

# Indigenous Food, Land and Heritage Primer

October 2015

## Background & History

The Working Group on Indigenous Food Sovereignty (WGIFS) was born in March of 2006 out of a recognized need to carry Indigenous voices and vision into the food security movement. The WGIFS works to increase understanding of the concept of food sovereignty and the underlying issues affecting Indigenous peoples' ability to respond to our own needs for healthy, culturally appropriate foods. The WGIFS seeks to apply culturally responsive consensus based protocols to critically analyzing issues, concerns and strategies for sustaining Indigenous hunting, fishing, farming and gathering societies that have persisted into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, despite the oppressive land and water policies instituted throughout the process colonization. The WGIFS commits to prioritizing potential by pulling together and working across cultures in complementary ways to flex and practice building trust in relationships and balancing out power dynamics. In this way, we work with rapidly expanding networks of supporters and political advocates to build strength and resiliency for overcoming learning tensions that exist within points of contention and gaps in knowledge within land and food system research, actions, and policy proposals.

## Indigenous Land Ethic

In contrast to colonialist notion of *terra nullius* that fails to recognize the sophisticated land and food system that existed in North America prior to contact with European settlers, Indigenous peoples have worked with, rather than against, natural systems to shape and humanize the land and food system for thousands of years. Indigenous land ethic **does not** view the land and food system, or any part thereof, as a commodity to be bought and sold in the market economy, nor do we view it as a "resource" or "product" to be exploited for external means. Based on values of *interdependency, respect, reciprocity, and ecological and cultural integrity*, an Indigenous land ethic views humans as a part of nature and not separate or dominant over it.

## Expanding the scope – Indigenous bio-cultural heritage in the land and food system

The Working Group on Indigenous Food Sovereignty calls upon the newly elected Canadian government and all MPs, as well as all existing governments, to actualize deep and meaningful truth and reconciliation with Indigenous peoples by addressing ways to support Indigenous peoples in conserving our **complex system of bio-cultural heritage** in the **forests, fields and waterways**. We call upon candidates to recognize the assertion of Indigenous jurisdiction as a key strategy for addressing the grave social and environmental injustices of the underlying colonial land, water, and food policies that are seriously impacting Indigenous hunting, fishing, farming and gathering societies to access culturally appropriate foods in the 98 Indigenous Nations occupying what is known to the colonizers as Canada. **Talking and consultation is not enough**. Direct action via **stopping further harm** from unsustainable, large scale, corporate exploitation, and **supporting the shift** from the global economic paradigm, towards a mixed economy that embraces Indigenous values and principles, and supports the development of multiple small scale community and bioregional economic strategies. We expect all participants in the election to change conversations at policy and planning tables by expanding the scope of "food lands" conversations to promote the conservation of the remaining fragments of **Indigenous hunting, fishing, farming and gathering areas**. The health and wellbeing of our present and future generations is intimately linked to the protection of our complex system of bio-cultural heritage in the forests, fields and waterways, and the conservation of biological and cultural diversity is of benefit to the health and wellbeing of all Canadians!

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The **BC Food Systems Network (BCFSN)**, a project on Tides Canada's shared platform, works to support more healthy, just and sustainable food systems in urban, rural and remote communities across B.C.



BC Food Systems Network