

NATIVE YOUTH LEADERS

REVITALIZING & EMBRACING WELLNESS THROUGH FOOD
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NATIVE YOUTH LEADERS:

Revitalizing & Embracing Wellness Through Food

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February 4th, 2015, marked a momentous day, when a diverse group of Native youth leaders from numerous communities across New Mexico, Arizona, and South Dakota came together to discuss an extremely important topic, *Revitalizing and Embracing Wellness Through Food*. This gathering marked the beginning of a rolling movement to reach far beyond individuals to families and communities and ultimately the future generations yet to come.

From my childhood I have been told, just like numerous others have been told, that one day our grandparents and parents will no longer walk this earth and that we will be the ones responsible for carrying on the teachings shared with us from the ones that have come before us, to help those that will come after us. The Native Youth Leaders gathering was an echo of that reality.

The group of individuals that came together at this gathering felt the reality of this responsibility. Everyone present had a strong desire to share their stories and ideas of how to revitalize and embrace wellness through food.

Since the gathering I have shared a story with numerous people I have crossed paths with from Florida to Hawaii of the day when Native Youth Leaders to voice their concerns with how to revitalize and embrace wellness through food. The people who have now heard the story have been inspired and impressed to know that such a dynamic group of Native Youth Leaders had come together with the desire to help others. I can only imagine the impact of the stories others have shared about this gathering and the numerous lives it has touched, but even more important is the lives that will be touched as the message of the gift of healing is spread.

The Notah Begay III Foundation, Ogallala Commons, and First Nations Development Institute wish to express gratitude to all those who made the *Native Youth Leaders: Revitalizing and Embracing Wellness Through Food* gathering possible to create an environment for Native Youth Leaders to share their insights.

~ Nikki Tulley






INTRODUCTION

The following report outlines the key activities, themes and outcomes of the gathering entitled, Native Youth Leaders: Revitalizing and Embracing Wellness Through Food that took place at the Indian Pueblo Cultural Center in Albuquerque, New Mexico on February 4, 2015. The purpose of the Native Youth Leader gathering was to bring together youth from different communities to share their efforts with food and wellness, learn from one another, grow their networks and participate in roundtable discussions with leaders in this area.

Twenty eight youth, ages 14-26, were selected through written applications to attend the gathering and contribute based on their activities as leaders and advocates within their own communities, their experiences with food and their involvement in and commitment to health and wellness. Participants' tribal affiliation included the Mescalero Apache Tribe, and Navajo Nation, Oglala Sioux Tribe, Tohono O'odham Nation and six Pueblos: Cochiti, Jemez, Laguna, Picuris, San Felipe, and Taos communities with equal numbers of males and females in attendance.

The conference was born out of a conversation about youth, food and health. In the opening introduction it was repeatedly expressed by organizational leaders that the youth voice was important. Are they growing food, have access to food, have their hands in food? Food has to be the basis of health and health systems.

It was also expressed, by the organizers, that this event is remarkable because it brought together Native youth who realize the importance of the topic. Each youth who participated is remarkable – his/her words/ideas/community work is really special. They came to share and learn in order to help their communities.



KEY GATHERING ACTIVITIES

The key gathering activities were the keynote, roundtable discussions, Community Snapshot and Rez Café.

KEYNOTE

The Pueblo Food Experience...What Food Means To Us. Roxanne Swentzell, Santa Clara Pueblo.

Roxanne Swentzell began her keynote by sharing that she loved plastering hornos and sowing seeds of traditional crops and incorporated all these passions in her life to develop the Flowering Tree Permaculture Institute. Her key messages included:

- 1 how the incorporation of Native people into the mainstream has created a more consumerist way of living resulting in less farming and negatively impacting holistic health,
- 2 the positive health impacts of eating pre-contact foods as evident in the Pueblo Food Experience and
- 3 the understanding that comes from the reconnection to food, culture, and the environment - that when there is care, connection, and love for your relationship with food, food is good, food is medicine.



ROUNDTABLES • BREAKOUTS

The keynote was followed by six different roundtable/breakout presentations and discussions that ran concurrently for three rounds. Each participant attended a different presentation each round for a total of three different presentations. Each presentation engaged an average of six participants.

ROUNDTABLE BREAKOUT 1

Local Food and the Community

Speaker: Tiana Suazo, Taos Pueblo, Taos County Economic Development Corporation (TCEDC)

This presentation discussed the important relationship between food and community and how that relationship affects the health and wellness of the people in the community. The presentation also described the TCEDC community kitchen and the services it offers those aspiring to start a small food business. The presenter shared how her internship with TCEDC helped her to connect food, community and career. Volunteering at a farm reconnected her to her community and gardening was a way for her to connect to the youth. Discussions following the presentation included, 1) participants identifying communities that

have small farms, 2) how farmers market on reservations can be challenging because of attendance and unfamiliarity with some produce items, 3) interests in exploring a cooperative approach to food entrepreneurship and 4) the need for a commercial kitchen.

ROUNDTABLE BREAKOUT 2

This presentation discussed the Oyate Teca Project in Kyle, South Dakota. The project grew out of the need to develop accessible, affordable and sustainable local food as there was none in the community and residents in the community went to grocery and convenient stores that charged high prices because the food was trucked in. The project developed gardens, traveling farmers market and partnered with local community organizations to grow food to supplement healthy foods needed across the reservation and focused on education. Discussions with participants centered on 1) food sovereignty, 2) accepting funding and resource from outside entities but keeping programming local and 3) the trainings needed to maintain thriving gardens to promote self-sufficiency.

Project Engaging Native Youth in Gardening Programs & Why it is Important

Speaker: Steve Hernandez, Oglala Sioux Tribe, Pine Ridge, South Dakota, Oyate Teca Project



ROUNDTABLE BREAKOUT 3

Empowering Youth for Healthy Food Systems

Speakers: Ventura Suazo & Daniel Nieto,
Santo Domingo Pueblo, Native Vision

This presentation provided an overview of Johns Hopkins Center for American Indian Health (Center) innovative and holistic initiatives called Feast For the Future (FFF) to ensure American Indian children and communities have access to healthy and nutritious foods and to promote Native communities capacity to reintroduce healthy indigenous foods and agriculture. Discussions with participants involved 1) visioning what they want for their community food system which included gardens for children's programs to help with access, 2) hands-on activities, 3) learning the language and teachings and 4) healthier snacking 5) growing plants native to the area 6) learning more about healthier nutritional lifestyles to educate younger Native students about the importance of eating healthy and getting involved in community gardens 7) approaching the tribe's council on initiating food projects and eliminating commodity dependence.

ROUNDTABLE BREAKOUT 4

Food is Medicine

Speaker: Justin Casiquito, Pueblo of Jemez,
Wadashile' Gardens

This presentation discussed how one could live by example and promote farming tradition and wellness. The presenter shared his experience with wanting to keep the culture alive and be that link for his people to help them be healthy and to provide access to low-cost, local, organic foods full of nutrients and vitamins. He noticed something was happening where people were made to choose - go to work and get paid or stay home and be a traditionalist. He is trying to bring them together and make a living. He saw the disconnection, how people do not plant anymore and how farmers are underestimated and not respected anymore. Farmers are like doctors; they grow medicine. He wanted to uphold tradition because food is medicine. He is living the example that people could see. At first he began by telling people "you need to do this, you need to that" and that was pushing people away. So then he just started living. When he took the approach of living the example, so many people started coming to him, asking questions. Elders came and shared stories.

ROUNDTABLE BREAKOUT 5

Project Oidag: Making a Toolbox

Speaker: Jesse Pablo, Tohono O'odham Nation,
Tohono O'odham Community Action (TOCA)

This presentation shared the activities of TOCA's youth-driven program and how youth can take what they have done and apply it to their own community by building their own tool box. Project Oidag teaches classes to surrounding elementary schools where each school has its own garden. It is also trying to farm traditionally by creating a holding pond with drainage ditches rather than using pipes to irrigate. The presenter also provided a practical planning tool called a mind map, which he walked through with participants. Instead of using a checklist, the mind map allows the brain to think more holistically by using colors and squiggly lines, which helps in fostering the thought process and creative thinking.

ROUNDTABLE BREAKOUT 6

Generations of Seeds

Speaker: Kyle Swimmer, Pueblo of Laguna, Environment Engineer at New Mexico Tech

This presentation discussed, 1) what has been lost when using the grocery store instead of growing food, 2) Native peoples ancient knowledge about farming and how it relates to today's food, 3) what can be gained from planting ancient seeds and indigenous knowledge, its place in western science and why an indigenous diet is important for Native people to maintain. The presenter shared that he farms to carry the tradition of food and agriculture. He defines sustainable agriculture as growing one's own food in a way that does not hurt the environment or anyone. Food is sacred, and when produced with "love and compassion" will nourish family, spirit, heart

and senses. He discussed the evolutionary trait developed in Native people, 1) from a history of eating a different diet, 2) seed trading, 3) the sacred significance of seeds in connecting generations to the past and future, 4) how seeds are babies, the planter taking responsibilities to care for them like their own children, and 5) the powerful knowledge contained in seeds. Forced into government diet and lifestyle of commodities, there is a loss to not producing food locally. Participants discussed how farming tradition is being lost, that young people have no enthusiasm for farming, and the importance of community education.

COMMUNITY SNAPSHOT

After lunch, the participants were asked to draw an image(s) that represents their community. The Community Snapshot activity allowed participants to share the wellness within their communities visually by putting on paper words, symbols, and text that represent their community. They then broke up into six small groups to share their snapshots and discuss what makes their community unique and their similarities and differences.



The groups identified the landscape including the 1) pueblo, structure, kiva, 2) pipe smoking, staff, 3) the river, 4) the way we work together and being so different in reservations locations but still the same in the way they identify with their community. The group had similarities concerning health, nutrition, technology, environment, family and home as center, leading by example, being inspirational, cultural

beliefs, all tribes here grow food, water is sacred and the need to learn to plant because of dependency on buffalo, which gave us everything, and now are scarce. Other similarities mentioned across most of the groups are the connection with animals (buffalo, deer, bear, livestock, fish, elk, hawks, eagles, horse) and traditional/cultural activities (pow-wows, dances, clans, baskets, traditional games). The

differences between communities are fast food, trailer homes, North Dakota pipeline, fracking, blue collar, location, vocation, geographical (mountains/desert; plains/prairie), and traditional food (buffalo original sustenance for plains tribes, now learning agriculture; deer sustenance for Apache).

REZ CAFÉ

The Rez Café provided participants a forum in which to lead discussions on their topic of interest by hosting their own table and offered further learning. Remaining participants picked a table/topic and contributed to the discussion.

Food as Health: Smoothies

Discussion of perception of smoothies and 1) what can be put into them, 2) preference over fruits and veggies, 3) juicing versus smoothies, 4) nutrients, 5) using smoothies as medicine, and 6) that it is good for kids to make garden smoothies utilizing fresh fruit and veggies that they grow themselves.

Healthcare for all Native Tribes

Discussion of challenges like access/long waits and doctors at Indian Health Services not caring. The group listed ways to keep people healthy so they do not have to go to the doctor: 1) education and knowledge, 2) medicinal plants, 3) preventative health - exercising and stretching, gym, traditions, promoting good health practices, 4) better mental health facilities - self-love to overcome historical traumas, 5) better hospitals/healthcare, 6) have tribally-controlled insurance agencies and a tribally-controlled clinic (move away from federal government owned and controlled), 7) hire tribal employees, 8) look towards tribal council for help and tribal sovereignty is the key.

Acequias in Taos Pueblo

The group presenter shared his concern about the decline of ditches and farming in Taos Pueblo and how this came to be. It was recommended for him to have a conversation with his grandparents about their irrigation and water use.

Traditional Stories and Knowledge

The group shared briefly some of their beliefs and stories including a Pueblo origin story and discussed oral tradition, medicinal uses of certain berries and plants, and the preservation of Native medicine knowledge.



School Garden

The group discussed, 1) the teachings that is sometimes done with school gardens, 2) how to get one started, 3) the challenges involved and the connection with the elements, science/math, stories and songs.

Culture and Songs

The group discussed: 1) different seasons to gather different plants/fruits, 2) what females in certain tribes wear to gather/harvest, 3) how they wear their hair to gather and its teachings, and 4) the different songs that are sung for different seasons, planting, gathering, hunting, and corn.

THEMES

Throughout the day, numerous themes emerged from the activities as different presenters and participants mention the same issues two or more times. These themes highlight the similarities among diverse communities in regards to revitalizing and embracing wellness through food.

- Elders (planting, harvesting, stories, giving seeds, songs, teaching traditions and language)
- Obesity in communities
- Importance of family
- Reconnection/compassion and love of food
- Food is medicine/food is sacred
- Community education (gardening, cooking, entrepreneurship, promoting wellness)
- Farming is disappearing/disconnection to the land
- Keeping culture/traditions alive through farming
- Gardens (school, community, personal)
- Farmers market
- Running important in some communities
- Irrigation (pipe/drip, holding pond with drainage ditches, flood)
- Water is sacred/water is life
- Songs
- Need for community commercial kitchen
- Keep food affordable, accessible and local
- Eliminate dependence on outside sources and commodities
- Sustainable agriculture
- Sovereignty (food, healthcare, tribal)
- Working with tribal leadership and council



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NB3

Jarrett Kazhe
Participant



OUTCOMES

At the end of the Native Youth Leaders gathering, participants were asked to complete a short survey form asking them to assess the gathering. Twenty-eight youth returned their anonymous survey forms.

Overall, participants rated the gathering as excellent. At least three fourths of the respondents rated each presenter, on a scale of 1 to 5, the highest scale of 5 with one respondent rating Roxanne's keynote a 10. All respondent answered, yes, that they were satisfied with the roundtable discussions and yes, that the Community Snapshot and Rez Café exercises helped to enhance the topics discussed. Almost half of the respondents felt, "the extent to which the NB3F Native Strong: Healthy Kids, Healthy Futures, Ogallala Commons, First Nations Development Institute is an important resource for you in carrying out your work" is extremely important and one third felt it was very important. Lastly, only one third of respondent "have attended any food and wellness events for Native youth."

In the qualitative portion of the survey, youth were asked what they liked most about the gathering. Almost half the

respondent referenced the learning aspect of the gathering, including "learning new things," "sharing ideas" and "hearing information" and what they liked second most, referenced by almost two fifths of the participants was meeting new people. "School garden" and "community garden" were the most common response by one fourth of the participants to the question, "Using the tools you have gained from this gathering, what tools do you plan on implementing when you return home?"

The survey also provided good feedback on future gatherings and areas of development. Respondent would like to see more topics on health and wellness, cultural identity, traditional customs and food, and community gardens and farms featured if there are future gatherings. Almost two fifths of respondents said the gathering was "too short" and another two fifths stated "shyness" and "people were hesitant to participate" in response to the question, "What did you like least about the gathering?"

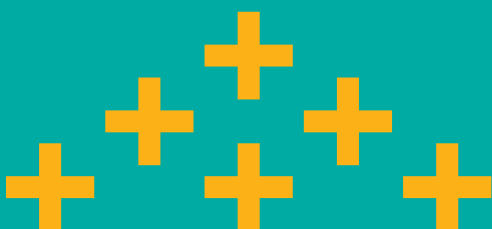


CLOSING COMMENTS

The conference was a success due to the leadership, knowledge and insights that each presenter and participant brought with them from their community through their participation that enriched everyone as a whole. It is clear that food in Native community is connected to all aspect of life and traditions and its disconnection has resulted in a change of lifestyle that is negatively impacting the holistic health of individuals and communities. Revitalization and reconnection are critical and are occurring at various levels but there is much more work to be done. This gathering has initiated the process of sharing the successful work that is being done in different communities to educate, increase access, promote and build community around issues of food and wellness. Participants have stated that they are

interested in taking the information they have learned to work with their communities to implement gardening to promote food and wellness. With their interests to continue this work in their communities, the seeds of food and wellness will continue to grow.

We thank each of the presenters and participants for all the ways in which they gave of themselves to contribute to the gathering. We hope that this event and its corresponding report inspire others to provide youth with opportunities to offer their voices and share their experiences to enhance discussions and generate solutions to issues of community wellness.







The Notah Begay III Foundation
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