

Indigenous Land Acknowledgement at the Education Center & 4-H Park

Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE) Orange County owns the Education Center & 4-H Park in the Town of Mount Hope. The Park is a regional facility for Orange County Agriculture, Youth and Families. The Park is comprised of 54 acres and currently has four multipurpose barns with one enclosed, a fully accessible restroom with showers, public water supply and three-phase electric. Plans include developing camping activities, installing heat for three-season use of one building, and construction of a year-round multipurpose building. An agroforestry demonstration field is planned. In addition, there is significant community support to build an office with large dividable meeting rooms and commercial/teaching/demonstration kitchen.

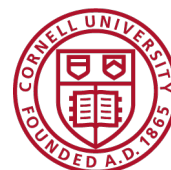
The Education Center & 4-H Park being built provides a space for CCE Orange County to exponentially increase outreach, opportunities and impact in Orange County. However, the history of Land Grant Universities and the Cooperative Extension system is complicated. The Land Grant College Act of 1862 (also known as the Morrill Act) provided a vehicle for the federal government to give land to states to build public universities in their respective state in order to educate the population to support the young democracy of the United States. An investigative report by Tristan Ahtone and Robert Lee titled “Land-Grab Universities” published in High Country News in March 2020, “tied the history of these educational institutions founded through the Land Grant College Act of 1862 to the forceful dispossession of Indigenous peoples, in some cases immediately prior to those lands’ disposition to universities. Essentially, the original funding for these land-grant universities is derived from land taken through a systematic and genocidal campaign of violence, fraud, forced treaties (some never ratified), dislocation, and death. Cornell received the most land through the provisions of the Morrill Act, almost 1 million acres in total.” (from CUIDProject: cuidproject.com)

Cornell University’s founding, and subsequently, Cornell Cooperative Extension’s “founding was enabled in the course of a national genocide by the sale of almost one million acres of stolen Indian land under the Morrill Act of 1862. To date the university has neither officially acknowledged its complicity in this theft nor has it offered any form of restitution to the hundreds of Native communities impacted.” (<https://cals.cornell.edu/american-indian-indigenous-studies/about/land-acknowledgment>)

As a step toward accountability and to better understand the complicated history being a program of a Land Grant University, CCE Orange County is committing to work with the original, pre-colonial

Helping You Put Knowledge to Work

Cornell Cooperative Extension Orange County provides
equal employment and program opportunities.



inhabitants of Mount Hope and Orange County who resided, hunted, fished, farmed, and stewarded the surrounding lands, including the Park. Our understanding is that these lands were home to the Lenape and Munsee-Mohican peoples, as well as served as traditional trade routes for a variety of other Indigenous peoples for at least 500 generations, spanning 12,000 years before European contact. Members of the Ramapough Munsee Lenape Nation still live regionally and have been the main point of contact for CCE Orange County, although the majority of the Lenape and Munsee-Mohican peoples were forcibly removed and now reside on reservations in Oklahoma, Wisconsin, and in Canada.

CCE Orange County staff are beginning to learn more about our history and have an opportunity to recognize the original inhabitants and stewards of this land. CCE Orange County looks to create a meaningful, mutually beneficial relationship with members of the Ramapough Munsee Lenape Nation in an effort for long-lasting co-beneficial learning and stewardship of these lands we all call home. We're excited to invite members from the Ramapough Munsee Lenape Nation to share their history, culture, and knowledge as well as open our space for their community's activities. We also have an opportunity to build relationships with the dispossessed Lenape and Munsee-Mohican communities and invite them to take part in and co-create sustainable, culturally rich programming and co-stewardship opportunities. These are just initial efforts CCE Orange County are taking in what we see as our obligation as a land grant university program toward accountability to Indigenous communities affected by the Morrill Act. As our relationship gets stronger and we learn more, we will continue to work toward meaningful, mutually beneficial actions that support our communities here in New York State and those of the dispossessed Lenape and Munsee-Mohican whose homelands we reside on.

Statement adopted by the Board of Directors June 23, 2025