



Sioux Chef Sean Sherman (second from left) and Twila Cassadore (far right) Indigenous food advocate pose with some of the servers in front of the Indigenous food samples being handed out Food Tank Summit. (Photo by Quindrea Yazzie)

The Skysong conference room at Arizona State University was over capacity at the recent Wisdom of Indigenous Foodways Summit in Scottsdale, Arizona.

Farmers travelled from reservations in Arizona such as Hopi, San Carlos, Tohono O’odham, well-known Native chefs came from South Dakota and Montana, two universities with a distance of more than a thousand miles all congregated at the summit.

Despite who they were and where they came from - food brought them together.

The four-hour summit featured Native communities and foodies who shared inspiring words about their agricultural practices and their right to food sovereignty. The event was presented by Food Systems Center for Sustainable Food Systems, ASI and The



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Food as resilience

Indigikitchen founder Mariah Gladstone, Blackfeet and Cherokee, runs an online cooking show dedicated to teaching information about Indigenous science. Gladstone said her past speeches about Indigenous foods were focused on dispossession and genocide, but it is time to look at Indigenous food and history from a new aspect.

"It's really important to celebrate the progress that is being made," Gladstone said.

Although there are benefits from eating Indigenous foods, it is also a challenge and a not-so-easy commitment, Gladstone explained as she reminisced on people she knew switching diets. When it came to spices they had to get creative with grasshoppers and other natural foods, she said.

"Food is not a commodity in Indian Country," Gladstone said. "It is a gift from the Earth, and it is our responsibility to make sure that we are sharing that gift with those who need it most."

Like Gladstone, Michael Johnson believes there is a challenge to come back to Indigenous foodways, but the lesson taught is what is most important.

Johnson is Hopi and every year he dedicates time to planting seeds so and relies on faith of moisture and sun to feed his crops.

The sacred process of planting a seed underground to the day of harvest, has taught Johnson patience and strength. "I am not only putting seeds in the ground, I am putting life in the ground," Johnson said.

"The Hopi way of farming is faith-based. It isn't a commodity; it's a way of life," Johnson said. "Hopi society is integrated with that, and that makes us really resilient."

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Putting seeds in the ground is very sacred and it is very hard for people to understand the value of that intimacy that we have with our crops said Johnson. The traditional ways and values are something that Native communities need to hold onto he said.

Strength and innovation

San Carlos Food Sovereignty advocate Twila Cassadore, finds inspirations and strength by her ancestors teachings and their way of life.

"Because of our ancestors and our elders, we are still here and able to share stories about sustainability and what worked in our communities," Cassadore said. "Seeing the way these stories have impacted young people today: it's magical."

Because of my ancestors, I am here said Cassadore. We as Native people are rooted from our ancestors existence and we don't realize how big of an impact we are in our community and for our future generations she said.

Sioux Chef Sean Sherman, Lakota, shared his dream of driving in any direction on this continent and being able to visit Indigenous food businesses and experience Indigenous food production.

"It is really important to think about how empowered we can be to absorb a lot of our ancestors' knowledge and still utilize the world that we live in today with all the tools and technology - and exposure," he said.

Sherman said it is an era of reclamation for Indigenous people. Looking into his family history, he said 100 years ago his Lakota ancestors retained all of their Indigenous knowledge but since his birth in 1974, Indigenous knowledge on things such as food has declined.

"Food is at the center of everything. We need to have control over food. If we can control our food, We can control our future," said Sherman. "We have to be adaptable and listen to the Earth."

Sherman voiced his concerns that future generations are losing their Indigenous food knowledge. The counter is to set down a foundation ... so every generation and grow a healthy future. He said we need to pass down the seeds -- and stories -- that are woven into us.

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