



## Guest Editorial

# **From bitter to sweet: Continuing the conversation on Indigenous food sovereignty through sharing stories, engaging communities, and embracing culture**

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Food for us comes from our relatives, whether they have wings or fins or roots...that is how we consider food. Food has a culture. It has history. It has stories. It has relationships that tie us to our food.

-Winona LaDuke, 2012

The desire to undertake a special issue on Indigenous Food arose during a conversation that took place between the co-editors following a panel on the same topic at the annual conference of the Native American Indigenous Studies Association in 2015. The panel contained a mixture of conversations that focused on the meanings and relationships of Indigenous peoples with land and food; the efforts and importance of re-knowing and re-defining those relationships through stories centred around community and family; and the ways in which settler colonialism operates to undermine Indigenous food sovereignty at both the structural and epistemological levels.

As Indigenous and settler academics we sought works that spoke to Indigenous foodways and practices in their vastness, while also traversing multiple geographies and spaces (urban and rural, northern and southern, land and water). We also looked for pieces that explored Indigenous foodways and diverse worldviews and epistemologies; incorporated different land management activities or strategies; featured the many patterns and practices of survival, resistance, and resurgence; combined Indigenous and Western food systems and practices; and encompassed the imposition of colonial and corporate policy and governmentality.

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The call for papers to *Canadian Food Studies* was well received, and served as an important measure of how rich and diverse scholarship in the field has become. Submissions ranged in content from explorations of the meanings and operationalization of Indigenous Food Sovereignty (IFS) by communities and Nations, the implications of climate change on food access and harvesting and the work of communities to establish priorities and best practices, to the insidiousness of settler colonialism. Indeed, it is a welcome situation where Dawn Morrison's seminal work on Indigenous Food Sovereignty (Morrison, 2011) is iconic rather than isolated and singular. The contributors for this issue come from a diverse range of disciplinary backgrounds ranging from public health, anthropology, nutrition, to Indigenous Studies and employ and draw on a broad range of methodologies.

Significantly, the editors and guest editors of the special issue wanted to illuminate Indigenous food issues and practices in a way that meaningfully incorporated the voices and perspectives of Indigenous peoples and that also extended these considerations to include Indigenous methodologies like storywork, the importance of situating self and culture, and reflexive praxis (Absolon & Willett, 2005; Graveline, 2000; Hart, 2010; Kovach, 2010; Archibald, 2008). It is essential that academia, and by extension academic publishing, be more inclusive of Indigenous methodologies and accept and adopt different ways of writing and thinking about issues and topics that diverge from the dominant and colonial framework. The decolonizing process has to be about more than just articles written by Indigenous scholars, but acknowledging and incorporating Indigenous methodologies in a meaningful manner that is not tokenistic. Relegating pieces that adopt such methodologies to commentaries, perspectives, or narratives unworthy of peer review imposes and privileges a certain type of knowledge and way of doing things that perpetuates colonial paradigms. Drawing on the eloquent words of Tabitha Robin Martens' piece in this issue, we must see that the "relationships that need to be cultivated should include gratefulness. The land, the sun, the sky, and moon and stars and everything connected within and around that are what gives us life. Life deserves respect. It deserves a moment of your time, a moment of your heart, to say thank you. The relationships that need to be cultivated must include looking inward, offering outward: kindness, respect, honour." Following Martens' advice will enable us to move forward in a good way. We appreciate the hard work and efforts of the journal editorial team at *Canadian Food Studies* to ensure that this special issue came to fruition, and their openness to including a variety of submission types and viewpoints.

In particular, the issue seeks to draw attention to works that explore Indigenous Food Sovereignty and highlights community perspectives through the explicit inclusion of Indigenous people and their organizations into the research process. Jaime Cidro, Tabitha Robin Martens, Lynelle Zahayko, and Herenia Lawrences's article entitled "First Foods as Indigenous Food Sovereignty: Country Food and Breastfeeding Practices in a First Nations Community in Manitoba" is a great example of this praxis in action. While involved in a different but related research project, community members and researchers noticed significant and important themes emerging from conversations on dental caries that required further exploration. Thus, in concert with community members, Cidro et al. explored the often overlooked role that infant feeding

practices and traditions play in IFS. Conventional discussion of IFS regularly fail to consider the role and place of children in the reclamation of IFS, and instead focus principally on adult participation in land and water based harvesting activities. The authors encourage us to consider the embodied nature of IFS and to see first foods and breast feeding as “examples of Indigenous food sovereignty, and part of a living culture.” Notably, this piece shows us how community-led research is organic and shaped by the needs and interests of community members; often leading to unexpected and important insights into other interconnected matters.

Continuing with research in Manitoba, the article “Access and affordability of ‘healthy’ foods in northern Manitoba? The need for Indigenous food sovereignty” by Mengistu Wendimu, Annette Desmarais, and Tabitha Robin Martens examines the availability and affordability of healthy foods in 15 First Nations communities in northern Manitoba and seven non-First Nations urban centres. Through the collection of food costs in 37 stores and six focus groups, Wendimu and colleagues consider the implications of higher food prices for individuals and communities. They found that lack of access to an all-weather road significantly influences food prices and that despite the Nutrition North Canada subsidy, many healthy foods remain unaffordable, with limited availability of healthy foods in First Nations communities in northern Manitoba that are significantly higher in cost than in Winnipeg or non-First Nations urban centers. The authors stress the importance of access to traditional food as critical for food security and for conversations beyond food security with “the need for a more substantial and profound transformation that includes decolonizing food systems and building Indigenous food sovereignty.”

The “En’owkin Centre Breastfeeding Art Expo” review by Karen Graham, Rhonda Camille, and Tracey Kim Bonneau shows the beauty of breastfeeding through an exhibition of six one-of-a-kind community art projects by Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists in British Columbia. The aim of the art expo is to increase awareness of the benefits of breastfeeding as well as build understanding and support for breastfeeding across cultures, families, ages, and genders. The larger Breastfeeding Art Expo is an exhibition of 15 large community art projects and 65 independent artworks celebrating the benefits of breastfeeding. Graham, Camille, and Kim Bonneau walk us through the En’owkin Expo as it features a stunning selection of six Indigenous art pieces including plaster casts, photographs, quilting, drawing, digital illustration, and painting.

“Healthy Roots: Sharing Stories Rooted in Haudenosaunee Knowledge to Grow Indigenous Foodways and Promote Well-Being,” by Kelly Gordon, Hannah Neufeld, and Adrienne Lickers, traces a community based initiative with the Haudenosaunee that used language to center, define, and inspire program objectives. Entsisewata’kari:teke (Mohawk) and Esa:do:gwe: (Cayuga) meaning “you will become healthy again” encouraged community members to undertake a 90-day challenge that integrated traditional foods and activities while fostering interconnectedness. The initiative focused on preparing and consuming only those foods available on Turtle Island prior to the arrival of settlers. In doing so the program, for the

community, fostered culture pride and emphasized the importance of re-knowing and relearning the ways of their ancestors in ways that made sense in a contemporary context.

The concept of re-knowing leads us to Tabitha Robin Martens' article, "Reflections: Indigenous Food, Culture, and Relationships." Martens' work is extremely important and brings together many of the themes raised in other articles included in this special issue. Of particular importance is the strength and resilience of community and family and the need to connect and draw on those strengths in order to identify how and where we need to move forward. As Martens advises us to consider as we "venture into the world of Indigenous food- the colonial history and traumas, the ceremonies and beauty, the destruction to the land and every other thread to this spider web of conversation- we must acknowledge that we, too, only know a tiny particulate of sand." Each article in this collection serves as a tiny particulate of sand that moves us forward to see and understand the many patterns and practices of survival, resistance, and resurgence of Indigenous peoples and Nations (Simpson, 2011).

"Toward Anti-Colonial Food Policy in Canada? (Im)Possibilities within the Settler State" by Lauren Kepkiewicz and Sarah Rotz encourage readers to consider critically the relationship that the current settler food movement has with Indigenous people and Nations. In particular, the authors draw on the contradictions evident between the development of a national food policy (a process currently underway) and IFS. Kepkiewicz and Rotz critique the ways in which settlers participate in the food movement and caution how the development of a national food policy will most likely serve to "reify colonial structures and relationships." The authors challenge us to consider the language we employ when discussing these issues because language carries with it power and meaning and words and phrases like "inclusion" and "giving voice" prevent meaningful relationship building that is rooted in equity, respect, and kindness.

Working with community members in the Inuvialuit Settlement Region (ISR), Northwest Territories, Tiff-Annie Kenny, Myriam Fillion, Sonia Wesche, Julian MacLean, and Hing Man Chan tried to prioritize existing food security initiatives to provide a basis for developing a comprehensive food security strategy for the ISR. Using the major determinants of food security (availability, access, quality, and utilization) the authors examine the three interrelated dimensions of the Inuit food system: country food, market food, and locally-produced food. The authors identified a total of 30 initiatives within the ISR. The article illuminates that food (in)security is a complex and multi-faced issue and despite the many programs that exist the situation remains a public health crisis suggesting that incorporating community input and priorities is essential for addressing the problem. This article offers a possible framework for program evaluation and complementarity.

The article by Andrew Spring entitled "Climate Change, Community Capitals, and Food Security: Building a More Sustainable Food System in a Northern Canadian Boreal Community," uses a participatory action research methodology to look the Ka'a'gee Tu First Nation (KTFN) located in Kakisa, NWT to identify threats to the community's food system. Identifying these threats will help with the development of community-based solutions that build on existing strengths and foster the resiliency and transformation of food systems to climate

change. By identifying transformative projects that were important to enhancing food availability, the community is actively defining their own food system. Climate change has communities deeply concerned about their continued ability to harvest traditional foods from their territories and to address these growing challenges, and band council and community members used their knowledge and expertise in concert with researchers to determine their own priorities and solutions.

Moving south in the geographic area that came to be known as Canada, the next article, “Exploring Homelessness and a Re-Emerging Food System,” looks at the ways in which Indigenous people experience homelessness in Prince George, British Columbia but continue to employ the practices of IFS. Julia Russell and Margot Parkes found that people expressed Indigenous values of caring, cooperation, and respect despite the precarity of their housing situations. Indeed, Russell and Parkes found that “those participants who were sharing food, were motivated by being able to provide food for others, and felt empowered by this through respect and collaboration. Participants that were growing food were actively reinserting themselves within their food system.” These collective/community practices of caring and sharing stand in stark contrast to the emergency services offered by the settler state which are highly individualized and parsimonious.

In “Aboriginal Isn’t Just About What Was Before, It’s What’s Happening Now: Perspectives of Indigenous Peoples on their Contemporary Diets” Lise Luppens and Elaine Power complicate our understandings of “traditional foods” and the landscape of cultural adaptation and fusion. Luppens and Powers spoke with community members about the significance, meanings, and values of the foods they ate and found that concepts of what constituted “tradition” were much more complicated and often included foods from other cultures. Indeed, this fusion can be seen in the adoption of foods from other cultures into feasting and potlatch ceremonies, two community-based practices that serve essential roles in ensuring community cohesion and well-being. Largely traditional foods were identified as “those that are familiar and meaningful to their families and community.” Clearly, further work on the ways in which food and foodways have changed over time needs to be undertaken.

Finally, we conclude with an expression of gratitude to everyone who contributed to this special issue and recognize that we are scattered across the country in the territories of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people. We are here to share some of the work and stories that have emerged through colonialism.

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