

WTCAC Director discusses Boots on the Ground Native youth program

By Danielle Plainfeather



This past March, I attended the Wisconsin Tribal Conservation Advisory Council's Industrial Hemp and Farm Bill training at the Ho-Chunk Hotel and Casino in Baraboo, Wisconsin. I took the opportunity to catch up with Alan Johnson, Executive Director of WTCAC and ask him about his "Boots On the Ground" Native youth program. The interview is as follows:

Me: Could you explain your concept for Boots On the Ground for Native American youth?

AJ: We've done a lot of discussion at the board level and also in our plannings. And, one of the true facets of need for the tribes here in Wisconsin is Boots On the Ground. They need more help. We had originated an internship program years ago and right now we are also hiring technical support. Resource conservationists and several are in engineering. But, the apprenticeship program seems to fit in between those two. And, Boots On the Ground, realizing a basic approach of

apprenticeship- individuals who will do some work on the farm in agriculture or natural resources will learn. And, if they combine that learning and mentorship that they receive from their supervisor in something called experiential learning, they will become stronger people, great apprentices, and potentially individuals who are leading people into obtaining another job within the tribe or perhaps within an enlisting agency.

Me: How do you see this program enhancing the ability of our youth in conservation?

AJ: Youth who already have an interest can utilize the apprenticeship program to enhance their knowledge and to enhance their skills so that they can indeed obtain a job for the future.

Me: What is your vision for our youth for the future?

AJ: Our programs are called “Investing In the Future.” WTCAC believes that through the investment that we make with our youth, in this case in Wisconsin, that tribal natural resources projects will be enhanced and completed. We look to our youth. They are our future.

Me: Thank you for sharing that. Please tell us about your organization’s work experience with the USDA.

AJ: WTCAC became a not-for-profit organization in 2001. Individuals put together this council in relation to the 1995 Farm Bill which first mentioned Native American tribes. Through this beginning we have worked very hard. Our greatest strength has been, and is, our board of directors. All of our board members are members of Wisconsin tribes. Through a body of different projects, memorandums of understanding, cooperative agreements...we’ve done a lot of different projects and programs. And, again, our mission...WTCAC’s mission...is to provide opportunities for Wisconsin tribes to fulfill their natural resources projects. And, that’s still our vision and that’s what we’re all about.

Me: If you have one thing that USDA could improve in the future what would that be?

AJ: I would highly recommend tribal members to be part of any type of review committee. Funding review committee. Through APHIS PPQ, there are suggestions. Through other USDA agencies, there’s different projects and programs. They’re all review. But, while they may be well written and understandable, there is still information in there that is still poignant to tribes. And, we are hoping that there would be members on those review committees who would be able to interpret and understand and perhaps define for other members of that committee tribal use.

If you would like to learn more about Boots On the Ground please contact WTCAC: www.wtcac.org



Spring into gardening! As well as learning about Soil Health. The NRCS Website provides an array of information that will lead you onto a path of knowledge and understanding about growing healthy plants. Happy Gardening!

Healthy Soil for Life

www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/soils/health

Soil health, also referred to as soil quality, is defined as the continued capacity of soil to function as a vital living ecosystem that sustains plants, animals, and humans. This definition speaks to the importance of managing soils so they are sustainable for future generations. To do this, we need to remember that soil contains living organisms that when provided the basic necessities of life - food, shelter, and water - perform functions required to produce food and fiber.

Only "living" things can have health, so viewing soil as a living ecosystem reflects a fundamental shift in the way we care for our nation's soils. Soil isn't an inert growing medium, but rather is teeming with billions of bacteria, fungi, and other microbes that are the foundation of an elegant symbiotic ecosystem. Soil is an ecosystem that can be managed to provide nutrients for plant growth, absorb and hold rainwater for use during dryer periods, filter and buffer potential pollutants from leaving our fields, serve as a firm foundation for agricultural activities, and provide habitat for soil microbes to flourish and diversify to keep the ecosystem running smoothly.

Learn more about how **Soil Biology** plays a major role in soil health.



What Soil Does

Healthy soil gives us clean air and water, bountiful crops and forests, productive grazing lands, diverse wildlife, and beautiful

landscapes. Soil does all this by performing five essential functions:

- Regulating water - Soil helps control where rain, snowmelt, and irrigation water goes. Water and dissolved solutes flow over the land or into and through the soil.
- Sustaining plant and animal life - The diversity and productivity of living things depends on soil.
- Filtering and buffering potential pollutants - The minerals and microbes in soil are responsible for filtering, buffering, degrading, immobilizing, and detoxifying organic and inorganic materials, including industrial and municipal by-products and atmospheric deposits.
- Cycling nutrients - Carbon, nitrogen, phosphorus, and many other nutrients are stored, transformed, and cycled in the soil.
- Physical stability and support - Soil structure provides a medium for plant roots. Soils also provide support for human structures and protection for archeological treasures.

Inherent and Dynamic Properties of Soil

Soil has both inherent and dynamic properties, or qualities. Inherent soil quality is a soil's natural ability to function. For example, sandy soil drains faster than clayey soil. Deep soil has more room for roots than soils with bedrock near the surface. These characteristics do not change easily.

Dynamic soil quality is how soil changes depending on how it is managed. Management choices affect the amount of soil organic matter, soil structure, soil depth, and water and nutrient holding capacity. One goal of soil health research is to learn how to manage soil in a way that improves soil function. Soils respond differently to management depending on the inherent properties of the soil and the surrounding landscape.

Understanding soil health means assessing and managing soil so that it functions optimally now and is not degraded for future use. By monitoring changes in soil health, a land manager can determine if a set of practices is sustainable. See [Soil Health Assessment](#) and [Soil Health Management](#) principles for soil health for more information.

Welcome to our new INCA team members!



Charitina Fritzler

Charitina Fritzler has ten years' experience of managing a nonprofit organization. She is a member of the Crow Tribe in Montana. Charitina received a BS in Business Administration from Montana State University in Bozeman, Montana. Her experience includes significant work for non-profit organizations as well as student financial aid and grants administration at a tribal college. Her primary focus will be to assist INCA in fulfilling its governance function, assisting in the fulfillment of the optimum interaction between management, personnel, consultants/contractors, the board of directors and INCA's generous benefactors. She is grateful to serve within an organization committed to the recognition and development of the unique potential of each employee and how it allows the opportunity to increase her awareness of community, social, environmental, and economic needs and her role in effectively

helping to meet those needs.

Randall Black Eagle

My name is Randall Black Eagle. I am an enrolled member of the Crow Tribe. For the past five years, I have been living on the Rocky Boy Indian Reservation where my wife resides.

I have thirteen years of fire experience and have been working in forestry for the Chippewa Cree Tribal Natural Resources Department for the past three years as the ARC Map technician.

My love of the field is what draws me to this profession. I have just finished with a degree from Stone Child College in Natural Resources and the opportunity to work with "at risk youth" strikes close to home for me as a product of the reservation environment. Today, I rely upon the ceremonial teachings of my cultural heritage and incorporate those teachings into my professional life. I am proud to be a part of the



INCA team and look forward to working towards a brighter future for tribal youth.



Bill Dunn

Bill Dunn is a wildlife and landscape ecologist with 40 years of experience in natural resource management.

His education includes:

- Bachelor of Science in Wildlife Biology from the University of Montana;
- Master of Science in Biology from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas where he studied the impact of feral burros on native desert bighorn sheep;
- Doctor of Philosophy in Landscape Ecology from the University of New Mexico where he studied the impact of energy development on sensitive wildlife species.

Highlights of his professional career include:

- 16 years with the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish where he worked to restore bighorn sheep and the Lesser Prairie Chicken. As part of these efforts, he pioneered the use of Geographic Information Systems in modeling wildlife habitat. He also wrote the first species management plans for the department.
- 10 years as an environmental consultant where he did biological evaluations and environmental analyses for the Navajo Tribal Utility Authority and the Southern Ute Nation; studied the potential to capture atmospheric carbon with vegetation in highway rights-of-ways to help solve climate change; analyzed how range conditions change with climate; and wrote an agriculture resource management plan for the Western Navajo Agency.

Bill is looking forward to helping tribes in the Southwest form Tribal Conservation Districts and use the available resources to improve the health of their lands and the lives of their people.

Food security is not in the supermarket. It's not in the government. It's not at the emergency services division. True food security is the historical normalcy of packing it in during the abundant times, building that in-house larder, and resting easy

knowing that our little ones are not dependent on next week's farmers' market or the electronic cashiers at the supermarket. ~Joel Salatin

APHIS Seeks Public Comment on Transition to RFID Official Identification Tags

Last Modified: Jul 2, 2020

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) is seeking public comment on a proposal where APHIS would only approve Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) as the official eartag for use in interstate movement of cattle that are required to be identified by the traceability regulations.

An official eartag is defined as an identification tag approved by APHIS that bears an official identification number for individual animals. Regulations allow APHIS to approve tags that can be used as official identification, and both metal and RFID tags are current options.

A transition to RFID tags would support APHIS' ongoing efforts to increase animal disease traceability by more accurately and rapidly allowing animal health officials to know where affected and at-risk animals are located. While this would not prevent disease outbreaks, it would allow animal health officials to more quickly contain outbreaks early before they can do substantial damage to the U.S. cattle industry.

APHIS is also seeking comment on a proposed timeline for implementation, which the agency would use if this transition occurs. The timeline would make RFID tags the only option for use in cattle and bison requiring official identification on January 1, 2023. APHIS would "grandfather in" animals that have metal tags already in place on that date – their metal tags would serve as official identification for the remainder of their lifespan.

This transition timeline would not alter the existing regulations. The cattle and bison that must be identified will not change, nor will the option for animal health officials in shipping and receiving states to agree to accept alternate forms of identification, including brands and tattoos, in lieu of official identification.

Public comments will be accepted through October 5, 2020 at the following site: <https://www.federalregister.gov/d/2020-14463>. After reviewing all comments, APHIS will publish

a follow up Federal Register notice. This notice will respond to any such comments, announce our decision whether to only approve RFID tags as the only official identification devices for cattle, and, if so, provide the timeline for such a transition.

Bulletin Board/Announcements

Consultation Webinars

USDA Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR) Consultation

Subject: Farm Bill Self-Governance Demonstration Project

Date: July 15, 2020

Time: 2:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m. Eastern Time

Conference Line: 877-692-8954

Conference Passcode: 1065181

Agricultural Marketing Service Listening Session

Date: July 16, 2020

Time: 3:00 p.m. Eastern Time

Toll Free: 1-877-226-8216

Access Code: 9893702

Topics:

- Research and Promotion Board Openings
- Coronavirus Food Assistance Program (CFAP) payments to growers
- Hemp updates

Grant/Loan Opportunities

[Supplemental Nutrition Assistant Program Employment & Training \(SNAP E&T\)](#)

[National Partnership Grants](#) – *Application Deadline: July 22, 2020*

The Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) intends to make available approximately \$5 million to support grants to non-profit national organizations with broad member or affiliate networks that provide direct workforce development services to low-income and low-skilled individuals, including SNAP participants. Grant funds will be used to support new organizational capacity to provide to network members or affiliates training and other technical assistance so that network members or affiliates may become third-party SNAP E&T providers.

[Monitoring Soil Health Impacts of Conservation Reserve Program \(CRP\) - Application](#)

Deadline: July 28, 2020

The Farm Production and Conservation Service (FPAC) is announcing the availability of cooperative agreement funding to collect and analyze soil health data from at least 200 sites on Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)-enrolled land reflecting a diversity of conditions for at least 3 years and to quantify the relationship between soil health and cover and practice management characteristics.

[Environmental Quality Incentives Program \(EQIP\) Boots on the Ground Assistance –](#)

Application Deadline: July 31, 2020

NRCS in the South Carolina State Office is seeking proposals from partners to provide “Boots on the Ground” assistance with the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). This assistance includes, administrative management of active contracts, assistance with conservation practice implementation (design, layout, surveying and practice certification) and updating conservation plans and maps.

[Rural Cooperative Development Grant – Application Deadline: August 3, 2020](#)

The primary objective of the RCDG program is to improve the economic condition of rural areas by assisting individuals or entities in the startup, expansion or operational improvement of rural cooperatives and other business entities.

[Socially Disadvantaged Groups Grant – Application Deadline: August 10, 2020](#)

The Rural Business-Cooperative Service announces the availability of \$3,000,000 in competitive grant funds for the FY 2020 Socially-Disadvantaged Groups Grant (SDGG) program. The purpose of this program is to provide technical assistance to Socially Disadvantaged Groups in rural areas including feasibility studies, business plans, strategic planning, and leadership

training. This program supports Rural Development's (RD) mission of improving the quality of life for rural Americans and commitment to directing resources to those who most need them.

[Agriculture and Food Research Initiative \(AFRI\) – Education and Workforce Development \(EWD\)](#) – *Application Deadline: September 25, 2020*

This program focuses on developing the next generation of research, education, and extension professionals in the food and agricultural sciences. EWD invites applications in five areas: professional development for agricultural literacy; training of undergraduate students in research and extension; fellowships for predoctoral candidates; fellowships for postdoctoral scholars, and a brand-new program for agricultural workforce training.

[Renewable Energy Systems and Energy Efficiency Improvements](#) – *Application Deadline: September 30, 2020*

The Rural Energy for America Program (REAP) will provide funds to agricultural producers and rural small businesses to install renewable energy systems and energy efficiency improvements.

An Open Letter from BIPOC Leaders in Food & Agriculture to Food Systems Funders

July 10, 2020

Dear Food Systems Funders,

We write to you as Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color (BIPOC) leaders in food and agriculture who work with hundreds of grassroots communities across the country who have been at and on the frontlines of food and agriculture justice work.

You've articulated your commitment to equity and to racial healing and we appreciate that. Now, it's time to put words into action, and put your money where your mouth is.

We are deeply concerned by two recent incidents. We find 1) the recent Rockefeller, W.K. Kellogg (WKKF) and Walmart Foundation RFP on “Assessing the Impacts of COVID-19 Responses across the Food System” and 2) the WKKF-funded \$200,000 grant to NCAT, a large, white-led, majority-white organization to do a “scan” of needs among BIPOC producers to be offensive and unacceptable. As the world is faced with the unprecedented impacts of recent events, we invite you to see the urgency to unite and build together rather than continuing a pattern of paternalistic practices that entrench our marginalization, reinforce a culture of white supremacy, and devalue the knowledge and genius in our communities. And while many foundations around the country are having conversations and making moves to directly fund BIPOC-led groups to support their communities, it is high time for food systems funders to do the same.

Below, we outline steps that your foundations can take to ensure more just ways of giving, and ensure greater impact.

We are all faced with the reality that the current systems and institutions that exist are woefully unprepared to protect the most vulnerable in our country. The COVID pandemic has highlighted how our nation’s food system is hugely negligent, demonstrating the inextricable link and intersectionality of food, environment, health, economic downturn and racial injustice.

It has always been the case that Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and other immigrant groups of color have been fighting for food systems and agricultural practices that are ecological and equitable — many indigenous groups have sustained these practices despite genocide and colonization; Black folks have been fighting for their liberation from oppressive food systems for centuries; Japanese and Mexican workers organized a beet boycott to win worker protections in 1903. Our history is rich. And in this moment, we are on the frontlines of food and agriculture justice work in BIPOC communities and sharing these perspectives with the field. We have been leading on response/recovery efforts. National efforts like First Nations Development Institute’s [COVID-19 Emergency Response Fund](#) were joined by regional and local efforts like Soul Fire Farm, SAAFON and Soil Generation coming together to distribute funds to food producers and land stewards. Collaborative initiatives like the [CA BIPOC Farmer and Land Steward Relief Fund](#) and the National Black Food and Justice Alliance’s [Reparations Summer](#) are providing support to land projects while building systems of integrated capital to flow to BIPOC farmer communities. Groups like Federation of Southern Cooperatives and First Nations Development Institute have been doing this work for decades, and they have been joined by other BIPOC-led groups in the last 10 years including HEAL, National Black Food and Justice Alliance, Minnow, Real Food Generation, Food Chain Workers Alliance, and many, many more.

BIPOC communities on the frontline continue to organize, inform the narrative and incite food, land and environmental policy changes where we live.

All of these organizations have responded swiftly and clearly in their calls for policy change. For example, HEAL Food Alliance and Food Chain Workers Alliance are organizing food and farm workers, uplifting their stories to the media, and [advocating for worker protections](#) in the face of the COVID-19 crisis. HEAL recently 1) co-wrote [Leveling the Fields](#) with Union of Concerned Scientists on opportunities in BIPOC communities, and 2) hosted a series of policy webinars uplifting the needs of workers and producers directly from leaders of Black Mesa Water Coalition, Soil Generation, La Semilla Center, the Diné graduates of their School of Political Leadership, and Pioneer Valley Workers

Center, Farmworker Association of Florida, and ROC-United. The alliance has drafted their [list of COVID-19 policy needs](#) that is grounded in [a detailed platform co-created by over fifty organizations](#).

Despite this collective body of work by BIPOC-led organizations, your foundations are continuing a harmful and dangerous pattern. Over the years, it has become a common practice of foundations to resource white-led organizations to do service work in BIPOC communities, or to fund a white-led organization with an established funder relationship to subgrant to an under-resourced BIPOC-led organization. BIPOC organizations are asked to partner for bottom dollar while the white led groups get the majority of resources. This is unacceptable.

There are many examples across the nation of foundations who have worked together to create more just ways of giving: Chorus, Surdna, Mertz, Nathan Cummings, Solutions, Solidaire, Ceres Trust, Hidden Leaf, to name a few. **We ask that foundations take bold steps to stop the moving train and move in concert with BIPOC-led orgs doing work in BIPOC communities.** Below we propose concrete ways these injustices can be rectified:

- 1) **Cancel Rockefeller / WKKF / Walmart foundation’s COVID-19 assessment RFP and reallocate the funds to BIPOC-led alliances & coalitions to support the COVID response work of their grassroots members who have already been doing the work on the ground, to help reinforce their efforts.**
- 2) **WKKF Foundation restructuring or rescinding the grant to NCAT for the national “scan” and repurposing it to fund the important work BIPOC-led orgs are doing on the ground, and compensating BIPOC-led orgs to provide the information that WKKF is seeking.**
- 3) **Come together with the BIPOC food justice leaders signed onto this letter to create a Food Systems [Funders Circle](#) that is committed to multi-year, expansive process of funding the ecosystem of our work and honors the intersections of racial injustice with health, environment, food, and the economy.**

We don’t need another study to know what actions would be impactful and our communities don’t have time for one. *We can literally tell you right now what is needed for workers, for BIPOC farmers, and in our communities.* But while we play this game of informing other folks’ processes, we’re watching our communities’ heightened exposure to COVID-19 result in premature deaths from comorbidities (most of which are diet-related), and we are already part of mutual aid response systems that are enacting solutions for communities in need. Meanwhile, many of our organizations are understaffed for the scale of work needed in this moment, and in most cases, staff are undercompensated for the tremendous amount of work that they do — with the very communities these white-led organizations are seeking to access.

The time is now to do things differently.

Even though we know BIPOC communities and poor people have been the hardest hit by the pandemic, the BIPOC-led organizations who signed on to this letter and who are from, and work within and with the hardest hit communities did not receive the Rockefeller / W.K. Kellogg / Walmart RFP directly. In fact, a program officer expressed surprise that we even saw it. And, to add insult to

injury, many of us have been asked by white-led organizations to help advise their processes of informing a COVID-19 response for food systems. We've been asked to facilitate, to broker relationships, to be the ones that help ensure that these processes are "equitable."

Furthermore, while we understand the urgency of this moment, the Rockefeller / WKKF / Walmart RFP demanded more time and capacity than most BIPOC-led organizations have right now as we are doing the work on the ground in hard hit communities. For example, a coalition of respected indigenous-led groups working in food and ag asked for more time to respond to the RFP, but were denied. But you can't do this work without us and the relationships that we have built without acknowledging the realities that our work is grounded in.

This incident mentioned above is just the latest flare up of an issue that has plagued the practices of way too many foundations for way too long. And enough is enough. The calls for change have been clear from philanthropic leaders like [Dimple Abichandani](#) of General Service Foundation; [Farhad Ebrahimi](#) of Chorus Foundation; [A-dae Romero-Briones](#) at First Nations Development Institute; [Vanessa Daniel](#) of Groundswell Fund; [Lori Villarosa](#) at Philanthropic Initiative for Racial Equity; [Rodney Foxworth](#) at Common Future; [Dana Kawaoka-Chen](#) at Justice Funders; [Sidney Hargro](#) at Philanthropy Network Greater Philadelphia; and many more. It is time for philanthropy to step up and really center racial equity and justice and BIPOC communities in your practices.

In addition to the specific remedies above, we have included some other ways that foundations can support food justice and address symptoms of a much larger problem.

In the big picture, we ask that foundations move from extractive to regenerative practices, including:

- 1) Cultivate authentic partnership with BIPOC communities by acknowledging the work of BIPOC-led orgs in these communities and listening to what they see on the ground and what their needs are;*
- 2) Stop crafting RFP processes that are not equitable for and accessible for BIPOC-led orgs, and instead craft grantmaking strategies informed by community needs and shaped by BIPOC-led organizations accountable to frontline communities;*
- 3) Stop funding larger, more well resourced white-led orgs that put together proposals for work in communities of color;*
- 4) Examine your own funding trends;*
- 5) Invest in unrestricted multi-year grants and move towards using a participatory grantmaking model with BIPOC-led orgs from and doing work in BIPOC communities; and*
- 6) Use the [Justice Funders' "Just Transition for Philanthropy" framework](#) and consult with Justice Funders and/or their members to support you on your journey.*

We urge you to meet this moment with the grace, clarity, and fortitude that we are seeing on the ground — to reimagine grantmaking in ways that we have seen justice-based funders like Surdna’s Sustainable Environment team, Solidaire Network, Kataly Foundation, Panta Rhea, Groundswell, and Urgent Action Fund do — and allow us to spend our time investing in the real work.

And, we invite you into a conversation with us to start this work.

Signed,

A-dae Romero-Briones & Raymond Foxworth for First Nations Development Institute

Navina Khanna for HEAL (Health, Environment, Agriculture, Labor) Food Alliance

Anthony Chang for Kitchen Table Advisors

Randolph Carr for National Black Food and Justice Alliance

Patricia Carrillo for Agriculture Land-Based Association (ALBA)

Helga Garza for Agri-cultura Network

Shakara Tyler for Black Dirt Farm Collective

Stephanie Morningstar for NEFOC (Northeast Farmers of Color Land Trust)

Mark Winston Griffith for Brooklyn Movement Center

Sonia Singh & Suzanne Adely for Food Chain Workers Alliance

Krysten Aguilar & Cristina Dominguez for La Semilla Food Center

Mai Nguyen & Neil Thapar for Minnow

Edna Rodriguez for RAFI-USA (Rural Advancement Foundation-International)

Anim Steel for Real Food Generation

Phillip & Dorothy Barker for Operation Spring Plant

Kirtrina Baxter for Soil Generation

Leah Penniman for Soul Fire Farm