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Growing Community Sustenance: The Social Economy as a Route to Indigenous Food Sovereignty

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ABSTRACT

While the social economy can achieve many positive outcomes, one recent benefit is that it can be a route to Indigenous food sovereignty—a restorative framework for feeding communities and engaging in decolonization. This article examines how some Indigenous groups in Canada use the social economy to build food sovereignty, beginning with an overview of cultural relationships with food, its place in an Indigenous worldview, and the effect of colonization on Indigenous foodways. After introducing food sovereignty, and in particular Indigenous food sovereignty, it focuses on how some Indigenous communities are using the social economy to build food sovereignty, using the example of the Northern Manitoba Food, Culture, and Community Collaborative. The article concludes with a discussion of the importance of community and food sovereignty, not only for Indigenous Peoples but also for the social economy itself.

RÉSUMÉ

L'économie sociale peut avoir plusieurs effets positifs dont celui de contribuer à la souveraineté alimentaire des autochtones, fournissant ainsi un cadre réparateur pour mieux nourrir les communautés et amorcer la décolonisation. Cet article examine comment certains groupes autochtones au Canada ont recours à l'économie sociale pour établir leur souveraineté alimentaire. Il aborde le sujet par un aperçu des rapports culturels que les autochtones entretiennent avec la nourriture, de la signification de la nourriture d'un point de vue autochtone, et des effets de la colonisation sur les habitudes alimentaires des autochtones. Après avoir décrit ce qu'est la souveraineté alimentaire et, en particulier, la souveraineté alimentaire autochtone, l'article se focalise sur la manière dont certaines communautés autochtones ont recouru à l'économie sociale pour augmenter leur souveraineté alimentaire. Pour ce faire, il utilise l'exemple du Northern Manitoba Food, Culture, and Community Collaborative. L'article conclut en discutant de l'importance de la solidarité communautaire et de la souveraineté alimentaire, non seulement pour les autochtones mais aussi pour l'économie sociale elle-même.

Keywords / Mots clés : Indigenous food sovereignty, social economy, community, food sovereignty, decolonization / souveraineté alimentaire autochtone, économie sociale, communauté, souveraineté alimentaire, décolonisation

INTRODUCTION

The social economy, like any economy, is not an end in itself but a means to something larger, such as increased well-being, sustainability, or independence from the capitalist economy. One emerging aim of the social economy is the enhancement of Indigenous food sovereignty. As Morrison (2011) explains, "While the language and concept of food sovereignty has only recently been introduced into communities and policy circles around the world, the living reality is not a new one in Indigenous communities" (p. 97). Indigenous food sovereignty not only asserts the right of Indigenous Peoples to choose their own foodways, but also involves the ability to exercise that right. Since the arrival of colonial powers in North America, this right has been deliberately and violently eroded, with devastating results for Indigenous Peoples, including poor health, premature death, loss of traditional knowledge and skills, and growing dependence on colonized foodways (Martin & Amos, 2017).

This article is written by three settler researchers who live and work on Indigenous lands in and around Tkaronto (Toronto). As white, middle-class academics, we study the social economy in Canada to better understand its benefits in the face of inequities based on factors such as gender, race, and class. We have long been interested in understanding how Indigenous communities engage with the social economy, particularly in terms of addressing food-related inequities. As allies, we wanted to document existing Indigenous initiatives to showcase their ability to address food sovereignty through the social economy. To document these initiatives, we received a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) Institutional Grant to map Indigenous social economy organizations related to food. This mapping exercise revealed a wide range of organizations across the country,[1] which we presented at the Place-based Food Systems conference hosted by Kwantlen Polytechnic University in August 2018.

In this article, we investigate how some Indigenous groups in Canada have used the social economy to build food sovereignty in their communities—growing community sustenance that is not tied to colonized foodways but returns to pre-colonial food practices. We begin with an overview of food, its place in Indigenous worldviews, and the effects of colonization on Indigenous foodways. Next, we explore the concept of food sovereignty and the rise of Indigenous food sovereignty. With this context in place, we then discuss how some Indigenous communities are using the social economy (whether they are aware of the concept or not) to return to traditional food practices and build food sovereignty. In particular, we examine how some communities that are part of the Northern Manitoba Food, Culture, and Community Collaborative (NMFCCC) have intentionally chosen the social economy as one of the routes to Indigenous food sovereignty. We conclude with some observations about the importance of community and food sovereignty, not only for Indigenous Peoples but also for the social economy. While the social economy can be a route to Indigenous food sovereignty, we note that Indigenous food sovereignty can help researchers and practitioners in the social economy understand the importance of community and food sovereignty. It can also help to decolonize the capitalist economy itself and overcome its inequities, which have been highlighted during the COVID-19 pandemic.

FOOD, INDIGENOUS FOODWAYS, AND THE NUTRITION TRANSITION

Food is central to human existence; regardless of our origins, we all need to eat (Sumner, 2016). While a basic life requirement, food is much more than just fuel for our bodies. Many of us, however, have lost our fundamental understanding of and connection to the deep social, cultural, economic, and environmental meanings of food, a process that Kneen (1995) refers to as distancing. Our relationship to food is developed during childhood (Wilson, 2015) and continues throughout our adult life. Food waste, food festivals, junk food, food offerings, eating disorders, and traditional cuisine all say something about our relationship to food.

French anthropologist Marcel Mauss (1967) famously described food as a "total social fact." While that may be true, food could also be described as a total cultural fact in Indigenous communities. From Indigenous perspectives, traditional foods (i.e., originating from the natural environment, including farming, wild harvesting, or hunting) must be understood within a wider cultural framing, which includes spiritual and environmental relations and concepts of responsibility, renewal, and reciprocity with respect to taking care of the land, waterways, and wider community for future generations (Neufeld, 2021). As Settee (2018) explains, food is one of the central features of being Indigenous: "For Indigenous peoples, the land, food and identity were seen as parts of a whole system. The land and food exist to feed the whole community as an extension of the family unit" (p. 179). Settee goes on to explain how Indigenous relationships to food are different from the mainstream relationships to food. To illustrate this, she calls on the words of Winona LaDuke (2005, p. 210), who explains that "food itself is medicine: not only for the body, but for the soul, for the spiritual connection to history, ancestors, and the land." In contrast, Settee argues, mainstream relationships to food mostly see food from a utilitarian perspective as individual caloric input and part of the capitalist economy. These mainstream relationships to food have been deeply encouraged by this economy, so much so that for some people:

> Food is no longer viewed first and foremost as a sustainer of life. Rather, to those who seek to command our food supply, it has become instead a major source of corporate cash flow, economic leverage, a form of currency, a tool of international politics, an instrument of power – a weapon! (Kreb, 1992 in Millstone & Lang, 2003, p. 11)

The use of food as a weapon has a sordid history, especially considering Friedmann's (1993) observation that food has long been associated with wealth and power. This is particularly true in colonial societies. For example, the Canadian government has used food as a weapon against Indigenous people. Sir John A. MacDonald, the first prime minister of Canada, withheld the food already promised in signed treaties to coerce Indigenous Peoples onto reserves (Daschuk, 2015). In addition, for more than a century, the scanty meals served to Indigenous children forced into the residential school system resulted in high levels of malnutrition, sickness, and death (TRC, 2015). And in the 1940s and 1950s, the Government of Canada performed nutritional experiments on Indigenous children in residential schools to establish the guidelines for Canada's Food Guide, withholding food from already malnourished children to test levels of food intake and health (Mosby, 2013). Overall, Neufeld (2021, p. 47) observes, "colonial policies have disrupted, denied access to, and in many cases decimated traditional food sources and medicines." In addition, the destruction of the natural world through centuries of colonization has impacted many peoples world-wide and

is an ongoing source of disruption and destruction of the traditional food practices of Indigenous Peoples, right up to the current food insecurity rampant within Indigenous communities.

Food is also a weapon in the form of industrialized or ultra-processed food—highly processed, nutrient-poor, edible commodities that are full of salt, sugar, and fat. Winson (2013) refers to these commodities as pseudo-foods and argues that they include not only what we would think of as junk food, but also juice beverages, frozen dairy products, and pre-sweetened cereals. He argues that pseudo-foods colonize grocery store shelves as well as other food environments, such as gas stations, hospitals, schools, and airports, making them difficult to avoid. Many pseudo-foods, he explains, could be classed as addictive, with a deliberate combination of salt, sugar, and fat laced with chemical flavourings that promote "craveability" or the "bliss point" and stimulate purchasing and overeating.

Pseudo-foods constitute a significant portion of what has come to be known as the Western diet, described by Pollan (2008, p. 10) as "lots of processed foods and meat, lots of added fat and sugar, lots of everything – except vegetables, fruits and whole grains." He reports that wherever people have given up their traditional foodways and taken up the Western diet, a predictable series of non-communicable Western diseases follows, including type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, and certain types of cancer. While these chronic diseases affect people around the world due to capitalism's relentless penetration of customary food systems, Neufeld (2021) argues that they tend to disproportionately affect Indigenous Peoples because of pre-existing health and social conditions brought on by colonization.

The adoption of the Western diet involves what is known as a nutrition transition, which refers to a change in a population's nutrition status. The concept was developed by Popkin (2003), who observed that after dietary changes were introduced into the developing world, the rates of non-communicable diseases increased. Considered by Samson (2016) as the most important issue affecting the health of Indigenous Peoples around the world, he describes it as "a change from gathered, farmed, fished, and hunted foods to industrialized energy-dense diets" (p. 1), adding that the nutrition transition has been accompanied by population shifts from being physically active to leading sedentary lives.

Martin and Amos (2017) have researched the nutrition transition within Indigenous communities in Canada, including the serious burden of chronic disease associated with it. They note that larger social, economic, and political contexts have shaped the nutrition transition and they highlight the impacts of *colonization* on the way the nutrition transition has manifested in these communities. When investigating this food crisis, Martin and Amos call into question the ideas associated with nutritionism, which focuses on specific ingredients in the diet, stresses individual responsibility, and fails to take into account Indigenous perspectives on how and why their communities experience food insecurity. For example, for many remote communities in Canadian sub-arctic regions, the Northern Store (owned and operated by the Hudson Bay Company until 1987) is a monopoly that has been the conduit for the nutrition transition because both the cost and quality of the foods it purveys do not support healthy dietary choices (Thompson, Kamal, Alam, & Wiebe, 2012, p. 55). In contrast, Martin and Amos (2017) emphasize the traditional importance of food in the production of community among Indigenous cultures and contend that respecting traditional cultural practices in terms

of food must become part of the solutions needed in many Indigenous communities, and indeed other communities and cultures around the globe. One solution that respects traditional cultural practices involves food sovereignty.

FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

Food sovereignty emerged in response to the lack of action over **the last** 60 years (exacerbated by the rise of neoliberal reforms in the 1980s) concerning the right to food, which was originally enshrined in the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 (United Nations, 1948). Put forward by an international movement of peasants called La Via Campesina, the concept moves this human right beyond the right to food to the right to feed oneself (Morgan, 2010). La Via Campesina, the largest social movement in the world, was launched by small farmers who feared that pending trade deals would worsen their situation (Friedmann, 2017). As a food justice organization, it calls on "all people to keep up the endless fight for food sovereignty, for integral agrarian reforms, for the return of territories to indigenous people, for an end to capital's violence, and to restore agroecological small-farmer and indigenous food systems" (La Via Campesina, 2014).

Desmarais (2017) defines food sovereignty as the right of peoples and nations to control their own food and agricultural systems, including their own markets, production modes, food cultures, and environments. Describing it as a radical alternative to corporate-led, industrial agriculture, she explains that food sovereignty is based on six principles: it focuses on food for people, values food providers, localizes food systems, puts control locally, builds knowledge and skills, and works with nature. In addition, she emphasizes that food sovereignty places producers and consumers at the heart of decision making by asking vital questions: "What food is produced, who grows the food, where and how is it produced, and at what scale" (p. 366); thus, addressing issues of power and power dynamics. McMichael (2008, p. 220) expands on this when he proposes that food sovereignty "serves to appropriate and reframe the dominant discourse, and as a political tactic to gain traction in the international political-economy en route to a global moral economy organized around 'co-operative advantage.'"

Building on the work of La Via Campesina and liberation theology, Grey and Patel (2015) remind us that food sovereignty is a form of decolonization from capitalism's cosmology of land alienation, specific gender roles that negatively affect women, and the commodification of nature and genetic resources. By examining food sovereignty alongside Indigenous struggles, they find a key theme: "food sovereignty is the continuation of anti-colonial struggles in ostensibly postcolonial contexts" (p. 433). For these authors, food sovereignty is and should be a radical anti-colonial project. This helps to explain the development and adoption of this concept by many Indigenous and campesino movements. As Morrison (2008, p. 11) has made clear, "food sovereignty is the newest and most innovative approach to addressing the complex issues impacting the ability of individuals, families and communities to respond to their own needs for healthy, culturally adapted Indigenous foods."

INDIGENOUS FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

Indigenous food sovereignty offers a restorative framework for nurturing relationships with each other and with the culturally important plants, animals, and waterways that provide people with food (Wadden, 2010). As emphasized by the People's Food Policy Project (2011, p. 9), "Indigenous

food sovereignty understands food as sacred and part of a web of relationships with the natural world that sustains culture and community." Martin and Amos (2017, p. 209) maintain that Indigenous food sovereignty holds a special significance for Indigenous Peoples because, even though the terminology itself is relatively new, the concept "speaks to issues that Indigenous peoples and communities have been struggling with for many, many generations." They add that advocates for Indigenous food sovereignty emphasize the importance of not only decolonization and self-determination, but also co-management strategies for developing resources and using food.

Like food sovereignty, Indigenous food sovereignty is based on a set of underlying principles, all of which reflect Indigenous worldviews: 1) food is sacred; 2) participation (at the individual, family, community, and regional levels); 3) self-determination; and 4) legislation and policy reform (Martin & Amos, 2017). Morrison (2011) observes that the principles of Indigenous food sovereignty are founded in Indigenous Peoples' responsibilities to uphold their distinct cultures and relationships to the land and food systems. Avoiding the limitations imposed by definitions, she argues that the term describes "the present-day strategies that enable and support the ability of Indigenous communities to sustain traditional hunting, fishing, gathering, farming and distribution practices" (pp. 97–98). Writing from an urban perspective, Cidro, Adekunle, Peters, and Martens (2015) emphasize the importance of cultural food with respect to Indigenous food sovereignty, adding that their research yielded three themes: growing, harvesting, preparing, and eating cultural food as ceremony; cultural food as a part of connection to land through reciprocity; and relearning Indigenous food sovereignty to address food insecurity in the city. Morrison (2011) broadens the discussion by pointing out that Indigenous food sovereignty also provides a framework for exploring, transforming, and rebuilding the industrial food system into a more just and ecological system for everyone. In this vein, Loukes, Ferreira, Gaudet, and Robidoux (2021, p. 157) note that conversations and actions around food sovereignty must "move toward a diverse range of economic models that center Indigenous people's sovereignty." One economic model being explored by Indigenous communities is the social economy.

INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES AND THE SOCIAL ECONOMY

The term "social economy" has a long and global history; however, there is not always agreement on the exact meaning of the term and the practices that are subsumed under its umbrella (Bouchard, 2009; McMurtry, 2010; Quarter, 1992). That said, the social economy encompasses many different types of organizations whose social objectives are central to their mission (Quarter, Mook, & Armstrong, 2018). In essence, "a social economy implies the basic reorientation of the whole economy and related social institutions" (Fontan & Shragge, 2000, p. 9). This includes Indigenous communities, which use social-economy organizations to overcome the devastations of colonization and return to their pre-colonial food practices through food-sovereignty initiatives.

In her exploration of the social economy as a model for Indigenous governance, Kuokkanen (2011) reports that the term "social economy" was first developed by an anthropologist studying the Tlingit society on the northwest coast of Canada in order to describe the inextricable link between economics and social organization and to recognize how the economy is embedded in social relations in Indigenous economic systems. Using the social economy as the starting point for considering

Indigenous governance, she proposes foregrounding "not only indigenous economic systems and their significance in their entirety but also social institutions as the basis of forming contemporary political organization and governance" (p. 233). For Kuokkanen, one of the added bonuses of the social economy is that it helps avoid the false dichotomy between traditional and modern, thus circumventing distractions regarding authenticity and traditionalism.

Sengupta, Vieta, & McMurtry, (2015) note that Indigenous businesses make up a distinct type of social enterprise in Canada, because they are led and managed by Indigenous communities. They maintain that Indigenous social enterprises have a complex history, with the forerunners of current Indigenous social-economy initiatives being implemented by non-Indigenous settlers and having a negative effect on Indigenous communities, reflecting the broader realities of colonization. Today, the factors that influence social-economy development in Indigenous communities include "the ability to convert different types of capital – including land, human, social, environmental, cultural, and financial capital – to meet holistic requirements of diverse Indigenous communities" (p. 119), resulting in organizations with unique quadruple bottom line indicators: economic, social, environmental, and cultural. That said, the fact that Indigenous communities participate in the social economy does not mean that the concept is automatically accepted.

> 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. (Wuttunee, 2010, p. 210)

After examining critiques of the concept, Wuttunee (2010) puts forward two reasons why the social economy has become an effective tool of community development: first, it permits a range of forms; second, it maintains control in the hands of Indigenous communities. Many Indigenous communities in Canada have chosen to participate in different forms of the social economy and have a great deal to teach non-Indigenous practitioners, policy makers, and academics about the conceptualization and practice of the social economy. We now turn to some of these initiatives.

INDIGENOUS SOCIAL ECONOMY INITIATIVES

There are numerous examples of social-economy initiatives created by Indigenous people in Canada. As settler researchers, we were familiar with the benefits of the social economy among settler societies and wondered how Indigenous communities engage with the social economy, particularly in the realm of food. To answer this question, we simply documented the extent of food-related social economy initiatives, using publicly available information posted by Indigenous organizations. In doing so, we found many examples of the social economy (Sumner, McMurtry, & Tarhan, 2019) and offer a respectful scan of these food-related initiatives.

To carry out this study, we employed a three-step method to assemble a map and a corresponding Canada-wide database of alternative food procurement in Indigenous communities. In the first step, we conducted an online search using the keywords "Indigenous/First Nation/Inuit/Metis food project" and "Indigenous/First Nation/Inuit/Metis food program." We used an online search engine and academic databases to search related media articles, information from support organizations (i.e., organizations that provide financial and/or logistical support) and reports, as well as academic articles.

As a result of this initial search, we identified various types of Indigenous food initiatives (including but not limited to such things as co-operatives, community gardens, community food markets, traditional food initiatives in healthcare institutions, and school gardens). Step two involved a secondary online search for each type of initiative, which resulted in the identification of numerous additional initiatives and organizations that implement or support alternative food procurement in and/or by Indigenous communities. The third step of the online search involved an inquiry into the websites of and grey literature (e.g., reports) published by these support organizations to reveal additional Indigenous-led food procurement initiatives.

Our online research identified a total of 167 Indigenous food-related social-economy initiatives across the country. The largest number of examples were community gardens and greenhouses (58), followed by co-operatives (42), school gardens (17), food markets (9), community-based food programs (9), harvesting and hunting initiatives (5), education and training (5), institutional food (4), community kitchens (2), procurement initiatives (2), and single initiatives including but not limited to a food aid program, a food bank, a food distribution center, a combined food market–community garden–greenhouse, and a harvesting and a hunting initiative focused on food aid. A brief description of a variety of initiatives will provide a window into the breadth of food-related social economy options used by Indigenous Peoples: a social enterprise, a community garden and a community freezer program, a food bank, and a country food program (see Table 1).

The first example involves a social enterprise in Garden Hill First Nation in the province of Manitoba. In her research, Puzyreva (2017) describes Meechim Inc., which embraces community economic development. By seeking to localize food production to meet community needs, it aims "to produce locally at the farm situated on reserve, sell the produce at a local market at lower prices than at the Northern Store, and to potentially introduce more initiatives that would increase healthy food consumption in the future, like a healthy food café" (p. 24). The goals of Meechim Inc. include youth and adult training and work opportunities through the provision of agriculture equipment and infrastructure, and increased food security and sustainable livelihoods (Thompson, 2015). Although improvements are needed, Meechim Inc. has the potential to help make food more affordable, bring people together, and instill a "we-can-do-it" approach in dealing with community issues (Puzyreva, 2017).

The second example centers on the Hopedale and Rigolet Inuit Community Governments in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador. They participated in a community-led food assessment (CLFA), which involved all members of the community in examining issues affecting access to food and developing solutions to overcome challenges in a locally appropriate manner (Food First Newfoundland, n.d.). Subsequently, both Hopedale and Rigolet communities decided to establish community gardens and join a Good Food Box program run by support organization Food First Newfoundland, which allows communities to order food in bulk and thereby share the cost of shipping while choosing for themselves the types of foods that are ordered. The Hopedale community also decided to expand and enhance its community freezer program, which funded local hunters to provide meat for low-income families and for elders who have no family to hunt for them. These residents are provided with one piece of frozen meat per month, while supplies last (Food First Newfoundland, n.d.).

The third example occurs on the Chippewas of Nawash Unceded First Nation in Ontario, where volunteers run a food bank in the community centre that provides food to both families and individuals of this Indigenous community. As part of the social economy, food banks like this are non-profit organizations that have a centralized warehouse where surplus food is collected, stored, and distributed, free of charge (Quarter et al., 2018). During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Chief and Council "urged every household to take advantage of the Food Bank at this time and avoid unnecessary trips out of the community to the supermarket" (Nawash Food Bank, 2021). While the food bank relied on home delivery during the beginning of the pandemic, it has now returned to regular pick-ups at the community centre.

The fourth example takes place in northern Manitoba. In this study, Thompson et al. (2012) discuss country food programs, describing them as organized initiatives that support people living off the land to feed the local community (noting that country food includes mammals, fish, plants, berries, and waterfowl/seabirds harvested from local stocks). After reporting that the one of the participants in the program "talked about how local funding and community direction results in food sovereignty" (p. 53), they conclude that country food programs are an important option for communities to consider because they can help build food sovereignty.

Table 1: Sample food-related social-economy initiatives in Indigenous communities

Name	Type of social economy initiative	Province/ Territory	Scale	Role in Indigenous food sovereignty & food security
Meechim Inc.Garden Hill First Nation	Social enterprise	Manitoba	Local	Local food; more affordable food. *Increased food sovereignty and food security*
Hopedale and Rigolet Inuit Community Governments	Community garden, Good Food Box program, community freezer program	Newfoundland and Labrador	Local, provincial	More food choice; more affordable food; local food. *Increased food sovereignty and food security*
Chippewas of Nawash Unceded First Nation	Food bank	Ontario	Local	More affordable food. *Increased food security*
Fourteen communities in northern Manitoba	Country food programs	Manitoba	Local	Local food; community directed and funded. *Increased food sovereignty and food security*

In our research on Indigenous food procurement, one organization stood out as promoting and supporting Indigenous social-economy initiatives as a route to Indigenous food sovereignty: The Northern Manitoba Food, Culture, and Community Collaborative (NMFCCC). As a program operating under the auspices of Tides Canada, the NMFCCC is a not-for-profit organization that provides financial and technical support to Indigenous-led food initiatives in northern Manitoba. Describing itself as an interconnected group of people, communities, organizations, and governments, it began as a pilot project in 2013 and became fully realized in 2014 (NMFCCC, 2017), with the overall goal of increasing food security and economic development (Glass, 2016). The NMFCCC can be described as an innovative collaboration made up of northern community people, northern advisors, funders, and organizations who all work together to foster healthier and stronger commu-

nities in Northern Manitoba, through improved access to healthy foods and the development of resilient local economies (NMFCCC, n.d.). Over the last seven years, it has supported social-economy initiatives such as community gardens, co-operatives, community greenhouses, and country food programs.

Since 2014, the NMFCCC has been releasing annual reports presented as community stories. These reports explain the organization's values and showcase the stories of food-related social-economy projects in various communities, along with a description of shared learning opportunities. They also focus on food sovereignty, highlighting its importance to Indigenous communities. As part of the NMFCCC, the northern advisors "offer their local and cultural knowledge to provide critical insight about how best to partner with and develop relationships with northern communities in the movement toward food sovereignty" (NMFCCC, 2016).

For example, the O-Pipon-Na-Piwin Cree Nation, commonly known as South Indian Lake, has a population of 1,200 made up almost exclusively of Indigenous, mainly Cree, Peoples. The one and only objective of its country foods program is "to achieve food sovereignty by strengthening and expanding the country foods service to community members in need and 're-skilling' community members" (NMFCCC, 2014, p. 9). Another example involves the Opaskwayak Cree Nation, located on the banks of the Saskatchewan River, which has about 5,000 on-reserve residents and 2,000 off-reserve. One of the objectives of its community gardens and fruit tree orchard is "to support food sovereignty and healthy living" (NMFCCC, 2015, p. 10). And finally, the Peguis First Nation, with a strong agricultural history marked by forced relocation, developed an agricultural project in 2011 focused on community gardens. Over the ensuing years, the project "has benefitted many in the community and has been recognized by many communities, governments, and the Collaborative as an example of agricultural sustainability, food sovereignty, and reconciliation" (NMFCCC, 2018–2019, p. 12).

For the NMFCCC (2017, 2018–2019, p. 7), these stories show the power of communities taking action to reclaim food sovereignty: "building a network of people dedicated to supporting and creating community, increasing food sovereignty, and strengthening local economies." In turn, the NMFCCC sees food sovereignty as having the power to change larger systems, with the understanding that food-sovereignty work has always been happening in these communities and will continue to happen, with or without support (NMFCCC, n.d.).

DISCUSSION

These examples illustrate how the social economy can be a route to Indigenous food sovereignty. But that is not the whole story. Indigenous engagement in the social economy has a great deal to teach non-Indigenous people about the importance of community and Indigenous food sovereignty. It also opens the door to the kind of food systems that can help address future food-security issues associated with challenges, such as pandemics, climate change, and geopolitical upheavals, through Indigenous food sovereignty.

In terms of community, we have already mentioned that many Indigenous social enterprises are led and managed by Indigenous communities to meet the needs of these communities (Sengupta et al., 2015). In other words, communities, not individuals, are at the heart of social-economy initiatives that aim for Indigenous food sovereignty. Community is central to Indigenous identity and relation-

ality (Vernon, 2015), and thus essential to the way Indigenous Peoples understand and participate in the social economy. As Kuokkanen (2011, p. 219) observes, at the heart of economic activities associated with Indigenous economies is "not the exchange for profit or competition but the sustenance of individuals, families, and the community," with surplus shared at festivals and ceremonies that preserve the social cohesion of the community. These economies, she argues, continue to be embedded within communities.[2]

In all the Indigenous-led food-related social-economy initiatives discussed in this article, there is a clear intention for involving and benefitting the entire community, rather than the few who are able to directly participate in social-economic activity. Compare this to non-Indigenous social-economic initiatives like food co-operatives, many of which are gentrified and exclusive, with a focus on individual memberships and benefit, and high-quality, high-priced goods that are not always accessible to a broader and more inclusive community (see, for example, Zitcer, 2015). This has led to the demise of many of these organizations (e.g., the West End Food Co-op in Toronto and the Ontario Natural Food Co-op). Such an outcome, of course, is neither exclusive to food co-operatives nor universal. However, one need only think of global corporations like Whole Foods whose clientele and price points are clearly exclusive to see a version of the negative impacts of this individualistic approach to the social economy (McMurtry, 2015).

The importance of the role of community in the social economy has been recognized by McMurtry (2010, p. 4), when he defines the social economy as "economic activity neither controlled directly by the state nor by the profit logic of the market, activity that prioritzes the social wellbeing of communities and marginalized individuals over partisan political directives or individual gain." For McMurtry (2015, p. 70), the community is the fundamental site of decision-making and "in whatever way this community considers appropriate, decisions are fundamentally democratic." McMurtry's conceptualization reflects the reality of the food-related social-economy initiatives discussed in this article—they are community focused, based in a relationality that is completely different from the individual focus of the capitalist economy that has seeped into almost every aspect of our daily lives. Crucial as these conceptualizations are, it is the practices developed by and within communities (specifically Indigenous communities) that give these conceptualizations life. A missing piece here is the public policy to support communities making these decisions (Loney & Braun, 2016; McMurtry, 2021). If the calls to action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) are to be realized in the realm of food, particularly in the areas of health, language, and culture, there needs to be a fundamental shift in positive, proactive, and community control for Indigenous communities to transform the colonization of their foodways.

There is another way that Indigenous practices and concepts can help move non-Indigenous communities to a more food-aware place, namely, the concept of food sovereignty. As we noted earlier, Grey and Patel (2015) see food sovereignty as a form of decolonization from capitalism. The social economy can also be a route to food sovereignty for non-Indigenous people, so they can step away from the grip of the capitalist food system, which has done so much harm to people and the planet (see Willett et al., 2019). This route is recognized by the United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force on Social and Solidarity Economy when it proposes that new definitions of the social and solidarity economy must prioritize community needs, community ownership, and community control, all as-

pects of "the transformative notion of food sovereignty" (UN Inter-Agency Task Force on Social and Solidarity Economy, 2014, p. v). With this in mind, Indigenous food sovereignty can, as noted earlier in this article, provide a framework for exploring, transforming, and rebuilding the current food system into a more just and ecological system for everyone. In other words, the social economy is a two-way street. While it can be a route to Indigenous food sovereignty, it can also be a means for non-Indigenous people to learn from Indigenous Peoples how to deepen their relationship to community and pursue food sovereignty. Respectful cross-cultural learning in the realm of economic practice and theory can only be a positive development.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted long-standing issues of food insecurity across Canada, particularly among Indigenous populations (Levi & Robin, 2020; PROOF, 2022). It reinforces the importance of building a resilient food system that can weather future challenges in the form of pandemics, climate change, and geopolitical upheavals. From this perspective, there is a need to recognize the importance of the alternative food provisioning that the social-economy initiatives in this study provide, and to ramp up support for community programming to develop Indigenous food sovereignty within communities facing food insecurity. As Levi and Robin (2020) emphasize:

> Even in a state of emergency, we can design new models and reinvigorate Indigenous food ways, honouring the resiliency and leadership of Indigenous communities like community centred food kitchens, hunter support programs, goose camps, gardens and initiatives like the Indigenous Food and Freedom School. (p. 2)

CONCLUSION

The social economy has long been associated with food, from the earliest co-operatives to the latest food-sharing platforms. This association is (and always has been) recognized by Indigenous communities as a way to overcome inequities in the current food system as a result of ongoing colonization and to reclaim food sovereignty and return to pre-colonial practices. Their engagement in the social economy, in turn, provides lessons for non-Indigenous people, including the importance of community and food sovereignty. These lessons are reinforced by the power of food, which McMichael (2000, p. 21) argues, "lies in its material and symbolic functions of linking nature, human survival, health, culture and livelihood as a focus of resistance to corporate takeover of life itself." If there is going to be an engagement with the TRC recommendations, food has to be part of the solution. When food is part of the solution, conceptualizations such as the social economy and Indigenous food sovereignty need to be engaged. If these conceptualizations are to be taken seriously, careful listening to and internalization of Indigenous perspectives is necessary. Finally, there needs to be societal supports for Indigenous communities to make community decisions on food and food futures, rather than paternalistic and colonial policies.

An Indigenous social economy combined with the power of food can decolonize, eradicate inequities, and rebuild community sustenance through Indigenous food sovereignty. In doing so, it can become a model for decolonizing the economy and overcoming its inherent inequities, which have only been heightened by the COVID-19 pandemic.

NOTES

1. For the map, see https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/0/viewer?mid=1oJUIKoPXI-_vVxB6kjEt-yWwV5x6Qmpu&ll=52.16642607535388%2C-97.79301950000001&z=3.
2. While our research does not engage with urban Indigenous communities, this would be an important site of future research. Our hypothesis is that the principles and issues outlined here would remain but would be made more complex by the urban environment.

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