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10TH ANNUAL  
Native CDFI Capital Access Convening



# CDFIs in Advancing Food Sovereignty: A Blackfeet Case Study

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# Learning objectives

- Explore key findings from a 2024 Blackfeet Nation foods systems study and strategies for Native CDFIs to enhance food sovereignty
- Learn about the Food System Transition Index and its role in assessing broader influences on food systems
- Discuss the importance of population-specific data to inform decision making



# Outline for today

- Project background
- Defining terms
- Existing tools
- Community-based research
- Recommendations
- Next steps





# Project background



# Definition of terms

Food  
security

Food  
system

Food  
sovereignty

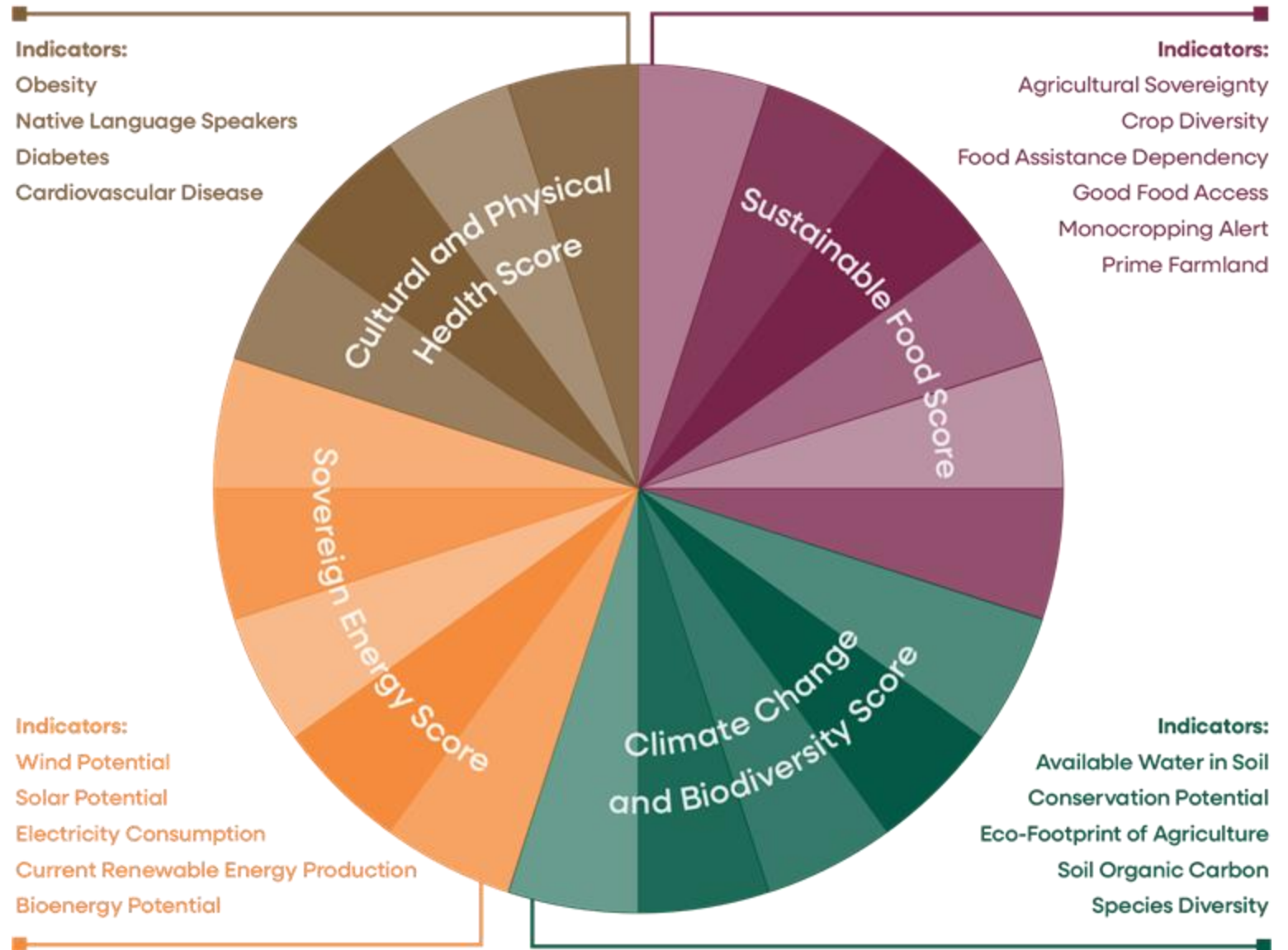
Healthy  
eating





# Existing tools: Food-System Transition Index (FSTI)

Food-System Transition Index Indicators and Subscores



# Existing tools: FSTI example

## Blackfeet Reservation FSTI rank and score



Sustainable Food Score	3.305
Sovereign Energy Score	1.389

Cultural and Physical Health Score	1.587
Climate Change and Biodiversity Score	3.209



# Existing tools: FSTI example

Sustainable Food Score					
Agriculture Sovereignty	Crop Diversity	Food Assistance Dependency	Good Food Access	Monocropping Alert	Prime Farmland
0.479	0.881	0.802	0.099	0.933	0.111

Sovereign Energy Score				
Bioenergy Potential	Current Renewable Energy Production	Electricity Consumption	Solar Potential	Wind Potential
No data available	No data available	0.823	0.471	0.095

Cultural and Physical Health Score			
Cardiovascular Disease	Diabetes	Native Language Speakers	Obesity
0.679	0.486	0.033	0.389

Climate Change and Biodiversity Score				
Available Water in Soil	Conservation Potential	Eco-Footprint of Agriculture	Soil Organic Carbon	Species Diversity
0.48	0.779	0.999	0.202	0.749





# Existing tools: **USDA Food Dollar**



# Existing tools: **Economic Multiplier Effect**

- Describes how an initial change in spending or investing can lead to a larger change in the economy
- Happens when the initial change in spending creates income for others, which leads to more spending
- Cycle of spending continues



# Existing tools: Economic Multiplier Effect example

**Scenario for local spending: Amount spent on food items away from home: \$6,166,854**

% sold on reservation		1%	3%	5%
\$ sold on reservation		\$61,669	\$185,006	\$303,343
If revenue was spent locally (EME)	If 10% was spent locally	\$68,452	\$205,356	\$342,260
	If 20% was spent locally	\$77,086	\$231,257	\$385,428
	If 30% was spent locally	\$88,186	\$264,558	\$440,930





# Existing tools: Secondary data

- Vital statistics and gathered data on:
  - Population
  - Agriculture industry
  - Land
  - Health
  - Food and food security
  - livestock

## Food and food security:

**22%**

of households use  
food stamps/SNAP

**\$6,273**

= Average dollar  
amount spent on  
food for 1 year

Total amount spent  
on food in 1 year:

**\$18.4  
million**

**69%**

indicate some level  
of food insecurity

**56%**

meet the criteria for  
low or very low food  
security

# Community-based research: **The methods**

Community  
meal

Community  
survey

Key  
opinion  
leaders

Case  
studies



# Community-based research: Who participated?

## Key opinion leaders

*Participating in interviews*

**11** individuals representing

**9** organizations

## Community members

*Taking community-wide survey*

**71** individuals representing

**5** Blackfeet communities

## Community organizations and representatives

*Attending community meal*

**12** individuals representing

**6** communities and

**3** organizations

## External community organizations

*Relatives from whom we learned*

**6** organizations representing

**5** indigenous groups in

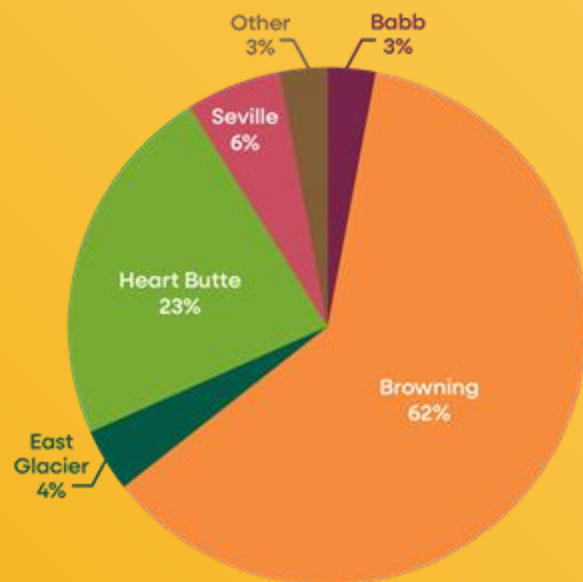
**4** US states



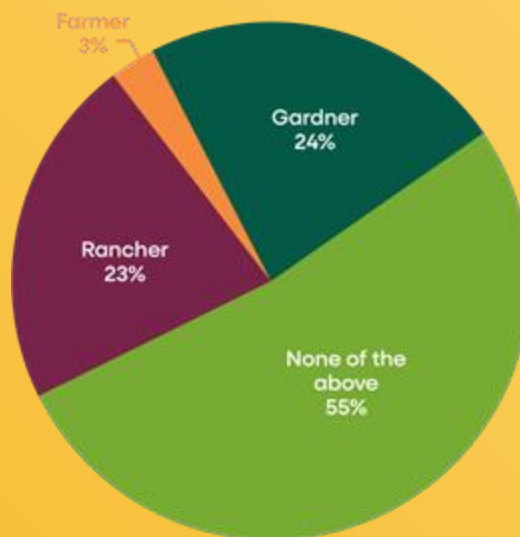


# Community-based research: Who participated?

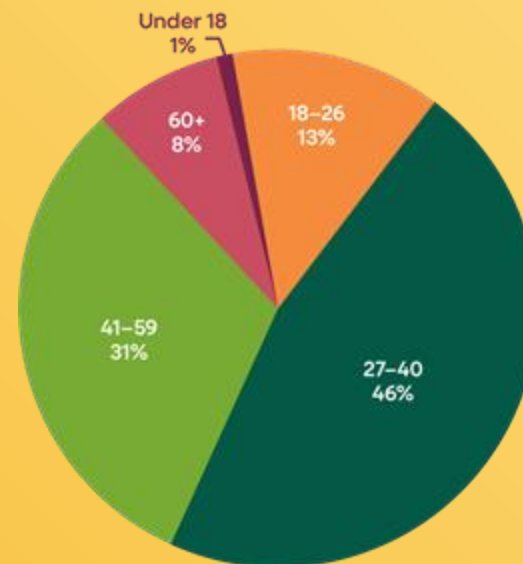
Participants by community



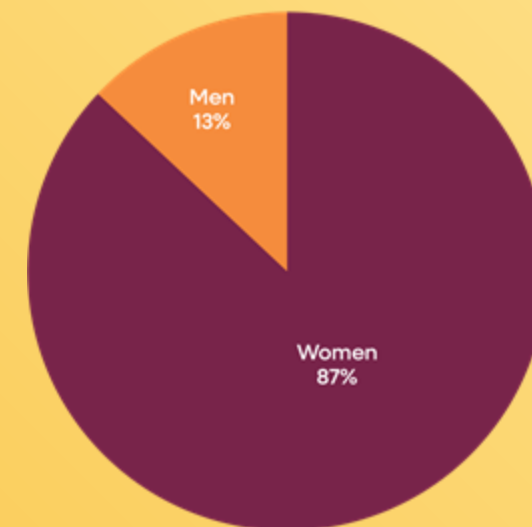
Producers in our community



Age of participants



Gender identity of participants



# Community-based research: Challenges



60%

of community members  
have difficulty providing  
healthy and fresh food  
options to their families



83%

of community members  
agree that buying healthy  
food is important to them



86%

agree that Blackfeet  
Nation should prioritize  
spending money  
on providing locally  
produced food



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“

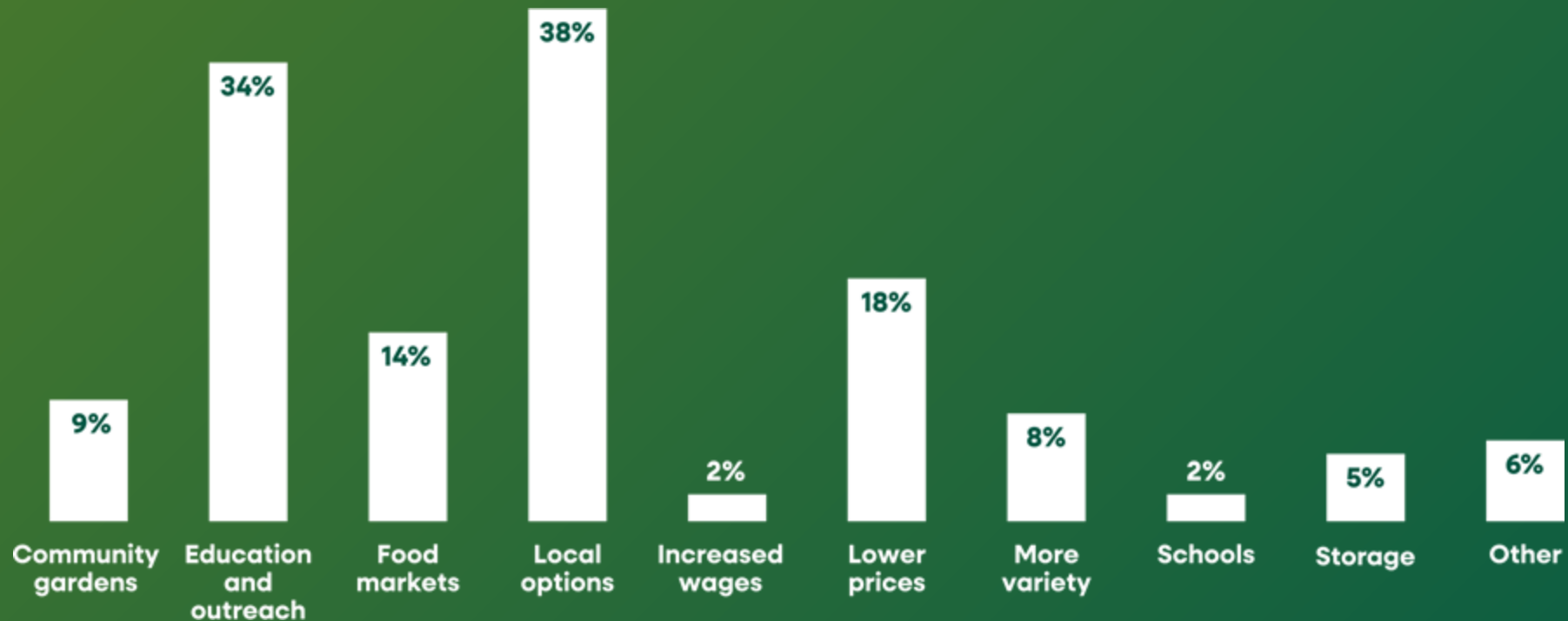
Very few locations offer healthy and affordable foods. Browning has two grocery stores that are technically the most affordable on the reservation. Most community members must drive to Browning for groceries, factoring in gas money spent, that leaves that much less money to spend on healthy foods. [On top of that], most processed foods are cheaper [and have a longer shelf life] than healthy foods.”

**–Heart Butte  
community member**



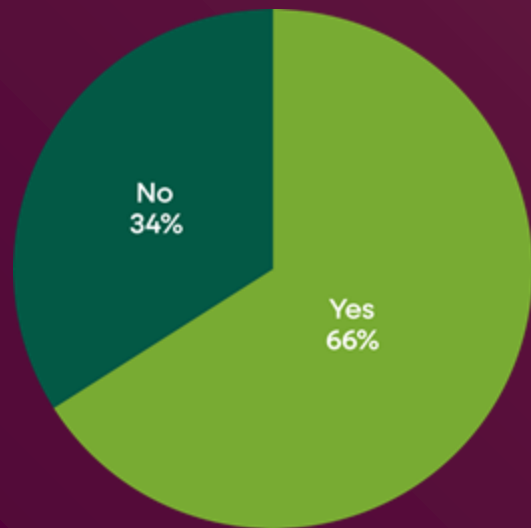
# Community-based research: What did we learn about the community?

Ways to increase amount of healthy and affordable foods in our communities



# Community-based research: What did we learn about the community?

Are you willing and able to spend more money on locally grown foods?



About how much extra money per week could you afford to spend on locally grown foods?



# Community-based research: **What did we learn about the community?**

- Outside of grocery stores and community initiatives, community members participate in other parts of the food system
- 3% of survey participants identified as a farmer
- Almost 25% of survey participants identified as ranchers and gardeners
- 12 of the 71 survey participants indicated interest in participating as food vendors in a local market





# Community-based research: What did we learn about the community?

Activity	Never	Sometimes	Winter	Spring	Summer	Fall
Gathering plants	36%	64%	4%	30%	54%	27%
Fishing	24%	76%	30%	37%	72%	21%
Hunting	27%	73%	43%	3%	0%	52%
Growing food	61%	39%	6%	25%	35%	9%
Raising animals	63%	37%	26%	32%	29%	31%
Average	42%	58%	22%	25%	38%	28%



# Community-based research: What did we learn about the community?

Want better access to ...	% that listed food item	Example of item listed, if any
Berries	7%	Blueberries, strawberries, raspberries, cranberries
Dairy	5%	Cheese, yogurts
Eggs	2%	
Fish	9%	Salmon, mackerel, sardines
Fruits	61%	Avocados, lemons, mangoes, tomatoes, watermelon
Grains	7%	Wild rice, whole grains, bread
Greens	9%	Spinach, kale, Swiss chard, lettuce
Herbs	5%	
Meats	18%	Locally born and raised livestock; wild game; grass-fed meats; bison, elk, and deer meats
Other	7%	Almond milk, kombucha, oil, healthier restaurant choices
Vegetables	66%	Asparagus, jalapenos, mushrooms, potatoes, squash, zucchini



CDFIs in Advancing  
FOOD SOVEREIGNTY  
A BLACKFEET CASE STUDY



# Community-based research: What did we learn about the community?

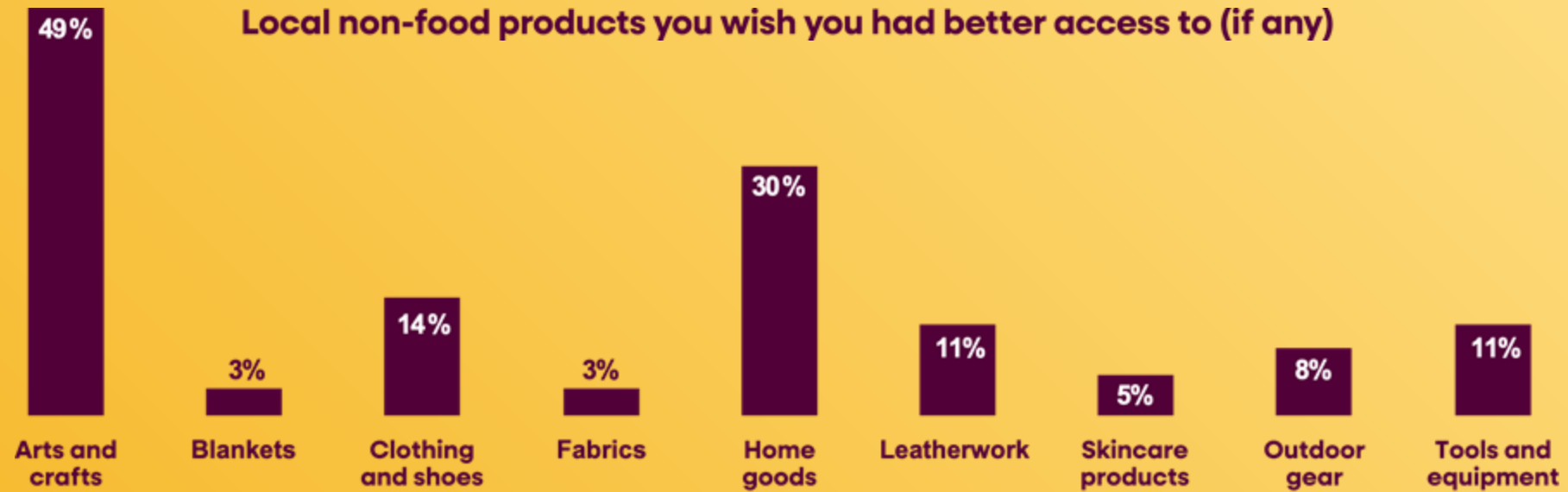
- Non-food items
  - 77% of survey participants expressed support for local non-food products as consumers
  - 13 of the 71 survey participants also indicated interest in being vendors of non-food items such as arts, crafts, and other homemade items



I would like to see a variety of things. I enjoy beadwork and painting a lot. I like leatherwork and see ideas that local talent come up with just by trying new things. We have a lot of talented people in our community."

**–Heart Butte  
community member**

# Community-based research: What did we learn about the community?





# Community-based research: **What did we learn about the community?**

## Future-market-specific



Food trucks  
and prepared  
meals



Activities  
for children



Traditional  
food  
preparation



# Community-based research: What did we learn about the community?

## Community partners

Program/ organization	Education	Food provision	Relationships with producers	Value-add
Blackfeet Buffalo Program				
Blackfeet Community College				
Blackfeet Food Distribution				
C+C Processing				
FAST Blackfeet				
Federal Food Assistance Programs				
Glacier Family Foods				
Indigikitchen				
People's Market				
Piikani Lodge Health Institute				

A bison stands on a grassy hill, facing right. The sky is blue with scattered white clouds. The bison has dark fur and a lighter, shaggy mane. The grass is green and slightly dry at the tips.

“

I believe that all the local entities need to work together even more to build a stronger unit. The local entities need [a say] and decision-making power. We need it in smaller hands. Producers need to be involved. And we need stronger working relationships as entities.”

**–Babb community member**

Work with vendors on how to eliminate their barriers (provide tables, require lower fees and deposits)  
Encourage minimal waste (food preservation or reuse, composting)  
Provide education and online resources around home gardens  
Work with day care centers to use bins as basins and grow areas for pollinators, etc.  
Provide free equipment rentals for red dirt wheels and low maintenance grow pollinators, etc.  
Provide free equipment

# Community-based research: What did we learn from our relatives?

- Hands-on programs
- Sustainable practices
- Education and partnerships
- Youth engagement
- Waste reduction





# Community-based research: **Opportunities and investments**

- Farmers markets
- Community-supported agriculture (CSA) boxes
- Renting and sharing resources (e.g. for value add)
- Incentives programs
- Local meat-processing facility
- Mobile food market
- Community gardens and farms
- Irrigation investment
- Renewable energy investment
- Updated Tribal Food Code



# Recommendations

Sixteen recommendations separated into 4 categories:

1. Capacity and reach
2. Relationships and outreach
3. Consumer interests
4. Beyond food



# Highlighted recommendations



- **Capacity and reach**

- **Resource assistance:** Consider small grants, loans, and technical assistance for food-related infrastructure and improvements
- **Engage young people in our food system:** Community and home gardens, cooking classes and demonstrations, partnerships with schools

- **Relationships and outreach**

- **Community alliance:** Cohesive effort to plan strategically and for mutual benefit

- **Beyond Food**

- **Multi-faceted approach:** Variety of smaller, targeted initiatives that can collectively contribute to a larger, more sustainable impact
- **Food business incubator:** Small-business loans and low-rent space while incentivizing the use of locally sourced foods and ingredients

# Conclusions

- The community is eager for better access to healthy, fresh, and local foods
- NACDC Financial Services is uniquely positioned to help facilitate and enhance food sovereignty







**Thank you!**  
Any questions?



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May 13-15, 2025