

May 31, 2019

Chairman Richard Shelby
Senate Appropriations Committee

Ranking Member Patrick Leahy
Senate Appropriations Committee

Chairman John Hoeven
Senate Agriculture Appropriations
Subcommittee

Ranking Member Jeff Merkley
Senate Agriculture Appropriations
Subcommittee

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RE: \$5 Million Needed for FDPIR 638 Demonstration Program

Dear Chairmen Shelby and Hoeven and Ranking Members Leahy and Merkley:

On behalf of MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger, a member of the Native Farm Bill Coalition, we request that you add an additional FY 2020 appropriation of \$5 million, if not more, for the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations ("FDPIR") 638 Pilot Program that was authorized in Section 4003(b) of the 2018 Farm Bill (Pub. L. 115-334).

MAZON believes that no human being should go hungry. However, we know that nearly one-quarter of American Indian and Alaska Native households are food insecure, and lack of access to traditional food systems has had a significantly negative impact on Native health. Rates of obesity and diabetes in Indian Country are nearly twice that of the rest of the U.S. population. Furthermore, tribes lack sufficient control over the management of federal nutrition programs that impact their members, resources, and governments. These programs include FDPIR as well as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and the National School Lunch and Breakfast Programs.

FDPIR serves low-income Native American and Alaska Native households, and the elderly, from approximately 276 tribes that do not have easy access to nutritious food and beverages on or near Indian Reservations. Despite efforts by USDA to meet the dietary needs of Native Americans and Alaska Natives, FDPIR food packages often do not include traditional, culturally appropriate and locally grown foods produced by Native farmers, ranchers and producers. This not only hinders the ability of tribal governments to promote the dietary well-being of its citizens, but it also prevents tribal governments from stimulating tribal food economies that are needed to overcome food insecurity and food scarcity in Indian Country.

Funding the FDPIR 638 Pilot Program would allow approximately 90,000 FDPIR participants around the country to gain access to more traditional foods, such as blue corn, wild salmon, bison and wild rice, of importance to the health and well-being of Native communities and support tribal farmers and producers across Indian Country.

For more than four decades, tribal governments have utilized the 638 authority (Indian Self-Determination Act, Pub. L. 93-638) to administer programs funded annually by the Departments of the Interior and Health and Human Services and similar authority to the Departments of Labor, Transportation, and Housing and Urban Development with great success. Research has shown that programs operated under 638 authority are more cost-effective, comprehensive and responsive to community needs. MAZON is confident that funding this pilot program will provide similar results. For this reason, we urgently ask you to fully fund the FDPIR 638 Pilot Program and encourage your colleagues to join you

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in supporting the self-determination and self-governance aspirations of tribal governments.

MAZON is appreciative of the efforts of the U.S. House of Representatives to fund the FDPIR Pilot Program at \$3 million through September 30, 2021. However, as a member of the Native Farm Bill Coalition and the over 170 tribes it represents, MAZON is concerned that \$3 million is not enough to fund a successful demonstration project. As you know, the U.S. has a special trust relationship with Native nations yet continues to fail to meet its obligation to promote tribal self-governance, support the general health and well-being of Native American tribes and protect their lands and resources. A recent report from the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, Broken Promises: Continuing Federal Funding Shortfall for Native Americans, confirms that federal funding for Native American programs and services has been disproportionately lower than funding for other non-Native populations (p.205). Allocating less than full funding for the FDPIR 638 Pilot Program only contributes to a long history of chronic and structural underfunding of Native American communities. To ensure the FDPIR Pilot Program's success and to identify additional areas of improvement and/or account for regional variances, the FDPIR Pilot Program should be fully funded and ideally, more than one FDPIR 638 Pilot Program should be awarded. For this reason, MAZON requests that the Senate appropriate the full \$5 million for the FDPIR 638 Pilot Program and consider allocating additional funding if possible.

In addition to our support for this funding for FDPIR, we remain concerned about USDA's proposed rulemaking to restrict states' flexibility to waive SNAP time limits. This proposed rule change would exacerbate hunger among Native Americans, an already vulnerable and frequently overlooked population. Despite reports of high unemployment nationally, unemployment remains a huge issue in Indian Country, in some cases as high as 21%. SNAP waivers for these communities literally save lives. **We encourage you to withhold funding for USDA that would be used to carry out this proposed rule change.** It is important to note that increasing restrictions for SNAP access would result in a spike in demand for FDPIR by Native Americans formerly eligible for SNAP. As has occurred in the past, such a spike in FDPIR enrollment could create a concerning strain on FDPIR, which has limited available funding in the first place.

MAZON is committed to supporting our Native partners in Indian Country, lending our voice to—and demanding accountability for—Native-led policy proposals and priorities.

We look forward to working together with you to address the widespread issue of food insecurity in Indian Country.

Sincerely,



Mia Hubbard
Vice President of Programs

Cc:

Mitch McConnell (R-KY)	Shelley Moore Capito (R-WV)	Dick Durbin (D-IL)
Lamar Alexander (R-TN)	John Kennedy (R-LA)	Jon Tester (D-MT)
Susan Collins (R-ME)	Cindy Hyde-Smith (R-MS)	Tom Udall (D-NM)
Lisa Murkowski (R-AK)	Steve Daines (R-MT)	Chris Coons (D-DE)
Lindsey Graham (R-SC)	Marco Rubio (R-FL)	Brian Schatz (D-HI)
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Jerry Moran (R-KS)	Patty Murray (D-WA)	
John Boozman (R-AR)	Dianne Feinstein (D-CA)	