4 Ways Indigenous Knowledges Can Improve the World Food System

Background and Purpose

- The current global food system does not prioritize public or environmental health, or promote good livelihoods for producers or consumers (see Figure 1 and Table 1).
- Indigenous peoples' access to healthy and traditional foods has been disproportionately affected despite sustainability in cultivating the land for centuries.
- Research consistently shows Indigenous communities around the world to be models of enriching food systems.
- In this age of social justice movements we should work together to rebuild systems that are failing to serve us.

Research Question

What kind of value would Indigenous knowledges bring into non-Indigenous agricultural practices?

Internship and Research Methods

- Internship with Organic Farm School (see Figure 2).
  - Recorded a podcast episode with Charlotte Coté on Indigenous food sovereignty.
  - Attended webinar events held by FoodShare Toronto.
  - Individual research that amplifies Indigenous voices.

Findings

1. Cultivate Respect

- Indigenous peoples share similar values passed down through storytelling, natural experiences, and generational wisdom.
- Inherent respect for the environment and its natural processes is often communicated in Indigenous lessons and creation stories like in that of Sky Woman, who is illustrated in Figure 3.

2. Community Connections

- Many Indigenous traditions revolve around the acquisition, preparation, and sharing of foods, creating a sense of community.
- Specific examples include Makah whaling and the Kanaka Maoli poi.

3. Diversity of Perspectives

- Allowing the global food system to be controlled by a few key players and monopolies contributes to the disenfranchisement of indigenous and minority peoples.
- Getting a diversity of input from a variety of stakeholders, ethnic and racial groups, and socioeconomic classes would ensure a more robust and equitable food system for all.

4. Health Effects

- Indigenous peoples eat a far more diverse diet than the average American who “eats less than 12 foods on a regular basis” (Krohn).
- Foods come from the land and are much less processed than what governments and supermarkets tend to provide.
- Economic benefits in not having to pay health costs for food-related illnesses.

Significance

“Indigenous role in reconstructing the food system will be to offer guidance on changing human behavior to what it can be, and showing how to live honorably” – Dawn Morrison

Table 1. A summary of different drivers in regards to building a food system.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Settler Values in the Food System</th>
<th>Indigenous Values in the Food System</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Drive Profit</td>
<td>Respond to the Environment's Natural Signals</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maximize Yield</td>
<td>Diversify</td>
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<tr>
<td>Be Fast, Be Efficient</td>
<td>Foster Harmonious Relationships</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shield Customers From Production Inner Workings</td>
<td>Operate on a Basis of Respect</td>
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Moving Forward

- To achieve a more ethical food system, we need to establish metrics for agricultural success that go beyond monetary value and yield.
- My 4 findings can be used as a framework to approach restructuring the food system based on a new set of values. Figure 4 shows another possible set of criteria.

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