



The Wâwiyiyaw

National Circle Newsletter For Indigenous Agriculture & Food
March 2026

NEWS

UPDATE



Rooted in Leadership: Celebrating Indigenous Women on International Women's Day

March marks International Women's Day, a global moment to recognize the strength, leadership, and contributions of women around the world. At the NCIAF, this day is an opportunity to honour Indigenous women whose knowledge, care, and leadership continue to nourish communities, lands, and food systems across Turtle Island.

Indigenous women have always been central to agriculture and food sovereignty. As seed keepers, harvesters, farmers, knowledge holders, educators, and entrepreneurs, they carry intergenerational teachings rooted in reciprocity, responsibility, and respect for the Land. Their leadership extends beyond production—shaping food policy, strengthening community economies, revitalizing cultural food practices, and mentoring future generations.



Yet, Indigenous women also navigate systemic barriers, including limited access to land, capital, and resources. International Women's Day calls us not only to celebrate achievements, but to recommit to equity, recognition, and meaningful support. At the NCIAF, this means continuing to amplify Indigenous women's voices, support women-led initiatives, and create pathways for capacity development, collaboration, and opportunity within agriculture and food systems.

We extend our gratitude to the Indigenous women who lead with courage, care, and vision—those whose work sustains families, communities, and Nations. Your knowledge feeds more than bodies; it feeds resilience, culture, and hope for generations to come.

On this International Women's Day, we celebrate you.

Building Connections, Moving Business Forward

Indigenous Business Gathering

The NCIAF was proud to attend the 2026 Indigenous Business Gathering at Prairieland Park in Saskatoon—an event that continues to set the standard for meaningful connection across Turtle Island. With more than 1,250 registered attendees and a sold-out trade show featuring 168 booths, the energy in the room reflected the strength and momentum of Indigenous business communities across Saskatchewan and beyond.

What makes this gathering truly unique is its intentional design. Rather than centering formal presentations, the event prioritizes time in the exhibitor hall—creating space for authentic conversations, relationship-building, and real opportunities to emerge organically. This format allows entrepreneurs, communities, and partners to connect in a way that feels natural, productive, and grounded in shared purpose.

A highlight of the day is always the delicious Indigenous lunch, paired with a short and engaging panel that brings forward timely insights while still leaving room for continued networking. Michelle Sandercock, Director of Business Development, alongside Monique Desjarlais, ReconciliAG Specialist, were grateful to connect with so many clients, cousins, and communities who stopped by to learn more about the NCIAF's work. We also extend our thanks to the many partner and ally organizations—we look forward to continuing to share your offerings across the many projects we support nationwide.



NCIAF Strengthens Connections at the Saskatchewan Association of Land Technicians AGM

The NCIAF had the opportunity to participate in the AGM of the Saskatchewan Association of Land Technicians (SALT), joining a strong network of professionals dedicated to Indigenous land management across the province. The gathering created a meaningful space to reflect on the progress, challenges, and future of land stewardship within Indigenous communities.

Throughout the event, there was a clear sense of shared purpose rooted in responsibility to the land and future generations. The knowledge exchanged and relationships strengthened over the two days underscored the importance of collaboration in advancing Indigenous-led approaches.

A highlight of the AGM was the presentation delivered by Dr. Melissa Arcand and Katherine Finn from the University of Saskatchewan. Their work continues to elevate and support Indigenous perspectives in land stewardship, offering valuable insights that resonated deeply with attendees.

Equally impactful was the panel of Land Managers, who shared firsthand experiences from their communities. Their stories reflected the strength and resilience of Indigenous land management practices, as well as the ongoing efforts to build capacity, protect resources, and pass on knowledge.

The NCIAF extends its appreciation to SALT for hosting such an inspiring and well-organized event. Opportunities like this are essential for fostering connection and advancing collective efforts in Indigenous agriculture, food systems, and land stewardship.



Building Relationships, Advancing Changes: NCIAF Visit with the Lieutenant Governor of Saskatchewan

The NCIAF was honoured to take part in a meaningful visit at Government House alongside Her Honour Bernadette McIntyre.

NCIAF President and CEO, Kallie Wood, and Senior Vice President of Business Development, Chris McKee, were pleased to attend. Hosted over tea, the conversation provided an opportunity to reflect on shared priorities and the important role of relationship-building in advancing Indigenous agriculture across the country.

As the NCIAF continues its work to support and elevate Indigenous-led agriculture at a national level, the presence and engagement of the Crown in reconciliation efforts remains a vital part of moving forward in a good way. The discussion focused on the impactful work taking place in communities across Canada, and how these efforts can be meaningfully supported to create lasting, positive change for Indigenous producers and Nations.



A key highlight of the visit was the opportunity to share more about the *Let's Grow Canada | On sort du rang* movement—an initiative rooted in care, strengthened by ingenuity, and driven by a vision of a more connected and sustainable food system. This growing national movement emphasizes the importance of celebrating the people behind our food, strengthening connections between communities and what sustains them, and positioning Canada as a trusted global leader in agriculture and food systems.

As global challenges continue to evolve—from food insecurity to climate change—there is an increasing need for innovative, inclusive, and resilient solutions. Through initiatives like *Let's Grow Canada*, there is a clear commitment to not only nourishing communities at home but contributing to solutions abroad, while creating opportunities for future generations.

In recognition of the visit and as a gesture of appreciation, the NCIAF presented Her Honour with a scarf—symbolizing both gratitude and a shared commitment to carrying this work forward across the land.

The visit served as a powerful reminder that real progress is grounded in relationships built on respect, openness, and shared purpose. By acknowledging the past and working collaboratively toward the future, meaningful change becomes possible.

The NCIAF looks forward to continuing this important dialogue and has already begun coordinating future visits to further strengthen these connections.

Together, we are shaping the future of agriculture in Canada—one rooted in respect, collaboration, and the strength of Indigenous knowledge and leadership.

What We Heard: Community Voices Shaping the Indigenous Prairie Bison Initiative

Over the past several months, the Indigenous Prairie Bison Initiative (IPBI) has entered its first and most important stage: **listening**. Through conversations with First Nations and Métis communities, bison stewards, Knowledge Keepers, and producers across the Prairies, communities generously shared their experiences, aspirations, and concerns related to buffalo stewardship.

What we heard was clear and consistent. Communities see buffalo not simply as livestock, but as a keystone species deeply connected to culture, ceremony, land stewardship, food sovereignty, and intergenerational healing. Many Nations are actively restoring herds or exploring what rematriating buffalo could look like on their lands, often with a strong focus on feeding their people first and rebuilding relationships with the land.

At the same time, communities identified real and practical challenges. There is a strong desire for hands-on, peer-based learning around bison management, fencing and infrastructure, herd expansion, and grazing practices. Communities emphasized the importance of learning directly from other Indigenous bison caretakers and Knowledge Keepers—through field visits, circles, and on-the-land experiences—rather than classroom-only or presentation-heavy approaches.

We also heard about the need for connection. Many bison stewards described working in isolation and expressed interest in building stronger regional and national networks where knowledge, experiences, and lessons can be shared across Nations. Youth engagement, cultural teachings, and ceremony were repeatedly identified as essential elements of any training or gathering.

In response to what communities shared, planning is now underway to build events that deliver both information and meaningful conversation on these priorities. This spring, three upcoming gatherings will help move these conversations forward:

Tatanka Wichohan (Buffalo Teachings)

May 4 & 5, 2026

Winnipeg, MB

This two-day gathering brings together communities already engaged in buffalo work. Indigenous voices and lived experience are centred, supported by intentionally selected western expertise and allies. Space is created for ceremony, knowledge sharing, and community-driven dialogue. Tickets will prioritize communities currently involved in buffalo stewardship.



Buffalo Engagement Workshop

May 21, 2026
Wanuskewin, SK

This workshop is designed to support practical learning and conversation around buffalo stewardship, land readiness, and community goals. Participants can expect focused discussions, shared experiences, and opportunities to explore next steps grounded in what communities have identified as priorities.



Indigenous Buffalo Engagement Workshop

Knowledge sharing and networking event
Wanuskewin Heritage Park • **May 21, 2026**



SAVE THE DATE

Keystone Connections: Connecting Buffalo Guardians

TSUUT'INA NATION, TREATY 7

June 2, 2026

Evening Book Launch of
IBRI's "Guardians of the
Buffalo: The Essential
guide to Bison Care"

June 3-4, 2026

A gathering to bring
together Indigenous
Buffalo caretakers



DETAILS TO COME!

Keystone Connections: Connecting Buffalo Guardians

June 3 & 4, 2026
Tsuut'ina First Nation, Treaty 7

This gathering offers a relational, caretaker-centred space that prioritizes peer connection, circles, and time on the land with buffalo. Designed to strengthen networks among buffalo guardians, it supports collective learning, mentorship, and future collaboration.

Community members are warmly invited to register and participate. In-province travel support may be available for eligible participants.

To inquire or learn more, please contact
ipbi@nciaf.ca

Together, these gatherings mark the next step in ensuring that IPBI continues to be shaped, first and foremost, by community voices.



Fresh Perspectives: Our Riipen Student Cohort

In February and March, the NCIAF welcomed another 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 Ayush and Naheed, and we invited them to answer a few questions as part of our spotlight feature.

AYUSH

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

My name is Ayush, and I am currently pursuing a Bachelor of Science in Computer Science. Through my studies, I've been developing a strong foundation in programming, database management, and data-related technologies. I'm particularly interested in working with data, and my long-term goal is to become a Data Engineer. Outside of school, I enjoy fitness and staying active, as well as exploring new tools and technologies to improve my technical skills.



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

I was inspired to apply to the NCIAF because it provides an opportunity to work with real-world data while contributing to meaningful, community-focused initiatives. As someone interested in becoming a Data Engineer, I saw this as a great chance to gain hands-on experience with data, understand how it's used in decision-making, and strengthen my technical skills in a practical environment.

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

What I've enjoyed most is working with data in a real-world context, specially building dashboards and organizing information in a way that provides clear insights. It's been rewarding to see how data can support decisions and create impact. I've also enjoyed collaborating with the team and learning from others throughout the process.

NAHEED



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

My name is Naheed, and I am currently pursuing Business Analytics at Cambrian College. With a strong foundation in mathematics and experience across data analysis and education, I've developed a passion for using data to tell meaningful stories. My recent work on the NCIAF dashboard project, I had the opportunity to build interactive Power BI dashboards and contribute to community-focused reporting. Outside of academics, I love learning new tools and staying curious about how technology can create positive change.

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

I was inspired to apply for the NCIAF project because it offered a unique opportunity to use data skills in a meaningful, real-world context. I was especially drawn to the organization's focus on supporting Indigenous communities and delivering value through data-driven insights. The project allowed me to combine my interest in data analytics with work that has a positive community impact, which is something I find very motivating.

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

What I've enjoyed most about working with the NCIAF is being part of a project that goes beyond technical work and focuses on real impact. It was especially rewarding to see how the dashboards we developed can help tell the story of the work being done across communities. I really valued the collaborative environment and the opportunity to work with a team committed to creating meaningful impact.

Growing the Next Generation: The Power of Summer Employment in Indigenous Agriculture

Rehiring a student for a second summer may be eligible under YESP where **the youth meets program criteria related to barriers to employment** – criteria that apply to many Indigenous youth.

Note: applicant must meet all other YESP eligibility criteria

Summer employment in agriculture is more than a seasonal boost—it is a vital pathway for young people to connect with land, culture, and community while providing critical capacity to those leading food and farming initiatives across Indigenous communities. During the growing season, when timing is everything, these roles become essential. Students are not only supporting day-to-day operations in gardens, greenhouses, and land-based projects, they are gaining meaningful, hands-on experience that fosters a lasting relationship with agriculture and food systems.

For many community changemakers, however, hosting students comes with real challenges. Through conversations across the country, the NCIAF has heard directly from communities about the strain of onboarding new students during the busiest months of the season. Training takes time, and program limitations have often made it difficult to rehire returning students who already understand the work and can take on greater responsibility.

In response, the NCIAF brought these concerns to Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC), advocating for greater flexibility. We were encouraged to see this feedback reflected in eligibility clarity noting that Indigenous youth can be considered for a second summer if they have faced barriers—an important step toward continuity, leadership development, and reduced administrative burden. Programs like the **Youth Employment and Skills Program (YESP)** play a key role by supporting agriculture and agri-food employers with wage funding to create meaningful youth employment opportunities. Application intakes typically occur in the winter, with deadlines often in late January, to support the upcoming growing season.

At its heart, summer employment in agriculture is about more than labour—it is about growing the next generation of leaders while strengthening community capacity when it is needed most.

Youth Employment and Skills Program Highlights

Changes have been made to:

- application limits and requirements, including identification of the youth participant
- **eligibility of previous youth participants**
- eligible costs for relocation and addressing barriers to employment

Non-repayable funding up to \$14,000 per youth to support wages and benefits

- Offers up to an additional \$5,000 per project for youth who must relocate or face barriers to employment

Cost-sharing model for Indigenous employers or those hiring youth facing barriers:

- AAFC covers up to 80%, Employer contributes at least 20%
- Total combined government funding cannot exceed 100% of project costs (stacking limits apply)

Applications are open until May 4, 2026.

Troubleshooting Online PDF Applications:

Chrome: Go to `chrome://settings/content/pdfDocuments` → turn on "Download PDFs" instead of opening in Chrome

Firefox: Settings → General → scroll to Applications → find "Portable Document Format (PDF)" → set to "Use Adobe Acrobat"

Edge: `edge://settings/content/pdfDocuments` → toggle off the built-in viewer



Events We're Attending

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

Aggie Days - April 15-19, 2026

Location: Calgary, AB

NAAAN Tri-National Event - May 11-13, 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 impact [the NCIAF is] creating goes far beyond business—it's about strengthening our communities, our voices, and our future. These moments of time spent together in community, on the land, and sharing knowledge are where real connection happens and relationships are built.



Jolene Johnson
CEO & President
Wabanaki Maple



Please reach out to info@nciaf.ca if you would like to list an event.

Bourbon Maple Garlic Steak Bites

Steak Marinade Ingredients:

- 1lb New York or sirloin steak
- 2 tablespoons Wabanaki Maple's Barrel Aged Bourbon Maple Syrup
- 3 cloves of garlic minced
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 teaspoon cumin
- 1 teaspoon ground cayenne pepper
- 1 teaspoon paprika
- salt & pepper to taste

Dipping Sauce Ingredients:

- 4 tablespoons Dijon mustard
- 3 tablespoons Barrel Aged Bourbon Maple Syrup

Preparation

1. Cut up your steak into 1-inch cubes and add them into a medium-sized bowl.
2. Add in maple syrup, olive oil, garlic, cumin, cayenne, paprika, salt, and pepper, and mix thoroughly until the seasoning is evenly coated onto the steak bites.
3. Cover the seasoned steak bites and marinate in the fridge for 30 minutes to 3 hours.
4. After the steak has been marinated, line the steak bites in the basket of your air fryer and cook for 10 to 12 minutes at 400 degrees.
5. In a small sauce bowl, mix your Dijon mustard and maple syrup and serve!

Recipe courtesy of Wabanaki Maple.

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Stay Informed

