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In 2022, four Native American community-based organizations that serve Native youth gathered to give their perspectives on Native Food Security and Native Food Sovereignty. Each organization brought members of their team who support their food and cultural education endeavors and work intimately with Native youth. They learned about each other's programs and quickly realized that they share many similar values, challenges, and dreams.



MESKWAKI FOOD SOVEREIGNTY • Tama, IA
meskwaki.org/mfsi

The Sac & Fox Tribe of the Mississippi established the **Meskwaki Food Sovereignty** to organize local and traditional food initiatives for the Meskwaki community. The agricultural club educates youth about the Meskwaki food system, agriculture, and land stewardship. The initiative also serves as an incubator to learn about traditional foods, growing, harvesting, and job skills through on-the-job training.



NDÉE BIKÍYAA – THE PEOPLE'S FARM • Whiteriver, AZ
facebook.com/ndeebikiyaathepeoplesfarm

Ndeé Bikíyaa – The People's Farm, on the White Mountain Apache Reservation, seeks to reconnect the community to its food, traditional lifestyles, and, ultimately, a healthier mindset. The People's Farm is a mentorship organization that is growing young Native American farmers and challenging notions of Native American health.



UKWAKHWA (OUR FOODS) • Oneida, WI
ukwakhwa.com

Ukwakwa, which means "Our foods," is an Oneida-led 501(c)(3) nonprofit that grows traditional, heirloom foods with an emphasis on Haudenosaunee varieties of corn, beans, and squash on the Oneida Reservation in Wisconsin. They bring people together to learn about cultural foodways, seed keeping, traditional toolmaking, and crafts. Ukwakwa believes every time an Indigenous person plants a seed, it is an act of resistance and an assertion of sovereignty.



ZUNI YOUTH ENRICHMENT PROJECT • Zuni, NM
zyep.org

Zuni Youth Enrichment Project (ZYEP) was formed as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit to ensure that Zuni youth will be healthy and prepared to continue the important traditions of the Zuni culture. ZYEP provides positive role models, enriching programs, and nurturing spaces to strengthen the community and support children in the Zuni Pueblo in what is now western New Mexico. ZYEP's Food Sovereignty program provides mini-grants, family gardens, community gardens, rainwater conservation, in-school education, and agricultural workshops in support of every generation of Zuni youth.

We invite you to learn from a collection of their candid responses because Native communities across Indian Country are working toward an Indigenous food system that travels both ways – a food system that draws from the past, can inform the present, and will be carried forward beyond us. Native communities intuitively know what Native Food Sovereignty and Native Food Security is and isn't. Let's hear it from them, in their own words.

How do you define Native Food Sovereignty?

- *We define food sovereignty as our community's ability to grow, share, and be nourished by our Native foods, contributing to the health of our people and the continuation of our traditions. (ZYEP)*
- *Growing, harvesting, preserving, and cooking our food on our own terms.*

How do you know when you have Native Food Sovereignty?

- *When we can care for our Indigenous foods without interference from non-Indigenous actors.*
- *When we have the ability to share cultural traditions and foods.*
- *When everyone in the community has access to traditional knowledge about caring for our food.*
- *When someone has a garden. No matter how small... This is part of food sovereignty.*

How do you define Native Food Security?

- *Native Food Security is about sustainability. It is a cycle, the source of food.*
- *Growing our own foods and having good quantities throughout the season, year to year.*
- *The USDA says food deserts. I cringe. There is food all around us. We need to find the people who can lead and guide us.*
- *Our elders won't be here long. We have to develop our own ways. It's one of the most difficult things.*

How do you know when you have Native Food Security?

- *When we know about wild foods.*
- *When we know what your Native foods are and where they come from.*
- *When we are prepared. When we are educated enough to educate the young.*
- *When the community comes first, we find those who can carry the knowledge.*
- *When kids taste the food. When they have that experience over and over.*
- *When food is known as medicine.*

What have you learned that would help guide another youth program focused on food work?

- *Develop a curriculum to go along with the youth program. Develop that beforehand so that you have something to follow.*
- *You know your community best. Stay focused on their strengths.*
- *Include the elders in the program.*
- *Serve plant-based and traditional foods at gatherings and meetings.*

If you had to make a promise to your community, what would it be?

- *As Native Americans, we have witnessed and experienced so much trauma. Going forward generations I hope to help build strong individuals who are aware of how special it is to be Native and continue the life morals we all live by.*
- *Continue the knowledge and ways of our ancestors.*
- *Keep doing the work I am doing to empower young Native farmers and teach our language and traditional ways that were taken from us. I promise to never give up.*
- *Protect our water, resources, elders, children, seeds, culture, and foodways.*
- *I promise to ensure that the knowledge of our elders can be shared with our youth.*

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Distinguishing between Native Food Sovereignty and Native Food Security in Indian Country is a three-part series that includes **Perspectives on Native Food Sovereignty & Health Equity**, **Native Food Security from Lack to Abundance**, and **Serving Native Youth: A Dialogue on Native Food Sovereignty and Native Food Security**.