

Report urges more Tribal control over food systems to improve health

By Mallory Black, Native Health News Alliance

SAN DIEGO – The way food is produced, accessed and funded on Tribal lands must be overhauled to combat the obesity and diabetes epidemics plaguing American Indians, according to a recent report.

Feeding Ourselves, a report commissioned by the American Heart Association, analyzed American Indian and Alaska Native food systems and resulting health disparities and found that American Indians are twice as likely as the rest of the U.S. population to develop a nutrition-related health problem.

More than 80 percent of American Indian adults are overweight or obese, according to the Indian Health Clinic Reporting System. Four-year-old American Indian children have twice the obesity of their white counterparts, according to a Robert Wood Johnson Foundation study.

The report found that most Tribal lands are in food deserts, areas that lack access to healthy food. It detailed the historical and economic factors that have broken down the American Indian food system.

“American Indians and Alaska Natives since time immemorial have relied on our traditional foods, or First Foods, to sustain us,” said Brian Cladoosby, president of the National Congress of American Indians in Washington, D.C. “The ability of Indian Country to feed itself with healthy, local and traditional foods is not only a critical part of a strong Tribal community, it’s vital to Tribal sovereignty.”

American Indians in the United States have never fully recovered from being separated from Native food sources and

subsequent federal government food programs, according to the report.

Improving the food system must also factor the loss of culture and poverty, as well as sedentary lifestyles.

One solution is for American Indians to grow food on Tribal lands and sell it to the federal government as part of federal feeding programs, said Janie Hipp, an author of the report and director of the Indigenous Food and Agriculture Initiative at the University of Arkansas School of Law in Fayetteville.

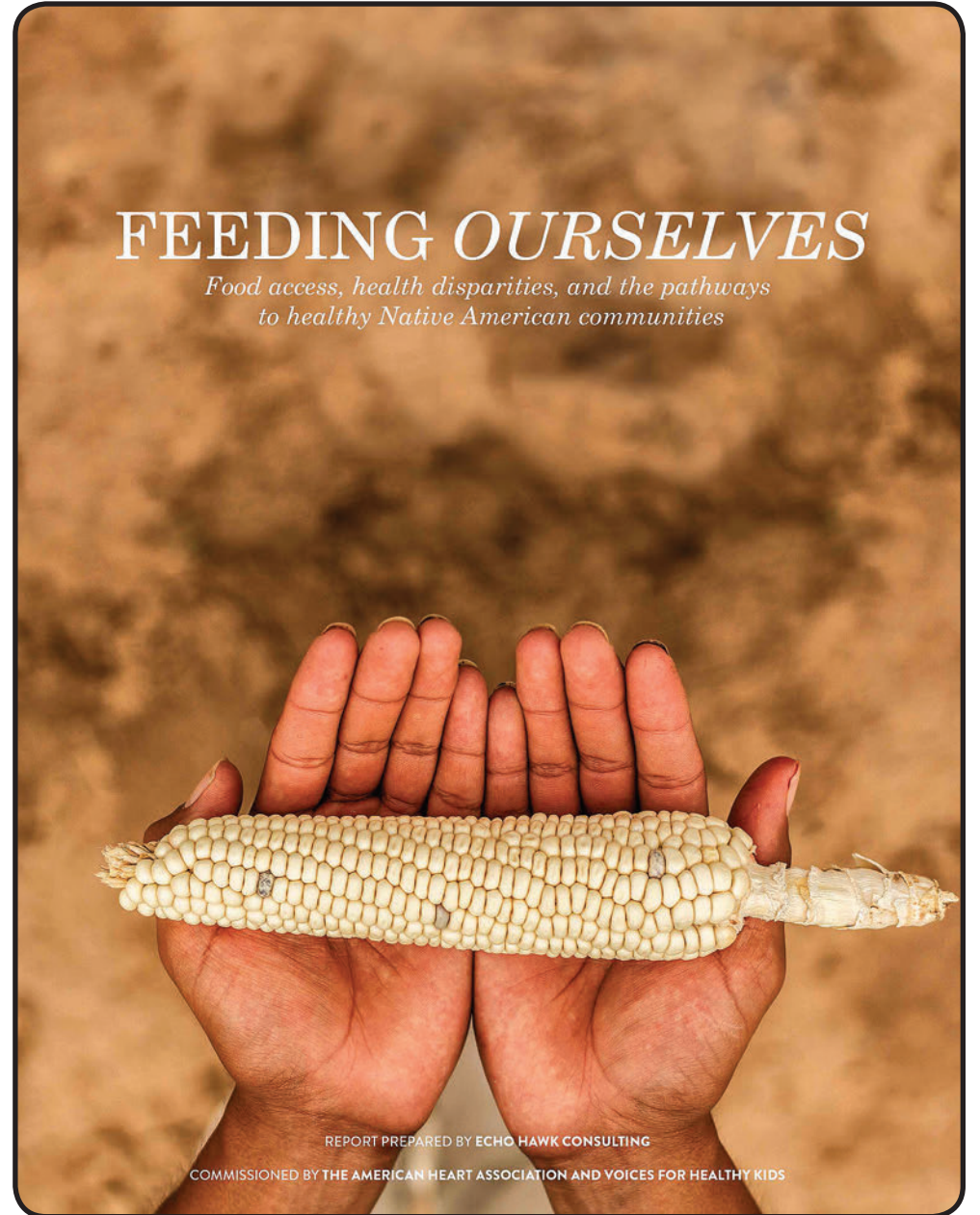
“We could use those lands to combat hunger, keep food local and alleviate hunger for Tribal members regionally,” Hipp said. “When you start to think of the potential of that, it gets very exciting.”

The report also calls for more Tribal control over the American Indian food system, incentives for buying healthy foods and programs funded by the federal government and foundations to educate and enable American Indians to make improvements.

Public health experts say a lack of data has prevented effective solutions.

Unless something changes, Native people will be continually left out of the conversations and strategies to address these issues, said Michael Roberts, president of the First Nations Development Institute.

This story is part of an occasional series about the health impact of access to healthy foods and safe places to be active. Mallory Black’s reporting was undertaken for Voices for Healthy Kids, a joint initiative of the American Heart Association and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.



Courtesy photo

Feeding Ourselves, a report commissioned by the American Heart Association, looks at health disparities in American Indian and Alaska Native communities.

For more information about the Siletz Tribe, please visit ctsi.nsn.us.

CEDARR

Community Efforts Demonstrating the Ability to Rebuild and Restore

Mission Statement

We will utilize resources to prevent the use of alcohol and other drugs, delinquency and violence; we will seek to reduce the barriers to treatment and support those who choose abstinence.

Nov. 4 • Noon

Siletz Community Health Clinic
200 Gwee-Shut Road, Siletz

Siletz Tribal Behavioral Health Programs

Prevention, Outpatient Treatment, and Women’s and Men’s Transitional

Siletz: 800-600-5599 or 541-444-8286
Eugene: 541-484-4234

Salem: 503-390-9494
Portland: 503-238-1512

Narcotics Anonymous Toll-Free Help Line – 877-233-4287

For information on Alcoholics Anonymous: aa-oregon.org

FIREWOOD

AREA

OPEN

Permits required

Logsdan Road (next to USDA)

Open to all Tribal members

**Obtain permits from
Natural Resources Department**