



United States Department of Agriculture

Office of the Secretary
Washington, D.C. 20250

MAY 31 2013

Dear Tribal Leaders:

I am pleased to announce the appointment of two prominent Native Americans to important positions here at the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). Ms. Leslie Wheelock will serve as Director of the USDA Office of Tribal Relations, and Ms. Patrice Kunesh will serve as Deputy Under Secretary for Rural Development. Their appointments are effective immediately.

Ms. Wheelock, an enrolled member of the Oneida Tribe of Wisconsin, previously served as Director of Economic Policy at the National Congress of American Indians. During her tenure, she worked on a variety of economic policies affecting economic development, energy and natural resources, and agriculture. She also previously served as a manager and strategic planning consultant on cultural and intellectual property for the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian. An attorney, she holds degrees from Cornell University.

Ms. Kunesh, of Standing Rock Lakota descent, previously served as the Deputy Solicitor for Indian Affairs at the U.S. Department of the Interior. In that position, she worked on a broad array of legal issues concerning American Indian Tribes and Tribal lands. Prior to that, Ms. Kunesh served on the faculty of the University of South Dakota School of Law. Ms. Kunesh also has worked with Tribes throughout the country on matters involving governance and economic and natural resource development. A graduate of Colorado Law, she was an editor of the Colorado Law Review.

Ms. Wheelock and Ms. Kunesh bring an important perspective to USDA, and will continue Obama Administration efforts to ensure that Native Americans have full access to USDA programs and a place at the table when decisions are made.

Since 2009, USDA has stepped up Tribal consultation and has worked with Tribes on important new USDA regulations. Since 2009, the Department has worked with more than 270 Tribal Governments to provide healthier food for more than 250,000 low-income Tribal citizens. Additionally, USDA has partnered with Tribal colleges to enhance community gardening efforts and improve nutrition education.

In 2010, USDA reached a historic settlement to provide compensation for Tribal producers who were wronged in the past, and today, we are strengthening our outreach for the future. Last year, I appointed a Council for Native American Farming and Ranching to advise me regarding USDA efforts in Tribal communities. In addition, we entered into agreements with the Bureau of Indian Affairs that will improve access to USDA programs on Tribal lands.

As important as these accomplishments are, there is much more to be done, and I am pleased that Ms. Wheelock and Ms. Kunesh have agreed to contribute to our efforts here at USDA.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tom Vilsack", written over a horizontal line.

Thomas J. Vilsack
Secretary of Agriculture