

Restoring Individual and Community Health: Northwest Native Plants and Foods Collective

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ABSTRACT

A team of native foods educators, nutritionists, herbalists, Native youth organizers, social media experts, tribal elders and story tellers has worked in collaboration with CWIS Fellow for Ethnobotany Elise Krohn, M.Ed to launch a year-long program of innovative indigenous plants and foods education classes, symposia, and American Indian and Alaskan Native train-the-trainer classes. The foundational concept of this program is the conviction that indigenous plants and foods practices have the power to strengthen individual and community health resilience, and to inspire Native youth to reclaim the power of health from a cultural relationship with the land.

The Northwest Native Plants and Foods Collective (NNPFC), funded for a year program by The First Nations Development Institute in Colorado, USA, aims to catalyze the indigenous foods and medicines revolution by raising awareness, mobilizing communities, and revitalizing traditional knowledge systems. The 13-member team includes experienced native foods educators, nutritionists, herbalists, Native youth organizers, social media experts, successful directors of tribal youth non-profit organizations, respected Elders and storytellers, university faculty, and a collaborative network of tribal leaders and ecosystem specialists dedicated to creating a safe and sustainable future for Native youth through indigenous knowledge and sustainable food systems. Collective members bring together over 60 years combined experience in developing and delivering innovative classes, symposia, and train-the-trainers work-



shops in American Indian and Alaska Native urban and rural communities.

Central to the Collective's mission is the belief that indigenous plants and foods practices have the power to cultivate individual health, community-wide resilience, and to inspire a cultural relationship with the land. Through actively serving indigenous people and communities in the Northwest States of Washington, Oregon, and Idaho, the NNPFC team has formed to build self-awareness, shared knowledge, intergenerational learning, sustainable practices, and functional food systems that empower Native youth and indigenous communities to create a holistic path to wellness. They honor the knowledge and wisdom

carried through the generations, and innovate based on the best technologies at hand. As one workshop participant commented:

“local people are highlighted as experts in the areas of traditional foods, food harvesting and preparation, and plant medicine for illness and wellness...which leaves a powerful example of the ongoing need for collaboration beyond the walls of medical hierarchy.”

The NNPFC project aligns with mission of Center for World Indigenous Studies, making CWIS an ideal partner. Both recognize the critical role youth must play in envisioning and implementing transformative ideas. The project launches a threefold approach to establish a long-term, diversified resource base for engaging tribal youth in innovating culturally-grounded food systems, developing food security approaches in times of global climate change, and achieving goals of community-wide holistic wellness for future generations.



Specifically, the NNPFC plans to:

1. Implement three one-day workshops that will be used to launch a diversified resource base for youth-focused and intergenerational programming.

Empowering Youth Teachers: Medicine Making and First Aid for Canoe Journey will provide Native youth ages 13-19 experiential training with plant identification and making first aid plant medicine kits to share with families and youth groups in preparation for the annual intertribal canoe journey. Connecting youth to first aid and herbal medicine in conjunction with traditional canoe journey teachings supports positive cultural identity with their ancestral land and respect for plant relatives. The Muckleshoot and Squaxin Island Tribes will host these workshop and youth educators will highlight their skills and products at the Youth Canoe Journey in August of 2015.

Youth in the Garden will be a multi-tribal gathering where youth exchange ideas, engage knowledge keepers and share skills in hands-on organic, locally grown food cultivation projects. Nisqually Community Garden will host this event in the summer of 2015 and tribal garden workers and Nisqually youth will showcase their innovative and community driven project.



Members of Northwest Native Plants and Foods Collective (NNPFC)

Cultivating Food Forests: What is Agro-forestry? is a one-day immersive workshop that draws upon local tribal forestry, fisheries, and natural resource management experts to cultivate planning for food security through tribally-driven programs. The Muckleshoot Tribe will host this workshop in the autumn of 2015.

2. Convene NNPFC and key partners in tribal government, tribal youth leaders, and local and national indigenous philanthropy for two daylong retreats to establish strategic long-term programmatic and resource plans around serving indigenous communities with a focus on Native youth. Outcomes of these meetings will provide NNPFC with clear steps for creating platforms for educational services, building a community where people share best practices, develop an appropriate dissemination plan including a presentation at the First Nation's L.E.A.D conference, and advocate for tribal food sovereignty and sustainable food systems.

3. Organize a social media campaign and an annual publication highlighting Northwest urban and rural tribal efforts to secure

food systems, address food sovereignty issues, and restore indigenous health. The social media campaign will serve youth audiences through popular networks including Facebook and Twitter. The annual publication will serve as a resource for both local tribes and the international community around building indigenous food systems. The three youth focused workshops will be featured in the first publication.

Restoring an emphasis on cultural uses of the land, medicinal plants, and native foods for individual and community health has the potential to build healthful communities throughout North America.

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