

2017 Eastern Oklahoma and Southern Plains
Native Youth in Food & Agriculture Summit
Hosted at the Chickasaw Retreat & Conference Center - Sulphur, OK
Report by the Intertribal Agriculture Council

The 2017 Eastern Oklahoma & Southern Plains Native Youth in Food & Agriculture Summit was hosted at the Chickasaw Retreat & Conference Center near Sulphur, Oklahoma, November 17th – 19th, 2017. Sponsorship from the Intertribal Agriculture Council, Choctaw Nation, and the Chickasaw Nation brought together representation of nine tribal nations from across the regions to explore agricultural development initiatives as a community development tool.



The 15 youth in attendance (pictured above) were able to explore the Chickasaw Cultural Center and learn of their Horticulture Department's commitment to preserving native plants throughout their landscaping. This three day event served as a first of its kind to take place in the Eastern Oklahoma and Southern Plains region.

One activity exposed youth to natural resource concerns. In a group project, the youth collaborated to outline conservation practices which will improve the sustainability of agriculture operations surrounding their communities. Beginning an operation of their own became more feasible as youth reviewed potential funding opportunities; each completing a Farm Service Agency Youth Loan Application with IAC Technical Assistant, Steven Bond (*Chickasaw*). To prepare youth for their visit to an FSA office, IAC Youth Programs Intern and past Oklahoma Ag-Credit Loan Officer, Zachary Ilbery (*Cherokee*) presented them with tips to a successful loan interview.

Youth participating in the Eastern Oklahoma and Southern Plains Native Youth in Food & Agriculture Summit learned of local, dynamic operations, like Better Together Farms. This brother and sister duo shared how their mission behind a small scale farming operation is to change how the nation views food production. Tribal initiatives highlighted included the Chickasaw Farmer Promotion Program, which has successfully connected community members with their food sources.

To close the conference, Cindy Farlee (*Lakota Sioux*) emphasized that success in Indian Country happens one step at a time. Farlee shared her unexpected journey in pursuing Indian Agriculture as a career, and how the IAC has been supportive as a solid pillar to her success. The current Haskell Indian Nations University student highlighted the importance of seeking opportunity; the first step to many which these outstanding young leaders will take as they return home to forever improve their communities.

