



CONFERENCE REPORT

FIRST ANNUAL CONFERENCE ON NATIVE AMERICAN NUTRITION



We need collaboration
between Native American,
non-Native, academic, and
traditional knowledge to make
Native American communities
healthier and stronger.



Lori Watso
Chair, Seeds of Native Health
(Shakopee Mdewakanton
Sioux Community)

September 25–27, 2016  Mystic Lake Casino Hotel

HOSTED AND SPONSORED BY
Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community and University
of Minnesota's Healthy Foods, Healthy Lives Institute

Seeds *of* Native Health
A Campaign for Indigenous Nutrition



 HEALTHY FOODS,
HEALTHY LIVES INSTITUTE
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

FOR MILLENNIA, Indigenous civilizations effectively maintained human and ecological health across this vast continent. Food systems were connected to all aspects of life, from economics and trade to politics and education. These ways of life ensured resiliency and longevity. High rates of obesity and diet-related chronic diseases—among many consequences of colonization and genocide—have only emerged in the past several decades, as tribal nations have been prevented from practicing traditional foodways.

In response, many Native Americans and their communities are doing important work to sustain and restore traditional teachings and practices associated with food and nutrition. This growing food sovereignty movement includes an increasing emphasis on culture, growing and processing of traditional foods, gardening initiatives, nutrition education programs, and food-based economic development efforts. Yet more should be done. We need more knowledge, partnerships and resources to support the vision and needs of tribal nations as they work to ensure a healthy future for their members.

That’s why we hosted the First Annual Conference on Native American Nutrition on September 25-27, 2016, at the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community’s Mystic Lake Casino Hotel. Our goal was to convene researchers and others from the academic world with tribal officials, Native American leaders, practitioners, and community members working on food and health issues in Indian Country. We are proud to have achieved this goal, convening more than 450 Native American and non-Native

people from 33 states, three Canadian provinces, and three other countries. Participants, half of whom were Native American, represented a range of backgrounds: nutrition educators, tribal officials, government officials, researchers, students, funders, and more.

This report describes the results and experiences from this groundbreaking event, which created a space for people to have significant conversations about the important work, challenging questions, and pressing needs related to food, health and culture in Indian Country. We hope that this work, and the recommendations that resulted, will further the movement towards improving nutrition in Indian Country.

The Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community and the University of Minnesota’s Healthy Foods, Healthy Lives Institute were deeply honored to serve as co-hosts of this landmark event. We would like to extend our appreciation to the members of the conference planning committee, who have for several

years fostered support and visibility for the critical importance of food and nutrition to the sovereignty and resilience of Native American nations.

Thank you for helping us make a lasting contribution event in the movement to restore Native Americans’ health, foodways, and power of self-determination. [We hope you will join us for the Second Annual Conference on Native American Nutrition, September 18-20, 2017.](#)



Mindy Kurzer, PhD

Conference Chair

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



Lori Watso

Chair, Seeds of Native Health

(Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community)



PRESENTER INSIGHTS

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FROM KNOWLEDGE TO PRACTICE

Improving Native American Nutrition through Indigenous Wisdom and Academic Research



This important, inaugural conference offered participants opportunities for learning, reflection, and interaction. Through keynote speakers, plenary panels, breakout sessions, working groups, poster sessions, and networking, the two-day event focused on four themes.



THEME 1
Translating Research into Policy and Practice

THEME 2
Highlighting Innovative Work in Indian Country

THEME 3
Building Momentum to Improve Native American Nutrition

THEME 4
Developing Partnerships

Our most pressing priority is to ensure full, easy access to traditional and healthy foods, along with the hands-on learning needed by Native American communities to restore traditional food systems and sustain our health and cultural teachings. To achieve this aim, we must work together.



RAISE AWARENESS OF KEY INFLUENCERS to better understand tribal food and nutrition issues to more quickly advance the work.

INSPIRE PRODUCTIVE, RESPECTFUL PARTNERSHIPS among tribal communities and various institutions to support food and nutrition efforts in Indian Country.

INFLUENCE NATIONAL FUNDING PRIORITIES to support food and nutrition research and initiatives across Indian Country.

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TRANSLATING RESEARCH INTO POLICY AND PRACTICE

Conference presenters shared numerous insights about appropriate approaches to research that resonate with Indigenous ways of knowing, and how that research can shape policy and practice in Indian Country. Using research to influence policy and practice can help advance food sovereignty and the health of Native American nations.



I don't use the term "researcher." Instead I say, "storyteller of health." It's hard to bridge that gap between what elders know and how to show it in numbers.



Abigail EchoHawk
(Pawnee/Athbascan)
Urban Indian Health Institute

GUIDING PARADIGMS ⊕ ⊗ —————>>>

Place Native American teachings, language, spirituality, sovereignty, and needs at the center of all work.	Support community- and Indigenous-led frameworks for research, programming, engagement, and policy.	Honor the inextricable connection between nutrition, food, health, the land, and the Indigenous relationship to the land.	Shift from a reductionist approach to nutrition, integrating food and health into all aspects of tribal life and the land.
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DECOLONIZING, RE-INDIGENIZING APPROACHES ⊕ ⊗ —————>>>

Define asset-based determinants and indicators from an Indigenous perspective.	Use Indigenous methodologies to produce knowledge and generate meaningful impact.	Develop and distribute intellectual property rights agreements that tribal communities, people, and initiatives can use when partnering with non-Native organizations.	Create protocol and policies, led by tribal colleges, for how seeds should be used, saved, or handled by researchers from historically white institutions.
Document and share tribal best practices.	Identify a Native American serving organization to provide leadership and resource development on model approaches to collaboration between tribes and universities focused on food, culture, and health.	Develop and share Indigenous data sets and conceptual frameworks.	



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HIGHLIGHTING INNOVATIVE WORK IN INDIAN COUNTRY

Participants worked together to identify key features of effective food, nutrition, and health initiatives in Indian Country. These attributes extend across design, delivery, and partnerships. The most effective programs are culturally based and multi-faceted, impacting multiple levels at once (from changes in individual behavior to systems).



Tribal people must create their own narratives of what constitutes health. This definition is specific to each Indigenous nation.



Breakout Session Participant

DESIGNING PROGRAMS ⊕⊗→>>>

Place Native American teachings, language, and spirituality at the center of all work.

Always integrate culture and nutrition.

Emphasize a healthy diet for pregnant and nursing mothers; encourage breastfeeding.

Use appropriate literacy levels when developing programs and materials.

Link mental health services in Indian Country to food, nutrition, and culture.



DELIVERING PROGRAMS ⊕⊗→>>>

Deploy programs at or with tribal colleges located in Native American communities.

Ensure youth involvement, including instruction on cooking and traditional foods.

Food and health work must involve the entire family to ensure behavior change.

Develop tribal community groups.

Include healthy food distribution as a program component.

Engage community members in ongoing, meaningful ways.

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BUILDING MOMENTUM TO IMPROVE NATIVE AMERICAN NUTRITION

Participants and presenters contributed insights into the future direction of Native American nutrition, food sovereignty work, and collaborative efforts needed to grow momentum. Presenters also shared advice on effective strategies for fundraising.

FILLING PROGRAM, INFORMATION, AND POLICY GAPS ➡

DEVELOP TRIBAL FOOD AND AGRICULTURAL SYSTEMS	Establish tribally managed, fully staffed agricultural divisions to create and implement comprehensive food sovereignty plans (including growing, harvesting, processing, and preparing traditional foods); use established tribally run, sustainable farms with support from land grant institutions.	Draft sample comprehensive food and agriculture codes for tribal governments.	Develop policies and related tools to protect land, water, and Native American people.	Translate research into tribal policies that strengthen food systems.	Incorporate food and agricultural transitions as part of a comprehensive bioregional management approach.	Replicate Seneca Nation's native plant policy across Indian Country.
CREATE HEALTHY FOOD ENVIRONMENTS	Translate research into tribal policies that create healthier food environments in Indian Country.	Invest more in youth-focused food and health programs.	Implement healthy food and beverage policies in Native American serving organizations, tribal communities and programs, and Indigenous events (i.e. healthy vending machines, healthy feasts and powwows,	Transition tribally controlled school food services to primarily traditional foods.	Change food distribution guidelines and foods distributed through U.S. Department of Agriculture and private organizations serving Indian Country.	Develop food infrastructure based on Native American knowledge and culture.
PROVIDE HELPFUL RESOURCES	Develop an online portal of Native American nutrition, food, and health programs and resources that people can access.	Offer tribal values-based business planning services for tribally run food systems enterprises.	Offer a youth-focused track at future Native American Nutrition Conferences.	GUIDING FUNDERS ➡		
				Develop sample, culturally relevant language for funding announcements.	Showcase exemplary Native American food and health work through storytelling for funders.	
				Substantially increase funding to support comprehensive, traditional food systems development.	Invest in research innovations, particularly Indigenously produced initiatives.	

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DEVELOPING PARTNERSHIPS

Many presenters shared powerful examples of how collaboration can enhance the quality and impact of efforts to improve Native American nutrition. These partnerships can help leverage more resources, build greater credibility and sustainability, and bridge diverse perspectives to generate lasting, beneficial impact.

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS FOR IMPACT

Foster strategic, respectful partnerships, guided and led by traditional knowledge and tribal nations.

Build collaborations with health care providers, practitioners, and community members.

Share existing resources with other communities and initiatives.

Create local and broader networks to promote programs and build connections between diverse partners, organizations, and people.

Submit joint funding proposals that include multiple partner organizations to increase likelihood of receiving support and delivering programs and initiatives in a holistic, comprehensive fashion.



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The work we are doing is innovative and we should own it. We should ignite the fire and decolonize the approaches, re-indigenizing our health system. If we are not involved in our food system, it will go away; through our respect of that system it will become vibrant again. Animals and plants will thrive and return. Innovation is what has been working in our communities and bringing it forth, especially with our university partners. We are here to inspire each other.

◆

Gary Ferguson
(Unangan/Aleut)
Alaskan Native Tribal Health Consortium

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DOING THE WORK IN A GOOD WAY

Protocol for Research and Engagement



Presenter remarks have shaped an emerging, appropriate protocol for respectful academic research and effective engagement with tribal communities.

HOW TO BE

Ensure cultural and scientific rigor.

Use guiding values, such as ‘building trust,’ ‘respecting traditional knowledge,’ ‘fostering community involvement and leadership,’ and ‘ensuring bureaucracies help, not hinder’.

Treat the work as a partnership and exchange of knowledge traditions, basing the relationship on traditional communal values.

Build trust and maintain relationships between researchers and Native American communities.

Respect the resiliency of ancestors and traditional knowledge, while using research to ask new questions.

Use the researcher role to lead change in the academy to become more responsive, sensitive, and competent in partnering with Native American communities.

Embrace adaptiveness and flexibility, where assessment tools and action steps can evolve with implementation of research.

WHAT TO DO

Create a memorandum of understanding at onset; determine data ownership, storage, and use; establish formal agreements on intellectual property rights developed by tribal partners.

Identify gaps in academic knowledge, using appropriate research methodology to build upon traditional knowledge to fill this gap.

Follow protocol, policies, and preferences of tribal communities relative to seed-saving, seed use, and seed handling.

Ensure students are trained in Indigenous methodologies, especially those who are Native American.

Model support to tribal nations on successful, existing programs like Upward Bound and STEM programs.

Provide dedicated staff and resources to enable tribes to re-establish traditional food systems and develop an online presence.

This counsel was accompanied by a candid account of the history of academic institutions and their responsibility and debt to Indigenous nations. Given this complicity share information with tribes, ask their opinion, or seek guidance; some voiced concern that these universities actively undermine progress on Native American food systems and Native American health.

To change this longtime dynamic of exploitation, marginalization, and neglect, universities and their faculty must collaborate effectively to respond to Native American nutrition concerns and offer meaningful support to tribal communities. These Nations must have more influence over and investment from universities to assure that research agendas meet their needs.

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PREFERRED RESEARCH APPROACHES

Conference participants identified numerous research practices that resonated well with Native American culture and values.

•◀◀▶▶•

This conference was incredibly informative and personally transformative. Land-grant institutions like the University of Minnesota have a responsibility to serve the public. This conference represents a great step forward in the way we serve Indigenous communities. By utilizing the best of Indigenous wisdom and academic knowledge, we are creating something together that we could not do alone. The University of Minnesota is committed to continuing this exciting collaboration with the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community, to improve Native American nutrition.

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Brian Buhr
Dean, College of Food, Agricultural
and Natural Resource Sciences,
University of Minnesota

Discussion groups and talking circles

Photo voice

Phone surveys

Culturally based strategies, including storytelling and intergenerational involvement

Community-based participatory research

Social, media, texts, and phone calls prompting healthy behaviors

Waist measurement instead of BMI

Socio-ecological model

Indigenous evaluation frameworks

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CROSS CUTTING THEMES

FOOD, HEALING, AND HISTORICAL TRAUMA

Trauma is central to the history and experience of Native American people and has a profound impact on individual and community health. All work in Indian Country should respond to historical trauma, skillfully weaving in systemic responses and individual support into food and health-related work. Practitioners and partners will need cultural competency training to be successful. Food sovereignty work is an important way for tribal communities to heal trauma, offering hope for health and well-being.

THE IMPORTANCE OF ELDERS, YOUTH, AND INTERGENERATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Practicing traditional ways of life is the cornerstone of health for Native American nations. Elders are the carriers of these teachings. They must play a central role in food and nutrition initiatives and have frequent opportunities to teach and interact with youth, who need to be a primary focus of these efforts. This investment in and attention to youth will bring more Native American people into health fields in the future.

FUNDING OUR WORK

Some presenters spoke described sources and strategies for funding Native American food and health efforts. Available sources include expanded Native American specific grants at the Centers for Disease Control, as well as community and corporate foundations grant-making programs. Numerous online portals also identify funding opportunities (e.g., the National Institutes of Health).



In addition to powerful, wide-ranging insights related to conference themes, presenters and participants also identified other critical issues relevant to Native American nutrition, food, and health.

TO INCREASE SUCCESS IN FUNDRAISING, PANELISTS HAD SOME HELPFUL ADVICE:



CONNECT Build relationships with funders, program officers and directors, and grantees to obtain grants, additional funding, or helpful advice. Invite funders to visit prior to a funding request to build lasting relationships.



COMPEL Draft a long-term, strategic vision and a compelling case with 'how' and 'why.' Focus on behavioral change strategies, which are more likely to receive funding than awareness raising or education projects. Submit a joint funding request from multiple organizations. Use Indigenous evaluation frameworks to measure impact.



COMPLY Follow instructions carefully on grant preparation and submission.



EQUIP Train early-career tribal members to fundraise and write grants, so they acquire these skills and can use them throughout their careers.

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PARTICIPANT INSIGHTS

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GUIDING THE WAY OF NATIVE AMERICAN NUTRITION

Hundreds of conference participants came together in structured breakout sessions to generate recommendations and themes to advance the work and thinking around Native American nutrition. They shared criteria for successful initiatives, described critical barriers, identified existing and needed resources, and pointed to specific roles for land grant universities in these efforts.



INDIGENOUS NUTRITION INITIATIVES THAT WORK

EFFECTIVE EFFORTS TO RESTORE NATIVE AMERICAN KNOWLEDGE, CULTURE, AND FOODS	Strengthen intergenerational relationships, where elders work with youth.	Reflect re-Indigenization and decolonization by incorporating traditional teachings, practices, and foods and addressing the impact of colonization on Native Americans.
	Include gardening, cooking, and nutrition education based on traditional knowledge carried by elders.	Reaffirm belief in and legitimacy of Indigenous philosophy, knowledge and practice.
	Account for the power and impact of historical trauma on depression and healthy behaviors (such as food choices).	
FEATURES OF A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK TO INFORM EFFECTIVE METHODS TO BUILD HEALTHY, STRONG NATIVE NATIONS	Be rooted in Native American traditions.	
	Employ “practice-based evidence,” rather than “evidence-based practice”.	
	Do not rely on outside experts.	



PARTICIPANT RECOMMENDATIONS

- Strengthen food sovereignty through a strategic framework and comprehensive approach to revitalizing Native American food systems, through transmission of traditional knowledge through intergenerational relationships
- Develop ways to produce knowledge and evaluate impact that are grounded in Native American ways of knowing
- The health sector should treat all Native American patients for trauma as they receive nutrition education or lifestyle counseling.
- Practitioners who help treat historical trauma need a community of peers for support.
- Historical trauma should be integrated as a metric in producing knowledge and measuring impact for Native American nutrition initiatives.

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KNOWLEDGE FOR IMPACT

Participants had a lot to say about knowledge gaps. A focused effort to address these gaps will greatly strengthen the field of Native American nutrition and provide communities, tribal governments, practitioners, and researchers with the knowledge needed to enhance their impact.

Social determinants of health must be reframed and expanded to be relevant or applicable in Indian Country. We must treat poverty and historical trauma as key social determinants of health. Both issues are multi-dimensional and all encompassing. We need to better understand how they drive, reinforce, and interact with intergenerational, biological, mental, and community health outcomes. We need effective ways to support and nurture Native community leaders in addressing historical trauma. We must use trauma work to inform every kind of intervention in Indian Country.

PARTICIPANT RECOMMENDATIONS

- Use academic research methods to demonstrate the impact and importance of culture and traditional food practices on improving health outcomes in Indian Country
- Collect more, better data in ways that are not reductionist and are respectful of Native American communities
- Analyze what programs are highest impact and most feasible
- Develop definitions of commonly used terms that are meaningful and respectful when working in tribal communities (i.e., examine appropriateness of social determinants of health)

	RESEARCHERS		PRACTITIONERS		COMMUNITY MEMBERS	TRIBAL GOVERNMENTS
<div>REVITALIZE AND CENTER NATIVE AMERICAN KNOWLEDGE</div> <div>Participants identified numerous knowledge gaps relevant to practitioners, tribal governments, community members, and researchers. This table describes the knowledge gaps identified by conference participants.</div>	Understand the connection between spiritual, nutritional, human and land health.	Know how to name, support, and mobilize Native American knowledge.	Know how to start, grow, and sustain health and wellness programs and initiatives.	Know how to decrease access to unhealthy food.	Know how to identify, raise, harvest, gather, cook, and use traditional foods.	Know the best combination of tribal policies and programs for a healthy Native American food system.
	Know how to be effective scribes of knowledge and understand that tribal communities produce that knowledge.	Know how to center culture to solve health problems in Indigenous communities.	Develop a financial solution for initiatives that don't have huge monetary support from tribes.	Understand role of and ways to respond to historical trauma in the context of their work.	Support and are involved in healthy food and nutrition initiatives.	Know how to move from individual grants and programs to tribal policy for food production and distribution.
	Engage in ongoing dialogue about the appropriateness and usefulness of terminology used in research.	Understand role of and ways to respond to historical trauma in the context of their work.	See healthy food access as a social justice issue, particularly in relation to land and water use, colonization, and genocide.			

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RESOURCES NEEDED

To expand the success and impact of Native American food systems and culturally-specific nutrition initiatives in Indian Country, participants pointed to numerous resource needs. Partnerships, education, funding, professional development, cultural competency, and food infrastructure all merit attention and investment.

CULTIVATE
INDIGENOUS
RESEARCHERS
AND LEADERS

Provide long-term support for a critical mass of Native American researchers who can collaborate to develop Indigenous scholarship, including systems that recognize and research its value.

Establish a shared vision, co-developed with Native American community, for nutrition research focused on tribal people.

Position more Native American people in leadership roles.

FOSTER
COLLABORATION
AMONG NATIVE
AMERICAN AND
NON-NATIVE
RESEARCHERS AND
PRACTITIONERS

Support and showcase strong, multicultural collaboration between Native American and non-Native researchers, community members, and health and nutrition practitioners.

Develop cultural competency of non-Native researchers to increase impact and trust of Native American and non-Native partnerships.

DEEPEN
COMMITMENT,
RE-EVALUATE
FUNDING
PRIORITIES

Relax the need for short-term evidence and assessment.

Reduce emphasis on short-term, small grant cycles that divert attention and resources from implementation.

Develop a 50-year strategic plan for Native American food systems and nutrition.

Increase dedicated, long-term funding (up to a decade) from government, universities, and philanthropy.

RESOURCES FOR
(RE)BUILDING
NATIVE
AMERICAN
FOOD SYSTEMS

Provide substantial investment to build community-based food systems, including training, labor, farm equipment and tools, soil improvement, aggregation and distribution, community kitchens, etc.

Research in epigenetics must not fuel fatalism; diabetes is not our destiny. While trauma can be passed down generationally and carried in human genes, so too, can healing.

Breakout Session Participant

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THE ROLE OF UNIVERSITIES

Participants also considered the role of different categories of land grant institutions. They offered numerous ways that these institutions can contribute important innovations, foster meaningful partnerships, and build leadership to advance Native American food systems and nutrition.

 INNOVATION

 LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

 PARTNERSHIP

1994 TRIBAL COLLEGES	Lead research and education for Native American nutrition and food systems work.	Co-create culturally specific research protocol for Native American initiatives (e.g., code of ethics; community-based institutional review board).	Provide training and support to those developing Native American food systems.	Partner with communities and use community-based participatory research methods.	1890 HISTORICALLY BLACK COLLEGES & UNIVERSITIES	Organize a conference for people of color and Indigenous peoples, focused on healing from oppression without the presence of the historic oppressor.
	Serve as hubs for creating Indigenous conceptual frameworks for agricultural research and development.	Support researchers and students pursuing agriculture, nutrition, and food systems studies; provide relevant career opportunities.	Incorporate Extension initiatives into student experiences.	Help elders use computers, smart phones, and social media.		
1862 HISTORICALLY WHITE LAND GRANT UNIVERSITIES	Ensure research protocol is useful, respectful, and appropriate for tribal communities.	Foster paradigm shifts in academic disciplines to meet needs of Native American nations.	Demonstrate deep respect, involvement, and responsibility in Native American communities.	Take responsibility for institutional mission pertaining to Indigenous peoples.	Embody institutional mission; be accountable, trustworthy, and transparent.	Build reciprocal relationships between Extension and tribal communities.
	Document thoughtfully, with necessary data to advance research.	Develop effective ways to share information and consult with tribes.	Treat tribal colleges and tribal communities as equal or lead partners in collaborations.	Foster leadership of partners from tribal communities and organizations.	Build lasting relationships across all types of land grant universities.	Offer scientific expertise, where useful, while respecting Native American traditions and lifeways.

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Seeds of Native Health
A Campaign for Indigenous Nutrition



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