



Office of the Secretary  
Washington, DC 20250

May 3, 2024

Dear Tribal Leaders:

Thank you to the many Tribes, the National Congress of American Indians, Native Farm Bill Coalition, National Association of Food Distribution Programs on Indian Reservations, Native American Agriculture Fund, many Members of Congress, and so many others who have reached out regarding the importance of expanding Tribal self-determination policies at the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA).

The Biden/Harris Administration and USDA support increased and expanded Tribal self-determination policies at USDA. Pursuant to President Biden's [Executive Order 14112 on Reforming Federal Funding and Support for Tribal Nations to Better Embrace Our Trust Responsibilities and Promote the Next Era of Tribal Self-Determination](#) published on December 6, 2023, and building on previously announced commitment to expand [USDA's Tribal self-determination policies](#), published on November 15, 2021, I am reaching out to request your engagement and participation in the formal consultation described below. This consultation will enable us to work together to further explore opportunities to expand and advance Tribal self-determination policies. The Tribal Affairs staff from the White House will also participate in the consultation.

USDA has been leaning aggressively into supporting Tribal self-determination policies within our current statutory authorities, as clearly reflected in our recent [Tribal Progress Reports](#). We welcome your input at this consultation on what additional flexibilities you think we could be leaning into to support Tribal self-determination policies with our current statutory authority.

We also appreciate it is the expansion of our current statutory authorities supporting self-determination/self-governance policies that are of interest for further dialogue and we look forward to discussing those as well.

While we must respect Executive Branch agency statutory and other legal restrictions regarding proposed legislation, we hope these consultations create space for open and creative conversations. The information presented in these upcoming consultations does not reflect official Administration policy positions, nor is USDA allowed to advocate any specific positions with Congress, without going through proper channels. The topics presented for purposes of nation-to-nation discussion in these framing papers are designed to facilitate discussion of concepts and ideas that will enhance our mutual understanding.

**What:** **Tribal Consultation: Expanding Tribal Self Determination Policies at USDA**

**Where:** National Congress of American Indians Mid-Year  
(Cherokee, N.C.) (*Hybrid: In-person and virtual*)

**Dates:** Monday, June 3:  
Forestry (1-4 p.m. EDT)  
[Register Here for Forestry Consultation](#)

Monday, June 3:  
Meat Inspections (4:30-7:30 p.m. EDT)  
[Register Here for Meat Inspections Consultation](#)

Wednesday, June 5:  
Food Sovereignty and Nutrition Programs (1-4 p.m. EDT)  
[Register Here for Food Sovereignty and Nutrition Consultation](#)

**RSVP:** All attendees, including those attending in-person, must register/RSVP above. The Zoom link will allow you to choose “Virtual” or “In-Person.”

**REGISTER USING THE ZOOM LINK.**

**(Select IN PERSON to attend at the National Congress of American Indians)**

This will be a formal Tribal consultation. Tribal leaders and proxies will have the floor in a nation-to-nation consultation. Tribal leaders may formally designate proxies to attend and speak on their behalf, and/or may call on subject matter experts to speak on their behalf during the consultation.

**Proxies may submit their proxy forms, which are enclosed with this letter to [tribal.relations@usda.gov](mailto:tribal.relations@usda.gov).**

I believe we will agree on many things. That, of course, does not mean we will agree on everything. My goal is not necessarily consensus at these consultations, but to be transparent with each other about our thoughts and ideas. My hope is that we will all leave with a better understanding for progress in furthering Tribal self-determination policies together.

I thank you for your patience with these complex conversations and appreciate your consistent advocacy on these matters. I respectfully invite you for further conversation.

Sincerely,

THOMAS J. VILSACK  
*Secretary*

Enclosure