

U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry
Nomination Hearing
October 29, 2025

Nomination Hearing for the following:

- Dr. Mindy Brashears, of Texas, to be Under Secretary of Agriculture for Food Safety
- Ms. Stella Yvelle Herrell, of New Mexico, to be an Assistant Secretary of Agriculture
- Mr. John Walk, of Virginia, to be Inspector General, Department of Agriculture

Opening Statements:

Sen. John Boozman, Chair (R-AR)

- Food safety is one of USDA's most consequential responsibilities and stressed the importance of modernizing food safety systems.
- Sound science in USDA's food system will maintain confidence among consumers, producers, and processors.
- Inspector General's oversight function is important to ensure integrity and stewardship of taxpayer dollars throughout USDA.

Sen. Amy Klobuchar, Ranking Member (D-MN)

- Emphasized the importance of the Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) in protecting public health.
- Raised concerns about the USDA reorganization plan and suggested better communication through the Office of Congressional Relations (OCR).
- Expressed concerns about the impact of the government shutdown on SNAP.
- Stressed the importance of an independent USDA Inspector General and the need for oversight and accountability within USDA programs.

Tribal Food and Agriculture issues raised by the nominees in their statements:

- Dr. Mindy Brashears:
 - Dr. Brashears did not raise issues specifically related to Tribal food and agriculture.
 - She focused her remarks on modernizing inspection systems, improving pathogen control (e.g. salmonella), science-based decision making and interagency collaboration, and workforce development.
 - Committed to making "data driven decisions to ensure the food safety of the US meat, poultry, and processed egg supply.
- Ms. Stella Yvelle Herrell:
 - Ms. Yvelle Herrell did not raise issues specifically related to Tribal food and agriculture.
 - She committed to strengthening the OCR responsiveness, modernizing communication where needed; enhancing transparency and accountability; providing timely and reliable information and implementing service standards for

congressional inquiries; and partnering with America's farmers, ranchers, foresters, and rural families.

- Mr. John Walk;
 - Mr. Walk did not raise issues specifically related to Tribal food and agriculture in his testimony.
 - He focused on transparency and accountability, particularly in informing the public of waste, fraud, and abuse in the administration of federal programs.
 - He mentioned that USDA is entrusted with stewarding more than \$200 billion of taxpayer funds annually and that it is critical for the OIG "to shine a bright light on the many activities of the department and its management of resource."

Q&A

- Sen. Tina Smith, (D-MN)
 - Directed to Mr. Walk her questions about the importance of the country's legal trust and treaty obligations to Tribal nations, particularly in relation to upholding government to government relations through formal consultation.
 - Mr. Walk spoke of his experience in being the USDA consulting official during a FDPIR consultation in September 2025 and stated the importance of Tribal relations and treaty obligations that the federal government has. He also spoke of recent consultations in Alaska and Washington DC about the Tribal impacts of USDA's reorganization.
 - Sen. Smith further spoke about the serious issues FDPIR has had and the role that he would have as IG who would be called upon to investigate some of the issues. Mr. Walk stated that he didn't see any conflict in the role of the IG and investigating issues; he cited supply chain issues with Paris Brothers and recent cyber incident that needed to be resolved.
 - Sen. Smith ran out of time and committed to following up with Dr. Brashears in writing.