



Local Programs and Cultural Enterprises







There are a variety of small scale local initiatives attempting to address food access and nutrition, and the picture differs from community to community. Some local band councils provide food boxes or provide money to elders to help subsidize food costs. Metlakatla's new health center features a kitchen that is used for their Meals on Wheels' program which provides meals to participants in the community delivered to their homes. The community of Gitxaala operates a greenhouse which was constructed in 2016 which will help preserve traditional food production, increase nutritional education and develop new skills within the Gitxaala Nation. Although there are no community gardens present in most communities, other First Nations in Canada, such as Garden River First Nation in Manitoba operate a thriving community based farming enterprise that supports the entire community (Loney, 2016). This is a successful model that could be adapted in the coastal Ts'msyen communities. Many Indigenous communities across Canada have designed and hosted a range of cultural initiatives that aim to re-connect people, particularly the younger generation to the land and to traditional harvesting and food preparation practices. Some examples of such programs include the Culturally Relevant Urban Wellness Program which is based out of Vancouver, British Columbia. This program aims to reconnect urban Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth with culturally relevant programming through land based activities like gardening, traditional fish smoking, and other activities. Some other examples include Ghost River Rediscovery in Calgary, Alberta and Swan Bay Rediscovery in Haida Gwaii, British Columbia. These are just a few successful examples of cultural programming that exist within Canada that could be used as frameworks for local programming in the Ts'msyen communities.



One such initiative that I propose is a hunter/fisher cultural program to be implemented in my home community of Metlakatla. This program would be structured to allow people within the community to have job opportunities year-round. The program would consist of various knowledge keepers in the community with expertise around hunting, fishing, and harvesting being paired with local youth and community members who are wanting to learn about traditional food. Hunters would receive a full time salary and participants would be paid a per diem. This would enable local elders, or those without jobs to provide food for themselves and community members, as well as passing on traditional knowledge to youth. This would strengthen community, promote cultural values, and develop skills within participants.





Another potential initiative would be to engage in cultural asset mapping – taking stock of what each community possesses or lacks in terms of resources. For example, such research would likely reveal that Gitxaala lacks a sufficient amount of quality topsoil which has been a hindrance to gardening activities (Port of Prince Rupert, 2016). With their recent addition of a community greenhouse they are going to require soil amendments to supply the plants with sufficient nutrients. Gitxaala has access to an abundance of marine seaweed, mollusk and crab shells, and various fish species waste. These can be a low-investment opportunity to create high quality fertilizers, compost, and compost teas made from resources obtained within their territory. The fertilizers and compost can be traded or sold to other communities who may be starting up greenhouse projects in the future or to potential markets across BC and Canada. There are many opportunities for business ventures for local entrepreneurs within the community. These are just a few examples but there is many opportunities for communities who utilize the resources within their territories.

Coordination and Integration: Toward a Sustainable Food System



While many people live in the four Ts’msyen communities, a majority of band members live off-reserve, usually in Prince Rupert and in some cases elsewhere in the province or across Canada. A potential collaboration between the private, public, and social sector would result in a regional scale community food project that would involve the key stake holders (Northern Health, First Nations Health Authority), various First Nations communities, universities (University of Northern British Columbia and Northwest Community College) and local small businesses and industry. This could be an experimental greenhouse / community garden where food could be provided to the hospital, community schools and programs, and local First Nations. Traditional food plants, berries, and vegetables could also be grown. Programming around healthy eating, and local First Nations culture could be incorporated and potential employment opportunities could be created. If First Nations became involved, food could be grown and distributed to local members. There is huge potential in a project like this. Initial investment would be high but the health, social, economic, and cultural benefits could be wide spanning and impactful.

Other Gaps, Reflections and Ways Forward



There have been many lessons learned while researching this issue. This paper outlines how acute the food insecurity issues in the four Ts’msyen villages is, yet there is little attention from governments, NGOs, or academics. Furthermore, there is a lack of research within, or about, the four Ts’msyen coastal communities on food security/insecurity and related topics. Majority of the sources available are produced by non-Indigenous people for the benefit of their degree. There needs to be more Ts'msyen people conducting research within their own communities. When Ts'msyen people are doing the research the effect of that research will be far more impactful and meaningful.

I have learned that potentially the first place to start improving food security would be healing from historical and current traumas such as Residential schools, the 60s scoop and the genocide of Indigenous peoples in Canada and the effects this has caused within our communities. The effects of residential school and other traumas vary for each individual but overall it caused a rift in the fabric of Ts’msyen society, values, culture, and traditions. Many people are still dealing with this trauma and its effects ripple through the entire family. In order to increase overall food security in a community these traumas need to be addressed and healed in culturally appropriate methods.

Food security for First Nations communities does not entirely mean access to nutritious market or garden grown foods. Having access to culturally important species like abalone, seaweed, and salmon, to name a few, is a form of cultural food security. Overall, for long term food and cultural security, access to resources needs to be allowed and protected, traditional knowledge needs to be passed on to younger generations, and sufficient funding needs to be in place to allow this to happen.



Lax Kw'alaams

Metlakatla

Prince Rupert

Gitxaala

Hartley Bay

C O A S T

T S I M S H I A N

