

The Wâwiyiyaw

National Circle Newsletter For Indigenous Agriculture & Food
December 2025

NEWS

UPDATE

A Year in Review - 2025

A message from the President & CEO, Kallie Wood:

2025 has been a defining year for the NCIAF. Together, we advanced our shared mission to strengthen Indigenous-led agriculture and food systems across Canada — rooted in sovereignty, sustainability, and the success of our communities and Indigenous Peoples.

We forged new partnerships built on trust and meaningful action. From industry to government to community-driven innovators, these relationships are helping us unlock opportunities — not only for today's producers, but for the next generation of Indigenous food leaders.

We convened and celebrated Indigenous agriculture on national stages. The Indigenous Agriculture Summit at Canadian Western Agribition reached new heights, showcasing innovation, entrepreneurship, youth leadership, and the power of Indigenous-owned food economies. We continued to elevate sectors that have always been Indigenous — from bison to wild rice to aquaculture — and we supported community-based food production to strengthen health and self-determination.

We made progress toward the infrastructure and capacity our Nations deserve. Whether through workforce development strategies, the groundwork for regional innovation hubs, support for market entry, or advancing food security initiatives in remote and northern communities — we demonstrated that Indigenous agriculture is not a niche interest. It is a national priority.

We listened. We learned. We led.

And we did it together — as a Circle.

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A Year in Review - 2025 (Con't)

Looking Ahead: Our Wishes for 2026

As we step into 2026, we do so with optimism and clarity of purpose. We will continue to elevate Indigenous voices in agricultural policy – ensuring our producers, youth, and community leaders are shaping the future of food in this country. We will work tirelessly to secure the investments required to scale real change – including innovation infrastructure, training pathways, business supports, and local food systems that deliver prosperity at home. We will deepen partnerships that honour reciprocity, respect the land, and strengthen our sovereignty – economically, nutritionally, and culturally.

We will champion youth – not as the leaders of tomorrow, but as changemakers of today. And above all, we will remain guided by who we are: caretakers of the land, stewards of water, keepers of tradition, and innovators for future generations.

In Gratitude

Thank you to the Nations and communities who trust us.

Thank you to the Elders and Knowledge Keepers who ground us.

Thank you to the producers, fishers, harvesters, and entrepreneurs who inspire us.

Thank you to our board, partners, and team – this work takes all of us.

Here's to a strong, united, and thriving 2026.

A year where we continue to nourish Nations and empower generations.

In unity and respect, hiy hiy,

Kallie Wood

President & CEO

National Circle for Indigenous Agriculture and Food



Chris McKee – Senior Vice-President, Business Development

[Highlight] - One of the most meaningful highlights of 2025 was witnessing Indigenous agriculture and food leadership move from conversation to action. Across the year—through partnerships formed, gatherings convened, youth voices elevated, and communities leading—we saw what is possible when Indigenous-led vision is met with trust, collaboration, and commitment.

2025 reminded us that food sovereignty is not a future concept; it is already taking shape in fields, waters, businesses, and Nations across the country. The progress made this year reinforced a powerful truth: when Indigenous peoples lead, systems change, and communities grow stronger..

[Hope] - My hope for 2026 is that we continue to deepen this momentum—moving beyond pilots into lasting systems, beyond relationships into true shared accountability, and beyond planning into sustained investment. I hope we see even more space created for youth leadership, more room for innovation rooted in culture, and greater alignment across governments, industry, and communities.

Above all, I hope 2026 is a year where Indigenous-led food systems are not just supported, but fully recognized as essential to Canada's collective food future—resilient, sustainable, and grounded in respect.

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A Year in Review - 2025 (Con't)



Michelle Sandercock – Director, Business Development

[Highlight] - I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to travel to the Yukon and be welcomed by such innovative, resilient, and inspiring Indigenous communities; witnessing their determination and success within such a beautiful, rugged landscape was truly electrifying. I carry immense gratitude for the trust, generosity, and teachings shared with me during those moments.

On a personal note, our family had a significant milestone watching our twin boys graduate—born under 2 lbs each, 70 days in the NICU - we have overcome learning disabilities and the beautiful chaos of twin life together. Watching them grow into young men fills me with pride, and a tender sense of how fleeting these moments are.

[Hope] - My hope for 2026 is rooted in gratitude—that NCIAF continues to be honoured with invitations to serve more Indigenous communities across the country. I am also thankful for the possibility of growing our team with more dedicated, passionate teammates to walk alongside communities and support this important work.

Kate Fraser – Director, Capacity Development

[Highlight] - It's been another amazing year at the NCIAF, and I am grateful to contribute to the organization. The highlight of my year was being part of the work that brought the NCIAF's vision to life through real connection and impact. Working alongside a small, committed team, I led the planning and delivery of the Indigenous Field Day, Indigenous Agriculture Summit, and launch of our national Web Hub. The most rewarding part was seeing those events create space for relationship-building, learning, and trust, knowing they set a strong foundation for how the NCIAF will lead into the future.

[Hope] - In 2026, I hope to see the NCIAF's youth programming launch and take root, creating meaningful opportunities for young people to explore agriculture, food systems, and leadership. I hope the program provides more space to inspire curiosity, foster connection to the land, and build skills that will help the next generation of Indigenous food leaders thrive. I am excited to see these initiatives grow in partnership with communities, shaping experiences that are both empowering and lasting.



Terry Lerat – ReconciliAG Advisor

[Highlight] - 2025 has been a whirlwind year for me, starting with January 2025. I look back and review each month to see if there is any significant time that stands out ahead of the next in line. I can honestly say that every week, month and season is as significant and rewarding as the previous. Agricultural activities such as growing profitable crops, raising superior beef cattle, all on our own First Nation, caring for the lands, and maintaining productivity of all agriculture lands. Land Stewardship maybe the most overlooked, misunderstood term in Food Production is of great importance and worthy of considerable attention, with these thoughts in mind, the production of the documentary by NCIAF on 4C Farms and Ranch along with sharing the visions and rewards of Ag ventures and food production by our First Nations means a lot to me.

NCIAF and the Indigenous Agriculture Summit at Agribition 2025 allowed far reaching audiences that should not be overlooked as the interest and networking on our Ag Ventures continues to this day.

[Hope] - For the year 2026 our Cowessess First Nation members in Regina are patiently waiting for their community garden to take form, I hope I can assist them with their wish. 2025 has been a great year, Merry Christmas to all, Wish everyone the best in 2026.

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A Year in Review - 2025 (Con't)

Sarah Adams — Business Development Specialist

[Highlight] - This year, my biggest highlight working with the NCIAF was seeing our ideas turn into tangible impact—bringing people together, elevating Indigenous voices in agriculture, and helping build momentum around food sovereignty, knowledge-sharing, and community-led solutions. I'm especially proud of the relationships strengthened along the way and the growing visibility of Indigenous leadership within the agriculture and food systems space.

[Hope] - Looking ahead to next year, I hope to continue building on this foundation by expanding our reach, deepening partnerships, and supporting even more Indigenous-led initiatives that honour land, culture, and the next generations.



Monique Desjarlais — ReconciliAG Specialist

[Highlight] - Since joining the NCIAF team in August, I have been welcomed and embraced with such warmth, kindness, and generosity. Being invited to take part in a traditional bison harvest with the Sioux Valley Dakota Nation so early in my journey was a grounding and beautiful gift; one that showed me just how deeply this team lives its values in community, reciprocity, and relationship. I feel incredibly grateful and honored to work alongside people who lead with love, passion, and purpose every single day. The team at NCIAF stands with community and pours their spirit into creating meaningful change.

[Hope] - As I look ahead to the upcoming year, my hope is to continue doing work that is deeply rooted in relationship, respect, and service to Indigenous communities. I hope to grow in my role by walking alongside communities and entrepreneurs in a way that feels supportive, thoughtful, and aligned with their priorities, while helping create pathways for food sovereignty, economic opportunity, and long-term sustainability. More than anything, I hope to contribute to work that honours the land, uplifts Indigenous voices, and creates real, lasting impact for future generations.

Justice Acoose — Communications Specialist

[Highlight] - Every day I work, I feel appreciative for the people I work with and the work our organization does. I feel honoured to highlight the youth, entrepreneurs, businesses, and communities that have allowed us to walk alongside their journey. As intimidating as it is, a highlight this year for me is taking over as a host for Nourishing Nations, the NCIAF podcast. It has helped me to build further on my interpersonal and communication skills while amplifying Indigenous voices in a new way – sharing stories, teachings, and innovations while strengthening connections across Indigenous agriculture and food systems.

[Hope] - Looking ahead to the upcoming year, my hope is to continue expanding our communications platforms and further developing my hosting skills. I look forward to supporting community-led initiatives and the next generation, and deepening understanding of the vital role Indigenous agriculture plays in building resilient, self-determined food systems.



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A Year in Review - 2025 (Con't)



Colin Arlt – Manager, Indigenous Prairie Bison Initiative

[Highlight] - My highlight was being invited to join an amazing team doing what I love as a full-time job. Buffalo provided and continue to provide everything Indigenous people need food, culture, clothing, shelter and kinship and was how the Métis Nation was formed. So having Buffalo provide all of my family's needs again means the world to me.

[Hope] - My hope for 2026 is to represent the Buffalo Nation and NCIAF with integrity and care. For many years, I have heard the call to bring Indigenous Buffalo Stewards and Guardians together, so being able to support this work feels like a dream realized. I hope the Indigenous Prairie Bison Initiative is guided by braided knowledge from Indigenous communities, as all our work at the NCIAF has been. I also hope this work

brings Nations closer together, just as Buffalo has done historically and continues to do today, including through the signing of the Buffalo Treaty. Above all, I hope to carry out this work in a way that honours and reflects NCIAF's mission.

Veronica Lynxleg – Executive Assistant

[Highlight] - The highlight of this year which would trump years before this also, was the ability, opportunity and the inconceivability of acquiring such a multifaceted, multi-intellectual, diverse, committed and heart-led family like NCIAF. Coming back to the city was perfect timing as everything- home and employment- fell into place so synonymously. That choice led me here starting with the best interview setting I have ever experienced in my entire life's job span. It felt right from those first moments. And upon meeting the great minds that make up the internal organs of NCIAF- my coworkers- they are easily the most incomparable, intellectually unrivaled, beautiful employees I have ever been privileged to admire in person and befriend.



[Hope] - My hopes for 2026 are quite simple- that we each receive the prosperity we deserve, each employee has love in their lives and that we all grow together in each of our own distinct ways but also as backbones for each other to uplift and prevail. I also hope that NCIAF continues to streamline and extend our reach more broadly to engage, enable and exuberate the advancement, capabilities and agriculture like-mindedness of our fellow Indigenous extended families.

Emily Nanne – Program Consultant

[Highlight] - Attending Indigenous Agriculture Summit (IAS) allowed me to affirm that Indigenous agriculture isn't an emerging idea but a movement already in motion— something I clearly witnessed at IAS—and when this reality is understood by those with the power to influence Canada's food system, it opens the door to meaningful support, investment, and integration of Indigenous leadership into the mainstream.

[Hope] - In 2026, my hope is to see stronger acknowledgement and support for emerging agriculture regions like the North, alongside programs, industry, and policymakers truly centering self-determination in Indigenous food systems. I'm hopeful that youth voices will have more space to lead our conversations, and that

the year brings even more opportunities to connect with the incredible people building resilient, self-determined food systems and businesses.





Indigenous Agriculture Summit 2025: Day-by-Day Summary

Day 1: Community-Led Food Systems, Youth, and Buffalo Restoration

Day One of the Indigenous Agriculture Summit emphasized that Indigenous food sovereignty is already happening—driven by community vision, youth leadership, and deep relationships with land and animals. Across sessions, speakers shared how northern and remote communities are building resilient food systems through land-based learning, youth employment, sustainable grazing, and culturally grounded programming. Examples from Fox Lake Cree Nation, Grow North, and Willow Brook Farms showed how food production, education, and employment reinforce one another, particularly when youth are trusted with real responsibility and supported through mentorship. Practical knowledge was also shared on accessing grants, navigating federal funding programs, and developing grazing management plans that respect both ecological health and animal autonomy.



(L to R) Kian Mistickokat, Vanessa Hines, Valerie Kinistino, Candace Carter, Adam Subject, and Colin Kobza.



Sioux Valley Dakota Nation Youth Panel, (L to R) Alexis Antoine, Meadow Leaming, Rylie Bell, and Bradley Bone.

A central theme throughout Day One was the role of youth as present-day leaders, not future placeholders. Youth from Sioux Valley Dakota Nation spoke powerfully about agriculture as an act of cultural responsibility, leadership, and service to future generations. Their reflections reinforced that meaningful participation—decision-making authority alongside guidance—is essential to building truly self-determined food systems. The day concluded with profound teachings on buffalo restoration, where speakers emphasized that bringing linniiwa back to the land is not simply conservation work, but a holistic act of cultural, ecological, and social renewal rooted in Indigenous governance, treaty relationships, and intergenerational knowledge transfer.

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Indigenous Agriculture Summit 2025: Day-by-Day Summary

Day 2: Innovation, Land, and Indigenous Economic Sovereignty

Day Two focused on innovation as a continuation of Indigenous knowledge systems—where culture, technology, and entrepreneurship work together to strengthen food sovereignty. Sessions explored wild rice stewardship, value-added food businesses, land use planning, and collaborative buffalo management, all grounded in the reality that Indigenous Nations continue to navigate land loss, policy barriers, and inequitable market structures. Speakers highlighted how Indigenous-led technologies, such as data and AI tools owned by Nations themselves, can protect Elders' knowledge while supporting decision-making in the face of environmental and economic change.



(L to R) Mikwan Mistickokat, Chris McKee, and Alex Mistickokat.

Economic sovereignty emerged as a strong thread throughout the day. From value-added food products and Indigenous-led processing to regenerative agriculture and land buy-back strategies, presenters emphasized that reclaiming control over land, production, and markets is essential to long-term community wellbeing. Youth education and innovation were highlighted as key drivers of this work, with educators, Elders, and youth leaders sharing how classrooms, gardens, and food hubs are becoming spaces for cultural revitalization, leadership development, and practical skill-building. The Summit closed with powerful reflections from Indigenous chefs and food entrepreneurs, who reminded participants that local, small-scale food systems thrive on collaboration, relationship-building, and pride of place—and that food, at its heart, is about care for one another and the land.



Chris McKee interviewing with Mick Favel from CTV.



(L to R) Marco Valicenti, Kallie Wood, and Chris McKee.



Events We're Attending

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

2026 Indigenous Lands Symposium - February 2-6, 2026

Location: Sudbury, ON

Advancing Women in Agriculture - March 8-10, 2026

Location: Calgary, AB

Indigenous Business Gathering - March 3-4, 2026

Location: Saskatoon, SK

Events We're Sharing

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

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

Location: Regina, SK

Forward Summit West - May 14-15, 2026

Location: Calgary, AB

Featured Quote

Here is our featured quote of the month:

This partnership between the Canadian Federation of Agriculture and the National Circle for Indigenous Agriculture and Food is a powerful step forward for agriculture in Canada. It's not only about formal collaboration, it's about unlocking real, on the ground opportunities for farmers and communities across the country.

By bringing together Indigenous and non-Indigenous producers, we're creating space for mutual learning, shared innovation, and the development of relationships that are rooted in respect and reciprocity. Through farm-level partnerships we have the potential to transform how we grow food, steward land, and build resilient agricultural economies.

We're excited about what this means for the future of Canadian agriculture. Together, we can amplify Indigenous leadership, support sustainable practices, and build a sector that reflects the diversity, strength, and potential of all our agricultural communities.

Keith Currie
President
Canadian Federation of Agriculture



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

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Stay Informed

