

# NORTHERN AGRICULTURE FUTURES 2023 REPORT



# INTRODUCTION

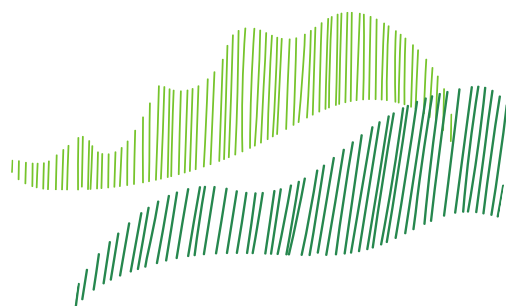
2023 marked another successful season for the Northern Agriculture Futures program (NAF). This year the entire northern region faced significant setbacks in their efforts to advance agriculture, economic food security and food sovereignty goals. A devastating wildfire season forced most communities in NWT, including all NAF partners, to evacuate for extended periods. Evacuation warnings and orders strained community resources, mental and physical health and in some cases, resulted in a loss of homes and community infrastructure. The wildfires and evacuations also created food supply chain challenges, such as limited access to grocery stores and food restocking issues, which brought into focus the importance of projects that build local capacity for communities to produce, preserve and store their own food.

Despite these significant challenges, NAF communities and Laurier continued to build relationships, plan and implement agri-food system projects, organize community events, provide skills training and share food with one another. This report provides an overview of activities undertaken and milestones achieved across the NAF communities and partners in 2023.

- Ka'a'gee Tu First Nation (KTFN)
- Smbaa K'e First Nation (SKFN)
- Hamlet of Enterprise
- Fort Simpson
- Jean Marie River First Nation (JMR)
- Kát'odeeche First Nation (KFN)
- Region wide

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Laurier and KTFN at the Dehcho Regional Agriculture Symposium in Fort Simpson
- Three-day event in Kakisa to celebrate 10 years collaboration between KTFN and Laurier
- Kakisa Community Food System Action Plan (2024-2029) created
- SKFN garden and store activities
- Supported SKFN in return to community after evacuation (ran youth programs)
- Summer student support for Hamlet of Enterprise community garden
- Field visit to Fort Simpson Community Garden
- Field visit to Jearn Marie River to support garden projects
- On-going conversations with K'atlo'deeche FN support soil sampling work (delayed)



# KA'A'GEE TU FIRST NATION

2023 was a difficult year for Kakisa residents. In spring, the community had limited access to food as wildfires in the Hay River area cut road access to nearby grocery stores and services. Although access to Hay River was temporarily restored, wildfires continued throughout the summer and fall months causing stress and uncertainty about the health and safety of the community and their traditional lands. When Yellowknife and other communities in the Tłıchǝ region were evacuated in July, options to access store foods and basic goods became further limited. In mid-August community members were ordered to evacuate to Fort Simpson, remaining outside the community for three weeks. Those who remained in Kakisa tended to the garden and harvested vegetables to supplement their traditional diets.

In late June, the tragic death of a local youth, and in August, the death of an Elder following the evacuation order further impacted community well-being. These losses are still felt in the community today.

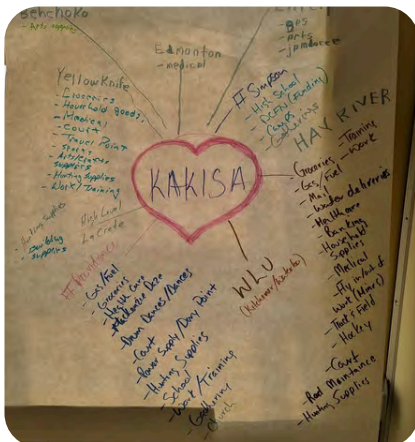
Despite these challenges, the community was committed to progressing NAF activities and food system goals. From April to mid-August, Laurier students resided in Kakisa to conduct research and support NAF projects on the ground. **Three students were posted to Kakisa over the summer** to work in the garden, help establish a composting program, and coordinate gardening support in nearby Enterprise. Wildfires in the Samba K'e region in June meant that an additional two students resided in Kakisa until July 1, when the SKFN evacuation band was lifted.

## March & April 2023: Seed Planting Workshops with Kakisa Lake School

Seed Planting Workshops focused on teaching youth how to start seedlings for the community garden. Community members and youth cared for the seedlings throughout the spring season. These workshops provided the community with the seedlings for the community garden and greenhouse.



Seed planting workshop, April 2023



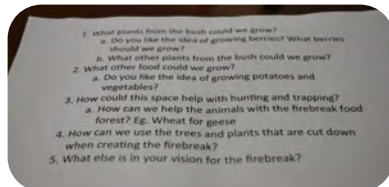
Community asset mapping, June 2023

## June 2023: Kakisa Food Planning & Visioning Workshop

From June 6-8, KTFN hosted a three-day event in Kakisa to celebrate 10 years of relationships, to share student research, revisit milestones and plan for future food projects.

# HIGHLIGHTS FROM KAKISA FOOD PLANNING AND VISIONING WORKSHOP

## Day 1



*Visioning for the Fuel Break Food Forest, June 2023*

Students and community members participated in a full-day workshop. In the morning, students presented research projects and findings. Students included both social science and natural science researchers working in Kakisa and on KTFN lands. This opportunity was important for community members and students as they continue to work together to build a more sustainable and resilient food system.



*Community asset mapping, June 2023*

In the afternoon, researchers facilitated three activities to help community members reflect on the current state of their food system and create a vision for the future. Activities included **participatory visioning for a fuel break food forest, community asset mapping, and a world cafe** to discuss and evaluate the various different research-supported projects in the community. Ideas and opinions collected from the activities contributed to the development of a **fuel break food forest pilot plot** (implemented in June 2024) and Kakisa's **Community Food System Action Plan**. A draft of this plan was presented to KTFN in spring 2024 to be finalized and implemented.

## Day 2

Students and community members from Kakisa and JMR participate in a **half-day training and garden work session to plant Kakisa's community garden and greenhouse**. In the afternoon, seniors from Enterprise also travelled to Kakisa to tour the community garden and partake in an **annual fish fry** hosted by KTFN. Community members from Kakisa, JMR and Enterprise as well as Laurier students and researchers shared a delicious meal and played lawn games.



*Planting the greenhouse, June 2023*

## Day 3

Laurier students coordinated an **excursion with Kakisa youth to Enterprise to visit the community garden** and play lawn games.

# SAMBAA K'E FIRST NATION

The summer of 2023 was a challenging time for the community of Samba K'e First Nation. A wildfire spanning over 50,000 hectares threatened the area, coming alarmingly close—within just 8 kilometres of the community. As the fire approached, the situation escalated rapidly, prompting the difficult decision to evacuate. The community's greenhouses and gardens were significantly impacted by the fires, with slow progress until members could safely return (the SKFN Garden Coordinator elected to stay in the Samba K'e during the evacuation to maintain the garden).



*Community garden and greenhouse at SKFN*

Once the evacuation order was lifted and the community returned, research students arrived to the community of Samba K'e to offer their support in various ways. Even in the face of fire-related challenges, there was a strong sense of determination and resilience among community members and the gardening team to rebuild and re-establish the greenhouses and garden, maintaining optimistic about the potential for a yield in early fall.

One key area where WLU students provided support was taking on the role of supervisor for the SKFN summer student workers, by request from SKFN leadership. As supervisors, the WLU students organized trips to the garden with the student workers, ensuring that young community members had meaningful opportunities to contribute. Tasks completed by both the research students and student workers included pulling weeds, broad forking the soil to prepare it for planting, running drip lines to optimize irrigation, and planting potatoes.



*Students working in the SKFN community garden*

Beyond the garden, the research students also assisted in the community store. They helped with grocery deliveries, stocked shelves, and organized inventory, ensuring that community members had access to the food and supplies they needed. In addition to these tasks, the students engaged with community members, offering friendly support and building relationships that fostered a sense of connection.

# HAMLET OF ENTERPRISE

NAF coordinators met with the Hamlet of Enterprise CAO to discuss student support for the Enterprise community garden. Between June-early August, Laurier students based in Kakisa travelled to Enterprise **weekly to support work in the community garden**. Under the instruction of Enterprise's foreman, the students maintained garden plots and helped harvest vegetables. Students also supported preliminary research to establish a recycling and composting program for residents, a priority for the community.

In June, Enterprise residents travelled to Kakisa to tour the community garden, learn about the community's food projects and partake in an annual fish fry and lawn games event hosted by KTFN. This event coincided with the Laurier-KTFN 10-year celebration and workshop.

Unfortunately, in mid-August, the Hamlet of Enterprise was devastated by a wildfire that destroyed over 90 percent of the community. Miraculously the community garden infrastructure was spared. Plans continue to support Enterprise's food goals as they rebuild from this tragedy.



*Enterprise Community Garden*



*KTFN-Enterprise Fish Fry in Kakisa,  
June 2023*



# FORT SIMPSON COMMUNITY GARDEN



*Students posing in front of the Fort Simpson Community Garden sign*

Due to the evacuation order delaying students from travelling to Smbaa K'e, there were extra hands to support other gardening initiatives in the region. On June 24, a NAF researcher and five summer students travelled to support the Fort Simpson Community Garden. Members of the community garden also attended and got to ask questions about their gardens, as well as hear about the various NAF-supported research projects in the region.



*Students working in the Fort Simpson Community Garden*

In an example of the interconnected relationships of the WLU research team, a youth member of SKFN, who works in the garden in Smbaa K'e but was in Fort Simpson due to the evacuation also showed up and helped out. The team cleaned out and planted seedlings in the greenhouse, prepared new beds for planting, planted seedlings in raised beds, and maintained berry bushes.

# KÁTŁ'ODEECHE FIRST NATION



*Soil Samples*

In May, NAF coordinators had conversations with KFN leadership to undertake soil sampling to determine which areas within the KFN land claim area have ideal conditions for food production. This work was delayed due to wildfires that compromised community safety and damaged houses and community buildings and displacing residents in May and June, as well as wildfires further threatening KFN coming from the Fort Smith region in August and September.

# JEAN MARIE RIVER FIRST NATION

In June, Laurier students based in Kakisa travelled to Jean Marie River First Nation for a one-day field trip to meet community leaders, establish relationships and support garden projects run through the school and community health program.



*Students posing in front of Jean Marie River welcome sign*

Students installed garden beds for Elders, helped maintain the school garden and provided a tree planting demonstration.

Also in June, three community members from JMR, two elders and one youth, travelled to Kakisa to participate in a gardening workshop and fish fry.



*Setting up the garden bed frame*

## REGION WIDE

On May 27, 2023, Laurier students, and Kakisa community members participated in the Dehcho Regional Agriculture Symposium, held in Fort Simpson.



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



**SAMBAA K'E  
FIRST NATION**



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RESEARCH GROUP**



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## FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:

**Andrew Spring**

Assistant Professor, Department of Geography and Environmental Studies  
Canada Research Chair, Northern Sustainable Food Systems  
Wilfrid Laurier University

[aspring@wlu.ca](mailto:aspring@wlu.ca)