

GHWIC Success Story

Fort Peck Community College: Fort Peck Tribes Buffalo Program

"For centuries, buffalo were highly regarded within the Tribes' community, serving as keystone figures in ceremonies, traditions and spirituality within the Tribes' cultures. To members, the buffalo were also imperative for survival, serving as a significant source of clothing, food and shelter. No part of the buffalo was ever wasted-the hide and bones were used to make shelters, clothing, everyday items and for ceremonies, while the meat was used for nourishment. The return of the buffalo to the Tribes' lands after their extermination from those lands in the late 1800's offers members the opportunity to once again utilize those invaluable animals to support healthy minds, bodies and spirits."

-EXCERPT FROM FORT PECK'S BUFFALO INFOGRAPHICS

In an effort to support food sovereignty, Fort Peck Community College (FPCC) conducted research to improve Tribal members' access to local buffalo herds as a food source.

In the second year of the GHWIC program, the FPCC GHWIC team partnered with the Fort Peck Tribes' Buffalo Program expert and tribal elder via the "Gather" Food Sovereignty Grant project funded by the First Nations Development Institute. Activities to research improved access to local buffalo herds included:



1. Soliciting in-kind advice and guidance from the Fort Peck Pté Group, a grassroots organization devoted to upholding the InterTribal Buffalo Treaty (www.buffalotreaty.com) on the Fort Peck Reservation
2. Consolidating 10 years of the Fort Peck Tribes Buffalo Program data on meat sales, annual buffalo hunt participation, community taste preferences, and knowledge of buffalo herds to assemble a 14-page educational booklet of infographics to raise community awareness.
3. Visiting and interviewing local meat processors to survey their interest and feasibility of processing the Tribes' buffalo meat on a regular basis.
4. Identified limitations to partnering with local meat processing plants:
 - 4a. Business and tribal members' meat processing dollars were leaving the Reservation's economy
 - 4b. Regional federally- or state-inspected facilities did not possess heavy-duty equipment needed to process bison
 - 4c. No regional bison meat processors possessed inspection standards & certifications required for meat re-sale
 - 4d. High demand of meat processing, low supply of processors/butchers
5. Producing a "Cost & Operations Analysis Report for Building a Modular Meat Processing Unit on the Fort Peck Indian Reservation", a research-based report that detailed the operational steps, start-up costs, and maintenance costs for the Fort Peck Tribes to build and operate their own meat processing plant.
6. Presenting and giving this Cost & Operations Analysis Report to the Fort Peck Tribal Council for use how they see fit.



86.9% of surveyed Fort Peck Tribal Members “agreed/strongly agreed” that buffalo should be used for healthful benefits.

Of 70 people surveyed, 71% responded that they would either try or switch loyalties to a local meat processing facility on the reservation if one was available (24% indicated “it depends”, and only 4% claimed to be loyal to their current processor).

Thus, we were able to identify an interest amongst the community to participate in a local, tribally-run meat processing plant.

Due to the limitations identified to partnering with an already-established meat processing facility, and the indications that tribal members would be open to the development of a local facility on the reservation, our GHWIC project focused our efforts in the second half of Year 3 on developing, writing, and presenting a business plan proposal for the Tribes to build a local, tribally-run meat processing plant. This report was titled, “Cost & Operations Analysis Report for Building a Modular Meat Processing Unit on the Fort Peck Indian Reservation”. What emerged from our research was the most in-depth analysis of the efforts required to build a meat processing facility on the Fort Peck Indian Reservation than had been produced to-date. A local, tribally-run plant had been a dream of the Fort Peck Fish & Game Department for many years, as a vision toward greater sovereignty and improved services for tribal members.

Upon completion of this report at the end of February 2022, our project team presented our findings and the business plan proposal to the Fort Peck Tribal Council Members, the Tribal Chairman, and the Tribes’ Fish & Game Department Director. We left the report in their hands. Two weeks later, it was announced that a resolution was passed by the Fort Peck Tribes to actively seek infrastructure grant funding to assist breaking ground on the project we proposed, an estimated \$2.1M undertaking.

