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Minobimaadiziwin Gitigaanin: Red Cliff Ojibwe Tribal Farm and Garden Project

Introduction:

A person's connection to the land and environment may depend on their culture, religion, or birth place. For many groups of people, maintaining this connection is done through the implementation of community-driven gardening projects, clubs, and traditions. Although the structure of these programs may vary, they are all rooted in community, culture, and the environment. Community garden projects such as the one at *Minobimaadiziwin Gitigaanin* Tribal Farm, created by Ojibwe and located on the Red Cliff Reservation, prove to have positive effects on the community by bringing diverse groups together to increase individual and community wellbeing, promote environmental stewardship, and preserve language and cultural traditions through education and group collaboration.

Background:

The Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Reservation, located at the top of the Bayfield Peninsula was created in 1856 through a series of treaties with the United States Government and Chief Buffalo. This reservation was established and is 1 mile wide by about 14 miles long (Figure 1).



Figure 1: The red star is where the Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa reservation is located.

Today there are 1,774 enrolled Tribal Members in Red Cliff. The *Minobimaadiziwin Gitigaanin* Tribal Farm and Garden Project were designed to assist community members in many ways including: providing knowledge on growing produce, sharing work and responsibilities, supplementing food for homes/families, reducing food budgets, access to the community orchard, and participation in the local farmers' market. Additionally, the program brings together tribal members and families within the community to pass on traditional ecological knowledge, work to combat climate change, and provide resources to the community. The goal of the program is to be a lasting resource to the Ojibwe, being based in their culture while also being resilient to new environmental obstacles the Tribe will face. Although the main benefits of the Garden Project can be seen, there are also intangible positives that accompany community gardening.

Communities all around the world have developed gardening programs that provide benefits to several members of the community. A survey conducted in 2012 in New Zealand reported that among secondary school students, gardening was positively associated with increased healthy dietary habits, physical activity, and improved mental health and wellbeing. Additionally, students who were involved in gardening reported lower depressive symptoms and experienced

higher family connections (Van Lier et al., 2012). Getting adolescents involved in at home or organized group gardening, may help them develop community connections and pride, build strong interpersonal relationships, and create long lasting physical, mental, and emotional health habits.

Similar benefits were found amongst older adults ranging from age 60-95 in a study released in 2020 that was conducted in Australia. The study reported that adults who were involved in gardening groups experienced increased social and physical benefits including a more positive perception of aging. It was concluded that the major contributor to overall gains was due to time spent in the garden and nature even without actual participation in the act of gardening (Scott, Masser, & Pachana, 2020). These studies provide evidence that diverse groups within a community can all benefit from being involved in organized gardening projects, especially those who are often misunderstood or disregarded in society.

Policies affecting the case -- tribal, state, federal, provincial, global:

The Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa reservation was established in 1856 as a result of many treaties with the U.S. government. The most recent treaty of those is the 1854 LaPointe Treaty. Chief Buffalo chose to negotiate with the U.S. after they threatened to remove the Lake Superior Chippewa to Sandy Lake, Minnesota. This caused widespread resistance. Wisconsin citizens signed petitions opposing the removal of the Chippewa, and Chief Buffalo went to Washington to get the order resigned. Once he successfully returned, Chief Buffalo was awarded 4 sections of land for his negotiation. This land is what began the Red Cliff Reservation, but then in 1963 The Senate amended the 1854 LaPointe Treaty and granted the reservation 14,000 additional acres of land (RedCliff-nsd).

In addition to the 1854 LaPoint Treaty, the Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa were heavily influenced by the 1924 Indian Citizenship Act and the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934. The 1924 Indian Citizenship Act granted tribal members U.S. citizenship while also allowing them to maintain tribal citizenship. Although citizenship was rejected by some tribal members, this act allowed for further acceptance of internal sovereignty by the Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa. Further work to improve the economic life of Indians and combat the effects of the Allotment Act, the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934 was passed (RedCliff-nsd). Although years of oppression, land loss, and struggle can never be undone, the Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa continue to work to preserve their culture and land through agreements with the U.S. government and within their own tribal government.

Analysis-Environmental and social implications of the case:

One of the main goals associated with *Minobimaadiziwin Gitigaanin* Tribal Farm and Garden Project is the revitalization and preservation of language and cultural traditions. Currently, there is only one Tribal member who is a native Ojibwe speaker (RedCliff-nsd). Preserving their language is crucial to the preservation of their culture. By offering Ojibwe language classes and implementing those techniques into other programs, like the Garden Project, the Tribe is passing on their language to not only children, but adults as well.

The Tribal Farm and Garden Project creates an inclusive environment for Tribal members of all ages to make connections. Not only does the program allow for families to come together, it facilitates teamwork and coordinated responsibility of an entire community. The diverse engagements of community members allow for stories to be told, lessons to be learned, and a deeper understanding of the Ojibwe culture to be developed by all members. Elders can pass on

traditional knowledge while younger members may bring new creative perspectives to the program. Additionally, *Minobimaadiziwin Gitigaanin* expands its reach outside of The Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa by engaging in youth community partnerships. Through programs like Xperitas, connections, memories, and knowledge of the Ojibwe culture are shared with youth in hands-on activities at the farm and time spent with Trial Elders (Xperitas.org). The Garden Project makes intracultural interactions along with cross culture engagement possible to expand the Ojibwe culture to an even larger group. These interactions and time spent engaging with nature will have positive effects on the overall wellbeing of everyone who participates, while also creating a strong connected community.

Through their partnerships and increased environmental knowledge within the Tribal community, The Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa uses the Garden Project to help build a strong base to support their community. The *Minobimaadiziwin Gitigaanin* Tribal Farm and Garden Project increases tribal resilience in a changing climate, and increases sustainability and long term prosperity of the Tribe. The program participants and coordinators are constantly working to tackle new obstacles, many of which arise due to changing environmental conditions and phenological timing. Farm and garden manager Nathan Secor says, “We really should look at the farm as an ecosystem so we can keep the soils healthy, ourselves healthy, and doing that by building resilience into the farm ecosystem” (Secor, 2017). Nathan and other farm members strive to look at challenges in a positive way instead of viewing them as roadblocks. They want to create a strong and long lasting resource for the Ojibwe, by using traditional ecological knowledge and innovative solutions to maintain the farm and garden systems.

Lessons learned/ applications to other settings, communities:

The Garden Project acts as a tool to revitalize Ojibwe culture and bring community members together. The garden project does this by emphasizing the importance of getting young people involved while also providing resources for Tribal elders to participate. The Tribal farm and Garden Project are associated with several other Tribal programs such as *Women, Infants & Children* (WIC), *Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program* (Senior FMNP), and *FoodShare Card*. All of these programs work in conjunction to support Tribal members with access to food, knowledge, and quality community time.

Other native community projects such as the Forest County Potawatomi Garden Guide may benefit from coordination between Tribal resources and programs. Coordination could help reach a larger audience, make the guide more accessible, and possibly easier to use. By having programs that mix well and support one another, Tribal nations may create a stronger, more closely knit community that will help maintain cultural values, pass on language, and promote environmental resilience for generations to come.

In addition to the Garden Project being coupled with several other Tribal projects, the program offers access to additional resources like the Tribal orchard and Farmers Market. Both of these resources allow for further community collaboration and responsibility while posing as an incentive to get people to participate. Although The Forest County Potawatomi Garden Guide is more focused on at home gardens, similar benefits or group activities to The Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Garden Project could accompany it. Several benefits are observed from group gardening, so organizing group meetings for those using the garden guide to discuss their techniques, ask questions, and trade plants or seeds may be beneficial. Creating a larger community garden of their own is also a future possibility for the Forest County Potawatomi.

Finally, The Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa think long term when building and maintaining *Minobimaadiziwin Gitigaanin* Tribal Farm. They want this to be a resilient and sustainable part of the Ojibwe community for years and years to come. Long term planning and problem solving is crucial in this process and it could prove to be very important to the Forest County Potawatomi Garden Project as well. The Garden Project wants to help preserve not only the growing of native plants, but the cultural connections the Potawatomi hold with them. Implementing strategies, plans, or tools to make sure that once these gardens are created they are maintained and protected even after the creator of them is gone, could be something developed later. Additionally, creating a similar educational guide on climate change that highlights obstacles that may be faced with potential mitigation techniques to go hand-in-hand with the Garden Guide, could be another helpful extension of the project.

Conclusion:

Whether it be language, tradition, or new sustainable practices, *Minobimaadiziwin Gitigaanin* Tribal Farm and Garden Project serve as tools to preserve Ojibwe culture and bring the community together. After examining the Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Garden Project, along with numerous community garden programs around the world, it is clear that physical, mental, and environmental benefits are correlated with involvement in community gardens. Also, similarly throughout many groups, community gardens allow for language, cultural traditions, beliefs, and connections to nature to be passed on through generations. The Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa have created a network of resources for their Tribal members to promote resiliency and sustainability. One of those very successful resources in the *Minobimaadiziwin Gitigaanin* Tribal Farm and Garden Project. It promotes the preservation of

Ojibwe culture and environmental stewardship, while serving as a model for other Tribal Nations such as the Forest County Potawatomi that are currently working to develop similar projects.

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