

THE POWER OF FARMING ALL THAT MOVES IS SACRED



by Ellen Spirit Seeker Fisher

Only by understanding that all life is sacred can you realize the rhythm of Mother Earth, and thereby know how to place your feet.

Early indigenous peoples of the Americas understood this easily. Their harmony with their land and their place in it was part and parcel of native being. Recognition and protection of common land concerned all Cherokees, but it held special meaning for women. Where the blood of the first woman, Selu, had soaked the ground, corn and beans sprang. Whenever Cherokee women tilled the fields and harvested the land's bounty they affirmed their identity as women, further, common title to the land validated traditional Cherokee values of community and cooperation.

By the early 1800's Cherokee land was being taken by encroaching white settlers; through removal, lottery and extermination the very life blood of native peoples was forcibly seized.

As time passed farming became an industry and the diversity of small plot farms and common lands of native peoples has been all but lost. With the advent of factory farms and corporate giants like Monsanto the diversity of crops and other foods have dwindled into a monotony of fields and giant farms that need ever stronger chemical brews of pesticides in order to thrive, and seeds genetically modified (GMO's) to withstand such a chemical onslaught.

This "chemical, modified soup" that inhabits today's farm culture results in the death of small farms and organic operations. Once these GMO seeds infiltrate a farmer's fields, the farmer's own saved seeds will no longer produce. Eventually the farmer must buy seeds every planting season and practically all seeds on the commercial market today are GMO seeds thus perpetuating a profit for farming corporations to the detriment of everyone else. Furthermore, the advent of farming as big business has effectively crushed the native spirit of community and sharing with each other.

The Cherokee have a legend of two brothers just after the Civil War who farmed a small plot of land given them by their grandfather. One brother liked to share the corn and

other food they raised and was ridiculed by his brother. "You are a fool to share, because we can trade it for nice things." The sharing brother said nothing because he knew sharing brought honor to the family. The caring and sharing brother helped his more commercially bent brother in many ways, including saving his farm plot from a violent storm. Today that violent storm is a metaphor for "storm" of factory farming that is quickly turning our food into bland stuff with hardly any nutritional value and a whole host of genetic modifications that no one knows the effect of on humans or other consumers.

There are grassroots movements growing today that are fighting that loss of diversity in our food. Throughout the US, Native, Chicano, and other peoples are rejecting industrialized agriculture and are growing their own food instead, thereby reclaiming the health of their traditions, culture, bodies, and land. They are contributing to one of the largest movements in the US today: creating a sustainable food supply chain.

One goal is to become completely self-sustaining so that during the growing season, people don't have to purchase what they can grow themselves. Another goal is to preserve the traditional way of life. We need to keep the traditions alive. We need to preserve the seeds. We need to preserve the soil. We need to preserve the planet.

One group engaged in this sort of grassroots effort, involving food plots on native Pueblo lands, plans to reach out to Head Start programs and senior citizens centers to help them plant small garden plots and help maintain them through the growing season.

Food raised is sold at the farmers' market, and people can order the food they want from the fields and if they're able to work, they should be farming for themselves, at least having a little plot of corn.

A few have become inspired to go out there and do it themselves, and with this comes a higher level of pride among the people about being Native and preserving their way of life.

I see this plan spreading to different communities, not just the reservations but all over the place. I see other communities learning from us, and taking that back to their people and starting it up all over again. We see it happening on a global scale already. There are farmers meeting together from all over the world. We need to all work together as land-based people and not look at what color we are or where we come from, because the land is not like that. Creator is not exclusive, so there's no reason we should be. They tell us, "The more biodiversity you have, the richer your soil is

going to be." It's like that with people. The more different kinds of people you have, the more we're going to be able to survive. That's why we need everybody working together. We can't compartmentalize ourselves. That's what industrial agriculture does.

If people would only open their eyes and their ears and their hearts to living in community, everything would work so much smoother. It's not only a Native thing. Community is a human thing. It's already in us, we just have to bring it back out. One person can grow corn, one person can grow something else, and they can share. That's how people used to survive way back when. These ideas are not an alternative for us, they're just a way of life. We're just doing what Creator meant for us to do.

International Indian Treaty Council, The Right to Food,
www.treatycouncil.org/new_page_5241.htm

Women, Food, and Agricultural Network,
www.wfan.org

White Earth Land Recovery and Native Harvest Online Catalog, www.welrp.org & www.nativeharvest.com

The Institute for Local Self-Reliance,
www.ilsr.org

Food First, www.foodfirst.org

Grassroots International,
www.grassrootsonline.org

Just Harvest USA bridges the healthy and local food movement with the farmworker rights movement. Join them
(www.justharvestusa.org/getinvolved.html)

Organize a plant or seed swap. Boycott corporate-owned seeds, especially those owned by the largest agro-corporations (www.organicconsumers.org/monsanto/index.cfm).

