

# Agriculture



Agriculture is a fast growing sector in Indian Country. It is the second leading employer in Native communities and is the backbone of the economy for about 130 tribes. The 2007 Census of Agriculture shows a dramatic 88 percent increase in the number of American Indian farmers (79,703 more than in 2002). In 2007, nearly 61,472 American Indians operated farms on more than 58 million acres of land and sold \$3.26 billion of agricultural products, including \$1.46 billion of crops and \$1.71 billion of livestock and poultry.<sup>x</sup> Because 36 percent of Native Americans live in rural areas, tribal governments and farmers look to active partnerships with the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to sustain and advance common interests across the broad array of services that USDA provides to tribal governments.

Tribal governments are recognizing that USDA services reach beyond agriculture, as they serve not only farmers and ranchers, but tribal governments, natural resource managers, youth, colleges, water infrastructure providers, energy suppliers, and communities. Indian Country looks forward to greater collaboration with USDA and synergies across their programs best suited to each tribe's circumstances.



## *Key Recommendations*

### DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

#### **Agriculture Appropriations Bill**

##### **Federally Recognized Tribal Extension Program**

- Increase the Federally Recognized Tribal Extension Program (FRTEP) by \$15 million.

Congress mandates research and extension services in every county in the nation. These services support farmers, natural resources managers, youth (via 4-H youth programs), and communities. While there are more than 3,100 extension offices nationwide, fewer than 30 extension agents are supported on Indian reservations, with current funding at only \$3 million. This means more than 97 percent of America's counties have had robust programs since 1914, while less than 4 percent of tribal members living on their reservations have access to these programs. This \$15 million increase would create up to 85 new offices, provide meaningful service to Indian Country, and begin to address a persistent inequity.

### DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

#### **Agriculture Appropriations Bill**

##### **Risk Management Agency Community Outreach and Assistance Partnership Program**

- Increase the Risk Management Agency's (RMA) Community Outreach and Assistance Partnership Program by \$6.05 million.

USDA RMA's Community Outreach and Assistance Partnership Program provides information and training to limited resource, socially disadvantaged, and other traditionally underserved producers. It has effectively provided education, program information, and technical assistance to these producers, enabling them to participate in crop insurance and many other USDA programs and activities. RMA has signed 298 partnership agreements worth more than \$32 million since 2003; in FY2008 alone, the program supported the activities of 65 organizations in 33 states with agreements worth \$8.3 million. Budget cuts in FY2009 resulted in an interim decision by USDA to fund the program at \$2.25 million. A \$6.05 million increase is necessary to restore funding to the FY2008 level for this important program.



DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

**Agriculture Appropriations Bill**

**Rural Development's Business and Industry Loan Program**

- Provide \$10 million for the Rural Development Business and Industry Loan Program.

This program is authorized to provide grants, loan guarantees, and below market direct loans for a variety of purposes, including construction, expansion, repair, or modernization to eligible entities, including Indian tribes and tribal businesses. The program is already authorized but has not been funded for several years. In light of existing disparities in the condition of tribal government infrastructures, a \$10 million investment in the program presents an opportunity to create jobs—a priority consistent with the Administration's Economic Recovery Plan—particularly on reservations where unemployment exceeds the rate for the overall U.S. population. This request will provide tribal governments and enterprises with a new source of capital and employment.

