



United States Department of Agriculture

Office of the Secretary
Washington, D.C. 20250

December 4, 2009

Dear Tribal Leaders:

At the recent historic White House Tribal Nations Conference, President Barack Obama signed a Memorandum on Tribal Consultation, pronouncing tribal consultations “a critical ingredient of a sound and productive Federal-tribal relationship.” The President’s Memorandum directs all Federal agencies to develop a plan of action to implement Executive Order 13175 on “Consultation and Coordination with Indian Tribal Governments,” within ninety days. Federal agencies are to complete this plan after consulting with Indian tribes and tribal officials, and submit the plan to the Director of Office of Management and Budget (OMB) within 90 days.

The Department of Agriculture (USDA) embraces this responsibility, and aims to develop a comprehensive plan for consultation and coordination with tribal nations. We also recognize the principles of tribal sovereignty and self-determination and are committed to developing a comprehensive plan that improves consultation and coordination with tribal nations.

USDA is responsible for interacting with Indian tribes, and we take this directive very seriously. In the near future USDA will be take part, along with other Federal agencies, in regional consultation conferences with tribal leaders and we invite you to participate in these consultations. Your tribe’s input is invaluable to us as we craft a consultation policy that respects tribal sovereignty, self-governance, and self determination. It is important to begin this effort immediately and invite your tribe to participate in the consultations meetings.

We are writing to you and all other tribal leaders of the Federally recognized tribes, to seek your formal written comments for the USDA policy on tribal consultation and coordination. In order to allow us to review your comments and incorporate them into our plan to the President, please submit your comments to USDA no later than **Jan 10, 2010**. Your comments on how we can improve our actions are critical. Please consider that your comments might include, but certainly are not limited to:

- What Federal actions should initiate consultation?
- How far in advance should the Department and its agencies give notices of consultation?
- Who should be invited to participate in consultation?
- How should consultation occur?
- Should timelines be considered in consultation processes?
- How should follow-up to the consultation occur?
- How should the Department coordinate among its agencies as well as with other Federal departments?
- What other opportunities or alternatives are appropriate to improve communication and coordination with tribes (e.g., conferences, workshop sessions, or task forces)?

Tribal Leaders

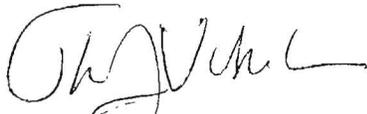
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As President Obama stated in his Memorandum, “consultation is a critical ingredient of a sound and productive Federal-tribal relationship.” We strongly support the President in this effort.

Comments can be e-mailed to: Janie.Hipp@osec.usda.gov; faxed to: 202-720-1058; or mailed to: Office of Tribal Relations, 1400 Independence Ave. SW; Room 500A; Washington DC 20250. We also have an electronic mailbox for receipt of email responses: tribalconsultation@usda.gov.

We hope your Nation will join together with us to develop this plan. If you have questions, please contact the Office of Tribal Relations at (202) 205-2249.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tom Vilsack', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Thomas J. Vilsack
Secretary