



Food Seasonality

Historically, diets in Native communities consisted of foods available through traditional agriculture, foraging and hunting. Native people introduced many of the world's healthiest foods and an exciting movement is underway to embrace food seasonality and promote our traditional foods in restaurants, schools, hospitals and other institutions.

Our traditional foods provide a variety of nutritious and healthful options like beta-carotene-rich pumpkins, berries with antioxidants and beans, which provide complex carbohydrates and healthy fiber. We know that our traditional foods are healthy and give us the nutrients we need to live long, happy and purposeful lives. Further, when our food is local and fresh, it tastes better and is environmentally sustainable.

Did you know?

- ❖ Locally-grown produce travels an average of 56 miles from farm to point of sale, compared to an average of 1,494 miles for 30 types of produce from conventional sources, according to the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture. By eating locally and seasonally, you obtain the freshest food and reduce your carbon footprint.
- ❖ Through its farm-to-school program, the U.S. Department of Agriculture is encouraging schools to buy locally and seasonally to promote better health for children. Starting in January 2014, they will make available two webinars each month to highlight the variety of ways in which school districts can purchase local foods. To learn more, visit <http://www.fns.usda.gov/farmtoschool/webinars>.
- ❖ Many Native communities are initiating programs to ensure that our youth learn about traditional food systems and sustainable environmental practices to embrace seasonal foods and promote healthy lifestyles. For example, with a grant from the Centers for Disease Control Traditional Foods Project, Salish Kootenai College on the Flathead Indian Reservation in Western Montana launched a program called *Traditional Living Challenge and Ancestor's Choice*. Through this program the community is restoring indigenous permaculture practices and creating mentoring relationships with elders and youth. The program also focuses on traditional ways of learning surrounding food gathering, hunting, and preparation and offers activities such as nutrition classes for children using theater, songs and puppets.¹

¹ Centers for Disease Control. Traditional Foods Project. Retrieved January 2014 from, <http://www.cdc.gov/diabetes/projects/ndwp/traditional-foods.htm>





- ❖ Hospitals across the nation are finding ways to promote health through local seasonal foods. For example, 100 hospitals in Michigan have made a commitment through the Michigan Good Food Charter to have 20 percent of their food purchases Michigan grown by 2020. To learn more, visit www.michiganfood.org.

Not only are schools, hospitals and other institutions sharing the health benefits of traditional Native foods, Native chefs are embracing the seasonal foods of our ancestors in their menus.

Nephi Craig is the Executive Chef of the White Mountain Apache Sunrise Resort's premier restaurant where he celebrates seasonal offerings by local Native farmers through multiple approaches, including a tasting menu of creative local cuisine. With international experience and classical French training, Craig is also the founder of the Native American Culinary Association (NACA), which recently held the *2013 NACA Food Symposium: Celebrating People, Land and Food*.



A Conversation with Chef Nephi Craig (White Mountain Apache and Diné)

How are local farmers positively impacting your work as a chef?

The role that farmers play seasonally in our work here is very important for a number of reasons ... They are revitalizing stories and oral traditions that a lot of people and a lot of our elders felt were being neglected or that weren't valued anymore. There is a reconnection to our traditions through the act of farming and supporting and promoting agriculture ... It really elevates our style of cooking because it's locally grown Apache produce and it's being used for à la carte menus or banquets or even being refined on our chefs' tables.

Tell me more about your commitment to promoting the benefits of seasonal foods?

As we in our Indigenous communities begin to revitalize our agricultural traditions or even food traditions, we begin to get in tune to the entire universe because of the seasonality of foods. As we delve even deeper it takes us to the spiritual and emotional level where some of our foods – whether they are cultivated Indigenous foods or wild Indigenous foods – are connected to our creation stories, our songs, they are woven into our baskets, they are represented in our art forms, our music and into our healing ceremonies. It's very powerful and when these things are brought back, it's a form of recovery. It starts in the home with families and the communities. When you bring in the decolonization piece, all Indigenous communities within the United States and even globally are experiencing a recovery from colonialism right now. These social movements revolving around social rights, food politics and food science are very liberating.





How far has the seasonal food movement come?

The world is growing up. It's becoming more conscious of food miles, ecology, all these things ... how far food travels. We are coming into an age of responsibility in a sense where we are beginning to care about our food and our planet and our locale. It's a neat time.

There's definitely a lot of work to be done to integrate these models into our education system and into the diets and onto the tables of our school programs, lunch programs and elder feeding programs where it becomes just part of the culture like it always has been historically. For example, in the mid to late 1800s, little kids here in Apache land growing up would have a very deep intimate knowledge of wild foods and high level of botanical information just by living here every day and every year. In that sense it's always been part of our vocabulary, our life vocabulary in a sense, so bringing that piece of our identity back into the schools and making it relevant and cool again I think is the next challenge.

We've made really great strides in just the span of less than 20 years. But it's an inter-generational practice and it's going to require generations. We've made huge strides. There are Native chefs all over now. There are Native farmers and they are younger. We see food programs in urban communities where Indigenous Latinos and people from Mexico and South America are clinging to their agricultural roots to maintain identity in urban communities.

How can you empower more chefs at restaurants, hospitals and school to embrace seasonal menus?

I think it's a cultivating a sense of creative professionalism because as Natives we have always been able to create something out of nothing. We've been very innovative since time immemorial, very self-reliant and articulate. I think just learning to cook and embracing the seasons is an adventure and challenge in itself. For example if a farmer has an abundance of squash, or an abundance of kale or tomatoes seasonally, buying that and using that to celebrate it on the menu or to preserve it – drying, canning or making sauces – I think it's just a matter of being creative. If we had a large crop of one or two specific items, I know that I would like to utilize that to celebrate the farm and the farmers to support their practice and begin the foundational work of building consistency.

Tell us more about the benefits of increasing the amount of seasonal foods in your diet?

I think many of our foods are very high in fiber, very dense and just packed with nutrition. A very simple example we use to conceptualize Indigenous food and agriculture are the "Three Sisters." Corn, beans and squash are a very important tool for me when I get to speak with the public or groups of all ages. It's a form of companion planting. It's very ingenious Indigenous agriculture and all three vegetables form a protein, which to me is evidence that much of our ancestral diet was 70% plant-based and not as carnivorous as the colonial palate would have us believe. It doesn't really support the damaging effects of, say, how they farm animals today.

These seasonal Indigenous menus that could be produced are not just on the superficial level of nutrition where we are concerned with vitamins, minerals and proteins. There's another dimension to nutrition with Indigenous communities, and all communities, and that's the spiritual dimension of nutrition, the emotional dimension of nutrition. That gratifying sense of self, of saying "this is Native, this my food. This is who I am." To me it's an interconnected





thing when you talk about nutrition. Whenever you talk about nutrition, appetite, health, recovery, cooking, there's dimensions to all of these different things. As Natives we like to take it to that level. That's the bigger piece of the recovery puzzle that we are piecing together now.

Could you give an example of how you use your creativity in promoting seasonal foods?

We run a chefs' table that's influenced by the seasons and depends on what we can get at the moment. What we do is create a tasting menu, which could span eight to 12 courses of small tastes of Native foods used in a very creative way. Very much like some of the best restaurants in the country right now and even globally. It brings back the notion that our foods are very important and that they are only available in this part of the world ... We will use different wild foods that we have gathered in the summertime and have preserved by different methods, either by drying, pickling or canning. In the summer the chefs' tables are very vibrant with local wild edibles – just a wide range of foods because of our land base here at Sunrise in the mountains is at about 10,000 feet and then we go down into the desert with the Salt River canyons, so it's a very diverse land base to select wild foods from.

Sample Seasonal Menu

Chef Nephi Craig inspires with the following menu items he created over the years, which celebrate his summer and early fall seasonal favorites from the Southwest and Indigenous peoples of South America.





Ch'iyáń alzaahí (Menu)

Nest'q' (Salad)

Acknowledging the Indigenous Civilizations of South America

Nest'q' iltá at'ééhi obe'ta'íi almond biyigé tii nadisgeed

South American Ayacucho Quinoa Salad

Mixed Greens, tomatoes, cucumbers, scallions, avocados,
Toasted Almonds and Pine Nuts
Citrus and Herbs

Itsj' (Entrée)

Honoring Western Apache Cattle Associations and Indigenous Trade Routes of the American Southwest

Magashi bitsj hist'éégo, Yúdahá bí nadq', Hkisyu taagi

Grilled Beef Tenderloin served over Roasted White Corn Mush from Dinetah

Three Sisters of Zucchini, Yellow Squash, Anasazi Beans, Tepary Beans and Sweet Corn
Sauce Nana

Hkqgd golnini (Dessert)

Capturing Identity, Time and Place: White Mountain Apache Tribe

Masáána bik'os ndeezi bigowq

Pear Bii' Gowah

Poached Pears, Roasted Pear Pearls, Pinon Cloud, and Toasted Pinons

For more information, visit

- ❖ **Northwest Indian College's Traditional Foods and Plants Project**
The Traditional Foods and Plants Project's mission is to promote self-sufficiency and wellness for Indigenous people through culturally grounded, multi-generational, and holistic programs. <http://nwicplantsandfoods.com/food-sovereignty>
- ❖ **National Good Food Network**
A program of Wallace Center this site offers communication and resources for scaling up regional and local food systems. The National Good Food Network is committed to building a food system that offers healthy, green, fair, affordable food so that more producers benefit, more communities have access to good food, and a greater number of acres are managed through sustainable practices. www.ngfn.org
- ❖ **White Earth Land Recovery Project**
The White Earth Land Recovery Project's mission is to facilitate recovery of the original land base of the White Earth Indian Reservation, while preserving and restoring traditional practices of sound land stewardship, language fluency, community development, and strengthening our spiritual and cultural heritage. <http://nativeharvest.com/>
- ❖ **National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition**





The National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition is an alliance of grassroots organizations that advocate for federal policy reform to advance the sustainability of agriculture, food systems, natural resources, and rural communities. <http://sustainableagriculture.net/>

❖ **The Food Trust**

The Food Trust's mission is to ensure that everyone has access to affordable, nutritious food and information to make healthy decisions. They have developed a comprehensive approach to improved food access that combines nutrition education and greater availability of affordable, healthy food. <http://thefoodtrust.org/>

❖ **Tsyunhekw[^] - Oneida Community Integrated Food Systems**

Tsyunhekw[^] plays a pivotal role in the reintroduction of high-quality, organically grown foods that will ensure a healthier and more fulfilling life and facilitate positive dietary and nutritional change. <http://www.oneidanation.org/tsyunhekw/>

❖ **Tohono O'odham Community Action**

Tohono O'odham Community Action is dedicated to creating a healthy, culturally vital and sustainable community on the Tohono O'odham Nation by offering a comprehensive set of programs aimed at creating a healthy, culturally vital and sustainable community. <http://www.tocaonline.org/>

