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ROCKY MOUNTAIN GARDENING

Living in the HIGH COUNTRY WEST

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BEAN
FARM
& TABLE**
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WIND RIVER INDIAN RESERVATION GROWING RESILIENCE

Tim Thomas, U.S. military veteran and member of the Eastern Shoshone tribe, wanted to restore Indian corn to the Shoshone and Northern Arapaho communities now living in Wind River Indian Reservation, Wyoming. He turned to a local not-for-profit tribal organization, Blue Mountain Associates (BMA), which gave him a small grant to aid his search for heirloom seeds from other tribal communities in order to grow corn locally, and to then share seeds subsequently saved from that corn.

Tim and his wife, Kathleen, sold the corn they grew at the Tribal Farmers Market, along with other homegrown produce, homemade chokecherry syrup and salsas. The weekly market, founded in 2010 by Blue Mountain Associates in partnership with Wyoming Cooperative Extension and hosted for the last six years by BMA, travels to various locations on the reservation throughout the summer and early fall months.

The Thomases shared their seeds not only with local families, but well beyond. The grassroots organization, Feeding Laramie Valley, grows Indian corn from Thomas' seeds in their southeastern Wyoming production gardens. Through BMA's connections with a community food system action research project, Thomas' seeds made their way to an urban farmer in eastern New York who then grew Indian corn in Brooklyn. Closer to home, about 40 other families sought help from BMA



Photos courtesy of the Growing Resilience Team



Tim and Kathleen Thomas received a grant to research heirloom seeds, which helped them grow and distribute Indian corn at farmers' markets and other venues.

for returning to the gardening that they remembered from their parents' and grandparents' days, including growing corn from the seeds the Thomas family shared.

Dr. Virginia Sutter, founder and executive director of BMA, and her son, Jim Sutter, decided to expand their food system collaborations with Christine Porter, a public health professor at the University of Wyoming (UW), so that their organiza-



Families randomly selected for the project receive raised beds to help them get started.

tion could support more food gardening with more families in Wind River. As a result, the *Growing Resilience* project was conceived.

After two years of collaborative design and piloting, UW, BMA, Eastern Shoshone Tribal Health, Northern Arapaho Tribal Health, Wind River Development Fund, and a Community Advisory Board received a \$2.5 million grant from the National Institutes of Health. They

The Weed-Hurley family signed up for the Growing Resilience home food garden project and has everyone involved. Ina Weed-Hurley says they are excited, and it shows!

are now conducting a five-year randomized controlled trial on the health impacts of gardens with 100 Northern Arapaho and Eastern Shoshone families on the Wind River Reservation

The first wave of 18 families joined the project in 2016. Ten of those families were chosen through formal research randomization to receive a garden right away. With financial and technical support from BMA, all were successful in establishing new home food gardens. Ina Weed-Hurley, who signed her family up to participate in the project, reports that her family is very excited to be growing their own food, that she feels proud to be continuing the sustainable tradition of her mother and grandmother.

The remaining eight families from 2016 will receive gar-



dens after two years of health data collection, in the summer of 2018. The next wave of about 40 families are currently in the process of joining as partici-

pants, and about half will start new home food gardens this summer. Health measures being collected include body mass index (BMI), mental and physical

health survey data, and blood-based health indicators such as hemoglobin A1C (a measure of diabetes and diabetes control).

Colonization and decimation of traditional Native American food ways have meant that the people of Wind River Reservation suffer from enormous health disparities, with life expectancies 20 years shorter than the Wyoming average. However, the Growing Resilience project leverages tribal assets of land, family, culture, and community health organizations to develop and evaluate home food gardening as a way to enable families to take control over, and to improve, their health.

—Christine M. Porter and Darrah Perez, with contributions from additional members of the Growing Resilience Team

WYOMING CALENDAR

Casper Winter Farmers' Market

204 E. 2nd Street
Casper
10 a.m.-2 p.m.
2nd and 4th Sat. of the month
thru May
Hosted by the Wyoming Food For Thought Project.
www.casperfarmersmarket.com

Cheyenne Winter Farmers' Market

Cheyenne Historic Train Depot, Cheyenne
First Saturday of each month
through May
10 a.m.-2 p.m.
You'll find a bounty of locally raised grass-fed meats from beef, bison, lamb, and pork as well as other local foods.
cheyennewinterfarmersmarket@gmail.com

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