

Megan Mahoney
Hudson River Valley Institute Internship
Professor J. Schaaf
April 23, 2010
Chapter #8

Native American Methods of Agriculture and Fishing

Surrounded by the plentiful resources the Hudson River Valley offers, Native Americans developed extremely skilled methods of producing food for their families. As such, the native populations were able to move from a hunter gatherer existence towards settlements.

A significant change took place from 1000-1600 AD when Native Americans began to grow vegetables. This shift into horticulture created more options for food, and plants became an essential nutritional component besides animals. Traditional Native American life centered on hunting, but innovations in horticulture ameliorated their lives. Corn, beans, squash, pumpkins, sunflowers, and tobacco became integral crops for Native Americans. As their comfort level with farming increased, Native Americans created water drainage systems, and developed advanced methods of agriculture to avert sediment erosion. Food supply was dictated by the seasons, signifying strict dependence on weather conditions. Fall was primarily the hunting season, catching deer, bear, birds, and weasel. Native Americans' cooked meals in clay pots or baked in corn husks, which typically consisted of cornmeal mush, fish, or meat.

Alternatively, spring and summer took advantage of warmer conditions, and fishing became the principal food source. The Hudson River was and continues to be auspiciously filled with striped bass, sturgeon, and eels, providing the Native Americans with a variety of food. Fish were caught with stone-weighted seines, weirs, nets set on poles, hooks,

and bow and arrow. The dugout canoe, hollowed-out from the trunk of a tree with the aid of scrapers, allowed for fishing and transportation along the Hudson River.¹

¹ Stephen P. Stanne, *The Hudson: An Illustrated Guide to the Living River* (Piscataway, NJ: Hudson Sloop Clearwater, Inc., 2007) 93.