



Freshly Fort Peck



Wendy Becker¹, Heather Snell²

¹ Extension Agent-Montana State University-Roosevelt County, Culbertson MT 59218 (406)-787-5312
wbecker@montana.edu

²Garden Project Manager, Fort Peck Tribes, Poplar MT 59255, (406)-768-2430 ultraampoule@gmail.com

Needs Identification



Northeast Montana is considered a food desert. Getting fresh and local foods is difficult. During the COVID-19 shutdown, there were truckloads of food brought in from around the country to alleviate food shortages. The foodstuffs acquired weren't always healthy or fresh. Food sovereignty has been a goal of the Fort Peck Reservation. Horticulture classes have been increasing in demand, as well as healthy eating options, and cultural connections. The need for local food especially grown on the Fort Peck Reservation initiated this project. A collaborative effort among Tribal Departments, Health Promotion and Disease Prevention, and MSU Extension, introduced a plan to start filling that need.



Educational Objectives



- ❖ Design a garden project that incorporated harvest time goals
- ❖ Create a meal kit from locally grown produce
- ❖ Conduct food education classes
- ❖ Change understanding of food sovereignty and enhance healthy eating



Program Activities



As a collaborative effort, meetings were held to plan the large project with the understanding that it would take multiple years to create infrastructure. The final segment would be the "Freshly Fort Peck" meal kits. These would be centered around what could be grown and put into a meal kit. These ingredients locally raised would be:



- ❖ Buffalo meat from the Tribes cultural herd
- ❖ Montana State Certified Potatoes
- ❖ Honey extracted from the beehives at the Tribal Extension Gardens Pumpkin Patch
- ❖ Pumpkins, squash, corn, onions, and dry beans from the Community Garden Project



In 2022, there were 29 education classes held in school and community settings. The Fort Peck Tribes still had policies with interaction with the public for health and safety concerns, so most programs were held outdoors.

Outcomes



- ❖ 135 free healthy meal kits serving a family of 6 were created serving 3 Tribal Elder and food bank centers
- ❖ 489 people were educated through 29 classes using buffalo meat, container gardens, honey extraction, agri-tourism pumpkin patch, garden workshops
- ❖ The Jane Kline Scholarship recipient modeled their presentation on the garden project education
- ❖ 6 Master Gardeners certifications were obtained
- ❖ Severe drought, grasshopper infestation, and supply issues modified overall meal kit inclusion but created other IPM educational opportunities

Impacts

The 135 Freshly Fort Peck Meal Kits, provided a family of 6 with a healthy meal option at a market value of \$40 for a total savings of \$5400, and it was locally grown on the Fort Peck Reservation.

Many Tribal members struggle with diabetes, and the potatoes grown were a low glycemic index variety. Having a different option has changed eating habits. The garden project and meal kits stimulated people to grow their own gardens, 8 people had never planted potatoes before. If they didn't have space, we also taught them to use containers for gardens. Gardening activities also promoted being more physically active. One elder said they raised tomatoes all the way until November. Using the community garden portion, a student won the Jane Kile Memorial Scholarship with a video project.



Food Sovereignty Scholarship Recipient Video



Evaluations indicated a 94% excellent rating, with an increase in healthier eating and knowledge gained. The Tribes offered more buffalo for classes. Drought, grasshoppers, and other problems created created opportunities to learn about Integrated Pest Management options. Finally, the Fort Peck Tribes started defining their version of food sovereignty.

Future Programming



Based on the impacts and evaluations, the meal kit will continue. Food sovereignty will vary in local stakeholder classifications, but will increase in opportunities such as farmers markets, a future meat processing plant, bee classes, cultural demonstrations, alfalfa trials, and garden variety trials.

