



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. These foods were provided by the U.S. government. Sherman, whose family are Oglala Lakota Sioux, would later raise this question about their collection of groceries: Why didn't the foods reflect their culture?

Sherman immersed himself in the study of cuisine. And even more questions arose: Why weren't Native American recipes being more widely used? Where could those recipes even be found? And why aren't there more restaurants serving Native American foods?

Sherman was determined to find answers. He 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. And he discovered the way to reclaim an understanding of Native American food practices: by using local plants and other natural ingredients in the environment. The idea to make food taste like where it's from inspired Sherman. He established his own Minnesota-based catering business, The Sioux Chef. He also started the non-profit, NATIFS (North American Traditional Indigenous Food Systems). His 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, Native peoples employed traditional agricultural and butchering techniques. They also developed methods of food preservation. And the foods they ate were as varied as North America's geography.

But as Europeans arrived, many traditional food sources, including heirloom seeds, were destroyed. Bison—which was vital to many Native diets—nearly became extinct. And making matters worse: During the late 1800s, the U.S. government sent Native American children to boarding schools. At these schools, they were taught cooking and farming methods. They never learned how to forage, farm, and hunt, as their ancestors did. So years of generational knowledge of Native American food traditions disappeared.

Through NATIFS and The Sioux Chef, Sherman is restoring that knowledge and reviving Native American cooking traditions and practices. His recipes avoid wheat, 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 dandelion, hyssop, cedar, and bergamot. The results have been traditional Native American dishes with a modern flair.



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.

For Sherman, going back to his roots is not just about reconnecting with his culture. Native American foods also have health benefits. Many of the processed and canned foods provided to Native American reservations through government programs are full of sodium. And they're loaded with bad fats and brimming with sugar. It's believed these foods have contributed to serious health issues plaguing Native American communities, including type 2 diabetes, heart disease, and cancer. NATIFS hopes to address this health crisis by re-establishing Native foodways.

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

Video credit: The Sioux Chef

Dictionary

cater (*verb*) to provide food and drinks at a party, meeting, etc., especially as a job

forage (*verb*) to search for something (such as food or supplies)

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

inspire (*verb*) to make (someone) want to do something; to give (someone) an idea about what to do or create

trend (*noun*) something that is currently popular or fashionable

Activity

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 Most Native Americans today eat foods such as elk, quail, and mushrooms.
- B The traditional Native American diet includes canned beans, boxed rice, and vegetable oil.
- C The traditional Native American diet includes wheat, beef, chicken, and pork.
- D Foods provided to Native Americans today are higher in fats and sodium than traditional native cuisine.

Question 2

Which of these is a statement of opinion?

- A 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.
- B 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.
- C Sean Sherman teaches people how to forage for indigenous food ingredients, such as wild dandelion, hyssop, cedar, and bergamot, to create Native American dishes with a modern flair.
- 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. Native American foods also have health benefits. Many of the processed and canned foods provided to Native American reservations through government programs are full of sodium. And they're loaded with bad fats and brimming with sugar. It's believed these foods have contributed to serious health issues plaguing Native American communities, including type 2 diabetes, heart disease, and cancer.

Why did the author include this passage?

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

Question 4

Which is the closest **synonym** for the word *trend*?

- (A) annoyance
- (B) commitment
- (C) fad
- (D) buffet

Question 5

The reader can predict from the Article that _____.

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

Question 6

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

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

Question 7

Read this passage from the Article:

Before contact with Europeans, Native peoples employed traditional agricultural and butchering techniques. They also developed methods of food preservation. And the foods they ate were as varied as North America's geography.

In this passage, the word *technique* means _____.

- (A) a statement that tells what is or is not allowed
- (B) a way of doing something by using a special skill
- (C) a program designed to help people in need
- (D) a story that is passed down through time

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?

- Ⓐ Sherman was determined to find answers. He 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. And he discovered the way to reclaim an understanding of Native American food practices: by using local plants and other natural ingredients in the environment.
- Ⓑ Sherman is one of a small number of chefs serving and promoting traditional Native American ingredients. But this might be changing. Native American foods fit perfectly into the growing farm-to-table movement, which promotes local fresh ingredients. Plus, Native American foods aren't processed and can easily be made vegetarian, gluten-free, or vegan. One thing Native American food is *not*, says Sherman, is a trend. It's a way of life.
- Ⓒ 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. These foods were provided by the U.S. government. Sherman, whose family are Oglala Lakota Sioux, would later raise this question about their collection of groceries: Why didn't the foods reflect their culture?
- Ⓓ But as Europeans arrived, many traditional food sources, including heirloom seeds, were destroyed. Bison—which was vital to many Native diets—nearly became extinct. And making matters worse: During the late 1800s, the U.S. government sent Native American children to boarding schools. At these schools, they were taught cooking and farming methods. They never learned how to forage, farm, and hunt, as their ancestors did.