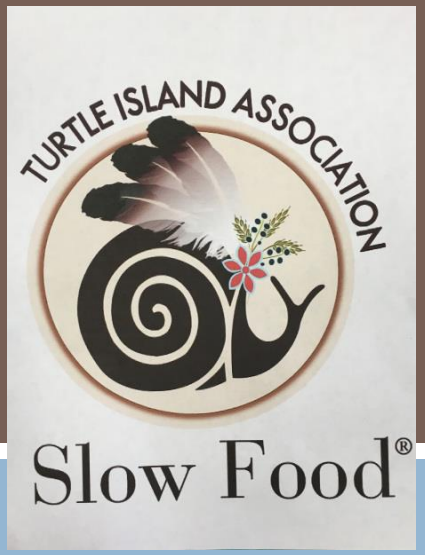
Slow Food Turtle Island



Turtle Island Slow Food planning participants: Back row from L: Clayton Brascoupe, Dan Cornelius, Angelo McHorse, Don Wedll, Winona LaDuke, Denisa Livingston, Melissa Nelson, Terrie BadHand, Megan Larmer, Terrol Johnson, Franco Lee, Kyra Busch, Daniel Mapp. Middle row (from L): Nicole Francis, Pati Martinson, Nicole Yanes, Roy Kady, Tiana Swazo, Samantha Felix, Aretta Begay, Pauline Terbasket, Lorraine Gray. Front (from L:) Elizabeth Hoover, Kaylena Gray, Emigdio Ballon, Lavina Gray

On February 22, representatives from Indigenous food projects around the country gathered at the Taos County Economic Development Corporation (TCEDC) with representatives from Slow Food USA (and Skyped in Slow Food International) as well as the Christiansen Fund, to discuss the possibility and mechanics of establishing a Slow Food chapter specifically for Indigenous people from Canada, the US, and Mexico. Participants felt that having a Slow Food association separate from the national organizations would give Native communities better opportunities to network, develop presidia to protect Indigenous foods, and send Native delegates to Terra Madre in Italy.

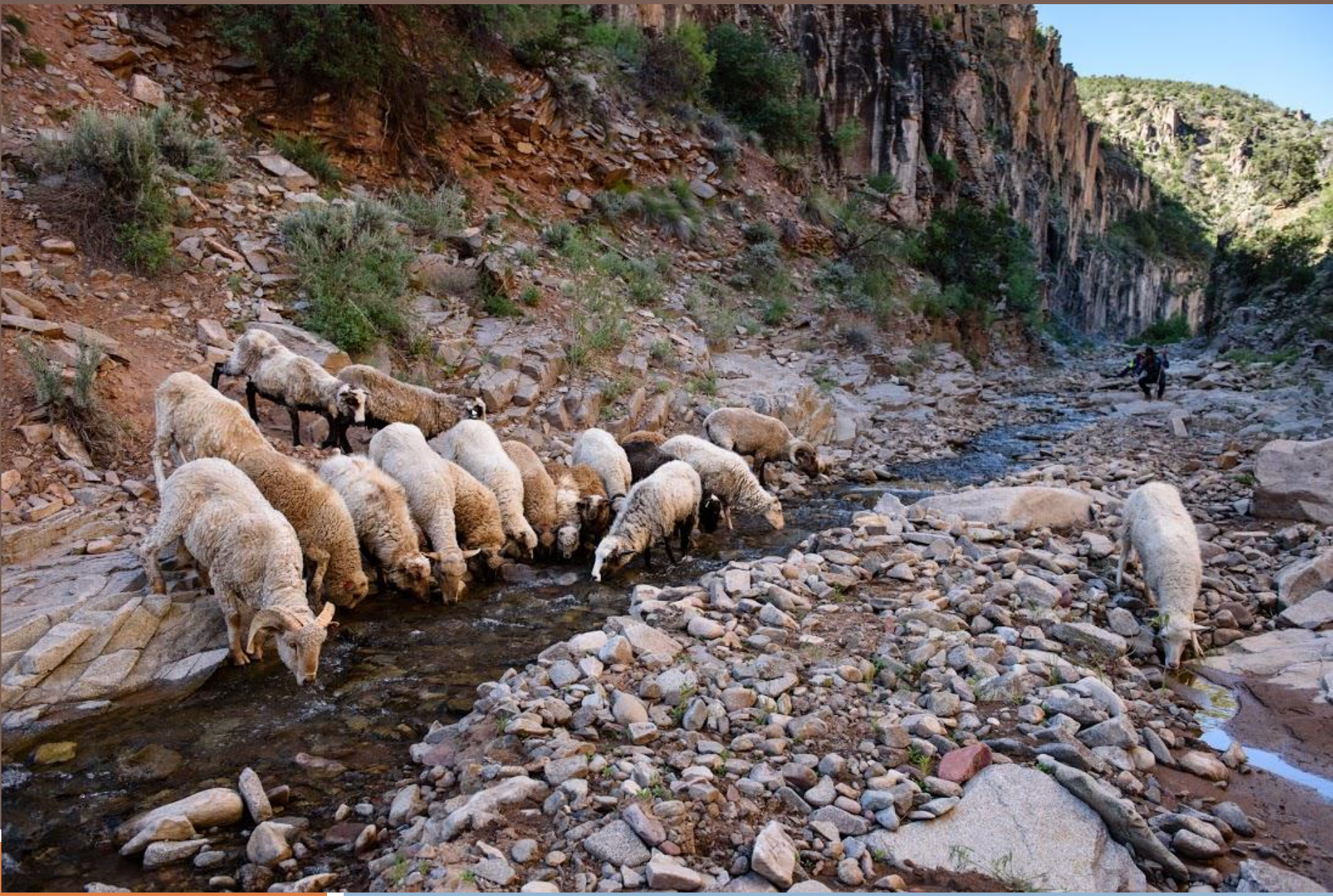
To give a little background, the Slow Food Manifesto was drafted in 1989, with support from 15 international delegates. Today, Slow Food has over 150,000 members and is active in more than 150 countries, including national associations in Italy, the U.S., Germany and Japan. There are more than 170 chapters and 2,000 food communities in the United States alone. The goal of Slow Food is to support the development of grassroots projects and activities, as well as the presidia project (which involves groups of producers who work together to protect and market their foods) and the Ark of Taste (an online catalog of foods that are at risk of extinction).

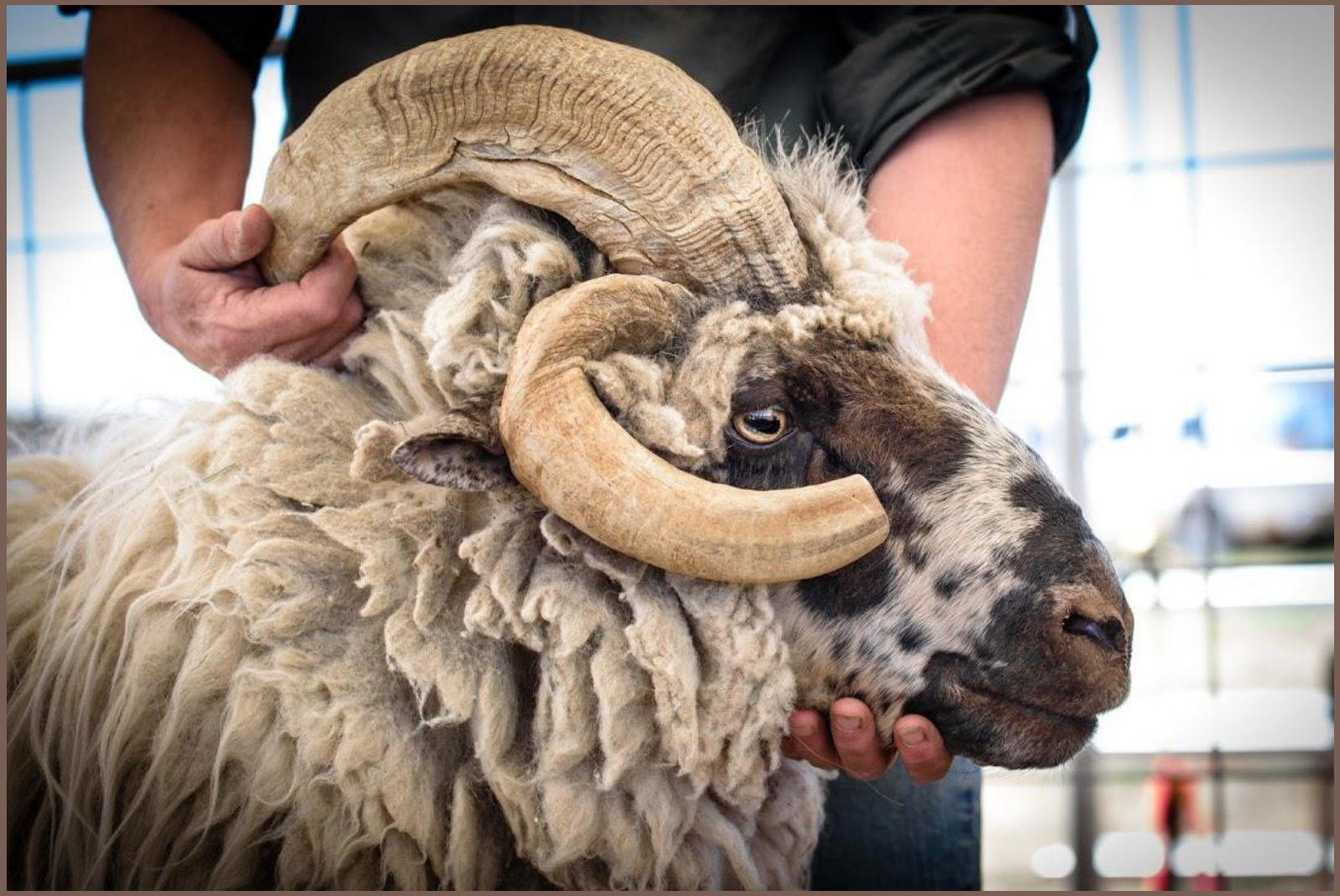
Nations like the US, Italy, Canada, Mexico, etc, have national associations, which come with certain obligations, including the registration of members, coordinating activities on the ground, and fundraising activities for both local projects and to support international campaigns. Rather that starting a new national association like this, our group decided to start a regional association, similar to the Terra Madre Balkans network.

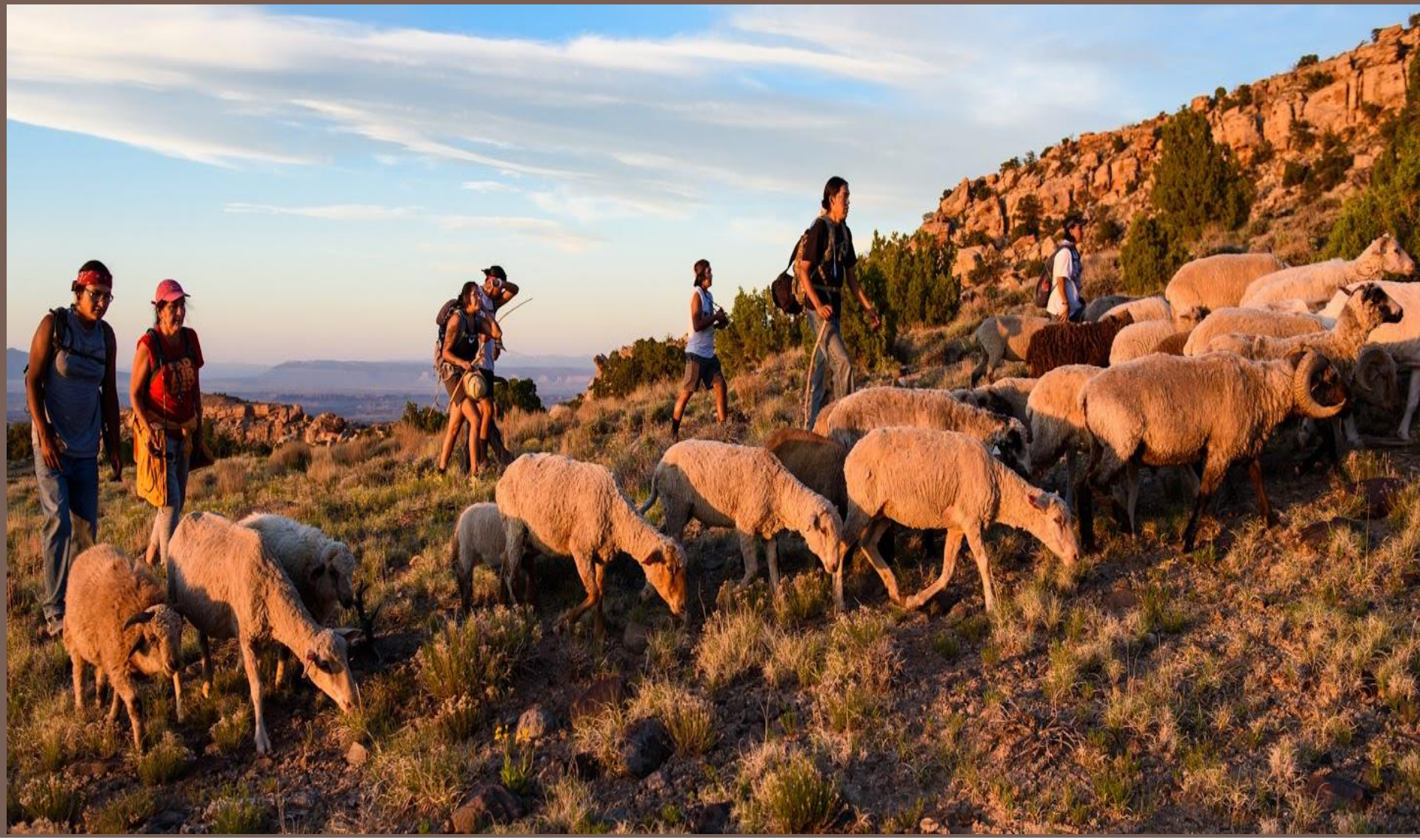
Becoming a regional association would allow the group to still nominate presidia and coordinate networking among members and their communities, without the financial obligations of a national association.
Kyra from the Christiansen fund noted that Slow Food has been recognizing increasingly over the past 10 years that its relationship with indigenous communities should be different than with nations, and has been working to develop this relationship. The first step was the creation of an Indigenous Terra Madre space within within the Terra Madre/ Salone de Gusto, as well as the establishment of a separate Indigenous Terra Madre event (in 2015 this took place in Shillong in India). This most recent gathering ended with 70,000 people at a food festival. In future years this event will potentially be hosted in Kenya and Canada.

But the group gathered in Taos this past February hopes to take this a step further, and establish a separate Slow Food regional association dedicated just to supporting Indigenous people on Turtle Island.

One of the programs within Slow Food is the establishment of presidia, in order to sustain the quality production of foods at risk of extinction, to protect unique regions and ecosystems, to recover traditional processing methods, and to safeguard native breeds and local plant varieties. Today, 472 Presidia involve more than 13,000 producers worldwide. In the USA, there are 5 presidia, three of which involve Indigenous foods: the Navajo Churro Sheep Presidium; the Anishnaabeg Manoomin (wild rice) Presidium; and the Makah Ozette Potato Presidium. Roy Kady from the Navajo Churro Sheep Presidium also reported that they have nominated the sumac berry as a presidium.

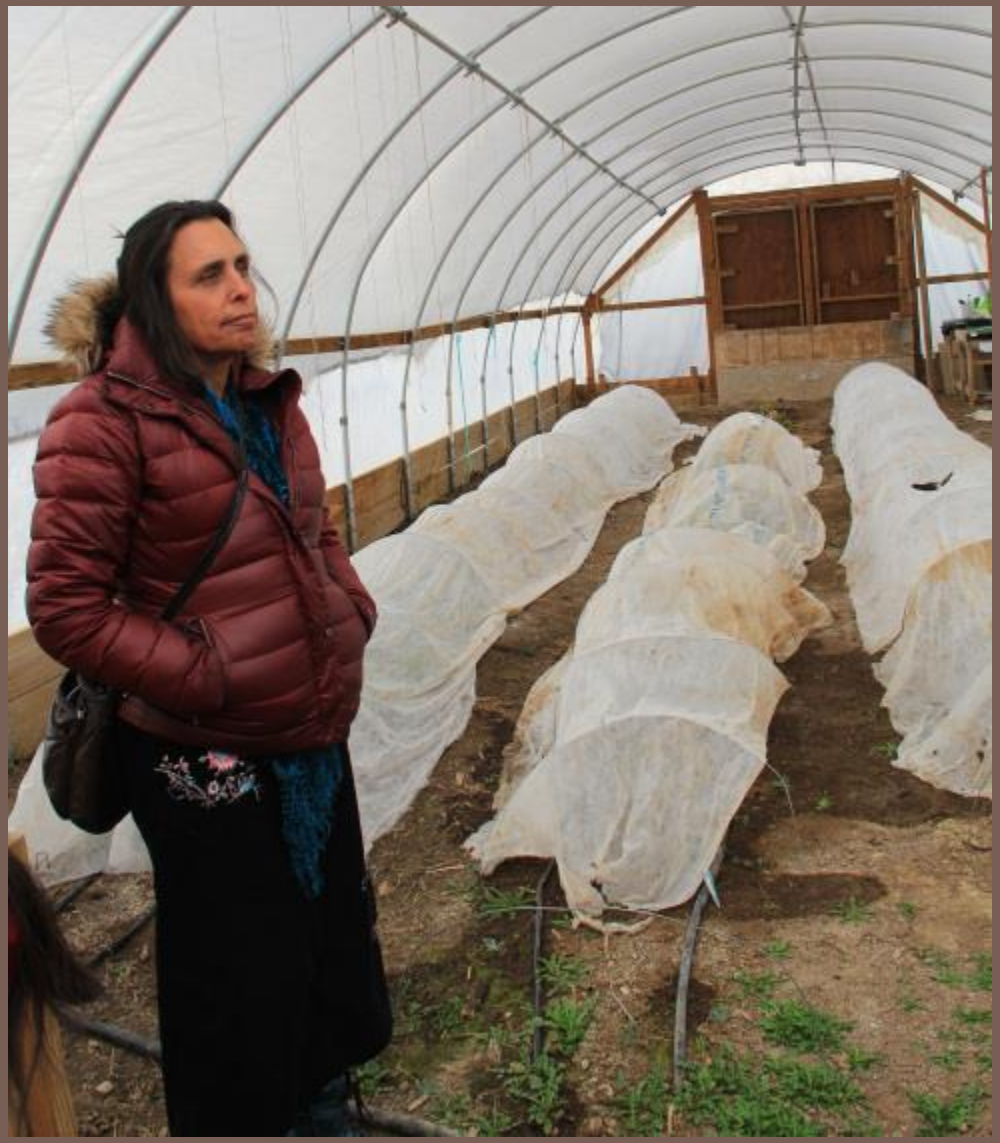






Conversations came up at this gathering about how to protect other important foods– like taro (an important food stuff in Hawaii), heritage corns, maple syrup, chiltapenes (wild chilis in the Sonoran desert currently threatened by over-harvesting and environmental contamination), the California Tan Oak (currently threatened by blight), and the Broad Leaf Yucca Fruit. (To learn more about the guidelines to establish a presidium, here is a document shared with us by Slow Foods: PresidiaGuidelines. Once a community has determined that they want to nominate a food for a presidium, they would fill out this form: Presidium Nomination Form).

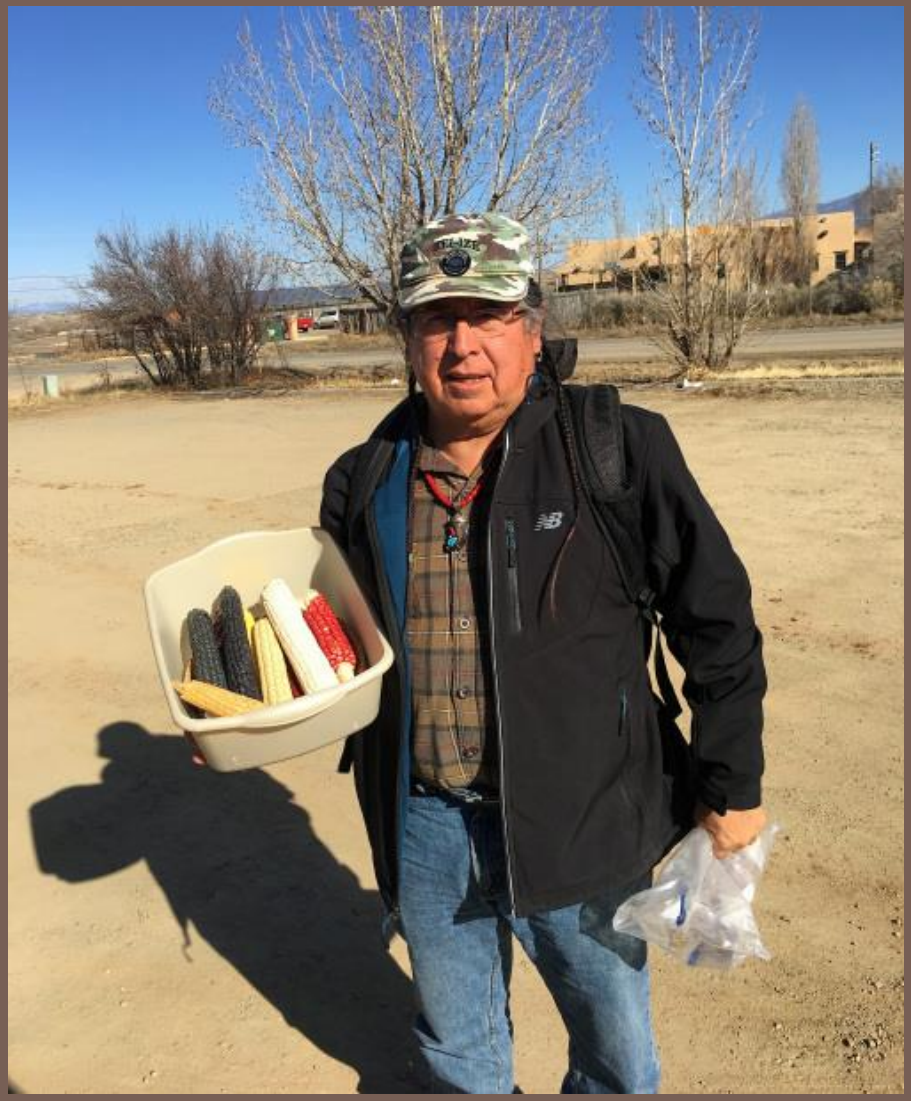
So what would the benefits be of establishing a Slow Food association for Indigenous people? I've included some of the attendees thoughts with their photos below:



Winona LaDuke (Honor the Earth; standing here in the TCEDC greenhouse), cited the value in the "opportunity to be part of an international food movement. The opportunity to hang out with cool food people from around the world who are like us. In my experience I found that my international exposure was enlightening. When I sent people to Italy, they came back empowered about how cool our food was and we were as cool any as anybody in the world." Honor the Earth was also able to garner support for their pipeline opposition through hosting Slow Food dinners. (Photo by Elizabeth Hoover)

Clayton Brascoupe (Traditional Native American Farmers Association) described utilizing educational materials created by Slow Food about food production and climate change in his community. He also described how "hoeing weeds, talking to children and grand kids, shearing sheep, butchering churro. We know it's important. But when we get recognized by other organizations at the international level, it reinforces what our elders in our communities have been telling us all these years. Then we can pass that along to our kids and our grandkids. You're not the only ones doing it, its really important. People all over the world are doing this. In isolated communities, marginalized communities, the work that we're doing has a global impact. Just us working in the fields that evening. For me that's the biggest benefit. Just knowing that whatever our leaders left us and they knew how important it was, there's people all over the globe engaged in the same thing. Having the right to do that, having the water to do that, having the seeds and control of the seeds to do that. I think we need those allies to ensure that once we are being impacted, we have allies all over the world behind us, and they know us, and they understand what our struggle is. That's where its been good for us." Clayton also spoke about traveling, and meeting other land-based people whose languages and foods were threatened;

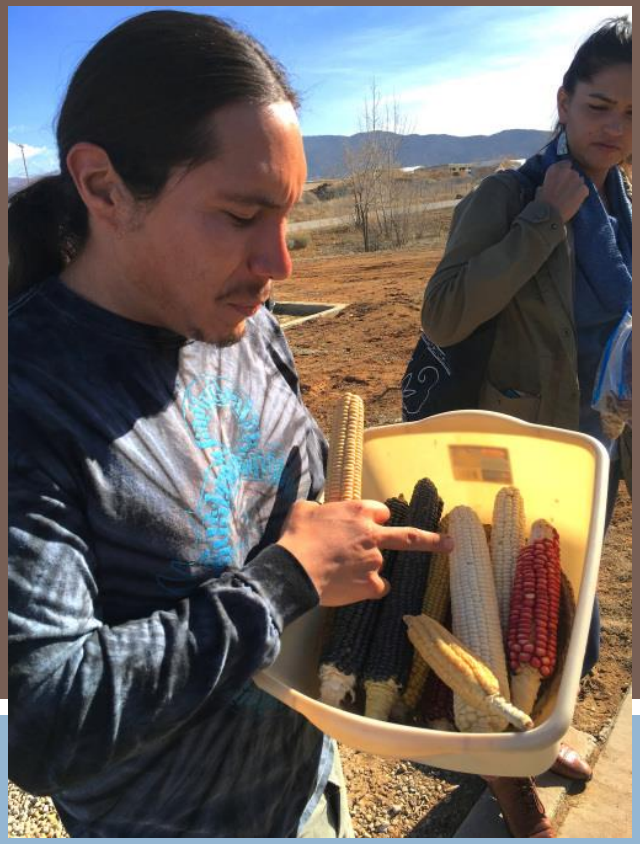
“We can bring that message back to our own kids, our grand kids. To see this, the work that I’m doing at this point isn’t just me and my family anymore its for my kids, grandkids, great grandkids. Those relationships we’re building now not just for me and my family but we gotta think further and further. The faces are still coming. That’s the work that we’re doing right now. We’re opening the door and greeting one another for our kids and our great grandkids.” (Photo by Elizabeth Hoover)



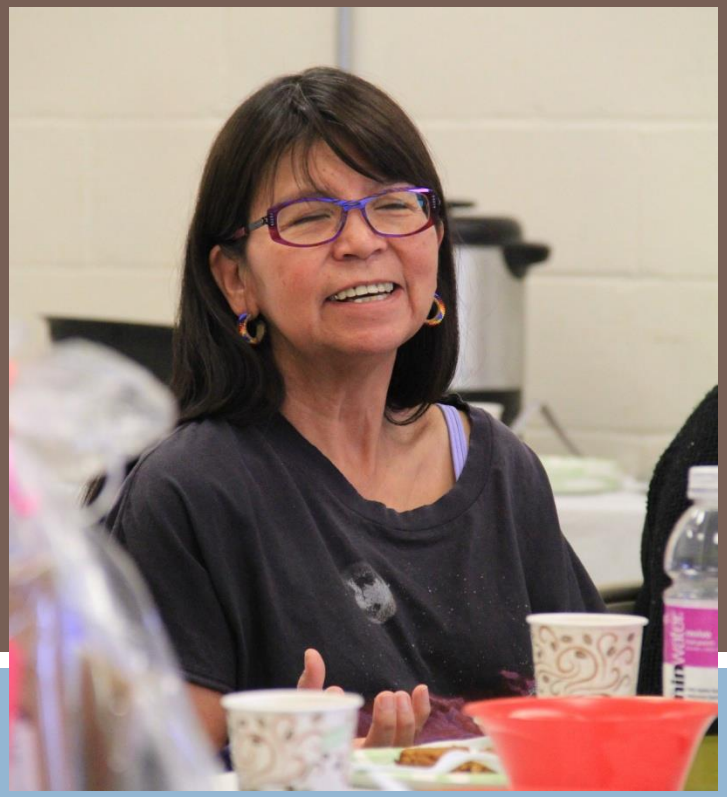
Roy Kady (in the green hat) with the Navajo Churro Sheep Presidium, described the benefit that this presidium has provided for his community. He sent young representatives to the last Terra Madre in 2014 and to the Indigenous Terra Madre gathering in 2015, and described how they came back "ignited." Having the Navajo Churro gain recognition as an important food to be cherished and protected through the development of this presidium has meant receiving better prices for their product at market. To Roy's left is Franco Lee, the Executive Chef for the Navajo Churro Sheep Presidium. Dan Cornelius from the Intertribal Agriculture Council highlighted the importance of working with Native chefs "to build excitement and pride in our foods."
Photo by Elizabeth Hoover

Angelo McHorse with Taos Pueblo Young Growers emphasized that for him it was “Not just what can Slow Foods do for us, but how can we share these resilient indigenous food traditions with the world… we can share lessons, knowledge and our practices to get back our food system, to establish food sovereignty beyond our nations… We’re the ones with info that should be shared and taught to improve the health of people and the environment and health of the world.”

Photo by Elizabeth Hoover

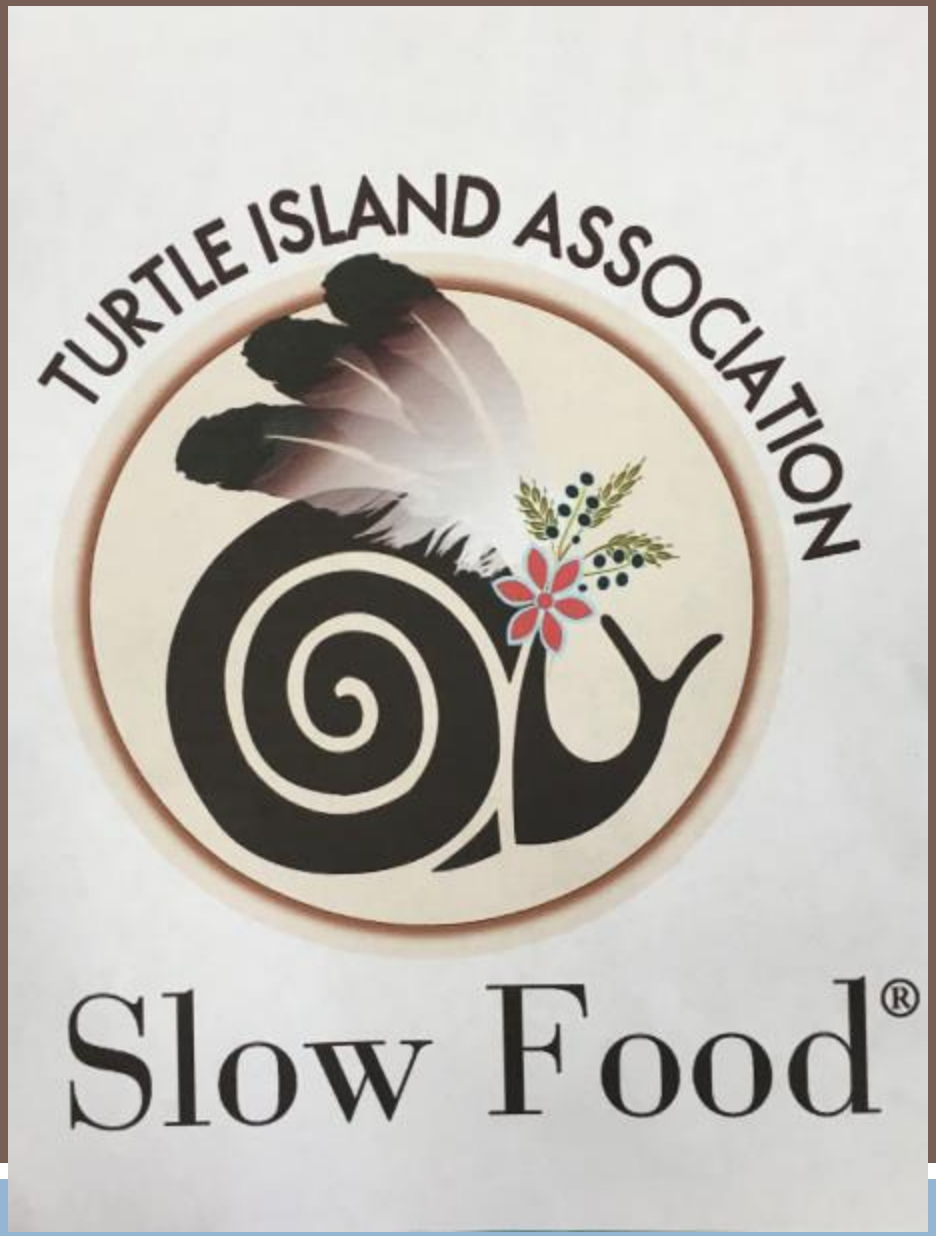


Pauline Terbasket from the Okanagan Nation Alliance, emphasized that Indigenous people need to have more agency in the preservation of indigenous foods. She mentioned organizations in Canada who have budget line items for Indigenous food sovereignty work, but she doesn't see real action from them. "We are the power, we are the change, we are the ones who are responsible for taking care of our own foods." She has been "reinvigorated and recharged" by interacting with people internationally through Slow Food gatherings who are going through similar struggles.
Photo by Elizabeth Hoover



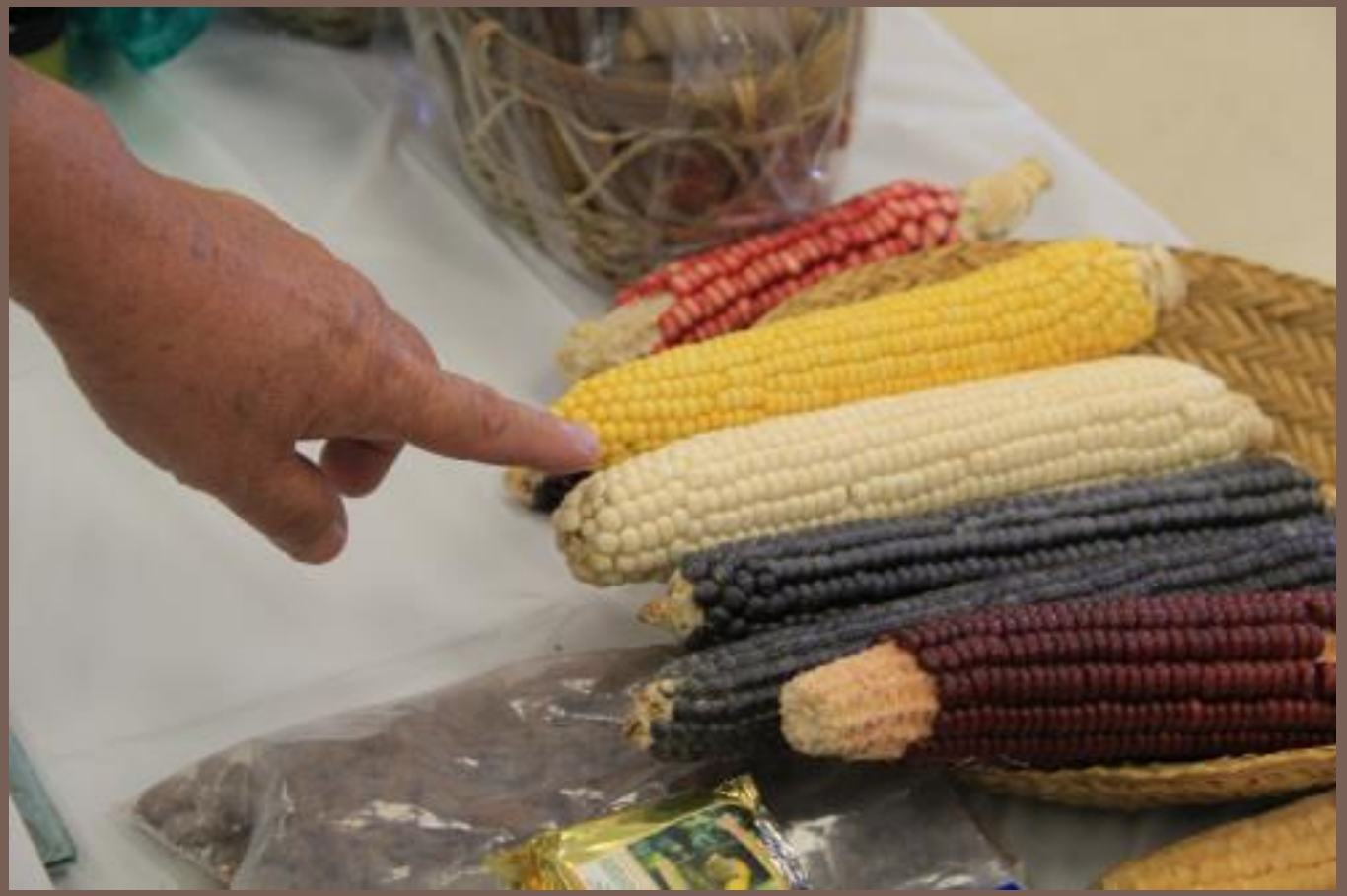
Terrol Johnson (looking thoughtful on the far right) from Tohono O'odham Community Action highlighted the importance of Native control over native food preservation. He described how it wasn't Native people who put many of those foods on the Ark of Taste. He then brought up the question, whose permission should you get to put a food on the Ark of Taste or in a presidium. Elders? Tribal council? Who are any of us to take that responsibility or control over foods owned by entire communities over countless generations? Definitely questions to consider going forward. To his right is Samantha Felix, also from TOCA, and to her right is Denisa Livingston from the Dine Community Advocacy Alliance. Photo by Elizabeth Hoover.

The name Slow Food Turtle Island (this tentative logo was created by Winona's staff) was chosen to denote a regional organization that would include Indigenous people from Canada, the US (including Hawaii), and Mexico. But there was not complete consensus on this name: other contenders included Slow Food Red Nation and Slow Food Four Directions.



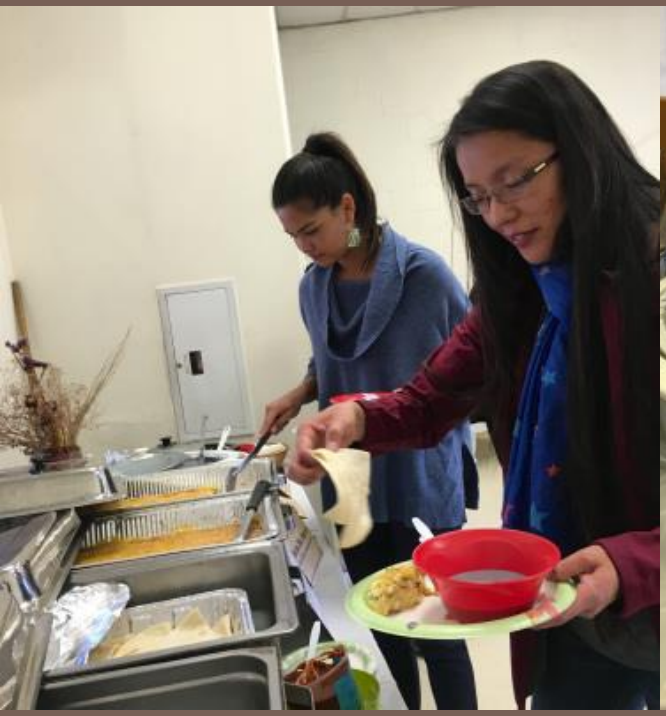
Kaylena Bray from the Cultural Conservancy gave an eloquent defense of the Turtle Island designation for the group. “Turtle island has deep cultural meaning– it brings to mind certain essence, the creation of land and how we’re connection to that. What we’re about and why we’re here. Part of what I’ve considered in a name is how it connects back to the elements of the earth. I know four directions does also but something about the turtle and the island is very land based.” She described the Haudenosaunee creation story in which a woman fell from the Sky World and landed on a turtle’s back. ” Touching the land, grabbing the land- all of the elements,
the comfort of the land– coming through the turtle’s back, in our creation story Sky Woman coming down and landing on the turtle.
This is how I see this connection that we all have to the work that we’re doing.”
Photo by Elizabeth Hoover

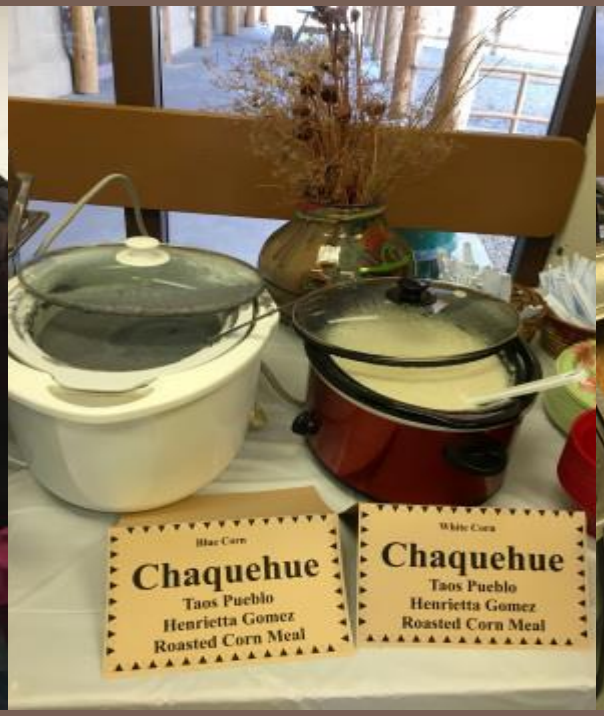
Kaylena Bray, Melissa Nelson, and Elizabeth Hoover are currently in the process of drafting the official proposal to establish the Slow Food Turtle Island regional association. The proposal will be shared with Slow Food International by the end of March, to be put before the Executive Committee (a governing body of 8 people, similar to a board of directors) for approval in March, and to the International Council (a larger governing body of 40 people, including coordinators and volunteers from across the global network) for approval in June.

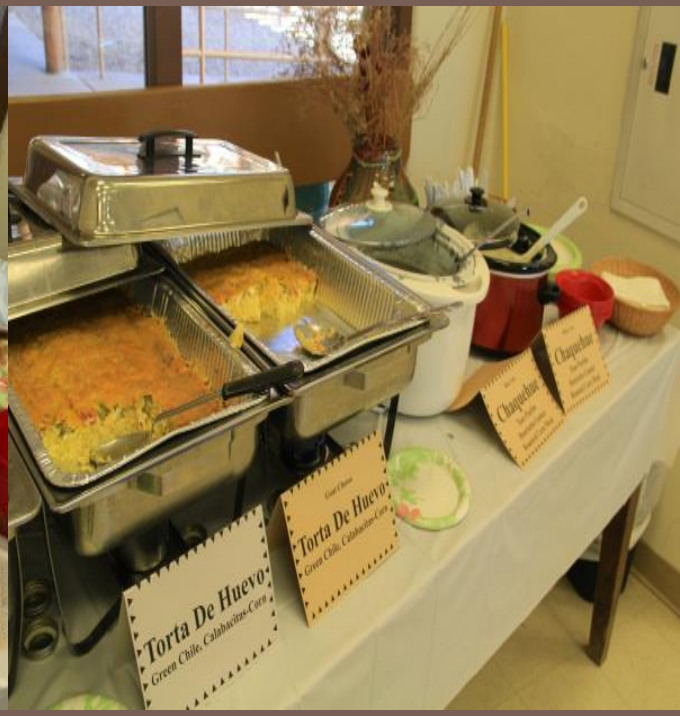


Clayton Brascoupe with four directions corn.
Photo by Elizabeth Hoover

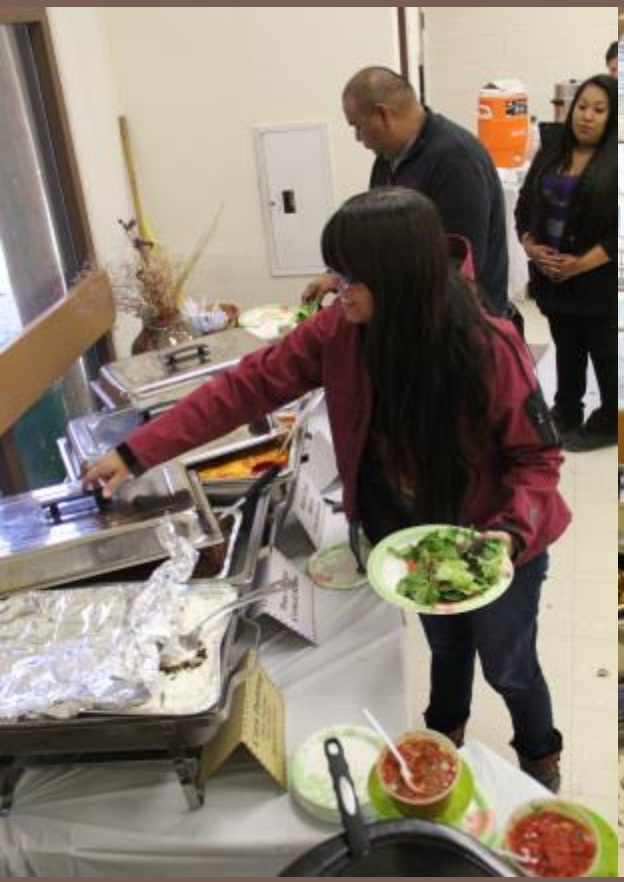
The meeting opened with breakfast, provided by the good people of TCEDC. Pictured here is Aretta Begay from the Navajo Churro Sheep Presidium, and Kaylena Bray from the Cultural Conservancy.

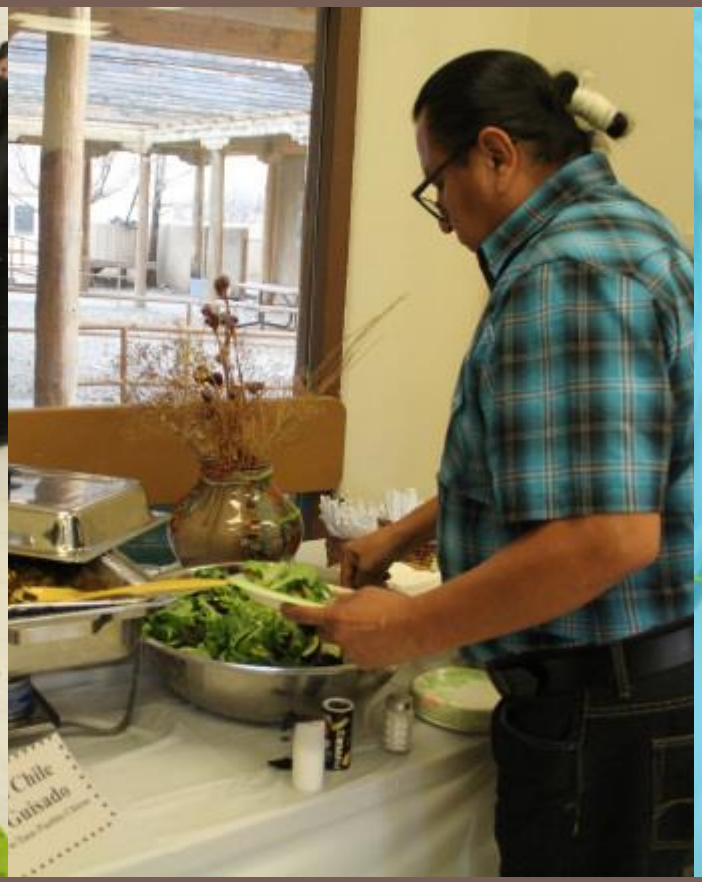






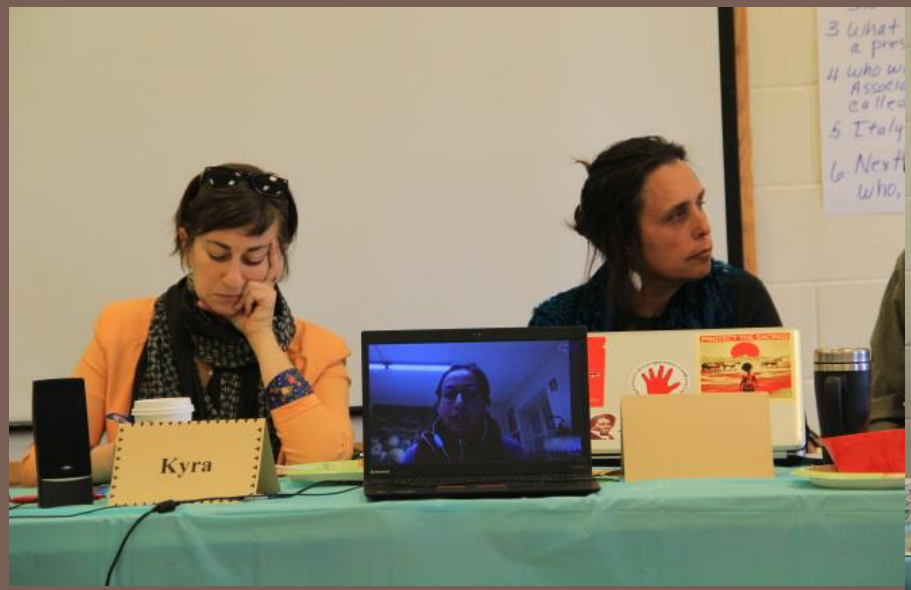
Lunch! Pozole with Tesuque white and blue corn grown by Clayton Brascoupe, Taos Pueblo cooked beans, green chile elk guisado with Taos Pueblo chicos, red chile bison enchiladas and salad

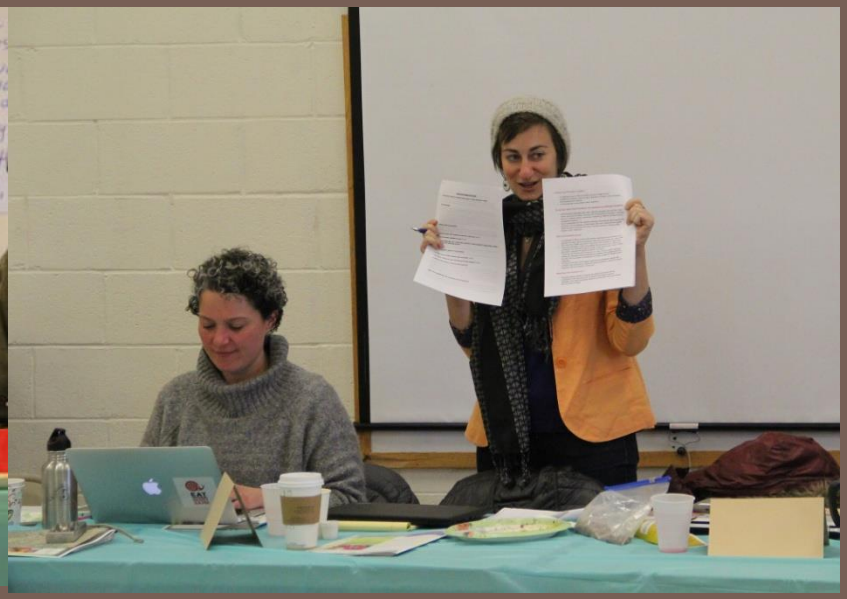




Hard at work, planning. Photo by Elizabeth Hoover

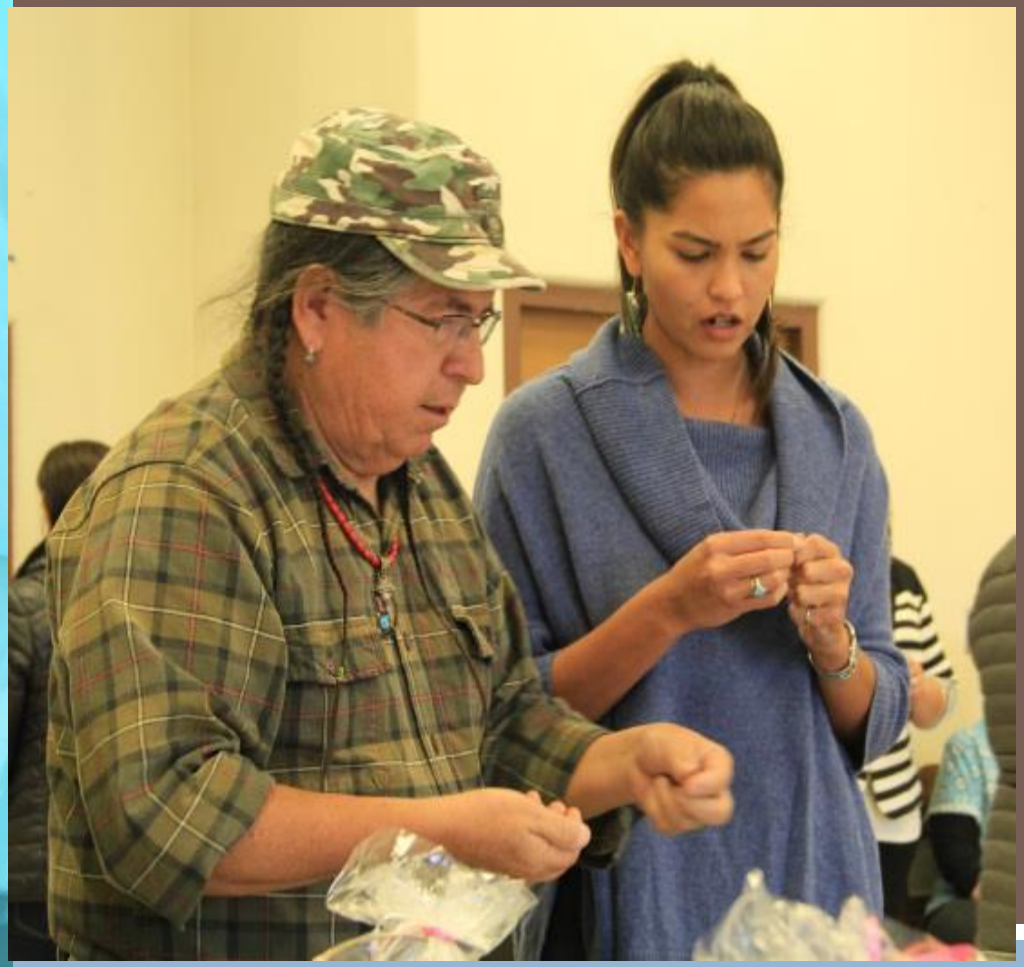
In addition to Kyra Busch from Christiansen Fund, and Megan Larmer from Slow Food USA, Elisa Demichelis from Slow Food International Skyped in from Italy, all to explain what the process would be like to establish a Turtle Island Slow Food regional association



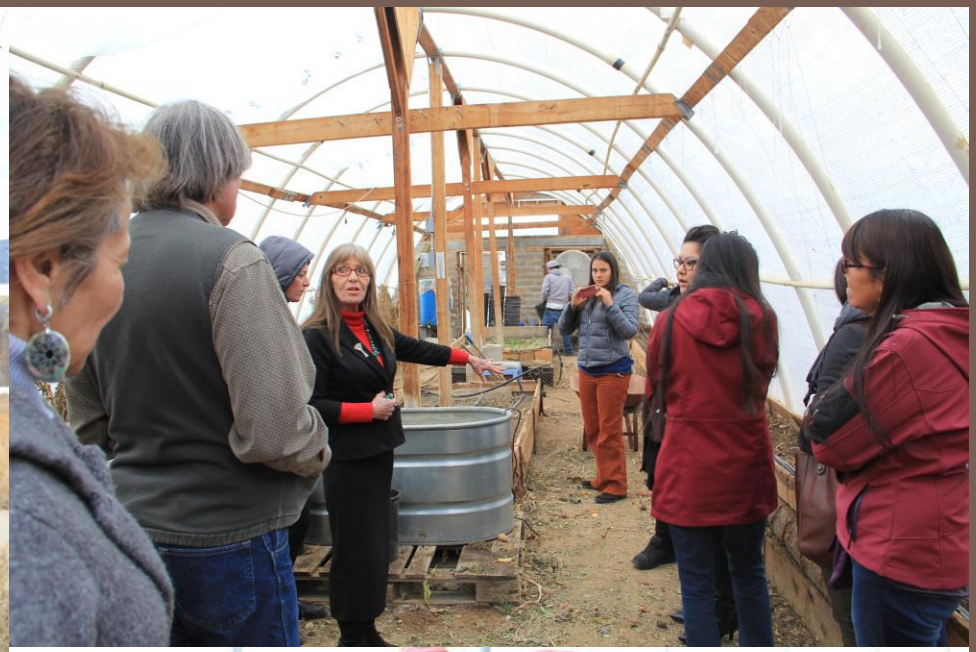


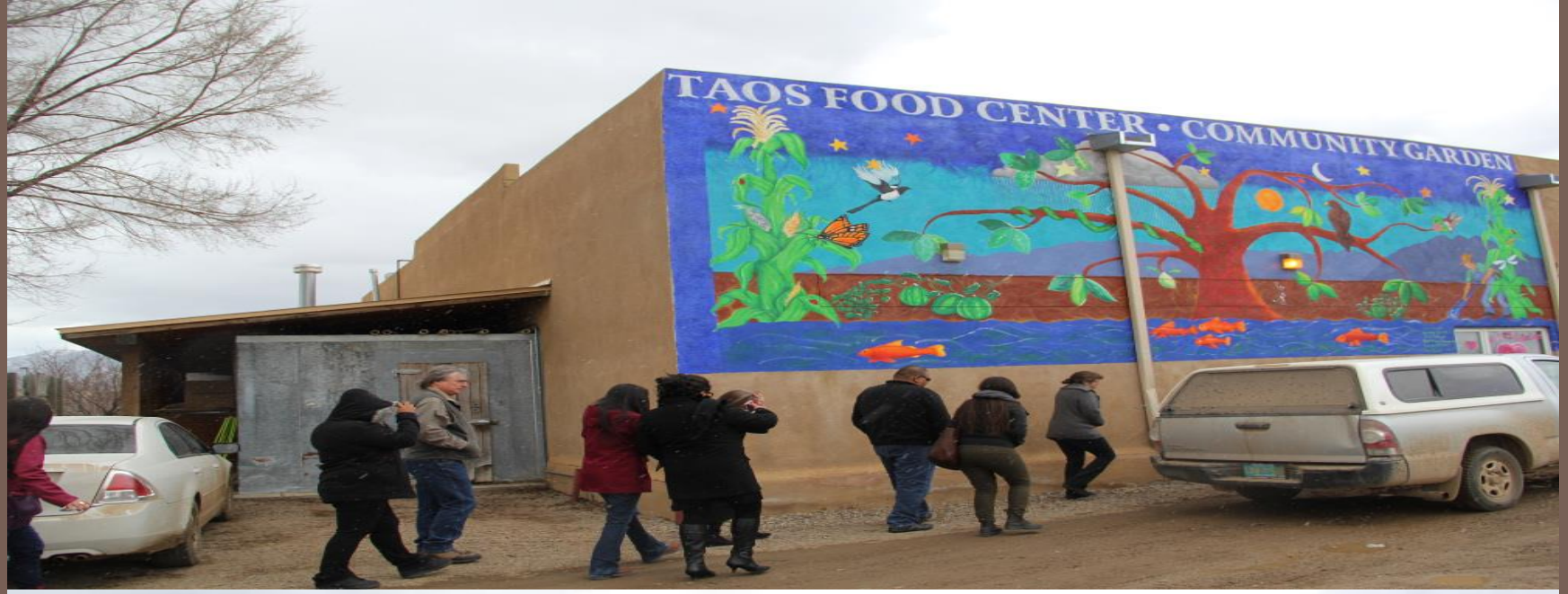
Hard at work, planning.
Photo by Elizabeth Hoover

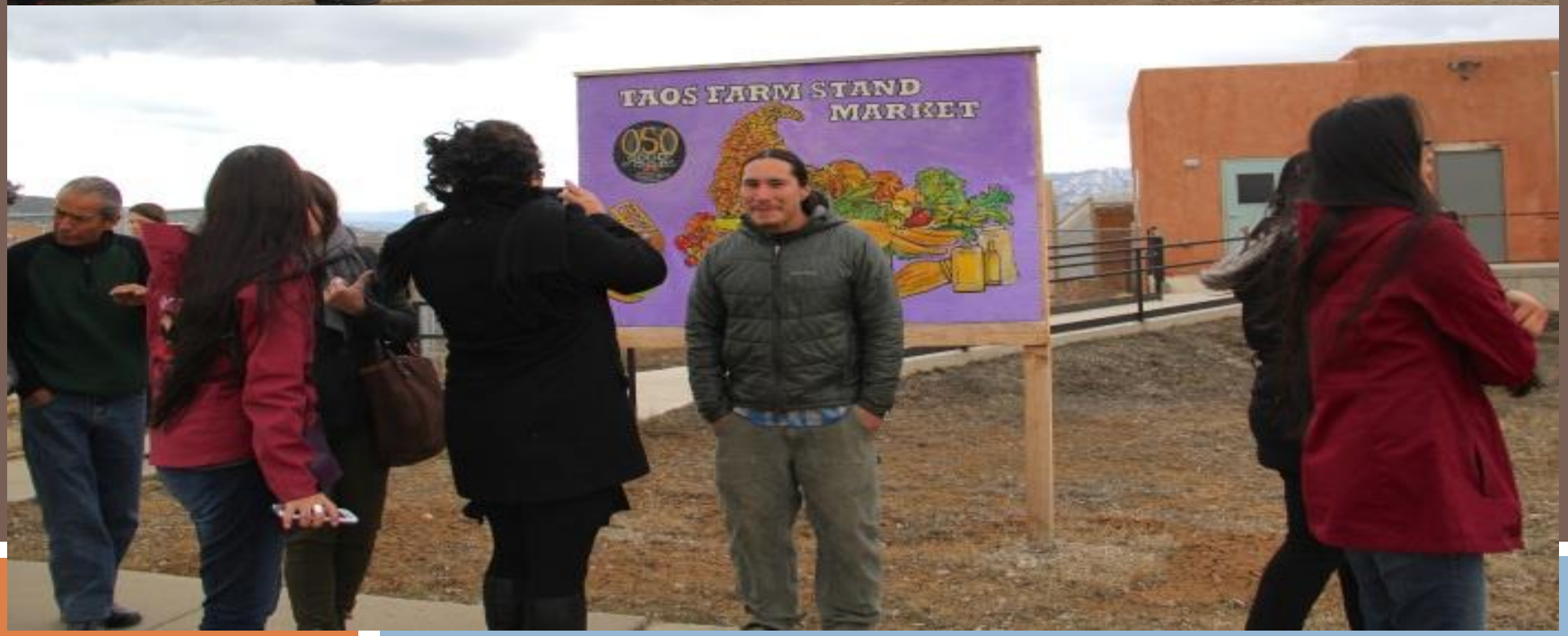
And of course, even though we were fed several meals, there was plenty of snacking! Pinons from Tesuque, and Clayton brought fermented roasted cacao beans from Belize.



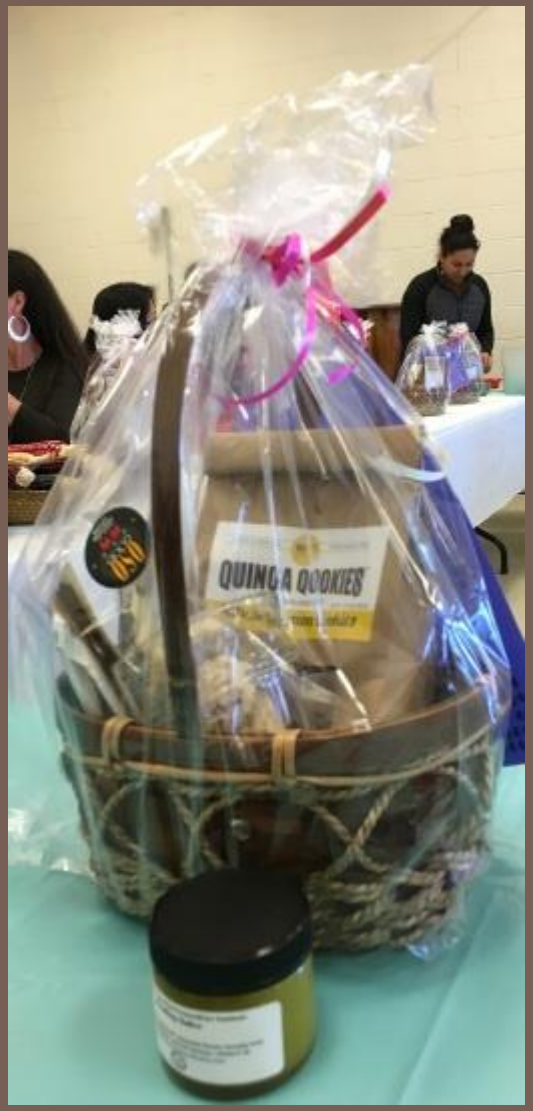
A tour of the TCEDC facilities, including the greenhouses…



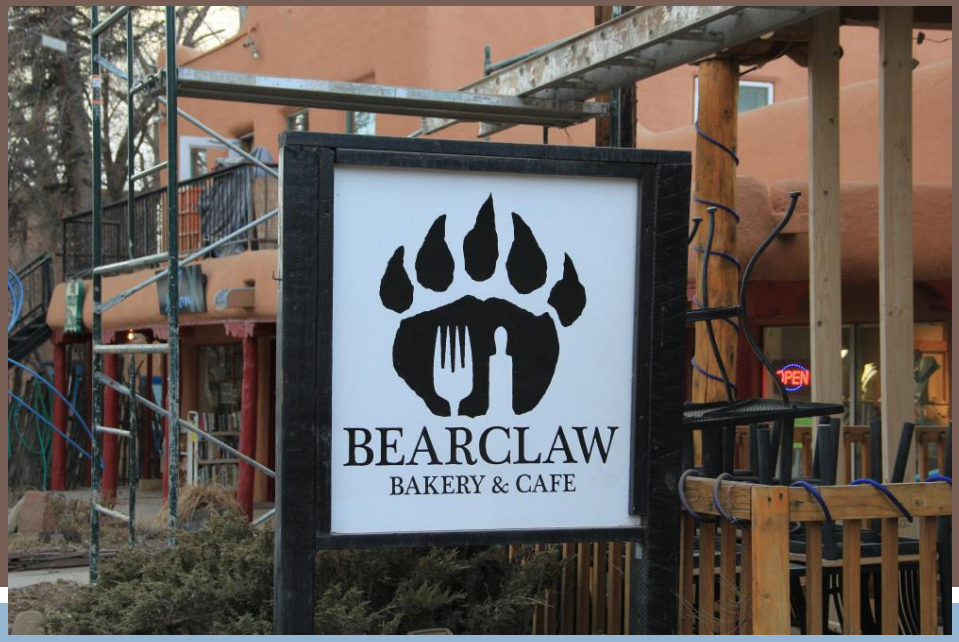

TAOS FOOD CENTER • COMMUNITY GARDEN


TAOS FARM STAND
MARKET

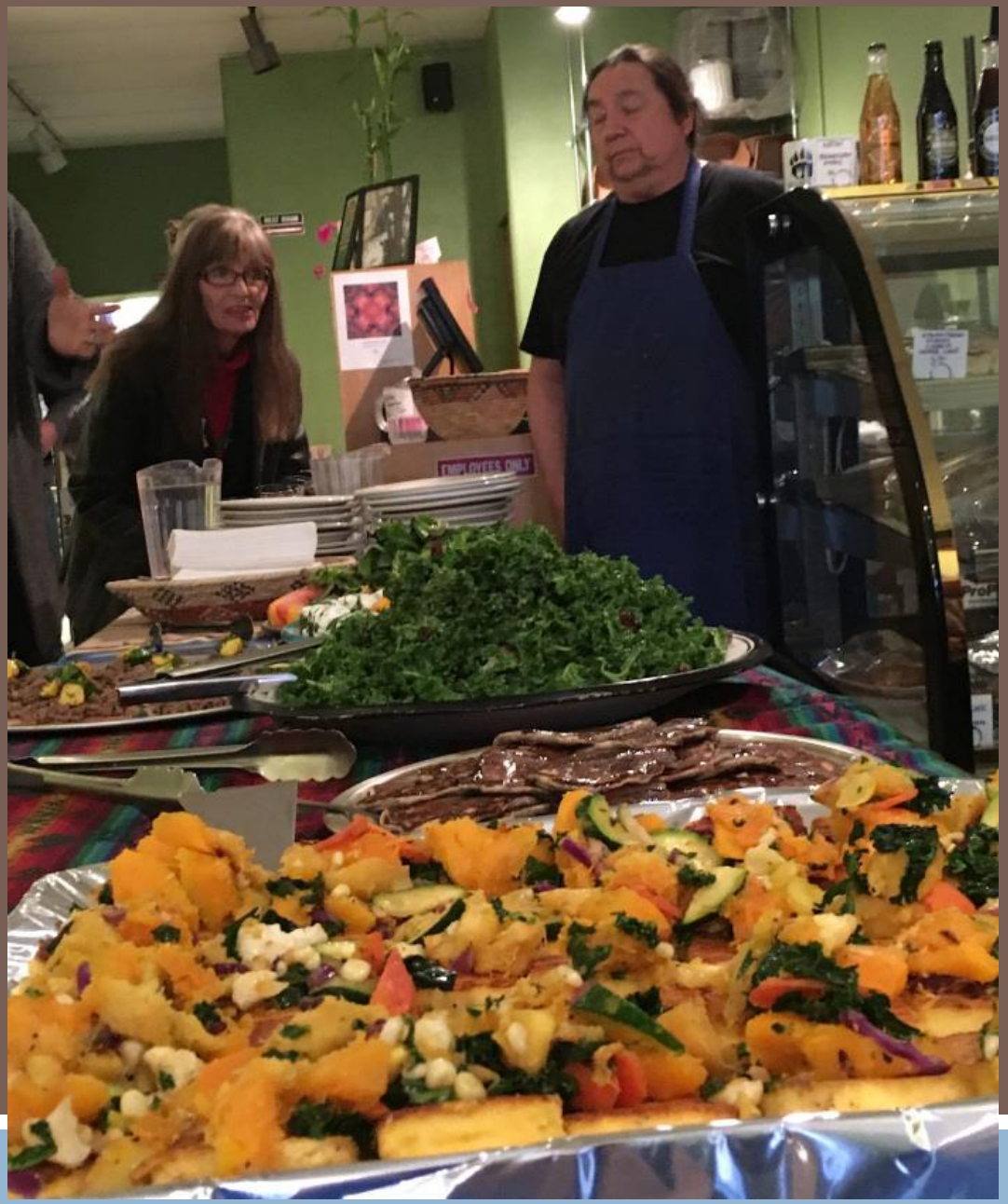
Basket full of goodies from the Taos Food Center, and salve by Lorraine. Photo by Elizabeth Hoover

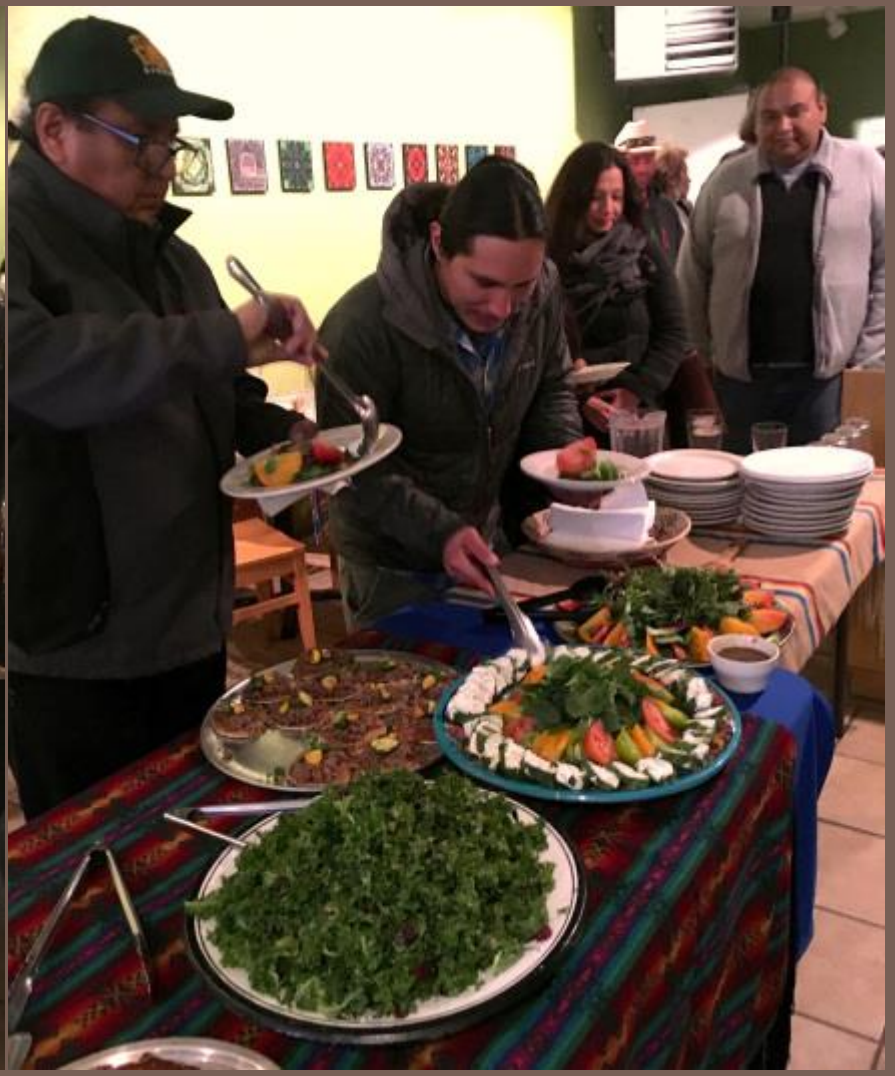


Dinner was at the Bear Claw Cafe, courtesy of Taos Pueblo chef Anthony Archuleta, who prepared a wonderful dinner for us. In the foreground are polenta cakes covered with local vegetables– winter squash, zuchinis, tomatoes, corn, onions and spinach. Behind them are blue corn cakes drizzled with local honey, a kale salad, and more blue corn cakes with buffalo meat and squash. Clayton also contributed some chocolate from Belize.

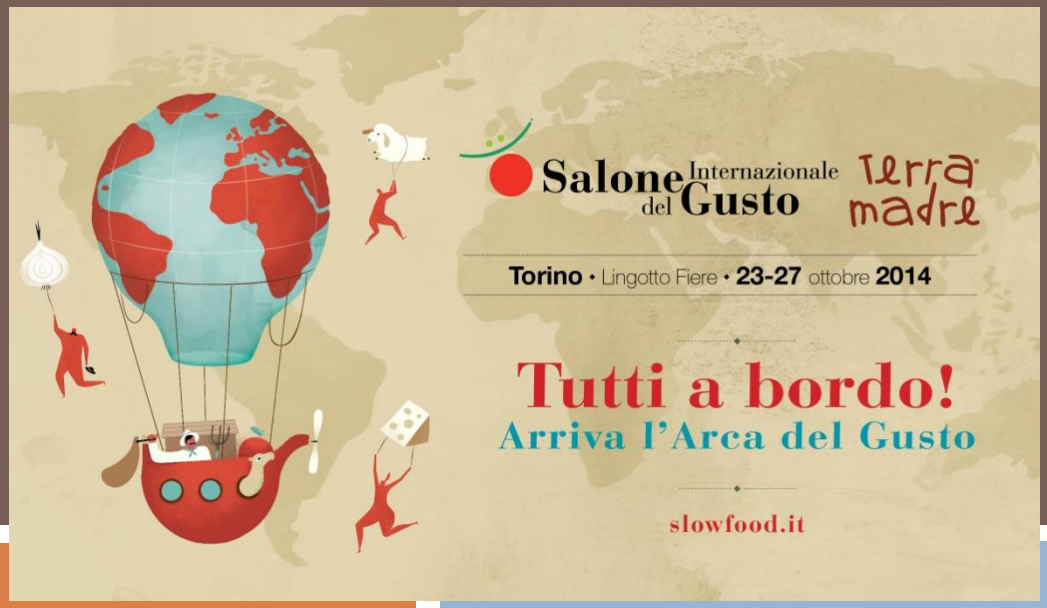


Anthony Archuleta, the Taos Pueblo cook who prepared a wonderful dinner for us. In the foreground are polenta cakes covered with local vegetables– winter squash, zuchinis, tomatoes, corn, onions and spinach. Behind them are blue corn cakes drizzled with local honey, a kale salad, and more blue corn cakes with buffalo meat and squash.
Photo by Elizabeth Hoover





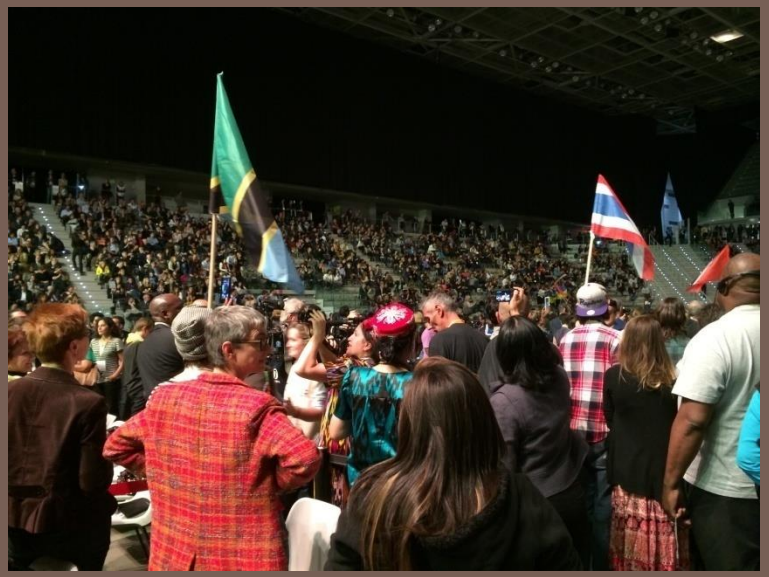
Terra Madre and Salone del Gusto, Slow Foods International. Turin, Italy



Slow Food®

The Slow Food movement got its start in the late 1980's when Carlo Petrini rallied friends and supporters to protest a McDonalds restaurant slated to come to Rome. Their argument was that fast food would be damaging to the local food culture; instead, people needed slow food. The Slow Food Manifesto was drafted in 1989, with support from 15 international delegates. Today, Slow Food has over 150,000 members and is active in more than 150 countries, including national associations in Italy, the U.S., Germany and Japan. There are more than 170 chapters and 2,000 food communities in the United States alone.

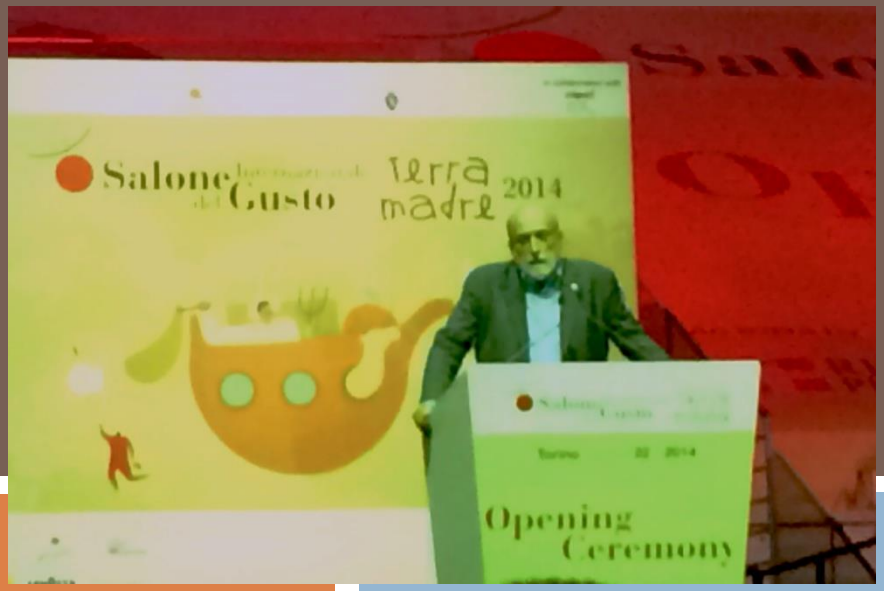
Every two years, Slow Food hosts the world's largest food and wine fair, Salone del Gusto, in conjunction with the Terra Madre world meeting of food communities, drawing over 250,000 visitors combined. I had the opportunity to attend this event, currently in its 10th year, on October 23-27. The event brought delegates from over 100 countries to exhibit and share their food cultures.



Representatives from over 100 countries marched in with their flags. Photo by Elizabeth Hoover

The event kicked off with an opening ceremony that included a procession of flags from around the world (including Aretta Begay carrying the Navajo Nation flag). In what truly felt like the Olympics of food, it was amazing to see representatives from around the globe, many of whom are currently actively engaged in hostilities against one another (for example, Russia, Ukraine, Palestine, Israel, United States, Iran, etc) march in together, set up table representing their food culture.

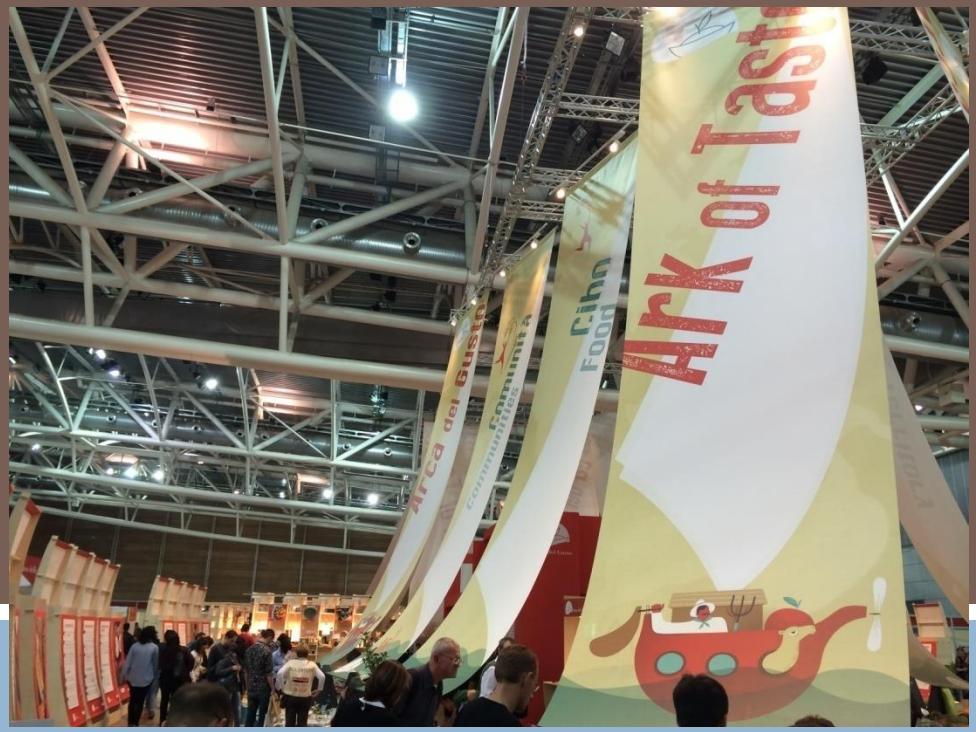
As Carlo described, "In the world we have the genetic wealth of over 7000 plant varieties that can ensure nourishment But in these food systems we only rely on 30-40 species." His concern is that seed banks aren't saving seeds from this many different species, only varieties of the 30-40 species. Carlo encouraged people to save unusual food varieties, things that other people might see as weeds, because some day the food industry "will have to come to your villages and beg for your seeds because that is where the future of mankind is."



Carlo Petrini, president of Slow Food International. Photo by Elizabeth Hoover

The purpose of the Slow Foods “Ark of Taste” is to try to encourage the consumption and preservation of some of this biodiversity. The Ark has gathered a list of 2,015 plants, animals, and food product that are endangered, and encourages people to grow them. 183 of the products on this list are from the United States. At this year’s Terra Madre, over 1000 products were on display from 108 countries. The purpose of the Ark is to point out the existence of these products, draw attention to the risk of their extinction within a few generations, and to invite everyone to take action to help protect them. This might mean purposely buying and consuming them, telling their story and supporting producers, or in the case of endangered wild species eating less or none of them.

Products nominated are foods that have distinctive qualities in terms of taste, must be linked to a specific area, to the memory and identity of a group and to local tradition, products must be produced in limited quantities, and be at the risk of extinction. The chiltepin pepper mentioned above, is one of the plants on the Ark of Taste.



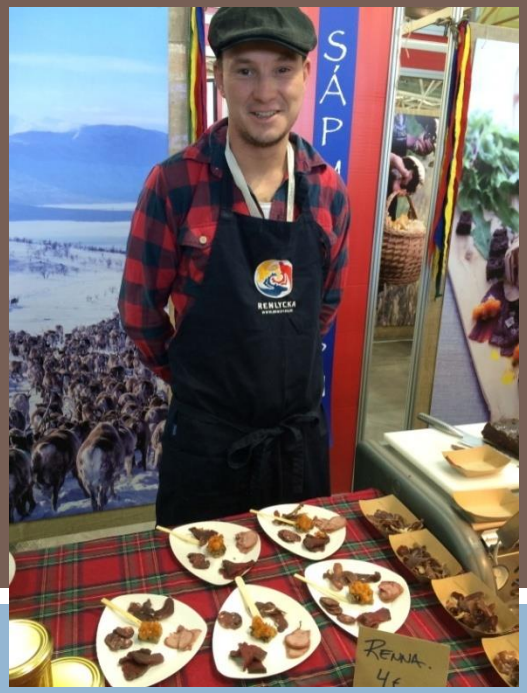
Ark of Taste exhibit. Photo by Elizabeth Hoover

While the focus of most of the panels I attended was seed crops, there were also indigenous people speaking about the importance of maintaining herding cultures. Aretta Begal works with the Navajo Churro land presidium as well as Dine' Be' Iina' Navajo Lifeway, which works to connect sheep producers with chefs. (Read more about the Navajo churro in our post about Black Mesa Water Coalition). Churro sheep have been bred by Navajo people for generations to be adapted to the arid southwest where they live off of desert shrubs like sage that impart their medicinal qualities into the meat.

US delegate sponsored panel about Native food. From L-R; Paige Rabalais, Nicole Yanes, Prairie Rose Seminole, Sue Wasserkrug, Jamie Holding Eagle and Aretta Begay. Photo by Elizabeth Hoover

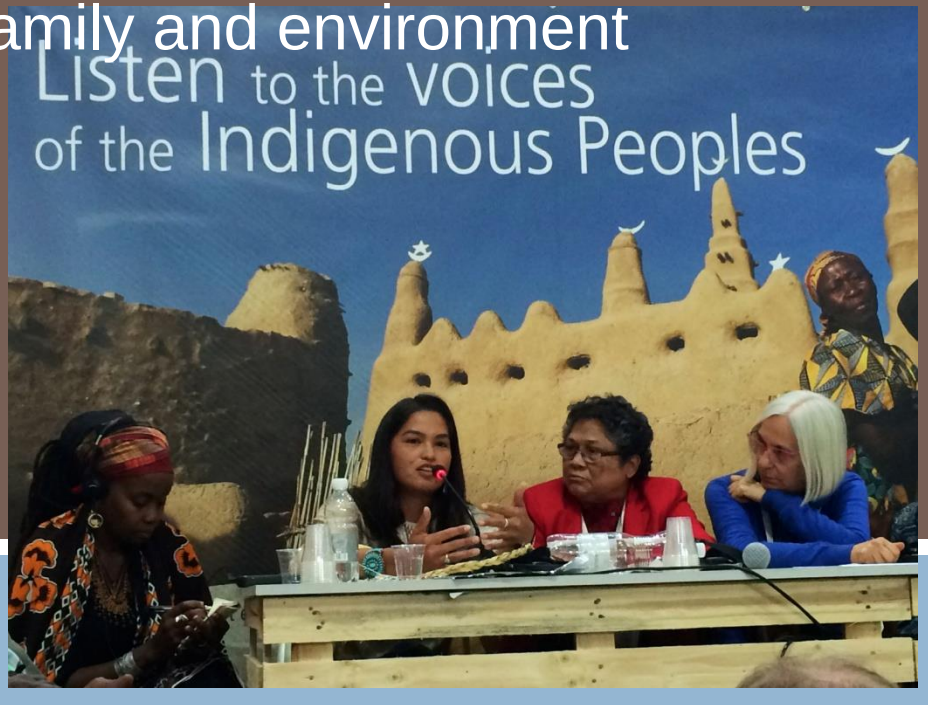
In an effort to ensure that these sheep are maintained, Aretta helps to host workshops and tasting events, demonstrating how you can prepare the meat and how to properly maintain range and flock health (including ram exchanges across different communities to keep flocks genetically healthy.) Aretta is currently working on a small recipe book using all local ingredients, as another way of encouraging people to cook and consume traditional sheep dishes.

Far to the north and east of Navajo, Ol-Johan Sikku described the 25 different reindeer herding peoples in the Arctic. Land grabbing has affected indigenous people in Nordic countries, where he described “land is taken by law and decisions and not by force anymore.” He cited the importance of adhering to the pre, prior and informed consent clause in the UNDRIP, regarding the utilization of indigenous land and resources, in order to ensure that Sami reindeer herders like his family can maintain their way of life and foodways.



Sami reindeer herder from Sweden, with sample of cured reindeer meat and cloudberry jam. Photo by Elizabeth Hoover

One of the drivers presenters described behind people's motivation in preserving their seeds and foodways is the connection between spirituality and food, something Kaylena Bray (Seneca) from the Cultural Conservancy in CA described as like a sweetgrass braid, with food, medicine and spirituality inextricably intertwined. Kaylena spoke to the whole knowledge system that goes into a bowl of corn mush, from clearing the land, planting seeds, singing songs, knowing when and how to harvest, preserve and prepare the corn, and the way this knowledge system places a person in their family and environment

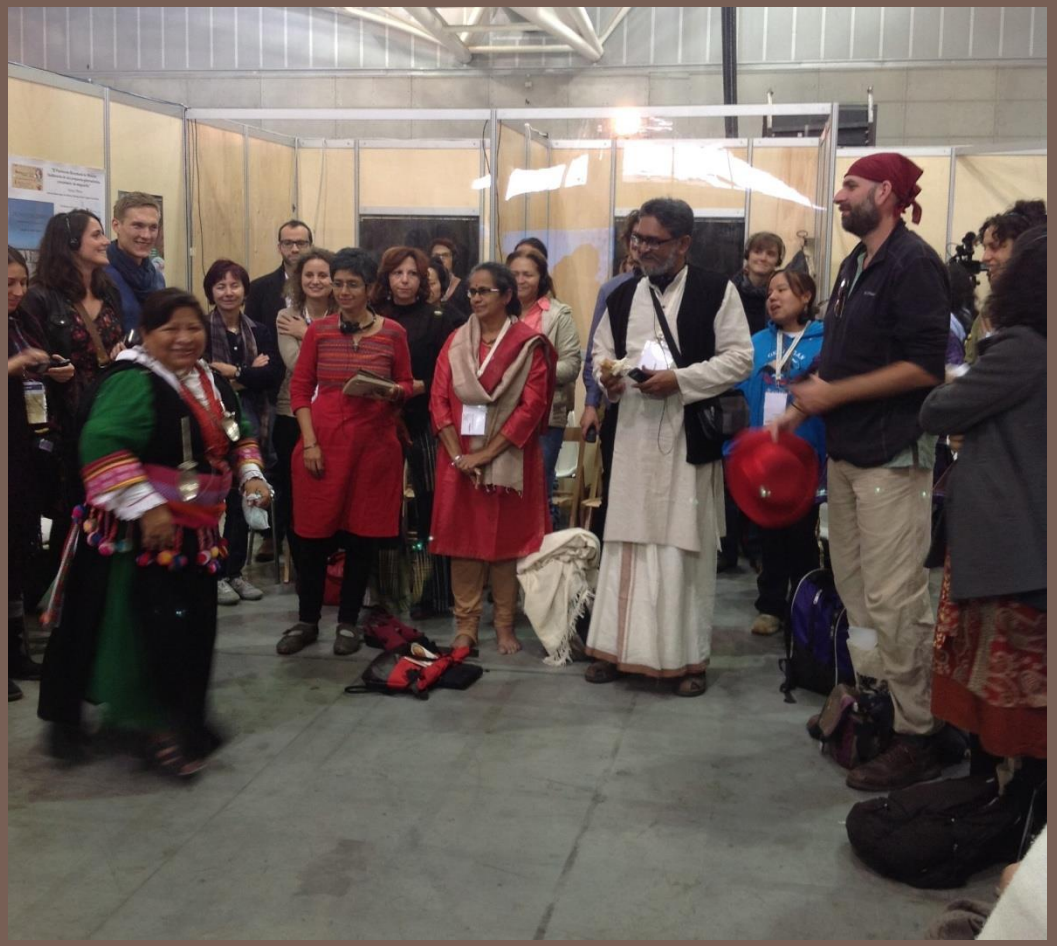


Esther Wanjiku Mwangi, Kaylena Bray, Myrna Cunningham Kain and Maria Irene Cardoso. Photo by Elizabeth Hoover

Esther Wanjiky Mwangi from Kenya described similar ceremonies around planting food, in which members of the community play specific roles in maintaining the spirituality around planting, harvesting and cooking food. She emphasized the importance of maintaining a good mind while cooking—if a wife cooks while mad it will cause discord in the house when people eat it. Similarly Jamie Holding Eagle (Mandan/Hidatsa/Arikara/Lakota) from North Dakota plants corn with her children in the traditional way, using digging sticks. There is no fighting allowed in the garden, or that discord will impact how the plants will grow, and the food that will result from them. Jamie's great-great-grandmother Scattered Corn was the first woman corn priest for the Mandan, and the last person to hold the position.

But Jamie is supporting some of the work through her science, in which she, through a lab at North Dakota State University, is running assays on traditionally grown food, many of which are proving its superior health promoting qualities over conventionally grown varieties. The hope is that this work will help promote the growing and consumption of these traditional food varieties and practices. But as Esther pointed out, this is also about a shift in attitude towards food “we need to go back to respecting the food we eat– not just biting into an apple– and think about what that means. We must respect the apple in itself. Wee need to put back the sacredness in our food.”

Aurora, an Aymara woman from Chile opened the panel with a ceremony, blessing the space in which people from so many parts of the world would be talking about their traditional foods. Photo by Elizabeth Hoover



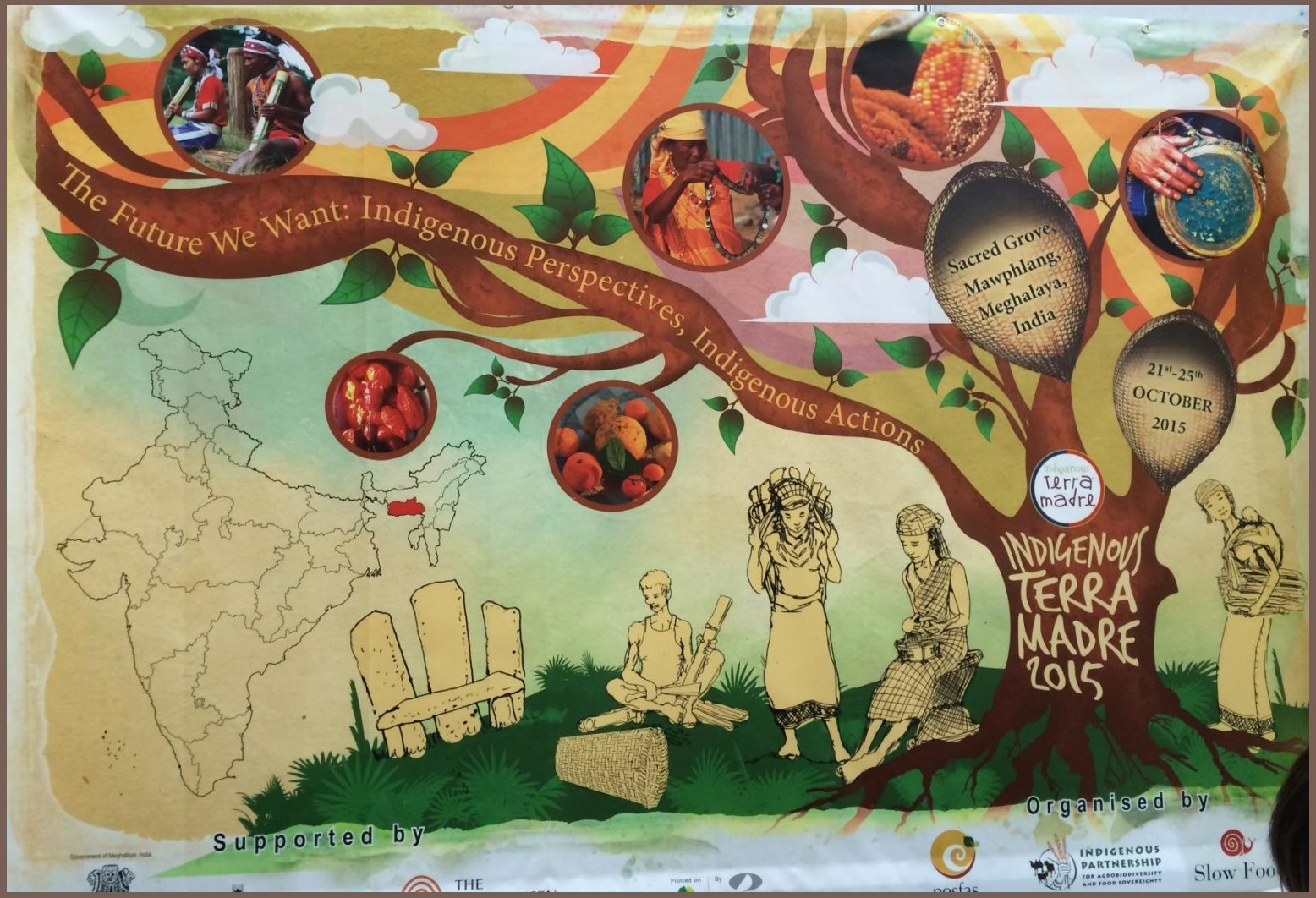
The notion of food as medicine was also a popular theme along this vein. Aurora (Aymara) and Raquel (Mapuche) described how their people in Chile were suffering new diseases because traditional food is medicine, and their bodies need it. Because of land dispossession due to forestry operations and hydroelectric projects, as well as agricultural programs, they are decreasingly able to plant their indigenous seeds.

Tuscarora white corn, part of the Ark of Taste. Photo by Elizabeth Hoover

Prairie Rose Seminole (Arikara, Northern Cheyenne) highlighted that prior to colonization, indigenous people of the plains had food as their pharmacy, gathering nutritious foods like timpsala (wild prairie turnips) and buffalo berries, which are rich in lycopenes and vitamin C. She is currently working on a curriculum for youth that highlights the role of food as medicine, to help maintain traditional knowledge, and improve health. She is also working on a cook book that will include traditional recipes as well as the stories of the women who preserved those recipes. “Those recipes are medicine. That’s how we want to live.”

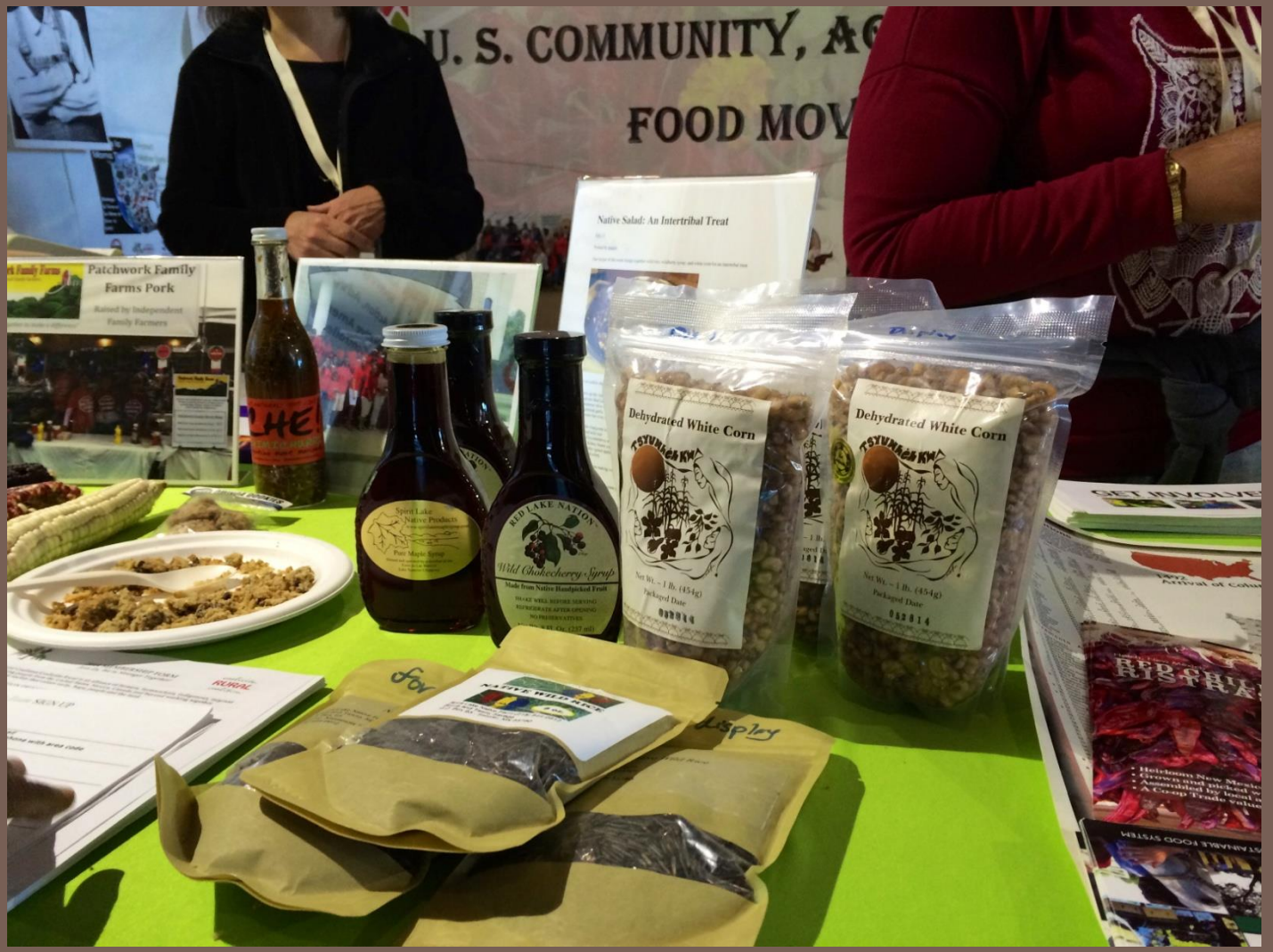
Another indigenous food from North America on the Ark of Taste; tepary beans. To read more about tepary beans, see our post about TOCA. Photo by Elizabeth Hoover

One of the challenges of promoting traditional medicines and foods is the risk that they will become popular with others. Prairie Rose described how most of the Echnacea in her region has become uprooted since being proven to have immune boosting properties. Similarly, Train Chuladecha, a traditional medicine practitioner from Thailand, described how once plants are determined to have medicinal properties, they are patented, packaged for the world market, and then harvested to near extinction. She described a plant called Eurycoma longifolio jack, which used to be used to heal fevers, but then everybody picked it all to sell and now there is none for the indigenous people who developed the original healing recipes. She is working with villagers to try to produce sustainable forest gardens to ensure the maintenance of their medicines.



Mural on the wall of the Indigenous Networking room, describing the Indigenous Terra Madre gathering to take place in India, 2015. Photo by Elizabeth Hoover

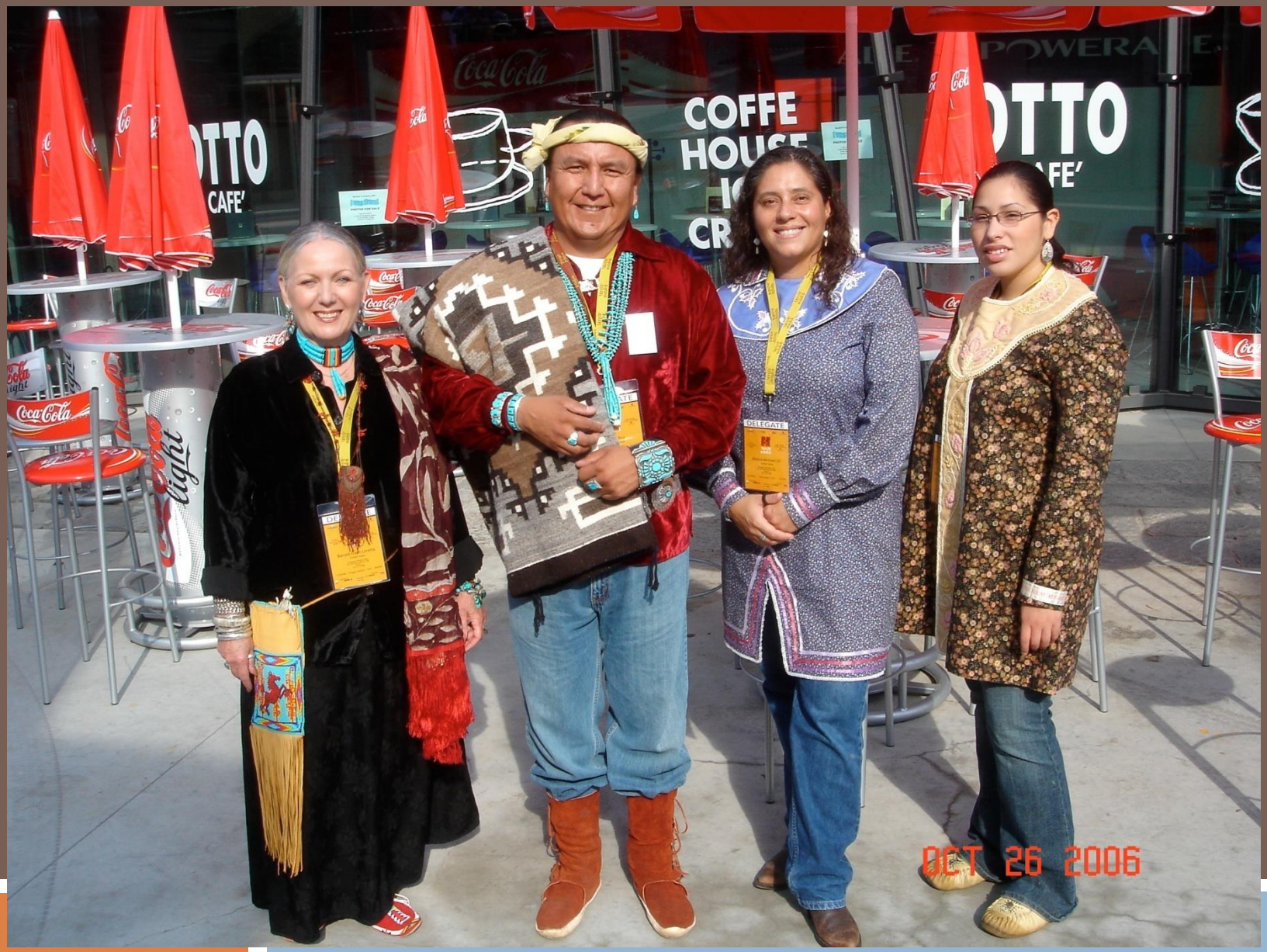
In closing, it was amazing to meet representatives from around the world who despite the vast differences in their home nations, languages and cultures are all facing such similar challenges in preserving their indigenous foods. Some like Sunita Rao from India recommended community level action in preserving seeds, others like Adelita San Vicente from Mexico have been fighting for national legislation, and still others like James from Kenya recommended international protection like the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture. People gathered after sessions to work across language barriers to continue to share stories and offer support and encouragement. It is my hope to attend Indigenous Terra Madre in 2015 to learn more about the world-wide struggle of Indigenous people to protect their food resources.

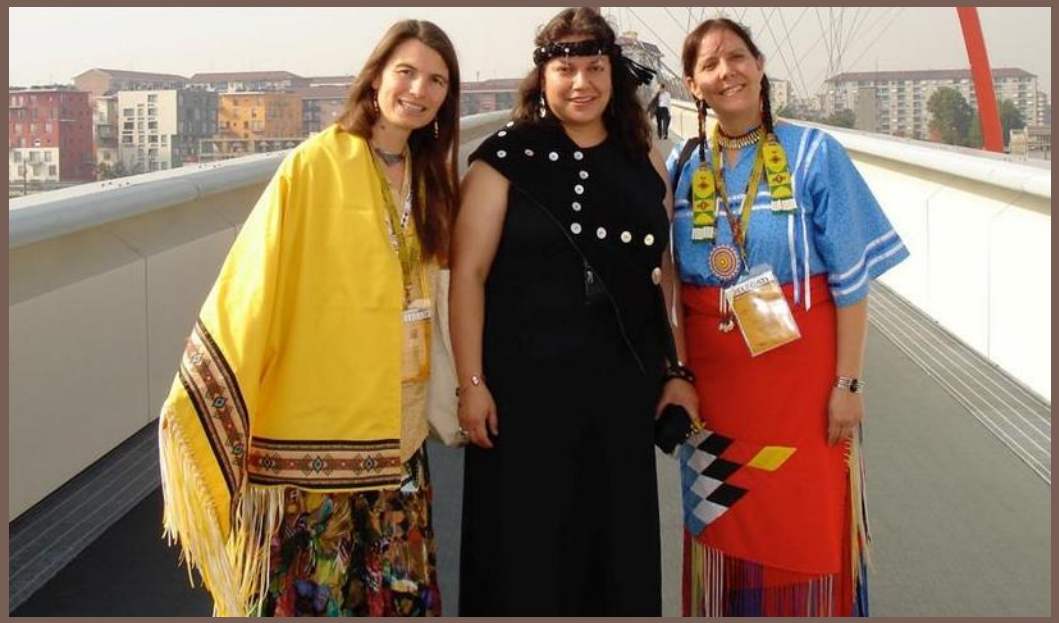


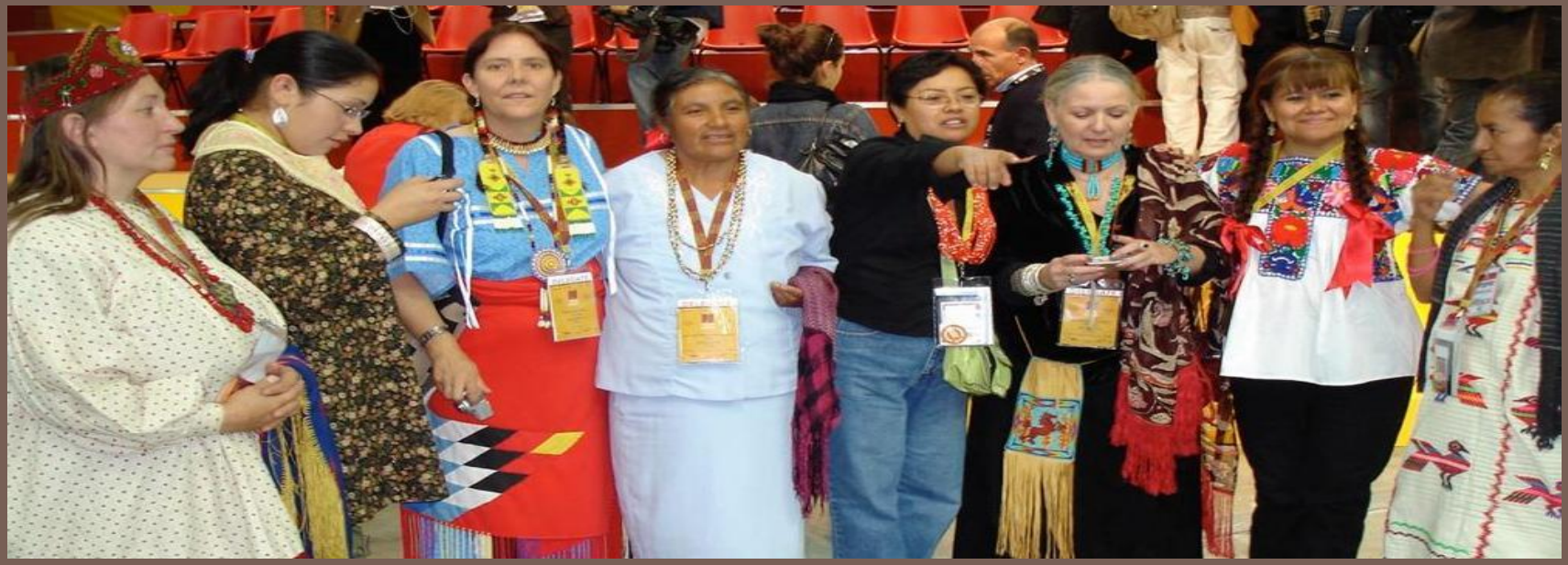
Rural Coalition table at Terra Madre, containing Native foods from Tsyunhehkwa as well as Spirit Lake Native Foods (blog post to come about our visit to both places.) Photo by Elizabeth Hoover.

Terra Madre 2006


Slow Food
terra madre
OCT 30 2006


COFFE
HOUSE
CR
OTTO
CAFE'
POWERA
Coca-Cola
light
DELEGATE
OCT 26 2006






produzione:
Tribù Anishinaabeg, Minnesota
sostenuto da:
Tutela Vini Oltrepò Pavese
Partner:
Gli Aironi
EEP IT WILD


terra madre

Indigenous Delegation

Terra Madre Turino, Italy 2006