

USDA Tribal Accomplishments 2022

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) is committed to Indian Country and is delighted to share some of its 2022 tribal accomplishments to coincide with the President's annual Tribal Nations Summit and Native American Heritage Month. USDA's tribal priorities broadly fit into three areas: 1) Removing the unique barriers for Indigenous and tribal access to USDA programs and services, 2) Promoting tribal self-determination throughout USDA, and 3) Adapting USDA's programs to include unique tribal values and Indigenous perspectives.

Announcing the Creation of USDA's First Tribal Advisory Committee (TAC): The 2018 Farm Bill created a permanent Tribal Advisory Committee to provide guidance to USDA from Indian Country and facilitate the nation-to-nation relationship. USDA announces the TAC will be formed and notice for applications will be forthcoming.

TRIBAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Rural Development

Increased Tribal Home Ownership Opportunities: USDA's Rural Development (RD) reinvested \$4 million in the 502 Single Family Housing South Dakota Native Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFI) Relending Demonstration Program. Through that effort we lend homeownership capital to two Native CDFIs who then relend those funds to increase homeownership opportunities, for tribal members, on tribal lands on several reservations in South and North Dakota. These efforts have increased the availability of homeownership opportunities, at an increased pace, on tribal lands on the Cheyenne River and Pine Ridge reservations. Concurrently, RD developed a supplemental guidance document to help staff more effectively make and service homeownership loans on tribal lands.

Increased Broadband Access and Self-Determination for Tribes: The ReConnect Broadband Program saw historic changes with a significant amount of grant funding set-aside, with no matching funds required, for tribal projects serving tribal lands. These considerations increased applications from tribes and tribal entities and resulted in additional grant awards to tribal applicants. The program also clarified that applicants were required to receive tribal permissions to be eligible to use ReConnect funding to provide broadband service on tribal lands.

Launched Rural Partners Network: The Rural Partners Network helps establish community networks where local leaders, including tribal governments, collaborate with civic and business organizations, nonprofits, service providers, 20 plus development agencies, and others to create new and lasting economic opportunities. To build out this network, USDA is starting with targeted tribal partnerships across the country in Arizona, Wisconsin, and Southeast and Western Alaska, including direct tribal partnership with the San Carlos Apache Tribe, Tohono O'odham Nation, Cocopah Indian Nation, and Menominee Indian Tribe of Wisconsin.

Improving Tribal Technical Assistance: USDA's Office of Tribal Relations signed a cooperative agreement with the Native Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI)

Network to develop an electronic resource toolkit that will promote awareness of and access to Rural Development Programs throughout the Native CDFI industry and additional tribal communities.

Instituted National Rural Development (RD) Tribal Training Program: This fall, RD is hosting virtual tribal training for RD staff. The training is being offered on a regional basis, as a level setting effort to better inform our responsibilities to, and work with, tribes. The training is built around the four core principles within the policy statement: trust responsibility, tribal consultation, tribal sovereignty, and the historic relationship between tribes and the federal government - and builds upon AgLearn training made available by USDA's Office of Tribal Relations.

Increased Broadband Access and Self-Determination on Infrastructure Projects for Tribes: The ReConnect Broadband Program saw historic changes with a significant amount of grant funding set-aside, with no matching funds required, for tribal projects serving tribal lands. These considerations increased applications from tribes and tribal entities and resulted in additional grant awards to tribal applicants. The program also clarified that applicants were required to receive tribal permissions to be eligible to use ReConnect funding to provide broadband service on tribal lands.

Issued First Rural Development (RD) Tribal Policy Statement: RD issued a [policy statement](#) on November 1 that renewed our commitment to strengthen partnerships with tribes and tribal communities and ensure Native people have access to the critical infrastructure and economic resources they need to thrive. The policy statement recommits the agency to:

- Upholding the agency's trust responsibility to tribal communities
- Respecting tribal sovereignty by protecting tribal treaty rights and fostering economic and cultural prosperity
- Engaging with tribes through timely and meaningful consultation on USDA's policies and programs
- Reflecting on the shared and complex history between tribes and the federal government

Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service

Preparing Tribal Nations for Animal and Plant Emergencies: USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) is cooperating with Native American agriculture and natural resources organizations to host regional Emergency Preparedness and Response Training. These workshops open a critical dialogue between APHIS and tribal personnel about the tribe's emergency response concerns and ability to respond to animal or plant health emergencies. In FY22, USDA hosted 102 tribal officials representing 41 tribal nations in these discussions. Workshop participants receive technical assistance with developing animal and plant health emergency response plans, initiating memorandum of understanding (MOU) discussions, coordinating logistical exercises, and identifying response vulnerabilities.

Expanding APHIS Tribal Funding Opportunities Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD): APHIS is awarding a total of \$525,673 to tribes to support combatting CWD. As part of this funding, APHIS is awarding \$274,973 through Cooperative Agreements to five federally recognized

Native American tribal governments to combat Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) on tribal lands across five different states. Additionally, two cooperative agreements were established, awarding \$250,700 for wild cervid CWD surveillance on tribal lands. These projects will allow recipients to further develop and implement CWD management, response, and research activities in wild cervids, including surveillance and testing. Read more about the [detailed spending plan](#).

FARMING AND RANCHING

Farm Service Agency & Risk Management Agency

Distressed Borrower Assistance Provided for Farmers & Ranchers: USDA provides access to credit to approximately 115,000 producers who cannot obtain sufficient commercial credit through our direct and our guaranteed farm loans. Through no fault of their own, our nation's farmers and ranchers have faced incredibly tough circumstances over the last few years. With the funds and direction Congress provided in Section 22006 of the IRA, USDA took action to immediately provide relief to qualifying distressed borrowers whose operations were at financial risk. Distressed borrowers with qualifying USDA farm loans have already received nearly \$800 million in assistance, as part of the \$3.1 billion in assistance

Expanding Access to Crop Insurance in Indian Country: While USDA sets parameters for crop insurance programming, crop insurance is sold and delivered solely through private crop insurance agents. USDA Risk Management Agency announced approximately \$1.9 million in partnership with the Intertribal Agriculture Council to strategically engage minority-serving institutions and related stakeholders to train, credential, and establish a pipeline of crop insurance agents and adjusters for underserved and tribal communities.

Recognizing traditional animals in disaster assistance programs: This year, bison herds across the country faced an outbreak of *Mycoplasma bovis*, a respiratory disease that is difficult to test for and with treat in buffalo. This year, the Farm Service Agency included *M. bovis* as an eligible cause for the Livestock Indemnity Program, which provides producers facing excess of normal mortality in their herds with a financial benefit of 75 percent the average fair market value of the animal(s) impacted.

First Ever Agreements with Tribal Nations to Support Long Term Conservation of Tribal Lands Through the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program: Farm Service Agency just announced new partnerships with three tribal nations, and 3.1 million acres, in the Great Plains to help conserve, maintain, and improve grassland productivity, reduce soil erosion, and enhance wildlife habitat through the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program. These agreements mark the first-ever CREP agreements with tribal nations.

Natural Resources Conservation Service

Alternative Funding Arrangements to Empower Tribes and Better Fund Tribal Conservation: Tribal partners encouraged the inclusion of Alternative Funding Arrangements for Federally Recognized Tribal Nations in the 2018 Farm Bill Alternative Funding Arrangements (AFAs). This new authority is critical to overcome low reimbursement rates on

tribal EQIP projects, better incorporate tribal knowledge into Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) programs, and advance common goals toward increasing tribal self-governance. With input from tribal partners, the NRCS policy was published in January 2022. Tribal organizations and the NRCS are providing training the tribal natural resources leaders and staffs on how and when to develop AFA Programmatic Agreements to better meet tribal natural resource challenges.

NRCS and Tribal Partners Developed Equity Agreements to Remove Barriers and Increase Access to USDA Resources: In 2022, tribal nations and tribal organizations developed cooperative equity agreements with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to improve the delivery of conservation services to tribal agricultural producers. As a result, NRCS staffs are assisting tribally led conservation workshops, demonstrations, field days, and direct technical assistance to tribal ag producers with the goal of increasing the number of tribal producers accessing NRCS and other USDA resources. Eighteen agreements representing \$7.5 million in federal funds were approved in FY 2022. The NRCS Outreach and Partnership Division expects to announce a new request for proposals soon to develop new partnerships to further build relations with tribal producers.

Support Provided for Community-Driven Relocation due to Climate Change: The NRCS Watershed and Flood Prevention Operations Program will also allocate \$40 million from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law to assist with community-driven relocation of Alaskan Native villages due to climate change, erosion, and flooding. Seven villages have been chosen from a set of the highest-risk villages. This funding will cover feasibility studies, watershed planning and NEPA compliance, and move design, and will partner with the Department of the Interior's community-driven relocation program.

NRCS EQIP Conservation Flexible Solutions Developed to Fit Both Large- and Small-Scale Agricultural Operations. Tribal organizations and other partners have asked the NRCS to develop EQIP program incentives based on the higher per acre implementation costs typical of urban and tribal community agriculture. There are economies of scale which make the per acre cost of implementing conservation practices like cover crop very different on 300 acres as opposed to a third of an acre. Fifty new EQIP scenarios are now available with the incentive based on how many thousands of square feet as opposed to how many acres. It seems like a small thing, but now EQIP is a more meaningful resource for smaller scale agriculture.

FORESTS

Forest Service

Historic New Forest Service Tribal Relations Action Plan: The USDA Forest Service Tribal Relations Action Plan on Tribal Consultation and Strengthening Nation-to-Nation Relationships is intended to advance tribal relations at the Forest Service and provides guidance and assistance to fulfill our federal trust responsibility, honor treaty obligations, and support tribal self-determination. The plan is a policy synthesis, a human resources roadmap, and a guide for our future tribal relations work. With this tool in hand, we can ensure that we are managing lands and waters in a manner that seeks to protect treaty, religious, spiritual, subsistence and cultural

interests of federally recognized tribes. The Action Plan also enhances restoration work across the landscape to restore ecological function and health, shift our paradigm of stewardship and management, and reduce the risk to communities from wildfire and climate driven disasters.

New Flexible Policy Direction for Partnerships Opportunities with the U.S. Forest Service:

Forest Service issued interim policy direction that makes it easier for existing and potential partners to work together with the Forest Service to achieve mutually beneficial goals. The new policy direction includes, directing broad inclusion of values partners bring to the relationship when determining how and when match requirements in partner agreements are met; removing the policy requirement for “substantial cash contributions;” and identifying a process to reduce, and in some cases waive, match requirements that are not statutorily required.

Historic Implementation of Tribal Self-Determination with Over 70 Tribal Co-Stewardship Agreements in Process:

Eleven new tribal-U.S. Forest Service co-stewardship agreements – which includes eleven agreements between nine tribes and eight National Forests are going to be highlighted at the Tribal Nations Summit. However, in addition to these eleven new agreements, our team at the U.S. Forest Service has taken the direction of the Joint Secretarial Order to heart and has been working very hard with our tribal partners. We are very excited to share that we have more than 60 additional tribal co-stewardship agreements in various stages of review.

New Hires under the Recruiting and Hiring Tribal Relations Positions Advisory:

The Forest Service used the USDA Hiring Advisory, *Recruiting and Hiring Tribal Relations Positions Advisory*, and served as the primary demonstration agency for the advisory. The process within the advisory laid out a systemic process that included specific direction on job analysis and selective placement factors, including the flexibility of utilizing both merit and demo hiring authorities. Over the last 12 months the Forest Service hired at least 30 new full-time tribal relations positions from grades 11-14. One single recruitment intended to recruit 7 GS-13 positions was so successful the agency selected a total of 13 highly qualified positions from that single certificate(s). The new positions hired utilizing the USDA hiring advisory netted the agency a sizable increase in permanent tribal citizens/members into the agency. These efforts directly support the Department’s priority of making USDA a great place to work by advancing Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility within the workplace.

RESEARCH AND EDUCATION

Office of Tribal Relations

1994 Program Being Moved to the USDA Office of Tribal Relations: The USDA 1994 Program is moving and being re-established within the Office of Tribal Relations in response to tribal leaders’ and tribal college and university presidents’ requests. Tribal colleges are owned and operated by tribal nations. This will place the office within the Office of Tribal Relations which is responsible for the nation-to-nation relationship. This move will improve the efficiency and coordination with Indian tribes to benefit tribal economic development opportunities, workforce development, and tribal and national food security.

National Institute of Food and Agriculture

Increasing Funding Opportunities for Indigenous Traditional Ecological Knowledge: The National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) has begun encouraging Indigenous Traditional Ecological Knowledge (ITEK) in many of the agency's Requests for Applications (RFAs) as a method to increase applications benefiting tribal communities. Language was added to many of NIFA's RFAs to increase the scientific funding for tribal research, Extension, and education related to ITEK to expand the cultural capacity of NIFA's funding portfolio.

Two Cooperative Agreements to Indian Land Tenure Foundation (ILTF) and Intertribal Agriculture Council (IAC): Two cooperative agreements were given to the ILTF and IAC totaling \$15 million. The \$5 million agreement with ILTF will go to expand its work with Indian agricultural producers in providing information and complex technical support on land management issues, including the development of agriculture resource management plans as well as estate planning legal services so that Indian landowners can use the tools available to pass assets to heirs without further division. The \$10 million IAC agreement will expand upon their national technical assistance model developed to eliminate barriers that Native producers face in realizing meaningful federal assistance and domestic and international market access. IAC will assist USDA in addressing longstanding systemic discrimination and respond to the immediate need for direct agri-business planning, program access, financial planning, market development, and tenure issues that are coupled with a substantial outside interest in the Indian agriculture and food systems sectors through Indian Country-specific assistance in collaboration with USDA that informs equitable program implementation for current producers and responds to the unique needs of Native Beginning Farmers and Ranchers.

Established New Native American Agriculture Fund (NAAF) and National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) Partnership: A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between NAAF and NIFA established a partnership that will serve tribal reservations and tribes around the country. The purpose of this MOU is to strengthen the cooperation between the two parties in a collaborative effort to increase projects to reservations. To this end, the parties will coordinate research, exchanges, trainings, and development activities of mutual interest, by partnering with NIFA's Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI) to increase the reach of both programs.

AISES Indigenous Knowledge Track: USDA's Office of Tribal Relations and Research, Education and Economics mission area have partnered with the American Indian Science and Engineering Society (AISES) to fund an Indigenous Knowledge research track at the annual AISES conference for students that conduct science and engineering research at the intersection of western science and Indigenous Knowledge.

FOOD

Agricultural Marketing Service

Expanded Support for Indigenous Food Sovereignty Through Increasing Local Tribal Purchasing: Through the Local Food Purchase Assistance Cooperative Agreement Program, the

USDA Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) partnered with tribal governments to increase Indigenous Food Sovereignty by providing a marketplace for locally produced tribal foods that are then distributed to tribal populations. This collaborative model provides a new market for farmers and ranchers while supporting greater accessibility to food for households and tribes' visions for their food sovereignty. In round two, AMS seeks additional proposals from other tribes and based on tribal requests, has incorporated a nationwide funding allocation to better support tribal applicants and better consider the needs present across Indian Country. As of the end of October 2022, 17 agreements have been awarded to federally recognized tribal governments, representing a total award amount of over \$14 million. An additional 14 applications from tribal governments are currently under review.

Empowered Tribal Food Sovereignty Through Increased Tribal Meat and Poultry Processing Capacity: Through the Meat and Poultry Processing Capacity - Technical Assistance Program, USDA has established agreements with a handful of tribal serving non-profit organizations, including the Flower Hill Institute and the Intertribal Agriculture Council, to administer and provide a wide range of technical assistance to businesses, including targeted support from tribal entities, seeking to support the growth of domestic processing capacity and the ability of independent facilities to serve more customers in more markets. Additionally, USDA awarded the Cherokee Nation approximately \$46 million to provide relief payments to farm and meatpacking employees within the 14-county Cherokee Nation Reservation and citizens of Tribal Nations across the country.

Honored Trust Responsibility Through Direct Funding to Tribal Seafood Processors: Through the Tribal Seafood Pandemic Response and Safety Grant Program, USDA provided \$1 million in grant funding to reimburse tribal government-owned seafood processors for COVID-related expenses associated with responding to changing market conditions and safety requirements that resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic. The funding was not required to be funneled through state governments, so it was provided directly to the eligible tribal governments. As part of our commitment to eliminating barriers and improving equity, USDA partnered with Intertribal Agriculture Council to provide technical assistance for eligible tribal seafood processors interested in completing an application package.

Increased Tribal Self-Determination Opportunities in Tribal Hemp Regulation: The USDA Domestic Hemp Production Program supports tribal governance and management of hemp production programs within their jurisdictions. To date, over 60 tribal nations have established independent hemp production programs on tribal lands. USDA continues to work closely with all stakeholder groups including states and tribes to help explain program rules and proactively address any legal questions. Additionally, the Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities recently awarded funding to several tribes in the Pacific Northwest to support tribal research to encourage hemp production in Indian country.

Increased Support to Expand Tribal Farm and Food Businesses: The USDA will be establishing a tribal focused Regional Food Business Center that will support producers by providing localized assistance to access local and regional supply chains, including linking producers to wholesalers and distributors. It will provide technical assistance needed for

tribal producers and businesses to access new markets, access to federal, state, and local resources, and assist small- and mid-sized producers in overcoming barriers to market access.

Food and Nutrition Service

Instituted New Hiring Factors for Tribal Facing Positions and Created Tribal Affairs

Technical Advisor Position: The Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) has implemented selective hiring placement factors for its tribal-facing positions to attract applicants with deep knowledge of and experience working in Indian Country. FNS is also working to better incorporate Indigenous knowledge throughout our agency, including in the development of nutrition standards. To ensure that it is integrating a tribal perspective at a more enterprise and leadership level, FNS recently posted a competitive announcement for a new Tribal Affairs Technical Advisor role in the Office of the FNS Administrator. This is important to USDA's commitment to equity and helps build capacity to implement greater self-determination into FNS programs.

Implemented Historic "Commodities"/Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations

(FDPIR) Tribal Self-Determination Pilot Project: FNS has successfully implemented the historic FDPIR Self-Determination Demonstration Project authorized by the 2018 Farm Bill. The demonstration project recognizes tribal food sovereignty by allowing tribes to enter into contracts with farmers, growers, and producers to procure their own foods to feed their people. Of the \$9 million received by FNS to date, approximately \$6 million has been utilized by eight participating tribes to purchase local, traditional foods, including bison, ground beef, Alaskan Halibut, Alaskan Cod, wild rice, and a variety of fresh fruits and vegetables among other products, from local farms. This October, USDA announced the solicitation for a second round of proposals to join the demonstration project, which will remain open through the end of January 2023.

Required Tribal Consultation Training for State SNAP Programs: FNS has issued new guidance and is training states on their tribal consultation requirements related to implementation of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). This is an area where FNS has taken on feedback from tribal leaders about the need for stronger federal involvement to ensure that tribal needs are met through the SNAP program.

Increased Access to Flexible Nutrition Education Funding in Indian Country. This fiscal year, FNS received an increase of \$4 million in FDPIR funding specifically to support nutrition education and is accepting proposals from FDPIR tribes to fully develop and expand these efforts locally. This funding responds to feedback from tribal leaders that nutrition education funds need to be more flexible to support Indigenous traditions, and should flow directly from the Federal government to tribal nations.

Expanded Access to Traditional Foods in the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC). In November 2022, FNS issued a proposed rule to update the foods available through the WIC program. This proposal would increase access to traditional foods, including fish, fruits and vegetables, and whole grains such as blue corn meal. The proposal will also make it easier for participants to access nutritionally appropriate alternatives to cow's milk, which is a priority for Indigenous nutritionists.

Office of Tribal Relations

Implemented the Indigenous Food Sovereignty Initiative: The following new resources were created and released as part of the USDA Indigenous Food Sovereignty Initiative.

- A users' manual for interested ranchers titled "Transitioning from Cattle to Bison," created in partnership with Intertribal Buffalo Council (ITBC).
- Regional Seed Saving Hubs created in partnership with Native American Food Sovereignty Alliance - Indigenous Seed Keepers Network (ISKN). The six seed cleaning fanning mills were purchased and distributed to help establish regional Indigenous seed hubs in the Midwest region and Southwest/Western region.
- Twelve videos on foraging wild and Indigenous plants, produced in partnership with foraging and ethnobotany experts Linda Black Elk, Lisa Iron Cloud (Oglala Sioux), and Addelina Lucero (Taos Pueblo/Yaqui). The videos highlight how sustainable foraging practices can increase nutrition security and promote sustainable Indigenous foods. These videos look at foraging in the Midwest, Mountain Plains, and Southwest regions.
- Twelve recipes and instructional cooking videos using Indigenous foods. The recipes and videos show ways to integrate foraged and Indigenous foods with foods available through USDA's Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR). In partnership with the North American Traditional Indigenous Food Systems (NATIFS), the videos feature award-winning chefs and restaurateurs Chefs Sean Sherman (Oglala Sioux) and Crystal Wahpepah (Kickapoo Tribe of Oklahoma). The recipes and videos focus on foods in the Midwest, Mountain Plains, Southwest, and Western regions.

In addition to these recently released resources, USDA is also announcing new cooperative agreements with tribal-serving organizations that will further expand the USDA Indigenous Food Sovereignty Initiative. These new agreements include:

- USDA will partner with Native Realities media company and Dr. Lee Francis (aka Indigi-Genius) to produce "Sovereignty Gardens," a short form digital media series

combining puppetry, animation, and live action video to engage Native youth in food sovereignty and gardening.

- USDA will partner with new foragers and chefs to create additional recipes and videos on foraging and cooking Indigenous foods for the Northeast and Southeast regions.
- USDA's Agricultural Research Service (ARS) will partner with two tribal land grant colleges (Nueta Hidatsa Sahnish College and United Tribes Technical College) on Great Plains Indigenous seeds and plants research. This research centers around Indigenous Traditional Ecological Knowledge (ITEK).
- USDA will partner with Intertribal Buffalo Council (ITBC) to produce a handbook on the best practices for the humane handling and harvesting of bison in the field, a hands-on curriculum and training focused on food sovereignty and food safety of bison field processing, and a model for a mobile bison field processing trailer.

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