

Swinomish Food Sovereignty Assessment

Phase 1

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Swinomish Food Sovereignty Assessment Phase 1:

The goal of the Swinomish food sovereignty assessment Phase 1 is to gather data on the heritage and current food landscape within the Swinomish Tribe in order to inform the development of the first comprehensive Swinomish community health assessment. The Specific Aims of this project are to gather data via: (1) literature review of heritage foods and uses; (2) a review of government-funded food programs to Swinomish; and (3) an assessment of food served in Swinomish programs (e.g., preschool, daycare, youth and afterschool programs, senior center).

Introduction

The Swinomish Food Sovereignty Assessment: Phase 1 is to assess the current food security status of the Swinomish Tribal Community. Food sovereignty assessments in native communities are one strategy to help reach goals, revitalize native food systems and identify barriers. It can be used to educate community members of their current environment and give them the tools and data they need to make decisions about their community health, economic development and cultural revitalization as they relate to food and agriculture (Food Sovereignty Assessment Tool, 2004).

What is food sovereignty?

“Food sovereignty is the right of peoples, communities, and countries to define their own agricultural, labor, fishing, food and land policies which are ecologically, socially, economically and culturally appropriate to their unique circumstances. It includes the true right to food and to produce food, which means that all people have the

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right to safe, nutritious and culturally appropriate food and to food-producing resources and the ability to sustain themselves and societies” (Food Sovereignty Assessment Tool, 2004).

What this means to the Swinomish community is that they have to right to safe nutritious foods. They have to right to grow and produce healthy foods and the right to food-producing resources. “Native food sovereignty” gives us the right to their traditional culturally appropriate foods and natural resources like fish, native plants and animals.

History of the Swinomish people

The Reservation is home to a community of Coast Salish peoples that descended from tribes and bands that originally lived in the Skagit and Samish River Valleys, the coastal areas surrounding Skagit, Padilla and Fidalgo Bays and Saratoga Passage, and numerous islands, including Fidalgo, Camano, Whidbey and the San Juan Islands.

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Figure 10: McKenny to Parker, April 11, 1871; attached map. Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs, 1824-1881, Letters Received from the Washington Superintendency, 1871, Letter M226, National Archives.

Figure 1 Maps: Present day and historical view of Swinomish Reservation treaty boundary.

For thousands of years, these Coast Salish tribes maintained a culture centered around abundant salt water resources that included salmon, shellfish, and marine mammals, as well as upland resources such as cedar, camas, berries, and wild game.

They lived in large villages during the winter and in summer encampments that followed the seasonal cycle of resource gathering from the mouths of rivers and streams where salmon was taken, to coastal shorelines where shellfish and herring and other forage fish were taken, to marine waters where finfish and sea mammals were taken, and to inland forests where wild game and berries were taken.

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Four major groups and their allied bands - the Aboriginal Swinomish, Lower Skagit, Kikiallus and Aboriginal Samish Tribes - signed the Treaty of Point Elliott with the United States in 1855 and reserved the southeast peninsula of Fidalgo Island for their Reservation and future use (Swinomish Indian Tribal Community, 1996).

Before contact with Euro-Americans, Coast Salish peoples were not farmers. They supported themselves by utilizing the rich natural resources of their homeland: fishing for salmon, harvesting shellfish, and gathering wild plants including berries, greens, and roots. American Indian people maintained their food culture in the face of rapid change after Euro-American traders, missionaries, and settlers came to the Skagit River Valley, but over time, as agriculture dominated the landscape and access to traditional food sources became restricted, diets began to change. The new Americanized diet based on refined grains and farmed meats did not provide the same nutrition as the old foods, and new health problems began to affect the native people.

Summary of Swinomish First Foods

The traditional Coast Salish diet, eaten in northwest Washington for millennia, provides all the nutrients our body needs: protein and healthy fats from salmon and other fish like herring, shellfish, and game like elk, deer, hare, and ducks. Complex carbohydrates from plant bulbs including camas, tiger lilies, and wild onions. Fiber and vitamins from wild greens like nettles, bracken ferns, and shoots. Vitamins and antioxidants from berries and rose hips. Cycles are part of the natural world, and part of holistic wellness. Eating according to what is available during any given season aids in a balanced diet.

The 13 Moons refer to the annual lunar cycles that Coast Salish people track to form their calendar. Each full moon is associated with the changes in nature that accompany it - wind shifts,

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salmon runs, plant blossoms, animal appearances, and more. Traditionally, native people lived as part of nature, and the strength of the community depended upon an understanding of the natural world and their place in it. Coast Salish peoples organize their lives around the cycles of the moon. Each moon is named after the natural or cultural events that happen while it goes from new to full and back again. The foods available during a certain moon are also part of the story. Pay attention to the traditional calendar, and you'll know what foods are growing in the forest, along the coast, and swimming in rivers! Plant harvesting takes place throughout the spring, summer, and early fall.

Spring starts with “Moon when the frogs talk” in late February to March. Herring and smelt are harvested, and the halibut is begging to be fished. Roots of the Sitka spruce, red-cedar and Oregon grape are collected for the inner bark. Edible plants are also collected such as tiger lily bulbs, red elderberries, and lady ferns. The next phase is the “Moon of the whistling robins”, which takes place much of April. Herring and smelt continue to be harvested. Shellfish such as mussels, clams and oysters are also harvested. Some are eaten fresh but most are cured for winter. Flatfish, halibut, lingcod and rockfish are all fished during this moon. Much of May is the “Moon of the digging time”. Roots and bulbs of many plants are dug during this moon. Camas bulbs are dug up and steamed between layers of dry grass over hot rocks covered by soil. Some bulbs are eaten and some are made into flour for storage. The community celebrates the capture of the first salmon with a ceremony to thank the salmon people for returning. The last lunar phase of spring is the “Moon of the Salmonberry” which takes place during the month of June. Fruits such as salmonberries and red huckleberries are ripening and ready to harvest. The ripe salmonberries signal the start of many salmon runs during this moon including summer Chinook and sockeye salmon. This moon also signals a time when the daytime tide is extremely

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low, allowing access to scallops geoduck clams and giant red sea urchins as well as many other shellfish.

The first lunar phase of summer is the “Moon of the blackberry” that takes place during much of the month of July. Many berries are ripe; blackberries are picked and eaten fresh or dried for winter use. Sap in the cedar trees stops running signaling the time to harvest cedar bark. The next lunar phase is the “Moon of the salal berry”, during much of the month of August. During this moon many plants are ready to harvest. salal berries are picked, mashed, dried and made into cakes. Currants and trailing blackberries are also ripe at this time. Chinook runs are reaching their peak; salmon in rivers are caught using dip nets and spears. Salmon are eaten fresh and a large amount is dried for winter use. This moon signals a good time to wind dry the fish before the insects increase.

Autumn begins with “Moon of the silver salmon”, much of September; during this moon silver salmon, also called Coho are fished by trolling with V-shaped hooks made of bent hemlock attached to a line. Other salmon runs continue in the bays and river and plant gathering continues. The next lunar phase is the “Moon of the elk mating cry” in late September and early October. During this moon much of the time was used capturing and preserving salmon. Hunting also begins for larger game such as deer and elk. Most of October is the “Moon of the Falling Leaves”; this is the end of the salmon runs so drying fish for winter continues. Hunting begins for ducks, geese and other birds as they return for the winter. The last lunar phase of autumn is the “Moon of the dog salmon”, drying and storage of salmon continues to increase food for the winter months. Shellfish harvest also begins again and continues to increase the food supply through the winter months.

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The “Moon to put your paddles away” begins the winter seasons during late November early December, signals the time to move indoors for the coming winter season. During the winter moons tools, baskets and other items are constructed. Shellfish continue to be collected during night time low tides. The next lunar phase in the cycle is the “Moon of the sacred time”, in late December and January, This was a time for learning spiritual and cultural traditions from elder around the fire. The last moon of the lunar cycle is the “Moon of the windy time.” Hunting, fishing and shellfish harvested continue through the end of winter. Ironwood is harvested from the ocean spray shrub to make many tools such as fish spears, fish cooking sticks, and long knitting needles for cattail sleeping mats.



13 moons Picture taken by Beth Willup at the Swinomish Casino 13 Moons Restaurant

Swinomish food programs

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The Swinomish community provides food to our community members through community dinners, ceremonies and SITC programs. Some of the programs that provide foods to our community members all year is our Swinomish Senior Center, Swinomish Daycare/ Pre-School and Swinomish Youth center.

Methods

Data collection for Phase 1 of the Swinomish Food Sovereignty Assessment focused on the Swinomish Tribal Government food programs and food available within walking distance of the Swinomish Village. The programs include the Swinomish Daycare, Youth Center, Recreation, Pre-school, Senior Center and the Swinomish Village Chevron.

Data collection, activities and interviews were conducted by me, Beth Willup, Swinomish tribal member and Northwest Indian College intern between June 2016 and March 2017. Survey questions for the kitchen managers consisted of budgets, where the food comes from, personal opinions about the foods served and the food sovereignty assessment. After the data is collected I will evaluate and determine the number of food programs that participated verses overall number of programs, the average food group percentages of each meal by program, nutritional values, sources of food, and potential substitutes.

Interviews

Interviews were conducted with the kitchen managers of the Swinomish food programs. We were able to speak with the senior center kitchen manager, Regina Bob and the daycare/ pre-school kitchen manager, Michelle Edwards. Interview questions were developed by the NWIC Swinomish Vista worker Grace Ward and Swinomish Intern Beth Willup.

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The Questions:

How accurate is the menu provided to me by the Swinomish nutritionist Michelle Skidmore?

How often do you meet with her?

Do you follow the recommendations?

Where does the food come from that you serve and who buys it?

Do you think any changes are necessary, why or why not?

Have you participated in any nutrition or food sovereignty programs and would you like to?

Michelle Edwards works for the Swinomish daycare/ pre-school, she is the Kitchen manager and usually does all the cooking alone or with Leslie McDonald as her kitchen aid. She does not get a menu from the Swinomish nutritionist although she has the entire year planned out and changes it as she sees fit according to what is available and what the kids like. She writes down everything on the menus that she serves and says they are 100% accurate. She does not meet with the Swinomish nutritionist at all. Michelle buys the food from F.S.A (Food Services of America, food distributor), F.S.I. (Food Services, Inc., food distributor) and the Pioneer Market (La Conner, local market) as needed. She does not feel that any changes need to be made to the menu. Michelle has not been to a nutrition or food sovereignty class/ program since she started and does not have any interest in participating in one at this time.

Regina Bob is the kitchen manager and only cook for the Swinomish Senior center. The senior center menu is printed in the Community newsletter each month. Regina meets with the nutritionist once a month to go over the menu and follows all recommendations 100%. She goes shopping ever Sunday at Fred Meyer for the week. She does not buy any traditional foods and

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does not want to start cooking traditional foods for the seniors. Regina said that because she does not have help in the kitchen cooking traditional foods takes too much work and too much time, it is not possible. When asked if she thinks any changes are necessary she said that she needs reliable people to help cook and better cooking materials. She has been to a meeting in Santa Fe for a nutrition conference and would like to go to more.

The Swinomish Senior Center

The Swinomish Senior center provides food to the elders of the community who need assistance. They cook lunch Monday through Thursday and have created a menu with the Swinomish Nutritionist Michelle Skidmore. Ivan Willup is the senior coordinator, Lori-Ann Cayou is the elder's caseworker and Regina Bob is the Kitchen manager and senior cook at the senior center.

The Swinomish elders' lunch menu is printed in the Swinomish monthly newsletter, "The Qyuuqs." For the 2016 year we compared the lunch menu to the Swinomish native food wheel created in 2016 by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. It recommends that a nutritional traditional native food diet would consist of 10% fruit, 20% protein, 40% vegetables and 30% grains. (figure2). Using the 2016 lunch calendar from the elders' lunch menu it showed us that the average food wheel consisted of 22% fruits, 23.5% protein, 31.8% grains/ starch and 22.4% vegetables (figure 3). There is a difference of -12% fruits, +3.5% protein, -1.8% grains/ starch and -17.7% vegetables.

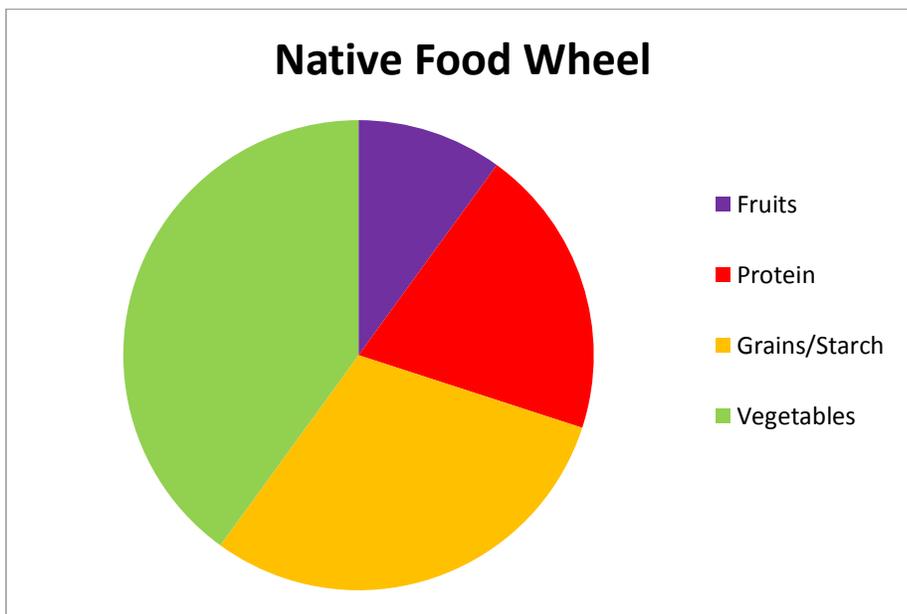


Figure 2: Native food wheel Created by the U.S. Department of agriculture consisting of a healthy nutritious diet for natives

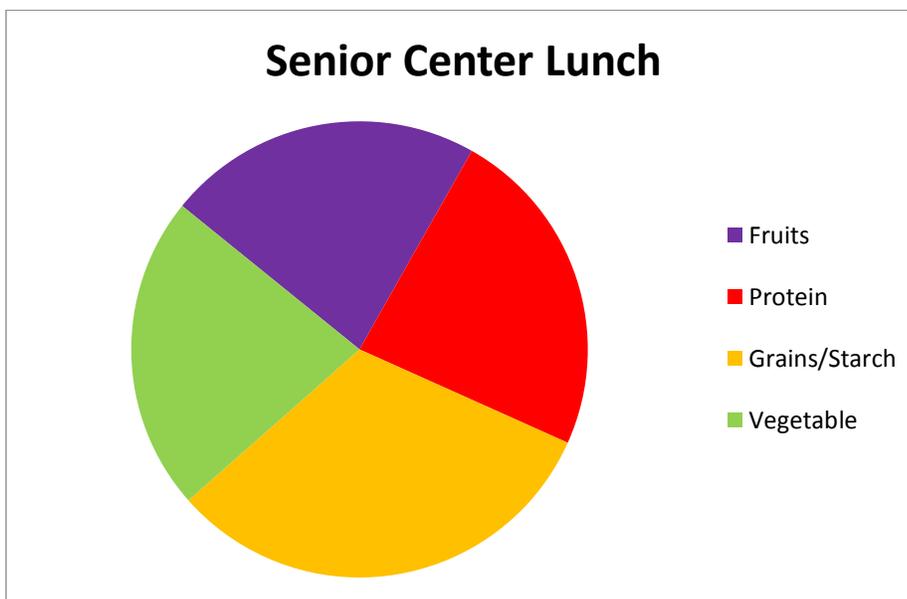


Figure 3: Food wheel consisting of the 2016 nutrition of the senior lunches provided by the Swinomish senior center

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The Swinomish Early Education Center (Daycare and Pre-school):

The Swinomish Early Education Center provides kids at the daycare and pre-school with breakfast, lunch, afternoon snack and after 5pm snack Monday through Thursday. Michelle Edwards is the kitchen manager/ cook and provided me with the 2016 yearly menu. For the 2016 year we compared the daily food menu to the Swinomish native food wheel created in 2016 by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. It recommends that a nutritional traditional native food diet would consist of 10% fruit, 20% protein, 40% vegetables and 30% grains (figure2). Using the 2016 lunch calendar from the elders' lunch menu it showed us that the average food wheel consisted of 22% Fruits, 34.5% Protein, 34.5% grains/ starch and 8.6% vegetables (figure 4). There is a difference of +12% fruits, +14.5% protein, +4.5% grains/ starch and -31.4% vegetables.

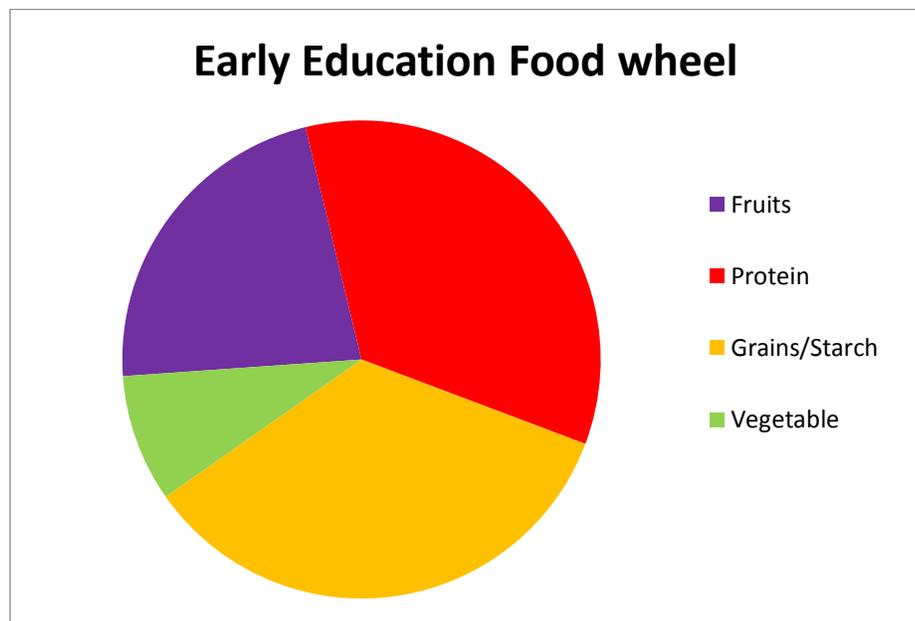


Figure 4: Food wheel consisting of the 2016 menu provided by the early education center

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Discussion

After collecting the data and comparing them to the Native food wheel I noticed that both programs were doing very good but could use just a little bit less fruit and a little more vegetables. I was impressed by the accuracy of the menus made by both the nutritionist and the kitchen managers; I think they both follow the native nutritional value needs. I know both kitchen managers have very little staff, money and time so taking these in to account is important to them. They work very hard and spend a lot of time trying to do the best they can with what they have. I let them know that the information they give has no reflection on the work they are doing in the community and that I am only collecting data for a resource reference for the Swinomish community.

My concern with the menus provided to me was that there are little or no traditional foods available to the tribal members through the programs. I was told that the Senior Center used to get frozen food from the Swinomish fish company but since they closed down they no longer receive fish. Regina Bob was not bothered by this because the fish took too long to defrost, clean and then cook before lunch. The Senior Center was also getting cooked fish on Wednesdays from a few of the tribal members, but that also has stopped. I was given the impression that she does not want any traditional foods brought to her because it is a hassle and a lot more work for her.

Swinomish also does not have a specific place where they buy their foods, it is up to the kitchen managers to get food for their kitchen and serve it. The food mostly comes from F.S.A. and Fred Mayer. We live in an area that we have a lot of local fresh produce plus our traditional natural resources. We currently have a Swinomish community garden where we grow fresh local

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organic foods and are given to community members for free. I asked both the kitchen managers if they would be interested in using the vegetables; both said they were not interested in and would not be able to serve them. Regina at the Senior Center did tell me that I could drop off some produce in a box and let elders take them if they would like.

Challenges and Barriers

Some of the biggest challenges I faced while taking on this assessment was the lack of information available and the availability of program participants. The Swinomish Community is very busy in the summer and is often closed during the canoe journey, Swinomish days and fishing openings. When we first started this assessment both Grace Ward and I found it difficult to contact the program managers, but could usually catch them while they were working, so the interviews and conversations were a little rushed.

One of the main kitchens at the Swinomish Tribe is the kitchen at the Youth/ recreation center. They feed the youth snacks during the school year and lunches and snacks during the summer and outings. The youth center kitchen does not have a menu available at this time. I did have brief conversations with Cathi Bassford, the Kitchen Manager, and she told me that she buys the food from Costco and serves the kids what is available in the pantry. I was able to collect some of the receipts from Cathi, but couldn't separate the items into meals.

Cathi Bassford also cooks for Swinomish Community events that include community dinners, funerals, and cultural ceremonies. She purchases food from Costco for those and is also given fish from the Tribe or community members. What is served throughout the year during these events is unclear at this time, but I would encourage the staff to keep a food diary of the meals for the future participation in the Swinomish food sovereignty assessment.

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The Swinomish Village Chevron is also one of the main places community members in the village go to for food and snacks. At this time we do not have a list of what is served in the Chevron station, but after observing for myself I was unable to locate any fresh produce. The food is normal convenience store products and an option of fried food is available. From my own experience there is not any kind of healthier option available at the store at this time. I would love to see a change at some point and making the fresh produce from the Swinomish Community Garden available there.

Conclusion

Phase 1 of the Swinomish Community Food sovereignty assessment was a great start to collecting the data necessary for continuing the full assessment. We reached out to many community members who were interested in the assessment and who would like to get involved. We also had many barriers and unexpected challenges along the way, but I have also found that the more we are involved the more people ask me about it and really do want to see the results.

Our Swinomish culture depends on the traditional food to live a spiritually, physically and culturally healthy life. I hope that through this process we can see more traditional food being served and available to our community. I know that our climate and environment is changing and that our native culture is resilient and needs to adapt. Our goal is to continue to collect data to be able to assess and make decisions for our community that will continue our traditions and culture through food sovereignty.

RESOURCES

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