

Senate Appropriations

Budget Hearing- USDA

April 22, 2026

Witness: Secretary of Agriculture Brooke Rollins

Highlights:

The FY27 USDA budget hearing focused heavily on farm economics, input costs, disease response, and rural development, but largely omitted Tribal agriculture and food systems from the conversation. Many issues were discussed—fertilizer costs, disaster relief, staffing shortages, nutrition programs— but the Tribal impacts were not acknowledged.

Key Points:

- Tribal Agriculture Largely Absent from Direct Discussion
 - The hearing did not include sustained or explicit discussion of Tribal Nations, Indian Country, or USDA’s federal trust and treaty responsibilities, marking a significant contrast with Interior-Environment appropriations hearings.
 - No direct references were made to Tribal producer set-aside programs, Tribal self-governance or 638 contracting at USDA, Native farmers and ranchers outreach, Tribal food sovereignty, FDPIR, or Indigenous food systems.
- Input Costs & Market Pressures Affect Tribal Producers
 - Senators and USDA leadership emphasized high fertilizer, fuel, and input costs, supply chain disruption, and global instability as major threats to producer viability.
 - Rollins described an “all-of-government” effort to address fertilizer affordability and rebuild domestic production.
 - No discussion addressed tailored relief or access barriers for Tribal producers, despite shared exposure to these pressures.
- Disaster Assistance & Program Design Gaps
 - Senators discussed Farm Bridge Assistance, disaster relief, and specialty crop program reforms to address climate and market shocks. Specialty crop producers emphasized that existing USDA disaster programs are often ill-suited to non-row-crop operations.
 - Without explicit Tribal tailoring, disaster and bridge assistance programs may continue to underserve Native producers.
- USDA Field Office Staffing & Access Concerns

- Multiple Senators raised concerns about USDA field office vacancies (FSA, NRCS), administrative backlogs, and delays in conservation and assistance programs.
- USDA highlighted IT modernization (“One Farmer, One File”) and “tiger teams” as mitigation strategies.
- Administrative modernization efforts were discussed without reference to connectivity barriers or culturally appropriate service delivery in Indian Country.
- Nutrition Policy Changes with Tribal Implications
 - The hearing addressed proposed changes to WIC cash value vouchers, SNAP eligibility, and nutrition program funding levels. Senators expressed concern about affordability and food insecurity, particularly in rural areas.
 - No mention was made of FDPIR modernization or coordination with nutrition policy reforms, despite its central role in Indian Country.
- Research & Land-Grant Universities
 - Concern emerged from Senators over proposed cuts to USDA research, including Hatch formula funding, Cooperative Extension, and Forest Service research and Experimental Forest sites
 - Senators stressed that long-term, place-based research (some data collected over decades) cannot be replicated if sites are closed or staff lost.