



**Animal and Plant
Health Inspection Service**
4700 River Road
Riverdale, MD 20737-1234
Voice: (301) 851-4100
Web: www.aphis.usda.gov

Remarks

**Remarks as Prepared for Acting Associate Administrator
Dr. Jere Dick
Intertribal Agriculture Council Annual Membership Meeting**

Las Vegas, NV, Dec. 11, 2013—Good morning, everyone.

I want to thank Executive Director Ross Racine and the IAC board of directors for inviting me to speak with you.

Before we get started, I'd like to tell you a little bit about myself.

Just recently, I was appointed to be Acting Associate Administrator of the Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service—as we call it, APHIS.

But I'm not new to the kinds of animal and plant health issues that concern you. In fact, I began my career with APHIS in 1988 as a field Veterinary Medical Officer.

After that, I served as the Eastern Region Director and then Associate Deputy Administrator for our Veterinary Services program—so I have experience in Washington and in the field.

Among many other things, I've led our response to cases of bovine spongiform encephalopathy in the U.S. herd and helped make sure that animal import facilities have stayed open along the U.S.-Mexico border, so trade can continue.

It's been my privilege over the years to have consulted with Tribes on the animal disease traceability rule and several program changes like commercial transportation of horses to slaughter.

I've also worked with Tribes on achieving disease-free status for brucellosis and bovine tuberculosis in New Mexico.

I'm proud to say that I'm the first person with extensive experience consulting with Tribes to serve in our Administrator's office.

So, being with you today has special significance for me.

Here with me is someone many of you know: Dr. Terry Clark, a member of the Lumbee Tribe.

Last year, Dr. Clark became the first National Tribal Liaison for APHIS.

Also here is Carl Etsitty, a member of the Navajo Nation and APHIS' Plant Health Tribal Liaison.

This morning, I'm going to talk a little about what APHIS is, the resources we can offer you, current budget realities, and our present and future efforts to strengthen our partnerships with you.

I'll also discuss where we stand on issues of special concern to many of you, like animal disease traceability, wildlife damage management, and Farm Bill Section 10201.

We can discuss these and other matters concerning you in greater detail at a breakout session I'm hosting this afternoon.

I hope to see many of you there.

The input you provide this morning and at that session is important to APHIS as we plan future programs and outreach in Indian Country.

Who We Are, What We Do

Some of you already know about and have worked with us in the past. For those who haven't, we're USDA's flagship agency for protecting the health of agricultural animals and plants.

We believe that maintaining healthy and profitable agriculture is essential because it means feeding and clothing the world, and providing the base for a thriving economy.

We also believe that the role of government is to do collectively what no one person or group can do alone.

That includes working with Tribes like yours to ensure your livestock, crops, and natural resources stay strong and safe from diseases, pests, and predators.

Over the years, we've collaborated with dozens of Tribes and Tribal associations through partnerships, cooperative agreements, emergency training, and other means.

Together, we've protected livestock from predators like wolves, coyotes, and bears.

We've combated invasive insects like the emerald ash borer and redbay ambrosia beetle, which attack trees of Tribal significance.

We've worked together on minimizing the damage that feral swine and other animals do to your crops—and much more.

I want to see APHIS strengthen these kinds of efforts and relationships, so that we can respond efficiently and effectively to Tribal concerns.

New Realities

But in today's climate of budgetary constraints, that's going to take careful planning.

I don't need to describe what's been going on in Washington these days when it comes to cutting funding.

I'm keenly aware that measures like sequestration, for instance, have hit the Tribes hard in many ways.

At APHIS, our budget has been reduced by about 17 percent over the past few years.

I want to stress that despite these limitations, we're committed to continuing our work with those we serve, like you.

But given the realities, we have to figure out how we can provide less expensive, faster, more effective solutions to the kinds of animal and plant health issues you face.

We also need to depend less on regulatory solutions to address those issues. It's very difficult to gain approval for new regulations today, and we don't see that changing any time soon.

While APHIS will continue to have a regulatory role, regulation won't be the only, or in some cases even the primary, way we contribute to the health of your animals and plants.

And to make sure those contributions really count, it will be essential for us to set clear objectives, identify how to meet them, and make honest measures of our progress.

Partnering with you more closely, and getting feedback from you on the issues that matter to you most, helps us plan ahead and provide assistance when and where you need it most.

How We're Responding

We're already busy strengthening our Tribal partnerships—largely through the efforts of our new Office of the National Tribal Liaison.

Dr. Clark and his team have been out in Indian Country and at meetings like these for much of the year, helping make the Tribes aware of the resources, opportunities for collaboration, and trainings we can offer you.

They've also focused our Agency on increasing the number and the timeliness of consultations with sovereign Tribal Nations on APHIS policies and programs that may affect them.

We know we haven't always done a good job of consulting with the Tribes in the past when we needed to. We are determined to change that.

As part of that effort, we've set up a four-part series of Tribal trainings—led by distinguished Tribal members—for APHIS staff who currently work with you or might do so in future.

We've also reorganized our internal methods of tracking our work with the Tribes. That helps us share information on our past successes with plant and animal health issues in Indian Country—and identify new outreach opportunities.

We've launched a new Tribal Web page that provides information on APHIS programs that may affect you, and information on how you can have input into these programs.

Finally, in the course of their travels across the country, Dr. Clark and his team have been getting your input on what you need from us, and how and where you need it.

I'd like to take a minute to talk about a few of those issues.

Major Issues in Indian Country: Traceability

One of APHIS' major goals over the next several years is to fully implement a functioning animal disease traceability program.

The final rule that established general regulations for this program went into effect on March 11, 2013.

Briefly, it requires most livestock moved interstate to be officially identified and accompanied by an interstate certificate of veterinary inspection or other specified documentation.

APHIS has made a point of working closely with those affected by this rule, including the Tribes, and we've appreciated your support.

We're making some funding for this effort available through cooperative agreements to Tribes next year, as we have in the past.

Horses/Burros

APHIS has also been providing some Tribes with equine health care services, such as testing for equine infectious anemia.

With regard to wild horse and burro overpopulation, our National Wildlife Research Center scientists have developed a single-shot, multiyear contraceptive called GonaCon Equine as a tool available to the Tribes and our other partners.

Wildlife Damage Management (Coyotes, Wolves, Feral Swine)

As many of you know, we also help Tribes that request assistance to manage predators that threaten livestock, such as coyotes and wolves.

We know that wolves have a special cultural significance for certain Tribes—and so we've worked with those Tribes to ensure the health and welfare of their wolf populations.

Feral swine are a huge issue for many States and Tribes. They've caused an estimated \$1.5 billion in damages, including at least \$800 million in direct damage to agriculture, and they can carry dozens of diseases.

That's why APHIS is proposing a comprehensive feral swine control program to provide expertise and operational assistance that helps Tribes, States, and localities manage these animals.

We're developing an environmental impact statement (EIS) to fully evaluate this program and alternative options.

We had an information call with the Tribes about this EIS and have extended invitations for consultation to all federally recognized Tribes.

I realize many Tribes have different opinions on this subject, so I urge you to discuss this issue with us.

Farm Bill Section 10201

Let's talk crops and plants for a minute.

The 2008 Farm Bill included funding under Section 10201 to prevent the introduction or spread of plant pests and diseases that threaten U.S. agriculture and the environment.

Several Tribes have already received funding for such activities as Tribal training and outreach programs, emerald ash borer mitigation, and invasive weed programs.

We expect approximately \$50 million to be available in fiscal year 2014.

Last month, we held an informational webinar on this for Tribal representatives. One more public webinar is scheduled for December 18 at 11am Eastern time.

Please submit your detailed suggestions for projects electronically through our Section 10201 Web site no later than January 3, 2014.

Biotechnology

We know that biotechnology is an increasing concern for Tribal farmers and others.

It's important to clarify that the safety of food and feed—even if originates from genetically engineered (GE) organisms—is regulated by FDA. Food labeling also falls under FDA authority.

My Agency's role is to ensure that GE organisms do not pose a plant pest risk.

In that role, we notify Tribal leaders when we receive an application to deregulate a new GE plant so you can identify potential significant impacts to Tribal lands or resources that we should include in our review process.

Right now, we're also assessing the proximity of field trials to reservations for federally recognized Tribes. We consult with affected Tribes when there are potential impacts on your lands.

I'm pleased to say we're developing a rule that would allow us to share some confidential business information related to these field trials, such as specific field trial locations, with State and Tribal authorities.

That will make it easier for you to provide feedback on those field trials that may affect your lands. As I said, we have proposed this change and our final rule is currently undergoing internal review.

Closing

So—that's just a brief overview of some recent and ongoing issues of interest.

I hope that you will come to our breakout session later today to talk about these and other concerns in more detail.

And if you can't make it, I urge you to please contact Dr. Clark and let him know what issues are important to you and how we might work together to address them. Hearing your perspective on the things that matter to you most is valuable to us.

In closing, I want to reiterate that at APHIS, we are committed to expanding our partnerships with you and to ensuring the health, marketability, and profitability of Tribal agriculture.

We want to involve Tribes earlier in our decision making, so Tribal interests are taken into account in the developmental phases of any major action APHIS considers taking.

We want to work with Tribes to improve response rates for emergencies and better prepare for emergencies—as well as increase Tribal participation in APHIS activities such as test exercises and trainings.

And we want to focus on better identifying needs that APHIS can help you meet.

We look forward to building a future where Tribal sovereignty is respected and our shared goals of promoting animal and plant health are met.

Together, we can help preserve our proud agricultural heritage for the generations of tomorrow.

Thank you.

USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer and lender. To file a complaint of discrimination, write: USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Ave., SW., Washington, DC 20250-9410 or call (800) 795-3272 (voice) or (202) 720-6382 (TDD).