

PURE RELIGION

Sam Charlie's Garden

Among the juniper and pinion trees of the Chilchinbito region of the Navajo Nation live Sam Charlie and his family. With the help of the LDS Charities Food Initiative and technical assistance provided by Church-service missionaries and local priesthood leaders, the Charlie family is growing a large fruit and vegetable garden.

Many people had thought that growing fruit and vegetable gardens was not possible on the sandy, wind-blown soils of northern Arizona. Gardens must be protected against free-ranging livestock. Wind screens must be used to prevent the blowing sand from dusting off the emerging crop plants. The crops are watered by micro-irrigation drip systems in this dry region of sparse and inconsistent rainfall. Rodent and insect pests also require attention.

Despite the challenges, green beans, watermelons, cantaloupes, tomatoes, zucchini and crookneck squash, peppers, and corn are doing well. Apple, apricot, and peach trees, along with grape vines and raspberry bushes have been planted. The tree and vine crops will begin to produce in two to three years. Neighbors have been astonished to learn their land could actually be made to produce abundant crops.

This food initiative was commenced among the Navajo and Hopi people at

the request of Larry J. Justice, president of the Tuba City Arizona Stake. He has taken as scriptural direction the comment made by Captain Moroni, who determined to alter the management of affairs among his people (see Alma 49:11). President Justice's great dedication to the people of his stake is resulting in a better quality of life for many. The gardening effort involves 250 families from Kayenta and Polacca to Cameron. The project is resulting in improved communication with members and families. Church activity has been enhanced, and the project has created opportunities for teaching gospel principles that are well beyond the improved technology.

Seven years ago Brother Charlie lost a foot in consequence of diabetes. Regarding his involvement in the gardening project he said, "It is wonderful to work with my family. Neighbors come by to see how the garden is doing. They even get some produce. My grandparents grew a garden. I went on the LDS Placement Program for four years and never learned how to grow a garden. It has been a wonderful thing to recapture this lost element of our culture. It is so good to go out in the garden and get something to eat rather than to drive to Kayenta and purchase groceries."





Sam Charlie in front of his garden