

Second Annual  
Conference on

# NATIVE AMERICAN NUTRITION

CONFERENCE REPORT

SEPTEMBER 17-20, 2017  MYSTIC LAKE  
CASINO HOTEL

**Hosted and Sponsored by**

Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community  
and University of Minnesota's Healthy Foods,  
Healthy Lives Institute



**“This is a unique conference that brings together the latest in nutrition science and the remarkable perspectives of our traditional leaders. I think both the traditional world and the scientific community have much to learn from each other. This conference provides the perfect venue for a new type of learning to occur.”**



**Donald Warne, MD, MPH (Oglala Lakota)**  
Professor and Chair,  
*Department of Public Health, North Dakota State University*



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From a rich exchange of traditional knowledge, innovative practice and research, and perspectives from academics, practitioners, youth, and elders, the Second Annual Conference on Native American Nutrition focused on three main themes: (1) healthfulness of traditional foods; (2) metrics and best practices for success in community-university collaborations; and (3) environment, land and nutrition. This experience afforded conference participants the opportunity to explore the interaction between and integration of Indigenous wisdom and academic knowledge.

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**IN RECENT YEARS,** *tribal nations and tribal-serving organizations have worked hard to restore traditional teachings and practices that support the health and resilience of Indigenous people and cultures. Uplifting traditional foods through hunting, harvesting and processing, as well as nutrition education and economic development initiatives serve as the pathway for Native longevity and health. We must continue generating necessary knowledge, partnerships and resources to ensure a healthy future for tribal nations.*

On behalf of the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community and University of Minnesota Healthy Foods, Healthy Lives Institute, we were pleased to co-host the Second Annual Conference on Native American Nutrition on September 17-20, 2017. From its inception, this conference series has been envisioned as a venue for the exchange and integration of Indigenous wisdom and academic knowledge. Leaders, researchers and practitioners can discuss critical work, vital questions and crucial needs associated with food, nutrition and culture to solve the dietary health crisis in Indian Country. We trust that the conference, the leadership of many participants, and the powerful impacts will further the momentum of restoring well-being among Indigenous people and nations.

This year, keynote speakers, panelists and breakout and poster session presenters shared compelling examples and insights that focused on:

**Use of Indigenous wisdom and academic research to improve Native American nutrition**

**Community/university nutrition research collaborations**

**Environment, land and nutrition**

**Perspectives of elders and youth**

**Exemplary initiatives and innovative work in Indian Country**

This report synthesizes information and insights shared by these powerful presenters.

The response to the inaugural conference was extraordinary; this year, we expanded the conference program from two to three days. The 500 conference participants came from 37 states, four Canadian provinces, as well as Mexico and New Zealand; 60% of attendees were Native American, representing dozens of tribes. Participants reflected a range of backgrounds, including tribal officials and employees, nutrition educators, government officials, researchers, students, and funders.

We offer our deep gratitude to conference planning committee members — longstanding leaders in elevating the visibility of the crucial role that food and nutrition play in the sovereignty and resilience of Native American nations.

Thank you for helping us make a lasting contribution to the movement to restore Native Americans' health, foodways, and power of self-determination. We hope you will join us for the Third Annual Conference on Native American Nutrition on October 2-5, 2018.



**Mindy Kurzer, PhD**

*Conference Chair*

*Director, Healthy Foods, Healthy Lives Institute, College of Food, Agricultural and Natural Resource Sciences, University of Minnesota*



**Charles R. Vig**

*Chairman*

*Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community*

## SESSION I HEALTHFULNESS OF TRADITIONAL FOODS

The conference opened with a presentation of the colors by the Sisseton-Wahpeton Kit Fox Society, an honor song from Ghost Nation, a Native drum group, and a blessing from Leonard Wabasha. The opening ceremony set the stage for a conference grounded in Native traditions and spirituality.

### MODERATOR

**Holly Hunts, PhD**  
Montana State University

### SPEAKERS

**Abigail Echo-Hawk, MA**  
(Pawnee/Athbascan),  
Seattle Indian Health Board

**Elisabeth Echo-Hawk Kawe**  
(Pawnee/Athbascan),  
Indigenous Wellness for  
Headwater People

**Gary Ferguson, ND**  
(Unangan/Aleut),  
Rural Alaska Community  
Action Program

**Linda Black Elk, MS**  
(Catawba Nation),  
Sitting Bull College

### ELDER RESPONDENT

**Beverly Stabber-Warne, RN,**  
MSN (Oglala Lakota),  
South Dakota State University



**“We have always looked at information, analyzed it, and done what we needed to do to protect the health of our people.”**

**Abigail Echo-Hawk**

The conference’s first plenary session featured a series of speakers who focused on concepts of transformational eating and health benefits of Indigenous foods, followed by a response from a tribal elder. For Native Peoples, nutrition involves complex, culturally rigorous practice, where specific protocols are used to ensure cultural

perpetuity; accurate transmission of traditional teachings; sensitive and respectful stewardship of the land, water, and all living beings; and appropriate gifting and gratitude to ensure good health. Elders – who are the keepers and guardians of this knowledge – teach and oversee Native ways of knowing around nutrition.

**“Elders and ancestors  
guide us toward the foods  
that keep us well and are  
part of our tradition.”**

**Gary Ferguson**



## Transformational Eating

**Abigail Echo-Hawk**  
**Elisabeth Echo-Hawk Kawe**

Gifts and gratitude play an essential role in Indigenous cultural identity and health; they are foundational to Indigenous nutritional paradigms. Growing, harvesting, gifting and receiving traditional foods in the old ways reflects a cultural rigor that readies the body to accept the medicine these foods offer. When an elder teaches children specific protocols for how to catch, process and give traditional foods, they are sharing the healing power of gifting and gratitude. Understanding their powerful, transformative influence on Native health and nutrition can also be helpful in healing historical trauma and deeply connecting Indigenous people to place.

## Indigenous Foods Improve Health

**Gary Ferguson**

Indigenous people were once healthy. Working with elders to remember and reclaim ancestral diets and medicines are powerful acts of decolonization and re-Indigenization. These food traditions – and the protocols that accompany them – support individual and community actualization and sustain Native cultures through time. Elders teach Indigenous communities how to gather foods and medicine, showing us nutrient-dense foods that promote health and culture. To maintain Native health and advance food sovereignty, it is important to take responsibility for the perpetuity of these traditional foods, caring for animals and plants. We must document our knowledge however we can, integrating it into curriculum for our children.

**“I was impressed by the conference and felt very grounded, centered and calm when I returned. As we go through life, we sometimes lose track of our roots and the teaching of our families. It is amazing that a large conference like this can send one away with wholeness.”**



**Nonie Woolf (Yakama/Choctaw)**  
*Retired public health nutritionist*  
FAST Blackfeet member

SESSION I  
HEALTHFULNESS OF TRADITIONAL FOODS

## Food Is Medicine

Linda Black Elk

Indigenous wisdom is science. Elders learned about the value of a wide variety of plants and their uses for healing through observation and trials. They share their teachings about these plants, giving the gift of this science so we can continue to share it. Many benefits of the plants identified and remembered by our elders have been confirmed by Western science. We have eaten these foods for generations. Plants are alive. As our relatives – they take care of us, and we protect them.

## What The Elder Says

Beverly Stabber-Warne

Context affects nutrition for tribal people. Geography, values and policy matter, affecting availability, accessibility, affordability, quality, quantity, cultural familiarity of food – and, ultimately, health. Years ago, families subsisted on hunting, gathering, fishing and gardening. But federal Indian policy has dramatically and problematically shaped the nutrition of Native peoples. When Native youth were sent to boarding schools, diets were low in nutrients and high in calories, and didn't reflect tribal cultures. Many Native families rely on federal feeding programs, which resulted in diets high in refined carbohydrates. The Lakota values of generosity, wisdom, fortitude, courage, honor, respect and humility can guide us as we work to improve nutrition in Indian Country and reclaim our traditions.



**“We need to respect Indigenous wisdom as science – this collective knowledge of thousands of people over thousands of years interacting with the landscape and participating with our plant relatives.”**

Linda Black Elk

### TEACHINGS

*Presenters shared important teachings that can guide collective thinking and practice around Native American nutrition, traditional foods and research. To build healthy, resilient Native nations, we need to ground our work in the teachings, values, protocols and culture of Indigenous communities.*

#### ◆ MAINTAIN THE POWER OF TRIBAL NATIONS

Respect Indigenous data sovereignty  
Ensure regulation of research by tribal communities

#### ◆ USE CULTURE TO HEAL

Culture is medicine  
Humility is one of the most important cultural values  
Observation, listening and humility all feed into teaching and learning  
Reclaiming our traditions is decolonizing

#### ◆ DO THE WORK IN THE RIGHT WAY

Gifts and gratitude are foundational to Native nutrition paradigms  
Observe proper protocol and respect the wisdom of elders  
Always seek permission from elders to share knowledge with others  
Learn about values and their relationship to natural life – including how we nourish ourselves – from elders

## SESSION II

# COMMUNITY/UNIVERSITY COLLABORATIONS: METRICS FOR SUCCESS

### MODERATOR

**Abigail Echo-Hawk, MA**  
(Pawnee/Athbascan),  
*Seattle Indian Health Board*

### SPEAKERS

**Donald Warne, MD, MPH**  
(Oglala Lakota), *North Dakota State University*

**Sharon Ka'iulani Odom,**  
MPH, RD (Native Hawaiian),  
*Ko'ua Kalihī Valley Health Clinic*

**Debbie Goodwin**  
(Ngai Tū hoe/Whakatō hea),  
*DBZ Consultancy Ltd.*

### Why Evaluate?

**Donald Warne**



Evaluation is an applied approach to learning about what works and how to make effective improvements to programs and interventions. Often linear, it can also be designed in an iterative, cyclical way that is more complementary to Native paradigms. Meaningful evaluation in Indian Country should be driven by what the community wants to learn, what kind of benefits accrue to the community as a result of the evaluation, and an understanding that complex challenges require holistic solutions. An Indigenous approach to evaluation that involves authentic tribal participation can guide program design to strongly resonate with community priorities. Evaluation can also help to illuminate the source of public health and clinical conditions. During implementation, it is valuable to see what aspects of a program achieve desired results, and at the end, the overall programmatic impact.

There are multiple purposes and ways to design evaluation and collect data based on an Indigenous cultural perspective. Participatory approaches are effective and should occur at the onset of evaluation planning. This type of evaluation – exemplified by the one developed for tribally focused efforts that were part of the Minnesota Department of Health's Statewide Health Improvement Program (SHIP) – can build tribal capacity in public health, policy, health education, and health services. Tribal participation for planning the evaluation along with data collection and reporting is essential.

**“After just two years of attendance, I now have connections across the United States at every level. I always leave inspired by learning from elders and innovative programs across the country and the world. After years of searching, I feel like at last I have found ‘my peeps’ – a group of diverse and dedicated professionals that shares my passion for working towards food sovereignty and improved nutritional outcomes in Indian Country.”**



**Holly Hunts, PhD**  
Associate Professor  
Human Development and Family Science  
*Montana State University*

**“The recovery of the people is tied to the recovery of food, since food itself is medicine – not only for the body, but also for the soul and spiritual connection to history, ancestors, and the land. Food first comes from our relatives – food has a culture, history, story and relationships. For us as Hawaiians – taro is our older brother, as is the land. The older siblings have a responsibility to care for us; our job is to care for them.”**

**Sharon Ka’iulani Odom**



## **An Indigenous Framework of Health**

**Sharon Ka’iulani Odom**

Aipono is an Indigenous Hawaiian healthy eating movement encompassing food, culture, history and traditional knowledge. The Waimānalo Health Center on Oahu offers a diverse, integrated array of successful healthy food-related initiatives, including education, nutrition, onsite food production and aggregation from local farms, food distribution, a café and more. However, Western-oriented funder requirements for evaluation measurement were ill-suited to assess the impact of these Indigenous health strategies. Using a culturally targeted story-sharing project engaging communities and families, the clinic discovered four key themes of Indigenous health, including connection to place, connection to

others, connection to past and future (including culture), and connection to better self, with spirituality serving as an overarching indicator. These themes formed the basis of an Indigenous evaluation framework that uses a story-gathering method to collect and analyze information for evaluation purposes. The clinic has integrated this framework into all facets of operations; funders now accept this approach; the University’s medical school teaches it to students; the state department of health employs it; and, through trainings, numerous agencies across six islands now deploy it for their own evaluation purposes.

SESSION II

COMMUNITY/UNIVERSITY COLLABORATIONS:  
METRICS FOR SUCCESS

**Kaupapa Māori Evaluation Frameworks**

**Debbie Goodwin**

In New Zealand, Indigenous programs and evaluation methods have mostly excluded Māori worldviews and stakeholders. For scholars and Indigenous communities, it is important to understand that each brings knowledge as partners that – when braided together – can improve the health of tribal people. Using a Māori-centered approach to evaluation becomes even more powerful when affected stakeholders co-design the approach with researchers and evaluators. This evaluation model is framed by an important treaty, controlled and owned by Māori people, and based on the Māori worldview. This framework meets Māori needs and goals, aims to make a positive difference, and provides information about the value of the specific program to Indigenous people. In all cases, Māori customs and thought guide the design and execution of the research and evaluation. While the evaluation centers Māori culture in its approach, evaluators and their partners can find this approach time-consuming and challenging to meaningfully engage community members.



**“With your basket and my basket, the people will live. You at this handle, and I at this handle of the basket. How will you and I collect the cockles and carry them home together?”**

**Debbie Goodwin**

**“Evidence-based practices rarely have evidence based in Indian Country.”**

**Donald Warne**

TEACHINGS

**BE SENSITIVE AND RESPECTFUL**

Respect tribal sovereignty  
What works with one tribal community may not work with others

**BASE WORK IN CULTURE**

Recognize the gifts of Native people  
Indigenous evaluation is the most effective way to determine impact in tribal communities  
Each person, each perspective is valuable  
Native people are connected to a place – this is vital  
Ceremonies are powerful, especially when the whole community supports people's healing

## SESSION III

# COMMUNITY/UNIVERSITY RESEARCH COLLABORATION: BEST PRACTICES USING INDIGENOUS AND ACADEMIC SCIENCE

### MODERATOR

**Harriet Kuhnlein, PhD**  
*McGill University*

### SPEAKERS

**Linda Frizzell, MS, PhD**  
(Eastern Cherokee and Lakota),  
*University of Minnesota*

**Tiffany Beckman, MD, MPH**  
(Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe),  
*University of Minnesota*

**Lisa Te Morenga, PhD,**  
(Ngāti Whā tua, Te Rarawa),  
*University of Otago*

## Looking Back on Research

**Linda Frizzell**



A historical look at research in Indian Country reveals important lessons about appropriate protocols for conducting research in tribal communities. While there is an evolving set of guidelines for research in tribal communities that have emerged from the challenges encountered by Native people as a result of academic research, it is critical that tribes be consulted before any research project begins.

In the context of public health research, obtaining input from tribal leadership about public health needs is a helpful first step. Seeking support, guidance and involvement from the tribe should always precede the development and submission of a proposal. A tribally controlled Institutional Review Board should assess and approve the proposed project. Provisions should also be established to ensure participating tribes control ownership, use, access and possession of all data gathered from tribal populations, including research, evaluation, assessments, monitoring and surveillance, surveys, videos, cultural knowledge and presentations. In all cases, tribal research protocols must be respected.

## Can Diabetes Be Cured?

**Tiffany Beckman**



Federal Indian policy created barriers between Native people and their life-sustaining lands, ultimately resulting in pervasive obesity and diet-related diseases. We also know eating behavior is complex, involving motivation, brain reward systems, culture, appetite and more. Working to cure Type 2 diabetes involves understanding the dimensions of eating behavior and the historical context that has led to the

widespread prevalence of obesity and diet-related diseases. The prevalence of Type 2 diabetes among Native American can be decreased by using a combination of healthy eating (including daily breakfast); humane, kind treatment from care providers; appealing to patients' desire to survive for the sake of family and community; and regular exercise prior to taking medication. This is a prescription for hope – to which patients really respond.

SESSION III

COMMUNITY/UNIVERSITY RESEARCH COLLABORATION: BEST PRACTICES USING INDIGENOUS AND ACADEMIC SCIENCE

## A Healthy Lifestyle Support Tool for New Zealand Māori Communities

Lisa Te Morenga

In response to health disparities faced by Māori people and a legacy of exploitative research, the New Zealand government established a culturally specific, national Māori health strategy enacted to ensure the well-being of all people, underpinned by key principles of a major treaty (partnership, participation and protection). With government funding, a participatory, community-led diabetes prevention intervention lasted for several years, focused in Māori communities with the nation's highest type II diabetes rates. Traditional communications methods, community resources to increase accessibility to intervention activities, involvement of local community members, health promotion activities, and community exercise and cooking classes led by locals resulted in significant reductions of insulin resistance and diabetes prevalence and a significant increase in physical activity and consumption of healthy foods. The program has been so successful that they wish to find resources to permanently sustain it and also requested and guided the development of a comprehensive mobile device software application that supports healthy behaviors.



**“Everyone who submits research to the Health Research Council of New Zealand must be able to demonstrate how it advances health equity and benefits for the Māori.”**

Lisa Te Morenga

**“Once relationships are established, universities can hardly keep up with the tribal community requests.”**

Linda Frizzell

**“We can’t let history get us down and keep us down.”**

Tiffany Beckman

### TEACHINGS

#### RESPECT TRIBAL SOVEREIGNTY

Health strategies should be based on the principle of sovereignty

There are some things outside researchers don't get to know

#### USE PRINCIPLES OF INDIGENOUS WISDOM

Hope is powerful medicine

With modern diseases, healing comes through good self-care

#### FOLLOW PROTOCOL NECESSARY TO GET FUNDING AND PROTECT RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Grantsmanship is a key skill for young Indigenous professionals to master

Tribes must involve an Institutional Review Board. If they don't have one, they can use Indian Health Services IRB

## SESSION IV

# ENVIRONMENT, LAND AND NUTRITION

### MODERATOR

**Janie Hipp, JD, LLM**  
(Chickasaw Nation),  
*University of Arkansas*

### SPEAKERS

**Devon Mihesuah, MS, PhD**  
PhD (Choctaw Nation  
of Oklahoma),  
*University of Kansas*

**Steven Bond, MD, MPH MS**  
(Chickasaw Nation),  
*Intertribal Agriculture Council*

**Larry Campbell,**  
(Swinomish Nation),  
*Swinomish Indian Tribal  
Community*

**Jamie Donatuto, PhD**  
*Swinomish Indian Tribal  
Community*

**ELDER RESPONSE**  
**Faith Spotted Eagle**  
(Yankton Sioux),  
*Braveheart Society,  
Ihanktonwan Dakota  
Territory*

### Effects of Relocation on Food Access and Nutrition

**Devon Mihesuah**



Place matters for Native peoples, shaping identity, serving as a site for ceremonies and burial, offering medicinal plants and more. Forced removal and relocation of tribal people disrupted cultural, spiritual and food-based knowledge. This separation from homeland has engendered significant health problems for Indigenous communities. Tribal communities who experienced forced removal continue to face ongoing challenges to their health and food sovereignty, as threats to culture and their land base persisted in their new environments. These tribes need access to their land and cultural knowledge to regain their health and well-being.

### Biodiversity and Nutrition

**Steven Bond**



From the very beginning, humans altered the environment to their benefit. The Chickasaw Nation works to maintain good human-plant relationships grounded in cultural significance. Studying plants aid tribes in sustaining medicines and spiritual practices, building flutes, selecting firewood, and developing new technologies. Despite threats of climate change and other human impacts on the land, tribes can create a multi-paradigm approach to ethnobotany that incorporates Western science, traditional Indigenous knowledge and Native nutrition. Protecting plant life with this approach presents the opportunity to educate tribal leaders, tribal members and the broader scientific community about cultural connections to the land. Biodiversity is threatened on all fronts, and we need to use cultural knowledge creatively to protect biodiversity.

**“The knowledge brought together at the Native American Nutrition conference is powerful as you feel the sense of purpose in meeting Indigenous people from around the world who capture the very essence of their people within them. We gather and renew our minds and spirits, exchange cultural knowledge for the betterment of our communities, network, and revive what was once ours. Bridging the gap between Indigenous wisdom and academic knowledge gives rise to the rejuvenation and resiliency of the power of Native people.”**



**Valerie Nuvayestewa (Hopi)**  
Diabetes Prevention Educator, Hopi Tribe



**“When the tide is out,  
the table is set.”**

**Larry Campbell**

## Indicators Of Climate Change

**Larry Campbell and Jamie Donatuto**

The Swinomish tribe wanted to learn more about the impacts of climate change on community health, natural resources, traditional or ‘first’ foods, and the sites where these foods are gathered, with the aim of guiding long-term tribal planning. Through a community engagement process involving more than 100 tribal member interviews, several health indicators surfaced that guided the approach to measurement, including resilience, self-determination, natural resource security, cultural use, and education. The tribe also worked with scientists to develop models of storm surges, creating aerial images of potential scenarios and their impact on tribal food

sources. At a community engagement session, tribal members viewed these images and used a virtual voting technology to identify potential impacts to and definitions of community health and connectedness. The tribe also uses culturally specific activities and curriculum to educate youth about tribal food traditions. All these activities equip the tribe to proactively address climate change, protect traditional foods, and improve the health of the community, in keeping with the teachings and beliefs of the tribe. This effort is designed to ensure the resilience and sovereignty of the Swinomish people long into the future.

**“In many places, we are rediscovering our understanding of the good land and in doing so, tribes once again are regaining their health. For a happy healthy life, we need a variety of things, including access to our land and the cultural knowledge that is embedded therein.”**

**Devon Mihesuah**



SESSION IV  
ENVIRONMENT, LAND AND NUTRITION

What The Elder Says  
Faith Spotted Eagle

Native people are emerging from a very dark time. This conference is a camp circle where we can align Native cultural knowledge with relevant Western knowledge for Indigenous purposes and needs in ways that make sense for us and help us heal from our original trauma. Our work of growing healthy Native nations starts with each person working to become whole and caring for each other. Another part of this work is to reclaim our land, restore endangered species, protect ceremonial sites, and bring back the spirits of Native peoples and plants. After all, plants carry thousands and thousands of years of wisdom; we must respect the spirit of the plant nation and animal world. In all this work, many will have to protect those who transmit culture and language from those who advance a colonizing agenda.

**“I am a practicing dietitian of more than 30 years; no conference has impacted me or uplifted me as much. Native people do have the answers. It is the only conference that focuses entirely on nutrition and Indigenous people. . .where they are honored as those who conduct academic nutrition research. The focus is on respectfully sharing nutrition research conducted with Indigenous people to discover healthier ways of living through sustained partnerships.**



**Sarah Miracle, MBA, RDN, LD, FAND**  
SNAP-Ed Program Manager, Chickasaw Nation



**“We have a wonderful diversity of cultivated plants. . .we have a lot of abundance. We are going to have to do some genetic work, we need to support our environmental groups, we need to become educated beyond the minimal standard because it’s our responsibility to care for the earth.”**

**Steven Bond**

**“It’s a joyous thing to welcome your spirit home.”**

**Faith Spotted Eagle**

TEACHINGS

◆ FOOD AND SPIRIT

Traditional foods are spirit food

◆ COLONIZATION IMPACTS

Federal Indian policy is at the root of many Native health problems

◆ PLACE AND HEALTH

Place is synonymous with Indigenous knowledge. We have physical, spiritual and psychological ties to culture and tradition, all of which are situated in place.

Cultural connections to the land can prompt communities and researchers to care for it.

◆ BRAIDING KNOWLEDGE FOR THE FUTURE

We need to integrate Indigenous and Western methods to produce the knowledge we need to make important decisions about our future as tribal nations



## CONFERENCE BREAKOUTS SHOWCASE



### **Tribal/University Relationships: Opportunities and Challenges** **Stephany Parker and Dwanna Robertson**

Respect, responsibility and reciprocity are needed for authentic tribal-university relationships. Listening deeply leads to trust, respect and honesty. The focus and approach of research should contribute to nation-building and decolonization, and be guided by tribes' missions, visions, goals and core values. Any intellectual property should be owned by the tribe. Sustaining relationships over time is important to tribes.

### **Funding Gardens and Farms** **Steven Bond**

Startup funds are easier for community gardens to obtain than grants to sustain them. Farm financing is available through grants and loans (such as microloans or loans targeting youth and historically underserved communities). It's important to clarify project goals and activities before funding deadlines, including project scope and size; reasonable first year goals; and matching or in-kind local resources. Gardens and farms require planning during the autumn prior to the growing season. Rebuilding culturally appropriate food sources is an important way to reclaim our health.

### **Tribal Nations Tell Their Stories of Food System Changes and Health Consequences Using Narrative and Cultural Imagery** **Kibbe Conti**

A culturally based process — combined with traditional methods of engagement — fosters constructive and painful dialogue in tribal communities about changes to Indigenous food systems. Communities explore tribal and family experiences with extensive historical trauma (such as land seizure, forced relocation, colonization, genocide, and a fundamental transformation of traditional foodways and health). This culturally based nutrition education program addresses high rates of diabetes and other diet-related chronic diseases, by providing a way for communities to learn about their traditional foodways and ultimately changing eating behaviors to improve health.



### Organizing Native Youth for Improved Nutrition

Joy Persall and Ernie Whiteman

Dream of Wild Health promotes decolonization of food and nutrition by saving seeds of traditional crops gifted by elders. Native youth learn gardening and healthy eating skills, sell produce to local consumers and participate in spiritually based programming. At the farm, young people interact with elders, begin their day with traditional spiritual practices away from technology and junk food, and learn about Native foods and healthy lifestyles.

### Storytellers of Health: Resilience and Research in Action

Abigail Echo-Hawk

What does it mean to conduct research in Indian Country? In tribal communities, research is the story; the 'subject' is the storyteller. Research should be conducted with tribal council approval or in partnership with tribes, which must protect their sovereign and individual rights and responsibilities. Tribes should take ownership of research projects occurring on tribal lands and with tribal people. Stories and storytellers must be respected, by establishing protocols and monitoring collection and dissemination. Researchers need to understand that tribal people are not individuals, but community members.

### Why and How to Document the Traditional Food System in Your Community

Harriet Kuhnlein, Letitia McCune and Valerie Nuvayestewa

For tribes to successfully document their food system, partners need to listen to community priorities and gain approval. Steps include identifying clear objectives, obtaining agreement from relevant leadership, forming a team, locating existing information, conducting focus groups to learn traditional names and sources of food, and determining scientific names of these and items for nutritional identification. Interviews with food professionals can also help determine the frequency of use of certain foods and their cultural significance. The end product should be treated as a living document that can change through time, bridges traditional and modern, uses traditional language and respects traditional teachings. This resource can serve teachers and libraries, foster cultural practices, support health promotion efforts, track environmental changes, and foster community engagement.

### Meeting Intergenerational Nutritional Needs with Ancestral Beverages

Valerie Segrest

This culturally adaptable nutrition curriculum focused on traditional foods, including health-promoting teas (such as nettle) and other beverages (such as bone broths) and foods (such as elk, salmon and deer). Designed for tribal nutrition and elders dining programs, these materials blend Indigenous and scientific knowledge by conveying the message that 'plants are our teachers.' History, cultural knowledge and nutrition can move the community toward healthier behaviors, but community members also need time to adjust to a new menu. When nutrition programs build on cultural knowledge, community members are more eager to change eating habits.

# PECHA KUCHA SHOWCASE



*These brief talks, moderated by Sarah Miracle, MBA, RDN, LD, FAND, spanned a powerful array of effective initiatives across Indian Country. Pecha Kucha presenters are marked with an asterisk.*

## **Decolonizing Nutrition Science**

**Craig Hassel\* and AL Tamang**

To be useful in Indian Country and to be a robust knowledge system, the field of nutrition science needs to be decolonized. Nutrition scientists must engage in critical self-reflection, surfacing assumptions embedded in the Western worldview and being honest about the impact of Western knowledge on Indigenous nations. Academic scientists must also learn how to work across other systems of cultural knowledge, so we can respect the power of many cultures' knowledge traditions around food and health.

## **Making a Pathway**

**Carol Titcomb,\* S Miles, L Bright, P Burgess, MH DeCambra, RK Enos, G Kalilihiwa, MFM Oneha, CK Kintaro-Tagaloa, S Morimoto-Ching and K Padilla**

Using traditional protocol, the Waimānalo Health Center created story circles where family members of different generations shared how Hawaii has moved from food self-sufficiency and traditional foods, through a time of dependency on imported, unhealthy foods, to a re-emergence of healthy food traditions as a way to reduce health disparities. Their goal is for this community to obtain the power to feed themselves in their own way.

## **Healthy Children, Strong Families**

**Emily Tomayko,\* AK Adams, RJ Prince, KA Cronin, TA Parker, K Kim and VM Grant**

A community engagement, research-based approach to fostering healthy lifestyles for Native American families effectively reduced the risk for obesity among young American Indian children. Targeting children and their adult family members, the program provided an obesity prevention toolkit (including lessons, materials, pedometers, kitchen utensils, and more) aimed to increase physical activity and fruits and vegetables consumption; ensure adequate sleep; and decrease screen time, stress, and sugar consumption. There were positive, measurable impacts for this approach.

## **Nutrition Monitoring App**

**Holly Hunts\* and E Dratz**

This mobile device-based software application enables program participants of a commodity food distribution program to track their consumption of healthy fats, sugar intake, and emotional wellness. Using the USDA national nutrient database, this app can also store photos of meals for later nutritional analysis; remember user-generated recipes; track optimal nutrition levels; add new foods; and generate dietary recommendations.

### **The Pacific Island Food Model Toolkit**

**Nicole Baumhofer,\* S Soong and MA Look**

The Department of Native Hawaiian Health developed multilingual, multicultural traditional food model toolkits (including plastic food models, information cards, and images) designed to encourage communities to eat healthy, culturally specific foods. This effort reaches 12,000 community members annually.

### **How Do Youth Contribute to Indigenous Food Sovereignty**

**Kaylee Michnik\***

On a remote Cree reserve in northern Manitoba, a tribe has established a 15-acre farm, using a workforce of tribal youth, to improve community health and reduce the physical and mental health challenges faced by these young people. Participatory action research to determine the extent to which this community farm contributes to youth resilience revealed an increased sense of belonging to their community and culture, skills mastery, and heightened commitment to caring for the earth.

### **Gitigaanike/Red Lake Local Foods Initiative**

**David Manuel\* and S Seki**

Two years ago, Red Lake Nation started a comprehensive program to increase food sovereignty, improve access to healthy food, foster healthier communities, and create revenue sources. The tribe has introduced popular family and community organic gardening, nutrition, and traditional foods education programs, as well as starting a rapidly growing organic farm that includes an orchard, high tunnel production, beekeeping, and large plot of fruits and vegetables that are donated to elders, families, and tribal programs and sold at area farmers markets.

### **Growing Resilience, Health, Food Sovereignty, and Partnerships on the Wind River Reservation**

**Christine Porter,\* M Arthur, A Wechsler, J Sutter, V Sutter and E Potter**

This research project focused on the health impacts of gardens in this Arapaho community of 15,000 people, which undertook a scalable, sustainable culturally specific approach to gardening. Using novel and culturally acceptable data collection methods that ensure tribal ownership of the data, the community has installed 32 gardens and will ultimately install 100 gardens over five years under the guidance of a community advisory committee.

### **Growing Resilience and Leadership on the Wind River Reservation**

**C Harris,\* P Harris,\* D Perez,\* R Bowers, K Lone Fight and NP White**

As part of a federally funded research grant, numerous community leaders ensure the success of healthy food activities on the Wind River Reservation. Because the nearest grocery store is 20 miles away, it's important for community members to support and sustain family and community gardens, food preservation classes, farmers markets, elder baskets, and the traditional teachings that accompany these activities. These efforts have served more than 100 families.

### **Grand Foods of the Grand Canyon**

**Carrie Galisay Cannon\***

For 12 years, elders have led an intergenerational program to share their plant- and land-based knowledge with tribal youth. They teach harvesting, preparing and preserving traditional and medicinal foods, many of which reduce the risks of chronic disease. Elders also share how to create and use tools to make other products from native plants, such as baskets, clothing, shoes, personal care products, nets, bows and arrows.



## YOUTH PANEL HEARING FROM YOUNG PEOPLE



*Garden Warriors is a program of Dream of Wild Health, a nonprofit that restores health and well-being in the Native community by recovering knowledge of and access to healthy Indigenous foods, medicines and lifeways. Moderated by Community Program Manager, Estelle LaPointe (Ihanktunwan Nakota), Faith Gronda, age 18 (Wyandot of Michigan), Tayah Reyes, age 18 (St. Croix Band of Ojibwe), Jennifer Buehlmann, age 13 (Ihanktunwan Nakota), and Sean Buehlmann, age 21 (Ihanktunwan Nakota), shared what they have learned as Garden Warriors, what they do, and how their experience helps them.*

Dream of Wild Health has a three-acre farm with a pollinator meadow, orchard and hoop house that provides healthy food for the youth-focused Garden Warriors summer program, the “Roots for the Home Team” salad cart sold at Minnesota Twins Games, and the Community Supported Agriculture produce box program. Youth grow the food distributed through these programs, oftentimes using ancient seeds propagated as part of the organization’s Indigenous seed saving program.

Youth participating in the Garden Warriors program acquire specific practical skills associated with growing and foraging medicine and food plants, as well as traditional language, fire-tending, fishing and other food practices. They become competent at marketing and sales skills. They also learn from elders and staff how to pray and

conduct themselves in a good way. Staff set standards for health and wholeness and provide a safe, secure and loving place for youth to spend their summers — on the land, outdoors and away from the city. As a result of their experiences in this powerful program, these youth take their newfound knowledge home to their families to share what they know and improve their family’s health and to work each Friday in community gardens located in their city neighborhoods.

“We are learning to be good relatives,” said one Dream of Wild Health youth panelist. Garden Warriors learn to respect the earth, water, elders and youth; they understand that food is medicine and plants have spirits and are teachers. Panelists affirmed that Garden Warrior participants also take care of each other.

## ELDER'S PANEL SHARING ELDER WISDOM



To close the conference, Janie Hipp moderated an Elder's Panel, which included Larry Campbell, Faith Spotted Eagle, Beverly Stabber-Warne and Ernie Whiteman.

### TEACHINGS

#### ELDERS CARRY OUR TRADITIONS

Tribal communities are only as strong as the connection between elders and youth. Old ways of teaching young people involve elders telling stories and modeling traditional practices. Original instructions, shared as teachings by our elders, should guide how we govern and feed ourselves.

#### INDIGENOUS WORLDVIEWS

Treating health as a whole reflects an Indigenous approach. Tribal people understand the interconnections between emotional, physical and spiritual balance.

#### THE SPIRIT OF FOOD

Tribal people must be prepared spiritually and culturally to gather and prepare food in a 'good way' — by following traditional protocol and teachings. In its purest form, this work is spiritual activity which feeds the body and spirit of those who obtained and received the food.

#### RECIPROCITY AND PARTNERSHIP

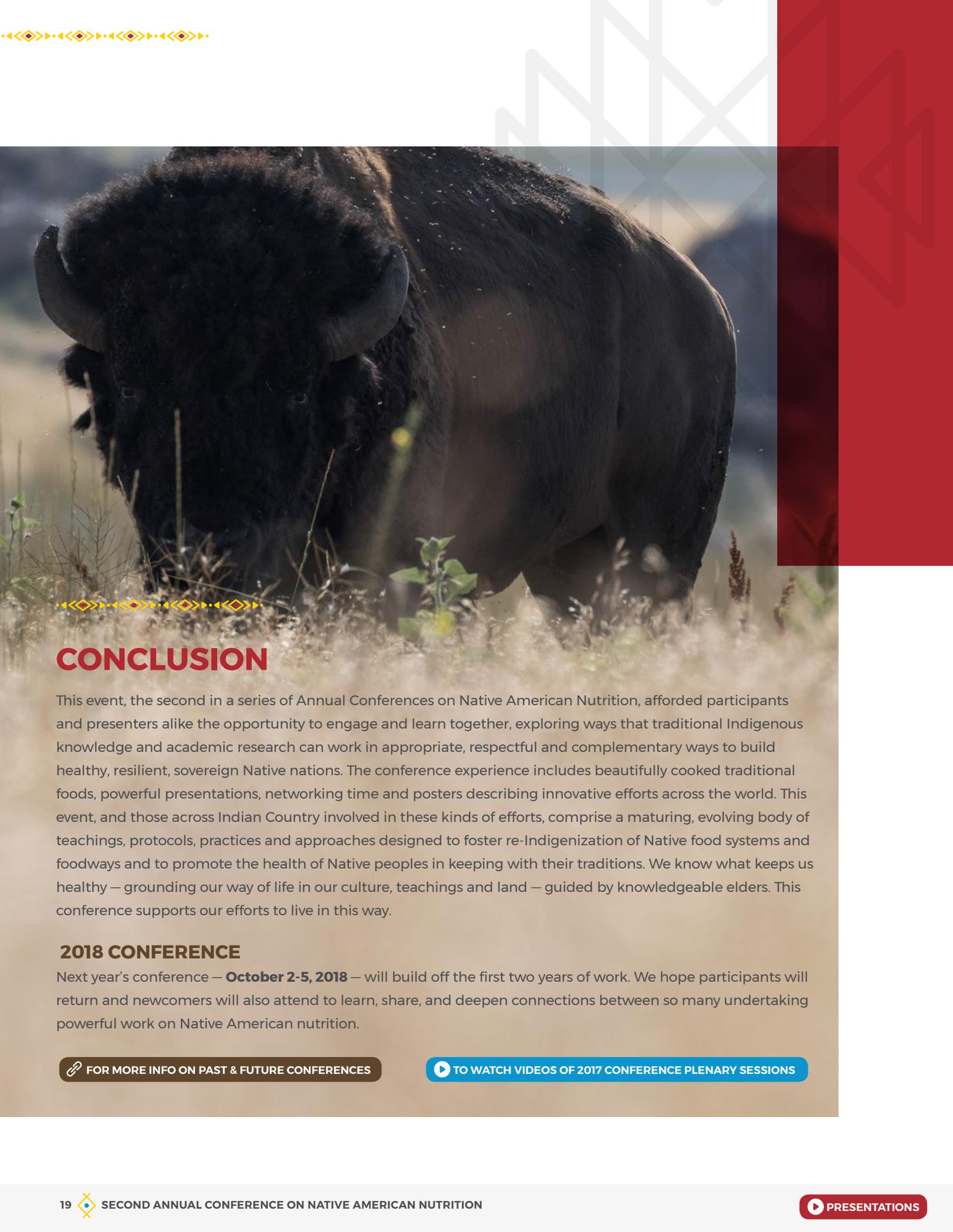
Cooperation and reciprocity are key to decolonizing our food systems. We must learn each other's medicines and traditions. Tribal governments are signing memoranda of understanding to share traditional knowledge in exchange for use of resources to address changing ecosystems within a given tribe's territory.

#### LEADING OURSELVES

We need flexibility to learn how to use our old ways and be progressive. We function under a tribal government system that was imposed upon Native nations by the United States government, and it can be difficult to maintain accountability. Native nations can be progressive and look toward the future, while staying traditional and maintaining our old ways, as long as we know traditional law.

#### WHEN HOME IS NOT YOUR HOMELAND

Many tribes experiencing forced removal now consider growing and storing healthy foods as a traditional practice. Urban Natives must also remember how to sustain food traditions. Hosting social events with food, ceremony, physical activity, and cross-tribal sharing help keep tribal people connected to their culture. For tribes on or near their original homeland with access to Indigenous foods, many members have diet-related health issues or don't participate in traditional cultural practices. Each tribe is different and approaches the process of reclaiming traditional foods and related teaching in its own way.



## CONCLUSION

This event, the second in a series of Annual Conferences on Native American Nutrition, afforded participants and presenters alike the opportunity to engage and learn together, exploring ways that traditional Indigenous knowledge and academic research can work in appropriate, respectful and complementary ways to build healthy, resilient, sovereign Native nations. The conference experience includes beautifully cooked traditional foods, powerful presentations, networking time and posters describing innovative efforts across the world. This event, and those across Indian Country involved in these kinds of efforts, comprise a maturing, evolving body of teachings, protocols, practices and approaches designed to foster re-Indigenization of Native food systems and foodways and to promote the health of Native peoples in keeping with their traditions. We know what keeps us healthy – grounding our way of life in our culture, teachings and land – guided by knowledgeable elders. This conference supports our efforts to live in this way.

### 2018 CONFERENCE

Next year's conference – **October 2-5, 2018** – will build off the first two years of work. We hope participants will return and newcomers will also attend to learn, share, and deepen connections between so many undertaking powerful work on Native American nutrition.

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