



THE ISLAND FOOD NETWORK

Impact Evaluation

March 2019

Contributors

This evaluation is a collaboration between the Our Food Project of the Ecology Action Centre and the Island Food Network.

This study was carried out by the Our Food Project of the Ecology Action Centre:

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IFN Steering Committee's active members at the time of the study: Eric Leviten-Reid, Erna MacLeod, Nadine Bernard and Kim Tilsley.

IFN Members

This study was completed from January to March 2019.

All quotes in this report are from the recorded interviews or sensemaking session and represent the voices of various IFN members; they have been kept anonymous.

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Funding for this study has been provided by the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC). The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent the views of PHAC.

We acknowledge that Cape Breton is the unceded Mi'kmaw land, Unama'ki.¹

¹ We are using *The Mi'kmaw Resource Guide* in order to determine when to use the term Mi'kmaw and Mi'kmaq. We apologize if we interpret the guide incorrectly and use the wrong term. (http://www.mikmaweydebert.ca/home/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Pg_94_DOC_MikmawResourceGuide.pdf).

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Island Food Network (IFN)

The Island Food Network is

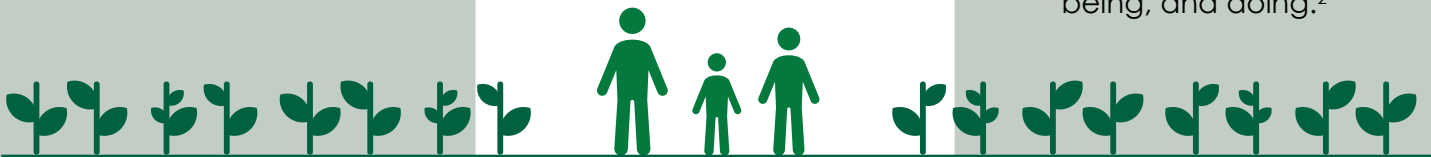
an umbrella for food action. The IFN connects food leaders, cultivates food knowledge, advocates for food systems change, and supports food initiatives.

We envision

a healthful, inclusive, just, and resilient food system that serves as a lever for transformation and growth.

We value

working collaboratively across sectors, with careful consideration for our environmental impact, and respect for Mi'kmaq and other Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing.²



IFN's Impacts

By taking part in the IFN, individual members report impacts such as developing connections and relationships, as well as providing a better understanding of the food actors across Cape Breton Island.

“I feel more plugged in in Cape Breton because of the IFN, more knowledgeable about things that are going on. I know more people who are doing things that are similar to what we are doing, but also more people who are doing different things [as] part of a broader network.”



More broadly the IFN has provided a multifaceted opportunity to explore and encourage change in the food movement on Cape Breton Island.

“[The] most significant impact has been through... connection... [and] community building that comes from our events.”

“I think the biggest thing... is creating a vision for food in Cape Breton... encompassing perspectives from all people and consider[ing] the ecological side.”

“The partnership between the municipalities and the network, as well as some of [the] research work... seems to be making a difference.”

²<https://www.islandfoodnetwork.ca>

The economic impacts, although not a primary focus of the IFN, were identified by IFN members as both direct and indirect. Direct areas include promoting buying local and supporting Island farmers. Indirect areas include skills transfer, peer education and marketing, all of which lead to better yield for farmers and increase profit.



Direct

"...directly there are jobs, sometimes positions for students that are associated with the Island Food Network. There are a few people who are actually employed to manage the network and expand the network."

"...with the farmer to farmer... we hire local chefs... [and] they source[d] as much as they could locally, from local producers."

Indirect

"Having an opportunity to connect with other producers has grown opportunities and the learning that comes with that definitely also has an impact on their ability to make some money on their farms and improve the viability on their farms."

"The IFN... played a role in providing knowledge and resources, to people working within the local food system, who have then been able to improve their capacity, their production, the work they are doing."

Return on Investment

Funding an IFN Coordinator is a great investment, for every \$1 input to the IFN Coordinator, there is \$2.6 leveraged through the IFN network and its activities.

\$2.6:\$1

"That's a good investment!"





INTRODUCTION

Purpose of the evaluation

Understand impact: To understand the breadth and depth of impacts of the IFN inclusive of individual experiences, impacts on Cape Breton broadly, and economic impacts.

Forward looking: To garner insights to support the IFN's next steps.

End-users and uses

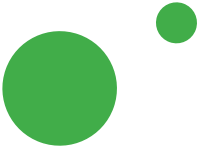
For use by the Island Food Network:

- **IFN sensemaking:** For the IFN members to reflect on their work, learn more about their impact and consider next steps together.
- **Fundraising tool:** To have data demonstrating and clarifying impact in order to leverage funding.
- **Finding a home for IFN:** To support the effort of finding one or more organizations or a coalition to host IFN moving forward.

For use by the Our Food Project of the Ecology Action Centre:

- **Reporting & accountability:** to demonstrate impact to its funder, the Public Health Agency of Canada.

Potential uses and benefits of IFN members participating in this evaluation process:

- To share their experiences
 - To learn more about IFN
 - To contribute to the evolution of the IFN
- 

Overarching evaluation questions

What are the most significant impacts of the IFN since it began?

How can the IFN continue to support the Cape Breton food system to grow and thrive?

What kind of evaluation is it?

Network: an investigation of a network, which is known to have both aspects that are well-defined (e.g., the steering committee) and ambiguous (e.g., questions such as Who are members/participants of the network? What activities are or are not considered part of the network?).

Regional: an inquiry into activities and impacts bound by the geographic region of Cape Breton Island.

Summative & formative: to both summarize impacts to date and look forward with insights and recommendations.

Participatory & user-focused: the IFN Steering Committee was part of the planning of each component of the evaluation, to whatever degree possible. There were multiple points of engagement including forming the evaluation questions, participating in interviews and the sensemaking session, as well as offering feedback on the final report. The scope, process and final products of the evaluation were created with multiple users in mind (IFN Steering Committee, IFN community more broadly, Ecology Action Centre's Our Food Project and their funder, the Public Health Agency of Canada).

Assets-based & appreciative inquiry: Asking questions has power. We intend to approach this study from an assets-based position of working from capacity rather than deficit.

CONTEXT

Food security in Cape Breton

Cape Breton is predominantly a rural region, with urban centres in Port Hawkesbury, and Cape Breton Regional Municipality (CBRM), where the majority of the population resides. Across the Island there are five Mi'kmaq band councils and five municipal councils, a situation which poses both a unique opportunity and a challenge for unity in Island-wide vision and governance. Colonization, a legacy of industry, and an aging and decreasing population create complex challenges for the region.³ Symptoms of these challenges include household food insecurity and a disproportionately high rate of poverty.



1 in 3 children in Cape Breton lives in poverty

SUPPORTING LOCAL FOOD BENEFITS EVERYONE

STRONG COMMUNITIES

LOCAL BUSINESS & JOBS

HEALTHIER ENVIRONMENT

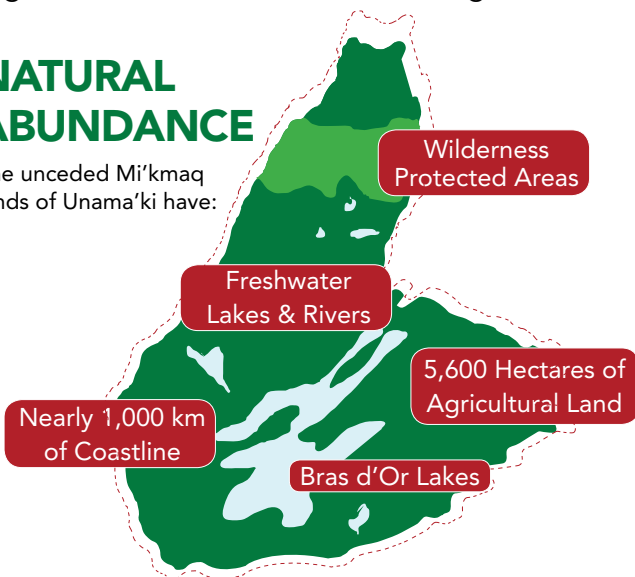
ACCESS TO HEALTHY FOODS

Despite a decline in farms⁴ and prioritization of seafood exports, the lands and waters of Cape Breton continue to inspire ideas for reinvigorating our local food economy.

Along with this sense of potential comes great responsibility to sustainably co-exist within our island ecosystem, as demonstrated by Mi'kmaq traditions. This stewardship role has become urgent in the face of climate change.

NATURAL ABUNDANCE

The unceded Mi'kmaq lands of Unama'ki have:



Amidst this complexity, food offers a tool for reconnection and growth. The IFN works to be a voice for food and the connective tissue between silos, councils, cultures, and people.

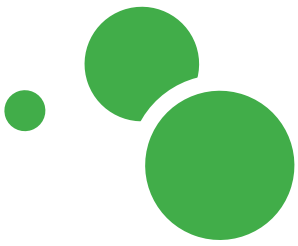
STEWARDSHIP

Mi'kmaq peoples have cared for these lands and waters for thousands of years. The Mi'kmaq took only what was needed and wasted nothing. The Mi'kmaq idea of **Netukulimk** is a way of life, balancing the need to feed ourselves well and make a living for current and future generations.



³ <https://www.islandfoodnetwork.ca/cape-breton-food-facts/>

⁴ <https://www.google.com/url?q=https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/170510/dq170510a-eng.htm?indid%3D10441-1%26indgeo%3D0&sa=D&ust=1552346886359000&usg=AFQjCNFU7vhEIUbsrKOZqhjAcee0-6LGiA>



Island Food Network

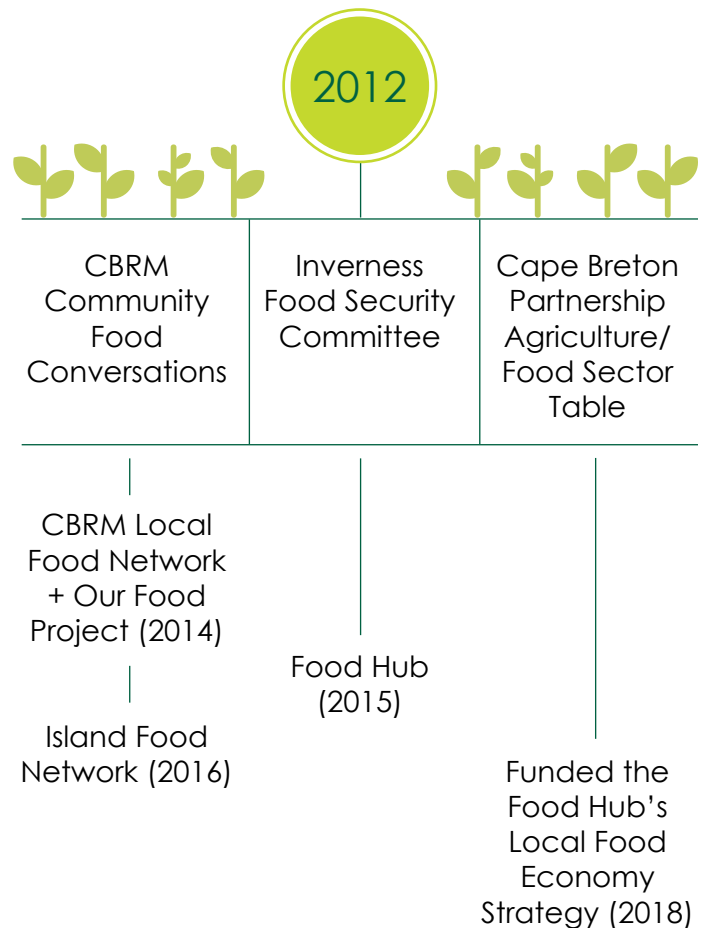
The Island Food Network is an umbrella for food action. The IFN connects food leaders, cultivates food knowledge, advocates for food systems change, and supports food initiatives. We envision a healthful, inclusive, just, and resilient food system that serves as a lever for transformation and growth. We value working collaboratively across sectors, with careful consideration for our environmental impact, and respect for Mi'kmaq and other Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing.⁵



History of collective food initiatives in Cape Breton

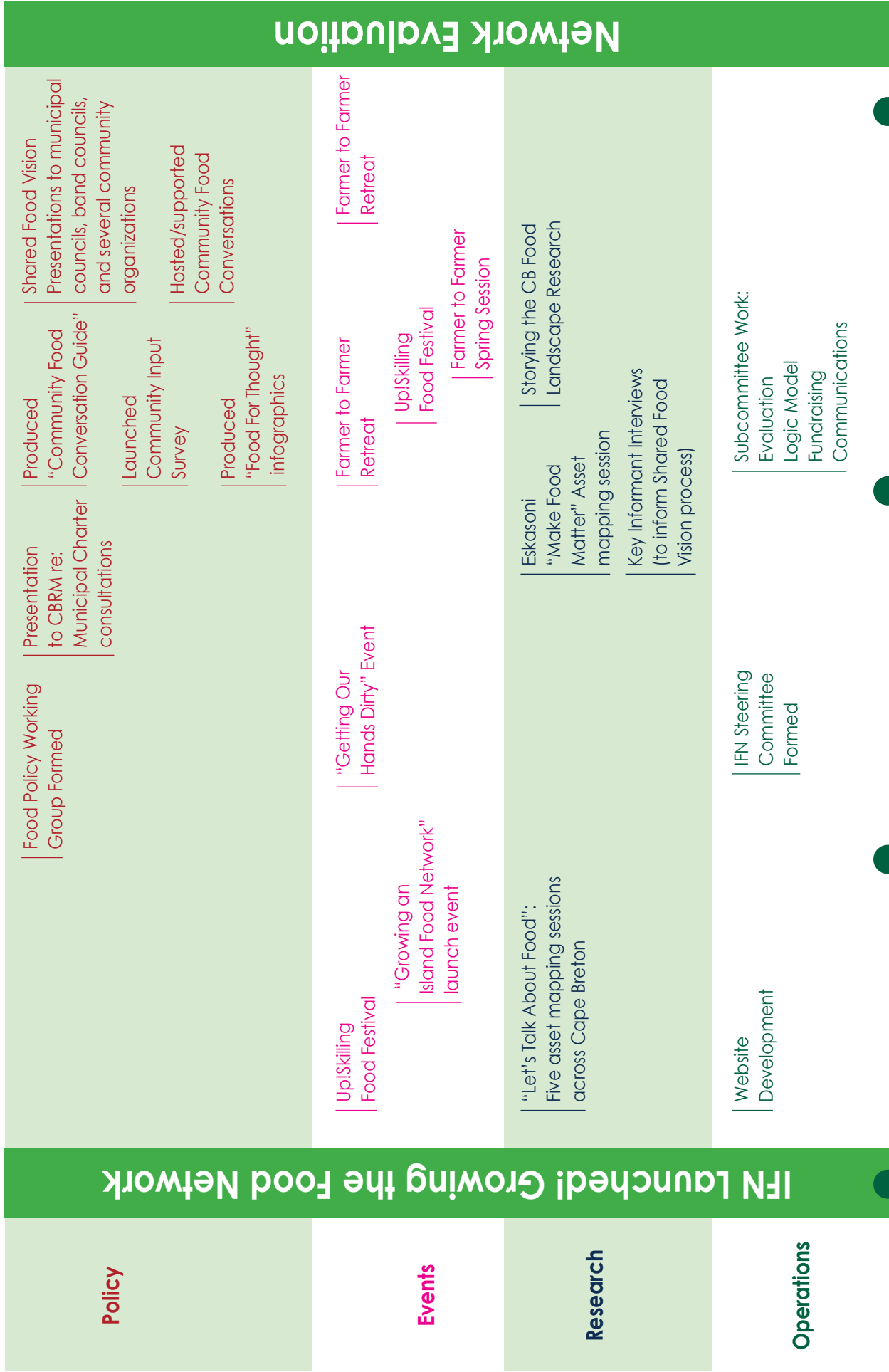
The IFN is the current iteration of over 10 years of food work in Cape Breton. This is a brief overview based on a presentation created by Eric-Leviton Reid for the IFN sensemaking session:

In 2012 three broad collaborative efforts began in order to strengthen the food movement: the CBRM Community Food Conversations, the Inverness County Food Security Committee and the Cape Breton Partnership Agriculture/ Food Sector Table. The CBRM Community Food Conversations led into the CBRM Local Food Network, which partnered with the Our Food Project to create the IFN. The Inverness County Food Security Committee led to the Food Hub, and the Cape Breton Partnership funded the Food Hub's recently developed strategy for growing the local food economy.



⁵<http://islandfoodnetwork.ca/>

IFN TIMELINE



2016

2017

2018

2019

Activities & outputs of the IFN since inception

Asset Mapping Sessions (Ingonish, Port Hawkesbury, St. Peters, Sydney, Inverness, Eskasoni): About 60 community members came together to create a map which highlights food assets located on Cape Breton Island. Food assets are places where people can grow, prepare, share, buy, receive or learn about food.⁶ These can be viewed on the IFN website.

Up!Skilling Food Festival: Is an annual public event that offers workshops hosted by local community experts on every aspect of food from seed to table. The workshops range from growing, sourcing, harvesting, storing, preserving, to cooking local and healthy foods. Each year there are approximately 100 people that attend this event.⁷

Food Policy Working Group: This group has a fluctuating membership, approximately 12 active members at the time of this report. It was created to begin the process of developing a shared vision for social, economic, environmental and health goals related to food in Cape Breton. This vision will serve as a foundation for an action-based food strategy.⁸

Cape Breton Farmer to Farmer Retreats: An annual event for current farmers and aspiring farmers to share knowledge, build connections, and share a meal. The first CB Farmer to Farmer Retreat welcomed 50 participants to discuss issues that matter among food producers in Cape Breton. This was followed by a more tailored event in the spring based on feedback gathered at the first session, again welcoming 50 participants.⁹

Storying the Cape Breton Food Landscape Research: The goal of this research project is to learn more about household food insecurity in Cape Breton. This research seeks to explore the following questions: How do residents of Cape Breton Island experience household food insecurity? What do people in Cape Breton perceive/experience as barriers or opportunities to consuming the food they want to? The primary objective is to document and understand Cape Bretoners' lived experiences with household food insecurity in a qualitative way.¹⁰ At the time of this report 11 participants had shared their stories through interviews.

Shared Food Vision Presentations: Members of the IFN attended meetings where they were able to inform organizations and councils about the IFN's Shared Food Vision project, build relationships and encourage participation. In total approximately 150 were in attendance.



⁶ <http://islandfoodnetwork.ca/> ⁷ <http://islandfoodnetwork.ca/>

⁸ <http://islandfoodnetwork.ca/> ⁹ <http://islandfoodnetwork.ca/>

¹⁰ Potvin, Leigh, CBU Research Ethics Application, 2.1 Research Summary. 2018

Community Food Conversations: The first conversation was hosted in November 2018 within the community to raise awareness about food issues, provide opportunities to gather community input into a Shared Food Vision, inspire action to build food security in the region, share ways to get involved in the IFN and local activities, and to build new connections and relationships with others interested in food issues. Eighteen participants attended the first community conversation, and many more conversations were being planned through 2019. A discussion guide that was developed by IFN to support these gatherings can be found on the IFN website (Discussion Guide for Community Food Conversations).

Communications: The IFN has created a number of ways to communicate with and connect people interested in food security:

- Newsletter sent out monthly: Cape Breton Food News with 375 people on the listserv
- Website: islandfoodnetwork.ca
- FaceBook Group: with 350 members
- Food For Thought infographics: <http://islandfoodnetwork.ca/cape-breton-food-facts/>



SCOPE, STAKEHOLDERS & METHODS

Scope of the analysis

The evaluation is measuring the impacts of the IFN over the period October 2016 to December 2018. The IFN was launched at an event in Oct 2016 in Iona called Growing the Island Food Network.

The areas of impact explored through the interviews were:

- personal value created by the IFN
- significant impacts on Cape Breton more broadly
- economic impacts.

See the interview guide in Appendix 1 for more details.

Stakeholder groups

For this evaluation stakeholders are considered members of the IFN who are directly affected by the outcomes of the IFN.

- IFN Steering Committee: a group of 6-10 committed individuals working to guide the evolution of the IFN.
- IFN Members: people who attend IFN events or who are members of one or more of the IFN initiatives.

Stakeholders who are not included in the data collection and considered outside of the scope for this evaluation are the broad groups that are served by the IFN (e.g., all food systems actors in Cape Breton).

Methods

Research design: The design of the evaluation was led by Miranda Cobb, with advisory support by Gabrielle Donnelly (evaluation consultant) and Kerri Marshall. All members of the IFN Steering Committee were invited to shape the evaluation direction, specifically the interview questions. Those that gave their input were Jody Nelson, Eric Leviten-Reid and Erna MacLeod.

Interviews: Fifteen semi-structured interviews were conducted by Kerri Marshall with members of the IFN Steering Committee, as well as IFN members with higher levels of engagement across a variety of IFN initiatives.

Return on Investment (ROI): An ROI for the IFN Coordinator's role was calculated based on monetary inputs and monetizable outcomes to demonstrate value for money.

Sensemaking session: All members of the IFN were invited to a one-day event on February 14th, 2019. Nine members of the IFN, including steering committee members and engaged IFN members, attended the day. The purpose of the session was to test the preliminary findings by checking if they reflected participants' experience and to explore any gap areas. This was also a developmental evaluation activity where the IFN's impacts were shared with members to support planning their next steps as a network. See Appendix 2 for a summary of the day.



FINDINGS: THE IFN'S IMPACT

These findings represent common themes expressed by the participants gathered from the 15 interviews.

IFN purpose and role

IFN members have a good understanding of the network's purpose and role; however they find it hard to concisely explain it and describe its importance to those not involved.

Members see the IFN as a vehicle or umbrella for bringing together a diverse group of people from across Cape Breton Island who have similar goals, values and desires, to look at food from many perspectives, with the hope of collaborating and fostering a sustainable food system on the Island.

Although most participants responded this way, there seems also to be a contradicting theme of 'fogginess' regarding what the IFN is. Participants suggested those involved in the IFN understand what it is and how all of the pieces attached to it are functioning, but when talking to the public or those not already involved in the IFN, they feel it is hard to explain or 'sell' the IFN.

“I see it as this connective tissue for different sectors, different groups working on different things. To have someone that holds all that together, across a large region, across different cultures, across different sectors, and over time as decision makers turn over in their positions, and as food leaders turn over in their organizational positions.”

Network membership

Individuals who participate in IFN activities and initiatives see themselves as part of the IFN; however often use the term 'they' when talking about it.

All participants interviewed felt as though they were **a part of the IFN in some capacity**. Even participants that may not be as actively involved at the moment (e.g., stepped back for personal reasons, moved away, work funding ceased) felt that they would likely be connected to the IFN well into the future. This sense of belonging was often contradicted by referring to the **IFN as 'they,'** a habit suggesting that people felt as though the IFN was an entity separate from them. There was also a sense that many participants felt as though they wanted to be able to be **more engaged** as a member, but were either unsure how to, or were lacking the ability to commit the time required.



“The IFN can hold continuity and be the connective tissue across the region over time.”

Personal impact

The IFN has fostered connections and relationships for its members, as well as provided a better understanding of the food actors across Cape Breton Island.

The majority of the participants felt that the most significant personal benefits thus far are the **connections and relationships** being developed that otherwise may not have. These connections include personal relationships as well as professional (i.e., municipal councils).

Along with these connections is the **knowledge** participants are gaining about key players across the Island, and getting to understand **Cape Breton's food system** on a larger scale, with regard to food in general, farming, consuming and producing, supply and demand issues, food insecurities, as well as food sustainability.

“I feel more plugged in in Cape Breton because of the IFN, more knowledgeable about things that are going on. I know more people who are doing things that are similar to what we are doing, but also more people who are doing different things [as] part of a broader network.”

Cape Breton impact

The IFN is providing a multifaceted opportunity to explore and encourage change in the food movement on Cape Breton Island.

Many participants agree that the work of the IFN is still in its infancy, that looking at the impacts on Cape Breton Island thus far are looking at them midstream. With that in mind the participants were split on their thinking: some believe that the **events such as Up!Skilling and Farmer to Farmer** have had the largest impact on the people, via **education**, transferring of skills, making connections, increasing **enthusiasm and motivating people** to move forward with smaller scale change. Others believe that the **Shared Food Vision**, and the conversations, tools, and connections made with municipalities, which may not have large impact at the moment, have the **potential to impact change on a much larger scale long-term**.

“I think the biggest thing... is creating a vision for food in Cape Breton... encompassing perspectives from all people and consider[ing] the ecological side.”

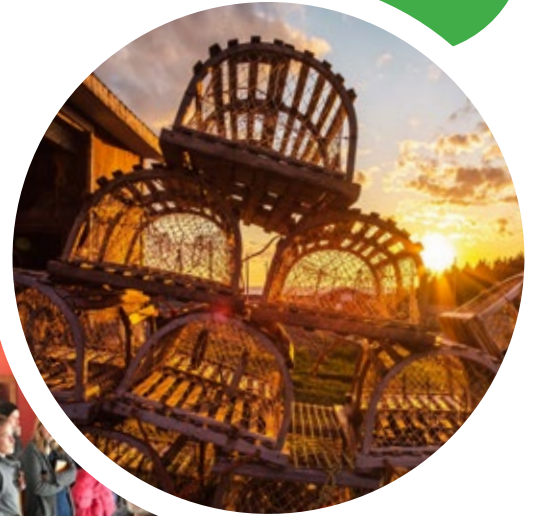
“[The] most significant impact has been through... connection... [and] community building that comes from our events.”

“The partnership between the municipalities and the network, as well as some of [the] research work... seems to be making a difference.”

Economic impact

Both direct and indirect economic impacts were identified by IFN members. Direct areas include promoting buying local and supporting Island farmers. Indirect areas include skills transfer, peer education and marketing, all of which lead to better yield for farmers and increase profit.

According to many participants, economic impact has not been a central focus of conversation amongst the members; therefore attempting to understand such impacts is challenging. Many of the participants suggested that one could look at **economic impact in an indirect way** attributed to **skills transfer, peer education, marketing** via facilitating a workshop in the Up!Skilling and Farmer to Farmer events. They believe that accruing new skills or funding ideas would lead to a **better yield for farmers, and increase bottom line numbers**. They also agreed that although these gains are likely to happen, they are extremely hard to measure. Other more direct areas of economic impact focused on **promoting buying local food and supporting the Island's farmers**, as well as the potential business brought to a community because an event is being held there (e.g., shopping in Sydney or using a local chef in Margaree for Farmer to Farmer).



Direct

“...directly there are jobs, sometimes positions for students that are associated with the Island Food Network. There are a few people who are actually employed to manage the network and expand the network.”

“

“...with the farmer to farmer... we hire local chefs... [and] they source[d] as much as they could locally, from local producers.”

”

Indirect

“Having an opportunity to connect with other producers has grown opportunities and the learning that comes with that definitely also has an impact on their ability to make some money on their farms and improve the viability on their farms.”

“The IFN... played a role in providing knowledge and resources, to people working within the local food system, who have then been able to improve their capacity, their production, the work they are doing.”

Feeling connected

The IFN has strengthened connections for individuals engaged within the IFN. However, there is a need for growing connections with underrepresented populations across the Island (i.e. Mi'kmaw communities, rural communities).

As previously mentioned, the majority of participants felt that the IFN has played a strong role in fostering connections across the Island. Some concerns were expressed over the ability to reach outside of the already existing members to expand the network, for example, with the general public or larger scale producers. This concern appears to stem not only from the 'fogginess' of the IFN identity, but also with the relationship or lack thereof between the IFN and The Food Hub. There is a consensus among the participants that there are currently "hot spots" across the Island that are engaged in the IFN and that there are **still many communities underrepresented**. The most important piece missing for many of the participants is the voice of our **Mi'Kmwaw communities**.

"I think there's a good deal more yet to be done"

around more general communication flow about all the things that are happening around the Island and sharing that so there is a much bigger network of people who are aware of and seeing what's happening and feel connected to it and have the opportunity of seeing how they might draw from the work of others, or contribute to it, or how it all adds up to something even bigger"

Communication tools

The tools used for communication are working for IFN members, although there is room for improvement; with more resources comes better supported communication outlets.

Of the tools used for keeping members connected the **newsletter** was the favoured means of communication, followed by **email** interactions (although long feeds posed a problem for many), followed by a strong emphasis on **face-to-face events** and networking opportunities. Most participants felt that interacting with one another was key to building and maintaining connection for them. The **website was the least favoured**, mostly because participants wanted the design to be more accessible to the general public. More time and resources are desired to make the website more user-friendly and resource heavy (i.e., articles relating to food from across the Island that are being seen in local papers could help link more people).

The majority of participants felt the tools of communication need committed individuals to maintain them, and realize this is a **lack of available resource issue**.



Outliers

These are some ideas that came up once or a handful of times that may offer further insights:

Poverty is a major underlying issue in Cape Breton that greatly impacts any work on food insecurity.

The potential effects of climate and big factory farming on the Cape Breton food system.

How is the IFN impacting/influencing the lives of the average person? The majority of those involved in the IFN are middle to upper class members of society and the language may not resonate with others.

The potential for volunteer burnout is high; a lot has happened in a short time, and the momentum is high to continue moving forward.

It's important to empower people with choice and the ability to choose healthy food.



RETURN ON INVESTMENT (ROI) OF IFN NETWORK COORDINATOR

This is a calculation based on quantifiable inputs and outputs of the IFN Coordinator from Oct 2016-Dec 2018.

Inputs

Staff salary, office, workshop & meeting expenses, transportation	\$81,172.35
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Outputs

In-kind	\$9,425.00	
Volunteer	\$35,298.00	1431 hours
Loaned Staff	\$84,187.33	3413 hours
Grants Leveraged	\$82,070.00	
TOTAL	\$210,980.33	

ROI calculations

Two ways of looking at an ROI:

1. Net Gain (Inputs-Outputs)/Outputs x 100 = 160% return on investment
2. Outputs/Inputs = \$2.6

For every \$1 input to the IFN Coordinator, there is \$2.6 leveraged through the IFN -

\$2.6:\$1



**“That’s a
good
investment!”**

Description

The ROI is used here to understand two things:

1. The cost of an IFN Coordinator, in order to be clear when planning how to fund the position in the future.
2. The resources leveraged for food systems change in Cape Breton due to the work of the IFN Coordinator.

In this case we used the actual numbers from Jody Nelson's work as the IFN Coordinator from Oct 2016 through Dec 2018. During this time, Jody Nelson held a full time position with the Ecology Action Centre as Community Food Coordinator for Cape Breton; acting as the IFN Coordinator was one aspect of this role.

Inputs

It was estimated that 80% of Jody's role with the Our Food Project was devoted to IFN-related activities, therefore 80% of her total salary was used. Using the same logic, 80% of materials (office space, phone, computer, internet etc.) and travel (gas and mileage) was used for the calculation. The full cost of meeting and workshop materials for IFN-related activities was added.

Grants leveraged included:

Grant	Details	Year	Amount
Community Health Boards	Wellness Fund for Up!Skilling. In partnership with Atlantic Coastal Action Program (ACAP)	2017/18	\$2,875.00
Community Health Boards	Wellness Fund for asset mapping	2016/17	\$1,495.00
Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC)	To enhance Up!Skilling Food Festival by adding an academic conference and community events. In partnership with Cape Breton University (CBU), Jodi McDavid handed over to Leigh Potvin.	2016/18	\$50,000.00
SSHRC	Storying the Cape Breton Food Landscape. In partnership with CBU, Leigh Potvin	2018/19	\$25,000.00
Community Health Boards	Wellness Fund for Up!Skilling festival. In partnership with New Dawn.	2018/19	\$2,700.00

¹¹ Statistics Canada. Retrieved February 2019 from: <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/>

Outputs

The cost of in-kind material supports was estimated, of which the vast majority were facilities (e.g., meeting and workshop spaces provided free of cost from partner organizations).

Volunteers include individuals contributing their unpaid time to IFN events and initiatives such as Up!Skilling, Farmer to Farmer, IFN Steering Committee, and the Food Policy Working Group

Loaned Staff are individuals that contribute their paid time to IFN events and initiatives. For example staff of Cape Breton University, New Dawn, Department of Agriculture and the NS Health Authority.

To calculate the volunteer and loaned staff amounts an annual salary of \$48,100 was used. This number from Statistics Canada is the Average Income of Nova Scotians between the ages of 25-54 years in 2016. An hourly rate of \$24.67 was then calculated (\$48,100/52 weeks/37.5 hours in a week) and multiplied by the total hours.

THE FUTURE OF THE ISLAND FOOD NETWORK

The IFN Steering Committee were keen to use this evaluation as an opportunity to hear from members about their visions for the future of the Network. These are common themes from the interviews.

Challenges moving forward:

- Being able to fully represent the voice of an island with its diversities in culture (rural and urban), increasing engagement with Mi'Kmaq communities and upholding the sense of responsibility created by a support system that may not exist at some point.
- Resolving the relationship with The Food Hub, to ensure that groups are collaborating for the people of Cape Breton and not creating confusion for the public.
- Many different people working together for a common goal can create a slow-moving machine.
- Resistance to change is typical from the masses (e.g., council, people in our communities).
- Losing funding.
- Continually working on defining what the IFN is. Everyone seems to have a different answer, and we must keep clarifying purpose and role in order to relay message to public – getting clear on that is huge.



Opportunities moving forward:

- Food Policy Working Group impacting the food system with the Shared Food Vision, a tool for advocacy and getting movement around food issues on the Island.
- Working more closely with CBU research connecting to community.
- Being an island = “petri dish for good things.” It’s a closed thing so you can control it if you can get a handle on it.
- So many other initiatives throughout the Island to connect with--community development through food, Northside Rising, Raising the Villages, food insecurity issues. Island-wide initiatives should be putting their heads together.
- “It’s a beautiful time, everyone is becoming more interested in their food, it’s also a terrifying time where you sort of have to be interested in your food.” Food is getting more traction, people talk about food more. It’s a good time; food is a hot topic issue, and people are thinking more about food for many different reasons.
- Strengthening the connections.
- Huge potential for getting people thinking about eating from our own backyard – can have a huge economic impact on CB. IFN can get people aware and get people acting with dollars – food vision.

IFN's best position moving forward:

Many of the participants suggested that further **clarifying the purpose** of the IFN and making the IFN more **tangible and digestible** will strengthen the entity of the IFN, giving it the power to encourage people to want to change the way they think about food and food-related issues across Cape Breton Island. Opening this door will provide an opportunity for the Shared Food Vision to be supported by not only local council but also individuals and communities that will push for change when it comes time to have their voices heard.

Ultimately the majority of the participants want to see connections and relationships continue to grow through events across the Island, and bringing people together with the Shared Food Vision (e.g., community, municipal/federal council, Mi'kmaw band councils, IFN members).



CONCLUSION

The IFN is an impactful entity

From the interviews and the sensemaking session it is clear that the IFN creates significant value for individuals, Cape Breton Island and the local economy. Individual members report building connections and relationships, as well as having a better understanding of the food actors across Cape Breton. More broadly the IFN has provided a multifaceted opportunity to explore and encourage change in the food movement on the Island. Direct economic impacts include promoting buying local and supporting Island farmers. Indirect economic impacts include skills transfer, peer education and marketing, all of which lead to better yield for farmers and increase profit.

Funding an IFN Coordinator in the future

Funding an IFN Coordinator has been demonstrated to be a great investment: for every \$1 input to the IFN Coordinator, there is \$2.6 leveraged through the IFN network and its activities. It was agreed amongst members at the sensemaking session that having a paid coordinator is essential to maintaining and building upon the substantial momentum of the IFN.

Beware of getting lost in the nature of networks

Networks are well-known to face challenges around achieving a perceived clarity of purpose and communicating succinctly facts about the nature of the entity and ideas about its value to those not involved. These are key issues that IFN members are grappling with. The frequent message shared in both the interviews and the sensemaking session is a desire to further clarify the purpose of the IFN and make it more tangible and digestible (see the Future section above). However, from a communications standpoint, the general public may not and need not grasp the workings of a network, and this goal can become a diversion from activities a network can succeed at. In the IFN's case this would mean focusing on the areas where they have successful impact.

A recommendation for the IFN is to become familiar and comfortable with the fogginess, bolstered by the insight that it is the nature of networks and not a failure of the IFN. There is a constant tension for many networks to simultaneously do the work they want to see in the world and build their internal systems (e.g., governance, communications etc.). This requires a fine balance, and if too much energy is spent on internal systems then motivation to do the activities in the world falters. However if energy is all spent on action, then a network can crumble from lack of supporting minimal structures. The IFN will continually need to navigate this tension together.



APPENDIX 1: INTERVIEW GUIDE

ISLAND FOOD NETWORK IMPACT EVALUATION INTERVIEW GUIDE

Introduction

Purpose of the evaluation

To understand the impacts of the Island Food Network (IFN) and its related activities over the past two years, and to consider what role the IFN can play moving forward in the Cape Breton food system.

Who is conducting the study

The Ecology Action Centre is conducting the evaluation under federal funding from the Public Health Agency of Canada.

We want to understand the effectiveness of the IFN as a requirement to report to our funder and in order for the IFN to understand their own impact and explore how to move forward.

Consent form - Go over consent form and sign.

PART 1 - IFN IDENTITY

We are trying to understand the impact of the IFN, which we see in part as a sum of the people involved and the activities that it undertakes. A generic goal of networks is to connect people and initiatives in a sector so they can be greater than the sum of their parts. Often the idea of who is or isn't part of the network is unclear, especially to those involved. Also, it is difficult to work around contribution and attribution (i.e., we recognize that the IFN is one piece of the puzzle in the Cape Breton food movement, not the whole). The IFN has contributed to impacts in Cape Breton, but is not the sole actor and not trying to own credit in this way.

1. **Based on your understanding, how would you describe the purpose and role of the Island Food Network?**
2. **Do you see yourself as part of the network? If yes, how? If no, why not?**

PART 2 - IMPACTS

Considering the IFN as a whole: the people involved (including you?!), and the activities it supports directly and indirectly over the past 2 years, etc.

3. **What is the most significant impact that the IFN has had on you personally?**
4. **Based on your own observations, what is the most significant impact that the IFN has had in Cape Breton?** (e.g., on folks other than yourself, on communities, on the local food system, on the local economy, etc. Probe: Small impacts are important as well as big, laying the groundwork/capacity building)
5. **Focus on Economic Impact: Based on your experience, has the IFN had an economic impact on the local food system/local food developments? If so, how? If not, why?**
6. *One goal of the network is to play a connecting role that enhances communication and collaboration among diverse participants in Cape Breton's local food movement.*
 - a. **Is the IFN meeting that goal of connection for you? If so, how? If not, why not?**
 - b. **What channels of communication are working for you and which aren't? (e.g., website, FB, twitter, email newsletter, events, meetings, shared projects, etc.)**
 - c. **What could improve connection for you?**

PART 3 - FUTURE

7. Emerging in the Cape Breton Landscape:

Looking ahead to the next phases of developing the IFN with the goal of building a resilient local food system:

- a. **What challenges do you see emerging for the IFN?**
- b. **What opportunities do you see emerging for the IFN?**

8. **Role of the IFN: In your view, what role is the IFN best positioned to play in strengthening the Cape Breton food system moving forward?**

PART 4 - CONCLUSION

9. **Is there anything else you would like to share?**

10. **Next Steps**

We will pull themes from the interviews and bring them to the gathering on Feb 14th, where we can explore them together and be constructive about the future of the IFN.

Is there anything in particular that you'd like us to do in that time together?

11. **As we progress through the analysis, should any other question come up, would it be alright to contact you?**

Thank you so much for your time and energy!!! :)



APPENDIX 2: SENSEMAKING SESSION

On Feb 14th at New Dawn in Sydney, 9 people gathered, a mix of folks from the IFN Steering Committee and engaged IFN members.

What we did

Introduction: Jody shared her visual overview of the IFN and its 4 core objectives.



Check-in: Sitting in circle we introduced ourselves and shared a bit about why the Cape Breton food system is important to each of us.

Impacts of the IFN Oct 2016 to now: Preliminary findings based on themes from the interviews were presented. Immediate feedback shared by the group was that the findings accurately reflected their thoughts, which sparked amazement at how common the themes were for everyone.



Using World Café we held two rounds of conversations:

Round 1:

What did you hear? What stood out to you?

Some of the thoughts shared included:

- Lack of resources - often this comes up as a theme.
- 'The IFN-Food Hub Bermuda Triangle' - in general people are confused about the two entities (who is who?), the different initiatives that each hosts (who's doing what?), aware of relationship challenges and wondering how to build a stronger working relationship.
- Fogginess about the IFN:
 - ... There is a sense of frustration that members know what IFN is and yet it still feels difficult to talk about. Though this is a common network challenge, there is a yearning to make the invisible work more visible.
 - ... Do people understand what the Shared Food Vision and Food Charter work is?
 - ... Part of the fogginess is that there are a lot of pieces to the IFN underway and most members are not a part of everything. This may be why self-identified members of the IFN still refer to the IFN as 'they' not 'we'.
- Participation - it's clear that people want to participate more and are interested but are limited by factors like being 'time-swamped' (i.e., not enough time in the day for everything!).

Round 2:

What's missing? Do you see any gaps in the findings?

Some of the thoughts shared included:

- Voices of those not involved in the IFN. Only IFN members were interviewed.
- Poverty - one of the greatest challenges facing Cape Breton is poverty and therefore a great challenge for the IFN.

Mostly this conversation consisted of solutions, brainstorming and planning.

Lunch: We shared lunch together catered by the Better Bite Community Kitchen

Here and now: What's currently happening in the CB food movement?

Eric-Leviten Reid gave a brief history of food systems collaborations over the past 10+ years to give context of where we are now and the landscape that IFN is working in. (See the Context section above for a summary of this presentation).

Jody shared her visual of the Cape Breton food system:



Future of the IFN: Challenges and opportunities for the IFN moving forward were shared based on themes from the interviews (see themes listed in section Future of the IFN above).

Refocused

I know a lot more now!

Glad to keep connected

Good energy

Optimistic

Appreciative of the interview feedback.

We have shared perspectives.

This is iterative work and I want to take it deeper.

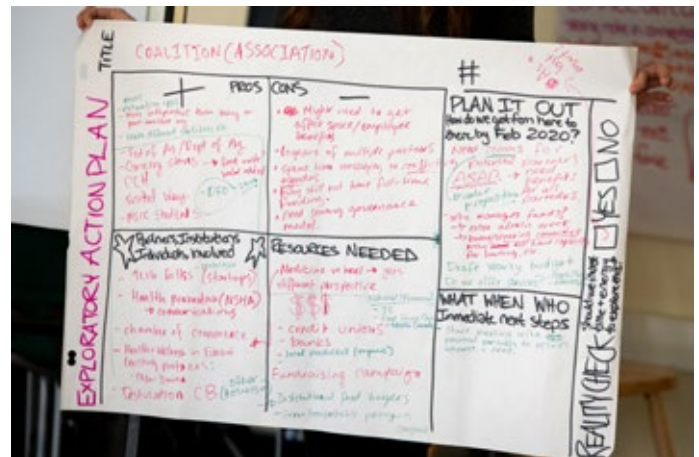
This process has been a good learning opportunity of how to use and integrate evaluation findings right away; how to use evaluation as an opportunity

Scenarios for IFN's future: At the time of the sensemaking session it was known that funding for the IFN Coordinator from the Ecology Action Centre's Our Food Project was to end in Jan 2020 due to a grant finishing. Because of this, three possible scenarios for the future of IFN's funding were being considered by IFN members, particularly the Steering Committee:

- Finding a new institutional home in Cape Breton for the IFN that would fund a coordinator and IFN initiatives.
- Building a coalition to collectively fund a coordinator and IFN initiatives.
- Let IFN go and allow for new iterations.

Each scenario would continue to include both grant-seeking and partnership development.

These scenarios were shared and then the group split into two to brainstorm action plans for the first two ideas using the following template:



The action plans were shared back with the group and immediate next steps were agreed to.

Check-out: What did you gain from the day? What are you taking with you?

Leaning in

I'm still a part of the IFN!
Feels like an 'us' now!
(instead of 'they/them')