

# Eating in place: Mapping alternative food procurement in Canadian Indigenous communities

Jennifer Sumner – University of Toronto

M. Derya Tarhan – University of Toronto

JJ McMurtry – York University

Place-based food systems conference, Vancouver, B.C., August 8-9, 2018

# Food Procurement

- Procurement – the (bulk) acquisition of food
  - Public sector
  - Private sector
  - Third sector
- Means of procurement
  - Tendering processes
  - Direct purchasing
  - Sharing
  - Trading

# Food Procurement

- Leveraging capacity of procurement
  - The public procurement of food and beverages in Ontario = \$1.8 billion per year
- The history of public food procurement = a story of untapped potential (Morgan, 2008)
- Procurement – a powerful instrument for creating social, economic and environmental change (Morgan and Morley, 2014)

# The nutrition transition

Debbie Martin (2012)

- Distinguishes populations that have undergone growing rates of overweight, obesity, and related chronic diseases
- Involves increased consumption of ‘unhealthy’ foods
  - High in saturated fats, refined sugars, and sodium
- Not an inevitable by-product of development
- Requires a more nuanced approach that “sheds light on how an individual’s food ‘choices’ are often the product of government policies and marketing strategies that promote processed and refined foods to the exclusion of more traditional or unprocessed foods”

# The nutrition transition in Indigenous communities

Debbie Martin & Margaret Amos (2017)

- Shaped by the larger social, economic, and political context
- Impact of colonization
  - The way the nutrition transition has manifested in these communities
  - The chronic food insecurity experienced by many Indigenous people
- Impact of nutritionism
  - Focuses on specific ingredients in the diet
  - Stresses individual responsibility
  - Fails to take into account Indigenous perspectives on how and why their communities experience food insecurity

# Alternative food procurement

- For Martin & Amos (2017), alternatives need to:
  - Take into account the traditional importance of food in the production of community among Indigenous cultures
  - Respect traditional cultural practices in terms of food
- Inspiring examples of alternative food procurement in the social economy

# The social economy

- Developed long before industrialization or the modern state
- Growing in importance in the age of neoliberalism
- In contrast to the neoliberal capitalist economy:

*The social economy involves economic activity neither controlled directly by the state nor by the profit logic of the market; activity that prioritizes the social well-being of communities and marginalized individuals over partisan political directives or individual gain.*

- Co-operatives, non-profits, credit unions, and mutual associations

# The social economy and food

- Food co-ops
- Food hubs
- Food banks
- Food programs
- Local food projects
- Community gardens
- Rural social enterprises
- Community interest companies
- Local buying clubs
- Urban farms
- Volunteer organizations
- Farmers' markets



# The social economy and Indigenous communities – Wanda Wuttunee (2010)

*The presumption must be that the social economy label is a term that comes from outside a given community – and as such may or may not fit with the terminology used by that community for naming its experience, even though many aspects of what is labelled by the concept describes centuries-old Aboriginal practice.*

- Important to ask critical questions:
  - Is the social economy an appropriate form of development?
  - Does the definition of the term include and value activities initiated and led by Aboriginal communities?
- The social economy has emerged as an effective tool of community development:
  - Maintains control in the hands of Aboriginal communities
  - Allows for a variety of forms
    - Co-operatives

# Co-operatives and Indigenous communities

- Co-operatives – democratic, member-owned and operated organizations with the primary goal of meeting members' economic and social needs
  - Producer
  - Worker
  - Consumer
  - Multistakeholder
- Wuttunee found that co-operatives
  - Offer Indigenous communities a measure of autonomy over their development
  - Allow for the realization of community values
  - Ensure any surplus stays under community control
- Aboriginal people are more likely than the general Canadian population to be members of co-operatives
- Co-ops have been especially well used by Aboriginal people as a way to meet community needs

# Project

- Mapping alternative food procurement through the social economy in Canadian Indigenous communities
- SSHRC Institutional Grant - \$1300
- A first scan – a work in progress
- Public knowledge – sites on the internet and available literature
- Shared document – can be added to
- Findings reflect and build on Wuttunee's (2010) research

# Map

- <https://www.google.com/maps/d/viewer?mid=1oJUIKoPXI-vVxB6kjEt-yWwV5x6Qmpu&ll=64.36461409103454%2C-97.79295494999996&z=3>

# Findings re: food procurement initiatives

- Place-based and respond directly to local problems
- Predominantly led by Indigenous communities and often supported by other organizations
- Most are food co-operatives
- There is a surge in community and school gardens, some of which evolve into co-ops
- Hospitals and universities are becoming involved with traditional foods
- Certain initiative types show high levels of geographical concentration in some parts of Canada

# Conclusion:

## Indigenous food procurement initiatives help to:

- Reverse the nutrition transition
- Build the foundation of a sustainable food system
- Support Indigenous food sovereignty
- Address food insecurity
- Re/create the infrastructure of the middle
- Expand the social economy
- Overcome food deserts
- Re-embed the economy within the community
- Re-emphasize the relationality of food