

Senate Committee on Appropriations

Review of the President's Fiscal Year 2026 Budget Request for the Department of Agriculture

6 May 2025

Witness: [Brooke Rollins](#), Secretary of United States Department of Agriculture

Overview: The hearing highlighted the critical issues facing the agricultural community, including funding, research, nutrition programs, regulatory efficiency, and international trade. The senators and Secretary Rollins discussed the need for timely and effective support for farmers and the importance of maintaining essential programs and services.

USDA's freeze of \$11 million RCPP award impacted Tribal ecosystem restoration projects, while delays in distributing funds for local food systems and emergency assistance have significantly affected tribal farmers and communities. Secretary Rollins and senators Shaheen and Baldwin emphasized the need for timely support and efficient fund distribution to mitigate these issues.

Secretary Rollins' Testimony:

She discussed the accomplishments of the USDA in the first 100 days of the administration, including efforts to lower egg prices and combat avian influenza. She emphasized the importance of supporting American farmers and ranchers and highlighted the administration's focus on reducing waste, fraud, and abuse in USDA programs.

Key Issues Discussed

- Funding and support for Farmers:
 - The importance of maintaining and improving farm programs, crop insurance, and the counter-cyclical safety net.
 - Concerns about the impact of tariffs and trade wars on farmers.
 - The need for timely and efficient distribution of disaster relief funds.
- Research and development:
 - The significance of agricultural research and the potential impact of budget cuts on ARS (Agricultural Research Service) facilities.
 - The role of land grant universities and precision agriculture in advancing farming techniques.
- Nutrition programs:
 - The importance of programs like WIC, SNAP, and local food purchase assistance in supporting nutrition and food security.

- Concerns about the administration's proposed budget cuts to these programs and the impact on families and rural communities.
- Regulatory and Administrative Efficiency:
 - Efforts to streamline USDA operations, reduce bureaucracy, and improve customer service for farmers and ranchers.
 - The need to maintain frontline FSA (Farm Service Agency) offices to support local agricultural communities.
- International Trade and Food Aid:
 - The administration's efforts to promote American agricultural products globally and address trade imbalances.
 - Discussions on the future of programs like Food for Peace and McGovern-Dole, which provide food aid internationally.

Senators' Concerns and Questions

- [Sen. Jeanne Shaheen](#) (D-NH): Raised concerns about the reliability of federal support for farmers and the impact of delayed reimbursements.
- [Sen. Susan Collins](#) (R-ME): Highlighted issues related to PFAS contamination and the need for continued research and support for affected farmers.
- [Sen. Patty Murray](#) (D-WA.): Expressed concerns about the impact of workforce reductions at USDA on agricultural research and food security programs.
- [Sen. Tammy Baldwin](#) (D-WI.): Discussed the importance of the [Dairy Business Innovation Initiative](#) and the impact of funding delays on dairy farmers.
- [Sen. Martin Heinrich](#) (D-NM): Addressed the importance of maintaining local dispatch centers for wildfire response and the impact of canceled food assistance programs on schools and farmers.

Tribal Specific Mentions

- Funding for Tribal Programs:
 - Sen. Shaheen: Mentioned that the USDA had frozen an \$11 million RCPP (Regional Conservation Partnership Program) award for the Connecticut River Conservancy, which included Tribal partnerships for ecosystem restoration. The delay in funding has impacted seasonal work and increased project costs.
- Local Food Purchase Assistance Program:
 - Secretary Brooke Rollins: Discussed the Local Food Purchase Assistance Program and mentioned that Tribes in Wisconsin had \$500,000 left out of \$700,000 allocated to them. This program was part of the COVID-era initiatives to support local food systems, including Tribal communities.

- Support for Tribal Farmers:
 - Sen. Baldwin: Raised concerns about the impact of funding delays on local food systems, including Tribal farmers who rely on these programs to sell their produce. The discussion highlighted the importance of these programs for Tribal communities and the need for timely distribution of funds.
- Emergency Assistance for Tribal Communities:
 - Sen. Shaheen: Emphasized the need for the USDA to release emergency assistance funds that were set aside for small farms in New England, including Tribal communities. The assistance was crucial for addressing the impacts of natural disasters on Tribal lands.