

November 2013

AZ Tribal Connection

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Important Dates to Remember

December 9-13, 2013

Intertribal Agricultural Council
2013 Membership Meeting
Flamingo Las Vegas

January 21-23, 2014

Southwest Indian
Agriculture Association
2014 Annual Conference
Harrah's Ak Chin Resort & Casino

Reminder!

NRCS accepts applications for all
programs on a continuous basis.

Contact your local NRCS field
office www.az.nrcs.usda.gov or
Tribal Liaison for more info.

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State Conservationist Update

A message from Keisha Tatem

Greetings my friends in Indian Country! We have just finished our fiscal year and looking back on some of the great work you are doing out on the landscape to protect Mother Earth. We are delighted to be your partner and provide technical support on many of the conservation projects taking place on Tribal land in Arizona.

We are also pleased to be one of the States selected for the Secretary's StrikeForce Initiative. As you will learn in this newsletter, this initiative is designed to address poverty in rural communities. This year, NRCS here in Arizona was able to obligate an additional \$1,040,614 to implement conservation measures in these communities.

As this year ends and a new year begins, we are working with Tribes and Tribal Conservation Districts to identify the conservation priorities to be addressed both on a short-term and long-term basis. I encourage everyone to get involved by attending the Local Work Group meetings held by your local conservation



district. This is where the conservation district solicits local input on conservation needs. The NRCS then approves projects for funding according to the priorities identified by the Local Work Group.

We look forward to a new year filled with opportunity to address the conservation needs on Tribal lands.

Keisha Tatem—State Conservationist

Local Food and Rural Arizona: USDA and You

By Dennis Chandler, NRCS Outreach Coordinator/Tribal Liaison

On June 25th the Orangewood Church in Phoenix and the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) hosted eight USDA agencies (Agricultural Marketing Service [AMS], Food and Nutrition Service [FNS], Farm Service Agency [FSA], Food Safety and Inspection Service [FSIS], Natural Resources Conservation Service [NRCS], Risk Management Agency [RMA], Rural Development [RD]), and Cooperative Extension to explain programs and funding opportunities to 105 participants who came from throughout Arizona.

StrikeForce is a USDA initiative that began in 2011 to address poverty in rural communities through collaboration to leverage resources to address local needs. Over 90% of the nation's poverty is located in rural communities. StrikeForce is currently functioning in 16 states. Arizona is one of the designated states.

Deputy Assistant Secretary of Agriculture for Civil Rights Lisa Pino, initiated the idea for a StrikeForce event in Arizona involving a diverse group of small vegetable growers, small business owners, farmers market managers, Tribal members, local elected officials, and several action groups who are involved with providing food to the hungry in Arizona. The staff of the Orangewood Church and LULAC are to be commended for hosting and supporting the day's event. They were a huge part in making the event successful. Several staff members of the USDA agencies organized and facilitated the all-day event. Five breakout sessions were offered. The five sessions dealt with:



The large gathering of people received information about how USDA programs could benefit their endeavors to raise and distribute Arizona grown food to feed Arizonans.

- 1) Production** - Programs to address or enhance production of farm and ranch commodities;
- 2) Marketing and Distribution** - Processing, farmers markets, distribution channel research, feasibility studies;
- 3) Food Safety/Food Security/Nutrition and Health** - Regulatory oversight, nutrition education, reducing hunger;
- 4) Housing/Community and Economic Development** - Multi-family housing, renewable energy, business development, infrastructure, broadband; and
- 5) USDA 101** - Broad overview on how, in a collaborative way, USDA agencies and programs address issues in rural America.

The breakout sessions were well attended. Participants met with USDA staff in groups of 15-25. They were informed about programs, technical assistance, funding opportunities and other resources to help address needs to assist the underserved in Arizona. Participants asked thought provoking questions that made even experienced USDA presenters ponder and think; this dialog led to more discussion between the participants and presenters between breaks and lunch.

At the conclusion of the breakout session, everyone gathered for a wrap-up discussion. Ms. Pino asked the group for feedback on the event. Several participants expressed how beneficial the presentations were and that now they have resources and contact information to go to. The event generated lots of enthusiasm and collaboration. Several participants voiced that they wanted to meet again in the near future to keep the momentum going. Local grassroots efforts are underway to keep fellow participants engaged.

Reforestation Efforts on a Scarred Tribal Landscape

By Beverly Moseley, NRCS Public Affairs Specialist



Daniel Kessay, with the White Mountain Apache Tribe's forestry department, and Jan Pertruzzi, with NRCS in Whiteriver, review plans for ponderosa pine tree plantings.

From the top of Limestone Ridge, 6,000 feet up, the scars of a massive wildfire on Arizona's White Mountain Apache Reservation in east central Arizona are still visible. As far as the eye can see are bare mountain ranges where century-old ponderosa pines once stood.

A decade ago, the Rodeo-Chediski fire burned more than 270,000 acres and an estimated 80 million trees, leaving behind few pine trees to help seed the beginnings of a new forest.

"There is no seed source out here for the tree to establish again, so one of the main things that we are doing is helping Mother Nature along by artificially getting trees out here," says Daniel Keesay, field operations manager for the White Mountain Apache Tribe forestry department.

The department and the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) are working together to restore native ponderosa pines to a portion of the reservation's scarred landscape. Experts estimate it could take planting 750,000 trees over 20 years to completely reforest the burned areas to historic levels. Tackling a reforestation project of this scope is expensive, time consuming, and labor intensive.

To start the restoration process, the Tribe has received financial assistance through the USDA's national StrikeForce Initiative for Rural Growth and Opportunity to plant 168 acres of ponderosa pine seedlings on Limestone Ridge.

The national initiative addresses high-priority funding and technical assistance needs in rural communities in 16 states, including Arizona, with a special emphasis on persistent poverty communities.

The White Mountain Apache Tribe project will not only help re-establish some of the Tribe's commercial timber sources and ensure pine forest for generations to come, but also provide needed habitat for wildlife.

"These taxpayer dollars are being very well spent," says Jan Pertruzzi, the NRCS district conservationist who has been working closely with the Tribe on the restoration. "It's money being put on the land and the people are benefitting from it."



Mack Nosie, with the White Mountain Apache Tribe forestry department, uses a hoedad to dig a hole for a ponderosa pine seedling in the shade of a burned tree stump, which protects the seedling from windy conditions that dry the trees.

The Four Corners Regional StrikeForce Event

By Richard Begay, NRCS Tribal Liaison



USDA Deputy Under Secretary Butch Blazer making opening remarks at the regional StrikeForce event in Durango, CO.

StrikeForce is a U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) initiative targeting “underserved” communities in several parts of the country. Arizona was designated to participate as a StrikeForce state last year, and Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) teamed up with sister agencies Rural Development and Farm Service Agency to ensure local producers, and communities are informed about the USDA programs. In an event to publicize and promote the StrikeForce Initiative, the San Juan National Forest hosted the Four Corners StrikeForce roundtable in Durango, Colorado on May 1, 2013. Curtis Elke, acting Arizona state conservationist (STC), and Richard M. Begay, Tribal liaison, attended the event.

Representatives from many USDA agencies, local Tribal members, and the general public were in attendance. The Navajo Nation was well represented. A few of the Shiprock Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) board members were also in attendance. USDA officials from Washington, D.C. kicked off the event. Deputy Under Secretary (DUS) for Natural Resources and Environment Butch Blazer, White House Senior Policy Advisor for Native American Affairs Jodi Gillette, and USDA StrikeForce Coordinator Max Finberg, made opening remarks before local USDA agencies made their presentations. Mr. Elke was able to provide an

update on StrikeForce activities in Arizona, especially on Tribal lands. Barry Hamilton, assistant state conservationist-field operations (ASTC-FO), Price, Utah, and Xavier Montoya, state conservationist, Albuquerque, NM, also gave brief presentations about their work with Tribes and other communities. USDA is committed to improving communities, removing barriers to accessing USDA programs, and streamlining and improving program delivery.

StrikeForce also encourages partnerships with local public and private organizations. The Washington, D.C. delegation visited Diné College in Shiprock, NM where they made brief presentations on how USDA can partner with Tribal Colleges, and with Tribes. Diné College President Maggie George was on hand to provide opening remarks and to welcome the USDA officials. Diné College is a land grant college and has received USDA assistance and is dedicated to working with USDA to improve its facilities and the services it offers to its students.

Arizona NRCS is working hard to improve the social and economic situations in communities across the state. For more information on USDA’s StrikeForce Initiative, please visit: http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usda/usdahome?navid=STRIKE_FORCE



Curtis Elke, acting AZ STC (middle), Barry Hamilton, UT ASTC-FO (right), consider options with Emma Charley, Shiprock SWCD member (left), on how to better serve Tribal communities.

Soil Health Workshops Held in Arizona

By Valentino Reyes, NRCS Public Affairs Specialist Intern



When you dig a little, you'll learn a lot about the health of your soil. That is exactly what scientists, farmers, ranchers, Tribal members, and federal and state employees found out by attending one of three soil health workshops held in early September throughout Arizona. The day-long workshop, presented by Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) experts, focused on the fundamentals of soil ecology and how to build soil health on farms and ranches.

With a strong turnout at all three AZ workshops, Ray Archuleta, NRCS agronomist, engaged producers and showed them first-hand, what can come from treating your land like a "chemistry kit." Ray compared how conventional-tilled and no-till soil react to water using a series of tests; demonstrating that a "living soil" can survive the harsh conditions that producers in the desert encounter.

"It's not just a growing medium" says Ray, "we have to remember, it's a living ecosystem." He went on to explain how several producers have been able to significantly cut back and even completely cut out inputs into their farming practices with the help of bio-mimicry which is copying nature and providing the soil with a wide variety of plants to feed, cover, and protect it.

"It's a very interesting and compelling message," said Zebb Shappell, a Mesa farmer who attended the Maricopa Soil Health Workshop. He explained later that he has land that he cannot irrigate and would benefit a lot if he could use the principles of soil health management to help cover that land with a cover crop mix that could survive off limited moisture from the winter and keep the hot winds from blowing soil into his irrigated land. The other two workshops were held in Willcox and Flagstaff.

If you were unable to attend one of the Soil Health Workshops, the NRCS can still show you how to unlock the secrets in your soil. The NRCS soil health initiative will introduce you to producers who use soil health management to make their farms more profitable, productive, and sustainable. The website also contains learning resources designed to help visitors understand the basics and benefits of soil health. For more information on the soil health initiative visit www.az.nrcs.usda.gov.

Zebb Shappell (left) and Lyle Shappell (middle) participate in Ray's (right) soil demonstrations.



Apache Youth Grows Food for His Community

By Beverly Moseley, NRCS Public Affairs Specialist

An Apache youth, Noah Titla, 13, has chosen to follow in the footsteps of generations of San Carlos Apaches by growing and harvesting his own food. His passion for reconnecting growing food with Tribal traditions has been a catalyst for increasing awareness of the benefits and availability of fresh food on the San Carlos Apache Indian Reservation in southeastern Arizona.

Through his hard work at the San Carlos 4-H Garden Club's community garden, Noah is making a difference in a state included in the USDA's StrikeForce Initiative for Rural Growth and Opportunity. The initiative addresses high-priority funding and technical assistance needs in rural communities in 16 states, including Arizona, with a special emphasis on historically underserved communities and producers in areas with persistent poverty, like the San Carlos Apache Reservation.



Millie Titla, NRCS district conservationist (left) in San Carlos, Noah Titla, San Carlos 4-H Garden Club member (center), and Sabrina Tuttle, University of Arizona Cooperative Extension Tribal extension program agent (right), inspect the garden's hose, which is used for drip irrigation.

"I didn't know that such a small community could grow such a good amount of crops," Noah says about his club's community garden. Club members share the harvested food with their friends and families.

Besides all the hard work club members put into keeping it going, the community garden is thriving thanks in part to the



Millie Titla, NRCS district conservationist in San Carlos, and her nephew Noah Titla work at the San Carlos 4-H Garden Club's community garden.

StrikeForce Initiative and resulting partnerships between USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service, National Institute of Food and Agriculture and Rural Development, as well as University of Arizona Cooperative Extension and local community members.

Noah's aunt, Millie Titla, NRCS district conservationist in San Carlos, teaches youth working in the garden about the importance of soil and water conservation practices. She also provides heirloom Apache squash, corn and watermelon seeds, which she grows behind the NRCS field office in San Carlos.

"Millie is my mentor. She really helped me out a lot with this and with my community fellow Apache members," Noah says.

"Gardening has been a part of the Apache culture for thousands of years, and we've lost the traditional way of gardening throughout the century," the elder Titla says. "I wanted to bring this back to the community so they could appreciate what gardens are about and what gardens can provide for their families."

Hopi Conservation District Gathers Good Crowd for Local Work Group meeting



Local producers, along with federal and state employees participated at the Hopi Conservation District's Local Work Group meeting.

-Photo courtesy of Bonnie Secakuku

Due to the hard work and persistent efforts of Bonnie Secakuku, Hopi Conservation District (HCD) secretary, fifteen individuals came out for the HCD's Local Work Group (LWG) meeting on August 21, 2013. The District Board President Harold Joseph announced, "The meeting is open for local farmers, agencies, and Tribal officials to give input to Hopi's natural resources concerns that are used to prioritize funding for various USDA programs."

With representation from Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), the Hopi Tribal Council, HCD, Tribal departments, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), cooperative extension, youth groups, and local farmers and ranchers a thoughtful and interactive process began that concluded with forty-six resource concerns being listed on the Hopi Reservation. Ms. Secakuku, district board secretary, facilitated the natural resources concerns portion of the meeting. Because of the varied interest of those attending, the resource concerns listed really represented the whole Hopi Tribe.

Following lunch hosted by the Sipaulovi Economic Corporation, the group reconvened and continued the discussion of resource concerns. The group identified which of the parties among the Tribal Council, Tribal departments, or the HCD has the appropriate responsibility to address that specific concern. NRCS representatives, Keisha Tatem, state conservationist, and Ray Dotson, assistant state

By Dennis Chandler, NRCS Outreach Coordinator/Tribal Liaison

conservationist-field office operations, added great value to the meeting at this point. The group concluded the LWG meeting with the identification of four priority resource concerns to address in 2014.

After the conclusion of the Local Work Group meeting, George Mase, member of the Hopi Tribal Council, invited Keisha to return and assist the group as they plan to discuss some of the remaining resource concerns with Tribal Council members, department personnel and conservation district members to select some resource concerns to be addressed next year. A November meeting is being planned.

Individuals who attended the Local Work Group meeting included: Harold Joseph and Bonnie Secakuku from HCD; Wendell Honanie, Hopi agency BIA superintendent; George Mase, member of the Hopi Tribal Council; Garth Poocha, employee of the Hopi Tribe, Office of Range Management, and Matt Livingston, extension agent at University of Arizona Cooperative Extension; Tribal members Gill Harrison Sr., Ned Lomawaima, Darrel Navasie and Jeannette Sahneych; and youth group leader Julian Fred.

In addition to Mrs. Tatem and Mr. Dotson, representatives from NRCS were Dan Carroll, district conservationist, and Dennis Chandler, outreach coordinator/Tribal liaison.