

FRAMING PAPER: EDUCATION & RESEARCH

USDA TRIBAL CONSULTATIONS ON BARRIERS/EQUITY: ANNUAL PROGRESS REPORT & FEEDBACK FOR NEXT STEPS

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USDA's Research, Education, and Economics Resources (REE) mission area is dedicated to the creation of a safe, sustainable, competitive U.S. food and fiber system and strong, healthy communities, families, and youth through integrated research, analysis, and education. USDA's REE mission area is composed of the Office of the Chief Scientist (OCS), which fosters collaboration and coordination among all science agencies at USDA, as well as the following four agencies: [Agricultural Research Service \(ARS\)](#), [Economic Research Service \(ERS\)](#), [National Agricultural Statistics Service \(NASS\)](#), and [National Institute of Food and Agriculture \(NIFA\)](#). Each of these agencies uphold high standards in Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility for the Research, Education and Economics arm of USDA. This paper is a response to 5 areas for improvement brought to light during the 2021 Consultation held March 9 and 11, 2021.

1. Integrate Indigenous Ecological Knowledge & Practices. Better incorporate indigenous foods and principles into USDA's research and funding. Including measuring subsistence and traditional practice in Census and studies.

What we heard from Tribes in 2021 Consultation: USDA should research traditional knowledge of indigenous practices - farming, ranching, medicine, etc. Federal Recognized Tribal Extension funding should be increased. In many states there are extension ran incubator farms that allow beginning farmers (of any age) to practice their farming skills in a controlled environment with very little upfront cost and very little risk. Research would be required to identify which crops would most likely qualify for use in the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR) system. For those crops, tribes should have the ability to do price guarantees for potential farmers. By sharing those prices with the training institutions, they can know which specific crops to focus on. However, tribal producers typically do not have an interest in mono-cropping.

Example of Progress Made to Date: To support the new White House [memorandum](#) aiming at elevating [Indigenous Traditional Ecological Knowledge \(ITEK\)](#), NIFA is encouraging applicants to include ITEK in their grant proposals when appropriate. NIFA recognizes the contributions indigenous communities have made to advancing environmental sustainability and responsible stewardship of natural resources. NIFA recently added a new statement to its Request for Applications as a strategy to increase applications benefitting tribal communities and remedy imbalances in support for tribal communities. According to the memorandum, "ITEK is a body of observations, oral and written knowledge, practices, and beliefs that promote environmental sustainability and the responsible stewardship of natural resources through relationships between humans and environmental systems. It is applied to phenomena across biological, physical, cultural, and spiritual systems. ITEK has evolved over millennia, continues to evolve, and includes insights based on evidence acquired through direct contact with the environment and long-term experiences, as well as extensive observations, lessons, and skills passed from generation to generation. ITEK is owned by Indigenous people—including, but not limited to, Tribal Nations, Native Americans, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians."

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ARS scientists are working with Tribal groups on: protecting and enhancing bison health and prairie ecosystems; improving livestock management to address grazing on poisonous plants and contaminated soils; and supplying Tribal Nations with germplasm samples of traditional Native American plant varieties and conducting research on the reintroduction of key plant varieties to Tribal Nations for ceremonial and cultural practices. USDA's Climate Hubs are working with Tribes to address the challenges of traditional production that are becoming exacerbated by drought, extreme weather, and other factors. For instance, the Indigenous Collaboration Team of the Southwest Drought Learning Network provides drought related information and resources to Tribal communities, and the Northern Plains Climate Hub partnered with other groups to organize a drought webinar series for tribes in the region.

ARS outreach of note includes work by a biological science technician at the ARS National Laboratory for Genetic Resource Preservation (NLGRP) in Fort Collins, Colorado, who is a member of the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe and who partnered with NLGRP staff and university colleagues to produce a video about the "Three Sisters" traditional agricultural system of Native American farmers. In another project, ARS soil scientist Amanda Ashworth (Fayetteville, Arkansas) has a cooperative agreement with the Indigenous Food and Agriculture Initiative (IFAI). As part of her Foundation for Food and Agriculture Research New Innovator project, the "Native Youth in Food and Agriculture Summit" is held in collaboration with IFAI. The Native Food Summit is a week-long event for Native American undergraduates focused on food and agricultural production and policy and has trained more than 100 Native American students interested in science and agriculture.

ERS researchers include Tribal lands as part of the Natural Resources Inventory (NRI) data that is captured in the Major Land Uses report ([USDA ERS - Major Uses of Land in the United States, 2012](#)). We report the summary categories (acres of cropland, acres of pasture, acres of rangeland, etc.) at the state level and do not disaggregate the data any further. We will review opportunities to disaggregate to the tribal levels.

OCS leads cross-cutting strategic planning and collaboration activities for science programs that support scientific excellence, innovation, and capacity to achieve USDA's mission. New efforts are underway to ensure that a diverse set of voices are heard and amplified, including but not limited to tribal nations and underserved communities. By accounting for these underrepresented communities, USDA hopes to develop a more well-rounded research portfolio by addressing research and programmatic inputs across a holistic set of needs.

Potential Next Steps:

- Continue to look at programs through an indigenous lens and adjust include ITEK
- Continue discussions with 1994/TCU leaders on ITEK research collaboration
- Hire staff that have expertise in ITEK
- Include tribal liaison(s) on new Federal Native Bee Monitoring Task Force
- Ensure that tribal representatives are invited to the annual USDA/EPA Pollinator State of the Science meeting
- Develop and build out a plant breeding emphasis on crops used by tribal groups and underserved communities

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2. Funding Parity for Tribal Colleges. TCUs are currently funded well below levels of other land grant colleges, regarding USDA staff and grants, and appropriations.

What we heard from Tribes in 2021 Consultation: 1994 Tribal Colleges and Universities want funding parity with 1890 Universities and other land grant colleges. Other land grant colleges get \$40 million permanently.

Example of Progress Made to Date: NIFA supports proposed increases in funding for the 1994s. There have been substantial increases in funding at the 1994s through Congressional Appropriations in 2018 and 2022 for 1994 Extension and 1994 Equity in Education as well as the American Rescue Plan funding directing money to the 1994s to support Meat and Poultry Processing and other Agriculture related workforce development and economic impacts to increase opportunities for Native producers. NIFA recognizes that these increases are imperative to Tribal communities and youth and works to support its stakeholders.

Potential Next Steps:

- Continue working with stakeholders to encourage building their programs
- Work closely with stakeholder organizations to stay informed of community needs
- Commit to support innovative programs through decreasing barriers and supporting ways to spread funding to traditionally underrepresented parties and programs

3. Increase USDA Partnerships with TCUs. Greater USDA opportunities for TCUs for research opportunities and internships and training in areas like science, technology, engineering, arts, and math (STEAM).

What we heard from Tribes in 2021 Consultation: USDA needs to partner with tribal colleges to do research.

Example of Progress Made to Date: In the 2022 request for applications (RFA), NIFA made changes in direct response to this request at the 2021 Tribal consultation. The Tribal College Equity Grants program has included the arts in the RFA to include STEAM. The Tribal College Equity Grants program is designed to help build Tribal education capacity in the food and agricultural sciences for Native Alaskan/American Indian students.

ARS Partnerships for Data Innovation developed a Tribal Story map and Tribal Relations Tool that provides information for ARS employees and USDA about the function of Tribal colleges and universities as land-grant institutions, the Tribes that chartered the schools, and nation-to-nation relationships with the United States. ARS is working with 1994 Tribal Land Grant College Program Director Lawrence Shorty and Tribal Liaison Lisa Yellow-Luger to gather feedback and assistance on different Tribal initiatives for ARS. ARS met with the First Americans Land-Grant Consortium (FALCON) Membership Business Meeting in November 2021 to discuss how to enhance ARS research interactions with 1994 land-grant faculty. ARS collaborates with organizations such as the Society for Advancing Chicano/Hispanic and Native Americans in Science National Diversity in STEM Conference; Society of American Indian Government Employees-USDA Chapter; American Indian Science and Engineering Society Conference; Native American Rangelands Partnership; and others.

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Native American interns work at ARS laboratories across the United States, and ARS scientists support Native American students and teachers at local schools and universities with a range of outreach and education programs, particularly in STEM. For example, the ARS laboratory in Wapato, Washington has a longstanding partnership with Heritage University in Toppenish, Washington, to host student interns, and the Wapato ARS lab also partnered with Heritage University to conduct outreach visits to the 8th grade science class at the Yakama Tribal School to increase awareness of STEM and ag-related research activities. ARS also offers informal outreach to local Native American groups such as the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians and recruits for employment opportunities and career development.

Potential Next Steps:

- Work to provide opportunities for USDA scientists and 1994 faculty and students to bridge relationships
- Set goals to hire staff from 1994s and tribal communities across USDA science agencies

4. **Streamline NIFA's Grants for TCUs. Access to NIFA programs is challenging for TCUs. NIFA programs should be encouraged to recruit grant reviewers with knowledge and experience in working with TCUs, Tribal Extension, and tribal communities including those that understand the role of traditional ecological knowledge.**

What we heard from Tribes in 2021 Consultation: Access to bulk of NIFA's competitive grant programs is challenging for tribal college faculty or non-tribal partners working with tribal communities.

Example of Progress Made to Date: In an effort to provide equitable views to panels, NIFA has undergone a change in their peer panel system to collect data on the diversity of panelists. These changes are a part of an ongoing effort to ensure equity and efficiency in the Peer Review Process. The goal is to have an automated Panel Composition process which reports can be produced annually and published regarding NIFA panel diversity. This will help NIFA be data-driven in its efforts to promote inclusivity and help to break down barriers that have previously been in place.

Potential Next Steps:

- Recruit potential panelists throughout the year and people with knowledge of Tribal Communities for panels
- Work with NIFA staff to educate them on ways to recruit and learn from Tribal panelists

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5. Increase FRTEP Funding & Extend Terms. Mandatory four-year recompetes and limited funding available prevents FRTEP agents from building trusted relationships with tribal community partners that are needed to fully realize project outcomes. Greater funding and longer terms needed for FRTEP because of the vital services provided.

What we heard from Tribes in 2021 Consultation: Current funding structure for the Federally Recognized Tribal Extension Program (FRTEP) requires projects be recompeted every four years. Mandatory recompetes on this short timeline and the limited funding available prevents FRTEP agents from building trusted relationships with tribal community partners that are needed to fully realize project outcomes. FRTEP programs continue to be in high demand as they are the conduit between 1862 land grant institutions and Tribes providing unparalleled educational services and leadership to a historically underserved audience. The demand for FRTEP agents to provide outreach, training, and resources to tribal farmers and ranchers increased dramatically during the COVID19 pandemic. FTREP agents modified their program content and delivery (with no additional funding) to provide training, resources, and information to tribal during COVID shutdown. Issues including food sovereignty/safety, water scarcity, and community well-being have become more urgent and important to the tribal communities as a result of the pandemic. In addition, many FRTEP agents are providing direct services and advice to Tribes who are managing new funds from CARES Act and the new Coronavirus Relief Funds.

Example of Progress Made to Date:

NIFA funds Indian Country Extension through the Federally Recognized Tribes Extension Program and the 1994 Extension Program. The FRTEP program is funded for FY2022 at \$3,360,000 and the 1994 Extension program is funded at \$9,500,000. These two programs are able to fund Indian Extension projects around the United States since the 1994s are predominately located in the Central and Western regions, this allows for the 1862s and 1890s to serve reservations in other parts of the continental United States that have no 1994 representation. During the competitive grant review process in 2022, NIFA took steps to help continuity of service to Tribal communities by giving priority for funding to projects who meet merit every four years. This will allow for relationships to continue between land-grant institutions and reservation communities. USDA/NIFA is supporting proposed funding increases by stakeholders for FRTEP.

Potential Next Steps:

- Work to support avenues to have FRTEP be a non-competitive program
- Support proposed budget increases for FRTEP