



## Harvest of the Moon: Revitalizing traditional Menominee food knowledge and healthy eating habits in youth

The *Kemāmaceqtaq* (“We’re All Moving”) team of Extension Menominee County/Nation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, worked with language and culture keepers and community artists to create a unique curriculum anchored in Menominee knowledge of the 13 moons and their associated Indigenous food practices. Harvest of the Moon was created to strengthen connections to food through the integration of Menominee language, Menominee moons, Menominee art, and Indigenous recipes. Together, this offers a complex learning system, passed from one generation to the next, with solutions for a healthy and thriving community. The program materials include posters for all 13 moons with original art, traditional moon teachings, the food as named in Menominee and English, recipes, suggested activities for virtual or group learning, and a coloring book. Now, Language and Culture teachers in Menominee Nation schools are using these tools in their classes and soon more school-based and community-based educators will too. Youth in the Menominee Nation are learning about and revitalizing traditional food practices to improve the future health of their community.

### Public Health Challenge

Four in ten Menominee County/Nation residents live with obesity, reflective of a long history of systemic oppression of Indigenous people by white settler-colonists. This has limited economic opportunities, access to healthy foods, and places to be physically active. The Indigenous people of the Menominee Nation have experienced generations of disruptive and unhealthy food systems, oversaturating the community with flour, sugar, and other processed foods, and creating barriers to millenia-old and healthy foodways. Today, Tribal nations in rural areas, like the Menominee Nation, are some of the primary victims of food apartheid – the systemic destruction of access to healthy or traditional foods.

### Approach

The Wisconsin Harvest of the Month program, under the University of Wisconsin-Madison Division of Extension, is a school-based program that encourages children and families to eat more fruits and vegetables, reduce food



waste, and support Wisconsin farmers and the local economy. The goals of this program resonated with the goals of the *Kemāmaceqtaq* team for Tribal children and families in the Menominee Nation and offered possibilities for creating a powerful, culturally specific adaptation.

Starting in early 2020, the team engaged with Menominee language and culture keepers and local artists to adapt the Harvest of the Month concept for the Menominee community. A first significant adaptation was to shift from *months* to *moons*, as moons are a culturally important marker of time and seasonality. The team worked to outline a calendar with the corresponding moon names in Menominee and with English translation, for example, *Pakwan-kēsoq* or “Budding Moon” for the May moon.

Knowledge keepers assigned traditional Menominee foods as related to the gathering, hunting, or fishing practices of each moon, like spruce tips in the early spring and wild rice in the late summer. The team named them in the Menominee language (e.g., *piakemenan* or “cranberries”) and identified recipes and learning activities that highlighted the food and the season. For each moon, the curriculum is rounded out with Menominee moon

teachings, songs, stories, pictures, advice, and original art of bandolier bags from a talented Menominee graphic designer, Daniel Grignon. Virtual learning activities and an accompanying coloring book extend opportunities for learning further.

The [Harvest of the Moon](#) website offers the curriculum for download to any interested educator or community member.



Kāwāhtek Kēsēkaen or spruce tips as featured on the *Wanāēw Kēsoq* (March moon) page

## Results

In May 2021, 25 copies of the Harvest of the Moon curriculum materials were distributed to Language and Culture teachers in the Menominee Nation K-12 schools. (81 total copies have been distributed to date.) With the COVID-19 pandemic continuing to affect the local schools, especially opportunities for in-person and hands-on learning, teachers have worked to familiarize themselves with the curriculum and develop ideas for its use.

To better understand the potential of the curriculum, the Kemāmaḥeḥtaq team hosted a focus group with four teachers in July. The teachers shared how they planned to use the materials, offered ideas for additions to the curriculum, and identified opportunities for collaboration that the curriculum inspired. They:

- Highlighted the impact they anticipated of these integrated language, culture, and food lessons for the health, knowledge, and identities of Menominee children
- Emphasized the value of incorporating traditional knowledge into all subject areas
- Noted how hands-on activities with traditional foods would support their Language and Culture lessons, by offering concrete and engaging ways to ground their lessons
- Identified ways the materials could bridge learning to subjects like science and history, and bridge classroom conversations relating to climate change and how it affects harvest seasons

- Looked forward to incorporating the graphics and coloring pages in art classes and creative learning activities

## Sustaining Success

**Kemāmaḥeḥtaq** will continue to update and provide Harvest of the Moon materials to relevant learning spaces, such as Head Start, daycare centers, and community meal sites. The team is also collaborating with local food cooperatives to provide to students the traditional, healthy foods highlighted by the curriculum and to build up local procurement of these foods.

## Quote

*“The Harvest of the Moon really stands out among cultural curriculum materials.... This will really help us carry on these traditions.”*

– Menominee Language and Culture Teacher

## For more information, visit:

The *Harvest of the Moon* webpage:

<https://healthyliving.extension.wisc.edu/programs/harvest-of-the-moon/>

The Kemāmaḥeḥtaq project webpage:

<https://menominee.extension.wisc.edu/kemamaḥeḥtaq-were-all-moving/>

*This effort is made possible by Outreach Programs to Reduce the Prevalence of Obesity in High Risk Rural Areas Agreement (1809) funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.*

## Contact Information

**Cooperative agreement:** Outreach Programs to Reduce the Prevalence of Obesity in High Risk Rural Areas Agreement (1809) funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

**Recipient:** University of Wisconsin-Madison, Division of Extension

**Strategy focus:** Food Systems

**Story author name and email:** Jennifer Gauthier -

[jennifer.gauthier@wisc.edu](mailto:jennifer.gauthier@wisc.edu)