



## GARDEN HILL FIRST NATION: Meechim Farm

Started in 2015, The Meechim Project is an integrated social enterprise food security project based in Garden Hill First Nation. The project consists of a farm, food market, agriculture-based training, and educational programming focused on teaching children about growing food and healthy eating referred to as “School-to-Farm”. It was designed with the intention of changing the local food system to create a healthy long-lasting impact for the community. The Meechim Project aims to resolve the lack of healthy affordable food options as well as increase employment and training opportunities for the local community.

The first year was tough to grow vegetables because of the quality of the soil. In 2016, we improved our crop growing and poultry operations. We grew over a dozen varieties of fruits and vegetables and increased the amount grown. We planted 139 rows of crops and hand-sowed 6 plots throughout the farm, improving on our acreage usage. Adding fish to the soil for fertilizer had a wonderful effect. Our plants were healthy and our yields were impressive. We will add fish again next year!

In 2016, we also constructed a hen barn. 400 broiler chicks were flown up and 90% survived to processing. Birds were prepped, packaged into sealed plastic, and quickly frozen. These chickens were then sold to the community. As well, we had 12 layer hens producing 18 eggs per

week. The eggs are given to workers at the end of the week.

In 2016, 8 full-time workers and 1 full-time supervisor from the local community staffed the farm. They worked from June 6th until October 28th for a total of 7,920 man-hours. Our manager, Robert Guilford, is a farmer from southern Manitoba. Robert spent 10-11 days at a time living and working at the farm guiding and instructing from May to September. Robert’s role is to build the skills of the local people to the point where they can take over the farm fully.

This year past we increased the community presence on the farm. With our hen barn containing two outdoor coops, local families were consistently coming to visit during early afternoon and evenings to see the operation. Children were curious about the chickens watching them from outside the fencing. When we were done processing the chickens, the farm’s workers, supervisor, manager, their friends and families held a feast at the farm to celebrate a successful season. Local people are increasingly becoming more aware of the farm and what it has to offer to the community.

Since this was only our second year of farm operations in Garden Hill, it was not without challenges. Flights to travel and support people in Garden Hill are expensive and inconsistent and there isn’t a good place to stay. We intend

to build a residence so that people can come and participate in our northern farm school in 2017. Communication would be improved if we had a phone at the farm. We are trying to make good relationships with the Garden Hill Chief and Council, but they are busy people. Finally, an all-season employee to monitor and secure the farm would really be helpful because the farm is vulnerable to vandalism or theft when left unattended for long periods.

While it can be challenging, we are still committed to ensuring this project continues forward. Over the next year or two, we are planning again to improve on our operation in Garden Hill. We will expand the growing area, build living quarters for support people and farm school students, keep improving our soil, create a seed storage area, start the farm school, and strengthen our farm to school program. There is lots to do!

We surveyed community members about the farm and their responses were motivating. 100% of people tell their friends and family about the farm and felt that it was either ‘very important’ or ‘extremely important’ to the community. Also, 100% of people we talked to had eaten something (egg, meat or veg) raised at the farm. Our motivations to support and grow this project come from the community. One member said simply “Keep it going... strong.”







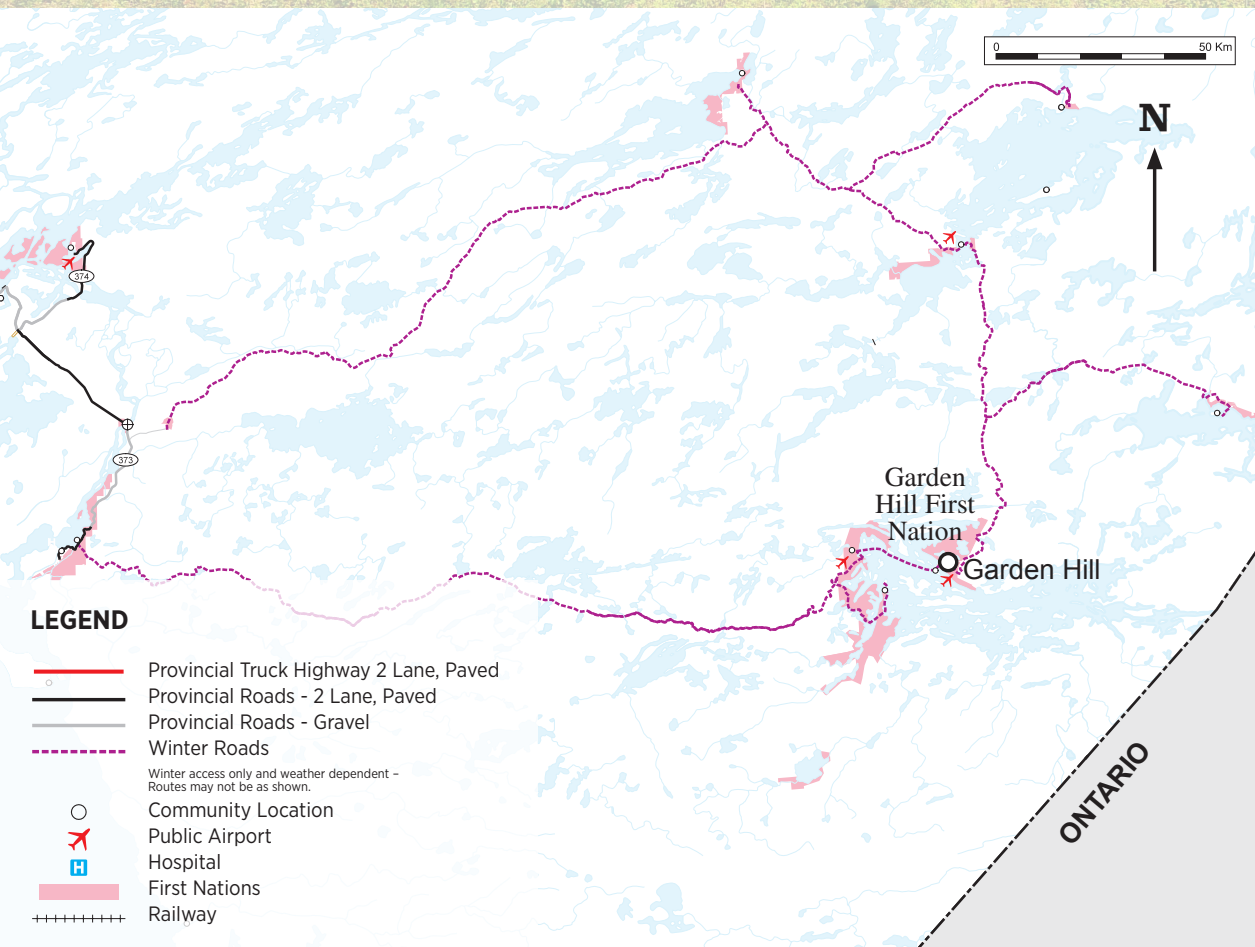
“It is a first in a long, long time to be growing things that we would be buying at the store.”

- Garden Hill community member

## NFMCCC funding

☑ 2016

☑ 2017



## > OBJECTIVES

Change the local food system to reduce dependency on southern food supplies, increase employment and training opportunities to create healthy long-lasting impacts for the community.

## > LOCATION

Garden Hill First Nation is accessible by fly-in or winter road, with no all-season road. With a population of 4,400 people Garden Hill First Nation is the largest fly-in community the province. It is part of the Island Lake region.

## > PHOTO DETAILS

[1] [2] Chickens/chicks in the coop. [3] Farm Staff constructing Meechim. [4] Panorama of farm. [5] Panorama of farm during construction. [6] Wayne Beardy with a potato grown at the farm. [7] Community Members and Farm Staff at Meechim Farm clean chickens. [8] Youth at the fall School to Farm Feast.

