

# LOCAL FOOD CHAMPIONS

SERIES 8



**Building on local food procurement research, this series is celebrating local food champions and their commitment to supporting Ontario's agri-food sector.**

## FACES BEHIND OUR FOOD

**PROFILING:  
KARA TREMBLAY  
APITPI ANICINAPEK  
NATION**

Created by  
Anna DeMarchi-Meyers and  
Dr. Sara Epp



Golden Horseshoe  
Food and Farming  
Alliance

UNIVERSITY OF  
**GUELPH**

School of Environmental  
Design and Rural Development  
Ontario Agricultural College

## LOCAL FOOD CHAMPION

# KARA TREMBLAY - APITIPi ANICINAPEK NATION

### GROWING FOOD, KNOWLEDGE AND COMMUNITY

At Apitipi Anicinapek Nation in northeastern Ontario, growing food is about much more than producing vegetables. It is a way to strengthen community health, reconnect people with the land, create opportunities for youth and build greater control over the community's food system.

Kara Tremblay has helped transform a once-underused community garden and hoop greenhouse into a growing centre for food production, education and community participation. Her work is helping the Nation develop a food system grounded in local knowledge, cultural values and a long-term vision of food sovereignty. Now the Nation's Traditional Economic Development Lead, initially led much of this work in her former role as Food Coordinator.

Youth involvement remains one of the most meaningful parts of the Nation's food initiatives.

Before moving into agriculture, Kara worked as a child and youth worker for more than a decade. She later completed the Business-Agriculture program at Northern College, but much of her knowledge has been developed through direct experience: preparing soil, experimenting with northern growing conditions, managing the greenhouse and learning from each season.

The garden's development began during a difficult period for the Nation. COVID-19 had left many community members isolated, while limited public space and infrastructure made it difficult to organize activities that could bring people together. At the time, the existing hoop greenhouse was little more than a frame. Revitalizing the garden offered an opportunity to address several needs at once. It created a reason for people to leave their homes, provided meaningful work for young people and began rebuilding connections around food, land and community.



"My formal agriculture training came through the Business-Agriculture program at Northern College, but so much of what I know has come from hands-on learning — working in the garden, listening to our Elders and community members, visiting and learning from other First Nations, working with partners, and especially learning alongside our youth. Every season and every person brings something different to the work."

Kara Tremblay

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The garden has gradually become something that community members recognize as their own. Produce is intended to be shared, and young people have become increasingly protective and proud of the space. The Nation has hired local summer students each year, giving youth an opportunity to learn where food comes from and to develop practical skills by planting, maintaining and harvesting crops. Kara's role has also grown beyond the daily work of gardening. As additional staff and seasonal support have become available, she has been able to dedicate more attention to funding applications, partnerships, planning and the long-term development of the Nation's food system.

Her leadership has helped demonstrate that the success of a community garden cannot be measured only by the quantity of food harvested. Its value can also be seen in the knowledge being developed, the confidence of young participants, the renewed use of community spaces and the conversations taking place about healthy and culturally meaningful food.

One of the most important outcomes of Kara's work has been her contribution to the creation of the Apitipi Anicinapek Nation Food Security and Sovereignty Charter. Developed collaboratively through the Nation's food committee, the Charter brings together perspectives from economic development, health, education, culture and other community departments. It establishes a shared direction for how the Nation will approach food security, food production, community health and the protection of traditional food practices.



Chief and Council formally supported and adopted the Charter through Band Council Resolution. The Charter affirms the fundamental right of band members to access healthy, affordable and culturally appropriate food wherever possible. Its vision is: "To cultivate a resilient, community-led food system that strengthens food sovereignty, promotes a healthy lifestyle, and sustains the physical, spiritual, mental, emotional, and economic health of the Nation."

The Charter recognizes that food sovereignty includes agriculture, but extends far beyond the garden. Hunting, fishing, gathering, trapping, medicine harvesting and the transfer of ancestral knowledge are all essential parts of the Nation's food system. The Charter is designed as a living document that will be reviewed annually and adapted as community needs and priorities evolve. Oversight will be provided by a Food Sovereignty Committee comprising community leaders, Elders, youth and individuals with relevant expertise.

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### RECONNECTING FOOD, LAND AND CULTURE

The Nation's long-term vision extends across its traditional territory. Future plans include mapping and creating a seasonal calendar of foods and medicines found on the land—from spring medicines and mushrooms to fish, game, berries and wild rice. This work would bring together the knowledge of Elders, hunters, harvesters and other land users, while helping younger generations understand when, where and how food has traditionally been gathered. Youth involvement remains one of the most meaningful parts of the Nation's food initiatives. Local summer students have helped construct, plant and maintain the garden while learning practical skills. The Nation is also developing partnerships that expose Indigenous youth to agriculture, forestry, renewable energy and land stewardship. These experiences are intended not only to create seasonal employment, but to encourage young people to see a future for themselves within the community.

Through patience, practical learning and a deep commitment to her community, she has helped turn a greenhouse into the foundation of a much broader movement. Her work connects food production with youth development, community health, traditional knowledge, environmental stewardship and local economic opportunity. Most importantly, Kara's leadership is helping Apitipi Anicinapek Nation define food sovereignty on its own terms. The Food Security and Sovereignty Charter provides a path forward, but the garden shows what that vision looks like in practice: community members growing, sharing, learning and making decisions together.



*By cultivating both food and community capacity, Kara is helping plant the foundations of a healthier, more resilient and more self-determined future for Apitipi Anicinapek Nation.*