The NM Agricultural Leadership program is committed to identifying and supporting effective leadership within the food, agriculture, and natural resource industries of New Mexico.

Seminar Topics:
Cultural Issues - Northwestern New Mexico

Seminar Objectives:
1. Gain an appreciation for one of the Native American cultures by speaking with individuals from that culture, visiting important cultural sites, and leaning about some chief cultural practices.

2. Develop an understanding of some critical issues on native and tribal lands.

3. Explore what culture means for you and for other people, and the role culture plays in leadership.

4. Identify specific traits of effective leadership of the individuals with whom we visit.

Inside this issue:
- Reflective articles from NMAL Class 12 participants
- Pictures from Seminar 2
- NMAL Contact Info
A Blast from the Past
By Shannon Berry

Imagine a long and bumpy ride with 8 adults crammed into an SUV; The trip out consisted of bagged lunches, lots of storytelling, intermittent attempts to nap, YMCA serenades, and lots of unforgettable laughs before we arrived to our destination. Little did we know the extent of what lie ahead of us at the end of a memorable car ride.

Chaco Canyon was the major urban center of the ancestral Puebloans from 850-1250 AD. On the visit we walked through a couple of the many “great houses” within the complexes. The vast majority of our time was spent at “Pueblo Bonito” which was the center of the complex and the largest great house in the Canyon. These structures were built in stages between the 800s and 1100s. According to Chaco Canyon research, this structure alone reached at least 4 stories, had 600 rooms, and 40 kivas (edifices for prayer). Most of these rooms were built for storage of food, goods, and supplies. We had the opportunity to watch a short informative film before we headed out for our hike.

It was incredible to see the intricacy of each and every artfully placed stone, ranging from slabs that are a fraction of an inch tall to others that are over a foot or more. Most walls remained fairly structurally sound, even all of these years later. Rooms were built under ground and up multiple stories. It was somewhat difficult to imagine how each of these structures were used at the time, however it was apparent that each and every room, wall, window, and stone was intentional.

What was further astonishing was the impact that this miraculous place had on our class. Two of our team’s members and our tour guide are Navajo; the influence of this special and holy place was especially impactful on them. This was particularly meaningful to witness and be a part of.

While the ride was long, the result of the trip was well worth it. We had a lot of fun, grew much closer, and all left with a new understanding. It was evident that we all had more questions and a yearning to know more about the ancestral Native Americans; but more importantly we left with an enormous new respect for the ancient people who once inhabited and thrived in Chaco Canyon.
In order to grow a strong, healthy, functional plant, you must first develop a strong root system to manifest its full potential. On July 26, 2017, our Agricultural Leadership Team had the privilege of visiting Chaco Canyon Historical Site, east of Crownpoint, NM. From cultural teachings, I was taught that the Navajo tribe are descendants from the original people of Chaco Canyon and Canyon De Chelly. Another location near Chaco Canyon called (Kin Yaaí) ‘Pointing Building’ is the location and home to the Towering House Clan.

The Chaco Canyon structures were fascinating, they had connections to the seasons and the times of day. The amount of time it took to build such structures is still questionable. They had to sculpt each individual rock to build, with limited resources, 15 feet high walls. Chaco Canyon was not only a home to the Navajo Tribe but also to different Pueblos. There are many different artifacts that have been found at Chaco Canyon that are still used today by Pueblos. Beautiful Kiva structures that took time and effort to build are continually used today to communicate with the great spirits. Each Native culture passes down songs and cultural stories to the following generation so that traditions will not be lost.

Visiting the site and experiencing the amount of energy, walking through that scared ground, I felt connected. I could feel the energy of different cultures uniting and as I kept walking I could feel the energy continuing to grow. Leaving the site I felt a feeling of pride, knowing that as an individual, that follows Navajo culture and lives to farm, is making a living in today’s society.
As a young Navajo girl, I remember listening to the very faint sound of my great-grandmother spinning wool through her spindle, using a coarse brush to comb through the wool, and the beat of her wooden weaving fork hitting the loom that nearly reached the ceiling. Every move she made was calculated. There was a story behind everything she did, from raising sheep to the traditional foods she made from blue and white corn.

Now, as a Navajo woman, those small pieces of Navajo culture are just memories. I did not carry on the tradition of weaving in our family nor did I have any interest growing up. My time consisted of school, sports, and growing pains of being a kid; things that I considered important. Sad to say, not much has changed within our youth since then…or so I thought.

The change is coming from the NMSU Tribal Extension office located in Shiprock, NM. Class 12 had the pleasure of meeting with Kathy Landers, Tribal Extension Coordinator and Leah Platero, Family and Consumer Sciences Agent. These two women are part of what I consider to be, community liberators to the Navajo culture for our youth. They help the Navajo youth develop and revive dynamic hands-on skills such as Navajo weaving from start to finish; how to use local native plants to dye wool for rug weaving and to use the plants for medicinal purposes. They are also teaching them how to prepare traditional foods with new recipes to cut down on the prevalence of diabetes, while still remaining healthy. These and other practices are helping preserve the history of the Navajo people, the clan system, language, clothing, crops, to name a few.

Kathy Landers has working with the extension programming in the Zuni, Navajo, Acoma, and Laguna communities for over twenty years. Her biggest challenges have been learning and understanding the cultural beliefs within the different Native American communities before jumping into the program, but her biggest reward is being accepted by the native people because she earns their respect.
NMAL Class 12 recently traveled to Farmington and the surrounding areas. It was a jammed-packed schedule, filled with a myriad of interesting and educational tours and visits. This included weaving, agriculture tours, a visit to sacred dwellings at Chaco Canyon, and an amazing history lesson about the Navajo. After speaking with several of my classmates, we all decided there wasn’t one thing that disappointed us.

I was extremely impressed by the Navajo Agriculture Products Industry (NAPI). It is an amazing farming operation that is highly technological while holding onto traditional Navajo practices. They focus on producing sustainable and high-quality products including alfalfa, beans, corn, potatoes, grains, and specialty crops. Our class was fortunate to listen to presentations and private tours from our own classmates Eric and Denise, and Class 11 Graduate Ryan. I could have spent all day touring NAPI.

One other thing that resonated with me was the walking tour we took with our guide, Elicio. Elicio is a modern-day medicine man. While young, he is extremely knowledgeable about his profession and I was glad to hear his craft is not only being passed down from generation to generation, but that there is also schooling to hone these skills. Elicio showed us various vegetation and plant life that they use to make remedies for ailments and dyes for weaving.

After visiting the native lands and hearing about how they use what the earth produces, Elicio gave us some history into what he and his ancestors have done to get where they are. To end the day, we had an amazing presentation from Zefren, who is not only a master weaver, but also a historian on all things Navajo. He has put together an incredible compilation of the culture and history of the people, including traditions, migrations, and even clothing, which he has replicated himself.

I thoroughly enjoyed this session and would encourage all to visit this area of our state to learn about the history and agriculture, and the culture that is still so vibrant today.
Healing Herbs while Dyeing in the Sun
By Jeff Anderson

On July 27, 2017 the New Mexico Agricultural Leadership Team was treated to a tour on the Navajo Nation, near Shiprock, NM of indigenous plants used to make dyes and medicinal products. Our host was a scholarly young Native American man by the name of Elicio. Our venture began after a stop at the Shiprock Cooperative Extension Office to meet with Elicio and Kathy Landers, the Tribal Extension Program Coordinator. Elicio, our Navajo guide, took us to a remote montane spot where a number of specialty healing/dye plants grew. We admired the beauty of the land as we journeyed to the spot Elicio had chosen.

The hills and mountains of the Navajo Nation are stained with the colors of the earth, red, white, black and gray. Among these montane hills are found the sacred plants used for millennia by America’s native peoples. Sages (Ts’ah), Junipers (kat-dil-tah’-li), Lycium (has-chay’-tha), Pinus (ńdishchii’), Fendlera, (tsin-tliz-I), Yucca, (hosh-kawn) and Ephedra to name a few. The plants vary in color from rich greens to silvery greys and are full of the oils, resins, minerals and compounds that make them pungent, sweet and important for healing. Healing was often mentioned as a key property of the plants we encountered. Elicio stated that one could tell a plant’s worth by the aroma it produced.

It was wonderful for all of us to spend this time with a man who has been blessed by the earth with the knowledge he has, to see in each plant what it has to offer to his family and mankind, one plant for healing your eyes, another for making natural wool shine like the golden sun. Who would have thought that the bark of sumac could produce a yellow dye, or juniper berries would produce a brown-yellow dye, or that cochineal scale (an insect found on opuntia cacti) would produce a magenta dye.

Our Ag Leadership group was amazed at the knowledge that this young man had. How he, at such a young age, had accumulated this wealth of knowledge from his native peoples and was able to relate it to us so effortlessly. This is the love of a man for his people, his heritage and mankind. We walked in Elicio’s shoes for a brief time that summer morning and we all were inspired, he opened our eyes to earth’s healing power and showed us that harmony comes from being one with the world you live in.

Class 12 was intrigued on the wide variety of resources available to the community. We gained knowledge from young Navajo leaders who were very knowledgeable, humbled, and showed a generous passion for what they have learned and are continuing to learn. Most of all, they have fun. The NMSU Extension office is empowering the youth to embrace the Navajo culture and to keep it alive.
In the United States, farmers tend to be an older crowd. In fact, the USDA estimated in 2012 that the average US farmer is 58.3 years old, and that number has been steadily increasing over the last thirty-five years. At conferences around the country, people are asking where the next generation of farmers and farm workers will come from, and speculating about the ways in which new technology can supplement the lack of new workers in the industry. At Navajo Agriculture Products Industry (NAPI), this doesn’t seem to be a problem.

There are many reasons to be impressed with the operation at NAPI, but most striking to me was the number of young professionals working there. From the headquarters to the fields, young men and women can be found in many positions of authority. They are the crop managers, accountants, office managers, and so much more. While the rest of the country asks how they can lure young people back to agricultural life, NAPI is handing them the reins.

What is the difference? NAPI, one of the largest contiguous farms in the United States, offers employees the ability to join a well-established operation instead of starting from scratch. Instead of undertaking massive amounts of debt to purchase land and equipment, an individual can immediately focus on the jobs they are passionate about. Not only that, but employees have a very real chance of being rapidly promoted and given increasing amounts of responsibility. Instead of making young employees handle the grunt work and ‘earn their keep,’ NAPI focuses on growing their talent and finding fresh challenges for them in the workplace.

Having trouble attracting young talent in your industry or operation? Take a page out of NAPI’s book. Offer new employees a pathway to meaningful work, future opportunities to grow, and show genuine interest in their well-being.
The Stories behind the Rugs
By Katie Kruthaupt

The New Mexico Agricultural Leadership program took Class 12 participants around the Farmington area. The Rug Museum, located around Shiprock, was only one of the many amazing places the group visited.

While participants walked throughout the museum, it was intriguing to look at the Navajo rugs, being that some date as far back as the 1800s. Many of the rugs still looked as if they were almost new, with the dyes in the rugs still looking vibrant and not faded. A different perspective was beheld on each rug’s meaning and significance after reading the captions explaining the context behind the rugs.

Rugs are just one of a few ways the Navajos express their culture by using natural resources to reflect the beauty of the dyes in the rugs. It was fascinating to learn how the dyes are derived from plants throughout the region.

Our hostess, Thelma, shared with the group about her efforts to help and teach anyone interested in learning how to weave. She took the time to demonstrate how the weaving process begins. The amount of balance, hand strength, and patience that it appeared to take to get the yarn refined to the right amount of thickness was fascinating.

In becoming familiar with some of the traditions of the Navajo culture, a few participants noted how deeply engrained the Navajo culture is in everything the Navajo people do from cooking to weaving. Participants were particularly wooed by the enthusiasm in the elders to pass along their talents, time, and wisdom to future generations. Their culture appeared to be very farm to table oriented with many crops and plants being used for cooking, medicinal purposes, and weaving.
Picture Collage - Seminar 2

Book Club

Eric Nez presenting at Navajo Agricultural Products

Toadlena - The Rug Museum

Chaco Canyon