

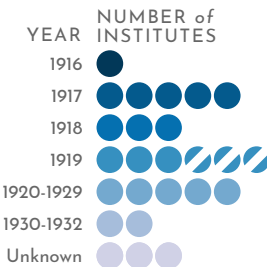
FARM, SOCIETY, ASSIMILATION

The Relationship between First Nations of Wisconsin and UW-Madison's Indian Farm Institutes 1916-1932

In 1916, UW-Madison's Agricultural Extension Service (AES) began offering Indian Farm Institutes (IFIs) at reservations across Wisconsin. At an IFI, extension employees would give talks on the latest farming methods, similar to Institutes offered to white farmers. The IFIs fit into the progressivist Wisconsin Idea that the University's research should spread beyond the campus and were the first long-term, institutional interactions between the First Nations of Wisconsin and UW-Madison.

The IFI's purpose was to educate Indigenous people in farming in an attempt to assimilate them into white society by breaking dependence on more traditional food production, such as farming, wild rice harvesting, hunting, gathering, and maple sugaring.¹ The white extension agents did not consider these or other Indigenous farming methods suitable, instead desiring First Nations to employ solely grain farming, dairying, and other methods which they preferred.¹ They believed that by learning the University's farming methods, Indigenous people would learn the value of hard labor and would be cured of "discontent, restlessness, and the tendency to wander from place to place."²

In a 1918 article on the IFIs, their organizer, J.F. Wojta stated that Indigenous people must begin farming because their other resources were less plentiful (mainly due to overhunting and fishing by white settlers), and that the federal government would not always support them.² He held the erroneous belief that Indigenous people were entirely reliant on the US government, while it is more accurate to say they survived in spite of the government's best efforts.¹



Despite the assimilationist values, no state did more to extend existing programs to serve Indigenous people.¹

Originally, there were to be four IFIs held every year, compared to the 125+ Institutes per year for white farmers. Despite this, there are only seven known IFIs that took place after 1920. This is most likely due to a lack of primary source data rather than a cessation of the Institutes. If records of these IFIs do exist, they are somewhere in the UW-Madison or Wisconsin Historical Society archives.

References

Nick Smith, cartographer - No affiliation with any of the 12 First Nations of Wisconsin.

