

Run to the Rogue 2023 Update

This year, R2R will take place
October 13th, 14th & 15th

This change is to avoid cancelations
due to wildfire season.

We look forward to seeing you for
Run to the Rogue in October!

Siletz Tribal Veterans

For information and assistance
from Tony Molina, Tribal Veteran
Representative, call 541-270-0569
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For information about the Siletz Tribe, visit our website at www.ctsi.nsn.us.

Vital foods: Smell, taste, texture contribute to nutritional benefits, food vitality

By Nancy Ludwig, MS, RDN, LD, Head
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What attributes do you look for when you buy produce or fresh food? When I buy produce, I'm looking for the most vital food. Vital is hard to describe in words, however, even though I believe I can sense it. This month, I want to explore the concept of vitality and vital foods as well as growing practices that support vitality.

I offer information for families in my role as consultant nutritionist to Siletz Tribal Head Start.

Let's start with some definitions:

Vital: 1. Absolutely necessary or important; essential. 2. Full of energy; lively.

Vitality: 1. The state of being strong and active; energy. 2. The power giving continuance of life, present in all living things. 3. Energy and strength.

Vital signs in health: Doctors measure vital signs, like body temperature, heart rate, respiratory rate, blood pressure and oxygen saturation to understand how a body is functioning and to detect and monitor health issues.

How can we apply the concepts of vital, vitality and vital signs to our food? What are the vital signs of our food and how can we notice or measure vitality?

With so much summer abundance, I invite you to wonder and explore, with each food encountered, how and where you notice vitality. What does it look like? How does it feel when you experience it? In what situations do you notice vitality? This may be clear to you or it may seem strange. I encourage this topic as a family conversation at the dinner table, grocery store, farmers market or in the garden.

I enjoy farmers markets where I can sense the food before purchasing. I grow some of my food and I also shop at grocery stores. Buying food online hasn't appealed to me because there is something I want to experience before I select an item, particularly produce.

What do you notice and what is important to you when selecting your food items? Is it visual? Is it the colors, the texture, the way it smells? For me, much of it starts with the visual, yet some of it, I feel,

For example, if it's lettuce, it might be the shade of green, the variegated tones of red and green, or the watery crispness in the leaves. Sometimes I smell it.

While at home in the garden or at the farmers market, I can taste it. This exercise might be similar with a piece of fresh fruit, yet the experience would be different. For me, smell and texture are very important for fruit.

Over the course of my life and nutrition career, I have learned to see "vitality" as a predictor of food quality and the benefits it has to offer. Vitality isn't easy to measure in the lab. I see vitality as ancient truth or knowing.

I believe vitality includes nutritional benefits, even if we cannot prove increased nutrient levels. The divide between evidence-based science and traditional approaches is highlighted by the concept of vitality, which can be observed, but not clearly measured, within the current limitations of science.

I see vitality as a relevant nutrition concept, despite the lag of science. Scientific findings are generally last, not first. Scientific methods attempt to confirm truth or find correlation.

When modern culture dismisses years of Indigenous observation and looks only to evidence-based science, I believe this reveals a lack of understanding of the limitations of science. The natural world is more complex than science can tease out with its methods.

Trained in science myself, I see its role and its limitations. Right now, with health as our goal, let's go a bit deeper.

With my interests in growing food and my time spent in the organic movement as an inspector for organic certification, I've noticed that some of the methods emphasize vitality. Biodynamic agriculture is one of those approaches. This integrated system was founded by Rudolf Steiner nearly 100 years ago. It works with the rhythms and cycles of nature and the cosmos as a system to support life and vitality.

At the opposite end of the range is modern chemical agriculture and the goal of maximum production. This approach tends to stress or deplete the system and balance of the soil.

Organic is another approach that spans a wide range within the extremes, depending on the emphasis on holistic systems, beyond what is allowed and not allowed under the rules for certification.

I recently read an interview with Gaby Gonzalez in *Biodynamics*, a publication of the Biodynamic Demeter Alliance (*Biodynamics* Summer 2022 #302). In this article she shared her experience as a third generation Mexican farmer.

She had watched her grandfather grow food in natural ways that included healing people with plants and animals. Then when her father took over the farm, he thought the modern ways he learned were superior. After five years of industrial chemical production, however, her father and his nine brothers decided to sell the ranch.

Gaby, knowing the advantages and disadvantages of each approach, entered into the world of organic agriculture to learn, to read and to practice. While in a composting course 15 years later, she discovered biodynamics, which filled in some missing pieces for her.

She began to understand the importance of biodynamics in life where plants were not the only factor to consider for high quality production. Also important is the soil, animals, elements, environment and cosmos – everything that occurs around us that allows us to be alive.

Within the interview, I was delighted with this question: "What is the connection between biodynamics and traditional Indigenous agriculture?" Gaby explained that they share a basic cosmovision, or worldview, an approach that acknowledges a connection with the whole.

She explained that in her tradition there are certain plants or animals that are considered as deities. The people are able to maintain a connection with the sacred beyond the concept of minor rank that humans give to a simple plant or a simple animal.

These beings, by becoming food and medicine, keep us alive within the sacred aspect of the intangible and our relationship with the whole. As human beings, whether we express it or not, whether we agree or not, we all know, on some level,

this wisdom also exists inside of us. This Indigenous worldview, discipline and philosophy of how human beings work with nature is shared in biodynamics.

To be clear, agriculture per se is not natural; it has been created by humans and technified. Techniques have evolved over time to meet the needs of various peoples, times, cultures and places. The word "agriculture" lacks culture in reality, which is what gives meaning to the connection between the Indigenous worldview and biodynamics.

The culture of life is recognized as being something bigger than we are, something we must honor with practices and processes that support life. In the same way, Indigenous cultures have their rhythms of planting corn and beans, using wise and intimate ways of working with each crop.

They are constantly observing, feeling and understanding the natural processes through which these sacred plants pass and that keep them alive. This allows them to visualize, to sense what works and what doesn't in order to revitalize their crops over time. Through this deep relating with the land, Indigenous peoples become resilient and independent. Modern-day agriculture does not value these practices.

The possibilities of establishing a relationship with one's environment are profound, which gives one what is necessary to restore it and support it to cultivate more vigor, more life. This connection is our biggest evolutionary responsibility.

We are a part of the earth and we must earn our place. If we decide to put ourselves first before anything else in nature, we lose our connection to the whole. Vitality arises from this connection to the whole.

Vitality is a term I believe is critical as we move forward with our roles, connecting with the whole and finding health.

Siletz Tribal Head Start offers nutritional support at no cost to Head Start families. If you have nutrition concerns about your Head Start child or want to discuss family nutrition concerns, please contact your teacher or the director and ask for a phone call with the nutritionist.