



Healthy Foods for Native Seniors Act

REP. GABE VASQUEZ (NM-02)

Federal food programs play a crucial role in Native American communities, supporting approximately 25 percent of Native Americans with various forms of federal food assistance. In some Tribal communities, participation rates reach as high as 80 percent. One such program is the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP).

The CSFP aims to enhance the health and nutrition of low-income seniors by providing essential foods such as canned fruits, vegetables, meats, and grains. Participants receive monthly food packages that supplement their diets and ensure access to vital nutrients they may struggle to afford otherwise.

Currently, Tribes can participate in the CSFP but cannot directly purchase commodities; instead, they must obtain food boxes through the federal government. **The Healthy Foods for Native Seniors Act proposes to change this by allowing Tribal entities to procure agricultural commodities directly under the CSFP.** This legislation seeks to empower Tribes to manage and distribute food within their communities, customized to their cultural and nutritional requirements.

Self-governance authority allows Tribal governments to administer federal programs within their communities—it is widely regarded as one of the most effective federal policies for Tribes. Self-governance policies make federal dollars work better to address the unique needs of Tribal communities.

This bill would:

- Create a demonstration program for Tribes to operate their own Commodity Supplemental Food Program.
- Authorize \$5 million for USDA to carry out the demonstration program.
- Ensure that agricultural products purchased under the demonstration project must be domestically produced, not increase the size of the food box, and be of the same nutritional quality.

Endorsing Organizations: Native Farm Bill Coalition

[~118H8513]

.....
(Original Signature of Member)

119TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

H. R. _____

To direct the Secretary of Agriculture to carry out a demonstration project to allow Tribal entities to purchase agricultural commodities under the commodity supplemental food program, and for other purposes.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Mr. VASQUEZ introduced the following bill; which was referred to the
Committee on _____

A BILL

To direct the Secretary of Agriculture to carry out a demonstration project to allow Tribal entities to purchase agricultural commodities under the commodity supplemental food program, and for other purposes.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Healthy Foods for Na-
5 tive Seniors Act”.

1 **SEC. 2. COMMODITY SUPPLEMENTAL FOOD PROGRAM**
2 **DEMONSTRATION PROJECT FOR TRIBAL OR-**
3 **GANIZATIONS.**

4 (a) DEMONSTRATION PROJECT FOR TRIBAL ORGANI-
5 ZATIONS.—

6 (1) DEFINITIONS.—In this subsection:

7 (A) DEMONSTRATION PROJECT.—The term
8 “demonstration project” means the demonstra-
9 tion project established under paragraph (2).

10 (B) FOOD DISTRIBUTION PROGRAM.—The
11 term “food distribution program” means the
12 commodity supplemental food program under
13 section 4 of the Agriculture and Consumer Pro-
14 tection Act of 1973 (7 U.S.C. 612c note).

15 (C) INDIAN RESERVATION.—The term “In-
16 dian reservation” has the meaning given the
17 term “reservation” in section 3 of the Food and
18 Nutrition Act of 2008 (7 U.S.C. 2012).

19 (D) INDIAN TRIBE.—The term “Indian
20 Tribe” has the meaning given such term in sec-
21 tion 4 of the Indian Self-Determination and
22 Education Assistance Act (25 U.S.C. 5304).

23 (E) SECRETARY.—The term “Secretary”
24 means the Secretary of Agriculture.

25 (F) SELF-DETERMINATION CONTRACT.—
26 The term “self-determination contract” has the

1 meaning given such term in section 4 of the In-
2 dian Self-Determination and Education Assist-
3 ance Act (25 U.S.C. 5304) with modification as
4 determined by the Secretary.

5 (G) TRIBAL ENTITY.—The term “Tribal
6 entity” means—

- 7 (i) an Indian reservation;
8 (ii) an Indian Tribe; and
9 (iii) a Tribal organization.

10 (H) TRIBAL ORGANIZATION.—The term
11 “Tribal organization” has the meaning given
12 such term in section 3 of the Food and Nutri-
13 tion Act of 2008 (7 U.S.C. 2012).

14 (2) ESTABLISHMENT.—Subject to the avail-
15 ability of appropriations, the Secretary shall estab-
16 lish a demonstration project under which 1 or more
17 Tribal entities may enter into self-determination
18 contracts to purchase agricultural commodities
19 under the food distribution program for the Indian
20 reservation of that Tribal entity.

21 (3) ELIGIBILITY.—

22 (A) CONSULTATION.—The Secretary shall
23 consult with Tribal entities to determine the
24 process under which each entity may participate
25 in the demonstration project.

1 (B) CRITERIA.—The Secretary shall select
2 for participation in the demonstration project
3 Tribal entities that—

4 (i) are successfully administering the
5 food distribution program of the Tribal en-
6 tity;

7 (ii) have the capacity to purchase ag-
8 ricultural commodities in accordance with
9 paragraph (4) for the food distribution
10 program of the Tribal entity; and

11 (iii) meet any other criteria deter-
12 mined by the Secretary, in consultation
13 with the Secretary of the Interior and
14 Tribal entities.

15 (4) PROCUREMENT OF AGRICULTURAL COM-
16 MODITIES.—Any agricultural commodities purchased
17 by a Tribal entity under the demonstration project
18 shall—

19 (A) be domestically produced;

20 (B) not result in a material increase in the
21 amount of food in the food package of that
22 Tribal entity compared to the amount of food
23 that the Secretary authorized to be provided
24 through the CSFP Guide Rate;

1 (C) be of similar or higher nutritional
2 value as the type of agricultural commodities
3 that would be supplanted in the existing food
4 package for that Tribal entity or be an agricul-
5 tural commodity with Tribal significance to that
6 Tribal entity; and

7 (D) meet any other criteria determined by
8 the Secretary.

9 (5) REPORT.—Not later than 1 year after the
10 date on which funds are appropriated under para-
11 graph (6), and annually thereafter, the Secretary
12 shall submit to the Committee on Agriculture of the
13 House of Representatives and the Committee on Ag-
14 riculture, Nutrition, and Forestry of the Senate a
15 report describing the activities carried out under the
16 demonstration project during the preceding year.

17 (6) FUNDING.—

18 (A) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIA-
19 TIONS.—There is authorized to be appropriated
20 to the Secretary to carry out this subsection
21 \$5,000,000, to remain available until expended.

22 (B) APPROPRIATIONS IN ADVANCE.—With
23 respect to any funds made available under sub-
24 paragraph (A), only funds appropriated in ad-

1 vance specifically to carry out this subsection
2 shall be available to carry out this subsection.

3 (b) ADMINISTRATION OF TRIBAL SELF-DETERMINA-
4 TION CONTRACTS.—

5 (1) ADMINISTRATION.—The Secretary shall ap-
6 point an existing office of the Department of Agri-
7 culture to administer Tribal self-determination con-
8 tracts, including—

9 (A) awarding of FNS nutrition program
10 self-determination contracts to selected Tribal
11 entities; and

12 (B) hiring contract officers and program
13 staff in order to manage the selection of Tribal
14 entities and execution of self-determination con-
15 tracts.

16 (2) STAFFING MINIMUM FUNDING.—Notwith-
17 standing any other provision of law, there is author-
18 ized to be appropriated to the Secretary \$1,200,000
19 for each of fiscal years 2026 through 2029 for the
20 payment of Department contract officers and pro-
21 gram staff salaries and benefits.