



Top Priorities for COVID-19 C4 Response Legislation

Extend the Coronavirus Relief Fund Spending, Provide Surety in Usage

- *Extend the window for Tribes and States to spend the Coronavirus Relief Fund funding to at least the end of FY2021 or beyond to account for the on-going pandemic response*
- *Provide surety on usage on the funding for Tribes to make investments in emergency and critical infrastructure, including food systems infrastructure*

The Coronavirus Relief Fund CARES Act funding has been essential for Tribal Nations and state governments to pay for expenditures incurred due to the COVID-19 crisis. With the pandemic continuing, impacts increasing, and the potential for a long economic recovery, both Tribes and States need the deadline to spend the funds extended past its current December 31, 2020 date to at least the end of Fiscal Year 2021 or beyond. In addition to paramount health care needs, improvements in food security and food systems' infrastructure are important as food shortages and lack of local and regional food markets have increased. Extending the time frame allows for addressing the immediate impacts, while planning investments in the infrastructure, like processing facilities and markets, to build local and regional food system resiliency. Tribes must have added surety and flexibility to investments in infrastructure, including ways to address gaps and capacity issues of food systems.

Lower Ag Loan Payments to Help Producers Weather COVID-19 Impacts

- *Farm Service Agency (FSA) borrowers' assistance relief and implementation of policies to provide relief and support for Tribal producers and entities*

The CARES Act and USDA have provided support to agriculture producers, but many more are facing increased uncertainty and risks as the pandemic continues to limit markets and slow production. Farm Service Agency (FSA) borrowers need improved loan relief to ensure continuity of operations and access to credit, and the proposed provisions will also enable assistance to non-FSA borrowers as well. Providing relief will allow for stability in production in Indian Country, and further improve the sustainability and resiliency of Indian Country agriculture. The next COVID-19 relief package should empower the Secretary of Agriculture to:

1. Immediately defer of all FSA loan principal due for the 2020 and 2021 production years, and extend all loans 2 years;
2. Offer payments to any lenders if they reduce the interest rate of current loans by 2% and offer the same reduced loan payments and extensions to their borrowers; and
3. Use FSA Farm Ownership loans to refinance real estate and other debt to aid in recovery from this crisis.

This will support producers across the country keep their production and infuse over \$1 billion in differed principal payments directly into rural and agriculture economies across the country.

Ensure Food Security through Nutrition Program Access

- *Allow the Indian Tribal Organizations (ITOs) to procure food locally and regionally using the CARES Act Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR) funding*
- *Waive the non-federal cost share requirement and allow for necessary administrative flexibility for verifications, certifications, and service in FDPIR*

The CARES Act funding for FDPIR food purchases and facility improvements/upgrades continue to be essential to address increasing food insecurity in Indian Country. As the pandemic continues, the FDPIR ITOs must have additional flexibility to receive the funds directly procure food locally and regionally, make emergency food purchases, and for new construction costs. Further, waiving the non-federal cost share requirement and providing the administrative flexibility for verifications, certifications, and service will alleviate the burdens on Tribal governments and ITOs.

- *Temporarily waive prohibition on dual use of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and FDPIR during the same month*

The current prohibition against using both FDPIR and SNAP in the same month must be temporarily waived. This will allow Native households more food options at a time when it is needed the most, reduce administrative burdens on FDPIR and SNAP staff, and slow the inventory depletion at FDPIR sites. FDPIR sites are seeing increased take rates of food, because people are now taking more items within their allocation out of concern over local food availability. SNAP participants, especially those in rural areas are seeing limited availability of food, coupled with price increases. Being able to utilize both SNAP and FDPIR would ameliorate both issues.

- *Increase SNAP's maximum benefit available to all households by 15 percent and the minimum benefit from \$16 to \$30 and delay implementation of the proposed and final SNAP rules*

With the increasing numbers of people out of work, due to extremely limited job opportunities available, and with children being out of school across the country, the new round of COVID-19 response legislation must include additional support to SNAP participants. By increasing the maximum benefit for all households by 15 percent and raising the minimum benefit to \$30, food insecure families in Indian Country and across the United States will have access to additional food necessary to weather this current crisis.

- *Provide parity and eligibility for Tribal governments and Indian Tribal Organizations in the Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP)*

Tribal governments and their agencies do not have full access to The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP), a critical component of the federal government's emergency food response. Donated foods for TEFAP only go to "State agencies" with recipient agencies on distribution. With the need for establishing additional methods of accessing and distributing of essential emergency foods during the COVID-19 crisis, Tribal governments, as well as FDPIR Indian Tribal Organizations, must be made directly eligible for the TEFAP program.