

otâskosîhk mîna anohc: kimâmawi-wîkinaw ôma askîhk
Yesterday and today, all of us are living together on these lands.
Speaker Notes: Chelsea Vowel, October 20th, 2021

Slide 1: title

Let's start with the Cree term wîtaskîwin, which means a peace, an alliance, a truce. wîtaskîwin is HOW we live together on the land, the means by which this can happen. It acknowledges conflicts, even hostilities, which must be resolved before we can truly share the land. To illustrate this, there is a town in Alberta named Wetaskiwin. The Cree and Blackfoot, traditional enemies, were in conflict over the Red Deer River boundary. In 1867 a truce was struck, and the place became known as wîtaskîwinihk ispatinaw, the hills where the peace was made. Today, a peace must be made between settlers, Indigenous peoples, and everyone else living on these lands who have been impacted by colonialism and white supremacy. In particular, what does it mean to be a farmer on Treaty lands?

Slide 2: Historical Background, Farming on the Prairies

Many people acknowledge that certain foods were cultivated in the so-called Americas before contact with Europeans, staples like potatoes, corn, tomatoes and so on. Sometimes Canadians are taught about “settled” peoples like the Haudenosaunee who grew corn in plots that would be familiar to farmers today. Nonetheless, there is a persistent myth that Indigenous peoples did not engage in widespread cultivation because it did not necessarily look the way a European would expect it to. However, beans, corn, and squash were being grown on the prairies in the 1400s, along with sunflowers. Plants were not uprooted and brought into squares of land to be tended, they were left where they grew best. Mint and raspberry by the shores, wapato bulbs in lakes, berries of all kinds wherever they did best, and so on. Human intervention allowed these crops to flourish and to continue to grow, sustainably. Indigenous peoples used controlled burning, irrigation (and on the prairies very much with the help of beavers). So not only did humans greatly alter their surroundings, so did animal nations.

“Wilderness” is a myth. Think about how private property, and hierarchies of access impacts what farming looks like.

Slide 3: Treaties on the Prairies 1871 – 1908

Alberta is covered by Treaties 6, 7, 8; Saskatchewan by Treaties 4, 6, and 10; Manitoba by Treaties 1, 2, 3, and 5.

With the buffalo gone and fur-bearing animals in decline, signatories to the treaties did specifically ask for help to shift to another way to feed their people. Treaty 6 (1876) had specific provisions to provide farming implements and training to encourage First Nations to replace the buffalo. Uniquely, Treaty 6 also includes a “medicine chest” clause, a reminder that pandemics are nothing new for Indigenous peoples. Here are specific items listed in Treaty 6:

- 4 hoes per family, 2 spades, 1 plough for every three families, 1 harrow, 2 scythes and 1 whetstone, 2 hay forks and 2 reaping hooks etc

- For each Band, enough of wheat, barley, potatoes, and oats to plant the land, 4 oxen, 1 bull and 6 cows, 1 boar and 2 sows, 1 hand-mill etc
Many of the promised materials never arrived.

Would you like to know more about how Treaty Elders view the numbered treaties? This is a fantastic resource:

http://www.otc.ca/resource/purchase/treaty_elders_of_saskatchewan.html?page=5.

Slide 4: Settlers vs. First Nations

Settlers had little to no regulations on their farming, FNs were micromanaged officially through the *Indian Act* from 1876 on, directly after the creation of the reserves on the Prairies. Settlers, including Ukrainians, could attest to the difficulty of working land that had never been “broken” before. Working the land was difficult for everyone, regardless of their previous experience, or the materials available to them, but legislation and federal policies specifically targeted First Nations farmers.

Even contending with poor reserve land, floods, frost, lack of delivered treaty materials, FNs very successfully farmed in the 1880s, working as collectives and using dry land farming techniques. Despite the great effort required to clear and plant, much of the land was rich in nutrients and yielded crops that far outperformed what was possible in settler’s homelands, where the soil had been exhausted.

Three major policies implemented by Hayter Reed, Deputy Superintendent of Indian Affairs between the years of 1893 - 1897: **severality** (splitting land up, no one farmer owning more than 160 acres, to encourage individualism, undermining collective efforts, “left over lands” sold/leased to settlers); **peasant farming** (reduce output to subsistence levels to support a single family, to encourage “self-sufficiency”, no large-scale machinery to be used); **pass and permit system** (restricted ability of FNs to leave reserve, sell products, purchase farm equipment etc, every single commercial transaction had to be approved by an Indian agent).

For more information about these and other policies, please see: <https://apihtawikosisan.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/FNAgriculture.pdf>

Slide 5: “Idle Land” and the Greater Production Campaign

Post WWI: Greater Production Campaign, lands taken and given to settler veterans, Indigenous veterans were denied the same and often couldn’t even return to their reserves (enfranchisement), amendments to *Indian Act* making it easier to take land not being cultivated “properly”.

Scrapped in 1919, but all the amendments and land removals remained. Commissioner for Greater Production was allowed to spend Band monies and lease land to settlers.

The Soldier Settlement Board (SSB) acquired over 85,000 acres of Indian reserve land in Western Canada for non-Aboriginal soldier settlement in the years immediately after World War I.

For more information on the Soldier Settlement Board and the Greater Production Campaign:
http://www.mhs.mb.ca/docs/mb_history/37/infamousproposal.shtml

Slide 6: Indian Agents and White Farmers

Indian Agents controlled all FN funds, could lease lands to white farmers unilaterally for any amount, and could carry out farming experiments. White farmers benefited from cheap access to FN lands and labourers, and many resented the successes of their First Nations neighbours, and had the political power to petition for change.

Farm tractor purchased by Alexander FN funds, turned over to settler farmer on leased Alexander lands. All purchases had to be out of pocket by individual FNs, because Band funds were controlled by the Commissioner. Many FNs ended up as labourers on their own reserves on lands leased to settlers or on Greater Production farms that were NOT leased, but still run by settlers. That loss of revenue was a lot, had Blackfoot lands (8000 acres) been leased, it would have brought in \$160,000 over four years. That's about \$2.7 million now.

At the File Hills Colony in Sask on the Peepeekisis reserve, graduates of LeBret, File Hills and other Residential Skills brought in to farm, became a "model" farm colony. Forbidden from speaking their language, spirituality controlled (illegal under Indian Act still), couldn't sell what they grew or butcher own animals, every aspect of life controlled. Out-produced neighbours until the 1920s, droughts, rise of KKK in rural Sask, settler petitions signed to stop providing resources to File Hills.

Slide 7: Métis Farming

Métis don't have treaties, we were not guaranteed any farming support or supplies from any governments, but have often been managed in similar ways that have prevented successful Métis agrarianism. Métis have been farming since the beginning, it is one of our traditional subsistence activities. Root crops would be put in, and families would leave for the annual buffalo hunt. Métis also relied on fishing, trapping, and trade.

After the Riel Resistance in 1885, there were various schemes, generated initially by Father Lacombe, to get Métis back to farming in order to alleviate poverty, render us "productive citizens." Métis were required to clear a certain allotment of land by hand within a certain period or lose the land, almost impossible to accomplish. Many Métis were forced to live on Crown lands as "squatters": Road Allowance communities, etc. this also made it hard to farm successfully, as they could be forcibly relocated at any time - no "right" to stay on the land. There were Métis farming colonies in Saskatchewan and Alberta that had varying levels of success, but no overwhelming success because they were undermined in so many ways. Métis more often were working for white farmers seasonally - planting and harvesting, picking rocks, busting stumps, etc. for meagre wages.

In 1938 with the passage of the Metis Population Betterment Act, Métis were granted land by the Alberta government, called Settlements, and encouraged to farm. Initially, who could live on the

Settlements was based on economic destitution - you had to be poor to live on what remains the only government-administrated Métis land. Farming for market was nearly impossible to do, as they had no collateral for loans to buy equipment and supplies to compete with white farmers, the Social Credit government was unwilling to provide any resources or infrastructural support. Settlement Métis turned to producer cooperatives in other industries: fishing, fur, and timber, but their efforts in those areas were also undermined.

For more information on Métis farming colonies, and the often contradictory on-the-ground responses by non-Indigenous administrators, despite government interest in fostering these collectives, please read: <http://www3.brandonus.ca/cjns/10.2/barron.pdf>

For a very in-depth look at communist community organizer Jim Brady, who was deeply involved in the creation of the Settlements and producer co-ops, please read Molly Swain's MA thesis: https://era.library.ualberta.ca/items/92c80d28-bc1e-4744-88bd-558441a16ec4/view/727ba824-a660-441d-9d5b-fbd0fba93e91/Swain_Molly_S_201809_MA.pdf

Slide 8: Contemporary Issues

The first thing we must acknowledge is that this is not merely an interpersonal problem, or a situation where there are simply a few vocal racists making trouble. The issues are systemic, and require systemic solutions. This does not mean we cannot take individual actions, but it does mean we have to have a two-pronged approach, minimally. One, we must change our own practices, and two, we must push for wider, systemic change.

Canada relies on stolen lands. Canadian agriculture requires private property and the removal of Indigenous peoples. Canada's extractive (primary resource) economy needs unfettered access to sites, which it then abandons. All of this is framed as meritocracy rather than settler colonialism. Settler colonialism is a relational term, referring to the system that created Canada, and enables this nation state to continue to claim lands and resources here. Regardless of someone's particular background, or that of their ancestors (including why they left, what oppression they faced back home and here) anyone who moves to these lands becomes part of that system of settler colonialism.

To understand more about this term please read: <https://apihtawikosisan.com/2020/02/settling-on-a-name-names-for-non-indigenous-canadians/>

To add that that article I've linked to, you may be interested to know two Cree terms for Ukrainians: opítatowêw – (They speak differently), and apotasâkwak – (inside-out coats, sheepskin, fur on inside coats).

Slide 9: Murder on the Prairies

Colten Boushie was murdered August 9, 2016. Colten was from Red Pheasant First Nation in Saskatchewan, the person who shot him, Gerald Stanley, was acquitted. Stanley lived near Biggar, SK. The Civilian Review and Complaints Commission for the RCMP released 2 reports: 1 cleared the RCMP. Second found the way Boushie's family was notified of his death was discriminatory, and there were serious shortfalls in the investigation, but mostly cleared them. **THEY FOUND NO EVIDENCE BOUSHIE INVOLVED IN PROPERTY OFFENCES THAT NIGHT.** Found the RCMP press releases disproportionately focused on allegations of theft. RCMP destroyed recordings and transcripts. Meanwhile, Iain Stables, a white man in Saskatchewan stole \$1.2 million dollar's worth of farm equipment.

Kody Giffen and his brother Brandon murdered Kristian Ayoungman in March, 2019. From Siksika First Nation, went to school in Strathmore Alberta. There was a racist altercation in Strathmore bar, the brother then shot him later that night over a pack of cigarettes. Family and Siksika leadership chose to keep it out of the media as much as possible to prevent racial tensions from escalating. Kody plead guilty to manslaughter, Brandon went to trial this summer, the brothers originally claimed to be Indigenous but threw racial slurs at the group Kristian was with.

Anthony (son) and Roger Bilodeau (father) murdered Jake Sansom and Maurice Cardinal, March 27, 2020. Went moose hunting near Bonnyville to feed their families when the pandemic began.

St. Paul, formerly St Paul des Metis

<https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2020/3/10/the-back-streeters-and-the-white-boys-racism-in-rural-canada>

A 70 year old man from Ashmont threatened to shoot up a school and two First Nations near St Paul in 2019. Close to the town are Saddle Lake, Whitefish Lake, Kehewin Cree Nation, Kikino Settlement, Fishing Lake Settlement. Local white boys cruise around and beat homeless Indigenous people.

Slide 10: Rural Concerns?

Crime rates on the prairies in rural areas is higher than in urban areas, 42% (MN), 38% (SK), and 36% (AB). Opioid addiction is an issue all over the country, but the prairie provinces are also struggling with meth addiction. Prairie police forces have seen their budgets increased significantly as a result, a criminal law rather than a mental health and addictions approach. For example, Saskatchewan spends less per capital on mental health and addictions treatment than any other province in the country.

These concerns impact ALL people living in rural spaces on the prairies. Who is blamed and scapegoated is not so evenly distributed.