Fort Hall gardening program provides education and food for tribal members

AT A GLANCE
This program provides gardening education and community garden plots to tribal members which are used to grow healthy food and feed tribal families and elders.

The Situation
Home vegetable gardening is one of the best options available for individuals and families to obtain healthy, wholesome produce. In fact, few food items purchased at a grocery store can compete with picking fresh corn, peas and leafy greens or digging baby red potatoes from a garden in preparation for an evening meal. In today’s busy world, many individuals and families have lost the knowledge and lack the time necessary to prepare an adequate garden space and grow their own food. A growing concern exists regarding the lost connection to and knowledge of food production, as well as the increasing consumption of processed foods by youth and adults. For these reasons, Fort Hall tribal members expressed a need to learn how to grow their own food. They wanted to provide healthier eating options for their families and the community. Concerns existed regarding a lack of developed space in which tribal members could grow their own food. A second concern was the lack of experience and knowledge of gardening. The third concern was a growing need to help combat the high incidence of consumption of unwholesome, high caloric foods common in today’s society. Everyone agrees more fruits and vegetables need to be included in our diets. Thus, funding, a well-developed community gardening space, and education were all needed to address these three community concerns.

Our Response
A community garden committee was developed which included tribal departments, tribal members, Three Rivers RC&D, and UI Extension. Funding was obtained through the IFFT foundation of Pocatello, Idaho, UI Extension and tribal departments to plan, develop and construct a garden site. The gardening committee developed plans, wrote procedures for soil improvements and weed control, developed a time frame and task sheet for each gardening component, and assisted with securing contractors to complete some of the heavy labor and actual garden plot development. The committee also developed garden rules and contracts to ensure people had a clear understanding of the community garden’s function and use. The Tribal Agricultural Resource Management Program (ARM) completed weed spraying. Top soil and compost were hauled to the site by our Tribal Roads department. The Tribal Facilities department installed water lines and hydrants to provide easy...
water access to gardeners. An outside contractor then leveled and prepared the ground. The contractor also prepared walkways lined with pea gravel and weed barrier fabric. A tribal fencing contractor was utilized to build a chain link fence around the garden. UI Extension purchased supplies to measure and stake 20 family garden plots. After these efforts were completed, the results were astounding! We had 20 active gardening plots the first year (2014). Fours plots were planted by a tribal department which donated the food to the Tribal Elderly Nutrition program. The elders loved the program and delicious produce! The Shoshone-Bannock 4-H Tribal Director, Nola Cates, managed and oversaw gardening activities to ensure the garden spot was properly cared for. As a result of Nola's efforts, every plot was well-maintained and beautiful. This community activity proved to be a fantastic venue for families to grow and work together as they learned how to grow and harvest their own food. We are looking forward to the 2015 gardening season as we have welcomed back seasoned and even new gardeners. Every plot has been planted this year and food will continue to be donated to our tribal elders and families.

Program Outcomes
The program provided community members with the means and methods to learn and grow their own food. Our Extension gardening program provided teaching methods that individuals and families were able to apply directly to their lives. Our motto is to provide research-based education and then provide hands-on learning opportunities so people can have better memory recall to duplicate what was taught. After attending our programs, people know how to design and plant their garden plots. They were armed with adequate knowledge to grow and harvest their own food. The community garden provided a way for tribal members to get outdoors and enjoy physical activity. Family bonds were made stronger by working together in their garden plots. Above all else, individuals and families developed their own personal connection to food production. They were taught and empowered to follow gardening principles so they grew, harvested, and consumed a bounty of healthy fruits and vegetables. This education enriched their lives with new knowledge, renewed, strengthened relationships and healthy, wholesome home-grown food! What stronger outcome then enabling people to enrich their lives through their own food production venues and seeing them accomplish their gardening goals?

The Future
UI Fort Hall Extension will continue educating tribal members about gardening and holding gardening classes in the spring. We will also continue directing and managing the garden to provide the community with a safe, beautiful garden in which they can grow their own nutritious produce.

As the interest in gardening and individual/family food production continues to grow, we will continue work on meeting community needs through new, innovative programs and program expansion.

Cooperators and Co-Sponsors
Brent Cornforth, Contractor
Doug Hevewah, Tribal Contractor
Fort Hall Housing Authority
IFFT Foundation
Paula Jones, Three Rivers RC&D
Shoshone-Bannock Agricultural Resource Management Program
Shoshone-Bannock Environmental Waste Program
Shoshone-Bannock Facilities Department
Shoshone-Bannock Roads Department

FOR MORE INFORMATION
Danielle Gunn, Agricultural Extension Educator
University of Idaho Extension, Fort Hall Reservation
Pima Dr. Building 7
PO Box 306
Fort Hall, ID 83203
Phone: 208.236.1046
Fax: 208.238.8018
E-mail: dgunn@uidaho.edu

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