



## Local foods classes growers seminar in Kyle



JANUARY 13, 2013 4:00 AM • [MARY GARRIGAN](#)  
JOURNAL STAFF

The Pine Ridge Reservation has plenty of land and good, reliable water sources, but not enough gardens or gardeners, say proponents of local foods and sustainability there.

In an effort to change that, the Gathering of Gardeners classes — as well as a series of how-to workshops aimed at local food entrepreneurs — will begin this month in Pine Ridge Reservation communities. The classes are part of a growing movement

toward sustainability, self-sufficiency and access to healthy foods on the reservation, according to Steve Hernandez.

"There's really been a big movement towards this on the reservation," said Hernandez, who runs the Lakota Ranch Beginning Farmer/Rancher program. The Lakota Ranch program is designed to nurture the operation of small, self-sustaining agriculture projects — whether those are farms, ranches or farmers markets — that bring stable economic development and prosperity to the reservation.

"Being sovereign is also about being able to feed ourselves. The need is so great, and the reservation is so huge. We want to be able to get out there and be talking about gardening in as many places as we can."

Interest in promoting local, sustainable food sources is increasing all across the state, and residents of the Pine Ridge Reservation are no different, said Chris Zdorovtsov, an Extension specialist.

South Dakota State University Extension will offer a series of free workshops for anyone interested in marketing locally grown and processed food on Jan. 15, 22, 29 and Feb. 5 at the Lakota Trade Center in Kyle. The sessions will include four classes running from 9 a.m. to noon each day. Those classes are aimed at people who want to direct market locally produced foods, or for producers interested in starting a farmers market.

"It's very important to get good food to places where there may not be easy access to healthier foods," Zdorovtsov said. "But it's also good for rural communities everywhere as an economic boost ... people selling a product that their fellow residents want to buy."

The Gathering of Gardeners classes are aimed at beginning gardeners, with presentations on types of gardens and answers to basic questions such as, "Why Should

I Garden?" The second class gives students the tools to create a garden plan, including the chance to schedule free garden tilling through the Rapid City office of National Relief Charities, one of the partners in a collaborative effort to promote gardening on the reservation.

Last year, 12 people graduated from the Gathering of Gardeners project, which started with classes in January and concluded with harvest, Hernandez said. This year, the two-night classes will expand to Oglala and Wanblee. "The eventual goal is to have active gardening communities all across the reservation," he said.

Kyle and Porcupine communities have active gardening clubs, as well as community garden plots. At the Oyate Teca Project youth center in Kyle last summer, a community garden plot was the main source of fresh garden produce for a small daily farmers market on site, as well as for a mobile market that traveled to other communities around the reservation.

"We set up at every district pow wow. We used a small bus that took us around the reservation and we set up a canopy and our tables. People just loved to see us come with our fresh vegetables," Hernandez said. "I see the need for farmers markets and fresh produce down here — to feed themselves and maybe have a little income from it, too. If it means a little money for them, or if it means having their own food, that's what we want to do."

In addition to the Extension Service, other organizations that are part of the conversation about local, sustainable food sources on Pine Ridge include National Relief Charities, Oglala Lakota College, Running Strong for American Indian Youth, the Oglala Sioux Tribe, Lakota Funds and Thunder Valley Community Development Corp. They have formed a collaborative partnership with tribal groups and interested individuals to promote gardening and farmers markets.

NRC has provided garden assistance on Pine Ridge for years, said spokesman Helen Oliff. Garden tilling and seeds are available to individuals and families. Community garden plots such as the one in Porcupine also get rakes, hoes and other garden tools. At the Kyle youth center, NRC provided funding for a greenhouse, canning station and farmers market costs.

"The upshot of this effort is that it is bringing more locally grown, fresh produce into the community, which is affordable, healthy and jointly grown by youth and elders. It is even creating an income stream for some folks," Oliff said.

At the Extension office in Kyle, community development associate Keith Ferguson said local food production is good for the health of both individuals and their communities. "From a reservation standpoint, the idea is to utilize their own land to save some money and, beyond that, to eat a lot healthier than anything they can get in the store," Ferguson said.

People have always gardened on the reservation, but in the past two years there has been more of a concerted effort to promote it, Ferguson said.

"There's been more of a united effort ... and organizations that were promoting gardening on their own said, 'We've got to come up with a set approach to this,' which is where the Gathering of Gardeners classes came from," he said.

In conjunction with the Extension classes on local foods entrepreneurship, the gardening education is part of the solution to improving access to healthy, locally grown foods on a reservation where fresh fruits and vegetables can be expensive and hard to find, proponents say.

"It is a movement," said Hernandez. "I'm just really happy to see that we're able to bring these classes to the reservation."

## Local foods classes

**Jan. 15:** Direct Sales Outlets & Marketing Your Product: Discussing direct marketing outlets for local foods, food product marketing strategies, online marketing and social media.

**Jan. 22:** Farmer's Market Start-up; Market start-up and selling tips, developing by-laws, regulatory agency overview, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) use and sales tax.

**Jan. 29:** Food Safety & Processing for Farmers Markets: Handling food safely; the home-processed food law; and canned, dried, frozen and baked goods for farmers market.

**Feb. 5:** Licensed Kitchens and Community Supported Agriculture: Opening a licensed kitchen, regulations, equipment, facility, food safety, Foodservice Manager Sanitation Certification, types of license and building a CSA business.

The training sessions are from 9 a.m. to noon and are sponsored by Lakota Funds, free of charge. To register, go to [www.igrow.org/events](http://www.igrow.org/events) or call Chris Zdorovtsov at 605-782-3290.

## Gathering of Gardeners

**What:** Gathering of Gardeners

**Where:** Kyle on Jan. 17 and Jan. 24; Porcupine on Jan. 31 and Feb. 7; Oglala on Feb. 21 and Feb. 28; and Wanblee on March 7 and March 14

**When:** 6 p.m. to 8 p.m., with meal