



## CLIPPINGS a weekly column from Iowa State University Extension and Outreach

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**For Immediate Release**

### **Indigenous Peoples' Day: A Time for Thanks and Giving**

*Pat Kosters, Iowa Master Gardener*

Native Americans, our Indigenous People, will forever be associated with Thanksgiving. It was the native people of the Pokanoket tribe who helped the Pilgrim immigrants of Plymouth Colony survive their first winter by providing food and supplies. According to historians, without their generosity all would have died. Giving thanks for their good fortune, the Pilgrims invited those Native Americans to share their first harvest festival in 1621.

This is another story of Native Americans' generosity to remember this Indigenous Peoples' Day. In the midst of the human tragedy inflicted by COVID-19, this tale of two nations - separated by the Atlantic Ocean and 175 years - is an inspiration. It is the story of two ancient peoples: the Choctaw Native Americans and the indigenous people of Ireland who share a common history. Both ancient peoples were, in effect, colonized by outside powers. Under the 1830 Indian Removal Bill, 17,000 Choctaw were forcibly relocated from their ancestral lands in Mississippi to what is now Oklahoma over "the trail of tears." About 2500 died of starvation and disease along the way. Similarly, roughly one million Irish people died of starvation and related causes during the Potato Famine that ravaged Ireland in the 1840's.

The modern-day relationship between these two nations began in 1847 when the Choctaws, who only recently had arrived in Oklahoma after their forced relocation, struggled to collect \$5000 in today's money for the Irish whom they learned were dying of starvation because of the potato famine. The relief funds were sent to Midleton, near Dublin. There, many decades later, the townspeople realized this aid had come from people who themselves had just experienced similar tragic circumstances. Over the years, the Irish people have formed an enduring friendship with the Choctaw Nation in Oklahoma.

In early 2020 this story took a new twist as COVID-19 caused disruptions around the world. This spring the Navajo Nation, one of the largest Native American tribes, experienced the highest coronavirus infection rate in the country causing its people to struggle with starvation and death. On May 1<sup>st</sup>, a Navajo native tweeted: "Navajo has depleted all of her limited resources. Help if you can." On May 2nd an Irish Times news correspondent tweeted: "Native Americans raised a huge amount in famine relief for Ireland at a time when they had very little. It's time to come through for them now." A GoFundMe relief effort immediately raised more than \$500,000 from 24,000 Irish donors. By October, this Navajo & Hopi Families COVID-19 Relief Fund had raised nearly \$6,000,000 worldwide to buy food and supplies for these families in need.

Even before the coronavirus pandemic, Native American tribal communities across our country were experiencing disproportionately high food insecurity. In South Dakota, the people of the Oglala Lakota Nation live in counties with child food insecurity rates near 40 percent. To help feed people in need during the pandemic, Feeding America, our largest domestic hunger-relief organization, announced the establishment of the COVID-19 Emergency Fund. More help is still needed. For all of us who can, this is truly a time for thanks and for giving.

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Pat Kusters, Iowa Master Gardener