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Yurok Agricultural Corporation enters Food Sovereignty arena with new purchase

In an effort to prepare and respond to the continued and future effects the COVID pandemic has had on our rural communities in and around the Yurok Reservation in Northern California, the Yurok Agricultural Corporation Board of Directors has determined there is a serious need to enter into the food space and begin building a program for the Yurok Reservation dedicated to education and assistance of residents in all aspects of food sovereignty. The Yurok Agricultural Corporation is pleased to announce the purchase of approximately 26 acres of land that once was the Weitchpec Nursery.

"Weitchpec Nursery was the premier supplier of flower and vegetable starts in the Humboldt County region for many decades. Once the owners retired the community lost jobs and revenue from that business." says Toby Vanlandingham, President of the YAC, "The Yurok Agricultural Corporation has an opportunity to once again bring that business back into the community to stimulate economic growth, create decent paying jobs, and to assist residents with becoming self-sustaining by growing their own food".

"COVID has heightened the importance in rural communities of micro agriculture and food sovereignty" says Madison Green, Secretary of the Board "The purpose of the Yurok Agricultural Corporation is to develop agricultural economic resources and to maximize revenue derived from such resources on behalf of the Tribe and its members, this project falls directly in line with our core mission as a company and will benefit our people for decades to come".

"The vision is to build a nursery dedicated to providing a quality choice for people looking for plant and garden supplies, as well as creating a farmers marketplace and an outlet to local area stores with quality vegetables at affordable prices" says the YAC Vice President Edward "Horse" Aubrey "I've been a staunch supporter of Yurok people maintaining true sovereignty by growing their own medicine and food, so when Toby brought this idea to the table it was a no brainer, power to the people".

The entire Yurok Reservation was declared a food desert by the U.S. Department of Agriculture in 2017, a multitude of studies have been done on the area and as many grants have been issued to try and build a healthy, sustainable, and culturally relevant food system. In some areas off the reservation there has been success,

unfortunately on the Yurok reservation there has been no solid foundation laid to sustain a program into the future.

“We’re still in a food desert and have been since colonization basically. I have been in agriculture my entire life, in order to really bring about change on the reservation we need a program that is not grant funded and has the resources to keep the program going.” Vanlandingham said “I was running the Kenek We-roy community garden up until I was elected to Tribal council, then life got busy. Now that I am the President of the Agricultural Corp I have the ability to build a system that the community needs, based off of the community needs, and not worry about finding a grant for that”. He added “Now I am not saying we will turn down any grant dollars available, but those dollars will not be the defining factor in the success of this program”.

With a tentative opening date of March 2021, the Yurok Agricultural Corporation will bring the dream of the community to reality and be the supplier of locally sourced non-GMO healthy affordable vegetables and vegetable starts. Weitchpec Nursery will focus on providing quality vegetables, plant starts, seeds, along with a variety of potted trees.

Weitchpec nursery will serve both residential customers and area retail stores. There will also be a variety of garden accessories such as potting soils, safe fertilizers, and garden tools available. In combination with quality vegetables starts, healthy vegetables and supplies, gardening how-to’s and community workshops to further educate on the benefits of growing your own food will also be readily available to the community.

The Yurok Agricultural Corporation is a Tribal entity that is organized, chartered and wholly owned by the Yurok Tribe. The YAC was created to develop agricultural economic resources in an orderly manner and to maximize revenue derived from such resources on behalf of the Tribe and its members.