Tribal Leaders Consultation Work Group (TLCWG) Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR) June 27, 2023 In-Person and Virtual Meeting

I. Opening Prayer

II. Welcome and Opening Remarks

- Chairman Mark Woommavovah, Acting Chair, Tribal Leaders Consultation Work Group, Comanche Nation
- Deputy Under Secretary Stacy Dean, USDA Food, Nutrition, and Consumer Services

III. Introductions—Welcome and Recognize Tribal Leaders and USDA Leadership

- Chairman Woommavovah
- Deputy Under Secretary Dean

IV. Previous Business and Agenda-Setting

- Acceptance of February 22, 2023, Meeting Minutes without exception
- Approval of Agenda

Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR) Summary of Topics Discussed

V. USDA DoD Fresh Program – Updates on Activities

- USDA staff shared recent activities on the USDA DoD Fresh Program to include updating the USDA/FNS and DoD/DLA interagency agreement to further enhance sections of it to be more responsive to Tribal needs. Many revisions are based on feedback shared from the FDPIR community.
- USDA anticipates completing the revisions by the end of September 2023.
- USDA provided an update on the produce quality inspection checks currently performed by the Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS), Specialty Crops Inspection Division (SCI). Under this inspection, SCI staff goes out one day before delivery of product to inspect the product on-site, prior to delivery. Inspectors look at quality of product and if delivery includes all items ordered.
 - Further follow-up calls were made to approximately twenty Tribes whose product was inspected to receive further feedback on their delivery. The follow-up also allows USDA and DLA to see if any issues occurred during transportation. Overall, positive feedback was received; FNS is going to further assess the results to determine where there are vendor issues and improvements can be made.
- Tribal leaders asked if there is a vetting process when selecting vendors. DLA shard the process for awarding contracts, which are all competitive awards, and are based on a technical review of their proposals, warehouse and distribution capabilities, and past performances, among other assessments.
- USDA provided an update on a new interim complaint process implemented by USDA and DLA to get a better understanding of complaints from beginning to end. The interim tool is an excel tracking sheet to capture all complaints and see trends. Long term, USDA will be looking at

- implementing an automated electronic tool.
- USDA also provided an update on stakeholder meetings currently being hosted on a monthly basis since February 2023. The meetings include FNS, DLA and FDPIR staff and provide a forum for all parties to discuss issues and work on resolutions in a more transparent manner. USDA shared it is still seeking volunteers from FDPIR program staff to consistently attend the meetings every month.
- USDA provided information on training of both USDA and DLA staff involved in working with Tribes. FNS has engaged an Indigenous owned/operated vendor, Tribal Tech, to deliver cultural competency training to approximately 50 FNS staff and DLA staff members involved in supporting the USDA DOD Fresh Program. The training was delivered on June 22, 2023, with more trainings to come.

VI. Cultural Competency Training Update

- Tribal leaders shared they would like to see cultural competency training to be more diverse and modern and not limited only to staff that works with FDPIR, but other nutrition programs as well. Stakeholders also asked how FNS Tribal Affairs Specialists are involved in cultural competency training.
 - USDA shared the new role of the Tribal Affairs Technical Advisor in the Administrators Office and the training developed by Tribal Tech.
 - O USDA also shared how the Tribal Affairs Specialists will work closely with the Administrators Office and the new technical advisors on various initiatives including more site visits and re-prioritize work. USDA clarified that the work is not allocated out by program, but tribally driven depending on regional needs. The Tribal Affairs Specialists are not the experts on all programs, but a resource to assist Tribes in getting the help they need.
- Tribal leaders asked if all the job descriptions for the Tribal Affairs Specialists are the same.
- Tribal leaders also asked for training details to be shared with them for review.
- USDA will follow-up on both items.

VII. FDPIR Self-Determination Demonstration Project

- Current Round 1 Contracts
 - USDA provided an update on the current 8 Tribes participating in the demonstration project. All 8 Tribes are on a 3-year contract which runs through September 30, 2024.
 All 8 Tribes are also distributing some if not all of their proposed Tribally procured foods.
 - USDA provided information on quarterly check-in calls as well as past site visits to Chickasaw Nation, the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium, and the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians as well as two upcoming site visits to Lummi Nation and Red Cliff in summer 2023.
- Update Round 2 Contracts
 - USDA shared it is in the process of expanding the demonstration project; 8 new Tribes have been selected to participate through a federal notice solicitation process published

- earlier in the year. Under the solicitation, which mirrored the same process from Round 1, 8 proposals were received from 8 Tribes. All 8 Tribes have been selected.
- o The 8 Tribes have been notified by USDA and BIA, who is working on the contract documents.
- o Total amount awarded in Round 2 is \$4.4 million. The 8 Tribes selected are:
 - 1. Cherokee Nation
 - 2. Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation
 - 3. Gila River Indian Community
 - 4. Quinault Indian Nation
 - 5. Sokaogon Chippewa Community
 - 6. Spirit Lake Tribe
 - 7. Tohono O'odham Nation
 - 8. White Mountain Apache Tribe
- USDA shared it is interested in hearing from Tribal leaders on any administrative changes they would like to see. USDA also stated it is very supportive of building its capacity and standing up an office of self-governance, but still needs to assess the best place for the office to reside.

VIII. FDPIR Studies & Evaluations – Update

- FDPIR Program Access Survey
 - USDA provided an update on the FDPIR Program Access Survey which Congress directed FNS to conduct with the goal to better understand the challenges that prevent FDPIR administering agencies from being able to reach homebound or elderly individuals and identify strategies and recommendations for distributing food to these populations.
 - FNS awarded a contract to Ken Consulting and in collaboration with them, conducted a
 pre-test of the survey with six FDPIR administering agencies and incorporated their
 feedback in the final survey. The six FDPIR agencies were across 5 regions and included:
 - 1. Nevada Department of Agriculture (W)
 - 2. Ute Indian Tribe (SW)
 - 3. Santee Sioux Nation (MP)
 - 4. Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians (SE)
 - 5. White Earth Band of Chippewa (MW)
 - 6. Quinault Indian Tribe (W)
 - The final survey was sent out to all FDPIR administering agencies on May 16th, 2023, and will close on June 30th, 2023. Subsequent to this meeting, FNS extended the survey deadline to July 7, 2023.
 - o A report of the findings will be submitted to Congress by the end of this calendar year.
- FDPIR Characteristics Study & FDPIR Self-Determination Demonstration
 - The FDPIR Participant Characteristics Study is a study that will replicate the previous FDPIR characteristics study conducted in 2016.
 - o It's a study that will capture key information about the national caseload make-up of the program. For example:
 - Obtain an updated demographic profile of participants;

- Explore FDPIR participation trends and the reason(s) for those trends;
- Examine food package distribution approaches and other key aspects of FDPIR operations; and
- By September 2023, FNS plans to make an award to a contractor to conduct this study.
 USDA is also working with the NAFDPIR Planning Committee to present the study during the annual conference.
- The study will include a technical working group that will provide guidance on the study methods and approach; it will be comprised of Tribal representatives, FDPIR staff and participants, and subject matter experts.
- o This study will also include an evaluation of the FDPIR self-determination demonstration projects which will allow FNS to better understand how the projects were implemented, and key successes, challenges, and lessons learned. The evaluation will include Round 1 and Round 2 Tribes.
- Tribal leaders asked how contractors are selected and if they have experience working with Tribal nations. FNS Office of Policy Support shared that having prior experience working with Tribes is included in the solicitation and priority is given to contractors who have this experience.

IX. Proposed Rulemaking on FDPIR

- FNS will soon be publishing a proposed rulemaking titled Food Distribution Programs: Improving Parity and Access. The rule is planned for publication in a proposed state by the end of the summer. Subsequent to the consultation the rule published on August 14, 2023.
- This rule proposes regulatory changes to all of FNS' household food distribution programs
 including FDPIR, CSFP and The Emergency Food Assistance Program, or TEFAP. FNS is
 also proposing some changes to regulations related to the use of USDA Foods in disasters
 and situations of distress.
- The changes are intended to increase access to the critical nutrition assistance that the food
 distribution programs provide, to modernize program operations, and to incorporate many of
 the lessons learned that we learned from implementing these programs during the COVID 19
 pandemic.
- The rule also strives to increase parity between FDPIR and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) since as you know many households participate in FDPIR as an alternative to SNAP. The proposed changes are intended to better align the two programs.
- All feedback from Tribal leaders will be taken into consideration. Feedback previously received from Tribal leaders through consultation meetings includes:
 - Consider providing more foods through FDPIR when there are large increases in SNAP benefits, like the SNAP emergency allotments that were distributed during the COVID-19 pandemic;
 - Consider adjusting FDPIR income guidelines or adding certain income deductions to increase participation in the program for those in need of food assistance but who may be over the current FDPIR income guidelines;
 - We have heard feedback related to waiver authority for FDPIR, and requests for FDPIR to have similar waiver authorities as other programs.

- o Tribal leaders have also indicated an interest in streamlining the dual participation check that requires program operators to work with SNAP State agencies to ensure that FDPIR participants aren't enrolled in both programs.
- Increasing the variety of the foods in the program, providing additional or distinct foods for certain participants, and reconsidering food offerings for Disaster Household Distributions were also ideas that have come up in past consultations.
- Lastly, we have heard some feedback related to the certification process for FDPIR and making it as easy and simple as possible for program participants.
- Comment received from Tribal leaders:
 - o Request to access certification module remotely.
 - o Reiterated need to increase FDPIR benefits when SNAP benefits go up.
- The proposed rule will be published in the Federal Register with comment period to receive comments and feedback this summer 2023. Technical webinars will also be made available on the rule's contents. Following the consultation, the proposed rule published, and the public comment period remains open through October 13, 2023.

X. IFMS and Alternative Computer Systems

- Over the past 3 months, our team has made significant progress in enhancing the system's functionality and performance to better serve the needs of the program and its customers.
- In April, Connie Martinez, Director of the Pueblo of Acoma Food Distribution Program and her staff hosted a 2.5-day IFMS training in collaboration with the IFMS project team. Three additional ITOs were also in attendance: Navajo Nation, Five Sandoval Indian Pueblos, Inc., and Pueblo of Zuni.
- FNS Staff and CACI (the contractor supporting IFMS) were also in attendance. The inperson opportunity allowed the project team to see Acoma's FDPIR operations first-hand and provided additional perspective towards fine-tuning IFMS. FNS is looking forward to more opportunities to visit with ITOs using IFMS and encourages FDPIR program operators to . reach out to discuss in-person training and support.
- System Upgrades:
 - FNS successfully completed a series of upgrades to the information system, focusing on the following key areas:
 - A) Improved User Interface: revamped the user interface to make it more intuitive and user-friendly. This will enable program stakeholders to easily navigate through the system and access the required information effortlessly.
 - Continued updates further enhance and expedite the certification module.
 - We continue to work on the issuance receipt to ensure that it works properly for users. We currently have an issue where a blank sheet of paper is added to the issuance receipt when it is printed. We developed a fix for issuance receipts that are 2 pages or longer, and we continue to work on the 1-page issuance receipt. We estimate that about 60% of issuance receipts are 2 pages or longer, so this should be a sufficient fix. The hot fix was released over the weekend.
 - B) Enhanced Security Measures: implemented advanced security measures to ensure the confidentiality and integrity of the data, such as:

- Continue to ensure that IFMS meets all security requirements and data protection.
- Sales Force did a Spring 2023 release that improved our security posture in keeping up with current threats.
- C) Scalability and Performance: To accommodate the growing demands of the program, optimized the system's performance and scalability such as:
 - To accommodate the growing demands of the program, we have optimized the system's performance and scalability.
 - Launched a mobile app for tailgate and/or distribution sites that lack internet or cellular connectivity.
 - Improvement to the test scripts
 - Added feature so users can clear simultaneous issuance errors on their own rather than calling the help desk. This was deployed the first week of June 2023.
- D) Expanded Functionality: In response to the feedback received from program customers, FNS introduced new features and functionalities to enhance the overall user experience. Some notable additions include:
 - Document storage and electronic signatures for application will be able in the release June 30th. Required verification information, including income statements and any other questionable information that must be verified.
 - Programs have the ability to customize the order in which food categories appear on the issuance screen. This ensures that food categories can appear in the same order on shopping lists, issuance receipts, food availability lists, issuance menu, and food storage sites.
 - Enhanced notifications notifications will populate automatically after the certification process is complete users will no longer have to generate the notice on a separate screen. This will be available June 30th.
 - Past applications will be linked to the household summary screens.
 Users will no longer have to search/filter on the application tab. This will be available June 30^{th.}
- E) User Training and Support: Recognizing the importance of user training and support, we have conducted comprehensive training sessions for ITO transitions from AIS. These sessions aim to familiarize users with the system's updated features and provide them with the necessary skills to maximize its potential. Additionally, our support team is readily available to address any queries or technical issues that may arise during transition and system usage such as log-in issues, assigning user roles, and adjusting to the IFMS experience. When programs first transition, they receive a week of a dedicated hyper care support line.
 - From February May 2023, 15 ITOs transitioned from AIS to IFMS successfully. FNS also provided over 50 training sessions during this time period.
 - Currently, 12 ITOs are still using AIS. The plan is that 4 will transition to IFMS and 8 will transition to Sygnal.
- Tribal leaders asked how FNS national office will work with regional offices on requests and

- implementation of alternate computer systems to ensure consistency. FNS shared its current process which involves a standardized checklist and a demo on systems available to help ITOs make a decision. FNS is also conducting monthly meetings with regional office staff to discuss ITO system transition.
- Tribal leaders also asked if Sygnal can be part of any FNS IFMS training that is conducted. FNS shared that it may have legal constraints but will review opportunities. Tribal leaders also mentioned that many ITOs may not consider an alternate system due to constraints in obtaining it such as: asking for additional funding and the procurement process. These constraints are not part of IFMS. FNS will look at its process and follow-up specifically with Chickasaw Nation who brought up the concern.
- A Sygnal representative provided an update on Sygnal updates and features including
 recently addressing an issuance speed issue. They are working on a few new features
 including a nutrition module to display recipes using USDA Foods and making it part of their
 online ordering system. Another feature Sygnal is working on is the ability to enable texting
 from the system where ITO staff can text participants directly to make them aware of
 appointments and/or food pickups, as examples.
- Sygnal representative also shared that they are currently looking at developing a system to support the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) and Farmers' Market.

XI. Food Package Updates

- FDPIR Guide Rate Changes FNS staff worked collaboratively with the FDPIR Food Package Review Work Group to assess the food package and provide enhancements. In conjunction with assessing the food package, the group worked together to identify 5 new foods that were most desired by program participants.
- Market research on the following 5 foods voted on by the Workgroup was performed:
 - frozen strawberries
 - frozen vegetable stir-fry mix
 - low-sodium turkey deli meat
 - extra virgin olive oil, and
 - bison stew meat
- In February 2023, based on market research, the Workgroup unanimously voted to move forward with the frozen strawberries (1 lb. pack) and bison stew meat (2 lb. pack). Both products will be available September 1, 2023.
- In terms of the units of food, FNS will be increasing the guide rate in the following three categories:
 - Eggs (dry or fresh) Increase from 1 to 2 units
 - Meat/Poultry/Fish Increase from 3 to 5 units
 - Vegetables Increase from 13 to 18 units
 - Also removing the fruit and vegetable exchange
- These guide rate changes go into effect September 1, 2023.
- FNS is also updating its funding memo to include information on requesting funding for increased storage needs per the upcoming changes.
- Tribal leaders asked about the use of Native vendors for USDA Foods procurement. FNS provided information on the procurement process.

XII. FDPIR Nutrition Education

- The FY22 appropriations from Congress included \$4M in FDPIR administrative funds to be used for nutrition education. To date, more than \$3.6M of \$4M has been allocated to 85 tribes.
- By June 30, the remaining funds were allocated to Spirit Lake Tribe to partner with the Native Food and Nutrition Resource Alliance to develop and deliver nutrition education for all FDPIR Tribes.
- For FY 2024, FNS increased the baseline allocation for each Tribe to \$20,000, up from \$17,500. Tribes will be able to request the amount of administrative funds for nutrition education needed during the annual budget negotiation process for FY24.
- FNS reiterated that the \$4M allocation is not a cap but a baseline estimate and encourages Tribes to submit requests to help meet all their nutrition education needs.
- FNS is working on opportunities to be able to showcase the different activities that Tribes are doing with the nutrition education funds and will share with the FDPIR community. FNS is also looking at hosting a nutrition education symposium in FY24. Tribal leaders commented that it would be great to capture how Tribes used Tribal ecological knowledge in any of their activities.

Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) Summary of Topics Discussed

I. CSFP Food Package & Guide Rate

- FNS provided an overview of the CSFP and further shared that the quantities of foods that CSFP participants receive in the food package are set by FNS and outlined in a document titled the CSFP Food Package Guide Rate. The current food package categories in the CSFP guide rate include fruits and juice; vegetables; cheeses; milk; meat, poultry, and fish; plant-based protein; cereals; and pasta/rice.
- States and ITOs are encouraged to consider their participants' individual nutrient needs and storage capacities when ordering, to ensure participant needs are met through the program. It is also a best practice to order a variety of foods from the CSFP Foods Available List so that CSFP food packages contain different foods from month to month.
- The specific USDA Foods that States and ITOs can order from USDA to meet the guide rate, are outlined in the annually published CSFP Foods Available List.
- Tribal leaders asked how leaders can get more involved to improve the foods available and if
 fresh produce may be added. Tribal leaders raised concerns with the lack of variety and would
 also like to see traditional foods included.
- FNS shared some challenges that exist in CSFP that are not seen in FDPIR, like how the program has capped funding. The program is discretionary and some FDPIR flexibilities do not exist in CSFP due to budgetary constraints. CSFP also does not have the same capacity to support infrastructure making the introduction of non-shelf-stable foods like fresh produce challenging. For example, increasing costs to support infrastructure in CSFP may come at a cost of serving less participants.
- Tribal leaders asked what the Healthy Eating Index (HEI) score is for CSFP. FNS shared the last HEI score was done in 2014 and the score was 84.
- FNS shared it is currently exploring fresh produce options for Tribes administering CSFP through its partnership with DOD.

• Tribal leaders and FNS had a discussion about foods available in the CSFP food package.

II. Administrative Funds

- CSFP administrative funding is provided to States and ITOs to pay State and local agency administrative costs of operating the program.
- Administrative funds are allocated to States and ITOs using an administrative grant per assigned caseload slot formula, which is mandated by law and adjusted each fiscal year to reflect inflation. State agencies must distribute administrative funds to local agencies based on their needs, and in a manner that ensures the funds help meet program objectives.
- In 2023, the grant per caseload amount was \$93.19 per caseload slot, up from \$84.47 in 2022. The large increase from 2022 to 2023 is due to inflation increasing year over year.
- Administrative funding levels for each State and ITO are publicly available and the 2023 amounts can be found in the January 2023 memo, Caseload Assignments for the 2023 Caseload Cycle and Administrative Grants.
- The administrative funding allocation process is outlined in both Federal statute and regulations. Because of this FNS is unable to deviate from our current processes to allocate CSFP administrative funding
- Tribal leaders shared that some Tribal CSFP programs' administrative funding was cut due to not meeting caseload levels and if there are any flexibilities or waivers to help address the shortfall. As mentioned, the allocation is outlined in Federal statute and regulations which limits FNS' ability to offer flexibility.

III. Scheduling of Future Consultations

 Intertribal Agricultural Council Conference – Week of December 11, 2023, in Las Vegas, Nevada.

IV. Closing Comments and Prayer

Follow-Up Items:

- 1. Tribal leaders asked if all the job descriptions for the Tribal Affairs Specialists are the same. USDA will follow-up and share the Tribal Affairs Specialist job description(s) used.
- 2. Tribal leaders asked for cultural competency training details and for the training to be shared with them for their review.
- 3. Tribal leaders asked what specific changes have been made to the interagency agreement (IAA) between USDA/FNS and DOD/DLA.
- 4. Tribal Leaders asked that FNS provide information regarding USDA DoD Fresh fill rate percentages by region.
- 5. Tribal leaders requested a report out of the SNAP-Ed Tribal consultations that occurred at the State level. USDA and Tribal leaders suggested that an FDPIR session be held at the SNAP annual conference.
- 6. Tribal leaders asked if any tribal data is used in the CSFP funding formula.

- 7. Tribal leaders asked if USDA is open to creating pilots in CSFP for Tribes, specifically related to fresh produce.
- 8. Tribal leaders asked about a potential CSFP food package Work Group.
- 9. Tribal leaders asked for streamlined eligibility between CSFP and FDPIR.
- 10. Tribal leaders requested Regional Administrators attend future consultations.
- 11. Tribal Leaders asked to participate in the "unpacking of evaluations" of tribal related studies (also expressed concern about the evaluators not being Indigenous or familiar with Tribal communities).

ENCLOSURES:

- List of Attendees Zoom Registration
- Attachment A In-Person Registration List
- Attachment B Answers to Follow-Up Items

List of Attendees

USDA and Tribal Consulting Officials

Name	Title	Tribe/USDA
Mark Woommavovah	Acting Chair, TLCWG	Comanche Nation
Stacy Dean	Deputy Under Secretary	USDA, FNCS

Tribal Leaders, Representatives and Other Attendees

June 27, 2023 – Zoom Registration List

Note: Registration was done via a virtual service which captures the identifying information below.

Registrants (as entered)

First		Tribal		
Name	Last Name	Leader	Tribe/USDA	Attendance
Amanda	Sheppard	No	USDA FNS	Virtual
Andreanna	Cook-Hiett	No	Southern Ute Indian Tribe	Virtual
Aneva	Hagberg	Yes	Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians	In-person
Ashley	Dowdy	No	Seminole Nation	In-person
Barbara	Lopez	No	FNS	In-person
	Tucker-			
Blair	Gruchala	No	NA	In-person
Brandon	Wisneski	No	Oneida Nation	In-person
Cheryl	Downing	No	Alabama-Coushatta Tribe of Texas	Virtual
Christina	Riley	No	USDA FNS	Virtual
			Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe Food Distribution	
Clinton	Knife	No	Program	Virtual
	Fischer-			
Courtney	Claussen	No	CRST	Virtual
Danielle	Lyons	No	N/A	Virtual

Allen Tuckwiller	No	USDA	In-person
Tuckwiller			
TUCKWIIICI	No	USDA/AMS	Virtual
Longoria	No	USDA	In-person
Prouty	No	Comanche Nation	In-person
Cross	No	USDA FNS	Virtual
Hellings	No	DLA	In-person
Conway	No	USDA	Virtual
Geary	No	FNS MWRO	Virtual
Sheehan	No	DLA Troop Support	In-person
Frider	No	USDA	In-person
Runnels	Yes	Santee Sioux Nation Tribal Council	In-person
Young	No	FNS	Virtual
Staley	No	FNS	Virtual
Sweitzer	No	USDA FNS	Virtual
Clifford	No		Virtual
Castro	No		Virtual
			Virtual
			In-person
	100		III person
Wahpat	No		Virtual
Haake	No	USDA	Virtual
Cress	No	Choctaw Nation Food Distribution	Virtual
Szklarski	No	DLA Troop Support	In-person
Slater	No	Iowa Tribe of Kansas and Nebraska	In-person
COLLINS	No	Chickasaw Nation	In-person
Schoenian	No	USDA FNS	Virtual
Lohnes	Yes		In-person
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