

MAY 09, 2018

Udall, Hoeven Introduce Legislation to Support Native Farmers, Ranchers, and Communities

Senators lead bipartisan effort to include Indian Country priorities in farm bill

WASHINGTON – U.S. Senators Tom Udall (D-N.M.) and John Hoeven (R-N.D.), vice chairman and chairman of the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs, respectively, this week introduced bipartisan legislation to support tribal self-governance, agricultural production in Indian Country, and enhanced agribusiness and rural development opportunities for Native American farmers, ranchers, and communities. The Cultivating Resources, Opportunity, Prosperity and Sustainability (CROPS) for Indian Country Act (S. 2804) would authorize tribes to exercise greater self-governance for U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) programs, such as forestry and nutrition, and update several other key USDA authorizations to better serve Tribes.

“Once every five years, Congress sets the course for federal nutrition, agricultural, and conservation policies in the Farm Bill reauthorization. But for too long, Indian Country has been left out of this process. As the Vice Chairman of the Indian Affairs Committee, I strongly believe that decisions made by Tribes for Tribes produce the best outcomes for Native families –

especially when it comes to issues of food, agriculture, and community development,” Udall said. “This bipartisan bill reflects Indian Country’s priorities, and is a step in the right direction toward more robust engagement with Tribes and Native stakeholders. Native Americans deserve a Farm Bill that will support Tribal families, farmers and ranchers, and opportunity across Indian Country.”

“Food and agricultural production is a driving force for many rural tribal economies,” said Hoeven. “Our legislation supports the growing Native agribusiness industry by expanding resources for Indian Country’s producers, improving the partnership between USDA and Indian tribes, and enhancing tribal self-governance over forestry and nutrition programs. Tribal leaders know that local decision-making often produces the best results. This legislation will expand access to valuable USDA programs and enable tribes to more efficiently develop and manage these agricultural programs and services for their communities.”

“We applaud Senators Hoeven and Udall for their proactive leadership in this reauthorization of the Farm Bill and for doing all that they can to ensure that Native people have the tools and resources needed to become significant contributors to the agricultural base of the nation and the world once again,” said Carrie Billy, president and CEO of the American Indian Higher Education Consortium. “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 – Tribal Colleges are proud to be part of this nation’s Land-Grant family. Yet, TCUs face a great disparity in access to many of the resources available to other Land-Grant Institutions. The CROPS bill is a significant step

on the road to parity. Again, we are grateful to Senators Hoeven and Udall for introducing the CROPS Act, and more important, for recognizing the vast potential and opportunity for Indian Country that lies within a thoughtful reauthorization of the Farm Bill.”

Agriculture is among the largest economic development industries in Indian Country, providing nearly \$3.4 billion to the market. There are over 56,000 Native farmers and ranchers operating on 57 million acres of land.

The legislation would leverage resources, capitalize on agribusiness opportunities, and strengthen the relationship between tribes and USDA by:

- Establishing a tribal self-determination demonstration project for food distribution and forest management activities under USDA. The legislation would expand direct tribal access to \$145 million in USDA funds and allow tribal food programs to better serve the nearly 90,000 Native Americans who currently participate in these programs, including elders and youth. It would also empower Indian tribes with greater resources to combat forest fires and responsibly manage the 18 million acres of tribal forest lands in the United States.

- Expanding resources, research opportunities and grant eligibility for tribal colleges and universities. The senators’ legislation would enable the 36 tribal colleges and universities to access nearly \$11.3 million in USDA research and extension funding.

- Providing greater certainty for the current Tribal Promise Zone designees, including the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians and the Spirit Lake Tribe. The legislation would ensure four Tribal Promise Zones continue to

have access to resources and technical assistance from federal agency partners.

-Establishing a permanent Tribal Advisory Committee on Agriculture and Ranching. The advisory committee would provide the Secretary of Agriculture with diverse expertise relating to geographical, tribal and agricultural industry issues throughout USDA.

The legislation comes as Hoeven and Udall lead a bipartisan effort to include Indian Country's priorities in the 2018 Farm Bill. In January, the committee convened an oversight hearing to identify opportunities for Indian agribusiness, followed by a roundtable to discuss how Congress and USDA can better support tribal traditional foods. The legislation reflects input received from the administration, tribal leaders, and tribal organizations.