

# First Americans Land-grant Consortium (FALCON)

*"The Original Land Keepers"*



## Food Sovereignty Discussion Luncheon October 19, 2009 – Washington, DC

### Summary Report and Recommendations<sup>1</sup>

#### Introduction

The First Americans Land-grant Consortium (FALCON) is a non-profit association that supports administrators and faculty at 1994 Land Grant Institutions, also known as tribal colleges and universities (TCUs). Each year, FALCON convenes a conference that brings TCU faculty and students together in a scholarly setting where they share their accomplishments, build their communication and leadership skills, and network with faculty and students from other TCUs, as well as partner organizations. In 2009, the conference was held in Washington, DC, on October 17-20. Approximately 120 people attended sessions over four days, including representatives of 24 TCUs, as well as 25 representatives of federal, higher education, and non-profit partner institutions.

During the annual conference, a luncheon discussion on the topic of “Food Sovereignty” was sponsored by the National Rural Funders Collaborative and the Lumina Foundation. The U.S. Department of Agriculture’s National Institute of Food and Agriculture provided the meeting facility. The purpose of the discussion was to: 1) identify the current state of activities at TCUs and in their tribal communities related to food sovereignty, and 2) identify ways to support and enhance those efforts. The goal of the discussion was to build a foundation for the development of a comprehensive strategy of planning support, resource development, and technical assistance for TCU food sovereignty initiatives.

Approximately 70 people attended the luncheon discussion, representing about 20 TCUs and a number of other non-TCU institutions. The discussion was facilitated by first introducing the purpose of the discussion and defining the term food sovereignty, then instructing individuals to provide written answers to two discussion questions on index cards, then discuss their answers with neighbors at the table, and then finally engage in a facilitated large group discussion. The two discussion questions were as follows:

1. What food sovereignty policies, strategies or activities is your tribal college or tribe pursuing or hoping to pursue?

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- 2, What specific things could make your food sovereignty efforts even more successful?

The luncheon discussion lasted about 60 minutes. Notes were taken during the large group discussion, and written comments from the index cards were collected. Several follow-up interviews were conducted after the luncheon to collect further information.

“Food sovereignty” is a term first used by Via Campesina in 1996 that refers to policies that articulate the right of peoples to define their own food systems, including agriculture, livestock and fisheries systems.<sup>2</sup> For the purposes of the luncheon discussion, food sovereignty was defined as:

Food sovereignty is the right of peoples, communities, and countries to define their own agricultural, labor, fishing, food and land policies which are ecologically, socially, economically and culturally appropriate to their unique circumstances. It includes the true right to food and to produce food, which means that all people have the right to safe, nutritious and culturally appropriate food and to food-producing resources and the ability to sustain themselves and societies.<sup>3</sup>

In the U.S. Native American context, food sovereignty holds the added dimension as an expression of tribal sovereignty, which is the fiercely held right of federally-recognized tribes to govern themselves within tribal lands.

### **Key Discussion Points**

The following key discussion points were articulated during the large group discussion, and are reported in the general order that they were discussed. Individual written responses generally supported the topics discussed in the large group, and they are included in Appendix A.

**1. The annual Symposium For Food and Seed Sovereignty.** Perhaps the most visible and far-reaching TCU effort related to food sovereignty is an annual Food and Seed Sovereignty conference co-sponsored by the Native Earth Bio Culture Council in conjunction with the Institute of American Indian Arts (IAIA) and Pueblo of Tesuque farm program. In 2009, the conference was held at the campus of IAIA in Santa Fe, New Mexico, on September 25-26.<sup>4</sup> A representative of IAIA spoke with great passion about the need to protect native plants and seeds from various forms of exploitation and appropriation, including the domestication of wild species, genetic modification, and the corporate patenting (and thus ownership) of native plants.

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<sup>2</sup> Via Campesina. nd. “Food Sovereignty.” Retrieved online at:

[http://viacampesina.org/main\\_en/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=47&Itemid=27](http://viacampesina.org/main_en/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=47&Itemid=27).

<sup>3</sup> NGO/CSO. 2002, June 13. “Food Sovereignty: A Right For All.” Political Statement of the NGO/CSO Forum for Food Sovereignty. Rome, Italy.

<sup>4</sup> Native Earth Bio Culture Council. nd. “Conference for Food and Seed Sovereignty: Sustainability & Food Security for the 21st Century & Beyond.” Retrieved online at: <http://www.foodandseedconference.info/>.

**2. Protection of Native Plants and Animals.** A lengthy discussion ensued concerning the need for legal protection from the exploitation and appropriation of native plants and animals by non-Indian, for-profit corporate interests. Numerous examples were given concerning perceived threats to native plants and animals from domestication, genetic modification, and commercialization. One example discussed was the domestication of wild rice in the Great Lakes region, where large-scale domesticated rice production and marketing has appropriated the “wild rice” brand. Additional concerns include inadvertent cross-breeding (contamination) between truly wild species and domesticated or genetically-modified species. A second example involved the domestication of bison into more docile animals confined in close, disease-prone quarters, producing less nutritious and higher fat meats containing antibiotics. A third example given was attempts by for-profit corporations to commercialize a variety of chilies used by southwestern pueblos by gaining patent rights and ownership of the variety, thereby making it potentially illegal for tribal members to cultivate and market the plants on their own.

**3. Protection of Indigenous Knowledge.** The discussion moved to the topic that indigenous knowledge, just as plant and animal species, can also be appropriated. For example, tribal knowledge of the medicinal properties and uses of a particular plant may have been developed over generations of careful observation and trial and error, yet this knowledge is not “owned” by anyone in the way that intellectual and property rights are defined in U.S. law. The careless sharing of that knowledge with parties that have commercial interests effectively places that knowledge into the commercial sphere, whereby the tribe no longer has any control or ownership of that knowledge. An example was given of a TCU research project being conducted using the indigenous knowledge of certain anti-diabetic properties of a plant, with several other research partners. Once the commercial potential was realized by the research partners, they moved aggressively to establish patent and royalty rights, with no regard for the safeguarding of the tribal indigenous knowledge.

**4. Local Tribal Food Sovereignty Initiatives.** Many examples were provided that demonstrated a broad range of activities at TCUs and in tribal communities that seek to strengthen local food systems. Perhaps the most common activities involve community (and household) gardening and farmers markets that produce and market both conventional fruits and vegetables and traditional (or native) foods. Local beef (or bison) production was also mentioned. Many programs involve education, training and technical assistance to help community members preserve traditional foods (and medicinal plants) and cultivation practices. Many food initiatives link their activities and goals with health and wellness programs. In almost every instance, cultural content plays a major role in the effort.

**5. Strengthening Local Tribal Food Systems.** The discussion concluded with strengthening TCU efforts and while there was some mention of resource development (i.e., more funding), the need for planning and technical assistance was articulated more often, particularly when referring to the protection of plants, animals, and indigenous knowledge. Legal counsel was viewed as a high priority, especially in the intersecting area of patent law and Federal Indian law. Tribal leadership is needed, especially the development of tribal policies and regulations to protect and preserve indigenous food systems, and to support food sovereignty initiatives.

## **Recommendations**

**1. Identify expertise and provide technical assistance on the legal protection of indigenous plants, animals and knowledge.** A high level of anxiety over the protection of indigenous plants, animals, and knowledge was expressed. Most of the concerns could be attributed to a general lack of knowledge in the relevant laws and rights. Expertise on Federal Indian law *and* patent law *and* indigenous knowledge needs to be identified and made available to the TCUs and tribes. Specific assistance could be provided on how to develop legally-binding vehicles that protect tribal interests, such as tribal policies and regulations, patents and royalties, research agreements, and marketing agreements. The technical assistance could be delivered in a workshop that brings TCU and tribal officials together with legal counsel.

**2. Provide technical assistance on TCU local food sovereignty assessment and planning.** While it appeared from the discussion that much activity was taken place among the TCUs, there was little evidence that any strategic assessment or planning was taking place. Strategic planning should be conducted at the local level, by working with the community to understand local strengths and needs, and then identifying the resources, activities, and outcomes required for high impact benefits. Several tools exist to assist in this effort. The First Nations Development Institute developed a "Food Sovereignty Assessment Tool,"<sup>5</sup> which provides a useful framework for local food sovereignty assessment and planning at a community level. Additional guidance for TCUs would involve program planning and design through a process described in FALCON's "A Planning Guide for Tribal Land Grant Programs."<sup>6</sup> Workshops or technical assistance site visits could help TCUs conduct effective food sovereignty assessment and planning with their community.

**3. Conduct a comprehensive scan and a national conversation among TCUs to identify common efforts, interests and solutions.** While each TCU should be engaged in the food sovereignty effort locally, there are many opportunities for resource, information and solution sharing among the TCUs nationally. While the luncheon discussion provided a rich snapshot of food sovereignty activities among the TCUs in attendance, it could not capture the breadth and depth of activities at all the TCUs. A comprehensive scan of all TCU food sovereignty policies, strategies, and activities needs to be conducted, and a national conversation needs to begin concerning areas of cooperation and collaboration. Web-based surveys and phone interviews could collect much needed data, and a TCU food sovereignty convening, in conjunction with an existing TCU event, could facilitate the start of a national conversation. Ultimately, these activities would place the TCUs in an attractive position for funding organizations looking to support high impact initiatives.

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<sup>5</sup> Bell-Sheeter, A. 2004. Food Sovereignty Assessment Tool. Fredricksburg, VA: First Nations Development Institute. Retrieved online at: <http://www.firstnations.org/publications/FNDIFSATFinal.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> FALCON. 2007. A Planning Guide for Tribal Land Grant Programs. Columbia, MO: FALCON. Retrieved online at: <http://stemrc.aihec.org/FALCON/Planning%20Guide/TCU%20land%20grant%20planning%20guide%20v1.pdf>.

## APPENDIX A

### INDIVIDUAL WRITTEN RESPONSES TO DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

#### 1. What food sovereignty policies, strategies or activities is your tribal college or tribe pursuing or hoping to pursue?

- Food businesses that exist off making food and selling them to office workers.
- *Lakota-Sioux* tribes in the upper Midwest were traditionally hunters/gatherers. The buffalo “*tatonka*” were our main staple for thousands of years. Buffalo were almost wiped out—now they are coming back. At Sinte Gleska University (SGU) we have a 180-head herd of buffalo. We provide buffalo meat to the Tribal members for wakes and memorials, and in the SGU student lunch program. We are now looking at ways to market our meat. We currently sell buffalo jerky and other meat products. We are currently developing a curriculum and sovereignty policies, strategies, and activities centered around the bison. –*Sinte Gleska University*
- I am currently working on a research project called “Traditional Foods of the Puget Sound” where we are asking community members: 1) what are the barriers to accessing traditional foods and 2) what are solutions to accessing traditional foods. Utilizing the voices of community members, we have quite a few ideas for solutions to these issues. Too many to list here but shortly: gardening programs, edible education programs, plants/foods as medicines classes. My tribe is also active in negotiations with various watersheds as well. –*Northwest Indian College*.
- Resource management involves insuring harvesting and resources will be there through the college’s conservation resource department. Dropped a contract with Ocean Spray because they used cranberry beds for wild rice beds. –*Lac Courte Oreilles Ojibwa Community College*
- We’re starting to talk about how to start a farmers market. With Extension, encouraging people to start their own farms and gardens. Teach a course in Agro-ecology that teaches people how to garden and manage gardens. –*Tohono O’odham Community College*
- Five community gardens on the reservation. Community feeds using gardens and healthy food. College gives away turkeys for Thanksgiving. Native Foods cooking class, for college credit. –*Salish Kootenai College*
- Investing Extension dollars into activities like farm-to-college, community gardening, building a local food and fitness coalition. –*Salish Kootenai College*
- Bison kept wild, not domesticated. Want to keep uncontaminated. –*Cankdeska Cikana Community College*
- 1. Tobacco seeds [for tribal] Tobacco Society. Planting is done annually, only by the seed carrier and planter. Only members of the society can be at the planting.  
2. Water protection issues. 3. Protection of other seeds related to medicinal use.

- Wild rice protection is a big issue. The University of Minnesota is genetically sequencing wild rice and the *Annishinabe* are concerned about GMO rice, and patenting of gene sequences, and the introduction of these into wild populations. –*White Earth Tribal & Community College*
- 1. Demonstration farms. 2. Farmers markets in Tsaile, AZ, partnering with IHS/Diabetes Prevention. 3. Bring in more common vegetables such as growing lettuce, spinach, cabbage, etc. –*Diné College*
- 1. Community gardens that support traditional crops and methods. 2. Farmers markets. 3. Support for families.
- Primarily education in healthy eating and the role of native/traditional foods in a healthy lifestyle. –*Salish Kootenai College*
- Start a garden, produce and market healing foods/herbs. –*Navajo Technical College*
- The Blackfeet Tribe has recently formed an Institutional Review Board (IRB) to oversee research projects. Our Tribal College is very active on this Board to ensure ownership, integrity, ethics and royalties are addressed. This Board has become very active in creating awareness to our community. –*Blackfeet Community College*
- 1. Leverage our culinary arts program, our community cafeteria, our greenhouse and micro-intensive garden for research and programs in wellness, community development, food science, and economic development. 2. NTC/IAIA collaboration on indigenous gardens and food sovereignty models. –*Navajo Technical College*
- In partnership with Tasaque Pueblo and other organizations, continue to support the annual Food and Seed Sovereignty Conference. Continue to do work in various community development initiatives to protect and strengthen the sovereign rights of indigenous groups. –*Institute of American Indian Arts*
- Our college has no sovereign food initiatives that they are pursuing at this time, but the Navajo Nation has a tribal entity (NAPI) [Navajo Agricultural Products Industry] that grows 8-15,000 acres of pinto bean, 20-25,000 acres of wheat and barley, and another 10-16,000 acres of Indian corn with high moisture corn crops. –*Diné College*
- We are developing a natural beef production system. We are working to preserve and increase native food plants. We are reintroducing bison meat into diets. –*Sitting Bull College*
- Growing traditional foods using traditional planting practices. –*Tohono O’odham Community College*
- TOCA (Tohono O’odham Community Action) in Sells, AZ, is promoting the traditional foods by establishing a restaurant with healthy-traditional foods to preserve the traditions and bring back the natural way of life. We need to work on protecting and preserving the native plants in the Sonoran Desert. –*Tohono O’odham Community College*

## 2, What specific things could make your food sovereignty efforts even more successful?

- USDA certification [of bison meat]. We also have an abundance of wild berries, grapes, wild turnips. As a tribe, we need to have annual harvesting policies and procedures adopted and regulated. Not so much with tribal members, but non-members coming onto the reservation. With the many sun dances we have happening on the reservation, many non-Indians are coming to these sun dances and they are harvesting sage without any harvesting controls in place. The tribe needs to adopt procedures so our native berries, grapes, turnips, medicinal plants are harvested. –*Sinte Gleska University*
- 1. Traditional Foods Principles—developing concepts to take with you in the grocery stores. 2. Work with vouchers for farmers markets, community gardening, grocery store shopping guides, elders into classrooms, creating our own local farmers markets. 3. We also have started a research project that supplies 15 *Lummi* tribal families with a community supported agriculture box that offers fresh locally grown foods. We are supplementing them with cooking classes and various educational interventions as well. –*Northwest Indian College*
- Legal protection of traditional ecological knowledge. –*Lac Courte Oreilles Ojibwa Community College*
- Get financial and political support from tribal and district governments/councils. Create markets for local produce, and sell local traditional foods in grocery stores. –*Tohono O’odham Community College*
- Bigger gardens. More community involvement. Involve young kids from the “Making Fitness Fun” program. –*Salish Kootenai College*
- Policy that encourages local food system development (e.g., school and institutional meals). Facilities for production, storage, training, processing. Funding to put agricultural production educators on the ground training new farmers in alternative production. Subsidize alternative production. –*Salish Kootenai College*
- Keep animals wild on native grasslands. –*Cankdeska Cikana Community College*
- 1. Funding. 2. Legal protection for sovereign tribes with all their local plants and animals. 3. Education on rights the sovereign nations have. 4. Organic seed for all sovereign nations. 4. “Native Made” branding and marketing.
- Support any activity that limits GMO’s, patenting of genes, etc. –*White Earth Tribal & Community College*
- Collaboration of efforts with multiple partners. –*Diné College*
- An agriculture program, a land grant office, administrative support, and community input. –*Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute*
- 1. Grants for existing farmers who grow traditional crops in a traditional manner. 2. Network for seed exchange.

- Research into ecology of native/traditional food plants, especially the role of wild fire in propagating/perpetuating traditional foods. –*Salish Kootenai College*
- 1. Study and improve soils. 2. Watering needs. 3. Enhance agricultural science programs. –*Navajo Technical College*
- 1. Having technical resources available to address legal protection for our tribal knowledge. 2. Educating our community and visitors alike on our tribes' contribution to foods and medicines, and the reasons to conserve and legally protect this information. –*Blackfeet Community College*
- The ability to develop a model that would be shared with other indigenous tribal homelands domestically and internationally. –*Navajo Technical College*
- 1. In developing our college's community garden, select plants that are indigenous to the area. 2. Conduct community education sessions to bring awareness about food sovereignty issues to our Native communities. 3. Make food sovereignty a priority with tribes. 4. Protect indigenous plants ("wild plants"). –*Institute of American Indian Arts*
- To market in the U.S. and the international trade agreement by growing on the Navajo Nation, to market at affordable cost and gain revenues. –*Diné College*
- More funding for the natural beef effort. We need food and nutrition classes at Sitting Bull College. –*Sitting Bull College*
- Funding for demonstration projects to produce enough food to market. –*Tohono O'odham Community College*
- We are starting a seed collection to help the preservation of natural/native plants. We need to raise our voice to get the attention we need to protect what we have before it is too late. –*Tohono O'odham Community College*