



NEWS RELEASE

Office of Public Relations

Diné College • Tsaile, AZ 86556 • (928) 724-6698
bdotson@dinecollege.edu

CONTACT: Bernie Dotson

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Oct. 17, 2017

Diné College Land Grant Office Receives \$220K Research Grant

TSAILE, Ariz. — A multi-institutional and grant-oriented research project aimed at establishing centers that support livestock and farm production is moving along, officials said.

Benita Litson, the Director of the Diné College Land Grant Office, explained that such centers include a Navajo Nation Extension and Research Livestock Center that would be located at the Crownpoint campus of Diné College.

"This is a funding request that we will be making to the Navajo Nation Siihasin Funding Opportunity," Litson said. "The Livestock Center is to support Navajo ranchers with not only improving the genetics of their herds, but to also improve management systems and to allow the accessing of new market opportunities."

The exact title of the project is "Enhancing the Quality of Sheep Wool and Meat and Livestock Meat Markets for Navajo Producers Applied Research."

Litson said her office wants to continue meeting with potential research partners to understand deliverables and expected outcomes, "and, specifically, recruit 10 sheep producers." Litson added, "Once identified, we will introduce each to the research and get formal agreements in place. We will take wool samples from the herd two times a year and prior to lambing. We will also purchase two sheep from the producer for the purpose of analyzing the meat."

The project is part of a \$220,000 federal grant that runs three years. The grant is from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Institute of Food and Agriculture.

Litson said the project stands to benefit more than 10 Diné College student interns who'll participate in the research.

"Students will learn about research concepts, assists with marketing studies, learn about the sheep industry and be active participants in shaping the next generation of ranchers," Litson said. "By conducting research that benefits the greater Navajo Nation, this strengthens the commitment at serving the people whether it's through a formal or non-formal educational program. The results will be shared with the Navajo Nation and allow producers to work toward establishing quality herds."

Litson said the research is geared around sheep production. "We are finding out more and more that sheep producers don't know the type of breed that they are raising. We have several breeds of sheep on the Navajo Nation, many are a cross-breed between an English breed and the Navajo Churro. The Navajo Churro were once near extinction and with the help of Navajo ranchers the populations of Churro sheep have rebounded. We support the Churro breed and found that there is a Navajo nonprofit group known as *Diné Be Lina* that concentrates on the Navajo Churro. We also realized that there were minimal efforts concentrated on sheep production, in general, and wanted to support sheep producers. This includes discovering how long it takes to change, improve a herd's genetics and findings and identifying alternative and new markets."

Litson noted that the research will focus on English Breeds, with the purpose of improving meat and wool quality, such as Merino, Ramboulet and Suffolk. She said the project started in September 2017 and goes through August 2020.

Both New Mexico State University and Utah State University will assist Diné College by providing guidance, expertise and support throughout the research.

"(NMSU) will support the marketing feasibility study, while (USU) will help with the actual wool and meat analysis," Litson said.

Litson commented that three producers are on board with the project so far. Land Grant personnel participating in the project include Feliz Nez, extension agent, and, Randy Joe, extension and outreach assistant, Litson said.