

impact

University of Idaho Extension programs that are making a difference in Idaho.

UI Extension in Fort Hall provides producer access to coronavirus livestock programs

AT A GLANCE

Fort Hall's Extension educator assisted tribal producers with the Coronavirus Food Assistance programs to help tribal producers survive the volatile livestock markets created by COVID-19.

The Situation

It takes several steps to get safe, healthy, wholesome food from a farmer and/or rancher to your plate every day. The United States food system is comprised of several complex components. Farms, ranches, feedlots, packers, processors, millers, transporters, warehouses and others are involved in food production before reaching you by way of grocery stores, schools, restaurants, hotels and hospitals. The majority of our food is processed in some manner except for eggs and milk. This intricate system is very efficient but does not allow for much flexibility. If one of these components breaks down or experiences a severe crisis, the system cannot readily adapt to meet new needs.

As COVID-19 affected where and how we obtained, prepared and consumed our food, we experienced a shortage of many food products. This is because 1) extra food inventories typically cannot be maintained; and 2) food cannot be rerouted quickly to other food-based sectors because of different supply chains and a change in demand. Because food storage facilities were at capacity, livestock had to be euthanized and milk was dumped. There was no space to store these products. Further, animals must be harvested at a certain stage of growth to fit harvest machinery and



Krissy Broncho and Carol Osborne-Cervantes, tribal producers, discuss how CFAP helped their ranches survive COVID.

market demands. If animals become too large, they cannot be utilized. Meat processing also declined because of quarantines at processing plants and employee demands for safer working conditions. These factors resulted in decreased food supplies.

As the COVID-19 pandemic continued to hit our nation and plagued states with shutdowns and sluggish economies, producers struggled to make ends meet. This was due to price declines, supply issues and increased livestock feed costs. In addition, some sectors of livestock markets experienced decreased demand in high value cuts of meat as restaurants were forced to close their doors and social gatherings became very limited. As restaurants closed, people began purchasing more food from grocery stores to prepare at home. These

changes affected the food supply chain dramatically. This shift resulted in increased spending at grocery stores, with higher demand and less supply equating to increased prices.

Producers typically earn a mere \$.11 from every dollar consumers spend on food in this complex system. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) estimated producers were losing 5% or more of this income to COVID-19 related market issues. To summarize, producers had to absorb livestock and crop sale declines as well as increased marketing costs of their products. Native American producers were hit particularly hard because of limited marketing options on reservations.

Our Response

To address this problem, Fort Hall's Extension educator learned about and participated in a webinar series regarding a USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) program released in 2020. The program was referred to as the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program (CFAP 1) to assist producers who suffered a 5% or greater price decline for livestock and specified crops as a result of COVID-19.

Following the webinars, the educator collaborated with two local county FSA offices so she could assist tribal producers with applications directly from the Fort Hall Reservation. In addition, one local office provided additional training to the educator on how to complete the required forms and application. The educator was then able to complete the process for all tribal producers. This action provided improved access for tribal producers to USDA FSA programs they do not typically utilize.

As the pandemic spread and producers continued to experience price declines, USDA FSA released the CFAP 2 program. The educator was again able to receive training from local FSA staff to assist producers with the application process.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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Program Outcomes

The generous support of the local FSA offices provided improved access for tribal member producers, so they were able to utilize these programs for their operations. The collaboration helped these producers survive the livestock market storm COVID-19 caused.

Approximately 30 tribal producers were able to apply and receive assistance from the CFAP 1. Approximately 30 producers applied and received assistance from the CFAP 2. Producers utilized the funding to pay for ranch-related bills, grazing fees, feed bills and ranch improvements.

Interviews with tribal producers demonstrated the tremendous impact of these collaborative efforts and the programs. One producer stated, "we were locked down and short on feed for our cattle. These programs helped pay for additional feed and assisted with grazing permit fees. I was able to replace worn out equipment tires and upgraded equipment as well as perform badly needed equipment maintenance. The program indirectly and directly helped with ranch bills. It helped us manage the effects of the pandemic."

The Future

Fort Hall's Extension educator hopes to continue a collaborative working relationship with the local FSA offices and producers. This collaboration helps tribal producers access programs and services they otherwise would not participate in. Having improved access to USDA programs is critical for tribal producers as they look to expand and improve the sustainability of their ranches.

Cooperators and Co-Sponsors

- Bingham and Bannock FSA offices
- Shoshone-Bannock tribal producers