That’s a Wrap!

It’s hard to believe, but our year-long Greenbelt Fund grant funded Leveraging Local Food Purchases project has come to an end! To celebrate, we’ve put together a summary of our accomplishments to share with you!

In April of 2017, we began our project with the hire of 4 community coordinators across the region. Throughout the year, we had some staff changes, but ended with Andrea in Sioux Lookout, Jessalyn in Kenora, Anita in Rainy River, and Karen in Thunder Bay. These coordinators worked to increase awareness of CLFC and local food issues in their districts, support existing and create new hubs, planning and executing local food events, and working on the development of a regional food charter.

NWO Regional Food Charter

In April, community coordinators across the region began collecting information for the development of the regional food charter by holding general and directed community input sessions. These sessions allowed us to meet with community members and partners across the region to learn about their priorities for the food system in NWO. We discussed issues like local food production, food security, access to culturally appropriate foods, culinary tourism, and protection of wild harvest food habitats.

All of this data was analyzed by our partners at Lakehead University to create a survey where participants could further narrow the vision of the document. This survey was circulated until the end of 2017 and a draft charter was developed for circulation in early 2018. Since then, we’ve been sharing the draft charter and a short survey to provide feedback on the document. We’re still looking for your feedback so make sure you let us know what you think.

Throughout the project, community coordinators across the region met with town, city, and municipal governments to share the food charter project and to gain their feedback. It was a great opportunity to engage our local governments and provide them with resources to better understand their community’s priorities as they relate to food! Once the final charter is officially released, we will be looking to local governments and organizations/institutions to endorse the document to help secure a thriving local food system in NWO! Make sure you stay tuned for the release of the final charter!

Hub Development

A major part of the project was to support existing community hubs by increasing membership and engaging the community while also connecting new communities and distribution points to our network.

In Sioux Lookout, distribution frequency was doubled from once per month to twice per month, and order volume allowed for a reduction in the delivery fee to the community. In Kenora, our distribution location moved from The Discovery Centre to The Recreation Centre and then finally to The Broken Paddle Coffee Roastery & Kitchen. Under our first Kenora Community Coordinator, Jocelyn, distribution frequency was increased from monthly to weekly thanks to an amazing partnership with Lake of the Woods Brewing Company.

Distribution in Thunder Bay started with 2 pop-up style hubs at Willow Springs Creative Centre and the Sleeping Giant Brewing Company. Thunder Bay area producers remained connected to our distribution network on a monthly basis.

In Rainy River, Anita was able to open a hub in Emo thanks to the help of Emo Feed Services. They were very accommodating and opened to us as a distribution location for sorting and pick-up. Our Emo location has been unique as it is serviced entirely by producers in the Rainy River District.
In mid-March of this year, CLFC was proud to announce the finalization of a partnership with Loudon Bros. out of Thunder Bay who are a food distribution company. This partnership meant that CLFC could now distribute local food to communities we previously couldn’t access with our transportation network. In the last week of March, CLFC launched and opened 3 new community hubs: Atikokan, Fort France, and Red Lake. Distribution in Red Lake and Fort Frances has been years in the making and members who have been waiting in waiting were delighted to finally be able to have delivery to their communities. These hubs had huge success in their first order cycles and we are excited to see how they grow and flourish moving forward!

Local Food Events

Community coordinators across the region also set out to hold local food events to showcase local food and engage community members. Each coordinator held a Farm to Fork type event throughout the year all centered around local food items. In Thunder Bay, it was a fish taco meal paired with local beers at Sleeping Giant Brewing Company. In Sioux Lookout, a full Farm to Fork event was help at Dick’s Grillhouse where the ticketed event saw a 4-course meal featuring local ingredients from across the region. Lake of the Woods Brewing Company in Kenora hosted a holiday appetizer and beer pairing event featuring amazing locally inspired finger-foods. In March, La Place Rendez-Vous hosted a Farm to Fork featuring local items in a fantastic 3-course meal!

All of these fabulous events allowed CLFC to showcase the talent of our local producers to really highlight the quality and diversity of locally produced food. Restaurants were able to showcase the talent of their kitchen staff and see for themselves what’s possible with NWO produced food!

Community coordinators also partnered with Sharalei of the Black Oven to hold sourdough workshops in Sioux Lookout and Kenora. This type of knowledge sharing allowed community members to learn about fermentation and sourdough bread making which really engaged community members! We are hoping to host a Black Oven workshop in Dryden in May, so stay tuned for ticket information!

This project also saw an amazing partnership with B&B’s Roadhouse Bar & Grill in Dryden. They approached us to provide products for a locally sourced breakfast and began sourcing eggs, bacon, ham, and farmers’ sausage for a delicious local breakfast! This is so unique for our area and it’s fabulous to see such great support for locally produced food!
**Community Engagement**

The benefit to having CLFC staff spread across the districts is that it allows us to stay connected with many communities and to create new community partnerships. Over the year, staff met with community organizations and partners across NWO to network and share information. This meant connecting with local schools, hospitals, the Northwestern Health Unit, government bodies, local food enthusiasts, producers and processors, and those involved with programming/ initiative creation. This allowed us to spread information about the benefits of local food production and use, to support producers looking for new markets, to identify new markets, and to inform decision making around community food initiatives. Considering the vast distances between communities in NWO, without staff in these areas, it would have been impossible to properly engage with so many levels of our communities.

Going forward, we will continue to work with Lake of the Woods Brewing Company and Loudon Bros. to assist with distribution in our communities and to identify opportunities for new distribution locations. With the help of Loudon Bros., we can consistently and reliably move large volumes of local food using food safe transportation. We are excited at the opportunities this will provide local food and what it means for our producers and consumer members across the region.

The community coordinators would like to thank everyone that we’ve worked with over the last year for all of their support and engagement with this project! It’s been an amazing experience and we’re all very proud to see the accomplishments that have been made possible over the last year! CLFC is doing amazing things across the region and it’s all made possible through the support of our members and our various community partners.

**Moving Forward**

So now what happens now that this project is done? Well, it means that you may see some changes at CLFC, but we’re all still working together to expand and better our Co-op. In Rainy River and Kenora, Anita and Jessalyn will be staying around to help continue to support their community hubs. In Thunder Bay, Karen has taken a position with a food agency and hopes to stay involved with the development of new hubs and community involvement East of Thunder Bay. Andrea will be moving on to a new job in Dryden but will still be staying involved with CLFC and the SNAPP program. In Sioux Lookout, we have a hired driver to bring goods from Dryden to Sioux Lookout to maintain the twice monthly schedule. We are working to find someone to permanently take over distribution in the community and will be relying on volunteers in the short-term to manage sorting and pick up.

CLFC is always changing and before you know it, we’ll be up to something new! Always remember that the support you provide through your membership with CLFC is far reaching and you’re helping to support a huge community centered around supporting local food!

Thanks for loving local!