



MEDIA RELEASE

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Expanding education and job opportunities for Indigenous youth

New micro-credential will focus on developing skills and providing jobs in the food processing sector

Saskatoon, Sask. — Canada’s plant-based food and ingredients sector is one of opportunity. As innovative companies across the country expand their footprint in order to produce more healthy, sustainable products, helping meet the growing global demand for protein, all Canadians are seeing the benefits—including an increase in long-term, sustainable job opportunities.

To help ensure the sector has access to skilled talent to help fill these job vacancies, the Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies (SIIT) and Whitecap Dakota First Nation, with a co-investment from Protein Industries Canada, are coming together to create a new micro-credential for Indigenous youth in Western Canada. This micro-credential will be developed in partnership with industry stakeholders across the country, helping narrow its focus onto skills most needed by employers in the sector.

“Canada needs a skilled and diverse workforce to support our thriving plant-based protein sector,” said the Honourable François-Philippe Champagne, Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry. “Through this new post-secondary program, Indigenous youth will have the opportunity to receive specialized training and access networking opportunities that will help them succeed. This will prepare them for employment in the food processing sector while helping the sector fill the highly specialized technical positions required to succeed in the global market.”

“In order for the promising plant-based protein sector to continue to grow, we must support efforts that improve access to skilled workers. Educational projects, such as those run by the Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies and Whitecap Dakota First Nation, play an important role in empowering Indigenous youth and business leaders to develop their skills to become leaders in the processing and manufacturing of plant-based foods,” said the Honourable Marie-Claude Bibeau, Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food.

Each semester will include 60 hours of on-site practicum, as well as networking opportunities with processing business leaders, Indigenous Elders, Chiefs and Council, and other Indigenous youth. These combined experiences, along with industry’s involvement in the micro-credential’s development, ensure the students have the skills needed to take part in the increasing opportunities and economic growth available within Canada’s growing plant-based food and ingredients sector, while addressing the food processing sector’s growing labour shortage.

“One of Canada’s fastest-growing sectors, the plant-based food and ingredients sector will require more than 17,000 new jobs across the country in the coming years,” Protein Industries Canada CEO Bill Greuel said. “By offering Indigenous youth with targeted learning opportunities that provide valuable skillsets, the Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies and Whitecap Dakota First Nation are preparing the future generation for long-term employment in the sector and increasing Canada’s ability to meet the growing global demand for plant-based protein.”

To further help students and other Indigenous youth see success as employees in the sector, SIIT and Whitecap Dakota First Nation will also be incorporating an employer-training opportunity into the project. Focused on business leaders and the food processing community in general, this training will be related to Truth and Reconciliation findings and recommendations, in an effort to create more inclusive, respectful and understanding workplaces. SIIT has created a best-in-class Program Advisory Committee to help develop and deploy the curriculum. This committee includes leading regional food and ingredient processors such as Saskatchewan Food Industry Development Centre, Bioriginal Food & Science, Ingredion and Horizon Manufacturing.

“We are excited to work alongside Whitecap Dakota First Nation, Protein Industries Canada, and other industry leaders within the agriculture sector, to support the development of a new micro credential for Indigenous youth in Western Canada,” said Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies President and CEO Riel Bellegarde. “The creation of this micro credential is vital to cultivating and supporting Indigenous innovators as they contribute their talents and expertise to Canada’s food processing sector, and to ensuring that they are equipped with the skills and training necessary to succeed and contribute to future economic growth in a meaningful way.”

“The partnership between our Nation, SIIT and Protein Industries Canada creates a new and exciting career path for our members and all Indigenous youth across the province. We know food security is vital to our future, and the learning opportunity for our people through this program offered at SIIT will ensure Indigenous voices and perspectives are included in the future of the food processing sector in Canada,” said Whitecap Dakota First Nation Chief Darcy Bear.

“Ingredion is very pleased to be contributor to this important project,” Ingredion’s Vanscoy-based Plant Manager Jimmy DeArmond said. “As a global business with extensive history in Canada and numerous communities around the world, Ingredion takes its training and engagement very seriously. We are looking forward to working with SIIT to develop core skills for Indigenous youth and simultaneously learning how we can grow as an organization and as individuals to integrate the Truth and Reconciliation findings and recommendations.”

A total of \$964,000 is being committed to the project, with Protein Industries Canada committing \$514,000 and the partners committing the remainder. SIIT will provide more detailed information about the micro-credential program during a session at the Beyond the Harvest Summit, scheduled for July 27 and 28. Registration is now open for this important event, which will bring together up to 200 Indigenous and non-Indigenous leaders in the agribusiness sector to generate collaboration and inclusion, discuss opportunities, and gather data to assess program needs in relation to interests and requirements of First Nations and agriculture sector partners.

Media may contact:

Miranda Burski
Protein Industries Canada
Regina, SK
306-581-1340
miranda@proteinsupercluster.ca

About the Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies

Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies (SIIT) is a First Nations-governed educational institution, one of only four credit-granting post-secondary institutions in Saskatchewan, and the only credit-granting Indigenous institution. SIIT provides adult learners with academic, vocational and technical training, as well as services and supports for employment and career growth. Indigenous learners represent over 90 per cent of the student body.

About Whitecap Dakota First Nation

Whitecap Dakota First Nation is located 26 km south of Saskatoon. Whitecap's members have mandated leadership to implement a nation-building vision geared toward strengthening community and building opportunity. It has approximately 600 members, many of whom live within the community, and has been successful in attracting over \$160 million in capital investment in economic development and tourism.