TREATY RELATIONS
COMMISSION OF MANITOBA

LET'S EXPLORE

TREATY TURNING POINTS

WHAT ABOUT ..?

'COWS & PLOWS'

'COWS AND PLOWS'


News / Manitoba

Pine Creek First Nation reaches $200 million treaty settlement

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FIRST NATIONS AGRICULTURE

Indigenous agriculture has a long history in the Americas. Archaeological evidence tells us that First People have been farming for at least 10,000 years.

Indigenous people were practicing agriculture in Manitoba and the Dakotas in the early 1400s. In 1986, researchers unearthed evidence that corn, beans, squash and sunflowers were being grown as far north as Lockport, Manitoba. Together, these three plants were the foundation of a healthy Indigenous diet.

Primarily mobile buffalo hunters, Prairie Indigenous people produced and traded food, medicine, construction material, and ceremonial supplies gathered from nearly 180 plant species.

With the arrival of Europeans came diseases, the decimation of the buffalo (a means of survival for Indigenous people), and settlers in search of land and resources. The lives of Indigenous people were changed forever, and traditional farming was devastated by colonization.

Sources: https://www.producer.com/crops/canadas-first-nations-people-were-countrys-first-farmers/; https://manitobamuseum.ca/a-brief-history-of-indigenous-agriculture/

BROKEN TREATY PROMISES

The Numbered Treaties (1871 - 1921) promised benefits to First Nations in exchange for sharing their lands. In some cases, these included Treaty Agricultural Benefits. After 1870, Canada was shifting from a fur trade economy to an agricultural-based economy. At the same time, the buffalo had been depleted on the Prairies and there was a shift in the traditional lives of First Nations. Agricultural Treaty provisions would help First Nations sustain themselves and their communities in a changing economy.

Treaty Agricultural Benefits included livestock, hand tools, farming equipment and seeds. In some cases, they also included suits of clothing, ammunition, and twine. For the most part, these promises were never honoured by the Crown.

'COWS AND PLOWS'

A **specific claim** involves an allegation that Canada did not fulfil a legal obligation flowing from Treaty, the Indian Act, or a legal obligation owed to a First Nation.

Specific claims relate to past wrongs against First Nations, including those relating to the Crown's failure to provide reserve lands or other assets under Treaty, or mismanagement of those lands or assets.

'COWS AND PLOWS'

The Treaty right to agriculture — the right to get oxen, livestock, plows and farming implements — is also known as 'Cows and Plows'. Because the Crown failed to provide what was a basic single family 'farm starter kit' to their Treaty partners, several First Nations bands have sought redress in the courts.

The Treaty Agriculture Benefits is considered a specific claim against Canada. This means that Canada/Crown did not fulfill their Treaty obligations. As part of the claims process, a First Nation submits a Band Council Resolution asking to start a claim for Agricultural Benefits under the Numbered Treaties. If the claim is accepted for negotiation, the First Nation will receive an offer to negotiate.

Recently, First Nations across the country have begun negotiating individual settlements with the federal government for these agriculture benefits. In 2020, Pine Creek First Nation, Treaty 4, became the first in Manitoba to file a 'Cows and Plows' claim. A negotiated settlement was reached in 2023.

SHARE YOUR UNDERSTANDINGS

- What is a 'specific claim'. Explain why 'Cows and Plows' is this type of claim.

- Why do you think this a turning point in Treaty negotiations between Indigenous peoples and the Crown?