



U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Highlight Accomplishments for Tribal Nations under the Biden-Harris Administration

- **Office of Tribal Relations Expansion:** In 2021, Secretary Vilsack restored and empowered USDA's Office of Tribal Relations to a free-standing office that can maintain the Nation-to-Nation relationship with Tribal Nations. The team has grown from a staff of 3 to 12, including policy analysts with expertise in American Indian law, treaties, economic development, conservation, and food sovereignty. In direct response to Tribal requests, the USDA Tribal College Program was relocated to USDA's Office of Tribal Relations in 2023.
- **Tribal Advisory Committee:** In 2023, USDA announced the members of the Tribal Advisory Committee (TAC), which held its inaugural meeting in 2024. The USDA TAC met quarterly throughout the year and will present its annual report to Congress and the Secretary of Agriculture, carrying out its statutory authority to provide advice and guidance to the Secretary on matters relating to Tribal and Indian affairs.
- **Tribal Co-Stewardship and Other Tribal Investments:** During the Biden-Harris Administration, the USDA Forest Service completed four land exchanges totaling nearly 15,000 acres restoring Tribal homelands across the nation. In August 2024, eight Tribes from the Great Sioux Nation signed a historic Memorandum of Understanding with the USDA Forest Service to outline the co-stewardship of portions of the Black Hills National Forest. The MOU establishes an ambitious framework for consultation, land and water conservation, and sacred site protection, among other activities. Over the last three years, the USDA Forest Service has invested approximately \$160 million in over 250 co-stewardship agreements. In fiscal year 2024 alone, the Forest Service invested approximately \$113 million in 121 agreements with Tribes and Alaska Native Corporations, with more than half of these focused on co-stewardship of the National Forest System. This work spans a range of Tribal and Forest Service priorities, honors treaty rights, and protects and maintains resources important to Tribes and cultural lifeways.
- **Bison Restoration:** USDA programs incorporated bison, a traditional indigenous animal, into land management, food and nutrition, and conservation programs across the Department. A \$63.75 million award in fiscal year 2024 to the InterTribal Buffalo Council will help restore cultural and spiritual practices, sequester carbon, and reduce greenhouse emissions. Additionally, USDA launched a \$700,000 program in 2024 to reimburse establishments for bison voluntary inspection fees incurred by Native American owned meat processing facilities or facilities operating on Tribal lands. Since 2023, nearly \$50 million in Indigenous Animals Harvesting and Meat Processing Grants have expanded processing opportunities using modern and traditional harvesting methods for animals that are native to North America like bison, reindeer, and salmon.
- **Funding Tribal Food Sovereignty:** Between 2021 and 2024, the USDA Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) has awarded more than \$120 million to Tribal Nations through the Local Food Purchase Assistance Cooperative Agreement (LFPA) and LFPA Plus programs to purchase local foods from local, regional, underserved, and Tribal producers to distribute those foods to their communities. The funding helped address the disproportionate food insecurity needs in Indian Country and ensure a more equitable distribution of LFPA resources.



- **Tribal Self-Determination in Food:** Since October 2021, the USDA Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) awarded \$11.4 million to 16 Tribal organizations for projects that give Tribes more options to directly select and purchase foods for their Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR) or Tribal “commodities” programs. This is an important step to increasing Tribal food sovereignty in the program and supporting Tribal economies, vendors, and producers. FNS also revised the WIC food package guidelines to offer a wider variety of foods that align with the latest nutritional science, accommodating cultural preferences to offer whole grain options like quinoa and blue cornmeal. Finally, FNS partnered with Tribal Nations to launch the Summer Electronic Benefits Transfer for Children Program, serving over 250,000 children through partnerships with the Cherokee Nation and Chickasaw Nation.
- **Tribal Sovereignty in Broadband Programs.** Under the Biden-Harris Administration, USDA Rural Development has awarded more than \$321 million to increase Tribal access to high-speed internet through the ReConnect Program. USDA also clarified that the long-standing requirement to obtain necessary permits and rights-of-way also includes the need for Tribal permissions when providing USDA-funded broadband service on Tribal lands.
- **USDA Clarifies Tribal Corporation Eligibility in Key Rural Development Program.** Responding to years of comments from Tribes and feedback received during Tribal consultation, USDA Rural Development is updating regulations for two key programs. USDA Rural Development clarified that Tribal corporations and other arms and instrumentalities are eligible for the Rural Business Development Grant program, which provides funding to create and sustain jobs and businesses in rural areas. This action responded to years-long comments from Tribes. USDA Rural Development’s Rural Housing Service also worked to provide Tribes and Tribal corporations with greater flexibility when applying to the Community Facilities programs. These changes will be codified in a forthcoming update to the Community Facilities Direct Loan and Grant regulation and directly respond to Tribal consultation and informal feedback.
- **Investing in the Next Generation:** In 2023, the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture invested \$25.8 million in the next generation of future leaders at Tribal Colleges and Universities through the NextGen program. This five-year investment includes support for scholarships and paid internships to encourage students and community members to grow their careers in food, agriculture, natural resources, and human sciences. Projects are led by the College of Menominee Nation, Fond du Lac Tribal and Community College, Northwest Indian College, and Nueta Hidatsa Sahnish College.
- **Enhancing Program Access and Delivery for Farm Loans:** Effective September 2024, USDA’s updated regulations for Enhancing Program Access and Delivery for Farm Loans revised the definition of “Family farm” in 7 CFR 761.2(b) to include commercial foraging operations as an eligible family farm for the purposes of operating loans where commodities such as wild rice are commercially foraged on Indian land. The rule also addressed barriers to program access related to applicant farm experience and loan collateral requirements. The rule also provides for the development of farm operating plans and repayment terms that emphasize the accumulation of working capital reserves and savings necessary to ensure farm resiliency and promote operational growth. As a result, more Tribal lands and operations will be eligible for Farm Service Agency loans.