

# Supporting the Health and Return of Locally Produced Traditional Foods Among Michigan Tribal Communities

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individuals with community” (Bell-Sheetter et al., 2014). Moreover, to invest in Indigenous food systems is to increase Indigenous communities’ health, economic development, and cultural revitalization (Bell-Sheetter et al., 2014).

## Implications of Indigenous Food Systems for Michigan Tribes

Some Indigenous nations in the United States have generated an economy through online markets, Indigenous foods farmers’ markets, and branded Indigenous foods, including [Red Lake Nation Fishery](#) and [Oneida Community Integrated Food Systems](#). These are great examples of Midwestern Indigenous communities who have developed food systems that promote economic development. In Michigan, tribal communities are beginning to develop the infrastructure to support economy through local and Indigenous food systems. The Inter-Tribal Council of Michigan (ITC-MI) has developed the [Michigan Tribal Food Access Collaborative](#) to improve access to local and Indigenous foods by supporting community food systems. This work is connected to growing efforts to develop local food systems in Bay Mills Indian Community, Little Traverse Bay Band of Odawa Indians, and through the UP Food is Medicine Coalition.

## Community Partnership

This pilot project expanded the work of Wiba Anung, a partnership between the Inter-Tribal Council of Michigan and representatives from Michigan State University (MSU). For more information on Wiba Anung, see Fitzgerald et al. (2013). The MSU representatives, Dr. Barnes-Najor and Ms. Saucedo, lead the research effort in partnership with Mrs. Leask, Ms. Cameron, and Mrs. Martin from ITC-MI. With the support of this grant, the team conducted a Photovoice project to explore community member perceptions of how colonization has disrupted Native food systems, how these disruptions have contributed to economic and health disparities, and how tribes could support a return to locally produced and traditional foods. Using a framework developed in partnership with colleagues at MSU (Isaacs, Wentworth Fournier &



Barnes-Najor, 2020), the Wiba Anung team examined local issues related to the intersections of social, economic, food, and health inequities from the lens of tribal members using Photovoice methodology.

## Framework

The project was grounded in community-based participatory research (CBPR) and Tribal-Participatory Research (TPR). CBPR is defined as a “systematic inquiry with the participation of those affected by an issue to education and action for social change” (Minkler & Wallerstein, 2003). TPR is similar in concept, but more clearly describes the process of co-creating knowledge

with Native communities (Fisher and Ball, 2003). TPR also recognizes the unique nature of conducting research in sovereign nations within the U.S. borders. These participatory processes allow for unexplored economic and health topics to be conducted in collaboration with Native communities.

## Starting Research Questions

Based on our literature review and prior experiences, we posed three starting research questions in our initial meeting:

- What does health mean for Native communities in Michigan?
- How do traditional foods and cultural customs relate to health?
- How do economic and food sovereignty relate to health?

The starting questions guided our initial meeting with participants. The Photovoice research method requires that the research questions being answered are established with the participants.



## METHOD

### Photovoice

Photovoice is a participatory action research method that uses photography and critical group discussions to examine individuals' lives and communities (Wang & Burris, 1997). This method gives participants autonomy of what knowledge they contribute and how that knowledge is interpreted and shared. Photovoice has been used with Michigan tribes to examine Head Start's role in Native American communities and was established as a culturally responsive research method for research with Indigenous communities (see Thompson et al., 2016). Thompson et al. (2016) stated, "the use of Photovoice as a participatory methodology was purposeful given that it engages participants in the research process, thereby fostering research *with* rather than *on* Native peoples" (p. 1). Given that we wanted to emphasize a participatory project—a collaboration—we created project coordinator roles to recruit research partners. The project coordinators are co-authors, Fillmore and Schneider, on this report.

This project occurred during COVID-19, which meant that all of our meetings with project coordinators and research partners were conducted online through Zoom. See Table 1 for the project timeline and meeting descriptions.

*Table 1. Project Activity Timeline*

<b>Month</b>	<b>Co-Authors</b>	<b>Participants</b>	<b>Purpose</b>
January	Barnes-Najor, Saucedo		Met with community partners from ITC-MI; reached out to project coordinators (Fillmore and Bear Schneider)
February	Barnes-Najor, Saucedo		Met with project coordinators, Fillmore and Bear Schneider
March	Barnes-Najor, Saucedo		Submit IRB application to MSU IRB
March	Barnes-Najor, Saucedo, Fillmore and Bear Schneider		Discuss research partner recruitment; review and establish Photovoice meeting agendas
April - May	Fillmore and Bear Schneider		Recruit research partners
May	Barnes-Najor, Saucedo		IRB application approved
June - July	Saucedo	All five research partners	Individual meetings, rapport development; Overview of: Photovoice method, consent form, Zoom, and equipment needs
July	Barnes-Najor, Saucedo, Fillmore and Bear Schneider	All five research partners	Meeting 1: rapport building; overview of Photovoice; introduce starting research questions; establish the questions being answered by the photographs
August	Barnes-Najor, Saucedo, Fillmore and Bear Schneider	All five research partners	Meeting 2: Photo selection, discussion, voting
August	Barnes-Najor, Saucedo	3 of 5 research partners	Meeting 3: Edit photo descriptions; identify how photographs answer research questions; discuss conclusions
September	Barnes-Najor, Saucedo	1 of 5 research partners*	Present findings at Innovate Michigan! Summit

\*All research partners were invited, but many could not attend due to other commitments.

## Photovoice Process

As Table 1 shows, our research partners were identified by the project coordinators. Once the team was established, the full team met to identify the research questions that we wanted to answer through pictures (meeting 1; see questions in the following section titled, “Established Research Questions”). After this meeting, the partners had two weeks to take and identify pictures they felt answered the research questions. At the end of the two weeks, the team met for meeting 2, where partners presented their pictures. The team ranked the three top photographs by each partner. Once those pictures were chosen, each research partner described the pictures that the group ranked as top three. This meeting was audio recorded and transcribed so the authors could document the descriptions each research partner provided. By the end of meeting 2, at least 20 pictures had been chosen that the research partners felt best answered the established questions. Some pictures were included in a collage rather than as individual pictures (see results section for the pictures and their descriptions). During meeting 3, Barnes-Najor and Saucedo presented the research partners’ photographs and descriptions, and the team collectively edited the descriptions to ensure accurate portrayal of the partners’ perspectives. The team also identified which research questions were answered by each picture and narrative.

## Established Research Questions

1. What are traditional foods?
2. How could health look in your community?
3. How do we describe or think about Indigenous concepts of wellness?
4. How do locally produced & traditional foods contribute to your health?
5. How do locally produced & traditional foods contribute to your community’s wellness?
6. What are the foods that we need to gain better access to utilize?
  - a. What are the barriers to reconnecting to locally produced & traditional foods?
  - b. What ideas do you have to increase access to these foods?
  - c. How do we protect our ability to grow & harvest sacred food?
7. How do your cultural teachings form your relationship with food?
  - a. How do you celebrate with food?
  - b. When do you eat them?
  - c. From where do you source them?

## RESULTS

The results are organized by the established research questions into three sections. First, the traditional foods—manoomin (wild rice), Odawa beans, and corn—are presented. Second, cultural foods are described in relation to traditional foods. Third, Indigenous concepts of wellness are described, documenting how traditional foods contribute to community wellness. Throughout each section, descriptions of cultural teachings and relationships with food are shared. This report presents many of the pictures and their descriptions with little to no additional text added by the authors to highlight the important messages shared by the partners.



## Traditional Foods: Reasons to Increase Access

### *Manoomin*

One of the foundational Anishinaabe traditional foods is manoomin (wild rice in Anishinaabemowin). One research partner said the following:

*“Wild rice, manoomin, which is like one of the many food sources that was removed from us, especially here in Michigan, is coming back. That is our main source of nutrients...pre-colonial food ways, manoomin has a beautiful back story. We can't really talk about Native food without talking about wild rice, and its importance to our culture. If I had to talk about an ingredient as part of my work, the main focus of my work, [manoomin] would be the ingredient.”*



This research partner is a chef based in Grand Rapids. They believe that:

*“culinary school really gives you that limited perspective on food, like food products...you know how it tastes and you know how to serve it, but there's like those key elements as part of growing food that we don't give chefs. [I am] using my Indigenous heritage to reconnect to it by going through the entire process of growing the food and nurturing and looking out for it and harvesting it. The picture with the manoomin kind of reminded me that these are the steps before. I don't know that all chefs lack that connection, but it's part of my heritage—I can't really lack that connection to food. To grow it and to be there from the beginning nurturing stages all the way to food production, putting it on a plate. It's really important, and it's kind of like the foundation of the model and the code that I adhere to being the chef that I am.”*



Another research partner described wild rice as an important piece of Anishinaabe cosmology and history:

*“The wild rice was an older picture...[it was] the first time I had the opportunity to process wild*

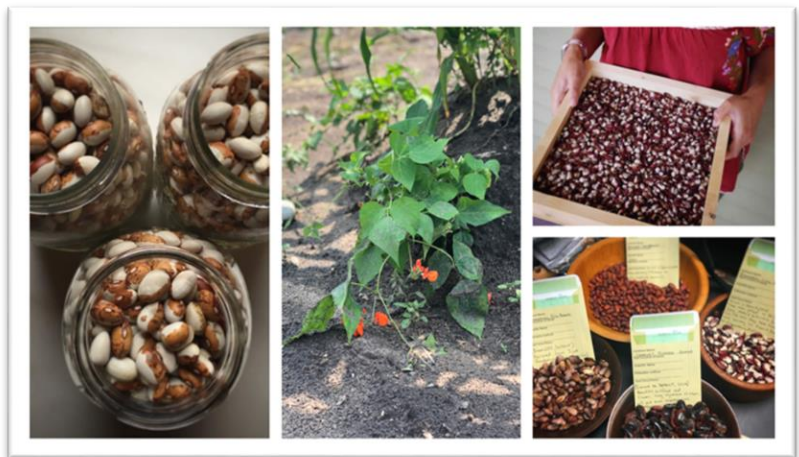
*rice...obviously, it's a really important food for people, but I often reflect on how our traditional foods, specifically our wild rice, plays an important part in our cosmology and our history. Wild rice played a really big part in our migration story as Anishinaabe people and led us to our permanent home. I feel like in a very similar way, our traditional foods have done the same for me through the work that I do. And so that's often what I...When I think about wild rice, what it represents for me."*

### *Odawa Beans*

One other foundational Anishinaabe traditional food is the Odawa bean, named after one of the Anishinaabeg, the Odawa peoples. One research partner described the Odawa beans as one of the three sisters: "...traditional food, what does that look like? I have a picture of the corn, squash, and Odawa beans. So that's the three sisters."

The Odawa beans are important traditional foods. A research partner said,

*"[It] is especially important for me because that's one of my ancestral varieties. It was really special to be reconnected with her and for us to now be on this journey together of revitalizing these foods. It was just really special to reconnect to one of those foods for my own lineage."*



Someone else mentioned,

*"I think beans get underrated for some things so, I think to show the color, the value of the process, and the variety of it is potent. Someone shared with me that corn is such [an] international food that stems in all walks of life, in all areas on earth, as well as beans do. I think it'd be nice to show some light [on beans]."*

It is important to highlight that traditional foods, such as beans, are the foundation for health and wellness. The revitalization of and increased access to traditional foods have been occurring through community programs. One research partner described it well:

*"A few years later, [while working on] the same program in Detroit...as we started building out the seed library, I was really intentional about how we can build seed literacy or understanding of our plant relatives' life cycles in all of our programming. All of our programming included some element of learning about the plants' life cycles. This was me getting ready for one of our cooking classes. That particular year, we were piloting... It was our first time using a culturally based nutrition curriculum called Thirteen Moons of Anishinaabe*

*Nutrition, and that I had learned about [when I went] to the Indigenous Farming Conference. Every one of the lessons kind of follows our traditional lunar calendar, and every lesson focuses on a specific food relative that's seasonal. It has a language lesson and a seed study... a food is medicine piece."*

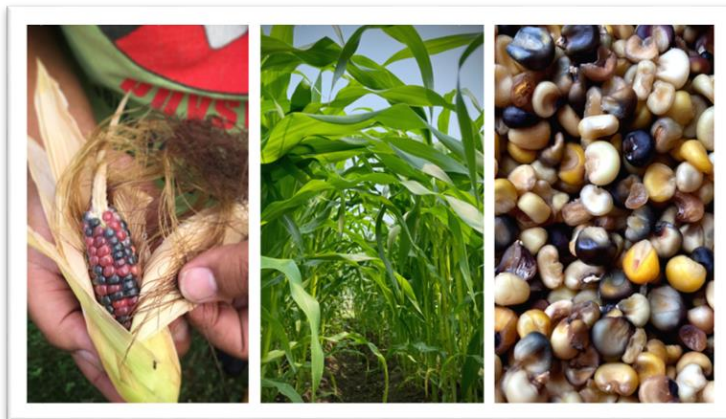
They go on to describe how increasing access to traditional beans has a deeper meaning. They say the following:

*"The three of us that were leading these classes together had our section that we always facilitated, and I always did the seed portion. It's always been really important to me too, I guess, as I've been on this seed keeping journey of passing along that story of these specific varieties of the seeds when they exchange hands. I've kind of learned over time that part of the responsibility or the role of a seed keeper is **a cultural memory keeper**. So, we remember the plant knowledge of how to grow these, how to cook with them, the communities of origin, and we try our best to pass those on. That's why I had all the little note cards as we were passing [the seeds] around in the class. So, we were focusing on beans that month. I wanted people to know where I had received the seeds, what I had observed while I was growing them in our little garden in front of the agency, hopefully inspiring others to become seed keepers and to re-familiarize themselves with our traditional foods."*

### Corn

In addition to beans and manoomin, corn is also a foundational traditional food. Our research partners were joyful in how they described the beauty of traditional corn and why it is important to increase their community's access to it.

One research partner described the above collage with the following:



*"It's glass gem corn...that was one of the first heirloom... heritage corn varieties, that we ever grew, [and] that we grew together. That was like the beginning of...we were trying to start a seed library in the Detroit community [for] the food program we were running together. I knew nothing about seed saving at the time, but I knew I had to learn really quickly because*

*our community wanted access to their traditional foods, and the foods we wanted access to didn't exist in our community anymore. That was the whole reason why we decided to start a seed library, is to make it easier for people to access those.*



*In order to even start a seed library, we had to build our own skills and capacity. That photo just brings me so much joy. Every single one of the little ears of corn that we unwrapped was like unwrapping a Christmas gift. We were squealing with joy. 'Oh, look at the colors in this one. Look at this one!' It represents a lot of things, both the need to build our own skills, to preserve things for the community, [and] how do we return foods or get over barriers of not having them or access to them."*

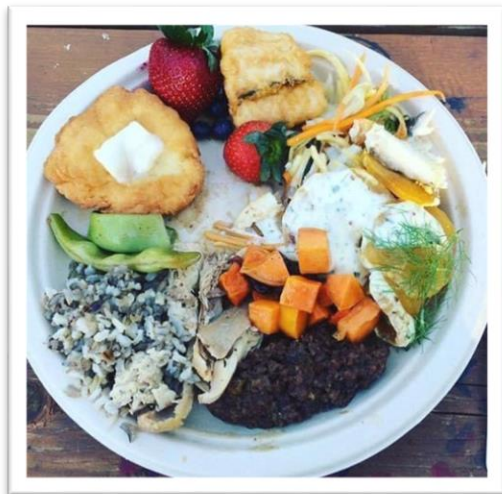
### *Traditional & Cultural Foods*

Traditional and cultural foods may be thought of as the same, but our research partners highlighted that there is a difference between them. For example, "the fish is traditional and then the [fry]bread is cultural." Frybread was created out of the foods that the U.S. government provided tribal communities (Miller, 2008).



One research partner highlighted,

*"My brother-in-law and my sister run a food business called [omitted] that they bring throughout the community. They go through Grand Rapids, Kalamazoo, and Dowagiac [Michigan]. They try to cook a lot of natural or Native foods, without adding all kinds of substances and additives and whatnot. They do the traditional Indian tacos and stuff. [My brother-in-law] gets all of his stuff traditionally. He buys his wild rice from a woman, [who is] White Earth Ojibwe in Minnesota, that she harvests herself. It's really healthy. It is a big hit throughout the powwow community and throughout the Grand Rapids, Kalamazoo, and Dowagiac areas. They make stuff weekly. They're not at events with COVID going on because, obviously, nothing's been going on, but ... they [still] do a meal prep and ship, or meal prep and deliver each week that you can get online. People can order these meals. They'll come pre-packaged and prepped. He makes them a couple of days before delivery. It's just something healthy and traditional."*



The picture on the left was described as a spirit plate.

*"That was a spirit plate that we had made or that my sister or somebody made from last weekend at the ceremony. It took a lot of traditional food. My sister and brother-in-law, they really do try to get everything traditional. It's not traditional, but I mean, in a sense, it's*

*become part of our traditions. They'll go and handpick their vegetables from local farmers because they want to try to keep it as natural as possible before [the vegetables] are sprayed and whatnot. You do got the frybread on there."*

## Indigenous Concepts of Wellness

### *Medicines & Teachings*

The foundation of health and healing is the medicine wheel, and it must always be considered when talking about health in Anishinaabe communities.

One research partner describes it well:

*"It's the medicine wheel. I included all the colors...I took out all my medicines. I put the medicine coordinating to the direction that they go in, and then I wanted...a fancier background. So, the [background] fabric is actually my ribbon skirt that I use...cultural teachings...taking something [and] giving something back with the tobacco. So, again, just incorporating our teachings as a way of spiritual, mental and physical health."*



They also mentioned that:

*"...they're teachings and they're all important to [us]...the cultural teachings [are] for food, so physical [health], is nourishment, to me, in my mind. It's important to include that in this. The three strands [in the braid of sweetgrass] are spiritual, mental, and physical health. In each strand, there's seven pieces of sweetgrass, which are the seven grandfather teachings. You need all three to keep the braid strong."*

### *Three Sisters Philosophy & Relations*

The Three Sisters of traditional foods are the bean, corn, and squash.

One research partner described the philosophy:

*"We already spoke about the corn and the beans photos...[that's] when we started our program [in Detroit] ...we call it the Three Sisters philosophy. Part of it was meant to be humorous as a personality test about who was what sister and why, but it actually really took on a deeper meaning for us because each of the three sisters are very unique and have unique gifts. When we're planted together, we intentionally work together and lend our gifts to each other; we all*

*thrive. The Three Sisters [philosophy] actually teaches us that the corn provides a trellis for the beans to climb. Meanwhile, beans add essential nutrients to the soil for everyone to benefit from, but she's really ambitious. So, you have to be careful with bean sister, and I'm a bean sister*



*because unintentionally we might pull things down if we get too vigorous. Then squash sister is kind of prickly, stretching out, doing her own thing, but she's protecting the other sisters from pests and animals and helping to keep the moisture in the soil. They actually grow better when they're planted together. We try to adopt that as a philosophy in our work and just because we didn't always understand where someone's gifts fit, it didn't mean that they didn't. Just meant [that] we had to reflect... and there are other tribal communities that have seven sisters, and so we actually started introducing others [as] you're sunflower sister... [we try] to deeply understand where each other's gifts all kind of fit in."*

From this description, it is evident that food is more than just items to consume; foods are related to one another and to human beings.

## Increasing Access to Traditional and Cultural Foods: Contributing to Community Wellness

Three of our established research questions ask about how locally produced and traditional foods contribute to health, both individually and in the community. Interestingly, most of the responses from our research partners were about the community's health, while none were about individual health. To have a healthy community is to have individual health. This section describes how traditional foods contribute to community wellness through youth farming, community farming, holding a sisterhood and matriarchy, and simple acts done with great love.

### *Youth Farming*

*"How can health look like any community... teaching our youth how to grow food, making sure that we live in sustainable communities and can help provide for ourselves if we need to...that's food sovereignty... and overcoming food deserts, so it's like access even to nutritional foods, because some people don't*





*live close to the city, and they can't...they don't have access to healthy, nutritional food. So, again, having your own sort of farmer's market, kind of like, [Minogin Market] ...how to be able to be self-sustaining.”*

One research partner mentioned that we should be “thinking of the seven generations in the future, as well as making sure that our youth know how to plant a seed and nurture it and grow it.” This would increase the community’s wellness and assure future generations continue to survive and thrive.

The picture on the right was described by the following:

*“My cousin works at [Ziibimijwang] farm. He's 18; he just graduated. It's a strong photo because it's us teaching our youth how to work with their hands and grow their own food...I just think it's important that we're teaching our youth to grow their own food.”*



Youth learning to farm could occur through community farms, such as Ziibimijwang farm, which is located in Carp Lake, Michigan. It is tribally owned and operated by the Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians. A research partner mentioned that:

*“The Ziibimijwang farm is actually a farm that our tribe owns and the way that they run it is through a corporate charter which is separate from the government. So, again, that's why I went up there and wanted to take a picture of the farmer's market, because that would incorporate the youth and the farm all in one picture. I ended up with a bunch of different pictures to [portray that we should] teach our youth and also [portray] overcoming barriers to reconnect using traditional foods which is having a farm in order to do that...”*

### *Community Farming*

Returning to farms was a big theme in our group conversations. Ziibimijwang Farm is only one example of what a community farm could look like. Urban farms, such as community farms in a city like Detroit, is something our research partners have worked on in the past and would like to see further supported in the future.

One partner said,

*“A group photo from our sacred roots...the time that the three sisters were working together, it was a journey for us. It was a journey that we were finding our voice in our place. There is a term that some of us are urban Indians, but, you know, we're not. It was our family's journey that put us in those locations. It's us as those relatives to reconnect and to feel a sense of belonging into those spaces. That was something that we journeyed together on. That was a very powerful photo of just the crew that put in the time and dedication in the community and what we're really setting now. At that time, we had a vision, but we weren't sure exactly where it was going until two or three years later, till we really got into the scene and really understood what we were doing with each other, what we were doing with our programs, and more importantly, what we were doing with the future and not only of the future for ourselves, but for those future generations and protecting that knowledge. All of us were there to offer expertise. We all were gardeners. We all were knowledge keepers of that. This was just something that we inherited, kind of. The park was getting untended and there was a lot of leg work that [we] did to really obtain that property. This was a day of working in the field and tilling it and working together. My daughter ate a worm that day, so it was special. It was very nice earthing together and really building another bond with each other. Like [research partner] said, the sisterhood that really correlates from that and the beliefs that we have and honoring and bringing together not just each other's differences but uplifting one another for that.”*



### *Sisterhood & Matriarchy*

One research partner described the importance of pushing for a sustainable return to traditional and locally produced foods.

They said,

*“I think a large part of this work for me has been sisterhood... So [research partner] told the back story a little bit about these girls here, these*





*Anishinaabekwe. We bonded, and we've never unfused each other. We've continued our journey and different pathways that have made us stronger and more knowledgeable. We are now holding positions in things that took time to build. We took risks amongst each other, a lot of risks, but we did it and we supported each other. We supported that journey of one another when one sister decided to take action into another pathway and another sister*

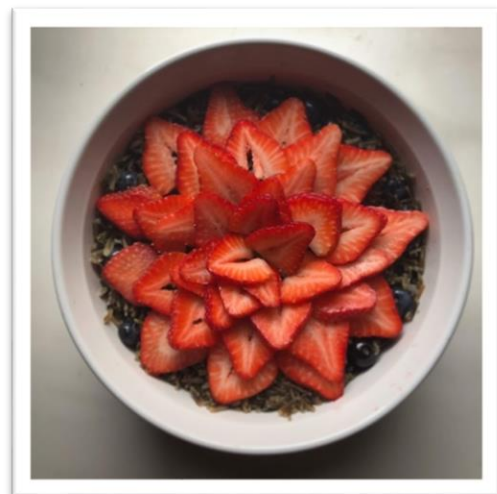
*decided to take action in another pathway. We still just kind of never left each other's side but prayed for each other's strength...we're all in the positions that we kind of dreamed about. We're owners. I started an organization that's been a passion of mine and the support from [research partner] and the seed knowledge and just her passion for food and community. [My friend is] carrying on that knowledge of creativity and earthing and just being a well being. We've all just journeyed together, and I just I couldn't ask for a better family. This just shows our journey; it's actually our start. This is some of the start and we built, you know, planted seeds together and we did a lot of community work and community outreach. Like [research partner] said, we all had different gifts that we brought together to bring more people together, not just us. We saw a greater vision amongst each other, and we did what we had to do to support that."*

### *Simple Acts Done with Great Love*

Community wellness is to do things with love and care.

One research partner described her time when working at a community center in Detroit:

*"When I was in Detroit, people always wanted me to make the wild rice with the maple syrup, blueberries, and strawberries. Why I specifically chose this photo of it...it's [a] very elaborate dishing of it, and because it's simple acts done with great love. I think that's what a lot of us and probably what a lot of our work is, is that some people are like, oh, it's so revolutionary, but it's just everyday things we have to do as people, like we have to eat. We need each other. But so often, I*

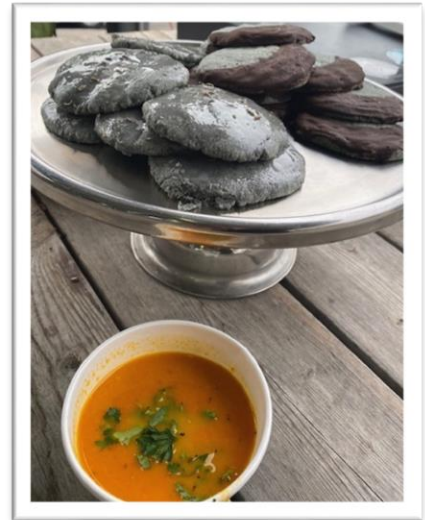


*think we get caught up in the stuff of how things are done and everyday life. We forget how miraculous it is... but really, for me, that photo is simple acts done with great love. Cooking for my community.”*

## DISCUSSION

### Food is More than Consumption

Food is more than consumption; it is relational. **Food sovereignty**, or in other words, being able to control the production of foods by using sustainable and ecologically sound methods, and the right to define food and agriculture systems (USFSA, n.d.)—is tied to land, place, relationships, community, and health. Through these pictures and our discussions, it is evident that Native communities’ relationships to food have been disrupted through colonization and Western practices. One research partner highlighted that there is another type of food system that is being discussed by Indigenous scholars called a kin-centric food system. This food system is based in relationships and goes beyond the exchange of goods, unlike our current economic system.



Alongside having a relationship with food is the revitalization of Indigenous languages. The process of growing, harvesting, processing, and eating foods, as well as the seasons in which foods are grown, have their own terms. In Michigan, the language is Anishinaabemowin. As it was mentioned in the results section, there is a nutrition education curriculum called Thirteen Moons that includes Anishinaabemowin. Language and relations to food cannot be separated.

We are connected to the land and to each other; we are related to food. If we were to not honor those connections and relationships, we would be harming ourselves.

### Strengthening Communities

To increase access to traditional and locally produced foods is to increase knowledge in growing, producing, foraging, cooking, and consuming foods. This knowledge strengthens communities. Individual health is measured by the health of the community.

Further, food is most often the center of community, and community most often occurs through food, especially in cultural events and



ceremonies. As it was mentioned in one of the photo descriptions, COVID-19 has made it difficult to hold community events and share food with community, which is unfortunate because food brings people together. The health of the community is the priority, as the concept of health is focused on the collective rather than on individuals. Only one question—question 4—was not addressed by any of the photos. Question 4 asks about individual health, but what we found is that what matters is not ourselves as individuals, but our health as a collective, as a community.

## Food Sovereignty

As mentioned previously, food sovereignty is to allow individuals or a community to control the production of cultural foods by using sustainable and ecologically sound methods. Scholars have defined Indigenous food sovereignty as a “re-connection to land-based food and political systems” (Martens et al., 2016, p. 18), and seeks to uphold “sacred responsibilities to nurture health, interdependent relationships with the land, plants, and animals, that provide us with our food”



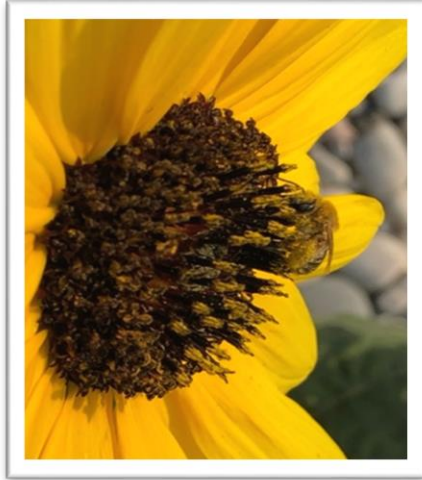
(Morrison, 2011, p. 100 as stated in Sowerwine et al., 2019). Food sovereignty allows for sustainable farming, producing foods for local communities to consume. An example of farming for the community is the Ziibimijwang Farm located in Carp Lake, MI. It is owned and operated by the Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians and was created to increase the health and welfare of the tribal community. Not only do tribal community members have access to the farm, but so do those who visit the farm and its store front, Minogin Market, located in Mackinaw City, MI.

One of the most important things the Indigenous food sovereignty movement is doing is increasing access to reconnecting to traditional practices. For example, through community farming, youth can be supported to become the seed keepers of knowledge so that they can continue to pass knowledge onto other youth. Further, food sovereignty and farming support inter-tribal solidarity, as this increases the option of revitalizing the trading system that occurred prior to colonization. This aligns with the kin-centric food system that was discussed earlier in the results section.

## Teaching of Traditional Foods

In many Native communities, particularly here in Michigan, an important concept is regarding living a Good Life. A Good Life is one that is connected, honors relationships, and follows traditional ways that support well-being. Teachings on the Good Life—*minobimaadiziwin* in Anishabemowin—are embedded in practices around traditional foods. It is evident that growing and consuming traditional foods are centered around cultural teachings. One of the main teachings





is that individuals need to be good relatives to all, including plants and foods, as we are all related. To be good relatives, we should be taking care of one another. Living a Good Life means we must strive to understand three aspects of these connections. First, we should strive for deeper connections across all life on this earth. Second, we should understand that our relatives' pain is also our pain. Finally, we must understand that the land connects us all.

### Capitalism is Antithetical to Indigenous Wellness

Lastly, one of the biggest conclusions from this project is that capitalism does not support Indigenous wellness. This economic system is the antithesis of Indigenous well-being, and possibly the well-being of everyone. Indigenous scholars and activists have pushed for regenerative economics. One partner said,

*“Our human economies were in line with natural systems. We were living more sustainably and aligned our lives with our cultural teachings. They tell us what to do and how to do it. They are our original instructions for how to meet the community needs without exploiting the Earth or any of our other relatives in the process.”*

Business and capitalism do not often allow connection to community. One participant said:

*“There are a lot of people in our generation who are rewriting the script on the responsibilities to a community that a business owner has, especially around accountability. That's something that we wanted to really serve in the foundation of what we do as business owners ... and incorporate that in there... incorporate our values and fundamentals right from the get-go. So, it doesn't kind of get washed away when money starts coming in. How do we use our privilege of being business owners to reinvest in our community? That's the thing that I take very seriously. I wouldn't run a business if I wasn't in that.”*

Someone else said, *“The Earth provides us everything that we need. We're the ones who put a price tag on everything.”*

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Taking into consideration the powerful messages and rich, detailed descriptions our research partners shared with us, we recommend the following:

1. Continue to include local Indigenous farmers, foods, and brands into smaller, local stores such as [Horrocks Farm Market](#) (Lansing and Battle Creek, MI) and [Monticello's Market](#)

[and Butcher Block](#) (Haslett, MI). Further, this must be done while placing an emphasis on developing and supporting a system of Indigenous food producers across the state of Michigan. Doing this would increase collective bargaining power across local Indigenous farmers while focusing on the collective. If small producers were to be asked to partner with larger local stores, the flow of the small producer's work must be considered. This aligns with the following recommendation.



2. Consider building the capacity of smaller food producers and markets to be able to sustain their work and to participate in selling their items sustainably and continuously in larger markets. Co-author, Rosebud, who is the manager of [Ziibimijwang Farm and Minogin Market](#), shared with us that staffing shortages make it difficult to sustain the small market. Moreover, the costs of staffing a small operation with careful attention to quality of product increase the prices of the food being grown and sold. These higher prices make it difficult for Indigenous community members to purchase their products.

3. Invest in food production systems (plots of land and markets) that can be used as local gardens, small farms, and markets that are also closer to communities. For example,



Ziibimijwang Farm and Minogin Market are at least 40 minutes away from the Little Traverse Bay Band community.

4. To address many of the issues raised by our co-authors and community partners, it is recommended that funding be prioritized that would create and support small businesses. Examples of such mechanisms include the St. John's, MI Eat Healthy Eat Local Foundation. An alternate funding model can be seen in the Oneida Community Integrated Food Systems work. What is common across both models is a focus on collaboration and expansion that is sustainable by community. Training and technical assistance for providers, community organizations, and tribal government could assist in the development of stronger community systems that are interconnected within a larger tribal network system. By providing a collective, systemic, and holistic funding model, providers may be better able to provide goods to local Indigenous families at an affordable cost while maintaining a viable business.

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