Traditional Food Principles

Cultivate Food Sovereignty
Food sovereignty is the core of tribal sovereignty. It is the inherent right of a community to have access to healthy, culturally appropriate food. When our ancestors signed the tribal treaties, they made sure that we would have native foods for generations to come. Each time we exercise our right to harvest native foods, we strengthen our cultural identity, relationship to the land, and to our community.

Food is the Center of Culture
People have always come together around food. It is at the heart of celebrations, family gatherings, holidays, and memorials. During European colonization, Native Peoples’ access to wild foods was suppressed, as was the right to practice cultural traditions. This changed peoples’ relationships with the land, the seasons, and their community. As we eat together, we tell stories, share songs, observe protocols and remember our connection to the land, the waters, and each other. These foods together the deep values embedded in our culture.

Promote Generosity
Generosity is a value inherent to Northwest Native culture, which includes both giving and receiving. People often express gratitude for the abundance of the land and the water, and pass that gratitude on by sharing. In potlatch and other ceremonies, families work hard to give food and other items away. Where we harvest native foods for elders or others in need, we are caring for the health of our community. It is through giving, not through acquiring money or things, that we become truly wealthy.

Eat with Good Intention
Cooking is a time to pay respect to the plants and animals that gave their lives to nourish our bodies. It is a time to honor the people with whom we are sharing food. If we eat while on the go, hurrying to the next task, we miss the pleasure of eating, and our bodies do not have sufficient time to savor and digest. This can leave us feeling hungry more.

Cook and Eat with Good Intention

Honor the Food Web
Everything in our food system is connected. Salmon return to their ancestral river every year and give their lives so that others can have life. If we take too much of one food or do not give back, we disrupt the balance. Elders instruct us to return every shell to the beach to provide a source for new systems to evolve. It is my responsibility to maintain the health of our food system so I can pass down a world that will support generations to come.

Wild & Organic Foods are Better for Health
The health of the environment determines the health of our food. Wild foraged foods usually contain complex nutrients. Industrial agricultural practices with harmful pesticides and fertilizers deplete the health of the soil and the plants and animals it supports. Organic gardening is simply returning to the way our ancestors grew food. As we return to a sustainable way of growing food, our health and the health of the land we cultivate will thrive.

Honor the Food Web

Eat a Variety of Foods
Before European contact, Northwest Coastal Native People were over 300 types of foods and therefore received a wide variety of nutrients in their diet. Today, most Americans eat only 12–20 foods on a regular basis. This negatively impacts our health and the health of our environment.

When I eat a wide variety of foods, I nourish my own health and promote biodiversity.

Eating Local Foods
Plants breathe, drink water, and absorb nutrients. After they are cut off from their life source, they begin to lose vitality. The fresher the food, the better it is for you. Eating local food supports our local economy, and protects the environment by reducing the amount of fossil fuels used to transport food to us.

When I choose local foods, it helps me grow a strong regional system. I taste the beauty of the land to which I belong.