

Pueblo Resurgents

Community Gardens & Farms in Practice

Pueblo Resurgents is a land-based organization centered in Isleta Pueblo of New Mexico and focused on reclaiming D'ai kinship and knowledge systems. We exercise sovereignty through food-growing practices, community-based research, and culturally reflective pedagogy. We mobilize our initiatives through a systems approach that reimagines our land-based economies in a 21st century.

The Cultivat(Ed) Cooperative is a food sovereignty subsidy of Pueblo Resurgents and has a mission of increasing access to healthy local food options and to local food economies. The Cultivat(Ed) Apprenticeship, Isleta Pueblo Farmers' Market, Radicle Food Distribution, and Community Mutual Aid CSA comprise our programs. Working in an intergenerational framework, we envision food sovereignty to be a future where our children can fluidly move across the land.

We work closely with tribal assets within the Pueblo of Isleta (POI), including the Isleta Headstart, the Elderly Center and Assisted Living, Isleta Health Center, and Tribal Leadership. We leverage these relationships to create community-based assessments that include food sovereignty assessment, diet and health, and Pueblo governance. The data generated from these assessments provides a unique and in-depth look into the needs of the community while simultaneously helping to create tailor made programs that ensure programmatic success.

All of our programs meet three focus areas: Emotional Intelligence and Leadership, Pueblo Knowledge and Kinship, and Systems-based Solutions. This framework highlights the innate agency that we possess as Indigenous peoples to understand our political landscape and to create from this place of knowing and kinship. Furthermore, this framework allows us the flexibility to develop matrices that are reflective of our ancestral ways of moving on the land, outside of capitalism, heteropatriarchy, colonialism, and on-going forms of violence.

The Cultivat(Ed) Cooperative focuses on leadership development via our apprenticeship and organic food production. We have established a network of Pueblo Farmers to support our food distribution efforts. Our food distribution efforts are grant funded, which allows



us to support living wages for farmers by purchasing food at retail prices. We leverage our food production networks to support leadership skill development while also meeting the needs of Tribal Assets.

Access to food and to growing food is an essential need and inherent right of our sovereignty as Indigenous Peoples. With much of our food systems having had to endure hundreds of years of colonial occupation, ecological manipulation, a changing social environment, and political discord, our community faces unprecedented levels of risk and vulnerability related to food security. Consequently, the systems that have largely replaced many of our own political institutions that governed food production pose more challenges than they do answers. Namely, centering transactional exchanges as fundamental to how we relate to one another and to our land. This poses unnatural challenges to how people access healthy food options and food systems.

While tribal assets are a foundational aspect to a thriving food economy, organizational capacity prohibits sustainable development of such networks. And while many tribal employees, directors, and program administrators would like to purchase food from our own producers, very little are familiar with the food growing practices and reinforce unnatural standards that mean very little to food access, but often directly impacts the livelihood of our own farmers. With such discrepancies, it has been essential for farmers to also inform planning, strategy and implementation of food-based solutions within our community.



Our program coordinators possess first-hand experience and skills related to food growing and distribution, an essential skill in relation to the administrative tasks of implementing food distributions, CSA's, surveys & assessments, info-sessions, workshops, and cooking demonstrations. By supporting the food growers themselves to not only be involved in the planning, but to administer these programs, highlights the capacity of food growers and organizations to deliver quality programming. Through our own capacity, our Program Coordinator supports a necessary Tribal Asset need of

coordinating our community's farmers' market and food distribution for the Isleta Headstart.

The Cultivat(Ed) Apprenticeship subscribes to the idea that systems change requires both Professional AND Personal Development, necessary when navigating colonial landscapes while reconnecting to our ancestral lands. This is accomplished by providing Technical Skill development, Emotional Intelligence & Leadership development, and Indigenous land-based education. With the average income of less than \$10,000 annually for farm workers on small-scale organic farms, it is no surprise that many people do not see farming and food production as a viable career, let alone a lifelong pursuit that can lead to meaningful relationships. The apprenticeship supports community members who have an interest in growing food, while gaining essential skills needed for cultural reclamation.

Furthermore, while navigating compromised ecologies and food systems, Indigenous food growers are expected to participate in a lucrative system driven by white supremacy that often does not reflect their community needs, with less access to essential skillsets, capital, monetary wealth, and resources. In a highly competitive business sector, our community farmers are expected to compete against one another. Our apprenticeship seeks to make land, water, equipment, skill share, capital and networks accessible in order to support what is often seen as a high risk business. Additionally, while none of our apprentices are considered full-time, we believe that an equitable wage is necessary, and why we pay our apprentices \$20/hour. One mantra we believe is that if our farmers can spend less time 'working' then they can also invest in family, community, and land-based relationships. We feel that supporting our food growers requires us to support their social responsibility and purpose as Pueblo (D'ai) people.

While we are focused on providing direct services to community members in Isleta Pueblo, our network of food producers includes other Indigenous food producers. Having access to resources for our food distribution provides security for our programs as well as our farmers.

Food Distribution: The Radicle Food Distribution is a no-cost food program that is grant funded, which is aimed at supporting the most vulnerable in our community: Children and Elderly. This year, we are coordinating a food distribution with the Isleta Headstart & Childcare Center which will impact 135 students and their

households. The bi-weekly food share will consist of approximately 7 items, and is aimed at supporting the cognitive development during an essential period of growth and development for children.

The Isleta Pueblo Farmers' Market is coordinated in-relation with the Isleta Elderly Center, which is aimed at both supporting food producers, artists, food preparers, and tribal programs, as well as supporting access to healthy food options for elderly. Based on a Farmers' Market Survey that we launched in 2021, we identified barriers that prohibit community food growers and community members from participating, while identifying what will support their participation in a community market. Some barriers include limited equipment (chairs, tables, canopies), food handlers permits, unaffordable foods and SNAP/EBT access, and familiarity with fresh produce. The market is the first phase of supporting education, kinship, and awareness around what a thriving food economy can look like.

Land Transfers: As a small organization that is a fiscal sponsor pursuing our own non-profit incorporation that is in the process of receiving a donation of land in the city of Albuquerque, the resources provided by the Sustainable Economies Law Center have been extremely helpful.

Being a fiscally sponsored organization, we've recognized the need to have a third party represent our interests to ensure that all parties involved (including the landowner and our fiscal sponsor) are all protected and that we can focus on our work. The Sustainable Economies Law Center has provided us with helpful information related to our situation. As 'Land-Back' initiatives become more common in New Mexico, the need for resources and professional support will be needed to support Indigenous organizations.

Checking in with other projects around the nation has been rewarding, in that every project is unique and has gone about the promotion of land stewardship and

This practice is an excerpt from the Learnign Circle Brief, *From Food Justice to Liberation: Building Community Power through Community Gardens & Urban Farms.*



cultural reclamation in different ways. We feel that this portion has been helpful to understand what makes our programming unique in order to focus on those aspects to continue to make them successful. I feel that having a basic understanding of the systemic factors that have created both the discord and the need to reclaim culture and food economies brings focus that does not reinforce or center capitalist interests.