

A Statement on the Current Status of Native Peoples from Food First

We begin by looking at the state of Native Americans through a range of metrics which underscore how much US governmental policies have marginalized and failed Native American people. Native American farming and foodways were decimated in the wake of colonization. Their lands were systematically taken and many of the ways that enabled them to be self-sufficient were compromised. Government policies long restricted Native Americans from owning livestock or equipment needed for agriculture, stifling their ability to contribute in the fight for food justice.

Systemic inequalities like these have often left Native American communities with limited access to resources and opportunities, resulting in food insecurity and poverty:

Food Insecurity:

- Native American households experience food insecurity rates that are double the national average. In some tribal areas, these rates can be as high as 20-30% of the entire tribal community
- About one in four Native Americans experience food insecurity, compared to 1 in 9 Americans overall

Poverty:

- The poverty rate on tribal lands is 31.5% compared to 13.0% in urban areas

Issues of poverty and food insecurity reflect a range of other challenges including:

Unemployment:

- Native American unemployment rates are significantly higher than the national average, varying by tribe and region
- In January 2022, the unemployment rate for American Indians and Alaska Natives was 11.1%, much higher than the national rate of 3.9%

Disrupted Families

- 78% of Native Americans live in urban or suburban areas off tribal lands
- Of the remaining Native Americans living on or near tribal lands, many experience higher poverty, poorer health outcomes compared to Native Americans living off tribal lands in urban areas

Climate Change:

- Climate change has disrupted their traditional ways of life, including from a farming perspective as crop yields have been adversely impacted leading to declines in the availability of culturally preferred Native American foods

But indigenous agriculture never fully disappeared - and today it is rising again through tribes reclaiming traditional practices.

Even in the face of systemic inequalities, Native food sovereignty movements continue revitalizing ancestral crops and traditions that protect people and the planet. The path forward requires us to learn from and stand in solidarity with our Indigenous neighbors. Their voices and perspectives are essential to creating a just food system for all. If we listen, engage respectfully, and advocate for tribal rights and wellbeing, a brighter future can emerge - one guided by Native wisdom and nourished by Native foodways.

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