



## **Best Practices in Community and Household Gardening Programs at Tribal Colleges and Universities**

Community and household gardening programs are found at many tribal colleges and universities (TCUs) active in community education, outreach and development. Some programs have been operating for many years and have successfully dealt with common challenges associated with gardening programs. Other TCU programs are relatively new and have brought fresh approaches to gardening issues. Still other TCUs are in the planning stages to start their own gardening programs.

Regardless of what phase your TCU is in, learning about each others' gardening successes, or "best practices," can benefit you, your TCU, and your community. Sharing what works best increases our chances of success and minimizes the risk of missteps. Sharing best practices among TCUs helps to keep an emphasis on tribal cultures and tribal strengths in all of our programming. We learn best from peers who can understand the unique situation of our tribal communities. This best practices brief was developed to assist TCUs in learning from each other so that they can better serve their tribal communities through community and household gardening programs.

### **BENEFITS OF COMMUNITY & HOUSEHOLD GARDENING**

Community and household gardening programs provide a number of benefits to tribal families and communities. Gardens improve health by providing fresh and nutritious fruits and vegetables and by encouraging increased physical activity through gardening chores. Gardens can also help the family budget by reducing household food costs and by the sale or trade of garden produce. Perhaps most

importantly, community and family gardening provides an opportunity for children, parents and elders to spend time with each other, as they strengthen their connections to each other, the land, and the natural world.

There are additional benefits when TCUs administer gardening programs. TCU students are encouraged to broaden their perspectives on health, nutrition, community development, economics, and natural resources through hands-on gardening experiences. Students can learn from gardening through summer internships, for-credit courses, field labs, and service-learning experiences. Gardens provide TCUs with visible opportunities for community engagement, where community members and TCU faculty, staff and students learn from each other. Gardening can be a great way to recruit youth and community members to the TCU. Finally, community gardens provide a space for TCUs to demonstrate or test new gardening techniques, and to collect and analyze economic, horticultural and health-related data.

## **SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATIONS**

The success of a community garden often hinges on the amount of people power available for labor-intensive chores such as planting, irrigating, weeding, and harvesting. While community volunteers are ideal, it is often difficult for working parents to find time to help. At the same time, teenagers are busy with school activities and many elders are involved in tribal duties. Turtle Mountain Community College (Belcourt, North Dakota) has succeeded in involving college students in gardening by offering a for-credit, three-unit summer course in Introduction to Native American Gardening. This accredited course counts toward students' general education requirements for graduation, and includes hands-on work in community gardens, as well as at household gardens of individual community members. Students are graded on their participation in community gardening, the quality of their own personal gardens, and on their daily journals entries. Each summer 8-20 students participate, receiving stipends funded from U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Tribal College Equity Education Grants program. *For more information, contact Mr. Mark Hamley at (701)477-7834, [mhamley@tm.edu](mailto:mhamley@tm.edu), or Ms. Michele Short-Azure at (701)477-7972, [michelle@tm.edu](mailto:michelle@tm.edu).*



Another successful strategy that encourages community participation in gardening is the Adopt-a-Plot implementation. In this case, community members sign up for small plots within the larger community garden space and are responsible for maintaining that plot through the growing season. Fort Berthold Community College (New Town, North Dakota) has created an incentive structure that helps to keep community members excited about their plot. Each person is charged \$20 to adopt a plot, and if their garden is maintained in good

condition throughout the growing season, that person is refunded \$10 back. The remaining \$10 is used for awards given to the community members with the best crops at harvest time. Two \$50 first prizes and four \$25 second prizes are awarded during the harvest celebration. Community members also have the opportunity to earn continuing education credits. At the same time, the college donates its own crops of corn and potatoes to elders throughout the reservation's communities. *For more information, contact Mr. Ron Klein at (701)627-4738 x275, rklein@fbcc.bia.edu.*

Farmers markets are another way to engage your community by sharing the bounty of your gardening programs, and at the same time demonstrating the economic benefits of producing your own fruits and vegetables. Cankdeska Cikana Community College's (Fort Totten, North Dakota) first-ever Farmers Market, held on a Sunday in the fall of 2007, succeeded in selling out in just a few hours. Community members bought potatoes, carrots, onions, squash, corn, and apples that were grown pesticide-free in the college's campus garden. The keys to



success included consumer-friendly packaging and pricing, which meant that produce were sold by volume rather than weight, and at comparable prices found in local grocery stores. Consumers also enjoyed the personal networking and community atmosphere of an outdoor market within their community. The market was entirely student-driven, and the proceeds went to support student activities. *For more information, contact Dr. James Garrett at (701)766-1330, jim\_garrett@littlehoop.edu.*

Integrating gardening programs internally with academic and outreach programs at a TCU strengthens the link between learning and practice, teachers and students, and campus and community. It also helps builds the sustainability of the gardening program through resource-sharing and joint-planning with other campus programs. At United Tribes Technical College (Bismarck, North Dakota), a campus gardening program is linked with the college's nutrition and foodservice degree program. Students learn about post-harvest food safety as vegetables are harvested, transported and prepared for consumption. In the Managing Food Protection course's kitchen laboratory, students learn to prepare garden produce to preserve its nutritional quality, as well as taste and appearance. Administered by the college's Land Grant Department, the gardening program is also integrated into other campus programs, such as the summer "Nokotas on the Prairie" math, science and culture camp for kids in grades 3-6, the Tribal Environmental Science program, an Ecological Society of America's Strategies for Ecology Education, Development and Sustainability (SEEDS) program, and an on-campus Women, Infants and Children (WIC)

program. For more information, contact Ms. Karen Paetz at (701)255-3285 x1426, [kpaetz@uttc.edu](mailto:kpaetz@uttc.edu), or Dr. Jen Janecek-Hartman at (701)255-3285 x1396, [jjanecekhartman@uttc.edu](mailto:jjanecekhartman@uttc.edu).

## REFERENCES

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