



COVID-19 Crisis Response:
*Food & Ag Policy Solutions for
Tribes and Tribal Producers*
April 22, 2020

**Infrastructure for Community Food System Development
for New COVID-19 Response Legislation**

Supporting Resilient Infrastructures and Food Systems

- ***Create a 15 percent Tribal reserve in the USDA ReConnect Broadband program and Distance Learning and Telemedicine Grant Program to enhance broadband access and long-distance healthcare in Indian Country***

Tribal citizens lack access to broadband at rates that exceed the national averages, especially in rural and remote areas. With the number of healthcare facilities, schools, colleges, and the need for additional infrastructure throughout rural and remote places in Indian Country, building out and improving broadband infrastructure for telemedicine and distance learning will help ensure that all citizens in rural and remote areas that rely on Tribally run facilities will have access to health care and educational services.

- ***Expand the use and increase funding for the Rural Development (RD) Community Facilities Programs***

Emergency-related disruptions in supply chains and increased demands have showcased a need for improving regional and local infrastructure to serve the needs of Tribal communities across the board. A Tribal-specific funding increase and additional support for building essential infrastructure, including: agriculture value-added infrastructure; quick build medical and food storage facilities; TCUs building and technological resources; and temporary refrigerated morgues, will help address long standing issues and build immediate capacity to address issues related to the COVID-19 emergency response.

- ***Increase funding for Tribal-specific projects under all USDA Water and Environmental Grant Programs by \$200 million***

Tribal communities often have high rates of underserved populations due to water quality and infrastructure limitations. In order to maintain high levels of sanitation and hygiene from both a health and food safety perspective, additional funds are necessary to address absent infrastructure, underperforming infrastructure, and water quality, safety, treatment, and storage challenges. These programs include: Grants for Rural and Native Alaskan Villages; the Water and Waste Disposal Program; Water and Waste Disposal Grants to Alleviate Health Risks on Tribal Lands and Colonias; and Emergency Community Water Assistance Grants.

- ***Expand USDA RD programs Substantially Underserved Trust Area (SUTA) designation to all programs at RD to support Tribal priority***

The “substantially underserved trust area” (SUTA) designation authorized by the 2008 Farm Bill allows USDA’s Rural Utility Service (RUS) to offer entities residing in specific locations low

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interest rates on utility loans; waive non-duplication, matching, and credit support requirements; extend loan repayment terms; and provide funding priority to some utilities infrastructure programs. SUTA should be amended to allow the Secretary to exercise SUTA across all Rural Development programs. A broader application of SUTA will recognize unique and essential Tribal infrastructure and business development needs and will be a tool to create communities of opportunity in Indian Country, especially to respond during and beyond the COVID-19 crisis.

Protecting Agriculture Producers and Food Economies

- ***Adequately Fund the Federally Recognized Tribes Extension Programs (FRTEP) at \$30 million***

FRTEP has been funded at the exact same level since it started in 1990. With the 2018 Farm Bill including 1994 Tribal land grant institutions for the very first time, now is the time that this strong network of existing programs at 1862 land grants and newly eligible 1994s can mobilize and quickly deploy additional resources on the ground and hire additional staff. This will help address COVID-19 related emergent and urgent needs, rebuild resiliency, and provide technical support to agriculture production and community food resiliency in Tribal communities.

- ***Provide Tribal specific funding for the Local Access Market Programs (LAMP)***

Supply disruptions and increased assistance demands on Tribally funded or Tribally administered programs have evidenced a need for a more robust local and regional food economy in Indian Country. Some Tribal Nations already coordinate food stockpiles through Incident Command Systems in anticipation of sustained demand through uncertainty in supply and are implementing quantity limits of certain food items to prevent depletion of these grocery supplies.

- ***Provide for agriculture lending through Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs)***

While the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) received funding to support small businesses across the country, many of the most at-risk businesses, such as agricultural enterprises, will not receive immediate relief from SBA programming. CDFIs, however, serve this section of businesses and entrepreneurs and are accustomed to underwriting borrowers that do not meet SBA requirements. Failures of these higher risk economy segments will result in a trickle up impact, impacting other businesses because of disruptions to or possible eliminations of supply chains.

- ***Create a COVID-19 Perishable Products Loss Fund due to market disruption***

Market disruption due to COVID-19 has resulted in a decline or stoppage of U.S. food products bound for international markets across the globe, leaving large amounts of inventory without a market destination. Entities that are unable to sell products in alternate markets will experience increased storage costs and product loss due to expiration dates. Creating a Perishable Products Loss Fund will prevent these producers from loss of revenue and it can open up these perishable products to new domestic programs and purposes, especially at a time when food access and security is a growing concern.

- ***Enhance Natural Resources Conservation Service (NCRS) programing for Tribal producers***

NRCS offers essential financial support to producers to maintain and build healthy lands to help ensure sustainable and regenerative production. With the increasing demands on the food supply chain, Tribal producers need as much support as possible to continue and increase production to support their local Tribal communities and provide products locally in Tribal food systems. These changes include: full advanced payments for socially disadvantaged producers; remove/waive requirements of one year prior control, the need for a Conservation Stewardship Program technical service provider, and compensation to former lessees of Tribal lands for the installation of existing conservation practices; and ease requirements for beginning farmers/ranchers.

- ***Philanthropic and Endowment Investment in Infrastructure Fund***

A huge untapped potential exists in the philanthropic and endowment realm for deploying capital to areas of Indian Country in need during this crisis and beyond. Currently, less than 1% of all philanthropic giving in Indian Country is focused on food and ag infrastructure despite it being one of the best investments. Aside from economic and food system building benefits in Indian Country, food and ag makes for a strong investment purely based on its demonstrated resilience in the face of decades worth of obstacles. Creating a fund to guarantee the mission investment of philanthropic dollars enables the leveraging of billions of dollars of endowments and philanthropic assets that can be used to continue and spark Indian Country food system growth and innovation for generations to come.