

2024 BARRIERS TO ACCESS TRIBAL CONSULTATION AND LISTENING SESSION
REPORT OUT

U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)
Tribal Research and Education: Barriers to Access
April 22, 2024
Virtual Meeting

Mission Areas: Research, Education, and Economics (REE)

Agencies: Economic Research Service (ERS), National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA), National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS), Agricultural Research Service (ARS)

Consulting Official: Dr. Chavonda Jacobs-Young, Under Secretary, REE

Facilitator: Heather Dawn Thompson, Director, Office of Tribal Relations (OTR)

I. Opening Prayer, Welcome, and Opening Remarks from Consulting Officials

II. Nation-to-Nation Consultation (Tribal government officials)

- Under Secretary Dr. Jacobs-Young provided opening remarks and noted the important input received on data sovereignty and recent access to public research in USDA programs

A. Indian Country Research Priorities

- A Tribal Leader expressed concerns about new people [private citizens] on Tribal treaty lands conducting harvesting activities in unsustainable ways. For example, Tribal leaders described how huckleberries are now overharvested and trampled by non-Tribal members. The Tribal Leader also mentioned that climate change research needs to continue to help mitigate issues and also protect species now.
- A Tribal College Leader highlighted the [Agricultural Science Center of Excellence for Nutrition and Diet \(ASCEND\) Report](#) and encouraged USDA to share it more broadly. They emphasized goal of using community participatory research to improve the health outcomes of the community. There is an important need to educate both non-Native and Native researchers who partner with Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs) so that they learn about the communities that they work with.
 - REE acknowledged this role and expressed support for these projects and future partnerships. REE mentioned that ASCEND works to cover some discussion on reorienting the palate.
 - ARS welcomed Tribal leaders to access the 22 germplasm banks located across the country.
 - OTR highlighted ARS' work on maize and interest in partnership with TCUs to propagate seeds considered in "low inventory" and ensure their longevity.
 - NIFA shared a story from a tribal citizen who asked a critical question about whether USDA researchers take the time to learn about the stories that complement the seeds and that that this question opened an important conversation because stories are a vital part of those seeds. NIFA expressed the importance of having equal knowledge as the stories are integral to research.

- A Tribal College Leaders highlighted TCU research and research capacity. Most research is community based participatory research, and TCUs are vetted community partners with tribes, communities, and families. They stated that students should engage in research that is meaningful to them, such as juvenile diabetes, which was not historically part of the Native experience, but is now seen as an inevitability. Research must try to tell the story better about community health and behavioral changes.

B. Indigenous Seeds

- A Tribal Leaders mentioned the need to protect seeds and species currently in the territory from people entering the territory and climate change, as they are a treaty resource.
- A Tribal College Leader commented on important opportunities to establish relationships with historic institutions and museums to rematriate their seed collections. They expressed support for the seed multiplication project, citing the historical relationship of Indigenous peoples with seeds since time immemorial. They emphasized the importance of rematriating seeds to support food sovereignty initiatives in Indian Country. They stated the importance of distributing foods to tribal citizens and mentioned that it is necessary to provide classes on traditional preparation and consumption to reintroduce foods to the community. They emphasized the need to think locally and regionally through potential Indigenous food hubs to help re-establish historic trade routes. The challenges are finding land access and space to re-propagate seeds and it would be ideal to consider where seeds originated. They would like to establish a template to support other TCU participation.
 - USDA noted the work of the Germplasm Resources Information Network (GRIN) and the potential for ARS to replicate certain aspects.

C. Tribal Data Sovereignty

- A Tribal Leader understand that the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) is important, but Tribal laws often protect data from disclosure so that the information cannot be used in ways that Tribes do not approve. Tribal Leaders requests that the U.S. government commit to honoring Tribal laws in the same ways that Tribes honor U.S. laws.
 - USDA responded that it is in the process of updating and expanding policies on these topics.

D. Budget Input: E.O. 14112 Unmet Budget Needs

- A Tribal College Leader mentioned the need for equitable federal funding across all land grant institutions. They suggested the TCU cooperative agreement model with ARS collaboration works well and has been important for TCUs. UTTC mentioned how the collaboration has provided them with lab access, field work opportunities, financial capacity, and ability to expedite projects. They emphasized the inclusion of cultural beliefs and Tribal Nations' roles in being caretakers of Mother Earth.
- A Tribal College Leader mentioned how important it is to set research priorities for communities and connect those to other communities and nations in the region. They also mentioned the need for equity in accessing equipment and critical infrastructure, including servers for data processing, and access to broadband/high-capacity internet. Technical capacity and access to resources are

- critical to equitable allocations of resources for TCUs, which allows them to stand at similar levels to fellow land grant institutions.
- REE spoke to USDA's current focus on equity in funding because without access to broadband, Indian Country cannot move forward.
 - OTR pointed to Executive Order 14112 on_ and its focus on unmet budget needs. OTR would like American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC) and American Indians in Science and Engineering Society (AISES) to engage and discuss what the equity numbers would look like.
 - A Tribal College Leader mentioned that equity has been a focus for a long time and the gap in funding to achieve parity is large. They mentioned how AIHEC has provided those numbers for some time and wants AIHEC to help tell the story. TCUs need help with workforce challenges as there are limited staff resources available to tell the story because the same limited people continue to be asked to do additional work. TCUs need USDA to hear what TCUs are doing well and where they might need help. They stated that TCUs have the solutions and answers, but need help finding money and resources. TCU leaders also emphasized the differences between each TCU and the need to learn about all of them, including the wonderful research they contribute to Indian Country.
 - NIFA mentioned reorganized investments in NextGen and the \$25 million for TCUs, but recognized ability to do more, including training opportunities.
 - REE echoed its support for participatory research and considered envisioning virtual centers of excellence at minority serving institutions.

III. Listening Session (Open to Indian Country speakers)

A. Indian Country Research Priorities

- A Tribal College noted that the Tribal College Research Program requires a partnership with an 1862 research entity: TCUs have come a long way and should be able to stand alone without having that required collaboration any longer. Additionally, the Federally Recognized Tribes Extension Program (FRTEP) program has only just been opened to TCUs in 2022, but preference is given to standing programs (excluding TCUs), a preference that makes it very hard for TCUs to get funding in a program that is for federally recognized tribes themselves.
 - REE noted these concerns and reflected on USDA's ability to share feedback with legislators.
- ERS mentioned that it is analyzing protected data to analyze farm production, financial capacities, food security, vitality of rural America
- A Tribal organization mentioned that studying Tribal diets is important, especially as it contributes to disease prevention. There needs to be caution about how research is conducted on how indigenous bodies metabolize nutrients compared to the general population.

B. Indigenous Seeds

- A Tribal organization mentioned they were impressed with opportunities for collaboration with ARS on the protection, preservation, and propagation of seeds and wild edibles, especially those that are low inventory. They mentioned the need for required tribal reviews to determine what distribution and bundling is appropriate, including limiting distribution beyond the Tribe.

C. Tribal Data Sovereignty

- National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) pointed to the 2022 Census of Agriculture released in February 2024. NASS noted that many data points described agriculture in Indian Country and additional data tabulations, specific to reservations, are upcoming on August 29, 2024. NASS emphasized that participation in the Census of Agriculture is voluntary and data in the census is protected by law, but data about individuals in Indian country or elsewhere may be a public record.

D. Budget Input: E.O. 14112 Unmet Budget Needs

- A Tribal college staff member shared gratitude for remarks on research at TCUs and emphasized passion for research and student involvement. Matching fund requirements in the New Beginnings for Tribal Students (NBTS) grants create a barrier to TCUs.
 - NIFA responded that matching fund requirements are required by law, so NIFA can only offer technical assistance to engage legislative representatives. Travel costs for remote areas are a focus of discussion. NIFA shared a desire to reduce barriers and will look to see what can be removed.
- A Tribal organization shared that many of the opportunities are focused on only youth and elder connections, which leaves out the middle generation.

IV. Closing Remarks

- REE provided an overview of its work to further equity and empathized about diet-related diseases, and the challenge of being able to shift away from a feeling that such diseases are now an inevitable part of the Tribal community's experience.
- OTR expressed gratitude to the Tribal participants and to REE for its commitment to Indian Country.