

Weed, Water and Soil Conference

*By Boyd Kitchen
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We organized and held a “Weed, Water and Soil Conference” targeted for Native American farmers. In September, I visited with members of the Ute Tribe Farm Board to discuss their request to hold a conference for tribal agricultural producers. They asked for education on weeds, soil fertility and irrigation. I was already involved with two committees in the planning of separate weed and water conferences for the general public. I proposed to the planning committees that we add an additional one-day conference specifically targeted to Native Americans and proposed that it be held on the Reservation. The committees agreed to meet with the tribe about the conference. The committee planned the conference with representation from Tribal members involved.



We held the conference on January 19, 2005 at the Ute Tribe Education building in Ft. Duchesne. Of the 53 participants, 39 were Native American producers. The agenda included identification and control of the noxious weeds of particular concern on the Reservation, West Nile Virus, water management and soil moisture, soil fertility, drought or flood, and federal assistance programs. Steve Dewey, Boyd Kitchen as well as local USDA agencies and a local veterinarian made presentations. Evaluations were completed by 18 participants who stayed until the end. They rated the overall quality of the workshop 4.4/5 and all said they would like to see the conference held again next year. Some of the comments were “The conference was very helpful to me”; “Time was well spent”; “Good food”; “We need more conferences for minority groups”; “Learned more than expected”.

I enjoyed working with the Native Americans who advised us in the planning stages. I also enjoyed interacting with those who attended. The conference was good in that it reached producers who had not attended similar programs offered in the past. Steve Burningham, Utah Dept. of Ag. and Food observed the conference and complimented us in holding a successful conference.

The following things were essential to make it work:

1. The Tribal Farm board requested the conference. I had been discussing educational programs regularly with members of the board for than a year before they made this request.
2. Tribal representatives participated in the planning.
3. The conference was held at the Tribal Education department.
4. The Tribal Public Relations department advertised in the Ute Bulletin and on the weekly radio program (which is given in English and Ute) as well as in local newspapers.
5. We kept the program flexible, adjusting presentations to the interests and needs of the participants.

6. Incentives for attending included prizes, weed books and lunch.

The advice I would give to others who plan to do something like this is do not be a slave to the clock. My experience has been that Native Americans can be offended by White America's obsession to keep tight schedules.