November 21, 2019

The Honorable Debra Haaland  
The Honorable Elizabeth Warren  
U.S. House of Representatives  
U.S. Senate  
1237 Longworth House Office Building  
309 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515  
Washington, DC 20510

Re: Supporting Tribal Food Security and Sovereignty in Honoring Promises to Native Nations Act of 2019

Dear Representative Haaland and Senator Warren:

On behalf of MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger and representative tribes of the Native Farm Bill Coalition (NFBC), we would like to express our gratitude for your support and acknowledgement of the trust and treaty responsibilities of the federal government to Tribal Nations in your work on the Honoring Promises to Native Nations Act of 2019. In reviewing the Broken Promises: Continuing Federal Funding Shortfall for Native Americans report and the current draft legislative proposal, we believe there are some additional provisions that can be included in the Act when it is introduced that will enhance Tribal sovereignty, Tribal food systems, and federal feeding programs to provide food security and economic opportunities for Tribal Nations. Below is a list of recommendations that embraces the key findings of the Broken Promises report to honor and support enhancing Tribal sovereignty through food security and food sovereignty.

Recommendations for Honoring Promises to Native Nations Act of 2019 for Food, Agriculture, and Economic Development in Indian Country

These recommendations overarchingly refer to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) including but not limited to the following USDA agencies: Food and Nutrition Service (FNS), Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS), and Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

Nutrition and Food Security – Federal Feeding Programs

1. Ensure all those living on Tribal lands do not face food insecurity, and that all federal feeding programs are recalibrated to better support the local use of Tribal lands and Tribal ability to solve local food access problems;
2. Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR):
   a) Advance appropriations for administrative funding of FDPIR to keep the program operating during times of uncertainty;
   b) Provide full funding for the FDPIR 638-Demonstration Project so Tribal Nations can source local, Tribally produced, and culturally appropriate foods for their citizens;
   c) Guarantee parity for FDPIR programs and participants in nutrition education funding, preferably for non-competitive education funding;
3. Authorize sufficient funding for a SNAP 638-Demonstration Project so Tribal Nations can develop the capacity to directly administer SNAP to better meet the needs of their citizens;
4. Authorize Tribes to directly administer child nutrition programs like the National School Lunch Program, the School Breakfast Program, the Summer Food Service Program, and the Child and Adult Care Food Program;
5. Ensure greater use of traditional foods within all federal feeding programs and as donated food product in all public institutional settings within Indian Country;
6. Create funding programs that will support Native consumers' healthy food access through small-scale, "self-help" grocery stores and financially supporting healthy foods incentive programs in Indian Country.

Agriculture and Economic Development
1. Enhance Tribal control of and participation in the local food system by supporting local and regional food processing and packaging infrastructure development;
2. Support the necessary funding and resources for the training and technical assistance necessary for Tribal producers to become USDA Commodity Foods vendors, opening up new market opportunities for Tribally produced foods;
3. Ensure that all agencies at USDA, the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), and all other federal agencies commit the necessary support and resources to strengthen, support, build and grow healthy food alternatives in Indian Country;
4. Allocate resources for interested Tribal Nations to develop their own regulatory infrastructure so that the nearly 80,000 Native farmers and ranchers across Indian Country will have clarity regarding inspections for FSMA;
5. Authorize “Treatment as a State” for USDA-AMS programs where Tribes have established Departments of Agriculture, particularly in Federal State Marketing Improvement Program and Specialty Crop Block Grant;
6. Provide the necessary levels of funding and guarantees to Native Community Development Financial Institutions so they can offer solutions that are responsive to Tribal producer needs and are not confined within the guardrails established by the commodity cycle which support corporate Agriculture and Finance Industries.

Forestry and Conservation
1. Require the Forest Service to recognize land held in trust for either Tribes or individuals as eligible base property for the purposes of livestock grazing permits it issues on Forest Service lands;
2. Direct USDA-NCRS to develop an interim conservation practice standard for Traditional Ecological Knowledge so that reporting progress can be documented, and a payment schedule can be developed for programs utilizing the standard.

Tribal Sovereignty
1. Expand Public Law 93-638 authority by authorizing the Secretary of Agriculture to implement 638 pilots and programs across USDA programs as requested by Tribal governments and utilizing existing appropriations;
2. Establish that USDA Office of Tribal Relations is the lead agency to oversee all USDA authorities on Tribal self-governance or similar authorities to allow improved intradepartmental coordination and cooperation;
3. Recognize the Director of the Office of Tribal Relations as an Officer of the USDA to ensure that USDA agencies appropriately adhere to their consultation requirements, including recordkeeping on consultation.
We believe that incorporating these recommendations into the proposed legislation will have long-term positive impacts for Tribal governments and their citizens, Tribal food and agriculture producers, and food system development in Indian Country. Thank you again for your strong leadership and consideration of these recommendations. Please do not hesitate to reach out if you have any questions or need additional information.

Sincerely,

Abby J. Leibman  
President & CEO  
MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger

Zach Ducheneaux  
Co-Chair, Native Farm Bill Coalition  
Executive Director, Intertribal Agriculture Council