

Eastern Sierra Tribal Food Coalition: Conversations on Food Sovereignty

Summary

Toiyabe Indian Health Project as a backbone organization, the nine Paiute and Shoshone Tribes of the Eastern Sierra continue to grow the Eastern Sierra Tribal Food Coalition, engaging in a common mission to improve the local food system through strategic planning and furthering conversations with Tribal leaders for extended support.

The coalition knows that their commitment to work together will benefit all of their communities and build toward true Tribal food sovereignty.

Challenge

According to the 2014 US Census, 3.9 million people (1.7% of U.S. population) identified themselves as American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN), with over 80% of AI/AN adults age 20-74 being overweight or obese and 30% of this disparate population estimated to have pre-diabetes (1.6 million people). The National Congress of American Indian's Center for Diabetes Research and Policy Research Center also notes that childhood obesity rates often exceed 50% in Tribal communities. and 1 out of 2 AI/AN children will develop type 2 diabetes in their lifetime.

Given the staggering statistics facing the AI/AN people of the United States, healthy food access and changes to how Tribal communities support food systems is paramount, as many of these communities remain in remote, under-served areas of the country.

"Our ancestors thrived in this region because of the amount of food available to them locally. Being part of the Eastern Sierra Tribal Food Coalition provides us the opportunity to support one another to once more have access to local, healthy food."

- Alan Bacock



Solution

Through ongoing monthly meetings, raising awareness and discussions around Tribal food sovereignty, the Toiyabe Indian Health Project Community Wellness Program has established a cohesive and action oriented food coalition with membership from nine Paiute and Shoshone Tribes in the Eastern Sierra of California.

The Eastern Sierra Tribal Food Coalition has participated in three strategic planning sessions, creating goals and action plans for increasing the infrastructure supporting local food systems. This coalition has also hosted a traditional meal for area Tribal leaders, engaging them on ways to support food system work through Tribal organizations and economic development.

Results

Having participated in many strategic planning sessions and successfully drawing community leaders into the conversation, the Eastern Sierra Tribal Food Coalition has gained the written support of four local Tribal Councils through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU).

The MOU, aimed at developing permanent recognition for the coalition and encouraging Tribal Administrators and Councils to support local food system efforts through economic development, is a symbolic agreement establishing commitment without establishing financial burdens.

It is the hope of the Coalition that this first step will lead to future agreements that financially support the Coalition, as well as additional Tribal food projects that are currently in existence.

Sustainable Success

With expert training from organizations like Change Lab Solutions and Community Initiatives, the ESTFC members have developed strategic plans, community visions, goals and objectives to continue coalition sustenance and policy development around healthy food access.

Continued support from the Toiyabe Indian Health Project Community Wellness Program will support present coalition members and work to build on the diversification of the coalition. The coalition hopes that in the coming year they are able to develop a master plan for a community education center, focused on food system sustainability and traditional food knowledge.

Your Involvement is Key

Being actively engaged in the Eastern Sierra Tribal Food Coalition provides Tribal community members with the power to adopt their own food policies and support agricultural and natural resource practices that mandate sustainable management of water and access to land for food production. Additionally they can prioritize the production and marketing of local healthy foods, financially supporting local producers and influencing their community to be a place of health for all, at all times.



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