



United States Department of Agriculture

Office of the Secretary
Washington, D.C. 20250

January 25, 2011

Dear Tribal Leader:

I am writing to let you know about the significant steps taken at the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) to implement President Barack Obama's November 5, 2009, Memorandum on Consultation with Tribes, and ask for your input.

Over the past year a team from across USDA has been working to re-examine existing USDA and Federal policies and Departmental Regulations regarding consultation and collaboration that guide our agencies. To better understand the needs of Tribes across the country, we recently held a series of joint consultation events where we heard from many of you concerning specific program rules, as well as existing programs and our general consultation practices. Additionally, we have reviewed comments received through other means such as in-person meetings, telephone and email communications, and your letters to me.

My focus is to create a policy that moves USDA toward better practices regarding future consultations and to promote policy development within the Department that includes collaboration and consultation from Tribes and honors our government-to-government relationship. To achieve this goal USDA is developing a new Departmentwide policy for consultation and collaboration with Tribes and we would value your input. Enclosed you will find the USDA's Draft Departmental Regulation on Tribal Consultation and Collaboration Policy. I invite you to review the document and share your comments with me by March 25, 2010. You may email your comments to tribalconsultation@usda.gov or mail your comments to Janie Hipp, Senior Advisor for Tribal Relations, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW., Suite 500A, Washington D.C., 20250.

Following a close review of your comments, the draft policy will be finalized. Thank you for your interest and participation. We look forward to your input and working with your Governments and communities to establish stronger relationships.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tom Vilsack", written over a circular stamp or seal.

Thomas J. Vilsack
Secretary

Enclosure