GOOD FOOD IS POWER

A collection of traditional foods stories from the
Ramah Navajo Community, Standing Rock Sioux Tribe and Tohono O'odham Nation

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report was written through a partnership between the Native Diabetes Wellness Program and Chelsea Wesner (Choctaw), American Indian Institute, University of Oklahoma, who collected the interviews that inspired this report.

All collaborators would especially like to thank staff and tribal members from the programs featured: Empowering Ramah Navajos to Eat Healthy by Using Traditional Foods (ERNEH) Project of the Ramah Navajo Community, Native Gardens Project of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, and Tohono O'odham Community Action (TOCA) of the Tohono O'odham Nation. This report would not have been possible without the sharing of their stories and diverse experiences in restoring traditional food systems.

Suggested citation: Native Diabetes Wellness Program. (2014). *Good Food is Power: A collection of traditional foods stories from the Ramah Navajo Community, Standing Rock Sioux Tribe and Tohono O'odham Nation*. Atlanta, GA: Native Diabetes Wellness Program, Centers for Disease Control & Prevention.

© 2014 Native Diabetes Wellness Program

Table of Contents

3 Purpose & Background

3 Traditional Foods Movement and the Native Diabetes Wellness Program

4 Methods

5 Key Findings and Shared Themes

Featured Traditional Foods Programs

6 Empowering Ramah Navajos to Eat Healthy by Using Traditional Foods (ERNEH) Project – Ramah Navajo Community, New Mexico

10 Native Gardens Project – Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, North and South Dakota

15 Tohono O'odham Community Action (TOCA) – Tohono O'odham Nation, Arizona

21 Traditional Foods Recipes from the Tohono O'odham Nation

22 Contact Information and Additional Resources

23 References

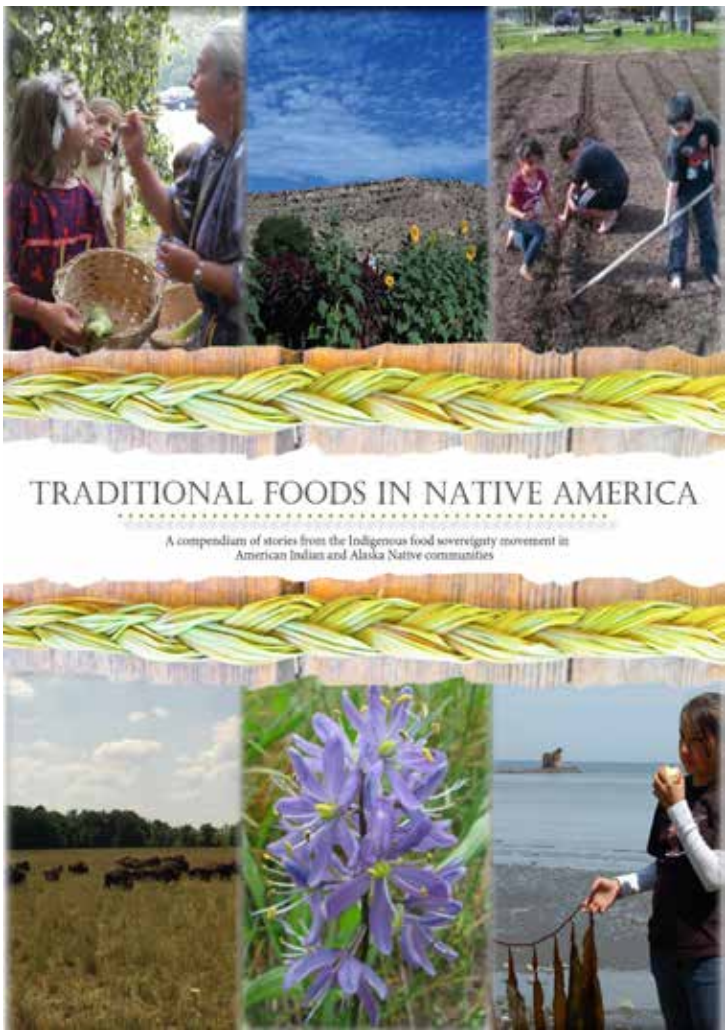
Purpose and Background

This report explores the traditional foods movement through the lens of three traditional foods programs: the Ramah Navajo Community, Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, and Tohono O'odham Nation. These stories were originally gathered by the University of Oklahoma's American Indian Institute (Wesner, 2012), to be featured on the organization's *Wellness in Native America* blog. The programs in this report were interviewed along with three other tribally-supported traditional foods programs from the Aleutian Pribilof Islands Association, Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma, and the Southeast Alaska Regional Health Consortium. While each of these programs is unique and diverse, they share in common the Traditional Foods Program, an initiative supported by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) Native Diabetes Wellness Program (NDWP). Although the author is currently working with the NDWP on a compendium of traditional foods stories, the stories in this report were compiled prior to this partnership.

Collected during the summer of 2012, the original set of interviews offers a glimpse of how tribal communities are using traditional foods as an opportunity to promote a healthful lifestyle, share cultural knowledge, and reclaim a local food system. Given the current level of interest in Native food sovereignty efforts, Wesner and NDWP staff thought updating and sharing the stories would be beneficial for tribal communities across the country. Three of the six grantees submitted substantial updates, the programs featured in this report. The original interviews are still available and may be found in the references section.

Traditional Foods Movement and the Native Diabetes Wellness Program

Grounded in the concept of food sovereignty, the traditional foods movement involves efforts to reclaim traditional diets while supporting culture, language, and environmental stewardship. For many tribes, the movement is a revival of foods their ancestors cultivated, gathered, hunted, and preserved.



The cover of Part I of the Compendium of Traditional Foods Stories, a collaborative project coordinated by the CDC's Native Diabetes Wellness Program.

At the local level, tribal gardens are flourishing with the sweet smell of blue and white corn, brightly colored chiles, ripe berries, and countless varieties of squash. Wild foods, such as beach asparagus, goose tongue, cholla buds, mesquite beans, saguaro fruit, chokecherries, polk, and Navajo tea, are gathered and prepared by elders and children. Tribes in the plains and coastal regions are restoring fishing and hunting techniques, while sharing traditional knowledge, stories, and language. As a collective, these programs are providing tribal communities with fresh and healthful food, ecological sustainability, and cultural preservation.

With a history of supporting tribally driven efforts to promote health and help prevent type 2 diabetes in American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) communities, the NDWP has become involved in the Indigenous food sovereignty movement. In addition to supporting traditional foods systems, NDWP focuses efforts on traditional physical activity and culturally based social support in tribal communities to address complex health disparities, such as type 2 diabetes, and social determinants of health.

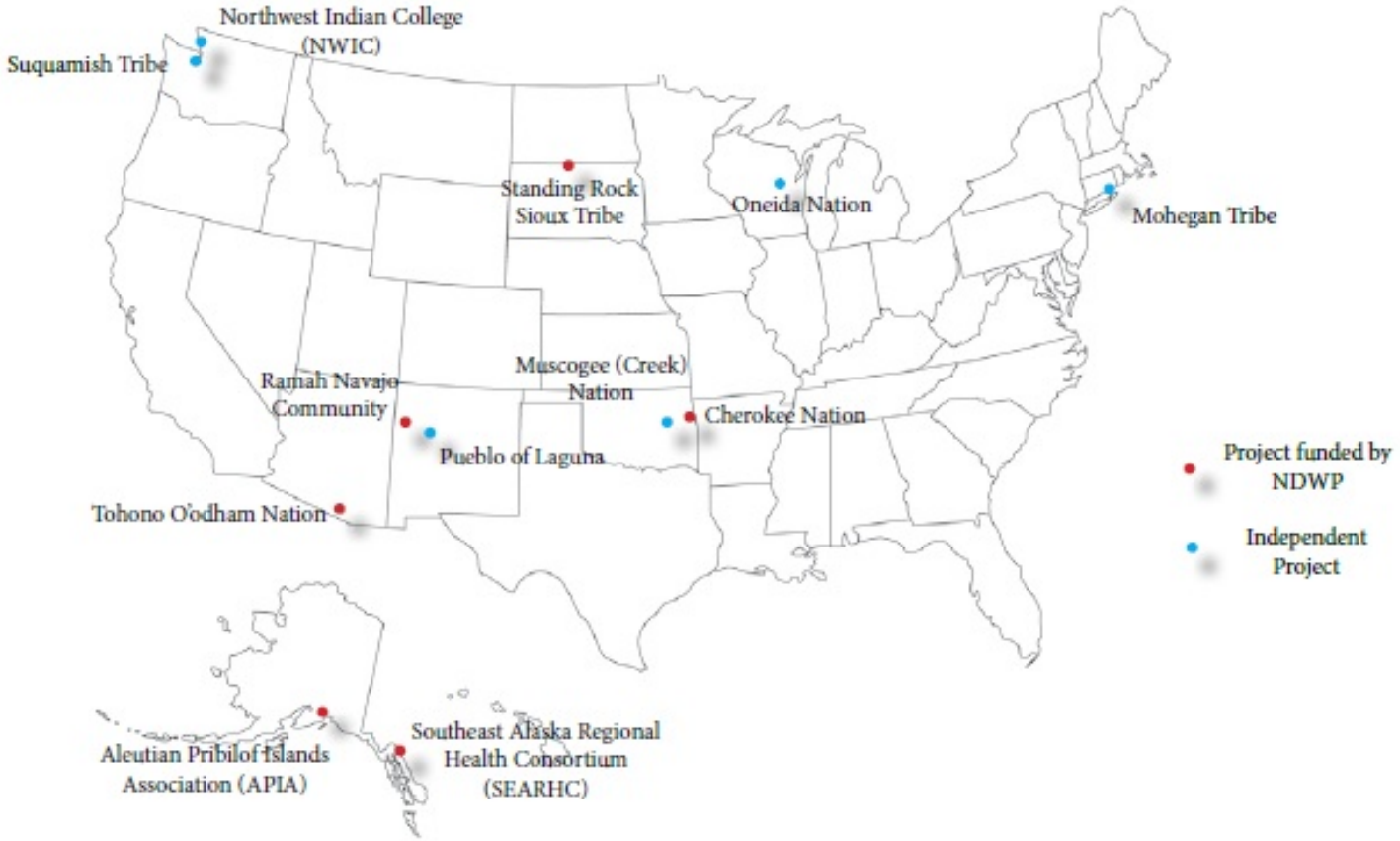
From 2008-2014, the NDWP has supported 17 tribal communities through cooperative agreements that make up the Traditional Foods Program. The 17 partner grantees are representative of tribes and tribal organizations from coast to coast. Each site has taken a unique approach to restoring and sustaining a healthful and traditional food system. Throughout the course of this program, NDWP has learned even more the great value these projects provide in addition to health promotion and type 2 diabetes prevention. The projects address critical issues such as food security, food sovereignty, cultural preservation, and environmental sustainability. When asked about their involvement in the traditional foods movement, NDWP staff members reported feeling fortunate to be a part of these efforts. One described their role as "… a small tributary flowing into a large river… the communities are the leaders in this movement."

METHODS

The initial methods used to conduct the interviews included a set of five open–ended questions asked of each interviewee. Each question and the answer made up the story for each community. The questions were most often answered in writing, providing the interviewee time to think about what she or he would like to say. We believe this method allowed for the rich and thoughtful narrative that each of these

COMPENDIUM OF TRADITIONAL FOODS STORIES:

Map of traditional foods programs featured to date



storytellers provided. For purposes of this report, the original interviewees updated their responses to reflect more recent activities and lessons learned.

Representatives from the Tohono O'odham Nation shared traditional foods recipes, which can be found after their story. All three programs shared contact information and additional resources for tribal communities interested in developing their own traditional foods programs.

All programs featured in this report are current grantee partners of the NDWP's Traditional Foods Program. Original interviews for the blog were conducted in August 2012. The responses were updated between June and July 2013. Participation was voluntary.

Key Findings and Shared Themes

The traditional foods programs featured in this report share many common goals and themes. Many are aligned with a recent report featuring six other traditional foods programs (NDWP, 2013). Some of the common themes across the programs' stories include:

- Supporting traditional foods education and raising awareness of the importance of restoring traditional methods for gathering and preparation.
- Using organic growing methods to preserve the environment and to increase access to healthier foods.
- Establishing a local food economy through social enterprises, cafes, farmers' markets or other activities.
- Increasing local food security and self-sufficiency through improving access to traditional and healthful foods for tribal members.
- Fostering intergenerational knowledge through engaging tribal elders and younger people in the local food system.
- Increasing physical activity through activities such as gathering, gardening, harvesting, hunting, preserving, and preparing traditional foods.
- Involving youth in program activities for cultural preservation, community engagement, and disease prevention/health promotion.

Other critical themes included:

- Developing seed saving efforts with a special focus on preserving heirloom seeds.
- Increasing the availability of healthful, local foods in schools (Farm-to-School policy).
- Implementing dry agriculture techniques, and practicing water conservation through water harvesting and drip irrigation systems.
- Promotion of and support for family gardens, community gardens and demonstration/classroom gardens.
- Improving soil quality through composting.
- Increasing access to healthful and traditional foods for tribal elders through existing United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) food voucher and distribution programs.

Featured Interviews

The following section includes interviews with three traditional foods programs. In the spirit of Cissimarie Juan (Tohono O'odham) of the TOCA Project, "…good food is power."

Amending soil with compost produced by the ERNEH Project. Photo courtesy of Randy Chatto.

Empowering Ramah Navajos to Eat Healthy by Using Traditional Foods

Ramah Navajo Community
New Mexico

"The title of this program is "Empowering Ramah Navajos to Eat Healthy by Using Traditional Foods" (ERNEH). The Ramah Navajo community, also known as Tlochini' Dine', has developed programs to help prevent diabetes and other chronic diseases through the re-introduction of traditional foods, increased opportunities for physical activity, social support, and promotion of policy change. The program is re-establishing a sustainable dry-land agriculture system by conducting composting workshops, which promote organic growing methods and water harvesting. The program is developing an "honor walk" that educates the community about Navajo Long Walk[1] history and integrates a sustainable physical activity and social support program. The Ramah Band of Navajo Indians is located in a rural area in northwestern New Mexico, separated from the main Navajo Nation. Nine hundred families, with about 4000 tribal members, live in small family "camps" scattered over 625 square miles of high desert land. Diabetes is a serious problem, with more than 250 individuals listed as active in the Pine Hill Health Center Diabetes Registry." (NDWP, 2009)

The following is an interview with Randy Chatto (Diné[2]) of the ERNEH Project from August 2012. The interview was revised in June 2013. Randy is the Project Coordinator for the ERNEH Project.

---

1 The Long Walk of the Navajo refers to the forcible removal of the Navajo people from their traditional homeland to Fort Sumner in the Pecos River Valley. The removal was directed by the U.S. government in 1864. As many as 200 members died during the 18-day march. In 1868, Navajo people were allowed to return to their traditional boundaries.

2 Refers to the Navajo culture and tribe.

Q: What's your favorite thing about being involved in your traditional foods project?

A: "Being a part of history: 'traditional foods' are probably one of the most important elements in any Native American/Alaskan Native's culture. In that culture there is someone keeping that practice moving forward, keeping it alive through sowing, hunting, gathering, reaping and harvesting. You are a key component to keeping your land, your people healthy, informed, encouraged and appreciated. I feel very fortunate and blessed to know that I am in some way helping my people of the Ramah Navajo Community."

Q: What traditional foods and physical activities do you have going on this summer?

A: "We are solely concentrating on the gardening and the farming this season. Significant work we are concentrating on is drip irrigation, water harvesting, plant care, and soil amendment. All of our participants are encouraged to take part in one of the many physical activities our Wellness Center has in place, and just working in a garden or field demands much physical work; that in itself is a great workout."

Q: Which local traditional foods did you choose to cultivate, hunt, gather or plant for your program?

A: "We have planted Navajo yellow and white corn, Navajo gray and Navajo Hubbard squash, several types of summer squash, beans, chiles and onions. A popular wild plant food is Navajo tea which some families are starting to gather. Since we began our Hunter's Safety education classes in collaboration with the Navajo Nation Fish and Game department many of our community members have gone through the classes and received their Hunter's Education certification. That allows those individuals to hunt big game such as elk and deer during hunting season."

Q: How has this project impacted your community?

A: "Many of our community members are excited to take part in a program that encourages them to plant, harvest and prepare their own healthy traditional plant foods. Many of our families and even departments within our organization of the Ramah Navajo School Board are beginning to eat healthy in turn they are seeing and realizing the significance of the re-introduction of family gardens, community gardens and dry land farming."

Photo courtesy of Randy Chatto.

Q: What are your plans to sustain this project?

A: "This project is not a temporary spark for this community but a lifestyle deeply rooted in our Diné culture. We must continue this effort to eat healthy and keep moving. We must all lend a hand and be part of a voice in keeping our people healthy. We are our own resource and we need to continue to tap into it. The spirit of self-sufficiency has always been with us but we have to carry on that community action. It's about raising champions in every facet of our peoples' lives; in body, in mind and in spirit! Our soil is the most important and critical renewable resource in our

"This project is not a temporary spark for this community but a lifestyle deeply rooted in our Diné culture. We must continue this effort to eat healthy and keep moving." Randy Chatto

Flourishing squash in western New Mexico. Photo courtesy of Randy Chatto.

community, not only here but the entire planet. We need to pay attention to it, care for it, sustain it, and in turn it, too, will care and sustain us. I believe that in order to develop a sustainable healthy community through planting we have to recognize the heart of our effort: our soil. My goal to sustainability in our community is to grow our own food, in our community gardens, family gardens and demonstration gardens in the community.

We also are now beginning the process of saving our own seeds and growing for the object of obtaining good heirloom seeds. We are also planning to eventually have an outdoor classroom garden to teach our children and community members to grow healthy food. The plan is also to introduce our locally grown food into the cafeteria of our school here in the community.

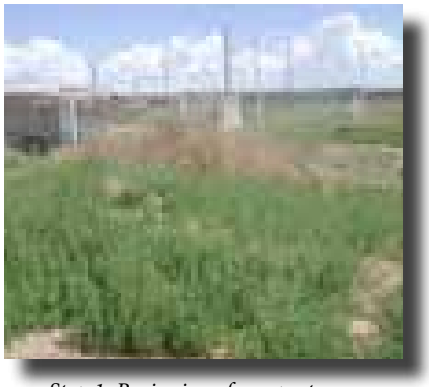
In all of this our soil is still and always will be our primary concentration. We have to put back in just as much as we take out. Without healthy soil we have nothing, good healthy soil is the beginning to everything being grown and harvested. Cover crops are also in our plans to improve and maintain healthy soil and its structure, and of course our composting program and water harvesting and irrigation are continuing."

Special thanks to Mr. Randy Chatto for sharing his time and stories. To learn more information about this project, please find contact information on page 22.

"Our soil is the most important and critical renewable resource in our community, not only here but the entire planet. We need to pay attention to it, care for it, sustain it, and in turn it, too, will care and sustain us." Randy Chatto

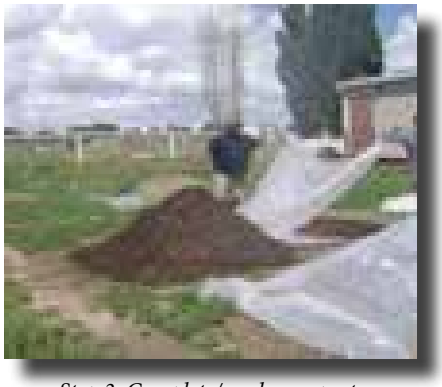
Composting 101

Randy Chatto has had great success with composting, enabling the ERNEH project to transform arid soil into fertile ground. These photos were taken throughout the composting process. To learn more about this process and to uncover some of Randy's secrets to composting, schedule a visit to the Ramah Navajo Community and see the ERNEH project.

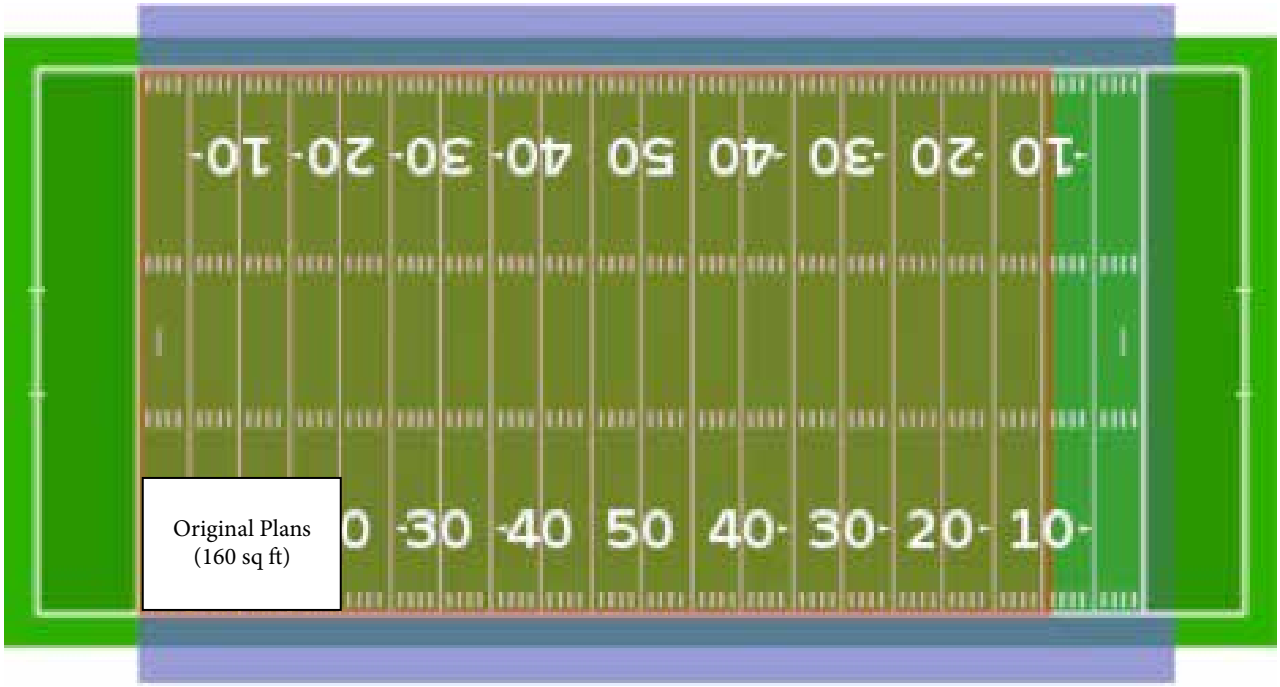


Step 1: Beginning of compost.

Step 2: Compost mixture.



Step 3: Complete/ready compost.



ERNEH Project's original garden intent (160 square feet) contrasted to current cultivation exceeding 90,000 square feet, approximately the size of three high school football fields.

Aubrey Skye and Ben Grann setting up trellises for pole beans at Standing Rock farms demonstration garden. Courtesy of Native Gardens Project.

Native Gardens Project

Standing Rock Sioux Tribe
North and South Dakota

The following is an interview with Mr. Aubrey Skye (Standing Rock Sioux) and Ms. Aiko Allen of the Native Gardens Project from August 2012. The interview was revised in June 2013.

Q: Would you mind sharing a bit of your program's background information?

A: "The title of this project is "Native Gardens Project: An Indigenous Permaculture Approach to the Prevention and Treatment of Diabetes." The Standing Rock Sioux Tribe is reclaiming cultural knowledge and traditions to promote health and prevent type 2 diabetes across eight districts in North and South Dakota. Strong partnerships with the Standing Rock Nutrition for the Elderly Program, United States Department of Agriculture, Senior Farmer's Market Program, Sioux County Extension Service, Boys and Girls Clubs, and National Relief Charities have yielded early results, aligning with a number of CDC's recommended strategies for communities striving to promote health and prevent obesity. The partners have increased availability and access to fresh local foods over the course of the four years spent so far in meeting the project goal. At the time of this article, the Native Gardens Project is in its fifth year of implementation.

Since 2009, the Standing Rock Native Gardens Coalition has held a total of 61 Farmer's Market days with estimated attendance of 2,500 consumers. Partners involved in the Native Garden Coalition include the tribal Diabetes program, the Nutrition for the Elderly Program, North Dakota State University (NDSU) Extension Service (Sioux County), Tribal Game and fish, Standing Rock Sioux Tribe Elementary, Middle, and High Schools, Sitting Bull College, the Long Soldier District Tribal council, Boys and Girls Club (McLaughlin), Nutrition for the Elderly Elders Advisory Council, VISTA (Americorps Volunteers in service to America), Robert and Beth White Mountain (Running Antelope District) community garden coordinators.

The Coalition has coordinated approximately 106 educational events (including Farmer's Market days)

with an estimated attendance of 3,534 individuals (including count of estimated Fort Yates Farmer's Market participants). Activities coordinated by the coalition include the Fort Yates Farmer's Market, food demonstrations, community garden development, gathering trips with youth, pow wows, health fairs, establishment of greenhouses, and distribution of fruit trees to elders.

In 2012, the USDA voucher program for Elders achieved its greatest success. While the number of $50.00 vouchers distributed to Elders and their spouses remained relatively stable, the percent of vouchers redeemed grew tremendously from 22 percent in 2009 to 100 percent in 2012. The value of vouchers redeemed in 2009 was $3,714. In 2012, $16,425 was circulated into the local foods economy.

The voucher program coordinated by the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe Nutrition for the Elderly program has been essential in establishing a demand for local produce and the seeds of a sustainable farmer's market with regular customers."

Harvesting wild prairie turnips or "thinpsinla" near Porcupine, N.D. Courtesy of Native Gardens Project.

Corie Lund, District Conservationist with the USDA-NRCS in Selfridge, ND. Courtesy of Native Gardens Project.

Q: What's your favorite thing about being involved in your traditional foods project?

A: "I like planting seeds... planting for the future, watching them grow, and having a vision for the future. Cultivating and having the seeds grow into something that you can eat and use to sustain yourself. The project involves me in traditional agriculture and perpetuating this system for Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, and bringing about positive change in the community in regards to good health and wellness."

Q: What traditional foods and physical activities do you have going on this summer?

A: "In 2012, we tilled more than 100 family gardens. The gardens involve people in physical activities – weeding, watering, etc. Traditional foods that were planted include corn, Hubbard squash, beans, tomatoes, and chile peppers. It was difficult to maintain family gardens in 2012 because of the drought conditions."

"I like planting seeds... planting for the future... cultivating and having the seeds grow into something that you can eat and use to sustain yourself." Aubrey Skye

Q: Which local traditional foods did you choose to cultivate, hunt, gather or plant for your program?

A: "A highlight event for 2012 was a buffalo harvest held in the fall. This harvest was mentioned in the first American Indian Institute *Wellness in Native America* article published last year. A successful event was held with youth, tribal council members, and tribal program staff (Fish and Game, Diabetes Program) in 2011 and we were able to coordinate another harvest with students from Standing Rock Schools. The harvest was an opportunity to share knowledge about bison and their importance to Lakota foodways and culture. Additionally, we hunted for deer and prairie chickens again. The deer meat is distributed to elders after it is dressed and packaged."

Q: How has this project impacted your community?

A: "The project has gotten more people involved in gardening. It makes locally grown foods more available. People have been involved in gardening for many years before I got here but we didn't have a farmer's market. The entire reservation (North and South Dakota) resides within a nationally recognized food desert. Because of the Native Gardens Project, within a hundred mile radius, fresh and locally grown foods, including traditional foods, are now available through vendors at the farmer's market in Fort Yates. Elders are provided $50.00 vouchers to exchange for produce.

Additional Outcomes (since 2009)

- *Gardens:* The length of almost six-and-a-half football fields have been tilled for approximately 154 family gardens across the eight tribal districts. Three community gardens were developed that constitute 20,000 square feet of space at Running Antelope district (McLaughlin), Porcupine, and Fort Yates. An estimated 125 individuals have visited the community gardens for presentations and tours. The gardens provide a hands-on approach to learning gardening skills and encouraging production of traditional foods.

- *Participation of Elders Advisory Board:* Approximately 48 meetings were held with

The Four Winds Nutrition Guide by Kibbe Conti, M.S., RD (Lakota Sioux).

"The entire reservation (North and South Dakota) resides within a nationally recognized food desert. Because of the Native Gardens Project, within a hundred mile radius, fresh and locally grown foods, including traditional foods, are now available through vendors at the farmer's market in Fort Yates."

Planting a no till garden at the Standing Rock Elementary School. Courtesy of Native Gardens Project.

the Elders' Advisory Committee. Members and their alternatives represent the eight districts. Information is shared about the project as well as traditional foods and physical activity. Total involved (average of 12-14 participants a meeting). Advisory board members are tasked with updates to their Tribal Council Districts about the project and its availability as a community resource and program.

- *Promotion and Awareness:* From 2009-2012, 757 media events (radio, print, TV, etc.) have promoted the project's activities and health education messages. Approximately 41,535,000 media impressions (saturation potential of messages) have reached listeners, viewers, and readers. Media events included interviews and PSAs on the radio for the Farmers' Market and garden tilling; articles and announcements in the local newspaper; community flyers; articles in Indian Country Today and a Huffington Post article that featured the Native Gardens Project, a South Dakota Public Broadcasting segment from "Dakota Life" aired January 2011, and a PSA called "Return to Balance" featuring actor Wes Studi in 2012. At the local level, KLND radio station provides the greatest opportunity to broadcast information about activities communities can participate in over the course of the grant."

Q: What are your plans to sustain this project?

A: "As the Native Gardens Coalition moves through its fifth year of implementation (2012-2013), it is exciting to share that the project continues to mature and is at the point where policy change is being introduced that will strengthen relationships and resources available that promote local access and availability of local foods including traditional foods. The Coalition is focused on project sustainability through development and implementation of a Farm-to-School policy for Long Soldier District (Fort Yates). Partners at the table include the Nutrition for the Elderly Program, Standing Rock Farms, NDSU Sioux County Extension, Latter Day Saints Church Senior Missionaries, Food Service director, Healthy North Dakota, VISTA, Farmer's Market vendor, and Farm to School Coordinator.

The goal of the policy is to start a Farm-to-School Program and other activities to improve the

Standing Rock Elementary School students planting their no-till garden. Courtesy of Native Gardens Project.

The Lakota Foodway by Kibbe Conti, M.S., RD (Lakota Sioux).

overall health of the area through better eating, fresher vegetables, and a safe and secure environment for the youth of the area. There is hope to expand the policy to another school district as well. Offering fresh local and traditional foods in the school cafeterias will be a great way to encourage consumption of healthy foods for our youth, maintain the presence of the farmer's market and create new ones as vendors are cultivated who will have produce for the schools.

Coalition partner, Standing Rock Farms, will contribute to the access and availability of fresh produce for the market and school food service programs through development of a pilot "irrigation pivot" garden. There are plans to plant potatoes and possibly other crops in the corners of fields where there is water run-off. The opportunity through Farm-to-School policy to protect our traditional foodways and promote food sovereignty is important to the long-term outcome of reducing Type 2 Diabetes among our people.

Additionally, a new community garden was established in 2012 at Standing Rock Elementary School. This "no-till" garden is coordinated by a USDA District Conservationist with NRSC (National Resources Conservation Service). The objective is to have community gardens across all eight districts (which may happen long after the grant cycle is completed) where the value for gardening and gardening skills will continue to be developed."

Special thanks to Aubrey Skye and Aiko Allen of the Native Garden Project for sharing their time and stories. ***To learn more information about this project, please find contact information on page 22.***

Elder Danny Lopez and Isabella Johnson sing to the new plants. Photo courtesy of Tohono O'odham Community Action.

TOCA
TOHONO O'ODHAM COMMUNITY ACTION

O'odham Ha'icu Ha-Hugic Duakog
"Tohono O'odham Food, Fitness, & Wellness Initiative"
Tohono O'odham Nation
Southern Arizona

The following is an interview with Cissimarie Juan (Tohono O'odham) and TOCA staff from August 2012, with revisions added in July 2013.

Q: Would you mind sharing a bit of your program's background information?

A: "TOCA is a 501(c)(3) community-based organization operating on the Tohono O'odham Nation. TOCA's Board of Directors is 100% Tohono O'odham and TOCA's staff is 80% Tohono O'odham.

Since 1996, Tohono O'odham Community Action (TOCA) has worked to create a healthy, sustainable and culturally-vital community on the Tohono O'odham Nation in Southern Arizona. TOCA began as a backyard community garden and a basket weaving class, and has grown to have 2 farms, a native foods café, and an art gallery. TOCA has brought back Tohono O'odham foods, ceremonies, and sports.

In 2010, TOCA published From I'itoi's Garden: Tohono O'odham Food Traditions, available on at TOCA and online at Blurb.com. Half oral history half cookbook, and full of color photographs, the book reflects years of work with over 35 elders. It has become a resource for Tohono O'odham seeking to recapture the health that they had when they ate traditional foods, before processed foods and other forms of "progress" brought type-2 diabetes to over 50% of their people. Young people are particularly affected, with childhood obesity rates tripling in the past 35 years.

Saguaro harvesting. Photo courtesy of TOCA.

In a community-based effort to combat type 2 diabetes and childhood obesity, TOCA's most recent work has been in collaboration with the local Baboquivari Unified School District. The goal has been to integrate traditional, locally-grown Tohono O'odham foods into the school lunch menu. Over the past two years, the meals have increased from monthly to weekly to 3 times a week.

The collaboration got a "jump start" in 2009, when TOCA's high school interns formed a cooking club in order to enter the national "Cooking up Change" competition from Healthy Schools Campaign and the USDA's Farm to School program. They won the contest, and their tepary bean quesadilla has since become a regular dish at the local school cafeterias.

Education in culturally-based nutritional eating has continued to grow. TOCA's Young O'odham United Through Health (Y.O.U.T.H.) created cartoon characters to popularize Tohono O'odham foods, and Y.O.U.T.H. members formed Project Oidag in 2011, creating new community and school gardens. TOCA's Michael Enis teaches traditional Tohono O'odham planting and harvesting songs to school children, and the high school's FFA works with Project Oidag to sell O'odham squash from farm stands. Alongside local partnerships, TOCA has exchanged information with 17 other projects through the NDWP's Traditional Foods Program.

In 2011, TOCA was one of 10 organizations across the globe to receive the "Imagine There's No Hunger" Award from Hard Rock Café/Why Hunger. In 2012, TOCA was recognized with the National Outstanding Achievement Award by the Indian Health Service Direct Service Tribes (DST) for community-based health and wellness. When TOCA's President and CEO Terrol Dew Johnson was named a White House "Champion of Change" for food security and rebuilding native foods traditions, in September, 2012, it seemed like a signal to "go national."

In response to national recognition for their efforts, TOCA has been working on a national publication, Native Foodways Magazine. TOCA's primary work continues to be serving the Tohono O'odham community, but it is hoped that the magazine will help economically sustain TOCA's work while sharing the amazing stories and the people who are actively involved in native food sovereignty, improving health, serving native cuisine, and growing food on reservations and in native communities across the Americas."

"... TOCA's high school interns formed a cooking club in order to enter the national "Cooking Up Change" competition from Healthy Schools Campaign and the USDA's Farm to School program. They won the contest, and their tepary bean quesadilla has since become a regular dish at the local school cafeterias."

Cissimarie Juan prepares tastings of traditional foods. Photo courtesy of Tohono O'odham Community Action.

Q: What's your favorite thing about being involved in your traditional foods project?

A: "When it comes to traditional foods, for me it's something more than just food, it's my heritage. I grew up on the Tohono O'odham Nation but I didn't have too much experience with traditional foods so now it's great to experience things first hand and to see how hard it is to grow our traditional foods, and to make the connections between food and health and to help my community. I love bringing the message of health through traditional foods to kids by making it fun for them to learn about and eat these delicious foods through games, traditional food cartoon characters hands on workshops and food sampling. I really love to work with people who have very little knowledge of traditional foods (like me) and to see them just a few weeks or a year later and see what they've learned and how empowered they've become, good food is power."

Q: What traditional foods and physical activities do you have going on this summer?

A: "Summer is an exciting and busy time for us. Many of our wild desert plants become available for gathering and it is our primary farming season. Wild foods that are gathered, starting in late March and April and continuing through October include cholla buds, mesquite beans, saguaro fruit, prickly pear fruit, wild spinach (amaranth), and acorns. One of the most important of these foods is saguaro fruit. The fruit ripens in late June at the hottest time of the summer, lasts for only about a month, and precedes the start of our summer rains. The ripening fruit represents our new year, and is important for nutritional, social, and ceremonial purposes.

Our primary summer event is our Saguaro/Bahidaj harvest camp – there are numerous physical activities that take place at this event including making our traditional harvesting sticks which require gathering dead saguaro ribs from the desert, sanding them and twisting wires around them to hold them together. The gathering of the fruit itself is a very physical activity which requires lots of walking, carrying up to 15 foot harvesting sticks, balancing the stick, and holding it up to use it to nudge the fruit off the cactus, and carrying the heavy buckets of fruit.

Traditional crops that are planted in the summer include white and brown tepary beans, O'odham squash, yellow-meat watermelon, devil's claw (used for basket weaving), cow pea, and O'odham corn. We have two farms that are managed by TOCA staff, including six full-time agricultural apprentices. The farm

Rosa Boarding School students carry Tohono O'odham squash from the fields Photo courtesy of Tohono O'odham Community Action. Photographer: M. Paganelli.

"Harvesting wild foods requires a lot of physical activity; dozens of hours are required to harvest quantities of wild foods, and harvesting containers can get quite heavy. Processing these foods also takes a lot of physical effort."

Indian Oasis Elementary students Natalie E. Johnson, Alyssa Carlos, Earl Bautista and Kaylee Pablo. Credit: Reprinted by permission from Native Foodways Magazine. Photographer: Robin Stancliff

work is helped out by summer high school interns and community members. There are also several community and school gardens where we work.

Harvesting wild foods requires a lot of physical activity; dozens of hours are required to harvest quantities of wild foods, and harvesting containers can get quite heavy. Processing these foods also takes a lot of physical effort. Farming is an inherently physical activity, and it takes a lot of work to successfully raise our summer crops.

We host a large number of events during our harvesting and planting seasons throughout the year that incorporate physical activities above and beyond the activity required to plant and gather our foods. These include youth rodeos and traditional games like kick ball (songiwa), a field hockey like game (ko'omai) and various fun walks."

Q: Which local traditional foods did you choose to cultivate, hunt, gather or plant for your program?

A: "In summer 2012, we have hunted jackrabbit, which was served to everybody who participated in the three day saguaro fruit harvesting camp. Each wild gathered food (cholla buds, saguaro fruit, prickly pear fruit, mesquite beans) uses its own technique and tools. Everything requires that you know about where plants are, when they produce fruit, and when they are ripe for picking. We rely on elders to teach us and other community members about how to pick and process the foods, as well as the foods' cultural importance, nutritional qualities, and other important information.

We have two main farms where we farm our summer crops of traditional corn (huñ), tepary beans, and squash (ha:l). One is a more production-oriented farm that we irrigate using pumped groundwater. The other is a traditional "ak-chin" farm that is irrigated only with rainwater. For the ak-chin farm, we divert water from the washes that only run after heavy rainstorms. This water either goes directly into our field, or is captured in a pond that can be pumped out as needed into the field. Everything is grown organically, although we are not certified organic. We typically plant these foods during summer and harvest them in the fall."

Q: How has this project impacted your community?

A: "Since we started this work over a decade ago, we have seen lots of positive changes in our community. For 40 years, tepary beans had essentially stopped being grown by O'odham farmers, and the beans were rarely seen during community feasts and celebrations.

Now, TOCA grows thousands of pounds of beans

annually, and other local farmers also grow the beans for sale locally and nationally. Tepary beans are now commonly eaten at community gatherings and as an everyday food. Traditional foods in general are much more commonly seen at events, and more and more people are getting interested in learning about how to grow, gather, and prepare traditional foods.

In 2010, the public school district that serves the Tohono O'odham Nation began to serve an O'odham menu option, and is now served often. With over 1,000 students enrolled in the BUSD#40 district, it has impacted every student K–12.

With education and awareness activities organized by TOCA and in collaboration with dozens of local families and tribal organizations, knowledge about the importance of traditional foods is much more commonplace. Perhaps one of the most important impacts of traditional foods projects is that now we are seeing many more youth (up to 24 years old) interested in all aspects of traditional foods; gathering, picking, planting, harvesting, processing, cooking, eating, stories, songs, language, ceremony, nutrition, and community building."

Q: What are your plans to sustain this project?

A: "We plan to continue collaborating with as many local organizations and community members as possible. For this work to continue, it is essential that as many tribal organizations, schools, and community members do work with traditional foods on their own terms as possible. The more people know about and enjoy eating traditional foods, the more likely these foods will remain an important part of daily O'odham life.

We also plan to continue to focus on working with youth. The more youth are involved in traditional foods projects, the more likely these foods will become a part of their daily lives in every season. The chain of knowledge and use of traditional foods was broken for several generations due to all the damaging social changes experienced by Tohono O'odham over the past century, to the point that many adults and their children had never seen, much less tasted, many traditional foods. The youth that we work with show a deep interest in sharing what they learn with their families, and will be much more likely to also share their knowledge with their kids when they get older.

On a practical matter, this work takes money. Our plans to sustain our traditional foods program include diversifying TOCA's sources of funding. TOCA has been attempting to "wean off" grant funding for years. Since 2009, we've reduced our reliance upon grant funding by 25%, and we hope to support more of our projects through social enterprises operating under TOCA's umbrella. Desert Rain Cafe and Desert Rain Gallery are TOCA enterprises that now pay for themselves and provide two dozen local jobs. TOCA's "New Generation of O'odham Farmers" program has spurred expansion of the local foods economy, and one

Amy Juan harvesting prickly pear fruit. Photo courtesy of TOCA.

The premiere issue of Native Foodways Magazine, a publication by Tohono O'odham Community Action.

result has been a local farmer's market which now sells twice a month in Sells, AZ.

TOCA has two major new projects. The first is Desert Rain Food Services, a non-profit food service business designed to provide locally-sourced, from-scratch-cooked, and educationally-supported school meals. This enterprise will operate locally and keep an estimated million per year of "food dollars" from leaving the reservation. It will also provide Tohono O'odham farmers with ready markets for their fresh produce and native desert harvesters with customers for their seasonal wild foods.

The second venture is publishing a national magazine on native foods. *Native Foodways Magazine* will promote native food sovereignty and celebrate food, culture, and community. The magazine shares stories of native farmers and gardeners, fishers and hunters, foragers and chefs. It shares the news of efforts to preserve traditional foods and cultural food traditions. Each issue will include recipes and food-related works of art. (See www.nativefoodways.org for more information.) The other 16 CDC Traditional Foods grantees are being invited to contribute stories to the magazine."

Special thanks to the TOCA staff for sharing their time and stories. To learn more about this project, please contact TOCA. Contact information is on page 22.

TRADITIONAL FOODS RECIPES

O'ODHAM WHITE TEPARY BEAN STEW

Recipe Courtesy of Frances Manuel, Tohono O'odham Elder, San Pedro Village. Reprinted from *From I'itioi's Garden: Tohono O'odham Food Traditions* (TOCA, M. Paganelli Votto & F. Manuel, 2010 TOCA, available at www.Blurb.com).

Tepary beans love slow cooking, this recipe produces a slightly sweet, delicious rich broth and is ideal for a crockpot. Frances always kept a pot bubbling on the stove.

1 cup of dried white tepary beans, rinsed and picked through
10 cups of water
1 teaspoon salt
1 pound oxtails, beef shortribs, deer or rabbit

1. Place beans, water and salt in a stockpot. Bring to a boil, reduce heat and simmer, covered, for one hour and a half. 2. Add meat to the bean mixture, cover and cook for one more hour, or until beans are tender and meat is falling off the bone. If using a crockpot, place water and all other ingredients in the pot, cover and set to high. Cook for 8 hours or until the meat is falling off the bone and the beans are tender. Yields 8 – 10 cups.

CHOLLA BUD CACTUS SPINACH SALAD WITH CITRUS VINAIGRETTE

Courtesy of TOCA's Desert Rain Cafe, a social enterprise of TOCA. For more information or to purchase exotic ingredients, visit www.TOCAonline.org.

Bright citrus flavors, fresh herbs and a burst of ginger make this a fabulous salad for lunch or dinner.

3 cups dried cholla cactus buds, boiled and picked over to remove any remaining thorns*
1 tsp olive oil
1 garlic clove, minced
1 cup jicama, diced
1 cup pineaple, diced
1 Jalapeño, ribs and seeds removed, diced
1/4 cup Parsley, chopped
1/4 cup Mint, chopped
2 cups, baby spinach leaves

Saute cooked cholla buds in olive oil and minced garlic. Cool and place in a large bowl. Add remaining ingredients and dress with Citrus Vinaigrette. To cook dried cholla buds, boil in twice as much water for about 2 hours or until buds are tender. Makes 6 cups.

Citrus Vinaigrette

1/4 cup Olive oil
2 tablespoons Seasoned rice wine vinegar
1 cup Orange juice, preferably fresh
1 tablespoon minced ginger
Salt and pepper, to taste
Pinch of red pepper flakes

Whisk olive oil, rice wine vinegar and orange juice together. Add remaining ingredients. You can prepare the dressing one day in advance and keep refrigerated, and can combine dressing with all ingredients. Makes about 1 1/4 cup.

Contact Information

Empowering Ramah Navajos to Eat Healthy by Using Traditional Foods (ERNEH)
Ramah Navajo Community
Contact:
Randy Chatto - *Randy.Chatto@ihs.gov*
Phone: (505) 775-3271

Native Gardens Project
Standing Rock Sioux Tribe
Contacts:
Aubrey Skye - *askye@standingrock.org*
Aiko Allen - *aiko_allen@yahoo.com*

Tohono O'odham Community Action (TOCA)
Tohono O'odham Nation
Contact:
Cissimarie Juan - *cjuan@TOCAonline.org*
Phone: (520) 383-4966

Additional Resources

Traditional Foods Program - Native Diabetes Wellness Program
Centers for Disease Control & Prevention
www.cdc.gov/diabetes/projects/ndwp/traditional-foods.htm

American Indian Institute - University of Oklahoma
www.aii.ou.edu

***Wellness in Native America: Strengthening Indian Country one story at a time**
americanindianinstitute.wordpress.com

Native American Foods & Health Program - First Nations Development Institute
www.firstnations.org/programs/foods-health

National Indian Health Board
www.nihb.org/public_health/ndwp.php

Indian Health Service - Division of Diabetes Treatment & Prevention
www.ihs.gov/MedicalPrograms/Diabetes/

*This resource is a blog managed by Chelsea Wesner of the American Indian Institute. Original interviews from this report may be found there.

References

Native Diabetes Wellness Program (NDWP). (2012, August 1). Traditional Foods Program. Retrieved from http://www.cdc.gov/diabetes/projects/ndwp/traditional-foods.htm

Native Diabetes Wellness Program. (2013). Traditional Foods in Native America: A Compendium of Stories from the Indigenous Food Sovereignty Movement in American Indian and Alaska Native Communities. Atlanta, GA: Native Diabetes Wellness Program, Centers for Disease Control & Prevention.

Wesner, Chelsea. (2012, September 5). Traditional Foods Part II [Web log post]. Retrieved from http://americanindianinstitute.wordpress.com/2012/09/05/traditional-foods/

Wesner, Chelsea. (2012, September 5). Traditional Foods Part II: Tohono O'odham Nation [Web log post]. Retrieved from http://americanindianinstitute.wordpress.com/2012/09/05/toca/

Wesner, Chelsea. (2012, September 5). Traditional Foods Part II: Standing Rock Sioux Tribe [Web log post]. Retrieved from http://americanindianinstitute.wordpress.com/2012/09/05/srst/

Wesner, Chelsea. (2012, September 5). Traditional Foods Part II: Southeast Alaska Regional Health Consortium (SEARHC) [Web log post]. Retrieved from http://americanindianinstitute.wordpress.com/2012/09/05/searhc/

Wesner, Chelsea. (2012, September 5). Traditional Foods Part II: Ramah Navajo Community [Web log post]. Retrieved from http://americanindianinstitute.wordpress.com/2012/09/05/rnc/

Wesner, Chelsea. (2012, September 5). Traditional Foods Part II: Cherokee Nation [Web log post]. Retrieved from http://americanindianinstitute.wordpress.com/2012/09/05/cn/

Wesner, Chelsea. (2012, September 5). Traditional Foods Part II: Aleutian Pribilof Islands Association [Web log post]. Retrieved from http://americanindianinstitute.wordpress.com/2012/09/05/apia/