



Navajo Nation Engages USDA Leadership as Department Begins Reorganization Consultations



President Buu Nygren met with U.S. Department of Agriculture Deputy Secretary Stephen Vaden at USDA headquarters in Washington, D.C., on August 20, 2025, to discuss strengthening agricultural collaboration and technical support for the Navajo Nation. Photo courtesy of the Navajo Nation Washington Office.

WASHINGTON, D.C. – This week, the Navajo Nation was the only tribal nation with in-person representation at the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s first of two tribal consultations, this time held in Washington D.C. The session focused on the USDA’s proposed reorganization plan and included participation from representatives of Indian agricultural organizations such as the Intertribal Food and Agriculture Initiative, the Coalition of Large Tribes, and the Native Farm Bill Coalition. Deputy Secretary Stephen Vaden led the discussion alongside Acting Office of Tribal Relations (OTR) Director John Walk and other USDA OTR staff.

During the consultation, Deputy Secretary Vaden provided an overview on the USDA's plan to relocate approximately 2,600 positions to five regional hubs, and streamline the Department's operations. He said the plan is projected to reduce costs and helps decentralize USDA operations by moving positions to new hubs in Raleigh, Kansas City, Indianapolis, Fort Collins, and Salt Lake City. He also highlighted maps of tribal citizen populations and Tribal College and University locations, which were shared to detail how the hub approach better serves tribal communities than the current office in Washington D.C.

Several tribal leaders and organizations joined virtually to share their perspectives on the proposed restructuring of USDA offices, functions, and staff. Other tribal organizations raised concerns about the reorganization's impact on service access and the need to preserve tribal program capacity. They called for greater inclusion of tribal employees in USDA staffing decisions, and more transparency about how the reorganization might affect tribal programs. Participants also stressed the need for USDA to uphold its trust and treaty responsibilities by maintaining tribal expertise across every Mission Area, expanding 93-638 contracting authorities, and ensuring that consolidation does not reduce tribal access to federal programs.

The Navajo Nation Washington Office was asked to provide oral testimony on behalf of the Navajo Nation at the hybrid consultation in Denver, CO, on October 16. Additionally, NNWO is preparing written comments for submission following internal review by the Navajo Nation Department of Agriculture, the Division of Natural Resources, the Department of Fish and Wildlife, and other related departments. These materials will be due 30 days after the initial consultation on November 15, 2025.

The Navajo Nation continues to grow its relationship with USDA leadership, having met previously with Deputy Secretary Vaden, his Chief of Staff Jen Tiller, and Natural Resources Conservation Service Chief Aubrey Bettencourt throughout 2025 to discuss the Nation's agricultural priorities. Among the priorities discussed in those meetings were opportunities to expand USDA technical assistance, create cross-training programs between USDA and Navajo Nation staff, and to improve accessibility and service delivery for Navajo farmers and ranchers.

Furthermore, the Navajo Nation is continuing efforts to bring Deputy Secretary Vaden, Secretary Rollins, and other key USDA officials to the Navajo Nation to deepen partnership and understanding. Such visits would allow federal leadership to see firsthand both the challenges and opportunities that define Navajo agriculture—from large-scale operations like the Navajo Agricultural Products Industry to the everyday work of local farmers and ranchers across the Nation. The Navajo Nation remains committed to strengthening its ability to manage its own food systems, advance self-sufficiency, and foster stronger, more collaborative relationships with federal partners who play a vital role in supporting long-term agricultural resilience.