AMERICAN INDIAN HIGHER EDUCATION CONSORTIUM

50 ANNIVERSARY

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A *Review of Title VII: University Perspectives on Research and Extension Programs*
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Chairman Thompson, Ranking Member Scott, and members of the Committee, I am Carrie Billy, an enrolled member of the Navajo Nation and CEO of the American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC), an organization comprising the 35 accredited Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs) in the U.S., all of which are 1994 Land-grant institutions. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today and share a few recommendations on the topic of agricultural research and extension in preparation for the next reauthorization of the Farm Bill.

BACKGROUND ON TRIBAL COLLEGES

American Indian and Alaska Native Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs) are small public institutions of higher education, chartered by federally recognized Indian tribes or the federal government. Most are geographically isolated – primarily located on federal trust land. TCUs have been established for two reasons: (1) the near complete failure of the U.S. higher education system to address the needs of – or even include – American Indians and Alaska Natives; and (2) the need to preserve our culture, our language, our lands, and our sovereignty.

Collectively, TCUs have grown from one accredited institution in 1968 to 35 today, operating more than 90 campuses and sites in 15 states and serving approximately 160,000 American Indians, Alaska Natives, and other rural residents each year in academic and community-based programs. They are in some of the most economically impoverished regions of the country, yet our homelands are rich in natural resources and our people are among the most resilient in the world. Within this context, TCUs are planting seeds of hope for the future; nurturing languages, cultures, and traditions; helping to strengthen tribal economies and governments; and working to sustain and revitalize our lands, waters, environments, and traditional foods.

TCUS AS LAND-GRANT INSTITUTIONS

In 1994, the TCUs took a significant step toward greater participation in the American higher education system when American Indian reservations became the last lands to receive federal land-grant status, and with that designation, to participate in vital agriculture and natural resource programs operated by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). This historic – and long overdue – recognition occurred with the passage of the Equity in Educational Land-grant Status Act of 1994.

As place-based institutions of higher education whose collective mission is to meet the needs of our Tribes and Tribal communities – and most important, to preserve, strengthen and sustain our Tribal lands, languages, and cultures – TCUs are proud to be part of this nation's Land-grant family. It is important to remember that over 160 years ago, the first Morrill Act was enacted specifically to bring education to the people. Today, the 1994 Land-grant Institutions (1994 institutions) – more so than many other institutions of higher education – epitomize the original intent of the first Land-grant legislation: we truly are place- and community-based institutions. All the 1994 institutions offer place-based agriculture (including aquaculture), and natural resource management programs and train a significant number of our Tribal natural resource research and management professionals and small farmers and ranchers.

Being part of the Land-grant system is important to us because, as I mentioned earlier, we are people of a place. Place defines who we are. Our stories, songs, and language come from the land, waters, mountains, and wind. Most of our land – the remaining Tribal land in North America – is forest or agricultural land. In fact, of the 56.2 million acres that compose American Indians reservations, more than 75 percent are agricultural and forestry holdings.

The National Institute of Food and Nutrition (NIFA) administers four modest programs for the 1994 institutions:

1. 1994 Agriculture education equity program: this foundational program has enabled the 1994 institutions to develop and offer small agriculture or natural resource education programs. $7 million in FY2023 (formula grants).
2. 1994 Endowment program: in lieu of grants of land from which to build and sustain programs, the 35 1994 institutions share annual *interest only* of federal government owned and held funds. $5 million in FY2023 (formula grants).
3. 1994 Extension program: supports 1994 outreach activities such as community gardening, youth summer science and nature camps, agriculture technical assistance, and financial literacy programs. $9.5 million in FY 2023 (formula and competitive).
4. 1994 Research program: authorized in 1998 and first funded in FY 2000 at $500,000, this modest program assists TCUs in protecting our reservation forests, woodlands, grasslands, and crops and monitor the quality of our soil, water, and other environmental factors. Projects range from studying bison herd productivity to efforts focused on the connection between traditional plants and their role in managing diabetes, controlling invasive species, and revitalizing Native species. $5 million in FY 2023 (competitive).

Each of the 1994 programs, though small, is critically important to the 1994 institutions and the communities they serve. As the NIFA website states, 1994 institutions often serve as the primary institution of scientific inquiry, knowledge, and learning for our Tribal communities. TCU land-grant research and extension programs provide science-based and culturally relevant community education and research programs for Tribal populations in areas such as diet, nutrition, and health; the environment and natural resource management; agriculture production and food sovereignty; economic and community development; and youth development.

Research at the 1994 institutions provides the best science-based foundation for addressing Tribal concerns and uplifting Tribal communities, while also providing models for successfully working with other institutions and researchers. USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture's (NIFA) TCU Research Grant program helps the 1994 institutions become centers of scientific inquiry and learning for remote and rural reservation communities. Through the program, TCUs address questions that matter to these communities, such as

protecting reservation forests and monitoring water quality. Projects help Tribes improve bison herd productivity, discover whether traditional plants can play a role in managing diabetes and develop new strategies to control invasive species. Grants support partnerships with other research entities and place an emphasis on training students in science.

The 1994 extension programs provide a local and trusted connection to the wide range of services provided by the land-grant cooperative extension system to remote and often isolated communities. TCUs create extension programs for their reservation communities that target local needs, such as reservation youth participating in fun activities in a safe environment; farmers and ranchers gaining science-based insights to improve their productivity; and financial literacy training that enhances rural reservation economies. Projects may help Tribal ranchers learn about new bison health practices, build community gardens to promote the re-introduction of traditional foods, and establish 4-H chapters for Tribal youth. TCU extension programs provide the knowledge, tools, and resources that help create jobs, reduce poverty, and increase prosperity in Tribal communities.

These TCU research and extension projects inform best practices that protect the environment, reduce poverty, create jobs, and increase economic prosperity in tribal communities and within Tribal Nations.

All the 1994 Land-grant programs supported by NIFA are designed to work in a complementary fashion. Research activities create new science-based knowledge and solutions for 1994 institutions, and 1994 extension programs transfer and apply research findings in Tribal communities. Likewise, Tribal communities ask 1994 Extension programs for solutions to their needs, which then informs what 1994 research investigates. Both 1994 research and extension inform what is taught in the TCU classroom (1994 Equity program). This complementary relationship between research, extension, and teaching represents the integrated, strategic Land-grant mission at TCUs.

EXAMPLES OF INITIATIVES AT 1994 INSTITUTIONS

Bay Mills Community College (BMCC) in Brimley, Michigan, has integrated land-grant activities focusing on education, extension, and research endeavors. Sustainable Agriculture and Food Systems work is done through the Waishkey Bay Farm, a 280-acre farm that facilitates teaching and research on sustainable agriculture and food production consistent with traditional Anishinaabek values. Current operations include hoop house vegetable production, hosting a community garden, pasture poultry production and processing, domestic blueberry production and novel berry research, tending honeybee hives, raising grass-fed beef, and industrial hemp research. Health Promotion activities are held at BMCC's Mukwa Health and Fitness Education Center, and multiple departments across campus assist with recruiting and retention efforts. Student research projects have focused on medicinal plants and pharmaceuticals, pesticide contamination in waterways, and invasive species.

Sitting Bull College (SBC) in Fort Yates, North Dakota, has a land-grant mission to "promote and enhance the ability of Tribal members' self-sustenance and economic well-being." This mission is accomplished by providing opportunities for community members to engage in agriculture-relevant programming at the college. Their research and extension programs are diverse. Extension activities include establishing and delivering a community market for local craftsmen, artisans, producers, and other vendors. The collaboration between research and extension can be seen in programs targeted for agriculture-related activities: vegetable production systems, irrigation systems, livestock care, greenhouse production, and ranching, in addition to related business activities such as financial literacy, facilities management,

business planning, and farm operations. In addition, SBC's Land-grant program incorporates elements of the Dakota/Lakota culture, such as horsemanship, the history of the horse, the use of horses in agriculture operations, training, and rodeo activities. The program incorporates elements of extension and research into its curriculum by offering an Associate of Science degree in Pre-veterinarian studies.

Fond du Lac Tribal and Community College, located in Cloquet, Minnesota, has a Thirteen Moons Extension program within its Environmental Institute, which incorporates Ojibwe culture with the 13 large scales of a turtle's shell and the 13 months of the lunar calendar. Among its many research, education, and extension activities is one that helps Tribal leaders address the potential impact of mercury contamination on both the Fond du Lac Reservation and in the St. Louis River watershed in northern Minnesota. The St. Louis River watershed is a large and diverse ecosystem but has mining industry impacts near its headwaters with tributaries that flow into Lake Superior. Fond du Lac Tribal and Community College land-grant research investigates the microbial connection to mercury in the sediments of the St. Louis River's tributaries. Working with the University of Minnesota, Fond du Lac Tribal students are trained in genetic sequencing, field sampling, data analysis, and dissemination. Research findings inform Tribal and state leads on how to protect this critical waterway and ecosystem.

Salish Kootenai College in Pablo, Montana, has an extension program that is working to reduce the impact of invasive species on the reservation and surrounding regional landscapes through education that helps landowners restore land productivity by controlling and containing new invaders. Educational activities include native plant restoration and extension-led research implementing new technologies and practices. Increasing community science literacy helps land management, conservation, and agricultural production. TCU students gain extension education and community research experience working with the Tribal community agricultural producers and regional research scientists addressing the effects of invasive species.

Haskell Indian Nations University, in Lawrence, Kansas, collaborates with Kansas State University's Indigenous Faculty and Staff Alliance, Kansas Association for Native American Education, and the Kickapoo Nation School in using research on food sovereignty and community gardens to educate the community on agriculture and nutrition in addition to providing role models for Native youth.

These are just a few examples, but they demonstrate our fundamental connection to the 1994 legislation: We are people of a Place. Tragically, due to misuse, exploitation, and lack of expertise and training, millions of Tribal acres are fallow, under-used, or are being developed through methods that could render resources non-renewable. For this reason, agriculture and forestry research is critically important to the 1994 institutions and our Tribal lands and communities.

THE NEED TO GROW 1994 LAND-GRANT PROGRAMS

PRODUCTION CHALLENGE

The agriculture challenges we face as a nation and world today are well established: constantly and rapidly changing technologies; population growth and predicted food shortages; environmental changes, competition over water and land access and use; obesity and health status; and more. A common thread adding another layer of complexity to each of these challenges is the aging agriculture workforce in the U.S. The average demographic of farmers and producers in the U.S. is a 58-year-old male. Native American farm operators tend to be slightly younger, with more female representation. The top three states for Native farmers and ranchers are Arizona, Oklahoma, and New Mexico, all states with 1994

institutions. But for American Indians and Alaska Natives (AIAN), the issue goes far beyond basic demographics. The 2017 Agricultural Census reports less than 79,000 Native American-operated farms, representing only 2.3 percent of the approximately 3.4 million farms in the U.S. Of these Native farms, only 10 percent had a market value of $50,000 or more, in comparison, 25 percent of all U.S. farms were worth $50,000 or more. Although in states like Arizona, which have a high AIAN population, 50 percent of all farmers and ranchers are American Indians, nationally, AIAN-owned farms accounted for less than 1 percent of U.S. agriculture sales and about 6 percent of U.S. farmland. The bottom line is that Native farmers and ranchers are already under-represented and under-valued in the U.S., and their numbers will likely decline even further as today's farmers and ranchers retire.

As a nation, we must do more to increase the number of young people seeking careers in the food and agricultural sciences, including agriculture research, agribusiness, food production, energy and renewable fuels, and farming marketing, innovation, and distribution. The need is particularly acute in Indian Country, as the numbers cited herein attest. For Native farmers and ranchers, access to land is not the primary issue, as it is for most potential farmers in the country. (As noted previously, 75 percent of the remaining lands in Indian Country are forested or agricultural lands.) Access to capital, agriculture education and research, and technical assistance are the major barriers for most Native farmers and ranchers. Outreach, technical assistance, and innovative research opportunities through traditional Cooperative Extension and education programs are limited in many Tribal communities, often due to the rural settings and funding limitations.

TCUs often lack the funding they need, as well as critical support from the mainstream Land-grant system, to develop and deliver appropriate agricultural programming and research opportunities. Yet, with adequate funding, TCUs can provide relevant, locally and place-based higher and technical/career education that is innovative and which includes important Tribally driven experiential learning and community-based research opportunities to aspiring and beginning farmers, ranchers, and agriculture/forestry researchers and students throughout Indian Country.

RESEARCH CHALLENGE

Unfortunately, USDA's research portfolio has not benefited in any significant way from the unique value that 1994 institutions can help meet the challenges we face as a nation and world. The USDA research portfolio is heavily oriented to large capacity and Research I institutions. In 2003, the Government Accounting Office (Gao) issued a report on the participation by Minority Serving Institutions (MSI) – which for purposes of the GAO study included the 1994 institutions – in USDA's research programs. The report concluded that MSIs received about 2 percent of all research funding. See: http://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-03-541. We believe the disparity described in the report has expanded in recent years, as the program in question was a predecessor to the Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI). We know it is the case for the 1994 institutions.

Research and experiential learning are critical components of higher education in the classroom, the lab, and for students' careers. Without being able to participate in USDA's flagship research program, AFRI, 1994 institutions are losing out in ways that are almost immeasurable. We strongly urge this Committee to address this issue and examine USDA's overall commitment to research, including facilities at the 1994 institutions.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONSIDERATION DURING THE FARM BILL REAUTHORIZATION

SUPPORT EDUCATIONAL EQUITY FOR TCUS

All 35 accredited TCUs are Land-grant institutions, and as Indigenous Americans deeply connected to our communities and land, we embody the spirit and intent of a Land-grant institution. Yet, there are inequities within the land-grant system, which the 1994 institutions would like to see addressed in the re-authorization of the Farm Bill.

Parity for NIFA's 1994 Land-grant program

According to the non-partisan Congressional Research Service, "[w]hile land-grant designation gave 1994 Institutions new access to federal funding, this access is more limited than that of 1862 and 1890 Institutions…" This is particularly true for our Research, Extension, and Equity funding.

In FY 2023, the 1862 land-grants (state) research program (Hatch Act) received $265 million; research at the 1890s (19 HBCUs) received $89 million; and research grants for 1994s (34 TCUs) received $5 million in competitive funding. For extension programs in FY2023, Congress appropriated $325 million for the 1862s in formula-driven extension funds; the 1890s received $72 million, also formula driven; and the 1994s received $11 million for competitively awarded grants. Since FY2017, 1890 extension funding has grown by $26 million (19 institutions). During that same time, 1994 extension funding grew by $6.5 million, for 35 institutions.

It is time to begin to address the inexcusable inequality.

AIHEC collaborated with USDA to study how much it would cost to effectively run NIFA programs at 1994 institutions. AIHEC examined existing land-grant program costs at 1994 institutions, unmet land-grant strategic plan activities and goals, and program costs at other land-grant institutions. The analysis revealed a need for $500,000 to strategically operate an institution's land-grant program and foundational agriculture education programming. This amount of funding would support two to three staff at 1994 institutions with additional amounts for travel and programming. With 35 accredited 1994 Land-grant institutions, this funding would total $17.5 million annually for each NIFA program and informs our FY2024 Appropriations request for NIFA programs (Extension, Equity, and Research).

This Committee—through the Farm Bill—can permanently authorize and support supplemental funding for basic 1994 Land-grant education and research activities, thus helping to ensure sustainability and equity for underfunded 1994 Land-grant programs. Moreover, the Agriculture Committee can amend the 1994 institutions' education equity payment authorization (Section 535) by removing an outdated and inadequate funding cap and extending the program's authorization.

We encourage Congress to authorize and appropriate the funding needed to ensure TCUs can implement and sustain effective research and extension programs for Tribal communities. Specifically, Congress should address funding inequities within the Land-grant system through the 2023 Farm Bill.

Reforms to the New Beginning for Tribal Students Program

The New Beginning for Tribal Students program within NIFA is specifically aimed at AIAN students. Over 80 percent of Indian Country is served by TCUs, and the 1994 institutions are well-positioned to support USDA in its New Beginning program. However, in the first year of the program, only four 1994 institutions received awards in New Beginnings (4 of 33 awards, or 12 percent), and only one TCU received an award

in year two, even though the program was specifically established to serve AIAN students. The primary reason TCUs reported not applying for the program was the inability to meet the 100 percent matching requirement. There is precedent for granting waivers to or eliminating matching requirements. Currently, the Secretary of Agriculture has the authority to waive matching requirements for certain 1890 and 1994 programs. Further, in the 2018 Farm Bill reauthorization, Congress established a permanent $40 million scholarship fund exclusively for 1890 Land-grant institutions with no matching requirement.

In addition to eliminating the matching requirements, AIHEC recommends increasing funding for the New Beginning program. TCUs are located primarily on rural reservations with poverty rates nearly twice the national average (25.8 percent for AIANs, compared to 14.1 percent nationally). While 1994 institutions do all they can to help students, including offering extremely low tuition, food pantries, and free shuttle services, gas cards, and books, the unmet needs of Tribal students are great. More than 75 percent of TCU students are eligible for federal Pell grants, and they often face challenges related to child care, housing, and food insecurity. Because New Beginning funding is limited, the program does not meet the full financial need of our students.

To help ensure parity with other land-grant institutions, the 1994 institutions request a $40 million scholarship fund, like the $40 million annual scholarship fund established in the last Farm Bill reauthorization to address equity disparities facing the 1890 institutions and Black farmers and ranchers.

Research Grants

1994 institutions' research programs seek to understand and solve problems facing AIAN communities in areas like nutrition; health; the environment; economic and community development; and land and water use. Research that specifically addresses AIAN issues provides the best, science-based foundation for lifting Native communities while providing models for successfully working with other institutions across the U.S. Ultimately, 1994 institution research will inform best practices that create more jobs, reduce poverty and increase prosperity in Native communities. 1994 institution research has been chronically underfunded since its inception in FY2000 and has never been funded at an amount sufficient to build any sustainable institutional capacity. Despite funding challenges, the 1994 institutions are required to partner with 1862, 1890, or other institutions of higher education or USDA facility to receive an award under the program, thus potentially diluting the already inadequate funding.

Eliminate Required Land-grant "Partners" for Research Grants: The 1994 Land-grant institutions need to be recognized as full members of the nation's Land-grant system. Currently, they are not. Unjustifiable inequities exist between funding and program capacity for 1994 institutions compared to funding and scope for the 1862 and 1890 Land-grant institutions. A small step toward rectifying this inequity and moving 1994 institutions closer to being true partners in the Land-grant system is to afford them the same ability to manage and operate their own research grants and chose when and with whom to partner. Currently, only the 1994 institutions are required to partner with other Land-grant institutions, research institutions, or USDA facilities under their research grant program. This requirement was enacted decades ago, when the 1994 research program was newly established by Congress and TCUs were just beginning to develop research agendas. The requirement served its purpose for 20 years or more. Now, it is time to allow the 1994 institutions the individual freedom to use their judgment, expertise, and network of partners and mentors to continue building their research capacity and working to solve regional, national, and global agriculture, land, and environmental challenges.

Designating construction and facilities upgrades as eligible costs under 1994 research grants: Unlike some other Land-grant institutions, TCUs do not have large federal construction/facilities grant programs, forgivable loan programs, or bonding authority. Within USDA, the only dedicated TCU construction program is a $10 million program for community facilities, which does not include research laboratories or equipment. (Historically, funding at $5 million/year or less for all 35 TCUs until FY2023 doubled the funding.) AIHEC proposes an amendment to Section 536 to allow TCUs to use a portion of their research funding for equipment and facilities construction and renovation.

INVEST IN INFRASTRUCTURE FOR TCUS AND TRIBAL COMMUNITIES

The 1994 institutions seek additional support to build their institutions and strengthen their Native communities.

Fund TCU Facilities

A 2021 survey of 1994 institutions conducted by AIHEC revealed a list of chronic facilities-related maintenance and rehabilitation needs, including the lack of adequate and safe laboratories, classrooms, and other research and education facilities, such as large animal clinical labs. The TCUs have an estimated total need of $400 million in deferred maintenance and rehabilitation and need $2.7 billion to fully implement existing master plans. Despite the longstanding need, no stable, significant federal support exists for TCU facilities, and only the two federal 1994 institutions have dedicated facilities construction and maintenance funding. Facilities repairs and upkeep come out of operating budgets, robbing funds from student support, curriculum development, research, and more.

A dedicated research and education facilities fund for TCUs in USDA would help meet the 21st-century research and education needs of Tribal Nations and the 1994 institutions. AIHEC supports extending the authorization of rural development programs targeted to the facility needs of the 1994 institutions and their communities.

Broadband program/Rural Utility Service

When the covid-19 pandemic began in the U.S. in March 2020, TCUs, on average, had the most expensive and slowest internet connectivity, using the oldest equipment of any other group of U.S. institutions of higher education.

Unfortunately for most TCUs, the same holds true today, and in some ways, the situation has grown more dire. With expanded connectivity through COVID-19 relief funding, the costs of operating and maintaining a broadband infrastructure in rural America have increased significantly, to unsustainable levels. Some TCUs currently pay 70 times the national average (or more) for broadband connectivity. Others are limping along with slower access. IT or cyberinfrastructure challenges in Indian Country needs to be addressed in a sustainable manner.

Although 30 of the 35 TCUs operate community libraries and serve as community hubs, they are barred from participating in the federal E-rate program. In addition, the regulations to administer federal broadband dollars Congress provided in the Infrastructure Act are targeted to address and expand Tribal household connectivity not the broadband needs of 1994 institutions. Operating funding provided by the Bureau of Indian Affairs– which has never been appropriated at the authorized level – is inadequate to support growing cyberinfrastructure/ broadband costs.

Congress should establish a permanent TCU Broadband Service Fund within the existing (and previously under-used) USDA-Rural Utilities Service Program. An annual $40 million set-aside for TCUs is needed to cover ongoing equipment costs, maintenance and upkeep, and continued infrastructure expansion to a level that, at minimum, meets national connectivity averages for institutions of higher education, connection to state and regional education/research networks, and IT staffing.

Modify Extension Services to Allow Construction

The 1994 institutions' extension programs provide science-based and culturally relevant community education to AIAN populations in areas such as diet, nutrition and health; the environment; economic and community development; and youth development. 1994 extension programs provide remote AIAN communities with a local and trusted connection to the wide range of extension services provided by the land-grant cooperative extension system. 1994 institution extension programs provide the tools and resources that help create more jobs, reduce poverty, and increase prosperity in Native communities. Unfortunately, 1994 institution extension programs have been chronically underfunded since their initial funding in fiscal year 1997 and have never been funded at an amount sufficient to build any sustainable institutional capacity, much less ensure that the facilities needed to operate programs safely exist.

Honor Sovereignty and Support Our Students

As AIAN people, we are deeply connected to our land. We all have creation stories that explain our emergence from a sacred place, from the land, the water, or the sky. Though our stories vary from tribe to tribe, we are people of this place – this land. In the pre-Columbus Days, an estimated 10 million people lived on this land, speaking hundreds of languages that are found nowhere else on Earth. But that quickly changed. Ships sailing across the waters and arriving on our lands brought disease, death, near annihilation – and in some cases, complete annihilation. They brought centuries of oppression, forced marches, relocation, and fighting over land and resources that continues today: a manifest destiny that to most Native people meant loss of homeland and the only way of life they knew. These were replaced with poverty, dependence, loss of culture and identity, and broken promises captured in more than 400 treaties between Tribal leaders and the U.S. federal government. Beginning in 1785, American Indian Tribes relinquished their sacred lands – more than one billion acres -- in exchange for treaty promises. It is from these treaties that the federal trust responsibility grows.

Many of our treaties included education. Yet the federal investment in AIAN education has always been minimal, and as detailed above, the federal investment in AIAN agriculture and Land-grant education and research programs is particularly dismal. This near lack of investment is particularly frustrating since Tribal lands were granted by the federal government to some states to build the nation's Land-grant system.

AIANs are resilient people, however, and as mentioned above, we began developing our own institutions of higher education, Tribal Colleges, in the 1960s because the system of higher education in the U.S. – including state Land-grant programs – failed to meet the needs of, or even include American Indians. We sought to develop our own education institutions, founded on our own ways of knowing, deeply connected to the land, air, and water around us, and open to all who sought affordable, accessible higher education relevant to the local community. Over the years, we have developed strong partnerships with other institutions, including other members of the nation's Land-grant system, just as we have partnered with our Tribes, the federal government, and state and local governments to advance our Tribal nations, states, and regions.

This year, the Tribal College Movement and the American Indian Higher Education Consortium celebrates our 50th anniversary. TCUs have made significant strides in the past 50 years, but challenges and inequities remain, as discussed above.

As this Committee considers the re-authorization of the Farm Bill, we ask that legislators please consider basic needs and how they impact college enrollment, persistence, and success. TCUs seek to address the needs of our students, lands, communities, and Tribal nations in a holistic manner, and we ask Congress to do the same. Moreover, over the past several decades, we appreciate the evolution in understanding regarding educational sovereignty and the increasing awareness of the community and place-based nature of TCUs. We ask that you continue to recognize the unique role of TCUs and that you honor the commitments and obligations made to Tribal Nations.

In closing, Mr. Chairman and Mr. Ranking Member, I want to reiterate that the 1994 Institutions have proven to be efficient and effective vehicles for bringing education and research opportunities to American Indians and Alaska Natives and the promise of self-sufficiency to some of this nation's most underserved regions. The small federal investment in the 1994 institutions has already paid great dividends in terms of increased employment, access to higher education and research opportunities, and economic development. Continuation of and significant growth in this investment makes sound moral and fiscal sense along with addressing inequities within the system. No other institutions better exemplify the original intent of Senator Morrill's Land-grant concept than the 1994 institutions. I am honored to have this opportunity to share our story and recommendations with the Committee today. Thank you.