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Report on OMAFRA's Engagement with Indigenous Rights, Relationships, Consent and Representation

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1. Introduction

This report is the result of an analysis of OMAFRA's approach to Indigenous issues and relationships in agricultural land governance, planning, program design and implementation. It investigates the extent to which Indigenous rights, knowledge and approaches are understood, respected and prioritized in Ontario agricultural land use policy, and programming. The study draws from policy and planning document analysis along with a series of informal discussions and 27 interviews with OMAFRA staff and external contacts who are working in and with Indigenous communities in the area of land, food and agriculture. The experiences of external contacts affirm broader analyses and conclusions made through important studies including the Final Report and Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015), the Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (2019), and the Calls to Action Accountability: A 2021 Status Update on Reconciliation (2021). While these reports— alongside the recent Third Party Review on Anti-Black Racism (2021) and the Ontario Public Service Third Party Review of Inclusive Workplace Policies and Programs (2021)—reveal that anti-Indigenous and anti-Black racism and exclusion are not unique to OMAFRA, it is important for each ministry to explore and understand the particular ways that these issues manifest. Further, while I commend the Ontario Public Service (OPS) for initial steps taken through recent investigations to expose and confront anti-Black racism, a huge gap still remains with respect to anti-Indigenous racism within OMAFRA and across the OPS more broadly.

The stories and experiences shared in this study show how ministerial perceptions and assumptions about Indigenous issues and realities alongside bureaucratic structures and mechanisms continue to exclude and harm Indigenous Nations, communities, and initiatives. Both external and staff respondents highlight significant problems regarding land access, health, community support, as well as ongoing issues regarding Indigenous representation, consent, consultation, and divergent understandings of internal capacity, goals, visions and needs of Indigenous partners and communities. The data further show major gaps in Indigenous representation, leadership and control, and an absence of Indigenous-led planning and decision-making across the Ministry. OMAFRA staff also exhibit concern over and/or expressions of a lack of knowledge and awareness of Indigenous issues and realities, dismissive attitudes, and an absence of meaningful relationships between the Ministry and Indigenous communities.

More broadly, the pervasive lack of knowledge and education on the part of non-Indigenous people concerning treaties, Indigenous relationships to land and stewardship, and Indigenous legal systems creates an ongoing and significant barrier to reconciliation. Again, while similar observations have been made across other ministries, sectors and industries, this should only demonstrate the magnitude and urgency of the problem. It was also made clear that OMAFRA is often not the lead ministry on issues of land-use planning and duty to consult with Indigenous Nations. These points together should indicate the need for OMAFRA to communicate and engage with partner ministries as you confront these issues and implement change.

Rhetorical commitments to reconciliation and nation-to-nation relationships have yet to lead to meaningful material changes in OMAFRA's institutional structure, culture, and priorities, such as funding commitments, knowledge building and awareness, programming design and implementation, as well as staffing, hiring and leadership positioning. In order for meaningful change and reparation to begin, OMAFRA must take a structural—and respectful—approach to advancing knowledge, dialogue, listening, reflection, action and relationship-building with Indigenous communities. As treaty partners, non-Indigenous people have a responsibility to learn and take active steps to live in better relations with Indigenous peoples on these lands together. The stories, experiences, and observations are presented in

this report to offer ministerial leaders and staff some starting points for meaningful reflection and systemic change moving forward.

2. Methods

This study originated in a series of conversations and consultations with staff members at the Ministry beginning in spring 2020. Upon consulting with—and presenting material to—Ministry staff, I engaged in informal discussions with several staff members to better understand their experiences and perspectives. Between March and August of 2021, I held formal interviews with 16 staff members and 11 external contacts who work in and with Indigenous communities on food and agriculture related issues and who have engaged with OMAFRA in various ways over the past several years.

Each of the 27 interviews lasted between 1 and 2 hours and involved participants working across different divisions and branches including policy, planning, and economic development. All but two of the external interview participants are working in/with their First Nation community or are supporting Indigenous food and agricultural initiatives in their work. After completing the interviews, I analyzed the data according to key themes using discourse and content analysis. I then connected these themes to relevant research, literature, and reports including Provincial and Ministerial policy and programming documents, such as Ontario’s duty to consult Aboriginal peoples, OMAFRA’s Inclusion Strategy (2018), the Northern Livestock Action Plan, the Agricultural Systems Approach, and several Provincial anti-racism and inclusion strategies and reports. Upon completion of a first draft, I distributed the draft to staff interviewees and external contacts and community members for their feedback and reflection. Several external participants also circulated the draft to colleagues and community members for further insights and feedback. This approach allowed me to receive input from a broader population than those I had interviewed. I would like to thank all of those who took the time to share your perspectives, stories and insights with me through your interviews and comments on the draft report. This report would not be possible without your engagement and participation.

3. Findings

Theme 1: Land Access, Conversion, and Health

External participants expressed significant concern about the very limited accessibility to land for Indigenous peoples to engage in Indigenous-designed and led farming and food provisioning practices (e.g. hunting, foraging, ceremony, as well as agroecology/agroforestry). While many noted similar exclusions for non-Indigenous, immigrant, and non-white aspiring farmers interested in non-dominant models of agriculture, it is important to identify the particular barriers that Indigenous communities face. One interviewee noted that Indigenous people in their community have demonstrated interest in land-based stewardship and agriculture only to find out that “they can't actually access land”.

Participants voiced specific concerns related to government and industry interests in land conversion and privatisation for agricultural development, such as beef production. Many confirmed that these developments were not aligned with, did not include, and/or would not benefit their communities. Several participants had particular concerns about agricultural expansion in Northern Ontario. One put it this way:

I know that there was, or is, a policy to do with the expansion of farming land in Northern Ontario. Some of our communities had raised an issue about that, because it's more treaty land that's being...we weren't sure about the consultation process with how First Nations were

going to be linked into that; to be consulted on any land disposition taking place as a result of that policy. So, that one was kind of problematic.

Another interviewee said that “we have a large traditional area, when it comes to people that hunt, and they go hunting in crown land, they go hunting for the (community). So, we would have an interest if some of those lands are converted to agriculture.” They went on to note that since they are trying to revitalize traditional livelihood practices in their community, OMAFRA’s projects aimed at land conversion and the privatisation of crown land for agriculture would have significant negative impacts on their ability to uphold treaty rights and build food security in their community. They connected this to broader concerns about settler ignorance and lack of education around treaty relations and obligations:

Often people talk about crown land, when it's anything but crown land. And the language matters. There's an assumption that if it's crown land, that there's an entitlement. And people don't know that we have a nation-to-nation agreement, Treaty 9 is exactly that. There are high levels of ignorance about what that means, and high levels of ignorance about how often the Treaty has been broken, and certainly not by First Nations. So that contributes to land issues and tensions. It's rooted in ignorance, which is rooted in culture, which is rooted in these outdated belief systems that don't serve anybody.

Staff and external interviewees identified that non-Indigenous people lack the necessary knowledge and understanding about key issues including settler-Indigenous treaty-making relations and history, the nature, role and impacts of colonialism and the Indian Act, divergent worldviews and systems of land stewardship between settler and Indigenous people, and the differences between crown land, colonial administered reserve land and traditional territories. This and other participants highlight that such high levels of ignorance have significant consequences for settler-Indigenous relations in ways that continue to impact Indigenous security and wellbeing.

Another participant explained that their community only recently regained their pre-Confederation harvesting rights, and land accessibility remains a huge issue: “People really want to funnel us into this one space, into this one Provincial Park. To say, ‘this is where you guys’ hunt.” Instead, they would prefer to build relationships with farmers and others in food and agriculture, such as OMAFRA. However, they have “no idea where to start, because there seems to be almost no relationship. It's super racist where we live. And I don't know how to build that relationship.”

Several participants also described the impacts of surrounding agricultural activities, such as pesticide use, on the health of the land that they are still able to access, as well as the plant and animal populations they rely on for food and sustenance. A participant from a reserve surrounded by large potato farms stated: “I can see how the land is changing, and I can see them working it too, they’re depleting the soil.” Another participant explained:

It's had an impact on the wild foods and the animals that graze wild foods. There has been an increase in things like measles. In the moose population, the animals are just not well...We could have food security up here if ministries [and industries] quit contaminating the land that we all depend upon...this assumption that as long as you have bush, you have food just isn't true, because it's not healthy. There's stuff that's going in our environment that wasn't there previously. You have to own that when you look at the activity that's happening here; so that level of ignorance that's allowed to continue at OMAFRA—at many different levels—I find incredibly frustrating, because we're not talking about new research here. This stuff has been on the table for a long time.

This participant is noting that OMAFRA’s longstanding goals, priorities, perspectives, and programs have—perhaps unknowingly—contributed to land and water contamination in ways that hinder Indigenous peoples access to their traditional territories, food provisioning, and land-based practices, which are affirmed by their treaty rights and support their wellbeing.

Theme 2: Support for Communities

The absence of Indigenous centered support and resourcing was another key theme shared by many external interviewees, and also identified by several staff members. Interviewees noted the lack of resources and support available to Indigenous communities to help them navigate programming, jurisdiction, and legislation barriers. First Nations jurisdictional circumstances create specific barriers and logistical constraints for community members when seeking resources and technical support, and accessing funding from the province. Many interviewees voiced concerns around navigating provincial and federal agricultural and food programming, and expressed instances where OMAFRA staff and funders did not understand or support the unique political contexts and constraints of Indigenous communities: “A big barrier is, we’re on federal land, and Ontario is not federal land... So, is this (grant or program) applicable or not? Can we apply for it? I technically don't live in Ontario, so, are they really going to cover me if I sign up for this Ontario program? And will I get all the insurance and everything?”

When reflecting on their experience attending business retention and expansion and rural economic development consultations, one participant noted that “there's no program that was actually built by us, for us” – a sentiment affirmed by many others. The participant went on to explain the implications of this:

One of my questions [for Ministry staff] was, did they have an example of these programs being successful in a First Nations community? As opposed to these big business retention and expansion corporations that come out of municipalities. Because [municipalities] have the manpower and they source the funding and all of that stuff, which is a lot different than our funding that we get. A lot of the details of our funding are a lot more stringent and very detailed. It's not very often that we can just spend how we need to, as opposed to how they expect us to. With the lack of resources and lack of knowledge, we get left scrambling trying to figure it out, and then we waste time and money trying to figure it out, because we don't have the support to actually turn to tell us, ‘this is how it could be done’. It creates issues on our end where we can't necessarily build the tools or resources that we need, because we're so busy trying to do it the way that they want it done. And it doesn't necessarily work for us like that.

The participant connected this to *how*, *by whom*, and *in whose interests* programs and projects are designed and implemented: “It still comes back to representation, in the sense where they didn't really have an answer for me in terms of how this applies to a First Nations community. There could be more work done to have *programs or streams that are actually built by an Indigenous consultant or Indigenous community*.” Instead, several respondents described how the Ministry commonly refers them to examples and projects led by municipalities, rather than “something geared towards us.” Participants connected these responses to ongoing conditions of institutional neglect and exclusion for Indigenous communities. One respondent explicitly said that “they actually aren't thinking about us...there were no real resources” dedicated to, or designed by, Indigenous communities, staff or advisors themselves.

Another interviewee clearly expressed the nature and impacts of Ministry directed information and programming, which doesn't reflect or attend to Indigenous contexts, interests or needs:

Ministry level information and knowledge is—for lack of better words—whitewashed. A lot of presentations and information are just really, in that sense, *whitewashed*. And people just don't want to hear it, *they want it coming from us*. That's another big thing, where we need that representation at that government level. Where they feel like, 'okay, I think they are actually on my side, they do actually want to help.' And it's not just another check box kind of thing... *I definitely felt like, it wasn't really built for me.*

Another interviewee described their concerns with financial support specifically and the ways that paternalistic approaches to Indigenous funding can impact their work and community: "I find that we're spending a lot of money to go back and fix things that didn't really get done in the first place. So, it just seems redundant at times. If we want to use the funds for something else, then we have to go and ask permission, 'can we use this for this?' It's not like, 'okay, you spend it how you need to spend it.'" In this way, participants described a general lack of flexibility "in terms of making our own decision to make changes or adjustments in the budgets. It's kind of always up to the higher power, whoever the funder is, you know, asking permission kind of thing."

Theme 3: Representation

Indigenous representation—in terms of Indigenous staff numbers as well as access, positioning, capacity, and leadership—was a consistent gap for Indigenous participants when interacting with OMAFRA, and the OPS more broadly. Multiple participants noted a particular gap in Indigenous representation and support within OMAFRA. One participant described the following when seeking OMAFRA support for Indigenous food and agriculture:

I get the sense that OMAFRA is just really overwhelmed. The number of times that I speak with [OMAFRA staff member name] and I just didn't feel like the frequency of our chats, compared to some of the other ministries...it just seems like [they're] swamped, like, totally swamped. I don't get, it doesn't seem that bad with some of the other ministries that I've dealt with. I don't know if it's just their department, or what it is, but I just get the sense that they have a lot less time to deal with us [Indigenous clients] than some of the other ministries I work with. When I worked with MTO [Ministry of Transportation], they had a whole Indigenous relations unit and also five or six people working just to deal with reps like myself. They don't have that level of capacity within OMAFRA.

None of the Indigenous interviewees were able to connect with or establish a working relationship with an Indigenous staff member at OMAFRA, which posed significant barriers when seeking information and accessing services and funding opportunities. All local advisors to whom interviewees were referred were non-Indigenous. As one interviewee explained, "she wasn't Indigenous, she didn't have a lot of knowledge about the success of the program in a First Nations community. And I left it there, like, I've got to figure it out on my own, which, I feel like is where we get left a lot." Another participant recalled asking OMAFRA: "Do you have an Indigenous consultant? You know, like an actual Indigenous person that understands the system and understands the needs of First Nations communities?" Even such an explicit request did not lead to contacts with an Indigenous representative or support person. The participant continued:

That is a huge barrier for every community; at the government level, we don't have Indigenous representatives...Most of the people that give us our money, or provide us with these funds are non-Indigenous. It's like trying to negotiate with someone who doesn't really understand the concepts and the real underlying issues, aside from what's on paper. Because a lot of our issues, we can't really quantify them. I find it really, really difficult to communicate with these funders if, for example, they've never even been to an Indigenous community. So, we're looking to these people for support, and they're just providing support based on a checklist or a standard that's the same for all First Nations. But we don't all operate the same, we all have various levels of resources and populations. That's probably one of the biggest things that I noticed in working with the Ministry is that nobody has real Indigenous support. Or, Indigenous consultants are non-Indigenous... It gets really hard where I feel like, on our level, the First Nations level, we're constantly trying to claw...it starts feeling like, they're looking at us, like they're just trying to get more, trying to claw more out of us... But, you know, we're already underfunded as it is, in relation to municipalities and things like that. I find it gets really tiresome. To be an advocate all the time...and then they constantly ask: 'Well, what do you need for? It kind of feels like it comes down to our word against theirs. And they're the higher power. That's what I think I've noticed, is the lack of representation. And that definitely makes things a little difficult in terms of trying to advocate for better resources for our communities.

Both staff and Indigenous interviewees made connections between the lack of Indigenous representation and resourcing, and the absence of Indigenous directed programming and staff support. Participant experiences with OMAFRA revealed the implications of this absence for Indigenous peoples. According to one interviewee:

If the resources aren't there and we're not streamlined to the non-Indigenous community, then we just put our hands up and say, 'okay, we got to deal with it on our own, to figure out a way to do this, to make it work for us', which gets a little bit intimidating at times because it just doesn't always work...there are a lot of gaps in the information they provide and information about the financial programming that's available. There's no real Indigenous connection yet. It's kind of like, 'here's some stuff, you got to figure out what to do with it on your own.'

In turn, several participants described instances where Indigenous-led food and agricultural project proposals were rejected, or inappropriate, unsuitable, and unattainable project revisions and timelines were proposed by OMAFRA funding review committees. As for OMAFRA employees, all but two interviewees stated they had established little to no relationships with Indigenous communities in their work.

Theme 4: Consultation and consent in programming and development

Key themes of consultation and consent are prominent in the data. External interview participants described being engaged in consultation only after programs and grants were developed and publicized, as opposed to a process of program co-creation or co-design. Typically, Indigenous participants were notified of programming merely as a means of encouraging their application submissions etc. Participants affirmed that at information sessions, they were presented with programs that had already been designed by the Ministry—often created initially to serve municipalities, and then subsequently promoted to Indigenous growers. Indigenous people need to be involved, as an interviewee states, “at the very beginning of the first conversation” from the initial conception “of what they want to do...Let's

all sit down and pound out some ideas, and start developing these things for ourselves. That's always been the challenge, where that is actually straight out refused.”

Interviewees working in and with Indigenous communities described experiences of being contacted for initial meetings with little or no follow-up. Several participants noted that they had not even been notified whether or not the Ministry moved ahead with plans, policies, or programming after initial meetings: “There's always that information session conversation that happens...and then my concern is, that's the end? We have those beginning conversations. And then, that's it. It just disappears, our conversations are done.” This interviewee described that, for the community, “it's like, well, we're just starting. Let's talk about some of the meat and potatoes of all the actions in between, let's talk about the ends of where we're going to be with this...it just becomes frustrating.” Another participant described the outcome of an ‘initial meeting’ between OMAFRA and their organization (that supports Indigenous agriculture) and the issues they observed with the consultation process:

We saw that call as the beginning of the conversation, but I'm sure by now they've already moved on to finalize their regulation. The timelines are just really not in alignment with...each of our communities would have their own individual consultation protocol. And we (organization) can't consult on behalf of all of our member communities. That has to be done in an individual community level. So, I don't know whether they've approached individual communities within our Nation to talk about it at that level and ensure we've done higher level discussion, but to also say that they've really consulted. I don't know if that can really be said to be happening. It's more just like, we have a call and they take away what information may be brought to that call, but that doesn't necessarily represent all of our communities or their citizens. So, it's not really for me to say whether people's communities were consulted adequately or not. I would say, from just that one call that we had recently, I know there were communities that were saying, ‘you have to engage more with us on a one-to-one level.’ And I don't know if that happened or not because I'm not there in the community...it's just really challenging when it comes to their timelines compared to the requirements that some communities might have for consultations.

This interviewee describes further concerns with OMAFRA’s consultation and engagement process:

They need to be more involved. I mean, they always come when we ask them to come and present, they've always come and presented. But at times, I don't know if they necessarily see: It's not just about them asking us questions and then taking that information back and developing their policy. It should be more...*we should be working together to develop policy*. They're working in isolation from us. *It's got to be more collaborative*. And I don't know if they understand that to the extent that maybe they should.

Another interviewee shared their experience of the consultation process and how it impacts communities:

Whenever we get these notifications that there's this new funding program available and, you know, you can apply...blah, blah, blah. I mean, it's a little unfortunate because it feels like every time something comes out, it's like we have to find a way to make it work for our people. And you know that there isn't very often that consultation piece beforehand. It's always, ‘well, here's what we have, do what you can with it’...my boss very, very often gives feedback and says, ‘okay, well, this is why this program isn't going to work for us and makes recommendations and stuff like that, but it's not very often that they come back with

anything that really opens that up, you know, those barriers, because that's really what they are.

Several other interviewees described similar experiences that point to gaps in the consultation process. They noted the need for individual communities to be directly consulted early on, and on an ongoing basis. As one participant recalls,

So often, what happens is that when we first have an initial conversation with a ministry, eventually what they'll do is they'll end up hand picking what Indigenous person they want to develop something. And it's like, well, who gave them, this person say, [the authority] to speak on behalf of all of us? If they want to speak on behalf of us, they need to consult with us. *And that's right from the very beginning.*

The interviewee then clearly identifies the nature of their concern with the governments typical approach, “we don't mind that there's an Indigenous person there, but *let's do it the right way*. That's my point, and that's what the court cases say. *Right at the very beginning, the duty is there*, right? ... that has to happen right at the very beginning.”

Finally, as noted under Theme 1, external interviewees had concerns about the consultation process and implications through which crown land may be sold off and privatized through programs such as the Northern Livestock Pilot Program (NLP), and the treaty concerns that arise when governments attempt to privatize and convert of crown land. However, the Indigenous interviewees had very little information about the consultation and consent process that OMAFRA said it had engaged in with communities and other ministries. According to one participant:

I don't know if we really had much of a discussion with OMAFRA about [crown land conversion], but, you know, we have raised to them that we would like them to be able to reach out to other ministries on our behalf, where we're not getting the traction that we would like with some other ministries. For them to be able to help us open the door with those other ministries as well. So, yeah, I don't know whether that discussion ever did take place with them and MNRF [Ministry of Northern Development, Mines, Natural Resources and Forestry]. But yeah, that's certainly a concern.

A number of OMAFRA staff described their own feelings of frustration and/or their observations that colleagues and managers often referred to Indigenous consultation as a barrier to program implementation. I was able to confirm these perceptions through interviews with OMAFRA staff who asserted exactly that. In reflecting on instances where treaty land rights and archeological sites require consultation, one staff member stated, “First Nations are very protective of giving up any land that they believe is theirs”, and that, “those are things that have to be negotiated... before you can make crown land available.” The same staff member said that in cases where the government is looking to convert lands to farmland, it can be difficult to engage in consultation if there may be some archaeological value for the First Nation, which makes it “impossible to move forward.” This perspective which sees Indigenous rights as an impediment illustrates larger problematic assumptions and mentalities that governments and settler civil servants often have, as well as assumptions about their own obligations and responsibilities as settlers in relation to Indigenous people, lands, and treaties.

OMAFRA staff interviewees described a wide range of knowledge, understanding, and awareness of settler colonialism, Indigenous rights, treaty relations, and duty to consult. One common denominator among them is that they have very little lived experience working with Indigenous people and

communities. Interviewees noted an increase in voluntary trainings across the OPS, including cultural awareness training and an Indigenous relations community of practice. These have helped to provide some basic competencies on Indigenous issues. However, many participants felt that there continues to be “huge barriers with Indigenous participation” and consultation. One participant observed that many staff members don’t “understand duty to consult, they don’t understand the basics.” And that too often, “Indigenous consultation is viewed as a barrier.” Interviewees noted issues ranging from the lack of cultural awareness and understanding, poor resourcing and under representation, to the lack of Indigenous directed and centered programming, funding and support. As one interviewee describes, “at this point, I could probably count on two hands the amount of people in the Ministry that have a workable knowledge of the most important issues, one is a lawyer, a couple of them are policy people...the rest are Indigenous, they've always had an Indigenous lens on everything that happens in the Ministry.” And while this interviewee notes that they “see a great deal of progress that has happened” in the Ministry during their time there, at the time of these interviews, there was only one dedicated staff position on the Indigenous file at OMAFRA.

Another interviewee noted that there is very little collective knowledge of Indigenous land claims, ownership, and consultation at the Ministry. One participant said that efforts at consultation seemed present at times, “but the accountability isn’t there.” For instance, they noted that responding to comments and concerns often isn’t required. Other interviewees stated that on some Ministry projects they had seen little to no Indigenous representation or consultation at all. In other instances, Indigenous representatives and communities were grouped into a larger list of stakeholders, including, municipalities, industry, farmer associations, community organizations, and ENGO’s, who were all consulted together using similar methods. When asked about Indigenous consultation, one interviewee stated that consultation often isn’t “meaningful at all. It’s superficial. It’s not really meaningful in the interest of the public good.” When asked about prospects for more in-depth and ongoing models of program co-creation and shared decision making with Indigenous communities, they stated that those conversations are not being had: “There are opportunities, but not much is going on...It’s something that we need to do better.” Some staff members called on OMAFRA to shift institutional culture and mentalities in order to advance reconciliation, “the expectation has to be different when it comes to Indigenous peoples. Because of the history of this country, things have to be different.”

Theme 5: Capacity

Interviewees working in and with Indigenous communities noted that there is little cultural awareness on the part of non-Indigenous staff, bureaucrats, and decision-makers about the lived realities and experiences of Indigenous communities. This ignorance creates significant barriers for Indigenous capacity building. Participants gave specific examples about resourcing constraints for local projects: “We really have to go back to basics with a lot of people, there's just not a lot of support externally.” The same interviewee said that, even if they receive referrals for projects, they are often unable to lead the project, because they lack the money, capability, and resources. As a result, “we lose the income effect in the community, because we just don't have the proper resources, whether it's human or physical to provide the members with what they really need.”

In reference to the Ministry specifically, an interviewee explained: “I don’t know if OMAFRA realizes that we need a lot more capacity at the community level to be able to encourage agriculture, it'd be great if we could have a person in each community that was devoted to agriculture...but we just don't have that level of resourcing right now, even if we had an individual within each tribal council, that would be a start.” Currently, there are very few organizational spaces and positions in Indigenous communities

dedicated to supporting food provision, security and agriculture. The participant said such positions are “very few and far between...I think it would be great If we could have capacity in each community, that would be a really good start.”

This interviewee points to important differences between the current approach OMAFRA takes to representation and advising and the prospect of OMAFRA contributing resources toward Indigenous advisors who are connected to communities, who have an understanding of community visions, needs and protocols.

The interviewee also made specific connections to how internal capacity issues are exacerbated through bureaucratic policies, expectations and guidelines, making it more difficult for Indigenous communities to compete for funding and program resources: “In terms of obstacles, some of the application processes for the funding, our communities don't have the capacity to be able to even write the sorts of level of proposals required or to spend the amount of time that's required.” As a result, “they might reach out to me for help, but I think it's very, very challenging for them as an individual to put a proposal together. So, a lot of times they might apply, but the quality of the proposal might not be to what's required to actually get funding...sometimes they might just decide not to apply.”

Another interviewee explained that, “we're just under-resourced in so many different ways” and “most people don't understand the relationship with external organizations and the amount of advocating that we have to do and the roles that we play in connecting the community with governments and rolling out programs and things like that, it's a lot more complicated” than many outsiders and ministry staff realize.

Such internal constraints—alongside the general lack of awareness about Indigenous issues and barriers on the part of government and the public—is of particular concern when dealing with potential land dispossession due to land conversion and privatization efforts: “When there's issues like crown land being changed over to private or anything”, very few representatives are able to “advocate on behalf of First Nations.” They go on to explain that such resources and supports are crucial because:

some of our communities in the territory are very small, and they don't always have the capacity to respond in a given time frame. And they don't have the resources to hire legal to look at the impact, if there's archaeological or environmental impact. So capacity is a big issue...our community will respond because we have a little bit more capacity in terms of the work that the lands department has been involved in, but some of the smaller communities may not...they may be impacted...they don't have comparable capacities.

In turn, one participant shared that when “there's a land disposition process for crown land and our community's supposed to get informed and they have to respond to those notices” there are significant concerns about the capacity for Indigenous communities to respond comprehensively and within given timelines. In many cases, the Ministry and other institutions may assume that adequate consultation has occurred when representatives of Indigenous communities were unable to respond within the timeline or according to institutional requirements, and thus land disposition can proceed. This speaks to the breadth and depth of concerns, demands, and expectations that communities are having to contend with, and the significant consequences (further land dispossession) that Indigenous communities may face if they don't meet institutional expectations.

Theme 6: Differing needs, visions and priorities

Ministry and external interviewees alike discussed significant gaps and disparities between the Ministry's visions and priorities for agri-food programming and that of many Indigenous communities. Interviewees explained that OMAFRA typically assesses agri-food programming through the purview of private land governance, economic development, and enterprise expansion. Interviewees working on Indigenous food programming said OMAFRA often assessed projects based on their potential to contribute to economic expansion outside the Indigenous community itself. In other words, OMAFRA requires projects to demonstrate a capacity to contribute to the (regional, provincial, or federal) settler economy¹ in order to be perceived and assessed as worthy or viable by the Ministry. As one interviewee describes,

It has to be business...you have to be business-oriented to be able to apply for funding. You have to be operating as a business, and the majority of our communities, if there's an interest in agriculture and they're just getting going, it's more for the community. It's more on a community-based level: To, for example, employ people...to produce...for food sovereignty. To make sure that people have food in the community as a whole, not for one person to start making a profit off of whatever they're doing. I've tried to really encourage members in our communities, 'well, why don't you turn this into a business that you can apply for funding.' But a lot of times there's a reluctance to do that because they just want to provide for their community, or they just want to start small. Everything's very economic focused and business focused, as opposed to more targeted for community level initiatives and grants and things like that...it is a huge barrier.

Another interviewee shares a similar experience:

we have one community that has quite a number of maple syrup operators, but they're all doing it for their own family and for the community and not so much to supply outside the community. And none of them are going to be looking to apply for funding, even though they want to improve their sugarbush or improve their building or whatever. But they're not going to go jumping through those hoops because they know that they're not operating as a business and they're not going to get the funding. So that's definitely a huge, huge barrier and a huge obstacle.

This interviewee reflected on an example where community members in the region put together a large agri-food proposal that was turned down. They explained that the proposal was very focused on community development: "They had a number of people that do hides, and they wanted to hunt animals and then use [them], and develop the skills to make moccasins." However, "it didn't fit within their traditional...It wasn't a beef farm, it wasn't traditional agriculture, but it was using food, using animals from the wild, and using natural foods, and it was totally turned down."² They described how hard the community worked to put together the project: "they worked with their whole region...and had support from all the other communities, it was just kind of sickening to see that they tried so hard to apply for

¹ By 'settler economy' I don't mean that this is an economy that only settlers participate in, or that Indigenous people are not involved in larger regional, provincial, or national economies outside of their communities, but rather, that this is an economy that has been built by settler populations through the process of colonialism and imposed on Indigenous peoples.

² When referring to 'traditional agriculture', this speaker seemed to be speaking about conventional, dominant, and/or industrial models of agriculture. From the view of the speaker and those that they work with, these models are heavily supported by OMAFRA and many of the agricultural agencies and associations in Ontario.

funding, but they were unsuccessful, because it didn't fit the traditional mold...of agriculture. The interviewee states that funders and ministries ought to “be more open to different types of economic initiatives. It was an economic initiative. It was something that could result in economic benefit for the community. It just didn’t fit that traditional agricultural mold so they didn't want to fund it.”

Another respondent described their community’s goals for agriculture and food: “For our community, we’re trying to grow that sector [agriculture], but it's more along food security, food sovereignty, food safety, and health.” The interviewee doesn’t see these goals reflected in conventional agri-food industry and support. Meanwhile, many in the community are unable to even enter conventional agri-food markets at all “even with the local farmers, there's quite a few chicken farmers now, but there's a quota that they can't even get into the system.” As will be expanded on in the discussion section, governmental priorities and assumptions about what Indigenous farmers, farming, and agricultural projects ought to look like too often leave Indigenous farmers and food provisioners highly constrained.

For instance, several respondents explained that government programming and policies often restrict Indigenous Nations and communities from engaging in Indigenous governance and management models and food provisioning, such as wild game, fish and other wild foods. Yet, those who want to participate in livestock, poultry, and dairy farming also feel excluded by the ministry and other dominant agri-food institutions.

An interviewee shares their experience establishing a local grocery store, which is “band owned, it's not entrepreneur owned.” They explained that “even managing the grocery store, there's not a lot of resource sharing in the community in terms of what can this family provide, and contribute to the grocery store? It's kind of like, we're running under the hierarchy of grocery stores, like Loblaws.” Ideally, they state that more local and wild foods and food sharing would be integrated into the store, however,

a lot of it is the food safety. The wild game is not...a lot of people in the community, consume wild game, fish, things like that, but it's not really known how to incorporate those types of foods into a retail setting. Because they're not FDA approved, or things like that. We're left using external resources. For fresh fish, we use a local fishery that's not Indigenous owned...we have to use theirs, because they go through all the testing and the packaging...we have local people who run their own fisheries and sell their own fish privately on the side, but we can't necessarily put the food in the grocery store, because it's not tested... it's the same with wild meat, like deer, we can't sell it in the grocery store, because it's not tested.

In turn, they describe that the conventional grocery store model is actually bolstering the sale of far away, industrial and processed foods in the community, rather than local foods, which is the opposite direction that many respondents said community members want to go: “There is some local. But again, most of the stuff is being provided by the grocery company.”

When speaking about the disconnect between settler government and Indigenous agri-food visions, goals, definitions, and desires, many interviewees pointed to larger issues of paternalism and colonial mentalities:

Traditional ecological knowledge is not held at the same standard within OMAFRA. It's not recognized...but we're seeing the effects of spraying glyphosate...We know that things like glyphosate don't break down the same way northern soils, it's more acidic up here, it's slower, it stays around for at least three seasons...And it leads to so many health implications. So when we talk epistemology...they think that their way of knowing is top

dog. They're not even looking at their own research and applying it within their own way of doing things. And yet traditional ecological knowledge holds the ecology, and has the answers.

Interviewees working with Indigenous communities identified a strong need and desire for community-led food projects, which included a range of initiatives and ideas. One participant said that “a lot of the initiatives the Lands Department in our community have done are to support and to foster food sovereignty and food security through building capacity for people to grow their own food or harvest locally, like morales, or fiddleheads, or raspberries. There's a lot of that in our community that just grows wild, and they've even done wild rice.” Another added: “I want to try and incorporate Indigenous methodologies of farming in our community, I don't want people to look at big agriculture and think that's the way we need to go, we need to do things in a small way.”

Many also spoke of the need for projects connecting local employment and well-being with land-based practices and stewardship, including community food growing, harvesting and food preservation,

I want to create space to work with the land that's going to also be available to people who work in addictions and mental health, and that there's somewhere people can go and be on the land in a healthy way, in a productive way, and learn and connect on the land while they're healing. I think it is an important thing to create that space...my goal is to create food jobs in the community and connections to land-based jobs in this community for our people. If they're going to heal, we have to give them another chance. And I've watched so many departments not give people a second, third, fourth, fifth or sixth chance. On the road to sobriety...we need to make these safe spaces for people where they can reconnect...that all works together in the community.

This interviewee went on to say: “I don't want to get in the farming game...I want our community to have our own food, to have our own fresh produce...to not have it come from the Ontario Food Terminal.” But in working with OMAFRA and agri-food industry programming, they stated: “I find it's like, ‘we want to convert you into farmers. That's what we got, like, ‘can we colonize you some more this way?’ Or, ‘you have to do it this way’, and this ‘big ag. is the only way to go.’... We don't need to get into the farming game, we need to feed our nation.” For them, OMAFRA’s approach is “assimilating Indigenous folks into that [agri-food] project. We've done this game before. We have a history of being amazing farmers with the shittiest implements ever, thrown in the garbage and handed down to us, and then became amazing at it, and we couldn't compete because we weren't allowed to sell it. We weren't allowed to be part of the market.” And still today, “we can't harvest wild rice like we used to. We need these things where can we plant our wild rice, where we're not going to get into fights with cottagers...we still need to be able to travel the land for our food sources. There is no big game around here for us anymore.”

The respondent explains that they are looking for support for community-led and driven—rather than government designed—programs and projects. Some specific initiatives that community members were developing, or looking to establish, included community regenerative gardens and farms, shared smokehouses, Indigenous seed banks, shared harvesting programs, community or cooperative sugar bush production, and a community ice house for fishermen and game hunters. Of course, this list is not inclusive of the wide range of initiatives that communities are envisioning.

In terms of funding specifically, there were concerns raised by both OMAFRA and external interviewees that OMAFRA and agri-food funders do not see community centered projects (that do not replicate

conventional models of employment) as a viable agri-food activity. An OMAFRA staff member noted that “community centered initiatives, like community gardens or volunteer greenhouses, are not a farm and aren’t considered valid. Business development resources are underpinned by a vastly different world view.”

Another staff member shared their understanding of Indigenous food security and sovereignty in the following way: “It’s access to fresh, healthy food...in Indigenous communities, you have traditional Indigenous diets that some elders and, you know, there’s always a component of the community, like a subculture that really does continue to embrace that.” In this way, the staff member seems to view these ideas, projects and initiatives as marginal, and not representative of community visions and goals—which are certainly diverse, and not monolithic. When asked how OMAFRA can support Indigenous food sovereignty, the same staff member stated that,

A ministry populated by agricultural scientists, like dairy people and crops people and specialists, and stuff like that; what can we do to support traditional food systems? Other than respond the best way that we can if we were asked about something like food safety, right? I mean, we do have production sheets on wild rice and blueberries, and we support maple syrup production and further processing and honey and honey bees, as well as aquaculture. But at the end of the day, what can we do? I’d say the majority of the effort has to be built upon what we already do as a Ministry, which is transfer knowledge and expand the scope of our support into Indigenous communities.

This quote reveals several built-in assumptions within OMAFRA regarding their role and purpose, which affirms my reading of ministerial documents and observations made during project forums, such as the Indigenous Agri-Food Funders Forum (2021). OMAFRA positions itself as the expert through which communities and applicants are expected to receive help. The institutional culture seems to be premised on the idea that the knowledge and “solutions” must come from and be held within OMAFRA, as opposed to a more collaborative and co-constructivist perspective that emphasizes support and resource sharing over knowledge transfer from one party (OMAFRA) to another (clients and users).

The concern for respondents interested in Indigenous food sovereignty is that this approach remains assimilative and significantly limits the kinds of collaborations, dialogues, and projects that are possible for Indigenous peoples. Indeed, the solution should not be for OMAFRA to internally acquire Indigenous knowledge in order to support Indigenous-led programs and projects. Rather, OMAFRA could choose to take a more collaborative, relationship-oriented, non-proprietary, and reciprocal approach. For instance, there is a great deal of visioning and action already happening in communities that OMAFRA could work with those communities to support and fund.

Unfortunately, the current institutional culture and approach tends to pigeonhole Indigenous peoples, and reinforces racist assumptions. Indigenous peoples are seen as inadequate farmers, or only interested in certain kinds of farming. However, the history of colonial exclusion, underfunding and sabotaging of Indigenous farming and agriculture is well documented (Carter, 1990, 2016; Daschuk, 2013). Indigenous farmers and communities are not monolithic, yet such perspectives permeate bureaucratic decision making and programming. Several interviewees noted that the programming guidelines either assumed that they were only interested in berry or maple syrup production, or forced them to engage in conventional farming models in order to be supported. Generally, enterprise-oriented projects such as aquaculture and maple syrup production can be more neatly integrated into government-approved economies. Regardless of the project in question, this approach leaves little room for shared decision-making and visioning or Indigenous-centred and -led project design. Given the legacy of colonialism

alongside the growing recognition of our obligations as treaty partners, we have a unique responsibility to support Indigenous food systems, projects and programming *on their own terms*, rather than OMAFRA's.

4. Discussion & Recommendations

Through interviews with OMAFRA staff and Indigenous and non-Indigenous people working in and with Indigenous communities, a number of key themes and issues arose that require a meaningful process of engagement by the Ministry.

Barriers to power, access, and control: getting clear about Indigenous consent, consultation and land dispossession

One of the most consistent findings were the significant *barriers to power, access, and control* for Indigenous Nations and communities in regard to Ministry visioning and decision-making and program design and implementation. The data show that Indigenous peoples remain structurally excluded from the decision-making tables where OMAFRA visioning, strategic and land-use planning, policy and programming is discussed and implemented. There is also a significant lack of Indigenous representation across the Ministry, especially in leadership and decision-making positions. Not unrelated, there is an absence of Indigenous-led and directed programming, land use and agri-food planning, policy design and advising.

When discussing OMAFRA programming and initiatives, staff noted a lack of Indigenous specific consultation across several programs, such as the Agricultural Systems Approach and land-use planning more broadly. Notably, multiple staff have noted that community consultation processes must be enhanced more generally in policy development across the Ministry to include a broader set of voices, and with engagement happening much earlier on in the process. While this is an important point for the Ministry to take up, it is also crucial to emphasize *the unique responsibilities that governments have with regards to Indigenous consent, consultation, and representation* specifically.

One of the programs that enacted more significant Indigenous engagement and consultation is the Northern Livestock Pilot initiative. However, interviewees—both staff and external—still noted major concerns with the consultation process employed during the NLP. These include (but are not limited to) the lack of Indigenous support or involvement in pertinent research studies investigating soil carbon sequestration between forest land and converted pasture and agricultural land; no presence of Indigenous co-management approaches to stewardship and land use change; and the down-streaming of consent and locally specific consultation processes concerning treaty rights issues such as land conversion and access to territories for hunting and foraging. In particular, *there is strong concern that the NLP would convert and privatize crown land without adequate consent, consultation or meaningful reflection into the role, purpose, and jurisdiction of crown land*. This brings us to the third key finding regarding settler awareness, education, and the need for learning.

Settler Awareness: a call for deeper learning

Views from staff and external contacts reveal significant differences in understanding about *what exactly crown land is* and *who has jurisdiction over it*, especially within the broader context of treaties, the differences between reserve land and traditional territories, and Indigenous relationships to land. Indeed, more recent legal cases, inquiries, and treaty scholarship show the longstanding assumption on the part of settler governments that crown land (i.e. not privately owned) can simply be privatized and sold at the will of the colonial administration to be deeply flawed and not reflective of the full treaty-making

relationship, intentions, and process (Borrows, 2010; Coyle & Borrows, 2017; Krasowski, 2019). Such issues must be revisited, discussed, and clarified before further privatization transpires.

More broadly, settler ignorance is an important contributor to the recurrence of false stereotypes and assumptions about Indigenous Nations and communities. Discriminatory beliefs that Indigenous people are deficient farmers and agriculturalists, that they receive more public resources than non-Indigenous Canadians, and that they are only interested in certain kinds of projects and initiatives, all contribute to a culture of anti-Indigenous racism across the Ministry and beyond. It must also be noted that many historical accounts and in-depth inquiries have clearly shown these beliefs to be false (Carter, 1990, 2016; Daschuk, 2013; Deloria, 1998; Yellowhead Institute, 2021). Such accounts have instead shown how colonial administrators have banned Indigenous Nations from practicing their systems of law, governance, land stewardship, food provision, culture, spirituality, family, and kinship.³

As noted, there are significant differences in the *depth* of understanding and knowledge that settler bureaucrats (and the public writ large) have regarding treaty history, settler-Indigenous relations, the nature and impacts of colonialism, and the role of land in Indigenous oppression and dispossession, which creates major barriers to change. The ministry should invest in a range of learning opportunities for non-Indigenous to more deeply educate themselves on these issues.

Meanwhile, staff interviewees noted a lack of willingness on the part of some colleagues to demonstrate meaningful interest in Indigenous issues or engage in anti-racism, racial bias, and diversity work more broadly. One interviewee noted that they have observed anti-Indigenous racism first hand. Anti-Indigenous stereotypes have become “normalized in people’s minds” which, they’ve observed, manifest in un-checked assumptions being made about Indigenous applicants:

I recall very clearly where we were reviewing applications to projects and the project analyst who was presenting the proposal from an Indigenous community said, ‘no, we don't need to give them money, they get enough money already from government.’

The interviewee described that they had expected to be a part of an inclusive work environment, but such instances made them wonder, “how does that actually translate?... I really do struggle with that, when I see some of the things that continue to happen.”

Unfortunately, such ignorance allows for racist discrimination and exclusion to continue unabated, or at best, it allows for inappropriate and tokenistic forms of consultation, representation and assimilation, creating further barriers and distractions to meaningful change. Another staff interviewee describes the barriers and contradictions they observe with how OMAFRA approaches diversity and inclusion more broadly:

All of the conversations are about OMAFRA as a workplace: diversity, inclusion. But how can we do better when everything is out of scope in terms of how we are liaising with the people of Ontario? I don't think that we can ever get there as an organization internally, as a workplace, if we're not looking at, ‘how can we be?’...if we're inclusive, and we have multicultural day, or we have our diversity, inclusion, or Indigenous peoples Lunch and Learn, that's great. But in the meantime, if we're not doing duty to consult, and we have systemic exclusion of farmers of color, we're never going to be a truly inclusive and anti-racist workplace.

³ Pertinent scholarship on Indigenous governance, treaty making, and land and kinship relations include the work of Kim Tallbear (2019), Aimée Craft (2013), Susan Hill (2017), and Heidi Bohaker (2020), among many others.

As this interviewee's reflection reveals, policy, protocol and language are all created within a colonial and a racialized construct, so inclusive language can never be a stand-in for supporting community-led initiatives, programs, and policies. More specifically, given that there is very little understanding of Indigenous and racial issues within the Ministry (indeed, several staff interviewees demonstrated dismissive attitudes and lack of understanding about Indigenous issues), greater institutional knowledge, awareness and training is an essential first step, but it is certainly not sufficient. OMAFRA should also direct energy and resources toward establishing *comprehensive community-first principles and strategies* that will provide leadership and staff alike with *a clear roadmap for working with communities* to support and fund projects already happening, or to support communities in enacting their own visions. Notably, the roadmap itself should be established using an Indigenous advisory or council process, *the structure of which should be determined collaboratively with Indigenous partners*. This brings us to the final theme.

Reflecting on relationships: toward meaningful consent and collaboration

Concerning process, there are ongoing barriers to meaningful processes of consent, consultation, engagement and dialogue. Typically, OMAFRA (not unlike other provincial and federal ministries) engages in processes of approval seeking, wherein consent is understood as a practice of information giving and notification. The nature of engagement is thus premised on minimal legal obligations to consult, and is underpinned by a culture of risk management. In these ways, Ministries turn processes of consent into consultation, which are significantly different in themselves, while down-streaming consultation into planning and project implementation stages, rather than at the stages of conception, design and visioning. All of this translates into how public policy is developed and how decisions are made. Meanwhile, staff confirmed that they are unfamiliar with the nuances of the process of consultation, which, beyond the basic legal duty to consult (and is typically not led by OMAFRA), remains very ambiguous and has not been clearly and comprehensively articulated and discussed across the Ministry. Currently, federal and provincial laws and policies continue to dominate the process, and Indigenous laws and points of view don't enter in. If OMAFRA intends to move away from minimal approval seeking, and toward respectful treaty relationships, non-Indigenous peoples have a responsibility to learn about and value Indigenous law and process.

This has a number of significant implications. First, as the data indicate, notification-oriented approaches overburden Indigenous communities, whom are already under-resourced. Instead, program, land-use planning, and economic development proposals ought to *only* be engaged by the Ministry if they receive clear indication from First Nations and Indigenous communities that they are interested in following-up. As well, OMAFRA must consider implementing transformative changes to their process of engaging in policy making, moving toward models of nation-to-nation governance, such as co-visioning and management and shared decision making. These processes are not for me to identify or recommend, rather, they ought to be established through ongoing and direct dialogue processes and collaboration with Indigenous Nations and communities. Through co-visioning processes, plans and agreements can be established with specific strategies to build Indigenous representation and capacity and to determine ways for OMAFRA to effectively support and fund community-driven projects. Of course, these models take time, energy and resources; Indigenous Nations must be meaningfully engaged and compensated, which must be prioritized and allocated by the Ministry. As one staff member put it, "if you don't have relationships in the community, good luck. And you can't just build those relationships willy nilly." In this way, non-Indigenous institutions, and all of us as treaty people, must grasp the foundational importance of settler-Indigenous relations, Indigenous treaty rights, and sovereignty, which goes far beyond (in both nature and function) minimal legal obligations to consult.

Interviewee perspectives and experiences show that relationship building is essential, and processes must go at the pace of trust-building and respect for Indigenous needs, circumstances, laws and process. As Dr. Leela Viswanathan (2021) asks: what could the relationship look like if we worked at the pace of trust, rather than the time required to meet development requests and project timelines? What does it mean to intentionally slow things down, especially in terms of development?

This is essential for full inclusion and equity. Meanwhile, staff noted with concern that the Ministry is making quick development and land-use decisions knowing communities are under-resourced and “pushing things through during a pandemic. Urgency has huge implications.” This is the opposite approach that is needed for building and maintaining trust.

When assessing the extent to which meaningful consent, consultation and engagement is being achieved, it is important that the Ministry reflect on *who decides* this. With regards to Indigenous and other equity-deserving groups, it is not up to the Ministry to determine whether their process is evolving in a meaningful way for the Nation or community. Indeed, it is up to the community to determine whether the process is meaningful for them or not. In this way, the Ministry could more openly and proactively critique its own processes in collaboration with Indigenous people, and eventually replace and improve policies, practices and protocols.

While many Ministry respondents reflected honestly on their own ignorance and lack of engagement with Indigenous Nations, communities and ways of life, without more consistent and structural practices of reflexivity (both individually and in community), it will continue to be difficult for non-Indigenous staff to be able to centre Indigenous issues, goals, needs, and experiences in the Ministry. As one staff member reflected “it's overwhelming that with good intentions, one can still do harm, and things don't get addressed. Staff are scared of legal implications.” They observed that it remains difficult to “have staff-to-staff conversations about Indigenous issues,” and that there is a culture of fear of doing it wrong, or even being sued by Indigenous affairs. This should be all the more reason for OMAFRA to re-consider its entire approach toward community consultation and collaboration with Indigenous Nations. While the focus here is on government-Indigenous relations, interviewees urged a similar shift in approach regarding community consultation more generally.

5. Conclusion

This study reveals very significant problems with how Indigenous rights, knowledge and experiences are understood, respected and prioritized in Ontario agri-food, land use, policy, and programming. The research and interviews clearly show that Indigenous peoples remain structurally excluded from Ministry decision-making, visioning, strategic and land-use planning, policy and programming. Moreover, there is a dearth of Indigenous representation across the Ministry, especially in leadership and decision-making positions, as well as an absence of Indigenous-led and directed programming, policy design and advising. The insights and experiences from this research ought to drive structural change and meaningful dialogue, knowledge and relationship building, listening, reflection, and action across the Ministry. This work can be undertaken through collaboration and from a place and spirit of curiosity, willingness, respect, and friendship. As treaty people, we can take up the many calls to reflection and action that have been patiently and tirelessly offered to us by Indigenous Nations and people, including, but not limited to The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP), and the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG). If done with care, accountability, transparency, and intention, this work can allow us to stand with and support the well-being and self-determination of Indigenous peoples, people of colour, and all people, as we move forward on these lands together.

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