Indigenous Food: Caribou

Caribou is an important food source especially for Northern Indigenous Communities full of essential nutrients such as protein, iron and Vitamin B!

"We eat lots of caribou meat, all parts of the caribou are used, nothing is wasted!" Mary Black Yellowknives Dene First Nation.
– Mary Black, an Elder from Yellowknives Dene First Nation.

Caribou has been an important part of Indigenous Culture since time immemorial. Caribou hunting is a part of the cultural traditions and identity of many Indigenous communities. Continuing to harvest caribou keeps that connection to the land and ancestral ways of living. In these communities, caribou take a central part of legends, songs, stories, drum songs, prayers and more.

When harvested the whole animal is used, providing not just meat and fat but also materials that can be made into tools and clothing items.

Safe harvesting and preparation:

Make sure meat is cooked well, dried or aged. Use containers made for meat storage.

Meat to be eaten raw should be harvested by an experienced hunter.

Check for signs of Brucellosis– a naturally occurring disease known to Caribou.

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Usage:
Caribou is a lean and low fat and high protein source compared to other meat sources. The fat of the caribou is a significant source of energy and has significant components for heart and blood health. Caribou is an essential form of nutrition for Indigenous communities in Northern regions. Internal organs are cleaned and used as a nutrient source prepared boiled or roasted.
Bone marrow is extracted it is a delicacy for community elders or used in soups and broth.
Caribou meat can be aged, roasted, fried, frozen, ate raw or made into dried or smoked meat.
Preservation methods depend on the region they are harvested in. Smoking or drying the meat preserves the meat and moisture loss improves the number of nutrient components.

Invite the children to help with recipes that contain caribou smelling and look at a sample before you start cooking. Take the children out to community feasts that serve caribou meat in ways that honor Indigenous traditions. Visit a caribou camp so children can see what you need to do to prepare to go hunting. Bring them back when there is meat so they can see the preparation process.

Have an elder/ knowledge keeper to tell stories around the fire or in the circle time area about caribou hunting or legends about the caribou.
Give teachings on different parts of the caribou how they are prepared and what can be made from each part.

Create a documentation board and or display featuring the children eating dishes with this Indigenous food ingredient.

P**layful Additions:**

Set up the sensory table to look like a caribou's natural habitat with moss, berries, rocks, lichen, caribou leaves.

Set up outdoor play area to create a space where a hunt can be role played, hiding a stuffed caribou for the children to find.

Make the dramatic play area look like the barren lands, post photos of caribou!