

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 1, 2020

The Honorable Sonny Perdue
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 205010

Secretary Perdue:

We write today to urge the U.S. Department of Agriculture to swiftly utilize the additional Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR) food purchasing funds that Congress provided in the CARES Act to increase the monthly FDPIR household food package benefit and allow purchases directly from Tribal producers. Tribal leaders and organizations have made it clear that immediate relief is necessary to ensure food security in Indian Country during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Tribes across the country, particularly those located in food deserts with unreliable food chains, are experiencing increased demand for food and more frequent disruptions in food supply chains. During the pandemic, many Native families are turning to FDPIR as their main source of food and rely on the additional nutrition resources it can provide. Along with Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits, FDPIR is a lifeline for many Native families in need during this crisis. Together, these federal programs fill gaps in supply chains and address the growing food insecurity in their communities. Accordingly, we urge you to increase the monthly FDPIR household food package benefit by 40 percent to provide parity with the increase in emergency benefits for SNAP that USDA has already permitted.

Additionally, we urge you to work with Tribal leaders and organizations to ensure that Indian Tribal Organizations and State Agencies that administer FDPIR can purchase directly from local and regional Tribal producers. While Tribes are experiencing drastic food shortages, Tribal producers are losing markets that are critical to their livelihood. By permitting Tribally-grown and raised products in FDPIR food packages, bought directly from Tribal producers, USDA would not only be assisting these farmers stay afloat but also greatly improving food security in Indian Country for months and years to come.

Indian Country needs emergency food and nutrition assistance now. We stand ready to work with you to ensure that Native families immediately and safely receive the resources they need during the COVID-19 pandemic. Thank you for your consideration of these requests.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jon Tester". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending from the end of the name.

Jon Tester
U.S. Senator

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Tom Udall". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, sweeping initial "T".

Tom Udall
U.S. Senator