

# Food Project Series

This document was prepared as an information resource for the City's *Local Food and Urban Agriculture Study* to highlight a few of the many food projects and partnerships that happen in and around Whitehorse. Funding opportunities are indicated.

1. **Downtown Urban Gardeners Society**  
Celebrating 22 years of community gardening
2. **Yukon Anti-Poverty Coalition**  
Food mapping project, 'Our Food in Place': Moving towards a more inclusive food system
3. **Fireweed Community Market Society**  
Connecting consumers to local food and farmers
4. **Whitehorse Food Bank**  
Growing fresh produce for emergency food pantries
5. **Valleyview Community Garden and Greenhouse**  
Capturing solar heat to make good things grow
6. **Yukon Agricultural Association**  
Online Yukon farm products and services guide
7. **Arctic Institute of Community-Based Research**  
Youth champions: Mobilizing Indigenous knowledge on climate change





(North garden)

## Spotlight 1: Downtown Urban Gardeners Society

### Celebrating 22 years of community gardening

The [Downtown Urban Gardeners Society](#) (DUGS) has operated a community garden at the base of the cliffs in the north end of Downtown since 1998. The garden is split into two areas that cover ~3,500 m<sup>2</sup> (0.35 ha) of public land, managed through a low-cost lease agreement with the City. Inventory has evolved to include 72 raised beds, a greenhouse, two sheds, a hefty supply of communal tools, and a portable outhouse. In most years, all gardeners who register at spring sign-up are assigned a bed, though a waitlist is occasionally generated.

In 2016, a spot rezoning amendment allowed for DUGS to add an apiary to the garden that features two hives housing 10,000 to 20,000 honey bees each. The hives produced over 20 pounds of honey in their first year, and support pollination throughout the downtown area. Honey is shared with gardeners; some is donated along with ~500 pounds of fresh produce grown each year for nutrition support organizations. Donations in 2019 and 2020 were delivered to the Golden Age Society for distribution to members.

As a non-profit society, DUGS has been able to access project funding from grant sources at the federal, territorial, and municipal levels, including the City's [Environmental Grant](#). Keys to the garden's success have included:

- > Access to land at an affordable lease cost
- > Part-time employment of a garden coordinator
- > Requirement for gardeners to sign a contract and contribute volunteer hours
- > Weekly 'Work-bee' events where tasks are assigned to share the work
- > Long-term support of a core group of volunteers and Board members

Challenges at the garden have included dealing with vandalism, theft of produce and tools, and seasonal limitations to water access. A connection to municipal water service is in place, but is turned on following the last frost of each spring. DUGS has navigated these challenges through creative solutions and partnerships with neighbouring residents.





## Spotlight 2: Yukon Anti-Poverty Coalition

### Food mapping project, 'Our Food in Place': Moving towards a more inclusive food system

The [Yukon Anti-Poverty Coalition](#) (YAPC) is committed to facilitating the elimination of poverty in Yukon through awareness, education, advocacy, community building, and action. In 2016, YAPC along with other members of Food Network Yukon carried out a food mapping project titled '[Our Food in Place](#)'. The project engaged 350 residents through workshops that explored the opportunities and challenges associated with accessing good food in Whitehorse.

The results identified that while many healthy, local food options exist, reaching them can be difficult for residents who are marginalized, low-income, and vulnerable to food insecurity. Barriers include:

- > Food affordability
- > Distance to reach food retailers, and lack of transportation to get there
- > Lack of facilities to store and prepare food
- > Lack of opportunities to learn about cooking and building food literacy skills

It was noted by participants that while emergency foods are highly valued and vital to the residents who rely on them, they tend to be non-perishable, high in sugars and carbohydrates, and often low in protein. Social exclusion from community food spaces, such as the farmers' market, was also highlighted for people who have limited income and are unable to afford market prices.

Like many Whitehorse residents, marginalized people are interested in eating healthy and nutritious foods, but need support to have better access to them. The project's recommendations for creating a more inclusive food system include:

- > Investing in initiatives that place people's choice and dignity first
- > Advocating for living wages and community resources that enable everyone to afford good food
- > Sharing gardening and cooking skills with neighbours and friends
- > Buying seasonal and local food
- > Having community gardens and spaces for communal meals
- > Supporting sustainable wild harvest
- > Eliminating food waste





## Spotlight 3: Fireweed Community Market

### Connecting consumers to local food and farmers

The [Fireweed Community Market Society](#) formed in 2005. After five successful seasons of the 'Yukon Made Market' that operated on the Hot Springs Road, the society moved to Shipyard's Park on the Yukon River waterfront of Downtown. From May to September, this City space hosts the market's collection of 40 vendors and information booths. Market days draw an estimated 1,000 people weekly to buy fresh local produce and processed goods, such as bread, coffee, jams, and pies, purchased to the tune of a busking musician. Crafters also set up shop to vend items such as jewelry, clothes, and body care products. The market has been an incubator for many small businesses as they get their start and test out product ideas.

The market's success can be attributed to:

- > The array of local foods and goods available for purchase
- > An active board, over 170 society members, 30 annual volunteers, and a seasonal coordinator that organizes the vendors
- > Workshops geared at building knowledge and skills around food topics
- > Partnerships with community organizations on market-enhancing events

The society has benefited from long-term support from the former Growing Forward funding programs, and from newer programs including the [Canadian Agricultural Partnership](#). A current challenge is to secure on-going, core funding to ensure that the market can continue to remain a vibrant fixture to the community life of Whitehorse. The society additionally operates an online market and the 12 Days of Christmas Market, which occurs each winter at the Kwanlin Dün Cultural Centre and similarly showcases local businesses.





## Spotlight 4: Whitehorse Food Bank

### Growing fresh produce for emergency food pantries

The [Whitehorse Food Bank](#) is a community-based organization that provides emergency food to people in need. Located in the core of Downtown on Alexander Street, the bank distributes food pantries to over 1,300 recipients each month; a number that has more than doubled over the past decade. In 2016, the Food Bank transformed the property's vacant parking lot into a garden space to grow fresh produce that can be distributed to clients. Members of the [Challenge Disability Resource Group](#) program built the garden's 14 raised beds, which additionally features a small greenhouse and shed.

Many of the volunteers who maintain the garden are seniors from the neighbouring assisted living complex. It was the initial interest they expressed for opportunities to garden and to be more involved in the community that was the inspiration for the project and made it a match for the Federal Government's [New Horizons for Seniors Program](#). The project received additional funds from Food Bank Canada to purchase topsoil and compost. The City contributed with an [Environmental Grant](#) for the purchase of seeds, tools, and other garden supplies.

The Food Bank receives thousands of pounds of produce donated annually from grocery stores, as well as private and community gardens. The new garden beds will see that even more fresh, local food can be included in the pantries distributed to clients. The garden's first year of production was a big success with ~200 pounds of produce harvested.





## Spotlight 5: Valleyview Community Garden and Greenhouse

### Capturing solar heat to make good things grow

The [Valleyview Community Garden and Greenhouse](#) was established in 2011 by the Valleyview Community Association, and has steadily evolved as a thriving community space. A grant from [Shell Foundation](#) was secured to build the greenhouse, which initially measured ~100 m<sup>2</sup> and featured 22 raised planting boxes. Participation by local businesses, including Ketza Construction, Complete Concrete, and Canadian Tire, also helped to make the project happen.

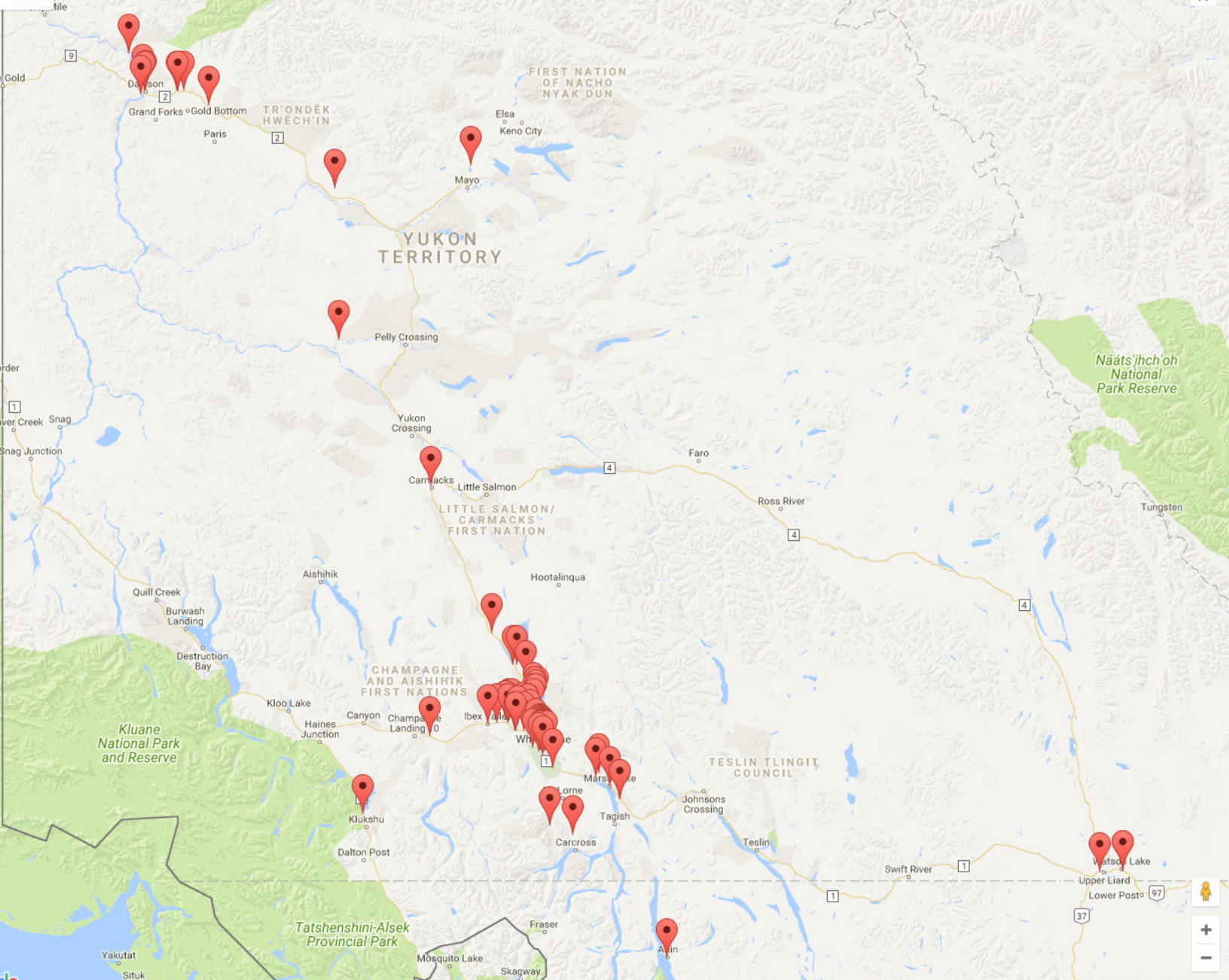
During the garden's second year, members secured funds from the [Tree Canada, Edible Trees Program](#) to start a berry and fruit tree garden that is open for the public to enjoy. In 2016, a municipal water connection was installed, financed mostly through a grant from the [Community Development Fund](#); membership fees also helped to cover costs, and funded a 2 m expansion of the greenhouse in 2018 to accommodate additional beds. In 2019, the association received funding through the City's [Environmental Grant](#) to purchase a water tank for use at the beginning and end of the growing season, when the municipal water connection is shut off for frost protection.

The greenhouse has been fully subscribed to since it opened and occasionally generates a waitlist. Success can be attributed to key factors that include:

- > A central location and ease of access
- > Excellent sun exposure
- > Access to water from neighbouring properties, used in spring before municipal water is turned on
- > A strong volunteer base that takes on maintenance tasks
- > A garden coordinator that oversees memberships, pest management, lease and insurance agreements, and mentorship of new gardeners

The biggest challenge for the garden was to navigate a rezoning process that was required for the garden land use to occur at the site. What seemed like a simple idea of transforming a vacant, unused roadway into a growing space turned into a long administrative procedure. Changes have since occurred to City regulations to ensure that community gardens and greenhouses can occur within all residential zones, without requiring a rezoning process.





## Spotlight 6: Yukon Agricultural Association

### Farm products and services guide

[Yukon Agricultural Association](#) (YAA) brings together a network of Yukon farmers and homesteaders, growers and producers, from Watson Lake to Haines Junction and Dawson City, and communities in between. The association additionally coordinates the [Yukon Young Farmers](#) chapter of the Canada Young Farmers network to encourage and empower young farmers, and foster sharing, education, and help amongst farm families.

In 2017, YAA launched an online and interactive version of its [Yukon Farm Products and Services Guide](#), which provides information about local food producers and retailers that sell local products. The guide also includes services, organizations, and associations active in supporting the local food scene. Want to know where to buy honey? Or which Yukon farms keep alpacas? Visit the guide online and search the menu for items that interest you.





## Spotlight 7: Arctic Institute of Community-Based Research

### Youth Champions: Mobilizing Indigenous knowledge on climate change

The [Arctic Institute of Community-Based Research](#) (AICBR) is a Whitehorse-based non-profit organization that works with Yukon communities on issues surrounding health, wellbeing, climate change, traditional knowledge, and youth. The institute uses a community-based research framework, which allows communities to take on a leadership role throughout the research process.

In 2017, AICBR partnered with the Government of Yukon Agriculture Branch and Climate Change Secretariat to initiate the [Yukon Indigenous Community Climate Change Champions](#) (YIC4) project. The aim of this 2-year initiative was to train First Nations youth (18-30 years) from across Yukon, Northwest Territories, Nunatsiavut, and Northern British Columbia, to develop leadership skills for gathering and mobilizing knowledge on climate change and adaptation from global, local, scientific, and Indigenous perspectives. The project was guided by a steering committee comprised of a climate change researcher from Yukon College, the community liaison of the Council of Yukon First Nations, and academic experts in nutrition and Indigenous food systems from McGill University.

In November 2017, a [Community Assessment Toolkit](#) was developed by 27 youth at a YIC4 workshop held in Whitehorse. The toolkit was used by participants in 2018 to lead community assessments in Carcross, Mayo, Ross River, and Atlin. Climate change perspectives were collected in each community through interviews and focus group sessions with Elders, government representatives, farmers, and other community members. Food related observations and concerns reported in the assessments include:

- > Changes in animal migration, distribution, and population, resulting in difficulty for hunters to find and track animals
- > Warming lakes that are causing water to freeze up later in the winter, and sometimes not at all, creating challenges for hunters, trappers, and ice-fishers
- > Concern that lake warming is affecting the quality of fish (e.g. meat is less firm), and fish are seeking deeper, cooler waters, making them more difficult to catch
- > Increased frequency and severity of forest fires, threatening plants, animals, and habitat areas
- > Plant species and berries drying up due to lack of groundwater and slower melting of snow in the springtime, causing increased evaporation and less absorption of water into the ground

Environmental changes have made it more difficult for community members to access traditional foods and medicines, and to practice cultural pursuits. Bringing youth back to the land and reconnecting with traditional ways of life were identified as top priorities for each of the participating communities. Steps have been taken to train youth in areas such as environmental monitoring, land stewardship/guardianship, farming, and community gardening. The YIC4 toolkit is being shared through workshops, webinars, and social platforms.



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Yukon Agricultural Association: page 7 (map)

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