

**Testimony of Trenton Kissee**  
**Director, Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources**  
**Muscogee (Creek) Nation**

**Before the**  
**U.S. Senate Committee on Indian Affairs**  
**Oversight Hearing on Native priorities for the 2023 Farm Bill Reauthorization**

**July 26, 2023**

**Introduction**

Chairman Schatz, Vice Chair Murkowski, and members of the Committee, mvto, niyawe, (thank you) for the opportunity to be here today to discuss ways that the Farm Bill can better serve agricultural production and the food supply in Indian Country. My name is Trent Kissee, I am the Director of the Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources for the Muscogee (Creek) Nation, a citizen of the Eastern Shawnee Tribe, and I also serve on the Intertribal Agriculture Council board of directors representing Eastern Oklahoma. My family and I raise our own beef and sell direct-to-consumer on our allotment land in far northeast Oklahoma.

The Muscogee (Creek) Nation is the fourth largest tribe in the United States, and the Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources houses programs supporting Tribal producers and manages the Nation's agribusinesses: our beef cattle ranch and Looped Square Meat Co., a 25,000 square foot meat processing facility and retail space which features our own Tribally-raised beef. We purposely placed the facility in a USDA-designated "food desert" in order to fill a much-needed void of fresh food access within the heart of our reservation. The Nation operate robust FDPIR, WIC and TANF programs, and the retail space accepts SNAP. Feeding our people and communities nutritious food and offering choices for families is of utmost importance to us.

The demand for locally- and Tribally- produced food is stronger than ever before. Since opening in December of 2021, the retail space at Looped Square has served over 20,000 customers with fresh, wholesome and nutritious food, some of which is grown and produced right there on the

Muscogee reservation. I receive inquiries weekly from livestock producers, Tribes and others about entering the processing or direct-to-consumer space. The food supply and the players involved are changing for the better, and sound Farm Bill policy can accelerate the enhanced security, sustainability and fairness of our agricultural markets and food supply.

### **Self-Governance and “638”**

A tested and proven way to efficiently deliver federal programs in Indian Country is by allowing Tribes to administer these programs themselves. Tribal governments interact with our communities every day and are both sophisticated enough to carry out complex programming and agile enough to know the intricate needs specific to each community. 638 compacts have proven successful time and again, and there is strong support in Indian Country for the expansion of 638 authority throughout USDA programs. An Office of Self Governance within USDA would give the agency a touch-point to streamline this process. Whether food procurement or distribution, FSA farm enrollment or meat and food inspection, offering Tribes the opportunity to compact and administer federal programs expands opportunities within our communities, gives Tribes a say in what is important to us and respects the sovereignty and uniqueness of each Tribal nation.

### **Meat Processing Training and Technical Assistance**

Recent timely investments in infrastructure and capacity by Tribes and the federal government were an important step in increasing the security, sustainability and viability of our food supply by expanding processing capacity for livestock producers and increasing choices and availability for consumers. Additional investments are needed in workforce development and technical assistance to ensure these operations can get off the ground in a good way and maintain the skilled workforce needed to meet the increasing demand for safe, locally-produced and processed meat and other foods. Tribes throughout Indian Country offer vast education programs and benefits, scholarships and training programs. Many Tribal communities have training centers or colleges, like the College of the Muscogee Nation, which makes Tribes perfect conduits for increased investments in workforce development programs.

### **Tribal Parity**

Finally, Indian Country continues to push for parity throughout federal law and policy. In the Farm Bill this would be markedly impactful, as Tribes are often subject to rules and procedures put forth by state committees or governments. Decisions that affect Tribal citizens and governments are best for everyone when those decisions are made respecting the Tribes as sovereign nations, not when through the lens of tribal-state relations. Additionally, parity in funding should be considered for all programs. About 2% of Americans identify themselves as Native American or Alaskan Native. If funding for a particular initiative falls short of at least 2% when compared to the funding allocated to state governments, this allocation should be reconsidered.

### **Conclusion**

It is my honor to work towards stronger, healthier and more sustainable communities in Indian Country and to be here today to discuss these priorities. I look forward to submitting additional comment for the written record by the deadline.