

Tailoring Programs to Cultural Needs

Extension work on the San Carlos Apache Indian Reservation

By Joanne Littlefield



Leader Anna Cadue shows San Carlos 4-H members sewing techniques.

Understanding the needs of community members in the areas in which they work is essential for extension agents. Each Native American community has its own cultural traditions and beliefs that make up the details of daily life — some similar, some uniquely different. When Sabrina Tuttle began her work on the San Carlos Apache reservation in east-central Arizona with the Extension Indian Reservation Program (EIRP), she learned that the best way to find out what mattered most to people was by getting out into the community and talking to them.

Her informal needs assessments, followed by formal assessments,

helped her to establish rapport with tribal members by asking them what they wanted from extension programs, rather than imposing ideas on them.

“I did so in a manner acceptable to Native Americans, that is, focusing on listening instead of suggesting,” she says. “Through talking with people and observing the community as well as reading about Apache culture, I began to achieve an understanding of the community.” Tuttle’s assignment on the San Carlos reservation includes animal science, range management, agricultural financial management, and nutrition and cooking education for both youth and adult groups. Her research into community issues also

Spring 2005 Issue Highlights

- 5 — E-Library in Kabul
- 8 — Navajo Extension Partnership
- 10 — Historic Herring Hall
- 12 — MAC Farm Ag-Ventures
- 14 — Race Track Industry Program Grads

has led to a better understanding of the ongoing water rights legal issues that affect tribal farm operations.

Youth Programs

A cultural emphasis on the San Carlos Apache tradition of the four geographic directions and the colors associated with them — yellow from the east, white from the south, blue or green from the west and black from the north — is the basis for a new set of 4-H Youth Development record books. Tribal 4-H club members construct not only their projects, but the descriptions of them and their accomplishments based on the way the activities fit into the various directions. Tuttle chose the model with advice from a newly formed 4-H leaders council consisting of tribal members.

“The records on 4-H activities, financial records, photos and story are placed in the four areas for the four directions, and the recordbook will be displayed on poster board or as a mobile, rather than in a book form,” Tuttle says. “The San Carlos Apache leaders council approved the final design. The elements of the record book meet the Gila County Fair 4-H record book requirements, but in a different format.” The result, Tuttle says, is that young people on the reservation are able to learn about their traditional culture while continuing to be a part of the larger 4-H world.

Continued on page 3

When Tuttle began, there were only four active 4-H members and one leader for the existing “Apache Pride” 4-H steer club. Tuttle developed and circulated an interest survey among potential 4-H’ers. Results indicated a high interest in arts and crafts, particularly those that reflect the traditional Apache culture, as well as animal projects.

“The apparent need was to recruit more leaders and 4-H members,” Tuttle notes, “but a somewhat hidden need, as expressed by 4-H leaders and youth, was to develop more autonomy for the San Carlos 4-H programs and to encourage stronger leadership and collaboration among leaders specific to the cultural needs of the San Carlos Apache Tribe.” Another goal was to promote a better relationship with Gila County 4-H, because geographic and cultural barriers exist between the two programs.

This survey information aided in the formation of new clubs and cooperation with other tribal agencies such as Boys and Girls Club and Diabetes Prevention to provide programs with a focus on arts and crafts, archaeology, archery, gardening, cooking and nutrition, and horses. San Carlos Apache Tribe Extension provides programs in the communities of San Carlos in Gila County and Bylas in Graham County.

Because horses are an integral part of life for many on the San Carlos reservation, a session called “A Horse of Course: an introduction to 4-H,” was well-attended at a youth conference held at the local junior high school. During the past two summers, Tuttle also conducted workshops at the Point of Pines Natural Resources Youth Practicum on the reservation — one on beef cattle management, another on basic horseback riding, and a third focusing on academic opportunities within the School of Natural Resources in the UA College of Agriculture and Life Sciences.

Adult Programs: Animal Science Education

The R-100 cattle ranch has been in operation on the San Carlos reservation since the 1930s. Involvement with UA researchers had been limited since 1999 due not only to the retirement of UA Animal Sciences faculty most involved in the program, but also as a result of tribal politics.

When personnel from the R-100 ranch requested aid from Tuttle on a restocking plan as part of BIA approval for the purchase of cows and bulls with water rights monies, she and other UA faculty met with the board to begin formulating the restocking plan. Additional training was also conducted in record keeping and pregnancy testing of cattle, along with financial analysis to aid in developing the plan. A prior plan developed by Tribal Administrations had formerly been rejected by the BIA. The BIA approved the current plan in 2004, and the R100 ranch began restocking their herd in early 2005.

A West Nile virus horse vaccination campaign resulted in a change in local practice — more horses were vacci-

nated — that most likely saved the San Carlos Tribe from considerable economic and social loss. Horses are not only used for ranch work and rodeo, but are highly esteemed by the tribe — a good ranch or rodeo horse is worth \$3000 or more.

The communications campaign included newspaper articles, along with broadcast public service announcements and public presentations about the causes of the disease and the need to vaccinate horses. Although not every single horse was vaccinated, no West Nile cases were reported in horses in San Carlos, despite the fact that several cases were found in surrounding areas of Gila and Graham counties.

To answer another need, Tuttle also helped plan and implement a free spay-neuter clinic for cats and dogs in the community. The idea was to treat as many of the numerous stray cats and dogs on the reservation as possible, along with the domestic pets of families who could not afford to take their family pets to the veterinarian. During the three-day clinic sponsored by the Humane Society, 375 cats and dogs were spayed/neutered and vaccinated.

By treating such a large number of animals, the community hopes the incidence of animal and human/animal transferable diseases will decrease on the reservation. With fewer stray animals in the area, families should have healthier pets, and people with limited resources may be able to take better care of the animals they have.

The bottom line in conducting these programs is better communication with clientele, according to Tuttle.

“Tribal members who became re-familiarized with extension programs expressed their needs,” she says. “They became active participants involved in planning events and formulating management plans, rather than being mere recipients of pre-planned programs with little consultation.” ❖



Sabrina Tuttle

San Carlos cattle board members and ranch personnel learn and practice horseshoeing skills at a workshop held at the R-100 ranch.