



Native Women's
Association of Canada

L'Association des
femmes autochtones
du Canada



DEC 9, 2022



Revolutionary Indigenous Ideals for Protecting Agrobiodiversity

**Beyond Biodiversity Targets:
Insights from Indigenous Biodiversity Research and Practice**

NATIVE WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION OF CANADA

NWAC at United Nations Biodiversity Conference: COP15
Montréal, Canada, December 7- 19, 2022

Prepared and presented by:

Hannah Patrie

Project Coordinator and Mentee, Environmental Department
Native Women's Association of Canada



MONOLOGUE

When I was an undergrad, I did a research project that proposed how we might change the Canadian Constitution to adequately fight climate change; and centered around my Indigenous roots and ethical values, I titled this project: The End of **Speciesism**, or the End of Humankind: A Discussion on Constitutional Reform to include Animal Rights and Protections.

My research was motivated by the appalling nature of our current food system, and the grotesque conditions of which our non-human relatives are forced into. Fearful that my professor would have radically different political and/or social opinions than myself, I took a breath, prayed to my ancestors, and wrote a piece that to this day is one of my most honest, relevant, and passionate works. And it started like this...

I have come to realize the privilege I have as a homo-sapien. Witnessing the institutionalization of fellow animals who reside in vertical cages, experience forced insemination, and are genetically modified to the point that they frequently seizure, have heart attacks, or suffer leg fractures due to the abnormally enlarged size of their bodies. I have heard the wailing sound of mother cows grieving the theft of their babies. I have witnessed habitats being destroyed for elite profit. As an Indigenous woman, the experience of animals is frighteningly similar to that of my people. Like animals, our people have been deemed as non-human others. Indigenous women have been objectified as property, [forcefully relocated, isolated, and manipulated;] [and as the incredible Dr. Shirley Anne Tate has argued, racialized women have historically and presently been seen as flesh rather than bodies- used, and abused much like our animal relatives] (Tate, 2015). The colonial argument is that our people are not civilized, thereby justifying the assimilation and destruction of our livelihood. That same supremacist ideology has led people to believe that domesticated animals have entered a sort of evolutionary social contract, in which their dependence on human care justifies specieist suppression. For far too long we have been subjugated under man-made hierarchies that devalue non-human-enough beings. But in my culture, we see animals as our relatives, so I write this paper in solidarity with my non-human kin and in defense of our Mother Earth.





This first set of images depict the current monoculture system which is unsustainable.

As I looked further into the reality of our monoculture food system whether that be in the form of livestock or crops, I connected an endless number of dots that all pointed to climate change, loss of biodiversity, and the destruction of Mother Earth. And I think it is easy to get stuck on, or even lost in a handful of explanations for our current **biodiversity loss** and **climate disaster**, but in my novice position I am realizing there is an overwhelming amount of vast and complex causes. Which also means our approaches for solutions must be vast and complex.

So, when I look to Canada's 2020 Biodiversity Goals and Targets, particularly Target 7 under Goal B, I am for lack of better words, confused. It states that by 2020, agricultural working landscapes will provide a stable or improved level of biodiversity and habitat capacity. But you see, our current agricultural system immensely lacks biodiversity. I reside in Treaty 6 territory, where you can drive down the rural roads and just see acres



upon acres of the same crop. My father lives on an acreage surrounded by grain fields all of the same variety, all sourced from the same genetically modified seed, and requiring the same quantity of fertilizers, herbicides, and pesticides known to exterminate other forms of life. Now I know many would argue that considering the size and scale of humanity, we need these agricultural mechanisms. But to that I ask, shouldn't we do better? Can we not do better than this self-destructive system?

Today, it is said that majority of our calories come from less than 30 varieties of food. (And) In the last century alone, we have witnessed a **75% decline in agrobiodiversity**. Therefore, seeing the words "provide a stable or improved level of biodiversity and habitat capacity" seems rudimentary at best. What we need is an agricultural revolution, which in large part means reassembling the decision-making table.

In Indigenous cultures across the globe there is shared fundamental practice of **relationality** and reciprocity with our environment. It is the understanding that us humans are just one small component of this great big world full of life and responsibilities beyond our own. And as one piece of the whole, we humans are no more important than the next species. Yet, today, our world - the "human kingdom" operates with a very different worldview. We are where we are today, with a global temperature of 1.1C, because of the continual exploitation, extraction, and destruction of the non-human world. And because of one fundamental systematic principle of which we justify all our actions, and that is **speciesism**.

Speciesism is the false notion that humans are the superior species and therefore has a right to do what is may to all those around them. Speciesism is a very dangerous and very false ideology which if not addressed will drive us straight to apocalyptic disaster.

Alongside the remarkable technologies and investments made for a greener more sustainable agricultural system, I strongly argue that we must institute a psychological shift away from speciesism. Our end goal cannot simply be to save humankind; we must be motivated beyond ourselves to accelerate solutions.





What does this look like? For one, this means learning to stop dissociating from the food and products we buy at the supermarket and start recognizing and empathizing all the life behind them. It means supporting environmental rehabilitation and protection efforts not for the sake of humans maintaining our resources, but for the sake of our planet being an ecologically rich, diverse, and fertile place for the next generations of all species. And we can look towards Traditional Knowledge to do this. And I don't just mean through occasional interactions, I mean incorporating it into large scale entrenched law and procedures.

Now, I know you might be thinking, this girl is far too utopian. I know I don't have all the convincing data and analytical reports to back up my proposition (at least not yet). But I do know that Indigenous people have persevered for time immemorial, we have remained resilient against all forces imaginable, and we still stand as land and water protectors against all strains. And this was accomplished not by working against nature, but with it. With respect and honour towards the beyond human world. Our ancestors saw the beauty and prosperity of a dynamic landscape, of which perfectly groomed unified rows and mass confinement were nowhere in sight. Let us imagine and strive for agriculture and ecosystems that exists according to the rules of nature, and where sacrificing the integrity of species is not a normalized mechanism of survival.

This second set of images depict diversified agricultural practices, much of which stem from Indigenous Knowledge, such as the Three Sisters technique.

Miigwech, thank you.





Native Women's
Association of Canada

L'Association des
femmes autochtones
du Canada


DEC 9, 2022



Revolutionary Indigenous Ideals for Protecting Agrobiodiversity

**Beyond Biodiversity Targets:
Insights from Indigenous Biodiversity Research and
Practice**

NATIVE WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION OF CANADA

NWAC at United Nations Biodiversity Conference: COP15
Montréal, Canada, December 7- 19, 2022

Prepared and presented by:
Hannah Patrie

Project Coordinator and Mentee, Environmental Department
Native Women's Association of Canada

nwac.ca