

# Where Can We Source Indigenous Foods?

A companion resource to [Cooking in Two Worlds: A Process Guide for Incorporating Indigenous Foods into Institutions](#)

*“Ideally foods should be ethically harvested from each specific bioregion during peak season, and grown and raised by Indigenous growers, harvesters, farmers and land stewards.”*

*–Tiffany Traverse - Knowledge Holder*

Sourcing Indigenous foods can seem overwhelming due to an overall lack of availability combined with potential regulatory barriers. Yet there are some certified Indigenous suppliers throughout the province that can provide Traditional foods. While the ultimate goal is to serve food sourced directly from Indigenous communities, this is not always an option at the start. It is a journey of building relationships and capacity. In some cases, it is acceptable to source ingredients from existing suppliers. Once ingredients can be sourced directly, budgets must account for market prices of Indigenous ingredients.

## **Traditional Foods**

Traditional foods are sourced directly from Indigenous community members and caterers who have ensured that cultural harvesting protocols are being followed and that any ingredients are gathered in a sustainable way. One of the most important cultural harvesting protocols is to only harvest food with good intentions and in a positive frame of mind. How a harvester feels will be passed on to those who partake in the harvest. Traditional Indigenous foods are also seasonal foods, as such the supply will vary based on availability.

## **Market Foods**

Some Indigenous ingredients, such as salmon, venison, bison, nettle, rosehips, and many other foods can be purchased from grocery or health food stores or commercial suppliers and prepared using Indigenous recipes. This allows institutions to serve Indigenous foods quickly once Indigenous recipes are sourced. However, it should be noted that market foods are only a stepping stone towards sourcing and utilizing Traditional foods.

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*“You can’t just go and purchase something from a hunter or food gatherer. It has to be put through the proper channels to ensure that it’s food safe so that is a tough question.” - Jenny Cross*

## ***Are There Indigenous Food Suppliers?***

There are several Indigenous owned and operated food producers throughout the province that can provide Indigenous and market ingredients. Contact Feed BC for a current list of Indigenous owned or operated food and beverage businesses in B.C. This is a non-exhaustive list of Indigenous owned and operated food producers and processors available to retail, restaurant, distributors or food service buyers. Some suppliers will have their own cultural requirements around sustainability, seasonality, and low impact production. While some of these suppliers may be local to your institution, not all will be accessible. Whenever possible it is advantageous to try and connect with your local Indigenous community to learn about what foods local Indigenous people truly use and see if there are any local food producers that may not be on this list.

## ***Can I Source Food From My Current Supplier?***

Many Indigenous foods can be acquired through common commercial food suppliers and distributors. These foods are often an easy way to incorporate Indigenous foods on the menu, with the understanding that market foods are a stand in for Traditional foods or community sourced ingredients. Truly serving Indigenous foods in your institution will require making connections with your local Indigenous community and working alongside them to learn what foods, recipes, and cooking practices you can integrate into your menus. The goal is to source foods that were harvested by Indigenous community members who were adhering to cultural protocols.

## ***Are Indigenous Ingredients Expensive?***

In some cases, Indigenous foods may have a higher cost than non-Indigenous foods, but like all foods it is more important how they are used. While bison tenderloin and whole Dungeness crabs may be too expensive for the menu, a venison bone broth soup or clam chowder, both of which can be powerful medicines to Indigenous peoples, may be more within the budget. It is crucial to remember that nutrient and vitamin rich Indigenous ingredients are a valuable addition to any menu even in limited amounts.

## ***How Are We Decolonizing Food Regulations?***

The Ministry of Health is aware and responsible for one of the regulatory barriers that Indigenous peoples face in accessing their foods in public institutions. There are now several committees and projects moving toward creating a two eyed seeing approach to our current food standards. With help from partners like the First Nations Health Authority and the BC Center for Disease Control, as well as a host of Indigenous Chefs and knowledge holders, work towards necessary awareness, understanding and change is underway.