

FRAMING PAPER: WHITE HOUSE CONFERENCE ON HUNGER, NUTRITION, AND HEALTH

TRIBAL CONSULTATION

BACKGROUND

This Framing Paper is a starting point to guide the Tribal Consultation being held to help prepare for the upcoming [White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health](#) (Conference). The Consultation is being hosted on June 28, 2022, from 1:30-3:30pm EDT by the White House Domestic Policy Committee (DPC), the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), and the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA).

Below you will find the **Five Pillars** of the Conference and the **Five Discussion Questions** that are the focus of the listening sessions and Tribal Consultations preparing for the Conference.

HHS and USDA have held a series of Tribal Consultations and Listening Sessions on nutrition in Indian Country during this Administration, and we have incorporated below some of the **Tribal Inputs** received to date related to indigenous nutrition, food ways, and food insecurity so we can build off previously provided comments. These comments are only intended as a starting point to facilitate a robust conversation.

FIVE PILLARS OF THE CONFERENCE

- 1. IMPROVE FOOD ACCESS AND AFFORDABILITY**
- 2. INTEGRATE NUTRITION AND HEALTH**
- 3. EMPOWER ALL CONSUMERS TO MAKE AND HAVE ACCESS TO HEALTHY CHOICES**
- 4. SUPPORT PHYSICAL ACTIVITY FOR ALL**
- 5. ENHANCE NUTRITION AND FOOD SECURITY RESEARCH**

GENERAL FRAMING OF TRIBAL INPUTS

The United States has a long and complicated history with food and nutrition policy in Indian Country. Throughout USDA and HHS's Tribal Consultations and Listening Sessions this past year, Tribal Leaders repeatedly pointed to this history as a leading cause of the continued nutrition and diet-based health issues in Indian Country from their perspective. Thus, this input must be provided as an overall framing to any tribal conversation about food and nutrition.

Specifically, Tribal leaders spoke of the dismantling of Tribal food systems, including the destruction of the bison and the criminalization of access to fish and foraging, as a tool of war against Native nations. They spoke of the distribution and the withholding of food rations as leverage for behavioral compliance with westward expansion and with the forced attendance of Native children at the federal boarding schools. Tribal leaders pointed to specific provisions in their treaties in which federal rations largely eliminated access to traditional indigenous foods and were replaced almost exclusively with western commodities, playing a significant role in the spread of diabetes throughout their indigenous populations from their analysis.

It was the Tribal Leaders' perspective that these historical federal actions curtailed access to indigenous plants and animals and indigenous food ways and increased Tribal food insecurity while decreasing nutritional value.

FIVE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

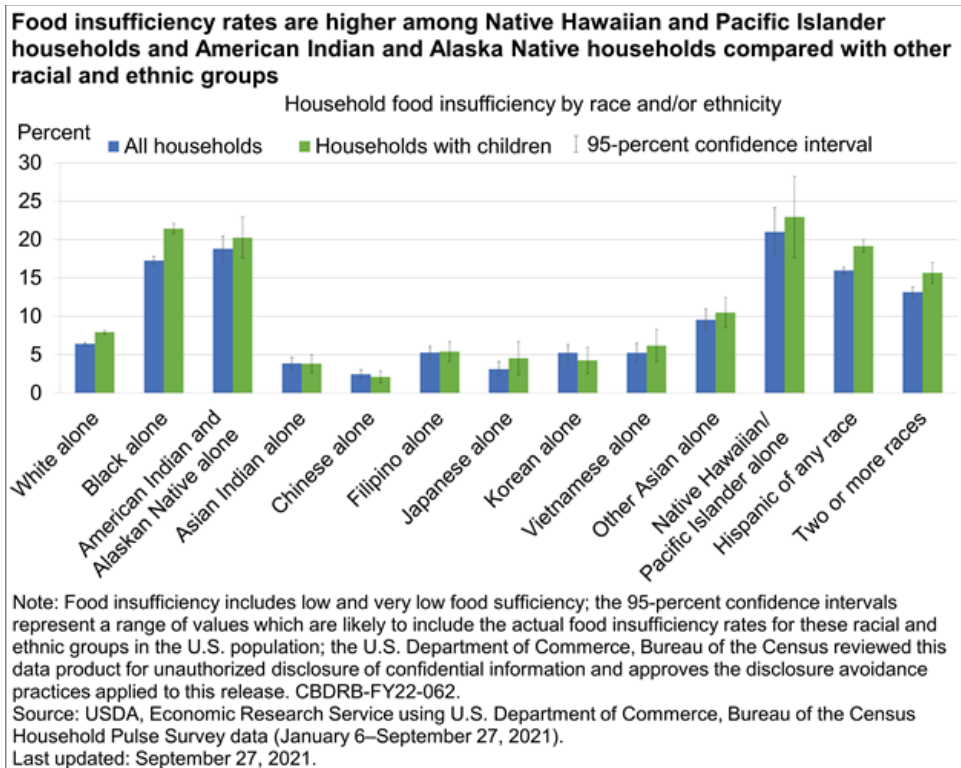
1. How has hunger or diet-related disease impacted you, your family, or your community?

TRIBAL INPUTS:

Statistics on Diabetes and Obesity in Indian Country. The American Indian and Alaska Native people increasingly face health challenges and have long experienced lower health status when compared with other Americans. American Indian/Alaska Native people are more likely than non-Hispanic whites to have obesity (adults are 50% more likely and adolescents are 30% more likely). They are also more likely to be diagnosed with diabetes, which is one of the leading causes of death among American Indian and Alaska Native people. In 2018, American Indians/Alaska Natives were 2.3 times more likely than non-Hispanic whites to die from diabetes.¹

- **Statistics on Food Sufficiency in Indian Country.** USDA's Economic Research Service has published estimates of food sufficiency—or a measure of whether a household has enough food--by detailed racial and ethnic categories. The latest [published estimates](#) from January 6 to September 27, 2021, show that American Indian and Alaska Native populations had higher rates of food insufficiency than other racial and ethnic groups. Almost 19 percent (18.8 percent) of all American Indian and Alaskan Native households had low or very low food sufficiency during this time, relative to 6.4 percent of White households.

¹ <https://www.minorityhealth.hhs.gov/omh/>



- **Adjust the Dietary Guidelines for Americans and Programmatic Nutrition Standards to Include Indigenous Bodies and Traditional Diets.** USDA and HHS have heard from Tribal leaders and Tribal nutritionists that they did not believe the Dietary Guidelines for Americans and nutrition standards in specific federal programs, such as school meal programs, were appropriate for indigenous bodies and that they have contributed to diet-related diseases. For instance, grains were not a common food for some Tribes and some Tribes, such as certain Tribes in Alaska, predominantly followed high-fat diets. They requested additional research related to appropriate guidelines for indigenous populations.
- **Promote Locally Grown Fruits and Vegetables Indigenous to Tribes.** HHS received extensive inputs about the high transportation costs of fresh fruits and vegetables, the lack of infrastructure to keep food fresh and safe, and the effect of climate change. Promoting local and regional distribution of fruits and vegetables allows tribal citizens to consume foods more culturally appropriate or appealing to them, reduces the financial and environmental costs, increases access to fresh food, and allows for more dollars to stay in the Tribe or Tribes in the region.
- **Restore Indigenous Animal Food Sources Such as Bison and Salmon.** Through multiple Tribal Consultations and Listening Sessions, we have heard requests to increase the availability of indigenous animal food sources such as bison and salmon. Recommended actions ranged from ones that would foster an increase in the populations of these species, such as disease prevention, to ones that allow for greater integration of these animals into federal food programs.

2. **What specific actions should the U.S. Federal government, including the Executive Branch and Congress, take to achieve each pillar? Provide specifics.**

TRIBAL INPUTS:

- **Expand and Make Permanent the FDPIR Self-Demonstration Project.** USDA received authority and funding to operate a 638-demonstration project for the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR). This project acknowledges Tribal sovereignty and allows for more traditional, Tribally-produced, local and regionally produced foods. The program has proven successful, and Tribal leaders have requested that the program become permanent and be expanded to all of FDPIR.
- **Expand “The Buy Indian Act” to All Food Purchases Made with Federal Dollars on Indian Reservations.** The Buy Indian Act (25 U.S.C. 47), which allows for the purchase of Native-produced products without going through normal competition requirements, does not apply to USDA. The Federal Acquisitions Regulations (FAR) presents significant challenges for Native producers, and these requirements are contrary to some treaty provisions which have “promise to purchase” provisions. Tribal leaders have asked for this preference, or something comparable, to extend to USDA so that the federal government can better support tribal producers and fulfill these treaty obligations.
- **Allow Tribal Implementation of School Meal Programs.** Tribal leaders have expressed concern over the fact that State agencies administer the Federal Child Nutrition Programs, since Tribal Nations are equivalent to states under the law and therefore are not generally subject to state jurisdiction. Allowing greater Tribal control over school meal programs would allow for Tribes to have sovereignty over the food their children eat and afford them self-determination over this Federal program.
- **Allow Indigenously Harvested Plants and Animals in Tribal School Meals.** Tribal leaders expressed concerns about how challenging it is for school meals in Tribal schools to reflect indigenous diets due to various regulatory barriers. Efforts should be taken to remove all regulatory and guidance-related barriers to serving Traditional foods in school meals. Additionally, technical assistance must be expanded to ease the burden on Child Nutrition Program operators when working to incorporate these foods.
- **Increase Opportunities for USDA Foods to Reflect Traditional Diets.** Tribal leaders recommended that more Traditional foods be procured through the USDA commodities program. These products should be sourced regionally from Tribal producers whenever possible, and distributed regionally to Federal nutrition assistance programs in Indian Country.
- **Increase Representation of American Indian/Alaska Native Populations in Federal Nutrition Program Staff.** Tribal leaders seek greater representation of American Indian and Alaska Native populations in the USDA Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) staff, particularly for Tribal-facing positions such as the Tribal Specialist roles in the Regional Offices. Additionally, Tribal leaders want USDA nutrition program staff to be trained on working with Tribes and culturally responsive.

3. **What specific actions should local, state, territory and Tribal governments; private companies; nonprofit and community groups; and others take to achieve each pillar?**

TRIBAL INPUTS:

- **Expand Tribal Self-Governance Opportunities into Federal and State Nutrition Programs.** Pointing to the successful examples of self-governance in the FDPIR program through its self-determination pilot, Tribal leaders have asked for greater self-governance authority and opportunities in food and nutrition programs, such as Child Nutrition Programs. In some cases, this involves giving Tribal governments the authority to administer federal programs, like FDPIR, while transferring state authority to Tribes in other cases, like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).
- **Expand Support for Indigenous Food Sovereignty.** Tribal nations have 638 self-governance/compacting authority to administer U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI) programs but until recently, USDA did not have such authority. Tribal leaders have continually emphasized that there are few places of more importance to Tribes for administration than their foods and asked for greater expansion of 638 programs at USDA outside of FDPIR.

4. **What are opportunities for public- and private-sector partners to work together to achieve each pillar?**

TRIBAL INPUTS:

- **Integrate Indigenous Foods and Indigenous Knowledge into State Nutrition Education.** States run nutrition education programs related to SNAP (SNAP-Education) and are required to consult with Tribes on SNAP-Education plans. However, Tribes expressed they did not always feel these lines of communication were active and indigenous foods were not well integrated.
- **Increase Research into Indigenous Nutrition to Inform the Dietary Guidelines for Americans (DGAs).** On November 15, 2021, the Office of Science and Technology Policy and the Council for Environmental Quality issues a [Memorandum for the Heads of Departments and Agencies](#) to call for the more formal acknowledgement and inclusion of indigenous traditional ecological knowledge (ITEK) into federal scientific and policy processes. Tribal stakeholders have cited the DGAs as a place to incorporate ITEK.
- **Increase Research into Indigenous Knowledge to Inform Climate Smart Sustainable Food Production Techniques.** Tribal leaders have asked for greater research and use of ITEK in areas like food production, traditional agricultural techniques, indigenous dry farming and gardening, etc. to assist in increasing food security and decreasing hunger.
- **Food Service Management Companies (FSMCs) can better support Tribal food sovereignty goals.** Tribal leaders expressed concern over the fact that when FSMCs or private vendors operate Federal nutrition programs in Indian Country. They have little

incentive to incorporate Traditional foods and food ways. This is an area where partnership with FSMCs to explore opportunities could be fruitful.

5. **What are innovative, successful activities already happening at the local, state, territory, and Tribal levels that could inform actions at the Federal level?**

TRIBAL INPUTS:

- **Promote Tribal Indigenous Food Sovereignty Initiatives and Best Practices.** Tribal leaders have asked that the federal government promote local Tribal efforts in restoring traditional foodways. USDA established the Indigenous Food Sovereignty Initiative (IFSI) last year to promote traditional food ways, Indian Country food and agriculture markets, and indigenous health through foods tailored to American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) dietary needs. Some topics include seed-saving, foraging, and indigenous cooking.