



the Catawba Nation

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Extinct Native Corn Seeds Discovered and Brought Back Home to Catawba Nation

For many years the Catawba Nation has been on the search for its ancestral seeds that once nourished the tribe for centuries. Last year, the Catawba Indian Nation (CIN) Division of Natural Resources successfully tracked down seeds from Catawba flour corn and grew a healthy crop that provided grits, flour, and cornmeal to citizens. The staff has always been on the look-out for Catawba sweet corn which was thought to be extinct. It was a staple in the diet of Catawba Ancestors.

Last month, approximately 150 seeds of Catawba sweet corn were found and returned home to Catawba land to be housed with the Natural Resources Division, who have taken on the huge responsibility ahead as the stewards of these precious seeds.

These seeds were discovered through an important connection between the United Southern and Eastern Tribes Assistant Director of Environmental Resource Management and member of the nonprofit *Braiding the Sacred*, Lea Zeise, and CIN Director of Natural Resources, Aaron Baumgardner.

Lea, accompanied by other Braiding the Sacred members, traveled to Oklahoma to pick up seeds which held over 2,000 different containers of different native seeds. There are thousands of varieties in the collection, about 200 of them are in critical condition, according to Lea. She said those are called Red Level Seeds, and in some cases, like with the Catawba Nation, those seeds have been disconnected from their people for some time now. Lea said their focus and work is to give them back and rematriate the seeds to the Nation's they belong to.

Lea said in the process of cleaning up the seeds, she picked up a jar which just so happened to be Catawba sweet corn. "I was excited and thought 'I know Catawba's who are growing corn;' because I know Aaron and Marvin (Bouknight), and the team who has been working hard to restore the corn."

Regrowing the crop is going to be a delicate project. Aaron's team is working with Davidson College in North Carolina, who helped raise the Catawba flour corn last year. According to Aaron, the college is going to be very careful with the seeds to give it every fighting chance to grow, "[W]e want this corn to be something that survives, but we have the understanding that it might not since the seeds were last grown in 1988. The seeds are very old."

Aaron went on to say, "[J]ust having the opportunity to steward these corn seeds that we can restore that bit of culture back to the Catawba Nation is something I'm really appreciate of, and grateful for."