



Tribal Agriculture Census Toolkit

As part of the Agricultural Resource Management Plan (ARMP) development process, Tribes may want to conduct a Tribal-specific agricultural census. This tool can help ensure the plan's long-term success, as a tribally conducted census may provide more accurate information that is often left out of national and state-level surveys. Below are some of the benefits of a Tribal Agriculture Census:

1. Support for Tribal data sovereignty
 - a. Tribes have the inherent right to govern and protect their own data. A tribally conducted agriculture census ensures that information about agricultural practices, land use, and food systems is collected, stored, and used in ways that align with the Tribe's values and governance. Relying solely on federal data sources may result in underreporting or misclassification of Native producers and their operations.
2. Generating tailored insights
 - a. National surveys often overlook culturally specific practices and traditional food systems that are central to Native agriculture. Conducting a Tribal-specific census can include culturally relevant questions such as the use of traditional ecological knowledge, community-based food sharing, and the production of culturally significant crops.
3. Informing economic development
 - a. Collecting accurate, Tribal-specific agricultural data helps identify economic opportunities, guide investments, and access grants and other funding. Tribes can use their census data not only to build local food economies but also support Native farmers and producers and strengthen agricultural infrastructure in ways that are self-directed by the community.
4. Strengthening Policy Advocacy
 - a. Including Tribal-led data collection within the ARMP supplies Tribal leaders and community members with evidence needed to support public policy positions. Whether Tribes are seeking fair access to federal programs or designing their own agricultural policies, having independent, credible data enhances their negotiating power, ensuring Tribal perspectives are not only included but prioritized.
5. Advancing Food Sovereignty
 - a. Agriculture is central to Tribal food sovereignty. By conducting their own census, tribes can better understand and support the systems that feed their communities and preserve cultural foodways.



How to Conduct a Tribal Agriculture Census

A Tribal agricultural census can help a Tribe craft an ARMP. A Tribally conducted agriculture census helps to understand and strengthen food systems, land use, and the agricultural economy. It can help guide tribal planning, funding, food sovereignty efforts, and policymaking.

1. Define the Purpose and Scope
 - a. Clarify goals in land use tracking, food production, economic development, and cultural preservation
 - b. Include farms, ranches, gardens, wild harvesting, livestock, aquaculture, and traditional practices
 - c. Survey enrolled Tribal members, land leaseholders, community growers, etc.
2. Engage Tribal Leadership and Community
 - a. Receive support from Tribal Council, agricultural or environmental departments, and elders
 - b. Form an advisory group of community members, farmers, and cultural practitioners
3. Design Census Tools
 - a. A questionnaire that includes key topics such as land use, crop types, livestock, equipment, labor, sales, barriers, etc.
 - b. Format it to be on paper, online, and/or in-person interviews (based on community preference and access)
 - c. Ensure all data collected is protected and owned by the Tribe
4. Train and Deploy Enumerators
 - a. Hire and train Tribal members as census workers
 - b. Provide training on respectful data collection, consent, and cultural sensitivity
 - c. Schedule outreach and visits during off-peak times in the agricultural calendar
5. Collect and Validate Data
 - a. Give clear instructions and offer multiple ways to submit information
 - b. Host drop-in sessions or offer phone support
 - c. Validate responses with follow-ups, if needed
6. Analyze and Report
 - a. Summarize key findings (number of producers, production types, economic impact, etc.)
 - b. Share findings with the community first



- c. Create user-friendly reports and maps
7. Use the Data
 - a. Inform food policy, land use planning, and grant applications
 - b. Support growers and food sovereignty initiatives
 - c. Update census regularly (e.g., every 5 years)
 8. Protect Tribal Data Sovereignty
 - a. Ensure all data is stored and controlled by the Tribe
 - b. Establish data governance policies
 - c. Limit external access unless approved by the proper Tribal authority

Tribal Agriculture Census Draft Questions

A Tribe may choose to conduct a Tribal Agricultural Census to gain a comprehensive understanding of its agricultural resources, practices, and potential for economic development. Data collected can help tribal leadership make informed decisions about land use, food sovereignty, and investment in agriculture-related enterprises. It also supports strategic planning for sustainability, climate resilience, and intergenerational knowledge transfer. By documenting the scope and scale of tribal agriculture, the census can strengthen advocacy for funding, policy support, and partnerships with federal and state agencies. Ultimately, it empowers the Tribe to preserve cultural traditions tied to the land while advancing economic self-determination.

The Indigenous Food and Agriculture Initiative (IFAI) has gathered these questions from the federal Agricultural Census and drafted additional questions to help Tribe's interested in conducting a Tribal agricultural census. These questions are designed to serve as a starting point for Tribes as they build and conduct their own Tribal Agriculture Census.

SECTION 1: Acreage & Location¹

- Number of acres operated under a permit?
- Number of acres owned?
- Number of acres rented or leased from others?
- Number of acres rented or leased to others?
- Total acres operated (calculation from above)?
- Number of acres operated under a permit on federal trust or tribal lands?

¹ Bullets 1-7 under Acreage & Location are official Census questions.



- In what county was the largest value of agricultural products produced?
- GPS coordinates or description of primary farm location.

SECTION 2: Agricultural Activity on Reservations²

- Did this farm or ranch use any land for livestock or farm plots within the borders of an American Indian Reservation?
- Were any acres located outside this Reservation?
- Total acres used for livestock or cropland within the Reservation?
- Did this farm or ranch have any livestock within the Reservation?
- What percent of livestock was on the Reservation?

SECTION 3: Land Use³

- Farm plot acreage:
 - Land harvested
 - Land with crop failure or abandonment
 - Cropland in summer fallow
 - Idle land or cover crops not harvested
- Pasture:
 - Permanent pasture/rangeland
 - Woodland pastured
 - Farm plots used only for grazing
- Woodland not pastured
- All other land (homesite, gardens, roads, etc.)
- Total acres operated

SECTION 4: Land Use Practices⁴

- Acres:

² Bullets 1-4 are official Census questions. Bullet 5 is closely derived from official Census questions as the Census asks counts by location, not percentages.

³ All bullets under Land Use are official Census questions.

⁴ Bullets 1-3 and their sub bullets, under Land Use Practices, are official Census questions.



- Drained by tile
- Drained by ditches
- Under conservation easement
- Cropland acres:
 - No-till practices
 - Reduced tillage
 - Conventional tillage
 - Planted to cover crops
- Use of precision agriculture practices?
- Use of regenerative or traditional land stewardship practices (e.g., controlled burns, rotational grazing)?

SECTION 5: Irrigation⁵

- Are any acres irrigated or are irrigation systems available?
- Acres of harvested cropland irrigated?
- Acres of other land irrigated?
- Total acres with irrigation systems?
- Do you intend to use irrigation systems in the future?
- Primary water source (surface water, groundwater, hauled water)?
- Any water rights or access challenges?

SECTION 6: Production Details⁶

- Crops grown (list by category: traditional/native crops, commercial crops).
- Livestock inventory (species and counts).
- Value of agricultural products sold (by category).
- Use of organic practices or certification status?

⁵ Bullets 1-5 under Irrigation are official Census questions.

⁶All bullets, under Production Details, are closely derived from official Census questions. Bullets 1-4 are simplified as the Census expands on each of the topics. Bullet 5 is derived as the official Census asks about the use of USDA programs only, not Tribal assistance programs.



- Use of USDA or Tribal assistance programs?

SECTION 7: Organization & Labor⁷

- Was more than 50% of the operation owned by the operator’s household or extended family?
- Number of households sharing net farm income?
- Was the operation organized as an LLC or Corporation?
- Operation’s legal status for tax purposes?
- Number of hired year-round workers?
- Number of hired seasonal workers?
- How many family members are involved in the operation?
- Do you have access to training or workforce development programs?

SECTION 8: Personal Characteristics⁸

- For up to 4 individuals:
 - Full name
 - Age
 - Sex
 - Race
 - Hispanic origin
 - Primary occupation
 - Retirement status
 - Days worked off-farm
 - Decision-making roles
 - Military service
 - Household size
 - Residence on farm
 - Year began operating farm

SECTION 9: Tribal-Specific & Helpful Additions

- Are traditional crops or heritage livestock raised?

⁷ Bullets 1-6, under Organization & Labor, are official Census questions.

⁸ All bullets under Personal Characteristics are official Census questions.



- Are cultural land stewardship practices used?
- Is food sovereignty a goal for your operation?
- What are the biggest challenges you face in agriculture? (e.g., water rights, market access, equipment)
- What resources or training would help you most?
- Do you plan to expand acreage or diversify crops/livestock?
- Interest in cooperative marketing or tribal food programs?
- Concerns about climate impacts on your operation?
- Access to broadband or technology for farm management?
- Availability of storage facilities, processing equipment, or transportation?