



## Cooking Up Native Traditions

### Article

**Minneapolis, Minnesota** (Achieve3000, January 17, 2020). When he was growing up on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota, Sean Sherman's family pantry was packed with canned beans, boxed rice, powdered milk, and jugs of vegetable oil—foods provided by the U.S. government. Sherman, whose family are Oglala Lakota Sioux, would later raise this question about what he considered a curious collection of groceries: Why didn't the foods reflect their culture?

As Sherman immersed himself in the study of world and American cuisine, yet more questions arose: If North America's history begins with Native Americans, why weren't indigenous recipes being more widely used and taught? Where could those recipes even be found? And why aren't there more restaurants serving Native American foods?

Determined to find answers, Sherman met with community elders and spoke with Native American chefs and historians. He learned how his ancestors foraged, grew, hunted, fished, preserved, and prepared their food. He discovered that reclaiming an understanding of Native American foodways meant utilizing local plants and other natural ingredients in the environment. That idea—of *making food taste like where it's from*—is exactly what inspired Sherman to establish his Minnesota-based catering business, The Sioux Chef, as well as his culinary non-profit, NATIFS (North American Traditional Indigenous Food Systems). This chef is on a mission to bring traditional Native American cuisine back to today's world.

But why was it lost in the first place?

Before contact with Europeans, Indigenous Peoples employed traditional agricultural and butchering techniques, developed methods of fermentation and preservation, and ate foods as varied as North America's geography. On the coasts, people ate shellfish; in the deserts, they dined on the nutritious parts of cacti; and across the plains, native wild rice was an important staple.

But as Europeans arrived and colonized the continent, many traditional food sources were destroyed. This included the near extinction of the bison—which was vital to many Native diets—and the destruction of heirloom seeds. To make matters worse, during the late 1800s, the U.S. government sent Native American children to boarding schools, where they were taught cooking and farming methods instead of learning how to forage, farm, and hunt, as their ancestors did. This resulted in the disappearance of years of generational knowledge of Native American food traditions.

Through NATIFS and The Sioux Chef, Sherman is restoring that knowledge and revitalizing Native American culinary traditions and practices, making them accessible to as many communities as possible. His recipes avoid wheat, processed sugar, dairy, beef, pork, chicken, and other ingredients that were introduced by Europeans, in favor of elk, quail, mushrooms, and wild rice. Sherman also helps teach people how to forage indigenous ingredients like wild



Photo credit: AP/Amy Forliti

*Sean Sherman whips up recipes using traditional Native American ingredients. That's what his catering business, The Sioux Chef, is known for.*

dandelion, hyssop, cedar, and bergamot. The results have been traditional Native American dishes with a modern flair. Some examples are bison meatballs, deviled duck eggs, corn and seed crusted walleye, and rabbit with cedar, wild rice, cranberry, and maple.

For Sherman, going back to his roots is not just about reconnecting with his culture and heritage. Native American foods also have innumerable health benefits. Many of the processed and canned foods provided to Native American reservations through government-sponsored programs are full of sodium, loaded with bad fats, and brimming with sugar. It's believed these foods have contributed to many of the serious health issues plaguing Native American communities, such as type 2 diabetes, heart disease, and cancer.

NATIFS hopes to address this health crisis by re-establishing Native foodways. It provides opportunities for people to learn about Native cuisine and helps tribes to develop culturally unique indigenous restaurants in their own communities.

Although Sherman is one of a small number of chefs serving and promoting traditional Native American ingredients, this might be changing. Native American foods fit perfectly into the growing farm-to-table movement, which promotes local fresh ingredients. Plus, indigenous foods aren't processed and can easily be made vegetarian, gluten-free, or vegan. One thing Native American food is *not*, contends Sherman, is a trend. It's a way of life.

*Video credit: The Sioux Chef*

## **Dictionary**

**indigenous** (*adjective*) produced, living, or existing naturally in a particular region or environment

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## Activity

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### PART 1

#### Question 1

Based on information in the Article, in what way do traditional native cuisine and the food commonly eaten today by Native Americans contrast?

- A Foods provided to Native Americans today are higher in fats and sodium than traditional native cuisine.
- B Most Native Americans today eat foods such as duck eggs, bison meatballs, and wild rice.
- C The traditional Native American diet includes canned beans, boxed rice, and vegetable oil.
- D The traditional Native American diet includes wheat, sugar, dairy, beef, and pork.

#### Question 2

Which of these is a statement of opinion?

- A Sean Sherman teaches people how to forage for traditional food ingredients, such as wild dandelion, hyssop, cedar, and bergamot, to create Native American dishes with a modern flair.
- B In the late 1800s, the government sent Native American children to boarding schools where they were taught cooking and farming methods that were different from their traditional methods.
- C Sean Sherman wanted to learn what foods were included in the traditional Native American diet, so he met with community elders and Native American chefs and historians to get some answers.
- D Although the government meant to do the right thing, it didn't really help anyone when it gave free canned beans, boxed rice, powdered milk, and vegetable oil to Native Americans.

#### Question 3

The Article states:

**For Sherman, going back to his roots is not just about reconnecting with his culture and heritage. Native American foods also have innumerable health benefits. Many of the processed and canned foods provided to Native American reservations through government-sponsored programs are full of sodium, loaded with bad fats, and brimming with sugar. It's believed these foods have contributed to many of the serious health issues plaguing Native American communities, such as type 2 diabetes, heart disease, and cancer.**

Why did the author include this passage?

- A To describe a way in which the United States government has come to the aid of Native Americans and achieved beneficial effects
- B To suggest that the government has actually contributed to the health problems of some Native Americans
- C To assert that Native Americans are now taking more responsibility for the health issues that currently plague their communities
- D To point out that the rate of type 2 diabetes, heart disease, and cancer has been falling steadily in Native American communities

## Question 4

Which two words are the closest **synonyms**?

*Only some of these words are used in the Article.*

- A cuisine and memento
- B revitalizing and alienating
- C innumerable and myriad
- D contends and refutes

## Question 5

The reader can predict from the Article that \_\_\_\_\_.

- A Sean Sherman will include more canned beans, boxed rice, powdered milk, and vegetable oil in the foods prepared at The Sioux Chef
- B many Native Americans will slowly change over to an all-meat diet that includes ample portions of beef, rabbit, bison, and walleye
- C more and more people will become familiar with the benefits of an indigenous diet through the work of NATIFS and The Sioux Chef
- D Sean Sherman will teach university-level courses that showcase traditional Native American dishes incorporating modern European ingredients

## Question 6

Which information is **not** in the Article?

- A Who Sean Sherman turned to when he wanted to find out more about indigenous diets
- B What harmful effects a diet high in sodium, fat, and sugar can impose on one's health
- C Why it is so difficult to find indigenous ingredients, like hyssop, cedar, and bergamot
- D What foods were commonly found in Sean Sherman's pantry when he was a boy

## Question 7

Read this passage from the Article:

**Determined to find answers, Sherman met with community elders and spoke with Native American chefs and historians. He learned how his ancestors *foraged*, grew, hunted, fished, preserved, and prepared their food.**

In this passage, the word *forage* means \_\_\_\_\_.

- A to raise animals as livestock
- B to plant food crops
- C to search for something to eat
- D to cook or prepare a meal

## Question 8

Which passage from the Article best supports the idea that Sean Sherman actively sought out the help of others when he wanted to learn more about traditional Native American foods?

- A** Although Sherman is one of a small number of chefs serving and promoting traditional Native American ingredients, this might be changing. Native American foods fit perfectly into the growing farm-to-table movement, which promotes local fresh ingredients. Plus, indigenous foods aren't processed and can easily be made vegetarian, gluten-free, or vegan. One thing Native American food is *not*, contends Sherman, is a trend. It's a way of life.
- B** But as Europeans arrived and colonized the continent, many traditional food sources were destroyed. This included near extinction of the bison—which was vital to many Native diets—and the destruction of heirloom seeds. To make matters worse, during the late 1800s, the U.S. government sent Native American children to boarding schools, where they were taught cooking and farming methods instead of learning how to forage, farm, and hunt, as their ancestors did.
- C** When he was growing up on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota, Sean Sherman's family pantry was packed with canned beans, boxed rice, powdered milk, and jugs of vegetable oil—foods provided by the U.S. government. Sherman, whose family are Oglala Lakota Sioux, would later raise this question about what he considered a curious collection of groceries: Why didn't the foods reflect their culture?
- D** Determined to find answers, Sherman met with community elders and spoke with Native American chefs and historians. He learned how his ancestors foraged, grew, hunted, fished, preserved, and prepared their food. He discovered that reclaiming an understanding of Native American foodways meant utilizing local plants and other natural ingredients in the environment.