

# CHAPTER TWO



## Elements for Understanding the Transformation of Indigenous Food Systems

By Rodrigo Yáñez, Karla Bayres<sup>10</sup>  
and Camila Migueletto

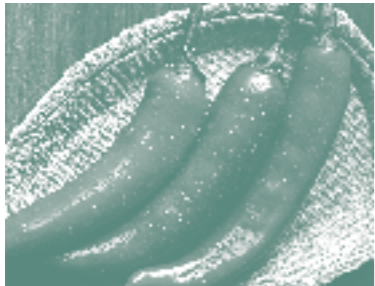
A synthesis of conversations held with representatives of various Indigenous peoples and nations of the Americas, from the Inuit people in Canada to the Asháninka people in the Peruvian Amazon is presented in this chapter. Using various methods, such as workshops and group and individual interviews, this material was collected between May 2024 and June 2025. The conversations aimed to identify and characterize Indigenous food systems, the foods and traditional elements that distinguish them, and the causes people consider most important in the transformation of their food systems. We also inquired into how these transformations connect with contemporary Indigenous diets, the impacts of climate change, and the strategies they are implementing to sustain Indigenous foodways. These are some of the reasons why they consider it important to continue discussing Indigenous food systems.

<sup>10</sup> Research assistant at Rimisp.



## Traditional preparations: the flavor of cultures

The continuity of traditional Indigenous dishes over time is related to the transmission of knowledge through ancient recipes that are taught from generation to generation. This transfer of knowledge occurs mainly in family and community spaces, where knowledge of ingredients and preparation is linked to grandparents and members of a genealogical tree that stretches across time. This is evident, for example, when discussing the traditional Métis bread (bannock):



*“It is one of the first traditional foods I learned about. It is a recipe I make with my grandmother all the time, and each family prepares it in their own way. I think it is something that definitely everyone should try.”*

Shannon Udy,  
métis, Canada

Other examples of ancestral recipes considered representative because of their long history, also connected to the territories where Indigenous peoples have established their lives, are the fish chipa with cassava asada<sup>11</sup> for the Asháninka people, and the uchujaku<sup>12</sup> (chili pepper gruel) and tzawar mishki<sup>13</sup> (agave syrup with barley rice) for the Kichwa Kayambi people.

Although younger generations preserve these traditions and know the ingredients, seasonings, timing, fermentations, and cooking methods, changing contexts and connections with the rest of the world, among other factors, mean that the loss of some food knowledge is a risk. All interviewees, who represent various peoples and nations of the American region, comment that from the cultivation and gathering of species to the preparation of dishes, these practices are strongly threatened by the changes experienced in recent decades.

For this reason, Indigenous peoples are paying special attention to traditional food systems and are striving to ensure their continuity over time. This work is consciously promoted and carried out in different ways with the aim of contributing to the revitalization of traditional diets and the improvement of Indigenous nutrition.



*“I worked on the dish known as pit barbecue or buried barbecue.<sup>14</sup> This is a dish that, according to what was discussed with a community member, used to be prepared by his grandfather. His father continued to prepare this barbecue, and this is how the man learned. Now his children are also getting involved and know how to prepare it.”*

Nicolás Marreros,  
náhuatl, Mexico

Traditional Indigenous culinary preparations include local ingredients and foods whose cultivation and processing have also been passed down through generations. Their procurement may involve learned collective tasks, and they are part of a heritage whose origins date back centuries, with the domestication of certain species. The traditional food system of the Wolastoqey Nation, for example, is based on hunting, fishing, and gathering, closely linked to family knowledge, as seen in the spring collection of fiddlehead ferns. Likewise, the local chunto (turkey) used in recipes of the Q'eqchi' Maya people was domesticated by previous generations. The same is true for maize among the Misak people, which is considered the creator of Indigenous peoples and a source of connection with their historical roots, or the potato in the case of Andean peoples.



11 See recipe on page 110.

12 See recipe on page 114.

13 See recipe on page 118.

14 See recipe on page 134.



## FOOD BASES OF THE INDIGENOUS PEOPLES OF THE AMERICAS

As a result of cultural and territorial processes, as well as biological needs, the ingredients and foods that underpin traditional Indigenous dishes generally differ among the Indigenous peoples and nations of Canada and Latin America. In Central and South America, domesticated plant crops that originated thousands of years ago predominate, while in Canada, wild animal protein from the respective territories takes precedence.

Nevertheless, diversity is the prevailing feature. For example, Asháninka communities in the Amazon have diverse food sources, which are connected to practices related to hunting, fishing, and gathering in forests and rivers, or to traditional agriculture in chacras (small farms). These are food systems that display a complexity associated with the most traditional methods, which can also be observed in heterogeneous food systems such as those of the Métis Nation, where diversity is strongly attributable to contact with other peoples and effects associated with the impacts of colonialism.



The traditional foods of the peoples inhabiting Canada are related to the consumption of substantial animal protein, derived from hunting large animals such as moose, caribou, and deer, as well as other animals like waterfowl and rodents. In coastal or northern Canadian communities, traditional dishes include marine mammals, fish, crustaceans, and mollusks—important resources provided by the territory. This reflects a way of life and a particular relationship with the natural environment, resulting from adaptation to the natural world and to the climatic conditions of each territory:



*“Regarding foods or dishes, in this region we have always had a connection with large animals, such as moose, deer, antelope, and also waterfowl like geese and ducks, and muskrats.”*

Priscilla Settee,  
cree, Canada

And while animal protein is emphasized as central, roots, berries, and other local plants are also mentioned as prominent foods. In Wolastoqey communities, fiddlehead ferns are gathered and then preserved to be available during the winter, while in Inuit communities, caribou is prepared in various ways:

*“In my village, Inuit people eat many marine mammals, belugas and whales, many fish, and also caribou. Caribou can be eaten frozen, raw (tuktu quaq), cooked, or fried.”*

Lynn Blackwood,  
inuit, Canada



In contrast, the traditional foods of peoples in Latin America are linked to the region's fundamental and historical crops, where maize and potato, species domesticated thousands of years ago, occupy an important place. These crops represent the foundation for the survival of many Indigenous communities. Recipes that use these crops include kentú tsulak (sango)<sup>15</sup> from the Misak people, ajojtawajwan (chilacayote atole)<sup>16</sup> from the Nahuatl people, maize tortillas<sup>17</sup> from the Q'eqchi' Maya people, and uchujaku<sup>18</sup> from the Kichwa Kayambí people.

Besides these crops, there are others, such as cassava, squash, quinoa, chili, and legumes such as fava beans and peas. Although crops are prominent, the meat of traditional domestic animals, such as turkey and guinea pig, as well as introduced animals such as chicken, cattle, and goat, is also included in traditional recipes, along with fish.

*"For us, cuisine has always been rooted in two important crops: maize and potatoes. These two are the most important staples."*

Andrés Tombé,  
misak, Colombia

<sup>15</sup> See recipe on page 124.

<sup>16</sup> See recipe on page 130.

<sup>17</sup> See recipe on page 128.

<sup>18</sup> See recipe on page 114.

## IDENTITY IN INDIGENOUS INGREDIENTS

Traditional dishes are part of the identity of Indigenous peoples. It is possible to find some recipes that vary according to specific communities or geographic areas, and they are prepared with native ingredients that are among the specific resources offered by each territory. In this way, in a single dish, nature, culture, and territory are connected, where identity is born, constructed, and maintained across generations based on what the land provides. This is conveyed in the idea of being a child of a particular food, such as maize:

*"To be children of maize is to connect with those historical roots that peoples have had, those connections that are created among peoples, because maize has been shared in many ways, through bartering and other practices. Thus, in maize, a natural product, there is a union that has been forged."*

Andrés Tombé,  
misak, Colombia

Foods are pillars of culture, and therefore, even when access becomes scarce and their consumption less frequent, they remain present because they are deeply rooted in the collective memory. This is the case of salmon for the Wólastoqey Nation, which is very strongly associated with their identity:



*"Another very important source of food for us is fish. Traditionally, we have been associated with Atlantic salmon, but there are some rivers and communities where wild Atlantic salmon have literally not been seen in a generation. Nevertheless, we still talk about salmon at almost every one of our gatherings. It is like a kind of genetic memory that we have."*

Ken Paul,  
wólastoqey First Nation, Canada



Lynn Blackwood, a representative of the Inuit people and head of the Food Security Program of the Nunatsiavut Government in Canada, speaks of this cultural process differently, conceptualizing it as cultural hunger. She introduces this term to represent a problem in Indigenous diets that is related not only to nutritional issues or access to food, but also to the cultural transformations of the diets of numerous communities. This type of hunger arises when foods that are part of a people's identity are no longer consumed. In her words:

*“Our main source of protein is caribou, and now it is endangered, so there is a ban on its hunting. I ate caribou last week and I felt nutritionally satisfied, but my cultural hunger was also satisfied. This cultural hunger is a concept that we need to highlight, beyond just talking about nutrients.”*

Lynn Blackwood,  
inuit, Canada



The concept of cultural hunger resonates with Nahuatl and Q'eqchi' Maya representatives from North and Central America, who have seen an increase in wheat consumption to the detriment of maize, the traditional food of that region. This is reiterated by Andean peoples when referring to the decreased consumption of quinoa and certain varieties of potato. When traditional foods are no longer consumed, years of biological experimentation and social agreements vanish, as do methods of cultivating and processing foods and the transmission of recipes. It is not only about diets; these transformations are also the expression of societies subject to exploitation and forced dietary change.

Ingredients, like recipes, are highly valued because they represent identities and roots linked to local and territorial cultural development, which demonstrates their spiritual and ritual importance beyond their contributions to physical health. Likewise, the value of the local is constantly associated with the environmental and nutritional contributions of food that is naturally diverse and produced autonomously, in contrast to non-traditional or industrialized food.

*“The original dishes are the most authentic, those that have been consumed for hundreds of years in my community, because they have a value that is not only nutritional, but also spiritual. They also possess a richness of biodiversity, as they come from crops that are native to us.”*

Kelly Ulcuango,  
kichwa kayambi, Ecuador





## CELEBRATIONS AND COMMEMORATIONS

Many traditional dishes are prepared especially for events and festivities that are important to communities. These dishes hold special significance and are associated with moments of gathering and community. This is how the Nahua people in Mexico refer to mole and the Misak people in Colombia speak of sango:

*“And you say: ah, you’re going to have a party, invite me for mole! Because it’s the meaning of the celebration.”*

Marisol Lerdo,  
náhuatl, Mexico

*“Sango<sup>19</sup> is a special dish. It is eaten at dinner, when we are together at the end of the day, after work, after studying. It is eaten around the hearth, when everyone is present.”*

Andrés Tombé,  
misak, Colombia

As access to some traditional foods becomes difficult, or even impossible, these dishes are usually reserved for special occasions, which become an opportunity to access ancient foods and ways of preparing them, and to celebrate communal bonds:

*“Whenever we have some type of gathering in the community, whether it is a wedding, a celebration for a new birth, or the passing of someone, the community leaders—usually the women in these types of activities—bring everyone together as a family. We usually have a shared meal where each person brings a traditional dish. This is how we view food security and why it is truly important to us.”*

Ken Paul,  
wolastogey First Nation, Canada

In Guatemala, kaq ik<sup>20</sup> (turkey stew with chili) is usually prepared when there are important events: planting, marriage, inaugurations, or the start of a project. It is prepared for events such as the planting of maize, another food, which is made into tortillas and can accompany the kaq ik. It should be noted that this association between a dish and certain events is more common in rural indigenous communities:

*“Kaq ik is a ceremonial dish. It is also eaten when maize is planted, because the planting of maize is very important and has traditionally been a ritual space among the Q’eqchi’ people.”*

Brenda Xol,  
maya q’eqchi’, Guatemala

These dishes are also exchanged for other products and are offered as symbols of gratitude and reciprocity. For communities or families where some traditional foods are scarce, exchanges are made to broaden availability and access.



<sup>19</sup> See recipe on page 124.

<sup>20</sup> See recipe on page 126.



*“Our food comes from our forest, from hunting, from the chacra, or from other places where we obtain or make it; it also comes from exchanges. If a person does not have a product, we exchange for what they have. We continue to value the exchange of products, the exchange of food, what we produce in each community, in each chacra, in each family. We share everything we plant so that we can eat, because we value our ancestral foods.”*

Marisol Shariva,  
asháninka, Peru



For Indigenous peoples and nations, traditional foods and dishes are much more than food: they are bearers of histories, cultures, and connections with the land and nature. Eating these dishes in company is a celebration of life, family, cultivation, roots, and heritage. In addition, there are ingredients, local products, preparation methods, utensils, and objects that make it possible to create a shared space and a familiar taste, where the connection between individuals and the community is a permanent and substantial aspect of identification with a people. Traditional dishes are subject to various transformations that Indigenous food systems are undergoing, and their persistence is a testament to the importance they continue to hold for the peoples and nations of the Americas.

**There are ingredients, local products, preparation methods, utensils, and objects that make it possible to create a shared space and a familiar taste.**



## Culinary objects: *utensils that preserve flavors*

The resources provided by nature are deeply incorporated into traditional Indigenous kitchens, and also through objects and utensils used to prepare food. The materials of which these tools are made reflect a connection with nature and local resources, and reveal a way of doing things that not only involves a functional or practical dimension, but also carries cultural meanings related to territories. Objects, materiality, are part of the environment, the memory, and the history of the communities.

In the history of Indigenous peoples and nations of Latin America, materials such as clay, stone, wood, metal, leaves, and fruits play a role. Clay is used to manufacture cups, pots, and casseroles, containers necessary for the preparation of a wide variety of dishes and broths. This type of container does not alter the energy of the food. Clay pots and pans, such as the comal in Guatemala, are also used. The use of stone is seen in tools such as the batán, an ancestral grinder of grains and maize. Wood is used both in the manufacture of spoons and to feed the fire.

*“Cooking with firewood is very different from cooking with gas. Even among types of firewood, cooking with bejuocos (vines) found in the hills is different from cooking with eucalyptus or pine firewood. The food tastes better when you cook with bejuocos.”*

Kelly Ulcuango,

*kichwa kayambi, Ecuador*



**In the history of Indigenous peoples and nations of Latin America, materials such as clay, stone, wood, metal, leaves, and fruits play a role.**

Metal, increasingly widespread and present in various modern objects, reflects certain elements of change. While it is part of traditional tools, such as the scraper that the Nahua people in Mexico use with maguey to produce pulque (a fermented beverage), it also replaces clay in the manufacture of pots, allowing for faster cooking. Large aluminum pots, called peroles, make it possible to cook for crowds, as in the broths prepared at weddings, as do comales that allow tortillas to be made to welcome all the guests.

Among the Asháninka people in Peru, banana leaves are used as wrappers or natural plates for serving food, and gourds are transformed into containers, called panoko or pate, which are used to consume beverages such as masato. In Q'eqchi' Maya communities in Guatemala, jícaro fruits (*Crescentia cujete*) are used to make guacales, another type of beverage container.

Among the Indigenous nations of Canada, certain utensils and tools are made from wood, plant fiber, and metal. Ash wood basketry is a traditional activity of the Wolastoqey nation. These baskets, crafted in various shapes, are used for gathering food, fishing, and transporting goods. They are lightweight and durable baskets that attest to a craft still practiced for both artistic and utilitarian purposes. For Inuit communities, the ulu, or woman's knife, stands out. With a crescent-shaped blade, the ulu is a sharp tool with multiple uses, such as skinning and butchering large land animals and marine mammals.



## THE ENERGY OF FOOD

The value of objects is recognized because it influences the flavor of dishes. Traditional materiality is related to not altering the energy of food, preserving a wealth of aromas and sensations as close as possible to their natural state. There is also a connection to history, to the past, to the generations that preceded the current ones, with whom the recipes originated.

*“In food preparation, clay pots are important; they give dishes a distinct flavor. And cooking with firewood—well, that is another touch that enhances the food. Sometimes even the little wooden spoons used to mix the ingredients matter.”*

Marisol Lerdo,  
náhuatl, Mexico

In general, dishes always turn out better with traditional objects and tools. Corn tortillas are a good example. As they are prepared today, on metal griddles, it is often perceived that they no longer have the same flavor as before, as they burn easily. Something similar happens with fava beans; aluminum adheres to them if they are roasted in pans made of that material. Community members therefore say that traditional utensils are inseparable from the authentic flavor of Indigenous peoples' cuisine.

*“Here we try to preserve utensils such as clay pots and wooden paddles. With these, the food has a different taste, as when using clay cups. The vessels used to serve drinks are also preserved, such as the guacal.”*

Brenda Xol,  
maya q'eqchi', Guatemala



## TRADITIONAL METHODS AND KNOWLEDGE

The objects mentioned, such as the batán, comal, tiesto, tulpa, and clay pots, are intrinsically linked to traditional culinary methods and techniques. The material and design imply a particular way of doing things, of cooking and preparing food by hand, which is often associated with a lifestyle distinct from the modern one. The use of these utensils helps ensure that various methods, which have been perfected over the years, are not lost and remain alive, considering also that many traditional Indigenous recipes cannot be prepared without these objects.

When discussing traditional methods, both the way food is prepared and the way utensils, objects, and tools are crafted and manufactured are considered. A clear example of how these elements preserve traditions is basket making among the Wolastoqey Nation, a set of skills honored at the community level and still collectively practiced. Basketry begins with the work of striking ash logs with mallets, delivering precise and steady blows until the fiber can be separated into strips. These fibers are then made into threads, which are subsequently interwoven to create baskets used for gathering berries and fruits, fishing, and carrying food, or transformed into crafts that may circulate as works of art.





*“There is still a very strong tradition of basketry in my community. Part of our production is for art. Another part is for gifts, but another part is truly for work, for practical uses. The baskets are important because of their association with food.”*

Ken Paul,  
wolastoqey First Nation, Canada

These cultural objects are part of environments and moments that facilitate the transmission of knowledge related to traditional foodways. An example of this is the *tulpa*, a hearth supported by stones, used by the Kichwa Kayambi people in Ecuador. Although it is usually women who cook at the *tulpa*, the arrangement of the space allows the entire family to participate in the preparation. This allows for the sharing of knowledge of culinary practices, but also provides a place and time for conversing and sharing oral histories unique to each people and each Indigenous community.

### CONNECTION WITH EVENTS AND FESTIVITIES

Given their pronounced identity and cultural dimension, culinary objects and utensils are also part of events, festivities, rituals, celebrations, or special moments that reinforce the sense of belonging and social cohesion within communities. Their relevance lies in the ability of these objects to preserve energetic harmony, both of the foods themselves, as a vital force, and between communities and other living beings or spiritual entities. The role of these items in such events therefore is connected with respect for and connection with traditions.

*“In very special moments, such as a wedding, when someone passes away, or when an important celebration is to be held, the dishes are prepared in clay pots. Because the elders say that in clay pots, nutritional quality is not lost and Pachamama or the elder beings are not harmed.”*

Andrés Tombé,  
misak, Colombia

These objects clearly demonstrate more than practical and functional aspects related to food. They are interwoven with and nourish identities. They represent an ongoing connection with the past and are a way of keeping Indigenous communities' food systems and traditions alive.





## Causes of the transformations of Indigenous food systems

The first major transformation in traditional food systems occurred with the European colonization of the Americas. The dispossession of territories and ways of life was an expression of the drastic transformation to which Indigenous peoples were subjected in all aspects of their lives. This process and its institutions established impediments to and restrictions on access to land, productive assets, food, and traditional practices and knowledge, through mechanisms of prohibition and policies of cultural assimilation: *“Other challenges for our food systems lie in access to knowledge about them. It is a major barrier, because many Métis people have been disconnected from their culture over time.”* (Shannon Udy, Métis, Canada)

While in Canada hunting, fishing, and gathering were prohibited during the administration of the Indigenous land reserve system, even though they were supported under treaties between Indigenous ancestors and the British, in Latin America systems such as the *huasipungo* in Ecuador were reinforced. This system allowed Indigenous laborers on haciendas, under extremely poor working and living conditions, to use a portion of the land as compensation for their labor, as was the case with the Indigenous *runa*:



*“The runa had to work from sunrise to sunset in very, very precarious situations to be able to obtain a plate of food. Huasipungo is a piece of land that was given to Indigenous people to work, but with many restrictions. Their diet did not include meat—no protein at all. And their basic food was a little of what was left over from the harvest, nothing more. Everything else was for the landowner, for the church priests, and for the hacienda families. All that food was for them. The runa ate very poorly, only grains.”*

Kelly Ulcuango,  
*kichwa kayambi, Ecuador*

Both Indigenous territory management regimes, in Canada and Ecuador, formal or not, involved the allocation of a small portion of land with little or no autonomy, which affected Indigenous peoples' access to food, food security, and access to natural resources, as well as their productive development, living conditions and health. Moreover, colonization not only deprived people of traditional food systems, but it also introduced new forms of food, products, and species, such as wheat and new domesticated animals for livestock. Many of these introduced foods, depending on their production and management, can now also be considered part of traditional diets, although there is some controversy about them, as is the case with wheat and certain fruits that are not among the foods historically produced in Indigenous territories, but which arrive now through national and international trade networks.



## INDUSTRIALIZATION

Industrialization, closely linked to the expansion of a global-scale economic model, and processes of globalization have profoundly transformed Indigenous food systems in all their dimensions: environmental, cultural, economic, and social. These transformations have favored large-scale production models that prioritize the pursuit of profitability, thus shifting away from the concept of food as a basic human right to see it as a commodity.

*“Our food system is under pressure due to Western development, we produce to feed the south, the rivers are dammed. This affects everything, it causes chaos in the gardens, with the large animals, with the waterfowl, and with the local economies. My family, which is made up of hunters, experiences these pressures. Our identity therefore suffers, as does our economy. The industrial food system is exerting a great deal of pressure and influence on our communities. That system is responsible for the rice, wheat, and corn crops and for the agrochemicals that large-scale production requires, and which are stripping us of power and of the space to make our own decisions.”*

Priscilla Settee,  
cree, Canada

This form of development, oriented toward yield and profit, expands not only through the commercialization of industrialized products, such as rice; processed foods, such as wheat pasta; and canned goods, but also through advertising and the media, which promote consumption patterns adapted to modernity:

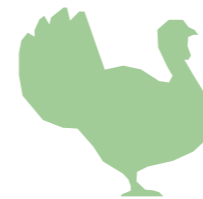
*“Other factors influencing the change in consumption are linked to the place from which people access their food, breaking a relationship with the past, as in the case of caribou consumption. Today, people need to go to stores and purchase food there. I also believe that advertising has had a great impact on the increase in the consumption of ultra-processed foods, which are generally not the healthiest.”*

Lynn Blackwood,  
inuit, Canada

## MIGRATION

Rural-to-urban migration is also an important factor and has produced disruptions in ancestral food practices. Families and young people who migrate, and who adapt to and adopt new lifestyles and the pace of urban life, influence the integration of quick and easy-to-prepare foods into their new customs: *“We see that families who have migrated, if it’s the whole family—the husband, the wife, the children—they bring other eating habits, with ham, eggs, canned beans.”* (Marisol Lerdo, náhuatl, Mexico).

These adaptations respond both to lack of time and to economic limitations and restricted access to resources, such as land for the production of traditional foods. One example is the raising of the chunto, or turkey, in Guatemala, which is not feasible in cities because of space limitations and the care required for the bird’s health. Nor is it consumed as frequently, because of competition with other products. In comparisons between urban and rural life, the latter is seen as an environment capable of providing greater continuity with ancestral knowledge and food practices:



*“I believe that culture has been undergoing modifications over time, because if we look at the areas closest to the urban zone, it begins to change. People start to replace chunto with beef or frozen chicken. But those who are further inside the communities still preserve their culture, raising and preparing chunto.”*

Brenda Xol,  
maya q’eqchi’, Guatemala



## SOCIOECONOMIC AND LABOR TRANSFORMATIONS

The change in socioeconomic conditions has influenced types of diets, because of both a relative increase in purchasing power and a transformation in labor conditions, as agricultural and non-agricultural work multiplies in both rural and urban areas.

Increased income has provided access to a diverse range of products. This does not necessarily mean the products are of higher quality, but the greater cash flow enables people to purchase products that were cultivated before. People also have access to products that were previously unknown, and families begin to consume more meat and incorporate it into their dishes. At the same time, migration to large cities—often linked to a decline in quality of life and increased job insecurity—pushes individuals to consume cheap, quickly prepared foods that satisfy hunger but are not very nutritious, are harmful to health, and strain people’s relationship with their traditional food practices.

*“If we talk about the economic level, in the communities it has improved greatly, and that has led to a change in the diet that families used to have, which was very much based on vegetables, on tubers, or solely focused on those. Now they are integrating more protein into their diets.”*

Andrés Tombé,  
misak, Colombia

This phenomenon is also related to migration, as heads of households seek other job and economic opportunities outside of the communities because rural production often is not sufficient. Representatives of different peoples note that these dynamics are distancing people from their customs.

*“Often, because the father has to work in the city, he no longer has that moment to sit in the tulpa (kitchen with a traditional wood-fired cooking area) to converse, to transmit the grandparents’ life experiences related to food preparation. If something is not done, the time will come when all of this may remain only for a museum.”*



Kelly Ulcuango,  
kichwa kayambi, Ecuador

## STATE AGENCY

Government actions and decisions have contributed to changes in Indigenous diets, because of public policies or legislation. Programs aimed at food security have led to the distribution of industrialized and processed products, which people say lack cultural relevance and are intended only to address nutritional and economic needs:

*“(Regarding the transformation of Indigenous food practices), the first culprit has been the State, with its food security policy, because they taught our communities to eat differently. I think since the 1990s, when they brought rice and many canned goods, that led us to change our diets significantly.”*

Andrés Tombé,  
misak, Colombia

State policy, as expressed in agrarian reform processes and land ownership regulations, and through the denial or recognition of treaties and Indigenous rights, has triggered changes such as the loss or incorporation of certain foods. The case is not closed however; there are ongoing processes, discussions about adapting policies, or the creation of regulations with a territorial approach and Indigenous relevance that may open new possibilities for imagining the future.

*“Policy also plays a role in changes to food systems. I believe it is important to have the conversation about the joint management of animals, and that could lead to discussion of territorial claims and rights concerning animals, such as, for example, hunting for subsistence versus hunting for profit. These are things we need to talk about.”*

Lynn Blackwood,  
inuit, Canada



# Food transformations and Indigenous diets:

## *new environments, habits, and preferences*

The commercialization of food through stores and supermarkets brings with it relatively new, non-traditional food options and consumption patterns associated with the practical immediacy demanded by modern lifestyles: *“People are picking up the habit of doing things quickly and eating quickly, so I think that has also brought about some changes here.”* (Marisol Lerdo, náhuatl, Mexico).

A new, non-traditional diet is being introduced into Indigenous peoples’ practices because of its broad availability and low cost. The ease of access to and consumption of these products drives changes and adaptations in people’s habits and communities’ practices, particularly near cities, but also in remote Indigenous communities. This has made it increasingly difficult to maintain traditional diets:



*“A large part of our traditional foods usually comes from roots, berries, or plants, as well as from fish and hunted animals. And it is difficult to maintain that traditional diet, because many people in our community go to regular grocery stores.”*

Ken Paul,  
wolastoqey First Nation, Canada

This is particularly seen in the habits and preferences of young people, who often do not enjoy traditional preparations or simply do not know them, because they grow up near urbanized environments, are connected with other practices, or migrate to urban areas at an early age.



*“New food fashions are adopted and ours are lost. So of course, all of this has changed our dietary habits. The dishes I share in traditional recipes are dishes enjoyed by adults and older adults. Children and youth, very little. In fact, many hardly even know they exist.”*

Kelly Ulcuango,  
kichwa kayambi, Ecuador

The introduction of new products and ways of eating is closely related to the loss of practices such as agriculture, animal husbandry and hunting, gathering, and fishing. This also implies a change in ways of life, which makes it increasingly difficult to maintain and transmit traditional habits and diets. As migration and multiple jobs accelerate life, quick and easy food options become more prominent:

*“Eating has changed a lot; now everyone wants rice and noodles. People look for what is easiest. Before, we ate broad bean mote, corn, toasted grains, papalisas, oca lawas, fresh corn, wheat.”*

Modesta Acarapi,  
quechua, Bolivia

*“Before, festivities were about making your own farm. You would prepare everything, your turkeys, your chickens, or your goats, so you could hold the celebration. Now there is greater access to commercial options, buying chicken and preparing it quickly.”*

Marisol Lerdo,  
náhuatl, Mexico



In comparison with traditional foods, it is easier, faster, and less expensive to consume industrialized, processed, or convenience foods sold in stores. Prepared dishes, meats, and even fresh vegetables that are not part of the traditional diet of the territories are also becoming popular:



*“There are some who like to mix local foods with rice or with carrots or potatoes, but for us, as Q’eqchi’ people, that is no longer so original, because these foods, like carrots, are new to the area.”*

Brenda Xol,  
maya q’eqchi’, Guatemala

The main value that emerges from the description of these foods is the ease of preparing or consuming them. An accelerating world requires speed, responsiveness, and the facilitation of domestic tasks that require extra effort. Many families adapt by reducing the time allocated to cooking, transforming a ritual space into a practical one:

*“With the arrival of products such as rice, noodles, and oil, most people have changed their diet. These products are easier to prepare; in the past, we had to grind corn and wheat on a grinding stone, but now we opt for what is most practical, such as cooking rice or noodles quickly.”*

Aurora Panoso,  
quechua, Bolivia

The consumption of ultra-processed products is associated with negative health impacts among Indigenous peoples, with particular concern about the effects on youth and children: *“That type of food takes away our power and is harmful. It takes away our health and our culture. We have an epidemic of diabetes and also suicides among young people who can no longer continue with their ancestral traditions.”* (Priscilla Settee, Cree, Canada)

These widely available food products often contain additives and offer low nutritional value, resulting in homogeneous diets, malnutrition, and chronic diseases such as diabetes. People emphasize that although these foods are appetizing and highly accepted in all communities, it is unsustainable to rely on them for nutrition in the long term.

Indigenous peoples observe and draw conclusions. Many of the health effects produced by modern diets were not observed when Indigenous peoples consumed traditional foods. There was a biological adaptation to the processing of foods cultivated or gathered in their territories: diverse, vernacular foods, that people know how to process, and which are processed by the communities themselves. This gave people confidence and security regarding the food they consumed:

*“In the most remote communities of the Asháninka people, illness is not seen often, because they eat a natural, ancestral diet that comes from our forest, that we plant as part of our culture, that our grandparents ate. There is much wealth in our chacra, in our forest, in our territory.”*

Marisol Shariva,  
asháninka, Peru

21 This opinion is shared by all interviewees and is supported by scientific data. A meta-analysis published in 2024 in BMJ (formerly the British Medical Journal), which is among the world’s top five scientific journals in general medicine, reports that greater exposure to ultra-processed foods is associated with an increased risk of adverse health outcomes, particularly cardiometabolic disorders, common mental disorders, and mortality. Based on these results, it is recommended that public health measures be developed to identify and reduce dietary exposure to ultra-processed foods and thus improve human health. Lane MM, Gamage E, Du S, Ashtree DN, McGuinness AJ, Gauci S, Baker P, Lawrence M, Rebholz CM, Srour B, Touvier M, Jacka FN, O’Neil A, Segasby T, Marx W. (2024): “Ultra-processed food exposure and adverse health outcomes: umbrella review of epidemiological meta-analyses,” BMJ 2024 Feb 28;384:e077310. doi: 10.1136/bmj-2023-077310.



The incorporation of certain meats and types of protein into the diets of some Latin American Indigenous peoples is relatively recent. Although there are territories where native species ; domesticated centuries ago, such as the chunto, or turkey, and the guinea pig, have traditionally been consumed, they now tend to be replaced by other animals, such as chicken and cattle, which are produced on a larger scale, a practice that spread with colonization and the rise of industrial livestock farming. It should be noted that although the goat and sheep are introduced species, they are considered part of a traditional diet because they are often raised by Indigenous families.

In general, from the time of colonization until fairly recently, eating meat was considered a luxury. The poverty and marginalization of Indigenous peoples, linked to systems that expelled them from their territories or regulations that condemned them to domination (such as the huasipungo in Ecuador and reservation systems), deprived them of more nutritious foods. Over the years, social struggle, agrarian reform, and better socio-economic conditions led to increased meat consumption, even in recipes that originally did not include meat as an ingredient:

*“In the past, or previously, let us say, ancestral dishes contained almost no protein component because it was a luxury that very few could access. This has changed, and nowadays, for example, meat or chicken is added to sango, but it was not something that was very common.”*

Andrés Tombé,  
misak, Colombia



*“The runa were forbidden from eating meat. That was considered a very presumptuous desire on the part of the runa—wanting to eat meat; it was prohibited. In fact, the diet itself was very, very rationed, and also racialized. When does this diet begin to improve? It is recent, with the agrarian revolution here in Ecuador, which took place in the 1970s. It was then that people began to eat meat, with the creation of agrarian cooperatives.”*

Kelly Ulcuango,  
kichwa kayambi, Ecuador

In most communities, various traditional foods and culinary practices persist, despite the challenges posed by recent changes. In certain territories, preserving the virtues of this continuity is a priority, associated with a way of life that has allowed people to live in harmony and good health for centuries.

Many peoples and nations are engaged in cultural revitalization processes that enable them to reflect on transformations and invite young people to learn to reconnect with their ancestral heritage and continue traditional practices. Some of these are linked to agriculture, others to the preparation of traditional dishes.

*“There has been a push in recent years toward food sovereignty and food security, which is why there are several different initiatives within the Métis Nation in British Columbia. For example, a home gardens project that was designed to promote food security, in which many young people have participated.”*

Shannon Udy,  
métis, Canada

Some communities have also reconnected with certain foods to which they had lost access over time because of government actions that perpetuated land dispossession and disregarded ancestral treaties related to hunting, fishing, and gathering. This is the case of lobster fishing for the Wolastoqey Nation, as this food has been integrated into their peoples's consumption practices again and has become a pillar of their diet.

Processes related to the reconnecting of identity with Indigenous food systems are not free from contradictions and challenges that stem from the impacts of colonization. There is a constant struggle against local, national, and international regulations that disregard Indigenous peoples' self-determination. Yet their practices persist, they resist, and Indigenous food systems maintain their vitality.





# Impacts of climate change and sustainable strategies in Indigenous food systems

A significant portion of the foods that sustain Indigenous diets come from territories affected by rising temperatures and extreme climate-related events, such as thaws, hailstorms, rain and drought, fires, and floods. These alterations result in an overall imbalance of ecosystems, manifested in the loss of natural resources and key biodiversity, the proliferation of other species, and changes in production, as well as in hunting, fishing, and gathering: *"Sometimes there is an excess of rain and other times droughts, which makes pests more likely to appear. Before, hail did not fall in this area, but now there are intense hailstorms that destroy the crops."* (Aurora Panoso, Quechua, Bolivia)

Rising temperatures and melting ice are phenomena that particularly affect Indigenous nations of the North, through the thinning and loss of ice masses. This makes hunting more difficult, as native species migrate to colder areas:

*"Climate change is having an impact in the North. The ice is no longer as thick as it used to be. With their hunting routes, hunters can no longer rely on the ice or the weather, because they are not predictable. So, places where people used to hunt have become unsafe, or they may not even be accessible because ice is not forming."*

Lynn Blackwood,  
inuit, Canada



These ecosystem alterations make access to diverse food sources more difficult and prevent the prediction and interpretation of natural indicators, which also leads to an increase in food prices. At times, this results in forced adaptation and unsustainable responses. Nevertheless, there are also isolated territories that demonstrate a differentiated impact, showing a greater ability to maintain traditional diets and greater resilience to environmental changes, as is the case of the Asháninka people in the Amazon rainforest.



*"We feel climate change through our Pichis River. Before, we knew when the river would rise, but now it may rain at any moment, or it may also get too hot. Near the town of Puerto Bermúdez, which is the capital of our district, fish have already decreased. In contrast, remote communities still maintain their resources and it is possible to find fish and animals to eat."*

Marisol Shariva,  
asháninka, Peru



The impacts of climate change are not only environmental, but also cultural. Indigenous peoples' worldview guides part their dietary and productive practices toward synergy with the natural cycles of their territories. The disruptions caused by climate change therefore affect the timing of agricultural calendars, which in turn affects ritual ceremonies or festive events, impacting both the cultural sphere and traditional forms of production:

*“In the past, rituals were performed to counteract lightning. The yatiris would mix the waters from the rivers of high and low areas so it would rain, and everyone in the community—men, women, boys, and girls—would challar to Pachamama with offerings, asking for rain. They would also set off firecrackers to ward off hailstorms. Today, it is no longer possible to confront natural phenomena.”*

Modesta Acarapi,  
quechua, Bolivia



## STRATEGIES FROM INDIGENOUS FOOD SYSTEMS

Indigenous peoples offer varied responses to climate change and diverse positions regarding how, and from what perspective, they should be implemented. Some are immediate responses driven by economic and productive needs, which do not always take into account well-being or environmental sustainability, such as the use of agrochemicals or the expansion of the agricultural frontier into forested areas. This expansion may also be vertical, as when land is gained from the páramos in the Andean region.

Other strategies include the cultivation of adapted and resistant seed varieties: *“Today we are searching for varieties that can adapt. We also are aware that many of these varieties will not be able to adapt and will not yield the same results, but we must continue farming.”* (Andrés Tombé, Misak, Colombia)

## The value of traditional knowledge and Indigenous leadership

Moving beyond adaptation as an immediate response entails a broad-based struggle and a reaffirmation of Indigenous knowledge systems, valuing them and granting them validity as “sciences,” that is, as complex and integrated systems and not simply a collection of practices. These knowledge systems have particular value because of the environmental stewardship inherent in Indigenous ways of life, which have recently received greater attention from institutions because of their history of resistance since colonization. Because it is part of integrated systems, Indigenous knowledge cannot be fragmented and decontextualized to fill in specific gaps of Western systems; otherwise, those integrated systems would lose their value and functions.

*“Promoting, revitalizing, working with young people and children so they have this knowledge and value our science, we begin to confront climate change so we do not merely have to adapt, but rather face it, fight against it.”*

Kelly Ulcuango,  
kichwa kayambi, Ecuador

Valuing traditional Indigenous knowledge and practices as a strategy for addressing climate change involves enabling Indigenous peoples and nations, who are fighting for their sovereignty, to lead their own food production initiatives according to the ideas that articulate their vision of food security. This leadership entails the validation of a unique worldview: prioritizing environmental sustainability over economic benefits and incorporating ongoing assessments to guide future actions.

*“If our Native nations, our Indigenous nations, were increasingly empowered to lead ideas about food production and food security, we would find that it is not just about food, but also about the habits and practices by which we do things.”*

Ken Paul,  
wolastoqey First Nation, Canada



### Sustainable and self-sufficient local production

Sustainable production and consumption center on diversity, both in the food products that are cultivated and in the sources of access: “We obtain food from our rivers, forests, and the chacras that we strive to conserve.” (Marisol Shariva, Asháninka, Peru)

This production is considered sustainable because it is generally free from, or significantly reduces, the use of external inputs and agrochemicals, prioritizing the use of organic matter and waste that enhance soil health. It also involves techniques such as crop rotation and practices such as using all parts of the food that is produced. “Here, living fences made of plants are being restored and are widely used. Living fences allow the ecosystem, mainly birds or insects that inhabit the surroundings, to occupy all these spaces here.” (Andrés Tombé, Misak, Colombia)

Sustainability is often closely associated with traditional knowledge and practices, which are also connected with economic sustainability, production for the family’s consumption, or self-sufficiency. “Sustainable food production means not depending on the market.” (Aurora Panoso, Quechua, Bolivia)

Production is considered sustainable especially when it includes food crops that represent the pillars of diets, such as maize, the dietary staple of peoples like the Q’eqchi’ Maya. This not only reduces food dependency, but also lowers costs and builds resilience in the face of crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic.



*“The cost of living is constantly rising. So, a family from the communities that grows what they consume, well, they already have everything; it does not cost them much. We saw this a lot during the pandemic. People in the communities fared better, much better, than those in urban areas, right? Because [those in urban areas] had no way to sustain themselves as a family, in the home. They had to go find elsewhere to find many products.”*

Brenda Xol,  
maya q’eqchi’, Guatemala



### Education and participation

Another way to address the impacts of climate change is to raise awareness and circulate knowledge and practices related to traditional agriculture, sustainable production for the family’s own consumption and good health, as well as a gender perspective related to domestic work. This reflects the inclusion of equally important social dimensions in response to the challenges of climate change. This involves methodologies for both education and outreach. A good example is the work done by the Aproba Sank Indigenous group in Guatemala, who have developed a methodology that links schools and farming competitions among communities, mobilizing more than 11,000 Indigenous farmers in the department of Alta Verapaz for over 20 years.

*“In the competitions we organize, the objective is to attract people’s attention so they can compete in the area of planting. But in the farmer schools, we go deeper; there is more awareness-raising, especially about current planting practices, about how not to lose what has been traditional. For example, in backyard animal husbandry—how to diversify backyard animal husbandry again?”*

Brenda Xol,  
maya q’eqchi’, Guatemala



## Community strengthening

Ultimately, a key challenge will be to align communities' efforts with those of institutions, especially government institutions. It is considered counterproductive that while communities assert their sovereignty by advancing sustainable production, States implement public policies detrimental to the environment, such as a lack of regulations in mining and monoculture, while simultaneously promoting the mass importation of industrialized and ultra-processed products. There is also criticism of government actions that promote and expand the consumption of non-traditional foods and practices through school programs, which limits the work being done to value Indigenous food systems.

It is therefore necessary to continue strengthening community organization, as climate change affects all peoples, and addressing it requires collective effort and negotiation in the political and legislative spheres. This is a necessary step for peoples and nations in the process of reaffirming their sovereignty to assume leadership:

*“The strengthening of community organization is very important, because, where is the páramo? It is within the communities, and in the communities there is no individualization; rather, it is everything, it is a community organization. Therefore, it is the community that must decide to reaffirm our knowledge system, to protect it, to care for those páramos, the water, the soil, children’s nutrition. To do this, policies must be created that recognize collective rights and food sovereignty. That struggle begins in the communities.”*

Kelly Ulcuango,  
kichwa kayambi, Ecuador

## The relationship between sustainable local production and health

Good health, both physical and spiritual, is frequently associated with sustainable local production and its capacity to provide culturally appropriate nutrition and energy: *“Local food is healthy because of the combination of ingredients and flavors it has.”* (Aurora Panoso, Quechua, Bolivia).

*“I say our food is still healthy because, in the end, it is prepared at home. Even though sometimes the ingredients are processed or purchased—for example, the chili pepper—families grind it and prepare everything at home.”*

Marisol Lerdo,  
náhuatl, Mexico

What makes Indigenous diets healthy is often described using adjectives like organic, diverse, fresh, local, natural, unprocessed, and without additives or agrochemicals when referring to production and consumption. Direct access to and preparation of food products allow people to know their origin and condition, which is associated with the low prevalence of diseases in some communities that consume few industrialized or processed foods. The consumption of traditional dishes is associated with well-being and with cultural and spiritual health, where flavors are linked to meanings, and both the practices related to preparation and the gatherings where the food is consumed establish a connection with the ancestral past.



*“Our food gives us good energy; it is a protein for all pregnant women, for children. That is why sometimes in the most remote Asháninka communities, disease is not seen much, because they maintain a natural, ancestral diet that comes from our forest, which we cultivate culturally, just as our grandparents ate many riches from our fields, from our forest, from our territory.”*

Marisol Shariva,  
asháninka, Peru



## What does it mean and why does it matter to speak of Indigenous food systems?

Food reflects a set of practices that make life possible, giving it a multidimensional nature where various aspects converge. Besides being the foundation that provides nutrition and sustenance to living beings, it encompasses cultural and relational elements that make it an activity of gathering and exchange, whether with family or the community. In this way, one's own cultural identity is nourished.

*“For Indigenous peoples and nations, speaking of food always also means speaking of the symbolic and spiritual realms that are expressed and come into conflict within a collective and universal activity: ‘To speak of food is to speak of life, to speak of cultural identity, to speak of reciprocity, of spirituality, of integral health.’”*

Kelly Ulcuango,  
kichwa kayambi, Ecuador

It is often said that one is what one eats; for this reason, food can bring people together even in contexts of change and conflict. It is considered an area that can reflect both collective difficulties and possibilities for transformation, thus contributing to internal social cohesion of peoples and among Indigenous nations:

*“We have found that food unites peoples. I believe there is a bridge in food-related matters; everyone faces the same difficulties: loss of diversity, food is very monotonous, among other things, but everyone has a point of convergence, as food brings them together.”*

Andrés Tombé,  
misak, Colombia



Food is thus considered the sustenance of life that provides energy, health, and well-being. This well-being is not only physical; it is not just about nutrition, but is also cultural and spiritual, and it is closely associated with the production system behind the food. For this reason, the need to guarantee healthy food, especially for younger generations, requires thinking about sustainable production:

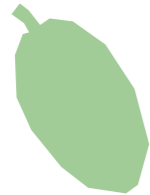
*“What we eat is what sustains our lives. That is, our lives depend on our food; we can live, we have energy. And yes, the importance of the organic, the natural, always arises when we talk about food, because that sustains our health.”*

Brenda Xol,  
maya q'eqchi', Guatemala



## PRESERVING TRADITIONS AS CULTURAL RESISTANCE

Sustaining in the present everything that surrounds traditional Indigenous food entails, and will entail, rescuing and strengthening these cultures, yet their continuity is pressured by the constant transformations experienced by the world on various scales. Speaking about food, or about feeding, is a way of resisting the threat faced by certain traditions and a way of reclaiming what is one's own. To speak of foods and dishes implies revisiting the ways and rhythms of cooking, reflecting on native species, tools, objects, utensils, and original flavors. In other words, it is to construct a shared consciousness from a daily act. This recovery has cultural value while also allowing for the preservation of sensory richness and the profound meaning of food as experience.



*“This matter of recovering recipes is important, and how you do it is important as well, because of the flavor. For example, some have tried to make it, the mole, with pots that they call steamers, but the flavor always changes. So, I think it really is important to continue to recover our traditions and our ways of doing things.”*

Marisol Lerdo,  
náhuatl, Mexico

It is not only a matter of recovering and preserving recipes; it is also necessary to ensure the transmission of this knowledge and these practices so that they are incorporated by younger generations. This intergenerational process must be cultivated both in homes and in collective and public spaces, such as schools and health centers. It is a task that raises concerns, as many children and youth are unaware of or show no interest in these food traditions. Given this context, continuing to speak about them is also a struggle that contributes to their continuity.

*“In our families, preparing and teaching our children to prepare meals is very important. One must know how to prepare them; we should know how to consume all foods, we should wash our hands, we should teach our children at home, in educational institutions, and also in health centers. For this, it is necessary to train children, to teach and demonstrate the preparation of our foods that come from our forest, from our home, from the chacra, and other spaces from which we obtain food.”*

Marisol Shariva,  
asháninka, Peru

The work of resistance to preserve ancestral foodways is communal and social, but it also has a strong individual component. Incorporating and maintaining traditional food practices, in the face of a standardized global diet, entails a constant effort to swim against the current, which is not without internal conflicts. Nevertheless, the possibility of effecting change through one's own decisions endows peoples with agency in much broader processes:

*“It is also a struggle even against oneself, to decide to remain and to become rerooted in my communal and spiritual principles, and to be in harmony with Pachamamita. It is a decision, and that decision comes at a cost. It is easier to adapt and adjust to the new, to new foods, to gourmet innovations. That is very, very easy; it is quite simple to lose communal identity. Therefore, much is said about struggle and resistance also in food.”*

Kelly Ulcuango,  
kichwa kayambi, Ecuador





## GUIDANCE FOR A TRANSFORMATION OF FOOD SYSTEMS

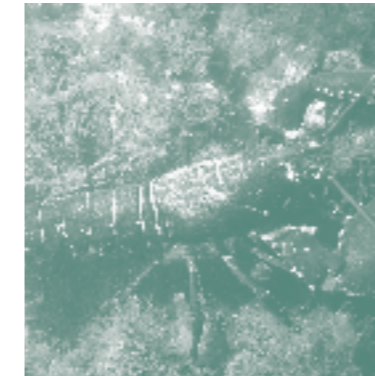
To speak of Indigenous food is, in part, an affirmation of sovereignty, since it is about deciding what and how to eat, where to obtain food, and about answering the question: Under what relationships does food connect communities, territories, and identities? This food-related self-determination involves preserving inherited practices, but also playing an active role in food systems. To fulfill this role, one must know the origin of foods, participate in their procurement and preparation, and reconnect with the natural and communal processes that make them possible. Finally, it is a matter of positioning oneself as an equal with other food systems, which coexist because they are preserved and endure.

Indigenous knowledge systems associated with food represent a response that is inherently subject to environmental sustainability. The present and future of Indigenous foods are linked to the preservation of ecosystems, and require a political commitment to engage, take responsibility for, and continuously care for the long-term relationship between human beings and nature. From this perspective, to speak of food is also to speak of sustainable systems and of the role that Indigenous peoples and nations can play in this process. One important idea in this regard is food literacy, understood as the knowledge and awareness of what is consumed:

*“If we do not think about the origins of our food, we will probably stop thinking about protecting the natural and wild places where we can grow natural foods. You cannot live on McDonald’s alone; it simply would not work. So, if we could increase this kind of food literacy around the world, I think many more people would think twice about whether their activities are damaging a natural habitat or improving it.”*

Ken Paul,  
wolastoqey First Nation, Canada

Given the particular place that Indigenous peoples and nations occupy in history, their perspectives, worldviews, and knowledge are indispensable for advancing towards equitable, resilient, sustainable, and healthy food systems. It is essential to strengthen Indigenous agency and leadership in these processes of transformation, as well as the opportunities for dialogue aimed at this:



*“The Indigenous perspective is absolutely essential. Everywhere in the world, Indigenous peoples were the first to develop foods. We have a great deal of knowledge about biodiversity, and that is why our participation is essential. International solidarity should create more opportunities to promote traditional practices of Indigenous peoples, because Indigenous peoples are at the center of global food sovereignty.”*

Priscilla Settee,  
cree, Canada

Just as leadership is important, it is essential to understand that Indigenous knowledge is situated within a broader context of life and systems; this is why the exchange and flow of knowledge and wisdom are beneficial. Preserving traditions does not mean isolating oneself from the rest of the world. Western and Indigenous knowledge can nourish each other and work together to achieve transformative objectives:

*“There is a concept called two-eyed viewing, where Indigenous perspectives are interwoven with Western science and research to better manage animals, to learn harvesting and hunting skills that have persisted for millennia. I believe Indigenous peoples have a wealth of knowledge about foods, which they have consumed for millennia, and even though their knowledge is not built upon conventional science, it is of great importance and value.”*

Lynn Blackwood,  
inuit, Canada



A concrete example of how Indigenous perspectives contribute to the transformation of food systems can be found in the resilience of small-scale agriculture and subsistence production. This has become evident during periods of social and economic crisis, such as during the COVID-19 pandemic, when people who grew their own food were better able to cope with food shortages: *“It’s good to talk about food and food production, as it gives us the ability to withstand food crises that occur suddenly.”* (Marisol Lerdo, náhuatl, Mexico).

Continuing to speak about Indigenous food is to speak of life, well-being, identity, and the future. Its importance transcends the nutritional and practical to become rooted in the cultural, spiritual, and political, as an act of resistance and sovereignty. Preserving and valuing this knowledge not only strengthens the cohesion and continuity of Indigenous peoples and nations, but also offers comprehensive responses to global challenges related to food.



**During the COVID-19 pandemic, people who grew their own food were better able to cope with food shortages.**

