

Addressing Food Security

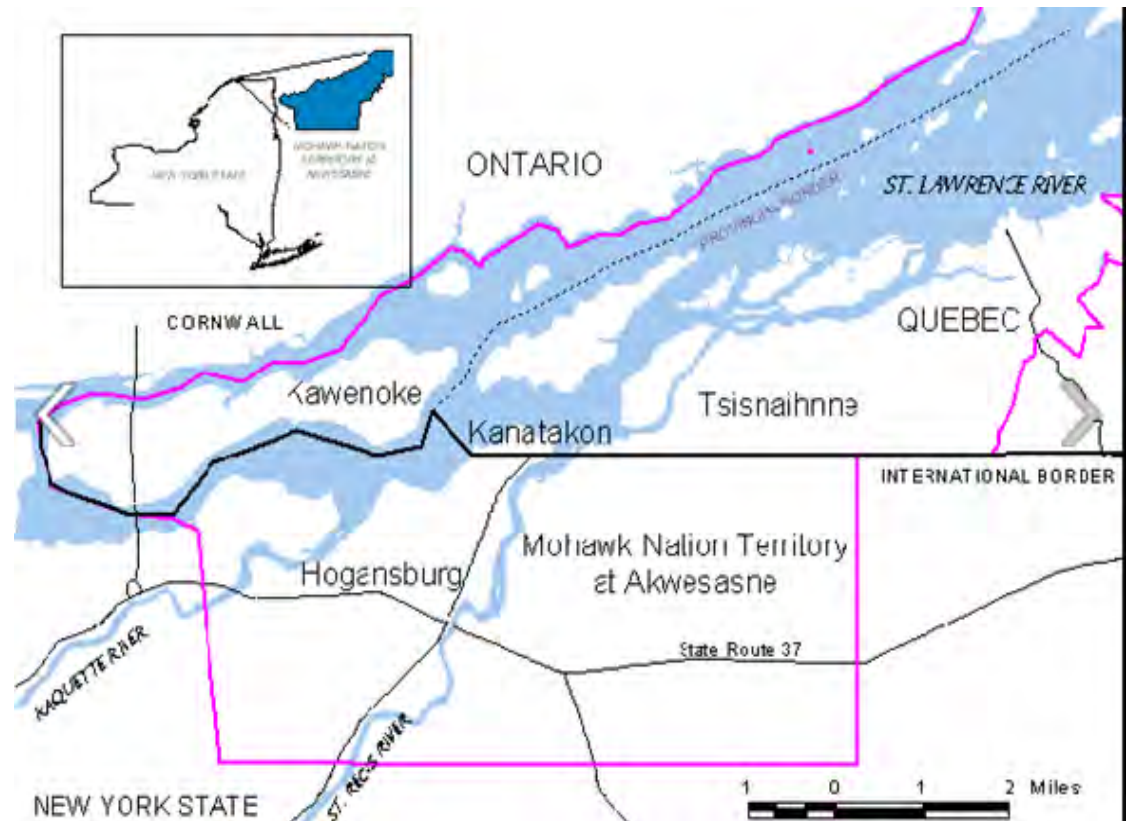


**Akwesasne's Tetewatská:hon
Green Food Bag Program
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Present Map of Akwesasne

History of Akwesasne

Mohawks were an agricultural people, only one of many stories told by oral tradition. The abundance of corn, beans and squash (our Three Sisters) was once and almost lost. There are three river tributaries that surround Akwesasne. Hunting and fishing supplemented the abundance of foods. Families shared, the household was a basic social and economic unit. There are many factors that contribute to food insecurities for the Mohawks. The Institution of Christianity is a major factor. Jesuits promoted individualism, male superiority over women and hierarchical political organization. Strategies to end a Nation were residential schooling, the loss of language, culture and way of life. Following American Revolution- the Iroquois lost 95% of their land.



Impacts of Resources

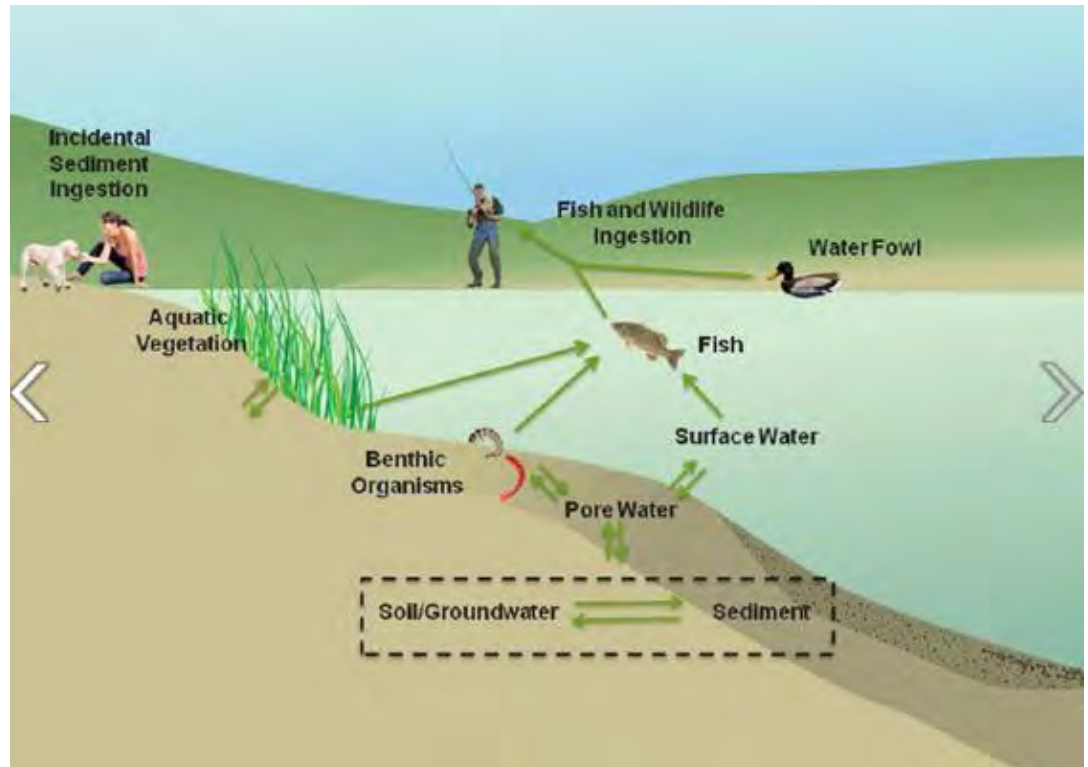
The community of Akwesasne has endured significant impacts to their resources, many of which were agricultural. Because of these impacts it has affected the socio-economic and environmental health status of the Akwesasne community.

The Mohawk Nation at Akwesasne is part of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, most often referred to as the Iroquois. Akwesasne straddles the U.S. – Canadian border between NY, eastern Ontario and western Quebec. Covers about 28,00 acres and est. Pop of around 10,000. Besides losing its fishing industry it also lost a major source of recreation. Industrial development brought environmental contamination and degradation. Groundwater contamination greatly impacted the principal source of drinking water. Polychlorinated bi-phenols, dibenzofurans, airborne fluoride-PAHs and heavy metals now inhabited the land.



Traditional Culture

With the contamination of water, soil, fish and fowl this became and still is a tremendous concern for the people. The Mohawk culture emphasizes the unity of people, animals, plants, land and water. The contamination not only affected their food choices, but also their religion, sense of tradition, and their way of life. There were two alternatives-neither of which is acceptable. Continue dietary and cultural practices that increase exposure which of course isn't an option because of health risks for adults, kids and generations to come. Second to ask community members to avoid dietary and cultural practices related to exposure. Now after years of progress and clean up the community is beginning to trust the land again.



Akwesasne's Tetewatská:hon Green Food Bag Program

The nearest grocery store on the U.S. portion of the reserve is about eight – twelve miles away depending where you live and you need American money. The city of Cornwall is anywhere from 6-16 miles away. The community must travel through American and Canadian customs at border crossings and a toll bridge. This leaves everyone in a predicament. The wait time alone causes stress. Tariffs on food also come into the picture.

Our Green food bag program is so unique to any other program. It is a non-profit fresh fruit and vegetable distribution system . The initiative is available to all Akwesasne residents. The program is open to all regardless of income level. There is no limit on how many bags one can purchase.



Green Food Bag coordinator- Sweets Jacobs

Organization of GFB

Each month the contents will change to reflect seasonal produce as well as market prices, availability and consumer feedback. The GFB is available for purchase only in advance and requires a pre-pay submission deadline-which is always the first Friday of the month. We currently have one price and that is \$10.00. The coordinator has always been able to put ten items in the monthly bag. Usually 5 vegetables and 5 fruits. An example of a green food bag would be: potatoes, celery, onions, lettuce, carrots, pears, mango, oranges, bananas, apples, lemons. Staples that home cooking and preparation are the basis behind the ordering of produce.



When, how and why?

Tetewatská:hon-meaning “Let ‘s Eat” has a vision. By providing fresh fruit and vegetables to households, we strive to lower obesity rates and decrease the amount of new chronic diseases. Our mission-to increase awareness to a variety of fruits and vegetables and to provide low cost access to the variety, we hope individuals will take charge of their health and be a key player in preventing chronic diseases and maintaining a healthy lifestyle. The program values community relationships and accountability, as well as an honest and cooperative working environment.



Contents and happy customers.



From conception to fruition

- March 2011, we talked about the Green Food Box
- April 2011- picked a name
- May 2011- attend Cornwall packing day to get a glimpse
- June 2011-local radio talk show to inform community of new food program
- July 2011-First Distribution Day!!!!
- Every month fine tuning.
- Many partners want to join in as the GFB has a target audience
- Community support purchases a set amount for their clients
- The Green Food Bag is unique in that it has two distribution sites.

Successes

We are on our own in making the Green food box a success. Cornwall site has an average of 40 GFB per month. We were hoping to get 20 in our first order in July 2011.

- July 2011-**First Distribution 246 bags**
- August 250
- Sept. -259
- October-150
- November-200
- December-235
- January 2012-498

It has not stopped, the average monthly number are that of 300 bags per month.



Informative and Educational

Due to high volume of community members participating in the Akwesasne's Green Food Bag, it is a perfect opportunity for other programs to capture an audience. The Dietitian will go over the recipe of the month that the coordinator puts in the monthly newsletter. The coordinator puts in cooking tips and healthy eating tidbits. The community health program at MCA will put in news of immunization, flu and other clinics that are in the community. The department of Health does various surveys and calendars at the GFB. We have had a free soup kitchen for the community and free clothing give away. The soup kitchen will serve the community quarterly. Other programs are waiting to jump on board.



Border issues

We have five sites which make our GFB so unique. Two main ones for delivery of wholesale produce and three other sites that collect orders and pick up. One of the main sites is on Cornwall Island across the bridge from Cornwall Ontario and the other is the center of Akwesasne, St Regis Quebec at the recreation centre. The third Tuesday of the month will always be the pick up for people that order for the St. Regis site. The third Wednesday is Cornwall Island site. We receive our fresh produce from the wholesale club in Cornwall. But that left us with problems. To go to the St. Regis site, the food passes over two main bridges and two border crossings, into the United States for 6 miles then into St. Regis for distribution and packing. The Dept. of Agriculture has stopped the GFB and now requires the coordinator to do a prior approval which entails time, more energy and frustrations. Right now we have acquired an U.S. Wholesaler that delivers to the St. Regis site, but we pay in American dollars. We will be trying to alternate wholesalers for delivery to St. Regis.





Tri District Elders

The three district of Akwesasne on the northern portion of the reserve, is one of five sites of the Green Food Box program.

Food Security

Availability- The Green Food Box program makes it available to the community once a month, to five different sites. Most of the stores in Akwesasne sell instant, high carb, high sugar, fast food and/or processed foods.

Accessibility- Our program makes the fresh produce accessible and hopefully the people will now access these fresh fruit and vegetables when grocery shopping.

Acceptability- the coordinator, a life long member and resident ensures that the food is culturally suitable and accepted.

Adequacy- Fresh, low cost produce makes this program one of the biggest and healthiest program that the community has encountered.

Action- the people of Akwesasne has taken the first step. The numbers tell it all. The volunteers that come pack on GFB day is amazing.

Does the Tetewatská:hon Program solve Food Security? NO! But we are on our way.



Monthly Food Boxes



Justice Program volunteering



Other initiatives that address Food Security,
administered by Community Health of Mohawk Council
of Akwesasne

Little Chef's Program



More “Lil Chefs,” and graduation



Raised Bed Gardening Instruction



Community kitchens



Teaching our youth our traditional foods



Canning classes



Cultural food, social singing and dancing



It's up to us, the next seven generations
depend on it! Niawen (thank-you)

