

# Greenhouse program to find sustainable options for fresh produce in the North



Student Andrew Nicols tends to tomatoes as part of ACC's horticultural production program.

Photo by ACC.

Students and researchers at Assiniboine Community College (ACC) are growing fruits and vegetables through the winter as a means of finding a practical way to grow fresh produce in Manitoba's northern communities.

The greenhouse project is in its second year of trials with the winter growing portion to be completed in spring 2015. The project compares the quality and yield

produced in three types of greenhouses using varying amounts of energy.

The different technological and energy inputs constitute different microclimates in each greenhouse. So far, the results have shown that it's possible to grow a good yield in a lower-tech facility.

"A solar greenhouse is very beneficial for growing vegetable crops due to the high humidity levels, especially in the spring and winter months. Crops grow pretty well in the medium-tech and low-tech greenhouses," says Michelle Sleshinski, a graduate of the horticulture production

certificate program who now works in the greenhouses at ACC.

One of the features of ACC's programs Sleshinski enjoyed as a student was the ability to learn through experimentation.

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"We really had free range to plant what we wanted and try to find different ways to get fruits and vegetables to grow, it was really hands on," she says. "You get to plant a seed and nurture it, it really becomes like a baby to you."

The greenhouse projects are joined between the horticultural production program and a new advanced diploma in sustainable food systems, which emphasizes innovation in food production

and management with a focus on ensuring broader, more economical access to healthy food.

## Manitoba-grown sweet potatoes

With funding provided through *Growing Forward 2's* - Growing Innovation program, researchers and students are evaluating sweet potatoes in field and greenhouse conditions. Different varieties of sweet potatoes have been brought in from around the world and are being studied in the greenhouses, and will be tested in rural plots during the summer months.

The hope from Sajjad Rao, researcher and instructor in the school of business, agriculture and environment at ACC, is that the sweet potatoes can be grown in Manitoba for commercial production.

"We started with things like carrots, cucumbers and tomatoes and we brought in sweet potatoes this year, which could end up being successful in our climate, we don't know yet," he says.

Rao says the research will span three to five seasons before they can make any decisions about an economic and practical solution for growing produce in northern communities. ■

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