Overview
Over the last ten years the White Earth Tribal and Community College (WETCC) Extension Services has built an expertise in providing development opportunities for youth and families related to traditional uses of natural resources, particularly in the areas of naturalist training and in traditional foods and crafts. In this capacity we are an essential component of the outreach, community engagement, and recruiting efforts of the College as a whole. Our work also upholds the institutional guiding value of “carrying into the future the way that we were given.” The mission of the WETCC Extension Service is to serve as a bridge between the College and community by providing food, youth/family development, and natural resource-based programming rooted in the traditions and values of the Anishinaabeg. We have provided this in a wide variety of contexts: seasonal camps; evening and weekend workshops; conferences; and for local schools, youth organizations, Head Starts, and nonprofits. Our programming has concentrated heavily on work with youth up to age 12. In recent years we have added a focus on family-oriented activities. The approach has been to build relationships with the children through schools, youth centers and the like, then encourage them to bring parents and other family members. During the last Extension Grant cycle we have also added elder programming delivered at Senior Centers, Elder Housing and similar locations.

SWOT
The WETCC Extension Service is in a very strong position internally and externally. Tammy and Becca have developed a massive network of collaborators and partners around our core foci of:

- Developing food security around traditional and local foods.
- Supporting the local foods movement.
- Teaching traditional arts and crafts and supporting local artists/craftspeople.
- Youth development around the above themes through programming in schools, in after-schools settings like the Boys and Girls Club, and collaborative seasonal camps.

This list of collaborators in this effort includes the following:

- White Earth Land Recovery Project, Robert Shimek, Director.
- Community member and Cultural Advisor, Judy Fairbanks.
- White Earth Boys and Girls Club, Tim Reiplinger, Chief Professional Officer.
- White Earth Child Care, Barb Fabre, Program Director.
• Tamarac National Wildlife Refuge, Kelly Blackledge, Visitor Services Manager.
• University of MN, Northwest Regional Sustainable Development Partnership, Linda Kingery, Executive Director.
• Mahnomen School District, Ramona Miller, Principal.
• Waubun School District, Eric Martinez, Principal
• Mahnomen Head Start (MAHUBE-OTWA Community Action Partnership), Heather Lehmann, Lead Supervisor.
• Mahnomen Garden Club, Volunteer Group, JoAnn Kersting, President.
• Mahnomen Health Center, Jessica Bjerk, Marketing Representative
• Meeting of Minds (MOM’s) Group – A regional, intertribal group that meets monthly, acts as a support system for idea-sharing, and works collaborative on issues of common interest regarding youth development and food sovereignty. Examples of this include projects like: seasonal camps, healthy local food initiatives and other food system work. The Leech Lake and White Earth Reservations will continue to create seasonal camps together.

Key MOM’s participants include:

  o Shirley Nordrum, Leech Lake Tribal College
  o Simone Senogles, Indigenous Environmental Network
  o Jessica Saucedo, Rail River Folk School
  o Wendy Kvale, Minnesota Department of Health
  o Amanda Shongo, Statewide Health Improvement Program
  o Brandy Toft, Air Quality Specialist, Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe
  o LT Megan Arndt, REHS, Environmental Health Office, USPHS-Indian Health Service, Rhinelander District Office

This level of collaboration allows us to leverage our resources far beyond what we could do otherwise. It also assures that our planning and priorities are well grounded in the needs and interests of the community. Becca and Tammy meet at least quarterly and often monthly with all of these partners in the process of planning and delivering programming to our target audiences.

We are also highly regarded externally through our involvement with the USDA Program Staff, the First Americans Land Grant Consortium, the Northern Plains Sustainable Agriculture Society, University of Minnesota Extension, the US Geological Service, the American Geophysical Union, and others. Through these connections/collaborations we have been able to attract as much grant funding as we can realistically manage with our current staffing. These funds have been used for programming, research, and student internships.
In short, we have a clear mission; a strong, supportive, and talented staff; tremendous buy in both locally and across the country; and a proven track record.

In my opinion our primary weakness is the fact that our USDA funding levels have not even remotely kept up with inflation. As a result, we have had to take on more and more projects in order to provide adequate funding. These additional projects often scatter our efforts and result in a heavy overhead of grant management activities. There is considerable risk of staff burnout. Some of us are perennially in danger of losing vacation time.

An important opportunity that has developed this year has been an invitation to play a greater role in the Math and Science Summer School that has been held on White Earth for the last 15 years. This program has been primarily funded and organized by the University of Minnesota Extension. They recently lost their funding and have chosen to follow our lead and continue the program through a deeply collaborative model leveraging the resources of a number of organizations on the Reservation interested in education and youth development. WETCC will be the host site for the Summer School this year and that will be a tremendous recruiting and outreach opportunity for the College. Going forward we hope to continue to host the Summer School here and institutionalize it in this new collaborative framework.

Another opportunity is the potential of our community garden and the gardening outreach work we have been engaged in. Community interest in this work, especially the youth gardening, continues to grow dramatically. As the garden and fruit trees mature there will be numerous ways to provide food and learning to the community with these resources.

The primary threats were already mentioned above. The amount of work required by our various projects is much greater than our level of staffing should be expected to support. The need to constantly find new sources of funding to cover the shortfall of our shrinking USDA funds and the overhead associated with managing all these grants is significant. In addition, all of us are very engaged in other activities and roles on campus which put further demands on our time. In order to really capitalize on the opportunity presented by the community garden and the related projects we need to hire an additional staff person dedicated to that work, but have been unable to find a funding source large enough for that yet.

**Plans**

For the next three years Extension will be focused on achieving the outcomes of our 2014 Extension Capacity Grant proposal. These include:

- Coordinating, teaching, assessing, and improving programming in youth, leadership development, and health and nutrition.
- Identifying and providing support for a cohort of practitioners of traditional skills, crafts, and food ways to also teach the above forms of programming.
- Sponsor seasonal camps and other youth/family events along with our collaborators to offer similar programming.
• Provide regular youth forums to inform the above, as well as provide youth with opportunities taking on leadership roles.

This work will continue using the same collaborative model we developed over the years. We will be engaged with the same partners, but we will continue to seek and take advantage of new opportunities as they arise as long as they lead us towards the goals identified above and below.

In addition to that, for the next year we will also work to achieve the goals of our 2014 Extension Special Emphasis Grant proposal. The goals for this project are to:

• Design, coordinate, teach, assess, and improve programming gardening, culinary arts, and videography.

• Support local presenters and mentors to assist with gardening and traditional foods topics.

• Create a Food Asset Map for White Earth.

These activities are built around the same partners and collaborative model as discussed above and serve the same mission. It is simply another funding mechanism to support the work.

For the rest of this year we will be completing work on our seed saving research project also funded through the USDA. This project has the goals of:

• Surveying Native farmers, gardeners, and cultural leaders as to their concerns, goals, needs, and interest related to the preservation, propagation, and breeding of indigenous seed lines.

• Collecting & categorizing indigenous seed; document historic cultural information.

• Conducting grow-outs of indigenous seed, evaluate agronomic traits, and increase seed stocks.

• Building a network for participatory indigenous variety evaluation, improvement, distribution and protection under an “open source”, “shareware” seed distribution model.

This work is scheduled to be completed by September 1, 2015, but we plan to request a one-year no cost extension because we have struggled with the participation and buy-in of our required partners.

A final initiative over the next year will be to plan for and submit a new Special Emphasis Grant proposal early in 2016. Planning will begin this fall as we identify a new priority for focused and targeted work. At this time we have no plans to change or add to any of our foci identified at the beginning of this document, but, to some extent, the theme of the upcoming proposal will be influenced by the needs and opportunities that arise over the next six months.

Over the longer term, we will need to submit a new Extension Capacity proposal early in 2018. Once again, this project will probably focus on the same broad themes as our current work, but it is far too early to predict what the community needs and available opportunities may look like at that time. With that, food security and youth development are likely to remain significant needs on White Earth and both will undoubtedly still be priorities for the USDA. I think it is safe to assume that our future initiatives will continue to focus on these areas.