

RANGELANDS

Around the World

Regional Feature



CELEBRATING THE CUISINE OF ARCTIC REINDEER HERDERS

by Anders Oskal and Alena Gerasimova
International Centre for Reindeer Husbandry

submitted by Ann Waters-Bayer

The Sámi herders in the Arctic areas of Norway, Sweden and Finland are celebrating their food and cooking traditions as a way to raise awareness about and safeguard their way of life and to empower their youth to handle their future in the Arctic. The Sámi are among the over 20 groups of Indigenous peoples who have herded reindeer in the taiga and tundra rangelands in the Arctic Circle for centuries. As part of a project to protect and revive their traditions, young Sámi – working together with older reindeer herders – recorded oral recipes and compiled them in a cookbook “Eallu: Indigenous Youth, Arctic Change and Food Culture – Food, Knowledge and How We Have Thrived on the Margins”. In their language, “eallu” refers to the herd of reindeer on which the lives of the Sámi pastoralists depend. In 2018, their book won the Best Book of the Year prize at the Gourmand World Cookbook Awards, organised by the Madrid-based Gourmand International.



Anders Oskal presents the EALLU book to the FAO Director-General Qu Dongyu

To make Arctic pastoralists' cuisine even more widely known to the world, the World Reindeer Herders (WRH), the International Centre for Reindeer Husbandry (ICR) in Norway and Danish architects developed the NOMAD Indigenous FoodLab, which is a combination of a nomadic Sámi tent and a modern mobile kitchen. This has been travelling to several cities in northern and southern Europe to demonstrate and celebrate Sámi cuisine and also to offer a meeting place for Indigenous peoples.

For example, for the World Food Forum (WFF) in October 2022, the NOMAD Indigenous FoodLab travelled to the FAO Headquarters in Rome and hosted discussions about the future of food, youth action, innovation and science – discussions led by the Sámi and other indigenous peoples to influence the global policy debate on the transformation of food systems. In the kitchen part of the FoodLab, Indigenous chefs from different parts of the world presented their traditional foods. The event also served to raise awareness for the International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists (IYRP) designated by the UN General Assembly for 2026. The WRH and ICR held

a reception with dishes from reindeer meat and other reindeer products prepared by the FoodLab chef team, who also cooked reindeer delicacies for two more receptions during the WFF. The FoodLab hosted the launches of the Coalition on Indigenous Peoples' Food Systems and the Indigenous Youth Campaign, as well as evening cultural programmes led by indigenous artists.

During the WFF "Tasting Books" session, the Eallu cookbook was presented by Sámi reindeer herders and co-authors Anders Oskal and Issat Turi to the FAO Director General Qu Dongyu, who later tweeted "NOMAD FoodLab tent at FAO shows the power of Indigenous Peoples' knowledge systems, which combine traditional knowledge of food with new tech and innovation to address today's challenges." The FoodLab continues to traverse Europe to show this power.

NOMAD Indigenous FoodLab was also a part of the BOCUSE d'Or Europe in Trondheim in March 2023, where Sámi and other Arctic Indigenous chefs shared their living culinary traditions. The best chefs in Europe had an opportunity to learn more about Arctic Indigenous peoples' traditional foods that are rich, diverse and zero-waste.

For more than three years since its launch, the NOMAD Indigenous FoodLab brought together Indigenous reindeer herding youth, traditional chefs and professional chefs to work together and produce delicious and innovative food experiences, served food with special delicacies from the pristine Arctic environment based on reindeer meat and berries, prepared in line with 10,000-year-old culinary traditions. During 2022–2024, the FoodLab had several events in Guovdageaidnu and other places in northern Norway, also travelled to Jokkmokk winter market to support Sámi youth in Sweden for the Sáminuorra 60 years' anniversary, to Arendal's Week for the largest political gathering in Norway, to Stockholm +50, to Aarhus Food Festival and Madens Folkemøde in Denmark, among other places.

For further information, see <https://www.nomadfoodlab.org/the-concept> and/or contact foodlab@reindeercentre.org or Anders Oskal, ICR Director and coordinator of the Regional IYRP Support Group in the Arctic oskal@reindeercentre.org

World Reindeer Herders (WRH) is the civil-society organisation for indigenous reindeer herders in the Arctic and sub-Arctic region. There are 24 reindeer-herding peoples in the world, spread over three continents and ten countries across the circumpolar north, with a total of almost 100 000 people who live as nomads and semi-nomads, following their reindeer through their annual migration patterns. The International Centre for Reindeer Husbandry (ICR) is an independent knowledge institution set up on recommendation of the Arctic Council and organised as a Norwegian State Entity with a Special Authority. Its main office is in Guovdageaidnu in Arctic Norway.



Images by: Andreas Ausland & Anders Oskal