



UNIVERSITY OF  
ARKANSAS®

*Putting Tribal Sovereignty in Food Sovereignty*

**Reflections on Developing Tribal Food and Ag Systems:  
Where to Start and How to Keep Going**

**January 27, 2021**

# Indigenous Food and Agriculture Initiative



## Our Founding

- Established in the Univ. of Arkansas School of Law in 2013 by:
  - Vice-Chancellor Stacy Leeds; and
  - Founding Director Janie Simms Hipp

## Our Mission

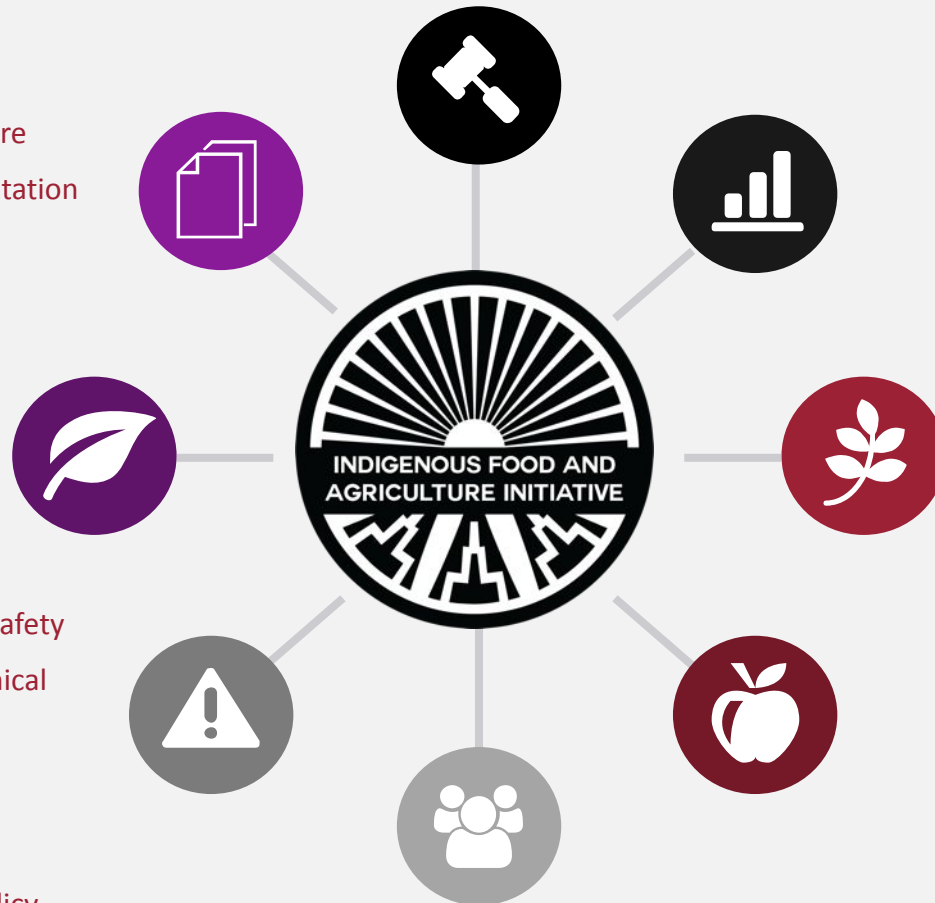
Enhance health and wellness in tribal communities by advancing healthy food systems, diversified economic development, and cultural food traditions in Indian Country.

We provide strategic legal analysis, policy research, and educational resources to empower Indian Country through food sovereignty, agriculture, and economic development.



# Our Work in Indian Country

- ◆ **Model Tribal Food and Agriculture Code**  
Comprehensive set of food and agriculture laws for review, adoption, and implementation by tribes
- ◆ **Native Farm Bill Coalition**  
Research partner for the largest-ever coordinated effort in Indian Country around federal food, agriculture, and nutrition policy
- ◆ **Native Food Safety**  
Native American Tribal Center for Food Safety  
Outreach, Education, Training, and Technical Assistance
- ◆ **Native Youth in Food and Agriculture Leadership Summit**  
Food and agricultural production and policy skills-development leadership summit for Indigenous youth



- ◆ **Cultivating Tribal Food Sovereignty**  
Facilitating agricultural production through tribal food sovereignty
- ◆ **Food and Agriculture 'Scaling Up'**  
Agricultural production tools and economic forecast models to help build strong Tribal food businesses and food systems
- ◆ **Tribal Hemp**  
Policy research and analysis of industrial hemp production
- ◆ **Food Security and Access**  
Development of educational resources and research for child nutrition and food access programs in Indian Country



# What is a Food System?

- Tribal Food Systems
- External Influences
- Reclaiming influence in the system through tribal government interventions





# Historical Context of Indigenous Food Systems



- Pre-Contact Foods and Harvests
- Post-Contact conditions and influence
  - Competition for resources
  - Encroachment
  - Reduction of accessible land base
  - Commodification of food resources
- Historic Federal Indian Policy Implications in food access

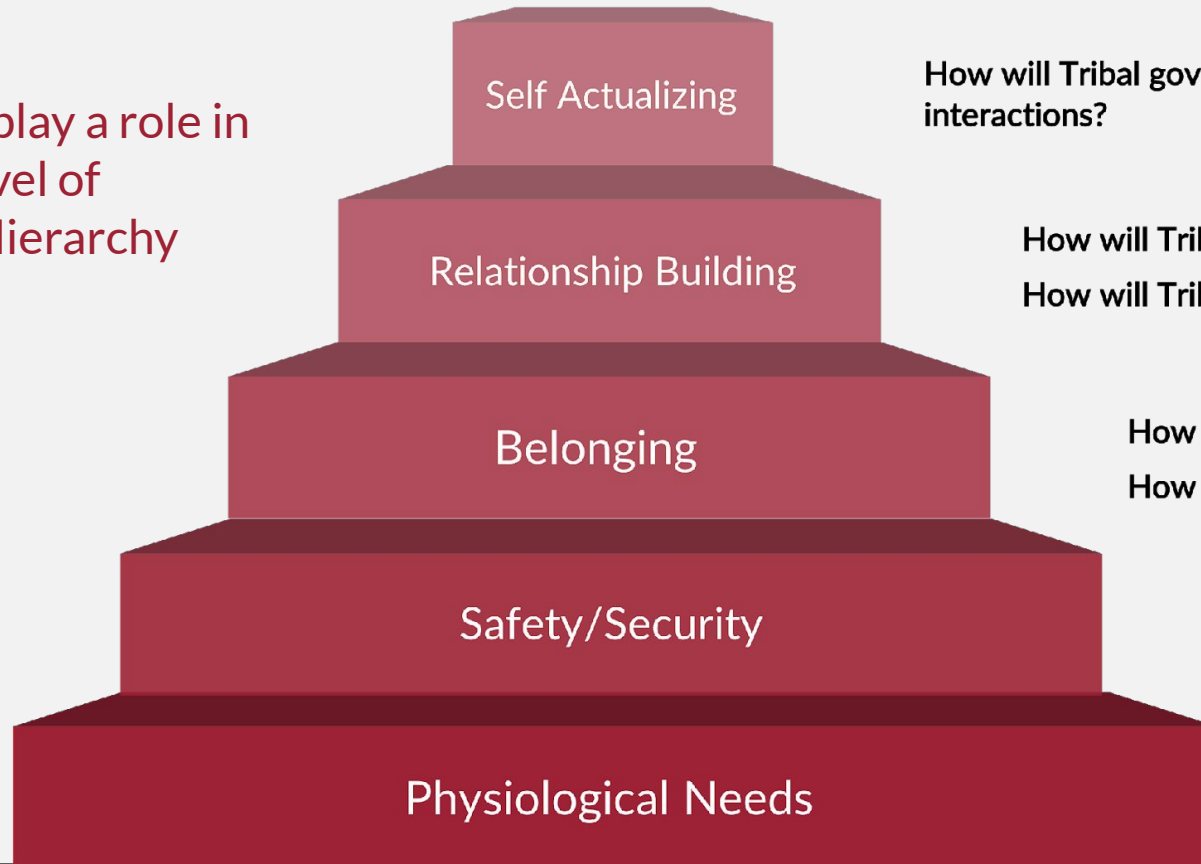
# Current Status of Indigenous Food Systems



- Reliance/Dependence
  - Federal Nutrition Programs
  - Non-Native retailers and distributors
- Food Deserts
- Limited access to nutritious, culturally relevant foods
- Limited sharing of cultural food stuffs knowledge

# Self-Actualization in Food Sovereignty

Governments play a role in each level of Maslow's Hierarchy



How will Tribal government regulate these interactions?

How will Tribal government leverage its resources?  
How will Tribal governments build partnerships?

How can Tribal citizens "buy in" to solutions?  
How will Tribal government engage its citizens?

How does the gov. respond to emergencies?  
How do Tribal citizens find employment?

How are needs provided for?  
Directly? Indirectly?

**Tribal Departments of Agriculture can provide a centralized resource for providing technical assistance, direct services, and building connections with external partners.**



# How to Intervene?

- Review Gaps/Needs
- Decide on Goals
- Collect Information
- Determine Program Creation of Expansion
- Adopt Necessary Code





# Tribally-Specific Needs and Issues

1. Food Deserts/Lack of Retail Groceries
2. Need for local tribal production agriculture/tribal producers
3. Need for expanded existing operations
4. Need to increase market shares through value-added components
5. Deficient market access/undeveloped or underdeveloped markets
6. Lacking Infrastructure/underproductive lands/natural resources in need of conservation
7. Unreliable Supply Chains



# Setting Goals

Goals for developing tribal food systems could include:

- Feeding Our People
- Encouraging Production
- Generating Revenue
- Offset Costs for Other Operations
- Occupy Regulatory Space
- Put Land into Production
- Access and/or Create Market Opportunities
- Create/Preserve Institutional and Cultural Knowledge



# Use of Existing Resources

## Build from what you have

- Facilities
- Regular gatherings/events
- Information Technology
- Production Facilities
- Land Base
- Existing Staff
- Knowledge



# Determine Program Creation or Expansion

## EXISTING PROGRAMS

- Cost to Expand
- Funding or Programmatic Restraints
- Coordination with other programs
- Staffing needs
- Infrastructure
- Self Administration

## NEW PROGRAMS

- Leadership from ideation to implementation
- Existing examples or models
- Funding
- Coordination with other programs
- Staffing needs
- Infrastructure
- Organization







## Muscogee (Creek) Nation ("Mvskoke")

Muscogee (Creek) Nation ("Mvskoke") has a strong history of tribal agriculture including cattle operations brought from the homelands through removal and modern era agricultural extension partnerships. Existing agricultural programs in the Department of Interior Affairs were reorganized under a new Division of Agricultural and Natural Resources in 2016 pursuant to legislation.

The current Director of the Division, Trenton Kisee, oversees the following:

- Creek Nation farm and cattle ranch operations
- Agricultural Youth Development Program
- Fencing
- Wildlife
- Natural Resources Management
- Storm Shelter Program
- Looped Square Meat Processing Facility (currently under construction)



Kisee supervises 5 full time employees. The Division has also hosted college interns and youth workers through the Summer Youth Program. Additional farm labor is sourced through a staffing company held by the tribe's business arm, Muscogee Nation Business Enterprises (MNBE).



Division programs interface with additional tribal programs that touch on components of agriculture, food and land management like Realty Land Services, Environmental Services, GIS and the Muscogee (Creek) Nation Conservation Commission which is an independent agency tasked with serving tribal citizens' conservation needs.



The Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources is funded through grants, self-governance fund allocations, tribal fund allocations and enterprise revenue.

Under Muscogee (Creek) Nation Code, the agribusiness enterprises are to be revenue generating and thereby, self-sustaining.

This is an example of a codified goal of a tribal agricultural program. Through these different sources of funding, Kisee and his team are able to achieve their goal of growth and expand the knowledge of agriculture tribal members and youth. For example, the Division was able to send students to Washington D.C. in the summer of 2019 to learn more about agriculture and its role in government in Indian Country after receiving a grant. The Division has also increased its outreach. Through the Ag Youth Development Program, an All-Indian Livestock Show is hosted annually. Shooting sport offerings have been added to youth programming in addition to support for 4H and FFA competitions. The ranch also has begun hosting an "Open House" for elected officials and staff to view facilities and operation improvements, take a tour of the grounds and share a meal with Division staff.

# Tribal Government Focused Materials

## Case Study

- Muscogee (Creek) Nation Division of Agriculture Case Study reflects the programmatic organization and operation of the agriculture programs housed within the division. Features include:
  1. Historical context
  2. Date of Creation
  3. Director
  4. Employees
  5. Funding Sources
  6. Goals
- This case study is intended to be an example to when tribes are considering developing their own tribal Departments of Agriculture.





## Menominee Indian Tribe of Wisconsin (Kaeyas Mamaceqtawak)

In 2018, the Menominee Indian Tribe of Wisconsin (Kaeyas Mamaceqtawak) created the Menominee Department of Agriculture and Food Systems, directed by Mr. Gary Besaw. The department works closely with the tribal administration, planner, and grant writer, to seek grant funding offered by a variety of organizations. Menominee currently has a 5-year grant with the University of Wisconsin to create a renewed and culturally vibrant healthy food system.

The tribe has experienced community health challenges, and in order address nutrition-related health issues Menominee has implemented a Food Distribution Program under the department. The program offers:



Healthy Food



Food Education



Training

The department also seeks to diversify operations on leased lands by pursuing policy changes that would allow:

- bee hives, chicken coops and gardens;
- build a larger commercial kitchen for tribal citizen access and economic benefit;
- and merge traditional and modern practices to further support improved access to nutritious foods and health equity.

### “ Food is medicine

Gary Besaw expresses the intent behind the program: “Food is medicine.” Mr. Besaw also reflects that agriculture and food systems management shouldn’t be a top-down approach, as the land belongs to all 9,000 Menominee members who should have input and responsibility.

Future goals include creating training and infrastructure for non-native agriculturists to allow better communication between the tribe and external partners; it is important for people and organizations working with Menominee “to learn values, language, customs” of the tribe like prioritizing health over economic interests.

Additional department goals include working to write policy and develop legal infrastructure, pursue the creation of a tribal land grant college, and ensuring Menominee’s interests are represented regarding issues for the next iteration of the Farm Bill. Ultimately, Menominee hopes to push USDA and Congress to receive the same treatment that states or territories receive for funding agricultural endeavors and legal issues. Mr. Besaw strongly recommends that other tribes look into forming their own Department of Agricultural and Food Services, stating that “there are a lot of resources and tribes willing to help.”

# Tribal Government Focused Materials

## Case Study

- Menominee Indian Tribe of Wisconsin Department of Agriculture and Food Systems Case Study reflects the programmatic organization and operation of the agriculture programs housed within the division. Features include:
  1. Date of Creation
  2. Intent Behind Creation
  3. Director
  4. Funding Sources
  5. Operational Activities
  6. Goals
- This case study is intended to be an example to when tribes are considering developing their own tribal Departments of Agriculture.







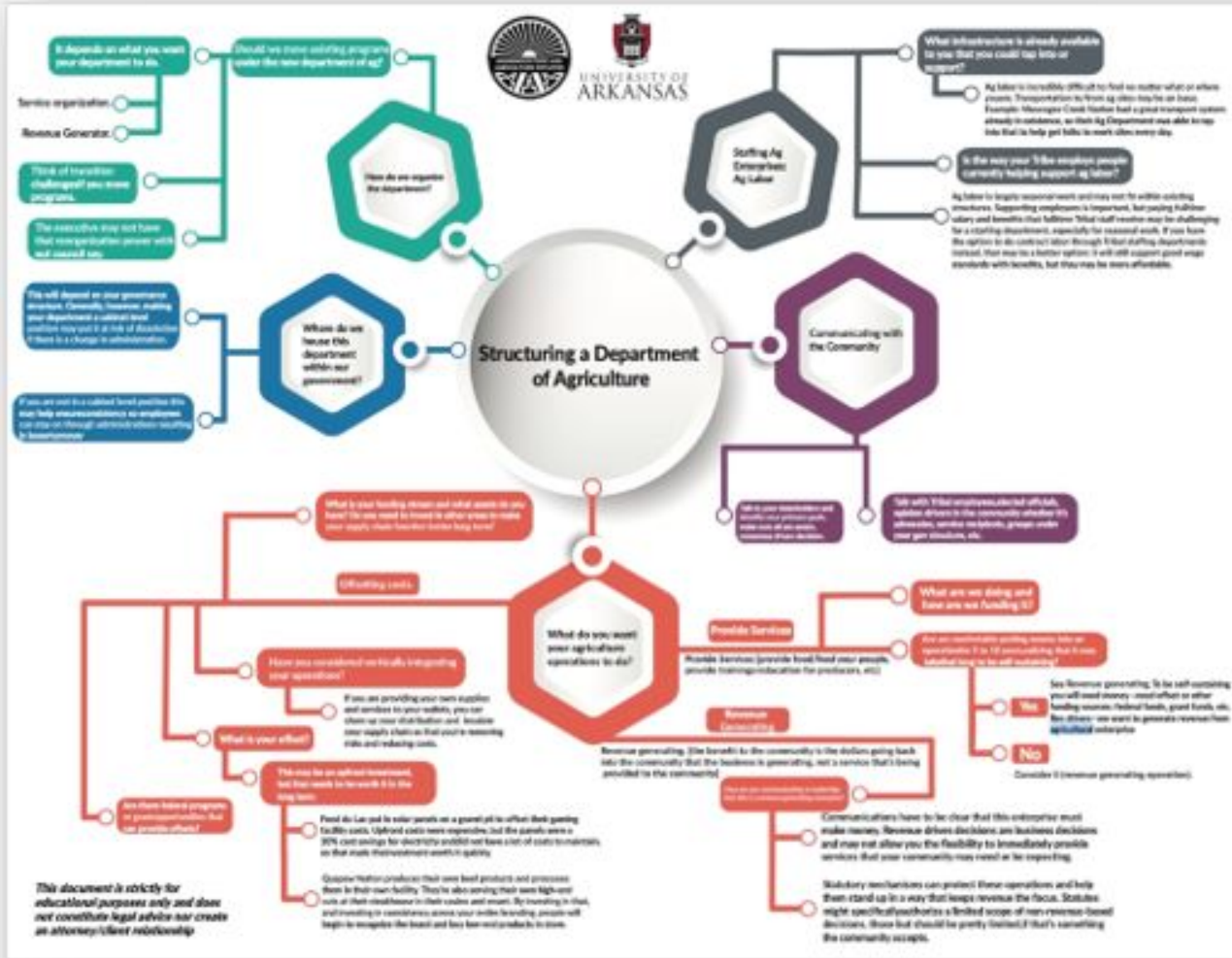
# Tribal Government Focused Materials

## Mind Map for Decision Making

This mind map reflects some of the common questions when undertaking the creation of a tribal department of agriculture. Considerations include:

1. Staffing
2. Communication from Community
3. Goal Setting and Analysis
4. Organization/Structure

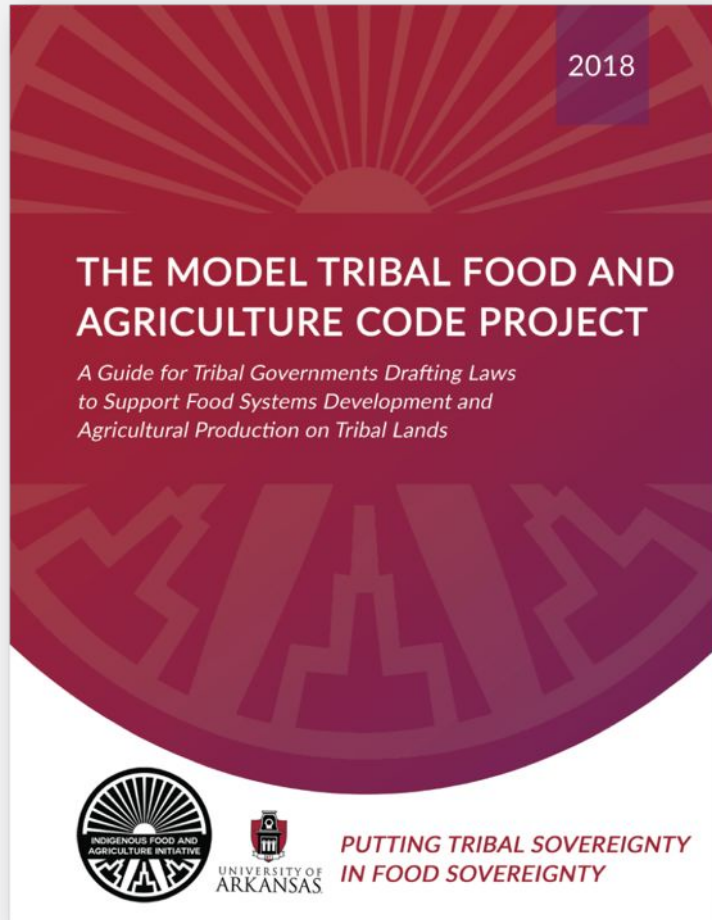
Walking through some of the branches of this chart will assist in determining which considerations and decisions will shape the tribal department of agriculture according to the specifics of each tribe.







# Model Tribal Food and Agriculture Code



- Project supported by the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger, AguaFund, Inc., Farm Credit, and NoVo Foundation
- Developed by IFAI attorneys along with key external partners
  - Intertribal Agriculture Council, Columbia River Intertribal Fish Commission, Public Health Law Center, Tribal governments

[www.tribalfoodcode.com](http://www.tribalfoodcode.com)





# Incorporating Justice Initiatives in Food and Ag Systems



- Fit for employment, peri or post-justice system contact
- Foster Youth employment position set asides
- Community Service for Diversionary programs
  - Food Service
  - Cultivation
  - Production location maintenance/upkeep
- DOJ funded Reintegration Initiatives
  - Labor opportunities
  - Skill development
  - Scaffolded transitions



# How IFAI Can Help

- Planning
- Goal Setting
- Funding opportunity information
- Legislative support for tribal code development, education, advocacy
- Organizational development
- Staff profiles/skill sets
  - Attorneys
  - Federal Experience
  - Tribal Experience
  - Food and Ag Program Expertise
  - Policy Information and Research







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