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Food Stash Foundation's Statement of Support for Wet'Suwet'en & Indigenous Self-Determination

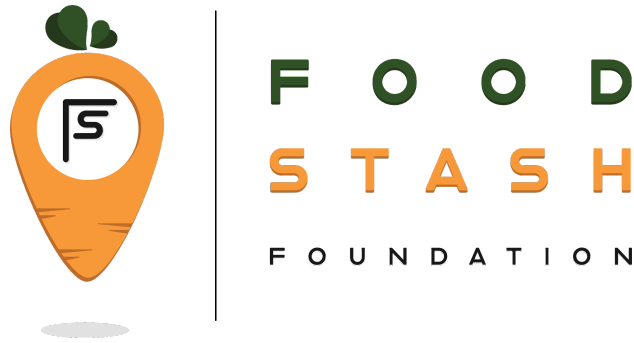
Like hundreds of other businesses, institutions, and groups, Food Stash Foundation stands in solidarity with the Wet'suwet'en people, Gidimt'en Access Point and Unist'ot'en Camp who are [defending their waters and lands against the Coastal Gaslink Pipeline](#). This pipeline lacks consent from the hereditary Wet'suwet'en chiefs.

Furthermore, Food Stash stands in support of the self-determination of all Indigenous Nations within their territories and the right to choose what happens on their unceded ancestral lands.

To explain why this is so important to us, we'd like to share a brief overview of history where environmentalism, Indigenous Nations and Canadian law intersect. We hope you will take 5-10 minutes to learn more:

1850-1950

Canada's nation building entailed the segregation of Indigenous Peoples and the suppression of the Indigenous laws that had been used for time immemorial to sustain the natural abundance of waters and land. If Canada ever employed resource conservation efforts it was because these were forced by settler-induced obliteration of wildlife (for example: the whaling industry began in the 1840s and by the 1860s it had collapsed). The Canadian State displaced Indigenous Peoples to create parks for the enjoyment of white settlers only. When conservation laws did exist they were not upheld unless they were used to control and disenfranchise Indigenous Peoples (i.e. stop them from hunting and foraging). Indigenous groups and leaders fought back, but the Canadian State worked hard to stifle and evade, rather than recognize, Indigenous



Nations. Residential Schools removed Indigenous children from their homes, and prior to 1951, Indigenous ceremonies were criminalized under the Indian Act.

1950-1980

The 1960s and 70s saw State leaders produce single-minded ideas on how to improve 'civil society' assuming that we are all the same/equal. They ignored the debilitation caused by systemic oppression and attempted to eliminate the unique rights of Indigenous Peoples (take for example Pierre Trudeau and The White Paper of 1969). People pushed back to show that such a singular, uniform society does not exist; marginalized groups organized to call out oppression, fight for their unique rights and illustrate how their circumstances differed from that of middle-class, white, men.

Indigenous leaders and alliances at this time launched a shift in colonial courtrooms towards upholding treaty rights and acknowledging Aboriginal title. Meanwhile, for the first time in Canadian history, caring for 'the environment' became a popularized idea. But, as environmental groups pushed to define themselves and promote their causes, they sometimes perpetuated stereotypes, appropriated culture and oppressed rural populations by not understanding the cascading impacts of their actions (for example the devastating impact animal rights activists had on Inuit and First Nation communities by aggressively opposing First Peoples' hunting practices).

1980-2015

After centuries of colonization, in 1982, Aboriginal rights were finally written into section 35 of the Canadian constitution. The duty of the Crown to "consult Indigenous Nations whenever Aboriginal rights or title may be adversely affected by conduct the Crown contemplates" was enshrined. So too was the legal responsibility for 'reconciliation:'

Reconciling the assertion of Crown sovereignty on one hand and preexisting **Aboriginal sovereignty, occupation and de facto control over the land** on the other (Murphy et al., 2008).

While the 1980s and 90s saw a major constitutional shift and improvements in Aboriginal law, it was not until the turn of the century that the Province of BC recognized the *government* status of First Nations.



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Meanwhile environmental law only gained non-binding federal statutes for wildlife protection and environmental assessments (the government had laws, but zero obligation to follow them, it was up to their *discretion*). Individual citizens and environmental organizations had little to no ‘standing’ to hold the government and industry accountable to environmental health, unless they could prove ‘direct harm to their person or property.’

During Conservative rule (2006-2015), Prime Minister Stephen Harper withdrew from the Kyoto Protocol. The 1999 Environmental Assessment Act was repealed in 2012 and scientists were muzzled as funding for their institutions was reduced. Research was destroyed when several Department of Fisheries and Oceans libraries were closed.

Thus, with few other options to halt the destruction of land and life, both settler and Indigenous groups began to realize the necessity of banning together through blockades. Environmental groups and Indigenous activists were quickly branded as threats to national security and a 2012 *anti-terrorism* strategy referred to environmental grievances as a source of domestic extremism (Canadian Encyclopedia, 2016).

2015-Now

In 2016, Canada was finally the last country to sign the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). UNDRIP “establishes a universal framework of minimum standards for the survival, dignity and well-being of the indigenous peoples of the world and it elaborates on existing human rights standards and fundamental freedoms as they apply to the specific situation of indigenous peoples (UN, 2021).” But since signing on, many contradictions to these minimum standards have ensued under the leadership of Justin Trudeau:

- In the winter of 2019, the RCMP forcefully removed Wet’suwet’en members and their allies from their unceded territory to make way for an LNG (fracked gas) pipeline. The pipeline was signed off on by the Wet’suwet’en elected council, but not by the hereditary chiefs.¹ Today, the RCMP are back.

¹ Food Stash notes here that this situation is complex, but it is our understanding that the hereditary chiefs are the traditional form of government while the band council system is a colonial process forced on First Nations. “Complex” is not a good enough reason to ignore what is happening.



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- On National Indigenous Peoples Day, the federal government delivered the final nail in the coffin of Residential School survivor, Romeo Saganash's, Bill C-262 to ensure all Canadian laws are in keeping with UNDRIP.
- Just one day after declaring a national climate emergency, Trudeau approved the Trans Mountain Pipeline Expansion project for the second time (after courts had initially ruled that impacted Indigenous Nations had not been adequately consulted).

Furthermore, similar contradictions are currently taking place in so-called British Columbia. In November 2019, the provincial government passed their very own [Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act \(Bill 41\)](#). The legislation sets out a process to align B.C.'s laws with UNDRIP. The legislation states:

Indigenous peoples shall not be forcibly removed from their lands or territories. No relocation shall take place without the free, prior and informed consent of the indigenous peoples concerned and after agreement on just and fair compensation and, where possible, with the option of return.

However, Indigenous land defenders have been forcibly removed from Wet'suwet'en territory- without their consent- on a number of occasions since 2019, so that their home can be permanently transformed for LNG export.

Conclusion

Despite the provincial and federal governments' continued practice of ignoring their own laws (from *The Royal Proclamation of 1793* to *Bill 41* of 2019) and dismissing the 'minimum standards for the survival, dignity and well-being of Indigenous peoples,' the last ten years have witnessed unprecedented solidarity between settlers and Indigenous groups. To reclaim their rights and title, Indigenous groups have constructed permanent spaces on their territories; spaces for peace, healing and even for educating settlers. This push back against forced removal and destruction of land and water represents a renewed iteration of a centuries-long fight for Indigenous self-determination.

We at Food Stash Foundation are proud to be a part of this unprecedented solidarity and we are grateful to listen and learn from Indigenous voices. We will stand up for Indigenous rights, and we will stand up for healthy land, air, water, food and community.