



Editorial

Working with all nations and all relatives in feeding the future: Pathways to decolonial food governance and sustainable planetary health

Shaileshkumar Shukla*

University of Winnipeg; ORCID: [0000-0001-6003-8551](https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6003-8551)

“Our forests are made up of trees. Much like the people who populate this Earth, each person and each tree is different. Different colours, different faiths, different beliefs; they come from different places. But like the forests of our islands... when troubles come to us, they come to us all.” And if we are going to withstand the winds of those troubles, like the forests we must intertwine our roots so strongly that these winds of our troubles cannot blow us over.”

- Chief Skidegate Lewis Collinson (as quoted in Cameron, et al., 2021, 10).

Most unprecedented changes and challenges to planetary health that include earth and human health, are attributed to short-sighted policies and systemic barriers. Standardized and top-down approaches of development that often dominate through limited, persuasive, and extractive eurocentric perspectives often dominate in

Turtle Island and most colonial regions of the world. Food and food-sustaining relatives (land, water, plants, animals, micro-habitats) which are central to planetary health, are negatively impacted and threatened by these human pressures, which have severe implications for our ability to feed current and future generations (FAO et al., 2023; Planetary Health Alliance, n.d.). Many international agencies (including those affiliated with the United Nations), food systems scholars, grassroots organizations, and community members are grappling with the very imminent challenges of addressing the alarmingly high level of food insecurity in Turtle Island (Council of Canadian Academics, 2014; Fieldhouse & Thompson, 2012) and the global South (Kuhnlein et al., 2013).

Indigenous food systems in Canada and across the globe have experienced colonial histories of dispossession and attempted acculturation (e.g., modern agro-centric

*Corresponding author: s.shukla@uwinnipeg.ca

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DOI: [10.15353/cfs-rcea.v11i3.717](https://doi.org/10.15353/cfs-rcea.v11i3.717)

ISSN: 2292-3071

research and development bias), compelling local communities to become disconnected from traditional land-based practices that were once foundational to their survival (Corntassel & Bryce, 2012). Recently, Indigenous food systems in Canada (Settee & Shukla, 2020) and globally (Kuhnlein et al., 2009 & 2013) have been explored and promoted to address complex challenges of achieving food security and create an enabling space for local voices, Indigenous knowledge systems, and participatory governance by contributing to sustainable planetary health (FAO et al., 2023) that will also secure present and future feeding. Therefore, reconnection, renewal, and revitalization of Indigenous knowledges and perspectives through small-scale, community-governed, and collaborative approaches are emerging as a strong beacon of hope in sustaining and nourishing human and planetary health futures.

The contributions in this issue vehemently demonstrate how pervasive and destructive the dominant, eurocentric, top-down and colonial approaches to food system governance and policies have been. The most common lesson that emerges from these issues is that despite experiencing the ill effects of colonial legacies, Indigenous food systems persist and, in many cases, prevail through systematic barriers to meet the vision for feeding the present and future. Some papers in this issue also chronicle the experiences of the emerging participatory governance (mostly between Indigenous communities and settlers in Turtle Island) and highlight important lessons (both common and unique) and starting points in understanding, designing, and evaluating similar participatory governance approaches.

While many Indigenous-settler partnership initiatives have evolved to counteract the eurocentric ideologies and structures that govern our food systems, they are still deeply entrenched in settler colonialism. Visitors to Turtle Island like me, even with a similar experience of

colonial legacy, must make serious efforts to move beyond just good intentions and genuinely engage in Indigenous led “ethical space” (a term coined by Cree Elder and scholar William Ermine) even if this work is difficult (Kerr et al., 2024). This requires the re-positioning of power and privileges to the advantage of Indigenous partners and their wisdom by “flipping the script” (Deranger et al., 2022). Settlers will have to be ready to re-envision and rewrite the script altogether with perspectives, wisdom and terms as set by Indigenous partners. This should be the first right step in honouring the treaty promises and consistent with the kind of strength-based approach (FNICG, 2020) that is being embraced and advocated by many governments, nations, non-government organizations, scholars, and grassroots community members working with BIPOC communities in recent times (Guinto et al., 2024).

There is evidence-based support for reintroducing Indigenous food systems (old food) as a new healthy alternative for modern times (Turner & Leigh, 2020; FAO et al., 2023), which also empowers Indigenous communities toward sustainable self-determination and Indigenous food resurgence (Corntassel & Bryce, 2012). Revitalization and restoration of Indigenous food systems are not only challenging the dominant oppressive and capitalist food governance but also advocating for decolonization through the renewal of relationships of diverse cultures and nations. Feeding the future requires a diverse array of rainbows—all nations and communities who will work through mutual respect, reciprocity, and reverence for the land, planet, and all relatives (Shukla, Settee and Lincoln, Forthcoming). Promoting intersectoral pedagogies with all (but particularly youth) who will actively engage in

three-eyed seeing¹ (Environment and Climate Change Canada, 2023) will augment Indigenous food system resurgence and Planetary health sustainability.

Many Indigenous teachings and cultural teachings around the world, in their original instructions, recommend seeking and restoring balance in all actions (doing, thinking, and speaking) while caring for seven generations of all relatives. It is not just our requirement and right, but a sacred responsibility that we inherited

and want to pass down to future generations—which will have enormous impacts on feeding the present and future: “I am all of my relatives, and all of my relatives are me” (Indigenous Language Institute, 2024).

Acknowledgements: I would like to thank Ms. Neepin Cook, Indigenous Studies work-study student, University of Winnipeg, for her editorial assistance.

Shailesh Shukla: As a settler person of colour and first-generation immigrant to Treaty-1 Territory, Shailesh’s connection to sustainable food systems and planetary health are rooted in the East Indian Sanatana spiritual traditions and his lifelong passion for Indigenous knowledge systems. For more than two decades, he has worked with Indigenous communities, including his doctoral and postdoctoral work on Indigenous knowledge systems and sustainability, this completed in close collaboration with First Nations and Indigenous communities from Turtle Island and South Asia. He co-edited *Indigenous Food Systems: Concepts, Cases and Conversations* with Dr Priscilla Settee and is currently working with both Settee and Dr. Noa Lincoln as lead co-editor of *Indigenous Insights for Planetary Health and Sustainable Food Systems: Learning from International Case Studies*, (forthcoming, summer 2025).

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¹ Three-eyed seeing approach is coined by Chief Indigenous Science advisor at Environment and Climate Change Canada. It means that nature or planet health should be understood through western sciences, Indigenous ways of knowing and voices of relatives with which we have relationships. Since Indigenous communities have been living with nature from time immemorial, they have developed deep knowledges and understanding of these important other relatives in nature (land, water, mountains, and all aspects of biodiversity), and therefore their voice becomes a critical third eye.

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