



Hearing on Trade Policy & Priorities
Before the Subcommittee on Livestock and Foreign Agriculture
November 17, 2021

Introduction

Testimony of Latashia Redhouse, Director of the American Indian Foods (AIF) program at the Intertribal Agriculture Council (IAC), presented before the House Subcommittee on Livestock and Foreign Agriculture.

Chairman Costa, Ranking Member Johnson, and Members of the Subcommittee Livestock on Foreign Agriculture, thank you for inviting me to provide you all with some information regarding livestock and foreign agriculture trade. My name is Latashia Redhouse. I serve as the Director of the American Indian Foods program at the Intertribal Agriculture Council. I am a member of Dine Nation and am tuning in from the United Arab Emirates where I am representing Tribal producers at Dubai's Expo World 2020 convention. Today my testimony will focus on the possibilities for and barriers to livestock and foreign agriculture trade across Indian Country.

Intertribal Agriculture Council (IAC)

The Intertribal Agriculture Council (IAC) was founded in 1987 to pursue and promote the conservation, development and use of our agricultural resources for the betterment of our people. Land-based agricultural resources are vital to the economic and social welfare of many Native American and Alaskan Tribes. The harmonies of man, soil, water, air, vegetation and wildlife that collectively make up the American Indian agriculture community, influence our emotional and spiritual well being. Prior to 1987, American Indian agriculture was practically unheard of outside reservation boundaries. IAC's responsiveness to on-the-ground needs and extensive networks contribute across the spectrum of Tribal food system development and further governmental and partner outreach efforts throughout Indian Country. Federal, state, and organizational partners draw upon IAC's expertise to inform programming and policies that directly impact Indian Country and beyond.

Tribal agriculture production and food systems are essential economic development and community drivers in Indian Country. According to the 2017 Census of Agriculture, nearly 80,000 Tribal producers are operating on over 59 million acres of land while generating over \$3.5 billion in economic activity. Some estimates suggest that adequate investments in Indian country, including increased federal funding for foreign trade and the removal of structural barriers to global market access, could allow for the agriculture sector across Indian Country to



grow to a valuation of \$45.4 billion, spurring economic growth that will contribute to the physical infrastructure necessary while providing the pathway to Tribal self-determination, food sovereignty, and economic growth.

I would like to mention that Chairman Costa, Member Correa, Member Harder, Member Khanna, Member Hartzler, Member Moore, and Ranking Member Johnson, each represent states which are among the top ten for American Indian/Alaska Native producers according to the 2017 Census of Agriculture.

American Indian Foods (AIF)

The American Indian Foods (AIF) program of the Intertribal Agriculture Council (IAC) began in 1998 under contract with the USDA Foreign Agricultural Service. The partnership was developed as a platform for Made/Produced by American Indian certified food and ag businesses to showcase products and share Tribal cultures with the world. The program is designed to work with American Indian owned businesses to provide export education and to facilitate global market penetration while developing sustainable economics based on food production.

The program is designed to offer domestic support to American Indian owned businesses interested in entering the international marketplace while developing sustainable economics based on food production. The program also promotes and authorizes the use of the Made/Produced by American Indian certified trademark to assist American Indian producers in improving their market success, thereby increasing the economic base of the Indian producer and their community, while protecting American Indian producers and consumers from fake and falsely advertised Indian-made products.

By converting the \$3.3 billion in raw food products currently already sold by producers on Indian Reservations today, we predict that Indian Country could become an economic powerhouse with an estimated \$9 billion in premium food products, alone.

Barriers to Foreign Trade Across Indian Country & Possible Solutions

While the IAC AIF provides support to agricultural businesses seeking growth in the international marketplace, many IAC AIF members continue to experience increased uncertainty and risks as the pandemic limits activities and future trade developments. Persistent labor and supply chain issues, coupled with the market uncertainties that both pre-date and accompany these pandemic impacts, are driving this increased uncertainty, along with the additional uncertainty and trauma of operating in a global pandemic that has disproportionately impacted



Native people. During this difficult time, Native producers' priorities understandably shifted away from seeking international markets to supporting their Tribal communities; 93% of Tribal producers responding to IAC's COVID19 response survey indicated that the pandemic had impacted their international sales. As Tribal communities begin to emerge from pandemic-related uncertainties and look again to international markets, some long standing policy and administrative problems must be remedied if Tribal producers are going to be able to access international markets. One of the longstanding problems is the reality of infrastructure needs in Indian Country agriculture, which for many years have gone underfunded or unfunded. Because of decades of being underserved by federal programs, Native producers begin their pathway to accessing international markets with fewer resources than their non-Native counterparts, and as a result lag behind in market access despite producing specialty and niche products that would do very well internationally.

The reality of federal underservice to Native producers and the need for Native producers to have better pathways to access international markets was one of the driving factors behind the Congressional adoption of Sec. 3312 of the Agricultural Improvement Act of 2018, or 2018 Farm Bill. This provision, one of the 63 Tribal specific provisions included in the final legislation, required the Secretary of Agriculture to seek greater inclusion and participation of Native farmers, ranchers, and producers on international trade missions and to report back to Congress about the status of Native producers in trade missions. These missions represent critical opportunities to promote Native-produced products, many of which are highly desirable on the international market. Despite this progress in the 2018 Farm Bill and directive to the Secretary, Native producers remained underrepresented in international trade missions in 2019. This provision was a recognition by Congress of the importance of international trade missions in placing producers in front of potential customers and easing pathways to international trade, and should be implemented as soon as possible. Organizations like IAC, which maintains a robust network of technical assistants across Indian Country, can help USDA identify potential applicants for trade missions to fulfill the promise of this Farm Bill provision.

Another issue we encounter is that foreign trade participants may not understand the certification, licensing, and registration protocol in the U.S. and various countries (for exports). Reproduction by competitors or unethical sellers who take advantage of producers' lack of knowledge remains a challenge as well. Participants with minimal resources may be irreparably harmed by failed business deals and the support to navigate these issues. Oftentimes, producers do not have the cash flow to cover packaging, repackaging, or labeling costs. A possible solution could include expanding educational efforts to increase availability of resources on export requirements, as well as marketing strategies and business planning. USDA FAS in-market specialists are added resources to offer guidance and market recommendations.



Native producers also face other unique challenges, such as appropriative non-Native food businesses that seek to market their products by claiming Native ancestry or cultural food practices. These unscrupulous food business entities mimic unique tribal food products without legitimate claim to tribal citizenship. Those businesses should not be allowed to participate in programs that allow them to access markets with products that perpetrate frauds on tribal food producers or food businesses.

We propose that the USDA provide tools and resources to analyze risk management and best practices, including international logistics (shipping, insurance, distribution, etc).

Opportunities for Expanding Foreign Market Access to Tribal Producers in Farm Bill 2023

One possible avenue for expanding foreign market access to Tribal producers is through the Trade Title of the upcoming 2023 Farm Bill.

The Trade Title programs are a vital part of food production for all food industries, especially in Indian Country. A growing number of Tribes and individual Indian producers are engaged in trade of food and agriculture products and have participated in the USDA Market Access Program (MAP) via the Intertribal Agriculture Council's American Indian Foods Program, which provides export-readiness training assistance and the incorporation of products into international food trade shows. Tribal food products have high market demand in overseas markets; however, the hurdles necessary to engage in such markets are complex and limit Tribal participation. Improvements to the Trade Title can help support and build Tribal food businesses and provide new markets for unique and traditional Tribal foods, while protecting producers and increasing economic development.

We advocate for supporting and maintaining Tribal food and agriculture businesses' entry into foreign markets by expanding Indian Country's access to the Market Access Program (MAP) and protecting unique Tribal foods against fraud. MAP could be expanded by substantially increasing the funding available to the existing agreements that facilitate coordination and administration of the MAP program. This should be done with the intent of increasing Tribal food business participation in the program so that Tribal audiences and more Tribal food and agriculture businesses can benefit from the program. The impact of such engagement will further solidify local food economies and food businesses and stabilize Tribal economies.

We believe that the USDA should institute a system by which fraudulent foods that mimic Tribal foods and Tribal food businesses can be uncovered and prevented in the marketplace. Food fraud is on the rise throughout the world, and unscrupulous food business entities are already trying to mimic or replicate unique Tribal food products. Those businesses should not be allowed to



participate in programs that allow them to access markets with products that perpetrate frauds on Tribal food producers or food businesses.

We also advocate for improving interdepartmental coordination and Tribal government and individual Indian producer inclusion on all U.S. trade missions. This should include recognizing Indian Country as the USDA develops a stronger relationship with the Department of Commerce on food and agriculture trade. A special interdepartmental coordination group with USDA, Department of Commerce, Department of State, and other applicable agencies should be created to ensure that Tribal food production is properly supported and encouraged on Tribal lands and is thereafter made a part of the U.S. trade missions and efforts to promote agricultural trade.

To further increase Tribal producers' presence on the world agriculture stage, Tribal governments, Tribal food businesses, and individual Tribal food producers should be included on all foreign trade missions undertaken by the United States to further facilitate the access of Tribal food products to such markets.

Lastly, we believe that it should be within Tribal nations' power to trade directly with Indigenous Tribes and Nations from Canada and Mexico. Tribal nations are sovereign nations and have the right to regulate their own trade agreements, especially those with other Indigenous entities.