



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

## **Top Priorities for New COVID-19 Response Legislation**

### **Lower Ag Loan Payments to Mitigate the COVID-19 Crisis Impacts**

- *Farm Service Agency (FSA) borrowers' assistance relief and implementation of policies to provide relief and support for Tribal producers and entities*

The CARES Act, H.R. 748 – Pub. L. 116-136, provided some support to agriculture producers, however as this crisis continues, more and more are facing increased risk and uncertainty. With markets drying up and production slowing down, many producers across the country cannot afford to maintain their operations and make payments on their ag loans. To provide the relief necessary to help stabilize agriculture operations, FSA borrowers need improved loan relief provisions, policies, and new programs to ensure continuity of operations and access to credit. These provisions will enable assistance to non-FSA borrowers as well. Providing relief will allow for stability in production in Indian Country, and further improve the sustainability and resiliency of Indian Country agriculture. The Native Farm Bill Coalition (NFBC) proposes the following three-part approach in any new legislative vehicle to empower the Secretary of Agriculture to:

1. Immediately defer of all FSA loan principal due for the 2020 and 2021 production years, and extend all loans 2 years;
2. Appropriate funding and allow the Secretary to offer payments to lenders if they reduce the interest rate of current loans by 2% and offer the same reduced loan payments and extensions to their borrowers; and
3. Use FSA Farm Ownership loans to refinance real estate and other debt to aid in recovery from this crisis.

These actions will support producers across the country to not only keep their production going at this critical time but infuse over \$1 billion in differed principal payments directly into rural and agriculture economies across the country.

### **Ensure Food Security through Nutrition Program Access**

- *Clarify that the CARES Act Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR) funding covers administrative costs, reimbursement of emergency food purchases, and allows Indian Tribal Organizations (ITOs) to procure food locally and regionally*
- *Waive the non-federal cost share requirement and allow for necessary administrative flexibility for verifications, certifications, and service in FDPIR*

The CARES Act (H.R. 748) provides critical funding for both food purchases (\$50 million) and facility improvements and equipment upgrades (\$50 million) in the FDPIR program. As costs

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increase, so do the administrative costs and burdens on Tribal governments and FDPIR Indian Tribal Organizations (ITOs). Additional flexibility to use this funding for administrative costs, emergency food purchases, local and regional food procurement, and new construction costs will support ITOs to continue to provide safe and effective service for FDPIR participants. Further, waving the non-federal cost requirement and providing the administrative flexibility for verifications, certifications, and service will alleviate burdens on Tribal governments and ITOs.

- ***Temporarily waive prohibition on dual use of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and FDPIR during the same month***

Additionally, the current prohibition against participants using both FDPIR and SNAP in the same month must be waived. Temporarily waiving this restriction will allow Native households more food options at a time when it is needed the most, reduce administrative burdens on FDPIR and SNAP staff, and slow the inventory depletion at FDPIR sites. FDPIR sites are seeing increased take rates of food, because people are now taking the maximum they are allotted out of concern over local food availability. SNAP participants, especially those in rural areas, are seeing limited availability of food coupled with price increases. Being able to utilize both SNAP and FDPIR would ameliorate these problems.

- ***Increase SNAP's maximum benefit available to all households by 15 percent and the minimum benefit from \$16 to \$30 and delay implementation of the proposed and final SNAP rules***

With the increasing numbers of people out of work, extremely limited job opportunities available, and with children being out of school across the country, the new round of COVID-19 response legislation must include additional support to SNAP participants. By increasing the maximum benefit for all households by 15 percent and raising the minimum benefit to \$30, food insecure families in Indian Country and across the United States will have access to additional food necessary to weather this current crisis.

- ***Provide parity and eligibility for Tribal governments and Indian Tribal Organizations in the Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP)***

With one exception, Tribal governments and their agencies do not have full access to The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP), which is a critical component of the federal government response to food needs during emergency situations. Donated foods that USDA provides for TEFAP only go to "State agencies" with recipient agencies on distribution. With the rapidly growing demand on FDPIR and the need for establishing additional methods of accessing and distribution of essential emergency foods during the COVID-19 crisis, Tribal governments, as well as FDPIR Indian Tribal Organizations, must be made directly eligible for the TEFAP program to ensure their citizens have access to essential food resources.