

Annual Report 2020-21

Mission

To inspire a community of environmentally active citizens through education, action, and advocacy.

Focus Areas

Our two main program areas are:

- 1) Sustainable local food systems
- 2) Climate action

We remain open and responsive to engage on other environmental issues that are identified as priorities by our community.

Project Summaries

Community Gardens (Heights, Blow Me Down, Reid and Caribou)

Despite the disruptions of 2020, we were delighted to be able to open two new community gardens in partnership with the federal government and the City of Corner Brook. We now operate 4 gardens.

Although there were some delays, we were still able to move ahead with planning and development of Reid Street and Caribou Road Gardens, including a consultation process, participant recruitment, infrastructure development, and finally gardener registration. Both Reid Street and Caribou Road Gardens officially opened with 15 plots each in June. There was much enthusiasm from the community for these new gardens, and all plots were immediately spoken for.

Gardeners had an extremely fruitful season, despite a slightly delayed start, and most were overjoyed by the harvest. Although we decided not to organize any work parties last year, we were able to have a well-attended launch event on a glorious September day. We did of course experience some challenges too, including figuring out the watering system in a summer of very minimal rain, and we also had some minor vandalism at Reid Street. Overall, however it was a wonderful season for the new gardens.

The Heights and Blow Me Down Gardens were also full in 2020, and we continued to work on improving the fertility of soil in both gardens. With support from the provincial government Community Garden Support Grant, we were able to provide some soil amendments, seeds and seedlings to all gardeners last year. All gardens were supplied with a large pile of compost at the end of the season as well, so that they could top up their plots in the fall.

Plans for 2021 include expansion of the Reid Street garden with another 5 beds and another new garden for the Curling area. We've already had work parties at all gardens, and are looking forward to some improvements at each garden this year.

Food Skills + Green Living Workshops

In early 2020, we had started planning our Green Living Workshop Series, but were only able to run one in-person event before restrictions started in March.

We held a very well-attended workshop on Low Waste Living in January with Dirk Muir and Alli Johnston, and had plans for Green Cleaning and Making Homemade Green Skincare Products in February and March. Both of these workshops had to be cancelled, including all the other in-person workshops we had in mind for the rest of the year.

After we re-configured our plans and moved all our workshops online, we were able to hold another 5 workshops between April – December. Topics were:

- Raising backyard hens
- Backyard & vermi-composting
- Autumn gardening & food storage
- Sauerkraut 101
- Electric vehicle info panel

Although it was unfortunate to lose the interactive, hands-on aspect of our workshops, we did discover some benefits to the online format. We could reach a much wider audience, essentially anyone with an internet connection. We could also easily record the event and then share it later.

Plans for 2021 include two workshop series: Greenhouse Gardening for Beginners and Wild Edibles. We are in the planning stages for both, and have already held the first greenhouse workshop. So far in 2020 we have already held 4 workshops online, including kombucha, sprouting, seed starting and container gardening. We had one in-person workshop on maple tapping, and we look forward to more outdoor in-person workshops, particularly with the Wild Edibles series.

Community Composting

We continued our community compost project for the fourth season in 2020, which included 30 – 40 households in the Humber Heights neighbourhood. A few more households signed up to take part. We were able to get the assistance of some volunteers in the fall to help us harvest and sift the finished compost. Three large rotary bins were installed in 2017 at Brandon Municipal Playground (near the Heights Garden) and participants drop their kitchen scraps there. The bins break down the compost quickly during the warm season. The finished compost is available to participants and community gardeners.

Plans for 2021 include the addition of two new community compost programs, located at the Reid and Caribou Gardens. Each program will accommodate 30-40 households. The programs both launched last week, with volunteer teams in place to help monitor and maintain the bins.

Humber Valley Fruit Rescue

The Humber Valley Fruit Rescue Project wrapped up its fifth season in 2020. As expected it was quieter than previous years, due to the pandemic. We were able to rescue about 100 lbs of apples with the assistance of 6 volunteer pickers. We weren't able to donate any of the fruit last year, so fruit was divided amongst the volunteers and homeowners. Over 800lbs of fruit have been rescued since the project's inception in 2017.

Green Drinks Speaker Series

In 2020, WEC started to organize a second season of Green Drinks, in partnership with Grenfell Campus. The event features a short talk on a themed environmental question from one academic and one community speaker followed by audience questions in an informal atmosphere at Bootleg Brew Pub on a Wednesday evening.

This speaker series has become really popular since we introduced it in the fall of 2018, with a capacity crowd typically in attendance.

We were only able to organize one event in January 2020 before pandemic restrictions. Dr. Ivan Emke, Honorary Research Professor at Grenfell Campus and Annette George, owner of Crow Brook Orchard spoke to "Can increased food production be done sustainably in NL?".

We had another event lined up for late March with the topic How Can Small Scale Fisheries Thrive in NL? The planned speakers were Dr. Paul Foley of Grenfell Campus and Jason Spingle of the FFAW. Unfortunately this event had to be cancelled, and we weren't able to do another Green Drinks for the rest of 2020.

Plans for 2021 included bringing back an online version of Green Drinks if possible. We did actually start planning for this already, but the one event we had planned in late April had to be cancelled due to unforeseen circumstances. The topic was going to be How Can NL Plan for a Fossil-Free Future? With speakers Dr. Angela Carter of the University of Waterloo and Raymond Cusson of the Harris Centre Forecast NL Citizen Forum. We may be able to re-schedule this topic in a few months. The series as a whole is now on hold until this fall, when we will consider options of how to bring it back, either online or in person.

Public Policy & Consultations

In the past year, we participated in the following ways in public policy:

- **Oil and Gas Letter:** In December we sent a letter to the Premier calling for the recently appointed Economic Recovery Team (PERT) to focus on a transition away from fossil fuels. We called for an end to further oil & gas exploration as well as an end to fossil fuel subsidies. This garnered a radio interview on VOXM. We also had an interview on CBC Radio recently, when the PERT released their report.
- **People's Recovery NL:** Early this year, we joined the People's Recovery NL, which is a broad provincial coalition created as an alternative to the Premier's Economic Recovery Team. The People's Recovery NL is creating its own set of recommendations for economic recovery based on the principles of social, economic and environmental justice.
- **Green and Just Recovery:** In December 2020, we signed onto the national initiative, Principles for a Just Recovery, a coalition of over 500 organizations that are calling on all levels of government to build back better after the pandemic.
- **Atlantic Food Vision:** Early this year we signed onto the Atlantic Food Systems Recovery Vision, which includes community groups in the four Atlantic provinces. We created a series of principles to create a sustainable and just food system in the region.
- **Citizen Engagement Report:** We worked with the Environmental Policy Institute at Grenfell who produced a short report for us on how citizens can engage with environmental policy. The report outlines ways that citizens can interact with multiple levels of government on environmental policy topics. It's now available on the EPI website. It was originally intended as the basis for a workshop, but that was put on hold last year and we will have a look at this again when possible.
- **Green Drinks:** In January, we engaged academic and community speakers for our Green Drinks Speaker series on how to increase food production sustainably in the province.

Plans for 2021 include organizing an online Town Hall to connect federal and provincial politicians with their constituents about current environmental issues, including commitments that have been made and any progress on these since the last election. This event currently is tied up in scheduling difficulties, but hopefully will happen sometime this year. We also plan to continue the discussion related to oil and gas, possibly with another letter to the Premier, and of course we hope to re-start Green Drinks in the fall.

Communications

We revamped our website in 2020, and launched it in December. It has a much cleaner look, features some professional photography, as well as some of our own, and is also more user-friendly particularly the pages for joining as a member or volunteer.

In 2020, our main social media platform was Facebook. We have a general WEC Page plus two Facebook Groups – one called Western NL Food Skills where people can share info, questions and resources related to food skills; the other is WEC NL Community Gardens which connects all the gardeners in our 4 gardens. We also have Twitter and Instagram accounts, which we use less extensively. We increased our Facebook Page Followers by close to 300 over the past year, and now have over 1100. Our numbers in the Western NL Food Skills Group also jumped from 180 members to 342.

We re-formatted our regular monthly email early in the year, and continued with short updates and reminders on our activities and events. The numbers on our email list continued to grow steadily in 2020. We added about 100 more email subscribers and have now reached almost 700. We also get a great rate of engagement with the monthly email.

In 2020, we also produced two issues of WEC's bi-annual newsletter, containing summaries of projects, our written submissions on various issues, book reviews, sustainability tips, and more. The newsletter was posted on the WEC website, sent to our email list, and distributed at local coffee shops and libraries.

Plans for 2021 include creating a communications plan that will help us increase and improve our social media presence, continuing to build our website, and producing two newsletters. We have also recently sent out a survey to get feedback from our members on our activities and communication preferences. We will analyze those results in a few months.