

The Wâwiyiyaw

National Circle Newsletter For Indigenous Agriculture & Food

NEWS

UPDATE

Strengthening Indigenous Food Sovereignty: NCIAF Partners with Tea Creek



We are excited to announce a new partnership with Tea Creek Training Inc. (Tea Creek), an Indigenous-led organization known for its dedication to land-based food sovereignty and trades training. This collaboration, established through an MOU, reflects a shared commitment to supporting Indigenous food systems and fostering self-reliance in Indigenous communities.

Tea Creek's hands-on programs provide invaluable opportunities for participants to reconnect with traditional food practices while gaining essential skills for agricultural and economic independence. By combining NCIAF's national leadership in Indigenous agriculture with Tea Creek's land-based training expertise, the partnership aims to offer impactful solutions tailored to the needs of Indigenous communities.

What This Partnership Means:

- **Enhanced Learning Opportunities:** Indigenous participants will have access to expanded educational and training pathways, rooted in traditional knowledge and practical agricultural experience.
- **Community-Led Solutions:** By supporting locally driven food sovereignty initiatives, the collaboration will strengthen Indigenous food systems and contribute to long-term resilience.
- **Economic Empowerment:** Promoting skills development and trades training will create sustainable economic opportunities, encouraging Indigenous leadership in the agricultural sector.

NCIAF President and CEO, Kallie Wood, emphasized the importance of this partnership:

"Working with Tea Creek allows us to combine our strengths and create meaningful change. This collaboration is about more than training – it's about empowering Indigenous communities to reclaim food sovereignty and build a resilient future."

Jacob Beaton, founder of Tea Creek, shared his perspective:

"We're thrilled to partner with NCIAF to expand our impact. Indigenous people are ready to lead in food production once again, and together, we're making that a reality."

Stay connected for updates on how this partnership will drive progress in Indigenous agriculture. To learn more about Tea Creek and their inspiring work, visit www.teacreek.ca.

Advancing Women Conference West 2025

The NCIAF was honoured to attend and present at the Advancing Women Conference (AWC) West 2025 in Calgary, Alberta. This year's event brought together over 350 delegates, 41 speakers, and 31 students from across Canada, each contributing to a vibrant and empowering atmosphere. From small breakout rooms to the dynamic main hall, every space was filled with energy and purpose as women and allies in agriculture gathered to share experiences, gain insights, and build lasting connections. The conference served as a powerful reminder of the importance of community, collaboration, and continued learning in the agricultural sector.

Throughout the conference, we were inspired by the many women who shared their journeys, challenges, and successes in agriculture and food systems. The sessions offered practical advice and emotional resilience, sparking meaningful dialogue among attendees. It was especially encouraging to witness the engagement of students and young professionals, whose passion and curiosity point to a promising future for the industry.

Our participation in the conference was highlighted by a workshop led by President and CEO, Kallie Wood, and Senior Vice President of Business Development, Chris McKee. The session, which focused on Indigenous agriculture and reconciliation, received overwhelmingly positive feedback from attendees, earning an outstanding average rating of 4.9 out of 5. Participants described the session as *“super engaging and enlightening”* and shared that they left feeling *“empowered to engage more meaningfully with Indigenous communities and people.”* The powerful dialogue and honest reflections in the room spoke to the deep need for continued education, understanding, and partnership when it comes to Indigenous perspectives in agriculture.



Jennifer Bishop, Business Development Manager at Tourism Calgary, described the workshop as a *“deeply moving and thought-provoking exploration of the history, relationships, and realities that continue to shape Indigenous agriculture in Canada.”* Her words capture the heart of our mission at NCIAF—to create spaces where Indigenous voices are not only heard but valued and elevated. We are grateful to have had the opportunity to foster these critical conversations and help shift perspectives around Indigenous knowledge systems, land stewardship, and the role of reconciliation in building a sustainable agricultural future.

We remain deeply committed to supporting and advancing Indigenous leadership in agriculture. Participating in AWC West 2025 reaffirmed the importance of creating inclusive spaces that honour Indigenous voices and knowledge systems. We are grateful for the opportunity to contribute to this important dialogue and look forward to building on this momentum as we continue our work to strengthen Indigenous food sovereignty and agricultural leadership across the country.



NCIAF Attends Indigenous Business Gathering in Saskatoon

On March 25, 2025, NCIAF's Director of Business Development, Michelle Sandercock, had the privilege of attending the Indigenous Business Gathering in Saskatoon, an event that brought together over 1,200 attendees and 120 exhibitors at the World Trade Center Saskatoon at Prairieland Park. Hosted by the Ministry of Trade and Export Development Saskatchewan, the event served as a dynamic platform for fostering connections between Indigenous and non-Indigenous businesses, economic development organizations, and industry leaders.



As a champion for Indigenous agribusiness, the NCIAF engaged in meaningful discussions about the role of agriculture and food sovereignty in Indigenous economic development. We connected with industry partners, Indigenous entrepreneurs, and community leaders to explore opportunities for collaboration and support in strengthening agricultural trade networks.

The event underscored the importance of ensuring Indigenous producers have access to the resources, markets, and partnerships necessary to build sustainable and thriving food systems.

The NCIAF extends gratitude to the organizers for facilitating such an impactful gathering. As we continue to advocate for Indigenous-led agriculture and food initiatives, we look forward to building on the relationships and insights gained from this event to drive meaningful change for Indigenous communities across Canada.

NIAP Advisory Circle Spotlight: Honouring Tradition & Innovation in Agriculture with Gordon Lerat

We are honoured to have Gordon (Gord) Lerat as a valued member of the National Indigenous Agriculture Programs (NIAP) Advisory Circle. Raised on his father's mixed farm on Cowessess First Nation, Gordon has dedicated his life to agriculture, starting his own farm at 22, and contributing to numerous agricultural initiatives, including creating the foundation for 4C Farms Ltd. His leadership as Chief and Councilor of Cowessess First Nation, along with his roles on various agricultural boards, has helped shape Indigenous agriculture. Deeply rooted in First Nations traditions, Gordon's involvement in sacred ceremonies and discussions with Elders has strengthened his understanding of the sacred connection between Indigenous Peoples and the land. His expertise in both traditional knowledge and modern agriculture makes him a vital asset in guiding the development of the NIAP programs.

Tell us a little about your history in agriculture and how your history impacts the strengths you bring to the Advisory Circle.

My journey in agriculture began at six years old when my father started farming 10 acres of oats – eventually growing and expanding to buy privately owned farmland in the non-native community and becoming a very successful producer – and our large family relied on what we produced, tending gardens, milking cows, and raising livestock. These hands-on experiences instilled in me a deep understanding of agricultural practices and the connection between First Nations traditions and modern-day farming. I later earned certifications as an Agriculture Production Technician and in Agricultural Mechanics, expanding my expertise by hauling fertilizer, grain, and livestock across North America. This exposure to large-scale operations gave me a broad perspective on the agricultural supply chain and its impact on our communities. With knowledge spanning small-scale family farming to international distribution, I aim to help strengthen Indigenous agriculture by blending traditional values with modern industry practices.

What inspired you to join the Advisory Circle?

I see the challenges and disparities in agriculture on our First Nations, and I am driven to help bridge that gap. My goal is to promote and elevate First Nations participation in the national agriculture industry—whether in grain production, cattle ranching, or other sectors. These developments are not just about the present; they lay the foundation for future generations. I want to inspire hope and create meaningful opportunities for young people to engage in agriculture, ensuring they have the resources and pathways to succeed. By identifying and fostering these opportunities, I aim to support the growth and sustainability of Indigenous agriculture for generations to come.

What is one key takeaway you've learned about the NCIAF during your time in the Advisory Circle?

The NCIAF has both the dedicated staff and the resources needed to support agricultural development in First Nations communities. What stands out to me most is the genuine commitment within the organization—there is a true sincerity in wanting to assist First Nations in achieving success in agriculture. The NCIAF is made up of passionate, hardworking individuals who are dedicated to making a real difference. I see a strong team with a shared vision, and I want to contribute to that success in any way I can. Whatever my role may be, I am ready to step up and support the mission however I am needed.



Photo, L to R: Gordon Lerat Sr. (Gord's father), Gord Lerat, and Crawford Sparvier (Gord's uncle).



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 - Apr 8-9, 2025](#)

Location: Regina, SK

[Calgary Stampede Aggie Days - Apr 12-13, 2025](#)

Location: Calgary, AB

[Indigenous Prosperity Forum 2025 - May 7-8, 2025](#)

Location: Gatineau, QC

[Indigenous Ag Summit, presented by FCC - Nov 2025](#)

Location: Regina, SK

Events We're Sharing

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

[RC \(Restaurants Canada\) Show 2025 - Apr 7-9, 2025](#)

Location: Toronto, ON

[MNP Webinar: Area One Farm Partnership - Apr 17, 2025](#)

Location: Online

[Food Leadership Summit - Oct 7-8, 2025](#)

Location: Calgary, AB

Program Opportunity

[Feast Fellowship, Sovereign Seeds](#)

Sovereign Seeds has announced the **Feast Fellowship**, a brand-new 8-month virtual program designed to support 2LSGBTQI+ Indigenous farmers in strengthening their agricultural business skills! This initiative, part of their Cultural Food and Agriculture Entrepreneurship Program, is open to Indigenous 2SLGBTQI+ farmers across Canada who are looking to start or scale a for-profit farm business.

Application Period: April 1, 2025 - May 1, 2025

Program Dates: June 2025 - January 2026

To learn more, check out the [Sovereign Seeds website](#).

For any questions, contact their Manager of Cultural Food Entrepreneurship at sonia@sovereignseeds.org.



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

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Stay Informed

