

**Agenda**  
**Agriculture and Agri-Food Advisory Committee**

May 14, 2025  
4 p.m.  
Electronic Meeting  
Quorum: 6

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**Page No.**

**A. Call to Order**

**B. Land Acknowledgement**

We acknowledge that York Region is located on the traditional territory of many Indigenous peoples including the Anishinaabeg, Haudenosaunee, Huron-Wendat and Métis peoples and the treaty territories of the Haudenosaunee, Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation and Williams Treaties First Nations.

Today this area is home to many diverse Indigenous Peoples, and we recognize their history, spirituality, culture and stewardship of this land.

We also acknowledge the Chippewas of Georgina Island First Nation as our closest First Nation community.

**C. Disclosures of Interest**

**D. Presentations**

**D.1 STEM Minds & Boreal Farms – Agri-Tech and Agri-Food Upskilling Program**

1

Anu Bidani, CEO, STEM Minds

Brandon Hebor, President, Boreal Farms

STEM Minds and Boreal Farms will provide a brief presentation on their new skills development training program for agri-tech and agri-food, followed by Q&A and input from the Advisory Committee

**D.2 Understanding the Impacts, Strategies and Opportunities for Local**

## **Food Purchasing**

Sara Epp, Assistant Professor and Latornell Chair in Environmental Stewardship, University of Guelph  
Anna DiMarche-Meyers, Lead Local Food Procurement, Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Alliance (GHFFA)

The Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Alliance is continuing work on local food procurement in Ontario's long-term care sector with the project Serving Up Local II: An Economic Analysis (SULEA).

This presentation will provide an overview of local food procurement and promoting local food champions, followed by Q&A

### **D.3 2024-2027 Agriculture and Agri-food Sector Strategy Updates**

Staff will provide an update on actions from 2024-2027 Agriculture and Agri-food Sector Strategy

Meena Hassanali, Program Manager, Rural and Agri-Food Initiatives

Nadia Mohammed, Rural and Agri-Food Business Specialist

Eman Ali, Communications Advisor, Economic Strategy

## **E. Deputations**

(Subject to Committee granting deputant status.)

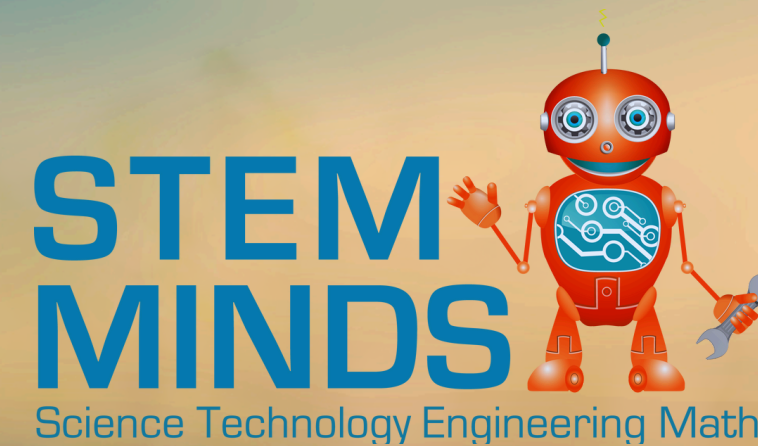
## **F. Communications**

## **G. Other Business**

## **H. Adjournment**



**BOREAL FARMS**



# **AGRI-FOOD AND AGRI-TECH UPSKILLING PROGRAM 2.0**

***Strengthening the Agri-Food Workforce across  
York Region and Ontario!***

**Presented by:**

**Anu Bidani - CEO, STEM Minds & Brandon Hebor - President, Boreal Farms**



**This Employment Ontario Project is funded in part by the  
Government of Canada and the Government of Ontario**



# About Us

## STEM Minds & Boreal Farms

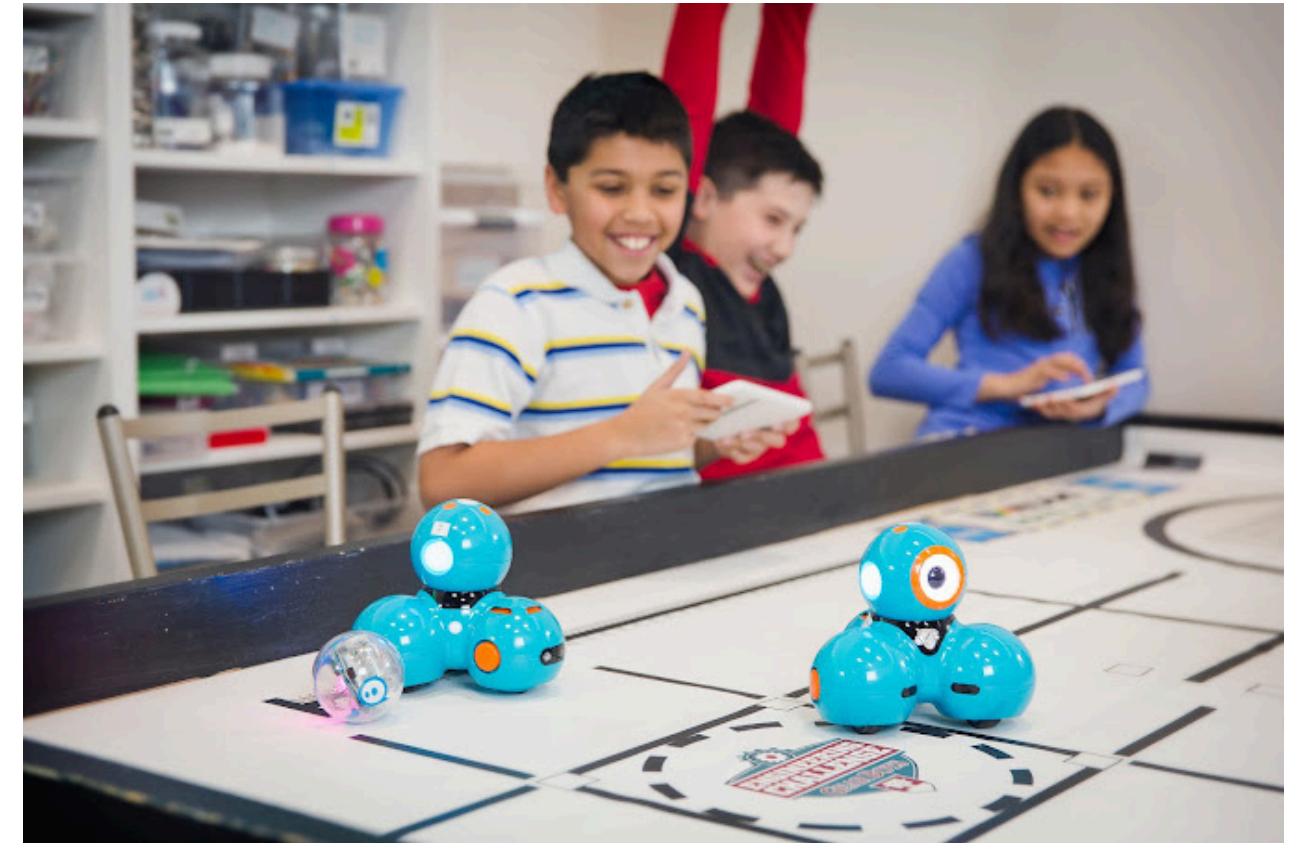
STEM Minds and Boreal Farms have continued our partnership for another year to immersive AgriFood and AgriTech workshops. The workshops are designed for students, newcomers, women and more broadly anyone who is interested in learning and building skills relevant the the AgriFood Value Chain across Ontario.



Why this  
Matters

**123,000**  
Skilled AgriFood  
Workers

Are needed by **2030** to support  
Canada's AgriFood sector  
*~RBC Thought Leadership*

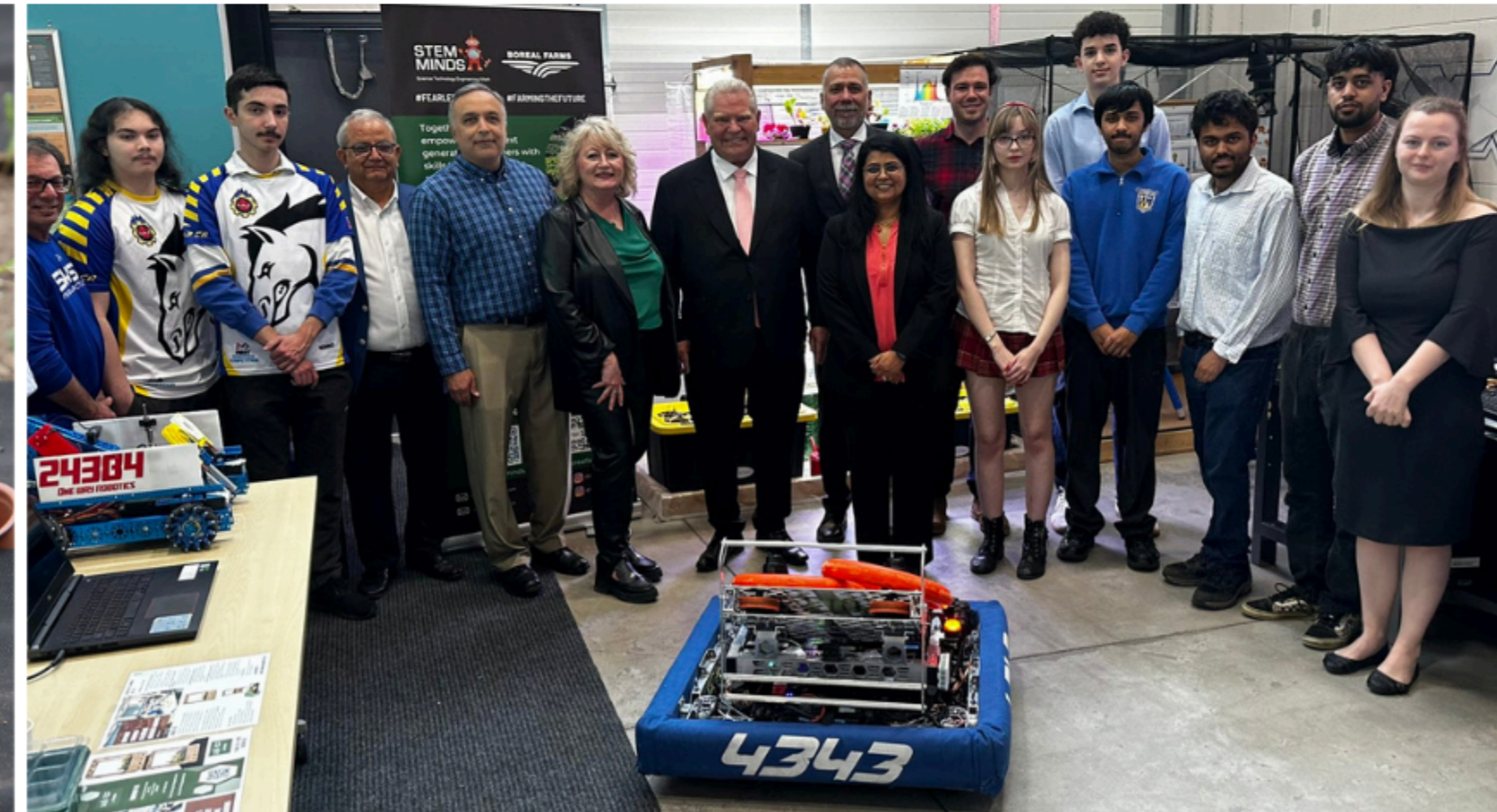
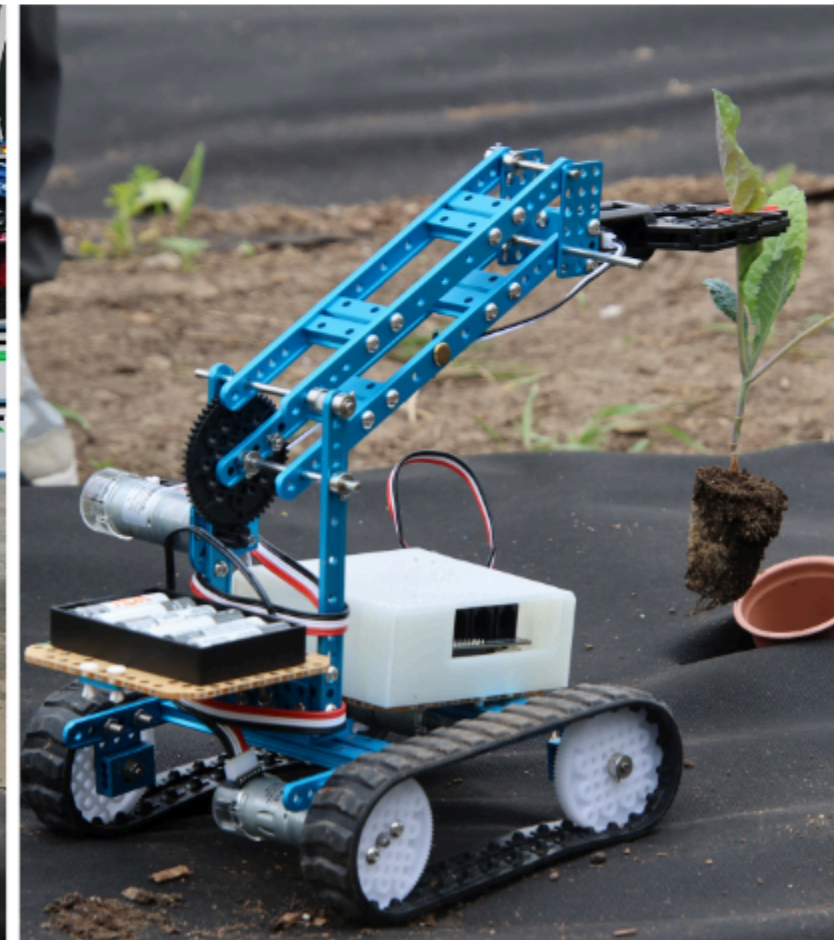
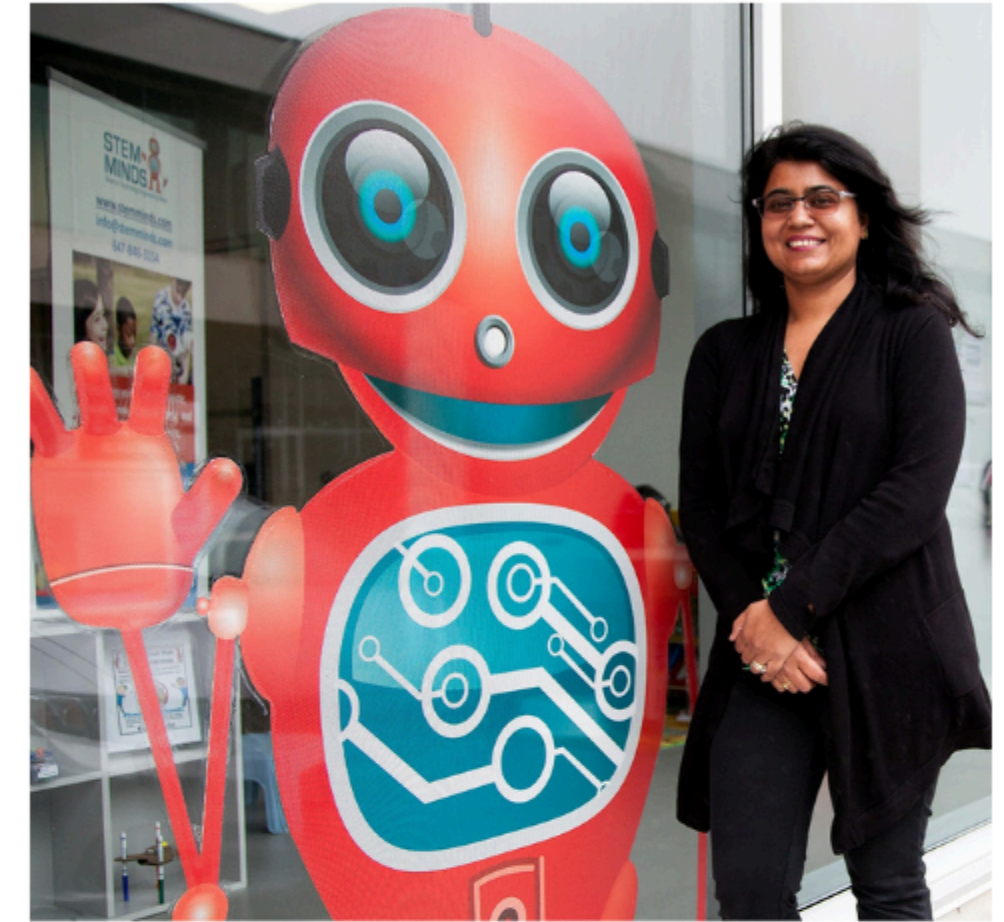




# About Anu

## Journey Into Entrepreneurship

Anu founded STEM Minds in 2016 after trying to find STEM-based programs for her two sons. With a passion for technology and as a former executive at Scotiabank for 20 years, becoming their Head of eStrategy and Solutions, Anu recognized she could create unique STEM education programs for kids ages 4-18 to unlock their full potential.





# About STEM Minds



- Serving communities and schools since 2016
- Delivery channels:
  - In-person programming (North America)
  - Virtual Classes
  - Online Learning platform
- STEM Skill Building for jobs of tomorrow
- Award-winning venture



## Mission:

To create the next generation of global STEM leaders.

## Vision:

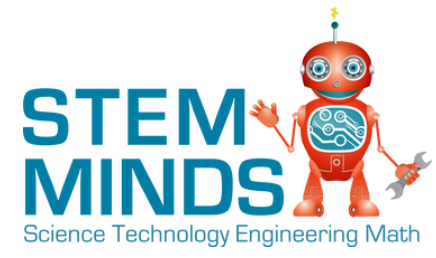
Build a world where every child has the opportunity to be STEM literate.

## OUR PROGRAMS

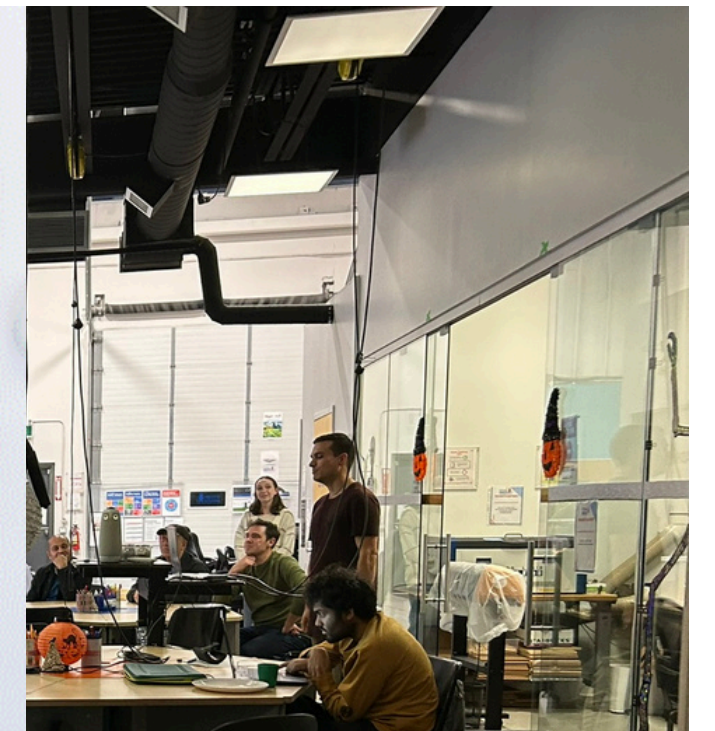
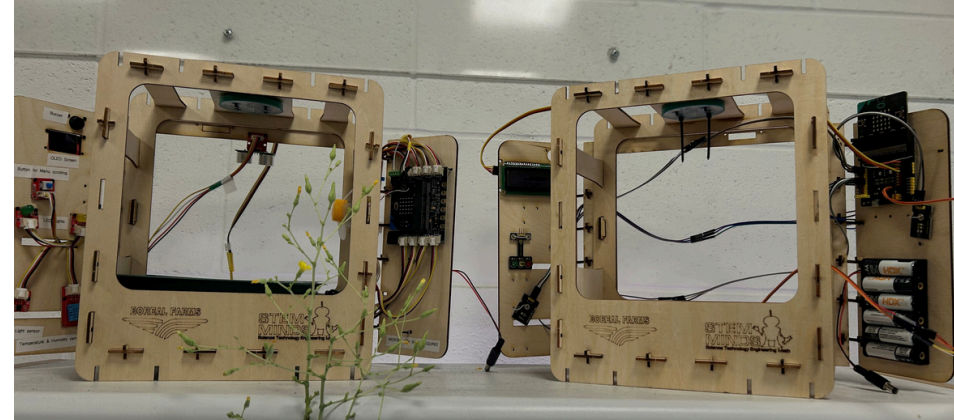
(Canada)







# STEM MINDS “OFF FARM” LEARNING EXPERIENCE





# About Brandon

## Journey Into Entrepreneurship

Brandon was born and raised in Toronto and is now a proud farmer and agri-preneur in York Region. His passion for food and farming started as a young child helping his grandparents in the backyard garden, watering and snacking on tomatoes is a fond memory of his early connection to the land.

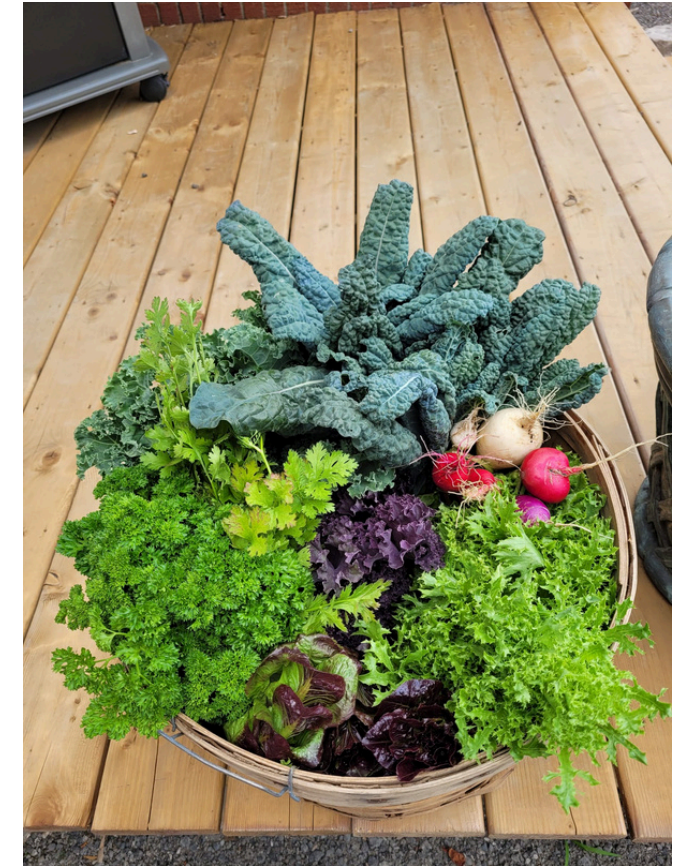




# Boreal Farms

## A Platform for the Future of Farming

Brandon founded Boreal Farms in 2021 and began operating a small scale vertical farm in a warehouse in Markham to demonstrate his vertical farming technology while generating sales from fresh leafy greens, herbs and vegetables.



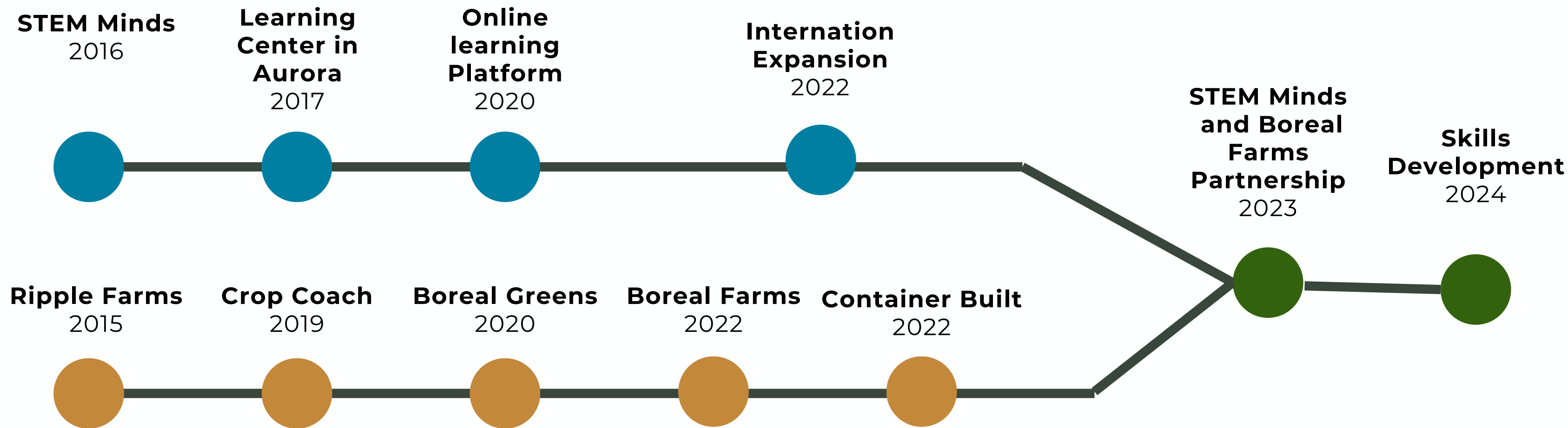


# Our Living Laboratory





# Our Collective Journey







# OUR COLLECTIVE IMPACT TO-DATE

**86,563**

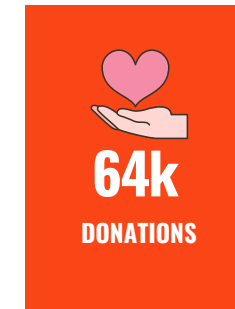
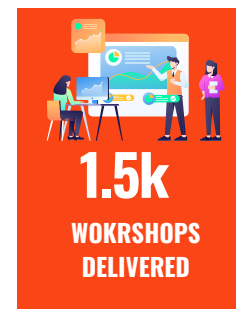
**STUDENTS IN  
CANADA**

**1.5MM**

**STUDENTS IN USA**

**6,567**

**TEACHERS**



**183**

**HIGH SCHOOL  
STUDENTS  
AGTECH/SHSM**

**151**

**AGTECH COMMUNITY  
MEMBER  
WORKSHOPS**

**5000**

**BOREAL FARMS  
TOURS AND TALKS**



**380 LBS**

**FOOD DONATED**

**6**

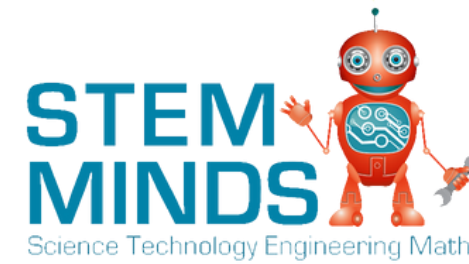
**APPLIED RESEARCH  
PROJECTS**

**5 ACRES**

**OF LAND BEING  
REGENERATED**







# Skills Development Fund - Program Assessment: 2024-2025

## Impact Report The Future of Food and Farming

**Access the Report and our  
Online Portal for 2025-26 Programs at:**  
*[industry.stemminds.com](https://industry.stemminds.com)*



**300+**  
Participants Served

**25**  
Workshops Delivered

**111**  
Participants Who Improved Employability Skills

**66**  
Partners Engaged

### Select Tracks For Skill Building Based On Your Interest

Choose from specialized tracks including:

- Online Certification – TUG
- AgriTech 4.0 – Robotics and Drones in Agriculture
- Skilled Trades in Agriculture
- Entrepreneurship and Innovation
- Food Safety, Quality
- Assurance, and Regulatory Compliance
- Agronomy and the Science of Plants and Soils
- Food Security and Sustainability
- Horticulture and Greenhouse Workers and Operators
- Small Scale Operators in the AgriFood Sector

[Learn More](#)



March 31, 2025- Version 1.0

*For Public External Review*



# SKILLS DEVELOPMENT TRAINING

## Addressing the talent gap in Ontario

- Grant approved for 12 months - Apr 2025-March 2026
- 12 Community Nights
- 24 Workshops plus 24 Tours
- Online Certification - Toronto Urban Grower
- Impact Report - Applied Research - Seneca Polytechnic
- Building an eco-system
  - School Boards: YRDSB, YCDSB, SCDSB
  - AgriFood Network / Employers
- Using Innovative Tools and Technologies
  - Drones, Sensors, Robotics, more...
- **Target:** Training 400 participants
- **Target:** Placements for 50 with Employers with Wage Subsidy





# Agri-Food Value Chain





# Our Ask for The Committee

1. We will be reaching out to committee members to ask for a 30-45 minute phone / zoom call
  - Discuss specifics of the program, areas for development and ensure our alignment with value chain ‘verticals’ as they relate to your business, place of employment or community
2. Introductions to local AgriTech / AgriFood Employers
  - Assist us with finding placements for 50 participants - directly or indirectly through your networks
3. Support our program by sharing our social media posts to your networks / social platforms
  - Once we have Ministry Approved media, we would love if you can help us get the word out!
4. Collaborate with us on program delivery, tours or community nights as they relate to your aspects of the value chain - honorariums are available
5. Come out and visit the farm and ‘living lab’ to see things in action - dates to be confirmed!





# THANKYOU