

Federally-Recognized Tribes Extension Program
2008 HIGHLIGHTS

FRTEP UNIT: Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians
Cherokee, North Carolina

PROGRAM AREA Agriculture, Horticulture, Nutrition, Culture & Heritage

PROGRAM TITLE: EBCI Tribal Farming Program

ISSUE(S) ADDRESSED:

The Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians (EBCI) own approximately 600 acres of farm land, located on 4 different properties, in the rugged mountains of Western North Carolina. The Tribe lacks the infrastructure to farm or fully maintain these lands. Additionally two of the farm properties are culturally and historically significant sites.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION:

The EBCI Tribal Farming Program was established to address the maintenance of these properties as well as create farming and gardening opportunities for enrolled members. Land is leased through a formal process coordinated by the Agricultural Extension Agent. The Tribal Business Committee grants leases to those who agree to help maintain the land by mowing, keeping it clear of trash, planting crops and cover crops.

The tribal farmlands are managed to allow many different types of use. Coordinating the activities on the farm properties is often necessary – recreation, education, farming and cultural events, ideally work in cooperation with one another. In order to be informed of the activities, the Agent represents tribal farming interests on the Cultural and Historic Properties Committee and the Revitalization for Traditional Artisan Resources Advisory Board.

The Agent also partners with tribal departments - such the tribal Historic Properties Office, Natural Resources and Environmental Planning & the Kituwah Language Program and several grant-funded agencies - whenever possible to improve the farmlands and increase their usefulness to Cherokee people.

PROGRAM IMPACTS:

More than 100 Cherokee people participate in farming and gardening through the Tribal Farming Program. Typical crops include vegetable gardens, hay, corn, and pumpkins. The crops produced are used primarily for family subsistence, pleasure horses and livestock. Cherokee farmers appreciate the access to prime, flat, space for raising crops. In turn the

farmers provide maintenance saving the tribe at least \$30,000 each year in mowing and weed management.

Seven of the farmers participate as vendors in the twice weekly Cherokee Farmers Market. One of these also has a roadside stand during off-market days. The average income is approximately \$200 in sales per vendor for each market day.

By working to manage the tribal farm lands for multi-use groups, several diverse activities are hosted: educational field trips, a model airplane club, paintball events, joggers & walkers, hunting dog training, birding, dog obedience training and cultural events. Current field research projects include wildlife habitat improvement, quail re-establishment, cover crop demonstrations, purple martin colonial nesting demonstration, invasive weed control, heirloom crop production, white oak growth study, and butternut / river cane habitat expansion. Research projects provide new knowledge that is used to improve the land and the natural resources for the Cherokee People.

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This (relatively) flat hay land is a valuable resource for Cherokee farmers in Western North Carolina.