

Book Review: Qaqamiigux: Traditional Foods and Recipes from the Aleutian and Pribilof Islands

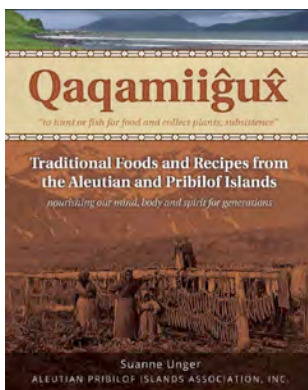
By Suanne Unger, Aleutian Pribilof Islands Association, Inc., 2014, 381 pages

Review by Elise Krohn

[Originally published in the Tribal College Journal of American Indian Higher Education, Volume 27 No 4.]

In this time when people are estranged from the source of their food, and when chronic diseases including diabetes, heart disease, and cancer are rampant, Native elders echo a common message: Your culture is your medicine. If you want to be well, eat your native foods, for they feed your body and they also feed your spirit. In the book *Qaqamiigux*, meaning “to hunt or fish for food and collect plants; subsistence,” we learn about the rich food traditions of the Unangan People from the Aleutian and Pribilof Islands of Alaska. While many books on indigenous foods have surfaced in recent years, few have the magnitude, beauty and completeness of *Qaqamiigux*. Rather than sharing recipes from an individual or a small group, the book documents a community-wide movement in revitalizing food traditions. Aleut language is included along with stories, myths, photographs, contributing writers, and featured chefs. Creating a book like this is not an easy task, but the reward is that the whole community “owns” the book and uses it. It becomes a source of pride.

The Unangan have the longest and most difficult history of contact with foreigners among Alaska Native people because of their unique geographical location. The first part of the book explores the historical, environmental, socioeconomic, and environmental factors that have led to an increased reliance on store-



bought foods and the development of barriers to utilizing native foods. Helping younger generations to understand this story is an important part of healing generational trauma, which includes the choices that we make about what we eat. Environmental contaminants and food-borne illnesses are also covered along with useful recommendations for safe food handling and preparation.

The second part of the book details over sixty types of marine mammals, fish, birds, caribou and reindeer, plants, and tidal foods. Seasonal harvest diagrams offer a visual representation of foods eaten throughout the year. Methods for harvesting, preparing, nutrient information, and recipes are included. Easy to read charts compare the nutrient density of native foods verses contemporary foods. For example, just three ounces of seal meat provides the same amount of iron as twenty-four hotdogs or sixty-eight chicken nuggets! While you may not need to know how to butcher caribou or harvest nagoonberries, many of the featured foods are found throughout Alaska, British Columbia, and the United States.

Qaqamiigux is a testament to the gifts of the Unangan People, and it will serve to perpetuate their cultural wealth into the future. The community-based model utilized to develop the book along with the beautiful format will help other Native communities to

create their own successful traditional foods resources. I recommend this book for students pursuing studies in native science, nutrition, community health and tribal food sovereignty.

About the reviewer



Elise Krohn, M.Ed. is an educator, author, herbalist, and native foods specialist in the Pacific Northwest. She is committed to cultivating healing relationships between people, plants, place and

cultural traditions. During her 15 years of experience teaching in tribal communities, she has worked with elders and cultural specialists to create successful community gardens, food sovereignty resources, a program on healing addiction, and curricula on chronic disease prevention. Through leading ‘train the trainers’ workshops, Elise has multiplied the number of educators who are teaching about native foods and herbal medicines in tribal communities. She also has over 10 years of experience as a clinical herbalist, and has authored two books and numerous articles on this and related topics. Elise is currently a Fellow in Ethnobotany and Ethnonutrition at the Center for World Indigenous Studies. Email: elise@cwis.org

Cite this article as:

Krohn, E. (2016). Book Review: Qaqa-miigux: Traditional Foods and Recipes from the Aleutian and Pribilof Islands. By Susanne Unger. *Fourth World Journal*. 15(1) pp. 115-116..