



May 4, 2020

The Honorable Pamilyn Miller
Administrator
Food & Nutrition Service
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., SW
Washington, D.C. 20250

RE: Establish a Coronavirus Food Assistance Purchasing Program for Indian Country within the FDPIR program to support producers, economies, and food security; Provide Parity to FDPIR food package benefits on par with SNAP

Dear Administrative Miller:

On behalf of the National Association of Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (NAFDPIR), the Intertribal Agriculture Council (IAC), and representative tribes and organizations of the Native Farm Bill Coalition (NFBC), we appreciate the Food & Nutrition Service and your staff for the continued engagement and discussions with Tribal leaders and tribal representatives during the COVID-19 crisis to work towards solutions for Indian Country. Based on the conversations and concerns we're seeing throughout Indian Country, we request that the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) FNS take swift action in utilizing the additional food purchasing funding provided by the CARES Act to the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR). In addition to the requests previously made by NAFDPIR, Indian Tribal Organizations (ITOs), and Tribal leaders to use this portion of CARES funding to support administrative costs for ITOs, we request these funds also be leveraged to support direct Tribal government and ITO purchasing of food from local and regional Tribal producers, and to increase the monthly FDPIR household benefit to account for growing market losses and increasing food insecurity in Indian Country.

On April 17th, 2020, USDA announced a \$19 billion fund, the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program (CFAP), to support America's food producers experiencing widespread market losses, which includes a \$3 billion Farmers to Families food package program. We view the structure of this program as a strong step forward by USDA, since it takes the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR) program and includes the direct local and regional purchasing authority that Tribal leaders and NAFDPIR has requested for FDPIR, and that was included as 638 tribal self-determination contracting in the 2018 Farm Bill. However, many tribal

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CFAP for Indian Country; Parity for FDPIR

governments and entities could not qualify for and be a part of the CFAP Farmers to Families food package program, and we are concerned that both tribal producers and families in need in tribal governments will not be reached by this important food and market assistance program.

While tribal inclusion and access for the CFAP is an issue that still needs to be addressed, the FDPIR programs stand ready to do the same with the \$50 million funding for food appropriated in the CARES Act. The 112 FDPIR ITO's across Indian Country regularly serve over 90,000 rural people, have the capacity and infrastructure already built to house and distribute food packages as well as the staff trained to do so, and represent an immediate and obvious distribution point for food assistance like CFAP. The nearly 80,000 Native farmers and ranchers across the country who produce more than \$3.5 billion in agricultural products annually have lost markets due to this crisis and have the products and capacity to fill the FDPIR food package needs. Incorporating Tribally grown and raised products into the FDPIR food package would improve food security, maintain and create jobs, support local Tribal and rural economies through agricultural enterprise, and ultimately provide long-term solutions to economic stagnation and food insecurity throughout Indian Country. We know this model will be successful in Indian Country.

Additionally, to further support FDPIR participants and tribal producers, we request that USDA-FNS also increase the FDPIR food package benefit to provide parity with the 40 percent increase in emergency benefits for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) recipients through the Families First Coronavirus Response Act. With the CARES Act funding that's been already appropriated, USDA-FNS would be able to provide this emergency increase at no additional cost, fill in growing gaps of food supply chain issues in Indian Country, and provide opportunities for Native producers to get their products to the families that need them while keeping their family farms and ranchers producing.

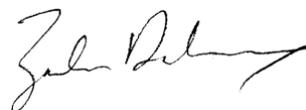
Coupling these two requests together will ensure that Indian Country is supported by USDA through this crisis and help the long-term development of a more responsive and resilient food system. It will bring forward new partnerships between tribal governments, tribal producers, and FDPIR. It will take great strides toward helping weather the pre-existing and COVID-19-related agriculture and food access crises in Indian Country. It will empower self-determination and tribally driven solutions at the governmental and regional levels to support rural America through job creation and improved food access.

We urge USDA-FNS to work with us towards these solutions and look forward to our continued dialogue and partnership.

Sincerely,



Mary Greene Trottier
President, NAFDPIR



Zach Ducheneaux
*Executive Director, IAC
Co-Chair, NFBC*