



2020 Fireweed Food Co-op Annual Report

Preface & Acknowledgements

Based on feedback we received at our AGM last year, as well as an ongoing process and commitment as an organization to learning and growth, our land acknowledgement looks a bit different this year. While the extent to which we are naming systems of oppression is not likely something you're used to seeing at AGMs, we believe an acknowledgement of substance is imperative for creating meaningful spaces and deeper relationships that honour honesty and accountability throughout our work. While this is certainly uncomfortable at times, it is an effort towards changing the status quo.

Committing to making our spaces safer means we commit to working against the systems of oppression that operate in the society we live in. But before we can truly work against them, we must acknowledge and commit to deepening our understanding of the ways we are already participating in these systems, benefitting from them, and even feeding them. We want to do this openly here in the hopes of normalizing this kind of self-audit for the plain fact that all those working under oppressive systems are working imperfectly and often must make difficult, imperfect choices. This is not to let us off the hook-- quite the opposite. If we are committing to make *safer* spaces, that means that we commit to the *process* of making them safer, in an ongoing, meaningful, long term fashion. We are committed to change while staying engaged and present. Not stepping back from responsibility but moving aside or even stepping forward to share space. Here is a portion of our self-audit, this is inspired by readings on #landback and the idea that decolonizing is more about changing relationships than it is about disengaging. The full self-audit will be available to our members and the public shortly, when our safe(r) spaces policy is completed.

We are a white settler-founded organization that does its work on stolen land, the traditional territory of the Anishinaabeg, Cree, Ojibwe-Cree, Dakota, and Dene peoples and the homeland of the Métis Nation. These people were displaced and killed in the still-unacknowledged genocide that led to the founding of so-called Canada. As an organization that works with farmers, a majority of whom are white settler farmers, we are contributing to the ongoing occupation of Indigenous land under Western constructs of land ownership. Our organization is still majority white and currently both our full time paid staff are white. *Note: this is only one portion of our self-audit.*

Through this audit, we ask ourselves: how do we stay engaged with the parts of the current [colonial and capitalist] system we have the power to influence, while deliberately resisting replicating these oppressive systems?

The answer to this firstly includes bringing more anticolonial, anticapitalist voices to our team, which we are committed to doing actively in the recruitment of new board members and staff. In the new year, we will form an Advisory Committee which will provide a third-party body for feedback and direct guidance from those in our community who are impacted by our work but



who don't have the capacity to join the board, while compensating them for their time. Feedback from the committee will be posted publicly, and our board and staff will be accountable to pursuing their suggestions.

We are also taking on *this* process: developing a Safe(r) Spaces policy through which we hope to generate more than just practical rules, but a blueprint for ongoing accountability. These steps are what we are taking so far to resist replicating systems of oppression while unavoidably working within them. We will be taking more steps. Suggestions are always welcome.

Finally, we want to acknowledge that liberation from oppressive systems must be collective, or it is not liberation at all. Just as our safe(r) spaces document is a living document, so too is our cooperative. As we listen, learn and grow as a community, we are open to the living changes that we will inevitably go through as we work towards that collective liberation. We are committed to doing this work at the *speed of trust* (a term created by adrienne maree brown). Thank you for all being here and being with us as part of it.



Year in Review: A Collaborative Report from Fireweed Food Co-op

Fireweed Food Co-op (FFC) experienced some major changes over 2019/20, from the rebrand from Farm Fresh Food Hub, to major operational expansions, including the launch of the Food Hub, renting of a warehouse, hiring of a Food Hub Coordinator, and an unexpected increase in new staff over the summer thanks to grant funding opportunities. FFC continues to operate with two full-time contract staff, Asha Nelson, Projects Coordinator and Anna Sigrithur, Food Hub Coordinator, and one part-time contract staff, Anna McKinnon, Delivery and Warehouse Assistant.

A special thanks goes out to the exceptional current and summer staff who helped keep the South Osborne Farmers' Market running and launch the Food Hub operations, all in the midst of a global pandemic. As of fall 2020, we said goodbye to Conor Nedelec, Delivery and Warehouse Assistant, Marti Sarbit, Food Hub Assistant and Max Kereluk, Farmers' Market Co-Coordinator. Check out the [FFC Blog](#) for contributions by our past and current staff.

Since the 2019 AGM three former Board members have stepped down, including Kelly Janz (past Treasurer), Jonathan Kroeker (member) and Arianna Hildebrand (member). Anna Sigrithur (past Secretary) also moved from a board to staff position, following a full hiring process. The current Board members include: Katie Daman (Co-Chair), Adara Kaita (Co-Chair), Naomi Gichungu (Treasurer), Matt McCormick (Secretary), Nathan Enns, Hannah Muhajarine and Hillary King.

We were challenged at last year's AGM to identify actionable ways in which our organization was living our values statement. Our board and staff have had a number of internal conversations around topics such as: the purpose of our work, the way in which whiteness and white supremacy shows up in our organization and its structures, as well as how we want to show up in our community and contribute to meaningful change.

As an organization, we also re-visited our [Values Statement](#) to ensure it accurately reflected the organization's goals and ideals and how they are mobilized for organizational action. To support an anti-oppressive and safer approach to community work, the entire FFC Board and staff participated in a two-part training session facilitated by Red Tent Winnipeg. Following the Anti-Oppression and Safer Spaces training, FFC formed a sub-committee to lead the community engagement, development of a [Safe\(r\) Spaces](#) policy, and actionable initiatives. We appreciate the ongoing accountability our membership has provided to FFC, and hope to continue to have these sorts of conversations as we remain committed to action, growth and change. There will be a brief report from our safe(r) spaces committee later in our meeting.



Like many small organizations, FFC faced many challenges due to COVID-19. Operations adjusted on the fly to meet public health orders and FFC developed a [COVID-19 Safety Policy](#) outlining requirements and expectations for our organization and those sharing space within the South Osborne Farmers' Market and Food Hub. While FFC faced many operational challenges, COVID-19 offered some exceptional opportunities, including a new online ordering system for the South Osborne Farmers' Market, grant funding opportunities to hire summer students or recent post-secondary graduates, and new community partnerships to support mutual aid and food security ([Waste Not Program](#) partnership with the Mutual Aid Society and Manitoba Community Food Currency Program with Direct Farm Manitoba).

As part of the organization's growth spurt, FFC took steps towards developing and formalizing new organizational systems, including drafting a new Labour Policy and Procedure Manual and Finance Policy. FFC also hired a part-time bookkeeper to collate financial information and migrate financial data into QuickBooks. The organizational growth was attributed to grant funding FFC received through a number of sources including the Canadian Agricultural Partnership Program, Manitoba Summer Student Jobs Recovery Program / Non-Profit Organization Summer Student Incentive Grant, Green Team, Assiniboine Credit Union, Manitoba Co-op Association, Winnipeg Food Council, Direct Farm Manitoba, Canada Summer Jobs Program and ECO Canada.

Continuing in 2020 and into 2021, FFC is excited to be working with Project Nunavut / Lake to Plate, funded through a Churchill Region Economic Development Grant, completing community engagement to formalize the Safe(r) Spaces policy and continuing to work towards stronger financial sustainability in the Food Hub's operations.



Projects Coordinator: Markets, Research & More!

By Asha Nelson

SUMMARY:

This past year has been a whirlwind, to say the least. After spending the better half of winter helping create the foundation of the food hub, the spring adapting our work to the ominous pandemic, and the summer managing new staff and programming, we decided the title of projects coordinator better suited my role with the organization. Expectedly, there's a lot of overlap between my work and the other staff, but for the purpose of this report, I'll try to narrow in on some of my main responsibilities and let my colleague, Anna Sigrithur address the rest in her report.

With regards to the farmers' market, it's been another busy year, especially with the added challenge of navigating the ever evolving COVID-19 health restrictions. Nonetheless, we managed to hire new staff, retain our loyal customer base and community atmosphere, while also introducing new initiatives and programming to the market. And we owe a lot of this success to the support and patience of you, our vendors, volunteers and community members. We also want to quickly thank Direct Farms Manitoba who advocated on our behalf during the early days of COVID-19 as well as provided us with financial support to help cover the majority of our COVID-19 related expenses.

And with that, let's jump right into it!

MARKET 2020 HIGHLIGHTS:

- We shifted our **Mothers & Others Day Market** to an online platform with in person pick up. Unfortunately, the software and packing/pick up logistics added more to our plate than we expected. That being said, we were still able to support our vendors and consumers while also keeping them safer during a very difficult time, which all-in-all feels like a success!
- We offered an **online shopping option** as an alternative to our physical summer market, particularly for those who were more vulnerable to COVID 19. Similarly, we opened the market 30 minutes early for folks who are immunocompromised, elderly, or for folks living with a disability to shop without the large groups of people.



- To ensure we had enough space for social distancing, **we limited our number of vendors** to 20 at the start of the season and 32 by mid-season. Of course, we hope to increase our numbers back to 40+ when the pandemic is behind us.
- We **hired two new summer staff**, Anna McKinnon and Max Kereluk, to help manage the day-to-day operations of the summer market. These two brought their own unique skills, personalities and ideas to the team and helped us **BIG TIME** with staying on top of our COVID-19 policies and procedures. We are incredibly appreciative of all their contributions!
- We **saw an increase of people** attending our market as well as an overall rise in demand for local food. On average, we had between 600-750 people attend our market every week which is roughly a 50-150 person increase from the previous season.
- We introduced our **Pay if Forward Program** in an effort to increase local food access at our market. The way it works is that customers who need extra financial support can take a \$5 token from the Info Booth to use towards subsidizing their purchase of local food. Market staff will then pay back the vendor with the money donated by customers.
- Established **new partnerships** with Arts Junktion, who handed our crafts kits biweekly in replacement of our craft table, and Compost Winnipeg, who provided us with free weekly compost pick up and a 64L bin.

OTHER 2020 HIGHLIGHTS:

- This year we were asked to participate in a **UofM research project** examining the impacts and response to COVID-19 by food focused organizations. The work included hosting our own internal workshop with board and staff to critically reflect on our organization's challenges and triumphs during the pandemic. Once the data is compiled, summarized and analyzed, the core research team plans to create recommendations and publish their findings.
- We made and sold our very own originally designed **tote bags and sauerkraut** as a fundraiser for our organization. Aftering selling far more than we expected at the farmers' market, we decided to screen print more totebags and plan to continue to sell them throughout the year. Check them out on our [square page](#).
- We organized our annual **Harvest Veggie Box sale** which was another great success! Not only did we sell out of our 50 boxes, but we also sold a ton of add-ons such as



meats, mushrooms and grains which was said to be of great help for producers struggling at this time.

- A **masters student** in the UofM's Human Rights Program has asked us to partner with her on her practicum that explores the feasibility of creating a locally procured inner city school lunch program. She also plans to launch a pilot scale lunch program in 2021 with Fireweed as the main supplier of local food. However, this is still very much in its early stages.

FUTURE PLANS:

- We're in the process of organizing our annual **Holiday Market** which will take place online this year. We are working hard to keep everyone safe, but similar to the Mothers and Others Day Market, there will be a lot of logistics to figure out!
- We are hoping to explore the possibility of bringing in more **service-focused vendors** to our market, such as a tailor or a barber. The goal with this idea is to continue to foster a sense of community, but also promote other sustainable ways of consuming.
- Next season, we plan to implement our **safe(r) spaces policy** at the farmers' market which will include making the appropriate changes to our vendor policies and supports; to our volunteer recruitment strategy and training; and to the general market space. You can read more about these changes in the Safe(r) Spaces report.
- This past summer, we received another grant from the Manitoba government to conduct a more **formal assessment of the food hub's** pilot year. This will include consultation with our producers and other food hubs in North America as well as analyzing sales reports and other data we collected over this first year. I will be taking the lead on this project and plan to publish a report in Spring 2020 which will be made available to our co-op members. Stay tuned!



Food Hub Coordinator: Food Hub

By Anna Sigrithur

SUMMARY:

We've had a jam-packed and overall successful pilot season of Food Hub operations. I am very proud of the things our team and our co-op members have done, and am humbled to have had the opportunity to lead this challenging and rewarding project.

Despite lower overall sales than initially projected (which we believe is largely due to COVID-19's impacts on the foodservice industry) we have made substantial inroads in market development, gained new customers and project partners, and have been able to begin communicating our values and model to our target market. We have learned a great deal about the operational differences between various food hub models, and that plus our growing understanding of both the wholesale grocery and small farming industries in Manitoba will be useful when planning for the future.

The Food Hub will continue operating throughout the winter as conditions allow, and we are already in the process of evaluating 2020, and planning for the 2021 growing season. Producer Member planning sessions are in the calendar, and we plan to strike our Stakeholder Advisory Committee in the new year. This year's operations would not have been possible without the faith and participation of our Producer Members who have stuck with this project and its vision despite the steep learning curve this first season. We can't wait to continue working with you all!

And, a closing thought: Going live with Food Hub operations in the time of a global pandemic has been extremely challenging but has also shown us the need, now more than ever, for a stronger local food system that can reduce the vulnerabilities created by a long, opaque and centralized food supply chain. As the demand for "local" grows, there will inevitably be more food produced, bought and consumed in our province. I personally believe that we have both the opportunity and the responsibility to work together to build a regional food system that functions on democratic, cooperative and justice-focused principles. I believe that a Food Hub can be a place where we explore putting this kind of food system into practice. Especially if it invests in community over profit, stays open to critical perspectives, and moves at the speed of trust.

2020 FOOD HUB AT A GLANCE:



- Food Hub sales to date are rounding the corner of \$30,000. According to our producer survey, over 65% of suppliers said the Food Hub was a new source of revenue for them, indicating that we have added some new dollars to the local food economy!
- During our pilot year due to a lack of capital, we used a consignment model meaning that we listed producers' products for sale to customers with our markup added but did not purchase inventory. Our model for next year will likely change to an inventory/consignment hybrid, but that is to be formally determined at our Food Hub Producer Member planning meeting at the end of this month.
- Our markups to various customer volume types: 12% retail, 20% restaurant, 5% nonprofit partners.
- 24 producer members supplied food to the food hub this season, selling vegetables, fruits, meats, grains, legumes, dairy, oil, mushrooms and eggs (eggs briefly).
- Biggest operational challenges (besides COVID): finding the right way to get feedback from producers about how the food hub is working for them, determining what size/scale of both producer and buyer we should work with, lack of access to enough capital to purchase inventory for bigger sales, lack of staff time/ capacity.
- Biggest operational successes: successfully finding some regular customers, creating business for some regular producer members, developing food security projects, learning a lot!

FOOD HUB 2020 HIGHLIGHTS:

- In June, we built our own **walk-in produce fridge** with the generous help of our community via over \$1000 in cash donations, \$2,500 in in-kind donations from AMC foam of insulation material, and some in-kind labour on the part of our hired contractor. Huge thanks to everyone who lent a hand!
- We had two **summer staff** join us at the Food Hub from July-September, Marti Sarbit (food hub assistant) and Conor Nedelec (warehouse and delivery coordinator). Both Marti and Conor were great to work with and we are grateful for the time they spent with us.
- COVID-19 has emphasized the strong need to invest in community food security, and we have been able to pivot to more food security activities than we had initially planned in



our pilot year. This has been done largely through our partnership with the Mutual Aid Society's "Serve the People" initiative. **Our Waste-Not food box program** diverts high quality local food from the waste stream and makes it available to community members who are most affected by the pandemic. Since July we have sent out over 400 hampers (25 a week) full of great, local food. We are now working with Serve the People to secure additional funding to continue Waste-Not over the winter months.

- In other food security news, we were very grateful to have participated in the **Manitoba Community Food Currency Program**, which piloted in the 2020 growing season. Thanks to Direct Farm Manitoba, we were matched with two community organizations (NorWest Co-op Community Food Centre and West Central Women's Resource Centre) to whom we provided over \$14,000 of local food at cost for 16 weeks. This was very helpful in generating steady sales for our farmer members, and in providing good food to community members during the time of COVID-19.
- Working with farmers has been great this year, though this has not been without challenges around figuring out what models works best for whom. We are dedicated to **engaging farmers centrally in decision making** via our producer member planning sessions this fall and winter, through regular surveys and feedback opportunities and via board and committee, especially the Stakeholder Advisory Committee. To reiterate: we're very appreciative of the relationships we've been able to strengthen this season and look forward to the next.
- Thanks to a successful application to the Churchill Region Economic Development Fund, as of this fall, **Fireweed Food Hub is partnering with Lake to Plate**, a Nunavut-based, Inuit-owned social enterprise fishery to bring their delicious, wild Arctic char to Winnipeg and Churchill. We are excited to be supporting Indigenous livelihood fisheries and to be offering this exquisite product to local buyers and cultural organizations this winter.

THE FUTURE OF THE FOOD HUB:

- **Producer Member planning sessions** for the Food Hub are coming up, with the first scheduled for Nov 26, and then likely again in January (TBD). Please never hesitate to get in touch with us to share your input and ask questions at any time however, we are always here to chat.
- Through the winter, we will be hard at work preparing for a more **full-scale launch of the Food Hub for the 2021 spring**. The Food Hub will be getting its own website and social media channels to better target our distinct wholesale market and generate sales.



We are working on developing our marketing strategies and spending time developing sales relationships and pursuing larger customers.

- The Food Hub's steering committee (for now called the **Stakeholder Advisory Committee**) will be struck and have its first meeting early in the new year. This committee will be a place for food producers, food buyers, and community members to provide input and suggestions to the Food Hub's direction, and to provide transparency and accountability to the community at large.
- We are in the process of **exploring other future partnerships**, including a shared service program with Compost Winnipeg, a MA Student's SSHRC-funded, local food school lunch program pilot project, and a possible community collaboration on an urban farm/ food centre. More info TBD!
- We are also **awaiting news on two funding requests**, in which if we are successful, would mean we would, in 2021: a) continue our food security partnership with NorWest Co-op by providing food to them for most of 2021 as well as piloting a mobile, subsidized cost veggie van market (potentially in partnership with the Community Food Currency Program); and b) hire an industry expert to create for the Food Hub a long term business plan for reaching into institutional food service procurement in Manitoba, one of our economic goals.



Safer Spaces Report

RED TENT TRAINING:

The board and staff at Fireweed has always been committed to thinking about how we can create an organization founded on principles of inclusivity and justice. With that in mind, in July, the staff and board of Fireweed Food Co-Op participated in an Anti-Oppression and Safe(r) Spaces training with the Red Tent. As a group we discussed our current operations and identified areas in which we were contributing to systems of oppression across our entire organization including through hiring practises, recruitment, governance, policy development and more. For example, we noted that farmers' markets can be classist - local food and wares are often sold within a price range that is inaccessible to people on a lower income.

With the help of Red Tent, we envisioned how to incorporate anti-oppressive action into our operations going forward. For example, we brainstormed how the Farmers' Market could play a role in creating access to local food for low income folks through collecting donations of food from vendor partners and money from the community to subsidize new food security programs.

SAFE(R) SPACES SUB-COMMITTEE:

Following the Red Tent training, we created a Safe(r) Spaces Sub-Committee, made up staff and board members. The committee has been meeting on a monthly basis to continue work that came out of our anti-oppression training. We've begun to turn these discussions into concrete actions by requesting community feedback and drafting a new Safe(r) Spaces Policy. We are committed to carrying on this ongoing learning process in a transparent manner.

SAFE(R) SPACES POLICY:

One of the first tasks that came out of our Red Tent training was creating a safe(r) spaces policy. Many organizations (some Manitoban examples include Harvest Moon Local Food Initiative, Rainbow Trout Music Festival, and Eadha Bakery) have a policy which states the organization's commitment to be a place where people, in all their diverse identities (particularly those that tend to hold less power or that society does not treat as the norm) are respected and safe. This fits in very clearly with Fireweed's values.

Our committee studied some examples of other organizations' policies (including the organizations mentioned above as well as others), and then collectively drafted our own. We



wanted to design a policy that would apply to the South Osborne Farmers' Market space but also the Food Hub, and any other organizational space where we come together as Fireweed.

SAFE(R) SPACES COMMUNITY SURVEY:

We wanted to make sure we had wider input on the policy from market vendors, market-goers, food hub buyers, and anyone else who interacts with our organization. We designed a survey for people to give feedback on their experience at the Farmers Market or the Food Hub from a safer spaces perspective, and what changes we could make to make it a safer space. The survey was available for the last two weeks of September. We emailed it to our mailing list, shared it via social media, and distributed some hard copies at the last two markets. We received some very helpful and thoughtful ideas which we incorporated into our policy.

The finalized version will be posted on our website in the coming weeks. But we see the safer spaces policy as a living document, so if you have input we would love to hear it---the [survey is still up on our website](#). The policy will be posted publicly at the market next year, and we hope that it will serve as a way to hold everyone, including ourselves, accountable to inclusivity.

NEXT STEPS:

The next step is applying a safer spaces lens to all our organizational activities--this includes hiring and labour practices; the board activities, including board recruitment; the market; the food hub; and our social media and other public facing communications. At the beginning of October, our safer spaces committee had a discussion about how we can improve our practices in each of these areas. Some key pieces we will be working on in the upcoming year are:

- establishing a Stakeholder Advisory Committee (a way for community members to help guide our organization without the larger time commitment of being a working board member)
- posting the safer spaces policy at our market and in our Food Hub warehouse
- asking market vendors and Food Hub producers to formally agree to the safer spaces policy
- providing training to market volunteers in safer spaces and de-escalation
- diversifying our volunteer base (to draw more from the South Osborne community especially)
- addressing barriers for low-income market vendors (maybe purchasing tents) and Food Hub producers



- working with Lord Roberts Community Centre to create gender-neutral washrooms
- convening a conversation on safer spaces and farmers' market with all the market coordinators in Winnipeg

Fireweed also continues to pay attention to how our internal relationships and organizational practices might sometimes reflect the values of our capitalist, white-supremacist society and to ask ourselves how we can move away from that. We've been trying to create internal structures that are anti-hierarchy and anti-urgency, and that value process over outcome. We plan to continue to move in that direction.

Fireweed is committed to being an anti-oppressive organization inside and out. The Red Tent training was a great learning opportunity for all of us, and ignited/re-ignited a lot of great conversations as well as leading to some tangible steps. But we know that nothing is ever perfect and that this work of creating safer, anti-oppressive spaces within our organization as well as the wider community is ongoing. We'd love to hear your thoughts!