



August 30, 2016
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Vice President Nez Praises the Vision of Tolani Lake Enterprises, Inc.



Vice President Jonathan Nez toured Tolani Lake Enterprises recently and lauded their work in the areas of self-sufficiency, economic development and food sovereignty.

TOLANI LAKE, Ariz.—The Navajo Nation Gardening Challenge is about to come to a close, as the harvest looms a few weeks away.

Navajo Nation Vice President Jonathan Nez launched the initiative earlier this summer to encourage self-sufficiency in families across the nation.

Office of the President and Vice President distributed seeds and a pamphlet on basic gardening techniques to interested families.

The seeds, which were non-genetically modified, were provided by Tolani Lake Enterprises. The pamphlet and gardening tips was provided by Northern Arizona University Institute for Tribal Environmental Professionals.

“The purpose of the challenge is to bring families together and reinstate

self-reliance and food sovereignty back into our people,” said Vice President Nez.

The first year of the gardening challenge is for Navajo families to plant a garden. The second year will be for Navajo communities to revitalize dormant farming areas. The third year will be a challenge to the entire Navajo Nation to farm.

Vice President Nez said the all-encompassing nature of farming needs to be reintroduced to the Navajo people, especially the aspects of working together and independence.

“It’s all there: physical exercise, bringing young and old together for intergenerational teaching, revitalizing speaking *Dine’ bizaad* and the traditional teachings behind farming,” Vice President Nez said.

“Farming and gardening is

about self-reliance and doing for ourselves, which is true sovereignty at its core.

“We must take the next step and incorporate food sovereignty into this initiative, by creating laws that require businesses on the Navajo Nation to allow Navajo farmers to sell their produce and meats for consumption,” he added.

Incorporated in June 2000, Tolani Lake Enterprises is a non-profit community development corporation located in the southwest region of the Navajo Nation and north of Winslow, Ariz. It was established to provide economic security, food security, community well-being, higher education, cultural preservation, and promotion of native veteran issues.

Tolani Lake Enterprises works with grass roots organizations such as North Leupp Family Farms, Western Navajo Food Policy Council and Coalmine Homeowners Association.

Vice President Nez toured Tolani Lake Enterprises earlier this summer and lauded the valuable work provided by the organization, especially with regard to their efforts in the areas self-sufficiency and food sovereignty.

Bill Edwards, CEO of Tolani Lake Enterprises,

said the organization is working with many chapters and entities to encourage gardening.

The Tolani Lake Senior Citizens center is one such entity, which boasts an outdoor garden, greenhouse and electric corn grinder for Navajo elders. Grand Canyon Trust funded the greenhouse, which featured oregano, wild tea, rosemary, lavender, tobacco, tomatoes, asparagus, lettuce, basil, and banana peppers.

“Our dream is to have this senior center to be the first on Navajo to feed itself from its own garden,” Edwards said.

He said the senior citizens from the area work with youth during planting and share the traditional teachings and stories behind farming.

The Service to All Relations (STAR) School in Flagstaff, Ariz. is partnering with the Leupp Family Farm through a U.S. Department of Agriculture Farm to School grant that was funded in FY 2014. The program teaches the importance of organic foods to native youth attending school.

The program provides cultural awareness and traditional teaching through a greenhouse on the school’s campus. Additionally, students receive fresh vegetables from the garden,

which is documented in their “Healthy Foods for Navajo Schools” manual.

Tolani Lake Enterprises sees continuation of such programs in the future of the tribe.

One such initiative is the Green Team project of Tolani Lake Enterprises, which is a collaboration with Navajo Workforce Development, Northland Pioneer College and Ashokala Gardens of Show Low, Ariz.

Funding for the program is provided by Navajo Workforce Development, while Northland Pioneer College provides college credits through the seven-month organic gardening course. Kim Costion of Ashokala Gardens provided instruction for the course, which was taught at Tolani Lake Enterprises.

The Green Team and other volunteers assisted Vice President Nez with his garden in Window Rock, which featured the double-dug lasagna bed.

“Thank you to Jonathan Yazzie of Tolani Lake Enterprises, Ron Hubert and Ann Marie Chischilly of NAU ITEP, and the Navajo Nation Youth Council. You all did a tremendous job on my garden,” said Vice President Nez.

The organic garden planted in Window Rock is thriving and the vice president has already harvested some of the vegetables.

Edwards said, “With the organic gardening certificates and the graduates, we started the Green Team. We’re able to go into schools, help them certify their gardens, and get their food into the cafeterias.

Schools are the number one institutions on the Navajo Nation that feed people.”

The Green Team is working on a Navajo Housing Authority gardening initiative and planning for a similar project in the Former Bennett Freeze Area.

Most of the farming done by Tolani Lakes Enterprises is located at the North Leupp Family Farms. However, a demonstration plot is available at Tolani Lake Enterprises headquarters.

The building features metal roofs, which captures rain water in huge black water tanks that were donated by BeachBody and raincatcher.org. From there, the water is gravity-fed through a solar powered water delivery system.

A similar solar powered water delivery system feeds the North Leupp Family Farm, which pumped more than 5 million gallons of water to the crops last year. The solar array there provides 50 kilowatts from 74 solar panels that pump 360 gallons of water per minute.

Edwards identified the region from Bird Springs to Winslow to Cameron as farmable lands and said many studies have been completed on the land already.

“There’s several thousand acres for farming there. The water under that whole area could easily feed the Navajo Nation,” he said.

Vice President Nez encourages families that started gardens this year to share their experiences.



Jonathan Yazzie of Tolani Lake Enterprises, Inc. displays heirloom seeds that were planted by chapter summer students, dating back more than 30 years.



Vice President Jonathan Nez is proud of his blooming garden, which was planted by the Tolani Lake Enterprises Green Team in June.



This pumpkin growing in Vice President Nez’s garden is ripe for the picking, along with yellow squash, zucchini, corn, beans, pumpkins and more.

