



Ketegaunseebee
Food Sovereignty Project

Project Report

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CRE
Canadian Roots Exchange

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Abstract

“The best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago. The second best time is now.” –
Chinese Proverb

The Ketegaunseebee Food Sovereignty Project was a youth-led volunteer project that successfully distributed 240 perennial food-producing plants to Garden River First Nation Community members; with specific consideration for targeting Elders and youth.

The goal of this project was to better Garden River First Nation’s food sovereignty by increasing the amount of food grown in the community. Perennial plants were distributed for this project which included fruit trees, nut trees, berry-producing shrubs, and grape vines. These plants can produce food for decades, benefiting current and future generations.

The Ketegaunseebee Food Sovereignty Project was funded by the Canada Roots Exchange (CRE) Food Sovereignty Grant, and supported by Chief Andy Rickard, the Lands and Resources Portfolio Holders, and the Garden River Lands and Resources Department. The Project Manager was Aaron Jones, Project Lead was Angela Belleau, Project Technician was Sebastian Belleau, and key volunteers include Jayselen Moore, Cade Nolan, and Stephanie Seymour.

Project highlights include:

- Gifting 240 food-producing plants to Garden River community members
- Distributing 120 \$50 gift cards to community members to help support gardening and individual food sovereignty-related projects
- Planting 20 apple trees in publicly accessible areas in Garden River First Nation
- Gathering information about local food sovereignty through a community survey
- Donations to food sovereignty-related projects in Garden River including:
 - \$2,000 to support GRFN Adults in Motion community garden boxes
 - \$1,500 to support the GRFN Child Care Centre greenhouse
 - \$1,200 to support the GRFN Education Units’ kindergarten class conduct on the land activities that involves collecting food

Acknowledgements

The project team would like to say chi-miigwetch to the Garden River Chief and Council, Garden River Lands and Resources Department, and to the many youth volunteers that helped to make this project a success. The project team would also like to say miigwetch to the Canadian Roots Exchange for funding this project.

Project Team

The Ketegaunseebee Food Sovereignty Project team is made up of Garden River First Nation youth including:

Aaron Jones: Aaron is a land-user, harvester, Natural Environment Technologist, the Fish and Wildlife Coordinator for Garden River First Nation, and a part-time student at Algoma University. Aaron and Angela Belleau first applied for the CRE Food Sovereignty Grant in the summer of 2021. Since the successful grant application, Aaron has been the Project Manager and has worked with Angela throughout the Ketegaunseebee Food Sovereignty Project.

Aaron moved back to his home community of Garden River in 2016 and wanted to start a volunteer project as a way to give back to the community. One of the inspirations for this project came from Aaron living at home and having access to current shrubs that his great-great-grandmother planted in the early 1900's. The idea of this project was to give Garden River community members the opportunity to plant their own food-producing plants to benefit their family and future generations.

Angela Belleau: Interested in wellness, ethnobotany and community development, Angela was invited by and joined Aaron in the creation of the Ketegaunseebee Food Sovereignty Project to learn about the potential of building a healthy, local food economy with a community-centered focus.

As the Project Lead, Angela assisted Aaron in creating project deliverables, timelines and outreach material such as a community survey that also served as a food sovereignty pre-assessment. Her goal with this project is to interpret the results from the survey to better understand the needs of the community when it comes to having autonomy over food and education around food.

Sebastian Belleau (Makwa Bimikahweh): Sebastian assisted with the Food Sovereignty project by helping with the organization and distribution of plants to community members, report writing, and planting trees around the Garden River First Nation. He recently joined the Lands and Resources Department as the Lands and Resources Technician for a one-year contract. Growing up in Garden River,

Sebastian developed a love for the outdoors early on in his life. He enjoys spending his time on the land hunting, fishing, boating, birdwatching, foraging, and hiking.

Prior to joining the department, Sebastian attended Sault College, graduating from the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Technician program (2020) and the Natural Resource/Environmental Law – Inspection and Enforcement program (2021). He is passionate about protecting and preserving the natural environment.

Other key volunteers include: Cade Nolan, Jayselen Moore, Stephanie Seymour, and Jo-anne Thiessen.

Project Overview

“Food Sovereignty is the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food through ecologically sound and sustainable methods”. - La Via Campesina

The goal of this project was to better Garden River First Nation’s food sovereignty by increasing the amount of food grown in the community. This goal was achieved by asking Garden River community members in a survey what types of plants they wanted, purchasing those plants, and then gifting those plants to the community. Over 100 Garden River community members received plants from this project, a total of 260 plants were given away, and 120 \$50 gift cards were distributed.

This project was designed specifically to include Elders and youth. Options for free delivery and planting services were made available for project participants. Volunteers attended an Elders luncheon at the Garden River Community Centre and distributed gift cards and approximately 80 plants. Plants and gift cards were donated to the Education Unit for staff to give to youth.

The plants given out in this project include fruit trees, nut trees, berry-producing shrubs, and grape vines. The plants ranged from 4 inch tall saplings to 6 foot tall trees. The plant options for this project were based on what plants are commonly grown in Garden River, what types of plants can grow in the plant hardiness zone 4b, and if the plants were native or cultivated plant species.

The plants ordered for this project were based on the survey responses by 60 Garden River community members, as shown in Table 1. The plants were then distributed to the survey respondents, Elders, community members, and youth. The survey respondents had two weeks to pick up their plants in early summer. Verbal advice was given to participants about planting, care and maintenance of plants.

Table 1. Plants ordered for the food sovereignty project

Plant species	Native or cultivated plant status	Plants requested from survey	Plants ordered
Apple	Cultivated	30	60
Blueberry	Native	14	20
Cherry	Cultivated	14	30
Currant	Native	2	20
Grape	Cultivated	12	20
Hazelnut	Native	2	10
Pear	Cultivated	14	30
Plum	Native	18	50
Raspberry	Native	12	20
Serviceberry	Native	3	0

This project was funded by the Canada Roots Exchange Food Sovereignty Grant Program and the project expenses are displayed in Table 2. The Canadian Tire gift cards, plants purchased from T&T Seeds, and 100 bags of premium gardening soil were distributed to Garden River community members. Gift cards were given out with the intention of helping to provide some funding for individuals to purchase gardening equipment, plants, or other equipment that would assist in on-the-land activities that help with food security; such as fishing or harvesting edible plants. Garden River community members that completed the survey and were non-reserve members were mailed a gift card as a thanks for their participation. It was essential to give out bags of gardening soil because there are many locations within Garden River First Nation that have sandy soil that would not support the growth of fruit trees. Project volunteers that assisted in this project received honoraria for their time.

Table 2. Project expenses

Project expenses	Supplies purchased	Cost
Canadian Tire	120 \$50 gift cards that were given to community members to support their gardening and food sovereignty projects.	\$6,000
T&T Seeds	240 food-producing plants that were distributed to GRFN community members.	\$5,000
Honoraria	Honoraria for project volunteers.	\$4,000
Administrative fee	10% project admin fee.	\$2,500
Premiere Garden Centre	20 apple trees, soil, and fertiliser. The apple trees were planted in publicly accessible areas in Garden River.	\$1,500
Home Hardware	Supplies to assist with planting trees including a wheelbarrow, axe, shovel, and 100 bags of gardening soil.	\$1,000

\$4,7000 of the project budget was unused. This allowed for monetary contributions to be made in the form of donations to other food sovereignty-related projects within Garden River. Table 3 shows some examples of food sovereignty projects that are happening in Garden River First Nation and received donations from the Ketegaunseebee Food Sovereignty Project.

Table 3. Project donations

Donations to other food-sovereignty projects in Garden River	Supplies purchased	Reason	Cost
Adults in Motion	Wood and building materials for raised garden beds.	These supplies were needed to build community garden boxes.	\$2,000
Child Care Centre	Wood and building materials for adding shelving and storage to a greenhouse.	These supplies were needed to build shelving and storage in the greenhouse beside the Child Care Centre.	\$1,500
Education Unit	Dehydrator, stove, vacuum sealer, and additional equipment.	These supplies will help the education units' kindergarten class to conduct on-the-land activities that also involve collecting food.	\$1,200

The last part of this project involved planting 20 apple trees in publicly accessible areas throughout Garden River First Nation. The locations for planting were evenly dispersed throughout the community, as shown in Figure 1. Planting locations include the Recreation Centre, baseball fields, pow-wow grounds, mouth of the Garden River, Band Office, Child Care Centre, Community Centre, mailboxes, playground, Trap Rock/Buhkwujjenenewabick (Chute, 2005¹), Ojibway Park Nature Trail, Ojibway Park, and the Healing Lodge.

¹ Chute, J. (2005). Shingwauk, George. *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*. Retrieved from http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/shingwauk_george_15E.html



Figure 1. Map of apple tree locations

Community Survey Results

“The true meaning of life is to plant trees, under whose shade you do not expect to sit.” - Nelson Henderson

The project was informed by Garden River community members by asking them to fill out a survey on Google Forms. The survey collected data on personal information, what plants community members want, level of gardening experience, cultural traditions, and food relationships. Each survey participant received a \$50 gift card from Canadian Tire and had the option of picking up two plants of their choice. This project had enough budget to allow for 60 people to fill out the survey; the limit of 60 people was reached within 24 hours of launching the survey on social media. These survey results are from a small portion of the Garden River community and cannot be extrapolated to reflect the opinions and experiences of all the Garden River First Nation community.

Information collected from the community survey is archived in a database that can only be accessed by the project leads. All personal information such as names, phone numbers, addresses will not be shared publicly and will adhere to First Nation ownership, control, access and possession (OCAP) principles.

Out of the 60 survey respondents, 42 live within the Garden River Reserve and 18 are off-reserve members of Garden River First Nation. Off-reserve community members were encouraged to participate in the survey and received a \$50 gift card for their time. Fifty of the survey responses were from adults aged 30-65, nine were youth aged 15-30, and there was one elder over the age of 65.

Survey participants had the options to pick up the plants they ordered, have them delivered to their home, or have them planted at their home. Only six people requested delivery of plants and two people requested volunteers to plant trees in their yard. These options were intended to increase accessibility for this project.

The project team sent out seven emails to the survey respondents giving them project updates, and information on when and where to pick up the plants they requested from the survey. Twenty-two survey respondents didn't pick up the plant's they ordered, but they were sent gift cards. The plants that did not get picked up were donated to other community members.

Each survey participant could select two different plant options including fruit trees, nut trees, berry-producing shrubs, and grape vines. The most popular choice of plant were apple trees followed by plum trees, as shown in figure 2. Cherry trees were moderately popular in this survey, but during the Elders luncheon they were the most requested plant.

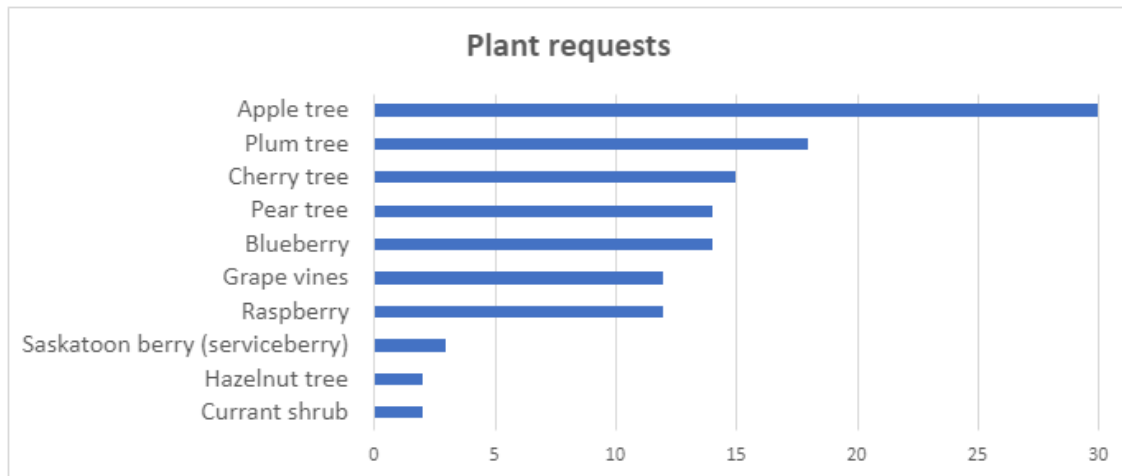


Figure 2. Plant requests from community survey

This project aimed to collect data on Garden River community members' experiences with gardening and food. As shown in figure 3, more than half of the respondents in the survey expressed that they were competent gardeners. This project was good for people that are beginner gardeners or have no experience gardening because the types of plants that were given out were typically low-maintenance perennial plants that can produce food for decades.



Figure 3. Level of gardening experience for survey participants

There are many different limitations for gardening but a lack of time was the most

common response on this survey, followed by poor soil conditions. Ketegaunseebee was known for having quality gardens, but there are many areas on the reserve that have sandy and poor soil conditions for growing gardens.

Growing and maintaining a successful garden requires knowledge about where to plant depending on light, soil and climate conditions, how to start seeds, how to transplant seedlings, composting, how to choose and use fertiliser, and watering requirements. A lack of knowledge can create barriers and be intimidating for those who want to learn how to garden. Gardening can range in cost and those costs can be a limitation for people who want to garden. The most expensive aspects of gardening can include the materials to build garden boxes, soil, gardening equipment, plants, and the additional cost of transporting these goods from store to home.



Figure 4. Limitations for gardening for survey participants

Having access to traditional foods is a key component of food sovereignty. Traditional foods are sustainable, healthy, and can provide connection to Anishinaabe culture and aki (Anishinaabemowin for the land). Most survey respondents had access to multiple sources of traditional foods, as shown in figure

5. Gardening can create easy access to wild berries, fruits, edible herbaceous plants, nuts, and even maple syrup.

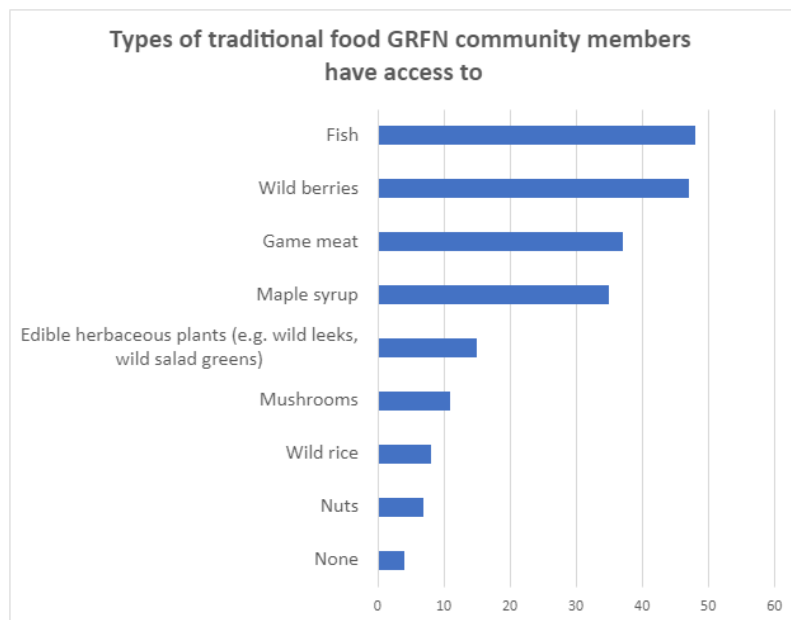


Figure 5. Types of traditional food survey participants have access to

Figure 6 shows the majority of survey respondents learned to harvest traditional foods by family members. Learning how to harvest traditional foods can also happen through teachings from Elders in the community, multiple types of media, and/or cultural classes. These methods of learning are essential because not everyone has family members that can teach them harvesting skills; or their family might only have knowledge about certain harvesting skills but not others.

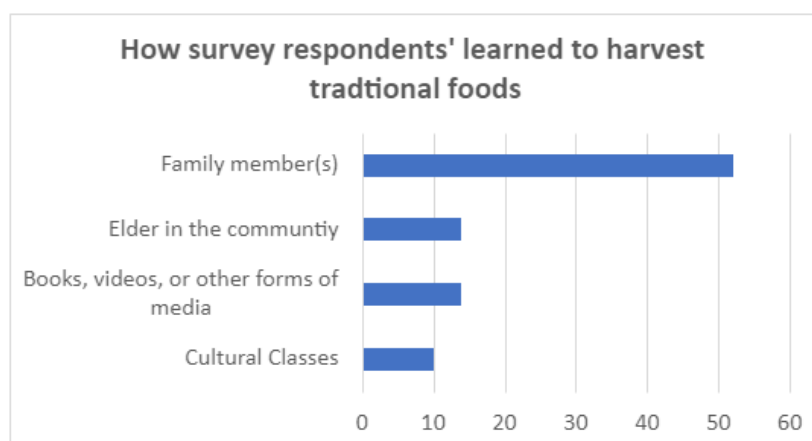


Figure 6. How survey respondents' learned to harvest traditional foods

Activities, projects, and opportunities are ways that Garden River community members can increase their knowledge about food sovereignty, gain new skills, acquire access to quality foods, and/or learn about traditional harvesting techniques. Figure 7 shows a high level of interest in many different types of activities and opportunities within Garden River. The majority of survey respondents selected that they would like to see a farmers market in the community. A farmers market could act as a hub for many of the activities shown in figure 7. These types of activities could also be supported by a full-time Food Sovereignty Coordinator employed by Garden River.

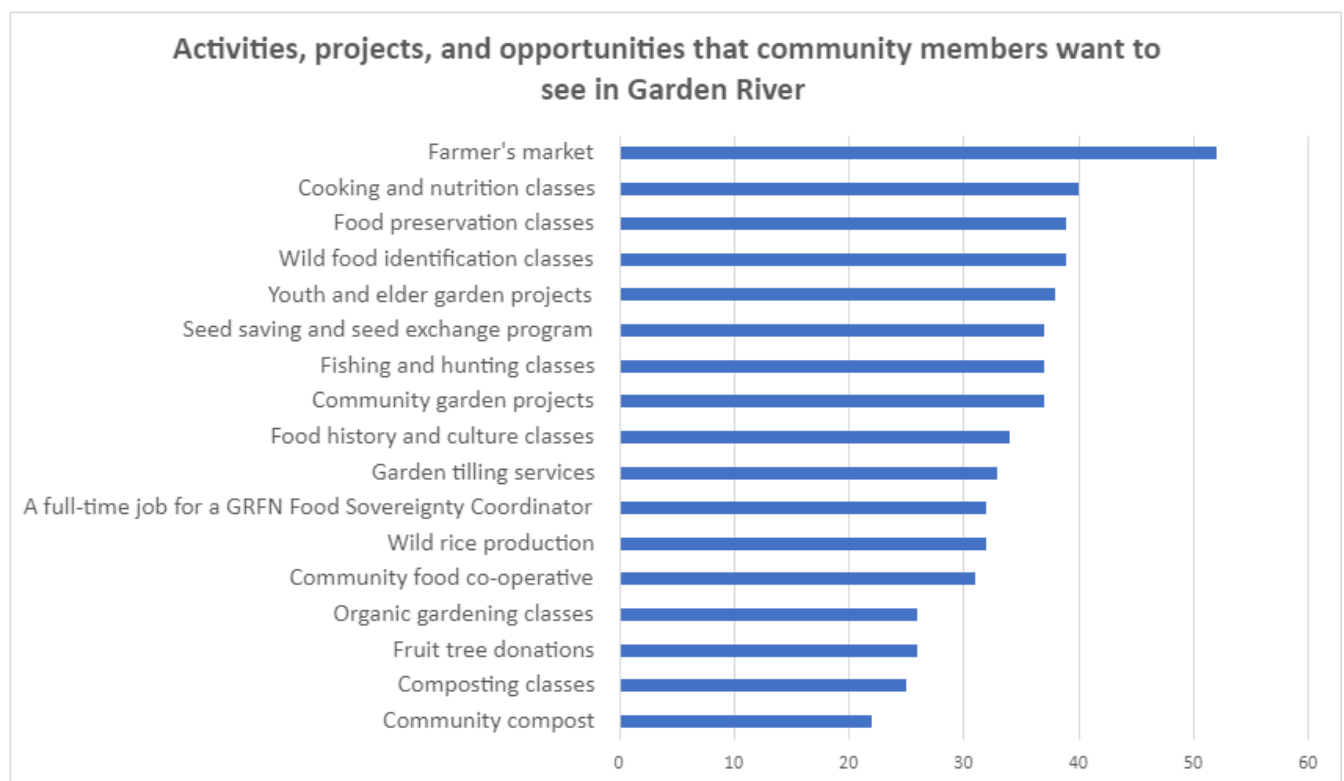


Figure 7. Activities, projects, and opportunities that survey respondents would like to see in Garden River

Discussion

“Even if I knew that tomorrow the world would go to pieces, I would still plant my apple tree.” - Martin Luther King Jr.

Garden River First Nation is a northern and rural Ontario community that has historically been well known for their vegetable gardens growing along the route voyagers and explorers followed (“*Garden River First Nation*,” n.d²). This is how Garden River got its name, Ketegaunseebee (Anishinaabemowin for *The Creator’s Garden*).

In 1846, Philetus Swift Church and his family established a store on Sugar Island near Church’s Landing. Church purchased vegetables and other goods from the nearby First Nations and sold them to voyagers as they passed through. The most popular items sold at Church’s store were raspberry jam, maple sugar, different types of vegetables, milk, fish, meat, and furs (Sootoday, 2022³). There is currently no grocery store or access to purchase locally grown, quality, or healthy foods on the reserve; which highlights the need for community members to grow their own food.

Growing perennial food-producing plants is a long-term investment that can benefit multiple generations. In 2022 there has been high inflation rates, higher cost of food, supply chain issues, and increased Canadian interest rates (Statistics Canada, 2022⁴). Being able to grow your own food will help to cut food costs while also contributing to healthier lifestyles.

The coexistence between native and cultivated plant species can have benefits to the ecosystem and Garden River community. A mix of native and cultivated plants can increase pollinator habitat and plant biodiversity. Benefits may include larger pollinator populations and more cross-pollination between plants; resulting in higher fruit yields.

² Garden River First Nation: The Creators Garden. (n.d). Our Mission. Retrieved from <http://www.gardenriver.org/site/mission/>

³ Sootoday. (2022). The time when you could buy raspberry jam, maple syrup by boat. Retrieved from <https://www.sootoday.com/columns/remember-this/remembering-the-time-you-could-buy-raspberry-jam-and-maple-syrup-by-boat-5033625>

⁴ Statistics Canada. (2022). Rising prices are affecting the ability to meet day-to-day expenses for most Canadians. Retrieved from <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/220609/dq220609a-eng.htm>

Direct project benefits are the main benefits of the project that affect Garden River community members. Alternative and future project benefits can include benefits that affect the environment, economy, and community.

Direct project benefits:

- Fruit trees and other perennial plants can produce food for decades and benefit multiple generations
- Support for individuals to grow food by providing plants, soil, and gift cards
- Increased knowledge about Garden River community members' access to traditional foods, how people learn about traditional foods, and what programs or activities community members would like to see in Garden River.

Alternative and future project benefits:

- Increased local biodiversity
- Increased habitat for pollinator species
- Increased interactions between community members and land
- Increased local circular economy
- Increased local trade
- Increased knowledge about gardening and taking care of perennial plants
- Increased physical health from people going outside to garden
- Decrease in carbon footprint for getting foods that can be grown locally
- Decreased reliance on grocery stores and transportation to get food
- Creating new memories of planting trees and shrubs with family members
- Creating future traditions of harvesting perennial foods
- Projects like this can help young people to cope with climate anxiety
- Opportunities for youth to work on projects within Garden River First Nation
- Food sovereignty projects can build climate change resilience within communities

The biggest limitation for this project was finding time for project team members to work on the project due to other full-time employment. Most parts of the project took more time than expected including project administration, planning, organising orders for plants, distributing trees, communication with project participants, and report writing. There were shipping delays for the plants which

likely caused stress for the plants; which may have increased the likelihood of plant mortality.

Some considerations to help improve future food sovereignty projects of this kind include increasing the limit of survey responses, having more opportunities for youth volunteers, distributing more plants, providing educational materials to teach people about taking care of their food-producing plants, and using Ojibway language in outreach materials and report writing,

The Ketegaunseebee Food Sovereignty Project proved that there is a strong community desire for increasing the food sovereignty of Garden River First Nation. The Garden River First Nation community, administration, and leadership can help to improve food sovereignty by supporting many of the activities, projects, and opportunities shown in figure 7. Food sovereignty can also be increased in Garden River by supporting and promoting sustainable hunting, fishing, and wild food harvesting practices. A full-time Food Sovereignty Coordinator hired by Garden River First Nation would be one of the best ways to support food sovereignty Garden River.

Conclusion

The Ketegaunseebee Food Sovereignty Project was a successful project that was led by Garden River First Nation youth. This project facilitated the distribution of 240 food-producing plants to over 100 members of Garden River First Nation, planted 20 apple trees in publicly accessible areas, gave 120 \$50 gift cards to community members, collected survey data, donated almost \$5,000 to other food sovereignty-related projects in Garden River First Nation, and had targeted opportunities for Elders and youth participation.

The project survey demonstrated a strong community desire for this project and other similar food sovereignty-related projects. The community survey reached its 60-person limit within 24 hours suggesting there was a higher demand for plants than this project could provide. This project could have been improved by distributing more plants, having more community involvement, and more opportunities for youth volunteers.

There were multiple project benefits including benefits to the Garden River community and environment. Many of the plants that were given out have the potential to produce food for decades and can benefit multiple generations. The project goal of bettering Garden River First Nations' food sovereignty was achieved and now the long-term success of this project is in the hands of community members that were given plants.

The project volunteers hope this project has been an overall positive experience for the Garden River First Nation community. Miigwetch for all the support throughout the duration of this project and we wish all the project participants the best of luck with their new plants.