

Tribal Council Security Aaron Otto
FDPIR Tribal Consultation Travel Report February 21-24

I arrived at the airport about one hour before my flight left. Joe VanAlstine was already there. I was not surprised in the least. I was running a bit late and assumed he would already be there.

I went through security as I have many times before with no big differences. I removed my hat, shoes, and belt, then emptied my pockets as required. I stepped through the security point and I made it through with ease. My experience over the last few years has sped up this process for me. Once on the other side of security I quickly put myself back together. I gathered my things and promptly got on to the plane.

We arrived in Detroit and I grabbed a soda at one of the stores in the airport and sat and played on my phone until it was time to board our plane to DC.

The flight was uneventful and Joe and I ended up sitting next to each other on the plane. When we arrived in DC I followed Joe to the Metro and he helped me purchase a Metro Card. We got on to the Metro and headed for the Crystal City Marriott. We got off the metro and started walking, through what seemed like an underground town, to the hotel. It was not too far away and we shortly arrived. Little did we know that the Marriott had two hotels in the same area and went to the wrong one. So we headed out once again to the underground city and walk just a little bit away and found the right Marriott checked in and headed to our rooms.

I got to my room and unpacked my things and sat down to relax. It had been about an hour, Joe and I agreed to meet to eat, so I headed down to the restaurant located in the hotel. I ordered a Club Sandwich and Joe and I talked a bit about what to expect the next day. We agreed to meet at around 9:30am to eat and head out to our meeting.

I woke up early feeling refreshed. I got ready gathered the things I needed and headed down stairs to meet Joe. I had some bacon, sausage, eggs, pineapple and a waffle.

After breakfast we headed back down to the Metro and headed to the Navajo Embassy. The Navajo Embassy was nice and they were very hospitable.

The Tribal Leaders Pre-Meeting regarding the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR) was supposed to start at 1:00pm but it did not start rolling until around 1:30pm. The meeting started out with a small presentation regarding the nutrition in the food package. For more information on the food package see attached document "*Science of the Food Package: Key Fact.*"

We shortly moved on to setting our agenda of items to discuss with the USDA representatives. We decided that it would be wise to be as "to the point" as possible. We came up with five requests that we wanted to touch on.

1. Request: To establish a permanent Tribal Leader Consultation Working Group

2. Request: To increased funding for FDPIR
3. Request: To make incorporating Traditional Foods into the package a priority.
4. Request: To preserve the FDPIR and do not merge with SNAP
5. Request: To improve the quality of the food package.

For a detailed outline of the requests and discussion topics please see attached "*Key Points of Consideration*" document.

After the meeting Joe and i went to a restaurant to eat i got the Spicy BBQ Korean Burrito it was pretty good.

After dinner we took the Metro back to the hotel and went to sleep.

Our agreed time to meet in the morning was 7:00am. We had breakfast i had the same as i did the day before. We eat quickly and started our walk to the Metro. After a short ride we got off the Metro and continue our trek to the Whitten Building that houses the USDA offices.

After a short wait we started the meeting. The main representatives of the USDA were Deputy Secretary Krysta Harden and Undersecretary Kevin Concannon and their staff.

There is a rough transcript of the meeting attached. (see "*FDPIR Tribal Consultation Meeting 2/23/2016*")

A summary of the meeting is provided as well. (see "*FDPIR Tribal Leaders Consultation Meeting: Summary February 23, 2016*")

We had lunch at the Witten Building. I had some fruit and salad.

After the lunch we had a debriefing meeting and discussed what had been said during the meeting. A second meeting date was discussed and we landed on a date sometime in April.

Joe and I left the debriefing meeting and headed back to the hotel. Later that evening we went to dinner at a nearby restaurant. I had the Chicken Cheese Steak Sandwich and a diet Soda. We sat and talked for a bit and then went back to the hotel so we had time to pack up and get ready for our flight home.

I woke up in the morning gathered the remainder of my things and headed back down to the lobby and checked out. I had plenty of time to eat so I went and grabbed something to eat and i had the same thing as the previous two days. Joe Met up with me shortly after i started eating and joined me.

We got back on the Metro and started our journey home. We made it to the air port and got through security with ease.

Our flight was Delayed for a bit so we sat and talked for a bit.

The airline was asking for volunteers to check their carryons so i gladly did so. We finally boarded the plane with some concern of missing our next flight. The plane ride was nice i took a little nap and talked with Joe and the person sitting next to me for a bit. Next thing i knew we were landing. I checked my phone to see how our second flight was doing because the time had passed to board the plane home. Luckily the flight was delayed a little as well. we had about ten minutes to get there so joe and i took off as quick as we could to get to our connecting flight. A little out of breath and sore i made it to the gate to find that it was delayed even more and no rushing was necessary. We waited and shortly got on to the flight and headed home.

We arrived at the Pellston Airport in no time and I said my good byes to Joe and met up with my family to grab something to eat.

FDPIR Tribal Leaders Consultation Meeting: Summary

February 23, 2016

- Lieutenant Governor Keel first addressed the issue of establishing a permanent Tribal leaders consultation group, consistent with Executive Order 13175 and other relevant legal authorities.
- Governor Mountain first addressed the issue of more adequate funding for infrastructure: for facilities, for vehicles, for nutrition education, and food, as well as the carryover policy.
 - Multiple Tribal leaders echoed Governor Mountain's request for more funding.
- President Begaye first addressed the issue of purchasing more traditional foods, possibly as a regional model, directly from Tribally owned food businesses and farms so that the package could stimulate Tribal economies at the same time as it provided healthy traditional food.
 - Multiple Tribal leaders echoed President Begaye's request for traditional foods in the package.
- All the above requests were generally well-received by Deputy Secretary Harden and by her successor, Michael Scuse.
 - DS Harden directed Leslie Wheelock in the USDA Office of Tribal Relations to work on establishing the consultation group ASAP.
 - DS Harden also directed the Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) to follow-up on purchasing requirements for traditional food vendors.
- Undersecretary Concannon explained that there are some increases in the budget requests, which he is defending today on the Hill.
 - These requests include \$5 million additional for administrative costs, \$5 million for traditional foods, and \$2 million for a traditional foods regional pilot program. (*A copy of the President's budget requests, along with relevant USDA documents explaining some of those requests for FDPIR, can be found in the appendices to the Briefing Book.*)
 - Chairman Miller and Governor Mountain both pointed out the need for the consultation group so that Tribal leaders can be advocates for FDPIR funding on the Hill.
- At the request of the Tribal leaders, Janie Simms Hipp briefly reviewed some of the scientific data that Drs. Holly Hunts and Ed Dratz brought.

- Undersecretary Concannon expressed interest in reviewing this further and forwarding it to federal government scientists.
 - However, he saw no need to seat a separate independent science panel.
- Charles Red Gates gave a brief history of the program and expressed concern that FDPIR would one day be subsumed into SNAP.
 - Undersecretary Concannon was very distressed by this and flatly denied that it would happen during this administration.
- Undersecretary Concannon was concerned that the consultation group would foment discord between Tribal leaders and the NAFDPIR members who sit on the Food Package Review Group.
 - Multiple Tribal leaders addressed this concern and noted that this is a partnership, that Tribal leaders came to this meeting because NAFDPIR Board members had asked them to advocate for the program, and that this cooperative partnership would continue in the future.
- Undersecretary Concannon expressed a wish to move quickly, but said that the meeting would simply not be able to happen by March 15th. He was not sure when it could happen exactly.
 - However, at the debriefing meeting afterwards, dates and locations throughout Indian Country were proposed for a meeting with incoming Acting Deputy Secretary Michael Scuse, who will be second in command at USDA beginning in March.
 - Janie spoke with Michael and he was very excited to get started on finding solutions.

Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR)

Science of the Food Package: Key Facts

- ❖ The USDA Healthy Eating Index Score for FDPIR is 20 points lower than USDA reports. USDA includes too many empty calories in their measure.
- ❖ Traditional diets were very healthy: they were high in healthy fats. (Omega 3s.)
- ❖ The FDPIR package is currently full of bad fats: Omega 6 fats, which come in vegetable oil and light buttery spread. Real butter is MUCH healthier but the package limits access to it.
- ❖ High Omega 6 diets, like the FDPIR package, are associated with:
 - Type 2 diabetes, heart disease, liver disease, cancer, kidney disease, arthritis, depression, anxiety, poor school performance, substance abuse, and suicide.
- ❖ USDA data **underestimates** the nutrients of **traditional** foods and **overestimates** the nutritional value of **commodity** foods.
- ❖ FDPIR provides just 28% of the USDA recommended cups of vegetables for the month.
 - Specifically: FDPIR provides 19.5 cups of vegetables/month (including soup) for everyone.
 - This is 65% of the vegetables a 2-3 year old needs a month according to USDA.
 - This is 21.6% of the vegetables a 31-50 year old man needs a month according to USDA.
- ❖ USDA exaggerates the actual quantity of vegetables contained in the food package. For example: a can that was supposed to contain 2 cups of vegetables only contained $\frac{3}{4}$ of 1 cup.
- ❖ The food package contains largely low-fat or fat-free dairy products. There is substantial scientific evidence that full-fat, not low-fat, dairy, is healthier. People who eat full-fat dairy are less likely to develop type 2 diabetes, heart disease, obesity.

Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR)

Key Points of Consideration

- **Request: establish a permanent Tribal Leaders Consultation Working Group.**
 - **Why:** There are significant issues with the FDPIR, a program that serves 102,000 of our most vulnerable citizens every month. Yet after years of correspondence, and decades of the program's operation, **today's meeting is the first time consultation has happened on the FDPIR as a whole.** To truly maintain a government-to-government relationship with the 276 sovereign Tribes using this program and USDA, meaningful consultation must continue.
 - **How:** This Consultation Group would be established under the legal and regulatory authorities of Executive Order 13175, President Obama's November 2009 Memorandum, OMB Guidance,
 - This is not a request for a listening session or a federal advisory committee.
 - *Immediate request:*
 - Seat group **immediately** but no later than March 15, 2016.
 - Determine the composition and membership of the group.
 - Determine meeting schedule.

- **Request: Increased funding for FDPIR:**
 - **Why:** Participation in FDPIR has increased by at least 90% in some places over the past several years. Food costs have also risen across the country. Increased funding for food purchasing in FDPIR is essential to the continued operation of this program.
 - **What:**
 - Funding for infrastructure (facility maintenance, freezers/cooling systems, building repairs, trucks/trailers, etc)
 - Funding for better computer interface system
 - Institute a carryover policy for FDPIR funds. Sister programs do have this policy but not FDPIR.
 - Nutrition Education
 - Remove matching requirement of 25%.
 - Contingency planning for food shortages in times of disaster
 - **How:**
 - Enter into a "budget negotiation" process between Consultation Group and FNS, much like the IHS or BIA processes. This should also include consultation on any proposed regulations.
 - Remove the "lean warehouse" policy in all regions.
 - Include more funding for FDPIR Nutrition Education—right now less than \$1 million is supposed to serve 276 Tribes, and the competitive grant process pits Tribe against Tribe.
 - Make the improvement of computer system a "process improvement" priority for USDA, which will allow it to be fixed more expeditiously.

- **Request: Make incorporating Traditional Foods into the package a priority.**
 - **Why:** Traditional foods are an absolute necessity for our Tribal diets. Scientific data proves what we have always known: traditional diets are healthier for us.
 - **How:**
 - Use base funding to purchase traditional foods. This is legally possible.
 - Institute a preferred vendor policy for Tribally-owned food businesses selling traditional foods in the commercial marketplace.
 - Consider moving away from a national food model and focus on a regional model that meets regional needs.
 - Reconsider pilot projects and request funding for them.
 - Remove regulatory or legal barriers to make it possible for each Tribe to purchase their own traditional foods

- **Request: Preserve the FDPIR and do not merge it with SNAP.**
 - **Why:** A SNAP model will not work for many of our most vulnerable people, some of whom would have to drive over two hours to reach a convenience store, let alone a full-service grocery store.
 - **How:**
 - For now, preserve FDPIR as a commodity assistance model.
 - Ultimately, “638” this program to Tribes—let Tribes, as sovereign nations, run FDPIR instead of State Agencies.

- **Request: improve the quality of the food package.**
 - **Why:** Recent scientific data, including studies published in peer-reviewed journals, call into question the overall health of the food package. Particularly, many of these foods exacerbate Type 2 Diabetes, which has reached epidemic stages among American Indian and Alaska Native people. These foods also cause other chronic diseases like liver disease. Because of these, in some parts of the country, American Indians’ lifespan is twenty years less than their white counterparts. We cannot continue to feed our people food that will kill them.
 - **How:**
 - Seat an independent science panel that includes a biochemist and economist to advise the Food Package Review Group on the overall nutritional value of the food package.
 - Recognize that the package needs to **transition** to a healthier package. Immediately removing all of these problematic foods punishes our people by taking away a primary—if not a sole—source of food.

FDPIR Tribal Consultation Meeting 2/23/2016.

Undersecretary Kevin Conannon speaks first. He welcomes everyone, explains the history of the room, and mentions that the budget for all feeding programs will be discussed before a House committee tomorrow. He then introduces Deputy Secretary Harden.

Deputy Secretary Krysta Harden: Thank you everyone for being here. Welcome to all of you, leaders of so many important Tribes across the nation. I am excited to hear and learn from you. I visited Oneida's distribution site last April, April 24. I think was the date, and I saw firsthand how that system was working. And it was a good system, it seemed to me, but they had problems and questions there.

What I hope you'll see is how committed we are to working with you, and listening to you, and finding solutions that work, not only for the people you represent, but for USDA and the federal government. You have the best people in the room for that, and I hope it shows you our full commitment to you...we are looking for reasonable, workable solutions that work not only on the ground, but through the federal government's processes. We have a big bureaucracy, and I know you know that...it has lots of layers, lots of issues, requirements, procedures, and processes that can be very cumbersome for us. If you ask these folks here today, they would streamline and make things much more workable as well, but we're working with taxpayer dollars and so we have issues we have to work with. So, we need to make sure those are minimized, and that you're getting the services you need...everyone here wants the same thing. We have well-meaning, committed individuals here who want to serve, but things get caught up in the process, and what sounds good on paper doesn't always work on the ground...

I pledge to you, we are known in this town as the "can do, will do, get 'er done" agency...we need common sense solutions. How do we make things work that sound good, work good, it doesn't me we always do, and my early days in this town I was trained to underpromise and over-deliver. We can't make promises today that we can't not deliver on...what I hope we do after a lot of thought and listening and sharing in conversation with you, is that we understand the needs better, the concerns better. But also that you recognize our limitations and our restrictions, but talk about—how do we break those down? Are there things we can do differently, within the realm of the law and the regulations, that make sense?

We are mostly rural folks here. We come from small towns and ranches ourselves, or our families do. We people who care and want to give back, that's why we are in public service, it's not for the pay or the hours. We care about our country, our nation, about you, about the Native American community, the foundation of this country. We want to be a good partner and do the best we can. What you'll hear today from us is a practical promise to do what we can do. I give you my pledge that that's my promise, to serve...that's why we're all here today. I'm very, very excited to be a part of this...we very much value the relationship we have with each one of you and the folks you represent...Thank you.

Lt. Governor Jefferson Keel: Thank you. We have the Tribal leaders that are here and want to thank you for this opportunity. Before you leave, I want to thank you for calling and helping to

facilitate this meeting. To my knowledge, this is the very first time that the Secretary of USDA has officially sat down with Tribal leaders in a true consultation meeting. There have been lots of telephone conferences and meetings at conferences, but those don't necessarily represent, and are not, consultation meetings. One of the first things—and the Tribal leaders here today have agreed—that we put together somewhat of an agenda. Basically, the items we want to present to you for consideration. We will go around the room, the Tribal leaders will present those items of discussion to you. My role is simply to facilitate, and help in any way I can.

I've been associated with food distribution for over twenty-five years. I was the director of the Chickasaw Nation food distribution program in 1990 or 1991, shows you how long ago that was. It was back when I was about 15 years old. [laughter] I really was—after I retired from the military, I was about 20 years as an airborne ranger in the US Army and I'm very proud of that. I came home to serve Indian people, because that's who I am. This program that we're meeting about, we serve over 102,000 people in this country. There are Tribes, 10 Alaska Villages, that want to come into this program but can't because of lack of funding. That's an issue we'll talk about later this morning.

But before we go any further, I was tasked to talk about the establishment of a permanent Tribal Leader Consultation Group in accordance with all the laws—the Executive Order, President Obama's 2009 Memorandum, and all the other documents. We're still not there yet but I would ask that we seat a Tribal Leader Consultation Working Group, and there are a number of legal precedents for that by law and, as I said, the President's Executive Order. We need to do this—you mentioned the budget. Tribal leaders haven't had any formal input into USDA's budget—ever. We have never been consulted on the budget through USDA. This working group could provide you with technical assistance in developing a needs-based budget for FNS that provides food for Native Americans. The National Association of FDPIR has the technical expertise, and they are made up of member Tribes across country. They could do that immediately.

We ask that this group be seated immediately. We know the budget request hearing's tomorrow—we ask that sometime between now and the 15th of March, that this be formalized so the group could be seated, with the composition decided on by Tribal leaders. They can decide who sits on it, and the final decision is with the Secretary's office. It probably should not be more than fifteen, or twenty people, because any more than that and we get into debates about priorities. But believe you could do that, have people from each region. Two people from each BIA region would make twenty-four people, a primary and an alternate. And they could also have their own technical staff advise them. Then, we could determine a meeting schedule, and decide how often they could meet and in locations and you should meet in Indian Country—not always in DC. Come to Indian Country and see what the programs are really doing in Indian Country, and the services they are really providing. Come to Oklahoma! There are more Indian people in Oklahoma than anywhere in the country. We argue with California about that. [laughter] But yes, come to California, Oklahoma, the Southwest, the Midwest, New England, Alaska—go to Alaska and talk to the people there that have needs that are not being met.

The bottom line, Madam Secretary, is this is so important to our people...it's a need that doesn't go away. We get a lot of lip service, and I don't know any other way than to put it out there like

that—and it comes from my heart. We meet with officials all the time, and as you said, we get priorities for change and those priorities aren't kept. And we understand that we've been doing it forever. A long time ago I was in Vietnam, and there was a saying, they'd write it on those t-shirts, and it doesn't apply to Native Americans but I've made it apply. "We've been doing so much with so little for so long, we believe we can do everything with nothing forever."

So we've been supplementing our own programs. Many tribes assist our own programs. We put things into the services, because it's the right thing to do. Many Tribes don't have the resources to do that, they struggle. If there wasn't a need, it would go away. And they've attempted to do away with this for years, and Red will talk about that. But since 1975 we've had the authority to contract things through—9-3-638 program. We need to look at that in the future, and let tribes operate this on their own, they have the capacity. Madam Secretary, I thank you for coming and speaking from your heart—and I recognize the accent. [laughter]

DS Harden: It's not Oklahoma but it's good to know someone around here understands me!

Lt. Gov. Keel: I spent a lot of time in Georgia and Alabama, so I can decipher it... Governor Mountain will speak now, and then he can introduce the next speaker.

DS Harden: Thank you so much, Lieutenant Governor. Governor?

Governor James R. Mountain: Good morning, Deputy Secretary Hayden, and Undersecretary Conrannon, and thank you for having us. I do appreciate the opportunity to be here with my fellow leadership representing all of Indian Country. It's very important to understand, we're not just here to represent our own pueblos and our own tribes, but this is a national issue in Indian Country, and we bring this message in this setting and I appreciate that. I appreciate the information that Lt. Gov. Keel has relayed on our behalf in opening. I can't regenerate enough the need for implementing a working group to establish true government-to-government interface with USDA. We're looking for a meaningful discussion that will build upon measurable outcomes. As you mentioned, it's a commitment, and we're looking for that simple commitment.

We have the leadership, and for many years our people—the individuals who run our program—they have been there for decades now, working day and night to advocate for our program. We've come to a time and a place where we understand now, "Where is your leadership?" We are here now. We have a better, more sophisticated understanding, and are asking you all to implement this group, to have this group, so we can go the Hill with you all and have that input into the budget, and have lead time to better prepare so we can advocate, not only for your purposes, but for FDIPIR. We don't want to utilize the "bureaucracy" too much today, but it shouldn't jeopardize the welfare of our people.

It is rare to have this sort of meeting, and this setting hasn't taken place maybe some forty years. But then, we were in jeopardy of having this program completely terminated. The fight has been long, and it doesn't need to be a fight. We need that true, meaningful, government-to-government relationship. We brought solutions to you today. We're not here banging our fists... we're respectfully requesting—and we're respectfully banging our fists. [laughter] That's how

we break down these barriers. We have short-term solutions, because we have infrastructure that is outdated. I personally invite you out to San Ildefonso Pueblo. Our facility is located in Nambe Pueblo, New Mexico, and I would love to have you, or your staff, come visit, because I think it represents what the needs are now, and how funding is a major concern for us.

There are several components for funding... a need for upkeep and for maintenance of these facilities. If we keep the perspective of that thirty- or forty-year timeline, those are the facilities we are talking about right now... we have IT needs, computer interfacing—those systems are a top priority to assure that we're actually communicating with the delivery system, and we meet those needs. That's a major priority and could be a "quick fix." I don't like to use that word but it's needed right now. We talk about nutrition education, a major component. Another solution we bring to you all is finding measurable outcomes to get information and our reach out to our people. We must have a contingency plan as well, we must address that in the event of disaster to meet needs of potential food shortages. We're starting to understand those dire needs and issues that could come about in the future. We have a little time today, and understanding that, we don't want you all to leave—and I understand coming in and out of meetings as well—but we've done our homework, we have our experts here. We don't want to bog down today in those discussions on the science and the research we've done, but that would be the benefit of having that group, so we can better educate you all on what our perspective is, and at the same time, with an open heart and an open mind, understand the process on your end. So maybe we have something to offer to streamline the process and better serve both entities. As well as issues with that. When we do not receive those fundings in a timely manner, we must utilize those resources getting them recouped into the USDA system and then sent somewhere else. It's definitely underserving our purposes if that continues to be the practice. So I do appreciate the time. We want to have pointed discussions today. It's a follow-up to a letter we sent to Secretary Vilsack back in August 2015 so... we do ask you all to continue to look at that letter and we've come here, as you said, to bring solutions and that commitment. If I pass the discussion on to next topic, to traditional foods, and those needs.

President Russell Begaye: Thank you Deputy Secretary, and your staff people that serve us, Leslie—thank you for working with us, and being our voice to the Secretary, and your staff back here that know us and the members of our tribes that are serving here in the agency. What we are really passionate about is being able to eat our own food rather than eating food someone else has made. And we need to do it by regions. I know my people, when they receive the packages, they look through and say, "This looks like something we don't eat," so they toss it... it would help us grow our economy, to help USDA to partner with Tribal nations, like Navajo, where we can package and grow our own food. In our region, Navajo beef is widely known, if you ever came to Navajo—and we invite you to be there—you will say this is the best beef you've ever had! [laughter]

But we have those across the nation, whether they are fisheries, farms... we have a huge farm, a very extensive system where we can grow corn, beans, we have a national distribution system through companies like Walmart, and now Whole Foods is coming in and taking our produce. These are high quality organic produce products, and we want to be able to pass it on to the people in our region, to tribal groups in our region, and if we were to set up together these

processing or manufacturing plants where you can help us—you then help us to grow our economy and put our people to work, but also to use the produce we're familiar with distributing...

From Tribe to Tribe, there's wild rice, there's salmon—we want to be able to ask you all to consider us doing that. And to partner with us. I think it's really important for our people to be able to eat food they're familiar with and enjoy. We know it's nutritious too. Our cattle are grass-fed and in our potatoes, corn, beans, all of those are organic products. We can produce those and package those and push them out to our Tribe, but also other Tribes in our region. So we are presenting that here today. Also, we're here to remove any regulatory things that are a barrier or roadblock so we can make this happen, to revisit policies and procedures that will help make this happen, to get tribally grown produce out to people, and for USDA to actually purchase these products so we can put them on our shelves at our distribution center. Even to start with a pilot project and help in the region. And for Navajo, as other Tribes, we are ready to take on that role and responsibility and function.

I just want to go back to the opening statement. President Obama is the only President I know of that has tried to bring a Tribal voice to the table for all agencies. I serve on DOJ and other panels, where we have the right to input into budgetary discussions. It would be a legacy from the standpoint of the Indian nations, that the President would leave behind, if you would institutionalize the input of Tribal leaders into the federal processes. We've never had that, those doors were always closed...but with the President and his concept and philosophy, it brought us to the table across the board and we want to see that happen with USDA. And the quicker the better, because as we all know, the transition has already started...thank you.

Deputy Secretary Harden: Thank you...a couple of things. First...I think you're exactly right, President Begaye, and I appreciate you noting that commitment from President Obama. It's not just talk—he recognizes the past relationships, and he has made it clear that that's not the way we do business in this administration. ...I just want you to know that Leslie represents the Native voice in everything we do...on the Farm Bill, we did not move forward without her, her review and her blessing...sometimes that meant things didn't move as quickly as others wanted...but we valued very much the input from the Tribes on every provision, and in making sure we made wise decisions and had the voice of Tribes through Leslie... We needed and we wanted your voice in that process...thank Leslie and her staff—they're small but they're mighty! They are a very wise voice, and the Secretary has made it clear to all of us that your voice has to be heard, we have to have consultation, because it is the right thing to do. And I appreciate Leslie, and I want to thank her for that. The Farm Bill is the one I've been more hands-on with, and I appreciate Leslie's commitment to making that a rich and successful process.

You've raised a lot of good issues...I understand the Native foods...our procurement folks from AMS are here, and I'm glad they're hearing this to follow up. I appreciate the need for the group, and that makes sense to me. ... We do want to avoid a FACA kind of situation, so we get to avoid the red tape, so we need to make sure that there's a working discussion with input, but avoiding the bureaucracy in a formal process. So we have to talk to our attorneys in a way that is streamlined enough, instead of just having an advisory group. I've been a part of those before

and they're not nimble, and they're not flexible. So, is there a mechanism for us to provide an ad hoc or formal relationship that legally avoids those restrictions so that we can get input and the partnership with Tribal nations without the hindrances that bog us down on process. I ask Leslie to work with OGC to do this and get this relationship going. There's always budget issues, there's always process, but we must find a way to work through the process. Leslie, you're a master at these things, so I think you can help us find the solution.

I also want to introduce Acting Deputy Secretary Michael Souse, and my Chief of Staff, Ashley. They will both be here after I'm gone and they are here today.

[short break for housekeeping announcements]

Lt. Gov. Keel: Thank you for your comments. Regarding the seating, I've worked with Leslie before—in my former life, I'm a recovering President of NCAI and in that position I worked with Leslie—and I know that the seating of this may be something of a challenge. But have a look at DOI and HHS, because both of them have those in place already.

Deputy Secretary Harden: Those are great examples. It's good to know there's no need to reinvent the wheel.

Lt. Gov. Keel: Governor Mountain talked about the history and the struggles we've had over the past forty years—and longer than that. I grew up on commodities. You know, I'm very familiar with the food packages then, and that's been a long time ago. We've asked Red to talk about preserving the FDIPIR and not merging it with SNAP.

Charles "Red" Gates: Thank you, Lieutenant Governor, and greetings to you, Deputy Secretary Harden, and to the Undersecretary, and Leslie, and all of the staff. I introduced myself as Charles Gates—I'm much more better known as Red. I don't quite know why. It's a name I picked up. I'm seventy-two years old and have forty-eight grandchildren. That's a long time, and I grew up in the old commodities too. We picked up our monthly commodities in a team and a wagon on the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation in North Dakota and South Dakota.

One thing about that, I remember being raised by my great grandparents. My mother died when I was four and we were fostered out, but great grandma took us in, and we ate good, healthy, homegrown food. But as time changed, the commodities were brought out in a wooden box truck, and we'd go in a team and a wagon and pick up mostly surplus meat or food. They used a cup to get cups of beans, they'd bring a container. Can't remember the meat, don't know if there was some or if there wasn't...but my great-grandmother prepared delicious meals because she always had huge gardens. So I grew up eating real healthy, because we were able to produce our own food. I say that, because as time went on, the food package changed, and in fact it was added. And our people got to liking it, and we didn't realize what it was doing to our bodies and our health.

I'm going to jump ahead to 1982... never realized how valuable these commodity foods were until my wife and I tried to feed nine children. And it became essential to make sure we picked up our commodities. I never paid attention to how my wife prepared those foods, so when I was

delegated to go to this program, there were threats to take away the program and put it under the states...it took us two years to straighten it out. But I had never seen the food, so I opened one of those cans, and when I seen what was in there, I asked my wife, "How do you fix that?" she said, "Well, I have to clean it up first."

I don't know how many of you remember February 26, 1990. I don't see anyone shaking their head. To me, it's a special day, simply because a Congressional hearing was held on Standing Rock—the select committee on hunger. It was a big issue back then...this committee was brought forward. I give you this history, because basically that's why I'm still there. They were able to set up a hearing at Standing Rock, and I know a lot of the area Tribes also attended. During that time, a lot of people were telling me, "Red, my kid won't eat this meal," but basically, they didn't want me to open the cans. The reason why was because they might take it away from us. They didn't want to take that risk. But I went to the Chairman and he asked me to do it. So that day is the day that I opened the can of beef and put it on a paper plate, and Congressman Tony Hall from Ohio said, "I wouldn't feed that to my dog." And then changes started to take place.

Then I became the second President of NAFDPR. When I became president of that association, I didn't realize where we were headed...the road we chose was the one the people we serve told us to take. I am here representing them, and I am here representing our chairman, and I am very, very humbled to be sitting here. But I did some studying on FDPRI, basically because I remember when we picked up these commodities, and when we picked them up as rations. They said, "Here's what you get," and the head of household had to pick it up...

So, the first Food Stamp Act in 1976 abolished those rations and wanted all Tribes to go under the Food Stamp Act. Tribal leaders came to Washington and said you can't, you promised in our treaties to feed us, provide health care, and education. So it was rewritten with this program in there. They put in the guidelines, the take rates, they said we would only receive certain foods, the surplus foods. Yes, we appreciate all that's been done since that time. But as the need for food grows, and we want to make the package healthier, we have to be sure—and I'm sure these Tribal leaders want the same thing—that this program is not abolished and put under SNAP.

Undersecretary Kevin Conannon: There's no plan to do so.

Charles Red Gates: We've heard discussion about that. That's my biggest fear. I think the staff from FNS has heard me say, I have a gut feeling that someone wants us all under SNAP.

Undersecretary Conannon: I'm responsible for the program directly, and anyone here who knows me knows that I champion FDPRI. Compared to SNAP, it's healthier, the HEI is the healthiest...and the budget I will be defending tomorrow expects the average enrollment to be 94,000...we are asking for millions of dollars in administrative costs.

...I haven't heard that from...there's no point in giving that any credence by discussing it at a meeting like this...let's not start bringing ghosts up that aren't real. There's no discussion I'm aware of anywhere...it's the healthiest of the food packages the government provides. We've

come a long way from surplus foods...they are typically healthier than the foods in a supermarket. It has less sodium, less sugar. Let's talk about the things that are real, there's no reality to that.

Red: I appreciate that, and I appreciate the response. But there is a study out there asking Tribal governments if they'd like to administer these programs. I believe one of the leaders brought it up, that maybe there's a way to "638" it, because as it was discussed a few years ago, there was talk of block-granting this to the states. And states don't really realize the needs our people have. We're talking about some of the poorest counties in the nation when you talk about the Mountain Plains region. Standing Rock, Shannon County, Oglala country, those are the poorest tribes in the country. That's basically why it bothers me. I'm not sure where it comes from...I don't know if it's a ghost, as you called it, but it still bothers me. I've been with this program since 1982, and every so often something comes up...we know our people better than anyone else...President Begaye said, let us be part of that, let us join hands and be true partners, and establish some mechanism that will allow us to feed our people the healthy food they used to eat. Thank you.

Lt. Gov. Keel: One thing I wanted to clarify—and I want to thank Red for that...one thing you spoke about was 1 million American Indians are on SNAP. They are not there by choice. They are there because they live in urban areas...they live in areas where there's more than 25 or 30,000 people, so they have no choice but to get on the SNAP program. If Tribes could "638" these programs...we could overcome that, and we could then administer the program and deliver the foods to our people, regardless of whether they were in these areas. That's one thing we could make an instant improvement. Thank you for that, for your commitment to the program. We're going to talk a little about the quality of the food package itself, but first I want to ask if the leaders have anything to add—Mister President?

President Begaye: Thank you, Undersecretary. We do have a great need for upgrading our facilities. On Navajo nation—it's half the size of Georgia, and Deputy Secretary Hardin were here, she'd understand how large that is. Roads are inaccessible, so we deliver lots of items out to the elders who live in rural/remote areas. A lot of those vehicles are breaking down, they are old. And people talk about loading food up in the beds of trucks and taking it out there, to the people. So upgrading our facilities, replacing the fleet of vehicles that make those deliveries, walk in coolers/freezers—and if you would really push for that, because a lot of our people, they don't have electricity or running water. They still use this program. They live in hogans, with dirt floors. And they need to pick up the produce from a cooler or a freezer to take it home and then use it within a few days, to be able to consume it. So when you go to Capital Hill, go to bat for our people. Especially the remote areas of our reservations.

Undersecretary Conannon: I should mention that we're mindful of that...I've seen facilities, and as more opportunities for proteins come along, it puts pressure on warehouses where they could or should have cooling capacities...the budget being considered tomorrow has an additional \$5 million included on the administrative side...that's the estimated administrative cost, and this is the first increase in the administrative budget in I don't know how many years—maybe ten or fifteen? So we're asking for an additional \$5 million, and it won't solve everything, but it's a start. Congress looks at all these things, and they look especially at the administrative

costs for FDIR, because it is the highest administrative costs of any of our programs, I will tell you.

Lt. Gov. Keel: Thank you, and on that point, I would ask for a short break, because I think we're at that point.

[short break]

Undersecretary Concannon: I think the President's comments, that we need to institutionalize some of these practices, is very well taken. We're in the last ten months or so of this administration. Who knows—I worry with what I see on television lately—but I'm hopeful that we have a continuation of those commitments. I appreciate and hear what you're saying. It would very good for us. We have interaction with our advisory group, but it may be more important to have interaction with Tribal leaders like you.

I do want to bring your attention to a chart we included in the packet today [Editor's Note: he is referring to the chart of funding and participation over time]. So, that's why I got a little edge in my voice there with Red... I have no time for that whatsoever because I'm deeply opposed to it. I'm very opposed to block-granting, period. And when Mr. Ryan, or others in Congress, talk about it, I see what a disaster that's been... so there's no consideration of that from me... I did appreciate the comments on Native foods. We are asking for in this budget the \$5 million for Native foods, but also for another \$2 million over and above that, to explore additional ways on the Native foods side. What else can we do... a few years ago, we had funding authorized for Native foods, and we granted a contract for Bison, but the company was unable to deliver. So, we got burned in that regard...

But the carryover. The request we have is to increase from one year to two years, and—we don't like the carryover either—this would allow you to carry forward for two years, because when you're in the middle of a contract, this would help. So there are some fixes to some of the problems that were raised earlier. The larger question was finding ways we can institutionalize without running into a FACA... that's really torture, if we can avoid finding ourselves in the middle of a FACA requirement—I don't want to have to deal with that, or have future administrators deal with it, but if we do something informally that delineates the roles of Tribal leaders versus FDIR. We don't want the NACDPIR leaders to disagree with Tribal leaders... Tribal leaders would have to trump the NACDPIR program.

Lt. Gov. Keel: I think if the Tribal leaders want it, and that's what's expressed, then the programs are their responsive. Just like in the federal government, you do what you're mandated to do. I believe a Tribal Leader Consultation Working Group is absolutely essential in my estimation. We can provide all the needed materials or support you need in terms of FACA requirements. We understand that, we've been working with that—especially in DOI and HHS and other agencies. So it's not really a challenge for Tribal leaders.

Undersecretary Concannon: I can't commit for the rest of USDA. I'd be talking about FNS, and indirectly, AMS, but I can't commit for them either... I would want to be clear, if there are concerns or issues with RD, or the Farm Agency that does more traditional ag—

Lt. Gov. Keel: Tribal leaders can work with all of those.

Undersecretary Concannon: We'll have to figure out a way to do it.

Lt. Gov. Keel: Thank you, Mr. Secretary... even the leadership of this agency is going to change, but the career staff aren't—they will still be here. ... Thank you. And in the essence of time, we did want to talk about the quality of the food package, and we've asked Jamie to go over that.

Jamie Simms Hipp: Thank you, Lieutenant Governor. And as my Lieutenant Governor, I do what he tells me to do! [laughter] I think I got the hardest assignment today, because the science behind the food package is very technical. And it's very difficult—but it's very important. Before I launch into that I want to share with you all that what we are seeing here today is also evidence of a groundswell within Indian Country writ large around health, around traditional foods, around food and ag writ large. The whole purpose of our initiative is to assist Tribal governments and food businesses and communities around food issues... but predominantly, our requests for assistance are around traditional foods. Why is that? It is obviously very bound up in who we are as different peoples, but it is also a very cultural and spiritual issue to us as well. But on by the way what the science is now showing us is that our traditional foods are healthier for us. I have been on my own personal journey and lost fifty pounds after I left the Department... it was depending on a diet of pretty much all traditional foods. That's what I cut down to. I can tell a difference when I slide off of that. So the package itself is not traditional foods. It's other foods. I am very familiar with the efforts made, particularly in this administration, to get more fruits and vegetables and really make this a healthier package. So our science advisors now are telling us that there's a lot more yet to be done in that space. There's a constant need to improve what is in the package. I brought this [Editor's Note: she refers to a can of commodity beef] but I'm not going to open it. But I think everyone here needs to open this and try to cook with it from time to time, and understand that this is so far from a traditional food that I don't even know what to say about that.

What our scientists are showing us now—and we are blessed to be connected with two of the many who will hopefully help us be in this space in a better way—is that they have deconstructed the food package items to compare what's in the package with what dietary and traditional needs are for a population in Indian Country who are already experiencing chronic levels of diabetes, heart disease, suicide—things I can't even talk about because they're so painful. Thinking of bringing the science glasses onto this package in a prevention way—that's not what we're talking about. We're talking about epidemic levels of disease. And if you don't calibrate your package in a way that brings those levels down, then you may inadvertently, with good intentions, put exactly what doesn't need to be in that package, or be favoring items that make things worse. So what we're asking... is that this consultation group of Tribal leadership actually have within its purview—and to us this could roll out in any number of ways, this is just one idea... but the creation of a science panel that, like a hazel bean, looks at this particular package with this particular population. Because what is happening in the scientific literature is there is so much of an increase of attention paid to traditional diets in general, but also the chronic and epidemic levels of disease within Indian Country's population at every age group. I would share with you one example of that heightened attention. American Heart Association,

Robert Woods Johnson Foundation, Mazon, Voices for Healthy Kids, these folks and a team of fifty to one hundred foundations are coming together at a nutrition science conference this year, just to focus on Indian health issues, and the makeup of our diets, so, just bear with me briefly as I hit some high points. You will realize very quickly that I'm not a scientist. We didn't want to turn this into a science meeting, but scientists are here.

Traditional diets are very healthy. They are very focused around Omega 3s, versus the Omega 6s the package is heavy on—so much so that if you look on a bar chart, it is four to five times heavier on Omega 6s than Omega 3s. It's harder to deal with, and it exacerbates chronic conditions. It affects issues like diabetes, heart disease, liver disease, kidney disease, cancer. And if you go into the mental health arena—and Kevin, I share your experience and I have block grants, because I watched it tear apart this nation's mental health system, and I'm so thankful you're so passionately committed to not going there—but the data we see from all public sources underestimates the nutrients of traditional foods, and when you get into the numbers and the scientific, microbiological, technical analysis, it overestimates the value of commodity foods.

These issues are too complicated to unpack today at this table. They need the attention of land grants, who are partners in nutrition to USDA. But we are asking they come out through a panel, we are asking that you all would open up your minds as to how the package is determined, because what we believe is that there does need—it's time to recalibrate. Things change over time. We know more. We are all willing. Tribal leadership and the scientists... to be full partners with you all to figure out where the science pieces are. We don't believe you have all the information you need to make best decisions about what to buy. Tribal leadership and Tribal food companies and the people who serve on the front lines of feeding our people, they see the difference traditional foods can make. They don't see it in the package. It's healthier than in the past, but it needs to absorb what the science is saying about us as Native people. Lieutenant Governor, Governor, President—did I miss anything?

Lt. Gov. Keel: If you did, I don't know—it's way over my head! [Laughter] With microbiology and those things, I tend to get lost. But the idea, Mister Secretary, is we want to include this in these discussions in this working group we're talking about, a separate panel, or a subcommittee, or however we want to call it. We could work with technical experts here at USDA and FNS to see about improvements. We understand these changes won't be made overnight. The system, the procurement system takes time. We understand all of that. But if we can start to make changes we can take a step forward. It's going to take time. We understand these things take time. But we believe that the emergency exists in Indian Country, and for the future of our children, and our families, we need to get this started, and I think the working group would be a positive step in that direction.

Gov. Mountain: In regards to the scientific information, it is very important to point out that in past discussions, where it hasn't been formal, or in this setting, we haven't been able to hit home how that impacts Indian Country. As we discussed yesterday, I think what I would like to hit on is that we are prepared to have meaningful discussion with your staff. I appreciate the passion, because it's reflective of our passion... it's very important to try to better understand what we're asking for. On that premise, we have done our homework... some things that were frightening with the scientific data has come up is—these are peer-reviewed journals where this

information comes from. The important thing about that, obviously, is we want to make sure that we have a better understanding of what your information is... whether it's traditional food or non-traditional, the fact remains that the type of food we're consuming is really adding to the issues we're having in Indian Country.

For instance, we talk about Type II Diabetes, and as many know, combating diabetes with these sorts of packages, and the values that really aren't up to par, we believe really accelerates the epidemic in Indian Country. It adds to liver disease issues in Indian Country. Some of the information that has come across, that heart disease, cancer, kidney disease, arthritis, depression, anxiety, poor performance in school, these plague our communities. And how do we start to turn that around? It starts with these discussions. And with stressing the importance of this working group. Just to continue to reassure you all—I'm tired of my people killing themselves, whether with an actual weapon or with food or drugs and alcohol—it has to stop. I am tired of that happening in my community, and I'm tired of seeing it in Indian Country. These are the sorts of things the scientific evidence is really helping for me to have a lot more of a platform to stand on, and have an educated, thorough discussion. I hope we are able to get the right people in place.

...if we talk about fiscal responsibility, also, we want to talk about responsibility to good health, and the health and welfare of Indian Country in general... appreciate your position, Undersecretary, regarding the SNAP issue, but that's a perfect example that lends to this discussion. There's a lot of misinformation out there, misperceptions that are not true. To be able to better understand these things is even more of a reason for us to implement this working group. We could go on and on with regards to the science, but I think this encompasses the issues we're faced with in Indian Country. All the evidence we have goes to my statement. I can't afford to lose any more of my people to these atrocities. It's time to turn that around. I ask if you all to establish the working group.

Undersecretary Conannon: I appreciate your statement of challenges... I'd be interested in those references to those journal articles. There are challenges well beyond FDIPIR in terms of the American food supply, and the food world. We eat more processed food than any country in the world. To the extent these articles focus on the impacts of FDIPIR, we'd be very interested. We just completed the Dietary Guidelines for All Americans. Those are not intended to address specific diseases, it's very preventative... we had huge pushback from cattle, meat, people who don't even want to hear the word sustainable, sustainability. So you appreciate the deep politics when talking about these things. We recognize we have preventable health problems in the total population, but disproportionately so in Indian Country, and we don't want to be enabling that. We want to be on the plus side of that equation if we can. I'm very open to an institutionalized way to have that exchange. Let us figure out some recommendations on how we might incorporate that. As you've noted these things take time. It takes many months, from my point of view.

Gov. Mountain: Undersecretary, we—based on a letter in August, we formulated this, and we'll continue to work off that document if you all will continue to recognize that. What I've seen is what you've mentioned in increased funding and advocacy for that on the Hill—it's taken into consideration some of the issues we've raised, and I do appreciate that. We plan on leaving a

I have behind packet to highlight the discussion and the research that our team has done, and I have a tremendous amount of confidence in the work they've put forth.

Jamie: If you'd like, Governor and Lieutenant Governor, and President—we could continue to work with the scientific advisors we have, and put forth more detailed documents so you can see what we're looking at. I don't think anybody has to send a FACCA to look at documents that are in journals. So I think continuing to build out that portfolio, if you will, of science-based data that will tear apart the issues we're uncovering would be helpful.

Undersecretary: We have a lot of interaction with the CDC, the American Heart Institute, the best federal scientists available to us, as well as all the universities we work with, so we're interested in seeing this—but we want to run it through the national centers of expertise and ask what they think of this research, to see if it would mitigate...for example, we're looking right now at the failure of city and state governments in Flint, Michigan, where a whole community has been put purposefully poisoned...there are certain foods that can mitigate lead poisoning...if you eat certain foods, it's more likely to have a benefit of mitigating or binding that lead. But it's not the strongest science. But at this point, given the damage that's been done, that's the kind of thing we're looking at. We're saying, what's the scientific basis of that? In our WIC program, we're saying, instead of a powder for infant formula, we're using a formula that's been done by the state, the county, the city. So we're very interested in using science in the best way possible. We get it. We understand. We have major problems.

Gov. Mountain: If I may, Undersecretary, we've taken the opportunity to express our concerns. I hope you all have found that in our concerns, we offer solutions. We look to be a partner, on the premise of government-to-government discussions. We do have other avenues to be able to assist us in this process, where we've learned on the BIA and HHS side. That being said, help us understand—who can we talk with? Because as Lieutenant Governor Keel and our leadership have said, we'd like to be able to have these discussions very, very soon, and we have asked for a March 15th date to be realized, because the window of opportunity is closing. I know Deputy Secretary Harnden said she would be leaving. Who do we work with and through and continue dialogue with to get that meeting in place in next few weeks?

Undersecretary Concannon: I think it's difficult to have a meeting between now and March 15th. We're in the high season of budget hearings...that isn't going to happen, realistically. But I certainly am willing to take the message to the Secretary—he's unable to be here today. I'm willing to put a practical way here—but we can't have the FOPR Food Advisory Group [Editor's Note: he refers here to the Food Package Review Working Group, which is composed in part of NAADPR Board Members and FNS employees]...we can't have them making recommendations, and Tribal leaders making different recommendations. If we're going to go forward with this, then the Tribal leaders will turn their voice...it [the Food Package Review Working Group] won't be the dominant voice anymore. I'm sure you'll consult with them, so it's not one or the other. Let us take what we've heard...I also have written communications of Tribal Chairman Harold Frazier and I'll pass this along. I will try to come up with a response to you as soon as possible. Within a number of weeks, not months. I recognize just as you said, we have at least in our case ten months or so, as has already been expressed. If we don't convene and actually

have meetings, it's just words. So do we have the meetings in Indian Country? That's probably preferable. We don't really have a travel budget, so we have to figure out how to accommodate such meetings and how to incorporate scientific issues here. I'm not inclined to create a separate organization on that front, but it needs to be under the aegis of this advisory group. You've given us a lot of substantive input here. Let us think about it, recognizing we need to give you a prompt response, in weeks not months. I don't want to be held to the 15th of March. I'm very committed, but we'll probably have to talk to other folks, too.

Gov. Mountain: That's excellent. I do appreciate you giving us a very clear idea of where things stand and what we can expect. We will follow up, we will have that leave behind and we will follow up with a letter recognizing the meeting today, and what we'd like to see moving forward.

Chairwoman Roxanne Sazue: I want to say thank you for allowing the leaders to come today. Some readings have been passed down to me; I need to pass them on too, otherwise it gets lost since the beginning of time, the whole problem has always been that there was never, ever, ever adequate funding. Ever. All the federal programs are trying to play catch-up, if you will. Along the way there's increases in everything. The economy. It's like anything we say, anything we drink, there's toxins there that are not good for us.

One of the things that I want to say thank you for is: I gave you the letter from Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe, which is my mother's tribe. They were unable to attend today but I wanted to make sure that I would be coming today to this historic meeting, and there are nine nations in just the state of South Dakota alone: the Dakota, Lakota, Nakota peoples. I want to acknowledge the Navajo Nation, and tell them that to me, you're setting precedents. To let us know you have the ability to grow your own food, and to me? That's sovereign. To me, that means a lot. So keep South Dakota in mind there! [laughter]

There are strength in numbers. Had we known you were going to the Hill tomorrow, that affects us in Indian Country. We could have brought you our statistics, our unmet needs. I really feel that is vital to all of us. Because we all have that responsibility, if you will, in our jobs that we do to serve. And if we don't have what it takes—the numbers—then someone gets left out and that's not what we want to do to represent the people. So I thank all the other leaders for coming, and for sharing your knowledge. I want to thank USDA for all that you do for Indian Country. And also, I wouldn't be doing my job as a mother—my son is blessed to work in the food distribution program back home, and he said, "Mom, when you go there, tell them: we need more meat!" So son, I did my job! [laughter] We like meat, we are meat eaters. We have the toronka, the buffalo, you know. I just want to give you thanks for allowing me to speak.

But when we talk about our bodies, this is all we have, this is it. We need to always be mindful about what we put into our bodies, what we eat and drink. The toxins that are out there—this is our castle, we have to take care of it. Some of us have diabetes and all the other things that affect us. It's important. The medications we take? To live? We take it for our heart, but then it attacks the other organs in our body. A lot of the time we're not consciously aware. But I thank you. It's really important that we educate and reeducate ourselves on the nutritional facts, on the water, how sacred the water is, without water we cannot live. We take a lot of things for

granted. We always think it's going to be there. If we don't take care of it—the land, the soil, we have to be mindful of these things because that's what we need to survive.

So with that, the Crow Creek Tribe says [speaking Dakota] for allowing us to come, because we are playing catch up. There's never enough funding for these programs, but we need to eat. I am very thankful for these programs, because I too ate commodities. I am not ashamed to say that. That was how we survived...so I ate 'em, and I survived.

Allize Brown: I want to echo what others are saying, and the message we're bringing. I think about my people. Our tribe is located right on the outline of the Pacific. We have rivers and lush forest lands. We salmon, elk, deer, bear, halibut, berries, roots, and we hunted for whale...that's in our DNA. So, so is high blood pressure, cancer, and alcoholism... I want to feed my children and my grandchildren the foods that are in their DNA... So it is because of meetings like this and the willingness to meet with Tribal nations that I say thank you.

Chairman Vernon Miller: It's certainly important, in terms of the labeling and the science in the food package that's provided, because for the majority of our communities this is their only source of food. Our elders are on limited fixed incomes, and there's high unemployment rates in our communities... when our families are only reliant on FDIPIR, that's the only form of sustenance, and it's not as healthy as it could be... it's still at a level that still needs to be improved on.

In my community, as small as we are, we have a dialysis center, because so many of our community members are on dialysis. ... Now, our community also has a nursing home to care for the elders, because of their diet... I wanted to point that out, because that evidence of how important that food that's being provided is. It really has to be at a level that supports a diet that is healthy for our communities. I'm happy to hear the other Tribal leaders, and now they use their Tribal economies and food sources. We do have a Tribal farm, and we are expanding. We are now farming on our Iowa side, and are expanding to 1500 acres. We do sell those to the regional area, but we don't have the infrastructure to resell to our communities. Because one year it's corn, one year it's not. I'm sure those here from USDA understand those yields. I just want to echo those, and I too am thankful, but also eager to know that this is the beginning of future consultations and opportunities to have this type of dialogue.

My congressman is on Appropriations, and I just had a meeting with him. I could have talked about the budgetary items. I could have assisted in that process. I could have spent five minutes to talk about budgetary needs, and the ways the communities need to improve. We need to use each other as a resource. I would have loved to have advocated on USDA's behalf for all these issues... and now that I know, at future meetings, I can do that... This group should work in collaboration with the staff here to ensure that Tribal needs and issues are addressed, and that we work together. I know you can't lobby, but we can. Thank you for this dialogue.

Representative Kenny Baker, Jr.: Good morning, and thank you for meeting with us. We have come long ways. As I was pondering on this process that we've been through—our first meeting in June, and now today, we have a chance to make history with this meeting. For once, it is up to us now with this information that we bring. Last meeting, I know it was a thorn... I'm happy

to hear you asked for an increase of \$5 million. I'm glad it didn't fall on deaf ears, because as Lt. Gov. Keel said, we get lip service a lot. For a long time, our relationship with USDA hasn't been good. In our region we had some struggles. Nationally—the lawsuit, with the farmers, for Native Americans. Also at the national level.

So I thank you for your commitment to Indian Country, because when we come here, for a lot of us, it's hard. We're not that fortunate to afford to come every few months. Smaller tribes aren't here, they depend on us as we come out here to speak. And as we go through the different changes in our programs. Our program—we just actually moved to a new facility. Our participation has increased 93% over the last year. We had to move, because we had people standing outside to get food. So as we worked with USDA on a grant or a loan, which fell through... that was probably nice horses the Tribe could have build for our people.

But because of the importance of food, we had to get this building renovated. We have a unique program, the only one in the country: our SNAP program and our food distribution program are in one building. We are trying to build on this. We understand that Tribes don't get a word in the educational funding that the states receive through SNAP. Our local office didn't even know funds were available. Our state, North Dakota, had a carryover of 43%... which is about \$100,000 carried over. And on expanding our services—because of our... what we thought was good on the food products compared to SNAP—it is to continue our partnership with SNAP and improve services for both places, because we know how much problems the SNAP people have—they are buying a lot of warm-up stuff.

Diabetes and dialysis—we send our people to three facilities within the surrounding communities. The farthest one is ninety miles away, and our people get up at 6am and drive two hours to get to their dialysis. I come from—we have four districts in our tribe—my district has the most diabetics in it. And a lot of them are FDIPIR clients, and they rely heavily on these foods. We talk about this at council level—hunger is a big issue. When we think about it, it makes me sad. Because we have kids at home that don't get to eat every day. This is hard. It gets me emotional. What we take for granted, our kids—our staff at our schools know what kids they are, because they don't like it when they get breaks, because they can't eat until they come back to school. This is a major concern. As a country, we have this issue.

I know we want to talk about this consultation committee. A lot of the stuff we bring to you today, and have before this, has come from our FDIPIR directors and managers. So when I hear you talk about us... sampling them—we work with our programs, and the information we brought today and will continue to bring are suggestions from our managers. Without them, we wouldn't be here today bringing these issues forth. I don't think we have issues with that—they pressed their concerns onto us, and we push the issues ahead.

Funding. Big issues. A lot of our places are very fortunate to have facilities, but some aren't so fortunate. One thing I see the government does all the time is put money out there and say, "Let the Tribes fight for it." And you lose the sense of what they're going for. I think with the work ethic that we have, pushing this forward, we need to stop that. We need to try to secure the right amount of funding. Because as Chairwoman—

Chairwoman Sazue: [pronouncing her name] Sazue.

Rep. Baker, Jr.: Sazue, I have to say it right, she is my elder. As Chairwoman Sazue said, the programs are starting to catch back up, as we see across Indian Country. IHS, BIA, law enforcement—they are funded at 49%. IHS is underfunded. As we see increases finally starting to come, for some of our people, it's too late. For some of us, we hope we can still make that change. I'd like to thank USDA, the Undersecretary, the Secretary, for giving me this time to come and voice my concerns. I wouldn't my people due diligence if I didn't speak. So I'd like to thank you.

Undersecretary Concanon: Thank you very much. Let me just say, I tend to view and my work colleagues view, other feeding programs that aren't expressly targeted at Native Americans, as still available to Native Americans. So, schoolchildren for example, we know that summer time is the time a child is most likely to be hungry. We've been pushing very hard for more summer places, but I know in Indian Country there are still places that don't provide that. So it's the kind of choice that perhaps Tribal leaders, we can use this dialogue on an ongoing basis as a way of asking if you're taking advantage of that. There's no cap on it, it's not a budget issue. It's just a matter of finding organizations across the country and in Indian Country that can offer these summer programs. Again, as a way of impacting those circumstances you mentioned, I look forward to that as a way forward, apart from FDIR. Some of our strongest operators of WIC are tribes... so I don't limit it, the main focus is on FDIR, but we can make you aware of these things and you can feed back to us concerns, issues, to make it more accessible, we're more than open to that. Thank you.

Deputy Undersecretary Katie Wilson: Do you operate any summer feeding programs or the At Risk after school program?

Rep. Baker, Jr.: The summer one we do have, but the other one you said? What was it?

Deputy Undersecretary Wilson: At Risk? We can give you more information...

Tribal Secretary Aaron Otto: Thank you. I grew up on commodities. I know how important they are to our communities to feed us and to get us through hard times. Where I'm going now isn't directly related to that, but I'm a diabetic, I became diabetic when I was the age of 20. And I'm 37 now, but at this point in my life, the diabetes has really taken its toll on my body. I have problems walking, I'm going blind. And so the food, the things I put into my body, have become very important to me to make sure that I'm eating the right things.

I recently took a tour of our distribution facility and some things I saw, I thought were amazing. The fruits and vegetables and the things that are available to give to people. That's great. But I also saw things like our ground beef, it appears to be grain fed and I'd prefer it be grass fed beef because I know there's more Omega 3s in that beef, and it's better for my people. I walked around and saw the cartons of milk that are 1% nonfat. Studies are showing that nonfat milk is not good for you, and if you want to drink milk, you need full fat Vitamin D milk to get proper nutrition. I switched to full fat about 4-5 years ago and noticed a different right away. Full fat yogurt, all that. Stopped doing low fat. You do low fat they add something else...

Some of the things I asked when I walked in there, I had concerns. Why don't we have—I'm still figuring out the program—why don't we purchase from our own farm? We have a farm. Why wouldn't we want to move toward purchasing from our own farm? Why wouldn't USDA want us to do that? I don't think you don't want us to, I think there's not a good avenue to do that at this time. Our people eat fish, we have a fishery. That fishery produces white fish. But we can't purchase that to hand it out. It's a traditional food for us, it's what my people lived on. The same with wild rice, the *memormen*. It's very important to us with protein and nutrition. It's better than rice, quinoa, or any other grain we could be eating. Wild rice—just—the nutrition in that is better than anything else. Why don't we have that? I understand, there's red tape to be able to do that. But I think that's the most important thing, is for us to have access. It's echoing what others have said: have those traditional foods available that our people ate. Because it's in us, it's in our genes. And we need access to that. I say jokingly sometimes after seeing the science, and all of that—and growing up on commodities myself, I joked about it yesterday a bit, but—it's genocide via food. The things that are helping us in turn are killing us. It's prolonging it, in my view. And I know it sounds more negative than some of the other things that people have said, but some foods are contributing to the mental health and the physical health of our people and we need to correct that... this meeting is getting us in that direction. So I want to say thank you.

Gov. Mountain: I know that Lieutenant Governor Keel had to leave, but are there any closing statements, or thoughts? I've heard you, and I believe, and we are thankful, obviously, for you and for your staff to be here and to listen to our concerns. And hopefully you've heard these concerns. As you've mentioned, they have substance. This is only the very beginning to a partnership that needs to be institutionalized, as President Begaye has said. It's very important. So I yield to you, Mister Concanon.

Undersecretary Concanon: Thank you all again for coming... these are, as has been so well expressed... these are issues of life and death, literally in the lives of people, as we've just heard. So we're very committed to both do as much as we can in the feeding nutrition programs to be of direct help, not just to provide calories, but to support people with foods that are healthy. Folks mentioned seeing produce, that's a change we've made during this administration. We've connected to DOD, and we piggyback on their contracts to get produce out to parts of country, like as an example, that didn't have access to those foods because of travel, logistics, roads or lack thereof. We know there are many, many challenges in the communities you speak for and represent. We want to be a positive force in terms of our food programs, in terms of impacting those lives... we want to be sure that committee will continue after the political appointees are gone. The senior career people are very committed. We've made adjustments in FDIR, getting it out of for example... the asset limit that kept people out of the program. These rare changes we've made to respond to challenges that households who have some assets have. Some of the increase that has occurred has been more advantageous for individuals in Indian Country than SNAP is, and we're pleased that those choices are out there. It is the rare example, where you can only be on one or the other. WIC, as I mentioned earlier, is one of our strongest public health programs, and a number of Tribal organizations across the country run it directly. They are very supportive and we're very pleased with that. They get nutrition education funds as well associated with that. So we think, we believe, that to be very, very important as well.

So we'll take these concerns, weigh them, speak with other policymakers in this building for examples. We'll get back to you in a period of weeks about going forward. I accept and believe in what has been stated by President Begaye, that whatever we do, we do it in a way that is institutionalized, so it's not subject to whatever occurs next November and beyond in terms of the new administration, so that when they come in they get a briefing that says, we're committed to the following venues...

On the science piece, I'm very interested, but I need a series of scientists looking at that. I know on the milk, that view is a view in some quarters, but it is not shared across the board. The Dietary Guidelines that were just promulgated take the low-fat view, for example. So I want to thank you all for coming here and your investment in expressing needed views to us, and I speak for the Secretary and the Deputy Secretary and Mister Scuse...thank you all for being here, thank you CTR for helping, to Jamie Hipp, our alumnus from Arkansas, for helping as well. We look forward to next step and wish you all safe travels. We hope to see you out there. Hope to see you as we travel as well.

President Begaye: I want to express our appreciation also, and your tentative commitment to look at the consultation group—we appreciate it. To work with what time remains, that's important to us as a legacy the current President has put in place. We support it wholeheartedly, particularly for us to be able to process, produce, and manufacture food products in our own regions. [...]