

# A GROWING GOOD

COMMUNITY FOOD ACTION PROGRAM



2013–2014

Across New Brunswick, communities, organizations and individuals are working hard to ensure a more healthy, sustainable and food-secure future for the province. Powered by the Community Food Action Program, groundbreaking projects including community gardens, bulk-buying clubs, the Community Food Mentor Program, and cooking classes tailored to children continue to reshape our communities for the better.

With a particular focus on creating food security for young people, seniors, those living in poverty and persons with disabilities, this program from the Department of Healthy and Inclusive Communities supports grassroots solutions that:

- Increase access to healthy food through teaching food and cooking skills and/or increase access to nutritious foods and fresh produce;
- Increase food knowledge and skills by providing learning opportunities in nutrition, cooking skills, growing food, learning about locally grown foods and/or food systems; and,
- Increase community capacity to address local food security, which helps individuals and communities recognize strengths, develop new skills and resources, and work collaboratively.

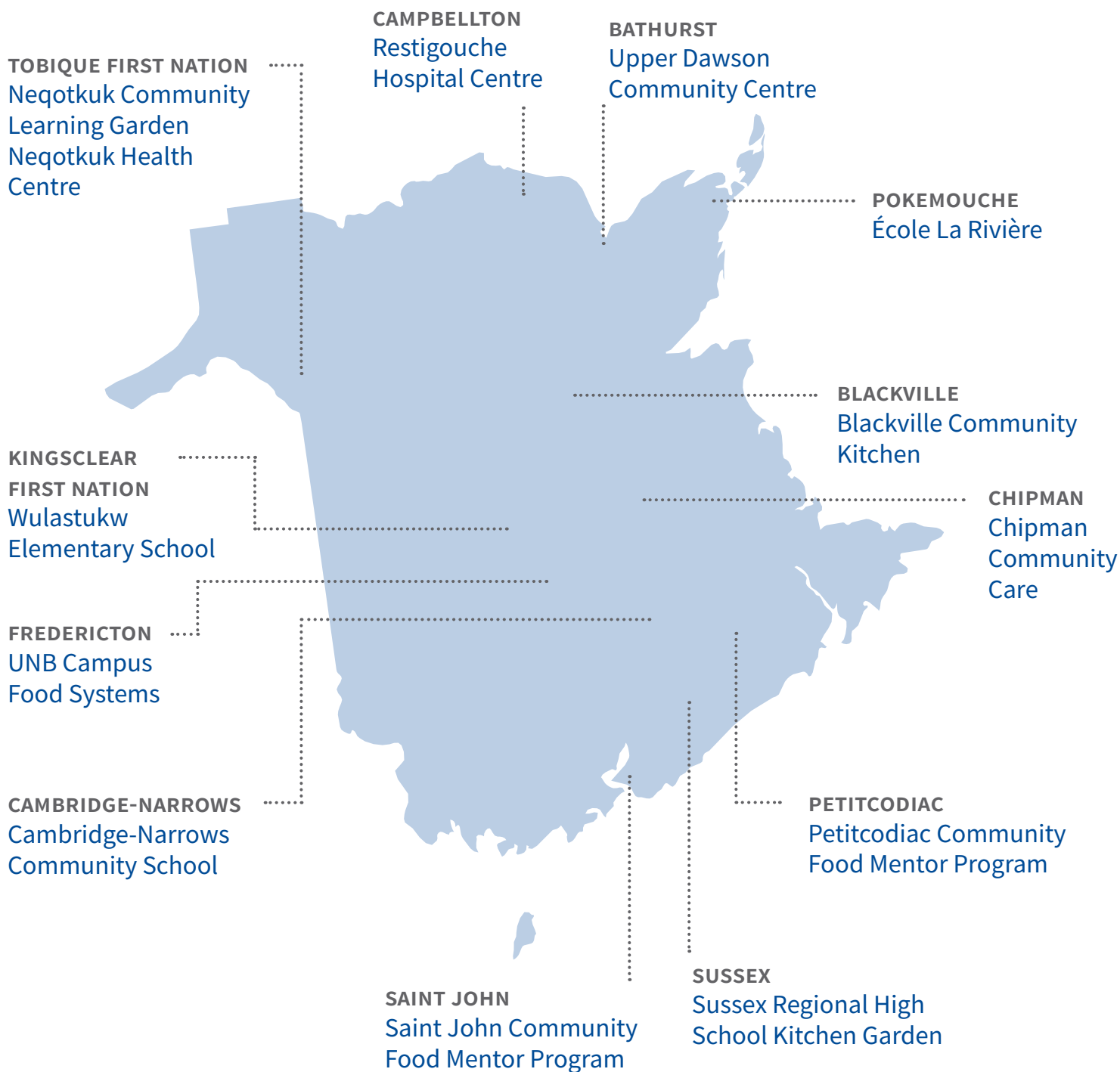
This 2013–14 annual report highlights some of the many Community Food Action Program projects that are uniting communities and continue to make New Brunswick stronger and healthier.

**In 2013–14, the Department of Healthy and Inclusive Communities funded 91 projects in N.B. communities.**

**For more information on the Community Food Action Program, visit [www.gnb.ca/wellness](http://www.gnb.ca/wellness)**



# FEATURED COMMUNITY FOOD PROJECTS 2013–2014





## SAINT JOHN COMMUNITY FOOD MENTOR PROGRAM

### SAINT JOHN

Since its 2011 launch, the Community Food Mentor (CFM) program has been a tremendous success; just ask program graduate Nela Ramirez. Taking part in Community Food Mentor training in Saint John gave her new connections to members of the region's burgeoning food movement, eventually leading to the launch of Nela's Kitchen in Rothesay.

Her store, located on Hampton Road, serves healthy, homemade, prepackaged meals that are perfect for busy, on-the-go families. Each day Nela and her staff cook large batches of seasonal recipes from scratch.

Ramirez points to a nearby fridge, where containers of cabbage roll casserole, kaleslaw salad and bone broth wait for the lunchtime rush. "It's like arriving home and asking, 'What's for dinner?' Our customers aren't always sure what they'll find, but they know it will be healthy, hearty and homemade."

Across New Brunswick, more than 20 communities have held training sessions to certify food mentors like Ramirez, who then share their newly improved skills in food and nutrition within their own communities.

In Saint John, a five-week program with a heavy focus on food security helped build bridges between areas of the city traditionally isolated from each other.

"Saint John is very split. We have a lot of division between our Northeast, West and South," says Jessica McMackin, a dietitian with Horizon Health Network. "People don't tend to move outside of those boundaries, so traditionally there has been less chance of bringing people together to work on joint food actions."

The CFM program's goal is to develop a network of dedicated food mentors through shared learning experiences. The training includes an introduction to food security in New Brunswick, reading food labels, healthy eating for less, and a national certification in safe food handling, among other skills.

"Many participants were already connected with a community group, and wanted to offer a food action through their organization but didn't have all the right resources and skills," McMackin says.

"Participants have said their training has opened new opportunities for them; they've developed more friendships, partnerships and connections with their community." ¶



# UPPER DAWSON COMMUNITY CENTRE

## BATHURST

The recipe on the first day of CHEFS! camp at the Upper Dawson Community Centre was a classic egg-in-the-hole.

The recipe is simple: Take a slice of bread, cut a hole in the middle, place it in butter in the middle of a hot pan, crack an egg into the hole, and flip it all once the egg is set. The kids loved it.

“When the parents came to the next class and said that their kids had made them breakfast, we knew they were getting something out of the program right at the get-go,” says Yvette Lavigne Frank, the City of Bathurst’s recreation programmer.

In the summer of 2013, 10 children met twice weekly for seven weeks at the community centre near a low-income housing community in Bathurst. The free camp used the “CHEFS! Getting a Start on Healthy Living” tool kit to teach nutrition, physical activity, healthy eating, food safety and more through interactive, kid-approved activities.

“Even when we weren’t doing a hands-on activity, the kids were captivated,” Frank says. “They took it all in.”

Frank praises the CHEFS! tool kit for its focus on theory. One activity, for example, helps children identify techniques that companies use to market food products to their age group, alongside a lesson about nutritional labeling.

***“Even when we weren’t doing a hands-on activity, the kids were captivated.”***

“That’s important because kids influence their parents’ purchases at the grocery store,” Frank says, pointing to research that shows stores position sugary cereals at a child-friendly eye level. “If you teach kids how to read labels, they may bring that back to their parents, which would educate them too.”

The Community Food Action Program grant offset the cost of the program, which allowed many families who couldn’t otherwise afford summer camp to send their children.

The investment paid off. “The kids loved learning recipes they could make on their own and serve to their family,” Frank says. “It gave them pride and a feeling of self-reliance.”

These burgeoning cooks aren’t done yet; each child left the program with a binder of recipes and a kit bag with measuring cups, mixing spoons, an apron and an oven mitt. ¶



## WULASTUKW ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

### KINGSCLEAR FIRST NATION

When the Kingsclear First Nation Community Garden launched in 2012, involving students from Wulastukw Elementary School was a priority from day one.

“We wanted to use [the garden] as a teaching tool with the students; show them they can grow their own food and not rely on grocery stores,” says Lacey King, a community health nurse at the Kingsclear First Nation Health and Wellness Centre. “The garden ties into a sense of identity and ancestry.”

The Community Food Action Program helped bring the garden into the classroom through a series of workshops on worm composting (also known as vermicomposting), growing seedlings, and permaculture, a model of agriculture that stresses sustainability and self-reliance.

In the spring of 2013, every classroom started trays of seedlings destined for the community garden.

“The children just love learning about the garden and how to grow their own food,” King says. “They loved the seedlings, too — they’re like their little babies.”

The worms, which live indoors in containers, were started by a Grade 4/5 class after a vermicomposting session.

“They were so interested. They just didn’t realize how useful worms were,” King says.

Vermicomposting uses red wiggler worms to convert food waste and organic material into natural fertilizer; all that’s needed is shredded newsprint, a bit of soil or leaves, and a regular feeding of fruit and vegetable scraps.

The worms can eat their own weight in kitchen scraps and bedding each day, giving off nutrient-rich castings that resemble fine-textured soil. That fertilizer is then used in the community’s garden, which grows vegetables available to the entire community.

King says she hopes the projects will increase food knowledge and skills in the Kingsclear community, and continue the wellness centre’s momentum in creating better access to healthy food. ¶





## CAMBRIDGE-NARROWS COMMUNITY SCHOOL

### CAMBRIDGE-NARROWS

With just 137 students, Cambridge-Narrows Community School is a very small K-12 school. “Our graduating class of 2014 was eight,” says Matt Nicoll, the school’s community coordinator.

It may come as a surprise, then, that this small school on the bucolic banks of Washademoak Lake has one of the best-equipped classroom kitchens in New Brunswick.

Inside the second-floor kitchen, overflowing boxes of bright orange carrots sit stacked alongside other fall vegetables. Nearby, purple light peeks out from behind a black curtain that covers a hydroponic growing system, the only one of its kind in New Brunswick, where students will experiment with growing produce inside through the winter. There’s ample prep space for the students to cook, great equipment and, to everyone’s great relief, a commercial dishwasher.

Cambridge-Narrows Community School is in the midst of a successful, three-year Delicious Ingredients Served Here! (DISH) program. This program gives children, aged 11 to 14, hands-on experience preparing and serving meals based on the Department of Education’s healthy foods policy. So when Nicoll pitched his idea for a free after-school cooking club in the spring of 2014, students took notice. (The Community Food Action Program grant supports both initiatives).

About 20 students aged six to 13 now meet on Friday afternoons to prepare healthy meals they can take

home and share with their families. Nicolls introduces a new theme for each class (e.g., “fibre”) and finds ways to impart his culinary enthusiasm on the eager participants.

“Programs like these are very beneficial to students because outside of school, they don’t have much to do,” he says. In this expansive rural area southeast of Grand Lake, homes are further apart, community facilities are few, and full-service grocery stores are rare.

Roadside farm stands prosper on these highways in the summer months, but access to fresh, healthy food is limited for much of the year. Many families buy groceries only a few times per month, Nicoll says, which means many students’ diets are rich in processed foods.

Meanwhile, in the school’s kitchen, members of the cooking club are adventurously trying unfamiliar fruits and vegetables while learning new recipes they can confidently cook for, or with, their families. In a recent week, each made their first quiche. Bringing together children from multiple grade levels has also helped bringing social gaps, Nicoll says.

“When the little kids get stuck, the bigger kids will help them out. Their friendships are not dictated by grade levels.” Nicoll says. “It’s one of the best things about this school.” ¶



## ÉCOLE LA RIVIÈRE

### POKEMOUCHE

Daniel Mallet and his team are succeeding where many parents and educators have struggled for generations: encouraging kids to eat — and love — vegetables.

With support from the Community Food Action Program grant, Mallet, principal of l'école La Rivière in Pokemouche, built a 72-square-metre, yellow-roofed greenhouse adjacent to the school in spring 2014.

His plan was to provide free, fresh vegetables to students every day, build healthier eating habits and help children try foods they may not eat at home. And it's working.

Every day, the school's chef ventures outside to the greenhouse, harvests what's available, and creates platters that are set out in the cafeteria. The fresh fruit and vegetable trays — mounded with bright red, green and orange peppers; cherry tomatoes; cucumbers and watermelon — are picked clean by the end of lunch hour, Mallet says.

"It's amazing to see how many kids will eat more vegetables, if they're just made available," Mallet says. Kids are even trading chips and chocolate bars for healthier fare like celery and carrots, he adds.

"It's not us who told them to do it: they're changing their own habits," Mallet says. The students say fresh vegetables taste better than store-bought, have the opportunity to try them through in-class tastings run by the chef.

As winter approaches, Mallet is planning for the next phase of the greenhouse's growth. A nearby organic farmer will work with students to grow kale and microgreens throughout the winter months, and students will start seedlings for 2015 in March.

"Everything is there so the students can take control of the project," Mallet says. ♣



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GROW MY OWN FOOD.”

Petitcodiac Community Food Mentor Program,  
Petitcodiac

Community

A photograph of a community garden. In the foreground, a wooden sign with the word "Community" written in black is attached to a wooden stake. The garden consists of several raised beds made of wooden planks, filled with soil and some young plants. In the background, there are trees, a blue house, and a clear blue sky. The overall scene is bright and sunny.





## NEQOTKUK HEALTH CENTRE

### TOBIQUE FIRST NATION

One of the best investments Stephanie Levesque's community has made in its food security is a simple rotating tiller.

The machine, which turns, mixes and loosens soil to prepare it for planting, is helping create about 30 new backyard gardens every year through a borrowing program in Tobique First Nation, northeast of Perth Andover. "In a community with just 400 households, that's a significant change," she says.

"Even elders who, in the past, were not able to have a garden because of the work involved in preparing soil are able to participate," says Levesque, a dietitian at the community's health centre. "Younger family members will come and till a garden for them."

The younger generation has also been a driving force behind the community learning garden, which is supported by the Community Food Action Program. In 2014, the garden's seedlings (all organic, a first for the community) were started by Grade 6 students in the Negotkuk Health Centre's greenhouse.

Managing the garden gives the students a sense of responsibility and pride, Levesque says. It's also a blessing for teachers, who value the contribution the garden makes in the classroom.

In fact, children are fast becoming the community's gardening experts. In the past, entrants to the health centre's community garden contest — won this year by a family who had planted their first-ever garden — were typically adults, Levesque says.

"As the years go on, it's the kids showing me their garden, it's the kids explaining the plants," she says. "The more exposed the kids are to fresh foods and vegetables, the more they'll eat."

Plus, the garden is accessible to all community members; a boon for low-income residents.

Levesque estimates 80 to 90 per cent of community members are on social assistance, and many do not own cars. The nearest grocery store is a taxi ride away. "If you remove that taxi ride you could have spent more on food. That makes a big difference in the amount of food you can bring home," she says.

For many, fresh fruits and vegetables are the first items cut from the grocery list.

"If you have a garden, the wax beans are still producing regardless of whether you have your cheque or not." ❧



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THEY JUST DIDN’T REALIZE HOW  
USEFUL WORMS WERE.”**

Wulastukw Elementary School,  
Kingsclear First Nation







## CHIPMAN COMMUNITY CARE

### CHIPMAN

On a sunny September afternoon, the cedar raised beds in the Chipman Community Garden brim with kale, tomatoes, Swiss chard, beans and nasturtiums.

Two years earlier, this swath of land behind Chipman Community Care was a weedy field. The community pitched in to till and clear the land and created Chipman's first community garden. In 2014, volunteers and local businesses again came together, this time building 30 raised beds in just a few days.

Now, as bees dart between flowering plants and tall pole beans sparkle in the bright sun, coordinator Gwyn Watson explains how the garden is part of the community's poverty reduction strategy.

Clients of Chipman Community Care, which provides food, clothing and housing assistance, get first dibs on the raised beds. The beds, constructed with the support of the Community Food Action Program, keep weeds and slugs at bay, improve water flow, regulate soil temperature and reduce the amount of bending and crouching needed to care for the garden.

At first, the revamped system presented a challenge for new gardeners.

"I don't think anyone had worked with raised beds before," says Watson. "They were trying to plant like you would a conventional garden. But we planted intensively and everyone learned the potential is there to grow a lot of food in a very small area."

Wearing a T-shirt with "I love kale" emblazoned across the front, Watson points to two beds that were built at double-height, for gardeners with back problems or physical disabilities. In coming years, she hopes more seniors from a nearby housing complex will take part in the garden.

"This new garden is a launching pad for us," Watson says. "We hope to see it grow and grow." ¶





## SUSSEX REGIONAL HIGH SCHOOL KITCHEN GARDEN

### SUSSEX

The magazine rack in Daniel Reicker’s classroom is slightly unconventional. Old issues of *Atlantic Forestry*, *Farm Life*, *Mother Earth News*, *National Hog Farmer*, and *Atlantic Beef* crowd the shelves of his Agricultural Science class, the last of a dying breed in the province.

The course is one of only two such programs that still exist in New Brunswick (the other is in Woodstock), teaching students at Sussex Regional High School about food production, livestock production, the history of agriculture and future trends in the field.

Reicker, himself from a farming background, was looking for a way to give students a more immersive learning experience after funding for field trips to nearby farms dried up. “I was stuck between four walls,” he says.

In addition, he knew the local food bank — the Sussex Sharing Club — needed fresh food items and, as he puts it, “We had all this land lying around.”

Powered by a Community Food Action Program grant, Reicker jumped into action. His school’s 5,000-square-foot outdoor garden now grows more than 5,000 pounds of vegetables per year — nearly all of which goes to the food bank. Some is also used

by the school’s Culinary Technology program, which teaches canning and preservation techniques.

On a sunny September afternoon, students pulled carrots and potatoes as others staked cherry and apple trees in preparation for the winter. The previous week, the class harvested 75 five-pound bags of potatoes and 80 three-pound bags of carrots, all of which was donated to the food bank.

“If you don’t know how to grow your own food, you’re not going to know basic skills to survive,” says Grade 12 student Jared Robinson, one of the few students in the class who lives on a working farm. His family has 230 cows on a dairy farm on the outskirts of Sussex.

“I think it’s good for the community. Students are learning how to grow food and the community is benefiting from that food.”

Sophie Sharpe, also in Grade 12, says gardening is simply something that everyone should know how to do. She comes from a farming background. Her father’s farm has been passed down through the generations for 200 years. “People think it’s back-breaking labour to pick weeds, but it’s not,” she says. “You just get down on your knees and pull something out of the ground. It’s rewarding.” ¶

## RESTIGOUCHE HOSPITAL CENTRE

### CAMPBELLTON

As a registered dietitian, Michelle DesRoches was certain patients at the Restigouche Hospital Centre in Campbellton would benefit from learning how to prepare healthy, budget-conscious foods. Being recovery-oriented meant the patients also needed opportunities to re-integrate with their community.

So, with the support of the Community Food Action Program, DesRoches and occupational therapist Melanie Lanteigne launched a 10-week teaching kitchen series aimed at bolstering clients' nutritional knowledge and providing opportunities to better care for themselves and their loved ones.

"The teaching kitchens emerged because we wanted to offer recovery-oriented programming that addressed nutrition education in a novel approach," says DesRoches, RD, CDE. "We wanted our clientele to learn about nutrition hands-on."

At a nearby Sobeys, clients learned about chronic disease prevention and management; how to make healthy meals with food bank boxes; reading nutritional labels; produce selection, and had countless opportunities to build social skills and develop self-esteem.

The Restigouche Hospital Centre, which delivers tertiary mental health services for all citizens of New Brunswick, quickly found the program offered its clientele more than just a lesson in cooking a good meal.

Partnering with Sobeys created opportunities for clients to experience life outside of the facility and overcome fears they may have — or barriers they may encounter — when returning to the community, DesRoches says.

***"The teaching kitchens emerged because we wanted to offer recovery-oriented programming that addressed nutrition education in a novel approach."***

"It helped me a lot because I was too shy to go to Sobeys," says Jake, 30. "I was afraid to go into the store, go to the cash, and buy something. But with the group I could do it."


The teaching kitchen was extended with plots in a nearby community garden, where more than 20 clients harvested beans, cucumbers and zucchini. Working side-by-side with community members helps de-stigmatize mental health, DesRoches says, and builds pride for the fledgling gardeners.

"I felt happier working in the garden," says Justin, 25, now lead gardener. "I found my behaviour improved, thanks to the combination of more activity and my passion for gardening. I made many friends."

Learning how to garden gives hope to clients who are working towards leaving the hospital. They can now connect with community gardens near their homes, DesRoches says. It's an initiative she hopes to see replicated across New Brunswick.

"My dream is to see a network of teaching kitchen across the province, reaching clients living with mental health." ¶



A close-up photograph of a person's hands holding a large quantity of small, round cherry tomatoes. The tomatoes are in various stages of ripeness, showing shades of green, yellow, orange, and red. The person is wearing a blue button-down shirt. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with light-colored gravel or mulch.

“WHEN YOU’RE IN A HOSPITAL  
YOU GET YOUR FOOD GIVEN TO  
YOU, YOU DON’T SEE HOW IT’S  
MADE, YOU DON’T KNOW IF IT’S  
FRESH. WITH A GARDEN YOU  
SEE IT GROW AND THINK,  
‘THAT’S WHAT IT’S SUPPOSED  
TO LOOK LIKE!’ ”

Restigouche Hospital Centre,  
Campbellton



# PETITCODIAC COMMUNITY FOOD MENTOR PROGRAM

## PETITCODIAC

In October 2013, the community of Petitcodiac was dealt a tremendous blow. Just one week after the Support People of Today (SPOT) food bank moved into its new building — after \$14,000 in upgrades and 1,000 volunteer hours — a suspicious fire flattened the food bank and destroyed everything inside.

But the community is resilient: Within three days, SPOT was up and running again, albeit in a temporary location. After the fire, Laura Alward, a local entrepreneur with a passion for food security initiatives, saw yet another opportunity.

“With everything that happened with the food bank, I recognized there would be a huge hole in services as they worked to rebuild,” says Alward. Having previously co-facilitated a Community Food Mentors training program in Sussex, she quickly applied for a grant to bring the program to Petitcodiac.

“I thought this is something I can do to bring the community in on food security efforts,” she says. “I could see the things that came of the training in Sussex and how it’s resonated in the community.”

The CFM program empowers participants — and by extension, the community — by teaching food literacy skills, food safety, how to make informed decisions about food, as well as food growing and preservation tips.

“There are a lot of things I didn’t learn from my grandparents,” she says. “Like a lot of people in my generation, I was too busy opening boxes and pressing buttons to learn how to grow my own food.”

*“I thought this is something I can do to bring the community in on food security efforts.”*

The four-day training, held in the spring of 2014, kick-started food security programs around Petitcodiac. A community garden in the neighbouring community of Riverview now has a food mentor who teaches a community kitchen program, including preserving and canning classes. Inspired by their CFM training, members of the local Boys and Girls Club built raised beds.

At the Petitcodiac Community Garden, Alward has brought in facilitators for workshops on seed saving, beekeeping, how to plant a garden to attract pollinators (such as bees), and growing food-producing trees to create microclimates. More than 50 fruit, syrup and nut-producing trees have been planted in and around the community garden, thanks to a partnership with the Petitcodiac Watershed Association. Another 200 are ready to be placed around the community in the spring of 2015.

Food mentors are now seen as community leaders in food, Alward says. “It’s become an example of what the community is capable of. It shows that we can do for ourselves what we’ve been waiting too long for others to do for us.” ¶



## UNB CAMPUS FOOD SYSTEMS

### FREDERICTON

A joint effort between students at two Fredericton universities to bring local, sustainable food to campus is bearing fruit, thanks to a Community Food Action Program grant.

Supported by the grant, St. Thomas University and University of New Brunswick students are working to strengthen their universities' connection to the regional food system and promote food literacy. Student lobbying led to a UNB Healthy Food Services Group Incubator Project, and students are now working to establish a community garden that will help foster community and promote skill-sharing and learning.

"There's been a huge change and transition toward how universities view food service," says Sarah Archibald, a program manager with Meal Exchange, a national charity that helps students develop innovative solutions to address hunger, food insecurity and sustainability in their community. Profit-driven cafeteria food, like cheeseburgers and fries, is becoming a thing of the past as universities work with local producers and consider their own role in the food system, Archibald says.

"We want the university to become a hub for the entire community," she says. "The CFAP grant has been fantastic in showing the community investment [in this project] to the university, to help them realize how valuable this is to Fredericton and the campus."

Students Nicole Hoare and Kaela Neil have helped coordinate a small test garden on the grounds of Renaissance College in downtown Fredericton. Their efforts will culminate in a campus-wide Harvest Party in late 2014, which will bring together students, administrators, farmers and others involved in Fredericton's food movement.

"What brings people together better than food?" says Archibald. "We want to start making these connections, so when students go to the cafeteria in the future, they can ask about the products they're consuming." ¶



**“YOU GET BURNED OUT IF  
YOU’RE WORKING ALONE,  
BUT IN HAMPTON I FEEL  
LIKE I’M PART OF A TEAM.”**

Maureen Robichaud,  
Hampton Community Kitchen,  
Hampton





# GREATER BLACKVILLE RESOURCE CENTRE

## BLACKVILLE

When Pastor Albertine LeBlanc applied for a Community Food Action Program grant she had a vision: help create unity in her rural New Brunswick community.

“The Blackville area tends to have cliquy networks that don’t come together as often as they should,” LeBlanc says. “We wanted to reach out to the people in the community who are not part of those groups.”

The Greater Blackville Resource Centre, which opened in 2012, is attached to the Voice of Hope Ministry and houses a food bank and thrift shop, in which the sale of clothing and household items funds the food bank.

With funding from the Community Food Action Program, the resource centre recruited volunteer Darlene Jardine to run a community kitchen program.

The 66-year-old certainly knows her way around a kitchen. Her former restaurant, Darlene’s Tea House and Family Restaurant, was a staple in Blackville for decades.

“I love cooking and could teach it all night and all day,” says Jardine, who has also worked in Europe as a chef. “It’s almost all I’ve done since I was 15 years old.”

For five weeks beginning in November, participants met on Tuesday nights to learn basic cooking skills and food safety; pickling and preserving; how to eat well on a budget; and healthy eating ideas for kids.

*“I love cooking and could teach it all night and all day.”*

For the latter, Jardine took inspiration from her grandson. “Kids don’t like a whole lot, so you try to work it into something so they don’t know it’s there,” she says. An example is zucchini mustard pickles: crisp, tangy preserves that don’t scream “vegetable.”

The Community Food Action Program grant also helped fund a Soup’s On program, which brought together nearly 100 people to share a simple soup meal.

“We took that \$3,000 and we stretched it,” LeBlanc says with a laugh. “We showed that by working together we can do great things.” ¶

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and Inclusive Communities**

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