

**Congress of the United States**  
Washington, D.C. 20515

May 16, 2025

The Honorable Mike Simpson  
Chair  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and  
Related Agencies  
Committee on Appropriations  
2007 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Chellie Pingree  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and  
Related Agencies  
Committee on Appropriations  
1036 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chair Simpson and Ranking Member Pingree:

As you and your colleagues begin work on the Fiscal Year (FY) 2026 Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies appropriations bill, we respectfully request that the Committee direct the Department of Interior to work with Indian Tribes to establish a pilot program under the National Seed Strategy within the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

Seed banks play a crucial role in revitalizing indigenous food systems, preserving traditional crops and knowledge for future generations. This pilot program, crucial for preserving Indigenous agricultural practices, will identify and safeguard traditional Native American seeds. The Secretary of the Interior, in consultation with Indian Tribes, will use a pilot program to determine which seeds are Native American, recognize the efforts of Indian Tribes in protecting such seeds, and support existing Native American seed banks and related facilities. For example, the Tesuque Seed Bank and the Cherokee National Seed Bank are critical for preserving native seeds and agricultural biodiversity for these Indian Tribes. Both seed banks have focused on maintaining and restoring the genetic diversity of crops that have sustained Native American communities for generations. They play a key role in safeguarding heirloom crops that are integral to indigenous diets and farming practices. Expanding seed bank opportunities through a pilot program will allow more Tribal Nations to preserve their heritage.

The National Seed Strategy, launched by the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Interior in 2015, is a comprehensive interagency plan highlighting the necessity of preserving plant biodiversity to ensure the resilience of food systems against environmental stresses. The strategy recognizes the unique role of this preservation effort. Native American communities

have faced significant challenges in protecting their traditional agricultural systems due to a history of displacement, land loss, and cultural erasure.

Furthermore, the positive impact of funding a pilot program in tribal communities across the United States is immense. These communities are disproportionately affected by the effects of droughts, wildfires, and shifting growing seasons. This pilot program will contribute to food security by ensuring that tribal communities can access resilient crops and will strengthen local economies by promoting sustainable agriculture.

As stewards of the land, Native American tribes have the knowledge and historical connection to the land, enabling them to lead efforts in restoring and managing their agricultural systems. By supporting Seed Banks, we empower tribes to take control of their food systems, increase their self-reliance, and protect their cultural heritage for future generations.

This pilot program is not just a standalone initiative, but a strategic alignment with broader goals outlined in the Indian Agriculture Resource Management Act (IARMA) (Public Law 103-177) and the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act (ISDEAA) (Public Law 93-638). These laws encourage self-governance and community-based solutions for food security and natural resource management. By prioritizing investments in tribal agriculture and natural resource management, we can affirm the importance of preserving Indigenous knowledge and supporting communities in their efforts to safeguard their traditions and ways of life.

We appreciate your consideration of this request and your continued support for Native American communities and their efforts to ensure a sustainable future.

Sincerely,



Norma J. Torres  
Member of Congress



Doug LaMalfa  
Member of Congress