

FOOD IS MEDICINE GROWER GUIDE



American Indian
Cancer Foundation®



Healthy foods play an important role in cancer prevention and overall wellness. Food Is Medicine programs are creating new opportunities for growers to support community health while strengthening local and Tribal food systems. This guide was developed by the American Indian Cancer Foundation (AICAF) to help growers understand Food Is Medicine programs, connect with potential partners, and explore how locally grown foods can support healthier Native communities.

1. What are Food is Medicine programs?

An explanation helping growers understand what the programs are and how they work.

Food is medicine programs can be found in the community, at a clinic, at a hospital and come in several forms. They are usually provided to those with both a chronic disease and food insecurity for a set time period, including food and some nutrition education.

Program Characteristics	Typical Structure
Food Benefit Amount	Examples include \$50 per week, \$50 biweekly, or \$200 per month, depending on the program design and funding.
Distribution Frequency	Weekly, Biweekly, or Monthly
Program Length	Examples are 12 weeks, 6 months, or 12 months
Budget Planning	Because funding is established before participants enroll, programs generally know their annual food budget and purchasing needs from the beginning of the program. This allows for more predictable purchasing from farmers
Example: FreshRx Oklahoma	Fresh Rx Oklahoma invests \$1,300 in locally sourced food per participant annually (approximately \$50 biweekly). For example, with 125 participants, the program purchases approximately \$162,500 of food each year, with those dollars going directly to farmers.

2. Benefits of selling to a FIM program: Highlighting 3-5 benefits to sell to FIM programs

Food is medicine programs provide a new market opportunity for producers by providing several benefits:

- Consistent, reliable purchasing
- Bulk buying from multiple local farmers
- Advance crop planning and predictable demand
- Potential for bulk contracts with 50% upfront payment
- Opportunities to expand or diversify production

- Meaningful work that improves community health

3. Working with a Tribal FIM program:

a. How to connect with a program

Contact your local food program. For Oklahoma, you can find a list of programs (past and present) on this dashboard:

<https://app.smartsheet.com/b/publish?EQBCT=fb2eea4f7fbf4598b0b34cdacfb39cd>

b. What questions to ask

Here are a few questions to ask to get an idea of how their program works:

- a. How many participants do you have?
- b. What is the timeline for enrollment?
- c. What food do you normally provide to your participants?
- d. What foods would you like to see in the program?
- e. What foods do you think the participants would like?
- f. What items might be culturally connected to the group that you serve?

c. How to work with programs on planning ahead, exploring buying options

Here are some additional questions and potential options to explore when it comes to navigating Food is Medicine purchasing:

- a. Are they able to commit to a certain amount of produce over a period of time?
- b. Are they open to exploring a bulk purchasing agreement where you can outline what amounts, at what price, and what harvest periods align with both of your needs?
- c. What portions are they looking for?

4. Tying in Native varieties, food sovereignty, and nutrient density / health impacts of food they grow

- a. Food is medicine programs provide an incredible opportunity to provide familiar and “new” ancient or heirloom Native varieties of foods that people haven’t seen in a while and that their heritage is deeply connected to. Food is a great teaching tool to remind people where food comes from and its medicinal qualities. Ancient varieties cultivated by Native communities are often more nutrient dense than modern varieties that have been overbred and genetically modified over time. Using soil health principles (old and new) also help the crop become (and humans) disease resistant, more nutrient dense, and guess what?!, it tastes better too! Program participants and implementers will be excited to try new things and to taste the care you put into your soil and food. Limit or eliminate pesticide use whenever possible.
- b. Minimize soil disturbance through low-till or no-till practices.
- c. Build soil fertility using organic composts and natural fertilizers.



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- d. Utilize mounds, berms, and circular planting formations where appropriate.
 - e. Increase crop diversity rather than relying on monocropping.
 - f. Integrate livestock through managed or adaptive grazing (such as bison) to improve soil health.
 - g. Plant cover crops to add nutrients, improve water infiltration, reduce erosion, suppress weeds, and keep the soil cooler.
 - h. Food is Medicine programs can strengthen Tribal food sovereignty by creating reliable local markets that keep food dollars circulating within the community rather than flowing to outside distributors. By serving as consistent institutional buyers, these programs support local farmers, improve community health, reduce healthcare costs, and help build a more resilient Tribal food system.

Indigenous Cancer Solutions Oklahoma Coalition (ICS-OK)

Founded in 2024, the Indigenous Cancer Solutions Coalition (ICS-OK) strives to promote healthy behaviors and reduce chronic disease risk factors, while collaborating with and for Native communities to reduce health disparities and achieve health equity.

We're working toward long-term changes that build on the strengths our communities already have. The ICS-OK Coalition knows the solutions are within the community. By coming together, listening to each other, and staying grounded in our cultures we're creating a strong path toward lasting health and wellness.

[Indigenous Cancer Solutions \(ICS\) Coalition-Oklahoma Survey](#)

