

Old Sun Community College and the U of L join forces in greenhouse project

Students and community members from the Siksika Nation will soon be learning about sustainable food production thanks to a collaborative greenhouse research project between Old Sun Community College (OSCC) and the University of Lethbridge.

On Friday, July 23, the U of L signed a research agreement with OSCC. This two-year partnership will provide opportunities for OSCC students and Siksika Nation members to learn more about science and technology applications — and engage in traditional educational opportunities for food security and sustainable food production.

Dr. James Byrne, a U of L environmental science professor, says the agreement will provide food security initiatives for Siksika Nation and the Blackfoot Confederacy.

“We’re partnering two educational institutions to better develop education in critical areas of food security, agriculture, climate change adaptation, and renewable energy,” says Byrne. “I hope within five years we see greenhouses on Siksika lands that are filling trucks up with locally sourced food.”

The greenhouse will provide a nutritious range of vegetables, including potatoes, squash, cucumbers, and other vegetables that are practical for greenhouse production. Partners hope the development can provide employment skills and opportunities for students and serve as an environmental knowledge hub and community gathering space.

Dr. Maurice Manyfingers (BASc (BA) ’83), OSCC president, says it was important the partnership was endorsed by local Siksika elders.

“Dr. Byrne and I met with the elders of Siksika and they wholeheartedly endorsed it, and are very happy we are moving forward with the initiative,” says Manyfingers. “This is a true collaboration and Siksika Nation has tremendous confidence in the University of Lethbridge. To me, this is a real demonstration of how much the University and local Indigenous communities need to be working together, and there is a lot of respect for an opportunity to grow those relationships.”

In addition, an energy efficient greenhouse, the project will also eventually provide an assessment of renewable energy options for Siksika Nation and a report on violent weather in Siksika and climate change adaption.

Shima Javaheri, a U of L graduate student, is currently pursuing a PhD in earth, space and physical science and this initiative will be part of her thesis.

“It’s a good experience and helping these people gives me a great feeling,” says Javaheri. “This project gives me energy to continue my PhD program and it’s a good experience for my future, too. I’m so excited.”

Dr. Dena McMartin, vice-president (research) says the agreement is an important next step to deciding the direction for future collaboration.

“We are a university that cares and a university that is working hard to build southern Alberta together — deciding who we want to be and where we want to go.”