

# Indian Country Extension Why it Matters

## ABSTRACT

Today's contemporary county-based Extension programs benefit tremendously from nearly 100 years of visibility, particularly with respect to institutional, financial and political relations at the community level. Extension's history and prominence in a community commonly leads to habitual and often profitable relationships with clientele. This arrangement provides important political support for the sustainment of Extension programs. Currently, extension programs exist in 3,057 counties across the nation, staffed by 8,987 FTEs at the county level--including U.S. territories. By comparison, there are 566 tribes and 314 federally recognized Indian reservations in America with a population of 5.2 million (2010 Census Brief) on 55,700,00 acres of land; yet the only dedicated Extension programs exist on 27 reservations with 36 FTEs under the Federally Recognized Tribal Extension Program (FRTEP). Cooperative Extension Programs are partnership programs. They are administered by the National Institute of Food and Agriculture at USDA. The states and territories contribute matching funds. Local programs are developed and conducted under the auspices of respective 1862, 1890 and 1994 land grant colleges and universities. In conventional Cooperative Extension, the local partner is county government. There are no counties on Indian reservations. As a result, the conventional funding mechanism is inadequate.

One typically assumes the 1862 land-grant county Extension program is mandated to serve Indian Country in locations where Indian reservations coexist with counties. It is often a significant challenge to persuade county government to de facto allow county funds to be disbursed on an Indian reservation, in support of county-based Extension work. Certainly there are instances of cooperation, collaboration, and mutual benefit. But there are many cases where this is not true, and the resulting political and governmental obstacles are indeed daunting. The county-based Extension model may be ill-built for this challenge of serving America's Indigenous people. Similar institutional paradigms can be found in state legislatures and land-grant universities.

The conventional American model for Extension work in Indian Country is challenged with political, financial, historical, and institutional situations much different from those in a conventional Extension relationship. There is no political counterpart to county-level government within most tribal governments, although most tribes have political subdivisions of central government--often called "agencies," "districts," "villages," or "chapters

There is generally no tax or revenue flow from the subordinate levels to the higher central government on a reservation unless commercial (i.e., gaming) or natural resources produce the income. There are no earmarked tribal funds for Extension work. The Bureau of Indian Affairs did contract with 1862 land grant universities for Extension work on a few reservations in the past (the program is now defunct). The legal governmental relationship between tribes and states may vary between states, particularly with respect to taxes. Tribes enjoy sovereignty and special relationships with other governments in America that are typically described in treaties,

legislation, executive orders or court decrees. ." Tribes are federal sovereign nations; they are not politically subordinate to states or counties.

Since Extensions inception with the Smith-Lever Act of 1914, formula funding has made the U.S. Extension organization the model for worldwide adoption, yet also since inception in 1990, Indian Country Extension/FRTEP operates exclusively on year-to-year competitive grant funds. In view of this, tribes pose tough questions to land grant universities, governors and congressional delegations about long-term commitment to FRTEP personnel that are difficult to answer. Tribes also wonder why the neighboring non-tribal county offices do not have the same competitive funding criteria for their local county Extension programs.

### Indian Country Extension History

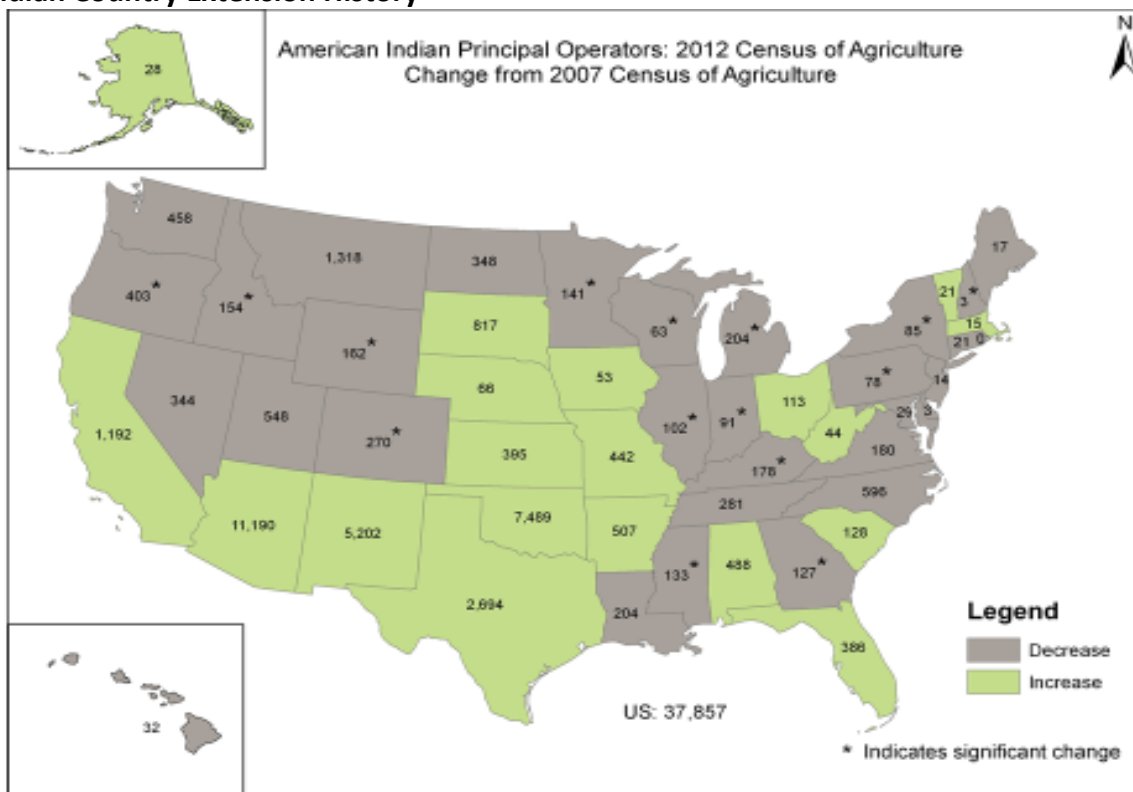


Figure 1. *Secretary's Briefing*, 2012 Census of Agriculture Preliminary Data Release, USDA, February 18, 2014

As early as 1930, Congress rejected a request by the Office of Indian Affairs to send funds to USDA for Extension work on Indian reservations (Kelsey & Hearne, 1949). The Bureau of Indian Affairs did contract with 1862 land grant universities for Extension work on a few reservations in the past but with minimal coverage. It was not until 1988 when The Intertribal Agriculture Council and the Southwest Indian Agricultural Association lobbied Congress and federal agencies in an effort to reinstate federal support for Extension programs on American Indian reservations (Smitman, 1989). Together, they represented nearly 70 tribes. Section 1677 of P.L. 101-624, the Food, Agriculture, Conservation and Trade Act (the "Farm Bill") is the result of

their work, authorizing the Extension Indian Reservation Program (EIRP) now renamed the Federally Recognized Tribal Extension Program (FRTEP). Initially authorized at \$8.0M, but funded at \$1.0M in 1991 and supporting 14 projects, it has grown slowly to \$3.0M and 36 projects on 27 reservations in 15 states nationwide--now reaching about 4% of all reservations and tribes.

In 2007, the National Agricultural Statistic Service (NASS) of the USDA performed their first full Census of Agriculture in Indian Country. In Arizona, Native American producers became the single largest group of agriculture producers in the state with the vast majority being Navajo, and of those, the majority were female. The illustration shown above (Figure 1; NASS, 2012) shows the dramatic increase in Native American producers across the country. The reason that they numbers increased was not because they were not there in the past but the fact the USDA treated each reservation as one farm. This created a severe undercount of Native American producer and an underfunding to USDA support programs that relied on formula funding from USDA including Cooperative Extension.

*Knowing that Smith-Lever funds are distributed in part on a formula that considers farm numbers and farm ownership/operators, one wonders why there has been no attention to this significant change in numbers once the "count" began in Indian Country.*

Some of the 36 FRTEP agents are university Cooperative Extension faculty, but some are not. Nationally, only one is tenured, owing that status to a previous position and career in non-Indian Extension. Only three have ever been promoted within their university system. Program funding is nationally competitive on five 4 -year cycles putting FRTEP agent and program against one another; with annual non-competitive annual renewals. FRTEP agents are not able to write proposals for outside federal short-term funding that commit their salaries as partial match, because their salaries are paid with federal funds. Accordingly, they are not able to compete in this arena with their non-FRTEP peers for promotion opportunities.

How the land tenure system on reservations works is a key component to Extension in Indian Country and why Cooperative Extension (EC) and United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) have rationalized not integrating the delivery of their programs in Indian Country. The county Extension financial model falls short with tribes. Property taxes cannot by law be paid on reservation trust lands--for the same reason that the U.S. Forest Service pays no property tax on the federal estate under its control. Property taxes are the main source of public revenue for the local financial share of county Extension programs. Some states and some tribes have negotiated tax exchange arrangements on fuel, tobacco sales, and other miscellaneous taxes, but resulting agreements are far from uniform across the nation, and many are under legal review. Gaming revenues, by federal law (Indian Gaming Act) cannot be spent on educational programs provided by CE. Not specifically pointed against CE, but IGA works to develop financial sovereignty, not develop funds for programs outside the core responsibilities of the federal trust relationship with the USG.

The issue of land tenure in Indian Country is exceedingly complex, but it drives critical issues regarding home siting, agriculture, loans, mortgages, commercial enterprises, and virtually all other potential uses and incomes from land.

The propensity in USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) for competitive funding for Extension work makes the matter worse. Tribes do not generally have resources to provide for in-kind or cash match on grant proposals. They do have, however, significant familiarity with short-term federal programs that tend to have marginal impact and are not sustained over time. One hundred years of formula funding made the U.S. Extension organization the model for worldwide adoption, yet Indian Country Extension/FRTEP operates exclusively on year-to-year funds.

Some would argue that tribal colleges should pick up FRTEP program at large. We would like to be able to support that, but for lots of reasons, FRTEP should remain nested within the 1862 system. While a few TCU's have CE programs that resemble CE work done by 1862's, however similar to FRTEP the TCU's only operated by a small number of tribes—about 4% (almost identical to the reach of FRTEP) and tribes are famously un-ecumenical about sharing resources with one another. Just as Cornell University is not likely to develop and conduct sustained Extension programs in Mississippi...the Oglala Sioux tribe is not likely to do its core and mandated work in other states or reservations.

### **Indian Country Extension Today**

There are a number of important differences between Indian Country and the rest of America that may help explain how Extension and the 1862 land-grant universities relate to America's Indian tribes, nations, and communities. The illustration may also help us understand why a few reservations have as many as three or four independently operating Extension services, while most have only minimal contact, at best, with Extension in any form.

Extension is not reaching Indian Country. The clientele group is small in number and has not been able to attract the political attention within USDA, NIFA, and APLU necessary to establish a solid financial foundation and future. Indeed, repeated attempts to convene discussions at USDA about unique needs for structural change in administration of FRTEP have been unproductive. FRTEP is administered as a national program, but is in fact a series of regional programs with a small clientele group. This makes it difficult to endorse proposals for program enhancement and expansion on a cost effectiveness and national need basis. There are unique challenges for Indian tribes as they seek equity in access to Extension. Dialogue is urgently needed.

Federal legislation funding FRTEP and 1994 tribal colleges suggests that Congress believes Indian Country should have the same kind of access to Extension as non-reservation county residents across America. The reach of these programs is inadequate on a national scale--many tribes and reservations are simply not being served. FRTEP and the 1994's, when combined, reach less than 10% of American Indians on reservations.

Generally, tribes are interested in and are seeking Extension services, but long-term funding partners such as Smith-Lever are virtually nonexistent. Tribes currently served by FRTEP regularly solicit additional resources for existing and lobby for additional programs for neighboring tribes. Non-FRTEP tribes seek program support and expansion through their congressional delegations, the Intertribal Agriculture Council, the Southwest Indian Agriculture Association, the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI, 2006), the Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians (2010) and other supporters. State legislatures are reluctant, and occasionally prohibited from appropriating funds for Extension work on reservations.

There is some well-developed confusion about the various Extension programs operating in Indian Country. This makes it difficult to enhance and expand programs. Only 36 states have Indian reservations. Fifteen of these states have managed to secure funding for FRTEP. Twenty-one other states could be building relationships with Indian Country to establish and enhance EIRP. Perhaps they are doing so, but there have not been recent national discussions on the issue at NIFA, USDA, or the APLU. APLU has been a particularly difficult organization to engage in this issue. Formal Extension offices and programs to serve more reservation-bound American Indians with additional field-based operations are urgently needed. The FRTEP model presents some hope that Extension may be "coming soon to a reservation near you" for American Indian residents on reservations so they have the same access to Extension programs as any other American citizen. Many tribes, nations, and communities have appealed and are asking for Extension programs, but without adequate political advocacy and lukewarm federal agency support, the program is unlikely to grow as needed.

Insiders at USDA and permanent staffers at House Ag tend to point a finger at the Congressional Black Caucus for inserting manager's language that required the program to go competitive in an effort to allow 1890 Colleges to compete for the funds to conduct FRTEP operations. No 1890 College has ever submitted a proposal, yet the language persists; and the political/social environment within USDA won't allow addressing this thorn.

Currently, the FRTEP has 36 offices in 19 states and is supported by a budget of \$3 million (Figure 2). Many FRTEP single-person offices are tasked with serving multiple—sometimes dozens or scores—of individual tribes. Still minuscule, the FRTEP's budget and number of offices have both tripled in size over the course of 25 years. However, the program is actually worse off than at its inception. Twenty-five years later, the average funding has remained nearly constant in actual dollars, not accounting for inflation, and the per-office average budgets have shown zero growth over this period. The FRTEP is predominately 100% funded by a fluctuating USDA budget, which requires participation in a nationally competitive 5-year grant writing process. This puts the local FRTEP office in the unenviable (and completely unique) position of facing defunding every 5 years. Each FRTEP office competes with other FRTEP offices for federal base funding. This is not the case with county Extension offices.

***A case could be made showing systematic discrimination against American Indians on reservations by continued lack of action by NIFA and USDA.***

Cooperative Extension programs succeed because of community trust and sustained programming efforts within communities and because issues important to the local communities are addressed. The uncertainty of funds and competition between FRTEP agents limits their ability to perform the core tasks that have made Cooperative Extension so successful.



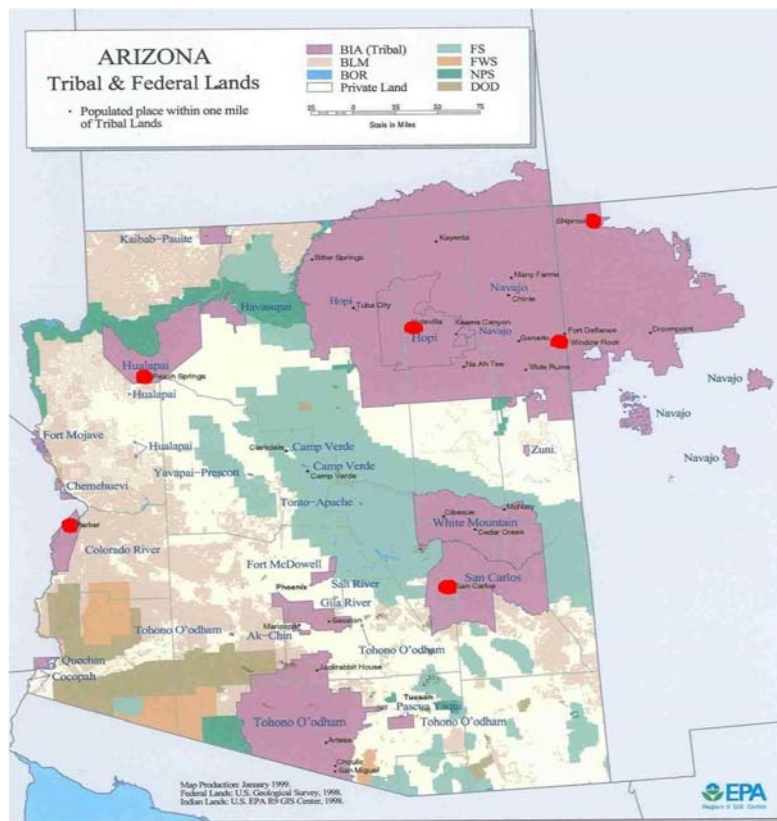
Figure 2. Map of Indian Reservations and Federally Recognized Trial Extension Program (FRTEP) offices in the United States. Geographic distribution obtained through the Indian Extension website (created by Joshua Meisel).

### **Key Differences Between Indian Country Extension and Non-Indian Extension**

- 1) Conventional \$\$ avenues don't exist: No country revenues, no general fund, no sales tax reversions, payments in lieu of taxes, no state revenues, no property taxes... Local funding for Extension on reservations is not available.
- 2) Reluctance by counties to spend resources on reservations ("it's the BIA's job"). "It's against state law."
- 3) Federal funding is virtually the only game in town for Extension work on the rez. No state or municipal grants.
- 4) FRTEP Extension Agents salaries paid 100% with federal funds; they must re-compete for their jobs-- and against each other--every 5 years. They cannot use portions of their salary as match on federal grant applications (federal salaries); unlike county Extension counterparts. Grant funding is severely limited where it is most needed.
- 5) FRTEP Agents currently reach less than 10% of Indian reservations due to inadequate structural needs not being addressed and national funding constraints
- 6) The National Congress of American Indians, the Intertribal Agriculture Council, the Southwest Indian Agriculture Association, the Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians and the Rural Coalition are all on national record with resolutions requesting additional funding for FRTEP.

## Arizona Examples:

Since 1991, The University of Arizona Federally Recognized Tribal Extension Program (FRTEP) seven funded positions have been providing extension education trainings to five of the Tribal Nations located in Arizona (Figure 3). Through the efforts of FRTEP positions the local tribal communities were able to learn, implements and improve their skills the following areas: Traditional Foods, Native Rancher Short Course, Native Beef Program, 4-H Youth Development, Youth Equine Camps, Range Management, Horticulture, Community and Youth Gardens, Farmer Markets Development, Business and Marketing Management, Science in the Classrooms, Irrigation Trainings, Beginning Farmer and Entomology just to name a few.



● Federally Recognized Tribal Extension Program (FRTEP) Offices

Figure 3. Map of Indian Reservations and Federally Recognized Tribal Extension Program (FRTEP) offices in Arizona and one in New Mexico.

Through the programs, the University of Arizona Cooperative Extension's Federally Recognized Tribes Extension Program provides Cooperative Extension programming to tribal communities in Arizona, promoting the health and wellness of individuals, families, communities, the environment, and the economy. Beyond program outcomes, FRTEP's programmatic activities generate an economic impact to the state through the attraction of outside federal funding, which in turn generates additional ripple effects in the economy through program spending and supported jobs. These jobs, income, and sales represent economic activity that would not have

occurred in the state had the out-of-state funding not been brought to Arizona through Cooperative Extension.

In recent years (FY2012 to FY 2015), more than half a million dollars per year have been brought into Arizona through the Federally Recognized Tribes Extension Program (FRTEP). These external funds not only support faculty and staff activities supporting tribal agriculture, they also produce multiplier effects that generate additional economic activity in the state. These multiplier effects stimulate additional spending on primarily private sector goods and services. The inflow of funds through the FRTEP program increases economic output in Arizona by nearly \$1 million per year (Duval, 2016).

The existing tribes value the long standing commitment of the University of Arizona through the FRTEP programs. In a recent letter sent the Director of the National Institute of Food and Agriculture the Hopi Nation Chairman stated the following ***“I want to express my appreciation for the FRTEP program which has been in place on Hopi since December 1991. The FRTEP program has been and continues to be a critical part of furthering both our agricultural producer’s education and production improvements as well as providing 4-H and youth development trainings”.***

Although the University of Arizona is making great strides in Indian Country, there are still 17 Federally Recognized Reservations and tribal communities which are only being marginally served. These Reservations and tribal communities comprise over a quarter of Arizona’s lands and are home to over 300,000 Native Americans tribal members (2000 Census). The size and population of the 17 tribes varies significantly, The Tohono O’odham Nation is located in Southern Arizona and covers 4,446 square miles with 20,640 members. The main agricultural commodities are Cattle, Sheep and a large variety of crops, while the Yavapai-Apache Nation consisting of 1.02 square miles and 743 members and the Yuma-Quechan Tribe at 68.1 square miles with 36 individuals, it’s this diversity in size, population and culture that creates an Extension challenges. Individuals from both the large and small operations are taking readily to the concepts of agricultural business and modern methods of production practice. ***In the most recent Agriculture Census, Arizona Native Americans agricultural producers are now the largest ethnic group, accounting for 56% of all farms and ranches in the state.***



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