



PUTTING TRIBAL SOVEREIGNTY IN FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

IFAI Analysis of the FY27 President's Budget Request for USDA – Potential Impacts for Indian Country by Agency

Office of the Secretary (OSEC)

The President's Budget proposes \$5 million for the Office of Tribal Relations, a cut of \$190,000 from the previous fiscal year. However, \$1 million of the funding is set aside for a Tribal Health Public Resource Center, effectively leaving the Office of Tribal Relations with only \$4 million. The [USDA Reorganization Plan](#) envisions a significantly expanded role for the Office of Tribal Relations, while recent [legislation](#) would direct the Office of Tribal Relations to oversee all self-determination agreements at USDA. The Office of Tribal Relations is already very small in relation to the work it is asked to do. If the President's Budget were to be enacted, this Office would be unlikely to have sufficient staffing to meet any increased demands.

The Budget also proposes a 50 percent cut to the Office of Civil Rights, which may make it more difficult for Tribes and Tribal members to raise discrimination concerns. The Budget would flatly fund the Section 2501 program, which provides outreach and assistance to socially disadvantaged farmers. This includes outreach and assistance to Native producers and veteran farmers.

Farm Service Agency (FSA)

The President's Budget proposes cutting FSA staff at federal offices from 2,627 full-time equivalents (FTEs) to 2,141 FTEs, an 18% cut. At county offices, the President's Budget proposes cutting additional staff, a 21% cut from 6,432 FTEs to 5,086 FTEs. FSA staffing is already at an [historic low](#), having declined by approximately 41% between 2005 and 2025.

These staffing reductions will have significant impact on Tribes and Native producers. Tribal producers face steep challenges accessing capital through commercial banks. With [86%](#) of Native communities lacking a single financial institution within their borders, FSA is a critical lender of first opportunity. Unfortunately, FSA county offices are often located far from Tribal communities and are already [understaffed](#), leading to delays in basic operations, like check endorsement and loan reviews. For producers operating on trust land, getting a simple operating loan can take five times as long as producers on fee-simple land due to administrative processes and delays at both FSA and the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), according to the Intertribal Agriculture Council. Further workforce reductions may only worsen delays, costing Tribal producers time and money.

The President's Budget Request also proposes to cut Direct Farm Ownership loans by 51%, while increasing Guaranteed Farm Ownership loans by 33%. The lack of commercial banks on Indian reservations and challenges securing loans with trust lands means that the increase in Guaranteed Farm Ownership loans is unlikely to offset the loss of Direct Farm Ownership Loans for Native producers. No changes are proposed to direct or guaranteed farm operating loans.

Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)

The President's Budget proposes fully eliminating conservation technical assistance through NRCS. The Budget instead [proposes](#) that technical assistance will be delivered through other funding sources. The Budget would also place a cap on technical assistance, limiting the agency to spending no more than 30% of overall NRCS funding to provide TA.

NRCS technical assistance provides tailored, one-on-one assistance for producers to manage conservation and natural resource concerns. Many Tribes and Native producers work closely with NRCS staff to effectively implement NRCS conservation programs. Recent staff cuts of 22% at NRCS in 2025 significantly delayed conservation programs. According to a recent [study](#) of Office of Personnel Management (OPM) data, 158 counties have lost all NRCS soil conservation staff, and 254 counties have lost all general natural resource management staff. One in four counties that previously had rangeland management staff no longer do.

Many Tribes and Native producers are on the front lines of increased extreme weather events, including worsening drought, extreme heat, and flooding. Elimination of remaining NRCS technical assistance staff may have far-ranging consequences for Tribes and Native producers who are managing worsening and more frequent extreme weather events.

Food and Nutrition Service (FNS)

Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR)

The President's Budget Request includes \$271 million for the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR), a \$36 million increase. The Administration says this funding will provide for 75,000 monthly participants as well as improvements to supply chain sustainability. Increased FDPIR participation is expected due to changes to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) under the [One Big Beautiful Bill Act](#) passed last summer.

The budget maintains \$3 million for the FDPIR Self-Determination Demonstration Project, which allows Indian Tribal Organizations (ITOs) to assume limited procurement of FDPIR foods through a 638 self-determination contract. Fifteen Tribal organizations have successfully participated in the program, though the 2026 [House Farm Bill](#) does not include an extension of the project or make it permanent.

Supplemental Food Assistance Program (SNAP)

The Budget provides \$90 billion in mandatory appropriations for Supplemental Food Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits, a decrease of \$343 million. The decrease accounts for lowered participation in SNAP due to the [One Big Beautiful Bill Act](#) (OBBA), which limits future updates to SNAP benefits and increases eligibility restrictions. The Budget [anticipates](#) 3 million fewer participants due to OBBA, a decrease of 7.25%. While members of Indian Tribes are exempt from SNAP work requirements under OBBA, the changes in state cost share requirements and limits in future updates may limit state SNAP caseloads, which would lead to increased enrollment in FDPIR for eligible Tribal citizens.

Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP)

The Budget eliminates funding for the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP), which provides food boxes for low-income seniors. Last year's [Budget](#) also proposed eliminating CSFP

and replacing the program with “MAHA food boxes” distributed through the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). Congress rejected the proposal and funded CSFP at \$460 million, and no further developments have been made on MAHA boxes. Creating a CSFP-like program at HHS may likely be challenging as HHS does not have experience with—or the staff and infrastructure for—food purchasing and distribution.

If CSFP were to be eliminated, this would immediately impact the [seven Tribes](#) that currently administer the program in support of their elders. This program’s elimination would also likely have a knock-on effect on FDPIR, as CSFP and FDPIR foods that are purchased by USDA are stored and distributed from the same contracted national warehouses.

Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)

The Budget proposes a \$200 million cut to the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), accomplished by reducing the Cash Value Benefit that WIC families use to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables back to 2014 levels. For the 32 Tribal Nations that administer WIC, this would reduce Tribal WIC families’ access to fresh fruits and vegetables. According to the [National WIC Association](#), the change would reduce the fresh fruits and vegetable benefit from \$52 to \$13 for breastfeeding mothers and from \$26 to \$10 for young children. This would make it very challenging for all WIC families to follow the administration’s Dietary Guidelines, [which advise eating fresh fruits and vegetables throughout the day](#).

U.S. Forest Service (USFS)

The President’s Budget proposes sweeping changes to the U.S. Forest Service’s (USFS) funding. The Budget proposes reducing USFS staffing by 61%, from 30,210 Full Time Equivalent (FTEs) to 11,787 FTEs. Much of change comes from transferring wildland fire services and staff to the newly created [U.S. Wildland Fire Service](#) under the Department of the Interior (DOI). However, the President’s Budget also proposes fully eliminating the State, Private, and Tribal Forestry program as well as the Forest and Rangeland Research program.

The State, Private, and Tribal Forestry program provides key technical and financial assistance for Tribes and others to manage their forests and grasslands, including fire service, forest health management, and landscape scale restoration. USFS’s [Congressional Justification](#) asserts that eliminating the program is necessary to balance “the appropriate roles of federal and State governments” and to encourage “increasing State authority” to fund management of forests. No mention is made of Tribal authority or Tribal forests, and it is unclear if States have sufficient funding to support forest management without federal support. Moreover, with limited funding, States may choose to prioritize State-owned forests to the detriment of Tribally owned or managed forests.

The Budget would also significantly reduce funding for the National Forest System, including salaries and expenses (-26%), land management (-31%), and collaborative forest landscape restoration (-26%).

USFS lost [32%](#) of its staff in 2025 and recently announced [plans](#) to move its headquarters to Salt Lake City, Utah and to shift to a state-based operations model. USFS plans to close all nine

regional forestry offices. The shift in operations and significant cuts to USFS's budget may jeopardize the agency's ability to work with Tribes on critical forest management projects.

Rural Development (RD)

The Budget proposes eliminating several Rural Development (RD) programs that support essential infrastructure in Indian Country, reduce energy costs, and address housing costs.

Eliminated programs include:

- Single Family Housing (Sec. 502) Relending Demonstration Program for Native American Tribes, which provides capital to Native Community Development Financial Institutions (Native CDFIs) to make homeownership loans for Native communities;
- Housing Vouchers, which provides rental subsidies;
- Congressionally Directed Community Facilities Grants, which provides funding to Tribes and others for developing essential community facilities such as healthcare facilities, public safety buildings, childcare facilities, and local food systems;
- Tribal College Grants, which provides funding to Tribal Colleges and Universities for infrastructure needs, such as classrooms and libraries;
- Rural Energy Savings Program (RESP) and the Rural Energy for America Program (REAP), which support energy savings and increased energy efficiency;
- Rural Business Development Grants for Native American Tribes, which supports economic development for Tribal communities.

While most RD programs are not specific to Tribes, RD is one of the few sources of federal funding for capital projects in rural communities. In Fiscal Year 2026, Tribes used Congressionally Directed Community Facilities Grants for [essential community facilities](#) such as schools, fire departments, police stations, and community centers.

Termination of energy assistance programs such as REAP, RESP, and High Energy Cost Grants may also disproportionately impact Native communities. According to the [Department of Energy](#) (DOE), the average energy burden of Native communities is 28% higher than the national average. Tribal energy costs are especially [high in Alaska](#).

National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA)

The President's Budget eliminates formula funding under the Hatch Act for agricultural research at 1862 and 1890 land grant universities, a cut of \$265 million. While Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs) do not receive Hatch Act formula funding, cuts to research funding at the other land grant universities will impact TCUs. Land grant universities may shift funding to core priorities, which may reduce opportunities for collaboration between land-grants and TCUs. Moreover, eliminating Hatch Act funding will likely have chilling effects on food and agricultural research. This potentially reduces opportunities for Native students seeking graduate education at land grant institutions.

The Budget would also reduce McEntire-Stennis Cooperative Forestry Act funding by \$18 million. This pool of funding, which helps to train the next generation of foresters, is not solely for TCUs. However, TCUs have only had access to these funds for eight years [after Congress updated the authority to reflect Tribal parity in the 2018 Farm Bill](#). Reducing the overall amount

of available funds makes it more challenging for TCUs to access these funds to build Tribal forestry programs.

NIFA funding for Native students, Tribes, and TCUs are generally flat funded or modestly cut in this proposed Budget:

- Research Grants for TCUs: \$5 million (-\$0.5 million from previous year)
- Native American Institutions Endowment Fund: \$11.8 million (\$0)
- Tribal College Education Equity Grants: \$7 million (-\$1 million)
- New Beginnings for Tribal Students: \$5 million (no change)
- Education Grants for Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian Institutions: \$5 million (-\$0.5 million)
- Federally Recognized Tribes Extension Program (FRTEP): \$4 million (\$no change)
- Extension Services at TCUs: \$11 million (-\$1 million).

However, while TCU and Native education programs were not significantly cut at USDA, the proposed funding levels still reflect historic underinvestment in TCUs and Native education. Unlike other land-grant institutions, TCUs do not receive formula funding and must rely on distributions from a small endowment fund and competitive funding. Research grants, Tribal college education equity grants, and extension grants at TCUs have generally been [flat funded](#) for the last several years, despite significant increases in the cost of high education, equipment, facilities, and other needs. Similarly, limited funding for FRTEP means that just [35 of the 575 federally recognized Tribes](#) — 6% — have access to a FRTEP agent. By contrast, almost every state county currently has access to an extension office. [County extension offices are expected to serve approximately 226 producers per extension agent; FRTEP offices are expected to serve approximately 2,100 producers per agent.](#)

National Agriculture Statistics Service (NASS)

The Budget proposal modestly increases funding for the National Agriculture Statistics Service (NASS) by \$2.45 million in anticipation of the 2027 Census of Agriculture. However, [NASS staffing](#) is down [37%](#) from last year. With such significantly reducing staffing, it is unclear if NASS will have the staff capacity necessary for conducting the next Census of Agriculture. Tribes may consider working with USDA to establish cooperative agreements to locally enumerate to ensure their members are included in the Census.