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Wasagamack First Nation

Where's the Dirt?

Seeds. Check. Hoe. Check. Wheelbarrow. Check. Dirt. Check. Wait a minute, did you say dirt?

In Wasagamack the dirt has to be hauled in from the bush before a garden can be planted and not just anybody knows where to find the good earth. Gary Knott, a pharmacy assistant who is on the CDPI committee for the Wasagamack First Nation, said when he needs dirt he asks an elder in the community where to find the best gardening soil. "He knows where to find the good stuff. You have to have the black stuff and it's in more of a swampy area," said Knott. With CDPI funding, large equipment was used to haul the soil from the bush to the road, where band members were free to pick it up to use for their personal gardens. Knott said there were 29 gardens this year.

Although gardening has been going on

in the community for decades, people are becoming more and more interested in growing things other than traditional items like potatoes and onions. "They want cucumbers and strawberries and peas and beans," said Knott. "There are a lot of people around and these things disappear as soon as they're ripe."

CDPI funding has been used to purchase seeds for distribution and Knott set up a small greenhouse near the nursing station. One year he managed to grow about 80 cucumbers in the greenhouse. This year he tried yellow wax beans, which flourished in that setting. He has yet to produce a good corn crop, but believes it's just a matter of time. "You have to work on it," he said, "Next year we'll bring in more soil. I have noticed that the older people that garden have nice, fine soil."

Knott said people are "not really" making the connection between chronic disease prevention and healthy eating. "But we are trying to teach them and we're trying to encourage them." In a community where children as young as 11 years old are insulin dependent, this education and encouragement can't come soon enough. He said during cultural week families go out to the trap lines to hunt and fish and "eat the wild stuff." Young people are interested in this pursuit, said Knott, but he has noticed a lot of junk food going out with the fishing and camping gear. "Some people are in denial, but if they have questions, we are here to help them. We can do a lot of teaching with kids."

Contact Information:

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▼ **Diabetes and Manitoba First Nations**

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▼ According to The Diabetes Integration Project, developed with the help of the Assembly of
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▼ Manitoba Chiefs and funded by Health Canada, most First Nations in the province now have
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▼ at least a 25% diabetes rate.

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▼ <http://www.winnipegsun.com/News/Manitoba/2008/10/21/7150121-sun.html>