

A photograph of three traditional tipis standing in a grassy field under a clear blue sky. The tipis are made of light-colored fabric and have wooden poles visible at the top. A dense line of green trees is in the background.

The Wâwiyiyaw

National Circle Newsletter For Indigenous Agriculture & Food

NEWS

UPDATE



Honouring Our Past and Embracing Our Full Circle: Celebrating Indigenous History Month and Pride



June marks both Indigenous History Month and Pride Month in Canada—a powerful intersection of reflection, celebration, and commitment to justice. For the National Circle for Indigenous Agriculture and Food, this month is an opportunity to uplift stories that have too often been marginalized, especially the voices and contributions of Two-Spirit people within our communities.

The term "Two-Spirit" is a modern, pan-Indigenous concept that reflects traditional understandings of gender and sexuality that existed across many First Nations before colonization. Two-Spirit people held sacred roles as knowledge keepers, healers, mediators, and leaders—roles deeply respected within their

nations. Colonization attempted to erase these identities through enforced binary gender norms and homophobia. Reclaiming and honouring Two-Spirit identities is a vital act of cultural resurgence and healing.

In the work we do around Indigenous food sovereignty and agricultural revitalization, it is essential to ensure that Two-Spirit voices are present and empowered. Two-Spirit people have always been caretakers of the land and the community, contributing wisdom and balance in ways that are deeply rooted in traditional knowledge. As we build food systems grounded in Indigenous values, inclusivity is not just a goal—it is a foundational principle.

This month, we honour the legacy and leadership of Two-Spirit individuals past and present. We also recognize that creating space for gender and sexual diversity within our programs, partnerships, and leadership circles strengthens our movement as a whole. Pride and Indigenous History Month are reminders that identity and culture are not separate from our work—they are at its heart.

Together, let's commit to learning, listening, and uplifting every part of the circle. This June, we celebrate not only who we are but who we've always been.



You're Invited: NCIAF's 2nd Annual Indigenous Field Day at Thunderchild First Nation

We are honoured to invite you to join us for a powerful day of connection, learning, and celebration at the NCIAF's 2nd Annual Indigenous Field Day, taking place on June 17, 2025, at Thunderchild First Nation in Saskatchewan.

This special event brings together community members, agricultural leaders, knowledge keepers, and partners to highlight Indigenous-led solutions in food systems and land-based practices. It is more than a field day — it is a gathering grounded in relationship, respect, and our shared commitment to food sovereignty and sustainability.



What to Expect:

- Tour Thunder Farms - explore a thriving community-led farming initiative proudly operated by Thunderchild First Nation
- Hands-On Learning – Participate in engaging, practical sessions led by agricultural and food system leaders who are walking alongside Indigenous communities to foster self-determination, economic opportunity, and long-term sustainability.

We look forward to welcoming you to Thunderchild First Nation for this meaningful day on the land. Space is limited and early registration is required.

Register now: nciaf.ca/events/2nd-annual-indigenous-field-day

Innovating from the Ground Up: How TeleGAN is Transforming Rural Livelihoods

On May 26, 2025, NCIAC Business Development Associate, Michael Burechailo, and Communications Specialist, Justice Acoose, had the wonderful opportunity to sit down with Vivian Arguelles, Technical Cooperation Specialist, for the TeleGAN project at the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA). It's clear that Vivian's passion for the project runs deep; while working on her PhD at McGill University, Vivian was offered the opportunity to work on TeleGAN. Once IICA secured funding for the project, Vivian was hired to lead the project and hasn't looked back since.

TeleGAN is a four-year regional initiative within Mexico and Guatemala (2024-2028) led by IICA and funded by Global Fairs Canada. The project works closely with ranchers, Indigenous communities, youth, and local institutions to co-develop sustainable solutions that improve productivity while protecting ecosystems and rural livelihoods. From early on, TeleGAN's vision was simple: using satellite monitoring to help ranchers manage soil moisture, vegetation cover, and drought or flood risk. Today, the team supports 1,300 ranching families across Mexico and Guatemala (30% Indigenous-led, 30% women-led since 2024), all of which use an app that translates high-tech imagery into on-the-ground insights.



Vivian and her team knew that introducing unfamiliar technology wouldn't work without strong community relationships. "One of the biggest challenges in the beginning was building trust", Vivian stated. "Many ranchers in places like Mexico were skeptical about satellite monitoring." They partnered with trusted community leaders, church members, and teachers to introduce the project in familiar and respectful ways. What happened next surprised everyone. "We weren't sure how open people would be to using the tech," Vivian admits. "But once we showed printed satellite images and explained the benefits, ranchers immediately wanted to learn more. They downloaded the app, asked questions, and began comparing the data themselves."

Today, the focus is on long-term sustainability. TeleGAN has already met its initial goal, engaging 1,300

ranching families across the region, but now the team is training with local governments and leaders to keep the technology running, even after the project winds down in 2028. Communities are already sharing insights with each other, building a network of knowledge that can outlast the program itself. When asked to sum up TeleGAN in one word, Vivian doesn't hesitate: "Innovative." And with its blend of high-tech tools and community empowerment, it's easy to see why.



Representing Indigenous Food Sovereignty at Forward Summit West 2025

This May, the NCIAF was proud to be represented at Forward Summit West 2025 in Calgary, Alberta, held May 14–15, 2025. Attending on behalf of the organization were Sarah Adams, Business Development Specialist, and Justice Acoose, Communications Specialist.

Justice stepped in to represent President and CEO Kallie Wood in the roundtable discussion titled “Rooted in Tradition: Indigenous Food Sovereignty and Agriculture.” The conversation, moderated by Tanis One Spot, Executive Director of Lands for the Tsuut’ina Nation, also featured Nicole Davies, Executive Director of Sovereign Seeds, and Daryl Kootenay, Co-Director of Howl. Together, the panelists explored the foundational role of traditional ecological knowledge, Indigenous ways of living, medicinal and culinary knowledge, and the power of food systems in healing, empowerment, and community resilience.

Throughout the Summit, attendees were immersed in powerful stories and critical conversations. Key themes included:

- The strength and leadership of Indigenous women across sectors;
- Youth-led panels emphasizing the next generation’s voice in shaping Indigenous futures;
- Open and courageous dialogue around mental health, with on-site professionals available for support;
- Honest discussions on lateral violence and racism in the workplace—and the importance of lateral kindness to create inclusive, respectful spaces;
- Encouragement to break barriers in procurement and partnerships, and assert Indigenous presence in economic development; and
- Reaffirming the path toward economic self-sufficiency while staying rooted in Indigenous worldviews.

One of the most powerful takeaways from Forward Summit was the diversity of attendees—leaders, entrepreneurs, knowledge keepers, and community advocates all coming together with a shared commitment to progress. The event didn’t shy away from hard topics, instead creating space for truth, growth, and collective visioning.

We’re grateful to have had a seat at the table and remain committed to advancing the message of Indigenous food sovereignty and supporting strong, self-determined communities through food, culture, and connection.



The NCIAF Joins National Dialogue on Indigenous Economic Growth at 2025 IGNITE Forum

Michelle Sandercock, Director of Business Development at the National Circle for Indigenous Agriculture and Food (NCIAF), attended the 2025 IGNITE Indigenous Prosperity Forum hosted by the National Aboriginal Capital Corporations Association (NACCA) from May 6–8 in Gatineau, Quebec.

The event gathered over 400 delegates, including Indigenous entrepreneurs, financial institutions, and policymakers, to celebrate and advance Indigenous economic self-determination. A key highlight was the emphasis on youth engagement. The forum featured Indigenous youth business owners and NACCA's Youth Advisory Council, providing a platform for emerging entrepreneurs to connect with established leaders and gain insights into sustainable business practices.

The forum also showcased the achievements of Indigenous Financial Institutions (IFIs) and their supporting organizations, such as NACCA and the Indigenous Growth Fund. Collectively, IFIs have provided over \$3.2 billion in financing to support economic development and the unique needs of Indigenous communities across Canada.

The gathering offered an opportunity to engage with peers and partners in the Indigenous business environment and to share the work of the NCIAF with Indigenous leaders across Canada. Both NACCA, the Indigenous Financial Institutions, and the NCIAF have shared goals - building resilient Indigenous economies and strengthening networks that support Indigenous entrepreneurs.





First Field Trip: The Team Visits Wanuskewin Heritage Park

On May 8, our team—alongside our newest summer students—set out on their first field trip of the summer to Wanuskewin Heritage Park, just outside Saskatoon.

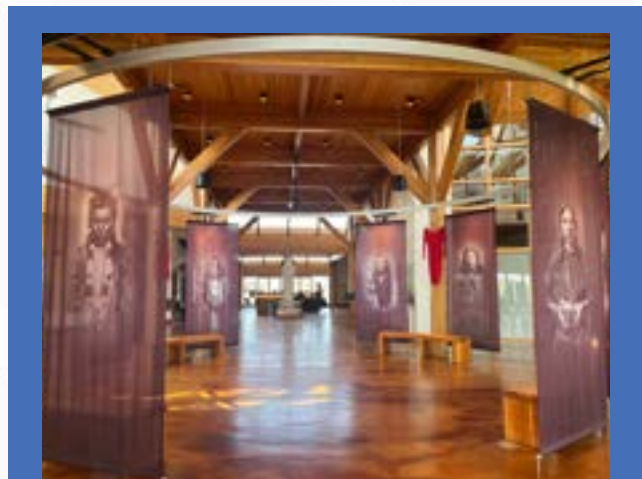
With our planned one-day event postponed due to unforeseen circumstances, leadership saw an opportunity to turn the day into a meaningful learning experience.

Wanuskewin, which means “*being at peace with oneself*” in Cree, is a National Historic Site and sacred gathering place that has welcomed Indigenous Peoples for nearly 6,000 years. The site offered an immersive introduction to the deep cultural and historical roots of the Northern Plains.

During our visit, we had the chance to:

- See a bison herd up close—an exciting moment that tied together the park's ecological restoration and cultural storytelling.
- Explore interactive exhibits, learning about traditional knowledge, language, and the archaeological significance of the land.
- Reflect on a powerful display honoring Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women (MMIW), which sparked important conversations and underscored the ongoing need for awareness and action.

For our new team members, it was an inspiring way to begin their time with the NCI AF. The trip reinforced our shared commitment to learning, respect, and reconciliation—values that are central to our work every day.



From Farm Roots to Community Impact: Spotlight on Summer Associate Michael Burechailo

Michael Burechailo is one of two Business Development Associates with the NCI AF, who began his summer with the team in May. Since he began, he's learned what the NCI AF is about, and dove straight in to working with clients and communities.

Tell us a little about yourself and your position within the NCI AF.

Growing up on a farm in central Saskatchewan, I have firsthand experience within agriculture, which has shown me both the rewards and the challenges of working on the land.

What inspired you to join the NCI AF?

I was inspired to join the NCI AF through my desire to support Indigenous communities... Experiencing the rewards and challenges of agriculture firsthand created a passion to help communities within the agriculture sector.



What have you found to be the best part about working with the NCI AF so far?

The best part of working with NCI AF has been building relationships and communicating with communities across Canada while learning about their unique challenges and how we can help to overcome them.



Events We're Attending

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

9th Annual Indigenous Clean Energy Forum - Jun 4-5, 2025

Location: Calgary, AB

Americas Ag & Food Security Forum 25 - Jun 16-17, 2025

Location: Kananaskis, AB

2nd Annual Indigenous Field Day - Jun 17, 2025

Location: North Battleford, SK

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.

Ag In Motion - Jul 15 - 17, 2025

Location: Langham, SK

Calgary Stampede - Jul 4-13

Location: Calgary, AB

Food Leadership Summit - Oct 7-8, 2025

Location: Calgary, AB



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

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Stay Informed

