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LESSONS FROM LOCKDOWN

*One pandemic through
three sets of eyes*

Food, decolonized

.....

*It's high time for
hemp fashion*

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As a reminder of the decolonization work necessary to build a truly sustainable society, we acknowledge that the process of putting together this issue took place on the territories of the following Indigenous nations:

Anishinabek, Arapaho, Cheyenne, Chippewa, Haudenosaunee, Kainai, Kwantlen, Kwikwetlem, Métis Nation (Region 3), Mi'kmaq, Mississaugas of the Credit, Musqueam, Piikani, Qayqayt, Siksika, Squamish, Stó:lō, Stoney Nakoda, Stz'uminus, Tla'amin, Tsleil-waututh, Tsawwassen, Tsuut'ina, Wendat



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A Long Road to Action

Xena Szkotak is walking cross-country for missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and Two Spirit people.

Xena Szkotak in conversation with **Gloria Snow**



Photo by Teresa Snow

On February 24, 2021, Xena Szkotak started walking the 7,821 kilometres from Victoria, BC, to St. John's, NL, along the Trans-Canada Highway. The 25-year-old—who has Indigenous heritage but was raised by her Polish parents in Edmonton—has hiked through sleet, snow, and rain to increase awareness about missing and murdered Indigenous people, and to raise money for the Native Women's Association of Canada. She never gives out her exact location for safety reasons, but in mid-April she was somewhere near the Prairies.

Two months after setting out, Szkotak had a conversation with Gloria Snow, a member of the Stoney Nakoda Nation who works as an Indigenous advisor to the town of Cochrane, AB. She is currently planning a local Red Dress Day in memory of the missing and murdered. Red Dress Day was set aside by Indigenous women to honour missing and murdered women, girls, and Two Spirit people from their communities.

In 2019, Canada's National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls released a final report that concluded there is no reliable estimate for the number of missing and murdered Indigenous people in the country. The inquiry's backgrounder notes that 16% of all women murdered in Canada between 1980 and 2012 were Indigenous, though they only make up 4% of the population.

Red Dress Day is typically commemorated in May, to raise awareness about the ongoing violence faced by Indigenous women.

Szkotak and Snow connected over the power of awareness and action in the face of this injustice. This conversation has been edited for length and clarity.

Gloria Snow: How has this experience been for you so far?

Xena Szkotak: So far it's been amazing! It's been really scary, though. I was travelling in a tent for the first two months, and I had some unfortunate circumstances that led me to not feel comfortable sleeping in my tent any longer. So I just bought a van and found someone to drive it across the country as I walk.

I knew that it would be isolating. I knew that it was going to be scary. But how fast that would impact me was really unexpected. One thing I had considered was that I was privileged, because I could choose my suffering: a long walk, weathering any storms, weathering hot temperatures. These are sufferings I chose, and I wasn't expecting to be quite as impacted by the suffering that I cannot choose—which is the fear of being a woman.

[The issue I'm raising awareness about] has become more real for me. I'd grown up in Edmonton, so I know what the struggle is like to be a woman, or an Indigenous woman, growing up in a town. But to get out into the rest of Canada—especially when there's really not a lot around—to know what that is like, to be alone out there, to be a woman out there, to be Indigenous out there... It's become so much more real.

What kinds of discussions have you had along the way about murdered, missing, Indigenous women and girls, and Two Spirit people?

I've had a lot of people message me and say, "What you're doing is so powerful." And, "Thank you so much. I've got this many sisters missing, and this many sisters murdered." And how much it means to them. It's an honour to have these women reaching out to me. And it is really, really powerful to feel like I can offer them some sort of hope, or comfort.

Walk me through what led you to do this.

I had planned to do long walks in the United States in the summer of 2020.

When the pandemic hit, I thought, maybe I'll just walk across Canada. I figured it would be an amazing opportunity to bring awareness for something I cared about.

What kind of support systems have gotten you through?

I do have a satellite phone for emergencies. So if there's parts of the highway where my phone doesn't work, I can send text messages through that. And it has an SOS function, which I haven't used, thankfully. That makes me feel a lot safer. I have a friend that I'd text every time I pitched my tent, and I'd give my location for the night. When I had time—on my town days where I was just resting—I would check in with my family.

What's something that people could do right now to help bring about real action when it comes to the issue of murdered, missing Indigenous women, girls, and Two Spirit people?

Understand the situation, know what's going on. Not a lot of people know that these women are missing and murdered. Spread awareness. I felt like there was nothing else I could do, which led me to doing this.

I read this quote the other day: "When someone is broken, don't try to fix them. (You can't.) When someone is hurting, don't attempt to take away their pain. (You can't.) Instead, love them by walking beside them in the hurt. (You can.) Because sometimes, what people need to simply know is that they aren't alone." Can you reflect on this?

I think that is the best thing that you can do, is just to be there. Just to be present is so powerful.

I want to again say ish-nish [thank you in Stoney] from Treaty 7 Territory. We thank you for all of your courage and your bravery to do this walk.]

You can follow Szkotak's journey and find her fundraising link at [instagram.com/xenaoleonore](https://www.instagram.com/xenaoleonore). This conversation was recorded by Brianna Sharpe. An extended version can be found at [asparagusmagazine.com](https://www.asparagusmagazine.com).

PUBLISHER, EDITRIX-IN-CHIEF
Jessie Johnston

ART DIRECTOR
Christine Fwu

DEPUTY EDITOR
Alia Dharssi

ASSOCIATE DESIGNER
Avvai Ketheeswaran

EDITOR
Daina Lawrence

FACT-CHECKERS
Desaraigh Byers
Tina Knezevic
Melissa Tessler

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT COORDINATOR
Natasha Karim

AD SALES — ads@asparagusmagazine.com
Naomi Perks

LOGO DESIGN
Emily Birr

ART DIRECTOR EMERITA
Erin Flegg

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Letter from the Editor

I had a realization about a month ago that I still can't quite wrap my head around. With the publication of this issue, we will have put out more issues of *Asparagus* during the pandemic (three) than were published in pre-Covid times (two). Just, whoa.

That realization felt momentous to me, and this issue was already feeling that way. It's our fifth! When I finally started the magazine after a decade of dreaming it, I said, and meant, that I'd be satisfied if we only managed to put out a single issue. Of course I hoped to do more. But if we'd had to stop after one, I could have accepted it. So the fact that we managed not only that first issue, but four more since then—including *three in a pandemic*—feels like a really big deal.

Here's another big deal. As we were putting the finishing touches on this issue, we got word that for the first time, an *Asparagus* story was selected as a finalist for an award. In the absence of programs in the three other western Canadian provinces, the Alberta Magazine Awards have categories for stories and publications from each of BC, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba. And Tessa Vikander's 2020 article "Trans, Inside and Out" has been named a finalist in the British Columbia Story category! We're so proud to have published this important article, and thrilled that it's getting recognition within the industry.

One more thing we're thrilled with is the phenomenal support we received from readers during our recent fundraising campaign to pay for our Fall/Winter 2021 issue. Thanks to the generosity of 138 supporters (so far), we've surpassed our goal of raising \$15,000. So our fifth issue will not be our last. If you were one of those gener-

ous readers, my team and I thank you from the bottom of our hearts.

You may notice that the list of donors below this letter is not 138 names long. The timing of the campaign didn't allow us to include thank yous by name in this issue, but they will absolutely take pride of place in the issue the campaign is paying for. If you're aching to see your own name in our pages, it's not too late to join them in making a donation.

While I hope we never have to do another emergency campaign like this spring's, donations from readers who can afford to make them will always be an important source of revenue for *Asparagus*, pandemic or no. Just as they are for many independent, progressive publications that are much more well-established than we are. It's the only way to keep work like ours accessible and affordable in an era when advertising dollars are harder to come by than ever, unless you're Facebook or Google.

To my mind, that work is worth paying for. Take this issue, in which we're once again telling wide-ranging stories—both large and small—of how we can live sustainably. Whether you're puzzling through which non-dairy milk to drink or concerned about mental health care for marginalized people, there's a story for you in this issue. Whether you're interested in exploring Indigenous food traditions or hoping to make a cruelty-free investment, we've got you covered. Whether you're looking to laugh, learn, or enjoy beautiful photography and illustrations, *Asparagus* has something for you. And with your support, we'll keep filling issues with bright, green storytelling long after the pandemic has become a memory.

—Jessie Johnston
editor@asparagusmagazine.com

Thanks to our Supporters

Asparagus depends on support from generous readers, including these supporters who donated in the last year.

This list was prepared before our 2021 fundraising campaign. Donors to that campaign will be acknowledged in our *Fall/Winter 2021 issue*. Join them in supporting independent journalism by becoming a donor at shop.asparagusmagazine.com.

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* = monthly donors

Discuss Gus

The Summer/Fall 2020 issue of *Asparagus* was exceptional. I enjoyed all the articles: especially: "This Book Builds Bridges," "Covid-19 Could Kill the Heart of COP21," "Stitching Together Coral Reefs," and "8 Things Teen Climate Activists Want Adults to Know." This sentence from the article on coral reefs stopped my heart: "It's amazingly peaceful to sit on the ocean floor slowly sewing coral fragments onto a stable structure, giving them a second chance at life."

But it was the poem by Rachel Aberle, "The Year Without Hugs," that has become a touchstone for the year. I continue to read this poem regularly, and this holiday season I shared it widely with family and friends. I have received many thank yous from people for whom the poem resonated as it did for me. Thank you for this gift.

—Deborah Newstead | Vancouver, BC

We want to hear from you!

Send your feedback, stories, questions, rants to editor@asparagusmagazine.com, or find us on social media (handles in masthead).

Discuss Gus items may be lightly edited for length and clarity.



Re: "Artists are the Architects of Activism We Need" | Winter 2021

Trying to find an inspiring/motivating article or two each morning—this one did exactly that! Beautiful piece.

—Teghan Acres | @teghanacres on Twitter

Re: "This Land Doesn't Need a White Saviour" | Winter 2021

This was amazing. I'm still thinking about how beautiful the landscape is, and how beside the point my opinion of its beauty is.

—Michelle Mancini | Facebook

Re: "The Story of Avocado" | Summer/Fall 2020

Still trying to process all of this as it is probably my husband's favourite food! And we have family in California who grow their own in their own tiny backyard. I knew they took a lot of water, so I... likely will eat more sparingly.

—Barbara Cantwell | Facebook



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Street Food

Community fridge programs fight food insecurity during Covid-19.



By **Rebecca Tucker**

Food placed in any of Toronto's community fridges seldom sits on the shelf for more than two hours. The fridges—there are at least seven—appeared on sidewalks in 2020 and are stocked full of food for the taking, no questions asked. Toronto's community fridges are all in different neighbourhoods, and are located outdoors at street level, many right on the sidewalk. The idea behind them is simple: walk up to

a fridge any time of the day, take only what you need and leave the rest for others.

For many households, access to safe and nutritious food has been increasingly difficult since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic last year. In fact, food insecurity in Canada spiked by 39%, according to Community Food Centres Canada, a non-profit improving low-income populations' access to healthful food. Insecurity rates are highest among racialized and Indigenous communities.

"A lot of the people who fit the criteria of being insecure might not feel comfortable accessing charity resources because of red tape or stigma," says Jalil Bokhari, who co-founded Community Fridges Toronto (CFTO) in 2020 with chef Julian Bentivegna. "We don't have criteria for who can use it, and how often they can use it, because it's anonymous. Food is a

right, and no one person is more deserving of food than anyone else."

Bokhari and Bentivegna know each other through their work in Toronto's restaurant industry (Bokhari works as a bartender). The idea to establish the first community fridge outside Bentivegna's restaurant, Ten, was partly born of the chef's desire to reduce the amount of food waste produced by his kitchen. (Perfectly good food, to be clear: one of the network's main tenets is that people should only donate food they would eat themselves.)

Food donations need to be new, unopened, and fresh. The fridges accept produce, dairy, bread, proteins, pantry staples, grab-and-go food, pet food, and personal care items (including personal protective equipment and menstrual products). No expired food, home-cooked food, or leftovers are accepted.

..... **START SMALL**



Photo by David Byres

A new community fridge
in Kelowna, BC

The first fridge was set up in July 2020 outside of Ten in Toronto's Brockton Village neighbourhood. Bokhari and Bentivegna have since set up six more fridges, and amassed a volunteer network of hundreds, including local residents, business owners, and hospitality industry workers.

The community-fridge concept is not new—nor is it unique to Toronto. The first well-known community fridges were set up in 2012, in Germany. Since then, fridges have been set up around the world, from the Netherlands to New Zealand. But their proliferation accelerated in 2020, as the financial insecurity wrought by Covid-19 increased food insecurity. Since the launch of CFTO, similar initiatives have popped up in Calgary, Vancouver, Montreal, New York City, and Seattle, among other cities.

CFTO, like the other fridge projects, is a mutual aid program. Mutual aid organizations, which have flourished during Covid, are organizations that depend on the voluntary exchange of time and resources, meant to build solidarity among participants through a framework of community and cooperation.

Project volunteers split the work of stocking and cleaning fridges, or facilitating the delivery of large donations from local restaurants or other organizations, while community members fill in the gaps by making small, individual donations. According to Bokhari, there's no set schedule for cleaning or donations, but he and Bentivegna help ensure things are running

smoothly by monitoring communications in a group Signal chat, and sending callouts and updates via Instagram.

While volunteers are frequent donors, Bentivegna says upwards of 80% of the fridges' stock comes from other members of the community, including local restaurants and food banks.

Some local organizations—such as volunteer group Bike Brigade, which coordinates medium-scale food deliveries to the network of fridges—have signed up as unofficial partners. But since CFTO is completely decentralized and volunteer-run, there is no drop-off centre or headquarters. Instead, all items are placed directly into the fridges by donors, and everything involved, from food to fridges, has been donated.

“We push away from the idea that you need money to help people, because it encourages a kind of backseat mentality; this idea that if you throw money at something, it will work itself out,” Bokhari says. “We're empowering people to pitch in... Sometimes means they'll buy food. But sometimes it means they'll clean a fridge.”

Each fridge is located outside a private business that has donated space. Sierra Leedham is a volunteer whose clothing store, Black Diamond Vintage, previously hosted a fridge in front of its main doors. (It was removed due to a City of Toronto bylaw that does not allow “abandoned” appliances on public property; the fridge has since been moved into an accessible private space.) The Parkdale shop owner says she

regularly fills, cleans, and delivers large donations to fridges around the city, a commitment that she says is typical of CFTO's dedicated team of volunteers.

She says the largest challenge facing the network is quality control: “trying to communicate to people that, if you wouldn't want to eat it yourself, don't put it in the fridge.”

“It's about solidarity and care and respect and love for the community,” adds Leedham, “and not just thinking that people should be thankful for what they get.”

Paul Taylor, executive director of food justice non-profit FoodShare in Toronto, is supportive of mutual aid efforts such as community fridges. But he worries that politicians will use the enthusiasm for mutual aid as a reason to take the implementation of anti-poverty and food insecurity policy measures off the table.

“Communities and individuals are responding to a moral imperative to support folks in their neighbourhoods that don't have enough food,” he says. “A lot of [community] interventions [understand] that it's racialized folks and Indigenous folks that are most affected by food insecurity... whereas our government is not addressing the issue adequately.”

When he looks at organizations like CFTO, Taylor is heartened that today's community-based interventions “not only recognize race-based inequities, but they also recognize systemic and structural inequities.”

When he became a father, Bond stepped back from his career as a transportation systems engineer for BC's Ministry of Transport and became a stay-at-home dad. Because his work as a city councillor tends to be confined to evenings, he's free during the day to parent.

Wilhelmina is now 6, with a 3-year-old sister named Coral. Bond still loads them onto the back of his bike and rides with them all over the hills and streets of North Vancouver.

A basic cargo bike like the Benno Carry On can be purchased for under US\$1,500, but if you add extra carrying capacity and electric-assist, prices can quickly reach five times that number.

So before you spend that much money, you really need to make sure it's the right choice for you. Bond says he bought his cargo bike before they were all the rage, and he chose an electric version to take on the hills in his area.

Ask lots of questions

Bond cautions the curious to test ride these bikes before making a commitment. “My suggestion to people thinking about a cargo bike is to go borrow or rent one. Try it out, see what it's like, even if it's just for

you get it? Who has the best shops and the best services?

“And get a buddy and do a few rides... while they're out and about on their cargo bike,” says Bond. “See where they go, what they do and how they do it. And ask them to come with you on your first few rides, or when you're trying something like carrying a large load.”

Kid safety

If you're planning on loading your kids onto the bike, you have a whole new set of



Photo by Mathew Bond

a day or just for a ride,” he says. “If you haven't been biking in a long time, or you're not a person that bikes regularly, try a little trip to the grocery store. I regularly put \$300 worth of groceries on the bike. Carry some other things around before you carry your children around on it.”

But Bond's biggest tip is a simple one: get advice from people already riding. In Vancouver, there are family biking Facebook pages, which include members that are taking their kids on cargo bikes. Social media offers a community that can answer questions about what type of bike will work best for each person's circumstances. You can ask questions like: What kind of gear do you need, and where can

concerns, according to Bond. First off, is helmet safety: “You have to wait till your child's head fits a helmet.”

Bond started each of his girls riding up front in a seat between his arms. When Bond's youngest, Coral, started riding, he added a second seat on the back of the bike for Wilhelmina. Eventually both Bond's girls wound up riding on the rear carrier. If you've got two small people on the back of a bike, face them away from one another so they don't knock helmets.

Learn your bike and your hood

The father of two also has some advice for those in the driver's seat. “Make sure you're comfortable. Build up your confidence,

and learn your routes,” he says. “Take your kids on a ride in the park, somewhere safe, and then kind of build up from there.” He's also the former president of the North Shore Mountain Bike Association and believes that cycling with his girls gives them a better understanding of their hometown. While most kids travel in a rear-facing car seat, his girls are riding along with him.

“Kids have a lot less freedom nowadays,” says Bond. “Because they get driven around, they don't even understand their own neighbourhood. I think developing that kind of sense of place is important.”

As well as helping his daughters to map out their own hometown, the bike trips build confidence in his daughters. “The girls know how to get to Lynn Valley, or their friend's house. Wilhelmina can give me directions: ‘Okay, it's this way. And let's go here; let's go there. Remember when we saw that animal here?’”

Consider storage options

Bond's final piece of cargo-bike advice is to think carefully about storage. If you live in a condo or apartment, or if you have to navigate a small elevator, what are the best places to park and lock your bike? And if it's electric, where can you plug in to charge it?

Bond has a parking space with a regular electrical outlet, but had to ask his strata for permission. And then they had to figure out how much to charge him.

After years of riding everywhere on a cargo bike, juggling kids, and home, and council work, Bond is happy with his choices. “When I tell people I use it for almost all my everyday trips, many are stunned, but also excited, and ask ‘Well, how do you . . . ?’”

Growing up on the back of a cargo bike has one more important benefit for Bond's daughters. It's no surprise that Wilhelmina is proud that she can now ride on her own.

“I already knew how to pedal when I was 4,” she says. “I practised and practised... I first started with no pedals. Then I said, ‘I have enough balance Papa.’ Then I tried the pedals.”

And when asked if she had ever fallen: “Yeah. But not too hard.”

LIFE CYCLE ANALYSIS

Precious Cargo

A father of two shares his secrets to pedal-powered parenting.



By **Barry Rueger**

As an on-again-off-again cyclist, I've always had a grudging admiration for those people who choose to ride everywhere, all of the time. I know people on Vancouver's North Shore who ride to and from work—up to 25 kilometres away—every day, and even more that ride for fun and fitness. I can actually see myself

commuting with rain gear and a briefcase, but what would happen if I also had a family to transport?

I asked North Vancouver District councillor Mathew Bond. When Bond's daughter Wilhelmina was born, he didn't rush out to buy a minivan: he decided to stick with his bright red 2016 Ezeé Expedir cargo bike.

DEPT OF SAFE SPACES

Rethinking Mental Health Care

A Toronto clinic offers anti-oppressive therapy services for racialized communities.



By Krystal Kavita Jagoo

Three years ago, Dev Ramsawakh waited months to see a psychiatrist, then was repeatedly misgendered at the appointment by both the doctor and a white social worker. This came after they had already tolerated being told to try yoga by that social worker, without any consideration for how someone of South Asian descent may have cultural and religious ties to those practices.

“Following that incident, I was really deterred from accessing mental health services. I struggled with feeling confident in the process,” recalls Ramsawakh, who identifies as genderqueer, gender-fluid, and polyamorous. “And I just felt exhausted and disillusioned. To realize that there would be the possibility of getting a psychiatrist who wasn’t invested in my wellness was very disheartening, and so for a long time I did give up on mental health services.” In this way, as a disabled racialized individual with a trauma history, Ramsawakh felt stuck for options.

Chinese, Korean, Southeast Asian, and Black participants were more than twice as likely as white participants to report discrimination during the pandemic.

Stories like Ramsawakh’s demonstrate the dire need for helping professionals to

better understand how oppression can intersect with mental health challenges. Otherwise, health care providers run the risk of harming the very people whose needs they ought to serve.

As Covid-19 continues to disrupt lives across the country, its mental health impact for marginalized individuals deserves more attention.

According to a 2020 Statistics Canada survey, gender-diverse participants were almost three times more likely than men to report that they had experienced discrimination during the pandemic. Based on the same study, Chinese, Korean, Southeast Asian, and Black participants were more than two times as likely as white participants to report discrimination. Participants with a disability were two times as likely to report experiencing discrimination.

Sarah Ahmed and Zainib Abdullah—two women of colour and co-founders of Toronto’s WellNest Psychotherapy Services—highlight the lack of representation in the mental health space as a driving force for starting their business. In doing so, they worked with other racialized communities to ensure that their practice is anti-racist, feminist, trauma-informed, LGBTQ-aligned, and culturally, spiritually, and linguistically appropriate.

“I continually hear from clients, over and over again, how grateful they are, how happy they are, that they have a space that is able to represent them,” says Abdullah. She describes how often they heard from racialized individuals during initial interactions that they are reaching out to connect with a therapist of colour. With 90% of their clients identifying as racialized, it is clear to her that their racially diverse

team of therapists allows for a rare feeling of safety.

Abdullah reflects on how there were never many healing spaces for her as a Muslim immigrant kid, which drives her own work to develop mental health services that meet the diverse needs of people in these communities, needs she understands well.

A woman of Arab and African ethnicity in her twenties requested to remain anonymous to share freely about her experiences, but for clarity we will call her Zara. Zara



Zainib Abdullah & Sarah Ahmed | Photo courtesy WellNest

reported seeking mental health support following panic attacks after a sexual assault. She recalls being asked by an older white doctor if she was a virgin, how long ago she had come to the country, if she had come alone, and if she liked her job. He also felt the need to tell her, “You realize that if there is no violence, that’s not a rape.”

That interaction resulted in three panic attacks about that doctor over the next 24 hours. As a permanent resident in Canada for less than three years, this Moroccan woman says she did not know if his triggering questions were the norm in these appointments.

Zara went to a free therapist, but found that her specific struggles about finding a job as a recent immigrant were not being heard. A friend then told her about the negative impacts of not feeling heard by

a health-care professional, “so I stopped because I thought maybe it’s free, but it’s going to actually cost me something.”

For this reason, Zara searched for a racialized therapist on the Healing in Colour website, and described her ideal therapist as an immigrant. This directory of racialized psychotherapists was created by BC-based mental health professionals, Yasmin Hajian and Premala Matthen. Their resource was developed in response to the unmet needs of racialized people seeking therapy.

Ramsawakh can relate to the harm these interactions can cause, and they suggest taking them seriously because a practitioner’s feedback may be a reflection of their lack of knowledge, rather than your needs not being valid.

“Do not allow them to convince you that your problems aren’t worth seeking care for, because they definitely are,” they add.

Ramsawakh currently sees a therapist who is a much better fit, but cost remains a challenge. “Even with the subsidized rates,

it’s about \$80 a session for 50 minutes,” they explained. “I see him weekly so that works out to over \$300 a month, which is a lot to spend. And that’s just one aspect of mental health care.”

Maybe it’s free, but it’s going to actually cost me something.

High mental health costs are not an option for many marginalized communities, as food insecurity is the largest concern in many households, so there may be even more barriers to therapy during the pandemic.

With financial challenges in mind, WellNest created free videos and blogs, in addition to their ongoing work to destigmatize therapy and offer services at

subsidized rates. Abdullah also described the hard work required as co-founders of a practice of mostly racialized psychotherapists to sustain and provide support for their team virtually during the pandemic, by checking in with them regularly. It has sometimes meant open discussions about the need to reduce practitioners’ hours, or cut back on referrals to support certain concerns, if therapists reported that they had hit their own capacity.

The organization also raised C\$12,000 in 24 hours to provide free services for Black people to support the Black Lives Matter movement. Their practice takes oppression into consideration and gives racialized people a glimpse into what equitable mental health care may look like. WellNest may provide the environment and the opportunity for racialized people to feel safe to access mental health supports. Something that Ramsawakh says they wished they’d had in that Toronto clinic all those years ago. |

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GREENER PASTURES

Kisumu's Climate-Smart Farmers

Kenya's smallholder farmers are adapting to a new climate reality.



By Kevin Lunzalu

In Nyalenda Village, Kisumu County, Kenya, Millicent Odera grows maize (what North Americans call “corn”), beans, leafy vegetables, butternut squash, pumpkins, and onions on 1 hectare of land. She’s been at it for 20 years. But, six years into her small agribusiness, she noticed the productivity of her farm dwindling.

“I used to harvest up to 20 sacks of maize, when I started, which reduced to just eight over time,” recalls Odera. Continuous application of synthetic fertilizers and pesticides had depleted soil nutrients. Meanwhile, shifting rainfall patterns had dented the ability of farmers to accurately predict planting seasons. Increased floods and droughts due to climate change often resulted in farm losses due to death of crops. As a response, Odera moved away from conventional farming methods and tools, including pesticides, synthetic fertilizers, and slash-and-burn agriculture.

She’s among a group of smallholder farmers across Kenya who are reacting to environmental changes spurred by climate change by adopting new techniques to sustain their livelihoods, often with environmental benefits. These farmers are shifting away from traditional rainfed agriculture by employing irrigation, using compost manure to add nutrients and minimize dependence on synthetic fertilizers, and growing crops that mature more quickly and require less rainfall. The farmers also learn

Farmers are battling with more clear signs of climate change.

about drought-tolerant species, proper seed storage, tree selection for agroforestry, and water management from government agricultural extension personnel. Some are also taking up poultry farming instead of rearing livestock, motivated by the smaller amount of water, feed, and land required by birds.

The impact of such changes can be significant. A 2020 study published in *World Development Perspectives* found that uptake of stress-tolerant crops in Kenya’s Nyando Basin improved household income by 83%. Even so, many farmers struggle to improve productivity, with many lacking knowledge of how to confront the rising challenges posed by climate change.

In the quest to improve her farm, Odera began rearing chickens, practicing vertical gardening, and growing vegetables in vessels that could retain moisture during dry seasons. She also undertook rainwater harvesting and storage to irrigate her vegetable garden during dry seasons, and planted fruit trees, which provide mulching materials, additional food, and fuel wood.

“Changing climatic conditions forced me to shift from traditional to modern farming methods,” says Odera. The changes also cut back on her farm’s carbon emissions, she adds.

Unpredictable patterns

Across Kenya, smallholder farmers—who produce over 70% of the country’s food and largely rely on rainfed agriculture—are contending with the impacts of climate change. Rainfall and sun patterns are becoming harder to predict, and droughts and floods are becoming more extreme. Since early 2020, the country has been coping with what is said to be the worst desert locust invasion in 70 years. Induced by heavy and widespread rainfall



Doreen Cherono farms in Kisumu. |Photo by Michael Samoei

in East Africa, swarms of locusts have devastated entire fields. Climate change will continue to adversely affect Kenyan food security, with a decline in yields of up to 69% by the year 2100, according to a 2016 paper published by Environment for Development, a global network of research centres.

“In most areas, farmers are battling with what seems to be more clear signs of climate change,” says Esther Maina, an associate environmental consultant at Lead Securities Limited, a consultancy that undertakes environmental and social impact assessments of farming ventures in Kenya. “And this could have more grave impacts on our overall food security if innovative approaches are not quickly adopted.”

Cultivating soils

Millicent Akoth, another smallholder farmer from Kisumu County, says she believes the secret to climate-smart farming lies in healthy soils. Starting in 2004, Akoth recorded dwindling yields—a challenge she attributes to poor soil nutrient and moisture balance.

“In 2010, I sought the services of an agricultural extension officer from whom I learnt that besides poor moisture retention, my soil was highly acidic. This meant the soils could not support many of the crop varieties that we grow in this region,” she says. Akoth began using organic manure to reduce soil acidity, and introduced crops,

such as sweet potatoes and chilis, that perform well in acidic soil.

“With proper soil management, you do not need huge tracts of land,” says Akoth. Through proceeds from the farm, she can comfortably feed her family with a variety of fresh nutritious foods including sweet potatoes, peas, leafy vegetables, maize, cabbages, onions, and tomatoes.

Akoth uses part of the farm as a demonstration plot to train other women on soil and farm water management techniques. “I am confident that when this knowledge is passed on—especially to women who are the key custodians of our diets—the region will be food-sufficient,” she says.

Her trainings help fill a dire gap. Even though smallholder farmers grow most of Kenya’s fruits and vegetables, they lack information about emerging climate challenges and how to respond to them.

Conserving resources

In Nyalenda B Village, Kisumu County, about 100 chickens cluck around Abigail Malanda’s 1,000 square-metre farm. Malanda used to keep cattle, but due to climate change and the resultant dwindling water supply, she found it hard to maintain a sizable herd that could guarantee good returns.

In 2010, she shifted to poultry-keeping, after training herself online to raise chickens. Chickens generally require smaller spaces and consume less water and feed compared to livestock, and raising them results in fewer carbon emissions, she says. She also maintains an egg incubation unit and 20 ornamental birds on her farm.

Malanda says she keeps her farm’s ecological footprint low by keeping the flock number small and sourcing almost all of her inputs locally. She also enjoys a ready market, since poultry farming is not widespread in the area. “Most of our customers collect their orders for eggs, meat, and live birds directly from the farm,” she says.

She’s keen to share her knowledge and help others conserve resources. Since 2018, Malanda has taught poultry husbandry to over 500 farmers from the area with a focus on helping other women.

She tells them about the economic and environmental benefits of raising poultry, she says. “I find happiness in seeing other women improve their income and mitigate climate change.” }

IT'S ELECTRIC

The Story of Solar Panels

An increase in solar energy will reduce our carbon footprint, but what other impacts could it have?



By Glynis Ratcliffe

If you grew up in the '80s or '90s, there's a good chance you used a solar-powered calculator. They were ubiquitous, though solar was used for little else at the time. A lot of kinks needed to be worked out before solar power could be effectively used for more than basic arithmetic. Only now is the technology catching up to sunlight's vast potential to power our world.

Before we dig into the story of solar panels, let's cover some basics: solar cells—also called photovoltaic cells—consist of a semiconductor material (usually silicon) topped with a grid of fine metal lines and sealed with glass. The semiconductor in a solar cell is mixed with minerals that give its top layer a positive charge. When sunlight hits the cell, negatively charged electrons are knocked loose and attracted to the positively charged top layer, where they encounter the metal conductor strips. The electrons move through the conductor strips as an electrical current that can be transported along wires or stored in batteries.

Regular silicon solar cells are known as “single-junction cells.” Researchers are currently exploring ways to layer multiple semiconductor materials in what are known as “multi-junction cells,” which increase efficiency by capturing different parts of the light spectrum. Another emerging technology is thin-film solar, in which a coating of photovoltaic semiconductor is deposited on regular glass, no silicon required.

Your solar-powered calculator was likely powered by three photovoltaic cells. Cells like these (but in a larger, standard size of 15.6 centimetres squared) are assembled to create a solar panel or “module,” which can power more than a calculator. A “solar array”—sometimes confusingly called a “solar system,” like the one we share with Mars—is made of many linked solar panels.

Those large-scale arrays were a long time coming. Scientists started trying to harness the sun's energy nearly 150 years ago. American inventor Charles Fritts made the first solar cells in 1883, but they were only able to convert less than 1% of the light that hit them into electricity. It took until 1954 for scientists at Bell Labs to create the first commercially viable solar panel. It was 6% efficient.

A question of efficiency

If 6% efficiency doesn't sound like much, that's because it isn't—which is the main reason solar panels weren't immediately adopted as a major energy source.

It took decades for scientists to build the efficiency of solar cells up to where it currently sits, at around 20%. Silicon has a natural efficiency ceiling—known as the Shockley-Queisser limit—of around 34%. This means it can only absorb that percentage of the sunlight that hits it, with the rest either reflecting out or passing through the cells. This ceiling is why the development of multi-junction technology is so important.

John Rogers, a senior energy analyst with the Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS)—a charity dedicated to solving the planet's pressing problems with science—illustrates how the tech has improved over the decades. “There's a 100-kilowatt solar system that was installed under the Carter administration, that was a big deal at the time,” he says. “Now you're talking about projects of hundreds of megawatts, so hundreds of thousands of kilowatts.”

It takes energy to save energy

Solar panels' environmental shine comes from their potential to reduce our dependence on greenhouse-gas-emitting energy sources. But before they can make green power, they need to be made themselves. And that process has environmental impacts that can't be ignored.

Photovoltaic technology is evolving quickly, and solar cells of all kinds are complex, so we can't delve deeply into all possible manufacturing impacts here. (A 2020 literature review of solar panel life cycle analyses runs to 39 pages.) But we can hit the highlights.

By far the largest impact comes from the energy-intensive manufacture of silicon. Depending on where the process is taking place—and most solar cells are currently made in China—silicon production can have a large carbon footprint. Life cycle analyses of solar cells often report on “energy payback time” (EPBT), the time it takes for a cell to generate the quantity of energy used to manufacture and ultimately dispose of it. The review mentioned above found that silicon-based photovoltaics can have EPBTs ranging from 10 months up to 6 years. Factors affecting EPBT include not only the efficiency of the solar unit, but also the amount of sunlight it has the opportunity to absorb. Lower insolation leads to longer payback times.

Newer solar technologies are less energy-intensive than silicon-based ones, but silicon is still the dominant player (making up 95% of the market by some estimates). Newer technologies come with other challenges. The major thin-film options use cadmium,

Solar can fit in the cracks. Whether on a landfill, or the edge of farmland, there are opportunities.

of pigs that were cleaned with contaminated river water. It's easy to imagine much worse outcomes. Mitigation of these toxic risks is possible, but requires proper environmental regulation and oversight, which will be particularly important as the solar energy market grows.

Newer solar technologies' reliance on precious metals like gold, silver, and platinum is also a concern the literature review describes as “non-negligible.” The authors state that it's “important to consider the real sustainability of a scenario of large-scale diffusion of these devices.” The impacts of mining, and/or potential scarcity of raw materials, make recycling at end-of-life critical to keeping solar technology as sustainable as possible.

Recycling matters

Disposal is a major pain point with solar panels, at least in North America. Most

cells contain lead; cadmium, as mentioned above, is carcinogenic. And separating the elements in thin-film CIGS cells (made by combining copper and selenide with the rare elements indium and gallium) is a complex undertaking.

Putting the onus on companies to provide recycling options for the products they sell isn't something we're used to doing in North America, but Rogers hopes recycling initiatives will develop as more people adopt solar power. In contrast, the EU created a law mandating all electric and electronic equipment manufacturers take responsibility for recycling their own products, including solar panels. The result is a not-for-profit association, PV Cycle, dedicated to doing just that in countries across the EU. Australia, Japan, and India are working on similar initiatives.

A 2016 study by the International Renewable Energy Agency projected that North America could create up to 1.1 million metric tonnes of photovoltaic cell waste by 2030, and potentially over 12 million tonnes by 2050. Clearly, photovoltaics recycling will need to be ramped up before then.

Facing the future

The International Energy Agency estimates that the amount of solar power generated globally almost quadrupled between 2014 (190 terawatt-hours) and 2019 (720 TWh), in no small part due to the technology's plummeting cost. Rogers is excited about the possibilities.

“Solar is modular, so it can sort of fit in the cracks, in between other stuff,” he says. “Whether it's on a landfill in my community, or on the edge of farmland, or low-quality land, or in other industrial sites, there are opportunities.”

In addition, he mentions the concept of “floatovoltaics,” or floating solar panels, as being of particular interest. Such arrays already exist throughout Japan and China, on inland lakes and particularly on reservoirs. The water has a cooling effect on the panels that can enhance efficiency in hot climates, and the shade they create can reduce evaporation and reduce destructive algae blooms in the water below.


With the US, Canada, and the EU all committing to pandemic recovery plans that emphasize climate action, it's clear much remains to be told in the story of solar panels. 



Photo by Gus Garcia

which is a carcinogen and can cause heritable mutations. Workers making these cells are at risk of exposure, and toxic leaching is a risk when thin-films are disposed of.

Silicon-based cells also pose a toxicity risk, as their production requires hazardous chemicals. A 2011 hydrofluoric acid spill at a Chinese solar factory killed dozens

panels have a lifespan of around 20-30 years, which means that the first wave of widely available solar panels is at or nearing the end of their use.

The main components of solar panels—metal and glass—are eminently recyclable. It's the other materials you need to watch out for, the UCS' Rogers says. Most silicon



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THE DECIDER

Got Mylk?

Not all non-dairy milks are created equal, so which one is right for you and the planet?



By Katharine Reid

Chances are, if you walk into your local coffee shop and order a latte, you'll be asked what kind of milk you want—and the options will be endless. A 2018 University of Oxford study showed that producing a litre of dairy milk results in almost three times more greenhouse gas emissions than a litre of any other plant-based milk. As more people try to reduce their carbon footprint, plant-based options (sometimes called “mylk”) are becoming more commonplace.

If you've ditched dairy in favour of plant-based milk, you're already making a positive impact, according to Dr. Lenore Newman, Canada Research Chair in Food Security and the Environment at University of the Fraser Valley (UFV).

“Dairy has one of the biggest footprints of the major food groups,” explains Newman. “We're diverting a lot of crops to feed cows.” When you switch away from dairy to an alternative, you make a significant savings on greenhouse gas emissions.

Sounds simple, right? As usual when trying to make the most eco-friendly decision, it's nuanced. Some crops (like soy) are monocultures, meaning they're repeatedly grown on a large scale on the same land (and that land has to be cleared to produce it). Too many of the same plant species in one area robs the soil of its nutrients.

But while we want to make the most environmentally conscious choice, we also want the food we choose to be delicious and nourishing. Luckily, plant-based products have come a long way in terms of taste. Here's how the most popular plant-based milks stack up in terms of environmental impact and nutrition.

Bad for bees: Almond milk

Like all plant-based milks, almond milk is much better than dairy milk on greenhouse gasses. But it still has some major issues.



Photo By Pixel-Shot

It uses the most water by far compared to other crops grown for milks, according to a 2010 report from the Water Footprint Network. And it's mostly grown in California (which is in a major drought).

“It uses a lot of water, it's a monoculture and it's really hard on pollinators,” Newman says. “Because almonds have to be pollinated, they bring almost all the bees in the western part of the continent to the almond farms in California. All this moving around isn't good for bees.”

A *Guardian* investigation compared it to “sending bees to war,” as commercial beekeepers transporting their hives to almond farms see them die in record numbers.

Despite its downfalls, almond milk has a much smaller impact on global warming than most US dairy milk, and about half the freshwater consumption, according to a study in *The International Journal of Life Cycle Assessment*.

Nutritionally, “almond milk lacks much protein, but does offer some fat,” says Jennifer Anderson, the registered dietitian behind the popular Instagram account Kids Eat in Color. Almonds themselves are

a nutritional powerhouse, offering protein, healthy fats, and fibre. But almond milk consists mostly of filtered water. Levels of fortification vary across brands.

Ethically, it's not the best option either. “The labour force that harvest the almonds don't have it really easy,” says Newman. And that's putting it mildly. According to the July 2020 Covid-19 Farmworker Study led by the California Institute for Rural Studies, an estimated 90% of California

farmworkers were born in Mexico, and approximately 60% are unauthorized to work in the US. Their undocumented status means they don't have access to health care services, and they don't get sick leave if exposed to Covid-19.

Verdict: Skip the almond milk if other plant-based options are available.

Dairy's nutritional counterpart: Soy milk

“Soy is a monoculture, so there is some clearing of land to produce it,” says UFV's Newman. Soy's water footprint is also larger than peas, oats, coconut's and hemp's, though it's nowhere near as high as almond's. Studies show soy's greenhouse gas emissions are about equal to almonds' and peas', but much lower than dairy's.

Another issue is that a large percentage of the world's soy is “Roundup Ready”—genetically engineered to withstand the herbicide glyphosate (Roundup), which the World Health Organization has linked to cancer.

According to a 2013 study in *Food Chemistry*, genetically modified soybeans

contain high residues of glyphosate. Organic soybeans, on the other hand, have a more healthy nutritional profile than other soybeans and come with the major bonus of not being treated with chemical pesticides or herbicides.

In short, if there are only certain foods you can afford to buy organic, soy should definitely be on that list.

Despite its pitfalls, soy does have a few party tricks. First off, because it's a legume, it fixes nitrogen in the soil, which reduces the need for synthetic fertilizers. Second, according to a McGill University study, soy milk is the best plant-based milk nutritionally, offering the closest nutritional profile to cow's milk. That makes it a good option for families with young kids.

“If you are using plant-based beverages with a toddler, it must be high in fat and protein, otherwise it is not nutrient-dense enough for a toddler,” says Anderson.

Verdict: Soy is a great high-protein option, but it's best to choose organic when possible.

Homegrown and heart-healthy: Oat milk

“The big winner, and my favourite, is oat milk,” says Newman. “Oat milk is one of the best-tasting options,” she says. And it's also homegrown. Canada is a top producer of oats and canola.

European brand Oatly generates 80% lower greenhouse emissions than cow's milk, according to their sustainability report. Land-use is also about 80% lower than cow's milk, and oats typically use less water to grow than all other milk crops.

Dairy milk produces almost three times more greenhouse gases than any plant-based milk.

But oat milk is likely the least nutrient-dense, according to Anderson. “You need to look at the nutrition facts and compare the brands in your local store,” she says.

The negatives of oat milk: Popular oat products like instant oatmeal, breakfast

cereal and snack bars were tested for glyphosate in an Environmental Working Group study. Roundup was present in almost all the products made with conventionally grown oats, and almost 93% of those samples had glyphosate levels higher than what EWG scientists consider safe for children.

Organically grown oats fared better, with only about 30% of the samples containing glyphosate, all at much lower levels. Oats, while a monoculture “are usually grown on previously farmed land, so the issue is subtle,” says Newman.

Verdict: Oat milk is a great heart-healthy option, especially if you choose organic.

Honourable mentions: Pea and coconut

Pea milk has a lot in common with soy. It's high in protein (and often has added fat) making it another good dairy alternative for toddlers. Because it's a legume, peas also replenish nitrogen in the soil. Unlike soy, peas are less likely to be genetically modified to be Roundup Ready. Pea is one of the more expensive options on the market, though, so for families who drink a lot of plant-based milk it might be a better occasional purchase.

As for coconut, it is a good option, says Newman “because it is usually farmed in mixed plantations with other species, and it brings money into parts of the world that really need small industry.” The downside is, “you have to bring it halfway around the world, so there is a bit of a carbon footprint.” Also, when you're picking out a coconut milk, look for one that's Fair Trade (and therefore produced more equitably).

Where to go from here

“The real truth is that dairy is rising in popularity around the world on average,” says Newman. “It's weird because North Americans are moving away from it. What happens if everyone else uses as much dairy as North Americans? The answer is: You just can't do that.”

Can we single-handedly save the planet by choosing plant-based milk? Or save the bees by avoiding almond milk? Probably not. But at least our morning coffees don't need to be part of the problem. }

KNOW LOGO

In Good Company

B Corp aims to identify beneficial corporations.



By Rebecca Gao

In 2007, 82 companies were certified as the first generation of Benefit Corporations, or B Corps. Today, over 3,500 companies in 70 countries—ranging from Kickstarter to Patagonia—have earned the certification. B Lab, the global non-profit that certifies B Corps, aims to inspire a cultural shift in the way corporations behave.

“Our vision is of an inclusive, equitable and regenerative economic system for all people and the planet,” B Lab's website explains. The founders—three friends who'd worked in business and private equity—were concerned about companies prioritizing the value of their stocks over ethical and environmental concerns.

B Lab's certification process aims to assess how a company's business model and operations impact workers, community, environment, and customers, rather than shareholder earnings. B Corps run the gamut from sole proprietorships to publicly traded multinationals like Ben and Jerry's and Danone North America.

“[B Lab] provides a holistic evaluation,” says Todd Schifeling, an assistant professor of strategic management at Temple University's business school in Philadelphia. “They evaluate across issues, which is appealing to audiences. And it really simplifies things, as opposed to adding up 50 different certifications.”

What is B Lab?

B Lab encourages companies to adopt a “triple bottom-line” model that considers people and the planet alongside profit. Its B Impact Assessment evaluates how a company treats its employees, people living in communities where it operates, the environment, and the way their financial structure affects the community. Companies

can access the assessment for free to see how they stack up against certified B Corps.

How do companies get certified?

Companies must achieve a minimum score on the B Impact Assessment, meet legal requirements set out by B Labs, have their impact assessment verified, and pay B Lab a certification fee. The assessment standards are set by B Labs' Standards Advisory Council, which is made up of academics and business experts, including professors, representatives of large companies like Patagonia and the Walgreens Boots Alliance, and members of the financial industry.

The impact assessment includes about 200 questions focused on day-to-day operations and the company's business model, which fall into five areas. Under the governance category, the assessment considers the impact of policies and practices, such as whether a company's mission statement includes environmental and social commitments and how it enables employees to act ethically.

Second, the assessment measures worker well-being through metrics like the percentage of full-time employees paid a living wage, and the type of health-care benefits employees receive. Third, the assessment considers a company's contributions to the community through factors like the number of living wage jobs created, and whether the company performs an environmental and social impact audit of suppliers.

Considerations related to environmental impact include greenhouse gas emissions reduced and offset, green building standards, and water conservation. Finally, customer impact is measured by things like whether the company offers warranties, how it handles customer data, and how it responds

Companies hoping for mere "greenwashing" wouldn't easily achieve certification.

to customer feedback. The assessment also includes questions related to supply chain, potentially sensitive industries like mining and prisons, and legal issues that could affect a company's eligibility to become a B Corp.

Companies receive a score out of 200 on their social and environmental performance. To become a B Corp, they must score at least 80. Businesses must also



amend their legal governing documents to require that directors balance shareholder interests with those of other stakeholders, including employees, suppliers, society, and the environment.

B Lab analysts evaluate the impact assessments and any changes to companies' legal structures. It's unclear how carefully assessments are analyzed. B Lab's website says the review process takes six to 10 months, but it also says some companies might not need to verify responses with an analyst. B Corps must display their scores on B Lab's website. Public companies must make their entire B Impact Assessment public, though they can redact sensitive information like revenue. To maintain their certification, B Corp-certified companies must update their assessment every three years and score at least 80 points.

How is B Lab funded?

According to its website, 68% of B Lab's 2019 operating budget of US\$12 million came from "earned income," including B Corp certification fees, impact measurement services, and event fees and sponsorship. Donations—including contributions from well-known donors like JP Morgan and the Rockefeller Foundation—accounted for the rest. To minimize conflicts of interest, B Lab has made a commitment to balancing revenue streams to avoid overreliance on one source, and created processes for managing potential conflicts. For example, a company cannot get certified for two years if it donates US\$100,000 or more to B Lab.

Why do companies get certified?

B Lab's website claims B Corp certification helps companies attract employees, earn customer trust, and gain competitive advantages. But the main reason companies go after certification? To show they're dedicated to being better.

"One major motivation for certification is to fight against other companies' unverified claims of sustainability and social responsibility," says Suntae Kim, an assistant professor of management and organization at Boston College. He has studied why companies become B Corps with Temple University's Schifeling. "Given the rigor, and the hassle, of the certification process—that involves a lot of work, energy, time, money, and potential liability—companies that hope to achieve mere 'greenwashing' wouldn't be able to easily achieve or maintain the certification."

What does this certification mean?


The B Corp certification provides a holistic assessment of companies' social and environmental practices. A company can't have a great environmental record, but treat workers horribly if it wants to be certified. However, B Corps are rated on a scale, so some perform better than others. To see how a particular B Corp scored, find its assessment at bcorporation.net/directory.

"They evaluate the entire company," says Schifeling. "So it's not like, 'this is just our green product line,' and on the other side of the company, most of our money is coming from crude oil or something like that."

Plus, Boston College's Kim says the certification hasn't been co-opted by big corporations for greenwashing. With other labels—such as organic, fair trade, and socially responsible investment—"efforts to expand the movement led to... the dilution of certification standards," he says.

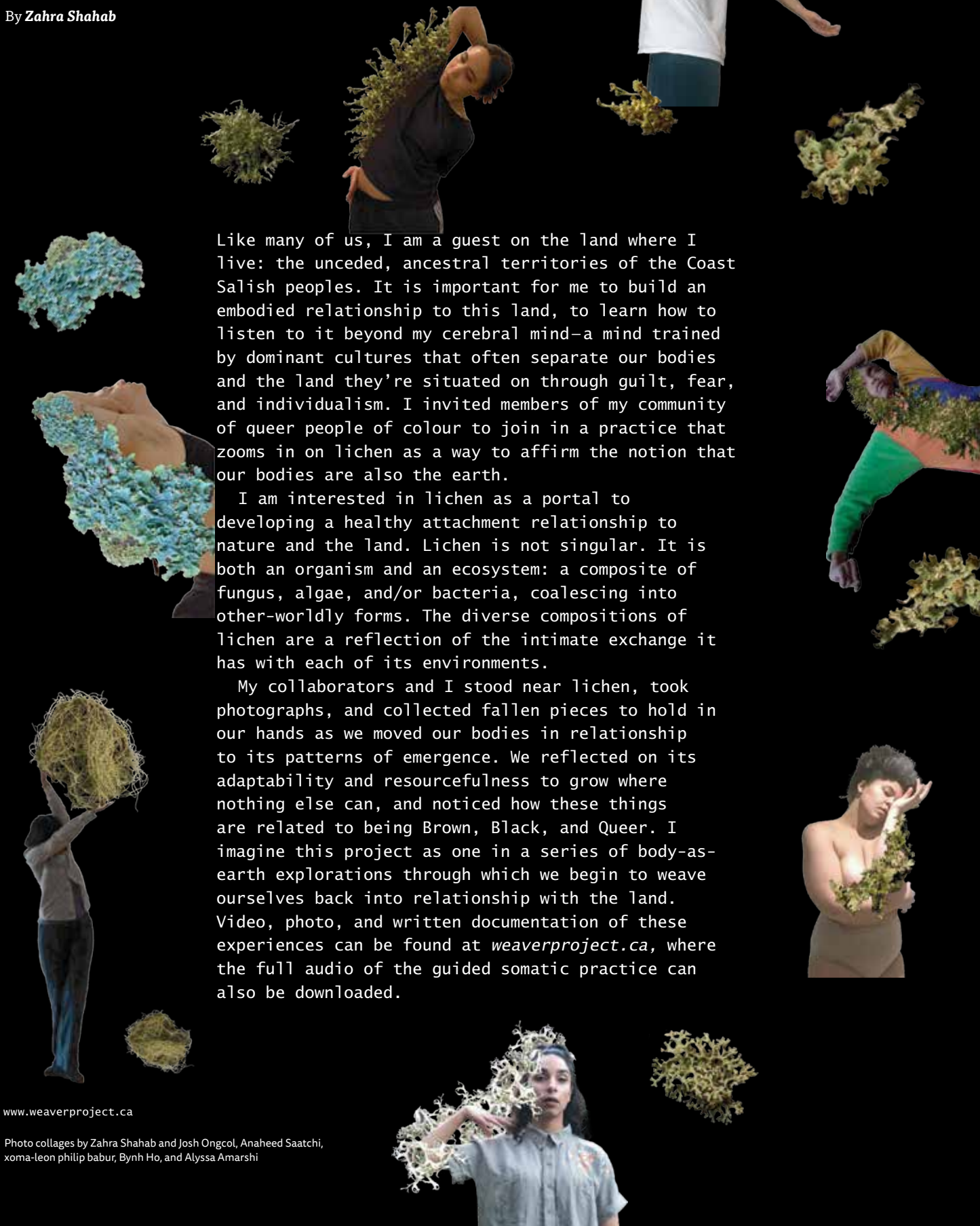
B Lab is taking steps to avoid such possibilities, Kim adds, noting it's put in place a rigorous guideline for multinational corporations which "would certainly make one think that there is no way profit-centred multinationals would want to even consider going through the process."

Buzzword summary

Rigorous, holistic, and undiluted (so far). An improvement on the status quo. 

Weaver Project

By Zahra Shahab



Like many of us, I am a guest on the land where I live: the unceded, ancestral territories of the Coast Salish peoples. It is important for me to build an embodied relationship to this land, to learn how to listen to it beyond my cerebral mind—a mind trained by dominant cultures that often separate our bodies and the land they're situated on through guilt, fear, and individualism. I invited members of my community of queer people of colour to join in a practice that zooms in on lichen as a way to affirm the notion that our bodies are also the earth.

I am interested in lichen as a portal to developing a healthy attachment relationship to nature and the land. Lichen is not singular. It is both an organism and an ecosystem: a composite of fungus, algae, and/or bacteria, coalescing into other-worldly forms. The diverse compositions of lichen are a reflection of the intimate exchange it has with each of its environments.

My collaborators and I stood near lichen, took photographs, and collected fallen pieces to hold in our hands as we moved our bodies in relationship to its patterns of emergence. We reflected on its adaptability and resourcefulness to grow where nothing else can, and noticed how these things are related to being Brown, Black, and Queer. I imagine this project as one in a series of body-as-earth explorations through which we begin to weave ourselves back into relationship with the land. Video, photo, and written documentation of these experiences can be found at weaverproject.ca, where the full audio of the guided somatic practice can also be downloaded.

www.weaverproject.ca

Photo collages by Zahra Shahab and Josh Ongcol, Anaheed Saatchi, xoma-leon philip babur, Bynh Ho, and Alyssa Amarshi

BLACK SHEEP PARENTING FOR A GREENER FUTURE

Fixing Food Waste Starts at Home

While the statistics are alarming, families have more power to create change than we think.

By **Brianna Sharpe**

This morning as I watched 6-year old Little Grey Lamb lick the peanut butter and jam off his toast, I knew the fate of that bread: although I consume many kid leftovers, there was no way I'd put that slobbery mess in my mouth or in soup stock, and we're choosy about what goes into our backyard compost. It was landfill-bound.

While some food waste is just the collateral damage of having kids, there is so, so much more we can prevent or divert. According to a 2019 report by Toronto-based

emissions. Meanwhile, almost one in seven Canadians is food-insecure. That number goes up to one in five when there are children in the home.

Fixing food waste doesn't automatically solve hunger, at home or abroad. But in lower-income countries, helping farmers avoid food loss and spoilage can make more food available to those who need it. In higher income countries, reducing food waste along the supply chain means retail costs can go down.

2019 interview that "wasting a third of the world's food supply represents a colossal amount of completely needless deforestation, carbon emissions, soil erosion, fresh water use and species extinction."

Global emissions from wasted and lost food are around three times the amount produced by aviation. While agricultural practices, land use, and supply chains are the biggest GHG culprits, I've come to appreciate that any household scraps I can't compost will soon be releasing methane in a landfill—without helping anyone's garden grow.

The food system guzzles up our water as well, so wasted food means wasted water. The American National Resources Defense Council estimates that throwing out one hamburger wastes as much water as a 90-minute shower, and an egg uses the equivalent of an 11-minute shower. Some environmental costs of food production are inevitable, but food waste is by definition avoidable. These are unnecessary impacts.

While it's impossible to create a one-size-fits-all solution to manage these impacts, Stuart has no problem coming up with one word to describe the food system: "Ecocidal." It's a decidedly glum term, but it contains a (very tiny) glimmer of hope. We got ourselves into this mess because our actions are powerful. We need to remember that power to effect change as we look for solutions.

Sweat the small stuff

It's been difficult to focus on food waste over the course of the pandemic. When my childcare went from part-time to zero-time, it was a struggle to even make dinner, let alone make plans for those poblano peppers I purchased on a whim. But a recent article I wrote on global food waste reminded me of everything we already do in my family—and also that I'd better use my privilege to do more.

While many families are tossing less due to meal plans and less-frequent shopping trips, both were pre-pandemic normal for us. We have a backyard composter (OK, three) and garden boxes ready to receive their output. Our freezer is full of veggie scraps for "someday soup." I pack leftovers for lunches, and make breadcrumbs from stale crusts. I scan the quick-sale section of No Frills, looking for discounts on soon-to-expire tins, and cereal in damaged boxes.

But I also lose track of mystery meals at the back of the fridge. We toss things based on

I lament liquified lettuce in the crisper.

expiration dates (which I know are woefully unregulated and misleading for consumers, but until a better system comes along, I often err on the side of caution). I lament liquified lettuce in the crisper. And the lamenting intensifies as I consider that Canada's National Zero Waste Council says the amount of vegetables this country wastes every day is equivalent to 470,000 heads of lettuce.

I'm far from perfect, so I asked my savvy group of parent friends for their tips. Here's a selection:

- "Old bread ends up in French onion soup or old fruit gets baked into breads."—Stefani, Calgary, AB
- "It's been my experience that just about anything can be turned into a muffin or a patty of some sort. Sweet, savoury, it doesn't matter. Leftover fruit or veg from lunch boxes can be chopped or blended into smoothies."—Kris, Australia
- "I freeze vegetable ends/wilted things in a big bag (add as they happen), and

then throw them into stock when I boil bones from leftover carcasses."—Janelle, Cochrane, AB

- "Cooking bigger meals with fewer ingredients really helps reduce the little bits of things that go off."—Jessica, Calgary
- "One word: Tacos."—Vanessa, Cochrane

La comida es sagrada


Vanessa's one word struck me as important, so I asked her for more. Vanessa is originally from Mexico, where the mothers and grandmothers say "*la comida es bendita*" and "*la comida es sagrada*" (meaning "food is blessed" and "food is sacred"). Food is sacred and wasting it is akin to sin. Luckily, "all leftovers can be tacos." Vanessa has made tacos for me, and I assure you this is a delicious solution.

I've gotten so lost in statistics on food recovery and tips to prevent loss, I've forgotten our relationship with food is a contract. In taking care of our bodies, we are obliged to also take care of our planet and community.

I want to be part of food rescue efforts in my community, so I reached out to a local non-profit, the Cochrane Food Connection. It turns out there is a tonne of work being done. Most grocery stores and restaurants are diverting waste by

giving to food banks or community outreach programs, though a couple are not. It was disheartening to discover not everyone is on board, but I'm stoked there are people out there inviting companies to participate, even if they're not always getting the answers they want.

I found out that a community pantry is being launched this month; I'm sure my kids would like to become volunteers (a.k.a. food rescue adventurers) if we can. I also learned some retailers are donating food they can't sell to a program that will help young parents learn to cook for their families. News like this makes the tough truths of food waste go down a bit easier.

Eating our food before it goes bad won't fix the food system, nor will it magically mean the end of hunger. But 63% of Canada's household food waste is avoidable, so each bit we prevent puts less pressure on the planet. Ultimately, I want my children to know that preventing food waste isn't only a set of habits we perform, but a sacred responsibility we uphold. 

Brianna Sharpe is an Alberta-based freelancer who covers politics, parenting, climate, and LGBTQ2S+ issues. She lives on a mini-acreage with her two mini-humans, a large husky, and a taller-than-average spouse.



Photo by Taz (CC BY 2.0)

food rescue organization Second Harvest, over half of Canada's food is wasted every year, which is more than the global average of one third, and higher even than in the US, where between 30% and 40% of food is wasted. And 14% of that Canadian waste comes from households just like mine.

It's tempting to close our eyes to what we put in our trash cans, but the facts are hard to ignore. Wasted food is responsible for 8% of global greenhouse gas (GHG)

Addressing food waste feels overwhelming, because it is. It's hugely complex, but I'm choosing to start in my kitchen and work my way out.

An ecocidal food system

The term "farm to table" is popular on restaurant menus and grocery store placards, but it can be hard to wrap our heads around the costs of that journey. Author and advocate Tristram Stuart said in a

ENVIRONMENTALIST FROM HELL

Think the Pandemic has Been Good for the Planet? Think Again.

Despite 2020's reduction in air pollution, plenty of worrying environmental trends need our attention.

By **Sara Bynoe**

I almost got hit by three cars yesterday. One made an aggressive left turn while I was in the middle of the crosswalk. As I crossed another street, a woman turned right toward me, batting her hand back and forth to say "Move! Move! Move!" The last person just didn't see me, even though I was wearing a bright yellow jacket. A jacket I bought so I could be seen by drivers.

Because of this pandemic, many of us are perpetually anxious and focused on our own needs and survival. These people weren't thinking about others while driving, not even vulnerable pedestrians in high-viz outerwear. Basically, this pandemic has revealed humans to be egocentric toilet-paper-hoarding jerkholes. We can see this

selfishness play out in the environmental sphere too.

People and the corporations they run are taking advantage of this disastrous situation. In Brazil, the Amazon rainforest

This pandemic has revealed humans to be egocentric toilet-paper-hoarding jerkholes.

is being logged illegally. The country's space research agency has satellite data showing that 64% more land was cleared in April 2020 than in April 2019. Ane Alencar—director of science at the Amazon Environmental Research Institute—told *National Geographic*, "You can do whatever you want in the Amazon and you



One environmental bright spot is that elephant poaching is down in Africa.

Photo by Matthew Spiteri

won't be punished." She also said illegal loggers are using the pandemic "as a smokescreen."

Other bad environmental news came from Africa, where there was a huge uptick in poaching early in the pandemic due to the loss of tourism. "A major source of income for rural communities has suddenly been cut off," said Jeremy Radachowsky, an executive with the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), in an interview with the *Washington Post*.

Matt Brown, the Nature Conservancy's regional managing director for Africa, told ABC News that conservation groups are seeing poachers shoot and snare wild antelope on their lands, "either to sell the meat at a local bushmeat market in the capital city or... to feed family." ("Bushmeat" is a term for wild animals hunted as food.) Across the Indian Ocean, in Cambodia, three critically endangered giant ibis birds were killed for their meat early in the pandemic according to the WCS.

On the other hand, South Africa's environment department recently reported that poaching was down overall for 2020, primarily due to travel restrictions preventing illegal poachers from smuggling goods out of the country. The reduction in travel seems good for the environment in many ways—less flying equals less pollution, etc. But it's also harmful, given how much conservation depends on ecotourism to fund it.

Meanwhile, in Kenya, Dickson Kaelo from the Kenya Wildlife Conservancies Association told the *Guardian* that "While elephant poaching may not escalate owing to the current suppression of international travel... demand for bushmeat will go up if there is nobody to monitor activities within the conservancies." If this pandemic has taught us anything, it's how interconnected we all are, and that for every piece of good news, there's usually a less-good trade-off.

Joe Walston, another WCS executive, told the *Post*, "Hopefully, people will also recognize all of these environmental issues

are related to each other and will take fewer trips but spend more time in the places they visit. In the short-term, we must do what we can to see rural communities and wildlife through."



Many environmentalists (including me) got excited when the lockdowns began, because we read reports that pollution had decreased significantly. Compared with the year before, New York's air pollution levels in March 2020 were reduced by about half because of measures taken to control the virus. The shutdown of heavy industries in China resulted in a nearly 50% reduction of nitrous oxide and carbon monoxide.

However, since lockdowns have been lifted, factories have worked extra hard to make up for lost time, and air pollution levels bounced back up quickly. And then there's the growth in online shopping, which is increasing demand for lots of products manufactured in China and presumably leading to more pollution. Online shopping also leads to more packaging and garbage. Jeez people, can we not just stay at home and listen to our own thoughts for one measly year? Oh yeah, no. No we cannot.

Another seemingly good pandemic development is that more people have taken up cycling and bike sales have surged. Again, part of the motivation is self-preservation, specifically avoiding crowded public transit. And that's the downside. Between people staying home, and opting out of shared transport when they leave, public transit use in cities worldwide has fallen by 50-90%. The resulting revenue losses mean that these systems—which were already undersupported in many places—now face job cuts, fare increases, and decreased service. The loss of public transit will affect society's most vulnerable, and lead to more cars emitting greenhouse gases on the road.

As I wrote in a recent column, the plastics industry took advantage of the pandemic too, pushing back on plastic bag bans with the idea that disposable bags were safer. "[Plastic industry executives] were misusing a lot of studies to make people afraid and think they were going to contract coronavirus and die from bringing reusable bags to the store," Greenpeace's Ivy Schlegel


told Frontline. We now know that transmission from surfaces is a minimal risk.

Some of this selfish behaviour is what author Naomi Klein calls "disaster capitalism," when the private sector takes advantage of a public crisis to expand wealth for top earners by exploiting the most vulnerable. To protect against this predatory behaviour, we need government intervention in the form of social programs, universal basic income, and green energy investment. In the USA, Joe Biden's stimulus package looks like a step in the right direction.

Individual responsibility has received a lot of attention this pandemic: we're told to wash our hands, avoid groups, stay home if we're sick. But individual action isn't enough in the face of workplaces with poor conditions and no paid sick leave—ahem, Amazon warehouses in Ontario. Governments that took a more collective approach had better results eliminating the virus. We're all looking at you, New Zealand.

We need a focus shift, away from individualism and toward collectivism. We need to care about vulnerable people, whether they're crossing the street in front of our cars, or living in poverty halfway around the world and forced to kill endangered birds in order to eat.

I know that you, dear *Asparagus* reader, are someone who cares about the environment and the people in it. I don't have to tell you this stuff is important. But just because we aren't stuck deciding between protecting endangered animals and feeding our families, doesn't mean we aren't operating from a mentality of self-preservation and selfishness these days.

We need to figure out how to put high visibility jackets on these issues for our leaders and communities. How you do that is up to you. Maybe it's sharing this article, writing to your elected officials, or donating to conservation projects. There are so many ways we can take care of each other and the planet right now. The important thing is not to let ourselves be blinded by pandemic anxiety, or the smokescreen of disaster capitalism. 

Sara Bynoe is a writer, actor, and event producer. When she was in the sixth grade she took such an interest in recycling, sustainability, and climate issues that her mother called her an "Environmentalist from Hell."

THE VIEW FROM INSIDE

A Feminist Climate Renaissance for the Roaring 2020s

Women are shaking up the climate movement with fierce, compassionate leadership.

By *Jesse Firemong*

As we waded into the 2020s amid a pandemic and deepening climate emergency, I find myself bombarded by the message that saving the world is women's work. I see it in the underpaid women care-workers holding society together. I scroll past it in Instagram ads encouraging me to buy sustainable products. I even celebrate its embodiment by teen girls leading climate strikes.

Yet, women are still being boxed out of formal leadership roles. At global climate talks, for example, women make up fewer than 30% of country delegation leaders. And research shows women in the US conservation movement grapple with hiring and promotion bias, among other manifestations of workplace sexism. Racialized women may find ourselves labelled "the 'problem' woman of colour" in our workplaces. It's a term some anti-racist educators use to describe the retaliation we may face when pointing out injustice.

Women's response to all of the above? Remake the movement from the roots up.

"There is a renaissance blooming in the climate movement," write marine biologist Dr. Ayana Elizabeth Johnson and author Dr. Katharine Wilkinson in *All We Can Save*, their anthology spotlighting women climate leaders. A "feminist climate renaissance," to be precise, "rooted in compassion, connection, creativity, and collaboration." It's focused on joyfully uplifting one another, making space to discuss emotion, and healing systemic inequities.

I feel like I'm on the threshold of this feminist flowering, more empowered to stand against injustice, but still unlearning years of oppressive work habits, and struggling at times to feel worthy in the movement. Recently, I reconnected with three women who have offered me care, patience, and

wisdom in my journey, and I want to share their reflections here.

Farrah Khan is my colleague at Greenpeace Canada, leading organizational strategy, diversity and decolonization efforts as our deputy director. Farrah's journey begins with her Desi (Punjabi) and Muslim roots.

"Thinking about my grandmothers and my mother, they definitely called the shots," she tells me over Zoom. Caring, opinionated women held her community in suburban Toronto together, but were often denied the same opportunities as men.

The feminist climate renaissance is rooted in compassion, connection, creativity & collaboration.

"While I saw their strength in leadership, I also didn't have mentorship when it came to building my own career," she adds. "In some ways I think I winged it. In others I think I still drew from their strength and applied it in the best way I knew how."

Having joined the environmental movement in 2006, Farrah remembers times she was the only woman and person of colour at the table with heads of big green groups. Things are changing, but not fast enough, she says. Today, women hold the top posts at 10 of the 14 organizations making up the Strathmere Group (a coalition of Canada's mainstream green groups), though there are few faces of colour in senior leadership. Research shows that gender diversity gains at green groups overwhelmingly benefit



Melina Laboucan-Massimo, Farrah Khan & Joanna Kerr (pictured L-R) |
Photos by Greg Miller, Andrew Norton | Greenpeace, Emma Kreiner | Greenpeace

white women. Farrah's not shy to name that the movement still struggles with both misogyny and racism. She's been that "problem woman of colour," she jokes ruefully.

"I'm a naturally rebellious person," she laughs. "It's part of who I am to question authority." Still, she says, it can be nerve-racking to speak up. Second-guessing yourself is easy, and women of colour often feel like we have to work three times as hard for the same respect. "We're held to a different standard," she says, "and have to prove... every day on the job that we deserve to be there."

A key reason why is white supremacy and its normalization of perfectionism, hyper-productivity, urgency, hierarchy, and individualism. It's embedded in green groups, just like the rest of society. Being unable to thrive as our whole selves is exhausting, even with supportive colleagues.

"Healing justice" is one pathway for addressing burnout, and caring for women of colour. Melina Laboucan-Massimo defines healing justice as "a framework that recognizes the impact of trauma and violence on individuals and communities, and names collective processes that can help heal and transform these forces." She's the co-founder of Indigenous Climate Action (ICA), a women-led organization that believes Indigenous peoples' rights and knowledge are essential for addressing climate change.

"It takes a lot of introspection," Melina tells me over WhatsApp. "It's thinking, 'What types of behaviours have I perpetrated against myself and movement spaces or organizations we have built?'" This kind of reflection requires time and space to grieve and heal before "the complete breakdown of a person's body or spirit."

She speaks from personal experience, following two decades of campaigning for Indigenous rights, an end to tar sands expansion,

and justice for missing and murdered Indigenous women. Two years ago, the trauma and physical toll of doing this work kept her bed-ridden for months.

"I think that most people in the climate movement and nonprofit work have more often than not felt like there's never enough time and you can keep working until you're dead," says Melina, who worked for Greenpeace before founding ICA. "The burnout is coming from a collective problem, but it became the individual's responsibility."

When I ask how women can support one another, she talks about her sister Bella, who died under suspicious and still unsolved circumstances. It's when people acknowledge the pain of losing Bella and offer her kind words—instead of clamming up awkwardly—that Melina feels supported. Such simple acts honour the vulnerability it takes to continue her advocacy.

Vulnerability is a vital ingredient in feminist leadership, says Joanna Kerr, CEO of environmental grant-making charity MakeWay. She's a long-time feminist who broke glass ceilings as the head of Greenpeace Canada and ActionAid International.

"My simple definition of feminist leadership is that it's really where the processes of leadership are inclusive and the outcomes are driven toward justice and equality," she explains, emphasizing the importance of humility, collaboration, and a sense of service to others. "It's both backbone and heart. It's both power and love."

Anyone can be a feminist leader, she reminds me, just as anyone can perpetuate the patriarchy or white supremacy. While organizations often focus on inclusion policies or training, what's really needed is culture change, she stresses.

The radical shift in culture we need takes time, reflection and conversation. Still, all three women mentioned specific


tactics that can help, from Greenpeace's new four-day work week, to the monthly "moon time" leave ICA offers employees with periods. Women can also team up to facilitate meetings and steer conversation toward feminist issues, says Joanna.

Farrah points to women in the Obama administration who resisted being ignored by joining forces: when a woman made a point, they would repeat it and credit her so her contribution couldn't be overlooked. It was strategic, Farrah says, "because it puts the emphasis on the woman and her value."

But what if you don't have allies at work? Ontario-based therapist and Black women's advocate Evalena Matlock-Corley suggests finding supportive online communities and practicing self-care. "What I really encourage my clients to do is recognize their own worth every single day," she says.

In Farrah's words, "there's no A-to-B, misogyny-over" roadmap for change. The feminist climate renaissance will look different in different places. Farrah says her next move will be to bring women, trans, and nonbinary staff together to co-create the solidarity, strategies, and mentorship needed for a culture where they can succeed.

"The power of intentional conversations is something I've seen over and over again," muses Joanna, who finds joy in seeing the women she's mentored move into "badass roles."

A hundred years ago, our society was recovering from the Spanish flu pandemic and ushering in the Roaring '20s, a cultural revival with its own feminist agenda. With our own roaring 2020s on the horizon, the feminist climate renaissance is tearing down the leadership barriers holding back climate justice, so that we—and our planet—don't just survive, but thrive. 

Jesse Firemping is a writer and climate justice communicator based on Tla'amin traditional territory in British Columbia.



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MONETARY VALUES

Invested Interests

How cruelty-free is this new VEGN investing fund?

By **Erica Eller**

As a white, 30-something woman who only recently started to save for retirement, I felt late to investing when I opened my first *Etrade.com* account in August 2020. I deposited some money and started exploring my options. But apart from a few sectors that I'd decided to rule out—fossil fuels, weapons, and mining—I wasn't sure how to approach investing from an ethical perspective. Investing for investing's sake might improve my finances, but if the unintended side effects are climate change,

are Black. This makes it extremely hard to include anti-racism as an investing redline.

One of the investment funds I initially considered was Beyond Investing's US Vegan Climate exchange traded fund (ETF), bought and sold under the ticker "VEGN." You can invest in ETFs in a stock exchange the same way you buy and sell individual stocks, at a relatively low share price. The difference is that ETFs track an index, which is a grouping of stocks, commodities, and bonds determined by an

of my diet. But the branding worked for me. The idea of a "cruelty-free" investing option sounded like it might cover most of my concerns. I decided to invest in some shares, which were selling for around US\$30 at the time.

I'd expected a thematic group of companies selling vegan labeled products, but the VEGN ETF is not that different from the S&P 500's ETF (SPY), which tracks 501 top-valued US companies. The main difference is that VEGN negatively screens (or excludes from the index) companies based on certain criteria.

Companies are excluded if they earn too much (generally more than 2% of their revenues) from activities that involve animal exploitation—in testing, research, the production of food or other commodities, or use in sport or recreation. VEGN also applies veganism's guiding principle of doing no harm by excluding military suppliers, weapons manufacturers, and tobacco companies. And it considers major contributions to climate change a deal-breaker, because these activities destroy animal habitats. "We're conscious of animal exploitation in its broadest form, not just... killing them to eat them," says Smith.

In other words, its negative screening rules more or less matched my initial redlines, except for anti-racism. When talking to anti-racist vegan scholar and diversity, equity, and inclusion consultant Dr. A. Breeze Harper, I realized this is not uncommon among products marketed toward ethical consumers.

"It's important to question the efficacy of green capitalism, as it still isn't really yielding equitable and inclusive results for the most marginalized [people]," she says. Harper advocates for a broader interpretation of a vegan cruelty-free ethics, emphasizing that marginalized people can be exploited in the food system and other value chains as much as animals—if not more.

Smith, who is white, also acknowledges the importance vegans place on minimizing harm to humans. The US Vegan Climate Index does screen companies for weapons and child labor. And Smith argues that positive social and environmental activities are mutually beneficial, so solving for one solves for the other variable as well. But without rules on social inequalities, it's debatable whether

Beyond Investing is actually helping the world become more cruelty-free for people from all backgrounds.

For Harper, even if an investing product divests from companies exploiting animals, it still applies the logic of capitalism, which upholds inequalities across race and class. "Being vegan is far easier than actually being actively anti-racist and questioning capitalism, because at least when you're vegan, there's cute replacements for cow cheese and cow meat," she says. "What are the cute replacements for giving up white financial privilege?" For her, the idea of "vegan investing" combines two spaces heavily steeped in white middle-class bias.

There's cute replacements for cow cheese and cow meat. What are the cute replacements for giving up white financial privilege?

Hearing this gave me a chance to check my own privilege. Why had I assumed it would be ok if only three of four of my redlines were satisfied?

Some of the companies in the VEGN index include Tesla, Apple, Mastercard, Visa, Microsoft, and Alphabet, Google's parent company. The stocks of these and other large cap companies—those valued at more than US\$10 billion—make up the largest slices of the index's pie by percentage. Then Beyond Investing brings in mid-cap companies, which are valued between US\$2-10 billion, but this accounts for just 2.5% of the batch.

Yet, many of the largest corporations listed in VEGN's index, Harper points out, have major racial disparities in their workforces. "Every year a report comes out, and these top companies like Google and Facebook are still struggling with racial equity and anti-racism as it plays out in how they hire, how they recruit, how they retain."

While ethical investing frameworks use metrics from diversity and inclusion

reports to evaluate businesses, these statistics leave out critical systemic issues, including how or why marginalized groups of people lack access to wealth.

"White people have ten times the wealth of black people," says Harper. This gap is the result of "four or five hundred years of systemic racism, and the wealth and resources accumulated starting with antebellum slavery," as well as systemic discrimination in employment practices, housing, and education. The resulting racial wealth gap influences "who is more likely to invest and have higher literacies around why one should invest," she explains.

In theory, impact investment platforms like Beyond Investing have a framework capable of addressing issues of racial inequality. Companies already use ESG reports to respond to the growing interest of consumers in evaluating companies based on the "triple bottom line" of people, planet, and profit in their investment and purchasing decisions. Beyond Investing uses data from major companies' ESG reports to determine whether they meet its screening criteria for its Vegan and Climate Index.

But people like Harper, who understand the historical dimensions of racism and poverty, are still skeptical about the methods used to report ESG-related business performance. She feels they can give a "sanitized picture" of ethical dilemmas. And this suspicion is not unfounded. It has prompted the EU to develop new rules against corporate greenwashing in financial products that claim to meet certain ESG standards, and the US Securities and Exchange Commission has created a task force on climate and ESG-related disclosures.

With most of the ethical emphasis being placed on climate change, racial inequality continues to lack the attention of mainstream, white, middle-class investors. The solution, for Harper, is actively centering anti-racist vegan ethics and the needs of "the most marginalized and vulnerable [people] who will be deeply and negatively impacted if ethics are not adhered to."

When consulting with businesses through her company, Critical Diversity Solutions, Harper champions a "holistic" set of ethical principles. These include access and inclusion throughout a company for people marginalized due to race, class, gender, and/or ability. It's also important


to examine an organization's decision-making, recruiting, worker protections, and even investments and property ownership.

Beyond Investing has a long way to go in terms of addressing the full extent of these issues. Yet it has made some strides toward diversity as a partly female-led and all-vegan team of principals.

"At least one of us has experience of living in poverty," Smith says. Whether or not the company will address racial inequalities in its vegan investment principles depends on its stakeholders. "Were it to be considered necessary or important by our investors, we could put in place a board to include a wider variety of viewpoints," she adds.

Examining vegan investing as an ethical option made me realize that my initial impulse to redline certain businesses or industries won't change underlying structures of inequality. Investing presents an odd double bind for people on the losing side of the economy, which is most of us. You may feel at once a desire to save and minimize your future economic risk or even overcome economic adversity, while realizing that you're promoting and perpetuating the system of inequalities you've also suffered from. And I, at least, know that any suffering I've felt from economic inequality is only a fraction of what others with marginalized identities have gone through.

I've since decided to move away from large-cap investments, and I now invest thematically and at my own risk in the individual stocks of smaller companies improving climate resilience and racial equality. As long as the capitalism that produced systems of slavery and colonization dominates the economy, I'm not convinced the words "ethical" and "investing" belong in the same sentence.

The complicity of investing is a challenging ethical dilemma, which is why I'm still waffling about my investing decisions. Knowing the insignificant scale of my investments also makes the whole exercise feel like mental gymnastics. But I also think what's important is not how we invest in stocks, but how we invest our time and energy into the spaces where we have real influence: our voices, our work, and our communities. 

Erica Eller is an Istanbul-based freelance writer specializing in climate tech and sustainability content.



Photo by Shopify Partners

war, and colonization, I'm not exactly sold on the idea.

There are more investing options than ever for people like me, who want to improve the impact of their investments. Public corporations are reporting on their environmental, social, and governance (ESG) impacts each year, as investors increasingly see these metrics as a selling point. But there's at least one ethical concern of mine that largely remains an outlier: racial inequality. For example, according to the University of Minnesota, 92.6% of all *Fortune* 500 companies have CEOs who are white, and only 1% have CEOs who

investment company. I liked the idea of investing in ETFs because they have lower risk than individual stocks, as a basket of diversified stocks. But as I did my research, I soon realized this fund wasn't quite as uniquely "vegan," as I'd expected.

VEGN is marketed as the world's first vegan investment product, allowing you to invest without supporting companies that directly harm animals. Beyond Investing's founder, Claire Smith, says "people can be activist[s]" by investing in VEGN in their retirement funds. I'm not vegan, but a climatarian: I refrain from eating meat to minimize the greenhouse gas emissions

NATURAL HISTORY

Misplaced Relief

After Hurricane Dorian devastated The Bahamas, I worried humanitarian aid might contribute to other disasters.

By **Alicia Wallace**



Destruction wrought by Hurricane Dorian in Marsh Harbour, The Bahamas

Photo by Paul Dempsey

In September 2019, Hurricane Dorian devastated Grand Bahama and the Abacos in The Bahamas. A people accustomed to hurricanes, we were shocked by the terrifying superstorm, a slow-moving Category 5. Those of us on other islands in the archipelago nervously watched social media accounts of what was taking place. Many houses were flooded up to their second levels; others were packed with people who came knocking, desperate for a safe place to ride out the storm.

As director of Equality Bahamas, a non-profit organization that promotes women's and LGBTQ+ rights, I was involved in relief efforts. We set up a donation center at the National Art Gallery of The Bahamas in New Providence that quickly grew into a distribution center for displaced people. Over six months, we supported over 700 people by providing weekly food packages, hygiene kits, menstrual hygiene products, bedding, baby items, school supplies, school uniform assistance, tarps, tools, career services, and connections to mental health services.

International organizations sent supplies and entered the country to offer assistance. States and organizations contributed money directly to the government of The Bahamas for relief efforts. International humanitarian organizations and UN agencies largely partnered with organizations that had greater capacity and connections than Equality Bahamas. We sustained our efforts by partnering with another local nongovernmental organization (NGO) with access to funding.

Food aid was typically selected based on cost and non-perishability, driven by the logic that the more food you can buy and the more easily you can store it, the more it can help. But reality is more complex; cheap, non-perishable choices tend to be unhealthy ones, while thoughtless packaging contributes to environmental problems. Day by day, I dealt with these challenges and thought about how we might reimagine the meaning of food security in disaster relief.

For months, water was one of the most pressing needs of those remaining in and displaced from Grand Bahama and the

Abacos to other islands in The Bahamas. International NGOs sent cases and cases of single-use water bottles. I didn't hear any discussion of purification products or methods as people rushed to get their hands on cases of water. I thought about the relationship between pallets stacked high with cases of bottled water and the rising sea levels that threaten to make these islands disappear within a century. We are still trying to get the landfill under control and, at the time, The Bahamas was just months into a single-use plastic ban. This response to an unprecedented climate event produced more waste that adversely affects the environment. On Day 1, we needed those cases of water. By Day 30, people would have been better off with water filters, water bladders, and reusable water containers.

One of the largest components of the hurricane relief program we ran was the provision of weekly food packages. Due to budgetary constraints, limited space, and the volume of need, we needed items that were nonperishable and easy to distribute. Food packages varied from week to week, but typically included tuna, sardines, corned beef, corn, sweet peas, sugar, evaporated milk, tomato paste, rice, grits, tea, and juice. The protein was canned and high in sodium—a major issue considering the high local rate of heart and circulatory issues.

From the cardboard boxes used for food packages to the plastic wrapped around cases of nonperishable food, our waste filled a dumpster week after week. To make better use of funds, we started asking people to return their boxes from the previous week in exchange for a packed box, but some people lacked space to store the boxes or said the boxes got destroyed. We eventually shifted to recyclable plastic bags which cost less, but they were not sturdy enough. I lamented that we could not secure funding to provide each family with a reusable cloth bag, but we asked people to bring their own so we could stop using plastic bags.

I have noticed, over years of running a nongovernmental organization, that one of the major issues with funding is the obsession with particular kinds of activities. Funders typically do not want to cover the cost of human resources, buildings,

equipment, and the like. When it comes to disaster relief, everyone—including international donors and individuals—seems to want to provide food, but there is too little focus on the type of food being distributed. Funders focus on quantity over quality and they tend to encourage NGOs to do the same through impact assessments that privilege quantifiable data.

Over six months, we had the pleasure of getting to know some of the people coming for assistance and had the opportunity to get feedback. While everyone was grateful, one message was clear: tuna and corned beef get tiring, and nonperishable food items are monotonous and not particularly healthy.

It is easy to sit at a computer and make the cheapest selections to help the most people, but isn't that the problem with international aid? In seeking to reach as many people as possible with limited funds, the system lost sight of the importance of prioritizing health. In The Bahamas, there are overwhelming numbers of people with hypertension and diabetes. The top causes of death from 2009 to 2019 were ischemic heart disease, stroke, and hypertensive heart disease. These should have been the first considerations. We have a responsibility to think about the long-term physical and mental effects of

Thoughtful, effective responses are not cheap, nor are the lives and islands impacted by climate events.

our actions and inaction. In this case, our food assistance had the potential to foster unhealthy eating habits, negatively affect physical health, and add a mental health stressor as people grew tired of the same items over and over again.

I thought of adding a green market to the weekly distribution, but it was not financially feasible. Instead, I negotiated with donors to provide grocery vouchers

so people could purchase fresh produce. There is no way to know how people spent the \$40—later reduced to \$20—and that's fine. We, the people providing assistance, should trust recipients' ability to make decisions for themselves.

Another area that was initially overlooked was supplemental drinks for elderly people. International NGOs and individuals do not typically donate Boost, Ensure, MiraLAX, and comparable items. Similarly, we had to specifically request or use discretionary funding to purchase baby formula, such as lactose-free options, for those with specific dietary needs.

In the Abacos, a few communities of Haitian migrants lost their homes and everything inside. Unlike most Bahamians who had family or friends who could house them, the Haitians had to stay in government-run shelters. Most were housed together in two shelters which made it easier to deliver programming tailored to their needs. Food packages were of little use to them because they did not have access to cooking facilities, so we made arrangements for volunteers to prepare breakfast one day per week.

We quickly learned the typical Haitian breakfast is not like Bahamian or American breakfasts, so we consulted with Haitian people to create a menu featuring Haitian dishes, such as Haitian-style spaghetti, instead of typical Bahamian breakfasts of grits and tuna, corned beef, or souse (a popular breakfast dish typically made with chicken or pig feet and flavoured with lime and allspice). The Haitian food provided a source of comfort, giving them the taste of home.

We need to be more mindful in responses to disaster, and set the intention not to create new disasters. How can we provide water to thousands without creating devastating waste that will end up in landfills? What food items can provide nourishment and foster health? What alternatives exist for those with allergies and specific needs?

How can our food assistance programs prioritize the needs of vulnerable people, reduce harm to people and environment, and honor diverse cultures and traditions? These questions are difficult to answer. Thoughtful, effective responses are not cheap, nor are the lives and islands



The author coping with boxes that held food aid after Hurricane Dorian. | Photo courtesy Alicia Wallace

impacted by climate events and our responses to them.

The Bahamas is still trying to recover from Hurricane Dorian. Infrastructure is being rebuilt and repaired, people are still displaced, some businesses are still closed, and families still need government assistance. This has, of course, been complicated by Covid-19. We remain concerned about the upcoming hurricane season and the damage another hurricane—whatever the strength and speed—could do.

Since Hurricane Dorian, and even more in the pandemic, Bahamians have become interested in backyard gardening. People are learning to grow their own food and see value in reducing our reliance on imported food. I hope we tap into the power of feeding ourselves, building strong communities with shared gardens and social enterprises that can respond to national crises with homegrown food. We may not be in the position to decline foreign aid, but we can set trends and protocols for international NGOs to follow in our country. We live with the consequences of slavery and colonialism, and we risk being saddled with the negative consequences of aid. **I**

Alicia Wallace is a Black feminist, gender expert, and research consultant. She is the Director of Equality Bahamas which promotes women's and LGBTQ+ rights as human rights through advocacy, public education, and community engagement.



WHAT WE'VE LEARNED

Three people from around the world told Asparagus how they hope society will change after the pandemic.

Paul squints into his cell phone under the midday sun for a Zoom call from Quezon City, Philippines. His baseball cap shades his brow and spotlights his big smile as he stands against a concrete brick wall. Roosters crow in the background as he tells me how he became one of the over 155 million people in the world to contract Covid-19 as of May 2021.

Over 10,000 kilometres across the Pacific Ocean, the pandemic has made it almost impossible for Margo—a sex worker in Vancouver—to make a living. Government relief programs have never been easy to access for sex workers. Now, options for support seem more limited than ever.

A time zone away in Albuquerque, NM, actor Noah Anderson remembers the energy that drew him to New York City and the shutdown that eventually pushed him out. He recalls the calm of isolating in his apartment and the powerful experience of marching for the Black Lives Matter movement with his roommates.

This global epidemic made our worlds smaller. It forced us to stay in our communities, limited our contacts, and in too many cases, took our loved ones. But while public health officials ask us to stay in the bubbles Covid-19 has created for a bit longer, it's time to burst them figuratively. *Asparagus* reached out to three people around the world about their experiences of the pandemic. They shared their unique challenges, stories of resilience, and lessons

they hope society learns as we start to imagine life after Covid.

Spread kindness, not misinformation

“The discrimination is so rampant,” Paul says. We’re publishing only his first name because he worries revealing he had Covid could make him and his family a target and scare away potential work. His wife works in the finance department of a hospital, and health-care workers in the Philippines have been locked out of their rental units by landlords, denied public transit, or refused service because of fear and misinformation they are spreading the virus. In a few cases, they’ve been violently attacked with chlorine and bleach.

The flood of information and misinformation about Covid has been called an “infodemic”; spreading as quickly as the virus itself, and with deadly consequences. Misinformation has sparked deaths, injuries, and assaults—as well as discrimination against health-care workers—worldwide, but it’s hard to know its full effect. At least 800 people died and over 5,000 were hospitalized in Turkey and Iran after treating themselves with false coronavirus cures, according to a July 2020 estimate published in the *American Journal of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene*.

The Philippines is the seventh worst country in the world when it comes to the spread of misinformation and the first in Asia, according to the news organization Rappler. Rappler works with the International Fact-Checking Network to track what, where, and how misinformation about Covid is spread globally, compiling it in a public database. They found the top falsehoods are about cures or treatments, and conspiracy theories. One false theory that has spread widely on social media is that the pandemic is part of a conspiracy to control the public.

Paul says he and his family have open conversations about the Covid information

they see online, and whether it is true. So when he started getting a headache, fatigue, and loss of taste, he knew he might have Covid-19. He immediately moved into a separate room, quarantining from his family. After three days of persistent symptoms, he was admitted to the hospital.

“My family was very much worried,” he says. He was isolated and no visitors were allowed. He had chills at night. After seven days, he was released to the care of his family. He quarantined as soon as he got home. His wife delivered food and water to his door, and cleared out of the way when he had to use the bathroom, sanitizing it before and after. Luckily, his wife and daughter didn’t get sick. Paul believes he might have picked up the virus on public transit.

Today, he’s feeling better but says he feels a strain in his heart while doing chores. He’s back at work as a consultant helping cooperatives with marketing, and says he’s even donated his plasma twice.

Under strict curfew, some call centre employees reported sleeping at work.



The neighbouring capital city, Manila, has been transformed. Before Covid, Manila was the city that answered your calls. The business processing outsourcing industry—including call centres and IT support—was booming in the Philippines, accounting for 9% of GDP and providing over 1.2



million jobs. It was an active city, says Paul, where you could find people roaming around almost every hour of the day or night.

Once the virus hit, the government put a strict mandatory curfew into place. Some call centre employees were able to work from home, but others reported sleeping at work in order to make their shifts.

Paul hopes sharing his story will counter misinformation. “I hope people will learn that Covid-19 is real, because others still pretend that it does not happen,” he says. Kindness and generosity can be contagious too, he adds. “Be kind and do what is good, so that it would spread to other people, just like paying it forward.”

Leave no one behind

Even behind a mask, Margo’s smile is apparent as she introduces herself. “I was transgender... started taking hormones when I was 16. Got breast implants when I was 19. Worked the street all through my life, on and off. I’m now 34. Hopefully a little wiser. I know a lot smarter.” Margo pauses before adding one more detail. “I can tell you one thing: these are the oldest implants you will ever see in your entire life.”

Margo is sitting at a table in a long room at WISH, a drop-in centre focused on improving the health, safety, and well-being of women in Vancouver’s street-based sex trade. Her friend Jasmine, who is also a sex worker, is at the other end of the table for emotional support. Colouring sheet posters of Rosie the Riveter and Wonder Woman line the wall behind them.

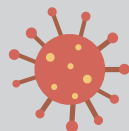
For safety reasons, *Asparagus* is using pseudonyms for Margo and Jasmine.

Covid-19 is having a “dismal” impact on sex work, says Jasmine. Before the pandemic, they earned enough money to live; Margo estimates she had two to three dates a night. Now, work is sporadic, sometimes with no clients for a week or more.

“My bills aren’t getting paid. And usually they’re always up to date,” says Margo. Over 46% of sex workers living around Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside said their business has been significantly impacted by the pandemic, and many were unable to work, according to a March 2020 survey of 95 sex workers conducted by a consortium of five service agencies.

The Canadian federal government created the Canada Emergency Response Benefit, or CERB, to help people who lost

There are a lot of folks who got left behind, especially sex workers.



work because of Covid-19. “But there are a lot of folks who got left behind, especially sex workers,” says Jasmine. Artists, recent immigrants, and some part-time workers also said they were excluded from government relief. Labour unions, activists, and academics say the pandemic has exposed inequalities in how we design economic and social supports and who we design them for.

Some people didn’t meet certain qualifications to access CERB, like a minimum annual income of \$5,000 or providing tax records. Other barriers to accessing emergency economic programs include not having a bank account or fixed address, according to a Covid-19 needs and risk assessment of Metro Vancouver sex workers.



Advocates pushed for changes to CERB and found some success; the criteria were updated to include students and self-employed people like artists and musicians.

Now, in her mid-30s, Margo’s looking to focus on something new. She’s not sure what’s next, but says whatever it is, she wants to help people who are suffering. The social distancing restrictions have been in place during a particularly lonely time for Margo. Her two toy pomeranians passed away last year. “It’s a family member. You’ve had these animals for, what, 13 years. All of a sudden, they leave you. And you put everything that you have into these animals.”

Margo does hope Covid will teach people to recognize challenges others may be facing. “Put yourself in the other person’s shoes... You have to realize that there’s two sides to every story. There’s your story, and they have a story to tell. And you should damn well listen when they have one to say.”

A different show must go on

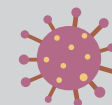
“It was perfect,” says Noah Anderson as he reflects on his first few months living in New York City. It had taken some time for him and a friend to save enough money to move to Brooklyn from Westchester, a suburb about two hours north by transit. He would go into the city almost daily, “doing auditions, hanging out with friends, exploring, looking for work.”

His first job was handing out flyers in Times Square for Broadway shows. He eventually got a few more gigs: the part of Romeo in a play, rolling silverware for a dinner theatre show, the lead in a movie. Finally, he earned enough to move to Brooklyn.

He and two friends found a fourth roommate online, and moved into a four-bedroom apartment. “A bunch of young actors, very excited to be doing auditions, and living in the city, and living in Brooklyn, and building our community and our network,” he says.

The hustle, bustle, and grit of the city drew him in. But a few months later, in mid-January, the first case of Covid-19 in the US was reported in Washington state.

**Can we gather now?
Can we sit next
to each other in
a theatre?
Can we stand
together in a venue?**



Within weeks, he and his roommates lost their jobs. Theatres shut down. Broadway closed. The arts industry worldwide ground to a halt.

The culture sector, which includes film, theatre, art galleries, and music, employs more than 30 million people around the world. At the end of 2020, the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) urged governments to create targeted policies to help the industry through the pandemic. “Culture

has helped us out of the crisis. Now we have to help culture and support the diversity to which culture owes its strength,” said UNESCO chief Audrey Azoulay in a statement.

After losing all his work in March 2020, Noah remembers, “lying on the couch and going well, shit. Like, you know, excuse my language, but we’re fucked... We’re broke. We’re actors.”

“Everyday funds are getting lower and hope is getting tighter,” he says. The “light at the end of the tunnel” was when the government announced the Pandemic Unemployment Assistance program. Eligibility extended to contractors, freelancers, and part-time workers, meaning some arts workers qualified. Each day, he’d open the government website to apply, but the site was struggling with the volume of visitors. Luckily, he got some money from a tax refund to cover him until the benefits kicked in.

During the lockdown, he and his roommates stayed indoors; sharing meals, watching movies, and playing lots and lots of Monopoly and Settlers of Catan. Then, in May, George Floyd was murdered by a police officer and the Black Lives Matter movement brought people outside. Noah, who is Black biracial, decided to join marches in Brooklyn and Manhattan.

“I went with my friends and it was powerful.” As big as the marches were, for Noah, the most powerful impact so far has been the conversations that opened up between him and his white roommates. “It’s not a part of American culture yet for Black people and white people and everyone in between to talk about the misconceptions [related to race].”

Without an end to the pandemic in sight, Noah moved to Albuquerque to live with family. He isn’t sure how long he’ll stay or where he’ll move next.

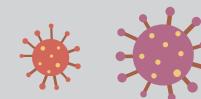
“Can we gather now? Can we sit next to each other in the theatre? Can we stand

together at a venue?” he says, like he’s on a long trip wondering if it will ever end.

In February, almost a year after the pandemic was declared, some movie theatres in New York City opened their doors again (at 25% capacity). No matter how much we relied on streaming services during the pandemic, Noah believes people will come back to movie theatres.

He hopes the society on the other side is different from the one he lived in before the pandemic. In addition to hoping for more reasonably priced popcorn, he hopes we’ve learned some practical things like good hand-washing and better sanitation practices. He also hopes people will be open to conversations about universal income and racism.

“We’ve learned a lot, and there’s no point regressing once the masks are off,” he says. |



Francesca Fionda is an investigative journalist and journalism instructor based in Vancouver. Follow her @francescafionda for research tips and Freedom of Information frustrations.

Stella Zheng is an illustrator and a recent graduate from Emily Carr University of Art + Design. Her work mainly deals with her culture and identity in the Chinese diaspora.

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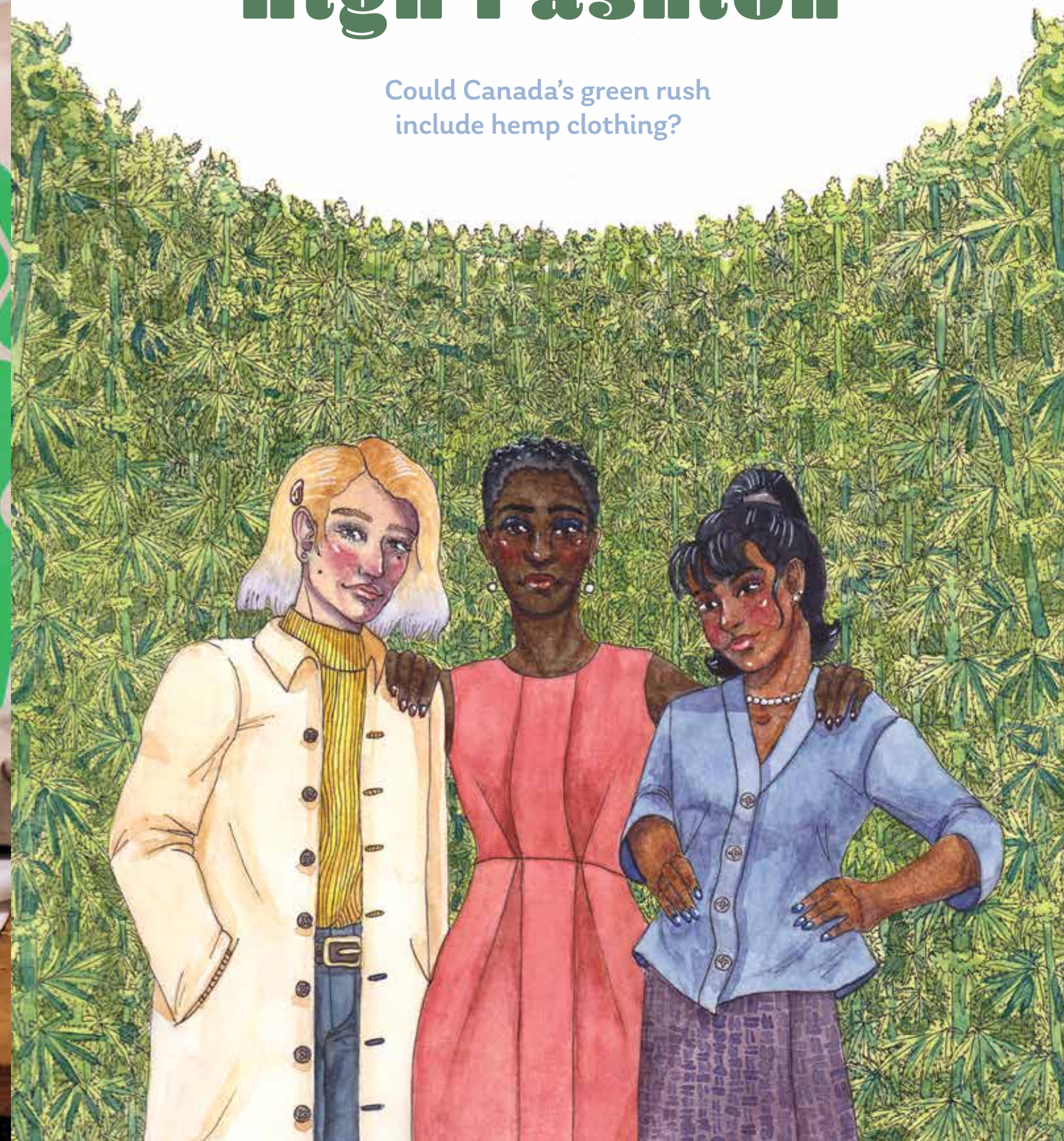
Show the world your
bright, green side
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Story by CRISTINA PETRUCCI

Illustration by ANNIRA FLORES

High Fashion

Could Canada's green rush
include hemp clothing?



“Does it smell like marijuana?”

“Is it at all soft?”

“Does it scratch your skin?”

These are some of the questions people ask when I mention that my jacket is made from hemp fabric. Perhaps my favourite of all is: “Can you get high by wearing it?”

In brief: no, it doesn’t smell like marijuana. Yes, it’s somewhat soft, and no, not scratchy. You can’t get high from wearing hemp, but wouldn’t that be something!

Purchased two years ago from a boutique in Toronto’s west end, my boxy, earthy-brown hemp jacket had an above-average price tag thanks to its organic materials and “Made in the USA” label. I asked myself: Is it worth it? Can I afford it? Will I wear it? The salesperson, noticing my hesitation, gave me a persuasive pitch on hemp clothing: its durability, breathability, and tendency to get softer with age. They told me to see the jacket as an “investment piece,” both for my closet and the future of fashion. I was convinced.

The fashion industry has a sustainability problem. Its heavy use of land, water, and fossil fuels—combined with complex global supply chains and the pervasive use of chemicals in textile dyeing and processing—makes it one of the world’s major polluters. According to the UN Alliance for Sustainable Fashion, the industry is the second biggest consumer of water and generates 20% of the world’s wastewater. Increased use of synthetic fibres derived from petroleum, like polyester, is making things worse, because their production emits more greenhouse gasses than cotton’s.

One way for fashion to lessen its impacts is to invest in alternative processes and materials, like hemp. Many news organizations and blogs have written about its potential—the *Toronto Star* called it an “up-and-coming sustainable superstar.” Major brands like Stella McCartney, Patagonia,

and Levi’s have included hemp textiles in recent collections.

While hemp could indeed contribute to a more sustainable fashion industry, increasing its presence in our closets is easier said than done. In theory, Canada could lead the way to this greener fashion era—hemp is one of the few fibre crops that can grow in our climate, and we grow a lot of it. But we’re a long way from having the necessary infrastructure to grow, process, and manufacture hemp textiles on a global scale.

Fashion may market hemp as a new material, but the earliest hemp cloth found by archaeologists dates back to 8000 BCE. And it’s not like making fabric from hemp was a lost art. Dr. Jan

the cultivation of cannabis from 1937 until 2018. Cultivation of industrial hemp was banned in some European countries during the 20th century, but never all of them.

Industrial hemp is the same species—*Cannabis sativa*—as recreational marijuana. The primary difference is that marijuana contains up to 30% tetrahydrocannabinol (THC, the principal compound that gets people high), whereas hemp contains no more than 0.3% THC.

They also look and grow differently. Hemp plants cultivated for fibre are slender and grow 3-5 metres tall, so that long fibres can be extracted from their stalks. Marijuana plants are short and bushy, as are hemp varieties cultivated for cannabidiol (CBD, a non-psychoactive

Nobody dreamt of having a hemp shirt because everyone was already wearing them.

Slaski, a long-time hemp researcher, told me about growing up in Poland, where cannabis was grown for centuries to make into clothing and cordage. “My dream was to own a nylon T-shirt,” he says. “That was the coolest thing a young kid could have. Nobody dreamt of having a hemp shirt because everyone was already wearing them.”

But while Slaski and his peers were wearing hemp, kids in North America were not. It was illegal to grow any kind of cannabis in Canada between 1938 and 1998. Similarly, the US effectively banned

cannabinoid garnering attention for its therapeutic uses), which is derived from the plants’ flowering heads and leaves. The most common hemp cultivars in Canada are grown as a grain (to use in food or to press for oil). They are narrow and grow up to 2 metres. Dual-purpose varieties also exist that allow both grain and fibre to be extracted from the same plant.

Since decriminalizing its cultivation in 1998, Canada has become a major hemp producer. In 2019 a total of 37,435 hectares of hemp were planted in Canada, an increase of about 6,000 hectares from 2018.

But little of that is for textiles. “I would guesstimate that this year about 80-85% of the acres will be devoted to grain,” Slaski tells me, “while fibre and CBD account for the rest.”

Given all that Canadian hemp cultivation, I wonder: why wasn’t my jacket labeled “Made in Canada”?

Hemp as a crop has numerous environmental benefits. It revives unhealthy soil by “vacuuming” out heavy metals, pesticides, or radioactive materials. It yields more fibre per area cultivated than either cotton or flax. Hemp’s deep and robust root system allows for growth with minimal rain. And it requires no pesticides and minimal fertilizer (if any at all). “I never sprayed my crop,” says Danyka Dunseith, a first-generation hemp farmer located in Stratford, ON. “That’s the

is derived from the outer layer, and hurd consists of the shorter, finer fibres of the central woody core. Absorbent hurd accounts for about half the stalk and can be used as animal bedding, building materials, and garden mulch. Bast—with its strength and mildew-resistance—is suitable for textiles, paper, and rope, and can make up between 10 and 40% of the stalk.

“It would be a shame, or economically unfeasible, or plainly stupid, if [Canada] wouldn’t develop applications for both types of fibres,” says Slaski.

The first step in converting hemp stalks to textile fibres is “retting,” letting stalks rot to loosen the bonds between fibres. The second step, decortication, is a mechanical process that breaks the stalks to separate bast from hurd. Next comes scutching: broken stems are beaten to extract remaining bits of hurd. Degumming

Agudelo and his team have developed pilot plants for decortication and refinement. Degumming, he tells me, is currently outsourced internationally. In the last two years, Eko-Terre has processed more than 2,000 metric tonnes of hemp, and plans to grow to “at least 14,000 tonnes of straw in the coming years.” Meanwhile, Agudelo tells me, China produces more than ten times that in a year, though official numbers are hard to come by.

“The textile market is the most demanding in terms of fibre quality,” says InnoTech’s Slaski. Within a hemp stalk, the bast and hurd are connected by sticky carbohydrates like pectin. For high-quality textiles, these fibres need to be thoroughly washed and separated.

“Once you remove these sticky parts, you have a cotton-like fibre,” says Agudelo. Additional treatment processes can make the fibre even softer, though it’s not always necessary.

Hemp for fibre is cultivated in several provinces, but plants in northern Alberta grow taller and yield more fibre due to the area’s extended summer daylight hours. Day length is particularly important because, as daylight decreases, the plant begins to flower, after which fibres become more coarse. Agudelo tells me that Eko-Terre plans to contract 10,000 hectares of hemp for textile fibre in Alberta in the coming years, and install their first industrial-scale processing lines for decortication and refinement.

Consumer interest will be a crucial factor in any potential hemp fashion boom. And shoppers do seem ready. In a 2020 survey of close to 19,000 consumers around the world, nearly six in 10 respondents said environmental impact is an important factor in their purchasing decisions.

One brand hoping to reach those shoppers is Ontario-based Immortelle. Founded in 2020 by Aneta Sofronova, Immortelle currently makes small batches

Your natural garment has a chance of biodegrading, whereas a polyester garment becomes a contaminant.

amazing thing about hemp—it wants to grow and it will grow regardless of the terrain.”

While hemp is indeed forgiving, it requires proper management to yield a commercially viable crop. “If you put hemp seeds in the ground in your garden, and leave it without watering or anything, it will grow,” says Slaski, who works at InnoTech Alberta, a provincially funded research institute. “But it will be one fifth or one tenth of what it will be capable of delivering.” Along with his team in Vegreville, AB, Slaski steers a processing facility developing hemp fibre applications. He also holds field days to educate potential hemp farmers on how to successfully manage the crop.

To understand why a Canadian hemp textile industry didn’t immediately blossom in 1998, it helps to understand how the plant is made into fabric. Hemp stalks (also called straw) contain two types of fibre: bast and hurd, which can be extracted from the same stalk. Sturdier bast

removes sticky pectin and lignin from the fibre. Hackling, one of the final steps, is the process of combing the bast in preparation for spinning. Only after all this is it ready to be spun into a yarn, and eventually woven or knit into fabric.

Some of this process is currently happening in Canada. Québec-based Eko-Terre—a sister company of major uniform-maker, Logistik Unicorp—specializes in the sustainable development of natural textile fibres. In 2011, Sustainable Development Technology Canada—a federal funding body—committed over C\$1 million to Logistik, some of which has funded Eko-Terre’s research into the best conditions for cultivating hemp for textiles in Canada, how to decorticate it, and other processes for converting straw to textile fibre.

“Processing hemp is very expensive,” comments Dr. Carlos Agudelo, Eko-Terre’s chief operating officer, “and it is very difficult for us because we have to create a reliable supply chain in order to start investing in more processes here in Canada.”

of loungewear, naturally dyed bucket hats, and soon-to-launch jumpsuits, mostly from hemp fabrics.

After earning her Bachelor of Design in fashion from Ryerson University in Toronto, Sofronova landed a job she loved at the Hudson's Bay Company. But for years after, she worked with brands that didn't align with her values, which led her to "completely lose interest in the industry." She stepped away from fashion to focus on improving her health.

"I started becoming health conscious" she says, crediting this period for her return to fashion. "I decided it had to be healthy through and through," she says, and resolved to work only with natural materials and dyes.

Sofronova is originally from Moldova, and before founding Immortelle had no idea her project had a family connection. "When I told my mom I wanted to work with hemp," she says, "I was told how she and my grandma would grow it and do the retting process in the river."

Sourcing hemp fabrics is not as easy or sustainable as Sofronova would like it to be. "I have a supplier in BC that imports from China," she says, lamenting the carbon footprint of that process, and wishing she could find Canadian-processed hemp. "Right now I have to work with what I find."

Immortelle's garments—like hemp clothes from brands including Patagonia

Pure hemp's stiffness makes it a "harder sell," adds Sofronova, so it's blended to make it more "palatable" to shoppers.

Kozlowski would like this to change. "Maybe if we used it in different ways," she says, "It would expand our understanding and use of [hemp] outside of how it's been branded." Unblended hemp could be used to make structured jackets and pants, she tells me, rather than lounge-wear or T-shirts.

Whether consumers are ready for unblended hemp or not, Kozlowski welcomes the fact that hemp is making its way into garments. "The industry needs to diversify its material pool," she says. "Your natural garment has a chance of biodegrading... Whereas a polyester garment does not live well in our current ecology—it becomes a contaminant."


In addition to reducing harmful waste, investing in hemp textiles would allow for shorter fashion supply chains. In 2010, Rebecca Burgess—a weaver and natural dyer from San Geronimo in northern California—set herself a one-year challenge of developing a personal wardrobe using only fibres, labour, and dyes sourced within a 240 kilometre radius from her home. Her success in creating a regional natural fibre supply chain inspired her to found the non-profit Fibershed.

sector develop in Canada. "There's the myth that natural fibres are too expensive," says Underhill. "That it costs too much to manufacture them in Canada. That Canada can't bring back a manufacturing sector. All those old-school beliefs. We know that those aren't true."

"If we want to support local clothing and local fibre, we have to be willing to purchase clothing at a higher price," says Kozlowski. But she cautions against blaming shoppers who purchase fast fashion, instead questioning the lack of "sustainable affordable versions."

Canada's increase in hemp cultivation signals that a market for hemp-derived products is growing. But there are still several hurdles to overcome in the fashion realm. Limited production, high material cost, and competition with dominant materials like cotton and polyester create significant barriers to hemp going mainstream.

"I don't think hemp will ever be as widespread as cotton," says Agudelo. He does believe hemp could take a sizable share of the textile market, but it will take "many many years."

Likening hemp clothing to pricier sustainable choices like organic food, he says "it's not for everybody." Still, Agudelo argues, "When you believe you have to reduce your footprint and have a sustainable garment, you should use hemp." 

Cristina Petrucci is a freelance writer based in rural Ontario covering tech, food, and sustainability.

Annika Flores is a senior high school student and artist from Steveston, BC.

If we want to support local clothing and local fibre, we have to be willing to purchase clothing at a higher price.

and T-shirt maker Jungmaven—are mostly made from hemp-cotton blends, which are softer than 100% hemp fabric. "You can have hemp on its own, there's nothing wrong with it," says Dr. Anika Kozlowski, a professor of fashion design, ethics, and sustainability at Ryerson. "It just depends what properties you want your end product to have."

Since its creation, Fibershed has grown into an international grassroots network, including four locations across Canada. Chapters operate mostly with wool, but the problems they're trying to address affect other natural fibres. Jane Underhill is the president of Toronto's Upper Canada Fibreshed (note Canadian spelling), and hopes to see a natural fibre manufacturing

Encounters with Indigenous farmers & thinkers decolonizing North America's food system.

IN SEARCH OF HONORABLE HARVESTS

Story by **REBECCA THOMAS & KATY SEVERSON**



Teluisi Rebecca.

I am a member of the Mi'kmaq Nation—the People of the Dawn. Our name for ourselves is *Lnu*. It is important that I state who claims me and my roots, so you understand what this land means to me, and my connection to it. I live in K'jipuktuk, Mi'kma'ki. Readers may know it as Halifax, Nova Scotia.

Far away as I am from the climate needed to grow avocados, I have a weekly ritual of buying one and letting it rot on my countertop before I use it. I don't ever think about the waste it creates; I am disconnected from where that fruit comes from. And it only costs a buck fifty a week. You can't even buy a coffee for that much anymore!

I understand and respect my relationship to the land when I am working it. I take care when weeding my garden in the summer. I plan my meals so as not to waste any of my homegrown produce. When I harvest wild berries, I use them before they mold, and I offer tobacco when I do any gathering or fishing. I never take too much when picking sacred plants, always leaving more than half of what I find.

And yet, I let that avocado rot week after week. Knowing there will always be a supply of mass-grown avocados has divorced me from the impact and effort that goes into growing that food.



My name is Katy.

I'm an American woman of European ancestry—a disjointed identity that includes a Norwegian last name, Irish skin, and German ankles. After years of studying and writing about food systems, I've become ardently interested in Indigenous agriculture and worldviews. Recognizing my shortcomings as I work to decolonize my own mind, I study these traditions and tell these stories with respect and humility.

In writing this piece, Rebecca and I spent hours over Zoom discussing the definition of “sustainability”—and what it means to interact sustainably with our food system. A turning point in my own understanding of this idea was the book *Braiding Sweetgrass* by Robin Wall Kimmerer, a member of the Potawatomi nation, which I read while living in coastal Maine last summer.

Under blankets of kelp, mussels and sea snails clustered in the crevices between rocks along the shore. When the tide receded, I'd harvest mussels for dinner. My instinct was to take every mussel I found, but Kimmerer told me to ask permission. That's the first step of what she calls the “honorable harvest.” When foraging or hunting, introduce yourself to the plant or animal you're harvesting, ask permission, then “abide by the answer.” If the mussels didn't easily come off the rocks when I pulled them, I took it as a “no.”

Never take the first ones you see, Kimmerer writes, in case there aren't any more. And never take more than half. So I left some mussels for the green crabs and the birds, and enough so the mussels could reproduce. The honorable harvest is about paying attention to the ecosystem as a whole. Asking for permission requires us to slow down, assess what we're harvesting, and see it as a life and a gift.

Kimmerer describes the difference between colonial capitalism's market economy and many Indigenous societies' gift economies, which consider land and the food that grows from it a gift to all. When we commodify food, we become disconnected from it and it loses its worth. But a gift comes with responsibility: to share with others, offer appreciation, and nurture the source of the gift.



In the hopes of learning a different way of relating to food, we spoke to a number of Indigenous people who farm, hunt, and gather, about Indigenous wisdom, lifeways, and agricultural practices in use today. Sewn through the ideas of everyone we spoke to was a worldview that informs a reciprocal approach to agriculture and nature as a whole, one that values intergenerational knowledge and work, reverence and respect.

“The nucleus of our sustainability ethic is in how we look at the world, not in specific planting or husbandry techniques,” writes Chris Newman, a Black and Indigenous farmer, in his 2020 essay “Indigenous Agriculture: It's Not The How, It's the Why.” Newman is an enrolled member of the Chopitco band of the Piscataway Indians.

He founded Sylvanaqua Farms in Virginia's Northern Neck peninsula, south of the Potomac River, where he raises grass-fed cattle, chicken, laying hens, and pork on about 15 hectares of pasture. But what he produces and how he produces it, he said, is less important than the why.



“Us being Indigenous and people of color, we look at ourselves more as land and water protectors who happen to produce food,” Newman told Katy last summer. When asked why he raises cattle specifically, he said that cows play a role in restoring

the landscape. The meat itself is less important than the role the animal plays in

The first white folks to show up here—like John Smith—did not recognize it as a food-producing landscape. He thought he'd died and gone to the Garden of Eden.

the restorative process. “What role does this animal and this plant have in protecting this landscape and protecting the water that runs through that landscape?”

At Sylvanaqua, he combines intensive agriculture—like producing pastured meat and eggs—with Indigenous agroforestry, the practice of planting a beneficial combination of native trees, shrubs, and other food plants. His goal is to restore the landscape while feeding large communities of people in the area. He's building a large-scale collective farming operation modeled after the expansive foodsheds managed by the region's Piscataway people before colonization.

“If you were to come into my neck of the woods back in... [the] early 1500s maybe, you would not have found a farm,” Newman said in his keynote speech at the Young Farmers Leadership Convergence last year. “You would have found a gigantic, diverse, beautiful, food-producing agroecology centered around the rivers, that was so big, so grand, so productive, that the first white folks to show up here—like John Smith—did not recognize it as a food-producing landscape. He thought he'd died and gone to the Garden of Eden.”

Many Indigenous populations around the world use agricultural systems that protect biodiversity while producing and harvesting food, he notes. “Protecting the environment always comes first. A protected environment will always provide.”

For example, the Heiltsuk Nation in Bella Bella, BC, have long hand-planted and managed kelp forests on shorelines to

expand spawning grounds for herring. The fish are not forced into living there, but invited. Not controlled, but encouraged. These kelp forests protect biodiversity in the area by feeding an entire ecosystem: salmon, wolves, bears, and orca whales, in addition to humans.

“How do we feed people from the landscape? One way is to say ‘the market wants X’ so we are going to grow these commodities... subdue this land, tame the wilderness and force it to feed us,” Newman said. “Or there is the Indian way, which is acknowledging what likes to grow here and grow there, and massaging the landscape to help it do its job.”



Through a sometimes spotty internet connection, Lonnie Yazzie told Rebecca stories tucked in stories—about his life, history, and language. He explained that when there isn't a pandemic, he's a cook in a restaurant in a casino. Yazzie is two-spirit and Diné (a member of the Navajo Nation) from Leupp, AZ.

Like most people in their twenties, he's a savvy social-media user with a beautiful Instagram grid. Scrolling through, you'll see sweeping desert landscapes and sunsets, and close-ups of husked corn in a rainbow of colours. Photos show several generations of his family working together to grind the kernels and make “kneeldown bread.” He documents the process of clearing the fields and prepping them for next season. It's all part of a cycle. Every person and plant has a place and role.

The Diné have cultivated this land for centuries. They're one of many Indigenous nations in North America who grow the Three Sisters: an interplanted garden of corn, beans, and squash. The corn provides a stalk for the legumes to climb, and the squash plant's broad leaves keep the ground moist while shading out weeds. Meanwhile, beans and peas bring symbiotic bacteria that fix atmospheric nitrogen in the soil, fertilizing all three.

Both Indigenous and non-Indigenous science confirm that a Three Sisters garden produces more food per area planted than

if corn, squash, or beans are grown alone. And the sisters complement each other in the human diet as well as they do in the soil. Dried corn's starchy carbohydrates provide energy through the colder seasons; legumes are rich in protein and dietary fiber; and squash supplies a host of vitamins and minerals.

Although Yazzie and his family come from a tradition of agriculturalists, they only began farming in earnest in 2012, as a way to supplement their own diet.

"We had to find a way to make what we had work," he said, alluding to both his family's farm and his people's history with colonization, including the Long Walk—the forced relocation of thousands

Indigenous languages and cultural traditions in the name of Eurocentric cultural assimilation. Languages of relationship and ceremony were forcibly replaced by English and Christianity: a noun-heavy language and worldview that describes non-human plant and animal species with the pronoun "it."

"It robs a person of selfhood and kinship, reducing a person to a mere thing," writes Kimmerer. "[In Potawatomi] and most other Indigenous languages, we use the same words to address the living world as we use for our family." If we see the land as "it" instead of kin, it lessens the responsibility to maintain a reciprocal relationship.

Language can and does impact worldview. For Yazzie, this could mean he sees the world through both a Diné lens and an English one. He was raised traditionally, learning and speaking *Diné bizaad*, and would sometimes pause in conversation because there wasn't an English word that conveyed the concept he was trying to explain. Many Indigenous languages contain what Kimmerer refers to as "the grammar of animacy." She uses the example of *puhpowee*, an Anishinaabe word that translates to "the force which causes mushrooms to push up from the earth overnight."

This past year, Yazzie and his family planted and grew all different colours of corn, squash, and melons. Yazzie explains the Diné farming philosophy: "You treat plants like children. You take care of them, and then one day they will take care of you."

This philosophy is reflective of what James Skeet—a Diné man who runs Spirit

Farm in Vanderwagen, NM—calls "Indigenous regenerative intelligence." The term "regenerative agriculture" refers to



Photo courtesy Lonnie Yazzie

practices that seek to restore soil health through small-scale diversified farming, in contrast to the large-scale monocultures that dominate our food system. The term is relatively new, but many regenerative agriculture principles have been passed down by Indigenous people for generations (an intellectual debt the movement often fails to acknowledge).

At Spirit Farm, Skeet uses Indigenous tradition to guide regenerative practices like microbiological composting that will heal the soil on his land. "Indigenous people have always had this organic mindset that all things are sacred," he said in a podcast with Duke Sanford World Food Policy Center. "Nature is to be respected and copied. Time is not linear but circular."

Yazzie recounted one of his favourite memories from the last season. The irrigation setup on his family's farm came apart, soaking the earth and creating a mud pit that he had to wade into to fix the system. The failing of this system could have meant the loss of his family's supplemental food, and yet Yazzie was able to laugh about it. Everyone was there and he volunteered to jump in. As with all the ways his community and family make it work, he captured it through a cell phone camera. According to Yazzie, "you've got to be modern to be traditional."



Hannah Martin grew up picking sweetgrass in her traditional territory of Taqamiju'jk, Mi'kma'ki (also known as Tatamagouche, NS). Sweetgrass is one of several sacred medicines that grow in brackish soil; it's used for a variety of ceremonies. This single act of ceremony was one of the only land-based activities she took part in regularly, but it helped shape a deep understanding of stewardship and the responsibility she had to the land.

She speaks passionately about who she is descendant from, where her grandparents lived, how they learned to work a trapline. As a full-time student, Martin learned about land stewardship in the classroom, but had very little hands-on experience until recently. She and her brother now own a woodlot. She spends time walking through the forest, getting to know the land and her relations: from the trees, to the deer, to the rabbits. She walks, listens, and learns. "Your relationship to food is sacred," she said. "Eating food is a spiritual relationship."

Everything is intentional, she told us. Whether you're gathering sweetgrass or hunting, it is an intentional act—you are taking it from where it is supposed to be. The process fosters a strong sense of humility. That humility keeps you in check, she said, and makes a person aware of their impact on the land. Martin thinks people are disconnected from where their food comes from, like Rebecca and her avocados.

This past year, Martin harvested her first *lentuk*, a deer. She walked us through the process of shooting the animal and sitting with it after it died: the emotions she experienced and the tears she cried; the profound respect she felt for the deer; the lock of her hair she offered as a "thank you" to the animal for its life. Her brother talked her through the steps of cleaning it: where to cut, what to leave for animals like ravens to eat. Nothing went to waste. She carried the deer out of the woods and saved the hide—she intends to learn how to cure it—and butchered the animal

herself. She shared the meat with friends and family.

"It felt like coming home," she said. "The source of all of our traditions comes from the land."

In many ways, Martin follows the principles of the honorable harvest. The story of harvesting a deer may read as violent

pit, pruned the tree, harvested the fruit, or washed, packaged, shipped, and stocked it on the shelf. The transactional nature of purchasing food through a convoluted supply chain ends the relationship before we even consume it. Is that why we don't mind letting the avocado rot? After all, it's only worth a buck fifty. Being more connected

You treat plants like children.
You take care of them,
and then one day they will
take care of you.

of Diné in the 1860s. This resilience in the face of attempted genocide is a point of solidarity for Indigenous peoples across North America.

The Native American Boarding Schools and Canadian Residential Schools of the 19th and 20th centuries were another attempt at genocide, intentionally erasing

Hannah Martin learned about land stewardship in the classroom, but had very little hands-on experience until recently. She spends time walking through the forest, getting to know the land and her relations: from the trees, to the deer, to the rabbits. She walks, listens, and learns.

and gruesome to some, but according to Martin, it put the impact of "taking" at the forefront of her mind. Whether she is picking mushrooms, harvesting medicines, or hunting *lentuk*, she is reverent of—and in relationship with—nature's gifts at each step.

Hunting *lentuk* requires more time, attention, and observation than purchasing an avocado from the supermarket. We often don't know whose hands planted the

to our food creates a more respectful and reciprocal relationship with the natural world—we waste less when we care.

"When there is no gratitude in return—that food may not satisfy," Kimmerer writes. "It may leave the spirit hungry while the belly is full. Something is broken when the food comes on a Styrofoam tray wrapped in slippery plastic, a carcass of a being whose only chance at life was a cramped cage. That is not a gift of life; it is a theft."



Photo courtesy Hannah Martin

Katy Severson is a food and farming enthusiast who's pretty much always on the move. Read more of her work at www.katyseverson.com.

Rebecca Thomas is a Mi'kmaw woman registered with Lennox Island First Nation. She is the daughter of a residential school survivor, and an unrelenting advocate for her community. She is a published poet and was the Halifax Poet Laureate from 2016 to 2018. She lives in K'jipuktuk, Mi'kma'ki.

Mulch this Mag

Reuse paper to add mulch & inner peace to your garden.

Words by **Carissa Kasper**

Photo by **Gloria Wong**



Are you overwhelmed by weeds in the garden? Is your soil sandy and loose, or clay and cracking, and no amount of watering makes a difference? Let's go to ground level. It is where the magic of the seed begins and the beauty of the plant arises.

As a kitchen garden designer and coach with Seed & Nourish in Vancouver, I teach people how to grow their own food with ease. A kitchen garden is a Victorian term for a dedicated space for vegetable gardening designed in a more structured way—often with the use of raised beds—than the traditional backyard veggie patch.

I teach clients from the perspective that being at war with our gardens—pulling roots, capturing insects, breaking up soil, dumping synthetic fertilizers on our plants—can create chaos within ourselves. We can never win against nature. Instead, we can follow her lead and create structures that help us to grow more and fight less. One such tool is the use of mulch.

Think of mulch as a warm, weighted blanket for roots, and try to sink your toes in deep.

Mulch mimics the leaf litter and plant debris we see covering soil in nature. We add organic amendments like compost, wood chips, and leaves intentionally at the surface to simulate this process. As the organic matter breaks down, the nutrients become available to plants.

Mulch creates an insulating layer of protection at the soil surface in our gardens, which regulates soil temperature, suppresses weeds, slows down the path of rain into soil, and holds it there longer. Most importantly, mulching allows microorganisms to thrive and do the work of bringing nutrients to plant roots, reducing our reliance on fertilizers and creating healthy soil and plants.

So, together, let's mulch this mag!

1. To create a new garden bed, or to use mulch in an existing garden bed, begin by gathering a pile of cardboard, newspaper, or compostable magazines such as this *Asparagus* issue to use as your bottom layer. The bottom layer acts as a weed barrier, but still allows water and nutrients to filter through into the soil. This replaces the use of landscape fabric, which litters the soil with microplastics. Make sure to choose compostable paper that is non-glossy, chlorine-free, and printed with soy-based ink (as are most newspapers).
2. Choose your mulch: leaves, compost, wood chips or gravel. Leaves will break down in a season, compost in a year, wood chips in a few years, gravel in decades. Choose a material that will break down quicker to surround annual crops, and a material that

will take years to decompose around perennials. The lighter the base material, the lighter the mulch you can use. If you use this magazine, choose a lighter mulch like leaves or compost. Heavier bases like cardboard will need a deeper compost layer, wood chips, or gravel.

3. Place your bottom layer material at least three layers thick on the soil, making sure that the edges overlap so no soil remains exposed. When using a lighter base, such as this magazine, the more layers the better. Once your bottom layer is laid out, you will add your chosen mulch on top.
4. If you are mulching around plants or trees, make sure to leave at least 5 cm from the stem or 15 cm from the trunk to avoid stem rot. Mulch retains moisture which is great for the plant's roots, but less so for a plant's stem.
5. Water the paper material until it saturates and lies fairly flat on the soil surface. Weigh corners down with rocks if needed.
6. Add 8 cm of your chosen mulch on top of your base and clear any that falls in toward the plant stems.
7. Your base will slowly break down over time, but will suppress weeds and feed the soil below while doing so. If choosing a quicker composting mulch, you can add 3-6 cm yearly to maintain the fertility of the soil and continue to suppress weeds.

Every time you choose to plan for the health of your garden, you choose peace for yourself. Go forth and paper the soil!

Carissa Kasper is a writer, designer, and garden coach at Seed & Nourish, where she creates, coaches and cares for kitchen gardens and their gardeners. When she's not gardening, you can find her writing, most recently in the Lonely Planet Travel Anthology.

Gloria Wong is a curator and visual artist based on the unceded territories of the Selilwitulh (Tsleil-Waututh), x'məḡk'əyəm (Musqueam), and Skwxwúmesh (Squamish) nations, working primarily in photography. Her practice explores the complexities of East Asian diasporic identities. She holds a BFA in Photography from Emily Carr University of Art & Design.

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