, we begin to see real movement toward food sovereignty in our communities



**JP Gladu**  
Founder & Principal  
Mokwateh



**Mokwateh**

### Cottontail Casserole

#### Ingredients

- 1 rabbit, dressed and disjointed
- 8 slices bacon
- 2 medium onions, sliced
- 2 medium potatoes, sliced
- 1 tsp salt or to taste
- ¼ tsp pepper

#### Instructions

1. Let the disjointed rabbit stand in salted water for about 1 hour.
2. Remove, wipe dry, and roll in flour.
3. Fry the bacon in a skillet until light brown.
4. Remove the bacon, and fry the rabbit in the bacon fat until golden brown.
5. Arrange the meat in a casserole dish and arrange the onions, potatoes, and bacon on top.
6. Dust all lightly with flour.
7. Add salt and pepper, and pour hot water over top.
8. Bake about 2 hours in a 350°F oven.

Recipe courtesy of *Company's Coming, Wild Game Cookbook*, by Doug & Peggy Kazulak

Please reach out to [info@nciaf.ca](mailto:info@nciaf.ca) if you would like to list an event.

Website: [nciaf.ca](http://nciaf.ca)

Address: Atoskewin Business Center

Regina SK S4S 7K3

Phone: 306-559-6098

Stay Informed

