

Declaration of a GMO- and Pesticide-Free Zone, Dine' Nation Territory

Indigenous Peoples "Corn is Life" Gathering
September 19 – 21, 2013, Dine' College, Tsaile, Arizona

Hosted and presented by Black Mesa Water Coalition, Dine' Policy Institute, Traditional Dine' Farmers and the International Indian Treaty Council

"Before there were human beings, before there was man and woman, there was the corn. The spirit of the corn, the corn song, the corn pollen -- they were always here. Take care of your family corn. It is a sacred being. It is who we are and how we are made. Listen to that song. Learn your language. The corn is praying for you to come home and be healed."

-- Dine' Hataali Avery Denny, opening presentation, September 20th, 2013.

Nahasdzáán dóó yádilhił bits'áádéé' bee nahazáanii (The laws of Mother Earth and Father Sky) set forth the rules by which we are instructed to interact and care for the natural world, including the plants and animals we use for our foods and medicines. The Dine' emergence story includes the four sacred plants that are the basis of our physical and spiritual life in this world -- the corn, squash, beans and tobacco. They place, hold and sustain us within the four directions and the universe as we understand it. They are the foundation of Hózhó (holistic well-being).

We understand that resisting and undoing the many negative impacts of colonization for our Peoples means restoring what was taken from us in that process. These include our lands, waters, traditional learning and teaching systems, corn and other seeds, food and medicinal plants and animals, sacred places, and the health and well-being of our families and clans.

We agree that these sacred elements and k'é (relationships) are of absolute necessity for restoring the practice of our food sovereignty and for our spiritual, cultural, physical, social and environmental health, identity and survival.

We share these understandings and teachings with other Indigenous Peoples and Nations throughout this continent who also hold the corn to be sacred.

We affirm that the inherent, collective right of Self-determination of Indigenous Peoples is not possible without Food Sovereignty and self-sufficiency. This was well understood by the colonizers who tried to destroy our traditional crops, seeds and food animals in order to control and subjugate our Free Independent Sovereign Nations.

We express profound appreciation and gratitude to our ancestors and traditional elders who kept our original decolonized practices, knowledge, seeds, creation stories, ceremonies and languages alive and well into this modern time despite many challenges, sufferings and struggles.

We recognize and thank all the traditional Indigenous farmers who work on a daily basis to maintain and strengthen our traditional food systems, resources and knowledge, to keep these things alive for all of us.

We commit to do the same for our young people and coming generations. We will do our parts to protect our traditional seeds, plants and methods from many current threats such as climate change, mining and extractive industries, genetic modifications, capitalism and privatization, government land use regulations, pesticides, mercury, uranium, coal and other toxic contaminants. They are the source of our survival, today and in the hard times that are coming.

We call upon the Navajo Nation Council and other Tribal leaders to stand with us in protecting the corn and other life-giving food resources in their traditional forms, natural diversity and original integrity. They are the solutions that are essential for our survival, and the basis for our own understanding of our human rights, Treaty rights and sacred responsibilities as Indigenous Peoples and original human beings.

We therefore declare the Dine' Nation traditional homelands to be a zone that will be kept free from genetically modified seeds, plants and animals as well as toxic pesticides. In that way it will be a healthy and safe place for our traditional seeds and plants, and our children and future generations to live, survive and thrive within the boundaries of our four sacred mountains, Diné Bikéyah (Navajo Homeland) in good health, tranquility, strength and beauty.

We affirm that the process to bring this about must begin immediately. **We commit** to take collective and individual action to implement this declaration through our own practices, and to build the necessary understanding and awareness among our Peoples, Nations, leaders and policy-makers, as well as our youth and coming generations, to make it a continuing reality.

“The Dine' have always been guided and protected by the immutable laws provided by the Diyin Dine' e, Nahasdzáán and Yádiłhił; these laws have not only provided sanctuary for the Dine' Life Way but has guided, sustained and protected the Dine' as they journeyed upon and off the sacred lands upon which they were placed since time immemorial”

-- 2 N.N.C. § 102 Fundamental Law of Diné

“Indigenous peoples have the right to maintain, control, protect and develop their cultural heritage, traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions, as well as the manifestations of their sciences, technologies and cultures, including...seeds, medicines, knowledge of the properties of fauna and flora...”

-- Article 31, United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

“We need to plant a new seed in the minds of our young people in every generation so that this knowledge will continue to grow.”

– Hataałii Avery Denny

Agreed by consensus, September 21st, 2013, Dine’ College, Tsaille, Arizona

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