



United States Department of Agriculture

Office of the Secretary  
Washington, D.C. 20250

February 2007

Dear Colleague:

Secretary of Agriculture Mike Johanns and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) have made it a priority to work with tribal governments, individual tribal members, and Alaskan Natives to ensure that members of these groups benefit fully from the numerous USDA programs available to them. Accordingly, USDA has developed *American Indians and Alaska Natives: A Guide to USDA Programs* for use by American Indian and Alaska Native tribal leaders and members, planners, community leaders, producers, and others who wish to utilize USDA programs in their work with members of their respective communities.

USDA programs span a wide range of areas, including food safety; international trade; housing; rural development; energy; telecommunications; food marketing; school lunches; women's, infants', and children's nutrition; food distribution centers; crop insurance; farmers' markets; animal and plant health; and farm loans, in addition to many other areas. Thus, I encourage you to be innovative in thinking about how you can best utilize USDA's diverse resources to better serve your community and to help USDA assist you in achieving your goals.

An excellent example of innovative thinking was shown recently by University of Montana personnel who worked with tribal leaders and staff members of USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service to create a brief videotape on food preparation and food safety. The video, which has been shown at pow-wows, stomp dances, community meetings, and many other events, helps build awareness of safe food preparation techniques and proper methods of food handling at large gatherings. Many other examples of innovative use of USDA programs exist, and it is my sincere hope that this *Guide* will help inspire the development of a great many more.

Special thanks are due the members of the USDA Native American Working Group for their contributions to the *Guide* and to interns Jacqueline Beckel and Vanessa Chicharello for their outstanding help in its development. A special "thank you" also goes to the Intertribal Agriculture Council for its assistance with the project.

Again, thank you for your interest in the *Guide*. I hope you will find it an informative and helpful resource.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Patrick Atagi", written over a horizontal line.

Patrick Atagi  
Director  
Office of Native American Programs