Knowing Which Way the Wind Blows
Weather Observation, Belief and Practice in Native Oklahoma (first impressions)

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My research...

I am conducting field interviews in southwestern Oklahoma to understand how Native farmers observe and conceptualize weather and climate, particularly in local, traditional ways, and how this knowledge is informing new efforts to farm, ranch and garden sustainably within a broader framework of food sovereignty. I also ask farmers whether they have noticed climate change and if so they've modified what they do in response to it.

On observational indicators in nature...

"...thickness of the chest fur of deer..." and thickness of squirrel and bird nests...thickness of pecan shells and greenness of plums...gathering habits of beavers...horse behavior when storms approach...star visibility...moon rings...signs over time – "everything is confused" – it makes it harder to base farming decisions on them.

Yet, they adapt their farming practices, including use of no-till methods for wheat that conserve water and soil and the need for chemicals, and maintenance of seed varieties (especially in vegetable gardening) – trying to make a difference with no-till – it produces a cleaner cure.

Interesting point made: "...knowing the needs of things is important; weather can get mixed up and turned around."

On farming...

The (increased) variation and (decreased) reliability of observational signs over time – "everything is confused" – it makes it harder to base farming decisions on them.

On climate change...

Climate change and the associated shifting patterns of weather and plant and animal life already are having highly local and enormous impacts (adapted from A. Ingerle and C. Sakakibara in Local and Traditional Knowledge are Important to...; from impression of what climate is presently doing to the environment)

On what the farmers know...

They feel what they know could contribute to the discourse and practice regarding climate change adaptation.

What others have to say about traditional knowledge...

Ingold and Kurkla (Perceiving the Environment in Forests, 2000) defined traditional knowledge as knowing "generated in the practices of locality," knowledge that is historical yet dynamic in content and unique in its vulnerability

Pieriottti and Wldzak (Traditional Ecological Knowledge, 2000) believe traditional knowledge can yield "unexpected" and "non-intuitive insights" about nature

Observational signs in nature and everyday experiences with nature are contextualized within workflows that promote particular (more sustainable) ways of living in the world.

"Traditional knowledge is worth knowing as a comparison to what is going on now – changes that could happen... we could save future generations by paying more attention to nature."

Native America Calling – The National Electronic Talking Circle Thursday, December 18, 2008 – "The Moon, the Stars and Sun"

"Native communities have always looked to the skies above when determining the best time for ceremonies, planting and harvesting. The close connection to the vastness of the skies is still present in many indigenous communities. From remembering the names given to constellations by our Native ancestors to studying astronomy. Natives are still reading the skies to plot their course and find their futures. What is the significance of the moon, sun and stars in your tribal culture?"

What others have to say about climate change...

"...doesn’t think much about it (climate debate) but thinks it’s happening... past 10 years have not been the same... more unpredictable... it’s down, then up, then down... water tables have been affected and creeks are drying up... rivers fall so low... what we put in the atmosphere is not healthy for the environment."

Climate change provides two "naive" ways of thinking about what they do:

"...Naive communities have always looked to the skies above..."

The Moon, the Stars and Sun

"...everything works together.

Nature as we know it is being lost. It is taken for granted by society. People don’t value the land anymore; they trash and waste it. There’s a lack of respect for what God has given us."

Local and traditional knowledge are important to consider

Exploring all ways of knowing – not just recent advances in weather and climate science but also on-the-ground observations of, experiences in, and adaptations to nature may prove useful for better conceptualizing, recognizing and understanding shifting environmental conditions.

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