

Growing small businesses on the Wind River Indian Reservation

Situation:

The University of Wyoming Extension 2010 Feast for Facts needs assessment identified as important the development and expansion of agricultural businesses on the Wind River Indian Reservation (WRIR). The Wind River Development Fund (WRDF) is a non-profit lending institution on the WRIR. Its board and staff members saw a need for their organization to reach out to agricultural producers. They had received an increased number of financial assistance requests from people involved in agriculture or thinking about starting an agricultural-related business.

The Wind River UW Extension educator and the program specialist with the WRDF developed, designed, and implemented a two-part workshop series encouraging people to build upon or develop new agricultural businesses and/or develop products for farmers markets and craft fairs. The WRDF offered micro-loan assistance.

The workshop series “Growing Small Business in Indian Country” was offered the spring and fall of 2011. The first workshop consisted of five weeks of different, full-day workshops:

- Planting and growing
- Developing a marketing plan
- Website design
- Beekeeping
- Chickens and eggs

The second five-week workshop series encouraged development of products that can be sold at the WRIR farmers market or at local craft fairs. Topics included:

- Hands-on chicken butchering (follow-up from series I)
- Making jams, jellies, and syrups from scratch
- Basic sewing seminar
- Small-business savvy and simple steps to sole proprietorship
- Vendor in’s and out’s (cancelled due to instructor emergency)



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Impacts:

Eighty-two WRIR residents participated and received 41 hours of programming associated with agricultural enterprises and small-business development. End-of-session surveys showed 100 percent of participants gained knowledge, 70 percent plan to use the information from the programs, and 56 percent wrote one goal they plan to attain because of the workshops.

A major outcome is creation of the Wind River Agricultural Resource Committee. Local producers meet monthly to discuss agricultural concerns and management plans for the future of farmers and ranchers.

The WRDF received 14 business development inquiries and, from those, gained 10 new clients. Of the 10 clients, three began working toward business goals.

The WRDF provided technical assistance to the other seven clients who are developing business plans and plan to use the lending opportunities provided by WRDF. Several workshop participants have sought further business development assistance from the WRDF, and at least two individuals have started to build upon their existing agricultural businesses.



Beekeeping workshop participants construct a beehive after learning the basics on raising bees and maintaining a hive.

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