

Finding Our Roots: Indigenous Foods and the Food Sovereignty Movement in the United States

Food sovereignty is the ability of an indigenous nation or community to control its own food system and food-producing resources free of control or limitations put on it by an outside power (such as a settler/colonizer government). Food sovereignty includes creating access to healthy food resources of one's own choice, assuming control over food production and distribution, and integrating cultural practices and values concerning diet, food production, distribution, and the entire food system.

"Food sovereignty is the right of peoples, communities, and countries to define their own agricultural, labor, fishing, food and land policies which are ecologically, socially, economically, and culturally appropriate to their unique circumstances. It includes the true right to food and to produce food, which means that all people have the right to safe, nutritious, and culturally appropriate food and to food-producing resources and the ability to sustain themselves and societies." - Political Statement of the NGO/CSO Forum for Food Sovereignty

"Food sovereignty is an affirmation of who we are as indigenous peoples and a way, one of the most surefooted ways, to restore our relationship with the world around us"

-Winona LaDuke (Anishinaabe)

"The land is our identity and holds for us all the answers we need to be a healthy, vibrant, and thriving community. In our oral traditions, our creation story, we are taught that the land that provides the foods and medicines we need are a part of who we are. Without the elk, salmon, huckleberries, shellfish, and cedar trees, we are nobody. ... This is our medicine; remembering who we are and the lands that we come from."

- VALERIE SEGREST (Muckleshoot), Muckleshoot Traditional Foods and Medicines Program, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2015).

Fast Facts

- Prior to European arrival, indigenous peoples of North America had diverse and regionally unique food resources. Each tribal group had developed culturally specific methods of food procurement (hunting, fishing, gathering, and farming), preservation, and distribution.
- Indigenous North American peoples created diverse social systems and ceremonies that supported and enhanced food security within their respective communities and that reinforced their relationships to the natural world.
- European and American settlement of North America displaced indigenous peoples from their lands and dispossessed them of their resources, resulting in lack of access to traditional foods and widespread food insecurity.
- Attempts to assimilate indigenous peoples into Euro-American society included considerable efforts to change their diets and their methods of food procurement or production. In turn, these changes altered Native peoples' relationship to foods, initiated new ways of interacting with the natural environment, and undermined their ability to maintain sustainable food practices and systems.
- The introduction of new foods as trade goods, rations, or through the dominance of European dietary preferences has damaged the health and well-being of indigenous peoples, while increased dependency on commercial food systems has undercut indigenous food security.
- Current efforts by indigenous peoples to address poor nutrition, ill health, and food insecurity often necessitate confronting the underlying and intertwined issues of colonization, food sovereignty, and identity.
- Exercising food sovereignty strengthens indigenous cultures and reinforces indigenous value systems, and is a key part of maintaining political sovereignty.

Resources for Research

- **Native American Food Sovereignty in Montana:** An Evaluation of Food Security, Food Access, and the Path Towards an Improved Food System on Seven Reservations. Helena: Alternative Energy Resource Organization, 2016.
<https://growmontana.ncat.org/docs/Native-American-Food-Sovereignty-in-Montana-2016.pdf>



- **TEDx Talk with Winona LaDuke - Seeds of Our Ancestors, Seeds of Life.**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pHNlel72eQc>
 Powerful video featuring Winona LaDuke. Winona is an internationally renowned activist working on issues of sustainable development, renewable energy, and food systems. She lives and works on the White Earth Reservation in northern Minnesota. As Program Director of Honor the Earth, she works nationally and internationally on the issues of climate change, renewable energy, and environmental justice with Indigenous communities. In her own community, she is the founder of the White Earth Land Recovery Project, where she works to protect Indigenous plants and heritage foods from patenting and genetic engineering.
- **Regaining Food Sovereignty: Neyaab Nimamoomin Mewinzha Gaa-inajigeyang.** (Video, 58:17) Sponsored by the Indigenous Environmental Network. Made in Minnesota. Posted by Lakeland Public Television, June 20, 2013.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZXCu9XbZTnA>
 The video addresses colonization, environmental destruction, climate change, traditional stories, food sustainability, illness/disease/diabetes and cancer, values related to traditional foods and environment, sobriety, processed foods, genetic engineering, and environmental justice as relates to food. It also addresses empowerment through taking responsibility for one's health and food.
- Inspirational video on indigenous chefs (3 minutes): *Native Chefs*.
<https://youtu.be/CNKCTYsxWxo>

Traditional Foods in Native America, Parts 1-4. Native Diabetes Wellness Program, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Atlanta, 2013.

- **Part I—Traditional Foods in Native America**
<https://www.cdc.gov/diabetes/ndwp/pdf/part-i---traditional-foods-in-native-america-april-21.pdf>
- **Part II—Good Food is Power** <https://www.cdc.gov/diabetes/ndwp/pdf/part-ii---good-food-is-power-april-21.pdf>
- **Part III—Compendium of Traditional Foods Stories**
<https://www.cdc.gov/diabetes/ndwp/pdf/part-iii---compendium-of-traditional-foods-stories-june-9-508.pdf>
- **Part IV—Traditional Foods in Native America**
https://www.cdc.gov/diabetes/ndwp/pdf/Part_IV_Traditional_Foods_in_Native_America.pdf