



# WHY FOOD SOVEREIGNTY IN THE FOOD SYSTEM IS IMPORTANT

Food sovereignty makes an important contribution to the development of sustainable food systems, given its focus on the environmental, economic, and social dimensions of sustainability<sup>3</sup>. Environmentally, food sovereignty supports agroecological principles of procuring and cultivating food in ways that support the health of ecosystems and biodiversity. It often resists popular technologies that damage ecosystems and undermine traditional ecological knowledge and management. Economically, food sovereignty supports localizing food systems and livelihoods of smallholder farmers by keeping profits local. Socially, food sovereignty supports traditional ecological knowledge involved in food production. Food sovereignty also supports food justice and empowerment throughout the food system, which can include the resistance of food aid and reduction of reliance on external food and seed resources. Food sovereignty seeks to empower small and subsistence farmers along with other underrepresented stakeholders in the food system including farm workers, women, and children. As a movement, food sovereignty tries to reclaim local power in the food system by building unity and solidarity through social relationships and sharing of local knowledge.

In the United States, the food sovereignty movement is especially relevant to Native American tribal nations, who have been systematically marginalized and largely stripped of their traditional food systems. Native American communities around the country are taking action to reclaim food sovereignty<sup>6</sup>. Among its food sovereignty actions, the Blackfeet Nation is working to reintroduce bison, develop a beef and bison processing facility, and increase the presence of local and traditional foods. These community-level efforts have the power to economically revitalize the Blackfeet Nation while also improving human health and transitioning agricultural practices to become more environmentally sound.

Enterprises can also take steps to strengthen food sovereignty. For example, the Sioux Chef team led by Chef Sean Sherman and Executive Director Dana Thompson seek to revitalize Native American Cuisine and decolonize the food system by re-establishing Native foodways through training, food service, research and development, and outreach<sup>8</sup>. Native American Natural Foods, LLC is another Native American food enterprise dedicated to supporting food sovereignty<sup>9</sup>. Their main product, the Tanka Bar made of prairie-raised bison, incorporates traditional values of the Oglala Lakotas on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota, including a deep commitment to helping the People, the Buffalo and Mother Earth. The production of Tanka Bars align with Native values and ancestral knowledge while providing an option to make a healthy food choice that provides economic benefits to the Pine Ridge community.

## CONSUMER PRACTICES TO SUPPORT FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

- 1. SUPPORT LOCAL AGRICULTURAL AND FOOD BUSINESSES.** Local products help support the economy of your community and keep purchasing power within the community.
- 2. CULTIVATE, HARVEST, AND PROCESS YOUR OWN FOOD.** This can be as simple or complex as you want. It serves to put you in control of what food you are eating and how it is produced.
- 3. EXPLORE TRADITIONAL FOODS OF YOUR CULTURE OR WHERE YOU LIVE.** Try preparing a traditional meal and learning why it is culturally important.
- 4. CHOOSE TO BUY FROM HISTORICALLY MARGINALIZED GROUPS** such as Native-owned companies who are contributing to their community's food sovereignty, particularly when buying traditional foods.

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