

Indian Country Priorities and Opportunities for the 2023 Farm Bill Title VI: Rural Development

Key Points and Recommendations

- Nearly 80,000 Tribal producers are operating on over 59 million acres of land and generating over \$3.5 billion in economic activity, yet Tribal entities are often under included or have difficulty accessing Rural Development (RD) programs.
- RD programs and funding can help Indian Country in areas such as broadband programs, housing programs, wastewater/sewer programs, rural business programs, and more.

Background Information and Context

From 2001 to 2018, USDA Rural Development invested more than \$6.2 billion in Indian Country, with \$3 billion invested through housing and community facilities programs, \$415 million through rural business and cooperative programs, and \$2.8 billion through rural utilities programs. However, it took nearly two decades for Indian Country to see just a fraction of what RD invested across the country in just one fiscal year: in FY2020, RD's investments in rural communities totaled nearly \$40 billion. Indian Country cannot continue to be left behind in rural investment opportunities. Tribes and intertribal organizations like IAC and NCAI have consistently highlighted multiple places where improvements in the Farm Bill, through the Rural Development Title, would enable RD to invest more heavily in Indian Country.

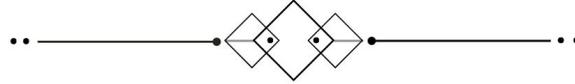
Opportunities for Indian Country in the Rural Development Title

Implement SUTA provisions throughout all Rural Development programs and Expand SUTA-eligible land definitions

- Existing loans can be refinanced through SUTA, but implementing SUTA provisions across the broad array of RD loans, loan guarantees, and grants would provide important support to tribal citizens living in remote, rural, isolated communities who are in dire need of the impact of RD programs.
- Amend the definition of trust lands to include tribal fee lands as eligible for SUTA.

Create Tribal Rural Development Set-Aside

- Create a total Tribal set-aside in all RD funding authorities to address the inadequacy and general lack of infrastructure in Indian Country, with at least 20% of all rural broadband projects supporting Native communities.



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Maintain the Under Secretary for Rural Development Position

- Having an Under Secretary whose primary duties are to focus on RD programs and funding is critical for Indian Country and rural America, and this position should be maintained.

Uplift Rural America By Supporting Native CDFIs Loan Authority

- Due to prohibitive requirements placed on CDFIs to access loan authority, only the largest CDFIs can secure any meaningful funding levels. If a process were to be developed to allow small, new, and emerging CDFIs access to this valuable tool, it would greatly increase Indian Country access to RD loan authorities.

Extend rural electric loan and Grant Program Authority to CDFIs

- Rural electric cooperatives are uniquely poised to be economic development drivers in their communities. Often, they choose not to avail themselves of this opportunity. In cases where a rural electric cooperative chooses not to participate in this program in the past, local CDFIs should have the opportunity to carry out the function.

Implement the Tribal Technical Assistance Office

- The 2018 Farm Bill created this office but it has yet to be implemented. This office could provide much-needed technical support for Tribes as well as clear up confusion inside RD about Tribal business structures, which currently often keep Tribes from accessing RD funds.