



**THE
NAVAJO
NATION**

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2. Ex Sec
PRESIDENT
JOE SHIRLEY, JR
VICE PRESIDENT
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August 26, 2005

The Honorable Mike Johanns
Secretary of Agriculture
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Mr. Secretary:

I would like to begin by welcoming you to New Mexico. As President of the Navajo Nation, I would like to take this opportunity to share my views with you concerning a number of initiatives the Navajo Nation is working with the U. S. Department of Agriculture.

As a short introduction, the Navajo Nation is located in the Four Corners region in the northwest corner of this state. The Nation includes the States of New Mexico, Utah, and Arizona within its borders and the land base is 17 million acres. Census totals have numbered our population at approximately 300,000 and 170,000 Navajos currently reside on the reservation. I am aware that you are here at New Mexico State to listen to comments concerning the Farm Bill. I will be providing comments on this subject during the open forum session and I would also like to request the opportunity to provide more detailed written comments for your review at a later date.

In this introductory letter, I would like to comment on four issues and initiatives that the Navajo Nation is currently working on that includes or should include the participation of the Department of Agriculture.

The first concerns the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) under the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). There are five (5) points that should be noted:

1. NRCS EQIP performance within the Navajo Nation depends on cost sharing from individual farmers. However, for the most part, the potential participants are extremely resource limited. Additional economic, social and cultural barriers make it even more difficult for irrigators to participate.

The Honorable Secretary Johanns

Page 2

August 26, 2005

2. For the most part, the irrigation projects evolved over many decades in the same areas where traditional farming had occurred. With input from different federal programs over the decades, the resulting irrigation projects were designed as subsistence systems with numerous small individual land users. Achieving conservation goals on a broader project level can be very difficult if the EQIP investment is narrowly focused on individual farm permits.
3. NRCS EQIP has no provision for cooperative agreements, intergovernmental agreements, or interagency agreements. Opportunities to create economies of scale in areas of education, training, planning, design and construction are severely limited by the current practice of contracting only with individual permits holders.
4. The Navajo irrigators face a range of institutional barriers that are not faced by most of the other communities that EQIP serves. For instance, the irrigators are not private landowners in the same sense that most EQIP participants are in other areas. Instead, the Navajo irrigators are permittees on trust land. The land status creates a complex set of institutional challenges that impede the participation of the Navajo irrigators.
5. Because of these issues, EQIP funding that has been awarded to the Navajo farmers in the past are not being utilized and are being carried forward. Mr. Arvin Trujillo, Executive Director for the Division of Natural Resources, has met with State Conservationist David McKay to determine how to address this situation. I request that you support their efforts. Canceling the EQIP contracts in the Shiprock area, which comes to about 120, is not a solution.

The second initiative involves the Native American program office within the USDA. The Navajo Nation is becoming more versed in the Farm Bill and the opportunities available to the Nation and its communities. The Nation's Division of Natural Resources and Division of Community Development have been working with USDA's Native American Working Group on a number of initiatives and projects to better utilize funding available under the current Farm Bill. I would like to request your continued support in these efforts. Ms. Annabelle Romero, with your office's Native American Program, has been instrumental in bringing key people to the table and has assisted us in learning more about USDA programs. The learning curve is still steep and this interaction needs to continue. Again, I would ask that you allow this program to continue and, if possible, I would also ask that the office be expanded to better coordinate our efforts and those of other Tribes and Pueblos throughout the United States.

The Honorable Secretary Johanns

Page 3

August 26, 2005

The third area I would like to address concerns support for Tribal extension programs. The Navajo Nation is currently working with New Mexico State University in developing additional extension services within the State of New Mexico for Tribes and Pueblos. We are approaching the New Mexico State Legislature to fund this effort, but I would also like to turn to the USDA to assist with planning and implementation efforts. The goal is to serve Indian communities through the establishment of permanent Cooperative Extension Services in our Tribal and Pueblo communities that would provide:

- A base for intercultural youth programs including 4H;
- Health based programs served by a Home Economist; and
- Natural and agriculture information services provided by a specialized Extension agent.

This outreach effort is needed at many of the tribal communities to begin the development of sustainable communities.

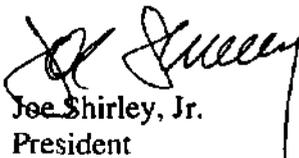
Finally, I would like to include my support towards the Southwest Strategy and ask that you also reaffirm the support of your office in this effort. Mr. Trujillo is the Navajo Nation's representative in this effort of collaboration. I have included a letter from Mr. Trujillo that will provide more information in this area.

As I noted earlier, I will have an oral presentation giving my initial views on the Farm Bill. I would also like to take this opportunity to invite you to visit the Navajo Nation and visit areas where we have worked successfully with your Department and allow us the opportunity to discuss areas that we need to continue to address and how we can further develop our relationship both from a governmental view point and a personal one as well. The Navajo Nation has had the pleasure of having Ms. Annabelle Romero, Mr. Vernon Parker, and Dr. James Butler, to name a few, visit our great Nation and we would very much like to include your name to the list.

Again, I thank you for coming to New Mexico and I hope to see you in Window Rock, Arizona.

Sincerely,

THE NAVAJO NATION


Joe Shirley, Jr.
President