



INDIAN COUNTRY AGRICULTURE & FOOD SYSTEMS

KEY POINTS & TAKEAWAYS:

- Agriculture and food systems work is growing in Indian Country, where Native farmers and ranchers operate over 60,000 farms and ranches. The National Census of Agriculture has seen a steady increase in the number of Native producers counted in the Ag Census since 2007.
- Native producers still face unique legal and financial barriers to realizing the full value of their agricultural products in the marketplace.
- Programs within the U.S. Department of Agriculture are not always accessible or appropriate for all food systems work, leaving gaps in food systems and health equity work. Funders can be a significant source of support in these areas.



Across Indian Country, thousands of Native farms and farmers are growing fresh fruits and vegetables, raising animals, bringing back traditional foods using ancestral seeds, restoring intertribal trade routes, and revitalizing indigenous foodways. Numerous examples of this work from Tribal communities across the country can be found within the asset map directory, which offers glimpses into specific programs, projects, and

initiatives improving food systems and increasing health equity throughout Indian Country. This brief document outlines some national data around Native agriculture and food systems and the growth this sector has been experiencing over the past twenty years.

American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) producers grow, raise, harvest, and produce



DESPITE THIS SIGNIFICANT, GROWING INVESTMENT IN AGRICULTURE IN TRIBES ACROSS INDIAN COUNTRY, THERE ARE STILL CHALLENGES, AND WITH THEM, OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE PHILANTHROPIC COMMUNITY TO HELP SUPPORT INDIGENOUS-LED SOLUTIONS TO THOSE CHALLENGES.

approximately \$3.5 billion in raw agricultural products every year on 60,083 farms and ranches. The National Census of Agriculture, which is conducted every five years by the National Agricultural Statistics Service inside U.S. Department of Agriculture, has seen a continued increase in counts of AI/AN producers, farms, land in farms, and market value of agricultural products since the 2007 Agriculture Census, which tracks with the growing investment in agriculture across Indian Country that grassroots organizations and food systems advocates are seeing in Tribal communities. These increases come at a time when farming overall is experiencing a significant lack of growth, while for AI/AN producers, the opposite is true: between 2012 and 2017, there was a 7% increase in the number of farms counted with an AI/AN producer, while nationally this number declined by 3%. In other areas, the growth of AI/AN operations was even more significant. The counted number of sheep and goat farms in Indian Country increased by 34% between the 2012 and 2017 Ag Censuses; fruit and tree nut farming increased 24%; beef cattle ranching increased by 20% as well as greenhouses, nurseries, and floriculture farming.

Despite this significant, growing investment in agriculture in Tribes across Indian Country, there are still challenges, and with them, opportunities for the philanthropic community to help support

Indigenous-led solutions to those challenges. Native producers still receive less support from farm payment programs than their white counterparts, and with many Tribal communities located in extremely remote areas, access to larger markets that can sustain the economic viability of an agricultural operation is difficult. Legal complexities regarding Indian lands also complicate matters, especially in securing loan funds to start and finance agricultural operations. Tribal farmers and ranchers attempting to farm on fractionated land bases face unique challenges and barriers in terms of using these lands as collateral for lending, and Native farmers and ranchers operating on trust land frequently find conventional banking systems to be unprepared or unwilling to lend them funds.

Thanks to support from the Native Farm Bill Coalition and its over 170 member Tribes, the 2018 Farm Bill included 63 Tribal-specific provisions that can begin to address some funding disparities through federal programs, but there is still work to be done in the implementation of those provisions to ensure that Tribes can meaningfully access them-- and there will always be community-driven work in Tribal communities that cannot be sustained or supported with federal funds, making support from the philanthropic community a continued important resource.