Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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CATOOSA, Oklahoma, November 6, 2019 – The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) today signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to improve tribes' and tribal members' access to farm conservation programs to advance conservation in Indian Country. The MOU was signed in Catoosa, Oklahoma, where USDA Under Secretary for Farm Production and Conservation Bill Northey was joined by BIA Director Darryl LaCounte at the Indian Nations Conservation Alliance - National Tribal Conservation Districts Conference. This MOU signing represents the Trump Administration's continued commitment to Indian Country.

The MOU enables USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and Farm Service Agency (FSA) to partner with BIA to improve assistance to American Indians and Alaska Natives in identifying and addressing the agricultural, conservation and economic needs of tribal communities on Indian lands. This creates a foundation for improved coordination, training, planning and implementation of USDA programs on tribal lands.

"We believe that providing greater efficiency and access to conservation programs, while limiting redundancies, is crucial to helping tribal communities maximize their agricultural production," Northey said. "Tribal landowners and land users play an important role in the management of agricultural land, and USDA looks forward to partnering with BIA to support the economic stability of tribal lands."

"The BIA, NRCS, and FSA have common objectives and trust responsibility to American Indian landowners and Tribes for development, conservation and sustainable use of natural resources. "said LaCounte. "We look forward to continued communication and collaboration to help ensure conservation programs are implemented on Indian lands in an environmentally, culturally, and economically sound manner."

The five-year agreement will also enhance USDA and BIA's efforts to promote best management practices for Indian lands, including the development of rural business opportunities, the management of farm and ranching operations, infrastructure development and stewardship of environmental, cultural and natural resources on Indian lands.

BIA will provide resource inventory, planning and management, and development assistance to Indian tribes, Indian landowners and land users.

FSA will work with BIA to provide outreach that builds awareness of FSA programs to support economic stability and increase the availability of farm loans to tribal communities. NRCS and BIA will work to provide conservation planning and technical and financial assistance to farmers, ranchers and forest managers to maintain, conserve and improve natural resources on private, Indian and other non-federal lands.

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