



University of Nevada
Cooperative Extension

Impact

People of the Land

Historically, American Indian agricultural producers and natural resource managers have not actively participated in programs sponsored by the U.S. Department of Agriculture – even though tribal leaders have indicated the need to strengthen agriculture on Indian lands. Meanwhile, federal professionals have described the difficulty they have reaching American Indian agriculture producers and natural resource managers on reservations. The situation is sometimes referred to as the "Indian situation." The goal of this program is to train agricultural professionals to better understand Indian culture and make them more effective in helping American Indian producers strengthen sustainable agriculture and natural resource management on the reservations.

Issue:

Although almost every reservation works with agriculture and natural resource professionals, including Cooperative Extension, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Natural Resource Conservation Service and the Bureau of Land Management, most programs are not specifically designed for American Indians. What's more, focus group research conducted at the 2003 Nevada Indian Agriculture Summit found that agriculture professionals perceive that there are major obstacles to the adoption of sustainable agriculture and natural resource management practices on Indian reservations. University of Nevada Cooperative Extension subsequently identified a knowledge gap whereby agriculture professionals need to improve their understanding and appreciation of individual tribal histories and cultures in order to work more effectively with American Indians individuals and reservation governments.

What Has Been Done:

In 2008 UNCE faculty completed a three-year Quality of Life assessment of American Indians and agency officials working on reservations in a four-state region of the western United States. This area – including Idaho, Nevada, Oregon and Washington – is known as the Western Range. Based in part on their findings, in 2009 the faculty completed a self-paced, eight-chapter curriculum which provides a thorough examination of the cultural, historical, social, political and economic attributes on selected Indian reservations within the Western Range and addresses the educational needs of agriculture professionals working with American Indian agriculture producers in that region. Faculty taught the curriculum throughout the region and nationally, and follow-up testing showed that agency professionals working in agriculture and natural resource management on Indian reservations came away with increased knowledge of American Indian culture; federal Indian policy over the years; the Doctrine of Discovery and Manifest Destiny; the issues of land tenure, checkerboard and fractionated lands on American Indian reservations; Indian agriculture irrigation projects; the Trust Doctrine; and many related issues.

Impact:

The program has reached more than 1,200 individuals during the course of this project. Fact-finding trips and reservation tours have resulted in increased participation and support for the curriculum from American Indians. In addition, 98 percent of the contacts made during the development of the curriculum has been comprised of American Indians. Since 2005, UNCE faculty have taught segments of the curriculum within the four-state region as well as at national conferences, including the annual meetings of the Intertribal Agriculture Council and Federal Recognized Tribal Extension Program. In 2006, faculty members taught the program at the Pyramid Lake, Walker River and Duck Valley reservations in Nevada, as well as the Colville, Coeur d'Alene, Umatilla, Yakima, and Warm Springs reservations in other states. In 2007, UNCE taught on site at the Colville, Coeur d'Alene, Nez Perce, Umatilla, Warm Springs, and Fort Hall reservations.

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