

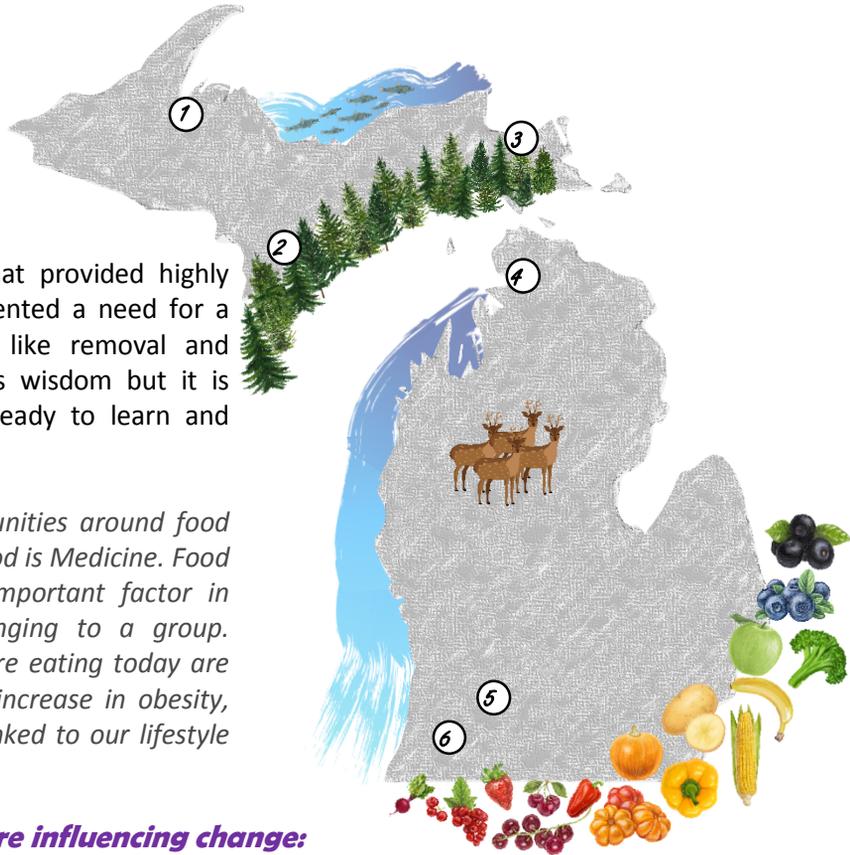
MISHKIKIIVAN MIIDJIM: 'FOOD IS MEDICINE'

MICHIGAN TRIBAL FOOD ACCESS COLLABORATIVE 2017-2019: INCREASING ACCESS TO HEALTHY, TRADITIONAL FOOD FOR YOUNG CHILDREN

Anishinaabe elders teach, Mishkikiivan Miijim (food is medicine). They have always cautioned us about what we eat. They preferred the wild game and fish because they are healthier and fit compared to domestic animals.

They intimately knew plants and trees that provided highly nutritious vitamins and minerals and prevented a need for a doctor's medicines. Government policies like removal and boarding schools interrupted some of this wisdom but it is returning a strong way and people are ready to learn and rebuild their relationship with Mother Earth.

There is growing motivation in our communities around food sovereignty attached to the wisdom that Food is Medicine. Food brings people together and can be an important factor in developing a person's identity and belonging to a group. Unfortunately, many of the foods people are eating today are not healthy and have led to a significant increase in obesity, diabetes, and cancer all of which can be linked to our lifestyle habits and the food we eat.



Here are a few of the ways Tribes are influencing change:

1 KEWEENAW BAY INDIAN COMMUNITY

- Held play dates for children at *Busy Body Bounce Town* to focus on child BMI
- Facilitated healthy cooking classes on various topics including smoothie making and preschool cooking

2 HANNAHVILLE INDIAN COMMUNITY

- Used prescription food programs to show families new ways of incorporating healthy food
- Partnered with local programs to provide nutrition education and used groceries as incentives for events

3 BAY MILLS INDIAN COMMUNITY

- Held *Cooking Matters*, a 6 week program with classes focused on healthy eating
- Partnered with local farms and used land to grow fruits and vegetables for the community gardens

4 LITTLE TRAVERSE BAY BANDS OF ODAWA INDIANS

- Held healthy food demos and supplied a healthy snack table at the tribal health clinic
- Experienced high retention from community members at nutrition education classes

5 NOTTAWASEPPI HURON BAND OF POTAWATOMI INDIANS

- Distributed food and built relationships with local farms to supply veggie boxes
- Organized weekly produce delivery from community gardens to Lunch and Learns

6 POKAGON BAND OF POTAWATOMI INDIANS

- Ran a food voucher program for kids 18 and under who were above the 85th percentile on the BMI chart
- The *Healthy Lifestyles* program offered quarterly weigh-ins, measurements, goal setting, and accountability partners

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“Get to know the plants and animals you eat and where they come from. Rediscover food forests and local farms or grow your own. Then, you will be another step closer to living the life our ancestors hoped we would have as well as protecting the health of your family and yourself.” -Michelle Schulte, 2019

There is sometimes confusion between Traditional Anishinaabe foods and foods now identified as cultural foods which are really foods introduced as our people were colonized and forced to assimilate. One of these foods is fry bread. It is special because it is a symbol of survival for many families during the period of forced removal. A good fry bread maker has an important role in some communities. Unfortunately, the processed wheat flour was never part of our traditional diets and our bodies don't always have the ability to digest it as well as people from other ethnic cultures. In addition, wheat is processed differently today than even 100 years ago; so even people from cultures who have traditionally eaten these flours are not able to process it. This can lead to a number of issues, including weight gain, diabetes, and chronic digestion problems. Flour was introduced to Native people to fill empty bellies unable to forage and hunt on their traditional lands and meet promises the government or Indian agents made. It does not contain the highly nutritious vitamins and minerals our bodies should eat to lead a healthy life.

Colonized “cultural” foods like fry bread, bologna (aka. Indian steaks) or hot dogs really do more to harm than help to our health. Anishinaabe relatives that fought over this land and signed treaties did as much as they could to protect our way of life and our ability to access to our ancestral lands well into the future. That is where our identity is built and where our culture will thrive. Some of our elders talk fondly of hunting, fishing and foraging. They knew what plants to eat and pick for teas to prevent or cure sickness. Now much of that wisdom is left only with our Traditional Healers. We are living in the time of the seventh generation. It is time for us to start making decisions that will protect the next seven generations ahead of us by gathering this type of wisdom and being the role models that break the cycle of sickness by living healthy. It might be difficult for some of our people to re-learn the language; and our spiritual beliefs may vary, but all Anishinaabe should be able to identify and live their culture by eating healthy foods from the Earth.



Credit: photographer-Leslie Seaton, 2011
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Respectfully shared by

Michelle Schulte, Inter-Tribal Council of Michigan, 2019



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