



BRAIDING RELATIONS:

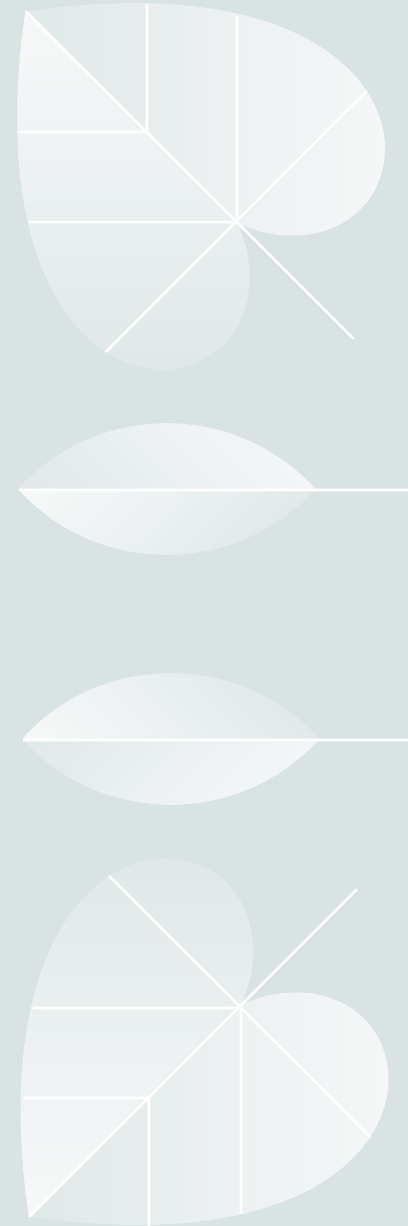
Extending Indigenous
Food Sovereignty
Efforts through
Community
Partnerships

FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

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AGENDA

- DEFINE FOOD SOVEREIGNTY
- SIGNIFICANCE OF "BRAIDING RELATIONS"
- TRIBAL LEADERSHIP AND COMMUNITY VISION
- THE ROLE OF PARTNERSHIPS
- ALIGNING ON VALUES AND SOVEREIGNTY RIGHTS
- PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS
- LESSONS AND TAKEAWAYS



WHAT DOES FOOD SOVEREIGNTY MEAN TO YOU/YOUR PEOPLE?

Sovereignty/Community Control

The right of communities to determine their own food and agriculture policies and practices. Ensuring access to sufficient healthy, and culturally appropriate food for all. Sharing knowledge and skills related to food, production, processing, and distribution.

Localizing Food Systems

Reduces the distance between food producers and consumers and building strong local economies. Values and supports small-scale farmers, fishers, and other producers.

Working with Nature

Utilizes sustainable and ecological farming practices while challenging the dominant, industrial model of agriculture, which can lead to environmental degradation, social injustice, and dependence on globalized food systems.



SIGNIFICANCE OF "BRAIDING RELATIONS"

BUILDING LASTING PARTNERSHIPS WITH TRIBAL COMMUNITIES IS LIKE BRAIDING A SACRED TIE. EACH STRAND WOVEN WITH TRUST, TRANSPARENCY, AND RESPECT FOR TRIBAL SOVEREIGNTY. WHEN CRAFTED WITH INTENTION, THESE RELATIONSHIPS BECOME STRONG, RESILIENT, AND GROUNDED IN SHARED PURPOSE.

TRIBAL LEADERSHIP AND COMMUNITY VISION

Incorporating and gaining feedback from tribal leadership and the tribal community is essential when doing food sovereignty work for several important reasons.

Here are specific examples that highlight why:

Tailoring Food Systems to Community Health Needs

- Example
 - A food assistance program brings in bulk produce that the community is unfamiliar with, while traditional foods like venison, squash, or blackberries are overlooked. The foods are underused, and health outcomes remain unchanged.
- Why it matters:
 - Tribal communities experience unique health challenges like high rates of diabetes or heart disease due to colonization-related diet shifts. Leadership and community input help ensure food sovereignty programs are designed to meet specific health priorities through culturally relevant foods.

Aligning with Tribal Governance and Policy

- Example:
 - A new initiative wants to distribute seeds, but tribal policy has regulations on non-native seeds being planted on tribal lands. The group didn't consult the tribal agriculture department and faces delays and legal barriers.
- Why it matters:
 - Tribal governments often have food codes, land use policies, and environmental protections in place. Involving leadership early avoids conflicts and ensures alignment with tribal law.

Ensuring Long-Term Capacity Building

- Example:
 - An outside organization trains community members in beekeeping but fails to provide follow-up support. A year later, the equipment is broken and no one knows how to repair it.
- Why it matters:
 - Community feedback helps shape programs that invest in skills, leadership, and resources needed for long-term success, not short-term interventions.

THE ROLE OF PARTNERSHIPS

Collaborating with external agencies that want to invest in tribal community food sovereignty initiatives is important, but it must be done thoughtfully and respectfully. Here's why such collaboration matters and how it must center tribal self-determination, long-term commitment, and data sovereignty:

Access to Resources and Expertise

External agencies can provide much-needed funding, technical assistance, infrastructure support, and access to broader networks that may not be readily available within the community. This can help accelerate the development of food systems that are sustainable, resilient, and culturally appropriate.

Amplifying Impact

When partnerships are built on mutual respect, they can scale up successful models, share best practices across tribal nations, and influence broader policy changes that support Indigenous food systems.

Support for Capacity Building

External collaborators can help strengthen tribal capacity through training, education, and institutional support, helping to ensure long-term sustainability of food sovereignty efforts.

Environmental and Health Co-Benefits

Collaborative initiatives can bring attention to the environmental, health, and economic benefits of Indigenous food systems, promoting broader societal support for tribal-led sustainability initiatives.

ALIGNING ON VALUES AND SOVEREIGNTY RIGHTS

Collaborating with external agencies that want to invest in tribal community food sovereignty initiatives is important, but it must be done thoughtfully and respectfully. Here's why such collaboration matters and how it must center tribal self-determination, long-term commitment, and data sovereignty:

Self-Determination Is Non-Negotiable

Tribes have the inherent right to define their own priorities, strategies, and goals. Collaboration must support, not override, tribal decision-making and leadership. External agencies should act as allies, not directors.

Respect for Long-Term Vision

Many tribal communities take a long-view approach to sustainability and cultural preservation. External involvement must move beyond short-term grant cycles to support enduring systems rooted in tradition and future generations.

Data Sovereignty Matters

Tribes must retain ownership, control, access, and possession of their data. External agencies should not collect, store, or use data without clear, tribe-approved agreements that ensure confidentiality, benefit-sharing, and accountability.

Avoiding Extractive Partnerships

Historically, some partnerships have been extractive – taking knowledge or resources without giving back. Responsible collaboration prioritizes reciprocity, transparency, and shared benefit.

Upholding Cultural Integrity

Food sovereignty is deeply tied to language, land, ceremony, and cultural knowledge. Partners must be culturally competent and commit to upholding the spiritual and cultural integrity of foodways.

PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

| Project | Partnership | # of people reached (approx) |
|--|---|-------------------------------------|
| Fruit Tree Planting (two phases) | The Fruit Tree Planting Foundation | Directly: 850 Indirectly: +2,000 |
| Wildlife Management Project (4,000 pounds) | City of Tega Cay, South Carolina Department of Natural Resources | +900 |
| Catawba Corn | Davidson College | +500 |
| Deer Processing Education and Internship | Backwoods Processing | 8 |
| Venison Meat Donation (1,720 pounds) | South Carolina Hunters for the Hungry | +700 |
| Farmers Market Partnership | Local farmers markets | In progress, TBD |



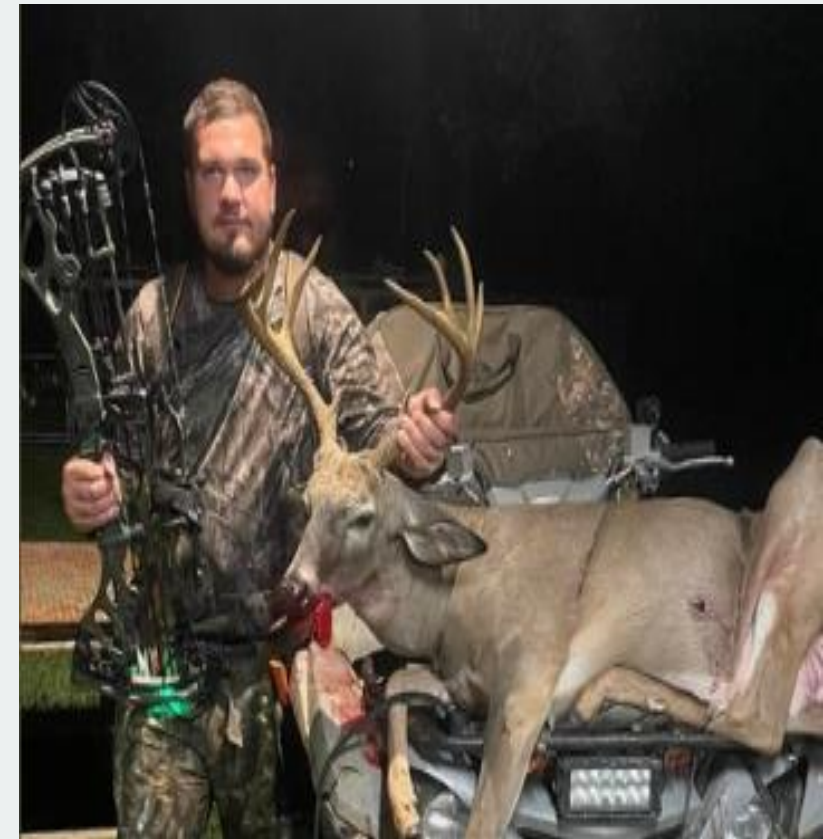
PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

VENISON MEAT PROVIDED TO TRIBAL HOUSEHOLDS AT THE CATAWBA MARKET AND PLANTING OF
FRUIT TREES AT BLACK SNAKE FARM



PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

DAVIDSON COLLEGE AND BACKWOODS PROCESSING PARTNERSHIP



UPCOMING PROJECTS

CATFISH FILLETING DEMO, COMMUNITY BOW HUNTING,

2025-2026 HUNTER VOUCHER APPLICATIONS

LESSONS AND TAKEAWAYS



Establish an Inter-Tribal Food Sovereignty Working Group

Purpose: Facilitate collaboration, knowledge sharing, and unified advocacy.

Benefits:

- Amplifies collective voices for policy change.
- Shares traditional ecological knowledge, seed banks, practices, and stories.
- Builds regional food systems through cooperative networks (e.g., trade, shared infrastructure).

Lesson: Strength lies in unity - diverse tribal perspectives enrich solutions.

LESSONS AND TAKEAWAYS



Policy Advocacy and Systemic Change

Focus Areas:

- Access to traditional lands and waters.
- Rights to harvest, hunt, fish, and gather.
- USDA and local policy reforms to support Indigenous food practices.

Actions:

- Engage in tribal, state, and federal policy forums.
- Partner with legal allies to push legislative change.

Lesson: Sovereignty includes governance over food systems - policy is a tool for reclamation.

LESSONS AND TAKEAWAYS



Strengthen Relationships with External Organizations

Criteria for Partnership:

- Alignment with tribal ethics and protocols.
- Long-term commitment, not extractive or transactional.
- Willingness to listen, learn, and follow Indigenous leadership.

Examples:

- Collaborate on grants, education, technical training, or infrastructure development.
- Establish MOUs with clearly defined roles and shared values.

Lesson: True allies are accountable, reciprocal, and willing to stand beside – not in front of – Indigenous leadership.

LESSONS AND TAKEAWAYS



Teach the Full Cycle of Food Sovereignty

Core Idea: Food sovereignty is not just about access – it's about understanding, participating in, and respecting the *entire life cycle* of food.

Key Practices:

- Teach how to grow, forage, hunt, fish, and harvest traditional foods.
- Include processing, preservation, and cooking techniques grounded in cultural traditions.
- Emphasize the full circle: from seed to plate to seed again – or from land to ceremony to compost.

Community Examples:

- Teach firearm/bow safety, tracking, processing game, honoring animal spirits, and traditional cooking methods.
- Embeds food sovereignty into daily learning and long-term identity formation.

Lesson: Don't just feed the people – teach them how to feed themselves in relationship with the land. Food sovereignty means knowing how to nurture, harvest, prepare, and return to the earth in a continuous, respectful cycle.



CONTACT INFO

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SOVEREIGNTY COORDINATOR

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