



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

TRIBAL PARTNERSHIPS GUIDE FOR TRIBAL NATIONS



FARM PRODUCTION AND CONSERVATION

FSA | NRCS | RMA | Business Center





ABOUT THIS GUIDE

Overview

Our goal is to make USDA farm and conservation programs and services more meaningful and accessible to Tribal nations and citizens on more than 64 million acres of tribal and allotted trust land used for farming, grazing by livestock and wild game, and forestry.

By connecting tribal nation leaders, land managers, agricultural producers, and citizens with USDA programs and services, USDA seeks to better fulfill its commitment and government-to-government responsibilities to tribal nations and promote opportunities for land access, indigenous representation, conservation partnerships, and support for tribal food sovereignty.



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Tribal nations interested in working with USDA can visit farmers.gov/tribal to learn more and contact USDA in their state.



WORKING WITH TRIBAL NATIONS

Trust Relationship with Tribal nations

Government-to-Government Relationship

The United States has a unique government-to-government relationship with federally recognized tribes as defined through treaties, statutes, court decisions, Executive Orders, and Departmental Regulations.

Tribal Consultation, Coordination, & Collaboration

[USDA Departmental Regulation 1350-002](#) directs the Farm Service Agency (FSA), Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Risk Management Agency (RMA), and Farm Production and Conservation Business Center leadership and employees to engage in government to government consultation and collaboration with federally recognized tribes on policy development and program activities. The goal of which is to ensure that tribal perspectives on the social, cultural, economic, and ecological aspects of agriculture, as well as tribal food and natural resource priorities and goals, are heard and fully considered in agency decision-making processes.



Outcomes

Consultation, coordination, and collaboration make USDA programs better fit tribal settings and increase program participation by tribal nations, tribal agricultural producers, tribal forest stewards, and landowners.

1. Revised USDA program policies, procedures and standards based on tribal knowledge, perspectives and priorities.
2. Coordinated tribal/USDA outreach efforts to producers and landowners.
3. Collaboration between leadership and subject matter experts from Tribal nations, USDA agencies, and tribal organizations on projects of mutual benefit.
4. Increased coordination between government agencies to provide better service to Tribal nations and their citizens.

Service on Indian Reservations

Tribal nations are welcome to request hosting [FSA and NRCS Service Center](#) offices on their land. For more information, see [USDA Departmental Regulation 1340-002](#).

Indigenous Knowledge and USDA Programs

Indigenous Knowledge plays a vital role in the scientific, technical, social, and economic advancements by helping us to better understand the natural world. USDA is committed to implementing the [government-wide directive](#) recognizing and including Indigenous Knowledge in federal research, policy, and decision-making.

FARM PROGRAMS

Federal Farm and Ranch Support

Farm Service Agency

The Farm Service Agency (FSA) provides financial assistance programs including disaster assistance, safety net, farm loans, price support and conservation programs that help tribal producers. If you're new to working with USDA, FSA will help you register your agricultural operation with a farm number and, depending on what you raise or grow, help you file an annual acreage report as required to establish eligibility for many programs. Tribal agricultural producers and landowners are encouraged to add their voices by serving on FSA's producer-elected County Committees and voting in the elections.

[Learn more about FSA](#) or find your local Service Center at farmers.gov/service-center-locator.

Natural Resources Conservation Service

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) provides farmers, ranchers, and forest stewards with financial and technical assistance to improve land stewardship and productivity through the application of conservation best practices. Tribal nations and tribal organizations assist NRCS in improving programs to make them more meaningful and accessible on tribal lands and lands owned fee simple by tribal producers. NRCS has local teams of professionals and technicians to work with you to develop and implement conservation plans based on your goals for your land. NRCS also has programs that cover a significant portion of the cost of implementing conservation practices on your land.

[Learn more about NRCS](#) or find your local Service Center at farmers.gov/service-center-locator.

Risk Management Agency

The Risk Management Agency (RMA) administers federal crop insurance through Approved Insurance Providers to help farmers prepare for the future. RMA strengthens the economic stability of agricultural producers and rural communities by increasing the availability and effectiveness of Federal crop insurance. RMA manages the Federal Crop Insurance Corporation (FCIC) to provide innovative crop insurance products to America's farmers and ranchers. Special provisions are available to beginning and underserved farmers. [Visit the RMA website](#) to find a regional or compliance office or find an [insurance agent](#) near you.

USDA Office of Tribal Relations

The [USDA Office of Tribal Relations](#) (OTR) leads the intergovernmental role for the USDA with tribes while individual agencies (FSA, NRCS, RMA) consult with tribes on project and program level efforts to enhance access to USDA's various programs and services to tribes, tribal organizations and citizens.

Bureau of Indian Affairs

A [Memorandum of Understanding \(MOU\)](#) between the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), FSA, and NRCS was [extended in 2024 through 2029](#) to collaboratively plan and implement USDA programs affecting tribal lands.



LOANS AND ACCESS

Land Access

In addition to the [farm operating and ownership loans](#) for individuals, USDA offers two tribal-specific loan programs.

- The [Indian Tribal Land Acquisition Loan Program](#), administered by FSA, helps tribal nations purchase additional property within the reservation to increase agricultural productivity on their lands.
- The [Highly Fractionated Indian Land Loan Program](#) helps tribes, tribal entities and tribal members alleviate the problems caused by fractionated interests on tribal lands through purchase agreements. Through land consolidation, current and new agriculture operators can improve and expand access to USDA programs and save tribal farmland for future generations. This intermediary lender loan program is financed through revolving loan funds from FSA.

Additional land access opportunities are available through:

- The [Heirs' Property Relending Program](#) helps to address heirs' property issues that have long been a barrier for many producers and landowners trying to access USDA programs and services. The relending program provides access to capital to help heirs find a resolution. USDA announced that [Akiptan, Inc.](#), [Cherokee Nation Economic Development Trust Authority](#) and [Shared Capital Cooperative](#), which has a partnership with [Federation of Southern Cooperatives](#), are approved intermediary lenders through the Heirs' Property Relending Program.
- The [Increasing Land, Capital, and Market Access Program](#) helps underserved producers by increasing land, capital and market access.



CONSERVATION

Partnerships in Tribal Conservation

USDA is grateful for the sustained commitment on the part of tribal elected leadership to consult with USDA leadership. Their knowledge, perspectives, and priorities drive crucial changes to USDA policy and programs. The dedication of tribal natural resource and agricultural staff to share their subject matter expertise broadens USDA's understanding of natural resource concerns and techniques and practices to heal the land.

Tribal nation alliances and organizations are helpful in building partnerships and situational awareness. They generously allow USDA to be part of the conferences and outreach efforts. And they dedicate staff to accomplish joint efforts through cooperative agreements with USDA. Tribal producers broaden USDA's understanding of land stewardship and how programs can be improved to be more meaningful and practical. Thanks to these efforts, tribal nations and producers more fully participate in USDA programs.

USDA encourages tribal nations, producers and organizations to build on this legacy allowing us the honor of contributing technical and financial assistance to their efforts to heal the earth through better land stewardship.

Partnerships with FSA

In 2024, FSA entered into its fourth [Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program \(CREP\)](#) agreement with a [tribal nation in Montana](#). In 2022 and 2023, for first time in agency history, FSA entered into three agreements with [tribes in the Great Plains](#). Additional tribes are working with FSA on opportunities to address priority conservation needs on their lands.

Through these tribal CREP agreements, agricultural producers voluntarily enter into contracts with the federal government for 10-to-15-years, agreeing to maintain an existing vegetative cover of permanent grasses and legumes, while retaining the right to conduct common grazing practices and operations related to the production of forage and conservation of existing ground cover. In return, FSA provides participants with rental payments, incentives, and cost-share assistance for establishing permanent fencing and livestock watering facilities needed to support livestock grazing. View [Frequently Asked Questions for Tribal Grasslands CREP](#).

Tribal nations interested in learning more about tribal partnerships with FSA can contact USDA in their state or submit a request to tribal.fpac@usda.gov.

Partnerships with NRCS

NRCS is working with tribal subject matter experts to develop conservation practice technical standards based on tribal knowledge including managing land for bison, sugar bush, wild rice, blueberries, traditional farming, and traditional gardening.

Tribal subject matter experts help NRCS better understand the role of low intensity burns in the management of ecosystems and production of forest and rangeland foods. Tribal nations also involve NRCS in their work to overcome aquatic organism passage barriers to reconnect stream ecosystems.



As a result of these collaborations, NRCS provides more meaningful technical assistance, and comprehensive financial assistance, to tribal nations and tribal producers in implementing conservation practices to meet their land stewardship goals. The NRCS deeply appreciates the sustained commitment from tribal leadership and their staffs in these collaborative efforts.

Tribal nations interested in learning more about tribal partnerships with NRCS can [contact USDA in their state](#) or submit a request to tribal.fpac@usda.gov.

Partnerships with RMA

RMA works closely with the Intertribal Agriculture Council and other partner organizations to educate and inform producers in tribal communities how best to utilize risk management tools, particularly crop insurance.

RMA funded several projects to support these efforts through the [Risk Management Education Program](#) and recently launched a new service to assist minority-serving institutions and underserved stakeholder groups with applications for this program.

Interested organizations are encouraged to reach out to RMA at RMA.risk-ed@usda.gov.

TRIBAL FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

Support for Tribal Food Sovereignty

Tribal nations and tribal organizations help USDA agencies design and implement programs to complement Tribal Food Sovereignty efforts.

[USDA's Indigenous Food Sovereignty Initiative:](#)

- Encourages incorporation of traditional food ways in USDA programs,
- Supports improved Indian Country access to food and agriculture markets, and
- Promotes indigenous health by ensuring foods included in national food programs are tailored to American Indian/Alaska Native dietary needs.



USDA agencies support tribal food sovereignty and regenerative agriculture efforts through the improved delivery of programs and services.

USDA recognizes traditional animals in disaster assistance programs, includes revenue generating indigenous foods in crop insurance, provides [grant opportunities](#) offering support on urban agriculture targeting indigenous foods, and provides technical assistance on increasing indigenous foods in various programs.

USDA released a [Producer Handbook: Transitioning From Cattle to Bison](#), which was created in partnership with Intertribal Buffalo Council (ITBC). The handbook can inform interested tribal communities and Native cattle producers about the process, costs, and factors involved in transitioning to bison production.

Traditional Animals in Disaster Assistance Programs

In recognition of traditional animals, FSA updated its disaster assistance programs to ensure coverage of livestock losses. FSA also updated certain livestock [disaster assistance programs](#) to include horses maintained on eligible grazing land. Many family farms and ranches use their forage to raise horses to augment their other agriculture endeavors. Additionally, Mycoplasma bovis for bison losses is now an eligible cause of loss for the Livestock Indemnity Program. For more information, visit farmers.gov/recover.



Indigenous Foods in Crop Insurance

Indigenous foods that generate revenue on a farm can be covered by federal crop insurance under the [Whole Farm Revenue Protection or Micro Farm](#) policies. You can find a licensed and qualified Approved Insurance Provider in your area through the [RMA Agent Locator Tool](#). An insurance agent can help you determine if any offered policies are right for you.

Urban and Innovative Agriculture

USDA is committed to serving all facets of agriculture, including gardens, farms, and even indoor operations in urban, suburban, and tribal communities. There is no population threshold for Urban and Innovative Agriculture (UAIP) program participation.

Learn more at farmers.gov/urban.

Starting, Expanding and Improving Operations

USDA offers a wide variety of programs and services to producers to help start, expand, and improve operations. This includes land and water [conservation](#), [disaster assistance](#), [crop insurance](#), [farm operating and ownership loans](#), and [safety-net programs](#).

Working Lands Conservation

The [Environmental Quality Incentives Program](#) (EQIP) is NRCS' flagship conservation program helping tribal nations, tribal producers, and other farmers, ranchers and forest landowners integrate conservation into working lands.

This program can help increase agricultural productivity through prescribed grazing, high tunnel systems, agroforestry, and more. The [Conservation Stewardship Program](#) (CSP) helps you build on your existing conservation efforts while strengthening your operation. CSP offers annual payments for maintaining existing conservation efforts as well as payments to implement additional conservation activities.

The [Grassland Conservation Reserve Program](#) (Grassland CRP), part of FSA's CRP program, helps landowners and operators protect grassland, including rangeland, and pastureland, and certain other lands, while maintaining the areas as grazing lands. The program emphasizes support for grazing operations, plant and animal biodiversity, and grassland and land containing shrubs and forbs under the greatest threat of conversion. For more information, contact your [local USDA service center](#).

On-Farm Storage and Handling

USDA supports access to on-farm storage and handling for new, small and mid-sized farms through FSA's [Farm Storage Facility Loan Program](#). These low-interest loans help producers build or upgrade facilities to store commodities, acquire storage and handling trucks and/or related handling equipment.

INPUT FROM TRIBAL NATIONS

Indigenous Representation

USDA values input from tribal nations and communities.

FSA County Committees

One great way to make a difference is through [FSA County Committees](#). Committee members ensure fair and equitable delivery of FSA farm programs in their county or multi-county jurisdiction. FSA is committed to establish and strengthen partnerships with tribal governments to engage tribal communities and increase participation in the county committee election nominations and voting processes.

Learn more about [tribal agricultural landowner voting eligibility](#). Nominations open in mid-June and end in early August each year. Ballots are mailed out in November and due back to FSA in early December. If you are interested in voting and serving on the County Committee, [contact your local FSA office](#) for information.

NRCS Collaboration

NRCS is committed to meaningful tribal consultation with tribal nation leadership. NRCS also collaborates and coordinates with Tribal Conservation Advisory Councils on a state and regional level and works with Tribal Conservation Districts across the country.

Tribal representatives who serve on these councils and districts help NRCS improve its programs, practices, and policies on an ongoing basis. These advisory councils have really helped NRCS and other USDA agencies work toward meeting our tribal trust responsibilities. Contact your [local NRCS office](#) for more information.



RMA Training Partnerships

RMA, in partnership with the [Intertribal Agriculture Council](#), Rural Coalition, Annie's Project and Alcorn State University, strategically engages with minority-serving institutions and underserved stakeholder groups to train, credential, and establish a pipeline of crop insurance agents and adjusters within tribal communities. RMA's goal is to increase the representation of underserved insurance agents and loss adjusters providing service to underserved communities. Those interested in learning more about becoming an agent or adjuster are encouraged to reach out to RMA or the IAC via email at julian@indianag.org or RMA.risk-ed@usda.gov.



LEARN MORE

Events and Resources

RESOURCE	MORE INFO
UPCOMING EVENTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ USDA Tribal Consultations
SUPPORTING THE NEXT GENERATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ USDA Tribal Youth Guide helps Native youth learn about available USDA programs and resources. ❖ Resources for Tribal Youth Organizations ❖ USDA tribal college partnership with the American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC)
ADDITIONAL RESOURCES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ USDA Resource Guide for American Indians/Alaska Natives ❖ Disaster Assistance at a Glance ❖ Inflation Reduction Act Assistance for Distressed Borrowers ❖ Equity at USDA ❖ Resources for beginning farmers and ranchers ❖ Resources for historically underserved farmers and ranchers ❖ Upcoming national program deadlines ❖ Information about doing business with FSA, NRCS and RMA ❖ Translation and interpretation services
OUTREACH SUPPORT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ FSA Outreach and Education ❖ NRCS Outreach and Partnership Division ❖ RMA Outreach and Education



Feedback and Questions

To provide feedback or ask questions about FPAC tribal partnerships, please contact the Farm Production and Conservation National Tribal Liaison team at tribal.fpac@usda.gov





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