Lessons from the Traditional Western Apache Diet Project
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Overview
This project stems from a 28 year effort by San Carlos Apache Tribal staff working directly with elders from the four Apache tribes in Arizona, to document and study traditional Ndee/Nnee (Western Apache) knowledge of the natural world, with a particular focus on pre-reservation Ndee nutrition, and ancestral healthcare and support systems.

Elders point to the establishment of the reservations, and the effects of crushing Army policies, in shattering Ndee institutions and sources of Earth-based activity, and health and support systems; and setting off the cycle of suicide, disease, and violence that continue to this day.

At this time Apaches were forbidden to gather their traditional foods, and were forced to subsist on meager and toxic ration foods.

Source of Epidemics
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Ancestral Nutrition
Based on elder interviews, staff were able to reconstruct 96 pre-reservation daily menus (8 days per month), and to conduct an initial nutritional analysis of these menus. The initial analysis and interviews indicate that the pre-reservation Apache diet was:

- High in fiber (2X USDA Guidelines)
- High in protein (2X USDA Guidelines)
- Low in saturated fats (28% of USDA Guidelines)
- Healthy in polyunsaturated fats (68% of USDA Guidelines)
- Low in cholesterol (53% of USDA Guidelines)
- Low in sodium
- High in B, C, and K vitamins, calcium, zinc, and iron
- Sweet, without processed sugars
- Rich in a wide variety of whole and wild foods and supplements
- Filling with little volume

A State of Gozhóó
Following the Nnee diet, and actively following the seasons and weather cycles, connects one directly to the Earth’s rhythm, which informed traditional everyday Ndee life, ceremonial cycles, social structure, economy, governance, and institutions.

Connecting to this rhythm still forms the basis for the traditional Nnee goal of a state of Gozhóó: The happiness and health that is derived from harmony between oneself, one’s family and community, and the natural world.