

COUNCIL TRAVEL REPORT



WHAT: Chiefs of Ontario Food Sovereignty Forum

WHEN: March 6, 2025

WHERE: Toronto, ON

WHO: Chief Tesha Rourke
Kylee Tarbell, EcDev Director

WHY: The forum provided a space to discuss key challenges, barriers, and solutions related to First Nations food security and sovereignty. As a member of the COO Economic Development Committee, Chief Rourke participated in a panel discussion, sharing insights on how food security impacts Akwesasne.

**NEXT
STEPS:**

- Funding for AMBE Schools – Securing support for school meal programs, traditional food integration, and food sovereignty education.
- Strengthening Community-Based Food Programs – Expanding community gardens, food preservation workshops, and land-based food initiatives.
- Advocating for Policy Changes – Addressing cross-border restrictions on traditional foods and pushing for greater recognition of Indigenous food sovereignty.





COUNCIL TRAVEL REPORT

For Immediate Release:

Enniskó:wa/March 24, 2025

CHIEFS OF ONTARIO FOOD SOVEREIGNTY FORUM **CHIEF TESHA ROURKE**

Tsi Snaihne District Chief Tesha Rourke recently attended the Chiefs of Ontario (COO) Food Sovereignty Forum in Toronto, Ontario, on March 6, 2025. This forum provided a space to discuss key challenges, barriers, and programs related to First Nations food security and sovereignty.

Chief Rourke was joined by Kylee Tarbell, Director of Economic Development, representing Akwesasne in discussions on traditional food access, food sovereignty policy, and sustainable solutions. As a member of the Chiefs of Ontario Economic Development Committee, Chief Rourke was invited to sit on a panel to share insights on how food security affects the Akwesasne community.

HIGHLIGHTS & KEY THEMES:

Barriers to Traditional Food Access

- First Nations communities continue to struggle with food insecurity due to rising costs, reliance on processed foods, and environmental contamination that limits hunting, fishing, and gathering.
- Climate change is disrupting wildlife patterns and affecting the availability of traditional food sources.
- A lack of funding and infrastructure for community-based food programs makes it difficult to establish long-term solutions.

Panel Discussion: Chiefs' Perspectives on Food Sovereignty

- Chief Rourke participated in a panel alongside other Chiefs, emphasizing the link between food sovereignty and community health.
- She highlighted Akwesasne's unique challenges, including cross-border restrictions that make transporting traditional foods between districts difficult and the lasting effects of industrial pollution on local land and water.
- The discussion reinforced that food sovereignty is more than food security — it is about preserving culture, traditions, and Indigenous rights to hunt, fish, and grow food sustainably.

Research and Policy Updates

- Presentations from experts, including Dr. Malek Batal and Dr. Kyle Bobiwash, provided insights into food insecurity in First Nations communities and the environmental factors contributing to these challenges.



- Reports linked food insecurity to serious health concerns such as diabetes, heart disease, and mental health struggles.
- Research emphasized the importance of cultural food security, ensuring access to and knowledge of traditional food preparation to maintain Indigenous identity and well-being.

Programs and Solutions

- Various organizations presented funding opportunities and programs aimed at improving food security in First Nations communities.
- Discussions highlighted school-based nutrition programs, community gardens, and initiatives supporting traditional harvesting, hunting, and farming.
- The forum emphasized the role of Indigenous knowledge in food systems and ways to incorporate traditional practices into modern food security strategies.

TAKEAWAYS & NEXT STEPS:

Funding Available for AMBE Schools

- A major outcome from the forum was learning that funding is available for Ahkwesasne Mohawk Board of Education (AMBE) schools to apply for food security and nutrition initiatives.
- This funding could support school meal programs, introduce more locally grown and traditional foods into cafeteria menus, and develop food sovereignty education programs.
- Follow-up is needed to ensure AMBE can access these resources to benefit Akwesasne youth.

Strengthening Community-Based Food Programs

- There is potential to expand community gardens, support local food producers, and encourage land-based food education programs.
- Partnerships with other First Nations who have successfully implemented food sovereignty initiatives could help Akwesasne develop long-term solutions.
- Additional funding should be pursued for greenhouse projects, traditional hunting and fishing programs, and food preservation workshops for families.

Advocacy for Policy Changes

- Continued advocacy is needed to support First Nations food sovereignty policies, particularly regarding cross-border trade, funding access, and environmental protection.
- Addressing legislative barriers that prevent the transport of traditional foods between Akwesasne's districts is a key priority.
- Collaboration with provincial and federal governments is necessary to push for greater recognition of Indigenous food rights.

MOHAWK COUNCIL OF AKWESASNE

Sustaining our inherent rights, facing challenges together to build a strong and healthy future.



The Chiefs of Ontario Food Sovereignty Forum reinforced the urgent need to address food insecurity in First Nations communities while protecting and restoring traditional food systems. This event provided a valuable opportunity to share Akwesasne's experiences, learn from other communities, and identify potential funding and policy solutions.

Moving forward, securing funding for schools, expanding community-based food programs, and advocating for policy changes will be key priorities. By working together, we can ensure future generations have access to healthy, culturally appropriate foods while maintaining our traditional ways of life.

For more information on the presentations: <https://www.chiefsmeeting.com/first-nations-food-sovereignty-forum>

AKWESASNE-LAND WHERE THE PARTRIDGE DRUMS

PHONE: 613-575-2250
FAX: 613-575-2181

PO BOX 90
AKWESASNE, QUEBEC H0M1A0

101 TEWESATENI ROAD
AKWESASNE, ONTARIO K6H 0G5

WWW.AKWESASNE.CA
INFO@AKWESASNE.CA