



Community Gardens Make a Comeback in First Nations Communities

Victoria, B.C. – August 19, 2008 First Nations communities around B.C. are reclaiming their horticultural roots, thanks to a joint federal provincial funding program.

In the last five years, almost 40 communities have received grants through the Aboriginal Agriculture Initiative (AAI) to establish community and allotment gardens, build greenhouses and watering systems, and buy tools, bedding plants and seeds. The intention, according to Archie Deneault, chair of the AAI Advisory Committee, is to help Aboriginal people achieve self-sufficiency through participation in viable, diverse agri-food opportunities.

Says Deneault: “These projects are in harmony with our traditional values. Our priorities are to increase Aboriginal awareness of and involvement in agriculture, to develop land for agriculture use, and to increase participation in agriculture by Aboriginal women and youth.”

The communities that have received funding have reported numerous successes in terms of individual as well as community wellness. In addition to promoting healthy lifestyles through the consumption of fresh, local produce, communities take great pride in their gardens. In some instances, there’s a positive economic impact as excess produce is sold for extra income. Community gardens can also be a springboard to more market-oriented, commercial agricultural production.

Near 100 Mile House, B.C., the Canim Lake Band is engaged in the award-winning BEADS endeavour that involves training Band members in horticultural techniques, including traditional gathering and preservation of indigenous foods. The goals of the project are to become self-sustaining in the area of horticulture and vegetable production and to create employment for chronically unemployed Band members.

A community garden is also central to the initiative underway in the Nemiah Valley, near Alexis Creek, B.C., where the Xeni Gwet’in First Nations Government operates the ?Eniyud Health Services Root Cellar and Greenhouse Project. This undertaking benefits the local Xeni Gwet’in community by providing healthy, clean, locally-grown vegetables and by contributing to the ecological integrity of the local bioregion.

For its part, the Neskonlith Indian Band near Chase, B.C. received funding for a project called Promoting Healthy Food and Healthy Families by Allotment Gardening. This initiative allows Neskonlith community members to come together and grow nutritious food while creating a beautiful destination where community members can spend time.

These are just a few examples of the kinds of projects being funded through the Aboriginal Agriculture Initiative. AAI funds are provided through the Agri-Food Futures Fund (AFFF), a partnership between the Government of Canada, the Province of British Columbia, and the Investment Agriculture Foundation of B.C. (IAF). The IAF is a not-for-profit organization that manages and distributes federal and provincial funds in support of innovative projects to benefit the agriculture and agri-food industries in B.C.

The AAI continues to look for creative ideas to grow aboriginal agriculture. Funding is available for eligible projects that fit within at least one of the AAI's strategic priorities. The next deadline to apply for funding is September 23, 2008. To learn more, please visit the AAI website at www.iafbc.ca/aai.

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