Growing Beyond Nutrition: How a Prison Garden Program Highlights the Potential of Shifting from Food Security to Food Sovereignty for Indigenous Peoples

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Abstract

Many Indigenous communities in Canada experience disproportionate rates of food insecurity and diet-related diseases impacted by historic and ongoing colonialism. Barriers to health and wellbeing associated with ongoing colonial processes also have resulted in inequities for Indigenous peoples within the criminal justice system. A prison garden program in British Columbia, Canada, attempts to address inmate rehabilitation and Indigenous community food insecurity by supporting incarcerated men to grow and subsequently donate organic produce to rural and remote Indigenous communities. Qualitative research undertaken to study program impacts shows that the focus on food security for Indigenous communities, while important, does not take into account wider contexts of colonialism and the importance of access to land, resources and rights inherent in food sovereignty. The study findings signal the limitations of programs and research that focus solely on food security for Indigenous peoples, and outlines how accounting for the colonial context can emphasize the critical role of Indigenous values, community strengths, and priorities for fostering food sovereignty and health.

Keywords

Food security; food sovereignty; Indigenous health; criminal justice programs; gardening; reciprocity; colonialism; strengths-based

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Introduction

Many Indigenous communities in Canada experience disproportionately high rates of food insecurity and correlated diet-related disease (Government of Canada and Health Canada 2007; British Columbia Provincial Health Officer 2009; Downs et al. 2009). Barriers to food security – sustainable physical, social, and economic access to the quantity and quality of foods that needed to meet nutritional needs (Edelman 2014; Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations 2015) - and other social determinants of health are linked to colonialism and have produced widespread obstacles to meaningful foods¹ for Indigenous peoples (British Columbia Provincial Health Officer 2009; Browne, Hayes & Gleeson 2014; Downs et al. 2009; Government of Canada and Health Canada 2007). These barriers include land dispossession, heavy regulation of subsistence activities, and forced reliance on wage labour and processed foods (Adelson, 1998; Kirmayer, Gone & Moses, 2014). Additional barriers to education and employment, including racism and stigmatization, have resulted in health and social inequities constituted through colonial systems that de-value the relational aspects of food.

A significant emphasis within health research, health promotion initiatives and food-based programming aims to address Indigenous food insecurity, and are largely focused on increasing access to food sources, which, while important, does not account for the Canadian colonial context. Scholarship focused on increasing food security in the face of what is often described as nutritional transitions and lost food traditions ignores purposeful and colonial attempts to sever community connections to land, culture and foodways, often resulting in programs and recommendations aimed at addressing individual dietary behaviours. Within many Indigenous contexts health and wellbeing requires not only nutrition, but cultural knowledges and their intergenerational transmission, and culturally-mediated and family-centered relationships and activities that surround the tending, gathering, preserving, preparing, and sharing of food (Adelson, 1998; Morrison, 2011). For many communities, (re)connection with ancestral foodways and systems holds potential not only to address food insecurity, but to provide the community cohesion, self-esteem, and wellness needed to redress disproportionate rates of social inequities such as under-employment and low educational attainment, which are, in turn, correlated with crime (Bagelman, Deveraux & Hartley 2016; Hand, Hanks & House 2012). While food security focuses primarily on dietary health, food sovereignty offers a holistic and relational conceptualization of wellbeing. Such a

¹The term *meaningful foods* is intended to acknowledge the dynamic and diverse food histories and foodways of Indigenous peoples, to avoid a prescriptive understanding of what is and is not ‘traditional’ or ‘cultural’, and to focus on food as political, social, relational and based in Indigenous rights, as opposed to cultural difference.

shift may, in turn, influence correlates of social and health inequities continuous with the criminal justice inequities experienced by Indigenous peoples (Adelson, 1998; Kelm, 1999).

The significance of Indigenous food sovereignty for diet-related health and holistic wellbeing are highlighted by a study that investigated impacts of federal prison garden program wherein incarcerated men in British Columbia (BC), Canada, grow and harvest organic produce that is donated to rural and remote T̓silhqot'in First Nation communities in BC. This study points to the limitations of focusing solely on food security when considering diet-related and holistic health for Indigenous peoples in Canada. The findings offer insights into how to expand the impacts of food security-based initiatives, and the importance of basing food-based health and social initiatives in the complex values, relationships and responsibilities inherent in food sovereignty and self-determination.

Background

Prior to colonization, Indigenous communities across Canada developed complex and meaningful foodways in diverse ecosystems, resulting in largely nutritious diets high in polyunsaturated fats and protein (Ministry of Health and Welfare 1994; Kelm 1999). Colonial encroachment confined communities to reserves, reducing physical access to food sources while increasing government regulation of subsistence activities. Gradually at first, and then with explicit force within residential schools and Indian hospitals², this “culinary imperialism” began to change food habits and preferences of Indigenous peoples (Kelm, 1999:37) through a systemic de-valuing of foodways and meanings (Adelson 2000; Grey and Patel 2014; Mosby and Galloway 2017).

Food security is an important aspect of health, however the meeting of basic nutritional needs is only one of many culturally and historically mediated factors that impact the appropriateness and meaningfulness of food and its impacts on Indigenous health and wellness (Elliott et al. 2012; Edelman 2014; Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations 2015). Food sovereignty, in contrast, is the *right* of individuals and communities to: nourishing, nutritious, and meaningful food, to produce these foods in environmentally and culturally sustaining ways, and to define and control ones' own food and agriculture systems (Wittman & Desmarais 2012). Food sovereignty for Indigenous peoples is “indistinguishable from the right to be Indigenous” (Morrison 2011; Grey and Patel 2014).

² Between 1880 and 1996, the Canadian residential school system forcibly removed Indigenous children from their communities. Government and church operated schools were intended to destroy cultural transmission and systemic racism made physical, emotional, spiritual and sexual abuse, as well as hunger and neglect, endemic (Kelm 1999; Milloy 1999; The Aboriginal Healing Foundation 2005). Indian hospitals operated in partnership with schools to control and punish hungry and ill children (Geddes 2017).

Colonial attempts to sever Indigenous relationships with ancestral foodways have impacted diet-related health, socio-economic wellbeing, and the correlates of crime. Most recently available rates of food insecurity for Indigenous peoples living off-reserve in Canada are at 33%, three times higher than the national average, and percentages rise to 75% in rural, remote, and northern communities (Fieldhouse & Thompson, 2012; Reading & Wien, 2009; Thompson et al., 2011; Van Den Berg & Custers, 2011); estimates place rates of food insecurity in reserve communities at 41% (Chan et al., 2011). Hunger and food insecurity have been linked to low educational attainment, barriers to sustainable and meaningful employment, and behavioural and mental health issues (Cook & Jeng 2015; Ferguson, Bovaird & Mueller 2007; Mosby & Galloway 2017; Silva et al. 2017), which are in turn linked with disproportionate rates of criminal justice system engagement (Dowden & Blanchette 1999; Perreault 2009; Sapers 2014). For Indigenous peoples, “the dining room table [is] every bit as much a site of cultural struggle as the classroom desk” (Milloy 1999, 275). Yet, despite historic and ongoing colonialism (Adelson, 1998; Kirmayer et al., 2014), many Indigenous communities continue to have rich and diverse meaningful foodways embedded in complex webs of relationships and values that connect the individual to community, history, and nature (Adelson, 1998). Additionally, communities have and continue to develop and engage in diverse community-based and –driven initiatives that link land-based learning, foodways and healing (Ballantyne 2014; Corntassel 2012; Kuhnlein et al. 2013; Radu, House & Pashagumskum 2014). A great deal of research on Indigenous diet-related health has focused on diabetes, obesity, and other outcomes of food insecurity (Downs et al. 2009; Mosby & Galloway 2017), and numerous initiatives have focused on improving food security for communities (Downs et al. 2009; Chan et al. 2017; Mercille, Receveur & Potvin 2012), with a particular focus on diet and exercise (Mercille, Receveur, & Potvin 2012; Rowley et al. 2000). Such programs and research rarely, if ever, engage with community priorities and strengths, overlooking the complex histories of colonialism, which continue to influence Indigenous foodways and health. This behavioural orientation to health promotion and food security continues despite evidence that community-driven initiatives better aligned with rights-based food sovereignty (Kuhnlein et al. 1989; Kuhnlein et al. 2013).

The federal prison garden in BC operates within this wider colonial context. The garden was founded in 2004 with the intention of reducing idle time by providing meaningful work for federally incarcerated men through the growing and donating of organic produce. Donated food is intended to address food insecurity in surrounding communities, aiming to provide crime prevention through addressing food as a social determinant of health and wellbeing. Spanning 7 ½ acres the garden produced 136,410 lbs of food during the 2015/16 season. Vegetables are donated to local organizations such as food banks, school lunch programs, homeless shelters and Indigenous communities. The donation of specific produce to the T̓silhqot’in First Nation operates within a larger federal prison employment program, wherein Indigenous and non-Indigenous men in federal custody across the Correctional Service of Canada’s Pacific Region build, grow, and create needed items such as furniture,

toys, clothing, and cultural items such as drums and rattles (Lang 2012; Brown, Varcoe, Taylor, Timler & Jackman 2017). The research reported here exists as a sub-study within this wider partnership context; the impacts of the wider partnership have been published elsewhere (Brown et al. 2017).

Methods

This research was ethnographic in design. Qualitative data was collected through interviews and participant observation focused on two sites: the prison garden and the men working there, and one of the six recipient T̓silhqot'in communities. Interviews were conducted with T̓silhqot'in community members (n=10), men working in the prison garden (n=10), and program stakeholders (n=5). Purposive sampling was used to invite individuals with personal experience and understanding of some component of the garden program to participate. Participant observation conducted within both the T̓silhqot'in community and the prison deepened understanding of the garden's impacts, contexts, challenges, and opportunities. The lead author conducted 3 weeks of fieldwork in the T̓silhqot'in community and 80 hours in the prison garden. Iterative thematic analysis was used to explore descriptive patterns and develop interpretive themes. Interviews were recorded, transcribed verbatim, anonymized and subsequently coded using NVivo software. Participant codes and pseudonyms were provided for each participant. Extensive field notes were taken to capture initial thoughts and insights, and this "narrative of events, behaviours, conversations, activities, interpretations, and explanations [...] help[ed] to create a portrayal of the soul and heart" (LeCompte & Schensul 1999, 17) of the garden, the people who worked there, and the community members who integrated donated food into their foodways. Participant observation opened up new avenues for data collection; for example, because donated vegetables were sometimes unfamiliar, data collection methods were expanded to include cooking workshops conducted in partnership with a community dietician from the T̓silhqot'in National Government (TNG). Feedback from community members participating in the workshops was integrated into ongoing analysis of program impacts.

Relationships

This study was conducted within the context of a broader prison-community partnership research program (Brown et al., 2017). A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was negotiated between the Work 2 Give Research team and the TNG. Ethics approval was received from the Correctional Service of Canada's Research Branch as amendments to pre-existing prison-community partnership research ethics approval, and through the University of British Columbia, Research Ethics Board. This study was undertaken with a theoretical and moral commitment to decolonizing and ethical research, and was founded on the principles of community-based and participatory research.

Results

The substantial benefits of working in the garden for the participating men were layered, deepening over the time and influenced by personal histories and contexts. The T̂silhqot̂in participants described the benefits of receiving produce as minimal; the distribution of vegetables was aimed at addressing food security, and was thus unable to redress the ongoing colonial context that impedes access to meaningful and culturally-mediated foods and foodways. The impacts of the prison garden on the men have been published elsewhere (Timler, Brown & Varcoe 2019); this paper focuses on the community setting. T̂silhqot̂in individuals understood the donated vegetables within the wider context of T̂silhqot̂in values surrounding foodways, highlighting that food is not only *nutritionally required*, but also based in *relationships* and, meaningfully grounded in *responsibility*. These three aspects of food sovereignty as they relate to the prison garden will be explored below.

Food as Nutritionally Required

The prison-community vegetable distribution process was aimed at improving food security. The T̂silhqot̂in community is rural and remote and experienced numerous barriers to accessing fresh produce, including a community store that exclusively sold processed foods. High gas prices and grocery costs meant many families drove to town infrequently and primarily bought non-perishable items, and those without vehicle access were reliant on others to access fresh food. The vegetables therefore met a community need, as one woman explained, “it’s really expensive. We can’t even buy lettuce anymore.” Unfortunately, distribution was not systematic and external distribution partners often decided mechanisms for delivery without insight into community needs. For some community members, receiving vegetables simply saved them a trip into town, whereas for others they “wouldn’t have had any vegetables” otherwise. Generally, the impact was minimal, with many participants describing their food (in)security as “same as usual” despite donated vegetables.

An initial lack of meaningful community input further truncated the impacts associated with distribution. Unfamiliar vegetables, such as varieties of squash, were often left in parking lots without any additional information; one woman explained that “we didn’t even know squash and stuff, we’re still in the learning stage.” Information about new food sources and proper storage to extend vegetable quality was not provided, despite expressed interest in learning. Community interest, paired with the community-based and participatory nature of this study, supported the development of community cooking workshops as part of this study. These workshops, conducted in partnership with the TNG, were well attended, and recipes and vegetable information sheets were created and distributed to support knowledge sharing. As one community leader explained after the first workshop: “now that they know what to do with it, I think they’ll be eating it [...] people, they’ve just never seen stuff like this.” To

optimize impact, vegetable distribution required community engagement and sustained feedback loops regarding community priorities.

Food as Relationship

The incarcerated men working in the prison garden were also able to directly donate to local organizations in close proximity. In contrast, the 500 km distance between the prison garden and the T̓silhqot'in communities, along with problematic distribution, impacted relationship development between the men and the community recipients. Volunteers provided delivery and a non-profit focused on restorative justice oversaw distribution; within this functional distribution context the relational nature of food was not realized. The majority of community members were unaware that the vegetables were grown by men in prison, however learning that added meaning; the majority of T̓silhqot'in people had personal connections with someone with lived incarceration experience. Community members understood the ways colonialism intertwined with economic vulnerability, barriers to education and criminal justice system engagement. Learning that gardening was available was meaningful, as individuals felt hopeful that similar programs were available for their friends and family in prison, providing opportunities for growth and healing; as one T̓silhqot'in man explained:

I know inmates, they're pretty good people when you talk to them [...] I don't know if they have people to care for them, out there in the real world. They're just humans themselves. And people when they go to jail, I guess they go to jail for a reason. And when they get there they probably don't feel right, but after a while they get into programs, gardening [...] they're there to learn too. (George)

This valuing of learning was reflected in the ways that many T̓silhqot'in people understood the men's work in the garden. The garden was not a charity, but an opportunity to heal: "it's good that they're in prison and into learning, and making themselves better." Additionally, community members understood the impact of gardening through their own land-based engagement:

They say [gardening is] a real healing thing. I mean anybody that's doing anything, whether it's gardening or anything, working or fishing, it takes the mind of you. You're doing something, and it makes you feel good inside. I think it's probably helping them heal in the prison, so I'm glad that they're doing it. (Carol)

Community members based their understanding in ancestral relationships with land; they saw the prison garden as an opportunity to continue learning, across prison walls. The vegetables represented a connection between the communities and the men, and both T̓silhqot'in people and the men expressed a desire to strengthen this connection through sharing of images, stories and recipes. By

focusing solely on food security these relationships were not nurtured within the program, reducing benefits for both the community and the incarcerated men.

Food as Responsibility

Finally, T̓silhqot'in community members envisioned ways to strengthen the program based on increasing responsibility. T̓silhqot'in contemporary foodways are inherently relational, for example, the first salmon of the year is gifted to someone to support ongoing reciprocity between the individual, community and natural world. Consequently, community members consistently resisted the label of passive recipient, instead offering suggestions on how to create and sustain T̓silhqot'in ownership and strengthen reciprocity with the men. One community leader described possibilities for increased involvement and autonomy, based on ongoing T̓silhqot'in resistance:

I mean we have drivers, we have whatever, the fuel- we have gas stations. I think anything's possible [...] we can make something happen. Right now we're doing negotiating with the, starting the negotiations with the federal government [based on the Supreme Court decision to grant land rights and title to the T̓silhqot'in Nation³], so put your list down [laughing]. (John)

Gardening was once widespread within the T̓silhqot'in Nation and communities were beginning to garden collectively again. However, significantly longer winters compared with the southern province restrict growing seasons and make crops more vulnerable to unexpected weather patterns, insects and other factors. People saw gardening as one means to ensure sustainable food sources given the increasing impacts of resource extraction and climate change on salmon runs and wild game. While climate change-driven erratic weather added additional barriers to sustainable gardening practices, relationships based in responsibility offered potential to account for not only nutrition, but also T̓silhqot'in priorities around climate change. As one T̓silhqot'in woman, who was working with a community-based economic development centre, explained:

This year was [the centre's] first year for the garden, so we're trial and error [...] if the guys in jails could even do a list of tips of gardening, like their tips and stuff, to help other people do their own gardens. That would be cool too, learning from their experience, they could tell people about how they did theirs [...] with changing climates and all that. (Ann)

³ On July 26, 2014, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled in favour of the T̓silhqot'in Nation, declaring land rights and title to over 1,700 square kilometers of ancestral territory (Supreme Court of Canada 2014); while not the entirety of ancestral T̓silhqot'in land, the case was precedent setting.

The community also understood the potential to harness the holistic benefits of gardening, ranging from productive use of time to learning to care for fragile plants in ways that could benefit community wellbeing:

[Some of our youth] are breaking into different cycles, and we're trying to stop it. Maybe if we had the guys from the jails do, you know, 'hey, I hear you're doing this and that, and this is where I am, [in prison], and this is where I started. You have a chance, right now, to turn your life around'. (John)

The community participants shared their investment in youth crime prevention and the potential of increasing engagement with the men. They recognized the shared histories between T̓silhqot'in communities and men in custody - whether Indigenous or not - and incarceration was understood as a manifestation of larger colonial structures. T̓silhqot'in community members saw themselves as active helpers, not recipients, and recognized the potential of the garden to support mutual responsibility:

Trying to get some kinda connection with [the men] and the younger people within the community [...] Anything you can pass on and share is always a good thing. If they're willing to come and learn [...] to teach on and pass on, and to be around people willing to help them. (Rose)

When asked how to strengthen and sustain the prison garden project community members focused on strengthening reciprocal learning. One man wished "they had a different kind of relationship with them, to be able to give something, to [help them] be proud of what they're doing." (Reference) Community members wanted to send smoked fish and meat to honour their ongoing relationship, increasing accountability and providing concrete ways to engender respect and healing. This commitment to relationships is ancestral; the garden project's one-sided donation model was at odds with T̓silhqot'in values of reciprocity, values they were committed to revitalizing:

It's sad, because long time ago everybody helped each other [...] we'd all get together as children and get together and [preserve salmon]. We'd put away a lot of salmon [...] The traditional way is getting lost because of the European way, but I wish I was still back in those days, instead of today. (Sharon)

Cooking Workshops

Cooking workshops were conducted within three T̓silhqot'in communities, in collaboration with the TNG community dietician, and timed to coincide with vegetable deliveries. Information on preparing and processing vegetables was provided and several nutritious and culturally-mediated dishes were prepared for free community lunches. Community feedback supported the development of vegetable

information sheets that included nutritional and storage information and a selection of recipes, and vegetable names were translated into Tšilhqot'in. These forms are now available alongside each delivery. Workshops were conducted to support community learning, as well as to nurture relationships with the men through sharing of information and images between the two groups.

Limitations

There are limitations to this study. The focus on one of Tšilhqot'in communities and the unique nature of the prison garden may impact the transferability of the findings to other contexts. However, while experiences of colonialism are diverse and varied, these experiences are grounded in shared histories of dispossession and racialization. Additionally, the history of academic colonialism and exploitative research on Indigenous communities may have limited participation. Attempts to address the impacts of history on research credibility included focusing on relationships and communication with community members, as well as implementing requested cooking workshops aimed to create and sustain mutual respect and reciprocity. All interviews with Tšilhqot'in participants were conducted in English and subsequent research using translation services would ensure that all interested were given opportunities to share the full spectrum of their knowledge.

Discussion

The prison garden highlights that, despite the nutritional value of the donated food, the prison garden must exist within relationships that create and sustain responsibilities towards other people to realize its full potential and align with Tšilhqot'in health and foodways. This study highlights that distributing vegetables from a prison garden without recognition of wider contexts truncated the meaning of food to mere nutrition. This focus on food security ignored colonial context, focusing on community hunger as opposed to strengths and values aligned with food sovereignty. Distribution did not connect the communities to the men, and the lack of information about specific vegetables limited potential community impacts, leaving the nascent and relational potential of the program to foster Tšilhqot'in health and wellbeing unrealized. For many Indigenous peoples, food security requires food sovereignty (Edelman 2014). Food sovereignty discourses aim to strengthen Indigenous communities through a range of strategies, including “respect for place and diversity, acceptance of difference, understanding the role of nature in production, human agency, equitable distribution of resources, dismantling asymmetrical power relations and building participatory democratic institutions” (Desmarais & Wittman 2014, p 1155). In this case, a food sovereignty approach could begin dismantling asymmetrical relationships between the prison, distribution partners and communities by shifting to a community-driven distribution model, drawing on Indigenous values and concepts of wellness, and creating and sustaining reciprocity between the men and communities.

Cooking workshops conducted within this study increased nutritional impact of donated vegetables by strengthening relationships. Images from the workshops were shared with the men and the ongoing sharing of pictures and thank you notes from the community is intended to strengthen relationships. While initially intended to increase community knowledge surrounding unfamiliar vegetables, ongoing community discussions following pilot workshops highlighted the need for community roundtables on food security and sovereignty. Community members were not interested in being told what to cook, but in taking part in community events where new knowledge was presented and incorporated into culturally appropriate and contextualized foodways.

Both the measurement of hunger in Indigenous communities and its solutions must stem from understandings of land and history, community strengths and values. Indigenous communities, when consulted, continue to highlight the importance of indigenous foods, foodways and food meanings for cultural wellbeing and community health and nutrition (Adelson 2000; Elliott et al. 2012; Morrison 2011; Mundel & Chapman 2010). T̓silhqot'in community members understood the potential benefit of the prison garden as an increasing connection with men in prison as a means to integrate new foodways and (re)engage with land, plants, and people in new and novel ways that support individual and community healing, particularly youth health and crime prevention. Sovereignty for Indigenous peoples is "infused with interconnected autonomy nurtured through relationship with land," (Kamal et al. 2015, p. 565) non-human beings, and community (Adelson, 2000; Kamal et al. 2015; Simpson, 2004). The integration of sovereignty into food security and diet-related health research and programming is particularly important given the increasingly devastating impacts of climate change, resource extraction the rising cost of store bought foods. Indigenous communities have and continue to subsist off diverse food sources, "they are hunters, gatherers, and fishers; they comb the beach, reap the hive, shepherd the flock, harvest on and in the water, and tend the forest as well as the field" (Grey and Patel 2014, p. 439). T̓silhqot'in communities saw gardening as a means to increase self-determination in the face of ongoing environmental degradation. It is this self-determination that is largely absent from food security literature that often positions Indigenous peoples as without agency, impacted by transitional forces that appear divorced from purposeful attempts at cultural genocide.

Community gardens in the Inga communities of Colombia grow meaningful Indigenous plant foods and medicines based, and the resulting plants and seeds are shared in community festivals and used to provide culturally appropriate school lunches (Chaparro 2013; Kuhnlein 2014). In Canada, the Nuxalk Food and Nutrition program in northern coastal British Columbia includes Elders (re)introducing Indigenous foodways, classes on budget-friendly grocery shopping, recipe booklets that integrate market foods with those harvested from the Nuxalk territory, and an ongoing advocating for more nutritious food to be available at local grocery stores (Kuhnlein et al. 1989; Kuhnlein et al. 2013). These programs highlight the possibilities of food sovereignty initiatives to explore community-based

solutions that encompass ancestral foodways and evolving traditions. Instead of focusing on food insecurity, community strengths and values can reinforce Indigenous “land-centered literacies” (Goodyear-Ka’opua, 2013 p. 84). Activities that connect Indigenous communities on the land and provide a space for Elders and youth to engage are acts of decolonization; strengthening communities in the face of systems designed to destroy them (Alfred & Cornthassel, 2005; Simpson, 2004). The prison garden offers potential to engage youth with incarcerated men, providing healing to both groups impacted by land dispossession and stigmatization.

The prison garden project provides key insights to working with and for Indigenous communities. Donated vegetables, while appreciated, were misaligned with community needs and thus unable to confront the historical context in ways that could foster food sovereignty. Yet, these vegetables provided an opportunity for T̄silhqot’in communities to experience new foods and recipes. Increasing the connection between the men and the T̄silhqot’in communities to include not only the sharing of vegetables, but of foodways and recipes could deepen impact and work to increase confidence around new and unfamiliar produce within communities. Cooking workshops can align vegetables with community preferences and provide opportunities for social bonding and further engagement with ancestral lands and foodways. Community consultation remains a necessary step to avoid research and programming disconnected from community strengths and values, approaches that often hinder, rather than help, community health (Easterly 2007).

Research on Indigenous foodways and meanings necessitates an understanding of and accounting for context. Colonialism continues to influence the causes, correlates and impacts of food insecurity. Land rights are foundational to health, and foodways offer a window into community identities and dynamic traditions. Interventions focused on food security for Indigenous communities that ignore these contexts will not have a significant or meaningful impact. Even more troubling, food security programs may provide an illusion that action is being taken, despite merely reinforcing colonial legacies. A great deal of public health and health promotion research has focused on food insecurity and dietary health among Indigenous communities (Downs et al. 2009; Fieldhouse & Thompson 2012; Willows et al. 2009). While an abundance of food security research recommends public health interventions (Mercille, Receveur & Potvin 2012), a pragmatic means to address ongoing food insecurity, such short-term interventions do not address the longer term and underlying land issues that continue to undermine Indigenous communities’ self-determination, food sovereignty, health and wellbeing.

Conclusions

These findings highlight the potential of widening the focus of diet-related health programming and research to expand beyond food security and include the relationships and responsibilities inherent in food sovereignty. The prison garden highlights the potential of increased community engagement and

recognizing community strengths; community cooking workshops increased benefit by strengthening relationships and responsibilities among T̓silhqot'in communities, the men in prison, and the foods they share. Addressing diet-related health by drawing on community strengths can increase reciprocal benefit and highlight the importance of land and community to Indigenous health.

Relationships and reciprocity are foundational to food sovereignty. Within T̓silhqot'in culture, mourning individuals refrain from fishing, hunting, or gathering foods for one year. This creates a need within that home for gifts of food based in socio-emotional community bonds. Food as relationship and reciprocity is something known and embodied by many Indigenous peoples. To quote Secwepemc Elder Jones Ignace, "food will always be what brings people together" (Morrison 2011, p. 97). Recognizing the reciprocity that already exists within T̓silhqot'in foodways and widening those connections to include the garden, the men, and the wider context of colonialism and resurgence will increase benefit. Basing food and diet-related research and programming on the relationships and responsibilities inherent in Indigenous foodways and meanings can provide a space for researchers and policy makers to "remain attentive to the very ground upon which we stand," and the histories, strengths and values buried and growing there (Snelgrove et al. 2014, p. 2). Drawing on this wisdom will only increase the meaning and benefit of Indigenous diet and health research, programming and policy, for "when Elders speak of the strength of their people, they invariably mention food" (Kelm 1998, p. 19).

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