
INTER-TRIBAL BISON COOPERATIVE



Project Title:	Strengthening the Buffalo Nation
Award Amount:	\$573,277
Type of Grant:	Social and Economic Development Strategies
Project Period:	Sept. 2006 – Sept. 2008
Grantee Type:	Native Nonprofit

PROJECT SNAPSHOT

- 3 jobs created
- 1 business created
- 100 elders involved
- 250 youth involved
- \$98,365 in resources leveraged
- 7,837 individuals trained
- 92 partnerships formed

BACKGROUND

Established in 1990, the Inter-Tribal Bison Cooperative's (ITBC) mission is to restore bison to Indian lands in a manner compatible with spiritual and cultural beliefs and practices. Currently, there are 57 member tribes in the Cooperative. These are tribes that commit substantial resources to maintaining bison herds because of their deep belief in the sacred relationship between the bison and Indian people. Member tribes are scattered throughout the western and upper mid-central portions of the United States, including Alaska. Collectively, ITBC tribes have restored over 15,000 animals to tribal ranges since 1992. ITBC also facilitates the tribes in developing

basic bison products and marketing them to the national economy.

PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

The purpose of the project was to conduct a marketing campaign to increase knowledge about the bison industry and to develop and enhance subsistence activities that retain or reestablish native traditional foods and/or byproducts of natural resources for local and commercial markets.

The project's first objective was to develop 28 new partnerships with tribes and increase their awareness of the benefits of using bison products. The ITBC board picked eight new tribes to approach via site visits; however, there was so much interest amongst other tribes that the project staff organized regional meetings open to anyone. ITBC's service area includes five regions, each of which received a two-day training session during the first year. Project staff then conducted two site visits to each member over the course of the project. Training included information about the benefits of bison meat, how to conduct a marketing campaign, and herd and grassland management. Site visits involved meeting with the training participants, as well as connecting with the tribal diabetes

programs, wellness centers and community health centers to educate tribal employees. By conducting the regional meetings, ITBC was able to communicate and connect with tribes with which ITBC was unable to arrange site visits, as well as other non-member tribes, greatly increasing their membership base.

Project staff solidified 57 partnerships in the first year and 35 in the second. Staff members trained over 260 tribal members to become volunteer community education trainers and facilitators. Over 150 people participated in the regional meetings in the first year. The project staff estimates that approximately 5,000 people increased their knowledge of the benefits of using bison meat over the course of the project due to training sessions conducted by ITBC staff members or the volunteer community education trainers.

The project's second objective focused on developing a community education guide to be distributed at regional meetings and trainings. Project staff created twelve different educational products and distributed over 1,000. These products included flyers, single page briefings, posters, PowerPoint presentations for trainings, and brochures. ITBC also created a cookbook as their education guide. The book not only includes recipes, but also contains information regarding the health benefits of eating bison meat.

The project's third objective was to create 4 new bison products and to increase the entrepreneurial skills of 32 people to market the products. ITBC developed eight new products: buffalo chips, whips, bites, smoke links, jerky, energy snacks, pemmican and chopped meat. Project staff estimates 100-150 people increased their entrepreneurial skills as indicated by increased outlets, vendors and individuals with improved business skills. ITBC currently provides the

following services of the vending process: purchasing and processing the buffalo meat; packaging the product; and the at cost resale to the distributors. The tribes then conduct their own marketing and sell the products for a profit.

The final objective was to develop radio, television, print and/or web-based education tools that can be adapted for use by all member tribes. Project staff developed ten tools including short films, radio spots and newsletters.

OUTCOMES AND COMMUNITY IMPACT

The project increased the tribal community's education regarding the use and benefits of bison. Children see the materials and bring them home to discuss with their families. Herders increased their herd management skills and now better understand the role they play in the bison market as a whole. Artisans benefit from the increased access to bison materials as the resources are more readily available.

The leaders of many member tribes comprehend the economic development potential in bison, and see how it is most beneficial to use internal products rather than importing from other tribes or buying meat commercially.

The regional meetings greatly increased ITBC's membership and also enabled the organization to become aware of problems and challenges the tribes commonly face with herd management. ITBC can now respond to these problems and include solutions in their trainings to help tribes overcome them.

“ITBC puts buffalo back in the people's hands, even if it is through a brochure.”

Jim Stone, Executive Director