

Flathead Reservation

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Mission Mountains, by Crystal LittleOwl..

The Flathead Reservation MSU Extension Office (FREO), is a Federally Recognized Tribal Extension Program (FRTEP) working with the Confederated Salish, Pend d'Orielle, and Kootenai Tribes. With over 1.317 million acres, reaching into four counties, program faculty and staff work to bring research-based information to reservation communities. The office is 100% grant funded and offers opportunities in Positive Youth Development, Agriculture, Natural Resources, Food Nutrition, Security, and Safety. MSU FREO recognizes our community as the home of a Sovereign Nation. We understand the importance of honoring cultural values by offering opportunities that support CSKT traditions. Our quality programming is successful due to the collaboration between tribal partners and other local resources. To all of them we say a heart felt...

"Lemlmnts? - Hu suki?q?ukni - Thank you."

Claiming Food Sovereignty - One Chick at a Time

In 2020, more than 300 reservation youth participated, in person or virtually, in the Meat Poultry Project. The purpose of the program was to promote Food Sovereignty and Agriculture

education in elementary schools. At a time when field trips and other group activities were not available, the answer was to bring "Ag" to the classroom. The Flathead Reservation MSU Extension Office partnered with two elementary schools. PreK - first graders participated in Phase 1. During this phase, academic skills were supported through STEAM Ag activities while social development was encouraged through sharing and small group interactions. One unexpected outcome...as students took ownership of the project...attendance rates increased. One school shared that a youth recently lost his mother. After multiple attempts to reengage the family in school...there was still a zero-attendance rate. However, once the incubators arrived and the chicken project started...the student had not missed a day of school. This Ag in the Classroom project did what mainstream education could not. It encouraged a grieving family and child to return to school. Virtual engagement also increased as families learned from home. On hatching day, the 24/7 live feed camera went down. It was 9:30 pm and the school principal was receiving phone calls at home that families could not watch the hatching with their students. Staff raced back to the school and got the camera rolling again.

As summer arrived, Phase 2 began. This brought the chicks out to the Extension Agent's house to finish maturing.

At harvest, older elementary and high school youth were invited out to talk about where food comes from and the importance of growing and sustaining food resources. Youth who had never seen or touched a live chicken were given the opportunity to do so. Students discussed the process of raising meat poultry and worked with a trained butcher to harvest the chickens. Cultural practices included talking about traditional hunting/gathering and prayers thanking the chickens for their gift. One young man said, “Next year I am going to raise my own chickens and feed my own family.” According to tradition, as a first-time project, all 55 pounds of meat harvested was gifted to the Tribal Elders lunch program. Both schools have asked to repeat the project in 2021 and look forward to promoting additional Ag in the Classroom opportunities through MSU Extension.





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Montana State University Extension is an ADA/EO/AA Veteran's Preference Employer and provider of educational outreach.

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