



# FIRST farmers

First peoples lived with great respect for their environments. They made little change to the landscape over thousands of years.

Where they lived had an impact on how they lived. For example, people in the north had a different lifestyle from those in the south. First peoples shared a knowledge of and respect for nature that affected every part of their lives.

“Over thousands of years, each First Nation developed its own methods of surviving on their traditional lands.

The Iroquois Confederacy had sophisticated farming skills and all First Nations relied upon fishing. But every First Nation depended on hunting and trapping. . . . Although resources and environments varied, large game and fur-bearing animals provided the food, shelter and clothing that were vital to survival.”



Harvey McCue and Associates for Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (2012). *The Learning Circle: Classroom Activities on First Nations in Canada - A Learning Resource for Ages 12 to 14.*

Many First Nations and Inuit people lived in small, mobile groups. They travelled in regular patterns, based on the four seasons. They travelled throughout **traditional territories**, the lands their ancestors had also occupied.



How can you honour the treaty land on which your community is located?

Seasonal movements allowed people to make the best possible use of all resources available to them. This included hunting and agricultural activities. Bison were very important as a source of food and other materials for some First Nations people. Pronghorn antelope, mule deer, elk and prairie birds were also plentiful.



Hundreds of seasonal plants, such as wild turnip and Saskatoon berries, were part of the diet of Plains First Nations. They “farmed” the prairies, collecting these plants and using them for food, medicine, ceremonies and construction materials.

First Nations people introduced hundreds of food crops to Europeans, including corn, potatoes, sunflowers, tomatoes and squash. First Nation foods now make up 60 percent of crops that are now grown around the world.



Did it surprise you to know that First Nation foods make up 60 percent of the world’s crops? Why or why not?

First Nations people had a great knowledge of the natural resources and climate of the prairies. This knowledge was important to their own agricultural practices. It also became important to the agricultural practices of early European settlers and farmers.



## Evidence of First Nations Agriculture



“A team of archaeologists on the banks of the Red River have collected evidence that the First Nations people of the Prairies, long thought to be nomadic, were in fact sophisticated farmers who had villages and the means to plant, grow and store food.”

Watch the video for more information on the **CTV News** website at [www.ctvnews.ca/sci-tech/archeologists-uncover-evidence-of-early-aboriginal-agriculture-on-the-red-river-1.2956128](http://www.ctvnews.ca/sci-tech/archeologists-uncover-evidence-of-early-aboriginal-agriculture-on-the-red-river-1.2956128).

Photo Credit: **CBC News** (June 20, 2016). *Anthropology students digging at Lockport site for connections to Aboriginal agriculture: 5-week excavation project looks to unearth clues to first farmers in the Red River valley.* [www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/anthropology-students-lockport-farmers-1.3644247](http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/anthropology-students-lockport-farmers-1.3644247)

Sources: *Traditional Life on the Land: Aboriginal Perspectives on Walking Together: Connection to Land and Aboriginal Reserve Agriculture to 1900* in **The Encyclopedia of Saskatchewan**.

Dario Balca (June 21, 2016). *Archaeologists uncover evidence of early aboriginal agriculture on the Red River.* **CTVNews.ca** [www.ctvnews.ca/sci-tech/archeologists-uncover-evidence-of-early-aboriginal-agriculture-on-the-red-river-1.2956128](http://www.ctvnews.ca/sci-tech/archeologists-uncover-evidence-of-early-aboriginal-agriculture-on-the-red-river-1.2956128)