Developing the Foundation for Food Sovereignty Work

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Food Sovereignty, simply stated, means that the control of a community’s food system is in the hands of the people of that community.

Food Security, simply stated, means that the people of a community know where their next meal is coming from and that they will have the food that they need.
When you are ready to start improving the local and tribal food system, the first thing to do is begin discussions with a core group of interested people.

Begin by re-visiting your pre-European contact food sources.
Get to know your Food System

Available facilities and equipment, sources of food, etc.

There are many elements that need to be considered.
Once you have examined and discussed your food system, you will begin to identify barriers to food security and food sovereignty. At this point it will be helpful to know more about the food habits, concerns and needs in your community.

Begin with focus groups to discuss food issues and begin to identify the information that will be most helpful to finding solutions to food problem areas.

A Community Food Sovereignty Assessment provides the community members and your organization with basic information about their food system.
As your begin your Community Food Sovereignty Assessment process always remember and honor the food traditions of your ancestors. It is these food traditions that nurtured and maintained your people in good health for millennia prior to the invasion of foreign foods, lifestyles and political actions.
It is a good idea for the organization staff to carefully read and answer questions in the FNDI **Food Sovereignty Assessment Tool** as you consider what you need to know and prepare to design your assessment.
Identify obstacles to food sovereignty

These can come in many forms, but the common denominator is anything that is preventing the community from having control of what foods they have available, how the foods are produced and how accessible and nutritious and culturally appropriate they are.
Design and implementation of your assessment will involve choosing the types of surveys or other information gathering tools you will use; where, when how you will gather the information and who will be involved.

There is technical assistance available for this work, but your community members should be at the heart of it.
Step One: Define your community

- Tribal Boundary
- Town, village, county
- Demographic group like Youth, Elders
- Health defined like community members with diabetes or other diet-related diseases
- Tribal members or inclusive of all living in the defined community?
- Many other ways to group people...
Muscogee (Creek) Nation, Oklahoma

Map showing the chartered communities and towns within the MCN boundary.
Step Two: Understand Food Sovereignty and what it means for your community.

This is primarily a task for the organization’s staff. There are many ways to come to this understanding and it will be an ongoing process.
Step Three: Think about what you need to know.

This one is tricky and will take time and consideration from the staff. You need to be aware of the end results that will be most useful to your community and to your organization in planning and implementing programs that will address the food sovereignty and food security issues that you anticipate being the most prevalent in your community.
Step Four: Design your Community Food Assessment Tool(s)

This is the heart of your work. It will take time and research into survey techniques, meeting sites, participation incentives, publicity outlets, staff roles, etc., etc., etc.
There are many types of survey tools. You need to become familiar with many of them and choose several that will be appropriate for your community. Keep each tool simple enough to be completed in fifteen minutes or less.

A dot survey provides an instant visual snapshot of results.

Written surveys will take time to complete.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Who are the members of this community?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>About you:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>About your household:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How many are employed? ___</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household Income:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married □ Separated □ Widowed □ Divorced □ Never Married □</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What foods do you eat?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How many times a day do you eat fruit and/or vegetables? □ 1 □ 2 □ 3 □ 4 □ 5 □ more than 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are most of the fruit and vegetables □ Canned □ Frozen □ Dried or □ Fresh?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do you usually have to drink? □ Soft drinks □ Water □ Coffee □ Tea □ Juice □ Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does your family grow any of the food that you eat? □ Yes □ No</td>
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<tr>
<td>Does your family eat food produced in the community? □ Yes □ No</td>
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<tr>
<td>Would you prefer to eat food produced in the community? □ Yes □ No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you eat more meat than fruit and vegetables? □ Yes □ No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are you concerned about the chemicals, hormones, etc. used in food production? □ Yes □ No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would you like to know where and how your food is produced? □ Yes □ No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are you concerned about the costs of food? □ Yes □ No</td>
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<tr>
<td>Are you concerned about contamination of food? □ Yes □ No</td>
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<tr>
<td>Are you concerned about the freshness of food? □ Yes □ No</td>
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<tr>
<td>Are you concerned about the nutritional value of food? □ Yes □ No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name three foods that are a regular staple in the diet of your family:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1)__________________________________________________________</td>
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<tr>
<td>2)__________________________________________________________</td>
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<tr>
<td>3)__________________________________________________________</td>
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<tr>
<th>Name three foods that you would consider to be “traditional” Mvskoke foods.</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>1)____________________________________________________________________</td>
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<td>2)____________________________________________________________________</td>
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<td>3)____________________________________________________________________</td>
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<th>Name three foods that you would add to your diet if they were more affordable and accessible.</th>
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<td>1)____________________________________________________________________</td>
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<td>2)____________________________________________________________________</td>
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<td>3)____________________________________________________________________</td>
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An introductory discussion helps people start thinking about their food system. This is a good exercise to introduce the idea of Food Sovereignty as it applies to daily life:

• Think of the last meal that you ate. Do you know where any of the foods were grown?
• Was any of the food produced in your community? Could it have been?
• Did your family produce any of the food? Could you have?
Step Five: Publicize the Assessment

Use as many outlets as possible: Info tables, radio, newspapers, TV and more.
Step Six: Conduct Assessment
Step Seven: Compile and Analyze Data

This is a task for the project staff. Results can be shown in many ways and should be filed in a safe place and made available to the communities who participated as well as to the organization and tribal programs that can use the data.
Results give you a real idea of your community’s interests

1. Native foods cookbooks 72%
2. Traditional cooking classes 67%
3. Farmer’s Market 67%
4. Vegetable growing classes 50%
5. Monthly traditional meals 49%
6. Community garden 48%
7. Fruit tree donations 47%
8. Food preservation classes 43%
9. Wild food edibles classes 41%
10. Garden tilling services 38%
11. Low cost/free seed 38%
12. Food history and culture classes 37%
13. Organic gardening classes 33%
14. Youth and elder garden project 32%
The data generated from your Community Food Sovereignty Assessment provides a basis of current, community-based information that can be used in designing projects and seeking funding.

Here are some examples of projects that Mvskoke Food Sovereignty Initiative funded using data from their Community Food Sovereignty Assessment conducted in 17 communities in 2007:

Traditional foods cooking classes and community gardens
Farmers Markets, Senior gardens and greenhouses
Resource Center and educational opportunities
Elder activities, gardens and interviews
Youth gardens and activities
Youth and Elder sharing and healthy meals and snacks.
Revitalization of Traditional Foods

[Images of various traditional foods and cooking processes]
Seed Saving, Seed Bank
With the Community Food Sovereignty Assessment information in hand, you may want to take the food system work to the next level...policy change.

At this point you will begin to analyze the food system and its components with policy change in mind.

Your core group will want to conduct a lot of educational activities and begin engaging the tribal leaders and other key stakeholders in the food system.
Identify issues that may be appropriate for legislative action.

Traditional foods for the Elderly Nutrition Program

Equipment for farmers

Regulatory standards for farmland preservation, commercial kitchen certification, etc.
Make plans to organize a Food Policy Council for your region and government. We will look at the Muscogee (Creek) Nation Food and Fitness Policy Council (MCN FFPC) as an example:

MCN region showing food deserts in orange and low-income in shades of green

MCN FFPC meeting in the MCN National Council Chambers
Muscogee (Creek) Nation Food and Fitness Policy Council

is made up of tribal citizens who hold positions of leadership within their communities or are key administrators within tribal programs such as diabetes prevention, WIC, and environmental health.

A TRIBAL RESOLUTION OF THE MUSCOGEE (CREEK) NATION ESTABLISHING A TRIBAL FOOD AND FITNESS POLICY COUNCIL

Be it Resolved by the National Council of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation:

WHEREAS, The Muscogee people were traditionally excellent farmers, fishermen and hunters and maintained a sustainable food system and were physically fit; and,

WHEREAS, The Muscogee (Creek) Nation asserts the sovereign right to determine culturally appropriate control of their food and agricultural systems that promote the general welfare of the citizens; and,

WHEREAS, The citizens of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation have expressed a serious interest and willingness to improve their fitness, food, and agricultural systems; and,

WHEREAS, With the increase in the Muscogee (Creek) Nation in diet-related health problems and excessive dependency on outside sources for food, there is a need to establish a Food and Fitness Policy Council to address food system issues and promote healthier lifestyles.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT, The Muscogee (Creek) Nation hereby supports the intentional and collaborative effort to include the food and agricultural system stakeholders in the decision-making process relating to food and fitness issues.

LET IT FURTHER BE RESOLVED THAT, The Muscogee (Creek) Nation hereby supports the establishment of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation Food and Fitness Policy Council comprised of representatives from the Indian Health Service, Muscogee (Creek) Nation Division of Health, Legislative, Executive and Judicial branches of government, Muskoke Food Sovereignty Initiative and farmers/ranchers and other stakeholders, as decided by the Food and Fitness Policy Council that will provide input and legislative recommendations to the government of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation.

ENACTED by the Muscogee (Creek) National Council on this 25th day of September 2010.
Policy work is a slow process and will require a lot of conversations and educational activities to bring the food issues into focus for your tribal leaders.

A newsletter is a very useful tool for bringing attention to food system problems and possible solutions. Be sure that the tribal leaders are receiving the newsletter and invitations to educational events. Schedule meetings and presentations with your tribal governing body and the most influential leaders.
I propose a Garden law.
That each community maintain and develop Community Gardens that can put folks to work, that can ensure a reliable and safe domestic food supply, and if gardens grow too much for their community, they can use the surplus for barter with other communities for other goods.
That’s real Homeland Security.

Laws like this are a real possibility with legislative support from the tribal government.

Policy possibilities are only limited by the imagination of the policy makers.
Dream large,
Engage your community,
Collect information,
and great things will happen!

Double rainbow over Wilson Community farmland.
Muscogee (Creek) Nation 2012
Tend your garden well and enjoy the benefits of your harvest.

Special thanks to Mvskoke Food Sovereignty Initiative and the members of the MCN FFPC.
Good Luck in your journey into your Food System as you explore the possibilities.

Thank you!

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