



# National Farmers Union – Ontario NEWSLETTER

*Strong Communities.  
Sound Policies.  
Sustainable Farms.*

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## Introducing the Farm Unit membership

*If you farm as a co-operative, collective, or partnership where the majority of the farm's labour or management is provided by individuals involved in actively operating the farm, you may join as Farm Unit members. Up to four individuals comprising a farming unit are recognized under a Farm Unit membership. Meet Roots to Harvest whose farmers are the newest Farm Unit members.*

At Roots to Harvest we use food as a tool to connect people to one another and build belonging and dignity through meaningful programs, initiatives, and advocacy. Through seed-to-plate production, we make food more accessible in an urban area, and our mandate is to provide meaningful and impactful employment, education, and mentorship opportunities within the local food system for young people who face barriers to success. We nurture people and our communities by growing sustainable, local food.

As a charitable organization, we cultivate almost three acres of land at two urban farms in Thunder Bay. They are beautiful and welcoming spaces, easily accessible by foot, bike, bus, or car. From our humble beginnings in 2007, we now employ 14 full-time staff. We keep our operations afloat through a variety of grants, direct sales, service, fundraising, and donations. Local farmers, many of whom are NFU members, have imparted their knowledge and skills as part of our educational programming, either on their own farms or at our urban gardens.

At our farms we harvest annual fruit and vegetables, maintain a number of fruit trees, harvest wild forage-ables (fiddle-heads, mushrooms), tend to a small apiary (10 hives), a modest rabbitry, and maintain a seed production garden. We also care for a three-season greenhouse in partnership with Nishnawbe Aski Nation. We sell our food at mobile markets and local restaurants at market prices, provide a CSA for our monthly donors, and donate hundreds of pounds of produce

annually to local schools, shelters, and food services organizations. We can, freeze, and dry our surplus for later use in a variety of different food literacy programming.

Our educational initiatives are central to our operations. Last year the Seasonal Horticultural Outdoor Worker (S.H.O.W.) program, which debuted in 2016, hired 10 disadvantaged youth to instill broad-based employment skills and agricultural training. In conjunction with the Lakehead District School Board, our long-standing Youth Garden Program employs twelve high school students for six weeks over the summer. Roots to Harvest resides on the territory of the Fort William First Nation, signatory to the Robinson-Superior Treaty. In partnership with numerous Indigenous led organizations, Roots to Harvest acknowledges and highlights the land-based and traditional food of our area and works with the knowledge keepers to learn and share the food culture and history of our region.

When the COVID-19 pandemic reached Canada, Roots to Harvest quickly pivoted in order to ensure access to affordable, healthy, and sustainable food was maintained for vulnerable people. After the closure of the food banks in Thunder Bay in April, we shifted our focus to provide emergency food access and have distributed food hampers to families with children and seniors experiencing poverty.

Roots to Harvest feels a kinship with the work and activism of the NFU locally and throughout Canada. Having long collaborated with NFU members,

in July 2020, four members of our farm staff joined the NFU as part of the new farm unit membership.

Our farm staff wanted to become part of a collective movement and voice that seeks to attain a just and sustainable food system for all. As a hardworking, grass-roots organization, Roots to Harvest recognizes the work the NFU has done to mobilize and amplify the voices of grassroots food systems, and we're excited to be a part of this important work.

"It's with excitement that I welcome staff of Roots to Harvest into the NFU," says Stuart Oke, NFU Youth President. "I'm proud to have contributed in a small way to the development of their S.H.O.W. program as a one-time staff member. Roots to Harvest staff knowledge and unique perspective on food sovereignty will undoubtedly bring value to the National Farmers Union."

Roots to Harvest demonstrates that a vibrant and multi-functional urban agriculture space is possible, and that growing food is a relational framework that not only builds vibrant communities but can also be beautiful, bountiful, and inspirational.



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