

NATIVE WOMEN & YOUTH IN AGRICULTURE



Who we are:

In 2004, the United States Department of Agriculture Cooperative State Research Extension and Education Service provided initial funding of a proposal designed by Janie Simms Hipp to begin creating a new Native Women in Agriculture network throughout Indian Country. Her proposal to USDA reflected the reality that as “women in agriculture” needs and organizations had begun emerging throughout the United States and internationally, the needs of Native women involved in agriculture and in small business pursuits hinged to rural communities needed addressing as a separate and distinct, as well as culturally significant, population group and that to expect non-native organizations to address the needs of Native women was inappropriate and would more than likely fail. USDA CSREES ranked the proposal first in its national competitive pool

and provided an initial \$200,000.00 in federal funding to begin the network. That funding will expire in mid-2006.

Almost immediately upon funding by CSREES, Hipp, who is Chickasaw, contacted Vicki LeBeaux who is Cheyenne River Sioux and who has been serving as Program Director for the Intertribal Agriculture Council (IAC) and enlisted her assistance in establishing the network and furthering the creation of NWIA as a nonprofit organization. The organization resonated immediately in Indian Country due to the critical role that Native Women have traditionally, historically and culturally played not only within their families and in leadership roles within Tribes, but particularly in agriculture and food systems.

It should be noted from the outset: there is no other organization of this breadth or depth within Indian Country focused on agriculture and natural resources and Native Women. This is truly a unique body within Indian Country and as such has had immediate resonance with Native American women throughout North America.

From an initial meeting of a small steering committee in Tulsa, Oklahoma in Spring 2004 emerged a vision for a much larger organization. The steering committee immediately identified the absolute necessity to not only focus on the needs of Native Women but to simultaneously focus on the need to encourage and promote agricultural and natural resource related pursuits among

Native Youth who are critical players in the future agricultural activities that will occur in Indian Country.

Realizing a vehicle to capture attention was necessary, the NWIA organization immediately advertised a “Youth Writing Competition” around the subject: “*Native Women in Agriculture: Past, Present and Future*” and received writing entries from Native youth from a multitude of Tribes. Five finalists were chosen from the entries and those individuals and their chaperones were sponsored in their attendance by Winrock, International to attend the annual meeting of the Intertribal Agriculture Council (IAC) in Hollywood, Florida in November 2004. This early support by Winrock proved critical in the long-term focus for the organization.

The larger IAC organization also embraced and promoted the NWIA group in 2004 and recognized immediately the need to continue a focus on Native Youth as a critical activity of the organization. NWIA already has a committed alliance with IAC due to their shared focus on agricultural issues and sustainability. IAC recognizes the necessity for more intense effort beyond their work that would focus specifically on the needs of Native Women and youth. What began as support for the Native Youth activities by Winrock has also blossomed into more comprehensive support for the organization and its goals.

Goals:

The NWIA organization's steering committee was thereafter expanded to twice its initial size and the group met in Albuquerque in March 2005 to provide guidance to the overall creation efforts by identifying a vision and mission for the group. The expanded steering committee identified the following mission and vision of NWIA:

Native Women in Agriculture Mission:

To provide a network and forum for Native Women in Agriculture.

Native Women in Agriculture Vision:

As Native Women of the Earth, who are educators, nurturers and conductors of cultural unity for future generations; we will address agricultural issues relating to education, food systems, viability, preservation of cultural identification and understanding.

The Steering Committee determined that NWIA as an organization should continue this dual focus – Native Women and Native Youth – and through these efforts enhance the future of Native Agriculture. To that end, a second annual writing competition was scheduled with subject matter for the 2005 competition being: “*Healthy Lands and Healthy People: How Are They Connected*”. Advertisement of the second youth writing competition has occurred and winners from the 2005 competition are joining the joint annual meetings of the Intertribal Agriculture Council and Indian Nations Conservation Alliance to occur in Nevada in December 2005.

The Steering Committee has determined that its Native Youth efforts should be expanded to create a Native Agriculture Youth Ambassadors Program from the writing competition finalists which will encompass a mentor relationship between the annual finalists and selected Native Women mentors involved with NWIA overall activities.

The long-term goal will be to continuing coalescing these activities into a comprehensive intertribal Native Youth program, encompassing a mentoring aspect, an ambassadorial aspect, an entrepreneurial component and be regionally based throughout the year but ultimately bring the identified Native Youth Ambassadors into an annual national intertribal educational programming effort. The Ambassadors program will begin in 2006. Separate funding streams will be established for these types of activities. The Steering Committee has also identified a three-year goal of conducting a Native Youth 4-H Summit in Washington DC by 2008-2009. Fundraising and plans for that effort will begin in 2006 for this nationwide, intertribal event.

CONTACT:

Vicki Le Beaux, President & Co-Founder

PO Box 428

Eagle Butte, SD 57625

605.964.4342

vlebeaux@indianaglink.com