

# OUR SHARED FOOD VISION:

## What We Heard



The Island Food Network (IFN) asked Cape Bretoners what matters to them when it comes to food. This document provides an overview of key themes that emerged through community engagement.

Input will be compiled and documented as a Shared Food Vision that reflects the many voices, experiences and values of the people of Cape Breton. This is only a starting point. Our Shared Food Vision will inform a Food Action Plan, which will guide policies, programs, and practices within and across communities in Unama'ki - Cape Breton Island. A Shared Food Vision will help us to recognize our collective, island-wide goals and aspirations related to food so that we can better work together to achieve them.

### RESEARCH PROCESS

159 people, ranging in age from 19 to over 65, participated in the "What is our Shared Vision for Food in Cape Breton - Unama'ki" online survey presented by the IFN. The survey opened on October 22, 2018 and closed on May 31, 2019. The survey was available on the IFN website and in paper-form. Data was also drawn from 138 participants that took part in eight separate Community Food Conversations hosted by: New Dawn Enterprises, Community Food Leader Program (island-wide group), Northside Rising in Sydney Mines and North Sydney, Coady and Tompkins Library in Margaree, Cape Breton University, Mi'kmaq Food Working Group in Eskasoni, and Dr. Kingston Memorial Community Health Centre in Richmond County. To further enrich this

data collection, 8 semi-structured interviews were conducted in collaboration with the Cape Breton University research project: "Storying food landscapes in Cape Breton: A community research project."

The data was grouped using pillars identified by the Food Policy Working Group of the IFN: Healthy Communities, Lands & Waters, Local Food Economy, Food Culture & Celebration and Food Literacy. These pillars are defined and unpacked in IFN's series of backgrounders: [\*Food For Thought - Cape Breton Food Facts\*](#). The pillars give us a way to approach the complex topic of food, but we recognize that many of the issues and opportunities around food are interconnected.

### CONTRIBUTORS

**Nadine Bernard:** Owner, Facilitator & Life Coach, *Slow Cooked Dreams*

**Jill Gardiner:** Coordinator, Evaluation and Learning, *United Way Cape Breton*

**Terry Gibbs:** Associate Professor, Political Science, *Cape Breton University*

**Catherine Hart:** Community Member, *Margaree*

**Eric Leviten-Reid:** Facilitator, Community Engagement and Collaboration, *New Dawn Enterprises*

**Karen MacKinnon:** Nutritionist, *Nova Scotia Health Authority*

**Erna MacLeod:** Associate Professor, Communication, *Cape Breton University*

**Megan MacLeod:** Community Coordinator, *Northside Rising*

**Debbie Madore:** Dietician, *Cape Breton-Victoria Regional Centre for Education*

**Kerri Marshall:** Research Assistant, *Island Food Network*

**Jody Nelson:** Community Food Coordinator, *Ecology Action Centre*

**Kailea Pedley:** Farmer, *Patchwood Farm*

**Leigh Potvin:** Assistant Professor, Community Studies, *Cape Breton University*

**Satya Ramen:** Senior Coordinator, *Ecology Action Centre*

**Kim Tilsley:** Farmer, *GlenRyan Farm*

*Production of this document has been made possible through a financial contribution from Public Health Agency of Canada. The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent the views of Public Health Agency of Canada.*

# HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

Good food is the heart of healthy communities. Food intersects environmental, emotional, spiritual, mental and physical health.



# HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

"Income is the big one!"



"We know that healthy, nutritious food plays a role in optimal physical and mental health and can boost learning and opportunities. We want everyone to reach their potential."



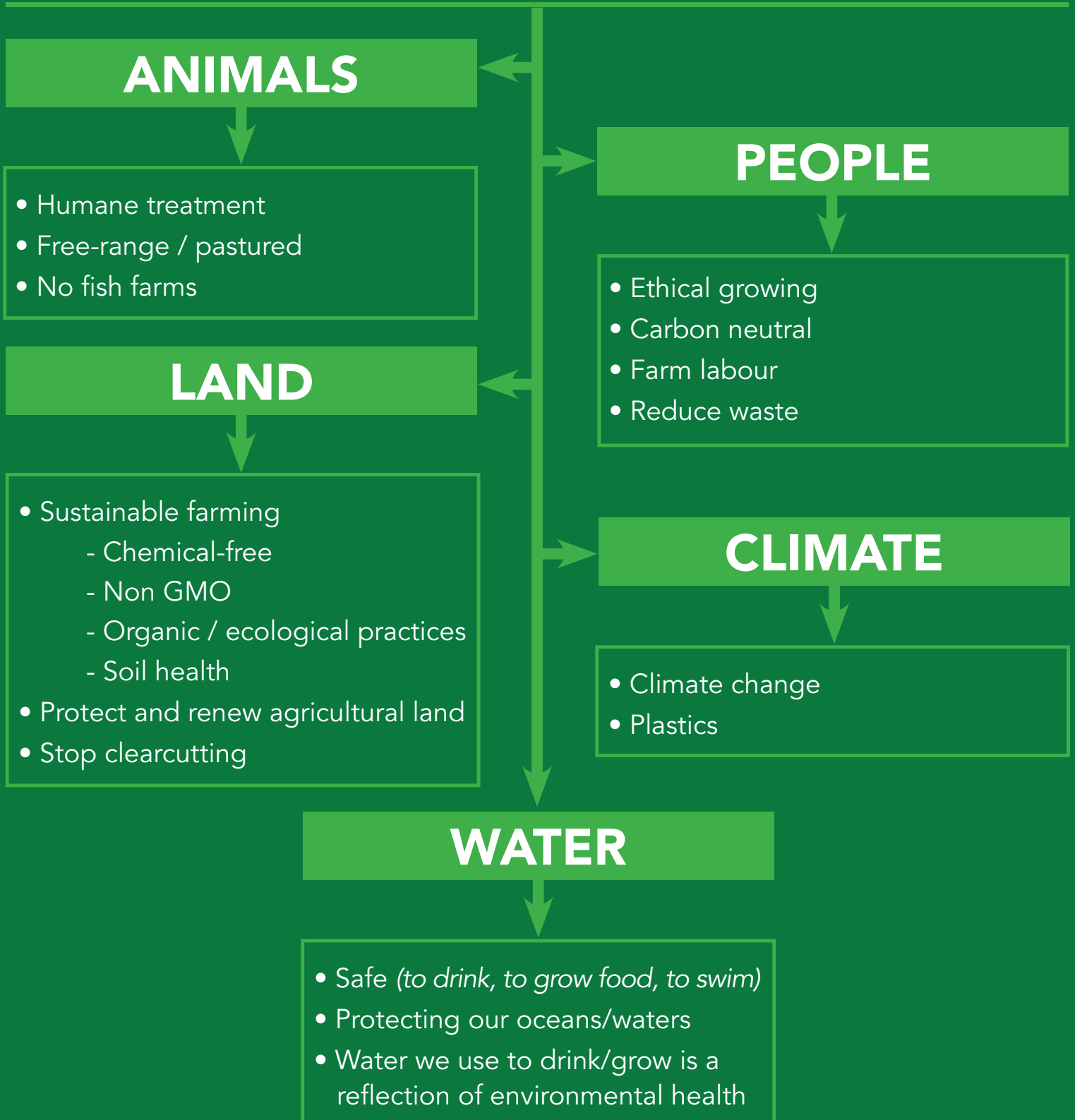
"As a member of a vulnerable population, it is difficult to afford healthy choices.

I would grow my own as an alternative but financial destitution hinders that as well.

Not having enough hinders ALL the productivity in my life through secondary inhibiting factors like stress and physical repercussions...."

# LANDS AND WATERS

Healthy lands and waters are vital in feeding our communities. By protecting our environment, we can feed ourselves and future generations with good, healthy food.



# LANDS AND WATERS



"Perceived connectivity to the earth- we are not separate from it... Internal health reflection of external health and vice versa."



Improving the health of our biosphere, through ecologically sensitive farming, forest management, and community development practices.



*"Kids showing respect for our land and animals; teach them so the next generation knows what to do too..."*

# FOOD CULTURE AND CELEBRATION

Food brings people together. Food is central to family, celebrations, traditions, and cross-cultural learning.



# FOOD CULTURE AND CELEBRATION



We love good food!  
Give food and people will come.  
We bring food to celebrate  
and also to mourn.



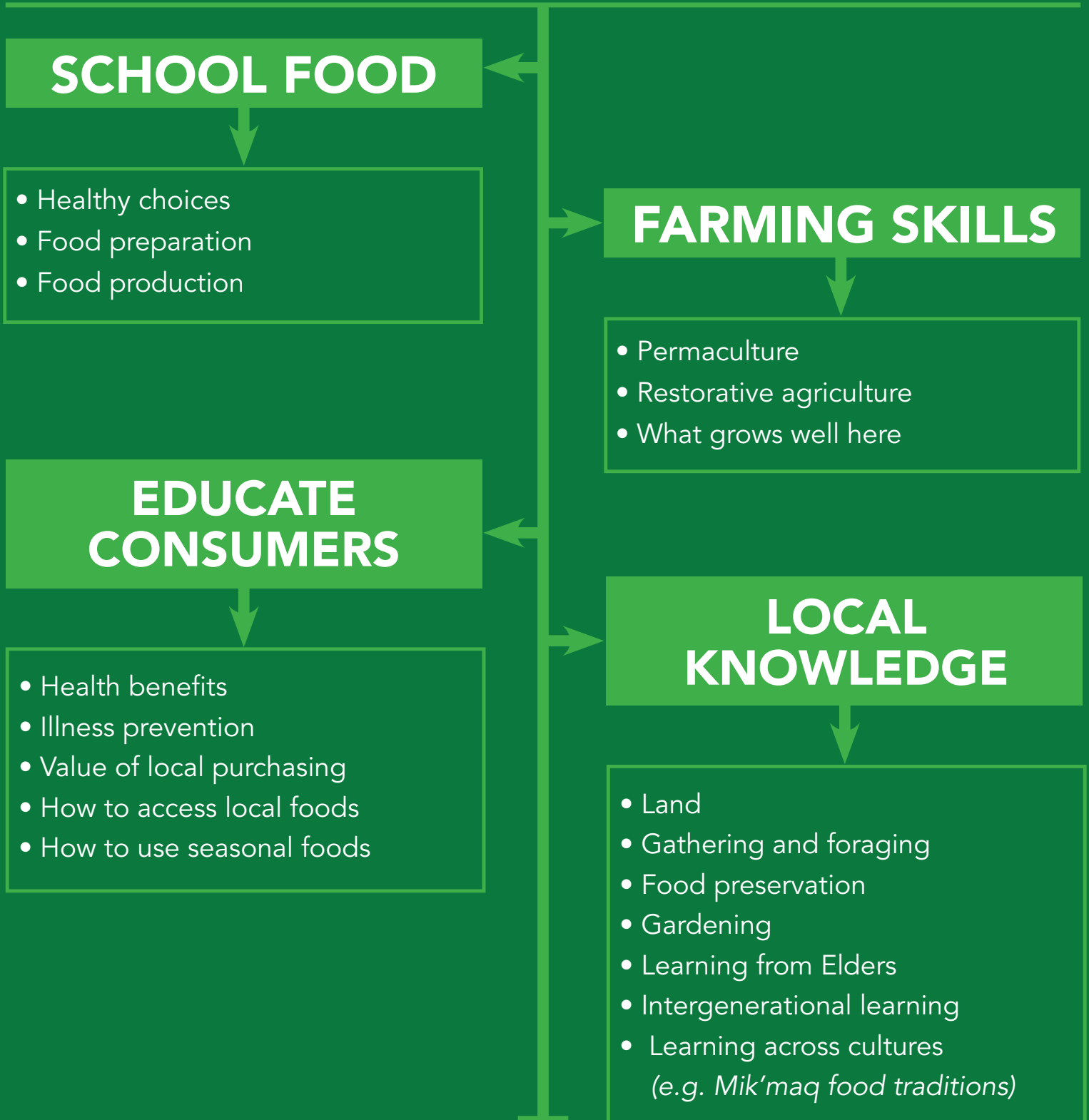
*"Canvas people that would be willing to share garden space. I have a very large garden plot that is too big for one person and would be willing to share."*

*"Sacredness of land, water, food, humanity, creation. If we all treat these as sacred, would we value them and each other more?"*



# FOOD LITERACY

Food literacy is an essential life skill. It can lead to informed food choices for better community health.





# FOOD LITERACY



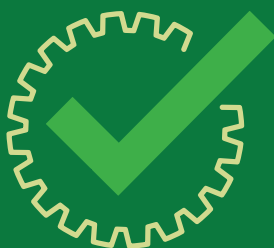
We no longer have life skills development courses in our public schools that can educate young people about things every adult needs to know to live a balanced life.



*"When it comes to education and knowledge I think it will be very helpful to involve more young people..."*



*"Access to and promotion of resources to help educate consumers on the value and significance of sustainable purchasing choices and healthy cooking and eating."*



# LOCAL FOOD ECONOMY

Food offers an opportunity for economic resiliency. Imagine Cape Breton as a leader in sustainable agriculture and food-based tourism; a place where people want to live and create.

## FOOD PRODUCTION

- Local growing
  - Diversity of foods
  - More land being cultivated
  - Year-round
- Local processing
- Food production = jobs
- Local ingredients in restaurants
- Support for new, young farmers and small scale
  - Land sourcing
  - Resources
  - Network
- Improved viability of farming

## BUILD A RESILIENT CAPE BRETON

- Branding Cape Breton food culture
- Culinary and agri-tourism
- Informal trade and bartering
- Consumer education
- Adapt food regulations to local context

## FOOD BUSINESSES

- Training and support for food businesses
- Food entrepreneurship centre
- Value adding retail fish and shellfish

## INFRASTRUCTURE

- Inspected kitchens
  - Education
  - Community engagement
  - Food preparation
- Abattoirs
- Community gardens
- Food storage
- Local processing/ retailing of fishery products
- Vibrant farmer's markets
- Dairy
- Greenhouses for season extension

# LOCAL FOOD ECONOMY

“ Increasing local food production to build a more resilient island - through education at all levels, finding creative ways to support aspiring and new food producers, through safeguarding agricultural land, and filling gaps in processing capacity. ”

*"Regulations are a huge problem that especially affects the availability of local meat and dairy. These need to be relaxed somewhat to allow for small farms to be able to easily get their product to buyers."*



“ I want to see a robust network of inspected kitchens available to prepare food for market, or local distribution and for teaching, with food storage facilities for folks who might not live where they have access to root cellars or deep freeze. ”

# OVERARCHING THEMES

Food offers an opportunity for economic resiliency. Imagine Cape Breton as a leader in sustainable agriculture and food-based tourism; a place where people want to live and create.

## SUPPORTS/POLICY

- Different regulations for small scale producers
- Farmer incentives
- Taxes supporting healthy, safe food system
- Well supported local branding system so local buyers can easily identify local products
- Fostering more opportunities for food production
- Universal Basic income so everyone can afford to lead a healthier, more productive life
- Junk food should be heavily taxed and vegetables, especially organically grown, subsidized

## FOOD SYSTEMS/ WORKING TOGETHER

- Food initiatives
- Partnership and collaboration
- Island-wide (work across counties)
- Younger generations taking action
- Local leadership
- Consult at-risk populations
- Clear and appropriate asks of government
- Rural development
- Food as a vehicle for community development

## CROSS-CUTTING THEMES IDENTIFIED BY THE FOOD POLICY WORKING GROUP

- Environmental Justice
- Indigenous Food Sovereignty
- Social Justice

# OVERARCHING THEMES



*"Any new food system must have a sense of place, one that sustains both the ecology and human communities of Cape Breton"*

*"I'm proud of the work being done for food in Cape Breton and think we need to keep sharing our successes (and challenges) and learning from other places striving to improve food systems."*

**“ We have the ability to feed all the people in Cape Breton with food grown in Cape Breton, so everyone can access and afford the food they need and want... ”**

# RELATIVE PRIORITY THEMES

# FARMS / FARMERS ACCESS

JUNK GROW

GREENHOUSES

FAMILIES

PRACTICES

DAIRY

AVAILABILITY

GOVERNMENT

# LOCAL LACK

SUSTAINABILITY HEALTHY

GAPS

PROGRAMS

MUNICIPAL

SYSTEMS

KNOWLEDGE

INCOME

PRODUCERS

PRODUCTION

ABATTOIRS

WAGES

SUBSIDIES

POVERTY

PERMACULTURE

INCENTIVES

MARKET

COST

PROCESSING

RESOURCES

ECOLOGICAL

COMMUNITY

EDUCATE

POLICIES

ECONOMY

CHILD

AFFORDABILITY

# FOOD STORIES

STORYING FOOD LANDSCAPES IN CAPE BRETON



"The kitchen was the centre of everybody's house. Everybody got together in the kitchen...you know, put the kettle on and have bread and molasses. You know, whatever was going. Visitors were always welcome. There was always food. It's still that way today, I guess in a different way, but then there wasn't all the technology. It was just down-home family in the kitchen and they talked. They talked over the cup of tea and they talked over the bread and molasses... It certainly has changed, family has changed. Everyone eats in a different room with a different computer or a phone or a television. Nobody gathers any more".

- Glace Bay Food Bank Client

*"...if we go to our elders, we will learn more, and we will learn how to respect the land and the Earth more, but I think as a whole Cape Breton used to have a lot more agricultural if we go to those older generations, they can teach us a lot."*

*Kimberley McPherson,  
Garden Coordinator, Glace Bay Food Bank*



"It's not a choice of how healthy they can eat or where they can find healthy food, it's what money is left to buy any food. So when you only have a couple of dollars, do I buy enough to make a healthy salad or do I buy a lot of Kraft dinner and hotdogs where I can get a few more meals? It's survival."

- Glace Bay Food Bank Client

*"...I started to volunteer at the food bank and I see a lot of things with other people as well as with myself going through the same issues, of not having enough with their pay cheques or their social assistance cheque or their unemployment and with their bills. They run out of food to try to feed their children for the month and it's very hard..."*

- Glace Bay Food Bank Volunteer

# FOOD STORIES

STORYING FOOD LANDSCAPES IN CAPE BRETON



"I know me even growing up, in the winter time we wouldn't have to buy meat or anything like that...they hunted all hunting season, so our freezers would be full of meat, deer, rabbit, partridge, you name it they took it home, so that's what I grew up on. There would be a lot less money spent on food then."

- Glace Bay Food Bank Client



"When we moved to Cape Breton, we wanted to be immersed in food and food issues here, both in the production side and the infrastructure around food in Cape Breton as well. As a result of that we find ourselves in social circles that involve a lot of other people that are interested in food...we have many friends through the farmers market, in our local community of food producers who are involved in food....we see people in our community who are actively making really interesting and fun things happen around food"

- Kailea Pedley,  
farmer at Patchwood Farm in Piper's Glen

"...our grandparents had to garden, and then our parents moved away from it, and it was kind of a sign of their success and their affluence that they didn't need to grow their own gardens, and now I think it is coming back. For reasons of taste and nutrition and economics people are back to wanting to grow their own again. It's been a bit of a pendulum swing... I think maybe now the change is people are a little more conscious about the impact of their choices and it is kind of a political act, or a political decision to grow your own or source locally..."

- Kim Tilsley, Library Assistant in Charge, Coady and Tompkins Library

"..my childhood days would have been in the 70's and at that time the Whitney Pier was vibrant. We had a steel industry and we had all the people that came here: the Ukrainians, Italians and Polish to work at the steel mill. People had gardens in their backyards. I was in Ashby. We didn't have a garden, but my neighbour grew their own grape leaves and they would make their own grape leaf dish, it was just part of what you did."

- Debbie Madore, Dietician, Cape Breton-Victoria Regional Centre for Education