

GREAT LAKES INTERTRIBAL FOOD COALITION

2022 SEASON TRIBAL ELDER FOOD BOX PROGRAM IMPACT REPORT

June 1, 2023



Food Coalition

greatlakesintertribalfood.org

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"It is our vision to rebuild a vibrant food system that will provide nutritious and culturally appropriate foods for people that need it and to support the economic development of indigenous and local food producers in the Great Lakes region"

-Great Lakes Intertribal Food Coalition's Working Vision

Overview

The Great Lakes Intertribal Food Coalition (GLIFC) is an intertribal partnership that aims to address the unique health and economic needs of the Great Lakes tribes by building a network of Native producers and supporting traditional foodways, food access, and economic development within Native communities.

GLIFC's inaugural program, the Tribal Elder Food Box Program (TEFBP), began in 2021 as a COVID-19 health disparity and response program. The TEFBP purchases healthy, culturally appropriate food from Native and local farmers and distributes it twice a month at no cost to tribal elders. In doing so, it supports the cultural and physical health of Native communities, provides stable and consistent markets for Native and non-Native Wisconsin farmers, and helps to build regional food supply chains.

This report provides an overview of GLIFC's past and present initiatives including what GLIFC has accomplished through the TEFBP and its current work to assess the assets and food production capacity of tribes in the Great Lakes Region. It also identifies tribal, state, and federal level policy recommendations that would support the TEFBP and GLIFC's vision for a regional, intertribal food system.



GLIFC History

● 2021

GLIFC formed in 2021 as a COVID-19 emergency response program. GLIFC developed a partnership with Feeding America and Feeding America Eastern Wisconsin (FAEW) to start the TEFBP and support the first Tribal Elder Food Box distributions. These distributions were critical to addressing heightened food insecurity in Native communities during the pandemic. In its first year, the TEFBP delivered food boxes to elders of seven of the eleven federally recognized Tribes in Wisconsin.

● 2022

GLIFC and FAEW expanded the TEFBP to serve all 11 federally recognized tribes in Wisconsin and more than doubled the number of food boxes distributed over the course of the Program's 15-week season. The Coalition used USDA Local Food Procurement Assistance (LFPA) Program funding to improve transportation and distribution channels and support TEFBP expansion and gathered feedback on the TEFBP from food box recipients and Program producers to improve the Program in future years.

Ongoing work

Part of GLIFC's future vision is to identify additional ways to build a more resilient regional food system that supports tribal food sovereignty across the Great Lakes region. Starting in 2022, GLIFC began collaborating with the Native Lands Advocacy Project (NLAP) to build an interactive storymap that provides information on health and food access related metrics for Great Lakes Tribes as well as current tribal producers and production capacity and the potential of Native lands to meet the regions' future food needs. GLIFC has also partnered with the Food Finance institute to identify ways to optimize the expansion of supply chain infrastructure, and is working with researchers and Extension professionals at University of Wisconsin-Madison to support Indigenous producers and coordinate Indigenous-led research on climate adaptation in Indigenous foodways.

● 2023

This year, GLIFC focused on increasing producer capacity and understanding what is needed to scale Native food systems and supply chains in ways that align with Indigenous values. To support Native producers, the Coalition has sought funding to acquire cooperatively owned agricultural equipment, to provide targeted technical assistance, and to establish a producer equity capital fund and an inventory fund. It has used LFPA+ funds to expand TEFBP purchasing from Native producers.

Tribal Elder Food Box Program

The Tribal Elder Food Box Program (TEFBP) is a food distribution program that provides tribal elders from all 11 federally recognized tribes in Wisconsin with free locally produced, nutritious, and culturally appropriate food. The Program has expanded rapidly since its founding in 2021. In its second year, the TEFBP more than doubled the number of food boxes distributed from 10,800 to 24,400 boxes over the course of the 15-week season.

Program Development 2021-2023

| | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 (projected) |
|------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|--|
| Total Budget | \$471,381 | \$1,413,700 | \$1,753,200 |
| Boxes per Distribution | 900 (10,800 total) | 1,650 (24,400 total) | 1,875 (31,800 total) |
| Tribes | 3-7 | 11 | 11 + community health centers in Milwaukee |
| Local Producers | 12 | 29 | 52 |

The Program has created reliable markets for local and Indigenous producers. In 2022, GLIFC purchased \$1.11 million worth of food from local producers, with nearly \$655k of this funding going specifically to Native producers. In two years the Program also more than doubled the number of local producers it purchases from, including increasing the number of Indigenous producers.

“These food boxes support the revitalization of our culture. I appreciate the “crop to table” life. It is a symbolic love affair with the sun, the sky, the earth and the water. Gifts from the creator. Thank you.” -TEFBP participant

“This program is amazing from the business side. It gives us a reliable source of income that we can plan around in larger quantities. But the biggest thing is that the products are going to exactly who we want them to, our own communities.” -TEFBP producer

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TEFBP Participant Feedback

["The Elder Food Box] makes me feel valued in the community by the effort. Yaw^ko!"

-2022 TEFBP Participant

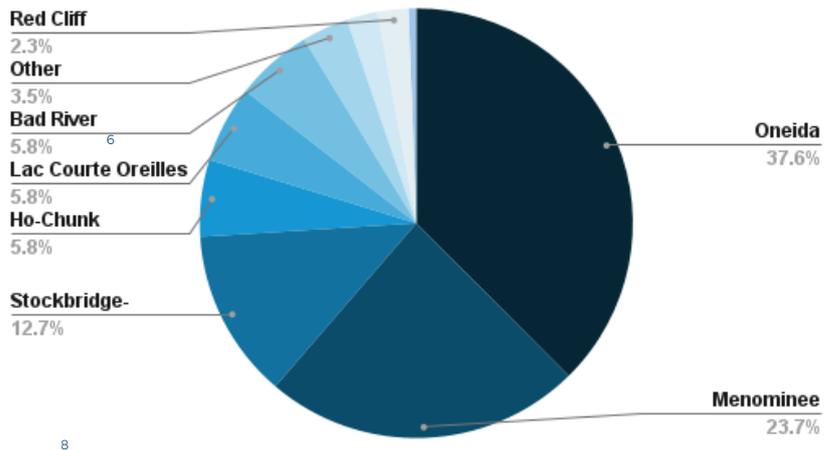
In November 2022, the TEFBP distributed surveys to elders at each distribution site to gain a better understanding of their experience with the Program (see Appendix C for survey questions). We received 174 responses from program participants (~9% response rate). 168 responses were from participants enrolled in 9 of the 11 participating tribes.

Additionally, 6 respondents reside in Wisconsin but are members of

of tribes located in other states. The overall feedback was positive with Elders expressing satisfaction with both the distribution and food options. In open-ended comments, many also expressed gratitude to the Program for making Traditional foods from Native producers more accessible.

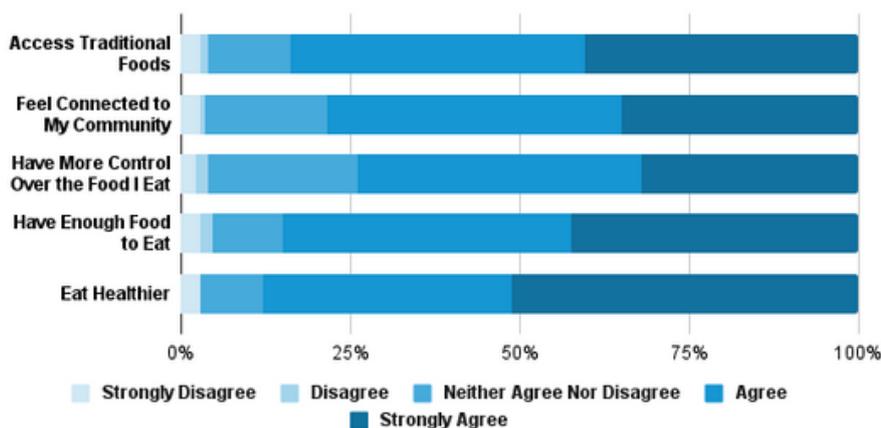
It is important to note that overall feedback and participant satisfaction is not fully representative of all Tribal Elder Food Box recipients. The percentage of recipients who filled out surveys varied across tribes and not all participants responded to the survey. Further evaluation of food distribution sites and leaders will be beneficial to gain a deeper understanding.

Respondents by Tribal Nation



Participants' Level of Agreement with the Following Statements

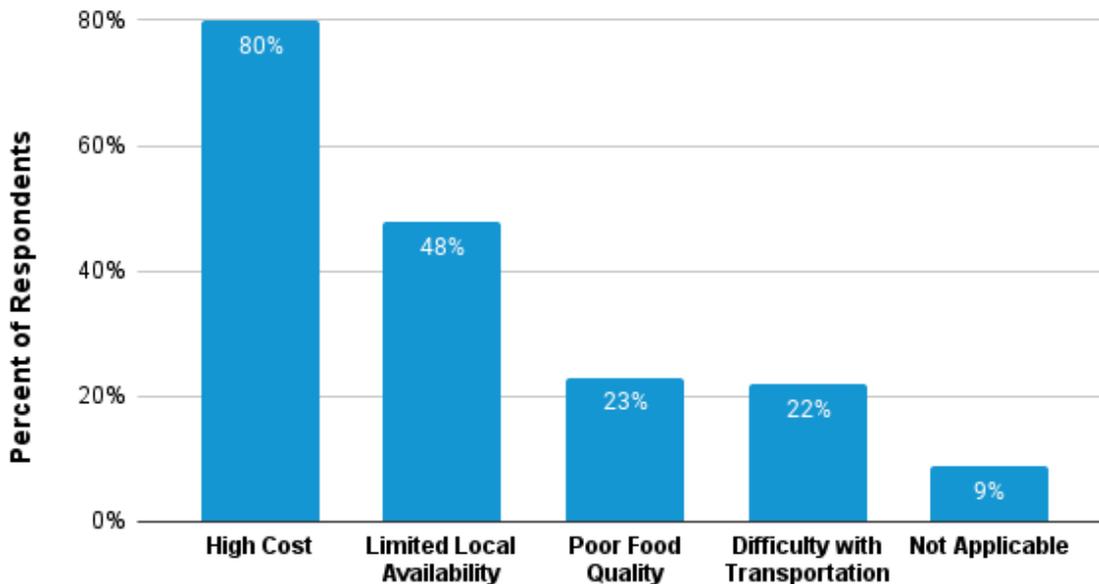
"The TEFBP has helped me..."



Participants generally felt that the TEFBP helped them access traditional foods, feel connected to their communities, have more control over the food they eat, have enough food to eat, and eat healthier. Over 73% of participants agreed or strongly agreed with all 5 statements, and 80% agreed or strongly agreed with 3 of the 5.

Solving Food Access Challenges

Food Access Challenges Addressed by TEFBP



Eighty percent of survey respondents reported that the Program helped reduce challenges related to food cost. This included improving respondents' access to culturally-important foods. For example, one person shared that they are often unable to purchase wild rice due to its cost and appreciated that the TEFBP had increased their access to this important food. Additionally, many elders mentioned how being on a fixed income has been an extra burden as food prices have increased due to inflation. These participants noted that one of the greatest benefits of the boxes is that it helps mitigate these price hikes.

Additionally, 48% of respondents reported that the Program had helped mitigate issues with food access due to limited local food availability, 23% reported that it had helped them access higher quality food, and 22% reported that it had reduced issues with food accessibility due to limited transportation.

Seven respondents also added that the boxes had helped address limited food access due to disabilities. One respondent shared “I’m healing from a knee replacement. The boxes helped me out a lot as I could not drive my car and I live alone.”

“We have had hard times this year, without the boxes we could not have kept to our diabetic diets. We made use of every bit of every box. Thank you.”

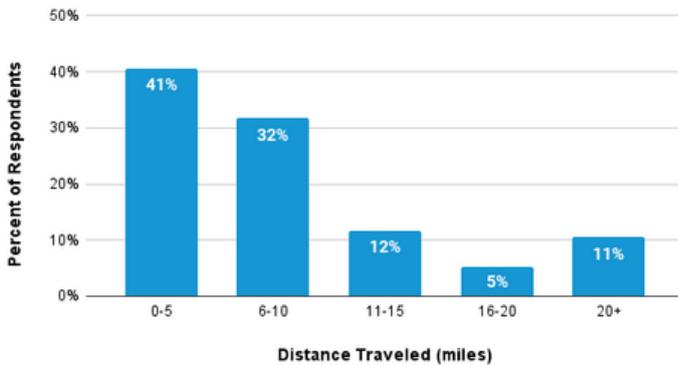
- 2022 TEFBP Participant

“I appreciate the Food Boxes and hope we continue to receive the boxes. Not only saves money but also saves a trip to [the] store which can be difficult for elders.”

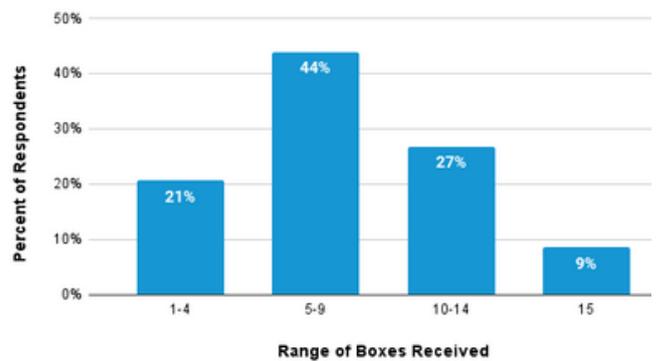
-2022 TEFBP Participant

TEFBP Access and Food Use

Distance Recipients Traveled to Distribution Site

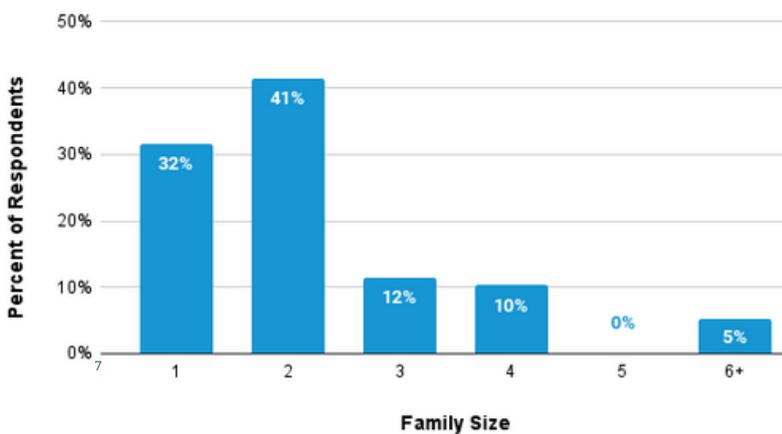


Number of distributions respondents participated in



The majority of TEFBP Elders (73%) traveled 10 miles or less to pick up their boxes, highlighting the accessibility of the Program. Elders most commonly picked up 5-9 boxes out of the 15 available.

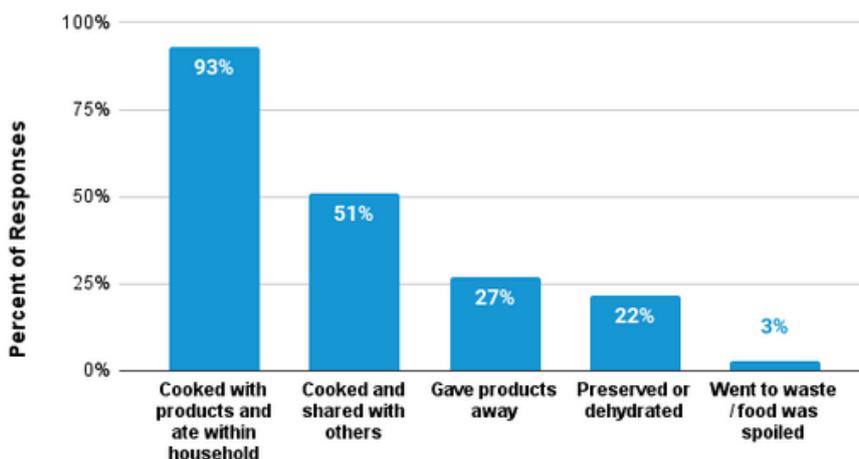
Number of Family Members Fed With Elder Food Box



Most Elders were only feeding themselves or one other person; however, 5% of respondents fed 6 or more people with the boxes.

While most recipients cooked food from the boxes within their own household over half also shared food with others outside of their family.

How Participants Used Their Elder Food Boxes



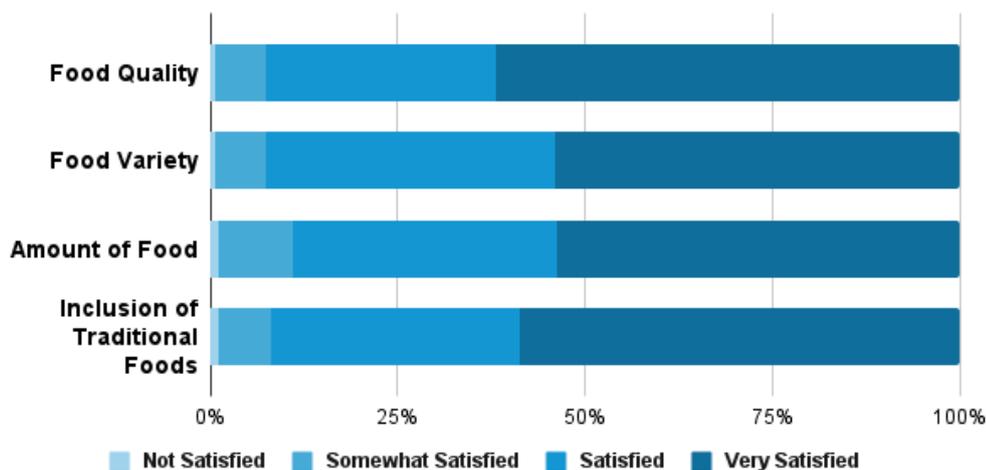
“Receiving the food has been wonderful! Good novelty & quality. Very happy to share some of the food with elderly neighbors on SS/Medicare & poor health.”

- 2022 TEFBP Participant

TEFBP Participant Satisfaction

Respondents of the survey were overwhelmingly satisfied with the food provided by the Program. Ninety-two percent of respondents were "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with the quality of food, variety of food, and inclusion of traditional foods. Satisfaction with the amount of food was slightly lower, with 89% reporting being "satisfied" or "very satisfied." Satisfaction with the amount of food may be lower because all families receive the same amount of food regardless of their family's size. Some respondents with larger families in particular, expressed that they would appreciate more food.

Participants' Level of Satisfaction with the Food Provided in the Elder Boxes

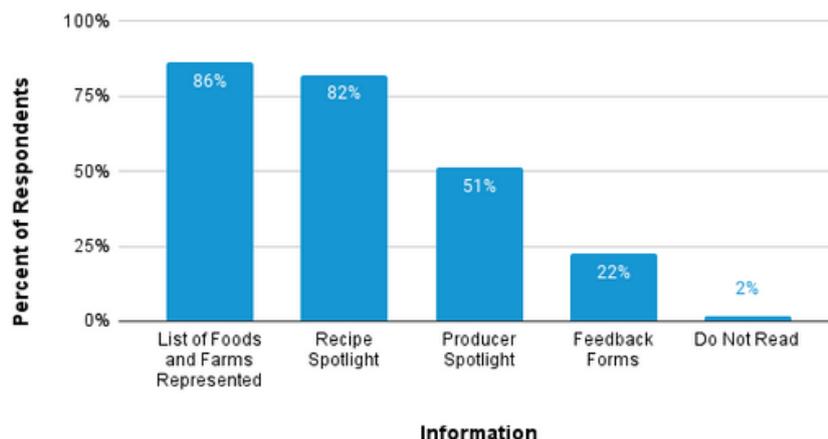


"[With TEFBP boxes] we have replaced unhealthy food with better options (grass-fed beef, bison, etc) This is especially important for me because I have health issues including heart disease"

-2022 TEFBP Participant

Newsletters were distributed with every food box with the purpose of providing elders with more information about the foods being offered and where they came from. The newsletters also included food preservation tips and recipes for how to prepare the foods in the boxes.

Information Found Interesting/Useful in the Newsletters



Supporting Native Producers

Food system studies show that supporting local farmers not only increases access to healthy foods, but can benefit individual state economies. TEFBP has taken this supply side approach to improving health and nutrition access for Tribal Nations in Wisconsin by prioritizing purchases Native and other local producers.

Creating a Direct Market outlet for Native Producers

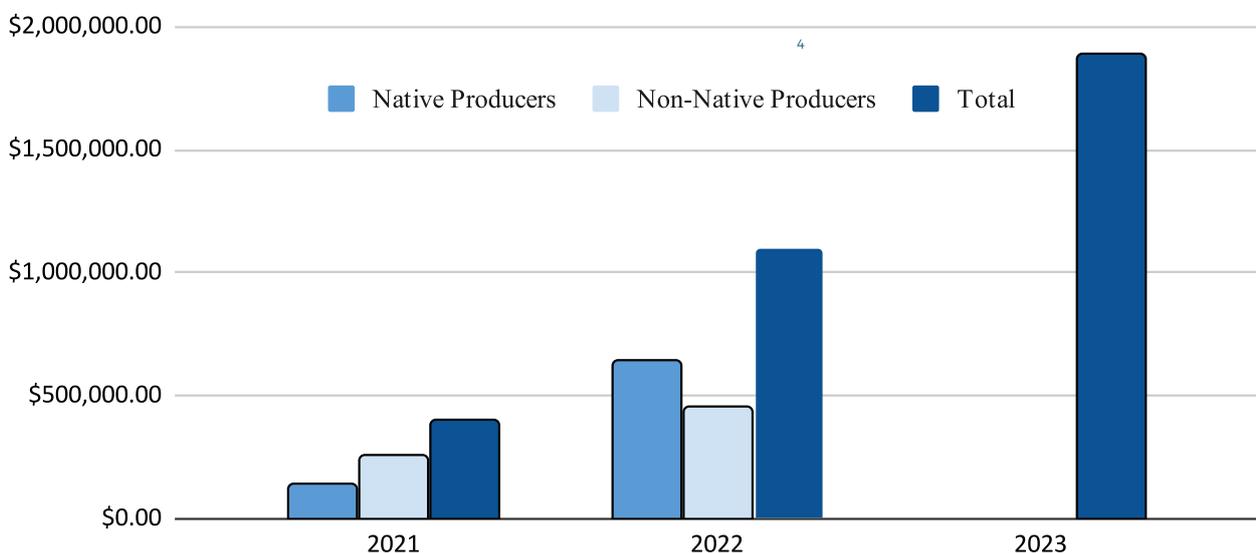
The Tribal Elder Food Box Program has been instrumental in expanding market access for local and Indigenous producers. Importantly, the Program's guaranteed revenue creates space for the growth of more Native farms and products in order to build a stronger Intertribal food economy.

The Program has sought funds to expand its purchasing power, especially its capacity to purchase traditional foods from Native farmers. In 2022, the Program was able to purchase more than \$1 million worth of food products from local and Native producers, with more than half of the purchases going to Native producers, a significant increase from 2021. The 2023 TEFBP budget for food purchasing is set at nearly \$1.9 million in guaranteed revenue to support local and Native farmers. The increase in purchasing ability is largely due to funding from the USDA's Local Food Purchase Assistance Cooperative Agreement Program and Feeding America Eastern Wisconsin's ARPA budget. Institutionalizing consistent funding through State or Federal budgets will be crucial to TEFBP's ability to support producers moving forward.

"[TEFBP] provided guaranteed revenue and we were able to maximize everything we do. We maxed out the aquaponics system. We were able to be very successful with the maple syrup in year one because we had an outlet for it immediately. It made us look at expanding things-- thinking about where we could expand and why we need to."

-2022 Producer

TEFBP Food Purchases from Native and Local Producers



Producer Feedback

In 2022, Program team members interviewed representatives of 15 of the 16 Native producers that the TEFBP worked with during 2022 (see Appendix B for interview questions). This section reviews feedback from 2021 and 2022 TEFBP Native producers to understand the opportunities offered by the Program as well as additional challenges that the Program can directly or indirectly work to address.

Producer hopes for the future of native food systems

Native producers participated in TEFBP for the cultural and community value and when asked about their hopes for a future Native food system, they wanted to see more Indigenous producers, especially more youth. Most also mentioned the need for increased land and equipment ownership/access to increase self-sufficiency and support food sovereignty. Further discussion of policies are discussed in the Policy Recommendations on page 14, but a notable theme among Native producers was the desire to see policies that direct more funds or producer incubator capital directly to Tribal food systems.

I farm land that is on the same block as my great-grandpa farmed a hundred years ago-- whom I'm named after. To think that all these years later he has a great great grandson that's actually producing in agriculture on that land is something that I take pride in."
-2022 Producer

TEFBP-Specific Producer Needs

The table below points to common challenges and requests for producer support that are specific to the TEFBP. These needs can be most directly and promptly addressed by GLIFC and rely on funding and administrative capacity more so than policy.

| | Challenges | Future Assistance |
|-----------------------|---|--|
| Transportation | Difficulty transporting time-sensitive products like meat over long distances; access to reliable, refrigerated vehicles. | TEFBP pick-up directly from producers; help finding capital for or supplying refrigerated trucks |
| Packaging | Significant additional labor was needed for some producers to follow packaging specifications for the Elder Food Boxes. | Provide standardized packaging materials, maybe with program logo; Assist with packaging labor |
| Equipment | Some producers lacked adequate equipment or access to processing to meet program production demands. | Funding for producers to buy equipment or a system to share equipment with other producers; Help to facilitate partnerships for product aggregation. |

MOVING FORWARD

TEFBP Participants' Suggestions for Improvement

- Expand advertising and communication about the Program and pick-up dates
- Include more recipes, cooking videos, and tips for preserving foods with each box
- Provide the food boxes year-round
- Allow participants to customize boxes
- Reduce food spoilage, as some participants reported receiving spoiled food
- Include more medicinal tea
- Allow participants to return boxes to be reused
- Allow flexibility in where participants can pick up boxes e.g., at a distribution site for a different tribe
- Facilitate field trips to the farms

2023 Goals

- Expand distribution to Milwaukee and Green Bay
- Increase proteins and traditional foods (allocation of \$55/box for these categories)
- Complete program feasibility study and apply for implementation grants by the summer of 2023
- Increase producer capacity through grant support, transportation and processing infrastructure, and equipment-sharing systems



“As an Indigenous producer and as an Indigenous person in general, we take pride in caring for our elders and it’s something that I’ve grown up with. When my grandma got older she didn’t go to a nursing home. Family moved in and we were able to keep her in her home until she passed away. We took care of her. That is what we felt was our responsibility and I think this program does that by providing high-quality foods for elders.

I think a lot of these elders have grown up in the commodity era where you’re getting commodities from the government that’s all processed food that’s leading to diabetes, leading to obesity, and it’s leading to a lot of these epidemics that the tribal members are suffering from today. With a program like this, you’re getting high-quality food that is good for them. I take pride in being able to do that. I think it’s pretty cool when you have tribal elders that are opening boxes that have grass-fed beef, pasture-raised chickens, and white fish that is caught out of Lake Superior from Red Cliff. That’s stuff that 20, 30, 40 years ago you never had. I’m 35 and I remember growing up going to commods with my grandma and we’d pick up government commodities. You’d get your packet of Spam and your dried powder milk. To think of how far we’ve come, that’s huge for the Indigenous Nations.”

- TEFBP Native Producer



Exploring GLIFC's Future

In addition to supporting and expanding the TEFBP, GLIFC's future vision is to identify additional ways to build a more resilient regional food system that supports tribal food sovereignty across the Great Lakes region. Moving forward, GLIFC is developing a systems approach to supporting Native producers by incorporating producer equity funds, cooperative business and production planning, and policy advocacy. GLIFC has also is partnered with two organizations, the Native Lands Advocacy Project (a project of Village Earth) and the Food Finance Institute, to conduct feasibility studies that will help GLIFC assess the current assets and food production capacity of tribes in the Great Lakes Region, identify what additional actions are needed to support tribal producers and food distribution channels, and how best to implement those actions.

Village Earth is producing an interactive storymap that allows users to explore rich data on Native populations and agricultural resources in the BIA's Midwest Region. It includes information on the historic context of food production on tribal lands (e.g., agricultural revenue lost to land cessions), on current tribal producers and production capacity, and on the potential of tribes and Native lands to meet the regions' future food needs. It also provides data on health metrics, demographics, food access, and food-related spending on reservations in the

Midwest region. The storymap provides a tool that GLIFC and individual tribes can use to understand how to expand production capacity to support food sovereignty across the Great Lakes region.

Village Earth is a publicly-supported 501(c) nonprofit organization focused on helping communities reconnect with the resources that promote human well-being by enhancing social and political empowerment, community self-reliance, and self-determination. One of the way they do this is by working in and with Native communities to address food and agriculture-related issues.

Screenshot of one of the interactive interfaces within the storymap

HOW MANY PEOPLE COULD MY RESERVATION FEED?
RE-IMAGINING RESERVATION FOOD SYSTEMS TO ENHANCE SOVEREIGNTY & SELF-DETERMINATION

Despite the large amount of agriculture production that occurs on Native American Reservations in the U.S., many are still classified as food deserts (having limited access to affordable and nutritious food.) Sadly, this is the product of over a century of misguided Federal Indian policy that promoted intensive commodity agriculture where most Reservation production goes to feed off reservation populations. This tool is designed to help re-imagine reservation food systems as being more focused on meeting local needs by calculating how many people Reservation lands could potentially feed.

What potential exists for greater food security on YOUR reservation or native land?

Select One or More US Native Land
(Multiple values)

Diet Scenario
BAS

| Cropland Type | Area (Acres) | Percentage |
|---------------------|--------------|------------|
| Perennial Cropland | 2 | 0.00% |
| Cultivated Cropland | 525 | 1.18% |
| Perennial Cropland | 268 | 0.60% |
| Perennial Cropland | 563 | 1.26% |
| Cultivated Cropland | 6 | 0.01% |
| Cultivated Cropland | 21,912 | 49.18% |

Based on the total area of grazing lands, cultivated cropland, and perennial cropland, **Bad River, Forest County Potawatomi, Ho-Chunk Nation and 8 more** lands could feed an estimated **66,610.10** people per year or **8.03** times the current estimated population of **41,421** (2021 ACS). This is assuming the diversity of fruits, vegetables, and grains was increased to support a recommended healthy omnivorous diet and local channels for processing,

See the Data How was this calculated?

Developed by Native Lands Advocacy Project <https://nativeland.info> | Carrying Capacity Model adapted from Peters et. al. 2016 <https://online.ucpress.edu/elementa/article/doi/10.12957/journal.elementa.000116/112903/Carrying-capacity-of-US-agricultural-land-ten>

The Food Finance Institute is conducting a feasibility study that will identify what additional infrastructure and production capacity is needed to support tribal producers, the TEFBP, and food distribution to Native communities across the Great Lakes region. The study will also provide information on how to strategically locate and expand it this infrastructure in ways that optimize supply chains across the region.

The Food Finance Institute (FFI) supports food-focused initiatives in building and funding profitable enterprises. They increase access to sophisticated financial technical assistance by supporting partners with training, resources, tools, and coaching.

Some questions addressed by the study include: Are there certain places in the landscape where tribes can strategically increase food production capacity to align with food distribution routes for the TEFBP? Are there specific places where more warehouse, cold storage capacity, or other infrastructure would be helpful? What types of equipment, processing, and distribution infrastructure should be owned and managed by individual tribes versus GLIFC or another intertribal entity? How much of a financial investment would tribal governments need to make to build a fully sovereign Native food system in the Great Lakes region?



Policy Recommendations

This section provides a list of Tribal, state, and federal policy recommendations that could help recognize and support the work that is being done by GLIFC and Wisconsin's 11 federally recognized tribes to improve local production and access to Native foods.

Tribal Policies

- **Support producer processing**
- **Support land access programs**, such as forestry permitting projects and discounted or free leases to Tribal producers on trust land
- **Develop a "Native food census"** (like the U.S. Agricultural Census) to better estimate the amount of food Native lands could supply. For example, Native foods inventories like the GLIFWC *manoomin* map; metrics for carrying capacity for Native corn varieties; assessment of local food initiatives like community gardens that are not captured in national datasets
- **Expand opportunities to get Tribal and locally produced foods into Tribal food programs, food service venues, and retail outlets**
- **Support and expand agricultural education programs**

State Policies

- **Continue funding for the TEFBP in the Governor's Budget**
- **Implement a 1151 Medicaid Waiver or In Lieu of Services (ILOS) Program** allowing Medicaid funding to be used to cover food as a reimbursable expense. Historically, states have been able to use 1151 Medicaid waivers to implement pilot programs that use Medicaid funding for expenses that aren't traditionally covered by Medicaid, such as opioid treatment. In 2022 the federal government approved California's permanent "In lieu of services" (ILOS) program that allows California Medicaid recipients (and potentially those in other states) to use Medicaid funding to offset the cost of services that address root causes of health issues, for example, providing healthy food as a means of mitigating diet-related illnesses. As defined by federal law, qualifying services must be "cost effective," ultimately offsetting medicare costs by reducing the need for medical treatment. Medicaid recipients can receive services from community providers, the same way they would for traditional medical services. California's ILOS program covers 12 different services including nutritious meals, housing deposits, and asthma remediation.
- **Develop an equivalent of the Wisconsin Agricultural Education and Workforce Development Council specific to Tribes and Indigenous agriculture.** This would help create opportunities for Tribal youth to receive training in culturally-appropriate agriculture and food production methods and build the base of young farmers and food systems workers needed to further future expansion of Tribal and intertribal food systems.
- **Increase Tribal representation on food system advisory councils including the WAEWDC**
- **Include Tribal leadership in the development of a state plan for the recently announced Resilient Food Systems Infrastructure Program.** Use program funding to support the TEFBP by providing capital for each Tribe to build a food distribution warehouse.
- **Institute land access provisions that establish first right of refusal for Tribes to purchase state-owned lands in their ancestral territories.**

Federal Policies

GLIFC joins the Native Farm Bill Coalition in advocating for the following changes to federal policies and programs. More details on these recommendations can be found here:

https://www.nativefarmbill.com/_files/ugd/8b3589_763e8879ac2842c0baa45c586ddfd83a.pdf

- **FDPIR recommendations:**
 - Make FDPIR 638 Pilot Program a permanent program
 - Reduce the matching requirement for FDPIR from 80% to 0%
 - Continue the nutrition education funding recently authorized for FDPIR
 - Allow Tribes to include herbs and spices through FDPIR
 - Allow Tribes to source foods from across national borders (e.g., Canada) for purchases from Tribal producers or in times of emergency
 - Provide additional funding for infrastructure updates to FDPIR facilities and equipment
 - Include more regionally-produced food from Tribal producers
- **Expand 638 self-governance authority to all Food and Nutrition programs**
- **Make USDA's Local Food Purchasing Assistance Cooperative Agreement permanent**
- **Institute land access provisions that establish first right of refusal for Tribes to purchase USDA and other federal lands in their ancestral territories**
- **Institute USDA-mandated recognition of Tribal Departments of Food and Agriculture, and incorporate Tribal Food and Agriculture Departments into interactions with offices of the federal government**

