



CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION

Traditional Foods Project in American Indian and Alaska Native Communities 2008-2014

Using Traditional Foods and Sustainable Ecological Approaches for Health Promotion and Type 2 Diabetes Prevention in American Indian and Alaska Native communities was a 6-year cooperative agreement that championed [17 tribal programs](#). The tribal programs worked to restore access to local, traditional foods and physical activity to promote health. The goals were to:

- Support traditional, sustainable, evaluable ecological approaches to type 2 diabetes prevention, focusing on local efforts to reclaim traditional foods and physical activity.
- Encourage local health practices and policies to increase availability of and access to local, traditional foods and physical activity.
- Revive, create, and preserve stories of healthy traditional ways shared in homes, schools, and communities
- Engage community members to improve and sustain activities in health promotion, sharing stories of hope for preventing diabetes and its complications.

While the Traditional Foods cooperative agreement (2008-2014) has ended, these pages have been maintained to share stories and teachings gleaned and generously shared by these programs. The CDC is dedicated to devoting resources to reduce health disparities and improve health in Indian Country. The announcement, “A Comprehensive Approach to Good Health and Wellness in Indian Country,” aims to prevent heart disease, diabetes, stroke, and associated risk factors in American Indian tribes and Alaska Native villages. The methods include: community-chosen and culturally-adapted policies, systems, and environmental changes that help to promote health and wellness and prevent and reduce heart disease, diabetes, stroke, and associated risk factors in American Indian tribes and Alaska Native villages.

Traditional Foods Stories

American Indian and Alaska Native communities across the country are reclaiming traditional foods as part of the global Indigenous food sovereignty movement that embraces identity, history, and traditional ways and practices to address health.

The stories below were compiled by Chelsea Wesner (Choctaw) to help NDWP understand the importance and meaning of traditional foods across Indian Country. The traditional foods stories represent Native communities across Indian Country.

[Part I—Traditional Foods in Native America Cdc-pdf\[PDF – 7 MB\]](#)

[Part II—Good Food is Power Cdc-pdf\[PDF – 3 MB\]](#)

[Part III—Compendium of Traditional Foods Stories Cdc-pdf\[PDF – 4 MB\]](#)

[Part IV—Traditional Foods in Native America Cdc-pdf\[PDF – 7 MB\]](#)

[Part V—Traditional Foods in Native America Cdc-pdf\[PDF – 8 MB\]](#)

Our Cultures Are Our Source of Health

This video highlights the wisdom of cultural knowledge, including harvesting local foods and playing traditional games, in promoting health and preventing diseases like type 2 diabetes in American Indian and Alaska Native communities.

- [Full Version \(9:02\)](#)
- [30 Seconds](#)
- [60 Seconds](#)

Traditional Foods Program and Map

The stories here highlight the CDC NDWP Traditional Foods Program grantee partner programs. These communities represent diverse cultures and geographies across Indian Country.

Traditional Foods Partners



The programs promote traditional approaches to health in their communities. Click on the sites on the Traditional Foods Map to discover observations and stories of the Traditional Foods Programs.

Aleutian Pribilof Islands Association (Alaska)

The Aleut Diet Program

- Provided widespread hands-on, sustainable opportunities in communities that focused on healthy and safe preparation, preservation, and used local traditional foods.
- Encouraged consumption of traditional foods, from both land and sea, and increased awareness of the nutritional benefits of traditional foods.
- Published *Qaqamiigux: Traditional Foods and Recipes from the Aleutian and Pribilof Islands: Nourishing Our Mind, Body, and Spirit for Generations*. The book includes

traditional values and stories, traditional foods recipes, and nutritional guidelines for healthy eating.

- Developed a website that promotes traditional foods. The site includes a glossary of traditional foods in the Aleut language, *Unangam tunuu*.
- Improved the quality and increased the variety of healthy food choices sold in local stores.
- Included a wide variety of traditional foods demonstrations by elders and local community members from across the region every year at the children's culture camp held in Anchorage, Alaska.

Catawba Cultural Preservation Project (South Carolina)

Catawba Lifestyle and Gardening Project

- Started and sustained gardens using traditional, ecological practices and growing methods.
- Established and sustained policy to serve water only as the beverage choice at all youth program functions.
- Collaborated with tribal programs to create and sustain family and community gardens.
- Established gardens and tribal farmers' markets that increased consumption of fruits, vegetables, beans, and herbs among tribal members.
- Increased physical activity opportunities for children and young people through gardening, fishing, gathering, and other traditional activities.

Cherokee Nation (Oklahoma)

Cherokee Nation Healthy Nation/Foods Project

- Promoted the cultivation, gathering, preparation, and preservation of traditional Cherokee foods.
- Developed Cherokee Nation's regional food hub.
- Collaborated with tribal programs to promote and preserve traditional Cherokee games of stickball and marbles.
- Engaged the community in traditional Cherokee games for physical activity.
- Expanded the Learn to Grow program, providing materials and technical assistance for gardening activities.
- Implemented the Farm-to-School program in Cherokee Nation schools.
- Hosted the CDC PSA filming of *Our Cultures are Our Source of Health*, which featured traditional stickball players from Cherokee Nation and representatives from four TFP

partners: Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, Salish–Kootenai College, Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians, and the Indian Health Care Resource Center of Tulsa.

Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians (Oregon)

Siletz Healthy Traditions Project

- Engaged the community to reclaim and promote gathering and preparing of traditional foods, being physically active, and preserving culture.
- Provided training activities, such as container garden workshops and worked with youth culture camps to gather plants and fish, to prepare, and preserve traditional foods.
- Provided opportunities to gather traditional foods from the sea, garden and hunt, all while teaching about protecting natural resources.
- Secured access to geographic areas not previously available for traditional foods gathering and hunting.
- Developed a culturally and geographically specific traditional foods calendar that describes traditional foods availability by seasons of the year.

Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians (North Carolina)

Healthy Roots for Healthy Futures program

- Partnered with Cherokee Central School District to establish and sustain the use of box gardens and a hydroponic system to grow lettuce using Good Agricultural Practices standards from the North Carolina Department of Agriculture.
- Restored traditional Cherokee trails as walking trails and demonstrated increase of their use by community members.
- Encouraged the use of school gardens as learning labs for the cultivation of native plants, food safety, science, social justice, and tribal heritage.
- Developed farm-to-school systems, community gardens, and farmers' markets.
- Used marketing campaigns that promoted the interconnectivity and positive effects of cultural pride, healthy traditional foods, and traditional physical activity.
- Taught Cherokee youth gardeners traditional organic farming methods.
- Eastern Band of Cherokee's food sovereignty initiatives such as the "Chief Garden Kit" distribution, which has now existed for 11 years, have increased capacity to grow heirloom crops and increase garden diversity.
- The Healthy Roots Project provided young people with experiential learning opportunities either to garden for the first time or increase knowledge about gardening and share experiences.

Indian Health Care Resource Center of Tulsa (Oklahoma)

Building Community—Strengthening Traditional Ties program

- Offered school-based health, nutrition, and physical education for a variety of community programs from summertime wellness camps to theatrical production classes.
- Generated traditional physical activities such as stickball, stomp, and powwow dancing in schools and other program settings.
- Provided physical activity and confidence-building for children, youths, and adults through an on-site ropes course taught by certified instructors.
- Provided sports and recreational camp programs that featured the CATCH curriculum and evaluated children's and youths' knowledge about health and wellness with CATCH evaluation tools.
- Engaged in policy advocacy, worked with state policy makers on healthy food initiatives, and addressed urban food deserts.
- Worked with two local elementary schools to establish gardening partnership and school-based health programs.
- Collaborated with Muscogee Food Sovereignty Initiative and Food Security Council to create awareness about growing traditional foods in urban settings.

Nooksack Indian Tribe (Washington)

Listen to the Elders: Healing Nooksack Health Through History program

- Increased knowledge and awareness of traditional foods through cooking demonstrations and food posters, and provided nutrition education at tribal events such as community breakfasts, Nooksack Days celebrations, and ceremonies.
- Promoted traditional foods through gardens, gathering, health education, and health promotion outreach events.
- Developed policies that addressed physical activities and traditional foods availability and access.
- Encouraged community members to build and maintain gardens.
- Reintroduced the war canoe culture, an indigenous game that promotes physical activity among tribal young people and adults.
- Developed traditional foods cookbook, available online at Wikibooks and Facebook.

Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation (Kansas)

Return to a Healthy Past program

- Encouraged PBPN cultural practices of gathering wild edible plants, and cultivating and harvesting wild traditional meats.

- Implemented gathering and gardening methods of preparing, distributing, and using traditional foods for tribal programs and communities.
- Increased the number of community and family gardens from 11 in 2011 to 51 gardens in 2014.
- Collaborated with the Tribal Commodity Distribution Program and provided canning classes.
- Reintroduced heirloom corn seeds demonstrating how to plant and harvest for use by community members.
- Distributed traditional foods to child care and Head Start programs, the Boys and Girls Club, and the Elders Center.
- Launched the first Harvest Festival in 2009, for which tribal members provided traditional foods they had grown, such as pumpkin, milk weed, wild rice, wild onions, and wild potato.

Ramah Navajo School Board (New Mexico)

Empowering Ramah Navajo to Eat Healthy by Using Traditional Foods program

- Reestablished a sustainable dry-land agriculture system through composting, organic growing methods, and water harvesting.
- By the end of the program, successfully implemented 8.4 acres of gardens of traditional and healthy local foods.
- Collaborated with tribal programs to implement a seed bank, which included heirloom seeds.
- Collected stories and digital stories on traditional planting, growing, harvesting, hunting, and preparing or preserving Navajo traditional foods.
- Coordinated, assisted, and trained community members on gardening, water harvesting, and composting.
- Updated the *Traditional Navajo Foods & Cooking* book, which includes information on composting, gardening, and water harvesting, as well as Navajo traditional recipes.
- Conducted a series of physical activity events called the “Honor Walk” that educated the community about the Navajo’s Long Walk, *Whééldi in Dine’*, history and tallied community members’ walking miles to match the miles their ancestors walked to Bosque Redondo.

Red Lake Band of Chippewa Indians (Minnesota)

Old Ways for Today’s Health program

- Increased tribal member's knowledge of and skills for preparing traditional foods and encouraging healthy Anishinaabe living. Traditional foods were offered at community health conferences and other community gatherings.
- Developed a 12-month calendar that displayed traditional foods, Anishinaabe culture, traditional recipes, and type 2 diabetes prevention education.
- Taught young people about seasonal traditional food preparation, such as harvesting and gathering berries and wild rice, hunting, fishing, maple sugar bushing, and gardening.
- Provided community members with starter plants, gardens, greenhouses, and fruit trees for community and family use.
- Held physical activity events that promoted healthy living, such as powwows, a Sobriety Run, and seasonal youth culture camps.
- Established a Facebook page with postings of traditional foods recipes, photos, gardening information, and a calendar of traditional foods events.

Salish Kootenai College (Montana)

Traditional Living Challenge in Contemporary Times: Indigenous Knowledge for Community Wellness program

- Offered healthy nutritional traditional foods and snacks for young people during summer physical activity programs and the school year.
- Taught Salish and Kootenai traditions and culture through nutrition and healthy living education for tribal youths and their families.
- Provided organized physical activity opportunities, including traditional games, for young people through the Boys & Girls Club, Head Start program, summer culture camps, and community events.
- Increased and improved active lifestyles for young people through other opportunities for traditional games, hiking, fishing, gardening, archery, swimming, hunting, and gathering activities.
- Restored indigenous Salish and Kootenai permaculture practices of the tribe, focusing on bitter root crops and related physical activity.
- Taught gathering, hunting, and preparation of traditional foods, including: buffalo stew, squash soup, huckleberries, buffalo burgers, venison burgers, buffalo chili, wild onions, and chicken wild rice soup.
- Held nutrition classes for children using theater, songs, puppets, and teacher training to encourage eating healthy foods and being physically active and used the Eagle Books stories in classrooms, programs, and Head Start to encourage these healthy messages.

Santee Sioux Nation (Nebraska)

Wiconi Unki Tawapi—Healing Our Lives program

- Promoted traditional healthy living among tribal members through culture clubs, canning classes, diabetes education, physical activity, traditional foods gathering practices, and gardening.
- Provided regular organized physical activity opportunities for tribal members of all ages groups at the Tribal Wellness Center.
- Encouraged children and adults to create family gardens and plant, water, weed, and harvest vegetables and fruits.
- Educated tribal members about traditional healthy foods, physical activity, and traditional teaching and practices through the Elders Share the Past talking circles.
- Provided social support, lessons on cultural heritage, traditional healthy foods, gardening, camping, and traditional physical activities, such swimming in the river and playing traditional games through the Young Braves Youth Group.

Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians (Michigan)

Uniting to Create Traditional and Healthy Environments program

- Provided access to and availability of traditional foods and encouraged their use in communities across eight districts.
- Provided intergenerational instruction on cooking, growing, harvesting, and planting traditional foods.
- Provided training, workshops, and classes on canning, freezing, smoking, and drying to preserve healthy foods for use through the long winters.
- Established community garden workshops throughout the nine service units, which promoted fresh produce use in the community and for Harvest Feasts.
- Established organized traditional physical activity opportunities, such as snowshoeing during the winter months.
- Reintroduced indigenous foods and practices specific to the land, history, and culture of the Anishinaabe People, including starter plants and gardens.

Southeast Alaska Regional Health Care Consortium (Alaska)

WISEFAMILIES Through Customary and Traditional Living program

- Promoted awareness and education on Tlingit traditional foods and cultural activities.
- Partnered with the local advisory team to encourage traditional physical activities.
- Provided health education through Tlingit storytelling.
- Developed a Southeast Alaska Traditional Food Guide that includes information on gathering local plants and berries.

- Created a four-season calendar of Tlingit traditional foods, seasonal plants, and availability of food from the sea, called *When the Tide Goes Out, the Table Is Set*.
- Established a SEARHC Traditional Foods and Wisdom Facebook account.
- Supported community-driven programs that build on healthy, traditional eating and physical activity such as gardening, seafood distribution, and berry gathering.
- Provided education and physical activity through traditional canoe paddling workshops and events.
- Used the 25-year-old youth culture camp every summer to encourage gathering and hunting traditional foods and learning how to prepare them.
- Provided digital story training to all traditional foods grantee partners early in the program; digital stories became a popular way to talk about health and traditional foods in many grantee communities.

Standing Rock Sioux Tribe (North Dakota and South Dakota)

Native Gardens Project: An Indigenous Permaculture Approach to the Prevention and Treatment of Diabetes

- Increased indigenous traditional knowledge awareness and skills to promote healthy living through gardening and physical activity.
- Increased availability of and access to fresh local foods through family and community gardens.
- Established regular farmers' markets and roadside stands to sell traditional foods and other healthy fruits and vegetables.
- Supported the Farm-to-School program that provided fresh local produce to be served in tribal schools.
- Collaborated with USDA Food and Nutrition Services to distribute USDA food vouchers to tribal elders for use at local farmers' market. In 2012, 100% of the 3,285 vouchers distributed, valued at \$16,425 total, were redeemed.

Tohono O'odham Community Action (Arizona)

O'odham Ha'ic'u Ha-Hugi c Duakog: Tohono O'odham Food, Fitness and Wellness Initiative Project

- Increased access to affordable, healthy, locally harvested traditional Tohono O'odham foods through farming.
- Expanded culturally based educational activities in local schools that promoted healthy food traditions and the heritage of health.
- Established the first Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) Program in the Tohono O'odham Nation.

- Started seed-saving project where farmers were responsible for preserving traditional seeds from their gardens.
- Increased education and access to tepary beans, a traditional crop of the Tohono O'odham Nation, in the community and school system.
- Youth group interns of the Project Oidag learned how to grow and market freshly grown traditional and non-traditional foods, and the interns created and led a series of Growing to Renew Our World workshops in the community.
- Project's Desert Rain Café partnered with Santa Rosa Day School (a BIE School) to pilot a program that revamped the food service, serving meals that incorporated traditional O'odham foods.
- Established *Native Foodways* magazine in 2013, which promotes traditional healthy foods, food sovereignty, and traditional knowledge about indigenous foodways.

United Indian Health Services (California)

Food Is Good Medicine program

- Established organic gardens for tribal facilities and entities.
- Developed young adult leadership program and collected stories about traditional foods.
- Supported the creation of digital stories by local high school students about food, foodways, and the Yurok language.
- Developed the *Food Is Good Medicine* guide.
- Partnered with WIC and Diabetes and Elder Nutrition programs to distribute healthy, freshly grown foods from program gardens.
- Developed an advocacy tool kit for tribal communities to increase awareness and encouraged use of traditional foods, called *Got Acorns?*
- Established and implemented marketing and communication plans with tribal programs and organizations to promote traditional foods.
- Transplanted native plants to use for basket making.
- Increased access to and availability of produce from the Potawot Community Food Gardens.
- Provided education about traditional foods at community events and conferences.