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**FIRST AMERICAN INDIAN U.S. WINERY OWNER PARTNERS WITH
INTERTRIBAL AGRICULTURE COUNCIL FOR MARKETING AND
EXPORTING WINES ABROAD**

*Female Native American Vintner Says American Indian Foods Program is Sweet
Experience*

Billings, Montana, – APRIL 25, 2011 – The Intertribal Agriculture Council (IAC) which directs the American Indian Foods (AIF) program, comprised of Tribal members exporting food products worldwide, has extended membership to Darlene Gabbard, owner of Native Vines Winery and a member of the Lumbee Tribe.

“The AIF folks actually called me on my birthday to let me know I’d been accepted into this great program,” says Darlene, who founded her North Carolina winery with just two fruit wines, and has since expanded to more than a dozen varieties.

“Needless to say, it was an exciting birthday present! So far, I’ve attended three AIF shows overseas and two training programs and through this, I’ve discovered vastly improved methodology to market and export our wines.”

“There are definitely fewer female than male Tribal AIF members, but I don’t think my experience as a female in this program is any different than the guys. I actually would love to see more women involved in this because our foreign customers are very excited about the American Indian heritage aspect and they really want that experience.”

Darlene says that before joining the AIF program, she had been contacted by importers from Germany and Canada interested in her wines, but had no idea about the rules and regulations in conducting business with countries outside the U.S.

“Previously, I shipped three separate wine samples to Canada, only to have them seized by Canadian Customs. Now that I’ve joined the AIF, the samples are in country and I’m awaiting their first order.”

“I’ve learned so much about all aspects of exporting and shipping requirements as well as the organizations available to help Tribal members like myself. One thing that is crucial is researching target countries ahead of time to determine what they are importing from the United States. For example, France imports only 3-5% of their wines, so there is little opportunity there,” explains Darlene.

She says the Netherlands, on the other hand, imports 29% of their wines from the U. S. and imports more wine products from North Carolina than any other state.

Darlene’s most recent marketing outreach included attending the *Foodex* trade show held in Japan just days before the earthquake and ensuing tsunami. She presented her unique Green Tea Wine, which was very well received by the Japanese.

American Indian Foods (AIF) is a program of the Intertribal Agriculture Council and was established in 1998 under contract with the USDA Foreign Agricultural Service. The partnership was developed as a platform for American Indian food businesses to showcase their products and share Tribal cultures with the world.

“This program is an invaluable opportunity for American Indian growers and producers such as Darlene to celebrate their rich heritage through the international marketing of their product lines,” says Nathan Notah, who is the director of the American Indian Foods program.

“There is a feeling of collective and spiritual well-being between the various American Indian Tribes because most of our food exports are grown and harvested in the same manner that they were by our ancestors, hundreds of years ago. This further joins exporting Tribal members to better take advantage of exporting opportunities to effectively build business and relationships,” finished Notah.

Currently, there are six female Tribal members in the AIF producing and harvesting export products such as Wild Seafood, Wild Salmon, Indian Fry Bread Mix, 100% Natural Buffalo Cranberry Bars and Fine Wines.

“The best thing about the AIF program is the exposure that it provides to a worldwide audience of potential food customers,” says Darlene. “There is no other medium that has such an extensive reach to foreign countries.”

Throughout the year, the AIF program has been involved with the Montana Farm to Table Connection, encouraging sustainable food growth; the National Resources Conservation Service, encouraging organic producers; the Natural Products Expo West Food Show in Anaheim, CA and the 2011 HOFEX Food & Drink, Hotel, Restaurant & Food Service in Hong Kong. The AIF soon will host another International Food Export Readiness Seminar in Oklahoma and a reverse seafood press mission in Oregon, Washington and Alaska.

ABOUT NATIVE VINES WINERY

Native Vines Winery is the first Native American owned and operated winery in the U.S. The winery is located in the Yadkin Valley Viticulture Appellation, in Lexington, NC, which is home to the Keyauwee Indian Tribe. The winery is situated on 36 acres of rolling pastures that has been transformed into vineyards.

Native Vines Winery has been producing award-winning wines since 1998. The winery produces a full line of viniferous wines, along with 3 signature wines, Sweet Apple, Sweet Blackberry and a Green Tea Wine the 1st of its kind.

Native Vines Winery is owned and operated by Darlene Gabbard along with her family. Darlene is the vintner and dedicated to producing the purest product possible, by practicing minimal chemical and pesticide use in both growth and production of the wines.

ABOUT AMERICAN INDIAN FOODS

American Indian Foods (AIF) is a program of the Intertribal Agriculture Council that began in 1998 under contract with the USDA Foreign Agricultural Service. The partnership was developed as a platform for American Indian food businesses to showcase their products and share Tribal cultures with the world. American Indian Foods come from coast to coast in the United States and are grown on the pristine lands of Native American Nations or raised in their natural waters. Many of these products are still harvested in ways defined hundreds of years ago. Native American communities are a close-knit group as many of them gather families and friends together annually to harvest, celebrate, and give thanks.

ABOUT THE IAC

The Intertribal Agriculture Council is a non-profit organization based in Billings, Montana, USA that supports American Indian agricultural programs throughout the United States. The IAC and its affiliates export agricultural products around the world and represent more than 25 enterprises.

For information on our association, please visit www.indianaglink.com or for more information on American Indian Foods visit www.AmericanIndianFoods.com

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