

MATHESON ISLAND COMMUNITY FOOD

LOCATION: Matheson Island, Manitoba

OBJECTIVE: Provide locally grown, harvested foods to Matheson Island residents; prevent diabetes and heart disease among future generations.

Matheson Island is home to 111 people. Located on Lake Winnipeg at the end of Provincial Road #234, the closest grocery store is 110 km away. The community is connected with the mainland by a cable ferry in the summer and by a winter road in the winter months. The school has 17 students from Nursery to Grade 8. Most community members are Métis and First Nation; many uphold the tradition of trapping and hunting, in addition to working in commercial fishing. Many residents have diabetes or heart problems.

Successes

- Twenty trees and 40 shrubs were purchased at a 75% discount and were planted. Varieties include apples, cherry, saskatoons, honeyberry and cranberry.
- Trees were in a highly visible area and residents independently harvested cranberries and apples.
- Fourteen raised beds were built for community members and distributed to homes; ten more houses are on a waiting list.
- Soil was brought in by truckload and dumped outside of the cemetery. People who received raised beds retrieved soil in the spring.
- Lumber for two gazebos was purchased, with support from another grant. One was built to shelter community members who gather in the orchard area.

Challenges

- Fishers want more information about liability insurance before taking children out to learn fishing.
- Weather was a challenge – the fishing season was bad, the growing season wasn't great.
- Staffing changes slowed the project down significantly.
- There was less participation from the school than expected.
- There was a short trapping season and youth were not interested.

Next steps

- Plan how remaining grant funds will be used in 2015.
- Consider a school field trip to Peguis First Nation in spring 2015. Students could attend a spring planting workshop and be inspired by a visit to the big garden.

