Fields of the Future: Unraveling the Loom
A Podcast by Bard Graduate Center
S2E1: Kevin Aspaas—The Navajo Way of Life

Introduction: This is Fields of the Future, an interview series by Bard Graduate Center. This season highlights the work of scholars, artists, and educators working with Indigenous textiles and textile history of the Southwestern United States and Mexico. In this episode Juliana Fagua-Arias speaks with Kevin Aspaas about the Navajo lifeway, the weaving process from sheep to loom, and the slow and conscientious craft of weaving a fast-paced society.

Juliana Fagua-Arias: Hi, I'm Juliana Fagua-Arias, designer, art historian and curator. I'm currently a guest in New York city or Lenapehoking, the land of the Lenni-Lenape. I'm thrilled to be talking to Kevin Aspaas, Dine' weaver, entrepreneur and fiber artist. Hi Kevin, thank you for joining us.

Kevin Aspaas: Hi Juliana, thank you for having me. [Foreign language]. Hello, everyone. I'm of the Towering House Clan, born for the Bitter Water People. My maternal grandfathers are of the Many Goats Clan and my paternal grandfathers are of the Mud People Clan. And I live here in Shiprock, New Mexico.

J F-A: So, to begin, I'd just like to ask you to tell us a little bit more about your practice, because you're a weaver and you're a fiber artist and you're also an entrepreneur.

KA:I'm a traditional contemporary Navajo weaver. I utilize the same style that has been practiced for many, many centuries among the Southwest and Navajo people. I use the upright vertical loom, same techniques, same setup. I'm also a fiber artist, so I work with wool, I work with cotton, I do my own dye work. So, a lot of the things that I do come from myself, very rarely do I go out and buy things that are already pre dyed. I kind of just fell into this role as an entrepreneur, from a young age, watching various relatives sell their own work, whether it be silver or they were seamstress, and even weavers too as well.

J F-A:Alongside traditional and contemporary styles, your weavings are recognizable for the old style, Navajo wedge weaving technique. So, could you talk to us a little bit more about that and what that is?

KA: So, the wedge weave technique is a Navajo innovation, it was born in the late 1800s, mid 1800s. A lot of that, the weavings of that time, were primarily blankets, utilitarian items. And so, the wedge weave itself is really unique in that, it only had a short time period lifespan. It was kind of before the Long Walk and a little bit after the Long Walk, right before the trading posts became a major player on the Navajo Nation and influencing Navajo weavers. The technique itself is woven at a diagonal angle; all the weft is woven diagonal in each row. So, it's a zigzag pattern. So, when you look at the weaving textile, wedge weave textile up close, you'll see that the warps in each row are pulled at an angle. So that's another name for it. It's called "pulled warp." And it also creates a scallop side. A lot of the blankets back then, they had very subtle

scallops on the side. A lot of them did kind of have a little wave going on. They weren't laying completely flat. So, when the trading post came into play, they had this idea of weaving rugs, things to be placed on the floor instead of things that were wearable.

And so that idea of something to lay flat on the floor, something that was perfect, that had the perfect sides, the wedge weave didn't fit that mold of what the trading posts were trying to achieve. When it came to me picking up the wedge weave itself, I picked it up back in the summer of 2014, I apprenticed under a master weaver out of Teec Nos Pos, Arizona. And I did probably about three turns, three zigzags. And after that, I was kind of just hooked. There was just something different about it.

I also like wedge weave because it doesn't fit into the narrative of Navajo weaving. We have this idea of Navajo weaving as being perfect and at a young age, being told by various relatives that you don't make your weavings perfect. As human beings, we're imperfect beings. I think one of my goals was that this technique needs to be brought back. And I think back in 2017, 2018, I won my first ribbons at Gallup ceremonial and at the Heard museum. And ever since then, I've progressively seen more and more wedge weaves come back.

One of the comments I get the most is "That's not Navajo." And I'm really surprised, because this is a very traditional technique. This weaving was born here, in Navajo land and created by our ancestors, the mothers and grandmothers, the uncles, the cheiis who were weaving.

J F-A: There seems to be this sort of contradiction that the technique seems to be more difficult, but it's not considered as perfect because it's not like this perfect straight lines. Right now, in the market or among other weavers, how's this wedge weave technique considered in comparison to, I don't know, regular weaving technique? Is it considered more experimental, more difficult, so a lot of people prefer not to do it?

KA: It's really experimental compared to everything else that we were weaving, blankets, mantas, dresses, pieces of clothing. I've heard from different collectors is that they think that wedge weave came about, because we didn't know how to side stack on a horizontal scale, going back and forth horizontally to create that angle.

So instead, we just ended up weaving the entire weft, at that angle to create that angle. And it is a very difficult technique to learn because there's so much that plays into what you're creating, warp tension, weft tension, how high you're building the angle, the warp spacing, the thickness of your weft, what you're working with. Even the way when you build up the angle of the wedge weave. So, there's a number of systems that you have to keep in order to keep each stripe a certain thickness. A lot of it is keeping an eye on the top of the warp or top of the weft and the bottom of the weft. So, you're subtracting, adding, and subtracting, adding as you're going along. The technique itself, I think it intimidates a lot of weavers. They stick to the traditional techniques that they were taught, traditional styles they were taught, whether it be a Storm Pattern, a Two Grey Hills, a Yei rug, things like that. There's these little side steps, the serrated diamonds and the Eye Dazzlers. And things that will sell, a lot of times people will

weave them because, that's what provides, gives them a source of income. But I think now as young weavers are starting out, they're weaving what they want to weave. A lot of times we start off as a hobby, something to do, something to learn. Eventually, it grows into maintaining a legacy within your family.

Weaving in general is a very hard art form to learn. It's very slow. And so, that turns people off because we live in such a fast-paced society. People want things fast and textile production isn't, without machinery anyways.

J F-A: Do you teach it?

KA: I do not, actually. If the weaver can see what's going on, see the wefts at work in progress, they can figure it out. So, a lot of times when other people see me working in demonstrations, they'll look over my shoulder while I'm weaving it and they'll be like, "Duh, I can do this". And I've had several friends pick it up like that.

J F-A: You mentioned your work with fibers, but also natural dye. So, I wanted to ask you about both, but so let's start with your experience growing your own fibers, wool, and cotton, I think that's so beautiful. So, if you could talk about, your relationship with the plants and animals that produce these fibers and then using that to create your own weavings.

KA: So, I think since 2015, 2016, I really began to hone in on the whole process from sheep to loom. And so, when you learn how to take care of the sheep, feeding them, watering them, making sure they're taken care of, down to when springtime rolls around, you've got to shear them, not only for textile production, but just to give the animal comfort in the hot weather.

So, shearing them alleviates the stress of carrying all that wool from the winter and provides them comfort and breathability. And so, taking them out to graze or giving them the proper hay, making sure that they're clean. Else, you'll be working with dirty fleeces and all this hay, plant matter that's in the wool, that's kind of a turnoff and makes the process more difficult. So, a lot of people tend to think that weaving itself is hard, but weaving is probably like the 10% of the whole process. The other 90% of the process is growing the fiber, taking care of it, processing it. When I say process, I mean, washing it, carding it. If you're blending fibers together, different color fleeces to create a different color, just like when you blend paint. The same thing with wool, if you want a certain color, learning the wool ratios like that. And down to spinning it, spinning in itself is a skill that has to be learned and honed in years, a couple of years just to get consistent yarn. After you're done spinning, you can dye the wool, or you can dye the fleece before you card and spin it. And so, growing it is a very, hands-on, is a very personal journey with your animal, or if you're growing cotton, like I did. It's a labor of love.

Back in the 1800s, before machinery, before computers, a lot of these things that I do were done communally, were done together as a family. The kids were taking care of the sheep,

herding them, watching them. Come springtime, multiple families would get together, help each other.

The fiber I work with is the Navajo Churro. The Navajo Churro sheep is one of the, if not the first, domesticated animal that was brought to the new world by the Spanish conquistadors and I think they brought cattle as well. They brought horses. Prior to the Pueblo revolt, Navajo clan groups managed to obtain the sheep through raids or trading. Prior to that, we have stories of weaving with plant fibers and one of them cotton. I heard stories of cotton growing wild here in the Southwest prior to the Spanish coming into the area.

And then once we learned how to grow, picking the wild cotton, and learning how to spin it, learning how to process it. Even down to our Hopi relatives domesticating the wild cotton and learning how to breed certain characteristics so it can grow within a short time span because I know cotton itself has a very long growing season, but the cotton that I grew last year had a ninety-day growing season, so it was a very quick plant to mature. It was my first time growing it. It was a success I probably got, I think about ten ounces of cotton from it. It's not a lot but I thought it was a lot.

That in itself, growing cotton and learning how to grow a fiber from a plant, that was amazing to say the least, seeing the progress of the plant each day was different. I remember I was taking so many photos of them and every time I get up in the morning, I'd run out there just to see them in a certain light. There was a certain light that I loved looking at the plant from, whether it be early in the morning when the sun is coming up or late in the evening, when the sun was setting, they had this certain glow to it.

I not only grew the Hopi kind, the white kind, but I also grew a Peruvian cotton, a brown cotton. So, I got those seeds probably like six years ago from a friend. And at that time, I had no clue that cotton itself could grow in different colors. Ever since I started this journey in general, there's so many things I've learned about diversity, not only in plants and animals, people as well.

J F-A: How is it different to weave with cotton or to weave with wool or even with these different types of cotton?

KA: Navajo Churro is very coarse compared to cotton. Navajo-Churro can be a soft fiber, but people mainly know it for its coarseness. It's very easy to spin. In my opinion, other people will tell you it's difficult to spin, but weaving with Navajo-Churro also has a different feel, has a different texture, way different textures than cotton. It tends to build faster simply because the fibers are kind of coarse and that coarseness will lead to... when you're packing down the weft, it'll build faster because it won't squish together so much versus weaving with cotton, it's a softer fiber. You kind of have this loftiness to it. When you're weaving with it, it just like squishes a little bit more.

When I learned how to spin Navajo Churro, it prepared me to spin all different types of fibers because of how easy it was to learn how to spin the mechanics of it. Spinning in general is such a fun thing to do as well. It's just carding. Carding the wool is tedious.

J F-A: Could you tell me about your experience with natural dyes? I'm particularly obsessed with cochineal, but also with indigo and the combination of both. I don't know if you have favorites.

KA: Right now, my current favorite dyes are cochineal and indigo. I could dye with those colors any day. When I first started learning, when you're learning these things, you start off on the easy stuff, the small stuff, things that are attainable, achievable. A lot of the plants that I learned how to dye with, they grow around Shiprock up on Carrizo mountain, which is 30 minutes west of Shiprock and picking plants along the road. I'll be carrying bundles of these different plants, globe mallow, Navajo tea, or native tea, greenthread. Other people know it as rabbitbrush, snakeweed, carnegie, dock root, cliffrose, mistletoe, Juniper. A lot of the plants that I did dye with mainly produce a lot of yellows, a lot of oranges, dark oranges, gold looking colors.

So, once I learned the basics, I went straight to the difficult stuff, which was cochineal and indigo. Cochineal, getting that red color was just, I don't know how to describe it, it was addicting. I kind of got obsessed with it for a while. And just experimenting because cochineal itself, there's so many colors you can get with it, from the pinks to the purple, to the reds, even over dying different yarns. So, I dyed yarn with Navajo tea, and I had it sitting on the side for probably about three months. And I wasn't planning on using it for anything. So, when I had gotten a cochineal and I started a dye bath for that to get a red color, I overdyed the Navajo tea with cochineal, and I got this really nice peach color. Oh, it was so pretty.

Learning how much science goes into dying as well was one of the key things that had me researching these different chemicals that you can use and mordants. So, along with being an artist and weaver, we learn the chemistry, you learn the science of things, of these dyes. And cochineal, learning that the pH level in the water affects what kind of shades you're going to be getting. So, to get a lot of my red colors I was using distilled water, I was going to the store and I was buying gallons of distilled water to dye to get that perfect red.

It's just kind of mind blowing that it comes from a bug too. This tiny little bug that grows on a cactus, that people think is a pest. I am sure it is a pest for people who own these cactus plants, who want these pretty big cacti with no infestations on it. When I tell people how I got the color, most of the red colors and then they kind of automatically assume it's an acid dye. And when I tell them it's a natural dye, I got it from cochineal and tell them it's a bug. They're just like, "That doesn't make sense. How do you get red from a bug?" They get freaked out.

Every weaving that you make, that you're doing on your own, dying the wool and all that, ensures that every piece is going to be different no matter what. That's what I also tell people that every time I weave something, I dye something, it's not going to be the same as something I did before. Just because there's so many things, variables that go into it.

Then indigo, indigo is on the same level as cochineal for me. It's such a fun process to dye with indigo a little bit more so than cochineal simply because when you're dying it, dying the yarn and when you're bringing it out of the water, out of the dye bath, it goes from that green color, and it slowly makes its way to blue as it's oxidizing. That's the funnest part, watching that whole process and you're standing there, making sure the fiber gets completely oxidized and I walk around swinging the yarn, just to get most of the excess water out of it. And I'm seeing it turn blue.

I remember when I first started dying with indigo, I was using freeze dried indigo. I think they call it the workhorse vat; it was the one with really harsh chemicals, lye and all these different mean harsh chemicals. We had the gloves on and sticking the yarn inside the bath and making sure with that one, it has to be hot.

Eventually, I started learning and started making connections with different indigo dyers who were doing the more organic process. So, they were either using their own fruits to reduce and as this trigger to help the indigo open up to bind onto the fiber.

I was just using simple fructose, simple sugar so that vat is a lot safer to use. I'm not worried about the heat of the water. I let it cool down and I'm able to work without gloves. So, by the end of the dye session my hands will be blue, my fingernails will be completely blue. So, for a couple of days, I'll have blue nail polish on my fingers. The organic sugar vat is very slow compared to the workhorse vat. It oxidizes way slower too but, safer, friendlier. You can pour it down, you can dump it anywhere and it won't hurt the earth versus, a workhorse vat you have to dispose of it properly.

J F-A: I'm not a weaver, I did take a cochineal dyeing class last semester with Porfirio Gutierrez, who we're also interviewing for the podcast. I did it because I've been researching more the historical aspect of cochineal, the importance of cochineal as a commodity during the early modern period in Latin America. And one of the things that I remember when you were talking, was that during the, I don't know, seventeenth, eighteenth century, when people in Europe saw those incredible reds, they actually thought cochineal was a berry that grew on a tree. It's incredible, how much mysticism is around this very little bug. I found out recently that actually, the cactus dies for you to grow cochineal, the plant eventually dies. And I was like, "What? I thought he was like some symbiotic relationship. I didn't know that. I've been trying to research more about the introduction of indigo to the Southwest because it's really interesting to me that both cochineal and indigo are so valued in the Southwest and yet, none of them are native to the Southwest. Both of them were introduced through trade networks, but there's always this narrative that's predominant about indigo, it's that this magic moment where it turns from this greenish-yellow to blue.

KA: It's funny too, because I meant, I said earlier that I did my own research on cochineal and indigo, but I actually learned from my mentor, Roy Kady, out of Teec Nos Pos, he's the master

weaver I talked about earlier too. He's the one who introduced me to a lot of these things. Played a big role in teaching me what I know now.

He took us to museums in Santa Fe, where we were able to go into these museum collections. And we were able to see blankets from the late 1500s, early 1600s that had indigo and cochineal. And these pieces still had the vibrant color, which was mind-blowing because these pieces are old, older than the U.S. Older than a lot of colonial systems here in North America.

Growing up, we were never taught these things where we were trading outwards and they made us think that we were all in our own little bubbles here, but which is entirely false. We were traders who had expansive trade networks going across the land. We knew of different people and even in our own stories, our own creation stories, clan histories, they tell us these stories, but you know the whole thing.

J F-A: Something that I'm also really interested in is that in addition to blankets and mantas, you also weave traditional style woven dresses and sash-belts and purses, and all these other things. So, I'm curious, how does the weaving experience change from when you're, I don't know, doing a textile that's going to be hung for example, versus something that's going to be worn

KA: When I'm weaving something that I know is going to be hung up on a wall or display it as a piece of art, I sketch it out and I have a plan for it and I know how it's going to look like, and I'm not as conscious as what I'm doing for the loom itself. But it changes when it comes to weaving something that's going to be used by an individual, that's going to be worn and utilized in ceremony or public events.

So, when I start the process for that, there's a lot of meditation. Prayer goes into it, into these pieces because in Navajo we're taught that these pieces are an extension of ourselves, an extension of our thoughts, an extension of our energy. Good thoughts for the individual wearing them, that it'll protect them, that they'll take care of it, and it'll take care of them.

I think it also changes because something that's going to be worn and utilized in everyday wear, that's the intention of weaving. We were meant to be weaving for one another. We were meant to be weaving blankets, weaving clothing, garments, and stuff like that. Items that you don't normally see nowadays because the fashion industry takes over, the fast fashion. Things that I do, is slow fashion, traditional fashion, things that are going to be worn in ceremonies, items that are going to be passed down. So, when I'm working on these, I'm not only thinking about the individual that I'm weaving it for, I'm also thinking about who they're going to be passing it down to.

When you think about it, a lot of these pieces that I make, a lot of the things that we make by hand and when they're taken care of and they're loved, they will be here longer than the creators will be. I'm going to be gone in like eighty years maybe, and my weaving was probably be passed down to the daughter, to the son, to the granddaughter. And it's going to keep going and going for however long as they take care of it and maintain it, clean it.

The dresses are my favorite right now. Currently, I'm on a rug dress, Biił ee', that's how we say the dress in Navajo, a Biił ee', kick right now. It's just, it's so fun to see the pieces go up side by side, they're two separate panels, weaving them at the same time. And seeing these ladies when they get the dress and then they send me photos of them, fully dressed with their belt, their moccasins, their jewelry, and the dress on them... It gives me chills because I love seeing Navajo ladies wear that traditional woven dress.

Nowadays, when we think of Navajo fashion, we think of calico skirts, velveteen blouses, tons of silver pins on them. I cringe at it because as a weaver I know that's not traditional. That's contemporary traditional, yeah, but when you want traditional, traditional, you want a woven dress.

And support our weavers who have the ability to make these dresses and pay them what they're due because we're spending so much money on name-brand designer stuff. I think I kind of say that from a biased perspective because I'm a weaver. But that's just you know, what I feel, people should support weavers, our own community should support our weavers.

J F-A: Absolutely, I completely agree with you. So, you're currently the President of the Diné led non-profit organization, Diné Be'Liná, which promotes and preserves the Navajo pastoral lifeways. Can you talk to us about the organization and also what does that mean, a "Navajo way of life"?

KA:I believe Diné Be'Liná is the one of the longest-run Navajo non-profit on the Navajo Nation. The core group that created the non-profit Navajo Lifeway were a group of grandmothers who sought to protect and bring back the endangered sheep breed, Navajo-Churro from extinction with the help of multiple people, not only Navajos, but non-Navajos who played a big role.

One of our motto's here, or one of our traditional teachings as shepherds is the [foreign language] which translates into English as "Sheep is the Navajo Lifeway," like sheep maintains, sheep is life. And so, a lot of things that in our traditional stories, traditional songs that are sung, we say that the sheep were given to us by the gods, the holy people, what we know as the holy people. They created them for us as gifts to their children. Human beings, the five-fingered people, and these animals they told us would take care of us, would feed us, would clothe us, where we would be loved. We would know what love is through our sheep as well.

And so, the Navajo Lifeway encompasses everything around that pastoral lifeway, the sheep, because when we say sheep is life we think of sheep, we think of food, we think of fiber, we think of taking care of the land, we think about the weather, the climate where we're at. Having sheep as a form of wealth among Navajo people. The more sheep you had, the more wealthy you were considered back in the day. Nowadays, just simply having sheep, whether it be five or ten or a hundred... You're inviting wealth into your life; you're bringing wealth to you. You want good things to come to you.

And we say that when we take care of the sheep and the sheep will in turn, take care of the land as well; when they're grazing, they're disturbing the land, allowing the other seeds from other plants to be planted and even the sheep itself in our stories they're told to be made from clouds; rain clouds. And so, when we take care of the sheep, when we use their wool for weaving, those are automatically prayers for rain, inviting rain to come to our land.

So, the sheep really did bring a lot of families together. And it still continues to bring a lot of families together when there's a gathering, ceremonies, family gatherings, birthday parties, graduations. Sometimes, people will request a sheep or people donate sheep to these events to help feed the people. So, the Navajo Lifeway organization in itself, well pre pandemic, a lot of the programs that we had pre pandemic, got cut off.

We have these events called spin-offs, they are events that are sponsored or supported by Dine Be' Iiná. A lot of the people who are a part of the Dine Be' Iiná will go to the spinoff and teach people for free, anything that they want to know. So, whether it be weaving, spinning, carting, shearing, different food demonstrations. And a lot of our elders are the ones who are knowledge keepers still. And teaching the young ones who go to these events. And one of the reasons why we have these events is to help bridge the gap between elders and the youth in our communities. When they're able to transfer the knowledge over to the young ones, it ensures another fifty years of that art form, of that craft to continue on, which is fantastic, it's important to learn these things in person from the individuals who have the knowledge, because sure, you can go learn from a book, learn from a video, but there's things in those videos, those books, that they don't tell you; stories, teachings that they won't share with you because a lot of these things, a lot of our teachings, Indigenous teachings anyways, were done orally, we didn't write them down in books.

We also have sheep to table events, where we'll invite chefs in to teach the community how to prepare different foods using Navajo Churro, using locally sourced ingredients. So, like in Shiprock here, it's a big farming community. So, there's a lot of corn, squash, melons, beans, traditional foods, or we'll go out and we'll collect food that's growing out wild. And the chefs themselves will teach us how to prepare different dishes and not only chefs, but also the elders too, teaching us their recipes that they have from their mom or from their clans.

So, each clan has their different way of cooking these dishes. And it's interesting to see the differences between each clan, between each family. And then we also have a sheep to loom program, where we teach the whole entire process from sheep shearing, carding, spinning, dying, setting up the loom and weaving it. We have several master weavers. A lot of our events we try to keep them free, so that we can bring our own community members in and have them learn at no cost, as long as they bring the materials themselves, we're able to teach them at no cost.

And then one of the very big events that we have is the "Sheep is Life" festival. I'm explaining this before the pandemic, it was a weeklong celebration, so, Monday through Friday, Monday through Thursday, there would be pre celebration classes. So, we'd offer Navajo weaving,

different styles of Navajo weaving. So, there'd be saddle blanket weaving, horse cinch weaving, different tapestry weaving techniques, learning how to warp a loom; make the Navajo loom, learning how to spin, card, dye workshops, using the natural plants that are around the reservation. And also, some felting workshops here and there. And then Friday, Saturday, and Sunday is the celebration. So, there'd be weaving demonstrations going on, dyeing demonstrations.

One of our board members, every year he'll donate a sheep to butcher, and he'll do a butchering demonstration for the people who are attending the celebration. And he'd be instructing them and showing them how to properly butcher, harvest and process all the meat. Throughout the day as soon as they're done butchering and they're starting to cook, there'd be food tasting events.

And then, there's also a sheep and wool show. So, during the sheep and wool show, there's usually people from all over the country who travel to the Navajo nation for the Sheep is Life celebration. People as far as West Virginia, Oregon, Washington, who would bring their best Navajo Churros to show in the sheep and wool. So, they would have, throughout the celebration, that'd be little sheep camps set up. People have their trailers, they set up small little corrals and have their sheep set up out there. And I think that was one of my favorite parts. Navajo people on the reservation are getting new bloodlines and people off the reservation are getting new blood lines as well. So, a lot of trading going on between all the shepherds there and even down to the wool grading people; bring in their best wool fleeces and seeing all the different shades of browns, tans, grays, and then the white color fleece.

At the beginning of the pandemic. So, a lot of our board members are, up there in age, I'll say. And so, when the pandemic began, a lot of our meetings had to go online, onto Zoom. And a lot of our board members had difficulty getting onto Zoom. We'd be waiting 30 minutes for everyone to come on the Zoom meeting. And our former president is a nurse, so as soon as the pandemic hit, he was busy with work. Like he was non-stop, I was a vice-president at the beginning of the pandemic and the board just approached me and they asked me to be interim president.

The other thing is too, I had never heard of Navajo Churro sheep until I started volunteering with Dine Be' Iiná. Prior to 2015, I just knew sheep. I didn't know there was different types of sheep. We have the original sheep; we have the first sheep that came to the Americas. But because of capitalism, we want the bigger sheep, we want more meat, more fat on our sheep. And Navajo Churro; they're kind of they're tiny, they're lean meat. Not only is the Navajo Churro better for the land, but the taste is a lot better than commercial breeds. I'm kind of biased because I love Navajo Churros, but seeing commercial breeds, when they graze the land, they just eat everything down to their root and they kind of tear up the land a little bit. They're more prone to overgraze, versus Navajo Churros; they're a lot hardier.

I also wanted to mention about, because Navajo society is matrilineal, a lot of the things that were done were in control through the women. Our grandmothers, our mothers were the ones

who were in charge of the flocks. They owned everything. The men, they help take care of it, maintain it. And so when it came down to saving Navajo Churro sheep, it's kind of a no brainer that it was the core group who decided to create the Dine Be' Iiná were women, were grandmothers who raised Navajo Churro, who grew up with this sheep breed and it's inspiring to talk to them because they're still here with us.

J F-A: Thank you, Kevin, for joining us today for the second season of the Fields of the Future podcast, it has been a joy and a privilege to speak with you and learn more about your work.

KA: Thank you, Juliana, for having me, and thank you to everyone who is listening and who will listen. I hope you enjoyed the podcast interview.