

INDIGENOUS Food Systems:

Transformative Strategies
to Perpetuate Nationhood



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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS



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INTRODUCTION

Indigenous communities throughout the world have steadily and consistently maintained, fought and continued to fight for the healthy existence of land, water, food and community. We are protective of the relationships with our environment, the force that shapes our existence, the force that sustained our ancestors, and the force that gives hope to future generations. Like stories that are handed down from grandparent to grandchild, our commitments to our lands and the gifts they offer are encoded in our songs of creation and embedded in a shared cultural intelligence that begins far before we are born and spans generations.

In recent years, there has been heightened attention to Indigenous food sovereignty and we reference this as the “Indigenous food sovereignty movement,” for want of a better phrase to describe this newfound attention.

Our creation story began alongside our first foods – our siblings – and our fates are intimately tied (for better or for worse). For thousands of years, Indigenous communities crafted relationships with our environments, our foods, and created an intimate language cultivated in culture and ways of being that continue to guide our path even now in the 21st century. The idea of a “movement” really doesn’t describe the obligations, responsibilities and commitment that many people within the Indigenous food space feel. A movement implies that there is a beginning and an end that seeks to shepherd a change. Indigenous farmers, growers, professionals, parents and communities who work in food systems are practicing their existence, following a set of original instructions that have guided our people for generations. Labeling this a “movement” reduces that existence to a reactionary response to events outside of the Indigenous identity, when in actuality growing

food, caring for our ancestral seeds, and ensuring our children honor and learn those connections is life and time itself, regardless of the pressures outside of our communities. In short, our foodways are the homeostasis of being that remind of us who we are and that our existence is tied to that of our lands.

Today, with the onslaught of social media, shortened attention spans, increased environmental pressures, and deliberate attacks on Indigenous culture and people, Indigenous communities are finding ways to tell their stories and speak their truth into existence. Indigenous communities are using food as a medium to build subtle skill sets that support nationhood in the midst of a contemporary assault on tribal sovereignty. From the young Indigenous university students who are finding ways to make people listen through research and papers on Indigenous land conflicts, to the young parents who are finding ways to incorporate healthy food into homemade lunches, Indigenous communities are harnessing their collective power to call upon our ancestral knowledge to ensure a new generation can walk the path to collect wild plants, fish in our streams, or plant our grandparents’ corn.

While the mainstream media and other outsiders may paint a picture of obesity and diabetes with a poverty-laden brush in Indigenous communities, Indigenous people themselves are painting their own pictures of inspiration and, more importantly, of their own growth and regrowth. We are storytellers who are telling our own stories, and these are the tales of Indigenous communities and their relationships with their foods, their lands, and their people.

RECLAIMING LOCAL SPACES AND ASSET MAPPING

Indigenous people claim much of the country as Indigenous despite the legal and political definitions that have defined ownership of Indigenous land. Ownership doesn't negate the obligations to the lands that are stewarded by Indigenous communities, but ownership may obstruct the exercise of responsibilities that place additional physical and emotional pressures on those whose connection with the lands have been weakened. Weakened does not mean severed. Many communities and people return to those lands outside Indigenous ownership to remind themselves, and the land, that they are not far from thought and the connections are still alive. Additionally, people return and return again with new generations to renew connections to these places. Now, young people are finding ways to ensure those connections are further recorded through writing, technology and modern programming.

This collection of stories highlights how different Native communities are creating local and national systemic change to improve the lives and well-being of local communities, and ensure the perpetuation of tribal nationhood. No matter what we call it, an Indigenous food movement or perpetuating Indigenous responsibility through action, Native communities throughout the United States are organizing and fighting for ways to change local conditions to improve community well-being and increase tribal sovereignty. This movement (for lack of a better word) around food has many entry points and involves many aspects of Native society and communities.



The current food movement in Native communities involves the protection of sacred sites, the preservation of the land and environment, increasing access to traditional and healthy foods to feed people, and engaging youth and other members of Native communities to take action to improve well-being. There are many and diverse entry points into the movement. As a result, the movement is dynamic and people are called to the work for the protection and perpetuation of local food sources for a variety of reasons. But what is clear, across Indian Country, is that food continues to mobilize individuals and entire communities to action.

The goal of this report is to highlight how a few Native communities and organizations are engaged in work to protect Native food sovereignty and thereby ensure tribal nationhood in the future. It aims to not only document what they are doing to protect and perpetuate important food sources, but why their work is in defense of tribal nationhood and is vital for their local communities and larger society.

Utah Diné Bikéyah

Reclaiming the Bears Ears National Monument

Utah Diné Bikéyah (UDB) and the Bears Ears Inter-Tribal Coalition – Navajo, Hopi, Zuni, Ute Mountain Ute, and Uintah Ouray Ute – are committed to protecting the Bears Ears National Monument and its cultural landscape. UDB is focusing on reclaiming its local space and asset-mapping of the area through one of its projects, Building Native American Youth Cultural Awareness and Leadership in the Bears Region of Southeast Utah, funded by First Nations Development Institute's Native Youth and Culture Fund from 2016 to 2017.

The project aims to engage, motivate and train local Native youth in documenting, mapping and archiving traditional knowledge and activities across the Bears Ears landscape. Working with tribal elders and spiritual leaders, the project provides exposure and training for youth in the methods and applications of utilizing traditional knowledge and mapping cultural values. The focus of the project engaged and distributed information across the five tribes of the Bears Ears Inter-Tribal.

Cynthia Wilson is the UDB Traditional Foods Program Director leading the charge. She is Navajo and holds a master's degree in nutrition.

Traditional Foods Assessment

"My focus is on traditional foods. I help to engage tribal communities in adding their voice into public land-management planning as they are the traditional wisdom keepers and original stewards of the land. I am currently working on a traditional foods assessment among the elders, who hold the wisdom of wild plants that exist in the Bears Ears region – a project inspiring youth and elected officials through traditional practice to address local health challenges," said Wilson.

The youth project helps strengthen intergenerational relationships between the youth and the elders.

The engagement focuses on traditional knowledge to reconnect the youth with their ancestral lands

and cultural heritage. "The younger generation is beginning to recognize the wisdom of their elders and it is our goal to revitalize our health, traditional economies, Native language and each other through landscape conservation," she said.

Foraging and Meal Preparation

As part of the Bears Ears Inter-Tribal Gathering held in June 2017, the youth were proactively engaged in hands-on cultural workshops and field trips in San Juan County, Utah. Most notably, they took hikes with Native Chef Karlos Baca (Tewa/Diné and Nuche), who is the founder of Taste of Native Cuisine.

Baca took the youth on a foraging field trip within the Bears Ears region, where they studied wild plants, and created traditional meals out of what they gathered. The experience opened the eyes of the youth, knowing they have traditional access to these wild foods and realizing they have a rich culture of knowledge with this land. "Baca showed them how to identify certain wild plants such as sumac berries (Navajo name is *chil'chin* and Ute name is *'isi-vu*). They also discussed the traditional uses of these plants and how to respect and relate to the land by only taking so much after giving offerings to Mother Earth," said Wilson.

The youth strengthened their cultural ties to the land and their elders through the workshops and field trips, which included Navajo rug-weaving, sheep butchering and cooking, traditional hunting rituals, and a 5K run. They learned about the health benefits of traditionally-sourced foods and the cultural responsibility to ensure the well-being of the land. This gathering, in particular, helped build on their cultural and natural connections to the land. The next step for the youth will be to kick off their filming project in documenting the application of Native wisdom from their elders to gain a deeper understanding of traditional land-stewardship practices.



Protecting Resources and Rights

Beyond Food, Beyond Oak Flat – Apache-Stronghold

The Native food movement indeed speaks to protecting Native food sources, building a local food economy, creating food sovereignty, and it is at the heart of tribal nationhood. But as a movement toward Native independence and a preservation of culture, it also has implications beyond food. The Native food movement is ensuring – and in defense of – environmental health for all. Extractive industry tends to slowly erode the core of a nation, while tribal nationhood is based on ensuring those resources are sustained for generations. In the Oak Flat area near Superior, Arizona, the Apache-Stronghold effort is taking a stand to protect access to the sacred site of Oak Flat, including its Native food resources. It is an effort that will directly affect the rights of the Apache tribes of the area, and the basic human rights of all people, everywhere, Native and non-Native alike.

Sacred History

For centuries, Oak Flat and nearby sacred places Apache Leap and Mount Graham were the original homelands to the San Carlos Apache and other Apache bands. Deep with ancestral ties, the land was held sacred. Generations grew up there, and tribes thrived through agriculture and hunting.

But by the mid-1800s, the sacred grounds were encroached upon by non-Indian settlers and miners in search of silver and other precious metals considered valuable resources. Native homelands were reduced to what is now the San Carlos Apache Reservation, and much of the sacred ground was designated as federal public lands.

Legislative Threat

While these designations protected the land to some degree, now they are again in jeopardy. U.S. Senators John McCain and Jeff Flake initiated federal land-swap legislation, Senate Bill 409, also known as the Southeast Arizona Land Exchange and Conservation Act.

According to Debra SpyderCloud Barnette (Lakota Sioux), who is studying the San Carlos Apache history in pursuit of a master's degree in Indigenous

Rights and Social Justice at Arizona State University, the bill basically gives the land to a foreign mining company, Resolution Copper Mining Corporation, with limited study into the environmental impacts or consultation with the San Carlos Apache or surrounding Apache tribes.

The bill violates the National Environmental Policy Act in that it transfers the Oak Flat area to Resolution Copper without first informing the general public about the adverse impacts on the quality and quantity of the region's water supply, physical environment, and potential health and safety risks.

Furthermore, the bill violates the federal recognition of the Oak Flat area as sacred space. Presidents Dwight Eisenhower in 1955 and Richard Nixon in 1971 acknowledged the area's cultural significance by closing it to mining. The Clinton Administration in 2000 ordered that federal agencies must consult with tribes when proposed legislation has a direct effect on them. In addition, the Obama administration and the National Park Service officially placed the Oak Flat area on the National Register of Historic Places in 2016.

Cultural Threat

With the bill now passed, the area's food and water sources will be further compromised. Moreover, the Apache will again lose Native rights to their holy land. This means a significant loss to the San Carlos Apache.

SpyderCloud explained that when you take the simple access to sacred land locations, you take the cultural identity. You take a support system and the backing needed to draw strength and purpose to, in turn, invest in tribal food systems, build a solid infrastructure specific to their values, and preserve the San Carlos Apache's culture for the future.

This type of theft is nothing new in Indian Country. Tribal cultural religious expressions related to sacred ceremonial grounds and burial sites have been historically dismissed by the federal government and natural resource development corporations, said SpyderCloud. This destruction and degradation of

sacred lands have continued to have negative and dangerous effects on the health and well-being of Native tribes. Rates for substance abuse, alcoholism and depression are four times higher among the Native population than non-Natives. “What’s happening at Oak Flat,” said SpyderCloud, “is another devastating blow.”

Building a Defense

Since the introduction of the bill, the Apache bands have been struggling to get the land-swap exchange reversed. They are fighting to protect their sacred site, the environmental integrity, and water sources from defilement.

Right now there is a treaty in place, but it is not specific to the San Carlos Apache or other Apache tribes, nor is it powerful enough to bear weight. According to SpyderCloud, the best chances of reversing the exchange, unfortunately, may not be the religious freedom legal argument, but the environmental legal argument. Although Resolution Copper has filed an Environmental Impact Statement, there are debates as to whether the mining complies with the U.S. Clean Air Act and the Clean Water Act.

The Apache-Stronghold is also leading a strong fight. This grassroots movement organized by the San Carlos Apache Tribe is bringing national awareness and support to prevent the loss of Oak Flat. It has aligned forces with many tribes and organizations to protest and resist the land-swap exchange. Continued efforts have included online petitions, demonstrations outside the Arizona State Capitol, and occupations of the Oak Flat area by tribal members and outside supporters.

In addition, the “Save Oak Flat Bill” has been drafted, rallies have been organized, and hundreds of organizations, tribes and environmental agencies have stepped forward. And yet the battle continues.

Implications for All

The heart of the matter is that the threat at Oak Flat is not just a threat to sacred land. It is a threat to a natural resource – the acorns and shunkbush berries used in ceremony. Ceremony is the codification of a nation’s principals/value, resource management, and amity to the world. Disruption of those practices will surely have ripple effects throughout contemporary reality, first as



Natural Resources & Treaty Rights

Treaties with Native American nations are the first and oldest living documents in American law. These agreements between the United States of America and Native American nations begin on the heels of America’s inception. These agreements have been the subject of conversation, regulation and contention for decades. Today, there is a renewed focus on the contents of these treaties stemming from heightened attention on the rates of natural resource extraction that are occurring nationwide.

For those working in Indigenous food systems, treaties are a starting point, a historical visible line where tribal food sovereignty begins and American control over Indigenous food ends, or vice versa. As in every legal document or argument, that invisible line is not always clear, or may have changed over time, but undoubtedly, the line does exist.

physical and environmental devastation, but surely followed by political and social struggles. Indigenous food sources are one of the first indicators of potential disruption. Oak Flats is proof that unethical legislative acts can cause contamination, degradation and land loss – devastation that is not just an Indigenous issue, but one that affects the environment.

As SpyderCloud explained, “People are realizing that this affects everyone. This is a fight that must incorporate all citizens. This is a stand, among Native peoples and non-Natives, to hold governmental officials and corporate officials accountable for the sustainment of our communities and the security of our future generations.”

The Native food movement is indeed improving nutrition, sustainability and health outcomes of Indian Country. But it is one component of an overall battle for Native resources and rights everywhere. Upholding religious freedom and environmental security at Oak Flat can protect sacred land for agriculture, food and ceremony. Moreover, it can protect the future of the San Carlos Apache people, and ensure that cultures everywhere, Native and non-Native, are never minimized or dismissed in the pursuit of politics, progress or profit.

Treaty Rights



Always Protecting: Sustaining a Source of Food and a Way of Life on the Columbia River

The Native food movement involves creating new strategies to access food, developing food systems, and restoring Native ways of sustainability and good health. The Native food movement is the demonstration of sovereign power. Food is a basic element, but often an overlooked base for nationhood. It is often said, "He who controls the food, controls the people." For some tribal nations, the frontline is exactly where the treaty right line was drawn so many hundreds of years ago. It is a line that must be monitored and exercised constantly, which in of itself is a necessary and transformative defense to ensure food sources, and a nation, are protected for future generations.

For the Yakama, Warm Springs, Umatilla and Nez Perce Tribes who have treaty fishing rights on the Columbia River, this challenge is undertaken by the tribes and the Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission (CRITFC). A technical and coordinating agency for all four tribes, this organization presents a unified force in protecting treaty fishing rights, and ensuring the river remains replenished and the salmon is always honored.

A Culture Threatened

Since their beginning, the tribes of the Columbia River Basin fished their waters and managed their natural resources, passing down fishing skills and the sacredness of the salmon. Their relationship with salmon was protected by tribal leaders in treaties between the tribes and the United States that were signed in 1855. Those treaties reserved for the tribes the exclusive right of taking fish from the streams running through and bordering their reservations.

Over time, these rights were encroached upon. Tribes slowly began losing control of the waters, and the resources needed to manage them. Lands were lost to newly formed dams, the salmon population declined, and climate change threatened the river.

Adding to this, the Columbia River Treaty with Canada was implemented, governing hydropower and flood control throughout the river. The treaty

spelled out rights between the United States and Canada, but it did not take into account the needs of the salmon or the Native rights and cultural resources. The tribes were not consulted, and their interests were not represented.

Facing controversy on the river, tribal fishers fought to exercise their treaty right to fish. Ultimately, this right was reaffirmed through a series of court hearings, and co-management authority for the river was returned to the tribes. Yet, while the rulings were positive for the tribes, fish returns had suffered significant losses. As the health of the river declined, tribal leaders recognized that salmon recovery was critical to the tribal treaty fishing right. The Yakama, Warm Springs, Umatilla, and Nez Perce recognized that a coordinated, unified voice was needed to speak for the tribes collectively and ensure their rights were upheld.

A Unified Front

In response to this need, CRITFC was formed in 1977. The commission joined forces of the tribes, providing support and technical assistance to help them restore fish populations, manage the fishery resources, and exercise treaty fishing rights. Now, the tribes are coordinating with state and federal agencies to ensure that all the tribes in the area have an equitable share of the salmon harvest and a voice to protect their livelihood and their culture.

Through the years, this focus has dovetailed into other services that support fisher rights and the sustainability of the salmon. The commission provides legislative and policy support, education and ongoing research on biology and climate change. Resources are dedicated to support more than 600 tribal fishers with marketing, safe fishing practices, and training in food safety and handling to increase the economic value of the fisheries. The commission also employs an enforcement team of patrol officers, dispatchers and administrators who enforce tribal fishing regulations along the 147-mile stretch of the Columbia River.

CRITFC Public Information Officer Sara Thompson explained that CRITFC is a tool for these tribes, here to offer hands-on technical assistance and constant dialogue so fishers can provide for their

communities. “By fostering the role of fishers and the treaty rights to the salmon,” she said, “We can support the tribes in developing a food system that’s in line with their value system.”

United for the Future

The voice of CRITFC will remain essential as the expiration date of the Columbia River Treaty draws near. While the treaty is in effect until 2024, it can be terminated by either the U.S. or Canada if either country provides a 10-year notice. Now, that 10-year window has opened and a treaty review is underway. What’s imperative at this time is that the four tribes are at the table, speaking up for their rights and interests and the health and future of the river. CRITFC is ensuring that happens.

So far the tribes, and 28 more throughout the U.S. and Canada, have come together to review the treaty and make recommendations. Together, they’ve ensured that a focus on the ecosystem has been added to the treaty’s intent. And they’ve mandated that they will be included with the two countries in any negotiations concerning the future of the treaty.

Success to Date

As CRITFC continues to support treaty rights and advocate for tribal culture, it has empowered Native fishers to make the most of their food supply. The commission has implemented a Spirit of the Salmon Plan committed to reversing the decline of the fish’s population. It has formed partnerships with the University of Idaho to increase understanding of fish biology and genetics. There is an emphasis on education for fishers in business management, OSHA compliance, boater safety and food safety.

Frameworks have been established to empower fishers to sell salmon directly to consumers, or via wholesalers. Fishers now have greater buying power and more resources. In addition, an annual conference is held to implement a vision for the river – one of health, resiliency and sustainability.

True to the spirit of their culture, all work is done for the benefit of not only today’s generations but the next seven. With this in mind, another focus of CRITFC is providing culturally relevant science, technology, engineering and math experiences to middle-

schoolers to foster an interest in natural resources. Among the topics: The science and lifecycle of salmon, and what it takes to keep the river populated.

The Native Food Movement takes on many forms, and multiple approaches are needed to ensure that the culture, access and resources surrounding food remain where they rightly belong. For these four tribes on the Columbia River, the movement is making sure the sacred salmon is not only treasured, but sustained as a source of nourishment and a means of livelihood and nationhood for the future.

To learn more about the CRITFC and the tribes of Yakama, Umatilla, Warm Springs, and Nez Perce, visit www.critfc.org.

ADVANCING TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE

Traditional knowledge is embedded and demonstrated in community, in relationships, and it is very much dependent on intergenerational interactions that occur regularly in Indigenous communities. It is the heart of nationhood. Ensuring traditional knowledge is transmitted from generation to generation is ensuring societal institutions remain intact. While the term “traditional knowledge” encompasses many subject areas and knowledge bases, it is understood as a way of life that has been carried from one generation to the next.

Greg Cajete, from Santa Clara Pueblo, wrote a book called *Native Science* that dedicates itself to explaining and analyzing traditional knowledge. He says:

“In Native languages there is no word for ‘science,’ nor for ‘philosophy,’ ‘psychology,’ or any other foundational way of coming to know and understand the nature of life and our relationship therein. Not having, or more accurately not needing, words for science, art or psychology did not diminish their importance in Native life. For Native people, seeking life was about the all-encompassing task. While there were tribal specialists with particular knowledge of technologies and ritual, each member of the tribe in his or her own capacity was a scientist, an artist, a storyteller, and a participant in the great web of life.”



Santa Clara Pueblo

Cultivating Traditional Food Knowledge Forward

Santa Clara Pueblo is roughly 26 miles north of Santa Fe, New Mexico, along the Rio Grande River, which makes it an ideal farming area. The Pueblos have been farming the Rio Grande Valley for thousands of years. Agriculture is the base of the Pueblo Society. Santa Clara is one of the smaller Tewa-speaking Pueblo villages, with 2,800 tribal members.

Santa Clara is a “traditional agricultural society,” says Janet R. Johnson, Coordinator for the Santa Clara Office of Self-Governance, who oversees the Pueblo’s Agriculture Program. Johnson says the program’s focus is on building community.

“Each family has their own plot of land. I remember when I was little and going with my dad and uncle to our field and helping them plant,” She said. “In the Agriculture Program we’ve seen some of the families make use of their lands. The agriculture staff promotes technical assistance with traditional farming practices, crop selection and placement, and how to prepare the soil for their gardens.”

Johnson said that by “encouraging and promoting a return to traditional gardening practices by offering and promoting community garden opportunities in a variety of methods and locations, providing agricultural assistance and services, and creating opportunities for intergenerational mentoring,” it all connects the people to their Pueblo lifeways, beliefs and to the land.

As part of their commitment to their traditional agricultural society, the Pueblo is in the process of conducting a Food Sovereignty Assessment that will increase control over traditional agriculture and food systems, improve the health of their community with locally-grown food, build community support of food sovereignty through workshops and meetings, and document culturally-driven food practices.

Recently a community dialogue session and community dinner was held that focused on the Pueblo’s ancestral foods – indigenous to the area – with no processed foods served.

“We have our own version of Hopi piki blue cornbread – Buwah. We also served squash soup, roasted corn, roasted squash, beans, turkey and green chile tamales, jerky, fresh berries, nuts, melon and Indian tea. We focused on what our first foods were...They are still available,” said Johnson.

Johnson and her staff wanted the 30 community members who attended to share a meal, and have conversations around what meals were like when they were growing up, especially the elders. Did their families have farming land? And what are their thought processes on food issues in the Pueblo? The Food Sovereignty Assessment is a high priority for the tribal leadership. Both Governor J. Michael Chavarria and Lt. Gov. James Naranjo and their families attended to show support for the work of Johnson and her staff.



Johnson says that the Pueblo wants to see “what opportunities are available, not just for individuals, but for the tribe overall, in order to better direct our own initiatives, take control of our food ... and how do we want our community gardens to be over the next five to six years. We want to get better at undertaking what the community wants – and to give back to the senior center and the community school.”

The Pueblo also has a seed-saving program where ancestral seeds are available upon request for tribal members. Unfortunately the seeds are in limited supply, therefore the program participates with other seed-saving programs and families within the Pueblo. Johnson says “providing seeds to our community members is an opportunity for tribal members to have control of and be proud of our foods.”

Transmitting traditional knowledge is normally channeled through age-old institutions like agriculture practices. However, with present day challenges that focus more on time-spent outside of the community, age-old institutions often require a deliberate conversation. Where once everyone in the Pueblo participated in growing food in their family fields, now Pueblo people spend time in wage paying jobs in urban centers. Because of this shift, communities like Santa Clara are taking deliberate steps to ensure community institutions remain intact. Santa Clara Pueblo, and a few others, are making agriculture a pillar and stand-alone department in Tribal government, reinforcing its position in the perpetuation of a nation.



YOUTH IN AGRICULTURE

In the 2012 Agricultural Census, the average American Indian farmer was 58.1 years of age. In Indian Country, there are approximately 52 million acres of operable farmland and close to 40,000 farms. American Indian youth have an incredible inheritance that is getting closer, or is already being transferred, to the next generation of American Indian farmers. Tribal nations everywhere are preparing their youth for leadership positions through skill-building, internships and knowledge transfer. Supplemental programs such as the Indigenous Food and Agriculture Initiative offer American Indian youth a specialized focus on legal and professional skillsets to assist tribal communities in preparing a new generation of farmers in Indian Country.



San Felipe Pueblo Interns Learn About Connections to the Land and Culture

The Pueblo of San Felipe is located roughly 25 miles north of Albuquerque, New Mexico, and 38 miles to the south of Santa Fe, New Mexico. While sandwiched between two of the top four largest cities in the state, the Pueblo spans 68,000 rural acres. It also has 3,400 enrolled tribal members and the majority of the community speaks Keres – the traditional language. The Keres language is what intertwines the people with their cultural and agricultural traditions.

At the heart of the Pueblo of San Felipe are the children, and to ensure the continuance of their culture and traditions with the land, a youth internship program was started within the Pueblo's Department of Natural Resources (DNR) in 2013, which includes the Agriculture Program, Environmental Office, Water and Land Management Offices, Mapping Office and Historic and Cultural Preservation Office.

Pinu'u Stout is the Director of the Department of Natural Resources. She said connecting the youth to their work and to their community is an important part of the department.

Supporting Traditional Agriculture

"We want to interest youth in farming, this is what we are trying to do. One of our goals and missions is to support traditional agriculture, to protect the land and preserve it. We are actively sharing what we do, why we do it, and how we do it with the interns," said Stout.

The Pueblo has many tribal members who farm traditional crops such as chile, beans, pumpkins,

melons and corn. Alfalfa and sudan grass are also grown and used as cash crops to bring in income and support the local agricultural economy, and to provide feed for the horses and cattle that are also raised on the Pueblo's land.

The number of DNR interns has grown from two in the first year in 2013, with up to as many as eight to 12 in the third and fourth years of the program. In 2017, there were five. Often, there are twice as many applications as there are positions available. While the number of interns has varied over the years due to funding challenges, the interest remains strong. The DNR staff is key to emphasizing the commitment, work ethic, responsibility and the importance to the community of what the young people are learning and receiving in their on-the-job education.

Learning Goes Both Ways

"Our goal is to provide opportunities for San Felipe youth to see what it is we do – work wise, with equipment, seeds, irrigation, machinery. To open their eyes as to what the tribal leadership goes through to provide for the community, to teach them job skills, resume-building, and so we can learn from them as well," said Stout.

One intern has been with the department since the beginning and is now in graduate school. He is involved with the Pueblo's Food Sovereignty Assessment Project, which is being funded by the First Nations Development Institute under the Native Agriculture and Food Systems Initiative (NAFSI).

"We're catching young people who are interested and could farm. We're trying to keep them on the right track through agriculture and natural resources work so they can achieve their own personal success," said Stout. With their success, comes the success of the nation.

Stout and her staff are proud of the accomplishments of their interns. One is now working with the local irrigation conservancy district, four have completed the Bureau of Indian Affairs/AmeriCorps Water Resources Training and are focusing on the Pueblo's agricultural irrigation system as part of their AmeriCorps internship, and another is in his third year at Haskell Indian Nations University, majoring in Environmental Science. Two current interns are seeking admittance to the Southwest Indian Polytechnic Institute (SIPI) to continue their education, and two interns from 2015 are now full-time employees with DNR. Stout and her staff are watching their youth grow and mature, much like the crops they tend for their community.

"I believe providing an opportunity for Native youth shows them what is available, a little bit of how much work it takes to complete a goal, and provides them with concrete evidence and ideas about how their community needs them, and what they have to offer to their community and themselves."



Like many youth in tribal nations, San Felipe youth are almost required to understand land and access issues early in order to influence career paths that eventually lead to the continued fight for tribal sovereignty like land and food access. Creating opportunities for youth to experience and witness the daily practice of tribal sovereignty can lead to a wide range of professional career paths that are often consulted out because many of those skill sets do not exist in tribal nations presently. As professional expertise grows in a tribal nation, so does its ability to express its own world view in addressing critical issues that affect future generations.

FOOD SECURITY

The Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations describes the four pillars of food security as being availability, access, utilization and stability. In a 1996 World Food Summit report, it stated: "Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life."

Historically, Native nations have had their own systems for food generation in place that relied upon traditional knowledge for harvesting, planting and consumption of locally-harvested foods. In the past 200 years, however, federal Indian policy has disrupted and, in some cases, destroyed these traditional practices – either through deliberate policies to remove Indians from territories known for their rich agricultural land and natural resources or else through deliberate attempts to starve Indians into submission. These policies and practices were deliberate, calculated, and meant to disrupt traditional Native food systems and related agricultural land practices.

Today, accessing healthy food remains a challenge for many Native American children, families and communities. Without access to healthy food, a nutritious diet and good health are out of reach. Currently, a significant number of Native Americans face economic and geographic barriers that prevent them from accessing healthy and culturally-appropriate foods. As a result of this food insecurity, Native Americans now suffer from high rates of diabetes, heart disease and other diet-related chronic diseases.



The Chickasaw Nation

Fighting Food Scarcity Through Access and Distribution

An essential component of the Native food movement is addressing food scarcity. This involves not only improving Native health and promoting sustainability, but physically getting food to Native communities where resources are limited and poverty is rampant.

In Oklahoma, where there are no reservations and only tribal jurisdictions, challenges to food access are compounded. Tribes are spread throughout the state, and many tribal members do not have a local food source and cannot access food programs that are available to federally-recognized tribes.

Here, through a system of stores and package drop-off points, the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR) is distributing food throughout the Chickasaw Nation, directly reducing food scarcity and improving the lives of thousands of individuals and families. While the FDPIR foods have historically not been healthy or nutritious, tribes like the Chickasaw Nation and others are working to improve the quality of food and increase access to foods.

Oklahoma's Food Desert

In southeast Oklahoma, the need for direct access to food is apparent, according to Roxanna Newsom, Director of Food Distribution, Farmers' Market and Nutrition Education Programs for the Chickasaw Nation. For many people, the nearest source of food is miles away. And often that source is a convenience store, where prices are high and nutritious options are limited.

Families may be eligible to get "food stamps" through the Oklahoma Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). But while most stores accept the stamps, the stores are often too difficult to access because of distance, weather, lack of

transportation and other barriers, or they are the small, expensive convenience stores with limited inventory for making healthy decisions.

Further, benefits through SNAP are based on income, which does not necessarily represent the need. This means even if people can access the food they need, many times it is not enough to feed their families, said Newsom.

A Solution to Scarcity

The FDPIR addresses this food desert by delivering nutritious packages to individuals who are not eligible for SNAP or do not have immediate access to stores that accept SNAP food stamps. The program sends packages to drop-off points in remote locations, and also establishes FDPIR grocery stores in convenient tribal locations, such as health centers or senior centers, to provide a "one-stop" resource for families.

The FDPIR began as part of the Food Stamp Act of 1964. When it originated, it was designed to serve families living on Indian reservations. In 1984, the program was amended to address the unique situation of Oklahoma by specifically including American Indian households residing in approved areas near reservations or in the state.

The FDPIR provides an alternative to SNAP. But, unlike SNAP, the program is based on overall eligibility, not on a sliding income scale. Everyone who qualifies for the program gets the same food benefit. According to Newsom, this increases the program's impact and ensures that families and the elderly do not fall through the cracks when it comes to getting the amount of food they need.

The FDPIR is part of a national program funded through the U.S. Department of Agriculture. It is

administered locally by Indian Tribal Organizations or state agencies. According to the USDA, 276 tribes receive benefits through the program.

In the Chickasaw Nation, the program serves 1,700 households from multiple tribes, including Navajo and Pine Ridge. According to Newsom, roughly 50% of these households consist of couples, often elderly, who would only be able to get a small amount of food through SNAP, but are able to access entire packages through FDPIR.

More than Cheese

Another distinction between the food available between FDPIR and SNAP is the emphasis on nutrition, abundance, local provisions and education. The descriptor “We’re More than Cheese” has been used regularly to communicate that these federal food packages go beyond providing the “government cheese” many of the older residents remember. Instead, the packages of today raise the bar in quality and variety.

- **Nutritious.** All foods are assessed and selected by a Food Package Review Workgroup that meets regularly. Packages contain whole wheat products, seasonal produce, lean proteins, and canned beans, vegetables and fruits, and all foods must be produced and processed within the United States. Foods are low sodium, low sugar and low fat. In addition, a study done at Montana State University found that FDPIR food packages score higher in the Healthy Eating Index than other federal food assistance and nutrition programs.
- **Abundant.** FDPIR provides a one-size-fits-all benefit, and each is designed to go far. Newsom said recipients are often surprised by the amount of food received, and that what comes in a package is typically more than what can be obtained through SNAP Food Stamps.
- **Local.** There is also a push to cultivate local foods, based on the region the program serves. Options of wild rice, Alaskan salmon, range-fed bison, and blue corn have been added. Having access to these traditional foods, plus education on how to prepare them, helps strengthen the Native culture in each tribal area. It also creates a market for local food producers, thus bolstering the food economy.
- **Educational.** Finally, the program focuses on education. The food packages come with nutrition information, recipes and tips on healthy eating. Through the Chickasaw Nation, recipients can also see food demonstrations and take cooking classes.

This education is so important, Newsom said, in helping people appreciate and prepare the food, and also understand the food’s quality over that of other federal programs. She said critics in the past have lumped FDPIR with other commodities providers that they feel have added to high rates of obesity and diabetes in Indian Country. Education, she said, is key to countering that mindset and helping people cook and prepare the food they do receive in healthy ways.

Healthier Outcomes

While official studies have not been done, Newsom attests that families participating in FDPIR are indeed healthier than families in other programs. The food is quality, the access is greater, and long-term improvements in health outcomes are imminent.

The program shows that federal food-distribution programs can incorporate better nutrition and education, and have ripple effects that build a local food economy. Finally, it creates a blueprint for other food deserts on how to get foods directly to people and how to set up stores, which Newsom said creates more of an atmosphere of dignity and respect.

Like any federal program, the FDPIR does face challenges. According to Newsom, the majority of the warehouses across the country were built in the 1970s. While the program has improved and expanded, freezer and storage space has not. Systems have become antiquated, and technology has not kept pace with the growth of the program, resulting in inefficiencies in inventory and distribution.

Other challenges surround funding. Federal budgets that govern SNAP affect FDPIR similarly, so the program is always vulnerable to changes in legislation and variables in caseloads, which rise and fall based on the economy, weather and seasons.

Still, Newsom knows the program is important enough to continue to overcome these threats. She said for people living in food deserts, the ability to cultivate good soil and a quality water source is just not possible. Through FDPIR, more than 100,000 individuals throughout Indian Country benefit. Food scarcity is directly addressed. The Native Food Movement is advanced, and on the Chickasaw Nation, children do not go to bed hungry.



Oneida Nation of Wisconsin

Integrated Approach to Food-System Development

How sovereign can a tribe be if it cannot feed its own people? And how healthy are we if we are plagued with diabetes? Many tribes have pondered these questions, as their communities have faced poor health outcomes and low access to healthy food. And since 1994, these questions have guided the development of the Oneida Community Integrated Food System.

At that time, the tribe realized that its forced reliance on mainstream processed foods was not only detracting from the tribe's independence, but creating grave health outcomes and threatening the sustainability of the community. Now, with an extensive food-system strategy, the Oneida Nation is answering the questions. The tribe is taking control of its food supply, investing in its economy, and restoring health, sovereignty and nationhood to its people.

Identifying the Need

Like most tribal communities, the Oneida Nation was at one time forced away from its natural food system, and cornered into another system that ran counter to its culture and strengths. Tribal members had built their life on the land for both food and independence. It was the root of their value system, and a gift they nurtured and preserved.

But over time, the Oneida Nation was assimilated into American society, where agriculture, food distribution, supply-chain management and nutrition

were controlled by the government. Hormones and preservatives became engrained in their diets. Fast food and processed foods became routine, and canned pork and bleached flour became a staple.

Over time, culture became more overlooked, and the Oneida had to find time to hunt, garden or cook. They became more reliant on the American system, and they began to see negative health outcomes common in mainstream America. Those same negative health outcomes seemed exacerbated in Indian Country. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, American Indian and Alaska Native adults have higher rates of obesity than white adults, and are twice as likely to be diagnosed with diabetes.

Through the years, the Oneida Nation has succeeded in slowly regaining control and identity, restoring lands and creating a thriving economy, with its own resources, government, schools, health care and law enforcement. A key component of this independence and sustainability has always been food. To survive, be healthy, and strengthen the nation going forward, a comprehensive review of their food system was needed.

A Systems Approach

The Oneida Community Integrated Food System grew out of the community, in a collective initiative to address the impact of diabetes on the health and wellness of the tribe. With health

and wellness as the focus, an initial task force was formed, and through the years a systems approach was developed based on five key areas: Community Engagement, Production, Distribution, Entrepreneurial Development and Sustainability.

The tribe created and continues to implement five integrated strategies:

- Build a community mindset for healthy foods. The first step in the strategy is to expose people to nutritious food and build a demand for it. Today, through school programs, 4-H, community gardens and special events like the Big Apple Fest and the Annual Harvest and Husking Bee, the tribe introduces people to better nutrition so they slowly develop a taste for it. The goal is to get people engaged in the safe and proper handling, growing and cultivating of food, so that they recognize its importance to a healthy lifestyle.
- Increase local food production. The next strategy is to develop ways to grow their own food. Through the years, production on the Oneida Nation has expanded from a three-acre garden to a 40-acre orchard, canneries, and 6,000 acres of farmland.
- Build local economies. This involves integrating food production into the economy. As part of this strategy, the Oneida Nation has established a framework of food-associated businesses on the reservation, including distributors and marketing agencies. This strategy also helps develop food business leaders. For example, the concept of an entrepreneurial food center and kitchen is being explored to give entrepreneurs a resource to start their own businesses.
- Integrate local foods into community outlets. In this strategy, a supply chain is fostered, bringing foods from farms to the schools, farmers' market, elder center and hotels. These outlets allow for everyone in the community to be introduced to healthy, local foods.
- Ensure sustainable development and practices. Finally, this strategy calls for ensuring the food supply and farming will be there for generations to come. It is considered a responsibility to care for the land, enrich it, and leave it as a legacy for future generations.

An Integrated Solution

Guided by these strategies, the Oneida Nation has created a system for not only producing food, but also improving food quality, teaching people about



food-related health risks, increasing employment and youth opportunities, and drawing people together around food. As an “integrated” solution, the system combines education, economy *and* community.

Closely aligned with the school and community services, it focuses on reteaching agriculture through programs like Annual Youth Day on the Farm, the Food Film Series, and Growing Gardeners Workshops. A Youth Entrepreneur Project shows young people how to harvest, process and market nutritional products. Also, an activity book is used to teach elementary students about food, health and culture.

The system also recognizes that a food system is an economy, and food for the Iroquois has always been a part of buying, selling and trade. The system gives people a way to grow their own food, and also sell it as a source of income, offsetting poverty.

Finally, the system is integrated with the community. It is welcoming and non-exclusive. It gives people options to eat healthy by growing their own food, or shopping from a farmers' market. There are entry points throughout the system to work in farming, distribution, sales and marketing. There is space for the whole community to be involved. Everyone is part of the solution, and everyone is key to making the system successful and helping the community thrive.



Indigenous communities are interconnected both generationally and relationally. This type of organization offers both solutions to food-system control and may also pose profound issues that are spread throughout a given population. In short, our relationships have been institutionalized in long-standing cultural practices, traditions and relationships. However, Indigenous communities are finding ways to re-ignite the social capital that is embedded in long-standing cultural institutions within our community. When appropriate economic development approaches match the value system and social organization of a community, we often witness entire food-system shifts.

BUILDING A COMMUNITY FOOD SYSTEM

A Return to Culture

The integrated food system brings back the way things used to be. Tribal Chairman Tehassi Hill reflects that the people of the Oneida Nation were always strong and healthy. Now, they are restoring those traits by re-embracing and celebrating agriculture.

Regular dedicated ceremonies are held, honoring seeding in the spring and harvesting in the fall. People are coming together to plan and plant gardens, and food again is a way of life. Food is strengthening communities and families, creating memories and bolstering relationships.

Moreover, the renewed focus on agriculture is an investment in sustainability. Like tribes throughout Indian Country, the Oneida Nations employs a "Seven Generations" philosophy, planning for years in the future. Crop rotation, food storage and natural farming practices are all done to sustain the land going forward. Food is grown in the way prominent in Native American culture: Three Sisters or companion planting. Corn grows tall and straight to hold up the beans, which provide nutrients to the soil, while the squash spreads along the ground, blocking sunlight and preventing weeds.

As a whole, the system reflects a strong connectivity to the land. Chairman Hill describes how food is medicine, but the land is the blood. It anchors the Oneida Nation, defining who they are as Indigenous people.

Long-Term Impact

The integrated food system of the Oneida Nation has set a roadmap for the future. Over the years, participation has increased as more families have seen how they can grow their own foods and supplement their incomes. And as demand for organic food has increased everywhere, so, too, has the economy of the Oneida Nation.

There have been improvements in obesity and diabetes rates, and the integrated model has dovetailed with other tribal efforts, including the health center's Diabetes Prevention Program. Nutrition education is regularly delivered in the tribal school system, healthful foods are now offered at school cafeterias, and partnerships with the local technical college have introduced students to agriculture as a viable trade.

Over time, people have become empowered to return to their culture and their natural foods, and to be as strong and healthy as they once were. They have re-embraced themselves as hunters and gatherers. And they've regained almost 40% of their original reservation boundaries, opening up more acres for farming and production. The land is returning to them, and health and sovereignty are again within their power.

To Learn More:

The integrated food system of the Oneida Nation is a proven, sustainable example of a systems approach to the Native food movement. More than producing its own food, it is restoring a culture, and cultivating the land for generations to come. For more information, visit <https://oneida-nsn.gov/>.

A Systems Approach to Food-System Development at Thunder Valley CDC

On the Pine Ridge Reservation in Porcupine, South Dakota, a multifaceted approach is being deployed to create a strong, healthy and sustainable community. Through programs for housing, youth development, social enterprise and fostering the Lakota language, the people of Pine Ridge are driving change. Among their initiatives to heal and build community is a commitment to developing a scalable and viable food system designed to increase food access, educate youth, and honor culture, while improving the health of the entire reservation.

Assessing the Environment

The Food Sovereignty Initiative is a growing program under the Thunder Valley Community Development Corporation (CDC), which serves the Oglala Lakota Pine Ridge Reservation. It is a program that continues to evolve in the same way it began – a responsive movement based on the needs and wants of the community.

Beginning in 2010, members of the Oglala Planning Circle went from home to home on the reservation, surveying more than 100 community members. They asked questions designed to assess the environment of food – Where do you buy groceries? How far do you travel to buy food? What types of foods are available? And what would an ideal food system look like, and would be you a part of it?

The Circle listened, and from there zeroed in on several key initiatives to improve life on and surrounding the Pine Ridge Reservation. Then, in 2014, the Circle conducted an Oglala Lakota National Food System Assessment to get more answers.

An Honest Look

The assessment brought to light the food realities of the community:

- Little access. Living in a food “desert,” people were experiencing a lack of access to fresh fruits and vegetables. There was a surge in convenience stores and gas stations that was creating an appetite for only fast and processed food. Healthy options were not readily available. Adding to this, as a result of treaty rights of the Lakota people, for decades the reservation was being supplied U.S. government commodities in an effort to alleviate

poverty and food scarcity. While “free” and meant to be beneficial, these packages actually contained processed foods high in fats, sugars and oils that were ultimately contributing to poor health outcomes.

- Lack of culture. There no longer was a cultural connection to food. For the Lakota people, food at one time was a foundation of basic life. Food was grown on the land, families cooked together, and meals were shared. Now, native foods of buffalo, wild game and herbs were no longer part of their diets.
- Lack of awareness. The convenience of processed food and commodities diminished the community's knowledge of how to create real food. Skills of food preparation, cooking and culinary arts were no longer fostered. Education about good nutrition, native foods, and the spiritual connection to food was no longer passed down.
- Poor health. All this resulted in poor health outcomes common throughout Indian Country. Rates of diabetes and preventable disease on the reservation were increasing. The lack of access to nutritious food and the awareness of its importance were slowing chipping away at the health, minds and spirituality of the people.

The Shape of the Future

The assessment identified that solutions to all these issues were desired. Community members wanted not only better food and better health, but also food systems that were local and historically tied to the culture. There was an overall sense that a big mindset had to be changed. A connection with food had to be rebuilt, and people had to re-learn that food was a basis for a life – and not just a convenience.

What resulted was the Food Sovereignty Initiative and four resulting goals.

- Goal #1 • Improve food access on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation
- Goal #2 • Increase food system sovereignty
- Goal #3 • Improve nutrition and public health
- Goal #4 • Decrease economic burdens on low-income families and increase economic opportunities creating a food economy

A Systems Approach

Aligned with these goals, the Food Sovereignty Initiative has incorporated a basis of education, access and collaboration into an always-evolving systems approach.

- **Education.** Education is a cornerstone. A 1.3-acre small demonstration farm with a large-scale poultry palace and geothermal greenhouse serves as both a food supplier and an education center. Youth are engaged on the farm to plan and harvest food and take care of chickens. Farming practices are taught in the Lakota language, and nutrition classes are held to share the importance of a local food system in improving their health, environment and economy. The farm also coordinates with the Thunder Valley's Lakota language immersion child care program to provide a hands-on learning experience for young children.
- **Access.** The demonstration farm and a smaller community garden provide residents with access to fresh, organic produce. People can come together to experience and engage with the local food system. Food initiative leader Nick Hernandez notes that the hands-on gardening bridges the gap of connection between people and their environment. They learn to plant, weed and nurture, and reconnect with food, how it's created and the role it plays in their culture. Moreover, food grown on both farms is made available throughout the reservation.
- **Collaboration.** Finally, the Food Sovereignty Coalition creates a reservation-wide collaboration among food producers, processors, transporters, financial supporters, sellers and community members. These entities work as a network, in coordination with state and local government, toward a common goal: restoring a functional food system in which food is produced and made available within a 300-mile radius. This is an important objective, because when the Initiative began, about 95% of food consumed on Pine Ridge came from sources outside the reservation. Leaders now seek to reduce that percentage to at least 50%.

Early Progress

The Food Sovereignty Initiative is in its early stages, but Hernandez reports that it has increased community knowledge of the roots of food and the importance of nutrition. Feedback is anecdotal.

Teens – who had never gardened but now work on the demonstration farm as part of the CDC's youth

leadership development program – describe tasting fresh tomatoes for the first time. Hernandez says appreciation for real food is beginning to outweigh the convenience of grabbing a processed burrito at a convenience store. People are learning about the risks of obesity and diabetes and seeing how native foods can improve their diet and health.

Next Steps

Plans for the Food Sovereignty Initiative involve building on its success with more food access, education and data.

Additional land will be sought to grow the demonstration farm, adding more poultry production and an egg market, while refining the farm as a scalable and replicable model.

More education programs will be developed to teach teens, children and community members about nutrition, native foods and agriculture. Farming will be fostered as a revenue opportunity for families, and an integral part of a food economy that hasn't existed for the last two generations.

Plans also include ongoing data collection on the food practices and health outcomes specific to Pine Ridge. Hernandez says that, to date, accurate statistics reflecting the health and wellness of the Lakota people have been lacking. In line with how the initiative began, the CDC will continue evaluating projects and seeking metrics to best ascertain the health of the entire community and the impact of the food system.

To Learn More

The Food Sovereignty Initiative on Pine Ridge Reservation is young, but community leaders say it has come a long way in a short amount of time. To learn more about Thunder Valley Community Development Corporation and its efforts to create systemic, sustainable change, visit www.thundervalley.org.

One of the chief interests in Indigenous food systems has been because of the stark health data that are often used to describe Indigenous populations. While the health field is wholly separated from other fields of study or vice versa, Indigenous communities are demonstrating the connectedness of our food to our community, to individual health, and to education. Beginning with connectedness, Indigenous communities are taking holistic approaches to address the disparaging data that are often used to describe Indigenous communities.



Food That Nourishes: A System That Inspires Change Starts Young at STAR School

STAR School President Dr. Mark Sorensen believes food sovereignty is a core component of overall sovereignty, and that a people cannot be truly sovereign if they cannot feed themselves. As an education institution that literally feeds the values of Navajo citizenship to young children, Dr. Sorensen's views potentially influence a nation.

Food Sovereignty guides the school's farm-to-school program, in which food is grown right on site and served to the students and community. It is an approach of education and access that is propelling the Native food movement and teaching youth that they grow the solutions to any present day issue.

Identifying the Need

The farm-to-school program at STAR School began as a response to severe poverty, social stresses and health and nutrition problems on the Navajo nation. According to data presented in the "Healthy Foods for Navajo Schools" report published by the STAR School, obesity and diabetes rates among the Navajo population were 40% higher than any other time in history, and four times higher than in other regions in the United States. In addition, in the school's rural community east of Flagstaff, Arizona, there were at least 11,000 low-income households all more than 10 miles from local grocery stores. The adult obesity rate was 21.5% and the low-income pre-school obesity rate was 8.2%.

Access to healthy foods was limited, as was education about why – and how – to eat right. At the STAR School, students routinely brought

chips, soda and Ramen noodles in their lunches. Meanwhile, the school's attempts to provide nutritious options in the cafeteria only resulted in waste as students continued to prefer their unhealthy staples.

What was needed was a comprehensive approach involving food production and education that would change the attitudes of kids and families about nutrition, and ultimately reverse the health outcomes that were plaguing the community. Food sovereignty was about not just becoming self-reliant for food. It was about being able to save their own lives.

A Solution in the School

The school was the ideal location to implement the new approach. President Sorensen, who has built a 40-year career in Indian education, asserts that every Native community has a school, even if they do not have a gas station, library or restaurant. He says schools are often the largest employer in the community, and they serve more food than any other establishment. As such, schools can be a vector of change: a key part of the economic engine that drives supply and demand.

Maximizing this setting, STAR School leaders set out to first introduce kids to more nutritious food. The program started by developing a culinary class to teach students how to use vegetables and create dishes that they'd enjoy.

From there the scope grew to food production. Sorensen notes that the school's motto, "Service to

all relations,” extends to all people and things that are related to them, including plants, environment, and food sources. This motto, combined with the tenets of the Navajo culture, empowered the school to serve nature, building greenhouses and creating outdoor gardens. Students were involved in caring for plants, watering, and harvesting vegetables.

Their experience in the greenhouses was further integrated with the school’s overall curriculum. Following recipes for nutritious meals became lessons in math and measuring. Growing food brought biology and chemistry to life, while farming and harvesting Native foods was incorporated into social studies and learning the connections between food and culture.

Certified to Serve

At this point, the school sought the next level: serving the locally-grown food in the school cafeteria. This presented an initial challenge because schools that are not located on tribal land, as is STAR School, fell under the jurisdiction of the state and county. School cafeterias and kitchens are considered food establishments, according to federal, state and county regulation. As such, they had to purchase food only from “approved sources,” pursuant to the food code of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration.

To become an approved source, STAR School underwent the USDA Good Handling Practices/ Good Agricultural Practices Certification and complied with federal protocols regarding food handling, storage, nutritional analysis and labeling. The result after countless trainings and certifications: The STAR School could begin serving the food it grew on its own, to its own people, at its own cafeteria.

Outcomes

Since beginning the program in 2012, STAR School has incorporated the home-grown food system into its curriculum and culture. As a result, it has seen a reduction in obesity rates, reaching levels significantly lower than reported in neighboring schools. Through the program and ongoing field trips to tribal farms, kids are developing an appreciation and joy from growing their own food and learning how it is inherent in the Navajo culture. The school is self-affirmation for Navajo children in that they can be self-sustaining.

Moreover, the program has built the foundation for further initiatives toward food sovereignty: reinvigorating local ranching of cattle and sheep and creating systems to access and maintain clean water.

Long-Term Implications

The farm-to-school program in Flagstaff is a strong foothold in the Native Foods Movement. The program takes aim at the fact that one-third of the Indian Health Services budget currently goes to treating diabetes. Sorensen says by shifting efforts toward prevention – in the form of better nutrition – the incidence of diabetes can go down, along with the costs required to treat the condition.

In addition, the program empowers communities to care for themselves and feed themselves, upholding a culture of sustainability and the school’s motto of service to all relations. It brings food to the table, and cultivates an appreciation for farming and a respect for health. And, as Sorensen says, it shows that Indigenous people have something to teach the rest of the world.

To Learn More

The farm-to-school program at the STAR School is proven and replicable and provides a model for all schools wanting to incorporate fresh, local produce into their food systems and advance the Native Food Movement. For more information, visit www.starschool.org.



FIRST NATIONS DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE



Making Food a Blessing Changing Perspectives and Palates to Improve Health Outcomes

On the Pueblo de Cochiti in New Mexico, the Native Food Movement involves going back to a culture grounded in agriculture – where rain was celebrated, systems were sustained, and food was a “blessing.” Here, the Keres Children’s Learning Center (KCLC) is taking a grassroots approach to the movement, upholding customs, restoring sacredness to Native food, and addressing the health of an entire community.

Identifying the Need

When KCLC opened, it set out to create an educational setting rooted in the language, values, history and worldview of the Pueblo people, including the Cochiti beliefs about food, food preparation, eating, serving and exercise.

It was a setting the school’s founders thought was important not only to uphold the Cochiti culture, but ultimately to save lives. According to “The State of Obesity,” New Mexico’s adult obesity rate has increased steadily since 1990, and by 2030 the number of cases of obesity-related health issues, including diabetes, hypertension, heart disease and obesity-related cancer, is expected to go up across the board, if rates continue at the current pace.

In Indian Country, including on Pueblo de Cochiti, trends like these are common. According to research presented by the Notah Begay III

Foundation and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Native American children have higher overweight and obesity rates than any other racial or ethnic group, and American Indian and Alaska Native youth are nine times more likely than white children to be diagnosed with type 2 diabetes.

Many of these health outcomes are rooted in disrupted food systems. In Cochiti, increased obesity and diabetes rates stem from the historical trauma of the Cochiti Dam and the construction of Cochiti Lake, authorized by the Flood Control Act of 1960. Led by the U.S. Corps of Engineers and the U.S. government, the dam created one of the largest man-made lakes in the country, and in doing so flooded traditional farm lands and disrupted the food system.

What resulted was the Pueblo people’s new-found reliance on external sources, which they had never experienced before. Native approaches to food and wellness were replaced with commodities and processed food. The imposed change in food practices led to a change in palates, and over time, even if better nutrition practices became available, many Pueblo people no longer had a taste for it.

Rebuilding with Youth

KCLC founders turned to education to help revitalize the Cochiti language and, as a part of that



effort, rebuild the taste palates for Native foods that, in turn, support the agricultural community that defines Pueblo nationhood. Ideally positioned, the school could reach children before age six, when palates are developing and eating habits are forming.

The school's guiding principles set a policy to:

- Train children's minds and palates through good nutrition and cooking experiences by preparing and tasting healthful alternatives to unhealthy foods;
- Support families in developing healthy eating habits; and
- Provide children authentic opportunities for movement and other physical activities to help prevent future health problems.

The school was determined to bring back Native food, and with it the health outcomes of its Native people. Its goal was to help the community begin a return to the way things were before its food system was disrupted and health issues like diabetes, obesity and heart disease were introduced.

Policy into Practice

Translating these guiding principles into everyday actions has taken several forms, starting with food itself.

KCLC provides healthy breakfasts to students five days a week and lunches two days a week. Children are to bring their lunches from home the other three

days. The rule for these lunches: No processed foods, no soda and no juice. And only water or milk to drink.

In doing this, children learn how to make good choices in what they eat, families become involved in the process, and better nutrition becomes the norm. Moreover, since kids begin eating healthy at such a young age, their palates develop accordingly. They become just as likely to crave fruits and vegetables as chips and cookies. According to KCLC co-founder Trisha Moquino, this is a critical component because just providing healthy options is not enough: Children have to be willing to eat them.

Educating Generations

The healthy eating practices transcend outside the classroom to the children's families and into the community. In packing the proper lunches, parents – and grandparents – rethink what is healthy and what may just seem healthy. Moquino asserts that the school is never punishing or shaming; instead it focuses on education in a positive and nurturing way.

The education also involves clearing up confusion about healthy food and the role of food in people's lives. For elders growing up in a culture where food is a "blessing," it can be challenging to convey that, despite this, all food is not good. A fruit cup in sugary syrup is not as healthy as a piece of fruit, and many foods, like hot Cheetos, are not blessings, but are actually contributing to obesity, heart disease and diabetes.

Empowering Change

Another implementation of the guiding principles is in directly producing the food students eat. With hopes to someday have a farm-to-school program, KCLC operates a raised-bed garden, which the students care for and use to harvest vegetables like chard, kale, basil and onions. Children learn about where healthy food comes from, and they cook and enjoy the healthy dishes they make from the food. And, because KCLC has a "dual-language education model" (the elementary classroom uses 50% Keres and 50% English on any given day, and the primary classroom offers a natural immersion in the Keres language), children learn not only farming practices, but the words for planting, growing, sun, watering and weeding based on the Cochiti culture. The school empowers elders to share their knowledge, and kids to realize all that's possible when you grow and make your own food, the way it used to be.



Outcomes and Long-Term Implications

KCLC has been open since 2012, and children who started going to the school as three-year-olds are now the mentors. Anecdotally, the older kids are now seen teaching the younger ones what is healthy and not healthy in their packed lunches. Families and extended families have reported increased awareness and appreciation for healthy food. And, slowly there has been a greater understanding throughout the community about the benefits of and need for better nutrition.

On a broader level, the school plays a grassroots role in the Native Foods Movement. School leaders recognize that changing perspectives about food and health involves multiple stakeholders, and that no one entity can do it alone. KCLC provides a roadmap for how to introduce a taste for healthy food, and involve staff, local suppliers, parents, grandparents and children in improving outcomes and better health for our collective future.

Long-term, Moquino encourages other communities to look at their own food systems, how they've been compromised, and the role of "school" in the nutritional lives of Indigenous children. From there, they can find a model in Keres Children's Learning Center. They can reteach their Native cultures and help people re-appreciate the role of food in their lives. It's a movement to make food a blessing again, and bring back the sustainability, nationhood, health and pride of the Pueblo people.

To Learn More

The guiding principles and curriculum at the Keres Children's Learning Center support teaching children at an early age, educating families, and working together to change habits and improve long-term health outcomes. For more information, visit www.kclcmontessori.org.

Food and food systems are a critical asset to any given community. We are learning, through numerous food sovereignty assessments, that food spending is often overlooked when communities embark on economic development, yet it is one of the few sectors that is easily accessible for change. Slight tweaks in consumption or spending patterns of individuals within a community can result in major impacts on dollar flow within an economy which, ultimately, leads to greater economic empowerment of Indigenous communities.

Growing the Local Economy





Making Food a Part of the Economy, Health and Culture – Seneca Nation

The Native food movement for the Seneca Nation in New York means building a local economy, creating partnerships committed to fighting disease, and advancing the award-winning Food Is Our Medicine (FIOM) program. FIOM involves a comprehensive health initiative and an investment in the culture and future of the Seneca Nation.

Lost Soil, Lost Systems

On Seneca lands in upstate New York, white corn used to flourish. The land was nurtured, and the crop was a source of nourishment, trade, revenue and sustainability. Corn was celebrated, and the economy thrived.

As times changed, the natural resource became depleted. Agriculture and farming could no longer support the Native ways, and knowledge of planting and harvesting stopped being passed down. Young people believed the only way to create a life was to move away. A tradition diminished, along with the production of white corn and the prosperity of the community.

Through the years, the local food system became entrenched in non-local customs. The Seneca Nation became the setting for convenience stores,

processed foods, and shipped-in, government-supplied commodities. Over time, the Seneca people lost their ability to access not only white corn, but also the fresh game, fruits and vegetables of their culture. And, as it has throughout Indian Country, health suffered.

Food as Medicine

Indeed, health outcomes were bleak. The Seneca Nation Diabetes Report cited the diabetes rate of the Seneca Nation as being more than double the rate of the rest of New York, and more than triple the rate of the United States. The high incidence of diabetes brought with it an increased likelihood of heart disease, stroke, amputation and a lifetime of ill health.

Understanding the need for change, a board member of the Seneca Diabetes Foundation approached Ken Parker, former project manager of the Seneca Nation of Indians, after attending one of his workshops on native plants. The board member asked Parker to develop a proposal to address the health and well-being of the Seneca community. Parker and his former collaborator put their heads together, and in 2012, the Food Is Our Medicine program was launched.

The first of its kind in Indian Country, the program set out to improve the health of the Seneca people by restoring culturally significant native plant usage and re-establishing a culturally informed food system.

“We set out to effect change – moving back to the environment and Mother Earth,” said Parker. “We needed to learn about our native foods that were significant to our culture and why we couldn’t find them anymore. Food and culture: they go hand in hand.”

Calling on Tradition

True to its roots in native plants, FIOM is grounded in the appreciation and need for native food, which had to be re-cultivated from the wisdom of tribal elders and traditional ways. Drawing on this insight, the Food Is Our Medicine program took hold, reigniting a respect and responsibility for the Seneca culture. Elder wisdom would be deeply intertwined in the FIOM organizational structure and would touch every component of the program.

Closely aligned with the FIOM program is the planting of white corn at the Seneca Nation. The FIOM program has sought to create access to white corn and white corn products and to increase awareness of the health benefits of white corn among Seneca Nation members. To be successful, many questions have needed to be answered. How was white corn traditionally grown, and how was it sustained? What did it mean to the Seneca people? This initiative began with direct input about native plants and gardening and has evolved into a continuing dialogue on traditional food and culture.

Multi-Faceted Approach

The FIOM program takes a comprehensive approach to Native food.

- **Native Planting Policy.** Key to the project is the commitment to nurturing native plants. The Policy specifies that any landscaping done in Seneca public spaces will exclusively utilize Indigenous species. This ensures that Native land is not used to cultivate non-native plants.
- **Self-sufficiency.** Through the program, Seneca community members are also empowered to grow their own traditional food in community gardens and raised beds. Forty community members and volunteers have planted over 400 native plants, including one-half acre of white corn. The garden promotes community cohesiveness while providing hands-on agricultural experience.
- **Seneca Nation Farmers’ Market.** From its inception in 2013, the Seneca Nation Farmers’

Market served as a venue for regional farmers, food producers and artisans to come together to provide high-quality, locally grown healthy food options, including white corn, organic produce, grass-fed animal products and handcrafted goods directly to Seneca Nation members and residents of the surrounding communities. At its height, it was the largest farmers’ market in the region. Although no longer part of the Seneca Nation, the Farmers’ Market did much to raise awareness of the importance of eating healthy, unprocessed foods.

- **Education and outreach.** The FIOM program also recognizes that eating for better health must go beyond the farm and table and into the consciousness of the community. Recognizing this need, the program expanded its initiatives to include a weekly film series on food security and nutrition, two annual Honoring Mother Earth 5K Walk/Run events, and an Indigenous Food Challenge that calls on community members to incorporate more Indigenous foods into their diets.

Growing Producer Capacity



Any food system is highly dependent on the production capacity of the community. At the core of production capacity is the individual producer who, in turn, refines his/her skills and understanding of how to grow food in a given environment. In more recent times, the production sector has steadily declined as employment opportunities in other professional sectors like technology have been encouraged. However, some communities are reassessing their needs and focusing on rebuilding the production capacities of their communities.

- Ongoing insight. Finally, at the forefront of the project there continues to be a respect for the culture and the input and knowledge of the elders. The Seneca host community outreach gatherings around traditional food, and the Elders' Sharing Circle meets monthly, inviting the whole community to listen to the sharing of traditional wisdom, songs, stories and recipes. Elders have a space to pass knowledge on to the next generation and preserve traditional ways of native plants and gardening.

Outcomes and Future Plans

The FIOM program was recognized by the National Indian Health Board in 2016, winning a Local Impact Award. The award was part of the Heroes in Native Health Awards, which honor individuals and organizations for their excellence, achievements and contributions to enriching and improving the health of American Indian and Alaska Natives.

Going forward, plans are underway to continue and expand agricultural activities at the Seneca

Nation. Goals include increasing production and consumption of white corn and improving access to organic fruits and vegetables.

The Native food movement is advancing thanks to initiatives like Food Is Our Medicine. Progress is being made to reverse current health trends and ultimately save lives. The FIOM program acknowledges and honors the medicinal power of traditional Seneca foods and the sustainable methods that once grew them. The program seeks to bring that knowledge – and the healing that comes with it – to the present-day Seneca community.

The Great Law of the Iroquois instructs its member nations, including the Seneca Nation, to consider seven generations into the future when deciding on any course of action. Food Is Our Medicine is helping to carry out the Great Law by creating a program – and a mindset – that looks to the innovations of the future while revering and preserving the wisdom of the past.





The Promise of Waimea Homesteading

In 1921 the Hawaiian Homes Commission Act was passed by Congress, spearheaded by one of Hawai'i's last royals, Prince Jonah Kuhio Kalani'ana'ole. In framing this unique legislation, Kuhio sought the land not for intrinsic value, but as a rehabilitation tool for Native Hawaiians. This approach to land as an instrument of rehabilitation is evident if there is an understanding of the importance of sense of place in the Hawaiian Culture.

Today, Hawai'i faces the same crises that Prince Jonah sought to abate nearly a century ago. Homelessness and despair are again taking center stage in conversation, diminishing federal and local resources demand efficiencies, and the economic system has weakened the ability of the individual to thrive. Hawaiian Home Lands, the birth child of the Hawaiian Homes Commission Act, has been thought of for many years as an anti-poverty tool, a land and housing subsidy that defrays the overall cost of living for Hawaiians, thereby creating additional stability regardless of income. Despite this subsidy, Hawaiians continue to lead in negative indicators such as obesity, diabetes and as a percentage of the incarcerated population.

Hawaiians, once a completely self-sufficient people, are remembering the enterprising and adventurous spirit that convinced them to brave the unknown oceans centuries ago. This strength in community and commitment to utilizing Prince Kuhio's gift as a resource is no more evident than in Waimea.

Once the center of the ranching industry in the state, Waimea boasts ample water and land resources, hot days and cool evenings. Between Hawai'i island's two oldest mountains, Kohala and Mauna Kea, the mature soils of Waimea and its major town, Kamuela, provide opportunity for a multitude of industries. Transitioning from the ranching tradition, Waimea residents have turned former ranch lands into some of the most productive in the state, producing much of the state's leafy produce. The commitment to farming and community was solidified decades ago when the local farming community invested in the Lalamilo cooling co-operative. This joint infrastructure provided the necessary lift to assist existing farmers in scaling operations and accessing the neighbor island and mainland markets.

Currently, more than 50 restaurants are located within 50 miles of the area. Goods at farmers' markets include tomatoes, cucumbers, corn,

eggplant, cattle, hogs, chickens, honey, eggs, and arts and crafts, with as many as 10 ready-made food booths. These local markets boast an average attendance of 200 to 300 people, and the past three years have seen 1.8 million tourists contributing to the island's economy.

In this intersection between supply, demand and opportunity sits the Waimea Homestead, over 10,000 acres of Hawaiian Home Lands with over 14,000 individuals residing in the area. Residents of the Homestead, together with assistance from First Nations Development Institute (First Nations) and a variety of community partners, are proposing the next ambitious infrastructure project to provide economic and cultural lift to the community.

The Waimea Nui Agricultural Business Center will act as a community farming space, and as a physical and informational hub for prospective farmers. The Community Agriculture Park will consist of 246 5,000-square-foot farm lots, 50 of which will have two greenhouses erected on them, providing a 2,112-square-foot indoor growing area in each greenhouse. The 30 acres of Hawaiian homestead community lands will be completely open to the public for use. Plots will be made available to homesteaders and Waimea community members, with 20% being set aside specifically for veterans. The front of the property will have several buildings serving a range of community needs. These facilities will include a farmers' market for local produce grown on and off property, as well as a communal storage facility. The storage will allow local farmers to purchase goods and supplies, like fertilizer and packaging, in bulk, thus reducing overhead costs and improving margins.



The brainchild of Mike Hodson, president of the Waimea Hawaiian Homesteaders' Association, and his wife, Tricia, they sought to bring farming back to the community through hands-on practice. "We approached the State of Hawaii and the Native Hawaiian community, but we had no traction, and everyone looked at our project as just a theory," Hodson said. "But First Nations saw what we wanted to do,

and they believed in us." Dubbed "Farming for the Working Class," the project received a grant from First Nations' Native Agriculture and Food Systems Initiative for the initial seed money of \$45,000.

"First Nations sees the power of projects that intersect food systems and economic development," said First Nations President & CEO Michael Roberts. "What Waimea wanted to do was strategic and community-minded, and the impact it would have on Indigenous people is exactly what we look for."

The Waimea concept has already impacted the Homestead community and will continue to evolve each year. The fast-paced rollout is occurring in stages, with candidate selection happening in the first 18 months. a Nui Homestead Farmers' Association provides Waimea community members with educational workshops conducted over a three-month period. Using a curriculum created by First Nations – The Business of Indian Agriculture – the course encompasses the standard business indicators of farming and the cultural aspects of Native resource utilization. Prospective students submit a program application and participate in an interview process.

In year one, the Agricultural Business Center will act as a classroom. In addition to completing the First Nations' curriculum, the students will learn computer programs such as Excel, Word and PowerPoint. At the end of the course, each student will have a developed business plan, and they will have acquired marketable and practical job skills.

In year two, the Agricultural Business Center will be the primary place of business for community members. To help ensure success, the facilities are meant to be rich in resources, housing office space for use by supporting agriculture organizations such as USDA, NRCS and the University of Hawaii-Hilo Agriculture Department.

In addition to these resources, the facilities will provide other basic services for farmers in the region. A produce market for farmers to sell products into the local market will be available seven days a week. This market will have a permanent staff, and stalls or bins for each farmer can be accessed if a farmer is not physically available to sell. Common-use equipment will also be available, reducing the upfront capitalization for each farmer.

While the nuts and bolts are standard farming infrastructure, deeper connections are also being fostered through this program. "People may just see a greenhouse on a piece of land," Hodson said. "But they don't see the social impact that

greenhouse has. It lets people invest in themselves, and it keeps families together. To me, that's the number one thing that is occurring."

Rehabilitation has many meanings. In medicine, rehabilitation can mean the restoration of an organ, joint or muscle to its former usefulness. In human services, rehabilitation can mean the recovery of an individual from addiction or incarceration. In each definition, rehabilitation assumes a former functionality, a utility that, once lost, can be regained through

proper training or therapy.

The Waimea Community Agricultural Business Center represents rehabilitation in each sense. As an agricultural park, the Agricultural Business Center is community infrastructure, a physical support that assists community members in flexing muscles that, until now, sat atrophied. As an economic driver, it again squarely places choice and destiny in the calloused hands of the individual, rekindling the American promise that hard work and determination will lead to success. From the

cultural perspective, reconnecting person to place allows the Native Hawaiian culture to flourish, not as a hotel sideshow but as the practice of mutual respect that was founded in the symbiotic relationship with the natural surroundings. Finally, the re-establishment of the family is occurring through the provision of common purpose, and through the hope that although land values continue to skyrocket, that there is still a place for those who know it best, no matter what their calling.



Food Policy

Indigenous communities are becoming ever more sophisticated in their capacity to protect, project and define control of their assets, including food systems. Policy development is one of the fastest-growing areas in food-system control that allows tribes and their governments to codify the desires of their communities and articulate those desires to those outside the communities. Policy is an important tool in aiding tribal governments in affirming their sovereignty and rights to provide for their communities and future generations.



Yurok Tribe Bolsters Food Policy for Greater Health and Sustainability

Key to the Native food movement is creating and enforcing the policies and law that give tribes power to meet the specific needs of their communities. Tribal food policies make it possible for tribes to protect their natural food resources and to control, manage and regulate their food systems.

In California, the Yurok Tribe is further bolstering its food policies through the Genetically Engineered Ordinance, passed in 2015. The first-of-its-kind legislation is not only protecting the Yurok's tribal right to salmon, but also promoting the health of the fish and the future of the entire tribe.

A History on the River

The Yurok Tribe is California's largest Indian tribe with more than 6,000 enrolled members. The tribe is located along Highway 101, five hours north of San Francisco, and encompasses ancestral lands along the Klamath River, home of the Pacific Salmon. The salmon are revered and protected, and there exists a sacred duty to care for the river and the land.

Throughout its history, the tribe thrived on the salmon in both diet and trade. But, as is common throughout Indian Country, this natural resource was compromised with the arrival of pioneers and settlers. The Yurok Tribe was driven from most of

its land. Many surviving members were forced to assimilate or move away.

Then, dams were built upstream, gradually drying up the waters and threatening the salmon population. The Yurok lost access to the river for irrigation and fishing. Legal battles and droughts ensued, further eroding the health of the river and the tribe. Dependence on government food subsidies increased, bringing with it serious health issues.

A Slow Rebuild

Since its darkest times, the Yurok Tribe returned from the brink of extinction, and has fought back steadily to reclaim its rights and restore the health, culture, and livelihoods of the Yurok people. Through regular protests, lawsuits against the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, and ongoing activism before the corporations that operate the dams, the Yurok Tribe has made significant progress.

It has advocated for dam removal so that the salmon can reach more than 250 miles of historic spawning habitat, and so that water-quality issues, including unnaturally high water temperatures, massive toxic algal blooms, and high populations of deadly fish parasites, can be alleviated.

Now, thanks to the tribe's efforts, the dams on the Klamath are slated for removal by 2020. In

addition, the tribe has established the Yurok Tribe Environmental Program to protect the environment of the Yurok Reservation, study the conditions of the river and fish, and identify whether contaminants are further jeopardizing the well-being of the Yurok people. Efforts are continually underway to not only uphold the Native rights to the river, but to make sure it is a healthy river, contributing to positive health outcomes.

The need is great: A study by the California Tribal Epidemiology Center found that Yurok tribal members may have higher rates of cancer and proteinuria, a sign of chronic kidney disease, than what is seen nationally.

Stronger and Healthier

The passing of the Genetically Engineered Ordinance adds to this progress. According to Stephanie Dolan, one of the primary authors of the ordinance and executive director of the Northern California Tribal Court Coalition, of which the Yurok Tribe is a member, the law bans genetically engineered crops from being planted, grown or harvested in Yurok Country.

In passing the law, the Yurok Tribe protects the viability and survival of the native salmon, while ensuring that the river – and people’s diets – do not become overrun with genetically modified, potentially toxic fish, ridden with herbicides, pesticides and antibiotics. The law also protects the tribe’s ancestral lands, and upholds its innate responsibility to care for the natural world.

Implications for the Future

The legislation also calls for creating an advisory committee to look at reducing pesticide use on the reservation, and it encourages other tribal communities to exercise their jurisdictions.

It has also laid the groundwork for the Yurok Tribe to work on similar ventures with the Northern California Tribal Court Coalition. This coalition unites the courts of the Yurok Tribe, along with Karuk Tribe, Tolowa-Dee-ni’ Nation, Hoopa Valley Tribe, and Bear River Band of Rohnerville Rancheria, in advancing food policies and ordinances in their communities.

Together they have launched the Rights of Mother Earth Program on issues affecting Indigenous food sovereignty. They have written tribal pesticide legislation and researched and drafted model codes and policy guides that will have implications for all tribal lands. They have hosted tribal youth food sovereignty camps, as well as a food sovereignty conference. And they have produced a Tribal Food Integrity Project Policy Process Guide, which outlines for tribes how to exercise sovereignty over their food supply by creating and establishing policies and procedures throughout the community.

What this means for all of Indian Country is a greater awareness of how food policy impacts health and culture, and how to establish those policies and protect natural resources in the face of the U.S. government. Tribes throughout California and the country can use this information to restore their food systems and return to the positive, strong health outcomes of their ancestors.

The Yurok Tribe and the passing of the first-of-its kind Genetically Engineered Ordinance is an example of how to protect the spiritual, cultural and physical health of tribal communities. It is an advancement in the Native food movement to not only secure food, but ensure that food is of the highest possible quality.

To learn more about the Yurok Tribe, visit www.yuroktribe.org. To learn more about the Rights of Mother Earth project, visit <http://nctcc.org/practice/rights-of-mother-earth/>



FIRST NATIONS DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE



Growing the Skills of Traditional Food Producers

Youth is the Energy Needed to Drive Traditional Native Farming

The Traditional Native American Farmers Association (TNAFA) has been committed to growing the skills of traditional Native American food producers since the early 1990s, receiving then re-deploying skilled growers to their own communities. The association was formed out of a two-day gathering held in Gallup, New Mexico, in July 1991, and was organized by Native Seeds/SEARCH, a seed conservation organization. The gathering drew traditional Native farmers and elders from all over the Southwest, representing different tribal communities from Arizona and New Mexico, according to Clayton Brascoupe, TNAFA Program Director.

Brascoupe says he and his family were just one of two “younger” families who attended and were there to listen and to hear about the challenges and concerns facing traditional Native farmers. “The conversations with the elder farmers back

in 1991 were around their main concern – how to get young people interested and back into agriculture. Since then, I think we (TNAFA) have been successful in getting the younger generation involved in agriculture and aspects around food, health and seed conservation.”

Over the years TNAFA has offered trainings in the various areas of agriculture and seed conservation, traditional foods and nutrition.

“We began focusing on our youth and women. Youth are energy – they will be the architects for their own futures. And women are the first teachers. They will be able to transfer knowledge and change inter-generationally. This doesn’t mean we only allowed youth and women to participate, but we did actively recruit youth and Indigenous women. Each year we averaged better than half youth and women participants,” said Brascoupe.

The original course was first held in 1996 for 13 days and was called the Permaculture/Traditional

Agriculture Design course. It was inspired by the Permaculture Design Course syllabus from the Permaculture Research Institute. The early training efforts would eventually evolve into a six-day intensive course that was supported by a grant from First Nations Development Institute in 2016. The modified course was structured to fit the budget and covered six days, where the focus was on designing a sustainable food system.

“TNAFA hosted a short version of this design course, Indigenous Sustainable Food Systems Design Course (ISFSDC), in the summer of 2016. The students learned to examine their local food system, and evaluate food security, access to quality foods, culturally-appropriate foods, food cost, and how to design a sustainable food system that will address these issues. Students worked in groups and designed their projects to be implemented in their communities or in other similar locations. The group was hosted at a local farm-to-school event so participants could see first-hand a living food system,” said Brascoupe.

The 20th Annual Indigenous Sustainable Food Systems Design course, supported by First Nations, focused on ecological design, natural farming and earth restoration, and natural healing – both human and Mother Earth. These strategies and objectives complement the Permaculture methodology, which is “the conscious, holistic design and maintenance of biologically productive ecosystems that have the diversity, stability, balance and resilience of natural ecosystems,” according to the TNAFA website. In 2017, the 21st annual course was held over 12 days.

“I remember them (the elders) saying this is not just about farming, but young people are leaving their communities due to a lack of housing and employment. Even access to the land for farming – our association began trying to address those things. It’s not just about the quantity of water for the New Mexico Pueblos, one of their key concerns is water rights, and it’s an annual thing. Some elders were concerned about the quality of the water, that it’s not as good as they remember it being when they were younger,” said Brascoupe.

By focusing on addressing the elders’ concerns over the years, it has led them into new areas that the TNAFA could not have foreseen when it first began.

“We gave young people educational opportunities, workshops and first-hand experience on reviving and restoring agriculture back into communities.

For a couple of years, we were kind of puzzled – a lot of the young people were university students or had family in urban areas. Rather than coming back to the reservation communities, they (the students) brought agriculture into the urban settings. I myself hadn’t thought about it at that point, but now the training also looks at bringing agriculture into the urban areas,” said Brascoupe.

TNAFA works with a few other national organizations to offer some support and direction. “The Native Food Sovereignty Alliance (NAFSA) and the Slow Food Turtle Island Association is an international organization that makes sure we have representation on the international level with our food and culture – to show that both are tied together,” said Brascoupe.

While the groundwork has been laid for the TNAFA to build on for many years to come, Brascoupe says there are still more important discussions that need to happen

“Often in the past we’ve re-examined how food is traded and distributed into the communities, especially with the farm-to-table projects. TNAFA has seen many tribal agriculture programs developing a for-profit economic model, I’m not saying that the model is bad, but that’s looking at it from an economic model – which is outside our Native communities. We need to look at what we had in terms of distribution and trade, and economic systems, then ask ‘how do we reinstitute these traditional models back into our communities?’ I don’t have the answers, but I’d like to see the discussions heading toward this.”

Choctaw Fresh Produce Makes Products More Accessible in Mississippi

The Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians has nearly 11,000 tribal members, with many residing on 35,000 acres of trust land scattered over eight communities in east-central Mississippi. Although most tribal members live near the tribe’s main headquarters, many more do not, making it difficult for them to access certain services such as fresh produce from the tribe’s farms. For much of its early reservation history, The Choctaw were considered one of the poorest communities in the nation. Much has changed, since the Choctaw are now considered as having one of the healthiest economies in Indian County, and part of that health comes from the focus on food. Through the tribe’s development, the surrounding counties are also benefitted. While Mississippi still remains one of the poorest states

in the nation, the Choctaw and its neighboring counties are the exception.

In 2012, the tribe established Choctaw Fresh Produce (CFP), a series of five farms that together contain 19 high tunnels capable of producing thousands of pounds of chemical-free fruits and vegetables. CFP distributes these fresh fruits and vegetables to tribal members through a unique community-supported agriculture program that offers organic goods to tribal members at a low seasonal cost. The goods are available at many locations on and off the reservation.

Transportation Challenges

Although this central location is convenient for tribal members living near the farmers' market, it is more challenging for tribal members who do not live near or have transportation to the market. Some tribal members are located in communities as far as 90 miles away. CFP quickly realized it needed new and innovative ways to reach out to the entire community. Over the past four years, CFP has experimented with several different models, including a mobile market, custom harvest programs, seasonal kiosks, and community-supported agriculture (CSA) programs.

In 2013, First Nations Development Institute awarded CFP \$37,500 through the Native Agriculture and Food Systems Initiative (NAFSI) to purchase a vehicle and equipment to launch a mobile farmers' market. According to John Hendrix, the mobile farmers' market ensures that "all tribal members have access to fresh fruits and vegetables regardless of their remote location or lack of transportation."

Tribal members have responded enthusiastically to the mobile market, which visits each of the tribe's eight communities up to twice a month. Since it began, more than 3,000 customers have visited the mobile farmers' market, and purchased approximately 6,500 pounds of fresh, healthy fruits and vegetables. CFP's mobile farmers' market visits tribal schools, businesses and other popular locations in the community. They also set up a stand at the local fairgrounds to sell fresh produce at the Annual Choctaw Indian Fair.

Kiosk is a Big Hit

Through the Custom Harvest Program, CFP accepts custom orders on Wednesdays, harvests on Thursdays, and then the items are available for pick up and payment on Fridays. CFP even added a seasonal kiosk program at its tribal buildings

where the community and employees can access five to six fresh items of the week and pay via an honor box. Hendrix said the seasonal kiosk has been a big hit because of its convenience, and is just another way to get the produce out to the community. At the end of each week, any surplus or blemished produce is donated to the Choctaw Elderly Center or the Social Services Program in an effort to minimize waste and maximize the community benefit from the farm operations.

CFP has made other strides, as it is USDA Certified Organic with its five farms as of June 2015. Also, it is Good Agriculture Practices (GAP) certified for food safety regulations as of August 2017, which has opened up new markets. Orders have been coming in from schools, on and off the reservation, which participate in the Farm-to-School program. The Whole Foods Market and Rainbow Food Co-op in the state capital of Jackson, Mississippi, are among the retail vendors.

CFP has been able to expand and sell its surplus fruits and vegetables to communities on and off the reservation due to increasing its production capacity. In the first year of operations, CFP produced under 7,000 pounds of fresh produce. In 2017, it expected to yield more than 100,000 pounds, an increase of 13 times since the first year. CFP now has the capacity to supply fresh produce to the tribal schools, Diabetes Prevention Program, and Health Center, as well as individual tribal members and tribal employees. And the sales off-reservation to wholesale customers are a part of the long-term financial sustainability of the operation.

All the growth CFP has been experiencing has also translated into jobs for the community. Hendrix said that by focusing on building the internal capacity of CFP, it has allowed six tribal members to gain full-time employment as Local Food Ambassadors. The employees go through a three-year training program, which prepares them to work at CFP or other area farms. CFP hopes to expand the training program and give others the opportunity to gain new skills and pride in working at the tribal farms. With increased skill development, the over-all economy that serves not only the tribe but communities outside the tribe grow exponentially.



Native Chefs

In the most recent focus on Indigenous food sovereignty, Native chefs are taking a prominent role in the promotion, awareness and “celebrity” of Indigenous food systems. Much like the days of old when it was the grandmas and aunts who painted culinary canvases within our communities, Native chefs are expanding the reach of Indigenous foods to more urban populations and allowing Indigenous foods to come within reach of American pop culture.

Tocabe: An American Indian Eatery

Tocabe is a successful Native American restaurant in Denver, Colorado, and co-owned by Ben Jacobs (Osage) and Matt Chandra, who began their work together in 2006. They opened their first restaurant in 2008. The restaurant’s roots go back to Grayhorse: An American Indian Eatery that was located in downtown Denver in the late 1980s and operated by Jacob’s family. The inspiration for Tocabe’s and Grayhorse’s recipes reach back to the family’s Osage roots. The word Tocabe means the color blue in the old Osage language. The interior of the restaurant reflects and represents the prairie grass, wind, clouds, and the hands represent the three villages of the Osage.

These cultural connections are important to

Jacobs, as are the recipes handed down by his grandmother and which are incorporated into Tocabe’s menu.

“We wanted to be a reflection of where my family’s from, where these recipes have come from, where this establishment came from. We wanted people to ask about it because we wanted to create a conversation with people when they are in here – that we’re different from other restaurants. When people come in, they just want good food. We want to serve good food. We want it to be delicious. We want it to be quality and consistent. But at the same time, we understand that we’re representing much, much more than that,” said Jacobs in a Tocabe: An American Indian Eatery video interview produced by First Nations Development Institute in 2011.

While he may be called “chef” by his peers and the food world, this is not a title Jacobs would give himself.

“My personal belief is that I find the tag of ‘chef’ very uncomfortable. I think of myself more as a restaurateur. My interest is in food – where we’re giving it and what it can do for people. A lot of Native chefs are more talented than me. I can learn the different techniques, but I believe in food. I

believe in people developing their food, and the people who are energizing and dedicated to FDPIR (Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations) are right at the heart of the program," said Jacobs.

The USDA's Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations, or FDPIR, is a federal feeding program available to Indian Tribal Organizations (ITOs) and state agencies, with approximately 276 tribes receiving benefits through 100 ITOs and five state agencies, according to the FDPIR official website.

Jacobs and his business partner Matt Chandra teamed up with the National Association of Food Distribution Programs on Indian Reservations (NAFDPIR), the Seminole Nation and First Nations in 2017 to produce a series of videos on cooking using traditional Native foods found in the FDPIR program – foods such as salmon, wild rice and blue corn. The videos showcase the changes within the FDPIR program, and cooking outdoors with FDPIR foods. Jacobs says FDPIR foods are good foods that are important in feeding Native people – especially the children.

"Within the program it is primarily Natives advocating for Natives and tribes. There's better higher-quality food, and better Indigenous foods that are Native produced and supplied by Native companies. We're putting Native foods back into the communities, and we are advocating for fresher

produce, packaging and Native-produced items," said Jacobs.

Making that personal connection with food is important to Jacobs. He sees Native foods and chefs defining "Culinary Identity."

"Culinary identity is very complex with Native foods. We are culturally and regionally driven, but we still have our identity as one. What are Native foods or where is it going? The Native foods profession – we're at the point as a group where we're defining and refining. Whether it's tribally, regionally or communally-based for all people – all three approaches or focuses are cool," said Jacobs.

As Tocabe nears its 10th year of operation in 2018, Jacobs as a restaurateur is focusing on strategic planning, development, operations and sourcing.

"We have to think years down the road. We're working on our own supply chain to supply restaurants with quality food. We looking at expanding and moving out of the Colorado area into the region. We have to ask ourselves when we go to the next level because we're not going to just do it. We have to think about who we represent. Whether it's for Native communities or not, we want people to walk into a reputable place and have a good quality experience that reflects all of us. There is a heavy focus as we go along to maintain culture and quality, to represent our community – at least represent Native identity – well."



CONCLUSION

This paper highlights the long-standing relationships that continue to exist and continue to be protected in Indigenous communities everywhere. While the tactics, strategies and conversations around the protections of our natural resources, land, water and food may be new, the persistence and long-standing relationships are deeply rooted in the identity of Indigenous communities and people. Like that of our creation stories, these responsibilities of protection will also be passed down to the next generation of young Indigenous people who will find new

ways to articulate the importance of food and the environment to our communities. Whether it is serving young children healthy meals in their schools, serving traditional foods in restaurants, or making a stand against resource exploitation, we are all responding to our original responsibility to our lands, community and people. Currently, we are but one ring in an entire series that continues to exist as long as our land, water, food and environment exist. Like a prayer, we offer these stories in hopes that the entire chain will be strengthened for a new generation to come.



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