

NORTHERN FOOD SYSTEMS STUDENT SYMPOSIUM: CALLS TO ACTION

Research communities have increasingly taken up the task of weaving action-based reconciliation into their practices. Publications like “Towards reconciliation: 10 Calls to Action to natural scientists working in Canada” and “Calls to Action to Research Scientists” provide invaluable guidelines to “...shift the power balance and meet the needs of Indigenous peoples and communities” (NWTAC, 2020) in all aspects of their work.

In honour of National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, we’re sharing some of the thoughts and experiences of researchers within the *Laurier Centre for Sustainable Food Systems* (LCSFS) network, the *Northern Food Systems Research Group* (NFSRG), and the *Community Capacity for Climate Change and Food Security* (C4FS) project. Select calls from the “10 Calls to Action” (Wong et al., 2020; NWTAC, 2020) have been adapted from the natural sciences context within this pamphlet. Building on these calls, LCSFS and NFSRG researchers reflect on their own responsibilities to the specific Indigenous communities they serve.

 @LCSFSresearch

 lcsfs@wlu.ca



Content for this pamphlet has been adapted from audio recordings of the 2023 Northern Food Systems Student Symposium, co-hosted by the LCSFS, NFSRG, and C4FS. The Symposium connects food systems researchers with students, and focuses on knowledge-sharing, workshopping, and education for the early career researchers in these networks.



ABOUT THE NORTHERN FOOD SYSTEMS RESEARCH GROUP (NFSRG)



Led by Dr. Andrew Spring, Canada Research Chair in Northern Food Systems, the NFSRG is composed of researchers, students, and community practitioners engaged in Participatory Action Research in the Northwest Territories. The NFSRG works collaboratively with partners on community-defined and led projects that build towards more resilient Northern food systems.

Working with Dr. Kelly Skinner (University of Waterloo) and Dr. Sonia Wesche (University of Ottawa), a broad team of food systems researchers support climate change adaptation and food systems research in the NWT through the CIHR-funded C4FS project. Each year, we jointly host a student symposium to bring together our research teams.

To learn more, [click here](#).

Graphic note illustrations of the symposium discussions by Shannon Loomer, Thinkbank Designs

@Thinkbank

@LCSFSresearch

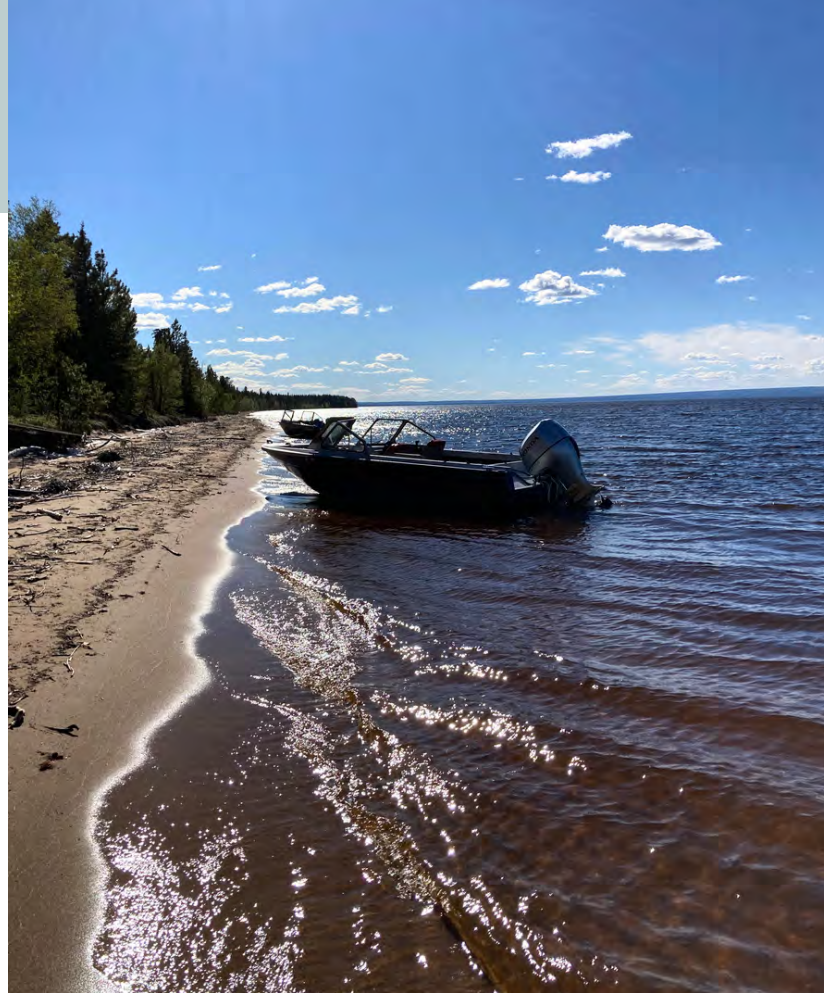
lcsfs@wlu.ca



CALL ONE: UNDERSTAND THE SOCIO-POLITICAL LANDSCAPE AROUND THE RESEARCH SITE

Brian Laird, on research and colonialism: "So much of what these research ethics applications are about is intentionality, about how we can make sure that we're not doing harm, because we need to recognize that there is a legacy of harm stemming from research done in Indigenous communities. So much of how we avoid causing harm through the work that we're doing comes down to ensuring informed consent, and that can only come through from clarity of communication."

Sonia Wesche, on ethics and community dynamics: "Local organizations don't always represent the breadth of interests in the community very effectively. So, I think the question is, 'how do we navigate both research agreements with local leadership and the need for individual community members to have the opportunity to provide consent?'"



CALL TWO: RECOGNIZE THAT INDIGENOUS PEOPLES SHARE THE GOAL TO GATHER AND SHARE KNOWLEDGE ABOUT THE LAND

Sonja Ostertag, on collaboration: "I found it's really effective when you have a team communicate together...especially with these really complex projects. Having someone who has a lot of expertise in different areas of the community; say, the harvesting perspective, the Elders' perspective, but also the scientific perspective. You're usually part of a bigger team...it's really great if you can make a whole story."

Camille Slack, on learning Indigenous approaches to research: "Getting to know people makes your research stronger. The two blend together. I do a lot of interviews where I'm going into people's homes, and often they have very busy homes. So, if I go and it's supposed to be an hour and a half, and I emerge four hours later having helped with feeding the baby or prepping dinner, okay, that was wonderful time spent, and I gained research commentary in the process."



CALL THREE: FIND MEANINGFUL WAYS TO SHARE AND CO-PRODUCE KNOWLEDGE

Sonja Ostertag, on co-creating knowledge spaces: "It's really about elevating and making sure that there's equal space for traditional knowledge, Indigenous knowledge. As much space as we dedicate to the scientific results. I think the idea of bringing the experts together, the different perspectives, is really critical, and I encourage you to find ways to do that at different scales."

Andrew Spring, on communication: "It's hard work to create that kind of personal space where we can all talk and listen and get that feedback on how we're doing. And I think that's, across the board here at our research centres, our priority."



CALL FIVE: COLLABORATE ON MEANINGFUL WAYS FOR INDIGENOUS PEOPLES TO EXPERIENCE AND PARTICIPATE IN SCIENCE, ESPECIALLY YOUTH

Tasha Lake, on social media and youth: "Social media isn't just a communication tool for our research outputs, but a meaningful tool around establishing relationships and getting to know what the youth want and how they want to be involved."

Maria Ramirez Prieto, on youth input: "Our research leads looked at our interview guide beforehand, and it changed a lot from what I had proposed at the start. A lot of the new questions came from working with youth; in particular, we worked with one youth who left her community to go to university for part of the year, each year. So, we added a question about how youth leaving the community affects their relationship with country food...and that wouldn't have happened if I wasn't working collaboratively."



CALL SIX: USE INDIGENOUS PLACE NAMES TO DECOLONIZE THE LANDSCAPE

Ashlyn Simpson, on language: “Something I wish I would have learned about before going to Old Crow was more of the Gwich’in language. I did learn while I was there, and people really took me under their wing as soon as they learned I wanted to know the language.”

Sonja Ostertag, on land and communication: “That on-the-land piece, meeting research partners in their place and on their terms, is something to think about.”



CALL SEVEN: TAKE A COURSE ON INDIGENOUS HISTORY AND RIGHTS

Carla Johnston, on educating yourself: “Go in with a trauma- and colonialism-informed mind and heart. At the same time, don't let it paralyze you. Practice talking about topics of colonialism; about issues that relate to trauma. Do it with your fellow researchers first, before you talk with community members.”

Sarah Jones, on TCPS2 training with communities: “We went through chapter nine on research involving Indigenous peoples, and I started out by saying, ‘this chapter is directed at non-Indigenous researchers who are working with Indigenous communities, so, you know, this is for me.’ And they said, ‘yeah, it is.’ One thing I added when discussing chapter nine was that it's about what we can learn from the community, how they can help frame the interviews and discussions, because they're the experts and they know best.”



CALL NINE: ENSURE THAT RESPECTIVE INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES REVIEW AND GRANT PERMISSION BEFORE PUBLISHING INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

Andrew Spring, on publishing with Indigenous communities: "We often include community members as authors, co-authors on papers, have them involved in as much of the research process as we can. And I think that shows our level of consent and commitment and relationship."

Kelly Skinner, on consent: "People asked us questions the whole week we were out on the land together. We also had many youths who hadn't necessarily participated in research before; they had a lot of questions but were a bit shy to ask. As they became more comfortable with us, they were able to ask them. The lesson here is that the consent process isn't a one-and-done, you've signed it. It's an ongoing process."



Jennifer Temmer, on relationships: "You're not just representing yourself; you're representing a bigger relationship. Be friendly, be personable with people, be helpful, but also be reliable. If you say you're going to do something, do it, and if you can't do it, say you can't. That is something that's very, very important; be reliable, because people really take that to heart, they trust you, and they are relying on you to do certain things."

Camille Slack, on expectations: "There needs to be a lot of managing expectations, adjusting ways of doing...not applying a western mindset to work in community. There are adjustments of what timelines look like, and urgency for different things, especially depending on the time of year."

Steph Woodworth, on priorities: "Most importantly, don't make everything about your research. Find ways to contribute to the community outside of your project. If you see something that needs to get done, do it. But be careful not to overstep boundaries, and don't assert yourself too much. You'll find your balance. When you get to know people and they get to know you, that will come naturally."



REFERENCES

The NWT Association of Communities. (2020). *Calls to Action to Research Scientists*. <https://communitiesandresearch.toolkitnwtac.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/42/2023/06/Calls-to-action-to-research-scientists.pdf>.

Wong, C., Ballegooyen, K., Ignace, L., (Gùdia) Johnson, M.J., & Heidi Swanson. (2020). Towards reconciliation: 10 Calls to Action to natural scientists working in Canada. *FACETS*. 5(1): 769-783. <https://doi.org/10.1139/facets-2020-0005>

ABOUT THE RESEARCHERS

Carla Johnston is a PhD Candidate at the Balsillie School of International Affairs and a specialist in community-based participatory action research, Indigenous rights, and food systems governance from the local to global scale. Carla has 10 years of experience in political advocacy, community-level planning, and policy development in the Northwest Territories, Canada and at the United Nations.

Sarah Jones is a Ph.D. student in the Department of Health Sciences at the University of Carleton. Currently, she is working on her Ph.D. project, "Evaluating the impact of the Tliche Highway on food security and other determinants of health and well-being in Whati ", exploring the impacts of a new all-season road to a previously isolated, remote Indigenous community in Northwest Territories, Canada. Sarah has previous professional experience as an environmental scientist and consultant. In this role, she has managed and authored environmental impact assessments for natural resource development projects (e.g., oil and gas, infrastructure, and mines).

Brian Laird is an Associate Professor within the School of Public Health Sciences and Associate Dean (Graduate Studies) in the Faculty of Health at the University of Waterloo. Dr. Laird's research focuses on: (i) quantifying the health risks from contaminants in food, water, and soil, (ii) informing the design of risk mitigation strategies, and (iii) improving our understanding of the links between external dose and target organ concentration. To these ends, Dr. Laird is examining population level contaminant exposure through environmental monitoring as well as human biomonitoring in the Northwest Territories and Yukon.

Tasha Lake is a 2nd year PhD candidate in Public Health Sciences at the University of Waterloo, supervised by Dr. Kelly Skinner. Tasha has worked as a social worker/psychotherapist committed to advocacy and anti-oppressive practice with marginalized communities in various community based and healthcare settings over the past 15 years. Her research interests include climate impacts on mental health and psychosocial wellbeing, psychological resilience and adaptation and Indigenous and youth perspectives and experiences. Tasha has lived and worked in Ontario, British Columbia, and the Northwest Territories. She is also the Mama of two small kiddos ages 4 and 6. Their futures influence her actions.

Sonja Ostertag is a Research Assistant Professor in the School of Public Health Sciences at the University of Waterloo. Dr. Ostertag has seventeen years of experience conducting community-based research in the Inuvialuit Settlement Region (ISR), NT. Their research bridges western science and Indigenous Knowledge to better understand how environmental changes may impact people and their traditional foods. Dr. Ostertag's background in toxicology, risk assessment, participatory research and traditional ecological knowledge makes them a leader in the co-production of knowledge in health-based research in the Arctic. They are currently co-leading research with six communities in the ISR to co-create knowledge and messages that promote healthy and culturally appropriate foods in the ISR.

Maria Ramirez Prieto is a Ph.D. Candidate at the University of Waterloo under the supervision of Dr. Kelly Skinner. She researches Inuvialuit youth experiences within the country food system through Photovoice. She is passionate about food security, food sovereignty, community-based research, and the co-production of knowledge.

Ashlyn Simpson studied Biomedical Toxicology at the University of Guelph before consulting in human health toxicology risk assessment. Now, Ashlyn is working towards an M.Sc. in Public Health under the supervision of Dr. Brian Laird at the University of Waterloo. Ashlyn's thesis work examines the levels of PFAS in people living in the Northwest Territories and, through statistical methods, assesses if commonly consumed traditional foods are contributing to PFAS exposure. Their current interests include knowledge sharing, the intersection of environmental and human health toxicology, and defining 'how much is too much' exposure.



Kelly Skinner is an Associate Professor in the School of Public Health Sciences at the University of Waterloo and holds a CIHR-PHAC Applied Public Health Chair. The Chair has an emphasis on community action, self-determination, and knowledge sharing, to better understand the intersections between food security and climate change with Indigenous communities in the Northwest Territories. Kelly engages in interdisciplinary, communitybased, and collaborative research and evaluation with northern communities, partners, and governments to capture community-led food initiatives in adapting to climate change and improving food security, northern food systems and environments, health and risk communication, health equity, and well-being.

Camille Slack is a PhD candidate in the Department of Geography, Environment and Geomatics, under the supervision of Dr. Sonia Wesche. Camille completed her B.A., B.Ed. and M.A. at Queens University. Her Masters research explored the potential for a revised food sovereignty framework to inform policy responses to climate change in the Canadian Arctic. Camille's doctoral research will be developed as part of the C4FS project – Community Capacity for Climate Change and Food Security Action in the Northwest Territories. This project is currently partnered with Paulatuk and Tuktoyaktuk in the Inuvialuit Settlement Region, to support climate change and food security action, as well as enhance community action and self-determination connected to local and regional food systems.

Andrew Spring is the Canada Research Chair in Northern Sustainable Food Systems, Assistant Professor in the Department of Geography and Environmental Studies at Wilfrid Laurier University, Director of the Laurier Centre for Sustainable Food Systems and Director of Research for the UNESCO Chair in Food, Biodiversity and Sustainability Studies. He has established an extensive research program with Indigenous communities and government partners in the NWT and have been able to build a large and diverse network of communities, local and regional Indigenous governments, territorial and federal government agencies, and academic researchers across the social, health, and natural sciences to address issues of climate change, sustainability, and food security.

Jennifer Temmer is a PhD candidate in Geography in the Laurier Centre for Sustainable Food Systems at Wilfrid Laurier University. She has a background international development, rural planning and agricultural business management and has collaborated with sustainable food projects and research across Latin America and in Northern Manitoba. Jennifer grew up on a tobacco and garlic farm in rural Southern Ontario, an experience that inspires her work and informs her research.

Sonia Wesche is an Associate Professor in Environmental Studies, Geography and Indigenous Studies at the University of Ottawa, and Co-Director of the Environment, Community and Health Lab (ECoHLab). She works collaboratively with Inuit and First Nations communities in the Yukon, Northwest Territories, and Nunavut to better understand local- and regional-scale impacts of environmental change, and implications for fostering adaptive capacity. Her interdisciplinary research is primarily community-based, and focuses on linkages among environmental change, food and water security, and health and well-being. For more information, see: uniweb.uottawa.ca/members/557.

Steph Woodworth is a PhD candidate in the Department of Geography, Environment and Geomatics at the University of Ottawa, co-supervised by Dr. Sonia Wesche and Dr. Andrew Spring. For their doctoral research, Steph is working with Dehcho First Nations, Ka'a'gee Tu First Nation, Ecology North, and Northern Water Futures to explore the impacts of on-the-land camps in the Northwest Territories, which bring together Elders and scientists to educate and engage Dene and Métis youth. Specifically, they use photovoice during on-the-land camps with northern youth to capture their experiences of land-based education and their concerns of and priorities for changes happening in their communities.



@LCSFSresearch



lcsfs@wlu.ca



PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS



FUNDING PARTNERS



Social Sciences and Humanities
Research Council of Canada

Conseil de recherches en
sciences humaines du Canada

Canada

 @LCSFSresearch

 lcsfsewlu.ca

