

# MAKOCE AGRICULTURE DEVELOPMENT



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2023  
ANNUAL  
REPORT



# FOUNDER'S STATEMENT

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**Like a productive garden, a local food system is a dynamic, living thing.**

As gardens need healthy soil, water, sunlight to flourish, a local food system can only thrive with creative, committed leaders, a deeply engaged community, and strong, invested partners. With that nourishment, local food systems can bring boundless opportunity and vitality to individuals and families, local economies, and to the land itself.

Nearly four years ago we founded Makoce to plant the seeds of a local food system here on the Pine Ridge Reservation. At the time Pine Ridge was frequently described as a food desert, defined by a barren landscape and lack of access and opportunity. Our goal at Makoce was to shift focus to the rich possibilities that exist within our community—and to the food oasis we can create by reconnecting with our traditional Indigenous food systems.

Today the seeds we planted are thriving, and reawakening us to the knowledge our ancestors always carried: that if we live in harmony with our homeland, in alignment with our traditional systems of stewardship and care, we can restore health and wellbeing to our communities. We can spark meaningful growth for generations to come.

This year Makoce witnessed that kind of growth in every aspect of our work. We expanded our organization's team exponentially, bringing 10 new staff members on board to guide the expansion of our community-based, regenerative initiatives.

- We broke ground on our Woyute Regenerative Production Farm—the first community accessible production farm on Pine Ridge—while continuing to train families to produce pasture-raised, antibiotic free chicken and to reduce our community's reliance on overly-processed foods trucked onto the reservation.
- We opened the doors of our new Cultural Foods Building, where community members are already gathering to engage with traditional practices—from harvesting buffalo and deer to making chokecherry jam—that sustained and nourished our communities for thousands of years.
- And after years of intensive work and deep community engagement, we released the master plan for Makoce's Food Hub—the essential infrastructure we need to support Indigenous farmers and producers and to deliver nourishing, local foods to our community members.

And that's only the beginning. With our path forward clear, and with our community standing with us, the food oasis that exists here on Pine Ridge is already beginning to flourish.



**NICK HERNANDEZ**  
Founder & CEO

# 2023 SNAPSHOT

Our leaps forward this year included:



## GROWING

We welcomed 10 new team members, adding directors for two of our core initiatives - our Food Hub and the Oceti Sakowin Food Systems Alliance. In addition, we expanded the number of community members engaged in our cultural foods and regenerative poultry programs exponentially.



## BUILDING

We continued to build the foundations of our local food system, creating new resources for community members and producers. We opened the doors to our new Cultural Foods Building, broke ground on our Woyute Regenerative Production Farm, and began building a new pole barn to support local poultry production.



## INNOVATING

Through the insights of community members and partners, this year we unveiled the Master Plan for Makoce's Food Hub - the beating heart of our local food system. And we produced the first comprehensive Food Systems Scan & Study to better understand possibilities for the local food economy of the Oglála Lak'hóta Oyáte



## CONNECTING

We continued to connect deeply with organizations and leaders across the country who share our vision for supporting Indigenous-led food systems. From engaging in national-level advocacy in Washington, DC to hosting two convergences on Pine Ridge, we brought stakeholders together in powerful ways.

# DRIVING LOCAL-FOODS INNOVATION

## MAKOCE'S FOOD HUB



“We’ve been dependent for so long—from historical government food rations to today’s outsourced food being trucked into the reservation. I’ve always believed that having our own food sources will put power back into our own hands.

The Hub will support that in so many ways, whether it’s through learning how to plant a garden, or starting your own food-related business. I believe it will bring people together, from our youngest kids to our elders, as we push toward food sovereignty.”

- Daniel Clifford, Catering Business Owner & Food Hub Community Advisory Committee Member

An architectural rendering of the Food Hub primary building and central gathering area

Food Hubs are like beating hearts. Local foods flow into food hubs from farmers and producers so they can flow back out into the community to nourish consumers and their families. They are the vital connection point that local food systems need to thrive.

We began envisioning Makoce’s Food Hub during the earliest days of our organization’s existence—because we knew creating it would fill a critical gap in our community’s infrastructure. Although Pine Ridge is home to countless farmers and producers, chefs, and educators committed to re-indigenizing our food system, there has never been a central gathering space for food-based entrepreneurs to share products, ideas, and inspiration. There is no central gathering place for community members seeking fresh, local, nourishing foods for their families.

That reality is about to change. After nearly three years of in-depth research and planning in close collaboration with community members, in August we released our Master Plan for the Pine Ridge Reservation’s first-ever Food Hub—a cutting-edge facility that will support the development of a local, regenerative food system.

Set to be built on 24 acres in Porcupine, South Dakota, the Food Hub will serve as the central connection point between local producers and food entrepreneurs—including farmers, ranchers, chefs, caterers, and more—and the broader Pine Ridge community. Through the Hub, local producers will be able to access essential tools and resources to distribute their goods more effectively, helping to build their businesses and reach new markets. The Hub will also ensure that all community members are able to access nourishing, locally-produced foods that support better health and wellbeing.

# MAKOCE'S FOOD HUB

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Creating our Food Hub Master Plan demanded an intensive, multi-step process that brought together diverse stakeholders and community members over the course of many months:

We began by creating a Community Advisory Committee—members included cultural food leaders, business leaders, youth, educators, and advocates—to share their wisdom and to develop a collective vision for the Hub that is grounded in Lakota values and belief systems.

We established partnerships with a team of culturally-grounded planners, architects, and advisors—including Hoxie Collective, Substance Architecture, and the USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service—who engaged deeply with our community advisors and helped us conceptualize a site that would provide vital food-based resources while integrating Lakota culture, language, spirituality and utilizing innovative physical, environmental, land-based systems.

By working through seven different iterations, we identified a final site plan that reflects the community's specific objectives and overall vision.

The Food Hub Master Plan includes spaces for a commercial kitchen, coffee shop, deli, and meeting, coworking, and learning spaces, as well as sufficient food storage for locally farmed produce and meats. Outside the primary building, the Food Hub's campus will include walking trails, gardens, and other spaces to encourage reconnecting with the natural world. Our design team is utilizing the most sustainable, energy-efficient practices to care for the land while creating unique spaces to support operations, spark innovation, and celebrate in a shared space.

With our plan in place, we are already taking steps to prepare to break ground—by completing soil surveys, preliminary engineering reports, and a wetlands study. With two new team members focused on the project's development—including Food Hub Manager Kelly Hunter—we are taking significant leaps forward to realizing the promise of a community-led food hub.



"Our work at Makoce has opened my eyes to the fact that we're not in a food desert at all. We have buffalo, deer, and now pasture-raised chicken, and that's just a start. By changing the way we think about food, and utilizing what our ancestors taught us, we can nourish our community from within.

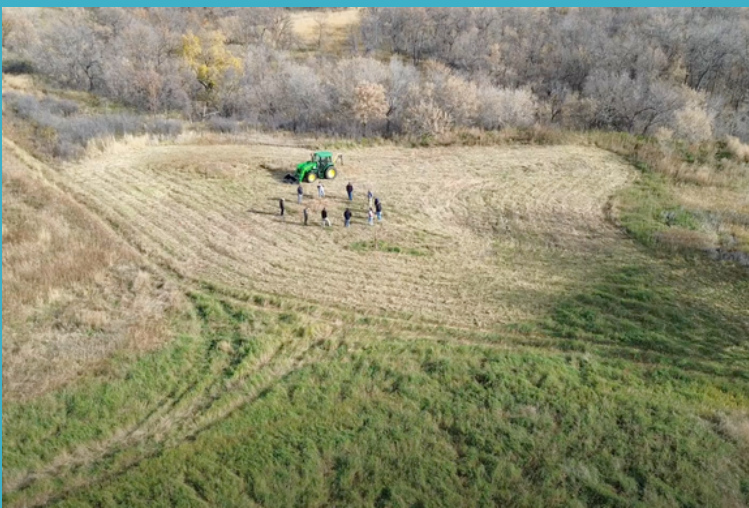
The Food Hub will make that possible by creating space for entrepreneurs to build their dreams, providing meaningful job training for young people, connecting community members to the fresh, local, and traditional foods they are seeking, and so much more."

- Kelly Hunter, Food Hub Manager

# NOURISHING THE LAND

## WOYUTE PRODUCTION FARM

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Makoce's team at the groundbreaking of the Woyute Production Farm

“Today’s work is all about putting down the roots of something that will grow for generations to come.”

– Farm Manager AJ Granelli

There is a persistent myth that the land on Pine Ridge is barren and unproductive. It’s a myth with deep roots in colonial thinking, perpetrating the belief that our communities cannot be self-sufficient. That our reliance on external resources is inescapable.

Today we know nothing could be further from the truth. While western agricultural practices and overgrazing have taken a significant toll, our ancestors thrived on the Great Plains for many generations before settler colonialism. They understood the vital balance of ecosystems and how to protect it, hunting and harvesting native species using practices that prioritized the wellbeing of the land, water, and plant and animal life.

As we celebrated breaking ground on Makoce’s 40-acre Woyute Farm this year, we committed to renewing those regenerative practices—as a pathway to supporting healthier families and communities and a more resilient environment. As the first operating educational farm on Pine Ridge, the Woyute Production Farm will help to provide local food producers the resources and tools they need to grow their agricultural enterprises. At the same time, it will provide all community members—and particularly young people—with opportunities to reconnect with the land and learn about vital regenerative practices. Our vision includes creating a diverse ecosystem—creating space for wildflowers, hemp, trees, nuts, bees, chickens and more—to nourish the land as we feed our communities.

This year we grew our farm team—which now includes Farm Manager AJ Granelli, Coordinator Tyler Eagle Bull, and Intern Curtis Leroy—to literally dig into the work of building a full-scale, regenerative production farm. We continued designing the farm's extensive infrastructure, including planning for roads, septic and power installation, and fencing. We began construction of a large pole barn that will serve as brooding space and a nighttime shelter for our free-range chickens. By mid-2024, we will have the capacity to house 1500 chickens at any given time, providing more space for local poultry producers to expand to new markets. With the purchase of a 65-horsepower tractor, we now have the vital equipment our team needs to build toward our vision.

# RECLAIMING OUR FOOD OASIS

## MAKOCE'S FOOD SYSTEMS INSTITUTE



Esperanza becomes the first to teach in the Cultural Foods Building

“Interning with Makoce has helped me really examine the connection between eating good food and our cultural healing as Lakota people. Every day I feel like all of us are mourning all the things that we've lost—including our understanding of how Lakota families and communities once lived on the land.

But beginning to grow our own food reminds us we are strong, and how it's not that long ago that we were completely self-sufficient. I think creating our own food system will bring back strength to the people, and bring the generational healing we need in the future.”

- Esperanza Rama, Makoce Cultural Foods Intern

It's often said Pine Ridge is a food desert. At Makoce, we are redefining the reservation as a food oasis.

If you look closely, our lands are rich with natural, whole foods—from fruits, berries, and sap, to turnips and sage, and animals like deer, wild turkeys, beavers, and more. Colonial policies disconnected us from those traditional sources of nourishment, restricting us from living in close relationship to the land. We were unable to carry forward the ancestral knowledge and practices that once protected our ecosystems and provided abundant, nutritious food for our communities. Our work now is focused on reclaiming those practices for the next generation.

Through Makoce's Food Systems Institute, we are rebuilding our knowledge of traditional foods while empowering community members to become leaders in the movement for a community-based, Indigenous-led food system. Through FSI's courses, trainings, and demonstrations, community members have the opportunity to take part in intensive, hands-on learning about regenerative food production and traditional Indigenous foods.

### Cultural Foods Education

This year we celebrated the opening of Makoce Cultural Foods Building, a community gathering space where our team will provide a range of educational opportunities focused on reclaiming our Indigenous diet. In the span of just a few weeks we held four harvest demonstrations during the last month of the year, bringing together more than 300 community members to gain hands-on experience hunting and processing buffalo, wild turkeys, and deer.

In a powerful moment for our entire team, our Cultural Foods Intern and high-school student Esperanza Rama became the first Makoce team member to teach a class in the new building. She focused on the process of making traditional chokecherry jelly and patties used by our ancestors. She delivered part of her presentation in the Lakota language to emphasize the importance of connecting traditional foods as an integral part of our work toward cultural revitalization.

# MAKOCE'S FOOD SYSTEMS INSTITUTE

## Regenerative Poultry Producers Program

Makoce's Regenerative Poultry Producers Program provides individuals and families with the resources and training to raise their own free-range chickens—to nourish their families and to build their own local-food enterprises.

Since the program first began in 2021, our team has supported over 25 families in producing small batches of meat chickens, with the goal of nurturing larger-scale poultry farmers in our community. Participants are supported by Makoce staff from beginning to end, receiving mobile chicken tractors to use on their properties as well as access to processing machinery and equipment. This year we continued to expand this foundational program, guiding 14 families through producing over 3700 lbs of free-range, antibiotic-free processed poultry protein in under eight weeks.

To encourage the growth of poultry production on the reservation, we also focused on creating needed infrastructure within the reservation's boundaries. We are continuing to pursue construction of a USDA-certified processing facility, which would allow local producers to tap into a broader regional market and spark the homegrown economic development solutions we need.

To better understand the challenges and opportunities of launching a federally inspected facility, this year our team traveled to Oklahoma and Arkansas to tour tribal processing plants created through COVID-19 emergency funding. At the Intertribal Agriculture Council's gathering of tribal meat and poultry producers, we connected with other Indigenous leaders working to support local producers and expand local food systems. At the Regenerative Poultry Convergence in Northfield, Minnesota, we presented the work our team is doing to expand pasture-raised chicken production on Pine Ridge.

## Comprehensive Food System Scan

This year also marked the release of the 2023 Food Systems Study: Exploring the Local Food Economy of the Oglala Lakota Oyate. This publication represents the first large-scale, comprehensive food system scan exploring how we can leverage existing resources—and fill gaps—to grow a thriving local food system on Pine Ridge. We worked with our colleagues at Sweet Grass Consulting to complete a deep-dive analysis of all available data on food-related policy, land use regulations, support and training programs for producers, food market access, and more.

Through completing the scan, we identified the strengths and assets our community already possesses, as well as deficiencies we must address, in order to establish a holistic, regenerative food system. We presented our findings at the Intertribal Agriculture Council's national conference and will continue to share our conclusions with Indigenous and community leaders as we move toward our mission. The study is now available on our website as a free resource for all community members and partners interested in understanding how we can garner existing resources, cultivate new ideas, and harvest the benefits of a local food system in the years to come.



From building brooding boxes and coops to support with processing, Makoce's team helps families become producers of nourishing free-range chicken





# DECOLONIZING FOOD SYSTEMS

## THE OCETI SAKOWIN FOOD SYSTEMS ALLIANCE

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Alliance Director Tierra Baird helps to lead conversation at the August Convergence

“With Makoce, I feel like I am part of the groundwork that will bring change for the communities on Pine Ridge.

The work being done with Makoce shows our community members that there is wealth in our language, culture, food, and relations; that we can live a life that our ancestors prayed for.”  
- Tierra Baird, Oceti Sakowin Food Systems Alliance Director

As we reclaim our Indigenous, community-based food systems, we must also confront the colonial policies and practices that attempted to eliminate them. We created the Oceti Sakowin Food Systems Alliance (OSFSA) to deepen connections between community leaders, food producers, advocates and researchers working toward food sovereignty as a pathway to tribal self-determination. As a true Alliance, we are generating ideas and insights on how to support a thriving Indigenous food system—through nurturing local markets, expanding cultural foods education, reducing colonial barriers that restrict land use and access, and driving policy development and change needed to support a local food system.

### Powerful Convergences

This year Makoce hosted two powerful convergences that created space for Alliance members and partners to gather, share their work, and develop innovative ideas around regenerative food systems. In January Alliance members gathered to clarify their shared plans for engaging in group advocacy and policy development work, while taking part in presentations on community wealth building and preparing Indigenous foods once used to sustain our communities in the winter.

In August we gathered for a major two-day convergence, bringing together more than 90 community members, relatives, and partner organizations to continue developing a collective roadmap toward a regenerative food system. During the August convergence we shared two crucial new resources with the community—the 2023 Food Systems Study and our new ArcGIS Story Map “Strengthening Indigenous Food & Agriculture on Pine Ridge.” This interactive digital tool provides users with an in-depth understanding of the historical and contemporary context on Pine Ridge, how our history has shaped our relationship with food, and how we can leverage opportunities and community strengths to create a thriving local food system.

We also held panel discussions highlighting the voices and perspectives of youth and elders, capturing their wisdom on why food sovereignty is so critical—and how we can reconnect with cultural foods and practices as a pathway to health and wellbeing.

# THE OCETI SAKOWIN FOOD SYSTEMS ALLIANCE

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In addition to our own convergences, we supported our relatives on the Rosebud Reservation during their first annual Sicangu Food Summit. Held in June, this event created space for organizations and individuals involved in food sovereignty efforts on Rosebud to gather and share ideas. Makoce CEO Nick Hernandez presented to the group on our work to drive development of a local food system and emphasized the importance of creating partnerships across reservation communities to lift up each other's work.



CEO Nick Hernandez traveled to Washington, DC to connect with policymakers on the importance of federal investment in Native producers and farmers

## National Advocacy

As a member of the Native Farm Bill Coalition, CEO Nick Hernandez traveled to Washington, DC to represent Makoce at a group advocacy event aimed at increasing support for components of the 2023 Farm Bill that will specifically benefit indigenous agriculture. Working alongside partners from the Indigenous Food and Agriculture Initiative and the Intertribal Agriculture Council, Hernandez connected with national leaders—including Representative Sharice Davids, a Ho-Chunk tribal member representing Kansas' District 4, and Farm Service Agency Administrator Zach Ducheneaux—on the importance of creating opportunity for Native producers.

## Emerging Leaders

In the years ahead, we are thrilled that Tierra Baird will be guiding the work of the Oceti Sakowin Food Systems Alliance as a member of Makoce's team. Tierra joined Makoce after completing her studies at Stanford University in Earth and Land Systems. As a deeply devoted community member, Tierra is committed to advancing research and education to spark innovative and positive environmental change for the Oglala Lakota tribe and the global Indigenous community.

# LEVERAGING SUSTAINABLE RESOURCES

## MAKOCE'S HEMP PRODUCTION PROGRAM

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"As a regenerative crop, hemp can provide us with incredible opportunities. We look to utilize it as a biodiverse source of food, as construction materials like insulation, and much more. Producing hemp holds the promise of revitalizing our economies and our communities."  
-Nick Hernandez, Founder & CEO

From building and heating homes to creating nourishing foods and regenerating depleted soil, we believe harnessing the power of hemp will be transformative for Pine Ridge communities.

As a sustainable resource, hemp holds extraordinary potential. The overconsumption of wood has led to the depletion of local forests, causing soil degradation and erosion that is likely to continue due to climate change. As an alternative, hemp grows 200 times faster than trees and is significantly more versatile than wood. Hemp has countless uses, including being turned into fiber or cloth, building materials and insulation, heating fuel or food, and more.

This year we continued to work toward the development of Makoce's Hemp Production Farm and processing facility. Our long-range goal is to develop and distribute hemp on Pine Ridge to provide community members with low-cost, sustainable materials for a wide range of uses. At the same time, we're working to empower local Indigenous producers to leverage the economic opportunities of hemp farming.

This year we continued to investigate new and innovative technologies in hemp production that can expedite production and use here on the Pine Ridge Reservation. That work has included developing relationships with other tribal organizations, including the Indigenous Hemp & Cannabis Farmers Cooperative, that are focused on helping Indigenous nations efficiently and effectively increase hemp production to benefit their communities.

# OUR VISION FORWARD

## STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS FOR 2024-2026

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Since Makoce was founded in 2019, our work has focused on building the foundation of a local food system. With that foundation firmly established, we are now turning our focus to the work of building—breaking ground on our Food Hub, raising the walls of new barns and processing facilities, creating more pathways for community members to produce and market local foods, and beyond.

In the last year we have experienced exponential growth in our organizational capacity—bringing together a committed team with the knowledge and skills to lift up new initiatives and engage our community. We now hold the comprehensive, deeply researched plans needed for creating a resilient food system infrastructure to serve the entire reservation.

As part of our 2024-2026 Strategic Plan, our strategic directions include:

### Launching Construction of Makoce's Production Farm, Food Hub, & Business District

Makoce's Production Farm and Food Hub are the infrastructural components that will become the backbone of the reservation's food system, supporting it for generations to come. The expansion of our Production Farm that is now underway—including new pole barns to house flocks of pasture-raised chicken, processing facilities, and freezer storage—will significantly increase the number of community members who are able to produce their family's own food and to launch their own local agricultural enterprises. As we move toward launching the first phase of the Food Hub's construction, we will truly begin to see the wheels of a local food system turn—by creating space for community members to access fresh, local food and for entrepreneurs and innovators to build enterprises that benefit families, communities, and our environment.

### Deepening Community Engagement in Food Systems Development

Community ownership of our local food system is vital. In the coming years we will focus our energy on significantly expanding opportunities for community members to engage in the building of a local food system—whether through creating local food-based enterprises, producing pasture-raised chickens and eggs home use, taking part in educational programs on traditionally Indigenous foods, learning to create home-based gardens, support local food advocacy, and more. We will create a new range of youth-focused programs—including expanded internships and an interactive activity-based book inspired by the National Parks Junior Ranger Program to provide children from on and off the reservation with opportunities to learn about our history, ecosystems, and cultural foods. This work will spark community leadership now—and support a new generation of food system leaders who will carry this work forward.

### Strengthen Our Organizational Infrastructure for Long Term Sustainability

Our role at Makoce is to serve as an anchor for our local food system. In the years to come, we plan to continue to expand the resources, opportunities, and training we provide our community as our local food system grows. For that reason, we are investing critical time and energy into building our organizational resilience and sustainability. We will continue to grow our team and create new roles for community members with a passion for leading food systems development. We will expand our communications and outreach efforts to increase engagement among community members and build energy around local foods and food sovereignty. And we will double down on our strategic fundraising work to build the long-range resources we need to sustain and grow local food systems for decades to come.