

Pawnee Eagle Corn and Improving Food Security for Pawnee People

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Abstract

As a result of settler expansion into the plains region, the Pawnees were removed into Indian Territory, now known as the state of Oklahoma. Along with removal, the Pawnee lost their rights to maintain their own traditional food sources and relied on government rations to sustain themselves. Today the Pawnee Nation suffers from a multitude of health issues such as diabetes, high blood pressure, and heart disease. **My research question, is how can rematriating Pawnee Eagle Corn improve food security for the Pawnee Nation?** Tribal nations across the country are looking to the past to solve our present health issues. Through the synthesis of tradition and innovation, sustainable food sources are coming into fruition. Traditional seeds can provide adequate nutrition and culturally appropriate food sources for Indigenous peoples. Securing our foods now will lead to a healthier future for our next generation.



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Literature Review

Current literature on rematriation largely stems from Indigenous nations looking to reclaim culturally significant practices or lifeways. Rematriation primarily exists as an extension of seed sovereignty, a term that relates to the independent right to use seeds. Scholars are primarily focusing on how seed sovereignty and rematriation can dispel ongoing health crises in Indigenous communities. Scholars examine how nations implement seed sovereignty as an extension of social justice. Seed sovereignty can repair historical injustices that have affected and displaced Indigenous peoples, while also reinforcing political autonomy against colonial exploitation (Hoover 2017). Seeds are the cultural legacy of Indigenous peoples and should be treated as kin, coexisting along with the Indigenous nations that propagated, respected, and maintained them (Hill 2017). Indigenous seed sovereignty is an important part of Indigenous self-determination because it allows tribes to reconnect with their traditional life ways. Food is an integral part of any culture's identity and without revitalization Pawnee culture is threatened.



Fig. 1 Eagle Corn – (Courtesy of Pawnee Seed Preservation Project)

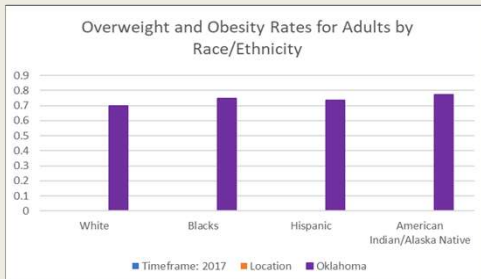


Fig. 2 Obesity Rates in Oklahoma – 2017
Kaiser Family Foundation analysis of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)'s Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) 2013-2017 Survey Results. (<http://www.cdc.gov/bfrss/index.html>)

Poverty and Food Insecurity

- As a group 1 out of 4 NA/AN are Food Insecure
- Indigenous communities have a poverty rate of 25.4% compared to the U.S. poverty rate of 12.3%
- 1 in 3 Native American children live in poverty
- Roughly 40% of Indigenous students attend high poverty schools compared to 8% of White students
- The median income for Native American households is roughly 30k less than the median income for White households

Food sources in Pawnee Jurisdiction

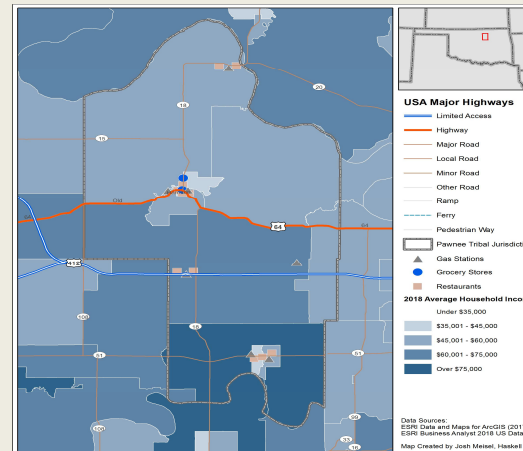


Fig. 3 Map of Pawnee Nation jurisdiction and places to get food.



Fig. 4 Painted like a horse beans – (Courtesy of Pawnee Seed Preservation Project)

Akitaru Food Assessment

The Pawnee Nation conducted a food sovereignty assessment in 2017 and found that roughly 72% of the 154 community members surveyed viewed diabetes as a health concern for themselves or their families. The survey assesses the barriers to eating healthier. When studying the community's interest, in local and traditional foods, 88% would like to see traditional corn grown, 74% expressed interest in learning more about traditional food, and 66% are aware of the ongoing Pawnee Seed Preservation effort. Interviewees expressed some form of interest in farming and agriculture (62%) but an overwhelming 86% expressed interest in the tribe growing its own food. Roughly half of the survey respondents listed the price of food and vegetables as the main barrier toward healthier lifestyles. Three out of four survey respondents reported eating less than one fruit and one vegetable per day. The information gathered through the Pawnee Nation Food Assessment verifies the necessity for food security guidelines to be established within the community. In addition to establishing nutritional goals at the community level, individual health education should be prioritized. Figure 2 shows that adult Oklahomans are classified as overweight/obese. Figure 3 represents where food can be purchased in the Pawnee Nation jurisdiction and the average household income.

Analysis

Eagle Corn to the Pawnee has and always will be more than food. The Pawnee people are intrinsically tied to their food sources but through settler-colonialism our connections to food are warped. Reviving traditional Pawnee Eagle corn reinforces our tribal sovereignty and strengthens our community by providing healthy, culturally important foods. Addressing the information gathered in my community, it is clear the tribal people also recognize the importance of traditional diets. Officially establishing a traditional food program as a sovereign nation, increasing health education through nutrition and health classes, and getting the youth involved are all important directions to take in addressing food security. Rematriating Eagle Corn ensures the Pawnee cultural landscape continues in perpetuity.

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7. "Pawnee Nation Food Sovereignty Assessment." 2017. Pawnee Nation of Oklahoma, November.
8. Fig. 3. Map shows places to get food in Pawnee Nation jurisdiction, as well as average income for the area.
9. Fig. 2. Kaiser Family Foundation analysis of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)'s Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) 2013-2017 Survey Results. (<http://www.cdc.gov/bfrss/index.html>)

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