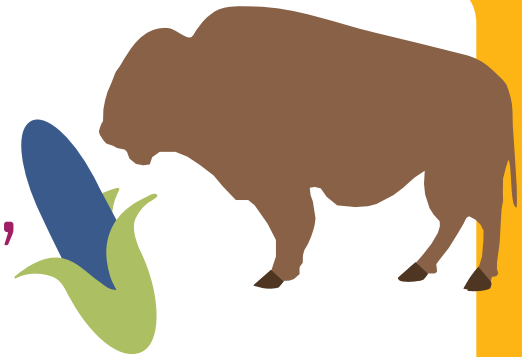




# BRINGING TRIBAL FOODS AND TRADITIONS INTO CAFETERIAS, CLASSROOMS, AND GARDENS



**SCHOOLS AND NATIVE AMERICAN TRIBES** across the country are incorporating traditional foods like bison, mesquite flour, wild rice, and ancient varieties of squash and corn into school meals and providing complementary educational activities that teach students about nutrition and Native American food traditions. There are more than 560 tribes recognized by the U.S. government, each with its own food and agricultural history and culture. Operating a farm to school program in a tribal setting or in a school with a high Native American population can help connect students to this history and expand markets for local and Native American farmers. This fact sheet explores how school and tribes are integrating traditional foods into child nutrition programs (CNPs), buying traditional foods locally, and incorporating multicultural nutrition education into classroom curriculum and hands-on lessons in school gardens.

## Incorporating Traditional Foods into Menus

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) encourages Indian Tribal Organizations, along with all operators of CNPs, to serve traditional and locally grown and raised foods.

**The Child Nutrition Programs and Traditional Foods memo (TA01-2015)** explains that traditional foods may be served in CNPs and includes examples of how several traditional foods may contribute towards reimbursable meals. The **USDA Food Buying Guide (FBG)** is a great place to start when creating menus that incorporate traditional food items since it includes crediting information and portion sizes needed to meet the nutritional standards for federal reimbursement.

**The Circle of Nations Boarding School located in Wahpeton, North Dakota, a charter under the Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate tribe, incorporates bison meat from the Intertribal Buffalo Council (ITBC) Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate herd into lunch meals. Bison meat is substituted for ground beef in items such as chili and spaghetti sauce. In addition, food from the school garden is served daily on the salad bar. Lise Erdrich, School Health Coordinator, says that the students rated her salsa verde recipe, made with traditional green tomatillos, "better than guacamole!"**

**Meat from domesticated and wild game animals, including many traditional foods like bison and venison, may be served in child nutrition programs.**

*For information about serving meat, see the memo, **Procuring Local Meat, Poultry, Game, and Eggs for Child Nutrition Programs (SP01 CACFP01 SFSP01-2016).***

While the FBG provides a list of products commonly served in CNPs, it is not comprehensive. If a food is served as part of a reimbursable meal, but not listed in the FBG, the yield information of a similar food or an in-house yield may be used to determine the contribution towards meal pattern requirements.

Since traditional foods may provide a different nutrient yield than the substitutes listed in the FBG, it is important to pay attention to preparation techniques and the nutritional content of the foods being substituted.



## Enhancing Food Sovereignty and Supporting Local and Native American Farmers

According to USDA’s 2012 Census of Agriculture, there are more than 46,000 American Indian or Alaskan Native farms and more than 2,000 Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander farms in operation in the United States. When CNP operators purchase traditional foods from these farms, everyone wins: Kids have an opportunity to eat nutritious, local, traditional foods; producers get an economic boost; and tribal communities enjoy more food sovereignty.

**The Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians operates the largest reservation based school system east of the Mississippi with over 2,200 students. The Nutrition Director works closely with local vendors, both on and off the reservation, to determine what local items are available and has procured muscadines, sweet potatoes, squash, catfish, peas, tomatoes, melons, and blueberries from local vendor, Choctaw Fresh.**

## Traditional Food and Agricultural Education for Native American Students

Lessons in history, health, math, English, and science can all be used to teach students about Native American foods, food traditions, and agricultural practices. Incorporating nutrition education related to traditional food items into cultural activities such as ceremonial songs or story telling helps students to identify with food as part of Native American culture. Additionally, Native American school gardens can give students a first-hand look at traditional farming practices. For example, a Three Sisters garden (where corn, squash and beans are planted together) is a great way to connect traditional agricultural practices to healthy food choices.

Cherokee Central Schools in North Carolina, a district whose three schools (elementary, middle and high) are all on the same campus, is home to a thriving garden program. Foods grown in the garden come primarily from heirloom varieties of seeds saved for generations by Cherokee people. Students are regularly brought to the garden for soil-related lessons, seasonal garden rotation days, and more exploratory days of tasting and learning. The garden harvest is used in classroom cooking lessons, cafeteria taste tests, and in the high school life skills class. Additionally, special guests from the community are invited to teach students about traditional Cherokee uses— edible, medicinal, and ceremonial—for the plants.

## Learn More

- **Farm-to-Cafeteria Initiatives: Connections with the Tribal Food Sovereignty Movement**
- **Indigenous Farm to School Programs: A Guide for Creating a Farm to School Program in an Indigenous Community**
- **Native Food Systems Resource Center: Farm to School**
- **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Traditional Foods Project**
- **National Farm to School Network Native Communities Page**



For more information, and to sign up for the bi-weekly e-letter from the Food and Nutrition Service’s Office of Community Food Systems, please visit [www.usda.gov/farmtoschool](http://www.usda.gov/farmtoschool). Questions? Email us at [farmtoschool@fns.usda.gov](mailto:farmtoschool@fns.usda.gov).

