



FIRST NATIONS
DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE

IN PARTNERSHIP
WITH



OUTCOMES
Under the

Nutrition Education *for* **NATIVE COMMUNITIES**

PROJECT



OUR MISSION

...to strengthen American Indian economies to support healthy Native communities. We invest in and create innovative institutions and models that strengthen asset control and support economic development for American Indian people and their communities.

OUR GUIDING PRINCIPLE

We believe that when armed with the appropriate resources, Native peoples hold the capacity and ingenuity to ensure the sustainable, economic, spiritual and cultural well-being of their communities.



ABOUT First Nations Development Institute

First Nations Development Institute (First Nations) is a Native American-led, national nonprofit organization whose mission is to strengthen American Indian economies in support of healthy Native communities. Through a three-pronged strategy of Educating Grassroots Practitioners, Advocating For Systemic Change and Capitalizing Indian Communities, First Nations is working to restore Native American control and culturally-compatible stewardship of the assets they own – be they land, human potential, cultural heritage, or natural resources – and to establish new assets for ensuring the longterm vitality of Native communities. First Nations is the only Native American-controlled nonprofit dedicated to asset-based, sustainable development, advocating for Native control of Native assets.

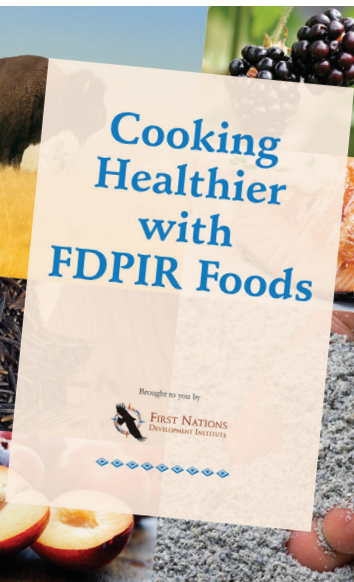
First Nations recognizes that farming, ranching and land management are longtime traditions in Native communities and are key assets affecting Native communities' economic health and Native community members' physical health. First Nations created the Native Agriculture and Food Systems Initiative (otherwise known as NAFSI) to support Native communities in building sustainable food systems that improve health and nutrition, strengthen food security, create food-related businesses, and overall increase control over Native agriculture and food systems.

PROJECT PARTNER National Association of Food Distribution Programs on Indian Reservations

For this project, First Nations is honored to have partnered with the National Association of Food Distribution Programs on Indian Reservations (NAFDPIR), a national nonprofit organization representing 276 tribes that have citizens participating in the federal Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR). Its membership comprises over 100 Indian Tribal Organizations (ITOs) and a few state offices serving the 276 tribes. NAFDPIR serves as a special organization that coordinates FDPIR program managers on such activities as sharing best practices, challenges, reviewing FDPIR contents and more.

PROJECT OVERVIEW Nutrition Education for Native Communities

In partnership with NAFDPIR, First Nations launched the Nutrition Education for Native Communities project to increase access to culturally-based nutrition education programs. More specifically, this project provided financial support to Native communities, giving preference to FDPIR program sites, to support nutrition education models in Native communities. Project participants developed a cookbook and nutrition education videos that will be used for nutrition education.





WHY is this PROJECT NEEDED?

Addressing Food Insecurity, Hunger and Access to Nutrition Education in Native Communities

Prior to colonization, Native peoples had self-sufficient and sustainable food systems. Over time, removal from traditional homelands, limited access to traditional food sources, and transitions to cash economies, among other things, weakened tribal food systems. Today, many Native communities and households are food insecure, dependent on outside food sources, and maintain a diet of Western foodstuffs that are often linked to negative and deteriorating health, community and economic effects.

Current data suggest that Native households experience food insecurity at greater rates than most Americans. Data indicate that 23 percent of Native households (nearly one in four) are food insecure compared to 15 percent of all U.S. households. Similarly, data note that 60 percent of all counties that are majority-Native American are labeled highly food insecure by the USDA.¹

However, some reservation communities experience even greater rates of food insecurity. For example, Shannon County, South Dakota, entirely encompassed by the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, has a child poverty rate over 60 percent and in households with kindergarten-age children has been reported to be as high as 40 percent.² Similarly, research on the Navajo reservation has noted that 75 percent of individuals are food insecure.³

Many Native communities face high rates of food insecurity in addition to high rates of obesity, and suffer from other diet-related ailments and diseases. This is largely due to the fact that healthy traditional foods are no longer readily accessible, “junk foods” are more readily available than other foods, and nutrition-related education opportunities remain scarce.

Recognizing that the loss of self-sufficient food systems is a contributing factor to the myriad issues Native communities face today, First Nations Development Institute (First Nations) works with and supports Native communities in reclaiming local food systems. Local food-system control is foundational to reversing years of colonization aimed at the disintegration of cultural and traditional belief systems and the dismantling of Native social and economic systems. If Native communities have control of local food systems, food becomes a driver for cultural revitalization, improving community health and economic development. This report, in addition to all of First Nations’ work, highlights the innovative approaches to community challenges being led by Native tribes and organizations to grow strong and healthy Native communities.

¹ Gundersen, Craig, Emily Engelhard, Amy Satoh, and Elaine Waxman. "Map the Meal Gap 2014: Technical Brief. Feeding America." (2016). ² Bauer, Katherine W., Rachel Widome, John H. Himes, Mary Smyth, Bonnie Holy Rock, Peter J. Hannan, and Mary Story. "High food insecurity and its correlates among families living on a rural American Indian reservation." *American Journal of Public Health* 102, no. 7 (2012): 1346-1352. ³ Pardilla, Marla, Divya Prasad, Sonali Suratkar, and Joel Gittelsohn. "High levels of household food insecurity on the Navajo Nation." *Public Health Nutrition* 17, no. 1 (2014): 58-65



What is food insecurity?

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) notes that food insecurity exists if people have limited or uncertain access to adequate food to meet their dietary needs to live an active and healthy life. Alternatively, food insecure households, at some point in the year, are unable to provide food to one or more household members because they lack sufficient resources.

What is hunger?

There is no wide agreement on a definition of hunger, however, it does exist as a result of food insecurity. Hunger is a personal, physical sensation of discomfort, over a sustained period, resulting from insufficient foods to meet an individual’s basic needs.



The FDPIR & HOW IT WORKS

- FDPIR program is a nutrition-assistance program that is distributed to low-income families as an alternative to Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) because of the lack of easy access to SNAP offices or authorized retailers on or near reservations.
- FDPIR is also commonly referred to as the “commodity” food program and sends a monthly package of food made up of some of the 70 different food products available to enrolled households.
- This program is administered at the local level by either state or approved Indian Tribal Organizations (ITOs).
- The USDA purchases and ships FDPIR foods to the ITOs and state agencies based on their orders from a list of available foods. Participants on most reservations can choose fresh produce instead of canned fruits and vegetables, according to the USDA.

What is the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations?

One federal feeding program that aims to address issues of hunger and food insecurity in Native communities is the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR). FDPIR is a federal feeding program whereby local FDPIR programs in or near Native communities provide USDA foods monthly to income-eligible households living on American Indian reservations, approved areas near reservations and in Oklahoma. Currently, there are approximately 276 tribes receiving benefits under the FDPIR.⁴ Food for distribution is purchased by the USDA and shipped to local programs. Local authorized distributors then store and distribute the food, determine applicant eligibility, and provide some limited nutrition education to recipients. FDPIR is one of the few federal feeding programs that reaches the most vulnerable populations in Native communities. In many cases, FDPIR serves households in isolated areas and those without access to vehicles to travel to grocery stores.

In many ways, the FDPIR program has become a cultural institution in Native communities, defining an entire generation of consumers in Indian Country from coast to coast. Cultural markers are evident (for better or worse) in popular references to “commods,” “commodity cheese” and “commod bods,” demonstrating that this feeding program has penetrated the social life of Native communities.

Currently, FDPIR is operated by a group of dedicated program managers at the community level. A large majority of these managers are over the age of 50 and have served in their capacities as managers for over 10 years. These dedicated managers are largely responsible for education and advocacy efforts to include healthier and traditional food options into the food packages offered under FDPIR and promote dignity, education and community through this very important feeding program.

⁴ Harper, E., R. Orbeta, L. Southworth, K. Meade, R. Cleveland, S. Gordon, M. Buckley, and J. Hirschman. "FDPIR food package nutritional quality: report to Congress." U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, Office of Research and Analysis, Special Nutrition Programs Report FD-08-FDPIR. Alexandria, VA: USDA November (2008).

"The uniqueness about FDPIR is that participants have to see us to receive their food, see us face to face, and that provides us with an opportunity to provide education materials and answer questions," said Mary Greene Trotter. While their program is providing a much needed service to the community, "...there was nothing specific as far as nutrition education to food distribution. Prior to this grant, the last nutrition person from North Dakota State University Extension Service was only available four hours a week."



PROJECT GOAL

Support nutrition education programs in Native communities, specially targeting FDPIR programs, and other organizations working to initiate or expand culturally and community-based nutrition education projects. With expanded access to nutrition education, Native individuals and families will improve their nutrition and healthy habits.

Over 9 months...

\$310,000

in grants were awarded to Native Communities.

21

Native communities in 12 states received support to design or expand nutrition education projects.

15

FDPIR programs received grant support.

6

nonprofit organizations working to increase access to nutrition education for Native people and families received grant support.

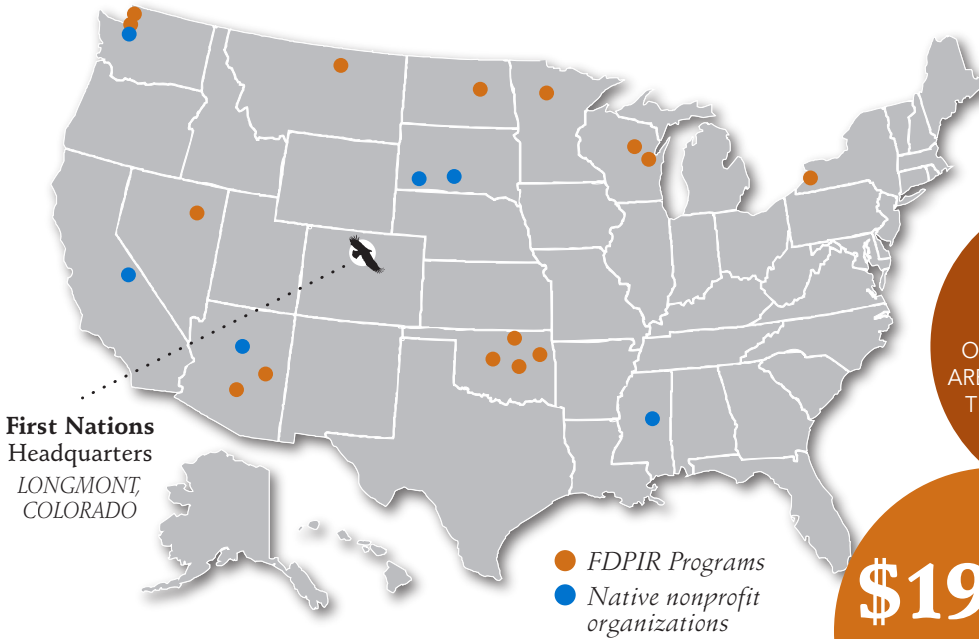
“We never would have had the resources for the eight-week nutrition education cooking classes without the support from First Nations. It was definitely a huge support that made the garden-based and nutrition education components of the Food Sovereignty Program much stronger. We’re excited and motivated to continue with cooking demonstrations during the third year of our community market.”

~ Bishop Paiute Tribe





UNDERSTANDING the Communities Served



First Nations
Headquarters
LONGMONT,
COLORADO



19

OF THESE COMMUNITIES
ARE LOCATED IN COUNTIES
THE USDA DEFINES AS A
FOOD DESERT.

28%

AVERAGE POVERTY RATE
ACROSS COMMUNITIES
SERVED COMPARED TO
13.5% NATIONALLY

\$19,500

AVERAGE HOUSEHOLD
INCOME COMPARED TO
NATIONAL AVERAGE OF
\$51,939

MEET OUR COMMUNITY PARTNERS

LOCATION

GRANT AWARD

Cherokee Nation

The “Smoothie Demonstration Project” increased consumption of healthy foods for 210 households, developing fresh fruit and vegetable smoothie recipes while providing physical activities for new ways to stay active and healthy.

Tahlequah, Oklahoma

\$20,000

Cheyenne & Arapaho Tribes of Oklahoma

“Education to Lead Our Next Generation,” by the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribe, developed a community cookbook through cooking demonstrations, designing recipes and taste testing with community members. The cookbook is accessible to all community members including FDPIR households and children in the Head Start program.

Concho, Oklahoma

\$20,000

Fort Belknap Indian Community

The “Food Sovereignty Program” developed and facilitated cooking classes and educational workshops, including healthy cooking and food preservation, food safety and safe storage techniques, garden planning and expansion efforts, seed starting and saving, and community gardens.

Harlem, Montana

\$10,000

Gila River Indian Community

Gila River Indian Community’s “Nutrition Education” project developed and facilitated cooking classes and educational workshops.

Sacaton, Arizona

\$10,000

Lummi Nation Service Organization

Through its project, “Nourishing Our Community,” the Lummi Nation Service Organization increased food security by increasing the number of community gardens, backyard gardens and garden boxes and increased nutrition knowledge by offering multiple healthy food alternatives for diabetes prevention and hypertension reduction community classes.

Bellingham, Washington

\$10,000

CONTINUED...



Ponca Tribe of Oklahoma

Ponca City, Oklahoma **\$10,000**

The "Ponca Tribe FDPIR Nutrition Education Program" developed nutrition education curriculum for all of its FDPIR participants and worked to strengthen local tribal food systems by increasing awareness of and access to traditional food knowledge and recipes.

Red Lake Band of Chippewa

Red Lake, Minnesota **\$10,000**

The "Red Lake Local Food Initiative Promotes Good Food that Feeds Us" developed a compilation of contemporary and traditional food stories into an e-book. Food demonstrations were held, increasing knowledge and healthy cooking, and informational nutrition education packets on healthy cooking, food safety and food budgeting were disbursed to all FDPIR recipients.

Seminole Nation of Oklahoma

Wewoka, Oklahoma **\$20,000**

The Seminole Nation's project, "From Observation to Participation," increased nutrition and health knowledge by developing a series of 12 recipe preparation videos.

Seneca Nation of Indians

Irving, New York **\$20,000**

Through the Seneca Nation's "Nutrition Education" project, tribal community members were served by increasing access to healthy eating through nutrition education classes on how to prepare traditional recipes in the FDPIR package.

South Fork Te-Moak Shoshone Indian Reservation

Spring Creek, Nevada **\$10,000**

The "South Fork Food Program" increased nutrition and traditional health knowledge by providing healthy cooking with traditional foods classes and cooking activities, providing opportunities to gather and prepare traditional foods and share oral stories.

Spirit Lake Nation

Fort Totten, North Dakota **\$20,000**

Through "Nutrition Education Curriculum for FDPIR Families," the tribe developed evidence based and culturally appropriate nutrition education curriculum with lessons that included: Focus on Fruits, Vary your Veggies, Aim for Whole Grains, Go Lean with Protein, Discover Dairy and Fun with Family Meals. FDPIR participants were provided with lesson plans that demonstrated the importance of the nutritional value for each food group and a Nutrition Mission passport that was used to track attendance, household size, and goal-setting.

Swinomish Indian Tribal Community

La Conner, Washington **\$10,000**

The "Swinomish Nutrition Program" implemented recipe development by bringing together elders, youth and other community members through cooking and taste-testing nutrition education classes.

Oneida Tribe of Indians of Wisconsin

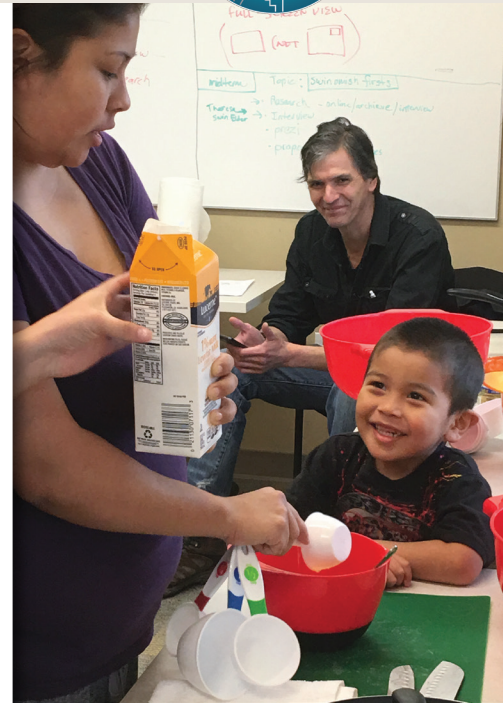
Oneida, Wisconsin **\$20,000**

Through "Oneida FDPIR Participant Nutritional Education Project," the tribe increased access to healthy and traditional foods by creating a nutrition education curriculum, cooking demonstrations with Oneida elders and the development of a cookbook.

White Mountain Apache Tribe

Whiteriver, Arizona **\$10,000**

The "Honor and Celebrate the Gift of Traditional Foods" project utilized Apache elders in the community to share traditional ways of food preparation and cooking, increasing nutrition and traditional health knowledge.



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Menominee Indian Tribe of Wisconsin *Keshena, Wisconsin* **\$26,000**

The Menominee Indian Tribe of Wisconsin's "FDPIR Program Nutrition Education" project worked with 25 tribal members to improve access and healthy eating by educating community members through cooking demonstrations.

Choctaw Fresh Produce *Philadelphia, Mississippi* **\$15,000**

Through its project, "Choctaw Nutrition Education Pilot Project," healthy recipe videos were cultivated, 500 recipe cards were distributed into the community, providing simple and healthy recipes that encourage cooking more fresh produce dishes at home, and a student-run farmers' market was developed, collaborating with students from Choctaw High School.

STAR School *Flagstaff, Arizona* **\$15,000**

The STAR School's "Nourishing Our Community" project provided nutrition education to all of its students in grades 5-8, increasing traditional knowledge of local foods and giving the students the opportunity to prepare and serve healthy meals.

Rosebud Economic Development Corporation *Mission, South Dakota* **\$15,000**

Through its project, "Feeding the People: Strengthening Family and Community Health through Shared Meals and Nutrition Education," the Rosebud Economic Development Corporation (REDCO) designed and developed "Family Empowerment through Food" nutrition education sessions in collaboration with the Boys with Braids team, focused on demystifying the concept the concept of nutrition and healthy eating.

Thunder Valley Community Development Corporation *Porcupine, South Dakota* **\$15,000**

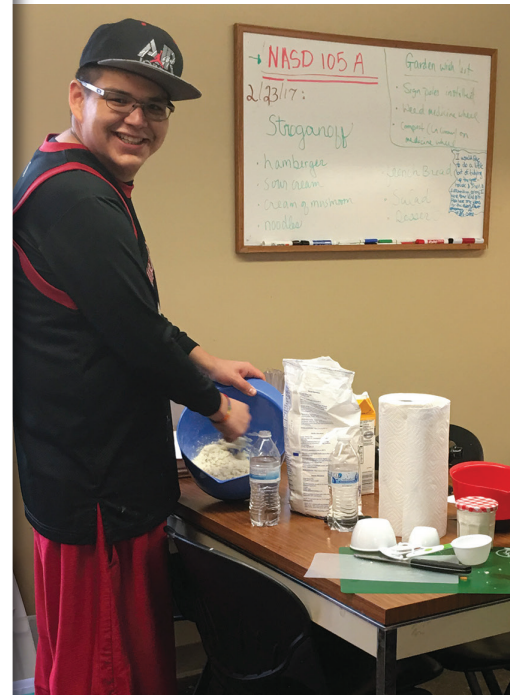
Through its project, "Lakota Food Knowledge," Thunder Valley drafted a Lakota Food Knowledge Handbook along with increasing access and knowledge to traditional Lakota foods through nutrition education classes focusing on growing, harvesting, processing, storage and consumption. They also developed videos documenting traditional ways of harvesting buffalo, processing dried buffalo meat and making the traditional food of wasna.

Muckleshoot Indian Tribe *Auburn, Washington* **\$9,000**

The "Traditional Healthy Beverages Campaign" worked to reduce youth consumption of sugary drinks and increase consumption of herbal teas, fruits and vegetables by developing a healthy beverage station toolkit and curriculum.

Bishop Paiute Tribe *Bishop, California* **\$15,000**

Through its project, "Garden-Based Education," the tribe increased production of traditional healthy foods through the cultivation of family demonstration gardens, and developed nutritional education flyers.





MEASURED PROGRESS: Behavioral Change

Community Partners reported the following behavioral changes:

Number of persons reporting an increase in the number of servings of fruits and vegetables consumed

2,407

Number of persons reporting an increase in the number of meals prepared at home per week

1,828

Number of persons receiving at least six hours of nutrition education

1,146



"The recipes used some of the new traditional foods such as salmon, wild rice, blue corn and bison, which are available in the new FDPIR traditional foods basket. Salmon was cooked in a cast iron skillet over an open flame, over a charcoal grill and on the stove top. The participants were excited to get those, but they wanted to know how to cook them, very quickly. In the cooking demos for one day it was not on the agenda, but the cook loves to cook salmon fillets, and everyone was excited about them, so we had to send for the salmon fillets. We cooked those too because we knew we had a captive audience."

~ Seminole Nation of Oklahoma





Specialized trainings provided in Native communities.

Topics included healthy and nutritious cooking, food preservation, food safety, traditional foods, gardening, seed starting and saving and more.

Regional
Healthier
Traditions
FDPIR
Cookbook

1

20

92

Cooking demonstrations & classes provided

88

Nutrition education resources for individuals and families developed, including pamphlets, brochures, posters and more.

1

Healthy Beverage Toolkit

25

Physical activity classes held

30

Nutrition Education Videos produced

5

Community-based cookbooks developed

**Measured
PROGRESS:**
Nutrition Education
Tools Provided



"Bison, salmon, wild rice recipes, blue corn meal, are all offered in the new FDPIR traditional foods basket. The participants liked bison/buffalo. Throughout the nutrition education we try to showcase different foods that are not familiar to the people in this area. We're close to Minnesota, so the wild rice chicken soup is good for those cold winter days. The salmon was not familiar to our area, so we served up that recipe too."

~ Spirit Lake Nation



The Seminole Nation of Oklahoma

The Seminole Nation of Oklahoma "is located in south-central Oklahoma, approximately 45 miles east of Oklahoma City, and it includes most of Seminole County," according to the tribe's official website. In other words the Seminole Nation is vast – and the majority of its tribal members are spread out across the county and the state. This might have proved a challenge for some, but Tod Robertson, the Seminole Nation Food and Nutrition Program Director, and his staff saw it as an opportunity to bring tribal members together in various settings.

The Seminole Nation has a transit service that is free for tribal members and provides transportation to and from tribal programs spread out across 633 square miles. The food demonstrations were held at various locations to give tribal members the opportunity to attend and experience the many different cooking options.

The Wellness Center at the Mikasuki Mission (Chief's House) was used to show how to cook on an outdoor, open flame such as at traditional ceremonial grounds or at powwows. Outdoor grilling over charcoal on picnic and commercial grills was shown because the tribal housing authority has grills for the community to access. The tribe's historic Grisso Mansion was used as well and drew large crowds. For one event, 56 people registered and, with the drop-ins, the number rose to 65. Word spread quickly across the community about all the good cooking that was happening, or perhaps it was the aroma of the delicious food.

The approach of cooking in three different types of settings encouraged attendance and left people asking when the next demonstration was going to be held. The participation crossed generations and at some outdoor events there were three generations of families in attendance – learning together.

"Elders were out there looking for things to do and it was an enjoyable event for them. It gave them the opportunity to get out. They prepared dishes, they were interested. It was great to let them share with each other, it brought out a number of different people, young people too, we always had people interacting and sharing their stories," said Robertson.

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While the cooking and food drew the people, it was what they were cooking with that stirred up the storytelling and memories that go along with cooking in a communal setting. "The cast iron skillet — when they would see it, it would remind them of the many times they used it previously. Participants would say 'I've got one of those at home' and it brought back memories of what was cooked and that helped us to say - you've eaten cooked food before," said Robertson.

Easier to "Eat Unhealthy"

One challenge which Robertson and his team worked with the participants on was how to fit cooking into their day, and the benefits of making time to cook healthy food versus the alternative.

"The participants remarked how easy it is to eat unhealthy. They didn't consider that they have time to cook. The demonstrations showed that if you don't have much time, well here's how you can prepare a nutritious meal to eat later. Unfortunately the convenience of store fried foods and fast foods, have taken the role of the cook. We're showing them that they do have time with the use of a slow cooker."

The demonstrations also gave the participants the opportunity to try unfamiliar foods available to them in their FDPIR food baskets. No longer the "commods" or "commodity food" their great-grandparents or grandparents grew up on, the program now offers healthier food staples along with fresh fruits, vegetables, dairy, meats, beans and much more.

"We definitely appreciate First Nations for obtaining the funding from the Walmart Foundation, it was great, because it wasn't federal dollars — it gave us the freedom to be creative," said Robertson.

Sharing the Knowledge of Food

Another goal of Seminole Nation's program was to share the recipes and cooking demos with not only tribal members in person, but to go virtual with the information with 12 videos, which will be posted to the Seminole Nation website and its official Facebook page, according to Robertson.

"You see everybody walking and sitting around and they have their phones, so if we do it (the demonstrations) just for people who are physically able to participate — then we've left out the rest of the world. With social media there is no limit to the access."





Spirit Lake Tribe

Mary Greene Trottier grew up having family meals around the dinner table. She knows how important that is to keeping connected to family and community.

"The concept of sitting at the table as a family has diminished, many are connected to their phones and you lose that family bond. Often times, young people think having a family meal means eating out of a bag - while driving down the road." As the Spirit Lake Tribe Food Distribution Program Director and a grandmother, Greene Trottier thinks about the young ones in her tribal community and wants better health and nutrition for them and their families.

With funding from the FDPIR Special Nutrition Education Grant, Elisha Poulsen was hired as a Nutrition Educator full time for the Spirit Lake Food Distribution Program. Together, Greene Trottier and Poulsen collaborated and applied for the "Nutrition Education for Native American Communities" grant from First Nations. Poulsen, who has her Bachelor of Science in Nursing, and is a tribal member, says Greene Trottier's vision for the community is motivating, and that once the project was funded, they had to work fast to accomplish their goals.

Passport to Better Health

Taking a cue from her grandson, who enjoys reading books about his favorite show - the *Little Einsteins*, who go on missions to learn about new things, Greene Trottier thought why not create "a journey to better health using a passport so they can share create a diary to track their changes on their own personal journey."

The Nutrition Passport program created by the Spirit Lake Food Distribution Program and the North Dakota State University Extension Service focuses on the five food groups of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, protein, and dairy. There is a section where participants can list their goals for each food group, and something new they learned in the nutrition classes and from the cooking demonstrations. The last section of the Passport features "Fun with Family Meals" to help the participants focus on eating together and enjoying healthy nutritious meals they can cook themselves.

"With the Passport and the adults, we asked questions like: 'How would they like to change their eating habits in the food group? How has the lesson impacted you?' We asked them to think about and reflect on it, their food journey. Each lesson prepares them, and there are four different recipes included in the lesson," said Trottier. The Passport was available for participants to take home to remind them of what they were learning in the nutrition classes. The demonstrations incorporated the FDPIR foods available to them.

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Traditional Foods and Storytelling

As the nutrition educator, Poulsen said the Passport was key to helping the participants see how much of each food group they may or may not have been eating and the serving size for their age group. While healthier eating was the goal, making sure the information and recipes made a cultural connection was incorporated throughout – in the form of storytelling.

"Each lesson has different recipes and we try to relate them back to our culture and the story behind it. We talked about gathering together around traditional foods, and we told the stories of the three sisters – corn, beans and squash," said Poulsen.

Also, with wojapi – a traditional Dakota berry desert served in the region – Trottier and Poulsen showed the participants how they could use the cranberries supplied in the FDPIR traditional foods basket, and not add a lot of sugar, as fruit becomes sweeter as it cooks and boils down.

Cooking and Sharing

The Passport helped the participants track their nutrition mission, and the recipes demonstrated and tasted showed how easy the FDPIR foods can be used to prepare nutritious meals at home. However, if one is looking at food insecurity, you might only think about the lack of food itself. Sometimes what is standing in the way of creating more nutrition meals is the lack of the proper equipment.

"The participants were so happy to receive the cookware or bakeware. They were crying and hugging us. It was emotional. We purchased different colored sets so they would get to choose the color they wanted. They have ownership in it now, and they were so excited." Greene Trottier and Poulsen say the incentive of completing the courses and earning the new kitchen tools made an impact on the participants and the staff. Newsletters were also sent out after each lesson providing more tips to stay on track with their nutrition changes, along with more recipes, and just to remind the participants they had support on their nutrition journey.

"We've provided a reason for them to use it (the cookware) and we've emphasized the nutrition," said Trottier. "Now we can move forward with future series, provide more lessons and continue them in the spring. We learn from sharing ... nutrition education is fun."





Bishop Paiute Tribe

The Bishop Paiute Tribe's Food Sovereignty Program (FSP) has been working to "expand their garden-based nutrition education projects to encourage healthy food and lifestyle choices" by partnering with the Bishop Elementary School (BES), the Bishop Indian Head Start (BIHS), and the Inyo County Health and Human Services Department and its food initiative programs.

With the funding provided by First Nations and the Walmart Foundation, the Food Sovereignty program, now in its third year, worked to expand the tribe's work and community outreach.

Families Learn Together

"We focused on increasing garden-based and nutrition education offerings for the fifth-grade classes at BES, and offered similar food related activities to BIHS students," said Jen Schlaich, Food Program Specialist for the Food Sovereignty Program. "Additionally, in collaboration with our FoodCorps Service Member Shanae Vega, FSP staff held an eight-week nutrition education class for Head Start families with hands-on cooking activities for both parents and children."

Each week the class featured a new fruit or vegetable in recipes that the FSP cooked in advanced to share with participants as a taste-test. Parents then went through the preparation steps for the featured recipe.

"BIHS already had a nutrition curriculum. However, in the evening classes, which involved both parents and their children, we were able to integrate foods that students were learning about during the day into their home lives," said Schlaich.

While the parents were trying out the new recipes, the kids were engaged in simple cooking activities that incorporated the same fruit or vegetable that their parents were learning about. The class ended with a fun activity for the whole family such as painting clay pots and planting cooking herbs or designing a fruit basket to take home to an elder. Also, the parents who attended the class were able to take home the meal that had been prepared in class that day.

Plants Impact the Community

While the youngest students were cooking up fun at the Head Start kitchens, the middle school students were busy outside in the gardens tending their own growing plots, and learning about a plant not indigenous to their area. In the Fall of 2016, as part of a farmer-to-farmer cultural exchange supported by The Garden's Edge, Quachuu Aloom, a Guatemalan Farmers' Cooperative, visited the FSP gardens to teach community members about one of their important traditional foods – amaranth.

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Both the fifth-graders and the Head Start students visited the garden to learn about how to harvest and process amaranth, in addition to cooking with it and using it to make crafts.

"We puffed the amaranth using a hot skillet and used it to make honey 'granola' bars that the students were able to taste. The seeds can be used in stews, ground into flour, or eaten like porridge. It is also a wonderful natural dye which the students were able to experiment with when making holiday gifts from plants to bring home to their families. The amaranth became so popular with the students that the small health food store in town ran out of amaranth. Community members requested seeds to plant along their fences as a usable barrier, and amaranth seed packets were distributed to those who were interested in it," said Schlaich.

Other foods planted and harvested in the FSP's family-demonstration garden included: Mohawk red corn courtesy of Rowen White from Akwesasne and founder of Sierra Seeds, tomatoes, strawberries, potatoes, rainbow chard, leeks, radishes, acorn squash, herbs and flowers useful for medicinal purposes or for crafts, currants, gooseberries, beans, peas and bamboo.

Nutrition Education from the Ground Up

Shanae Vega, a Bishop Paiute tribal member, worked with FSP as the FoodCorps Service Member and served as the garden education mentor. Vega would provide support with the nutrition education lessons during the day with the Head Start students, and later in the evenings was involved in the eight-week cooking series for the Head Start families.

Schlaich says Vega was excited to be involved and connecting with community members around garden-based and nutrition education, especially with the kids. At every cooking class Vega was surrounded by kids, who were wondering what she was going to help them cook or what they might get to taste-test next. Vega was also excited to work with all of the fifth grade classes in Bishop that included students from the reservation and from the City of Bishop. She also worked with all children at BIHS and their families from the reservation.

All of the project's efforts, including the partnership with FoodCorps, provided over 127 BES students with 10 hours of nutrition education, and nearly 85 BIHS students with six plus hours of garden-based education. Schlaich and Vega worked to get the information out to the community through a variety of ways, via the tribal newspaper, KBPT Bishop Paiute tribal radio station, and through their partnerships with BES, BIHS, and the Inyo County Health and Human Services Department.

Schlaich says the partnerships, and the funding support from First Nations were key to their success. "We never would have had the resources for the eight-week nutrition education cooking classes without the support from First Nations. It was definitely a huge support that made the garden-based and nutrition education components of the Food Sovereignty Program much stronger. We're excited and motivated to continue with cooking demonstrations during the third year of our community market".





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