



ECONOMIES OF FOOD IN KAKISA, NWT

In 2022, WLU Masters student Laura Rodriguez-Reyes worked with partners in Kakisa to understand the dynamics of food and economic development in the community. This research aimed to 1) identify the challenges and opportunities of operating an enterprise in Kakisa, 2) determine the community's vision of an Indigenous-led enterprise, and 3) identify next steps to realize this vision.



**NORTHERN
SUSTAINABLE
FOOD SYSTEMS
RESEARCH GROUP**



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BACKGROUND

The small Indigenous community of Kakisa, NWT, relies predominantly on the traditional food system, harvesting, fishing and gathering of traditional foods from the lands and waters of the surrounding lakes and rivers of the boreal forest. Climate change adaptation and food security planning research started in 2013 due to community-identified threats of climate change to the traditional food system and overall health of the community. The community, however, continues to adapt to these changes and build resilience into their food system. Much of their continued adaptation is due to their strong cultural and social ties within the community, where traditional knowledge and connection to the land plays a key role.

Kakisa, with the support of researchers at Wilfrid Laurier University, has initiated small-scale food production projects to increase access to local healthy, perishable foods, with the desire to scale up production so that portions of the produce can be made commercially available, if the community so chooses. The community also has robust commercial and subsistence fisheries that provide food for the community, and surrounding region through both sharing networks and formal economy. As opportunities exist to expand local food production through innovative agroforestry practices like the Ka'a'gee Tu Food Forest, and firebreak agriculture projects, there is a clear opportunity to use food to foster economic, social and cultural development in the community.



Noda Enterprises

- Noda Enterprises is the economic development arm of the Ka'a'gee Tu First Nation. Noda has lacked a full-time staff position for some time, and as such the community's economic development plan has stalled.
- A revitalized Noda Enterprises could be reimagined as the management body of the community's food production initiatives to help facilitate the production, processing, distribution and sale of food in the community.
- Noda Enterprises would play a key role in developing these opportunities, creating business plans, identifying training opportunities and ensuring all developments are guided by the community.

RESEARCH AIMS

Research Question

How can the Ka'a'gee Tu First Nation balance their vision of food sovereignty and cultural traditions of food sharing with economic opportunities, specifically through the implementation of a food hub or social enterprise for distributing surplus food?

Research Objectives

- 1) Identify the challenges and opportunities of operating an enterprise in Kakisa,
- 2) Determine the community's vision of an Indigenous-led enterprise, and
- 3) Identify next steps needed to realize this vision.

RESULTS

Challenges & Opportunities

- Concerns about viability of a store (not profitable).
- Various attempts (either store or just gas) have failed in the past.
- Need someone in the community to be trained and supported to champion the initiative
- Concerns of who will do the reporting and get all the permits.
- New infrastructure could be used to store food, fish and produce from the garden to make more food available for the community, but also tourists.
- Want a community space that is open and accessible for people to gather and socialize (cook, have coffee, do crafts, etc.)
- Save on food costs (primarily fuel) on trips to Hay River.
- Need a space for doctors and nurses and other visitors (consultants or auditors) to stay and work.



Community Vision

Community wants more than just a store:

- A place to socialize
- Access to coffee and food (like a café)
- Sell crafts and locally made items
- Sell fish to support the commercial fishery
- A place for workshops (sewing and other crafts)
- Fridges and freezers with extra food (for sale or to share) from the gardens or staples (milk, eggs, and flour)
- Tourism activities / guiding / boat rental
- Organize small cottage or hotel room rental
- Gas
- Tools and equipment for fixing equipment
- Help to organize farmers markets and sell Kakisa-made goods and foods regionally (in Hay River for example)



Next Steps

- Start small and build up over time.
- Looks for opportunities for training and support
- Funding will be an issue. Opportunities to work with Nutrition North Canada and other organizations should be explored to support Noda's operation.

CONCLUSION

As Kakisa looks to revitalize Noda and potentially develop plans for a new building, community members had a lot of input into what this enterprise could look like. Many community members prioritized a space where the community could come together and connect as a main priority, emphasizing building social and cultural connections in the community. Having a place distribute food within the community as well as sell food, crafts and other services (tourism, accommodations and gas) to visitors was a key component of the vision for economic development.

**INTERESTED IN LEARNING MORE?
PLEASE EMAIL ANDREW SPRING
ASPRING@WLU.CA**