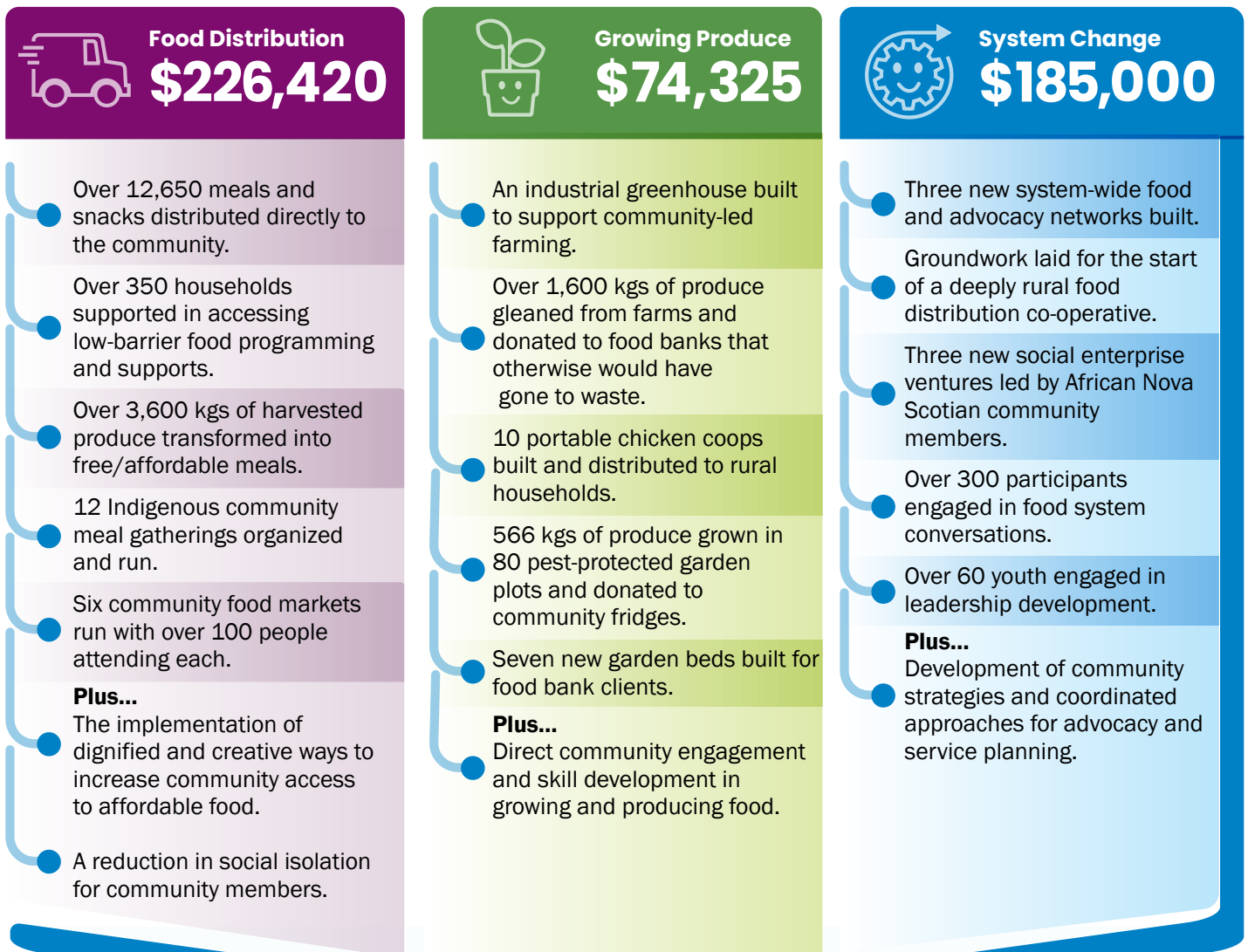
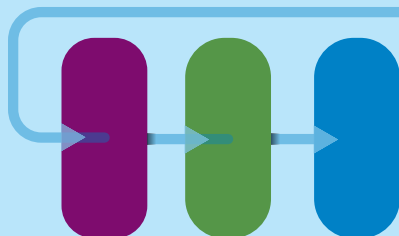


INNOVATION GRANT IMPACT SUMMARY

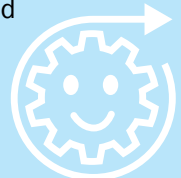
In 2024, **Feed Nova Scotia** contributed **\$485,745** to fund 18 different and impactful projects across the province through the Innovation Grant. Our investments fell under the following umbrellas:



ACROSS ALL PROJECTS



- Almost 2,000 people reached through food-based workshops and events.
- Thousands of volunteer hours contributing to community food programs and services.
- Many new partnerships, networks, and job opportunities created.



Akoma: Let's Grow Together

Theme: Growing Produce

Amount Funded: \$25,000

Proposal:

Akoma received funding to engage youth in the Preston Township communities (North Preston, East Preston, Cherry Brook/Lake Loon, and surrounding areas) in hydroponic farming, sustainable agriculture, and food security education. The program created hands-on learning experiences and raised awareness about food insecurity.

What happened:

Akoma consulted with local leaders to ensure the project met community needs and designed a series of workshops that were delivered to youth, teaching hydroponic farming and food system education. Weekly pizza nights addressed food insecurity and built community, with youth making pizza using ingredients they helped grow in both a hydroponic facility and a community garden. Each youth took home a tomato plant to continue their growing journey.

Outcome:

- Over 30 youth participated, gaining skills in hydroponics, gardening, and food systems.
- Youth reported increased awareness of food insecurity and a deeper understanding of sustainable agriculture.
- The combination of farm work, garden work, and food-based activities kept youth engaged and enthusiastic throughout the program.
- The program sparked broader community conversations about food sovereignty and youth empowerment.
- Feedback was overwhelmingly positive, with many expressing a desire to continue learning.

Key Insights:

- A dynamic and varied approach (mixing hydroponic learning with outdoor gardening) helped maintain youth interest and focus.
- Hands-on activities such as cooking with produce and planting personal crops made learning tangible and enjoyable.
- It was important to be flexible and responsive to the needs of the youth—adjusting daily routines, creating indoor options for rainy days, and incorporating reflective learning tools (like themed word searches) helped maximize participation and impact.
- Strong partnerships, like the one with Feed NS, were vital to the success of the program.

What's Next:

The program will run annually, to continue engaging youth in agricultural learning. Akoma is aiming to deepen community connections and continue creating opportunities that inspire youth to explore careers and leadership in food systems, sustainability, and agriculture.

Calvary Temple: Community Live Equity Initiative

Theme: Food Distribution

Amount Funded: \$50,000

Proposal:

Calvary Temple received funding to run a series of education workshops in remote Digby Neck and Island communities on nutritious, low-cost meal planning and cooking, as well as offering credit workshops and offering food to participants. Partway through the initiative, the group broadened its focus to include a long-term solution and is in the early stages of developing a community-run affordable food distribution co-op for the community.

What Happened:

Monthly community sessions were held covering topics like easy meals, 14-day meal plans, and canning. Participants received grocery kits for home practice. A credit education session was delivered by Equifax. In addition to direct food access work, the organization also built capacity to lay the foundation for a non-profit food store in the community.

Outcome:

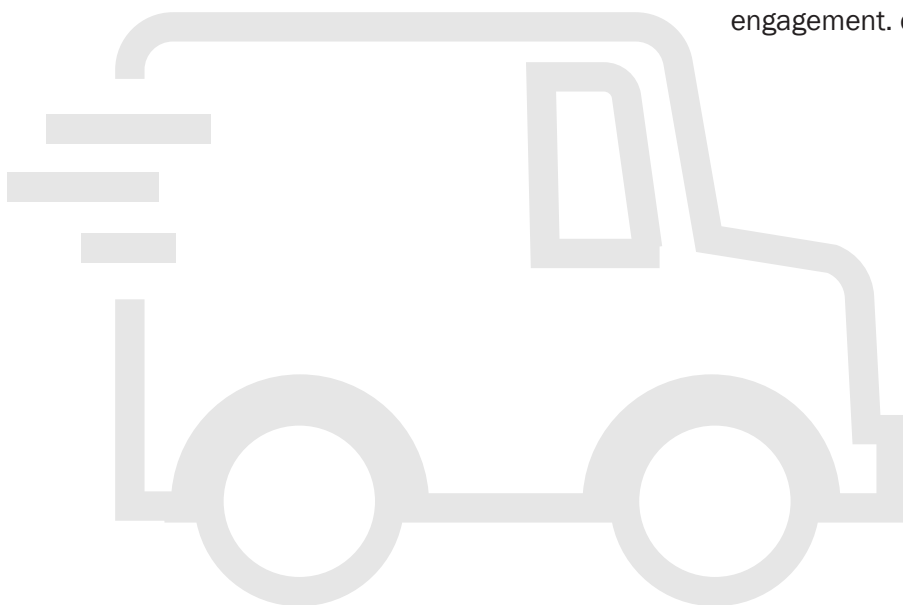
- Participants learned practical skills, like how to eat nutritiously and affordably, and how to make practical meal plans.
- Participants made nearly 5,000 meals as a result of the 14-day meal planning workshops.
- Residents expressed strong interest in working together and joining a non-profit board to launch the community food co-op.

Key Insights:

- Accessible, practical and supportive programs appeal to and draw in many community members.
- Simple, family-friendly programming and strong community relationships are essential.
- Knowing your community and remaining flexible with plans leads to greater success.
- Creating a sustainable food solution requires ongoing education, community trust, and funding.

What's Next:

Calvary Temple is currently focused on establishing a non-profit food distribution centre for the Digby Neck and Island communities and will integrate learnings into future programs and with continued community engagement. cate the model in their local context.



Cape Breton Food Hub: Rescuing Vegetables from the Fields

Theme: Food Distribution
Amount Funded: \$30,000

Proposal:

The Cape Breton Food Hub received funding to reduce food waste and increase food access by gleaning unsold produce from local farms while paying farmers for their harvest. The group redistributed food that would have otherwise been wasted by processing gleaned vegetables into prepared foods that were then donated to food banks and community organizations.

What Happened:

Two gleaning days were held: one with a planned group-based harvest and one open to the public, with gas cards and tax support for those who helped. In total, 3,650 pounds of vegetables were collected from fields and an additional 8,000 pounds of already harvested produce was processed into meals like soups, purees, pesto, and pickles. The food was donated to local food banks, community centres, Indigenous organizations, and other groups like Meals on Wheels.

Outcome:

- Farmers earned \$4,000 from unsold produce.
- 3,650 pounds of produce was gleaned and donated to food banks, and over 8,000 pounds of produce was processed into prepared food.
- Prepared food was supplied to multiple food banks and community groups.
- Community participation in food support was increased, particularly during public gleaning days.
- A large volume of produce was processed for future use, further reducing food waste.

Key Insights:

- Open public invitations were more effective than targeting groups or schools.
- Processing and distribution of produce is as time-consuming as the harvest.
- Paying farmers helps build trust and participation.
- Timing, staffing, and weather significantly impact success.
- There was far more unsold or unharvested produce than anticipated.
- Building long-term relationships with farmers is crucial.
- Planning for harvest windows is essential; frost can quickly ruin produce.

What's Next:

Cape Breton Food Hub plans to continue the project and expand it over time to work with more farmers and community groups. Using learnings from this project, they will work to improve capacity and efficiency, ultimately supporting more farmers and communities.

Cape Breton Youth Project: Dignity of Choice

Theme: Food Distribution

Amount Funded: \$22,490

Proposal:

The Cape Breton Youth Project received funding to launch a dignified grocery delivery program, serving 2SLGBTQIA+ youth and families in need of food support in Sydney who felt excluded or uncomfortable accessing existing food supports.

What Happened:

The Dignity-of-Choice Grocery Program supported youth and families. The initial plan was to run 12 bi-weekly cycles, each fulfilling 10 grocery orders (\$150 each) and two gift cards (\$75 each). However, demand far exceeded this model: within three hours of opening applications, 70 families applied. To meet the need, project staff expanded the program and completed three cycles, ultimately serving approximately 150 families.

Participants were provided with order forms to ensure accuracy and dignity of choice. While waiting for grocery orders, families also accessed a small food bank at the Cape Breton Youth Project stocked with pantry items, frozen meals, school snacks, and personal care products.

Outcome:

- Families received essential food support during the most expensive months of the year.
- Youth and families, particularly newcomers, were encouraged and supported in accessing broader community resources.
- Young adults, many of whom were seeking help for the first time, developed trust and confidence in reaching out for support.

Key Insights:

- Food insecurity is deeper and more urgent than anticipated. The demand for services was immediate and overwhelming.
- Dignity-of-choice grocery orders were highly effective, allowing families to select foods that best suited their needs.
- Simple tools (fillable forms and clear processes) made program delivery smooth and accurate.
- Staff and volunteers providing poverty reduction services need ongoing support, as the emotional impact of listening to community stories is significant.
- Successful poverty reduction requires coordinated, long-term community collaboration.

What's Next:

The Cape Breton Youth Project has secured additional funding to provide emergency grocery orders to youth on an as-needed basis. However, sustainability remains a key challenge they are working to address by searching for ongoing funding to ensure youth and families are not left without food support, and to build on the progress achieved.



Community CARES Youth Outreach: Stone Soup – The Power of Lived Experience

Theme: Food Distribution

Amount Funded: \$30,000

Proposal:

Community CARES Youth Outreach received funding to address food insecurity and social isolation in Northside Cape Breton and to empower young adults and families living in poverty, by offering free community markets, cooking classes, and opportunities for skill-building and peer involvement. Educational resources such as seasonal produce guides and ingredient substitution lists were provided which supported participants to make informed, cost-effective food choices outside of the free markets.

What Happened:

The project successfully delivered a series of six free community markets, reaching approximately 100 individuals per market (with one November market serving 150 attendees). Markets provided nutritious food in a farmers' market-style setup to promote dignity and choice, alongside resource sheets and recipe ideas.

Biweekly cooking classes offered hands-on instruction in meal preparation and budgeting. Participants shaped the menus and chose market offerings. Peers acted as advisors, allowing participants to contribute without overextending themselves.

Outcome:

- Markets and classes improved access to nutritious food and taught cooking skills.
- Participants gained confidence, self-worth, and a sense of belonging.
- Peer input influenced market setup, food selection, and class content.
- Social isolation was reduced through connections and shared learning experiences.
- Creative food tastings and recipe swaps encouraged skill-sharing and innovation.

Key Insights:

- A farmers' market-style format provided autonomy, dignity, and choice, reducing stigma and fostering social inclusion.
- Flexibility in peer engagement is crucial: meeting people where they are increases participation and sustainability.
- Combining food access with education and social connection creates longer-term resilience against food insecurity.
- Small class sizes allowed for more personalized learning and skill development.

What's Next:

Community CARES plans to continue the market and cooking class model, refining peer engagement to focus on self-leadership and wellness. They are seeking new partnerships and funding opportunities to expand reach, while maintaining dignity-first approaches that prioritize choice and community-building.

Common Roots Urban Farm: Oh Deer! How Can Urban Farms and Deer Coexist?

Theme: Growing Produce

Amount Funded: \$6,325

Proposal:

Common Roots Urban Farm (CRUF) in Woodside received funding to test non-fence-based deer deterrents in an urban garden while supporting community plotters (many of whom face food insecurity or are new Canadians) and enhancing the productivity of the gardens.

What Happened:

CRUF Woodside experimented with various deer deterrents, including scented repellents (bloodmeal, bonemeal, Irish Spring soap, and Plantskydd), visual and sound distractions (streamers and metal plates), and physical barriers (hoops and row covers). Gardeners were consulted frequently via meetings, casual interactions, newsletters, and a year-end survey. The market garden had its most productive season in 10 years. Over \$3,000 worth of produce was donated, doubling the previous year's amount. Donations supported the Dartmouth Community Fridge, plotters experiencing food insecurity, and patients at a local mental health facility. The team shared findings publicly, promoted learning among gardeners, and improved infrastructure for future years.

Outcome:

- Hoops and row covers were highly effective in the market garden, not only deterring deer but also protecting crops from cold and pests.
- Gardeners benefited from a variety of deterrent options, but success varied depending on frequency of garden visits and maintenance ability.
- Mini fencing proved to be an unexpectedly effective community-led solution.
- There was a significant increase in food donations supporting food-insecure households and health programming.
- The project generated learnings that can inform future farm design and operations.

Key Insights:

- One-size-fits-all deterrents don't work. Flexibility and personalization are key.
- Covers and hoops are effective but require significant upkeep.
- Mini fencing was a low-tech, high-impact solution, warranting dedicated support.
- Staff and volunteer presence was critical to market garden success and maintenance.
- Multifunctional tools (like row covers that shield from pests and cold) offer added value.
- Community learning, supported by Feed Nova Scotia, fostered openness and adaptability.
- Find out more about CRUF's findings [here!](#)

What's Next:

CRUF is focused on applying their learnings from this project by developing educational handouts to guide material use and maintenance, along with planning dedicated support at the start of next season to help plotters. Learnings from the project will also inform future garden design.

Community Society to End Poverty: Developing a Poverty Advocacy Network

Theme: System Change

Amount Funded: \$50,000

Proposal:

Community Society to End Poverty (CSEP) received funding to build organizational capacity and strengthen a province-wide poverty advocacy network. Planned activities included recruitment of a Project Coordinator, hosting focus groups with service providers, and convening a member workshop to set future advocacy priorities.

What Happened:

CSEP strengthened their capacity by formalizing their structure and completing succession planning. To build the poverty advocacy network, they hosted a sample focus group with North Grove and held an in-person membership event, bringing together 16 representatives from across Nova Scotia. They also conducted member surveys and hosted strategic planning sessions. This work grew the membership to 25 organizations across the province, with rural and regional representation, and stronger relationships with provincial departments and partner organizations.

Outcome:

- CSEP now has a clearer governance framework, stronger administrative systems, and an expanded membership base.
- The member event successfully brought together service providers, strengthened collective identity, and shared advocacy goals.
- CSEP increased its visibility with government partners and has established itself as a credible collective voice on poverty reduction and housing issues.
- While some planned focus groups were postponed, a tested model exists for future use.

Key Insights:

- Organizational capacity must be established before doing community research.
- Recruitment and engagement increased network strength, but member-led models require external support due to frontline demands on service providers.
- Flexibility is essential: pausing the focus group process allowed more intentional investment in structure and strategy.
- Clear terms of reference and strategic planning are crucial to ensuring continuity.

Whats Next

Moving forward, CSEP plans to continue capacity-building on a volunteer basis while pursuing funding for a permanent staff role. With this foundation they plan to advance a comprehensive advocacy plan based on lived experience and explore partnerships to support sustainability and joint advocacy.

Digby and Area Community Garden: Outreach Expansion

Theme: Growing Produce

Amount Funded: \$25,000

Proposal:

The Digby and Area Community Garden received funding to transform food security in the Digby area through access to fresh, affordable produce while promoting healthy eating and intergenerational community involvement. The long-term goal is to coordinate with farms and other gardens to establish an affordable fresh food market. This phase focused on hiring staffing to boost capacity, building partnerships, and strengthening outreach, particularly among seniors, youth, and low-income residents.

What Happened:

The Community Garden hired a gardener, who improved permaculture practices and significantly improved soil and crop yields. Affordable produce was sold to up to 20 families, in addition to donations of produce to the local food bank. Five gardening workshops were held, a greenhouse was set up, and the garden grew to 32 plot holders. Over 100 people attended the workshops, a clean-up event, and a celebration of music and food event.

Outcome:

- The garden increased food production and community participation.
- A productive garden led to earlier-than-expected produce sales and donations.
- Educational workshops and events had high engagement.
- The Community Garden learned about the need for accessible infrastructure and culturally dignified food access.

Key Insights:

- A skilled, consistent Garden Manager is critical to success.
- Permaculture practices significantly enhance productivity, soil health, and sustainability.
- Earlier staffing in the spring is essential for preparing the garden and maximizing yield.
- Greater coordination is needed across gardens, food co-ops, organizations, and municipalities to share learnings and advocate for food sovereignty.

What's Next:

Moving forward, the community garden is working to secure long-term funding for the Garden Manager role and exploring the possibility of hiring an Executive Director. They plan to continue to expand their gardens through a greenhouse and affordable produce sales. Long term, they hope to engage with municipalities to advocate for food security in local planning and collaborate with other organizations to support and scale similar models.



Annapolis Valley Frugal Moms: Food Access & Skills for the Valley's Precariously Housed

Theme: Food Distribution

Amount Funded: \$37,224.25

Proposal:

Frugal Moms received funding to support unhoused and low-income families across Kings, Annapolis, and Digby Counties by providing nutritious, shelf-stable foods and building food preparation skills. The initiative combined the distribution of fresh and freeze-dried produce with practical workshops on cooking, canning, and food preservation through partnerships.

What Happened:

Frugal Moms assessed the needs of unhoused individuals and low-income families to determine how best to serve them. Early testing and informal consultations identified high-need regions. The group purchased a freeze dryer and preserved 50 meals to distribute. To apply skill development, food access, and reduce social isolation, 6 workshops were held to teach cooking and food preservation skills, with over 80 participants. Partnerships with 5 organizations offered additional workshop locations and improved food access across the region. In addition, 45 microgreen kits and 3 grow towers were distributed to participants to help them grow their own fresh food.

Outcome:

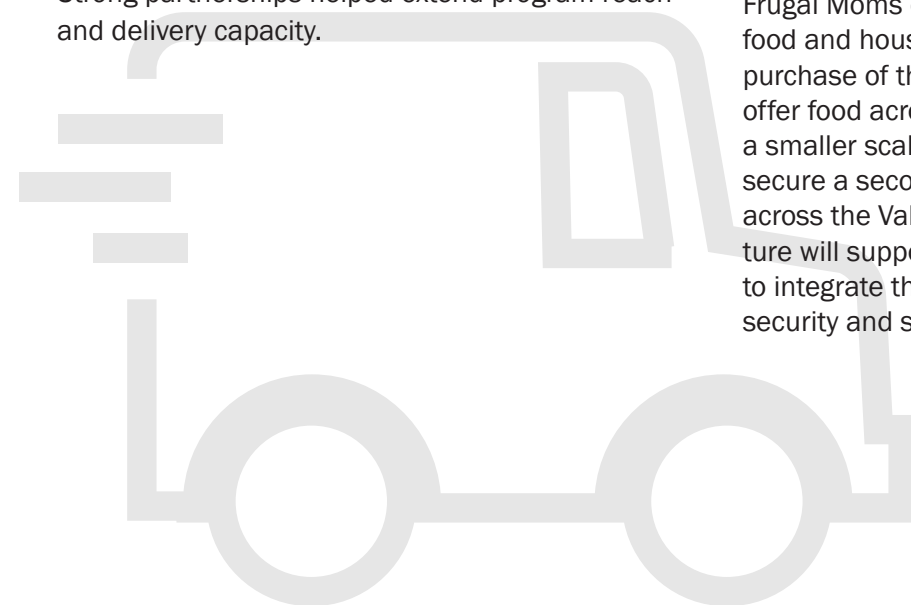
- Fresh produce and freeze-dried food were successfully distributed to individuals facing food insecurity, especially those without access to refrigeration.
- Workshops provided essential skills around food preparation, canning, and preservation. An online group continues to support people to learn about food preservation.
- Communities across Kings, Annapolis, and Digby Counties were served, with regular check-ins on 15+ unhoused individuals in each county.
- Strong partnerships helped extend program reach and delivery capacity.

Key Insights

- The need for emergency food support does not go away once an individual is housed.
- The freeze dryer was more difficult to use than anticipated, creating delays and food waste. A second unit in another hub would help meet demand and reduce transportation needs.
- When working with unhoused individuals, outreach strategies must be developed with an understanding of lived experience (e.g. understanding barriers at local shelters)

What's Next:

Frugal Moms continues to serve people experiencing food and housing insecurity in the Annapolis Valley. The purchase of the freeze dryer will expand their capacity to offer food across the Valley. The project will continue on a smaller scale while the group fundraises to be able to secure a second freeze dryer to support wider outreach across the Valley. Freeze drying and growing infrastructure will support long-term service delivery, with plans to integrate them into regular programs, increasing food security and self-reliance.



Inspiring Communities: Digby County Farm Incubator

Theme: Systems Change

Amount Funded: \$30,000

Proposal:

Inspiring Communities received funding to co-create farm incubator prototypes to improve food security, economic opportunity, and community resilience in rural African Nova Scotian communities. The initiative aimed to center community voices, build local capacity, and foster sustainable, community-led agricultural innovation.

What Happened:

Inspiring Communities designed and implemented a farm incubator in partnership with community champions, residents, and local organizations, including bee-keeping projects, and an industrial greenhouse that serves as an educational hub and a platform for agribusiness development. The program engaged youth through hands-on learning in agriculture and provided training and mentorship to build leadership capacity within communities. It also held a community health workshop to understand Digby's local food system, local health challenges, and design decentralized models of addressing food insecurity.

Outcome:

- Participating communities increased access to food and agricultural knowledge.
- Youth and local champions were empowered with sustainable skills and leadership opportunities.
- Social cohesion, trust, and ownership was strengthened through inclusive decision-making.
- Inspiring Communities created a replicable, community-driven model for agricultural innovation.
- The farm incubator in Weymouth Falls was transitioned to full local ownership.
- Beyond the original pilot areas, Inspiring Communities laid the groundwork for future community-led projects.

Key Insights:

- Co-creation and community ownership are essential for long-term impact and trust.
- Capacity-building is a foundational investment for engagement and sustainability.
- Flexibility is critical when working with diverse and rural communities.
- Clear communication and expectation-setting help align goals and reduce friction.
- Strategic partnerships amplify resources, deepen impact, and engage youth.

What's Next:

Moving forward, the project is transitioning to the organization Future Civics, who will expand the incubator model to new communities, beginning with a partnership with the Jordantown-Acacia-Conway Betterment Association Community Centre. Learnings will inform capacity-building and logistics in future sites. The group will continue advocating for funding streams that support grassroots, community-led food and agriculture initiatives, and maintains a commitment to co-creation, inclusivity, and adaptability in all future efforts.

Island Food Network: Mobilizing Collaborative Food Action

Theme: System Change

Amount Funded: \$35,000

Proposal:

The Island Food Network (IFN) received funding to advance collaborative food action across Unama'ki/Cape Breton through relationship-based engagement, data sharing, community gatherings, and support for local innovation in food access. The aim was to support grassroots collaboration and strengthen the IFN as a regional connector and advocate.

What Happened:

The IFN conducted context-setting research using existing food data and practitioner interviews, built relational infrastructure (replacing listserv with personalized engagement with 140 contacts) and hosted a celebration gathering to foster connection and joy in the network. They also supported other grantees in Cape Breton by convening a Community of Practice and supporting food access and youth leadership prototypes.

Outcome:

- Relationships within the food community in Cape Breton were strengthened.
- Trust-based partnership encouraged collaboration across organizations.
- IFN is increasingly recognized as a central support in the regional food system.
- IFN generated community-informed food access principles to guide decisions.
- IFN shared resources and supported two innovative food access prototypes.
- The project reinforced IFN's role as a bridge between grassroots action and systems-level change.

Key Insights:

- Relationships are the foundation for effective, community-driven food systems change.
- Many organizations want to collaborate but lack time and infrastructure.
- The food community is overburdened and underappreciated; relational support and celebration are essential.
- There's a persistent tension between immediate action and long-term systems work.
- Clarity around principles and intentional scope is vital to avoid burnout and duplication.

What's Next:

Moving forward, IFN plans to complete and share results from two new community food access prototypes, launch a Collaborative Food Network across 8–9 remote communities in Victoria County, and continue listening, convening, and creating meaningful opportunities for the food community to lead change.

Mobile Food Market: Transforming Access Through Digital

Market Bucks

Theme: Food Distribution

Amount Funded: \$25,000

Proposal:

The Mobile Food Market (MFM) received funding to replace stigmatizing paper food coupons with a dignified, reloadable, digital “Market Bucks” card for use at MFM sites. The goal was to create a secure, stigma-free system that would empower individuals and families experiencing food insecurity to access healthy food with choice and privacy.

What Happened:

The MFM co-designed a digital system using QR-coded cards with Tomat, a software developer, including training tools and instruction guides. \$10,000 worth of Market Bucks cards were issued through partners: Boys and Girls Club, Veith House, Schools Plus, and MFM volunteers. The cards were used at 3 weekly MFM sites, with a 98% redemption rate. The system enabled faster checkouts and easier administration.

Outcome:

- 166 Market Bucks cards were distributed to community with high, consistent usage.
- Participants reported an increased sense of dignity and reduced stigma.
- The cards provided an improved checkout experience for customers and supported volunteer efficiency.
- Organizations that MFM is partnered with are now investing in Market Bucks independently, including provincial government interest.
- For participants, Market Bucks felt “normal,” “like real money,” and built confidence and trust.

Key Insights:

- Dignity-centered design changes how people interact with food support.
- Clear, simple tools (like a video and one-pager) are critical for adoption.
- Not all partners were immediately on board — early relationship-building is key.
- Ongoing, stable funding is needed to sustain and scale the program.
- Change takes time; trusted champions and early adopters make the difference.
- Even small pilots can influence system-wide conversations when rooted in respect and community feedback.

What's Next:

Moving forward, MFM plans to expand access to more communities and organizations, including Musquodoboit Valley, while fundraising for sustainable funding. Learnings will be incorporated into broader MFM work, and they will continue advocating for Market Bucks as a food prescription model across Nova Scotia.



North End Community Health Centre: North End Food Network

Theme: System Change

Amount Funded: \$20,000

Proposal:

The North End Community Health Centre (NECHC) received funding to establish the North End Food Network (NEFN) as a community-led initiative addressing chronic food insecurity in Halifax's North End, with a focus on African Nova Scotians, newcomers, low-income households, and single-parent families. The project aimed to build community connections, amplify first voice leadership, and develop a food action roadmap rooted in equity and dignity.

What Happened:

The NEFN hosted 11 meetings to build the network, offering food, childcare, and honoraria to ensure accessibility. These meetings engaged over 300 participants and 12 organizations, with monthly newsletters to continue engagement. This work informed the development of a community-informed food action roadmap. Each meeting became a hub for connection, mentorship, and advocacy, while supporting Black and newcomer-owned catering businesses.

- NEFN held 11 hybrid meetings with consistent attendance (25-35 participants each).
- The meetings increased community knowledge and engagement around food justice.
- A mentorship network emerged between elders and younger participants.
- The meetings amplified first voice advocacy and visibility in local media.
- Cross-sector partnerships were strengthened, with resource sharing.
- The network significantly reduced social isolation.
- Exit surveys showed that 90% of participants felt more connected to local resources, 80% increased their understanding of food sovereignty, and 100% want the network to continue.

Key Insights:

- Community-led efforts foster more trust and sustainable impact than service-led models.
- Real-time storytelling and peer-to-peer dialogue are powerful tools for transformation.
- Hybrid accessibility and financial supports are crucial for equitable participation.
- First voice leadership must be central—not symbolic.
- Regular, welcoming gatherings reduce isolation and spark collective action.
- Unexpected momentum (e.g., media attention, mentorship bonds) demonstrates the potential for broader systems change.
- Challenges (e.g., weather, language barriers, initial engagement) can be addressed through flexible, community-driven solutions.

What's Next:

Moving forward, the NEFN is working on developing a toolkit to support community-led food justice models across NS with plans to launch a community-led NEFN spinoff. They will also use their learnings to advocate for city-wide policy integration of food sovereignty principles. Peer Outreach Support Services & Education.

Peer Outreach Support Services & Education (POSSE): Sipekne'katik Community Food Project

Theme: Food Distribution

Amount Funded: \$26,096

Proposal:

POSSE received funding to deliver a monthly soup program for the local food bank and host monthly community meals, while engaging youth and elders in meal preparation to promote intergenerational learning, improve cooking skills, and strengthen community ties.

What Happened:

POSSE hired a professional chef to lead a soup program with monthly cooking events. Each event engaged 16+ youth and several elders to cook, serve, and share recipes. The program resulted in 1920 soups donated to the food bank, and 2314 meals served at monthly community events, surpassing the original goal by over 1000 meals. Elders who were involved in the project shared recipes, and a community cookbook was developed.

Outcome:

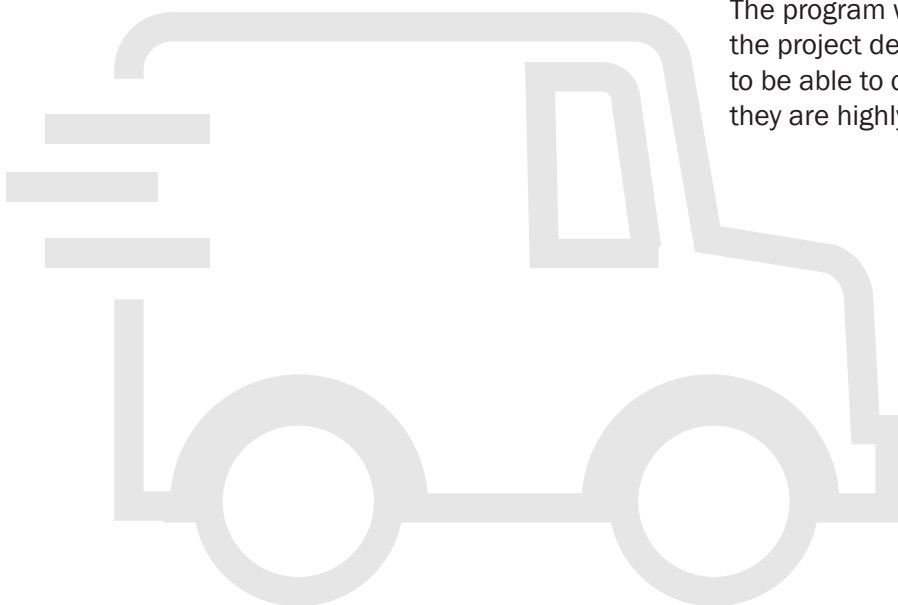
- Youth gained basic cooking skills and a deeper connection to community service.
- The project had high participation, community involvement, and demand for both meals and soups.
- 96% of participants said the meals met their dietary needs, and 100% said the meals met their cultural needs
- Positive feedback included: "Great meal every time," "Keep the meals going," and "I love learning how to cook."

Key Insights:

- The need for food support is greater than expected; food insecurity is deeply felt in remote communities.
- Beyond meals, cooking programs build skills, confidence, connection and joy.
- Intergenerational learning (e.g. elders teaching youth) was a highlight of the program.
- Community members are open to trying new foods when introduced in a respectful, supportive environment.
- Programs need plans for supporting participants when demand can't be met.

What's Next:

The program will be able to continue for 6 months past the project deadline. POSSE is seeking out new funding to be able to continue the community meals monthly, as they are highly needed and valued in the community.



Richmond River Roots: Social & Medical Prescribed Food Box Program

Theme: Food Distribution

Amount Funded: \$30,610

Proposal:

Richmond River Roots received funding to reduce food insecurity and social isolation among economically disadvantaged residents of Richmond County by providing locally-sourced, nutritious meals and food and gardening education.

What Happened:

Richmond River Roots worked with a local primary health care team to identify participants that faced challenges related to social isolation, low income, and food insecurity. Twenty-five families (30 individuals) were enrolled. Identities were protected and known only to relevant coordinators and volunteers.

Twenty volunteers were recruited to deliver weekly meals to participants, which were purchased from the Pan Cape Breton Food Hub and included items like shepherd's pie, stews, soups, and pot pies, made with local produce. Some meals were also cooked on-site using River Roots-grown ingredients. In total, 1,080 meals were distributed, and the group also held 8 cooking and gardening workshops, engaging over 60 participants.

Outcome:

- The program transitioned from produce boxes to prepared meals due to unreliable produce availability and participant preference.
- Meals and volunteer visits were deeply appreciated by recipients. Some participants mentioned these were the only full meals they received weekly.
- Workshops increased participants' knowledge of food systems, gardening, and cooking.

Key Insights:

- Prepared meals were more desirable than raw produce for this demographic.
- Social connection through volunteer delivery was a key benefit.
- Many more individuals in Richmond County could benefit, but volunteer limitations and geographic spread restricted reach.
- Community feedback emphasized the importance of familiar foods, but also openness to trying new things when support is present.
- Sustaining the project requires continued external funding; relying solely on food production proved insufficient.

What's Next:

Moving forward, the group intends to continue the program and involve a Nova Scotia Health Dietitian more directly. The group is exploring ways to deepen volunteer-participant connections and expand volunteer recruitment, especially in underserved areas.



The North Grove: Food in Focus

Theme: Systemic Change

Amount Funded: \$25,000

Proposal:

The North Grove received funding to engage more youth (ages 12–18) in food access and literacy programs, build leadership through a summer volunteer program, and provide opportunities for cultural exchange, skill-building, and connection.

What Happened:

The North Grove ran several programs, including an 8-week Youth Volunteer Leadership Program with 16 youth (13–16 years), 3 youth-led, intergenerational food-sharing events, and expanded after-school volunteer roles for 25 youth weekly, with snacks and meals. They also partnered with John Martin Junior High (JMjH) for multiple school visits focused on farming and baking, launched a March Break youth volunteer program, and hosted a well-attended youth volunteer appreciation event.

Outcome:

- 100 youth were engaged across all programming—more than double the previous year.
- Youth contributed over 1,000 volunteer hours (10% of all North Grove volunteer hours).
- The program became increasingly youth-led, and youth supported program design.
- Youth reported feeling more included, confident, connected, and safe.
- Notable partnerships included continued collaboration with JMjH and new engagement with YMCA Immigrant Services.

Key Insights:

- Youth value contributing to intergenerational, community-wide programming.
- Listening to youth and giving them creative control results in more meaningful and impactful programming.
- Cooking, baking, and sharing food creates a powerful sense of community.
- Structure and flexibility is key: A well-organized program that still allows space for youth-driven ideas works best.
- Safe, welcoming spaces foster belonging and deeper engagement, especially for newcomer youth.

What's Next:

Moving forward, the North Grove plans to launch youth involvement in the Primrose Preserves social enterprise, providing job skill training and broader community impact. They are working to expand food literacy and cooking opportunities, deepen intergenerational connections, and introduce youth advocacy components into programming, to continue cultivating a strong, safe, and inclusive space for youth leadership.

Transition Bay St. Margarets: Insta-Gardens

Theme: Growing Produce

Amount Funded: \$7,000

Proposal:

Transition Bay received funding to increase local food production skills in St. Margarets Bay by installing raised-bed gardens for food bank clients with limited gardening experience, in partnership with the St. Margarets Bay Food Bank. By offering equipment and mentorship, the goal was to reduce food dependency, foster food self-sufficiency, and generate a ripple effect of interest in food growing within the community.

What Happened:

To select participants, seven client names were provided by the food bank. Some clients had to withdrawal due to landlord restrictions or health issues. To support gardening education and planning, Transition Bay members produced vegetable transplants and provided mentoring support throughout the season, and fencing was added to protect gardens from deer and rabbits. Clients had a successful growing season and expressed strong appreciation for the gardens.

Outcome:

- Three households (families of 3–6 members each) received gardens, reported successful harvests, and began learning food production skills.
- Younger household members participated in garden maintenance, building intergenerational learning.
- The model demonstrated feasibility, though timelines need to be longer to account for partnership and installation delays.
- Strong relationships with the food bank and client enthusiasm were central to success.

Key Insights:

- Close coordination with food bank staff is essential, especially given their workload and confidentiality requirements.
- Willingness to maintain a garden is more critical than prior gardening experience.
- Lead time is necessary for planning, site visits, sourcing materials, and installation.
- Protection against animal predation (e.g., fencing) should be standard.
- Even with a small number of installations, the potential for a community ripple effect remains high.

What's Next:

The project is ongoing, with plans for the remaining four gardens to be installed in partnership with the food bank. If the pilot continues to prove successful, it can be expanded in St. Margarets Bay and replicated in other communities across Nova Scotia.



Weymouth Waterfront Development Committee: Hen Buddies

Theme: Growing Produce

Amount Funded: \$11,000

Proposal:

Weymouth Waterfront Development Committee received funding to introduce backyard chicken-keeping to food-insecure and isolated households in Weymouth. Families would receive a “Hen Buddy Kit” (hens, chicken tractor, feed, supplies, and support), with the goal of improving food security, mental well-being, and community connection.

What Happened:

In total, 6 families participated in chicken-keeping. Participants reported overwhelmingly positive emotional responses: families named their hens, shared egg stories, and described the hens as mood-lifting and entertaining. Participants traded eggs for other food in their community to try new foods and share in their harvest, while some families used them as a key protein source. Surplus eggs were shared with neighbors, family, and a Free Food Pantry.

Outcome:

- Families received an average of 3 eggs/day—about 6 dozen/month per household.
- Participants experienced improved mood, routines, and reduced isolation through chicken interaction and learning how to care for hens.
- Three families continued chicken-keeping independently; others plan to rejoin annually.
- Participants used chicken manure as garden fertilizer and chickens contributed to natural pest control.

Key Insights:

- Chicken keeping improves emotional well-being as well as food access.
- People bond deeply with their hens, which enhanced commitment to their care.
- The loan model works well, offering a no-risk trial encouraged participation.
- Infrastructure is the main barrier, once coops are provided, families manage well.
- Social media has limits. Facebook worked for some, but additional outreach channels are needed for equity.
- Contracts are key for clarity on ownership and care expectations.

What's Next:

Weymouth Waterfront Development Committee plans to build and distribute the remaining 5 chicken tractors to meet the original planned goal of 10 tractors. They plan to continue to loan out coops and hens each spring, and refurbish returned tractors, while seeking additional funding for long-term sustainability of the Hen Buddies program.

