

USDA TRIBAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE

December 8, 2025

Pending Advisory Committee Approval

The Tribal Advisory Committee (the Committee) was convened for its meeting at approximately 9:00 A.M. Pacific Time on December 8, 2025, at the Intertribal Agriculture Council's (IAC) Annual Meeting, Virgin Hotels, 4455 Paradise Road, Room Sage 3, Las Vegas, NV 89169, and virtually over Zoom webinar.

In accordance with the provisions of Public Law 92-463, the meeting was open to the public from approximately 9:00 A.M. Pacific Time to approximately 5:00 P.M. on December 8, 2025.

Council Members Present:

Trenton Kisse, Committee Chair
Meagen Baldy, Committee Vice Chair
William Barquin
President Whitney Gravelle, Bay Mills Indian Community
Benjamin Jacobs
Karen Linnell
Council Member David Pourier, Oglala Sioux Tribe
Whitney Sawney
Kelsey Scott
Glenn Teves

Staff of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Office of Tribal Relations (OTR) attending were:

Trevor Benson, Policy Advisor
Josiah Griffin, Designated Federal Officer (DFO)
Elena Krajewski, Assistant Designated Federal Officer (ADFO)

Staff of the U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI) attending were:

William (Billy) Kirkland, Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs, DOI
Bryan Mercier, Director, Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA)
Trina Locke, Director of Environmental and Natural Resources, Office of Trust Services, BIA
Thomas Mendez, Branch Chief for Agriculture and Rangeland Development, BIA

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

Committee members considered and approved the agenda without amendment.

ADOPTION OF THE SEPTEMBER 2025 MEETING MINUTES

Upon motion duly made and seconded, the Committee unanimously adopted meeting minutes of the September 2025 TAC meeting.

OTR UPDATES

Office of Tribal Relations Policy Advisor Benson provided updates on behalf of USDA, with DFO Griffin sharing an update on the Committee nomination process.

Staffing Changes. Kayla Roche, introduced to the Committee in a previous meeting as a special assistant in the Office of Tribal Relations, transitioned to a new role supporting the USDA Rural Development Chief Operating Officer. Policy Advisor Benson shared that it is not uncommon for political appointees to transfer offices or agencies.

OTR Funding Levels. In the May 2025 Committee meeting, OTR shared the administration's proposal to maintain level funding for OTR. The continuing resolution enacted on November 12th authorized OTR's appropriations to remain at \$5.19 million with \$1million for the continuation of a Tribal Public Health Center. OTR had partnered with North Dakota State University to establish and maintain this Center. Additionally, Congress appropriated \$700 thousand to cover processing and inspection fees for bison owned by Tribal governments, Tribal entities, and Tribal members at State or USDA inspected facilities.

Coordination with Tribal Colleges/Universities (TCUs). At the time of this meeting, USDA planned to host a meeting of the USDA-American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC) leadership group in February 2026.

Partnership with IAC: Virtual USDA/DOI Workshops. OTR was coordinating with IAC to host joint workshops between USDA and BIA staff. OTR identified these workshops were to support interagency coordination and understanding of policies between the two departments.

Committee Member Linnell suggested that USDA could enter into Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Advisory Council for Historic Preservation in a similar manner to the USDA MOU with the BIA.

Reorganization Consultations. Agriculture Deputy Secretary Vaden hosted two hybrid Tribal consultations in October on USDA's Reorganization Plan, one in Washington, D.C., and one in Denver CO, with the opportunity to attend virtually. Indian Country showed robust participation in both consultations and through the written comment period. Topics discussed included the shared goal of efficiency and effective service delivery, the impacts of the proposed USDA hubs, the importance of maintaining developed relationships, the need for the Office of Tribal Relations and Tribal relations expertise in USDA mission areas, and the importance of USDA's general trust

responsibility. The report out for this consultation would be made available on USDA's [consultation website](#).

Committee Member Barquin identified that the consultation dates occurred during the National Congress of American Indians and Alaska Federation of Natives conferences, questioning how the Committee can support this process. Committee Member Teves posited that a regional hub should be positioned on the west coast to better engage Hawai'i

Beef Industry Plan. Policy Advisor Benson acknowledged the Committee's interest in prioritized resources for cattle producers, since the majority of American Indian/Alaska Native farms are ranches. In October 2025, Agriculture Secretary Rollins joined Interior Secretary Burgum and Health and Human Services Secretary Kennedy in releasing the [USDA Plan to Fortify the American Beef Industry](#). This plan was part of a suite of actions to strengthen the American beef industry and recognize the American rancher's critical role in the national security of the United States.

Committee Member Scott suggested that IAC could support a listening session or round table between Tribal beef producers and USDA principals. Where the USDA plan identified potential partnerships with the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA), she furthered that there has been a gap in SBA agriculture financing that could be addressed by leveraging USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service data. .

TAC Nomination Update. After the September 2025 Committee meeting, USDA extended the nomination window until October 6, 2025. USDA shared complete nomination packages received, redacted of personally identifiable information, with Ranking Member Angie Craig, House Committee on Agriculture.

TAC MEMBER OBSERVATIONS AND FUTURE GOALS

DFO Griffin opened discussion by suggesting, based on conversations with Chair Kisse, that this time allow Committee members to be reflective of their appointment terms and identify future aspirations for the Committee. Chair Kisse encouraged those members whose terms were lapsing to share their feedback for the Committee.

Committee Member Barquin stated that it has been an honor to serve on the Committee. Committee Member Barquin reflected that, while many other advisory committees experience a learning phase, the Committee dove into their work quickly. He encouraged the Committee to encourage USDA to implement previously submitted recommendations. Where USDA prioritizes rural prosperity, he suggested USDA be more inclusive of Indian Country, where Tribal lands are predominantly rural or rural in nature. Where USDA negotiates agreements with Tribes, he suggested that these agreements should not be solely designed to protect U.S. interests.

Committee Member Jacobs expressed gratitude for the work of this Committee and the Office of Tribal Relations for supporting Committee functions. He encouraged the

Committee to advance the needs of the communities they represent, their food security, and their agricultural production.

Vice Chair Baldy stated that serving on the Committee has been an honor and a blessing. She recognized the need for this Committee to continue and that the Committee's work has built on recommendations made by the Council for Native American Farming and Ranching. Vice Chair Baldy reflected that the needs of her community, the number of hungry elders, the community trauma, inspired her to pursue appointment on the Committee. She thanked the DFO and ADFO for providing them a framework to be successful.

Committee Member Linnell opined that Alaska Native Villages were not removed in the same way as Tribes in the lower 48 states. Instead, she suggested that by-catch has resulted in a lessening of salmon upriver that has also impacted the availability of elk and caribou. Committee Member Linnell states that USDA should consider Committee recommendations as supporting but not supplanting government-to-government consultation. She thanked OTR for supporting the Committee and actively listening to the Committee's deliberations.

Committee Member Teves reflected that the loss of Committee Member, Dr. Monty Roessel, lessened the ability of the Committee to fully support and reflect Native education. He thanked the Committee members that have served and encouraged USDA to renew their appointment.

Chair Kissee thanked each of the Committee members that are terming out for their contributions, their participation in monthly meetings, and their willingness to engage and lift up their community's voices. He identified that many Tribes took steps during the lapse on federal appropriations to continue serving their community, e.g., Muscogee Creek Nation donating 16 thousand pounds of meat to Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) recipients. He echoed other Committee members in reflecting that it has been an honor to serve as Chair and thanked OTR staff for their service.

SUBCOMMITTEE UPDATES

References to Committee members in this section acknowledge whether the member also chairs a corresponding Tribal Advisory Committee subcommittee.

Ranching, Farm Production, and Conservation Subcommittee. Subcommittee Chair Scott expressed a desire that USDA disaster assistance better reach Native producers, particularly those farms or ranches involved in beef production. She acknowledged previous public comment discussing the impact of staffing changes at USDA service centers.

Committee Member Linnell stated that while USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) may direct funding through the National Association of Conservation

Districts, these funds do not necessarily reach Tribal Conservation Districts (TCDs). She expressed a desire for USDA to provide funding to TCDs directly or that organizations provide Tribal letters of support or resolutions of consent before being awarded.

Subcommittee Chair Scott expressed appreciation for NRCS Chief Bettencourt's elevation of Tribal outreach strategies, affirming that more work can be done to elevate Tribal government priorities. She separately posited that the calendar year 2026 price guides should be updated to support more accurate producer balance sheets. Chair Scott suggested that balance sheets may be undervalued since the price guide reflects three-year averages that do not account for current price indices on cattle, the futures market, and steps taken by this administration advancing livestock industry interests.

Committee Member Teves identified that the local Farm Service Agency (FSA) staff retired, causing his nearest service center to close. Until this location reopens, producers must fly to the nearest Island to visit an office.

Committee Member Barquin suggested that additional resources may be needed to support New and Beginning Farmers and Ranchers. Committee Chair Kisse separately expressed a desire for more targeted discussion on livestock disease and coordination under USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service.

Economic Development Subcommittee. Committee Member Teves encouraged USDA Rural Development to provide a more holistic determination on eligibility. He reflected that three or four generations may reside in the same home on Native Hawaiian Home Lands which may impact eligibility.

Food, Food Safety, and Trade Subcommittee. Committee Member Barquin suggested that investment in Tribal nations and the Native Hawaiian Community is critical to advancing rural prosperity. Where funding is routed through States, he suggested that many States identify including Tribal set-asides; however, many States do not take this step.

Subcommittee Chair Baldy suggested that funding should be restored to the National Intertribal Food Business Center (NIFBC) to support those applicants requesting business builder funding. Committee Member Scott stated cold storage and transportation are the two most frequent asks for NIFBC funding. Chair Baldy further reflected on the subcommittee's exploration of food safety oversight and inspection. She suggested that USDA could also take steps to streamline the process for becoming a USDA certified vendor.

During the lapse in federal appropriation, Subcommittee Chair Baldy identified the local office to cancel SNAP benefit enrollment was not open; however, cancelling these benefits is required before a Tribal household can fully enroll in the USDA Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations. She cited a USDA letter that Tribal households could prove due diligence on attempting to cancel SNAP enrollment, but many Tribal households still relied on additional Tribal support for accessing foods.

Committee Member Linnell reiterated statements on the impact of trawling to the fishing and crabbing industry. The amount of by-catch harvested by trawling, she posited, pushes communities to SNAP because they can no longer be self-sufficient with salmon fishing. She further stated that trawling damages ocean ecosystems and questioned whether Joint Secretarial Order 3403 may provide any bearing on these conversations.

Committee Member Teves suggested that the Local Food Purchase Assistance (LFPA) program, or some variation, may advance greater producer markets alongside expanding support for the Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentives Program to include protein purchases. Committee Member Jacobs seconded the benefit that the Local Food Purchase Assistance Program offered to Tribal food security and producers. In managing this food security, identifying that it saved their community during the government shutdown. Vice Chair Baldy shared that the local Klamath Tribal Conservation District purchased 100 boxes per week of beef, milk, cheese, and eggs to share with their community. Committee Member Scott suggested that LFPA served as an entry point for producers, helping them grow to be a larger contributor in their food system. Committee Member Jacobs reiterated the administrative steps necessary for Tribal households switching between SNAP and FDPIR may be burdensome.

Committee Linnell stated how many schools no longer maintain full kitchens to prepare foods and the amount of food prepared may not provide the nutrient content necessary for some youth. Committee Member Jacobs added that many Tribal communities need cold storage

Education and Research Subcommittee. Subcommittee Co-Chair Sawney summarized previous subcommittee discussions focusing on the need for more education, research, and extension funding. She reiterated a previous recommendation submitted by the Committee requesting a Committee appointment representing Tribal College/University interests.

Subcommittee Co-Chair Teves highlighted the importance of supporting professional development opportunities to extension agents. He stated that the Farm to School program can support supplemental agriculture curriculum, while encouraging USDA research programs be protected.

Vice Chair Baldy suggested that additional Native youth may be interested in agriculture if more FFA chapters were available, with barns at local schools. Co-Chair Teves identified that even when schools sponsor an agricultural program, the FFA or 4H instructor may not have an agricultural background. Committee Member Scott expressed a desire to explore whether the absence of a Federally Recognized Tribal Extension Program (FRTEP) agent may impact USDA engagement levels.

Forest and Public Lands Management Subcommittee. Subcommittee Chair Barquin shared the intention to introduce a number of new recommendations not previously raised in subcommittee discussion. He discussed the need for additional resources and

authorities to be provided for USDA's wildfire response efforts, suggesting that fire management and land management are directly related. Vice Chair Baldy agreed with the suggestion that wildfire funding and coordination on Forest Service managed lands should stay with USDA. Committee Member Linnell suggested that if wildfire funding is moved to the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the departments should utilize a specific accounting code to track use. Vice Chair Baldy also reiterated a desire for more expansive self-governance contracts and compacts with the Forest Service.

Committee Administration Subcommittee. Chair Kissee expressed interest in coordinating future subcommittee meetings with OTR and monitoring recommendations. Committee Member Sawney suggested OTR should have greater visibility in Indian Country, including participation in Tribal conferences and events. On the department's reorganization, she encouraged USDA remain adaptable and approachable to the needs of Tribes and Tribal members in their region. Committee Member Scott suggested the Committee play a role in supporting the orientation for future Committee members.

COMMITTEE DELIBERATION

Committee Member Barquin commended the Secretary for taking steps to recognize religious freedoms, encouraging this consideration extend to the many Tribes who consider their 'church' in the mountains and forests. Committee Member Linnell seconded that many Tribal members tie their faith and religion to the use of land, regardless of land ownership. Upon motion duly made and seconded, the Committee considered and approved the following recommendation unanimously:

- USDA should ensure Indian religious and cultural expression are protected and allowed on National Forest System lands.

Committee Member Barquin proposed that the U.S. Forest Service provide greater flexibility in the negotiation and administration of co-stewardship and co-management agreements. Under this framework, he suggested that a 'master agreement' could provide the basis for further negotiations between Tribes and District Ranger. Upon motions duly made and seconded, the Committee considered and approved the following recommendations unanimously:

- The Tribal Advisory Committee recommends USDA and USFS Master Agreements with Tribes to provide flexible, legal frameworks that would reduce the need to go through a lengthy process to enter into an agreement for each individual action.
- To strengthen Tribal partnerships and ensure success, the TAC further recommends that each Master Agreement include a list of project add-ons (for activities like fuels reduction, cultural burning, monitoring, and workforce) so work can begin quickly without re-drafting terms.
- The TAC recommends the Master Agreement template be co-developed with Tribal governments to avoid the past mistakes of USFS-Tribal agreements primarily consisting of what they are not, rather than on what the U.S. and Tribal governments can do together.

- Once entered into, the TAC recommends the Chief of the Forest Service delegate authority to the District Ranger to enter into agreements with Tribal governments for specific projects, including Good Neighbor Authority, TFPA, 638, Co-Stewardship, and other legal authorities. Agreements should allow the Ranger District and the Tribal government to work together on a number of issues, including actions on-Reservation and on the National Forest System lands.
- To support implementation, the TAC recommends that Master Agreements provide for multi-year, flexible funding, braided funding with one consolidated report, advance payments where permissible, and Tribal capacity support (staffing, training, equipment, and youth/fire crews).
- The TAC recommends the Office of General Counsel, in coordination with Tribal governments, analyze current partnership legal authorities and interpret those authorities according to the Indian canon of construction so that the greatest extent of partnership can be achieved. This analysis should result in clear field directives to the USFS of what types of actions the USFS can perform on-Reservation, what types of actions Tribes can perform on the National Forest System, and where joint action is authorized.
- To the extent the Office of General Counsel and Tribal governments agree that legal authority does not exist for certain types of actions, the TAC recommends that Congress enact legislation authorizing those types of partnerships.
- The TAC recommends USDA complete the analysis described above within six months of receipt of this recommendation.
- The TAC also recommends USDA finalize Master Agreement templates with project add-ons within twelve months, followed by an annual co-stewardship report progress on shared outcomes.

Committee Member Barquin posited that, while there is mutual interest in restoring fire to the eco-system, if negotiations take three to four years, these activities may be too late to accomplish their intended purpose. Upon motion duly made and seconded, the Committee considered and approved the following recommendation unanimously:

- The TAC recommends USDA prioritize actions that return beneficial fire to ecosystems through responsible forest planning and management. To achieve this, restoration actions must occur at landscape scale and across jurisdictional boundaries. Thus, partnerships between the Forest Service, other USDA mission areas, and Indian Country must be robust, co-led with Tribes, and expedited. The Master Agreements described in Recommendation [X] can be used to implement this recommendation by: (1) adding short project add-ons for prescribed and cultural burning; (2) issuing a written delegation from the Chief to District Rangers with a 30-day review clock for burn add-ons; (3) relying, where lawful, on pre-cleared clauses and programmatic reviews to reduce duplicative process; and (4) providing multi-year, flexible funding.

Committee Member Barquin suggested that the 9th Forest Congress included participants from a wide variety of interests and governments. Upon motion duly made and seconded, the Committee considered and approved the following recommendation unanimously:

- The TAC recommends the USFS implement the 9th American Forest Congress principles and resolutions.

Committee Member Barquin suggested that federal forests are vital and protecting their ecological integrity and biodiversity serves as a powerful, nature-based climate solution. Committee Member Linnell added that traditional ecological knowledge serves as a critical element for fostering ecological integrity. Committee Member Baldy reflected that traditional practice ensures the availability of resources for multiple generations. Upon motions duly made and seconded, the Committee considered and approved the following recommendation unanimously:

- The TAC recommends the USFS prioritize ecological integrity in forest planning and management. Proactive forest stewardship should:
 - Maintain and restore the composition, structure, and function of forest ecosystems to enhance carbon sequestration, habitat suitability, and adaptive capacity for all species.
 - Elevate co-governance and equitable partnerships with Tribal Nations that uphold sovereignty, ensure decision-making power, and integrate Indigenous land ethics into national forest frameworks.
 - Modernize forest laws and policies to explicitly incorporate ecological integrity and Indigenous knowledge as guiding principles for management across jurisdictions.
 - Invest in workforce and institutional capacity to train future forest leaders in TEK-informed adaptive management, climate resilience, and collaborative conservation.
 - Foster innovation in forest product markets and climate finance systems that align with ecological integrity, transparency, and cultural respect for the lands and communities that sustain them.

Chair Kisse questioned whether the Committee was interested in submitting another report the Secretary and relevant committees of Congress. Committee Member Barquin responded in the affirmative.

Committee Member Teves noted that the Native Hawaiian Community is often not appropriately and directly engaged in policy decisions. Upon motion duly made and seconded, the Committee considered and approved the following recommendation unanimously:

- USDA should consult with the Native Hawaiian Community similarly to what's been done with Tribes.

Committee Member Teves further suggested that the current span for home mortgages does not adequately provide a low enough rate to make USDA housing programs affordable. Upon motion duly made and seconded, the Committee considered and approved the following recommendation unanimously:

- USDA should investigate 50-year mortgages to address the needs of Tribal and Native Hawaiian Community homes.

Committee Member Barquin suggested that USDA administered state funds are not benefiting Tribes proportionately or at all. He identified that programs such as the Specialty Crop Block Grant and Farm to School state funding may be implicated by this comment. Vice Chair Baldy suggested that the Committee is interested in exploring more ways for these funds to be directly available for Tribes and Tribal producers. Upon motions duly made and seconded, the Committee considered and approved the following recommendations unanimously:

- USDA should be required, when it creates or reauthorizes state formula or cooperative agreement programs in food and agriculture, to establish a direct Tribal allocation pathway (Tribal governments and/or a designated Tribal intermediary) alongside state allocations, rather than relying solely on state-administered competitions.
- For existing programs like SCBGP and Farm to School State Formula Grants, USDA should create a Tribal set-aside or opt-out mechanism so that Tribal Nations can elect to have their share of formula funding administered by a trusted Tribal-led national organization that serves all 574 federally recognized Tribes (for example, the Intertribal Agriculture Council) instead of being dependent on state processes.
- The TAC recommends USDA should standardize minimum Tribal engagement and equity requirements for any state agencies receiving USDA formula funds, including:
 - documented Tribal consultation (not just general stakeholder listening sessions).
 - outreach plans and timelines targeted to Tribal Nations and Tribal producers.
 - clear scoring criteria that do not structurally disadvantage Tribes.
 - consequences for non-performance (such as reallocation of unobligated balances to Tribal entities or Tribal intermediaries).
- The TAC requests USDA review and remove state-level eligibility requirements that function as barriers for Tribal Nations, such as requiring applicants to serve on specific state-created bodies (e.g., a school wellness committee), and instead recognize Tribal equivalents (Tribal health boards, education committees, wellness coalitions, etc.).
- The TAC requests that USDA issue joint guidance across AMS, FNS, and NIFA clarifying that Tribal nations must not be treated as “special interest groups” under state-run processes, but as sovereign governments with distinct eligibility, consultation, and data-tracking expectations.
- The TAC requests USDA compile the following information:
 - A program-by-program list of USDA state formula / cooperative programs in food and agriculture (AMS, FNS, NIFA) with:
 - CFDA numbers;
 - statutory authority;
 - allocation formulas; and
 - whether Tribal governments or Tribal organizations are eligible direct recipients.

- State-level data showing, for each relevant program:
 - which states declined funds;
 - which states carried unobligated balances past a certain threshold;
 - the number and dollar amount of awards to Tribal governments or Tribal organizations.
- Case examples from Indian Country showing how state-level decisions (declining funds, restrictive RFPs, short timelines, or lack of outreach) have materially limited Tribal access, contrasted with states that have successfully partnered with Tribes.

Committee Member Barquin suggested Tribes lack parity with State Regional Trade Groups in the participation of USDA facilitated agricultural trade missions and trade shows. Upon motions duly made and seconded, the Committee considered and approved the following recommendations with Committee Member Scott abstaining:

- The TAC recommends that USDA and Congress establish permanent Tribal seats with voting power on NASDA and each of the SRTG boards as a condition of continued federal MAP support, ensuring that Tribal interests help shape export strategies and priorities.
- The TAC recommends creation of a dedicated Tribal Market Access allocation or set-aside within MAP, administered by a trusted Tribal-led national organization, to provide parity with state cooperators and to build long-term Tribal trade capacity (market research, branding, trade missions, compliance, etc.).
- USDA should elevate IAC to the same cooperative status as NASDA and the SRTGs by authorizing it to administer all program offerings allowable under MAP UES, including internships, cost-share programs, branded promotion, and technical assistance, and by providing adequate, multi-year funding that supports a cooperator infrastructure equal in strength and scope to state-led entities.
- The TAC recommends USDA conduct a Tribal impact assessment of MAP and related trade programs, analyzing how current governance structures and cost-share requirements advantage state agencies and state commodity groups relative to Tribal Nations and Tribal producers.

Committee Member Barquin expressed interest for supporting more expansive USDA funding for developing Tribal Departments of Agriculture. Committee Member Linnell cited that DOI requires Tribes develop an agricultural plan and that a Tribal department may be best equipped to provide oversight of these activities under a comprehensive planning approach. Upon motion duly made and seconded, the Committee considered and approved the following recommendation unanimously:

- The TAC recommends USDA support the creation, development, and expansion of Tribal Departments of Agriculture within Tribal governments to facilitate and promote all goals of Tribal food sovereignty, including agricultural economic development, food production, natural resource stewardship and relations, policy and advocacy, support for Tribal citizens engagement in food and agriculture, liaising with federal agencies in support of Tribal citizens and Tribal agricultural efforts, resiliency, and cultural foodways.

Committee Member Teves asserted that many generations of Hawaiians may reside within the same household, impacting their eligibility to specific loans or grants. Upon motion duly made and seconded, the Committee considered and approved the following recommendation unanimously:

- USDA should take a holistic approach in determining whether an applicant will receive a grant or loan.

Committee Member Teves suggested that USDA should develop adequate resourcing to support beginning farmers, particularly in Indian Country and the Native Hawaiian Community. Upon motion duly made and seconded, the Committee considered and approved the following recommendation unanimously:

- USDA should maintain robust beginning farmer program to address aging farmers and have a set aside for Tribal, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian Communities.

Committee Member Sawney expressed a desire for continuity in services and operations to Tribes in USDA's reorganization efforts. Committee Member Glenn expressed that identified hub sites may not carry the expertise necessary to adequately serve Tribal communities along the west coast and Alaska or the Native Hawaiian Community. Committee Member Linnell suggested that centralizing services may not have a direct correlation to increased services and that flights to these areas may be challenging. Upon motions duly made and seconded, the Committee considered and approved the following recommendations unanimously:

- USDA should ensure continuity of services to Tribes ensure that USDA relocation plans are continuously informed by Tribal input through consultation, even after the relocation takes place.
- USDA should consider having a hub on the west coast instead of having two of them next to each other in Arizona and Utah to address the needs of Tribal communities along the west coast, in Alaska, and Hawai'i.

Committee Member Teves expressed interest in the continuity of Farm to School programming and projects. Upon motion duly made and seconded, the Committee considered and approved the following recommendation unanimously:

- USDA should reinstate and expand the farm to school program to address education in schools as well as moving local produce into schools.

Committee Member Linnell expressed uncertainty over whether USDA was under a hiring freeze. She identified that the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service maintains no Tribal liaison in Alaska. She held that filling this vacancy and vacancies from other Tribal-facing roles after the deferred resignation program was important. Committee Member Barquin suggested that a resolution passed by the National Congress of American Indians may be repurposed with this goal. Committee Member Scott expressed that this recommendation should include any such vacancies in the USDA Office of Tribal Relations. Upon motion duly made and seconded, the Committee considered and approved the following recommendation unanimously:

- The TAC recommends that USDA ensure the retention of staff and the preservation of personnel, positions and functions necessary to ensure effective Tribal consultation and meaningful, supported collaboration with Tribes.

Vice Chair Baldy suggested the National Intertribal Food Business Center was intended to provide critical support to developing and expanding Native food businesses. Upon motion duly made and seconded, the Committee considered and approved the following recommendation with Committee Member Scott abstaining:

- The USDA Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) should continue its vital financial support for the Native Regional Food Business Center. This funding is essential for tribal businesses to drive rural economic development and enhance tribal food security.

Committee Member Barquin acknowledged recommendations made by the Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians and National Congress of American Indians regarding forest planning and management. Upon motion duly made and seconded, the Committee considered and approved the following recommendation unanimously:

- The TAC recommends the USFS ensure early, sustained, and well-resourced government-to-government consultation with all Tribal Nations within the Northwest Forest Planning area, consistent with the federal trust responsibility and recommends the USFS provide technical assistance and funding support necessary for Tribal Nations to fully participate in the continued amendment process, including development of the Revised EIS and FEIS, and project development and implementation at the Forest level.

Vice Chair Baldy referenced a desire for broader USDA funding authorities benefiting seafood interests. Committee Member Linnell suggested that this funding should support smaller operations and not factory trawlers. Upon motion duly made and seconded, the Committee considered the following recommendation:

- The USDA should adopt a provision or provisions within the Farm Bill to grant access to USDA funding and programming for both traditionally and commercially harvested seafood sectors.

Committee Member Linnell suggested that this funding should support smaller operations and not factory trawlers. Upon motion duly made and seconded, the Committee amended and approved the above recommendation to read as follows:

- The USDA should adopt a provision or provisions within the Farm Bill to grant access to USDA funding and programming for both traditionally and commercially harvested seafood sectors for tribes and tribal producers.

PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD

DFO Griffin opened the public comment period at 3:00 P.M. Pacific Time by framing this period as an opportunity for the public to inform Tribal Advisory Committee's workplan. In these remarks, he stated that as this public comment period was directed to Committee members and not to federal agencies, members of the public may not expect discussion with agency staff. Additionally, the DFO instructed that TAC members

may ask clarifying questions but may not seek discussion with commenters in this period.

NOTE: This section paraphrases comments and does not reflect verbatim remarks from any commenter.

Carly Griffith Hotvedt, Indigenous Food and Agriculture Initiative, commented that under 7 U.S.C. §8301 et al., Tribes are not authorized to be included in the National Animal Health Lab Network. If an animal disease findings impact Tribal lands, Ms. Hotvedt suggested that Tribes would be required to negotiate with a state entity to make this report. Incorporating a recognition of tribal sovereignty would require amending the statute. Separately, Ms. Hotvedt encouraged development of a tracking system to monitor food in transit from warehouses to Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservation sites. Additionally, Ms. Hotvedt reflected concern over agency determination on whether deregulation requires consultation. On a separate matter, Ms. Hotvedt expressed concern over the increase in Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program administrative cost share requirements passed in the One Big Beautiful Bill from 50 to 75 percent. She suggested that many Tribes reside in States that may not maintain the revenue necessary to meet this requirement. While she pointed to a provision allowing Tribes to assume administration of SNAP if there is a failure by state, she suggested insufficient guidance exists as to what constitutes such a failure.

Buck Jones, Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission, stated that the early termination of Regional Food Business Centers were significant losses to Tribal members along the Pacific Northwest that signed contracts with the Northwest Region. He expressed frustration that the reduced timeline to meet Train the Trainer requirements made it impossible to fully participate. Mr. Jones commented that the reductions to the Local Food Purchase Assistance program also impacted Tribes and Tribal producers that rely on this food and that additional cold storage funding must be made available. Mr. Jones separately expressed that seafood trawling is negatively impacting the availability of traditional fish species and the shrimping industry due to by-catch. Mr. Jones encouraged USDA recognize fisheries as agriculture and to provide more targeted funding for this purpose.

Eva Dawn Burke, NANA Member, expressed appreciation for many of the comments raised, including from Mr. Jones. She identified that USDA heavily subsidizes the pollock industry, further contesting that this industry is not sustainable. Alternatively, Ms. Burke encouraged USDA prioritize funding for food sovereignty and land stewardship programming like the Local Food Purchase Assistance program. Tanana Chiefs Council utilized this funding to purchase salmon. Additionally, she commented that the National Intertribal Food Business Center was intending to support their salmon and culture camp operations, but the absence of this funding strains capacity to make these products available.

Mai Nguyen, Intertribal Agriculture Council, commented that USDA has lost 15 percent of its workforce and requested USDA retain staff that know Tribes, know USDA,

and know BIA. Ms. Nguyen attested that an independent study conducted by the Intertribal Agriculture Council suggests that producers on Trust land wait five times longer to receive financing than on fee simple lands. Ms. Nguyen requested the immediate hiring of a USDA Director of Tribal Relations and the elevation of this role to Assistant Secretary. She expressed concern with transitioning other roles, such as Regional Conservationists to politically appointed Assistant Chiefs. She further expressed concern with any proposal to reassign agency Tribal liaisons into the Office of Tribal Relations, which may not have the budget or staff capacity to assume oversight over these functions. She encouraged the Committee continue exploring the Memorandum of Understanding between the USDA and DOI. She further encouraged USDA allocate appropriate levels of disaster assistance that reflect the realities of Tribal agriculture production and that USDA create a contingency fund with points of contact for the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations in the event of a government shutdown.

Keir Johnson Reyes, Intertribal Agriculture Council, echoed the request to immediately seat a Director of Tribal Relations. He further suggested that moving the NRCS National Tribal Liaison to Washington, D.C., removed the previous Tribal liaison from this position. Instead, he suggested that USDA should prioritize direct, field based coordination to ensure that the role is filled by Tribal producers able to facilitate that engagement.

Theo Garcia encouraged technical assistance providers be made available to support capacity building into program funds. He expressed a desire for making more technical service providers available, including national organizations that could fly to requested locations.

Trey Iron Pipe, Blackfeet Nation, commented that his Tribe is experiencing extreme drought. He requested NRCS provide additional funds for water development and resources to calculate evaporation rates. He identified Congressional funding to support weather stations for additional data.

TAC DELIBERATION

Reflecting on public comment, Committee Member Linnell requested Committee Member Teves have the floor to discuss a potential recommendation. Upon motion duly made and seconded, the Committee considered the following recommendation:

- USDA should implement a program similar to the Local Food Purchase Assistance program to support farmers' efforts to sell food in their communities, to bolster economic development efforts, and bolster food security for Tribes, Alaska Natives, and the Native Hawaiian Community.

Committee Member Sawney requested this recommendation be tabled until the Committee could determine if a similar recommendation had previously been submitted.

Committee Member Teves encouraged USDA consider greater flexibilities in SNAP waivers for Tribes, Alaska Natives, and the Native Hawaiian Community which often

lack necessary employment opportunities. Committee Member Barquin reflected that the Committee should deliberate on how to present this recommendation. DFO Griffin cited that the [One Big Beautiful Bill offered an exception](#) for Native Americans, Alaska Natives, Indigenous Peoples, and Tribal members. Committee Member Barquin asked if the Committee was interested in broadening this exception to include Native Hawaiians. Committee Member Scott encouraged this recommendation be taken up by the Food, Food Safety, and Trade Subcommittee for information gathering.

Vice Chair Baldy reflected on previous discussions regarding National Historic Preservation Act implementation. Upon recommendation duly made and seconded, the Committee considered and approved the following recommendation unanimously:

- The USDA should collaborate with the Cultural Preservation Committee to establish a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Tribal Historic Preservation Officer (THPO) to streamline the cultural assessment process.

Committee Member Sawney identified that the tabled recommendation is not duplicative of previous submissions. Upon motion duly made and seconded, the Committee considered and approved the following recommendation unanimously:

- USDA should implement a program similar to the Local Food Purchase Assistance program to support farmers' efforts to sell food in their communities, to bolster economic development efforts, and bolster food security for Tribes, Alaska Natives, and the Native Hawaiian Community.

Committee Member Barquin reflected on public comments, citing that commercial buyers operating on national forest lands was illegal. Committee Member Linnell suggested that such operations may also impede on treaty rights, suggesting that if the U.S. Forest Service were to allow this activity, that the agency should also provide appropriate educational materials on how to properly harvest. Upon motions duly made and seconded, the Committee considered and approved the following recommendations unanimously:

- The TAC recommends the USDA and USFS work with Tribal governments to protect huckleberries and other resources from commercial harvest, damaging harvest practices, and overharvest.
- The TAC recommends the USFS and USFS-LEI work with Tribal governments to protect the exercise of Treaty and other harvest by Tribes and their citizens.

Committee Member Barquin reflected on the comments shared by Ms. Hotvedt on the administration's deregulatory agenda, encouraging the Committee Administration Subcommittee add this topic to their agenda.

Committee Member Linnell opined that additional resources are necessary to support activities in Alaska, including fisheries and forest planning. She suggested that Tribal inclusion in the Federal Subsistence Board is critical for its continuing success. Committee Member Barquin acknowledged a National Congress of American Indians resolution that speaks to this issue. Upon motion duly made and seconded, the Committee considered and approved the following recommendation unanimously:

- The TAC recommends the Secretary support keeping the Federal Subsistence Board as it is as of January 1, 2025, with three (3) Tribally nominated seats, three (3) federal seats, and the five (5) federal agencies

Committee Member Scott expressed a desire for more expansive NRCS technical service providers in Indian Country and Alaska.

DOI UPDATE

DFO Griffin introduced [Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs \(AS-IA\), William \(Billy\) Kirkland](#).

AS-IA Kirkland stated that he is here to learn from this Committee tasked with serving one of the most underserved communities in the countries. He identified that agriculture in his home state is a \$90 billion industry, that without it, people do not eat, and that agriculture is more than cows and plows. Agriculture includes subsistence. AS-IA Kirkland represented that while the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between USDA and DOI may be one item for discussion, the Committee may have other topics of interest in mind.

Committee Member Linnell reflected that a major typhoon has impacted several Alaska communities, causing many families to move. She stated while Washington, D.C., was slow to respond, the State of Alaska took action quickly. The night before she drove to the airport, she reflected her area experienced 100 mile per hour winds. AS-IA Kirkland noted that Alaska also experienced an earthquake, promising to make contact information available.

Vice Chair Baldy thanked the Assistant Secretary for joining this Committee meeting. She presented elements from public comment discussing food security and forest management. She acknowledged the role of the Committee to provide recommendations for USDA and Congress on these matters. She encouraged the Assistant Secretary to review the Committee's recommendations posted online.

Committee Member Barquin identified some of the issues the Committee has previously raised with DOI: Agricultural Resource Management Plans, a backlog in probates, the fee to trust process, wildfire management. As-IA Kirkland identified that he can work to bring relevant staff to Committee meetings as necessary for discussion.

Committee Member Scott thanked the Assistant Secretary for bringing up the MOU. She reiterated research conducted by the Intertribal Agriculture Council on the additional time farmers must wait for a farm ownership loan on Trust land in relation to fee-simple land. She also encouraged greater collaboration between federal departments around developing Agricultural Resource Management Plans.

AS-IA referenced that existing systems may be antiquated and that more work is necessary to address issues like probate. He identified that food security is national

security and also necessary for Tribal sovereignty. These conversations, broadly, he identified as essential for keeping youth in their homelands.

TAC DELIBERATION

Committee Member Linnell reiterated a portion of public comment addressing fisheries resources. She referenced Joint Secretarial Order 3403 among DOI, USDA, and the U.S. Department of Commerce as a potential leveraging point for greater interagency coordination. Upon motion duly made and seconded, the Committee considered and approved the following recommendation unanimously:

- The TAC recommends USDA look at Joint Secretarial Order 3403 to look at long-term sustainability for fisheries in Tribes and rural communities.

Vice Chair Baldy referenced another public comment suggesting the elevation of the Director of Tribal Relations. Upon motion duly made and seconded, the Committee considered and approved the following recommendation unanimously:

- The TAC recommends that Congress elevate the director of tribal relations to an assistant secretary level.

Committee Member Sawney questioned whether the Committee can support the onboarding and orientation of new members. DFO Griffin acknowledged that newly appointed Committee members must receive the same orientation as current members in Federal Advisory Committee Act and Ethics trainings. Committee Member Linnell wondered what the timeframe is on appointing new members. Policy Advisor Benson acknowledged coordination with Acting Director of Tribal Relations, John Walk, on this matter.

Committee Member Linnell reflected on action taken under Secretary Vilsack to amend the memoranda of agreement recognizing TCDs to five year terms. She expressed frustration that negotiations to renew her TCD spanned a year and a half. Upon motion duly made and seconded, the Committee considered and approved the following recommendation unanimously:

- The TAC recommends USDA remove the 5-year expiration clause in memoranda of agreement or understanding recognizing Tribal Conservation Districts and replace it with "until it is dissolved by the Secretary or the Tribe."

ADJOURN

Upon motion duly made and carried, without objection, the meeting adjourned at approximately 5:00 P.M. Pacific Standard Time.