



Indian Country Priorities and Opportunities for the 2018 Farm Bill *Title IV: Nutrition*

Key Points and Recommendations

- Approximately 25 percent of Native Americans receive some type of federal food assistance, and in some tribal communities, participation is as high as 60-80 percent.
- Indian Country needs a consistent, comprehensive, and tribal-led approach to tailor federal food assistance programs to the specific needs of tribal communities and citizens.
- Allow tribes the option to enter into Self-Determination Contracts pursuant to P.L. 93-638 for administration of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and all other federal feeding programs.
- Improve the funding, flexibility and infrastructure of the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR).
- Require a CBO or CRS inquiry into the impact of drastic cuts or elimination of food assistance programs on the overall agricultural economies of tribes.

Background Information and Context

With 25 percent of all Native Americans receiving some type of federal food assistance, and in some tribal communities as high as 60-80 percent, the importance of the Nutrition Title programs in Indian Country cannot be overstated. The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) provides benefits to 24 percent of American Indian and Alaska Native households; 276 tribes and 100 inter-tribal organizations administer the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR); and American Indians and Alaska Natives make up more than 12 percent of the participants in the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), to name a few.

These participation rates hinge on limited meaningful employment opportunities, poor transportation options to food sources or food retail, lack of food retail locations in tribal communities, the age and population characteristics of the individuals in the communities, and the prevalence of chronic health problems, among other issues. Because the rate of obesity, diabetes, chronic heart diseases, cancer, and other health problems is so high in so many communities in Indian Country, participation rates in the feeding programs coupled with the prevalence of persistent poverty create a fragile system of food access across Indian Country. A consistent, comprehensive, and tribal-led approach that is tailored to Indian Country's needs is paramount.

Any cuts or changes to reduce direct participation in the programs diminish the food, and in some cases the only meals, available to Native children, pregnant women, elders, and veterans. No one, especially our most vulnerable tribal citizens, should ever have to go without food. Tribal governments have consistently sought the authority to take over the administration of federal food assistance programs like SNAP, which they currently cannot run, to not only improve food access and efficiency of the programs, but to further tribal self-governance and serve the unique needs of their citizens and communities.



Programs like FDPIR must be improved to allow tribes to better respond to the infrastructure, storage and transportation challenges, and provide the means and support to purchase traditional, locally grown food in food packages. Traditional and locally grown foods from Native farmers, ranchers, fishers and producers encourage healthy living, cultural sustainability, and traditional practices. They also support economic development, food production, and agribusiness in Indian Country.

Opportunities for Indian Country in the Nutrition Title

Tribal Administration of the SNAP and All Federal Food Assistance Programs

- Provide tribal governments and tribal organizations the direct authority to administer SNAP and all other federal food assistance programs which they are currently not allowed to directly manage. This can be achieved by providing tribes with “638” self-governance contract authority for nutrition programs which exists for Department of the Interior and Indian Health Service programs. Allowing tribes to take over these functions from the federal government will improve efficiency, reduce regulatory burdens, and support tribal self-governance and self-determination.

Improvements to the FDPIR and Other Federal Feeding Programs

- Since 2015, several tribal leaders have consulted with the USDA Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) over significant improvements needed to FDPIR. While tribes have made some headway with USDA, significant legislative changes still need to occur within the FDPIR program, including:
 - Eliminating the matching funds requirement for each of the FDPIR program sites to participate, or limiting the matching requirement to 5 percent.
 - Providing tribal feeding sites with parity to state counterpart programs by allowing them to engage in carryover of unspent funds from year to year. This unequal treatment is problematic to tribal feeding programs whose funding needs, particularly for food distribution infrastructure (e.g., warehouses), could be met by allowing carryover funding.
 - Requiring FNS to continue to engage in tribal consultation.
 - Requiring FNS to engage in tribal consultation concerning reasonable alternatives to the regulatory-approved practice of “tailgating” at FDPIR program sites. No FDPIR program site should be allowed to engage in this demeaning practice.
 - Requiring FNS to consult with tribes and develop a written, public contingency plan in the event of any lapses in funding, disasters, government closures, or related incidents that might interrupt or cause the stoppage of food delivery.
 - Allowing those who participate in FDPIR to also simultaneously participate in SNAP. Neither program provides enough food for participants in remote places; by allowing simultaneous usage of the programs these two supplemental feeding programs can be combined to actually result in addressing food insecurity.
 - Requiring FNS to hire at least one national tribal liaison located in its Washington, D.C., offices and one regional tribal liaison located in each regional FNS office subject to a federal Native American hiring preference or high levels of experience with tribal communities.
 - Increase nutrition education funding to at least \$5 million per year and create an alternative to competitive funding so each tribal program receives support for nutrition education program materials through a coordinated approach.
 - Requiring FDPIR traditional food purchases (bison, wild rice, salmon, blue corn, and other products) to be a regular part of food package purchases and not require supplemental or special appropriations to purchase these foods.



- Requiring FNS to engage in tribal consultation to compile a budget for FDPIR warehouse and other infrastructure needs to be included in its entirety in each federal budget cycle and request until it is fully funded.
- Requiring all FDPIR purchasing and distribution to occur on a regional basis and include as much locally and regionally tribal-produced food as reasonably possible.
- Remove the “Urban Place” definition to allow tribes and the USDA to work collaboratively to serve even more tribal citizens who need nutritious food, regardless of where they live.

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