The Navajo Nation Food System and Diné Food Sovereignty
Food Systems – A Holistic Analysis

• What are the impacts of modern food production on people’s health and culture?
• What are the impacts on the environment?
• What are the economic impacts?
• What are the social and community impacts?
THE NAVAJO NATION FOOD DESERT
What is a food desert?

• “A food desert is any area in the industrialized world where healthy, affordable food is difficult to obtain. It is prevalent in rural as well as urban areas and is most prevalent in low-socioeconomic minority communities, and is associated with a variety of diet-related health problems.”

• Access to healthy and quality food.
• Affordability.

• FOOD IS A SOCIAL JUSTICE ISSUE
The Navajo Nation Food Desert

Legend
- Food Deserts
- Non-Food Desert
- Food Desert
- Navajo Nation Boundaries
Where do you do your grocery shopping?

First Choice
Total 220
Off the Reservation - 113
On the Reservation - 107

[Pie chart showing 49% Off, 51% On]

Second Choice
Total 220
Off the Reservation - 137
On the Reservation - 73

[Pie chart showing 35% Off, 65% On]

Round Trip Distances to Off-Reservation Food Stores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>To Gallup, NM</th>
<th>To Farmington, NM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tsaile</td>
<td>155 mi</td>
<td>174 mi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Round Rock</td>
<td>240 mi</td>
<td>236 mi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lukachukai</td>
<td>173 mi</td>
<td>155 mi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinle</td>
<td>183 mi</td>
<td>225 mi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Many Farms</td>
<td>210 mi</td>
<td>218 mi</td>
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Diabetes and Other Nutritional Illnesses

Navajo Diabetes

• 1 person in 6000 with diabetes in 1937
• Now close to 1 in 3 Navajos have diabetes; this rate is increasing.
• On-reservation rate may be closer to 1 in 2.

The rise of nutritionally related illnesses extend to Obesity, Heart Disease, Hyper-Tension, and some Cancers.

There is a direct correlation in a Westernized Diet and Nutritional Illness. Every Indigenous population that encounters Western Diet sees these Illnesses in a few decades.
Discussion on Choice

• If you are low income (or have no income)
• If you don’t have a vehicle
• If you have no access to healthy foods

• What kind of choice do you really have?

• HOW DO WE CREATE ACCESS TO HEALTHIER FOODS
FRAMEWORKING COLONIZATION AND DECOLONIZATION IN FOOD SOVEREIGNTY – UNDERSTANDING THE ROOTS OF OUR FOOD SYSTEM
Thinking About Our Consumption

• Where does our food come from?
• How has this changed for us as Indigenous People?
• Is there a connection between colonization and our current health/economic/social issues? What role does food play?
• What would decolonization of our food system look like?
Colonization

• Conquest/Western Expansion/Manifest Destiney
• Take over Land and Natural Resources
• Removal and Relocation of Indigenous People
• Policies of Assimilation
  – Boarding Schools

Neocolonialism of Land and Natural Resources continues today globally
DINÉ FOOD TIMELINE
Diné Food Timeline; What is a traditional diet?

- Prior to European Arrival
  - Cultivated Crops: Corn, Squash, Beans
  - Wild Animals, Hunted Game Meats
    - Big game: Elk, Deer, Antelope
    - Small game: Prairie Dogs, Rabbits, Squirrels, Badgers
  - Wild Plants
    - Hundreds used for medicine, food, beverage
  - Insects
    - Locust
  - Trade with other Tribes
    - Hopi orchards

- Food Sources were self-sufficient and Local
- Largely Plant Based Diet
Diné Food Timeline; European Influence

• 1500’s -1800’s – Influence of the Spanish
  – Introduction of Sheep, Cattle, Horses, Melons, Wheat, Peaches and other Fruit Trees, integrated into Diné agriculture and the Diné Food System

  – Diné became herders, but remained independent of the Spanish, and Mexican governments and maintained Food Sovereignty
Diné Food Timeline; American Policy

• 1830-1840: The Americans come to the Southwest

• 1851-1864: Scorch Earth Campaigns to Destroy Diné Food System
  
  □ 1864 – 1868: Removal to Fort Sumner
    □ Crop failure and restrictions on hunting
    □ Dependence on the US government for food; flour, lard, salted pork, coffee
      □ the origins of fry-bread; government rations in treaty
      □ illness and death from spoiled rations
    □ Starvation

• Treaty of 1868
• 1930's Livestock reduction and land leasing system

AFTERMATH
• Boarding Schools
  • Insistence on Dairy even though 75% of Native Americans are lactose-intolerant
• Relocation Programs
• WIC
• FOOD STAMPS
  – Dietary Influence – Value placed on Western Foods; Native Foods viewed as “dirty” “backwards”
Diné Food Timeline, 1980-1990’s Food Surveys

• 1968 – First Grocery Store, Window Rock
• By the 1980’s,
  – soda and sweetened drinks, store bought bread, and milk were commonplace in the Navajo Diet
  – gardens were generally small and “no longer appeared to be a major source of food for many families.”
  – according to one study, “many of the traditional foods were rarely if ever consumed.”

• early 1990’s
  – Fruits and vegetables were reportedly consumed less than once per day.
Diné Food Timeline; Current Trends

• Today:
  – fried potatoes, fry-bread and tortillas, sugary drinks, and processed meats most consumed

• The general trend: the decline of pre-contact foods and the increase of non-native foods.

• These dietary changes did not occur by chance, but were fostered by a series of American interventions and policies; namely forced removal, the livestock reduction, boarding schools, relocation, and food distribution programs, along with the changes in a subsistence lifestyles to wage based society.
What Do We Do?

“There is a better way and it begins with restoring our traditional foods. The recovery of the people is tied to the recovery of food, since food itself is medicine, not only for the body, but for the soul, and for the spiritual connection.”

– Winona LaDuke
SOLUTIONS EMPOWERING INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE DINÉ FOOD SOVEREIGNTY
Diné Food Sovereignty

“Diné Food Sovereignty is fundamental to rebuilding a healthy and self-sufficient Food System for the Diné people. Diné Food Sovereignty is the right of Diné people to define their own policies and strategies for sustainable production, distribution, and consumption of food, with respect to Diné culture, philosophy, and values, and is considered to be a precondition for food security on the Navajo Nation. Diné Food Sovereignty ensures the ability to establish our own culturally appropriate and sustainable systems of managing natural resources including lands, territories, waters, seeds, livestock and biodiversity. Diné Food Sovereignty empowers Diné people by putting the Diné people, farmers, and livestock-owners at the center of decision-making on policies, strategies, and natural resource management.
• Political Sovereignty and Self-Determination for the Diné people and Diné Nation is not possible without Diné Food Sovereignty.

• Our indigenous foods are a gift from the Diyin Dine’é and that these foods provided the sustenance and well-being of Diné people within Diné Bikeyah. In this respect, the right to food is sacred, and cannot be constrained by colonial laws, policies, institutions, and economic systems; Diné Food Sovereignty works to restore Hózhó and is fundamentally achieved by uphold our sacred responsibility to nurture healthy interdependent relationships with the land, plants, and animals, that provide us with our food.”
Community-Based Public Education

• Food System Awareness
• GMO education
• Planting
• Range land management
• Wild Food Collection
• Cooking
• Food Storage
• Butchering
• Traditional Teachings

OUR ELDERS ARE OUR KNOWLEDGE HOLDERS
Let’s work together to take act and empower our communities
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