

# YXE Food Tour Development

Report prepared for The Saskatoon Food Council

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## Executive Summary

This report furthers the exploration of developing culinary tours in the Saskatoon Region. After a review of the Just Food Tours Business Plan and initial discussions with potential tour stops and operators in the community, the following goal was identified for this phase of the project:

**To make recommendations that support the current ecosystem to take the next steps toward a viable food tourism program, in a way that supports and strengthens relationships in the community.**

The process involved discussions with non-profit organizations, Riversdale restaurants, departments at the University of Saskatchewan, and existing tour stops on the Osler Local Food Trail. Through discussions, other businesses, farmers and restaurants who had taken part in food tour pilots or *ad hoc* tours were also added to the list. The list is by no means exhaustive.

An analysis of existing tours, their level of success and potential partners in building capacity for culinary tours revealed concern over the financial viability of a food tourism organization as well as a division of audiences between locals (the preferred audience of small businesses, restaurants and farmers) and out-of-town visitors (a target audience for tourism organizations).

A thematic organization identifies four themes and supporting messages to cover during any food tour. Choosing an organizing theme but touching on all four in any food tour will help to assemble food tour stops. The four themes are:

1. 6000+ years of connection with the land
2. 'One Big Small Town'
3. Commitment to Sustainability
4. A Hub of Innovation

The recommendations focus on alternative culinary events that support businesses and appeal to residents, while reserving customized culinary tours for visitors. Tours can be assembled by selecting partners listed in the food tours resource guide (a living document that will be managed by [Tourism Saskatoon](#) and added to over time) and a food tour 'recipe':

- **Get people on the land.**
- **Demonstrate tangible links** between farms and restaurants and food makers
- Select tour stops that are along a **simple route**.
- **Try to offer a taste at every stop.**
- **Select a main theme** to tie the experience together. Use the remaining themes and related messages as supporting content.
- Offer the group a **guide with a deep knowledge** of the food scene and food systems.
- **Give the floor to owner-operators.**
- **Choose 3 to 4 stops** and try to keep the entire tour within **3 to 4 hours**.

Through a combination of leveraging existing resources (such as local personalities and goodwill among partners) and strengthening shared infrastructure (such as transportation sources, virtual footage and a home base for culinary tourism in Saskatoon), the fledgling culinary tourism industry in Saskatoon will build capacity over the next 5–10 years toward a sustainable and robust food tour program.

## 1.0 Introduction

The Saskatoon Food Council has been researching and developing the food tourism sector in and around Saskatoon with the help of WD funding to develop and improve agri-tourism opportunities in the rural area surrounding Saskatoon.

A business plan was prepared by the Canadian Culinary Tourism Alliance for the establishment of Just Food Tours, a social enterprise to be administered by the Saskatoon Food Council. Next steps were to include further development of the Osler Local Food Trail through conducting more tours and adding more farms to the tour route.

COVID-19 has had a massive impact on tourism, food production and opportunities for public gatherings in our province and city. The proposals within the Just Food Tours business plan required 'ground truthing' to determine whether they were viable or sustainable in the current post-pandemic climate.

When changes in personnel happened at the Saskatoon Food Council, Tall Order Communications was contacted to further develop the Just Food Tours plan. The original goal to develop more food tours was quickly replaced with the task of revisiting the local food ecosystem and potential for culinary tourism given the post-pandemic situation.

This document outlines our analysis of the previous study, an analysis of the state of the culinary tourism landscape in Saskatoon and Saskatchewan right now, including tours that have been piloted to date, a 'recipe' for what makes a great food tour, further development of goals and messages to consider in future tour development, recommendations for next steps, and the creation of a living document of potential food tourism partners, what they would offer a food tour experience, how they are willing to be involved, and what sort of reciprocation would be valuable to them.

## 2.0 Process

This phase of the project included a review and analysis of the Just Food Tours Business Plan and a series of formal and informal meetings with the current players in the landscape.

The Just Food Tours Business Plan had some great general ideas regarding food tours, but it was immediately clear that costing estimates needed to be tested among Saskatoon businesses. The current process of arranging food tours is entirely *ad hoc* and is created by Saskatoon's business network primarily through calling in favours. A check-in with various businesses and non-profits revealed tension, exhaustion and misunderstandings, and also much willingness to share resources and create a successful food tour program. What emerged is a sense of where Saskatoon is, in its capacity to deliver tours.

With these initial discoveries, we adjusted our proposed deliverables to a new approach: to develop a list of resources who have expressed interest in being involved, outlining what they have to offer a food tour program, and what they need in reciprocation in order to have the program be sustainable for them. The answer differs from organization to organization, depending on their structure (non-profit, for profit) and mission (supporting members vs. keeping the doors of a business open).

**Our goal is to make recommendations that support the current ecosystem to take the next steps toward a viable food tourism program, in a way that supports and strengthens relationships in the community.**

This report reflects the outcomes of a long series of conversations with non-profit organizations, restaurants, farmers, and food consultants

## 2.1 Conversations to Date

### Non Profit Organizations

[Tourism Saskatoon](#) (Jeff Fehr, Darby Sutherland)  
 Saskatoon Food & Ingredient Processing Cluster ([Joanne Baczuk](#))  
[Meewasin](#) (Amy Wall, Magel Sutherland, Samantha Cowan)

### Retail Outlets

[SaskMade Marketplace](#) (Emily Yan)  
[Federated Cooperatives LTD](#) (Sav Bellissimo)

### Greenhouses

[U of S Greenhouses](#) (Jackie Bantle)  
[Floating Gardens](#) (Rachel Buhler)

### Farmers

[Farm One Forty](#) (Arlie LaRoche)  
[Pine View Farms](#) (Melanie Boldt)  
[Sunnyside Creamery](#) (Bas and Martha Froese-Kooijenga)

### Brewers/Distillers

[9 Mile Legacy Brewers](#) (Shawn Moen)  
[Black Fox Distillery](#) (Barb and John Coté)

### Restaurants/Food Service

[U of S Culinary Services](#) (James McFarland)  
[Taste Hospitality Group](#) (Chris and Courtney Hill)

[Primal Restaurant](#) (Christie Peters)  
[Odd Couple](#) (Andy Yuen)  
[Dakota Dunes Resort](#) (Chris Standing)

#### Cooking Classes

[Local Kitchen YXE](#) (Caitlin Olauson)

#### Consultants

[Inspired By Nature Culinary Consulting](#) (Chef Jenni Willems)  
[Flat Out Food](#) (Jenn Sharp)  
[Alberta Food Tours](#) (Karen Anderson)  
[Glyph Creative](#) (Christian Boyle)  
[Honey Willow Creations](#) (Honey Constant)

Informal conversations also took place at the Tourism Saskatoon Christmas Party and the CEOs Meeting for the Saskatchewan Food and Ingredient Cluster. We connected with the University of Saskatchewan Strategic Communications (Namarta Kochar) at the Tourism Saskatoon event and reached out to the communications department at the College of Agriculture and Bioresources. That conversation was requested to be postponed until the University of Saskatchewan is reopened to the public and to tours.

Following discussions with the Saskatoon Food Council Board, the potential scope for this project expanded, but the schedule did not. Several other businesses and organizations were approached that did not respond to the request, or stated they were interested in the project, but did not have time to respond within the timeframe. A partial list of others who expressed interest or whom we were recommended to contact, but were not reached within the timeframe are included here:

[Pig & Pantry](#)  
[Saskatoon Tribal Council Economic Development](#) (Dana Soonias)  
[Dark Side Donuts/Night Oven Bakery](#) (both owned by Bryn Rawlyk)  
[Fable Ice Cream](#)  
[Saskatchewan Food Industry Development Centre](#)  
[Bannock Express](#)

Now that the scope of the project has the potential to widen, a whole new exploration of other neighborhoods in Saskatoon, such as Broadway, and of other regions in the province, and areas outside Saskatoon could take place.

## 3.0 Just Food Tours Study - Review

The CCTA's business plan for Just Food Tours was a comprehensive plan that identified the purpose of the social enterprise, conducted a market analysis of the food tour audience in Saskatoon, made recommendations for marketing, sales and operations of the enterprise, and outlined an implementation plan. To maintain the continuum of planning, we will reiterate the Goals, Objectives and Success Factors outlined in the Just Food Tours Business Plan.

### Goals

- The local food network is stronger
- Tourism dollars are both increased and localized
- Visitors are exposed to the foodways of the area
- Unique places and spaces can be accessed through food tours
- Students and residents are employed by the social enterprise
- One tour is recognized as a Canadian Signature Experience

### Objectives

- To use tourism for good
- To actualize the mission and mandate of the Saskatoon Food Council
- To create more positive impacts than negative externalities
- To cultivate resident love and visitor appreciation for the local food system
- To foster collaboration and facilitate the creation of synergy

### Success Factors (bolding for emphasis)

1. Developing strong **long-term partnerships with experience providers** will be critical to the success of Just Food Tours.
2. Taking the time to develop the **right messaging and materials** when approaching the experience providers will be essential to begin building these relationships.
3. Vendors will want to understand the **benefits of participating** on a food tour and it will be Just Food Tours' responsibility to explain this.
4. The tours need to be developed so that participants experience the right **balance of fun, information, education and food**.
5. Tour presentations and scripts need to be carefully crafted to highlight unique aspects of the organizations' values and the food tastes, as well the historical, cultural, and architectural elements of the tour.
6. The development of Just Food Tours image and branding is important but more critical to the success will be **understanding the market**.

7. The likelihood of success increases if there is **strong sectoral support**. As such, fostering the existing relationship with Tourism Saskatoon and building resilient partnerships/relationships with other tourism industry partners is important for the growth and success of Just Food Tours.

This phase of the project strives to address the elements of the success factors shown in bold.

The finally realized end goal of the Just Food Tours enterprise remains constant.

The related services provided by the social enterprise include the easy-booking and seamless delivery of the pre-packaged tours, towards meeting several customer needs, including but not limited to the following:

- Participating in food tours that are enjoyable, safe, secure, and accessible
- Exploring the destination with a group of like-minded individuals
- Learning about the local food system, including how regenerative agricultural practices can be part of the solution to global warming
- Learning about Saskatoon and area's foodways
- Increasing awareness of, and capacity to respond to, food-based issues
- Tasting delicious and place-based products and dishes

The question that we raised during this analysis is: what is the most realistic and sustainable timeline to accomplish the end goal in a way that also realizes the success factors?

## 4.0 Analysis

Immediate findings from initial conversations with food tourism organizers and potential businesses revealed a series of existing and previously piloted food tours and reports on their success, as well as the generalized needs of the various organizations and audiences that might be reached.

### 4.1 Previous, Current and Upcoming Food Tours in Saskatoon

#### 4.1.1 SaskMade Marketplace

SaskMade Marketplace, in partnership with Chef Jenni, purchased a van with the intention of using it for bespoke food tours. Maximum participant numbers were limited to the size of the van: 10 people including the guide and driver.

The team developed and piloted one tour - 'Bridges' explored cultural as well as physical bridges. The tour lasted about 4 hours, and brought participants first to Wanuskewin and then to Petrofka Orchard, exploring Indigenous and settler (Doukhobor) perspectives on food.



A second tour, from Makers Malt – malt growers in Rosthern – to Nine Mile Legacy Brewery was planned as a pilot when the COVID-19 pandemic closed down tours.

Emily Yan, owner of SaskMade Marketplace, has stated that while they are interested in supporting food tour development, food tours will not be a strategic focus for SaskMade Marketplace in the next two years. The logistics of using the van for tours, considering how it limits tour numbers and the insurance it requires, do not make that a desirable transportation option. Emily recommended hiring a bus and driver instead. SaskMade Marketplace does have several possible offerings related to food tours that have been captured in the Food Tours Resource Guide.

#### 4.1.2 Local Kitchen

During the summer of 2021 the Local Kitchen scheduled a regularly occurring walking tour, “Rooted”, starting at the Askiy Garden, stopping at Nine Mile Legacy before making soup out of Askiy Garden produce at the Local Kitchen. Leftovers were donated to the Community Fridge. Caitlin Olauson reported that it was difficult to fill the tours and they were not a financial success. It is likely that COVID was a factor in low numbers, but we also heard from Alberta Food Tours that locals seem to like to manage their own time and not attend scheduled tours.

Caitlin noted that they have seen success from self-guided cooking classes on The Local Kitchen’s website. Users pay a fee to download the information, and can arrange it on their own time with their own guests. Alberta Food Tours has a similar program that could be leveraged in various neighbourhoods, and Caitlin confirmed that might be a less labour-intensive way to provide a food tour experience without having to provide staff to host it.

#### 4.1.3 Tourism Saskatoon

Through discussions with various owner-operators, we heard of some food tours that have been assembled on an *ad hoc* basis, which seem to tick many of the boxes of an ideal food tour, such as time frame, taste experiences, deepening connections to farmers, and strengthening ties between rural and urban experiences. One such example is a three-stop tour that involved Black Fox Farm and Distillery, Farm One Forty, and dinner back in the city at Odlá, where visitors would enjoy food grown at Farm One Forty and drinks from Black Fox.

#### 4.1.4 Dakota Dunes

Dakota Dunes is hoping to further develop its food-related offerings. At this point, they offer their guests a tea and bannock experience by the fire. Chris Standing, formerly of Wanuskewin, is their new educational programmer, and he also mentioned a tour that has taken place involving guests staying at Dakota Dunes Casino Resort, stopping at Bannock Express in downtown Saskatoon and then carrying on to Wanuskewin for a tour. This tour offers an ideal continuum of living Indigenous cultural evolution, from ancient archaeological sites and living Indigenous heritage to modern expressions of Indigenous comfort food and examples of self-determination.

Dakota Dunes also owns passenger vans to bring people from downtown Saskatoon to either Dakota Dunes, or occasionally out to Wanuskewin for special events.

#### 4.1.5 Wanuskewin

Wanuskewin piloted their Han Wi (full moon) dinners prior to COVID-19 and plans to continue them next summer. These dinners happen one or two nights in June, July, August and September. Some of the dates are already sold out. The experience is one-of-a-kind and very memorable, but also has accessibility issues, as the event is held on the river bank cliffs across the Opimihaw Valley from Wanuskewin.

Wanuskewin also hosts plant medicine walks, bison walks (among other cultural offerings) and has restaurant and banquet facilities featuring Indigenous-inspired foods and ingredients.

#### 4.1.6 Meewasin

Meewasin is unique in Saskatoon in that they employ professional interpreters and develop educational programs on a regular basis. As custodians of the Saskatchewan River Valley in the Saskatoon area, they also reinvest whatever fees they charge back into the community.

Meewasin piloted a 'Naughty By Nature' adult-oriented evening at Beaver Creek Conservation Area that involved mixing a cocktail using local spirits and locally harvested herbs, walking the land to view wild plants and signs of animal life (and telling stories about animals finding mates) and providing a boxed charcuterie dinner featuring locally sourced ingredients and promoting local businesses, paired with a locally brewed beer or cider. Meewasin expects to continue Naughty By Nature in 2022.

Meewasin is also in the process of developing a Heritage Walking Tour in downtown Saskatoon which will focus on the natural and built heritage of the city, but which also has the potential to include restaurant stops. The walking tour will be piloted in April of this year.

#### 4.1.7 Alberta Food Tours

While Alberta Food Tours are not located in Saskatoon or Saskatchewan, they are an established business whose experience is relevant to developing such a venture in Saskatoon. Karen Anderson, founder of Alberta Food Tours, said that only one of their food tours is currently operating. That one takes place entirely indoors at the Banff Springs Hotel because "all four food stops are under one roof and there's low turnover within the team and a high commitment to excellence that matches our own." She expressed skepticism about when any other food tours would run again, citing financial risks, staff shortages among restaurant partners, and the fact that "people want to do things independently and on their own time."

Karen noted that a potential development that she could help with as a consultant is the Saskatoon Food Finder, which would be a spin off of the [Alberta Food Finder](#) game: "It's low

cost to consumers, enlists loads of partners, shares history, art and culture and is FUN - all caps.”

Alberta Food Tours’ experience is important to note, as Alberta has four times Saskatchewan’s population and the international tourism draw of Jasper and Banff. Calgary and Edmonton are three to four times Saskatoon’s population. If the financial risk in communities of that size is too great, we need to take note of what sustainable culinary tourism development looks like.

## 4.2 Who Tells the Story?

The Just Food Tours report identified the need to hire guides that would be trained to run tours, given a script and key messages to follow.

While it would be ideal to have a professional guide or interpreter available to lead the tours, this may not be immediately possible. The Saskatoon Food Council may not be able to raise money to pay for a full time tour guide, and the greatest value in a tour guide comes from deep knowledge of the Saskatoon food scene and having established relationships with the businesses on the tours and the spaces between them.

There is also great value in meeting the owner-operators and hearing directly from them on a tour. In discussions with farmers, restaurant and brewery/distillery owners, there was skepticism about whether a scripted tour would be able to take pressure off owner-operators during tours. The overwhelming opinion was that owner-operators or trusted long-time employees would still be required to set up the business to receive the tour and also tell the story of the business.

Should culinary tourism partners find an ideal tour guide candidate who has the industry connections and knowledge of the Saskatoon food scene, it may be worth it to hire them. Otherwise, a knowledgeable host could be anyone from Saskatoon Tourism, anyone from the list of consultants in this document, a professional interpreter from Meewasin, or perhaps guides sourced from a partnership with the University of Saskatchewan’s Education or Drama programs. In the case of the interpreter from Meewasin, it may be necessary to include more scripting information, since these professional interpreters have a deeper knowledge of natural history rather than agricultural and food history.

## 4.3 Who is the Audience?

Historically, the majority of Saskatchewan’s tourism numbers have been Saskatchewan residents or visitors from neighbouring provinces, usually staying with family. This may change with future movements toward marketing Indigenous tourism packages to international audiences, but for now it is important to understand that fact.

Tourism Saskatoon is also in the process of marketing Saskatoon as a conference destination, which has the potential to bring in greater numbers of business travellers. Saskatoon is a hub

for research and agricultural business, and those travelers may also be a target as tour capacity grows.

When imagining the evolution of culinary tourism in Saskatoon, it is important to note that locals and Saskatchewan residents may have different interests than those who are entirely unfamiliar with the community. A successful culinary tourism program may require different approaches for residents and visitors.

#### 4.4 Competing Needs of Tour Partners

Tourism Saskatoon is clearly interested in building capacity for tourists from elsewhere, whether other regions in Saskatchewan, the rest of Canada, or international tourists. They are also interested in tour experiences that could add value to conference packages.

On the other hand, local businesses, including farmers, retail locations, restaurants and brewers are more interested in building relationships with locals who have the potential to become regular customers. In their eyes, tourists are a one-time meal or tour stop, and that has limited value in a cost-benefit analysis of participating in tours.

#### 4.5 Potential Partners

##### 4.5.1 Non-Profits

[Tourism Saskatoon](#) is a connector and promoter of Saskatoon businesses and tourism opportunities. They have agreed to manage the food tours resource guide upon the completion of this phase of the project.

[Meewasin](#) is a unique conservation education organization that employs professional interpreters and runs educational programs. While food is not their specialty, they do offer food-based programming and are interested in developing partnerships. Any fees paid to Meewasin are reinvested in the community.

[Wanuskewin](#) is an Indigenous organization with a world-class interpretive centre and conference space. They have developed high-value dinner experiences and land-based educational programs.

[The Food Centre Inc](#) is a food processing centre that provides food production expertise, training and facility rentals to emerging food businesses in Saskatchewan. They are a source of contact information for emerging businesses, as well as having an important economic development story of their own to tell in relation to Saskatoon and Saskatchewan's food scene.

**Saskatoon Food & Ingredient and Processing Cluster** (website under development) is a network of organizations within the food and ingredient industry in Saskatoon, including Federated Co-operatives Ltd., The Food Centre, Ag West Bio, start-up companies, producer

organizations and more. They are a potential source of industry connections and support for culinary tourism development.

#### 4.5.2 Farmers

Farmers currently involved in the Local Food Trail continue to be interested in being food tour partners. Some of the original Local Food Trail members are no longer in business (Steve Guenther, Anna's Orchard) and others have questioned whether food tours are the best way for them to connect with their target markets, which are local residents interested in where their food comes from.

Working farms have seasonal practices (slaughter dates, for example) that require consideration, so while farms offer an authentic rural connection experience, the realities of that authentic experience need to be accommodated.

#### 4.5.3 Restaurants

Restaurant owners that have survived the pandemic shut-down are highly aware of the costs of operation and have had to get very real about the costs of favours and freebies. The restaurant owners approached for this study spoke with one voice about needing to safeguard their busy times for paying customers, and stated that they would be selective about participating in tour events that supported their bottom line rather than compromising it.

In general, that means selecting tour stops that land outside of lunch, dinner and happy hours, and expectations of fair pay for staff and food costs. Promotional costs have less value for restaurants when they are serving out-of-town visitors.

#### 4.5.4 Distillers and Brewers

This project involved speaking with 9 Mile Legacy Brewing Company since they have a storefront on 20th Street, and Black Fox Farm and Distillery, as they have participated in previous tours. In both cases, and the case of other brewing and distilling businesses in Saskatoon, they are a great resource for both tours and special events, since they have bookable spaces that can be used for events that promote multiple businesses at once.

The Slow Food in Canada National Summit in 2018, for example, hosted a 'meet the farmers' cocktail evening at Lucky Bastard Distillery where local chefs were matched with local farmers to create food samples from the farmers' products. Both the chefs and the farmers were present at their stations to talk to guests. The event was a great success and also required extensive planning. Slow Food paid chefs and farmers for attending with the proceeds of their ticket sales.

#### 4.5.5 Retail and Food Makers

Local food retailers included in this project included The Cure, which is a Riversdale Business and also connected to Riversdale restaurants, and SaskMade Marketplace, since it had piloted food tours in the past, and it specializes in promoting local farmers and makers. SaskMade has

identified several ways that their storefront and staff could participate both as a tour stop and as a tour provider when tour stops feature their members.

There is inherent value in a tour stop (or stops) that allows guests to purchase items related to the tour. Other retail outlets that would likely want to be involved are the [Pig & Pantry](#) and the [Little Market Box](#) which has recently relocated to 20th Street.

## 4.6 Future Opportunities

There are some exciting emerging projects and opportunities that will substantially expand the culinary tourism landscape in the Saskatoon area in the next 5 to 10 years. These are explored below.

### 4.4.1 Indigenous Tourism Corridor

Christian Boyle of Glyph Creative has been working with Beardy's and Okemasis' First Nations as well as several partners along the historic corridor between Chief Whitecap Dakota First Nation, Duck Lake and Batoche. The corridor includes First Nations communities as well as Dakota Dunes Casino Resort, Wanuskewin, Duck Lake Regional Interpretive Centre and Batoche National Historic Site. The Indigenous Tourism Corridor will be Saskatchewan's first international multi-day export tour package.

The [Kichiota Partnership](#) is also working towards creating a destination near Fort Carlton that will offer overnight glamping accommodations and food-related events. Both the destination and the Indigenous Tourism Corridor are under development. The loose schedule for launch of the multi-day tour package is Spring 2023. This package has the potential to become a Canadian Signature Experience.

### 4.4.2 Meewasin Greenhouse Development

Meewasin is currently conducting a capital campaign to expand their native plant greenhouses and create a gathering and teaching space alongside them. Negotiations are underway with the University of Saskatchewan to determine a location for the development. When it is open (possibly 2024), there will be an Indigenous teaching space, food service spaces as well as the largest native plant greenhouse in Saskatchewan.

The addition of the greenhouse development to the University of Saskatchewan will fill an important gap in the food tourism infrastructure on campus. While there are many wonderful stories to tell that meet the goals outlined in the Just Food Tours business plan, the University campus lacks a purpose-built gathering space that is not part of its formal educational infrastructure. Having a space that is also in close proximity to the river valley also strengthens messaging related to Saskatoon's pre-contact landscape.

#### 4.4.3 University of Saskatchewan Strategic Plans

The University of Saskatchewan was closed to tours and the general public during the pandemic, and has not yet officially opened. Communications staff were not interested in discussing potential food tours until the university re-opens. However, a quick review of both the [University of Saskatchewan's](#) and the [College of Agriculture and Bioresources'](#) strategic plans show direct alignment, particularly in the areas of community outreach and collaboration, with the goals and messages of the Just Food Tours business plan.

Conversations with the U of S Greenhouse Manager and the U of S Culinary Services Director were also promising from both a tour and tasting perspective. Both programs have many demands on them, but if timing of tours fits with other commitments and avoids busy times (such as May when the horticulture program is planting and conducting plant sales, and September when classes are starting up), there appear to be many opportunities.

A future state of more formal culinary tours appears possible at the University of Saskatchewan once the Meewasin infrastructure is in place and the University reopens to the public. Further relationship building and requirement gathering will need to take place at a future date.

## 5.0 Thematic Framework

The themes and related messages outlined below are a touchstone that any food tour guide can come back to when building a script or a list of key points to make on any tour. They can also be shared with anyone (such as owner-operators of local businesses) who might speak on tour stops, to ensure that messaging is consistent with the Just Food Tours Business Plan and the Saskatoon Food Council's mandate.

### 5.1 Themes

#### **6,000+ Years of Connection with the Land**

What is now known as the Canadian Prairies supported thriving Indigenous populations who lived in a symbiotic relationship with the land and its wildlife. Settler farmers brought a new world view and have continued another kind of connection with the land. Our food producers and chefs explore the gifts of the land in their commitment to local food.

#### *Related Messages:*

**#Sincetimeimmemorial:** This land has supported humans with abundant food for millennia. Today we are known as 'the breadbasket of the world,' but that only scratches the surface of our contribution to global food systems.

- Before this land had its current political boundaries, there were other acknowledged boundaries between nations who had complex trading agreements that spanned the entire continent.
- Many current place names, including 'Saskatchewan' and 'Saskatoon' are related to trade routes and Indigenous foods.
- Bison was a staple food of pre-contact Indigenous peoples, and a keystone species for the entire prairie biome. The land and the way we feed ourselves changed drastically with the loss of the bison.

### **'One Big Small Town'**

The food industry in Saskatoon is small and tightly knit, and often more supportive than competitive. Small independent businesses, especially those committed to artisan quality and sourcing local products, work together where possible. Non-profit organizations have created a culture of innovation and support for local businesses.

#### *Related Messages:*

*#SaskBounty:* As people in this province always have, we connect over and gather to enjoy the bounty of the land, from bison and wildcrafted foods to locally developed fruits and vegetables, to grains and pulses.

- Wanuskewin offers archaeological evidence of 6,000 years of gathering to hunt and process food.
- Settlers learned from Indigenous peoples about wild foods available to harvest. Saskatoon is named after the ubiquitous Saskatoon berry.
- While prairie settlers did not always have a lot of resources, they usually had home grown and gathered food to share.
- We are a close-knit community, and that is especially true in the supportive atmosphere among our businesses, and all the community building organizations that support the industry.

### **Commitment to Sustainability**

Businesses and organizations who are committed to the local food culture are also working closely with local suppliers and integrating sustainable practices into their businesses (i.e., solar energy, circular waste programs).

Food security is also a commitment for many of these businesses. (I.e., Taste Group donating to the Friendship Inn, The Local Kitchen connecting with Askiy Garden, U of S Culinary Services offering a food program for students in need).

#### *Related Messages:*



**#SKLocalFood:** Saskatchewan agricultural policy supports export agriculture and focuses on our position in the global food economy. Yet there is a growing commitment among residents, farmers and business owners to develop a strong local food economy.

- Saskatchewan exports nearly 70% of what it produces. Saskatchewan is the world's leading exporter of lentils, peas, canola, flax, oats and durum wheat.
- Historically, Saskatchewan has produced approximately 80 percent of Canada's mustard crop.
- Saskatchewan is home to the Global Institute on Food Security and the Global Institute on Water Security, and researchers continue to develop new varieties that are resilient in our climate and also adaptive to climate change.
- Local food is a way to combat climate and supply chain disruptions as the world becomes more complicated.
- Local food builds community and strengthens relationships - and creates resilient local economies.
- Local food is fresh and tastes great - pair that with some of Saskatchewan's export products, and you've got a broad culinary palette to paint with!
- Food miles have a large ecological footprint, and anyone interested in lowering their eco-footprint may want to consider choosing local food.

## **An Innovation Hub**

The Saskatoon Food Centre, the Food Ingredient Cluster, Ag West Bio, the University of Saskatchewan are all supporting applied food innovations and product development. Saskatoon's food system is bolstered by a combination of research and development in agriculture, long standing farming traditions, and a strong independent entrepreneurial spirit.

### *Related Messages:*

**#SaskMade:** Saskatoon is a food industry hub, from new crop developments at the University of Saskatchewan, the Food Centre, SaskMade Marketplace, food and brewing artisans and business owners, and is surrounded by agricultural lands producing grain, fruit and vegetables.

- Saskatchewan has historically developed cultivars that grow well here. Seager Wheeler Farm is a National Historic Site that shares the story of the earliest cultivar developments (including Red Fife Wheat, which is used extensively at The Night Oven Bakery, and is in Slow Food Canada's Ark of Taste).
- The University of Saskatchewan and several grain and pulse partners (CDC, SPG, NRC-PBI) work tirelessly to develop grains and pulses that are better adapted to Saskatchewan growing conditions.
- The University of Saskatchewan Fruit and Vegetable programs have bred prairie-hardy fruits that are now synonymous with Saskatchewan-grown foods and orchards: dwarf sour cherries and haskaps are two popular berries; several varieties of apples have also been developed. Fruit program staff will proudly share more.

## 6.0 Recommendations

We are not yet at the point where it is feasible to offer fixed schedule tours in an economically sustainable manner. It may be several years before we will be. It is, however, in the best interest of Saskatoon's farmers, tourism organizations, food retail and restaurants to continue to build capacity in the realm of culinary tourism, and there are dozens of stories to be told and meaningful connections to be made.

### 6.1 Create different experiences for guests/visitors and local residents

Visitors and residents have different awareness of the community and different interests when it comes to exploring the city.

Food tours can be custom-created from the resource guide to directly address the interests of **tourist groups** or **conference attendees**.

In the case of **locals**, monthly or **seasonal neighbourhood events** or promotions may inspire more uptake. Some suggestions that have emerged through discussions undertaken for this project include:

- **Neighbourhood crawls** - involving multiple restaurants or businesses within walking distance in one neighbourhood. It can be organized in a similar manner to Saskatoon's Folk Fest, using passports to identify which businesses you've been to.
- **Meet the Farmers** - organize a ticketed event at one of the breweries or distilleries that pairs local chefs with farmers. Local spirits, beer and cider can also be available, either provided from the host brewery, or in partnership with more than one brewer or distiller.

**Evergreen digital content** is a one-time development investment that would also provide easy to track success metrics. [The Local Kitchen](#) has measured the success of their downloadable cooking classes; a food tour could be organized in the same way. Varying levels of partner engagement can be employed in such a program – as in the [Alberta Food Finder](#), partners could agree to supply an exclusive food tasting to participants in the program. This level of engagement would work best with a custom digital platform/app that allows bookings so that the partners can be notified when to expect tour groups.

### 6.2 Follow a Food Tour Recipe

Customized food tours can support the overall brand of Saskatoon's culinary scene and meet the tour objectives from the Just Food Tours report by following the following recipe:

- **Get people on the land** – whether on a farm, along the river, at Wanuskewin, or in a park, the connection to the land is key to the experience.
- **Demonstrate tangible links** between farms and restaurants and food makers – this is not difficult to do in Saskatoon. The Farm One Forty – Odlā link is an obvious one, but when you're working with chefs and retail outlets that specialize in connecting with local growers, there will be many others.

- Select four stops that are along a **simple route**.
- **Try to offer a taste at every stop** – depending on the overall intent of the tour, consider small tastes that end in a sit-down meal at a restaurant or special event venue.
- **Select a main theme** to tie the experience together. Use the remaining themes and related messages as supporting content – ideally by the end of the tour, you will have had an opportunity to touch on all four throughout the experience.
- Offer the group a **guide with deep knowledge** of the food scene and food systems.
- **Give the floor to owner-operators** – they enrich the tour experience and inspire questions and meaningful conversations.
- **Choose 3 to 4 stops** and try to keep the entire tour within **3 to 4 hours**.

The combinations of stops can be selected based on both the interests of the tour group and availability of resources. Some ideal tours have already been tested by Tourism Saskatoon:

Black Fox Farm & Distillery → Farm One Forty → Odlá for dinner

This is a lovely, simple route into the country, stopping at the maker of the spirits and the farmer who raised the plants and animals you will be enjoying at your meal. The entire trip, including the meal, could easily take place within 3 to 4 hours.

Stay at Dakota Dunes → Wanuskewin Heritage Park → Bannock Express

This is a beautiful combination of experiences combining a luxury stay and sharing the contrast between the deep history of Wanuskewin and modern Indigenous culture at Bannock Express while also supporting Indigenous businesses and organizations. It is simple, thematically connected and experience-focused.

### 6.2.1 No need to overdo it

In the case of a Local Food Trail tour offered at the Slow Food in Canada National Summit, stops took place at the Sunnyside Creamery (where shopping was available), Anna's Orchard (where fruit samples were offered), Pine View Farms (where shopping was available), and then the group ended at Osler Mennonite Church for a sausage and verenyky lunch during which Floating Gardens made a presentation about their greenhouse.

This is an example of a tour that, while richly storied, interesting, and positively received by participants (which included a mix of locals who purchased tickets and conference attendees), the tour ran long and ended up at least an hour behind schedule. Three stops in this case would have been just right.

### 6.3 Invest in Personalities

You may not always be able to hire a consultant with deep knowledge of Saskatchewan's food systems, but it will be worth the financial investment and the need to plan ahead – the value of the tour will increase immeasurably. These are people who are woven into our culinary communities, have made their careers in food, and whose passion for Saskatchewan's land and bounty is deeply contagious. The storytelling experience will be far more meaningful to visitors with one of these consultants heading your tours.

Alternatively, these are also individuals who could be engaged to train tour guides when we have reached capacity that requires trained guides. A stop-gap measure could also be to arrange a story/idea-sharing session between food-focused consultants and Meewasin's professional interpreters to expand their knowledge of Saskatoon's foodways so that they are available to conduct food tours if needed (this would require discussion with Meewasin to ensure that staffing levels can accommodate this).

### 6.4 Develop Shareable Infrastructure

**Transportation** was noted as a deficiency for out of town tours. While some potential partners do own transportation, that transportation is not devoted to culinary tourism. Building capacity may include sharing access to a van or bus that can be appropriately insured for the purpose of tours.

Saskatoon Food Council board members also discussed the possibility of a future project involving **virtual tours** of farms or behind-the-scenes in kitchens or food production facilities that could be produced by students who would be learning about the food system as well as telling stories about it. This could build capacity for future tour guides as well. This would be a shareable resource that would support virtual tours or *in situ* tours that could be shown during 'Meet the Farmer' events.

The *Flat Out Food* TV series is also an existing resource that could be made available through an agreement with Jenn Sharp and CityTV.

### 6.5 Minimize Pressure on Organizations and Businesses

By giving enough notice to businesses, non-profits, and educational institutions whose primary purpose is not culinary tourism, we can reduce pressure on those entities and maintain positive relationships. If possible, arrange tours involving tourists or out-of-town guests to occur during shoulder times of day or shoulder seasons for the organizations and businesses involved. Considering the differences in availability and the diversity of busy times from organization to organization, tours should be able to be offered throughout the year without overly taxing anyone.

## 6.6 Select a Culinary Tour Base

Whether that organization is the Saskatoon Food Council or another organization, it would be ideal to house any resources in one place with a non-profit organization that can represent Saskatoon's culinary tourism offerings and be a source for tour development for anyone who is looking for it.

## [7.0 Food Tours Resource Guide](#)