Sacred Foods Equals Healthy Lives

Lea Foushee, B.S., Craig Hassel, Ph.D.,
White Earth Tribal & Community College, Anishinaabe Knowledge Institute,
Cordwood Corner 113

Abstract

The past 150 years has witnessed dramatic change in the diets and lifestyle of Anishinaabe people. The highly physical hunter/gatherer lifestyle of seasonal camps and subsistence foods has given way to a dependence upon market foods, commodity foods, fast foods and inexpensive, highly palatable convenience foods. The contemporary food system has left communities within the White Earth Anishinaabe Nation (Reservation) Gaa-waabaabiganikaag with an abundance of cheap, calorically dense convenience foods that contribute to the persistence of diet-related chronic disease. People must now travel 20 – 50 miles to find a full service grocery store with a reasonable selection of fruits and vegetables. This project reflects a community-based approach that draws upon the food gathering heritage and Anishinaabe culture as vital resources to a recovery and restoration of health to Anishinaabe people, families and communities. The healing available from a traditional subsistence diet comes not only from the physiochemical nourishment of the foods themselves, as commonly understood within biomedical perspectives, but also with a nurturance arising from a cultural, emotional, and spiritual relationship to those traditional foods. “Nurturance” in this broader sense includes foods as a sacred connection to all that is, food as a sacred relationship to place, food as memory, food as consciousness and food as cultural survival. This project proposes a plan developed by community-based organizations to plant subsistence wild foods during the coming year and plan four additional sites across the White Earth Anishinaabeg Nation. Greater availability of sacred foods represents a path to healthy lives.