



USDA TRIBAL CONSULTATION & LISTENING SESSION ON EQUITY/BARRIERS
MAY 1, 2023

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EDUCATION & RESEARCH

Register for the Consultation: [HERE](#)

Tribal Barriers Progress & 2024 Next Steps:

1. INTEGRATE INDIGENOUS ECOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGE & PRACTICES
2. FUNDING PARITY FOR TRIBAL COLLEGES
3. INCREASE USDA PARTNERSHIPS WITH TCUS
4. STREAMLINE NIFA'S GRANTS FOR TCUS
5. INCREASE EXTENSION FUNDING AND EXTEND TERMS
6. INCREASE NUMBER OF SCHOLARSHIPS FOR TCU STUDENTS

1. **INTEGRATE INDIGENOUS ECOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGE & PRACTICES**

What we heard from Tribes in 2021/2022 Consultations: Increase Indigenous Traditional Ecological Knowledge (ITEK) in USDA work. Better incorporate indigenous foods and principles into USDA's research and funding. Include measuring subsistence and traditional practice in Census and studies.

Examples of Progress Made to Date:

- **ITEK in Grant Proposals** – Where possible, NIFA is encouraging applicants to include ITEK in their grant proposals.
- **TCU Cooperative Agreement** – As part of an agreement in the Indigenous Food Sovereignty Initiative, ARS scientists in Mandan, North Dakota entered into cooperative agreements with United Tribes Technical College (UTTC) and Nueta Hidatsa Sahnish College to develop seed propagation techniques for culturally sensitive plants/crops. ARS provides space and technical resources to the colleges for this research. In addition, ARS and the 1994 TCUs will collaborate on developing a white paper focusing on best practices for USDA researchers working with Tribal Colleges.
- **Indigenous Diet Collaboration** – ARS, in collaboration with UTTC, a tribal historian, and a chef with expertise in indigenous foods, is outlining what an Indigenous diet that consists of foods consumed prior to the Indian Appropriations Act of 1851 looked like and modern-day substitutions for those foods. Foods will be prepared to ensure they are accessible to any adult wanting to incorporate them into their diet.
- 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

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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.

- USDA recently announced the launch of a new initiative called **ASCEND for Better Health** that aims to reduce the burden of diet-related chronic diseases including obesity, type 2 diabetes, heart disease and stroke, and cancer, especially in underserved populations that are often at elevated risk for these diseases. The ASCEND for Better Health team has engaged community members and leaders to discuss health disparities and collaborative strategies to combat these issues. This process will inform future research and federal programs to maximize impact with communities. A tribal listening session is currently being planned with guidance from OTR.
- **TEK Task Forces** – In March 2023, NIFA launched a Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) Task Force to engage with and explore opportunities to integrate TEK into internal and external practices. While this NIFA Task Force will encompass a broad exploration of TEK, it will also recognize, honor, and lift-up Indigenous Traditional Ecological Knowledge as a specific component as outlined in the White House ITEK memo. Additionally, NIFA is recruiting two TCU scholars to work on an ITEK Task Force focused on Environmental Justice.
- **GusNIP and ITEK** – In FY2022, the Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program (GusNIP) Produce Prescription Program established a system giving preference to proposals serving historically underrepresented communities and geographies. As a result, tribal communities received three times as many awards than in 2021. GusNIP grants require human subject's protections and Institutional Review Board (IRB) approvals. For FY2022, this program issued new guidance to engage, consult, and/or collaborate with Tribes to ensure Indigenous Knowledge is considered, Tribal sovereignty is respected, and that there are positive outcomes for Tribes. These awardees now must provide Tribal IRB and/or Tribal Council approval and includes a mechanism for tribal data ownership.
- The **AFRI Data Science for Food and Agriculture** request for applications specifically requests that applicants address the CARE indigenous data principles (p. 93, <https://www.gida-global.org/care>), and NIFA is working with the National Agriculture Library (NAL) data librarians to include these principles in the NAL data management resource materials.

Potential Next Steps

- Continue to look at programs through an indigenous lens and adjust to include ITEK
- Continue discussions with TCU leaders on ITEK research collaboration.
- NIFA has requested and is advertising for two 1994 scholars to work on an NIFA ITEK Task Force and in the area of Environmental Justice.
- NIFA will develop its Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) Task Force to engage with and explore additional opportunities to integrate TEK into internal and external practices. Furthermore, this task force will continue to collaborate with the OTR ITEK subcommittee to ensure departmental coordination.

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Tribal Input Needed:

- Should REE Hold an ASCEND for Better Health listening session about tribal nutrition disparities in North Dakota?
- Should REE develop and build out a plant breeding emphasis on crops used by Tribes? If so which crops?
- What are potential areas to integrate ITEK into USDA that USDA is not currently utilizing?
- Have there been issues related to ITEK and/or successes that you've experienced in the last year for which USDA could provide assistance and learn from?
- What potential projects or collaboration would you like to see between USDA and tribal governments or organizations related to ITEK?

2. FUNDING PARITY FOR TRIBAL COLLEGES.

What we heard from Tribes in 2021/2022 Consultations: TCUs are currently funded well below levels of other land grant colleges, regarding USDA staff and grants, and appropriations.

Examples of Progress Made to Date:

- **Proposed Appropriations Increases to TCUs** – There have been substantial increases in funding through Congressional Appropriations in 2023 for TCU Extension and TCU Education Equity grants program. The FY 2023 Consolidated Appropriations Act (Public Law No. 117-328) provided increased funding for Tribal College Research (11.11%), Tribal College Extension (15.79%), Tribal College Education Equity (27.26%). NIFA recognizes that these increases are imperative for the success and long-term sustainability of programs for Tribal communities, Tribal Colleges, and youth.
- **American Rescue Plan Funding** – The American Rescue Plan has funding for TCUs to support Meat and Poultry Processing and other Agriculture related workforce development and economic impacts to increase opportunities for Native producers. In FY 2023, the American Rescue Plan Technical Assistance Investment Program (ARPTAI) was developed to ensure improved understanding of and equitable participation in the full range of USDA programs and services among underserved farmers, ranchers, private forest landowners and operators, and other key targeted individuals and communities through supporting the organizational delivery of outreach and technical assistance projects and establishment of technical assistance networks. Through a direct grant award of \$5 million, the Sovereign Equity Fund (SEF) will deliver a Tribal Extension project to respond to the unique needs of native producers. The SEF will provide sub-awards to develop and maintain an Extension presence and support Extension outreach on Federally Recognized Indian Reservations and Tribal jurisdictions of Federally Recognized Tribes.
- **NIFA in President's Budget** – FY24 President's Budget for NIFA includes a request for \$1.5 million to conduct an in-depth study of the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) to investigate the needs of Tribal and Alaskan Native communities.

Potential Next Steps/Tribal Input Needed:

- Continue working with stakeholders to encourage building their programs.
- Work closely with stakeholder organizations to stay informed of community needs.

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- Commit to support innovative programs through decreasing barriers and supporting ways to spread funding to traditionally underrepresented parties and programs.
- What are some ways the lack of parity in funding have affecting your campus?
- In what ways would increases in funding help enhance your TCU and the experiences for your students?

3. INCREASE USDA PARTNERSHIPS WITH TCUS.

What we heard from Tribes in 2021/2022 Consultations: USDA needs to partner with tribal colleges to do research. Greater USDA opportunities are needed for TCUs for research opportunities and internships and training in areas like science, technology, engineering, arts, and math (STEAM).

Example of Progress Made to Date:

- **The USDA Tribal College Program was moved from OPPE to the Office of Tribal Relations (OTR)** per the TCU and Tribal Leaders requests.
- Under OTR the **USDA Tribal College Program will be hiring 5 new TCU Tribal Liaisons**, there is currently only one.
- USDA and AIHEC renewed the long-expired MOU in the Spring of 2023.
- 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 promotes 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.
- **Native interns work at ARS laboratories across the United States.** ARS support Native American students and teachers at local schools and universities with a range of outreach and STEM education programs. For example, the Wapato ARS lab partners with Heritage University for visits to an 8th grade Yakama Tribal science class to promote STEM and ag-related research. ARS engages the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians and recruits for employment opportunities and career development.
- **Mandan, North Dakota ARS scientists work with local 1994s.** Activities include technical assistance for culturally significant plants' seed increases and supporting the Environmental Science Department at United Tribes Technical College and for the FAIRE project at Sitting Bull College. ARS participates with the Tribal College Program (OTR-OSEC) to develop a fellowship program linking faculty at 1994 TCUs with ARS scientists.
- **Increased Funding for Students and Internships** – In FY 2023, NIFA had an increase in funding for the Tribal Colleges Research Grants Program and the 1994 Equity in Education Program. NIFA has available four internships for students to work in TEK.

Potential Next Steps/Tribal Input Needed:

- We are working to provide opportunities for USDA scientists and 1994 faculty and students to bridge relationships. Should this be expanded to Native students and faculty at other colleges?
- What are some ongoing projects at your TCU that could benefit from USDA collaboration?

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4. STREAMLINE NIFA’S GRANTS FOR TCUS.

What we heard from Tribes in 2021/2022 Consultations: 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.

Example of Progress Made to Date:

- **Increased Panel Diversity** – 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.
- **Deepened Panel Expertise** – NIFA convenes peer review panels comprised of research, education, extension, and other subject matter experts to review competitive grant proposals. In FY22, NIFA made changes to their Peer Review System and staff trainings to identify panelists and ensure peer review panels have the required expertise while remaining inclusive, representative, and diverse. NIFA peer panel composition diversity reports are produced and published annually. This helps NIFA promote inclusivity. As a result of this work, for FY22 and FY23, numerous NIFA peer review panels increased the number of tribal citizens and/or 1994 representatives on their panels. For example, in FY22 NIFA’s Tribal programs had 13 panelists from 1994’s on five panels.
- **New AFRI ITEK Language** – For FY23, many NIFA competitive grants incorporated language to elevate ITEK including the Agriculture Food and Research Initiative (AFRI) RFA. NIFA established a “Tribal Animal Health Coordination Network” to (1) identify research needs, knowledge gaps, and challenges of agricultural animal health for Tribal communities and Tribal animal producers and (2) incorporate ITEK to support healthy animals. This language may encourage Tribal producers to apply for AFRI programs.

Potential Next Steps/Tribal Input Needed:

- How could REE better recruit potential panelists throughout the year and people with knowledge of Tribal Communities for research and other panels?
- What are some of the challenges you have faced when applying for NIFA grants?
- What forms of technical assistance would you like to help with these grants?

5. INCREASE EXTENSION FUNDING & EXTEND TERMS.

What we heard from the 2021/2022 Consultations: 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 and the 1994 Extension program because of the vital services provided.

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Example of Progress Made to Date:

- **Increased Extension Funding** – For FY 2023, FRTEP is funded at \$4,310,000, and the 1994 Extension program at \$11,000,000, increases of 23.14% and 15.79%, respectively, over FY 2022 funding levels. 1994s are in the Central and Western U.S. For FRTEP, this allows for 1862s and 1890s to serve tribes in states that have no 1994 representation. For the 1994 Extension program, this allows 1994s to serve their communities.
- **Prioritization for Previously Funded Projects** – NIFA is unable to change Congress' requirement that FRTEP maintain a competitive status. However, NIFA works to ensure Tribal service prioritizing funding for previously funded FRTEP projects deemed to have merit. This supports existing relationships between land-grant institutions and tribes.
- **Professional Development of FRTEP Staff** – Professional development opportunities for FRTEP project directors and agents are planned annually and include NIFA Day at the Intertribal Agriculture Council (IAC) conference and a FRTEP Professional Development conference. Best practices are presented and discussed. NIFA convenes a 2024 FRTEP Professional Development Conference Planning Team consisting of NIFA Tribal Programs staff and FRTEP program representatives.

Potential Next Steps:

- Explore budget increases for FRTEP, increasing the number of programs maintained by FRTEP.

Tribal Input Needed:

- What opportunities could be expanded in Indian Country if there was increased funding for extension programs?

6. INCREASE THE NUMBER OF SCHOLARSHIPS FOR TCU STUDENTS

What we heard from the 2021/2022 Consultations: There needs to be more scholarships for TCU students.

Example of Progress:

- **Tribal Scholars Program Streamlining** – Starting in FY23, USDA ensures that all 1994s can participate in the scholarship; that the scholarship may now follow its recipient to a 4-year degree granting institution; and that USDA provide a living stipend. Additionally, USDA shortened the application from 12 pages to 1 to reduce the administrative burden on students.
- **Agency Recruitment of Tribal Students** – For FY23, a total of 27 positions are being specifically recruited for the following agencies: 6 in ARS, 4 in NIFA, 10 Forest Service, 2 in FSA, at least 5 in NRCS. Additionally, there are three new agencies participating in the 1994 Scholarship.

Potential Next Steps/Tribal Input Needed:

- What subject matter areas would you look for scholarships in? Are you comfortable with REE leaning into ITEK?
- What barriers have you encountered with your students applying for scholarships at USDA?