

12-1-2005

## Is 10% Good Enough? Cooperative Extension Work in Indian Country

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### Recommended Citation

Hiller, J. G. (2005). Is 10% Good Enough? Cooperative Extension Work in Indian Country. *The Journal of Extension*, 43(6), Article 3. <https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/joe/vol43/iss6/3>

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## Is 10% Good Enough? Cooperative Extension Work in Indian Country

### Abstract

The Cooperative Extension system delivers local programs in virtually all of America's counties. Extension's intergovernmental model capitalizes on resources of counties, states, and the federal government and provides an institutional framework for county Extension work. The Extension system and model is not as applicable, however, for members of America's 562 Indian tribes, particularly those living on 314 major Indian reservations. This 90 year-old template is woefully inadequate for Indian Country Extension work. This article presents background on how this situation evolved and suggests that national-scale dialogue to develop program equity for this underserved and place-bound audience is needed.

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## Introduction

Extension is not reaching Indian Country. This article presents a brief background of life in Indian Country, a historical snapshot of Extension work on Indian reservations as related to conventional non-Indian Extension work and reveals a number of institutional obstacles blocking progress towards equity. As a starting point, it is recommended that national dialogue with tribes and tribal organizations is needed.

The extensive background section in this article is intended to familiarize the reader with key historic and contemporary features of American Indian life on reservations. Brief comments are made on frequently asked questions related to Indian Country. Finally, this article concludes with a sketch of who is doing what and suggests we reevaluate the local Extension model and refine it to operate more effectively in Indian Country.

As is the case with most Extension field programs, work in Indian Country suffers from an inequitable distribution of scarce resources. The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service (CSREES) administers the national Extension Indian Reservation Program (EIRP) and the "1994" Tribal College Land-Grant programs. From a national perspective, however, these programs are only beginning to address needs of underserved reservation-bound American Indians. The programs are reaching surprisingly few Indian communities. Many tribes and reservations have no Extension services whatsoever--be it from EIRP, a 1994, the tribe, or conventional 1862 county-based Extension services.

It should be noted that "Indian Country" is a legal term, not a derogatory one. It is used in Title 18, U.S. Code to generally describe land within the boundaries of a federally recognized reservation, but includes other lands as well. Included in the legal definition are "dependent Indian communities" whether inside or outside of a reservation, lands acquired by tribes and nations, and allotted lands holding Indian title. There are over 175 different indigenous languages spoken by American Indians in this country.

## Background

Indian Country Extension ironically exhibits a living reenactment of predecessor Extension work in

rural America. Historically, county Extension agents worked predominantly in rural counties and had to establish personal relationships with farm families before beginning to deliver educational programs. Agents communicated regularly with boards of county commissions and special interest groups to develop support and suggestions for Extension work. This was pioneering work in rural America and began a new era for the 1862 land-grant and the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Today's contemporary county-based Extension programs benefit tremendously from over 90 years of visibility, particularly with respect to institutional 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. Extension programs exist in 3,057 counties across the nation, staffed by 8,987 FTEs at the county level--including U.S. territories (CSREES, 2003; NACO, 2003).

In a similar way, Extension work in Indian Country is moving along the same trajectory, albeit without the benefit of community familiarity. Clientele are typically rural dwellers. Many live in villages, settlements, and small towns, some are rural non-farm or farming/ranching/fishing/subsistence families. As with county Extension programs, productive and valued personal and community relationships are critical precedents to successful programs.

These relationships must be built almost entirely from scratch in Indian Country--even today. There is virtually no historical relationship between a tribal government and an Indian reservation Extension office that compares to, or parallels, that between off-reservation county Extension offices and county government. There are 562 tribes and 314 federally recognized Indian reservations in America. By comparison, there are dedicated Extension programs on 27 reservations (28 FTEs) under the EIRP.

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.

## **Indian Country 101--A Primer**

### **Who Is Indian?**

An "Indian" or "Native American" is a person recognized as such by a federally recognized tribe. Tribal enrollment requirements are typically specified in a tribe's constitution or tribal law. There are no U.S. government standards of blood quantum. Many tribes require certain degrees of blood for enrollment; others require proof of lineal descendancy from an ancestor originally enrolled as a member of the tribe. Individual Native Americans are U.S. citizens. An "Indian Tribe" (or Nation, Community, Colony, or Alaskan Native Village) is an ethnological and a legal term. Over a dozen tribes are petitioning for federal status through the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), litigation, or congressional action. Tribes having state recognition, with or without a reservation, have different legal standing from federally recognized tribes when dealing with other forms of government in the U.S.

### **About Taxes**

Generalizations about the tax environment in Indian Country are made only at considerable risk of being inaccurate. 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. Members who live on-reservation but work off-reservation in non-tribal enterprises pay both state and federal income taxes as appropriate (NGISC, 2003). 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.

### **Land Issues**

Lands held in trust for the tribes by the U.S. government through its agent, the BIA, dominate most reservations. The issue of land tenure in Indian Country is exceedingly complex--it drives issues of home siting, agriculture, loans, mortgages, commercial enterprises, and virtually all other potential uses and incomes from land. There are two general categories of land on reservations, tribal and allotted. Tribal land can be either "tribal original" or "tribal purchase." Allotted land can be either "undivided interest heirship" or "single ownership" lands (Miller, 1989).

Tribal original land has been in trust status since the formation of the reservation, never having been owned by the U.S. government. Tribal purchase land comes from transfer to the tribe by an allottee or heir. Allotted lands were taken from tribal ownership and granted to individual Indians under the series of federal allotment acts. Undivided heirship is the result of allotted land that has been passed to heirs in the form of shares, not as individually identified tracts. After only a few generations, a typical allotment may have several hundred shareholders. Single ownership land usually results from an allottee will or sole surviving heir.

There are obvious implications for land management activities such as access, grazing, logging,

fishing, hunting, gathering, mining, farming, and other uses that are often confounded by the status of land ownership. There is no known parallel or similarity of this type of land tenure situation in non-Indian Country anywhere in the world.

## **Indian Gaming**

The Indian Gaming Regulatory Act (IGRA) of 1988 governs legal gaming on Indian reservations (P.L.100-497; 25 U.S.C. §§2701). Tribes are required to enter into gaming compacts with their respective state legislatures that are subject to approval by the Secretary of the Interior. Casinos may only be located on trust lands, although some tribes have successfully petitioned to convert fee simple titled lands to trust for this purpose. About 57% of all tribes are engaged in gaming. Nationally, Indian gaming amounts to about 10% of all legal gaming in America (NIGA, 2003).

## **Per Capita Checks**

One does not automatically receive a government payment every month as a result of being Native American. Some tribes issue per capita payments to members in a fashion similar to corporate stockholder dividend payments. Revenues from natural resources or business enterprises provide a basis for payments when there are profits to be distributed. About 25% of gaming tribes issue per capita payments to individual enrolled members. These payments are not allowed, however, until the Secretary of Interior certifies that tribal gaming revenues first provide for government services, economic and community development, general tribal welfare, charitable donations, and requirements for aid to local governments.

## **Higher Education**

Haskell Indian Nations University, the Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute, and the Institute of American Indian Arts are operated by the BIA and offer exemption from or reduced tuition to members of federally recognized tribes. They join America's four military academies and the Uniformed Services University of Health Sciences as federal universities. One's tribe does not automatically pay expenses for members to attend college--even to a tribal college. They may, however, grant scholarships and financial aid to members (AIHEC, 2003). Some tribes have established scholarship endowments in support of non-Indian and Indian students in need.

## **Indian Country Extension Model**

With the brief background provided, one can see 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. The legal government-to-government relationship between tribes and states may differ 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, or court decrees. They are not subordinate to counties or states.

The propensity in CSREES 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. Ninety years of formula funding made the U.S. Extension organization the model for worldwide adoption, yet Indian Country Extension/EIRP operates exclusively on year-to-year funds. In view of this, tribes pose tough questions about long-term commitment to EIRP personnel that are difficult to answer. Does the same dialogue occur in counties?

## **What is Being Done--or Not--About Extension Work**

There is an eclectic mix of higher education and Extension providers in America. Some are operating in Indian Country--but only in a few places. Providers include county Extension, the Extension Indian Reservation Program, Tribal college Extension, and Tribal Extension. All these programs are constrained to varying degrees by political boundaries of state borders, Indian reservation boundaries, county lines, and community college districts, to name a few.

## **County Extension**

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). 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 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.

### **Extension Indian Reservation Program**

In 1988, 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 EIRP. Initially authorized at \$8.0M, but funded at \$1.0M in 1991 and supporting 14 projects, it has grown slowly to \$2.0M and 28 projects on 27 reservations in 15 states nationwide--now reaching about 4% of all reservations and tribes.

EIRP places Extension agents/educators and their educational programs on Indian reservations. Their principal audience is residents of the reservation. These offices are much like a conventional rural county Extension office. The agents/educators are employees of the 1862 land-grant Cooperative Extension organization. Many report directly to the state Extension director; others report through a neighboring county Extension director or administrative head.

Some are faculty, but some are not. Nationally, only one is tenured, owing that status to a previous position and career in non-Indian Extension. Only one has ever been promoted. Program funding is nationally competitive on 5-year cycles, with non-competitive annual renewals. EIRP agents are not able to write proposals for outside federal short-term funding that show 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 peers.

### **1994 Tribally Controlled Colleges Extension Program**

Congress enabled and funded the Equity in Educational Land Grant Status Act of 1994 (Section 354 of P.L. 103-382). The Act initiated a USDA revenue stream to existing tribally controlled colleges in 12 states and issued them land-grant status within the community of 55 state universities ("1862's") and 17 Historically Black Colleges and Universities ("1890's"). There are 33 tribal colleges; 31 are designated as "1994's." The 1994's receive four types of funding from the Act, including:

- A. Equity grants;
- B. A share of interest income from a newly-created endowment, designed to mimic "land grant" revenues received by 1862's and 1890's;
- C. Funding for competitive proposals for Extension work; and
- D. Competitive proposals for research.

Tribal college Extension programs have been shaped by tribal college influences, by community needs, and by the competitive grants processes at CSREES. USDA is not, however, the sole source of tribal college funding. They commonly receive funds from the tribe, from congress, the executive branch agencies, and from various grants.

Five states have both EIRP and tribal college Extension; these programs are co-located in several instances. The 1994's are operated by about 5% of all tribes. Several tribes are developing new colleges and will eventually apply for 1994 designation.

### **Tribal Extension**

Yet another form of Extension exists on a few reservations that are remnants of the first Extension work in Indian Country. Dating as early as 1892, the "boss farmer" worked for the "Indian Agent" (later called the "BIA agency superintendent") and managed tribal agricultural operations (Rooks, 1910; Bruguire, 1999). In the 1940's the boss farmer effort began to model after the USDA-Agricultural Extension Service organization, but still differed in a number of significant respects. Boss farmers were BIA employees. There was no funding relationship with county, state, or federal government (except through the Department of Interior) and no formal link to USDA or to the 1862 land-grant institution.

Most of these early boss farmers had received agricultural training and degrees from 1862 land-grant institutions and regularly cooperated with neighboring county agents. Most of the boss farmer positions had disappeared by the mid-1950's, with a few still on the books in the early 1980's. For a short period of time in the latter years, the BIA contracted with several 1862's to conduct Extension work on reservations, but these arrangements disappeared as well.

## USDA Ag Census

The USDA Census of Agriculture has historically not reported on Indian Agriculture until the last few years. The data are admittedly difficult to acquire, but for many generations, USDA apparently considered that Indian reservations had only one farm and only one farmer--the "tribal farm" and the tribal "boss farmer." Accordingly, livestock and agricultural production data apparently came from only one farm.

This could be to blame for the error of delaying access to USDA farm programs for individual agricultural producers on many reservations for several decades. It may have also adversely affected the distribution of Smith-Lever Extension formula funds to some states. Those states with larger-than-thought numbers of farms due to under-reported Indian agricultural producers and farms may benefit from a recalculated formula. A full and accurate Indian agriculture census is urgently needed, along with a commensurate reevaluation of USDA formulas for funding that are driven by these data.

## So What?

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, CSREES, and NASULGC necessary to establish a solid financial foundation and future. EIRP is administered as a national program, but is in fact a regional program 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 EIRP and 1994's 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. EIRP 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 EIRP regularly solicit additional resources for existing and lobby for additional programs for neighboring tribes. Non-EIRP 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, 2004), and other supporters. Half of the tribes conduct gaming, but revenues are not accessible for Extension programs because of language in the National Indian Gaming Act that restricts how these revenues are used. There are few other sources of revenue to support Extension on reservations. State legislatures are reluctant to appropriate 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 EIRP. 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 CSREES, USDA, or the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges (NASULGC).

A high priority should be placed on developing formal programs to serve more reservation-bound American Indians with additional field-based operations. The EIRP 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 for Extension programs, but without adequate political advocacy and lukewarm federal support, the program is unlikely to grow as needed.

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