



# GARDENS IN TRIBAL COMMUNITIES

**TRIBAL COMMUNITIES** are growing gardens of all forms from medicinal gardens and small community gardens to larger food production gardens to school gardens. This fact sheet will primarily focus on tribal school gardens. Tribal Nations are increasingly leveraging school gardens as tools to preserve tribal language, a connection to the land, culture and a source of food for child nutrition programs.

Introducing whole, traditional foods into student diets can help children form life-long, healthy eating habits. **Research** indicates that children are more likely to taste, consume, and have positive opinions of fresh produce when they are given hands-on opportunities to plant and harvest. School gardens offer an interactive, outdoor classroom for engaging both elders and students in linking their past and future, and a broader educational and cultural history. USDA supports tribal communities and schools who use school gardens for educational purposes and as a source of produce for child nutrition programs.

The following are examples of tribal schools growing gardens to provide food for child nutrition programs, connect children to the source of their food, and create hands-on interdisciplinary learning experiences.

**Arizona: Rooting Traditions to Today with Three Sisters**

Service to All Relations (STAR) School has a garden program that includes outdoor, hydroponic, aquaponic, and greenhouse gardens. The greenhouses, certified by the Arizona Department of Health Services, provide produce for the school’s salad bars. STAR also hosts a harvest festival,

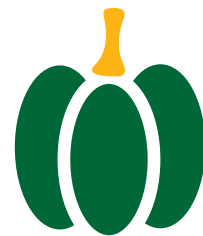
where students prepare a feast for the community using the garden’s bounty. The “three sisters” – blue corn, beans, and squash – play a prominent role in the gardens, teaching students about their heritage, health, and sustainable growing strategies.

**New York: Kanenhi:io & Akwesane Freedom School (AFS)**

The Akwesane Freedom School conducts full-day Mohawk language immersion classes for students in pre-K to grade 8. The AFS owns a 10.5 acre site where Kanenhi:io, a collective of community farmers, educators, and entrepreneurs, has developed a community garden, greenhouse, and cannery. In addition, school staff and parents are partnering with Kanenhi:io members to involve students in the growing and production of food.

**Colorado: Montezuma School to Farm Program**

Since 2009, **Montezuma School to Farm program** has used their Seed to Table curriculum to teach students how to grow, harvest, and cook local foods. Students receive experiential education related to water and soil conservation practices. The school garden products are sold at student-run farmers’ markets and cooked and eaten by students at pop-up restaurants and in nutrition classes.



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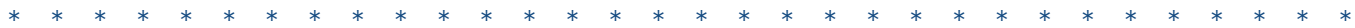
## Planting Seeds

Use these key steps to plan a successful garden:

- 1. Build a team:** Connect with tribal school administrators, teachers, community members, cooperative extension agents, food service directors, student groups, and the Indian Health Service or public health service agency to get everyone on the same page about the garden’s location, scope, and focus.
- 2. Choose a location:** Consider elevation, water source, sunlight exposure (at least 6 hours per day), soil health, and accessibility for students.
- 3. Design the space:** Choose your plants, consider heirloom, traditional or native varieties, making sure that they will thrive in the local environment. Include students in the design and develop a planting and harvesting plan for all seasons.
- 4. Build your garden:** Schedule a kick-off event before the first seeds are planted. Getting community members, staff, and students involved ensures you will have support to keep your garden growing strong.

## Procurement

Federal funds, including USDA Farm to School Grants and National School Lunch Program funds, can and have been used to support garden supplies, equipment, and staff. From a federal perspective, USDA allows the purchase of garden products for use in child nutrition programs. Tribal schools should always check with their state agency and local tribal authority for other rules or regulations regarding procuring school garden produce. Tribal schools have three options for using school garden products in school meals:



For more information, and to sign up for the bi-weekly E-letter from the Food and Nutrition Service’s Office of Community Food Systems, please visit [www.fns.usda.gov/farmtoschool](http://www.fns.usda.gov/farmtoschool).

Questions? Email us at [farmtoschool@fns.usda.gov](mailto:farmtoschool@fns.usda.gov).

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donations, intergovernmental agreements, and purchases. For more information on how to procure from school gardens, please refer to the **Farm to School and School Garden Expenses Memo (SP 06-2015)**.

## Food Safety

USDA developed a basic recommendation sheet titled **Food Safety Tips for School Gardens** that highlights considerations when developing an edible school garden, including testing soil and ensuring a safe water source. When these considerations are taken into account, food grown in tribal school gardens can be safely served in child nutrition programs. School garden produce has a short supply chain to the school cafeteria where it is prepared, which allows the highest level of food safety transparency of any food that enters child nutrition programs. Check with the local Indian Health Service (IHS) office to see if they have a policy that governs school gardens. Tribal governments have the ability to allow or prohibit school garden produce in school meals.

## Learn More

For more information about farm to school strategies in tribal communities check out our **Bringing Tribal Foods and Traditions into Cafeterias, Classrooms, and Gardens Fact Sheet** and **Traditional Foods Memo**; for more on how to build school gardens visit **USDA’s Office of Community Food System’s school garden resources**.

The National Farm to School Network has collated stories and resources for **Farm to School in Tribal Communities**. This **FoodCorps in Native Communities** resource provides on-the-ground accounts of their work.

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