

Analyzing Columbia Basin Tribal foods



Stuart Harris, CTUIR science and engineering director, and public health faculty members Barbara Harper and Anna Harding (far left) look on as researcher Bob Durst explains the method for determining the nutrient content of Native foods.

"Our tribal diet, culture, and ceremonies have been centered around natural foods for centuries," explains Stuart Harris, a Cayuse Indian and OSU graduate. "We've lived with a balanced, time-tested diet of meat, fish, vegetables, plants, and berries." A member of the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation (CTUIR), Stuart says Western influences have changed tribal diets across the country. "Until now, we have not studied the nutritional values of our traditional foods, but with this research, we hope to provide convincing evidence to promote a resurgence of Native foods and a healthier lifestyle."

He's referring to a new research project – a tribal- and OSU-funded collaboration between the CTUIR Department of Science & Engineering and OSU's Department of Public Health and Linus Pauling Institute in which Native foods are being tested for antioxidants, vitamins, minerals, and macro- and micro-nutrient content. This biochemical analysis of berries, roots,

and plants will also shed light on the impact of environmental contaminants in tribal diets and traditions.

Linus Pauling researcher Debbie Mustacich and public health professor Anna Harding are principal investigators on the study, the first to comprehensively determine the nutrient and antioxidant profiles of Columbia Basin Native food plants. It's a community-based participatory research initiative, bringing scientists and local community members together to investigate issues of importance to the CTUIR. "We also developed a unique material and data sharing agreement that is particular to this project but that can be used as a model for other university-tribal research collaborations and that protects tribal sovereignty," says Anna. Stuart hopes the project will encourage young tribal members to become scientists.



Barbara Harper, environmental health program manager for CTUIR, says it's important to respect the Seasonal Round, the annual nutritional cycle followed by the tribe.